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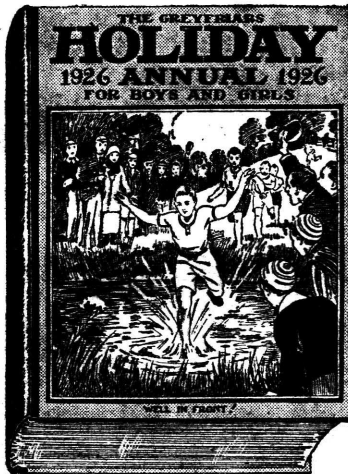
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THIS week's mail contains such an extraordinary lot of questions that I really don't know how to set them out with their respective answers. Some queries I must place on the unanswerable shelf. For instance: "How much does Dr. Holmes eat at dinner?" "How old is Mrs. Holmes?" Now, I ask you, how often can we find out the real age of a member of the fair sex? It's one of those questions best left alone. And, after all, it doesn't matter. Mrs. Holmes must be a very likeable and understanding—I was just going to write "old lady," so I'd better ring off. Here's another batch of unanswerables: "How many bricks were used in the building of St. Jim's?" Ugh! Gives me a headache to look at that query for two minutes, let alone setting out to count the bricks. "Is Wally D'Arcy's bicycle a Raleigh, a Mead, or a—?" Phew! Wait a moment, this is a beauty. "Why doesn't Taggles qualify for the old age pension?" I rather believe some of my chums are indulging in a little leg pull at my expense. Ah, well, I've done the same myself, so we'll leave it at that.

MORE WILDRAKE!

Hurrah! I can answer this question! It comes from a loyal Gemite in the Midlands. He wants more stories of Wildrake. Well, my chum, next week's gem of a school yarn features Kit Wildrake. How's that?

WIRELESS!

Several Gemites have written and asked me if I couldn't arrange a weekly chat to be broadcast from the B.B.C. offices. Well, we are moving at a rapid pace these times, so a weekly chinwag from your Editor may not be so far off as we might imagine. But wait—you never know but that my bark of a voice might upset the "good spots" on your crystals, then you'd all be sorry. Besides, I'm a bashful sort of fellow. Why, every time I look in a mirror I blush. That's because a particularly active mosquito thought I wasn't puffed up enough!

Next Wednesday's Programme.

"KIT WILDRAKE ON THE TRAIL!"
A topping St. Jim's story, by Martin Clifford.

"THE CRIMSON CLAW!"
Another splendid instalment of this amazing story, by Lester Bidston.

"VISITORS!"
A humorous St. Jim's Supplement on the above subject, by Tom Merry & Co.

"JINGLES!"
A stunning poem, featuring Miss Marie Rivers, by our special Rhymester.

Cheerio, chums!

Your Editor.

WHEN THE WELL RUNS DRY! Baggy Trimble's friendship for Troope, the new boy at St. Jim's, lasts exactly as long as Troope's money does. As the loans fall off so cools Baggy's friendship!

TOO MUCH TRIMBLE!



CHAPTER 1. The Artful Dodger!

TOM MERRY stared. Manners and Lowther stared also. The Terrible Three of the Shell were surprised. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the chums of the Shell were in their study—No. 10—discussing what they were going to do with the afternoon.

Suddenly the door opened, without a knock. Sidney Troope of the Fourth Form stepped in quickly, and closed the door after him without a sound. He stood at the door, his hand on the knob, as if listening for a sound from the passage outside.

Evidently, he had not even observed that the owners of the study were on the premises at all.

Troope of the Fourth was a new fellow at St. Jim's, having arrived at the beginning of the term, and Tom Merry & Co. had seen something of him, and rather liked what they had seen. Still, they were naturally not "pally" with a fellow who was new to the school, and not in their own Form. Really, it was extraordinary for Sidney Troope to "butt" into their study in this unceremonious way, as if the room belonged to him, without even tapping at the door.

So it was no wonder that the Terrible Three stared blankly at the intruder.

Troope had his back to them. He had not glanced across the study at all. He was listening, apparently, for a footstep outside, his face to the door he had carefully closed.

"Well, my hat!"

Monty Lowther uttered that ejaculation.

It startled Troope.

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

And he swung round towards the three, with a red face.

"Oh!" he repeated. "I—I didn't see you chaps!"

"What's the name of this game, Troope?" asked Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"I—you see—" Troope stammered.

"Don't you know that Fourth Form fags aren't allowed to butt into Middle School studies in this way, kid?" demanded Manners severely.

"You see, I—"

"All serene, no harm done," said Manners, laughing.

"What's the row? Is there a prefect after you with a big stick?"

"Nunno!"

"Some of the fags ragging you?" asked Tom.

"N-no!"

Troope listened at the closed door again. Then he turned once more to the Shell fellows.

"Sorry!" he said. "I thought there was nobody about. Most of the fellows are out of their studies on a half-holiday. I suppose I oughtn't to have butted into your study, but I supposed there was nobody here. Sorry!"

"No harm done, old scout," said Tom. "If you're dodging somebody, stay as long as you like."

"Thanks!" said Troope.

There were footsteps in the passage.

A Magnificent, New Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's, featuring Troope, the new boy, and his frantic efforts to sever the bonds of friendship imposed upon him by Baggy Trimble.

By Martin Clifford.

They passed along, and passed the door of No. 10, and Troope seemed relieved to hear them pass by.

"That's Trimble's hefty tread!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Trimble's the only chap in the house with a tread like an elephant. Is Trimble after you, Troope?"

"I think he's looking for me," confessed Troope.

"And you're dodging him?"

"Well, something like that."

"Why not punch his nose instead?" asked Manners.

"Hem!"

"Kick him!" suggested Lowther. "Kicking does Baggy Trimble good."

Sidney Troope laughed rather ruefully.

"Well, I can't very well kick him," he said. "But—but I don't want to have him on my hands for the first half-holiday of the term, and that's a fact. Only I'd rather not tell him so."

The Terrible Three grinned.

"You're too soft for St. Jim's, old scout," said Monty Lowther.

"You see, I'm under an obligation to Trimble," said Troope. "I don't want to be ungrateful. But—"

"But Baggy is too much of a good thing!" chuckled Lowther. "I've noticed how jolly chummy he is with you, Troope. It's your own fault."

"How's that?" asked Troope.

"You've got pots of money!" grinned Monty. "It's the penalty of wealth."

Troope laughed.

"Still, the fact is, I'm under an obligation to him," he said. "Trimble did a big thing for me the day I came. I dare say you fellows have forgotten. But, of course, I can't forget it."

"I haven't forgotten," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Somebody tried to kidnap you on the first day of the term, and Trimble gave the alarm, and you got away from the man."

"That's it," said Troope. "I don't know who the man was, or what he wanted; but there it is. He had me chloroformed, and was getting away with me when Trimble gave the alarm. Goodness knows what would have happened if Baggy hadn't been on the scene. After that, I can't very well turn the chap down. But—"

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

They knew all about Troope, and the mysterious attempt that had been made by an unknown racing man to kidnap him on the way to school on the opening day of the term.

The affair had caused rather a sensation, and the police were still looking for the unknown kidnapper—without success, so far.

Undoubtedly Baggy Trimble of the Fourth had come in unusually useful on that occasion.

Judging by Baggy's descriptions of the episode, it might have been supposed that the fat Baggy had rushed to the rescue of the kidnapped junior, and torn him from the kidnapper's grasp at the risk of his life.

As a matter of actual fact, Trimble had done nothing but give the alarm, and other hands had saved Troope from his unknown enemy.

Still, there it was. Trimble had been the cause of the rescue. And the fat Baggy was making the most of it. Troope was known to be a rich fellow, and was obviously

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very good-natured and forbearing in disposition. He was, in fact, the very fellow Baggy Trimble wanted to meet! So, in the role of rescuer, Baggy Trimble had chummed up with the new junior, calmly disregarding the disinclination of his new chum.

How much money Baggy had borrowed from Troope in the course of a few days, was a question; but everybody in the Fourth and Shell knew that it was a considerable amount. That, however, Troope did not mind very much. He had plenty of money. It was Baggy's persistent friendship that worried him.

He did not want to be ungrateful. He recognised fully the service Baggy had done him. But he did not want the company of the fat and fatuous Baggy; he did not want a fat arm pushed through his; he did not want Trimble to address him as "old chap," and "old scout." In fact, he yearned to be relieved of the fascinating society and overwhelming friendliness of the fat Fourth-Former.

But Baggy was not to be denied.

He was Troope's chum, and Troope's wishes in the matter did not count. And, in the circumstances, Troope felt a natural delicacy about expressing his wishes too frankly. He could not forget that he owed much to Baggy.

Hence, obviously, his hurried dodging into Tom Merry's study that sunny afternoon.

Troope had a "Holiday Annual" under his arm, and was apparently going to enjoy his half-holiday perusing that entrancing volume under a shady tree. Instead of which, if Baggy ran him down, he would have to tolerate the fat company of Trimble, and listen to Baggy's talk about Baggy. Baggy's talk was seldom on any subject but Baggy, and it was a most uninteresting subject to any other fellow.

Footsteps came back along the Shell passage.

Troope listened with painful attention.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther watched him, grinning. They wondered whether Baggy would run him down, and what he would do if Baggy did run him down.

Troope had shown much patience in dealing with Baggy—more patience than any other fellow at St. Jim's would have displayed. But it was probable that his patience was wearing thin.

The footsteps stopped.

The door opened.

Troope, making a sign to the Terrible Three to keep silence, backed against the wall, so that the door, in opening, concealed him from sight.

Baggy Trimble's ample form almost filled the doorway, as he blinked into the study and met the grinning glances of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 2.

Parted Pals!

"SEEN my pal Troope?"

Baggy asked that question, and blinked inquiringly at the chums of the Shell. He blinked also round the study. But the open door hid Troope from his sight, and it did not occur to Trimble that the new junior was behind the door. Troope scarcely breathed.

"Your pal Troope?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes. I'm looking for him."

"Look a little farther!" suggested the captain of the Shell. "Shut the door after you."

"The fact is, he came along this passage," said Trimble, with a puzzled look. "We've arranged to go out for a walk this afternoon, but he seems to have forgotten."

"What a memory!" said Lowther. "Extraordinary to forget a treat like that!"

"Yes, isn't it?" said Baggy fatuously. "He can't have made a mistake about it; I told him plainly I should wait for him after dinner. But when I saw him on the stairs and called to him he walked the other way, just as if he'd quite forgotten all about it, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, have you seen him?" demanded Baggy. "I'm asking at all the studies along the passage."

"Seen him?" said Monty Lowther reflectively. "Yes, I've seen him."

"Where?" asked Baggy eagerly.

"At the Fourth Form table, at dinner."

"You silly ass!" howled Baggy. "I mean after that. It isn't ten minutes since I saw him on the stairs, and he seems to have disappeared. I've looked in all the other studies."

"Surprising how fellows do disappear when you want them," remarked Lowther. "Would you mind disappearing yourself, Trimble?"

"You see, old Troope is looking forward to a walk with me to-day," said Trimble. "We're no end chummy, you know. He's grateful for what I did for him the first day of

term. Not that I'm a fellow to pile it on about that, of course."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Still, the fact remains that I rescued him at the risk of my life," said Trimble.

"The fact? Great Scott!"

"You fellows would hardly have done what I did!" remarked Trimble.

"Hardly!" agreed Tom Merry.

"It was nothing to me. Brave as a lion, you know," said Trimble.

"Brave as a rabbit, you mean?" asked Lowther.

"No. I don't!" roared Trimble. "Anyhow, I can't see you chaps doing what I did when that kidnapper merchant had hold of Troope."

"Agreed!" said Manners. "Let's see, you hid under a seat, if I've got it right, and gave the alarm as soon as there was somebody else on hand to take the risk—if any! Quite your style."

"Yah!"

"Shut the door after you, fatty," said Lowther.

"Go and eat coke!" growled Trimble.

Crash!

It was distinctly unfortunate. Baggy Trimble was about to retire from Study No. 10, when the "Holiday Annual" slipped from under Troope's arm behind the door and crashed on the floor.

Trimble jumped.

"My hat! What——"

Then he grinned and jerked the door away from the wall. Sidney Troope, with a very red face, was disclosed to view.

"Sidney, old chap!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Troope.

"Japing your old pal!" grinned Trimble. "He, he, he! I've been looking for you everywhere, Troopey. Come on!"

Trimble picked up the "Holiday Annual" and tucked it under his fat arm.

"We'll read this together, old bean," he said. "What?"

"Eh? Oh, yes!"

"I'll carry it for you, old man. Come on!"

Sidney Troope, with a rather unhappy expression on his good-looking, good-natured face, moved to the door.

"Troope, old man!" said Lowther.

Troope looked back.

"Kick him, old bean—kick him!" said Monty Lowther.

"Take my tip! You'll come to it sooner or later; and sooner will save you a lot of trouble. Kick him—and kick him hard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Troope grinned and shook his head and followed Baggy Trimble from Study No. 10. The Terrible Three resumed their interrupted discussion of what was to be done with the half-holiday—a much more important matter than the affairs of Trimble and Troope. Sidney Troope walked down the Shell passage with Baggy Trimble, and at the stairs he paused, and Baggy's fat arm was pushed through his, as if Baggy guessed that he was thinking of escape.

"Come on, old fellow!"

"I—I want to speak to D'Arcy!" muttered Troope, catching sight of the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form.

"Right-ho!" assented Trimble. "Let's!"

He wheeled round towards Arthur Augustus, still keeping his arm through Troope's.

"Oh, never mind!" said Troope, discouraged.

The two juniors went down the staircase together. On the lower landing they came on Blake and Herries and Digby of the Fourth, and the three juniors grinned at the sight of them. Troope coloured and hurried on with Baggy. He was well aware that most of the School House fellows looked on him as rather "soft" to be bagged in this way by Baggy Trimble, and yet he could not quite see what else he could do.

It was possible that, as Monty Lowther warned him, he would arrive at the pitch of kicking Trimble, and thus getting rid of him and his effusive friendship together. But he was far from having reached that pitch yet.

Undoubtedly it was a fact that he owed his liberty to Trimble's intervention on the first day of the term—his life itself, for all he knew to the contrary, for it was impossible to guess with what object the unknown racing man had kidnapped him.

That fact was not to be overcome; it stood between Trimble and the kicking he certainly deserved. Possibly Troope erred on the side of long-suffering good-nature, but that was a fault on the right side. Fellows like Mellish, or Racke, or Crooke, would have turned down anybody without ruth after receiving any number of obligations. But Sidney Troope was not that kind of fellow.

He was beginning to feel that he really could not stand Trimble, but he felt also that so long as he could stand him it was up to him to do so.



Crash! Trimble jumped. "My hat! What——" Then he grinned, and jerked the door back. Sidney Troope, with a very red face, was disclosed to view. "Sidney, old chap!" "Oh!" ejaculated Troope. "Japing your old pal," grinned Trimble. "He, he, he! I've been looking for you everywhere, Troopey. Come on!" (See page 4.)

So he walked out of the House with Baggy, a captive to the fat junior's bow and spear, as it were.

Levison, Clive, and Cardew of the Fourth were lounging on the House steps, and they grinned at the sight of the two, as Blake & Co. had done.

As a matter of fact, Troope, rather slim and graceful, and a good deal taller than Baggy, and the fat Baggy almost as broad as he was long, made rather a remarkable pair walking arm-in-arm.

Baggy seemed unconscious to it, but Troope was quite conscious of it, and he did not like it; yet he could not make up his mind to shake off Baggy's podgy arm. But he was growing more and more restive.

"This way, old bean!" said Baggy affectionately. And he piloted Troope towards the gates. "We'll have a stroll through the wood—what?"

"Yes," murmured Troope dispiritedly.

"And drop in at Mrs. Murphy's, in Rylcombe, for some cake and ginger-pop——"

"Ye-e-es."

"And then squat under a tree and read your 'Holiday Annual,' old fellow."

"Mmmmmmm."

"We'll stick together all the afternoon, old chap."

"Oh!"

"Right up to call-over!" said Trimble. "What?"

"Um!"

"Damon and Pythias over again—what?" said the fatuous Baggy, with an affectionate blink at his chum.

"Oh! Ah! Yes."

"I'll tell you some of the doings we had at Trimble Hall in the vac, you know," said Baggy. "Great times, Troopey old man! I wish I'd known you then, and I'd have asked you. You must come home with me next vac; I sha'n't take no for an answer. The Prime Minister has promised to spend Christmas at Trimble Hall——"

"Eh?"

"And two of the princes——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And there will be an ambassador or two and a few of the nobility—in fact, a fairly decent lot!" said Trimble airily.

Troope looked more restive than ever as Baggy piloted him through the gateway and along Rylcombe Lane. This was a fair sample of Baggy's light and genial conversation—

entertaining enough to Baggy, but liable to pall on the listener.

They turned into a short cut through Rylcombe Wood under thick, old trees showing the brown of autumn.

"I'll carry the book if you like," murmured Troope. Possibly some vague thought was in his mind of dodging Baggy in the underwoods and getting away to a quiet spot with his "Holiday Annual." And possibly Baggy Trimble guessed as much, for he shook his head. Baggy was not generally very obliging, but he was willing to carry the book—in fact, determined to do so.

"That's all right, old fellow—I'll carry it," he said.

"Isn't it a bit heavy, Trimble?"

"Not at all."

Troope gave it up.

They walked on through the woodland path, Baggy rattling on cheerily. His fund of conversation was inexhaustible, and as it was all about himself he never tired of it.

"Look here," said Troope suddenly, "I'll tell you what, Trimble! I'll race you to the village."

"My dear chap, it's too warm this afternoon for racing—I say, hold on, Troopey!" roared Baggy Trimble, as Troope, without waiting for his answer, shot ahead at a rapid run.

Troope seemed deaf.

"Come on!" he shouted.

"I say—stop——"

Troope raced on. A bend of the path hid him from Baggy Trimble's sight in a few seconds.

Baggy broke into a run; but he stopped in a minute or two, breathing stertorously. Baggy was not in a condition for a foot-race.

"Oh dear!" gasped Baggy. "Troope! I say, Troope! Troopey! Sidney, old man! Troope! TROOPE!"

But answer there came none.

If Sidney Troope was still within hearing he was getting out of hearing as fast as his active legs would carry him. And Baggy Trimble had a well-grounded suspicion that if he kept on to the village he would miss Troope there—he was sure to miss him there!

Baggy stopped, with feelings almost too deep for words. Troope was gone, leaving his "Holiday Annual" in Baggy's fat hands, doubtless considering his escape cheap at that price. Baggy sniffed and grunted and threw himself down to rest under a tree. After all, he had the "Holiday

Annual"—he would have bought a copy of that valuable publication himself, only he did not like spending his own money on it. There was not going to be any ginger-pop and cakes—at Troope's expense—at the village tuckshop, that was clear now. Still, Baggy had bagged something for nothing.

He propped his podgy back against a tree, and propped the volume open on his fat knees, and began to read the "Holiday Annual"—what time Sidney Troope, feeling like Sindbad the Sailor when he had shifted the Old-Man-of-the-Sea from his shoulders, strolled cheerily in the country lanes far away.

CHAPTER 3. Mistaken Identity!

SNORE!
Baggy Trimble's head leaned back against the tree-trunk, and the "Holiday Annual" slid from his knees into the grass.

In the deep, solitary wood, with no sound save the twittering of birds in the thick, leafy branches, Baggy Trimble dozed over his volume, and at last fell asleep.

He did not hear a footstep, as a man came along the scarcely-marked grassy path under the trees.

Trimble had settled down some yards from the path, and in the underwood and bracken he was hardly likely to be observed by any chance passer-by. But the man who came loafing along the path heard the deep, unmusical snore of the fat Fourth-Former of St. Jim's, and glanced towards him.

The man halted, turned towards Trimble, and stood staring at him.

His glance was fixed on Trimble's cap, which bore the St. Jim's colours, and showed him to be a member of the old school.

The man regarded him intently.

He was not a pleasant-looking man; his face was red and pimply, and he had a squint in his left eye, and his nose was a little out of the straight, the result of some energetic fistical encounter. He looked like what he doubtless was—one of the shady characters who hang about races, picking up a living by any means but work.

"That's a feller from the blooming school, anyhow," murmured the man, as he squinted at Trimble. "If it's the cove we want I'm in luck!"

He trampled through the bracken towards the sleeping junior.

The "Holiday Annual" lay in the grass at Trimble's feet, and it had fallen open at the title-page.

On the title-page were printed the words:

"This book belongs to—"

A space followed for the name of the book's owner to be written in. In that space a name was written, in a large schoolboy hand:

"Sidney Troope."

The sporting man's eyes glittered.

"What blinking luck! That's the bird!" he murmured. "This 'ere will be good noos for Isaacs, and a fiver for me. You're in luck, you are, Squinty!"

He stooped and shook Trimble by the shoulder.

Baggy's eyes opened.

He blinked at the shabby, disreputable-looking man bending over him.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

"Jump up, covey!" grinned the squinting gentleman.

"Eh? What do you want?" demanded Trimble, a little alarmed.

"I want you, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"Jest you jump up," said the squinting man cheerily.

"I want you to take a little walk with me through this here wood. I'm going to give you a drive in a motor-car, I am, out of pure kindness of 'eart. Catch on?"

"I'm jolly well not going with you," said the alarmed Baggy. "Look here, you jolly well sheer off. I haven't any money about me—not a brown! You let a fellow alone."

The squinting man seized him by the shoulder and jerked him to his feet.

"Going to argue about it—what?" he asked, with a very ugly, bullying look which made Baggy Trimble quake.

"Eh? Oh, no!" gasped Trimble.

The fat junior, in dire alarm, blinked up and down the grassy path. It was a lonely path, but on a half-holiday it was a good deal used by St. Jim's fellows going down to the village. Baggy Trimble would have given anything just then to see a cheery crowd of St. Jim's chaps coming along. But there was no one in sight.

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The squinting man slipped an arm through Baggy's and took a grip on him that felt like the grip of a vice.

"This 'ere way!" he said.

"I—I say—"

"You shut up, sir!" said the squinting man. "You ain't going to be 'urt, take my word for that. But you mark this—you get away once, but you ain't getting away again. See? I've got a life-preserver in my pocket, and if you try to dodge me I'm sorry for you! Why, I'd crack your 'ead for you jest as soon as look at you; and it wouldn't be the first, neither!"

Baggy, looking at the scowling ruffian, could quite believe that.

"But—but I say, what—what do you want with me?" he gasped. "I tell you I haven't any money."

"Shut up!"

With that iron grip on the fat junior's arm, the squinting man led him away through the wood, leaving the "Holiday Annual" lying in the grass.

Trimble walked, with his fat knees knocking together.

He was frightened almost out of his fat wits.

It did not even occur to him that the man had taken him for somebody else; he was not even aware that Troope's name was written in the "Holiday Annual," and, of course, did not know that the squinting man had seen it there. For the moment he did not connect this squinting ruffian in his mind with the racing man who had attempted to kidnap Troope, of the Fourth, on the first day of the term. Had it been the same man Baggy would have known him at once—he had not forgotten the hard face of the kidnapper. But the squinting ruffian was a stranger to him.

Baggy Trimble stumbled on beside the ruffian, quaking.

Certainly, had the prisoner been Sidney Troope, the squinting man would not have led him away so easily.

But Trimble did not even think of resistance.

He thought of shouting for help, but a single glance at the red, pimply face of his captor drove that thought from his mind.

For nearly a mile the squinting man led him through the wood, carefully avoiding the footpaths, till they came out at last in a dusty lane.

A closed car stood in the lane, half hidden from sight by trees, with a man lounging near it, smoking a pipe. The man was dressed like a chauffeur, and was evidently the driver of the car. He turned quickly at the sound of footsteps and gave Squinty a grin and a nod.

"Nailed him, Squinty?"

"What-o!"

"We're in luck."

"Jest what I was thinking, Tadger. It's a fiver each for us," said Squinty cheerily. "Get her going."

"Sure you've got the right party?" asked Tadger, fixing his eyes on Baggy Trimble with a searching stare.

"Course I am!" said Squinty irritably.

"I wouldn't have known this cove from Jim Isaacs' description," said Tadger, still eyeing Baggy. "Isaacs never said anything about him being as fat as a barrel."

"All the same, it's our bird; I see his name in black and white," answered Squinty. "Get her going, we don't want to hang about now we've got the covey."

"Right you are!"

Tadger started up the engine, while Squinty opened the door of the car and began to bundle Baggy Trimble into it.

"I—I say—" gasped Trimble.

"Cheese it!"

"Where are you going to take me?" gasped Trimble. "I says, I've got to back to school for call over."

Squinty chuckled.

"They'll get noos of you at the school, never fear," he answered. "You 'op in! Now, then, 'op it!"

"But—"

"Op it, I keep on telling you!" snarled Squinty.

Trimble quaked, and "hopped" it. Squinty followed him into the car and closed the door.

"Buck up, Tadger!"

"Jest going!"

Tadger took his seat, and the car moved. Baggy Trimble squeezed into a corner as far as possible from Squinty, who had taken a life-preserver from his pocket, and held it resting across his shabby knees.

"Sit up!" said Squinty.

Trimble sat up, quaking.

"You want a cosh on the napper with this 'ere?" asked Squinty.

"Ow! No!" gasped Baggy Trimble.

"Then you mind your eye! You ain't going to be 'urt, but you've got to go and see a friend of mine—see? You call out, or even wave your 'and from the car, or look as if you wasn't enjoying this 'ere joy ride, and you get such a crack on the napper that you won't remember what hit you. See?"



"Jest you jump up," said the squinting man cheerily. "I want you to take a little walk with me, through this here wood. I'm going to give you a drive in a motor-car, I am, out of pure kindness of 'eart!" "I'm jolly well not going with you!" said the alarmed Baggy. "You let a fellow alone!" The squinting man seized him by the shoulder, and jerked him to his feet. "Going to argue about it, what?" he asked, with an ugly, bullying look. (See page 6.)

"Oh dear!"
And the car glided away along the shady, leafy lane, heading for the Wayland high road, and what ultimate destination Baggy Trimble could not even guess.

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprise for Tom Merry & Co!

"DAMON, minus Pythias," grinned Monty Lowther. Tom Merry and Manners chuckled. The Terrible Three were strolling along the Wayland Road, with their back to the market town.

Monty Lowther had been given the casting vote in the discussion as to what was to be done with the afternoon, and Monty had voted for Wayland Picture Palace, Monty's taste being rather in the direction of films.

A walk to the market town through the green woods was pleasant enough, so Tom Merry and Manners were contented. But the new picture at Wayland had been a disappointment. It was an American film reeking with crooks, and gunmen, and convicts, and detectives, and shooting affrays, and sand-bagging and motor smashes, and Tom and Manners were soon yawning painfully—and even Monty was fed-up before the whole reel of rubbish had reeled off. So the Terrible Three left early, and found pleasant autumn sunshine outside, and they walked cheerily along the high road, heading for a lane that ran between deep woods in the direction of St. Jim's. And there, sitting on a stile at the opening of the lane, they spotted Sidney Troope, the new fellow in the Fourth Form.

He was alone, so it was clear that he had somehow shaken off his effusive and affectionate pal Trimble. It was Damon without Pythias, as Monty Lowther expressed it.

Troope was reading—not the "Holiday Annual," which had been left in Baggy's hands. Doubtless he missed his favourite book, but it was worth while missing that, or anything else, so long as he missed Baggy Trimble, too.

"Hallo, old scout!" sang out Tom Merry, as the chums of the Shell turned into the lane. "Lost something?"

Troope looked up from his book.

He grinned.

"Yes; I've lost Trimble," he answered. "I hope you haven't found him?"

"No such bad luck," said the captain of the Shell, laughing. "Let's rest here a bit, you chaps. Room for three little ones, Troope?"

"Lots," said the new junior, and he shifted along the stile to make room for the three Shell fellows.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther sat in a cheery row. Motor-cars buzzed along the Wayland high road with an almost incessant hum and buzz; but the leafy lane that turned from the road was quite deserted. It was seldom traversed save by a farmer's cart, or a shepherd with a flock of sheep.

"You're a good way from the school here, Troope," Manners remarked.

"Eh? No farther than you fellows," said the Fourth-Former. "This isn't out of bounds on a half-holiday, is it?"

"No. But after what happened to you the day you came, isn't it rather risky for you to trot so far on your own?"

"Oh, that!" said Troope, carelessly. "I'd almost forgotten that. Where's the risk?"

"Well, that johnny who tried to kidnap you last week might try it on again," said Manners.

Troope laughed.

"He might," he agreed. "Blessed if I know what he wanted me for; but as he tried once, he might try again. But I'm not letting it worry me."

"All the same, I shouldn't get too far from the school alone, until the police have nailed that fellow," said Tom Merry, rather gravely. "Goodness knows what the man wanted to kidnap you for; but it's clear that he did, and he might be hanging about St. Jim's looking for another chance."

"I suppose so," assented Troope. "I'm jolly well not going to keep within gates, though, because of that. Besides, the man would hardly dare to show up near the school; both Trimble and I know him by sight, and, if he was seen, he would be run down."

"Still, there's a risk," said the captain of the Shell, "especially in lonely places like this. You'd better walk back to St. Jim's with us."

"Pleased to!" smiled Troope. "Not because of the risk, but you fellows are jolly good company."

"A discerning young fellow, this new kid," said Monty Lowther. And the Shell fellows laughed.

"Hallo, there's a giddy motorist looking for punctures!" remarked Lowther, a few minutes later.

A closed car came plugging down the lane towards the high road.

The juniors glanced at it.

The lane was cut up into deep ruts by the heavy wheels of farm carts that had ploughed up the mud in rainy weather. In the sunshine of the past few days it had dried hard. It was not a road that any motorist would have chosen if he could have helped it, and Tom Merry & Co., who knew the lane-well, had never seen a car grinding through it before.

"My hat!" ejaculated Troope suddenly.

He stared at the car as it came abreast of the stile on which the four St. Jim's fellows sat in a row.

"What—"

"Trimble!" exclaimed Troope.

"By Jove! So it is!"

Through the side window of the car the juniors had a view of a well-known podgy profile.

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth was sitting there, by the side of a man with a pimply face and a squint.

Trimble's glance had turned on the juniors, and now they saw his full face, and they started at its expression.

If ever terror and dismay were depicted in a human countenance, they were depicted in Baggy Trimble's fat face at that moment.

"Help!"

That sudden yell broke involuntarily from Baggy Trimble at the sight of the St. Jim's fellows. He forgot the threatening glare of the man at his side for a second.

Tom Merry jumped from the stile.

"What on earth—"

The squinting man grasped the fat junior at his side in a savage grip, that made Trimble collapse on the seat with a howl of fear.

Tom sprang towards the car.

But he had no chance—it was past him, and turning into the high road almost in a twinkling.

"Stop!" roared Tom Merry.

That something was wrong was clear enough, amazing as it was. Baggy Trimble was evidently held by force in the car; his wild yell for help had been proof enough of that.

Tom Merry broke into a desperate rush after the car.

Manners and Lowther and Troope followed him fast, all of them in a state of astonishment and alarm.

The car turned towards Wayland, and rushed on, dropping the juniors hopelessly behind.

Tom Merry halted, panting.

A bend of the road hid the rushing car from sight. The captain of the Shell turned to his companions.

"It was Trimble, right enough, and he shouted for help!" he exclaimed. "What on earth does it mean?"

"Goodness knows!" said Manners blankly.

"What on earth could anybody want Trimble for?" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Beats me hollow!"

"Looks like kidnapping, but why the thump should anybody kidnap Trimble?" said Tom. "But he shouted for help, and you saw that fellow collar him and stop him. I say, there's something jolly wrong here!"

"It's rotten!" muttered Troope. "I—I shook him off this afternoon, and if I hadn't—" He broke off.

"Well, it's not your fault," said Tom. "We'd better get along to the school as fast as we can, and tell Railton. He will know what to do."

"Let's!" said Lowther.

"I suppose that's the only thing we can do," said Manners. "Dash it all, it's getting jolly thick. First somebody tried to nab Troope last week, and now it's Trimble. Might be the same gang."

"Come on!" said Tom.

And the juniors started for the school at a run.

They kept steadily on the trot all the way, but it was a good distance to St. Jim's, and it was an hour later when they arrived, flushed and breathless, at the gates.

"Bai Jove, you fellows seem to be in wathah a hurwy!" Arthur Augustus was sauntering elegantly in at the gateway when the breathless four arrived, and he turned his celebrated eyeglass upon them inquiringly. "Anythin' up, deah boys?"

"Lots! Trimble's been kidnapped!" said Tom breathlessly.

"Wats!"

"Wats?"

"Wats, deah boy! Nobody would kidnap Twimble," said Arthur Augustus. "No fellow in his pwopah senses would inflict Twimble's company upon himself if he could possibly help it."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

The juniors trotted on breathlessly to the School House, leaving Arthur Augustus shaking his noble head. A few minutes more, and they were in Mr. Railton's study, telling their story to an astonished Housemaster.

"The Gem Library—No. 920."

CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise for Mr. Isaacs!

BAGGY TRIMBLE groaned dismally. The car was speeding along the high road, eating up the miles. Baggy's fat arm was in the grip of the squinting man, who occasionally gave it a savage twist.

Many a car passed them on the road, but Baggy did not venture to shout for help again, or even to blink out of the window. The iron grip on his arm warned him that he had better not.

"You give another yell, and see what will 'appen to you!" said the squinting man, between his discoloured teeth, with a glare at the fat Baggy. And Trimble did not dream of giving another yell.

He groaned, but he groaned under his breath. That glimpse of Tom Merry & Co. had roused his hopes for a moment, but only for a moment. Now St. Jim's, and all St. Jim's fellows, were left far behind.

The car had turned off the road before reaching Wayland town, and was now heading southward by a road over the downs. What its destination was Trimble could not even guess. But he knew that miles were flying under the racing wheels, taking him farther and farther from St. Jim's, and he was fairly palpitating with funk.

What was going to happen to him? Why had these lawless rascals seized him?

He could not guess.

He was kidnapped—that was clear. But why? Who in the wide world could possibly have any motive for kidnapping Baggy Trimble of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's? It was inexplicable. He had nothing about him worth stealing, and certainly anyone who knew anything of him would never have dreamed of kidnapping him for purposes of ransom. True, in the Fourth Form Baggy talked a great deal about Trimble Hall, and the lofty and expensive company that gathered there. But in cold reality Trimble Hall shrank to the size of a suburban villa, and Mr. Trimble would probably have found some difficulty in springing a ten-pound note by way of ransom for his hopeful son. But if it was not that, what was it? Baggy's fat brain was in a whirl as he tried to think it out.

What was certain was that he was in ruthless and lawless hands, and speeding away from St. Jim's as fast as a fat car could carry him.

He groaned dismally.

"Old your row, young Troope!" said the pimply man at last. "You ain't going back to your school, but I keep on telling you you ain't going to be 'urt. 'Old your row!"

Baggy blinked at him.

The name the man had uttered enlightened him all of a sudden. It was like a flash of light in the darkness.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"You're jest going to have a holiday with a friend, you are; a bloke who was a friend of your uncle, the old colonel, what pegged out last year, and left you his money," said Squinty. "That's all, and that you can take my word for. So shut up, and give us a rest, and don't be skeered."

"I'm not Troope!"

"Eh?"

"You think I'm Sidney Troope?" gasped Baggy.

"What do you mean?" growled Squinty. "I don't think you are young Troope—I know you are. Goin' to say you're not?"

"Of course I'm not," gasped Baggy. "I say, you're making a mistake, you know. I'm not Troope."

"Stow it!" said the squinting man.

"On my word—"

"Stow it, I tell you," exclaimed Squinty impatiently. "Do you think that chicken will fight, you young fool?"

"But I'm not Troope," gasped Baggy. "I'm not a bit like him. My name's Trimble."

"Chuck it."

"I—I tell you—"

Squinty displayed a knobby, knuckly fist under Baggy Trimble's nose. Trimble jerked his head away suddenly.

"Now you shut up, or you'll get a oner!" said Squinty.

And Baggy Trimble shut up. He did not want what the ruffian described as a "oner."

But he was feeling relieved a little. These rascals, for some reason he could not even guess at, had mistaken him for Sidney Troope; it was Troope of the Fourth that they wanted. Evidently they were confederates of the racing man who had tried to kidnap Troope on his way to St. Jim's, and who was doubtless keeping at a safe distance from the school, where at least two fellows knew him by sight.

Sooner or later they were bound to discover their mistake, and let him go; and that was a consoling thought to Baggy.

He quite pulled himself together as the car sped on, by country road and leafy lane.

"Look here, what makes you think I'm Troope?" he asked, breaking the silence again at last.

Squinty gave him a threatening glare.

"At it again?" he demanded. "I tell you, you'd better stow it. I know you're young Troope, cause I saw your name wrote in the book you was reading when I nabbed you. See?"

Trimble grinned, involuntarily.

"That was Troope's book," he said.

"It was your book."

"You see—"

"I see that I'll twist your arm if you don't shut up—like that there!" said Squinty, suiting the action to the word.

"Ow!" howled Trimble.

"Want some more?"

"Ow! wow! No."

"Then give us a rest."

After that strong hint, Baggy Trimble gave the squinting gentleman a rest.

The car slowed down at last in the dusk. It ran into a

book with his name wrote in it—leastways, he'd fallen asleep over the book. I jest had to walk him to where Tadger was waiting with the car—"

Squinty broke off.

The racing man's hard, glinting eyes were fixed on Baggy Trimble, shrinking back in the car.

His face was dark with rage.

"You fool!" he panted.

"What?"

"Is that the boy you have brought here?"

"That's the feller, guv'nor—Sidney Troope—"

"It is not Troope."

"What?" ejaculated the squinting man.

"I don't know his name, but I've seen him before—it's the fat fool who gave the alarm the day I had Troope in my hands. You confounded idiot, what have you brought him here for?" roared Isaacs.

"But—but his name was wrote on the book what he was reading—"

"Fool!"



St Jim's Jingles!



No 4.—REGINALD TALBOT

The name of Talbot gives a thrill,
And makes the heart beat faster.
His early exploits haunt us still—
Those days of dire disaster
When Talbot lived, in London
slums,
A chequered life and lawless.
But now he's hailed by all his
chums
As fearless, straight, and flaw-
less.

How terrible those early days
He spent in Angel Alley!
Well-versed in crime and all its
ways,
With cunning cracksmen pally.
Yet in his breast, through that
dark time,
There burned an ardent yearning
To quit the sordid paths of crime,
Never again returning.

The chance arrived, and Talbot
came
To take his education
At the old Sussex school, whose
fame
Re-echoes through the nation.

But the dark shadow of the past
Could not be thrown behind him,
And those with whom he once was
cast
Made speedy shift to find him.
Adventures followed in a whirl—
Adventures grim and tragic;
And Talbot shared them with the
girl
Whose influence was magic:



REGINALD TALBOT.

The plucky Marie, with whose aid
He fought the foes who pressed
him.
And, thanks to that leal-hearted
maid,
Those foes could never best him!

Those dark old days have vanished
now,
And Talbot's step is lighter.
Unclouded is his youthful brow;
His handsome face is brighter.
He joins with Merry and the rest
In jolly schoolboy revels,
No longer goaded and depressed
By memory's "blue devils."

It takes a worthier pen than mine
To tell of Talbot's praises—
Of his career through storm and
shine,
And life in all its phases.
But this I say—and mean it, too—
Don't think me merely skittish:
Old Talbot's thoroughly "true
blue,"
And everything that's British!

ANOTHER ST. JIM'S CELEBRITY—MARIE RIVERS—
IN VERSE NEXT WEEK.

lane off the turnpike road, and stopped at a gate. Trimble, blinking from the window, saw a wooden bungalow, with green shutters to the windows, standing in a field a dozen yards back from the gate. No other building was in sight.

The door of the bungalow opened, as the car stopped. A man with a hard face and keen, watchful eye, came out, and hurried down to the gate. Trimble knew him by sight; it was the racing man who had attempted the kidnapping of Sidney Troope in the train on the opening day of the term at St. Jim's.

This, then, was the "Isaacs" of whom he had heard the two ruffians speak. Trimble knew the racing man's name now.

Isaacs hurried to the car.

"What luck?" he called out, as he came up.

"Got him!" answered Tadger.

"Good."

The racing man reached the door of the car, as Squinty threw it open.

"Got him, guv'nor," said Squinty. "Dropped on him in the woods near the school, all on his lonesome, reading a

"Mean to say we've got the wrong pig by the ear, guv'nor?" gasped the squinting man, in dismay.

"Fool!"

Isaacs stretched out his hand to Baggy Trimble, and

gripped him by the shoulder. Baggy gave a yelp of terror.

"Tain't my fault!" he howled. "I told him I wasn't Troope—I just happened to be reading Troope's book—I told him—ow! Leggo!"

"You fat scoundrel!" said the racing man, between his teeth, "I've a good mind—" His glare froze the fat junior with terror, so murderous did the ruffian look in his rage and disappointment. "This is the second time you've butted into what doesn't concern you. Squinty, you fool, you dolt, what are we to do with him?"

Squinty gave Trimble a very unpleasant look.

"I'll wring his neck, if you give the word, guv'nor," he answered.

"Fool!"

"Look 'ere, guv'nor—"

"Are we going to swing for that fat idiot?" snarled Isaacs.

"Don't be a fool, I tell you. You've spoiled everything—after this Troope will be on his guard—it will be ten times more difficult—"

"There's plenty of time yet, gov'nor," said Tadger. "It's a fortnight yet before Koh-i-Noor runs."

"Silence!"

Isaacs drew the squinting man aside, and for some time they conversed in low muttering tones, while Baggy Trimble covered, palpitating with terror, in the car. Then the squinting man re-entered the car, and Tadger drove away again, at a reckless speed in the autumn dusk.

CHAPTER 6.

Kidnapped!

"KIDNAPPED!"

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, looked very sharply at the four breathless and excited juniors.

"That's what it looked like, sir," said Tom Merry. "I'm quite certain that Trimble was in the car against his will. He shouted for help."

"And the man with him grabbed him, and shut him up, sir," said Lowther. "I saw that."

Manners and Troope nodded assent.

"It is most extraordinary," said the Housemaster. "I do not think you boys would exaggerate what you saw; but it is very extraordinary. Did you, Troope, observe the two men in the car?"

"Yes, sir; one looked like a chauffeur, and the man inside had a squint and a damaged nose," said Troope.

"You will remember, Troope, that on the day you came to this school, an attempt was made to kidnap you. Was either of these men the same person who attacked you on that occasion?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Had you seen either of them before?"

Troope shook his head.

"No, sir; I'm sure of that. I should know that brute again anywhere."

"That man was described as a racing man," said Mr. Railton. "Did these men look as if they were of the same kind?"

"The squinting man did, certainly," said Troope. "I should have taken him for a hanger-on at the races, on his looks."

"That's so," said Manners.

"It is possible that there is some connection between the two affairs," said the Housemaster. "However, I shall telephone to the police-station at Wayland immediately. Did you notice the number of the car?"

"No, sir; it went so fast—"

"Very well; you may go now," said the Housemaster, very much puzzled. "I must report this to the Head. Remain within gates, in case Dr. Holmes should wish to question you."

"Yes, sir!"

And Tom Merry & Co. left the Housemaster's study.

Most of the St. Jim's fellows were coming in to tea now, but among the crowd of fellows who came into the House, the fat form of Baggy Trimble was not to be seen. For the first time on record, Baggy was missing a meal—a sufficient proof, in itself, that something extraordinary had happened.

The Terrible Three went to their study to tea, taking Troope with them. The eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glimmered in at the door as they sat down to tea.

"You fellows were pullin' my leg, of course?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Nothin's happened to Twimble?"

"He's kidnapped, ass!"

"But it is weally inexplicable that anybody should want to kidnap Twimble, deah boys."

"Admitted! But there it is!"

"It's true enough," said Troope. "It makes me feel awfully rotten. If I'd kept him with me, it wouldn't have happened."

"Oh, rot!" said Lowther.

"When that brute had me, the first day of the term, Trimble butted in and stopped him," said Troope. "And—I wasn't able to help Trimble. I'd have done anything to—"

Troope paused, with a glum and moody look on his face. Baggy, as a pal, had been very trying; Troope could hardly blame himself for having shaken off the fat junior.

But, as the matter had turned out, it lay on his conscience, Baggy had saved him from the kidnapper—and now he had fallen into the lawless hands himself, and Troope had not been able to help him. From the bottom of his heart, Troope wished that he had allowed Baggy to stick to him that half-holiday.

"It's weally extwaordinawy," said Arthur Augustus. "Vewy extwaordinawy indeed. It is wathah a pity that I was not there, isn't it?"

"What could you have done, ass?" grunted Manners.

"I twust, Mannahs, that I could have wescued Twimble."

"We couldn't!" said Tom.

"Vewy likely; but a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Fathead!"

"I do not think that you will impwove mattahs, Tom Mewwy, by usin' oppwobwious epithets," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "It is a vewy great pity that I was not there. Howevah, it cannot be helped now; and you must not think that I blame you youngstahs. I dare say you did all you could—but if I had been there— What are you goin' to do with that cushion, Lowthah?"

"I'm going to chuck it at a silly ass!"

Arthur Augustus retired from the study hastily.

Apparently the swell of St. Jim's spread the news of the strange episode of the afternoon, for a few minutes later Wildrake and Mellish came along to Study No. 10 in the Shell. They were Trimble's study-mates in the Fourth.

"What's this giddy news?" asked Mellish. "Mean to say that anybody has kidnapped Trimble?"

"Yes."

"Too jolly good to be true," said Mellish, shaking his head. "Anyhow, I hope they'll keep him for the rest of the term, if they've got him. It will be ever so much nicer in the study."

And Mellish walked away grinning, evidently not much distressed by his fat study-mate's disaster.

"It's straight goods, is it?" asked Wildrake.

"Quite!" said Tom Merry. "Goodness knows why they've done it, but they have."

"I guess it's got me beat, then," said the Canadian junior.

"Trimble isn't a prize for anybody. He's got no money; and nobody could want his company."

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"All the same, they've bagged him," he said. "There doesn't seem to be any reason why they should; but they have!"

"I guess it's a mistake, then."

"How's that?"

"They've taken Trimble for somebody else," said Wildrake, "that's the only explanation."

"How could they?" said Manners. "There's nobody else at St. Jim's anything like Trimble, and nobody of the same name. Fatty Wynn is a bit like him sideways; but in nothing else."

"It's some blessed kidnapping gang at work," said Lowther. "First they tried it on Troope, and now it's Trimble."

Wildrake shook his head.

"More likely they were after Troope, and got Trimble by mistake," he said. "Troope's got pots of money, according to what Trimble says—and Trimble likes him so much that it must be true."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, then, Troope's good game for a gang like that," said Wildrake. "But Trimble isn't worth the cost of the petrol to run him off in a car. Looks to me as if that racing

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johnny was after Troope again, and got the wrong bird by mistake."

Troope started.

"But it's impossible!" he exclaimed. "If that man described me to his confederates, I suppose they couldn't think they'd got me when they got Trimble."

"You never know," said Wildrake. "Trimble is always borrowing things, and he might have had your hat with your name in it, or your hanky with your initials on it."

"But he hadn't—at least, I think not!"

"By Jove, though, I think Wildrake has got near it!" said Tom Merry. "If they took the fat duffer for Troope, it would explain the whole thing. Had Trimble anything about him with your name on it, Troopey?"

"Not that I know of! Oh, yes; my 'Holiday Annual'!" said Troope, recollecting. "My name was written in the book, and I left it with Trimble. But—"

Wildrake smiled.

"Then I guess that did it," he said. "If that's so, Trimble's all right—they'll let him go when they find they've got the wrong bird. But you'd better keep your weather-eye open, Troope—they won't make the same mistake next time."

And the Canadian junior left the study, leaving the chums of the Shell exchanging very thoughtful glances. It was borne in upon all their minds that the keen Canadian junior had put his finger on the solution of the mystery.

Tom Merry rose from the table.

"Wildrake's right," he said. "At least, it's jolly likely; and I think I'd better mention it to Mr. Railton. Ten to one they were after Troope all the time, and landed the wrong fish."

"Looks like it," agreed Manners.

"Jolly lucky, if it's so!" said Monty Lowther. "They won't want to keep Trimble when they find out their mistake; but godness knows what they would have done with Troope. You're in luck, Troopey, old man!"

Troope nodded.

Tom Merry left the study to speak to the Housemaster. He came back in a few minutes.

"Railton thinks it's likely," he said, "and you're not to go out of gates again, Troopey, till this is cleared up. You've got to be taken care of, old man."

Sidney Troope made a grimace.

"I jolly well don't want to be taken care of," he said. "I'd rather take my chance."

"Housemaster's orders, old man," said Tom, with a smile. "I say, I'm jolly glad Wildrake hit on it like that. I'm pretty certain that we shall hear of Trimble soon. Dash it all, he's not a nice chap; but I was feeling jolly anxious about him."

"Poor old Trimble!" said Troope. "It's hard cheese on him, but if it's a case of mistaken identity, I suppose he will be all right."

"Certain!" said Tom cheerily.

But Troope did not look very cheery during tea in Study No. 10. He was anxious about Trimble; and his conscience troubled him a little—perhaps all the more because it was undeniably to miss the company of Baggy Trimble that he had run away and left him.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

THERE was one topic in the School House of St. Jim's that evening.

That topic was Trimble of the Fourth.

That so utterly unimportant and insignificant a personage as Baggy Trimble should be a topic in the whole House, was an extraordinary occurrence.

But for once Baggy filled the limelight.

Trimble loved the limelight, of which very little came his way, as a rule; so it really was rather hard upon him

that he should be absent at a time when every fellow was talking about him. For once he was conspicuous, but only by his absence.

Long after lock-up, Trimble was still absent.

It was known that Mr. Railton and the Head had been "on the phone" several times to the police-station at Wayland; but no news had been received of the missing junior.

The fellows wondered whether he would turn up for bed-time; indeed, whether he would turn up at all.

Even in the Sixth Form studies, the extraordinary adventure of Baggy Trimble excited interest, and was discussed by such great men as Kildare and Darrell and Langton.

Wildrake's suggestion that Trimble had been seized in mistake for Troope by kidnappers who did not know him by sight, was generally regarded as well-founded; especially on the ground that nobody who knew Trimble could possibly want him for any reason whatever.

So there was not much anxiety about Trimble; but a great deal of curiosity and discussion.

Sidney Troope, undoubtedly, was worried.

He had come to the conclusion that it was indeed a case of a mistake on the part of the kidnappers; and that he himself had been the intended victim.

For the second time, therefore, Trimble had been the means of saving him from the grasp of his unknown and mysterious enemy.

It was likely enough that the lawless gang, finding out their mistake, would release the fat junior uninjured; but though it was likely, it was by no means certain.

Trimble was a fellow to whom no one would have chosen to be under an obligation, if he could have avoided it. But Baggy seemed to be piling obligations on Troope.

When he turned up again he would turn up with new claims on Sidney Troope's regard—claims that could hardly be denied. If he had been difficult to shake off before, he would be doubly difficult to shake off now. Troope could not help such thoughts coming into his mind; and then the reflection that Trimble was in ruffianly hands, that he might even be in deadly danger, would come to him with a pang of remorse and shame. He felt that he could have received Baggy with open arms as his dearest friend if only he could have seen the fat Fourth-Former safe back at St. Jim's. And then, as he pictured the effusive and overwhelming Baggy in the role of dearest friend, he knew that he couldn't. Really, it was a



Baggy Trimble squeezed into the corner of the car as far as possible from Squinty, who had taken a life-preserver from his pocket, and held it resting across his shabby knees. "Sit up!" said Squinty. "And mind your eye! You ain't going to be hurt, but you've got to go and see a friend of mine, see?" (See page 6.)

very uncomfortable state of affairs for Sidney Troope.

The evening was a long one to Troope. He could not help worrying about a fellow who had fallen into a danger that should have been, properly speaking, his own.

His brow was moody over his prep in Study No. 3, and his study-mate, Bates, grinned as he noted it.

"Worrying, old bean?" asked Harold Bates.

"Yes."

"Because you think Trimble will turn up again?" asked Bates, with a chuckle. Evidently Harold Bates was not worrying.

"Goodness knows what may have happened to him," said Troope. "It's nearly half-past eight!"

"Oh, he'll turn up like a bad penny," said Bates. "Nobody would keep Trimble hanging about him if he could help it."

Troope finished his prep, or rather, left it unfinished, and strolled from the study. He was in a worried frame of mind, and his study-mate's remarks were not grateful or comforting.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met him in the Fourth Form passage, and gave him a sympathetic nod.

"Feelin' wathah down, deah boy?" he remarked.

"Well, yes, a little!"

"It's howwid, as Twimble was such a friend of yours," said the swell of St. Jim's sympathetically. "I should feel

it vevy much myself if Blake or Howwies or Dig got into such a feahful sewape. I quite undahstand your feelin's, old chap."

Troope coloured.

"Twimble isn't weally such a bad chap," went on the swell of St. Jim's. "I'm suah he's got his good points."

"Oh, yes!" muttered Troope.

"Of course, he is a feahful fibbah, and a gwecday young boundah, and no fellow's studay cupboard is safe fwom him," said D'Arcy. "Still, I think he may have some vevy good qualities, though nobody evah seems to have noticed them."

Troope grinned faintly.

"Aftah all, he must have some wecommendation, or you would not have chummed up with him as you have done," said Arthur Augustus. "Weally, it was quite a touchin' fwiendship."

"Oh!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Quite womantic in its way, you know. Twimble saved you fwom a kidnappah, and a devoted fwiendship was the result—I quite approve."

"Hem!"

"Of course, Twimble told a lot of feahful whoppahs about what he did, but that is Twimble's way. I weally think that he cannot help tellin' whoppahs—it is constitutional with him, you know. Pway do not think I am sayin' anything against your fwiend Twimble, old scout."

"Oh! You're not?" ejaculated Troope.

"Not at all, deah boy. I am makin' out the best possible case for him," said Arthur Augustus. "My opinion is that he is such a feahful fibbah, because he weally does not know how to distinguish between twuth and the othah thing, see?"

"Oh!"

"I am suah he has his good qualities," continued Arthur Augustus charitably. "I have nevah observed any in him myself; but I am suah they are there. What are you gwinnin' at, Twoope?"

"Was I grinning?"

"Weally, this is not a time to gwin, when your closest pal is in dangah," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I twust he will soon be westored to us, Twoope, and you will see your fwiend again safe and sound. It is vevy unfortunate that I was not on the spot."

"What could you have done?" asked Troope.

"I have no doubt, Twoope, that I should have done somethin' or othah," said Arthur Augustus. "If it would be any comfort to you, Twoope, in this twyin' time, to talk to a chap about your fwiend, step into my studay, and we will talk about Twimble."

"Thanks!" said Troope.

But he did not step into Study No. 6; he walked on, leaving Arthur Augustus a little perplexed.

On the staircase, Troope came on the Terrible Three going down after prep.

"No news yet, I suppose, you fellows?" Troope asked.

"About what?" asked Tom Merry.

"Trimble, of course!"

"Oh, Trimble! No, not that I know of. We shall see him back all right," said Tom. "Those rotters will be glad to get shut of him when they find out their mistake."

"I wish I could feel sure about that!" muttered Troope.

He went down with the Shell fellows, and stopped at the great door of the House, which stood open. In the pleasant autumn evening, stars glimmered down on the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Troope stared away towards the school gates.

"That's a car passing," said Tom Merry, as a distant whir came from the Rylcombe Road, and Troope started and listened.

"It's stopped!" said Manners.

"I wonder—" muttered Troope. He ran down the steps.

"Hold on, young 'un!" called out Tom Merry. "You're not allowed out of House bounds at this time of night!"

But Troope did not heed.

He disappeared in the dusk in the direction of the gates. Monty Lowther grinned at his comrades.

"Might be Trimble coming back," he said. "Of course, he's bound to come back all right. Let's go and see."

"Let's!" said Manners.

"Oh, all right!"

And Tom Merry & Co. followed Troope of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 3.

Trimble Turns Up!

"GET out!"

"What?"

"Get a move on, you fat fool!"

The squinting man grasped Baggy Trimble by his shoulder in the dark interior of the car, and shook him roughly out of his seat.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 920.

The car had stopped; the door was flung open.

"I—I say—" gasped Trimble.

Since the meeting with the racing man, Isaacs, at the green-shuttered bungalow, Baggy had covered in the car in a state of palpitating funk, as it whirred on by unknown roads in the dark.

What was intended to be his fate, what was to happen to him, whither he was being taken, he could not guess.

Squinty's eyes, which squinted at him greenishly in the gloom of the car, chilled him with dread.

The kidnappers evidently did not want him now that they knew he was not Sidney Troope. But what were they going to do with him? Visions of imprisonment in some subterranean dungeon floated before Baggy's scared eyes, and even worse terrors assailed him. When the car stopped, and he was roughly told to get out, he was fairly shivering with terror.

The squinting man shoved him through the doorway without ceremony. Trimble stumbled and fell on his fat knees.

The car whirred on again.

The door slammed, the engine roared, and the car dashed on by the shadowed road under the trees.

By the time Trimble had picked himself up, it was gone, and its red rear-light was vanishing in the dusky distance.

"Oh dear!" gasped Baggy.

He blinked round him with terrified eyes.

A wide road, shadowed by trees, was all that he could see. If there was any building at hand, the thick branches hid it from sight.

Where was he?

Evidently the kidnappers had done with him. That was clear even to Baggy Trimble's scared and confused mind.

But where had they thrown him aside? The car had covered many miles, and a whole county might lie between Trimble and St. Jim's, for all that he knew to the contrary.

"Oh dear!" he mumbled.

It was a relief that Squinty and Tadger were gone. But on that lonely road, after dark, Baggy was full of terrors. If only he could have even guessed where he was; but he had not the faintest idea.

He blinked round him in dismay.

There was a glimmer of starlight over the trees; the road ran before him like a shadowy white ribbon through the dusk.

He took a few steps, and then halted. Then, as he blinked round him again, he discerned a stone gateway, and large metal gates. He was, after all, near a building of some kind; he could see that, now that he was out of the shadow of the trees.

Baggy scuttled up to the gates at once. As a forlorn fellow, abandoned on a lonely road at night by a gang of kidnappers, he felt that he had a right to demand admission and protection at the first door. Through the bars of the gate he could see the glimmer of a light from a little window, apparently belonging to a lodge. And Baggy lifted up his fat voice, and shouted:

"Help!"

Somebody was bound to come if he shouted for help, he considered. That somebody might give him a shelter for the night, or even lend him a car to get back to St. Jim's.

He heard the sound of an opening door.

Through the bars of the gate, he saw a dim figure emerge from the lodge, and stand staring in his direction.

"Help!" roared Trimble.

The shadowy figure came down to the gates, and stood blinking at the fat junior through the bars, apparently in astonishment.

"Let me in!" gasped Trimble. "Help, help! I've been kidnapped! They may come back! Help!"

"Look 'ere, Master Trimble—"

"Eh?"

Trimble almost fell down.

It was the voice of Taggles, the St. Jim's porter, that addressed him through the bars of the gate.

Baggy blinked at him in amazement.

"What's this 'ere game?" went on Taggles. "If it's you, Master Trimble, why can't you ring the bell like a yooman being, instead of a-howling and a-yowling like a cat?"

"Is—is—is that you, Taggles?" spluttered Trimble.

"Did you think it was the 'Ead?" inquired Taggles sarcastically.

"Is—is—is this St. Jim's?"

"What! Look 'ere, Master Trimble, I 'ope you ain't been drinking?" said Taggles. "Well enough you know what it is!"

"I—I don't—I mean I didn't—I—I—"

Trimble spluttered in surprise. Slowly it dawned upon his obtuse brain that the gates he had arrived at were the gates of St. Jim's, though, in the belief that he had been landed far from home, he had not thought of that possibility.

The kidnappers, having no use for the fat junior, had brought him back to the place to which he belonged. Baggy Trimble understood that at last.



By the time Baggie Trimble gained his feet the car was whirling away, its red rear light vanishing in the dusky distance. The fat junior blinked round him in dismay. Then he took a few steps and halted. As he blinked round again, he discerned a stone gateway, and large metal gates. "Where am I?" he muttered. (See page 12.)

Taggles was unlocking the gates. Baggie Trimble rolled in, much relieved, as well as astonished, to find himself back at St. Jim's again.

"So you got back all right, Master Trimble, arter makin' out you was kidnapped," said Taggles.

"I was kidnapped—"

"Ho!" said Taggles.

"I've had a fearful time—"

"Ho!"

"Is that you, Trimble?" shouted Sidney Troope, coming up breathlessly from the direction of the School House.

"Hallo, Troopey! Yes, old chap!"

"Oh, good!"

The Terrible Three came up.

"Turned up like a bad penny!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"I jolly well knew he would."

"I suppose you fellows have been awfully anxious about me?" gasped Trimble.

"Oh, awfully!" said Manners.

"It was heart-breaking," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"The awful thought that we'd lost you for ever, and the still more awful thought that we hadn't—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you Shell cads can go and eat coke!" said Trimble. "You're jolly glad to see me again, ain't you, Troopey, old chap?"

"Yes, rather!" said Troope.

"I've been kidnapped, you know," said Trimble. "You fellows saw me in the car. I've been through awful dangers. Escaped by the skin of my teeth, you know. All for your sake, Troopey. They thought I was you when they bagged me, owing to your name being in the 'Holiday Annual' I was reading."

"Wildrake was right," said Tom Merry. "Jolly cute chap! Better come and report to the Head, Baggie."

The juniors marched Trimble to the School House. Baggie's terrors were all gone now, and he was strutting with importance as he entered the House. There was a shout at once.

"Here's Trimble!"

"Bai Jove! Heah he is! Congwattahs, old man!"

"They didn't want him, after all," grinned Cardew of the Fourth. "But it's rather unfeelin' to send him back so soon. Really, they might have kept him a little longer."

"Yah!" said Trimble.

"Where have you been?" asked Levison.

"Had an awful time," said Trimble. "A frightful gang of ruffians collared me. I put up a tremendous fight. I felled three of them—or was it four—"

"Make it six!" suggested Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton came out of his study.

"Trimble, I am glad to see that you have returned. You have not been hurt?"

"Not exactly hurt, sir," said Baggie. "But I've been in a frightful danger, sir. I—"

"Come with me to the Head," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir."

Baggie walked away with the Housemaster, while the news spread like wildfire through the House that the missing junior had returned. When the juniors were shepherded off to their dormitories, Baggie Trimble was still with the Head and Mr. Railton, and it was rumoured in the House that Inspector Skeat had arrived in a car from Wayland to see the fellow who had been kidnapped. After lights out in the junior dormitories, Baggie Trimble was more of a topic than ever.

CHAPTER 9.

Heroic!

"B AI Jove, heah's Twimble!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ought really to have been fast asleep at a quarter past ten, junior bedtime at St. Jim's being half-past nine.

But he was wide awake, and so were most of the other fellows in the Fourth Form dormitory, when a light gleamed at the door.

Baggie Trimble rolled in, very late for bed, and Mr. Railton loomed up behind him.

(Continued on page 16.)



THE St. Jim's News



Specially Described by Our Contributors.

JACK BLAKE:

One very sultry half-holiday I dozed off to sleep in a punt on the River Rhyl. It was an awfully stupid thing to do, for the punt was not tethered in any way, and was drifting fancy-free downstream. When it came to within a few yards of the foaming mill-race, I providentially awoke, and just managed to back away out of danger in the nick of time. If I hadn't awakened when I did, I should have gone to sleep for good! Whenever I go a-punting nowadays, I always keep both peepers wide open.

DICK REDFERN:

You'd think it was impossible to go to sleep on a push-bike, wouldn't you? Yet that is what I did towards the end of a long and exhausting ride. I must have nodded off to sleep over the handle-bars, for I can remember nothing of the last stage of my journey, from Wayland to St. Jim's. Mechanically, I must have kept on pedalling, and it was a jolly lucky thing for me that the road was clear at the time. My chums, Lawrence and Owen, were waiting for me in the school gateway. They saw that something was wrong, because my machine was reeling drunkenly from one side of the road to the other, and I never looked up or answered them when they hailed me. They ran out into the roadway; Lawrence grabbed hold of the jigger, and Owen lifted me down from the saddle. Then I woke up, and it was some moments before I realised where I was, and what had happened.

BAGGY TRIMBLE:

At Wayland Fair last summer I went to sleep on a horse's back! Not a real horse; but one of the wooden steeds of a merry-go-round. I had been stuffing myself with cokernuts and things, and I suppose that's what made me drowsy. Anyway, I fell asleep over the horse's neck, and the fool of an attendant didn't wake me up until the show was over. Then he said: "You've been round fifty times, sir, at tuppence a time. That'll be eight-and-fourpence, please!"

BERNARD GLYN:

I once fell asleep in the woodshed, where I had been busy with one of my inventions. I happened to be dog-tired, and I threw myself down on to some sacking, and gentle sleep slid into my soul, as the Ancient Mariner would say. I must have been missed at calling-over, but nobody thought of looking in the woodshed for me. I awoke about midnight, feeling cramped in every limb. It was intensely dark, and the sound of a rat scuttling across the floor fairly gave me the creeps! I scrambled to my feet and fled in a panic, and I shall never convert the woodshed into a dormitory again!



WHEN it's night-time in Italy, or in Paris, or in London the inhabitants ought to be sleeping the sleep of the just, but they are not! There is a sound of revelry by night, as the waltzers glide gaily over the ball-room floor, and the orchestra discourses sweet music. Getting quite poetical, aren't I?

When it's night-time at St. Jim's, the scholars ought to be sleeping the sleep of the just. Can't you picture us tucked in our little beds, enjoying a lovely sleep, "full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing"? You can picture it, if you like; but you'll get a more accurate picture if you imagine us gathered round a tuck-hammer by candle-light, or making a raid on the rival dorm, and indulging in a fast and furious pillow-fight!

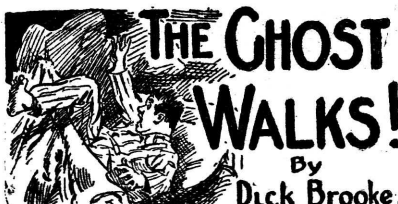
We have to be very tired indeed to go to sleep after the prefect on duty extinguishes the light. Nine times out of ten we never dream of going to sleep. There is nearly always "something doing" when it's night-time at St. Jim's. It may be a midnight feast; it may be a pillow-fight; or it may even be a raid on some orchard in the vicinity of the school. But the last-named exploit is not undertaken very often, for the consequences are jolly serious if the orchard-raiders are caught. Breaking bounds at night is looked upon almost as a capital offence by the powers that be.

Life at St. Jim's would be rather tame if we all went to sleep the moment our heads touched the pillow. Sleeping is such an awful waste of time, when you might be amusing yourselves in various happy ways. Even if there is no midnight feast, or other jollification, on the tapis, it is better to lay awake discussing the next footer match than to start snoring immediately after "lights out."

There are no end of ways in which a fellow can amuse himself from lights out until "the witching hour of night." Manners usually lights a candle, and buries himself in a book. He keeps "The Holiday Annual" in his locker. Skimpole stays awake, pondering over the wise precepts of Professor Balmycrumpet. Bernard Glyn's brain is busy thinking out fearful and wonderful inventions. Kerr, although no longer a fanatic on Cross Word Puzzles, likes to lay awake solving "teasers." And Baggy Trimble's idea of bliss is to take a paper bag from under his pillow and merrily munch jam-tarts.

The night-life of St. Jim's is so varied and interesting that I think it is high time we published a Special Dormitory Number. The only drawback is that it may possibly find its way into the hands of the masters, who will have fifty fits if they find out how we amuse ourselves during the night watches! But let us hope that Fate will be kind, and that this particular issue will escape the eagle eyes of the authorities!

Tom Merry



Grimly the ghost goes gliding
Through the quad at dead of night,
When the truant moon is hiding
And there's not a star in sight.

Softly the spook goes creeping
Up several flights of stairs,
When the school is soundly sleeping,
Forgetting its daily cares.

Gaily the ghost goes frisking
Into the Fourth Form dorm,
And the bedclothes it is whisking
From Baggy Trimble's form.

Then Trimble starts up, screaming:
"I say, you fellows— Ow!
Am I awake or dreaming?
There's a gug-gug-ghost, I vow!"

"What uttah nonsense, Twimble!"
Come Gussy's drowsy tones.
And the ghost, alert and nimble,
Departs with rattling bones!

To Ratty's bed-room stealing,
He clanks his spectral chains;
And Ratty wakes up, squealing,
While pandemonium reigns!

"Tremble, thou tyrant master!"
Cries the ghost in tones of dread.
"For I come to bring disaster
Upon thy base bald head!"

"Thou art no gallant hero,
For frantic is thy fear!
Tremble, thou son of Nero,
And quake when I draw near!"

Then, all his courage banished,
Poor Ratty mumbles: "Flee!"
And lo! the ghost has vanished,
With a laugh of ghoulish glee.

Gaily the ghost goes gliding
Through the quad, at peep o' day,
To his secret place of hiding—
And night's shadows steal away!

VISITING DAY
AT ST. JIM'S!

(Look out for another interesting supplement next week.)



A SHOCK for the SHELL!

An Amusing Story of a Midnight Raid.

By SIDNEY CLIVE.



"Gussy's in luck!" said Monty Lowther. "One of his jolly old uncles has turned up trumps, and sent him a hamper of tuck. It's a whacking great hamper—one of the biggest I've ever seen. Gussy's going to stand a midnight feast to the whole of the Fourth." "Lucky Fourth!" grunted Manners.

"And here we are, wasting away through lack of nourishment!" said Lowther. "It's too bad! The Fourth Form dorm to-night will be a land flowing with milk and honey—or, rather, with ginger-pop and golden syrup—and in the Shell dorm we sha'n't have so much as a monkey-nut to chew! What are you going to do about it, Tommy?"

Tom Merry was looking very thoughtful. It was some time before he spoke. When he did speak there was a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"What do you fellows say to raiding Gussy's hamper? We can nip downstairs just before midnight and collar the hamper, and take it up to our own dorm. And we'll leave a dummy hamper filled with bricks and things for Gussy and his guests!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A topping wheeze, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther gleefully. "Rather hard on poor old Gussy; but we musn't be sentimental. The Fourth have raided our tuck hampers before now."

"Yes, rather!"

"I should like to see Gussy's face when he opens the dummy hamper!" chuckled Manners. "It will be worth a guinea a box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To-night's the night, then!" said Tom Merry. "We'll raid the giddy hamper, and have the feast of our lives. I'll borrow an empty hamper from Dame Taggles, and fill it with bricks, and we'll smuggle it into Gussy's study to take the place of the genuine hamper."

Having plotted this deep dark plot, the Terrible Three of the Shell, smiling serenely, strolled out of their study. They were just too late to see a fat figure scuttling round the corner at the end of the passage. Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, had been listening at the keyhole. He had overheard the plans of the plotters, and was now speeding away as fast as his fat legs could carry him, to warn Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his chums.

Baggy burst into Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage like a whirlwind.

"I say, you fellows!" he began breathlessly. "What do you think those Shell bounders are up to? They're arranging to raid your hamper, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in alarm. "How did you know this, Trimble?"

"Ahem! I—I—"

"The usual keyhole method, I suppose!" grinned Jack Blake. "So the Shell have arranged to loot Gussy's hamper, what?"

"And they're going to put a dummy hamper in its place," said Trimble. "Tom Merry's going to fill it with bricks."

"The—the feahful wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I will go an' see Tom Mewy at once, an' administrate a feahful thwashin'!"

"Not so fast, Gussy!" said Jack Blake, putting out a detaining hand.

"Unhand me, Blake! Do you think I am goin' to take this lyin' down? Fancy those Shell bounders havin' designs on my hampah! I am extremely angry!"

"Simmer down, old scout!" said Blake soothingly. "It won't be to our advantage if you go and punch Tom Merry's nose. In fact, punching Merry's nose is rather a risky experiment. He's quite likely to punch the puncher! Look here, Gussy, I know a trick worth two of that. Now that Baggy has put us wise to the Shell's little plot, we can easily frustrate it." "How, deah boy?"

"We will do unto our neighbour as our neighbour intends to do unto us!" said Blake, with a chuckle. "We'll cart the hamper up to the dorm, and smuggle it under one of the beds; and we'll leave a dummy hamper, full of bricks, for Tom Merry to find."

"Bai Jove! That's quite a wippin' wheeze, Blake!"

"Of course it is! This is the home of ripping wheezes!" said Blake, tapping his cranium. "That's what we'll do. We'll hoist the Shell with their own petard, as old Shakespeare would say. Thanks very much for giving us the tip, Baggy. As a reward, you shall be allowed to stuff yourself to-night till you go off pop!" "Oh, good!" said Trimble, as he rolled out of the study.

Going off pop was a painful form of demise; but the glutton of the Fourth seemed to fairly revel in the prospect.

Midnight was approaching as three pyjama-clad figures stole softly along the Fourth Form passage. Two of them—Manners and Lowther—were carrying a hamper chock-full of bricks. The other—Tom Merry—was lighting the way to Study No. 6 with his electric torch.

"This way!" said the leader of the expedition.

The dummy hamper was dumped on to the floor of the study, and Manners and Lowther, panting from their exertions, looked round for the genuine hamper. It stood under the table.

"Out with it, and shove this one in its place!" commanded Tom Merry.

The transformation was quickly effected, and then the Terrible Three carried the hamper—the genuine hamper, as they thought—up to the Shell dormitory. It was extremely heavy—quite as heavy, in fact, as the hamper of bricks which they had left in its place. The juniors found it hard work to get their burden up the stairs.

Midnight was booming from the old clock-tower as the raiders entered the dormitory with their booty. Candles were lighted up and down the large room, and half the Form was sitting up in bed, grinning gleefully in anticipation of a glorious spread.

Feverishly, Tom Merry set to work to open the hamper. At last he succeeded in prising up the lid, and there was a whoop of delight from the onlookers.

But the joy was short-lived. Tom Merry stared and blinked at the interior of the hamper. It was full, not of choice and wholesome edibles, but of bricks!

"Spoofed!" yelled Tom Merry. "The Fourth must have got wind of our plot. Look here! This beastly hamper's full of bricks!"

There was a doleful chorus of groans from the Shell fellows as they realised that the midnight feast was "off."

Meanwhile, there was a sound of revelry by night in the Fourth Form dormitory, where the feasters were going strong, and the ginger-wine flowed freely!

TELL ME YOUR DREAMS!

By Professor Monty Lowther

(the celebrated Dream Expert, whose explanations of certain dreams appear below. Professor Lowther will be pleased to interpret any dream you may care to describe to him for a modest fee of five guineas!)

DREAMING OF EARTHQUAKES!

BAGGY TRIMBLE, of the Fourth, writes to say that he dreamed of a dreadful earthquake, which lifted him bodily from the ground, and dashed him down again with great violence, shaking every bone in his fat body. Baggy wishes to know what this dream—or, rather, nightmare—portends. Simply that he is about to receive a terrific bumping at the hands of his schoolfellows. (By the way, Baggy, you omitted to enclose your fee of five guineas. If you are financially embarrassed, fivepence will do to be going on with!)

STORMS AT SEA!

TO dream that you are in peril on the sea, and that you are drowning in about five fathoms of water, is a sure omen that you are about to be ducked in the school fountain! Aubrey Racke has just experienced such a dream, and I hope my interpretation of it will cheer him up. I should advise him to carry a lifebelt about with him in readiness for the coming calamity.

A FATEFUL DREAM!

KNOX of the Sixth is a person I don't envy, for he has just been visited by a most appalling dream. He dreamt that the school sports were in progress, and that he was taking part in the long jump, and also the sack race. Sounds harmless enough,

but the "long jump" is merely another term for expulsion. It is my painful duty to warn Knox that he will soon be shaking the dust of St. Jim's from his feet, having been "bowled out" during one of his midnight exploits. (Did I hear a chorus of "Jolly good riddance!")

THOSE MARBLE HALLS!

CARDEW of the Fourth has experienced the wonderful dream which is described in Tom Moore's poem:

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls,
With vassals and serfs at my side."

I can only conclude that Cardew will shortly receive an invitation to Trimble Hall—if, indeed, such a place exists outside Baggy's fertile imagination!

GETTING INTO HOT WATER!

D'ARCY MINOR is also among the dreamers. He dreamt that he was in the act of taking a hot bath—rather an unpleasant dream for a grubby fag who has a rooted objection to soap and water! To dream of a hot bath, young Wally, means that you will shortly find yourself getting into hot water—probably with your Form-master, Mr. Selby!

TAGGLES THE ACROBAT!

"WHICH I 'ad a werry thrillin' an' excitin' dream last night, Master Lowther!" said Taggles, the porter. "I found meself 'standin' on me 'ead, right at the top of the school flagstaff! I was in a terrible plight, as ever was! I didn't scarcely dare to breathe. If a gust of wind 'ad come along, I should 'ave been blowed off me perch, an' I should 'ave come 'urtling downwards through space! I was in an 'orrible panic, I can tell you! 'Ow can you explain this dream of mine, Master Lowther?"

I can only say that people who are in the habit of "taking a drop" overnight must not be surprised to find themselves "taking a drop" from the school flagstaff in their dreams!



TOO MUCH TRIMBLE!

(Continued from
page 13.)

A dozen fellows sat up in their beds to look at Baggy. For once he was an important person. He had stayed up three-quarters of an hour after bed-time; he had been with the Head; he had interviewed the Wayland inspector; he was brought specially to the dormitory by the Housemaster long after the other fellows were in bed. So Baggy was the cynosure of all eyes.

He rolled in importantly.

Mr. Railton glanced at the Fourth-Formers, apparently surprised to see so many of them awake.

"Lose no time, Trimble," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Baggy. "You fellows—"

"Do not talk now, Trimble. It is long past bed-time."

"Very well, sir. I hope I shall be excused rising-bell in the morning, sir, in the circumstances?"

Mr. Railton made no reply to that.

Trimble turned in, and the Housemaster put out the light and retired.

Possibly he expected the Fourth Form dormitory to compose itself to slumber when the light was out. If so, the Housemaster's expectation was very far from fulfilled.

A minute after the door was closed, nearly every fellow was sitting up in bed, and nearly every voice was addressing Baggy Trimble.

"Tell us about it, Baggy!"

"What's happened?"

"How did you get away?"

"What awful ass was ass enough to kidnap you, Baggy, when he might have kept you at arm's length?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What sort of a brute was he to send you back to us, when we thought we'd lost you, old bean?"

"Weally, Cardew, that is wathah unfeelin'!"

"Go hon!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"Ring off, old man, while Baggy tells us the giddy tale," said Blake. "Keep as near the truth as you can, Baggy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Silence for the thrillin' tale!" said Cardew. "We're all waitin', Baggy. Dyin' to hear it!"

"Yes; let's know what happened, old chap," said Troope.

"It was an awful experience," said Baggy, sitting up in bed, and preparing to enjoy himself as the hero of the hour.

"I was seized in the wood by a fearful squinting ruffian—I mean, a gang of ruffians. Of course, one man would never have got away with me."

"Go it!"

"I put up a terrific fight. You fellows know what I am like when I am roused—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I knocked them right and left. Placing my back against a tree, I faced them with my hands up, and dared them to come on, like—like—like that chap Horatius, you know, standing on the bridge and facing the Tuscan army," said Baggy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"They rushed me, and I hit out right and left. Two of them went down, stunned, I think—"

"Not dead?" asked Cardew.

"Nunno, I—I—think not—"

"That's just as well," said Blake; "lot of bother attending inquests when you knock a chap right into kingdom-come with one of your hefty blows, Trimble. A terrific fighting-man like you ought to be a bit careful."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"But they were too many for me," went on Trimble. "Three of them lay gasping on the ground, but the other six got me."

"Oh, draw it mild," said Levison. "You didn't let six fellows handle you, Trimble? You wouldn't."

"There may have been seven or eight—"

"Or a round dozen," suggested Clive.

"Make it a baker's dozen," said Wildrake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows think I'm exaggerating—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"They got me—the eight of them," said Trimble, "and

then I think I should have got loose, but the four I had knocked down got up—"

"The four?" asked Blake.

"Yes; they got up—"

"They must have increased and multiplied while they were down and out, as you knocked down only three at the beginning of the tale."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I meant, four. Of course, in the excitement of the moment I may not have counted very accurately," said Trimble. "It was a wild time, I can tell you. Anyhow, they all piled on me, and after a terrific struggle, I was overpowered. Bound hand and foot, I was led away through the wood."

"Bound hand and foot?" gasped Blake.

"Yes. Otherwise I should still have resisted; you know I'm the fellow to be game to the last."

"My hat! But how did they lead you away with your feet bound?"

"I—I—mean—they—they didn't exactly lead me away," stammered Trimble. "I—I—mean—they let my feet loose so that I could walk, you know. That's how it was."

"Good! Get on with it!"

"Well, the brute marched me away through the wood—"

"The brute? Was there only one brute after all?"

"I—I—mean, the brutes! The whole gang of them! They got me to a motor car that was waiting in a lane and forced me in," continued Trimble. "They crowded in round me, and held revolvers to my head while I was driven away."

"Draw it mild, old man," murmured Troope. "There was only one man in the car with you when I saw you."

"I—I—mean—"

"Well, what do you mean exactly?" chuckled Mellish.

"I—I—mean, the other brutes got out of the car, after a time," said Trimble. "That brute with a squint stayed on guard. That was when I passed you, Troopey, and those Shell fellows. Well, after a time we got to a bungalow where we met that racing man—the brutes called him Isaacs. Inspector Skeat was jolly glad to hear his name—it's a clue, he said. Well, Isaacs found that I wasn't Troope after all, and they drove me back to St. Jim's and dropped me outside the gates."

"And how did they come to take you for Troope?" asked Bates.

"It was owing to Troope's name being in the 'Holiday Annual' I was reading, see? That squinting brute—the other brute called him Squinty—saw it, when he came on me while I was asleep, see, and thought I was Troope. That's why he collared me."

"He?" said Blake. "You mean, the whole fifteen or sixteen of them?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, exactly," gasped Trimble. "You—you see—"

"Oh, we see all right," agreed Blake. "You let one man kidnap you, and you didn't put up a fight. You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself. You're a disgrace to St. Jim's."

"I've told you I put up a terrific fight!" roared Trimble. "I knocked them right and left. Some of them were stunned. I fancy they must be in hospital now."

"Phew!"

"And they were after Troope all the time?" said Herries.

"Yes. It was like me to take the danger on myself," said Trimble. "That was me all over. You see, Troopey's my pal—ain't you, Troope?"

"Oh, yes!"

"That was why I did it," said Trimble. "I thought to myself, let 'em collar me—I'll face the music; that was what I thought. All I thought of was to keep them from getting at my pal Troope."

"Great pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble's powerful imagination was evidently at work, even while he was telling his story. This improvement of the original yarn had only just occurred to him obviously. But Baggy was not the fellow to let a yarn go unimproved, simply because the improvement occurred to him rather late in the day.

"You fellows can cackle," said Trimble disdainfully. "I'm used to jealousy and detraction. I can't see any of you fellows taking a pal's danger on your own shoulders as I did. There isn't a chap in this dormitory who would have acted just as I did."

"Wathah not," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "You are p'wobably the only fellow in the Fourth, Twimble, who could be collared without puttin' up a scwap."

"I tell you I knocked them right and left—"

"Wats!"

"I was overpowered by numbers," hooted Trimble. "I stood up to the punishment like—like a prize-fighter. I was simply covered with bruises."

"There's a giddy proof of the story," said Cardew.

"Glad you can see it!" snorted Troope.

"I can't see it yet, old bean—but I've got an electric torch here! Let's see the bruises!"

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Let's."

"Yaas, wathah!" chortled Arthur Augustus. "Let us see those feahful bwuises, Twimble."

"I—I'm too tired to turn out of bed now!" stammered Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows had been scrapping with a gang of ferocious kidnappers, you'd be tired," snapped Trimble. "I'm going to sleep."

And Trimble settled down to repose, and his deep snore mingled with the chuckles from the other beds in the Fourth-Form dormitory.

CHAPTER 10.

The Undesirable!

SIDNEY TROOPE sighed.

It was a couple of days later.

Troope was strolling in the quad after class, looking quite cheery, till the fat figure of Baggy Trimble appeared in the offing.

Then he sighed.

Trimble rolled towards him with a genial grin on his fat face. Sidney Troope restrained the impulse to dodge away under the elms.

He tried to smile as Trimble joined him.

"Here you are, old fellow," said Baggy. "I say, I missed you after class, somehow."

"Did you?" murmured Troope guiltily.

"Yes, old man! But I've found you again."

"Yes," murmured Troope unhappily.

Baggy sauntered beside the new junior under the elms. They passed the Terrible Three, who were also sauntering. Three grinning glances were turned on them.

Since the incident of the kidnapping of Baggy Trimble, that fat youth's friendship for Troope had been more effusive than ever.

Baggy, who always was a stickler, was still more sticky, so to speak.

He had new claims on Troope, and he enforced those claims with ruthless persistence.

By this time, Baggy almost believed that he had taken Troope's danger on his fat shoulders, out of loyal friendship and devotion. That, at least, was the view he impressed upon Troope.

But there was no doubt that Baggy had suffered on Troope's account, whether intentionally or not. But for the mistake made by the kidnappers, it was extremely probable that Troope might have fallen into their hands. It was clear now that Isaacs' confederates were hanging about the school that half-holiday watching for a chance to get at Sidney Troope; and as Troope had been far out of gates, by himself, it was likely enough that they might have fallen upon him, but for the mistake of identity.

For the second time, Baggy had saved the new junior from his unknown and mysterious enemy.

And it was a real service; for now that it was known that Isaacs and his gang were still seeking to kidnap Troope, every possible precaution was being taken for his safety. He was under strict orders not to go beyond the gates of the school until the Head should give permission; which was not likely to be given until the kidnapping gang were in the hands of the police.

That was a consummation devoutly to be wished; but it had not happened yet. Troope, who was considerably irked by the restraints on his movements, longed to hear that Isaacs was in the hands of the police. Now that the man's name was known, as well as his description, there seemed a good chance that he would be taken; and this, again, was owing to Baggy Trimble. Isaacs, Squinty, and Tadger were being hunted for—search was being made for the green-shuttered bungalow, and for the car that had been used by the kidnappers. And all this useful information had come from Baggy Trimble. If Sidney Troope was relieved of the mysterious danger that hung over him, it could not be denied that that result would be largely due to Baggy.

Troope admitted it—he had to admit it. And in these circumstances, he felt less able than ever to shake off Baggy.

A fellow who piled obligations on him like this, and professed devoted friendship into the bargain, was really not to be shaken off—at least by an easy-going and good-natured fellow like Troope.

But it was growing altogether too "thick."

Baggy really was not a nice fellow to know.

It was not only that he was a bore, though he was an overpowering bore. It was not only that he was a boonder, though he was, as Cardew had remarked, the outside edge in bounders. It was not only that he was greedy, and conceited, and talkative, and untruthful, and unscrupulous—though in all those fascinating qualities he transcended any other fellow at St. Jim's. It was Baggy "tout ensemble"—Baggy taken in the lump, as it were—that was intolerable.

He was about the last fellow at St. Jim's that Troope would have chummed with, if he could have helped it.

Indeed, Troope felt, sometimes, that if he had been shut upon a desert island with Baggy Trimble, he would have kept carefully to one side of the island, with Trimble on the other.

It was not only that Baggy appropriated Troope, but he kept him away from other fellows whom he liked. Other fellows would have been chummy enough with Troope, but had no desire whatever to swallow Baggy Trimble in addition. If Troope was asked to tea in a study, his devoted pal would go with him as a matter of course; and nobody wanted Trimble. If Troope took a walk, his loyal chum walked with him, and nobody else did.

And there were other matters, which Troope had thought little of at first, but which he was driven to think of. He had plenty of money, and Baggy borrowed it ruthlessly. Even plenty of money was not sufficient to meet that steady drain, and Troope, who had come to St. Jim's with more money in his pockets than most fellows, found himself hard up. Already he had written to his guardian for a fresh supply. He had received the fresh supply, and along with it a severe lecture on economy. And Trimble had already made deep inroads into the new supply. Troope was a generous fellow, and rather more careless with money than he ought to have been. But his devoted pal was wearing out his generosity.

His good-looking face was quite unhappy in expression as he walked with Trimble under the elms that sunny afternoon.

Baggy rattled on very cheerily.

Either he could not or he would not see that Troope could hardly tolerate him and felt like a member of the noble army of martyrs in his presence.

"By the way, Troopey," said Baggy presently, "I owe you some money, old chap."

"Ye-e-es," murmured Troope.

"A few pounds, I think," said Baggy.

"I—I think so." It was more than a few pounds, as a matter of fact; but it was not worth while to mention that, as Baggy was never known to settle a debt.

"Of course, a thing like that doesn't matter between friends," said Baggy.

"Hem!"

"But, of course, I'm going to settle up," said Baggy. "Short reckonings make long friends, you know."

"Oh!"

"I shall be getting a handsome remittance shortly from my uncle—I've mentioned him to you—my rich uncle, you know."

"You have," sighed Troope—"often!"

"In the meantime," said Baggy, "I'm rather short of ready tin. Could you manage a couple of pound notes, old chap?"

No answer.

"If you could oblige me with a pound, Troope—"

"The fact is, Trimble—"

"I could make ten bob do," said Trimble, some instinct warning him that he was approaching danger-point. "Is that all right?"

"Oh, yes, all right!"

A ten-shilling note changed hands. Tom Merry & Co., re-passing under the elms, could not help seeing that little transaction, and they exchanged glances. Troope coloured as he caught their looks. Baggy Trimble did not heed them.

"Thanks, old chap!" he said. "I've got to see a fellow now; but I'll see you again at tea-time. Come to tea in my study."

"Oh, all right!"

"On second thoughts, though, you wouldn't care for Mellish's company; he's rather a cad. I'll come to tea in your study, instead. Comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Right-ho, then!"

Baggy Trimble rolled away, much to Troope's relief. The "fellow" he had to see was apparently in the tuckshop, for it was in that direction that the fat junior rolled, with the ten-shilling note crumpled in his podgy hand.

Sidney Troope stood and looked after him with quite a peculiar expression on his face. He had hoped to make friends, and perhaps some special chum, when he came to St. Jim's. He had succeeded—there was no doubt about that. But his success did not seem to have a very gratifying effect on him.

CHAPTER 11.

Monty to the Rescue!

"I T'S up to us!" said Monty solemnly.

Tom Merry and Manners smiled.

They knew that solemnity in Monty's manner. It testified that some jape was in a state of incubation.

"Well, what's up to us?" asked Tom.

"We're Middle School!" said Monty. "All these fags—Fourth Form kids and such—are under our protection. They don't realise it—"

"They don't!"

"But they are!"

"Oh, yes, they are!" yawned Tom. "What are you driving at?"

"As the protectors, guides, and general bear-leaders in the Lower School, it's up to us," said Monty. "Twice Trimble has rescued Troope. Now we're going to rescue him."

"Eh? The giddy kidnapers haven't called at St. Jim's, have they?" asked Manners.

"We're going to rescue Troope from something worse than kidnapers."

"My hat! What's that?"

"Trimble!"

Tom Merry and Manners chuckled. Whether Baggy Trimble's friendship was worse than being kidnapped might be a question. But there could be no question that it was eminently undesirable. Any fellow honoured with Baggy's friendship might be expected to testify deep gratitude for being rescued from it.

"Trimble's Damon-and-Pythias bizney," went on Lowther, "is rather touching in its way. In fact, Troope must be a little touched to put up with it. Touched in the upper story, I mean."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, in the giddy circles, he can't exactly turn the chap down," he said. "I thought he was rather soft to stand it, but really he's under obligations to the fat bounder. I don't think I should turn him down in the same circumstances—though goodness knows how I should be able to stand him!"

"But suppose he turned Troope down?"

"Catch him!" said Manners. "He knows that Troope's got pots of money; and as long as a fellow has money Baggy will love him like a brother."

"Suppose he lost all his money?"

"Ass! He couldn't if he wanted to; and I suppose he wouldn't want to, even to get shut of Trimble."

Lowther sighed.

"I'll put it in words of one syllable, suited to your undeveloped intellect, old man," he said. "Listen to the words of wisdom; lend me your ears, and give your chin a rest."

"Fathead!"

"Suppose it turned out that it was all gammon about Troope's money, and he's not rich at all."

"It isn't, and it won't, ass!"

"Shush! And suppose Troopey began to ask Baggy to hand back a few of the pound notes he's bagged."

"Blessed if I see what you're getting at!" said Tom.

"Baggy would drop Troope like a hot brick, of course. But it isn't going to happen. It's well-known that Troope's got pots of money, with a racing stable thrown in, from his old uncle when he died."

"Yes, it appears so; but appearances are sometimes deceptive," said Lowther. "You know what is said to be the real punishment of a liar? It isn't that nobody believes him, but that he's unable to believe anybody else. After Baggy's yarns about Trimble Hall and the Trimble wealth, he would simply swallow it like a gudgeon that it was all gammon about Troope's money if the idea was put into his fat head."

"But how—"

"That's the idea," said Lowther. "Baggy's going to learn that there isn't any Troope money—and we'll watch the result."

"Oh, my hat!"

Monty Lowther strolled away from his chums, leaving them grinning. He followed Baggy Trimble into the tuckshop.

The fat junior had disposed of the ten-shilling note. It did not take Baggy Trimble long to work through such a moderate amount in the way of tuck. He was looking very shiny and fat and rather sticky as he slid from the stool at Dame Taggles' counter and wiped his mouth on his sleeve in his own elegant manner.

"Hallo, old pippin!" said Lowther genially. "Blowing your big remittances from Trimble Hall in riotous living—what?"

Trimble grinned complacently.

"I've had a snack," he said. "Any change from that ten-bob note, Mrs. Taggles?"

"No, Master Trimble."

"Oh, all right!"

"You've blued ten bob on a little snack, have you?" said Lowther. "Some fellows are rolling in it—what?"

"Pooh! That's nothing to me," said Trimble airily. "If I happen to be short of cash it only means telephoning home."

"Lucky bargee!" said Lowther. "Just a phone call to Trimble Hall and there you are—what?"

"Just that!" assented Baggy.

He rolled out of the tuckshop, and Monty Lowther walked with him.

"You rather chuck your money about, don't you?" said Monty genially.

"What does it matter when a fellow has lots of it?"

"Quite so! Where that came from there's plenty more—eh?"

"Exactly!" assented Trimble, thinking not of Trimble Hall, but of Sidney Troope of the Fourth.

"And then the way you lend fellows money!" said Lowther. "Isn't it rather reckless?"

Trimble blinked at him suspiciously for a moment. But Lowther's face was serious and bland.

"Pooh! I don't miss it!" he said. "I rather hand it out, in my thoughtless, generous way, you know. I don't have to consider trifles—like you, for instance."

"Still, you want to be careful," argued Lowther. "I've noticed that you're rather chummy with that new chap Troope."

"I saved his life!" said Baggy loftily.

"Hem! Of course, having saved his life, you feel very friendly towards him, and you're not a chap to care whether a fellow's poor."

Trimble jumped.

"Poor!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, Troope's a jolly good fellow, isn't he? After all, what does it matter if he's a penniless orphan?" said Monty.

"I know he's an orphan," said Trimble. "That legal johnny, old Pinkingham, is his guardian. But he's got pots of money."

"Has he?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Oh, pots and pots!" said Trimble. "He got a big fortune from his uncle, Colonel Troope. That's all right."

"If it's all right, all right," said Monty. "But—speaking as an older fellow than yourself, you know—I think I'd make sure of that before I lent him a lot of money, in your thoughtless, generous way, you know. Some of these fellows who are supposed to have pots of money, sometimes have the clobber they stand up in, and precious little else."

"Oh, rot!" said Trimble, rather uneasily.

"Cardew of the Fourth knows his people," remarked Lowther casually.

"Does he?"

"Yes. I fancy Cardew would know how Troope really is fixed, if you wanted to know."

And, with a genial nod, Monty Lowther strolled away, leaving Baggy Trimble with some food for thought.

Monty walked into the School House, and made his way to Study No. 9 in the Fourth, where he found Levison, Clive, and Cardew at tea. Levison waved his hand to a chair.

"Just in time," he said.

"Thanks!" said Lowther, as he sat down. "I really came in for a little light and genial conversation; but that cake looks good. You fellows are all Scouts, I believe?"

"Certainly," said Clive.

"As Scouts, you're bound to do fellows good turns."

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"Yearnin' for the chance!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew gravely.

"Then you can help me to rescue a fellow in your Form who has fallen into the claws of a cormorant," said Lowther.

"My hat!"

"It's rather a jape, too," said Monty. "This really is good cake. I'll try again! Thanks!"

Monty Lowther proceeded to explain, and there was a chortle in Study No. 9. Levison & Co. entered cheerily into the little game.

And from Study No. 9, when tea was over, Monty Lowther proceeded to Study No. 6, where Blake & Co. were enlisted in the good cause. Finally, he dropped in at Study No. 3, where he found Sidney Troope and Bates. Tea was on the table; also a fives bat, close to Harold Bates' plate.

Bates grinned as Lowther's glance fell on the bat.

"That's for Trimble!" he said. "Trimble came in to have tea with Troopey. He got the fives bat. If he comes back again, he'll get some more of it—see?"

"What a ripping idea!" said Lowther. Troope looked uncomfortable.

"Bates doesn't like Trimble here," he said. "It's Bates' study as well as mine."

"You don't like him here any more than I do," said Bates.

Troope did not answer that.

"I've made it a rule," went on Bates, "to kick Trimble out every time he puts a nose into this study. I don't think he'll come back while I'm here."

Bates of the Fourth was right; Trimble didn't. Having finished his tea, Harold Bates left the study. Troope eyed Monty rather curiously.

"Did you come in to speak to me?" he asked.

"Just that," assented Lowther. "In this matter, dear boy, you can regard me as your kind and affectionate Uncle Montague."

Troope grinned.

"What are you driving at?" he asked.

"I'm going to save you. You're a bit too soft for St. Jim's, and I'm going to help you out," explained Lowther. "I suppose you'd really give a term's pocket-money to get rid of Trimble?"

Troope made no reply.

"I know you don't want to turn him down——"

"I can't!" said Troope.

"Quite so. In the circumstances, you can't. But how would you like him to turn you down?"

"He won't," said Troope. "The—fact is, Lowther, I—I don't like talking about Trimble like this. He's jolly friendly, and I can't throw a fellow's friendship back in his face. I'd rather drop the subject."

"But you'd still rather drop Trimble?"

Troope grinned, in spite of himself.

"There's only one way, old bean," said Lowther. "You're a pretty average fellow in some respects, but you've got one shining quality that inspires Trimble with undying affection."

"My hat! What's that?"

"Cash!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Troope uneasily. "I shouldn't like to think that that was Trimble's only reason."

"Facts are facts, old chump, whether you like them or not. You've got lots of qualities. I don't mind admitting that I rather like you myself——"

"Thanks!" said Troope, with a grin.

"But you've only got one quality that appeals to Baggy, and that's cash. Let's put it to the test."

"How do you mean?"

"Lose all your cash, old bean, and ask Baggy to settle up a few of the loans you've made him."

"I don't admit——"

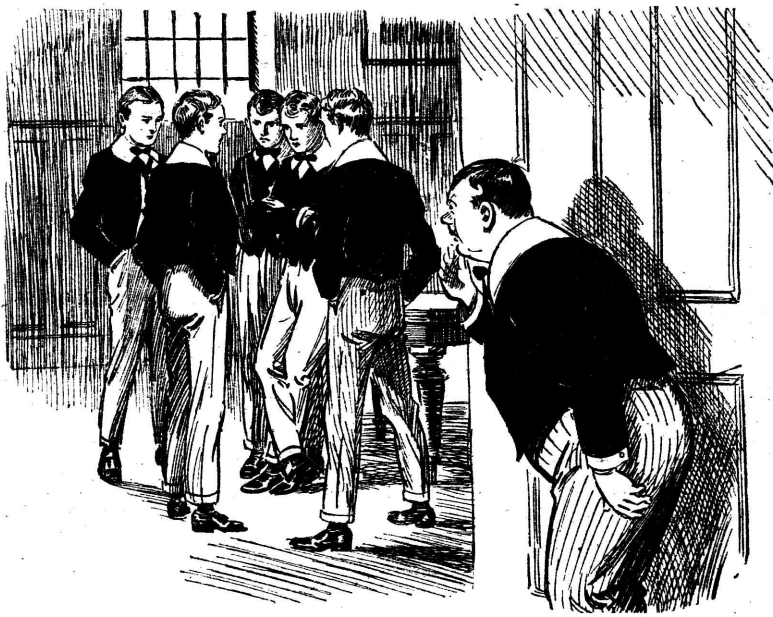
"Dear man, every fellow in the House knows that you've been Trimble's banker ever since you came."

"Oh, rot!" said Troope, colouring.

"Try it on," urged Lowther. "You can't drop Trimble, though he plunders you, and makes you feel that life at St. Jim's isn't worth living. But give him a chance to drop you."

Troope's face brightened up, quite involuntarily.

"He wouldn't," he said. "He can't be so mercenary as all that. I'm sure that if he thought I was hard up it wouldn't make any difference to him—at least, I hope it wouldn't."



The group of juniors chatting in the corner of the Common-room did not seem to observe a fat figure that had rolled in. But Baggy Trimble had observed them. He did not lose a word. Naturally it did not occur to his fat brain that this especial conversation was intended for his ears—that his little weakness for eavesdropping was being made use of by the plotters. (See this page.)

"Good! If he comes out of the test right side up, I'll own up that he's a better chap than I ever believed," said Lowther. "You'll really be doing him a good turn, and making fellows think better of him."

"Something in that," said Troope, with a faint smile.

"Then it's a go?"

"Well, if the fellow chose to turn me down of his own accord, it would be his own look-out," said Troope. "Mind, I don't believe he would. But it's a go, and we'll see how it turns out."

"Done!" said Monty Lowther.

And the humorist of the Shell strolled away, feeling quite satisfied with the progress of his plot.

CHAPTER 12.

Not Worth Knowing!

"TWOPE?"

"Yes, that new chap."

"I heard that he had pots of money, deah boy."

"One hears such a lot of things," smiled Cardew.

"I've heard that Trimble of the Fourth has pots of money, with Trimble Hall thrown in. In fact, I've heard it from Trimble himself, and he ought to know. Straight from the horse's mouth, as it were. And yet there's nothin' in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Troope——" said Tom Merry.

"You see, I know his people," said Cardew. "Blessed if I know how it got round that he was rolling in cash. I'm sure Troope never said anything of the kind himself."

"Trimble seems to have started the ball rolling," said Manners. "He heard somebody speaking to Troope about what he'd inherited from an uncle, or something."

"Just like Trimble!"

"But is Troope really hard up, just like Trimble himself?" asked Blake.

"Harder, I should say, since Baggy has bagged about all he had," said Cardew.

"Bai Jove!"

The group of juniors, chatting in a corner of the Common-room, did not seem to observe a fat figure that had rolled in. But Baggy Trimble observed them.

He did not lose a word.

Trimble was not particular about little things like this. Listening to conversation not intended for his ears was quite a trifle to the fascinating Baggy.

And it naturally did not occur to his fat brain that this especial conversation was intended for his ears—that his little weakness in this respect was being made use of by the plotters. He did not dream that Tom Merry & Co. had plotted a plot, and schemed a scheme, and that they had been all ready to begin when Trimble came into the offing. Baggy's belief was that he was hearing what he

was not intended to hear, and he had no scruple about doing so.

Instead of making his presence known, Baggy dropped into a high-backed armchair, noiselessly, so that he could continue to hear without being observed.

The juniors grinned at one another, perfectly aware of that strategic proceeding on the fat Baggy's part. And they proceeded to keep the ball rolling, knowing that Trimble's large ears were drinking in every word.

"But Trimble seems to have got a lot of information from somewhere," Monty Lowther went on. "According to him, Troope got a lot of money from his old uncle, and a racing-stable, and a big house, and all that."

"He heard a man saying so, anyhow," said Levison.

"And believed all he heard!" smiled Cardew. "Of course, I don't know old Colonel Troope's exact circumstances. I believe he left enough to pay his bills."

"Troope's been lending a lot of money to Trimble," said Digby. "We all know it in the Fourth. He must be an ass to do it, if he's handing out his whole allowance for the term."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, Trimble seems to have wedged in and helped him when that kidnapping chap got hold of him," said Cardew; "and they're pals, you know. He's grateful, and all that. Besides, he doesn't know Trimble as we do. Perhaps he believes that Baggy will only have to phone to Trimble Hall for the money when it's wanted. Of course, he will want it."

"But what a jest on Trimble," said Monty Lowther. "He's palling on to Troope for his money, and there isn't any money—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not a word to Trimble," said Cardew. "Let him run n. It's quite amusin' to watch him."

"Let him find out for himself," agreed Herries.

"The fact is, I've dropped him a hint," said Monty Lowther. "Sorry I spoke now. Still, if Trimble hasn't sense enough to take a hint—"

Behind the high back of the chair, Trimble grinned.

"Bai Jove, you know, it's weally wathah funnay, to see Trimble wunnin' aftah a fellow for his money, if the fellow hasn't any money, you know."

"No end of a jest," said Cardew. "Let him run on. Not a word to Trimble."

"Not a word," agreed Tom Merry.

"Wathah not!"

The little crowd of juniors strolled out of the Common-room, still apparently unconscious of the fact that Baggy Trimble was there.

Baggy made a grimace after them as they went.

So that was it, was it?

He had been spoofed—or, rather, he had spoofed himself. He had wasted his time and his fascinations on a fellow who was not, after all, worth knowing. Worse than that, he would be expected to return all those little loans he had borrowed from Troope. Still worse, the fellow would very likely feel entitled to borrow of Trimble himself, in his turn. Troope had been his banker, so far, and that had been very agreeable to Baggy. But if the case was reversed—

Baggy Trimble sat quite a long time in the armchair, thinking over it. He rolled out of the Common-room at last, and made his way to the Fourth Form passage, to see Troope.

The door of Study No. 3 was half-open, and Baggy did not observe that a glass in the study mirrored his fat form as he approached. Monty Lowther, in the study, had his eye on the glass, and he was speaking to Troope as Baggy got into hearing.

"The fact is, Troopey, it's high time to dub up," he said.

"You see, the fellows really pay up their subscriptions at the beginning of the term. Shell out, old fellow!"

"You see—" murmured Troope.

"As secretary and treasurer, I have to get in the dubs," said Lowther. "I'm dunning all the fellows now who haven't shelled out, and you're one of them. Cash!"

"Sorry!" said Troope. "The fact is—"

"Stony?" asked Lowther.

"It's all right. I'll borrow the money of a friend," said Troope. "Trimble will lend me ten shillings like a shot!"

Baggy Trimble stopped outside the doorway.

He had come there for a talk with Troope, to make assurance doubly sure, as it were, before he deprived the new junior of the boon and blessing of his valuable friendship.

He was getting the information he wanted now! If Troope could not afford to pay up his subscription to the junior club, he was scarcely the fellow for Baggy to waste time on.

"Well, that's all very well," said Lowther. "But I have to get the dubs in, you know."

"I know; but—"

"I don't want to dun you, old bean, but there it is," said Monty. "Make it to-morrow, then, and it's all right."

"That's all right. I can rely on Trimble."

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In the study glass, Monty Lowther had a momentary view of a fat figure stealing silently away. Trimble vanished without having entered the study.

The Shell fellow chuckled.

"What price that?" he asked.

Troope, whose eye had also been on the glass, grinned rather ruefully.

"I can't really believe that Trimble is such a worm," he said. "I'm going to give him a chance. He's been jolly friendly to me."

Monty Lowther laughed.

"Well, he has been friendly—very friendly," said Troope. "I'm going to be friendly in my turn. I'm going to give him a chance, and if he plays up like a man I'm going to stick to him."

"That's a jolly big 'if,'" said Lowther, with a chuckle; and he left the study.

He found Baggy Trimble in the window-seat on the landing, with a thoughtful frown on his fat face. Lowther called to him.

"Baggy, old bean, I think Troope wants to speak to you in his study."

"Does he?" grunted Trimble.

"Bates isn't there," grinned Lowther. "All clear!"

Grunt from Trimble.

"Well, aren't you going?" demanded Lowther. "The fact is, I think it's rather important."

"I dare say you do," sneered Trimble. "I don't! If Troope wants to speak to me he knows where to find me, I dare say."

"Dash it all! That isn't the way to treat a pal, especially such a pal as Troope. Look here, he really has a reason for speaking to you now," said Lowther. "I happen to know what it is, so run along!"

Trimble's fat sneer intensified. No doubt the secretary of the junior club was anxious to get the subscriptions in. But if he imagined that Baggy was going to pay Troope's sub he was making an enormous mistake. Trimble did not stir.

"You mind your own business," said Trimble. "As for being pals, I don't know that we're such pals as all that."

Monty Lowther went on down the stairs, and winked into space as he went. That loyal and lifelong friendship seemed in imminent danger of total collapse. Trimble was no longer keen to play Damon to Troope's Pythias. Really, it began to look as if Sidney Troope would not be troubled much longer with too much Trimble.

CHAPTER 13.

The End of a Friendship!

"BAGGY, old chap!"

Sidney Troope's tone was quite affectionate.

Only a few hours before, that affectionate address would have been grateful and comforting to the fat ears of Baggy Trimble. Now it did not seem to please him. He blinked at Troope in quite a distant way.

Troope did not seem to observe it.

He slipped his arm through Baggy's as they walked down the corridor. Baggy disentangled his fat form at once.

"You remember your idea of digging with me in No. 3," went on Troope, still unobtrusively, "well, look here, Trimble, I've spoken to Bates. I think he might agree to changing out if you are still keen on coming into my study. What do you think?"

Trimble smiled sarcastically.

"I get on all right in No. 2," he answered. "I'm not thinking of changing, at present."

"Still, it would be better to have a study with your best pal, wouldn't it," urged Troope.

Grunt!

"As we're such friends—"

Grunt!

"By the way, there's another matter I want to speak to you about—"

"Another time," said Trimble. "I've got to speak to a fellow."

And the fat junior turned the first corner.

Troope looked after him with a rather grim expression on his face. He had no further doubt on the subject, and he had a feeling of annoyance that was very natural in the circumstances. Ever since he had been at St. Jim's he had submitted to Baggy's effusive and overpowering chumminess. Trimble had a claim on him, and he could not wound the feelings of a fellow who had a claim on him, and who offered him friendship. It had not occurred to him that Baggy had no feelings to wound.

Certainly, he had had his doubts about Baggy, and he had grown very restive under his friendly attentions, and in his incessant society. But he had tried to like the fellow, and at least, he had put up with him. And now—

"The awful rotter!" murmured Troope.

He did not see Baggy Trimble again until bedtime. Certainly, the evening was a pleasanter one without the unmusical voice of Baggy buzzing in his ear. But when the Fourth Form went up to their dormitory Troope joined Baggy, and walked with him.

"I've been looking for you, old chap," he said.

"I dare say you have."

"There's something I wanted to mention, but I don't seem to have run across you," said Troope.

"The fact is, my time's a good deal taken up," said Trimble loftily. "You can't expect me to neglect old friends on your account, Troope."

"But we're such pals, Baggy—"

"I've given you a lot of my time," said Trimble. "There isn't any other fellow in the Fourth who'd have shown so much kindness to a new kid, I can tell you."

"Oh!"

"It's my way. I'm always thoughtlessly generous," said Baggy. "But there's a limit, you know."

And he rolled into the dormitory.

Troope caught Cardew's eye and grinned. When the Fourth turned in Troope called out good-night to Trimble, but received no reply. The fast friendship was fast withering.

On the following morning Troope joined Baggy as they left the dormitory. Baggy quickened his pace a little, but Troope did the same. The two juniors seemed to have changed characters. It was now Troope, instead of Trimble, who was the pursuer.

"About this afternoon," said Troope cheerily.

"What about it?" grunted Trimble.

"It's a half-holiday, you know."

"I know that!"

"How shall we fill it up?" asked Troope. "You know I'm gated for the present—I can't go out of gates. Lucky I've got a pal like you to stick to me."

Grunt!

Baggy Trimble had his own ideas about that. He entertained hopes of fastening himself on to Aubrey Racke, of the Shell, for the afternoon, in one of Racke's little excursions. Certainly, he had not the slightest intention of passing the half-holiday within gates on account of his dear pal Troope.

Troope standing excessive feeds in the school shop was one person; Troope seeking to borrow money to pay his subscriptions was quite another. The first person Trimble had liked immensely; the second he desired to keep at arm's length, or farther, if possible.

After dinner that day Baggy Trimble loafed about watching for Racke, of the Shell. Quite a scowl came over his fat face when Troope joined him. He was fed-up with Troope.

"Chess in my study, what?" asked Troope.

"I don't play chess."

"We'll have a ramble about the place, old fellow. There's a lot of things I haven't seen yet."

"I'm going out."

"But I'm gated!" said Troope, in surprise. "Of course, you're going to stick to a pal who's gated, Baggy."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Trimble irritably.

"What?"

"You can't jolly well stick on to me like this," said Baggy, still with a watchful eye open for Aubrey Racke.

"Oh, if that's how you look at it—"

Grunt!

"Well, look here, Trimble, there's a matter I must mention. I'm rather short of tin—"

"Not my bizney, is it?"

"Lowther's dunning me for my subscription. I suppose you can lend me twelve-and-six?"

"Suppose again!" said Trimble.

"You won't?"

"I never lend money," said Trimble. "It's a bad system."

"My hat! Well, then, if you can't lend me twelve and six, I suppose you can square a few of the little loans I've made you."

"I believe you've lent me a few trifles," said Baggy scornfully. "If I'd known you were hard up I certainly should not have borrowed a few measly half-crowns from you. Of course, I shall settle up. Next term—"

"Next term won't do for my subscriptions this term."

"After all I've done for you I'm blessed if I understand

how you can have the cheek to dun me like this," said Trimble.

"I'm not exactly dunning you," said Troope mildly. "I won't ask you to square, but I do ask you to lend me twelve-and-six, as a pal. I know you've had your allowance to-day."

"Just like you to keep an eye on a fellow and see whether he's in funds," sneered Trimble. "But I can jolly well tell you that you're not sponging on me, Troope."

"Oh!"

"As for the few trifling sums you've lent me, I'll settle next term—or the next. I've done a lot for you, anyhow."

"Call it square, then," said Troope quietly. "You placed me under an obligation to you, Trimble, without my asking, and I've lent you about seven pounds. Keep it, and call the account square. And I'm jolly glad to be done with you!"

"Can it!" jeered Trimble. "I'm jolly well done with you, anyhow, and the sooner you sheer off the better I shall like it. Thumping cheek, I call it, for a new kid to try to land himself on a fellow like this."

Aubrey Racke appeared in the quad, heading for the gates. Trimble turned his back on Troope without ceremony and followed Racke.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Sidney Troope.

It was the end of a friendship!

"Comin' down to footah pwactice, deah boy?" asked a cheery voice, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped the new junior on the arm. "You won't mind bein' gated if you get some footah—what?"

"Good egg!" said Troope.

"Come on, old bean!" said Tom Merry. "Your beloved pal, Trimble, seems to have left you stranded, so you must put up with little us."

"Poor little us!" said Monty Lowther. "After Trimble, I suppose we must seem like moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine. But you must make us do somehow."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Troope burst into a laugh.

It was a happy afternoon for Sidney Troope. He was gated, because the kidnappers were still at large; but gating did not matter very much when he was playing football with fellows like Tom Merry & Co. And he saw nothing of Baggy Trimble, which was a happiness in itself. The account with Trimble had been squared, and he was done at last with that fascinating youth.

But Sidney Troope was not quite done with Trimble.

There remained one episode—a brief one.

Probably it was from Ralph Reckness Cardew that Trimble learned—too late—the facts. No doubt Cardew considered it would be "amusin'" to open Trimble's eyes, and see what he would do.

Troope and Bates were at prep. in their study, an evening or two later, when Trimble arrived.

He looked in at the door, and the beaming smile on his fat face showed, before he had spoken a word, that he knew how matters really stood.

"Troopey, old chap—"

Troope looked up.

"Hallo!"

"Like a hand with your prep., old man?"

"Thanks, no!"

"Well, come along to my study," said Trimble. "I've got a cake."

"Whose?" asked Troope sarcastically.

"Hem! Trot along, old chap! I haven't seen much of you the last day or two," said Baggy, "and we're such pals—"

Troope chuckled.

"Oh, you've caught on, have you?" he asked. "Do you think that that chicken will fight now, Trimble? Where's your fives bat, Bates?"

"Here it is!" said Bates, jumping up.

"I—I say!" stuttered Trimble.

He turned to flee as Bates brandished the fives bat. Troope made a stride forward, and a boot was planted on Baggy Trimble's tight trousers as he went.

There was a heavy bump in the passage, and a loud howl.

The door closed.

THE END.

FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY

"WILDRAKE ON THE TRAIL!"

A stunning extra-long story of St. Jim's, featuring
Kit Wildrake, the junior from British Columbia.

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THE ALTERNATIVE!

thousands of feet below them!

Rather than face a lingering death at the hands of the rascally Yen How, aboard the latter's airship, Penny Rudd and Fan Shen prefer to risk a parachute descent to earth,



THE CRIMSON CLAW!

A Full-of-Thrills Mystery Story, featuring "Penny" Rudd and his Chinese chum Fan Shen.

By

LESTER BIDSTON.

A Leap for Life!

PENNY landed three feet in front of Chang whilst the grin of victory still wreathed that ugly creature's face. As though the metal had been resilient rubber, Pen rebounded straight at How's jackal and lashed out in grim fury.

"Make for the stern, Fan!" he yelled. "Unclip two of the bundles hanging overboard. They're parachutes! It's our only chance!"

Giving Chang no chance to recover from that first dynamic surprise, Rudd waded in—a veritable tornado—with flailing piston-rods for arms, and his whole weight behind every thudding blow.

Crash!

Chang reeled, but the trembling rails prevented him from falling. He tried to shield his face, but sledgehammer-blows crashed on his ribs. His hand swept down and tore the knife from his belt; but a fierce kick sent the steel whirling into space, and again his face was being pulped by Pen's pounding fists. Finally, with mouth and nose spouting blood and his mind a-whirl, he staggered back three paces before he dropped in a heap on the narrow cat-walk.

The whole lightning onslaught had hardly occupied ten seconds, but it gave Fan breathing space to do his bit. It also blocked the path of the raging gang up for a moment—a fact on which Pen had counted, and one of which he now took instant advantage.

Even as Chang began to sag to the metals Pen whipped round and streaked along the trembling run, with never a thought of what a slip would mean. He saw Fan waiting, poised on the after deck's extreme edge, and he realised with joy that his pal had guessed his wishes.

Too spent to speak, Rudd slipped an arm through the metal ring of the parachute held out in readiness. A fleeting backward glance showed that the yellow pack were almost on their heels—the furious Tao scarce ten feet away.

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"Now—jump!" Pen gasped hoarsely. Incapable of that last exertion himself, he saw Fan take the horrifying leap; then he also tumbled blindly into empty space.

A full thousand feet Pen fell, plumb the depths like a crashing stone. He was subconsciously aware that earth was rushing up to meet him at express speed, but he was more vitally alive to the truth that the breath was being forced back into his lungs and that he was rapidly choking.

The next thing he knew was that his right arm was being wrenched upwards until it threatened to tear away from the shoulder; then, where to the present he had been plunging head first, he suddenly realised his body had described a parabola, and that his feet were now in position to hit solidly.

Then it gradually dawned on him that the electrifying speed of his descent was lessening, and that there remained a fighting chance of life, after all. A glance upwards showed that the unshapely bundle in which he trusted had opened out into a huge umbrella parachute, that it was resisting his weight by wind pressure, and that the earth below had taken on some semblance of sanity.

The next anxious thought was of his chum and how he had fared.

Slowly rotating in what was now an orderly descent, Pen at last sighted the second parachute, several hundred feet to the right, somewhat lower, but in full working order.

Of the ship above he could see no sign, for the umbrella obscured most of the sky. But he was confident that an airship—especially one poised with deadened engines, as the Dragon had been—must take minutes to turn, even if its outwitted commander considered the trouble worth while. After all, Yen How dare not come near the ground without risking his unwieldy monster; he dare not even drop low enough to fire on them in a land that was scarred by mountains and hills.

So, devoutly thankful for an amazingly lucky escape, Pen touched down, and was grasping his pal's hand five minutes later.

"You'm a gleedy glut-ton!" Fan chided. "You take on allee fightin' and leave poor Fanny the lun-away allee time!"

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

PENDENNIS RUDD, better known as "Penny" Rudd, born and bred in China of English parents. Knows the habits of the Oriental from A to Z. Attached to the Peking Legation, and holds a watching brief for the British Government on matters affecting British residents in China.

FAN SHEN, a young Chinese, Penny's close friend and assistant.

INSPECTOR WELBECK, known as "Asiatic" Welbeck on account of his activities in the East End of London against Oriental criminals.

PROFESSOR FORSHAW, an authority on Eastern languages and customs.

PRINCE YEN HOW, chief of the notorious League of the Crimson Claw. Possessed of amazing hypnotic powers and all the Mystic trickery of the East, Yen How bids fair to becoming another Napoleon.

CHANG FU, one of How's principal agents.

Yen How aims to dominate China, but without modern machinery and European science to aid him, he realises that he can do nothing. With consummate daring the outcast prince comes to England and kidnaps ten of the most famous European scientists. He smuggles the ten aboard a private yacht, from which, in turn, they are transferred to a giant airship. Penny Rudd and Fan Shen, who have followed hard on How's trail, also manage to get aboard the airship. A plan to make Yen How surrender is almost assured of success, when, of a sudden, Rudd and Fan Shen are taken by surprise. Penny realises what capture means, and, with a suicidal leap, he flings himself through the trapdoor of his hiding-place on to the bridge below.

(Now read on.)

"It was first come, first served!" Pen grinned. "I've got split knuckles and a feeling that we've been badly had. Once again How has beaten us, and remains free to carry on his rotten game of subduing China to his beastly will."

Fan shook his head.

"We've not been so badly had," he decided. "After all, we had to return to China, and How has kindly given us a big lift."

"So he has," Pen smiled; "but I'd like to know just where he's lifted us to."

Disconsolately they stared at their surroundings. It was plain that they were thousands of feet above sea-level, for mile on mile of mountainous country stretched in every direction, and always it seemed to slope away from them.

"Well, there's not a soul in evidence, and perhaps never will be in this desolate countryside," Pen decided. "So long as we make eastward, it doesn't matter which line we take, but the sooner we move the sooner we'll find some kind of beings."

But after hours of hot tramping they began to think that they had dropped into an uninhabited world. Never a living creature or sign of a man's handiwork did they sight, until, emerging from a wooded valley as night drew near, they found their path blocked by a towering mountain, and at last sighted a building.

But what a building! Dominating the valley, it was superbly detached at a height of five hundred feet. Reared on a huge spur of rock, its massive walls, terraces and bastions rose upwards as if the spur had been specially placed by some divinity as a foundation-stone for a god's stronghold!

To Pen it was a goodly sight that promised grub and information. To Fan, it brought bewilderment and such frowning perplexity that he stood as if carved in stone!

Hajjar, the Mysterious!

SO long did Fan stare at the gaunt stone palace that Pen at last grew wrathfully sarcastic.

"We can stand here till we take root if you like, Fan," he said. "But I'd suggest we start the climb now, as it's the only way to learn anything."

Fan turned to his pal with the puzzled look still in his eyes.

"In Peking we've pictures of all the holy houses," he muttered. "If the idea wasn't laughably impossible, I'd say that was the Llamasery of Hajjar—the very one How was sacked from."

"Hajjar the Mysterious," Pen replied. "Well, I've heard queer tales of the place, but why shouldn't it be Hajjar?"

"Because we were in London four days ago," Fan answered, "and London is several thousand miles away."

"You forget that a modern airship covers anything up to one hundred miles an hour," Pen replied. "You also forget that we were on the Dragon at least forty hours—giving us a range of four thousand miles."

"Strangers, you speak of Hajjar the Mysterious! Does that then mean you are followers of the Excellent One?"

The speaker might have sprung from the ground, for all the chums had heard of his approach. Whipping round in sudden alarm, they were amazed to see an old, homely-clad Chinaman standing within arm's length—his placid face inscrutable, but his slat eyes vividly alert and suspicious.

"You ask if we follow the Excellent One," Fan answered.

"Sir, we salute the Excellent One with profound respect." He made a sign of obeisance—made it in such a way that the ancient knew at once he also belonged to the lama clan.

"It is well," the ancient said, simply. "You have travelled far and need rest and change of garment. Come then, knowing the Hajjar Llamasery is your home."

In some trepidation the chums followed up the mountain-side. In China the lamas were their friends and were bitterly opposed to the Crimson Claw Society; but here, in the wild solitudes of Tibet, they knew the human deities who dwell in the secret llamaseries wielded strange and awe-inspiring powers—or so the tale was told in Peking. True or not, Pen had enough respect for the genius that had ruled a continent for thousands of years to wonder if Hajjar was destined to be a "home" or a prison.

Entering the building after a stiff climb, their guide led the way through gloomy stone corridors and into a cell that was cold as a sunless tomb.

"Rest you here," he mumbled. "Shortly water and cool raiment will be brought; later, you will be received by the Lama Dalai."

"The Lama Dalai, Fan?" Pen queried, when they were alone. "I thought he resided in Lhasa?"

"But his shadow lives in Hajjar," Fan answered. "Or rather, as Hajjar is next in importance to Lhasa, its ruling head is really named the child Dalai."

A plunge in cold mountain water, a generous meal and suits of cool clean cottons put the chums in good shape for the coming meeting; but it was nearly three hours later when they received the summons to appear before the priest who wielded more power than most kings.

Through gloomy passages cut in solid rock they were led to a chamber that must have been deep in the mountain-side. Entering, they found themselves in a place furnished with the utmost simplicity, its one incongruous note being an electric lamp high overhead.

One other person occupied the room—an elderly man robed in a single garment of black silk. With limbs relaxed and head bent, he sat merged in deep thought a full two minutes after their arrival.

Twice he nodded his head and, occasionally, his lips moved as though he communed with some unseen speaker. Then, looking up, he slowly rose to his feet and beckoned the chums to approach.

Tall and broad-shouldered, he carried the stoop of the student, though he was obviously in perfect physical training.



"Now jump!" gasped Pen hoarsely. Incapable of that last exertion himself, he saw Fan Shen take the horrifying leap from the airship—then he also tumbled blindly into empty space.

His high forehead was that of a thinker, his square jaw hinted determination, and his eyes—wide set and sparklingly alert—told of a brain keyed to swift and accurate reasoning.

"So Yen the Outcast, winning in all else, failed in his designs on you," he said quietly. "The word came that you had fallen into his hands and much we feared—for we could do nought to help you."

Pen's eyes opened wide.

"But what can you know of our troubles?" he gasped. "Why, sir, How's plans were so well laid I'd have sworn not a soul outside his gang knew that we've left England." He suddenly smiled. "Oh, I see—Welbeck's got on our track, too late."

"Scotland Yard still searches for Rudd and Shen, nor will they credit but that you are still in their great city," the Dalai replied. "No, we of the priestly clan have our spies in London, Limehouse, and little of the Claw's activities fail to reach Lhasa."

"But here in the wilds?" Pen protested. "Of course, you could get the news by wireless, though I never knew Tibet boasted—" He broke off, noticing Fan's scandalised expression. "Sorry, sir, perhaps I shouldn't ask questions."

"Much can be forgiven Chinese Rudd," the Dalai smiled. "I can even tell him that the wireless we use in Hajjar is the wireless of thought, not of sound!"

"Even as you entered I was receiving news from the Sublime One in Lhasa," he continued, quietly. "He was telling me that the police of London have asked the Peking Government to effect How's arrest and that the Welbeck you spoke of was hurrying to Peking to receive the prisoner."

Pen stared.

"I can believe it, though I don't fancy Welbeck's chance of getting within a thousand miles of How," he grinned. "But how you get the news is a regular facer to me, sir."

"I've known the same kind of thing done in Peking," Fan whispered. "You've got to forget your English standards out here, Pen."

It was impossible that Fan's cautious whisper had reached Dalai's ear, yet he quickly proved that nothing was hidden from him.

"You must also remember, Pendennis Rudd, that the cult of the mind has been practised in Greater China for thousands of years," he said. He looked musingly at the chums, as if reading their very thoughts—as perhaps he was.



Dominating the valley, the building was superbly detached at a height of five hundred feet. Reared on a huge spur of rock, its massive walls, terraces and bastions rose upwards as if the spur had been specially placed as a foundation stone for a god's stronghold.

"Because high destiny and your own steadfast purpose have made you the instrument for Yen How's punishment, I would bid you recall the power he can wield—he who knows but a little of the inner mysteries."

"He's made a pretty ghastly use of the little he does know," Pen answered; adding, bluntly: "The marvel to me is that the great llamaseries have allowed him to carry on his murderous game so long."

"Against brute force our powers are limited," the Dalai said, sadly. "A little while, and I will explain How's tremendous ambitions, the path by which he hopes to attain the same, and the reason he laughs at our enmity. First, because it is important you believe my words, I will show you the Claw's methods against our people."

Signing the chums to seats at the table, he indicated a queer-looking instrument that occupied its centre—a ball-shaped frame-work of wired silver holding scores of tiny, swivelled mirrors. Even as they looked, a vivid light sprang into its centre and it began to revolve with ever-increasing momentum.

"Let your eyes fasten on its brightness," the Dalai murmured. "Let your thoughts dwell only on its hidden mystery. If you would learn the ways of the Claw, take not your eyes from the ball of changing light."

There was hardly the need for that advice. The changing colours, flickered off by a hundred mirrors, fascinated of their own accord, and they rapidly forgot the world that lay outside that tiny, revolving sphere.

Later, they knew the thing had dulled their minds by its rhythmic monotony, and had cunningly prepared the way for a highly scientific form of suggestion. At the moment they were only aware that—after an unknown interval—the Dalai's voice took on a sharper tone, and that their minds amazingly responded.

"Your inner selves have journeyed to Yunnan. Your inner sight is fixed on the llamasery of Ta-Li. You see that which is happening at this very moment—an ugly, but a true sight!"

As the Dalai's voice drooped to silence, a picture—minute but wonderfully clear—took shape in the glowing ball—the picture of a huge wooden building, domed in its centre, and spired at every corner.

Then, as the picture rapidly enlarged, they saw a terrible struggle in progress, both within and without the building. An army, clad in drab grey, was ruthlessly massacring the inoffensive inhabitants—showing no pity on unarmed men, who accepted brutal death with amazing stoicism.

From the sullen crowd gathered outside the llamasery an attempt was made to rescue the remnants of the priestly clan. But, immediately, the grey horde unmasked machine-guns and shot down scores of innocents—as brutal a deed as the world's history has ever known.

And then, in the pall of smoke created by gun-fire, the whole scene faded away, and the eerie ball ceased its noiseless revolutions. Again the bewildered chums were staring into the Dalai's inscrutable eyes, marvelling at what they had seen, wondering how much had been fact and how much fiction.

"That is the way of the Claw and the method by which Yen How is disposing of all who oppose his will," the Dalai murmured sombrely. "Over the vast area that embraces Yunnan and Szechwan the Claw is bared and the people bow the knee to their master!"

"Dalai, you use the words of the Claw's own records, for we came across them in London," Pen answered. "But when we left China two months ago there was some pretence of law and order in the two great states you have named."

"There is so no longer," the Dalai replied. "Both civil and military police have joined the Claw in vast numbers, and the deed shown to you is being multiplied a hundred-fold."

"What's the idea, sir—revolution?" Fan asked.

The Dalai smiled thinly.

"How could be crowned Emperor of China to-morrow, for the weak government in Peking cannot say him nay," he replied. "But he aims at something greater than that—I think he aims at world-wide power!"

Pen smiled. The idea of a Chinese rabble matched against the trained armies of Europe was too rich. He pitied the yellow men if ever they were persuaded into that mad adventure.

"The thought is not so wild as you think, Rudd," the Dalai said quietly. "You know the foundation of our faith—that the day will dawn when China must again take its place as the ruling nation of the earth."

"I'll be sorry for your people, if ever they make the attempt," Pen answered, highly nettled. "But if that is your idea, why are you so dead set against Yen How?"

"Because How uses the ancient prophecy to forward his personal ambition, and because the appointed time is not yet," the Dalai replied smoothly.

Fan was looking decidedly uncomfortable.

"That's hardly nice to Pen, sir," he muttered. "He's admitted to me many a time that China could put two hundred million men in the field—if ever it forgot its private quarrels." He leaned forward, greatly daring. "But why remind him of that, sir, when he is fighting our battle against How?"

"Because the Claw is preaching that the day has arrived, and that How is the appointed master," the Dalai explained. "The lying creed is spreading over the eighteen provinces, the Claw's adherents already number by the million."

"But the idea seems so fantastically silly!" Pen protested.

"It was, until How stole ten famous 'foreign devils,' came the slow reply. "Of these ten I know nothing, except that the Sublime One in Lhasa sends word to you that How's success or failure is dependent on the ten, and that Pendennis Rudd alone can make failure certain."

"Um! We're going after How all right," Pen answered. "But I'd have thought the Sublime One's own spies would have done that work far better than Penny Rudd?"

"No; for Lhasa explains that the ten are expert in the science of Europe," the Dalai explained. "Spies we have in abundance; but, even if they found the ten, the work to be done for How must be beyond the understanding of any lama."

"Yes; I can see that," Pen admitted. "But we're about seven hundred miles from the border, and the two provinces you mentioned are big enough to hide ten thousand scientists—not ten. You say you've heard from the Sublime One. Did he give you any idea where we must begin the search?"

"He mentioned only that you had done much of the white man's flying during your previous work against the Claw."

"We had to, sir," Pen answered. "The British Embassy provided us with a machine, because a deal of our work lay in rescuing up-country traders threatened by How's thugs."

"If we had that little bus here, Pen, we'd soon be in How's special territory," Fan said longingly.

"One will be here by dawn—a gift from Lhasa," the Dalai answered, with a thin smile.

"Great Scott!" Pen gasped. "You don't mean to tell me Tibet's taken to flying?"

"How's unruly hordes are a threat against Tibet as well as China," the dignitary replied. "They mass on our borders, and, in preparation for the clash that must come, flying monsters are being hastened from Europe and gathered round holy Lhasa."

"We won't be so far behind Yen How, after all!" Fan chuckled. "He little thought the rod he was making for his own back when he sneaked us from London!"

"Think not your task is ended when Szechwan's borders are in sight," the Dalai warned. "A pall of mystery has fallen over that vast province, and few of our spies have returned from its sinister interior. Of those few, not one garnered a hint of the Crimson Claw's real aims, nor could even learn where its inner council sits."

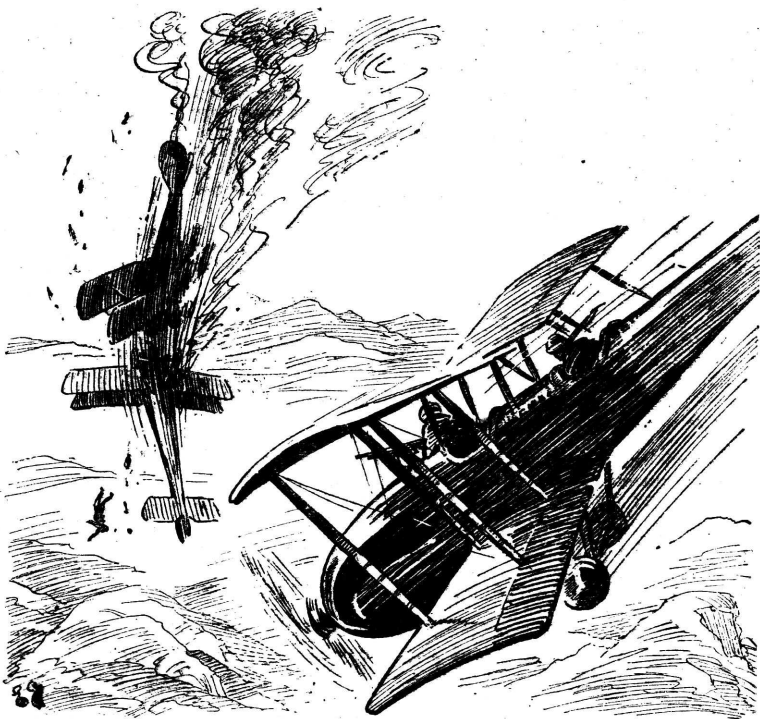
"But someone must give orders!" Pen protested.

"Messages arrive, but the bearers keep the secret of their starting-point. Not the highest officer of the grey armies know his real masters—though Yen How sometimes shows his face."

"You mean there's a blind spot somewhere in Szechwan?" Pen asked.

The Dalai inclined his head.

"A blind spot—where the Claw is preparing a coup that will stagger thought," he predicted. He rose to his feet—a hint that the interview was ended. "Until dawn, rest, for it comes to me that you are to be terribly tested."



For a moment it looked as if the machines would escape collision by inches. Then, completely out of control, the lower plane darted aside—and they crashed head on!

"If you're the Penny Rudd I've heard so much about, I'll resign my job," the fellow said in English. "I'm Dobson, late of the R.A.F., and now in the service of his nibs in Lhasa. I've heard you're going after the Crimson Claw, and it's a game I'd like to take a share in."

Pen grinned and shook his head.

"Sorry, old fruit," he said. "But, unless you know Chinese, I'm afraid you'd give the show away."

"Um! Thought there'd be a catch in it somewhere," Dobson sighed. "Well, here's your hoss. It'll carry you anywhere if you know how to nurse it."

The Dalai remained hidden, but proved that the venture was still in his thoughts by sending his guests a young fortune in paper yuan, and a very special preparation for the dyeing of Pen's skin. He also sent a message that the stain would last for a month, though its wearer plunged into water every day in the week. So, within the hour, the Verrier bus roared into the air, its occupants two poorly clad Chinamen who looked strangely out of place in such a setting.

"Dobson's filled the tank from the spare tins, and says she's good for a twelve-hour run," Pen shouted through the tube. "But seven hours will satisfy us, for we dare not be in the air within fifty miles of Szechwan's border."

Flying at a height of seven thousand feet, the chums had little inclination for conversation during the hours that followed. The engine purred smoothly, though once an air-pocket between two towering heights nearly brought disaster. Beyond that, they flew over a desolate countryside that boasted a few miserable villages, many mountains, and practically no people.

Then, as the sun was dipping below the horizon, and Pen was questing for a place to land and abandon the machine, Fan suddenly yelled a startled warning.

"Look out, Pen!" he howled through the tube. "There's a speck rising from the ridge yonder. It can only be a Claw scout."

Like an angry wasp, a heavy fighting bus topped the rise and swept into full view. Straight for the Verrier she winged, with an advantage in height, and less than half a mile separating them.

"Oh, hang!" Pen groaned. "Who'd have expected an enemy bus fifty miles inside a friendly country?"

But the Claw machine made no attempt to mask its intentions, though it was invading territory that China was, nominally, at peace with. It simply streaked for the Verrier, and commenced proceedings by loosing a stream of bullets from a quite unexpected machine-gun.

"The murderous snakes!" Fan yelled. "Don't wait to

The Yellow Hounds Appear!

THE cold morning light was breaking over the hill-tops when the chums were awakened with the news that the "winged devil" had arrived. Hurrying to the outer terrace, they found a crowd of lesser lamas staring in nervous curiosity at a very modern type of Verrier-Vaux aeroplane, and were immediately greeted by a tired but cheerful pilot.

ask our business. Just anxious to kill, like any beastly viper."

But Pen was too busy swerving to answer. Like a famished tern that sights unwary prey, the big yellow plane swept down on the little scout. And Pen, guessing the Chinks had come hunting on How's orders, sought only a way of escape from the trap, taking risks in angled darts that would have turned an R.A.F. officer green with envy.

Gathering speed, he flew downwards until barely a dozen feet separated his machine from hard rock, and outwards until he won breathing space. Then, swerving at a speed that tilted his wings almost perpendicular, he zoomed into the sky and raced back in an effort to rise above the brutes who meant to crash him.

"How are we, Fan?" he yelled, after an interval. "Two hundred feet above him, and yards quicker on the turn," Fan answered. "I've got Dobson's gun here. Why not let's have a smack at the beggar, Pen?"

"Because our job's to get into Szechwan after How—not to commit suicide, you ass!" Pen grunted. "I'm only anxious to dodge the brute if— Oh, my hat! Look what's closing in!"

Fan had been twisting his neck to keep an eye on their original pursuer. Now, looking straight ahead in the path of the setting sun, he sighted a second aeroplane, darting in like a flashing dragon-fly, and realised they had flown blindly into a death-trap!

"My venerable ancestors!" he groaned. "We're for it, and How has the laugh."

He delved into a pocket, and sighed regretfully as he

ignored. Knowing the risk he was courting, he held dourly to his plan, as if intending to fly just over the off bus, then, when a bare thirty yards separated them, he suddenly dipped, shot past the whirling propellers, and came up under the other's tail.

In the same second Fan loosed the contents of his automatic at the well of the cockpit that was less than ten feet away, and nightmare things began to happen at lightning speed.

One or more of Fan's shots had found a billet, if the sudden upward swerve of the enemy plane was anything to judge by. Rearing up on its tail like a startled colt, it leapt straight at the second hunter that was shooting down in relentless pursuit.

For a moment it looked as if the machines would escape collision by inches, then, completely out of control, the lower plane darted aside, and, with both searchlights flaring, they crashed head on. In an instant the whirling propellers locked, and the two shattered monsters plunged down into the dark depths.

With blanched cheeks and an involuntary cry of pity, Pen was flattening the Verrier to an even keel when a frenzied yell from Fan warned of fresh danger.

"Pen, we're on fire!" Fan howled through the tube. "That beggar's last burst of bullets has started our tail blazing!"

Twisting his neck in an effort to judge the damage, Pen realised that his pal had stated less than the truth. The long, slim tail was smoking and crackling, and within seconds the fire must ignite the running petrol!

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thought how impotent his one small automatic must prove against two machine-guns.

"Sit tight, Fan. I'm going to test their knowledge of stunting," Pen warned, and for ten long seconds he risked spattering bullets by maintaining an absolutely straight line.

Quite suddenly he banked, zoomed, and dropped into a dizzying spin, praying that these yellow novices would be unused to such tactics. Plunging past his first pursuer like a fallen meteor, he eased the stick as quickly as he dared, gradually regained control, and flattened out. Never for a moment dare he rest. Already the last comer was plumb the depths after him, and their original hawk hunting in graceful curves, but cunningly keeping height. To make matters worse, two blinding searchlights now focused on the Verrier, and pinned them in a vicious glare despite all Pen's daring dodging.

One advantage he held in that the scout was quicker on the turn than either of its heavier pursuers. Swiftly reasoning, he nursed his lighter machine in zigzagging bursts that left the enemy guessing more than once, and allowed him to regain some of the height he had lost.

"We're above the second now!" Fan cried with a sigh of relief. "They're sweeping up in our path with barely a hundred yards between them."

A sudden idea came to Pen, fathered by Fan's words. Nodding grimly, he pulled the joy-stick into his chest, and shot the machine almost straight into the darkling sky. Looping swiftly, he accurately gauged the distance with one searching glance, and began to flatten out in the direction of the farthest machine.

He could almost hear the yell of triumph from the enemy

Pen Follows the Light!

WITH the machine breaking into flame like oil-soaked paper, Pen knew that their time in the air must be short. They had ninety-nine chances of crashing like a spent shell, and one—a shadowy one—of coming to earth with whole bones.

His first lightning move was to deaden the engine by cutting the petrol supply. Then, pushing the stick forward to its limit, he sent the Verrier hurtling earthward in a nose-dive, and prayed that solidity was not too near.

His object was twofold—to hold the flames from the petrol fumes for a short time, and to localise the fire by giving it practically nothing to feed on.

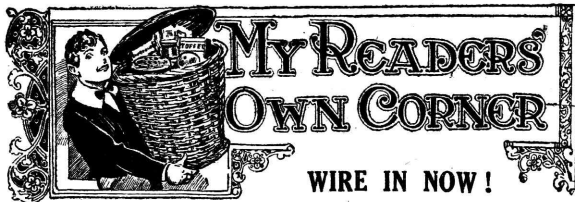
Even then he was not content. Steadying the joy-stick between his knees, he tore the buckle of the safety-strap apart, and yelled advice to Fan to follow his lead. Still alert for the possibility of life, his eyes quested the lower spaces, and his reward came by sighting the inter-locked enemy craft flaming like a meteor, and falling at meteor speed.

Once sighted, his glance never swerved from that guiding light. He watched the blazing wreckage hit earth three seconds later, and scatter into bursting pin-points like an explosive shell.

In that bewildering moment he judged that they had less than two thousand feet to drop, and decided that the last hair-raising risk must now be ventured.

Cautiously easing the stick backward he began to turn the

(Continued on page 28.)



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TEACHER WAS CAUGHT !

"Tommy, I am ashamed of you!" said the annoyed teacher. "You haven't washed this morning. I can even see what you had for breakfast." "What did I have, then?" asked Tommy Jones cheekily. "Egg," answered the teacher. "No, I didn't, then," spoke up Tommy. "I had that yesterday morning!"—A delicious Tuck Hamper has been awarded to G. Johnston, 36, Boundary Road, Wallington, Surrey.

TRYING IT OUT !

It was just after William had kicked a ball through the doctor's window that his mother found him eating an apple as fast as he could. "Why, Willie," said his mother, "what's this mean?" William looked at his mother coyly, then said with a smile "An apple a day keeps the doctor away!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Tyler, 14, Connaught Road, West Ealing, W. 13.

USED TO IT !

An old gentleman entered a bus, and the collector came to collect the fare. "How would you like this job?" asked the talkative conductor. "Well," said the old gentleman, "I wouldn't mind it. But it must be awkward when you are making out the time-table and the bus is jolting all the time." "Ho," said the conductor, "you'd get used to that. I'm so used to it that I have to have my two young children to jog the table when I do any writing at home."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Stanley James Ardley, 25, Felsham Road, Putney.

AN ODD PAIR !

The two Scots met again after a number of years. Sandy had become affluent. "Ha'e a cigar," he said. "Thank'e, Ah wull," replied the other. The cigars were produced, and the two were soon puffing away merrily. "Losh! But sich smokes maun ha'e cost ye a deal o' siller," said Jock. "No sae muckle, no sae muckle," replied Sandy pompously. "A matter of five shillings the twa, maybe." For a while the two smoked away, and talked on the subject of income-tax. Then came a pause. "Sandy," said Jock at last, in tones of one who has made a discovery, "Ah'm thinkin' yours is the four-and-ninepenny yin!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Thomas Hearne, 116, Percy Road, Southsea, Portsmouth, Hants.

HIS MONEY'S WORTH !

Two Scotsmen, having come to London for a holiday, were walking down one of the main streets when one of them saw a notice on a passing tramcar: "Shilling All Day Travel." "Here, Jock," he cried. "Here's a cheap way of spending our holiday riding about all day." But his chum gripped his arm. "Wait, you fool!" he said. "We're here for a fortnight, and there might be excursions!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Gofford, 44, Virginia Road, Bethnal Green, London, E. 2.

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"THE CRIMSON CLAW!"

(Continued from page 26.)

sheer nose-dive into an angled swoop, switched on the search-light, and restarted the engine.

For a few seconds only he was forced to the grave risk of racing his engine, but the instant he felt the Verrier responding to the pull he again applied the closure. Subconsciously, he was aware that they missed a grim spur of rock by less than twenty feet, then his eyes were gladdened by sight of a rolling valley carpeted with sweet meadow-grass.

Amazingly cool under such nightmare circumstances, he tilted the bus accurately, deadened the purring engine at the exact second, and touched the valley at less than thirty feet from its lowest level. Without loss of time Penny and Fan Shen jumped out of the machine.

Ten, twenty, thirty yards of staggering flight they won before the end came. Then, with a sharp detonation as of overhead thunder, the petrol-tank burst, and the little Verrier ceased to be!

"Oh, my sacred aunt!" Pen gasped, when he recovered a measure of breath. "We've been through some giddy squeaks, but that really raises the limit!"

"Allee sad bizney—we'm lost our suppel!" Fan sighed dolefully.

Pen stared, as well he might. He knew Chinamen as well as most, knew that the most grisly risks often left them outwardly unmoved; but—he just stared. Fan had watched six men dive to an unthinkable end, had dodged a like fate by a miracle—and was beavailing a lost supper!

"Strange are the ways of the yellow man, and tenderly is his heart fashioned," muttered Pen faintly.

"They met the death they meant for us," Fan replied, icily unmoved. "It's plain Yen How sent them scouting for us with orders to kill at sight—and I wouldn't have wept if he'd been one of them." He dismissed the lost with a shrug. "But you deserve the Cross of Buddha for tearing us out of that mess, Penny, and if you'll track down food as cleverly, I'll vote you top-hole man."

"I can even promise that within an hour," Pen smiled.

"Then we're wasting time watching the bonfire burn out," Fan answered quickly. "I don't see any clue, though."

"I think the clue was visible just before the 'strafe'

started," Pen grinned. "When you yelled the warning, I was busy looking at a lot of twinkling lights that were showing on the plain ahead. If they don't mean a caravan and food, I'm a yellow-bird."

In some ways, Fan was the most matter-of-fact chap that ever lived. Without a second glance at their own scattered wreckage, or even a thought for the flaming pyre on the opposite height, he made a bee-line for the rise that led to the plains, and Rudd followed him.

Hours later, the two weary plodders approached a circle of fires, and, hugging the outer darkness, carefully reconnoitred the position. A glance proved that they had located a convoy of cattle of exceptional size, accompanied by scores of clumsy grain wagons that left little doubt as to destination.

Round each camp-fire lay groups of sleeping herdsmen; but between the fires, alert patrols mounted on shaggy Tibetan ponies guarded the resting cattle.

"Fodder for the army," Fan whispered. "Now, if we could only find the headman—"

"What about his nibs under the sacking?" Pen interrupted.

Following the direction of Pen's pointed finger, Fan made out the lines of a rude shelter barely three feet high, from which a pair of untanned leather jackboots protruded.

"The lord nestles not with the jackals," Fan muttered. "That's the great man, and he's worth investigating."

"You hold the sacking up," Pen breathed. "I'll bring him back to life—and trouble!"

Crawling on hands and knees to the head of the tent, Fan gently raised and held aloft a length of ragged covering, whilst Pen ran inquisitive fingers over the plump form of the sleeper.

With delicate touch he eased a knife from its belted sheath, pocketed it, and placed the cold bore of his automatic against the fellow's forehead.

"Rouse up, friend!" he whispered.

With the words, his hand pressed firmly over the man's mouth. He felt the form quiver, and an arm shoot down to the belt! One suspended moment of shocked surprise, then the rudely awakened creature began a frenzied struggle that threatened to rouse the whole camp.

(Will the stranger who has been so rudely awakened prove friendly or otherwise to Penny Rudd's cause? Read next week's fine instalment of this yarn, boys.)



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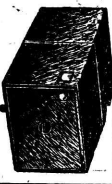
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