

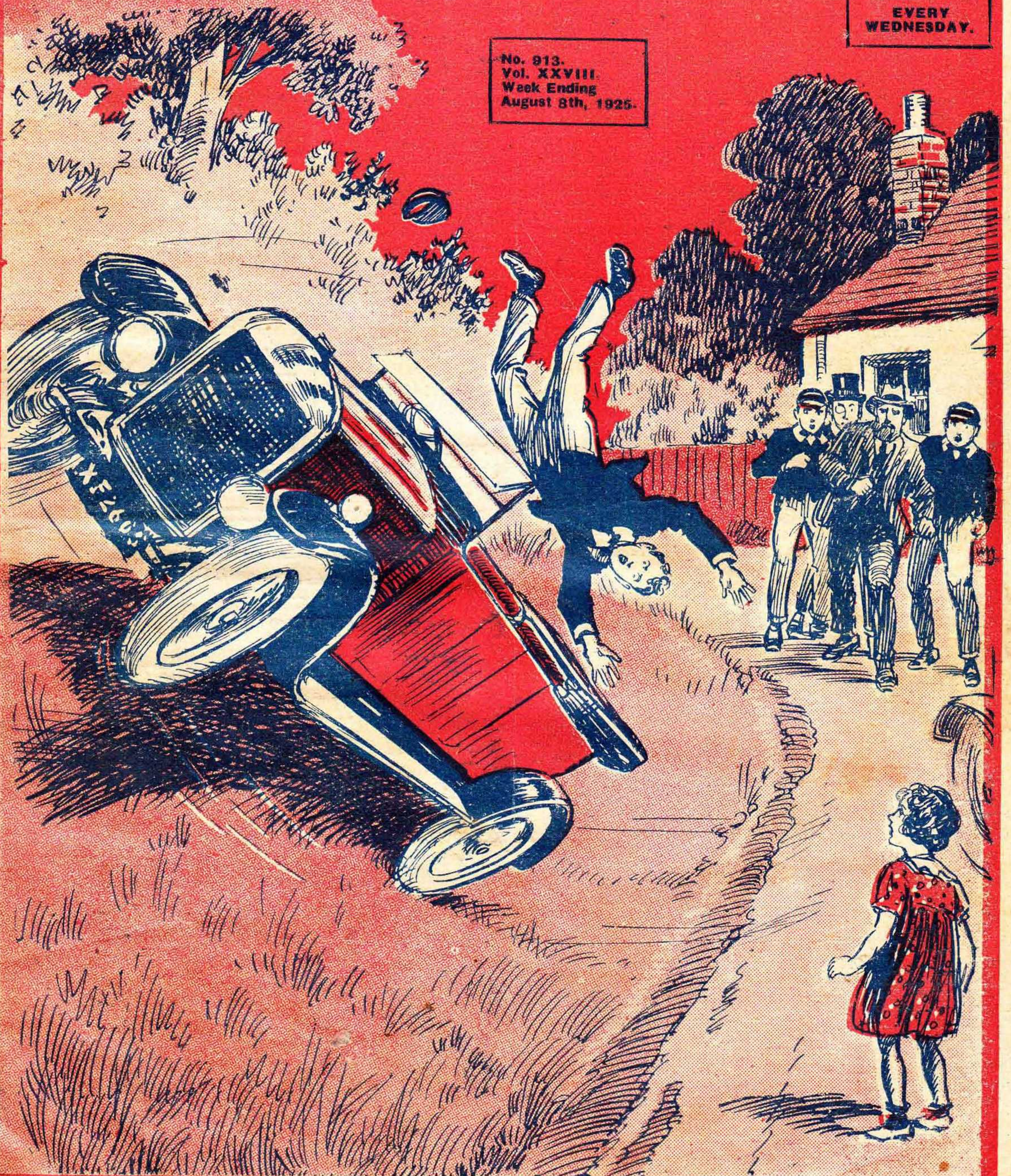
STUDY No. 9 ON THE WARPATH Long Complete School Story Inside.

The GEM 2^D

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

No. 913.
Vol. XXVIII.
Week Ending
August 8th, 1925.



CARDEW THE RECKLESS!

(To avoid running over a child Ralph Reckness Cardew risks his own neck. See story of Tom Meyry & Co., inside.)

YOUR EDITOR CHATS WITH HIS READERS!

Address your letters to
The Editor, The "Gem"
Library, The Fleetway
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Street, London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—There is great news about next week's issue of the GEM, for our powerful new serial of mystery, adventure, and Chinese romance starts in that number. You will all like "The Crimson Claw!" I know for certain. It is written by that favourite author, Lester Bidston, who is, as we all know, a master of his craft. Order your copies early. There will be a boom rush for next Wednesday's GEM with the startling opening of a yarn which is great in every particular. It shows us something of the underworld of China, and of the manner in which the hideous ramifications of Celestial intrigue reach Western Europe, and England even. Distance is not much of an objection to the almond-eyed plotters of the farther Orient. The scheming Eastern has the cunning of the serpent and the patience of a cat. The start-away of this gripping romance of Chinese conspiracy is gripping in the extreme, for the series of amazing incidents begins with a mysterious crime at the very portals of Scotland Yard itself. The message of the Hidden Hand is ferocious in its savage intensity, and the thrill of this terrible happening is made more real by the knowledge that the instigator of the abominable act is an individual well primed in hypnotic powers, also that he has in his possession the Crimson Claw itself. This Crimson Claw is fashioned of blood-red amber, and is something more than a mere talisman of a relentless fate. Be sure to read this splendid story, and pass the word along to any non-reading chum who may be knocking round that this is the time to join up with the gallant band of Gemites.

"CAMP AND CARAVAN!"

Our new number, too, will contain the hilarious account of the doings of Tom Merry & Co. on holiday. This is as jolly a yarn as any Mr. Martin Clifford has ever written. It just bristles with merriment and cheery wizzes. You will meet all the prime favourites of St. Jim's out in the open, and it is a bright and lively party you may be quite certain. Lots of hints have blown in on me about what St. Jim's ought to do these hols. That my readers will be amply satisfied with what is doing there is no possible doubt whatever.

A NEW ZEALAND READER.

A splendid letter about the GEM and its ever-increasing circulation reaches me from Miss Ima Levy, 20, MacFarlane Street, Wellington, New Zealand. There, as throughout Australia, Gemites keep on rolling up, and they write me brilliant letters concerning the yarns of St. Jim's. My Wellington friend says a lot of good things about "the wonderful success of the GEM." New Zealand's enthusiasm is appreciated, I assure her.

"MAGNET" FREE GIFTS!

The wonderful Free Gifts of Cut-out Stand-up Action Photos of Famous Cricketers that were, on account of unforeseen circumstances, postponed, will be GIVEN AWAY with next week's issue of our ripping Companion Paper, the "Magnet" Library. To make up for the disappointment,

Four Stand-up Cut-out Photographs.

instead of two will be presented Free with every copy. Each photo is a wonderful likeness of a famous cricketer. Hobbs, Hendren, Parkin, and Sutcliffe will be the first four given, each beautifully printed in two colours. Don't forget, boys! Make certain of these gorgeous Free Gifts by ordering a copy of next Monday's "Magnet" at once!

Your Editor.

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"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best storyette sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your ioke, to me.

GOOD OLD GLAM.!

THEN HE COLLAPSED!

The fog was thick, and the short-sighted old gentleman could not see a yard in front of him when he left the office. But he knew every inch of the way to the tram-terminus—or thought he did. Ah, at last! He clambered aboard, and took his place in the far corner. Time passed, but the tram showed no signs of moving. More time passed, and the old gentleman grew impatient. At last he rose and buttholed a misty figure. "What time do you think this tram will start?" he demanded. "Tram!" came the answer. "This isn't a tram. You're in a cabman's shelter!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to G. H. Powell, 27, Merthyr Road, Hirwain, Glam.

VERY FINE!

A motorist, charged with reckless driving, was told by his solicitor that if he treated the magistrate affably he would probably escape any penalty. So when the case was

called he stepped briskly into the dock, and said to the magistrate: "Good-morning, sir! And how are you?" To which the magistrate replied: "Fine—five pounds!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Keath, 40, South Road, West Bridgford, Notts.

HE WOULD!

Father (to son just back from camp): "Is it true, my boy, that the Scoutmaster called you a blockhead?" Son: "No, dad; all he said was, 'Keep your hat on! There's a woodpecker about!'"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Charles Henry Loomes, 103, Higham Hill Road, Walthamstow, E. 17.

NO NEED TO WORRY!

"Why on earth do you keep looking round at the coat-rack?" asked a City man, who was dining in a restaurant with a friend from the country. "I am keeping an eye on my overcoat," was the reply. "Ridiculous! You don't see me continually looking round there." "Well, there's no need for you to do so. Your coat went about ten minutes ago!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. N. Smith, 54, Legsby Avenue, Grimsby.

SOME SOUP!

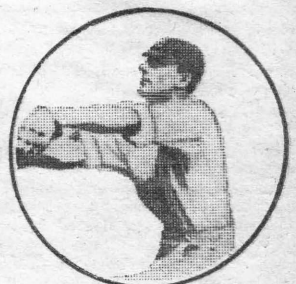
A man had just finished lunch at a small restaurant one day when the waiter came to give him his bill. "Did you have lentil or pea soup, sir?" he asked. "Goodness knows!" answered the diner. "It tasted more like soap!" "Well, that would be lentil, sir," said the waiter quickly, "for the pea-soup tastes like paraffin!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Leslie C. Long, 9, Hendham Road, Wandsworth, S.W. 17.

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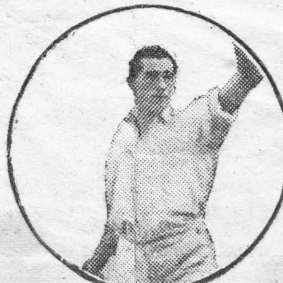
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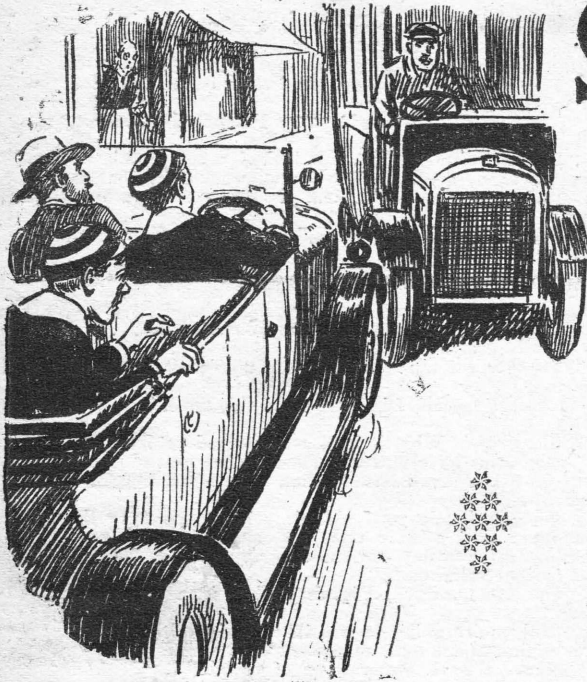
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STUDY No. 9

ON THE

WARPATH!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story
of the Popular Chums of St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus—Novelist!

GUSSY! Gussy!" The voice of Robert Arthur Digby went booming along the Fourth Form study passage at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy heard, but would not take any notice.

Gussy was busy—very busy indeed, though, as yet, no visible result of his labour appeared on the foolscap sheet which lay before him.

A fountain-pen was in his right hand, and an expression of intense thought pervaded his aristocratic countenance.

"Gussy! Are you deaf, you chump?"

"Weally, though Dig is one of the best of good fellows, he can be a howwid nuisance at times!" murmured Arthur Augustus, rather peevishly.

And he thoughtlessly dipped his pen into the open inkpot before him. This was quite unnecessary, for Gussy's fountain-pen was not like that which George Herries had lately been using.

Gussy's was in excellent order. Herries' had two or three defects. One was that the top was so difficult to unscrew that several minutes were required for the operation; another that, even after being filled, it frequently refused to flow; and a third—perhaps the worst of all—that when it did flow, its discharge was sudden and copious. So of late Herries had generally used it after the fashion of an ordinary pen, which explained the open inkpot.

"Gussy!" yelled Digby again. "Do you hear me, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus flicked his right hand impatiently, and a shower of splashes spoiled the virgin whiteness of the sheet of foolscap.

As the pen was already fully charged with ink, the dipping had been rather worse than unnecessary.

"Oh cwumbs!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

The door of Study No. 6 opened, and Digby appeared, a cricket-pad under his arm.

Gussy did not even look up.

"Why this language, Gussy?" inquired Digby.

"Go away!" snapped Arthur Augustus.

"I say, old top, what's the matter? Something seems to have gone wrong with the works. Can I help?"

"Buzz off!"

"You're uncommonly polite this afternoon, I must say. Aren't you playing cricket?"

"I am not playin' cwicket, Digbay, an' I do beg an' pway that you will remove yourself frowm this studay an' allow me to resume the work you are intewwuptin'!"

"Well, I like that, dashed if I don't! It's as much my study as yours, I believe. And I can't see what work you are doing, unless making blots on clean paper is work."

Arthur Augustus passed his right hand over his noble brow in a wearied manner.

"You make me tiahed, Dig," he said. "Because you can see no visible result, you—"

"I'm not so jolly clever as you are, old top! You can see invisible results, I suppose? But what is the matter, really?"

"Nothin' is the mattah, Dig, except that I am vewy busay, an' do not desiah to be intewwupted."

"What is it—lines? I didn't know you'd collected them. But anyway, you needn't bother about them now. If you'll come down to cricket, we'll all help you later on, and the four of us can polish them off in a few ticks. What did you get them for?"

"It is not lines, Digbay. It is somethin' of much gweatiah importance than lines."

"Not a love letter, I hope? I should think you've had enough of that sort of rot!"

For a moment Arthur Augustus had been mollified by Digby's offer, on behalf of Blake and Herries as well as himself, to aid with the supposed imposition. But Digby's new suggestion nettled him.

"Weally, Digbay, even if I were guilty of the cwass folly of w'itin' love lettahs—"

"Well, you have been before now. And you've got no more sense than you had then—at least, if you have, none of us have ever noticed it."

"I will not condescend to argue the mattah of my sense with you, Digbay; but I must say that I considah you should know bettah than to imagine that anyboday with the slightest notion of the cowwect thing would w'ite a love lettah on foolscap papah."

"Depends on how much he'd got to say, I suppose. Come to that, we never write lines on foolscap. So what can it be?"

"I do weally wish that you would mind your own biznay, Digbay!"

Digby shifted the pad from under his arm into his hands.

"I am minding my own business," he said. "My business at the present moment is to get you to play cricket, instead of frowsting here over some silly rot. Now, once, are you coming?"

Digby lifted the pad threateningly.

"I have already told you that I am not comin', an' I am not frowstin' ovah sillay rot."

"Twice—are you coming?"

"I wefuse to come. I will not submit to thwreats!"

"I haven't thwreatened you, fathead! For the third and last time, are you coming?"

"I am not! Don't you thwow that pad, Dig— Ouch! Yooooooh! Yawooogh! You sillay ass! Look what you've done!"

Digby saw, and repented.

He had only meant to hit Gussy on the head. He had not counted on the pad's ricocheting thence on to the table,

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striking the open inkpot, and causing it to discharge its contents.

Some of the ink went over the pile of foolscap that had lain by the pot. Some of it went into the face of Arthur Augustus, some on his broad, white collar, and quite a lot on his chaste fancy waistcoat.

It was really astonishing that one moderate-sized inkpot could hold sufficient ink for all the damage that had been done.

"Oh, I say, Gussy, I'm awfully sorry, really! I didn't mean—"

"Go away! You will send me mad if you remain heah any longah, Digby!"

"Never mind, old top; you won't have far to go. And I'm not going to clear out till I've helped you with this mess, anyway."

"I have not requested your help, an' I will not accept it!" fumed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't be an idiot! I've told you I'm sorry. That ought to be good enough, I should think. Not much damage done here, anyway."

Only the top sheet of foolscap was badly splashed. The edges of a few of the sheets beneath it had taken some of the ink. These Digby quickly removed, lest those below should be soaked. Then he turned his attention to Gussy.

"You'll want a clean collar, old bean," he said. "I'll go and fetch you one, if you like."

"You have completely ruined my waistcoat, Digby!"

"Well, it certainly doesn't look much the better for it. The ink splodges aren't regular enough to fit in with the pattern," replied Digby, surveying the damaged garment with a critical eye.

"It is ruined, I tell you!"

"I heard you. Do you know, Gussy, I never did like that waistcoat?"

"You sillay ass! I have nevah worn it before to-day. I put it on in the hope that it would give me inspiwation. One of those Fwench chappies—Balzac or Dumas, or somebody—always used to put on his best clobber before he sat down to w'ite his novels."

A light dawned upon Robert Arthur Digby. Gussy was writing—or was about to write—a novel!

What a joke!

That was how it appeared to Digby. But, of course, Gussy was in dead earnest, and Digby knew that he was.

"Oh, I see! I'll fetch you that collar, Gussy, and another waistcoat. Which will you have—the yellow one with the red-and-blue stripes, or the mauve one with the green, red, purple and yellow pattern?"

"Wats! None of my waistcoats ansahs in any way what-eva the descriptions you have given. I will have the simple black-an'-white one, I think. Be quick, Dig! I do not desiah that anyone should blow in an' find me half-undressed."

Digby bolted.

His readiness to go did much to make Arthur Augustus feel more lenient about the damage he had done.

But Gussy did not guess what was behind that readiness.

Digby had made up his mind that he would cut cricket for the afternoon. It was a little too hot for leather-chasing, anyway.

Gussy and his novel would be more entertaining than anything that was doing on the playing-fields. And by this time Blake and Herries would certainly have started in to play. They would not come to fetch him and Gussy, though they might gird at them as slackers later on.

So Digby came back, with a clean collar and the black-and-white waistcoat for Gussy.

"Here, let me do that for you," he said, as he saw his chum wrestling with the stiff collar and an obdurate stud.

"If I cannot do it, Dig, I see no weason to suppose that you can," replied Arthur Augustus, rather crossly. "If it had not been for your childish behaviouah, there would have been—"

He was cut short by Digby's knuckles against his throat.

"Now, I'll show you a little trick you don't know," said Digby.

"Gwooooh! You will most assuahedly choke me if you are not more caahful!" mumbled Gussy, as Digby moved his hand.

"Not likely! Here, you're so jolly particular that I won't do it myself—I'll tell you how to do it. Just moisten the tip of your first finger and put it against each of the stud slits in the collar."

"Weally, I fail to see what diffewence that can make," said Gussy peevishly.

But he did as he was told, and it worked like a charm. The stud slipped into the slits without the least trouble, whereas before it had seemed as though it never would go through.

"There is somethin' in that twick, Dig," said Gussy, with much greater affability.

"There's a lot in it," replied Dig. "Now get your jacket

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and sit down, and we'll have a yarn over this novel of yours."

"I am not awaah that I told you I was w'itin' a novel, Dig!"

"As far as I can see, you're not yet," answered Digby, glancing at the blank sheets of foolscap. "But I've got it into my head somehow that that's the job you're on."

"You have more acumen than I should have cweditid you with, Dig."

"Good word, 'acumen'! Yes, I'm not the complete ass I look, Gussy."

"I should not say that you looked a complete ass, Dig. Wathah sillay at times, maybe; but that's not your fault."

"Tell me all about it, Gussy. What are you doing it for?"

"For five hundred pounds," answered Arthur Augustus solemnly.

"What! You don't mean— But, of course, it can't be that! No publisher could possibly be such a chump as to offer you five hundred pounds—or five hundred pence, for that matter—for any giddy novel you could write."

"I flattah myself, Digbay—"

"You do, old top! We've often noticed it, and told you about it."

"I flattah myself, Dig, that when this novel has appeahed all—"

"Ah, when! Why, it isn't even started yet!"

"When this novel has appeahed all the leadin' publishahs will be fallin' ovah one anothat with much biggah offahs than that."

"Oh, you do, do you? Who's going to pay you the five hundred? It's a mere trifle, of course, to what you'll be making afterwards; but, as they say over in France, it's the first step that costs."

"The five hundred, Dig, is offahed in a pwize competi-tion."

"And you're going to win it? You've already made up your mind about that, of course."

"Yaas. I have ewevy hope of winnin' it. I think my patah will be pleased. We have never had a litewawy man of weal distinction in the family."

Digby gasped. Arthur Augustus had run on in imagination even farther than he had expected.

Not a line of the novel was yet written, but Gussy already saw himself not only as its author and the winner of the five hundred pound prize, but also as the writer of numerous other novels to follow, and a literary man who would add lustre to the honoured name of D'Arcy.

But that was just like Gussy, after all. Alnaschar, in the "Arabian Nights," was a mere circumstance compared to Gussy. The man who counted his chickens before they were hatched must take second place to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Now, you see my point, Dig," said Gussy in the most friendly way.

After all, it was good to have someone with whom to discuss the novel. And of his chums Digby was by far the best for that purpose. Jack Blake persistently underrated Gussy, in Gussy's opinion; and Herries was a perfect Philistine about everything except music, and would be sure to pour cold water on the project.

"I see?" replied Digby. "I don't know that I see it quite so clearly as you do, but, still, I see it. When are you going to make a start?"

"I have already made a start, Dig."

"Well, I can't see the evidence. You haven't put anything on paper, except blots."

"It's heah, Dig—heah!"

And Arthur Augustus tapped his forehead.

"Oh! I've often wondered whether there really was anything there. Now I know."

"If you are goin' to talk in that stwain, Digbay, I refuse to discuss the mattah with you."

"Sorry, old top! No offence! Tell me all about what you've got—er—here."

And Digby tapped his forehead just as Gussy had done.

"In the first place, I have the name of the hewo, which is a mattah of more importance than you may imagine."

"Well, it does count, of course. I suppose there are better names than Jack Smith for a hero."

"Wathah! My hewo is named Wupert Vavasour."

"Some name!"

"Bai Jove, yaas! Sets a standard, y'know—stwikes a keynote—all that sort of thing."

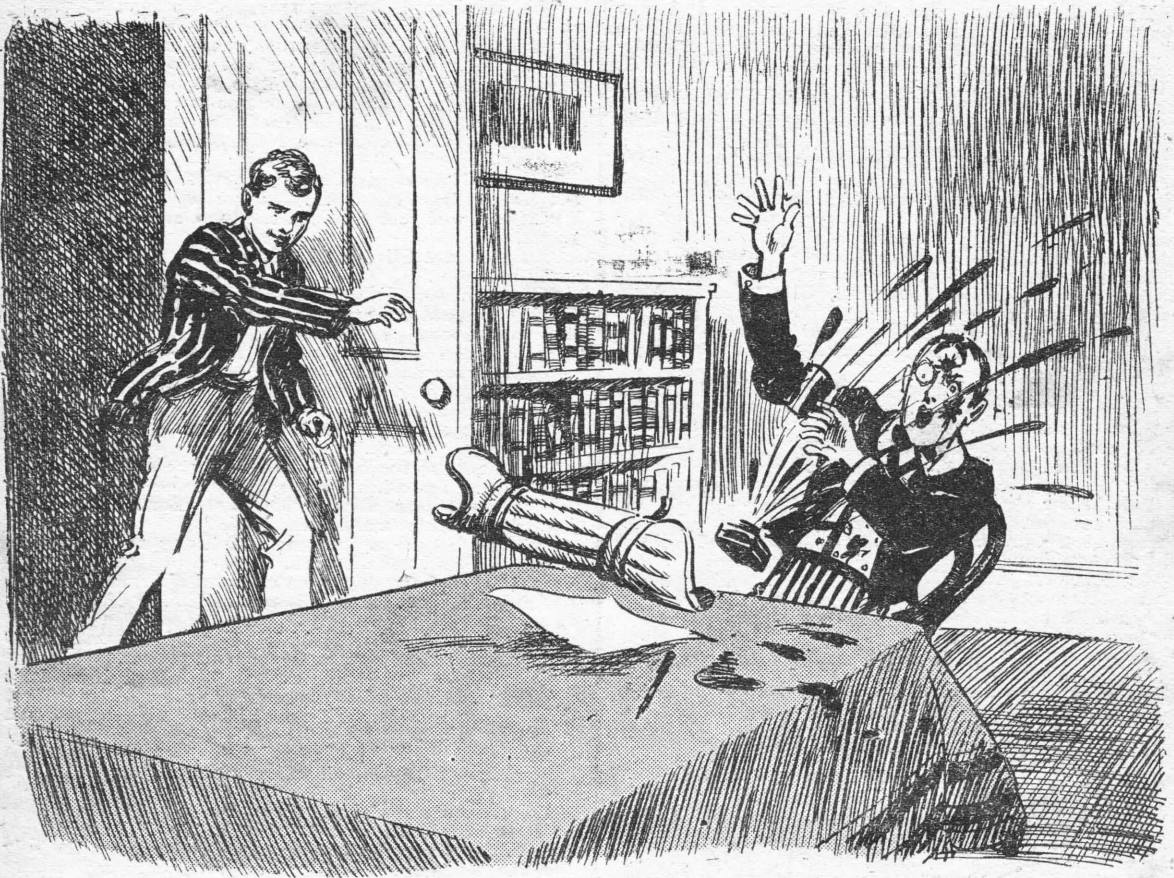
"He wears a monocle, of course?" put in Digby slyly.

"Yaas, he does. Though I cannot imagine how you guessed that, Dig."

"Not such a complete ass as I look, y'know, Gussy. What about the heroine?"

"I am not quite saah, but I think she will be named Mavis Gwendolen Veah."

"Veal? I shouldn't, if I were you, Gussy! Sounds too much like calf. Now, if she was the prodigal son— But, of course, as she's the heroine that's out of the question—"



"Are you coming out to cricket?" asked Digby, lifting the pad threateningly. "I am not!" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't you throw that pad, Dig— Ouch! Yoooop! You sillay ass! Look what you've done!" The flying pad caught the inkpot and scattered the ink over Gussy's face, his waistcoat, and the paper on the table. (See page 3.)

"I did not say 'Veal,' Digbay! I said 'Veah.'"
 "Oh, all serene! Get on with the washing. Vere's all right, and goes nicely with Vavasour."

"Yaas, that's what I thought, deah boy! But Mavis Gwendolen will be all wight, in any case."

"What about the villain? Of course, there is a villain?"
 "He is named Jaspah. I am not suah about his surname, but I have made-up my mind that his Chwistian name shall be Jaspah!"

"Bloggs?" suggested Digby.
 "Don't be widic, Dig! Theah is nothin' funnay about my villain. Bloggs is a comic name."

"H'm, yes! Perhaps there is that objection to it."
 As he spoke Digby got up and moved softly towards the door.

Gussy watched him in surprise, wondering what he could be about.

"How would Trimble do—Jasper Trimble?" snapped Digby, throwing open the door and seizing by the collar a podgy youth whose attitude suggested that his ear might have been at the keyhole the moment before.

"Here, you leave me alone, Digby!" yelped the fat Fourth-Former. "I wasn't doing anything to you! I suppose I can pass your door without being jumped on like this?"

"You can pass the door all right, Baggy," answered Digby. "What we don't allow is listening at the keyhole."

"Who was listening at the keyhole? I wasn't. Besides, who would listen to the silly rot you were talking about?" burbled Baggy. "Gussy writing a giddy novel, with a hero who wears a monocle! Of course, that isn't Gussy himself—yah! And a heroine named Mavis Gwendolen—yah! Soft, I call it! I wouldn't lower myself to listen to such rot, so you can leave go of me, Digby!"

"You've proved your innocence so completely that I'm not going to let you go till you've been punished for being so jolly innocent, Baggy!" returned Digby, grasping a cricket-stump from the corner of the study. "Gussy, will you hold Jasper over your knee while I larrup him with this, or shall I hold him over mine while you apply it?"

"Bai Jove! The fat wottah weally was listenin'!" said Arthur Augustus.

"There seems some reason to suppose so. But even if he gets punished when he's innocent he'll work that out before the day's gone. I'll hold him, and you swipe him, Gussy. Will that do?"

"You can't—I won't!" howled Trimble.
 But Digby could, and Baggy had to. And Gussy laid on the cricket-stump with vigour.

"Now it will be all over the giddy school about my novel!" he said disgustedly when Baggy had departed, lamenting.

CHAPTER 2. Advice Wanted!

"CLIVE, deah boy!"

"Yes, Gussy, what is it?"
 Sidney Clive, the South African junior, who shared Study No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage with Cardew and Levison, halted at the call of Arthur Augustus.

He was rather in a hurry, for he had promised to catch up his chums on the way down to Rylcombe. But Clive was one of the most good-natured fellows at St. Jim's, and he liked Gussy.

"I want youah advice on a vevy sewious mattah, Clive," said Arthur Augustus.

"My word, you look as if it was serious, too! It won't wait, I suppose?"

"I would much wathah have it at once, if you do not mind, Clive."

"Oh, I don't mind. Only I want to catch up Levison and Cardew before they get to the village. See here, I'll get my bike. They're walking. If you come along with me a little way we can yarn as we go, and when we've finished I can jump on and buzz after them."

"Wight-ho, Clive!"
 The machine was fetched from the bike-shed, and Clive wheeled it to the gates, while Gussy walked by his side in silence.

He seemed thoughtful and worried. Clive wondered what

could be the matter. But the impetuosity of Arthur Augustus did get him into trouble at times, and if Clive could help him out of any such trouble by advice, or otherwise, he would be more than willing to do it.

When they were outside the gates, with no one within earshot, Gussy spoke.

"Clive, deah boy," he said, "I imagine I am justified in assumin' that you know a good deal about blackmail."

Clive stared. From almost anyone else this would have seemed offensive. But he was sure that Gussy meant no offence. He never willingly wounded the feelings of others.

"I don't know why you should suppose so, old top," answered Clive. "I assure you I've neyer practised it. Try round the corner; it's more in Trimble's line than mine. Mellish might give you a pointer or two also, perhaps."

"But you are a South African, Clive," said Gussy, looking puzzled.

"I am, and proud of it. What's that got to do with it? I never heard that blackmail was one of our staple industries."

"I undahstood—that is to say, I wead a book once—"

"Don't you go doing it, Gussy! Your brain isn't built to stand that sort of thing. Puts ideas into it that would never get there of themselves, you know."

"Pway don't wot, Clive! I get enough of that in my own studay."

And Arthur Augustus looked so distressed that Clive realised he must be taken seriously.

"The book was about I.D.B.'s—illicit diamond buyahs, y'know—"

"Oh, I know," put in Clive, smiling.

"An' theah was no end of blackmail in it. Ewevybody seemed to be blackmailin' eweryone else—except the hewo, of course. He didn't."

"No, he wouldn't," agreed Clive. "That isn't in a hero's line. But I assure you, Gussy, that there are people in South Africa who aren't heroes, and yet don't go in for blackmail."

"They might be blackmailed, though," Gussy suggested. "Were you evah blackmailed, Clive?"

"Only once."

Gussy's face lighted up with eager interest.

"Oh, bai Jove! Pway tell me about that, deah boy!"

"Fraid you'll be disappointed. I was about twelve at the time, and the blackmailer was eleven. He offered not to let on to the masters at my school about something I'd done if I'd give him a ticky! That's a threepenny-bit, you know."

"An' did you give it to him?"

"Yes, I gave it to him—not the ticky, though. What I gave him was a jolly good hiding and leave to tell the masters anything he liked. He didn't tell. I guess it was a lesson to him. Perhaps he won't grow up into a regular blackmailer, and that will be one less in South Africa than there might have been, won't it?"

"Now I appwehend that youah way of meetin' a blackmailer was quite the wight way, though you an' he were both only kids," said Gussy thoughtfully.

Clive glanced at him. He had treated the subject lightly, but that seemed to have had no effect upon Arthur Augustus, who was in even more deadly earnest than at the outset. Clive's little story seemed to have impressed him as one carrying a moral.

"For a fellow with any backbone I should say it's the only way," Clive answered. "I don't want to brag; but no blackmailer would ever get me to pay him a cent. It's absolutely fatal! Start paying, and you are at the beast's mercy!"

"Yaas. But circumstances altah cases, y'know, Clive. Cannot you figgah to yourself a fellow in such a position that, though he had plenty of couwage an' was not weally a bad lot, he could not well wufuse to pay?"

Clive shook his head. He was beginning to feel quite troubled about Gussy.

"I can't, old chap," he said. "I tell you there's only one way to deal with the brutes. Defy them to do their worst!"

"But, deah boy, that's all vewy well—an' I quite believe that you would act as you say, an' all that; but—"

"Look here, Gussy, what have you been doing? Make a clean breast of it! I'll bet my shirt that it isn't anything so bad that any rotten blackmailer could have a real hold over you."

"Oh, bai Jove, Clive, you are wathah jumpin' at conclusions, don't you think? I didn't say that I'd done anythin'."

"Well, don't tell me if you don't care to. I'm your pal, and I'd be willing to help you out of a mess. But it's natural enough you should prefer to get Blake and Herries and Dig to help. They'll say the same as I do, I'll bet!"

"I— Weally, Clive, I think you might undahstand that I consulted you because I did not caah to tell those fellows."

"All right! I've given you my advice. I'm not going to ask you any more questions. But I'm certain that the only way is to stiffen your back and tell the blackmailer to go to blazes!"

And with that Clive put his foot on the step of his bike, ready to mount.

"Don't go yet, Clive! I haven't finished. Let me state the case pwopably. Suppose a chap came to a chap, an' told him that he meant to delivah him up to justice if he didn't shell out. An' suppose the chap hadn't—"

"Which chap hadn't?"

"Why, deah boy, the first chap, of course! We will call him 'A,' an' the othah shall be 'B.'"

"That's the blackmailer," said Clive. "B for blackmailer, A for yourself."

"I did not say for myself, Clive. Suppose that A hadn't weally done it at all, but was seweenin' C—"

"You don't mean Cardew, do you? Because if you do you'd better let us manage the affair."

By this time Clive felt sure that Gussy really was the victim of a blackmailer's wiles.

"No, Clive, I assuah you, on my word of honah, that I do not mean Cardew. The C is not the initial of anybody's name."

"I don't want to be inquisitive, Gussy, but I really can't help you unless you'll make things a bit plainer."

"But that is just what I cannot do, deah boy. Now, don't you think that A might be a vewy decent chap an' yet give in to the blackmailah out of his wegard for the othah chap—C?"

"I think A would be a fatheaded chump to give in to the blackmailer on any consideration whatever," replied Clive emphatically.

Arthur Augustus sighed.

"I am afwaid you cannot help me, Clive," he said.

"I'm willing enough to help you. And I'm not the only one who would be. But if you're going to be such a silly ass—"

"You don't undahstand, deah boy, an' I feah that it is hopeless to attempt to make you undahstand," broke in Gussy, with a hand to his forehead.

"Right-ho! But don't forget that I'm willing to help, if you'll only let me know what you're really driving at. And I can give you one bit of good advice, anyway. Tell Blake—he's got some sense."

And Clive rode off.

Arthur Augustus retraced his steps to the gates, walking slowly, and thinking hard as he walked.

He found Taggles, the porter, in conversation with the postman, who had just handed over the letters for the school. These Taggles would sort out, for School House or New House, and in his own good time place in the racks.

"Anythin' for me, Taggles?" asked Gussy.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy, there is," said the postman. "I remember noticing it."

"Pway hand it ovah then, deah boy!"

"You'll get it presently, sir," said Taggles. "Which what I says is this 'ere—no good goin' to meet trouble, an', in my experience, a letter's a 'eap more likely to mean trouble than good luck."

"I would wathah have it now, if you have no gweat objection, Taggles," said Gussy.

The porter grunted. But Gussy was generous with his tips, and Taggles could not see his way to refuse. So he sorted out the letter, while Baggs went off to finish his delivery round.

"Ere you are, sir, an' I 'ope it's good news, though that seems too much to expect these days," Taggles said.

"What a deplowable pessimist you are, Taggles," observed Arthur Augustus, opening the letter, which was addressed in a hand he did not recognise.

"Nothink of the sort," answered Taggles. "I ain't no pessimiser, nor nothink like it. But what I says is this 'ere—it's best to look on the dark side of things till you find the bright side turned to you. But mostly you don't—see, Master D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus did not answer. He had slit open the envelope, and he walked away reading the letter it had contained.

His face, serious before, looked even more serious now.

Plainly there was nothing very cheering in that letter.

"Pessimiser, am I?" muttered Taggles. "An' I got a night to be, I reckon. Which what I says is there did ought

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A voice behind him caused Clive to turn in a flash. "Caught you at it, Clive!" whispered Baggy Trimble. "What are you spying on D'Arcy for?" Clive's scarlet face showed his confusion; and Baggy gave a chuckle of triumph. "Don't worry, old man!" he whispered. "I sha'n't let on, as long as you make it worth my while to keep mum!"

(See page 10.)

to have bin a tip for the trouble I took sortin' out that letter. But was there? Now I arsk you, Ephraim Taggles, was there? There were not!"

CHAPTER 3. Another Takes Counsel!

SIDNEY CLIVE pedalled hard down Rylcombe Lane, seeking by rapid motion to put out of his mind the thought of Gussy's woebegone face.

But he did not find it easy.

That Gussy was seriously perturbed about something was evident.

Clive began to reproach himself with having failed in sympathy.

Perhaps if he had not been so very decided in his views Arthur Augustus might have told him more, and a chance to help would have offered itself.

Even now Clive could not make anything coherent out of what Gussy had told him. But the more he thought of it the more sure he felt that the swell of St. Jim's was being blackmailed by some scoundrel, and that he was an innocent victim.

Rounding a bend, Clive all but ran down his chums. They had to skip aside to avoid him.

"Hang it all, you might ring your bell if you're going to buzz round corners like that!" snapped Ernest Levison.

"Sorry, old chap! I was thinking about something," answered Clive, dismounting.

"You shouldn't, Sidney," said Cardew. "It's out of hours for that kind of thing. I know that your active conscience forces you to do a minimum of thinkin' durin' classes, which isn't the case with Ernest an' myself, who are lucky enough not to be troubled with consciences. But—"

"Speak for yourself, Cardew!" struck in Levison. "I'm not admitting that I haven't a conscience, though I don't fancy mine is so big a nuisance to me as Clive's is to him. What's the matter, old top? You look really worried."

"I am," owned up Clive.

"Tell your uncles," urged Cardew. "Get it off your

little chest! What to you may appear a great matter may seem to Ernest an' me of no moment at all. What have you been doin', Sidney?"

"I haven't been doing anything," replied Clive, rather crossly.

"Then it's somebody else. By the way, why the bike?"

"A fellow wanted to speak to me about something, so he came part of the way with me, and I brought the bike along, so as to be sure of catching you two up before you got to Rylcombe, as I'd promised."

"Ever punctual an' precise, Sidney! To you a promise is a promise. To me—what is it? Mere breath. To Ernest—what is it?"

"Oh, dry up, Ralph!" said Levison. "You keep on talking your silly rot when, if you'd an atom of sense, you'd see that Clive really is worried about something."

"Never mind," said Clive. "I don't know that I've any right to tell you fellows."

"My curiosity pricks up its ears," said Cardew. "If it's none of my business I just naturally want to know, y'know. That's me. Unlike Ernest here, I am wise to my own failin's."

"Who was the fellow that kept you, Clive?" asked Levison.

"D'Arcy," answered Clive.

Then he realised that he had given away rather more than he had intended.

"An' into what swamp of trouble has my noble kinsman been gettin' himself now?" inquired Cardew.

"I didn't say he'd done anything of the sort," rejoined Clive. "Look here, Ralph, if it was my own affair I'd tell you fellows at once—you know that. But it isn't. It's—that is to say, it's not mine at all, but somebody else's."

"An evasion worthy of the illustrious Baggy!" murmured Cardew.

"If Gussy made you promise not to let on you can't let on, of course," said Levison.

"I didn't actually promise. In fact, he never asked me to. But I rather think he expected me to keep it dark."

"Gussy's a silly ass, but if he's in a hole we're game to help him out," said Levison.

"Oh, by heck, yes!" said Cardew. "Anyway, you'd better unbosom yourself, Sidney. You are the very last person I know fit to carry the weight of a deadly secret."

"I don't know that it's so deadly, though it does seem to me that Gussy's well on the way to making an awful idiot of himself," replied Clive.

Cardew winked at Levison. Levison did not return the wink; but the same thought was in his mind as in Cardew's. Both wanted to know what was wrong; and both were very well aware that if they kept Clive talking he would be certain to let it out, as he was not bound by any pledge of secrecy.

Had he said that he was so bound they would have left him alone. As it was, they saw no harm in pumping him.

"He's always doing that," said Levison.

"It is Gussy's forte," added Cardew.

"But not like this," said Clive.

"No, not like this. This is the first time he has broken out in this particular rash of idiocy," returned Cardew solemnly.

Clive stared at him.

"What do you know about it, Ralph? He hasn't told you anything, has he?"

"Nothin' at all, old chap. I know only what you have told me."

"But I haven't told you anything at all!"

"No. It's a dashed guessing competition, without any prizes, so far," said Levison. "But you might just as well tell us, for you'll have to sooner or later."

"I don't know about that. I suppose I can keep a secret, can't I? But I don't mind telling you fellows, because I really don't know a bit what to do about it myself, and I'm sure you won't let it go any farther."

"Wild horses shall not drag it from me, Sidney," said Cardew. "I don't know how wild horses start in to drag secrets from anyone, when I come to think of it. Also, it is to be noted that in these parts wild horses aren't exactly common. But they sha'n't drag it, even if I meet them an' they try it on."

"Oh, stop your rot, Cardew!" snorted Levison. "Whatever it is, Clive thinks it's serious. We'll keep it dark, old chap."

"Then I'd like to tell you, because you may be able to think of some way to help. Gussy's being blackmailed."

"Is that all?" said Cardew, smiling broadly.

"And enough, too, I should think."

"Not a bit of it. The egregious Baggy on the job, that's all."

"I'm sure you're wrong. Gussy wouldn't get the wind up if Baggy tried to blackmail him."

"It would be Baggy who would get the wind up," said Levison. "He'd find he'd bitten off more than he could chew. Even Gussy isn't ass enough to let Baggy blackmail him."

"Might be Mellish—or Racke an' Crooke," suggested Cardew. "An' there are others. Clampe no soul above blackmail, an' Scrope is of the same kidney."

"I think it's all rot," said Levison. "Is it likely that Gussy would do anything that might put him in the power of a blackmailer?"

"For a fellow wide to the ways of this sinful world you have most singular faith in human nature. Ernest," drawled Cardew. "Now, I would not put it past the bounds of possibility that anyone—not even Gussy, or the candid Merry, or the excellent Kildare, or Railton—not even the Head himself—might have done something that would give a scoundrel a hold over him."

"Can you imagine Clive here doing anything of the sort?" asked Levison bluntly. "I don't say me—I might. You might; but not Clive."

"Oh, stow that, Levison!" expostulated Clive, blushing.

"I'm no such saint as all that comes to. But I'll tell you this—I'd never pay blackmail. I told Gussy so. My advice was to let the rotter do his worst."

Cardew clapped him on the back.

"An' dashed good advice, too, Sidney!" he said warmly.

"But we gather that he did not take it?"

"No. He didn't seem to be able to see it my way."

"What's he done?" asked Levison. "Did you get any notion of that?"

"The notion I got was that he hadn't done anything—that it was another chap who had done it, but the blackmailer was getting on to him by mistake, and he couldn't make up his mind to give the other fellow away."

"Now that," said Levison, "does sound like Gussy."

"What's to be done?" Cardew inquired.

"That's just what I can't tell you," answered Clive, with a worried face. "What can we do? He wouldn't tell me the details."

"Pity he chose you," remarked Levison. "Cardew or I

would have turned him inside out before he tumbled to it that we were pumping him."

"Shall one of us tackle him, Sidney?" asked Cardew.

"I shouldn't like that," replied Clive thoughtfully. "He might think it rather rotten of me to say anything to you. But I do wish we could help him!"

"Let us keep our eyes open, an' that may be possible," said Cardew.

"Ought to be," Levison agreed. "Gussy isn't great at keeping secrets. Personally, I really don't think there can be much in this. But I should like to know just what there is; and if it should turn out to be Racke or any of that crowd, I'd enjoy spoiling their game for them!"

"I don't think it's anyone else inside the school," said Clive. "I can't exactly explain why I don't believe it; but I'm pretty sure. And I don't think it's Banks or that sweep at the Green Man."

The chums of Study No. 9 had reached the end of the lane now, and were in the quiet High Street of the village.

"Let us put it by for a time," said Cardew, "an' attend to our own concerns. After that, let the motto be, 'Watch an' wait!' Watchin' and waitin', we may find out who the scoundrelly blackmailer is. An' when we have found that out, Study No. 9 will be on the warpath!"

And Clive, though he was not quite easy about having told his chums, yet felt comforted to have had their counsel and to have their assurance of help.

CHAPTER 4.

The Shadower Shadowed.

"WHERE'S my fountain-pen?" It was George Herries who asked that question in Study No. 6, on the following Saturday afternoon.

He and Blake had just come into the study, garbed for cricket. Tom Merry's eleven had a match on that afternoon, and both were playing.

Digby was not; but Blake and Herries had understood that D'Arcy was turning out. His name had certainly been in the list which the junior captain had posted on the notice-board.

But he had not been up to the dormitory to change, and they found him now seated at the table, with the pile of foolscap, at which already so many gibes had been levelled, again in front of him.

Somehow or other, Blake and Herries seemed even more firmly convinced that Digby and Gussy never could and never would write a novel; and, whereas Digby merely poked fun at him in a half-sympathetic way, Blake and Herries were openly derisive.

"Never mind about your fountain-pen, Herries," said Blake. "You can't want that just now, Gussy, why haven't you changed?"

"But I do want it," said Herries. "I've got a letter for home to address before I forget it."

"I have not changed simply because I am not playin', Blake," said Arthur Augustus. "Heah you are, Hewwies. You can use my pen, though I do not as a wule care to lend it."

Blake and Herries snorted together, and spoke together. "I don't want your rotten pen," said Herries. "I want my own!"

"You're never going to chuck cricket to mug over that silly tripe of yours all the afternoon!" exclaimed Blake. "You can't. You're down to play; and you've got to play!"

"I have informed Tom Mewwy that I cannot play, an' he has vewy kindly agweed that Wedfern shall take my place," answered Gussy. "Hewwies, I wegwet to say—"

"That's right!" said Blake bitterly. "Let the House and the study down by giving up your place to a New House bouncer! Not that I've anything against Reddy, and, of course, he's really a heap better player than you are, but he—"

"What do you regret to say, eh?" stormed Herries. "If you're going to tell me—"

"You're simply giving potty over that rotten novel of yours!" Blake continued.

"That you've—" went on Herries.

Arthur Augustus put his hands to his ears.

"You will weally dwive me distwacted!" he said wildly. "Blake, you gave me youah pwomise that you would not talk about my novel. I do not want the whole school to know that I am w'itin' it. Now you bweak youah word by shoutin' oppwobious things about it with the door wide open!"

"What's the odds? We promised not to tell. We didn't want the other fellows to know we'd got a lunatic in the study," answered Blake. "But Dig hadn't told us then that Baggy knew. What's the use of trying to keep anythin' secret when Baggy knows it?"

"I want my fountain-pen!" growled Herries.

Herries was nothing if not obstinate. It really did not

matter much when that letter was addressed, or with what pen the address was written. But Herries wanted his fountain-pen, and Herries meant to have it.

"I wegwet to say, Hewwies," said Gussy in his most conciliatory tones, "that it—"

"If you're going to tell me that you've done in my fountain-pen you've got a thick ear coming to you!" howled Herries.

"I was not goin' to tell you anythin' of the kind, an' as for a thick yah I am by no means so suah, Hewwies, that you are capable of givin' me one," answered Arthur Augustus, looking at his burly study-mate through his monocle in a way that made Herries more furious than ever.

"What have you done with it, then? You must have done something, or you wouldn't be talking about 'regretting to say,' you fathead!"

"I wepeat that I wegwet to say that I cannot hold myself altogetah fwee fwom wesponsibility in the mattah of the destruction of your fountain-pen, Hewwies. I—"

"Then it is destroyed? You—you—oh, you burbling, wooden-headed tailor's dummy! You silly effigy! You—"

"It was a wotten pen, Hewwies. I know that, because I twied to use it, havin' tempowavily mislaid my own. But the thing has gone all w'ong. It will not wite; it only makes blots. So when it wolloed off the table I weally did not twouble at the moment to pick it up."

"And then you went and put your silly great hoof on it, I suppose?" snorted Herries.

"Nothin' of the kind, Hewwies! Towsah did the west. Towsah chewed the pen up. I twust that it will not upset his internal awrangements. But he has eaten so many queeah things in the past that I should hardly think that pwob."

"You—you glass-eyed lunatic! You go and feed my fountain-pen to my dog! There's the pen gone, and the next thing will be old Towser pegging out—and it will be all your fault—you, with your fatheaded novel!"

"Where is Towser?" asked Blake.

For Towser, Herries' bulldog, had no right to be in Study No. 6, though he was often to be found there.

"Undah the table," replied Gussy.

"Dead?" gasped Herries. "I'll never forgive you as long as we live if he's dead, D'Arcy!"

Herries' affection for Towser was as great as his faith in him. To Herries, Towser represented all the canine virtues. Other people did not always see Towser quite in the same light.

"No, deah boy, I do not think he is dead," replied Gussy. "At the pwesent moment he is gnawin' my wight boot. I do not mind so much, for I have an old pahiah of boots on."

"You don't mind, I dare say; but I do!" snapped Herries. "Don't you think a fountain-pen is enough to upset a poor dog's inside without feeding him on leather?"

"I assuah you, Hewwies, that I have no wish to have my boots gnawed by Towsah—not even my vevy oldest boots," answered Gussy mildly. "But when I twied to push him away gently he growled in such a fewocious mannah that I thought it pwudent to give him his head, so to speak."

Herries lifted the tablecloth.

"Come along, Towser! Good old dog! Fine old fellow!" he said coaxingly.

But Towser did not respond to the blandishments of his adoring master.

Blake stooped, caught the bulldog by the collar, and dragged him out.

"It's no use talking to him," he said. "He hasn't sense



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enough to understand. There will be a row if he's found here, you know!"

"He's got a heap more sense than you have, Jack Blake!"

"Right-ho, Herries! Perhaps he has. But, if so, he's a wonder at concealing it. I've never seen any sign of it. Here, take him!"

Herries took Towser in his arms, and the fatuous animal protruded a long pink tongue and liked his owner's face.

"There! And you say he's got no sense, Blake!" cried Herries, in triumph. "He wouldn't do that to you!"

"He wouldn't get the chance," Blake answered. "Then you really don't mean to play, Gussy? You're going to sit here mugging over that tripe all the afternoon?"

"W'ong, Blake! The weason why I am not playin' is that I have an appointment to keep this aftahnoon."

Clive passed the door at that moment, and heard what Gussy said.

Now, Sidney Clive was about the last fellow at St. Jim's to spy on anyone.

But he and Cardew and Levison had agreed that a watch should be kept on Gussy. That was detective work, not spying, and plainly for Gussy's good, and for no advantage of their own.

Clive had agreed to that theory. But now he did not feel quite easy about the notion of following Gussy.

It did not seem the straight thing somehow.

Levison was playing in the match of the afternoon. Clive and Cardew were not. Levison would already be on the ground. Cardew was not in Study No. 9, and Clive did not know where to find him. Cardew had declined to join Clive in watching the match.

There was none with whom the South African junior could take counsel in this emergency. He had to decide for himself.

His decision was influenced by the knowledge that both Cardew and Levison would blame him if he let slip this chance.

He would have to go. He did not fancy himself in the shadowing role. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not a suspicious person. Probably he would not dream that he was being shadowed.

"Blake! Herries! Aren't you fellows coming?" sounded the cheery voice of Tom Merry from the passage.

"Oh, I say! Here's a nuisance! I must get Towser out of this!" groaned Herries.

"That is all wight, deah boy. Leave Towsah to me," said Gussy.

"Will you smuggle him out? I say, you're a decent old ass after all, Gussy, and I forgive you about the fountain-pen. It wasn't much use, really."

"I will take him, Hewwies. I twust that he will recognise that I mean to be fwiendly. However, I wegwet to say that he does not always undahstand that as thowughly as I should wish."

But that was Gussy's own trouble, and Herries had no time to bother about it. He and Blake bolted.

To Gussy's relief Towser proved quite friendly. He was, indeed, more friendly than was at all necessary, for when Gussy had conducted him stealthily out of the School House and to the kennels, he refused to be chained up, and insisted upon following his master's chum.

"Well, I suppose it does not weally mattah much," murmured Arthur Augustus to himself. "That is, unless Mr. Ayscott objects to bulldogs."

So Towser followed Gussy out of gates. Taggles, who was no friend of Towser's, gave him a hostile glance. But

taking Towser for a walk was not against the rules, and Taggles could say nothing.

At the gates loafed Baggy Trimble, hands in pockets, shoulders slouched.

"I say, Gussy, old pal——" he began.

"I am no pal of yours, Twimble, an' I must ask you not to address me as Gussy!"

"Well, D'Arcy, then. I say, D'Arcy, I don't know where you're going, but I'll come with you if you like."

"I do not like, Twimble, an' if you attempt, to follow me I will set Towser on you!"

"Yah! He wouldn't go for anyone because you told him to! It's as much as he'll do to obey Herries!"

There was some truth in that. Nevertheless, the threat was sufficient to keep Baggy from following the swell of St. Jim's at once.

Then Clive passed Baggy.

"I say, Clive——"

"Nothing doing, fattibus! I don't want your company."

"Think you're clever, don't you?" sneered Baggy. "I wasn't going to offer you my company. I wouldn't be seen with you. Yah!"

Clive made no answer, but passed on, as though in a hurry.

Then he slackened pace, and it occurred to Baggy, who, with all his crass stupidity in some ways, was cunning enough at times, that Clive was following D'Arcy.

Perhaps it was not very difficult to guess that. Clive made a bad shadower, and he knew it, and the knowledge of it may well have shown in his gait.

Baggy scented something interesting, and followed Clive.

From the playing-fields came the shouts of the combatants and the spectators of a dozen games. Gussy wished he was there. It was not willingly that he had given up his place in Tom Merry's eleven.

Clive wished he was there, too. He hated the job he was on.

But Baggy did not wish himself there. Spying suited the obese Fourth-Former far better than either playing or watching cricket.

At the top of Rylcombe Lane Clive hesitated. There were awkward places in Rylcombe Lane for a fellow quite unused to shadowing. At intervals it ran between high banks, and if Gussy met the supposed blackmailer in one of these places, Clive could hardly do anything but pass on, which would mean missing entirely what passed between them.

So the South African junior climbed over a gate and took to the fields.

The hedges were pretty high everywhere along the lane, but not so high or so thick that he would have any difficulty in keeping his quarry in sight.

It came upon Clive almost as a shock when he thought that he would have to listen to what Gussy and the man he met said—that is, if he got the chance to listen.

To him it seemed a horribly mean thing to do. But unless he did it, he and his chums would have no opportunity to help Arthur Augustus out of his scrape. To do that they must know something.

Baggy was troubled by no such scruples, and had no notion that they could trouble Clive. Baggy had now made up his mind that, for some reason or other, Clive

was spying upon D'Arcy, and he thought he saw a chance of turning the affair to his own advantage.

So he lumbered over the gate behind Clive, and followed him, keeping very close indeed to the hedge.

But he need hardly have taken so much care, for the inexperienced shadower never suspected for a moment that he himself was being shadowed!

CHAPTER 5.

A Man of Mystery.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY did not hurry.

He walked with his head rather less erect than usual, for he was thinking hard.

Towser snuffled along at his heels. Towser had no special affection for D'Arcy; but he liked an outing, and in his own way he was enjoying this.

Behind the right-hand hedge, sometimes on a level with D'Arcy, sometimes well above him, where the laje ran between banks, came Clive; and a little behind Clive came Baggy Trimble.

Suddenly Arthur Augustus halted. Clive halted, too, for a second. Then he moved on, ducking his head, to catch up with D'Arcy.

For here was surely the blackmailer!

He came from the direction of Rylcombe, of course. There was nothing about his appearance that suggested rascality; but, as Clive told himself, one could hardly expect a blackmailer to look like one, for one did not know what a blackmailer should look like.

This fellow was well enough dressed, though his clothes were not of the latest fashionable cut. He wore a soft hat, and he had a bushy, dark beard, tinged slightly with grey.

About him there was something which made Clive think vaguely of home—of South Africa.

The man was a colonial, that was it! His walk, his beard, his whole appearance suggested it.

That must be why Gussy had questioned Clive about the prevalence of blackmail in South Africa, though Clive did remember that he had professed to get his notions out of a novel—a simple artifice, that, and one that had doubtless some truth behind it.

It did not make Sidney Clive feel any happier to believe that this man of mystery hailed from his native land.

He could not hear what the man and Gussy said at first. He saw them shake hands, and he fancied that Gussy went through that formality with some reluctance. But of that he could not be sure.

There was nothing in the manner of either that spoke of hostility. But Gussy did not look happy, and the bearded face of the man was very serious.

And now Clive began to think that he had underrated Tower's intelligence. The noble hound, after one sniff at the stranger's legs, which the stranger did not seem to mind in the least, began to quest about, nose to ground. Within a minute or two he was scrambling up the bank at the top of which, behind the hedge, Clive stood.

Ayscott—that was the man's name! Clive heard Gussy call him by it, and made a mental note of it.

A few words more he heard.

"In the circumstances, you know, I can't well go there to see you," said the stranger.

As he spoke, he looked over to his left, where the bank fell away, and Clive, following the direction of his gaze, saw the fine old buildings of St. Jim's outlined on the horizon.

"No. I see your point, Mr. Ayscott. In the circs, as you say, you couldn't vewy well look me up theah," replied Gussy. "An' yet——"

His voice fell, and the rest of what he said did not carry to Clive.

It was very annoying. To play the listener against one's will, and then to hear nothing that really mattered, seemed to Clive rough luck.

But, though he could not hear, he could see. He saw that Arthur Augustus was unusually subdued and troubled. That fitted in with the blackmail notion.

On the other hand, the demeanour of Ayscott did not altogether fit in with it. There was nothing truculent about him. He did not seem to be threatening Gussy.

But probably the threatening had been done earlier. What was pretty plain was that Arthur Augustus had come to meet this fellow, though he did not want to come. The stranger's words could hardly mean anything but that the business between them was of such a nature that his coming to the school to see D'Arcy would compromise that junior.

Again they spoke in tones that failed to carry to Clive. He tried to hear, feeling that he had jeopardised his honour in listening at all, and that it was useless to jeopardise it without result. In his keenness to catch something that might be definitely helpful, he forgot all about the questing Towser, and was deaf to the approach of Baggy.

He started in alarm as a podgy and unclean hand fell upon his arm, and a voice breathed hotly in his ear:

"Caught you at it, Clive! What are you spying on D'Arcy for?"

Clive turned like one who hears the hiss of a snake. To him in that moment Baggy was just a trifle less welcome than a snake would have been.

He would never hear the last of this! The fat rotter would spread it all over St. Jim's that he had caught Clive playing the spy!

His scarlet face showed his confusion; and Baggy gave a chuckle of triumph.

"Don't you worry, Clive!" he whispered. "I sha'n't let

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Baggy burst through the hedge, with Towser hard after him. Arthur Augustus had almost reached the top of the bank when Baggy crashed full into him. "Oh! Yawooooo! Weally—" Then a mouthful of grass checked Gussy's utterance, and, locked in one another's arms, the two rolled down into the roadway. (See this page.)

on—as long as you make it worth my while to keep mum!" Clive had no time to answer.

He was never quite sure what he would have answered. This was as clear a case of blackmail as one could ask for; but the situation did not find Sidney Clive quite as resolute against the wiles of the blackmailer as he had felt sure of being.

The story he had told D'Arcy flashed across his mind.

But this was so different a case.

Then he had had only the punishment of a master to face. Now he had to expect the sneers of the rotters, the contempt of the fellows whose good opinion he valued.

It was true that no one took much notice of what Baggy Trimble said—at least, it was true that no one would admit that he took much notice of it.

But Baggy's gabbling tongue had caused endless mischief. He was a notorious liar; but it did not follow that he was always lying. In this particular instance, the very presence of Clive behind the hedge was enough to add weight to his story.

No smoke without fire, the fellows would say.

Clive might wriggle out of it by lying hard enough. But Clive was not an adept at lying.

These thoughts flashed through his mind so swiftly that Baggy had hardly finished speaking before Towser pushed his way through the hedge.

"Yooop! Call him off, D'Arcy!" howled Baggy.

He was horribly afraid of Towser, and Towser knew it. Towser, for his part, did not love Baggy, and, like most dogs, he was ready to terrify anyone who showed signs of fear.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Gussy. "That sounded like Baggy Trimble."

"Towser, don't be an ass, old fellow! Come here, then! Good boy! Come here!" urged Clive.

He and Towser were on quite friendly terms, for Clive was the sort of fellow whom dogs and children instinctively like. But Towser paid no heed to Clive now. At his best, he was not a very obedient dog.

He went for Baggy. His ugly jowl was altogether too close to Baggy's fat legs for that rotund youth's liking.

"Yarooooogh!" Baggy howled. "Stop him! He's going to bite me!"

It is not at all likely that Towser would have bitten Baggy. He was merely playing a rough game. But Baggy did not know that, and Arthur Augustus did not know it.

Gussy came scrambling up the bank, leaving the man Ayscott standing in the road, with what seemed to Clive a curious smile upon his face.

But it was only a glance Clive took at Ayscott. His own situation was too unpleasant for him to be greatly interested in what the man of mystery might think of this contretemps.

Clive would have been glad then to have the earth open up and swallow him. He could not bear the thought that in a few seconds more D'Arcy would know that he had been spied upon by a fellow whom he would never have thought capable of such meanness.

"Yooop! Ow!" burred Baggy. "He's biting pieces out of my leg!"

Towser was not doing that. But he was showing sufficient interest in Baggy's well-filled trousers to justify some alarm on the part of their wearer.

He chased Baggy from the hedge, and then he rounded him up, and chased him back again.

Clive saw no need to help Baggy, and no chance to help himself. Perhaps he might have made a bolt, but he must have been seen if he did, and Baggy would tell.

"Ow! Yooop! Yow!"

Baggy burst through the hedge with Towser hard after him.

Arthur Augustus had almost reached the top of the bank. He would have done better to stay in the road.

Full upon him Baggy crashed.

"Ow! Yarooooogh! Weally, Baggy—"

Then a mouthful of grass checked Gussy's utterance, and, locked in one another's arms, he and Baggy rolled down into the roadway.

Towser stood for a second or two at the top of the bank, wagging his stern, and evidently pleased with himself.

Clive drew a deep breath of relief. Gussy had not seen him. He still had a chance—a slender one, but a chance.

Baggy was so terrified that he might forget to mention that Clive was there, and Clive was quite sure that Gussy had not seen him.

But probably the fright would not last, and Baggy would blab.

Clive had all but made up his mind to come out of his hiding, when Towser created another diversion.

With three bounds the intelligent animal reached the bottom of the bank.

Baggy had just got to his feet. One more bound Towser gave. It was enough.

Baggy fled, yelling wildly.

"You don't think that your dog will injure the fat boy?"

Ayscott inquired.

Clive thought it was rather remarkable that a blackmailer should trouble about a little thing like that. But, after all, even blackmailers must have their feelings, and this man had not been long enough in Baggy's company to realise that all the fat junior got from Towser would be no more than he deserved.

Arthur Augustus had arisen, and was dusting himself down. He was pretty badly shaken, and very much annoyed.

"He is not my dog, Mr. Ayscott," he explained. "He belongs to a friend of mine. When he followed me I did not send him back, because I knew very well he would not obey if I did. He is an extremely obstinate animal, but he is not a vicious one, an' I am quite shuah that he will not damage Baggy."

Clive felt that he could not move now till D'Arcy had gone. But he did not want to hear any more. He had had quite enough of spying.

He could not help hearing, however, the rest of what was said by Ayscott and Gussy.

"I fear you are hurt, D'Arcy?" said the stranger.

Clive thought again that he showed more feeling than a blackmailer could be expected to show. But probably blackmail was only a matter of business with him; apart from what was between them he might really like D'Arcy. It was hard not to like Arthur Augustus when you knew him.

"I am not exactly hurt, Mr. Ayscott, but I must confess that I am wathah shaken an' a good deal fluwried," Gussy replied.

"I see. You had better get back to the school. But there is no reason why we should not meet again for a talk. I am not in a hurry. The hotel at Wayland is very comfortable, and I propose to put in a few days longer there. Will it suit you to meet me again—er—when shall we say?"

Ayscott must have been told or have tumbled to the fact that Gussy had not sufficient money on him to meet his demands, Clive thought. But, though the man must surely be a scoundrel, he was at least a civil and considerate scoundrel.

"Oh, yaas! Oh, certainly, Mr. Ayscott! Since you feel that you cannot come to St. Jim's, I must, of course, meet you elsewhere. Shall you be in Wayland ovah Wednesday next?"

"I can stay as long as that. Then we will meet on Wayland Moor, if that suits you? We cannot miss one another on the road over that. What time will suit you?"

"Thwee o'clock will suit me vevy well. An' I will bring it with me, Mr. Ayscott. I promise you that."

Gussy must mean the money. What else could he mean? But Clive was surprised at the friendly tone in which Ayscott answered.

"You'd better, young man! You and I will fall out if you don't."

The words on paper look like a threat. They did not sound like a threat to Sidney Clive. The tone was quite genial.

"All wight! Depend upon me, Mr. Ayscott. I will be theah, an' I will bring it."

And Gussy held out his hand, which Ayscott took in quite a friendly manner.

They parted. Gussy went off towards St. Jim's, limping a little. Ayscott strode off in the direction of Rylcombe, and as Clive watched him go he was more sure than ever that he was a Colonial, but not so sure that he was a South African.

His gait was that of a man accustomed to ride rather than to walk. But, though the horse is used in South Africa, the Afrikanders are very far from being a nation of horsemen. There are so many districts where the tseise fly will not allow horses to live.

Ayscott might be from Australia. But to know whence he came would not help to elucidate the mystery. The clue to that was here—in England, and somewhere near St. Jim's.

Clive thought that, since it seemed to be Gussy's fate to be blackmailed, he had rather better luck than some of the people who were thus victimised. For Ayscott was at least a polite and even considerate blackmailer.

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That did not make his crime the less, but it did make Sidney Clive feel less abhorrence for the criminal. In fact, he found it difficult to feel any abhorrence at all. If he had met Ayscott, and had had no idea of what sort of man he was, he would have liked him.

It was all a puzzle, and Clive did not see what was to be done about it.

But Ralph Reckness Cardew and Ernest Levison had longer heads than he. He must report to them, and perhaps they could suggest some plan of action.

CHAPTER 6.

Cardew's Scheme!

CLIVE had reached Study No. 9, and was waiting impatiently there for his chums, though he knew well enough that Levison could not be along for an hour or so, when he heard the voice of Arthur Augustus in the passage.

"Well, Baggay, did Towsah catch you? I nevah realised that you could spwint like that."

"No, he didn't, then! And I wasn't really afraid of the beast. It might look as if I was, but I wasn't. All the same, you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself for setting him on to me."

"I did not set him on you, Twimble, as you know vevy well. I am quite incapable of such cwelyty. But I am wathah sowway that he did not get in one bite. You could well afford to lose a little flesh, an' you deserved it for your spyin'. No, I am not sowway, though. It would have poisoned the pooah dog, an', though I do not pweicely love Towsah, I have some wegard for him for Hewwies' sake."

"Yah! I wasn't spying. But I could tell you who was!"

Clive's heart stood still.

Next moment he was blessing Arthur Augustus.

"I will not listen to you, Twimble! You are not twuthful, an' you are a w'etched scandalmongah!"

"You needn't think I was going to tell you—not after what you said to me about Towser. But there was someone spying, all the same, and you'd be surprised if you knew who it was!"

"I wepeat that I will not listen to your false stowies, Twimble. It stands to weason that if theah had been anyone else I must have seen him. Buzz off, if you don't want kickin'!"

Trimble bolted. But at a safe distance he stopped and shouted:

"Yah! Who's writing a silly novel? Yah! You wouldn't like it if I spread that about, D'Arcy! Call me a liar, do you? But that's not a lie, anyway!"

Arthur Augustus made a furious rush, and Baggy scuttled for the safe haven of his own study. Clive heard him slam the door. He heard Gussy come back, no longer hurrying.

So Gussy was writing a novel! Clive smiled at the thought of that.

But he was not particularly surprised.

No one in the Fourth or the Shell was ever particularly surprised at anything Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took it into his head to do. He was always breaking out in a fresh place.

Then a notion came into Clive's head.

Could it be that Mr. Ayscott was a publisher, who had come to interview Gussy about the novel?

No; that was too wild an idea. It was hardly within the bounds of possibility that any publisher on earth would consider seriously the giving to the world of a novel written by the swell of St. Jim's.

Besides, Mr. Ayscott could not be a publisher. He did not look a bit like one.

For the matter of that, he did not look like a blackmailer. But Clive had already satisfied himself that this was not to be expected.

And he did look like a man from one of the overseas dominions. Now, it was easier to imagine an Australian, say, as a blackmailer than as a publisher, and that without any disposition to think ill of Australians.

Clive went over all that he had heard. Except for the appointment made for the next half-holiday, it was little enough.

But what there was would not fit in with the theory of Mr. Ayscott's being a publisher. If he had been, there would really have seemed no reason at all why he should not look up his prospective client at the school.

It would not fit in at all. But Clive fancied that he saw where Gussy's enterprise fitted into the blackmailing affair. The poor, deluded donkey thought he could make enough money out of writing a novel to meet the blackmailer's demands!

So satisfied was Clive that this theory was correct that he made up his mind to say nothing to Levison and Cardew about the novel. It could not help them to decide what



"You will get into the car an' accompany us on a long journey," said Cardew. "Oh, and supposing I refuse?" asked the stranger. "Then what is going to happen to me?" Cardew pulled back his coat and showed the butt of his revolver. (See page 17.)

to do; and Cardew was just the fellow to roast Gussy unmercifully about it.

Clive had given away one secret of Gussy's. He did not altogether regret that even now, because Cardew might be able to see a way to help the victim of blackmail. But he was not going to give away another, and he could see only the thinnest thread of connection between the two matters.

Baggy would probably give it away before long. That he had not done so yet was doubtless due to the fact that he was too stupid to see the humour of Gussy's attempt at literature.

Let Baggy give it away, then. But Clive was not going to.

Were those fellows never coming?

Clive paced up and down the study in his impatience.

"Wearin' holes in the carpet, Sidney?" spoke Cardew, as Clive's back was turned to the door. "Whence this thushness? Let it be admitted that it is not a valuable carpet, but—"

"Oh, chuck rotting, Ralph! I'm ever so glad you've come!"

"That's very nice of you, Sidney. It is pleasant, if novel, to find oneself welcome somewhere. But why are you joyful?"

"Shut the door, and I'll tell you. I don't know, though. Perhaps we ought to wait till Levison comes."

Cardew closed the door.

"We will not wait, Sidney," he said. "I have never noticed in you any tendency to shortness of breath. What you now tell me can be repeated to the excellent Ernest as an' when necessary. Proceed!"

"I've found out all about Gussy!"

"Oh, by heck, have you?"

It was seldom Cardew showed excitement, but he did betray some then.

"Yes. He met the blackmailer this afternoon, and I followed him and listened. It seemed a rotten thing to do, but—"

"Do not take a wrong view of a perfectly proper action, Sidney. The distinction between a detective an' a spy is a quite obvious one to any well regulated mind. You were actin' as a detective, an' for the good of my noble kinsman. Need I say more? Again—proceed!"

"I suppose it was all right, though I can tell you I didn't like it. And it was jolly queer, in some ways. The blackmailer really didn't seem such a bad sort of fellow. But you'll get it better if I tell you exactly just what I saw and heard."

"Like your usual perspicacity, Sidney! I will judge for myself as to whether the blackmailer was really a good gentleman, seekin' to benefit Gussy, after I have heard your story."

Clive told the story simply and at no great length, but quite clearly. He repeated to Cardew almost word for word all that he had heard pass between Ayscott and D'Arcy.

"I think there can be no doubt," said Cardew. "The man has bowels of compassion. He could even feel mildly concerned about the deplorable Baggy, it seems, an' plainly he had no desire to rub it into my noble kinsman. Nevertheless, he intends to have his pound of flesh, an' it is our business—mine an' yours an' Ernest's, old top—to put the giddy kybosh on his plans."

"But how are we going to do it? I've thought and thought, but I can't see a way."

"Now, I, Sidney, have hardly begun to think as yet, an' I have already evolved the rudiments of a scheme."

"My word, Cardew, you've a brain!" exclaimed Clive admiringly.

"So-so. All that is inside my napper is not wool. Sidney, dear boy, the first requisite for the successful prosecution of the doubtless lucrative profession of blackmail is secrecy."

"Yes, I suppose so. But I don't see how our knowing is going to help Gussy. We might tell Ayscott that we knew; but he would know we couldn't give him away, because that would be giving Gussy away—or the chap he's screening."

"Put out of your ingenuous mind the person screened. Him I take to be merely a figment of the imagination of my noble kinsman. But that is of very little consequence, in any case. My point is that blackmail is a penal offence, an' that we can scare this Ayscott person off."

"But how?"

"On Wednesday afternoon next the depraved Ayscott is met, not by his deluded victim, but by three gentlemen of St. Jim's, who propose to settle his hash! You an' I an' Ernest, Sidney—we three!"

"But what can we do with him?" asked Clive.

The audacity of Cardew's scheme had not yet been fully revealed to him; but plainly there was more to come, and, knowing Cardew as he did, he was rather uneasy as to what might be in that more.

But the thought of drawing back never occurred to him. It did not occur to him even when Cardew's plan was revealed in its full audacity.

(Continued on page 16.)



SPECIAL BOATING NUMBER!

GLYN'S MOTOR BOAT!

By Harry Noble.



I WASN'T a bit surprised when I heard about it.

I was only remarking to Dane a few weeks ago that Glyn had been mighty quiet of late, so it was odds on his being due for another outbreak before long.

A period of blissful peace in Study No. 11 on the Shell corridor is generally the prelude to the production of something particularly diabolical as the result of Glyn's misdirected ingenuity.

So when he came into the study just as we were sitting down to tea a few days later, looking as black as a sweep's apprentice, and announced that he'd been spending the afternoon hard at work on his new motor-boat, it was just about what we'd been expecting, though, of course, we'd previously had no notion of the exact kind of stunt he was wasting his time on.

"A motor-boat!" echoed Dane, as Glyn fetched a tin of grease-soap out of the cupboard and started for the bath-room. "So that's your latest, is it?"

"That's so," nodded Glyn, pausing at the door for a moment. "I say, Noble, save a cup for me in the pot. Sha'n't be more than a couple of ticks."

He was a trifle longer than that, of course, but when he came back we managed to get the whole of the yarn out of him, for what it was worth. He explained that for some time he'd been ambitious to possess a motor-boat, and in the end he'd decided to build one to his own design. He said that he didn't see why an unmechanical chump like Cardew should have a power-boat, while a chap who had forgotten more about engineering than anybody else at St. Jim's was ever likely to know had to slave away at a pair of sculls in the blazing heat if he wanted to spend an hour or so on the river. It wasn't good enough, he said, and so he'd determined to remedy the state of affairs.

He was quite enthusiastic about it, and pointed out how nice it would be for Dane and I as well. He would be able to take us out in the boat, just as Cardew took Levison and Clive, for long trips up the Rhyll; and we could land on places like Greenruff Island, which is too far away for an afternoon's excursion in a rowing-boat or canoe, and have tea right away from everybody, and all that sort of thing.

Dane, who is, like myself, more than a trifle sceptical concerning the reliability of Glyn's productions, inquired whether by "all that sort of thing" Glyn was alluding to the possibility of such additions to the afternoon's enjoyment as breaking down or cap-

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sizing soon after we'd embarked; but Glyn promptly told him not to talk rot, and that if his motor-boat didn't beat Cardew's sardine-tin into a blue fit, he'd eat it. And he wasn't a bit pleased when Dane hinted that there was every likelihood of his wishing, in the very near future, that he'd built the boat of chocolate and marzipan, which are not only digestible, but also pleasant to the palate and easy to chew.

Speaking for myself, I hadn't much hope that the stunt was likely to come to anything, but I thought it only fair to give it a try-out, on the off-chance that possibly at long last Glyn had managed to turn out something that was worth the time, trouble, and expense it had cost him.

We tried to pump him for details, but Dane's leg-pulling had made him get a bit on his ear, and he would tell us nothing except that if we didn't want to go out with him we could jolly well do the other thing. We did gather, however, that the boat was down at the public boating-station at Rylcombe, where Cardew kept his little launch, and that Glyn had been spending all his spare time down there for a week or two building it.

In the end we arranged to go down after tea the following evening and have a look at the contraption, on the distinct understanding that if we didn't like the look of it we were under no obligation to trust ourselves on the river in it.

Dane and I couldn't help looking forward to going to see the boat, in spite of our misgivings that the whole business was more than likely to prove a wash-out, as per usual. But there was no denying that, if by some miracle Glyn had really succeeded in constructing something that was within reasonable distance of being anything like what a motor-boat ought to be, we were in for some very pleasant times on the river during the summer months.

Naturally, Glyn himself hadn't the slightest doubt that the boat wasn't absolutely IT.

"You wait till you see her," he said several times during the day. "You'll say you've never seen anything like her in your life."

And he was quite right; that's exactly what we did say, though I don't think we meant it in quite the same sense as he did. But it was perfectly true. In fact, I don't suppose many people have ever seen anything like it. You see, Glyn had built it up from the material he had at hand, and none of it had ever been intended for such a purpose.

The boat itself was an old skiff that had seen its best days—or, rather, I should suspect that it had seen all the days, best and worst, it had ever been intended to see. Anyhow, it was long past being of service to the boating-station people, and that's saying a lot, considering the state of the boats they regard as being still serviceable for letting out on hire.

The motor was out of an old motor-bike, and when I say "old," I mean just what I say. Perhaps "ancient" would be a better word, though. It was bolted down to a big wooden block in the middle of the boat, and was connected by means of a belt to the apparatus that drove the boat through the water—at least, Glyn said it did, though we certainly shouldn't have credited it with doing so if we hadn't been assured of the fact. It was this apparatus that attracted the most of our attention as soon as we set eyes on the boat, and did most to make us agree with Glyn that we'd never seen anything like it before in our lives.

There was a big paddle-wheel fixed to each side of the boat.

Glyn said that he'd been unable to get hold of a proper propeller, and that he hadn't the material at his disposal to make one, so he'd contrived paddle-wheels, which, he assured us, answered the purpose just as well. They were about four feet in diameter, with ten or twelve blades, or paddles, whichever you like to call them, made of thin wood, on each. When the motor started it drove them round and round, and they went whizzing through the water and drove the boat along—according to Glyn, at least.

I said "when the motor started." The trouble was that the blessed thing didn't start for half an hour or so, and Glyn was smothered in oil and grease by the time he'd got it to show some signs of life. Fortunately, Dane and I had brought something to read along with us, so we made shift to stick it out and give the thing a chance, though we were in two minds about risking ourselves on board, even if the motor did work. Anyway, we thought we might as well chance it for the sake of a lark, and we got in. Glyn warned us to be very careful how we stepped aboard, but he hadn't have wasted his breath. We could see that it was a case for minding your step.



Then we floundered, right in midstream, and I found myself swimming in the midst of cushions and bobbing heads.

It wasn't much better when we sat down in the stern. The boat had a very lopsided sort of balance in the water, which Glyn accounted for by the fact that one paddle was a bit heavier than the other. Still, he added, that didn't matter in the least, as they both worked quite well. It didn't seem to occur to him that it might have been better if the paddles had worked a trifle less satisfactorily, and the boat had been a little less liable to capsize.

Dane said he'd never been so glad in his life that he'd taken the trouble to learn to

swim. I didn't hear what reply Glyn made to that remark, because as he was speaking he moved the control that put the engine into gear with the belt to the paddle-shaft, and we started off.

I'll say this for Glyn's motor-boat—it certainly went. It went so well that, in my amazement, I quite forgot that I was supposed to be looking after the rudder-lines, and it was pure luck that Glyn happened to glance up from his engine in time to yell a warning to me, so that I was able to avoid, at the very last moment, running down a skiff with half a dozen occupants that was returning to the boating-station.

We didn't collide with them, but we passed across their bows, and they got the benefit of the wave we were causing on the surface of the water, which nearly swamped them. Judging by some of the remarks they shouted across to us they didn't exactly regard it as a benefit, though. We left them bailing away for dear life with their hats, and still shouting their candid opinion of us across the water.

But we couldn't bother about them. We'd got troubles enough of our own to occupy our attention. Glyn had speeded up the motor, and the boat was rushing through the water like a torpedo-boat destroyer. The paddles were going round and round like mad, churning up the water, which was flung high into the air in sheets of spray that descended upon us like a shower-bath.

In a couple of minutes we were all soaked to the skin, and there was half a foot depth of water swilling about in the bottom of the boat. I couldn't see through the spray as far ahead as the boat, and hadn't the faintest notion where I was steering to. I yelled to Glyn to slow up, and to Dane to get hold of something and start bailing out, for I could see that another minute or so of that sort of thing would see us making for the bottom of the river. Glyn had the sense to do the right thing for once, and he slowed down the engine.

And then, of course, Cardew came along in his launch. That did it. Glyn forgot all about what had happened when he let out his engine in his eagerness to outpace Cardew, and he started off again, faster than ever. I had to steer more by memory of the river than by what I could see, and, of course, I couldn't take into account anything that might happen to be in our way.

I managed to get round the first bend all right, and about thirty seconds after that I felt a bump, and heard some yelling above the roar of the engine. We afterwards discovered that we'd upset a canoe with Racke & Co. on board. They weren't on board after we'd given them that bit of a bump, though. I yelled to Glyn not to be a silly ass, but to slow up, and from what I could make of his answer something had gone wrong with what he called the "throttle," and he couldn't control the engine.

By the number of boats that we passed I realised that we were getting near to the St. Jim's boathouse, and I got the wind up pretty badly.

I knew that, being a fine evening, the river would be crowded with boats, and it seemed to me that there was every probability that after we'd passed the river would be strewn with the wreckage of them.

It was sheer ill-luck, though, that the Senior Eight should have been out practising just then. I managed to catch a momentary glimpse of it, and swung the rudder over in time to avoid ramming them; but they foundered, all the same. Couldn't help themselves, once they got into our wash. One of the oars got mixed up with the paddle, and the blade came in for a moment over our stern, catching Dane under the chin and lifting him clean out of the boat. The paddle went with him, and immediately the boat listed over to the other side and became absolutely uncontrollable. The remaining paddle hung down more deeply into the water, and gained more power, which, being on one side of the boat only, had the effect of whirling us round and round in a circle from side to side of the river. The water came slopping over the gunwale, and we settled lower and lower.

Then we foundered, right in midstream, and I found myself swimming in the midst of a litter of cushions and back-rests and paddles and sculls and bobbing heads.

I got safely to the bank, and so did Glyn—safe, that is, as far as the risk of drowning was concerned; but when the occupants of the boats that we had sunk dragged themselves ashore as well—oh, hellup!



THE INCOMPETENTS!
By Jack Blake.

THERE is a rule that fellows who can't swim are not to be allowed to go on the river. That's all very well, but what about the fellows who can't row?

A chap who can't swim is only a danger to himself if he's ass enough to fall in, but chaps whose notion of rowing is to get out into midstream and start whirling their cars round till you can't tell whether they're in a boat or a windmill are a nuisance and a danger to everybody else on the river.

Therefore, I say, prohibit the use of boats by fellows who can't manage them.

Which, of course, is only another way of saying that New House chumps ought not to be allowed on the river. And if the Head only knew as much about the asses as we do, he'd make a rule that they shouldn't be.

The New House never has known anything about rowing. If you gave a New House chap an oar, you'd have to explain to him what it was, and then he wouldn't know which end of it to put into the water. How they've got the cheek to take boats out at all beats me. But they do, worse luck, and the result is that you have to spend half your time dodging them, because they're all over the place, first this side, and then that side, and then in the middle—anywhere and everywhere but where they ought to be—which is on the fags' sports ground, playing marbles. And if they bump into you they have the cheek to argue about it, and try to make out that it's you who are in the wrong and they're in the right. As if a New House chap could possibly be in the right about anything!

The other day Figgins & Co., in a double-sculler, collided with Grundy, also in a double-sculler with Wilkins and Gunn. Grundy is no end of an ass; but he's a School House chap, so it stands to reason that, ass as he may be, he's got more about him than any New House chap.

Figgins wanted to know where Grundy thought he was going to, and Grundy promptly and quite rightly replied that it was his business where he was going, and Figgins' business, as a New House chump, was to keep out of his way instead of asking cheeky questions about matters that didn't concern him in the least.

It was quite a lively argument, and it became even livelier. In fact, it became so much so that both boatloads joined in, and they finished it up in the river.

RIVER ETIQUETTE!
By Monty Lowther.

IN managing a boat, as in everything else, there is a right way and a wrong way of going about the business, and I propose giving a few hints that may be of some service to those of my readers who, while being anxious to do the right thing always, are in some doubt about certain points of river etiquette.

In the first place, the correct side of the stream for a boat is nearest to that bank which is on the steerer's right. Some amateur coves seem to think they are steering bicycles on the King's highway, and insist on keeping to the left, while others, being uncertain which side they ought to be on, split the difference, and go along a few yards on one side and a few yards on the other, being careful always to change sides and go across the stream just as another boat is trying to pass or overtake them. As a matter of fact, the correct side for boats' crews of this particular kind is neither the left of the river nor the right, but the bottom; and you may be pretty certain that eventually they will arrive there, but not, unfortunately, to stay.

EDITORIAL!
By Tom Merry.

ONCE again the long, pleasant summer days bring to us the ever-welcome call of the river, and I don't think St. Jim's as a whole has ever responded with more eagerness to the invitation than it has done this year.

At all hours of the day—except when the call of the Form-room, which, if less welcome, is even more insistent, forbids—the Rhyl is thronged with craft of all kinds, from fragile single-sculler 'riggers, skimming over the surface like water-spiders, to lumbering, broad-in-the-beam tubs that seem as if they could cross the Channel in a gale.

A half for which there is no cricket fixture sees the boathouse empty within a half-hour or so of dinner, by which time everything in which it is possible to row or scull or paddle is on its way up or down stream, according to the choice of its crew.

When I say "everything," I except, of course, the three or four "eights" which are reserved strictly for racing purposes, and may not be otherwise used on any consideration whatever. A properly built racing-shell costs too much to be treated roughly, and it is a certain fact that any boat which is taken out for an afternoon's excursion or for a short spin in the evening has to take its chance.

The Rhyl isn't as broad as it might be, just as some of the crews aren't as skilful as they might be—and in many cases considerably less so than they consider themselves to be—so that collisions aren't infrequent.

There is very rarely any damage done, it is true, and practically no danger is involved, as a wise rule forbids any but swimmers to use the boats; but sometimes a light craft such as a canoe gets an unlucky biff that necessitates some repair work being done.

Speaking of canoes reminds me that several of the fellows own their own boats, and canoes of various kinds account for about five out of seven or eight privately owned craft. They're so handy, you see, and by using them fellows are able to work their way along one or two backwaters that are too shallow for any other craft. The little single-seater, decked, canvas canoes, with a double paddle, are the favourite kind for private use, and this year an event has been added to the regatta programme for this class of boat.

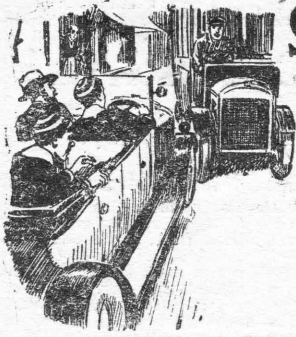
Tom Merry

If any of you happen to live near a stream shallow enough to permit of the use of punts, you should bear in mind that the fashion of sticking the pole in the mud and clinging to the top of it while the punt drifts away on its own is no longer considered good style. If, however, you really care to do it, there is no reason at all why you should not, provided that you do not introduce any sort of vulgarity into the display, such as raising your voice and carrying on a conversation with your friends in the departed punt.

Should anybody in another boat paddle up to you and offer you a bun, it is permissible to take it, using the right hand for the purpose, at the same time making some witty remark and raising the hat—if one is being worn—with something of a flourish.

When you do eventually decide to descend it is the height of bad form to release one's grip suddenly and drop into the water with a splash, thereby incurring the risk of splattering occupants of passing craft with water.

The proper method is to slip slowly and gracefully down the pole, and slide gradually into the water, making as little commotion as possible. When correctly performed, this little manoeuvre never fails to evoke the admiration and applause of the onlookers, who may possibly request you to repeat it—a request which, it is needless to add, should be complied with, and upon no account to be responded to with handfuls of river mud, however much you may be disposed to indulge in a little pleasantry of that character.



STUDY No. 9 ON THE WARPATH!

(Continued from
page 13.)

"We can kidnap him, Sidney, an' run him off somewhere!" answered Cardew.

"But we've nowhere to take him to!"

"Oh, I've no notion of imprisonin' him. I'm not goin' to let the man become a nuisance to me, as he certainly would be if we had to keep him shut up somewhere. We shall run him thirty, forty, fifty or so miles in a car. Then we shall explain to him—that is, I will explain to him; I shall enjoy that part—just what we think of him, an' just what he has to do."

"And what are we going to tell him he has to do?" asked Clive.

"Keep away! Not at his peril must he come within five miles of St. Jim's again!"

"I don't quite see—"

"But I do, an' that's what matters. I shall tell him that we know his game, an' that his reappearance will mean that he will be reported at once to the police. He may argue that we are endangerin' Gussy by takin' such a line with him. My reply will be that he can't do my noble kinsman any harm as long as he stays away from the neighbourhood, an' that he can't come back to the neighbourhood without gettin' the police on his track—not our own Rylcombe in-cumbrance, but the Wayland police. I rather think he'll see reason, Sidney—I rather think so!"

Clive did not ask how Cardew was going to get a car. To Cardew, who had plenty of money, that was easy enough. But he put a question that seemed to him more difficult to answer.

"How are you going to get him into the car?"

"By threats, Sidney—by threats! He will be made to understand that we are desperate characters, who will not hesitate to shoot."

"I don't know. You think I'm an ass for reckoning that the chap isn't altogether a bad sort. Perhaps I am. A blackmailer must be a rotter. But I tell you, Ralph, I don't a bit believe Ayscott is going to be forced to do anything he doesn't choose to just because you threaten to shoot him. He isn't that kind of man, I'm sure."

"His colonial appearance has given you a distinct bias in his favour, old top—that is easy to see. But I think that, unless he himself is heeled, he will yield to this little persuader."

And Cardew produced from his desk a small revolver.

"My word! Ralph, you idiot, you'd get into no end of a row if it was found out you had that thing!" gasped Clive.

"True, Sidney—true! The English public school is a hide-bound sort of institution, nourished on absurd prejudices. Its authorities could never be brought to see that a fellow may need a gun now an' then. This gun is pretty harmless, however. It is not loaded, an' at present I have no ammunition for it. I do not propose to get any, moreover, for, with every desire to help Gussy out of a scrape, I have no desire to figure in the papers as the 'boy gunman of St. Jim's,' or anythin' choice of that sort."

"Oh, well, if it isn't loaded, if it's only bluff, and he might fall to it, I can't see much harm in that, Ralph."

"Spoken like a true son of the Empire! You improve, Sidney—you improve. I have hopes of you yet!"

"Oh, don't rot, old fellow! This may be a joke to you, but I can't see it that way myself. There's another thing. What about Gussy? Have we got to kidnap him first, so that he shouldn't turn up?"

"Bound an' gagged in a box-room, or somethin' of that sort—eh? No; I do not think that will be necessary. It will be enough if we arrive at the rather indefinite rendezvous ahead of him. An' that will be easy. He may walk, or use his bike; in either case, we shall have the advantage of him. An' we shall start earlier."

Cardew seemed to have the whole thing mapped out, and to possess no doubt as to the complete success of the scheme.

Clive was not so sure of its working out precisely as Cardew

anticipated. But he was committed to it. He could not back out now.

"Where are you going, Ralph?" he asked a few minutes later.

"To take tea with a fellow who has been kind enough to invite me, but unaccountably omitted to ask you an' Ernest also."

"But Levison will be in any minute now, you know."

"That is of no consequence. You can tell your story, an' inform the excellent Ernest what we mean to do. There is, in classical phrase, no kick comin' from Ernest, I promise you."

Clive was not so sure of that. Levison and Cardew did not always look at things in quite the same way.

And at the back of Clive's mind was an uneasy suspicion that to Ralph Reckness Cardew this affair was mainly a rag.

Cardew was willing enough to help Gussy, but that was not the aspect of the matter which appealed to him most. What he really cared about was the scheming, the pitting himself—Clive and Levison were only followers—against a dangerous man.

Clive told Levison that after he had recounted the story of the afternoon's happenings, and had explained Cardew's scheme.

"I dare say you're right, Clive," said Levison. "That's Ralph all over."

"But you'll come in?"

Levison got up from the chair he had been straddling, and paced up and down the room.

It seemed to Clive that he was in doubt. But Levison often puzzled Clive.

Levison was grinning when he turned his face to Clive and answered:

"Oh, I'll come in! You didn't doubt that, did you, old top?"

"No. We three always do stand by one another. But what do you really think of it, Levison?"

"I think it's all over like Ralph, and I think it's going to work, if we haven't made a miscalculation somewhere. If we have, you'll get blamed, Clive, because you've had the detective part of the job in hand, and if there's been any bungling you've done it. But that's no odds, for we're all in the same boat if trouble comes of it. Get tea, will you, old fellow, while I go and change? I'm peckish. Best open that big tin of salmon."

And Levison hurried off, leaving Clive in considerable doubt as to what he really thought about it, but in no doubt as to his being ready to share the risk and the fun.

For probably Levison, like Cardew, thought of it as fun.

Clive could not see it that way.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Ayscott Gets a Surprise!

"WHAT'S become of the novel, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, looking in at No. 6, with Manners and Lowther, after classes on the following Wednesday.

"Oh, hai Jove, Tom Mewwy, who told you anythin' about my writin' a novel?" returned Arthur Augustus, lifting his pen from a Cross Word puzzle.

"Now, who did tell me?" said Tom. "But never mind that; it's common knowledge, isn't it?"

In point of fact, the Terrible Three had only heard of the projected novel a few minutes earlier.

Baggy Trimble had visited No. 10 in the Shell passage, on his usual quest—that of grub. Baggy had learned that Manners had received a hamper from home, and that news had caused the mouth of Baggy to water and the heart of Baggy to yearn within him.

So he had approached the three, and, lest he should get chucked out before there was a chance of sharing in the good things, he had employed his customary device—that of news to tell.

The only news of which he could think was that of Gussy's novel-writing.

He had told Mellish about it, and had found that Mellish did not regard it as important. Any silly ass might try to write a novel, Mellish said; look at the silly asses who wrote stuff for the "St. Jim's News"!

It was largely due to Mellish's indifferent reception of the tidings that Baggy had failed to broadcast them. Also, there was really nothing against a fellow's character in his attempt to write fiction, and on the whole Baggy preferred stories that reflected upon a fellow's character.

But Lowther, something of a literary aspirant himself, and Tom Merry, who edited a paper, might be expected to feel some little interest. Baggy thought.

So he tried it on.

The result had not come up to his hopes. He had not even got as much as a sniff of the contents of the hamper.

But when he had been put out, the Terrible Three looked at one another, and then, moved by a common impulse, made for No. 6.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was one of their best pals, but a chance to chip him was a chance that they did not willingly let pass.

"I was not awaah that it was common knowledge," replied Gussy. "Blake an' Dig an' Hewwies pwomised me that they would not talk about it. But Baggay knew, an' I pwesume that he has told you."

"Never mind that," said Tom Merry. "Where is it, and why aren't you labouring upon it?"

"Because I have scwapped it, deah boy. Mind you, I am quite suah that I have it in me to wite a novel that would make a weal hit. But this particulah one was for a pwize competition, an' the time wanted weally did not give me a faiah chance. I made a wough calculation that I must put in at least four hours a day to get it done. But I have not that time to spaah. Theahfore I scwapped it."

"Isn't it sad, you fellows?" said Digby. "Rupert Vavasour, the soul of chivalry, monocle and all, has gone into the fire, and with him have gone Mavis Gwendolen, the beautiful heroine, and Jasper Bloggs—no, Trimble—was it Bloggs or Trimble, after all, Gussy?—the villain, and all the rest of them. I feel it no end. I loved that novel of Gussy's. I was a kind of advisory collaborator, you know, and when he got the five hundred I should have touched him for fifty at least."

"Don't wot, Dig!" snapped Gussy.

"And now he's turned his attention to Cross Words!" said Lowther tragically. "Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen!"

"But, weally, y'know, Lowthah, these Cwoss Word puzzles are most awfully intewstin', an' they add to a chap's vocabulahwy no end. I do not feel that I am wastin' time upon them. Can you tell me, deah boys, of a word of five lettahs that means 'fraud'?"

"I can," answered Lowther, in hollow tones.

"Oh, thanks awfully, Lowthah! That will help. What is it?"

"G-u-s-s-y!" Lowther spelt out.

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, I think you are not onlay a most insultin' fellow, but also a cwass ass!"

"But you really are a fraud, Gussy. We come here to rag you about writing a novel, and, behold, we find you doing a Cross Word puzzle! There's nothing in that—we've been had that way ourselves."

"Do you propose to put in the afternoon at that pastime—if it is a pastime, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry.

"No, deah boy, I—"

"Then you'll come to cricket. We're rather short this afternoon. So many fellows seem to think it's too hot, and want to laze about."

"I wegwet to say, Tom Merry, that I cannot come. It is quite imposs. I have an engagement."

"You didn't tell me anything about it, Gussy," remarked Digby.

Blake and Herries were not present. But Tom Merry knew that he could count upon them to help make up two elevens for a game.

"It was not necessary that I should tell you, Dig!" returned Arthur Augustus, rather stiffly.

"You'll turn up, Dig?" said Tom Merry.

"Unless Gussy wants me to go with him."

"I do not want you to do anythin' of the sort, Dig, thank you!"

"Right-ho, Tom! I'll be there!"

The Terrible Three departed. But a moment later Manners was back.

"Oh, I say, you fellows, I've had a hamper from home. Come in to tea with us, will you? Blake and Herries, too, of course."

"We'll come, you bet, Manners!" replied Digby.

"I will come if I am able, Mannahs," said Gussy.

"Right-ho!"

Manners took himself off.

"You're getting jolly mysterious, Gussy!" said Digby.

"Weally, deah boy, I do not considah that you are justified in makin' that charge. I am not conscious of any lack of openness in my dealin's with my friends!"

"Then, where are you going this afternoon?"

"That, Digbah, is my biznay, an' the biznay of no one else whatevah!"

But there Arthur Augustus made a mistake, for the three chums of Study No. 9 were making it very much their business.

Cardew had seen to the hire of the car. It was not brought to the gates for them, of course. They got into it half a mile or so from the school, and the man who had driven it was sent back on foot with a good tip.

Clive sat by Cardew, who drove. Levison Jounced in the body of the car.

They were so well ahead of the time mentioned by D'Arcy and Mr. Ayscott that about half-way across Wayland Moor Cardew pulled up.

"We won't go any farther till he comes along," he said.

"I rely upon you, Sidney. I think I could recognise him from your description; but you have seen him, and with your eagle eye on the job there should be no possibility of error."

"There's no chance of my not knowing him again," answered Clive. "But I wouldn't be so jolly sure that we can't make a mistake. The whole gidly plan may be a mistake. I must say Gussy hasn't looked much like a black-mailer's victim this last day or two."

"Don't be faint-hearted, Sidney! As for Gussy, he dissembles—smiles while the canker of care gnaws at his heart, an' all that sort of thing, y'know. Surely that must be our bird comin'?"

"My word, so it is!" exclaimed Clive. "How could you spot him at the distance?"

"By the face-furnishin's, dear boy—in the dear, dead past we should have called him 'beaver.' Well, I am ready, and it is too late for anyone to draw back."

"Nobody said anything about drawing back," remarked Levison.

But he did not feel exactly easy, and Clive felt very uneasy indeed.

Cardew got down.

"You can clear out of that, Sidney," he said. "The gentleman with the face fungus will sit next me."

Mr. Ayscott came on, walking steadily, but without hurry. He would have passed them with no more than a casual glance but that Cardew stepped across his path, and said, quite politely, but with any amount of determination:

"Excuse me, sir, but I must request you to stop!"

"Must you? And why?"

"Because you have gone quite far enough on this road!"

"My good lad, is that for you to judge?"

"In an ordinary way I should say no," replied Cardew coolly. "I assure you that it is no habit of mine to drive about the country puttin' a term to the walks of his Majesty's lieges. But this is somethin' rather out of the ordinary."

"It rather struck me that way," said Ayscott.

He seemed amused. Clive had noticed his glance at the St. Jim's caps. He would naturally remember the colours.

"I am goin' to ask you to get into that seat an' accompany us on a journey," said Cardew.

"Oh, that's your game, is it? Where do you propose to take me?"

"Nowhere in particular. If you have any special preference I shall not refuse to humour it. But the place you name will have to be some considerable distance from St. Jim's."

"I won't ask why. I will merely ask what is going to happen to me if I refuse?" returned Mr. Ayscott.

Then Cardew showed the butt of his revolver, which he carried in the left-hand pocket of his overcoat.

"Oh! This is what sensational literature and bad home training bring the youth of the present day to, is it?" said Ayscott.

He seemed annoyed, but not furious; and neither Levison nor Clive could make out that he was in the least afraid.

Afterwards they were able to size up his attitude correctly. In the main he was curious. He wanted to find out just what Cardew was driving at. The fact that all three were St. Jim's boys influenced him; that also they understood later.

"Say, rather," answered Cardew urbanely, "that this is what nefarious practices bring the perpetrators of them to."

"That's it, is it? Well, I don't want to be shot. I'll obey you, I think. Possibly before you put me down you will be kind enough to tell me of what nefarious practices I have been guilty."

"To do so is my intention," said Cardew. "Get up, then, Mr. Ayscott."

"Then you know my name? May I ask yours?"

"My name is Cardew."

"Oh! Son—no, you must be a grandson—of that old rip Reckness—eh?"

"You have my venerable progenitor accurately labelled, by name and by character," Cardew answered.

Ayscott smiled grimly. He got into the seat by the driver's, and Clive tumbled in with Levison.

Cardew swung himself up, and the car shot forward.

Just at that moment, unseen by any of the four, Arthur Augustus, on a motor-bike, crested a slight rise of the moorland road, and caught sight of the car.

He saw the St. Jim's caps, and wondered who those in the car could be. But he did not connect them in any way with his appointment to meet Mr. Ayscott.

He might have overhauled the car, but he did not want to do that. So he slowed down, and let it get well ahead of him.

It disappeared from sight. Whoever the driver might be, he liked pace.

The white road wound like a ribbon over the moor to

where the roofs and spires of Wayland showed on the skyline. But there was no sign of anyone on it.

"Weally," said Arthur Augustus to himself, "Mr. Ayscott, though he seems quite a decent sort, is wathah a nuisance! I might have been playin' cwicket this aftahnoon but for him, an' now it does not appeah that he is comin'."

CHAPTER 8.

A Mistake, After All!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW was an expert motorist. But to anyone who was not aware of that fact the pace at which he drove the car must have seemed dangerous in itself; and, his expertness admitted, Cardew really was not a prudent driver. He rather liked taking chances.

Before they had reached Wayland Mr. John Ayscott was thoroughly annoyed with Cardew. It chanced that Ayscott had done comparatively little motor travelling, and he had never been driven at this pace before.

It was bad enough along the road into Wayland, with no traffic to complicate matters. Cardew let her rip, and the speed indicator showed 55 m.p.h.

But it was worse in the town. He did slow down to the legal limit there; but the legal speed-limit was all too fast for Ayscott, and when Cardew, swinging round a corner in the middle of the road, all but collided with a motor-bus, his heart was in his mouth for a second.

The driver of the bus shouted something angry at Cardew, and Cardew shouted something cheerily impertinent back at him. Next moment he shot past another car with not three inches to spare, and remarked to Mr. Ayscott:

"That fellow doesn't know how to drive. He was all but into us."

"I must admit that you can drive, young Cardew; but I don't like your style of driving," was the reply he got.

"Ah, well, crime is its own Nemesis. If anythin' should happen to you to-day, Mr. Ayscott, it will be your own fault. You should have refrained from lamb-shearin'!"

Mr. Ayscott did not in the least understand that. But

A TALE OF MYSTERY, "THE CRIMSON CLAW!"

NEXT WEEK.

for the presence of the other two St. Jim's boys he would have thought that Cardew was mad. But, as they were evidently in the plot, that explanation of these very curious proceedings was hardly satisfactory. They could not well all three be mad.

Cardew fancied that Ayscott had got the wind up badly, and, with a view to keeping him in that condition, he went into top speed again as soon as Wayland was left behind.

But, though their captive did not like the pace, he had not lost his head.

His mind was not yet made up as to how he should deal with these three young rascals. There was reason, impossible for them to guess, why he had no desire to be too rough on them.

But he did not like that revolver in Cardew's pocket. It was not safe for any of them, he thought.

There he was wrong, for the revolver was a no more deadly weapon than a child's toy pistol would have been.

His right hand stole towards Cardew's left overcoat pocket. Cardew did not notice, and the other two could not see.

The revolver was deftly transferred to the pocket of Mr. Ayscott.

Now that gentleman felt more at ease. But still he did not care for the pace at which they were travelling. There was a certain exhilaration about it while the road ahead was absolutely clear; but he felt uneasy whenever they met any vehicle.

His uneasiness was not justified. Cardew, at whatever pace he might be putting her along, would not through any fault of his own collide head-on with anything he met. But there was a contingency which had hardly occurred to Mr. Ayscott, preoccupied as he was with what seemed to him visible dangers, and that was the chance of a sudden emergence of another car from a by-road.

And that very thing happened.

Cardew was not the only person at fault. The young man driving the other car, though his pace was not great, should never have come into the main road without warning, as he did.

For a second collision seemed inevitable, and collision must have meant a nasty smash. The face of the young man in the other car went white; but he kept his head. Cardew's face never changed colour. His hands shifted the

wheel quickly; the car swung to the left, as though going up the road down which the other had come. There was the slightest of jars. Then the other car shot across the main road into the by-road on the right, and Cardew swung out again into the highway.

"Sorry!" yelled the other driver.

"You should be. But you might have been sorrier!" shouted Cardew.

"This has gone far enough!" snapped Mr. Ayscott.

"I beg your pardon?" returned Cardew.

"Stop!"

"Not dashed well likely!"

"But you will! See here!"

The revolver was produced.

"So you go heeled, do you? Now I thought violence was quite outside a blackmailer's limits!"

"You young fool! What do you mean? And I don't go heeled. This is your own weapon, which I took from your pocket!"

"Oh, my aunt!" groaned Levison. "We're right up against it now. I'd never have thought he had the nerve. And, do you know, Clive, I'm not a bit sure that he is a blackmailer, really."

"I'm not, either. We've made a ghastly mistake somehow. I suppose it's my fault. But Ralph won't stop. What a nerve he has—there are two of them for that. He's laughing at him!"

Yes, Cardew was laughing as he drove, on the high speed again.

"Put it up, my dear man, put it up!" he shouted. "You can't frighten me with that, for I know it isn't loaded!"

"Will you stop?"

Ayscott was really angry now.

"No!"

"Then I'll make you!"

"You'd better not meddle! Oh, look out, you utter idiot!"

Ayscott had snatched at the wheel in his ire, and the car swung in dangerous fashion. Cardew pushed Ayscott away with his shoulder. He had seen what his unwilling

passenger had not—a farm cart very near the mouth of another by-road.

A quick swerve to the left took them safely past it.

And then Cardew pulled up.

"I'm goin' to stop now," he said. "We'll put you down here. I bar travellin' with dangerous lunatics, an' it-wasn't your fault that we didn't have an accident then."

"I admit that I should not have touched the wheel. But this business has gone altogether too far. I submitted to your extraordinary demands out of curiosity rather than fear, though, of course, there was always the possibility that your revolver was loaded, and that you were mad enough to use it. But now I demand an explanation of it all."

"An' you'll get it, dear man, you'll get it!" replied Cardew, jumping from his seat. "Come along, you two! This is where Mr. Ayscott learns what particular sort of dirty dog we know him to be, an' I shall want your evidence, Clive."

They were all in the road by the time he had finished speaking. The face of Mr. John Ayscott was a study in conflicting emotions.

"You utter young idiot! 'Blackmailer,' eh? 'Dirty dog,' eh? What in thunder do you mean by it?"

"I mean just exactly an' precisely what I say," answered Cardew coolly. "You are a blackmailer, an' a blackmailer is always a dirty dog. I'll explain myself. We know the game you've been playin' with D'Arcy, an' we met you an' carried you off to make you wise to the fact that it doesn't go!"

Cardew was still sure. But the faces of Levison and Clive showed that doubt was in their minds; and the face of John Ayscott was most assuredly not that of a man who believed himself helpless because of his guilt.

He threw up his head and laughed—a hearty, ringing laugh, that could never have come from the throat of a scoundrel.

And at the sound of that laugh Cardew's face changed. The sureness faded out of it.

"So I've been blackmailing D'Arcy, have I?" roared Ayscott. "Now the notion of that certainly is a joke! Did he tell you so, by any chance?"

"No," replied Cardew. "But he told Clive there. Oh, by heck, I'm not so sure even of that now! But he told Clive somethin', an' it's on that we've acted."

There was no need for Mr. Ayscott to ask which of the

other two was Clive. The crimson face of the South African junior showed that.

"No, it isn't quite right to say that he told me that you—or that anyone—had been blackmailing him," said Clive, making a great effort to state his case clearly. "But he asked my advice as to what a fellow should do if he was blackmailing, and I thought he meant himself. He wouldn't tell me any more, and I was worried about him, and told these fellows."

He paused.

"Go on," said Mr. Ayscott. "I can excuse what you did, foolish as it was. I cannot excuse the reckless and dangerous driving of young Cardew here. But it's easy to forgive all three of you for going too far in your desire to help a chum—the easier for me, because I am an old St. Jim's boy myself."

"What?" gasped Cardew.

"I'll explain that later, if I think it necessary. Meanwhile, Clive has the floor."

"I followed Gussy and saw him meet you," continued Clive, hanging his head. "I know it sounds beastly mean; but I'm not a spy really."

"He did it with the best possible intentions, sir," put in Cardew.

"Of that I am sure. Go on, Clive!"

"I was up on the bank behind the hedge when you met Gussy, sir. I thought there wasn't a chance that I shouldn't be caught out when Towser came along. But Baggy's fumble just saved me. And after that I heard you make an appointment for this afternoon, and you said—no, Gussy said—he would be sure to 'bring it.' I couldn't make anything out of that but money that he had to pay over to you."

"So he told me, an' I worked out this plan, sir," said Cardew. "I'm the only one to blame, really. Levison only came in because he wouldn't go back on me, an' you can see for yourself that Clive isn't the sort for desperate measures. My notion was to meet you, run you a good few miles away, an' then let you know that we were wise to your game, an' if you came near St. Jim's again, we'd put the police on to you at once."

"Great Scott! If here isn't Gussy!" cried Levison.

A motor-cyclist was coming fast towards them from the direction of Wayland. Gussy, weary of waiting, had ridden into the town, and had called at Mr. Ayscott's hotel. There he had learned that the landlord had seen Mr. Ayscott go past a little earlier in a car, driven by a boy in a St. Jim's cap, with two more boys wearing the school colours behind.

The car had taken the northern road. Arthur Augustus, with a word of thanks, remounted in haste and took the northern road also.

"It's D'Arcy, right enough," said Cardew. "I congratulate you on the keenness of your eyesight, Ernest."

Another moment, and Arthur Augustus was with them. He jumped from his machine.

"Weally—"

But Cardew checked his flow of speech before it had fairly got under weigh.

"Let me explain, old top!" said Cardew. "This is a modern 'Comedy of Errors.' Somehow or other, you gave Clive the notion that you were bein' blackmailing. I'm not blamin' Clive or you; there's only one fellow really to blame in all this an' his name's Cardew. We—"

"Oh, bai Jove! One moment, Cardew! Weally, I nevah anticipated such a dweadful mix-up as this ffrom merely askin' Clive what a chap ought to do if he was blackmailing. I only wanted to know because the hewo of my novel was to be blackmailing, an' I fancied Clive, as a South African, might 'know somethin' about such things."

"Your novel?" gasped Levison, staring at Gussy.

Everyone was staring at Gussy. But upon the face of Sidney Clive there began to dawn a look of understanding.

"His novel!" said Cardew. "D'Arcy's novel! We've been an' gone an' kidnapped Mr. Ayscott because Gussy was writin' a novel, an' hadn't the sense to say so when he asked Clive for advice about it!"

"You—you kidnapped Mr. Ayscott?" gasped Gussy.

"We did so," answered Cardew. "We were resolved that you, my noble kinsman, should not fall a victim to the wiles of a low blackmailer—excuse me, Mr. Ayscott—nothing personal—we know better now!"

"Oh! Oh! Bai Jove, you fwabjous asses! I say, though, it was vevy decent of you, an' all that, but, weally, Mr. Ayscott as a blackmailah is too funnay for words! Why, he is one of my patah's oldest fwriends, an' he was a St. Jim's— Oh, I'm sowwy, Mr. Ayscott—I oughtn't to have let that out!"

"It does not matter, D'Arcy. I have already told them as much. Now I am going to tell them more."

CHAPTER 9.

An Old Boy's Return!

MR. AYSOTT'S bearded face was very grave as he told his story.

"Thirty-five years ago I was expelled from St. Jim's," he said. "I am not going to tell you exactly what caused my expulsion; you may take my word for it, I think, that, though it was all wrong and the authorities were justified, it was nothing really disgraceful I did."

"I am quite suah of that, sir," spoke Arthur Augustus.

"We all are," murmured Cardew.

"My people sent me out to Australia," went on Mr. Ayscott, with a hand on Gussy's shoulder. "I got along very well there, and until a few weeks ago I never came home. That was partly because I had really no home to come to. My parents were dead, and my brothers and sisters had wiped me out of their lives.

"I had never been very happy at home, anyway. But I had been most uncommonly happy at St. Jim's, and it nearly broke my heart when I was cast out.

"All through the years of my exile—no, it was hardly that, for I love Australia, and mean to end my days there—but always I have carried with me the memory of the dear old school and the fellows who were my chums. One of them was the younger brother of Lord Eastwood, D'Arcy's father. That uncle of D'Arcy's has been dead a good many years now, but to me he is still alive—I see him again in this boy. It was through Lord Eastwood I heard of his death—and after that we corresponded at regular intervals. When I got to England again I went to see Lord Eastwood.

"He urged upon me the paying of a visit to his old school to see his boy. I might say his boys, for I know that Walter is there also. But it was Arthur I wanted to see, because he seemed the living image of his uncle, my chum. I could not stand the notion of passing inside the gates of the school again, so I wrote to Arthur asking him to meet me."

"An' I wasn't best pleased when I got your lettah, sir," confessed Gussy. "I thought you ought to come to the school. Whatever may have happened thirty-five years ago, I am sure that neithah our good Head or anyone else would hold it against you now. It seemed to me—you will excuse my plainness of speech, sir—wathah funkin' it."

"You are right, I dare say. But I still funk it. To me the place would be peopled with ghosts. And I went from it in disgrace. Against my name in the leaving book there is a black mark, D'Arcy!"

"There's one question I'd like to ask, sir," said Clive. "Of course, I know there's nothing in it, but at the time it seemed to me that it couldn't mean anything else but the cash Gussy had to pay you. He was to bring you something to-day. What was it?"

"Have you got it, Arthur?" asked Mr. Ayscott.

Gussy nodded. Then from the breast-pocket of his jacket he produced an envelope, and from the envelope he drew a photograph carefully wrapped in tissue paper.

It was one he himself had taken, showing the great door of the School House, with a dozen or more fellows clustered about it. The Terrible Three were there, and Talbot, Levison and Clive and Cardew, Blake and Herries and Digby.

Ayscott took it.

"I shall value this," he said. "I shall value it all the more because I see that you three, who made fools of yourselves to help a chum—oh, I am not blaming you for it; I like you for it—are all in it. This will go back to Australia with me. And I shall leave you my address, and if any of you ever come near Willimulla Station you will be very welcome guests."

"Look here, sir!" said Cardew boldly. "Get into the car again, an' I'll drive you to St. Jim's. Look up Dr. Holmes—he's one of the best. Tell him what happened to you, an' how you feel about it. If he doesn't meet you like a long-lost brother—well, I'll never believe in him again! An' I may say that Dr. Holmes is one of the very few people in whom I do believe."

Mr. Ayscott shook his head.

"I can't screw my courage up to it," he confessed.

Then his face took on a sterner look.

"Moreover, young Cardew," he added, "I have a quarrel with you that does not extend to your chums. Your plot—that's wiped out. You did it all to help D'Arcy, and I cannot blame you. But I do blame you for your reckless driving! Time after time you endangered all our lives. You are not fit to be in charge of a car. I will not enter it again with you, and I will not allow any of these lads to enter it. You will drive it back alone. We will return by train. There is a station within a mile or so from here, I know."

(Continued on page 24.)

THE FORTUNE BOUNDARY!

A boundary hit, as a rule, scores only four,—but in the case of Stanton's boundary it realised a fortune as well!



HAL STANTON'S BOUNDARY!

A Special Long Complete Cricketing Tale with an unusual climax.

BY
VICTOR NELSON.

CHAPTER 1. Out of Form!

OUT! A hundred boys who watched the practice at the school nets rapped out the word as one.

As many faces expressed almost dazed amazement.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter with Stanton?"

"To be bowled by a trickler like that! A Third-Form kid could have blocked it!"

"Phew! He's right off to-night. And he seemed a top-notch when he played in those two matches for the school. What's wrong with him?"

Hal Stanton of the Fifth himself looked dazed, too, as he walked slowly from the practice nets, with his cricket bat tucked under his arm.

In fact, he had seemed to be batting in a dream, from the moment when, a few minutes before, he had taken his place at the wicket.

He had played listlessly, mechanically, and it had been only sheer luck that had saved him from having his bails sent flying from the first ball.

"A pretty chance we'll stand to-morrow against the Grammar School cads if they play that idiot in the school team!" sneered Matt Washburn, also of the Fifth. "The Grammar School can play cricket, if they are a lot of scholarship rotters, and if Stanton fools around like that we'll be giving them a beastly walk over."

"Oh, shut up, Washtub!" cried Rolly Banks, Hal's especial chum. "You don't like Stanton since he stopped you bullying young Parker of the Third, and told you he'd pull your nose, and you've not a good word to say for him. He'll be all right when it comes to the match to-morrow."

But Merson, the captain of Towers House, one of the oldest public schools in the Midlands, seemed to share the surly Washburn's doubts.

"I say, Stanton!"

He signalled Hal as the latter came slowly across the smoothly-rolled grass of the playing-field.

"Man, what's got you?" he asked, a little sternly as the Fifth-Former started and pulled up on hearing his hail. "You'll have to shape better than that if I put you in the team against the Grammar School to-morrow."

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"I—"

Hal Stanton hesitated and moistened his lips.

"I'll do my best, Merson," he said.

"You're not feeling quite yourself, are you?" The tone of the tall, athletic skipper of Towers House was a little less sharp. "Is anything wrong?"

Once again Hal Stanton paused. Then he shook his head.

"No; I'm all right," he declared. "I promise you that they sha'n't get me out in a hurry to-morrow."

"I hope they will not, Stanton," said Merson quickly. "This season the Grammar School have one of the best teams going, between you and I, and even with every one of our players at his best we are going to have a stiff job to beat them."

"I'll not let the old school down, Merson," Hal Stanton told him quietly. "Er—do you mind if I clear off now? I've a letter I want to post in the village."

The captain nodded, and Hal walked to the pavilion.

His chum, Rolly, joined him when he emerged, wearing his blazer and minus his leg-pads.

"Hal, old chap, I wish you had been over there just now," Rolly said as they started to walk together towards the village. "Washtub was chewing the fat rather a lot about your play—called you an idiot, amongst other things, and said that the Grammar School would walk over us if the captain put you in the team to-morrow. I'm sure you would have punched him in the eye if you had heard, and—well, I'd like to see it—what?"

"I was a bit off this evening, Rolly."

"What's up, old man? Something's wrong with you. You've hardly spoken a word all day, and you look white about the gills. What's on your mind?"

Hal Stanton half turned towards his friend, and he opened his lips as if to take Rolly into his confidence.

But as it happened, his chum at that moment was looking away and laughing at the efforts of a hot and perspiring man trying to catch a frisky horse in a meadow beyond the hedge, and the words that Hal would have uttered remained unsaid.

When the letter, which was addressed to Hal's father, was posted, and the two Fifth-Formers returned to the school, they heard a prolonged burst of clap-

ping, that told them the practice match was over.

"Finished early to-night," said Hal as they crossed the quadrangle; and he glanced up at one of the twin towers above the old, ivy-covered school, which dated back to the reign of King George III. "It's only just after six."

"Which clock were you looking at?" grinned Rolly. "Not the one in the west tower, I hope? The giddy thing is a bit slow, you know."

"If you ask me, I should say it's gone on strike altogether," answered Hal, smiling faintly, and for the first time that day. "I wonder why the Head doesn't have a new clock put up there to match the other?"

Both boys stood for a moment gazing up at the round shape that marked the position of what once had been a clock in the western tower.

They realised that the ancient time-piece must have been in position almost from the date, over a century and a half before, when the school had been built.

It had long since ceased to function, and its face was almost completely blotted out by lichen and the ivy, which grew thickly over the whole surface of the tower.

"I expect the Head doesn't want to spoil the ancient look of the jolly old place," said Rolly. "It was before his time, so they say, that some other headmaster had the new clock put in the eastern tower, so that he could see the time, I suppose."

"That's what people have giddy clocks for," said Hal brightly. "They—My hat! What's that?"

His foot had struck something which gave out a metallic ring as it skimmed over the gravel and collided with a stone.

Hal ran forward, and saw that it was a small round object, like a coin, though it had become almost black with age.

As he picked it up and rubbed it vigorously against the lining of his blazer he let out an excited shout.

"Great pip! It's a sovereign!" he cried. "Look, Rolly, look! Where could it have come from?"

"A sovereign? My only aunt, so it is!" exclaimed his chum, taking the coin and, in his turn, giving it a "polish." "No, it isn't, though; or, if it is—Why, it's a guinea! An old George guinea, Hal!"

His friend whistled, and stared at him with his grey eyes ablaze with excitement.

"A guinea?" he repeated, then whistled again. "Rolly, I wonder if we've found a part—a very small part—of the lost treasure of Towers House?"

CHAPTER 2.

The Night Prowler!

"WELL, what did the Head say, Hal?"

Rolly Banks looked up from his prep as his chum entered the study they shared.

"He took charge of it, Rolly, to see if anybody would claim it," answered Hal. "But he laughed at me when I said it might be a part of the mysterious school treasure. Said someone had dropped it, more likely, in the grounds years ago, he expected."

"What's all this yarn about a mysterious hidden fortune at the school?" asked Rolly, dropping a blot unnoticed in his exercise-book in his suppressed excitement. "I've only been here two terms, you know, whilst you are an old stager."

"Oh, the yarn goes that a jehmy named Septimus Sefton, who founded the school and acted as Head in the days of George III., was a rich old codger, and that he got a bit strange in the napper before he died. He—"

"Buried his giddy wealth, or something, eh?"

"He must have done that, Rolly, if there's any truth in the tale," Hal nodded. "He was supposed to be jolly rich, yet not a sovereign—or rather, guinea—was ever found after he had died."

"Phew! Wasn't his money in a bank?"

"No; he was supposed not to trust banks, or something of that sort, and to keep it somewhere in the school-house. He was a bit potty, I should think. He left all manner of queer rules in his will, and most of them were stuck to until this day. My aunt, I wish I could find his fortune, and another giddy will with it, to say that 'findings' were 'keepings,'" he added, his handsome face momentarily forced again.

Rolly had forced his attention back to his prep, and was making fruitless efforts to remove the blot.

For that reason he did not notice how worried his chum looked, and it was only when they were making their way to the dormitory with a crowd of other Fifth-Formers that Rolly realised that Hal was again strangely silent.

"Now, what the dickens is wrong with old Hal?" Rolly thought, when he had stretched his rather bulky form in his bed by the window. "There's something on his mind, and I wish he'd out with it so that I could help him if there's a chance."

A buzz of conversation was running through the long dormitory, and the one topic was the match that was to be played against the cricket eleven of the local Grammar School on the morrow—a Saturday.

As Merson, the captain, had said, their rivals were a remarkably good team, and Towers House would have to look to their laurels.

So far this season the latter had not lost a match, and there was a sort of nervous tension in the air.

For longer than the oldest boy at Towers House could remember there had been a deadly feud between the two schools, and Towers House felt that it would be a humiliation almost beyond

endurance if the "Grammar kids" were the team to give them their first slamming of the season on the cricket field.

Suddenly the door opened, and the voices were stilled as Mr. Shelly, the Fifth-Form master, made his appearance to see lights out.

For long after he had gone Rolly found it impossible to sleep.

He lay in his bed thinking of Hal and wondering what secret trouble could have come to him. And Rolly's eyes were fixed subconsciously upon the lighted window of a study across the well formed by the school buildings.

"I hope he doesn't muff things in the match to-morrow," Rolly whispered to himself. "He did so jolly well against St. Andrew's when the captain gave him his chance that it'd be a thousand pities if he spoiled things to-morrow and got turned out of the cricket team. Then those Grammar School kids would crow like one o'clock and make our lives unbearable if they did whack us, and—"

Rolly's muttered thoughts were broken off with a snap.

He sat bolt-upright in bed, and had to resist a desire to rub his eyes at what he could see beyond the well.

A moment later he was out of bed and shaking the sleeping Hal by the shoulder.

"Hal, Hal! Wake up! But don't make a row and stir up the others!"

As Hal Stanton opened his eyes and blinked drowsily up into the darkness he heard the words hissed in his ear.

"Rolly, what's up?" he breathed as he sat up.

"Come over here to the window and you'll see," whispered back his chum, beginning to glide in that direction.

Hal Stanton slipped out of bed and followed his white-clad figure, which he could just make out in the gloom.

As he joined Rolly by the window the latter gripped at his arm in excitement.

"Look!" he said tensely. "Look at Bully Washburn!"

Hal gasped.

Matt Washburn, who was, like Rolly, a comparative newcomer at the school, was never tired of mentioning that his pater had paid an extra fee that he might be provided with a private study and bed-room, and it had been from the window of the former that the light had shown.

Washtub, as the rather hulking youth had promptly been christened, had especial permission to sit up after lights in the various dormitories were out, as he was swotting for a forthcoming exam.

"That's a funny way to swot, isn't it?" Rolly whispered.

And he was right.

Washtub's "swotting" at the moment consisted in clambering out on to the window-sill of his study, where he was crouching, and looking down doubtfully into the fifty feet void beneath him.

"What the dickens is he up to?" Hal gasped. "Has he studied too hard and gone potty? If he fell he— My hat, he has!"

But it was a false alarm.

Washtub certainly had swung himself from off the window-sill into space. But a second glance showed the excitedly watching Hal and Rolly that the bully was clinging to a stout rope, secured somewhere in the room, which they had not previously noticed.

Down, down, down went the bulky Fifth-Former, until his figure was swallowed up by the deep gloom of the well between the school buildings.

"Well, this is rum!" Hal breathed. "No, no! Don't open that window yet. Give him time to reach the ground and get away. Then we can listen which way he goes."

The two chums stood there in the dark for perhaps half a minute. Then Rolly, who had released the catch of the window, noiselessly raised it inch by inch.

He and his chum craned out, and, straining their ears, they found it just possible to detect the bully's soft foot-falls as he moved away to the left—towards the quad.

Then came silence. They waited for several moments longer. Then, as they were about to draw in their heads, there came a faint sound from the distance which caused Hal to start.

"Hear that?" he jerked.

"It was only an owl, Hal!"

"It wasn't, Rolly!" Hal's voice was tense. "It was a cry for help, or I never heard a human voice before. It—Hark! There it is again!"

This time there was no mistaking the sound.

"Help! Help!" It was a desperate shout for aid, though it sounded very muffled and far away.

"It's Washtub—and he hasn't lost much time in getting into some sort of trouble!" exclaimed Hal. "Bring my sheets. I'll knot those together. We must see what's up. But we won't make a song about it, if we can help it, and let everybody know that Washtub was out."

Whilst Rolly stole away towards Hal's bed the latter secured together his chum's sheets and blankets. By the time Hal's bedclothes were knotted to these an impromptu rope which would reach almost to the ground was formed.

After testing the knots in feverish haste Hal knotted the end of the long line of sheets and blankets to the framework of Rolly's bed.

Already Rolly had huddled on a few of his clothes. Hal followed suit; then he tossed the free end of the "rope" out of the window and climbed out on to the sill.

As soon as he was well started on his risky descent Rolly followed; and a few seconds later both lads stood in the deep gloom between the tall, ivy-covered buildings.

"Come on!" jerked Hal. "He yelled out again just now, and some of the masters will be hearing him if we don't reach him soon and gag the beggar or something!"

On tiptoe they ran towards the quad. They reached it, and, quickening their pace, they sprinted for some trees which divided the gravelled stretch from the playing-fields.

For it was from that direction that Washtub's cries had rung out.

"Help! Help!"

Yet again they sounded; and then Hal heard a frantic splashing noise that accompanied the terrified voice.

"My aunt! He's fallen down the land well that the gardeners use!" he cried. "All right, Washtub! Cut out the yelling and hang on! We'll fetch a rope!"

But as Hal turned he found that his chum had already shot away towards a toolshed. Fortunately, Rolly had found it unlocked, and as the moon peered from behind some drifting clouds Hal saw that Rolly already was returning with a stout hemp coil.

Then, as he looked back at the grim outline of the old well, which probably dated back to the erection of the school, he saw something else—that one of the two bucket-ropes attached to the windlass had been broken off short.

In reality Matt Washburn was in no immediate danger, for he was clinging to a crosswise stanchion and keeping his head and shoulders above the turgid

water, which lay twenty feet beneath the ground level.

Rolly uncoiled the rope and sent it snaking down to the discomfited bully. Then Hal lent a hand; and when they felt Washtub's weight upon it the two lads began steadily to haul.

"Ha, ha, ha! What were you trying to do, Washtub?" chuckled Rolly, when, less than a minute later, the hulking youth scrambled from the well-mouth, gasping and oozing water from head to foot.

"I—I didn't see the beastly well in the darkness, and before I knew what was happening I had stepped into it and was in the water," Matt Washburn stammered, and he seemed confused. "Thanks for pulling me out!" he added ungraciously.

"A pleasure, old top—what?" said Rolly, and waited tentatively.

"I—I—" Washburn still stammered awkwardly. "I came out to post a letter," he said. "I mean, I wanted it to catch the first collection in the morning."

"Oh! Thought you were looking for the school's hidden treasure, or something," grinned Rolly.

And he put down the quick breath that Washburn drew to the cold.

The water in the land well was icy, even in the summer months, and Washburn's gasp was followed by a noticeable chattering of his teeth.

"I'll catch m-m-my d-d-death of cold if I don't get these wet things off," he groaned. "The—or—letter was important, but bother it now. And, anyway, it's—it's somewhere down the w-w-well."

Hal said nothing. He remained silent,

as he had been since helping to land Washtub back into safety, until the surly Fifth-Former had turned away.

Then:

"Rolly, old man, I believe your chance shot hit the giddy mark," he said quietly.

"Eh?"

Rolly swung round and stared at him in the moonlight.

"You jolly well heard what I said, and I'm not going to take the trouble to repeat it," smiled Hal. "Washtub didn't tumble into that well. He meant to go down it!"

"Eh?"

"Just so. He sat on the raised bucket and began to lower himself by paying out the rope of the other one. Then the rope supporting him broke, and let him down with a run. Look for yourself, if you like. You'll see that the bucket's gone."

"To look for—"

Rolly broke off and whistled softly. They looked excitedly into one another's faces.

Had the bully some clue that led him to believe that the fortune of the long-dead founder of the school was down the well?

And was it possible that it had been hidden in its black depths for the century and a half that had elapsed since his death?

CHAPTER 3.

The Great Match!

I AM afraid that it is rather hopeless now, Shelley, unless our lads surpass themselves. What is the score now?"

Mr. Shelley, the Fifth-Form master,

turned to Dr. Harvey, the kindly, grey-haired old Head of Towers House, who was the speaker.

"One hundred and fifty-two, sir," Mr. Shelley said, a little grimly. "Our fellows will have to show better form than they did last night at the nets to beat that—especially Stanton!"

The long-discussed match between the Grammar School and Towers House was in full swing, watched by a mighty crowd of schoolboys from both schools and a good sprinkling of visitors and villagers.

It had been the visitors who had won the toss, and at first, as the Grammar School fellows had begun their innings, prospects for Towers House had looked rosy.

For Cooper, reputed to be one of the Grammar School's best batsmen, in lunging out at what he believed to be an easy ball from Patman, the acknowledged crack bowler of Towers House, stepped it with his pads, and retired early to the pavilion.

And the Grammarians' captain, Marsh, who had followed him in, and who had a reputation for caution, was deceived by Patman's apparently dilatory bowling—to his cost.

A trickler that looked dead easy broke and rose unexpectedly, and, to Marsh's disgust, he heard a click behind him, a stentorian roar of "Out!" and he knew that his bails had gone spinning.

But Twyford, the next Grammar School chap in, obviously had been warned to take no risks.

He blocked anything that he was doubtful about, and not until he had knocked up fifty did he make the fatal mistake of laying about him.

He was caught out neatly then, as a particularly tricky ball from Patman clipped the shoulder of his bat and whizzed straight for the gloved hands of Joynson, the wicket-keeper.

The turn of luck that had commenced with Twyford's advent, however, seemed to cling to the Grammarians; and now, with the last two lads of their eleven in, their score had mounted up to the formidable figure of 152, as Mr. Shelley had said.

"Stanton? I heard that last night at the nets he did not show the—ah—skill he displayed in the two matches for the school in which he figured," said the Head. "I sincerely hope he is more himself to-day, Shelley. He—ah! See! See!"

The Head so far forgot his usual calm dignity as to clutch at the under-master's arm.

One of the last two Grammar School "men" had chanced a smashing drive; and Hal Stanton, fielding in the boundary, overlooked by the imposing old school, was running—running like a hare, his eyes fixed upon the ball.

"He'll not do it!" almost groaned Mr. Shelley. "He'll not— Jove, he has, though!"

And Hal had!

The ball smacked down into his up-flung hands as he made a mighty spring. He fell, sprawling, near the ropes, unable to check his impetus. But though he crashed to his knees a foot or so from the crowd of onlookers there, the ball was held safe in his upraised right hand.

"All out!"

The cheering and clapping made the skies ring. The villagers applauded both sides; the Grammarians thundered their appreciation of their team's successful innings; the boys and masters of Towers House showed approval of Hal's fine catch in the good old British fashion.

No time was lost in the taking of the Towers House innings, and though in their hearts they felt that it was rather



"What the dickens is he up to?" gasped Hal, as he watched the figure crouching on the sill. "If he fell— Oh, he has!" But it was a false alarm. Washtub certainly had swung himself from the window-sill into space. But a second glance showed the watchers that the bully was clinging to a stout rope.

(See page 21.)

a forlorn hope, the faces of Adams and Brent, who went in first, were set and determined.

They scored steadily, and had knocked up twenty between them before Brent, just a little too late in taking off after a hit from Adams, was run out.

A rather reckless player, named Martin, followed Brent, and good fortune watched over his slogging for quite a while.

The afternoon wore on. Stumps were to be drawn at six-thirty. The Grammarians, however, lost the supremely confident grins that had been on their faces as the Towers House score mounted steadily.

Then the grins began to appear again as the luck changed and lad after lad came out, until there was only one left waiting to take his innings—Hal Stanton.

And the score then was just under the century, with time creeping on.

The hands of the clock in the eastern tower pointed to five minutes past six!

"Huh! Fifty-five to get to win!" sneered Matt Washburn, who stood with a man with a sandy moustache and rather shifty eyes, who bore so strong a resemblance to the bully that their relationship could not be for a moment in doubt. "And only twenty-five minutes to do it in, whatever happens! The school's done, and we'll be the laughing-stock of those Grammar School rotters for the rest of our beastly days."

"Why, son?" asked his companion. "Is that boy a bad player, then?"

"You'd say so, pater, if you'd seen him at the nets last night," Washburn scoffed. "Shouldn't be surprised if the brute gets out for a duck."

Hal Stanton looked even more pale and troubled than he had done on the previous day, and schoolfellows and masters alike watched him anxiously as he took his place before the wicket.

Merson, the Towers House skipper, who had gone in fifth, was at the opposite wicket, and he also glanced doubtfully at his new partner.

Hal looked nervous—in the wobbly, confidence-lacking state when a player will sometimes "muff" the very first ball sent down to him.

He, however, stonewalled the first five of the over, and every one expected, as they watched impatiently, that Hal would do likewise when the sixth ball was sent whizzing down.

Instead, he seemed to wake up. He jumped out and drove with all his fine, lissom strength behind his bat.

A roar went up from the Towers House crowd—for the ball soared away and away and dropped behind the pavilion.

"A boundary! Six!" cried the Head, enthusiastically clapping with the rest. "Bravo, Shelley. If he keeps up that play, Shelley, we might win, even yet."

Merson faced the bowling and with a leg sweep slammed the ball to long leg, and a premature groan welled out as the fielder there sprang to make a catch. "Run, run!" Merson shouted; for the Grammar School player had missed.

The captain and Hal snatched the run just in time, and once again the Fifth-Former faced the bowler.

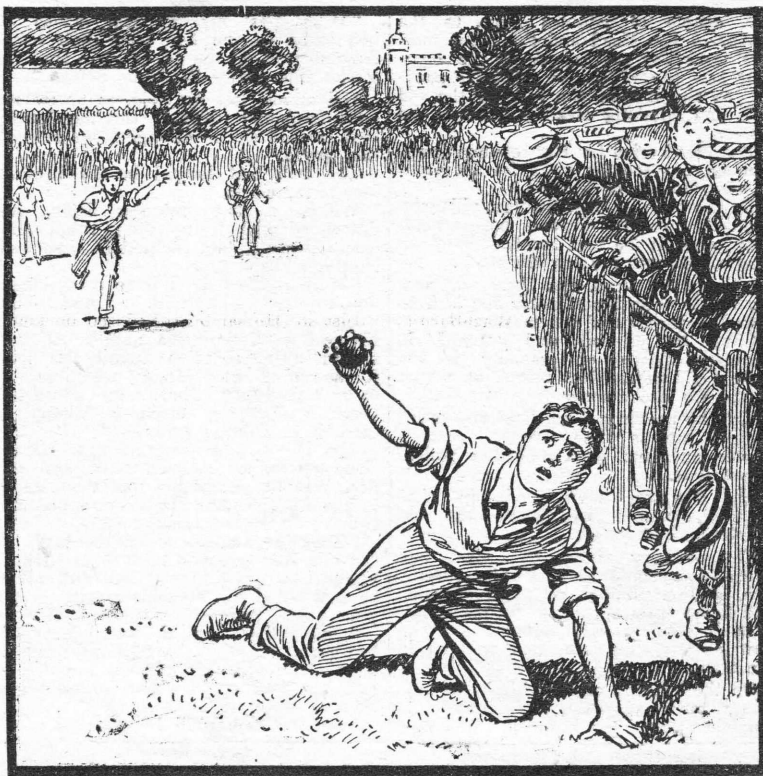
Rolly Banks watched his chum eagerly. Would he go in for cautious tactics again, or—

"No! By Jove, he wasn't doing anything of the sort.

Crack!

The ball was out past cover-point, and again Merson and Hal were sprinting for all they were worth.

From that moment, if Hal Stanton had a secret trouble weighing on his mind, he must have put it from him and



Hal was running like a hare, his eyes fixed upon the dropping ball. "He'll not do it!" almost groaned Mr. Shelley. But Hal did! The ball smacked down into his upflung hands, and he fell sprawling near the ropes, unable to check his impetus. But the ball was held safe in his upraised right hand. (See page 22.)

thought only of the honour of the school.

His jaw set like a rock, and he began to play the game of his life.

It seemed that he and Merson were doing nothing but hit and run. The captain found the younger lad's obvious enthusiasm contagious, and the continued cheers and clapping were like a tonic to him.

Twenty-two—thirty—thirty-five!

He reproached himself for not having put Hal in earlier—the game might have been over by this time, with a win for the school, had he done so, he realised.

Now, would they have time to win? The clock in the eastern tower showed that it was twenty past six. Only ten minutes to go!

Crack!

Hal had stepped out and slogged at a shot the Grammar School bowler had made far more easy than he had intended. It disappeared amongst the spectators beyond the boundary ropes and counted four.

At five and twenty past six the Towers House score stood at 142 total; but two hits by the amazing Hal brought them within five of the Grammar School's total—at twenty-eight minutes past six!

Two minutes, and they wanted five to equalise—six to win.

Could they do it? As he faced the bowler for the last over, Hal set his teeth. They had got to do it somehow, though that relentless hand was creeping on and it was only a minute more to go now.

If only he—

Ah!

The ball was arcing down the pitch towards him, one of the kind that might break dead and slither along the ground straight into the wicket; one of the kind that did not invite liberties being taken. And yet—

It had to be chanced. Hal stepped out and, opening his shoulders, brought his bat swinging round with every ounce of his strength in the hit.

Thud!

A dead silence as every person who watched was thrown on the tiptoe of expectation and excitement. Then—

Crash!

Like a fast-soaring bird, the ball had risen higher, higher, higher, passing over and beyond the crowd of boys, masters, and villagers on the school side, and smashing clean into the face of the obsolete clock in the western tower, where it remained.

"Ha, ha, ha! A boundary, and you've won for us, Stanton!"

Hal found the laughing and excited captain wringing his hand.

"But, Jove, old man, what a hit, and you've done it for yourself now. You've got to risk breaking your neck or leave the school, branded as a coward."

"Eh?" gasped Hal. "Do what, Merson? I don't understand."

"It's an old rule made by the founder of the school, a century and a half ago—Septimus Sefton. He was keen on cricket, and that was one of the old regulations he left behind, that, if a boy should send a ball through the face of the clock from the cricket-pitch, he should climb up the tower and retrieve it, or admit himself a coward and leave Towers House branded as such."

Merson laughed then.

"I don't expect the Head would enforce the rule in these days," he began; "but—"

He gasped. The last thing that Hal Stanton would allow was for his courage to be questioned, and already he was sprinting towards the school.

A couple of minutes later, to the horror of the Head and the other masters and the excitement of the boys, they saw the white-clad cricketer clinging to the ivy on the face of the old wall and climbing steadily towards the tower.

The Head cried for Hal to come down. But he was too far away for his voice to carry to the daring lad.

By the time he, Mr. Shelley, villagers, and the crowds of boys of both schools who joined in the rush reached the quadrangle, Hal was nearing the clock.

Up, up he went, and there was now too much noise from below for him to hear the protests of the master.

Once he slipped and seemed in imminent danger of crashing to the ground a hundred feet below, as a part of the ivy broke away from the wall.

But he gained a fresh hold and saved himself just in time, dragged himself higher, and then gave a positive yell of amazement.

Hal Stanton understood, in that moment, whence had come the old guinea he had found.

The masonry about the clock had broken away and crumbled in its extreme age, and a number of guineas which had fallen from a rotting wooden chest in a bricked-up cavity just below the now useless timepiece had wedged in the crevice.

On the heading of the old clock-frame was a tarnished plate, and it was just possible to read the lettering upon it.

"Here lies my fortune, which I bequeath to the boy who shall have done so well on the cricket-field that he makes this climb—Septimus Sefton."

Hal almost lost his hold, as he stared with fascinated eyes at the inscription that seemed like a message from beyond the grave.

The ball had lodged in the broken face of the clock.

When, a few minutes later, he descended with it to safety, those who crowded about him realised that he was laughing unsteadily.

"Here is the ball—I have proved I'm no coward!" he said. "And"—he unclosed the hand he had drawn from his pocket, disclosing a number of tarnished guineas—"I've found the lost fortune of Towers House, which seems to belong to me! There's tons more up there under the clock—a whopping fortune in George guineas!"

The Head and everyone near stared their speechless astonishment, and on Mr. Washburn and his son, who stood in the background, Hal's words seemed to have an extraordinary effect.

"Then it was not down the well, as the old Black Letter book I unearthed hinted," Mr. Washburn breathed, after he had stood for a moment with dropping jaw. "It—"

"No, father, but I was," growled Washburn. "I might have been drowned! That brute of all people has found it—and you've spent the fees to send me here for nothing."

From which it will be gathered that

Matt Washburn's presence at the school had not been solely for him to gain learning.

"Good old Hal! Good old Stanton! Three cheers for the chap who saved the school!"

There was a sudden rush of Fifth-Formers and, flushing and protesting, Hal was raised shoulder-high and borne off across the quad in triumph, with a clapping, yelling, and cheering mob bringing up the rear.

Many had not been near enough to hear what Hal had said or to see the old gold coins, and all they knew was that—through his wonderful play—the Grammar School had been beaten, and that they still could go about with their heads held high!

The honour of Towers House was preserved!

"It was a mighty lucky windfall for me," Hal Stanton said, a little huskily, to his chum, Rolly Banks, later. "I heard this week that dad's partner had vamoosed with fifty-thousand pounds belonging to their business."

"By Jove, that was what made you so off at the nets, old man?"

"Yes, Rolly, if I hadn't stumbled on Septimus Sefton's legacy, the dear old dad would have had to fail, and I wouldn't have been able to come back to the good old school after this term. Good old Septimus! I'll never hear him called a potty old crank again!"

THE END.

STUDY No. 9. ON THE WARPATH!

(Continued from page 19.)

"Oh, I say, sir! I did drive fast, I know. But my nerve's all right, an' I knew that Levison an' Clive wouldn't mind, an', believin' you a blackmailer, I wanted to put the wind up you. It was part of the treatment—see? I hope you'll forgive me. I promise to drive back as carefully as anyone could."

"No, I will not have it. You must learn your lesson."

"Very well, sir!"

Cardew was badly huffed, but he submitted.

His chums could guess at the manner in which he would drive that car back. He had taken risks on the outward journey, but they were tame compared with the risks he would take on the way home, in that mood.

"Oh, bai Jove!" cried D'Arcy.

It all happened in a moment.

Cardew had put the clutch into top speed at once. He rushed away from them.

Down the slopes towards him came a big car. Out of a cottage by the roadside toddled a child of four or five.

The road was but barely wide enough for the two cars. On Cardew's side it had a high bank. On the other was a ditch.

The driver of the big car swerved and narrowly avoided the ditch. The child stopped, then turned back.

It seemed that nothing but a miracle could save Cardew from running down the toddler.

No miracle—only the reckless courage of Ralph Cardew! He did not think of himself at all; his sole thought was to save the child.

Straight at the bank he drove, and the car went yards up it before it heeled over—heeled over and crashed down, with Cardew underneath!

Out of the other car came three men; while up the road rushed Ayscott and Gussy, Clive and Levison.

Their united efforts pulled the car off its driver, who had had the nerve to throw out the clutch in the last moment—the last moment of his life, as they feared.

"Are you hurt, Cardew?" asked John Ayscott anxiously. "It was one of the pluckiest things I ever saw," said the driver of the other car.

"Oh, rats!" replied Cardew. "You'd have done the same if you'd been on my side of the road. I'm not broken anywhere, Mr. Ayscott, though there may be a bruise or two."

"I don't know how to make amends. I misjudged you. Reckless you may be, but—"

"You can make amends easily enough, sir. I'll tell you how in a minute."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 913.

And as soon as the other car had driven off Cardew told him.

"You're the sort of man who sticks to your word, I know, Mr. Ayscott, an' I'm bankin' on that. What you've got to do is to come with us to St. Jim's, see the Head—he's really a dear old bird, but you mustn't have tea with him if he asks you. For tea in Study No. 9—that's our study—is the programme. An' when you do leave St. Jim's after that you'll be able to feel that the old place belongs to you again, in the way it belongs to every fellow who's been there—see?"

For a minute or more John Ayscott stood thinking hard.

But he felt that he could not refuse Cardew.

He dreaded the ordeal of meeting Dr. Holmes. He dreaded the passing through the gates of St. Jim's again because of the memories it must conjure up.

But he could not refuse Cardew after what had happened.

They rang up from the nearest post-office the garage from which Cardew had hired the car. Another was sent to fetch them, and with it came a man to look after that which lay upside down in the road.

Cardew did not drive back. He had no desire to. Though he was not badly hurt, he was bruised and shaken.

What passed in the brief interview between Mr. Ayscott and Dr. Holmes they never heard. But the man from Australia came from it, with a beaming face, and he told them that the Head had asked him to come down a little later and stay a few days at the school, and that he had agreed to do so.

There was a bigger company in Study No. 9 than John Ayscott had expected to see. That Arthur Augustus should keep the events of the afternoon from his chums was out of the question, of course; and it happened that the Terrible Three and Talbot were all present when he rushed in to tell the story.

They were all his chums, too, and he did not see why he should not tell them also. When they had heard of it they trooped along—Tom Merry and Lowther, Manners and Talbot, Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy. And John Ayscott, though at first the crowd rather took him aback, soon found himself at home with them all.

He enjoyed that tea as thoroughly as any of them, though probably he ate less than any. Even the appetite of an Australian station-holder is not quite equal to that of a healthy boy. He liked them all, and he left in quite a glow of pleasure at the thought that within a week or two he would be coming back to renew acquaintance with them, and to spend a few days at the old school as the honoured guest of its Head—who had heard exactly what had caused him to be cast out.

THE END.

(Don't miss "Camp & Caravan!" next week's grand extra-long story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.)

"A CRY FOR HELP!"

Risking his liberty, an escaped convict returns to Wrexborough to answer the call of his workmates entombed in the mine,

DAVE, THE PIT-BOY!

By MAX HAMILTON.

A Thrilling Story of the Coal-Mines, dealing with the Exciting Adventures of the Young Hero of Wrexborough Pit—
DAVID STEELE.



READ THIS FIRST.

David Steele, an ambitious lad of fifteen, decides to try his fortune in Wrexborough, and accordingly secures a job in the Wrexborough coal-mines. From the outset he becomes entangled in a web of overwhelming evidence, which points to his being responsible

for the murder of a Mr. George Scott, the rascally brother of the mine-owner. Dave is found guilty by a judge and jury, and is sent to prison. He escapes, however, and is prepared to strike out for a new freedom when he learns that his former workmates are imprisoned in the Wrexborough mine.

(Now read on.)

How David Returned!

DAVID pulled a penny from his pocket, thrust it into the newsboy's hand, and snatched a paper from him. The headlines had not exaggerated. An awful catastrophe had befallen the Wrexborough Pit. Without the slightest warning, a torrent of water had broken into one of the lower galleries, and had quickly flooded a large section of the mine.

How many lives were lost it was as yet impossible to say, but sixty men were missing. It was hoped that most, if not all of them, had had time enough before they were cut off by the rising water to take refuge at the farther end of the seam. This sloped upwards, and was therefore believed to be above the level of the flood. Even if that were the case, however, their rescue was more than problematical, for not only must the intervening galleries first be pumped out, but a large section of rock, which had caved in under the pressure of the water near the foot of the shaft, would have to be cut through.

This, it was feared, would be a labour of days. There would be little hope, therefore, of reaching the unfortunate men alive.

The report went on to state that, among the missing men was the owner of the mine, Mr. William Scott, whose name had recently been before the world in connection with the extraordinary story revealed at the Wrexborough murder trial.

All day long the pumps had been clanking at the head of the Wrexborough shaft; but those who worked there had little hope of saving the lives of the sixty men who were known to have been cut off by the inrush of the water.

With a worn, haggard face, Grafton, the manager of the mine, turned homeward, as the long winter night began to descend.

He had been at his post for twenty-four hours without bite or sup, and he would not have left it now but for the fact that, if he was to be of any further use on the morrow, rest and refreshment were an absolute necessity.

He stumbled wearily into his house, and sank down in a chair. Hungry as he was, he could not eat. He stopped after he had swallowed a few mouthfuls, and covered his face with his hands.

"It chokes me!" he groaned. "I cannot eat when I think

of those poor chaps dying down there by inches! And Scott amongst 'em, too—the best fellow that ever stepped!"

He started, and looked up. A smart tap had resounded on the window-pane. It was repeated more loudly. He rose, and lifted a corner of the blind.

Outside, a face was pressed against the glass, and as the manager saw it, he started again; for the eyes into which he looked were the eyes of the missing convict, David Steele! With an exclamation of surprise Grafton hurried to the door and opened it. In an instant David had slipped inside.

"David Steele," the manager said, in a low voice, "what brings you here, lad?"

Like Scott, Grafton had always firmly believed in David's innocence of the crime of which he was accused, and he imagined that, knowing this, the boy, hard pressed by the police, had come to seek refuge in his house.

"What brings me here, sir?" David repeated eagerly. "The accident in the mine—the flood! I heard of it this morning in Leeds; and I've managed to get back to Wrexborough, and been hiding about here till I saw you come in. Mr. Grafton, is what this paper says right?" And he pulled a thumbed leaf of the "Yorkshire Post" from his pocket. "It is hoped that the men at work have been able to take refuge at the end of the deep-level seam, where the galleries have a decided upward trend. In that case, it is just possible that they may be rescued alive."

"Yes, that's right," returned Grafton, astonished at the boy's excitement. "If they're alive at all, that's where they are—at the very end of the lower seam. But they're hardly likely to be alive when we get to 'em," he concluded, with a heavy sigh. "It'll be a matter of days first, I'm afraid!"

"No, sir," cried David, his eyes sparkling, "not if you work from the old pit! It's pretty well on a level with the end of our lower seam, and that's what I came to tell you. I went from one to the other after Markham, and those chaps who are shut up there now could have done the same thing, if Markham hadn't fired a charge there and blocked the passage up. But there'll be no pumping to do from that end, sir; you'll get at 'em ten times sooner. That's what I've come from Leeds to tell you!"

For a moment Grafton stared at the boy speechlessly; then he clapped his hand on David's shoulder.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, drawing a long breath, "I believe we shall save them, after all! Can you find your

way about the old mine—I mean, do you know the spot we have to work at?" he asked anxiously, as an afterthought.

David nodded.

"I can find my way from the foot of the shaft to the place where I came across Markham," he replied confidently; "and it's just beyond there the opening must have been."

"Right you are!" said Grafton joyously. Renewed hope had made him forgetful of his fatigue and even of his hunger. "Look here, my boy," he went on, growing grave again, "you must think what you are doing. If you are going to guide a gang of men into the old mine, the matter will get to the ears of the police, and—"

"Don't think about me, sir!" David rejoined quickly. "There's sixty lives at stake!"

Grafton wrung his hand; then, opening the front door, he peered cautiously up and down the street.

"There's no one in sight," he said, "so the best thing you can do is to be off to the old shaft, and wait there for me. I'll have a gang out there in less than an hour; then we'll go down, and you shall show us the way."

David nodded assent, and, turning up the collar of his coat to hide his face, quickly disappeared into the darkness.

He was soon safely out of the town, and, reaching the edge of the shaft, he sat down to await the arrival of Grafton and the rescue party.

It had been no easy task for him to reach Wrexborough and gain access to Grafton unobserved.

He had come most of the distance by train; but he had not dared to show his face openly in Wrexborough, so had left the train at a little wayside station ten miles away, where he was fairly safe from recognition. The remaining distance he had tramped, taking every precaution against being seen and arrested. When night had come on, he had hung about the neighbourhood of Grafton's house until the manager entered it, when he had approached and tapped upon the window.

He knew well the risk he was running—the practical certainty of his recapture. But, as he had told Grafton, there were sixty lives at stake, and he had not hesitated.

It had flashed into his mind, on reading the newspaper account at Leeds, that, if that account were correct, it would be comparatively easy to reach the entombed men from the old shaft; but at the same time, he knew that it was unlikely that this idea would occur to anyone but himself.

The pit had been deserted for so long that no one in Wrexborough had any but the vaguest idea of its extent and windings.

He, and he alone, could guide a rescue party to the exact spot at which the rock must be pierced, and he had determined on fulfilling his plain duty, though with a clear knowledge of the peril he ran in so doing.

The manager was as good as his word. In well under an hour he and a number of willing volunteers arrived at the edge of the shaft. He had said nothing to them about David until their destination was almost reached; then he turned to them and remarked quietly:

"My lads, I told you I knew someone who could guide us through the old shaft and show us just where to cut a passage into our own deep-level seam. You'll be surprised to hear who that someone is. It's the escaped convict, David Steele!"

There was a murmur of amazement as Grafton went on:

"Whether he is guilty or innocent of the murder of George Scott is a matter for the law to decide, and I'll pass no opinion upon it; but this I do know, that, having got clear away, he has risked his liberty to come back to Wrexborough to show us how those sixty poor fellows can be saved!"

"Then he's a plucky chap!" said a decided voice from the group of miners, and a murmur of "Ay, ay!" followed on the words.

"Where is he?" demanded Stevens, striding forward. "I should like to shake hands with 'im!"

"He'll be waiting for us at the pit's mouth," returned Grafton.

A Momentous Discovery.

STEVENS was not the only one who wanted to shake hands with David Steele. There had always been a strong feeling in his favour among the pitmen, and they were quick to see the heroism of his present action.

But Grafton did not allow much time for greeting. By his orders ropes were slung over the side of the shaft, and preparations made for the descent.

He and David were the first to go down; the others—some twenty in all—followed in quick succession.

"Now, then, lad," said the manager, when they were all assembled, "lead the way!"

Picking up his lamp, David started through the disused corridors, the others following in single file.

The boy had no difficulty in recollecting the way. The terrible events of the last visit to the old mine had branded every twist and turning of the galleries upon his memory.

Passing the stable in which Scott had been imprisoned, he kept straight ahead, picking his way over the loose stones.

"Hope the whole place don't come down on the top of us!" muttered Stevens, who was next to David, looking up at the roof. "It looks mighty shaky in parts, lad. Sure we're going right?"

"Quite sure!" David replied. "It was just about here when I heard the explosion that night, and—Hallo! What's that?"

There was a note of horrified surprise in his voice as he pulled up short and turned the light of his lantern upon something lying stretched upon the ground—something against which his foot had struck.

"Why," cried Stevens, as he followed the direction of the boy's trembling finger, "it's a man—a dead man, for sure!"

And as the others came crowding up along the narrow passage, he and David fell upon their knees beside the body.

It lay huddled up upon its face, with one arm outflung, the other clasping something tightly to the now lifeless breast. The rigid stiffness of the man's attitude told Stevens at once that he was dead. But death could not have taken place long before, for his face, as the miner turned it to the light, was perfectly recognisable, and a simultaneous cry of "Markham!" broke from those who were near enough to see it.

"Markham!" exclaimed Grafton. "Here, and dead—for I suppose he is dead!"

"Not a doubt about it!" returned Stevens, in hushed tones. "And what he was doing here, poor fellow, goodness only knows! Look, here's a sort of bag that he's got pressed against him. His fingers are that tight on it, I don't believe I can unfasten 'em!"

"Why, David," cried Grafton, suddenly turning to the boy, "what's the matter with you?"

For, with a low, gasping exclamation, David had reeled back against the wall. The manager imagined for an instant that he was overcome by sight of the corpse. But it was a sudden rush of hope—not of fear—that for the moment almost deprived the boy of speech.

"Mr. Grafton," he stammered at last, indicating the "sort of bag," as Mr. Stevens had called it, "which the dead man was still clutching tightly to his breast—'Mr. Grafton, that—that is George Scott's despatch-box—the one he took away from the hall—the one that has been missing since the night of the murder—the one the police believed I had stolen and hidden!"

"Good heavens," cried Grafton, a light breaking in upon him, "then Markham stole the despatch-box! So Markham must have been the man who killed George Scott! Dave, lad, you'll stand cleared before the world yet!"

David covered his face with his hands. For the moment he was utterly overcome by a rush of emotion at the thought of all that this discovery would mean to him; and not to him alone—to all his friends, and, most of all, to his mother.

"Hadn't we better go on and get to work, sir?" he asked. "You're right," Grafton returned. "We mustn't forget what we came for, and keep the poor chaps waiting in torment longer than need be. But the police must know of this at once. You go back to the foot of the shaft, Bevan, and signal to the men at the top to haul you up. Then make the best of your way to the station, and tell the inspector in charge what we've found, and he'll send some of his men to take possession of the body and the despatch-box. As quickly as you can, mind!"

"Right you are!" replied Bevan; and, turning round, he soon disappeared by the way he had come.

He lost very little time in carrying out his instructions. Once at the mouth of the shaft, he set out for the town at his best pace, and within a few minutes of his arrival there was pouring out his tale to an amazed inspector.

That personage was at first inclined to be incredulous, but it was his duty to get at the truth of the story, and accordingly, guided by Bevan, he set out for the scene of the discovery, more than half inclined to suspect a hoax. Very unwillingly, he descended into the pit, feeling himself a martyr in the cause of duty. But his tone changed when he stood beside the dead man, and saw the leather case held between his fingers.

"H'm!" he said thoughtfully. "There's brown marks on the leather. Look like bloodstains. And if this turns out to be the missing despatch-box—mind, I say 'if'—I shouldn't wonder if there wasn't a free pardon for that young David Steele."

"A free pardon!" exclaimed Bevan indignantly—"a free pardon for what he ain't never done! I like that! Why, the whole blessed judge and jury ought to go on their knees and ask him for a free pardon!"

The inspector smiled loftily at his companion's ignorance of the inscrutable ways of the law.

"Wonder where he is, that young Steele?" he said reflectively. "He's a sharp 'un, he is, getting away like that!"

Bevan chuckled silently. He had not thought it necessary to inform the official that David was only a very short distance off.

Though he did not suppose that, after what had occurred, the lad would be greatly distressed at being arrested as an escaped convict, there was no purpose to be served in handing him over to the arm of the law, so Bevan held his peace.

The Rescue Party's Peril.

LEAVING the inspector to make the necessary arrangements for the removal of the body, it is time to return to the rescue-gang hard at their work of mercy at the extremity of the old mine.

Their way was checked at last by a mass of broken rock filling up the gallery along which they had hitherto proceeded. This was the passage by which David had first entered the disused mine. Its present choked condition was the result of the charge of dynamite fired by Markham a few weeks before with the fiendish design to imprison David in the pit.

Upon this debris the rescue-gang set to work with a will with their picks, working as only men can work who know that life or death depend upon their efforts. There was not one of them who did not risk his own life by the work, for the crumbling condition of the long-neglected roof threatened at any moment to bring it about the ears of the men beneath it; and often, at the stroke of the picks, a shower of fragments would come rattling down, dislodged by the concussion. Yet there was not a man of them who did not labour on with dogged pluck, sturdily indifferent to his danger.

Nearly an hour had passed by, when suddenly one of the men held up a warning hand.

"Listen, lads!" he exclaimed. "I believe I hear a knocking! Listen!"

They held their breath to listen, and then a cheer broke out, for it was in truth a muffled sound of knocking that fell upon their ears.

"There's some of the poor fellows alive, at any rate!" said Grafton, with a sigh of relief. "Thank heavens for that!"

"Ay, and not so far off, neither!" Stevens broke in. "The knocking sounds pretty clear. 'Twon't be long afore we work our way through to 'em!"

"No; and it'll have given 'em heart like to know we're coming, for they'll have heard our picks, sure enough."

And with these reflections the men fell to work again with redoubled hope. And then, just as they thought success was certain, a new danger revealed itself.

Through the interstices of the rock, water began to trickle—at first in drops, then in an increasing stream. The men paused and eyed each other blankly.

Beneath the coating of grime that besmeared his face, Grafton had grown pale to the lips.

"Lads," he said hoarsely, "if there's any of you that feel you ought to think of your wives and children—why, I shan't blame you if you save yourselves while there's time. You all know what that water means!"

"We've thought of it already, Mr. Grafton," said Stevens roughly, "and we know as those poor chaps shut up in there has folks depending on 'em same as us!"

He turned back to the wall of rock as he spoke, and brought his pick down upon it with all his force.

In grim silence the toil was carried on—toil that might even now be useless, since it was probable that the entombed men had already succumbed to the rising flood. For several minutes there was no sound to be heard but rapid strokes of the picks and the bubbling of the water; and then the foremost workers sprang back as a mass of rock, yielding to their blows and to the pressure of water behind it, rolled forward and crashed on to the floor of the gallery.

Where it had stood showed a black, cavernous opening, through the lower part of which a torrent streamed.

Instantly the light from the miners' lamps was flashed into the opening, where, at the same moment, a drawn and haggard face showed itself. With a shout of joy, Grafton and Stevens waded and clambered forward, and, seizing the man by the shoulders, dragged him into comparative safety.

Another and another followed, as the men who had believed themselves doomed a few minutes before came crowding to the hole.

Acquitted.

IT had been pierced none too soon. The entombed miners were standing well over their waists in the water. A very little time longer, and they would inevitably have perished. By Grafton's directions, the rescuers guided and assisted them as they emerged to the foot of the shaft, where they would be out of reach of the still-flowing water.

One after the other, every one of the sixty missing men were hauled through the opening. Thanks chiefly to David's knowledge of the old shaft, not a life had been lost of the many that must have otherwise been sacrificed. Scott was the last to make his appearance.

One of the miners had already ascended to the pit's mouth to carry the good news of the rescue to the anxious crowd that had gathered around it at the rumour that the work of digging out the entombed men was proceeding from the side of the old shaft.

When the last of the rescued men had arrived at the surface it was the rescuers' turn; and another mighty cheer went up as Grafton was recognised climbing out.

Accompanying him was a slight, boyish figure, who, for the moment, passed unrecognised under a coating of grime and coal-dust. But not for long.

For, stepping up to one of the police who were keeping order among the crowd, and preventing them from approaching too near to the head of the shaft, the lad said evenly:

"I am David Steele, the escaped convict! I wish to give myself up!"

It was by the advice of Scott that David had taken this step.

"As soon as that is over you will be released, David," Scott had said. "To surrender to the police only means a few days' further imprisonment; and you will very likely be called to give evidence at the inquest, which may be an advantage to you."

Scott was right. At the inquest held a few days later on the body of the collier, David was brought from Wrexborough Gaol to give his evidence.

The first and strongest proof of Markham's guilt which had been thus discovered was a belt slung round his hips at the time of his death—a belt fitted with a leathern sheath that contained a knife. This knife, it was remarked, had evidently not been made for the sheath, and did not fit it. And it had entered someone's head to compare the latter with the weapon by which George Scott had met his death, which had afterwards been discovered in the possession of David Steele.

The result was the discovery that the one was obviously made for the other, and the practical certainty, therefore, that the knife with which the crime had been committed had been the property of Markham.

Nor did this fact stand alone. Another was brought to light by no less a personage than Micky Jones, who, attired in the new suit of clothes which Scott had given him, presented himself at the police-station on the day preceding the inquest, with an air of supreme importance. Demanding to see the inspector in charge, he produced, for that functionary's benefit, a damp and ragged fragment of discoloured cloth.

"Well, what's that for?" demanded the official, amused by the small boy's gravity.

"Piece o' cloth," said Micky. "I've bin making investigations at the scene o' the murder, and I've found it on a nail by the door o' the old farm'ouse."

"Indeed!" remarked the inspector politely. "And what am I to do with it?"

"See if Markham's got a tear in 'is coat," responded Micky promptly.

The inspector started.

"By Jove," he muttered, "there is a tear in the man's coat!"

And, telling the youthful detective to wait, he hastily left the office.

Great was Micky's triumph at the discovery he had made. For the worn and tattered patch was found to fit exactly into the tear on the dead man's garment; and here was proof positive that Markham had at least visited the spot where the murder was committed.

The coroner's court was crowded next day, for it was known through the town that David Steele's guilt or innocence hung upon the finding of the jury. Scott was there to nod cheerily to David as he was escorted into the room by a couple of warders. Captain Mowbray was present, delighted at the turn events had taken, and also Mrs. Steele, pale and trembling, and as yet scarcely daring to hope.

Primarily, of course, the court was concerned with the manner in which the deceased miner had met his death. The medical evidence proved that he had died from purely natural causes, and the theory generally accepted was that in one of his attacks of madness Markham had found his way back to the old mine by the entrance at the Slide, and had wandered about in it till death overtook him.

Another idea was that he had concealed the despatch-box there, and was about to fetch it away when he was seized by the illness to which he succumbed.

Up to the time of the inquest all the efforts of the police to discover what had become of him during the interval between his disappearance from Wrexborough and his death were unavailing. But he was afterwards believed to have been identified with a man who obtained work at a town a little distance off, and, though appearing perfectly sane for some time, suddenly left his situation after an outbreak of violence that seemed to point to madness.

This fact, however—if fact it was—only came to light some time later, and had no bearing on the tissue of evidence which indicated the dead man as the murderer of George Scott, and, therefore, David Steele's innocence of that crime. Markham's possession of the box, which must have been taken from Scott on the night of his death, the correspondence between the fatal weapon and his leather sheath, and last, but not least, Micky's discovery of the piece of cloth from his coat, all pointed to his guilt, and bore out the truth of David's story.

Whether Markham had simply struck Scott down in a fit of furious mania—like that in which he had flung David over the edge of the tunnel—and was, therefore, not responsible for his action; or whether, in a lucid interval, he had met and quarrelled with his accomplice over the possession of the booty, and deliberately robbed and done him to death, could never now be known.

But the impression made upon all present by the hearing of the evidence at the inquest was that there could be no doubt that the result of the Home Secretary's attention being called to the case would be a free pardon for David Steele. So convinced were the prison authorities of this that, instead of despatching the young convict for the second time to Portland, he was detained at Wrexborough Gaol, pending instruc-

tions from the Home Office, and they allowed him all the privileges of which prison discipline admitted.

Nor was he long detained there. The governor himself was the first to bring the anxiously expected news that the prison doors were to be opened to him, and that he was free to go forth into the world again without a stain upon his name.

Immediately on receipt of the expected news the governor had sent a messenger to Scott, and ten minutes after the man had reached him the mine-owner drove up to the doors of the gaol.

"I've come to take you to your mother, David," he said. But it was not behind the station cabby's horse that David left the precincts of the gaol. He and Scott were seated in the cab, it is true; but in place of the horse a score of stalwart pitmen had harnessed themselves to the shafts. It was perhaps as well that they had done so, for the thunderous blare of "See, the Conquering Hero Comes," performed by the Wrexborough brass band as it marched ahead of the cab through the shouting throng, might have been too much for a high-spirited horse.

Micky Jones, it need hardly be said, was not left out of the fun.

As for David himself, his arm was nearly wrung out of its socket by the time the cab drew up at the door of Mrs. Nichols' house, where his mother stood on the step, waiting to clasp him in her arms.

If the most eventful part of David Steele's career at Wrexborough was over, the most prosperous was yet to begin. It is owing to the mine-owner's help and advice, as well as his own hard work, that David is at present a well-known mining engineer, who has made a name for himself in the North Country.

He has fulfilled the boyish desire with which he started out, a good many years ago now, on his lonely and almost penniless march to Wrexborough.

Micky Jones, the former barge-boy, is now a smart grocer's assistant in Wrexborough. He is still small of stature, but he cherishes the fond belief that he has not yet done growing, and will develop some day into a fine specimen of manhood.

THE END.

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