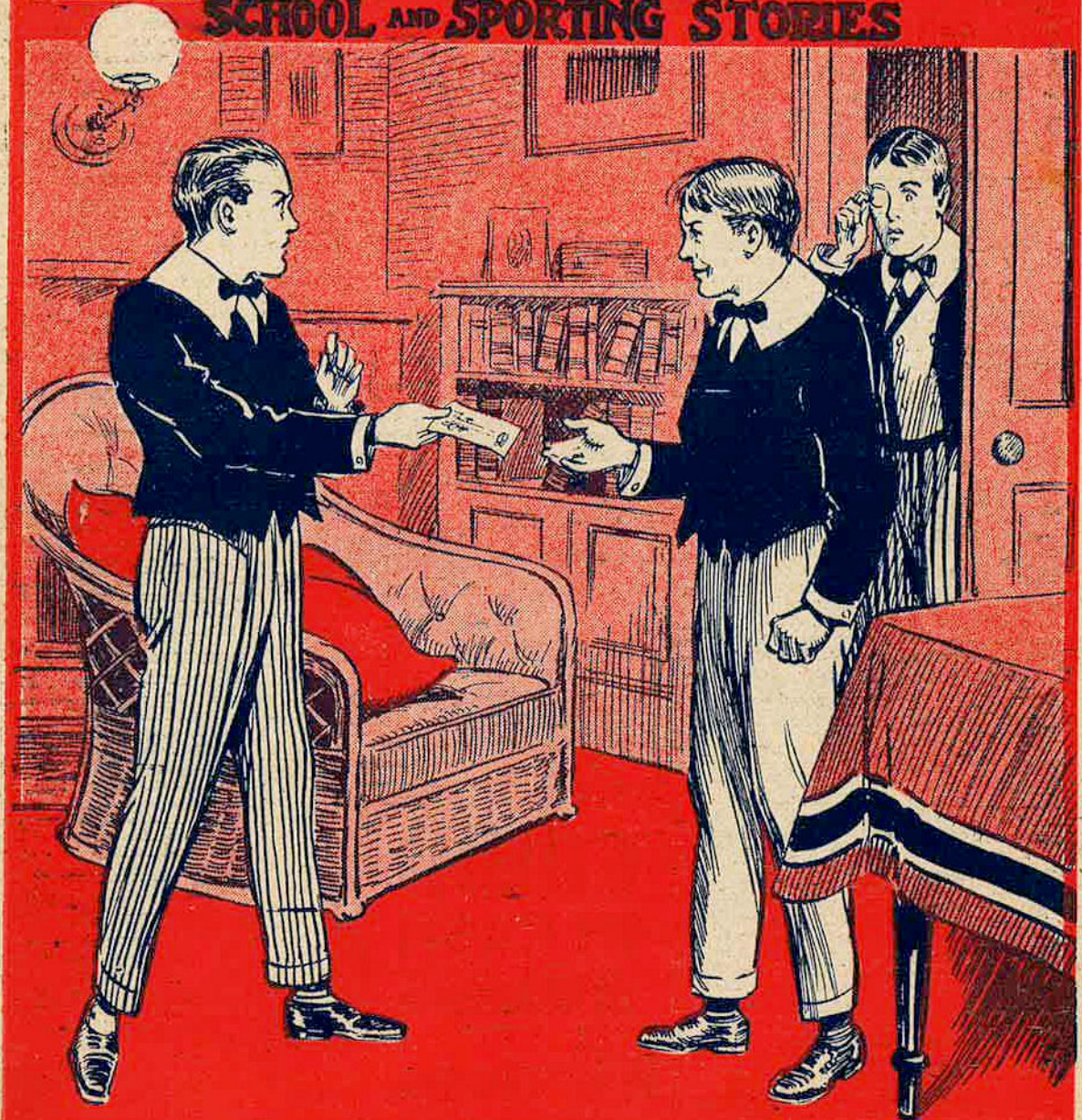


THE GREAT SCHOOL-STORY PAPER!

The GEM 2^D

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June 16th, 1923.

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HUSH-MONEY !

(Aubrey Rucke finds the price of Figgott's silence heavy—but is not prepared for the sudden appearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. An incident from the grand, long complete school story, entitled: "CLEARING HIS NAME!" contained in this issue.)



Access all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

- "THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
- "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
- "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
- "CHUCKLES" Every Thursday
- "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

My dear Chums,—These are great days for the GEM. Nothing new in that fact, I know you will say, but though the old paper has been booming along for so many years, scoring magnificent success after success, yet there is something very special indeed in the modest row of little figures you find on the cover. Next week they register 602! Rather on the lines of a taximeter, and there is something in the parallel, for ever since the long ago time when the Gem first caused delight to thousands, the famous Wednesday weekly has been going on, making the pace, showing the way. This is a point worth thinking about. A paper never stands still. It must get up speed, it has to improve with each number, it has got to take note of the swinging changes of the years, and cater for everybody and all manner of tastes. I think, glancing back at the supremely fine record of the GEM, one can feel a quite pardonable sense of satisfaction that the GEM has been a winner all the while. And then one looks ahead at all the fresh achievements and store, and the further triumphs for St. Jim's!

"IN ANOTHER'S NAME!"
By Martin Clifford.

World-famous Martin Clifford provides a very big story indeed for our next number. It is a yarn that will grip you from the first line. The whole thing pulsates along, with wonderful and entirely unforeseen developments turning up on all sides. It all deals with a nephew of Mr. Latham, a youngster whom the master has never seen. You will appreciate this tale, I know, partly because of its rattling surprises which come thick and fast, partly on account of the raciness of it all, the sporting spirit, let alone the amazing mystery which broods over it all the time. It would be a pity to draw aside the curtain and let you see what happens. Wait till Wednesday, and be sure to order your copy of the GEM, so as to avoid being left with only a polite "Sold out!" from the newsagent when you drop in and ask for the paper. But I must say a word about the prime mystification which causes such a rare tip-up at St. Jim's. Blake & Co. go to meet the stranger, and some startling incidents occur in consequence. Everybody is out and out puzzled, and you can't blame this on to anybody at the school, not even McArey, though the superlative representative of the House of Eastwood does generally contrive to put his foot in it somehow or other. The

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story proves a lot of things. One of these things is how wise it is to make sure of your man. It also shows that St. Jim's is a veritable treasure-house, full of valuable articles calculated to excite the cupidity of unscrupulous people who will stick at nothing to get rich quick.

To my mind "In Another's Name!" is just one of the finest samples of Mr. Martin Clifford's skill. It presents just such a picture of St. Jim's as you all like. The old favourites move through the yarn, each one helping in the working out of a stunning plot. It is all nonsense to say that a good story is just so much mechanism. True enough incidents dovetail in, but when a writer like Martin Clifford sits down to spin a yarn things fall naturally, and every character fits in in the most perfect style.

"THE MYSTERIOUS BELL-RINGER!"

Grand Anthony Sharpe Detective Story.

Heaps of stories have been written about bells, but this new tale of the great detective need stand in no fear of comparisons. These bells are a puzzle. The whole countryside is bewildered by the music, which is heard at all times and seasons. Who rings the bells? That's the question. The old church gets the reputation of being haunted, as is most natural seeing that no intelligible explanation is forthcoming to elucidate the mystery. Now, just watch in next week's splendid story what happens, and why. Note the adroit manner in which Anthony Sharpe, the man who is so seldom baffled, gets to work. He discovers a thread, as it were, and he patiently follows up the clue, to find himself getting hot. But there is a lot of trouble and hard work before the detective gets well on the track of the truth. You see, the obvious explanation, according to some people, is already to

hand. The ancient church is haunted, and surely that's enough! But it does not prove to be half enough for Anthony Sharpe, and, as matters turn out, an extremely fortunate thing, too! I can promise you a really enjoyable time with this clever story of crime-detection.

"REQ. OF THE ROAD PATROL!"
By Vincent Owen.

Reg, the scout of the Automobile Association, shows rare pluck and resource in this masterly narrative, which describes the quest for missing pearls. It is a real marvel for smart thinking and wonderful episode. You will follow the movements of the leading characters, Abdul Mullah, the stealthy, full of Eastern cunning, Latimer and Jessop, and Professor Carfew, with unflinching interest, while the actual facts about the missing jewels will make any reader jump with amazement. The professor is interesting, and the other characters also stand out in vivid relief, compelling attention. And what became of the pearls? Nothing quite so ingenious has ever been hit on, surely! Reg, the scout of the A.A., proves himself a remarkably fine chap in this chase after a gang of scoundrels who are intent on big gain, and there will be a general request for some more of the adventures of the smart fellow. The A.A. scout in his well-known uniform, sees plenty of life as he goes about his work. You know him for what he is—a marvel of quiet efficiency and reliable service. You will be downright interested in the doings of Reg.

"THE SPIDER OF THE NORTH"

Our serial is racing on with the most wonderful series of surprises. It is a genuine masterpiece, and the mill-lane scenes supply a universal demand.

OUR COMPETITIONS!

Don't forget these. The Cricket Competition is as well and suitably represented next week as the ever-popular Tuck Hamper page. As regards this last, let me remind my chums that a postcard serves best. Send in the brightest story-ette you can find. If you don't win one week you may the next.

A STRAIGHT TIP!

No analogy is needed for good advice. Once again I want to urge on all my friends the prime necessity of ordering the GEM well in advance. There is also the kindly thought for the newsagent to be taken into account. He wants to satisfy his customers, but as each week brings a big rush for the GEM, he naturally finds himself in a quandary when late-comers besiege him for copies after he is sold out. So make a note of the matter and place a fixed order so as to make everything square.

CHEERIO!

As you will be sure to have noticed as you tramp on through the world, it is the simplest things which are most likely to be forgotten. Look at the need for being cheery under trying conditions! The way some people overlook the prime necessity might make one smile. The fellow who lets himself be worried by some passing annoyance is well known to us all. He allows a vexation to master him for the time being, which is a pity. He is doing himself harm, and others with whom he is working. It is easy enough to be cheery when things go right, but where grit is wanted is on those occasions when matters go awkwardly. The fellow who triumphs, then, wins all the time.

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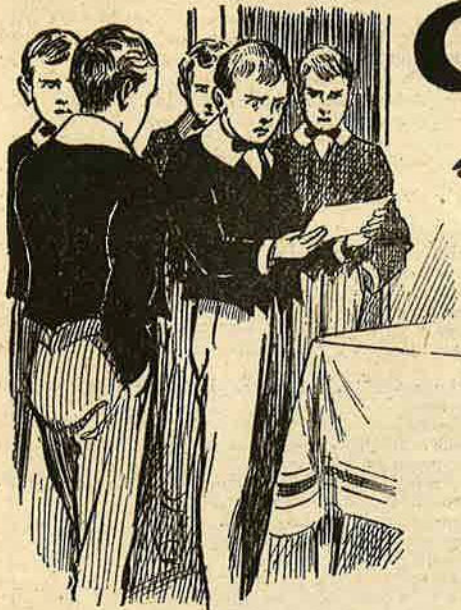
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CLEARING HIS NAME!

A Splendid Story of St. Jim's telling how Ernest Levison unravels the mystery of his chums' strange behaviour.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. "What's Up?"

"LEVISON!"
"Well?"

Levison of the Fourth spoke coolly and quietly. He was standing by the window at the end of the Fourth Form passage in the School House at St. Jim's looking out into the dusky quadrangle, when Cardew and Clive came along.

His face was almost expressionless as he turned to look at them.

Only that afternoon Ernest Levison had returned to St. Jim's, after his long stay at Greyfriars. Cardew and Clive were his best chums at St. Jim's. But no stranger to them would have guessed it, seeing them now—seeing the cold, steely look with which Levison met them.

Nor could anyone have guessed from Levison's look the bitter disappointment he was feeling at his reception in his school after his long absence. It had wounded him to the quick. But Ernest Levison was not a fellow to wear his heart upon his sleeve. There was not a sign in his face of what he was feeling.

Cardew and Clive might have been the merest acquaintances by the way Levison carelessly glanced at them.

"You're back," said Sidney Clive awkwardly.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry we were out when you came."

"If we'd known—" began Cardew.

Levison smiled.

"No need for you to stay in that I know of," he answered.

"It's been a ripping afternoon—better out of doors than indoors. I hope you had a good run in the car."

"That was all right," said Cardew. "But—"

"Good!" said Levison lazily. "Lucky bargee, to get a car to run about in on a half-holiday! I've been sticking for hours in a common or garden train."

"Have you had your tea?"

"Oh, yes! I tea'd with Frank when I came in."

"Come along to the study," said Clive.

Levison shook his head.

"I'm taking a stroll round to look at the old show," he said. "Mr. Lathom's letting me off prep this evening as it's my first day back."

"I wasn't thinking of prep," said Clive. "I—I want to hear about you at Greyfriars."

Levison yawned.

"Nothing much to tell," he said. "Nothing that would interest you chaps."

"Does that mean that you're not goin' to tell us?" asked Ralph Reckness Cardew very quietly.

"Why should I bore you with trifling affairs of no interest?" asked Levison.

He nodded carelessly to the two juniors, and made a move towards the staircase.

"Hold on a minute!" said Clive.

"Well?"

"What have you got your back up about?" asked Sidney Clive in his direct way. "I'd like to know what we've done."

"Yes, give it a name," said Cardew, with a nod.

"My dear men, you've done nothing," said Levison, with a stare. "And I've not got my back up. Why should I?"

"I don't know why you should," answered Clive quietly; "but it's pretty clear that you have."

"What got it?"

With that Ernest Levison walked away to the staircase, leaving his two study-mates looking at one another very oddly.

"Bai Jove! It's Levison!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth met the returned junior on the landing.

"Little me," assented Levison.

"This is wathah a surprishe, deah boy."

"Is it?"

"I nevah expected to see you to-day," explained Arthur Augustus.

"No?" said Levison genially. "That seems to be the general state. I seem to have dropped in like a bolt from the blue."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Unpleasant sort of shock, I suppose," remarked Levison. "But don't blame me. I had to come back, you know. This happens to be the school I belong to, you see."

"Yaas, I undahstand that, Levison," said Arthur Augustus.

"I am vevy glad to see you, of course."

"Thanks!" said Levison dryly.

"I am sowwy about you at Gweyfwiash," continued the swell of St. Jim's. "As you used to belong to that school, your visit there was a gweat opportunity to set yourself wight with your formah schoolfellows. It has worked out wathah wottenly."

Levison looked at him.

"Is that your opinion?" he asked.

"Yaas, natuwally."

"You don't think it barely possible that you may be mistaken?" asked Levison sarcastically.

"Weally, Levison—"

"You don't think it possible that even your powerful brain might be a little off-side?" asked Levison.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his celebrated eyeglass in his eye, and looked hard at Levison. He was not an observant youth as a rule, but he could feel an undercurrent of bitterness here that surprised him.

"I twust, Levison, that you are not watty?" he said, with dignity.

"Not in the least."

"I had an impvession that you were speakin' as if you were watty."

"Simply your obtuseness, old bean."

"What?"

"Obtuseness."

"Weally, Levison—"

Levison moved on.

"Pway do not walk away while I am speakin', Levison," said Arthur Augustus, rather warmly. "I have not finished yet."

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"You never have finished, you know," said Levison over his shoulder. "Would you mind going and boring some other fellow for a bit? Don't give it all to me on my first day back."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stared blankly after Levison as the Fourth-Former went downstairs. He was quite taken aback. He glanced round, and spotted Cardew and Clive by the passage window, and bore down on them.

"What's the mattah with Levison?" he asked.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and Clive shook his head.

"Is he watty about somethin'?"

"Looks like it."

"I have just seen Wacke of the Shell comin' in—"

"Bother Racke!" grunted Sidney Clive.

He was too worried to be interested in Aubrey Racke just then.

"Yaas; but he had a pwize nose!" said Arthur Augustus. "Levison must have passed him comin' from the station, I think. I asked Wacke who had been punchin' his nose, and he only attahed an oppwobwious expvession which I disdain to repeat. Do you think Levison wowed with Wacke in the lane?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"It is wathiah odd that Levison should punch Wacke's nose on his way heah, and cut up wusty with his old fwends as soon as he awwives," said the perplexed swell of St. Jim's. "I suppose that twouble at Gweyfwiahs is weighin' on his mind."

"Very likely."

"Has he told you how it turned out?"

"No."

"Is he still undah suspicion there?"

"He's told us nothing, so we can tell you just as much!" answered Sidney Clive.

"I weally do not undahstand Levison, now, deah boys."

"Same here!" said Cardew, with another shrug of the shoulders.

Arthur Augustus walked away to Study No. 6, to inform his chums, Blake and Herries and Digby, of Levison's unexpected return—and of his still more unexpected rattiness. He was quite perplexed; and for once his well-known tact and judgment were at fault. He had to admit that he couldn't catch on.

CHAPTER 2.

The Cold Shoulder!

LEVISON of the Fourth glanced round him in the lower passage, and called to Piggott, who was lounging in sight. Piggott of the Third Form was looking at him with a covert grin.

Levison noted the grin, though he did not appear to do so. He thought he understood it. His cold and neglectful reception after a long absence from the school was, doubtless, becoming a sort of joke in the House—even the fags of the Third grinned over it. Levison was inclined to take Piggott by the scruff of the neck, and knock his head against the banisters, in repayment for that covert grin. But he refrained.

"Seen my minor, Piggott?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, I've seen him!" assented Piggott.

"Where is he?"

"Mooching in the quad," said Piggott. "Looking for Wally and Reggie. He won't find them. They ain't back from the pictures at Wayland yet."

And Piggott chuckled.

"What's the joke, dear boy?" asked Levison, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

Reuben Piggott promptly backed away. He did not like that look in Levison's eyes.

"Oh, nothing!" he said. "Your friends are jolly glad to see you back, what? Frank's friends, too. Ha, ha, ha!"

And with that Piggott of the Third scuttled away, still grinning. Levison drew a deep breath.

His anger was growing deeper and deeper; but he would not make himself ridiculous by chasing a cheeky fag along the passages. That shady little rascal, Piggott of the Third, was not worth resentment. His resentment, which grew more bitter with every passing moment, was visited upon older heads than Reuben Piggott's.

He strolled out of the School House. Racke and Crooke of the Shell were loafing by the steps, and Racke was rubbing his nose. He gave Ernest Levison a black scowl.

"Get a jolly hearty reception in your study, Levison?" he called out.

Levison stopped, and fixed his eyes on Racke.

"You made a remark like that when I met you in the lane, Racke," he said quietly.

"Now I'm makin' it again!" sneered Racke.

"I punched you for it," said Levison. "Do you want another?"

Aubrey Racke made no answer to that question. Apparently he did not want another. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders and sneering, and Levison walked on without heeding him further. Crooke grinned as he disappeared into the dusky quad.

"He's carryin' his head high, but I'll bet you he's jolly hard hit," said Racke shrewdly.

"You bet!" said Racke. "It's worked out better than I dreamed. I fancy I've put a spoke in the cad's wheel this time."

"There'll be trouble when it comes out about the telegram."

"Who's to know anythin'?"

"It was risky. I wish you'd told me nothin' about it!" muttered Crooke uneasily.

"No risk that I can see. The telegram came from Greyfriars, signed with that cad's initials. He can't even find out that Skinner of the Remove sent it—and if he did, how could he nose out that I put Skinner up to doin' it? Safe as houses!"

"Well, I hope so!" said Crooke. But he seemed to have a lingering doubt.

Without bestowing a thought on the two cads of the Shell, Levison of the Fourth looked round the quad for his minor. It was close upon lock-up now.

He found Frank Levison of the Third hanging about, with a very disconsolate look on his face.

"Hallo, young 'un!" said Levison.

"They haven't come in, Ernie."

"Who haven't?"

"Wally D'Arcy and Reggie Manners."

"They can't be long now, or they'll be locked out."

"I—I say, Ernie, I—I feel rotten!" muttered Frank miserably. "They might have stayed in gates when they knew I was coming back this afternoon—mightn't they?"

Levison's lip curled sarcastically.

"Well, I hear that Racke of the Shell gave them reserved tickets for the pictures," he said. "They couldn't resist that."

"I think it's rotten of them. I've a good mind not to speak to them when they come in."

Levison's lips tightened.

The same neglect and coldness that had been shown towards himself had been shown towards his minor. Levison resented that more bitterly than his own treatment.

He could harden his heart, like Pharaoh of old, and take what came with a cool, grim philosophy. Frank was not built that way. The sensitive little fellow was feeling deeply the indifference displayed by his friends.

He did not share his brother's cool, sarcastic temper. He was hurt; and he could not take refuge in anger.

But the hard look passed from Levison's face as he saw Frank's sensitive lip quiver, and he forced himself to smile.

"My dear kid, don't worry," he said. "You'll find your pals as right as rain. They don't think much in the Third. They haven't all got old heads on young shoulders like you, you know. It's just thoughtlessness."

Levison's minor brightened.

"Well, they might have thought a bit," he said. "But—but I don't want to be sulky with Wally and Reggie. I'll speak to them when they come in."

"That's right," said Levison. "Go down to the gates, and you'll see them in a few minutes now."

"That's a good idea," said Frank.

And he trotted off.

Levison turned back to the School House. He had comforted his minor, and that was something. Knowing the happy-go-lucky disposition of the average Third Form fag, he had little doubt that Frank would soon be on his old cheery terms with his pals in the Third. It was better for him not to nourish resentment for a slight—much better. No good ever came of sulks.

Levison could see that, clearly enough in his brother's case. He did not seem to see it in his own.

When he went into the School House again Clive and Cardew were in sight, talking to Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell. They looked at him, and made a move to join him. Levison walked on into the junior Common-room as if he had not seen them.

Clive coloured, and Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled faintly. Tom Merry noted the incident, and looked puzzled.

"Anything up with Levison?" he asked.

"Looks like it!" grinned Lowther.

"He seems to have something up against us," said Clive. "Blessed if I know what. He won't tell us a word about Greyfriars or the trouble there."

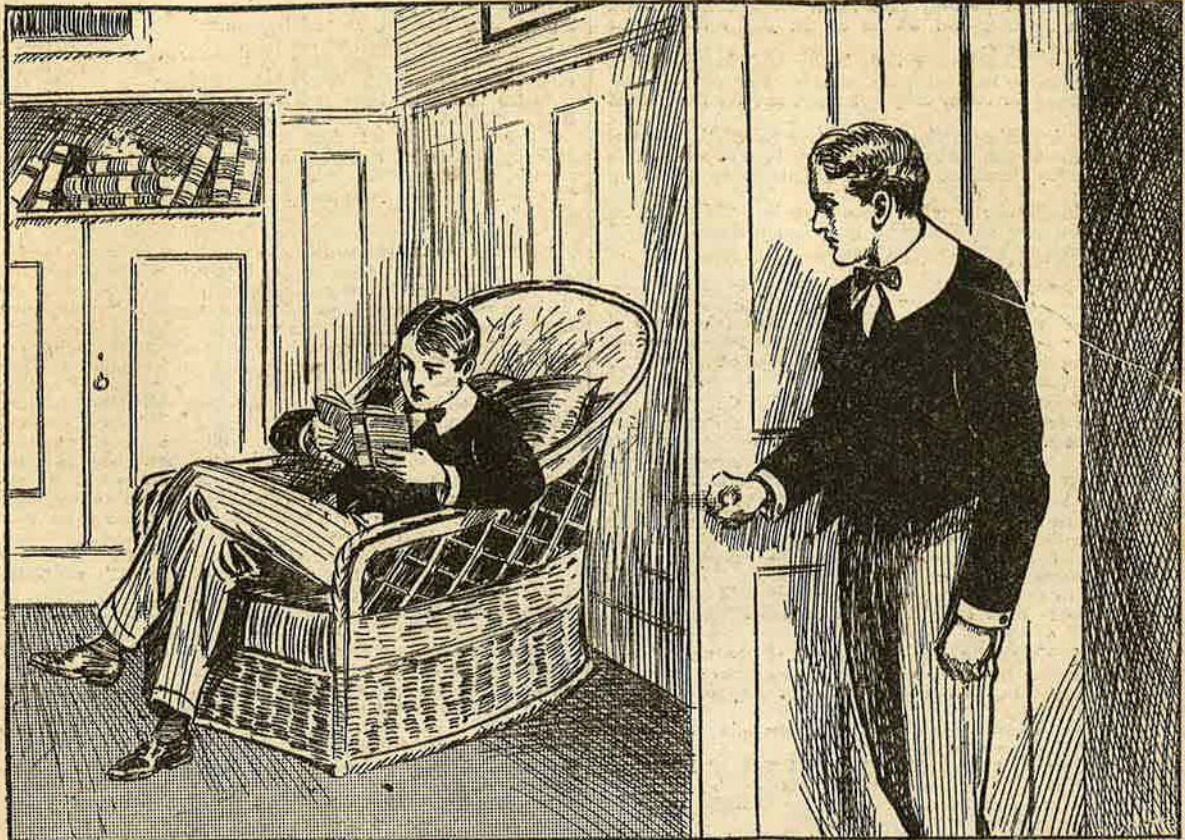
"Why not?"

"Blessed if I know."

"How is it he's here to-day, after his telegram telling you not to expect him?" asked Manners.

"He hasn't told us."

"The dear man's got his jolly old back up!" yawned



Tom Merry pushed open the door of the Common-room and glanced inside. Ernest Levison was there in an armchair, reading. He did not look up as the captain of the Shell arrived. "Deep in it?" asked Tom, with a smile. "Eh? Oh, yes, a little!" answered Levison. (See this page.)

Cardew. "He seems to take it personally because we were out in the car. Apparently expected us to guess that he's changed his mind again and decided to come. But even my powerful intellect wasn't equal to guessin' that."

Tom Merry, with a thoughtful look on his cheery face, went into the Common-room. Levison was there in an armchair, reading. He did not look up as the captain of the Shell arrived.

"Deep in it?" asked Tom, with a smile.

"Eh? Oh, yes, a little!"

"Did you leave things all right at Greyfriars, after all?"

"After all?" repeated Levison. "I left things all right there, certainly! Why not?"

"Oh, I thought—"

Levison laughed.

"You thought that, having been a jolly old black sheep when I was a Greyfriars chap, I must have broken out again in the old surroundings—what?" he asked.

"Nothing of the kind. But—" Tom paused. "If you don't want to tell me anything, I don't want to ask, of course!"

"There's nothing to tell."

"Oh! If that's so, all the better!" said Tom, and as Levison's eyes were already on his book again, Tom Merry walked away, considerably puzzled and not at all pleased.

Levison's eyes remained on his book. But he was not reading. His face was cool and careless; but in his breast there was a black bitterness that surprised himself.

CHAPTER 3.

Startling News for Levison Minor.

"FRANKY!"
Two fags of the Third Form shouted the name together.

Wally and Reggie had dodged in just in time to save lock-out. And as they were scudding across to the School House to save call-over, they almost ran into Frank Levison.

Their surprise was great; but their pleasure equally so, as Frank could see even in the dusk.

"You're back?" exclaimed D'Arcy minor.

"Back again, old bean!" said Reggie Manners.

"Didn't you expect me to-day?" demanded Frank,

wondering now whether there could have been some mistake, somehow—though how a mistake could have been made, he simply could not imagine.

"Expect you?" repeated Wally. "Why should we, fat-head?"

"We thought you'd be staying with your brother, of course," said Manners minor. "Don't you always stick to your silly major like glue?"

"Yes. But—"

"Well, of course we thought you were sticking," said Wally. "Never even dreamed you'd come back without him!"

"But I haven't come back without him!" exclaimed the bewildered Frank. "Ernie came back with me, of course!"

"Did he?"

"Of course he did!"

"Did the bobbies let him?"

Frank Levison almost fell down.

"The—the bobbies?" he babbled.

"Yes! How did they let him go?" asked Reggie Manners. "Of course, we don't believe he did it, as he's your major. Do we, Wally?"

"Oh, no!" said Wally. "Wouldn't think such a thing of Frank's major. Wouldn't tell Frank so, if we did!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you gone potty?" yelled Frank. "What do you mean? Tell me what you mean, you duffers!"

"Come on!" shouted Wally. "We're late! We'll be shut out of Hall in another two ticks!"

"Tell me—"

"Come on, you ass!"

"But I—"

Wally and Reggie were racing away for the House. Frank Levison followed; there was nothing else to be done. He was utterly bewildered; but there was no chance then of explanation of the fags' mysterious words.

Wally & Co. squeezed into Hall just in time to answer "adsum" to their names. Wally glanced across at the ranks of the Fourth, and saw Ernest Levison there with the rest, and nudged Manners minor.

"He's really come back!" he said, in a whisper.

"Then he's not arrested!" breathed Reggie.

Frank caught his breath.

What this could possibly mean, he had not the faintest idea, unless insanity had set in at St. Jim's during his absence at Greyfriars.

After the roll had been called, Wally and Reggie linked arms with Frank Levison and marched him out of Hall between them. Obviously they were glad to have their chum back.

They marched him to the Third Form room, the general meeting-place of the Third, which they had to themselves until Mr. Selby should come in to take his Form in evening prep.

"Good old Franky!" said Wally cheerily. "If you'd let us know you were coming, we'd have had a spread ready."

"We would, rather!" agreed Reggie.

"But I wrote—"

"I know that, fathead!"

"You answered the letter!" exclaimed Frank.

"Of course I did! I say, was it very rotten in sunny at Greyfriars?" asked Wally sympathetically. "I say, even old Selby was a bit sorry when we heard you were on your beam-ends there!"

"They were very good to me," said Frank. "But, of course, I'm jolly glad to be back!"

"Seen the Head?"

"Yes."

"Did he rag you?"

"Only a bit of a jaw," said Frank. "But, look here; I want to know why you fellows didn't expect me to-day, after I wrote you that I was coming Wednesday, and you answered the letter? Have you gone off your silly rockers?"

"I think you must have," answered Wally. "Think we'd have gone to the pictures this afternoon if we'd known you were coming? How long have you been in?"

"Hours!"

"Rotten! Us at the silly old pictures all the time!" said Wally. "I wish Racke hadn't given us the tickets now. It was decent of him, though—and he's not very decent as a rule!"

"The pictures were good!" said Manners minor. "There was one of Chumpy Choplin—"

"Blow Chumpy Choplin!" exclaimed Frank. "I want to know about this. You knew I was coming—"

"Don't I keep on telling you that we thought you'd be staying with your major?" howled Wally.

"But you knew he was coming!" exclaimed Frank. "I told you in my letter we were coming together!"

"I know that," said Wally. "But, of course, when he said he wasn't coming, we thought you were staying on with him!"

"When he said he wasn't coming?" repeated Frank.

"Yes. Now, what about some supper before old Selby comes along?" said Wally. "I've got a bit of the cake left—"

"Blow supper!" yelled Frank. "What do you mean by saying that my brother said he wasn't coming?"

"For goodness' sake give it a rest, Frank," said Wally impatiently. "I'm hungry, if you're not! We got nothing to eat at Wayland except some chocs, and we missed tea. Tain't my fault if your silly major keeps on changing his mind, is it?"

"Blow your major, if you come to that, Frank!" said Reggie. "We hear too much of your major, take it from me!"

"Ernie never said he wasn't coming!" roared Frank. He understood by this time that there was something more than a "mistake" here. There had been some kind of a deception, as he realised clearly enough.

"Bosh!" said Wally. "Do you mean to say he never told you about the telegram?"

"What telegram?" shrieked Frank.

"The one he sent to Clive to-day."

"He never sent a telegram to Clive!"

"Bow-wow! It was handed in in class, and Mr. Lathom let Clive read it," said Wally. "I had that from Trimble."

"It wasn't from my major. Ernie never telegraphed."

"Then he didn't tell you!" said Wally, in wonder. "Why didn't he? But you must have known about the row!"

"What row?" gasped Frank.

"The row at Greyfriars."

"There wasn't any row at Greyfriars!"

"Choose it, Franky! That won't do! Musn't tell whoppers to your old pals."

"Who's telling whoppers?" yelled Frank.

"You are! There was a row at Greyfriars," said Wally.

"How could the police be called in, without a row?"

"The—the police!"

"Yes. Don't say you didn't know."

"There weren't any police," babbled Frank, in blank amazement. "What do you mean? We left Greyfriars all right. What should there be any police for?"

"The missing money, of course."

"What money?"

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"The money your major bagged— I—I—I mean, the money they thought he had bagged."

Frank Levison stared at the fags.

"Are you potty?" he asked at last. "Where did you get all this silly rot from? Who's been pulling your leg?"

"Like to see anybody pull my leg!" said Wally disdainfully. "Mean to say it isn't true?"

"Not a word of it! Not a syllable!"

Wally winked at Reggie Manners.

"Oh, all right!" he said resignedly. "It isn't true, if you like. Anyhow, your major seems to have got out of it all right."

"There wasn't anything to get out of!" yelled Frank.

"All right—all right—there wasn't!" said Wally soothingly. "Now about some supper before old Selby blows in."

"Blow supper! I've got to know about this, and my major's got to know!" said Frank savagely. "Somebody's been spinning a rotten yarn about him. Was it Trimble?"

"Don't be an ass, Frank! It was all in the telegram. We've both seen the telegram. You see," explained Wally patiently, "my major, old Gussy, had a wheeze of giving Levison a reception when he came back—all hands rallying round at the station, and that rot. Just like old Gussy—

putting his silly old foot in it! Well, the fellows were all ready to start, and Clive simply had to show them the telegram, to explain why the giddy reception was off. Otherwise, he'd have kept it dark, I suppose. Of course, he'd have mentioned you weren't coming, as he knew we were going to Wayland Junction to meet you."

"There wasn't any telegram!" roared Frank.

"Perhaps we dreamed we saw it, then!" suggested Manners minor, with sarcasm.

Frank controlled his excitement and wrath. He tried to calm himself.

"You mean to say that Clive of the Fourth had a telegram from my major, saying he wasn't coming back to St. Jim's to-day?" he asked, as quietly as he could.

"Yes, ass, and we saw it!"

"Then it was a bogus telegram!" said Frank. "I'm jolly well going to see Clive about this!"

"Hold on!" roared Wally. "Don't you want any supper, you young ass?"

Apparently Frank Levison wasn't bothering about supper. He rushed out of the Form-room, and sped away to the Fourth Form passage, leaving his chums staring.

CHAPTER 4.

Study No. 9 Gets a Shock!

"STEADY, the Buffs!"

Tom Merry made that remark, with a laugh, as Frank Levison came across the landing with a rush.

He nearly rushed into the Terrible Three of the Shell, and Tom stopped him just in time. He caught the excited fag by the shoulder, and Frank spun almost entirely round him.

"Ow!" gasped Frank.

"Understudying the 'Charge of the Light Brigade'?" asked Monty Lowther cheerily.

"Leggo, you ass!"

"Looking for your major?" asked Manners, as Tom released the breathless fag. "You seem to have come home in better spirits than the other chump. You're not sulking."

Frank Levison's eyes flashed.

"Ernie's not sulking, and you're a silly ass!" he retorted.

"Thanks!" said Manners, unmoved. "You've picked up a lot of politeness during your stay at Greyfriars. Did you learn it from Billy Bunter?"

"Oh, don't gas!" said Frank. "Look here, did Clive of the Fourth get a telegram—"

"Of course he did! Think it wasn't delivered?" asked Lowther.

"It was a swindle!" gasped Frank. "My brother never sent a telegram!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, you're all silly duffers!" said Levison minor, and, leaving the Terrible Three to digest that, he rushed on to the Fourth Form passage, and arrived breathless at the door of Study No. 9.

He hauled the door open with a crash.

Generally, Frank's manners were quite nice, and he was quite a good example to the rather unruly young ruffians in the Third. But his good manners had quite deserted him now in his excitement.

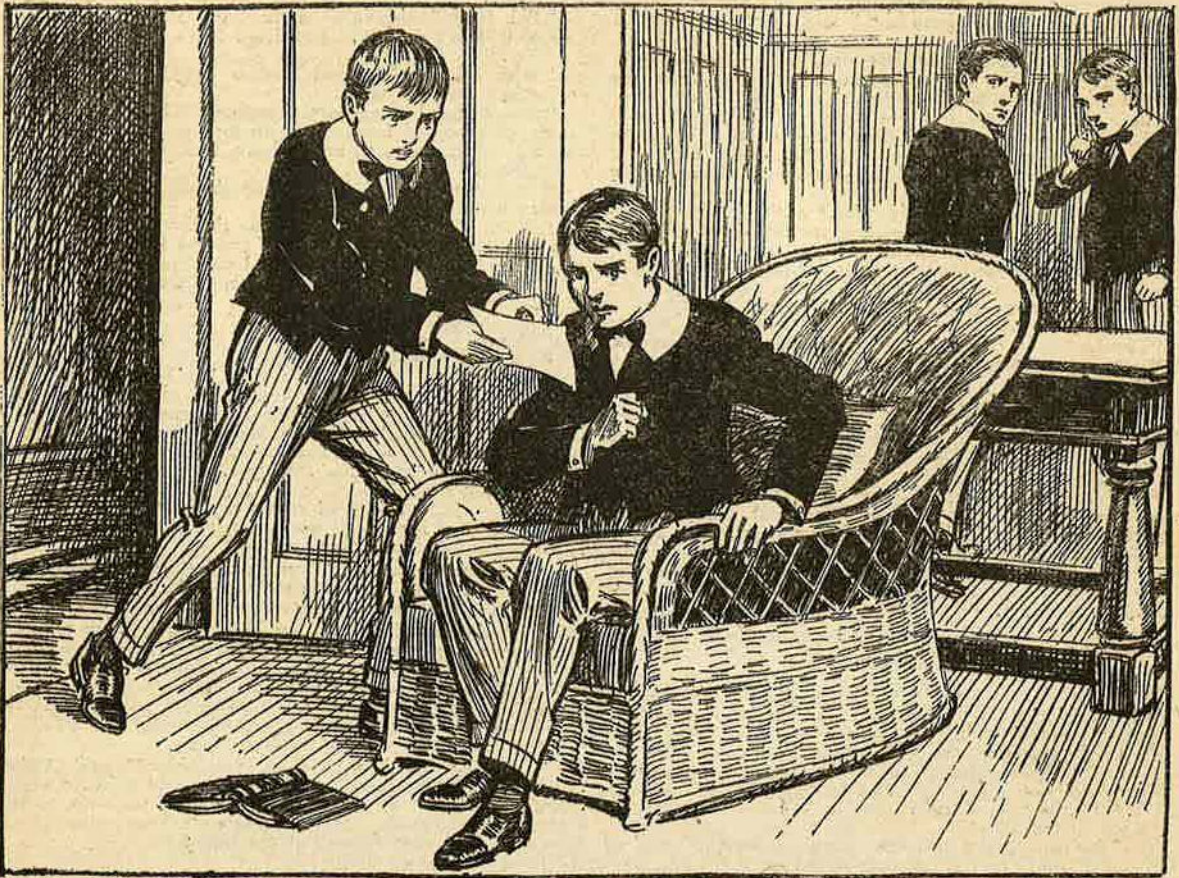
Clive and Cardew were in the study.

Both of them stared at the fag—Clive with a slight frown, Cardew with a sarcastic smile.

"Ernie not here?" gasped Frank.

"Do they knock at doors at Greyfriars, before butting into a study?" asked Cardew. "We do here."

"Oh, don't rot!" said Frank. "You're a silly ass, and



"Ernie!" Frank Levison gasped out his brother's name, as he dashed into the Common-room, with a crumpled telegram in his hand. "Look at that!" The fag thrust the telegram fairly under the nose of Levison of the Fourth. "Clive got it this morning!" panted Frank. "They—they thought it came from you!" Levison stared at the wire blankly. (See page 8.)

you've been taken in! Wally says Clive had a telegram from Ernie to-day, from Greyfriars."

"Wally, as usual, is perfectly correct in his statements," said Cardew gravely. "But it's no news to you, I suppose? Levison didn't venture to keep his proceedings secret from his youthful mentor—what?"

"Fathead! Ernie never sent a telegram!"

"The excellent Ernie has been keepin' secrets from his minor," said Cardew solemnly. "We must speak seriously to Ernie about this!"

"Don't rot, I tell you!" shouted Frank. "If Clive had a telegram, it was spoofo, and Ernie never sent it! Why should he?"

"Because he'd changed his plans."

"But he hadn't!"

"He seems to have changed them a second time, since he's here!" remarked Cardew. "But—"

"Let me see the telegram!" exclaimed Frank. "If it's not a silly jape, show me the telegram!"

"I've got it here," said Clive.

He took the crumpled telegraph-form from his pocket. Frank almost grabbed at it. He smoothed it out, and read it with starting eyes, the two Fourth-Formers watching him curiously, and Tom Merry & Co., who had followed him to Study No. 9, looking in at him with equal curiosity:

"Don't expect me to-day. In trouble here. Money missing. Police called in. I know you will believe in me, but they think me guilty here. Writing.—E. L."

"Handed in at Courtfield," muttered Frank, when he had finished reading that precious message. "And you silly chumps believe that Ernie sent you that telegram?"

"Didn't he?" growled Clive.

"Of course, he didn't!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Isn't there any trouble at Greyfriars?" asked Tom Merry, from the doorway. "No money missing, or—or—"

"No."

"Do you mean to say that nothing's happened?"

"Of course not!" roared Frank angrily. "The Head and

Mr. Quelch shook hands with Ernie when he left, and Wharton and a crowd of fellows came to see us off. There was nothing amiss—nothing at all!"

"Great Scott!"

Frank struck the telegram with his clenched fist.

"Some rotten cad sent this, to dish old Ernie when he got back!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Some measly worm—some rotter! Skinner, perhaps! Ernie got on well with every fellow but Skinner, and one or two of Skinner's friends."

"My only hat!" said Clive blankly.

Cardew whistled.

"It's spoofo—spoofo from beginning to end!" said Frank, more calmly. "You ought to have known it!"

"How could we know it, if it's so?" said Clive rather gruffly. "Telegrams generally mean what they say."

"If there was money missing they wouldn't suspect Ernie!" snapped Frank scornfully. "They'd know better!"

"Well—ahem—"

"I'm going to take the telegram to Ernie!" exclaimed the fag. "Where is he?"

"In the Common-room downstairs," said Tom Merry.

Frank rushed out of the study with the telegram clutched in his hand.

The juniors looked at one another. They had been taken utterly by surprise.

It had never crossed a single mind at St. Jim's that the telegram was a bogus one. It was signed with Levison's initials. It had been handed in at Courtfield, near Greyfriars. No St. Jim's fellow could possibly have got so far afield to send it, if any of Levison's enemies at St. Jim's had thought of such a dastardly trick. In spite of Frank's excitement, Tom Merry & Co. even now did not know what to think.

"Did Levison send that wire?" said Manners blankly.

"If he did, his minor never knew," said Cardew.

"But if there were serious trouble over at Greyfriars—money missing and Levison suspected and police called in—Frank would be bound to know about it."

"It couldn't be kept from him," said Tom.
 "I—I suppose so."
 "Let's go and see what Levison says," said Clive abruptly.
 "Good! Nothin' like information straight from the horse's mouth!" assented Cardew.

The Fourth-Formers left the study and followed Frank, and the Terrible Three of the Shell followed on. They were curious to hear the explanation of this very surprising episode. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped them on the landing.

"You fellows know what's w'ong with Levison?" he asked, turning his eyeglass inquiringly on the Terrible Three.
 "Somethin' up. Blake thinks pewwaps he ate a wayway-bun comin' home, you know, and it disagweed with him. An uttably ridiculous suggestion, in my opinion!"

"Go hon!" grinned Tom Merry.
 "Hewwies thinks—"
 "Herries does?" asked Monty Lowther, in surprise.
 "That's something new! When did Herries start thinking?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"
 "Come along, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I fancy we're going to hear the giddy history of the mystery now! It's going on in the Common-room!"

"Bai Jove! I'll come!"
 Blake and Herries and Digby came, too. The juniors went downstairs in a crowd, and Talbot and Kangaroo and several other fellows joined them, having already seen Frank and learned that something was in the wind. Quite a little army marched into the Common-room to interview Ernest Levison and to hear the "history of the mystery," as Tom Merry expressed it.

CHAPTER 5.
 Light at Last.

ERNIE!" Frank gasped out his brother's name as he dashed into the junior Common-room with the crumpled telegram in his hand.

Ernest Levison looked up from his book.
 "What's the row, Frank?"
 "Look at that!"

The fag thrust the telegram fairly under the nose of Levison of the Fourth. Levison stared at it blankly.

"Clive got it this morning!" panted Frank. "They—they thought it came from you!"
 "My hat!"

Levison began to understand. He took the telegram and examined it carefully, a bitter smile on his lips. On the other side of the Common-room, Racke and Crooke exchanged a glance and strolled out. They could see that the facts were coming to light now, and they did not want to be on the scene.

Levison was still examining the bogus telegram when Cardew and Clive came in. He looked up at them, with a smile.

"You got this, Clive?"
 "In class this morning," answered Sidney Clive.
 "You thought I had sent it?"
 "What could I think? Didn't you?"
 Levison laughed.

"No! This is the first I've heard of it!"
 Tom Merry & Co. came in in time to hear that statement from Levison of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
 "You didn't send it?" exclaimed Blake.

"No!"
 "Who did, then?" asked Herries blankly.
 Levison laughed again.

"Somebody at Greyfriars, I suppose!" he said. "Somebody who wanted to muck it up for me here when I got back! You fellows might have told me you'd had a telegram!"

"Told you?" said Clive. "Why should we tell you we'd had a telegram from yourself?"

"Well, yes, when you put it like that, why should you?" agreed Levison, smiling. "You thought I knew all about it, as I'd sent it. Only, you see, I didn't send it!"

"Then things are all right at Greyfriars?"
 "Right as rain!"
 "No trouble there at all?"
 "None!"

Clive clenched his fists.
 "By gad, I'd like to get within hitting distance of the cad who sent that!" he exclaimed, his eyes blazing. "I'd give him a lesson on sending spoof telegrams!"

"I'm jolly glad!" said Tom Merry sincerely. "It was a bit of a shock to all of us, Levison. Of course, we never doubted that it had come from you."

"Wathah not!"
 Levison felt a twinge of remorse. The apparent coldness and neglect of his friends were explained now. Where were the grounds of his resentment now?

"You see, deah boy," went on Arthur Augustus, "we were gettin' up a reception for you—"

"A—a—a reception?" stammered Levison.
 "Yaas, wathah! It was my ideah!" said Gussy proudly. "Wegardin' you as havin' won a lot of cwedit ovah at Greyfriars for your school, you know, I woped in all these fellows to weceive you at the station with honnors! That was how we came to know about the telegram. Clive had to tell us, you see, as we were all weady to start!"

"Oh!" said Levison rather breathlessly.
 "It fairly knocked us ovah, you know!" said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, we believed it would all come wight. But, natuwallly, we didn't expect you to turn up to-day, atah that telegram. Weren't you wathah surprised at not seein' any of your fwends at the station?"

Levison coloured deeply.
 So this was the explanation of the neglect he had resented, which had hit him so hard. A malicious trick, which a few words would have elucidated at once but for the bitterness and resentment he had allowed to govern him. It came into his mind that had Frank yielded to the same feelings the trick might never have been discovered at all. It was only by comparing notes with his friends in the Third that Frank had discovered the truth—that was clear.

There was a moment or two of silence. Clive broke it.
 "Did you think we'd have gone out in the car, Levison, if we'd known you were coming?" he said reproachfully.
 "You might have known us better than that!"
 Levison's colour deepened.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, light breaking at last on his noble mind. "That was why Levison was watty!"

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.
 "Weally, Lowthah—"

Levison of the Fourth rose to his feet.
 "Would you mind kicking me, Clive?" he asked. "Kick as hard as you like, old fellow!"

"Fathead!" said Clive, laughing.
 "Of course, I never dreamed that you'd had a spoof telegram," said Levison. "How could I? And—and—"

"We want to find out that jolly old practical joker," said Cardew. "We can't let this pass."
 "Wathah not!"

"It couldn't have been a St. Jim's chap, that's one comfort," remarked Tom Merry.
 Levison smiled slightly.

"The telegram wasn't handed in by a St. Jim's chap, that's a cert," he said. "But I fancy it originated here. I had one or two enemies at Greyfriars—especially a chap named Skinner. But Skinner wouldn't have done this on his own. He wouldn't have spent the money on it, for one thing. Telegrams cost money—especially long ones."

"But somebody must have," said Tom, puzzled.
 "Somebody with money to burn," agreed Levison.
 "Somebody here who wanted to muck up my return. He seems to have succeeded pretty well, too. I suppose it was bound to come out in the long run, and he knew that. But I've had as rotten a few hours since I got back as I've ever had in my life. I think I'll call on Racke!"

"Racke!" exclaimed all the juniors together.
 "Racke of the Shell."
 "But Racke couldn't have—"

"He couldn't have sent the telegram; but he could have put up some pal at Greyfriars to do it."

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"Racke knows Skinner of the Remove!" remarked Manners.

"But, dash it all, Levison, wait for a little proof!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Even Racke's entitled to a fair show, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite so," agreed Levison. "Skinner may have done this on his own—though I don't believe it. I've reasons for looking after Racke. Racke met me on the way here, and rubbed it in about my friends going off in a car, as if they didn't want me back or care whether I came or not. I punched his nose for it. Racke gave tickets for the pictures at Wayland to young Wally and Manners minor. That kept them away for the afternoon, making Frank think they'd thrown him over, after arranging by letter to meet him at Wayland Junction when he came."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"It isn't like Racke to give anything away for nothing," said Levison dryly. "He spent the money on those tickets specially to get Frank's friends away when Frank was coming home. I see that now."

"Bai Jove!"

"Racke's got a long memory for offences," said Levison. "He wanted to make our coming back rotten for both of us, and he succeeded."

"It does look suspicious about the cinema tickets," admitted Tom Merry. "But there's no proof about the telegram, Levison. Don't be hasty."

Levison nodded, and left the Common-room with Clive and Cardew. Harmony was restored among the three members of Study No. 9, at all events. The juniors were left discussing the strange affair with some excitement—divided in opinion as to whether Racke of the Shell had had a hand in the trick. Frank Levison cut away to the Third Form room, with a bright and cheery face. He cared little who had played that malicious trick, now that it had been cleared up, and he remembered that he was hungry. And in the Third Form room there were great festivities, and all was merry and bright, until Mr. Selby came in to take the Third in prep—after which brightness and merriment were naturally conspicuous by their absence.

CHAPTER 6.

No Proof!

AUBREY RACKE sat in his study armchair, rubbing his prominent nose meditatively.

There was still a slight ache in his nose, reminiscent of Ernest Levison's knuckles.

Crooke was beginning prep at the study table, glancing every now and then at his study-mate.

"It's all out now, Racke," he remarked presently.

Racke nodded.

"It was bound to come out when they compared notes about the telegram," he said. "It lasted longer than I expected. I never expected Levison to let his old sulky temper get the better of him as he did. I thought it would all be explained when he met Clive and Cardew," Racke grinned. "The dear man played into my hands."

"They'll make it up now."

"I suppose so. I've put a spoke in their wheel, though," said Racke. "I fancy Levison's had the rottenest afternoon of his life to-day. He didn't enjoy his giddy homecoming, I fancy."

"I think not!" grinned Crooke. "You don't fancy that he will suspect?"

"How could he?"

"Well, he's rather keen," said Crooke. "He's bound to think of you, at least, even if he can't prove anything."

"Let him think what he likes," said Racke carelessly. "I haven't left a trail behind me."

"There's one thing."

"What's that?" snapped Racke, with sudden ill-temper.

"What are you driving at, Crooke?"

"You used Railton's telephone while he was out, to telephone to Skinner at Greyfriars."

"Who's to know that?"

"Record of trunk calls," said Crooke. "When Railton gets his bill in, there will be a trunk call marked for the date. Isn't he likely to make some inquiry about it?"

Aubrey Racke laughed scoffingly.

"This affair will be forgotten before Railton gets his phone bill. And who's to prove who phoned? Do you think I was ass enough to be seen going to his study?"

Crooke nodded slowly and thoughtfully.

"Seems clear enough," he assented. "It will be known that there was a trunk call from St. Jim's to Greyfriars on the date. But as Levison was at Greyfriars then, Railton's more likely to suspect that one of his friends here rang him up for a jaw."

"Very likely," said Racke, with a laugh. "Anyhow, I don't come into the picture. Hallo!"

There was a knock at the door, and Levison of the Fourth

came in. Clive and Cardew stood in the doorway without entering.

Racke scowled at the chums of Study No. 9.

"I don't remember askin' you to my study, Levison!" he grunted.

"I've come without being asked. I've found out about the spoof telegram from Greyfriars," said Levison.

"The what?"

Racke raised his eyebrows.

"You know nothing about it?" asked Levison, his eyes fixed keenly on the face of the cad of the Shell.

"I don't even know what you're talking about."

Levison tossed the telegram on Racke's knees, as he sprawled in the armchair.

"Look at it," he said.

"Thanks. I'm not interested."

"Will you read it?"

"No."

"I'll read it to you, then."

"You needn't trouble," yawned Racke. "I've mentioned that I'm not interested."

Without heeding that reply, Levison picked up the telegram again, and read it aloud. Racke yawned portentously while he was doing so, and Crooke grinned.

"That's news to you, is it?" asked Levison.

"Quite! I didn't know you'd been stealin' anythin' at Greyfriars," said Racke cheerily. "Did you, Crooke?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"The telegram is spoof—nothing of the kind happened there," said Levison calmly. "A Greyfriars fellow—I suspect Skinner—sent this off."

"Dear me!" said Racke. "Hadh't you better run back to Greyfriars and interview Skinner? He seems a bad boy."

"He's a friend of yours," said Levison.

"I believe I've met the chap," said Racke carelessly.

"I believe you have," assented Levison. "You're birds of a feather—a pair of rascals."

"Thanks."

"Because of that I don't believe you'd have risked putting this trickery into writing," said Levison. "I believe that you put Skinner up to this trick; but I'm fairly sure you didn't put it in black and white. He's the kind of pal who'd use it against you if it would serve his turn."

"This is all Greek to me!" yawned Racke.

"I think you must have got at him by telephone," said Levison, watching Racke's face as he spoke.

But the cad of the Shell was thoroughly on his guard, and not by the flicker of an eyelid did he betray himself.

"No good telling you you're barkin' up the wrong tree, I suppose?" drawled Racke.

"None at all."

"No good tellin' you that I'd forgotten your existence—which isn't quite so important as you seem to fancy?"

Crooke chuckled again. He considered that Racke was quite holding his own in this particular interview.

"No, that won't wash, either," said Levison. "I know why you gave the cinema tickets to the fags. For the same reason you put your pal at Greyfriars up to sending this telegram. Did you remember that records are kept of trunk calls?"

Racke laughed.

"Go it!" he said. "If you can prove that I've had a trunk call this term, you're welcome!"

"You're not afraid of an inquiry?"

"Why should I be?" smiled Racke. "Go ahead! If I've had a trunk call at any of the local post-offices, I dare say you can get somebody to identify me."

"That means that you used a school telephone."

"Does it? Which?"

"That can be found out," said Levison.

"Possibly! And if—just supposin'—it's found out that there was a trunk call, how are you goin' to make out that I had it? Goin' to make out that you were watchin' me from Greyfriars?"

"You admit it, then?"

"Not at all! If you accuse me of sendin' a telephone message, puttin' up a chap to sendin' a spoof telegram—which is an offence against the law—I'm goin' to the House-master," said Racke deliberately. "I shall ask Mr. Railton to inquire into the matter and see justice done. You can't sling around accusations like that without any proof, Levison."

Levison drew a deep breath. Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled slightly.

"Looks to me," continued Racke, "that you made an enemy at Greyfriars, or somewhere, who played a trick on you—that is, takin' your word for it that this telegram is spoof, and that you weren't suspected of stealin' there. Tryin' to put it on me is a bit beyond the limit. What put the idea into your head?"

"Very well, you deny it!" said Levison. "I sha'n't act without proof. That's all I've got to say now."

"Enough, too!" remarked Racke. "Shut the door after you, will you?"

Levison left the study with his friends. He was feeling fairly sure in his own mind, but he could not be certain. Clive was looking very doubtful.

"It's pretty clear to me," muttered Levison. "But I don't see how it is to be fixed on the cad."

"I can't say it seems clear to me," confessed Clive honestly. "I suppose Racke's capable of it; but there's not an atom of proof. What do you think, Cardew?"

Cardew smiled.

"I think it's absolutely certain, and that it absolutely can't be fixed on Racke," he answered. "Unless he made some slip that we don't know about, he's got us beat. What about prep?"

And the three returned to Study No. 9.

Racke grinned at Crooke as the door closed on Levison & Co. He had quite enjoyed the interview.

"Well, what do you think now?" he asked.

"Safe as houses!" said Crooke.

"I fancy so," said Racke complacently.

And he turned to his prep, completely easy in his mind. But that ease of mind was not destined to last long.

CHAPTER 7.

Under the Thumb!

REUBEN PIGGOTT of the Third Form slipped out of the Form-room after Mr. Selby had finished. Wally & Co., still making much of the returned Franky, remained in the Form-room, planning a great supper—one of the somewhat weird feeds in which the fags indulged on great occasions. They had no eyes for Reuben Piggott, the black sheep of the Third.

Piggott looked into the junior Common-room. Tom Merry & Co. were there, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his friends, and Levison and Clive and Cardew, and a crowd of other fellows. But apparently the person whom Piggott sought was not there, for after looking over the crowd with his sharp little rat-like eyes, Piggott departed and went up the staircase.

He stopped at the door of Racke's study in the Shell passage and turned the handle. The door did not open.

Piggott knocked.

"Who's there?" called out Racke.

"Piggott!"

"Cut off!"

Piggott grinned. He could guess that Racke and Crooke were having a smoke after prep, hence the locked door. He knocked again.

"Clear off, I tell you!" snapped Racke.

"I want to speak to you before dorn."

"The want's all on your side! Clear!"

Knock!

Piggott was evidently in a determined mood. As a rule, the shady little rascal was a humble hanger-on of Racke & Co., and the wealthy Aubrey's word was law to him. A change had come over Reuben Piggott.

"Still there?" rapped out Racke.

"Yes! Let me in!"

"If I open that door I'll boot you down the passage, you cheeky little cub!" howled Racke angrily.

"Then I'll go to a prefect," said Piggott through the key-hole. "I dare say Kildare or Darrell would like to know all about the telegram from Greyfriars."

Racke jumped.

"My only hat!" breathed Crooke. "You haven't been ass enough to let that scrubby little beast know anythin', Racke!"

"Nothin' of the kind. He can't know anythin'," muttered Racke; but there was alarm in his face. "He's heard Levison talkin', and he's tryin' on a bluff. I'll smash him!"

Racke unlocked the study door and threw it open. Piggott eyed him warily as he entered.

"No larks, you know!" he said.

Aubrey Racke kicked the door shut, and picked up a five-bat, with a savage glint in his eyes.

"You've asked for it!" he said. "Now you're goin' to have it!"

"Better listen to me first," said Piggott coolly. "I've come here as a friend."

"I've no friends in a fag Form!" sneered Racke. "Toadies, if you like! And a toady isn't allowed to cheek his betters!"

"I was in Raulton's study the other day," said Piggott.

"What?"

"D'Arcy minor and the rest were raggin' me for sayin' something about their pal, young Levison. I hid in Raulton's study to get away from them, as Raulton was out."

Crooke gave a long whistle, and Racke's grip on the bat relaxed.

Piggott grinned.

"I heard the whole talk on the phone," he said. "Your half of it, I mean. I couldn't hear Skinner's half, of course."

"It's a lie!" said Racke huskily.

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"Is it?" said Piggott cheerily. "I'm willing to make a statement to Mr. Raulton, and leave it to him to judge."

Racke threw down the bat.

Crooke had not yet finished his prep. He left it unfinished and walked out of the study. Crooke had sagely decided that the less he knew about this matter the better.

Racke sat down heavily.

It is said that the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley; but on this occasion Racke had felt absolutely certain that his tracks were well covered; that even if suspicion arose there could be no possible proof.

He was almost stunned by the discovery that proof—positive proof—of his treachery existed; had existed all the time.

"It's a lie!" he repeated, but without conviction.

Piggott smiled.

"You've said nothing—"

"Of course I haven't," said Piggott cheerily. "I was waiting for you to land yourself, old bean. No good saying anything before the telegram was sent, you might have phoned to Skinner again and countermanded it."

Racke breathed hard.

"I'm down on those Levison cads as much as you are," grinned Piggott. "I'm backing you up, Racke. I was jolly glad to see them dished when they came back—jolly glad! And I wanted you to get fairly landed, you know. I thought you might be nicer to me afterwards, knowing that I could give you away." And he chuckled.

Aubrey Racke stared at him.

"What do you want?" he muttered.

"Guess!" grinned Piggott.

"I'm not goin' to give you any money, if that's what you mean."

"Please yourself," said Piggott. "I'm not asking for anything, am I? I don't mean to, either. I might accept what was offered."

"You don't seem to see that you've landed yourself as well as me," said Racke, recovering his nerve a little. "If you heard what you say you heard, and kept it dark, how are you going to explain that? Are you going to tell the Housemaster that you kept it dark to hold over my head after it had come off?"

"No jolly fear!" grinned Piggott. "I'm going to say that I was so scared by what I heard that I didn't know what to do."

"What?"

"Then I came to you and begged you to own up to what you'd done."

"Eh?"

"How's that?" asked Piggott with perfect coolness.

"You little villain!"

"After taking plenty of time to think it out, I thought I ought to ask a prefect's advice," went on Piggott. "I felt that I ought not to keep such a thing secret, yet I hated to give a fellow away. I was afraid of being thought a sneak. Won't that account nicely for keeping it dark?"

Racke bit his lip hard.

"I'll give you nothing!" he said.

"Right-ho!" said Piggott indifferently. He turned to the door. "I may as well mention that my conscience is troubling me, and that I'm going to Kildare to take advice. If you don't mind, I don't." His hand was on the door.

"Stop!" said Racke hoarsely.

"Why?"

"I—I've got a ten-shilling note here."

"Dear old fellow!" said Piggott. "It's awfully good of you to make me a present like that, Racke. It's generous. Couldn't you put your generosity on a higher gear, and make it a pound?"

Racke gritted his teeth with helpless rage. He took out his purse and jerked a pound note from a wad of others. Racke of the Shell was the happy possessor of plenty of pound notes; the war-profits of Sir Jonas Racke were a never-failing horn of plenty.

Piggott held out a grubby hand.

"You really want me to have it, Racke?" he asked banteringly.

"Yes," breathed Racke.

Tap!

The study door opened just as Piggott was taking the pound note from Racke's shaking fingers. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form turned his eyeglass upon that surprising scene in amazement, and ejaculated:

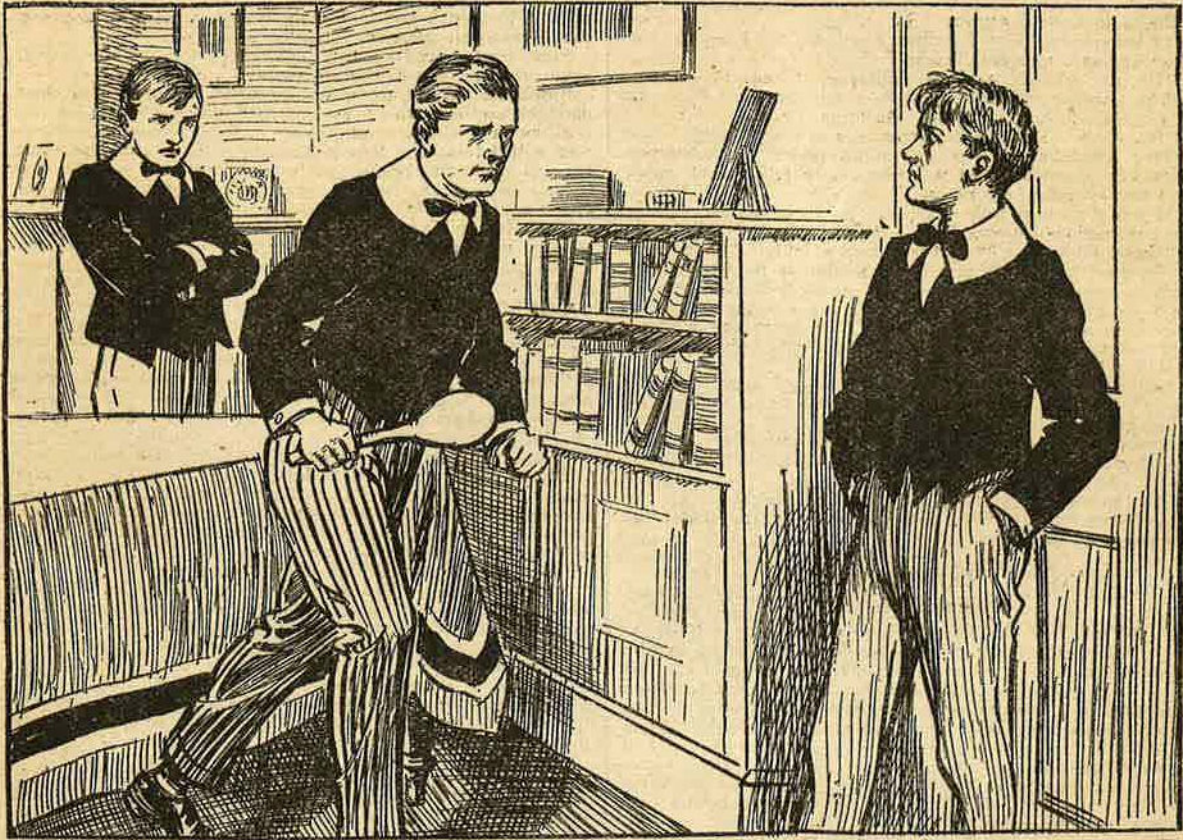
"Bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 8.

Arthur Augustus Means Well!

"BAI JOVE! I twust I don't intwude?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was of a trustful nature. But if, at that moment, he really trusted that he did not intrude, he was carrying trustfulness to an unheard-of extent.



Aubrey Racke kicked the door of the study shut, and picked up a fives-bat. "Now then, Piggott," he said, with a savage glint in his eyes, "you've asked for it, and you're going to get it!" "Better listen to me first," said Piggott, "I've come here as a friend, you know. I was in Mr. Railton's study when you were using the phone!" (See page 10.)

Racke, appearing utterly confounded by his sudden appearance, fairly staggered. Piggott of the Third stood, for a second, with dropping jaw, the pound note in full view, clutched in his greedy, grubby fingers. Then hurriedly he jammed it into a pocket.

His face was crimson.

"I twust—" recommenced Arthur Augustus.

Racke turned on him with sudden fury.

"What do you want? What are you buttin' in here for? Can't you keep out of a study where you're not wanted?"

"Weally, Wacke—"

Piggott slipped out of the study, past Arthur Augustus. He sudded away down the passage, leaving Aubrey Racke to deal with his unwelcome visitor as he chose.

Racke advanced on D'Arcy with his fists clenched and his eyes blazing.

"You cheeky cad, butting in—"

"Pway modewate your expreessions, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I knocked at the door befoah entewin', as you are awah. I see no weason whatevah for this out-break of uttah wudeness."

Racke checked his fury.

His clenched fists and his angry face had no effect whatever upon Arthur Augustus, who was quite prepared to encounter Racke, or two or three Rackes, if it came to that. And the Shell fellow realised that Arthur Augustus, utterly unsuspecting by nature, attached no importance to the scene he had witnessed.

No doubt he was surprised to see Racke handing a pound note to a fag of the Third. Racke, rich as he was, was known to be mean with money, and there existed no known reason why he should give pounds to Piggott.

But surprised as Gussy certainly was, he gave the incident no thought. It was no business of his what Racke did with his money; and Arthur Augustus was the last fellow in the world to interfere in another fellow's affairs, or to comment upon them.

It dawned upon Racke that by his savage outburst he was liable to awaken suspicion where none existed so far, and he strove to control his evil temper.

He dropped his threatening fists and unclenched them, and sat down again, trying to calm himself. Arthur Augustus stood like a statue, looking at him with lofty calmness.

Never before had Gussy given so excellent a rendering of the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"I twust you are sowvvy, Wacke, for gwecfin' me with such uttah wudeness, when I came heah as a fwiend," said Arthur Augustus, at last, with gentle dignity.

Racke stared at him.

"As a friend?" he repeated.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What are you driving at?" muttered Racke.

"It is twue that I do not like you, Wacke, and in fact cannot stand you," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "Only the othah day I punched your nose—which somebody else seems to have punched again, judgin' by its appearence. But faih play is a jewel. Even a wottah like you, Wacke, is entitled to faih play. Your wight to faih play is not altahed, in my opinion, by the fact that, genewally speakin', you are an uttah wottah and outsidah. I twust I make myself cleah?"

"You silly owl—"

"Bai Jove! Is that weally a pwopah wemark to make, Wacke, when I am speakin' to you as a fwiend?"

"What do you want?"

"Nothin', deah boy. I looked in to speak to you fwom fwiendly motives. Levison is undah the impression that you put up somebody to sendin' that wascally telegwam, which mucked up the weception I was pwepawin' for his weturn. Othah fellows, I feah, share Levison's belief. I wufuse to believe anythin' of the kind myself."

"Oh!" gasped Racke.

"There is not an atom of pwoof," continued Arthur Augustus. "Levison seems to me to have jumped to a conclusion, simply on the gwound that you are a wottah genewally speakin'. I have told him that I disappwove of jumpin' to a conclusion in such a weckless mannah. I am sowvvy to say that his weply was simply a diswepful ejaculation. I have come heah to tell you, Wacke, that I stwongly disappwove of findin' you guilty without evidence, and that I shall stand up against it. That is all."

And having thus delivered himself, the noble Gussy turned to the door, Racke staring at him blankly.

"Oh!" gasped Racke at last. "Thanks, D'Arcy."

"Not at all, deah boy. Simply a mattah of justice and faih play," said Arthur Augustus gracefully.

Racke suppressed a grin.

"I am sowwy," added Arthur Augustus, "if I flutahed in at an awkward moment, Wacke."

"Oh, not at all!" stammered Racke. "Not in the least. I—I'm standing young Piggott a—a new bat, you know, as he's taking up cricket. That was how—"

"Bai Jove! That's jolly genevous of you, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus, with cordial admiration. "I know you have lots of money; but it is not ewevy fellow that would give away a pound for nothin'."

"I don't want it talked about," muttered Racke, eyeing the unsuspecting Gussy in a sidelong way.

"Quite wight, too," said Gussy approvingly. "It is wight to do good by stealth and blush to find it fame, as somebody or othah puts it. I am vevy pleased, Wacke, to have discovahed, by sheeah accident, that you are not so fwightfully mean as is genewally supposed. It shows how a fellow may be misjudged, simply fwom hidin' his light undah a bushel, doesn't it?"

And with quite a cordial nod to Racke—feeling that that shady youth had been greatly misjudged—Arthur Augustus sailed gracefully out of the study.

Racke kicked the door shut after him savagely.

Arthur Augustus had meant well in that visit to Racke's study. Arthur Augustus always meant well. But to judge by the expression on Racke's face, when he was gone, the black sheep of the Shell did not feel any the better for Gussy's good intentions.

CHAPTER 9.

Looking for a Trail.

LEIVISON of the Fourth was back in his old Form at St. Jim's—after twenty-four hours it seemed to him as if he had never been away. He dropped into his old place; and although his chums were far from demonstrative, it was easy for Levison to see how glad they were to have him back. From all excepting the half-dozen fellows who had constituted themselves his enemies, he had a cordial welcome; and, agreeable as it was, there was something of a sting in it. It brought remorse to his heart for the bitterness he had felt on his first day back—the outcome of the miserable trick that had been played.

He could hardly blame himself for the misunderstanding—as, of course, he had had no suspicion of trickery. But he blamed himself for not having gone directly to his chums to ask frankly for an explanation. Those few miserable hours of bitterness and resentment would have been spared him had he acted in the same spontaneous way as his minor. Levison realised that. It was not the first time that Levison of the Fourth had learned a lesson of value from his young brother in the Third.

His brow grew grim when he thought of what might have resulted.

Resentment might have bred resentment, bitterness been repaid by bitterness, and a total estrangement might have ensued, which would have prevented the simple explanation from coming to light at all. But for Frank, that had been possible.

That possibility made Levison grit his teeth. The rascal who had stirred up so much trouble should not, if he could help it, escape without punishment. If only as a warning against such trickery in the future, he should be punished.

Cardew and Clive fully shared Levison's feelings on that point. Study No. 9 had been disunited for a time—it might have remained disunited. The wretched plotter ought to be brought to book.

On that point the three were agreed; on minor points they differed. Sidney Clive's opinion was that the rascal in question was at Greyfriars—out of the reach of justice. There were two or three fellows at Levison's old school whom he had rubbed the wrong way, so to speak, especially Skinner of the Remove. Clive was inclined to believe that the whole thing could be put-down to Skinner.

Levison and Cardew believed that the wretched scheme had originated at St. Jim's; and they believed that it had originated with Aubrey Racke of the Shell.

They had to admit, however, that there was no proof.

The matter was discussed in Study No. 9 for some time. Whether a trunk call had been taken from St. Jim's to Greyfriars that week could only be discovered by taking the Housemaster into the matter.

Certainly, Mr. Railton would have made a very stern and searching inquiry, had he known of the false telegram.

But that was not feasible. The Housemaster could not be brought into the affair—all the unwritten laws of the Lower School were against that. Racke's punishment, if his guilt was proved, would come from his schoolfellows; official punishment was not desired, and was, in fact, barred.

So in that direction evidence could not be sought. But

even if the trunk call had been proved, what was to prove that Racke had taken it?

Suspicion would be strong; but there would be no proof. And suspicion was strong already.

Ralph Reckness Cardew declared that the case was clear enough, but that there was nothing doing. Clive did not consider that the case was clear; but he agreed that there was nothing doing. Ernest Levison assented to that; but he still gave the matter deep thought. It seemed too utterly rotten that such a heartless trick should be played and the perpetrator of it get off scot-free.

That Levison suspected Racke was known to all the juniors, and opinion was very much divided on the subject.

The thing was probable enough; most of the fellows admitted that. But the general view was that, without something to go upon, Levison ought not to have said it.

"Might accuse anybody of anything, if proof isn't to be waited for!" Jack Blake remarked in Study No. 6; and the whole study agreed, especially Arthur Augustus.

"The thing is pwob enough in itself," Arthur Augustus admitted. "But pwobability is not enough. I wegard Levison as having acted wathah hastily. It's not fair on Wacke."

"Once a rotter, always a rotter, though," said Herries.

"Yaas, pewwaps—nevahtheless, Wacke is entitled to fail play," said D'Arcy. "I told him yestahday that I was standin' up for him in this mattah—I wegard it as bein' up to me. I do not believe in givin' a dog a bad name and hangin' him."

"Something in that!" assented Dig.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, if a fellow is to be found guilty of things on a bad name, what about Levison himself?" argued Arthur Augustus. "He used to have an awf'ly bad name once. I pointed this out to Levison."

Blake chuckled.

"Go hon! What did Levison say to that?"

"He said 'Wats!'" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wegarded his weply as lackin' in both intelligence and mannahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The opinion of Study No. 6 was very generally shared. Tom Merry & Co. shared it. As Gussy said, the thing was probable, but it was not British fair play to hang a dog because he had a bad name. On that principle Levison himself, at one time, would have come off badly.

Which was not pleasant for the returned Fourth-Former.

But for this consideration, probably Levison would have let the matter drop; he had plenty of other things to occupy his thoughts, and he was not given to nursing injuries. But it was too bad to be the victim of a dastardly trick, and also to be considered hasty and inconsiderate in laying the trick at the door of the perpetrator. And so Levison was very keen on bringing the facts to light.

For that reason he wrote to Greyfriars; and he received a reply from Harry Wharton which brought a little light on the subject. Skinner of the Remove had been called into Mr. Quelch's study one day that week to answer a trunk call; but on the subject of that trunk call Skinner declined to say a single word.

"It was Skinner, and Racke phoned him, and put him up to sendin' the wire," said Cardew, when he was shown Wharton's letter. "But you'll never fix it on Racke." Levison knitted his brows.

"Half the House is down on me for accusing Racke," he said. "I can't let it rest at that. Even Clive thinks I ought to have held my tongue."

"Well—" said Clive, and stopped.

"I didn't speak so hastily as the fellows suppose," said Levison quietly. "I was sure it was Racke, and I figured it out that I'd be able to get at the proof somehow. I'm bound to do that now."

"How?" said Clive.

"Well, it's pretty certain that Racke used one of the House telephones. Somebody may remember having seen him at it."

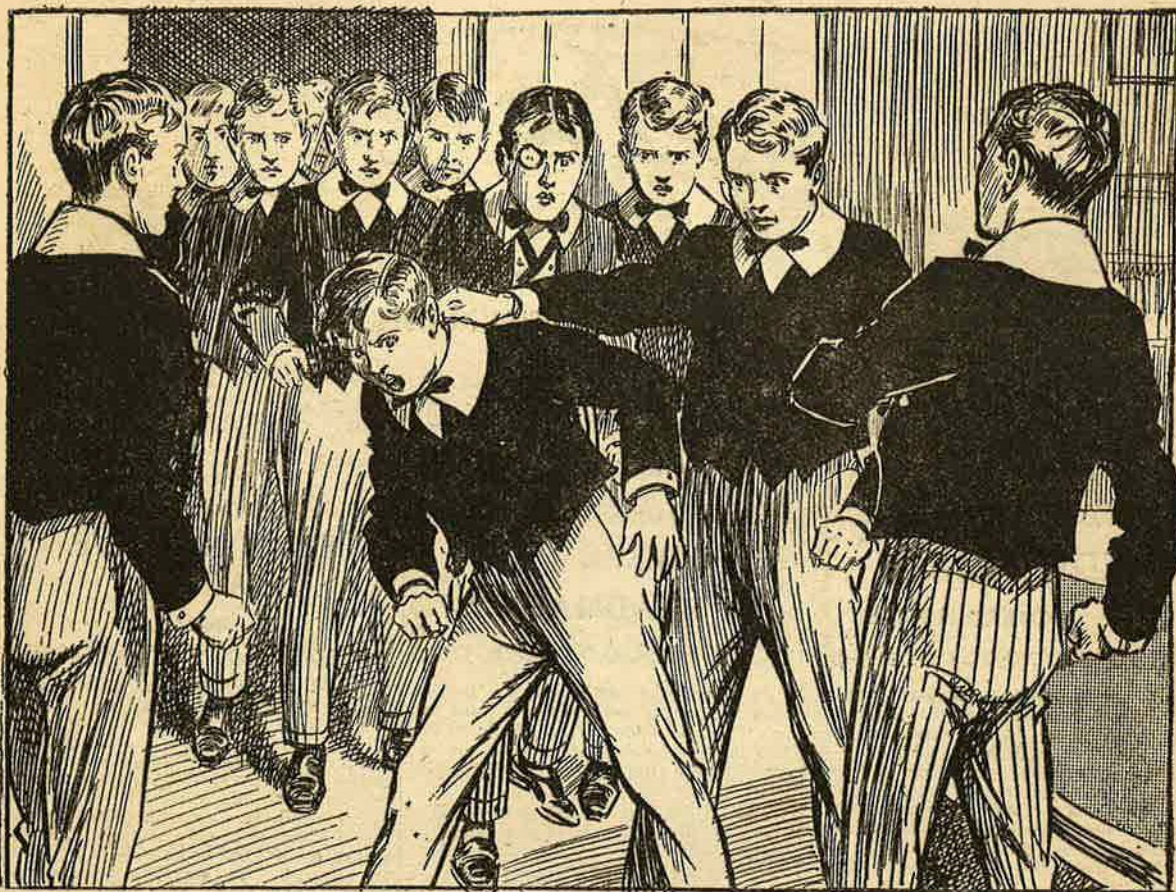
"He wouldn't be seen."

"It's not so jolly easy to get at a telephone without being seen. He must have used a master's telephone when the master was out. Fellows often do, as a matter of fact. But a fellow nosing into a study where he has no business may be noticed. I'm going to inquire about that, anyhow."

"Best of luck," said Cardew, Clive looking very dubious.

Levison's new inquiries were soon generally known, and some of the fellows smiled when they heard of them. A good many fellows remembered that Mr. Railton had been absent from the School House late in the day before Levison's return. But nobody seemed to have the faintest knowledge whether Racke of the Shell had been near the Housemaster's study. And then came unexpected information which was hardly a help. Frank Levison brought it to Study No. 9.

"Somebody was in Mr. Railton's study while he was out



Tom Merry's grasp fastened on Piggott's collar, and he was swung back. He wriggled in the grip of the captain of the Shell. "I—I say—let me go!" he panted. "I—I—" Tom Merry gave him a look of scorn. "It's pretty plain now, Piggott," he said. "What has Racke been giving you money for? And why did he just call you a blackmaller?" (See page 17.)

that day," Levison minor said, rather ruefully. "I've found it out in the Third."

"Racke?" exclaimed Levison.

"No; Piggott."

"Piggott! He's a little beast, but he never played that trick," said Levison. "Skinner wouldn't have done it to oblige Piggott. I don't suppose he knows him even."

"Sure he was there?" asked Cardew.

Frank nodded.

"There was a row in the Form-room, and Wally and Reggie were after Piggott," he said. "Piggy dodged into Mr. Railton's study to get away from them. Reggie waited a long time for him round the corner, in the passage, and punched his nose afterwards."

Cardew whistled.

"Reggie didn't see anything of Racke?" he asked.

"No. But he wouldn't, you know; he was round the corner in the next passage," said Frank. "He couldn't hang about in masters' quarters watching for Piggy. Racke would have come along from the Hall, if he'd gone there. But Piggy was there, you know; he was there a long time. I've asked him, and he knows nothing about Racke."

Levison was silent. Cardew grinned.

"Well, there's the giddy evidence you've been looking for, Levison," he said. "It's practically proved that Racke couldn't have gone to the study to telephone. Railton was out, but a young gentleman of the Third seems to have been there most of the time. Racke ought to be obliged to you for diggin' up evidence to clear him like this."

Clive burst into a laugh; and Levison, after a pause, laughed, too. It was a very unexpected outcome to his inquiries.

CHAPTER 10. D'Arcy Does It!

"LEVISON, deah boy!" Levison grunted. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's manner was serious, not to say solemn, and a dozen fellows in the Common room looked round and grinned. When Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy was on the high horse he was usually regarded as entertaining.

"I am goin' to speak to you as a fwient, Levison," continued the swell of St. Jim's.

"Don't trouble," said Levison.

"No twouble at all, deah boy."

Cardew looked curiously at the swell of the Fourth.

"Don't you feel a pain, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"A pain? No."

"Not in your lower jaw?"

"Eh? Certainly not."

"Then it must be jolly tough," said Cardew. "Blessed if I ever heard of a jaw standin' all this usage without gettin' tired."

"I wegard that remark as utfahly asinine, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus. "I wequest you not to buif in with asinine wemarks when I am speakin' to Levison as a fwient. I am goin' to advise you, Levison—"

"Bosh!"

"To dwop it," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ass!"

"Dwop it!" repeated Arthur Augustus firmly. "I wegard it as bein' up to you to dwop it."

"Listen to the words of wisdom!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Go it, Gussy! Get on to seventhly."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"It's not bad advice, though," said Blake. "Even Gussy gives good advice sometimes. There's such a thing as gettin' fed-up with Racke and what he did or didn't do."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison coloured.

"I only want to get at the facts," he said.

"Wabbish!" said Arthur Augustus decisively. "Your sillay inquiries, Levison, are weally amountin' to a persecution of Wacke. I do not like the fellow. Ewevone knows that I cannot stand him. But there is such a thing as fah play; and my advice is, dwop it!"

"I'll ask your advice when I want it," suggested Levison.

(Continued on page 16.)

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EDITORIAL!

By Dr. RICHARD HOLMES.

IN an unthinking moment I rather rashly consented, at the request of Tom Merry, to edit this number of the "St. Jim's News." It is rather an unusual task for a headmaster to undertake, and I must confess that, had I given the matter careful consideration beforehand, I should have graciously declined the honour which the well-meaning juniors thrust upon me. However, a promise is to me a sacred bond, and I trust that I have carried out my task successfully.

I should like to make it clear, in the first place, that I was very hard pressed with work connected with the college when the job of editing this small journal was thrust upon me, and, consequently, I have been compelled to pass one or two contributions which I should otherwise have been inclined to exclude. I very much regret that I have been unable to devote as much time to the editing of the number as I should have wished. In fact, I did not even have time to read and correct the proofs, so I dare say I shall receive a surprise or two when I do find time to peruse the printed pages.

The editing of an amateur magazine is by no means the most remarkable request that I have had made to me. Some juniors—particularly those belonging to the junior Forms—display astonishing coolness in bringing to me tasks they would have me do. One young rascal in the Second, only a few weeks ago, brought his brood of white mice to me, and wanted me to christen them. Another equally daring lad wanted to take a cast of my features by smothering my face with warm, sticky wax. His ambition was to make a bust of me and present it to the school, but it was never realised. Even Trimble once asked me to write for some samples from a big confectioner's.

As soon as it became known that I had consented to edit this number of the "St. Jim's News," four different boys conceived the idea of starting magazines, and each came to me with the request to edit the first number. This is the first time that I have ever taken on the role as editor of a schoolboy magazine, and I think it will be the last!

RICHARD HOLMES.

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IF I WERE HEADMASTER?

(It is generally agreed that Dr. Holmes runs St. Jim's very well—in fact, no public school ever had a better Head. The following views of some of the St. Jim's lesser lights are, however, interesting):

TAGGLES (the school porter).—Wot I says is this 'ere. St. Jim's would be a verry different place if I was 'ead! Them young rips of boys wouldn't be allowed so much liberty as they henjoys now. The penalty for sassing the school porter would be imprisonment all night in the cells. (I'd 'ave these built in the vaults, on the lines of a prison.) The servants would 'ave their wages doubled and workin' hours 'alved. Which the young rips would 'ave lessons from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., with intervals of 'alf an hour for meals—and no 'olidays!

Mr. HORACE RATCLIFF (House-master of the New House).—In the event of the administration of St. Jim's falling into my hands, I should certainly see that less time was devoted by the juniors to such ridiculous and wholly unnecessary pastimes as cricket, football, etc., and that a stricter measure of control was exercised over the unruly juniors belonging to the School House.

BAGGY TRIMBLE (the Prize Pig of the Fourth).—St. Jim's wood become more like a public school should be, if I were Head. Lessons wood be opashonal, and masters wood be treeted as the pade servants of the pewpils, which, of korse, they reely are! Studdies wood be sumptuously furnished, and no charges maid for braikages! Class-rooms wood be fitted with plush seats, and refreshments dewring lessons wood be the order of the day.

A. A. D'ARCY (the Priceless Swell of the Fourth).—I wood make a point of seen' that the juniors paid more attention to their personal appearance, bai Jove, if I had the wunnin' of St. Jim's. School caps would become things of the past, and toppahs would be the wule. Nothin' dwab in neckties allowed, and fellows given every encouragement to weah fancy waistcoats. Fewocious animals like Hewwies' bulldog Towsah, who has no respect whatever for a fellow's twousahs, would be kept wight off the pweinises!

EVENTS IN MY CAREER!

By the Head.

MY first appointment, after leaving college was at a large public school in the North, ruled over by a tyrant of a headmaster named Dr. Crouch. Schools in those days were very different to what they are now, and a schoolboy's life was by no means an easy one. Dr. Crouch was a bully of the worst type, and my soul often revolted at his cruel ways with the boys, but I was powerless to do or say anything, as I was then only a junior master.

One day, however, things reached a crisis. A young lad named Weaver caught a number of rats in the school cellars during the dinner interval one day, and it appeared that, to escape the watchful eyes of Dr. Crouch, he had to hide the rodents in a cage in the Form-room cupboard. During the lesson, a young rascal at the back opened the cupboard and released the trapdoor. Out swarmed the rats in a miniature army, over-running the class-room and causing confusion everywhere. Dr. Crouch came in and had his ankle bitten by one of the creatures. He blamed the whole affair on to me, with the result that I had to leave, but it was with very few regrets.

I next opened a school of my own in a small village in Dorset. And a very successful venture it was, too! Space does not permit of my relating the experiences I had there.

A few years afterwards I became a master at St. Cleo's College, then under the rule of Dr. Malcoln, a gentleman after my own heart. He died whilst at the college, beloved by everybody. I was fortunate enough to succeed him as headmaster.

I remained at St. Cleo's as headmaster for some years, then I was transferred to a large grammar school in London. A terrible fire destroyed the old building, which was never put up again. I saved the life of one of the boys, who was ill in the sanatorium, and the medal I received in recognition of my act is still one of my most valued possessions.

From the ill-fated grammar school I came to St. Jim's, where I have been headmaster for many years. And I hope I shall remain at St. Jim's for many, many more years to come, for to govern such a grand old school is to me more of a pleasure than a duty.



MAKING the HEAD a HERO!

By Jack Blake.

"GET hout! Which the 'Ead's given me horders that you're not to be admitted! 'Op it!"

Thus Taggles. He spoke in a very angry voice to a stranger outside the gates of St. Jim's. The stranger was a youngish-looking fellow, rather lean and weedy looking, wearing huge tortoise-shell rimmed eyeglasses.

"Look here," he said desperately, "I've come to photograph Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of this school! I am Cornelius Buzzard, the representative of 'Walker's Weekly,' the famous home journal, and we are running a series called, 'Famous Headmasters of Famous Schools.' I want to photograph Dr. Holmes at work, and publish the photo in 'Walker's Weekly'!"

"You go and eat coke!" growled the St. Jim's porter. "Which you've been worrying Dr. 'Olmes for several days now, and which the 'Ead's fed him! 'E refuses to 'ave his photogaf printed in your rotten weekly paper! Clear hoff, and take your camera with you!"

Cornelius Buzzard made a desperate rush in at the gates of St. Jim's, but Taggles planted his heavy bulk in his path. Buzzard went over and rolled in a large puddle just inside the gates.

Tom Merry, Lowther, Manners, and Levison strolled up and grinned at the sight of the weedy journalist grovelling in the mire.

Taggles snorted and explained the reason of Mr. Buzzard's ungraceful position.

"The cheeky 'ass!" said Tom Merry. "We'll remove him, Taggy. Now, boys, get ready with your boots. We're all good footballers. When I say 'Three,' we'll all make a rush and boot him through the gateway! Now, one, two, thr—"

"Yarooooooooogh!" howled Mr. Buzzard.

He gathered up his camera and ran. He streaked down the Rylcombe Lane like a hare. Tom Merry & Co. sent a shroud of laughter after him.

Mr. Buzzard was a dogged journalist, and when he slowed down his brain began to think out a fresh scheme of getting into St. Jim's to photograph the Head.

Suddenly the fat form of Baggy Trimble hove into view through the now gathering dusk.

Mr. Buzzard buttonholed the plump St. Jim's junior and whispered a few sentences into his ears. Baggy was in his usual hard-up state, and the mention of "ten shillings for your trouble" caused him to chuckle greedily.

"Right ho!" he said. "Rely on me, sir!"

He and Buzzard walked back to St. Jim's. Buzzard waited outside while Baggy carried his camera in. Baggy hid the camera and then went indoors and upstairs to the Fourth Form dormitory.

There he raided some of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's beautiful raiment. He carried a bundle of clothes through the dusk and out of the gates of St. Jim's without detection.

Mr. Buzzard took the clothes eagerly, and screening himself behind the bushes, put them on.

When he emerged, clad in a pair of Gussy's trousers, a fancy waistcoat of brilliant hue, wide Eton collar and a St. Jim's cap, he was a sight for gods and men and little fishes.

Baggy roared, but agreed that Mr. Buzzard would pass muster in the dark.

Gussy's clothes fitted where they touched on Mr. Buzzard, but he was still game for the artful little scheme of his.

"This way!" said Baggy. "We'll work the trick!"

Taggles was in his lodge, so they got into the school quad without trouble. Baggy fetched a ladder from the woodshed, and the pair crept with great stealth across the quad until they came under the Head's window.



A blinding glare of light lit up the Head's study as Buzzard and his camera came sprawling through the window.

"I shall have to take the photo by flashlight!" muttered Buzzard. "It won't take a tick. You hold the ladder at the bottom, Master Trimble, while I climb up!"

Buzzard mounted the ladder, Baggy Trimble holding it at the bottom.

The journalist gave a grunt of satisfaction when he saw Dr. Holmes seated at his table reading some papers. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House was also there.

Buzzard was careful not to be detected. The window was open at the top, and he stood on the window-sill and focused his camera on the Head.

Down below a party of School House fellows, headed by Tom Merry, had met with Figgins & Co. of the New House. Trouble always ensues when School House and New House meet. In this case, Figgins & Co. were taking a hamper of tuck across to their casual ward, and the heroes of the School House determined to wrest it from them.

They did. There was a fierce conflict in the middle of the quad, and Tom Merry & Co. scudded off with the hamper in their possession. Figgins & Co. picked

themselves up and pounded after them with whoops of rage.

Tom Merry & Co. ran round the school wall with the tuck hamper.

They did not see the ladder until it was too late.

Figgins & Co. swept down on the School House fellows, and a horde of struggling fellows surged against the ladder.

"Look out, you idiots!" shrieked Baggy Trimble.

Crash!

The ladder lurched sideways, lit Buzzard in the back, and sent him, his camera, and apparatus sprawling through the Head's window, just as he touched off the flashlight.

A blinding glare of light lit up the Head's study as if a thousand streaks of lightning had found their way into it. Mr. Railton staggered back, his hands to his face to protect his eyes. Dr. Holmes sprang to his feet, and Buzzard and the camera landed at his feet.

Down below, Baggy and the ladder were in the centre of a fighting mass of juniors.

Figgins & Co. got away with their hamper in the confusion.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Dr. Holmes, when he had recovered his vision. "What the—who is this boy?"

The "boy" sat up and moaned and groped for his eyeglasses. He was sitting in the wastepaper-basket. The ruins of his camera and flashlight apparatus were strewn about the carpet.

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Railton, with a start. "It isn't a St. Jim's boy at all. It's that rascal Buzzard! He has had the audacity to adopt these means of obtaining the photograph he required."

"Yow-wow-wow!" moaned Buzzard. "What happened? My camera's broken! I—"

Mr. Railton came grimly at him, and he made a break for the door.

He dashed blindly downstairs, not knowing the way, and ran full tilt into Tom Merry & Co., who were savage at the loss of their booty.

"My waistcoat!" shrieked Gussy. "Bai Jove, deah boys, heah's the wotah Baggy was tellin' us about!"

"Kick him out!" hooted Monty Lowther. "We should have had that tuck if it hadn't been for him!"

"Yaroooogh! Yow! Leggo! Yah!" howled Buzzard, as Tom Merry & Co. laid violent hands on him and whirled him downstairs and across the quad to the school gates.

They flung him headlong into a thick bush at the other side of the Rylcombe Lane.

Crash!

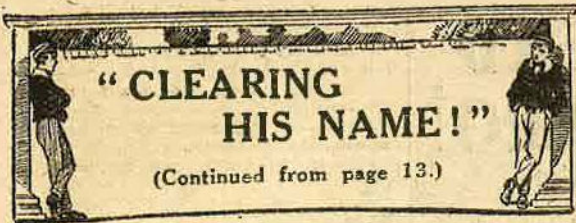
"Wow-wow-wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Buzzard remained suspended in the middle of the prickly bush and struggled. The Eton jacket was split up the back, and he looked a very funny sight when, tearing his way at last out of the bush, he took to his heels and ran as hard as he could down the Rylcombe Lane.

That was the last St. Jim's saw of the enterprising representative of "Walker's Weekly." But they heard later that Mr. Buzzard had created quite a sensation in the village when he appeared in those tattered and torn schoolboy clothes!

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(Continued from page 13.)

"Wats! Wacke is sevewal sorts of a wottah," said Arthur Augustus. "I have punched his nose myself. But faih play's a jewel. And even Wacke has his good points, as I happen to know."

"You've been borrowin' Glyn's microscope?" asked Cardew.

"Eh? No."

"Then how could you see Racke's good points?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't wot, Cardew! Wacke has his good points, but he doesn't talk about his decent actions," said Arthur Augustus. "He sometimes does vewy genevous and good-natured things which fellows don't know about. I happen to be awah of it," added Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Then you ought to tell us," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Racke as genevous and good-natured is a bit of a surprise, I must say."

"He's been pulling Gussy's leg with some rot," said Blake.

"I twust, Blake, that it is not vewy easy for a fellow to pull my leg," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "And, moreovah, I happened to see this incident by sheeah accident, comin' into Wacke's studay the othah day when he was not expectin' me. I weward it as genevous and good-natured of Wacke to give a Third Form kid a pound to buy a new bat."

"Great pip!"

"That's a new way for Racke to spend the war profits," said Manners. "If it's true, we've been a bit hard on Racke."

"I twust, Mannahs, that you do not doubt my word?"

"Not at all, old bean; I only doubt your sense," said Manners politely. "You've been stuffed up, I fancy."

"I wewpent that I saw it with my own eyes!"

"Not with your ears!" asked Monty Lowther humorously. Levison fixed his eyes on the swell of St. Jim's with a very keen and curious look.

"You saw Racke give a pound to a Third Form kid?" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How do you know it was to buy a new bat with?"

"Wacke said so."

"Was the kid Piggott?"

"Bai Jove! I uttably fail to see how you can possibly guess that it was Piggott, Levison!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in utter astonishment.

Levison laughed.

"You see, I get a bit suspicious when I hear of Racke being genevous and good-natured," he said.

"I wewgard that as wotten, Levison."

"You would, with your powerful intellect," assented Levison. "What was Racke giving Piggott money for?"

"To buy a new bat."

"Fathead! If Racke was giving Piggott a pound, it was because Piggott was screwing money out of him."

"Weally, Levison—"

"You regard that as rotten, too, don't you?" grinned Levison.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis.

"I do!"

"I don't quite see the point, Levison," said Tom Merry.

"It's a bit of a surprise for Racke to stand Piggott a new bat. But—"

"It's not so surprising when you know the facts. I should have known what to think, if I'd known before that Racke was shelling out money to Piggott of the Third!" said Levison caustically. "I've been making inquiries, as you know—"

"We know!" grinned Blake.

"We do—we does!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"And it's come out that the time Railton was away—the same time that Skinner, at Greyfriars, got a trunk call from somewhere—Piggott of the Third was hiding in Railton's study; the Third were after his scalp."

"Well, and what—?" asked Tom.

"That beat me when I heard it!" said Levison. "I had figured it out that Racke had used Mr. Railton's telephone while he was out, and then I found that Piggott had been in the study a lot of the time. Racke was almost certain to

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The FIRST PRIZE of £5 will be awarded to the reader who submits a solution which is exactly the same as, or nearest to, the solution now in the possession of the Editor. In the event of ties the prize will be divided. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit. The Editor reserves the right to add together and divide the value of all, or any, of the prizes, but the full amount will be awarded. It is a distinct condition of entry that the decision of the Editor must be accepted as final. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

This competition is run in conjunction with "Boys' Friend," "Magnet," and "Popular," and readers of those journals are invited to compete.

I enter "ESSEX CRICKET CLUB" COMPETITION, and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

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G.

have been seen by Piggott if he'd gone there to phone, and that knocked my inquiry on the head."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Only now," said Levison quietly. "It comes out that Racke is giving Piggott money."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom.
"I want to know what he's paying Piggott for. Racke is about as likely to give a pound away for nothing as a hundred pounds."

"It was to buy a new bat, Wacke told me," said Arthur Augustus. But he spoke dubiously now.

Even the aristocratic intellect of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was getting a move on at last.

"I suppose Racke had to say something, as you came on him shelling out," said Levison, "and any yarn was good enough for you!"

"Weally, Levison—"
"Tom Merry's brow set grimly.

"You think that Piggott saw Racke telephoning to Greyfriars, and heard his instructions to Skinner there, and that he's getting money out of Racke to keep it quiet, Levison?"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.
"What does it look like?" he said.

"Well, it looks pretty clear, I'm afraid," said Tom slowly.
"But we'll jolly soon have the truth out about that! We'll see Racke at once."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" said Arthur Augustus feebly.
"Come on, dear men!" said Cardew. "Let's all go and see Racke. At the very least, we ought to pat him on the back for turnin' out to be a generous and good-natured fellow—so very unexpectedly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Quite a little army of juniors marched away to the Shell passage, where Racke was in his study. Crooke was coming out of the study, shutting the door after him as they arrived.

Crooke looked a little startled.
"What's up?" he asked quickly.

"Lots of things, dear man," said Cardew. "We're a committee of inquiry into the manners and customs of your study. Did you have a hand in it?"

"In—in what?" stammered Crooke, in alarm.
"Foggin' telegrams, dear man!"

"I—I don't understand—"
Cardew laughed.

"Crooke didn't have a hand in it, but he knows about it," he said. "You've really got a speakin' countenance, Crooke!"

"I—I—" stammered Crooke.
Tom Merry raised his hand to knock at the study door. As he did so there came a raised, angry voice from within:

"You little blackmailing rotter! You've had three pounds from me already!"

"Shut up, Racke!" shouted Crooke, giving the warning rather late.

Tom Merry threw the door open.
Aubrey Racke was standing with clenched fists, his eyes fixed savagely on Piggott of the Third. The shady young rascal was eyeing him warily. The scene required little explanation, after what the juniors had heard.

"Dear old Racke!" said Cardew. "He simply can't control his generosity and good nature! Two to one he was just goin' to give Piggott a quid to buy another new bat, if we hadn't butted in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Don't look so jolly savage, Racke, old bean!" went on Cardew. "We've saved you a pound by buttin' in like this. I'm sure you'll restrain your generosity when you know that the game's up."

"Bai Jove! Wacke—"
"What—what do you mean?" muttered Racke thickly.

"I—I— I was just saying to— to Piggott—"
"Hold him!" exclaimed Levison, as the black sheep of the Third made a dive to get out of the study.

Tom Merry's grasp fastened on Piggott's collar, and he was swung back. He wriggled in the grip of the captain of the Shell.

"I—I say, let me go!" he panted. "I—I—"
"What do you mean by buttin' into my study like this?" exclaimed Racke, with an attempt at bluster.

Tom Merry gave him a look of scorn.
"It's pretty plain now," he said. "Piggott, what has Racke been giving you money for?"

Piggott panted.
"Why did you just call him a blackmailer, Racke?"

"Bai Jove! I am afraid I allowed Wacke to take me in, dear boys!"

"Go hon!" murmured Lowther.
"So Racke came to Railton's study while you were there, Piggott?" said Levison quietly. "You heard him phoning to Skinner, and you've been holding it over his head for his dirty money?"

"I—I haven't— I—I didn't— I—I—"
"That means the sack!" said Levison. "And the sooner you're kicked out of St. Jim's, you horrid little rotter, the better! Come along and see Railton!"

Piggott broke into a yell of terror.
"Let me go! I've only had three pounds! Racke's got lots of money, and he's always swanking with it! Besides, he offered it to me to keep it dark about the telephone!"

"Shut up!" hissed Racke.
Piggott glared at him.

"They know all about it, you dummy!" he said. "They heard what you said a minute ago. I knew it wasn't safe after D'Arcy saw you giving me the quid the other day. I thought he'd tumble, sooner or later, though he's such a silly fool!"

"Bai Jove!" howled Piggott. "I couldn't stop Racke telephoning to Skinner, could I? It wasn't my fault!"

"Give him a dozen with a fives-bat, and let him go!" said Levison, shrugging his shoulders.

Piggott was twisting most uncomfortably when he wriggled away down the passage at last. A severe batting and the sudden drying up of his horn of plenty constituted Piggott's punishment—and there was more waiting for him in the Third, when the Third heard the story.

"And now you, Racke—"
"Get out of my study!" said Racke.

"Anything to say?"
"Go and eat coke!"

"Bai Jove! I wathah think that this is a case for a wecord waggin', dear boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

The other fellows thought so, too. And the ragging that took place in Aubrey Racke's study was really a record. When it was over, the cad of the Shell wondered dismally whether life was worth living for a fellow who preferred crooked ways to straight.

Racke's punishment ended the matter; and, on reflection, he was glad to have escaped so cheaply. It was probable, too, that Racke would think twice, if not three times, before he was guilty again of such treachery. Levison of the Fourth had been justified; and in Study No. 9 all was calm and bright. Once more Levison had come out ahead!

THE END.

(Another grand story of the famous chums of St. Jim's next week, boys. Make a note of the title: "IN ANOTHER'S NAME!" by Martin Clifford. You will vote it the finest story you have ever read.)

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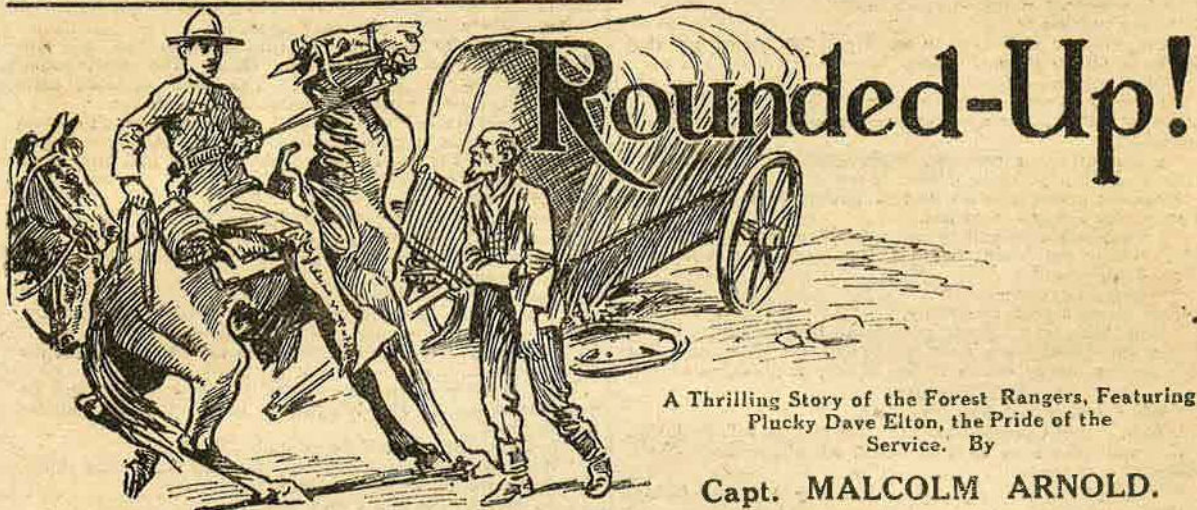
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CHAPTER 1.
The Hold-Up!

RANGER DAVE ELTON, reaching the ford below Willow Creek, halted Sonny, his horse, and allowed the animal to drink. He had covered the best part of twenty miles that warm morning, and the ranger, taking his hat from his tanned forehead, let the wind of the valley cool his damp brow.

He was feeling for his pipe, when from the slope above there came a quick crack, the unmistakable report of a revolver. The ranger's horse raised its head sharply, the water dripping from its soft muzzle, and Elton gathered up the reins.

Crack, crack!
Two fresh reports sounded, from the left this time, and the ranger, calling to his horse, sent it splashing through the shallow ford, and then scrambling up the bank, to set off at a long, raking gallop across the slope.

To the left, about half a mile away, bulked the edge of a timber belt, rising in a majestic sweep across the mountains, towering line upon line as far as the eye could reach. Between the river and the trees the ground was undulating and covered with grass. Ideal cattle ground, broken here and there with patches of scrub.

As he gained the top of the slope the ranger caught sight of a wagon. It was on the trail that ran through the trees to Pine Falls.

He noted that the canvas top was sagging to one side, and he saw that the two horses which had drawn the vehicle had broken loose from their traces, and were pounding madly up the trail.

From a patch of scrub on the left of the road three riders appeared. They were heading for the trees, and were swinging their horses up the slope at full speed. Elton could see the rise and fall of the arms as they lashed their animals on; and, as he sent his own mount galloping towards the track, Ranger Dave saw the first of the fugitives vanish into the trees. He was followed a moment later by the others, then Elton, reaching the trail, checked Sonny for a moment.

The two horses with the broken traces were thundering along towards him, and he swung his own mount round, waiting for the frightened creatures. Then, as they drew near to him, he called to his horse, and sent it forward.

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The runaways swerved as the mounted figure drew near to them, and Elton, bringing his own animal round like a flash, ran neck by neck with the startled ponies until, at last, he managed to reach out and grab at the trailing reins of the nearest.

A double turn round the horn of his saddle and a steady pressure gradually mastered the foam-flecked, frightened creatures. At the end of half a minute Dave Elton had them completely under control, and when he brought them to a halt he slipped from his saddle and went up to them, speaking to them quietly.

He noticed now that one of the ponies had been grazed by a bullet. There was an ugly wheel across its flanks.

"Steady, boys! Steady, boys! That's all right."

His quiet voice had its effect on the nervous, terrified beasts, and at last he was able to mount his horse again and swing round, to ride back along the trail, leading the two ponies behind him.

As he topped the slight rise and caught sight of the wrecked wagon, he saw a man standing beside it. When Elton halted by the hooded vehicle its owner came forward and Ranger Dave saw that one arm was hanging limply by his side, while the drawn look on the face indicated what had happened.

"They got me all right, ranger, drat 'em!"

Ranger Dave recognised the speaker. He was old Seth Cowley, a trader, who moved from lumber camp to lumber camp, dealing with the men employed there.

Some of his stores had fallen out of the wagon on to the roadway, and Ranger Dave saw that the front wheel had been smashed.

Leaping from his horse, Elton approached the wounded man. The bloodstained shirt was removed, and the ranger examined the shoulder. A bullet had passed through the muscles below the shoulder-blade, a painful, but not dangerous wound.

"All right, Seth; you just sit down. I'll look after you."

From the wagon the ranger brought a water-bottle and a few strips of linen, then a rough bandaging followed. Seth's face was pale, and his lips were set in a thin, tight line.

He drank a mouthful of water, and propped up against the back of the wagon, he looked at the tall, uniformed figure.

"Pity you didn't come along just about twenty minutes earlier," he said.

"But I guess those skunks had laid it out very neatly."

He pointed down the trail, and the ranger saw a gap in it. There were a number of broken branches of trees and thin strips of wood jutting out from the gap.

Seth Cowley drew a deep breath.

"They had it all ready for me," he said. "It is a booby-trap, and I drove right into it. That darn gap was covered over, and I didn't notice it until my front wheels flopped into it. I managed to get the wagon through all right, but, as you can see, the wheel gave and spilled me out."

"What happened afterwards, Seth?" Elton asked.

"I was sort o' dazed," said Seth, "for I landed on my head, but I caught sight of them darn skunks coming for me from behind that clump of thorn. I didn't have the ghost of a chance with them, and one of them covered me while the others got busy on my wagon."

"Thieves—eh?"
"I reckon so, and a bit worse than that!"

Seth arose to his feet.

"I guess they must have knowned that I was taking down a wad of notes to Contractor Bardall," he said, "along at Pine Falls. Boss Hemmersday handed the wad across to me last night. It ain't the first time I've done that job for him, and I reckon he thinks I'm as safe as the next one. But, mobbe, he'll change that opinion after this."

"Was it a large sum?" Dave Elton asked.

"Not quite sure, ranger; but it must have been round about four or five thousand dollars."

The two went back to the wagon, and Seth glanced into it. His stores were heaped up on the wagon tilt in sad disorder.

"They've helped themselves to all the eats they could lay hands on, too," the old trader went on. "But I ain't so mad about that as the money."

"Any idea who they were?"

"The skunks who were masked, ranger," the trader returned. "I didn't have much chance to study 'em. All I know was that the biggest fellow of the bunch only had three fingers on his left hand. It was him that plugged me."

His eyes snapped.
"He fired at my ponies first," continued Seth. "Reckonin' to stampede 'em. That was when I kind o' lost my temper, ranger, and I went for him. He got me, though, as you can see."

The matter-of-fact way in which the old fellow gave the details of the grim episode made Ranger Dave smile quietly.

"Best thing you can do, Seth, is to get down to Pine Falls," he said at last. "I dare say you could ride one of your ponies, and once you get there and report to Mr. Bardall he'll send someone along to fix up your wagon for you."

Seth looked up at the tanned, handsome ranger.

"Waal, ranger, I kind o' thought you might do that for me," he began; "but, mebber, you ain't heading for Pine Falls?"

Ranger Dave settled his Stetson on his head and turned to his mount.

"No, I'm not heading for Pine Falls, Seth," he returned. "I'm going to follow those fellows. They've taken to the timber, and anything that takes to the timber is my special business."

"Listen here, ranger!" Seth said. "There are three of them galoots, and, from what I could see of 'em, they are pretty tough fellows. I'm figurin' that it would need Sheriff Thomas and a posse to get 'em!"

"Mebbe it will," said Dave; "but, anyhow, I can have a try."

He mounted with one supple swing of his athletic body, and gathered up the reins.

"You can give Sheriff Thomas my compliments," he said, "and tell him

that I'll blaze a trail. It may help him if he feels inclined to follow."

Next moment the ranger's powerful horse was carrying him at a canter up the slope, and Seth Cowley watched the swaying figure until it had vanished into the trees at the point where the three men had disappeared.

Seth managed to light his pipe, then, crossing to his two ponies, he dragged himself on to the back of one of them, and, leading the other, the old trader set off for Pine Falls, leaving his derelict wagon by the roadside.

"I didn't ask him to take the job," Seth consoled himself with, "and I reckons he's going to walk into a heap of trouble. Still, he looks to me like a fellow who could handle trouble and not come so badly out when it arrived at the show-down."

CHAPTER 2.

"Hands Up!"

RANGER DAVE ELTON picked up the tracks of the three riders as soon as he entered the vast belt of timber, and as he rode steadily onward, the ranger halted now and again at some huge, towering giant, cutting away a fragment of bark in the great trunk.

Blazing a trail is an old Indian trick,

and through the long afternoon the ranger stuck to his task.

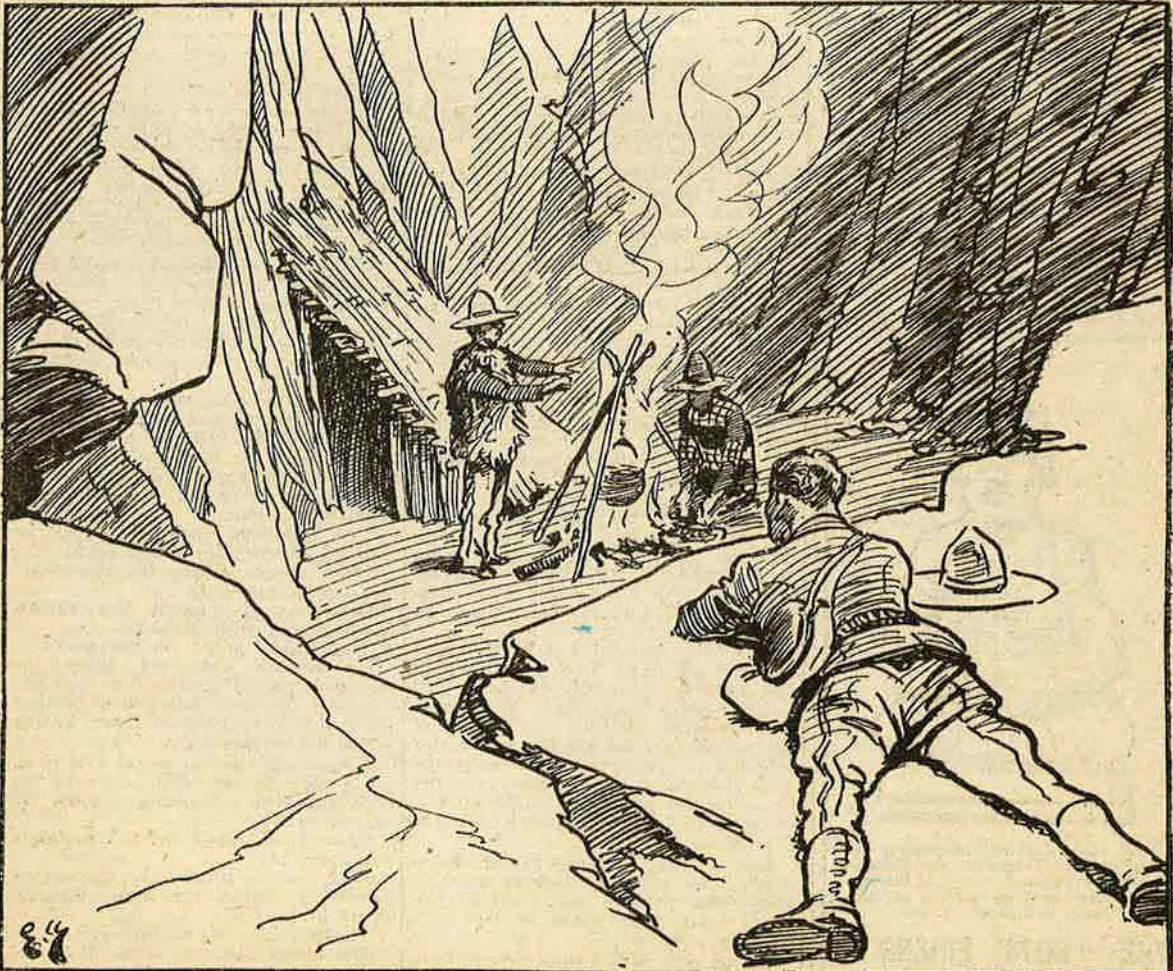
The track led him steadily upwards, following a long slant, and as he rode onwards Elton discovered that the men were practically following the route that they had taken when they had headed for the road. Hoof-marks pointing downwards established this fact, and somewhere about three o'clock in the afternoon they came to the site of what had obviously been their camp.

It was in the heart of the trees, and the ranger's brows drew together as he saw the heap of charred wood, for in those great forest lands it is an unlawful act to build a fire amidst the timber, where a chance spark will form a conflagration which may destroy valuable property and endanger lives for miles around.

It was within an hour of dusk when he rode out of the timber belt on to the great, sloping hillside beyond. Here the ground was broken and bouldery, with patches of tussock grass and bushes.

He reached a small plateau, and, crossing it, found that the trail led on through a narrow gorge, flanked on either side by the higher slopes. The sandy bottom of the gorge revealed the hoof-marks of the fugitives clearly enough, and Elton rode on steadily, his eyes fixed on the trail.

Onward and upward he rode, till dusk



Dave Elton lay full length on the rocks and looked into the cup-like hollow in the gap of the hills. Two men were standing before a fire in front of the hut, and Dave noticed that one of them had only three fingers on his left hand.

found him at the base of a high, towering peak. He was near to the snowline now, and ahead spread the barren, rocky, verdureless stretches that ended where the white masses of unmelted snow lay like a great cloud over the summits.

Under the shelter of a high boulder, the ranger drew rein and dismounted. On that particular morning he had not troubled to fill his food bag, and he realised now that he had made a mistake.

"A ranger ought always to be prepared, Sonny," he said. "But, as you and I were only going as far as Pine Falls, I didn't think it was worth while to load you up with a corn sack."

There were patches of scanty tussock grass here and there in the rough ground, and after unsaddling his animal he half-hobbled him, and allowed him to wander off. He knew that Sonny would find sufficient to eat in the sparse vegetation, and there were innumerable pools of rain water, where he could quench his thirst.

"I'll have to do the rest of this on foot," Dave Elton decided, "and it is not going to be an easy job."

He found a couple of biscuits in his pocket, and these formed his supper. He lay down under the shadow of the boulder wrapped in his blanket, and tried to sleep. But, with the coming of the night, there arose a keen, icy wind, and during the long hours the ranger lay shivering under his thin covering.

When the morning broke cold and clear he was glad to rise and move about to bring back the circulation into his stiffened limbs.

He saw his horse far down the slope sheltering behind a clump of rough scrub.

"Wise boy," said Elton to himself.

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"Heading back to the timber, are you? Well, I don't blame you, either."

He stooped over his saddle and slipped his revolvers into his belt, then, after filling his water-bottle at a pool in the rocks, Dave Elton took up his chase anew.

It was a tough, grim task. It led him through high, shuddering boulders, along narrow ravines, and on around crazy ledges, higher and higher into the rough, scarred mountains, and finally he came to the first patch of gleaming snow, a long stretch of valley under the shelter of a higher ridge.

It was here that he came on the first signs of the men he was following, for from beyond the ridge there came a thin feather of grey smoke, rising column-like, unbroken into the still air.

He moved to the right, then, leaving the trail and working his way out from the rough, broken ground, he reached the face of a cliff, a scarred, jagged mass of stone and boulder.

He began to climb it, working his way steadily from foothold to foothold. Here and there on the face of the rock were patches of snow, through which he had to force his way.

His fingers were numbed, and the rarefied air made his heart drum swiftly as he laboured onward. But at long last, spent and exhausted, he drew himself over the top of the cliff, and, scrambling on amid the jagged blocks of stone, he saw a narrow, cup-like hollow below.

To the left was a small hut, or rather a shelter, built against the background of rock. There was a fire in front of the lean-to, and a man was kneeling beside the blaze. On a tripod a pot was hanging, and Dave Elton, crouching behind his hiding-place, watched the man for a long moment.

Another individual came lounging out of the hut later. He was wearing a thick fur wrap, and as he came near to the fire he stretched out his hands towards the flames. Dave saw the extended fingers, and he noted that the left hand was maimed.

So far as he could see there were no signs of horses in the little cup-like hollow in the gap of the hills. They were probably stabled lower down, and presently the appearance of a short man coming up through a narrow fissure on the left suggested that that supposition was correct, for he was carrying with him an empty leather bucket, and there was a sack over his shoulders.

Dave Elton lay at full length on the cold surface of the rocks and watched the scene. The trio had a meal, squatting in front of the shelter, eating stolidly, then the tall man arched to his feet, and, with a surly nod to his companions, crossed to the narrow gap on the left.

By moving forward slightly the ranger saw the tall figure pass down through the narrow, fissure-like entrance and vanish round a bend. So far as he could see this gap was the only means of leaving the curious cup-like recess, for round it on every other side arose the high cliffs. The gap or fissure was not more than ten yards wide at the top, and it narrowed down to a space of three or four feet.

For a long moment Dave Elton studied the position, then an amazing inspiration came to him. About five yards away from where he lay there towered a huge rock. It was on the edge of the cliff, and one half of it indeed was looming over the narrow entrance gap.

It seemed to be poised in mid-air. The wear and tear of the elements had gradually eaten away the softer ground

beneath it, leaving it standing there, a black, immovable block.

Thrusting his hand into one capacious pocket, Dave Elton drew out a long, slender tube covered with glazed, blue paper. Among the various devices that a forest ranger uses to battle with fire is the dynamite cartridge. It is a swift and effective trench digger, blowing out a great gap, over which the fierce blaze cannot strive in its devastating work.

On his hands and knees Dave Elton crept forward until he was kneeling behind the poised boulder. He set the cartridge under the great fragment, forcing it into the softer earth, then he attached the long line of thin fuse, and, moving away again, he laid the fuse as he went.

Finally, when he reached the flat boulder, from which he had first watched the inmates of the hut, he fixed the end of the fuse in a small cleft of the rock, then, rising to his feet, he stepped boldly to the edge and called,

"Say you, there!"

The thick-set man, who had been superintending the cooking, came barging out of the hut. Dave Elton had dropped into a sitting position on the edge of the flat rock above, and as the man came scrambling out of the hut he drew his revolver and levelled it. The eyes of the tough were raised to the seated shape, and at the menacing movement of that figure his hands rose level with his shoulders.

Next moment the second man came barging out. Dave saw him reach for his belt, and a quick, warning voice sounded.

"Hands up—quick!"

The fellow delayed just the briefest second, and a sharp crack sounded, then he reeled back against the hut, gripping his wounded wrist, while a stream of angry oaths broke from his lips.

"Keep right where you are!" Ranger Dave said. "This is my little picnic, and I'm going to arrange affairs."

The shorter man had not moved from his position, and Dave, still covering the rascals, began to slide down over the edge of the cliff. It was a drop of about twenty feet, but the smooth surface made it easy for him, and he landed in a little shower of rubble.

Crossing towards the shorter man, Dave reached up and took the fellow's revolver from his belt. At a sharp word of command the man backed into the entrance to the hut, and Dave, following him, stooped over the wounded rascal, removing his gun.

"We'll be more comfortable now," he drawled, lowering his own weapon.

"Say, ranger, what's the big idea?" the shorter man began.

Dave hurried through the narrow opening and turned to the two.

"Get inside quick! In you go!"

He roached out and lifted the wounded man, thrusting him into the hut, and the other fellow hustled after him; then Dave followed them, halting in the narrow doorway.

He was only just in the nick of time, for a moment later the leader of the gang appeared, scrambling through the narrow gap.

"Say, Loo, what's on? What were you firing at?"

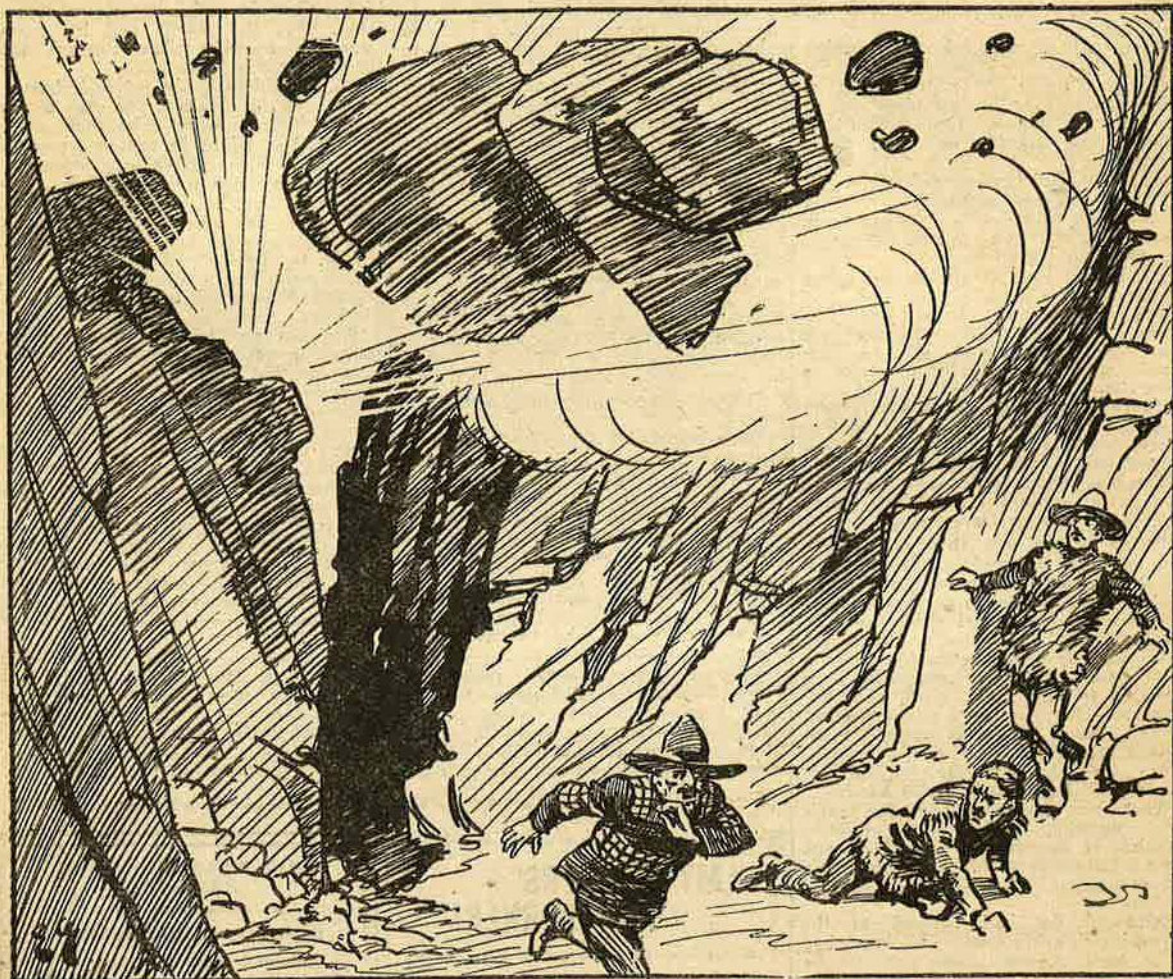
Elton had his revolver handy, and he jabbed it against the short, thick-set figure by his side.

"Keep quiet!" he whispered.

The leader came on across the level ground, heading for the hut.

"Do you hear me? What's wrong with you? Are you deaf?"

Dave watched the lean figure as it drew nearer. It was a vicious, criminal



"Below there!" Dave Elton's warning was drowned by a deep hollow roar, and from below the poised boulder there shot out a great fountain of earth and rubble. A yell of fear went up from the three scoundrels below, and they flung themselves aside just in time.

face that met his gaze. The lean jaw, the small, close-set eyes, and the thin, sinister lips stamped the man unmistakably.

Two yards from the hut, he hesitated as though some instinct warned him of danger.

"Loo, do you hear me?"

Elton swung round to level his revolver; then, just as he made the pace that would have carried him through the doorway, to confront the leader of the gang, the thick-set crook made a sudden lunge.

His shoulder landed on Dave's back, and the ranger went staggering out of the hut. Next moment Loo had leaped on him, and, gripping Dave by the arm, he jerked it downward.

The revolver cracked, and the bullet bit into the solid earth; then Dave and his antagonist went down together, while from Loo's lips arose a yell.

"Quick, boss, help me! Help me!" he called.

The ranger had twisted round, and he brought his fist upwards, sending a smashing blow into the broad face of his attacker. Loo's head went back with a jerk, and another frenzied shout broke out.

"Quick—quick! Get him! Get him!"

There was an oath and a scrambling sound, then Dave had a brief vision of the tall leader looming over him with arm upraised. He saw the butt of a revolver gleaming, then it came down

full on his temple. A myriad of stars danced in front of his eyes, and his body went limp.

CHAPTER 3. Trapped.

RANGER DAVE ELTON came back to consciousness again to find himself tied up hand and foot, and leaning against the side of the hut with his captors round him. Someone had thrown a pannikin of water on his face, and, as he opened his eyes, the man with the wounded wrist leaned forward and glared at him.

"About time you sat up and took notice again, Mr. Ranger!" he snarled. "This is where we get some of our own back!"

He raised his hand, and struck Elton across the mouth with his open palm, a vicious, cowardly blow.

"Quit that, Pete!" the tall leader said, gripping the man by the shoulder and dragging him away. "We don't want to spoil the ranger's beauty—yet!"

Dave's dazed brain was clearing now, and he looked up at the lean, evil face.

"What brought you here, ranger, and what's the game?" the man demanded.

"Don't think you need to ask that," Dave returned. "You know what

happened down there on the Pine Falls trail. You robbed an old man, and shot him up. I guess that's enough to make any man follow you!"

The narrow, close-set eyes flashed. "Oh, so you trailed us, did you? Waal, that's a bad job for you, ranger! You're the first man who's done that; and I shouldn't be at all surprised if you weren't the last!"

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and a grim smile flickered on his thin lips.

"I reckon we'd always be safe above the snowline," he said. "You rangers are supposed to keep to your timber belts, ain't you?"

"That all depends," Ranger Dave returned.

"Anyhow, the timber belts are safer for you," the man went on. "You're workin' this on a lone hand, ain't you?"

He grinned sourly. "They won't think o' lookin' for you up here, ranger," he added. "No one lives above the snowline. That's what they think down below."

He laughed harshly.

"I could tell you a whole lot of things about us," he snarled. "We've been here gettin' on two years. Wonder if you remember that job down along at Malders Ferry. We fetched away ten thousand dollars that trip! Then there was old Tim Darrell's outfit at Black

Deer Creek. They panned out pretty well, too."

Dave Elton watched the speaker intently. He was referring to two cases of robbery which had taken place during the past six months, cases which had baffled the sheriff and the local authorities.

"Fine kind o' headquarters we've got up here," the man continued. "No one thinks of lookin' above the snowline, you see, and it won't do for anyone to get wise."

He leaned towards the bound figure and nodded his head.

"We've got to silence you, Mr. Ranger," he said. "You've butted into something, and you've got to pay. You'll never leave this little retreat of ours alive!"

There was no mistaking the deadly meaning in his words. This hiding-place, high in the hills, was an ideal retreat and a very safe one.

The lean-jawed leader took a turn up and down before the hut, then halted in front of Ranger Dave again.

"You walked into this, and you've got to pay," he said. "It was just sheer luck that made me find this quiet, little shack, hidden away all by itself in the snowlands, and I don't figure on anyone findin' out about it. It makes a mighty handy hiding-place. It would have paid you better, ranger, to have gone on to Pine Falls, 'stead of hittin' our trail, for you ain't got the ghost of a chance of lettin' anyone know what's happened."

He took his revolver out of his pocket and balanced it in his hand.

There was no doubt about the man's evil intentions. He was perfectly capable of shooting to kill there and then. Dave Elton's life hung on a hair for a moment, but he revealed no sign of fear.

Although he had listened to the menacing voice in silence, his brain had been hard at work; and now, as he looked up and met the piercing, level gaze of the outlaw, he smiled quietly.

"I dunno what sort of fool you take me for?" Dave Elton said. "But do you think I'm quite such a darned ass as to come up here all on my lonesome, eh?"

There was an exclamation from Pete, who was lounging on the other side of the doorway of the small hut. He started forward, but an angry gesture from the tall figure brought him to a halt.

"Quit that, ranger," the man said. "You're not goin' to tell me there's anyone with you. I know the ways of you fellows. You always work the lone hand."

Dave leaned back against the hut. "That's true enough, sometimes," he returned placidly. "But trackin' down hold-up crooks like you isn't a ranger's job, don't forget. You'll find out a bit more about it when Sheriff Thomas looks in here. I'm not the only man who can follow the trail across the snowlands!"

He met the level, searching glance without moving a muscle, and Pete muttered something to the other man. They drew aside, and the third rascal joined them. They whispered together for a few moments, but Dave could not hear what was being said, although now and again the harsh voice of the leader came to him as it was raised in angry protest.

Finally the trio came back across the narrow hollow, and, while the leader and the thick-set Pete entered the hut, the man with the wounded wrist crossed

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to where Dave was seated, and, stooping, he cut the cords that bound the ranger's ankles, jerking him up on to his feet.

"You've got to come along wi' me," he said. "And don't forget, I'm right behind you, ready to shoot!"

He gave his prisoner a shove, forcing Elton forward a few paces. Then the ranger felt the muzzle of a revolver pressed against his back, and his guide marched him across the cup-like space into the narrow gap. They walked down between the high cliffs for a few yards, then Dave was turned to the left and forced to climb through a fissure, down which a narrow stream trickled. At a spot where a ledge of black rock jutted out over the brook, his guide harshly ordered him to halt.

"Squat there, and don't make a noise!"

Dave seated himself, and his custodian, climbing on to the rock, squatted down behind him. They were out of sight of the narrow gap, but presently Dave heard footfalls, and a few moments later the tall leader appeared lower down the channel.

"Keep your eye on him, Loo!" he called. "We'll just test out that theory of his."

"You can leave him to me, boss," Elton's guardian returned.

The tall crook went on again, and Dave listened to the heavy footfalls until they died in the silence. He knew what had happened; his quiet bluff had worked so far as to make those two rascals go off out of their

hiding-place in order to assure themselves that the sheriff and his posse were not tracking them through the snowlands.

They would probably get their horses, and would ride down to the edge of the timber. That would take them some time, and it might be the best part of a couple of hours before they returned.

Dave pretended to yawn, then, turning on his side, he stretched himself out on the rough surface of the boulder, facing his guard. The man had lighted a pipe, and he was puffing at it.

His injured arm was tucked into his shirt, and his revolver was lying across his knees.

The sun was beating down on the mountain top, and presently the man drew his hat lower over his eyes, to shade himself from the fierce rays.

Without moving a muscle, Dave had placed his bound wrists against a rough, jagged edge of the rock, and was hard at work rubbing the cord to and fro. He kept his shoulders steady, and, lying on his side as he was, that slow, steady movement was completely hidden from the hangdog ruffian facing him.

"You'll get yours when they come back, ranger," the man began presently. "You can take my word on it. We don't figure to allow any fellow like you to beat us to it."

He sidled down the rock a little further in an effort to avoid the sun that was raining down remorselessly on his head and shoulders. Dave, sawing away grimly, felt the first slackening of the cord that sent a swift thrill through him.

(Continued on page 27.)

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BEAT-EN!

Young Murphy, eager to join the police-force, came to London to pass the necessary medical examination. This he easily did, and the next day he was interviewed by a high official. "Well, my man," said the latter, "you look a promising sort of fellow; where were you educated?" "Oh," said the recruit, "shure I was educated in Dublin." "Ah, and you have a good knowledge, I hope?" "I have, sor!" "I wonder can you tell me, for example, how many miles it is from London to Manchester?" At this the recruit became nervously agitated, and at length he blurted out: "Look here, bejabbers, if you're going to put me on that beat, I'm done wi' the force!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Eric Fields, 106, Moss Lane, Hale, Altrincham.

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CURIOUS COINCIDENCE!

The conductor of a train in the Wild West, observed a tramp stowed away on the front end of the baggage truck. He ordered the brakeman to throw him off at the next station. The brakeman went, but he was about to start the throwing-off process when the tramp drew a revolver and advised him to retreat. The advice seemed good, and the brakeman took it. Upon his return, the conductor asked him if he had got rid of the tramp. "No," returned the brakeman, "I didn't have the heart to turn him off. You see, he turned out to be an old schoolmate of mine." "That don't cut no ice with me!" said the conductor angrily. "Just wait until I get him. You'll see something flying in the air, then!" The conductor went forward, but soon returned, looking pale. "Well, and did you throw him off?" asked the brakeman. "No," answered the conductor, "he—er—turned out to be an old schoolmate of mine, too!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to E. N. F. Caldwell, 30, Love Street, Paisley, N.B.

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A plucky Lancashire boy sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire. This is famous David Goodwin's most powerful story.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

TOM COMPTON, a young piercer, formerly of Barton's Mills, sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire.

Mill after mill had suffered at the hands of this treacherous foe. At last Tom, by chance, actually catches the Spider in Barton's Mill. He gives chase, but the Spider, a sinister figure in blue goggles, makes good his escape. He drops a pocket-book, however, from which Tom Compton obtains valuable information.

Tom is unable to save Barton's Mill, which is blown up, the owner being killed. From that time it becomes Tom's only ambition to crush the Spider. He obtains a post through a friend, Dick Stearns, on the staff of the "Clarion," the offices of which are next to those of the Spider's. Here he meets Dennis Gale, another victim of the Spider's handiwork, who promises to assist him in his great fight. The Spider plans to capture Compton and Stearns, but his attempt proves futile.

Later, another mill is threatened, and Peter Grant, the manager, calls for Compton's assistance. Tom hurries to the scene, and is just in time to avert disaster. Then, weeding out the Spider's underlings, he is instrumental in getting the mill in full swing again. Victory achieved, he is returning to the "Clarion" offices in company with Dennis and Gale, when a wagon, its horses out of control, comes pounding upon him.

(Now read on.)

The Poisoned Sponge!

A CRY of horror burst from Dick and Dennis as they saw their comrade overtaken. It rang in Tom's ears above the yell of the driver, the snorts of the maddened horses, and the thunder of the wagon.

The pole struck him slantwise on the shoulder and knocked him off his feet. It is said that people with a vivid imagination die twice—once when they feel death close upon them, and once when it comes. In that fraction of a second Tom thought he felt the murderous hoofs beating on his skull, and expected the great wheels to grind over him and crack his spine.

What really happened, he never knew, but the impact of the pole sent him flying. It hurled him against the wall, and, by a miraculous piece of luck, he was flung into the very doorway he had so nearly reached. His head struck the lintel with a splintering crack, and he sank down senseless in the recess just as the great wagon thundered past with a roar and a rattle of hoofs and wheels.

A livid mist seemed to fill his brain, and all was blank.

The instant the wagon passed, Dick Stearns and Dennis came running up with horrified faces and beating hearts, hurrying to where Tom lay, yet dreading what they might find. The white, still figure, when they reached it, made them fear the worst.

"He's dead!" moaned Dennis, dropping on his knees beside the insensible boy. "T' villains ha' had their way at last. They've finished him! Oh, Tom, Tom!"

"Gently!" said Dick, who knew something of injuries, lifting Tom's head on his knees. "He's had a bad shaking-up, but he isn't dead, by a long way. He'll live to beat 'em yet!"

"Thank Heaven!" gasped Dennis. And the tears rolled down the rough little fellow's face. "He'll live, then—say he'll live, Dick!"

"He's had a bad knock on the head," said Dick; "his forehead struck the lintel. Why, his shoulder's wet with blood! That's where the pole struck him. It's only a flesh wound, though. Tom's as hard as nails. He wants a doctor, though; and he'll have to lie up a day or two."

"Let's get him home, then, and quickly!" said Dennis.

Dick hesitated a moment.

"No," he said; "they'd move heaven and earth to finish him off if he were in a private house, and there are a dozen ways they could do it, however closely we guarded him. If danger threatened the house—fire or explosives—we might not get him out in time now he's helpless. It's too risky. A hospital's the place."

"Ay!" said Dennis eagerly. "St. Simon's Hospital. Not all the villainy t' Spider ever contrived can find a way in there. Stand guard over him while I run for an ambulance."

Duncheater was well equipped with street ambulances, for they had plenty of work. There was seldom a day when some poor broken human frame was not brought out of the great mills and carried away, shrouded, to the hospital or the mortuary. And since the Spider's power had settled on the city they had been busy indeed.

In four or five minutes Dennis was back with a covered ambulance and its volunteer carriers. Tom's silent form was lifted tenderly and placed inside, and the little carriage wheeled away to its destination. Dick and Dennis walking on either side of it, and keeping an

anxious look-out. Soon the little piercer came round to Dick's side.

"We're shadowed," he whispered; "there's one o' t' Spider's spies just behind. They think he's dead, most like; but they're watching to see if we go to t' hospital or t' mortuary."

"Thank goodness they can do no harm once we're inside!" returned Dick, beneath his breath, as the great grey doors of St. Simon's appeared before them. "He'll be safe till he's sound and well again, anyway."

In all the long struggle against the Spider the two boys had never felt such security as when they found themselves in the wide, cool hall of the famous hospital. There was nothing but order and cleanliness, charity, and skill in healing. There was no door by which a villain could creep in, and none came here but the sick and injured, and those appointed to take care of them.

The superintendent received the party, and Dick soon smoothed things over. He saw no sense in running risks even here, and did not mean Tom to be taken to the public wards, where visitors were allowed to see the other patients.

"Our friend's had a bad shake-up," he said, "but he isn't dangerously hurt. We want to pay for everything. Can we have a private ward?"

"Certainly!" said the superintendent. "There are three empty. The junior surgeon is out, but the house-surgeon will attend to your friend at once."

In a twinkling Tom was put comfortably to bed in a private room, between cool sheets, a bowl of flowers on the window-sill, and everything clean and comfortable. Dick and Dennis begged to be allowed to stay till all was settled, and as it was seen how anxious the two friends were, no objection was made.

"You will be able to stay while he is attended to if you like," said the matron. "The house-surgeon will be here in a minute."

It was some little time, however, before the surgeon arrived—a kindly, capable-looking man, and he was greatly hurried.

"I am called away to a very urgent case that is just coming in," he said, "in another ward. But Dr. Kennedy Blair, from St. Eldred's, will be here immediately, and he will attend to your friend. He is more skilful than I," added the surgeon, with a smile; and he hastened out.

"Kennedy Blair's a good man," said Dick. "He's a famous Manchester

surgeon. Just slip down to the hall, Denny, if they'll let you, and ring up Mr. Grant on the telephone, and let him know what's happened. He may be counting on Tom."

Dennis went down, and a few moments later Dr. Blair entered, briskly but quietly. He was a tall man, with jet-black hair and broad, black eyebrows, that met across his forehead in a band half an inch wide, and he had long, supple white hands. He nodded to Dick, then stepped across to the bed and examined Tom, who was still insensible.

"Nothing serious," he said quietly to Dick, with a hard, dry smile. "No, he won't get concussion of the brain; you needn't worry. I will bandage his head and dress that wound on his shoulder, and there's no reason why he shouldn't be out to-morrow. He's a hardy youngster. I'll go and prepare my bandages."

He left the room with noiseless tread. Down in the telephone-room in the hall Dennis was informing Grant of the accident, and when he hung up the receiver he went quietly upstairs.

Just off the staircase, half-way up, he paused for a moment. A little laboratory opened there, and through the door, which was slightly ajar, Dennis saw Dr. Blair at work.

"He's getting the dressings ready for Tom," thought Dennis. He was about to pass on, when he checked himself. At that moment he saw something that filled him with a vague, unknown fear.

The black-haired doctor was standing with his side towards the boy, and on his dark face was a flickering, sinister smile. Through the chink of the door Dennis saw he held a damp sponge in his hand, which he was moistening with stuff from a large bottle on the shelf.

"That's antiseptic stuff," thought Dennis, who had once been treated himself for a badly-cut arm, acquired in the mill, "to prevent infection."

It was not that, but the next action that made him uneasy. The surgeon took another, a smaller sponge, and treated it in the same way. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he put his finger and thumb in his waistcoat-pocket, checked himself, glanced swiftly around the room, and stepped across to close the door.

Dennis flattened himself back against the wall, but the instant the door was shut he apphed his eye to the keyhole. It was an action he loathed, but what he had seen aroused horrible suspicions in his mind, and for Tom's sake he made no scruples about it.

Through the keyhole he saw the surgeon, smiling still more evilly, draw a tiny corked glass tube from his waistcoat-pocket and uncork it with great caution. What there was in it Dennis could not see, but the surgeon shook it downwards gently, and dabbed its mouth several times over the smoothest side of the sponge.

Dennis watched with a sort of startled fascination. He hardly knew what was happening; it was not much the little piecer knew of medicine and science. But there was something so strange about the action, so evil about the face of the doctor, that he felt a tiny shiver run through him.

He waited no longer, but sped noiselessly up the stairs and made his way into the ward again.

"Dick!" he whispered, "there's something wrong!"

"What!" exclaimed Dick. "How?"

Rapidly and clearly Dennis recounted all he had seen in the little laboratory on the stairs. When he had finished, Dick Stearn's face was ashy white.

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"He's not Kennedy Blair at all!" said Dennis ominously.

"Yes, he is. I've seen him before. He's none too straight. There was a scandal about him years ago, which has blown over. Money will do everything, and the Spider's squared him somehow. We must save Tom from him at all costs. Lucky Tom's unconscious still!"

Dennis smothered an ejaculation as he glanced at the bed. Tom was awake. He was white as the pillow he lay on, but his eyes were unnaturally bright and alert.

"I've heard all you said," he murmured.

"He'll go into a fever, or something," muttered Dick, hurrying to the bedside, "if he knows of this! Lie down, Tom, old chap; it's all right!"

"Don't be an ass, Dick!" said Tom coolly. "Do you think I'm a baby? We've got to defeat this surgeon, or he'll finish me! If he touches me with that sponge I'm done for! I'll tell you how to do it."

The two boys listened eagerly. Pale, wan, and broken as he was, Tom still had his unconquered wits about him. The danger was appalling, but he was not beaten yet.

"Dick," he said, "you know Harry Grenville; I've met him at your rooms. He's a medical student here, and keen on bacteriology and microscope work. What's better, he doesn't fear man or devil. Send Dennis to find him and bring him here."

"Yes," said Dick. "What then?"

"You must get hold of that sponge, by hook or crook, and prevent Blair from using it on me. If he does, I'm a dead man! Get it by strategy, if possible, and, if not, use force. When you've got the sponge, let Harry Grenville test it, and prove what there is on it, and we shall have Dr. Kennedy Blair by the hip! Whatever poison there is—unless Denny's made a mistake—he's put there. Do you see?"

"I'll do it!" exclaimed Dick. "Denny, scoot off and—"

But the little piecer had already gone. He knew there was no time to lose, and that the only living creature he cared for in the world was in fearful danger. He was off to seek Harry Grenville, the student, and Tom knew he could trust the boy to find him.

"Don't fear, Tom," said Dick. "The scoundrel shan't bring his plot to a finish. I'll stop him, at any cost, of course!"

"You'll have the dickens' own job if you're not spry," said Tom faintly, but pluckily. "A surgeon's got complete authority in a hospital. If you make a row too soon, he'll call the attendants, have you pitched out, an' there'll be nobody to stop him. He may get rid of you, anyway, beforehand."

A sudden flash of thought shone in Tom's eyes.

"Here's the plan," he said; "easy as winking, no violence. Slip down into the—"

He broke off suddenly and fought for breath. He tried to go on, but the deadly feeling of torpor swept over him again, and he saw the room swimming before his eyes. Before he could finish he sank back senseless on the pillow.

Dick rose up, appalled to find himself face to face with such a problem. Honest Stearns, loyal as he was, and clever in his own line, had not the ready, all-round resourcefulness of his young friend. He saw Tom had a plan in his head which would defeat the surgeon's plot, but the boy had not had time to get it out. And

at that moment Dr. Blair himself came into the room, with a thick-set assistant behind him bearing the bowl, sponges, and bandages.

"You here still?" he said, with a slight frown at Dick.

"I should like to stay, if I may, sir," replied Dick.

He did not add that nothing short of death would have removed him from that room just then.

The surgeon hesitated a moment.

"Very well," he said; "you may stop. It is only a matter of a few moments. When it is done you must go. The patient must be kept quiet."

Dick caught the faint, ugly leer that crept into the surgeon's eye as he said the last words. With skilful hands the assistant placed the things ready, and the surgeon bared Tom's shoulder and took up the larger sponge.

Dick waited in an agony of anxiety for Dennis' step and the help he would bring with him. He knew that to declare war too soon, with two to one against him, and no help at hand, would probably end in his being overpowered and the surgeon doing the fatal deed in spite of him.

He watched anxiously the big sponge being dipped in the bowl of disinfectant. That, at any rate, was sure proof that the sponge could do no harm. The wound was dressed with it. Then the surgeon, his thin lips tightening, picked up the smaller sponge.

"Excuse me, doctor," said Dick, stepping forward with a white face. "You cannot use that sponge!"

The surgeon glared at him, and as he saw the boy's white face, and heard his commanding tones, his own eye gleamed dangerously. He perceived like a flash that his secret had been discovered.

"Hold him!" he said curtly to his attendant.

Before he could move, Dick found himself pinioned from behind by a pair of powerful arms.

"Put him outside," said Blair coolly, and lifted the sponge to apply it to the wound.

With a wild cry Dick put out all his strength, and fought madly with his captor. At most times he would have been no match for the burly assistant, but despair lent him force. He launched out two back kicks that landed violently on his captor's shins, and with a mighty wrench broke away from him and hurled himself on the surgeon.

Bowled Out!

IN the very nick of time Dick thrust Blair violently from the bed, and snatched the sponge from his fingers.

With a roar of rage the surgeon turned on him, and at that moment the door opened sharply, and in came Dennis, with a tall, good-looking young fellow of about twenty-four by his side.

"What on earth's this?" said the newcomer—for it was Harry Grenville, the medical student Tom had spoken of.

"Throw that young ruffian out!" shouted Blair, beside himself with rage, trying to wrest the sponge from Dick. "He threw himself on me as I was dressing a wound, and snatched the sponge from me."

"Is this true, Dick?" exclaimed Grenville. "You've made a mistake, if it is."

"The sponge is poisoned!" cried Dick. "I accuse this man of attempted murder!" He wrenched himself free from Blair.

"This is a precious lawless proceeding," remarked Grenville. "I hope you fellows haven't made a mistake, or we shall find ourselves in devilish hot water."

"Don't you want your chemicals and test-tubes and things?" inquired Dick, as Grenville took out a big microscope and focused it carefully.

There was no answer. Dead silence reigned in the room. Grenville spent some time over the slide, and then examined another, while the boys waited breathlessly. Everything hung on the student's verdict. Dick took a glance at Blair's face; it was an unwholesome grey, like a fish's belly.

"The sponge," said Grenville slowly, "is impregnated with the bacilli of both pyæmia and septæmia."

"Talk English, Harry!" said Dick, with anxious impatience.

"There are some millions of the microbes of the worst forms of blood-poisoning on this sponge," said the student. "One touch of it on the wound, and all the doctors in Europe could not save the victim from one of the most horrible deaths known to science."

"You can't prove it!" cried Blair hoarsely. "It was not my fault! The bacilli of pyæmia do cause deaths after operations in hospitals, and they form of themselves."

"Do you mean to suggest," said Grenville, eyeing him, "that these germs came upon the sponge by accident?"

"Of course they did! Do you dare to accuse me of putting them there?" He laughed sneeringly. "Do you think you can trace organic microbes to my personal action?"

"I know nowt about bacillary, or whatever his name is," said Dennis, "but this is what he put on t' sponge!"

And, with a sharp movement forward, the little piecer thrust his fingers into the surgeon's waistcoat-pocket, and snatched out the tiny glass tube he had seen used in the laboratory.

"Put that under thy spy-glass, mister," he said to Grenville, handing him the tube.

Dr. Kennedy Blair fell back in a dead faint.

"Well done, Denny!" said a weak voice from the bed. "Look after the surgeon—he's hurt."

The others started, and turned to find Tom in his senses again, regarding the scene with glassy eyes.

"Lie quiet, Compton!" said Grenville kindly. "It's all right, and we've got all we need. Never mind Blair; he's shamming most likely."

"Not he," said Tom feebly. "Tisn't much wonder he's fainted, poor beggar! Give him some brandy, Grenville. I want to speak to him."

Grenville did as he was asked, though he looked as if he would prefer to ram the bottle down the doctor's throat. Blair coughed and sat up in a dazed way. He had struck his head against the waistcoat in falling, the blood was trickling down his ashen face, and altogether he looked a pitiable object, utterly broken and beaten.

"The next thing to do," said Grenville grimly, "is to get a constable, and lock him up."

"Yes, fetch a policeman, Denny," said Dick. "Take care he's from Stanford Street."

"Not from Stanford Street or any other street," said Tom, raising himself. "Give him another tot of brandy and let him go."

"What!" exclaimed the others. The surgeon stared dumbly.

"Listen to me, Dr. Kennedy Blair," said Tom. "I want to know what the Spider paid you for this job."

"I don't know what you mean by that," said Blair humbly; "but I'll tell the truth. There's no way out of it. I was given five hundred pounds by a man in workman's clothes—some enemy of yours, I guessed, but I don't know who he was—and the promise of another thousand if the—the business was a success."

The surgeon covered his face with his hands and gulped.

"It's brought you to the door of penal servitude and absolute ruin," said Tom. "I'm going to let you off the penal servitude, but the ruin stands—as far as doctoring goes. You are not fit to hold a position as a doctor, with the lives of people in your care."

"The best thing you can do is to skip the country, and try and earn an honest living on fresh lines. I'm not going to let you start in England again. There are four of us here, all witnesses, with ample evidence to send you to Dartmoor Prison for the rest of your life. If I ever hear of you setting up as a doctor—and I shall hear of it, if you do—I'll send you there without fail. As long as you run straight we shall hold our tongues, for it's my own affair, and possibly I may want you some day. Now go!"

Dr. Kennedy Blair rose, slowly and heavily, and stood for a moment with bent head.

"You are right, lad," he said, in a voice he hardly recognised. "I—I'm glad I didn't succeed. Thank you! I don't know why you do this, but thank you, and good-bye!"

And, with stooping shoulders, his face looking ten years older, the man who had been saved from the crime of Cain slunk out of the room, and left the hospital for ever.

The Warning Message!

"GOOD heavens!" muttered Grenville. "I wouldn't have let the scoundrel go! I've a mind to go after him and have him stopped!"

"Stay where you are, Grenville," said Tom. "It's my show, you know. He didn't try to murder you. We've got bigger fish to fry. He's only an outside link of the chain, and would be no use to us. We're close on the track of the Spider himself and his principal men, and I've no time to waste on prosecuting outsiders; and this creature's done no harm. Besides, we've got him if ever he dares show up again, which he won't. I may have a use for him by-and-by."

"Tom's right," said Dick, drawing a long breath. "He knows what he's about. You hang on to that tube of germs, Harry, and keep it."

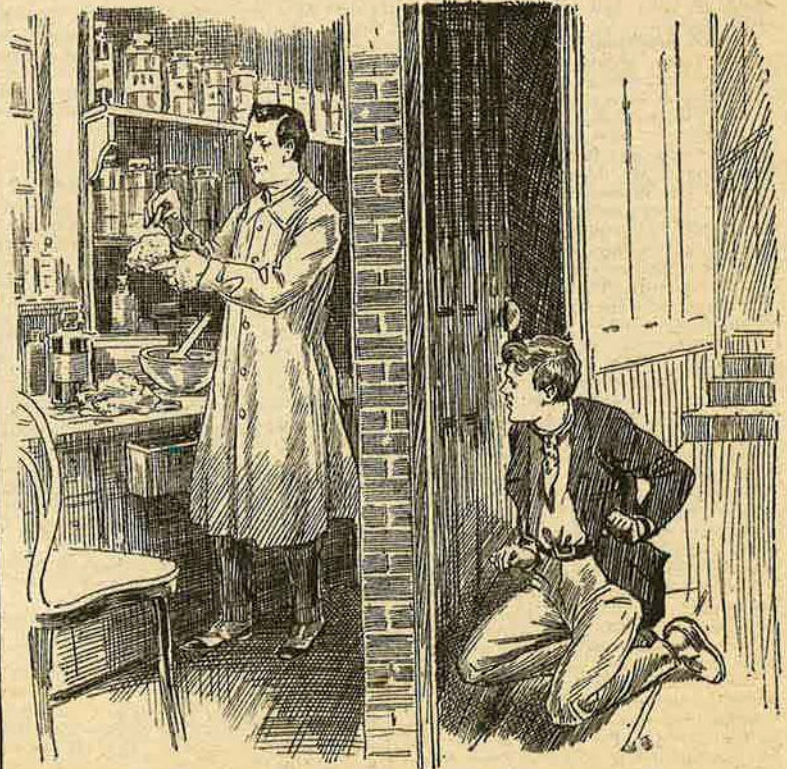
"Ay, Tom's right!" echoed Dennis. "Thou hasn't seen all the game yet, Mr. Grenville."

"Well, I suppose you'll go your own way," said Grenville; "but now I'm going to have mine. You've got to keep quiet for twenty-four hours, Tom, or you'll break down."

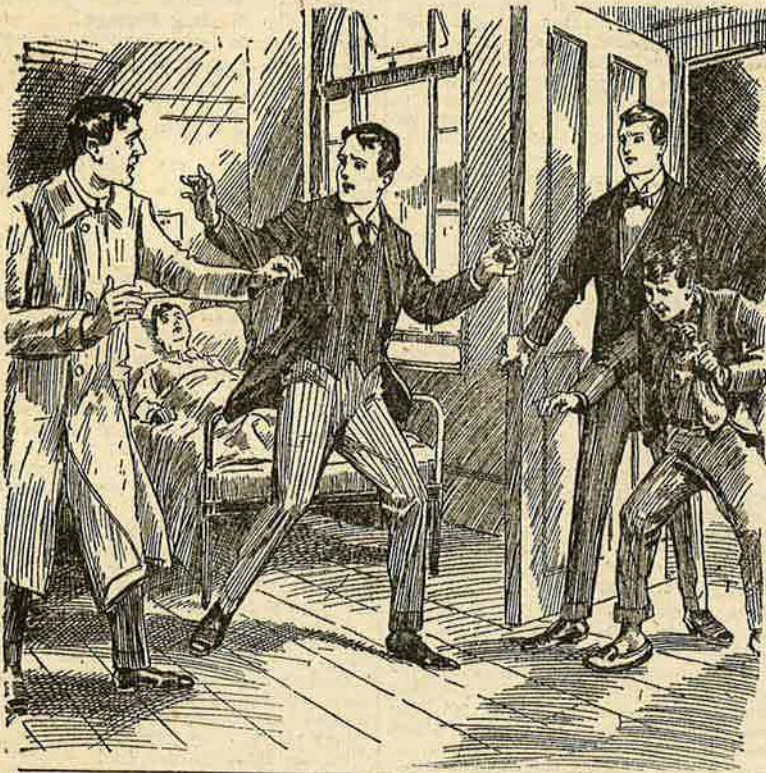
"Can't afford to break down," said Tom fretfully. "and I must be up to-morrow, so I'll obey."

Grenville dressed his injuries for him with deft fingers, and announced his intention of mounting guard over his young patient till he could leave, having Dick and Dennis within call.

His slight wounds were of small account, and at ten o'clock next day he was so fit, and so fretful at being kept a prisoner, that Grenville and the house



Dennis Gale looking through the keyhole, saw the surgeon uncork the tiny glass tube and dab its mouth several times over the sponge he was holding.



Dick Stearns wrenched himself free from Blair's grip as Dennis, accompanied by Grenville, entered the room. "This sponge is poisoned!" he cried. "I accuse this man of attempted murder!"

surgeon, who had returned, discharged him as well.

Tom's wonderful vitality stood him in good stead. Work was better for him than resting, and so keen was he on the fight that he was ready to plunge into it again without delay.

Luckily for him—since he was in no condition for any further strain just then—he found Mr. Morton Kane was still away. He hurried to Hargreave Buildings to report as soon as he was able, but learnt that his employer was not expected back for two days, nor was there any way of communicating with him.

Consequently, Tom Compton had two days' rest, and he needed them. But he spent most of the time in inquiries on his own account, and chafed greatly at the delay. His luck seemed to have deserted him, for on the morning of the third day he went to the buildings, to find that Mr. Kane had been there, but had left again immediately, leaving no message. Tom went off to find Dick Stearns, but could get no help from him. The boy called at the offices again later in the afternoon, but Mr. Kane had not returned, though they expected him. Tom waited some time, and then went out, intending to snatch a hurried meal.

He was standing at the window of a restaurant, wondering if it was not too crowded for him to waste time in trying to get served there, when he felt somebody brush against him.

"Open it in private! Hurry!" whispered a voice suddenly in his ear.

Something was thrust into Tom's hand in the crowd. He turned sharply, but for the life of him he could not tell who had spoken, and there was no face near

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that he knew. Quick to act, Tom got clear of the crowd, and in a side alley opened the missive that had been thrust into his grasp.

It was a piece of folded paper, torn and stained, but the words within it made Tom whistle with astonishment.

"Is it a trap?" he muttered.

"I am in the hands of the enemy," it read, scrawled in pencil. "I have only you now to look to. Do not fail me. I write this on a launch in the Mersey, and have just learnt they are taking me to the old hulk on Branton Sands. Go there with all speed, and you may be in time to save me, or at least to avenge me. I fear the worst, and have little hope of this reaching you.

"MORTON KANE."

There was a postscript begun, but broken off, as if the writer had been interrupted.

"It's a trick!" was Tom's first thought. "This is a trap, and a clumsy one, too, for the Spider to set. He generally does better than this sort of thing."

He paused a moment. Was he right, or was Morton Kane really in danger? If so, how would Tom ever forgive himself if he stood aloof and gave no help?

He looked at the letter still more intently.

"I believe it's genuine!" he muttered. "It's Kane's writing. The Spider can disguise, but he can't forge. I know that. I know Kane's handwriting, too, and I can swear to this. Even if it were a trap I must go!"

Without an instant's delay he dashed off to the station. There was no train

going direct to his destination, but by good luck there was one to Birkenhead just starting. Within six minutes of receiving the message Tom was rolling westwards.

"I know that hulk on the sands," he muttered, as he threw himself back in the seat, "an old barque that was driven ashore years ago, and her hull still stands. I went all over her at low tide when I was there on my three days' holiday."

The train went much too slow to please Tom, and when he found it stopping at all the local stations he was in agony at the delay.

"What am I to do?" he cried. "Life and death hangs on my journey, and there's no faster way!"

At last, making a rapid calculation of the distance on the small railway map in the panel of the compartment, Tom made up his mind to get down at a station from which he might, with luck, strike across to Branton, and reach it in quicker time than by going to Birkenhead. He jumped out as the train drew up, and raced off to a bicycle shop in the little town.

The shopman made demur at letting his machine to a stranger, but Tom was armed with the sinews of war, and, slapping down a five-pound note, bought the best second-hand light racer in the shop, distrusting new machines. Leaving the astonished shopman to gape, he mounted and pedalled off at lightning speed, not even waiting to light the lamp.

A shouting village policeman tried to stop him half-way, but Tom dodged, and tore onwards. It had been dark for some time now, and the last part of the journey Tom had to abandon the bicycle and scurry over loose sands of the upper beach on foot. At last he reached the spot he was making for.

"The tide's half up," he muttered. "Is there never a boat?"

The strong salt wind whistled in from the sea, and all around was empty desolation. Only the curlew's pipe in the distance broke the stillness, and far out to sea a lightship winked and blinked steadily in the velvet dark.

Tom threw himself flat on the sand, and by looking straight along seawards, he could catch the loom of the old hulk against the night sky, half a mile out. At low water it was possible to wade across the channel and gain the higher sand on which she lay, but now all was covered by the tide.

Tom ran along the beach towards some old huts where fishermen mended their nets in the daytime, and to his great joy he found a rough, tarry boat, with her heavy oars lashed to the thwarts, tied to a post.

With an effort he managed to drag her down, and, cutting the oars loose, he sculled out with all speed towards the hulk.

He was no great oarsman, but he knew enough to get a boat along, and agonising anxiety made him do his utmost. He forced her alongside the hulk, and clambered to the deck.

The instant he was aboard he felt his side-pocket to feel that his pistol was there, for he still feared a trap, and then he shouted:

"Mr. Kane! Are you here?"

(What has become of Morton Kane? Will Compton rescue him in time? You will find out for yourself when you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial.)

"ROUNDED-UP!"

(Continued from page 22.)

A last strain of his lacerated wrists saw his bonds part, and, with his hands still behind him, Dave clenched and unclenched his fingers until the numbed limbs regained their strength again.

"We won't even waste a bullet on you, you skunk!" the man went on. "A lot of nice, long, deep drops here, into twenty or thirty feet of snow at some places, and it's snow that never melts. D'you get me? You'll lie there till round about doomsday, and, mebbe, a day or two after that!"

He had leaned forward slightly, his ugly face twisted into a look of malignant glee as he baited his prisoner.

Dave Elton watched that long, lean jaw as it swayed above him, then, as the man made another duck of his head to emphasise his point, Dave Elton struck sharply, round and upward. The blow came with lightning-like swiftness, and the hard, bunched knuckles landed full on the point of the jaw.

As the ruffian swayed backwards he tried to grab at his pistol, but it fell from his knee, and in another moment Elton was on his feet, and had lifted the revolver. The half-dazed crook made a desperate effort to reach Dave, clutching at him as he half-rose to his knees, but the ranger rammed his fist into the rascal's face again, and the man rolled over, sprawling across the face of the rock, to fall in a heap into the tiny stream below.

From the flat rock Dave Elton leaped out on to a small spur, clambering up to the top of the cliff, then, working his way along the rough boulder, he reached the edge of the fissure, and had a clear view of the ground below.

He was just in time to see the two figures dismounting from their horses. They had returned from their search, and he saw them turn to breast the dark slope.

That way of escape was closed to him, and, after a moment's pause, the ranger turned and commenced to work his way through the high boulders, creeping from shelter to shelter, until he was once again on the wind-swept space that looked over the hollow where the shed stood.

An angry cry echoing up the hollow warned him that the leader had found his subordinate, and, flat on his face, Dave warned his way to the edge of the sheer cliff, and lay there, waiting.

He saw the length of fuse lying where he had left it, the frayed end twisted round a small stick.

Heavy footfalls came to him, and he saw Pete come lumbering through the gap supporting the half-dazed guard. The tall leader followed him, and his lean face was contorted with rage as he barged through the gap.

He hurried past his companions, and Dave saw him draw his revolver as he reached the shed and entered. An angry oath sounded as he emerged again.

"Ho ain't here, I tell you—he ain't here!" he called. "We've got to look for him, for he's hiding somewhere about. D'you get me?"

Drawing back from the edge of the cliff, Dave fumbled in his pocket, and drew out a small pipe-lighter. Reaching out he placed the lighter against the frayed edge of the fuse, then released the spring. A little spurt of flame shot

out, and the fuse began to burn, a tiny thread of smoke marking the swift run of the glowing sparks along the fuse.

Dave Elton slipped behind a boulder, then, leaning forward, he called:

"Below, there!"

He heard the angry voices rise, and a shot came snarling over the edge of the cliff.

"Come on, you fools; we'll get him—we'll get him!"

Dave ventured to look out from the top of the shelter. He saw the leader hurrying across from the shed, heading for the narrow gap, while Pete and the other man were running at his heels.

"Better stop, you all!" Dave Elton cried. "There's something goin' to happen in a minute!"

The leader flung round, and his arm was raised at the same moment. A shot snarled against the boulder just as Elton dropped out of sight.

"We'll get you—we'll get you, you skunk!" the angry voice shouted.

"I shouldn't be too sure of that!" Dave Elton called back. "If you ain't very careful something's going to get you. There, what did I tell you?"

The latter part of his warning was drowned by a deep, hollow roar, and from below the poised boulder there shot out a great fountain of earth and rubble.

A yell of fear went up from the trio, and they flung themselves aside. They were only just in the nick of time, for next instant that massive boulder came hurtling down from the cliffs, to fall into the narrow, cleft-like opening to the hollow, while on top of it there rained a shower of smaller boulders and stones.

When the dust cloud drifted away Dave saw that the narrow gap was completely blocked, and a solid twelve-foot wall of rock concealed the entrance.

"You can try to get over that if you like," Dave Elton called. "But the first man who puts his head above it gets a bullet in it. I got the drop on you all from here."

He seated himself with his back against the boulder, and listened to the angry voices of the three rascals below. They were caught like rats in a trap, and from side to side of the deep hollow they moved, searching in vain for an outlet.

Finally, the leader tackled that blocked-up opening, but Dave was on the

watch, saw the long hand appear as it reached for the top of the great boulder, and promptly sent a bullet through the thin palm, bringing the man down with a yell of agony.

"I've got you gaoled, and gaoled you'll stay until they come along and take you down to Pine Falls!" Dave Elton called.

It was late in the afternoon before the clattering of horses hoofs and the sound of voices from the path below made Dave fire three quick shots as a signal; and when Sheriff Thomas, a ruddy-faced, brown-bearded man, came clambering over the boulder, followed by half a dozen sturdy lumbermen, he found Dave Elton on guard over the outlaws.

"I figured it out that I couldn't take 'em all down to you single-handed, sheriff," Ranger Dave drawled. "So I did the next best thing. I trapped 'em and held 'em till you came."

After the sheriff and his men had swarmed over the barrier rock and had taken charge of their prisoners a search in the hut revealed proofs of many recent robberies carried out by the gang.

Among the treasure trove was the wad of notes which had been stolen from the old trader.

At nightfall Dave Elton parted company with the sheriff and his posse and their prisoners as they entered the timber belt to head on down towards Pine Falls.

"Ain't you comin' in with us, then, ranger?" Sheriff Thomas asked.

Dave shook his head.

"No, thanks, sheriff!" he said. "My job's guarding the timber belts, and I've got to get on with it."

He waved his hand and rode quietly off into the thick bushwood, to vanish under the high, stately giants that he guarded.

THE END.

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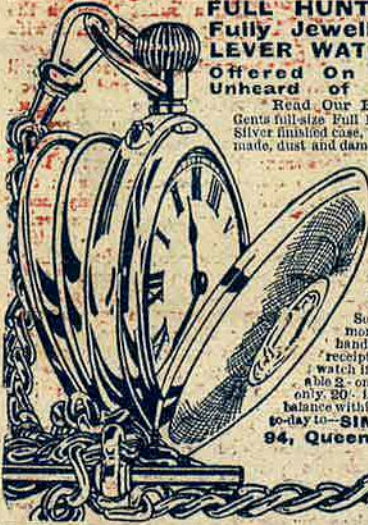
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