

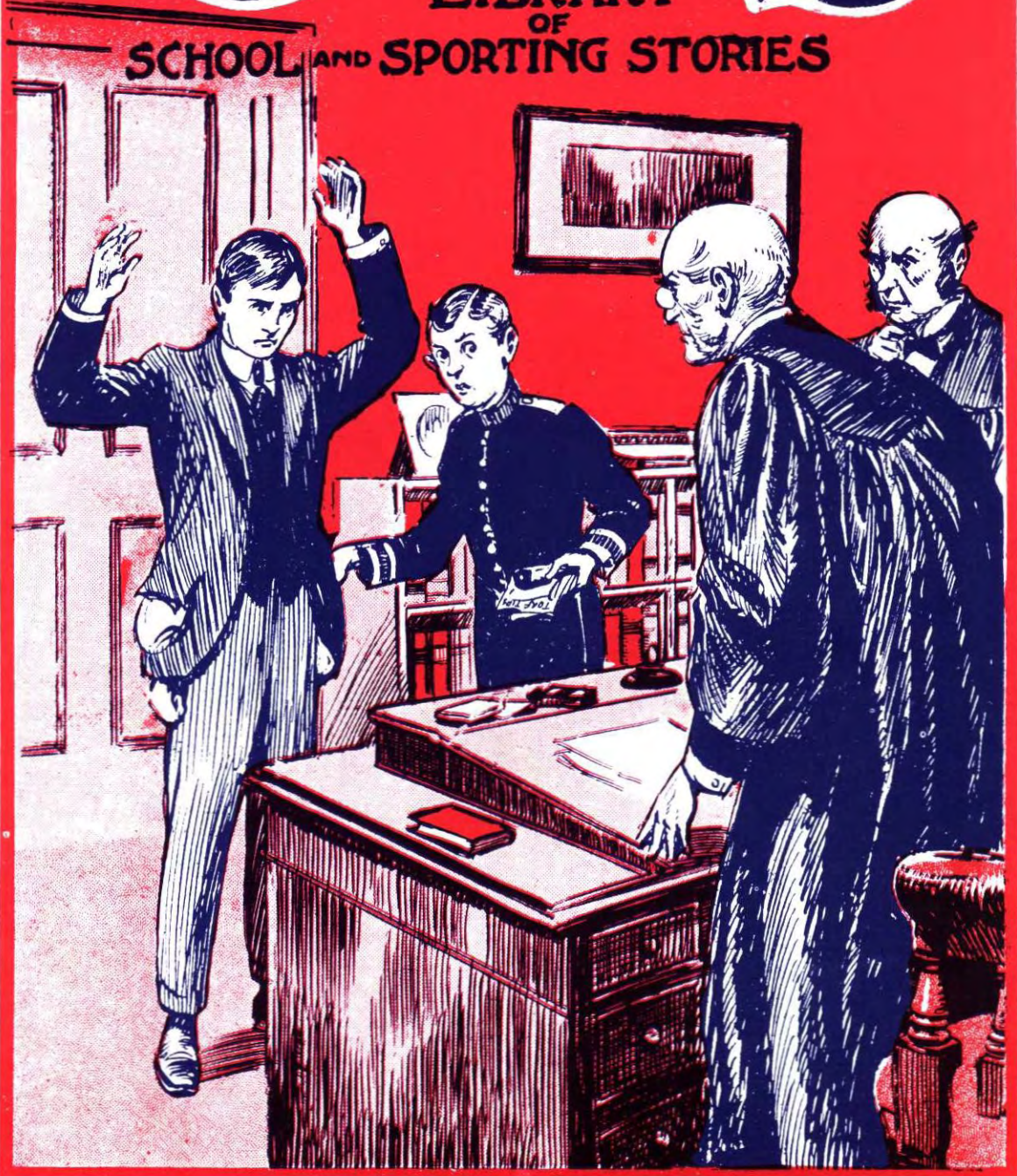
"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S MISTAKE!" A POWERFUL SCHOOL STORY BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

No. 858.
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July 10th, 1924.

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



SEARCHING THE "BLADE" OF THE FIFTH!

When Cutts' pockets are turned out the contents prove something of a revelation to the Head of St. Jim's! (A startling incident from the grand long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. contained in this issue.)





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' FRIENDS" Every Monday
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
 "JUNGLE JINKS" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

MY DEAR CHUMS.—A special treat next week! Mr. Martin Clifford has written an extra-long yarn of St. Jim's about camping. This great subject has a tremendous appeal to readers of the GEM, and no wonder at it. Many of them are campers-out, and have been preparing for a spell in the open for weeks past. Mr. Clifford goes into the business with splendid thoroughness. He understands camping himself, how it is done, and what rules to follow. The new yarn is as bright and jolly an affair as anybody could wish.

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN CAMP!"
 By Martin Clifford.

You will be extra keen on the coming story, since it introduces that cheery wight, Gordon Gay. The latter, with his chums, happens to be camping near at hand. Now, the hang of it is like this: Lord Conway, Gussy's brother, is running a cadets' camp, and like the sportsman he is, he invites Tom Merry & Co. to join forces. The offer is jumped at by the Shell, and, of course, many vastly entertaining happenings ensue. It was not likely that Gordon Gay & Co., the biggest rivals Tom Merry & Co. have got, would let such a priceless chance slip. They do not; they seize the golden opportunity to wash out old

scores with fresh and thrilling japes and rags. Tom Merry and his stalwart henchmen are quite equal to the demand put upon them. From the first chapter the story hums along. The tale is the best start of a holiday series the GEM can boast. The fun goes like wildfire. Look out for a long yarn which will make your sides ache. I shall leave it at that.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

Our famous Concert Number will beat the band, which is most suitable. They are patrons of music at St. Jim's, and nothing could be more appropriate than a special issue of the bright little supplement dealing with harmony. Those people who really understand the ins and outs of music have been asked to contribute. I am not going into the list of contents. That can wait till Wednesday, but the budget of good things should satisfy all desires.

"THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!"
 By Roland Spencer.

A really top-notch instalment of the serial appears next week. There has been nothing to vie with this perilous quest for gold under the sea. The plucky adventurers press on, and thanks to the sheer audacity of their courage, succeed in winning through on the first stage of their search for the treasure, down deep amidst the tangle of the ocean bed. But astounding events are to come in the course of the enterprise, and with the Rat as an adversary, final triumph is still a long way off from Dan Derrick and Brian Carr. The coming chapters are matchless for grit and drama. Just follow what's coming in this new yarn about the old romance of the sea.

THE LEVISOONS!

One of the firmest and most enthusiastic supporters of the GEM writes me a

long and interesting letter about the Levisons. I regret that these really popular characters do not appear quite as often as this reader would like, but shall hope to make amends for this in the near future. Anyway, it was a pleasure to get such a thoroughgoing tribute to the merits of the GEM.

NO DULL WEDNESDAYS!

A reader down in Kent says he has not had a dull Wednesday since a chum introduced him to the GEM. Rain or snow, nothing else mattered. He asks who can eat most—Wynn, or Baggy? Trimble will probably win by a neck. He has neck for anything. This correspondent wants a humorous story with Monty Lowther's puns popping like champagne corks all the time. The treat is coming.

BOOKS!

A staunch reader writes from Wigan to say that Mr. Martin Clifford has hit the giddy target in his description of Gussy. "The author puts D'Arcy down as being kind-hearted, elegant, but a good scrapper and all that, which is quite right and proper." This correspondent asks me a number of questions about books, such as "Bleak House," "Barnaby Rudge," and the works of Scott, Kipling, and Robert Bridges. Scott he finds altogether too dry, but I feel pretty sure, if he cares to make the plunge, he will get tons of enjoyment out of such fine historical works as "Quentin Durward," "The Fortunes of Nigel," and "Ivanhoe." My Wigan chum writes a thoughtful, discerning sort of letter of which he might well be proud.

HOW IT BEGAN!

A correspondent writing from Norwich says he bought a book which contained no school story nor anything about detectives, so he gave it up and started the GEM. He was so pleased with the Tom Merry tale that he has bought the GEM ever since. "I expect," he says, "that Mr. Martin Clifford's stories will always take first place. I should like to know if there will soon be another rag between the New House and the School House?" "Coming, sir," as the waiter puts it. There are plenty of ructions on the way, for the old feud rages as hotly as ever.

Your Editor.



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)
 All attempts in this Competition should be addressed to: The GEM, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

TUCK FOR MANCHESTER.

"Good Judge, Jones!"

Inspector (to inattentive boy): "Jones, can you spell needle?" Jones: "Yes, sir." Inspector: "Spell it for me, then." Jones: "N-e-i-d-l-e." Inspector: "No, no! There is no 'i' in needle." Jones: "Well, it ain't a good 'un, then."—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been sent to John Farith, 6, Bentley's Buildings, Weaste, Manchester

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REVENGE!

The old cabby regarded the broken-down taxi with delight, but did not speak. The chauffeur began operating on his machine. He turned it, twisted it, and banged it, but to no avail. Still the cabby spoke not. Eventually the chauffeur wiped his brow. Then the cabby, with a gleam in his eye, approached him. "Ere," he exclaimed grimly, holding out his whip, "ere you are, mister; 'it it with this!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Albert J. Beattie, 54, Crownhill Road, Harlesden, N.W. 10.

SO HE THOUGHT!

A sculling match was arranged between an Englishman and an Irishman. The Englishman won with ease, and for fun stopped several times during the race. After the finish the Irishman came in for a lot of chaffing, in view of the overwhelming nature of his defeat. But he merely shrugged his shoulders. "Faith," he said, "if Oi had had the long rests he took Oi could have beaten him easily!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Bradbury, 67, Eve Street, Ancoats, Manchester.

JUST SO!

The inspector was questioning the infant class on words and their opposites. "Now," he said, "can you tell me the opposite of white?" "Black," responded the class. "Now, what is the opposite to happy?" "Sad," came the answer. "Sorrow?" "Joy." After a moment's pause he rapped out: "The opposite to woe?" "Gee-up!" came the surprising reply.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Slattery, Benburb House, Shettleston Road, Glasgow.

(Continued on page 16.)

Figg's little joke had consequences which he did not foresee—and Cutts of the Fifth gets a lot more limelight than he cares about!



THE HOUSE-MASTER'S MISTAKE!

A Magnificent New Long Complete
School Tale of the World-Famous Chums
of St. Jim's—Tom Merry & Co.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Too Many Cooks!

"MANY hands make light work," said Tom Merry of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But too many cooks spoil the broth," observed Monty Lowther.

"Rats!"

"We're all ready to help, Figg—it's for you to say," said Manners.

George Figgins of the New House at St. Jim's looked doubtful.

There was quite a crowd in Figg's study in the New House. His chums and study-mates, Kerr and Wynn, were there. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, School House fellows, were there—and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy also was there.

Figgins, to judge by the worried wrinkle in his rugged brow, was up against it; and his friends, apparently, had rallied round him.

"It's jolly good of you fellows to weigh in like this," said Figgins. "Awfully decent! But—"

"That's all wight, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Let's wiah in without wastin' time, or you will lose your twain."

"But—" said Figgins.

"Risk it," said Kerr.

"With Ratty, it isn't so much a risk as a certainty," said Figgins dismally.

Mr. Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House, was at the bottom of the trouble.

Figgins of the Fourth had leave from school to go home for three days. Old Mr. Figgins had asked the Head, and the Head had kindly consented. Mr. Ratcliff, Figg's Housemaster, did not approve—it would not have been like Mr. Ratcliff to approve of anything that conduced to anybody's comfort or satisfaction.

However, Mr. Ratcliff had no power to rescind the Head's decision, so that was all right. Figgins was to go. While the other fellows went in to classes that afternoon, Figg was to start for the station. Only—almost at the last moment Mr. Ratcliff had shown the cloven hoof.

An imposition of five hundred lines had descended on George Figgins like a bolt from the blue.

It was true that Figg had a hundred lines to write, which he hadn't yet written. It was true that when an impot was not handed in on time, it was often increased as a punishment. Mr. Ratcliff was technically in the right. But poor Figg had been quite overwhelmed with dismay when, after dinner, Mr. Ratcliff had suddenly asked him for the lines that were not done; and announced that the impot was increased to five hundred, which must be handed in at Mr. Ratcliff's study before Figg put a foot outside the New House.

Hence the gathering of the clans, as it were, in Figg's study. It was an absolutely impossible task for Figgins to

get through in the time. It meant losing the train at Wayland, and, in consequence, losing the Great Western express, and in further consequence, not getting home that day at all. Figg's home was in Somerset, which was a good distance from the old school in Sussex.

Many a time at St. Jim's, when a fellow had a big impot to do, his friends would help him. Sometimes there was quite a striking variety of hands in a long imposition. Sometimes it would pass—sometimes it wouldn't. With a keen, sharp, acid gentleman like Mr. Ratcliff, the chances were that it wouldn't.

"But it's the only way, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You can't lose the twain, Figgay—and you can't start till you've handed in your lines—so pway let us all help, and wisk it."

"Ratty's sure to notice," said Figgins. "He goes over a fellow's impot with an eye like a hawk."

"Yaas—but—"

"Just like him to double it, and make me stop to do a thousand lines instead!" groaned Figgins. "And Ratty's in a beastly temper to-day, too—I hear that he's been ragging the Fifth in class."

"But you must show up something before you go," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes."

"Chance it, old man. Slam the lines down on Ratty's table at the last minute and rush off to catch your train. You'll be gone before Ratty can spot the thing, if he spots it at all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins nodded at last.

"I'll chance it!" he said. "It's awfully decent of you fellows to stand by me like this—especially you School House bouncers. Pile in as fast as you can."

The decision having been taken, no more time was wasted in words.

Seven juniors sat down round the study table, sheets of impot paper were handed round, three or four copies of P. Vergilius Maro were "whacked out," and the whole gathering set to work.

Five hundred lines from Virgil was no joke. Even with so numerous a party handling the impot, they had to work at high pressure.

A sheet of Figg's writing was put up against the inkstand as a copy. Every fellow had to make his "fist" as like Figg's as he could. It was not a difficult task, for Figg's handwriting was large and sprawling, and might have been almost anybody's. As Monty Lowther remarked, they only had to make the impot look as if intoxicated spiders had dipped themselves in the ink and crawled over the paper.

Seven industrious juniors worked at high speed.

Sheet after sheet of paper was covered—the juniors taking different sections of P. Vergilius Maro, to be joined when the task was completed.

Some of the writing resembled Figg's. Some of it resembled the writer's own. Some of it undoubtedly resembled the trail of inky spiders. Some of it, indeed, resembled nothing in the earth, or in the waters under the earth. But it was generally felt that it was good enough for Ratty.

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The impot grew and grew, like the little peach in the orchard.

Whether it was a case of many hands making light work, or of too many cooks spoiling the broth, certainly the helpful party were getting on with it.

It wanted still ten minutes to classes when the task was done. Figgins laid down his pen with a gasp of relief.

"Thank goodness!"

"Yaas, wathah, I'm glad that's ovah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Don't give Watty too much time to look at it befoah you cleah off, Figgy."

"You bet!" said Figgins.

He gathered up the sheets.

"Best of luck, old man," said Tom Merry; and the Terrible Three left the study to get across to the School House in time for class.

Arthur Augustus lingered another moment or two to help Figgins gather up the sheets. Arthur Augustus was very good, and undoubtedly he meant to be helpful. It was sheer ill-luck that he knocked over the inkpot.

Fellows had knocked over inkpots before, and no harm done. Such happenings were by no means uncommon in junior studies.

But in this instance the happening was certainly very unfortunate.

For the inkpot was nearly full; and a flood of ink shot across the finished imposition, fairly swamping it.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"You ass!" yelled Kerr.

"Weally, Kerr—"

"You frabjous chump!" shrieked Fatty Wynn.

"Weally, Wynn—"

Figgins said no word. He couldn't! Many hands had made light work. But too many cooks—at least, one too many—had spoiled the broth! That impot was utterly ruined, and certainly could not have been handed in to any master at St. Jim's—Horace Ratcliff least of all. George Figgins, in dismay and despair, stared blankly at the inky sheets and said no word!

CHAPTER 2.

Called Over the Coals!

BUZZZZ!

Horace Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House, grunted as the telephone-bell rang in his study.

Mr. Ratcliff was in a bad temper that day. That was nothing unusual; but his temper, generally bad, was now a little worse.

The Fifth Form had given him trouble. Mr. Ratcliff was Form master of the Fifth, and he was not a pleasant Form master. There were fellows in the Fifth who had vowed solemn vows to come back to St. Jim's later on, when they were Old Boys, and give Horace Ratcliff terrific thrashings.

But that was only a happy prospect in the distant future; for the present, the Fifth Form had to stand Horace Ratcliff. When he was ratty, which was very often, they had to bear it—only giving him as much trouble as they could in return. The cane was not supposed to be used in senior Form-rooms, but that morning Mr. Ratcliff had gone to the length of rapping the knuckles of Cutts of the Fifth, Gerald Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, a great man and a magnificent "blood" in his own estimation.

Cutts' feelings, when he had his knuckles rapped like a fag in the Third Form, could not have been expressed in words. But Mr. Ratcliff cared nothing for his feelings. Indeed, having found solace in rapping Cutts' knuckles, he had proceeded to rap St. Leger's, and then Gilmore's. The Fifth Form had been on the verge of mutiny when classes fortunately came to an end. Since then Mr. Ratcliff had lunched, and indigestion had followed. His nose was red, and his eyes had an unpleasant glitter in them. Now he was waiting in his study, a good deal like a spider in his web, for George Figgins. Figgins had to hand in five hundred lines before he started for the station. If Figgy failed to do so, he had to remain till he had written the lines—and if he lost his train, so much the worse for George Figgins.

Mr. Ratcliff was filling in his time by going over his accounts. The house accounts took up a good deal of his time; many matters which most Housemasters would have left to the house-dame Mr. Ratcliff attended to personally. New House fellows averred that Ratty made a personal profit by cutting down the "grub" on occasions; but in that, perhaps, they did even Mr. Ratcliff an injustice.

There were a number of bills on the table, and several little heaps of currency notes and coins, and a ten-pound note. Somewhere, in Mr. Ratcliff's complicated accounts, eighteenpence seemed to be missing. Mr. Ratcliff was

savagely on the trail of that eighteenpence. Mr. Ratcliff would have raised Cain for a much smaller sum. In the midst of his abstruse calculations, the telephone-bell rang and buzzed insistently.

Mr. Ratcliff grunted and stamped across to the instrument. He jerked off the receiver with a jerk that nearly overthrew the telephone.

"What—what—"

"Mr. Ratcliff! The headmaster speaking!"

It was a deep voice on the phone. Mr. Ratcliff started. Why Dr. Holmes should ring him up from the other side of the quadrangle was a mystery to him.

"Yes, sir?" he said, as suavely as he could. The Head of St. Jim's never saw anything of the crusty side of Mr. Ratcliff's temper, if Ratty could help it.

"Mr. Ratcliff! Kindly come over at once—I desire to speak to you before classes! I am very much surprised, Mr. Ratcliff, at what has happened in your Form-room this morning!"

"What? What?"

"It appears, sir, that you have actually struck some members of your Form—practically assaulted them—"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"Dr. Holmes!"

"Such conduct, sir, cannot be allowed at St. Jim's! I am surprised and shocked, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Sir! I—I—" Mr. Ratcliff stammered. "Cutts, sir, was insolent, and I—I—"

"I am prepared to hear what you have to say in your defence, sir! Kindly come to my study without a moment's delay. Unless you can explain your conduct satisfactorily, Mr. Ratcliff, this school is no place for you! I am waiting for you, sir!"

The speaker rang off.

Mr. Ratcliff stood with the receiver in his hand, his face crimson. Never had the headmaster spoken to him like this before. Never had Mr. Ratcliff dreamed that he would ever hear such words from Dr. Holmes. Was it possible that Cutts of the Fifth had complained to the Head—that the Head had taken a serious view of what was, after all, a trifling incident—without even having heard Mr. Ratcliff in his defence?

The New House master replaced the receiver and turned away, trembling with anger and something like apprehension. He crossed to the door of the study and opened it. Then he glanced at the money on the table. There was no time for delay; he had to see the Head before classes, and Dr. Holmes was due in the Sixth Form room very shortly. Mr. Ratcliff felt for the key to change it to the outside of the lock, and lock the study-door after him.

Then he panted with wrath. The key was gone.

He knew that it was a trick by some junior of his House—some fellow whom he had punished, and who had abstracted the key to worry him a little in return. Probably his study key was reposing just then at the bottom of a dustbin.

However, it mattered little. Classes were close at hand—the St. Jim's fellows were already heading for the Form-rooms. Mr. Ratcliff closed the door, and hurried out of the New House.

He crossed the green old quadrangle with quick, jerky steps.

Fellows in the quad glanced at him and exchanged smiles. Seldom had they seen Mr. Ratcliff look so angry and perturbed.

Under the elms near the School House three fellows of the Fifth Form were lounging—Cutts, and St. Leger, and Gilmore. They winked at one another as Mr. Ratcliff scurried by, his gown streaming tempestuously behind him.

"The old fish has caught on the hook," murmured Cutts.

"My hat! There'll be a row!" said St. Leger.

Gerald Cutts shrugged his shoulders and strolled away towards the New House.

Quite unconscious of the comments of those members of his Form, Mr. Ratcliff hurried into the School House.

He knocked at the door of the Head's study and opened it.

"Dr. Holmes—"

The Head was not there.

Mr. Ratcliff blinked round the study. It was amazing that the Head should not be there in the circumstances.

The New House master stepped out into the corridor again. A fat junior peered at him round a corner, and Mr. Ratcliff called to him.

"Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth approached him warily. Trimble's opinion was that Mr. Ratcliff looked dangerous. "Do you know where Dr. Holmes is, Trimble? Have you seen him leave his study?"

"Yes, sir!" said Trimble. "He went to the Sixth Form room a few minutes ago, sir!"



Figgins' impot was done at last. "I'll help you to collect the sheets up, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kindly. "It's nearly—bal Jove!" D'Arcy's elbow caught the inkpot, and a flood of ink shot across the finished imposition, fairly swamping it. Figgins' mouth opened, but he could not speak. (See page 4.)

Mr. Ratcliff did not wait to thank Trimble for the information. He rustled away to the Sixth Form room, more and more angry and perplexed. If the Head intended to call him over the coals surely he could not intend to do so in the presence of the Sixth Form. And he had distinctly said that Mr. Ratcliff was to come to his study! It was most perplexing and irritating.

The Housemaster hurried to the Sixth Form room, and found Dr. Holmes there. The Sixth were not yet in—only two or three of that high and potent Form were in the room—Kildare and Darrell and Langton. Dr. Holmes was conning over *Æschylus*—it being his benevolent intention to inflict some of that great man's work on the St. Jim's Sixth that afternoon.

"Dr. Holmes—"

The Head looked up and raised his eyebrows slightly, as Mr. Ratcliff stood before him, flushed and agitated. The Head did not approve of any departure from sedate repose in a master's manner.

"Well, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"I am here, sir!" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly.

The Head's surprised eyebrows went higher.

"I can see that you are here, Mr. Ratcliff," he answered. Really, the information seemed a little superfluous to the Head.

"Well, sir?" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Well, sir?" said the Head.

There was a pause, and the two masters looked at one another. Both of them were surprised.

"I expected to find you in your study, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff at last.

"Indeed, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, what is it?" asked the Head. "I shall be busy in a few minutes, Mr. Ratcliff. What is it?"

"That is what I wish to know, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, with acid dignity. "It is for you to say."

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff, you surprise me very much," said the Head, more and more astonished. "I do not follow your remarks in the least. You have, I presume, some object in coming here?"

"You have surely not forgotten, sir, requesting me to come!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, wondering whether the Head's intellect was failing at last.

"Dear me! Certainly I have forgotten, if I asked you,

Mr. Ratcliff," said Dr. Holmes. "I have no recollection—no recollection whatever. When did I make this request?"

"Only a few minutes ago—six or seven minutes perhaps, sir," retorted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Bless my soul, there is some mistake here!" said the Head. "I was in my study at the time you mention—"

"Quite so."

"But you were not there, Mr. Ratcliff! How, then, could I have requested you—"

"You have not forgotten, surely, sir, ringing me up in the New House—"

The Head almost jumped.

"Ringing you up, Mr. Ratcliff?" he ejaculated.

"Certainly! And asking me on the telephone to come over to this House at once—"

"Bless my soul! Do you seriously mean to say that you received such a telephone message, and imagined that it came from me?" exclaimed the Head in amazement,

It was Mr. Ratcliff's turn to jump.

"You—you did not—" he stuttered.

"Certainly not! I should not be likely to use the telephone, sir, to communicate with a gentleman only a hundred yards away," said the Head. "It appears that some absurd trick has been played. Certainly I did not telephone."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Oh! Ah! I—I—I—see! A—a—a trick—a wretched practical joke! Oh—ah—I perceive now! I—I really beg your pardon, Dr. Holmes, I—I supposed—"

"Not at all, sir!" said the Head, with a smile. "An absurd trick! My name appears to have been used very impudently. I shall request Mr. Railton to investigate this. I am sorry you have been disturbed in this way, Mr. Ratcliff."

The Sixth were coming in now, and Mr. Ratcliff, with a crimson face, retired from the room, leaving the Head to the Sixth and *Æschylus*. The New House master fairly trembled with rage as he whisked away. His leg had been pulled! A Housemaster's leg, almost the most important leg at St. Jim's, a leg that should have been regarded with awed respect by all the school! Some School House boy had done this—some young rascal—some impertinent young scoundrel—some impudent trickster. Mr. Horace Ratcliff breathed fury as he whisked away, and his look boded no good to the practical joker who had used the telephone.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgy Chances It!

GEORGE FIGGINS stared at the ruined imposition on his study table with blank dismay, in dumb desperation.

Whether the variety of hands would have passed Mr. Ratcliff's inspection or not was now a question that did not matter. The lengthy impot could not be presented to the Housemaster at all. It was fairly soaked and streaming with ink.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his celebrated eyeglass in his noble eye and gazed at his handiwork.

Kerr and Wynn gazed at Gussy, considering whether to seize him and rub his noble features in the ink.

"I am feahfully sowwy, Figgay, old chap! Feahfully cut up, you know!" said Arthur Augustus. "How fwightfully unfortunate that the wotten inkpot should woll ovah like that, you know."

"Ass!" said Kerr.

"Callin' a fellow names will not mend the mattah, Kerr," said the swell of St. Jim's with mild reproof.

"Fathead!" said Fatty Wynn.

"I have already remarked that I am sowwy," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "Slangin' does no good, Wynn."

"Chump!"

"Figgay, old man!" said Gussy,

George Figgins groaned.

"Can't be helped!" he said. "It's done now. I can't take that in to Ratty. He would double an impot taken in that state. I sha'n't get to Bristol to-day."

"It's feahfully hard lines, old chap! Pewwaps it would do some good if I called on Mr. Watcliff and explained the mattah to him," suggested Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "If I mentioned that it was howwidly inconsiderate of him to give you an impot at such a time he might wealise—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"There goes the bell!" said Figgins wearily. "You fellows had better get off to class. I'll begin again."

"Let's rub that silly ass's chivvy in the ink," said Fatty Wynn. "That's the least we can do!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made a strategic retreat to the doorway.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"It's all right," said Figgins, affecting a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "Old Gussy meant well—he always does." Figgins grinned faintly. "You fellows get off, or you'll get into a row with Lathom. That won't do any good."

"Nothin' more I can do, Figgay, deah boy?"

"Thanks, no; you've done enough, old man."

Arthur Augustus retired from Figgins' study. Kerr and Wynn followed him a minute or two later. They could not help their chum now, and they were due in the Fourth Form room over in the School House.

George Figgins sat down to renew his task with a glum face and a heavy heart.

There was no chance now of catching his train at Wayland Junction—no chance of reaching Bristol that day! He would have to telegraph to his father. One day out of his three days' leave would be wasted thus—owing to Mr. Ratcliff and his acid ways.

It was quite unlike George Figgins to feel bitter. He was too fit and healthy for anything like malice to have a place in his breast. But he could not help feeling a little bitterness now. Ratty ought really to have gone a little easier with him, he knew that! No doubt he ought to have written his original impot on time. But the punishment of that omission was too heavy.

Figgins dipped his pen in the ink, and then laid it down again. He hadn't the heart to recommence that lengthy task.

He turned over in his mind the possibility of making an appeal to Mr. Ratcliff. He could explain how the impot been "mucked-up" by accident. Possibly even Mr. Ratcliff might concede a point. It was unlikely, but there was a chance.

The chance was faint, but Figgins determined to try it. He left the study and went downstairs.

He tapped at Mr. Ratcliff's study door.

Mr. Ratcliff had ordered him to bring in the impot before class, and had told him that he would be in his study to receive it. First bell had gone, and it was close on class now. The New House was quite deserted; the Form-rooms being in the larger building on the other side of the quadrangle. There was no answer to Figgy's tap, and he opened the door of the study.

The room was empty.

That Mr. Ratcliff had been there very recently was clear; the state of the table showed that he had been called away unexpectedly. Figgins glanced at the money and papers on the table, and grunted. Where the thump was Ratty, he wondered. Figgins had only time to get to the station, if

he was given leave to go with his impot undone—his bag, already packed, lay ready in the hall. It was really too bad to have to wait for Mr. Ratcliff and lose his train.

Then a gleam came into Figgy's eyes.

He had come there to ask leave to go with his impot undone—owing to an accident! He had no time to wait. Did not the circumstances justify him in taking Mr. Ratcliff's leave for granted?

Figgins felt that they did.

Mr. Ratcliff ought to give him leave, that was certain. Figgins decided to take for granted that Mr. Ratcliff would have done as he ought.

There would be trouble when he came back; that was more than likely. It couldn't be helped.

But it came into Figgy's mind that, if Mr. Ratcliff was going to give him all this worry, there was no reason why Mr. Ratcliff should not have a little worry himself in return.

He picked up the ten-pound note from the table, and slipped it between the leaves of a volume of Livy that lay close at hand.

Mr. Ratcliff could have the pleasure of hunting for that tenner, until he opened his Livy in the Fifth Form room and discovered it there.

Figgins grinned as he thought of it. It was a Roland in return for Mr. Ratcliff's Oliver.

Having disposed of the ten-pound note between the leaves of Mr. Ratcliff's Titus Livius, Figgy left the study.

He picked up his bag, put on his cap, took his coat over his arm, and looked cautiously out of the doorway of the New House.

A few belated fellows were scudding towards the School House, otherwise the scene was deserted.

Figgins scudded away towards the gates. He had been anxious a few minutes before to see Mr. Ratcliff. He was now equally anxious not to see him.

Taggles, the porter, was aware that Figgins had leave that afternoon, and the junior passed out of gates unquestioned.

He hurried away to Rylcombe, and caught the local train to Wayland Junction, and sat down in it with great content. He was sure of the Great Western express now—sure of arriving home at the time his people expected him. When he came back to St. Jim's, after three days' absence, he could explain to Mr. Ratcliff that he had taken his permission for granted. No doubt there would be trouble; but that was three days' off, anyhow, and in the meantime he was booked for home.

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgins suddenly.

It occurred to him that if he mentioned to Mr. Ratcliff that he had been to his study, Ratty would indubitably guess who had hidden the tenner in the Livy.

Figgins whistled. He rather regretted that he had played that little joke on Ratty. Still, if there was trouble to come, it was consoling and cheering to think of Horace Ratcliff rooting frantically round his study in search of the tenner. If Figgy was to be made to "sit" up, it was a solace to know that Mr. Ratcliff was "sitting up" in the meantime.

So Figgy dismissed the matter from his mind, and changed at Wayland into the Great Western express, and went cheerily on his way, regardless for the time of Horace Ratcliff and all his works.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Ratcliff Sees It All!

GERALD CUTTS, of the Fifth Form, grinned as he lounged into the Form-room with St. Leger and Poynings. Cutts' knuckles had been rapped that morning, regardless of the fact that he was a Fifth-Former, a senior, and altogether a lofty person whose knuckles should not be rapped. But Cutts felt that he had indemnified himself by that telephone trick on his Form-master, Mr. Ratcliff's angry and apprehensive face, as he whisked into the School House for his interview with the Head, entertained Cutts greatly. The New House master had certainly believed that he was being "called on the carpet" by the Head; and though no doubt by this time he had discovered the deception, certainly he must have had some very unpleasant minutes.

"The old scout's late," remarked Prye of the Fifth, as Cutts & Co. lounged in.

"I think he's got an interview on with the Head," grinned Cutts, and St. Leger and Gilmore chuckled.

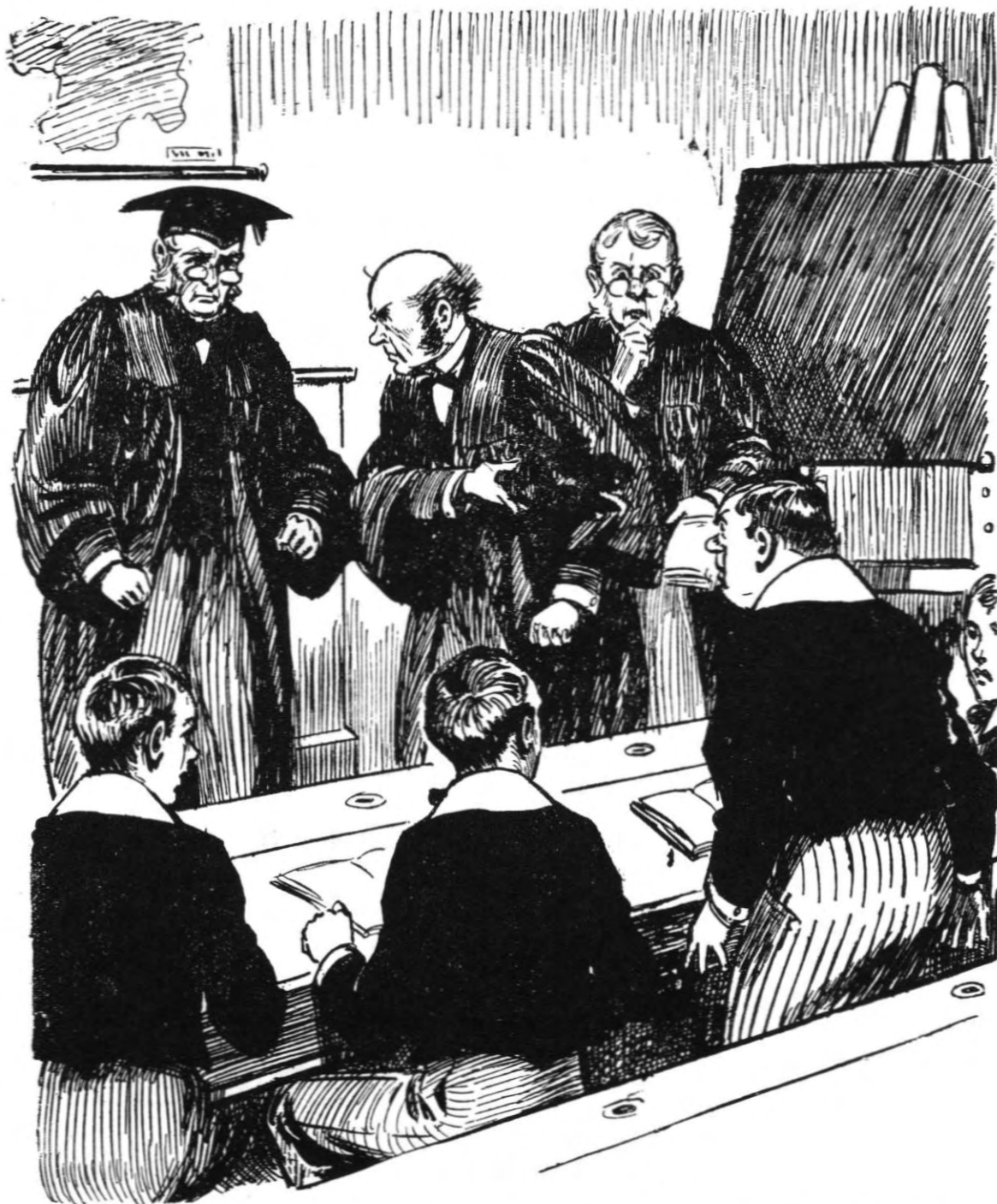
"I saw him in the corridor," said Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth. "He looked in no end of a bait. What's the matter with Ratty?"

"I wonder!" yawned Cutts.

"Cave! Here he is!" murmured Poynings.

Mr. Ratcliff's crimson face looked in at the doorway of the Form-room. Cutts eyed him coolly.

There was absolutely no evidence, so far as Cutts knew, to connect him with the unknown person who had telephoned to Mr. Ratcliff. If he were questioned, Cutts had a denial ready—the dandy of the Fifth was not very particular on such points.



"I think we need look no further for the culprit, Dr. Holmes," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Trimble was lurking near your study door only a few minutes after the telephone message, and he denies that he was there." The fat Fourth-Former spluttered with sheer funk. "I—I didn't—I wasn't—I swear——" "Trimble," said the Head, in a deep voice, "stand out here!" (See page 10.)

But Mr. Ratcliff did not refer to the trick; it had not occurred to him, so far, that it was a member of his own Form that had deceived him. He suspected Tom Merry or Lowther, or Blake of the Fourth, or one of that cheery circle of School House juniors with whom he had had trouble before. Chiefly he had Monty Lowther of the Shell in his mind; but he had little doubt that the whole set of impertinent juniors were "in it."

It was time for Mr. Ratcliff to take his Form, but he remembered that he had left his study unlocked, with money on the table; it was necessary to see to that first of all.

"I shall be a few minutes," he told his Form. "You know

what you have to do, and I shall expect to find that you have not wasted time when I return."

With that he whisked away.

"Cheeky cad!" drawled Cutts. "Talkin' to us as old Selby talks to the Third! Where was the man brought up, I wonder?"

"What the giddy thump does the Head stand him for?" said St. Leger. "The man's no gentleman!"

"Oh, he fools the Head, and pulls his jolly old leg!" said Cutts contemptuously. "Let the cheeky cad wait till I've

left St. Jim's! I'm comin' back then to give him the hidin' of his life."

The Fifth-Formers sat on the desks, or stood about the room in groups chatting while they waited for their Form master. That was their way of obeying Mr. Ratcliff's injunction not to waste time while he was gone.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff hurried across to the New House.

He entered his study, to collect up the bills and money and look them in his desk. His valuable time had been wasted—the accounts had to remain unfinished for the present, and he had to give up the chase of that elusive eightpence.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff suddenly.

He stared round him.

The currency notes and the coins that he had left on the table were still there. But the ten-pound note was gone.

Gone!

Mr. Ratcliff could scarcely believe his eyes. He stared over the table—he stared round the floor. The tenner had not fallen to the floor; it had not blown away—door and window had been closed. It had vanished.

It had been taken!

Who had taken it? The House was deserted; there was no one—Then Mr. Ratcliff thought of Figgins. Figgins of the Fourth, that afternoon, was excused classes; he was going home, and before he went he had to bring his impot to Mr. Ratcliff's study. Was it possible that Figgins had come there and taken the banknote?

Mr. Ratcliff did not like Figgins. That cheery youth was much too cheery and breezy, and healthy and happy generally, for a gentleman like Mr. Ratcliff to like him. But he could scarcely entertain the thought that Figgins was capable of theft. In fact, he knew that it was impossible. Still, Figgins was apparently the only fellow in the House, and he had been due in Mr. Ratcliff's study with his impot.

The impot was not there. If Figgins was still in the House he must be in his study. Mr. Ratcliff whisked up the staircase, and fairly scuttled into the Fourth Form passage, and hurred open Figgins' door. But Figgins was not there. The study was empty and silent. On the table lay the ruined imposition.

Mr. Ratcliff looked at it. Under the swamping of the ink he did not observe the variety of hands in that impot.

He understood what had happened. Figgins had written his lines and spoiled them by an accident, and had not ventured to show them up. He had not, therefore, been to the Housemaster's study.

But where was the boy?

Was it possible that he had had the audacity to leave the school, in spite of his Housemaster's strict order that he was not to go till the lines had been handed in?

In his anger at that thought Mr. Ratcliff almost forgot the missing tenner. If it proved to be so, there would be serious trouble for Figgins when he came back.

The angry master hurried downstairs again. He returned to his own study and rang for the page.

"Go to Taggles at once, and ascertain whether Master Figgins has left the school."

"Yessir."

Mr. Ratcliff gathered up currency notes and coins, and bills and papers, and locked them in his desk. He looked round the study once more to make assurance doubly sure that the ten-pound note was nowhere there. He even picked up the volume of Livy lest he should, in an absent-minded moment, have laid it down on the banknote and so hidden it from sight. But the tenner was not under the volume.

Mr. Ratcliff shoved Livy into his bookshelf. He had used the volume in class that morning, but it was not required for the afternoon.

The page tapped at the door.

"Mr. Taggles says that Master Figgins is gone, sir. He had his bag with him. Mr. Taggles said that the 'Ead, sir, let him know that Master Figgins had leave to go 'ome to-day, sir, and so—"

"That will do!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins was gone. He was, for the present, beyond the reach of punishment. That would have to wait till he came back. Even then it was dubious, if Figgy appealed to the Head. The inky imposition would show that he had done his task and had only been prevented by an accident from handing in the lines.

But Figgins and his sins of commission and omission did not, after all, matter very much at that moment. Who had taken the ten-pound note? Had Figgins taken it? Was it in his pocket now as he was speeding homeward in the express?

"Is that boy a thief?" Mr. Ratcliff muttered savagely. "But how could he have known there was money in the study? Impossible! And he could not have come here by chance, as he had evidently decided not to bring me his lines. There is no reason to suppose that he has been in the study in my absence at all. One of the servants more likely, or— Ah!"

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In a flash Mr. Ratcliff saw it all.

That telephone trick.

Someone, at present unknown, had telephoned to him from the School House, deliberately to trick him into leaving his study.

He had left it, and during his absence the banknote had been taken.

Figgins, obviously, could not be the person who had telephoned from the other House.

Figgins could be dismissed from the matter altogether.

The telephone-call had come from the School House. Deliberately Mr. Ratcliff had been tricked into leaving his study so suddenly that he had had no time to put the money away.

It followed—it was all clear to Mr. Ratcliff—that the person who had telephoned had known how he was occupied, and had tricked him away in order to steal the money while he was gone.

Mr. Ratcliff saw it all.

CHAPTER 5.

The Inquiry!

"D. R. HOLMES!"

The Head of St. Jim's turned with a slight frown on his brow, at Mr. Ratcliff's agitated voice, in the doorway of the Sixth Form room.

The Head was busy.

In Æschylus, that great Greek of ancient times, there exist many dubious passages. In these dubious passages Dr. Holmes took a deep and keen interest. About some of them he had his own opinions—opinions that did not always agree with those of the commentators. The Sixth Form of St. Jim's, on the other hand, took a far from keen interest in such matters, as a rule. There were "swots" and "saps" in the Form who listened to the Head's exposition, as though pearls of knowledge and wisdom were falling from his august lips. There were other fellows who maintained an attitude of interest, from a good-natured desire to give the Old Scout his head, since it seemed to make him happy. And there were others—perhaps the majority of the Sixth—who suppressed their groans with difficulty, and who would have given a term's pocket-money to have Æschylus in the gym for a few minutes with the gloves on.

So when Mr. Ratcliff's crimson and excited face was projected into the Sixth Form room, the Head was deeply perturbed and annoyed, but the great majority of the Sixth regarded him with benevolence. They looked on him as a rescuer. There were times when it was a pleasure to see even Horace Ratcliff. This was one of the times.

"Dr. Holmes—"

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"A most serious matter—"

"I am extremely busy, as you see—"

"I am sorry to interrupt you, sir. I am keeping my own Form waiting. But a theft has occurred—"

"What—what!"

"A theft, sir! A banknote—"

"Bless my soul!"

The Sixth Form stirred with interest. Certainly, a theft in the school was not a pleasant matter. But Æschylus was still more unpleasant. Anything short of manslaughter would have been welcome.

"A banknote, sir, was taken from my study—"

"Mr. Ratcliff—"

"That trick on the telephone—"

Dr. Holmes raised his hand.

"Mr. Ratcliff, as you know, I do not interfere in the jurisdiction of my Housemasters. The matter is in your hands if it has occurred in the New House."

"But a School House boy is concerned—"

"Then the matter may be referred to Mr. Railton."

"Your authority, sir, will be needed—"

"Possibly. In that case I will deal with the matter when I am disengaged."

"But it is imperative, sir, that no time should be wasted."

"If you will come to my study at four o'clock, Mr. Ratcliff, I will hear about the matter, if it is necessary for me to hear."

The Head's tone was final.

"Very well, sir!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

He retired, much to the regret of the majority of the Sixth. Æschylus took his place, and they preferred Mr. Ratcliff, especially as that testy gentleman was rather entertaining when he was in a "tantrum."

Mr. Ratcliff, fuming, retired to his Form-room. He did not care to refer the matter to Mr. Railton, Housemaster of the School House. He disliked that gentleman intensely. Moreover, as Mr. Railton was not wanted with the Sixth that afternoon he had gone out, and was not at present available, in any case. The serious affair of the missing tenner had to stand over, much to Mr. Ratcliff's chagrin. He whisked into the Fifth Form room with a black brow.

"Look out for squalls, you fellows!" murmured Prye, as he came in.

Mr. Ratcliff had been a Tartar that morning. He was still more Tartaric that afternoon.

It was not a happy day for the Fifth Form at St. Jim's.

Mr. Ratcliff was thinking all the time of the missing tenner. If that ten-pound note should not be found, the loss must fall on Mr. Ratcliff. The New House master, who was prepared to spend hours in quest of an elusive eighteenthpence was not likely to bear the loss of ten pounds with equanimity.

It was like Mr. Ratcliff to take it for granted, without a doubt, that a theft had been committed. That some recklessly humorous fellow might have hidden the tenner in order to give him the pleasure of a hunt for it did not even occur to his mind. It was his way to put the worst possible construction upon any occurrence.

There was a thief somewhere, and that bad character had to be discovered and expelled from the school, and, still more important, compelled to disgorge his plunder. Expulsion was a light punishment for him—indeed, Mr. Ratcliff would really have preferred to give him something lingering, with boiling oil in it.

Mr. Ratcliff was anxious for classes to be over, so that he could settle down to the search for the tenner and the purloiner thereof. His Form was still more anxious for dismissal; they were completely fed-up with Ratty.

Lines fell in the Fifth Form room thicker, by far, than leaves in Vallombrosa.

By the time the hapless Fifth escaped there was scarcely a fellow in the Form who was not the richer by an impot ranging from one hundred to five hundred lines. Ratty was "spreading" himself with a vengeance.

But everything comes to an end, and the St. Jim's Fifth were free of Ratty at last, and he was free of them.

As soon as he left the Form-room he whisked away impatiently to the Head's study, there to wait for Dr. Holmes.

The Fifth crowded out with dark faces, the whole Form in a very ill humour.

"We're not standin' this, you know," St. Leger remarked. "I'm fed-up with the cad!"

"Fed-up to the chin!" growled Poynings. "My hat! I came near shyn' an inkpot at him."

"We'll make him sit up for it!" muttered Gerald Cutts savagely. "There are ways and means."

"For goodness' sake keep off your telephone stunts!" implored St. Leger. "It only makes Ratty worse. Give the good man a rest, and he may be better to-morrow."

"Oh, rats!" growled Cutts.

"It's that that's put his back up," said Gilmore with a nod. "Looks to me as if there's going to be a row about it."

"Who cares?" snapped Cutts.

"Well, it's all right, if you can prove a giddy alibi. Sure anybody didn't see you in the Head's study?" asked Poynings.

"Not that I know of," growled Cutts, rather uneasily. "I dodged in just after the Head left to go to the Sixth Form room. The Head certainly didn't see me."

"Let's get along to the nets," said Prye. "If there's a row in the House, the farther we're off the scene the better."

Cutts assented to that, and the chums of the Fifth proceeded to cricket practice. As a matter of fact, Gerald Cutts, with all his coolness, was feeling a little uneasy. Certainly he had made Ratty "sit up," but he knew that Mr. Ratcliff had a nose like a bloodhound on the trail of an offender.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff was in the Head's study, expounding to the headmaster of St. Jim's, Figgins he did not think of mentioning. The theory he had formed on the subject satisfied him completely. Someone had tricked him into coming over suddenly to the School House, by means of a telephone call in the Head's name. During his absence the banknote had been taken from his study. It was all clear to Mr. Ratcliff. The fellow who had telephoned had stolen the banknote. Mr. Ratcliff was quite satisfied that he saw it all.

The Head was very grave and considerably perturbed.

"Have you any suspicion with regard to any individual?" he asked.

"I think that certain members of the Shell and the Fourth Form should be questioned," said Mr. Ratcliff. "As the junior Forms are not yet dismissed—"

"Very well, we will lose no time," said the Head, suppressing a sigh.

Mr. Ratcliff's opinion was that a great deal of time had been lost already. However, he did not say so, and in silence the two masters proceeded to Mr. Linton's Form-room, to begin with the Shell.

CHAPTER 6.

What Trimble Knew!

TOM MERRY & CO. were in their places in the Form-room when the Head entered with Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, gave the visitors an inquiring glance. The Shell fellows looked on with interest as the three masters talked together in low tones, wondering what was "up." It was obvious that something of an unusually serious nature had occurred. The New House members of the Form stirred uneasily. They could see the gleam in Mr. Ratcliff's eye, and they did not like Ratty near at hand when he had that look in his eye.

Then the Head addressed the Form.

"My boys, a very serious thing has occurred. Some person, at present unknown, telephoned to Mr. Ratcliff from this House, and induced him to leave his study, just before classes. While he was absent a banknote was taken from his room."

There was a buzz in the Form.

"Mr. Ratcliff believes that there is a connection between the two incidents. It appears probable. However, my only desire is to elucidate the facts. Is the boy present who telephoned to Mr. Ratcliff, using my name?"

No reply.

"If the boy who played that foolish trick is guiltless of the subsequent theft it will be to his advantage to come forward frankly," said the Head mildly.

Silence in the Shell.

"No one here has anything to tell me?" asked Dr. Holmes. Apparently no one had; at all events, no one said anything. The juniors looked at one another, and looked at the Head, and uttered no word.

"I presume that I may question certain members of this Form, sir?" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Merry! Manners! Lowther!"

"Yes, sir!" said the Terrible Three with one voice.

"You three boys were concerned in a similar trick played on me some time ago. Lowther used the telephone on that occasion."

"Yes, sir!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"Did you telephone to me to-day, Lowther?"

"No, sir!"

"Where were you during the ten minutes before classes?"

"In Figgins' study in your House, sir."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff. "And what were you doing in a junior study in my House?"

"That is hardly to the point, Mr. Ratcliff," interposed the Head.

"If Lowther does not choose to answer—"

"I don't mind answering, sir," said Monty Lowther with deadly coolness. "I was sympathising with Figgins, sir."

"What?"

"I thought it rather hard, sir, that you should give Figgins an imposition of five hundred lines, to write out before he could catch his train, after the Head had given him leave from school."

Dr. Holmes started a little. Mr. Ratcliff turned almost green. There was a grin along the ranks of the Shell. Ratty had asked for it, and now he had got it.

The Head's brows knitted. Mr. Ratcliff choked a little, and hurried on to question Manners.

"Manners, where were you before classes this afternoon?"

"In Figgins' study in the New House, sir," said Manners brightly. "I was sympathising with Figgins because—"

"That will do! Merry, where were you at the time?"

Tom Merry smiled cheerily.

"I was in Figgins' study in the New House, sir, sympathising—"

"Silence!"

"It appears, Mr. Ratcliff, that this questioning is futile," said the Head with some asperity. "These three boys could not be concerned in the matter, since they were in a junior study in your House at the time. Let us proceed to the Fourth Form room."

"Very well, sir!" mumbled Mr. Ratcliff.

The two masters left the Shell room, leaving the Shell grinning, and even Mr. Linton smiled faintly. The general opinion was that Ratty had not got much "change" out of the Terrible Three.

The Fourth Form room was visited next.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was about to dismiss his class when the two masters entered.

"Bai Jove! Somethin's up, you fellows," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sagely.

"Ratty's on the warpath!" assented Blake. "Can't be after any of us this time, though."

"Bai Jove! I wondah if he's spotted that we helped Figgay with his lines. I don't see how he could, as Figgay nevah handed in the impot. But you nevah know, with Watty."

Blake and Herries and Digby grinned. Their noble chum had told them how he had helped Figgins. They had

not been at all surprised to hear of the disastrous incident of the upset inkpot. It was really so very like Arthur Augustus!

There was silence as Dr. Holmes addressed the Fourth, in the same words that he had used to the Shell.

There was no answer from the juniors.

The guilty party was not present, and had he been present it was improbable that he would have owned up.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes roamed over the Form, like those of a lion seeking what he might devour.

That the trick had been played on him by a School House boy he felt certain, and he did not yet suspect that it might have been played by a senior.

"No one here has anything to tell me?" asked the Head.

"My hat!" murmured Baggy Trimble.

There was a glimmer in Baggy's round eyes, suppressed excitement in his fat face. Levison, who was near him, glanced at him.

"You fat duffer, don't give yourself away," he whispered.

Trimble blinked at him.

"What?" he ejaculated.

"If it was you—"

"Me! It wasn't!" gasped Baggy in alarm.

"Well, you look as if you know something about it, anyhow," said Levison. "Keep your wooden head shut if you do, fathead."

There was no reply to the headmaster's question. It looked as if the Fourth would be drawn as blank as the Shell. Every face in turn was subjected to a grim scrutiny by Mr. Ratcliff, and his sharp eyes fixed at last on Baggy Trimble.

"Trimble!" he rapped out.

"Oh! Ah! Yes!" gasped Baggy, startled.

"You were lurking in the Head's corridor when I came over from the New House—I remember seeing you there. You were quite near the door of the Head's study."

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Baggy, in great alarm.

"I remember it distinctly," said Mr. Ratcliff, compressing his thin lips. "I asked you if you had seen Dr. Holmes leave his study, as I had expected to find him there."

"Well, I told you, sir, that he'd gone to the Sixth Form room, sir," said Baggy.

"You have just denied that you were there?"

"Yes, sir—I was in—in the quad—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, in the tuck-shop, sir. I never touched the Head's telephone, sir, and I never knew you had a banknote in your study, sir. I haven't been near the New House, and—and—"

Baggy fairly babbled with terror under Mr. Ratcliff's basilisk eye.

The New House master smiled grimly.

"I think we need look no further for the culprit, Dr. Holmes. Trimble was lurking near your study door, only a few minutes after the telephone must have been used, and he denies that he was there."

Baggy spluttered with sheer funk.

"I—I didn't—I wasn't—I swear—"

"Trimble!" said the Head in a deep voice. "Stand out here."

"Oh lor'!"

Baggy Trimble limped out before the class. His fat knees knocked together as he stood before the Head.

"Trimble! Did you telephone to Mr. Ratcliff from my study?"

"Oh, no, sir! Never thought of such a thing," groaned Baggy. "I—I wouldn't, sir! It—it wouldn't be respectful, sir. I wouldn't have said such things to Mr. Ratcliff on the telephone, sir, to—to save my life! I wouldn't, really, sir."

"He knows what was said on the telephone, you see, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "It is all clear now."

"One moment," said the Head quietly. "We must not jump at conclusions, Mr. Ratcliff."

"This boy admits—"

"I don't, sir!" spluttered Baggy. "I don't admit anything, sir! Not a word."

"Leave it to me, Mr. Ratcliff, please. Trimble!"

"Oh dear! Yes, sir!"

"Tell me the truth, boy, and you have nothing to fear. You were near my study at that time—"

"No—I mean, yes, sir," gasped Baggy.

"Did you enter my study?"

"I swear I didn't, sir."

"Did you see anyone else enter my study?"

"Only—only a Fifth-Form chap, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff started.

"Trimble, I have heard reports of you from your Form master, from which it appears that you are a boy of a very prying and inquisitive nature," said the Head. "You had no business near my study at all."

"No, sir, that's why I wasn't there—"

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"What?"

"I—I mean, that's why I was there, sir!" gasped Trimble.

"You saw a Fifth Form boy enter my study?"

"Oh dear! Yes, sir."

"His name?"

"Cutts, sir."

"Did you hear him use my telephone?"

"How could I help it, sir, when the door was a-jar," gasped Baggy. "I—I wasn't listening! I—I happened to stoop down near the door, sir, to tie my shoe-lace—"

"Never mind that! You heard Cutts of the Fifth Form speaking to Mr. Ratcliff on the telephone."

"Oh dear! Yes, sir! I mean, I couldn't be sure, sir—you see, sir, he wasn't speaking as usual, he put on a deep voice like a man, sir—"

"That will do, Trimble."

Dr. Holmes left the Fourth Form room, Mr. Ratcliff following him with a brow like thunder. Mr. Ratcliff understood now that he had been "japed" by a member of his own Form, and he had, very reluctantly, to give up the hope of fastening the guilt upon any member of Tom Merry & Co. A few minutes after the two masters had gone, Mr. Latham dismissed the Fourth, and the juniors swarmed out into the passage, and immediately gathered round Baggy Trimble.

"You feahful wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in wrath. "What do you mean by givin' Cutts away?"

"Well, Cutts is a cad," said Trimble. "He kicked me yesterday."

"That is not a weason for sneakin', you fat wottah."

"I wasn't sneaking," exclaimed Trimble indignantly.

"Look here, you know—"

"You fat frog," growled Blake. "You've got Cutts landed in a row now."

"Serve him jolly well right," said Trimble. "I couldn't help it, could I? They'd have thought it was me."

"You ought not to have been spyin' at all, you wottah, and then you would have known nothin' about it," said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"I wasn't!" howled Trimble. "I only wondered what Cutts was sneaking into the Head's study for, after watching him go. I—"

"You are a pwyin' wottah, Twimble. You are also a wotten sneak. I considah that you ought to be bumped."

"Hear, hear!"

"I say—yaroooh—leggo—oh lor'! Whoooooop!" roared Trimble.

Bump, bump, bump!

In a very short time the affair was the talk of both Houses at St. Jim's. Meanwhile, Cutts of the Fifth had been sent for, and had repaired very reluctantly to the Head's study—extremely uneasy, but little dreaming what was to come.

CHAPTER 7.

Trouble for a Black Sheep!

GERALD CUTTS entered the Head's study, half-expecting to find Mr. Ratcliff there. So he was not surprised to see the New House master—though he certainly was surprised by the blackness in Mr. Ratcliff's brow, and the deep gravity of Dr. Holmes. He wondered whether he had been sent for on some matter more serious than suspicion that he had played the telephone trick. Cutts of the Fifth had a good many sins on his conscience, and cleverly as he covered his tracks, there was always danger of discovery. Indeed it was rumoured in the House that Cutts had once been within measurable distance of the "sack."

Cutts had a nerve of iron, and very few scruples. He was prepared to brazen the matter out if he was suspected—and he was in a very wary mood as he stood before the Head.

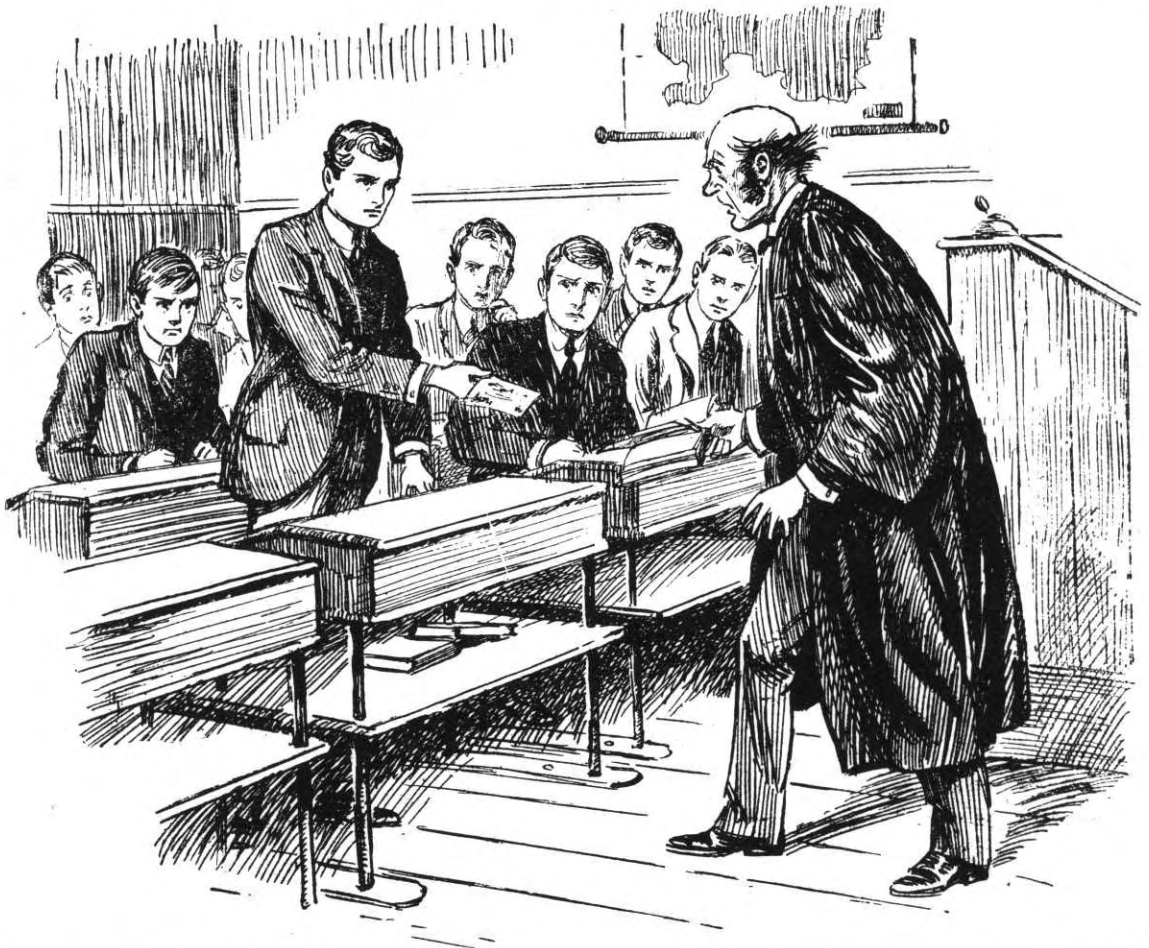
"Cutts," Dr. Holmes spoke very gravely. "A Fourth Form boy states that he saw you enter my study shortly before classes this afternoon. Mr. Ratcliff was telephoned, apparently from this study—certainly from this House. Take your time and answer me carefully."

Mr. Ratcliff suppressed a snort. His system would have been to "jump" a suspected person, and startle a confession out of him.

Cutts drew a deep breath.

So he had been seen!

His active brain worked quickly. Whether he denied the fact was not, with the dandy of the Fifth, a matter of conscience, but a matter of expediency. If the Head had named Trimble, a denial would doubtless have been safe—Trimble being well known as a reckless prevaricator. But the informer's name was not given. In the circumstances Cutts felt that it was not safe to utter a denial that might be disproved. It did not take Cutts ten seconds to make up his mind. If he had been seen, the safest way out was a clean breast of it.



In the midst of a dead silence Lefevre stooped and picked up the crisp slip of engraved paper which had fluttered to the floor. "A banknote for ten pounds, sir," he said. "Is this the banknote you have lost and which you have accused Cutts of stealing?" "Bless my soul!" Mr. Ratcliff blinked at the banknote, and blinked again, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. (See page 14.)

"Yes, sir," he said. "I am sorry to say that I entered your study without permission. I apologise, sir."

"I am glad to hear you answer so frankly, Cutts," said the Head, relieved. "You admit that you played a trick on the telephone, speaking to Mr. Ratcliff in my name?"

Cutts wondered whether the unknown Fourth Form boy had overheard him. Not knowing, he could not risk a prevarication.

"Yes, sir."

"Cutts! This is a serious matter, in a senior boy in your position," said the Head gravely.

"I know, sir," said Cutts meekly. "I regret it very much. But I was so excited this morning, sir, by Mr. Ratcliff having struck me—"

"Cutts! What did you say?"

Mr. Ratcliff butted in breathlessly.

"Sir, a false statement—a false statement! It is utterly untrue that I have ever struck a member of my Form!"

"I certainly cannot believe such a thing," said the Head sternly. "Cutts, take care what you say."

Cutts' eyes gleamed. If he was called on the carpet for making Ratty sit up, at least he was going to have his money's worth.

"I repeat my statement, sir, and call the whole of the Fifth Form to witness," he said. "Mr. Ratcliff struck me with a pointer."

"Impossible!"

"He struck St. Leger and Gilmore also, sir; and they will be willing to corroborate what I say."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

Dr. Holmes was a kindly and unsuspecting old gentleman. Cardew of the Fourth had observed that he was warranted not to see what was right under his nose. The Head was, in fact, about the only person at St. Jim's who did not know what an extremely unpleasant gentleman Horace Ratcliff was.

But some glimmering of it dawned on his mind now. His eyes were fixed on Mr. Ratcliff intently.

"Pray, let me explain, sir," said the Fifth Form master, catching his breath. "Cutts was insolent—I rapped him on the knuckles with the pointer—no boy in the Fifth Form would venture to say that I did anything more—"

"Is that what you meant to state, Cutts?"

"Yes, sir—Mr. Ratcliff struck me across the knuckles with the pointer," said Cutts calmly. "He struck St. Leger in the same way."

"Bless my soul!"

"Such usage for a senior boy, sir, is not supposed to be the thing, at any public school," said Cutts. "I knew, sir, that you would not approve of it. I am sorry that I did not appeal to you, sir—but took the matter into my own hands. I can only plead, sir, that I was excited, and that I shrank from acting as an informer. I telephoned to Mr. Ratcliff, sir, to give him an impression that you knew of the occurrence, hoping, sir, that this could cause him to reflect and restrain his temper on future occasions."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed fury.

Cutts had stated his case with remarkable coolness and ability, not to say cunning. He had very little fear of the result.

It was quite clear to him that the Head was surprised and displeased by what he had heard; and that the Fifth Form master was to hear more about it later.

"Very well, Cutts," said the Head. "You did wrong—great wrong—especially in using your headmaster's name in a foolish trick—"

"I know, sir," said Cutts meekly. "I am very sorry, sir. I only hope, sir, that you will not think I meant to be guilty of any disrespect to you."

"We will say no more about that," said the Head. "I

make allowances for your provocation, Cutts, though, of course, I blame your action very severely. If it were only a question of that foolish trick being played on Mr. Ratcliff, I should let the matter end here."

"Thank you, sir," said Cutts.

He was feeling elated. He had scored off the tyrant of the Fifth, and he was practically exonerated. He could not have hoped for a better outcome than that.

"But there is a more serious aspect to the matter," said the Head. "Cutts, did you enter the New House while Mr. Ratcliff was called over here by that false message?"

"Yes, sir," said Cutts, in wonder. "No harm in that, sir. I went to speak to Poynings of the Fifth."

"You actually entered my House?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, his eyes glittering. "You admit it?"

"I don't see any reason for concealing it," said Cutts. "I often go over to the New House to speak to Poynings. He's a friend of mine. I came back with him to classes."

Dr. Holmes was very grave indeed now.

"Had you any other object in going to the New House, Cutts, apart from speaking to Poynings?"

"No, sir."

"Did you enter Mr. Ratcliff's study?"

"Certainly not." Cutts flushed with anger. "If anybody has played any trick in Ratcliff's study, sir, it was not I."

"A banknote was taken from Mr. Ratcliff's study in his absence."

"Oh!"

"And my belief," broke in Mr. Ratcliff, "my belief, sir, is

that I was deliberately tricked into leaving my study by the thief."

"Oh!" gasped Cutts again.

"Have you anything to say, Cutts, on this subject?"

"Only that I never went near Mr. Ratcliff's study, sir, and never knew there was any money there."

"You did not take the banknote?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Cutts indignantly.

"You state that you tricked Mr. Ratcliff into leaving his study, purely for the purpose of a practical joke, without any ulterior motive?"

"Certainly."

"The ten-pound note is missing," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a grinding voice. "And I feel bound to remind you, Dr. Holmes, that last term Cutts was discovered to have dealings with a bookmaker at Rylcombe, that he was found to have backed horses, and that you considered whether you could allow him to remain in the school. I suggest, sir, that Cutts has continued such practices, and that he has consequently found himself in want of money, that he has taken this method of—"

Dr. Holmes raised his hand.

"You are suggesting a great deal, Mr. Ratcliff. We will not get on quite so fast, please. Cutts, you will remember my serious warning to you last term. Is it possible that you have disregarded that warning, and resumed your dealings with discreditable characters outside the school?"

"No, sir."

"You have not been engaged in any betting transactions?"

"Never, sir!"

There were a good many fellows at St. Jim's who knew that Cutts was as complete a blackguard this term as he had been last term. But the Head was not aware of that.

He answered coolly and collectedly, but he was trembling inwardly now. Cutts had too many shady secrets to feel easy now that the inquiry was taking this line.

"I do not believe you, Cutts," said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "I believe you tricked me away from my study, intending to commit a theft in my absence. You may even have seen the money from my study window beforehand; a junior could not have looked in, but you are tall enough to have done so. I have no doubt—"

"One moment, Mr. Ratcliff. Are you in debt now, Cutts?"

"I think I owe a few shillings at the tuckshop, sir."

"I am not alluding to such trifles. Have you any other debts?"

"I borrowed ten shillings of Poynings, sir. Nothing else."

"I firmly believe," ground out Mr. Ratcliff, "that the impudent young rascal has the banknote in his possession at the present moment."

"That is not true, sir," said Cutts.

"Have you any objection to a search, Cutts?" asked the Head, deeply distressed.

Cutts breathed hard and quick. Of Mr. Ratcliff's missing tenner he knew nothing; but he had good reasons for not wanting to be searched. Nothing of the kind had occurred to him before he had entered the Head's study, of course.

His discomfiture did not escape Mr. Ratcliff's watchful, spiteful eye.

"Cutts objects to a search, sir, apparently," said the New House master.

"I know nothing about the banknote!" said Cutts desperately. "I have no banknote on me."

"Then a search will help to clear you," said the Head, his manner growing more severe. "Mr. Ratcliff, kindly touch the bell for Toby."

Mr. Ratcliff kindly touched the bell.

"Toby," said the Head, when the House page appeared, "I desire you to turn out Master Cutts' pockets."

Toby almost fell down.

"Oh, yeesir!" he gasped.

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Cutts panted. But resistance was out of the question; he stood, with his face white and red by turns, while Toby turned out pocket after pocket, to the lining.

Quite an interesting assortment of goods came to view. There were papers and letters that were harmless enough, a silver pencil, a pearl-handled penknife, and so on. Then came a silver cigarette-case, packed with cigarettes. Dr. Holmes' brow grew sterner as saw it. Then came a pink sporting paper, and the Head's frown grew sterner still as he read the title, "Turf Tips." Then came a sheet of imput paper, with pencil scrawling on it—the names of horses, with dates and starting-prices, in Cutts' own hand.

Cutts was pale as a sheet when the investigation was finished. No banknote had come to light. But plenty of evidence had been revealed that the blackguard of the Fifth was not a reformed character.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sneeringly. "I think the matter is clear now, sir," he said. "Here are proofs that Cutts has not abandoned his betting transactions in spite of his narrow escape last term. His motives for purloining my ten-pound note are fairly clear now."

"Cutts, what have you to say?"

Cutts almost groaned.

"I swear, sir, that I never entered Mr. Ratcliff's study—that I know nothing about his banknote."

"How can I believe you, Cutts?" said the Head sorrowfully. "Only a few minutes ago you assured me, in the most solemn manner, that you had not renewed the betting transactions of last term. Yet here is indubitable proof that you have done so. How can I take your word?"

"I'm not a thief, sir!" panted Cutts, all his coolness gone now, as he realised the terrible position in which he stood. "I—I confess that I—I've dabbled in that—that foolery, sir—like a fool! But I never dreamed—"

"It is useless to add falsehood to falsehood," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I swear—"

"Enough!" said the Head. "I cannot take your word, Cutts; you must realise that. But I shall not judge hastily. Search shall be made for the banknote. Until it is discovered, no decisive step shall be taken."

"Really, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, who had fully expected the condemnation of Gerald Cutts on the spot.

"This matter is in my hands, Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Oh! Ah! Certainly, sir!"

"I shall request Mr. Railton to make a thorough search in Cutts' study. For the present, Cutts, you may go into the quadrangle, and remain there till you are called."

"Dr. Holmes," said Cutts hoarsely. "On my word—"

"Your word is worth nothing, Cutts. You may go."

Gerald Cutts went unsteadily from the Head's study. Fellows who saw him pass, in the corridors, turned their heads to look at him again, so ghastly was his face. St. Leger and Gilmore, and Poynings of the New House were waiting for him at the doorway. Cutts brushed past them without a word and strode on, leaving his comrades of the Fifth staring after him blankly in consternation.

"What on earth's happened?" muttered Poynings.

"Goodness knows!"

St. Leger whistled softly.

"The sack!" he said. "Cutts has got it at last! He always said that his luck would hold out! It's let him down at last! Something's come out, and Cutts is bunked."

"Good gad!"

"Rotten!" muttered Gilmore. "I—I say, if he's bunked, d'ye think he'll let out anything about us?"

St. Leger shrugged his shoulders.

"Good gad! If he does—" said Poynings, quite scared.

There was alarm in the ranks of the black sheep of the Fifth. Gerald Cutts, careless and unconscious of what they might be thinking, tramped under the elms in a mood of black despair. What a fool he had been! That was his chief thought. He had gone the pace, as he called it; he had prided himself on being the fastest fellow at St. Jim's. He had always trusted in his luck, which had been amazingly good. And now—now it had let him down at long last!

He knew nothing of Mr. Ratcliff's banknote. But he knew what it looked like. Certainly the search in his study could reveal nothing—nothing but cigarettes, a cigar or two, and perhaps one or two sporting papers. But if the banknote was not found, indubitably it would be believed that he had concealed it somewhere in safety. What could he expect the Head to think?

Kildare of the Sixth passed him with a curious glance at his white face. Cutts had always despised Kildare, as a fellow who thought of nothing but Form work and games; a milksop who never wanted to "see life"; a fellow who never saw, or wanted to see, a sporting paper, and certainly never dreamed of backing horses or playing bridge for "bob" points in his study. At that moment Cutts would have been glad to change places with Kildare. Kildare turned back.

"Anything up, Cutts?" he asked good-naturedly.

Cutts looked at him almost wildly.

"Nothin'—only I'm goin' to be bunked from St. Jim's for somethin' I haven't done!" he groaned.

Kildare shook his head.

"That's rot!"

He walked on, leaving Cutts of the Fifth muttering curses.

CHAPTER 8.

The Shadow of Suspicion!

TOM MERRY & Co. could scarcely believe their ears when they heard it.

St. Jim's buzzed with the news.

School House and New House thrilled with the excitement of it. The only St. Jim's fellow who did not share in the excitement was George Figgins of the Fourth Form, for the simple reason that he was far away in the county of Somerset, and knew nothing about it.

The whole story was soon known all over the school. Toby, the page, had talked of the happenings in the Head's study—Mr. Ratcliff made no secret at all of the affair—and a score of fellows had seen Mr. Railton carrying out the search of Cutts' study.

Gerald Cutts' own looks dissolved any doubt that might have existed. There was no mistaking that Cutts' look was that of a fellow upon whom the "chopper" had come down.

"It was bound to come, you fellows," Arthur Augustus told his comrades sagely. "Nearthly the whole school knew what a howwid wottah Cutts was. Now the Head knows. That's all there is to it, deah boys."

"But it's rather thick," said Kerr. "I can't quite believe that Cutts burgled Ratty's study."

"Too jolly thick!" said Fatty Wynn. "Ratty is always suspecting somebody of something."

"But the banknote must be gone!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And Mr. Ratcliff isn't careless with money," said Manners. "That isn't one of his faults. He's jolly close with money. He's not a man to lose a banknote."

"No fear."

"All the same, I think he's offside," said Kerr of the Fourth. "It's too thick. He may have dropped the note somewhere."

"It's possible," said Monty Lowther doubtfully.

"But not jolly likely," said Levison of the Fourth, with a shake of the head.

"Wathah not!"

"I suppose—" said Ralph Reckness Cardew thoughtfully.

"What?" asked Tom Merry.

"I suppose Ratty hasn't blued the banknote on the races, and made up this yarn to account for it?" suggested Cardew gravely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fathead!" said Tom, laughing.

"I say, pretty thick of Cutts, isn't it?" said Baggy Trimble, joining the group of juniors. "Bunked for a cert, what? He's guilty, of course!"

"How do you know?" snapped Blake.

"Well, look at it," said Trimble. "He gets old Ratty away from his study, and then goes into the New House. It comes out that he's been backing horses. Of course, he spied on old Ratty counting his money, through the study window. I'm sure of it. Besides, I jolly well know he's guilty. The beast kicked me yesterday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are an uttah ass, Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I certainly shall not believe Cutts to be a thief unless it is proved."

"Oh, it's proved all right!" said Trimble. "I haven't any doubt of it, and I'm a pretty keen chap, you know. I wonder where he's hidden the banknote? You fellows got any idea?"

"Oh, kick him!"

"Yaroooooooop!"

Baggy Trimble retired from the discussion. That evening a search was going on for the missing banknote, officially conducted by the prefects of both Houses. An unofficial search was also going on, conducted privately by Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. It is much to be feared that had Baggy discovered the missing tenner it would next have been discovered in the tuckshop. Fortunately, the fat junior did not discover it.

Gerald Cutts remained in his study that evening. He knew that most of the St. Jim's fellows at least doubted his innocence, if they did not actually believe him guilty. St. Leger, who shared his study, came in, and seemed in a very silent and distraught mood. He opened his lips several times to speak, but did not utter a word, and Cutts broke out at him savagely at last.

"Do you think I did it, you fool?"

"N-n-no," said St. Leger haltingly. "But—"

"But what, you stammering fool?"

"You may as well be civil," said St. Leger. "I don't know what you've done. From what Poynings says, it seems that you may have gone direct to his study in the New House after leaving us in the quad. Still, you had time to whip into Ratty's study and collar the banknote. You know yourself how it looks—after what they found in your pockets in the Head's study."

"I know, you idiot!"
"Well, don't play the goat, Cutts!" said St. Leger impatiently. "If you've got the banknote hidden away, for goodness' sake shove it somewhere where it can be found. That's the only way to save your neck, if it can be saved."

Cutts' eyes blazed.
"You rotter! Do you think—"
"I'm only advisin' you for your good," said St. Leger sullenly. "Don't bung the indignation stunt at me. You've sailed pretty near the wind a good many times, as I know, even if you haven't done this."
"Get out!" roared Cutts.

He advanced on St. Leger with his fists clenched and his eyes blazing. St. Leger got out. In the passage he shrugged his shoulders and walked away whistling.

Poynings of the New House Fifth was the next visitor. He came in looking very uneasy.

"I say, Cutts, old man—"
"Do you think I did it?" hissed Cutts.
"Nunno. Of—of course not! But, I say, it looks as if you're goin' to be bunked, whether you did it or not. You—you won't think of roundin' on your old pals now you're for it, will you?"

Cutts laughed savagely.
"So that's what you're worried about?"
"Well, I know you're straight, an' all that, and—"
"You don't know anythin' of the kind. And I can tell you that if you fellows don't stand by me now I don't stand by you," said Cutts. "I'm up against it, and we sink or swim together. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it—you and the rest. Now get out!"

Poynings of the Fifth walked away from the study with a pale face.

It was not a happy evening for the black sheep. Neither was Mr. Horace Ratcliff happy that evening. He was satisfied that the guilty party had been discovered. He flattered himself that he had shown considerable astuteness in bringing the truth to light so promptly and effectively. But the tenner was still missing. The expulsion of Cutts of the Fifth was all very well. It was a passing gratification. But Mr. Ratcliff was thinking chiefly of the tenner. That was the most important consideration. He would rather have pardoned Cutts than have lost the tenner.

Restitution had been demanded. But Cutts could not restore what he had not taken. Sacked from the school, he would go with Mr. Ratcliff's tenner in his pocket. So it seemed to Horace Ratcliff. It was a most exasperating thought to Mr. Ratcliff. He slept badly that night, and when he slept he dreamed of his lost ten pounds.

And the following morning, when he came whisking over to the School House to take his Form in the Fifth room, he looked more angry and acid than he had ever looked before. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who saw him come in, shook his noble head.

"Watty looks wattier than evah," he remarked. "I weally should not care to be in the Fifth this morning, you fellows."

Tom Merry & Co. agreed. Nobody envied the Fifth Form that morning, and Cutts least of all. But, as it happened, there were to be amazingly unexpected happenings that morning in the Fifth Form room at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

Awful for Mr. Ratcliff!

MR. RATCLIFF gave Cutts of the Fifth a scornful stare as he came in. Cutts was in his usual place in class. He had not been dealt with yet, and, so far, it was not known whether he was to be judged guilty and expelled. Until the banknote actually was found the Head did not care to act decisively. At all events, he was resolved not to act hastily, quite indifferent to Mr. Ratcliff's opinion. Cutts, therefore, took his place in his Form with his usual cool hardihood. Fellows wondered at his "neck" in showing himself there, in the circumstances. But Gerald Cutts of the Fifth had never lacked "neck."

"You are here, Cutts?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff sharply. Cutts eyed him with a black and bitter look.

"Yes, sir; I am here!"
"So far, Cutts, the Head has declined to act upon the proof of your guilt and expel you from the school. But undoubtedly this day will be your last day here."

Cutts gritted his teeth.

"Judged guilty of theft," resumed Mr. Ratcliff, "I should

have supposed that a sense of shame would have deterred you from coming to the Form-room. You are excused classes; you had better go."

Cutts did not stir.
"You hear me, Cutts?"
"I hear you, sir! I shall not go!"
"What? What?"

"Until the Head decides against me, sir, I shall take my place in the Form!" said Gerald Cutts.

There was a murmur of assent from the Fifth. Who the thump was Mr. Ratcliff to decide the matter like this, when the Head had not yet decided it?

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard and deep. He was disposed to order Cutts out of the Form-room; but Cutts had a right there, so far, and Ratty knew that the order would not be obeyed. He was still more disposed to take Cutts by the shoulders and "sling" him out; but he realised that, in the peculiar circumstances, with little to lose, Cutts was quite likely to knock him spinning.

So the Fifth Form master let the incident drop, and Cutts remained. Mr. Ratcliff decided to ignore him.

"Livy—Book XVI!" he said harshly.

Mr. Ratcliff had his own Livy under his arm—little dreaming of what that particular volume of Titus Livius concealed. He opened the volume.

A crisp slip of paper fluttered out before the class. The draught from an open window caught it, and fluttered it in the sight of all the Fifth.

It dropped to the floor at the feet of Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth.

Mr. Ratcliff stared at it, startled.
The Fifth Form stared at it.

Cutts gave a jump.

In the midst of a dead silence, Lefevre stooped and picked up the crisp slip of engraved paper.

Mr. Ratcliff found his voice.
"What—what—what is that, Lefevre?"

"A banknote, sir!"
"A—a—a banknote!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

Lefevre's look was grim. His manner was openly contemptuous as he answered:

"A banknote for ten pounds, sir. Is this the banknote you have lost, and which you have accused Cutts of stealing?"

"Bless my soul!"

With trembling fingers, Horace Ratcliff took the banknote from the captain of the Fifth. He blinked at it, and blinked again, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

It was the missing tenner—there was no doubt about that. He knew the number—besides, he knew that there had been only one ten-pound note in his study—and this was a ten-pound note, and it had been inside his Livy, which he had just brought from his study bookshelf.

There was no doubt.

The banknote had not been stolen. His whole astute theory on the subject tumbled to pieces. He had "seen it all"—or fancied that he had—and, in point of fact, there had been nothing to see. The telephone trick had not been part of a deep-laid plot to steal his banknote—the banknote had not been stolen.

Cutts rose to his feet. His eyes glittered at the New Housemaster.

"Is that the ten-pound note, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Dear me! It—it certainly appears so!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, utterly taken aback and confounded by this unexpected happening.

"You accused me of stealing it. It was in your own Livy all the time. You put it there and forgot. And you accused me!"

"I—I—I—" Mr. Ratcliff spluttered.

"Apologise!" snapped Cutts.

"What—what?"
"I demand an apology!"

"You insolent rascal, sit down!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. Cutts did not sit down. He stamped across to the door.

"Where are you going, Cutts?"
"I'm going to fetch the Head!"

"I command you—" roared Mr. Ratcliff. Cutts did not heed. He strode out of the Form-room, leaving the Fifth in an excited buzz, and Mr. Ratcliff in a state of utter dismay and apprehension.

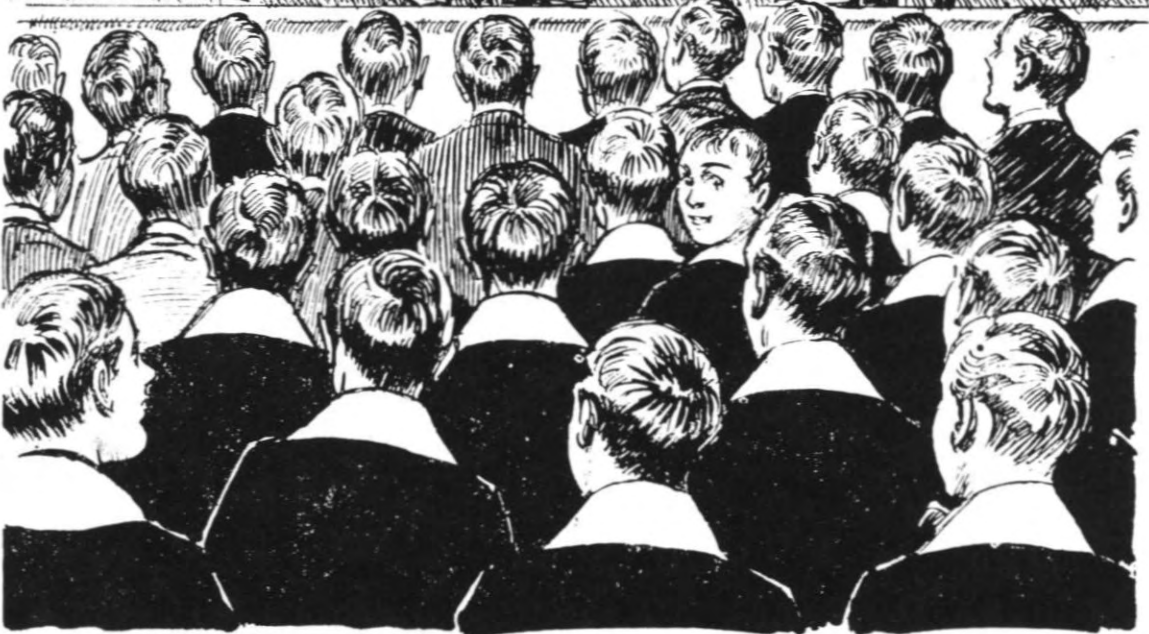
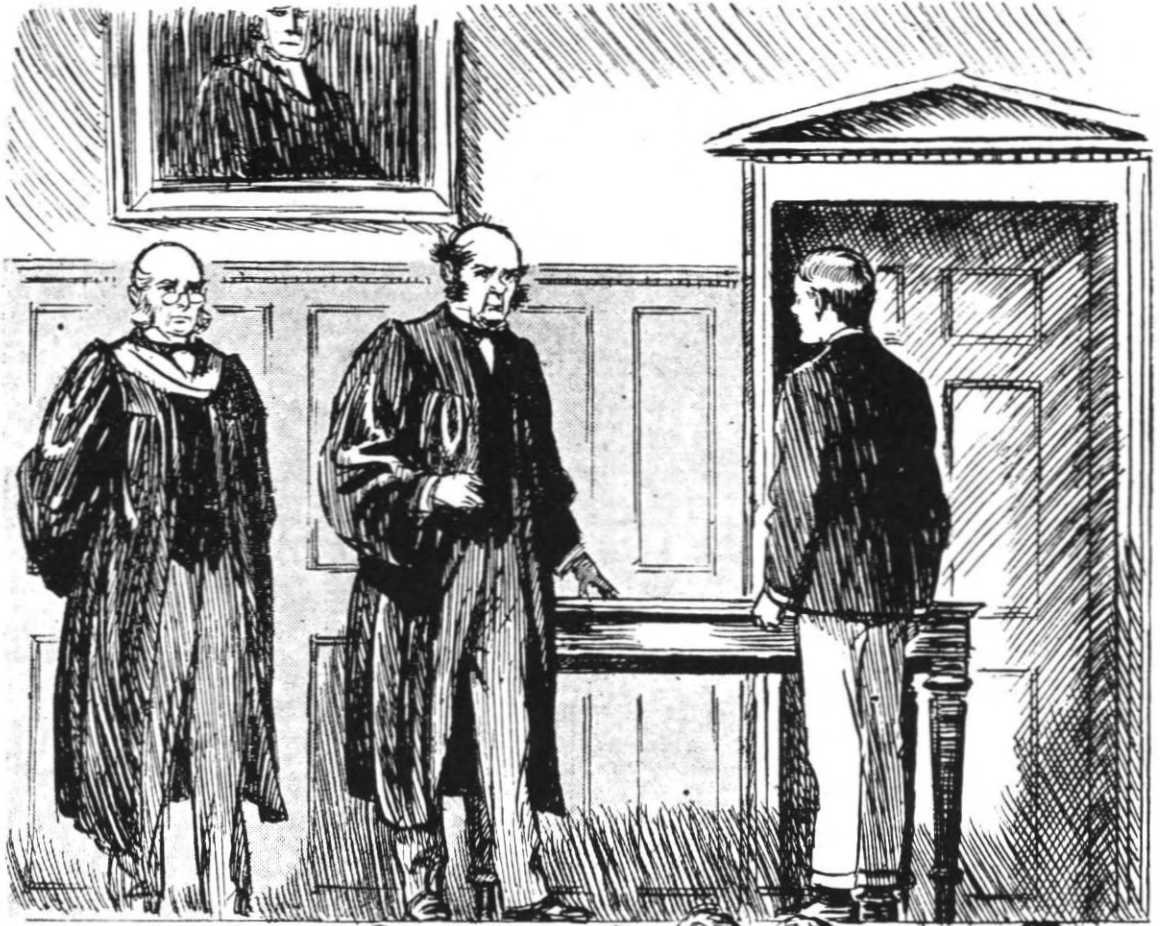
How had the banknote come into the book? He remembered that Livy had been on his study table at the time when he was doing his accounts. Had he slipped the banknote into the volume and forgotten it? He had no recollection of doing so. He was puzzled and bewildered. Anyhow, the banknote was there—evidently not stolen at all. Mr. Ratcliff realised that he was in a serious position.

What would the Head say?
He was soon to know.

There was a stately tread in the corridor. Dr. Holmes,

(Continued on page 16.)

THE HOUSEMASTER'S APOLOGY!



Mr. Ratcliff spoke in halting tones. But he had to speak. Cutts stood out before the Fifth, and Mr. Ratcliff tendered his apology for his groundless suspicion. There was a deep silence while he was speaking—only Ratty's thin, acid, faltering tones were heard. (See page 16.)

with a grave, stern face, entered the Fifth Form-room with Cutts.

Mr. Ratcliff, confused, dismayed, apprehensive, still stood with the banknote in his hand.

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

The Head's voice was very deep.

"Sir!" gasped Horace Ratcliff.

"That is the missing banknote?"

"Ye-es!"

"Then it was not stolen?"

"N-n-no."

"It was missing apparently owing to your own inconvertible carelessness, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"I—I—I—"

"You accused a member of your Form of theft. You have urged me to expel him from the school, instead of delaying the matter for further investigation."

"I—I—"

"Cutts," said the Head, "you are completely exonerated."

"Thank you, sir!" said Cutts, with a triumphant glance at his Form master.

"I shall pardon you, Cutts, for your other offences, as you have been proved innocent of this, the most serious. But bear in mind, Cutts, that it is largely your own fault that I allowed circumstantial evidence to weigh against you. Had you been innocent of other offences I should have taken a different view. Let this be a warning to you, Cutts, for the future!" said the Head sternly.

Cutts did not reply to that.

"Mr. Ratcliff, you acknowledge now, I presume, that your accusation against Cutts falls to the ground?"

"Yes, sir," articulated Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I regret I—I—"

His voice trailed off.

"You owe Cutts an apology."

"I—I—"

"Cutts has been accused—he has been laid under suspicion before the whole school. Before the whole school he must be vindicated. Classes will cease while the school is assembled in Hall. In the presence of the school, Mr. Ratcliff, you will withdraw your accusation against Cutts, and tender him an apology."

"I—I—I—" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

A refusal trembled on his lips, but his courage failed him. He knew, from the Head's stern countenance, the alternative. It was that, or dismissal from St. Jim's.

He had to submit—or go! He submitted.

"Somethin's on, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy eagerly.

"Go hon!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

The St. Jim's fellows did not need Gussy to tell them that something was "on"—when classes ceased and the whole school assembled in Big Hall. The occurrence was so unusual that it was quite obvious that something extraordinary was on.

"Cutts for the long jump, perhaps!" said Monty Lowther.

"But the Head wouldn't interrupt classes for that!"

"Perhaps they've found the giddy banknote," said Cardew.

"Let's hope so!" said Tom Merry. "I can't really believe that Cutts had it!"

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

(Continued from page 2.)

A CAT'ASTROPHE!

A lady, having lost a valuable canary, advertised for it in the newspapers. The following day, on opening the door, she was surprised to find a little boy standing there with a big, fat, sleek-looking tom-cat under his arm. "I've come about your notice in the papers," said the boy. "But I advertised for a canary, not a cat," replied the old lady. "Ah, yes, ma'am; but the canary's inside!" came the astonishing reply.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. S. Pitt, Wayside, Amersham-on-the-Hill, Bucks.

LEFT TOGETHER!

During the War two friends met in the Strand the morning after a raid. "Any damage down your way?" the first asked. "Damage? Rather!" answered the other. "Father and mother were blown clean out of the window. The neighbours say it's the first time they've been seen to leave

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"Yaas, wathah! Cutts is a wottah, but weally——"

"Silence, you juniors!" called out Kildare.

The Head entered. Mr. Ratcliff, with a face that was pale with suppressed fury and chagrin, entered with him.

There was a hush in Big Hall.

Ratty's face attracted all glances. The fellows listened to the Head, but they looked at Ratty.

In a few words the Head explained that the missing banknote had been found; that Mr. Ratcliff's accusation against Cutts was wholly a mistake, and was completely withdrawn; and that the Housemaster desired to make the matter unmistakably clear by a public apology in the presence of the whole school.

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus, "that's wathah decent of Watty!"

Some of the juniors grinned.

"You can see how much he desires it—by his looks!" murmured Cardew.

"Silence!"

Mr. Ratcliff spoke in halting tones—but he had to speak. Cutts stood out before the Fifth, and Mr. Ratcliff tendered his apology for his groundless suspicion.

There was a deep silence while he was speaking. Only Ratty's thin, acid, faltering tones were heard.

The apology came out in jerks, as it were, but it came out. Mr. Ratcliff's face was almost green when he concluded.

Then the Head dismissed the school.

Classes were resumed; but in every Form-room there was a buzz of excited talk that morning, which the masters strove in vain to suppress. The Fifth, that morning, were taken by Mr. Railton. Mr. Ratcliff retired to the seclusion of his study in the New House, too humiliated and shamefaced to meet the public eye, covered with humiliation as with a garment.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy after class. "Watty's got it in the neck this time, deah boys!"

And the dear boys chuckled, and agreed that he had!

George Figgins learned what had happened when he came back to St. Jim's a day or two later.

The news made Figgins jump.

He was caned by Mr. Ratcliff for having taken French leave, and his impot was trebled. But Figgins did not mind very much. He felt that he had indemnified himself in advance. Certainly, as Tom Merry & Co. learned from Figgy, Cutts of the Fifth had never been in any real danger, for, of course, Figgins would have owned up to putting the banknote in the Luvy, had it been necessary. As it happened, it was not necessary. The whole affair was cleared up before Figgy came back. So Figgy told only his own friends, and Mr. Ratcliff never knew.

Figgins rubbed his hands after his caning, which was severe. For days he laboured at his enormous imposition. Nevertheless, he was quite merry and bright. His only regret was that he hadn't been present at the scene in the Hall when Ratty had gone through it.

THE END.

(Don't miss the first of a splendid series of camping stories next week, chums, entitled: "TOM MERRY & CO. IN CAMP!" By Martin Clifford.)

the house together in seventeen years!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Hodson, 34, Porter Street, Staveley Town, near Chesterfield.

TIT FOR TAT!

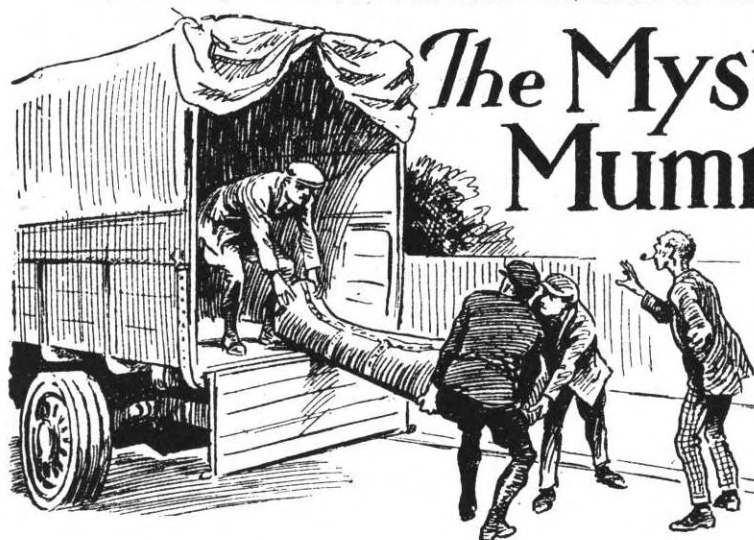
A number of young ladies were travelling in a tram, together with an old gentleman. "I washed my hair last night," said one of them, "and it is all over the place to-day." There was a silence; so, meeting with no comment, she repeated her statement. There was another pause, and she again told the company about her hair. By this time she was getting on the old gentleman's nerves, so, to pay her out, he stepped on her toes. She emitted an exclamation of surprise and pain. "I'm sorry," said the old gentleman apologetically, "but I washed my feet yesterday, and they are all over the place to-day!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Wintle, Pellowell, nr. Lydney, Glos.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

A further thrilling yarn of those three sworn comrades, Sandy Munro, Denny Burdett, and Bob Harkley. Aboard the van Ermytrude, they drift into a whole sea of adventures, and still find themselves "in the van" at the finish!



The Mystery of the Mummy-Case!

by
GEOFFREY PROUT

A Rattling Story
of the
Three Chums
A-wheel.

CHAPTER 1.

When Knights Were Cold!

IT was very early morning, and the sun was just rising, when a red-headed form crawled below the canvas curtains of a battered, rusty, broken-down-looking motor-van. This van was of no recognised make. She was built up, so her driver said, of discarded parts from other more aristocratic motor-vans. But skill had coaxed the engine to go and the clutch to grip. The gears were a worry; but, as the young vandrider said, if the forward gears did fail, they could always run on the reverse and steer the van ship-wise.

The red-headed lad's name was Sandy Munro. Sandy was a striking youth, particularly about the ears, and he was a Scot, born and bred. But he had lived a good many years in England.

He shivered as he stood on the ground in the long, wet grass.

"Bur-r-r!" said the lad, as he looked out across the extensive downland to the hills, behind which rose the glorious sun. "Bur-r-r-r! It's parky! I must get those two lazy beasts out of it. Until yon paraffin-stove is smoking merrily and yon rashers sizzling tunefully I'll not be a contented man. And we've to wash yet! Bur-r-r-r!"

Sandy gently awakened his sleeping companions, both older than he by a couple of years, by hauling them out of the van by the feet. Denny Burdett and Bob Harkley fell, yelling for mercy, in a mix-up of blankets and great-coats on to the dewy grass. Then, while they were sorting themselves out and alternately muttering against the keen, early-morning wind and threatening to flay Sandy alive, the lad lit the stove and put the kettle on. Then he washed, and hauled out the rashers of bacon and a loaf of bread, holding them ready for the vacation of the stove by the old tin kettle.

The chums had started on a career of wandering carriers, but so far no orders had come their way. They didn't worry much about that yet, for they still had some money to go on with.

The sun rose higher. So did the spirits of the three as the fried bacon and chunks of fried bread disappeared. Soon the world looked quite jolly, and by the time the chums had worked the stiffness out of their limbs it looked a good, warm, comfortable, and beautiful place indeed.

A figure was walking down the road towards the place where the car was drawn on to the grassy areas on either side of the hard road. It was a man—tall, overcoated—and he was walking briskly in the keen, sharp, morning air of downland.

The man stopped when he drew abreast of the chums' van. He paused in consideration for a few minutes, then walked over towards the three.

"Good-morning!" he said pleasantly. "Beautiful morning! Makes one feel that it's good to be alive—what!"

"I reckon it makes one feel relieved to be alive, sir, after having spent a night like we've had. Cold—perishin' cold!" said Sandy, with a grin; and the stranger laughed pleasantly.

"And what may you be doing, friends?" he asked. "Delivering that van somewhere, I suppose?"

"It's our own van, sir," replied Denny proudly. "Bought recently by us—and not on the instalment system, either."

The stranger's face fell. He stroked his fair, shapely moustache.

"Ah, young men of means out for a rattling holiday, of course—"

"Rattling's the word, but I dunno about holiday," broke in Sandy.

But the stranger continued. "Good! Very good! Splendid for young men to find themselves as free as eagles, full of life, full of the beauty of the countryside—"

"And full of beans, too, sir," again broke in Sandy, grinning broadly, while Denny and Bob laughed. "You see, sir, we're in business. See, here's our card. We're making for Northampton, and we all hope we shall get there safely."

Sandy groped in his pocket, pulled out a cracked and greasy piece of paste-board, pushed it back again, and got hold of another slightly cleaner. He handed this to the early-morning walker, who read:

"Messrs. Harkley, Burdett & Munro,
MOTOR-VAN PROPRIETORS.

Deliveries promptly executed.
Anywhere. Any time. Any speed.

Motor-van for hire, with driver,
for all purposes.

Deal with a firm noted for its
push and go!"

The gentleman put a pair of pince-nez on his nose before he read. Then, after

he had finished, he looked up with a beaming smile.

"Ah, that's better!" he said. "I've been looking for such a firm as you three. But, not having been able to find one up to now, I had determined to do a little job I have on hand myself. However, you are the men for it."

"I am an archaeologist, and live about fifteen miles back—an old house in the Chiltern Hills. I have been staying here for a few days. Well, I bought a mummy in Northampton recently. It is, of course, in its case. I want that mummy-case collected at the address in Northampton and delivered to me at my house. It needn't be a speedy journey, which is all to the good"—the stranger looked critically at the van as he spoke—"but it must be a very careful one, for mummies are liable to powder to dust if not very carefully handled."

The three chums listened intently.

"There must be no stop or talk on the road," continued the stranger. "Think you could do it?"

"Rather!" swiftly chorused the three chums, with an eager note in their voices.

"Good!" said the stranger. "But I must proceed further before I can promise myself that you will do the job. Now, to begin with, if you are attacked by someone who wants to steal the mummy, I shall hold you, by promise, to fight. But you must employ cunning as well. As a matter of fact—I say it because you look plucky youngsters and will not let a spice of danger deter you from doing the job—as a matter of fact, there's a man who will stop at nothing to get that mummy. We archaeologists are funny animals."

The stranger laughed pleasantly.

"We are great rivals, and our motto is, 'All is fair in archaeology.' Well, my fellow-archaeologist may employ force, he may employ cunning. Your job will be to meet force with force, cunning with cunning. My opinion is he'll try to get the case by trickery—if he tries at all. Maybe he'll try to wheedle you into a trap in some way, possibly have some agents dressed up—agricultural labourers, a female in distress, perhaps, shouting for help; maybe a policeman—pseudo, of course—to try to frighten you. You must be ready for anything. And if you'll undertake

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the mission, knowing the difficulties and dangers, I will pay you twenty-five pounds for the job."

The chums gasped, and Sandy even staggered. Here was a scoop for them. Twenty-five pounds for doing something they'd willingly undertake merely for the sheer love of it!

"We'll take it on, sir, despite the difficulties," said Bob through his teeth, trying to choke back the intense eagerness he felt.

"Good!" said the gentleman, with satisfaction. "Your address in Northampton? The chief post-office? Splendid! I will send you the address of the place where the mummy is, and the exact minute—the exact minute, mind—when you must call there for the case. It has to be prepared for its journey by the antique dealer I bought it from, you see. In your own interests, as well as mine, I advise you to keep the matter a dead secret. You have my card? Yes? Good! Then I'll bid you all good-morning and the best of luck. I'll look forward to seeing you with the mummy very soon."

The archaeologist continued his walk along the road, stroking his moustache; and the chums, as soon as he had disappeared from sight, joined hands and had a wild war-dance on the heath-land. They whooped and leapt, patted the battered, rusty wings of the van, and packed away the gear in the back in joyous haste. Then Bob got busy with the starting-handle.

Half an hour after he had started with the starting-handle, each of the three chums almost exhausted, the engine fired fitfully, but finally began clanking, knocking, and rattling away merrily.

"Sounds a bit funny, that engine, doesn't it?" asked Denny rather anxiously.

"Pooh! That's all right," said Bob, gripping the wheel. "That's only the big end's a bit loose. I hope that blessed clutch will grip. If it does, and we do get started, there's to be no talking to me when I'm changing gear, mind, like last time. It's a life or death business for Ermyntude, changing gear—as everybody within a mile can hear!"

"Right-ho, old thing!" replied Denny, the immaculate. "If you think the engine hasn't caught a cough, or anything like that, during the night—though it sounds as if she has—then let us away."

Bob let in the clutch very, very gently. At first it wouldn't grip, and Bob had to let it in full. Then it gripped suddenly, and the van, with a joyous leap, bumped and staggered on to the road.

She gathered way. Then the gear was changed, Bob with a set and rigid face, drawn with awful anxiety as he gripped the lever. So away they went, with a bang and a rattle, at quite a respectable speed, Sandy peering anxiously astern from the back, ready to give instant warning if anything should drop off.

Before noon, by a great stroke of good fortune for them and bad luck for Northampton, they entered the big town, heralding their approach along by Cotton End and over the canal into Bridge Street, like a dust-cart loaded with old baths, buckets, and tins, going at treble speed.

The passage of Ermyntude and our three heroes through Market Square and along Abington Street created quite a sensation in Northampton that day.

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CHAPTER 2.

The Drive in the Night!

"HERE'S the show!" bawled Bob, shouting to make himself heard above the noise of the engine, as Ermyntude, the motor-van, drew into the kerb on the left of a road of semi-detached houses.

Bob shut off power, and the panting engine gained a respite from its labours. Then Denny felt he could speak in comfort.

"Doesn't look much like a jolly old antique dealer's place to me, old things," he said. "Private house, very ordinary-looking. But if we can get the mummy, and with it the twenty-five quidlets, all will be well."

Sandy had rung a lusty peal at the bell, and the door was opened by a lantern-jawed man with a very low forehead. This man had fierce, bushy, grey eyebrows. He might have been anything not requiring a great amount of intellect. The chums' idea of antique dealers was bespectacled, learned old fossils in dressing-gowns. However, inquiries elicited the fact that he was an antique dealer at his private residence.

The friends went into the house, and were shown into a fusty room containing a long, coffin-like thing, bound round with straw at the ends. This, the dealer told them, was the mummy-case.

"It's werry, werry valuable," said the man, "and I wired to Mr. Grindley when I got 'is letter, sayin' as I thought it ought to be delivered by a pianner firm, wot 'as motor-vans speshully built for easy runnin'. I said as I thought a van run by three young men just started in business wasn't good enough."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," broke in Bob. "So we're not to get the job, after all?"

"Well, ye wouldn't if I 'ad my say. This 'ere mummy ought to be well guarded, as well as looked after careful. There's a man wants it badly—not Mr. Grindley—an' 'e'd give 'is eyes for it. Grindley bought a hantique from me some time ago, and this other bloke wot goes in for hantiques, too, wanted it as well. Well, 'e tried to get it from Grindley's men by dressin' up as a detective and demandin' the 'andin' over of the clock. It were a gran'father clock. The bokes carryin' of it for Grindley 'anded it hover as meek as lambs. Of course, there was a terrible row, but the chaps said as a policeman was there w' the 'tec, so wot was they to do? Grindley lost that there gran'father clock. Funny thing about these archaeologists is as they won't go to law one agen the other. Course, they makes cash adjustments, but it's the gettin' of the hantiques—"

"Are we to understand, my good man," said Denny, "that we still have the job of moving this mummy to Mr. Grindley's house? Here's our letter of authority from Mr. Grindley. He told us to call, as you will see, at exactly nine o'clock. Well, we're here, and it's just falling dark."

The man grunted. "Yes," he replied, "I got a reply wire from Mr. Grindley. 'Ere 'tis." The man fumbled in his pocket, and produced the telegram. "Read it!" he ended.

The chums read the wire:

"Yes. Deliver mummy to men I send with letter of authority. Warn them of danger of jolting.—GRINDLEY."

"Well, that's that," said Sandy. "Why so much old buck, Mr. Trew? Come on, chums. Get a grip of the thing, and we'll have it out as nicely and gently as we would handle a new-born babe. Catch hold, Bob! Get a grip of it, Denny."

Without any more protest from the dealer, save mumbles to be "werry careful," "watch the sides o' the doorway," "sure not to bump it puttin' of it in," and so on, the lads got the case safely in the rear portion of Ermyntude. Sandy sat beside it, his duty being that of van-boy. Then Bob cranked up without much trouble, the engine still being nearly red-hot, and soon Ermyntude leapt to life as the clutch gripped suddenly in its own peculiar, sweet way.

The journey was well started, the lights of the van shining dimly on the road. Straight down the London Road they went, and, to the great relief of Northampton, out into the wide, wide country.

As they ambled along the road leading to Newport Pagnell the chums conversed, with difficulty.

"Hope we have an adventure with the jolly old thing," remarked Denny to Bob.

"So do I," replied Bob; "but I doubt if we shall. Grindley seems to have taken precautions, and we haven't breathed a word about it. By the way, I was inclined to think that there was something fishy about this business. But the grumbles of that antique dealer Trew and the wire from Grindley put my mind at rest. No, old son, I'm afraid we shall deliver the mummy without incident."

"Never mind, old bean," said Denny consolingly. "Think of the incidents we can have with twenty-five pounds!"

Just at that second two figures stepped out into the road ahead, and held up their hands. They were dressed exactly like policemen, and they had the policeman's authoritative manner. But Bob winked at Denny as he slightly accelerated speed.

"Stop!" roared one of the men in blue ahead.

"Likely!" yelled Bob above the roar of the engine, as Ermyntude, showing that there was plenty of go in her still, almost flashed past. "You're not real policemen!"

The men, however, leapt for the back of the van, and soon a yell from Sandy told Bob and Denny that entrance had been gained. Bob shut off power and applied the brakes, and Ermyntude, after running for a hundred yards or so by her own impetus, stopped.

Bob and Denny were round to the back in a flash. They tore aside the canvas curtains, and there they saw Sandy struggling manfully with a portly man in blue. So only one had gained entrance!

Bob and Denny gripped the man's coat and hauled savagely. The pull dragged both the man and Sandy out into the road, the mummy-case coming with them, too. But Denny just saved the case as it was see-sawing gaily on the back edge of the floor of the van. He pushed it back—none too gently. Then he sailed in to the aid of Sandy and Bob.

They had the man in blue lying on his back in the road in a few minutes, his helmet over his face, and his fingers clawing frantically at the gritty surface. "Gerroff, you!" he roared. "Thunder, but ye'll all suffer for this, attackin' the law in this way!"

"Come off it, old son!" cried Sandy. "There's no law about it. We know all about your tricks. You're not a real policeman, so come off it!"

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"You can't diddle us, old tulip," remarked Denny. "Also, I hear your false companion panting as he runs forward along the road in his false policeman's boots. Comrades, we must deal with this deceitful man very quickly. Look, there's a pig-wallow just over that low wall. I vote we heave him in there, and then away in our beloved Ermytrude!"

"Great!" said Bob. "That'll cool his ardour a bit. Great fat pigs should wallow to keep healthy. Ever had a wallow, friend?"

"Elp!" roared the man on the road. "Elp, Bungay, in the name o' the law!" "How he sticks to the law!" said Denny. "Up, lads, and in with him. Quick, for if Ermytrude is obstinate when we get back we'll have to tackle 'em both. The other's not far off now."

With their captive struggling and bellowing, the chums hauled him to the low, mossy wall at the roadside, behind which was a depression in the ground filled with liquid black mud. It was, as Denny had said, a pig-wallow.

Over the wall bumped the unfortunate captive, and, responsive to the hefty shove by our three enthusiastic motor-men, fell with a splotch into the mud. Then Bob and Denny, led by Sandy, much as they would have liked to stop and watch their victim in the wallow, hared off to the van. The fates being kind, the engine fired at once, and Ermytrude's ambling way was resumed.

"That's settled that little plot, anyway!" laughed Bob. "Good job Grindley warned us about the methods of that beggar who is out to get this mummy. Hope that jolt when we yanked Sandy and the 'policeman' out hasn't hurt the mummy."

"I don't think it has, old bean," replied Denny. "I shoved it back safely. It was heavy, though, but my strong right arm did the trick, not to mention my strong left."

With many a chuckle over this first adventure, out of which the chums had sailed so honourably, the journey was continued through the night. After two hours more of the steady run at about twelve miles an hour, however, Sandy banged on the boarding behind the backs of Denny and Bob.

"Hi!" yelled the boy. "Hi! There's a car behind us travelling all out. Saw its lights on the last hill-crest. Maybe another stunt to get this mummy. Why don't you draw into a field, or something, to let it pass? We can spy out through the hedge to see if it is all right."

"Good egg!" said Bob. "You're a smart lad, Sandy. I'll slow down here, Denny, and you run forward and open that gate. We'll run into a field and let that following car pass, whatever it is. Probably only a private car or something; but we'll take no risks. Anyway, the engine could do with a cool down."

Into the field they bumped; then, after the lights had been switched off and the gate shut, Denny ran out into the road and walked steadily towards the approaching vehicle.

When he came into the view of the men in the approaching car he heard the engine throttled down. As the car drew to a standstill near him, a man leant out.

"Here, you, sir!" he called. "Did you see a rattling van go by just now?"

"What? A thing like a kid's bashed tin toy, with an engine knocking and clanking fit to fall to pieces?"

"That's the vehicle!"

"Rather! I saw it and heard it! Started to get up speed like billy-ho just about here. Went along at about twenty miles an hour. Why?"

"We want that van, that's all."

The car moved forward, and was soon purring along the road at a good forty, leaving Denny grinning in the darkness. "Now for the resumption of our journey," he said to himself. "Grindley will be most pleased with our shrewdness."

The Ermytrude got going again, after some difficulty in consequence of getting stuck in a dip just at the gate-entrance. However, they got free at last, and took the road once more. They had to turn off to the left about two miles farther on, so they had great hopes of dodging the car, which would be bound to return along the straight road after a while.

They arrived at Grindley's house—a lonely old place in its own grounds—without further incident. Grindley was waiting to receive them.



Tearing aside the canvas curtains, Bob and Denny found Sandy struggling manfully with a portly man in blue. Gripping the man's coat they hauled savagely, dragging both the man and Sandy out into the road.

"Ah, lads!" he said. "Congratulations on having got here safely! Any adventures?"

The chums told him of their exploits on the road. As they unfolded their yarn, however, Mr. Grindley's face grew whiter and whiter. At mention of the car full of men, he looked really frightened.

"Boys," he said, in great excitement, "Do you want to earn another twenty pounds? If so, run me and my mummy right away into Amphill. I'll tell you the way. Will you? I'm afraid of a visit here by the villains who are trying to get hold of this mummy."

"Ay, we'll run you in, Mr. Grindley," said Bob. "If you want to go at once, get your traps ready, and I'll have a run over the engine. You'll want a bit of speed, perhaps, and, if so I might tighten up the fan-belt a bit. It keeps slipping.

Must keep the fan going well if you want speed out of Ermytrude."

"Speed? Yes, rather! As much as you can give me. I want to catch the early-morning north-bound train. We can do it easily. I'll be back in about two minutes."

The excited archaeologist, then darted off into his house.

CHAPTER 3.

A Peep at the Mummy!

SANDY looked at his chums with a grin.

"Not finished yet, I can see!" he said gleefully.

"Well, it's money for jam," said Bob. "But I'm hanged if it isn't a funny business. I'll admit I'm feeling a bit puzzled."

"So am I, old bean," said Denny. "To tell you the truth, I've been puzzled for some time. That mummy-case seems to me heavy for a mummy. Not that I've ever clasped a jolly old Egyptian mummy in my arms, don't you know; but I should imagine they're light sort of things. Things that crumble to dust easily can't be heavy, and that one is!"

"I didn't notice it," said Bob.

"No, because you were only one of three when we carried the case out to the car. But I heaved it all on my lonesome while you two were rolling in the grit with that bobby johnnie, and I can tell you, the thing's heavy."

"Let's have a look at it, any way."

The chums climbed into the back of their van and bent over the mummy-case. A match glimmered, and Denny emitted a low, swift exclamation of surprise. The straw at one end had become slightly out of place, and he noticed that the material under the straw, looked rather new. He pointed this out to his chums, and Sandy and Bob nodded in agreement.

"I vote we have a look at this properly."

"Right-ho!"

Another match glimmered, and by its light Sandy pulled at the straw band round the end of the case—the wider end.

"Gosh! I believe the lid of the case is only fixed on by this straw and rope band!"

The match went out, and another one scraped on the box. The light again THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 858.

lit up the faces of the chums, now serious and puzzled. Sandy jerked the straw and rope band right off, then got his fingers on the lid just as the wind blew the match out.

"I've got a grip of the lid, chums," he cried, "and it's loose. Light another match, and we'll have a peep inside. Buck up, Bob!"

Bob fumbled with the match-box; then suddenly the matchbox slipped from his nerveless fingers, and the matches scattered on the floor of the van, as a swift yell of fear sounded from Sandy.

"Havers, if moved!"

Denny fell back with surprise. Then another yell sounded from Sandy.

"Something nipped my finger under the lid! It's no natural!"

"Get-out of the van!" gritted out Denny. "Buck up, Bob! What's the delay? Come on, Sandy!"

"It's no natural! It moved—the lid moved!"

Denny was scrambling for the curtain at the rear of the van. He had a hand on the mummy-case to help him along. Suddenly he felt the lid of the case heave upwards. He yelled lustily, while Sandy again let out a piercing cry of warning. There was a clatter on the floor of the van as Sandy shot out in the wake of Denny who had leapt into the free air and had collided heavily with Bob.

Bob was standing upright, not frightened, but certainly greatly alarmed, to put it mildly. Then, from inside the van, a tongue of flame shot out, stabbing into the darkness, and lighting up the interior of the van for an instant. It revealed the mummy-case open, its lid having slipped on to the floor, and in the case a man sitting bolt upright, holding an automatic pistol, from which had shot the tongue of flame.

This Bob saw in a flash. Then the report of the pistol crashed out, and a bullet sang past Bob's ear, deafening him.

Here was something real and understandable, so the chums gathered together. They were all three on their knees, to miss any further bullets that might come crashing out of the van.

"Up when I give the word, and into the van to collar that beggar in the mummy-case!" gasped Bob softly.

"Right-ho!" breathed Denny, and Sandy nodded in the darkness.

"Now!"

The chums leapt upright and charged at the now closed curtains of the van.

They piled in on top of the mummy-case and the man just clambering out of it. They hit out savagely, but so did the man.

Denny went back with a crash against one of the angle-irons of the floor; then the man turned all his fury against Bob. But Bob was ready, and the pair became locked together in a desperate struggle. Denny was dazed as he slowly rose on his knees.

"Shout, Bob!" he gritted out. "Shout, old tulip, so's I'll know where to hit out!"

"Here!" gasped Bob. "He's got me down! He's—"

The words were choked back as the man's muscular fingers closed on Bob's throat. But Denny got his hands on the nape of the man's neck and hauled him backwards. This resulted in a yell from Bob as one of the man's heels crashed against his shoulder.

Bob leapt at the man's feet and held them tightly, for the ruffian was kicking out recklessly, and one blow from his heavy boots might do dangerous damage. In the grip of both Bob and Denny the man heaved and kicked, and at last registered a blow on Denny's nose with the back of his head.

For the second time Denny went back, and the man's strong fingers clawed forward to get another grip of Bob's throat. But before he reached his object he felt his feet crushed close together and jerked backwards. Bob was spilled off sideways, and Sandy's voice cut through the pitchy blackness:

"Ah've roped his feet, Bob! At him now, you two, while you've a chance!"

Denny and Bob needed no urging. They piled on top of the ruffian, and soon had him helpless. They forced his hands behind his back, and Bob called to Sandy.

"Another running noose, Sandy. Hands here!"

Sandy was just passing the noose round the man's wrists with the rope from the mummy case, when a snarling voice spoke from the outside darkness.

"Hold up, ye cubs!" The words were spoken in a voice scarcely to be recognised as that of Mr. Grindley, the archaeologist. "Hold up! I've got ye all covered!"

Bob and Denny knew they could not be seen in that pitchy blackness from outside the van, so they left the now helpless hero of the mummy-case in the hands of Sandy, crept to a ready position, hands on the curtains, then, at the word from Bob, leapt suddenly forward.

They sprang right on top of the man outside, their weight bearing him down to earth. The man's firearm went off, but it did no damage. He struggled fiercely, but Bob was tough and Denny was lithe and strong, despite his dandified appearance.

All the same, a fierce struggle took place on that weed-grown drive. The three figures staggered here and there, fell down, scrambled up, then grappled again. Denny caught a blow on the side of the face from Grindley's elbow, and was once more put in a state of dazedness. When his brain cleared, he saw Bob down with Grindley on top of him, so he leapt in to the attack once more.

Just then Sandy jumped out of the van and lent his aid in the struggle, and Denny and he, with Grindley between them, rolled over and over on the gravel of the drive.

All discovered that night that gravel is harder than they had before realised. Their faces and hands got scratched and torn, and their limbs ached in a dozen

places. Denny particularly had been roughly handled. All the chance blows seemed to have come his way—from feet and elbows and heads.

Bob was soon well mixed up in the fight on the drive as well as the others. Sandy and Denny were dealing with the upper portions of the man, so Bob contented himself with quietening the legs of the desperate fighter. That the man had some excellent reason for winning clear that night seemed pretty plain. He fought and tore like a tiger, and the three friends had all they could do to manage him. If it had not been for Sandy's smart work with the rope in the van, the result of the scrap would have been very different—with two desperate fighters to deal with.

As it was, Grindley was at last trussed up as securely as Sandy had finished the job of trussing the man in the van.

"I think, old tulips, that I can claim the plums of this night's scrap," said Denny, mopping his nose. "I verily believe I have stopped every blow against us three this night—"

"Into the van with this beast!" said Bob. "I guess we'll have to take these two beauties for a joy-ride."

"We have still to complete our contract, my children," said Denny. "We promised to take Mr. Grindley to the station. We said we'd run him in, if I remember the exact words. Well, we will—to the police-station."

"Yes," put in Bob; "that's all very well, Denny, but I fancy we'll have to discuss things a bit. It looks to me as if we're in a bit of a hole."

"How?" inquired Sandy, as he dabbed his handkerchief at a cut hand.

"How? Why, it looks very much like trouble for us because we have tipped a real policeman into a pig wallow, put real live detectives, or anyway, plain-clothes police-officers, off the scent, and helped a couple of obvious villains in their unlawful work, though that work is still a mystery to me."

"Not so much a mystery to me, Bob," replied Denny. "My natural abilities as a sleuth—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"My natural abilities as a sleuth, old tulip, prompt me that these two ruffians were trying to dodge the law, and we've helped 'em. But we've nabbed them at last, and my keen brain tells me that we have a ticklish job ahead of us. If we are caught, it will be considered that we turned traitors against our confederates when hard pressed. Our only way to save our face is to dodge those bloodhounds out to get us, and get to a police-station, where we can hand our friends over of our sweet will."

"We've got Grindley's letter as evidence that we were gulled, haven't we?" asked Bob. "What's the old panic for, then?"


"By Jove, yes!" replied Denny. "Hold on to that letter as you would hold on to life, Bob. All the same, I think we ought to dodge that car-load of 'tees if—"

"Me, too," said Sandy, the canny. "If we give the men up ourselves it won't look as if we were trying to hook it, despite the fact that we have these wasters bound hand and foot, and Grindley's letter. And you bet if we're lugged in to a police-station by that car-load of bloodhounds, they'll try to prove that we are accessories in the crime, or whatever the term is."

"Right-ho!" said Bob. "P'r'aps you're right."

"And now that's settled," said Denny. "I wonder if our dear Ermytrude will be kind enough to oblige by not conking out till we get to the nearest police-

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station. Let us have a try and get out on to the broad highway once more."

Ermytrude gave no trouble worth calling trouble. She took captors and captives merrily along the roads, making honest country people in the houses they passed turn uneasily in their beds and dream that an iron foundry was falling to pieces about their ears.

On went the van, coughing and grinding at times, but still on. Just as they got near the main road—they had been travelling along by-roads so far—they saw the powerful lights of a fast car streaking along.

"Yon's the lights of that police-car, or I'll eat my hat!" said Sandy.

Bob immediately switched off the faint glimmer from the Ermytrude's electric head and side lights. He throttled down and turned the car off the road and into a wood, through which they could pass for some distance owing to the sparseness of the plantation.

The chums then left the van and scouted back to the edge of the ragged copse. They got near the by-road, then sank down as one man to cover. The police-car was coming along the by-road.

"What mugs we are," said Bob. "Gosh, if we're caught like this our own yarn as to the true state of things won't wash anywhere—"

"Too late to alter things now, my child," said Denny. "Just keep your trap closed and lie low. Ten chances to one they'll not stop here to investigate."

The friends crouched low, and soon they heard the powerful hum of the police-car as it drew up the hill.

"Slow down here," they heard one of the plain-clothes men say. "That wood looks a likely place for them to hide."

The chums' hearts seemed to turn to ice. But their hearts warmed up and went out with a bound to the next speaker. Denny afterwards said he'd love that man for ever.

"Bah! We've wasted too much time over gates an' fields an' copses since we saw by the wheel tracks as how they'd give us the slip arter we'd spoke to that young man. Best thing is to get to the nearest phone and tell Northampton to warn stations farther out. They're miles away by now."

The car moved on, and Denny rose when it was safe, swept off his hat and bowed in the direction in which the detectives had disappeared.

"Thank you, kind friends," he said. "And now, Bob we must ask one more favour of Ermytrude. And that is to get us this last five miles to Gridstock police-station without further incident. We've had our money's worth to-night, I think."

Ermytrude was justifying her existence. She roared out of the wood with a great fuss, seemingly in open defiance of the chums, whose hearts missed a beat now and again at the frightful din of their getting out on to the road. Would someone hear it and come round to capture them? If so, the case would be blacker than ever against them.

"Ermytrude old dear," said Denny, shaking his head, "you'll have us all in clink yet. The police at Northampton will be pricking up their ears at this shindy, not to mention the detectives in the car. However, give us a bit of speed, old bird, and we'll carry through our scheme with full honour and glory before the bloodhounds can get us."

The van took the chums and their captives, with much clamour and clashing of cymbals, to the police-station at Gridstock, where the friends handed over their cargo.

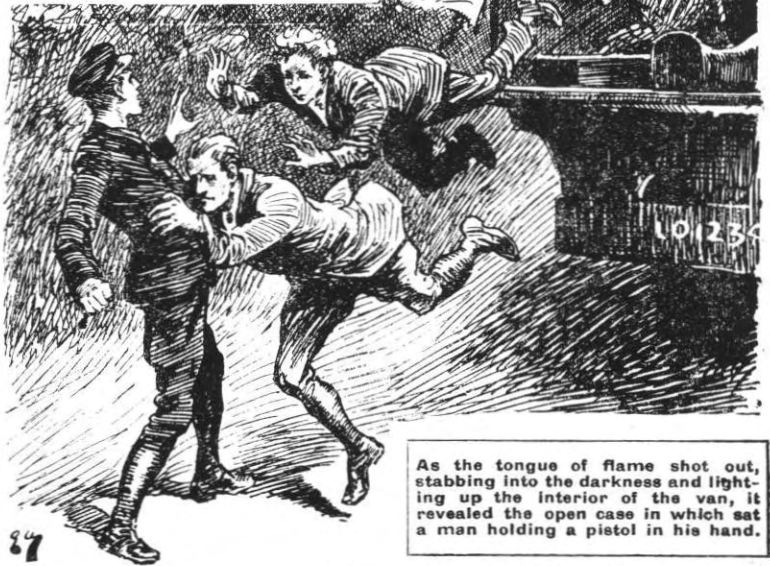
The sergeant in charge took down the chums' statements in detail. The friends thought that Ermytrude was slow, but comparing her with that sergeant she was a streak of lightning.

The still bound prisoners, their dour faces contorted with rage, sat hard by, under guards. At last, thoroughly exhausted, the friends were told by the sergeant, as he, with his pen in his teeth, blotted the scrawled, flourishy writing in the charge-book, that, "The 'ole blamed thing was a fishy business, an' they'd 'ave to stop at the police-station for the night, at least."

This was only to be expected, since telephone news of the escape from Northampton of a dangerous criminal in an old motor-van had been sent round to all outlying stations, Gridstock included.

The sergeant in charge at the station—the inspector was out—telephoned to Northampton about the capture of the criminal in question, and the people who had helped him to escape. This brought the detectives in the big car round pretty promptly.

The chums were questioned closely. They explained again how they had been misled to assist evil-doers, the sergeant



As the tongue of flame shot out, stabbing into the darkness and lighting up the interior of the van, it revealed the open case in which sat a man holding a pistol in his hand.

of the police-station producing Grindley's letter.

"Well, boys, you've done a smart thing, after all," said the detective who did this second questioning, a keen, quick-witted man. "Lucky for you you have this letter, and smelt a rat at the last moment. As a matter of fact, there's a charge out against you, not only for helping Slippery Dick to escape, but also for giving detectives wrong information—or, I should say, withholding correct information—and tipping a policeman during the performance of his duty into a mud-hole. Still, you'll get out of that now, of course, since you can prove that you were led to believe that some people were to dress up as police to try to hoodwink you."

"Then it's all right?" said Bob. "But can you tell me just why the police didn't nab Slippery Dick when he was in Northampton?"

"Well, there's no harm in saying a word or two about that now," answered the detective. "We knew he was in the town, but didn't know where. However, we were pursuing investigations, and had all the roads and railway-stations watched. Detectives, of course,

saw you load up with the mummy-case, reported it merely as such. We raided the address you took the mummy from, deeming it suspicious, and found there evidence that that mummy-case contained Slippery Dick, a man we've wanted for a long time."

The chums listened intently.

"We incidentally caught another man we can charge with aiding and abetting Slippery Dick in his robberies. A hue and cry was raised after you, of course,



As the tongue of flame shot out, stabbing into the darkness and lighting up the interior of the van, it revealed the open case in which sat a man holding a pistol in his hand.

and outlying stations informed. Then I set off with other detectives in a car, and you gave us the slip nicely. By the way, this other man, Grindley, is a forger we can easily have put away in a nice, big, roony, grey stone mansion for a number of years, too.

"Well, boys, you're lucky! You'll have to attend at the trial, of course. But you'll be all right. You'll get praised for your work, instead of a spell of imprisonment for attacking the law and what-not."

"So we've a lot to be thankful for, I take it," drawled Denny.

"You have!"

Denny turned to Bob and Sandy. "Ermytrude, under her new command, has started off well, comrades," he said. "May she ever prosper!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob and Sandy together.

Then the chums sallied forth to their car, to finish the night with well-earned rest in their cosy and secluded position in the police-station yard.

THE END.

(Look out for another grand yarn, dealing with the thrilling experiences of the three Staunch Chums A-Wheel.)

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SARKY MARLINE TO THE RESCUE! Thanks to the hard hitting of the bow-logged old sailor, Brian Carr is able to gain his freedom!



THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!



By **ROLAND SPENCER.**

(Author of our Recent Success: "Tom of the Ajax.")

In the Shadows!

SARKY MARLINE came like the bursting of a hurricane to dispel the sulphurous, tense, breathless calm before the storm. The sailor was soon sitting on a chair in the room of the Warrior Bard Hotel, listening intently to what Guadiana and Dan had to say.

"Shiver me, Brian a prisoner wi' that there Rat anigh! At Sker House, ye say? Then it be Dan an' me to loose our tawps'ls and run down t'see what's to be done. Ye got the box from the Maria de Castellon, y'say. An' this 'ere man Rayne 'as pinched the useless part o' it!" Sarky rumbled. "All well an' good, Don. Split me, ye've all done wonders. But I sha'n't rest till Brian be wi' us once more. Remember what the Rat did to pore Tom Parker, Don?"

Guadiana shuddered, and Sarky slapped his thigh. "Split me, but 'e'll do nothin' o' the sort wi' Brian, or me name's not Marline! Gettin' dark now, the Result's in a decent berth, so you get aboard, Don, an' Dan an' me will p'int for the Sker. We'll spy the lay o' the land there, an', if we can, we'll get Brian. If we need help, we'll come back. 'T'feel this 'ere outsize fist swish through the air an' smash atween them beady eyes o' the Rat will be meat an' drink to me.

"Now, Don, don't 'e go for to shift the position o' the Result. Wait for me to come back. The Golden Gain'll now be wallerin' round the Longships, an' ef she should arrive afore I get back to the Result, it'd be best not to be anchored in our salvin' position, or it'd give the game away, y'understand?"

The Don nodded. He looked ten years younger now. Dan swiftly dressed himself for a night vigil by Sker House. His heart sang. Why? Ten minutes ago he had felt dull and depressed. Now he felt full of life, full of energy and high hope. Was it Marline? Was this seasoned sailor with the rumbling laugh, the round, red, jolly face, the scar down his cheek, the short, bowed quick-moving legs the cause of the renewed vigour both he and Guadiana felt flow into their veins?

Dan remembered his father's words as the old sea captain lay on his sick-bed: "No need to worry more, Dan, when Sarky's nigh!" And Dan was living to experience the truth of those words. This wonderful, live-wire sailor was indeed like a breath of sea air blowing in stagnant places. He was life itself, and Dan filled his lungs and felt his muscles tighten as he followed the sailor out of the hotel.

"Now, Dan, you be pilot to this 'ere Sker 'Ouse," said Sarky. "An' you be the brains o' the hexpedition, son, same as yer father was in days gone by. I'll be sailin' master, same as I allus was, forbye we's steerin' a course on dry land. A Derrick wi' the sextant an' a Marline wi' 'is eye on the cordage. Anythin's possible to us, lad. If we needs force, we'll come back for it. But two's better'n a score where a bit o' gentle scoutin' work is needed."

Dan laughed and led the way towards Sker House. The pair arrived at the high brick wall of the place within half an hour of their setting out from Thirlbeach. Lights twinkled from the Result at her anchorage, and everything seemed peaceful as Dan and Sarky began to scout round the

house, thoroughly examining all four walls, noting the windows, doors, and so on.

They could discover nothing as to Brian's whereabouts from outside the wall, so Sarky gave Dan a heave up, and the boy helped the sailor over, too. The pair dropped into the garden, and rested, crouching, where they had landed, as they heard a muffled growl and the swishing of feet through grass.

A dog was near—and a big one too, apparently. Dan's nerves were strung up to concert pitch, and Sarky Marline's eyes gleamed red in the darkness. The brute would give warning, even if he did not harm them by the attack.

Marline began to attract the dog's attention by moving his hand in the rank grass. Dan crouched silently, wondering. Then a low, swift exclamation escaped him as a pair of blazing eyes appeared not two feet from his face.

The commencement of a deep-throated roar sounded from the dog. But Dan felt Sarky's body stiffen, and heard the evil swish of something through the air. There was a dull thud, then silence.

Sarky began to whisper. "I've put 'is light out, Dan. Got that there torch? Gad, this is a bit o' luck! Now they won't dream as anyone be a scoutin' round the 'ouse, wi' that vicious brute silenced for ever."

The small circle of light beamed down from the torch, and there on the rank undergrowth lay a thin, savage-looking Great Dane, its throat bleeding and stretched out dead.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Dan in a low voice. "What a brute!" "I reckon it be the on'y dog loose in the grounds," said Sarky, putting his sheath knife away, "so we can scoot off now. Where should we go first?"

"There's a lighted window round the other side. I saw what looked like the figure of a boy looking out. The window was open."

"Think we oughter go there? The boy might give the alarm."

"We won't let him see us. We'll scoot about in the shadows and watch. I can't think of anything better just at the moment."

"No. Reeto, lead on!"
Soon Sarky and Dan were on the other side of the house. Crouching in the shadows of bushes they looked up to the window where Dan had seen the boy sitting. The youngster was still there, like a carven image. His fore-arms resting on the window-sill.

Sarky and Dan watched intently. Soon the boy was joined by another figure.

"What did you hear?" asked the newcomer. Dan gripped Sarky's arm in his excitement. Brian's voice! That young fellow standing beside the boy who was leaning on the window-sill was Brian himself! Would it be safe for them to signal to him? Was the boy friend or foe?

"I thought I heard one of those Great Dane brutes sort of begin to bay, then splutter."

"Are they both in the grounds?"

"No; one is kept indoors and one outside."

"Well, I suppose it was nothing. You heard nothing else?"

"No."

"Well, I'll settle down and sleep again. Good lad, for waking me up. Give me another shake if you hear anything more, will you?"

Brian Carr disappeared from view, and Sarky and Dan looked at each other in some perplexity. What could they do? Was this boy to be trusted, or would they ruin their last chances by letting him know of their presence?

Dan drew Sarky Marline away from the spot, and the pair flitted from shadow to shadow right to the other end of the garden. Here they began to talk in low tones.

"There must be a ladder or something in a big garden like this," Dan said. "Without something of the sort we'll never get Brian away, even if we let him know we're here. What about a rope? You can throw a track-line a good distance."

"No man further, shipmate," said Sarky, "but 'tis risky. A miss, and the line would fall wi' a tidy plop on the gravel. 'Sides, where's the rope?"

"Well, we've got to do something. Let's get off, you one way, me the other, right round the house, and look for something we can use."

"A lone course it be, shipmate. Anything for action. Meet back here?"

"Yes, that's it. I'm off!"

Dan and Sarky, each taking his separate route, began to scout from shadow to shadow again, stooping low and running silently when crossing rather open spaces.

The encircling of the house took some time, since they had to search as well, and when they met again Sarky's voice was eager.

"Found anything?" he asked.

"No," replied Dan shortly.

"Well, I hev! A scaffold pole it looks like. Just reach up, I reckon. This way! We can carry it wi'out any shindy, you takin' the tip an' me the butt."

Before long the pole was lying on the grass within the shadow of the shrubs under the window of the room where Brian was sleeping.

The boy still had his position at the open window. He seemed to be on the watch for something. Dan nudged Sarky, and whispered into the sailor's ear.

"Let's chuck a pebble up and chance it," he said.

"Ay, we'd best do somethin' like that."

Dan selected a pebble, and threw it with such precision that it passed right into the room. The boy sprang to his feet, and almost at the same instant a white hand stretched out and gripped the youngster by the shoulder. With a jerk the boy was pulled out of the way, and Brian Carr leaned out of the window.

"Below there!" he breathed.

"Aloft there!" whispered back Dan. "Derrick and Sarky here, Brian. We've got a scaffold pole. Can we heave it up to your window-sill for you to slide down?"

"What-ho!" was the expressive whisper, in reply, by Brian Carr.

Dan and Sarky now hoisted the pole as speedily as possible. They got the tip on high, then lowered it gently on to the sill. Brian and the boy were at the window as the tip of the pole fell into position.

"Hist, there, below!" whispered Brian. "This youngster's coming down first. He's going to be my ward from now on."

"For the love o' Mike, look alive!" mumbled Sarky. "Bring the whole bloomin' nursery down if ye want, so's ye come quick yersel'. Slide down, an' never mind the splinters till after."

Dan held the butt of the pole firmly, and looked upwards. Then a swift exclamation of alarm escaped the youngster as a door was heard to open round the corner.

Men were heard to talk.

"I tell 'e I heerd the creepin' an' swishin'," a voice was saying.

Sarky Marline gripped Dan's arm tightly.

"The Rat, boy!" hissed the man. "The Rat!"

Brian was still talking to the boy, and Marline and Dan looked up with their hearts thumping heavily against their ribs. Would they never come down?

"You first," said the boy. "I'll follow."

Dan yelled out loudly now. The alarm had been given. Feet were pounding about in the garden. Brian was astride the window-sill, and even as he put his leg over, two black-sleeved arms shot out from the curtains.

Brian clutched at the sill with one hand and his other fist shot into the room, as the arms were thrown round the shoulders of Tony Rayne, and the boy was dragged, kicking and screaming, into the room.

Brian leaped back into the room, and then Dan and Sarky had to turn, with fists clenched, to meet the men who were closing in on them from the darkness of the shrubbery on either hand.

Gone Away!

DAN and Sarky Marline swung round to face the attackers, whose dim forms leapt at them as they stood by the butt end of the scaffold pole down which Brian was to have slid.

"Fight, Sarky!" hissed Dan. "Fight for time. We'll give Brian every chance!"

"Ay!" returned Marline grimly, as he rounded his shoulders ready to meet the first of the rush. "Fight as ye've never done afore."

Marline punctuated his words by a straight drive for the face of a reckless being whose enthusiasm far out-balanced his prudence. The man went flying back with a yell, to crash on to his right shoulder, turn heels over head, and then lie still. The kick of a mule wasn't in it with a blow from the knotted fist of Sarky Marline.

Dan found himself with plenty to do as well. The youngster was hitting out doggedly at the two men who were trying to edge round his position. But he could get in no effective blow, and his active brain told him that it would be useless to try. So the plucky young diver contented himself with dodging the blows of the attackers and harassing all within his reach, to give Marline the opportunity he needed to knock out one after another of their assailants.

The moon had been shining weakly at the outset of the fight, but now ragged clouds had blown across the face of it, and men could be seen merely as dim, flitting, dodging, and leaping forms. Dan appraised the strength of the attackers, and in his rapid survey he could see that there were at least four men still going strong.

Sarky Marline had his short bow legs planted well apart, and the sailor's long arms swung with deadly precision. There was little science in Sarky's fighting, but there was tremendous force in his blows, which were delivered to the command of a mind which would never own defeat. The tough, stocky, fierce one-time bo'sun of a hard-case ship was fighting as if he were quelling an outburst of trouble amongst a rascally crew.

The greatest weight of the attack was delivered against Sarky's side. But the little sailor was equal to his task. His eyes gleamed with the joy of battle. And the fighting of toughs was not a new game for Sarky Marline.

Dan's tactics kept the two men on his side at their distance from the pole. But the boy could see that the defence of the position could not be maintained for long,

CHARACTERS IN THE STORY.

DON ALONZO GUADIANA DE LA MANCHA, a Spaniard and financier of the expedition aboard the salvage boat *Result*.

SARKY MARLINE, a trustworthy, bow-legged old seaman in command of the *Result*.

DAN DERRICK, a cheery youth, and son of Captain Derrick—known as "Daredevil" Derrick—a rugged sea captain of some sixty-five years.

BRIAN CARR, a chum of Dan's, and son of "Amphibious" Carr, inventor of a patent diving-dress which Brian in his research work had perfected.

Their unscrupulous rival, known as the "Rat," a round-shouldered, beady-eyed Mexican half-breed.

The story opens with Dan Derrick seated at the bedside of his sick father. A spell of delirium has just passed, and Dan promises the old sea captain to call upon Don Alonzo Guadiana, a Spaniard whom Captain Derrick had long since befriended, and ask for a job. He is setting out on his mission when he meets Brian Carr, who has perfected a patent diving-dress which has been the lifelong study of his father. The two visit the Don, who has come to England in quest of gold which lies hidden in a hermetically sealed box in the lazaret hold of the galleon, *Maria de Castellon*. A brief interview follows, and the lads, fully aware of the perilous times ahead and the rascality of the Rat, a Mexican half-breed, whose intention is to forestall them in their quest, show their willingness to accompany the Spaniard on his

great adventure. With a note of introduction, the lads are sent to Sarky Marline, the jovial old seaman who is to command the *Result*.

The great adventure begins, and, after two futile attempts by the "Rat" to delay the expedition, the party reach Thiribreach, where Dan and Brian, garbed in the patent diving-dresses, wade into the depths to locate the Spanish galleon. They are scrambling up the shingle to report their find when some dark figures splash into the shallow water and charge upon them. Brian is captured, and carried away to the haunt of their rivals. He is talking to his warder when he glimpses the *Result* anchoring near by. Help was at hand!

(Now read on.)

for reinforcements were coming. Two forms crept along in the shadow of the house, with the intention, Dan judged, of rushing in and surprising the defenders. And one of the creeping forms was that of the Rat. His humped back and trailing arms could not be mistaken, even in the blackness of the night.

Dan shouted to Sarky.

"The Rat! Coming! Look out!"

A man leapt at the boy, thinking his attention taken from his immediate attackers. But Dan was ready. He side-stepped swiftly, brought round his left foot, and crashed the man to earth by the neatest of neat trips. The fall was heavy, and the man was winded. Then Dan, with only one against him at that second, bored in.

In the meantime the Rat and his creeping companion rushed in. Sarky swung round, with a big sea oath, to meet the new attack, his right drawn back and his body bent forward. Then a light gleamed out as a man lit a lantern.

The rays of the lantern fell across the place where Sarky was standing. The Rat was just gliding in with his curious lope, his face fiendish in its animal-like fury. But a change came over the half-breed as the form of Sarky Marline was illuminated by the lantern. Apparently, the man had been unaware that Sarky Marline was there, for, at sight of him, he screamed like a wild beast in terror and leapt backwards.

Dan saw his opportunity. The boy lowered his head and rushed. His clenched fist crashed right between the half-breed's little glittering eyes, and back the man went, reeling, chin in air. Sarky, his blazing legs flashing, leapt towards the Rat, with his eyes blazing like an angry tiger's, and his great, knotted fingers hooked like the talons of an eagle.

But he did not reach the half-breed, for that limb of evil, as Rayne had called him, gave another piercing scream of terror, and, stooping low, dodged Sarky's clutching hands. He shot off into the blackness at an incredibly swift pace.

Two men now rushed at Sarky's broad back, and Dan gasped as he struggled and tore to get clear of the grip another man had of his body. The boy saw Sarky go down, face forward, then a man laid his hands on the scaffold pole and tugged to wrench it from its position against the window-sill above.

The tug failed to have the desired effect. There was a streak of darkness above, and down came the form of another person, sliding like a flash along the pole. The newcomer crashed the man at the butt of the pole to the earth, took in the situation at a glance, and, with two swift blows, sent the

men who were about to pile on to Sarky's broad back flying forward. Sarky was up in a flash, and swung round with a cry towards where Dan was struggling in the grip of the ruffian who had clutched at him.

Dan never could remember the correct details of the next few seconds. He was conscious of gasping snarls, jerks, and blows, then he fell free from the strong arms that held him. He felt a fist close on the clothing of his shoulder, and he was jerked off and away. He sensed that he was being dragged clear of some fresh danger. Then he felt a rush of air, and, with a cracking of branches and tearing of foliage, terminating in a thud, the heavy scaffold pole fell from its vertical position.

A groan intimated that someone had been crushed down by its weight. But Dan was still gripped by the shoulder, and, his legs working as if by clockwork, he followed the lead, and soon Brian, he, and Sarky Marline were clear, and crouching in the shelter of a shrubbery.

"Split me, but as near a thing as I ever want," grunted Sarky Marline. "Ef ye 'adn't slid down at that second, Brian—"

"Never mind talk now!" rasped Brian. "Get out your shooter, you ass, and stand ready. I hear one of those Great Dane brutes has been 'let loose!'"

"The Rat must have loosened the dog as soon as he had streaked off in terror from Sarky," gasped Dan.

"There are two of the brutes," broke in Brian. "You must shoot straight if they track us, Sarky. We're not out of the wood yet. Those two brutes—"

"There ain't two," said Sarky with a rumble. "There's on'y one. I slid me sheath knife acrost the throat o' the other. Look 'ere, we're waitin' for trouble. Let's git, and quick!"

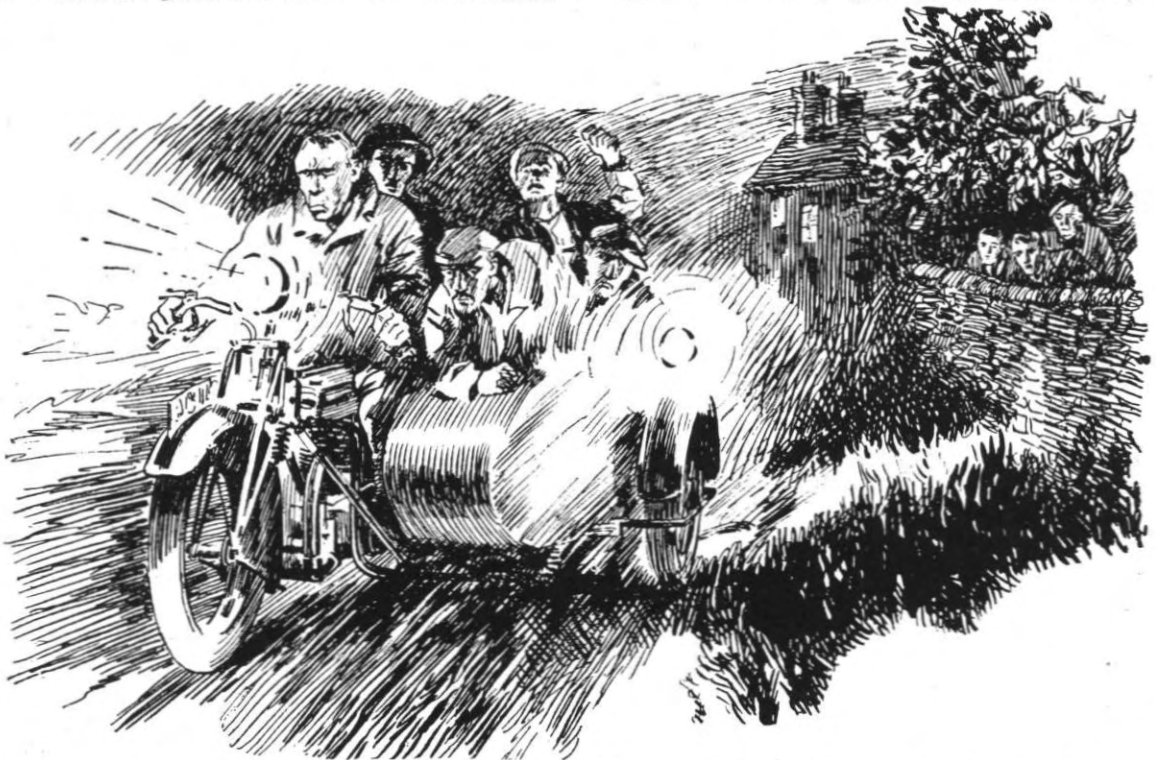
"You all right, Dan?" asked Brian.

"Right as rain on a bank holiday," returned Dan brightly. "I'll lead the way out. You follow me, and Sarky bring up the rear, ready to shoot anything that overhauls us."

"Trust me fer that, Dan," rumbled the sailor, feeling the balance of his automatic in his right fist. "Sink me, it was that 'ot I couldn't find the opportunity to dror me pistol before. Wished I'd 'ad it to tickle up the spine o' that there Morveno. Lead on, Dan, and look slippy."

Dan set off, Brian just behind, and Sarky came crashing along in the rear. Dan led the way straight for the wall where he and Sarky had previously scaled it. Pounding feet and the roaring of the huge dog could be heard not far behind.

The three blundered up against the wall before they knew



The crouching three watched the fast-moving combination with its crowd of men hanging on to the bicycle and side-car wherever they could get a grip. "General Morveno rushing a flanking party ahead to cut us off!" said Brian, coolly.

it was anywhere near, and, in a confused group, clutched at the top and scraped their knees and their toes in their hurry to get over, for the dog was close up. He had leapt for Brian's leg as that young man swung over the top of the wall on his stomach in a mild panic, catching Sarky Marline on the jaw with his foot as his legs flashed over.

Who is Gurdley?

SARKY went down to the other side more quickly than he thought he would, and in a fraction of a second the three daring adventurers were picking themselves up, safe for the time being.

"Wither me eyes, why didn't I shoot that there 'ound afore I come over?" grumbled Sarky, rubbing his jaw.

"Fraid I helped you over a bit, Sarky," said Brian. "That's the worst of getting panicky. But come on, lead the way back to Thirlbeach. Better take the road, I s'pose. But they've got a motor-bike! Listen!"

Even as Brian spoke the powerful roar of the motor-bicycle's engine sounded. The machine thrummed like an aeroplane, then they heard the gear changed as the combination swung through the gate and hummed swiftly along the road, now settled down to its pace.

The crouching three saw it pass, men hanging on to the bicycle and side-car wherever they could get a grip.

"General Morveno rushing a flanking party ahead to cut us off," said Brian coolly. "Do you two know of any way back across country?"

"Down to the beach, and run along the sand," suggested Dan.

"Yes, and get trapped between the sea and our enemies," replied Brian sarcastically.

"Give me a whiff o' the sea, an' I feel more at 'ome," remarked Sarky. "From what I see o' the country t'other side o' the road, we'd be best on the 'ard sand for a quick streak back to Thirlbeach, opposite where the Result's lyin'. 'Tain't fur, anyways, an' if we's spotted, I'll blaze away wi' me automatic. That'll bring the Don out wi' three or four good salvage men. I'd just like to see a crash atween the Rat an' 'is gang and no more'n four o' our salvage toughs."

"Get to the beach, then," rasped Brian. "And run like the wind—"

"A pampero out o' the Plate won't be in it wi' the pace I'll lead," rumbled Sarky, setting off over the sandy herbage of the space between them and the beach.

The chums kept alongside, fully conscious that they'd have to look alive, for the shouts of pursuers were sounding not so very far behind. The roaring of the big dog, however, seemed pretty distant.

Out on to the hard sand they ran, then, at the fringe of the water, where Sarky said they'd get a surface like a racing track, and wouldn't be so easily seen against the dark sea, the three heavily-breathing fugitives headed towards Thirlbeach.

The lights of the Result swayed peacefully out in the cove. How those three tearing runners wished they were safe aboard the little vessel! But they had a long way to travel yet. And three men were heading for the beach, no doubt sent off to see if they had gone that way. Or perhaps they had been seen.

Soon, one of the three chasers gave a shout, and the party changed direction slightly.

"Gosh, it's a sprint for it," gasped Brian. "They may be armed, those three. Spurt up a bit."

To stop and fight would be to give time for others of their enemies to draw up closer. So, as Dan said, they'd have to put their money on speed, for the time. And they did!

Two of the men behind soon got winded and slowed down. But the third was not only a superb runner, he was a very brave man as well. He stuck to the chase.

At last Sarky Marline halted.

"Blowed ef I'm goin' to run away from one," he said. "Ere, 'nough runnin', you two. I reckon I've a job for me fists now, 'stead o' me legs, which is gettin' a bit worn."

Dan and Brian could not help laughing, even in the heat of that grim chase. They halted, and, with Sarky, turned to face the lone chaser.

The man came on swiftly. When he got close, he saw the three waiting for him. Then he suddenly realised he was



At the shout of warning from Dan, Brian swung ponderously round, crouching beside his chum, for a great, heavy mass of wreckage was slewing and bubbling down straight for them! (A dramatic incident from next week's thrilling instalment.)

alone. He stopped suddenly, drew a revolver, and sent three shots crashing towards the chums.

"Ho, so that's the game, be it?" muttered Sarky grimly, as a bullet deafened one ear. "Well, I got a shooter, too."

Sarky drew his automatic and raised a perfectly steady hand. He fired, but the bullet missed its mark.

"Look, the Result has heard the revolver shots!" cried Dan, pointing out into the cove.

The salvage ship's searchlight flickered, then beamed out, and the powerful white beams went searching about along the beach. The rays quivered and then stopped when the three adventurers and the man with the revolver were in the circle of light.

Bang, bang, bang!

The revolver spoke again, and Dan yelped as a bullet seared across his hand, drawing blood. But it was only a scratch. Sarky Marline whipped his pistol up, and with a muttered "All right, me old shell-back," sent three shots back in reply.

There was a yell from the man, and he pitched forward on to his face, his revolver flying yards ahead of him. The faces of Brian and Dan blanched. What if Sarky had killed the man? They ran over in fear and knelt beside the form. Sarky came up more slowly.

"Don't 'e worry yer gentle minds, shipmates," he said, with a grin. "It was him or us."

"Ay, it was self-defence," said Brian. "But think of the consequences, too, Sarky. This is terrible."

The man on the sand stirred and twisted round. He looked up at the three with a wan smile. His face was dead-white, looking ghastly in the pale light of the searchlight from the Result.

"Don't worry," he said. "'Tain't the first I've took since I came in wi' Morveno. On'y through the thigh. I ain't dead yet, nor I ain't goin' to die—"

"Ain't you?" said Sarky grimly. "You be pretty sure o' yerself, I reckon. You ain't got yer proper bearin's yet, mate. Ef I ain't mistaken, you was one o' the Don's crew wot mutinied under Morveno. And 'ere comes the Don in a boat bouncin' over the water like a rare 'un. Gentle as a lamb, is the Don, ain't 'e? Ay, to them 'e likes. But 'e's a Spaniard to 'is enemies."

Dan and Brian watched the man's white face in surprise. From fearless defiance, the face took on a look of utter terror.

"The Don!" gasped the man. "Mates, be you Britishers an' let me fall into the Don's 'ands—"

"Bah, the Don's a gentleman. 'E ain't the Rat, shipmate," said Sarky. "But I reckon ye'd find a salvage ship's crew a rough lot to find yersel' shanghai'd amongst, nah, wouldn't ye?"

The man gasped.

"Listen," he said, his white face working. "I'll tell ye. Don't worry about the Rat, nor Rayne, nor any o' them. It's Gurdley you want. Gurdley's the man wi' the splash. The Rat, 'e found out about the Don 'avin' that there Spanish parchment. 'E told Gurdley, 'an Gurdley's the moneybags. Wi'out Gurdley, ye've smashed the Rat. I tell 'e—"

"An' who may Gurdley be?" asked Sarky, in his grandest manner.

"I dunno, mate. 'E lives in London. Gurdley's the jugular vein o' this 'ere enterprise. Dror a knife across that, an' ye finish the Rat an' Rayne an' all them others. Ye'll let me slip nah, shipmate, won't 'e? I kin crawl to the dunes, I guess—"

"Your bacon's saved," said Sarky grandly. "But on'y 'cos 'alf a dozen o' yore dear pals is haring across towards us at this 'identical minute. An' 'ere's our boat. So long, mate, an' see as ye don't stop one wi' your spine next time."

Sarky set off swiftly for the surf, and Dan and Brian followed. The boat's forefoot grounded, and Guadiana leapt into the water, a pistol in his hand.

"Thank heaven you are safe," he said. "Anyone hit?"

"Yes, one man, senor," replied Brian, "but only through the thigh. Not serious. There are others running down now, so we'd best slide off to prevent bloodshed."

"Yes, yes," said Guadiana hastily. "Back out, men. We must avoid bloodshed at all costs. The police—"

Sarky Marline winked at Brian and Dan as they all piled into the boat and were rowed rapidly back to the Result, leaving their enemies dancing in rage on the beach.

Divining Plans!

DAN DERRICK, during his short, hard life, had many times wondered what paradise was like. Now he knew, as he stepped into Don Alonzo's private cabin on the salvage ship Result. It was paradise enow to Dan and Brian after their stirring adventures with the Rat, Rayne, and their gang. The bare, untidy, littered apartment looked a safe and comfortable place, indeed, as the chums sank wearily down on a locker and took some much-needed refreshment.

Guadiana had ordered an immediate conference in the cabin, and he and Sarky were talking eagerly about the man Sarky had wounded, and his report that Gurdley was the financier of the Rat's schemes. But the talk availed little. The name Gurdley was unknown either to the Spaniard or Sarky.

"How is it you didn't bring that boy down with you, Brian?" asked Dan as he broke a chunk of bread with his hands.

"Poor little beggar!" said Brian, bolting half his steak at one stroke. "Crumbs, this is the provender for me now! I only had soup and a nibble of bread-and-butter at Sker House. Oh, Tony? Yes, he was grabbed just as I was going to slide down the pole. Rayne grabbed him. I ought to have insisted on the young ass going first. But he was an obstinate little fathead. However, I like him the better for it. Well, I scrambled back into the room, and landed Rayne a beauty, in payment for some goods he had handed out to me earlier in the night. But it didn't knock him out. The man pushed his son—that kid is Tony Rayne, Rayne's son—out of the door on to the landing, slammed the door, locked it, and put the key into his pocket before I could get at him. Pass along the tomato sauce, will you? Gee, this Welsh bread's a treat. Well, I closed with Rayne, and he got one for his knob, I can tell you, though I was pretty well played out myself. His head crashed on the fender, and he lost his senses. I knelt down to get the key and so get hold of Tony again, when I heard men on the landing outside. One said "Take the whining kid downstairs, Bill." I heard Tony, kicking like a little tartar, being taken downstairs, so I knew I had lost the poor little chap. I looked out of the window, and saw the rumpus below. Rayne began to stir, so, feeling a bit groggy after the diving and my interview with Rayne and the Rat, I thought I'd better go. I did, and landed just in time to help you and Sarky to turn the tide of battle. Pass the lime-juice, will you? I say, senor, is the Rat renowned for his torturing abilities? As much was hinted to me."

Guadiana turned towards Brian. His face was grey.

"That which happened at the Inquisition—may my country never forget it—is as nothing compared to the fiendish cruelty of Morveno," said Guadiana. "Brian, my boy, you have no idea how relieved I am to have you with us again. The Rat is a fiend incarnate! He is afraid of neither law nor devil—"

"'E be afraid o' the law I carry in me two fists, Don," cut in Sarky. "Remember the Brass River?"

"Yes, Marline, well I do, and my gratitude is undying. The Rat, boys, had me in his power. But Sarky came to the

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rescue. He hammered the Rat to within an inch of his life, and, animal-like, Morveno has never forgotten it."

Dan and Brian pressed for details, but Guadiana dismissed the subject with impatience.

"We have business to discuss," he said. "The lights of the Golden Gain are in view, and you two boys must sleep. I want you to go overside as soon as Brian thinks you are both fit. Brian will have to use his third suit, and you must remember that the Rat's divers will be over, too, to discover where you are working. I know you two too well now to know you won't back out because of the peril of working on the bottom with Rayne in a diving dress the same as yours, and, who knows, how many other divers in ordinary gear hard by—"

"We're game, senor," said Brian. "We've promised you to see it through in exchange for the generous share you have offered us. Don't worry that we'll back out."

Dan nodded in agreement with Brian, as he masticated steadily.

"Well, you say there are a few chests below in the Maria de Castellon. You will have to pilot the Result to where she has to drop her anchor. Then we will lower chains and steel cables, and you will have to fix 'em on the chests, which we will raise. How can this be done?"

"Steam up to the bearings," replied Brian promptly. "Dan and I go overside with a long codline, we will walk about till we find the galleon again, and MacFadyen will have to be slick with the engines, and Sarky with the wheel, following our lead with the codline. When we tug three times, down goes your anchor. We'll place you so that the Result will swing to ride dead over the spot where the galleon is lying. Then the chains and cables will go down right to the spot. If we look sharp, we could have the chests attached to the cables before Rayne appears alongside us. It is useless for us to make plans as to our own defence on the bottom. We'll have to act on our initiative, according to circumstances. But you keep a keen look-out all round for fear we should have to shoot up in a hurry."

"Splendid!" said Guadiana admiringly. "Well, here's dawn streaking through the skylight, so you two gourmands ought to sleep now. Leave us a little food on the ship, won't you, for we're hungry, too?"

Guadiana smiled calmly again, and the chums laughed. The Don seemed years younger than he had been a short while ago. The Spaniard was a characteristic example of his race—all moods and changes. Dan and Brian never ceased to wonder at the Don's changeableness. Always a gentleman, he suffered from the terrible handicap of moodiness. One moment he might be trembling with nervous excitement, and the next, cool as an iceberg and steady as a rock; or perhaps, hopeless to despair, then boyishly over-confident and smiling. But there was a steady influence over the whole expedition in Sarky Marline.

Dan and Brian turned in on lockers in the Don's cabin, so that they could have perfectly undisturbed rest. They were soon asleep, and Guadiana and Sarky went on deck, to post an efficient anchor watch, which would report the movements of the Golden Gain.

The two men stood together near the wheelhouse of the Result and watched the approaching rival salvage ship. She was a curious-looking craft, but to their nautical eyes the last word in efficiency. Her hull was squat, and the high mid-structure looked incongruous, to say the least. Powerful donkey-engines were on her decks, which, like the Result's, were cluttered up with coal and gear.

The skipper of the Golden Gain, a brutal-looking, hard-case man, with a face half-jaw, was on the bridge. He was staring over towards the Result in a curious manner, and Sarky gave him the benefit of a jovial flourish of his hand. The reply to this was the extension of a huge clenched fist, and a scowl that would rival any thundercloud.

The Golden Gain waddled across the cove, and dropped her anchor quite near to the Result. Guadiana turned to Sarky.

"We've a real man there, Marline," he said—"and a real ship. A grim brace for us to have as rivals, I take it."

"Ay," returned Sarky. "'E's salvage front truck to keel, is that chap wi' the jaw. A reg'lar tough 'un, or I'm no judge. But we's fast and 'andy wi' the Result, Don; and, arter all, we's no extra special raisin' or haulin' work to do. The big job is for the divers. An' I reckon our suction pumps'll be as good as the Golden Gain's, any day."

"Well, we'll soon know how the wind is going to blow. Legally, they can spy out our methods, drop their anchor, and start salving at the same time as we—"

"Ay, they's as much right to do it as we hev, Don. But unless I'm greatly mistook, we'll find as they'll make an effort to get hold o' your parchment. They won't be

contented to be sold a pup every time, split me if they will. I reckon we'd better forgit the law, Don. We want the bearin' o' that last galleon—the one off the Seven Hunters—as much as they'll want to know where to go an' look for the landmarks. I reckon there's a 'high ol' time ahead o' all o' us afore this little cruise be over."

"I'm inclined to think you're right," replied Guadiana dreamily, thinking of the Rat, and looking at the man whose face was half jaw.

At Work in the Depths !

AT four o'clock that afternoon Dan and Brian were dressed in the diving suits—Dan in his own and Brian in the spare one, which, luckily, he had. Jefferson Rayne, on the deck of the rival salvage ship, was dressed in the suit he had stolen from Brian: Also four other divers were ready, and air pumps mounted in boats riding alongside the Golden Gain. The Rat stood with the skipper on the bridge.

"Think we ought to have our other divers down, Brian?" asked Dan, as he sat with nerves taut, waiting for the time when they should go overside.

"No, I think not, Dan. Fact is, Rayne will find that compared to us in my father's diving dress, those other chaps, with ropes and air-tubes and so on will be useless. Their movements below water will of necessity be slow. The water's deep, you know, and unless they have been urged by big promises, I doubt if they'll stop down more than twenty minutes at a time. Well, what's the good of that?"

"No good at all, from their point of view, but jolly good from ours."

"You're right! Well, I say let our own divers rest till we come up against a tough proposition in getting the treasure from one of the galleons. Blasting work, fixing suction hoses, or getting wreckage cleared away will call our other chaps down quickly enough. The anchor's awash now! Sarky's pointing over, and the Don's ready with his prismatic compass. Stand by to be pushed over, Dan!"

Young Derrick felt his heart beat wildly as the time for the plunge drew near. The Golden Gain was churning along close to the Result. Rayne was sitting on a platform overhanging the water, ready to go down, too, and the other divers in the open boats being towed along beside the Golden Gain, sat in the stern of their boats, ready for the signal.

Don Alonzo had his eye to the slit in the eye-piece of his compass. He signalled "port" or "starboard" with his hand as the Result moved slowly ahead. Sker Elbow was now ahead, and the Don began to read off the points as they appeared in the lens of his compass while the Result slewed gently round.

"Elbow N ½ by E!" called out the Don at last. "Hard a-port and steam in on that line."

Sarky swung the wheel round, and cocked his eye—the good one, for one had suffered somewhat, from the cut he had received from the Rat at one time in his career, resulting in the scar down his cheek. The sailor kept the Result on a hairline for the headland, while the Don took the bearing from Thirlbeach Spire.

Dan and Brian could hear nothing of what was being said, but they could tell by the Don's attitude that they were nearing the spot.

"Spire ESE ¼ by E!" now said Guadiana. "Hard astern and lay to in this position. Hi, you men with the divers, get 'em over!"

Guadiana peered into the observation ports of Dan and Brian's helmets. He smiled a good-bye, and patted the big brazen domes. Then Brian and Dan raised their hands, and they were hove out over the water by a boat davit. They tugged at the slip knot of the rope round their arm-pits, and crashed down into the water with two heavy plops, then a smother of spray.

And Jefferson Rayne, from the deck of the Golden Gain, vent down also.

Dan felt himself rolling heavily through the green water, as his ballast bags dragged him down and down and down. He felt he would never stop. But at last he was brought up against soft muddy sand. He rose, swaying, to his feet and switched on his light. Brian was just reaching the bottom hard by, the thin wavering codline "growing," as sailors say, above him.

Dan walked over to Brian and established telephone contact by pressing in the contact pins.

"Well, here we are, old son," said the lad. "Looks as if we've hit it pretty true. There's the galleon, that dark mass of weeds over there, or I'm greatly mistaken."

"Ay, that's the place, Danny!" returned Brian. "Lead on, you. I'll tow the Result along. Shine up your light and see if we can see her keel."

Dan did so, and he and Brian swayed backwards to look

(Continued on page 28.)

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up. There they saw the bottom of the Result, her rolling chocks, main-keel, rudder, and slowly churning screw, looking like that of a little toy ship, dim and ghostly, on high.

Dan set off towards the galleon, and Brian followed, tautening the cod-line. Sarky Marlino and the chief engineer were having a bad time above. The Result had to follow the lead by Brian, and, in the words of MacFadyen, "it was no so easy."

As he led the salvage ship along Brian kept a sharp lookout for Rayne. At last, a strong beam of light from the right intimated to the young divers that their rival was hard by. Soon they saw him pushing along towards them in haste, lest he should lose sight of his guides.

Brian got the Result well over the old galleon, and then he gave three hard tugs on the codline. Dan looked up, shining his lamp towards the upper regions. He saw the heavy anchor of the tug enter the water and come bubbling and careering down, with the chain above it snaking like a huge sea-serpent as the cable was dragged out of the chain-locker. Fish streaked away from the descending monster in terror.

Fascinated, the young divers watched. Many an anchor they had seen let go from a ship. And they had often tried

to visualise that anchor's antics on its way to the bottom. Now they were seeing it—actually seeing it from below.

The great hook struck the mud with its crown, and a length of the cable fell beside it, stirring up the ooze and hiding the anchor from view. But the run of the tide carried the cloudiness swiftly away, and the chums saw the chain tauten, saw the anchor jerked round by the weight of the ship above. Then the fluke drove in, and the Result was at anchor.

"Gosh! Well judged that, Brian!" said Dan. "She's riding dead over the galleon. And here comes Rayne. Look, there's the Golden Gain's hook coming down not far off from the Result's. Gosh, they're following the Result pretty close!"

"Ay, and Rayne's following us! Come on, chum, plunge into the weeds! He'll have a job to find us in that sea jungle, I'll bet, and by the time we've got the chests fixed up he might discover where the lazaret hold is."

(Brian's order was carried out, and the two chums plunged under cover of the weeds. A thrilling fight on the sea bottom was imminent! Don't miss next week's thrilling instalment, chums!)

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