

SEE THE IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT ON PAGE 16. IT CONCERNS YOU!

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THE HAUNTED MILL!

A Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's inside.



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.
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CLIFF HOUSE.

I am in receipt of a cheery letter from a girl friend, who considers it is just about time the girls had a chance at magazine editing. She wants Miss Marjorie Hazeldene to edit a paper for Cliff House, just as Harry Wharton is doing the same kindly work for Greyfriars.

I see no reason why not, and I should very much like to hear what my chums think about the matter. It is not mere gallantry which causes fellows to recognise generously, and with some amount of humility, that girls have often very extraordinary and extremely brisk imaginations. Moreover, they see a whole crowd of details which get missed by their brothers. Their perceptions are so keen. For such reasons I can see a fine future for such a weekly as is suggested.

Often engaged in going through the voluminous correspondence which comes to this office I notice how closely girl readers follow the yarns. The clever questions they ask is proof enough of that fact. Now, it is not within my knowledge or recollection that such a paper as my girl chum proposes has ever been put on the market. It is the engaging novelty of the business which hit me specially, and which makes me eager to see what others think. Remember this, too, that the girl characters in the tales have always been most popular. The trouble has always been that not enough was heard of them. So let me hear what you think, please. A postcard will serve. I am sure that the girls would succeed. They have such a fund of humour, and we could do with a little sentiment as well.

TIPS FROM AUSTRALIA.

"Goggs is only a fiction boy," says an Australian correspondent. "I have yet to see the boy who is a champion boxer, a fine jiu-jitsu expert, and who talks like a professor of geology."

"Of course, that is all right, but Goggs is Goggs, and we are all a bit gone on him, for he is clever, and his cleverness is made reasonable and fascinating by the talented writer who has the prodigy in charge. My critical chum goes on to say that Trimble is worse than the limit, and that he outdoes Bunter. Personally, I do not agree. Trimble has won a lot of notoriety, but he must play second fiddle to the renowned W. G. B.

Now for the letter again:

"This week's 'Penny Bravo' had a St. Jim's story, 'Barro, Baggy' and words fail to describe that fat little beast who would not have cared if Levison or Cardew had been killed, so long as he won his bet. Grundy is all right even if he is clumsy. Cardew is TF, Gussy is horrible, and if Monty Lowther does not stop those awful jokes (which were in the world before Adam and Eve) there will be murder. They spoil a good story.

A friend of mine wants to know how Inky speaks French. Does he say the 'Oufitness est verifique'? And how does he get on with English grammar?"

Well, it was a good letter, and I appreciated it, but as for some of the many points, I do not see eye to eye with my friend overseas. He overstates the case as regards Baggy Trimble, and yet understates it.

The fact of the matter is that where a character causes a reader to use such language, it shows that the said character has succeeded in his job, like the villain in the play when the rascalion gets hisses. If everybody succeeded in their own special and rightful tasks all would be well, or at least, better. And as for Monty and his puns—why, these jokes have become a part of the merry jester. They are second nature by this time. I am afraid there is nothing to be done. It is good to see George Alfred Grundy set right with the world. Grundy is all right. He has been misunderstood often enough, but his heart is tucked up in the correct quarter. And then Gussy! Horrible! I Gussy horrible! Here my correspondent is surely out of it. A few mannerisms apart, D'Arcy is one of the finest gentlemen who ever slipped into patent leathers.

GUSSY GETS CALLED OVER THE COALS.

There is another sharp word about D'Arcy, and this comes from quite another part of Australia, hundreds of miles from the home of the writer just referred to.

"I am writing," says my chum from Victoria, "to you to express my opinion of the 'Gem' Library. If you cut out a lot of the rot about Gussy I reckon you would get a lot more readers. And put in a bit more about Harry Noble and Gordon Gay. Give Australia a chance. Falbot and Buck Finn are very popular over here. I Gussy horrible! A few more opinions." I know a lot more readers who have the same opinion."

I am obliged to the writer, and can tell him plainly that, while respecting his impressions of the yarns, I am not in agreement with the conclusions he draws. For, you see, an Editor does somehow get to know things, and as each week passes I have far more evidence of the popularity of Gussy than of any feeling that his quaint method of speech is creative of dislike. Personally, I am disposed to regard comments similar to those quoted as real compliments. They show such a deep interest. The author who can describe a character so well as to render the said character liable to abuse has achieved triumph.

THE GAME OF CHESS.

Several readers want me to make a feature of chess in the Companion Papers,

but I am inclined to doubt whether there is sufficient demand for such a feature. Chess is a grand game, and one that calls for plenty of skill. It is just one of those pastimes or studies, which you like, which has no end to it. There is always more to learn. At the present time I certainly have no space for diagrams, and chess articles without plans of the various games and moves are rather unsatisfactory things.

I suppose a good many of my chums do play chess sometimes of a winter evening. I hope they do. It is possible to play well enough after quite a short practice to derive a lot of amusement out of the game, though the champions will take weeks to think out a new system, and an hour to weigh out the possibilities of a single move. We have all heard of Zukertort, and the others. But the best part of the world has not time for luxuries of this deliberate kind. And then there is such a lot that is humorous and accidental in chess.

There is a true story of a famous player who asked a comparative stranger to play him a game. They sat down, and the experienced fellow was a victim to checkmate in a very few moves. He was amazed, and wanted to find out how it had been done, but his disgust was so big, that it would have stuck out of mid-Atlantic when he learned that his adversary really knew nothing about the science of the game!

A DIFFICULT BUSINESS.

You know the old, old story about the fair lady in the far-back days who came by sailing-ship to London to seek for an individual named Gilbert. The only words of English she knew were "Gilbert, London," but she did all right with those two. She found Gilbert, married the gentleman, and the two were happy ever after. The charming little tale is almost on a par with a request from a generous-hearted correspondent in Melbourne, who offers "Margaret" as many copies of the Companion Papers as she likes.

Now, "Margaret" certainly sent in a letter to these offices long since, but I have not her address by me, and the friend in the South does not give his place of abode, so what can be done? I am afraid there is nothing to be done. The only way in these matters is to send in a notice, with full particulars, and then I will insert it. But if "Margaret" sees this paragraph she will know that the letter she wrote a long time since was read with much sympathy and interest by my unknown Melbourne chum.

Your Editor



THE MYSTERY OF THE MILL!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of Tom Merry and Co., the chums of St. Jim's.

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I. Grundy's Yarn.

"Oh rats!" It was Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who exclaimed thus.

George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell, regarded him severely.

There was quite a crowd in the School House junior Common-room, as there usually was between prep and supper. Grundy, with his back to the fire, his hands in his trousers pockets, and a very serious look upon his heavy face, had been holding forth about something he had heard in Rycombe that day.

"Yas, wathah! Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I am surprised at your attitude towards Grundy's narration, my noble kinsman," drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew. "That Blake should be a sceptic is understandable. But it was only at the end of last term that you were a convinced spiritualist."

"Nevah, deah boy, nevah! I was only an earnest seekah aftah the light."

"But surely a real live ghost that can be seen is more than many spooks that can do no more than waggle the legs of tables!"

"Don't talk wot, Cardew! Who evah knew spooks to waggle the legs of tables?"

"I never did, by gad! But then my acquaintance with spooks is so slight that it may be said to be non-existent. Am I right in attributin' to them a propensity for touchin' the faces of earnest 'seekahs' with cold an' clammy hands, strummin' on tambourines, an' generally playin' the giddy goat in various ways?"

"I thought I was talking, Cardew," said Grundy, with weighty sarcasm.

"An' you were probably correct, dear old top! You usually are talkin'. We meet here chiefly for the purpose of hearin' words of wisdom from your lips."

"And silly rot from yours!" snapped Grundy.

"Quite so, old gun! But that is rather ungrateful of you, as I was takin' up a

line more or less in support of your argument, y'know. I had it in mind to show logically an' clearly that D'Arcy's mere spooks were hopelessly inferior to your ghost—"

"Don't call it my ghost!" roared Grundy. "I don't say I've seen it. I only—"

"Oh, beg pardon! I thought you had given it the inestimable benefit of your distinguished patronage an' protection. No self-respectin' ghost woud ask more, I am sure."

"My hat!" gasped Wilkins. "And that chap makes out old Grundy talks a lot!"

"Well, Grundy does," admitted Gunn. "But here comes Lowther. Those two won't have all the chin-wag to themselves now!"

Lowther, Tom Merry, Manners, Taibot, and two or three more of the Shell entered together at this moment.

"Heard about the ghost, you fellows?" asked Roylance.

"Whose?" inquired Lowther.

"Grundy's," answered Digby, grinning.

"Don't be a silly ass! It's not my ghost!" howled Grundy.

"Can't be," said Lowther, shaking his head wisely. "You're here. If you're elsewhere at the same time it is not your ghost that appears, but your astral body."

"That's right, isn't it, Gussy?"

"Do not appeal to me, Lowthah! I do not claim any special knowledge in such matters," replied the swell of the Fourth stiffly.

"Sorry! Thought you did. My mistake, no doubt."

"What's the yarn, Grundy?" asked Tom.

"Oh, do let's have it all over again, please!" groaned Cardew. "Such a dashed treat for us all, y'know."

"Well, the fact that you have heard it doesn't make it any the less news for us," said Taibot. "If you don't want to hear it again you can avoid it by going."

"So I can! Never thought of that. Ta-ta, everybody!"

And Cardew lounged out.

No one else went. Grundy's story had aroused considerable interest. It was Cardew's way to pretend that it failed to interest him.

"You know the old mill on the rise above this end of Wayland Moor?" began Grundy.

"We do," replied Tom solemnly.

"Proceed!"

"Well, they're saying in the village that it's haunted!"

"By what?" inquired Lowther.

"Oh rats!" said Blake again.

"That sounds very likely, Blake," said Lowther. "Though what the rodents find in the way of grub there, seeing that the mill hasn't been in going order—"

"I didn't mean it was haunted by rats," chipped in Blake. "I meant it was rats to say it was haunted."

"I thought it was Grundy who said that," returned Lowther, looking puzzled.

"Well, then, you're wrong, as usual!" snorted Grundy. "I don't say so; I only say that I've heard so."

"And so you believe your ears? You ought to, they're quite big enough to be reliable, I should think."

"You leave my ears alone!" snapped Grundy.

"As long as you continue to keep them nice and clean I will do so, dear man!"

"You are the silliest ass I ever ran against, Lowther!" roared the irate George Alfred. "One can't talk sense to you!"

"I've noticed that defect in you," replied Lowther. "But I never held it as my fault."

"Weally, Lowthah, you might give Gwunday a chance!"

"There! Even D'Arcy, ass as he is, sees—"

"Bai Jove! I shall be compelled to give you a fearful thwashin' if you are not more civil, Gwunday!"

"Put them both out!" cried Tom.

"We shall never get anything from Grundy until that's done!"

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"Weally, Tom Mewey—"

"I am dumb!" said Lowther.

"It was Binks at the butcher's who told us," said Grundy, while Lowther held a hand in front of his own mouth and Harries held one in front of Gussy's. "And Binks isn't an imaginative sort of chap—"

"Has Bingo seen the ghost?" Kangaroo asked.

"No. But he knows a woman who has!"

"Who is she?" inquired Talbot.

"A Mrs. Jarvis, who lives in one of those lonely cottages on the north side of the moor. There's a footpath up by the mill that's a short cut to her home, and she was going home late one night when she saw it, and nearly died of fright."

"What was it like?" Levison asked.

"All white and ghastly," said Gunn.

"Am I telling this tale or are you, Gunn?" roared Grundy.

"Why, Gunn, I believe you think there really was a ghost?" said Tom, in surprise.

"No, I don't," replied Gunn quickly. "But—well, you know, Merry, that poor woman saw something, and she won't believe that it wasn't a ghost."

The story had impressed Gunn, it was plain. Grundy, also, seemed somewhat moved by it. But Wilkins was frankly incredulous.

"I don't believe there's anything in it," he said. "Some trick of the moonlight, I should say. You know what women are!"

"Yes; the female part of the human race," said Lowther. "That doesn't incapacitate 'em from ghost-seeing, I suppose, Wilky."

"Do you think there's anything in it?" returned Wilkins.

"If Grundy believes, then I believe—and tremble!" answered Lowther.

Grundy frowned upon him.

"I'm not saying I believe," he said.

"But I think it wants looking into."

"And that you're the boy to look into it, I suppose?" said Clifton Dane.

"I am quite prepared to do so," Grundy replied majestically.

"There hasn't been any moon for several nights," said Clive. "So if this happened lately it couldn't have been that."

"Shall you go alone, Grundy?" asked Durrance.

"No. I shall take Wilkins and Gunn with me."

"I'm game!" said Wilkins.

"I—I—well, I'm not; that's straight!" Gunn said, shivering.

"Are you a funk, William Gunn?" roared Grundy.

"No, I don't think I am. But I'm not sure that there aren't such things as ghosts. An uncle of mine says he's seen one. And I don't want to."

"Anyone else care to come?" asked Grundy.

"With you as leader?" returned Kangaroo.

"Yes, of course!"

"Declined, without thanks!" replied the Cornstalk.

Grundy looked round in his loftiest manner. He never could understand why his leadership should be objected to. Grundy thought himself capable of leading anything, from an Army division to a mule, as Lowther said.

But no one volunteered to be led.

"I'll go to-night!" he said. "And Wilkins and Gunn will come with me."

"Right-o!" said George Wilkins.

"Bet you I don't!" said William Cuthbert Gunn.

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CHAPTER 2.

Expedition the First.

BT when the time came Gunn went out.

He did not like it a little bit, but he was too staunch to stay behind.

Grundy never flattered anybody but himself. Gunn did not expect to be praised; but he did think it a trifle thick that Grundy, while he insisted upon his going, talked as if he would be a mere drag on the expedition.

"Now, don't you go and lose your head, Gunn!" he said. "If you feel scared, just get behind me. I'll protect you!"

"It's all right as long as you don't believe that there are any such things as ghosts, you know, old chap," said Wilkins.

"But I do! At least, I more than half believe. And my uncle's seen one. I suppose if your aunt had seen a sea-serpent you'd be afraid to take a dip at the seaside?" inquired Grundy.

"She's seen you!" retorted Gunn.

"She could stand a sea-serpent after that, I should think. And, after all, I reckon I can stand a spook. There is some advantage in having a face like yours about the place, after all, Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole dormitory cackled at that. This conversation had taken place while the three were dressing. It always pleased the Shell when Gunn or Wilkins raised the heel against Grundy.

"Anybody else coming?" asked Grundy, when he was ready.

"Wants someone to stand in front of him while he stands in front of Gunn?" suggested Lowther.

Grundy snorted his contempt of that suggestion, and the three stole out.

"I'm not sure that we ought to have let 'em go alone," remarked Tom.

"Which of them is going alone?" inquired Lowther.

"Oh, you're a fathead! I suppose you're not game to follow them?"

"I may be a fathead, Thomas, but I'm not quite such a fathead as all that comes to!"

"Manners?"

"Nothing doing, Tommy!"

"I'll come if you like, Tom," said Talbot.

"Oh, I don't mind, then!" Manners said.

"And I suppose I shall have to come, to see that you kids don't get into trouble," said Lowther.

"I won't have either of you!" replied Tom, with just a suspicion of snappishness. "Talbot and I will go."

And only Talbot and he went. There were plenty more fellows in the dormitory, but he had no special fear of the supernatural. But it was a cold night, and bed seemed to them all a more desirable place than that bleak hillside above the moor.

Tom and Talbot were some time and some distance behind the trio. They saw nothing at the mill, because they did not get there. But Grundy & Co. saw something.

Gunn was somewhat shivery at first, and evidently had little heart for the adventure. But—though perhaps he hardly realised it himself—more than half his dread was due to the risk of being caught breaking bounds. When they were once clear of the school precincts, and that risk was practically at an end for the time being, his spirits rose.

"I suppose my uncle was mistaken," he said. "Imagined it, no doubt. But if you two chaps had ever heard him

tell the yarn it might have made you feel a bit queer. I'll tell it to you now."

"No need!" replied Wilkins hastily. "You'll only go scaring yourself."

"Oh, it won't scare me!" said Gunn. "I know it already, you see."

"Well, it won't scare us," Wilkins said.

"I don't know about you, Wilky," Grundy said in his loftiest manner, "but I can answer for myself. Go on, Gunn!"

"Yes, go on!" chimed in Wilkins.

But he did not say it as if he were really keen.

The night was dark, but there had been a slight fall of snow, and what lay on the ground gave to the gloom a faint suggestion of light. It was rather an eerie night altogether. Every now and then a gust of wind moaned through the trees.

"My uncle was staying at a place in Shropshire," began Gunn, in a squeal-cherl voice. "It was a rummy old place—all gables outside, and queer odds-and-ends of stairs and winding passages and deep window recesses inside. You know the kind of place I mean."

"Rotten shows, I call 'em!" said Grundy. "Give me a proper modern house, with big windows and bath-rooms and all that! You don't find ghosts in them."

"I don't believe the spooks fancy houses with bath-rooms in them," remarked Wilkins. "It's always these musty old shows you hear of them in."

"I never was in Shropshire, and I don't know that I ever want to be," Grundy said.

It struck Gunn that both of them preferred to talk rather than to listen to his story.

"There had been a murder in the house a few years before," he went on.

"Look here, Gunn, murders aren't nice things to talk about!" objected Grundy. "I consider it's best to keep one's mind off subjects of that kind."

"But I'm not going to talk about the murder!" protested Gunn. "I only mentioned it to account for the ghost."

"A ghost ought to be able to account for itself without—"

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

"See here, Gunn, which of your uncles was this?"

An interchange of visits had made Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins pretty familiar with one another's family circles.

"My Uncle John."

"Is that the one with the walrus moustache and purple nose?"

"Hang it all, Grundy, that's no sort of way to talk about a fellow's relations!"

"I can't help that. I want to make out which of them it is. George is the one with the head like a bladder of lard, and Bill is the bow-legged specimen."

Yes, the one I mean is John. Well, I tell you straight, William Gunn, I consider your Uncle John something only a little better than an idiot, and I shouldn't think of paying the slightest attention to anything he said about having seen a ghost."

"Same here!" said Wilkins.

Gunn grinned. He had made his protest on Uncle John's behalf, and not being particularly fond of this relative, who was hardly a gold-mine in the tipping way, he was not keen on repeating it. But he was not at Grundy's description of his uncles that he grinned. It was at the very evident unwillingness of both Grundy and Wilkins to listen to that ghost story.

"It turned my uncle's hair grey—"



"What are you after at this time of the night, you two?" demanded Grundy. "Oh, nothing much," answered Levison coolly. "What are you prowling about after, come to that?" "My duty," snapped Knox. (See Chapter 3.)

what little there was of it to turn," he said.

"Rot! It isn't grey now!" snapped Grundy.

"No, because he's dyed it. He often says the ghost caused him to die."

"Pretty rotten joke, too!" growled Grundy.

"Pity you fellows weren't there!" continued Gunn. "He was afraid. You wouldn't have been, I know."

"Not likely!" replied Wilkins.

"No, it isn't likely," agreed Grundy.

"But it's possible, you know. I don't believe that such things as ghosts exist; but I'm not going to say that I might not be scared if I saw one. Because if I saw one I should know they did exist; and if they do—well, they wouldn't be nice things to meet, would they?"

Gunn grinned again. He was sure now that his comrades were beginning to find their feet cold. The curious thing was that he, by long odds the most nervous and sensitive of the three, did not feel frightened. It was as though their growing fears drove fear out of him.

"No, they wouldn't," said Wilkins.

"I say, Grundy, of course it's all rot! But—do you think it's worth while to go on?"

"What can we say to the fellows when we get back if we don't?" snorted Grundy.

"We—we could say we'd been and not seen anything," answered Wilkins.

"I couldn't—it would be a lie!" replied Grundy.

"My name's Wilkins, not Washington!"

"You mean you're a liar!" snorted Grundy.

"I mean you're a fool!" snapped Wilkins.

"Oh, come on!" said Gunn. "What's the use of squabbling?"

They were on the footpath which led past the mill now; but the mill was not yet visible.

"I say, I can see something that looks like a light over there!" said Grundy.

"I wish the wind wouldn't make that beastly noise," Wilkins said.

Grundy halted.

"It's my opinion that you're farked, George Wilkins!" he said.

"And it's my opinion that you're—not!" returned Wilkins.

The hide of George Alfred Grundy was, as a rule, quite proof against sarcasm; but that shaft got home.

Brave as a lion against any bodily danger, Grundy really was a trifle scared now. It was easy enough to be sceptical concerning ghosts when one stood in front of the Common-room fire, toasting one's trousers and laying down the law. But it was a slightly different matter out here in the snowy gloom.

But Grundy, scanty as was his imagination, had yet that fear of being afraid that often nerves the more

sensitive spirit. He had quite made up his mind to go on.

Wilkins had made up his mind not to go back alone. Better to go on than to do that.

And Gunn really did not feel afraid, though he knew that he might feel so if anything happened.

They went on, and by-and-by they began to feel sure that the light they saw came from the mill itself.

"It's a beastly, uncanny sort of light," said Wilkins, with chattering teeth.

"Oh, rot! What I'm thinking is that a ghost would have no need of a light," replied Grundy.

"Perhaps it's a corpse-candle, or something of that kind," Gunn cheerfully suggested.

"Idiot!" snapped Wilkins.

"You shouldn't say things like that, Gunn. They frighten Wilkins," said Grundy.

Now they were very near the mill. It loomed up above them in the gloom, with its broken sails, black against the background of snow.

"I should think we've gone far enough," said Wilkins tremulously.

"We might stop here," Grundy answered.

They were within ten yards of the ruinous old building, and there was really no need that they should approach it more closely.

"Look!" cried Gunn. "Up there!"

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And, even in speaking, he turned and fled down the slope.

Then Grundy and Wilkins saw what he had seen—a white form with a face that showed ghastly luminous at some opening high up in the side of the mill.

They shrieked and fled. Grundy crashed into Gunn from behind, and Gunn shrieked, too, as they rolled together down the slope. And Wilkins, finding himself alone on a sudden, fairly whimpered with fear.

"Here we are!" cried Grundy. "This way, Wilky!"

Gunn could not have given that call to save his life. After that one shriek his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. Wilkins was, if anything, in worse case than Gunn.

But the strong spirit of George Alfred Grundy had rallied. He was still desperately frightened; but, in a vague, confused way, he felt that he simply must be less frightened than those two, or they would all three go stark, staring, raving mad. Someone had got to bear up.

Wilkins gave a sob as he grabbed Grundy's arm. Between them they helped Gunn up—if it really was help that Wilkins gave by tugging at his chum's right leg. There are possibly better methods of getting a fellow in his feet.

"Don't look back!" breathed Grundy. The adjuration was quite needless. A fortune would not have tempted either Gunn or Wilkins to look back.

But, screwing up all his pluck, Grundy turned his head.

He could see nothing—not even the mill itself.

"It's gone!" he said huskily.

CHAPTER 3.

Ghost—or?

"HALLO! Is that you, Grundy?" Never had Tom Merry's voice been so welcome to Grundy as it was then.

"Yes," he answered. "It doesn't sound much like you," said Talbot.

"You wouldn't sound much like yourself if you'd seen what we've seen," replied Grundy.

And his voice was still weak and shaky. "What have you seen?" asked Tom sharply.

Neither he nor Talbot felt any inclination to jeer. Grundy had pluck beyond the ordinary; they knew that. But

Grundy was obviously badly shaken; and somehow the fact that Wilkins and Gunn were too scared even to speak was plain to the newcomers.

"It!" replied Grundy, in awe-stricken accents.

"What, the ghost?" said Tom. He caught Wilkins by the arm as he spoke, and felt that he was trembling violently. Talbot reached out in the gloom for Gunn, and Gunn clutched him and sobbed with fright as he clutched.

"The ghost—yes?," answered Grundy.

And that he meant it was very plain. Tom and Talbot, who had seen nothing, and who were as courageous as Grundy, felt their nerves tingling, and became aware that they were less sceptical out here in the gloom than indoors.

"Don't go on!" faltered Wilkins, finding his voice.

"We weren't going to," replied Tom frankly.

"Don't talk now," Talbot said. "Wait a few minutes, till we've got to the road."

"Talk!" Gunn half-shrieked. "I can't stand the silence—anything's better than that."

"Oh, back up, old fellow!" said Tom. "Yes, back up!" echoed Grundy feebly.

"It was awful!" said Wilkins. "A shrouded form, and that face—oh, that face!"

"You all saw it?" Talbot said. He perceived that it was of no use to attempt to divert the minds of the three from the experience which had so shaken them. Better let them talk about it, since they certainly could not talk of anything else.

"Yes," answered Grundy. "Look here, I suppose you fellows think I'm a funk?"

The great George Alfred was regaining his self-control.

"I don't," said Tom. "I'm not saying that I believe you've seen a ghost. But you've seen something, and I don't wonder that it gave you a nasty turn."

"Nor I," Talbot said. "I don't know what the fellows back in the dorm will say; but Tom and I have been out here, and we can understand if they can't. It's an eerie sort of night."

"You think it was a fake, Merry?" asked Grundy.

"I think it may have been, old man." "Well, I know it wasn't—I know! I shall never jeer at ghosts again. And I

take back what I said about your Uncle John, Gunny. I dare say he did see a ghost. Why shouldn't he? We've seen one."

Now they had reached the road over the moor, and Talbot halted.

"Tom," he said, "I don't half like the job, but I'm game to go to the mill if you are. There's a mystery about this, and now is the time to clear it up."

"I'll go," replied Tom. "But I'm not dead sure that I sha'n't be afraid when I get there."

Grundy screwed up all his courage. The offer he made then was one that no fellow without a big heart could have made.

"If you fellows go, I'll go!" he said. "But I shall be in a horrible funk all the time."

There was pluck in the confession as well as in the offer.

But Wilkins and Gunn put the stopper on the project.

"What are we going to do if you go back?" burbled Wilkins.

"Just keep on along the road," replied Talbot.

"I daren't! I shall have a blessed fit if you leave us!" said Gunn.

"You'll be together," argued Tom. "That's no good. Gunn's just as farked as I am. Wilkins said, 'We've got to have someone with you who isn't farked.'"

He spoke almost despairingly. Even had they been keener Tom and Talbot would have felt that it was sheer brutality to leave those two to themselves.

"Well, I suppose there will be another chance, Talbot," said Tom.

"I suppose so. And I sha'n't mind if there's more of a crowd of us when we take 'em," answered Talbot.

"Right-ho! We'll go back home now."

There were three audible sighs of relief. Grundy was as ready to go home as his chums.

Wilkins and Gunn had recovered a bit before the walk of St. Jim's were reached. But the weary manner in which they dragged themselves along the passage from the box-room indicated that they had had enough.

If Tom and Talbot could have had their way no word of chaff would have troubled the trio that night.

But, unluckily, Monty Lowther was awake.

"'Tis now the witching hour of night, when churchyards yawn, and graves give up their dead," he pronounced solemnly, as Tom lighted a candle-end.

"Don't!" muttered Gunn, his face white as chalk.

"Dry up, Monty!" snapped Tom. But it was never easy to stop Lowther.

"Manners!" he called. "Kangy! Dane! Gore! The spook-seers have returned!"

"You ass!" snorted Talbot, as Manners sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes, and several others stirred.

"Hallo! Seen anything?" asked Manners.

"Yes, we have! We've seen the ghost!" answered Wilkins, with a half-hysterical laugh.

"Rot!" said Harry Noble.

"It isn't rot, Noble," said Grundy gravely, and without a trace of his usual bluster. "We have seen it."

"What about you and Talbot, Tommy?" inquired Manners. "Did you see it, too?"

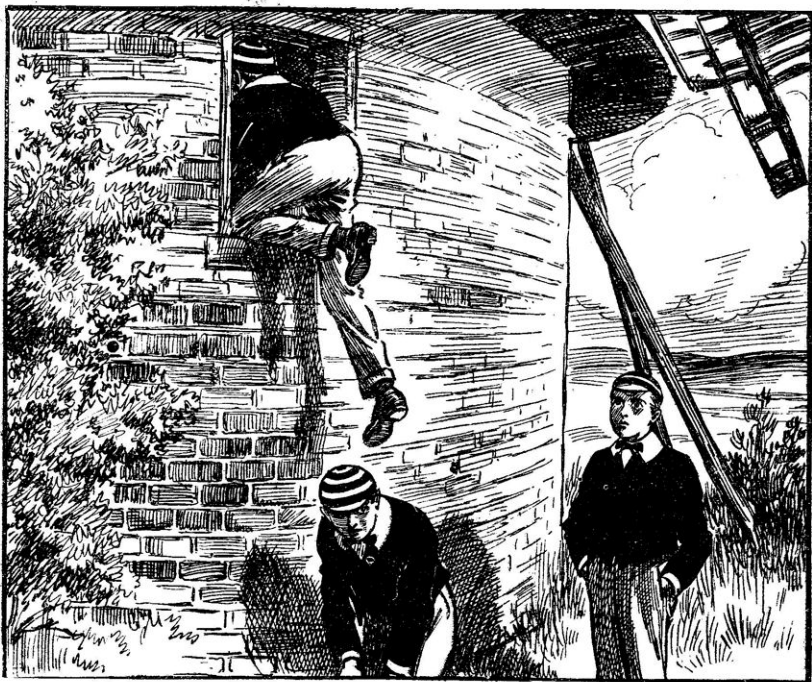
"No," replied Tom. "But, look here, you fellows, Grundy and Gunn and Wilky saw something that was enough to scare anyone into fits—I'm quite satisfied of that. I don't say it was a ghost; but

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Levison squeezed in between the small aperture in the side of the mill, though it was a tight squeeze. "No need to come after me," he said. "I shan't be long!" (See Chapter 6.)

then, I didn't see it. They saw it, and they say it was."

"Soul among the prophets!" murmured Lowther, impressed in spite of himself by Tom's gravity.

"They imagined it," said Kangaroo. "I don't think so," answered Talbot. And Talbot was just as grave as Tom. "See here," said Clifton Dane. "What do you fellows think it was? Grundy seems to have been converted to the spook theory; but I give you two credit for more sense than that."

"It may have been someone playing ghost," replied Tom. "But against that there's this—why should they?"

"To keep people away from the mill," suggested Manners.

"But why should anyone want to keep people away?" asked Talbot.

"Ask me another!" "It might be the headquarters of a gang of smugglers—only there aren't any smugglers of that kind nowadays," said Bernard Glyn.

"Or it might be a meeting-place of Hun spies, only the time for that has gone," Gore said.

"I should like to hear more about these apparent supernatural phenomena," spoke the mild voice of Herbert Skimpole. "I am afraid that there is among you a tendency to deny anything that is beyond your very limited intelligences. That is not the true scientific spirit. For my part, I should be glad to aid in a

close investigation of the supposed supernatural phenomena, and—

"We're talking about ghosts, fat-head!" snorted Gore.

"So am I, my dear Gore."

"Why don't you talk English, then?" Skimmy sighed. George Gore was a sore trial to Skimmy—a Philistine, utterly unscientific, and on an intellectual plane which seemed to the philosopher of the Shell quite beneath contempt.

"Hallo! Anything happened?" asked Ernest Levison, and he and Clive appeared in the dormitory.

"We've been keeping awake till you fellows came in," said Clive. "Wanted to hear all about it, you know."

"Did you go, Tom?" inquired Levison, in surprise.

"Talbot and I went after them—not with them."

"If we'd known, we'd have come like a shot. Anybody see anything?"

"We've seen the ghost!" announced Grundy, in a voice of awe.

Wilkins and Gunn said nothing. They were in bed by this time, and had pulled the bedclothes up over their heads, glad to be there and safe. But they rather welcomed the advent of the two Fourth-Formers, for that meant more talk, and both dreaded the silence and the darkness which they must soon endure.

"Rats!" said Clive. But Levison looked at Grundy curiously. He was keener than Clive;

and he saw that something really had happened to Grundy—something that had taken all the brag and bounce out of him for the time being.

"You didn't see anything, Merry?" said Clive.

"No. But I'm sure these chaps did, whatever it may have been," Tom answered. "Clear out now, you two! The sooner Gunn and Wilky get some rest the better it's going to be for them."

Levison and Clive went. Hardly were they outside the Shell dormitory door when an unpleasant voice hailed them.

"What are you after at this time of night, you two?" it demanded.

Gerald Knox, who had thus dropped upon them, was the most unpopular of all the St. Jim's prefects, and the one hopeless rotter in the Sixth.

"Oh, nothing much," answered Levison coolly. "What are you prowling about after, come to that?"

"My duty!" snapped Knox.

"Didn't know that ever kept you out of bed," said Levison.

"None of your dashed impudence! You'll do me two hundred lines each, and if I have another word of cheek from you I'll use my asphalt, by gad!"

Levison said no more, and the two slipped into their silent dormitory. Knox went on down the passage towards the stairs.

"You were a silly ass to talk to him

like that, Ernest?" said Clive. "I bar Knox; but, after all, he's a prefect, and he had a right to jump on us for being out of dorm. What did you do it for?"

"I wanted to have a good look at him, Sidney," returned Levison. "Knox is such a handsome fellow, you know."

"Blessed if I can see it! The most I'd say for him is that he doesn't look quite as big an outsider as we know him to be. But I suppose we'd have had the impot any way. That boulder never loses a chance to get at us."

But Levison really had wanted to have a good look at Knox. He had noticed—that Clive had not—that the prefect's boots were damp, and showed traces of snow between soles and uppers.

And, when Clive had fallen asleep, Levison slid out of bed and went to the box-room. And there he found what he had expected to find—a thick overcoat, which he recognised as Knox's, and a hat which had the prefect's initials inside the lining!

He looked again next morning; but hat and coat had gone then.

CHAPTER 4.

Expedition the Second.

"W HITHER away, Thomas?" asked Monty Lowther, as Tom took his overcoat down from the peg in No. 10 after classes next morning.

The snow was falling fast now—a wet, sleety snow that was worse than heavy rain. In the study a bright fire burned, and Lowther had pulled the easy-chair close up to it, and had settled down with a book; while Manners, at the table, was busy with some photographic work.

"To Rylcombe," replied Tom. "Coming?"

"What's the game?"

"Inquires about this mill bizney."

"Oh, that isn't worth bothering about," said Lowther lazily.

"You're not coming, then?"

"You are perspicacious this morning, Thomas. I am not."

"Manners?"

"Are you going alone if I don't come, old chap?"

"No. Talbot and Kangaroo and Dane and Gore are coming, anyway; there may be more."

"Then I'll stay here and get on with this."

"Right-ho! I don't mind. We're going to have a yarn with that fellow Binks at the butcher's."

"Give Bingo my love!" said Lowther, grinning.

Binks, the butcher-lad, was quite a favourite with the St. Jim's juniors.

Others, besides those mentioned by Tom, did come. Arthur Augustus had a cold, and was snuffling and wheezing in Study No. 6; but Blake and Herries and Digby all joined up, and Levison and Clive also came along. Cardew said he would stay and comfort Gussy—for which boon Gussy showed no marked gratitude.

Wilkins and Gunn had had to go to the sanatorium that morning. Cold and shock had combined to make them really ill. Grundy was unusually quiet, but he was not ill.

The small crowd of juniors easily found Binks, and invited him into Mrs. Murphy's to partake of refreshment and to talk. Cocoa and hot buns suited Bingo as well as they did Tom Merry and the rest.

"Me? Not for no money!" said Binks, when asked whether he would care to go along and investigate the mystery of the mill.

"I ain't afraid of nothin' natural, not as I knows of. But ghostes—that's whery you've got me

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beat. My grandmother knew a man what 'ad an aunt, an' her brother-in-law's second cousin see a ghost an' expired on the spot."

Lowther was not there to ask whether the ghost was that of a leopard, and which of the leopard's spots the victim expired upon, and no one present thought of asking. But Binks saw that they were not greatly impressed.

"Come nearer some than that," he said, in low and awed tones. "My pal 'Eavins—Eldred 'Eavins, you know—well, I won't go for to say that he saw the ghost of the mill. But 'e 'eard it!"

Bingo and Grundy had fought once, and had been good friends ever since. They had a good deal in common. Each held that the fact of a fellow's being ready to stand up to him was enough to prove that fellow's pluck, for each put a high estimate upon his prowess with the fists or the gloves.

"He didn't show much pluck last night," remarked Herries.

"But he did!" said Tom at once. "He'd have gone back with us even after seeing the—after seeing whatever it was they saw."

"Well, why didn't you go back?" inquired Blake, grinning.

"Gunn and Wilkins were too badly upset," replied Tom.

"And you and Talbot weren't keen, Tommy, old top!" said Noble.

"We were not!" said Talbot emphatically. "And I don't think any of you would have been."

"I'm game for to-night, anyway!" Kangaroo answered, without boast or sneer in his tone.

"And I!" said Tom.

"I, too!" Talbot said quietly.

"I'm on!" Blake spoke up.

Dane, Gore, Herries, Digby, Clive, and Levison did not hold back.

But Bingo did. He was asked to join them, and he refused most firmly.

"I ain't a-goin' to meddle," he said.

"If I was sure as it was someone playin' tricks I'd be on it like a bird. But, s'pose it reely is a sperrit? You can't punch a sperrit on the jor, can you? Well, then!"

Mrs. Murphy came along with a fresh supply of cocoa at that moment, and caught Bingo's concluding words.

She turned pale—quite a difficult feat for the good dame, whom much cooking had given a peony complexion.

"Everybody's frightened out of their senses!" she said. "There was a woman came in here this morning. She's going a mile round rather than pass the mill at night. And Mr. Pepper is in bed through a scare as he got there."

"Did the ghost ask him to lend it a five?" inquired Kangaroo.

Erasmus Zochriah, Pepper, the village miser, was not persona grata to St. Jim's.

"Serve the old hunks right!" said Gore. "But if it is anyone playing tricks it's dirty! Why, it might frighten a woman to death!"

"But what would they play tricks for?" asked Bingo. "That's what gets me. There don't seem no sense in it."

"Might be reason we haven't thought of," said Levison.

"You know something, Levison?" queried Talbot.

"No, I don't! I don't know a thing! I'd tell you if I did!"

Had Cardew been there he would have felt pretty sure that his chum suspected something, though he might know nothing. But the fellows present did not understand Levison, as Ralph Reckness Cardew did.

"Who's the owner of the mill?" asked Tom.

But even Mrs. Murphy did not know that. It had been in a ruinous state ever since she remembered, she said.

The juniors returned to St. Jim's through the sleet, feeling distinctly less cheery than usual. None of them had any notion of backing out of his promise for the night; but all felt depressed by the influence of the weather and the mystery, and one or two of them began to revise their opinions concerning ghosts.

"We don't want too many in it," said Talbot, as they neared the school.

"Now, I think, the more the merrier," replied Herries.

No. 27.—Mr. HORACE RATCLIFF, M.A.



Housemaster of the New House and Form-master of the Fifth. A thorough tyrant, always wielding the cane with extreme vigour, and for the most trivial offences. A man with apparently no understanding of boys, and with no sympathy for their fun and pranks. Has been the cause of many exciting times in the School House, when he has had to take duty there in the absence of Mr. Railton.

"What did it sound like?" asked Kangaroo, with a grin. Harry Noble was one of the most pronounced sceptics there.

"Howful!" replied Bingo. "Wails an' groans, an' groans an' wails!"

"When was this?" Talbot inquired.

"Larst night, betwixt ten an' eleven."

"Why, we were that way between eleven and twelve!" exclaimed Tom.

"See anythink?" asked Bingo eagerly.

"Talbot and I didn't. But Grundy and Gunn and Wilkins, who were ahead of us, say they saw a ghost."

"Goo' lor!" gasped Bingo. "An' Mr. Grundy, he's got pluck enough for anythink, too!"

"It isn't going to be merry, anyway," Tom said. "There are ten of us here. With Manners and Lowther that will make twelve—quite enough!"

"Are you going to force them into it?" inquired Kangaroo.

"They won't need forcing. They won't stay behind," answered Tom.

"There's Cardew," remarked Clive. "He won't want to come," said Gore.

"Bet you he does!"

"Thirteen's an unlucky number," observed Blake.

"Getting superstitious in your old age?" gibed Digby.

"No, I'm not! I don't believe in ghosts any more than you do—not half as much, I dare say."

"Well, half as much might be enough, for I'm beginning to sort of kind of fancy that there may be such things," confessed Dig.

"But it was the thirteen bizney I meant."

"Oh, that! Well, you can stay at home with Gustavus. He's not fit to come, anyway."

"Rats! I mean to go—even if I am faked."

"There's Grundy," Kangaroo said.

"Leave Grundy out of it—he's had his bit," returned Tom.

"And there are the New House chaps," said Dane.

"I'd clean forgotten them! No, we won't take them in. Let's make this a School House bizney. If we must have another, Roylance is the man!"

In the upshot, both Roylance and Grundy went. George Alfred refused to be left out. But it was significant that he showed no sign of desiring to lead the expedition. Grundy was chastened in spirit, and quite unaware that most of his comrades thought more highly of his courage than they had ever done before, though they had never had cause to doubt it.

The fifteen dropped from the leads outside the box-room window one after another. Eleven was just chiming when the last of them reached the wall by the old tree that had played its part in so many night adventures.

Then, one after another, they clambered over, hampered by their coats. It was a wretched night, though the snow had now ceased to fall.

They turned into the road leading across the moor.

Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Talbot were ahead. Lowther was more silent than usual; but Manners could not keep his tongue still. Both were a trifle nervous; but so were most of the others.

"Tommy," said Manners, "I've just had an idea. Could it be the Grammarians, do you think?"

"Ass! What would they do it for?" growled Lowther.

"They might—for a lark, you know."

"Gordon Gay and the rest of them wouldn't think it a lark to scare women almost out of their senses," said Talbot.

"Nunio! Can't have been that crowd. But I'm not going to believe that it's really a spook."

"That's just what Manners is beginning to believe!" whispered Dig, in their rear, to Blake.

"Are you?" returned the Yorkshire junior.

"No—yes—I don't know! You certainly don't seem to. What do you think about it, Herries?"

"About what?"

"Whether it's really a spook, of course!"

"Oh, that! I was thinking that Gustavus has the best of the deal to-night, spook or no spook!" growled Herries.

"He wanted to come," said Dig.

"That was true."

"Yes; but he was jolly glad not to be

able to!" replied Blake.

And that was true also. Blake implied no reproach. He felt—and he knew most of the others felt—that the expedition was no catch at all.

Some yards behind the rest came Levison and Cardew. They had dropped back together, and Clive had gone on with Roylance and Gore.

"I missed you just before the start, Ernest, dear boy," said Cardew.

"Yes. I went to see about something. I didn't want to say anything to the rest, but I didn't mind your twiggling."

"What was it, by gad?"

"I wanted to know whether a certain fellow was in bed," admitted Levison.

"Which dormitory, old top?"

"Guss!"

No. 28.—The Hon. WALTER ADOLPHUS D'ARCY.



D'Arcy minor, third son of Lord Eastwood, and the younger brother of the great Gussy. The leader of the gag boisterous fun, but with something of his brother's high ideals for all that. Wally, as everyone calls him, is as straight as Gussy, and, in his different way as proud, but there is nothing of the dandy about him.

"I can only think of the respectable Racke an' the conscientious Crooke. But if they had been missin'—"

"Oh, they're not in this! Above their weight, Ralph. It wasn't really to a dormitory at all I went; it was to a study."

"Sixth—eh? Sounds like the dear Knox! Do you think he's in this wangle?"

"Of course it is a wangle. You an' I, Ernest, have not that simple faith which the rest—"

"No, they haven't really faith in spooks; they've only doubt. Grundy's the only one of the crowd who believes, and I must say I think it's no end plucky of him to come."

"I agree, though I fancy the illustrious one would be surprised if he heard you an' me sayin' kind things about him. Was Knox there?"

"Yes, he was," replied Levison. "He nearly nabbed me, too. He was awake."

"That rather settles it, doesn't it, dear boy? Unless you have some definite—"

"I've nothing at all that could be called really definite. I'm a suspicious bouncer, that's all. I've been told that times enough. I say, Cardew, have you heard about any trouble at the Green Man lately?"

"I have not had that pleasure."

"Pleasure be hanged!"

"But it is a pleasure, Ernest!" protested Cardew. "Just as you are a suspicious bouncer, so am I a revengeful bouncer. Ill-tidin' of the foe comforts me no end. An' I count most of our gay dogs an' merry blades among my enemies, which sounds like a certificate of virtue for little me to which I fear I'm not really entitled. But why your question?"

"Oh, never mind! What a beggar you are to jaw! Let's dry up now. I want to think."

"Quite unlike the rest of the crowd there, Ernest, I fancy. They would give somethin' now to make their minds really blank, instead of full of spooks an' grisly horrors!"

But after that somewhat unkind speech Cardew dried up. He felt pretty sure that the keen mind of Ernest Levison was working upon some definite line towards a solution of the Mill mystery, and his own mind, no less keen, though very different in its methods, went to work also.

CHAPTER 5.

The Rout of the Expedition.

"THERE it is!" said Tom Merry. The sky had grown lighter, and the glimmer of the snow

counted for more than it had done on the night before. They could see the mill up on the slope, covered with snow, from some distance away.

They halted. Most of them felt that it was not necessary or desirable to go nearer, yet would not admit that they felt it. To the bolder spirits of the crowd the notion of going back without seeing anything, and without getting into the place to ascertain whether there was anything to be seen, appeared altogether too tame.

But even by these the alternative—to march straight up and go in—was not faced without a qualm of dread.

It looked ghostly enough, that ruinous old mill, with the snow all around it. Even Levison and Cardew, most sceptical of the fifteen, admitted that.

"No light," said Blake.

But as he spoke a light appeared. It shone through the broken planking of the upper part of the mill, shone with a curious glow. It was not the flicker of a fire, that was certain. It was not candle or lamp-light. It could not be gas or electricity.

To them it seemed to have a phosphorescent quality.

"That's like it appeared last night!" jerked out Grundy.

No one laughed. No one felt like laughing.

But, though more than one hand sought the arm of some chum for the sense of comfort that the feel of it could give, no one bolted yet!

Grundy did not clutch at anyone's arm. He stood between Tom Merry and Talbot, his heavy face upturned, as if he

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waited and watched for something that he knew was coming. They could not see his eyes. Had they seen them they would not have recognised them.

He waited, in a strange suspense. Others dreaded; but he knew—he had seen!

"By gad! This doesn't feel comfy," murmured Cardew.

The tense atmosphere was telling even upon him.

Then, upon the waiting group, there came a panic such as comes at times upon a flock of sheep. From the mill proceeded a terrible, long-drawn wail, like the sound of some soul in torment.

They scuttled, all but one of them. That wail would have been unpleasant to hear by daylight in a busy street. Heard thus at night, coming from a place reputed to be haunted, it was too much to bear. The St. Jim's standard of courage was, at least, as high as that of any other school, which is saying a good deal, and these fellows did not represent the average of it, but something much higher, for they were for the most part a picked crew. But they scuttled, all but one.

And that one did not stay because he was less afraid than the rest. He stayed because he could not go, because he had fallen unconscious.

It was Grundy, too heavily taxed by the unexpected horror. Afterwards he declared that he could have borne again the sight of that ghostly figure. He had nerved himself to bear that. But the wail struck upon his tense nerve in a new place, and fairly bowled him over.

The rest ran, keeping close together, jostling one another, and were breathing hard, all of them, but no one cried out until one of them halted and yelled: "Where's old Grundy?"

It was Cardew who had noted Grundy's absence. In the confusion no one had seen the burly Shell fellow fall.

And Ralph Reckless Cardew did not wait for anyone to return with him. He bolted back.

But hard on his heels came Reginald Talbot and Tom Merry and Ernest Levison. And Kangaroo turned also, and hurried after them, and Roylance and Manners came rushing back together, and close behind them were Blake and Herries, Digby and Lowther, Dan and Clive. George Gore ran on for another fifty yards or so. His pluck was not equal to that of the rest. But he had pluck in measure, and when he found that he was alone he swung round and followed, cursing himself for a funk.

Cardew lifted Grundy's head. Tom and Talbot dropped on their knees by his side.

"He wouldn't like it if he knew that I'd handled him," said Cardew, with a laugh.

Speech and laugh alike were tremulous, but to most of them it seemed amazing that Cardew could laugh.

"He isn't dead, is he?" faltered Dig. "Not likely," answered Cardew. And now the shakiness had gone from his voice. For Grundy was stirring.

"Oh, look!" cried Manners, pointing to the mill.

In front of it, showing up plainly against its tarred black surface, appeared a spectral figure, about which shone a strange light.

It was not fifty yards away, and for the moment not one there doubted that it was really and truly a ghost.

Some of them bolted again. This was more than they could bear.

But five stayed with Grundy—Tom Talbot and Talbot, Kangaroo, Cardew, and Levison. And, while the eyes of the other four went from the spectral figure to Grundy, Levison's never left the figure.

Tom pulled the skirt of his coat over Grundy's face. But that was needless.

"It's all right," spoke Grundy, in a husky whisper. "I've seen it! And I don't care so much now you fellows have seen it, too. You'll know I—I— Ahhhh!"

And Grundy fainted again. What he had been going to say was that they would know now that it was not for nothing he had been so badly scared the night before.

Four pairs of eyes were upon him. Only Ernest Levison watched the sheeted figure.

Blake came hurrying back, and after him trailed the rest.

"I—you chaps, I never knew before that I was a funk!" gasped Jack Blake.

"You're not," replied Talbot gently. And Talbot was right. There was no funk in all the crowd of them. Not all had their courage keyed quite as high as had some. But it had meant courage in all of them to return.

"MICK O' THE MOVIES!"

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"PENNY POPULAR."

Even though the figure had disappeared now, no one but Levison saw it go; no one else was quite sure whether it had still been there when Blake and those behind him came back. They all confessed that they had not dared to look. But Levison said nothing—then.

"Better pick the old chap up and carry him off," said Kangaroo.

"No need. I can walk," spoke Grundy, coming quickly out of his swoon again, and catching those words. Tom and Kangaroo supported him, for he needed help. Keeping well together, the crowd moved down the slope slowly—all but one. Some glanced fearfully back over their shoulders, others were too much afraid to look back.

But presently Cardew, without word to anyone, stopped again. He had missed Levison. It was hardly that he could not see him; the light was not sufficient to tell one fellow from another, except in the cases of the two or three distinctly taller than the rest. But Cardew sensed his chum's absence.

He had only a few seconds to wait, and he did not enjoy that brief time.

Then out of the gloom Levison stole to his side.

"Ralph!" he exclaimed.

"Waited for you, old gun!" said Cardew.

"But how did you miss me? I thought no one saw me go!"

"I didn't see you go, but I missed you."

"Thanks! Look here, I've found out something!"

"I guessed as much, dear boy!"

"I saw that ghost-thing go in, and a door opened for it! Ghosts don't need doors to be opened for them, Ralph. I crept up close and listened. There was no cry to see through, but I could hear voices. I couldn't make out the words; but they laughed, the brutes! Oh, it's a fake, Ralph—a cowardly, brutal fake! And I'm going to find out who the rotters are, and make them pay for their game!"

Seldom had Cardew known Levison so moved. He was a fellow of rather cold and indifferent feelings outside a narrow circle. Cardew, Clive, Talbot, perhaps Tom Merry, and above all, his minor—these meant much to Ernest Levison; but his regard for others always seemed careless and limited.

It was not what had happened to Grundy that had moved him, that was certain. Cardew did not quite know what it was, yet he sympathised with his chum's wrath. And that fact might have puzzled others as much as Levison puzzled Cardew, for Cardew was generally held to be no more widely sympathetic than Levison.

"Hallo, there!"

"That's the dear Sidney!" said Cardew. "He's missed us."

Clive was different. He was the kind of fellow able to care a good deal for quite a number of friends. But these two came easily first with him.

"It gave me quite a turn when I missed you!" he said. "I thought something must have happened to you both. Ugh!"

"Thought the spook had got us?" gibed Cardew.

"Don't talk like that!"

"It was decent of you to come back alone, old man," Levison said.

"Oh, it wasn't far! They've stopped down there. One or two of them are trying to make up their minds to go back and see if they can get into the mill. But I don't think they'll do it, and I know I'm not on."

Levison hurried on to join the rest at that. He did not want them to go back, though perhaps he could hardly have explained why. Certainly he could not have explained why he meant to tell no one else but Clive about what he had seen. And he would not have told Clive but for the South African junior's return in search of him and Cardew.

Perhaps it was because Levison was naturally secretive. His hardness told, too. Had Tom Merry or Talbot or Blake—any of the others, indeed—known what he knew they would have told, if only because it would have bucked up everyone so greatly to be made aware that the whole thing was a fake.

But Levison never thought of that.

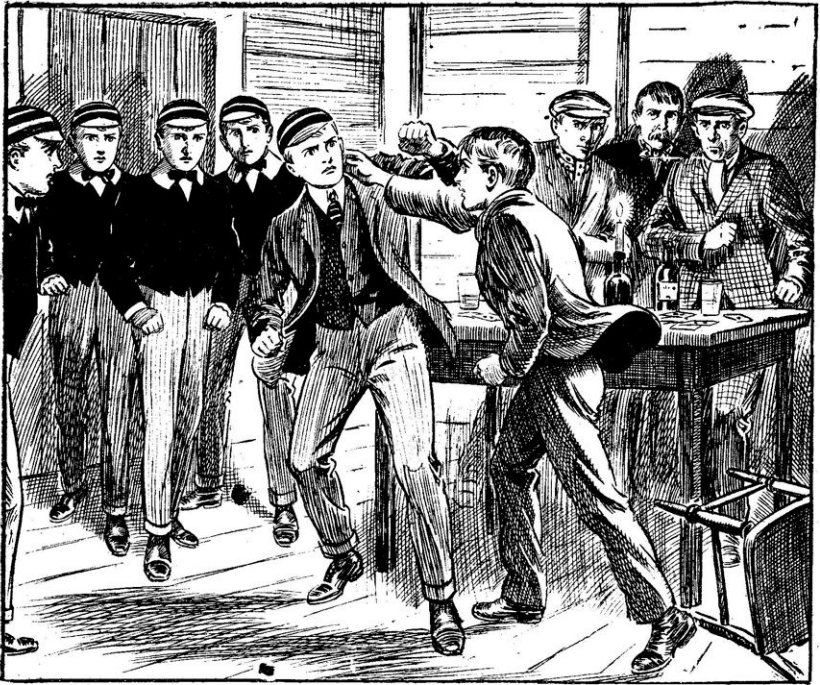
It was a very small minority that spoke for going back—Tom Merry, Talbot, Kangaroo, and Blake, that was all.

"Are you keen, Tom?" asked Levison.

"Keen? I shirk it no end! And that's one reason why I think I ought to go. But the chief reason is that this may be the only chance to clear up the mystery."

"Oh, I don't think that! It will keep," replied Levison. "I'm not going back, anyway!"

Tom and his supporters gave in, and the crowd moved homewards.



Bingo had wailed long enough. Smack! His open hand smote the face of Knox with the sound like a report of a pistol. (See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER 6.

The Mill by Daylight.

"QUEER that no one thought of that before!" said Cardew. "Dashed queer, by gad! You've the best brains of the lot of us, Ernest!"

"Well, you don't go looking for ghosts, by broad daylight," said Clive.

"Not when they're pukka ghosts," replied Levison. "But this is a fake; I'm jolly sure of that. We aren't likely to find anyone there in the daytime, but we may find something that will help us to guess who the sweeps are."

"Oh, come along!" Clive said.

And the three set out for the mill.

They had agreed to say nothing to anyone else. Study No. 9 had rather a way of keeping things to itself.

Sidney Clive was very bit as keen as the other two. Possibly the problem appealed to him in rather a different way from that in which it appealed to them. They meant to stop the blackguardly faking at the mill; but their chief interest was in getting to the bottom of the mystery. Clive wanted to get to the bottom of it, but he cared more about making sure that no one else should suffer as Grundy, Gunn, Wilkins, and others had suffered.

Grundy was in sunny that day. He was there for a cold, and he had a cold.

But all who had gone on the expedition of the night before knew that it was not a mere chill that had so completely bowled him over. And Clive, at least, had lots of sympathy with Grundy.

"I've some information for you, Ernest," said Cardew as they left the great gates of St. Jim's behind them.

"Well?"

"Remember askin' me whether there had been any trouble at the Green Man lately?"

"Yes. Has there?"

"There has. The zealous Crump was laid up, an' a man from Wayland—you know Everson, who helped us when we were searchin' for Digby?—was takin' his beat. Well, Racke an' Crooke, on pleasure bent, ran into Knox under the hospitable roof of Jolliffe. It was an after hours' party, of course. Not usual for the gay dogs of the Shell to foregather with Knox, I believe. It seems to have been an accident, an' his Highness the Prefect wasn't best pleased. But they settled down to their little game—Jolliffe, Banks, Knox, an' our two dear pals. In the midst of it there came a rap at the door, an' Everson appeared, askin' awkward questions. But Knox an' Racke an' Crooke were hidden in the scullery or the coal-hole, an' Banks is a lodger, an' the active an' intelligent officer got no change out of his raid."

"Knox and Racke and Crooke didn't get much change out of it, either, I fancy," said Levison, with a sardonic grin. "I should have liked to see them shivering in the scullery while Everson talked to Jolliffe! How did you hear, Ralph?"

"Scrope told me the yarn, dear boy." "Is Everson still on duty here?" Levison asked.

"No. But it is believed he gave Crump the tip."

"That would account for those sweeps wanting another place to meet in," Levison said. "The mill would serve their turn at a pinch, though it's not just the time of year when it would do best. But Knox wasn't out last night."

"No, old top. Knox had a ragin' toothache. No doubt you will sympathise, bein' so full of the milk of human kindness. I don't."

"I should be glad to hear that every tooth in his giddy jaw was aching!" Levison replied.

"How did you find that out, Ralph?" inquired Clive.

"Knox's fag, dear boy. But he doesn't know that he told me. An' I don't fancy Scrope has any notion that he revealed anythin'. It was just chat, y'know, an' everyone's used to my chat-
tin'."

"You're ahead of me there," confessed Levison. "I can pump chaps, but they know afterwards that they've been pumped. You pump them, and they think you're a nice, pleasant chap, with all the time there is on his hands, and ready to talk about anything."

"But that is true, old top!"

"Rats! You're the deepest bounder at St. Jim's!"

"Approbation from Sir Hubert Stanley!" quoted Cardew.

He meant that it was a toss-up whether he or Levison were at both of them went so far beyond Clive that they fairly left him gasping. But his knowledge of their craft meant no lessening of his faith in them.

It was a wretched day of cold thaw, and their journey was no pleasure jaunt. Nearly all the snow had melted, and the broken sails of the mill dripped water upon them as they tried to get the door open.

"Never used to be fastened," said Levison. "I've been here before, though it was terms and terms ago. But there's a proper lock now."

"Why, here's Bingo!" exclaimed Clive.

The butcher lad scowled as he came up to them. They could not understand it, for they counted Bingo a friend. Most of the Fourth and Shell had so counted him since the days when he had fought and had rescued Goggs, of the Grammar School, overcome Cutts, of the St. Jim's Fifth, and thrashed the great George Alfred Grundy.

But there was hostility in his manner now.

"Ere, I say, 'ave I copped you at it?" he growled.

"We don't follow you, Binks, dear boy," returned Cardew.

"Ho, don't you? Are you the rascals that 'ave bin playin' these 'ere rotten ghost games—that's my meanin'?"

Clive stared at him, too dumbfounded to speak. Levison glared at him, too angry to speak. But Cardew said earnestly:

"Pon honour, Binks, we are not! We have only come to see whether we can find out anything about the rascals. Like you, we believe that there is trickery in this."

The honest red face cleared. It was plain that Binks was convinced at once.

"That's all right, Mr. Cardew," he said. "But it give me a turn for the moment, seem' you 'ere, an' thinkin' that you might be in it. I should 'ave 'ad to do my best to thrash the three of you if you 'ad bin. An' I ain't rightly sure that I could have made a good job on it."

"But why?" asked Clive.

"Somethin' 'appened last night!" answered Bingo darkly.

Something certainly had happened; but it could hardly be possible that Bingo was talking of what they knew.

They waited for him to say more. It came with a rush.

"My little gal—"

"Didn't know you had a girl, Binks. Thought you had twenty, by gad!" said Cardew.

"Well, I used to 'ave, that's a fact. Nothink in it—on-'er walkin' of 'em out all that. But this is different—this is my gal. You get me?"

They certainly got him. His deadly earnestness made it plain that Reginald Binks, no longer the general lover, had succumbed to the charms of one particular girl—that Bingo meant it this time.

"Go on," said Levison.

"It's 'arf called 'er!" blurted out

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Binks, drawing the back of his red hand across his eyes. "Seems she didn't know nothink about this ghost business. She'd only jost got back from an allerday. 'Ousemaid at the vicarage, she is, you know. An' she come along 'ere last night about ten o'clock, comin' back from seein' an aunt of 'ers that lives over the moor. She's got pluck—she ain't afraid of the dark. Well, I dunno the rest, not rightly. She's seen somethin', an' she dragged 'erself 'ome somehow, more'n 'arf out of 'er wits. She's in bed at the vicarage now, an' the cook says as—'Oh, I can't stand it!'"

Bingo broke off, his utterance choked. Cardew laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, Binks," he said. "Yesterday you believed in ghosts."

"Yuss. Ain't sure as I don't to-day."

No. 29.—REGINALD MANNERS.



Manners minor. A spoilt child, wayward and self-willed, but with little real vice in him. Has been led astray more than once by older fellows, and has caused his major no end of trouble. Wally D'Arcy has taken him in hand, but finds him distinctly a handful. The last ready to acknowledge Wally's leadership of the six who stand closest to him, but still one of them for weal or woe.

But—but don't you see, sir? Ghostesses or no ghostesses, it's up to me, this thing is! Nellie's been 'urt, an'—an' I jost got to find out!"

"We were here last night, too," said Levison. "Not just we three—more than a dozen of us. It was later than when Miss—than when your girl came along."

They saw something. It looked like a ghost, but we know it wasn't! Get on to that, Binks—we know for certain it wasn't!"

"And if your girl knew, it might help to calm her down," Clive said sympathetically. "Couldn't you go up to the

vicarage and tell the cook, or somebody? It does make a difference when anyone knows that it wasn't ghosts, but only some sweep playing tricks, doesn't it? I was horribly scared last night; but I don't think I should be now I know."

Bingo looked from one to another of them, and into his eyes there came a gleam of hope.

"I'll go now, straight away," he said. "I wanted to see if I could find out anything 'ere; but it'll leave that to you gentlemen. After all, it's 'er what matters. An' I'm sure you're right, Mr. Clive—it would ease 'er mind to know it wasn't a ghost, bless 'er!"

Bingo departed in haste, and the three set themselves to solve the problem of getting into the mill.

Their talk with the butcher-lad had made them keener than ever to find out all about the mystery.

But it was fast becoming less of a mystery to them. That Knox was in it they felt sure. Cutts, St. Leger, and Gilmore, of the Fifth, might be. Racke and Crooke, they felt certain, were not. Banks, the bookie, might be, but hardly Jolliffe. The landlord of the Green Man would not leave his comfortable fireside for the old mill on a January night; but Banks was a bird of prey, and where the carcass is the vultures gather. There were other possibilities. Knox had distinguished pals at Wayland who sometimes visited the Green Man; and among them was one, Mr. William Griggs, whom Levison held a very likely fellow to be concerned in such a business as was this.

"Here we are!" said Clive. "If one of you gets on my shoulders he ought to be able to get in through that window."

The window was at the back. On the whole, the lower part of the mill was still in a tolerable state of repair; indeed, it looked as though some tinkering-up had been done to it quite lately.

Levison squeezed in, though it was a tight squeeze.

"No need to come after me," he said. "I sha'n't be long."

Within ten minutes he had completed his inspection.

"Can't find any definite evidence of the ghost fakery," he told his chums. "But there's any amount of evidence that the place has been used for merry meetings lately. Empty bottles, bag-ends of cigars and cigarettes, a torn card or two. And there are locked boxes. I hadn't anything to force them with, or I'd have done it like a shot. I found this, too!"

He held out a small piece of paste-board.

It was evidence as indisputable as they could have hoped for. Knox's card, with a pencilled IOU for £5 on the back of it!

"The wine must have been red, by gad, when any of the crew, likely to be there was careless with that valuable document," remarked Cardew.

"I'll bet it wasn't Banks!" returned Levison, who had known the bookmaker only too well in his unregenerate days. "He wouldn't lose it."

"How did they keep warm?" asked Clive.

"Does it matter whether they kept warm or not, Sidney?" said Cardew.

"The frigid-ahem!—Hades of the old Norse belief would be quite a good gadget for that crowd."

"I don't mind whether they kept warm," answered Clive. "But I felt curious."

"Oh, there's a big spirit-stove in the place," said Levison. "And there are plenty of rugs. They didn't trouble to hide them."

"Any bottles not empty?" Cardew asked.

"Didn't see any. They'd lock the full ones up, no doubt. Why?"

"Nothin' much. Pity that there's such a prejudice against poisonin', isn't it? An ounce or two of arsenic among that crew would be quite a serviceable expedient."

"I say, Ralph!" protested Clive.

"He doesn't mean it, ass!" growled Levison.

"Not sure I don't," Cardew said. "It was bad enough for Grundy an' those other chumps. But playin' your dashed tricks on women an' girls is too thick for anythin'. Poor old Bingo!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Advance Guard.

HERE was a meeting in Study No. 10 on the Shell passage that afternoon. Except for Grundy, unavoidably absent, all the fifteen who had shared in the expedition of the previous night were present. But no one else was asked except Bernard Glyn, who had come very near to splitting with his chums Noble and Dane for not letting him into the affair earlier.

"You were so busy on that fatheaded invention of yours, old chap," said Kangaroo apologetically. "You hadn't eyes or ears for anything else."

"I'd eyes and ears good enough to find out that you bombers were up to something," snapped Glyn.

They took him along, having no choice in the matter. Blake and Herries and Digby did not bring Arthur Augustus along; but he came. He walked in, snuffling a little, just after the others had assembled.

"I take it vewy unkindly of you all!" he said. "Blake, Hewvies, Dig, I can nevah look upon you as friends, weal fwends, again!" Tom Mewey—

"But you'd such a rotten cold, old chap," said Tom.

"My cold is wathah my own affair, I take it!" replied Gussy stiffly.

"Ours, too," said Manners.

"I weally fail to see—"

"We don't want to catch it, do we, dummy?"

"You weren't fit to go last night, and you're not going to-night, Gustavus," Blake said.

"I was most unfaihbly chisselled out of goin' last night, an' I go to-night, if any one goes!" replied the swell of the Fourth, with immense decision.

"A strait-waistcoat is what he needs!" growled Gore.

"Thank you, Gore. But what I weally most need at the present moment is a clean handkacheef. Will you kindly twot an' fetch me one?"

"Oh, it's no use arguin' with Gussy! He'll be in eamny to-morrow, no doubt; but he'll have company there, anyway."

"Now, let's hear all about it, Levison," Tom said.

Levison told his story, briefly and clearly.

"And you mean to say that you got on to this last night, and never said a giddy word to us?" exclaimed the Kangaroo.

"You'd the same chance of getting on to it that I had, Noble."

"I hadn't, then!"

"Why not?"

"Because I haven't your brains, and I'm not so blessed cool!"

"Easy enough to keep cool last night," replied Levison, with a shrug.

"More than cool. I know I shivered—with cold and fright," said Talbot, smiling.

Lowther arose.

"Gentlemen! I beg to put it to the meeting that Levison has deserved well of St. Jim's," he said solemnly.

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't rot!" said Levison.

"My dear chap, I'm not rotting. I mean it!"

"Thanks, then, Lowther! But there really wasn't much in it. And the real subject for discussion is what we're going to do to-night."

Tom Merry's sunny face took on a grim look.

"We're going to attack in force," he said. "And we're going to put those brutal cads through it, whoever they are, and whatever the consequences may be."

"There won't be any consequences," said Clifton Dane. "They'll have to take what we give them. If they went

"It wouldn't be so easy for a crowd. And you don't want to have to lay siege to the place," Levison replied.

"Doesn't it mean going early?" asked Tom.

"I've thought of that," said Levison. "We shall have to be there in good time, for we don't know what time the bombers gather. Dummies in our beds—that's the game!"

And you fellows hurry up and get into our beds—there you are, smell a rat and go examining the dummies. Half the dorm in bed when he comes will look all right on a night like this."

"Bai Jove! You weally have thought things out, Levison, deah boy!"

"Havin' the wherewithal for the process, my noble kinsman," drawled Cardew.

"If you mean to insinuate, Cardew, that I have no brains—"

"My dear man, how could anyone look at you an' be in any doubt about that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I accept your apology, Cardew. But I do not undahstand in the vey weast what these silly asses are cacklin' at!"

"Are our forces strong enough?" asked Tom.

"We ought to be able to do all that's needful," replied Talbot. "But there are other fellows who would like to be in this, and I don't see any special reason why they shouldn't be."

"Figgy & Co. will be sick if we leave them out," Tom remarked.

"Bit dangerous taking New House fellows in," said Gore. "Old Ratty often slinks into dormitories to see if anyone's absent."

"Oh, it's too cold for him to go prowling around to-night!" Digby said. "I vote we have those three."

"And Redfern & Co.," said Lowther. "And the fellows from No. 5," put in Blake.

"Yaas—Julian an' Kewwushy—"

"Durrance and Lumley-Lumley," Tom said, unheeding Gussy. "And I think that's about enough—unless you want to tlike Skimmy, Talbot?"

Talbot shook his head.

"As a scientific examination into spookery this would be a wash-out, and as an adventure Skimmy wouldn't care about it," he replied.

"I'll see the New House fellows," said Tom. "Blake, you might speak to Julian & Co. Royslane, you can tell Durrance and Lumley-Lumley about it."

Thus it was settled, and a dozen more were added to the sixteen at the meeting, for no one refused to go along.

It was not long after prep when Levison and Clive and Cardew stole out of the School House and over the wall, well wrapped up against the cold.

Again the weather had changed. Snow was once more falling, and a gusty wind blew it against their faces as they left shelter.

"Not much like South Africa, Sidney—eh?" said Cardew.

"Brrrr! No, it's not! And it's not much like the study fire, is it, Ralph?"

"Habet!" chuckled Levison.

But both he and Clive knew that their chum was ready enough to leave the study fire for anything that he thought worth the doing.

No one was about the mill when they reached it.

"But has it occurred to you that, quite possibly, no one will come on such a night as this?" returned Cardew to Clive's exclamation of pleasure at their being in good time.

"Oh, don't be a beast!" said Clive.

"I think they'll come," Levison said.

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No. 30.—EPHRAIM TAGGLES.



The porter of St. Jim's, and a famous character in that great seat of learning. His conversation with the fellows of St. Jim's usually consists of "What I says is this 'ere!" and "You young rips!" Very polite and affable when he scents a tip. Much aggravated by juniors who declare that he has stood at the gate for over a century.

for us afterwards, and let out their game they'd be lynched."

"An' has it occurred to you fellows how you are goin' to effect an entrance?" drawled Cardew. "Excuse my mentionin' it. A minor point, of course, but one that has some slight bearin' on the possibilities of puttin' the evildoers through it."

"My hat! I hadn't thought of that!" admitted Tom.

"Break the blessed door in!" growled Herries.

"We've a better plan than that," said Levison. "Cardew and Clive and I will go on in advance, and hide ourselves in the mill. We'll find some way of getting the door open for you when we hear your signal."

"But if you can get in at the window, why can't we?" asked Kangaroo.

"I seem to feel it in my bones that they will."

"That's only because you want them to," replied Cardew slyly. "Now, all that I feel in my bones is deadly cold."

"Don't you want them to come?" inquired Clive.

"On the whole, y'as, dear boy. But I never expect to get what I want. My experience of this werry world is that that's just what a fellow doesn't get, y'know."

Levison grinned in the gloom. That pessimistic speech came well from that spoiled darling of fortune as Ralph Rockness Cardew.

They got in through the window, Clive, the best gymnast of the trio, coming last, and hauling himself up with very little help.

Once inside, Clive and Levison found themselves somewhat infected by Cardew's pessimism.

It was very cold and comfortless in the old mill. Hardly did it seem possible that Banks and the other local sportsmen who were believed to be of the mill-priory, would leave their snug bar-parlours, or that Knox and the other St. Jim's gay dogs would steal out on such a night.

But they had been there on nights as bad. And Cardew gave the other two a crumb of comfort.

"You will be rejoiced to hear that Knox no longer has the toothache," he said. "He had the offending molar out to-day."

"I'm not rejoiced!" growled Levison. "But it means there's a better chance of his coming," said Clive.

Cardew patted him on the head.

"Sidney grows intelligent!" he said. "But we must beware, Ernest, of grafitin' upon his ingenuous nature our low craft."

"Rats!" snapped Clive.

"We'd better go upstairs," said Levison.

"Yas. I'm not sure that Knox an' his kind friends would give us the heartiest welcome possible if we stayed here," answered Cardew.

The chamber in which they were was that formerly devoted to the grinding work. But the millstones had been removed long since. Above were rooms that might have been used as stores, or might have been living-rooms. A crazy ladder led to these.

Up this ladder they went. That it had been used lately they were sure, for Grundy & Co. had seen the pretended ghost appearing somewhere near the top of the mill.

They reached the floor above the grinding-chamber, and passed on to the next. Cardew flashed an electric-torch around.

"Look!" cried Levison. "I didn't come up here this morning. If I had I'd have found out more!"

For there lay a sheet and a mask, and by them a bottle of phosphoric paint.

"Listen!"

Cardew grabbed each of his chums by an arm.

They stood silent.

"Someone was getting in at the window. Then a voice said:

"Jigger it! I've tored my trousers!"

"Bingo!" cried Levison.

CHAPTER 8.

A Surprise for the Gay Dogs.

"HALLO, there!"

Banks had heard them, but did not recognise their voices. They went down, and he ascended. They met him on the middle

floor, and for a moment his red face was full of renewed suspicion.

"It's all right," drawled Cardew. "We're only the advance guard. The rest will come along later, an' this den of sweeps an' blackguards will be cleared out to-night, or we'll know the reason why!"

The suspicion on Binks' face faded away.

"Sorry!" he said awkwardly. "I 'adn't ought to 'ave thought wrong of you!"

"How's your girl?" asked Levison.

"Eaps better!" replied Binks. "I've seed 'er fads a minute. I told 'er about you young gents, an' she wanted for me to say 'Thank you!' She says if ever I git fightin' with any of you agin after this she'll gimme the sack!"

"I'm glad she's better," said Clive. "I say, Binks, it took some pluck to come here to-night!"

"You've come!" growled Bingo.

"Yes; but there are three of us," answered Levison. "Did you expect to meet anyone here, any of us?"

"Dunno as I did."

"What did you intend doin', by gad?" asked Cardew.

"I meant to see as there wasn't no playin' at ghostesses to-night, not if I 'ad to throttle someone to stop it!" replied Binks grimly.

"Well, we'd better hide now," Levison said. "Where shall it be?"

"Up above," returned Cardew.

"Why?"

"The ghost properties are there. No one can use them without comin' up, an' if anyone comes up we'll attend to him!"

They ascended to the top floor, and hardly had they reached it when the sound of a motor-car was heard.

Peering from the opening at which the apparition had shown itself, they saw the car driven up close to the mill, and by the light of its lamps they were able to recognise one of those who got from it.

"The dear Griggs!" whispered Cardew to Levison. "This is the Wayland contingent. Thought they'd be in it."

"But that cad hasn't a car," said Levison.

"Probably his employer's. Fellow that looks like a pukka chauffeur there. One of the crowd, no doubt, givin' his pals a joy-ride."

"Nice night for it!"

"Well, Ernest, dear boy, the ride was not the sole attraction, y'know."

There had come in the car. Presently the burly Banks came on foot, in two greatcoats and apparently about a dozen mufflers. The four could hear Griggs chaffing him about the way he was wrapped up.

Griggs' voice carried, and so did that of Mr. Banks. It was possible to hear practically all they said.

"Young gents from the school comin' to-night, I wonder?" rumbled the book-maker.

"Oh, they'll come! Knox is no end keen on gettin' his revenge," answered Griggs, in his higher-pitched tones. "I say, don't any of you let on that I've lost that I O U of his! He'll pay if he thinks I've got it, but not if he knows I can't produce the thing!"

"That's all right!" Banks rumbled. "I say, what's the matter with broaching a bottle while we wait for them?"

There appeared to be nothing the matter with that, from the point of view of the Wayland trio. But the bottle could hardly have been uncorked when the St. Jim's seniors arrived upon the scene.

There were only two of them. Knox

was one, of course, and Levison made out the other to be Cutts.

The greetings exchanged below showed that he was right. There was some coarse chaff about the spook business, from which it was easy to gather that the assembled half-dozen blackguards thought it clever and funny.

Clive heard Bingo grit his teeth, and knew that he was thinking of the little housemaid at the vicarage. And Clive thought of Grundy. He was naturally not so fond of Grundy as Bingo was of his Nellie; but his generous indignation had been aroused, and he was not the only fellow who appreciated fully the real pluck that Grundy had shown.

The hannters of the mill settled down to their revelry.

Above, the four took counsel, and agreed that if anyone came up to play spook he should be bound and gagged. Levison produced from his pockets a small ball of strong twine and a spare handkerchief, and Cardew congratulated him sarcastically on living up to the Boy Scout motto of "Be prepared!" But Cardew did not add that he himself had come likewise provided.

Then they waited for the three curlew calls which were to be the signal of Tom Merry's approach with his small army.

Of one thing they were uncertain—by what the spookery was governed. Did the rascals below practice it on chance, or was a watch kept, and did the apparition show up when anyone drew near? Against that there was the fact that the last few nights had been very dark, and that it had hardly been possible to distinguish the figure of anyone until it was close at hand. Yet Grundy and his companions on the Monday, and the crowd on Tuesday, had run into a spook manifestation in such a manner as to suggest that the rascals were aware that someone was at hand.

That problem was never solved, but its solution mattered little. What is certain, and what did matter, was that Knox was in the hands of the four when the curlew calls sounded through the snow.

He came on unsuspectingly, and was gagged almost before he knew that they were upon him. They were binding him when they heard the curlew call.

Knox's startled eyes opened wider when he saw Levison snatch up the sheet and mask.

"Quick!" hissed Levison. "Help me, Ralph! Bingo and Clive, hold that cad down!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Clive.

But Cardew asked no questions. His mind leaped at once to Levison's plan.

The mask, daubed with some of the phosphoric paint, was slipped on to Levison's face. He robed himself, and hurried down the ladder.

Then Clive understood, and gasped. It was a bold stroke, just like Levison.

They had been sure that they would find a way to let their comrades in, but they had not thought out a way. The six mill-haunters were all bigger and stronger than any of the St. Jim's juniors inside the place, though Bingo was probably a match for any of them. But, anyway, they were six to four, and it might not have been so easy to open that door.

But, with a little luck, Levison would do it easily enough now. The other five had seen Knox go up, and had no suspicion that there was anyone else up there to come down. Levison was much shorter than Knox, but in the circumstances that fact was hardly likely to be noticed. He had only to play his part boldly, and they would take him for the

spectre going out to frighten anyone passing.

And neither Cardew nor Clive doubted their chum's boldness. Failure would have surprised them.

Cardew stole down after Levison as far as the middle floor. Bingo and Clive were left to guard Knox. They did not attempt to the him up. They had all they knew how to do to hold him, for he struggled desperately. It was dark, too, for Cardew had taken the electric-torch with him.

"Yow!"

Bingo ran to the knee of Knox in the pit of his stomach, and crashed down almost on top of Cardew, clutching at the ladder as he went, and thus breaking his fall somewhat.

Knox's fist smote Clive right between the eyes, and Clive's hold loosened.

The prefect tore the gag from his mouth, and yelled frantically to his pals.

But it was too late!

Levison had slipped out, with no more than a casual glance from any of the five below. And now Tom Merry and his band were awaiting in.

Knox tumbled down the ladder almost on top of Bingo, and before the butcher-lad could clutch him had reached the lower flight, and was following Cardew down. Clive also came, and he and Bingo were only just behind Knox.

Below, the assailants of the mill were in such force as gave the half-dozen bad eggs who had played their blackguardly game there no chance.

Tom Merry and Talbot, Figgins and Kerr, Noble and Dane, Blake and D'Arcy, Julian and Kerruish, Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, Manners and Lowther, Roylance and Durrance, and the rest crowded in, till the place was full to overflowing. Behind them all came Levison, who had waited to tear off his mask and sheat.

Banks and Cutts, Griggs and the other two Wayland sparks, stared at Knox as though they could not believe their eyes. Levison had got past them without suspicion. They had taken him for Knox. But here was Knox, and here were a couple of dozen or more sturdy juniors bent on taking it out of them!

"Ere, what's all this mean?" growled Banks, with a desperate effort at bluff.

"You'll soon see!" snapped Tom Merry.

Bingo pushed his way through to face Knox. It had been the prefect who had gone up to prepare himself for playing ghost; and, naturally enough, Bingo held him guilty of having played ghost the night before, and scared Bingo's girl almost to death.

Levison and Cardew and Clive knew better. Knox had been an absentee then. But they did not think it worth while to correct the butcher-lad's mistake.

And Tom Merry and the rest of the

new-comers paused. Somehow, without knowing just what had happened, they understood that Bingo had a heavier reckoning to make up with these cowardly rascals than they had.

"Put your 'ands up!" roared Bingo.

"Stand back and give them room!" cried Tom Merry.

"What's bitten you, butcher?" snarled Knox.

Cutts grinned. Though they might make these night expeditions together now and then, Cutts and Knox were not real friends. The Fifth-Former had been given one of the biggest surprises of his life when Binks had thrashed him, and he was rather pleased with the notion of Knox's getting just such another surprise.

"You dirty 'ound!" roared Bingo.

"Call yourself a gent, an' go scarin' of gals an' women? Put your fists up, or you'll get my bunch of fives acrost your ugly mouth!"

"Stand back and give them room!" repeated Tom, trying hard to clear a space for the combat. You, Banks, get back into that corner! Your turn will come all right, I promise you! But it's Knox's first!"

Still the prefect hesitated. He was sick at the turn affairs had taken. His Sixth-Form prestige would avail him nothing here, he knew. These juniors would deal with him as they would have dealt with Racke or Crooke. And if the story leaked out he would be a prefect no longer; worse than that, he would almost certainly be sacked!

Bingo had waited long enough.

Smack!

His open hand smote the face of Knox with the sound like the report of a pistol.

Then Knox's fury woke. They were hard at it directly.

There was no time to put the fight on a regular footing. Neither Binks nor Knox thought of rounds or seconds, any more than they thought of gloves.

No time, and no need. Carpentier did not deal with Joe Beckett more speedily than the butcher-lad dealt with Gerald Knox.

Knox might have the advantages of weight and reach. His strength was not greater than Bingo's; his skill was distinctly less. There was in the butcher-lad the making of a champion, and now he was a living flame of fury.

Crash! That was on Knox's jaw, and it made him reel.

Bingo hit the hook it on the nose, and blood spurted.

Bang! Right on the mark he got it, and fell, and lay helpless.

Bingo stood over him, his nostrils quivering, his eyes gleaming.

"E's 'ad 'is little lot," he said. "E won't come up for no more. Is there any of you who's game to take 'is place?"

You, Banks, you walkin' beer-'ouse? You, Mr. Cutts, who ought to be ashamed of yourself to be in this? You with the shover's cap, that looks a bit more like 'arf a man than any of the rest of 'em!"

"Lookee 'ere, young Binks," began Banks. "I—"

"Don't you talk to me, or I shall bloom'n well go for you! If you crew of dirty tikes had what you deserve you'll all go to the stone-jug for this game!"

"What's the good of bullyraggin' us?" snarled Griggs. "The ghost idea was Knox's, an' he's had his dose."

"You," snapped Bingo. "What can I do but give you the rough side of my tongue? If you was to stand up to me I should kick you, you two yards of shoddy! Hi, you in the shover's cap, ain't you on?"

Binks had picked out the best of a bad lot. The fellow who had driven Griggs and the other Wayland specimen over stepped forward.

"I'll fight you if you like!" he said.

"But before I start I'd like to say that I'm sorry I was in this, and that I sha'n't easily be caught in anything like it again. If anything's happened to anyone that matters to you, take it out of my hide! You can lick me, I know, but I dare say I deserve it."

Bingo's hands fell to his sides.

"What bloom'n change am I goin' to get out of liekin' you after that?" demanded the butcher-lad. "Look 'ere, best thing you can do, if Mr. Merry an' the rest of these gents agree, is to clear out this, an' drive straight off 'ome! Never mind Griggs an' Buckle; they can foot it!"

"No, I was in it, and I'm not going to shirk my share of what's coming," replied the chauffeur.

"What are you wearin' that for?" asked Bingo, pointing to the strip of variegated ribbon on the fellow's chest.

"I've the right!" came the quick reply.

"Yuss. You was a man, onst! I reckon you might make one again, if you tried 'ard. Griggs an' Buckle an' Banks, they never was men! An' these other two—why, they're on'y schoolboys, though I dessey they're on' older than me."

There was a certain rude eloquence about Bingo. The fellow had been deeply moved, and the manhood in him spoke. It spoke to the chauffeur, as his crimson face showed. It spoke to Tom Merry and the rest. Perhaps it spoke even to Cutts, for he hardly looked comfortable.

"I give it up!" said Bingo. "It's for you now, sir; you put this thing through, I reckon."

It was to Tom Merry he said that, and as he said it he turned to go.



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"You're not going, are you, Binks?" said Tom.

"Yuss. I've done what I come for." Bingo looked down at Knox, who had come to himself after a full minute of oblivion. Knox looked up at him with a scowl.

Bingo walked out, and disappeared into the snowy night.

**CHAPTER 9.
Retribution.**

"**W**E'LL take Banks first," said Tom Merry. "He's the oldest."

"And the ugliest!" added Lowther, humorously.

"You'd better be careful 'ow you lay 'ands on me, young gents!" said the burly bookie. "There is such a thing as the 'or', you know."

"You can have all the law you want, if that's your game!" replied Tom. "I shouldn't think the law allows the kind of thing that's been done here, though they say the law is an ass. But we're going to put you through it, whatever may happen to us afterwards for doing it."

Banks looked appealingly at his companions in villainy. Perhaps even yet he thought that bluff might choke the juniors off.

But none of the others thought so. Knox and Cutts knew them too well. Griggs and Buckle were plainly afraid. The man who wore the strip of ribbon looked disgusted with himself and his fellow-sinners.

And Banks was no hero. Even had they made a struggle he would not have counted heavily in it.

"Figgys, Reddy, Kangaroo, will you attend to Banks?" rapped out Tom.

George Figgins, Dick Redfern, and Harry Noble stepped forward, their beaming faces indicating that they were quite pleased with the job assigned them.

"Take his coat off!" ordered Tom. Mr. Banks was divested of his coat.

"Take his waistcoat off!" "Ere, I say—"

"Don't you say anything!" snapped Kangaroo.

The waistcoat came off. Tom, with a hand to his chin, looked at the fellow.

Lowther spoke. "Take his t—"

"Here, hold hard! There's a limit!" protested Kerr.

"My dear chap, I was only about to suggest that his temperature might be taken before we go farther," replied Lowther. "What did you imagine I meant?"

"He, ha, ha!"

Mr. Banks did not join in the merriment, though even Cutts and Knox and Griggs and Buckle grinned feebly.

"Got those canes?" asked Tom.

Blake produced a bundle of a dozen or so supple canes.

"Do you think as I'm goin' to be caned like a bloomin' kid?" roared Banks.

"No. We know you are!" snapped Tom. "The him up, you fellows! Clive, Owen, Herries, you might lend a hand if he's troublesome!"

Mr. Banks was troublesome; but the half-dozen hefty juniors were too strong for him. With hands and feet bound, he was laid over the table, from which cards and bottles had been swept. He squirmed and swore; but he was helpless.

"Any volunteers for the job of executioner?" inquired Tom.

There were at least a score. Tom chose Herries.

Herries laid on with vim.

"Yow! Ow! Stop it! I can't stand no more, curse you!" yelled Banks.

But Herries paid not the slightest heed. The cane split, and he took another.

"Banks, Banks," said Cardew solemnly, "what an exceedingly slovenly person you are! Your little breeches can't have been brushed since they came from the tailor's hands, by gad! Phew! What a dust!"

"That will do, Herries!" said Tom.

"Oh, I could go on for a lot longer yet," answered Herries cheerily.

Banks groaned. He was past cursing.

Herries gave him a final stinging cut that did for the second cane. Then they put him aside.

"We'll take you next, Cutts!" Tom said.

"You dare! Look here, Merry! I promise you that if you try that game with me I'll make you all repent of it sooner or later! I'll kill you, by gad!"

"We'll risk it!" Tom answered coolly.

"Blake, Lawrence, Roylance, Talbot, Manners, and Wynn, attend to him!"

The six chosen were as ready to risk the wrath of Cutts as Tom himself, and in their grip he was helpless.

"Blake, you will operate?" Tom said, when the Fifth-Former, purple with ire, spluttering and belowing, was laid in position.

"Oh, rather!" cried Blake, seizing a cane.

And he laid on with a will. When it

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came to the actual endurance of punishment, Cutts showed more fortitude than Banks had done. He clenched his teeth, and Blake drew from him no more than a groan or two.

Cutts was lifted up and laid aside. It was not adjudged safe to release him yet. "Gussey, Dig, Julian, Kerr, Lumley, Lumley, Hammond, will you have the goodness to attend to Mr. Griggs?" said Tom.

"Oh, look here, young Merry, a joke's a joke, but I don't see why you want to carry this away further," protested the lawyer's clerk. "I didn't think out the ghost dodge; it was your man Knox who did that!"

"Shut up, you cur!" snarled Knox. Julian operated on Griggs, and went about his work with real satisfaction. Griggs had more than once said nasty things about Julian's uncle, Mr. Moss, and the nephew had heard of these.

The other Wayland had submitted with no more than a word or two of pleading, and Lowther saw to it that he got what was due to him.

"Now we'll take you, Knox!" said Tom.

"I'm a prefect!" snarled the Sixth-Former. "I defy you to touch me!"

Straight in the eyes Tom looked him. "I wonder you aren't ashamed to talk about that," he said. "How long do you think you'd be a prefect if the Head and Railton knew of what you've been doing here? You're the worst of the whole rotten crew!"

"Oh, you won't sneak—I know you better than that!" sneered Knox.

"I'm not so sure that it would be sneaking. I'm not sure that we don't owe it to the honour of the school to have you kicked out. But you've had one lesson to-night, and you're going to have another, and I'll see that it's one you'll remember, by Jove!"

Tom meant to wield the cane himself in this case, and they all knew why.

Guilty though he was, Knox was a prefect, and to lay hands on a prefect was a school crime. Tom had led; he would take the biggest risk.

But not without an offer from someone as ready as he to take it.

"Thomas," said Cardew gravely, "I

shall esteem it a favour if you will let me play executioner this time!"

"Can't be did, old chap! It's my job! But you can help to tie him up. Come along, Levison, Dane, Durrance, Talbot!"

Knox struggled furiously. He got Durrance in the face with his fist, and made Clifton Dane's nose bleed with a savage jab from his elbow. But his struggles were useless. He was overcome at length, and laid face downwards on the table.

"Swish, swish, swish!" Tom laid on until his arm ached, and still Knox raved and swore and threatened.

"I thought you'd get tired first, but I'm just about done!" admitted Tom, throwing down the cane.

Levison snatched it up, anticipating Cardew by the fraction of a second only.

And Levison laid on until Knox's oaths ceased, and he fell to whimpering, his spirit utterly broken for the moment.

The punishment was savage; but it was no more than the Sixth-Former deserved. He had cared nothing at all for the results of the cowardly imposture he had planned; he would have gone on with the game, unheeding the sufferings of his victims, had he been allowed to go on. A mere ordinary flogging was not enough.

He would scheme vengeance later, they knew. They cared little for that; but it did not serve to lighten his punishment, naturally.

Talbot and Kerr together cried to Levison to stop.

"He'll be fainting in a minute!" said Kerr.

"Go on till he faints, Levison!" growled Kangaroo.

"No, stop!" said Tom.

He turned to the chauffeur. "We can't do that kind of thing to a man who put in three years over the water," he said.

"Thank you!" muttered the fellow. Then he lifted his head, and looked Tom straight between the eyes. "I think I'd put a bullet through my head if you did," he said. "I may be a bit of a black sheep; but I'm not woolly lamb enough to bear that!"

"We're going to carry these five out and roll them in the snow, just to cool them off," went on Tom. "When we've gone you can untie them if you like; but it's for you to decide. Only we must know first. They wouldn't be much loss; but we can't afford to have any of them pegging out, you know!"

"You can leave them with me," replied the chauffeur.

Banks was picked up, hurried through the door, and shot into a snowdrift. Griggs and Buckle followed him.

"You'd better think twice, Merry!" snapped Cutts, as Tom and three or four more seized him.

"Oh, we've done our thinking!" replied Tom.

Cutts was flung on top of Banks. Then Knox was carried out and shot on to the heap.

"Griggs," said Tom, "who owns this place?"

"A client of my governor's!" mumbled Griggs.

"I guessed as much. Well, if we hear of any of you using it again after to-night your governor will hear about it, too—that's all. Come along, you fellows!"

And the juniors formed up into column of fours, and marched off through the fast-falling snow.

They had taken a heavy risk. They had incurred the vengeful hatred of three who might yet be dangerous. Griggs and Buckle counted for a little; but Banks was a bad enemy, and Cutts would not rest till he had had some measure of revenge, and Knox, with his authority as a prefect, was certain to find means to make them smart before long.

But they had solved the mystery of the mill, and had put a stop to the ghostly manifestations; and the future could take care of itself.

So they marched back in triumph, while behind them the discomfited enemy, like the heathen of old, raged furiously.

THE END.

(Another grand long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, next week, entitled: "Malcolm's Secret!" Order your copy early.)



SYNOPSIS.

Dick Danby, a stalwart lad of sixteen, obtains the promise of partnership from Captain Morgan Kidd, skipper of the auxiliary schooner Foam, and his daughter Stella, in a treasure cruise to the wrecked Pathan. Dick is the sole survivor of the Pathan, which was lost and is lying submerged, off an island in the South Seas. In the strong-room of the ill-fated ship is two million sterling in bar-gold and money, and the Dragon's Eye—a wonderful diamond.

Otto Schwab, posing as a Dutchman—though in reality the commander of the U-boat which sank the Pathan—and Sulah Mendoza, a villainous Malay, are their unscrupulous rivals for the treasure.

Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox join the expedition, also Wang Su, a Chinese boy.

They reach the island off which the Pathan is sunk, and a fierce encounter with the Red Rover takes place, in which our friends are victorious.

Later, it is discovered that Otto Schwab and Mendoza are in league with the natives of the island. Work on the wreck is commenced.

Wang Su obtains the Dragon's Eye, unknown to the others. That night Dick and Wang Su destroy the Islanders' war-canoes by fire.

Next day Otto Schwab is taken prisoner, and he informs Captain Kidd that Mendoza and the Islanders are going to attack the Foam.

(Now read on.)

Against Overwhelming Odds.

IT is scarce necessary to record that no one slept on board the Foam that night.

It was with mixed feelings they watched the approach of day, for to their dismay, they found the schooner surrounded by a thick mist, which hid from view everything a dozen yards away.

But though the increasing light told that the sun was mounting higher in the heavens each minute, there was not a breath of wind, and even the bright beams of the orb of day seemed unable to disperse the blanket of mist which hemmed them in on every side.

Scarce a word was spoken. Every ear was strained to catch the first-sound of bare feet creeping over the coral reef which would herald the approach of their foes.

But when hour succeeded hour, and nothing happened, the crew of the Foam began to hope that Mendoza would withhold his attack until either the weather cleared, or the tide arose sufficiently to enable them to warp.

That was the longest morning Dick Danby ever remembered.

Much to his disgust, Captain Kidd had pushed him in the stern, when he would far rather have been in the bows, on which, he felt assured, the first brunt of the attack would fall. His closest companions were two Kanakas amidsthips, and he would have the whole after-part of the vessel to protect against a possible, though, perhaps, improbable, attack.

Harry and Joe were in the bows, the rest of the Kanakas lined the bulwarks to the waist, whilst Stella was perched on the cross-trees of the mainmast, anxiously watching for the rising of the mist.

Wang Su had blandly refused to be assigned to any post, pleading that he was "a velly frightened Chinaman," and would be much more useful below than on deck.

As by this time all on board knew the Chinaman had not a streak of cowardice in his composition, and that his plea of being too frightened to fight was only an excuse, Captain Kidd very wisely allowed him to have his own way.

As for the skipper, his post would be at the Bull Pup once the fighting commenced; until then he kept all on the alert by patrolling the vessel from stern to stem.

He was longing for the fight to commence, and fuming every minute it was delayed.

"Can't make out what the half-baked pirates are waiting for, Dick!" he said, harping for a moment by Danby's side.

"For canoes, most likely," replied Dick. "Perhaps they were not able to persuade the other islands to give up their craft, and hauled us ashore so that we shouldn't give them the go-by whilst they were waiting."

"Maybe!" agreed the skipper doubtfully. "If so, they'll find themselves left behind. The tide is already lifting the Foam's stern, and it's coming in fast. In another hour we—"

He broke off abruptly, and hastened towards the bows, as a sudden burst of rifle-firing came from the reef, followed by a chorus of fierce, bloodcurdling yells, so close at hand that Dick knew the attackers must have crept unseen within striking distance of the schooner.

A moment later the loud, sharp crack of the quick-firer rang out, and, peering through the mist, Dick saw stabs of fire, which told him that his comrades were hard at it.

His first impulse was to rush forward and join in the fray, indeed, he had reached the mizzen-mast before he realised that, by so doing, he would be neglecting his post, and leaving the stern of the schooner unguarded.

"Rotten luck!" he growled, as he turned to retrace his steps. "The other chaps are getting all the fun, and I'm tied here, all dressed up and nowhere to go!"

Even as the last words left his lips he realised that he was in for an even more exciting time than the shouts and shots from the bows told that his comrades were experiencing.

Like a distorted jack-in-the-box, an Islander's head, appeared over the stern.

His face, convulsed with the lust of blood, was rendered even more repulsive by a huge knife he carried between his

more men from the canoes, which had crept close to the Foam's stern, whilst the Malays engaged the attention of the defenders around the bows.

Like an overwhelming flood they surged forward. Clubbing his rifle, for every moment he could delay the savages' advance would be of vital importance to his comrades, and he was determined to die rather than retreat an inch before they were ready, Dick faced the howling, jostling, overconfident crowd.

A roar that might almost be said to rival the bark of the Bull Pup resounded in his ears. The next moment, Captain Kidd, whirling a huge cutlass above his head, was on his right.

Shriller, yet as death-defiant as his skipper's shout, Kou uttered the war-cry of his tribe, as, wielding an axe in both



Swiftly Dick Danby's rifle sprang to his shoulder, and the Islander fell back into the sea with a bullet through his forehead. (See this page.)

teeth, to enable him to use both hands to clamber over the bulwarks.

Swiftly Dick Danby's rifle sprang to his shoulder, and the Islander fell back into the sea with a bullet through his forehead.

The bloodcurdling yells that arose from beneath the stern warned Dick that the savages were attacking in force, and a loud cry of warning burst from his lips as he fired at a second savage, who appeared close to where the first had been.

By this time the bulwarks as far as the ship's waist were lined with the clay-bedaubed heads of yelling Islanders. Fearing lest his retreat should be cut off, Dick stepped back to the mizzen-mast, firing as quickly as he could pull the trigger, until his magazine was empty; then, drawing his automatic pistol scattered death amongst the clustering savages.

For a moment the attackers paused, daunted by the death-dealing weapons of their white foe, but every second brought

hands, he flung himself at the savages who were closing in on Dick's left.

For nearly a minute the fight, fighting as men will who fight for their lives, held the Islanders at bay.

But, though reinforced by Joe Maddox and a Kanaka, they could not hope to hold back such overwhelming numbers. Inch by inch—not one of which but was hotly contested—they were driven back, until three-parts of the ship was in the Islanders' hands.

Urged on by their chiefs and skull-adorned priest, the Islanders swept down upon the little party, thinking to swamp them by sheer weight of numbers.

But Britons never fight so well as when their case seems hopeless.

And hopeless indeed it appeared to be. Assailed from the reef by a constant stream of bullets from the rifles of Mendoza and his Malays, whose attack had only been intended as a feint to draw the attention of the crew from the Islanders creeping on them from out the mist, the

defenders of the Foam felt that this was indeed the end, and that they had only succeeded in recovering the Pathan's treasure to enrich the German and the Portuguese.

Already the Islanders were swarming below, or climbing the rigging, to hurl their spears down on the dauntless little band.

So far as the first-named were concerned, this was a decided advantage to the Britishers, as they immediately commenced looting the vessel, finding that a safer and far more profitable employment than hurling themselves upon men who had not even the common sense to know when they were beaten.

They also released Otto Schwab, who rushed on deck.

Maddened by rage, he snatched a shark's-tooth-studded club from a native, and rushed at Captain Kidd.

The next moment a squeal of terror burst from his lips. Dodging the rage-blinded German, the skipper seized him by the throat and belt, and seemingly without an effort hurled him over the side.

Overreared by this exhibition of strength and daring, the Islanders drew back.

But only for a moment. The next they surged forward once more, their bloodcurdling shrieks ringing through the mist.

"Good-bye, skipper! So-long, you chaps! Our numbers are up!" cried Dick, frantically thrusting a clip into the magazine of his rifle.

Even as he spoke, a loud explosion, accompanied by a cloud of smoke, came from the head of the cabin stairs, and the next moment the Islanders recoiled as they saw their snake god, huge tongues of fire shooting from his gaping mouth, moving unsteadily towards them.

Surprise held them motionless for a fraction of a second; then, howling with terror, they turned and fled, scorched by the fiery breath of their outraged deity. Almost before the Britishers had re-

covered from the surprise of the snake god's dramatic appearance, the deck was clear of every foe save one, and he, a wounded priest, enraged at the treacherous part played by the god he had tended so assiduously for many years, raised himself on one elbow, and, with a last dying effort, launched his spear at the fire-sporting apparition.

The weapon struck the feathered mask fairly in the centre, and a shrill cry of pain came from its interior, as it stumpled a few steps, then sprawled on the deck, revealing a pair of wildly-kicking, yellow legs that had supported it.

Amazed at the result of his blow, the priest opened his mouth, probably to summons back his fleeing companions, but, guessing his intention, Dick Danby gave him his quietus with the butt-end of his rifle, ere he dragged the feathered head from off Wang Su, and knelt by his side.

The spear had struck the brave Chinaman in the lower part of his body, but had glanced off some hard substance in the vicinity, and he was still conscious when Dick had seen him deposit his job.

Piercing the bag, the fearful weapon had bit deep into Wang Su's thigh, inflicting a terrible wound from which the blood was pouring in a steady stream.

Realising that if the flow of blood were not stopped his brave little servant would bleed to death, and unable to withdraw the head of the spear, Dick wrenched it from its shaft, and it dropped on deck, together with the embroidered bag.

Snatching up a piece of rope, Dick Danby tied it round Wang Su's leg above the wound, and, forming it into a tourniquet, soon stopped the bleeding.

"That's all right, old chap! You'll not get your ticket for shadowland just yet," he said reassuringly.

"Me allee light. Wang Su no much hurt," replied the Chinaman.

But his voice was very weak, and Dick finding that, for a time, at any rate, the

fighting had ceased, was about to carry him below when, to his utter amazement, a spasm of fury convulsed the Chinaman's face, and he looked accusingly at Dick as he cried, or rather shrieked:

"You thief! You great, heap-big thief! Wang Su save you life, you lob pool Chinamans!"

Dick looked at his faithful little servant in alarm rather than anger, for he thought him delirious.

"That's all right, Wang! Don't put yourself in a fever over nothing. What is it you've got?" he asked soothingly.

"You stolee pool Chinaman's job!" he replied, more calmly, though evidently still labouring under great excitement.

"Oh, that's the trouble, is it? Well, keep your pigtail on; it's here! It's some Joss, for it certainly saved your life," replied Danby, picking up the embroidered bag, and trying to disentangle it from the shark's teeth with which part of the haft, as well as the spear's head, was studded.

Now a shark's tooth is made to hold things, and even though they had been stolen from their rightful owner's jaws, they still did their duty, with the result that the bag was torn in halves and something fell on deck, which rolled towards the scampers.

A cry of horror burst from the wounded Chinaman, a cry that ended in an ejaculation of delight as Dick bent swiftly down and seized the object just as it was about to disappear through a scupper-hole into the sea.

"Give it me! Give pool Wang him's Joss!" pleaded Wang Su.

But Dick Danby did not reply.

He was gazing, in amazement and rising anger, at the glistening object that lay in his hand.

It was the Dragon's Eye!

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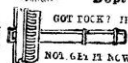
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