

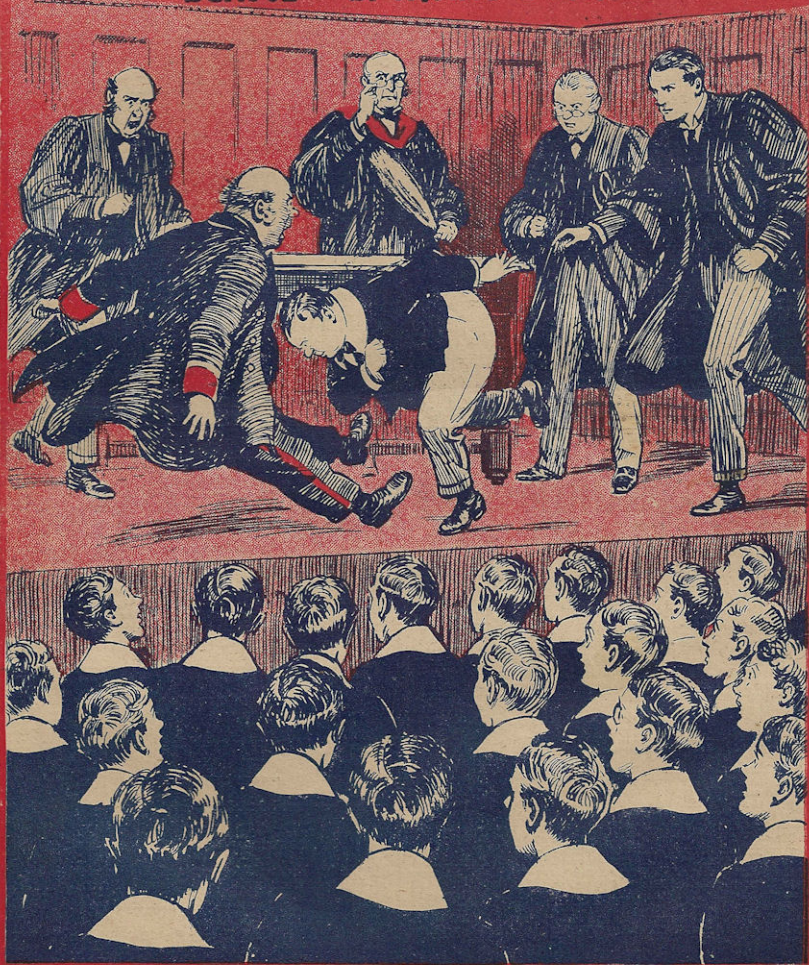
BRIGHT STORIES FOR DARK EVENINGS!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

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of
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 922.
Vol. XXVIII.
October 10th,
1925.



BAGGY TRIMBLE'S BOLT FOR FREEDOM!

(Rather than face a flogging, Trimble decides to make himself scarce. Read the topping school story inside.)



You Know A Good Joke? Let's Hear it, Chum.

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HAPPY HANDSWORTH! GREASE!

As the steamer was entering the harbour of Athens a passenger approached the captain, and, pointing to the distant hills, inquired: "What is that white stuff on the hills, captain?" "That is snow," replied the captain. "Well," remarked the passenger, "I thought so myself, but another passenger just told me it was 'Grecco'!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Sidney Tame, 13, Farcroft Grove, Farcroft Estate, Handsworth, Birmingham.

THE "PIRATE!"

A little boy boarded the top of a "pirate" bus. When the conductor went up to collect the fares he found the youngster hiding under one of the seats. "Here, my boy, what are you doing there?" he asked angrily. The lad poked his head out. "You are a 'pirate' bus, ain't you?" he asked. "Yes," said the conductor. "Well," said the boy, "your job is to maroon me, so please make it the little island in Piccadilly Circus!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Kenneth Barton, 141, Norbury Crescent, Norbury, S.W.16.



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

GOOD TURNS!

ONE Gemite from the North, who is a Scout, tells me that every member of his troop is a GEM reader. It came about in this way. As you doubtless know, a true Scout should render a good turn to one of his fellow-creatures every day. What better turn than that the members of his troop should be made aware of the finest boys' paper on the market? my correspondent said to himself. He more than thought about it, did this loyal Gemite; he waded in with right good will. And now all the troop reads the GEM, and all the troop is scouting out for new readers. Splendid notion!

SMOKING!

"Do I support the view that boys of fourteen shouldn't smoke?" That's the query that comes on a postcard from Northampton. Nothing more than that. No name, no address. Frankly, I do support the view. Smoking is all right in its way, although there is hardly a smoker who won't tell you that it is injurious to the health in the long run. But for a youth of fourteen to start smoking—well, he's going to make himself an old man before he is a young 'un. Apart from the health side of the question, it fosters the silly aping of the grown-up, about which I spoke in a previous Chat concerning the use of bad language. You'll all grow up in time; you will all smoke, I've not the slightest doubt. And when you've sampled all these manish things I shouldn't wonder but that you'll be sighing for your young days over again, like most of us do. Time enough to get old when you don't have a say in the matter, without forcing Nature's hand in your youth.

RAFTS!

I read of a case in the newspaper the other day where a party of schoolboys were skylarking on a raft. That's all right in its way, although it can be made a dangerous **The GEM LIBRARY—No. 922.**

TAKING A CHANCE!

Tommy (to chum on way to school): "What shall we do—go fishing or ramble in the woods?" Sammy: "Let's toss a penny. Heads stands for fishing and tails for the woods." Tommy: "But what about school?" Sammy: "Oh, well, if the penny falls on its edge we go to school!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Pavey, 9, Fairmount Crescent, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

THE SAINT!

Son (who has been sent in the corner for being naughty): "I never knew any little boy who was perfect except one." Mother (encouragingly): "And who was that?" Son: "Father, when he was a little boy!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Clifford Robinson, 8, Poplar Square, New Street, Farsley, near Leeds.

WELL SPOKEN!

Mike and Bill were out walking. Mike, who was the shorter of the two, could not keep up with Bill's strides, and after a while began to get very tired and out of breath. "Sure, Bill," he exclaimed, "do you always walk as fast as this?" "Yes," replied Bill, "and faster than this when I am by myself." "Indeed!" exclaimed Mike. "Sure, and I would not like to be walking with you when you are by yourself!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Patrick M. Clifford, 3, Tramway Terrace, Gifford Road, Sandymount, Dublin, Ireland.

HEADING FOR TROUBLE!

Schoolmaster: "Now, Bobby, do you remember what I told you about the North Pole yesterday?" Bobby: "Er—1—er—1—". Schoolmaster: "Really, you can never remember anything, boy! What is the use of your head?" Bobby (brightly): "Well, it keeps my collar from slipping off, sir!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Waterman, 5, Leather Lane, Holborn, London, E.C.1.

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pastime. In the case of which I refer two of the fellows on the raft tried to jump ashore. They did the jump all right, but in taking off the sudden strain caused the raft to submerge, with the result that the rest of the party were floundering in the river. The end to that innocent little jaunt was tragic in the extreme. There's another side to this fooling about on a raft. If you must go "rafting" find out beforehand exactly how much the improvised boat will stand. I'm thinking chiefly of an experience that happened to me in my boyhood. There were three of my chums on the raft, and I was on the bank of the river. I waved to them and told them that I wanted to come aboard. "Jump!" was the decisive reply. I did! And as I landed on the raft the whole contraption went under water—likewise the party. It ended all right because we could all swim. But—

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GERALD KNOX.

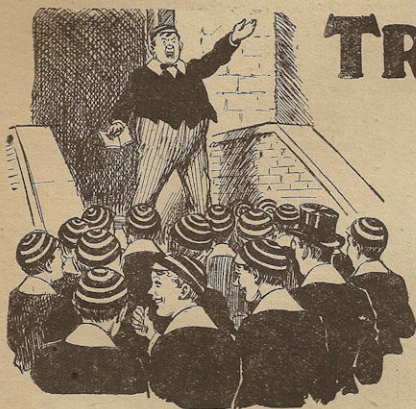
A special "spasm" by our St. Jim's Rhymester features Gerald Knox, the unpopular perfect—in verse.

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Your Editor.

WHAT'S IN A NAME!

When Baggy Trimble, the biggest funk and duffer at St. Jim's, assumes the character of Bob Briton, a fictional hero, Baggy at once becomes—



TRIMBLE THE TERRIBLE!

A Grand, New, Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, featuring the rise and fall of Baggy Trimble, as champion of the oppressed!

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

On the Warpath!

"BRUTE! Cad! Cowardly ruffian!" Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth halted in astonishment. They had just come in from the footer, and were passing the door of Baggy Trimble's study when these fierce epithets rang out.

"What the thump—" began Blake in wonder. "Brutal bully! Blustering braggart! Release that frail fag and put up your hands, and I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

"Greatest Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The juniors in the passage exchanged wondering glances. It seemed as if a thrilling drama was being enacted in Baggy Trimble's study. It seemed also, that Baggy Trimble was playing the part of a hero. Heroic parts were not in Baggy's line. The fat Falstaff of the Fourth was not of the stuff of which heroes are made.

On this occasion, however, Baggy's blood seemed to be up. Fierce anger and indignation and defiance were all mingled in his clarion cries.

Jack Blake & Co. stood spellbound outside the closed door of the study. They were too astonished for the moment to burst into the study and see what was going on. They could only surmise what was taking place on the other side of the door.

Baggy Trimble's shouts gave the impression that there were three persons in the study—a brutal bully, a frail fag, and Baggy himself. And Baggy seemed to be taking the offensive against the brutal bully.

"Do you hear me?" he went on, his voice rising crescendo. "Release that snivelling whelp and put up your hands! This is not the first time I've caught you at your bullying games, Hulker!"

The listeners gasped. "Hulker!" echoed Herries. "Who the merry dickens is Hulker? There's nobody of that name at St. Jim's."

"Perhaps it's some wuffian from outside the school?" suggested Arthur Augustus. "But fancy Twimble havin' the pluck to tackle him! Wondahs will nevah cease!"

Again Trimble's voice rang out. "I'll punch, pommel, and pulverise you, you hulking lout! I'll black your eyes and thicken your ugly ears and make your nose look like a squashed strawberry! Come on, you cur! Take that—and that—and that!"

A series of heavy thumps accompanied that fiery outburst. It seemed as if Baggy Trimble was committing assault and battery upon the mysterious Hulker.

The juniors in the passage recovered the power of action at last.

"Come on!" roared Blake, throwing open the door of the study.

He rushed into the apartment, with D'Arcy and Herries and Digby hard at his heels. The famous Co. expected to witness the extraordinary spectacle of Baggy Trimble thrashing a bully, with a whimpering fag looking on.

But they were disappointed.

There was no blustering bully in the study, there was no snivelling fag. There was only Trimble!

But it was a very different Trimble from the Trimble they had been accustomed to seeing. It was the egregious Baggy, right enough, but a very wild and warlike Baggy. His jacket was off and his sleeves rolled up. The light of battle gleamed in his eye, his hair was dishevelled, and he was engaged in hammering the table with a podgy fist.

So engrossed was Baggy in this pugnacious pastime that he failed to notice that his study had been invaded by four astonished juniors.

"Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud!" Baggy's fist smote the table with tremendous force. Tea had been laid, and the crockery danced and rattled as the blows descended.

The crashing and banging might have been heard all over the School House. It brought Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell hurrying to the spot.

"Hallo!" ejaculated the captain of the Shell, looking into the study. "What's all the giddy rumpus about?"

Jack Blake tapped his forehead significantly.

"Trimble's lost what little glimmering of sanity he had left," he explained. "I don't know what the table's done to deserve such a pasting, but it's getting it good and proper!"

"My hat!" Seven startled juniors focused their gaze upon Baggy Trimble.

Certainly the table was "getting it." And Baggy's knuckles were getting it, too. They were barked at each blow, but Baggy didn't seem to mind. He hammered away harder than ever.

"That's one for your eye!" he panted. "And that's one for your nose! And now I'm going to give you an uppercut that will stretch you senseless at my feet!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "He's mad, dear boys—mad as a wild dog!"

Baggy Trimble gave the unoffending table a ferocious look. Then, bending down, he smote the under-side of it with terrific force.

Crash!

The effect of that uppercut was calamitous. The table rocked on its legs, the teapot jumped clean off the tray and was dashed to fragments on the floor of the study. Cups and saucers and plates were scattered in wild disorder.

Trimble paused, panting.

"Let that be a lesson to you, you hulking lout!" he exclaimed. "If I catch you mistreating one of those miserable little fags again I'll give you another dose! I'm the hero of the school, and heroes have a short way with bullies! Yes, you can moan and groan, but you'll get no sympathy from me, you rotten tyrant! I've declared war on tyrants—war to the knife—and I mean to crush them under my heel, as sure as my name's Bob Briton!"

The juniors fairly gasped. They could no longer doubt that Baggy Trimble was bereft of his senses.

When a fellow committed assault and battery upon a harmless table, when he referred to it as a bully and a tyrant, and declared war upon it, when he called himself by the heroic

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sounding name of Briton—then it was high time he was removed to Hanwell or Colney Hatch and placed in a strait-jacket or a padded cell.

"Mad—quite mad!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Poor old Baggy! I've seen this coming for a long time. I always did say he had bats in his belfry."

"But—but it's a dreadful thing, dear boys!" said Arthur Augustus, aghast. "Trimble is quite violent, but Jai! Vive! He'll be startin' on us next!"

"Collar him!" rapped out Tom Merry.

There was a sudden rush of feet towards the flushed and furious Baggy. For the first time the fat junior became aware of his audience. Indeed, he could no longer have remained oblivious to their presence, for they seized him in no gentle manner and whirled him fairly off his feet.

"Ow! Laggo, you rotters! Unhand me, or I'll lick the lot of you! You've just seen me give Hulker the thrashing of his life—"

"We've just seen you act like a crazy lunatic!" growled Jack Blake. "You're mad—mad as a hatter, or a March hare! And we're jolly well going to truss you up, before you do any more damage!"

"Yes, rather!"

Baggy Trimble struggled furiously, but unavailingly, in the grasp of his captors. Five of them held him tight while the other two started to gather up the fragments of crockery-ware from the floor.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Digby suddenly. "I think I've found the explanation of Trimble's petty conduct. Look here!"

Digby picked up a book which lay open on the floor. It was a book with a gaudy cover, which depicted a strikingly handsome youth in the act of fighting half a dozen burly louts, any one of whom could have eaten him.

The title, blazoned in bold letters, was "Bob Briton's Schooldays."

Digby held out the book for general inspection, and there was a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Relief was mingled with the juniors' amusement. They were relieved to find that Baggy Trimble was not insane, as they had feared. And they promptly released him.

"The silly fat chump has been filling his head with that trash!" said Tom Merry scornfully. "I know that book. I read it myself once. It's supposed to be a story of school life, but it's nothing more than a hotch-potch of wild and impossible adventures. The hero, Bob Briton, is a wonderful chap. He has a fight in every paragraph almost, and a crop of hair-raising adventures in every chapter. He slays the school bully, he declares war on masters and prefects and organises a great rebellion. He's given the sack about six times, but something always happens to save him at the scaffold, as it were. He rescues the Head from a gang of kidnappers, he plucks the Head's daughter from under the very engine of an express train, and he saves people from watery graves and blazing buildings and escaped tigers, and

goodness knows what else. A wonderful fellow this Bob Briton! He's as strong as Samson, as daring as Drake, as reckless as Raleigh. In fact, he's all the heroes of history rolled into one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble blinked wrathfully at Tom Merry.

"It's all very well for you to sneer at Bob Briton," he said, "but he's a fine fellow—one of the very best—and I'm going to follow in his footsteps! I've just been reading how he knocked out Hulker of the Sixth for bullying young Frayle of the First."

"And so you started bashing the table, and kidding yourself you were licking a bully—what?" said Blake.

Trimble nodded and surveyed his barked knuckles. "I wish it had been a real flesh-and-blood bully, instead of a chunk of wood!" he said. "Never mind! We've got a real bully at St. Jim's, and I'm jolly well going to make him sit up!"

"Meaning Knox of the Sixth?" said Lowther.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha! I can see you wiping up the floor with Knox—I don't think!"

Baggy Trimble glared at the grinning faces around him.

"I'm going to be the Bob Briton of St. Jim's!" he declared. "I'm going to thrash bullies, and flout authority, and throw law and order to the winds, and start a rebellion, and—"

"Whoa!" said Lowther. "One thing at a time, Baggy. Which are you going to do first?"

"Deal with Knox!" was the prompt reply.

"You—you're going to thrash Knox?" stuttered Manners. Trimble hesitated.

"Ahem! Perhaps I ought to warn him first, and then lick him later, if he persists in his bullying ways. That's what Bob Briton did with Hulker of the Sixth. He gave him a solemn warning, which was ignored, and then he waded in and slaughtered him. I'm going to take the same line with Knox."

Baggy Trimble pulled down his sleeves, donned his jacket, and elbowed his way to the door.

Looking very grim and determined, the fat junior rolled away in the direction of the Sixth Form passage.

Seven smiling juniors trooped at his heels. They anticipated a slaughter; but not the slaughter of Knox of the Sixth!

CHAPTER 2.

Warning Knox!

BAGGY TRIMBLE marched boldly up to the door of Knox's study.

As a rule, Baggy avoided that apartment like the plague. Bearing a lion in its den was a playful pastime by comparison with calling on Gerald Knox.

But Baggy seemed no longer to stand in awe of the bully of the Sixth. His eyes were gleaming, his fat hands clenched. He was fired by the exploits of that wonderful schoolboy hero, Bob Briton. Indeed, the mantle of Bob Briton seemed to have fallen upon Baggy Trimble. Gone was his wonted timidity and funk. Baggy felt as bold as a lion.

He paused for a moment outside the door, and stood muttering to himself. He was rehearsing the scene from "Bob Briton's Schooldays"—the scene in which Bob had burst into the study of Hulker of the Sixth, and told him in plain language what he thought of him.

"Brute! Cad! Cowardly ruffian!" muttered Baggy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the juniors in the passage.

"Go it, Baggy!"

"Give it to Knox hot and strong!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"He'll never have the nerve to cheek Knox," he said.

Baggy Trimble overheard that remark, and it gave a spur to his resolve—if, indeed, any spur was needed.

Without a preliminary knock, Baggy threw open the door of Knox's study, and marched in, leaving his schoolfellows gasping.

Knox was at home; and he was, as usual, on the warpath. In one hand he clutched an ashplant, and with the other he was grasping a squirming fog by the collar.

Curly Gibson of the Third was the unfortunate victim. He had neglected to lay Knox's tea, and the prefect, coming in hungry and thirsty from an afternoon on the river, was furious to find that the table had not been laid—or the kettle put on.

After bellowing "FAG!" about six times, each time louder than the last, Knox had succeeded in luring Curly Gibson into his lair. And now he was about to hoist him over the table and administer suitable correction with the ashplant. As it happened, Baggy had arrived at the most opportune moment.

The cyclonic entry of Baggy Trimble, however, made Knox pause. He spun round, and scowled at the fat junior,

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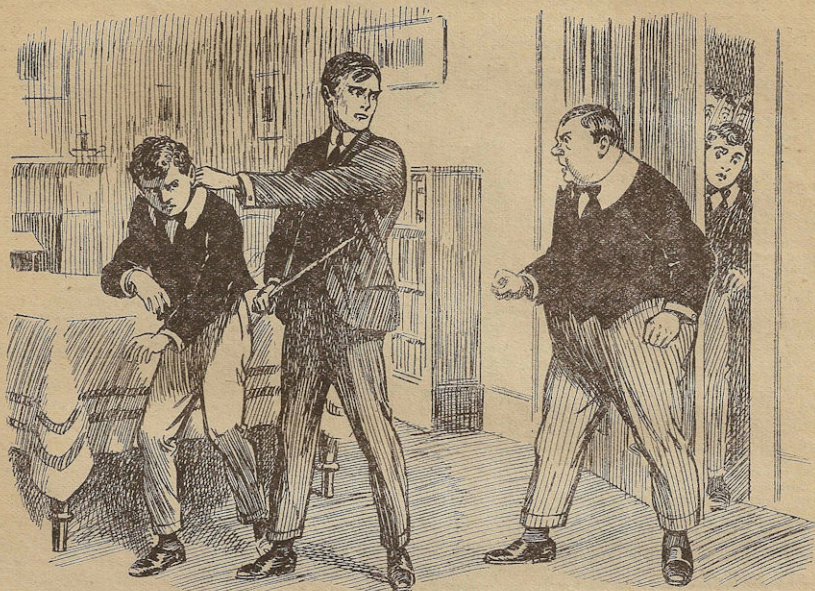
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Gerald Knox was about to hoist Curly Gibson over the table when Baggy Trimble arrived on the scene. The Sixth-Former spun round, and scowled at the fat junior. Baggy returned scowl for scowl; and then, before Knox could speak, he commenced to chide him. "Brute! Cad! Cowardly ruffian!" Knox fairly gasped. (See page 4.)

Baggy returned scowl for scowl, and then, before Knox could speak, he commenced to chide him in the language of Bob Briton.

"Brute! Cad! Cowardly ruffian!"

Knox fairly gasped. Automatically, he released his grip of the fag's collar. Curly Gibson was glad of the diversion. He glanced towards the half-open door, as if contemplating his escape.

Outside the door stood a breathless group of juniors. They had not dreamed that Baggy Trimble would show such nerve as to rebuke Knox to his face.

But Baggy was fairly wound up now, and the stupefied silence of Knox encouraged him to go on.

"Brutal bully! Blustering braggart! How dare you wreak your savage cruelty upon a frail, feeble fag! How dare you, I say?"

Curly Gibson was neither frail nor feeble. On the contrary, he was a particularly sturdy youngster. But Baggy Trimble was quoting from "Bob Briton's Schooldays," without bothering whether Bob Briton's words were applicable to the present case.

Knox fell back a pace. The ashplant nearly fell from his hand. He did not reply to the torrent of words with which Trimble whelmed him, for the simple reason that he was struck speechless.

"Tyrant! Tatar! Nero!" scolded Baggy. "I've come here to tell you that I'm going to put an end to your reign of terror! This frail, feeble fag"—Baggy pointed to the sturdy Gibson—"has been the butt of your base brutality too long!"

"Oh, my aunt!" muttered Curly.

"I'm fed-up to the teeth with your bullying ways, Hulker—I mean, Knox!" went on Trimble. "You are a low-down ruffian—a swaggering washbuckler! I warn you solemnly that your bastiged tyranny over such diminutive, delicate dwarfs"—Baggy again pointed to Curly Gibson—"has got to stop! If I catch you at these bullying games again, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life, you great, hulking coward!"

"Phew!" gasped Monty Lowther, from the doorway. "Stand clear, you fellows! Baggy will come flying out on his neck in a jiffy!"

"Just look at Knox's face, deah boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I believe he's goin' to have an apoplectic fit, bai Jove!"

Certainly the prefect's face was working convulsively. He was trying to speak, but the words were choked back by his rage. Presently, no doubt, he would recover the power of speech—and of action. Meanwhile, Baggy Trimble proceeded to emphasise his warning.

"I'll punch, pommel, and pulverise you, you hulking lout! I'll blacken your eyes, and thicken your ugly ears, and make your nose look like a squashed strawberry! You hear me, Hulker—I mean, Knox? Behold in me the champion of the oppressed—the devoted friend of the downtrodden—the sworn enemy of bullies! Tremble, tyrant!"

Knox certainly trembled—not with fear, as Trimble thought, but with concentrated rage.

"This is the first and last warning you will receive!" continued the fat junior, scowling fiercely at Knox. "I won't bandy words with you another time. I'll wade right in and slaughter you! Understand?"

A low rumble, such as precedes the eruption of a volcano, came from Knox.

"It's coming!" murmured Lowther, from the doorway.

"We shall see Vesuvius in action in a tick!"

"If Trimble's got a grain of sense left in his fat noddle he'll scot!" muttered Blake.

Baggy shook his fist at Knox, whom he imagined was thoroughly cowed.

"Lay my words of warning to heart, tyrant!" he exclaimed. "I've declared war on tyrants—war to the knife—and I mean to crush them under my heel, as sure as my name's Bob Briton—I mean, Baggy Trimble! Release that shivelling whelp at once!"

But Curly Gibson had already made good his escape. Taking advantage of the diversion, he had scuttled through the doorway, and gone speeding away to the fags' quarters, to convey to his chums the startling news that Baggy Trimble had gone mad.

Baggy blinked round the study.

"Ah! He has cleared off, I see. I notice you haven't said anything in reply to my warning, Knox. You're scared

stiff, I reckon. That's just like you blustering bullies. You're all cowards at heart. Pah! I regard you with scorn and contempt!"

Knox had almost recovered from his stupor—almost, but not quite. By the time he had regained the power of action Trimble was gone, and the door had slammed behind him.

Knox clutched at the mantelpiece to steady himself, wondering if he had been dreaming.

"The—the cheeky fat cub!" he spluttered at length. "He—he had the awful nerve to threaten to thrash me! Why, I—I'll pulverise him! I'll spiculate him!"

Knox rushed to the door and flung it wide, and savagely strode out into the passage.

Like Moses of old, the enraged prefect looked this way and that way, but there was no man.

Baggy Trimble had gone, and his schoolfellows, fearful for his safety, had precipitated his departure. They had hustled him away with all speed, and had advised him to take sanctuary in one of the box-rooms until the fury of Knox had spent itself.

Baggy, however, indignantly refused to bide.

"Why should I hide from a rotten tyrant?" he exclaimed. "I'm not afraid of tyrants. Besides, Knox won't come after me. I've crushed him and cowed him—squashed him and subdued him, just like Bob Briton squashed and subdued Hulker of the Sixth!"

"Weally, Twimble, you ass," said Arthur Augustus, "if you don't get Bob Briton out of your head, you'll be gettin' into serious trouble!"

"Of course he will!" growled Tom Merry. "Fancy lettin' himself be carried away by such balderdash as 'Bob Briton's School-days'! How did you get hold of the book, Baggy?"

"Grundy gave it to me," explained Trimble. "He was getting rid of a lot of his old books—rubbish he called them. The silly chump was actually going to burn 'Bob Briton.' Did you ever?"

"Burning it was about the most sensible thing he could have done," said Blake. "Had Grundy read it himself?"

"No. He said he had no time for kids' books."

"What a blessing!" said Tom Merry fervently. "If old Grundy had devalued Bob Briton, goodness knows what would have happened. He'd have run amok, I dare say."

"It's a ripping book," said Baggy Trimble. "A jolly sight better than anything that Scott or Dickens ever wrote. It would have been sacrilege to have burnt it. I've only read a couple of chapters, so far, and now I'm going to get on with it. And I hope your fellows will have the decency not to interrupt me, like you did before."

Baggy hurried away to his study, where he was soon deep in the armchair—and in the breathlessly-exciting exploits of Bob Briton.

CHAPTER 3. Seeing Baggy to Bed!

KILDARE of the Sixth glanced into Baggy Trimble's study.

"Bed-time!" he said tersely.

Baggy Trimble neither heard nor heeded. "His ample person was reclining in the armchair, and 'Bob Briton's School-days' lay open on his knees. Baggy's eyes were very bright, and his plump cheeks were flushed. He was not merely reading the book on his knees. He was almost eating it."

Kildare stared at him, and a frown came over his handsome face.

"Bed-time!" he repeated.

Still no reply from the occupant of the armchair.

Baggy Trimble did not even look up. He had reached a most exciting episode in Bob Briton's hectic career, and he started to declaim the passage aloud.

"Bob Briton drew himself up to his full height. His eyes were blazing, his cheeks flaming, his ears burning. He was on fire with righteous indignation. Fearlessly he faced the school bully, fixing him with a ferocious glare. 'Hector Hulker, he hissed, 'your hectoring ways have got to stop—once and for all! This is the second time I've found you ferociously thrashing a frail, feeble fag! Prefect or no prefect, I'm not afraid of you! I'll strew this study with your bones! Put up your mitts!"

"Gone in a flash were Hulker's brag and bluster. The burly braggadocio threw himself on his knees, pleading piteously for mercy."

"Bah!" said our hero with a contemptuous snort, as he inserted his boot into the ribs of the grovelling bully."

Baggy Trimble shot out his own boot as he recited the last passage, and the coal-scuttle heeled over on its side with a crash.

Kildare stood in the doorway, staring at the fat junior as if mesmerised by him.

"Trimble!" he roared, in a voice that Stentor of old might have envied.

Baggy heard this time, but he didn't look up. His eyes were still glued to "Bob Briton."

"Buzz off!" he growled.

"W-what?" gasped Kildare.

"Run away and pick flowers!"

The captain of St. Jim's breathed hard.

"You—you cheeky young rascal!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Kildare was looking very grim now. He was not accustomed to "cheek" in the course of his duties, and on the rare occasions when he encountered it he came down heavily.

In a flash the captain of St. Jim's crossed to the armchair, like a wolf descending on the fold. He seized the fat junior by the collar, and swung him to his feet. "Bob Briton" fell with a crash and a clatter into the fireplace.

"Yow-ow-ow!" bellowed Baggy, as Kildare commenced to shake him like a fat rat. "Leggo, you rotter!"

Shake, shake, shake!

The unfortunate Baggy might have been a dice-box, judging by the vigour with which Kildare shook him. His teeth fairly rattled as he was jerked up and down.

"You silly fat duffer!" panted the captain of St. Jim's, desisting at last from his exertions. "Do you think I'm standing any cheek from you?"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"I told you twice that it was bed-time, but you seemed to be buried in that book. Judging by the extract I heard you read, it's a book that ought to be banned at St. Jim's. If it was in my power to confiscate it, I would. You silly young cuckoo! I suppose you're dying to emulate the doughty deeds of Bob Briton!"

"Yes, rather," said Trimble.

"Well, listen to me. There are no Bob Britons in real life. If there were, they'd have a sorry time of it. I know it sounds very romantic to go around slaughtering bullies, and all that sort of thing, but these things only happen in fiction, not in fact. Take my advice, Trimble, and burn that book. It may save you a deal of trouble later on."

"What! Burn 'Bob Briton'?" cried Baggy in tones of horror. "No jolly fear! I'll burn my Latin primer and Greek lexicon with the greatest of pleasure, but you won't catch me feeding Bob Briton to the flames. I'm going to read it over and over again. It's a ripping book! Can I take it up to bed with me, Kildare?"

"No, you can't!" growled Kildare.

"But—but I say—"

"Come along! I'm going to see you to bed. Strictly speaking, I ought to see you to bedlam."

Kildare's own grass decedent once more upon Baggy Trimble's collar, and the fat junior was marched out of the study. Bob Briton was left to languish in the fireplace.

Baggy's brain was working rapidly as he was hustled along the passage to the staircase.

What would Bob Briton have done in such circumstances? Surely that gallant hero would not have suffered himself to be marched off to bed in this manner?

Kildare was acting like a tyrant, and Bob Briton had declared war on tyrants. The heroic Bob would have shaken off that iron grasp on his collar and turned fiercely to grapple with the tyrant. Trimble must do likewise.

The fat junior waited until they reached the foot of the staircase. Then, suddenly and without warning, he tore himself away from Kildare's grasp. Then he turned at bay, like a plump bloodhound, and struck out with all his force at Tyranny, as personified by Kildare.

The captain of St. Jim's swerved quickly to one side, and Trimble's fist came into hard and painful contact with the wooden knob of the balustrade.

"Yarsoosh!"

A fendish yell rang out. There was a patter of feet on the landing above, and a number of pyjama-clad juniors peeped over the banisters and surveyed the scene.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Jack Blake. "That awful ass Trimble is going for old Kildare!"

"My hat!"

His first blow having missed its mark, Baggy essayed further blows. For one breathless moment he struck out wildly at Kildare's stalwart form.

The captain of St. Jim's succeeded in dodging the avalanche. Then, stretching out his arm, he seized Baggy by the collar in a vice-like grip, and marched him willy-nilly up the stairs.

"Back to your dormitory, you kids!" he panted.

And Jack Blake & Co. promptly beat a retreat.

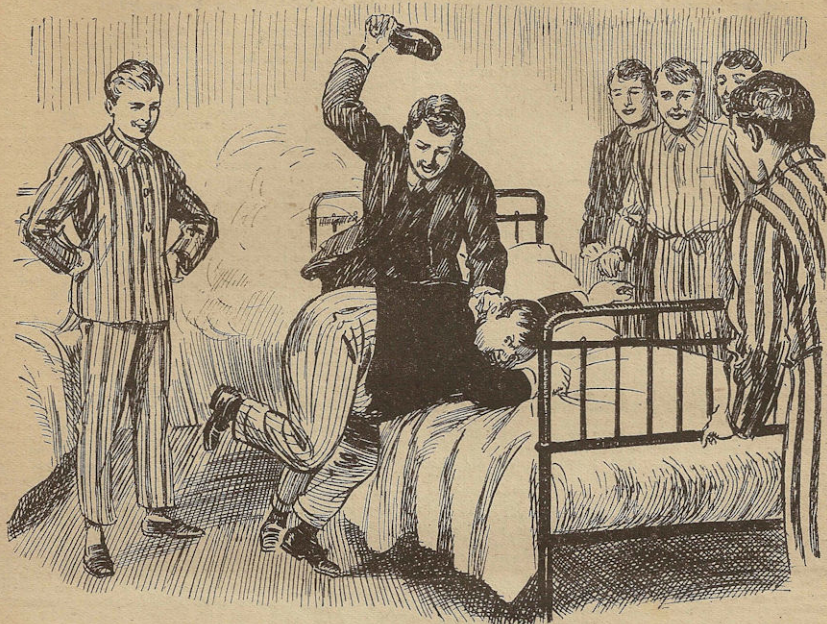
Looking very grim, Kildare marched the rebellious Baggy into the Fourth Form dormitory, and dumped him across his bunk as if he had been a sack of coals.

"Lend me a slipper, somebody!" he said, glancing round.

Cardew smilingly obliged. And Kildare, pinning Trimble down to the bed, proceeded to belabour him with the slipper.

Whack, whack, whack!

The dust rose in clouds from Trimble's tight-fitting trousers, and his yells of anguish were so piercing and



Whack, whack, whack! The dust rose in clouds from Trimble's tight-fitting trousers; and his yells of anguish were so piercing and penetrating that they would have awakened the celebrated Seven Sleepers. "Ow! Yow! Yaroooh! Give over, you rotten tyrant! Unhand me, you beastly bully! You shall pay dearly for this, as sure as my name is Bob Briton—I mean Baggy Trimble!" Kildare heeded not, but continued operations with the slipper. (See page 6.)

penetrating that they would have awakened the celebrated Seven Sleepers.

"Ow! Yow! Yaroooh! Give over, you rotten tyrant! Unhand me, you beastly bully! You shall pay dearly for this, as sure as my name is Bob Briton!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare did great execution with his strong right arm. He was quite limp by the time he had finished, but not so limp as Baggy Trimble. That luckless youth sprawled on the bed and roared.

"There!" panted Kildare, handing the slipper back to Cardew. "I hope I've whacked all this Bob Briton nonsense out of you, you silly young duffer!"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"Turn in at once! You'd better stick to the 'Boys' Friend' or the 'Holiday Annual' in future!"

Kildare stood over Baggy while that youth undressed. He saw him into bed, then he extinguished the light, gave the Fourth a rather grim good-night, and withdrew. A chuckle followed Kildare's departure.

"Poor old Baggy!"

"Poor old Bob Briton!"

"He tackled the giddy tyrant and came off second best!" chuckled Cardew. "Better give tyrants a wide berth after this, Baggy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble made no reply to his schoolfellows' banter. He lay groaning between the sheets, slowly recovering from the painful application of Cardew's slipper.

One by one the Fourth sank into the arms of Morpheus. But Baggy Trimble remained wide awake, glaring into the gloom.

When midnight chimed from the old clock-tower, Baggy was the only fellow awake. He stealthily arose and slipped on a dressing-gown over his pyjamas. Then he tiptoed towards Blake's bed, calmly appropriated an electric torch from under the pillow, and stole out of the dormitory.

Lighting his way downstairs, Baggy Trimble proceeded to his study.

"Bob Briton" still lay where it had fallen, in the fir-

place. Baggy gathered up the volume almost affectionately, and tucked it under his arm, and went back to the dormitory. Then he lighted a candle and placed it on a locker beside his bed. Returning Blake's torch, he crawled into bed, and settled down to a happy perusal of his hero's adventures.

Baggy's physical discomfort was forgotten now, and his plump countenance beamed like a full moon.

This was Baggy's idea of happiness—to lie in bed devouring the exploits of that super-schoolboy, Bob Briton. It would only have needed a bag of jam-tarts to make his happiness complete.

All around him his schoolfellows slumbered, while he turned over page after page.

The night wore on, and the candle flickered low in its socket. The first grey gleams of daybreak were stealing in at the high windows before "Bob Briton" fell with a thud from the reader's hand, and Bob Briton's ardent disciple sank into slumber.

CHAPTER 4.

The Sword of Defiance!

"TURN out, Trimble!"

Jack Blake stood over Baggy Trimble's bed and shook the fat junior into consciousness.

Rising-bell had gone, and the Fourth were hurrying through their ablutions.

Baggy Trimble sat up in bed and blinked drowsily at Blake.

"Wass time?" he murmured.

"Time you were up and doing, old fat man!" said Blake cheerfully. "Rising-bell's gone, and the brekker-gong will sound in a jiffy. Tumble out!"

It was only the mention of "brekker" that induced Baggy to leave his snug bed. He would not have missed his morning meal for worlds.

Yawning portentously, he lowered one fat leg to the

floor, and then its partner. Then he scrambled through his toilet. He was weary and heavy-eyed, which was not surprising in the circumstances.

"Bob Briton" accompanied Baggy Trimble downstairs to the dining-hall.

Tired though he was, Baggy was not too tired to resume his perusal of that wonderful masterpiece. He rested the book on his knees during breakfast, and glared his eyes upon its pages while he bolted his eggs-and-bacon.

Little Mr. Latham, who presided at the Fourth Form table, glanced sharply at Baggy once or twice; but he failed to see the book on the fat junior's knees, and merely contented himself with a mild rebuke.

"Pray sit up, Trimble! Do not eat your breakfast in that hangdog fashion."

Baggy straightened himself, but he continued at intervals to devour "Bob Briton" while he devoured his breakfast. And, strange to relate, he enjoyed the book more than the breakfast.

When the time for morning lessons arrived, Baggy succeeded in smuggling "Bob Briton" into the Form-room. He considered that the account of Bob Briton's school-days would prove far more entertaining than Virgil. The classic gems of P. Virgilius Maro were completely wasted upon Baggy Trimble.

Seated in the back row, at a convenient distance from the Form-master, Baggy felt that he could read "Bob Briton" with impunity, while the rest of the fellows worked. And, even if Mr. Latham were to pounce upon him, Baggy wouldn't have cared much. He had come to an exciting chapter, describing how Bob Briton had openly defied his own Form-master—a Mr. Wackford—before the whole class.

There was one passage in particular which fired Baggy's blood, and made him long to emulate his hero.

"Mr. Wackford," cried Bob Briton, springing to his feet, "we won't sit down under your beastly tyranny any longer! Instead of taking it lying down, we're going to stand up to you!"

"Hear, hear!" thundered the class in chorus.

"You've been a brute to us all through the term," cried Bob, "and this is your day of reckoning! Collar him, you chaps! Sling him across the desk, and I'll give him a round dozen with his own cane!"

"Hurrah!"

With one accord the fellows leapt to their feet and closed in upon their Form-master. The wretched tyrant, wobbling at the knees and quaking in his shoes, shrank back against his desk. His face was pale with terror.

"Spare me!" he entreated. "I'll do anything you ask if only you'll let me off! I'll cancel all your impositions, and I'll never cane another boy as long as I live! Be merciful, Briton!"

"But Bob's blood was up. He signalled to his school-fellows, and they heaved the wretched tyrant across his desk. Then Bob Briton got busy with the cane, and unearthly shrieks rang out as the instrument of torture rose and fell. Mr. Wackford wriggled and writhed as his back was bombarded with the blows of the avenger."

That passage made a profound impression upon Baggy Trimble.

Forgetful of his surroundings, Baggy clapped his hands in sudden ecstasy.

"Oh, ripping!" he exclaimed, "Good old Bob Briton!"

Baggy's voice smote upon the silence of the Form-room with a suddenness that was quite startling.

Instantly every eye was upon him, including the eye of Mr. Latham.

"Trimble!"

The Form-master's voice was like a thunderclap.

Baggy looked up.

"How dare you!" thundered Mr. Latham. "How dare you utter slangy and irrelevant ejaculations in the middle of lessons?"

In the ordinary way Baggy Trimble would have quailed at the stern voice of his Form-master, but on this occasion he did not turn a hair. He regarded Mr. Latham with cool insolence.

"I'll do as I jolly well like!" he said.

"W-w-what!"

Mr. Latham looked as if he could scarcely believe his ears. For a moment he stood as if petrified, unable to move or speak.

"If I want to say anything, I'll say it!" went on Trimble. "No tyrant of a Form-master shall stop me!"

There was a gasp from the class. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was seated next to Trimble, gave him a frantic nudge.

"Dwy up, you awful ass! If you cheek Latham like that he'll come down on you like a thousand of bricks!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Baggy. "I don't care a flick of the fingers for old Latham! He's a tyrant! He's another Mr.

Wackford! And he'll share the same fate if he's not jolly careful!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Latham gave Trimble a truly terrifying look. Like the Ancient Mariner, he held him with his glittering eye.

"Trimble!" he roared. "Such insolence is unpardonable! Stand out before the class!"

"Sha'n't!" flashed Baggy, defiantly.

The class sat as if spellbound. Such flagrant defiance of a Form-master was almost without precedent at St. Jim's. Some of the bolder spirits in the Fourth had sometimes ventured to speak to Mr. Latham in tones of veiled insolence, but nobody had dared to defy him openly as Trimble was now doing.

Mr. Latham coloured to the roots of his hair. His face twitched with anger. He tried to speak, but words failed him.

Emboldened by the Form-master's silence, and with Bob Briton's words fresh in his memory, Baggy Trimble returned to the attack, as it were.

"Mr. Wackford—I mean, Latham," he exclaimed, "we won't sit down under your beastly tyranny any longer! You've been a brute to us all through the term, and this is your day of reckoning!"

"Phew!" gasped Jack Blake. "It's going to be Trimble's day of reckoning, if you ask me!"

Mr. Latham stood as if dazed.

"Are you out of your senses, Trimble?" he gasped.

"Not at all!" said Baggy. "I'm quite sane, and I'm in grim earnest, just like Bob Briton was."

"Trimble raddled," stuttered Mr. Latham.

"Trimble raddled," he said enthusiastically. "He wouldn't have any truck with tyrants. He gave old Wackford, his Form-master, a dose of his own medicine. That's the way to treat tyrants. Schoolboys never shall be slaves!"

"Are you demented, Trimble?" demanded Mr. Latham. "Who are these persons of whom you speak? Is it possible that they are fictitious characters, figuring in some sensational school story which you have been reading? What is that book on the desk in front of you? Bring it to me at once!"

"Sha'n't!"

The word rang out defiantly. Undoubtedly, the exploits of Bob Briton had made a deep impression upon Baggy Trimble's impressionable mind. The fat junior was on his feet now, fairly bursting with defiance. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes were gleaming.

Mr. Latham had endured much; but he could endure no more. Since Trimble would not come to him, he must go to Trimble—another case of Mahomet going to the mountain.

Picking up a cane, the incensed Form-master swooped down upon Baggy like a hawk swooping upon its prey.

Trimble watched his approach with a certain amount of apprehension. He felt that things were not working out quite so well as they had worked out for Bob Briton against Mr. Wackford.

"Back up, you fellows!" panted Baggy, appealing to the class. "Down with tyrants and tyranny! Don't let old Latham put his paws on me!"

If Trimble imagined that the class would be electrified into action by his shout, and hurl themselves upon Mr. Latham, he imagined a vain thing.

No, a fellow stirred. Some were grinning; others were looking quite scared.

Mr. Latham reached his objective, panting a little. He seized the fat rebel of the Fourth by the collar, and marched him in front of the class.

"Back up!" gasped Baggy. "Don't sit there like a set of graven images! You can't expect me to cope with this tyrant single-handed! Blake! Gussy! Herries! Rescue!"

"Be silent, wretched boy!" thundered Mr. Latham. "Your conduct has been simply abominable! You have characterised your Form-master as a tyrant, you have flagrantly defied my orders, you have behaved with almost incredible insolence! It is only your utter stupidity which saves you from being taken before the headmaster. You have been filling your head with trashy fiction! I will now endeavour to eradicate the effects of that absurd book!"

So saying, Mr. Latham half-pushed, half-abused the fat junior across a form.

With a last despairing cry of "Back up!"—a cry which might have been addressed to a brick wall, for all the response it elicited—the unfortunate Baggy resigned himself to his fate.

Whack, whack, whack!

Mr. Latham plied the cane with tremendous vim. He might have been the village blacksmith, swinging his sledge, by the vigour he put into it.

It was a painful and humiliating experience for the ardent disciple of Bob Briton. And the yells of the victim echoed and re-echoed through the Form-room.

Mr. Lathom did not desist until his arm ached. Then, laying aside the cane, he motioned to Baggy Trimble to go back to his place.

Moaning and groaning, the fat junior crawled to his seat. And his moans and groans continued for the rest of the lesson.

Baggy Trimble was a very subdued—though not silent—rebel during the remainder of the morning. And his only consolation was that Mr. Lathom, in the heat of recent events, had forgotten to confiscate "Bob Briton's Schooldays."

CHAPTER 5.

A True "Briton"!

MR. LATHOM had not succeeded in curing Baggy Trimble. He had subdued him for the time being; that was all.

"Bob Briton's Schooldays" had taken firm hold on the fat junior's imagination. It had shaken him out of

this, Bob Briton always came out on top in his adventures. If he fought a tyrant, he inevitably vanquished him. If he declared war on his Form master, he always got the better of it.

Yet Baggy, in trying to mould himself upon Bob Briton and copy that youth's actions, had come sadly to grief. There was that scuffle on the stairs with Kiddare of the Sixth, which had ended in Baggy being spanked with a slipper. And then, when he had hurled defiance at his Form master, in the true Bob Briton style, Mr. Lathom, instead of being cowed and crushed, as he ought to have been, had proved master of the situation. Trimble was still smarting from that terrific caning.

Why was it that everything came off for Bob Briton, and nothing came off for Bob Briton's devoted disciple?

That was what mystified Baggy. In his purling stupidity he could not see that between romance and reality there is a great gulf fixed.

When lessons were over for the day Baggy betook himself to the river—accompanied, of course, by Bob Briton.

It was a glorious afternoon. The autumn sunlight



St Jim's Jingles!

No. 6 TOM MERRY.



TOM MERRY, captain of the Shell,

Is famed the wide world over; From Canada to Camberwell.

From Delaware to Dover. They talk about him in Ceylon

(where every prospect pleases), They yarn about him in Yukon.

And love his japes and wizzes.

Some readers may remember how,

A kid in knickerbockers, Tom Merry made his primal bow,

And met with many mockers. But Tommy very quickly showed

That he was not a "softy"; But one who cherished, on life's road,

Ambitions keen and lofty.

Jack Blake had been the leading light

Prior to Tom's appearance; But Merry showed, in many a fight,

Such pluck and perseverance, That Blake was banished from his throne,

And Tom became the leader;

The enterprise which he has shown

Delights each ardent reader.

He "digs" in Study Number Ten

With Lowther and with Manners;

This trinity of mighty men

Draws dozens to its banners.

Three British schoolboys of the best,

In friendship's bonds united,

They work and play with zeal and zest.

And see that wrongs are righted.

Tom Merry boasts a governess,

The worthy Miss Priscailla;

Who sends him hints on food and dress

From her secluded villa.

"Wear chest-protectors, Tommy dear,

And feed on rice and sago; Then you'll be safe, and need not fear

Pneumonia or lumbago!"

If "darling Tommy" took this tip,

How all the chaps would snigger!

But Tommy fears no icy nip, He's full of health and vigour.

Explore these islands all around,

From Leeds to Londonderry,

No finer fellow will be found

Than world-renowned TOM MERRY!



TOM MERRY.

NEXT WEEK! GERALD KNOX, Sixth-Form Prefect!

himself, as it were, and revolutionised his whole outlook upon life.

Never in all his career had Baggy been so strongly influenced by a mere book. He wasn't fond of reading. He had struggled through some of the books in the school library, but he had regarded their perusal as a penance rather than a pleasure. "Treasure Island," which fired the romantic fancy of the average fellow, left Baggy cold. He had no desire whatever to sail the seas in quest of gold and adventure.

As for the works of Henty and Ballantyne and Fenimore Cooper, the exploits of their heroes had awakened no responsive chord in Baggy Trimble's mind. Henty was as dull as Homer, in Baggy's opinion.

And now, quite by chance, he had come into possession of a highly coloured book by an unknown author, and it thrilled him to the heart's core.

The only thing in the book that mystified Baggy was

danced upon the sparkling waters of the Rhyl; and the tall rushes which bordered the banks were swaying in the breeze. Birds twittered gaily in the trees; all was fair and bright.

But Baggy Trimble had not come down to the riverside to enjoy the beauties of Nature. They did not appeal to him a little bit. He was conscious of them, but they reminded him unpleasantly of long country walks and lectures on botany. The only beauties that appealed to Baggy's gross senses were the beauties of a bunshop.

Baggy had come out of gates so that he might resume his reading of Bob Briton without danger of interruption. Had he stayed at St. Jim's, he would have run the risk of Mr. Lathom pouncing upon him and confiscating the book. And that would have been a tragedy.

The fat junior looked around for a comfortable spot. He

found one at length, on the bank, beneath the spreading branches of an elm.

A short distance away, a rickety rustic bridge spanned the river. And farther down was the weir, with its whirlpool of seething waters.

"This will suit me a treat!" murmured Baggy, throwing himself down in the long grass. "Lemme see. Where did I get up to?"

He turned over the pages of Bob Briton, and found the place, and was soon deep in Bob's amazing adventures. The book seemed to get more and more exciting as it went on.

Bob Briton was a marvel. There had been no other schoolboy like him before or since. Life was one breathless whirl of adventures, so far as Bob was concerned; and he always came up smiling.

There were other characters in the story, but they faded away into a hazy background. Bob Briton took all the lime-light. He stood out from all the rest—a Triton among the minnows, so to speak.

Baggy Trimble's face fairly glowed with enthusiasm as he turned over the pages. Here was a picture of Bob "adventuring" a perfect; a little farther on he was portrayed in the act of waving the red flag of rebellion from a window in the school tower, while the Head and the masters stood helpless in the quadrangle, gnashing their teeth with impotent rage.

And here was another picture, more realistic than the rest. Bob Briton, minus coat and boots, was taking a daring plunge into the river, above whose surface appeared the white face of a drowning schoolboy.

Baggy Trimble gazed at that picture long and intently. His heart beat more quickly than usual.

"My hat!" he murmured, drawing a deep breath. "If only I had the chance to do daring stunts like that! Some lives get all the luck. They go around saving people's lives with as much coolness as if they were merely collecting cigarette-cards! They reap no end of honour and glory, and fat rewards into the bargain. I only wish I could have the chance of saving somebody from a watery grave!"

Baggy's wish was gratified there and then.

Suddenly a shrill cry rang out on the autumn air.

"Help! Help!"

Baggy looked up quickly. So absorbed had he been in Bob Briton that he had not noticed that anybody was on the river.

Curly Gibson of the Third had been on the river. He was now in it!

An empty punt was plunging wildly in the water. The fog had been manœuvring the punt down-stream, but he was a mere novice in the art, and presently Curly and the punt had parted company.

Baggy Trimble looked, and caught his breath. He saw that Curly Gibson was caught in the mill-race, and being whirled rapidly in the direction of the weir.

The fog could swim, but he was not a strong swimmer, and he seemed quite helpless now, as the powerful current beat him swiftly downstream.

Curly's white face was turned for a fleeting instant towards Baggy Trimble.

"Help!" he repeated. "But there was despair in the fog's cry. What help could he expect from Trimble!"

In the ordinary way, Baggy would have stood wringing his hands helplessly in such a crisis. He was no swimmer, and he was no hero.

But this was a very different Baggy from the cowardly Baggy of old. The influence of Bob Briton was at work.

Baggy had already fallen a prey to the crude absurdities of the book, and he was now fired by its better and nobler influence. He had longed for an opportunity to save someone's life; and no sooner had he expressed that longing, than, hey presto, the opportunity was here!

Baggy acted with amazing promptness; and it was well that he did so, for Curly Gibson's plight had become perilous in the extreme.

In far quicker time than it takes to set it down, Baggy had rushed on to the rickety rustic bridge; and he now lay across it, with downstretched arms, waiting to grab Curly Gibson, and haul him up to safety. Trimble could just touch the water with the tips of his fingers.

"It's all right, kid!" shouted Baggy. "I'll get you!"

On the face of it Trimble's action did not seem to be particularly heroic. But the bridge was very unsafe, and it creaked and wobbled dangerously beneath Baggy's bulk. At any moment it might collapse, and precipitate the fat junior into the river.

"Now!"

At the psychological moment Baggy's grasp descended upon Curly Gibson's collar, checking the fog's wild career downstream.

Baggy hung on grimly with both hands. He was obliged to wriggle himself well forward, before he could commence hauling up. His body was inclined well over the bridge, and beneath him the mill-stream raced madly. If he over-balanced, and fell, it would quite possibly mean the loss of two lives.

But Baggy was not concerned with this direful possibility. His one aim and object was to haul the fog up to safety.

Baggy was not a muscular fellow, and the exertion required was tremendous. He succeeded in raising Curly clear of the water, and his arms felt as if they were being wrenched from their sockets.

"Quick!" he panted desperately.

Curly was at last able to clutch at the bridge. He hung on for a moment pumping in breath. Then, with Trimble's assistance, he heaved himself on to safety. In his sodden clothes, and with his breath coming and going in great gasps, he sat on the bridge and stared at his rescuer.

Could it really be Trimble who had plucked him from those swirling waters? Was he dreaming? Or had the age of miracles come back?

The fog could not speak. He could only stare at Baggy in dumb gratitude and unfeigned surprise.

Baggy also needed a "breather," and a full moment elapsed before he was able to rise to his feet, and quit his unsafe position on the rickety little bridge. He staggered towards the bank, and Curly Gibson followed.

"Silly young ass, to take a punt out when you don't know how to handle it!" growled Baggy.

"I know," said the fog penitently. "It was an awful ass. I might have been drowned—I should have been drowned—if you hadn't leaned over the bridge and grabbed me. You were running a big risk, Baggy. If that wobbly affair had given way—"

Curly shuddered.

"I should never have believed that you were a giddy hero," the fog went on. "You've never looked the part, somehow."

"Oh, really, Gibson, you've no right to think that. I've always had heaps of pluck, and I've simply longed to save somebody's life, but I've never had the chance—until now."

Curly grasped the fat hand of his rescuer.

"Thanks, Baggy!" he said simply. "I shan't forget this in a hurry."

"That's right, kid," said Baggy magnanimously.

The fat junior was feeling rather proud of himself. At the same time, he was a little disappointed to think that the rescue had been performed without an audience to clap and cheer. Bob Briton's gallant life-saving feats had all been accomplished in the presence of cheering crowds.

"We'd better be getting back to the school," said Baggy, at length. "You mustn't hang about in those wet togs."

He gathered up his book from the grass, and rolled away in the direction of St. Jim's. Curly Gibson trotted beside him, shedding miniature pools of water from his soaking garments.

CHAPTER 6.

The Unbelievers!

TOM MERRY & CO. were kicking a football about when Baggy Trimble rolled on the scene. Nobody had seen the fat junior come in with Curly Gibson, and Curly had hurried away to the dormitory to change his clothes.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, looking up as Baggy approached.

"Here's Bob Briton!"

And there was a laugh.

"He's still got that trashy book with him," growled Manners. "He should have finished with Bob Briton, after what happened in the Form-room this morning."

"Wonder what Baggy's next stunt will be?" mused Tom

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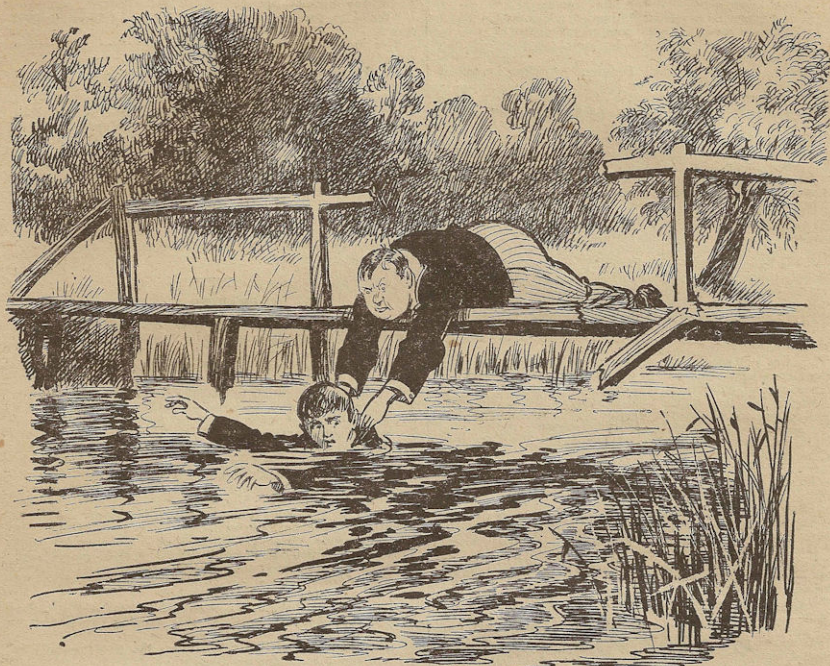
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ANSWERS

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"It's all right, kid!" shouted Baggie Trimble. "I'll get you!" The bridge was very unsafe, and it creaked and wobbled dangerously beneath the fat junior's weight. "Now!" At the psychological moment, Trimble's grasp descended upon Curly Gibson's collar, checking the fag's wild career downstream. Trimble hung on grimly with both hands. (See page 10.)

Merry. "Will he point a pistol at my head, I wonder, and command me to give him a place in the junior eleven?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble glared at the grinning footballers.

"You fellows are lucky to see me alive," he said. "I've just had an awfully narrow squeak of losing my life."

Trimble's schoolfellows stared at him. Footer practice was suspended, for the moment.

"What have you been up to now, Baggie?" asked Talbot.

"I've just fished a fellow out of the river," explained Baggy, with assumed unconcern, as if fishing fellows out of rivers was an every day performance on his part. "I saved him from a watery grave, you know."

"Eh! Saved whom?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Young Gibson of the Third. The silly young ass was punting on the Rhyll, and he tumbled in, and got carried away by the current."

"My hat!"

"He was caught in the mill-race, and he was swept along at about—er—sixty miles an hour," said Baggy.

"Oh, make it a hundred!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy scowled at the humorous Lowther.

"I did something that you'd never have the pluck to do, anyway," he said. "You know that old rickety bridge, at the lower part of the river? Well, I hurled myself bodily on to it."

"Impossible!" said Manners. "The blessed bridge would have collapsed. No bridge could stand your weight, Baggy."

"That's why Waterloo Bridge had to be repaired," explained Lowther. "Trimble walked across it once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy scowled at his hilarious schoolfellows. It was quite obvious that they didn't believe a word he said, and he could hardly blame them, for he had told so many fibs in the past.

This was not the first time Baggy had claimed to have rescued somebody from the river. His claims had invariably proved bogus ones, and the juniors naturally supposed that Baggy was adding yet another fairy-tale to his large and varied output. Instead of hailing him as a gallant hero, and striking up the chorus of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," they laughed in his face.

Jack Blake & Co. came strolling on the scene, attracted by the sounds of merriment.

"What's the joke, deah boys?" inquired Augustus D'Arcy.

"Baggy is doing a bit of Britonising," explained Tom Merry, with a laugh. "He's been reading of Bob Briton's wonderful life-saving feats, and now he's trotted out a cock-and-bull yarn to the effect that he fished Curly Gibson out of the river."

"It isn't a cock-and-bull yarn!" shouted Baggy in wrath.

"You're a lot of Doubting Thomases! Yah!" He turned to the newcomers, his own Form-fellows. "I hope you chaps will believe me, at any rate. You know that I never tell a lie."

"We know that you never tell the truth, except by accident," growled Jack Blake. "You say that you fished young Gibson out of the river?"

"Yes."

"But you can't swim—"

"Oh, really, Blake! I'll tell you the facts. When I saw the frail, feeble fag being whirled along by the current—"

"At a hundred miles an hour!" interjected Lowther.

"I promptly rushed on to that cranky old bridge, and leaned over, and grabbed young Gibson by the hair, and started to haul him up to safety."

"Yes, I can just see you doing it!" said Blake.

And Monty Lowther started to hum a variation of "The Old Rustic Bridge."

"I am thinking to-night of the old rustic bridge That bends o'er the murmuring stream; It was there, Baggy dear, without panic or fear, That you saved Curly's life—in your dream!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go on, Baggy!" gurgled Herries. "What happened next?"

Baggy resumed his narrative.

"I was hauling young Gibson up by the scruff of his neck—"

"You said it was his hair a minute ago," said Talbot.

"Ahem! It—it was the hair on the back of his neck," stammered Baggy.

"But Curly hasn't any hair on the back of his neck," said Lowther. "Sure it wasn't Esau you rescued, Baggy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble bestowed quite a ferocious glare upon Monty Lowther, whose humorous interruptions did more than anything else to throw discredit upon his story.

"I was hauling him up by his hair," he repeated, "when suddenly there was a terrible crash—"

"And you woke up?" suggested Talbot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats! There was a terrible crash and the bridge gave way, and the next minute we were fighting for our lives in the mill-stream!"

This was not strictly in accordance with the facts. But Baggy considered that a little fiction would set off the facts to excellent advantage.

"Young Gibson grabbed hold of me," he went on, "and his face was as white as a sheet. 'Save me, Baggy!' he cried hoarsely. And then he sank into unconsciousness."

"Go on," said Tom Merry. "That's got the true Bob Briton touch about it."

"Striking out with all my strength," said Baggy, flinging out his fat arms by way of illustration, and catching Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a terrific crack across the cheek, "I bore my burden bravely to the bank."

"You understand, you fellows," said Lowther. "Bravely Baggy bore his burden—bore it bravely to the bank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows can laugh," said Baggy, "but it was a fearful ordeal, I can tell you, fighting the foaming billows, breasting the bounding breakers—"

"Hallo! The sea's been transferred to Rylcombe!" said Digby.

Baggy Trimble gave an angry snort. He could see that it was no use going on with his narrative. He could descent about it from now till Doomsday, but nobody would believe him, unless corroboration came.

And corroboration was near at hand.

Curly Gibson, attired in a rather shabby knickerbocker suit, came trotting towards the footballers. The juniors expected Baggy Trimble to turn tail at sight of him. But Baggy stood his ground.

"Now you'll see whether I've been telling fairy tales or not," he said.

"I say, Curly," said Tom Merry. "Trimble's been trying to kid us that he rescued you from a watery grave."

"No kid about it," said the fat. "It's true enough."

"True!" shouted half a dozen voices.

Curly nodded.

"You wouldn't think old Baggy was a giddy hero, would you?" he said. "But he saved my life right enough. You know I wouldn't say a thing like that if it wasn't true." "Greatest Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

All eyes were on Curly Gibson now. And Curly promptly proceeded to give the details of Baggy's life-saving feat. Those details did not square exactly with the details which Baggy had given. Curly said nothing about the bridge collapsing. But there could no longer be any doubt that Baggy's story was fundamentally correct. With great pluck and presence of mind he had saved the fat's life.

"Well," exclaimed Tom Merry, with a deep breath, when Curly had finished his recital, "this fairly beats the band! I'd no idea that Baggy would blossom forth into a giddy hero. What fathead said the age of miracles was past!"

Trimble glanced loftily at his schoolfellows.

"I think you owe me an apology," he said haughtily.

"We do, indeed!" said Talbot. "But you're such a

notorious fibber, Baggy, and your latest yarn took such a lot of swallowing—"

"Well, it's true," said Baggy. "Are you fellows satisfied now?"

The juniors nodded. They knew that they could place complete reliance on the word of Curly Gibson.

To say that Tom Merry & Co. were astonished was to put it very mildly. Like the prophet of old, they were amazed with a great amazement. They began to look upon Baggy Trimble with a new respect. Hitherto they had regarded Baggy as a pretty worthless sort of person. But, as Monty Lowther said, a fellow who could save another fellow's life, at great personal risk, must have some good in his make-up.

The news of the rescue was broadcast through the school, and Baggy Trimble came as near to being popular as he had ever come before. His name was in everybody's mouth that evening, and he felt as proud as a peacock with two tails.

Thanks to Bob Briton, Baggy had at last accomplished something worth while.

CHAPTER 7.

A Call to Arms!

TOM MERRY frowned.

He was approaching the notice-board in the hall with a football list in his hand—the list of players for Saturday's match.

It was Tom's intention to post the list on the notice-board. To his intense annoyance, however, he found that there was not a single inch of space available. Somebody had covered the entire notice-board with a huge sheet of drawing paper, blotting out all the other notices and preventing fresh ones from being posted up.

"What awful cheek!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

His chums nodded.

"Fearful nerve!" said Manners.

"Looks like Trimble's handiwork," said Monty Lowther.

"What's it all about, anyway?"

The Terrible Three glared at that huge announcement which monopolised the notice-board. But their glares were converted into grins as they perused it.

"NOTICE!

A MASS MEETING

will be held in the Quad this evening, at seven o'clock sharp.

BAGLEY TRIMBLE will address the whole school on a subject of

TRMENDUOUS IMPORTANCE,

which cannot be discussed here, or some tirant of a master or prefect would tear down this notice.

KOMRADES OF ST. JIM'S!

Roll up in your thousands and here what BAGLEY TRIMBLE has to say. It will cause the greatest sensation of modern times!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Lowther. "Baggy's broken out in a fresh place! This is another Bob Briton stunt, by the look of it."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Tom Merry, in wonder. "What is the fat chump going to address us about?"

"Going to incite us to a giddy revolution. I expect," said Lowther, with a grin. "You can bet your lives that Baggy's been sweating it up, and that he's simply dying to follow in the footsteps of his hero."

"The silly fat duffer!" growled Manners. "If he starts any revolutionary stunts here he'll land himself in serious trouble."

"I say, you fellows—"

Baggy Trimble had come up behind the trio.

"Talk of revolutionaries and you're bound to hear the tinkle of their fairy feet," said Lowther. "Look here, Baggy. Why have you called a mass meeting? What are you going to spout about?"

"It's a secret at present," said Trimble. "You'll know all about it this evening. I can't discuss it with you fellows now, in case it gets to the ears of the Head or the masters. It's got to be kept awfully dark. If the Head knew there was going to be a great rebellion—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy scowled at the laughing juniors.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" he said.

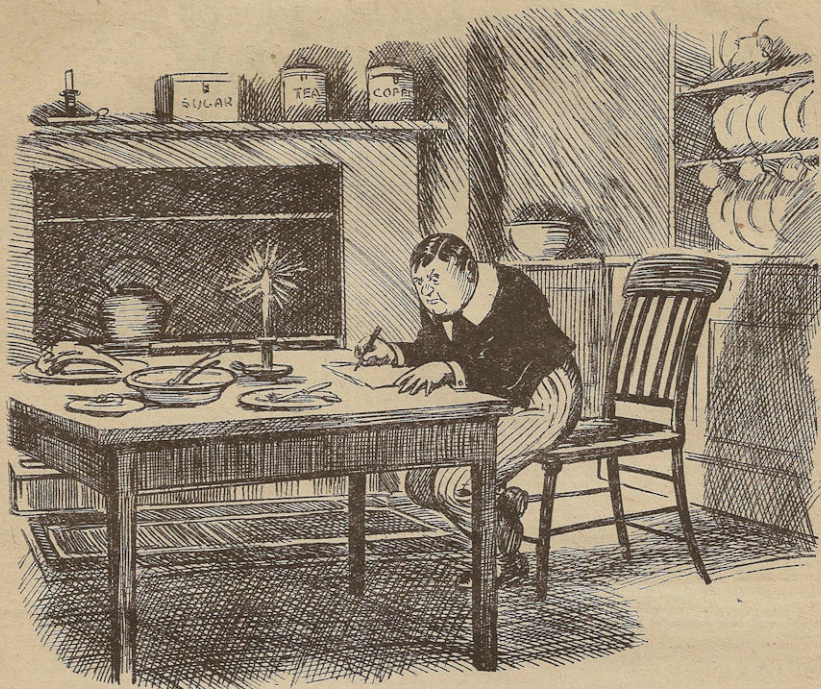
"Why, you duffer, you've already let the cat out of the bag!" said Tom Merry. "So you're going to organise a great rebellion—what?"

"I decline to discuss the matter," said Trimble loftily.

"It's a secret, and it's jolly well going to remain a secret. I'm not going to tell you anything about it until the rebellion actually comes off, and we fly at the throat of the tyrant!"

ANSWERS

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Having well satisfied his appetite and feeling refreshed by his "forty winks," Baggy Trimble seated himself at the kitchen table. Then he produced a note-book from his pocket, tore out a sheet of paper, and started to indite his farewell letter to the Head. (See page 20.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Monty Lowther, wiping his eyes. "You'll be the death of me, Baggy!"

Baggy Trimble blinked almost ferociously at the Terrible Three. They were treating his announcement as a huge joke, instead of realising that it was a very serious and solemn matter.

However, Baggy had no doubt that the majority of the fellows would take it seriously, and that they would "roll up in their thousands" when seven o'clock came, and listen with rapt attention to what he had to say.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to take that notice down, Baggy," said Tom Merry.

"Eh? Certainly not! Why should I take it down?"

"I've got a football notice to put up."

"Football!" said Trimble scornfully. "What does football matter in a crisis of this sort? There won't be any football after to-night!"

"What?"

"I'm going to organise a big barring-out in the gym," explained Baggy, quite forgetting that his plans were to be kept strictly secret. "We're going to lay in supplies of grub, and barricade ourselves in, and hold the fort against all-comers!"

"Great pip!"

"So football will be out of the question, you see, until the rebellion is over. You can cancel Saturday's match, Merry."

"Can I?" stammered Tom Merry.

"Of course! We shall spend Saturday afternoon in our fortified stronghold, hurling defiance at the tyrants!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I prefer kicking a footer about any day," he said. "Anyway, my notice is going up, and yours is coming down. See?"

Tom Merry calmly proceeded to jerk out the drawing-pins

with his penknife, and Baggy Trimble's announcement, released from its moorings, as it were, came fluttering down. "You rotter!" roared Baggy. "I've a jolly good mind to punch you for that, Tom Merry!"

"Punch away!" said Tom cheerfully, as he pinned his own notice to the board.

But Baggy, although well imbued by this time with Bob Briton's fighting spirit, showed no inclination to carry out his threat.

With a snort of anger, he gathered up his announcement and rolled away in, order to find a fresh home for it.

When seven o'clock came there was a gathering of the clans in the school quadrangle.

Baggy Trimble expected a big crowd, and he was not disappointed. Juniors and fags turned up in full muster, and there was a good sprinkling of Fifth-Formers.

The mighty men of the Sixth had not deigned to put in an appearance; but this was all to the good, so far as Trimble was concerned. He could not very well make a fiery speech of a revolutionary nature in the hearing of the prefects.

Mounted in majesty on the top of the School House steps, Baggy Trimble started to address the multitude. A sea of grinning faces greeted his gaze.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—" he began.

"Hurrah!"

"Pile in, Baggy!"

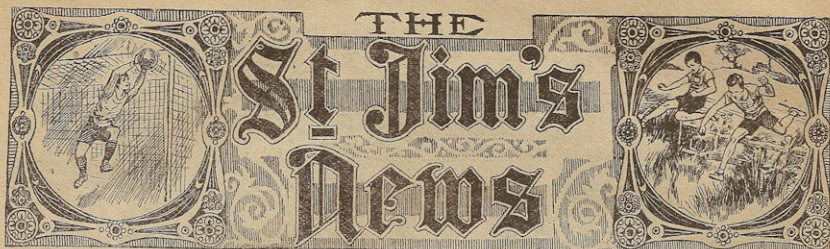
"We are gathered together on this suspicious occasion—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We are gathered together, I say," went on Trimble, stealing a glance at "Bob Briton's Schooldays," which was open in his hand, "in order to declare war upon those three great evils which rear their ugly heads in our midst. I refer, gentlemen, to the evils of Tyranny, Oppression, and Discipline."

(Continued on page 15.)

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THE ST. JIM'S DETECTIVE!

A BRIEF CHAT WITH
GEORGE FRANCIS KERR,
THE SHERLOCK HOLMES
OF ST. JIM'S.

By Our Special Reporter.

"YOU have been fighting!" was Kerr's first remark to me, when I stepped into his study.

"Great Scott, Kerr! You're a marvellous fellow! Was that a lucky guess, or was it skilful deduction?"

"The latter," said Kerr. "The moment you put your nose round the door I saw it was swollen and inflamed—the nose, not the door. I also detected a black eye, a cut lip, and a thick ear. A microscopic examination would also reveal a lump the size of a pigeon's egg on your forehead. From these facts I confidently deduce that you have been fighting."

"Marvellous!" was all I could say. Then, dropping into the chair which the great detective placed for me, I drew out my notebook and started to fire questions at him.

"Tell me, briefly, some details of your detective career," I said. "What was your first case?"

"The Case of the Vanished Tuck," answered Kerr. "For some time tuck had been disappearing in the night from the school shop. It was a baffling mystery. Dame Taggles looked and bolted the premises every night, and the windows were securely fastened. None of the locks or fastenings were tampered with, so it was obvious that no burglar had got in. Yet the tuck was gone!"

"My hat?"

"Dame Taggles consulted me in the matter, and begged me to take up the case," said the detective, offering me a chocolate cigar. "Following up a number of clues, I eventually unravelled the mystery. The culprit was Baggy Trimble. He used to visit the tuckshop at night, and climb on to the roof, where there was a small skylight."

"But Trimble couldn't possibly squeeze his big bulk through that skylight."

"I know that. What he did was to fish for the tuck with a rod and line. The line had a big hook on the end, and was lowered through the skylight. Tarts and doughnuts and other tasty items were easily captured in this way. Of course, Trimble was reported, and he got it where the chicken got the chopper. That first case of mine gave me great satisfaction. I received from Dame Mimble the stupendous fee of sixpence for my services."

I smiled as I jotted down these facts in my notebook.

"And what was your most successful case?" I inquired.

"The Case of the Vanished Footer Eleven," said Kerr. "The whole team suddenly disappeared on the morning of the match—disappeared as mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up. Search-parties scoured the countryside in vain. The whole school was in a ferment. The team had to be found by two o'clock, for a silver cup was at stake. I at once took up the case, and discovered the whereabouts of the vanished eleven in the nick of time."

"How was it done?" I asked breathlessly.

"It's a long story," said Kerr. "I'll tell you some other time. Suffice it to say that it was a case of kidnapping. The whole team had been decoyed to a lonely spot and made prisoners. It was that case which really brought me into the limelight as a detective and made my name."

"Are you very busy at present?"

"Yes, rather! I'm engaged on half-a-dozen mysteries at once. There's the Case of the Borrowed Bike—Figgy's bike, you know. Some houndie borrowed it last night and buckled the front wheel, and punctured the back tyre. My client, Figgy, is in a fearful sweat about it, and I feel jolly ratty myself. I shall leave no stone unturned to track down the culprit, and when I do run him to earth he'll be punctured worse than the bike."

At this stage I suddenly gathered up my notebook and fled from the study.

Being the bike-borrower in question, I had no desire to be punctured!

MYSTERY PIE!

By Baggy Trimble.

I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night;
And the fellows in the Fourth
Lie snoring left and right.
I arise from dreams of thee—
And a spirit in my toe
Has told me—who know how!—
To the pantry down below!

The midnight chimes grow faint
On the cold and frosty air;
No profane on the proverb
Can see me standing there,
Softly I steal inside

With stealthy steps and sly,
And with groping hands I search
For the good old Mystery Pie!

I know not what's inside,
Beneath thy crust concealed;
Whether 'tis ham or beef
Or apples, sliced or peeled.
I only know I'm here
With the pie-dish in my hand;
And the rapture that I feel
For folks could understand!

Gently I set thee down
On the table, clean and white;
Then I grope towards the switch,
And I flood the place with light.
"We'll soon see what's inside!"
In eager tones I cry;
And thy secret shall be mine,
O delightful Mystery Pie!

Grasping a knife and fork,
I deftly carve thy crust,
Piled with the team resolve
To gorge until I bust!
O perfect, priceless Pie!
Thy glories, who can tell?
The crust is raised at last—
Then I give a startled yell!

O lift me from the floor!
I faint! I gasp! I choke!
I feel busy at the door,
Has played a hateful joke!
She's filled the beastly dish
With fruit-skins, shrivelled dry;
And there's only the crust for me—
The crust of the Mystery Pie!

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES of ST. JIM'S!

By Monty Lowther.

IF Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, came to St. Jim's, I could set him some pretty problems to solve.

Here are just a few of the mysterious happenings which have occurred recently.

HOW did a prickly hedgehog find its way into Mr. Linton's desk in the Shell Form-room?

WHO were the three mysterious masked ruffians who set upon Knox of the Sixth in the quadrangle after dusk, and gave the bully of the Sixth a dose of his own medicine? Were they genuine desperadoes or schoolboys in disguise? Anyway, Knox is thirsting for their gore!

HOW did Kildare's birthday cake manage to find its way from our genial skipper's study to a certain study in the Fourth Form passage, tenanted by Trimble? I've seen a "cake-walk" before now, but that particular cake must have been well versed in the geography of St. Jim's to find its way about so successfully!

WAS there any connection between the disappearance of Kildare's cake and the bilious attack suffered by Baggy Trimble the morning after?

BY what mysterious agency did George Alfred Grundy manage to score a goal at footer on Saturday? Did the spirit of Steve Bloomer suddenly take possession of Grundy's physical body? Something of that sort must have happened, for it's a well-known fact that Grundy could never score a goal off his own boot!

WHO was responsible for turning Gussy's Sunday topper into a battered confection? Was it a human being or a canine quadruped? How did the battered object—once a thing of beauty, but now unsuitable for the humblest tramp—find its way into the kennel of Towser, the bulldog?

HOW does Knox of the Sixth account for the discovery, on his study table, of a pink sporting paper which is banned at St. Jim's? Did the autumnal gales blow the paper aloft and send it whirling into Knox's den? (Perhaps the newsagent in the village can clear up this perplexing problem.)

WHO was the anonymous donor, to Wally D'Arcy of the Third, of a bar of washing-soap and half a dozen clean collars?

WHO stole the milk from the saucer of Minnie, the mouse? Or was it accidentally tracked over when the House department for Baggy Trimble when she found that fat gormandiser trespassing in the kitchen?

WHO tinkered about with Mr. Ratcliff's alarm-clock and got the dear old gentleman out of bed at four o'clock instead of six? Glyn seemed uncomfortable when the Fifth Form master questioned him as to the ownership of a pair of pliers which Ratty found on his bed-room floor.

A NIGHT MYSTERY!

By Jack Blake.

BAGGY TRIMBLE of the Fourth stood over Mellish's bed and shook him. "Gerraway!" grumbled Mellish. "Tain't rising-hell yet!"

"It's half-past eleven!" said Baggy. "Have you forgotten our arrangement? We're going to the Priory ruins to tackle the ghosts."

It was unusual for Baggy Trimble to tackle anything or anybody, whether natural or supernatural. Certainly he would not have dreamed of going alone to the ruined Priory. Baggy was not of the stuff of which heroes are made. With a companion, however, he would feel a little less funky. Besides, Baggy was curious—very curious indeed—to find out what was going on in the Priory ruins.

A strange story had reached Baggy's ears—a story which suggested that the ruins were haunted.

It was said that every night, about midnight, wild and unearthly shrieks proceeded from the ruins, and that anyone who was bold enough to peep through a crack in the masonry could see a number of wild-looking figures performing a sort of war-dance.

The story had fired Trimble's curiosity, and he was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. Overnight, he had chatted with Percy Mellish on the subject, and the precious pair had arranged to sally forth, shortly before midnight, to investigate the strange phenomena.

Mellish had been very keen on the expedition at the time, but now, in the silent watches of the night, his enthusiasm had cooled considerably.

"Better the ghosts!" he murmured drowsily. "Go and tackle them yourself, Baggy!"

"Oh, really, Mellish, you promised to come along with me, you know! I'm not selfish, and I never like to keep a thrilling adventure all to myself."

"I believe it's all a lot of bosh," said Mellish. "The Priory ruins are no more haunted than this dorm it is!"

"Anyway, I think we ought to go and investigate. Of course, if you're funky—"

Mellish gave an snort.

"Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!" he said. "Why, you're the biggest funk in the Fourth, Baggy! I'm surprised at your wanting to go on this stunt! It's a case of curiosity getting the better of funk, I suppose!"

"Look here," growled Trimble, "are you coming, or are you not?"

"Oh, I'll come!" retorted Mellish, turning out. "But if it turns out to be a wild-goose chase, and there's nobody in the ruins, I'll jolly well stay you! I'm not going to have my beauty sleep spilt for nothing!"

Baggy Trimble was already dressed, and it didn't take Mellish long to slip into his clothes. Together they stole forth from the dormitory and crept down the dark staircase.

"What are we going to tackle the ghosts with, Baggy?" asked Mellish.

"Flour and soot," was the prompt reply. "I've had a couple of bags filled—one with flour and one with soot. They're in the woodshed. You take the sooty and I'll take the flour, and when we come across the ghosts we'll buzz the bags at them—see? Mind you, I'm not saying that there really will be ghosts in the old ruins. I dare say it's some fellows skylarking about. But they've no right to scare people by shrieking and yelling in the middle of the night, and if they get a shower-bath of soot and flour it will be their own funeral. Mind how you go, Mellish! It's jolly dark down here!"

They were approaching the box-room window. Baggy cautiously raised the sash, and squeezed his plump form through the aperture. Mellish followed. Having gained the quad, they groped their way towards the woodshed.

It was no night for craven spirits to be abroad. A thick fog hung like a pall over the St. Jim's quadrangle. The air was cold and clammy. Baggy Trimble began to marvel at his own courage in setting forth on such an expedition. As for Mellish, he was seriously beginning to wish that he had never budged from his warm bed.

Trimble went first, and he reached the woodshed rather sooner than he expected. Stepping blindly through the darkness, he flattened his nose on the door.

"Found the woodshed?" inquired Mellish, with a sneeze.

"Yarooooo!"

"Shush! You'll be waking the school, yelling like that! Open the door, and let's get at those bags!"

"My nose," wailed Baggy.

"Blow your nose!"

Baggy recovered presently from the painful concussion. He opened the door of the woodshed and stepped into the Stygian darkness within. A farther yelp escaped him as a big rat scuttled across the floor, running past his trouser-leg. Baggy snatched up the two bags in feverish haste and rejoined Mellish.

Mellish took the bag of soot, and the two adventurers were off and away at last. They scaled the school wall—rather a difficult acrobatic feat for Baggy—and, after tramping down the dark and lonely lane, they plunged into Rycombe Woods.

It was not a pleasant journey. They had not proceeded very far into the woods when Mellish tripped over a tree-hole and went sprawling. And Baggy, who was short-sighted by day and totally blind by night, tripped over Mellish's recumbent form and went sprawling, too. There was a shrill dust of snuff, and some minutes elapsed before the adventurers rcted themselves out.

But the chapter of accidents was by no means complete. Baggy walked full-tilt into a tree, and his already smarting nasal organ was again in the way. Then the precious pair lost their way, and got into a sort of

maze, from which there seemed to be no way out.

But at last, after Mellish had expended all his matches, and his patience into the bargain, they struck the path, again, and found themselves nearing the Priory ruins.

Their hearts were beating fast now. A light glimmered from the ruins, and a most noticeable howl, like that of a hungry wolf, broke the stillness of the wood. The howl was followed by another, and then another, and then a whole chorus of dismal howls.

Mellish clutched his companion's arm. "I'm off!" he muttered. "I—I can't stand this!"

Baggy was in a similar state of blue funk, but his curiosity would not allow him to turn tail. The light that glimmered from the ruins seemed to mesmerise him.

"Come on!" he murmured, screwing up what little courage he possessed. "We're not going back now after fagging all this way. Better go on our hands and knees, then we shan't be heard."

"You go first, then!" said Mellish. His teeth were chattering fearfully. The howling had ceased now, but it seemed to be succeeded by the most fiendish and awesome cries that ever shattered the silence of Rycombe Woods. Braver fellows than Percy Mellish would have thought would have thought twice before approaching those apparently haunted ruins.

They were near enough now to see what was going on. There was a big aperture in the masonry, and through this aperture a number of wild-looking beings could be seen executing a sort of war-dance. They were garbed like Red Indians, and their cries of ghouliah woe were dreadful to hear.

Baggy and Mellish lag fozgo beside the aperture, clutching their bags. They were trying to summon up enough courage to rise to their feet, and to hurl their ammunition at those fiendish figures, Baggy's bright idea was to smother the dancers with flour and soot, and then decamp hastily in the darkness. It was one thing to conceive such an idea, but it was quite another thing to put it into execution.

Presently Mellish gave a startled gasp. "They—they're coming towards us!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The student-watchers had been heard—they could not possibly have been seen—by the strange creatures in the ruins. One of those creatures—he was evidently the chief of the tribe, judging by the array of feathers in his topknot—was already clambering through the aperture.

Mellish, in desperation, discharged the contents of his bag at the grotesque figure as it emerged. Baggy Trimble did the same. In their state of funk and hurry, however, both badly misjudged the direction, with the result that Mellish received an avalanche of flour and Baggy a deluge of soot!

"Gug-zug-zug!"

Covered with soot and flour and confusion, Trimble and Baggy turned to flee. Footsteps uttered behind them, but they managed to give their pursuers the slip in the darkness.

They did not stop running until they reached the gate of St. Jim's, and then they paused, panting in the darkness, looking at each other in the lamplight. Baggy was as black as the ace of spades; Mellish had been transformed into a snowman.

"You've swarmed me with soot, shaking the flour from his hair. 'Don't you ever ask me to come any more of these midnight expeditions! You swamped me with flour, you hairbrained idiot!'"

"And you swarmed me with soot!" growled Baggy. "Of two evils, I prefer the flour!"

Exchanging mutual compliments, the precious pair returned to their dormitory, and each of them regretted, from the bottom of his heart, having set forth on that disastrous expedition.

Next day the mystery of the ruins was solved. It was found that Gordon Barr, of Rycombe Grammar School, had written a Red Indian play, and that midnight rehearsals took place in the Priory ruins. The war-dancing and the howling and the fiendish yells were all part and parcel of the performance. It all seemed very harmless when it was explained, but it will be a long, long time before Trimble and Mellish set forth together on another such excursion.

THE END.

Supplement II.

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 922.

EDITORIAL.

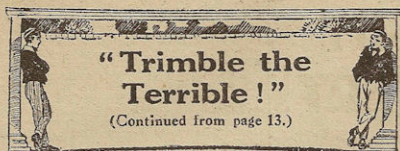
MYSTERIES are jolly fascinating things. They excite your curiosity, and your Sherlock Holmes invents a theory, and you are off on an adventure. I've just been reading a book—a real thriller—called "The Mystery of the Moated Grange." Of course, it's a ghost story, and it's a close-blue full of mystery.

After reading this mystery-book, I thought it would be a bright idea to publish a special "Mystery" Number of the "News." With this end in view, I asked Jack Blake to write me a mystery, and you, another Monty Lowther to do me a comic column dealing with St. Jim's mysteries. I also squeezed a poem out of that very unpoetical youth, Baggy Trimble. The verses have been revised and sub-edited, otherwise they wouldn't be readable. Baggy won't recognise his own poem when he sees it!

There have been mysteries without number in the history of St. Jim's. The majority have been solved, but some remain unsolved to this day, in spite of the fact that there are a good many amateur detectives knocking about. Kerr of the New House simply loves to tackle a mystery. So does Fowler, the devoted bulldog of George Herries. I saw him unravelling a mystery only the other day. He was eating a sausage!

Kerr will probably become a famous 'tee one of these days. He is certainly a very cute customer, and he has cleared up many a mystery which has baffled the rest of St. Jim's. Good luck to the campy Scottish bulldog who may be the burglar's bane and the thief's terror.

TOM MERRY.



"Trimble the Terrible!"

(Continued from page 13.)

"Good old Bob Briton!"
 "We have writhed too long under the lash of the tyrant," continued the orator. "Too long have we bowed our backs beneath the brutal blows of the birch and the cruel cuts of the cane. And now I call upon you, one and all, to rise up in righteous indignation, and shake off the tyrant's yolk—"
 "Good egg!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Shake off the tyrant's yolk," repeated Trimble, fixing Lowther with a fierce glare, "and bring him squinting to his knees! First, there's that arch-tyrant, the Head! Then there are all those parachutes, the masters—"
 "Sure you don't mean 'parasites,' Baggy?" drawled Cardew.

"Parachutes is the right word," said Trimble. "I pity your ignorance, Cardew! Then there are the prefects. They're parachutes, too!"

"They certainly come down sometimes—and pretty heavy," observed Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Baggy Trimble made a dramatic gesture.
 "They've got to be crushed!" he exclaimed firmly. "The Head, the masters, the prefects—they've all got to be made to suffer for what they've made us suffer! Gentlemen, the day of reckoning has come! We're going to show them that schoolboys never shall be slaves! We're going to fight them in open rebellion, and they'll jolly well get the worst of it!"

"Hurrah!"
 A burst of ironical cheering rang out.
 Baggy Trimble was too obtuse to see that the cheering was ironic. He imagined that the fellows were fairly carried away by his warlike speech, and that they were with him to a man. The applause rang like music in Baggy's ears.

"Follow me! I will be your leader!" he cried.
 It was the same cry with which Bob Briton had rallied his schoolfellows, in the Great Rebellion at St. Sid's. There had been a whole-hearted response on that famous occasion, and there was—or, rather, there appeared to be—a whole-hearted response now.

The quad was in an uproar.
 "Bravo, Baggy!"
 "We'll follow you to the end of the earth—and back again!"
 "Down with the tyrants!"
 "Up the rebels!"
 "Hurrah!"

Baggy Trimble fairly beamed upon the assembly. He had expected a certain amount of opposition to his scheme for crushing the tyrants; but it seemed that the whole of the Lower School was with him in that mighty enterprise. The fellows appeared to be thoroughly roused, wildly excited, and ready for anything.

It was some time before Baggy could resume his speech owing to the clamour of tongues around him.

"To-night's the night!" he exclaimed at length. "The Great Rebellion will commence directly after calling over. At a signal from me, you will march boldly out of Big Hall, and proceed straight to the gym."

"Do we sing 'The Red Flag'?" inquired Talbot, with a grin.

"No. 'Rule Britannia,' with the word 'schoolboys' in place of 'Britons.' Schoolboys never, never, never shall be slaves! See!"

"And supposing the masters and prefects try to stop us?" said Blake. "It's quite possible they will, you know!"

"In that case, smite them!" cried Trimble, in warlike tones. "Smite them hip and thigh! I'll set you the example!"

"Yes, I can just about see you knocking out Kildare of the Sixth!" said Blake, under his breath.

"A number of fellows will be detailed to raid the kitchen and the tuckshop," Trimble went on, "and we'll lay in enough provender to last us for weeks, if necessary. But I don't think the rebellion will last more than a few days."

"I shall be jolly surprised if it lasts for more than a few minutes!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Of course, Trimble's spouting hot air," said Manners.

"He doesn't seriously mean to carry out this hare-brained stunt of a rebellion, Tommy!"

"He'd never have the pluck," replied Tom, laughing.
 "But you mustn't forget that he's been filling his fat head with all this 'Bob Briton nonsense—'"
 "I know. But when he sees the Head and the masters standing in solemn majesty on the platform in Big Hall, he'll never have the nerve to defy them. If I thought for one moment that he would, I'd stop the fat idiot making a fool of himself!"

At that moment Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth came out into the quad to see what the demonstration was about.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Trimble, "I can see two tyrants approaching, so I'll buck up and finish my speech. Now, don't forget what we've arranged. At a given signal, you will all march boldly out of Big Hall—"

"What will be the signal, dear boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a smile.

"Why, I shall march on up to the platform, and shake my fist in the Head's face, and strike up 'Rule, Britannia.' Then you'll all march out, singing. Gentlemen, this is going to be the biggest and fiercest rebellion that ever was!"

Then, as Kildare and Darrell bore down upon the assembly, he added:

"The tyrants are now within earshot, so I'll say no more. Dismiss!"

Instantly the great crowd melted away. Limp with laughter, Tom Merry & Co. staggered into the building.

Not for one moment did they dream that Baggy Trimble was in earnest. They merely supposed that he had been letting off a few rhetorical fireworks. It was mere froth and bubble, and would end in such. Trimble would never have the pluck to proceed from words to deeds. So the juniors thought, anyway. They did not realise to what extent the foolish Baggy had been carried away by "Bob Briton's Schooldays."

CHAPTER 8.

Not According to Programme!

CALLING-OVER took place in Big Hall. Sometimes it was conducted by the Head in person; at other times one of the masters, deputed for him.

On this particular evening the Head called the names from the school roster, and Big Hall echoed with a repetition of "Amen!"

When the Head reached Trimble's name, Baggy answered in the usual respectful manner. Beyond the fact that his fat face was a trifle flushed, there was nothing to suggest that he was about to launch "the biggest and fiercest rebellion that ever was!"

There were no absentees. And at length Dr. Holmes laid the roster aside, and said evening prayers.

When that function was over, and the school was about to be dismissed, a number of grinning glances were bestowed upon Baggy Trimble.

The time was now ripe for the signal to be given—the promised signal which was to plunge St. Jim's into revolt.

Nobody expected the signal, of course. It would have required colossal nerve for Baggy Trimble to march up to the platform, shake his fist in the Head's face, and strike up the chorus of "Rule, Britannia!" The Head looked even more awe-inspiring and majestic than usual as he stood there with the masters ranged behind him in a row.

"Now's the time, Baggy!" whispered Mellish of the Fourth. "Up, the rebels!"

The next instant, to the unbounded surprise of Percy Mellish, Baggy Trimble stepped out from his place.

The fellows stared at him as if spellbound.

Could it be possible, after all, that Trimble had not been talking "hot air"—that he was perfectly serious in his intentions?

Certainly the fat junior looked serious enough as he left his place. Grimly serious was his expression, and there was a gleam in his eyes.

Looking quite alarmed, Jack Blake plucked at Baggy's sleeve.

"Go back, you ass!"
 "Sit down, you madman!" hissed Herries.

Baggy Trimble might have heard, but he did not heed. He stepped out into the centre gangway and started to march—or, rather, waddle—towards the raised platform on which stood the arch-tyrant and his "parachutes."

There was alarm on every face now. Fellows whispered frantically to Baggy Trimble as he passed them, but Baggy was far too intent on his purpose to heed them. If he heard the whispers at all, he must have supposed they were whispers of encouragement.

The Head frowned as Baggy came on. It was a frown which would have done credit to Jove of old.

"Trimble!" he thundered. "How dare you leave your place without permission?"

Even the terrifying tones of the Head failed to check the

progress of the fat rebel. Baggy came on. He reached the platform and mounted it, and then, amid an awful hush, he flourished a podgy fist in the Head's face. That fist was in perilous proximity to the Head's nose.

Dr. Holmes stood rooted to the platform. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Astonishment and anger were mingled in the expression. He tried to speak, but words failed him.

As for masters, they were too utterly dumfounded to interfere. Like the gentlemen in the "Floral Dance," they could only stand and stare.

Encouraged by the stupefied silence, Baggy Trimble continued his fist-shaking.

"Tremble, tyrant!" he exclaimed. "The hour has struck!"

There was a horrified gasp from the assembly.

Finally the Head found his voice.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "The—wretched boy must have taken leave of his senses!"

"The hour has struck!" repeated Trimble dramatically.

"Your reign of tyranny and oppression is over! The fires of rebellion have been kindled, and soon the whole school will be engulfed in their blaze!"

That was a passage from "Bob Briton's School-days," and Baggy felt very pleased that he had memorised it. Certainly the effect of that passage was most startling.

Baggy was about to continue, when he noticed that Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Railton were in the act of striding towards him.

Now was the time—the psychological moment, so to speak—that the signal should be given!

Turning to the assembly, which sat scared and stupefied, Baggy gave them the first note of "Rule Britannia!"

Dead silence followed.

Baggy tried again, but nobody took up the chorus.

A look of alarm came over the fat junior's face.

What did this mean? Why was everybody sitting so still, like images carved in stone? Why didn't the fellows leap to their feet, as per programme, and march boldly to the door, shouting their song of defiance?

"Up, the rebels!" cried Baggy desperately.

Nobody stirred. The only rebel present was Trimble himself—and even Baggy realised how incongruous it would be if he marched boldly to the door, singing "Rule, Britannia," all alone, without a single follower.

"What's the matter with you all?" gasped Trimble.

"Come on, you fellows! 'Rule Britannia,' you know!"

Still no answer, still no movement from the silent rows of fellows.

At last the truth of the situation dawned upon Trimble's slow-working mind. The shouts and cheers at his mass meeting had been merely ironical. Nobody had the slightest

intention of supporting Baggy in his rebellion against the tyrant and the oppressor.

The revelation came as a painful shock to the fat junior. He felt like the general of an army deserted by all his troops in a time of crisis and left to grapple single-handed with the enemy.

"Traitors!" he panted. "Why don't you back me up?"

The next moment the fat arms of the rebel were pinioned by Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Railton. They stood holding Baggy Trimble, waiting for the Head to deal with the unprecedented situation.

"Trimble?—the Head's voice was like the booming of breakers, 'you have behaved abominably! You have dared to treat me with defiance and disrespect! You have openly flouted my authority! Is it possible that you have conceived a wild notion of organising a general rebellion?"

"Kildare me, sir," said Mr. Lathom, stepping forward. "The foolish boy has been filling his mind with lurid and sensational literature. He was responsible for a similar outburst in my Form-room a few days ago. I fully intended to confiscate the absurd book he has been reading, but unfortunately it escaped my memory."

The Head nodded. He was looking very grim.

"I think I have an effective antidote for the poison which this foolish boy has absorbed," he said. "Kildare, kindly request Taggles, the porter, to step into the Hall for a moment."

Kildare departed on his mission, and the school waited in hushed expectancy for the arrival of Taggles. They knew full well what was coming—a public flogging. That was the antidote which the Head had meant.

Certainly Trimble had asked for a flogging, and, although people do not always get what they ask for in this world, there could be no doubt that Baggy would not be disappointed on this occasion!

After a brief interval Taggles came shuffling into the Hall, followed by Kildare.

"Taggles," commanded the Head, taking a birch-rod from the desk, "pray take this young rascal upon your shoulders."

"Certainly, sir!" said Taggles with alacrity. Taggles was never averse to assisting at a public execution, especially when the victim was a boy he disliked.

Baggy shivered at the sight of the birch. Public floggings only appealed to Baggy when he was a spectator of them. He didn't like occupying the principal role!

Swiftly he asked himself what Bob Briton would have done in such a case. Bob would never have tamely submitted to a birching. Not he!

"I won't be birched!"

That was what Bob Briton had cried on one memorable

(Continued on next page.)

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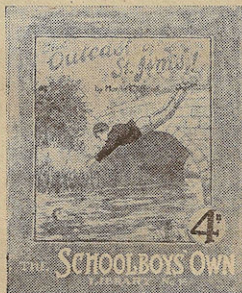
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occasion, and that was what Baggy Trimble cried now. His voice rang through Big Hall.

There was a gasp from the fellows. They realised that Trimble was only making things a dozen times worse for himself by such futile defiance.

"I won't be birched, d'you hear? I'm not going to stand this rotten tyranny any longer!"

"Be silent!" thundered the Head. "You cannot be conscious of what you are saying, Trimble. Take him up, Taggles!"

Mr. Railton and Mr. Ratcliff released Baggy in order that Taggles could take the fat junior on his shoulders.

But Baggy had no intention of being "hoisted." The fighting spirit of Bob Briton possessed him again, and this, coupled with his fear of the birch, prompted him to offer a stout resistance. He would not be flogged. Bob Briton would never have submitted to such an indignity, then why should Trimble?

Baggy's next action was amazing. Suddenly and without warning he lowered his head and rushed full-pelt at Taggles.

Taggles had been waiting to receive him, but he had not bargained on receiving Baggy Trimble in that whirlwind fashion.

Baggy's head butted into the porter's waist region with terrific force, and the astonished Taggles sat down suddenly on the platform with a bump and a roar.

"Yarooooo!"

St. Jim's looked on breathlessly. Such a sensation had not been known at the school for a long time.

Taggles sat up dazedly, making a noise like the rush of air from a deflated tyre.

As for Baggy Trimble, that youth was fairly worked up now. He seemed to be "seeing red," as it were.

Having floored Taggles with that bull-like charge, Baggy now turned his attention to Mr. Ratcliff, who was about to seize him by the collar.

But it was a case of the seizer seized, for Baggy, plunging low, grabbed the Housemaster by the leg and hung on like a limpet.

Mr. Ratcliff swayed uncertainly for perhaps half a minute, then he completely lost his equilibrium and went crashing to the floor, with Baggy Trimble atop of him.

Crash!

Baggy was no light weight, and Mr. Ratcliff seemed in dire peril of being transmitted from a Housemaster into a pancake.

"Oooooooh!"

It was a long-drawn-out gasp from the unfortunate Mr. Ratcliff.

"Drag him off!" he panted. "He—he is suffocating me!"

The majority of the onlookers were looking very grave now. There was a certain humour in the situation, but the humour of it was outweighed by the gravity.

Baggy Trimble, in assaulting a master, had aggravated his original offence to a considerable extent. He had piled Pelion upon Ossa, so to speak.

"The—'the mad idiot!" muttered Tom Merry. "He'll be sacked for this!"

Manners nodded grimly.

"Bob Briton's got a lot to answer for," he murmured. "This will mean the long jump for Baggy. Dash it all, you can't go around butting porters in the belt and upending Housemasters without getting it in the neck!"

He'll be committing assault and battery on the Head next!" breathed Monty Lowther.

But matters never reached that stage.

Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth rushed on to the platform and laid violent hands on Baggy Trimble and heaved him clear of Mr. Ratcliff, who sat up on the platform pumping in breath.

Meanwhile, Taggles, the porter, had managed to scramble to his feet. He glared wrathfully at Trimble.

"Savage young rip!" he growled. "Wot I say is this 'ere—you deserve to be expelled from the school for such conduct! If I had my own way I'd birch you black and blue, and then—"

"Be silent, Taggles!" thundered the Head. "Take this unruly young rascal upon your shoulders!"

"Largo! Unhand me! I won't be flogged!" roared Trimble, struggling in the muscular grasp of the prefects.

Further resistance, however, was futile. Kildare and Darrell hoisted the fat junior on to the porter's shoulders, and Taggles seized Baggy's wrists and gripped them as in a vice.

Baggy struggled for a moment, but his struggles resembled those of a newly-landed fish, growing weaker and weaker, and finally subsiding altogether.

The Head then proceeded to wield the birch with tremendous vigour. He put a hundred per cent. of energy into each carefully-measured stroke, and the yells of the victim echoed through Big Hall.

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"Yaroooo! Ow! Yah! I won't be flogged by a tyrant! You-ooop!"

Baggy Trimble was not flogged by a tyrant, but by a righteously angry headmaster.

Seldom had the fellows seen Dr. Holmes do such execution. He laid on a dozen of the best—or rather, from the victim's point of view, a dozen of the worst.

The painful ordeal was over at last, and it was a very limp and discomfited rebel who rolled off the porter's shoulders on to the platform.

All the fighting spirit of Bob Briton seemed to have evaporated now. Perhaps it would return anon. In the meantime Baggy Trimble moaned and groaned, and grunted and gasped, and presented as pitiable a spectacle as could well be imagined.

The Head was panting a little as he laid aside the birch. "Trimble," he said, "I need hardly point out to you that your conduct has been unpardonable and unprecedented. Not only have you flouted authority with words, but you have been guilty of physical violence towards a Housemaster, and towards the school porter. You will pass the night in the punishment-room, and I shall seriously consider the advisability of sending you home in the morning."

Baggy groaned.

"Have you anything to say in extenuation of your heinous conduct, Trimble?"

"Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" said Baggy. It almost seemed as if he were barking at the Head.

"Take him away!" said Dr. Holmes, motioning to Kildare.

The captain of St. Jim's promptly seized Baggy by the collar and marched him to the door.

There was no question of resistance now. Trimble went like a lamb. Snuffling and snivelling, he was hustled along, his fat little legs keeping pace with Kildare's giant strides.

And the door of Big Hall closed behind the rebel of St. Jim's, whose "rebellion" had fizzled out like a damp squib.

CHAPTER 9.

A Desperate Resolve!

THERE was a notable absentee from the Fourth Form dormitory that evening.

Baggy Trimble's bed was empty.

The fat junior was to pass the night—possibly his last night at St. Jim's—in the gloomy and cheerless punishment-room.

Jack Blake & Co. could not help feeling sorry for their plump schoolfellow.

It was true that Trimble had kicked over the traces, and gone altogether too far. He had caused an unprecedented scene in Big Hall. No other fellow would have dared to call the Head a tyrant to his face; yet Trimble had done so, and as if that were not enough, he had made a bull-like rush at Taggles, the porter, and had upset Mr. Ratcliff's equilibrium by sweeping his legs from under him. And now Baggy was languishing in the punishment-room, "with all his imperfections on his head," as Shakespeare has it.

But Jack Blake & Co. could find excuses for Baggy, even if the Head could not. The real cause of Baggy's violent outbreak in Big Hall was Bob Briton. Baggy Trimble had been carried helplessly away by the crudely sensational book like a leaf scurrying before the autumn gale. He had modelled himself on his hero. He had made the excrement Bob Briton his pattern and guide. And this was the result.

A severe flogging, with expulsion to follow, unless the Head relented by the morning.

"This is a dreadful business, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It just shows what comes of weadin' wedeulous litewatual. Now, if Twimble had stuck to usef'ul an' sensible books, such as 'Fashions for Boys,' an' 'The Womance of the Fancy Waistcoat,' this would nevah have happened."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It means the sack for the fat duffer," said Arthur Augustus gravely. "When he was blabbing in the quad this evening, about holding a barring-out, and crushing the tyrants, I thought it was all bunkum. You could have knocked me down with a feather when Baggy went marching up to the Head and called him a tyrant."

"Same here," said Herries. "Poor old Baggy! He's a fat worm, and several sorts of an ass, but I can't help feeling sorry for him. The sack's a jolly serious matter. I don't like to see any fellow get marching orders, unless he's an out-and-out rotter."

"We made a gweat mistake, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus, "in not takin' 'Bob Briton' away from Twimble an' burnin' it. If only we had done that it would have saved Baggy from this sowwy pass."

Jack Blake nodded.

"It will be a sleepless night for Baggy, I'm thinking," he said.

"And a hopeless dawn," said Dirty.

"There's just a chance that the Head will relent, an' that



The crackman, who had been kneeling with his head half-buried in the Head's safe, whilst he rummaged about amongst the miscellanea of papers, was taken completely off his guard. Hastily he withdrew his head, and was in the act of scrambling to his feet, when Baggy Trimble dashed at him with upraised ruler! (See page 21.)

the chopper won't come down, after all," said Cardex with a yawn. "Let's hope so, for Trimble's sake. Good-night, all!"

And Ralph Reekness rolled over in bed and composed himself to slumber. The rest of the Fourth followed his example.

But, as Blake had predicted, there was no sleep for Baggy Trimble that night.

Alone in the dreary punishment-room, at the top of the building, Baggy lay fully-dressed on the bed.

He was not brooding over his misdoings, or suffering agonies of remorse, as some fellows might have done. All the same, he was far from happy. Either by an oversight, or by design, no supper had been brought up to him, and he was ravenously hungry. He had only eaten six rolls-and-butter, and a honeycomb, and half a dozen doughnuts, for tea. They had fortified him for the time being, but a decade seemed to have elapsed since tea-time.

Being without food, and without any prospect of food until the morning, was gall and wormwood to Baggy.

But he had one consolation in that dark hour. "Bob Briton" was still in his possession. It was smuggled into one of his capacious pockets, and the Head, like Mr. Latham, had forgotten to confiscate it.

Baggy ought to have been thoroughly "fed-up" with "Bob Briton" by this time. But he wasn't. His efforts to emulate that gallant hero had all ended in disaster, with the exception of the life-saving episode. But Baggy was as devoted as ever to "Bob Briton," and by the light of a guttering candle beside his bed he embarked on the last chapter.

It was the most thrilling chapter in the book, as a last chapter should be. By a curious coincidence it portrayed Bob Briton in a similar predicament to that of Baggy Trimble. Bob was lying in the punishment-room, under sentence of expulsion. But he resolved not to wait for the sentence to be put into effect. He would run away. Having made this desperate decision, he tore his sheets into strips, and knotted them together to form a rope. Then he made his escape from the punishment-room at dead of night.

Baggy Trimble thrilled as he read of this daring exploit. But before he could discover what happened to the hero—whether he was recaptured, or whether he ran away to London to seek fame and fortune—the candle went out, and the reader found himself in darkness.

Baggy was thinking furiously.

Why not do as Bob Briton had done? Why not make a rope of sheets, and escape from his prison? He would leave a farewell note of defiance for the Head, and he would cheat the gallows, so to speak.

Fired with this reckless resolve, Baggy Trimble did not stop to weigh the consequences of such an action.

Running away from school was all very well, if the run-away's pockets were well-lined, and if he had somewhere to go to. But if, as in Baggy Trimble's case, he was "broke," and dared not go home to his parents, then it was sheer madness even to contemplate running away.

Baggy was not one of those persons who take thought for the morrow. He could not see much farther than his snub little nose. He had no forebodings as to the future, for the reason that he was absorbed in the present.

He rose up from the bed trembling with excitement.

"I'll run away!" he exclaimed. "I won't give the Head the satisfaction of sacking me. I'll escape, just like Bob Briton did!"

"Boom!"

It was the first stroke of twelve sounding from the old clock-tower.

Baggy crossed to the little window and peered out into the blackness.

A pall of Stygian darkness overhung the quadrangle. Black clouds hung heavily in the sky. Not a star twinkled in the sombre heavens.

It was an ideal night for an escape, but by no means an ideal night to be out in.

Baggy shivered a little. Then he fortified himself with thoughts of Bob Briton.

Withdrawing from the window, he stripped the bed of its sheets, which he proceeded to tear into strips.

It was difficult work in the darkness, knotting the strips together. Baggy was a clumsy craftsman, and his fingers seemed to be all thumbs, as he fumbled with the knots. It took him the better part of an hour to form a rope which was long enough and strong enough—long enough to reach the ground, and strong enough to bear Baggy's weight, which was considerable.

But the task was completed at last, and Baggy tied one end of the rope of sheets to the bedrail, and made it secure. Then he opened the window and passed the rope through it, and it dangled down in the darkness, fluttering against the wall.

The critical moment had come!

Baggy Trimble had no head for heights, and in normal circumstances nothing would have induced him to descend from an upper window by means of a rope of sheets.

By this time, however, Baggy was so saturated with the daring exploits of Bob Britton, that he was not the old timorous Trimble at all. This was a new Trimble, primed with pluck and fired with reckless courage.

He drew himself up on to the window-sill and squeezed himself through the aperture. It seemed, at first, that he would share the fate of Charles the First at Carisbrooke Castle, and get stuck in the opening. It was a small window, ill-adapted to Baggy's purpose.

Fortune favored the fat junior, however. He contrived to squeeze himself through, and, tightly gripping the improvised rope, he started his perilous descent.

The cold night air caught his breath. Above him the rope tautened almost to the point of snapping. It was well that Baggy had taken infinite pains with the tying of the knots. It was well, also, that the sheets were strong and durable.

Very slowly he descended, hand-under-hand.

For a brief moment panic seized him at the thought that the rope might have fallen far short of the ground. But he quickly pulled himself together, reflecting that Bob Britton would never have entertained such craven fears.

Clinging tenaciously, like a fat monkey, he continued his descent.

It seemed an age before he got sufficiently low to distinguish the flagstones of the quad. Then he found, to his joy, that the rope practically reached the ground. It only fell short by a few feet, and Baggy easily negotiated that. He dropped down on to the flagstones, and peered about him into the shadows, fearful lest his descent might have been seen.

All was still and silent, however. No lights gleamed from any of the windows. Even the most studious of the masters had retired long since.

"So far, so good!" muttered Baggy. "Now, what's the next move? I must get into the building, somehow, and find some grub. I've never felt so peckish in my life!"

On investigation, Baggy discovered, to his delight, that the box-room window was open. Why it was open at that time of night was a mystery. It was the duty of Taggles, the porter, to see that all doors were locked, and all the ground-floor windows bolted, before St. Jim's retired for the night.

"What a stroke of luck, finding this window open!" exclaimed Baggy. "Taggles must have forgotten to shut it. Or perhaps Knox of the Sixth is out on the razzle, and he's left it open for when he comes back."

But, whatever the explanation of the open window, it proved a boon to Baggy. He clambered through into the box-room; then he made his way, silently and stealthily, towards the school kitchen.

Arrived at that haven for hungry souls, Baggy groped in the darkness for a candle and matches, which he eventually found. Then, armed with a lighted candle, he explored the pantry.

On the shelf, ready for human consumption, was a pie—a plump, healthy-looking pie—the mere sight of which made Baggy's mouth water.

"Oh, what luck!" he chortled.

Investigation showed it to be a rabbit-pie. Baggy foraged for a knife and fork, and placed the pie on the kitchen table and "piled in."

It was a novel experience, to sit feeding in the school kitchen, at one o'clock in the morning, with the candle-light casting strange and grotesque shadows.

Baggy Trimble was in his element now. All his trials and tribulations were forgotten as he attacked that pie. His jaws worked overtime, and in an incredibly short space of time he demolished the entire pie. Having eaten nothing since tea, eight hours before, Baggy was making up for lost time.

When the last portion of pie-crust had gone to join the rest of the pie in Baggy's capacious interior, the fat junior sat back in his chair, with his hands clasped in the region of his lower waistcoat-button. He did not feel equal to any

exertion just yet. His head nodded on his chest, and he dropped into a brief doze.

He was roused somewhat abruptly by the kitchen clock striking the hour.

Refreshed by his "forty winks," Baggy produced a notebook from his pocket, tore out a sheet of paper, and started to indite his farewell letter to the Head.

It was an extraordinary epistle.

"To Doctor Holmes, Eskwire.

"Tirant! You shan't have the satisfaction of sacking me in the morning. I'm clearing out now, as dead of nit, having first of all fortified myself in the school kitchen. I shall be jolly glad to shake the dust of this beastly prizen from my shoze. You are a tirant, and the masters and pre-fects are your parachutes. I wish I could have persuaded the fellows to join me in my crusade against tirany and injustis; but they are a chieking-barted set of funks!

"Farewell, tirant! It's no use putting detectives on my track, bekwase the wide seas will roll between us by the time you get this note.

"Yours in scornful content,

"BAGLEY TRIMBLE."

"This will make the old tyrant squirm!" muttered Baggy, blinking at his handwriting, and replacing the cap on his fountain-pen. "He'll go purple on the face when he finds this letter tucked under his study door. Shouldn't be surprised if he has an apple-plectic fit!"

Clucking softly to himself, Baggy blew out the candle, and groped his way from the kitchen, and made tracks for Head's study.

CHAPTER 10.

An Amazing Capture!

BAGGY TRIMBLE reached his destination at last, after much stumbling and groping and barking of shins in the darkness. He did not think it safe to carry a light, lest some master or prefect be on the prowl.

He reached the door of the Head's study, and stooped down, in order to thrust the note under it.

As he did so Baggy uttered a low murmur of surprise.

There was a light shining in the Head's study. Its rays shone through the chink beneath the door.

"My hat!" gasped Baggy.

He hastily withdrew the note and slipped it into his pocket. "Fancy the Head being still up, at this time of night!" he reflected. "Why, it must be nearly two o'clock!"

Dr. Holmes was certainly a very studious gentleman. He was, in fact, engaged in writing a book, and his literary labours often lasted until midnight. But he had seldom been known to stay up till this hour. Two o'clock in the morning was hardly a respectable hour, even for a literary gentleman.

Baggy Trimble was startled at first, but he quickly recovered his composure.

"I'll take a peep at the old tyrant!" he murmured.

And he promptly glued his eye to the keyhole.

But instead of seeing Dr. Holmes, working at his desk, Baggy discovered a strange man in the study.

Trimble started violently.

Clearly he saw the man's face in profile. It was a bearded face, though the man did not seem old. He was kneeling in front of the Head's safe, working upon it with gloved hands. Beside him, on the floor, was an electric torch.

A cracksmán!

The thought flashed into Baggy Trimble's mind at once, though he did not give it utterance. He was trembling with excitement now, as, with his eye pressed to the keyhole, he watched the movements of the marauder.

The opening of the safe seemed to be giving the man a lot of trouble, for he muttered an imprecation once or twice.

Baggy watched him as if mesmerised.

This, then, accounted for the box-room window being open. Evidently the cracksmán had forced it, in order to gain access to the building.

Baggy's heart was pounding against his ribs—not with fear, but with excitement.

Here was a glorious opportunity of distinguishing himself on his last night at St. Jim's! If he rushed into the Head's study, and overpowered the cracksmán, and frustrated his knavish tricks, he would reap no end of honour and glory.

The old Trimble would not have dreamed of getting to grips with a cracksmán. He would have run a mile rather than face a nocturnal marauder.

But the new Trimble, inspired and inflamed by the doughty deeds of Bob Britton, was a very different person. Instead of shrinking from the prospect of grappling with the cracksmán, Baggy welcomed it.

Perhaps it would be wiser to steal quietly away and give the alarm. But no; that wouldn't do. Others would come hurrying on the scene, and would capture the cracksmen, and capture all the glory into the bargain.

The capture must be effected single-handed, by Baggy himself.

Supposing the man was armed? That was a rather grim possibility. Even in his new mood of recklessness and devil-may-care, Baggy had no desire to stop a bullet with his plump person.

There was only one thing for it. The man must be overpowered before he could draw his revolver, if indeed he was armed.

Lying on the Head's desk, as Baggy clearly saw, was a solid ebony ruler. He would rush into the study, snatch up the ruler, and bring it down on the cracksmen's head, all in the twinkling of an eye.

Baggy waited until the cracksmen swung open the heavy door of the safe and became engrossed in its contents. Then he made his whirlwind rush, in accordance with plan.

Never had Baggy Trimble acted so swiftly in his life. He threw open the door, and literally hurled himself into the study.

One mighty leap brought him to the Head's desk, from which he snatched up the ebony ruler.

The cracksmen, who had been kneeling with their heads buried in the safe, whilst he rummaged about amongst the miscellanea of papers, was taken completely off his guard. He had not expected any intrusion at that unearthly hour.

Another brief interval, and there was a patter of slipped feet, and Tom Merry & Co. came hurrying on the scene. They were closely followed by Jack Blake & Co. and a crowd of others.

Fellows fairly swarmed into the Head's study, and the overflow paced the corridor.

There was a buzz of excited voices.

"Where's the giddy burglar?"

"Have they bagged him?"

"Hope he hasn't got clear!"

Tom Merry & Co. having been the first to arrive, were eye-witnesses of the strange scene in the Head's study.

There was the open safe, and the cracksmen stretched senseless on the floor, and the flushed and triumphant figure of Baggy Trimble.

"My only aunt!" gasped Tom Merry. "What are you doing here, Baggy? And who is this merchant?"

"A cracksmen, of course," was the reply. "He was going through the Head's safe, and I caught him red-handed and downed him!"

"You—you downed him?" stammered Manners.

Baggy nodded.

"I peeped through the keyhole, and saw what he was up to," he explained. "Then I rushed boldly into the study, and tapped him with that ruler!"

"Great Scott!"

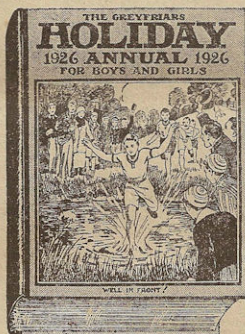
"Some tap!"

The juniors blinked at Baggy in amazement.

Obviously, the fat junior's story must be true, for there

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He had imagined the whole school, masters and boys, sleeping soundly in their beds.

Hastily he withdrew his head, and was in the act of scrambling to his feet, when Baggy Trimble brought the heavy ruler down upon his head.

It was a powerful blow, which even the head of a nigger could not have withstood.

The cracksmen collapsed to the carpet with a groan. He rolled over, with twitching limbs, and then lay insensible.

Baggy Trimble stood over him, with the ruler poised for another blow, if it should be necessary.

But it was not necessary. That one blow had been all-sufficient.

"Got him!" chortled Baggy triumphantly. "That's just how Bob Briton would have floored him, I reckon."

He glanced down at the unconscious cracksmen, and replaced the ruler on the desk.

"Won't the fellows be surprised when they know about this!" he murmured.

Of that there was not a shadow of doubt. St. Jim's would be something more than surprised; it would be flabbergasted. As a matter of fact, Baggy was surprised at it himself—surprised at his own courage and promptitude.

"They're going to know about it right away!" he muttered. "I'll set the burglar-alarm going. That'll fetch 'em!"

A few moments later St. Jim's was started out of its slumbers by the sound of the alarm, which rudely shattered the silence.

were the open safe and the senseless form of the cracksmen to corroborate it. Yet where had Trimble suddenly got his courage? Had he inherited it from Bob Briton?

Whilst the juniors were pondering the amazing situation there came a deep, stern voice from the corridor:

"Make way, please!"

The crowd separated, forming a gangway through which Mr. Railton might pass.

"What is all this?" demanded the Housemaster. Then he stopped short suddenly on the threshold, and stared at the open safe, the triumphant Trimble, and the inert form of the cracksmen.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

Then he turned inquiringly to Tom Merry & Co.

"Trimble's bagged a burglar, sir," explained Tom Merry.

"He caught him at the Head's safe, and cracked him on the head with a ruler."

Mr. Railton looked incredulous.

"It's true enough, sir!" said Baggy Trimble. "Dashing boldly into the study, I snatched up the ruler, and brought it down on the fellow's boko! I fairly Britonised him, sir!"

"You—you what?" stammered Mr. Railton.

"Britonised him—laid him out in the true Bob Briton style, sir!"

"Good gracious!"

"Had I been a second too late, the rotter would have whipped out his revolver, and plugged me," Trimble

went on. "But I didn't hesitate for a second, sir. Taking my life into my hands, I rushed at the scoundrel, and put him to sleep with a skull-cracker!"

Mr. Railton strode towards the unconscious form of the cracksmen. He dropped on one knee, and loosened the man's collar, and looked quite anxious for a moment. He had seen something of Trimble's frenzy, in Big Hall, and he had fears that the man might be in a state that was more serious than unconsciousness. A crack on the head with an ebony ruler was no light matter.

Presently, however, the expression of anxiety on Mr. Railton's face changed to one of relief.

"He is coming round," he said.

The cracksmen opened his eyes. He blinked at the ring of excited faces around him, and then his gaze alighted on Baggy Trimble.

"Hang you!" he snarled; and he made a determined, but futile, effort to struggle to his feet.

Suddenly there was a cry from Talbot of the Shell: "I know that voice! This is no ordinary burglar that Trimble has captured, sir!"

Mr. Railton looked round.

"What do you mean, Talbot? What are you saying?"

"It's Dawlish, sir—Jim Dawlish!"

There was a buzz of amazement from the crowd in the study, and from the corridor beyond, to which Talbot's excited tones had penetrated.

"Dawlish!"

"Great Scott!"

"He's in disguise," said Talbot; "but it's Dawlish, right enough. I think you'll find, Mr. Railton, that his beard is false."

The Housemaster plucked at the man's beard, and it came away in his hand, revealing the clear-cut, aggressive chin of Jim Dawlish.

"You are right, Talbot," said Mr. Railton. "It is indeed Dawlish—the scoundrel for whom the police have been vainly hunting since the school was plundered when we were away in camp. This is the man who has proved as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp—the man whom even John Rivers was unable to trace. His capture had, in fact, been despaired of."

"And Trimble—Trimble, of all people—managed to collar him!" gasped Tom Merry.

The cracksmen made a further effort to rise, but it was beyond him. He bestowed upon Baggy Trimble a deadly glare of animosity. If looks could have killed, Baggy would promptly have expired on the Head's carpet.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged wondering glances.

It was, indeed, an extraordinary turn of fate that Baggy Trimble should have been the instrument whereby the elusive Dawlish was brought to book.

For months past there had been a hue and cry for the leader of the Dawlish gang; but all efforts to trace him had proved abortive, and it was believed that he had fled the country.

But Dawlish had merely been lying low, waiting his chance to pay a nocturnal visit to St. Jim's for the purpose of ransacking the Head's safe, in which valuable bonds and securities were stored from time to time.

A few months before Dawlish had rifled the safe, without result. Before going to camp the Head had lodged all his valuables with the bank. But Dawlish had hoped to be more fortunate on this occasion. And fortunate he would have been but for the unexpected intrusion of Baggy Trimble. The cracksmen would have got away with a rich haul.

Mr. Railton ordered all the juniors back to their dormitories, with the exception of Baggy Trimble. Then he telephoned for the police, and gave instructions for Jim Dawlish to be taken into custody.

Shortly afterwards the Head appeared on the scene in his dressing-gown. He looked startled at first, and then astonished, as Mr. Railton recounted the story of Baggy Trimble's bravery.

"Amazing!" was the Head's comment, when the Housemaster had finished. "I had no idea that Trimble possessed such courage. This is quite a revelation to me, Mr. Railton!"

"And to me, also," said the Housemaster. "I can only conclude that Trimble derived his courageous impulse from that sensational book he has been reading—Bob Briton's School-days."

"In that case," said the Head, with a smile, "the book has been productive of beneficial results, as well as baneful ones. At the same time, I shall confiscate the book at once, if Trimble still has it in his possession."

"Oh crumbs!" said Baggy.

"If you have the book on your person, Trimble," said the Head, "I must ask you to deliver it up to me."

Very reluctantly Baggy produced "Bob Briton" from his pocket, and handed it to the Head. He then had the

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mortification of seeing his hero crammed into the fireplace, and ignited.

Presently Bob Briton was in flames, and the pages which Baggy Trimble had devoured so eagerly were now being devoured in another manner.

"I—I think it's an awful shame to burn my book, sir!" said Baggy. "I was going to take it away with me, now that I'm sacked."

"The Head looked at Baggy.

"Are you under the impression, Trimble, that I propose to expel you?"

"Yes, sir. You said last night, in Big Hall—"

"I was exceedingly angry with you, Trimble, for flouting authority, and for acting in such a frenzied and ridiculous manner. I confess that I seriously contemplated sending you home in disgrace. In the light of recent events, however, I do not feel justified in taking that step."

The Head glanced at Mr. Railton, who nodded his approval.

"I will not inquire how you came to be here, when you should have been in the punishment-room, Trimble," Dr. Holmes went on. "Apparently you found means of escape from your place of detention, and it is fortunate for me that you did so. I must compliment you, Trimble, upon the courage and resource which you have displayed."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Baggy.

He was smirking with satisfaction now. The news that he was not expelled, after all, compensated for the destruction of Bob Briton.

"I must ask you, Mr. Railton, to supervise this boy's literature in future," said Dr. Holmes. "Should any lurid or sensational works of fiction come into his hands, they must be confiscated forthwith."

"Very well, sir," said the Housemaster.

The Head turned to Trimble.

"You may go to your dormitory, my boy," he said. "I will make a public announcement in the morning, to the effect that you have been pardoned."

Baggy Trimble was fairly swelling with pride and importance when he rolled into the Fourth Form dormitory, at three o'clock in the morning.

Jack Blake & Co. were wideawake, and they plied Baggy with questions, and seemed relieved to know that the sword of Damocles was not to descend, after all.

Baggy fairly basked in the limelight of popularity; but whether he would succeed in retaining the golden opinions of his schoolfellows was gravely open to doubt.

Now that Bob Briton had been burnt, the new Trimble would revert once more to the old Trimble. The courageous Baggy would become the craven Baggy; and it would be a case of "as it was in the beginning."

The next day the theft of a rabbit-pie was reported from the school kitchen. But the Head, like a certain celebrated admiral, viewed this incident with his blind eye.

As for Jim Dawlish, that precious scoundrel was formally charged at the Wayland Police Court with breaking into and entering St. James' College, with intent to commit a felony; and Baggy Trimble was one of the witnesses, and the most important witness at that.

Dawlish was committed for trial to the assizes; and St. Jim's hoped to be freed from his unwelcome attentions for a considerable period.

The capture of the cracksmen constituted a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's. And certainly it was a big feather in the cap of Bob Briton's erstwhile disciple—Trimble the Terrible!

THE END.

(Another fine work of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums, entitled "D'ARCY MINOR'S SECRET!" by Martin Clifford. Don't miss it whatever you do!)

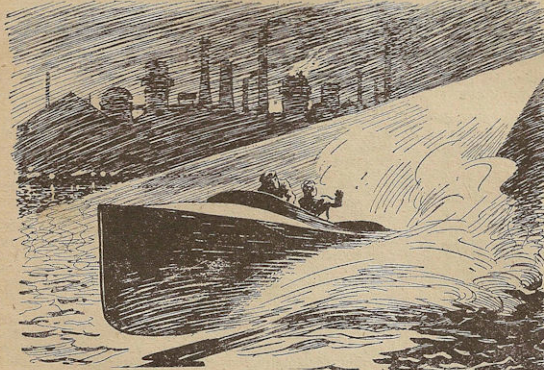
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Rudd and his Chinese chum
Fan Shen.

By

LESTER BIDSTON.

Desperate Measures.

THE very completeness of Chang's preparations proved his own undoing. The men drawn up in one doorway to prevent escape dare not risk a volley that would almost certainly riddle their own overlord, and Fan's lucky snap passed so desperately close to Chang's head that he instinctively ducked back out of sight.

In that moment of thwarted rage, Pen plunged the room into a darkness that was only relieved by the subdued glow entering through the opened panels.

Chang had enough regard for his own skin to keep out of sight. His soldiers, less alert, remained outlined, like marionettes on a lighted stage. Only when Fan sent one down with a smashed knee did they realise how swiftly the position had changed and hurriedly crowded back from the exposed position.

Knowing the initiative could not remain with them many seconds, the trapped pair dropped to all-fours and ran like cats towards the place wherein Chang skulked. But that wily one, forestalling their idea, and having no wish to meet them alone, was already vacating the room. All they saw of him was an elbow as he closed yet another panel.

"Fan, the place is a regular maze," Pen whispered hurriedly. "As we dash through the rooms I'll tear down every light, whilst you fire at every fellow you see."

Fan nodded grimly, and sent back a solitary bullet as a warning to the soldiery to keep a respectful distance. Although the crisis had arrived so swiftly, their knowledge of Chinese inns proved immensely useful in the desperate affray that followed.

For instance, they were well aware that the "Seventy Moons" really meant the house of seventy rooms. Knowing also that sliding panels took one straight from room to room, and that the house was innocent of stairs and passages, they foresaw amazing chances of bewildering their enemies.

"To the right for a time, Fan," Pen advised. "Then

we'll do a half-circle and work back to the darkened rooms."

"Here they come—two ways at once!" Fan yelled. There was no doubt the whole place was swiftly rousing. Confused inquiries were echoing through the thin lath partitions, and Pen did all he could to increase bewilderment by twice yelling to newcomers advice that drove them straight into the path of the original pursuers.

Sinister though the result must be, the chums grinned joyfully at some of the queer things revealed in the "Seventy Moons" maze. Once they rushed headlong into a select dope party, and drove the homed beings in fear all ways at once. Again, they dropped abruptly into a happy dinner gang, and the "chop suey" clumps wondered if a cyclone had flashed across their vision.

But the balance was in Chang's favour and increased with every second that passed. Turning at last to work round to the darkened rooms, the chums quickly realised that Chang's men were spreading out fan-wise and cunningly driving them to one section of the building.

"He's pinning us down—trying to surround us!" Fan yelled, firing at a cautiously opened panel.

"He's driving us away from the exits!" Pen answered grimly. "We can shoot a dozen down, there'll be a score to take their place."

"And a thousand on watch outside," Fan groaned.

Deadly work out talk for a lurid minute, whilst the pair extricated themselves from a three-sided attack at the cost of two surface wounds and the expenditure of most of their supply of ammunition. The screams that whistled through the house told that the bullets had not all been wasted, but the attack went on without respite.

"Fan, we're done when the last of our bullets have gone," Pen said quickly. "The brute's simply using his men as cannon-fodder—he cares not a scrap how many die, so long as he gets us in the end!"

"True, oh, Penny," Fan murmured. "As we've got to go out for keeps, we'll give Lunging a sight to remember us by!"

Before Pen could stop him, Fan tore the paper

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

PENENNIS RUDD, better known as "Penny" Rudd, born and bred in China of English parents. Knows the habits of the Orient from A to Z. Attached to the Peking Legation, and affects 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 PORSHAW, 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 most famous European scientists. Another Napoleon.

CHIANG 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 during the outbreak 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 bound for China. Penny Rudd and Fan Shen manage to smuggle themselves aboard the airship, but ere, some time later, surprised by Yen How's agents. The adventurous twain escape the fate intended for them, however, by dropping to earth in parachutes. To their amazement, the two sleuths find themselves in the heart of China, close to the great Peking Lamasery. The head of this powerful religious sect feeds against them, however, for Chang Fu pierces their identity. The inn is surrounded by troops and escape seems hopeless, but Fan, in a bold bid for freedom, tears down the lantern that alone illuminates the room. (Now read on.)

from a lamp and applied the bare flame to flimsy curtains that lined the walls of that particular room.

The building, probably centuries old, was dry as tinder. With a speed that surprised even Fan himself, the thin partitions of wood took fire. In a split second the whole of one wall was crackling and blazing like oil, and a flame was lighted that must consume the building in less than five minutes!

"You do same, Pen," Fan hissed, jumping for the next room. "If the gods favour, we might take Chang with us."

"You yellow peril," Pen muttered. "Anyway, it's about the last dig we can have at the 'Claw,' so here's for it! Keep this way, lad; we'll fire a path clean across the place!"

Couriers of the "Claw."

BLAZING like prairie fire after drought, the "Seventy Moons" became a beacon for all Lungning to see and marvel over. Thousands rushed to the spot, the most fantastic tales circulated of what was happening, and every survivor that emerged from its many doors yelled garbled accounts that added to the confusion.

Inside, the place was already an inferno of flame and choking smoke. Driven back through room after room, lost to all sense of direction, Pen and Fan suddenly plunged into several terrified servants belonging to the kitchen staff.

"Trail after 'em, Fan!" Pen whispered hurriedly. "If there's a way out of the maze, they'll know it."

Yelling something about "those cursed spies," they joined the frenzied group as other—and more innocent—persons were doing. They soon formed indistinguishable units in a packed crowd who had but one idea—to escape the disfiguring touch of flame that would render them unfit to mingle with their venerable ancestors in heaven!

Once the shrill-voiced leader had to turn swiftly aside when actually yelling that freedom lay across the width of a single room. Probably it did, but the flames were already in possession, and again the race was resumed.

But the Lungning Chinks had evidently driven clean through the maze of rooms—a feat the chums had found impossible, and one that must speedily have brought them to a fiery end. Now the outer wall had been reached the worst was over, another exit was found, and the crowd frothed out of the doomed building.

Emerging by a back door, Pen saw a nest of narrow streets winding away from the inn—saw also that every path was blocked by a solid mass of sightseers.

"This way leads to the hills, and they're guarded," he whispered. "I'm going to use the jade claw to open a way to the river-front—for that's our only road out of Lungning."

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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 922.

"Besides being the only road we want to go," Fan murmured slyly.

It was a strange sidelight on Chinese character that not a shadow of sympathy was shown to the smoke-choked, grimy few who escaped from that side of the building. Ribald remarks were passed in plenty, but no one thought it necessary to offer a drink for the soothing of raw throats. Pen actually saw one poor wretch tearing burning clothes from his scorched body, but dare not offer a helping hand—for that is not done in China, and would have marked him out for suspicion at once.

No; he just took one cold look at the tortured wretch, then shouldered a way into the packed mass, and openly vaunted the replica of How's jade claw to the sullen ones who resented his passing.

"Way for the Claw!" he cried. "We go to rejoin his Excellency, whose orders we were taking when the 'Moons' took fire! Make way, base ones, or prepare your backs for the lash!"

Never a soul thought to question his authority, for every being the length and breadth of Szechwan revered the claw and all it stood for. They knew that only those high in favour with the Sublime One were granted copies of his dread insignia, and, not having the truth of the Seventy Moons' domes, they pressed back from Pen as though he had the plague.

By this audacious method Pen edged a way through the throng, and dived into the first off-street he sighted. Fan was never more than a pace behind, and, once clear of the direct line of the fire, they found narrow, unpaved lanes that were entirely unlighted and practically deserted.

"Penny Rudd, you've a fear of brass," Fan complimented, speaking English for fear of unseen listeners. "But the game we've played will soon be all over the town, so we'd better go easy with the jade claw."

"Yes, the claws played its part, and the beggars'll tear us to bits if they lay hands on us now," Pen admitted. "Also, old lad, when Chang an' the governor hear we've broken from the bonfire they'll be in a sweet old mood. Seems to me the river's the only road out of Lungning, though I could wish for a better one."

"And a wet one, unless we find a loose craft lying handy," Fan grunted.

"I'm relying on the hint the young 'sojjer' dropped about smoke boats," Pen explained. He took a cautious peep round a corner and listened intently; then: "He probably meant tugboats, an' one of 'em's our meat, if the fates be kind."

Zigzagging steadily down hill, two minutes' swift run brought the hunted pair to the river frontage. Like most up-country places in China, town lighting was an unknown luxury; but ships' lamps and a fringe of paper lanterns on the quay edge showed a number of ore-bulks, several natty little river boats, and—a gift from the gods!

"Sacred Buddha!" Pen gasped. "Am I dreamin', or am I really looking at a motor-launch—a thousand miles from nowhere?" Then, as understanding came, he laughed softly. "By all that's lucky, Fan, it's Chang's own river craft, and the very thing we want!"

Hugging the black shadows of roughly-built sheds, they crept quickly towards the thing that had aroused their cupidity—a red painted, three-quarter decked boat of European build, and one that undoubtedly "had the legs" of anything else on that part of the river.

"Crew missing," Pen whispered. "Thank goodness, Fan, your people can never resist a firework show. I'll wager they're still feasting their eyes on the Seventy Moons' ruins!"

But Fan suddenly gripped his pal's arm. "Not all of them!" he breathed. "Listen! Someone comes, and in a desperate hurry!"

His quick ears had caught the crunch of racing steps a second before Pen sighted several figures speeding from the site of the fire. In an instant he realised they were making direct for the motor-boat, and that the last avenue of escape was closing before his eyes.

"Ten yards to their thirty!" he cried. "At it, Fan!" Springing from the shadows like hunted hounds, the chums were beside the craft in a flash. A shrill howl from the right was instantly followed by a spattering volley from several guns. But pounding hearts are bad aids to marksmanship, and the bullets were lost in the night.

"It's Chang himself!" Pen yelled, as the Manchurian's bull bellow echoed along the quay. "Tear the ropes away, Fan! I'll let 'em see we've a bite left in us!"

Flat on the deck, his head barely showing above the quay edge, Pen loosed his last shots at the oncoming group. One cinily outlined figure toppled to earth, tearing at a broken thigh; another, less fortunate, crashed face forward and lay motionless still. Then, yelling to his pal to take the wheel, Pen sprang to the tiny motor—an electric self-starter, fortunately—and pressed the white lever that sent a quiver and throb through the hull.

Another touch on Pen's part, a hesitating turn of the wheel

on Fan's, and, first scraping the stone piling, they swirled away into mid-stream.

A fleeting second too late Chang took a flying leap at the swiftly moving craft. His heavy body, a whirling arc of grotesque limbs, hit the deck with a force that started the craft rocking drunkenly. Viciously, not waiting to recover his balance, he pointed his revolver within a foot of Pen's head. But Fan, coolly hanging to the wheel, lashed out with a foot so accurately that the gun spoke a split second after the raging brute began a neat header into the water.

"Any damage, Pen?" Fan asked anxiously.
 "Not a one," Pen chuckled joyously. "You keep your peepers fixed ahead, old fruit, for I'm whipping her up to capacity!"

Of Chang's fate they neither knew nor cared. A more important matter was that the whole length of quay was now alive with dancing lanterns and resounding with frenzied yells of bitter rage.

Pen, glancing backward, glimpsed crews rushing aboard tugs, and one little, fussy craft already moving down-river. Then, as the launch jumped to maximum, lights and yells dropped swiftly behind, and the black, sullen current took them to its care.

The Secret of the Sifan!

"EASE her off, you ass!" Fan yelled, after a nightmare minute.
 "You'll either smash into the bank, or swamp her, at this rate."

Fan's fears were justified, for curling rollers above the bows marked the speed they were making—and that, on a water of unknown width!

"Alleez right, Fanny-lad," Pen laughed cheerfully. "I'm so full of beans at our getaway, that I feel like hitting the skyline for sheer joy!"

But the shrill whine of engine swiftly tuning to a smooth purr, told that he had taken heed of Fan's warning and reduced speed to a minimum.

Not daring to let the boat drift, he bade Fan hold her steady, ran along the curved dock to the bows, and bent low over the water. Lying motionless for many seconds, he at last straightened and sighed relief.

"Not a sound of pursuit as yet," he called back. "They'll attend to Chang first, if I know anything of your yellow brethren, and only think of coming after us when he stirs them up."

"They're a one-idea lot," Fan allowed.
 "But when they do start trailing us they'll follow round the world, remember."

Pen knew that only too well. The average Chink will wait a life-time to "get his own back," and endure any hardship to attain his ideal. But he was not worrying about the red revenge stunt, at the moment, instead he was fingering a contrivance that reared a foot above the bows—a thing he had mistaken for a machine gun.

"Fan, there's a dinkum little searchlight here," he called back, presently. "Might have known there would be, seeing the 'Claw' has opened out a great mining centre at Lunging, and that Chang or others must visit the place frequently."

"That's what I'm fogged over," Fan answered. "What do they want a mining centre at all for?"

"Because How's bringing a modern army into being—a proposition China's never tackled before," Pen replied. "But we'll talk of that when we've lighted the watery way."

Crawling back to the engine well, he soon located a polished switchboard, and experimented with its few levers, until he found one that sent a blue beam spreading a hundred yards down river. Further fingering of the levers proved that the light worked on a swivel that could be moved right or left, to show up either bank.

The prospect was not inviting. The light, too weak to reach far, revealed a watercourse two hundred yards wide, banked by raw rock, worn smooth by ages of friction and the relentless force of a swift current. Looking straight ahead, the black waters curling into sullen wavelets, hinted a depth and flush that warned Fan to take the utmost care in his wheelwork.

But if the light showed up the dangers of the river, it allowed Pen to run the motor at a rare old bat. Helped

"A DESPERATE MEASURE!"



Before Pen could stop him, Fan applied the bare flame of the lamp to the filmy curtains lining the walls of the room. In a split second the old dry wall was crackling and blazing like oil! (See page 24.)

by the natural flow, they worked up to a smooth twenty, and held her at that with an easy mind against pursuit.

For quite a while they remained silent, knowing they were rushing to the final hazard in this grim business, and trying to arrange the over-crowded events of the past three days in a sequence that might give a hint of what the future held.

"I've been casting my thoughts back to London, Fan," Pen said at last.

"Thinking of the landlord you bilked, when you suddenly left?" Fan asked, without a smile.

"No, you loony!" Pen grimaced. "You can be sure Scotland Yard attended to that, and took possession of our luggage as well. No, Fan, I was thinking of the murdered Vidoc—wondering how he got hold of the 'Claw' papers, that outlined the plan for stealing the ten scientists."

"Seeing the job we've had to get near the place, I can hardly believe he ever did get hold of them," Fan vowed.

"But I think I see it now," Pen answered. "You'll perhaps remember that Vidoc originally came to China to find why a French money king was busy transferring his wealth from France to Min Yak."

"I remember that, of course," Fan agreed.

"Well, it's plain that Prince How had that money-bug under his hypnotic thumb," Pen continued. "It seems equally clear that the Frenchman somehow recovered his wits in time to bag those papers, and pass them to Vidoc. But the point I want to make is that How carried out his kidnapping in spite of all, and that proves the ten scientists are vitally important in whatever colossal scheme is maturing."

"We might find out what the scheme is, but the world outside is never likely to benefit by our knowledge," Fan sighed.

"You're wrong there, old lad," Pen smiled. "Both Lhasa and Hajjar will send word of our passing to England. Once the Yard's eyes are turned on Szechwan, it won't be long before they get busy. Then again, Bazra's yarn will head them to Dando—and that's a leading line to How's headquarters."

"But what's our leading line, Pen?" Fan asked. "Disguised as 'Claw' couriers, I did see a chance of learning How's secret, and even getting away with the news. Now, however, we've several million fanatics thirsting for our juice, and several million chances of 'em getting it, before we're much older."

"That's just what I'm coming to," Pen agreed, quietly. "We've seen enough of Lungging to know that the 'Claw' is running this part of China on modern lines. I think it's safe to say Kanzezo is the centre-spot, and the place where the ten scientists are hidden."

He paused awkwardly, and Fan glanced at him suspiciously.

"Well, and what then?" Fan murmured.

"I think we ought to let Europe know exactly where its famous men are," Pen answered. "In short, Fan, you ought to get away whilst it's possible, and make a break for civilisation with the news."

"Suppose we both make the break while it's possible?" Fan suggested quietly.

"Ee—no," Pen replied slowly. "They're men of my own colour, after all, and I'm going on to see if I can help 'em."

Fan sniffed, and for once, shot a really angry glance at his white pal.

"In other words—because it's any old odds against us winning through—you want me to save my own skin," he snapped. "If that's your rotten idea, we'll part company now, but I'm going to Kanzezo, just the same!"

Without a moment's hesitation, he steered the boat towards the off bank, evidently intent on "parting brass razgs," right away. Pen, staring with wide-open mouth

for an instant, sprang to his side, and turned the craft back into mid-stream before answering.

"Simmer down, lad," he advised. "I only meant that the murder of Videc, and the stealing of ten 'foreign devils' is white man's business, and that you've no need to commit suicide over it."

"You're forgetting one important item," Fan said quietly.

"And that?" Pen asked.

"That How's schemes, at the least, mean the slaughter of myriads of ignorant yellow men," Fan answered. "That interests me, perhaps, even more than the fate of your 'foreign devils.'"

Pen nodded.

"Nuff said, you're right," he apologised. "We'll look ahead then, and there's three things we'll have to remember."

"One is that Chang'll be after us in a tug, if he hasn't already been drowned," Fan suggested.

"Another thing is that Lungging and Kanzezo will most certainly be in 'phone or wireless touch," Pen replied. "The third is that, by dawn, thousands will be searching for the red launch—and they have orders to kill at sight."

"Um—yes," Fan murmured doubtfully. "If they wait for days—"

For long they pondered the situation, but found it impossible to plan ahead. Not knowing what awaited them, they decided that chance and their own quick wit must take the place of method, and there they left it. Soon afterwards the moon topped the mountains, and they temporarily forgot their woes in the glory of the scene.

As it happened, the boat was rushing past a few miles of open country; but from the banks ahead and behind, great ranges of mountains rose in desolate splendour—a savage land, filled with savage and merciless men!

Presently, the heights again enfolded them, and they shot abruptly into a swift-running ravine. Even with the bow-light going it needed alert steeersmanship to avoid smashing into a wall of rock, and it was with sighs of relief that they again saw the river widening.

That, for a moment! Then Fan gulped as though he had swallowed something hard, and Pen whistled shrill amazement.

For miles ahead, the moon lit up a scene that was all red flame and black shadow! Smoke rolled in heavy clouds that deadened moonlight, but, as they drew nearer, the red haze showed up a veritable inferno of hurrying, labouring men!

"My sacred aunt!" Pen gasped. "A Chinese Sheffield!"

"Shef—feel?" Fan queried frowningly.

"Place where steel's made in England!" Pen snapped impatiently. "See the squat chimneys—they're blast furnaces, hundreds of them. Um! This explains all the ore-mining at Lungging."

"You mean they're making steel?" Fan asked, hopelessly ignorant of the mysteries of a blast furnace.

"In mighty quantities, if I'm any judge," Pen replied. "If it's guns How's soul's hankering after, I'd say he's making enough to blow China sky-high!"

Now taking a turn at the wheel, Pen steered towards a bank and ordered Fan to shut off the engine.

"Anyway, it isn't Kanzezo, and that's where we'll find How and the missing ten," Fan said practically.

"True enough," Pen admitted. "And I'm wondering how we're going to dodge the place. If we abandon the boat they'll run us down in no time, and a tramp round means more— My hat, that's torn it!"

Abruptly a powerful searchlight flared into being from the heights they had passed a minute before. That it had been placed as a help in guiding the cumbersome ore hulks held no interest for the pair. It was more to the point that a staccato "zirrip" broke out from either bank, and that the bullets of machine-guns flecked the waters all round them!

"Trapped!" Pen groaned. "Crouch down—and let her go, Fan!"

As Pen instantly realised, there was no going back. Against that racing current half their speed would be gone, even though they evaded the storm of bullets now focusing on them.

No, it was a case of "needs must," of running a gauntlet without hope of safety at the end. Straight through the middle of that amazing factory city must they drive, and bitterly they understood the activity of the many craft now stringing out across the narrow river!



Viciously Chang pointed his revolver within a foot of Fan's head. But Fan, coolly hanging to the wheel, fashed out with a foot so accurately that the gun spoke a split second after the raging brute began a neat header into the water.

Trapped!

WITH bullets peppering and penetrating the launch at about ten a second, Fan hardly needed advice to crouch down. He slid to the floor of the well like a vanishing gnome, but he slipped the motor into top gear even as he fell.

And Pen, also cuddling as low as possible, took hair-brained risks in zig-zag turns that bewildered the gunners. Trained men of a European army would probably have blown the craft to bits in the first onslaught, but these fellows fired what might be called sighting shots, and so lost their opportunity.

But they did enough damage in those few hot moments to give Pen tremors in plenty. The launch was holed in a dozen places even as she leapt forward; then she was tearing away down river, a great curling wave thrown off from her bows and half her length out of water.

For a few happy seconds they jumped from glare to shadow, and the searchlight quattered angrily ahead. It showed up a scene that would have frightened the best—a nightmare of armed men lining the quays, of two score or more vessels frenziedly rushing to block the fairway!

"Tune her up, Fan!" Pen yelled. "I'm trying a bluff! I'll take us through—or under!"

Steading the boat close to the right bank, Pen held her steady until the blue glare again gripped them. Persistently hugging that same side and streaking along like a red torpedo, he had the satisfaction of seeing the fussy little tug and quaint oar-pulled junks stampede over to intercept them.

Considering the hurtling onrush of those they sought to stop, the Chinks showed themselves devoid of fear, but that they were foolish in trusting to appearances was dramatically proved.

Swift as a swallow the launch whipped across the river, accurately as a homing pigeon it flicked between two lumbering hulks that showed a scant four feet of water from hull to hull, then, whilst the yellow horde still blinked in blind surprise, Pen circled the stern of an eight-oared junk, was through and again whipping open water.

The birth of a grin formed on his lips, but, as quickly, it died. For just one delightful moment he knew the joy of victory well earned, then twin beams from above dropped on the river, and the red launch shot clean into the glare before his brain could register this fresh danger.

Recovering instantly, he did all that was humanly possible. He swerved right across the river, came round in a half-circle, and sped like a wriggling snake for another mile.

But he soon guessed that he had other than yellow amateurs now hunting him. Coolly, of sinister intent, one plane circled overhead with glarlight constantly exposing Pen's every move, whilst another swooped low over the water and came at them like a skimming kestrel.

Against the hurtling onrush the speed of the red launch was never in evidence. Pen acted with iron nerve the moment he understood the wicked game. He twisted the boat about with a jolt that nearly capsized it, intending to hug the questionable shelter of the Chinese river craft; but, even in turning, the wheel was shot to splinters in his hands, and a score of bullets made as many holes in the tank.

Like a mad thing intent on suicide the launch turned straight for the timbered piling of a jetty, crashed head on, and sank like a stone. The harassed pair, marveling that they still lived, came to the surface with bursting lungs and were exposed to the gaze of angry thousands by the inexorable blue glare.

"It's 'domino' this time, old pal!" Pen gasped. "The game's played—we lose!"

"The game's played," Fan agreed. "The telling of it need bring no shame to us."

"My giddy aunt, what's the idea now?" Pen spluttered.

Instinctively they kept aloof, wondering why they troubled. With the die cast definitely against them they had grown curiously tired and indifferent. A minute more—a minute less—what matter, when the end was already written?

Then a fresh outburst from the aero machine-guns roused them to renewed interest in life. For a moment they thought the airmen were joining in the "hate" game against themselves, but the sight of the quay populace running like

The Russian half-breed raised his gun, shrugged, then pointed grimly up-hill. "Now march!" he cried. Drenched to the skin and utterly weary, Penny Rudd and Fan Shen were forced to the stiff climb at a cruel pace.



rabbits for shelter told that the bullets had not been directed on their hobbing heads.

"We'll soon know," Fan answered. "Here's one beast swooping with a trailing rope for us to hang to."

"As we're saved from bullets it's probably a rope we will hang to," Pen answered grimly. "Meanwhile, we'll grasp the gift the winged god sends, and hang on."

Dragged down river for half a mile, the plane hauled them like stranded fish at the foot of a towering hill. Clearing the water from their eyes, the first thing they saw was a twenty-foot flame stabbing the sky—a red glare repeated at thirty-second intervals.

"How's headquarters?" Fan whispered.

"What d'you mean?" Pen asked absently, his eyes on the plane now taxying to a standstill close by.

"The terrace building atop the hill, the clusters of huts sweeping down to the factories," Fan replied quickly. "It's Kanzezo itself, only we couldn't see the monastery for smoke."

Almost before Pen could grasp this ominous truth four uniformed airmen advanced from their machines, revolvers prominently to the fore. As Pen had already guessed, they were Europeans—flat-faced Slavs, who looked anything but friendly.

"You s'render, Ingleso!" one demanded in laboured English.

"Being half-drowned, played out, and nearly starved, we do," Pen grunted wryly. "But it's a rotten game, isn't it—white men playing traitor to their colour in a yellow thug's camp?"

"The white man's sun is setting, the Yellow Dragon on a red background will soon take its place!" the Slav sneered, now using the Mink dialect.

"Um, I understand," Pen answered, his lip curling. "Like vultures, fellows of your rotten kidney flock naturally to a murderer's Mecca!"

"If the prince hadn't ordered me to stay my hand, I'd blow your head off for that!" the Slav snarled. "He wirelessed me just in time, and deeply I regret the lost sport."

"But the jackal obeys the lion," Fan murmured, adding pointedly: "We prefer to deal with the lion."

The Russian half raised his gun, shrugged, then pointed grimly uphill.

"So you shall, and may you enjoy the deal," he grinned coarsely. "Now march!"

Drenched to the skin, utterly weary, the chums were forced to the stiff climb at a cruel pace. Even then, Pen was all out to learn things, and the stabbing flame overhead held a hint he was anxious to verify.

"Private firework show of How's?" he queried.
"The natives call it 'The Tongue of the Son of Heaven'" the Russian snapped. "Soon you'll hear his voice. Until you do, keep your lips closed."

But Pen found an opportunity to whisper his thought to Fan as they trod the first terrace leading to the monastery.
"Believe it's a 'spark' station—a tremendously powerful one, by the size of the flame?" he muttered.

Beyond that, talk was impossible, for now a guard of most warlike lamas closed round and hurried them into the great stone castle that was, by courtesy, still named the Lamaserie of Kanzezo.

And there, in the grim vastness of its bleak hall, they once again faced How—prince, murderer, and the most sinister lord over his character of Son of Heaven, as self-styled god—

Now, in her China, he stared somberly at his prisoners. Stuffy upright on a dais of carved black ebony, robbed from head to foot in vivid crimson, he formed a startling centerpiece for those who surrounded him.

Facing the throne, an enormous model of the crimson claw that meant so much in Szechwan reared high on gilded poles. Beneath the claw a dozen shaven lamas sat at a long, low table. Further off, three white-faced Europeans stood guarded by Chinks armed with gleaming scimitars—a picture completed by a rabble of low-grade monks who lined the walls from door to door.

"So, hunters, the cup lifts at last from the dice, and shows you blanks," How began quietly. "Come nearer, fools, that I may read the thoughts of folly ere they wing to shadow-land."

"Fools we have been," Pen admitted loudly. "Had fools' folly not ruined us, Yen How would have died the day we held him prisoner in the belly of his own Dragon!"

A hiss as from a nest of roused vipers greeted this defiant sally; but How, lifting a hand, stilled it instantly.

"The dying cry snarls, but harms none," he said calmly. "The Son of Heaven heeds not your puny anger, and only needs your wretched bodies to serve as a warning lesson to these obstinate ones."

The last words had been spoken in English, obviously for the benefit of the three dejected Europeans so closely grouped.

One, whom Pen now recognised as Elson Starr, the stolen English aeroplane inventor, looked scornfully back at How and smiled wearily.

"Seven of our number you have subdued by hypnotic evil," he said quickly. "Kind Nature refuses to allow us three to work with doped brains, and nothing you can do will make us work with active ones."

He was clearly speaking for the understanding of the chums, and gained, by way of payment, a cruel, back-handed blow from the brute who guarded him. But that punishment How quickly stroked, nor did he intervene whilst Pen whispered to his pal.

"See the game, Fan?" he said quickly. "How's trying to use the ten to perfect his factory domgs in the town below. Seven are unconsciously serving his end with doped minds; these three are unable to work doped, and refuse to move with clear minds."

Fan nodded, and smiled wryly.
"And we're to be the lesson that will put fear into them?" he sighed. "Better if the Sihan held our drowned selves, Penny Rudd!"

Cold as a mountain peak, detached as the god he spelt, How stared musingly down until the chums had finished speaking. It may have been the contrast between Yen How dodging like a sewer rat through Limehouse slums and that of a king now holding life and death over millions; but there seemed something terrifying in this method of permitting the two white parties to arrive at an understanding of his devilish intentions.

He even smiled when his captives spoke to each other across the table, even told the scowling councillors seated thereat not to intervene.

"Starr, we've followed you from London," Pen said hurriedly. "Whatever this brute does to us, remember we've sent word back to England, and it's only a matter of time before you are freed. Stick it out. Don't let sympathy for us weaken you."

Will Starr and his colleagues give in now that the fate of Rudd and Fan Shen depends upon their decision? Mind you read next week's thrilling instalment, chums.)

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