

"THE HEROIC COWARD!" Magnificent Extra-Long School Story BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

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GERALD CROOKE'S DARING EXPLOIT!

"Great Scott!" cried George Figgins. "Look at Crooke! He's got Miss Glyn's necklace!" Gerald Crooke, with gleaming eyes, clambered along the footboard of the fast moving train. (A thrilling incident from the grand long tale of Tom Merry & Co., contained in this issue.)



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

Address 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
 "JUNGLE JINKS" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

MY DEAR CHUMS.—Just a word here about a letter that reached me an hour since. The writer says that he "never seems to tire of reading the rattling fine stories in the GEM." That he never will tire of them is a fact which may be taken for granted, seeing that the standard of excellence is always going up higher with each number of the popular paper that comes out.

"UNDER TRIMBLE'S THUMB!" By Martin Clifford.

Take next week's splendid story of St. Jim's, and you will not assuredly have to seek any further for the secret of the tremendous popularity of the GEM. The new yarn is a first line example of the brilliancy of the St. Jim's author. It has its note of tragedy, of course, but its humour is all there, the same cheery, rollicking fun which makes the series so welcome all over the world. It is hardly necessary for me to say much about the coming story, more than to point out that it is typical. It is all typical of the ineffable Baggy Trimble. No bigger humiliation could be conceived than that of eating humble pie at the dictates of Master Trimble. When you learn that such is the ignoble fate of Gerald Cutts; you may feel a twinge of sorrow for Cutts. Of course, Cutts brings it on himself. He falls right into the hands of the treacherous little intriguer, Baggy, and Baggy does not muff his chances of making capital out of the wonderful opportunity which, as it were, drops right on to him out of the clouds. And Cutts has the poorest time of it imaginable. Read this great yarn. It will interest you from first to last.

CONCERNING BAGGY!

An Australian chum sends me a very good letter about the St. Jim's stories. In the course of it he says that Baggy Trimble never seems to have any friends. This is not quite correct. If my chum will look deeper, he will see that time and again Tom Merry and Cardew, among others, have acted as real friends to the miserable little sneak. This is not just an exhibition of lofty patronage. The genuinely good fellow does act that way. He does not reserve his kind actions for those who can revenge him. Not a bit. He stands between some pitiful lump of meanness—such as Baggy—and saves the little toad from the consequences of his wrong-doing. The sight of such conduct cheers one up wonderfully.

fully, and thank goodness actions of the sort are being done daily all over the world.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

There is pleasure for all cricketers and others in next week's issue of the bright and up-to-date supplement. The subject dealt with is cricket, and the number includes a splendid contribution on fast and famous cricket feats, and also a description of how Baggy coached the fags in the great game. Of course, it is easy to imagine Trimble as a champion cricketer. What he does not know of the game is a matter I am not going into here. Baggy has his slanderers, but then so have all great men. I feel sure that Baggy does much to brighten cricket. His exploits as narrated in next week's GEM will cause a hearty laugh.

"ZIGLIO'S LAST CARD!" By Martin Walker.

Nobody can say with any respect for accuracy that Dr. Ziglio has not had a good run for his money. This series winds up in our next number, and the master criminal, who has put the civilised world by the ears, meets his fate. How and in what circumstances you will see. I am inclined to think that the wind-up is as powerful and dramatic as anything yet. Without giving anything away, I should like to say that the end of the chase embarked upon by Jennifer Pettigrew Wren is a tense and thrilling affair. It is spectacular, and at the same time it touches chords of feeling in a way which is inevitable even when black villainy reaps the reward of a long career of dastardly crime.

THE HUMP!

A correspondent up north sends me a rather sad letter about his life. He is fed-up. That's the real truth. He takes a depressing view of the world. It is partly through over work, and partly on account of some unfortunate happenings in his own home. Of course, there is no magic specific for getting rid of trouble. It would not ensure happiness if we could have recourse to such a remedy. Trouble is an ally. People who never have trouble become soft and jaded, and are seldom much use. But reading between the lines of my chum's letter, I feel that he has good cause to be cheery despite of all. For he has undoubted powers of thought. There is ugliness in life, and plenty of crass selfishness. But there is also the quality to be found which makes the saint, or the Bayard, and there are fine rewards for those who keep on keeping on all through.

The Children's Best Coloured Paper
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THE TUCK HAMPER!

The famous prize which reaches one GEM reader each week continues to be all the rage. The "Readers' Corner" is a feature of the paper which we would not like to be without. It can always be relied upon for a hearty laugh. Send in your best story, addressing it to the Editor, The GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C. 4.

QUIBLING ABOUT SCRIBBLING.

A friendly critic takes exception to Tom Merry's "fist." This cheery contributor says that T. M.'s signature varies considerably. But then so do the signatures of most people. There is the cold morning kind of writing, and the signature which is done with the pen at a public counter. We all know that kind of nib. Its points seem to have had a terrific hot argument. One goes travelling off in one direction, and t'other takes the opposite route. Come to think of it, there is immense variety about the way people write. Some stick to wonderful copper-plate, but they are a magnificent minority wallowing in calligraphic perfection, so to speak. Most individuals write just in accordance with their moods. Frequently they wobble, and allow the capital letters to get the better of them, which is sad. It is a pity to let your letters have tails and flourishes. Then there are people who seem to write with a stick. I think myself that the script hand is the safest, as in the long run the main reason for writing is that somebody else shall read what is set down.

"RIVALS OF THE RACECOURSE!" By Andrew Gray.

The GEM serial is scoring steadily. The graphic pictures of racecourse life are noteworthy. I know that many of my readers are interested in the great subject. There are startling developments in next week's instalment, so keep your eye on your newsagent and see that he keeps you a copy of the paper.

MISS FAWCETT!

Will Mr. Martin Clifford oblige by introducing this worthy lady again? I shall put it to him on the first possible occasion. But readers who have missed the presence of the good soul need not think that she has faded out of knowledge. Far from it.

AN UGLY RUMOUR!

It appears that Skimpole has been in trouble again. Among his numerous pastimes Skimpole includes sketching, and last half-holiday the industrious fellow tried to draw his impressions of a pig. Skimpole had gone far afield, and he was sitting on a gate admiring the scenery when he saw the grunter. The pig was couchant, as they say in heraldry, but the moment it caught sight of Skimpole's sketch book it showed keen resentment. Skimpole has said little on the subject, but he seems to have had a rough time. The animal was a hungry, athletic-looking beast, and it charged the artist. The gate collapsed, and so did Skimpole. An exciting chase ensued, but unluckily all the picturesque details will never be known.

A SCOUTY YARN!

A correspondent says that among all the thousands of readers there must be many who are Scouts. Quite right, there are. How about a Scouty yarn? Is there any chance? I will give the suggestion full consideration. What do others say on the subject?

YOUR EDITOR.

Gerald Crooke, shrinking from the results of his own wickedness and folly, seizes the only course open to him to make right his great wrong!



THE HEROIC COWARD!

An Extra-Long Thrilling Complete
School Story of the Ever Popular
Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Crooke's Cunning!

WHAT'S the wheeze?"

Aubrey Racke, the black-sheep of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, asked that question in some surprise as he entered Study No. 7 after dinner.

It was a Wednesday afternoon, and Racke, the leader of the gay dogs of St. Jim's, had planned a little trip up the river, where, in one of the quiet reaches, smoking and a few games of nap would be the order of the day.

Racke & Co. had to keep those sporty little habits of theirs very secret, as at St. Jim's smoking and gambling were strictly taboo.

Racke addressed himself to Gerald Crooke, his studymate and usual chief collaborator in his dinky exploits.

Crooke, who was dressed in gleaming white cricket clobber, was oiling a bat when Racke came in. Racke's surprise was quite pardonable, for Crooke did not often indulge in cricket, except so far as the school rules made it necessary. Not that Crooke was a duffer at cricket. On the contrary, he had shown that he could be quite a good player when he liked. But the trouble with Crooke was that he did not often like. Smoking, playing cards, and breaking bounds were pastimes more suited to his peculiar nature. Racke was therefore quite astounded when he beheld his studymate arrayed for cricket that afternoon.

"What the dickens are you up to, Crooke?" demanded the merry blade of the Shell.

Crooke looked up with a grin.

"Can't you see?" he said coolly. "I'm playing cricket this afternoon."

"Great Scott! Where?"

"At Abbotsford, with Tom Merry and the rest."

"Whew!"

Racke looked narrowly at his studymate.

"So you're still toadying up to those goody-goody rotters?" he said.

Crooke did not reply. He went on oiling his bat.

A laugh curled the corners of his thin, hard lips, however, and a peculiar glint showed in his eyes.

Racke, watching him, wondered what was at the back of Crooke's mind.

Gerald Crooke had always been "up against" Tom Merry & Co. as much as Racke himself. The rotters brigade at St. Jim's did not exactly receive kind and sympathetic treatment at the hands of the young Shell captain and his cheery followers—quite the reverse, in fact.

Tom Merry & Co. were down on all blackguards, and were for ever ragging the dinky young "goers" in their midst.

Crooke, the eldest fellow in the Lower School, and a malicious bully as well as a blackguard, had always been Tom Merry's worst enemy in the school. Yet lately, to use Aubrey Racke's own expression, he had appeared to be "loading" up to Tom Merry & Co.

Crooke was now on quite friendly terms with them, as a

consequence of a plucky deed which he was supposed to have performed.

Bernard Glyn's sister Edith had been menaced by a mysterious dwarf, who had made various attempts to steal from her a quaint necklace which Captain Malcolm Glyn had brought home with him from South Africa. The necklace had come from an obscure Kafir tribe, and had not been thought to be of great value. Crooke had managed to worm himself into a party at Glyn House by means of a cunning ruse, had played in a cricket match with Tom Merry & Co., and surprised all by his magnificent playing. Tom Merry & Co. had rebuffed him afterwards, however, and this had embittered Crooke more deeply against them.

Feeling vengeful against Miss Edith, too, he had played a dangerous, cowardly trick on her, and for this Tom Merry had horsewhipped him before most of the juniors of the School House. Crooke had vowed to himself never to forget that horsewhipping. He had decided to masquerade under a cloak of penitence in order to gain his revenge, and had apologised to Miss Edith, and promised to make amends for his caddishness.

While showing a false desire to go straight in future, he had planned a cowardly revenge on Tom Merry & Co. on the Wayland Moor. Fate had intervened to upset his ruse, and in attempting to escape from being seen, Crooke had found himself near the bottom of a deep quarry. He was unable to get back the way he had come, and in order to get to the top a terrible climb confronted him. And then, while he still stood wondering what he should do, a girl's cry for help had rung out from the bottom of the quarry.

Clambering down, Crooke had come upon Miss Edith struggling with the dwarf. He had attacked and overpowered the dwarf, and recovered the necklace which had been stolen, and made out afterwards that he had risked his life to save Miss Edith by climbing down from the top of the quarry. The necklace had afterwards been found to be very valuable, and Crooke had received the thanks of Captain Glyn.

In face of these facts Crooke's claim to be trying to make amends had been believed, and Tom Merry & Co., always willing to help a schoolfellow, had given Crooke their friendship.

Little did they know that Crooke, although friendly and honest to their faces, was still scheming against them behind their backs.

He had not forgotten the horsewhipping, and was determined to vent his spite on Tom Merry & Co. at the earliest opportunity.

"So you're playing cricket with Tom Merry and the rest of the gang, eh?" sneered Racke. "Bit of a change for you, Crooke, isn't it? Chuck playing the 'good little George,' and come out with us this afternoon."

"Not much!" replied Crooke. "Didn't you know I'd turned over a new leaf? I've realised the error of my ways, and am sticking to the straight and narrow path in future."

"Oh, rats!" growled Racke. "You've got some axe to grind, I know. You can't pull the wool over my eyes, Crooke."

"Go hon!"

"Look here, are you coming out with us?" demanded Racke impatiently.

"Sorry, Racke; but I do not approve of smoking and

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playing nap. It isn't done in the best circles. I'm playing in the Junior Eleven this afternoon against the Abbotsford Amateurs Cricket Club."

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Racke left the study, and slammed the door with quite unnecessary violence behind him.

Crooke chuckled softly to himself.

Racke did not take kindly to his "reformation," although he shrewdly suspected that Crooke was not so sincere as Tom Merry & Co. believed.

Crooke, having finished his bat, left Study No. 7.

He looked in at Study No. 10, the headquarters of the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were there.

"Hallo, Crooke!" said Tom Merry quite cordially. "We're just ready. We'll go along and rake out those Fourth-Form bouncers."

"What about Glyn?" asked Crooke. "Isn't he coming?"

"No. The ass is busy on another of his blithering inventions."

Bernard Glyn, the youthful inventor of St. Jim's, usually spent his half-holidays indoors experimenting. He had flatly refused to accompany Tom Merry & Co. to Abbotsford, although they wanted him to go.

Captain Glyn had put a motor-car at Tom Merry & Co.'s disposal for the afternoon. Glyn had pointed out that, although it was nominally a seven-seater car, there would be sufficient room in it—with a crush—for the whole eleven.

The match at Abbotsford was the second of the series of matches in the County Championship, which Captain Glyn had inaugurated. Tom Merry & Co. were bent on winning the championship. They had only played the Abbotsford Amateurs once previously, but had found them foemen worthy of their steel. The Abbotsford fellows had made quite a name for themselves, and an interesting match was expected.

Tom Merry & Co. had voted it very sporty of Captain Glyn to lend them the motor-car. They looked forward to the drive very eagerly. Glyn ought to have accompanied them, of course, but the mechanical genius of the Shell was otherwise engaged, so Tom decided to please him by leaving him alone in his glory.

The Terrible Three and Crooke went along to the Fourth-Form passage and knocked at Study No. 6, where Jack Blake & Co. had their habitation.

"Come in, fatheads!" said Blake's voice wearily. "We're hanging about for Gussy, as usual!"

"Weally, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he looked quite excitedly at the Shell fellows as they came in. "I say, deah boys, some howwid wuffian has put glue in my ewicket shoes, and I've wuined a paiah of silk socks twyin' to get it off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I fail to perceive any cause whatevah for wibald laughah!" said the swell of St. Jim's severely. "I twist neithah of you fellows are responsible for that wastuly twick?"

"Not guilty, me lord!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Anotah wottah—or pewwaps the same wottah—has put a piece of Limburgh cheese in the pocket of my blazah. The smell is most chwonik!"

"Whew! Chronic isn't the word!" gasped Tom Merry, stepping away from Arthur Augustus. "I wondered what the niff was when I came in. So it's you, Gussy?"

"Yaas—I mean, it's the cheese, deah boy," said Gussy. "If I catch the wottah who did it I shall considah it my painful dutay to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

Arthur Augustus was annoyed.

But for the fact that Gussy cultivated, under all circumstances, the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, he would have been ratty.

Tom Merry & Co. were amused, but Blake, Herries, and Digby were exasperated.

"The chump wants to mess about cleaning a fresh pair of shoes, and hunting out a new blazer," said Blake. "You'll have to come along in those things, Gussy—there's no time for changing now."

"Weally, Blake, I uttahly wufuse to go in these shoes and that blazah—"

"Ready, you chaps?" asked Talbot, appearing in the doorway. "The car's arrived, and it's waiting outside."

"Good egg!"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

"Pway wait a minute, Tom Mewwy, while I—"

"Whew! What a horrible smell there is in here!" said Talbot.

"It's from Gussy," grinned Tom Merry. "Somebody's hidden a lump of ripe Limburger in his blazer pocket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Talbot—"

"Glue in his white shoes, too," grinned Monty Lowther. "Poor old Gussy! But come on, kids, the car's waiting!"

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"This way, Gussy!" said Blake, yanking his aristocratic chum towards the door.

"Wefuse me, Blake!" roared Gussy. "I wufuse to go in this howwid smellin' blazah—"

"Rats! Kim on!"

"Yawwoooooogh!"

Gussy struggled, but he was grasped in many hands and whirled through the door, rushed downstairs, and fairly dragged into the quadrangle, where a large, handsome touring-car was waiting, surrounded by an admiring crowd.

Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern of the New House were there.

They grinned when they saw Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. arrive with Gussy.

"Here we are!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "Don't get too near Gussy, you chaps, unless you want to be gassed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoooooogh! You wuffians! You've wumped my twousahs—"

"Get in!" said Blake.

"I wufuse—"

"Chuck him in!" said Blake.

Bump!

"Yawwoooooogh!"

Gussy landed on the floor of the open car with a loud concussion.

The others tumbled in after him, Crooke getting in last. The car was large and roomy, but with eleven youngsters aboard it was rather a squeeze.

Digby, Herries, and one or two others who were not in the team and who could not get into the car, went on to the station to catch a train.

"All aboard?" sang out Tom Merry. "Hallo! What's that?"

A tubby-looking junior, with a round, fat face, bolted out of the School House and jumped on to the running-board of the car just as it was about to start.

It was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

"What the merry dickens—" gasped Tom Merry. "Here, get off, Trimble!"

"I'm coming!" roared Baggy, wrenching open the door and making strenuous efforts to squeeze in. "I want to have a ride—I mean, I feel I must go with you chaps, to cheer you on, you know! Make room there, Noble!"

"Yaroooooop!" roared Kangaroo, as the heavy foot of Baggy Trimble came down on his toe.

The other juniors glared at the fat intruder.

The car was filled to overflowing already, and there was simply no room for Baggy. Baggy's cool cheek simply took his schoolfellows' breath away.

Baggy had a fixed conviction that no party could possibly be complete without his estimable self. That was Baggy's egregious way. He was always barging in, and no amount of bumping and raggings would rob him of the illusion.

"Get out, Trimble!" howled Jack Blake. "There isn't any room!"

"Oh, I don't mind a crush!" said Baggy, jamming himself still farther into the car. "Don't you chaps get up for me—I'll stand."

Tom Merry & Co., with warlike looks on their faces, were getting up for Baggy, but not to give him a seat.

"Chuck him out on his neck!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"What ho!"

"Hi! Wharrer you doing?—Yowp! Yah! Hands off! Wooooooogh!" screeched Baggy, as many hands were laid violently upon him. "Leggo! Ooooooop!"

Baggy struggled and hit out wildly, fully determined not to be thrown out of the car on his neck.

Crooke was one of the first to join in the fracas with Baggy.

He stood next to Jack Blake, who was making great efforts to eject the fat intruder. Crooke also fought with Baggy.

Crooke's eyes suddenly lighted up with a cunning gleam. He had fully intended, from the first, that Tom Merry & Co. should not win their match against the Abbotsford Amateurs if he could help it. He was going with them, ostensibly to play his best; but he was a traitor. His malicious soul was burning with hatred for Tom Merry & Co., and he was ready to take any opportunity to do them a bad turn.

And now he saw his opportunity!

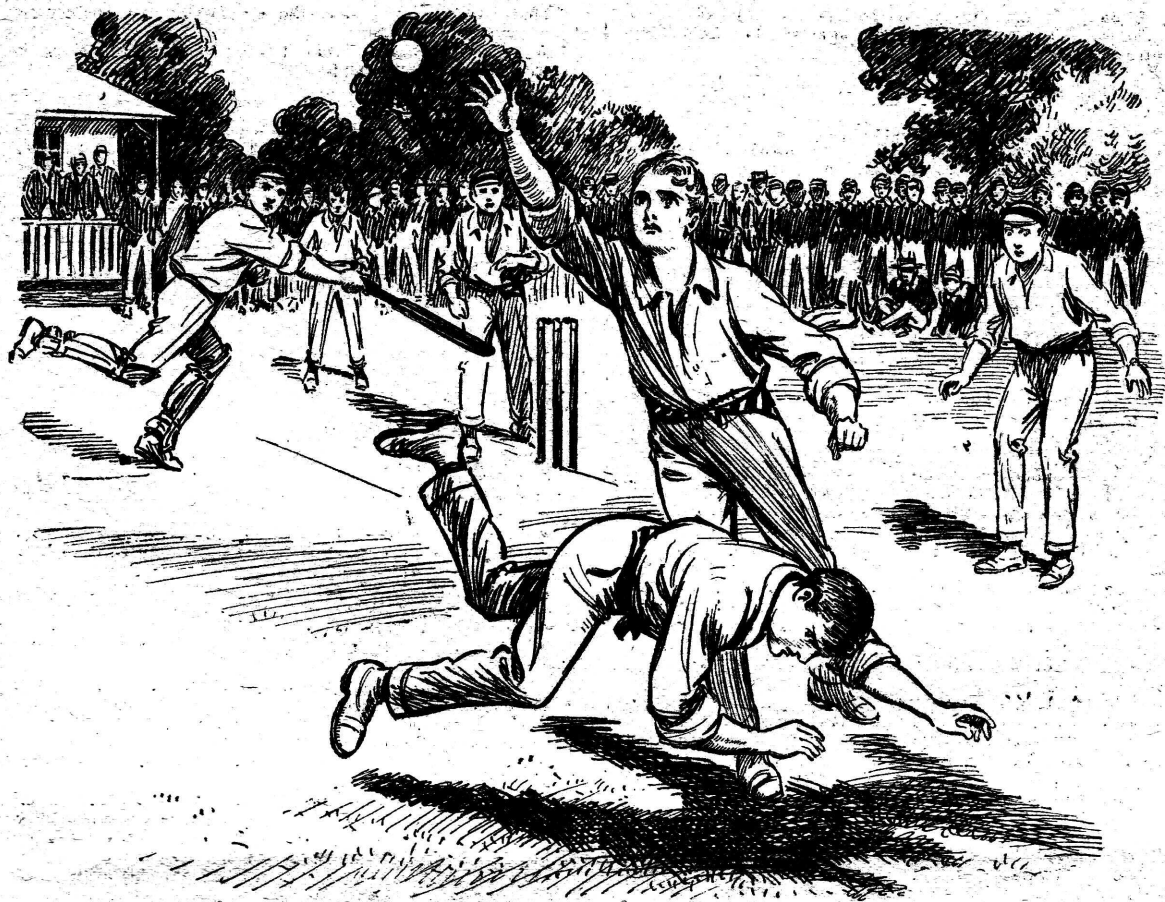
While he and Blake were struggling side by side to turn Baggy Trimble out of the car Crooke brought his foot back and gave Blake a vicious kick on the left ankle.

The young Fourth Form leader gave a sudden cry of pain and staggered back.

"Oh! My foot! The little rotter!"

"What's the matter, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, with a quick, anxious look.

Blake was leaning against the car side, his face white and drawn with pain.



Click! The heavy smite of Godfrey's willow sent the ball soaring high into the air. Figgins leaped up as it descended and the leather landed safely in his waiting hand. The joyful cry which followed was changed next minute into a disappointed shout, for Crooke had stumbled against Figgins' legs, causing him to drop the ball. (See page 6.)

"Trimble—it must have been Trimble—kicked me on the ankle!" he muttered. "Oh! I—I can hardly move!"

"Oh jeminy!"

The St. Jim's cricketers looked alarmed.

Baggy Trimble was being held between Kangaroo and Figgins. He gave a yelp when he saw the angry looks of the others.

"I didn't! I say, you fellows, it wasn't me! I didn't kick Blake—"

"You little worm, I don't believe you!" exclaimed Tom Merry between his teeth. "Of all the rotten, cowardly tricks—"

"Rag him!"

"Spificate the young toad!"

An angry rush forward was made, and Baggy Trimble went down, howling at the top of his voice, and wildly protesting his innocence.

Nobody believed him. Baggy's reputation as a fabricator was against him. He was dragged out of the car and bumped hard on the ground. Then the angry juniors kicked him away, and Baggy at last disappeared under the elm-trees, loudly bewailing his lot.

The juniors turned back to Blake, who was sitting in the car nursing his injured foot.

"How is it, Blake?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

Blake's face was twisted with pain.

"I—I'm sorry, you fellows," he muttered. "I reckon I'm crooked for the match. The little cad has put me right out of action."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Bai Jove! What howwid luck!"

The St. Jim's cricketers all looked dismayed.

Gerald Crooke joined in the general condemnation of Baggy Trimble, who was believed by all to have kicked Blake in the struggle in the car.

Inwardly Crooke was exulting! He had crooked one of the team's best players, and no suspicion whatever was directed upon himself.

"We shall have to put Reilly in Blake's place, that's all,"

said Tom Merry gloomily. "Oh, I'd like to scrag that little rotter Trimble. I don't suppose he thought about crocking Blake for the match—it was just spite. But—but it's jolly rotten. Reilly isn't half as good a player as Blake."

Reilly was found, and he entered the car, while Blake remained behind to have his injured foot seen to.

And the car drove away from St. Jim's, Tom Merry & Co. feeling savage and disappointed.

CHAPTER 2.

A Close Win!

"HERE we are again, my lads!"

A tall, handsome Army captain greeted the juniors as the car drove up at the Abbotsford ground.

It was Captain Malcolm Glyn, the stalwart uncle of Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and who had recently returned from South Africa.

He shook hands warmly all round, giving Gerald Crooke a specially hearty welcome.

"So you managed to pack into the car—eh?" he laughed. "Why, where's Bernard?"

"He's at St. Jim's—busy, as usual, on an invention, sir," replied Tom Merry.

"The young rascal! His inventions will turn his head one day!" laughed the captain. "But what is the matter with you, lads? You don't appear to be so cheerful. Has anything happened?"

"Blake, one of our best players, was crooked just before we left St. Jim's, sir," said the Shell captain. "We've got a substitute, of course, but—but we shall notice Blake's absence."

"Hard lines!" said Captain Glyn sympathetically. "The Abbotsford fellows are in great form, too. But it can't be helped. This way, my lads!"

The Abbotsford ground was crowded with eager sightseers.

Tom Merry & Co. had won great renown as cricketers, and the Abbottsfordians were keen to see them play.

It was a single innings match, as were all the matches in Captain Glyn's championship. Tom Merry won the toss, and he and Figgins took their bats in to open the St. Jim's innings.

The Abbottsford captain—Godfrey—was a strapping fellow, well over the size of any of the St. Jim's boys. The first ball he sent down to Tom Merry made a wicked bee-line for the centre stump, but the St. Jim's skipper's bat was there promptly to intercept it.

Godfrey proved himself to be a deadly bowler, and scoring was painfully slow. Tom Merry and Figgins kept their wickets well, however, and the scoring-board registered 24 for St. Jim's when Figgy's wicket went down. Kangaroo followed him, and the cheery Cornstalk acquitted himself well, slogging away the leather for a rapid succession of twos and threes.

Tom Merry was caught out in the slips, and D'Arcy succeeded him.

Whether it was that the odour of the Limburger cheese still harassed the swell, or whether the fast bowling was too much for him is not known, but Gussy did not even succeed in breaking his duck. His aristocratic countenance wore a very rueful expression when he made the return trip to the pavilion.

Reilly went in next, and, as Tom Merry had expected, was not proof against Godfrey's smashing deliveries. The Irish junior made two, and then his middle stump was whipped out of the ground like a sky-rocket.

"For goodness' sake do a bit of scoring, Monty!" said Tom Merry, as Lowther strapped on his pads.

Monty did his very best, which amounted to 5 runs. He shook his head dolefully on his arrival back at the pavilion.

"No go!" he said. "That chap Godfrey knows how to put a break in the leather, and no giddy error."

The Abbottsford fielding, too, was excellent, and three more wickets fell to the disconsolate total of 15 runs. That brought the score up to 87 when Gerald Croke went in.

His schoolfellows' eyes were turned hopefully upon him.

Croke had shown them what he could do when he felt inclined. His play at Glyn House had been magnificent, and he had been shaping very well at the nets at St. Jim's.

There was a cynical look on his sallow face as he faced the bowling. He tipped the first delivery off the edge of his bat into the slips, blocked the second, and hit the third for 2.

Redfern, who was his partner, then had the limelight, and the New House junior made 12 in that over, bringing a ripple of cheering from his schoolfellows.

Croke again.

The burly Shell fellow met Godfrey's next shot with a smashing willow, and the fieldsmen went leather-hunting. Four runs had been made by the time the wicket-keeper had the ball again.

Croke's eyes glittered.

He was well at home with Godfrey's style of bowling, and he knew that he could add considerably to the score if he wished.

But it was Gerald Croke's intention to let his team down. To see Tom Merry & Co. beaten, to dash down their hopes of winning the championship, was one item in his secret scheme of revenge.

Godfrey's bowling partner sent down a stiff "yorker."

Croke stepped out at it, and sent the leather soaring into the air.

"Good old Croke!" roared Monty Lowther jubilantly from the pavilion.

The batsmen were running. Once—twice—

Redfern signalled to Croke to stop. The ball had been fielded, and was coming in to the wicket-keeper. But Croke did not heed the signal. He ran, and was well out of his crease when the agile wicket-keeper caught the ball and knocked off the balls.

"How's that, umpire?"

"Run out!"

Croke chuckled to himself when he saw his schoolfellows' rueful looks.

He had deliberately got himself run out. To all appearances he had fallen into that trap which often besets an over-zealous batsman—the desire to snatch an extra run.

"I'm sorry, you fellows!" he said quietly when he got back to the pavilion. "I—I thought it was safe enough."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry ruefully. "You were a silly ass, though, Croke!"

The remainder of the St. Jim's innings was painful—to Tom Merry & Co.

When Fatty Wynn—the last man—went down, the grand total for St. Jim's was 104.

"Pretty happy outlook for us, I don't think!" growled Manners. "If Blake had been here—"

"And if Croke hadn't been so jolly fatheaded—" said Herries.

"We've got to stop them scoring—stop 'em by hook or crook!" said Tom Merry. "It's up to you, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn nodded, and took a firm grip on the leather he held in his hand.

The Falstaff of St. Jim's was a wizard bowler. Hat tricks were almost every day occurrences with Fatty. He knew that Tom Merry expected of his best that afternoon.

Godfrey and a stubby little fellow opened the innings for Abbottsford. This latter did not appear to be much of a cricketer, but the manner in which he took his stance at the wicket soon showed that he knew his business.

Godfrey was renowned as a batsman. Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened as he sent down the first ball. Godfrey had to play with great caution. Two overs passed, and only 3 runs were scored. Four more overs, and the score had leaped to 21. Godfrey had been playing havoc with Tom Merry's bowling.

Then there was a roar as Fatty clean bowled the stubby fellow. Another chirrup of delight arose from the fieldsmen when Fatty sent the next man home with one smashing yorker. Then Godfrey got going, and raised cheers from the ropes by scoring four boundaries in two overs.

Four other men came and went, thanks to Fatty's bowling and to the magnificent fielding of the St. Jim's team. The score stood at 79.

"They've only got 26 to make, and the match will be theirs!" gasped Tom Merry. "See if you can't get Godfrey out, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn sent down some cunning balls, but the wily Abbottsford skipper stone-walled those he was not sure about. Fatty's bowling kept the scoring slow, however.

Godfrey's partner was a brilliant bat. He and the skipper played slow, but sure, and the runs mounted up significantly.

Ninety-nine runs registered on the board for Abbottsford, and there were three more men to go in.

Click!

Again came the heavy smite of Godfrey's willow on the ball, and away it soared, high over the heads of the fieldsmen. A long-legged figure and a burly figure raced for the ball—Figgins and Croke.

Figgins intent on catching it and Croke determined that the batsmen should make the best of it.

Figgins leaped up at the ball as it descended, and it landed safely into his waiting hands. But the joyful cry from Tom Merry & Co. which followed was changed next minute into a disappointed shout, for Croke had stumbled and fallen against Figgy's legs, causing him to drop the ball.

Godfrey, the most-feared batsman of the Abbottsford team, was not caught out, after all.

The batsmen were running back for the third time.

Figgins turned, quick as a flash, and picked up the ball.

His eyes narrowed as he flung the leather an instant later. Straight as a die it went towards the empty wicket nearest him.

Godfrey was racing towards that wicket, his bat outstretched.

All eyes were fastened on Talbot, who was crouching behind the wicket.

Smack!

Talbot's hands closed over the ball, and, a second before Godfrey's bat thrust into the crease Talbot knocked the balls off with the leather he held in his hand.

"How's that, umpire?" howled Monty Lowther.

"Out!"

Godfrey had been run out almost by a miracle.

"Played, Talbot! Played, Figgy!" roared Tom Merry. "Now, Fatty! They've only got 3 to make for a draw—4 and they win! You've got to knock down three wickets to stop them. What about it?"

"Gimme that ball!" said Fatty.

He faced Godfrey's successor, then took a short run and a spin.

Whiz!

The batsman raised his bat, and the ball, with a cunning twist, curled under it, knocking the off-side stump to an angle of forty-five degrees as it passed.

"Out!" yelled Monty Lowther jubilantly. "That's the stuff, Fatty!"

The field crossed over, and another run was made.

Fatty Wynn did not have the bowling for that over, and the field watched Tom Merry anxiously.

One other run was registered before the over finished, and the scores stood: St. Jim's 104, with Abbottsford 103. St. Jim's could not hope to win now.

"Go it, Fatty!" yelled Figgins encouragingly.

Fatty took a hard grip on the ball. Down it went, like a seventeen pounder, and Monty Lowther next minute executed a species of war dance on the green sward in a delirium of delight.

The ball had uprooted the middle stump and sent the bats flying into Talbot's chest.

"Out!" said the umpire, with a peculiar glance at Fatty Wynn.

"Last man in!"

Tom Merry & Co. were on-tenterhooks of excitement now. Never before had a cricket match come to so close a finish. Crooke was biting his lips anxiously. Was it possible that Tom Merry & Co. would win, after all?

A breathless hush fell on the crowd as Fatty prepared to assail the last man's wicket.

The ball came down with swift precision, and there was a click.

The batsman had hit it!

Manners and D'Arcy were after it like fiends, however, and the batsmen dared not run, so promptly was the ball returned.

Fatty rolled it in his plump hands and gave another swift delivery.

Crash!

The batsman heard that sickening sound behind him as he swiped at the leather that was not there. He looked round and saw his wicket spread-eagled on the turf.

"Out!"

"Bai Jove! We've won, deah boys!"

"Hurrah!"

CHAPTER 3.

An Offer Refused!

ST. JIM'S had won by the skin of their teeth—by one run!

Next minute Fatty Wynn found himself clasped lovingly to Lowther's breast, and the exuberant Monty kissed him fondly on either cheek, and then on the nose.

"Grooooooh! Gerroff!" spluttered Fatty. "Draggim-away, somebody! Groooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come to my arms, my bundle of charms!" trilled Monty affectionately.

"Yow-wow!"

Fatty Wynn was the hero of the hour.

He, and he alone, had won the match for St. Jim's.

Crooke ground his teeth with rage.

In spite of all he had done—his crocking of Blake, his deliberate "muffing" of his own innings, and his baulking of Figgins on the field—Tom Merry & Co. had come out with flying colours.

Captain Glyn was the first to come up and clap Fatty on the back.

"Jolly good, Wynn, my lad!" he said. "Your bowling was magnificent! My word, though, what a narrow squeak! You fellows deserved to win!"

"Rather!" said Godfrey, with a good-natured grin. "It was a grand game. That fat chap is some bowler!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. took cheery leave of the Abbotsford fellows.

"Whither away now, my lads?" asked Captain Glyn.

"We're off to St. Jim's, sir, to tell 'em the glad news," said Tom Merry. "Blake will be no end anxious to know how we've got on."

"Why not delay it for a little while?" asked the captain, with a laugh. "Edith issued instructions for me to inform you that she had in a special supply of pastries, and that you were all to come back to Glyn House to tea."

"Oh, good egg!" said Fatty Wynn, with a radiant smile.

"We'll come, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

There was no mistaking the heartiness of Tom Merry & Co.'s acceptance of the invitation. Edith Glyn knew how to cater for boys, and tea at Glyn House was always an event to be looked forward to.

"Right-ho, then!" said Captain Glyn. "My car is waiting outside. Some of you lads can pack in with me—that will mean less of a crush in the other car."

Tom Merry & Co. and Captain Glyn walked out of the cricket ground, where they found two cars waiting for them.

One was the car they had travelled over in, and the other, a handsome white limousine, belonged to Captain Glyn.

"Bai Jove! What a weally wippin' cah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, adjusting his monocle the better to view Captain Glyn's car.

"What-ho!"

Had any of the juniors been looking at Gerald Crooke at that moment they would have seen him give a start and noticed his face turn suddenly pale.

Crooke was not looking at the car but at the chauffeur who was seated at the wheel.

The Shell fellow's expression was of amazement and frank disbelief.

He walked closer to the car, standing apart from his chums, and peered hard at the captain's chauffeur.

"My hat!" ejaculated Crooke under his breath.

"Lansing!"

The man in uniform seated in the car turned his head, and a semblance of a smile played at the corners of his mouth.

He was a slim, dark, handsome man. His features were sallow, but clear cut. He gave a short nod in recognition of Crooke, and then jumped out of the car to open the door for the captain.

Crooke stood almost rooted to the ground in astonishment. "Lansing!" he muttered. "What the dickens can he be doing here—as chauffeur to Captain Glyn!"

Crooke knew Reginald Lansing as a regular habitue of the Green Man public-house, that salubrious little inn by the banks of the Rhyl, just outside Rhyllcombe, where Crooke, Racke, and the other dingy young blades of St. Jim's were wont to go in secret to play shady games.

Crooke was well known at the Green Man, and was known, too, of course, to that select band of patrons whom Mr. Joliffe admitted to his little back parlour after hours. Lansing was one of this band.

Of late, too, Crooke and Lansing had been a good deal in each other's company. Lansing was the youngest of Mr. Joliffe's select coterie, and had made himself particularly affable to the St. Jim's junior. He and Crooke had gambled together, and already Lansing had won a considerable amount from him—mostly in I O U's.

The last time Crooke had seen Lansing was at the Green Man, two nights ago, when he had surreptitiously broken bounds with Aubrey Racke and Clampe.

Lansing seemed to be always well supplied with money. How he got it was a matter which the accommodating Mr. Joliffe did not query. Lansing had always seemed to Crooke to be a "gentleman"—one of the swaggering sort who lived on his wits. He had never suspected Lansing of following any occupation so honest as a chauffeur's.

What was the swaggering hanger-on at the Green Man doing as chauffeur to Captain Glyn?

Gerald Crooke could not banish that question from his mind.

"Tumble in, Crooke!" said the captain, clapping him on the back with such suddenness that the rascally Shell fellow started back violently. "What are you standing there day-dreaming about?"

"Oh—er—nothing, sir!" said Crooke hurriedly.

He got into Captain Glyn's car, with D'Arcy, Tom Merry, and Fatty Wynn. The others were already in the other car.

"Right away for Glyn House!" sang out the handsome, bronzed captain, who, in the company of the St. Jim's juniors, was quite like one of them.

The cars drove off and sped through the pretty countryside en route for Glyn House.

Crooke, seated on one of the tip-up seats of the captain's limousine, kept casting curious glances at Lansing through the window. The one thought was racing through his brain all the time—how had that rascal got into the employ of Captain Glyn?

"Heah we are at Glyn House, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as the handsome car swung in through the wide gates of the millionaire's house. "And theah's Miss Edith waitin' for us on the steps, bai Jove!"

A pretty girlish figure ran down the steps to meet them as the cars drew up.

Edith Glyn, a radiant picture of healthy, happy girlhood, gave Tom Merry & Co. a hearty welcome, bestowing on D'Arcy a particularly winning smile when that gallant youth bowed to her with all the dignity of a true Vere de Vere.

"Why, Bernard isn't here!" exclaimed Edith. "Where is he?"

"Oh, he preferred to stay in at St. Jim's, Miss Edith," said Tom Merry. "He—he said he was busy."

"On another of his inventions, I suppose?" said Glyn's sister, with a laugh.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, come in! Tea is ready," said Edith. "I'm sure you boys must be hungry!"

"I'm simply famished!" said Fatty Wynn. "Cricket makes a chap hungry, you know—especially when he has rather a delicate constitution to keep up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wynn deserves the biggest feed we can manage for him, Edith!" laughed Captain Glyn. "I'll see that he doesn't go short."

Crooke glanced back at Lansing as he accompanied Tom Merry & Co. up the steps.

The chauffeur grinned at him and winked slyly.

Tea at Glyn House was a cheery affair.

At first the conversation centred round the cricket match, of course, but afterwards the topic changed to the mysterious Kafr dwarf who had been such a menace to Miss Edith, and who had disappeared after Crooke had captured him and taken the stolen necklace from him.

"I suppose nothing more has been seen of the dwarf?" asked Tom Merry.

Captain Glyn shook his head.

"No; he has probably returned to South Africa by now."

My friend, Detective Sanders, of the C.I.D., has been making inquiries, and a dwarf answering to our late friend's description is known to have left Southampton last week, bound for Cape Town. He has abandoned all hope of getting the necklace now."

"Fancy the necklace turning out to be so valuable, after all!" laughed Edith Glyn. "I have offered to give it back to uncle, but he refuses to take it."

"The necklace is yours, Edith, and I am very pleased that it has transpired to be valuable," said Captain Glyn. "It will not do for you to wear it every day, however. It must remain under lock and key for a little while, at any rate, in case other attempts are made to steal it."

"So you've got it locked up, sir?" asked Figgins.

"Yes; it is in Mr. Glyn's private safe upstairs," replied the captain. "It is the most valuable thing in the house, now."

Gerald Crooke was the first to rise from the table when tea was over.

"May I go down to the garage and look at your car, sir?" he asked the captain. "I'm awfully interested in motor-cars, and yours is one of the latest super-sporting Vulcans, isn't it?"

"Yes, Crooke. If you go down to the garage now you will find the chauffeur cleaning her. He will show you the engine, and tell you all about the car."

Crooke hurried out of the room and made his way to the garage.

Lansing was there when he arrived, cleaning the car with the water-hose.

He switched off the water, and gave the St. Jim's junior a grin as he came up.

"Hallo, Crooke!" said Lansing familiarly. "I didn't know you were pally with the boss."

"Neither did I know you worked here," said Crooke, looking curiously at the other. "What's the idea?"

Lansing looked about him, and, having satisfied himself that nobody else was about, he beckoned to Crooke.

"Come inside the garage, Crooke. I want to talk to you."

He laughed softly when they were together inside.

"I expect you have guessed that there's something in the wind by me being here, Crooke," he said. "I can rely on you not to give me away?"

"It's no business of mine," said Crooke shortly. "I don't suppose it would pay me, either, to start the captain asking questions about you."

"Hardly!" grinned Lansing. "But it would pay you, Crooke, and pay you well, to help me with the job I've got on."

Crooke shot him a quick look.

"Help you!" he echoed. "What are you up to, Lansing?"

"A short while ago," said Lansing coolly, "you played a prominent part, Crooke, in safeguarding a certain necklace that came into Captain Glyn's possession."

Crooke started.

"The necklace!" he exclaimed. "Then you—you're after that!"

"Sure!" came the bland reply. "It's game well worth going after, young Crooke. You know the value of it. I happen to know where I can dispose of the necklace for about ten thousand, so I mean to get it."

"How—how did you know about the necklace?" demanded the St. Jim's junior.

"I heard about it from the dwarf!" smiled Lansing. "You remember he escaped from St. Jim's just after he was caught. He hid himself in the Rylcombe Wood until after dark, at the top of a tree. In climbing down he fell, and I picked him up and took him to the Green Man. He gave himself a pretty bad bash on the head, and I looked after him. I needn't tell you all the details, but I got the story out of him. I spent a few years in South Africa, and I knew his dialect. The dwarf has given up hope of getting that necklace—I scared him away. That leaves the coast clear for me, of course, to get it for myself. Captain Glyn happened to be advertising for a chauffeur last week, so I wangled some false references and got the job. Being on the spot, I am able to keep my eyes open and spy out the land. I know where the safe is, and I have also found out the combination of the lock. All I want now is an opportunity to get at the safe, open it, and get away with the necklace."

Crooke looked at his companion in amazement.

He drew a deep breath.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "So that's your game! And—and you want me to help!"

Lansing nodded.

"Yes, Crooke. You can help me, right now. You owe me about twelve quid. I'll hand you back your IOUs and give you fifty quids besides, with a promise of some more cash if you'll help me to get away with the necklace to-night."

"What exactly would I have to do?" asked Crooke.

"Your schoolfellows are in the drawing-room now with

the captain, Mr. Glyn, and Miss Edith. Go back there, Crooke, stay in the room with them, and lock the door, putting the key in your pocket. Then you can give me the tip from the French windows. I'll be waiting outside, and then—"

"Oh, bosh!" snapped the junior. "I can't do that, Lansing."

"You won't help me?"

"No!" said Crooke coolly. "I'm a friend of the family now. You can go ahead if you like, and I'll keep mum, of course. But I don't think I'll take a hand. It's too risky for me."

"Risky?" said Lansing. "How?"

"In many ways!" returned the junior. "If you get caught you'd split on me. I'm supposed to be reformed, and I mean to keep up the deception—for the time being, at any rate. I didn't know you were a cracksmen, Lansing."

The other laughed.

"That's my big line, Crooke—safe-opening. Look here, kid, it will be worth your while—"

"No, thanks!" said Crooke; and he walked out of the garage. "I'll have nothing to do with it. If you can think of an idea for me to get revenged on those other chaps I'll lend an ear willingly. But I'm not getting mixed up in any robberies. The game's not worth the candle. Cheerio! See you at the Green Man one night—when I can get out."

Crooke gave Lansing a nod and walked back to the house.

A grin curled the corners of his mouth.

He laughed cynically.

"I reckon it's not up to me to say anything to Captain Glyn," he mused. "Lansing can get on with the job for all I care. But I'm keeping on with the Good Little Georgie act for the time being—till I've made Tom Merry and the rest of the gang sit up!"

And, with those charitable thoughts in mind, Gerald Crooke went into the drawing-room and rejoined Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

The Burglar-Proof Safe!

BANG, bang, bang!

Those loud sounds echoed up and down the Shell passage at St. Jim's two days later.

They were caused by two wrathful juniors kicking and thumping on the door of study No. 11, the apartment occupied by Bernard Glyn.

Clifton Dane and Harry Noble felt that they had good cause to be wrathful, and they beat a wild tattoo on the closed door with fists and boots.

"Glyn, you blitherer! Let us in!"

"Open this door, you blighter!"

And the voice of the schoolboy inventor came in equally exasperated tones from the other side.

"Can't yet! You'll have to wait!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"We won't wait!" howled Kangaroo. "We want to get in to do our prep!"

"Blow your prep! Go and do it in the Form-room!"

"We want our books!" screeched Clifton Dane.

"Borrow some more, idiot!"

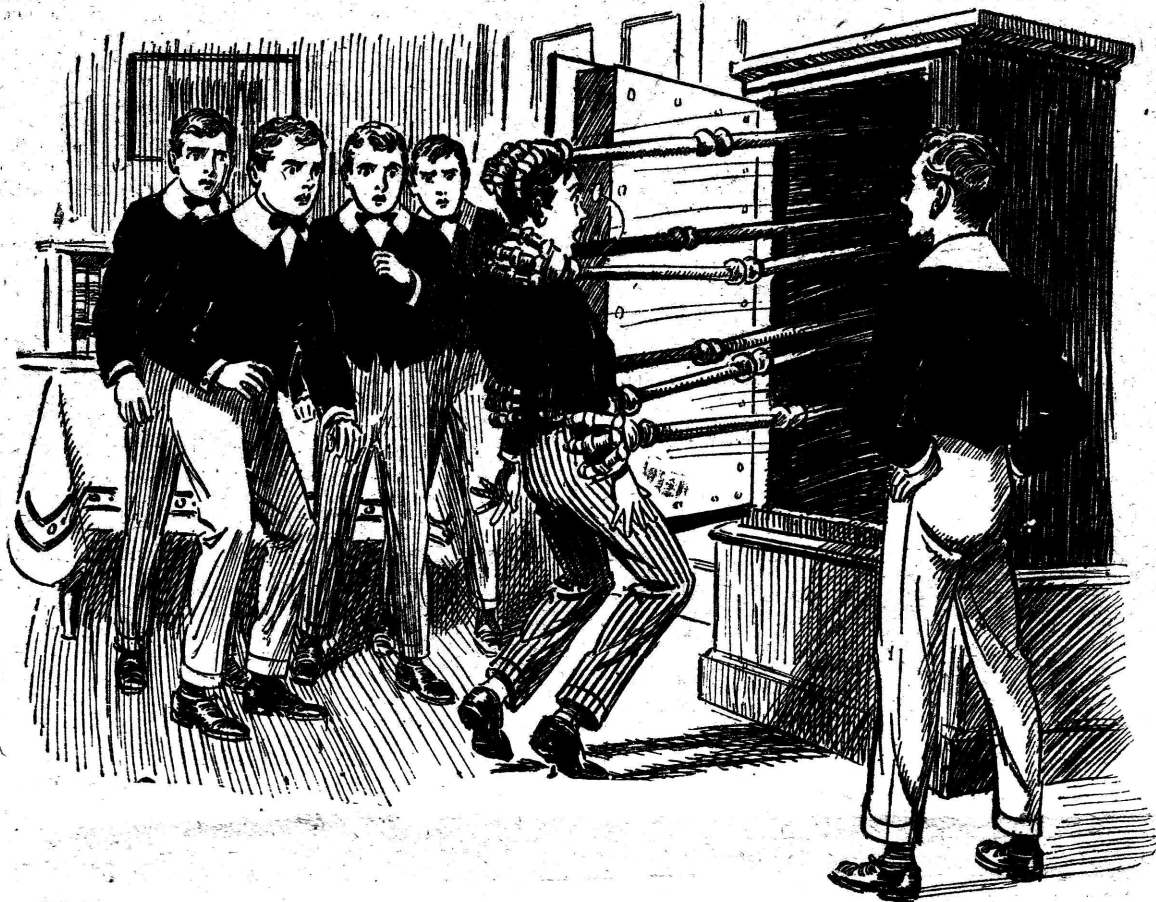
Kick, kick, kick!

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were not unused to this experience of being locked out of their own study. They had the very doubtful pleasure of sharing that room with Bernard Glyn. The youthful inventor of St. Jim's did not make an ideal study-mate—quite the reverse, in fact. He filled the study with weird chemicals and obnoxious vapours, littered the walls and floor and table and cupboard and chairs with gruesome apparatus, and turned the study into a workshop and laboratory. Glyn was a very enthusiastic inventor, and, to do him justice, many of his inventions worked. He had ample cash to satisfy his inventive desires, and he had turned out some weird and wonderful contraptions in his time.

But Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were by no means enthusiastic at having an inventor for a study-mate. Neither of them shared Glyn's keenness. They looked upon Glyn and his inventions as unnecessary evils and nuisances. And Bernard Glyn most emphatically regarded Kangaroo and Clifton Dane as nuisances, too.

That was why Glyn, when he had an invention "under way," or was engaged on any "tricky" experiment, invariably locked the door on his study-mates, to keep them from interfering. This was a wise precaution on Glyn's part. He had often had his chemicals poured into his hair and down his neck—externally, of course—and bits of his ruined apparatus hurled at him, or thrown, with himself, right out of the study.

Glyn had been very busy on another invention lately, and nobody knew exactly what it was. The inventive genius of the Shell was very close with his ideas. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane had in consequence been crowded out of



In blissful ignorance of what was about to happen, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was turning the knob of the safe door, when it suddenly swung open on its hinges at great speed. At the same instant a series of great claws came out of the interior of the safe and fastened upon him like the clutching tentacles of some weird animal. "Yawoooooh!" roared the swell of St. Jim's. (See page 10.)

Study No. 11 on many an occasion. They were now feeling fed up with this treatment. They felt that they had a right to do their prep in their own study, at any rate.

"Glyn, you awful boulder, will you open this door?" breathed Kangaroo sulphurously through the keyhole.

"Yes, rather—when I've finished!"

"We want it open now!" hissed Clifton Dane.

"Go and eat coke!"

"You—you—"

"Run away, there's good asses! I'm fearfully busy! I want to finish this job by this evening," said Bernard Glyn in a tired voice.

"We'll finish you when we lay hold of you, if you don't open this door now!" roared Kangaroo.

"Rats! If you want to make a noise—"

"We will make a noise—"

"Then make a noise like a bee and buzz off!" said Bernard Glyn coolly.

Kick! Thump! Wallop! Crash!

Glyn's two wrathful study-mates seemed likely to burst the door in at any moment with the terrific onslaughts they made upon it.

Study doors along the Shell corridor were flung open and exasperated juniors glared forth.

"Who's making all that row?" demanded George Gore in his burly way.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

"Hi, give it a breeze, you idiots!" roared Monty Lowther from Study No. 10 next door. "You're making our study rock! Our table's dancing about! The inkpot's fallen over, and Manners' impot has been swamped!"

"Blow your study, and blow Manners' impot!" snapped Kangaroo. "We're locked out, and we mean to get in!"

Crash! Wallop! Thud!

The Shell fellows glared at Kangaroo and Clifton Dane.

It was prep-time for the juniors, and it was impossible for them to work with that noise going on, and they said so—most emphatically.

But Kangaroo and Dane continued to kick at their study door.

Their exasperated Form-fellows thereupon resorted to deeds, not words.

A large dictionary, hurled by Grundy, struck Kangaroo in the nape of his neck and sent him staggering forward. Clifton Dane at that precise moment delivered a terrific punch towards the door, and his fist landed, not on the door, but on Kangaroo's nose.

"Yarooooooogh!" roared the Cornstalk.

"Wh-what the— Wow-wowwwwwww!" howled Clifton Dane next minute, as the hard, stale top of a derelict loaf from Study No. 7 landed with terrific force on his chin.

Whiz! Wallop! Thud!

All manner of missiles whirled upon the luckless locked-out juniors. Tom Merry & Co. might have felt some sympathy for them in the ordinary way, but they simply could not stand being interrupted in their prep.

"Yarooooop! Yah! Wow! Stoppit!" howled Kangaroo, dancing.

"Woooooop! Ow! Wow-ow!" moaned Clifton Dane.

They had perforce to retreat. They dashed away from Study No. 11 under a perfect fusillade of whizzing books, and chunks of coal, and old brushes, and empty tins, and similar devastating missiles.

There was quite a litter on the linoleum in the Shell passage after they had gone.

But peace and quietness reigned. And a soft chuckle came from Bernard Glyn inside Study No. 11.

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane went along to the Form-room and proceeded with their prep, vowing all manner of blood-curdling-deeds of vengeance on the devoted head of their inventive study-mate.

Ten minutes later Jack Blake & Co. of Study No. 6 strolled along the Shell passage.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle and looking at the untidy state of the corridor in great astonishment. "Whatevah has been happenin' heah, I wondah, deah boys?"

"Looks as though a cyclone had broken loose," said Blake. "Or an earthquake," said Herries.

They tapped at Study No. 10 and entered. They found the Terrible Three just finishing off the impot that had been spoiled.

"Hallo, you chaps!" said Blake. "Have you been having an Aunt Sally shy in the passage?"

"The cowwidor is in a most disgwaceful condish, deah boys," said Gussy reprovingly. "Weally, I should wegard it as most infwa dig, you know."

Tom Merry explained what had happened.

Blake & Co. chuckled.

"So Glyn's still on his invention," he said. "I wonder what it is this time?"

"I think I'll knock and ask him," said Tom Merry. "I'll remind him about his prep, anyway. He's been slacking rather a lot lately, and old Linton will be down on him like a hundred of bricks in the morning if he hasn't done his prep."

The Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 tapped at Study No. 11 next door.

"Hallo!" said Glyn's voice. "Who's that?"

"Only little us!" said Tom Merry. "Can't you open the door, you boulder?"

"Half a tick!"

The key turned in the lock, and the door opened.

Bernard Glyn, looking very dirty and dishevelled, beckoned to the chums to enter.

The study was in a most untidy state.

Nuts and bolts and wires and wheels and batteries littered the whole room.

"Great pip!" said Tom Merry. "Linton ought to see this room now, Glyn! He'd scrag you!"

"Oh, rats!" grinned the schoolboy inventor. "What do you think of my latest invention?"

He indicated, with a proud sweep of his hand, a large steel safe that stood in the centre of the room.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at it in astonishment.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "Is that the invention?"

"That's it," said Bernard Glyn. "Of course, it doesn't look much, but there's a lot in it. I've been studying the subject of burglar-proof locks, and I've invented a lock that will baffle any cracksmen in the world. That safe is fitted with my patent burglar-proof lock. Not only does the lock protect it from being opened, but there is another device which acts as an additional safeguard. I'll tell you more about that later. But the lock's the important thing. It can only be opened one way, and by a secret combination that no safe-opener, not even the most expert, would ever dream of. It's the most useful invention I've ever thought of."

"Bai Jove! Wheah did you get the safe fwom, Glyn, deah boy?"

"Oh, I picked it up cheap at the second-hand shop in Rylcombe," said Glyn. "I got it in one night while you chaps were at rehearsal in the Rag. Of course, it has had to be adapted to suit my special requirements. The safe itself has been hidden in the vaults until this afternoon, and I've been working on the lock and other apparatus in here. I got Taggles and the gardener to bring it up during lessons, and I've been fitting it up since directly after school was over."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "You really claim that safe to be burglar-proof, Glyn?"

"Absolutely," said the schoolboy inventor proudly. "I defy anyone to open it. I can alter the combination when and how I like. I'll tell you what. Let's ask Talbot to try his hand at opening it. He learnt all the tricks of the safe-opening trade before he came here, didn't he? He was supposed to be a very clever cracksmen."

Glyn had brought up a phase of Reginald Talbot's career that was not often spoken of at St. Jim's now.

Talbot of the Shell, before coming to the school, had been brought up in the underworld of London among the cleverest rogues of the metropolis. In those days he had been known as the Toff. Trained by his criminal associates in the art of safe-opening, the Toff had developed, although only a boy, into an expert cracksmen. He knew all the secrets of the most up-to-date locks and safes, and had often told Tom Merry & Co. how most of the daring safe-robberies had been carried out.

"Talbot's hot stuff at opening secret combination locks. Old Rivers, who taught him, was considered to be the most cunning of all safe-openers," said Tom Merry. "Right-ho, Glyn! We'll let old Talbot have a shot at testing your wonderful lock."

He went along to Talbot's study, and found him at home.

"I say, Talbot, Glyn's invented a patent lock, which he claims will resist the efforts of any cracksmen," said the Shell captain, with a grin. "You know all the tricks of the trade, so perhaps you wouldn't mind trying your hand at opening it?"

"With pleasure!" said Talbot, with a smile. "There wasn't a safe that could beat me in the old days, and I haven't forgotten the wrinkles that old Rivers taught me."

He went back to Study No. 11 with Tom Merry.

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"Here's the wonder merchant!" grinned Blake. "Now, get to work, Talbot!"

Glyn set the combination, and Talbot, approaching the front of the safe, took a grasp of the knob and proceeded to work the tumblers, his ear to the lock.

Glyn watched him, and gave a chuckle when he noted the perplexed look on Talbot's face.

"Well?" he asked, after some time had elapsed. "Do you think you'll be successful, Talbot?"

The junior shook his head decisively.

"No, Glyn. It's a marvellous lock. It absolutely beats me—and I confess I've opened many an elaborate secret combination in my time."

"It should make the safe burglar-proof—what?" grinned Glyn.

"Rather! I should say that a cracksmen would have to be very smart indeed to open that lock of yours, Glyn."

Tom Merry & Co. looked impressed.

They knew that Talbot spoke with some authority. The Toff of the old days was not accustomed to speaking flippantly.

"Well, that ought to be a pretty useful invention," said Tom Merry. "Rather a change for you, Glyn. Your inventions are usually pretty wild and woolly. There's nothing weird about this one, is there?"

"Oh, I don't know so much!" said Glyn, with a chuckle. "You wait! Now, supposing a burglar got to know of the combination? It would be an easy matter then for him to open the safe. But this safe is absolutely burglar-proof. I'll show you. Now, Gussy, let us suppose that you are a bold, bad burglar—"

"Weally, Glyn, I wufuse to be wegahded as a burglar!" said Arthur Augustus, with considerable dignity.

"But just let us suppose, Gussy," said Glyn pacifically. "Of course, you'd never make a real burglar. A good burglar must have brains!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Glyn, I wegahd that remark as most oppwobwious" gasped Gussy indignantly. "I demand that you withdraw it immediately, othawise I shall be undah the painful necessity of givin' you a feahful thwashin', bai Jove!"

"Oh, keep your wool on, Gussy!" said Glyn. "Look here, old chap, I want you to pretend to be a cracksmen who has somehow gained possession of the combination of this lock. I want you to open the safe, using the code."

"Bai Jove!"

Glyn wrote down the code on a sheet of paper and handed it to Gussy.

"There's the combination of the lock as it is now set," he said. "Now, Gussy, get to work and open the safe. A chap of your deductive ability ought to be able to open it, working on the code."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus went to the safe door and proceeded to open it, frequently consulting the code.

He turned the knob backwards and forwards, in and out, according to the code, and at last there was a click.

"The lock's open! Gussy's done it!" said Glyn. "Now, open the safe, Gussy!"

In blissful ignorance of what was about to happen Arthur Augustus opened the safe door—at least, he started to open it.

But no sooner had he commenced to do so than the door was wrenched out of his hands by some hidden force. It swung open on its hinges at great speed. At the same instant a series of great iron claws came out of the interior of the safe, and before the startled swell had time to move even they fastened upon him like the clutching tentacles of some weird animal. One iron grappler encircled Gussy's throat, another bunch of iron talons clapped down upon his head ruffling his beautifully brushed hair like a mop and holding his head tight, while others fastened their grip upon his arms and his waist.

"Yawoooooooooogh!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! Yow! Oooooooooogh!"

The other juniors, with the sole exception of Glyn, fell back in utter amazement.

Arthur Augustus struggled and wrenched and made desperate efforts to free himself from the iron claws, but they held him fast.

His roars awoke the echoes in Study No. 11.

"Now, don't carry on so, Gussy!" chuckled Bernard Glyn. "The tentacles are not hurting you, I'm sure. I could set them, of course, so that they would hurt frightfully. You see, chaps, they are just now holding Gussy in a gentle grasp."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co., having recovered from their first astonishment, were highly amused at Glyn's burglar-proof device for his safe, and they roared.

D'Arcy also roared—though not with laughter.

"Yawoogh! Gwoooogh! Let me loose! Ooogh!"

Bernard Glyn waved a hand towards the safe.

"You now perceive the beauty of my safe!" he said.

"The safe is quite harmless to open when a secret button on the hinge is kept pressed down. But when the catch is released, and the button is up, no one can open the safe without being caught in the tentacles. They are sufficiently powerful to hold even the strongest man until the police arrive.

"Great pip!"

"So, you see," concluded the schoolboy inventor triumphantly, "the safe is absolutely proof against burglary. The clutching-hand idea is a safeguard in itself, without the lock."

"Yow-wooooooh! Glyn, you howwid wottah, will you—yow-wow!—wesease me fwom these beastlay things?" roared the swell of St. Jim's, struggling vainly in his irons. "Yah! My clobber is wumped—gwooooh! I am in a feahful fluttah—yoww! Glyn, I demand to be weseased this instant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. regarded Gussy's plight as distinctly funny. Not so the swell himself, however. His wrath increased minute by minute.

"Glyn—yow-wow! Oh, bai Jove! Will you wesease me, you wuffian?"

"All serene, Gussy!" chuckled Glyn.

He crossed to the safe and pressed a concealed button near the hinges of the door.

The grappling-irons immediately opened, releasing their grip on Gussy. He struggled back, and, losing his balance, he sat down on the floor with a great concussion.

Bump!

"Yooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus did not remain long on the floor. He jumped up, and, pushing back his cuffs, he advanced in a most war-like manner upon Bernard Glyn.

His very monocle seemed to glimmer with wrath. "Glyn, you howwid wottah, you played that twick on me with the expwess purpose of throwin' me into a fluttah!" he exclaimed heatedly. "My clobber is uttably wumped, and I feel in a wotten condish. Undah the circs, I weghad it as my painful dutay to administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, come off it, Gussy!" said Glyn, backing away, in alarm. "I only did it just to demonstrate—"

"There's the blighter!"

"There's the scallywag!"

Sounds of rushing feet and those two exclamations broke in at that juncture, and, turning round, Tom Merry & Co. saw Kangaroo and Clifton Dane dashing into the room.

Their faces were grim and wrathful, and their attitude was war-like.

"Grab him!" gasped Kangaroo.

"Spifficate the fathed!" roared Clifton Dane.

The two incensed juniors rushed at Glyn at the same moment that Arthur Augustus made an attack in a similar direction.

Glyn looked round in alarm.

"Look here, you chumps, I say—Yow-wow-wow! Yah! Gerraway! Yaroooooooh!"

Next minute Glyn went down, with Gussy, Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane on top of him.

All that could be seen for some time was a mass of kicking legs and whirling arms, from which came fiendish yells in the dulcet tones of Bernard Glyn.

"Yarooooop! Yah! Rescue! Woooop! Help! Ger-oooooh!"

Biff! Bump! Crash! Wallop!

Glyn stood absolutely no chance, and Tom Merry & Co. were too doubled up with laughter to render him a helping hand.

Glyn's howls arose crescendo as he struggled in the toils of the three wrathful avengers.

In the midst of the fracas steps sounded outside, and three newcomers appeared in the study doorway.

Tom Merry & Co., when they saw them, ceased their laughter, and gave gasps of dismay.

Their startled eyes beheld Captain Glyn, Miss Edith Glyn, and a plump, hard-faced man who was a total stranger to them.

CHAPTER 5.

In Safe Keeping!

"WHAT the dickens—" began Captain Glyn.

"Oh dear!" said Miss Edith in horror.

"Bernard! Is that his voice?"

"Yow-wow-wow-wow! Yah! Gerroff! Leggo! Wow! Stoppit! Woooooh! Ow! Yarooooop!" wailed the voice of Bernard Glyn.

"Gussy! Noble! Dane! Chuck it, you asses!" gasped Tom Merry, in a hoarse whisper. "Leave Glyn alone!"

The three angry assailants of the schoolboy inventor looked round. They almost jumped up when they saw the three newcomers to the study.

"Oh, Gweat Scott! Bai—bai Jove!"

"Oh jeminy!" gurgled Kangaroo.

"That's done it!" gasped Clifton Dane.

They blinked sheepishly at Captain Glyn and Miss Edith as they stood up. Gussy groped for his monocle and jammed it into his eye.

"Bai Jove!"

"That was all D'Arcy could say.

Bernard Glyn lay sprawled on the floor in an ungraceful attitude, and his moans and gurglings were weird and wonderful in the extreme.

"Goodness gracious!" cried Miss Edith. "What ever has happened to poor Bernard?"

"Ahem!" coughed Kangaroo. "Just a—a little argument, you know, over a—a small matter. Quite a small matter, I assure you, Miss Edith."

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "A widiculously small mattah, Miss Edith. Pway allow me to assit you to wise, Glyn, deah boy."

"Grab my arm, old chap!" said Clifton Dane quite affectionately.

"Grooooh! Yah! Woop! Gerrah! Oh dear!"

Glyn struggled to his feet without assistance.

He mopped at his nose, which was streaming red, and blinked out of one eye—the other having shut up shop altogether—at his sister and uncle.

"Groogh! Hallo, Edith! Hallo, uncle! Wowp! Fancy gerrogh—seeing you!" he spluttered.

Captain Glyn gave a grim smile.

"You look as though you'd been in the wars, Bernard, my boy," he said. "What have you been up to?"

"Ow! Just demonstratin' a little invention," gasped the luckless mechanical genius. "A harmless demonstration, you know."

"Judging by the demonstration I have just witnessed, I should say it was the very opposite to harmless!" said Captain Glyn dryly. "You had better run along and have a wash and brush-up. We will wait for you in Tom Merry's study, if we may."

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Tom Merry. "Come in!"

The Terrible Three led the way into Study No. 10, and Jack Blake & Co. followed.

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane remained in Study No. 11 to clear up the muddle.

"Well, my lads, I suppose you are wondering why we have come here—and so late in the day," said the captain, with a smile. "We happened to be passing in the car so I thought I'd drop in and see you and Bernard. This is Detective Sanders of the C.I.D."

"Bai Jove!"

The hard-faced man from Scotland Yard bowed stiffly to the juniors. He did not appear to think it a great honour to be introduced to mere schoolboys.

"An attempt was made at Glyn House this afternoon to steal the necklace," said Captain Glyn quietly. "The safe in Mr. Glyn's study was opened—evidently by an expert safe-breaker—and a good deal of the valuables stolen. The robbery was manifestly made for the purpose of getting the necklace, however, for the special drawer in which it was locked had been hacked about. The thief was evidently disturbed at his work before he could open the drawer, and he made off with what he could of the other contents of the safe."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Then there is still somebody after the necklace. Could it be the dwarf, I wonder?"

Detective Sanders shook his head.

"Certainly not, my lad," he said gruffly. "The dwarf was an ignorant Kafir native. Besides, I have information which satisfies me that the dwarf has left England. There is somebody else on this job—and somebody who is a pretty clever cracksmen, too. I shall lay him by the heels in all good time."

At that juncture Bernard Glyn came in, looking cleaner, but still bearing marks of having been through a mangle.

He gave a long, low whistle when he heard the news.

"My only aunt!" he said. "Thank goodness the necklace wasn't stolen! What are you going to do with it now?"

"I shall deposit it in the bank at Wayland," said Captain Glyn. "It will remain there until Detective Sanders has traced the would-be thief and put him under restraint."

Glyn's eyes lighted up suddenly with an eager light.

"There's no need to trust to the bank at Wayland, uncle!" he exclaimed. "Banks are not proof against cracksmen, you know. There have been a good many bank robberies lately, haven't there? Let us take care of the necklace!"

"You!" almost shouted Detective Sanders. "A pack of boys!"

"Yes, rather!" replied Glyn, glaring at the self-important C.I.D. man. "Look here, uncle! I've invented a safe that's absolutely burglar-proof. That's my latest wheeze—a lock with a combination lever that can't be opened without the code, and some mechanism inside the safe that catches a

burglar if one succeeds in getting the code and opening the door."

"It sounds very interesting, Bernard," said Captain Glyn. "I should like to hear more about it."

Glyn eagerly explained all details of his latest invention. Talbot vouched for the baffling nature of the lock, whilst Gussy gave very telling testimony to the powers of the weird grappling device.

Detective Sanders gave a sneering laugh. "Captain Glyn, surely you do not take this so-called invention seriously?" he demanded. "As if a schoolboy could possibly invent a lock that would baffle a lock expert! The mere suggestion of such a thing is ridiculous!"

"I'll wager you can't open it, anyway, sir!" said Bernard Glyn warmly.

"By Jove! That will be a good test of the lock!" said Captain Glyn, with a smile. "You have the reputation of being the Yard's biggest expert on safes, Sanders. See what you can do with Bernard's lock."

"Very well," said Detective Sanders, with a shrug of his stocky shoulders. "Show me this wonderful safe. I'll undertake to open it in five minutes—probably less."

"This way!" said Glyn eagerly. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were not in Study No. 11 when the little party arrived there.

Gerald Croke happened to come out of his study, though, and he joined the party, receiving a warm handshake from Captain Glyn.

When they were all in Study No. 11 Tom Merry closed the door.

"There's my patent safe!" said Bernard Glyn proudly, indicating the rather ancient-looking safe. "Just wait while I set the lock!"

Glyn did so, and then Detective Sanders approached the safe with a confident smile.

Like Talbot, he worked the knob to and fro, listening to the fall of the tumblers as he did so. Four minutes passed, by which time Detective Sanders' confident smile had vanished, giving place to a very peculiar look. Ten minutes elapsed, and the C.I.D. expert became quite red and flustered.

"Well, have you opened it yet, sir?" asked Glyn sweetly. "No!" snapped Detective Sanders, bad-temperedly. "And I doubt whether it ever will open, my lad!"

"Here is the code," said the schoolboy inventor, handing the other a sheet of paper. "Now try it."

Detective Sanders glared at the code. He forgot all about the grappling arms of which he had heard such a vivid description from D'Arcy.

He set to work to open the lock according to the code supplied by Glyn.

The safe door did come open at last—it fairly flew open when Detective Sanders pulled at it.

And then, with swift suddenness, the startled detective found himself grasped by those fearsome-looking claws.

He yelled and struggled, and Tom Merry & Co. roared loudly.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Captain Glyn, his eyes sparkling. "Bernard, that safe of yours is wonderful! I always thought you a clever little beggar, but I didn't think you could do anything like this."

"You should have seen some of the inventions he's brought out, sir," said Monty Lowther. "The living model of Gussy he made, for instance! It was some dummy—just like the original!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"
"And his impot machine and—other things!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "He's hot stuff at inventing things and making 'em work!"

"Will you set me free?" roared Detective Sanders, from the safe. "I'm—yow-ow!—getting cramped!"

Glyn manipulated the button and released the detective from the clutching hands.

"Well, uncle, do you think you could safely trust the necklace with us?" he asked brightly. "We'll look after it, and you can rely on it never leaving that safe until you want it."

Detective Sanders gave a snort. "Captain Glyn, I trust you will not entrust the necklace to these boys," he said. "Such an idea is preposterous! If it should get lost—"

"I was just thinking, my dear Sanders, that it wouldn't be a bad idea to leave the necklace at St. Jim's," said Captain Glyn quietly. "There is somebody after the necklace, but he wouldn't dream of it having been left at this school to be looked after. He would certainly not think of looking for a valuable necklace at a boys' school. These lads, I know, can be trusted implicitly, and I am so taken up with my nephew's wonderful safe here that I think I will do as he suggests."

"You—you'll leave the necklace here, with these boys?" demanded Detective Sanders faintly.

Captain Glyn nodded.

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"Yes. It will be as safe here as anywhere—and probably safer. I shall have to consult Dr. Holmes, of course, and no doubt he will have certain opinions on the matter. But so long as Dr. Holmes thinks the plan feasible I am willing to allow these boys the custody of the necklace."

"Let us speak to Dr. Holmes, then!" snapped the C.I.D. man. "He will agree with me, I have no doubt, that the necklace is far too valuable to be left in the hands of a pack of schoolboys!"

He accompanied Captain Glyn to Dr. Holmes. Tom Merry & Co., Bernard Glyn, and his sister eagerly awaited their return from the Head's study. Croke sneered covertly at them from where he stood by the window.

At last the captain and Detective Sanders returned. "Dr. Holmes was surprised when I mentioned the matter to him," said Captain Glyn, in response to the juniors' questions. "The suggestion was, naturally, rather—er—tall. But he also has faith in you lads, and he agreed with my contention that the necklace would be safer here, as the would-be thief would not suspect that it had been hidden at a school. Dr. Holmes has agreed to the suggestion, but thinks the safe had better remain in Tom Merry's study, as he is the most responsible boy in the Lower School. Are you agreeable to that, Bernard?"

"Rather!" said the schoolboy inventor cheerfully. "I'd sooner Tom Merry had the safe in his den, as a matter of fact. There isn't much room in here, and I want to get on with some other inventions."

"We'll look after the necklace, sir!" said Tom Merry eagerly.

"Very well," said the captain, with a smile. "I will entrust the necklace to your care. You lads will keep this matter secret, and not tell anyone else?"

Tom Merry & Co. and Croke nodded.

Captain Glyn withdrew the quaint necklace from his inner pocket and handed it to Tom Merry.

"There you are, Tom. You and Bernard have the custody of that—for Edith. I leave it here with perfect confidence."

"Bah!" snapped Detective Sanders. "You are doing a very foolish thing, Captain Glyn, if you will pardon my saying so. I will accept no responsibility whatever if the necklace gets lost."

"That will be quite all right, my dear Sanders," said the captain quietly. "And now, boys, what about taking the safe next door?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The safe was heavy, but it was taken into Study No. 10 without any difficulty.

Bernard Glyn locked the necklace in the safe and set the combination.

He wrote out four copies of the secret code. One he handed to his uncle, one he kept himself, and the other two he gave to Tom Merry and Blake respectively.

"Only we four know the combination now," he said. "I think that's all right—eh, uncle?"

"Rather!" laughed Captain Glyn. "I won't even let Sanders into the secret. And now we must be going."

When Tom Merry & Co. returned from the gates after seeing off their visitors, they found Dr. Holmes waiting for them in Study No. 10.

The Head examined the safe with great interest, and he gave a kindly smile before he departed.

"It is most unusual for me to allow valuables to be left in charge of junior boys," he said. "For the present, however, I will not interfere with the arrangement. You lads will be very careful?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

Tom Merry, Blake, and Glyn that night memorised the combination, and then, to be on the safe side, they burned the papers on which the code was written.

They could not see how the necklace could possibly be stolen from St. Jim's now.

CHAPTER 6. Croke's Cuteness!

WEDNESDAY afternoon saw the St. Jim's Junior Eleven playing at Langley. Gerald Croke received a bitter disappointment at being left out of the team. No opportunity came his way of interfering with the match, and Tom Merry & Co. returned to St. Jim's that evening the victors by 38 runs.

The next match, to be played at St. Jim's, with Gordon Gay & Co., of Rylcombe Grammar School, was the semi-final of the captain's championship.

Captain Glyn had received his call back to South Africa earlier than he had expected, and the matches were, therefore, being hastened so that he should be able to see the final.

The semi-final was looked forward to eagerly by all St. Jim's.

When, on Friday evening, Tom Merry's cricket list went



Bernard Glyn's howls rose crescendo as he struggled in the toils of his three wrathful school-mates. In the midst of the fracas steps sounded outside, and three newcomers appeared in the study doorway. Tom Merry & Co. gave gasps of dismay as their startled eyes beheld Captain Glyn, Miss Glyn, and a plump, hard-faced man who was a total stranger to them. (See page 11.)

up, and Crooke saw that his name did not appear again, he scowled blackly.

He had been keeping up his pretence of reformation, and had turned up regularly for cricket practice, in the hope of getting back his place.

Crooke's sole burning desire was for revenge on Tom Merry & Co., whom he hated. He would glory in being able to prevent them from winning the captain's championship.

Saturday was a sunny day, and Gordon Gay & Co. turned up in good time and in the best of spirits.

The usual cheery chaff took place between the rival juniors. All joking was put aside, however, when the business of the cricket match came to hand.

Gordon Gay & Co. were determined to pull off that championship, and thus show St. Jim's that the Grammar School was top dog. Tom Merry and his followers had their own ideas about that, and they were prepared to give the Grammarians a run for their money.

When Tom Merry and Figgins got set at the wicket that afternoon, Gordon Gay & Co. had plenty of leather-chasing to do.

Crooke watched the play with a scowling brow for a short time.

It gave him a pain to see the runs mounting up for the Junior Eleven, and he thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and strode out of gates.

He made his way towards Rylcombe, thinking that the coast might be clear for a visit to Mr. Joliffe, of the Green Man.

Most of the boys of St. Jim's were watching the match, so that he probably would not be seen.

He reached the Rhyl, and walked past the little inn several times before he passed through the wicket-gate and tapped at the side door.

Mr. Joliffe appeared at the door, and he rubbed his hands affably when he saw the St. Jim's junior.

"Come inside, Master Crooke! Always pleased to see you!" he said. "You haven't been down to see your old pals lately."

"No," said Crooke. "I haven't had the time—or the money!"

"Well, well! Don't let the question of money worry you,

Master Crooke," said the obliging landlord of the Green Man. "That reminds me. Mr. Lansing wants to see you. He's in the parlour now."

Crooke went into the parlour, and was greeted by Lansing, who looked jaunty and debonair as ever in his smart clothes. His handsome, sallow face was wreathed in smiles as he shook hands with Crooke.

"Come to have a little game of nap—what?" he said. "You're just the chap I want to see, Crooke. Have a smoke?"

Crooke took the proffered cigarette, and lit up.

He looked narrowly through the haze of smoke as he sat with Lansing in an alcove seat in Mr. Joliffe's parlour.

"You're not working at Glyn House now, then?" he asked casually.

"No," said Lansing. "What's the use? The necklace I am after isn't there, and, besides, I have all the information I want."

"Really?" said Crooke.

"Yes; and all I want now is your help, Crooke. You've got to help me this time."

Crooke shot him a quick glance.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Lansing leaned forward and touched his arm.

"I mean, Crooke, that I've found out where that necklace is hidden," he said incisively. "You have it at St. Jim's, in a safe in the junior quarters. I heard Captain Glyn discussing it with old Sanders of Scotland Yard when I drove them away from St. Jim's the other afternoon. I also heard that Captain Glyn had a paper in his pocket with the combination code written on it. I made it my business to sneak into his room and hunt out the paper."

"You found it?" exclaimed Crooke, catching his breath.

"Yes, and I took a copy of it," was the cool reply.

"Nobody suspects that I have the secret of that combination. My one difficulty now is to get at the safe to open it. St. Jim's is a big place, and I don't know my way about, and I should probably get caught if I broke in."

Crooke chuckled softly to himself.

He was thinking of what would happen to the wily Lansing if he did get to Glyn's wonderful safe and attempt to open it.

"So, you see," continued Lansing in the same quiet, deliberate voice, "I need your co-operation, Croke. I'll make it well worth your while. Once I get that necklace I shall clear off to South Africa with it, and there will be no risk of my getting caught, I can assure you that. I know all the ropes."

"Well, what exactly do you want me to do now?" asked Croke.

"I want you to take that combination code and open the safe," said Lansing. "You know where it is, and how to get to it, and the best time to do the job. You will hand over the necklace to me, and in exchange I'll give you back your IOU's and a lump sum in cash besides. How does that strike you?"

Croke did not reply. He was thinking.

"What's the matter. Don't you think it's safe?"

"Oh, I expect it will be safe enough," said Croke carelessly, although inwardly he was eager. A plan had entered his head.

"Then you'll do it?"

"Yes, I'll do it, Lansing," replied the rascally Shell fellow. "Where is the combination code?"

"I'll give it to you on Tuesday night, Croke," said Lansing. "That will suit me best. Say I meet you outside St. Jim's at half-past eleven?"

Croke thought for a few minutes.

"All right, Lansing," he said at length. "Everybody will be in bed by then. I'll see you at eleven-thirty outside the school gates."

They went on talking, and then joined in a game of cards.

Thus the afternoon passed, and Croke did not leave until the sun was getting low in the sky.

He arrived back at St. Jim's just in time to hear vociferous cheering from the playing-fields.

"Bravo, St. Jim's!"

"Played, Tom Merry!"

Croke set his teeth hard.

Did the cheering mean that St. Jim's had won the semi-final?

Yes. The match was over when Croke arrived on the playing-field. Gordon Gay & Co. were looking rueful but cheery. The St. Jim's fellows were all jubilant. Tom Merry & Co. had won by 20 runs. It had been a long, magnificent match. Tom Merry had scored over a century, and at the end of the innings had still been not out. Fatty Wynn, too, had been excelling again, and altogether the St. Jim's juniors felt that they deserved well of themselves and of their country.

They were in the final for the captain's championship, and they had high hopes of winning.

Croke scowled bitterly as he strode indoors, but a cynical smile soon took the place of the scowl.

He and Lansing had formulated plans that afternoon at the Green Man, but Croke had plans of his own to carry out. He was not going to adhere strictly to Lansing's scheme. Uppermost in his mind was the desire to make Tom Merry & Co. sing small, and now Croke felt that he had the opportunity simply thrown at him.

On Tuesday night—the night before the final—he was meeting Lansing outside St. Jim's. Lansing would then hand him the secret code that would enable him to open Glyn's safe. Croke would open the safe and extract the necklace, but not to hand it over to Lansing.

Gerald Croke was, perhaps, the most reckless young rascal at St. Jim's, but even Croke's recklessness fell short of robbery on such a large scale. He had not the nerve to be a party to the thieving of the necklace. He had another plan—one that was less daring, but which would suit his purpose better.

He would take the necklace and hide it. Instead of giving it to Lansing he would go out to him and tell him that he had been surprised, and chased, and had thrown the necklace away so as not to be caught with it on him. Lansing would be savage, of course, but he would not dare give Croke away. He would have to wait and bide his time.

The necklace, however, would be missing at St. Jim's. Disgrace and ridicule would fall on Tom Merry & Co., who had undertaken to keep it safely for Miss Edith. Croke chuckled softly to himself when he imagined Tom Merry & Co.'s feelings when they discovered that the safe had been opened and the necklace gone.

He would not keep the necklace, of course, but just hide it until his enemies' humiliation had been complete. Then suddenly Croke himself would "recover" the necklace and reap fresh glory for himself. He did not fear Lansing, knowing that the rascal would not dare give him away. Croke, instead of being a dupe for Lansing, would make Lansing his dupe.

He knew how to operate the secret button on Glyn's safe

that threw the grapplers out of action when the door was opened. His plans could not fail to materialise.

Croke laughed, bitterly to himself when he heard Tom Merry & Co. celebrating their victory over a high tea in Study No. 10.

On Wednesday they would not be laughing. The shock of discovering the safe opened and the necklace missing would put Tom Merry & Co. off their cricket mettle, and if he could manage to get into the team he would do his best in other subtle ways to prevent the Junior Eleven from winning the championship.

CHAPTER 7.

The Ruse that Failed!

ELEVEN o'clock!

It was Tuesday night, and Gerald Croke lay in bed in the Shell dormitory, listening to the last reverberating echoes of the school clock booming on the night air.

A nearly full moon was riding in the sky, shedding its mellow, liquid radiance over the countryside.

Croke allowed ten minutes to pass, and then he sat up.

"Anybody awake?" he called softly.

Nobody answered him.

The only sounds in the dormitory were those of his Form-fellows' steady breathing and the intermittent snoring of George Alfred Grundy.

Croke rose hurriedly and dressed.

He put on a pair of slippers, and, having first made sure that nobody was awake, crept from the dormitory. Through the dark, silent passages he went like a prowling wraith, and at last reached the lower box-room.

The window came open easily, silently. He slipped through and dropped lightly into the quadrangle below.

Croke kept well within the shadows, and made his way across the Close to the school wall. He reached the old oak-tree, climbed up it, and swung himself on to the top of the school wall.

A few minutes later he was standing beside Reginald Lansing in the Rylcombe Lane outside.

"So you've come," said Lansing. "Is it all clear, Croke?"

"Yes," muttered the junior. "Where is the paper?"

"Here."

Lansing thrust a paper into Croke's hand. The junior looked at the code eagerly. It was complicated, but fairly easy to follow.

"It ought not to take you long to open the safe and bring out the necklace," said Lansing.

"No; that will be all right," said Croke. "Have you got my IOU's and the money?"

"Yes, in my pocket."

"Good!"

Croke did not care whether Lansing had the papers and money. He had only asked that question in order to disarm suspicion.

"I'll cut off now," he muttered. "Look out for old Crump—he's on duty along here to-night. I sha'n't be long."

He folded the paper carefully and put it in his pocket. Then he scuttled off, climbed over the wall and joined the shadows in the Close, under the elm-trees.

He re-entered the School House via the box-room window, and made his way, creeping stealthily through the corridors towards the Shell passage. Everywhere was eerie and dark and silent as the grave.

Study No. 10!

With infinite caution he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

There stood the safe, like a grey, forbidding sentinel, in a corner of the study.

He flashed on his electric pocket torch and examined the cunningly-hidden button on the door hinge. He pressed it down firmly until he heard it click softly into position.

"Good!" he muttered. "That's put those idiotic iron claws out of action. Now to open the safe!"

He withdrew the paper from his pocket and consulted it.

Following the directions on it, he turned the knob from side to side and pushed it in and out, until at last he heard the final click of the tumblers and he swung the door open.

He did this gingerly, taking care lest the gripping irons should, after all, be in action. But they were not, and with a low murmur of satisfaction he switched his light on the inside of the safe.

He grinned slightly when he saw a rabbit-pie and a bag of jam-tarts on the centre shelf. Possibly Tom Merry & Co. had placed those comestibles there to keep them out of the prowling way of Baggy Trimble. In a smaller compartment below, however, wrapped in cotton-wool and secured in a box, he found Edith Glyn's necklace.

His eyes glittered as he slipped the necklace into his pocket. He then took up the paper on which the code was written, and applied a lighted match to it. The paper burned freely.



Crooke, having finished digging the hole, was about to drop the necklace into it, when a footstep behind caused him to wheel round sharply. A low cry of dismay escaped the junior's lips as his eyes fell upon Lansing. "So you've tried to double-cross me, eh, Crooke?" he snarled. "I followed you here, wondering what your game was!" (See this page.)

and Crooke let it drop on to the carpet when the flame reached the edge that he was holding. The paper having burnt to a dull grey ash, he rubbed it to powder, so that it disappeared into the carpet without leaving a trace.

"I'll leave the safe open," he muttered cynically. "It will be a nice thrilling sight to meet their eyes when they come down in the morning."

He crept stealthily from the study, closing the door softly behind him.

Crooke went down to the box-room again and reached the open air. Instead of going to the wall he turned off and went into the dark, gloomy cloisters.

There was a piece of waste ground behind the ruined chapel, and thither Crooke made his way. He bent down on reaching the waste ground, and with a large blade of his jack-knife commenced to dig a hole large enough to take the necklace.

He had finished the hole and was about to drop the necklace into it, when a footstep behind caused him to straighten up sharp and wheel round.

A low cry of dismay escaped the junior's lips.

Lansing stood behind him!

The rascal's face was contorted into an expression of fendish rage.

"So, Crooke, you've tried to double-cross me—eh?" he snarled. "You thought you'd pull the wool over my eyes. You didn't know that I saw Crump, the policeman, coming, and climbed over the wall to keep out of his way. I watched for you to come out, and followed you here, wondering what your game was. Now I know. Give me that necklace, you young hound!"

Next minute Lansing flung himself on Crooke, and the pair fell to the ground fighting furiously.

Crooke's one thought was for the necklace.

He dared not allow Lansing to get away with that if he could help it. The thing was valuable, and he himself was the one who had stolen it from the safe.

He reached out for the necklace, where it had fallen from his hand. Lansing's arm also shot out, but neither reached it.

Then began a grim, fierce struggle for possession of the

necklace. Crooke fought savagely, desperately. He was determined that Lansing should not have the necklace. He would rather restore it to its owner, and when Lansing gave him away afterwards he would deny the accusation and make the best of a trumped-up story.

To and fro they swayed, locked in each other's embraces, each striving his uttermost to reach the necklace.

Crooke, powerful though he was, found his assailant more than a match for him. He hung on grimly, but realised that he was gradually being beaten.

Lansing crashed a heavy fist suddenly between his eyes, and Crooke's senses reeled for a brief instant. In that instant, however, Lansing had found time to snatch up the necklace and struggle free.

Crooke whirled round and tried to grasp the other. He failed, and then a cry escaped his lips.

Somebody was coming through the cloisters!

The moonlight, shining full down upon the old arches and the stone flags below, showed the newcomer to be Tom Merry.

Crooke staggered up as Lansing leaped to his feet and darted away.

"Hold him, Merry!" shouted Crooke hoarsely. "He—he's got the necklace!"

Tom Merry, nothing loath, gave chase to the fugitive.

Crooke did not follow.

He remained behind, picked up his jack-knife, and kicked back the mould into the hole that he had dug.

Then he ran out of the cloisters in the direction that the Shell captain and Lansing had taken.

As he passed under the old elms a groan sounded through the night stillness, and then he heard his own name called faintly.

He whirled round towards the sound, and then saw the prostrate figure of Tom Merry lying in the grass.

The Shell captain had been cruelly struck on the temple with a life-preserver and partially stunned.

He recovered soon after Crooke had reached him, and staggered to his feet.

"I'm all right now, Crooke!" he muttered. "The rogue

took me unawares! He got away! You say he had the necklace?"

"Yes," said Croke, paling. "What are you going to do now, Merry?"

"Call the Head, and get him to telephone the police at once!" said Tom Merry swiftly. "I had a good look at the rascal, and I should know him again anywhere. I fancy I have seen him before somewhere, but I can't think where."

Gerald Croke went white to the lips.

Tom Merry's words struck a chill fear to his craven soul.

He had seen Lansing, and would recognise him again. He would be able to give a description of the rascal, and this would assist the police in finding him.

If Lansing were caught he would implicate the junior, who had taken the necklace from the safe. Croke would be accused, and it would mean expulsion from St. Jim's.

While he stood there thinking other juniors arrived.

Tom Merry had awakened some time after Croke had left the dormitory, and, seeing Croke's bed empty, he had gone down to his study, feeling vaguely apprehensive. There he had made the startling discovery that the safe had been opened and robbed.

Tom had dashed up to the dormitory and roused the others, and immediately gone out into the quadrangle. Sounds of the struggle had attracted him into the cloisters to the spot where he had found Croke fighting with Lansing.

"What has happened, Tommy?" demanded Monty Lowther breathlessly.

"The necklace is gone! The thief got away with it!" said Tom miserably. "What will Captain Glyn and Miss Edith say?"

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Blake. "But what is Croke doing down here?"

All eyes were immediately turned on Croke.

"I—I—I—" he stammered. "I could not sleep, so I got up and dressed to have a walk round the quad, so some fresh air. When I got downstairs I saw the burglar, and gave chase. He ran me into the cloisters, and then turned on me. He had the necklace in his hand, and I tried to get it from him, but couldn't. I hope your fellows don't think I had anything to do with the robbery!"

"Don't be an ass, Croke! Of course we don't!" said Tom Merry. "But we mustn't waste time jawing. Let's go and see the Head. The police must be set on the track of that rascal at once! Jolly lucky I managed to see his chivvy. It's a funny thing, too, but I have an idea that his face is familiar. Anyway, I could pick him out again in a thousand."

The juniors went indoors to tell the Head of the amazing midnight happening.

Dr. Holmes communicated with the local police at once, and furnished them with a description of Lansing, as given him by Tom Merry.

The juniors were then ordered back to bed.

Excitement reigned supreme, and it was a long time before Tom Merry & Co. finally settled down to sleep again.

CHAPTER 8.

A Daring Escapade!

GERALD CROOKE did not have any sleep at all that night.

He lay awake, tossing from side to side of his bed, tortured by thoughts and apprehensions of the morrow.

If Lansing were caught Croke knew that he would get into trouble, too. That much was certain. The least it would mean for him was expulsion from school. He shuddered at the prospect now, although in the past Croke had taken risks of expulsion without turning a hair.

He must get to see Lansing somehow, and try, at least, to recover the necklace. If he could help the rascal to escape, so much the better.

The recovery of the necklace, if he could manage it, would be something in his favour if the worst came.

Croke, by morning, had made up his mind on a plan of action.

He was a coward now—a craven coward, shrinking from the results of his own blackguardly folly. But from Croke's cowardice dawned a grim determination to make good the wrong if he were able. He must recover the necklace, not out of any honourable consideration for Miss Edith, or Glyn, or Tom Merry & Co., but simply to save himself from the full consequences of his rascality, to ward off the blow when it fell.

St. Jim's was alive with the news directly after rising-bell. The school had been broken into during the night, and Glyn's safe, thought to be so invulnerable, had been opened. Edith Glyn's valuable necklace, which had been entrusted to Tom Merry & Co.'s care, had been stolen.

The juniors had no thoughts of cricket that morning, although in the afternoon the final for the championship

was to be fought. The St. Jim's Junior Eleven were due to play Fleetwood Athletic on their ground at Wrayford, and it would be the stiffest match of the whole round.

Bernard Glyn looked as dismayed and unhappy over the robbery as a fellow could look. Gerald Croke, however, suffered his own torturing thoughts without showing them.

He must get to Lansing at once. The rascal could not have gone far last night. He would probably have taken refuge at the Green Man. Perhaps he was still hiding there.

The thought made Croke madly eager, and he could scarcely contain himself during morning lessons.

Directly the class dismissed he left St. Jim's and made his way down to the Green Man.

Mr. Joliffe opened the side door to him, and Croke noticed at once that the landlord's manner towards him was strained and awkward. He did not open the door more than a foot, either.

"Good-mornin', Master Croke!" said Joliffe with a smile on his face that belied the suspicious glint in his eyes. "I'm sorry I can't stop to attend to you now. I'm very busy."

"I want to find Lansing," said the junior eagerly. "Is he here?"

"Lansing?" said Joliffe, edging farther behind the almost closed door. "Mr. Lansing 'asn't been 'ere since the day before yesterday, Master Croke. 'E left to travel up north somewhere, I believe."

Croke's eyes glittered eagerly, and he thrust a foot in front of the door as Joliffe essayed to shut it.

"That won't do for me, Joliffe!" he rapped. "I saw Lansing myself last night, and he told me he'd been here all day. I believe he's in here now."

"Which I says 'e ain't!" said the rascally landlord of the Green Man with a leer. "Mr. Lansing don't live 'ere now. Ain't that plain English?"

"Let me come in and search for him!" said Croke fiercely between his teeth. "I won't believe he's not here."

Joliffe bared his yellow teeth in a snarl.

"You believe wot you like, Master Croke, but you ain't comin' pokin' about on these premises this mornin'!" he said. "Mind, I don't want to 'ave any row with you, bein' an old customer o' mine, but I must stick up for my rights. You just run along and don't worry. Mr. Lansing ain't 'ere."

Croke set his teeth hard. He was on the point of making a hot retort, but he restrained himself. He strode away, and the little side door of the Green Man closed with a bang. Croke did not walk far.

He felt convinced that Lansing was in hiding at the Green Man. He had probably paid the unscrupulous Joliffe a large sum of money to harbour him for the time being. But it would not be for long. Directly the hue and cry was raised Joliffe would get rid of the refugee. Joliffe was a most accommodating gentleman, but he had his limits. He always tried to keep on the right side of the law, for private reasons of his own. Croke knew the landlord of the Green Man, and knew his fear of having the attentions of the police drawn towards his establishment. So Croke, feeling convinced that Lansing was at the Green Man, decided to lay in hiding and watch.

He secreted himself in a clump of bushes from which he was able to keep observation on the little public-house un- seen by anyone.

His vigil was a long one. One o'clock struck from the Rylcombe parish church, and he wondered what the fellows at St. Jim's would be thinking, as he had not turned up for dinner.

Half-past one.

Croke started when he saw a figure swing out of the wicket-gate. The man who left the inn appeared to be middle-aged. He wore eyeglasses, and a brown moustache drooped from his upper lip. He carried a gladstone bag in one hand.

The waiting junior recognised the walk at once.

"That's Lansing!" he muttered tensely. "The hound is disguised, but I know him. I won't let him go this time!"

When his quarry had walked on some distance ahead Croke left his hiding-place and followed.

The man walked direct to Rylcombe and passed into the railway-station.

Croke followed close behind him, and purchased a ticket to Wayland. It did not matter to him where the other was going—he would follow.

He was surprised to see a large number of his own school-fellows on the platform when he arrived there.

The St. Jim's Junior Eleven were waiting for the train to Wrayford.

The man that Croke was following also saw them, and he walked quickly into the waiting-room.

Croke, seeing that the man was safe for the time being, went up to the St. Jim's juniors.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Heah's Cwooke wollop up, deah boys!"

The juniors looked in surprise at Croke.

"Hallo! Where the merry dickens have you been?" demanded Monty Lowther. "Don't you know you're wanted at St. Jim's?"

"Wanted at St. Jim's?" ejaculated Croke with a start. "By whom?"

"By Detective Sanders, of Scotland Yard!" explained Lowther. "He's properly wild because you hadn't turned up at dinner-time. The rotter has detained Tommy, Blake, and Glyn."

"Detained them!" exclaimed Croke. "What for?"

The St. Jim's cricketers looked glum. "He detained 'em just to show off!" growled Herries in his blunt manner. "Thinks himself no end of a big gun. Sanders rolled up soon after lessons this morning and started making inquiries. He got to know that Glyn, Tommy, and Blake were the only ones that knew the combination besides Captain Glyn, and then he was told that you had had a fight with the burglar last night. He said he wanted the four of you, but you weren't there, so he made sure of the other three. They've got to stay in all the afternoon to wait his pleasure to answer questions. And we want Tom Merry and Blake for the match."

"It's beastly!" moaned Monty Lowther. "Here we are, off to the final, about to play the pick of the bunch of the other championship entrants, and Tommy and Blake are out of the team. What hopes do we stand of winning?"

Croke did not reply. Were he not in such a predicament himself he would have exulted at the Junior Eleven's misfortune. But his own worries fully occupied his mind just then.

The juniors fell to discussing the officiousness of Detective Sanders in commandeering Tom Merry and Blake—they did not worry so much about Glyn, as he wasn't in the team—when their presence was urgently required with the cricket team at Wrayford.

The discussion was being carried on heatedly when the train entered the station.

Croke detached himself from the other juniors, and hid by a stack of milk churns.

He watched the waiting-room door anxiously.

The St. Jim's fellows piled into the train, and just as it was about to start Croke's quarry ran out of the waiting-room and entered a third-class compartment.

Croke noted which compartment it was, and he swung himself into it as the train commenced to move.

The man sitting alone in the corner seat gave a violent start when he saw the Shell fellow.

Croke waited until the train had gathered some speed, and then he stood up and confronted the other.

"Now then, Lansing, you've got to square with me!" he said between his teeth.

The other jumped up with a cry.

"Then you—you've been following me, Croke?"

"Yes. I waited for you outside the Green Man, and followed you to the station," said the St. Jim's junior grimly.

"What do you want—the money and your I O U's?" demanded Lansing. "You can have what I promised you, and—"

"I don't want that!" snarled Croke. "I want the necklace you stole from me last night. You've got to return it now, Lansing, or, by heaven, I'll make you!"

Lansing looked in surprise at the junior, and then he laughed.

"You'll make me—eh?" he sneered. "It would take more than a school-kid to make me do anything! I—"

He broke off, for Croke next minute sprang like a tiger at his throat.

Lansing was taken unawares, and he reeled back on the compartment cushions with the boy on top of him.

Croke was desperate, frantic now. Cowardice had driven him to bravery; he had no fear of Lansing. His one consuming thought was to recover the necklace and redeem himself.

Croke lay on top of the man, his hands encircling his throat. The disguise had come off, revealing Lansing's own features.

"Where is the necklace, you cad?" hissed Croke. "I want it—quick!"

"You sha'n't have it!" snarled the other, exerting all his strength in his efforts to get up.

Croke realised that soon the man would gain the mastery.

He gave a quick look round, and saw the Gladstone bag lying within his reach.

He picked it up, and, acting in sheer desperation, he raised the bag on high and brought it crashing down on Lansing's head.

Again and again the bag descended with cruel force, and the man, with a groan, fell limply back on the seat.

Croke's breath came in short, sharp gasps now. With trembling hands he ran through Lansing's pockets as the man lay there, helpless and dazed from the force of the blows he had received.

Croke did not discover the necklace, but he found a bunch of keys, and one of these, he discovered, fitted the lock of the bag.

He unlocked the bag and opened it.

He rummaged swiftly, eagerly, among its contents, and at last an exclamation of joy and relief escaped his lips.

The necklace at last!

Lansing, snarling, struggled up and hurled himself at Croke.

But in that same instant the junior wrenched open the door of the train compartment and, holding the necklace between his teeth, he climbed out of the fast-moving, swaying train on to the footboard.

"Come back!" hoarsed Lansing. "You little fiend, Croke! I—"

The roar of a passing train dashing in the opposite direction drowned his words.

Croke was gone from the compartment.

With the necklace still held between his teeth he clambered along the footboard, gasping for breath, and holding on for his life.

Digby of the Fourth happened to be looking out of a compartment window further along the train, and he gave an amazed shout as his eyes fell upon the reckless junior.

"Croke," he cried, "you mad idiot! What are you up to?"

Digby's voice trailed off into a cry of horror.

Out of the compartment from which Croke had left a man had appeared, his face wreathed in a look of supreme hate and malice.

Croke flung a look back over his shoulder and saw Lansing clambering along the side of the swaying train towards him.

Tensing himself for the ordeal, he quickened his pace and clambered from door to door.

Some of the compartments he passed had people in them, others were empty, but he was making towards his school-fellows.

An incredulous shout arose from Figgins, who, with all the other startled St. Jim's juniors, was looking out of the window at Croke's daring exploit.

"My hat! Look in his mouth, you chaps! Croke's got Miss Edith's necklace!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Croke, panting, his eyes streaming with water, staggered up to the compartment door. Willing hands opened the door and dragged him in.

Lansing, several yards behind on the footboard, gave a snarl of rage when he saw that Croke had foiled him.

He gave a desperate look round.

The train was climbing the fairly steep gradient that led up to Wayland Station. Lansing gritted his teeth, and took a desperate leap from the train.

The schoolboys watched him, eyes wide with horror, as he rolled over and over down the embankment.

They did not see him reach the bottom, but as the train rounded the top of the gradient they saw a dishevelled figure stagger across the fields.

It was Lansing, making his last desperate bid for freedom.

Croke, seated in the compartment to which he had so pluckily clambered, was surrounded by his eager school-fellows.

D'Arcey had taken possession of the necklace.

"Cwooke, deah boy, you have wecovahed Miss Glyn's necklace for the second time at gweat wisk to your life!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "Bai Jove, I vegand that as weally magnificent! Cwooke, I have said some howwid things about you in the past, but I twust you will now accept my sincere apology, as fwom one gentleman to another!"

Croke did not reply. He could not.

He lay on the seat, panting and trembling.

Now that his ordeal was over, the reaction took toll of his nerve.

He had enacted the part of a hero because he was a coward.

Had he not been confronted with the menace of expulsion for his wrongdoing he would never have thought of doing such a thing.

His schoolfellows regarded him only as a hero, however. They knew nothing of the more sordid side of the affair.

CHAPTER 9. Victory for St. Jim's.

"O H, it's rotten!"

"The beastly Hun!"

"This is too thick!"

Thus the three juniors who were languishing in the Shell Form-room, to await the pleasure of Detective Sanders, of the C.I.D.

Tom Merry, Blake, and Bernard Glyn sat in their seats

and writhed in anguish of spirit—especially the two former. On the eve of setting out for the final in Captain Glyn's championship Detective Sanders had come along, pompous and important, and demanded that they be kept in to answer his questions when he cared to make them.

Dr. Holmes had had no other resource but to agree, as Detective Sanders was handling the case.

It was maddening to the luckless juniors. They had set their hearts on St. Jim's winning the championship, and knew that unless they played the team would be considerably weakened. Their opponents in the final—Fleetwood Athletic—were a first-class team and full of strength. Tom Merry, Blake, and Glyn felt very dismal and exasperated as they languished in the Form-room.

The school clock chimed two.

Tom Merry jumped up in wrath.

"Hang Sanders! I'm going over to Wrayford to play in the match!" he exclaimed. "I'll write down on paper all I can possibly tell Sanders and leave it here for him to read when he comes in. He sha'n't keep me away from the match!"

Blake and Glyn looked in astonishment at Tom Merry.

"I—I say, Tommy, what about the Head?" asked Blake. "We're here actually under his orders, you know, although Sanders is the cause of it all!"

"I don't care!" flashed the Shell captain heatedly. "Neither of us have done any harm, and we should not be cooped up here. I'm kicking against the traces for once, anyhow. You chaps can stay if you like, but I'm off!"

Tom Merry and Blake were already in their cricket clothes.

Blake looked glumly through the window into the sunshine.

"You hop along, Tommy, and leave us here," he said. "If we all three go you'll catch it hotter afterwards, and the Head will look upon you as the ringleader. We'll stick it out and explain to the Head when he comes."

"All right," said Tom. "I can cycle to Wayland and catch the fast train to Wrayford. That will get me there about ten minutes after the others arrive, and I shall be in time for the match. You come on later if you can. I'll keep your place open, Blake!"

"All serene, Tommy."

Tom Merry hastily scribbled out his information to Detective Sanders and then hurried from the Form-room.

He passed Knox on the stairs, and the bully of the Sixth, who had heard of Tom Merry's detention, immediately called him back.

But Tom, like Baalam's ass, heeded not the voice of his master.

He ran on, and disappeared down the School House steps, leaving Knox bawling angrily after him.

Tom Merry took out his cycle and set out at a scorching pace from St. Jim's.

He took the road via the moor and cut off at the old bridge, making towards the railway. That route would lead him direct to Wayland Station.

Tom was pedalling swiftly along the lonely moor road that dipped into the valley near the railway, when a dishevelled figure of a man appeared at the side of the road.

Only for one fleeting instant did Tom catch a glimpse of the man's face, for he darted away; but that glimpse was sufficient.

The Shell captain recognised him at once.

"It's the fellow who stole the necklace last night!" he muttered to himself; and he jammed his brakes on hard and dismounted. "My word, if only I can get the rotter!"

He flung his bicycle into a bush and started off on foot in pursuit of his quarry.

He could only guess which course to take, but that his judgment had been shrewd was soon proved when, looking down into a gully, he caught sight of the fugitive.

With one leap Tom Merry reached the bottom of the gully just as Lansing scrambled away.

He whirled round on the junior, a mad, murderous light in his eyes, and the two closed.

They floundered into the loose clay and stones at the base of the gully, and rolled over and over, fighting desperately. Lansing found that he had a different type of assailant in Tom Merry, compared with Croke.

Tom hung on tenaciously, and allowed the man to weary himself. Then the champion boxer of the Lower School at St. Jim's gave Lansing a selection of his best upper-outs and body blows.

Tom Merry knew where to hit, and he hit hard.

He soon had Lansing rolling among the stoges, moaning for mercy.

Tom wrrenched off the fellow's necktie and bound his feet together with it, then, with his own handkerchief, he secured his victim's hands.

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Then he climbed to the top of the gully and beckoned to some men in the distance.

"Let me go, will you?" moaned Lansing. "I'll tell you the truth about that necklace, Master Merry. When you hear about Croke—"

"Croke!" echoed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

Lansing then recounted the whole story to Tom Merry. He also told the Shell captain of one or two confessions that Croke had made to him at the Green Man with regard to his mock reformation and his secret plans for preventing the St. Jim's junior eleven from winning the championship.

Tom Merry listened to these revelations in breathless amazement.

"Then it was Croke, the awful cad, who actually opened the safe and stole the necklace. He wanted to keep it himself, was burying it in the ground behind the old chapel last night!" he exclaimed, drawing a deep breath. "And—and all the while we have been pampering him, believing him to be trying to go straight, he has been sneering at us and plotting behind our backs. Croke has been a traitor and a fraud all the time. Oh, my hat! What will the others say?"

The men to whom he had beckoned arrived at that moment, and Tom asked them to look after his prisoner until he returned.

He found his cycle and sped into Wayland, where he was able to hire a fast car, in which he returned to the gully. Lansing was then taken aboard the car.

"Right away for the Fleetwood Sports Ground, at Wrayford!" he ordered the driver.

The car reached the ground in record time.

The other St. Jim's juniors were there with Croke. They were telling the Fleetwood fellows the thrilling story.

"Why, here's Tommy! Good old Tommy!" roared Monty Lowther jubilantly. "We've got the necklace back, old chap. Croke got it from the thief."

"Yes, I know all about that," said Tom grimly. "You chaps will be surprised to hear that Croke himself was the thief in the first place."

Gerald Croke reeled back, his face going deathly white.

"What do you mean, Merry?" he demanded thickly. "The thief who broke into St. Jim's took the necklace from the safe, and—"

"You lie!" rapped the Shell captain angrily.

Thereupon he told the others the whole story as given him by Lansing.

Cries of amazement arose from the St. Jim's juniors.

Fellows who a few minutes ago had been praising Croke for his pluck and resource, looked contemptuously at him now that the real truth was known.

Lansing was taken from the car and made to repeat his story.

Croke then covered back under the condemning looks of his schoolfellows.

"Bai Jove! This has sent me into quite a fluttah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I nevah imagined that a fellow could be such a wottah as Cwooke. It appears that he was dwiven to the bwavevy he showed on the twain, in ordah to save himself from gettin' into feahful twouble."

"That's it," said Tom Merry. "Croke is a hero of a sort, but he's more of a coward. He's a heroic coward."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He has saved his skin by getting back the necklace," said the Shell captain. "That certainly stands in his favour. Croke got it back because he was frightened of Lansing getting caught and letting the cat out of the bag about him. But that doesn't alter the fact that Croke is several sorts of a rotter. He deserves a hiding for his treachery to the team alone."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed at the covering Shell fellow.

"You'd better go, Croke," he said, between his teeth. "and don't try to associate with us any more! You'll get the licking of your life if you do. Clear off!"

Croke went without a word.

"What about this othah pweicious wottah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, indicating the rather battered-looking Lansing. "We'll give Lansing a sporting chance to get free and save further trouble for Croke," said the Shell captain evenly, and he turned to Lansing. "You will be released in a minute, and I advise you to make yourself as scarce as possible, for directly we get back to St. Jim's we shall tell Detective Sanders about you."

Lansing's bonds were freed, and he lost no time in making good his escape.

The Fleetwood fellows had been interested spectators of the incident on their ground.

"What about the match now?" asked the skipper—Howard.

"I have left one of my men at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "Will you excuse me a tick while I run across and telephone for him to come?"

"All serene!"

(Continued on page 23.)

In his new guise as the "Red Ant" the elusive Dr. Ziglio, the world's master criminal, strikes terror into all-expecting Detective Wren, who persists in his quest!



THE RED ANT!

By MARTIN WALKER.

Another Exciting Episode in this Thrilling Series.

CHAPTER 1.

Lady Chudleigh's Pearls!

IT was a visitor for the world's greatest detective and crime investigator.

The man whom Augustus, Jennifer Pettigrew Wren's factotum, had ushered into his master's study was taller even than Robertson, Detective Wren's secretary, who was more than six feet in height. He had a thin, gloomy face, and cast a melancholy eye upon Wren as the latter outstretched his hand in greeting.

"Good-evening, Sir Tobias Chudleigh!" said Wren cordially.

Sir Tobias nodded and shook hands. "Sit down and make yourself at home, Sir Tobias," invited the detective.

The baronet complied.

"A cigar?"

Sir Tobias shook his head.

"No, thank you, Mr. Wren," he returned in thin, strident tones. "My time is strictly limited, and I have come to discuss business as rapidly as possible."

"A man after my own heart," said Wren warmly. "You have come, I take it, Sir Tobias, in connection with the robbery under strange circumstances of Lady Chudleigh's pearls last week?"

"Last Friday, to be exact," prompted Sir Tobias.

"The police have not progressed very far in the matter?" asked Detective Wren.

"They have not." Sir Tobias leaned forward. "In fact, Mr. Wren, they have been making such a bungle of matters that I have very grave doubts as to the possibility of our ever tracking down the thieves and regaining the pearls."

"Oh, come, come, Sir Tobias!" said Wren consolingly. "These are early days to take such a pessimistic view."

"The burglary occurred five days ago," argued Sir Tobias.

"Oh, I admit they've got a start on us," said Wren; "but sometimes that isn't a bad thing! Gives a thief time enough to make the rope he's going to hang himself with. What was the value of the pearls, Sir Tobias?"

"Forty thousand pounds."

"Oh, yes, of course! I remember reading it. They were insured, of course?"

"Oh, heavily. Luckily, I had taken out a special policy which covered robbery by violence or any other method while Lady Chudleigh was wearing them."

"So that," murmured Wren, "if you do not recover the pearls you will receive the sum of forty thousand pounds from an insurance company?"

"That is hardly the point, Mr. Wren."

Sir Tobias' note became a little lower. Some inflection in Wren's voice had annoyed him.

"The point is that the pearls were a great sentimental value to Lady Chudleigh, and that since their loss she has been fretting very considerably. Indeed, I am more than worried about her state of health, since she is not a strong woman at the best of times."

"Forgive me, I should have realised that fact," apologised Wren. "What you want, then, is for me to take the case in hand?"

"Privately, of course," said Sir Tobias. "I naturally do not wish to offend the police."

Wren smiled.

"If the police so much as see me in the neighbourhood their past experience will tell them that I'm on the job," he returned. "However, this is hardly a time to study their personal feelings. Perhaps you would briefly reconstruct the robbery and the circumstances under which it took place. You were on the scene at the time, I believe?"

"There were no fewer than seventy people on the scene, Mr. Wren," returned Sir Tobias. "And no fewer than seventy people saw the actual undoing of the clasp that fastened Lady Chudleigh's pearls at the back of her neck. It occurred at twenty-five minutes to eight. I remember this because I had just put away my watch, after comparing it with the correct time by a clock on the mantelshelf. I was acting as host at an evening given in celebration of the silver wedding of Lady Chudleigh and myself. Lady Chudleigh was sitting at the end of the centre table—there were three tables, you must understand."

Detective Wren drew his chair a little closer to the speaker.

"I had just put my watch away, as I have said," continued Sir Tobias, "when I became conscious of a peculiarly sweet, heavy scent permeating the heated atmosphere of the room. I asked

the lady on my right if she noticed it, and she said that she did. I called a butler over, and told him to switch on another electric fan. By this time the scent was beginning to be oppressive. The butler moved away to do as I had said, but even as he did so the whole table seemed to recede from me. The lady on my right might have been a mile away when I next looked at her. I turned around, and the butler was so far away that I could not even distinguish his features. Neither could I hear anything. Where the laughter and chatter of seventy people had been upon my ears there now was a deathly silence. In comparing notes afterwards, each one of us had the same story to tell. Each felt that we had been cut off from the world. We were individuals apart; all of us intensely vague and unable to grasp anything—unable even to move."

"In other words," put in Wren, "you were suffering from complete paralysis of every sense, though not to the point of attaining complete unconsciousness. You attribute this feeling to the sweet, heavy smell that you mention?"

"I can see nothing else to blame for it. At any rate, it pointed to the presence of something foreign in the air."

"What happened then?"

"I can only base my theory of time upon the hour at which I regained my senses, which was exactly fifteen minutes later," continued Sir Tobias. "But I should say that five minutes after the odour had gained complete control over me a dark figure, garbed in a cloak and a helmet not unlike those worn by the Ku-Klux-Klan, crossed my line of vision and made for Lady Chudleigh. I strained to move, but found myself absolutely powerless, as I have told you. I was forced to sit there and watch, as in a dream, this phantom-like figure passing silently through the room, gliding towards my wife. She made no movement, either. Naturally, she was afflicted, as we all were."

"Yes, yes," interposed Wren a little testily. "What did the figure actually do?"

"When it reached Lady Chudleigh," said Sir Tobias, his dark eyes flashing, "it bent over her, calmly unloosed the clasp at the back of her neck, after which it slipped the pearls off, placed them in a small receptacle, and, without further ado, left as it had come. When we all recovered the use of our

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

faculties we naturally raised the alarm and a hue-and-cry. But it was of no avail. All that we found, the only clue that the police now have, was a small piece of white card, exactly like a visiting-card before it is printed upon. On this card were inscribed the words: "I shall not call again.—The Red Ant."

"The card was placed—"

"Across the top of Lady Chudleigh's wingglass."

"Were the words printed or written?"

"They were written in a perfect copper plate, from which the police can only surmise that the man must have served an apprenticeship in that trade. Actually, the lack of all characteristics tells them nothing."

As Sir Tobias finished speaking Wren crossed to the table and picked up a card that lay thereon.

"Was it anything like this, Sir Tobias?" he inquired.

Sir Tobias took the card from Wren's outstretched hand, and as he looked at it, his eyes bulged.

"How amazing, Mr. Wren!" he gasped. "Where did you get this?"

"Apparently you do not read your newspapers very well, Sir Tobias," Wren said with a smile. "A robbery, similar to the one that took place at your house, has taken place every night since that date, at some big function or other. One occurred last night, at the house of Mr. Gregory, the big diamond merchant. The Red Ant got away with a haul of just over five thousand pounds. Not quite up to his usual standard, but, on the whole, not an unsuccessful visitation. I happened to be present last night at Mr. Gregory's affair, and I, too, suffered the fate of the rest. In a week, Sir Tobias, the Red Ant will have amassed a fortune of nearly a hundred thousand pounds, but I shall not catch him till he is in the act of bringing about his big coup. I'm waiting for that. And it will come in some entirely different direction. He will continue using this drug of his until he has occupied the police of the entire country with sufficient work to carry them on for a year, and then he will go full out for the big game."

"In other words, Sir Tobias, the Red Ant, and the famous master criminal, Dr. Ziglio, are one and the same man. So you see it is practically impossible for me to take up your case alone. This is not a matter of one crime; it is a matter of many, and the solving of any one will be the solving of them all. The police have had your case in hand for five days now; let them continue with it. I shall work on my own. But you can convey my most respectful regards to Lady Chudleigh and tell her that she may rest assured of one thing, namely, that her pearls will be returned to her."

Sir Tobias rose from his seat.

"I see what you mean, Mr. Wren," he said. "I'm sorry that you cannot see your way clear to take up the case alone."

He extended his hand.

Wren was about to accept it when the report of a revolver-shot rent the air.

Sir Tobias Chudleigh gave a shriek of agony, and something heavy fell with a thud on to the carpet. His left hand dangled helplessly at his side.

Robertson, who had fired the shot from the other side of the room, leapt round the table; but Sir Tobias, despite his injury, was too quick for him. With an amazingly agile movement he flashed out one long leg, kicked over the table, and plunged the room into pitch blackness by smashing the electric light that hung over it.

Wren dived forward and felt the man's breath against his face for a brief second. But in the darkness that was all.

Then came a splintering of glass. Another shot. And when Augustus, attracted by the sound of violent strife, burst into the room and illuminated it somewhat with a light from the passage, Sir Tobias Chudleigh had disappeared completely.

Wren rushed to the window. He had no need to throw it open, for it was smashed to smithereens. He looked out and down to the ground below. The distance was, roughly, twenty feet. Sir Tobias had evidently hung his great height down, and had risked the drop.

At any rate, there was no sign of him in the deserted street below.

Wren withdrew his head and returned to the room. He found Robertson examining the revolver that had fallen from Sir Tobias' hand by the light of an electric torch.

"Saw him bringing it out from beneath the folds of the cloak he was wearing," said Robertson. "I believe he was going to shoot you stone dead, chief."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," returned Wren coolly. "But what really worries me is—who is the Red Ant? Dr. Ziglio or Sir Tobias Chudleigh? This gentleman has complicated matters, Rob."

"For myself, I should say he has," said Robertson. "You'll have him arrested, won't you?"

"Arrested?" Wren laughed. "Not I. I'm deeply grateful to him; he's given me a working basis. Besides, what proof have we that he tried to kill me? The wound in his wrist rather points to the fact that we were the aggressors. No, Rob, Sir Tobias Chudleigh remains at liberty for a little while longer. And then we must hope to catch him for what he's worth."

"Wonder why he came here?" mused Robertson, placing the revolver on the table.

"A bold move," returned Wren. "I should say that he acted on the instruction of Ziglio. Wanted to know how far I had gone into the case. They must have known that I should be interested in it. He had instructions to kill me if I knew too much. Also, I feel sure that he wanted me to spend this evening at his house."

Robertson nodded in agreement.

"Instead of which," added Wren, "we shall be decorating the portals of Mr. Browning-Dawson's house in Fifth Avenue, on the occasion of the big party he is giving in honour of his daughter's coming of age. The Red Ant is bound to be there, Rob. He has his reputation at stake. And, incidentally, as I informed Sir Tobias, he has the big game in view, and he must give the police plenty to think about. Rob, we must be ready. Time's getting short. We're due in Fifth Avenue at seven-thirty, you know. It's past seven o'clock now."

CHAPTER 2.

The Red Ant's Fate!

THE brilliant gathering in Mr. Browning-Dawson's beautiful house in Fifth Avenue was seated at dinner. There were more than one hundred guests, the cream of the city's society, and they were under the sway of gaiety and excitement.

Mr. Browning-Dawson had informed his guests that the house was surrounded by a special force of detectives, employed by him to frustrate any effort that might be made by the mysterious Red Ant, who had paid such audacious visits to the homes of less wary citizens. What he did not tell them, however, was that Jennifer Pettigrew Wren and his secretary were also engaged in reconnoitring. Wren had come only upon the condition that his presence should not be made public.

Outside the mansion a cold wind hustled and hustled round corners, driving before it a thin, cutting rain. Two plain-clothes constables stood talking in low tones at the great iron gates



Under the influence of the mysterious drug the lady sat motionless while the Red Ant approached her. Then with long, lean fingers it commenced to remove her tiara. Wren and Robertson, their revolvers at the ready, stole up behind the criminal.

at the end of the drive. The keen observer would have noted a dark form here, another there, behind a bush, or lounging against one of the giant oaks. Sometimes the red pin-point of light from the end of a cigarette would flick the darkness; indeed, there were all the usual signs that the tentacles of the law were stretched about the grounds of the house in Fifth Avenue.

As for Wren and Robertson, they had driven up in the detective's car, and had been rapidly conducted by Mr. Browning-Dawson's secretary to a side entrance through which they had passed into a small ante-room adjoining the dining-room, and with access thereto. The secretary, a personable young man, when Mr. Browning-Dawson himself had gone, remained and watched their preparations in wonder.

"Special sort of masks?" he inquired, as Wren produced from a suitcase the headgear and preventive hoods that he had brought with him.

The detective nodded. "I heard about the police and their masks," said the secretary. "They came off worse than the people without 'em, didn't they?"

"They did," Wren replied, smiling. "The drug that the Red Ant uses is not known to any but those familiar to the East. The ordinary mask will allow sufficient to percolate through and intoxicate a man, and once it is inside the mask the drug will retain the fumes."

"What is the drug?" queried the secretary.

"It is known as strychna," returned Wren. "And its main virtue is that there is only one substance through which it will not travel. I first met with it in Central China."

Ten minutes later the detective and Robertson were ready, and the two stepped silently from the ante-room, through the connecting door, and into the dining-room. A thick, black velvet curtain, hung at the end of the four-foot passage, prevented them from being seen, while they could part the curtain just sufficiently to observe everything. Two grim, sinister figures they made, standing there silently, waiting for the arrival of the mysterious Red Ant.

Wren, after about five minutes, left Robertson on guard, and returned to the ante-room. Going to the window he pulled back the curtains slightly, and gazed across the gardens.

What he saw caused him to start involuntarily. Coming across the lawns he could discern a hooded figure, a stooping, dreadful-looking figure that seemed to glide rather than to walk. The figure carried something that looked like the nozzle of a hosepipe, which it moved from side to side.

Wren picked out the form of a detective leaning against a tree. The hooded figure passed within arm's length of him, but he made no movement. The detective was drugged by the deadly strychna, and could neither move nor speak. The Red Ant's screen of fumes was issuing from the nozzle-like implement he held.

Wren doubled back to rejoin Robertson. He knew that within a minute or two now the Red Ant himself would be in the dining-room, and that the time for action, swift and sure, would arrive.

Together they waited in the little passage. Within three minutes Wren, peering through the curtains, realised that the entire assembly was falling under the influence of the mysterious drug. Mr. Browning-Dawson was staring in front of him fixedly. His daughter, his wife, indeed the whole company, were becoming paralysed, helpless.

Then, suddenly, across the watcher's



As Detective Wren felt his feet touch the roof of the train he let go his hold on the rope ladder.

line of vision there glided the Red Ant himself. He seemed to be making direct for a lady upon whose head glittered a tiara of diamonds, almost priceless. She remained sitting, motionless, staring blankly in front of her, unconscious of his approach. It was an eerie sight! The Red Ant reached her, and with long, lean fingers commenced to remove the tiara. Wren and Robertson stepped from their hiding-place, revolvers in hand. Wren stole up behind the criminal, and with a sudden, swift movement, prodded him in the small of the back with the muzzle of his weapon.

The Red Ant swung round, and Wren pressed him backward, turning him round, and forcing him back through the dining-room. They reached the threshold of the door, this strangely hooded party, when the Red Ant shot out his right arm. Wren fired low, but not in time to stop the criminal from creating darkness by switching off the main electric-light switch.

The Red Ant next turned and dashed into the hall. Wren had succeeded in wounding him in the leg, but not badly enough to stop him running. Upstairs he went at a mad rush, Wren and Robertson in hot pursuit behind.

The Red Ant seemed to bear a charmed life, for the pursuers' shots missed him again and again. He turned off down a passage, and burst into a room. Then followed the sound of splintering glass, and when Wren and Robertson entered they found the room empty. They rushed to the window and looked out. On the gravel path, some thirty feet beneath them, they saw the huddled form of the Red Ant.

Dashing out of the room and down-

stairs, they reached the man in five minutes, and, bending over him, Wren proceeded to loosen his hood. In a minute the detective peeled the material from his head and disclosed the white face of Sir Tobias Chudleigh. He was dead.

Search through his clothes brought to light a letter in a plain, white envelope on which was written: "In the event of capture, I shall contrive to commit suicide. Will the finder of my body open this letter!"

Wren tore open the envelope and read as follows:

"I know that this cannot go on long, as Wren is on my trail. But, since I cannot face exposure and disgrace, preferring death, I want to say that I have been forced into doing what I have done by Dr. Ziglio, with a view to detaching police attention from other matters, as well as for the actual gain accruing from my own crimes.

"I have been in Ziglio's power for over a year now, and I trust that some day he will meet his just reward. Should I die before he brings off his big coup, I want the police to know that he is after the two million gold sovereigns that will travel from Frankston to Der-ville on Wednesday, the 30th of this month. How he proposes to get this bullion I do not know, but that he will succeed I do not doubt, unless those in charge are very careful. I hope it all ends soon. I am a broken man."

Wren looked at Robertson, and while the latter was reading the letter he pulled off his hood.

"To-morrow," he said, "is Wednesday, the thirtieth of the month."

CHAPTER 3.

"We've Won this Time!"

WEDNESDAY, the thirtieth of the month, dawned grey and sulky. Inspector Tremayne, of the Frankston police, was engaged in talking to his chief half an hour before the departure of the train from the city to Derville with the gold aboard.

"I'm mighty sorry I couldn't get Boston to come with me," the inspector was saying. "Useful man, Boston. Knows more about train robberies than anyone else in the force, I should say."

The chief nodded. "I agree with you," he said. "But it can't be helped. Boston's out on a wild-goose chase for the Red Ant, and Boston's tentacles are with him. You wouldn't have such good men as you have, Tremayne, if that enterprising criminal hadn't killed himself last night. Personally," added the chief, "I think—always have thought, and always shall think—that this bank business is a job for the military. However, there you are!"

"Well, so long, chief," said Tremayne, extending his hand, "if I don't come back I'll write. It's a nasty job this."

"It is," admitted the chief. "But go to it, Tremayne. You'll win through. Good luck!"

They shook hands, and Inspector Tremayne left the office. In the car that whirled him down to the station he fully realised his terrific responsibility. True, it was a big compliment, but if anything happened—if anything happened!

The thought persisted in leaping through Inspector Tremayne's brain. He reviewed the qualities of the men that he had with him on the job. Tamworth, keen as mustard, resourceful, too—a good man; Richardson, very able; Dundee, a Scotsman, worth his weight in gold; Evans, a Welshman, worth his weight in anthracite; and Piggott. Piggott had been in the force for years. What he didn't know wasn't worth knowing. They were all heavily armed. No; on the whole, thought Inspector Tremayne, as his taxi turned into the station drive, there could not be much need for anxiety.

Arriving at the station, he found everything in order. His carriage was the last of a long train, and his little band of comrades, together with the two railway officials who were also to travel with them, were waiting for him. Everything was as good as it could be.

At half-past nine exactly the great engine of the express emitted a long, shrill blast from its whistle, and next

moment the train jolted into motion.

Soon they were rushing through the countryside at fifty miles an hour.

Inside the special carriage the police settled themselves comfortably. Richardson, Dundee, a railroad official, and Tamworth were playing bridge. Tremayne, seated upon a box, toyed with a revolver. The others exchanged friendly argument on political subjects of the day. The boxes containing the precious sovereigns were stacked almost all round them.

An hour passed thus. The train had by this time entered a vast, barren plain, one might call it a desert. The line stretched across the flat expanse of land for a distance of more than a hundred miles, and not a house or a tree could be seen. As far as the eye could range there were only the shining ribbons of metal, the road running parallel, and brown burned earth.

Nobody noticed two very strange things that were occurring as the train rushed through this desert. Nobody noticed the figure of a man, seated astride the coupling between the special carriage of the train and the one next to it, and nobody noticed the aeroplane that had "picked up" the train and was following it. The man sitting astride the couplings was working furiously at the connecting links. And one of the men in the aeroplane was preparing to leave it.

"Steady, Rob!" cried Wren, for Wren it was. "Keep her going just as she is now. Ha, there goes the ladder!"

The detective had dropped out his rope ladder, and the next minute he had left the aeroplane and was swaying down towards the train—towards the last carriage. He felt his feet touch the roof, and let go his hold on the rope ladder. Then he started to roll down the slight incline, his speed increasing by the rocking of the tearing carriages. He stretched out and grasped a ventilator, and hung on for a moment, lying spread-eagled across the roof. Then he commenced to worm his way towards the iron ladder at the rear of the carriage. At this moment the man sitting astride the couplings finished his job, and the last carriage parted from the train.

From his somewhat perilous position the man watched the fast-disappearing express with much gratification.

Inside the coach Tremayne suddenly looked up.



STARS OF THE CIRCUS



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"We're slowing down," he said. "Never knew this to happen on this bit of line before."

"We are slowing down," said the railroad official, who had been talking to Piggott. "And you'd better put up your hands, Inspector Tremayne, if you value your life, and drop that gun!"

Tremayne, turning round astounded, found himself gazing down the business end of the railroad official's gun. He still held his own. The railroad official's barked out, and Tremayne, with a cry of agony, fell forward on the floor. The others started to their feet. Richardson flashed his hand to his pocket, but Piggott got him before he had time to reach it. Tamworth went down with a yell as the railroad official shot him through the ankle, while Evans and Dundee, too flabbergasted by the swiftly-moving events and the fate of their companions, held up their hands as commanded. The other railway official relieved them of their weapons.

By this time the lone carriage was coming to a standstill. Within a minute it stopped altogether, but not before Evans and Dundee were securely strapped up.

Piggott then pushed his head out of the window. Far ahead he could see a little cloud of dust coming towards them along the road that ran parallel with the railway-track.

"Car's coming," he said shortly, as he withdrew his head. "Get busy!"

The three men were in the act of hauling down the first of the boxes containing the bullion, when the door suddenly slid back, and Jennifer Pettigrew Wren stood framed in the opening.

"Gentlemen," he said, "don't move one inch in my direction till I say it."

All three swung round in surprise.

Wren's hand was as steady as a rock. "I don't think I'll come in," he continued. "You'd better come out. If might be—"

His remarks were cut short by the deadly blow that was delivered on the back of his head by the man who had been seated on the couplings. His knees sagged, and he fell forward, halfway into the special coach. At that moment the car that had been coming up the road drew alongside the stationary carriage. From it stepped Dr. Ziglio, who looked down at the fallen, unconscious Wren.

"Dear me!" he said. "Trouble with Mr. Wren again, eh? What a foolish fellow he is. But I think we've won this time, don't you, boys?"

THE END.

(Whether Dr. Ziglio thinks right remains to be seen. Be sure you read the next story in this thrilling series, entitled: "Ziglio's Last Card!" which will appear in next week's issue of the GEM.)

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Rivals of the Racecourse!

BY
**ANDREW
GRAY.**

A Sensational
Story of the
Turf.

The Wily Wisby!

WHY have you brought this man here?" demanded the chairman of the committee, unable to grasp the significance

of all this. "Why, you dough-headed chump!" yelled Derringer. "Can't you see? You've just turned my pard down for riding foul, and now I'm going to prove to you that it's all a lie! It was Wisby who kicked Martingale—not the other way about! And this camera's going to prove it, so soon as we get the film developed. They're tackling the job right now!"

"Rubbish! Do you think we can wait all day for that?" spluttered one gentleman at the table.

"Why, yes, I reckon so!" retorted Dick. "You're Britishers, ain't you, sitting here to see fair play? And if you ain't, I am! As for waiting, the film won't take long," he went on. "This Scopos Company is an up-to-date American consarn to supply the picture theatres in record time. They've got their own travelling dark-room, and the operators are hard at it now."

Wisby's face turned sickly white when he heard this. If the camera really revealed his treacherous act, he was ruined. More than that, he would be execrated in every picture palace in the land.

Meantime, of course, the crowds outside were all seething with impatience. That there was something in the rumour that the case was being retried was shown by the sudden lowering of the numbers in the great telegraph-board.

A huge mob was collected behind the grand stand, clamouring for news.

The minutes dragged away, and at last three men were seen shouldering their way through, bearing a mysterious black box.

It was a long roll of negative film now developed and chemically dried. The Scopos operators, with American cuteness, recognised that this was one of the biggest "scoops" ever known. They had worked like demons to take full advantage of it.

"Hurrah! Here we are! Now we'll see who's telling all the lies!" whooped Dick, as the men hurried in.

The stewards all promptly donned eye-glasses and spectacles to make a close examination of the thousands of tiny

pictures recording every move and detail of the incident.

The film was unwound with infinite care, for it was likely to prove the biggest Turf sensation of the century.

The excitement grew and grew as the photograph showed how Wisby, on Roumart, was quickly creeping up on Mat Martingale.

Soon it was seen that Wisby was beginning to raise his inside boot, drawing it backwards. Mat, apparently, was quite unconscious of this, looking straight ahead.

And now, in picture after picture, Wisby's foot was beginning to descend again. He was shown lunging forward

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

LORD RIPLADE, late owner of the estates of Furzedown and the famous racehorse, *Whiplash*, the most-talked-of two-year-old of his day.

TOM MARTINGALE, his lordship's "trusted trainer and esteemed friend," and "guv'nor" of the renowned Furzedown training stables, in whose charge are sixty thoroughbreds, famous among them being the *Stunt* and *Whiplash*.

MAT MARTINGALE, his sixteen-year-old son, a true and trustworthy apprentice.

SCARFE, another apprentice, but an unscrupulous rascal.

SIR ROGER RACKSTONE, a mean and despicable scoundrel, and owner of the *Stunt*, a most unreliable racer.

The late Lord Riplade had so willed that, should his property be unclaimed by his missing heir within one year of his death, the *Whiplash* colt was to become the property of Tom Martingale, providing the trainer was still at Furzedown. Failing this, it would go to Sir Roger Rackstone.

Realising the situation, Sir Roger Rackstone sets a plot in motion, and gets Tom Martingale hounded out of Furzedown.

Mat Martingale, the old trainer's son, who is left in charge of the stables, finds a friend in Dick Derringer, an American.

Fearing further treachery at Furzedown, the American sets a trap, and Scarfe is found in the act of doping the famous *Whiplash*.

A dramatic scene follows, which nearly results in the arrest of Mat and Dick.

Later, after buying the *Stunt* for a ridiculous figure for Lord Dungarrin, one of the Jockey Club Committee, Tom is granted a trainer's certificate.

All goes well until the treacherous Scarfe falls a victim to his own rascally actions, and blames Mat for foul riding.

The chairman is riding in Scarfe's favour, when Dick Derringer comes rushing upon the scene with a photographer bearing a film of the whole proceedings which would establish Mat's innocence.

(Now read on.)

in the saddle, as if putting all his force into one mighty effort.

"Why, yes, by Jove! This evidence is irrefutable!" decided the chief steward. "We cannot appreciate it fully, perhaps, until we have seen the pictures thrown on the screen. But to me it certainly looks as if Wisby—"

A shout of dismay cut him short. Everyone at the table had to fling himself back helter-skelter to save his eyes, for a sheet of flame had suddenly roared up under their noses, darting across the table, and consuming the precious roll of celluloid at a breath.

The picture film that was to have established Mat's innocence beyond a doubt had, in some mysterious fashion, caught fire, vanishing to nothing before their very eyes.

The Stewards' Verdict!

FIRE!" The brilliant flash of flame within the stewards' room had caught the eyes of the crowd outside.

The precious photographs which were to have established Mat Martingale's innocence flared up like powder.

Everybody had to fly for their lives. Chairs were overturned, and stewards and witnesses fought to get out of the door.

None could blame them. The room for the moment was a roaring furnace.

"Get buckets—grenades—anything!" panted Mat, taking command, long before even Dick had recovered from the first shock of dismay.

Catching up someone's big coat, he flung it over his head, and straightway darted back into the heart of the blaze.

At all costs he wanted to save some portion of the film. All his future depended on it. So, sweeping the coat right and left, he strove to beat out the flames. But it was of no use. The celluloid had already vanished to ashes, and it was now the furniture that was burning.

By this time the private firemen had arrived with hand-engines. Dick was hauled out, gasping and singed, though still as determined as ever.

"How did it happen? It was done on purpose," he declared. "Where's Wisby? I remember now he came in smoking a cigarette."

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"A cigarette!" echoed the dejected photographers. "Why, that would do it, of course. A touch would start the blaze."

So they fetched up Wisby and taxed him. He denied it, of course; and, as several of the stewards had been smoking cigars, in spite of the operators' warning, none could say absolutely that he was the guilty party.

At that moment, to everyone's relief, word was brought back that the fire had been got under.

"Well," said the chief steward, harking back to business, "whatever the cause of it, the affair has been most unfortunate. Still, the meeting, I think, has seen enough to agree that Martingale was not the aggressor."

Mat heaved a great sigh of relief; at this, but the chairman had not finished.

"You spurred Wisby through the boot without a doubt," he went on severely. "Whether it was not the result of provocation, however, is another matter. In any case, the whole affair has been disgraceful to you both."

"Well, I'll be jiggered," burst out Dick Derringer, "if that isn't a regular backhanded way of sliding out of it!"

"Silence, sir!" thundered the chairman. "We have given you a fair and patient hearing hitherto. We don't want any impudence now."

The American was furious. But the order to clear the room was given, and almost before they had hustled him outside, the previous decision of the stewards had been reversed and the Stunt declared the winner of the race.

So delighted was Mat that he forgot all else for the moment. Away he dashed, and Dick after him.

The news had just been communicated to the waiting crowds. Those that had backed Mat's mount broke into cheers, and scurried off to the rings to collect their winnings.

Meantime, amid all this excitement, Scarfe had been left to groan and moan by himself under a heap of horse-rugs in the empty loose-box into which he had been carried.

Everyone had deserted him to await the result of Dick Derringer's dramatic appeal. Realising this at last, Scarfe crawled on to his legs.

He was not very badly hurt. The blow which had felled him had raised a lump the size of an egg.

But he had a skull like iron.

His first thought, naturally, was of Sir Roger, who had knocked him down.

"The hound! I'll take it out of him for that, see if I don't!" he groaned, as he climbed into his clothes, which lay beside him. "I'll make him pay up five times fifty quid when I get hold of him. I wonder where the scoundrel has got to now?"

Finding his clothes, he dressed and stumbled to the stable door, blinking about him in bewilderment. The usual host of stable-boys round such quarters had vanished. Suddenly he gave a gasp and a jump.

From under the cobbles at his feet came a voice squeaking in ghastly accents:

"Help! Let me out! I'm suffocating! Help!"

Scarfe pulled himself together. He looked up at the rafters, and even poked among the loose straw. There was not a sign of anyone to be seen. Yet still the voice was heard whining for aid.

"Strike a light, where are you, then?" spluttered Scarfe, getting over his fright at last. "What's your game? Are you up a chimney or down a drain?"

"I'm in here!" gulped the mysterious voice. And the apprentice decided that it must come from a big galvanised iron tank beside the next stable-door.

"In there," quoth Scarfe, noting that the lid was padlocked. "And who the thump may you be when you're at home?"

"Rackstone—Sir Roger Rackstone," answered the voice in a suffocating whisper.

"What!" yelled Scarfe. "Well, if this ain't a go, I don't know what is! So you're Sir Roger, are you? Well, I'm Scarfe—d'y'hear?—Scarfe, whose pocket you jolly well picked, you sneak thief, and whose head you nearly cracked in your nasty temper. D'y'you follow me, you limping har?"

It was the baronet's turn to yelp, though his exclamation was one of pure dismay. Scarfe was tearing at the padlock! The key had not been turned in it, as it happened, and it came adrift in his hand.

In another second his captive would have been out and away like a rabbit, but Scarfe just remembered this in time.

"Oh, no, you don't!" he snarled, slipping the bolt into the staple again. "I've just thought of something. I've got a lot to say to you!"

"But I'm suffocating! I'm sitting up to my waist in whitewash, or something," whined his victim. "Let me out first, and then we'll talk."

"Oh, yes, like we did in the stable before! No blessed fear!" laughed Scarfe uglily. "You can blessed well suffocate for all I care, and then I can go through your pockets afterwards. I want that two hundred and fifty quid out of you that you promised me."

"Two hundred and fifty!" exclaimed the muffled voice indignantly. "Why, you said fifty!"

"Well, I say two hundred and fifty now. That's compound interest for two hours and the crack on the nut you gave me. And it's blessed cheap, too, so you'd better part!"

"Not me," protested his victim. "I'll see you hanged first! It's rank black-mail!"

"Rank whitewash, if you ask me, by the smell of it," laughed Scarfe, sniffing the stuff through the crack of the lid. "It's got carbolic in it, hasn't it? It's what they use to lime out the stables."

His wretched prisoner neither knew nor cared. He only knew that all his clothes were saturated with it, and that he would never get the smell out of his nose in a lifetime.

"So come now, my beauty, you'd better come to business, you know!" leered Scarfe. "The quicker you put your penny in the slot the quicker you'll be out of it. Try and make believe it's a blessed automatic machine and you're a packet of chocolate. It'll come easier p'r'aps."

Sir Roger spluttered and groaned. He was bent double, and had been so for over an hour. He was cramped in every joint, and shivering with cold, yet still he whined and protested.

"Do you think I'm made of money, that I carry two hundred and fifty pounds about with me?" he tried to bluff.

"All right," said Scarfe easily. "You write out a cheque, then, and pass it through. Only you'll have to wait inside till I cash it, and that won't be till tomorrow," he sniggered.

A sepulchral groan and a splashing of soupy liquid followed. He was fumbling



There was a sudden shout of dismay, and everybody in the stewards' room dropped backwards as a sheet of flame roared up under their noses, darting across the table, and consuming the precious roll of film which was to have established Martingale's innocence.

for the wallet in his inside pocket. This was above high-tide mark fortunately.

"All right, you young fiend; you've got me, I suppose, and I'll have to part!" sniffed Sir Roger. "But supposing I pay up, you'll have to get me away without people seeing me. You must get someone to bring my car round so that I can jump straight into it."

"Right-ho! That's all Sir Garnet!" grinned Scarfe. "You wallop up the chips, and I'll be back in less than two ticks."

Sir Roger wanted him to bring the motor first, but the apprentice was not having any, and said so.

So, with a great deal of squeezing and grunting, the banknotes were slipped one by one through the crack in the lid.

"Ten—twenty—eighty!" counted Scarfe, smacking his lips until the last of the notes was through, damped and stained. Still, that did not matter.

Sir Roger had only two hundred pounds upon him, so his captor had to be content with that.

"And now that mortgage you stole," insisted Scarfe.

In vain Sir Roger raged and spluttered. He had to hand that over, too, and thus his latest scheme for smashing Mat Martingale was left entirely at his accomplice's mercy to betray or not.

But Scarfe swore "honour bright," and slipped away to fetch up Sir Roger's motor for him. Not a soul had come in sight during all this transaction, and the baronet was devoutly glad to know it.

Wrapped in a big motor-cloak, he might still beat a comparatively dignified retreat.

However, his luck was out, as always. Scarcely had Scarfe vanished on his errand when a mighty roar of cheering rose. To his horror it drew rapidly nearer. It turned the corner, and headed straight for his hiding-place.

It was the Furzedown apprentices chaireing Mat Martingale round from the stewards' entrance. The case against him had been dismissed, and popular favour was all on his side once more.

"Hurrah! Good old Furzedown! Three cheers for Mat!" cried the apprentices, standing their hero up on the very tank in which the wretched Sir Roger was crouching.

They had forgotten conveniently that if the Stewards' decision had gone the other way they had decided to booh their young boss off the course.

Such, alas! is the fickleness of youth. And then someone remembered Scarfe, and this led to a shouted inquiry for Sir Roger Rackstone.

"Great Scott!" cried Dick Derringer, in consternation. "Why, darn me if I haven't forgotten all about him!"

"Forgotten him! How? Where?" demanded everybody.

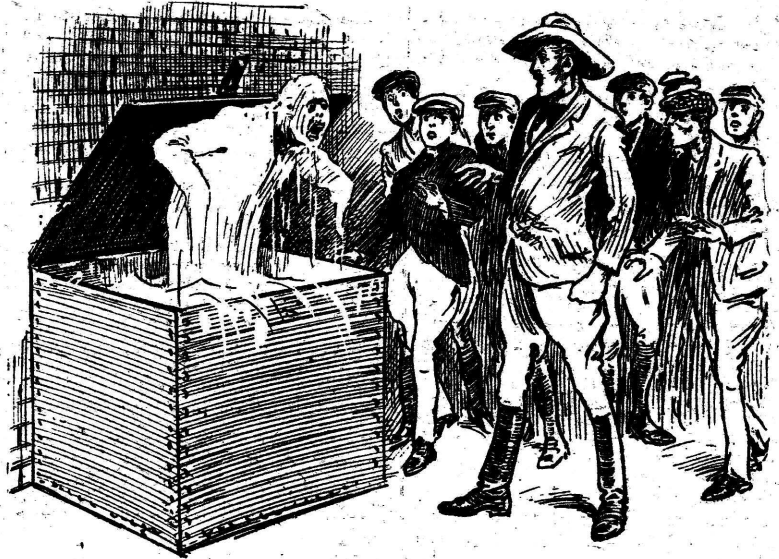
"Why, you remember how the wretched ass was running for his life from the crowd!" answered Dick. "Well, he doubled back along these stables, and appealed to me to help him. I simply couldn't resist, he looked so done and scared. So I popped him inside there!"

"Where?" yelled all the apprentices like a pack of hounds.

"Here, in this tank Mat is standing on. I expect the beggar must be half dead by now. Quick! Jump down, and we'll see."

He pulled the padlock bolt out of its staple, and was lifting the lid, when it flew up, and up popped Sir Roger, too, like some ghastly Jack-in-the-box.

The crowd, all eager enough to get at him before, fell back in horror. For, daubed with whitewash from hair to heel, the baronet looked too horrible for words.



Dick pulled the padlock bolt out of its staple, and was lifting the lid, when it flew up, and up popped Sir Roger Rackstone, like some ghastly Jack-in-the-box.

Sir Roger Has a Bad Time!

SIR ROGER RACKSTONE was like a piebald corpse. He was hideous, and the reek of him was enough to kill an elephant at a hundred yards.

"My hat!" gasped Dick Derringer, who almost thought he had killed the poor man, and that this was his ghost rising to denounce him.

"Dog!" screeched Sir Roger, as cramp in the backbone seized him suddenly, and made him writhe. "You've murdered me! You told me to get in here. It's a plot against my life!"

Derringer smiled. "Where's Scarfe and that infernal motor-car?" he bellowed, almost in tears, as he flopped out of the tank and floundered about in a spreading pool of whitewash.

Then the humorous side of the situation struck all the apprentices at once, and they went into convulsions of laughter.

"Miserable cubs—contemptible curs!" choked the baronet, fishing up the wreck of his top-hat, and clapping it on his head. "Stand from my path! Do you hear? And don't attempt to follow me, or you'll rue it!"

The temptation, however, was too great. Forming in procession both before and behind the pitiable object, they chanted, in solemn chorus, "Hush, hush, hush, here comes the bogey man!" to the time of his squelching tread.

The sounds of harmony quickly attracted a crowd of the general public, needless to say. They also yelled with unfeeling mirth.

Fortunately, Scarfe arrived at that moment to announce the arrival of the baronet's motor-car. His face, when he saw what had happened, was a picture.

He was so utterly taken aback that, before he knew where he was, Sir Roger had grabbed him by the neck, and was hugging him in his reeking arms.

"You little toad! You vicious viper! This is all your doing!" shouted the baronet, mopping his confederate's face and head up and down his dripping waistcoat, whitewashing him from ear to ear. In fact, by the time he had finished with him, Scarfe was almost as weird a spectacle as himself.

Then, with a parting kick, Sir Roger sent him sprawling in the dirt, and straightway leapt into his car.

A warning yell, a furious forward lurch, as if he hoped yet to hear the bones of half a dozen of his persecutors cracking under his wheels. The next minute he was down the road, vanishing at the speed of sixty miles an hour.

Anyone who could have doubted the genuineness of Scarfe's quarrel with his old-time ally after that must have been hard-hearted indeed.

He shook his fists and raved like one demented. He called Sir Roger everything under the sun, and it was some time before Mat could pacify him.

Secretly the boy trainer was delighted. It was a triumph over his enemy to have gained back one whom he had deliberately tempted to turn traitor.

Next morning Mat was up and out early, wondering why no telegram had come from Lord Dungarrin, congratulating him on winning his patron's first race for him.

Then the post arrived, but still no line from his lordship; only another shoal of bills and curt replies from tradesmen to Dick Derringer's appeals for time to pay.

More disappointing still, there was not a word from any new client, as Mat had been hoping. He had been quite building, in fact, on his victory of yesterday inducing, at least, some of his dad's old clients to restore their patronage to Furzedown Stables. But not a sign.

The boy trainer was heartbroken. Dick Derringer came upon him roaming up and down the rows of empty boxes, his lip quivering with despair and misery.

Of his dozen charges only Whiplash and the Stunt counted a straw. The rest were mere weeds and platers, some of which seemed to have been forgotten utterly by their owners.

"Still, Whiplash and the Stunt, eh!" cried Dick, to cheer him up. "There's many a stable would give their heads to have just those!"

But Mat was too forlorn to be comforted.

"No; the fact is it's no go!" he groaned despondently. "None of the big men will care to give me any business while my poor dad still lies under a cloud. Even Dungarrin, you see, has deserted me. That row yesterday, I suppose, has choked him off!"

"Tut-tut!" laughed Dick, though he realised full well the seriousness of the situation.

"I wish to goodness this new Lord Ripplade would turn up if he's going to, and be done with it," said Mat bitterly. "He would have to keep on Whiplash, here—unless he was a fool!"

"How do you mean that he would have to?"

"Why, I told you, didn't I, that the horse would pine his heart out if they ever took it away. They tried that when they sent him up to York once. He was away six days, and then ran at the meeting there. But, bless you, he was all to pieces, and it took us a month to get him back to his proper feed again."

"Yes, I remember now," answered Dick. "So you wish this Lord Ripplade was here to take the colt over. You hope that he would start a regular stud at Furzedown?"

"Yes. Why not? Don't you think he would? You say you've met him."

"I can't possibly tell you," answered his chum.

"You mean that p'raps he'd want to keep his string at more fashionable quarters? He's not the sort to want to help a chap like me, just because I need it?"

"That I don't know really; but he might."

"But you knew him. What sort of a fellow was he? You say he is young," persisted the youngster.

"I said I knew of him. But I tell you I've never actually seen his face," answered Dick. "As for the sort of man he is, there were some that liked him, and plenty that would have thrashed him if they could."

"And you still think that he may be alive?" urged Mat. "It's funny, though, that the lawyers can get no trace of him, surely? Was there any mystery about him? Was he queer in the head at all?"

Dick laughed.

"No more queer than I am, so far as I know," he answered. "But he had a double, now I remember."

"A double? Somebody that resembled him?"

"Yes, very closely, as I've heard people say. And that may be one reason why the lawyers have failed to get track of him. The double may have thrown them on a false scent."

"But they would soon find that out, surely, when they had tracked the double down?"

"Why, yes," agreed Dick dubiously; "but he happened to be a regular wrong 'un, and a convicted thief. So he would probably take jolly good care that they did not track him."

"Oh, I see!" said Mat. "Still, they could not have been so much alike as all that. One of them must have some mark about him—"

"He had," cut in his chum; "a brown mark on his left shoulder, supposed to look like a Geneva cross. But I never saw it."

"Oh," said Mat again, his interest in the new Lord Ripplade quickly waning as his own troubles crowded upon him once more.

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The Billstickers!

HOWEVER, it was time to send the "string," such as it was, on its morning gallop, and this occupied Mat's thoughts for an hour or so.

All day, though, the feeling of foreboding and despair settled deeper and deeper upon him. There was still no word from Lord Dungarrin, and not a whisper even of any fresh horses being entrusted to Mat's care.

The next day and the next were the same, even to the morning flock of tradesmen's bills. Some he managed to pay. But the biggest were desperate. Something would have to be done.

"Anyone would think you'd got the brokers in, and were all gone bankrupt!" said Dick grimly. "I wonder what it means? There's something behind it all."

"Of course there is—that beast Rackstone!" snapped Mat. "He's deliberately, going round pampering the silly tradespeople. Why, in the old days if we owed a man a hundred pounds for a year we should never have heard a word. Now they won't trust me for a shilling."

"Well, I'll have to go up to London and see what I can do," said Dick.

"What can you do, you silly chump?" insisted Mat. "We are bankrupt. There's no use dodging it. The only thing to do will be to sell up Furzedown and square up, then start and sweep a crossing if there's nothing left. Oh, I wish dad was well and back home again!" he groaned from the depths of his despair.

Nevertheless, Dick did go up to London by the first train next morning, though a more unlucky time he could scarcely have chosen. For at eight o'clock, just when everybody was smacking their lips over visions of juicy rashers and friend eggs after the morning gallop, Mrs. Grummidge came pursuing Mat with a face blank as a whitewashed wall.

"There's not a thing in the 'ouse for anybody's breakfast, much less mine!" she informed him, in a doleful screech. "And the butcher, an' baker 'ave just sent up to say they can't let you 'ave no more goods till the bills is paid."

"What! Great scissors!" gasped Mat. "Fourteen hungry apprentices and two stable lads, each with the capacity of ten wolves to feed, and not a half-loaf of bread to go round them."

This was certainly the crowning blow. "Have you sent over to Ewell?" he ventured breathlessly. But apparently Mrs. Grummidge had tried everywhere, with the same result.

"They all says alike," she wept. "No money, no goods. There's a curse of the 'ouse ever since the poor old master was took away. It's the end of the beginning, mark my words, Master Mat. A youngster like you shouldn't have tried to keep the place up. You ought to have gone bankrupt, and not paid anyone a farden, like a gentleman!"

"Rot!" said Mat, bridling. It was a curious thing about him that the more cast down other people were the bolder-hearted he became.

"If there's really no grub, I'll have to tell the chaps, that's all," he said. "They'd better clear off and leave us. We can do no more."

He resolved to call them up immediately, and put the case to them fair and square.

A moment later the word went round

that the young boss wanted to see them on the lawn outside the house.

"I say, you fellow," began Mat, when they were all assembled. "I've got rotten bad news for you, and I don't know what you'll think of it. But you've stood by me these weeks past through trouble and worry without pay or anything, and now—there's no grub."

"Gracious!" groaned one of the apprentices, in a tone of blank consternation and horror.

"What, no breakfast even!" blurted another, after a sepulchral silence of a minute or two.

"Not a crumb! Furzedown is stony broke at last—pebbled to the wide!" answered Mat. "I'm not going to whine about it. We've all done our best, and with just a ha'porth of luck and support we might have pulled through."

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Scarfe sympathetically.

"So there you are! I can only tell you the bed-rock truth," continued Mat. "I've tried to keep the old show going during dad's illness, but I suppose I'm too much of a kid. Now, as far as I can see, I've got to sell it so that I can pay all up what I owe you."

"You don't owe us anything. We came back on the understanding that we all whacked in—win or lose!" called out Scarfe, amid sympathetic murmurs from the lads.

"Well, that's awfully good of you to say so! But I owe you your breakfast, for one thing," laughed Mat bitterly, "and a good many tens of hundreds beside to other people."

A dead silence followed.

"Still, every penny is going to be paid up, you needn't fear," Mat continued bravely. "Furzedown belongs to my father, and it's bound to sell for more than what we owe. The only thing, though," he finished, with a break in his voice, "is that you'd better chuck it up and leave me to the mess. You'll have to, in fact."

"Rot!" cried the little crowd before Mat.

"But there's nothing to eat!" "We'll eat grass!" was the sturdy reply.

"Then perhaps you could sell off only the house and keep the stables," suggested Scarfe, looking strangely pink and downcast about the eyes.

The notion was greeted with a cheer. Tears sprang into the boy trainer's eyes.

"Well, you're awful bricks to want to stand by me still," he told them. "Perhaps I might act on Scarfe's suggestion. Thank goodness, at any rate, the old place is our absolute own, every stock and stone of it, to sell or do with as we choose. If that were not so, I don't know how I could face you now. I—I—"

Words failed Mat altogether. His listeners put it down to overwhelming emotion. But at last they saw that his eyes were not merely gazing into misty space, but were fixed on some far point behind them. Suddenly his face hardened. All turned round at once.

"Great scissors!" gasped the lad. "What, roughs!"

Scarfe had turned a brilliant scarlet by now. All eyes, though, were too busy watching mysterious figures at work at the drive gates to notice that.

Six rough-looking men were loafing about in a little crowd, while one of their number, with paste-pot and brush, was slopping a big bill on each gatepost.

"Hush! Come back! Don't say a word!" said Mat, checking a general stampede to go and demand what the intruders were up to. "They're coming up to the house now, and they certainly can't be roughs. So stand quiet, and see what they'll do."

A growl as loud as fifty watchdogs was the answer of the apprentices. The six rough-looking men came up the avenue. At the bigger trees, and wherever a door offered itself, the man with the paste-pot slopped up still another bill.

A big, bluff, red-headed brute with a squint seemed to be giving them their orders.

"Shove another one on that there conservatory, 'Erry!" they heard him command the billsticker. "Then come on, all of you, up to the front door."

Thus they slowly worked their way up the avenue and round to the front door, before which Mat and his apprentices were marshalled.

"Not a word. Don't move. Watch!" commanded that young gentleman as grimly as he could manage.

Truth to tell, he knew not what else to do. It was as if his dreams of disaster had come at last.

What these men had come about—what they mean defacing his father's property

—Mat could not for the life of him imagine.

Nor did Scarfe suggest more energetic action. He, like the rest, simply gaped.

However, at last they were to see what these precious bills had had to say, at any rate.

"Vetting a large finger and thumb, 'Erry, the billsticker, selected a choice specimen from the sheaf in the bag at his back.

Laying it tenderly down, he proceeded to paste it with infinite care. The other five grinned the while, nudging one another with their elbows, and occasionally jerking their thumbs at where Mat stood.

"Now, then, 'Erry, that's enough of that!" said the squint-eyed man at last. "You ain't going to start and shave the doorstep, are yer, flapping your ol' lather-brush about that way? Whack it up on the ol' front door, so we can all see what it reads like. Eh, 'Erry, my lad?"

Picking up the bill by the extreme corners, the billsticker slipped it deftly on the green varnished panels, and gave it a last flick over with paste.

Mat had already taken one stride forward in sudden rage at their desecration of his home. But now it was a spring in

the reverse direction that he took. He leapt back with a strangled cry of dismay.

"Tokenhouse Mart," the poster was headed, and then in staring letters:

TO BE SOLD
by order of
SIR ROGER RACKSTONE, Bart.,
The Mortgagee,
THE FAMOUS RACING STABLES
KNOWN AS **FURZEDOWN,**

the late property of Mr. Thomas Martingale. Comprising a handsome, modern, fourteen-roomed residence, replete with every convenience. Extensive model stabling premises for seventy-five horses, famous all the world over as the most up-to-date racehorse training establishment in England, etc., etc.

No wonder poor Mat reeled back on his heels.

But before he could say a word the defiant hoot, hoot! of a motor-horn sounded in the avenue, and round the curve came sweeping Sir Roger Rackstone himself.

(What further trouble is in store for Mat Martingale? Be sure you read next week's exciting instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)

travellers!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Howard Frith, 23, Whitburn Road, Doncaster.

A REAL GENTLEMAN!

"Yes," said the old lady, "my Annie has married a gentleman." "Oh," said her friend, "and how do you know he is a gentleman?" "Well," answered the old lady, "the first time Annie brought him into the house I gave him a cup of very hot tea, in order to see when he poured it into his saucer if he would blow on it like these common people do. Well, he didn't. He just watted it with his hat!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. F. Dunne, 26, Claremont Road, Sefton Park, Liverpool.

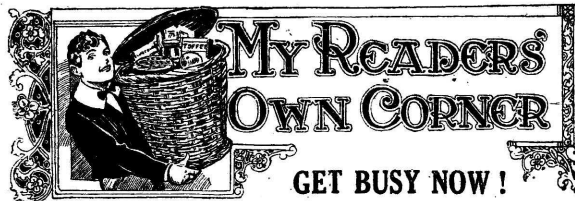
ALL HE HAD!

A young barrister was asked to defend a tramp who was accused of stealing a watch. The lawyer pleaded with all the ardour at his command, drawing a pathetic picture with such convincing energy that at the close of his argument the prisoner was found "Not guilty." The tramp drew himself up, and, tears streaming down his face, said to the barrister: "Sir, I have never heard such a grand plea, and I have never cried since a child. I have no money with which to reward you, but"—drawing a package from his pocket—"here's that watch. Take it, an' welcome!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. W. Malin, 37, Acme Road, Watford, Herts.

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**TUCK FOR LONDON!
ECONOMY!**

Fred: "I've just saved a sovereign, dad." Father: "Oh, indeed! How's that?" Fred: "I've paid a shilling for a 'guinea' pig!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to B. J. Wonfor, 24, New River Crescent, Palmer's Green, N. 13.

NOT TO BE HAD!

"Now, Alfred," said teacher, "what does c-a-t spell?" "I don't know, miss," answered Alf. "But what does your mother keep in the house to catch mice?" "A trap, miss." "No, no! What animal is fond of milk?" "My Bobby, miss," was the reply. "Well, what scratches your face?" "A branch of a tree." "Now," said the teacher, losing her patience, "do you see that animal on that fence over there? Then tell me what c-a-t spells?" "Kitten, miss!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Christmas, 25, Wharfedale Road, King's Cross, N. 1.

THE TABLES TURNED!

Seated in a railway-carriage were three persons, viz., two commercial travellers and a farmer. "What are those animals, Mr. Farmer?" asked the first traveller, breaking the silence. "Sure, they be sheep," replied the farmer. "When they be dead, they be mutton." The other traveller was highly amused, and asked the same question later on. "Sure, they be cows," answered the old farmer, "and when they be dead they be beef." A little while later the traveller pointed to some donkeys in a field and asked what they were. "Them, my man," said the farmer, "be commercial



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"THE HEROIC COWARD!"

(Continued from page 18.)

Tom Merry rang up Dr. Holmes, and told him the good news that the necklace had been recovered. The Head received as many details as Tom could hurriedly gasp into the telephone, after which he promised to release Blake and Glyn, on condition that Tom Merry & Co. came straight back to St. Jim's after the match to explain matters.

"The Head's a brick!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, as he returned to the Fleetwood ground. "We're ready now, Howard. Sorry for the delay."

Tom Merry won the toss, and elected to put the Fleetwood fellows in first, reserving his own innings until Blake could arrive.

And so the final for Captain Glyn's championship began, Tom Merry & Co. playing one man short.

Bucked by the stirring events of the afternoon, the St. Jim's juniors played up like Trojans, and although the Fleetwood fellows showed themselves to be hard hitters, they found the fielding, and the bowling a great deal to contend with, especially Fatty Wynn's bowling.

They marvelled at the abilities of the fat New House junior.

He took five wickets for 9 runs towards the end of the Fleetwood innings, and this kept down the home team's score considerably.

The innings ended for 127, and just as the players were retiring for lemonade, a merry honk-honk! sounded at the gates, and Captain Glyn's magnificent white limousine drew

gracefully into the drive, with the captain himself at the wheel.

Inside the car were Miss Edith, Bernard Glyn, Jack Blake, Detective Sanders, and, wonder of wonders, Baggy Trimble. Baggy had succeeded in squeezing himself into that party by means of his usual unbounded cheek and wily artifices.

"Hallo, boys!" cried the captain. "As soon as I heard the news from Dr. Holmes I had to rush over here. I should have come in any case, of course, to present the medal to the winner. So the necklace has been recovered—eh?"

"Yes," came the general chorus.

During the interval the newcomers were told all details. It came as a great shock to them, as to the others, to hear of Gerald Crooke's duplicity.

"But never mind, we find Crooke to be the same rotter as he's always been, so we'll let things go at that," said Tom Merry. "Here is the necklace, Miss Edith, all safe and sound, thanks to our heroic coward!"

All looked on eagerly when the time came for the St. Jim's innings to commence.

Tom Merry and Talbot soon accustomed themselves to the bowling, and they wielded their willows with great gusto, sending the leather into the country again and again.

The score crept up, Figgins, Blake, and Gussy adding considerably to the total in their respective turns. Kangaroo knocked up one boundary, and in the next over was caught out. The Fleetwood bowlers did their best when the St. Jim's numbers went up to 115, and there were still two more wickets to go.

The last two men—Redfern and Clifton Dane—defended their citadels with might and main, and they brought the total up to 129 before Reddy's middle stump went flying.

"Another close shave!" chuckled Tom Merry. "But we've won the championship!"

"Huwwah!"

And in the joyous celebrations that followed Gerald Crooke and the rascally Lansing were entirely forgotten.

THE END.

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