

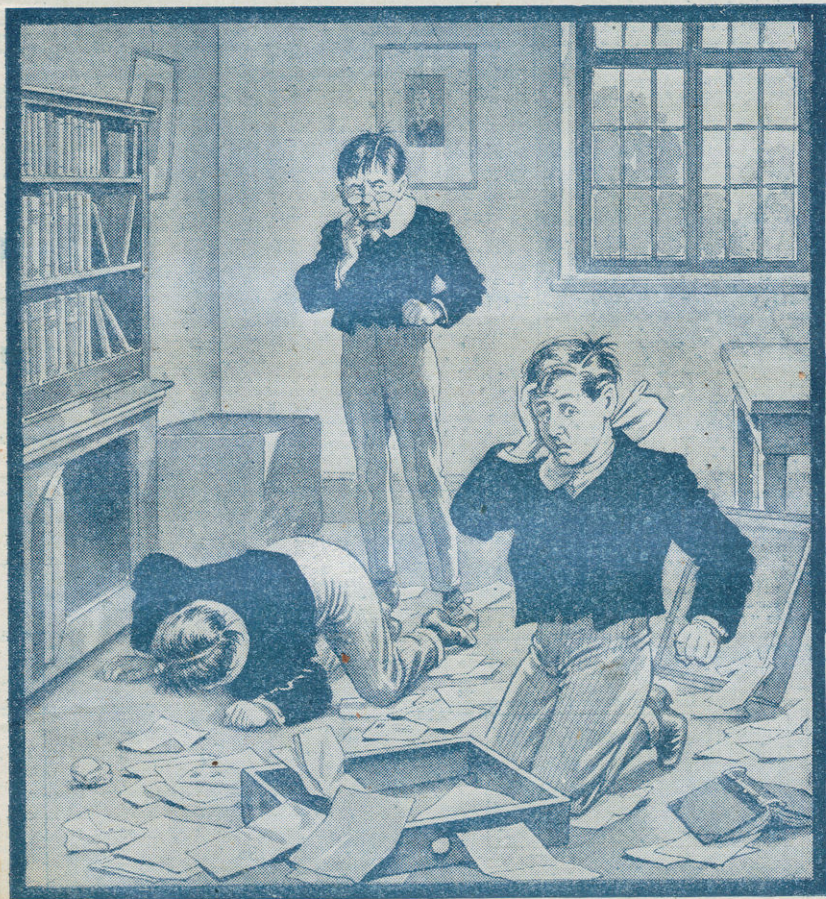
TWO GRAND COMPLETE SCHOOL STORIES IN THIS NUMBER!

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## TALBOT'S STOLEN STORY!

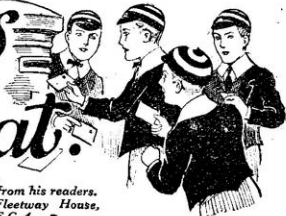


**THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING MANUSCRIPT!**

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# The Editor's Chat.



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For next Wednesday:

## "BROUGHT TO LIGHT!"

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## PAPERS ALL THE WEEK.

A very jolly little notion indeed comes to hand from Bayswater. It is what one calls "something like," and, in fact, it is very much like it. The correspondent who brings the idea to my notice says that there should be a Companion Paper fresh hot from the printing works every day of the week.

He says that Frank Richards writes a book every week, ditto Martin Clifford. True, very true!

Then why can't Owen Conquest do the same? That's all! Is Owen Conquest lazy, or suffering from that tired feeling? If this neat little programme could be put into execution, we should have the "Magnet" on Monday, the "Greyfriars Herald" on Tuesday, the "Gem" on Wednesday, the "Rookwood Recorder" on Thursday, the "Penny Popular" on Friday, and then, I take it, my chum would clamour for the "Courtfield Courier" on Saturday!

I am much obliged to him, but though it is a tempting enough programme, I am afraid we cannot manage it yet awhile. You see, authors are but humans. They want sleep and odd minutes for meals; and, although the three writers mentioned practically live with wet towels round their aching brows, and, despite the fact that they are willing fellows, there are limits to what even such champions as they can achieve.

## THE "PROMENADE EN L'AIR."

The other day I saw in a very smartly-written French weekly paper a reference to what the flying men were doing in France. There were accompanying

pictures showing bird's-eye glimpses of Paris—such quarters as the Place Vendôme and the Trocadero.

And then the writer spoke of the lack of development in France. He seemed sort of disappointed altogether, and I fail to see the occasion for his gloom.

"There are two reasons," he says—"which account for the paralysis of aviation in France—lack of money, and the fact that the public has no confidence."

Now, of course, nobody has much money these days. It was all washed away in the war, but even with these shortcomings any outsider can see what strides the gallant French have been making in the business. My French confere should not get into the dumps.

By the way, his description of a flight is fairly fascinating.

"Let us," he says, "go out and see the spring-time from the height of heaven. We won't talk much. We'll fly. When you have flown once you will be ready to agree that there is no more risk up in the air than on land. But one has got to know this truth. Fear comes from ignorance best part of the time."

## RECOMMENDATIONS.

Bracknell is a delightful village away down in Berks, and a letter just received from there, signed Dorothy and Arthur Tucker, would put fresh heart into a dying duck in a thunderstorm. They are simply delighted with all the Companion Papers in that part of the country, and my two special fitens are recommending the stories all round. So I shall look for a boom from Berks!

## TROTTER ROUND THE GLOBE.

You remember the old, old yarn of the fellow who slipped on the magic gosholies and wished he could travel. And, hey presto! he found himself jammed inside a stuffy continental railway-carriage, wedged between a fat man with a cough and a lady who complained of her rheumatism as the train jolted on through the night.

Then the lights got lower, and the traveller was afraid he had forgotten his

passport. After that he was awfully anxious about his money, but he could not get his hand down to his pocket to make sure all was safe.

Later still he found the cooking at a foreign hotel upset him, and the bed was damp, and he did not know the language, and so on, and so on, till at last he wished himself back in his own snug little village of Muddleton-on-the-Slush where, at least, he did not fear what might happen, for he knew well nothing dangerous ever did happen.

There is something in it. Fellows sigh for the world, and when they see it, they only wish they hadn't. I was reminded of all this by what my good friend Tom Knowles tells me. He and his ship are running on a twelve-month charter for the Italian Government, and the trip has enabled him to see Venice. He says that the Rialto Bridge, of the "Merchant of Venice" fame, is not as beautiful as it is portrayed. The shops are squalid. He did not think much of Leghorn either. The Italians call the place Livorno, which sounds like a dish of fried pig. Well, Livorno is small, dirty, and rather smelly.

Travelling, in this case, with duty to give interest—and, somehow, there is never much real pleasure unless there is a seasoning of duty to go with it—has plenty of charm. If some of my chums read the letter I am referring to, they would be yearning to pack up and get aboard the lugger.

But it is not everybody who can go to sea. A whole crowd of us have to remain on land to look after the odd jobs and carry on. The sea life is for a few, rather an enviable few. For romance is waiting for you out at sea. Romance comes aboard immediately the ship has slipped off from the quay, and it is there all the time while the voyage lasts.

Your Editor



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# TALBOT'S STOLEN STORY!

BY  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD**

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Divided Opinions.

"ENGLISH literature! Yah!" said Racke of the Shell.

"Does the monosyllabic express your considered opinion of English literature, Racke?" inquired Monty Lowther politely. "If so, may I ask how you come to have one? The 'Pink 'Un,' and 'Ruff's Guide to the Turf,' whatever their merits, are not precisely 'wells of English undefiled,' and I never heard of your reading anything else."

"I don't," replied Racke. "I wouldn't be bothered with Shakespeare an' Marie Corelli an' foote of that sort, by gad!"

"Which sort?" asked Cardew, grinning.

"That sort. Don't I make it clear to you? Can't help that. I haven't undertaken to supply you with intelligence."

"That is fortunate, for you have none to spare. Well, Shakespeare an' Marie are both Stratfordians, an' I suppose that accounts for your notion that they fall into the same class."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Lowther and Talbot and a few more laughed. But the majority of the Shell and Fourth, gathered in the School House junior Common-room, saw nothing in particular to laugh at. Shakespeare came into the school curriculum, and Miss Corelli did not; but that was all the difference they could see, and on the whole most of them preferred Marie of Avon to William of Avon.

Perhaps it was with a view to giving them a clearer notion of what constitutes literature that Dr. Holmes, Head of St. Jim's, had made the arrangement which was really arousing Racke's ire, as both Lowther and Cardew knew perfectly well, though they pretended not to know it.

On the school notice-board that day had appeared the following announcement:

### "LECTURES ON ENGLISH LITERATURE."

"The Head has pleasure in informing the school that he has arranged with Professor Aloysius Fielding, D.Litt., to deliver a series of lectures on the great English writers. These lectures will begin a week hence, and attendance at them will be compulsory for members of all Forms down to the Fourth inclusive. Boys in the Third and Second who desire to attend will be allowed to do so with the consent of their respective Form-masters. The lectures will be given in Hall in the evenings, and there will be no preparation for those attending them on the dates on which they take place."

"RICHARD HOLMES."

"I don't care a bang about Shakespeare and all those old back-numbers!" said George Alfred Grundy. "But I'm not complaining, for one. It's easier to sit and hear a chap spout about books and authors and things than it is to mug up Virgil and swot over quadratic equations."

For once Grundy fairly expressed the general feeling. There were, perhaps, half a dozen fellows in the Shell and Fourth, including Lowther, Talbot, Cardew, Kerr, and Gunn, to whom that notice had brought pleasure. There were several others—Tom Merry, Manners, Julian, Lunley-Lumley, Roylance, and Durrance among them, who had not the least objection to listening to the lectures, though they might have preferred a cinema entertainment. But to the bulk of them it meant getting off prep for something much easier, as Grundy put it.

"Oh, dash it all!" said Crooke. "A chap needn't bother with most of the prep, unless he chooses. Of course, maths have to be done after some fashion or other, but who wastes time muggin' at classics or rot of that sort? I know we don't, by gad!"

"So Linton suspects, I fancy," remarked Tom Merry.

"There's one thing; we needn't listen to the old fossil!" Racke said.

"No. You can play noughts and crosses on a paper on your knees instead," returned Manners contemptuously.

"Noughts an' crosses!" snorted Crooke. "Well, I suppose you could bet on that? Anything you can bet on is good enough for you fellows, isn't it?"

"I don't mind the lectures. What I bar is the Head setting us exam papers on them afterwards, just to find out whether we've been attending to the professor's chinwag," said Blake.

"He won't. He'd have said he was going to if he'd meant to," answered Tom Merry.

"If he doesn't, Linton and Lathom will. They won't let such a chance slip," Blake said gloomily. And Blake was right!

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Ignorami!

"SUCH crass ignorance as yours, Racke, is absolutely excusable!" snapped Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. "The only paper which can be compared for a moment with yours for badness is Crooke's."

The forthcoming lectures had stirred up Mr. Linton. Blake had suggested that both he and Mr. Lathom, of the Fourth, would be likely to set papers in literature after the course. But Mr. Linton had sprung a surprise upon his Form by setting such a paper on the morning of the day upon which the first lecture was to be delivered. He hinted that there might be something more of the kind to come later; but the bulk of the members of his Form felt that they did not mind much if there was, as long as it was

nothing more difficult than they had been given that morning.

"Of design, I asked only simple questions, such as one might have expected any mere child in the Second Form might have answered," went on the master. "For instance, I asked you to name a dozen characters—six male, six female. That was surely not asking much? Only half a dozen boys in all the Form have failed to give such a list. And of these half a dozen four have, at least, made an attempt, though I cannot congratulate Grundy on his notion that Ben Jonson was a creation of Shakespeare's. Jonson, Grundy, was second only to Shakespeare himself among the dramatists of that day, unless one inclines to give second place to 'Marlowe of the mighty line.'"

He paused. Grundy chipped in. "Well, sir, I know he had something to do with Shakespeare," he said, in rather an injured tone. "I really don't see that I was so very far out."

"We will waive that question, Grundy. I am addressing myself specially now to boys even more dense and ignorant than you are."

There was some chortling at that. It was not quite nice for Grundy, but it was very nasty for Racke and Crooke.

But the chortling ceased at Mr. Linton's frown.

"Racke, how came you to imagine that Micawber was one of Shakespeare's characters?" demanded the master.

"Well, I know he comes in some book or other, sir," mumbled Racke, flushing as the Form giggled.

"Ah! You have also included Penderennis. Why?"

"I know he comes in some book or other, too, sir, an' I thought he was in Shakespeare."

"Have you ever heard of Dickens or Thackeray?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I'm not so ignorant as all that."

"Have you ever read them?"

"I can't say I've read them, sir. I know all about them, but I never did care for poetry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Linton's frown could not prevent the Shell from roaring at that.

The master glared.

"You know all about Dickens and Thackeray, Racke, and yet you are not aware that they were novelists, not poets? Yet it was only last term that I devoted three or four lessons to those two!"

"I expect that's where I got Micawber an' the other chap from, sir. I haven't a very good memory for things like that."

"We must take steps to improve your memory, Racke! Crooke, you have included Ophelia and Juliet among Shakespeare's male characters, and Romeo among the females!"

"Just a slip, sir," pleaded Crooke. "I meant the other way round."

"Oh, you meant the other way round, did you? Tell me exactly what you meant! Stand up in your place and tell me!"

Crooke stood up, scowling.

"Well, Crooke?" the master snapped.

"Julius Caesar was a man, sir."

"Caesar is not in question, Crooke!"

"Would you mind giving me the names again, sir? I—I—you've confused me a bit."

"Ophelia, Juliet, Romeo."

"Oh, I know now, sir! Ophelia was a man, an' the other two were ladies."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Racke and Crooke, you will remain in your places when the Form is dismissed!" said Mr. Linton.

"Lucky thing for you he forgot about you," Grundy whispered Wilkins.

"Me? Why, you silly ass, you don't mean to class me with those ignorant duffers, do you?" growled Grundy indignantly.

"Grundy!"

"Yes, sir!"

"He hasn't forgotten you, after all!" murmured Wilkins.

"What is your authority for the attribution of 'Paradise Lost' to the pen of Sir Walter Scott?"

"I'm not sure that I know just what you mean, sir."

"I will put my query in language more suited to the extreme density of your mind. You say that Sir Walter Scott wrote 'Paradise Lost.' Why do you say so?"

"Didn't he, sir?"

"He did not, Grundy! You also will stay after classes!"

Twelve o'clock came, and the Form was dismissed. But Grundy, Racke, and Crooke had to keep their seats.

"I have a copy of an extremely elementary manual of English literature—that in use in the Lowest Form at this school," said Mr. Linton to the disgruntled trio. "I sent for them specially for you three, as it seems necessary to get down to the rudiments in your cases."

You will write out all that the manual says about Shakespeare, Dickens,

Thackeray, Milton, and Scott. You will not merely write it out; but you will commit it to memory, and be prepared to answer any question I may ask you as to the works of these five authors this afternoon. That you may not overrate your powers of assimilation, I command you not to leave this room until the first bell for dinner sounds."

And Mr. Linton stalked out, past the little crowd of Shell and Fourth Form fellows which had gathered in the passage to hear what measure he had meted out to the ignoramuses, as Manners put it.

"Ignorami, dear boy," said Lowther.

"It's all the same," Manners answered.

"Pardon me, but it is not all the same. The literary atmosphere which, from today onwards, will envelop St. James'—St. Jim's does not sound correct in such a connection—calls for more meticulous correctness than has hitherto—"

"Oh, cheese it!" snorted Gore.

"You're as bad as old Skimmy!"

"You would not say hippopotamuses, Manners," went on Lowther.

"I should if I wanted to," retorted Manners. "You couldn't stop me."

"Ignorami sounds best," said Digby.

He stuck his head in at the door of the Shell Form-room.

"Cheerio, ignorami!" he said.

"Get out!" howled Grundy.

"We've got some ignorami of our own," remarked Blake cheerily.

"Lathom got at us this morning just as Linton did at you. From what I can make out we had the same paper to answer. They must have put their dear old wooden craniums—"

"Crania, please, Blake!" corrected Lowther.

"I said craniums, and I mean craniums!" retorted Blake.

"Begy's kept in," said Clive.

"Where's Herries?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, he's kept in, too! And Lathom's given them the class-book that the Second use to mug up," replied Digby.

"Any more?" asked Kangaroo.

"Three or four," answered Roylance.

"Why, you're ignoranter than we are!" said Tom Merry, with a sidelong glance at Lowther.

"Oh, Thomas, Thomas, how can you?" wailed Lowther.

It was plain that Messrs. Linton and Lathom had taken concerted action. Those who had escaped detention did not mind that, of course. But in the Shell and Fourth Form-rooms alike there was grumbling when those detained heard from friends outside how matters stood.

"What's Lathom want butting in on us?" growled Grundy.

"Just like old Linton! Lathom wouldn't have thought of it on his own!" growled Herries.

But Herries and the rest of the detained Fourth-Formers set to work on what they had been ordered to do. Theirs was a smaller task than that of the three Shell fellows, and only Baggy Trimble felt quite desperate about it.

In the Shell quarters, however, squabbling soon began.

"Linton's a dashed old cad!" snarled Racke. "He should have me to mug up Milton an' Scott because that silly ass over there muddled them up?"

"Linton's an old fool, but he isn't a cad," answered Grundy. "You're a fool and a cad, too, Racke! Anyway, Milton's an easy one. I've got Shakespeare and Thickers and Dackeray—I mean, Thickery and Dackens—oh, hang them, you know what I mean! I've got them to do just because you two sweeps are such gross hippopotami!"

Grundy had overheard the argument between Manners and Lowther, and had muddled the words mentioned in characteristic Grundeen fashion.

"Let's hear each other our little lessons, Aubrey," said Crooke. "I'll start, Scott wrote 'Paradise Lost'—Ha, ha, ha!"

"You two had better shut up, and let me get on, or you'll be getting something you won't like!" said Grundy darkly.

For a few minutes the two bad eggs did shut up. But the temptation to chip Grundy proved too strong for them.

The blunder the burly Shell fellow had made was at least as excusable as the bloomers they had made. But they affected to regard the attribution of 'Paradise Lost' to Scott as the joke of the term.

"Hear me reel off the list of Scott's works, Gerry," said Racke. "Here goes! 'Wavering,' 'Guy Somethin'-or-other,' 'twasn't' 'Guy Fawkes,' I know, because I should have remembered that."

"Couldn't be off rememberin' it with old Grundy in sight," said Crooke. "But it's 'Waverley,' not 'Wavering,' an' 'Guy Mannering' is the next."

"An' 'Ivanhoe,'" continued Racke, getting something right at last. Then, winking at Crooke, he said: "An' 'Paradise Lost.'"

"Wrong!" yelled Crooke.

"I'm sure that's right! Grundy said so, an' Grundy knows heaps better than the silly joser who wrote this book. 'Paradise Lost' was by Scott, wasn't it, Grundy?"

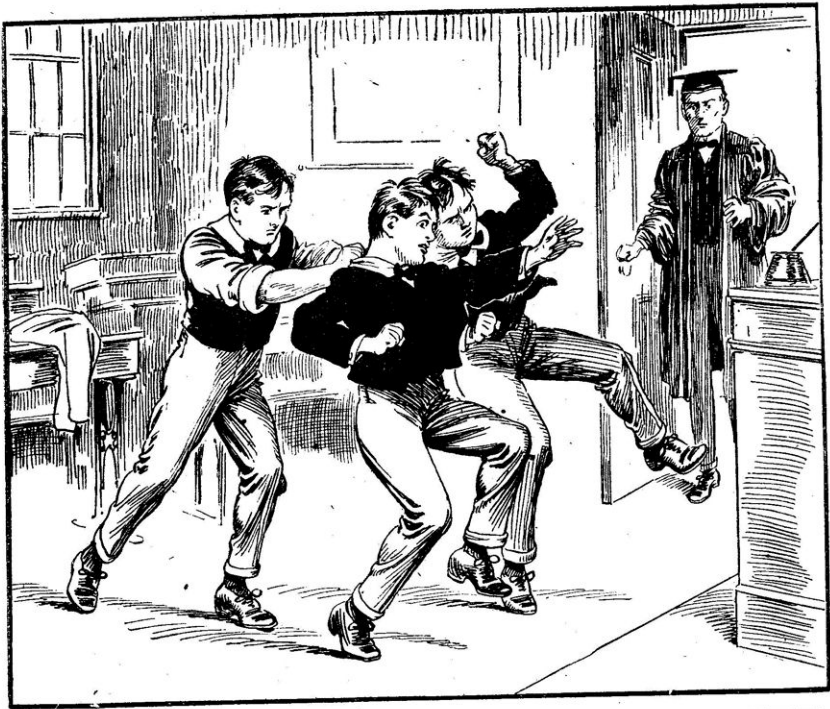
The great George Alfred rose from his seat, and began to turn up his cuffs in a most business-like manner.

One thing at least was certain. Whatever those three forgot of that detention task they were all likely to remember who the author of 'Paradise Lost' was. The chipping to which Grundy had been subjected had impressed it upon his mind. And now Grundy was going to impress it upon the minds of Racke and Crooke.

"I warned you sweeps!" snorted Grundy. "You didn't take any notice of that. Now I'm jolly well coming for you!"

Racke and Crooke tried to stand up to him. But the two together were no match for the burly George Alfred.

He had them by the collars, and was banging their heads together, when the



Grundy had Racke and Crooke by the collars, and was banging their heads together, when the door opened suddenly and Mr. Linton stood there, as if petrified with astonishment. "What does this mean?" he snapped. (See Chapter 2.)

door opened suddenly, and Mr. Linton stood there as if petrified with astonishment.

Grundy released the pair, and they began to smooth their ruffled plumage. Crooke's nose was bleeding, and Racke's collar had parted from its moorings.

"What does this mean?" snapped Mr. Linton.

Nobody answered.

"This is disgraceful—absolutely disgraceful! You have made a bear-garden of my Form-room. Each of you will copy out the whole of that manual, from the first page to the last, and show it to me within four days!"

The three gasped as he went out.

From the passage a few seconds later, when the master had disappeared, came the voice of Blake:

"My hat! The ignorami have got it in the neck this time, you fellows!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Kindness to the Professor!

"WHAT a dashed job!" groaned Crooke. "In four days, too! We sha'n't have time to do another dashed thing while we've got this hangin' over us!"

"An' it's all the fault of that confounded old professor!" said Racke. "I should like to boil the old beast in oil!"

"Oh, I don't know that it's all his fault, though I haven't any objection to his being boiled!" Crooke replied. "I suppose the Head's really at the bottom of it, askin' the old bounder to come here an' jaw."

"He didn't ask him, as far as I can make out. They're old friends, an' the professor offered to come."

"How did you find that out?" inquired Crooke, with rather languid interest.

Even the professor seemed to Crooke more interesting than Scott and Shakespeare, and the rest of them. He was at least alive, while most of them had been dead quite a long time.

"Baggy heard the Head talkin' to Railton about it. He thinks heaps of the professor, it seems."

"Who does? Baggy?"

"Not likely! The Head. Fielding is an eccentric kind of old buffer—can't see a dashed yard without his glasses; worn out his eyes porin' over moulsey old books, I suppose. But accordin' to the Head he's a genius, an' can make anyone listen to him when he gets on the go."

"Rot! I bet he can't make me!" said Crooke. "Is he here yet?"

"No. Comin' this afternoon."

"Silly old image! Now I know that he butted in an' offered to come here

an' gas I think boilin' oil's too good for him! Wish I could get even with the old bounder!"

"I wonder whether we could?" said Racke thoughtfully.

Crooke stared at him.

"Don't see how," he grunted.

"I don't quite see yet, but I've got the glimmerin' of a notion. If he's really helpless without his dashed goggles, we might take him in an' do for him, I fancy."

"How?"

"Meet him at the station, an' direct him miles out of the road, or somethin' like that."

"No go!" said Crooke. "The Head will very likely go along to meet him. If he doesn't, he'll have the station fly ordered, or a car, or somethin'."

"We might meet him at Wayland, an' say that the Head had sent us," said Racke. "If we could strand the old fossil on Wayland Moor without his specs, why, dash it all, we'd very likely gettin' over the lecture to-night, as well as settin' even with him for this!"

"It's a notion, Aubrey, but it's a bit risky," said Crooke slowly.

"Wait a jiffy! I don't see that there need be a lot of risk in it. If he's really as blind as a bat without his glasses it ought to be easy enough. We must disguise ourselves, of course."

Do you think you could get hold of a pair of Skimmy's specs? He has more than one pair, y'know."

"What for? Are you goin' to pretend to be Skimmy?" Crooke asked.

"No; that will be your role. You're a lot more like Skimmy than I am."

"Oh, dash all that! Do you mean to make out that I'm like that weird chimpanzee?"

"Not really like him, of course, Gerry. But the professor's half-blind, y'know."

"Without his glasses he may be, but if—"

"First thing to do is to knock his glasses off an' tread on them!" said Racke coolly.

"By Jove! That's pretty bold. But he's sure to have another pair."

"In his luggage, I dare say; not in his pocket, I should think."

"Perhaps not. Well, if I am to be Skimmy, who are you goin' to be?"

"D'Arcy, with an eyeglass. I can talk like him, dear boy, y'know."

"Wally, professor, I am delighted to meet a man of your celebrity! Bai Jove, yaas!"

"Might do," said Crooke dubiously. "I don't suppose the old fossil knows Gussy. It wouldn't go down with anyone who did, I can tell you!"

"Are you on? That's the question," said Racke.

"Yaas, I'm on, if you think we can really shove it off on to Skimmy an' Gussy, an' risk nothin' ourselves," said the heroic Crooke.

"Oh, I don't suppose they'll be convicted! But if the old bird's really so dashed short-sighted I don't see how we can be," Racke said.

"We'll take dashed good care to be in the back row at his jawn's, an' the Head isn't likely to ask us to tea with him. We're not among the prize scholars of the Shell, y'know."

"I'll go an' see whether I can bag a pair of Skimmy's goggles," said Crooke.

"I'm not on unless I can."

"But he managed that without any difficulty. Reconnoitering down the passage, he found the study which Talbot, Gore, and Skimpole shared empty, the door standing ajar, and he stole in."

It was a bit of luck to find Skimpole absent. Talbot and Gore were fellows who spent a good deal of their time out

of doors; but Skimmy very seldom took any exercise that he could avoid.

Crooke's eyes wandered over the table, dressed in Talbot's handwriting to Colonel Lyndon.

The gallant colonel was his uncle, as well as Talbot's, and there had been a time when George Gerald Crooke had looked upon himself as his uncle's heir.

That he had lost all chance of inheriting even a share of the colonel's wealth was entirely Crooke's own fault. But Crooke could not see it that way. He looked upon Reginald Talbot as an interloper, and hated him poisonously.

But he did not touch the letter. He could see no possible profit in doing that.

The absent-minded Skimpole was the kind of person to whom one pair of glasses is of no use. Before now he had been discovered blinking round for the spectacles he supposed to have been mislaid while two pairs were already pushed up from his eyes on to his bumpy forehead. But he seemed to have been wearing only one pair that day, for the other was on the table, half-covered by a volume of the immortal works of Skimmy's idol, the learned Professor Balmycrumpet.

Crooke collared the spectacles, checked Balmycrumpet on to the floor, and departed, only a few seconds before Skimmy returned.

It was easy enough for the two plotters to guess by what train the lecturer would arrive at Wayland. It would be the one from town some twenty minutes or so before the four o'clock local to Rycombe.

They went over to the market town by rail, and spent an hour or so at billiards before going to the station.

When they got there Crooke was wearing Skimmy's glasses, and they really made him almost unrecognisable at a glance. The monocle which Racke wore was considerably less of a disguise, but it made a difference to his face.

"That must be the old fossil!" said Racke, as the train from town discharged its passengers, and he saw among them a scholarly-looking middle-aged gentleman, peering around him in a very short-sighted manner.

"But he hasn't any goggles!" objected Crooke.

"He's lookin' for them, fathhead! Can't you see him pokin' his absurd old napper about, like an owl in the daylight?"

Racke had guessed aright. It was Professor Fielding, and he had mislaid his glasses. But there was nothing absurd about the professor to any but jaundiced eyes. His face was clear-cut and pleasant, if not exactly handsome.

"Speak to him, Gerry! Fifty to one he's left the dashed goggles on the seat! If I can get hold of them he won't see them again in a hurry, an' if you talk to him it will give me a chance to collar the things. But don't forget—you're Skimmy, and I'm Gussy!"

Crooke, with some inward trepidation, but with no sign of timidity in his bearing, went forward.

He lifted his cap politely.

"Excuse me, sir, but am I right in assumin' that you are Professor Balmycrumpet—I mean, Professor Fielding?" he said.

"I am Professor Fielding, my boy. Am I correct in supposing that you are from St. Jim's? I think I recognise the school colours, though without my glasses I can really see very little indeed."

"Yes, sir. My name is Skimpole, an' I an' my friend D'Arcy have been sent to meet you here. I say, D'Arcy, old chap, look round for the professor's glasses, will you?"

"Wight-ho, Skimmay!" replied Racke.

"I suppose you left them in your compartment, sir?"

"Yes, I think I must have done so. But I did not remember them till I was some yards along the platform, and now I am quite at a loss to tell which was my compartment. But it was a third, and a smoking one."

"I'll find them, sir!" Racke returned.

"You will have a better chance of doing so than I should have, I think," the professor said.

Racke saw the glasses lying on the seat of the second compartment into which he looked. But he thrust them into his pocket, and went on looking.

The guard waved his flag. The whistle sounded.

"Alwaid it's weally no go. profsah," said Racke. "Some wotthah must have grabbed them."

"They will hardly prove of much value to a picker-up of unconsidered trifles, I think," answered the professor, quite good-temperedly. "Well, it cannot be helped. Luckily, I have another pair in my suit-case, and I think I had better get at them at once."

"Is it weally worth while, sir?" asked Racke. "We are heah to act as guides, y'know, an' I should think it wotd west your eyes a bit to be without the glasses for a brief time."

"There are times when I fancy that it does, my boy. But how is it that you two have been sent to meet me here?"

Racke had his lie ready.

"They have been makin' changes in the way-time-table; sir," he said glibly. "An' the twain which used to wun to Wylcombe about this time has been taken off. The Head did not discover the fact till this aftahnoon. An important appointment prevented his comin' ovah to Wayland himself, an' he asked us to come."

"We were looking forward so much to your lectures that we thought it would be a treat for us, sir," said Crooke, feeling that he must keep up his end.

"I an glad to hear that. Are there many of you so eager?"

"Not as many as there ought to be, sir," answered Crooke sadly. "St. Jim's isn't really much of a place for literary

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keenness. Why, there was actually a fellow in our Form the other day who said that Scott wrote 'Paradise Lost'!"

Racke nudged Crooke. It was a mistake for Crooke to get out all his literary knowledge at once, he felt. Racke and Crooke did know now who had written the great English epic, but they knew little beyond that. Racke was trying hard to remember whether it was Dickens or Thackeray who wrote "The Antiquary," but he could not, and he made up his mind to keep off so dangerous a subject.

"Have you been in these parts before, sir?" he asked, before the professor had a chance to reply to Crooke.

"No, I have not, though I have often promised myself the pleasure of a visit to my old friend, Dr. Holmes."

"Well, sir, would you care about walking?" inquired the schemer. "It's only a mile or two over the moor, an' there's some no end pretty scenery."

Now Crooke nudged Racke. Racke was forgetting to talk like Gussy in his eagerness to ensnare the professor.

It was actually a good deal more than a mile or two across the moor, and in an ordinary way the two slackers would have barred the walk back. But they felt that they could stand it now, with the cheering prospect of losing Professor Fielding on the way.

If it had been possible that two decent fellows should have devised such a plot against the Head's visitor, they could hardly have carried it through when they found what a genial and likeable man the professor was. But that did not matter to Racke and Crooke.

"I shall enjoy the walk," said their victim. "As for the scenery, that will be lost upon me. But it is a fine afternoon, and the fresh air and the exercise will do me good."

#### CHAPTER 4 Nothing in It!

THE professor strode along at a pace that gave the two slackers some trouble to emulate. He was plainly a far better walker than either of them.

They discovered quickly that, whatever might be the defects of his vision, his hearing was keen enough. There was no opportunity for them to whisper together, and they were forced to communicate by signs.

They walked one on each side of him, and did their best to hide the fact that his pace was beyond their liking.

But they could not hide it long. "I must slow down," said the professor. "I have always been a rapid walker, and I appear to be going too fast for you boys."

He had not failed to note that Crooke was blowing hard and Racke wheezing a bit.

"The fact of the matter is, sir," said Racke, "that I have a blister on my right heel. Shall we walk on the grass? The hard road is painful to it."

Crooke made frantic grimaces at Racke. Gussy would have said "blistah," "wight," "gwass," and "wood." And Crooke was not quite sure that Professor Fielding was "as big a fool as he looked," to use the language Crooke would have used.

But Racke had an object in his suggestion. Crooke twigged that when, as soon as they had left the road for the springy turf of the moor, his comrade began to edge the professor farther and farther from the highway.

Within ten minutes they were quite a long way from the road.

"I like the feel of the turf underfoot," said the professor, "but I should be

helpless off the road without guidance. It is a very long time since I took a country walk without my glasses. I can only guess at the whereabouts of the highway."

"Well, guess, then! Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Racke.

Crooke took the cue. Next moment the professor was standing alone, and the two bad eggs had hidden themselves behind a clump of gorse.

Their victim peered round him in a way that might have appealed to a soft-hearted fellow as pathetic. It was evident that the extent of his short-sightedness had not been exaggerated.

"D'Arcy! Skimpole!" he said. "Is this a joke on your part?"

There was little anger in his voice as yet. He was not a man prone to gusts of anger.

But no answer came to him, and now he spoke more sharply.

"It is not a joke in the best of taste," he said. "I really think it has gone far enough."

Still there was no reply. Racke and Crooke were by no means soft of heart, and they saw nothing but fun, their own spiteful kind of fun, in the professor's predicament.

"The old fossil will begin to rave soon!" said Racke.

But "the old fossil" did nothing of the sort. He appeared to have tumbled to the fact that he had been taken in; that this was not the mere heedless fun of two irresponsible juniors, but a concerted plot. And he had too much dignity to rave.

He was plainly trying to make up his mind in which direction the road lay. He moved to and fro uncertainly.

"Let's bunk!" said Racke. "Look at the sky! The clouds have come up over there, an' they're movin' this way. We shall have a soaker within half an hour or so."

"Wait!" answered Crooke, grabbing his arm. "Don't look at the sky, look at the road, chump!"

Racke looked at the road, and saw four cyclists coming swiftly from the direction of Wayland.

"Some of our chaps!" he said.

"Oh, dash it all, we must stay hidden for a bit! If they see us clearin' off it may all come out, y'know," snarled Crooke.

"Special pals of ours," returned Racke. "Merry, Manners, Lowther, an' your dearly beloved cousin, Gerry! You may wait here. I'm not dashed well goin' to, I can tell you! They've spotted his nibs, an' when he tells his tale of woe they'll spot us if we stay here. Come along, an' keep your napper down, for my sake! If we can get into that hollow an' steal along for a bit we may be safe."

They moved off in the direction Racke had indicated.

The four on the road had dismounted. "I believe that chap's blind," said Tom Merry, gazing at the professor, some two hundred yards away.

"Looks like it," Talbot replied. "He's gropin' about as if he couldn't see much, anyway."

"Let's go and make sure," Tom said. "Hurry 'em, then!" said Manners.

"There's a storm on its way," Talbot and Tom resigned their bikes to their chums, and made haste towards the professor.

When they reached him he was moving away from the road.

"You speak to him, Talbot," said Tom.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" asked Talbot. "I beg pardon if we are in

error, but it struck us that you seemed to have difficulty in finding your way."

"I have. Where is the road?"

There was some excuse for the suspicion of snip in the professor's tone. "We have just come from it," answered Talbot. "It is in the opposite direction from that you were going to take!"

"You are St. Jim's boys, are you not?"

"Yes, sir!"

"A trick has been played upon me by two of your schoolfellows! They met me at Wayland Station, told me that the afternoon train to Rylcombe had been discontinued—"

"That's wrong, sir!" put in Tom.

"Ah! The fact makes it all the more plain to me that this was a concerted plot, and no mere trick on the impulse of the moment, though why two strangers should plot against me I cannot imagine. They must have known of my extreme shortness of sight, and I suspect now that the search for my mislaid glasses was a mere pretence. They told me that it was a walk of only a mile or two across the moor to the school—"

"Nearer six than two," said Talbot.

"They led me off the road on a pretext, and then deserted me."

"I'm sorry, sir," Tom said respectfully. "I won't say that none of our fellows would be capable of such a trick, for it wouldn't be of any use to say so. But there are very few who would do it. I'm sure! Have you any notion who these two were?"

"They gave me their names as D'Arcy and Skimpole."

"Then they gave wrong names, sir!" answered Tom, with some heat. "That's a rotten shame!"

"D'Arcy and Skimpole are friends of yours?" said the professor drily.

"D'Arcy is one of my best chums," replied Tom. "And he's the very last fellow I know to do such a thing as this! Why, I'd sooner imagine myself doing it than D'Arcy!"

"Skimpole shares my study," said Talbot. "He is very eccentric, but quite harmless, and really a good fellow."

"It is more than likely that the two young miscreants gave wrong names—which makes their trick infinitely worse," said Professor Fielding.

"What were they like?" asked Tom.

"I really could not see them distinctly—my sight is so very bad without glasses. But the one calling himself D'Arcy wore a monocle, and had a difficulty with the letter 'r'."

Talbot and Tom looked at one another. Could it have been Gussy, after all? It seemed impossible, yet—

"That difficulty, as I now recall, was intermittent," the professor said. "This would be likely in the case of anyone playing a part. The boy wore a silk hat."

Again Tom and Talbot exchanged glances. There was only one fellow in the Shell besides Gussy who frequently wore a topper. Racke hated the school cap.

"Can you remember anything about the fellow calling himself Skimpole, sir?" inquired Talbot.

"Are you fellows ever coming?" shouted Manners. "It's going to pour in about two tows."

"Are you a cyclist, sir?" asked Tom.

"I am. But without my glasses—"

"I think we can get round that difficulty. You could see the back of a fellow riding directly ahead of you. I suppose, sir?"

"Yes, I could do that. But you boys have hardly a spare bicycle. I suppose?"

"That's no odds. You can have mine, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 638.

and I'll ride on Talbot's step. We're some way from the school, and there's a storm coming up."

"Thank you very much. I accept your offer with gratitude!"

Talbot and Tom liked the professor. It would have been excusable had he suspected them of being parties to the plot, and had he thought their offer merely another ruse to take him in. But it was plain that he had no such suspicions. Racke and Crooke might have set him down as a fool for that; but these two did not.

"Come along, sir!" Tom said, taking his arm.

"The boy who called himself Skimpole," said the professor, as they hurried towards the road, "wore a school cap. He had spectacles. He dropped his final 'g's,' and said 'yaas' for 'yes.'"

Talbot and Tom Merry had little doubt now. Racke and Crooke! They were almost sure of it.

A few words of explanation sufficed for Lowther and Manners. The professor mounted Tom's machine; Lowther and Manners rode ahead, and Talbot followed the visitor, with Tom on his step.

"Sing out if we go too fast, sir," said Manners. "But we mustn't waste any time if we're to get in before the rain comes."

"Ride as hard as you like, but call out to me if there is any sharp turn in front" was the reply. "Wait, though! Our friends behind are handicapped for speed!"

"That's quite all right, sir!" said Talbot cheerily. "Pile in, you two! If you can leave us behind, we sha'n't rag you. But you mustn't leave Professor Fielding behind!"

There was little fear of this, it appeared. Later they learned that many years before, in the days of the old high bikes, the professor had been a well-known figure on the bicycle track at Cambridge.

They made good speed, and reached St. Jim's just as the rain began.

"I am very much obliged to you, my boys," the professor said. "I think I have all your names, except that one of you is merely 'Tom' to me at present. Manners, Lowther, and Talbot, I know, though I might have difficulty in telling one from another."

"I'm Tom Merry, sir. And—I suppose you'll have to report to the Head about the trick played on you? I—we hope that if you do you will say that we're quite sure that it wasn't D'Arcy and Skimpole who played it, and that you will give them an opportunity of proving their innocence at once. They can, I'm certain!"

"I will do as you wish, Merry. But for that mean attempt to throw the blame upon others, I am not sure that I should have said anything about it. I shall have the pleasure of meeting you four again, of course!"

"If you'd come to tea in our study one day, sir, we should be glad!" ventured Tom.

"I accept the invitation with pleasure."

"I'll take you to the Head now, sir. I say, Monty, you might look up Gussy, and find out where he's been this afternoon. Talbot will see Skimmy, I know."

"Thomas, your command shall be obeyed!" replied Lowther gravely.

Ten minutes later, Gussy and Skimpole were sent for by the Head. They went without any fear, for they had quite conclusive alibis. Blake, Digby, and Herries had been with their chum all the afternoon; and Gore, nursing a toothache, had sat and growled at Skimmy until that great philosopher had

almost reached the tether of his patience. But Gore went to the Head with Skimmy willingly enough, and Gussy's three chums went with him; and both the Head and his guest were satisfied of the innocence of the swell and the scientist.

"Come and have tea with us, Talbot," said Tom. "We'll sit near the window and watch out for the return of the two sweeps who are out in the storm at this moment, if my guess isn't all wrong."

"Got on to something, Tommy?" asked Manners.

"Wait and see, my son!" answered Tom.

It was three-quarters of an hour later before they saw what they had waited for.

Then Racke and Crooke, soaked to the skin, snarling at one another, came over the quad from the gates in the pouring rain.

"Behold Skimpole and D'Arcy, you fellows!" said Tom, dramatically.

"My hat! But I half guessed it!" exclaimed Lowther. "It didn't seem likely that there were two other fellows who would be such cads!"

"What beats me is what they did it for?" said Manners.

"I don't suppose we shall ever find that out," replied Tom. "But we'll put them through it for this, you bet!"

"After they are proved guilty, Tom," said Talbot. "But if they are guilty—and I haven't much doubt of it—I've a notion why they played the trick. They were dead against the lectures, you know, and then Linton dropped on to them like a thousand of bricks. So they thought they would take it out of the professor."

"But how did they know about his being as blind as a bat?" objected Manners. "The whole scheme hung on that!"

"I think I can tell you that, too! Gore said Baggy Trimble had been gassing about a conversation he heard between the Head and Railton—you know how Baggy does hear things. And the Head told how Fielding had mucked up his sight by hard study."

"What we've got to do is to account for the movements of all the other Shell and Fourth fellows this afternoon. Needn't go outside the two Forms; no one in the Fifth or Sixth could have been in this, and the fags aren't affected, as they needn't go to the lectures, and can't have anything against the professor. Oh, we'll do it!"

And they did it; and in the Shell dormitory that night, Racke and Crooke, still protesting that they were not guilty, were given part at least of what they deserved.

But, of course, no one thought of letting the Head know that the abusers of all the art of hospitality, as Lowther put it, had been those two.

There had been nothing in that plot for Racke and Crooke, after all!

#### CHAPTER 5.

#### Different Notions of Value.

"WHY, it's nothing but a rotten story!" said Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, in great disgust.

Baggy had just come from the rack in which the letters were placed for collection by those to whom they were addressed; and he had an envelope, with the blue registration lines upon it, in one pogy hand, and a rather yellow-looking sheaf of leaves, of a size and shape unusual in these days, in the other.

Yet there had been no registration letter—indeed, there had been no letter at all—for Baggy.

Which might seem strange to anyone who did not know that adipose and unvirtuous youth. But then, everyone at St. Jim's did know him.

"My hat! Did you ever hear of sending coats to Newcastle?" asked Monty Lowther.

"But you wouldn't call Baggy's mere 'stories,'" objected Cardew, the only fellow present who had at once got on to Lowther's meaning. "'Whackers,' or 'whoppers,' or 'hes'—but not mere stories, dear man!"

"What's anyone want sending a story to Baggy for?" inquired Manners. "Baggy's no editor. He's only quite an ordinary pig!"

"Perhaps it wasn't sent to Baggy," suggested Levison. "The fat clam has been known before now to—"

"Let's have a look at the address, porpoise!" said Manners.

And he snatched the envelope from Baggy's hand.

"Leave that alone, Manners! It's mine—at least, I— Well, perhaps it ain't mine. But I certainly thought it saw my name. Perhaps it wasn't mine. It might have been Dane's, or Lumley-Lumley's."

"By gad! I've never realised it before! But Dane's name and Lumley-Lumley's look extraordinary alike, when they're both plainly written," said the gibing Cardew. "An' either of 'em's as much like Trimble as makes really no difference."

"But this happens to be for Talbot!" snapped Manners.

"There—I thought I might have made a mistake!" burbled Baggy. "But Talbot's name does look like mine—they both begin with a 'T,' you know. And there ain't so very much difference between 'Reginald' and 'Baggy.'"

"Rough on Reginald, if there's not," said Levison.

"Look at the address, you fellows! It's as plain as can be!" Manners said.

"No one who wasn't blessed nearly blind could make any mistake about it."

"I—my eyes have been rotten bad lately, Manners!" pleaded Baggy. "It's all Latham's fault for keeping me in so often."

"You fat fraud!" snorted Manners. "A registered letter, too!"

"Make what excuses are possible for the errin' Baggybus," said Cardew. "Seeing that it was registered, he naturally assumed that it was of papers bearing the charmin' autograph of John Bradbury."

"Yes, that's what I fancied," Baggy burbled. "I didn't know it was only a silly old story, or I'd never have touched the thing! I mean— Oh, I don't mean anything of the kind! You are a rotter, Cardew, tripping a chap up like that!"

"Get!" cried Levison. And he expedited Baggy's departure with his foot.

Manners took the letter and envelope along to Talbot's study.

All three of the inmates chanced to be present, for once. Skimmy was poring over a volume of Professor Balmey's crumple, his thin hands pressed to his bony brow. Gore was putting a new pair of laces in his footer-boots. Talbot sat by the fire, reading.

Manners briefly explained. From any other fellow in the Shell a burst of wrath might have been expected. But, though Talbot barred Baggy about as completely as anyone could do, he did not say much.

"Just like that fat sweep! Thanks, very much, Manners!" was all.

Manners went, and Talbot looked at the contents of the registered envelope.



The address had shown him at once that it was from his uncle, Colonel Lyndon.

The colonel was a well and widely-read man, and Talbot had felt sure he would be interested to hear of the approaching lectures. The letter which Crooke had seen on the table when he had stolen in to "borrow" Skimpy's specs had been written to tell him about them.

This was an answer to it. Colonel Lyndon was even more interested than his nephew had thought he would be. "I have heard Professor Fielding," he wrote, "and I wish it were possible for me to be present at the course of lectures which you will have the good fortune to hear. There are many authorities on literature; but I know of no other who can talk about it as Fielding can."

"Give him my kind regards. He may not remember me, for we met but once, and was only one of the crowd. But he may like to know that I remember him, and that lecture of his on 'American Writers of the Nineteenth Century.' "It is on this account I am sending you the enclosed story, which came into my hands in rather a pathetic way. Among the American officers I met over there was one to whom I took a very strong liking. He was a man much younger than myself, and he had already won some fame in his own country as a writer of short stories for the magazines. He had certainly never dreamed that fate would throw him into the whirlpool of war. One would have set him down as but little fitted for a soldier's work, with his fine, delicate brain, full of high imaginings, and his frail physique. But he had the heart of a lion, and his men would have followed him anywhere.

His literary idol was Edgar Allan Poe, the author of 'The Pit and the Pendulum,' 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' and other stories which are admitted classics. He told me a week before his death that there was a distant tie of kinship between him and Poe, and that among his most cherished possessions was an unpublished MS. by the dead author.

"As you know, I have always had a great admiration for Poe. I was naturally interested, and he promised to let me see the MS.

"But when I saw it he had 'gone west.' He died heroically, less than twenty-four hours before the Armistice. I was his best friend in France, it seemed, for there came to me a packet containing his will, letters to the mother and the girl who waited for him over the Atlantic—who were never to see him again in the flesh—and a story, which he asked me to keep in memory of him. "I believe it to be indisputably the work of Edgar Allan Poe; and I am not sure that there is anyone else in the world besides you, my boy, to whom I would trust it, for I value it highly. No, that is not correct. I would trust it to Fielding and to Dr. Holmes, whom I know to be also a devotee of the Poe cult.

"I want you to show it to both of these, and to get Fielding's most valuable opinion of its genuineness. He is an authority on style. If he says it is not Poe's, I will believe it; no other man could convince me. I may be at St. Jim's within a week or two, and I hope to be allowed to listen to one of the professor's lectures."

Talbot's wrath had been rising while he read this, and when he had got thus far he stood up and said things about Baggy which astonished Gore and Skimpy.

To him it seemed a profanation that the podgy, thieving hands of the fat rascal should even have touched that work of a dead genius, with its associa-

tions with a gallant young life laid down in the service of the great world-cause, and the value which the uncle of whom he thought so much put upon it.

"My dear Talbot!" protested Skimpy. "It is very unlike your usual equanimity of temper to—"

"Oh, let her rip!" chipped in Gore. "There's a lot of things about Baggy that Talbot hasn't said yet. I could help him out with a few."

"I won't bother you!" said Talbot, smiling. "And I've finished, Skimpy. But when you fellows hear, I think you'll understand why I got my rag out!"

Not many Shell fellows would have credited Gore with sympathy enough for that. But perhaps Talbot knew Gore better than the rest. Anyway, he was sure of Gore's understanding now. So he was of Skimpy's. Those two had very little indeed in common, but they shared a strong feeling of friendship for Reginald Talbot.

"I'd boot the fat villain across the quid!" said Gore, when Talbot had told the story.

Skimpy sniffed and blinked. "It is really very sad, Talbot," he said. "That young American officer and the mother and the girl waiting for him, while he lay dead. But Trimble could hardly have read the letter, and the story would not have any interest for him."

For once Skimpy spoke quite like an ordinary mortal. But next moment he relapsed into his usual style.

"I have never devoted myself seriously to the lighter branches of literature, Talbot," he said. "I have always felt that the world had a right to expect from a mental development like mine absorption in more important things. But, of course, I am conversant with the name and fame of Poe, and I have no doubt that his works are to be found in the school library. If you desire I will give an hour or two of my valuable time to a close comparison of those works and this lucubration."

"I shouldn't bother, Skimpy, if Taggles has time to go into it," said Gore.

"My dear Gore! Do you mean to infer that you consider my opinion on a literary question of no more value than that of Taggles?" protested Skimpy, quite shocked.

"Not so much," replied Gore, winking at Talbot.

"It's the professor's opinion my uncle seems to want Skimpy," said Talbot. "Of course, if you'd care to examine the MS."

"I will certainly do so, my dear fellow," answered Skimpy gravely. "I regret that I cannot spare the time at the moment. But at the first available opportunity—"

"Skimpy will decide whether it was Shakespeare, Bacon, or Hogg who wrote it! Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Gore.

"Take care of it, Skimpy," said Talbot.

Baggy Trimble might regard that MS. as valueless, but Talbot did not feel like that about it.

#### CHAPTER 6.

##### Racke and Crooke plot again!

HERE were only three fellows in the junior Common-room when Gore entered it that evening, and one of the three, Manners, was just going out, for he really had no use at all for the society of the pair he found there.

Racke and Crooke stood by the fireplace talking racing. Some more "dead certs" and "absolute snips" had gone the way which such things are apt to do.

In consequence, Racke and Crooke were distinctly hard up.

It was a state of affairs which they disliked extremely.

"Don't go, Manners," said Gore. "I've a joke to tell you."

Manners dropped into an armchair. "Tell on!" he said.

"You know that thing you brought to Talbot—the registered envelope Baggy had accidentally—I don't think I opened?"

Manners nodded. "Well, the enclosure was an unpublished story by Edgar—I can't remember the chap's name, but he wrote 'The Murder with the Pendulum,' and other blood-stained tosh like that. Supposed to be no end of a big pot in the story-writing way, though blessed if I can see why! Figgly might have written 'The Murder with the Pendulum.'"

"Is that your joke?" inquired Manners, drily.

"No, of course it isn't, duffer! I'm only explaining."

"It must be," Edgar Allan Poe you mean, and the yarn you're trying to think of is 'The Pit and the Pendulum.' There's another about the murders in some street or other in Paris—it was a monkey who did them."

"Sounds interesting," Gore said. "I'd read that one if I'd nothing else to do. I suppose the chap really was—oh, you know—a classic, don't they call it?"

"That sort of thing is more in Lowther's line than mine," replied Manners. "But I think there's no doubt Poe is reckoned among the great writers. What's the joke? You're a long time coming to it."

Gore told of Skimpy's offer and his own suggestion that Taggles would be a more efficient literary critic than the Shell philosopher. Manners was mildly amused, but failed to see as much in it as Gore.

"Where's Lowther?" asked Gore. "I want to make a bit more about this monkey-murder chap."

"Lowther's no end busy. He's just about to prove to the world that he's a truly great writer," Manners answered, grinning.

"How's that?"

"Well, there's a prize of a hundred quid offered by 'The Ludgate Magazine' for the best short story sent them by anyone who has never had a yarn in a magazine. Smaller prizes as well, but it's the hundred quid Lowther's after."

"I say! If old Talbot sent in that thing he's got from his uncle he'd be pretty certain to carry off the prize, I should say."

"Very likely. But old Talbot wouldn't do it," said Manners.

"I suppose it would be a bit off the rails, and Talbot's the last chap to do anything of that kind. But lots of fellows would," said Gore. "I don't know that I wouldn't myself. There was a time when I'd have done it like a shot, and seen nothing against it either. But—yes, it would be a bit off."

Neither Gore nor Manners had any notion that Racke and Crooke had been listening to their conversation. Their backs were turned to the two bad eggs, and they had almost forgotten their presence.

Had they got up to leave the Common-room, then it is likely they would have noticed Racke and Crooke, and that they would have felt they had done wrong to talk of any business of Talbot's before his enemies.

But it chanced that Tom Merry, Kangaroo, Kerr, Figgins, and Patty Wynn

came in together at that moment. Something had happened over in the New House, and Figgins & Co. had come across—after the permitted hours for such visits—to consult some of their chums in the School House as to what should be done.

They were full of their subject, and both Manners and Gore forgot all about Racke and Crooke. Those two had stolen out before a dozen other fellows, including Talbot and Blake & Co., came in together.

"What is it, Aubrey?" asked Crooke. "You nudged me to get—what?"

"You heard Manners an' Gore?"

"Yaas. I was listenin' as hard as you were. Hang Talbot! That potty old uncle of mine seems to think more an' more of him every day."

"Is that all you saw in it?"

"What else was there to see?"

"Come along to our study, an' I'll tell you. I fancy we're on a good thing here. An' even if it doesn't come off, we lose nothin' except a few hours' trouble."

Crooke followed, rather puzzled.

But when they were safely behind the closed door of their own study Racke soon enlightened him.

"This dashed story," he said. "Manners thinks Talbot's too high-toned to send it along for the competition Lowther's in for. Well, I dare say he's right. Talbot always was a fool. But we're no fools, an' we ought to be able to collar the big prize with it! Fifty each would come in quite nicely just now!"

"But we haven't got the thing," replied Crooke weakly.

"We can get it, I suppose, by gad?"

"Well, we might. An' I'd dashed well like to, I can tell you, Aubrey! It would queer cousin Reginald's pitch with my uncle for a bit if he lost it. The old joeser's jolly particular about havin' his property treated carefully. But how do we know it would win the blessed prize?"

"Couldn't be off it, I should say," returned Racke. "This chap Poe seems to have been a small potato, by what Manners said. Stands to reason his tush would be better than Lowther's tush."

"But Lowther wouldn't be the only chap in for the prize," objected Crooke.

"Did I say he would? But he's a fair specimen of the sort of half-baked lunatic who thinks himself a literary character. Merry and the rest of them think he really can write. This Poe chap ought to knock him."

"But if the thing's published with your name to it—"

"Or yours," put in Racke. "We'll toss for that, as we're to divide the spoils."

"I don't mind. Even if the whole dashed thing came out I shouldn't be deeper in my uncle's black books than I am now. I don't care about him; but they'll make it dashed hot for us here. I haven't forgotten how they put us through it just for a little harmless trick on that ass Fieldin', if you have!"

"It's lucky I have, isn't it? I never forget things like that, Gerry. I wait my chance to pay them back, by gad!"

"Skimmy's got the yarn now, accordin' to Gore. Easier to get it from Skimmy than from Talbot, I reckon."

"An' you've got Skimmy's specs, old top! Cut along with them, an' say you found them somewhere. No tellin', but you'll get a chance to collar the dashed MS."

"What's it like, I wonder? I sha'n't have time to examine it."

"Well, it wouldn't look new, I suppose. The paper might be a bit yellow, an' the

ink a trifle faded. But there ain't likely to be five hundred stories lyin' around, y'know!"

"Look here, Aubrey, you go!"

"Right-ho!" said Racke, to Crooke's surprise.

And he took the spectacles from the place where they had been hidden, and went.

But first he glanced into the Common-room. The crowd there had swollen. He saw both Talbot and Gore, as well as most of the other members of the Shell. They were discussing the news Figgins & Co. had brought—Ratty's latest gross injustice, practised at the expense of Redden, Lawrence, and Owen, whom the tyrannical master of the New House had always hated.

That, however, is another story.

Racke saw that it was hardly likely he would get a better chance than he had at that moment. Skimpole seldom visited the Common-room. He considered the kind of conversation which went on there quite beneath his mighty intellect.

He was in his study when Racke, after tapping and getting no reply, opened the door very softly, and stole in, hoping to find the room empty.

"I tapped," he said, as soon as he found it was not.

"I beg your pardon, I am sure! I failed to hear you," replied Skimmy, blinking at him.

Racke's eyes, quick and keen for such a business as this, noted an open drawer in the table at which Skimmy sat, and in that drawer a sheet of yellowish paper which might well be the MS.

He drew nearer. He came close to the table—so close that his hands could be put into the drawer without his reaching forward far.

Another glance he took. Yes, this must be the story! "The Doom of Denevel" was the title.

"You wanted to see me?" said Skimpole, quite politely.

"Well, hardly that," answered Racke. "That's no dashed treat, y'know! I've been to Madame Tressaud's, an' seen the Chamber of Horrors, an' after that you're a bit tame! I dropped in because I've found something that I think may be yours."

"Indeed?" returned Skimmy. "I cannot recall having lost anything lately."

"Not a pair of your dashed goggles?"

"Why, yes, I have certainly mislaid a pair of my glasses. I hardly regarded them as lost; it so often happens that Talbot or Gore comes across them under an accumulation of papers when they are thus mysteriously missing."

"Well, Talbot or Gore wouldn't have found them this time," said Racke, producing the glasses. "I suppose these really are yours? Better look at them carefully before you claim them."

Skimmy examined the spectacles with care; and while he was doing so Racke slipped Colonel Lyndon's property under his coat, and pushed the drawer to, lest its being open might remind Skimmy of the story.

It might have been risky to do that with anyone else sitting where Skimmy sat, but hardly with him.

"Yes, these are undoubtedly mine, and I am extremely obliged to you, Racke!" said the philosopher gravely.

"Don't mench! I like to do a good turn to the afflicted, mentally or otherwise, once in a way," answered Racke, as he departed.

"It is a great pity Racke has not better manners," murmured Skimmy to himself.

"There was no good reason why he should say unpleasant things to me when

doing me a kindness. But I fear that he is really not an estimable individual, at best."

Then Skimmy straightway laid down the recovered spectacles, and in less than a minute had forgotten all about Racke's visit.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Missing!

"**W**HERE'S that MS., Skimmy?" "I regret to say, Talbot, that I have not yet had time to compare it with the known works of the reputed author. I will to-day get a volume of them from the library, and—"

"Hurry up, then! I want the professor and the Head to see it. Don't you remember that the professor said something in his last lecture about the writers of short stories in English, and mentioned Poe and Kipling, and one or two more? He said he should have more to say about them another time, and it may be next time."

"Dear me! I shall be interested. But I do not recall his remarks. The fact is, that I resolutely shut my ears to his last lecture, having too much of real importance in my mind to be able to give attention to any such immaterial subject as that of fiction."

Talbot smiled, and left the study.

He had no expectation of any valuable result coming from Skimpole's comparison of the story with others, even if it was ever made. The chances were that it never would be. Skimmy would keep on postponing it.

But Talbot was always more decent to Skimmy. Even when he laughed at him he laughed kindly.

It was a beautiful day, and as Talbot crossed the quad he saw Professor Fielding pacing up and down, with his hands behind his back, enjoying the fresh air.

He had now been at St. Jim's for some weeks, and had become the friend of many of the fellows, including Talbot, who now approached him.

"I have a message for you, sir," began the junior. "My uncle, Colonel Lyndon, heard you lecture once, and was introduced to you afterwards. He does not suppose, he says, that you will remember him; but he was very keen on your lecture, and he hopes to come along while you're here and listen to another of them."

The professor beamed.

"I am gratified by so real a compliment!" he said. "I think I do recall your uncle, Talbot. A handsome, rather stern-looking man of fifty or so, is he not? I seem to remember him as specially interested in Poe."

"You've got him, sir! You must have a jolly good memory! And it's queer you should mention Poe, for my uncle has sent along a MS. supposed to be by him. There's a story hanging to it, if you can spare a few minutes to listen, and as he wants both you and the Head to see the MS. and say whether you think it genuine—"

"I can spare as long as is necessary, my boy, and I am eager to see the MS."

Talbot then recounted the story of the young American officer.

"I shall be at the match this afternoon," said Professor Fielding, "and, of course, you will be playing. But if you have time after the game is over, or after tea, you might bring me that story. Perhaps it had better be after tea; you will be sure to find me in Dr. Holmes' study then."

"I'll bring it, sir, and thank you very much!" replied Talbot.

"The benefit is on the other side, and



The disguised Racke and Crooke, soaked to the skin, and snarling at one another, came over the quad from the gates in the pouring rain. "Behold Skimpole and D'Arcy, you fellows!" said Tom Merry, looking out of the window. (See Chapter 4.)

it is I who should offer thanks," said the professor.

He always talked to the fellows he liked as if they were his equals; never put on any side, as Tom Merry, one of his greatest admirers, expressed it. Possibly that was one reason why they liked him so well.

The match was worth seeing. The professor enjoyed every moment of it. Cousin Ethel was present, on a short visit to Mrs. Holmes, and she watched it by his side.

George Figgins played as finely as ever he had done in his life; Figgys was always good value, but he never played better than when the bright eyes of Ethel Cleveland were upon him.

Dick Redfern, who had only escaped the clutches of Ratty and found himself able to play at the last moment, was in fine fettle at centre-forward for the New House. And Fatty Wynn, in goal, and Kerr, at back, distinguished themselves.

But there was plenty of good form on the other side, too. The forward line—Gussy and Talbot, Tom Merry at centre, and Blake and Levison—were at their best, and it was nothing against Fatty that they scored as many as four goals, for he had no chance with any of the scoring shots.

The New House also scored four, and the whistle sounded with the result a draw.

Cousin Ethel was coming to tea in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and Talbot was among those asked to meet her. The Terrible Three and Figgins & Co. were also guests, of course.

Talbot thought it best to make sure of the MS. before tea, and as soon as he had changed he went along to his study. "I've spoken to the professor about that story, Skimmy," he said. "It looks as though I shall have to take his opinion before I do yours, after all. Where is it?"

Skimmy looked rather relieved. He had no doubt whatever of the value of his opinion. He had also, however, no doubt about the value of his time, and, willing as he always was to do anything for Talbot, he had begun to feel that it was better that such inferior brains as those of Professor Fielding and Dr. Holmes should be employed upon the alleged Poe MS. than that he should spend a valuable hour—never to be reclaimed—upon it.

"It is in this drawer, my dear Talbot," he said, smiling.

"Don't you bother. I'll get it," replied Talbot.

There were lots of papers in the drawer, which was Skimmy's special repository; but the MS. did not seem to be among them.

"You'd better look," Talbot said. "I

don't want to mess up your precious documents, and I can't see it."

"But I am sure it is there, my dear fellow. I remember quite distinctly putting it there. It lay on the top, above some notes I had made on the atomic theory."

"Here are your notes on the what-is-it, but I don't see the story," answered Talbot, still unruffled.

He felt sure Skimmy had put the MS. somewhere else. Gore would not have meddled with it, he knew, and why should anyone else?

The smile faded from the face of Herbert Skimpole as he searched the drawer.

"It is not here, Talbot!" he said, putting his hand to his forehead. "But you know how exceedingly reliable my memory is in matters of this kind, and I am absolutely positive that I put it here."

"I know how giddy reliable your memory isn't, old chap," answered Talbot. "It works all right at times, and then it gets the string-halt or something, and—"

"Gets the whatter?" inquired George Gore, entering at that moment.

Talbot did not trouble to explain his speech.

"Skimmy's mislaid that Poe MS., Gore," he said. "I want it before weep,

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and I'm going out to tea. Beastly nuisance!"

"Skimmy is twenty-five different kinds of donkeys, and then some!" said Gore, grinning. "But don't you worry, Talbot. I'll find it for you, and bring it along to No. 6. That's where you're due to tea, of course. I heard Miss Cleveland was coming."

"Thanks, Gore! I know I can depend upon you," said Talbot, as he hurried off.

"I hope that he did not mean to infer that I am an undependable individual," remarked Skimmy sadly.

"Ass if he thinks you anything else!" snapped Gore.

Then the two went to work, though Gore told Skimmy he was only in the way.

Tea was nearly over in Study No. 6, when there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!" yelled Blake.

Gore appeared.

"Sorry to intrude," he said.

"You do not intrude, dear boy," Arthur Augustus replied graciously.

"Talbot's told us all about it," said Blake. "Have you been hunting all this time? Jolly decent of you, Gore."

"So I think," said Cousin Ethel, and Gore flushed.

"That's nothing," he said. "But I'm frightfully sorry, Talbot, and Skimmy's about ready to tear his wool out by the roots. It can't be found!"

Reginald Talbot looked rather blank. He could not help it. Already he had grown anxious about the MS., knowing how much his uncle valued it. And there were the Head and the professor to be considered, too. The Head would have been told of it, and they would both be expecting him.

"If you like, Talbot, I'll explain to the professor how things are," said Cousin Ethel, perceiving the trouble in his face.

"It's kind of you," Talbot replied.

"But I think I ought to go myself."

"If you think that you must be right, for it depends upon how you feel about it, of course," the girl answered. "I must be going now. Shall we go together? I don't mean to the Head's study, of course, but downstairs."

They went together, but Figgins and Kerr and Fatty went also. In fact, Talbot and Kerr and Fatty walked behind the other two until the New House trio had to turn another way. Figgins could not help being a bit of a monopolist where Ethel Cleveland was concerned.

But Cousin Ethel had time to whisper a word of comfort to Talbot before they parted.

"It's sure to turn up!" she said.

"I hope so. I shall feel that I've let my uncle down badly, and those two as well, if it doesn't," answered Talbot. "Thank you for your sympathy, Cousin Ethel!"

"Good-night, Talbot!"

"Good-night, Ethel! You're not going until Friday, are you?"

"No. I shall see you all again."

The girl vanished in the direction of Mrs. Holmes' drawing-room, and Talbot tapped at the door of the Head's study.

## CHAPTER 8.

### No Clue!

"OH, you have brought the precious MS., Talbot?" said the Head, quite eagerly.

Talbot felt like groaning. He had to disappoint Dr. Holmes as well as the professor, and Dr. Holmes mattered almost as much to him as his uncle did, while the professor had come to matter a good deal, too.

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"No, sir," he answered. "It's mislaid."

"I trust you don't mean that it is lost, Talbot?" said the Head. "That would be an irreparable misfortune."

"It would, indeed," agreed the professor. "All too little of Poe's work exists. Any addition to it would be priceless."

Talbot felt more worried than ever. It was to his sensitive mind as though he had proved false to a trust.

He had not been as careful as he should have been, he knew. Skimpole should never have been allowed to take charge of the MS.

"I don't think it can be really lost," he said doubtfully. "But I let Ski—I let another fellow have it, and—and it can't be found."

If the two men whose eyes were upon his face then had been suspicious men, or if that face had been less frank and sincere, there might have been in their minds a notion that the whole story of the MS. was a fake.

But Professor Fielding and Dr. Holmes were not given to mean suspicions, and Talbot had their full confidence.

"Well, I hope it will soon be found," said the Head. "Don't spare any pains to that end, Talbot. You do not perhaps appreciate the value of this MS., but I—"

"I think I do, sir," Talbot said respectfully. "I may not understand all about it myself, but I know that my uncle thinks a lot of it, and I see that you and Professor Fielding do also. That's enough for me."

He turned to go. The eyes of the two men followed him.

"That boy is a fine fellow, Richard," said the professor, as the door closed behind him.

The old friendship between these two had renewed itself in full strength, and the Head had begun to feel that when Professor Fielding's holiday was over there would be a gap at St. Jim's that no one else could fill.

"A very fine fellow, indeed," agreed the Head. "I have told you his story. You could never have guessed it from his face or his speech. Yet there are boys here who had every chance in their early days who are not worthy to tie his bootlaces. There is his cousin, for instance—Cooke. That boy has given me endless trouble. A dozen times I have been on the point of expelling him. But I hate putting that stigma on any boy. It is always a last resource here. I have watched anxiously for some sign of good in him, but I can see none."

Meanwhile, Talbot had gone back to his study. It was not often he neglected his prep, but he did not touch it that evening. He spent the whole time searching through the litter which the turning-out of the study had made.

Gore helped him, and Skimmy wanted to help. But his offer was turned down by both the others. Skimmy was no good for anything of that kind, and they were rather annoyed with him.

"It's no go," said Talbot, at length.

"Fraid it isn't," answered Gore. "If the thing had taken to itself wings it couldn't have disappeared more completely."

"I hate being suspicious," Talbot said. "But it does really look as though someone must have taken it."

"But who would?" returned Gore. "I know your uncle thinks a heap of it, old chap; but to any fellow here it would hardly have been worth the paper it was written on. Who knows anything about it?"

"I told the fellows and cousin Ethel at tea to-day. But that was after it was

lost, and it doesn't help, anyway. Besides them, there are only we three."

"And Manners," said Gore.

"Oh, yes! Manners brought it along after Baggy had opened it."

"And I mentioned it to him in the Common-room a little later."

"Anybody else there?" inquired Talbot.

"Racke and Crooke were standing by the fire, talking about gee-pees. But I'm not sure that they hadn't gone out before we began to yarn. I know Manners was just going out when I blew in. It wouldn't interest Racke and Crooke, anyway."

"No, I shouldn't think it would interest them," agreed Talbot. "There's only Baggy. Unless anyone else was there when he opened the letter. I must ask Manners about that. I suppose we must count Baggy out. He's too stupid to see any value in the thing."

"I'm! I don't know that I should be in such a hurry to count him out," returned Gore. "Talbot, old sport, you want Kerr on this job!"

"Or Cardew," said Talbot. "He's as keen as Kerr when he likes. I think I'll ask them both. But I'll go and see Manners now."

"Cardew and Levison—nobody else," said Manners, when the question was put to him.

Talbot went along to No. 9 on the Fourth Form passage at once. He could not get at Kerr until the morning; but he could enlist Cardew's aid that night, and he did so. Cardew was rather bored with the uneventfulness of life just then, and readily agreed to play detective.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Racke and Crooke—Authors.

"BY gad, there's really something in this yarn!" the exclaimed Racke.

"There is," Crooke agreed.

"I'm not nuts on readin'; I reckon most books are piffle. Don't know that I should care to read many stories like this, for that matter. But we had to read this one, an' I must say it does get a chap. That part where Ethan Rossiter goes into the haunted chamber, an' comes rushin' out again, an' drops in a dead faint, with the candle gutterin' over his clothes—"

"An' you aren't told what it was he saw or heard, an' yet you feel dashed certain that it was somethin' too horrible for words! By gad, that put me in a cold perspiration!" Racke said.

For the first time in their lives the two bad eggs of the Shell had come under the spell of genius.

Perhaps, if they had read "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia," "The Masque of the Red Death," and others of the weird stories which that master of the horrible and the uncanny, Edgar Allan Poe, left to be carried to the clouds of future generations, they might not have been quite so much impressed by "The Doom of Devanel." But this kind of thing was outside the range of their experience.

"Tell you what—it's a sure winner!" said Crooke.

"By gad, yes! Lowther couldn't touch this in a hundred years, or any of the other people who are goin' in for the competition, I'll bet. Oh, we'll carry off that fifty each right enough. But we've got to be careful, Gerry."

"We're bein' careful, aren't we, chump? The door's locked, an' this thing's goin' to be hidden where no one can find it till it's copied out, an' after that it's goin' into the dashed fire, dear boy!"

"But there's more than that to it. See here, do you suppose Talbot's read this thing?"

"I don't know. How should I? My dashed old uncle has, though, I should think, whether the dear Reginald has or no."

"Yas, there's danger there. One thing we shall have to do is to alter the names of people an' places all through the yarn."

"Dash it all, that's rather like hard work, Aubrey! I know I can't think of names as good as 'Devanel' and 'Ethan Rossiter' an' the rest of them. 'Brown' an' 'John Smith' an' that sort of thing won't go with the yarn a bit."

"They've got to be altered," persisted Racke.

"It will be almost as much trouble as writin' the dashed thing ourselves!" grumbled Crooke.

"Well, when it's done we shall be practically the authors, an' chaps of that kind are supposed to take no end of trouble. There's another thing—the story's sure to be published. If it's published with your name—or mine—to it, we shall be on the rocks."

"Oh, by gad! I never thought of the dashed thing appearin' in print. It was the fifty each I was thinkin' about, naturally. How are you goin' to get round that, Aubrey? For if Talbot doesn't spot it, my old hunk of an uncle will."

"I've thought that out, too," Racke replied. "I can fix it up. We can send the thing along with a false name an' address; an' I'll send that fellow of mine to the address we give when the cheque's comin'."

"Suppose the bounder sticks to it?" growled Crooke. "You know, he ain't to be trusted a yard. If he was honest he wouldn't be any use to you."

"He won't know. He'll have instructions to go an' put up at the address, an' send on to me any letters that come in the name we choose, which will be the one he'll take for the time bein'." See?"

"How long will it take these 'Ludgate Magazine' people to sort out the dashed yarn an' make up their silly minds, do you think?" asked Crooke.

Racke did not know much about that. He suggested a fortnight. The possibility of its being six months or so before the result of the competition was announced never even occurred to him.

"How soon must it be in?" Crooke inquired next.

"Oh, I don't know, by gad! Didn't you get a copy of the rag at Wayland?"

"No. Didn't I tell you they'd sold out?"

"We might write to the office for one," suggested Racke.

"If we know the address. But we don't. Besides, it would be risky. If any inquiries were made later on it might come out. We've got to avoid any sort of connection with the dashed affair."

Crooke was growing even more cautious than Racke. Both were handicapped in their villainy by their ignorance of everything that had to do with the journalistic profession. Lowther, for instance, would have known that there were several books of reference in the school library from which the address of the magazine might be got; and Lowther would have been aware that the fact of a paper's being sold out at the Wayland bookstall was no evidence that it was unprocurable. The bookstall manager would have accepted an order for a copy; but Crooke had never thought of that.

But he did think of Lowther, as it chanced.

"Look here, Aubrey, that ass Lowther's in for this. He's sure to have the rotten rag with the competition notice in it."

"Better go an' ask him for the loan of it!" said Racke sarcastically.

"No fear! I can sneak in an' get it."

"Your turn, Gerry! I got this."

Racke laid a hand on the MS.

"I shan't go. I'm not goin' to be caught in Study No. 10," replied Crooke sullenly. "Tell you what, I'll send Baggy."

"S'pose the fat ass gets blabbin'?"

"Oh, he won't! I can stuff him up so that he won't suspect anything, an' he'll do it for a bob. He doesn't know anything about the competition; and we shouldn't have known if we hadn't heard Manners an' Gore jawin'."

"That's true enough. Well, get him to do it. It is safer than for either of us to go."

"Yes!"

Racke thrust the MS. into a drawer.

"Who's there?" sang out Crooke.

"Me!" answered the squeaky voice of Baggy Trimble.

Racke got up and opened the door.

"Just the fellow we wanted to see!" he said, with unusual geniality.

Baggy looked suspicious.

"We've got a job for you," said Crooke. "Do you know whether Merry an' that crowd are in?"

"They've gone to Rylcombe," replied Baggy.

"I saw them go. Why?"

"Well, sneak into their study an' see if you can find a paper called the 'Ludgate Magazine.' There's an article in it about racin' that we want to see, an' we know Lowther's got the thing. Of course, we don't care to ask him for the loan of it."

"Oh, of course not!" smirked Baggy.

"Besides, he wouldn't lend it to you fellows; he bars you too much. I'll go. But I say, Racke, could you lend me a ten-bob note? I happen to be hard up—only for the moment, but it just happens so."

Racke groaned. It was not to be paid for by a mere bob, this sneaking errand, and it would not do to refuse Baggy's request.

"You shall have it when you bring that magazine," he said.

The podgy rascal departed. Within two minutes he was back.

"Here it is," he said. "It was lying in the armchair. I hope Lowther won't miss it. But if he does he won't know who took it. He, he, he!"

"Not if you keep your silly mouth shut," growled Crooke.

"Oh, you bet I'll do that! Thanks Racke. You shall have this back when I get my remittance. Next week, I fancy it will be."

"Ah! You do fancy things, Baggy!" answered Racke.

He would never see that ten shillings back, he knew. But it did not matter much, even though he was hard up. When Racke and Crooke thought themselves hard up it usually meant that they had only what would have been comparative affluence to most fellows in the Shell, who had not as many shillings to spend as they had pounds.

"By gad, it's a good thing we got it!" said Crooke a few minutes later. "The competition closes on Saturday, an' it's Thursday now. You won't have time to work the address wangle."

"Let's have a look at the conditions," rejoined Racke, frowning.

He pored over them for a minute or two. Then he said:—

"I can see a way. You only have to put a nom de plume on the MS. of the story you send. But you must enclose a letter giving that nom de plume an' your

real name, with the address. Well, I shan't enclose the letter. See?"

"Dashed if I do! How are we goin' to collect the oil of it—?"

"Chump! I'll send the letter on afterwards, when I've fixed it up. Refer to the title of the yarn, an' give the assumed name; we needn't bother about any trouble they have in sortin' it out. That's their funeral!"

"By gad, you are a downy one, Aubrey!"

"Pity we can't happen on a few more MSS. like that one, Gerry, an' a few more competitions like this! We'd make quite a good thing of it as authors, strictly incoog—eh? I say, though, we must start in at once with the alterations, an' we shall have to copy part each of the yarn—it won't matter about its bein' in two hands, I should think, I'd get it typed, only it would never do to let anyone else see it."

So, quite pleased with themselves and their scheme, the two black sheep went to work. They did not guess how Trimble's errand to Study No. 10 and Racke's cunning dodges were to form links in the chain of evidence which would later be forged against them.

But of how that chain was forged, and of how the clearing up of the MS. mystery involved the coming out of another transgression of theirs, which they had fancied buried, next week's story must tell.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Tom Merry's, to be next week, entitled "BROUGHT TO LIGHT." Order your copy EARLY.)

## READERS' NOTICES.

Correspondence, Etc. wanted.

M. A. Michelson, 55, Park Road, Centennial Park, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, with readers anywhere, 15-16.

Miss J. Davis, 110, Station Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, with readers anywhere, age 17-19.

F. Patman, 79, St. John's Road, Glebe, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, with readers anywhere, age 14-16.

A. C. Brodie, 50, Skinner Lane, Birmingham, with readers interested in postcards.

Miss G. Scott, 44, Totteridge Avenue, High Wycombe, with readers anywhere, age 16-18.

Miss D. MacTavish, P.O. Box 317, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, with readers anywhere.

Miss E. Chant, 4, Kirkwood Street, North End, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, with readers anywhere.

E. Lane, 120, Camberwell New Road, London, S.E. 5, with readers anywhere, age 12-14.

D. H. Dickman, 87, Canterbury Street, Cape Town, South Africa, with readers interested in stamps or coins, age 16-18.

E. Hill, 34, Beverley Street, Blackley, Manchester, with readers living in South Africa, Australia, Canada, or America, age 17-18.

J. Reid, 1122, Washington Street, Hoboken, New Jersey, U.S.A., with readers living in Australia.

L. Wilson, Bungalow, Wilga Street, Bondi, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, with readers anywhere, age 14-17. All letters answered.

Stoker C. H. Churchard, No. 3 Mess, H.M.S. Strenuous, G.P.O., London, with readers anywhere, age 18-20.

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# DOBBIN'S AMAZING SCOOP

A Splendid Complete Story of the Chums of St. Katie's. By Michael Poole.

## CHAPTER 1.

### The Camera Wizard.

**A**T the end of Mr. Roger Blunt's first month at Katie's, everyone realised that he was a permanent hard-set, never-could-be-different sort of fixture.

The Transitus didn't gloat about it. But they settled down to the real facts of life. You couldn't get away from Jolly Roger; the cleverest work-dodging device ever invented simply withered away under his bright and shining eye. He had systems which guarded against things you couldn't even think of, and the ordinary games merely made him smile.

His three-points-to-a-line idea, for instance, was guaranteed to turn any ordinary fellow into a strenuous swot within a fortnight. Roger simply said that it tested everyone thoroughly.

That was one of Jolly Roger's favourite expressions, "You must learn this thoroughly," he said, and meant it. At normal times a fellow just ran through a lesson, and it was a matter of luck how he got through the following day. Sammy Steed used to run round the class twice, and the chances were that he was bound to ask one question you knew the right way. If you didn't, he asked another, generally easier than the first, just to give you a chance of showing that you really did know something about it.

With Jolly Roger you had to take a slip of paper and get your pencil ready for a race. He asked ten questions—but each question was really three. If you got one point wrong the whole question was wrong!

There wasn't any time for thinking, because Roger said it was also a test of quickness, and brightened the brain. The moment he had rapped out the last

of the thirty "points" he called out: "Pass your papers to the end, gentlemen! Buckle, please collect them for me!"

Jolly Roger took the papers himself. Later on he would go through every one of them in class, brightly and breezily.

"Bunting! Ah, Bunting, you are weak on figures. I'll speak to Mr. Gladridge about your mathematics. Owing to this weakness, you have only two questions out of ten correct, though you have sixteen points out of thirty correct. Nevertheless, Bunting, you get only two marks, which is lamentable. Dexter! Dexter shows the same weakness. You have twenty-five points correct, Dexter, yet only get five marks out of the ten. You must devote special attention to dates, Dexter! I shall note your progress in dates!"

You see the idea? He told them that by the end of the term he would know the weight of each of their intellects to the fraction of an ounce. Next term he would start training them in real earnest. They would get to the stage where they would simply love work!

It wasn't any use kicking against it, or trying to lead Roger astray on the question of your particular brain power. The poor old Transitus just had to go on having their brains brightened and tested and developed up to Jolly Roger's "thoroughly efficient standard."

Mind you, there were good points about Roger. Bill Strong said that if he'd cut out all his scolding business he'd be the best master they had, because he really was hot stuff on football, and Bill rejoiced at the way he rounded up the slackers.

Yet here again he had good points. At football Dobbin was rather like an elephant trying to play ping-pong. He always went to where the ball was before

somebody else had taken it to another place. He ran about the field a good deal more than Bill Strong ever did, but the ball had a way of dropping just at Bill's foot as though it liked it, while it trusted, or developed a break and bounced backwards, if Dobbin got within kicking distance.

Did Jolly Roger blame Dobbin because of this? Not a bit! When Dobbin turned up with his camera one afternoon, expecting that Roger would simply make him play, old Roger came along and talked quite intelligently about stops and focal plane shutters, and quite agreed that Dobbin should try to get a snap of him as he did one of his special performances of the lightning eel on the touch-line.

At this sort of thing Dobbin was a gilt-edged wonder. Of course, when you know that his father thinks nothing of taking lions in the act of jumping on him in the jungle you'll realise that playing about with a camera is in Dobbin's blood. He can't help it. He has taken Bill Strong in mid-air with his top curl just touching the ball, and you can absolutely see Bill's front teeth just gritting together as he gets ready for the shock.

You would think Dobbin was rather proud of his skill. Yet it's just here you come right on his secret sorrow and realise why he always looked so serious.

The one big ambition of Dobbin's life was to contribute his wonderful photographs to the illustrated papers. So far he had failed, despite the fact that his snap-shots were absolutely the most perfect things you could desire. One of the editors—who knew Dobbin's father, and also knew something about Dobbin himself—would write nice little letters of encouragement to Dobbin. He told him that he had nothing to learn about producing a photograph: where he went astray was in the question of subject.

The snaps of Bill Strong were simply splendid—but they weren't "news."

Just at present Dicky Dexter was taking a pathetic interest in Dobbin's photography. "Life was a dreary business, and a fellow had to do something but, with the prospect of taking tea with Jolly Roger once every week and having a heart to heart talk with him about being good, there wasn't very much chance of doing anything very interesting. No harm, anyway, in helping old Dobbie with his camera!

Dobbie was very glad about it. "We'll do something big between us, Kid!" he told Dexter. "And there's money in it! Pots of money! I haven't made any yet, but I'll just show you what I mean. Pascal all says about these photographs. Then you'll get the right idea of what the "Daily Flashlight" really wants."

They went into the subject. Mr. Pascal had written quite a nice letter, pointing out that "Athletic master shoots winning goal," and "Brilliant play by William Strong, St. Katherine's full-back" were ripping photographs, but their interest was purely local. What was wanted was something extraordinary—an amusing incident, or a remarkable accident, or a series of photographs which told a thrilling story. "The three photographs in to-day's Flashlight, 'Schoolboy's Dramatic Escape from Burning Tenement' show you exactly what I mean. There's a real story behind those photographs—you'll find all about them on page 2."

They looked at the Flashlight and read the story. No. 1 showed the "Thrilling moment when young George Jones appears on the window-ledge—a great, tall, ugly-looking, round-bodied, and a fireman dancing round: photograph taken at six o'clock in the morning, prompt. No. 2, taken at 6.3 a.m., showed George in mid-air, with firemen in the foreground holding a sheet all ready for little George. No. 3, taken at 6.12 a.m., gave a back view of George lost in his mother's all-embracing arms.

"It's all very well," Dobbie complained, "but we can't go and set fire to the school and take the chance of somebody doing a flying leap, can we? The Beak wouldn't stand that sort of thing. Old Pascal says if I could get something really thrilling in the football field it might be all right—somebody going over the top-bar of the goal-post, or the goalie being driven through the back-net with the force of a shot, or something of that sort. If we could only get some really thrilling scoop—"

He looked inquiringly at the Kid. Somehow Dobbie had the feeling that, with the Kid's aid, he could please Mr. Pascal, and so win fame and fortune.

There was a brighter light about the Kid's eyes, and he'd lost that sad, wistful expression which had begun to grow on him just lately.

"There's more in that jolly old camera game than I thought, Dobbie," he said reflectively. "Mean to say, it isn't just pressing a button and messing about in the dark-room, is it? Why didn't you tell me all about this thrilling business before? We'll thrill 'em!"

"When shall we begin?" Dobbie asked.

"What's wrong with to-morrow?" the Kid demanded. "What can we do? We couldn't put a rope round Bill Strong and jerk him over the cross-bars? What we've got to do is to think out something dramatic, and then to make it happen. Keep still, Dobbie! I think! My brain revolves. I can feel Jolly Roger's brightening powder chipping away the chunks of rust on my neglected intellect! Oh, why was I born so brilliant and brave?"

And echo answers 'Why?' But wait, my child! Patience! My mighty mind conceives a plan, and likewise a scheme."

That was the way the Kid always talked when he was wound up. You couldn't stop him. And generally, when he talked like that, there was trouble knocking round somewhere for somebody!

## CHAPTER 2.

### Arranging the Pictures.

"AII, you little lump of—of craziness! You—you ass!" said Bill Strong.

Bill hadn't got the Kid's inventiveness for words, and he struggled with effort just now to find anything that would express his feelings for the Kid.

"And you, too, Dobbie! Mean to say, we all know what the Kid is when he gets his head! But you—weren't you going to help me make him into a nice little lad, who'd be a credit to us? And now—"

Bill Strong sank into a chair, utterly staggered and helpless.

It was an hour or two after the first really thrilling incident on the football field had been arranged. In Bill Strong's opinion, it had not been a success.

It hadn't been a success from Dobbie's point of view, either. The Kid had told him exactly where to stand, and the thing was to happen before the practice-game started. Bill Strong had guaranteed to hit the goalpost with a rattling shot—by Dicky Dexter's special request.

Also by special request, and entirely unknown to Bill Strong, or the Worm in goal—his real name was Grubb, but they called him the Worm for short—three other players were to rush forward as soon as Strong kicked, and bang the Worm into the net.

Bill Strong had asserted that he could not only hit the goalpost, but, as the ball rebounded, he could meet it, and put it into the net. Dicky Dexter had said it was an impossible feat; Dobbie had said it was impossible.

The other three players were under the impression that Dobbie wanted a snap on an exciting moment in goal.

Nobody knew that, in some mysterious way, the Kid had obtained a saw, and done a little fretwork business on the goalposts. That perhaps explains why he was so anxious that no one should go near the goal until Bill Strong had exhibited his wonderful aiming powers.

What really happened was this: Bill Strong kicked, but the ball rebounded at an angle right away from the goal. He caught Dobbie fair and square in the face, so that he didn't see the really thrilling thing which happened all in the next moment.

Bill Strong, missing the ball, pulled himself up with the goalpost, just as the valiant three charged down on the Worm. As Bill grasped the upright, the whole affair tumbled to pieces. Each upright post became three short lengths and the cross-bar hunched forward, bringing the net with it.

Now, Dobbie! Dexter was filled with joy at the absolute and complete thrillings of that moment.

But by the time Dobbie had recovered his camera, other thrilling things were taking place, only they weren't quite the sort of thing he wanted to photograph.

Bill Strong and the valiant three had crawled from under that net in record time. They felt they had been deceived, and, without waiting to pick up any clues their thoughts turned to Dobbie—and the Kid!

Unfortunately, just at that moment, Dig Hallam happened to have strolled

over from the Sixth ground to have a word with Strong. Big Hallam was captain of Katie's. In ten seconds he, also, gathered every detail of the business, and he commanded that Dexter and Dobbie should stand before him.

It's no use writing about unpleasant things, any more than it was any use Dexter trying to explain that they hadn't produced any proof that they would get the posts. Big Hallam said things that were not kind. Several times he said to both Dexter and Dobbie: "I warn you two kids"—in a solemn sort of way—but there were other things that were a lot worse.

However, Big Hallam wasn't going to break the heart of a kind headmaster by letting him know anything about it. The whole thing would be hushed up. Dexter and Dobbie would pay to Big Hallam the full money value of the goalposts as soon as convenient. They would go and get the spare posts at once; they would remove the damaged posts; and they would report to Hallam at 4 o'clock.

You would think that this killed the partnership between Dobbie and the Kid? It didn't. Dobbie had the feeling that Dexter had done his best, and the Kid had an idea that he had let Dobbie down, besides landing him in for a fairish amount of ready cash. It was over this latter point they both felt pained. Something would have to be done about it.

"Next time," said the Kid hopefully, "we'll cut out anything connected with the school. It's a handicap, Dobbie! You're bound to butt into somebody who's too stodge to see the thing in its right light. But you wait! I'm not the sort of chap to let you down, am I, Dobbie. And, anyhow, with Big Hallam collaring all our spare cash for weeks to come, we've just got to make some more!"

Two or three days passed. Outwardly all was calm, though the Kid missed the practice game one afternoon, and even Dobbie didn't know where he'd gone.

When at last the Kid did roll up, and found Dobbie alone in the study, he bubbled over with joy. He made a speech to Dobbie there and then, but a lot of it had nothing to do with anything.

"You've got an idea?" Dobbie asked at last.

"An idea? A brain-wave?" the Kid retorted. "Unknown schoolboy's thrilling heroism! How's that for a beginning? Mystery, dramatic touches, cool courage—just like the pictures! You'll gasp, Dobbie! Listen!"

Dobbie did gasp. Not violently, but just a semi-doubtful sort of gasp.

"Mean to say," he said, "this weather, you know, Kid? It'll be horribly cold! And it's risky, isn't it?"

"I've done it before!" retorted the Kid. "Footer togs won't make any difference to me! I've arranged every detail this very afternoon. No tiny detail under your-foot business with this infant! Sarah Sawyer's fixing the doll at the Busy Bees are coming along. You! I'm dead keen on this, Dobbie! It'll put the pictures of little Georgie right in the giddy background! You leave it all to your Uncle Richard!"

Dobbie decided to leave it. Besides the kid really was an expert diver and swimmer, and this gave him a chance.

Only half-a-mile from Katie's runs the River Nare. It isn't a roaring, rushing torrent or anything of that sort, but is a decent, ordinary, nice-brought-up river. A mile down-stream from Katie's grounds it is closed by a common or garden stone bridge, which looks very low—until you stand on the coping and think about diving from it.

Nevertheless, dozens of Katie's boys in years gone by have dived from the centre of the bridge, though the feat is expressly forbidden. But it sets the seal on a swimmer's ability. Once you have dived from Sander's Bridge you really are one of the elect. Bill Stroug had done it, and so had Dicky Dexter.

On the following afternoon Dobbin, with his wonderful reflex camera strung about him, the three Busy Bees, and Richard Dexter, all in footer togs, stood on the river bank by this bridge. The Kid was doing the talking as usual.

"You can twist your camera some way, can't you Dobbie, so's to make the old bridge look a lot higher? You want to do that, you know. But that's your job. You'll leave this giddy contraption as far out as you can, Bunty? Wait till you see me wawe. But you've got the whole idea?"

A minute or two later the Kid was on the bridge. He was attired in footer clothes, but without the boots. That was a detail it had been decided to risk.

He jumped on to the coping of the bridge and waved his hand to Dobbie, who was on the bank, down on one knee, and peering carefully into the full-sized find of his camera. Behind Dobbie stood Bunting, Buckle and Barron.

"He'll funk it!" Buckle spoke his thoughts aloud. "Look! He can't make up his mind."

"Rot!" Bunty shut him up. "Not the Kid! Not that sort!"

"Dry up!" growled Dobbie, as he pulled a handle at the side of the camera and changed the first plate. Scene No. 1, unknown hero poised for the thrilling dive, has been snapped!

Dexter was balancing himself on the stone coping of the bridge. Buckle was right up to a point; the water looked a horribly long way off. One—two—three—

He took it "like a bird," as Bunting said afterwards. Old Dobbie, his thumb on the queer arrangement which pressed the shutter, jabbed quickly, almost as Dexter's feet left the bridge. There wasn't time to change the plate and get another as the Kid cut into the water.

"Toppin' dive!" gasped Bunting.

"Quick! Check that dolly in, you ass!" Dobbie yelled and Bunting realised that he'd forgotten his part of the programme. He was still clinging to the dummy, all arrayed in a child's clothes, which Sarah Sawyer had fixed up for Dexter.

The next moment the dummy was flung out as far as it would go. It struck the water just as Dexter came to the surface, and after a brief instant he saw it. As he swam towards it Dobbie went nearer the water's edge, and another plate was exposed just as Dexter's hand was dragging the dummy under the water a little.

Then Dobbie changed his position again, and called out excitedly to Bunting and his friends. Two of them were in the water now and wading out a little way so that as Dicky Dexter struggled towards them with his burden they were ready to lend a willing hand.

Dobbie risked another plate or two after that. But the final one had yet to come. The Kid stood on the bank while Bunting helped to get rid of some of the superfluous water. But the other two Bees and Dobbie were already off across the fields. Buckle carried the soaking dummy and Dobbie called instructions to him as they ran along.

At the door of the first cottage they struck. Sarah Sawyer greeted them smilingly.

"Don't smile, Sarah!" Dobbie gasped. "Just look glad, but tearful!"

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"Goodness, gracious!" Sarah gasped. "Here, don't you push that dripping thing on me now! You can put it down, and tell Master Dexter—"

"Hold!" Buckle said. "Hold it, Sarah!"

And Dobbie's shutter worked again.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### A Question of Justice.

UP in the art editor's room, at the office of the "Daily Flashlight,"

Mr. Pascall and his assistant were examining a series of six prints.

"Wonderful lens work!" said the assistant. "You say it's a youngster's work?"

"Young Dobbin—son of the Dobbin," said Mr. Pascall. "Clever kid! Pestered me for months. Given him advice—lie's worth it! Told him we want news stories. No chance at school of course, but he's made news! It's the right spirit!"

The assistant looked through his magnifying glass again at a sparkling print which showed two boys helping another from the water. A third was gripping a bundle which might have been a child. The assistant's magnifying glass had confirmed his opinion that it was not.

"We'll use 'em!" said Mr. Pascall, suddenly. He picked up the carefully written foolscap which Dexter and Dobbie had composed between them. It told all about the unknown boy hero's daring dive and his sudden disappearance from motives of modesty, and it even explained how the photographer happened to be there. As a work of fiction, it was nearly as good as the brilliant photographs—yet Mr. Pascall calmly tore it up and dropped it into the waste-paper basket!

"It'll make quite a good story," Mr. Pascall laughed. "Do it on these lines. Hope it won't hurt the lad's feelings, but he'll have to get used to that! Anyhow, I expect it's the cheque he wants. Pay him full price—exclusive rights. Won't his dad smile!"

Mr. Pascall proceeded to dictate a story—which was nothing about an unknown hero, but it was ever so much more truthful than Dobbie & Dexter's composition in the waste-paper basket!

And at that very hour in the Transit room-former at Katie's, sat Dobbie and Dexter. They were the sole occupants. With his eagle eye, Jolly Roger had seen right through them this morning. He had told them quite frankly that he was profoundly convinced that for three whole nights they had deliberately wasted their time in prep. He said that he was disappointed with them, and only his well-known kindness prevented him from flaying them alive.

He also reminded Dexter that this being Thursday he would, after spending his afternoon in school, take tea with Mr. Blunt.

Even that didn't depress the Kid. Every time he thought of those photos of Dobbie's he had a pleasant "something-accomplished-something-done" feeling in his mind.

"The 'Flashlight' certain to print them!" said Dobbie for the millionth time, as he pushed away his French Grammar.

"Be bound to!" agreed the Kid confidently. "Ripping photos, thrilling rescue, and I think Sarah looked all right, don't you? I mean, she's got a funny face of course, but you could see she was feeling glad. Wonder how much money they'll send you?"

They talked on this interesting aspect for some time. The thought of it even

fortified Dexter during a particularly trying half-hour with Jolly Roger at tea. Somehow Roger seemed to know that he had some secret joy, and asked one or two pointed questions.

"I am glad you are taking an interest in photography," Jolly Roger said.

"But I regret that both you and Dobbie are devoting too much time to it. You must keep everything in its proper place, Dexter! Have you taken anything of more than usual interest of late?"

"Just one or two odd things, sir," said the Kid unhappily.

"Ah, yes! Doubtless I shall see something of the results of your collaboration with Dobbie in due course!" Jolly Roger said pleasantly. "I have enjoyed your company, Dexter. I feel sure that when we get to know each other better we shall be great friends."

He said that every time, and Dexter always said "Yes, sir," and felt an ass.

On the following morning Dobbie and the Kid were amongst the first to await the coming of the paper-boy. Dobbie said he felt sure it would be in this morning. They were bound to rush photographs of such a thrilling event.

The boy came. Dobbie got the "Flashlight." Then his heart gave one tremendous bound. He saw on the back page, almost immediately, his own photographs!

Success had come at last! Ambition's hopes were crowned at last! The paper almost fell from his hand, only Dexter caught it. His eyes dimmed, and he couldn't read. The first real taste of fame simply took Dobbie's breath away!

"What's this? They've got the wrong heading, Dobbie! Oh, my hat! I say, Dobbie!"

Dexter's voice had a note of panic in it. It wasn't a gladsome cry of joy, or anything like it. Dobbie undimmed his eyes and came back to earth.

"This is making a mess of things, isn't it?" Dexter was turning to the inner pages.

"There's quite a lot about it here. 'Should Children See Exciting Pictures?' 'Youthful Aspirants for Film Fame.' They've got your name in Dobbie, and I'm your youthful friend. Oh, my giddy aunt! If anybody sees this you're done, Dobbie! You're in the soup now!"

The photographs were all right. They were as clear and bright as the "Flashlight's" pictures always are. It was the headings and the descriptions which had gone wrong. Instead of "Unknown Hero's Thrilling Rescue" they'd put "Schoolboy's Risky Film Fakes." Instead of a picture of one or two about the only child falling into the river and being swept to a watery grave they explained that the bundle marked "x" was only a dummy.

"The boys' ambition is to become famous film actors and operators. They endeavoured to emulate the feats of Tod Smart, of screen fame, and the result is the remarkable series of photographs shown on page sixteen, which would do credit to the best professional producer."

"The photographer who stage-managed the scenes is the son of the world-famous J. T. Dobbin, whose wild animal studies are so well known. The youthful friend who undertook the risky dive from the bridge is a pupil at the same school. Cinema-producers will doubtless keep their eye on him."

"Whether high-diving and photography are part of the school curriculum we know not, but the headmaster who numbers these enterprising youths among his pupils must at times—"

"Oh, my hat!" Dexter growled. "If the Head sees that!"



"If Jolly Roger ever gets to know of—" Dobbie began.

"He'll guess that's my face!" Dexter said bitterly.

The Head did get to know. Jolly Roger saw the pictures. They did more than merely guess that the face of the high-dive hero belonged to Dexter. They asserted instantly that Dexter was responsible for the whole idea.

They did all this by themselves and separately. The Head decided that this sort of thing had got to be stopped. He determined to see Jolly Roger immediately after morning prayers.

If the truth were known, Jolly Roger hoped almost as fervently as Dexter and Dobbie that the Head hadn't seen the "Flashlight." But long before morning school began every fellow, every master, and every servant in the school knew all about it. The story spread quicker than the measles. It got boiled down and seasoned in the process. "The Kid's got his photo in the papers. He's going to be a famous film favourite. Dobbie took the photos, and he's going to be a stage-manager! It's a fact! It's all in this morning's paper!"

That was how the story ran. Dicky Dexter got sick of being asked about it, and he went into the Transitus Form-room with a sinking feeling just below his heart.

Ten minutes after the first hour had begun, Blott, the school-porter, came in. He had a message for Mr. Blunt from the Head.

"Ah, yes! Thank you, Blott!" Jolly Roger smiled, but it was some time before he took his eyes off the paper. Then he looked up, with a queer little frown on his forehead.

"Dexter, Dobbie, Buckle," he said carefully, "and the two other boys who were associated with you in the production of the photographs appearing in this morning's 'Flashlight.'"

"Yes, sir," said Barron and Bunting weakly.

"I am desired to conduct you personally to the headmaster's room," said

Jolly Roger. "We will go now. Strong, you will please maintain order during my absence."

Jolly Roger said nothing on the journey to the head's den. He ushered them in almost proudly, it seemed. Somehow they all had the feeling that Jolly Roger was one of them, and that he was also in the soup.

"You have seen that, Mr. Blunt?" the Head began, and put forward the "Daily Flashlight."

"Yes, sir!" Jolly Roger answered. "I have seen it."

"Your views, I have no doubt, coincide with my own," the Head went on in his Napoleonic manner. "I cannot recall any incident which has given me so much pain, which has brought the school and its masters into such disrepute. The whole of the Transitus Form— Yes, Mr. Blunt?"

"If I could speak privately with you, sir, for a moment!" Roger said very quietly.

"Certainly! Of course! That, perhaps, will be the best!" the Head agreed. "You boys will remain outside while Mr. Blunt and I discuss the case."

Roger opened the door for them, and they filed out into the corridor. They did not say much. There are times when life is too terrible for mere words.

The minutes ticked slowly by; the school seemed horribly quiet, and no one wanted to talk, even if they had dared. A quarter of an hour passed—twenty minutes. The door opened, and Jolly Roger, still smiling, moved a beckoning finger. They filed in once more.

"Your Form-master and I have discussed the case," the Head said, in precisely the same tones as before. "He has persuaded me to take a much more lenient view than I intended, and he has accepted the responsibility for your future behaviour. He will mete out to each of you such punishment as he considers wise. This is an exceptional step on my part, only taken because Mr.

Blunt assures me that, apart from this, your conduct of late has been exemplary. That is all."

"Thank you, sir!" said Jolly Roger, and motioned to his little lambs to move. They went out.

He said nothing to them as they went back, beyond the fact that he would see them all at twelve-thirty. At this hour the six met once more, and Jolly Roger knew every tiny detail within ten minutes. He even knew that a cheque was confidently expected.

"I regret to suggest it," said Roger, "but I feel that the cheque would be more usefully employed by one of the local charities than it would by you, Dobbie. Perhaps you will consult me after the cheque has arrived?"

"Yes, sir," said Dobbie weakly.

"The question of your diving performance, Dexter, is, unfortunately, a totally different matter," Jolly Roger went on. "It is expressly forbidden, for reasons which even to you should be quite plain. I will see you alone after the others have left us. It is very rarely that I take steps of this kind, but you will be able to tell the others, Dexter, your opinion of my capacity."

He said very little more. But what he did say was terse and pointed. Dobbie, Buckle, Bunting, and Barron were then permitted to retire.

Dexter came ten minutes later. The others had waited for him, but he urged them to go. Just for a time he wanted to think about things quietly. He would tell them what he thought later.

He did, but it had nothing to do with amazing scoops for Dobbie. He admitted quite frankly that on the subject of cheques, rules Jolly Roger had completely reformed him.

THE END.

(Next week's grand, complete story of St. Katie's is entitled "REFORMERS ALL!" Make a point of ordering your Gem early.)

**READERS' NOTICES.**

*Correspondence, etc., Wanted.*

Miss G. Willis, 10, Agar Terrace, Gillington, Bradford—with a reader anywhere.

A. L. Shingle, 56, Dulwich Road, Herne Hill, S.E. 24—wants readers for his amateur magazine, 2d. monthly.

A. Fraser, 255, Barkby Street, Footscray, Victoria, Australia—with readers anywhere, age 14-15.

G. Brunt, 266, Barkby Street, Footscray, Victoria, Australia—with boy readers living in the British Isles, age 14-15.

W. H. Kitson, 36, Broadbent Street, Southwold, Suffolk—with readers anywhere, age 15-17.

Will the African reader who wrote to P. Eccleston, 35, Cambridge Street, Bilton, Staffs, please write again, as his letter has been mislaid.

S. Robb, 105, Robb Street, Aberdeen—with readers anywhere.

N. P. Willis, Whelford, Langdon Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham Spa—with readers anywhere, interested in postcards and stamps, age 13 and upwards. All letters answered.

A. Hammond, 31, St. Stephen's Road, Bayswater, W.C. 2—wants readers and contributions for his amateur magazine.

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# QUINTON'S HERITAGE.

Our Great Adventure Serial.  
By **ANTHONY THOMAS.**



"He's partly responsible for a good many of our men being killed," jerked Tim Daly. "He won't have another chance! Shoot him!" "What!" Jim Quinton gasped, jumping to his feet. (See this page.)

**Dillon Braester's Fate.**  
It was John Quinton who had established a court of justice in Karradon. In a long, low hut, well-lighted during the day, the king and his advisers gathered from time to time and listened carefully to all that a prisoner might wish to say in his own favour.

Not until all excuses had been put forward and everything said in his defence was judgment pronounced. The poorest native in Karradon knew that the white men had brought this to their country. They could not be suddenly condemned because their shadow had annoyed someone greater than themselves. Nor could Mendijah, or any other medicine-man, cast his spell over them, for even if he did, would not the white men give them a charm which should keep away the evil until the king had listened to their case?

On the morning following the victory-revels, Jim Quinton took his place by the side of the Bazzara Malkura on the low platform at one end of the courthouse. Near him sat Tim Daly, and there were three other natives on the king's left hand.

Dick Willoughby joined Erik at the side. They had no official part in the proceedings, but were interested spectators.

Mendijah was the first prisoner to be brought in. He was a very different person from the old medicine-man Jim

had first met. Two stalwart Karradon warriors guarded the little old man, who, robbed of all his trappings, cut but a poor figure.

Jim gathered from Tim Daly that his

**READ THIS FIRST.**

*Jim Quinton, by the will of John Quinton, his father, is to succeed to a mysterious position at Karradon, in Africa.*

*Jim is accompanied by Tim Daly, Erik, and Nijellah, who have come to escort him to Karradon; also his school chum, Dick Willoughby.*

*Eventually the party reaches Africa, also a rical party known as the Karradon Syndicate, which includes Dillon Braester, a cad of the Sixth Form at Harnwood's School, Braester senior, and Cyrus Kerson. A fellow named Flaxman, head of the Syndicate, remains in England.*

*Later Daly and Nijellah are captured by the rical party, and Jim, Erik, and Dick Willoughby continue on to Karradon.*

*An attempt to install Dillon Braester in Jim's place is frustrated by Daly, who has escaped captivity.*

*A great battle eventually takes place, during which Dillon Braester is taken prisoner. He is to be tried on the morrow, and Jim and Dick decide to attack by him, in spite of the fact that he is an enemy.*

(Now read on.)

case had already been considered, and Mendijah was only brought in here as a matter of form.

He already knew what his punishment was to be, and had accepted it gladly. As a blood-brother of the king he could not be called upon to pay the penalty his traitorous conduct deserved, simply because he still claimed the privilege of brotherhood, and had urged that he was not fighting against the king.

He was to leave the village and go to the settlement at the lakeside as a worker. Possibly, in the course of time, he would justify himself again, and would be allowed back to the village.

This cheered Jim Quinton considerably. If this were the kind of justice they were dealing out, all his worries and fears about Dillon Braester were groundless.

Mendijah was taken out. A few moments later Dillon Braester was brought in. His arms were bound behind him, and two warriors were guarding him. The old, sullen look was in his eyes, but Jim felt glad that he made an attempt to carry himself well.

He was brought to a standstill a few yards in front of the king. Almost immediately the king and his friends began to talk among themselves, then turned to Daly and discussed the question with him.

Daly called out to Braester at last.

"You might understand that you're a prisoner," he asked. "You are being tried properly, and if you have anything to say, I'll see that it is interpreted exactly. You are accused of being concerned with your friends in stirring up trouble against us, and being responsible for an attempt to bring about the death of the king. Is it true, or not?"

"I don't know!" Braester flung back his answer. "What's the use of asking me? What can I say about it?"

"You can say anything you wish," Daly answered calmly. "What do you wish to say? Let's hear it now!"

"I've got nothing to say!" Braester answered, and stared at him.

"You won't have another chance!" warned Daly, but Braester merely sneered.

Daly turned and spoke to the king again. For some time they talked, but at last Daly swung round to Jim.

"They're all agreed—want to make an example of him!" he jerked. "He's partly responsible for a good many of our men being killed. He won't have another chance! Shoot him!"

"What!" Jim Quinton gasped and jumped to his feet. "Look here, Tim, we can't have that! We've got to do something! Get him away! A white fellow—after all, Tim! You won't allow them—"

Tim was turning again and talking to the king. The conversation now was no longer quiet. They seemed to be arguing and insisting, and it was plain that Tim Daly was alone.

Suddenly the king rapped the ground violently with his stick, then stood up and waved it. He was insisting on his right to be the final judge, and he gave judgment now, despite all arguments.

The guards evidently understood the word he called to them. Then, with an effort, the king managed to use one of the few words of English he knew, and called it out aloud several times in a harsh, grating voice. He called it to Braester as they were pulling him away, and then he turned round and called it to Jim, as though insisting once again on his right.

"Death! Death!" he grated out, and the word had a queer intonation which gave it a horrible sound. "Death! Death!"

It was then that Braester seemed to waken up and realise that all this performance was not part of some foolish jest. A sudden fear entered his mind, and he pulled himself free for a moment from his guards, and had jumped forward a few paces towards where Quinton still sat, before they laid hands on him again.

"Quinton!" he called. "I say, Quinton; don't let them start any tricks! What's that chap saying? You'll help me, Quinton? For pity's sake—I I say, Willoughby, you'll stand by me?" They were pulling him away before he could say any more.

But Quinton was on his feet and had seized Tim Daly by the arm.

"What are they going to do, Tim?" he demanded.

"Shoot him!" Daly's face was set. He knew better than Tim did how matters lay at present. Between them, he and Quinton had a fair amount of power, but if they used it in the present case their future position would not be very strong.

"When?" Quinton asked, and there was a calm quietness in his voice which made Daly look at him.

"Right now!" Daly answered. "Unless—"

"Get them to put it off for a time, Tim!" Quinton urged. "We've got to think this thing over—talk about it quietly. I'm not going to stand for that kind of thing, whatever happens, Tim. He's a white fellow, and he's a Har-mood's man—a blood brother of mine, if you like, even though he's a wrong 'un. But I shall stick by him through this. Are you going to help me, Tim?"

Tim Daly looked into Jim's face squarely and straightly for a moment or two before he spoke.

"Right, Jim!" he said quietly at last. "I am with you, of course!"

He turned abruptly and joined the natives, who were about the king again. For some minutes after that it was plain that a fierce argument was going on. Meantime, Willoughby had whispered to Jim.

"I'm going out, Jim!" he said quickly. "I'll watch those fellows with Braester. See you later!"

He had gone before Jim could make any objection. Erik also spoke to Jim, and in a few moments, acting on Quinton's instructions, had followed Dick Willoughby from the hut.

By now the fierceness of the argument between the king and Daly seemed to have quietened down a little. Jim had seen a new side of Malkura's character this morning, and gathered that while in many things he gladly accepted the ruling of the white men, in certain questions he kept the right of final decision for himself.

Daly turned at last to Jim, leaving the others to carry on their talk.

"We're going to talk it all over again," he explained. "I've told him that in a way Braester is a sort of blood-brother to you—it's the only way I could explain the idea that you're both from Har-mood's. I've said he's let you down—just as Mendijah played the part of traitor to the king. Anyhow, Braester's safe for the time! We can't do any more at present. It's a problem, Jim, and there's going to be some trouble in finding a way out of it!"

The meeting broke up presently, and Jim left the hut in the company of Tim Daly. Before he went out he had a chance of showing the king that at least

he was still a good friend of his, and Daly lost no opportunity of explaining to Malkura how unfortunate they both considered this awkward question to be.

Dick Willoughby and Erik joined them shortly after they had returned to their own house again. Dillon Braester, still bound, had been placed by himself in one of the huts, and armed guards were keeping watch on him.

"But what's to be done now?" Dick Willoughby asked. "You're not in favour of letting any harm come to the fellow, are you, Tim?"

Daly shrugged his shoulders, and for the first time that morning allowed a little smile to creep about his lips.

"No, I don't think I am now," he admitted slowly. "Mind you, it's only the idea Jim has put into my mind. I've been out here too long to have too sensitive views. And what would Kerzon and the Braesters have done if they'd got the upper hand? It's different in England. Here every man has to fight fairly and squarely for his own hand. Anyway, he's got to play the game with those of his own class—and with everybody. Mendijah, Braester—it's all the same—they haven't played the straight game. Still, you want to get Braester out of this mess, and somehow we'll do it."

But in his own mind Tim Daly was none too happy about the prospects. They talked a great deal about it, but whichever way they turned, there did not appear to be any simple solution of it all.

Daly went over to visit the king in the afternoon. He was away for some considerable time, and while both Jim and Dick Willoughby were indulging in a gentle siesta, Erik came in. He touched Jim lightly on the arm.

"Hallo, Erik! What's the trouble now?" Jim asked, and noticed that the little man's face wore that queer, excited

expression which betokened trouble in the neighbourhood.

"I went out, Bazar, and found a man hiding," Erik answered. "How he came to be so near I do not know. He says that he came last night when the dancing and the feasting was going on. He is your enemy, but he says that he would speak to you. I think he is very weak."

"My enemy?" Jim was on his feet in a moment. "Wants to speak to me? I wonder—you'd better bring him in, if you can, Erik. And you'd better keep on the alert, Dick! If there's going to be any more trouble, I'd like to have your help!"

Erik went out noiselessly. It was nearly ten minutes before he returned. Behind him came another man, somewhat worn and dishevelled, and with his face badly scratched and bruised. At first sight, indeed, Jim scarcely recognised him, but knew he was a white man. It was Henry Braester—Dillon Braester's father!

He stood on the threshold of the room, his head bent a little, as though afraid to raise his eyes and meet Jim Quinton's gaze fairly.

"Well, you wanted to see me?" Jim spoke jerkily at last.

"Yes!" Henry Braester lifted his head, and made an effort to speak quite calmly. "I'm beaten, of course! You've got me at your mercy now. But I came back—I wanted to find out, I can't. Where's my boy, Mr. Quinton? What's my son Dillon? What has happened to him? Is he still safe?"

#### The Braesters Pass On.

It took Jim Quinton a moment or two to grasp the meaning of Henry Braester's questions, even though he heard them quite plainly.

"Yes; he's quite safe—for the present," Jim said at last, and spoke as

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though it were an ordinary query. "He's been in a pretty tight corner, but I think we'll get him out all right. How did you get here?"

Braester shrugged his shoulders, as though an answer were unnecessary.

"I went part of the way with Kerzon and the others," he said at last. "They wouldn't come back to look for Dillon, so I came. He—you have got him as a prisoner?"

"Yes," said Quinton; but did not explain further.

"Ah!" Braester gave a little sigh which sounded as though he were in pain. "Of course, I'm your prisoner now. I've hunted all round this place. Been hiding from your men, too. Then you stole inside last night, hoping to find out something; but I didn't. I've kept out of sight all day."

"Of course!" said Quinton, because he could think of nothing else to say at the moment.

Nor did Dick Willoughby help him out. Apparently, Dick thought that this had nothing to do with him, and was idly turning the pages of a year-old magazine.

Henry Braester braced himself up with the air of a man who means to take some violent action, and Jim watched him anxiously.

"I'm not asking for any favours,"

Braester began, then hesitated. "I mean, I am asking you a big favour. Can you—do you think you can get Dillon safely out of this? Is there a chance? So far as I myself am concerned you can—"

He was standing quite near the door, and it opened suddenly. Tim Daly had returned, but for the moment he did not see Braester.

"Well, Jim, I guess I've managed things pretty well this time!" he began cheerfully. "Malkur's right on our side now, and is quite willing to forego his vengeance on young Braester, provided that you—Hallo!"

As he closed the door behind him, he saw Henry Braester standing there. Tim stared at him in angry amazement, and his hand had gone almost immediately to the weapon hanging by his side.

"What's this game?" Tim demanded abruptly. "Aren't you satisfied yet? Where's Kerzon? Come along! Let's have the truth—quick!"

Jim stepped in now, and explained quickly all that Braester had already told him. Daly listened very quietly, but never once did he take his eyes off Henry Braester.

"H'm!" Daly nodded, when Jim had finished. "So Kerzon and his two friends have cleared off, have they?"

Flaxman will be pleased when he gets the news! You don't think they'll start out again on another expedition?"

He spoke with a hint of sarcasm in his voice, but Braester took his question seriously.

"I am quite sure they will never attempt to come this way again," he said. "It's been a fight—a hard fight—but you've won, Daly. I'm beaten. Kerzon and Flaxman's two agents have gone. They're getting back to the coast as soon as they can. And you've got me and six other boys prisoners. I'm not crying for mercy, except—there's the boy, Daly. I'm responsible. I dragged him into it. If you could get him back to England and—"

He looked appealingly at Tim Daly and then at Jim Quinton. It is very easy to be bitter and to swear vengeance when you are fighting against equal enemies, but it is very hard for a decent man to keep that bitterness when his enemy is in his hands and at his mercy.

Jim Quinton would have spoken at once, but he left it to Tim Daly to do the talking at present. And Daly was not so quick to show his real feelings as Jim.

(There will be another grand instalment of this magnificent adventure serial next week. Order your copy EARLY.)



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