

"THE RETURN OF THE TOFF!" THRILLING ST. JIM'S STORY
STARRING REGINALD TALBOT INSIDE.

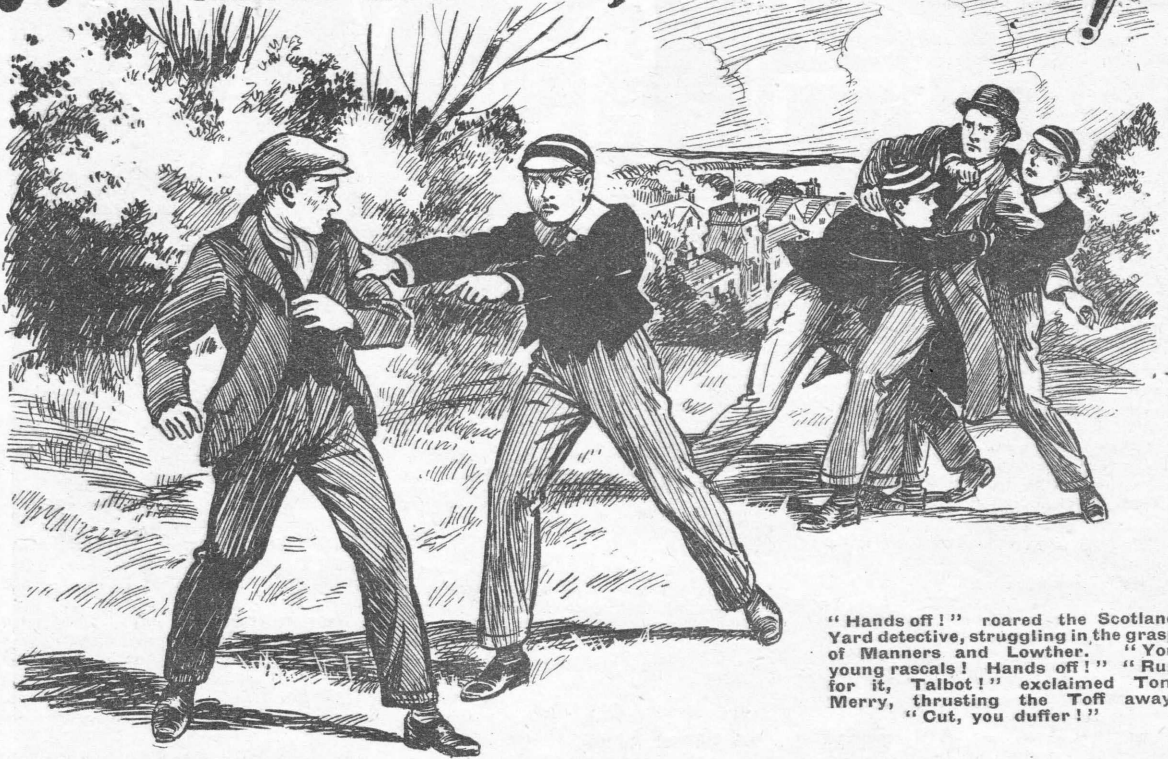
The GEM 2^d



The
TRAIN
WRECKER!

**"WANTED" BY THE POLICE, REGINALD TALBOT FINDS HIS FRIENDS AT ST. JIM'S
READY TO BACK HIM UP IN HIS HOUR OF NEED!**

The RETURN of the TOFF!



"Hands off!" roared the Scotland Yard detective, struggling in the grasp of Manners and Lowther. "You young rascals! Hands off!" "Run for it, Talbot!" exclaimed Tom Merry, thrusting the Toff away. "Cut, you duffer!"

CHAPTER 1.

A Visitor for Tom Merry!

"MASTER MERRY!"
"Hallo, Toby!"
"Genelman to see you, sir."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

It was really rather an awkward moment for a "genelman" to see Tom Merry, for a little celebration was going on in Tom Merry's study at St. Jim's. That famous apartment in the Shell passage in the School House was crowded—not to say crammed. It was an important occasion.

It was Tom Merry's birthday, and naturally enough he and his chums were celebrating the event. And naturally the celebration took the form of a feed, to which all their friends were invited. And as the names of their friends were legion, the capacity of the study was taxed to its utmost.

The Terrible Three were there—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy had come along from Study No. 6. Figgins & Co. had come from the New House. Kangaroo, the Australian, had come with his friends. Reilly of the Fourth had brought several fellows. In fact, Monty Lowther remarked that a "Standing room only" notice was required.

There certainly wasn't much room; but the feed was ample, and that compensated for other deficiencies. Fellows sat where they could—on the chairs or

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the table, or in the window, or on the coal-locker. Those who could not sit, stood up. There was an overflow meeting, so to speak, in the passage.

And then Toby, the School House page, put his shock-head in at the doorway—with some difficulty, as it were—and announced that a "genelman" wished to see Tom Merry.

"Have him up," said Monty Lowther hospitably. "He's come at the right time, whoever he is. Make room, somehow."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Blessed if I see how he's to get in!" said Tom Merry, laughing, with a glance over the crowded study. "Perhaps I'd better go down."

"Rats! We can't spare the founder of the feast!" said Blake. "Who is it, anyway? Didn't he give you a name, Toby?"

"Ere's 'is card, sir."

"Hand it over, ass!"

Toby grinned, and passed the card to Tom Merry.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he glanced at it.

"Nothing wrong?" asked Lowther.

"N-no; but—"

"Bai Jove! I twust it isn't a beast with a bill at a time like this?" said Arthur Augustus anxiously. "Fortunately I have had a fivah frowm my patah, deah boy, and if—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Thanks; it isn't that! Look at it! Blessed if I know what the man can want with me!"

The juniors all looked at the card. It bore the inscription:

"J. D. FOX,

"C.I.D., Scotland Yard."

"Well, my only hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a whistle. "A giddy detective!"

"Great Scott!"

"What have you been doing, Tommy?" asked Monty Lowther solemnly. "This is a surprise—quite a shock! What have you been up to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry warmly. "I can't imagine what the man wants. Are you sure he asked for me, Toby?"

"Yessir!"

"Have him up here," said Manners. "I don't care what Tommy has been doing, we'll stand by him! The minion of the law is not going to collar the founder of the feast."

"Wathah not!"

"Just imagine Tommy going off like Eugene Aram, with giddy gyves upon his wrists!" murmured Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll stand by you, Tommy!"

"Back up!"

"Fatheads!" shouted Tom Merry wrathfully. "It must be some mistake or other. The man can't possibly want anything with me. Where is he, Toby?"

"Waiting in the passage, sir," said Toby, with a grin.

"Well, show him in. Make room for

THERE'S THRILL UPON THRILL THROUGHOUT THIS ENTHRALLING STORY OF THE TOFF'S STRUGGLE AGAINST HIS PAST LIFE.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD**

him to come in, you fellows, if you can," said Tom Merry. "You can all hear what he's got to say."

"Keep your pecker up! We'll stand by you!" chuckled Blake. "All I want to know is—what have you been up to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here he comes!"

The juniors crowded back to give Mr. Fox admission to the study. All eyes were turned upon him as he came in. He was a well-built man, quietly dressed, with a very square jaw that told of a very determined character. He had grey eyes that looked like steel. He seemed a little surprised to find the study crammed with fellows, and it was not very easy for him to get in.

"Master Merry?" he said inquiringly.

"Here I am," said Tom. "Give Mr. Fox a seat, somebody."

"Pway accept my chair, Mr. Fox!"

"Thank you; I will stand!" said Mr. Fox. "I am sorry. I seem to have called at a somewhat awkward moment—ahem!"

"Oh, don't mensh!" said Tom politely. "But I really can't guess what you want to see me for, Mr. Fox."

"If it is anythin' pivate, deah boy, we will wetiah at once," said Arthur Augustus.

"Not at all," said Mr. Fox. "I simply desire to ask Master Merry a few questions, and if he is unable to answer them, perhaps some of you other young gentlemen may be able to do so."

"Bai Jove!"

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry. "Any old thing!"

"Of course, I am here simply in pursuance of my duty," explained Mr. Fox. "Any assistance you can render me you are bound to give to aid the execution of the law. I have reason to believe that you can help me in securing a notorious criminal."

"Wha-at!"

"All right, Tommy!" murmured Blake. "He's not after you, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A notorious criminal!" repeated Tom Merry, puzzled. "I—I'm afraid I can't help you, Mr. Fox. We—we haven't any here, you know."

Mr. Fox smiled.

"You have been very well acquainted with the person I mean," he said. "The question is whether you know his present whereabouts, and I think it probable that you do."

"My hat!"

The study was in a buzz of excitement now. Mr. Fox's statement astounded the juniors. Several fellows had come along the passage to look in, among them Levison of the Fourth, who was all ears now. Levison was always keenly interested in everybody's business but his own, and anything up against Tom Merry & Co. was especially welcome to him.

The cad of the Fourth did not mean to miss this.

"Oh, Tommy," sighed Monty Lowther, "what ever have you been doing? What bad, wicked acquaintances have you been making while your kind uncles weren't looking after you?"

"Shut up, fathead!" said Tom Merry.

"Mr. Fox, you're making a mistake. I haven't any notorious criminals on my visiting list, really."

"The person I refer to is a boy of your own age," explained Mr. Fox. "He was once here, at this school—"

"What!"

"Where he was known by the name of Talbot."

"Oh!"

"Talbot!"

"My hat!"

"And I ask you," said Mr. Fox grimly, "whether you can give me any information likely to help me to lay hands upon that boy criminal, known among his associates as the Toff, and known in this school as Reginald Talbot?"

Mr. Fox's words were followed by a dead silence.

CHAPTER 2.

The Toff in Peril!

TALBOT!

Well enough the juniors of St. Jim's remembered the name. Only a few months before, that strange junior had been at St. Jim's, and since he had left there had been no word from him.

A strange story was Talbot's.

During his short stay at the old school he had won golden opinions from all. He had chummed with Tom Merry &

Having forsaken a life of crime for one of honesty, Talbot would give anything to be back among his chums at St. Jim's. But a fugitive from justice, hunted and harried by a Scotland Yard detective, what chance has he of redeeming the past and starting afresh?

Co., and they had liked him immensely. A splendid cricketer, a good all-round sportsman, a splendid fellow in every way, they had believed him—till the crash came.

And they still remembered the crash—how it had come out that Talbot, whom they had believed the soul of honour, was, in reality, a boy cracksman, the leader of a dangerous gang; and how he had come to St. Jim's, deceiving the Head, deceiving everybody, to carry on his nefarious calling there.

Yet their friendly feelings towards Talbot had not changed. For the discovery had been made that the unhappy boy had repented of his many misdeeds.

Born and bred among criminals, he had had no chance in his earlier days; he had used his great talents in the cause of crime, knowing no better.

At St. Jim's a change had come over him. The influence of Tom Merry & Co., the associations of the good old school, had worked a complete change in his character—had opened his eyes to the reality of things.

Had he chosen to carry on his scheme, he could have done so successfully, keeping up the deception without danger to himself.

But he had repented and reformed,

with the result that his old associates, baffled in their nefarious works, had turned upon him and betrayed him.

It was because he had thrown aside the evil past and determined to stand or fall by honesty that he had suffered.

While Hookey Walker and the rest of the rascally gang went to prison, Talbot had disappeared.

But his old chums remembered him with affection and regret. For he had given proofs of his repentance; they knew that his reform was sincere. By turning to honesty, he had brought ruin upon himself. Yet he had never faltered for a moment in his new path. They knew that he had gone abroad, there to begin a new life; but that was all they knew of him. No word of news came from the fellow who had been the most popular junior at St. Jim's, and who was now an outcast.

The discovery that the detective from Scotland Yard was in search of old Talbot was a big shock to the juniors.

They had supposed that his repentance, and his suffering for it, had cleared up the past, and that he would be given a chance in the future. They realised now that the law did not take cognisance of such things.

Talbot had repented. He had made restitution; thousands of pounds' worth of loot had been restored to the rightful owners by his means, and he had gone off into the world penniless. But what he had done in the past remained to be paid for. The law was not satisfied.

The silence in Tom Merry's study lasted several minutes. The juniors could not speak. Utter dismay had fallen upon all of them.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to find his voice. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned it upon Mr. Fox with burning indignation.

"Do you weally mean to say, sir, that you are lookin' for old Talbot?" he asked heatedly.

"Exactly!"

"But it is wotten—uttahly wotten—and—"

"It isn't playing the game!" exclaimed Figgins warmly. "Why, don't you know—"

"Look here, Mr. Fox—"

Mr. Fox raised his hand.

"Please remember that I am carrying out the instructions of my superiors, and that I have my duty to do!" he said. "Now, Master Merry—"

"But you don't seem to understand, Mr. Fox," said Tom Merry, as calmly as he could. "I know that Talbot was brought up among criminals. I—I suppose he wasn't an honest chap before he came here. But after he came here it was all different. You must know all about the matter. He handed back everything that was taken in the robberies in this district. Then he was betrayed by his pals because he wouldn't help them to rob this school."

"I am aware of it, Master Merry."

"Well, then, when a chap has repented and reformed, given proof of it, and made restitution, what do the police want with him?" Tom Merry asked warmly.

Mr. Fox smiled.

"He has to stand his trial for many things in his youthful career, Master Merry. I have no doubt that the matters you mention will count in his favour when he is tried, and he will be dealt with mercifully. But he must be arrested and tried. He will be sent to a reformatory, in all probability."

"What's the use of a reformatory to a chap who's reformed—and proved it?" Tom Merry demanded.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That is not for you or for me to judge," replied Mr. Fox. "You are old enough to know that the law must be administered. The boy disappeared from this school before the police were called in to take the burglars into custody on the night when the discovery was made. He has, naturally, been searched for since, but in vain. Now, however, that he is known to have returned here—"

"Returned here!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes; now that is known, I have come to take him into custody," said Mr. Fox. "I want you to tell me if you have seen him, and where and when, and you will kindly do so immediately, Master Merry, as my time is valuable."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I don't know anything about him, or where he may be," he replied; "and if I did, I wouldn't say a word to hurt him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I hadn't any idea that he had come back," said Tom. "It's news to me! I've seen nothing of him, and heard nothing from him. But if I did, I should treat him as a pal!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Fox looked searchingly at the captain of the Shell.

"I do not like to doubt your word, Master Merry," he said dryly. "But there is proof that the Toff has come back to this neighbourhood, if not to this school. He has been seen and recognised."

"I know nothing at all about that."

"The natural assumption is that he has come here to communicate with some of you young gentlemen who still have friendly feelings towards him," said Mr. Fox. "He is probably in need of assistance, especially if he is keeping to honest paths. It is very surprising that no one here has heard from him!"

Mr. Fox looked round with a keen glance at the crowd of faces in the study.

But there was only surprise and dismay to be read in them. Nobody there knew anything about Talbot or his return.

"We can't tell you anything," said Blake shortly. "I don't know that we would if we could; but we can't, and that settles it!"

"No one here has seen anything of him?" asked Mr. Fox, looking keenly from face to face.

"No one," said Manners.

"Wathah not!"

The detective looked disappointed. Evidently he had hoped to obtain information regarding Talbot from Tom Merry or some of his friends.

"Very well, I accept your assurance, of course," he said. "Undoubtedly, however, the boy has come back here with some object, and perhaps the headmaster might be able to afford me some help. Excuse me for having troubled you!"

And Mr. Fox left the study.

There was a buzz in the room after he had gone. Mr. Fox's statement had fallen like a bombshell into the merry meeting.

Old Talbot had come back, and the police were hunting for him. It seemed too terrible to be true. Not only had the unfortunate lad lost everything by his steadfast adherence to his new resolutions, but he was to lose his

liberty, too. For the law was not to be denied. Justice demanded a victim, and repentance did not count. Repentance, reform, were not sufficient to destroy the wretched past; the debt to justice had to be paid.

Before Mr. Fox's arrival the meeting in Tom Merry's study had been very cheery. But the cheeriness had departed now. Mr. Fox's mission at St. Jim's had been quite sufficient to banish it. Even Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House, ceased to regard the good things on the table with enthusiasm. All the fellows were thinking about Talbot, and all of them were dismayed and anxious.

"How utterly rotten!" said Monty Lowther. "Talbot turned out to be such a thoroughly decent sort at the finish, and even before that. We can't forget that he risked his life for young Wally."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "He saved my minah's life, and wisked his own—and only a weally decent fellow would have done it!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Somebody said once, that the law was an ass," Manners remarked. "That somebody was right. The law is an awful ass!"

"And old Talbot's come back here!" said Tom Merry, in wonder. "Queer that we haven't heard anything from him! He must know that he's got some pals here who'd stand by him if he wanted help."

"Only he was proud as Lucifer, and he would take no help," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "Old Fox can think he's come back for help, but I know him better than that. That isn't what he's come back for."

"All the same, he's probably stony," remarked Figgins.

"I know we'd all jolly well help him if we could, Fox or no Fox!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "As for giving information against him—rats!"

"Yaas, wathah—wats!"

The celebration was over.

Mr. Fox had quite spoiled that happy occasion. In the circumstances, the juniors felt that they could not celebrate.

The meeting broke up much earlier than they had intended.

Tom Merry was wearing a very thoughtful and worried look. His friendship for Talbot of the Shell was deep and sincere; he had never forgotten him.

When the Terrible Three remained alone in the study, Manners and Lowther fixed an inquiring look on their chum. They could guess what was coming.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "you know what I'm thinking of. If old Talbot's come back to this quarter we want to see him. He was our pal, and we agreed that we'd always look on him as a pal, in spite of—of everything. I don't want to make light of what he has done; I know how rotten it all was. But we ought to remember that he was the son of a crackman, brought up to the bisney, and the first time he found himself among decent people he chucked up the whole game, and suffered for it. After that it would be mean to be down on him. I know he's a decent chap, and I know he's my friend. And if I can help him I'm going to."

"Hear, hear!" murmured the Co.

"If he's back in this neighbourhood, he very likely wants to see us," said Tom. "Well, he can't come to the school without giving himself away. But we may meet him outside somewhere, and if we do—"

"We'll give him a tip about Fox!" chuckled Lowther.

"Exactly! Now, who says a walk?"

"Walk!" said Manners and Lowther together.

And the Terrible Three sauntered out of the School House and crossed the quad and walked out of the gates of St. Jim's. From which it might easily have been guessed that Mr. Fox was not likely to receive much assistance from the chums of the Shell.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison Offers His Help!

LEVISON tapped Mr. Fox's arm as the gentleman from Scotland Yard came away from Tom Merry's study.

Mr. Fox paused and looked down at him.

The thin face and cunning, greenish eyes of Levison did not make a particularly good impression upon Mr. Fox. But that experienced gentleman was ready to make use of any material that came to hand.

"You wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Fox," said Levison. "Step in here, will you? I don't want the fellows to see. They would be down on me at once."

Mr. Fox obligingly followed the cad of the Fourth into an empty Form-room.

"I heard all you had to say in Tom Merry's study," Levison explained.

"And you can give me some information?" the detective asked eagerly. "You have seen something of the Toff—I mean Talbot?"

"No, I haven't so far. I thought he was abroad," said Levison. "Is it quite certain that he has been seen in this neighbourhood?"

"Quite!"

"Then I think I may have some information to give you later. You see, he can only have come back here to have something to say to Tom Merry and his friends. They were always very thick, and finding out that Talbot was a thief hasn't made any difference to them," said Levison, with a bitter sneer. "They're not particular. I suspected him all along, from the very beginning. Long before it all came out I guessed that he was a shady character, and denounced him, and all the fellows sent me to Coventry for my pains."

Mr. Fox looked curiously at the cad of the Fourth.

"You did not like Talbot?" he asked.

"I hated him."

"Because he was a bad character?"

"Ye-es," muttered Levison. As a matter of fact, Levison had disliked Talbot for his good qualities, not for his bad ones, but he did not feel inclined to confide that to Mr. Fox. But the Scotland Yard detective was accustomed to reading character, and in a couple of minutes he understood Levison very clearly.

"And you suspected him?" asked Mr. Fox.

"Yes, and denounced him, as I said; but he was awfully deep; he knew how to make himself popular. Even after it all came out, and they had to admit that I was right about him, they were more down on me than ever," said Levison. "It made them ratty to find that I was in the right, after all."

Mr. Fox smiled.

"But I haven't forgotten him," said Levison, gritting his teeth. "If I get a chance I'll make him pay for it. Now he's come back here, if he has come back, he's sure to get into communication with Tom Merry and the rest. And you can reply upon it that they won't say a word to you about it."

"It is their duty to help me," said Mr. Fox.

Levison sneered. "Very likely; but that won't make any difference to them, you'll see. If they came across him they'll help him, and keep it dark."

The detective frowned. "That would be a very serious step for them to take," he said. "It would be against the law."

Levison snapped his fingers. "That's all they care about that," he said. "Look here, Mr. Fox, I'm quite willing to help you if I can. I know my—my duty."

"Exactly! It is everyone's duty to help in the execution of the law," said Mr. Fox—not very warmly, however. "If you can give me any information at any time I shall be much obliged. What is your name?"

"Levison; I'm in the Fourth Form here. If I find out anything else, where can I see you or write to you?" asked the cad of the Fourth.

"I shall be staying for a few days in Rylcombe, at the Rylcombe Arms."

"Good! I'll keep my eyes open."

Mr. Fox hesitated for a moment. Levison was willing to help him, and Tom Merry was unwilling, yet he could not help liking Tom Merry and feeling a vague dislike and distrust towards Levison. But he stifled his natural antipathy towards the cad of the Fourth and nodded. He reflected that detectives of the Criminal Investigation Department could not afford to be too particular as to the kind of tools they used.

If Talbot did communicate with Tom Merry & Co., as was very probable, a spy in the school itself would be the surest means of making a discovery. And here was a spy, apparently designed by Nature for such business, offering his services for nothing. Mr. Fox felt that he could not afford to throw away such a chance.

"Very well," he said. "I shall be glad to hear from you if you have anything to tell me."

"Only, don't let the fellows know," said Levison uneasily. "They'd be down on me like a ton of bricks if they knew."

"I understand," said Mr. Fox dryly.

And he left the Form-room.

Levison grinned, with a catlike gleam in his eyes. It seemed that at last his chance had come for repaying, with interest, all the slights and humiliations he had suffered with regard to Talbot. As for the contempt he had not failed to read in Mr. Fox's eyes, that did not worry him at all, so long as he served his end.

Levison was not unused to contempt.

Mr. Fox made his way to the Head's house, and sent in his card, and was admitted to the presence of Dr. Holmes. The Head of St. Jim's received him with his usual courtesy. He had met Mr. Fox before, in connection with the arrest and trial of the burglars who had broken into the school on the night Talbot had gone. The good old Head looked very grave, however, when the gentleman from Scotland Yard stated his business.

"You—you are looking for that unhappy boy, Mr. Fox?" he asked.

"I have orders to take him into custody, sir."

"But—but I should have thought the authorities might have allowed this matter to pass into oblivion," said the Head. "That boy, Mr. Fox, had really a noble nature, in spite of the unhappy results of his early training. He was brought up among infamous associates, but at the first opportunity he turned



"You're hiding a criminal in the footer team," said Levison. "But I'll soon let Detective Fox know!" He strode towards the door of the dressing-room, but he found Glyn, Dane and Digby barring his exit!

from wrong to right. It was because of his stubborn honesty that his old associates betrayed him. You are aware of that."

"All that will count in his favour, sir," said Mr. Fox. "But he must take his trial. I am certain that he will be dealt with mercifully."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"But he is living an honest life now, Mr. Fox."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Then you are in communication with him, sir?"

The kind old gentleman did not see the trap. But he shook his head.

"No; but I am convinced of it," he said. "I do not conceal from you, Mr. Fox, that I helped him to leave the country."

Mr. Fox smiled grimly.

"I will take that as a confidence, sir," he said. "I recommend you not to make that statement in public. You were taking the law into your own hands. However, no harm is done if the boy is now arrested. You can tell me where he is?"

"I cannot. I had one letter from him after his arrival in Spain."

"In Spain?" repeated Mr. Fox.

"Yes; he went there immediately. It was rather a dangerous country to go to, with war raging out there, but no doubt he thought it the safest place. I have not heard from him since. He told me he had obtained work there in a commercial house. His knowledge of Spanish was very good. But he would not tell me his address, in case I should be asked questions about him. I suppose the poor lad foresaw something like this," the Head added, with a sigh.

"But he is not in Spain now," re-

marked Mr. Fox. "As a matter of fact, sir, it is known that he is in England; he has been seen in this neighbourhood. You were not aware of it?"

The Head started.

"No, I was quite unaware of it, Mr. Fox," he said.

"Then you cannot tell me where he is?"

"Certainly not."

"It is very important that he should be found as soon as possible," said Mr. Fox. "I am assured that he will be dealt with leniently, in consideration of the fact that he prevented a robbery at this school. But he must, of course, stand his trial in the usual way, and it is my duty to take him into custody. I am sorry that you cannot give me any hint as to where to look for him."

Dr. Holmes looked deeply distressed. He had a very affectionate remembrance of Talbot.

"I cannot say I am sorry, Mr. Fox," said the Head frankly. "I sincerely trust that the unfortunate boy will not be found. You will excuse my saying so. I am sorry—deeply sorry—that he has ventured back into danger. I know you are only doing your duty, Mr. Fox, but—but my sympathies are all with that unfortunate boy, and I make no secret of it."

Mr. Fox smiled slightly as he rose to his feet. He was evidently a good-natured man, though hard as iron in the pursuit of his professional duty.

"I quite understand your feelings in the matter, sir," he said. "However, I have my duty to do, and I trust I shall be able to take the son of Captain Crow back to London with me a prisoner. Good-afternoon!"

And Mr. Fox took his leave, leaving the Head of St. Jim's in a decidedly worried frame of mind.

"The unhappy boy!" murmured the Head, when Mr. Fox was gone. "The unfortunate, reckless lad! Why has he come back? I—I suppose it would be wrong, from the point of view of the law, yet if I saw him, I—I really think that I should feel bound to aid him. Whatever he has been in the past, I am convinced that a more honest and upright lad does not exist, and I cannot forget that he saved me from heavy loss."

And it was some time before the Head could settle down quietly again even to the entrancing study of Æschylus.

CHAPTER 4. Chums Yet!

TALBOT!" Tom Merry uttered the name softly.
And Lowther and Manners repeated it in a whisper.

It was Talbot!
The Terrible Three had hoped to see something of their old pal when they left the school—they had hoped it, but they had not expected it. And here he was, in full view, ten minutes after they had sauntered out of the gates of St. Jim's.

Talbot did not see them.
The well-built, handsome lad looked his old self. There were some lines on his boyish face that told of trouble, that was all. In his early days no one could have been more careless and happy than the Toff, but he had evidently found the path of honesty a thorny one.

For with honesty came hard work

and war, for the lad who had to begin at the bottom of the ladder and fight his way upwards.

The schoolboy cracksman who could make a fortune in a single night by the cracking of a safe had left St. Jim's almost penniless, grimly refusing to keep a single shilling that was not honestly and justly his own. He had youth, strength, health, and determination, and he was determined to take his chance. He was clever, too, and his education was good. There was a place in the world, surely, for such a lad.

But he had found the battle hard. No more luxuries, no more idleness, no more extravagance for the Toff. Hard work and a clear conscience, instead. And he knew that the change was for the better.

He stood on the hillside, looking down at the old school.

The three chums of the Shell caught sight of him there as they came along the lane.

But Talbot's eyes were not turned upon them; he was looking towards St. Jim's, the grey old building glowing in the sunset. On the playing fields the first eleven could be seen engaged in a footer match with the team from Abbotsford. In the quiet of the countryside the shouts from the football ground came faintly over the hills.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Well done, Kildare!"

"Bravo!"

There was a strange emotion in Talbot's handsome face as he looked upon the old school, which had been the only home he had ever known. Tom Merry, as he looked at him from the lane, thought he could understand the emotions that were struggling in the

breast of the strange and wayward youth.

"Poor old Talbot!" he muttered. "What a rotten shame that he can't come back to St. Jim's!"

"Rotten!" muttered Lowther. "Let's speak to him, anyway."

"Talbot!" called out Tom Merry.

Talbot started.

He looked down the hillside and caught sight of the Terrible Three. His handsome face flushed crimson for a moment, and then the colour fled, leaving him deadly pale. He made a movement as if to retreat as the Terrible Three came quickly towards him.

"Talbot, old man, hold on!"

Talbot hesitated.

Tom Merry reached him first and held out his hand. Talbot gave him a strange look.

"Tom Merry, I did not expect to see you!"

"Give us your fist, old chap!"

"My fist! You know what I am—"

"Yes, I know what you are—one of the best and straightest fellows breathing!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I know that! Give us your fist!"

Talbot shook hands with him.

"You are jolly good to me," he muttered. "Now—now that you know my history, I wonder that I've got the cheek to look you in the face."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom cheerily. "We understand."

"You bet!" said Lowther, as he and then Manners shook hands with the outcast. "Keep your pecker up, Talbot, old man!"

Talbot caught his breath, almost with a sob.

"You speak like that to me, when—when you know—" he murmured.

"Of course we do!" said Tom. "We know you never had a chance at the start, and we know that as soon as you had a chance you jumped at it. That's all we want to know. Now, what have you been doing with yourself all this time? Sit down here and have a whack in this toffee and tell us all about it."

Talbot smiled, his face brightening curiously under the influence of the hearty cordiality of the chums of St. Jim's. He accepted the chunk of toffee; he was once more a frank and cheery schoolboy, if only for a moment. The lines of care seemed to have faded from his handsome face.

"Where have you been?" asked Manners. "We heard that you had gone abroad. You might have dropped us a line, you boulder!"

"Better not!" said Talbot. "Better for you to have forgotten all about me. I'm not the kind of fellow for a chap like you to remember."

"Are you looking for a thick ear?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No, thanks!" said Talbot, laughing.

"Then don't talk any more rot like that. Now, tell us what you've been doing."

"I cleared out of England," said Talbot slowly. "The Head helped me, like the brick he is. He believed in me. I—I couldn't take any of the money, you understand. I had plenty of money, but—but it wasn't mine. I handed it all over, and I was stony. I let the Head give me twenty quid for a start. I got the express that night to Newhaven and crossed to France. I thought I wouldn't be safe in France, so I made my way through France and got across the border into Spain. I would be safe from the police there, with the war going on. I had some luck after that. You know I'm pretty good at Spanish and French, and I got

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a job in a merchant's office in Barcelona. Next to nothing in the way of pay, but it was a beginning, and I could just live on it. I wanted to be in England, but that was impossible, of course, so I made up my mind to stick it out in Barcelona. I should be there still, only—

"The war?" said Manners.
 "Yes. I had to clear out when the trouble in Spain became too dangerous. I could have got a job." Talbot's lip curled for a moment. "I had an offer; all right so far as money went, but it wasn't the kind of job I could accept." He laughed a little harshly. "The Toff was beginning to get particular, you know, though even in my worst days I don't think I'd have taken on what Gonzales offered me. You see, as I am English, I could have been useful to them. Gonzales had wormed out that I had been in trouble in England, and he thought I was the kind of fellow he was looking for."

"What did he want you for?" asked Tom curiously.

"Spy work," said Talbot. "I refused. I wouldn't become involved in that terrible conflict, especially doing such underhanded work. Gonzales cut up rusty when I refused."

"What did you do?" asked Lowther.
 "I punched his head," said Talbot.

"I had to make my meaning clear."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then I cleared off. I got home somehow," Talbot shivered a little. "I won't tell you what I've seen in that country; it's enough to keep you awake at nights. I got back to England, and I've been back a good time now. I ought to have stayed in London, I suppose, but I couldn't resist coming to have a look at the old place. You fellows don't understand all that St. Jim's means to me. I had to come and see the place again. I tramped it—and here I am."

The juniors looked at him with friendly commiseration. In face, in manner, he was the old Talbot they knew so well; but he did not look much like the Talbot who had been one of the best-dressed fellows at St. Jim's. His clothes were shabby and worn, his boots ragged and dusty. It was very easy to see that he had been through many hardships and privations.

"And now—" said Tom, after a pause.

"Now I've got work with a farmer near Wayland for a few days," said Talbot quietly. "Hard work; but, as I said, I'm not afraid of that. I say, I'm jolly glad I've seen you fellows. It bucks me up."

"I wish you could come back to St. Jim's," said Tom wistfully.

Talbot compressed his lips.
 "I wish I could," he said. "But you forget, I'm wanted by the police. But if I could come, I shouldn't have the cheek. And the fellows—what would they think of the Toff as a school-mate, now they know?"

"I know we'd all welcome you."

"You're bricks, all of you," said Talbot. "If I'd had better chances when I was a kid, I should deserve this more now. But the past can't be helped. The only thing is to keep straight in the future, and I'm keeping straight now—straight as a die. You believe that?"

"Of course we do!" said Tom warmly. "We know it. Talbot, old man, you're in danger down here."

"Danger?" said Talbot.

"Have you ever heard of a chap named Fox, of Scotland Yard?"

"One of the keenest detectives in the



"Which way do I turn the handle to get hot water?"

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C.I.D.," said Talbot. "He was after Captain Crow—my father—for years, before the end came. Not a bad man; but I shouldn't like to meet him now."

"He's down here," said Tom.
 Talbot started.

"Looking for me?"
 "Yes. You've been seen, and it's been reported. He's come down to the school to inquire after you. He's in the school now."

"Then I'd better clear," said Talbot, with a sigh. "It's a bit hard when a fellow can't be left alone when he's proved that he means to run straight; but it's not easy to shake off the past. I've got to pay for that now—pay for it with interest. Fox is only doing his duty. But he won't nail me, if I can help it. I—What's the matter?"

Monty Lowther uttered a sudden, startled exclamation.
 "Here he is!"

Talbot set his teeth, as he started and glanced round.
 In the lane, coming from the direction of St. Jim's, was a figure in a grey coat and a bowler-hat. It was Mr. Fox. He caught sight of the group of juniors on the hillside at the same moment. A gleam came into his steely eyes, and he broke into a run towards them.

CHAPTER 5.

To Save a Pal!

TOM MERRY clenched his hands desperately.

The detective was almost upon them; the handcuffs were already clinking in his hands. There was no mistaking his determination. He had found his quarry, and Talbot was his prisoner.

The unhappy lad had reached the end of his tether at last.

Talbot did not attempt to run. Behind him was the steep hillside, before him was the active, muscular detective. He had no chance. His face paled a little, but there was no sign of fear in it. A bitter smile was on his lips, that was all. His fate was upon him, and he was prepared to face it.

"Talbot," Tom Merry almost choked—"Talbot, old man, run for it!"

"Run!" panted Manners.

"Useless," said Talbot quietly. "I've

got to go through with it. Here you are, Fox. You have me at last!"

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Fox quietly. "I've got my duty to do. It won't be so hard on you, Toff—not so hard as it would have been, I mean. You will get off lightly, considering what you have done. But I have orders to arrest you, and that's what I'm going to do!"

"You're not!" shouted Tom Merry, his eyes blazing. "Talbot, you ass, cut off, I tell you! We'll help you!"

Mr. Fox frowned grimly.
 "If you interfere, Master Merry, you will be breaking the law, and you will be taken into custody, too," he said. "Come on, Toff! If—"

He strode towards Talbot.
 Monty Lowther's foot came suddenly in the way, and the detective stumbled and fell on his knees, with a sharp exclamation. Tom Merry caught Talbot by the shoulder and dragged him away.

"Run for it!" he panted. "Are you mad? Cut, you duffer—cut!"

"But you—"

"Never mind us—cut!"

"I won't get you into trouble!"

"Hands off!" roared Mr. Fox. He struggled to his feet, but Manners and Lowther grasped him and bore him to earth again. "You young rascals! Hands off!"

"Cut, Talbot!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Take your chance, you idiot!"

Tom Merry excitedly thrust Talbot away. The outcast did not hesitate longer. The chums of St. Jim's had crossed the Rubicon now. They had laid hands on Mr. Fox, and they had to face the consequences. But liberty was dear. It was all that the unhappy lad had left.

"I'll go!" he muttered huskily. "I shall never be able to thank you enough for this, Tom Merry!"

With the speed of a deer, Talbot dashed down the hillside.

Mr. Fox uttered a yell of rage as he saw him go, and made a desperate effort to throw off Manners and Lowther. The detective was muscular, and he nearly succeeded. But Tom Merry threw himself upon him, and the man from Scotland Yard was crushed to earth again.

With the three juniors sprawling over him and clinging to him, Mr. Fox was helpless.

He struggled under the weight of the Terrible Three, while Talbot dashed away and disappeared into the wood.

Not until Talbot was out of sight, and there was no chance of the detective running him down again, did the Shell fellows release Mr. Fox.

Then their grasp relaxed and they rose.

Mr. Fox sat on the ground, utterly out of breath, panting wildly, his face red with rage.

The Terrible Three were breathing hard. Their faces were grave enough. Talbot was gone. They had saved him. But at what a price! What had they done? He was their old pal, and they had chipped in to save him. But that was not how the law would look at it. They had forcibly prevented a detective from arresting a law breaker for whose arrest a warrant had been issued; and the thought of what they had done and the probable consequences made them feel almost giddy. Yet they were not sorry!

Mr. Fox staggered to his feet. He stared round furiously for Talbot.

But the deep, dark woods had long

swallowed the fleeing Toff. Then he fixed his eyes upon the chums of St. Jim's.

"You know what you've done?" said Mr. Fox, breathing hard. "You know that you'll have to pay for it?"

"We know," said Tom Merry quietly. The thought of the scandal, the disgrace, made him feel almost sick.

Manners set his teeth hard. Lowther turned a little pale. They had acted upon the impulse of the moment to save their old pal. But what was to happen now? What would their people say?

Mr. Fox regarded them keenly, the anger dying out of his face.

"What did you do it for?" he asked gruffly.

"To save him," said Tom.

"To save a criminal—a cracksman?"

"He isn't that now. When he was at St. Jim's he was our pal. He risked his life to save a chum of ours. We—we couldn't leave him in the lurch." Tom Merry's voice faltered. "We know we've broken the law, Mr. Fox. You can do as you like. We shan't resist."

"You told me you knew nothing of him only an hour ago."

"We didn't then. We came out hoping to meet him, after what you told us, and—and we met him here. He had come back to have a look at the old school. That's all. Now, if you want to take us, we'll go!"

"You know what it means?"

"I—I suppose so."

"We've broken the law, and we've got to pay for it," said Manners nervously. "I suppose it's only right in a way. But if you knew what a splendid chap Talbot is you'd understand. But you've got your duty to do, I suppose, and you must do it."

Mr. Fox picked up the handcuffs, which had fallen into the grass in the struggle. Tom Merry's face went red and white.

"Not that," he muttered thickly. "We—we'll come quietly, Mr. Fox. You needn't rub it in like that."

"I didn't mean to," said Mr. Fox. He slipped the handcuffs into his pocket. "You are three young rascals!" he went on deliberately. "Three young fools, I should say, rather. You deserve to be made an example of, but—" Mr. Fox paused. "Perhaps I can understand things better than you think. Good-afternoon!"

He brushed his bowler hat, set it on his head again, and turned away.

The Terrible Three could scarcely believe their ears.

"Mr. Fox!" burst out Tom Merry. "You—you don't mean—"

"You—you're going to look over it," stammered Lowther.

The detective smiled.

"You young asses," he said. "I'll leave it to your own conscience. I shall get my prisoner, anyway, sooner or later. Only don't do anything of the sort again. I shan't be so patient next time."

"I—I say, you're a brick," stammered Tom Merry. "I—I hope we didn't hurt you, Mr. Fox."

"You did hurt me, as a matter of fact," grunted Mr. Fox. "But it's all in the day's work. Be more careful next time, that's all. Good-afternoon!"

And the detective walked away. He was smiling.

The Terrible Three looked at one another in silence. For the moment their relief was too deep for words.

"Well," said Tom Merry at last, with a deep breath, "we're well out of that scrape, you chaps. I think it's about the

worst we've ever been in. And—and that detective chap is a ripping good fellow!"

"One of the best!" said Lowther. "I was feeling pretty sick, I can tell you. Let's walk back to St. Jim's. An experience like that leaves rather an unpleasant taste in the mouth."

The Terrible Three walked back to the school in silence. They had saved Talbot, and they were glad of that. But—but for Mr. Fox's generosity, matters might have gone very badly with them in consequence. And their feelings were very kindly now towards the detective from Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER 6.

The Letter From Talbot!

"LETTER for you, Tom!"

Monty Lowther came into the study with a letter in his hand.

It was a couple of days after the meeting with Talbot, and the St. Jim's fellows had heard nothing of him since, and nothing of Mr. Fox. But in this case no news was good news, for if Talbot had been caught they would certainly have heard of it.

Lowther closed the study door, and tossed the letter on the table.

"I brought it up as soon as I spotted it in the rack," he explained. "Levison was nosing over the letters, and he had his eye on it."

"No harm in Levison seeing Tom's letter, is there?" asked Manners.

"That depends. I think I know the fist," said Lowther.

Tom Merry took up the letter quickly. It was addressed to him, in a handwriting he did not remember to have seen before. But as he scanned it, it occurred to him that the hand was disguised, and that there was something familiar about it after all.

"Talbot!" he murmured.

"So I suspected," said Lowther. "And the less Levison knows about it the better. You remember he was always up against old Talbot, and he would do him harm now if he had half a chance. Let's see what he says—if it's from Talbot."

Tom Merry opened the letter. It was from Talbot. Inside, the writing was not disguised. It was only in the name and address on the envelope that Talbot had taken the trouble, in order not to draw attention to the fact that Tom Merry was receiving a letter from a fellow who was "wanted" by the police.

"It's from Talbot," said Tom quietly. And the three juniors read it together.

"Dear Tom,—I want to thank you and the other chaps for the way you helped me the other day. I got clear away, thanks to you. I hope you did not have to suffer for it. I am very anxious about that. What you did was a jolly serious thing. If you are in trouble over it I shall give myself up to Mr. Fox, and get you clear that way. I can't let you suffer for my sake. You have done quite enough for me.

"I am in Abbotsford now. I have a job here. I think I am safe enough, but I must know whether you are in trouble on my account. Will you write to me—George Brown, at Slingsby's Farm, Abbotsford?—Always yours,
"R. TALBOT."

"Just like him!" said Tom Merry. "He was always a decent chap, and now he's thinking about us instead of about himself. If he's staying at

Abbotsford, we may be able to see him again, though I wish he were in a safer place. I believe the detective is still hanging about looking for him here. Still, it's a good distance to Abbotsford."

"We shall be over there on Saturday afternoon for the footer match," Manners remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; and we might see him then, perhaps. I want to see him again. Anyway, I'll write to him at once and tell him it's all serene with us, and relieve his mind. He's got a job on a farm under the name of George Brown, it seems. I—"

Tom Merry broke off abruptly as the study door opened. Levison looked in.

Tom hastily crumpled Talbot's letter in his hand, and turned a flushed face towards the cad of the Fourth.

"What do you want?" he said angrily. "Why don't you knock before you come in, Levison?"

Levison's eyes lingered upon the crumpled letter in the Shell fellow's hand.

"Sorry!" he remarked. "I just looked in to speak to you fellows—"

"Well, what is it?" growled Tom Merry.

He put his hand in his pocket with the letter in it. Levison smiled slightly.

"It's about the Abbotsford match to-morrow," he remarked. "I was wondering whether you'd care to play me in the team."

"No, I wouldn't!"

Levison laughed.

"Sure? You want a good half-back, you know, and I—"

"I won't beat about the bush with you," said Tom Merry abruptly. "You didn't come in here to ask me about the footer team. You know jolly well that I wouldn't play you at any price. You came in here to spy."

"On what?" asked Levison, with a smile.

Tom Merry did not answer that question. It occurred to him that he was, in fact, giving the matter away to Levison. Levison had noted the similarity to Talbot's hand in the address on the letter, and he had come there to make sure. And Tom Merry's angry words furnished him with proof, for if there had been nothing to conceal, Tom would not have suspected the Fourth Former of prying.

The Shell fellow bit his lip angrily. It was not the first time that he had realised that he was no match for Levison in a contest of cunning.

He pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said abruptly.

Levison shrugged his shoulders and quitted the study. He had discovered what he had come there to ascertain. There was no doubt left in his mind that the letter he had seen crumpled in Tom Merry's hand was from Talbot.

Lowther slammed the door after the cad of the Fourth.

"Hang his prying!" he growled. "Better destroy that letter, Tommy. The cad will get his eyes on it sooner or later."

"Right-ho! I'll answer it and then burn it," said Tom. And he sat down at once to reply to the letter.

It did not take long.

"Dear Talbot,—We are all right. Mr. Fox acted like a brick. No need to worry about us. We're playing Abbotsford to-morrow afternoon, and the public are admitted to the ground. If you can come along we might see you, if you think it safe."

And the Terrible Three all signed the letter.

Tom Merry promptly burnt Talbot's letter, thus satisfying himself that it was safe from Levison's prying eyes. Then he walked down to the school letter-box with his reply to it, and slipped it into the box. He passed Levison in the quadrangle, and the eyes of the Fourth Former followed him curiously. Tom Merry took no notice of him. He returned to the School House.

"That's done!" he announced, as he came back into the study. "The collection goes at six, and Talbot may get the letter to-night—anyway, first thing in the morning. Then he will know that it's all right. Now for tea!"

And the chums of the Shell sat down to tea, discussing the forthcoming match with Abbotsford over that cheery meal, not troubling to give a thought to Levison.

They little guessed how Levison was occupied at that moment.

CHAPTER 7.

Levison's Trick!

BLAGG, the postman, came along from the direction of Rylcombe. Outside the walls of St. Jim's a junior was lounging idly. It was Levison.

He was leaning against the school wall close by the letter-box. He smiled to himself in his catlike way as he discerned the postman coming up the lane. Mellish of the Fourth came out of the school gates and looked round.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed. Levison nodded.

"Aren't you coming in to tea?" asked Mellish, looking at his studymate in surprise.

"Presently."
"What are you hanging about here for?" asked Mellish.

"I want to see the postman."
"It isn't a delivery now; it's a collection," said Mellish, puzzled.

"I know that."
"Then what the dickens—"
"Shurrup! Here comes Blagg!"

Blagg, the postman, touched his cap as he came up to the letter-box. The box was placed in the thickness of the school wall. There was a slit for inserting letters on the inside of the wall as well as the outside. The one inside was to save juniors going out after locking-up. Blagg stopped before the letter-box to make his collection.

"Good-evening, Blagg!" said Levison affably. "I've been waiting for you. There's a letter in the box I want to see—"

Blagg shook his head stolidly.

"Can't touch any letters wot is once put in the box, Master Levison!"

"Oh, yes, I know! But I've forgotten whether I put a stamp on my letter," Levison explained. "That's all I want to know. I want to look over the letters and see if they're all stamped. No harm in that, Blagg."

"Not at all, Master Levison."
"Thanks! I'll wait while you do it."

Mellish looked at his chum in surprise. He knew Levison better than Blagg did, and he was quite certain that his studymate was not speaking the truth. But why Levison should wish to look over the letters in the box was a mystery to Mellish. Blagg was an unsuspicious old fellow, but he knew his duty, and he certainly would not have allowed Levison or anybody else to meddle with the letters once posted.

Blagg opened the box and collected the letters. He did not see any reason why he should not oblige Levison by looking over them to see whether they were all stamped.

Levison made no attempt to touch the letters. He simply looked over the postman's shoulder while he examined them. A sudden gleam came into his eyes.

What he was looking for was not an unstamped letter, as a matter of fact, but a letter addressed in Tom Merry's handwriting.

And he had spotted it. Blagg turned over among the rest an envelope with Tom Merry's well-known writing on it, which Levison, of course, recognised at once. The address upon it was: "George Brown, Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford."

That was enough for Levison. That Tom Merry was not acquainted with anybody named George Brown at Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford, he was quite assured.

Tom Merry had posted only one letter—there was only one addressed in his hand. This, then, was the letter he had posted immediately after receiving the letter which Levison suspected had come from Talbot.

The inference was clear. Tom Merry was writing to Talbot under the name of George Brown at Slingsby's Farm.

"Don't seem to be no letters 'ere without a stamp, Master Levison," said Blagg.

"All serene!" said Levison, with a nod. "I suppose I stamped it all right, after all. Much obliged, Blagg!"

"Don't mention it, Master Levison!" And Blagg went his way. Levison grinned.

"What the dickens are you up to?" asked the mystified Mellish. "You jolly well knew you hadn't put a letter in there without a stamp on, you ass!"

"Quite so!"

"Then what did you want to see the letters for?"

"I wanted to see what name and address Tom Merry was writing to," grinned Levison; "and I've seen it now. You know that Talbot is hiding himself somewhere in this neighbourhood?"

"I know that detective chap said so," replied Mellish.

"Fox is staying in Rylcombe to look for him," said Levison.

"How do you know?"

"He told me. I'm going to help him. It's a chap's duty to help the police to arrest a notorious criminal!" said Levison virtuously.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Mellish. "Don't give me that kind of thing! I know you've got your knife into Talbot, and you'd better not let the other fellows know you're trying to harm him. It won't be nice for you if you do."

"I don't intend to let them know," said Levison coolly. "I knew that Talbot would write to Tom Merry sooner or later, and I've been keeping my eyes on the letters. I spotted a letter this afternoon—in a disguised fist, I know; but I thought I knew it, all the same. I meant to know where Tom Merry's answer was addressed to, and now I know."

"Talbot?" asked Mellish, with a whistle.

"George Brown, at Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford," said Levison.

"Then you're on the wrong track, after all."

"Fathead!" said Levison. "You don't think Talbot would be living there under his own name, do you?"

"Oh!"

"Of course, he's taken another name. Easy enough for him to do so: he's used to it. I don't suppose Talbot is his real name, for that matter. Probably he doesn't know what his real name is, if he's got one!" said Levison, with a sneer. "Anyway, I'm sure that he's staying at Slingsby's Farm now, under the name of George Brown."

"My hat!" said Mellish. "If that man Fox knew—"

"He's going to know! I'm going down to Rylcombe now!"

Mellish looked a bit uneasy.

"I say, it's a bit rough on the poor brute to set the police after him like that!" he muttered. "And when the fellows find out about it—"

"I've got my duty to do!" said Levison loftily. "Coming with me?"

"No fear!" said Mellish promptly.

"I'm not going to be mixed up in it!"

"Go and eat coke, then!" growled Levison.

He turned in the direction of the village, and Mellish promptly went in at the school gates again. Levison grinned as he went down the road. He

(Continued on next page)

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was sure of his ground now, and he felt that he held the fate of his old enemy in the hollow of his hand. And he would have no mercy. Before a couple of hours had passed, Talbot, once of St. Jim's, would be the detective's prisoner, with handcuffs on his wrists! And Levison grinned with delight at the anticipation.

But Levison's little scheme was not destined to be carried out quite so easily. He had not covered a dozen yards from the gates when a sharp voice called to him.

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was coming up the road from Rylcombe.

"Levison!"

The Fourth Former stopped.

"Yes, Kildare?"

"Where are you going?" asked the Sixth Former, frowning. "It's just on locking-up. Have you a pass out of gates?"

"N-no!"

"Then get inside—and sharp!"

"I—I say, Kildare, I—I want particularly to go down to Rylcombe," stammered Levison, dismayed by this unexpected check. "You can give me a pass. Will you?"

Kildare eyed him grimly. He had a very unfavourable opinion of the cad of the Fourth.

"And what do you want in Rylcombe?" he demanded.

"I—I want to go to the outfitter's."

"Indeed! What are you going to get at the outfitter's?"

"My—my new footer boots."

"Your new footer boots can wait till to-morrow," said Kildare dryly. "No need for a special pass out to fetch a pair of footer boots. Get in!"

Levison gritted his teeth. He had so extensive a reputation for untruthfulness, that it was natural that the prefect should not take his word. Indeed, it was a lame enough excuse, for Levison was known not to be a footballer. But it was useless to argue with Kildare, and Levison went back sullenly into the school.

A few minutes later, Taggles locked the gates.

Levison went savagely into the School House. He was baffled for the time. It was too late to send Mr. Fox a letter to reach him even on the following morning, as the last collection had been made at the school letter-box. But unless Levison took the risk of breaking bounds after dark to visit Mr. Fox, there was no other way of conveying his valuable information to him.

Mellish looked at his chum as the latter came sullenly into the study, and grinned.

"You haven't gone, after all?"

"That rotter Kildare sent me back."

"Never mind—leave the thing alone," said Mellish. "Very likely you're after a mare's-nest all the time, you know."

Levison grunted and sat down at the table to write.

"After all, he'll get this by midday to-morrow," he said. "The rotter will still be at Slingsby's Farm, and the detective will catch him there. It's the best I can do."

"Better leave it alone!" advised Mellish.

"Oh, rats!"

In ten minutes Levison's letter to Mr. Fox was written and dropped into the school letter-box, to wait there for the morning collection.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three were keeping Talbot's secret. Not even to the chums of Study No. 6 did they mention Talbot's name and address. For his safety's sake, the fewer in the secret,

the better. Little did they dream that Levison knew already as much as they knew, and that the information, carefully written out, was lying in the letter-box, to be delivered to Mr. Fox on the morrow.

CHAPTER 8.

The Match at Abbotsford!

"HERE'S the motah-coach, deah boys!"

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry.

The St. Jim's junior eleven were all ready to start for Abbotsford.

It was a keen afternoon. Tom Merry & Co., muffled in coats and scarves, took their places in the coach, and started.

They were in great spirits. Tom Merry had a thoughtful shade on his brow. He was thinking of Talbot, and wondering whether he would see anything that day of his old friend; for, in spite of all, Tom still regarded Talbot as a friend. Several fellows beside the footer eleven had crowded into the coach, and a good many juniors were riding over on their bikes to see the match.

Among them was Levison, and the footballers noticed his presence there with surprise.

Levison was not a footballer, and he somewhat ostentatiously took no interest whatever in the House and school matches. Why he should be following the junior eleven to Abbotsford was not easily to be understood.

"Where are you off to, Levison?" Figgins of the New House called out to him, as he pedalled away behind the motor-coach.

"Abbotsford!" replied Levison.

"What for?"

"To see the match, of course!"

"And what the dickens do you want to see the match for?" asked Figgins, in surprise. "Have you been making bets on it?"

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. "Go and eat coke!"

Levison soon dropped behind, and the juniors soon forgot all about him. Surprised as they were by his unaccounted interest in the footer match, they did not think of suspecting that he had any other object in visiting Abbotsford that afternoon.

By that time, as Levison knew, his letter was already in Mr. Fox's hands. The detective was aware that Talbot, under the name of George Brown, was to be found at Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford.

Levison wanted to be "in at the death."

He surmised that it was quite possible that Talbot would come to the Abbotsford ground if he could, to see the St. Jim's match. If he turned up there, Levison intended to keep his eyes open for him, and take measures accordingly. The cad of the Fourth was bitterly determined that his old enemy should not elude the net that was spread for him.

The coach arrived at Abbotsford School in good time. There were a good many people on the footer ground already—Abbotsford fellows and townspeople who had strolled in to see the game. Tom Merry looked over the crowd, but he did not see Talbot.

Yorke, the Abbotsford junior skipper, greeted Tom Merry & Co. warmly. In the last match with St. Jim's juniors, Abbotsford had been successful, Tom Merry and several other members of the team being away at the time. The St. Jim's eleven meant to avenge that defeat, now that they were in full force.

"We have got to give them the kybosh, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked impressively, in the dressing-room. "They licked us last time—or, watah, they licked you fellows; but now I am here, it will be all wight, I twust."

Kangaroo of the Shell gave an impressive snort.

"Weally, Kangy—" began Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the Cornstalk.

But Monty Lowther interrupted.

"Gussy would be more useful if his placz in the team was changed," the humorist of the Shell remarked thoughtfully.

"Yaas, I have wemarked several times to Tom Mewwy that I should be more useful as centah-forward than as outside-left," said Arthur Augustus. "The duffah does not seem to see it, howevah."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't see it now, Gussy."

"Still, I suggest a change," said Lowther solemnly. "It isn't too late, Tommy, and it may make all the difference in the game."

"What are you driving at, ass?" asked Tom Merry politely.

"You see, Gussy is outside-left—"

"Yes."

"Well, I suggest he should be left outside, instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And then we shall really be a much stronger team," explained Lowther.

"You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus witheringly. "I wegard you as a howlin' duffah, Lowthah. Pway keep your wotten puns for the 'Weekly,' deah boy!"

"Well, I was only suggesting a change for the good of the team—"

"Oh wats!"

And Arthur Augustus walked out with his aristocratic nose high in the air, followed by the rest of the team, chuckling.

Tom Merry won the toss, and Abbotsford kicked off. St. Jim's followed up the kick-off with a hot attack upon the Abbotsford goal, the whole forward line—Kerr, Figgins, Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy—combining in fine style. The ball from a shot by Tom Merry struck a goalpost and glanced again into the field of play.

There was a sharp struggle before the goal, and the Abbotsford backs strove hard to clear, but the leather went in again. The goalkeeper punched it out, and Figgins' head met the ball and drove it in again before the goalie could recover himself.

There was a shout as the leather landed in the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Well done, St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah!"

It was first blood for Tom Merry & Co. The crowd round the ropes cheered loudly.

"Bravo, Figgins!"

Tom Merry looked round quickly; he thought he knew the voice that shouted "Bravo, Figgins!" Close up to the ropes stood a lad in shabby clothes and gaiters, with a sunburnt face and a cap pulled down over his forehead. He looked like an ordinary farmer's lad, but Tom Merry knew the handsome face at once. It was Talbot. He had come to see the match after all.

As the footballers walked back to the centre of the field, Tom Merry waved his hand to him.

"Who's that, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Talbot!" whispered Tom Merry. "Keep it dark!"

"Bai Jove!"
The players lined up again. Talbot was watching the match with keen interest, longing to be in the ranks of the St. Jim's juniors. Had matters gone well with him—had he been able to remain at the old school—he would have been in the junior eleven, and would have been lining up with the rest that sunny afternoon. And his heart was with his old comrades yet.

He followed the game keenly, cheering every success of the St. Jim's players, and quite forgetting, in his keenness, that the shadow of danger was over him. Not that he had much fear of being recognised. The change in his appearance was great, and it needed a second look to know him as Talbot, once of the Shell at St. Jim's.

But there were keen eyes there, and not all friendly ones. Levison was in the crowd, and he was scanning all the onlookers in turn, in the hope of discovering his old enemy. He knew the keen interest Talbot took in the sports of the school; remembered how keen the outcast had been upon cricket and football when he was at St. Jim's.

If Talbot had come to see the match, he would have unconsciously eluded Mr. Fox, who probably at that very moment was seeking for him at Slingsby's Farm. And Levison was sure that he would come there if he could. And if he came, Levison intended to spot him and take his own measures. And, within a quarter of an hour of the start, Levison's keen and stealthy eyes were upon the lad in shabby clothes and gaiters, who was taking so keen an interest in the game.

Levison's eyes glittered as he saw the handsome profile, and he worked his

way nearer to get a closer view of the face.

Talbot, his eyes on the game, did not notice him—did not think of him or any other enemy. Levison came near enough almost to touch him, and Talbot did not observe him.

Satisfied that he had found his quarry, Levison slipped quietly away through the crowd. He did not intend to put Talbot on his guard. The outcast could remain there, in a fool's paradise till Levison had had time to play his cunning game, and then the blow would fall.

The cad of the Fourth wheeled out his bicycle, mounted it, and rode away at a scorching speed.

In ten minutes he jumped off his machine at the gate of Slingsby's Farm. If the detective was there— His eyes gleamed as he caught sight of a figure coming towards the gate from the direction of the farmhouse.

"Mr. Fox!" he called out. The detective hurried towards him.

"You had my letter?"
"Yes," said Mr. Fox dryly.

Levison was rendering him a service, and yet he found it very difficult to infuse anything like cordiality into his manner. It was impossible to like Levison, and Mr. Fox had a very shrewd suspicion that the junior was seeking to serve only his personal ends.

"You haven't found him?"
The detective looked sharply at Levison.

"I came over here at once," he said. "I am afraid your information is not very well-founded, Master Levison. There is certainly a boy employed here named George Brown. He is absent at present, Mr. Slingsby having given him the afternoon off. But Mr. Slingsby gives him an excellent character."

Levison sneered.
"Talbot always had a way of making friends," he said. "He can twist anybody round his finger he likes."
"Not yourself, apparently," said Mr. Fox.

"I was too cute for him," said Levison loftily. "He couldn't take me in as he did the others. Why, some of them would stick to him now, though it was proved that he was a thief, and a regular cracksman. But I've come here to tell you where you can find him. I've just seen him."

"Where?"
"He's watching the St. Jim's eleven play at Abbotsford School."

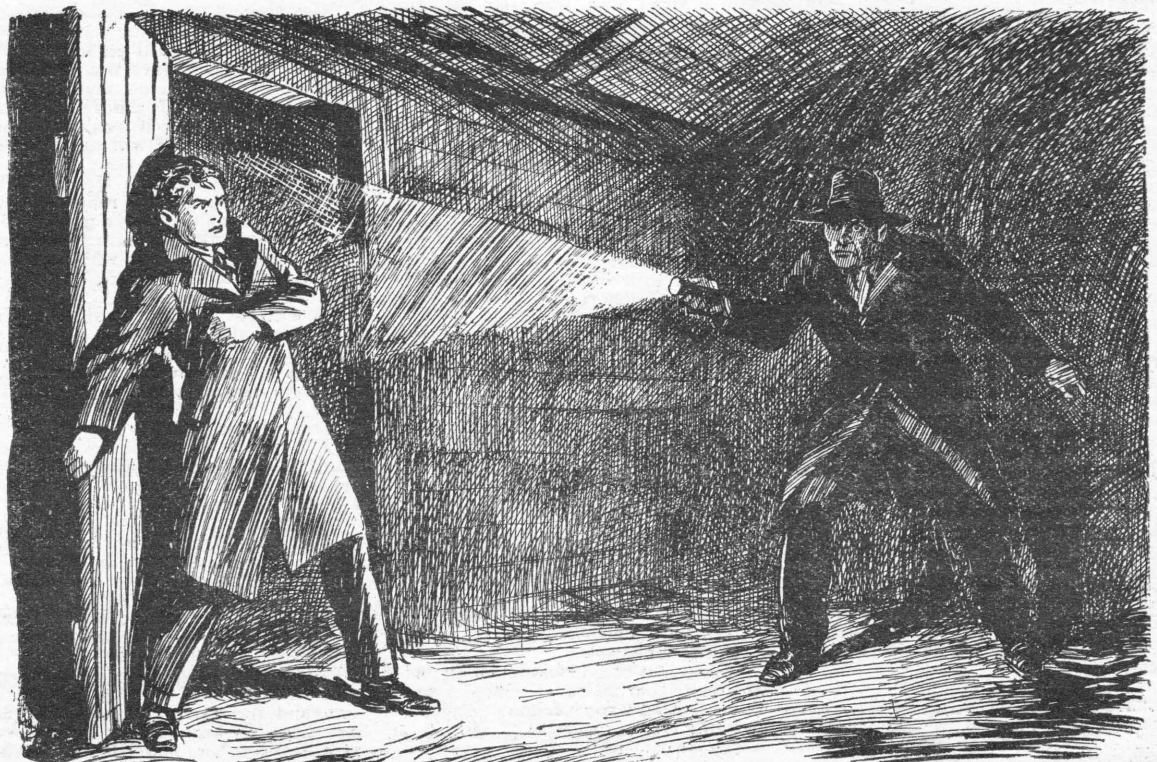
"You are sure?"
"I tell you I've seen him," said Levison. "I stood as close to him as I am standing to you now. I could have touched him."

"Good!" said Mr. Fox. "Show me the way there, and I'll soon put an end to the tricks of our young gentleman."

"I'll take you there," said Levison, walking beside the detective, and wheeling his bicycle. "But I won't come in with you. I don't want the fellows to know that I put you on Talbot's track. They would rag me bald-headed if they knew. A lot of them still stand by Talbot, thief as he is. Tom Merry and the rest would make my life not worth living if they knew I'd given him away. But you'll find him quite easily. He's dressed in old clothes and gaiters, and wearing a cap. He's very close up to the ropes, watching the game."

"Very good!"
At the gates of Abbotsford they parted company. Levison cycled slowly away, a triumphant grin on his face.

Mr. Fox strode away towards the football ground. Levison felt that he



A sudden flash of light came from the gloom, and the beam of a torch fell full upon Talbot's face. "Caramba!" exclaimed a voice with a Spanish accent. "So it is you!" Well the Toff knew the voice, knew the small swarthy-faced man behind the torch. "Gonzales!" he muttered.

had reason to be satisfied. The Toff was fairly run down at last, and it was only a matter of minutes before the detective's hand would drop upon his shoulder.

And Levison dismounted from his bike at a short distance, and waited for the pleasure of seeing the Toff led away with the handcuffs on his wrists.

CHAPTER 9.

During the Interval!

GOAL! Well done, Abbotsford!"

Pheep!

The whistle went for the close of the first half.

Almost on the stroke of half-time, Yorke, of Abbotsford, had scored a goal, and the teams were level pegging—one goal each.

It had been a gruelling half, and the players on both sides were breathing hard. Tom Merry sauntered to the edge of the field of play to exchange a word or two with Talbot. The latter nodded to him with a smile.

"I say, are you safe here, Talbot?" Tom Merry asked, in a low voice.

"I think so. Why not?"

"There are a good many St. Jim's fellows in the crowd, and they might recognise you."

"They wouldn't give me away if they did."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"There are some who would, old chap—Levison, for instance, or Mellish or Crooke."

Talbot smiled.

"But those slackers won't be here," he remarked. "I remember they never used to turn up for the matches when I was at St. Jim's. They wouldn't be likely to come over here to see a footer match."

"Levison has come over, though."

"Levison! What for?"

"To see the match," said Tom.

Talbot looked a little uneasy.

"I remember Levison pretty well," he remarked. "He hasn't come over here to see the match, I know that. And the match isn't big enough for him to have any bets on it, so that can't be his reason. I wonder what he is doing here? He knows, of course, about the detective having come down here to look for me?"

"Yes. They all know that."

Talbot gave a sharp look round.

"The rotter may suspect that I'm here," he said. "I dare say he can guess that I would like to see a St. Jim's match. Perhaps I shouldn't have come here. But where is he? I don't see him. Great Scott—" He broke off suddenly.

Tom Merry followed his glance, and for a moment his heart seemed to stand still.

In the distance, but easily recognisable, was the figure of Mr. Fox, of Scotland Yard, advancing towards the football ground. A movement of the crowd hid him from sight the next moment, but both Tom Merry and Talbot had seen him.

Their eyes met in a startled glance.

"That's Fox, the detective," Talbot muttered.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"He's here for you, Talbot. Levison must have seen you and warned him. He couldn't possibly have come here, otherwise."

"The cad!"

"Talbot, there's time yet! Run for it!"

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"He's between me and the gates," said Talbot, with a bitter smile. "No good running; and I won't make a scene here, and disgrace you before the Abbotsford fellows. It's all right, Tom. I'll go with him quietly."

"You shan't!" Tom Merry panted. "We've saved you once. We'll do it again! Come with me—quick!"

"But—" "Come—quick!"

Tom Merry grasped Talbot's arm, and hurried him into the St. Jim's dressing-room. It was done almost in a few seconds, while the crowd still hid Mr. Fox from sight.

"He hasn't seen you yet!" panted Tom.

"But I can't hide here," said Talbot quietly. "Better let me alone, old chap. I'm bound to be found."

Tom Merry pressed his hand to his forehead. He tried to think it out. Outside, in the crowd, the detective was scanning the faces for Talbot. Sooner or later, if he did not find him, he would look into the dressing-rooms. How was Talbot to be saved? Flight was impossible. If Levison had betrayed him, he would have described him to the detective. The moment he showed himself outside the dressing-room he was lost.

"What's the row, Tom?" asked Lowther, following his captain in with Manners. He had seen Tom Merry rush the lad in gaiters into the pavilion, and he wondered what it meant. He gave a jump as he recognised the junior. "Talbot!"

"Shut the door!" said Tom hurriedly.

"It's close on time for the whistle," said Manners.

"Shut the door—quick!"

Manners obeyed.

"Fox is out there looking for Talbot!" breathed Tom Merry. "What's to be done? Can you fellows think of anything?"

"By Jove!"

"Talbot's got to be saved somehow. He can't run for it. What's to be done?" said Tom Merry, almost in despair.

The door opened, and Blake and

D'Arcy came in. Kerr followed them. The Scots junior was sucking a lemon.

"Nearly time," he remarked. "What the—Hallo, Talbot!"

"How do you do, deah boy?"

"Shut the door, for goodness' sake!" groaned Tom Merry. "Fox is outside, looking for him. What's to be done?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"He's not going to have him!" growled Blake. "We'll sling him out if he comes in here, confound him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Talbot smiled slightly.

"You can't do that," he said quietly. "Better leave me alone, you fellows. I've got to stand it, and I don't want to disgrace you."

"Wats!"

"Hold on!" said Kerr quietly.

"There's a way, I think."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry. He had great faith in the sagacity of the Scots junior. "Think of a way out of this fix, Kerr, old man, and you can call the New House Cock House of St. Jim's as long as you like."

"Talbot can't bunk," said Kerr hurriedly, "and he can't stay here. The detective will look in here for him. He knows already that we back up Talbot—some of us, at any rate. But there's a way. Go and see Yorke!"

"Yorke?"

"Yes. Tell him one of your men wants to stand out, and ask permission to play another man in his place."

"But—but what—" began Tom Merry dazedly.

"Don't you see? I'll change clothes with Talbot—footer rig—and he can go on in my place," said Kerr hurriedly. "The detective won't think of looking for him in the footer team. It's about the only place he won't look!"

"My hat!"

"Oh, you—you giddy genius!" gasped Lowther.

"Get your things off, Talbot—quick!" panted Kerr. "Shove them into a locker out of sight. I'll get into my own clothes. You can have my jersey and shorts—see? Get some mud on your face, too. Some of the fellows have muddy chivvies, and it won't be noticeable specially, and it will disguise you. Quick!"

Tom Merry clapped Kerr on the shoulder, with a gasp of relief.

"Kerr, old man, you're a genius! It's a chance—a good chance. Buck up, Talbot, and get changed, while I go and speak to Yorke."

Talbot hesitated.

"It will get you into trouble!"

"Hang that!"

"I can't plant this on you."

"Shut up, you ass, and get changed!" said Tom Merry, almost fiercely. "Besides, it won't get us into trouble. It won't be found out."

"I'll whisper a word to the rest of the team," said Blake. "Every fellow in the team will stand by you, Talbot, like a giddy Trojan!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I say, you are bricks, you fellows," said Talbot, with a break in his voice. "Blessed if I know how I deserve this!"

"Buck up!" breathed Kerr. "Not a second to lose!"

"Right—ho!"

Talbot threw himself into the scheme with all his heart. Liberty was dear to him, and the daring venture, too, was just after his own heart. He stripped off his clothes, and donned Kerr's footer rig, the Scots junior changing back into his Etons. Mud scraped from Kerr's footer boots was daubed on Talbot's face—only a few touches; but Talbot, who had been an adept in the art of

make-up in the old days, knew how to make these few touches effective.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry hurried out in search of Yorke. To confide the matter to Yorke was, of course, impossible. But the Abbotsford skipper was a good fellow and a sportsman, and Tom had no doubt that he would agree to the rather unusual arrangement.

He was not disappointed. As soon as Yorke heard that Kerr wanted to stand out of the second half, he agreed at once for another fellow to take his place. As he remarked cheerfully, he intended to beat St. Jim's, and he wanted to beat eleven, not ten of them!

Tom Merry thanked him with a warmth which made Yorke conclude that the St. Jim's skipper already regarded a licking as highly probable. He little guessed the thoughts that were really in the Shell fellow's mind.

Blake had "whispered a word" to the other footballers of St. Jim's. Startled as they were, the whole team were all ready to play up loyally. Every fellow in the team had been on good terms

with Talbot when he was at St. Jim's, and remembered him with kindness. And they were all willing to do what they could to help him.

Tom Merry hurried back to the dressing-room. He had caught sight of the detective again. Mr. Fox was strolling among the crowd round the ropes, quietly but very keenly scanning all onlookers. Tom Merry knew what he was seeking. But it was doubtful now if Mr. Fox would find what he sought.

"Time!" said Tom, as he came in breathlessly. "The sooner we're playing the better now. Ready, Talbot?"

"Quite."
Very handsome and fit Talbot looked in footer rig. And the change in his appearance was very effective. The juniors were grinning with glee at the trick that was to be played on the gentleman from Scotland Yard. It was hardly likely that Mr. Fox, keen as he was, would think of looking among the eleven players from St. Jim's for the outcast.

Talbot was safe, at least, until the end

of the match—at all events, they fervently hoped so.

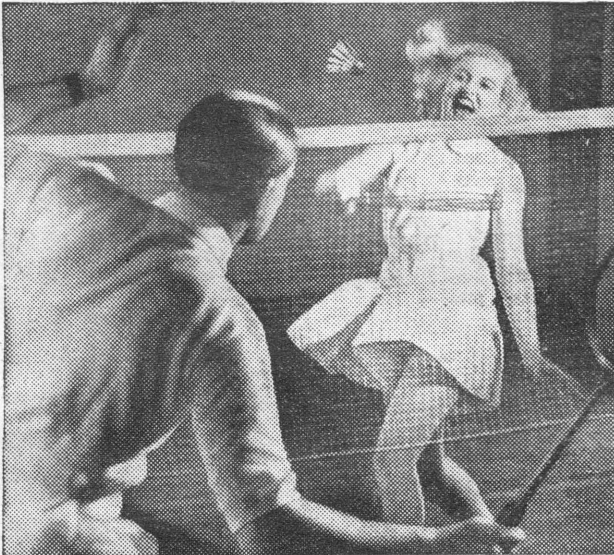
"Come on, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

In the midst of the St. Jim's footballers, Talbot left the dressing-room. It was more than time for the players to line up for the second half. They lined up, the whistle went, and the second half of the match commenced. And Kerr, having generously sacrificed his share in the match for the sake of an old pal, sauntered out of the pavilion, and passed the word among the St. Jim's fellows in the crowd.

For it was highly necessary that the St. Jim's fellows should not make audible remarks upon the change in the team. Mr. Fox had very sharp ears. Levison was not to be seen, and all the other St. Jim's fellows present belonged to Tom Merry's "set," and were quite ready to back him up in the scheme to save Talbot.

And having passed the word, Kerr proceeded to keep his eyes very wide
(Continued on next page)

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open. in case Levison should return; for Levison was very likely to spot the "wheez," and if he spotted it, he would seek to betray it at once.

And in that case, Kerr was prepared to deal with him promptly and effectively.

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"Go it, Abbotsford!"

"On the ball!"

The second half was in full swing, and the play was fast and furious.

CHAPTER 10.

No Exit!

MR. FOX wore a baffled expression.

Careless of the match that was going on, unmoved even by the shouts of "Goal!" the detective had made a round of the footer ground.

Not a single person in the crowd had escaped his hawk-like eyes.

If there had been a lad who looked like a farm-hand present, the gentleman from Scotland Yard would certainly have spotted him at once.

And if Talbot had been in the crowd in any other guise, Mr. Fox would have known him equally well—having a photograph of the Toff as a guide.

But Talbot was not there.

Mr. Fox was puzzled and angry. He had set his heart upon effecting that capture, which he had been especially dispatched from headquarters to effect. The Terrible Three had baffled him once, and now it seemed that he was to be baffled again. If Talbot had been there, where was he now? There was only one way out, and Mr. Fox had had an eye upon that all the time.

A mere onlooker, a farmer's boy, and a stranger to Abbotsford, could scarcely have gone into the school buildings. It was impossible to suppose that any Abbotsford fellow was hiding him. Then where was he?

Had the informer been mistaken? Or—Mr. Fox coloured with anger at the thought—had Levison been pulling his leg? Was the anxiety of that junior to serve him simply a pretence, and was he playing a practical joke at the detective's expense?

It was possible; but, upon the whole, it was not likely. Mr. Fox was a good judge of character, and he had read in Levison's face his bitter animosity against the Toff. If Levison had given him false information, he must have been mistaken—it was not deliberately done. And how could he have been mistaken, when he knew Talbot so well? It was scarcely possible.

No. Talbot had been there. He might have gone before the detective arrived; yet, if he had come to see the football match, that was not probable. Why should he leave after the first half, instead of seeing the match through?

Mr. Fox, with a determined frown, walked towards the pavilion. He remembered how the Terrible Three had stood by Talbot on a previous occasion. It was not possible that any of the Abbotsford fellows were hiding a fugitive in the school buildings, but it was quite possible that he had found refuge in the St. Jim's dressing-room. And Mr. Fox meant to know.

Kerr and Bernard Glyn, and Clifton Dane and Digby were standing in a group outside the pavilion, watching the game. They looked at Mr. Fox as he came up.

"I think I have seen you young gentlemen before," Mr. Fox remarked, scanning them sharply.

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"Yes; we were in the tea-party when you came to see Tom Merry," said Kerr affably.

"You remember what I came for?" the detective asked.

"Something about a chap you were looking for, wasn't it?" remarked Digby.

"Yes. I am still looking for him."

"Not turned up yet?" asked Glyn.

"Not yet. But I have reason to believe that he is here!" Mr. Fox said emphatically.

"Here? By Jove!"

"And I wish to look in your dressing-room!" said Mr. Fox sourly. "Is there any objection?"

"Not at all," said Kerr, with an air of wonder. "Look where you like, Mr. Fox. You are quite welcome."

"Certainly, Mr. Fox!"

"Very well, I will do so," said Mr. Fox, and he went into the pavilion.

The juniors smiled to one another, and resumed watching the game. Mr. Fox was welcome to search the pavilion from end to end, if he liked, so far as they were concerned.

The detective came out in a few minutes. A tussle was going on before the St. Jim's goal, and a player was down on the ground. He rose, smothered with mud, and quite unrecognisable. Kerr chuckled softly as he noted it. He knew that that muddy player was Talbot.

The detective walked away without speaking to the juniors again. He had looked through the dressing-rooms without finding Talbot.

He was puzzled and angry.

If he had known that Kerr had been in the St. Jim's eleven for the first half of the match, he would have suspected something; but he did not know that.

As it was, he never even thought of looking at the twenty-two players in the field. They were outside the scope of his investigations.

With a frowning brow, and feeling savage and disappointed, Mr. Fox walked away to the school gates. He had failed again. Either Levison had misinformed him, or the boy had gone before his arrival on the scene. In that case, he had doubtless returned to Slingsby's Farm, and Mr. Fox would seek him there once more—unless he had got wind of the detective's proximity, as was possible.

Well Mr. Fox knew the astuteness of the boy crackman.

He strode away angrily from the school gates. Levison was waiting a little distance down the road, his machine leaning against a wall. He came hurriedly towards the detective, his face blankly disappointed.

"Where is he?" he asked. "You've got him, surely?"

Mr. Fox halted and surveyed Levison grimly.

"I have not got him!" he snapped.

"But—but why not?" asked Levison in bewilderment. "You haven't let him go?"

"I have not seen him."

"But he is there."

"He is not there!"

Levison's eyes glittered with rage. Was he to be disappointed after all, when he had laid his plans so carefully?

"He is there, I tell you!" he almost yelled. "I left him there, and he wouldn't have gone away. He was neck-deep in the match—watching it as if he'd never seen a footer match before. Why should he go away? I tell you, he's there! Perhaps he saw you coming, and dodged out of sight somewhere."

"I have searched for him."

"Those rotters are hiding him, perhaps," said Levison, gritting his teeth.

"I have looked in their dressing-room," said Mr. Fox. "I suppose they could not hide him in the school—a school they don't belong to? You must



"Caught!" came a sharp exclamation, as a torch shone on Talbot. Scotland Yard was on his shoulder,

have been mistaken in thinking you saw him there."

"I wasn't mistaken! Do you think I don't know him?" hissed Levison. "They've diddled you somehow! It's Tom Merry at the bottom of it, I suppose. You let them see you, and they've worked it somehow."

"I don't want any of your impertinence, my lad!" said Mr. Fox sharply. "Good-afternoon!"

"I—I say, you're not going away and leaving him free?" asked Levison in dismay. "I'll swear he's still there!"

"Nonsense!"

"I know he is!" growled Levison. "They've diddled you somehow. Look here, I'll go in and look for him if you'll wait here. Don't clear off and leave him to escape. I know he's there. They've hidden him somewhere, and kept him out of sight. Wait here for a few minutes, anyway, while I have a look round."

The detective hesitated. He was very anxious to effect his capture, and very unwilling to admit defeat. He nodded finally.

"I'll wait here ten minutes," he said. "Right-ho! I'll bring you word."

And Levison ran off towards the school, leaving Mr. Fox in a very dissatisfied frame of mind.

In two minutes Levison was on the football ground, scanning the crowd. It did not need more than a minute or two for him to ascertain that the lad in gaiters had indeed vanished. Levison hurried towards the pavilion. Levison found Dane, Glyn, and Digby outside the door. Kerr, who had seen him in the distance, had slipped into the building. They glanced at him carelessly.

"Hallo! What do you want?" asked Digby.

Levison scowled. He did not care to



Talbot. The Toff turned to run, but the hand of Mr. Fox of closing there in a grip of iron.

explain what he wanted. If possible, he wished to keep his share in the betrayal of Talbot a secret, though he was willing to risk even a ragging rather than allow his old enemy to escape. He hurried into the building, and the three juniors followed him.

They knew that Levison would guess the truth as soon as he discovered that Kerr was no longer in the team, while St. Jim's were still playing a full eleven. And as soon as Levison made that discovery, the chums of St. Jim's were fully prepared to deal with him.

Levison ran into the dressing-room. He had a very strong suspicion that he would find Talbot hidden there in spite of Mr. Fox's failure to find him. There was certainly a junior in the dressing-room, and Levison gave a cry as he saw him.

"Talbot! I've found you, you villain!"

"Hallo!"

Levison staggered back almost stupefied. It was not Talbot.

"Kerr!" he gasped.

Kerr nodded with a cheerful smile.

"Yes. Anything wanted?" he asked.

Levison's glance wandered round the room. Then it returned to Kerr. There was a strong suspicion in his look.

"Why aren't you in the team now?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'm standing out!" said Kerr airily.

"You were playing in the first half."

"True, O King!"

"And why aren't you in the second half? They're not playing a man short."

"Quite so."

"Then who's the other man?" asked Levison. "Who's been put in the team in your place? I'll jolly soon know. I know already. I can guess your rotten

trick. That's where you've hidden Talbot—in the eleven, by gum! You're hiding a criminal from the police in the footer eleven, and that fool of a detective— But I'll soon let him know!" He ran towards the door, panting.

Three juniors stood in his way. Bernard Glyn, Clifton Dane, and Robert Arthur Digby were lined up to prevent the exit of the cad of the Fourth. Levison tried to shove past them, and was promptly and unceremoniously shoved back into the room by Clifton Dane. The Canadian junior administered a powerful shove that sent him staggering.

"Let me pass!" shrieked Levison.

"Not just now!"

"You—you hound!"

"What?" said Clifton Dane, advancing upon the cad of the Fourth with his hands up. "What did you call me, Levison?"

Levison shrank back from the Canadian junior.

"Let me pass, hang you! You're hiding Talbot—hiding him among the players in the eleven. You know you are!"

"Go hon!"

"I'm going to fetch the detective here."

"Are you?" said Kerr cheerfully. "My private opinion is that you're not.

I rather think you're not going out of this room, Levison. I may be wrong. But that's what I think."

"Same here!" chuckled Glyn.

"There are four of us for you to walk over first, Levison, old man, and some more outside, too. It looks to me as if you've put your silly head into a hornets' nest, old chap."

Levison made a sudden rush for the door. Clifton Dane hit out without hesitating, and Levison caught the Canadian's knuckles on the side of his head. He went to the floor with a crash, and lay there gasping.

"Have some more?" asked Dane sweetly. "There's plenty more where that came from, you know."

"Ow!"

"Same here, too," said Digby. "You're making me miss seeing the match, you worm, and I'd like to give you a thick ear. Come on!"

Levison did not come on. He staggered to his feet, his hand to his head, and scowled savagely at the four juniors. He was a helpless prisoner in the dressing-room, and he realised it. And the minutes were passing. Mr. Fox had promised to wait ten minutes for him to bring information if he could.

The ten minutes had already passed. Levison ground his teeth with rage as he realised that the detective would now be on his way to Slingsby's Farm again, and the way of escape would be left open for Talbot as soon as the match was over. And he was helpless.

"Look here," he muttered, between his teeth, "you know you're breaking the law! You know this is illegal!"

"What's illegal?" asked Kerr.

"Nothing illegal in keeping a cad shut up in a dressing-room that I know of."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's illegal to help a criminal to

escape!"

"We're keeping a criminal from escaping, you mean!" grinned Glyn; and the juniors laughed again.

Levison panted with rage.

"You—you rotters! You know very well that Talbot is out there! You know that the detective is hunting him!"

"Let him hunt," yawned Digby.

"It's our duty to help him!"

"When did you first think of doing your duty?" asked Kerr, with an air of friendly interest. "Rather a new departure for you, isn't it?"

"Yes; don't you set up as a humorist, Levison," said Glyn, with a shake of the head.

Levison's eyes blazed with fury.

"Will you let me out?" he yelled.

"No jolly fear!"

"Then I'll report you all to Dr. Holmes for helping Talbot to escape from the police."

"I dare say you'll act like a dirty sneak," agreed Kerr. "But you'll get the ragging of your life for doing it."

"I don't care! I'll make you suffer for this!"

"Go hon!"

"You'll be flogged!" howled Levison.

"And what will you get afterwards?"

murmured Clifton Dane.

"I don't care!"

"You'll care when the time comes, my

pippin!" said Clifton Dane, with a gleam in his eyes. "You've been ragged for sneaking before now. If you sneak over this matter we'll make your life not worth living at St. Jim's!"

"What-ho!"

"Let me pass, and—and I'll say nothing about it!"

"Rats!"

"You're not going to pass, and we're not going to waste time looking after you here," said Clifton Dane coolly.

"I'm going to lock you in this room."

"I'll yell for help!"

"And one of us will stay with you," said Dane. "One's enough to watch a worm like you! And if you give a single yelp you'll be pulverised. Toss up which of us wastes half an hour looking after the cad, you fellows."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors were keen to see the finish of the match. They tossed up, and Clifford Dane was odd man out. Digby and Kerr and Glyn walked out, and the Canadian locked the door and sat down near it and took a copy of the "Magnet" from his pocket.

Levison stood with clenched hands and burning eyes. He did not dare to attempt to pass the Canadian junior; he knew how painful the result would

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be. He could only wait, with the knowledge that his scheme had failed; that the detective was passing farther away every minute; that the way was clear for Talbot to escape. He writhed with rage as he thought of it; but he was helpless, and he remained, gritting his teeth, till a loud shout from the football ground announced that the match was over.

CHAPTER 11.

Looking After Levison!

TOM MERRY & CO. came crowding into their dressing-room with cheerful faces.

The crowd outside was still shouting.

"How goes it?" asked Clifton Dane eagerly.

"We've won, of course, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I vewy neahly had a goal."

"Was that the winning goal—the one you nearly had?"

"Weally, Dane—"

"Three goals to one," said Tom Merry cheerily. "And I fancy our new recruit would be a jolly valuable member of the team if we could keep him. I jolly well wish we could."

Talbot smiled.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus heartily. "Hallo! Is that that wottah Levison?"

Levison was scowling at the victorious footballers.

"Yes, Dane's been keeping an eye on him," said Kerr.

"Will you let me pass now?" demanded Levison fiercely.

"What's the hurry?" asked Tom Merry.

"You are hiding a criminal here."

"Oh, shut up!"

"You are keeping that rascal here!"

"There's only one rascal here at present, and his name's Levison," remarked Blake; "and if he says another word he'll get a whack across his beastly mouth!"

"You rotter!"

Whack!

Levison uttered a yell and staggered into a corner. Jack Blake had suited the action to the word.

"Want some more?" asked Blake grimly. "Open your caddish mouth again, and I'll wipe my boots on you!"

"Yaas, wathah—and mine, too!"

Levison did not open his mouth again. He regained his feet, scowling and gasping, his eyes glittering like a snake's.

Talbot hardly glanced at him.

"I'd better be getting off, you fellows," he said. "I only hope you won't get into any trouble over this!"

"Oh, that's all right!"

"That cad will make trouble for you if he can," said Talbot, with evident misgivings. "I—I'm afraid I oughtn't to have allowed you to help me."

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Yes, rats—and many of 'em!" said Tom Merry. "You can't get out in your own clothes, Talbot. Levison's friend, the detective, may be hanging about. You can put on my clobber, and I'll take yours."

"But—but you can't go back to St. Jim's in my old clothes!" exclaimed Talbot.

Tom Merry laughed cheerily.

"Yes, I can. I'll button up my overcoat over them, and they won't be seen. You take my clobber, and buck up. You can borrow one of the fellow's bikes—"

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"Mine's outside," said Clifton Dane. "I'll lend it to you with pleasure, Talbot."

"But—but—" stammered Talbot. The cordial friendliness of the St. Jim's juniors seemed almost to overcome the outcast.

"No buts," said the Canadian junior. "You can have my bike. You can send it back to the school by railway when you get a chance. Or you can leave it at Brooke's place. You know Brooke, the day boy; his place is on Wayland Moor—"

"Yes. I—I don't know how to thank you!"

"Don't try, old chap!"

"If the giddy Fox is nosing around he won't be likely to suspect a fellow in Etons on a bike," grinned Monty Lowther. "You'll pass for one of our fellows going home after the match, Talbot. You'll get clear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thank you all!" said Talbot in a voice full of emotion. "I—I can't say much, but I'm grateful. I only wish I deserved it more. I hope you won't get into any trouble on my account. Mind, if you do I shall give myself up. I've made up my mind about that."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry. "If there's a row we can stand it. As for Levison, we'll find a way of making him hold his rotten tongue."

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "We'll give him a House ragging to begin with."

"Mind the cad doesn't get away," added Tom Merry. "He's going home with us."

"I'm not going home with you!" snarled Levison. "I've got business in Abbotsford."

"Then it can stand over for another day. You're coming home with us in the coach, and we'll see that your sneaking tongue is kept quiet for a bit, anyway."

"My—my bike is out in the road."

"Hang your bike!"

"I'll look after that!" grinned Clifton Dane. "I'm lending my bike to Talbot, so I can ride yours home for you, Levison."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you—" began Levison furiously.

"Shut up!" said Blake threateningly. "Do you want another one on your talk-trap? This is where you take a back seat. You're dead in this act!"

Talbot was soon dressed in Tom Merry's clothes. Kerr and Blake scouted outside, and came in to report that there was no sign of Mr. Fox in the vicinity. Talbot shook hands with his chums and left the pavilion quietly.

A minute later he was riding away on the Canadian junior's bike; and no one who saw the junior in Etons, scorching on a bicycle, could have suspected that it was the farm-boy who had come there to watch the St. Jim's match. And Levison, who could have given information, was in safe hands.

Tom Merry donned the rough attire Talbot had worn and buttoned up his coat to conceal it. Then the St. Jim's juniors prepared to leave.

Blake and Monty Lowther took an arm each of Levison's. They did not intend to give him an opportunity of making his escape and taking further information to Mr. Fox. The cad of the Fourth ground his teeth and submitted; he had no choice but to submit. At the first attempt to pull his arms away Blake and Lowther twisted those arms till he gasped with pain, and he did not make more than one attempt.

Tom Merry & Co. took a cordial leave of the Abbotsford fellows. The coach came round, and the St. Jim's juniors mounted it, Blake and Lowther helping Levison in without releasing him for a moment. The vehicle drove off, passing a bunch of cyclists who had started for St. Jim's, among them Clifton Dane mounted on Levison's machine. The juniors drove home in high good humour. They had won the match, and their old pal Talbot had escaped. His danger had been brought upon him by the cad of the Fourth, and the other fellows had saved him.

Levison sat with a sullen brow during the drive to the school. If he had been able to get away there might still have been time for conveying information to Mr. Fox and securing the arrest of the outcast.

But he had no chance of getting away. The grip upon his arms never relaxed all the while the coach was driving home to St. Jim's.

When they reached the old school Levison dismounted with the rest, Blake and Lowther still holding him in a most affectionate manner.

Levison gave them a look of hatred.

"Will you let me go now?" he said thickly.

Blake shook his head.

"Not yet. We've got to talk to you first! Quite a lot of things to say to you, my tulip!"

And Levison was marched into the woodshed instead of into the School House as he had anticipated. With a crowd of juniors round him he had no chance of bolting.

In the woodshed, with the door closed, Levison was released, the juniors forming a thick circle round him. Levison glared round the circle with savage eyes.

"Now," said Tom Merry quietly, "we're going to talk to you, Levison."

"Talk away!" sneered Levison. "That won't prevent me from going directly to the Head and then you can look out for squalls. You've helped a criminal to escape from the police, and you'll have to answer for it."

"Whether we've broken the law or not, I don't quite know," said Tom. "I'm not well up in the law. What I do know is that we've helped an old pal who's down on his luck, and who deserves to be helped as much as ever any fellow did."

"Hear, hear!"

"And I suspect that he wouldn't have been in danger but for you. I can't help thinking that you brought Fox there somehow with your beastly spying—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And now," went on Tom determinedly, "you're going to hold your tongue, Levison!"

"You'll see soon!" hissed Levison.

"We'll see now," said Tom. "In the first place, if you sneak you'll be ragged. Every fellow here will do his level best to make you sorry for it."

"What-ho!"

"And if you want to fight twenty fellows one after another—any one of whom could knock you into a cocked hat—you've only got to say the word!" grinned Blake.

"I shall ask the Head for protection after having done my duty," said Levison.

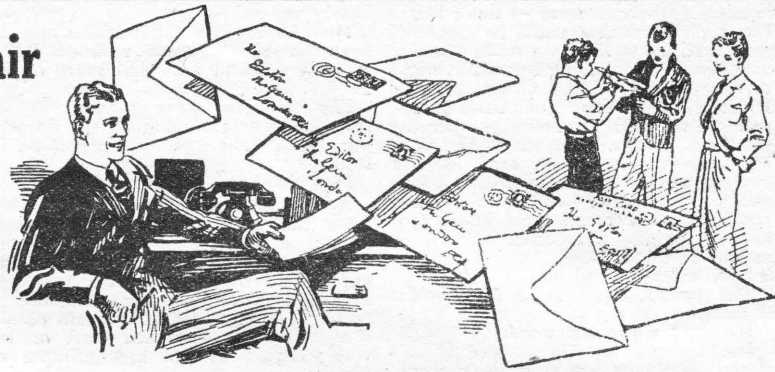
"Much good that will do!" growled Herries.

"In the second place," resumed Tom Merry steadily, "if you go to the Head, Levison, I will go to the Head! Some

(Continued on page 13)

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal.
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters to:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, Chums! Well, you now have the first great story of the "Toff" series in your hands, and I should imagine that every one of you was extra keen to read it. As you will all readily agree, Martin Clifford has certainly excelled himself with this brilliant yarn. When you have an odd moment just drop me a line and let me have your opinions.

Having read the first story of the Toff's return, I expect you are eager to see what happens in the next. This yarn bears the title of

"THE TOFF'S CHANCE!"

Pardoned for his past crimes, Talbot is now as free as air. But though the Toff is thankful for his freedom there is one thing he still desires, and that is to be amongst his chums at St. Jim's again. In his present circumstances this seems impossible.

But an unexpected opportunity presents itself when a servant in the New House is dismissed for insolence by Mr. Ratcliff. Talbot seizes his chance, and, thanks to the Head, he is engaged by the New House master for the position.

Mr. Ratcliff is very reluctant to take on a servant who has been a crackman, but he cannot go against the wishes of the Head. However, he makes things extremely uncomfortable for Talbot, and forbids him to mix with his friends at the school. But Tom Merry & Co. are equal to "Ratty," and they, in their turn, make things extremely uncomfortable for the irascible Housemaster!

You will enjoy immensely every moment of this exciting and humorous

yarn, and you will vote it every bit as good as the one in this number.

"THE REMOVE ON A DIET!"

The position of the chums of the Greyfriars Remove under their faddist Form-master is steadily growing worse. Not content with practically reducing the Remove to a starvation diet, Mr. Chesham's next amazing innovation is to make the juniors wear nightcaps! The Remove naturally object strongly, but it makes no difference to the faddist. He is as determined as ever to look after the health of his Form in his own way. But the Remove will not stand much more of the faddist, and when he introduces skipping-ropes and makes his Form skip in the Close, before the grinning juniors of other Forms, matters reach a head.

You will find Frank Richards at his brightest and best in this sparkling story. Make certain you don't miss next Wednesday's GEM.

REPLIES TO READERS.

H. Barrett, Eastwood, Notts.—Glad you liked "Gussy Goes to Work!" I will pass on your compliments to Martin Clifford. Thanks for your suggestion. Probably you will hear more of it later. I'm afraid your joke was rather a "chestnut." Try again, old chap!

S. Zimmerman, Leeds, 7.—Pleased to hear you think that the GEM stories are getting better and better. Johnny Bull

doesn't make his advent at Greyfriars for some time yet. I'm sorry, but your joke was not quite suitable. Have another shot.

L. Taylor, Liverpool 6.—Thanks for your complimentary letter. Yes, you can be sure the GEM will keep up its high standard of stories. Let me know what you think of the "Toff" series.

Miss F. Morrison, Fulham, S.W.6.—Glad to hear from you for the first time. Your "Pen Pal" notice will be published in due course. There's still a long waiting-list. I will get Martin Clifford's autograph for you. Do you want it put in your album? The joke you sent, though very good, has been used in the GEM.

G. Watson, Winnipeg, Canada.—Many thanks for your interesting letter. I have put your "Pen Pal" notice on the waiting-list.

J. Danks, Birmingham 9.—Yes, Martin Clifford has written GEM stories since the old paper started in March, 1907. He invented the St. Jim's characters. Your joke didn't quite make the bell ring. A joke which lends itself to a humorous illustration stands the best chance of winning the sender half-a-crown.

D. Vleeskruyer, Amsterdam, Holland.—Thanks for your congratulatory letter. As you think the last "Toff" stories were the best that the GEM has published, you will greatly enjoy the present series. The GEM and "Magnet" have readers all over the world, but naturally most of their readers are in English-speaking countries.

"See" you again next week, chums. Chin, chin!

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Miss Vivian Sternberg, Good Hope Seminary Gardens, Cape Town; girl correspondents; age 14-16; abroad.

Peter H. Nye, 118, Clonmell Road, Philip Lane, Tottenham, London, N.17; age 14-17; pen pals abroad.

R. W. Quantick, 2, Church Cotts., West Alvington, Kingsbridge, Devon; pen pals; stamps, postcards, etc.

Miss Gloria Lambking, "Coo-ee" Maraylya Road, Oakville, via Riverstone, N.S.W., Australia; girl correspondents; age 17-21; sport, collecting photos of royalty.

Douglas Jamieson, "Glencoe," 98, Cumberland Road, Auburn, N.S.W., Australia; stamps; U.S.A., Canada.

Leslie Syddall, 7, Malvern Avenue, Smithills, Bolton, Lancs; age 10-16; stamps.

John Launer, Netherby, via Nhill, Victoria, Australia; age 15-17; stamp collecting, sports; New Zealand, India, Pacific Islands.

Miss Enid Hanson, "Arlyn," Princes Road, Bessacarr, near Doncaster; girl correspondents; age 15-17.

Miss J. Papa-Kittoe, c/o A. J. Akwangya-Kittoe, Esq., Palm House (Mbeadzi) No. 32, Winnebah, Gold Coast, British W. Africa; wants a West African girl for a pen friend.

Reginald Chinnery, 4, Ridgeway, Woodford Green, Essex; age 11-14; pen pals; China, Japan, Brazil, S. Africa.

William Tha Lunc, 15, Chanay Street, Daingwunkwin, Moulmin, Burma; age 11-15; fretwork and correspondence; England, America.

Lim Tow Kuan, c/o Chop Tong Hong, 69, Rodger Street, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya; age 15-19; snaps, sports, films, stamps, views.

Lionel J. Remedios, 29, Granville Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China; pen pals; age 16 and upwards.

R. H. Lee, 27, Meyrick Road, Battersea, London, S.W.11; wants members for his International Pen Pals Club. Magazine monthly.

Leslie W. Partridge, P. O. Matopos, via Bulawayo, S. Rhodesia, S. Africa; pen pals.

William D. H. Hoyle, 7, Lytham Road, Fulwood, near Preston; age 13-15; British Navy and Mercantile Marine.

Miss Dorothy Potter, 33, Lindon Drive, Alvaston, Derby; girl correspondents; pen friend in Canada.

Miss Mary Carver, 1, North Milburn Street, Sunderland, Durham; girl correspondents; age 16-18.

Jack Levine, 10, Jagersfontein Avenue, Cape Town, South Africa; age 15; stamp collecting; British Empire.

Mortimer Oliver, 1055, Bernardapt, 11, Outremont, Quebec, Canada; age 9-10; stamps; Orange River Colony, Gold Coast, Gibraltar.

Lambert Remedios, 2b, Aboo Sittee Lane, Penang, Straits Settlements; age 16-19; snaps, sports.

Miss Doris Robinson, 219, Loftus Street, Leederville, Perth, Australia; girl correspondents; age 14; swimming, reading, hiking, movies.

Miss P. C. Lomax, c/o Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Corp., Poochow, China; girl correspondents; stamps.

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of us might be sacked or flogged for helping Talbot get away—I don't know. But I do know that you'd be sacked if the Head knew what we could tell him about you—of breaking bounds at night to play cards at the Green Man in Rylcombe. We know your little games, and we've held our tongues, because we're not sneaks. But we could tell, if we chose—and prove it, too! And if you say a word about this affair, I give you my word that, besides the ragging you'll get, the Head shall know your history for the past term. You'll be sacked from St. Jim's, and you know it! Now let the cad go!"

The juniors stood aside for Levison to pass.

He went without a word.

But he did not go to the Head's study. He knew that Tom Merry would keep his word; and he knew that if his blackguardly way of life was revealed to the Head, nothing was more certain than that he would be expelled from St. Jim's.

Sneaking was not in Tom Merry & Co.'s line; but it was, after all, a game that two could play at, and Levison, chafing with rage and disappointment as he was, dared not risk it. And so that visit to the Head's study was never paid, and Dr. Holmes remained in blissful ignorance of the happenings at Abbotsford that afternoon.

CHAPTER 12.

The Tempter!

"CARAMBA! So it is you!"

Talbot started violently.

It was night upon Wayland Moor—a dark, windy night, with but a few stars glimmering in the sky.

Talbot had been tramping wearily over the moor. He had escaped from the trap Levison had laid for him at Abbotsford; but he could not return to Slingsby's Farm. There, he was certain, the detective would be looking for him. He left Clifton Dane's bicycle at Brooke's house on the moor and tramped on.

Brooke of the Fourth, the day-boy at St. Jim's, had been very friendly with Talbot during the outcast's stay at the school. He had asked Talbot to stay for the night, but the outcast had thanked him and declined. He would not run the risk of bringing trouble upon Brooke. He left a note with the day-boy for Tom Merry, and another for Farmer Slingsby, excusing his sudden departure, and then went on his lonely way.

He had little money, and his heart was heavy.

He knew that Mr. Fox was searching for him, he knew that he was probably watched for at the railway station. He was in danger, and he had to tramp his way to safety—if safety was to be found. But it was not only that that made the boy's heart heavy. He had had a glimpse of St. Jim's again, he had experienced once more the hearty friendship of his old comrades at St. Jim's, and it brought back keenly to his mind all he had lost.

If only matters had gone differently! If only he could have kept his place in the old school!

But repentance and reform were not enough.

The wretched past had to be paid for, and he was paying for it now. Even if he won his way to safety, the old school, and all he loved and prized, had to be left behind—for ever.

He would never see Tom Merry & Co. again—never look upon those frank

and friendly faces, never hear those hearty voices.

He had to face the world alone, to keep on the struggle unaided by a friendly voice or a cordial grasp of the hand.

His thoughts were gloomy as he tramped over the moor in the deepening night. The rain was beginning to fall.

He was tired and dispirited.

A shepherd's hut, looming up blackly from the gloom beside the footpath, offered a shelter for the night, and Talbot turned from the path and approached the gloomy little building. It was dark and deserted, and half in ruins. There, at least, he could obtain a night's rest, and then start on his tramp again at the first glimpse of dawn.

But as he entered the tumbledown cabin, there was a movement in the darkness within, and he realised that some other solitary wayfarer had taken shelter in the hut. Talbot paused in the entrance. He was not afraid of meeting a tramp or a footpad. He had little about him that was worth stealing.

A sudden flash of light came from the gloom. It was a small electric lamp suddenly turned on. The full light fell upon Talbot's face. Then he heard a voice with a Spanish accent exclaiming in surprise.

Talbot clenched his hands.

Well he knew that voice. He looked at the man who held the electric lamp, dimly visible behind the beam of light—a small, swarthy-faced man, with cunning, narrow eyes, his face half-hidden by a slouched hat.

"Gonzales!" muttered Talbot.

The Spaniard grinned.

"What an unexpected meeting!" he said.

Talbot made a movement as if to quit the cabin. Gonzales quickly stepped between him and the doorway.

"Not so fast!" he said. "Are you not glad to see an old friend?"

"You are no friend of mine," said Talbot coldly. "What are you doing in England?"

Gonzales laughed.

"I have important business to attend to here."

"Some treacherous business, I'll be bound," said Talbot. "You were a spy in Barcelona. You are not afraid of being denounced by the police?"

"Not by you!"

"And why not?"

"I might do some denouncing in my turn," said Gonzales, with a hard laugh. "You see, I know you, my young friend. Did I not make discoveries in Barcelona about you? Did I not know that you are wanted by the police of your own country? You cannot afford to quarrel with me."

Talbot bit his lip.

It was true enough, and he knew it. What was the Spaniard doing there, skulking in that lonely place? Whatever he was doing, whatever his treacherous object might be, the Toff could not denounce him, for he had as much reason to fear the police as the Spanish spy had.

He reflected bitterly that he had been an enemy of society himself in his earlier evil days. He had repented, and since his days at St. Jim's, he had been as straight as a die. But he had not earned the right to feel and to act as any other Englishman. He was an outcast. If he denounced this scoundrel, one inevitable result would be his own arrest, his own imprisonment!

Gonzales watched the struggles in the boy's face in the light of the electric lamp. He smiled grimly.

"You understand that you cannot afford to be my enemy?" he said.

"I understand," said Talbot dully.

"What reward would they give you if you denounced me?" jeered Gonzales. "Prison—prison, to eat away all the young years of your life—"

"Yes."

"Bah!" said the Spaniard. "You know where your own interest is. My young friend, it will pay you not to quarrel with me. I made you an offer in Barcelona."

"And I refused it," said Talbot, between his teeth. "I don't want to get mixed up in your country's troubles."

"Do not let us mince words!" said the Spaniard, still with his narrow, cunning eyes upon Talbot's face. "You are a criminal. You belong to the class that is wanted by the police. You are—or were—a gentleman crook. You do not deny that?"

Talbot made no reply.

"I repeat my offer to you," resumed Gonzales. "I can make it worth your while to serve our cause in Spain. You are valuable. You are keen, sensible. You are an English boy, and, as such, not liable to suspicion among our enemies; but you have the experience and resource of a man. I tell you, you are worth very much to us."

"You can keep your offer!" muttered Talbot. "I refuse to become one of your spies!"

"Listen!" said Gonzales. "I am not here to spy. I have work to do in England—great work for my cause in Spain. You can help me."

"I?" said Talbot.

"You have more knowledge of the country than I," said Gonzales eagerly.

"What is your work?"

"We had secret information in Barcelona that the British Government were intending to send troops to Spain," said Gonzales.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Talbot.

"What can you, a criminal, know of your country's intentions?"

"More than a dirty spy!" retorted Talbot. "Now let me pass, Gonzales. I have nothing more to say to you—and the open moor is better than sharing a shelter with a spy."

The Spaniard gritted his teeth.

"You will go? Yet you are poor? And I offer you what you choose to name—"

"Hold your tongue, I tell you, and let me pass!" Talbot clenched his hands. "If you do not stand out of my way, take care!"

The Spaniard muttered a curse and stood aside. Talbot strode from the cabin. The light went out in the lonely hut. The Spaniard remained alone in the darkness. Talbot, with bitterness in his heart, was tramping away over the dark, windy moor.

CHAPTER 13.

To Redeem the Past!

TOM MERRY & CO. were in their warm beds in the dormitories at St. Jim's.

Talbot thought of them as he tramped gloomily on.

He wondered whether they were thinking of him.

He had looked his last on St. Jim's. He had seen the last of his old friends. He was an outcast and a fugitive. But never had he felt the humiliation of it so keenly as now. The Spaniard had taken it for granted that he would be willing to play the spy, and Talbot had bitterly reflected that he had a right to take it for granted. Why should he

expect to find honourable scruples in one who was outlawed by the laws of his own country?

What was the work that Gonzales was skulking there to do? That he was there in secret Talbot was assured, and it was his duty to reveal the man's presence to the police. His duty! But he could not do his duty without giving himself up to punishment which doubtless he had deserved once, but which he no longer deserved. He must hold his tongue and allow the Spaniard to carry out his schemes, whatever they were, or lose his liberty. That was the alternative.

He came out into the road over the moor again, heedless of the cold wind, thinking—thinking hard.

After all, what if he gave up his liberty? What was the Spaniard scheming? He had said he was not there as a spy—his work was of another kind. Was it in connection with the secret information he had had that British troops were being sent to Spain?

Talbot remembered Gonzales in Barcelona. The man had been secretly engaged in chemical work—the manufacture of explosives. Was it something of that sort that brought him here—here, within easy distance of the main line to Southampton—the line upon which troop trains sometimes passed.

Talbot halted, with a gasp, as the thought flashed through his mind.

Was that it? Was a troop train due to pass on that line to-night? Talbot knew it was unlikely, to say the least, that British troops were to be sent to either side in the Spanish Civil War. But suppose Gonzales thought they were? Might he not attempt something desperate to stop them?

If that was the plan, Gonzales was the man for the task. He was a man without scruple, daring in his own cunning way, and with an intimate knowledge of high explosives.

And Talbot, remembering his old acquaintance with the surrounding country when he had been a junior at St. Jim's, remembered the railway viaduct where the railway crossed a deep gully, within half a mile of the spot where the old shepherd's hut stood. Was that Gonzales' business? And was he biding his time in the old hut, where Talbot had discovered him—waiting for the right moment to do his fiendish work?

"Great Scott!" muttered Talbot.

The suspicion was terrible, but it might be true. If it was true—if the scoundrel was there to do such deadly work—there was no choice left to Talbot. At any cost to himself he must stop the Spaniard. His liberty, his life, weighed little in the balance.

Talbot set his teeth hard. He stood thinking it over. The railway viaduct was not far away. Under it he could hide and watch. And if the Spaniard came there—

A form loomed up in the shadows, and the bright light of an electric torch shone on Talbot's face. There was an exclamation:

"Caught!"

Talbot sprang back.

The hand of Mr. Fox, of Scotland Yard, was on his shoulder, closing there in a grip of iron.

"Caught at last!"

Talbot gritted his teeth. With an upward sweep of his arm he knocked Mr. Fox's grip from his shoulder, and darted away in the darkness.

The detective sprang after him.

But the night had swallowed up the fleeing outcast, and after a short while the detective paused, his face dark with anger and disappointment. The Toff had slipped through his fingers once again—slipped through his fingers when his grasp had been fairly upon him.

"Hang the luck!" growled the detective. "To meet him like this, and let him go again! But I'll have him yet!"

He switched off the light of his torch savagely. The fugitive had vanished in the darkness. The chance meeting had brought no luck to Mr. Fox; it had only added to his list another disappointment.

Talbot ran on in the darkness.

But he soon slackened down. There was no sound of pursuit behind him. The night had favoured him—pursuit was well-nigh impossible.

He changed his direction, and made for the railway bridge. He remembered the lie of the land; he had learned it well when he was a junior at St. Jim's. He tramped on steadily through the wet grass and gorse.

Once or twice he stopped to listen.

It seemed to him that he heard faint footfalls, like an echo of his own, in the windy night.

Was the detective following him, after all? Or was it the Spaniard—or fancy? In the moan of the wind, the rustle of the gorse, he could not be certain.

He tramped doggedly on.

He knew his duty. If the Spaniard had the designs he suspected, it would be his business to baffle them at whatever cost to himself. And that he would do. It would be an atonement for all his wrong doing in the past.

The more he thought about it, the more certain he felt of the Spaniard's design.

Gonzales could not be skulking in that lonely hut at night for nothing. He had a purpose there, and what other purpose could he have?

He caught sight of the railway embankment at last, looming up dimly. Deep below in the gully flowed the stream, with a heavy, sullen murmur in the night. Dimly through the night twinkled the lights on the railway line.

Again that sound of footsteps.

But Talbot was not listening. He clambered over the embankment, and reached the railway track.

Standing on the track he looked along the line. On the high bridge there was a glimmer of light.

A man was bending down there, and Talbot knew that the light came from an electric lamp.

It was the Spaniard!

He was at his work there—and Talbot knew what his work was. He did not know if a train was due, but he guessed that the Spaniard would know. The man was undoubtedly timing his villainous deed to take place shortly before the train passed—possibly a troop train.

Then there would be no time, no possibility, for the destruction of the bridge to become known. The train would rush on to a yawning gap—to horrible destruction—and hundreds of lives would be lost.

Talbot's heart beat hard. He heard the footsteps again by the railway embankment. He smiled grimly as he realised how close Mr. Fox was. The detective was close behind him, with the pertinacity of a bloodhound. It would have been easy for Talbot to dodge him



Gonzales thrust his hand into his pocket. It came out suddenly, there was a gleam of steel, and the next instant a sharp report! Talbot gave a faint cry and dropped to the ground. "You scoundrel!" panted the detective, and his clenched fist crashed into the Spaniard's face.

in the shadows; his escape would have been simple. But he was not thinking now of escape.

He turned back and clambered down. Then he called out softly:

"I am here!"

There was a startled exclamation in the darkness:

"The Toff!"

"Yes; I am here! Come quickly!"

Talbot groped forward in the darkness in the direction of the detective's voice, and his hands came in contact with Mr. Fox's coat. An iron grip closed on his shoulder.

"So you've decided to give yourself up? You will not get away again!"

There was a clink of metal in the darkness.

"There is no time to handcuff me now, Mr. Fox." Talbot's voice was low and steady. "Listen to me! I will not try to escape. I will give myself up, if you choose. Only help me now—help me!"

"What do you mean?"

"There is a man on the bridge," muttered Talbot hoarsely—"a Spaniard! He is going to destroy the bridge! He thinks British troops are being despatched to Spain!"

"What!"

"And then—the train——"

"Great Scott! Troops going to the Near East were to leave London for Southampton to-night. It was reported in to-day's paper. The train will travel over this line!" The detective's grip closed tighter on the Toff's shoulder. "Are you telling me the truth? Is this a trick?"

"Look!" muttered Talbot.

The detective, still with a grip on the boy's shoulder, clambered up the embankment. On the bridge the glimmer of light was still shining.

CHAPTER 14.

In the Shadow of Death!

TALBOT gripped the detective's arm.

"You see him?" His voice was a barely audible whisper.

"Yes."

"You see what he is doing?"

"Who is he?" muttered the detective, standing motionless, his eyes on the figure that crouched on the rails, hardly visible in the glimmer of the light. "What do you know of this? Who is this man?"

"His name is Gonzales; he is a Spaniard. You can see what he is here for!" Talbot muttered hoarsely. "You needn't fear that I shall run. I am your prisoner, if you choose. I could have escaped if I'd liked—you know that!"

The detective nodded; he knew that. He had wondered why Talbot had deliberately run into him instead of escaping in the darkness.

"He must be stopped; he must be taken!" said Talbot. "I will help you. But be on your guard; I am certain that he is armed, and it is a bomb that he is fixing there. There's no time to lose! Come on!"

Mr. Fox drew a deep breath.

He was out that wild night to capture the Toff—the boy who was now in his grasp. But he realised that there was more important business on hand now. There was a bigger and more important capture before him—if he could effect it.

He knew more than Talbot; he knew that a troop-train was to pass over the bridge that night. He knew that if Gonzales were left to carry out his

nefarious work, the train would go plunging into the gully, carrying its human cargo to sudden and terrible death.

Mr. Fox drew his breath hard.

"Stand by me, Toff!" he said quickly.

"This may mean a pardon for you if we secure him and prevent an accident. It may mean death for both of us. But——"

"I am not afraid!"

"No; you were always a cool hand," said Mr. Fox. "Come on, then!"

He had released Talbot.

The detective and the Toff crept along the lines, cautiously and silently; what slight sounds they made being drowned by the moan of the wind.

They were behind the Spaniard as he crouched over the track.

What he was doing they could only partly see; but they could see that he was fixing some object there by one of the rails.

With his back to them, the Spaniard could not see them; and in that lonely place he had no suspicion of being observed in the darkness.

Only the barest glimmer of his lamp lighted his rascally work.

Closer and closer came the two strange comrades—the Scotland Yard detective and the cracksmen he had been hunting—comrades now in peril of their lives!

For they knew their peril. The explosion that was intended to wreck the railway bridge might come while they were close to the spot, and hurl them into eternity.

They were within six feet of the Spaniard, still unseen and unsuspected, when Gonzales suddenly rose to his feet, with a low exclamation of satisfaction, and the glimmer of light was shut off.

His work was finished.

He turned to come back along the track, evidently anxious to get away at once—for good reasons. But he halted suddenly, as the two figures loomed before him, touching him.

They sprang upon him the next moment.

Gonzales uttered a sharp cry, and grappled with them fiercely. But he went down heavily on the lines, with two pairs of hands grasping him. The detective's knee was planted on his chest, pinning him down. Gonzales struggled savagely. He was not a big man, but he was muscular, and the detective had his hands full.

"Let me go!" shrieked Gonzales. "Run—run, fools! In one minute more you will be blown to atoms! Run!"

The detective's grip tightened.

"Can you hold him?" panted Talbot. "I will look——"

RED-HOT REBELLION AT GREYFRIARS!



Mr. Hacker's reign as headmaster of Greyfriars has brought about a nice state of affairs. Instead of cringing at the terror of his glance and the swish of his cane, Harry Wharton & Co. have declared a stay-in strike! And the tyrant Head is a prisoner in their hands—forced to obey orders instead of giving them! Be sure to read

"The Prisoner of the Stronghold!"

by Frank Richards

the thrill-packed story of Greyfriars, in the

MAGNET

NOW ON SALE

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"I've got the villain!"

"Good!"

Talbot sprang up, and ran to the spot where Gonzales had been kneeling. The Spaniard was still struggling furiously with the detective. It was not only arrest he feared, it was the explosion of the infernal machine he had fastened to the track—the bomb that was to shatter the bridge and leave a yawning gulf for the oncoming train. If that explosion came while he was still struggling on the bridge, Gonzales knew what his fate would be. He was fighting for his life!

Mr. Fox understood well enough, but he did not relax his grip. And he was keeping the Spaniard pinned down, though he could not get the handcuffs on him.

Talbot stopped, peering at the dark track before him. In the gloom he could see nothing; he struck a match, but the wind extinguished it instantly. His heart was thumping; he knew how precious the minutes were—the seconds even! He knew that at any moment might come a frightful explosion, and death in the midst of destruction!

But if he could not use his eyes, he could use his ears. A faint tick, tick, tick! came to his strained hearing, and he knelt and bent over a dark object that was placed between the metals. He comprehended. It was an infernal machine worked by some mechanism, timed to explode when the Spaniard had gained a safe distance. Gonzales had not expected that he would be stopped on the bridge! How long had he allowed for the interval before the explosion? Nearly a minute had already passed! The frantic fear of the Spaniard showed that the explosion must be close at hand.

Talbot felt an icy thrill run through his body for a second as his hand touched the dark object from which the faint ticking came.

In an instant it flashed through his mind like a picture of fire. What if it exploded even as he touched it?

Yet the Toff did not hesitate.

With steady hands that did not tremble he grasped the horrible contrivance and lifted it from the track!

Then he groped his way towards the parapet of the railway bridge.

He stumbled on the lines, but he did not fall. The ticking of the infernal machine, it seemed to his throbbing ears, had grown louder and faster. The impulse to drop it and run was strong. But he stumbled on—he reached the parapet—he lifted the bomb over it with steady hands and dropped it into space.

The bomb whizzed downwards into the deep gully, and Talbot listened, with fast-beating heart.

A sudden, fearful roar came from the darkness below—a terrific explosion that awoke the echo of the moor for miles.

The bomb had exploded before it reached the bottom of the gully. But it was too far off to cause damage to the bridge. He heard a rattle of falling stones, he felt the bridge shiver, that was all. The thunderous echoes died away. Only the moan of the wind was heard on the lonely moor. The danger was past.

Talbot stumbled back towards the detective and his prisoner. Mr. Fox was standing up now, with the Spaniard in his firm grip.

"Safe now!" muttered Talbot through his white lips. "I threw it over just in time."

"I know!" The detective was shuddering. "A narrow escape for both of us! Lend me a hand with this scoundrel while I put the bracelets on."

Talbot's grip fastened on the Spaniard. Next moment Gonzales suddenly released his right hand by a tremendous effort from the detective's grasp, and thrust it into his coat.

It came out suddenly, there was a gleam of steel, the next instant a sharp report—a cry, and a heavy fall!

"You scoundrel!" panted the detective.

His clenched fist crashed into the Spaniard's face; Gonzales went down as if he had been pole-axed. His head crashed on the metals, and he gave a groan and lost his senses. He was handcuffed the next moment. The detective sprang to his feet and bent over Talbot. The boy had raised himself on his elbow.

"Toff, you are hit!"

"Yes," muttered Talbot thickly.

"Never mind, we've saved the train!"

There was the shriek of an engine down the line. The detective dragged Talbot clear, and then dragged Gonzales, still unconscious, from the line. He stood aside, with panting breath, while the train roared by, glimmering with lights, through the dark night, and with a loud, cheery chorus coming from the crowded carriages.

The troop train had been saved. Talbot had saved it, and there he lay with the pallor of death on his face and a bullet in his body. Truly the Toff had atoned fully for the past.

CHAPTER 15.

The King's Pardon!

TOM MERRY & CO. heard the news the next day.

The whole school was soon buzzing with it.

At first all they knew was that an attempt had been made to wreck the troop train, and that a Spaniard had been arrested by Mr. Fox, of Scotland Yard. They knew, too, that a lad who had hurled the bomb from the bridge, and saved five hundred soldiers bound for the Near East, lay in Wayland Hospital with a bullet in his body, between life and death.

It was a story to thrill the hearts of the St. Jim's fellows; but when they learned more their hearts beat with pride in their old chum, who had so nobly redeemed the sins and mistakes of his unhappy past.

For on Monday they had fuller news—news that the boy who had saved the troop train was a fellow who was "wanted" by the police, known as the Toff—and then they knew that it was Talbot.

"Talbot!" Tom Merry said, almost dazedly. "Old Talbot! Who will say a word against him after this?"

"Bai Jove! I'd like to hear anybody say a word against him!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy truculently.

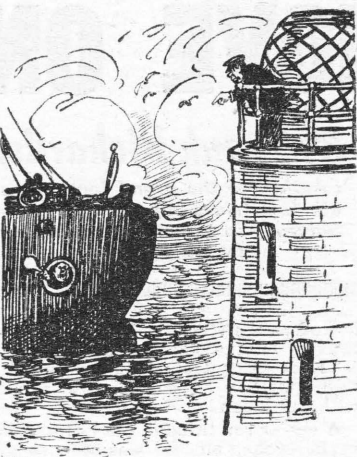
But nobody did. Even Levison was silent and ashamed. He realised that if his trap for Talbot at Abbotsford had been a success the troop train would have been destroyed—Talbot would not have been there to save it.

Five hundred lives would have been lost, and the Spaniard, Gonzales, would have got away. And so even Levison was glad that his scheme had failed and that Talbot had escaped to render his country that service.

And Talbot was lying wounded—in danger of his life. The knowledge of that tempered the pride and satisfaction of his old chums.

Tom Merry & Co. cycled over to Wayland to inquire for him as early as they could.

OPTIMISTIC!



Liner Passenger: "Ahoy, there! Have you seen a table tennis ball anywhere around here?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Howell, 146, Barnsley Street, Holderness Road, E. Yorks.

At the hospital they were refused admission to Talbot—his state was too serious. But they learned that the bullet had been extracted, and that he was going on well. His splendid constitution was saving him, and the danger was almost past. And as they came away they met Mr. Fox, who had also been there to inquire after the Toff.

The juniors looked grimly at the detective, whose face was very grave.

"So you've got your prisoner, Mr. Fox," said Tom Merry, with a bitterness he could not repress.

Mr. Fox nodded gravely.

"Yes, Master Merry. He will recover; there is no doubt about that now, and it will be the best thing he has ever done for himself."

"How is that?" asked Figgins. "I suppose he will be arrested when he leaves the hospital, though it's a rotten shame."

The detective shook his head.

"He has earned his pardon," he answered. "As I told you when I saw you at the school, he would have been dealt with leniently, in any case. I have made my report to the authorities, and there is not the slightest doubt that the Toff will receive the King's pardon."

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"The King's pardon! My hat! That's ripping!"

"Wippin', bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Mr. Fox smiled.

It was good news for the chums of St. Jim's. They returned joyfully to the school with the news for the other fellows that Talbot was out of danger, and that his liberty as well as his life was safe. And the whole school rejoiced. From Dr. Holmes, the reverend and respected Head, down to the smallest and inkiest fag, St. Jim's was proud of Talbot—proud that he had once been sheltered by those ancient walls.

"I knew that I was not mistaken in the boy," the Head said to Mr. Rail-

ton, with great satisfaction. "I was certain of it. He has more than redeemed his past now. I only hope it will be possible for him to come back to the school. After what he has done, I am sure that the governors will raise no objection, in spite of his past, and I think the boys will give him a rousing welcome."

"And the masters, too!" said Mr. Railton heartily.

There was no doubt about that. And the same thought was in the minds of Tom Merry & Co.

Talbot was pardoned, Talbot was free, and he must come back to St. Jim's.

A week later they were allowed to visit him in the hospital. They found him pale, but calm and cheerful, and mending rapidly. He was glad to see them, and he listened, with a smile, to their congratulations; but he shook his head when Tom Merry told him that he must come back to St. Jim's.

"Impossible, old chap!"

"Rats!" said Tom warmly. "You've got to come!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "What possible objection can you have, Talbot, deah boy?"

"You can be jolly certain of a welcome on all sides," said Figgins. "I can assure you we'd be jolly glad to have you in the New House."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry promptly. "He's coming back into the School House. We can't spare him!"

Talbot smiled faintly.

"It's impossible," he said. "I'd like to come, you know that, but—but I can't. You forget that I've got no money. I have to work for my bread."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Neither did I," confessed Tom Merry. "I suppose that's rather an important point. But we will work it somehow. We'll have a whip round to raise the tin—"

"Hear, hear!"

Talbot shook his head.

"I couldn't come on those terms," he said. "I thank you all—you know I'm grateful—but I couldn't! It's impossible! I'd give anything to come back to St. Jim's, but I couldn't come on charity, and that's what it would be. You're bricks, all of you, but it can't be done!"

"It's going to be done!" said Tom Merry firmly. "If that won't do, we'll find some other way; but you're coming back to St. Jim's, that's settled."

And when they left Talbot, it was with that determination fixed in their minds; and at St. Jim's they discussed it, turning the matter over in every way, determined that a solution of the difficulty should be found.

Talbot had received the King's pardon. He was free as air. In a few days more he would be discharged from the hospital. A way must be found. It simply had to be found. But it had not been found by the time Talbot left the hospital, and Tom Merry & Co. learned that he had gone back to work on Slingby's Farm.

But the heroes of St. Jim's were not easily to be beaten, and, difficult as the matter seemed, the juniors were determined that before long Talbot of the Shell, no longer an outcast, would resume his old place at St. Jim's.

(Next Wednesday: "THE TOFF'S CHANCE!" Look out for the next great yarn in this gripping series, telling how Talbot came back to St. Jim's—as a boot-boy! Don't forget to order your GEM early.)

SHORT RATIONS—STUDY FEEDS FORBIDDEN—THE TUCKSHOP BARRED! THE REMOVE GO HUNGRY UNDER FADDIST RULE!

THE REMOVE ON A DIET!

The Faddist Again!

"**W**HERE'S Quelch?" It was Harry Wharton of the Greyfriars Remove who spoke, in a tone of surprise. The Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—were in their class-room, ready for the morning lesson. But the big hand of the clock had crept on from nine-fifteen to nine-twenty, and the Form-master had not yet appeared.

"Five minutes late, by Jove!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the matter with Quelch?"

There was a buzz of voices in the Remove-room. The class were taking advantage of the absence of the Form-master. Most of them were talking, and several were hammering on their desks, or throwing paper pellets at one another. Morning work should have commenced five minutes ago, and the Remove enjoyed their unexpected liberty.

The tardiness of Mr. Quelch was unprecedented. The master of the Remove was usually punctuality itself.

"Where's Quelch, I wonder?" repeated Harry Wharton.

"What does it matter?" asked Billy Bunter, who was extracting a tart from a paper bag hidden under his jacket. "I'm blessed if I can see what you want to worry about him for, Wharton! We are much more comfy without a master in the room!"

"I hope there's nothing wrong with Quelch, anyhow," said Harry, in a low voice. "You know he went away for his health and came back earlier than he intended, because we got on so badly with his substitute. He may have broken down again!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, with a whistle of dismay. "I hope not. Of course, I should be sorry for Quelch, but I think I should be sorrier for us. We don't want to be under that ass Chesham again!"

"The assfulness of the honourable Chesham is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Hindu junior, in the quaint English he had not learned at Greyfriars. "It was impossible to stand his esteemed fadfulness!"

"We shall have to stand it, though, if Quelch is ill!" said Bob Cherry glumly. "Chesham isn't gone yet, you know. He was going by the ten o'clock train this morning, I heard, so he won't have started for the station yet."

"Hallo, here's Quelch!" The door of the class-room opened and the master of the Remove came in. The noise ceased as if by magic. During their short term under the new master, Mr. Chesham, the Remove had been riotous—and not without reason—but they never "ragged" their own master, Mr. Quelch. He was a man to inspire respect, and he was, moreover, a dangerous customer to "rag."

"He looks pretty rotten!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Every eye was fixed on the Remove master as he crossed from the door to his desk. Mr. Quelch's face was very pale, and it was evidently only by an effort that he made his way across the class-room. At the desk he paused, and

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

looked at the Remove, leaning his hand heavily on the back of a chair.

"I am sorry I am late, my boys," he said quietly. "We will now proceed with the lesson!"

A shiver ran through the Form-master as he spoke, and he was seen to grip the back of the chair tighter. His pale face became like chalk. Harry Wharton sprang from his seat and ran quickly forward and caught the Remove master as he reeled unsteadily.

"You are ill, sir!" Mr. Quelch sank into his seat, looking sick and giddy.

"I—I am afraid I am," he murmured. "Thank you, Wharton. But—"

He did not finish. It was plain that the effort of reaching the class-room had been too much for the Remove master in his weak state. He had been determined to go through with his duties;

With the return of Mr. Quelch, the Remove are only too pleased to see the back of their temporary Form-master. But, as matters turn out, they have not yet seen the last of Mr. Chesham and his faddism!

the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

The half-open door of the class-room was pushed wider open, and an imposing figure in cap and gown entered. The class were all attention at once. It was the Head.

Dr. Locke uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Mr. Quelch!"

The Remove master made an effort to rise. The Head came quickly forward.

"Do not move!" he exclaimed. "You are too ill to take your class, Mr. Quelch. I thought you looked very ill when I saw you in the corridor, and I came to speak to you about it. You must not think of going on!"

"I—I am sorry—"

"Fortunately, Mr. Chesham has not yet left. I will speak to him, and he will be pleased, I know, to retain charge of the Remove until you are fit to resume your duties."

"But—"

"Not a word. You must go to your room immediately," said the Head, with kindly firmness. "You are not fit for work!"

The Remove listened with glum faces. They were sorry for Mr. Quelch, whom they liked and respected; but their glum looks were chiefly, caused by the

thought of again coming under the authority of Mr. Chesham.

"There'll be trouble!" muttered Bulstrode.

"Heaps of it!" grunted Billy Bunter. "Let him try to cut down my meals again, that's all!"

There was a step in the passage without. A gentleman in an overcoat, with a bag in his hand, passed the open doorway. The Head looked round quickly.

"Wharton, ask Mr. Chesham to step in here, please!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Harry went quickly to the door.

"If you please, Mr. Chesham—"

The new master turned round. Mr. Chesham's face was a dreamy one. He looked like a man who lived more in his thoughts than in the world. He nodded to Harry.

"What is it, Wharton?"

"Mr. Quelch is ill. The Head is here and he wishes to speak to you."

"Certainly!"

Mr. Chesham came into the room. The Remove master had risen and was leaning heavily on the Head's arm.

"I am sorry for this, Mr. Quelch," said the new master, looking genuinely concerned. "I am afraid you returned to take up your duties before you were really fit!"

The Form-master smiled faintly. He had returned suddenly to Greyfriars because he had received a letter from Wingate of the Sixth explaining the terms Mr. Chesham was upon with the Remove. But of that fact Mr. Chesham was blissfully ignorant.

"I am afraid so," he replied. "I fear I shall have to ask you to undertake my duties once more, Mr. Chesham, for a short time."

"I shall be delighted. I am only glad that I was not already gone from the school," said Mr. Chesham. "You may rely upon me, of course."

"Quite so," said the Head. "Come, Mr. Quelch, let me help you to your room!"

"One moment, sir. I should like to speak to the class." Mr. Quelch looked over the silent Remove. "Boys, I am compelled to leave you for a time—I hope for a very short time. Mr. Chesham will take charge of the class while I am gone. Will you do your best while I am away and accord to Mr. Chesham the attention and respect you have always given me? If I feel that I can rely upon you, it will be a weight off my mind while I am away."

Harry Wharton had resumed his place. As captain of the Remove he felt called upon to reply, but the situation was a difficult one. It was impossible to refuse a Form-master's request, and would have been unfeeling. But the promise, if it were made, to respect the new master and obey him in all things would probably prove very irksome to the Remove.

"We will do our best, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"I rely upon you, my boys."

And Mr. Quelch left the room, leaning upon the Head's arm. The Remove drew a deep breath. They were under Mr. Chesham's orders again now, and there was no help for it. That Chesham

HARRY WHARTON & CO., IN THIS LIVELY YARN OF THEIR EARLY SCHOOLDAYS, FIND THEIR FORM-MASTER ONE TOO MANY FOR THEM!



"What does this mean?" It was a sudden voice at the door of the study. The juniors looked round in dismay. Mr. Chesham stood in the doorway. "I fully expected my regulations as to moderation in eating and drinking to be followed by an outburst of greed and gorging in the studies!" he exclaimed.

was a kindly man made no difference. He was a faddist who insisted upon imposing his fads on others. How would the Remove be able to stand him?

"We will now take the first lesson," said Mr. Chesham quietly.

He removed his coat and hat and laid down his bag. The lesson was already nearly a quarter of an hour late. There was a movement of attention.

"Bunter!"

"Yes, sir!" piped Billy Bunter, blinking nervously through his big spectacles.

"Did you speak to me, sir?"

"How dare you come into the class-room with a smudge of jam on your face?"

Billy Bunter turned red. He had not come into the class-room like that. The smudge had been made while he was eating jam tarts at his desk during the absence of Mr. Quelch.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!"

"What is making your jacket bulge out like that, Bunter?"

"N-n-nothing, sir!"

"Unbutton it immediately!"

Billy Bunter made a desperate effort to slide the bag of tarts from under his jacket to the desk. There was a thud on the floor as a couple of tarts slipped out of the bag. Mr. Chesham came towards the desk.

"Bunter!"

"Y-e-es, sir?"

"You have brought these horrible, sticky articles of diet into the class-room—"

"They're not horrible, sir!" said Bunter, with some spirit. "They're jolly good tarts, sir—the best that Mrs. Mimble makes."

"They are an unhealthy food."

"I get so hungry, sir—"

"This is merely habit-hunger, which can be cured by an effort of the will. In any case, this unwholesome pastry could only do you harm. Take those tarts out of the class-room immediately and throw them away."

"Throw them away?" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, and at once!"

Bunter rose. He picked up the two tarts that had fallen to the ground, and returned them to the bag; then he walked slowly out of the class-room.

"Make haste, Bunter!"

"Yes, sir."

Bunter was not gone two minutes. When he came in there was a fat twinkle in his eye and a fresh smudge of jam on his face. It was pretty clear to the Remove how he had disposed of the tarts. Fortunately, Mr. Chesham was not so observant.

"We will now commence," he said.

And morning lessons commenced. Before the Remove were dismissed, they heard the sound of wheels in the Close and knew that Mr. Quelch was gone again.

The Faddist on the Warpath!

HARRY WHARTON, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh, the chums of the Remove, strolled out into the Close after morning school. They were all looking very thoughtful.

"Well, we've got him again," said Bob Cherry.

"The gotfulness is terrific!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"He hasn't shown the cloven hoof yet," Nugent remarked. "He may be going to turn over a new leaf, you know. Perhaps the experience he's had of the Remove will be a lesson to him."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"You don't think so, Harry?"

"No, I don't," said Wharton. "He means business. He hasn't started yet because he hasn't had time—that's all."

"The rotter!"

"Well, he isn't exactly a rotter," said Harry, laughing. "He's doing it from a mistaken sense of duty."

"When a chap starts making other people uncomfortable from a sense of duty, he wants jumping on!" said Bob Cherry oracularly.

"And the jumpfulness should be terrific!"

"He will get jumped on if he starts his fads again!" said Nugent rather excitedly. "There were those sandals, you know. We never wore them, and Quelch sent them away yesterday. That was lucky. If they had been still here we might be going around in sandals now, like a lot of giddy Arabs!"

"He means 'business!'" Wharton repeated. "I only wonder what the next wheeze will be. He's started taking care of our precious health and he will keep it up. He—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Mr. Chesham came out of the house. He observed the four juniors, came towards them, and stopped.

"Ah, I wish to speak to you!" he said. "I am afraid that you misunderstood me at our first acquaintance, my lads. You thought I was interfering with your liberty—"

"Yes, sir," said Harry Wharton.

Mr. Chesham coloured a little. He had not exactly expected that reply.

"Well, it was quite a mistake," he said. "My intention was to take care of your health, which I am afraid has been somewhat neglected. Upon the whole, Wharton, you may continue your cricket practice—"

"Thank you, sir," said Harry, with a breath of relief.

"But only on condition that you take proper precautions. You must not run too fast or strike the ball with too great violence, or the strain may have a serious effect upon your lungs."

"But my lungs are not weak, sir!"

"I hope you do not intend to set your judgment up in opposition to mine, Wharton!" said the Form-master sternly.

Harry Wharton was silent.

"It will be necessary for you, also, to be careful in your diet," said Mr. Chesham. "This can only be ensured by your taking meals always in my sight."

"We always do, sir, except—"

"Except for the tea in the study."

"Yes, sir," said Wharton, with a sinking heart.

"I am afraid that will have to be discontinued," said Mr. Chesham. "I will, however, consider that very carefully before making a change. Dear me, I believe you are wearing a belt, Cherry!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take it off immediately. You must not wear a belt. The effect of compression upon the interior organs is apt to set up irritation, which may lead to appendicitis."

"But—"

"Take it off!"

"I've worn a belt ever since I was a

kid, sir, but I don't remember ever having had appendicitis," said Bob Cherry rebelliously.

"Give me that belt!"

Bob Cherry reluctantly handed it over. It was, perhaps, fortunate that he was wearing braces as well.

"All the belts in the possession of Remove boys must be brought to my study before afternoon lessons," said Mr. Chesham. "Will you, Wharton, as head boy of the Form, see that my order is carried out?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"That is not the way to reply to me, Wharton. It hints, as it were, an unwillingness to obey my orders."

Wharton was silent.

"I am afraid you will not remain head boy if you take up an attitude of opposition to your Form-master!" said Mr. Chesham severely. "You will make it a point, please, to see that all belts belonging to Remove boys are brought to me."

"Very well, sir."

"But how are we to play cricket without belts?" asked Nugent.

"You must wear braces instead."

"But—"

"I must insist on the disuse of belts as dangerous to the health. Possibly you could fasten your trousers to your cricket shirts by means of safety-pins."

"My hat!" murmured Nugent.

"Upon further subjects—such as morning baths and regulations in your diet—I will speak to you later," said Mr. Chesham. "It is impossible to settle every point at once, and I am afraid there will be some foolish discontent in the Form. I look to you, Wharton, as head boy, to see all my directions carried out." And Mr. Chesham walked away.

The chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"What did I tell you?" said Harry, with a half-laugh. "He means business, and he has started early. Hallo, Bulstrode! What's the trouble?"

The bully of the Remove was striding up, with a face like thunder. He stopped and scowled at the chums of Study No. 1.

"Trouble enough!" he growled. "If that ass Chesham stays here much longer, he will get slain!"

"Has he started on you?"

"Yes, he has. He says I'm lethargic, and I've got to walk quickly round the Close three times every day between morning and afternoon school."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you rotters to cackle! I was just leaning back in class, that's all, and that demon spoke to me about it as I was coming out. He said he would not accuse me of being lazy, and that he set it down to lethargy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not going to stand it!" growled Bulstrode. "Nice ass I shall look walking round the Close three times a day! I shall be chipped by every fellow in the school!"

"Why not declinefully refuse to perform the thrice walkfulness?" asked the nabob.

"That's all very well, but he's in earnest over it. I don't want to be detained for a half-holiday or given five hundred lines."

"Well, the walk will do you good," said Bob Cherry. "As a matter of fact, you know, you are rather lazy, Bulstrode."

The Remove bully growled, and strode on. The chums of the Remove could not help laughing.

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"Chesham is coming it strong," said Harry Wharton. "The walk won't do Bulstrode any harm; but when the fags of the Third Form get to know about it, they'll lie in wait for him and chip him. He's not popular, and they'll be glad of the chance."

"The chipfulness will be great!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Bunt! What did you do with those jam tarts?"

"Ate them!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at the chums. "Fancy the chap being ass enough to think that anybody would throw jam tarts away! You could have knocked me down with a flat-iron when he told me to throw them away, you know. But it occurred to me that I could bolt them instead."

"And you bolted them?"

"Yes. But, I say, you fellows, it's getting near dinner-time."

"That's nothing to worry about, Bunt. You generally look happy when it's getting near meal-time."

"Yes; but that was before this awful Chesham came," said Billy Bunter, who was looking the reverse of happy now. "You know how he cut down the meals. I don't know what to do about it. My constitution isn't very strong, you know, and I'm afraid I shall be ill if I don't get enough to eat. I never get really enough at the best of times, you know."

"Why not have a good tuck-in at Mrs. Mimble's shop before going in to dinner?" Nugent suggested.

"Thank you very much, Nugent! Come on!"

"Come on—where?"

"To Mrs. Mimble's. Weren't you suggesting treating me to a feed, in case there isn't enough for dinner?"

"No, I wasn't!" said Nugent emphatically. "I suggested your feeding there, Bunt. But I'm not filling up any comorants this afternoon, thank you!"

"Don't be selfish, Nugent! I was thinking of having a feed at the tuckshop, in case of accidents."

"But suppose it turned out to be a good dinner, after all, and you had just had a feed?" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, that's all right! I can always stand two feeds!" said Billy Bunter.

"I've got a healthy appetite, you know."

"Yes; I've noticed that."

"I was thinking of having a feed, but I happen to be broke. I'm expecting a postal order this evening, but I may be seriously ill by that time if I don't have my proper amount of sustenance. I was thinking that you fellows might like to stand me a feed now, and I'll refund when my postal order comes."

"Can't be did, Bunt! We know all about that postal order!"

"Well, you see, I'm hungry, and I know you wouldn't like me to be ill. As for the postal order, I don't really like the flippant way you speak about it, Cherry. It's really almost as if you doubted my word. It's bound to come this evening. I really expected it yesterday, but there has been some delay. You wouldn't like to see me ill and moping about the study, would you?" said Billy Bunter pathetically.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "If you start moping about the study, we can easily turn you out, you know."

"Really, Cherry—"

Harry Wharton extracted a shilling from his waistcoat pocket. Bunter's eyes glistened at the sight of silver.

"Thank you very much, Wharton!" he said, as Harry tossed it to him. "Of course, this is only a loan?"

"That's all right, Bunt!"

"I'm afraid I can't accept it,

Wharton, unless it is regarded strictly as a loan," said Billy Bunter, slipping the shilling into his trousers pocket.

"Whether it is regarded loanfully or giftfully, the resultfulness will be exactly the sameful," murmured the nabob.

"I'll settle up for this directly my postal order comes, Wharton," said Billy Bunter. "I expect it to be for a considerable amount, and then I will settle up some other little accounts when the order comes. Did you say you wanted to lend me a shilling, Nugent?"

"No."

"Did you, Cherry?"

"No."

"H'm! Well, I can get a snack for this. Upon the whole, Wharton, as my postal order is certain to be for at least ten shillings, you may as well give me the other nine shillings now, and have the whole of it when it comes—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'm afraid it can't be done, Bunt. Go and blow that shilling, and don't leave any jam on your face this time! Come on, you chaps!"

The chums of the Remove walked away. Billy Bunter looked after them with a far from satisfied expression on his face.

"Wharton is rather selfish," he murmured. "They're all rather selfish, as a matter of fact. A generous fellow like me is rather out of place in the Remove, I am afraid. I suppose I had better get what I can for this shilling."

And Billy Bunter made a direct line for the school tuckshop.

Bulstrode's Walk!

MR. CHESHAM was at the head of the Remove table at the midday dinner of the juniors. The Remove watched him with anxious eyes. He had signalled his first assumption of authority over the Remove by cutting down their meals. Whether he meant to continue in the same way was the burning question.

He soon showed that he did intend it.

The plates that were passed down the table to the hungry juniors contained thin slices of beef—so thin as to show almost the pattern of the plate through. There were no potatoes on the table at all. Mr. Chesham had abolished potatoes as indigestible, forgetting that what might affect him in middle life might be quite harmless to the hungry juniors.

There was bread, and it was of a wholesome variety, undoubtedly much superior as an article of diet to white bread, but hardly a satisfactory substitute for beef and potatoes.

The Removites glared at their plates, and ate sulkily. The plates were cleared in record time, and there was a pause. It was perfectly certain that Mr. Chesham did not intend them to have a second helping. But the Removites were hungry.

"If you please, sir, may I have some more beef?" said Levison.

Mr. Chesham shook his head.

"I think not, Levison."

"I'm hungry, sir!"

"Merely a habit-hunger, the result of overeating in the past," said Mr. Chesham kindly. "It will soon pass off, Levison."

Levison grunted.

"I'm hungry!" said Bulstrode sulkily.

"Have you walked round the Close three times since morning school, Bulstrode?"

"I've done it twice, sir."

"You will not forget the third time before afternoon lessons," said Mr. Chesham, gently but firmly.

And Bulstrode snorted as loudly as he dared.

"I—I should like some more beef, sir," faltered Billy Bunter.

"Yes, I think you probably would," assented the Form-master. "Your case, Bunter, is the most striking I have ever come across of the deplorable effects of gluttony."

"Oh, sir!"
 "Indeed, I think it is extremely probable that your stupidity in class is largely due to your gluttony," said Mr. Chesham.

A giggle ran down the Remove table, and Billy Bunter turned red.

"Oh, really, sir! I never get enough to eat—"

"I shall speak to you again on this subject, Bunter. It is an important one. I cannot help thinking that you are suffering from a state of fatty degeneration. You may leave the table, boys."

pathetically. "My hat! They'll be ordered to wear clean collars next."

"Oh, they'd go on strike rather than that!" said Temple confidently.

"Yes; I suppose a worm will turn in time."

"Certainly; and the endurance even of the Remove has its limits. A washed neck and a clean collar coming at the same time would make them absolutely ill. Somebody really ought to warn Mr. Chesham to start these things gradually."

The chums of the Remove swung away with heightened colour, followed by the chuckles of Temple, Dabney & Co.

"It isn't only the faddishness of the Chesham ass," growled Bob Cherry. "But to be cackled at by those duffers in the Upper Fourth—"

"The fadfulness is great," said the Nabob of Bhanipur ruefully; "but the cackfulness is terrific!"

shall have to get our backs up at the finish, you know. He will keep on if we don't stop him."

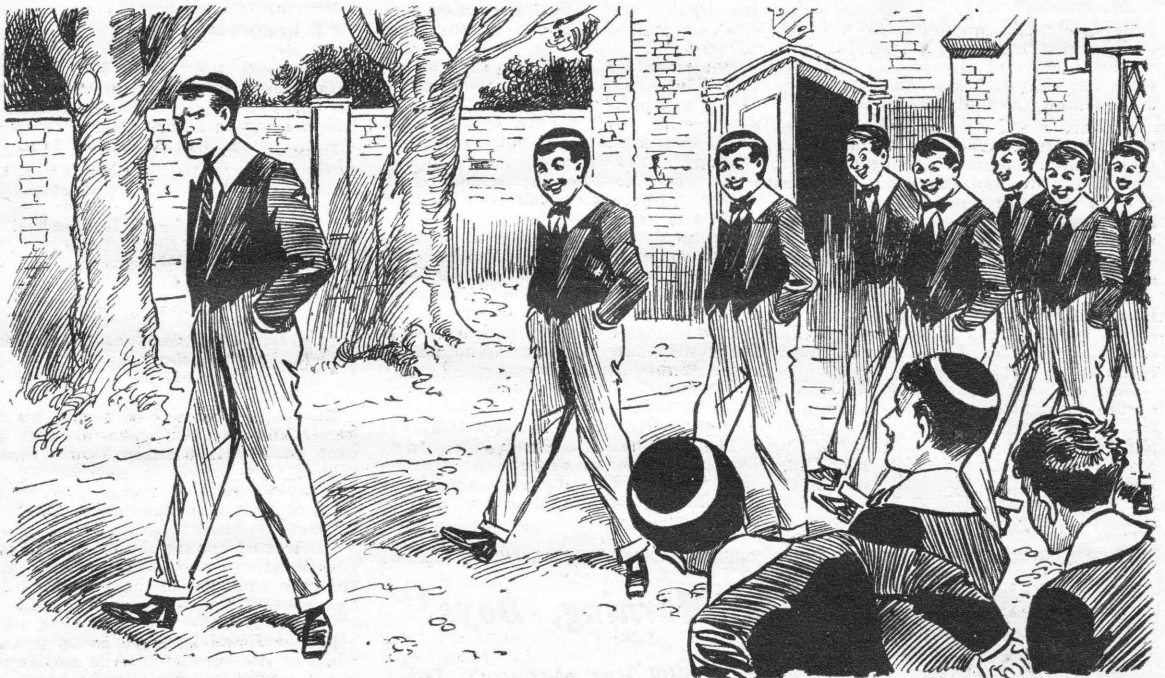
"That is true, I suppose. But we can rag him in our own way, without trying such a serious step again as a revolt," said Wharton. "Of course, we're not going to put up with it patiently."
 "Rather not!" said Nugent emphatically.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"
 "I'd better go and get those belts now—"

"Suppose you don't do it?"
 "Well, as head boy I'm bound to do as he tells me, I suppose," said Wharton, wrinkling his brow. "It's all rot, of course, but orders have to be obeyed."

"Well, we'll come and help you," said Nugent.

The chums of the Remove were soon busy collecting up the cricket and other belts belonging to fellows in the Form.



As Bulstrode strode savagely round the Close on his enforced walk, a dozen fags formed up and marched round behind him, imitating his angry stride, while everyone in the Close roared with laughter.

The Removites went out with dark faces.

The Upper Fourth were grinning at them, and in the Close they chipped the Removites unmercifully on the subject of the new master and his new regulations.

"I hear you're going to be put to bed at seven o'clock and tucked in by the matron," Temple remarked to Harry Wharton. "Is it a fact? Dabney told me so."

"My dear chap, surely you don't regard anything that Dabney says as a fact!" said Harry Wharton. Dabney turned red.

"Look here, Wharton—"

"Oh, don't be annoyed with the little fellow, Dab!" said Temple. "He's feeling rather worried, you know. I hear that the order has gone forth that the Remove will have to wash their necks regularly now under the new regime, and, of course, it weighs on their minds a good deal."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.
 "I suppose it would," said Fry sym-

"Something's got to be done," said Nugent.

"I've got to see about those belts," said Harry Wharton grimly. "There will be a row if they're not in the dummy's room before afternoon school."
 "Look here, why not have a revolt?" said Bob Cherry excitedly. "We tried it before, and made him climb down." Wharton shook his head.

"It won't do, Bob. It was the rows in the Remove that brought poor old Quelch back before he recovered from his illness. Now he's broken down again. It's rough on him, you know. We shall have to put up with Chesham without any open row this time, for his sake. He can't help the man being a howling ass!"

"I suppose not, but—"
 "We said we'd do our best. Well, I think a revolt of the Form would be doing about our worst. If we brought the Head into it, we don't know where or how it would end. We shall have to grin and bear it."

"Human nature can't stand too heavy a strain," said Bob Cherry sagely. "We

There was growling on all sides, but the juniors realised that Harry was helpless in the matter, and the growling was directed against the faddist Form-master.

Bulstrode, of course, ventured upon a sneer on the occasion. Bulstrode had never forgiven Harry Wharton for taking his place as head of the Form.

"Jolly good sort of Form captain, you are!" he remarked. "Why don't you stand up for the Form against that confounded ass?"

"Bosh!" said Harry.
 "If I were Form captain I'd jolly soon show him that he couldn't have things all his own way with the Remove."

"You can take the lead, if you like," said Wharton. "If you have any plan for putting the Chesham ass in his place, carry it out, and we'll back you up."

"I'm not Form captain—"
 "No; you're a windbag!" said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "You talk THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,515.

big because you won't be put to the test. Hand me over that belt."

"Take it, and be hanged!"

A heap of belts of various colours and sizes was deposited in the Form-master's study. Harry piled them on the table and left them there.

It was near school-time when the chums of the Remove finished their task and came out into the Close. The sound of loud laughter attracted their attention at once.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's on?"

"It's Bulstrode!"

"The honourable and esteemed Bulstrode is taking his worthy constitutional," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, grinning.

The chums of the Remove could not help laughing as they looked on. Bulstrode was walking savagely round the Close, and the news of his enforced pedestrianism had evidently spread, for little fags out of the Third and Second Forms had gathered to watch and follow in his footsteps.

Bulstrode had always been a bully, and he was extremely unpopular with the small boys of Greyfriars, and they were not slow to seize the opportunity of ridiculing the bully of the Remove.

A dozen diminutive fags had formed up and were marching round the Close after Bulstrode, grinning like monkeys. The Removite had not been conscious at first of their impertinence, till the loud laughter of the spectators drew his attention to it. Then he glared round and made a rush at the fags, and they scattered and escaped.

When he strode on again they followed on in single file, at a safe distance, imitating his angry stride, while everyone in the Close roared with laughter.

Two or three times Bulstrode rushed at the tormentors, and they scattered; but every time they formed up again and followed him, and the bully of the Remove was crimson with rage and humiliation when his walk was over. Mr. Chesham met him at the door and smiled blandly.

"Dear me, you have quite a colour, Bulstrode!" he said. "You see, your exercise is doing you a great amount of good already."

Bulstrode did not reply. His feelings were too deep for words.

The Iron Hand!

THE Remove came in to afternoon school in an expectant mood, and not a very good-humoured one.

A word from Harry Wharton, their recognised leader, and they would have stayed out in the Close and not come in to lessons at all. But Harry had good reasons for not allowing a revolt to take place under his lead.

After all, the matter was one between the Form and the Form-master. It was not in the game to take steps which would lead the Head to interfere on either side. The Remove could fight its own battles.

Mr. Chesham was at his desk, and he blinked pleasantly at the Remove with his dreamy eyes. The boys took their places, and afternoon lessons commenced.

In spite of Mr. Chesham's fads, he was a man of considerable scholastic attainments and quite fitted for his task. He was not so strict as Mr. Quelch, however, in the matter of getting through work.

As the lessons proceeded Billy Bunter's expression was seen to grow more and more mutinous.

Bunter was not the fellow to stand up for a principle, but anything like hunger touched him in his tenderest spot. He was hungry now. The snack at the tuckshop before dinner and the few thin slices of beef had not made much difference to him. And hunger made Bunter desperate.

"Bunter!"

Mr. Chesham rapped out the name, and every eye turned towards Billy.

The fat junior was leaning forward on his desk, with an expression upon his face which Bob Cherry afterwards described as resembling that of a dying codfish.

"Yes, sir," said Bunter faintly.

"Sit up immediately!"

"I—I can't, sir."

"Are you ill?"

"Well, not exactly ill, sir, but very faint."

"Faint? You feel faint?"

"Yes, sir; from want of food."

Mr. Chesham's brow darkened.

"Is this intended for impertinence, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir! I should be sorry to be impertinent, sir, while you are present. I am very hungry, sir."

"I have explained to you that this is merely an illusion, Bunter. It is what is known as habit-hunger, and is an effect of the imagination."

"I know I feel jolly empty, sir."

"You are not really empty, Bunter. Sit up!"

"I haven't the strength, sir."

"Do you want me to cane you?"

"I'd rather be caned than starve to death any day, sir," said Bunter recklessly. "I feel that I'm going to die."

"Sit up immediately!"

"I haven't the strength to move a limb, sir."

"We will see," said Mr. Chesham grimly, and he picked up a cane from his desk and came towards Bunter. "Now sit up, Bunter."

Bunter looked at the cane and looked at the gleam in Mr. Chesham's eye, and found strength to sit up with surprising alacrity.

"Hold out your hand, Bunter."

"My—my hand, sir?"

"Yes; I'm going to cane you for your impertinence."

"I—I— Really, sir, I'm sorry. I didn't meant to be impertinent. I was only overcome by weakness due to want of sufficient nourishment."

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Chesham.

Bunter reluctantly held out his fat hand, and Mr. Chesham brought the cane down with a sharp blow. Bunter roared.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Stop that ridiculous noise, Bunter!"

"Ow! It hurts!"

"It was a very slight cut. I shall give you something more severe than that if you are impertinent again," said Mr. Chesham. "You will sit upright."

"Y-e-e-es, sir."

Bunter found strength to sit upright when he discovered that the master was not to be trifled with. But he had given a cue which another member of the Remove followed. It was Levison, the new boy in the Form, who was in a sulky and discontented mood and ready for mischief.

"Levison, you will construe," said Mr. Chesham in the Latin lesson. "You will go on from 'insula portum efficit objectu leterum—'"

"Quibus," said Levison sullenly.

"Construe!"

"I don't feel equal to it, sir."

"Eh?"

"I'm not up to construing, sir, after having missed my dinner."

Mr. Chesham did not argue with Levison. He picked up the cane which had enabled Bunter to recover his lost strength so suddenly.

"Come out here, Levison!"

Levison went out before the class.

"You have disobeyed me," said Mr. Chesham. "Hold out your hand!"

Levison set his lips hard.

"Hold out your hand, Levison!"

The hand came slowly out. The cane swished down, and Levison jerked his hand away. Mr. Chesham gave a gasp of anguish as it smote upon his own leg. The Remove burst into an irresistible chuckle. Levison grinned, too, but the



"Good Morning, Boys!"

You all know Will Hay, of course. The latest film of the 'schoolmaster' comedian of cinema, stage and radio fame, "Good Morning, Boys!", will be at your cinema shortly. He's supplying another mirthquake, meanwhile, in

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2d

The **PILOT**

grin was only momentary. The angry Form-master seized him by the collar, swung him round, and brought the cane into play again actively.

Levison roared and wriggled, but the blows descended until he had had eight or nine, and then the master released him.

"Now go back to your place, Levison, and let that be a lesson to you."

And Levison went back, scowling.

It was an unexpected sight of the iron hand, and the Remove was certainly more respectful and attentive after that lesson to Levison.

The afternoon was not a pleasant one. The Form were discontented, and in some cases the hunger was very real. All were glad when the hands of the clock indicated half-past four and the class was dismissed.

"One moment," said Mr. Chesham, as the juniors rose to their feet. "I have a few words to say to you. The curtailment of your breakfasts will probably, at first, make you feel the habit-hunger of which Bunter complains. To obviate this, and to increase your allowance of sustenance, I shall arrange for some refreshment in the class-room midway between breakfast and dinner to-morrow."

The faces of the Remove brightened up considerably. They were dismissed, and they poured out into the Close, discussing the happenings of the afternoon.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter hurried after Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry and caught them up. The Falstaff of the Remove was looking anxious and distressed.

"What's the matter, Bunt?"

"I'm famished. I suppose we're going to have tea in the study the same as usual to-day?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Chesham hasn't forbidden it yet."

"Don't you think we had better have an extra good feed this time in case he forbids it?" suggested Bunter.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, it's not a bad wheeze."

"It is a wheezy good idea," said Hurree Singh. "Let us have the whipful roundness and have a jolly feedful feast in the study."

"That's what I was thinking," said Bunter. "I am famished. I suppose that chap is mad and won't come to his senses till some of us are dying. I felt like dying this afternoon."

"I thought the cane revived you wonderfully," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, don't be funny, Cherry! This is too serious a matter for jokes. A faddist like that ought to be suffocated at birth, you know. I wouldn't mind cold baths or walks round the Close, but to cut short a fellow's grub—"

"Unspeakable!"

"The unspeakableness is terrific!"

"It's not a bad idea about the feed," said Nugent thoughtfully. "I feel too jolly empty myself to go in for cricket till after tea. Get tea as quickly as you can, Bunt, and mind there's plenty of it."

"Hand over the tin and I'll jolly soon get the tea," said Bunter.

The chums of the Remove pooled a little heap of silver. As it happened, they were in funds. Billy Bunter hurried off to the tuckshop, with the money jingling in his pocket and satisfaction beaming in his face.

"I wonder what the refreshment in the morning is going to be?" Nugent remarked thoughtfully. "That looks like a glimmer of common sense on the part of the Chesham ass!"

Harry laughed.

"Some humbug, I expect—nothing fit to eat."

"I feel ready for a good feed," said Bob Cherry. "I'm beginning to understand now how chaps become cannibals. I hope Billy Bunter won't be long with that grub."

"May as well get along to the study and help," suggested Nugent. "The fire will have to be lighted and the kettle boiled."

"Right-ho! Come along!"

The Removites went up to Study No. 1. Hazeldene was in the passage looking very blue. Harry nodded to him.

"Coming in to tea, Hazeldene?" he asked.

"Rather!" said Hazeldene with alacrity. "I'm stony, or I should have got something at the tuckshop. This new regime is rotten."

"Rotten isn't the word for it. We're going to have a bit of a feed now, though. I dare say the horror will abolish supper next."

A Study Feed!

BOB CHERRY soon had the fire going in the study. Nugent filled the kettle, and Hazeldene laid the cloth. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh looked into the cupboard and brought out cups and saucers and plates and knives.

"Better get out what grub there is," said Harry. "We shall want it all, you know, as well as what Bunter brings in."

"But there isn't any esteemed grub, my worthy chum."

"Oh, yes. There's the cold rabbit pie."

"I think I saw the honourable Bunter eating that this morning, my worthy friend."

"H'm! The steak pudding, then."

"The honourable dish is here, but the steak pudding has performed the vanishing trickfulness."

"Bunter again, I suppose. The jam roll—"

"It has performed the disappearfulness."

"The cake—"

"The cake is also of the departed."

"The young cormorant!" exclaimed Harry Wharton wrathfully. "Hasn't he left anything? By Jove, he's cleared out the whole show!"

"Yes; the esteemed cupboard presents the aspect of that of the honourable Mother Hubbard," said the nabob.

"Kettle's boiling!" said Nugent. "How long is that young cormorant going to be?"

"Warm the teapot ready."

"I've done that."

"Perhaps he's stopping to boltfully devour some of the esteemed provender," the nabob suggested.

"I shouldn't wonder. He's bound to have what he calls a snack. Oh, here he is! What have you been so long about, Bunter, you villain?"

"I'm sorry, Wharton—"

"And how did you get that gravy on your face?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Bunter hastily wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Well, I thought I'd better sample some new veal-and-ham pies Mrs. Mimble had. It was no good getting them if they weren't any good, you know. So I had a couple—"

"Thank goodness you haven't bolted the whole shoot!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We were asses to trust you with the tin without watching you."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Where's the bacon? I've greased the pan," said Bob Cherry. "Shove it in!"

"Oh, let me do it!" said Billy Bunter. "You fellows can't cook! You have to cut the rind off first. Gimme a knife."

There was soon a savoury smell of frying bacon in the study—very grateful to the nostrils of six hungry juniors. Micky Desmond of the Remove came along the passage and sniffed, and stopped at the door of Study No. 1.

"Faith, and is it a feed ye're having?" he asked. "Sure, and it's not meself that will refuse to have a snack wid ye!"

"Come in!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "There's heaps. I wish we could have in the whole Remove, but we're pretty crowded now. Lend a hand."

And Micky Desmond started sugaring the cups. Bunter, with a glowing face, was busy frying bacon.

"Nearly done, Bunt?"

"Close on," said Bunter, beaming. "Get the plates on the table, will you, Nugent? They're warm enough."

"Right you are!"

The bacon was soon finished and the eggs cooked. The tea-table looked inviting. Nugent poured out the tea, and the fragrance of the cheering beverage was added to that of the bacon, and Billy Bunter added fried eggs.

"My hat!" said Hazeldene. "This is ripping!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The rafterfulness is terrific."

"Yes, this is about as good a feed as any we've had," said Bunter. "We had a jolly good one that time—it was just after the exam, when you swindled Wharton, Vaseline—"

Hazeldene turned scarlet.

Bob Cherry gave Bunter a kick under the table. Bunter was always referring to tabooed subjects in the most outrageously tactless manner, and the kick was deserved. But it came at an unfortunate moment.

Billy Bunter was serving fried eggs direct from the frying-pan, and the kick made him jump. There was a surge of grease and eggs from the pan, and there was a fiendish yell from Micky Desmond as the hot and steaming mess went over his legs.

"Arrah! Tare an' 'ounds!"

Micky Desmond sprang up, kicking his chair over backwards.

Billy Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry indignantly through his big spectacles.

"What did you kick me for, Cherry?" he asked. "Now there's two or three eggs wasted."

"What about my trousers?" yelled Micky Desmond.

"Well, they're spoiled, I suppose. But I'm thinking about the eggs—"

"Faith, and I'll ram yere head in the grate, ye blithering spalpeen!"

"I'm sorry, Desmond, especially as the eggs are wasted, but it's Cherry's fault—not mine. He gave me a kick all of a sudden, without any reason whatever, and I wasn't expecting anything of the sort."

"Sure, if I wasn't a guest in the study, I'd wipe up the flure wid ye," said Micky Desmond, rubbing his trousers down with his handkerchief.

"It's Cherry's fault—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's have tea. All of you served? Good! Go ahead!"

"What-ho!"

"What does this mean?"

It was a sudden voice at the door of the study.

The juniors looked up with a general gasp of dismay. Mr. Chesham stood in the doorway!

Confiscation!

MR. CHESHAM stood looking at the feasting juniors, with a severe brow. The frown upon his face grew darker as he looked.

He stepped into the study. "I expected something of this sort," he said. "I fully expected my salutatory regulations as to moderation in eating and drinking to be followed by some horrible outburst of greed and gorging in the studies."

Harry Wharton turned scarlet. He was always temperate in eating and drinking, and no one had ever accused him of being overfond of either. Billy Bunter was the only person in the study to whom the Form-master's words could apply with anything like justice.

"I don't think you have a right to say that, sir," Harry broke out hotly. "We have always been accustomed to having tea in our studies, and no master at Greyfriars has found fault with it."

"You must not speak to me like that, Wharton." "We had a much smaller dinner than we are accustomed to, sir, and we are hungry. We are allowed to have what we like for tea." Mrs. Mimble is not permitted to sell anything in her shop that is not good for us.

"You must not argue with me, Wharton. If I allowed this reckless feeding in the studies, I might as well drop all the new regulations I have made as to your diet. In one half-hour of that reckless eating you would undo all the good done by previous temperance."

The juniors were silent. They knew what was coming next, and there was angry rebellion in every heart.

Mr. Chesham advanced into the study, and looked with an eye of extreme disfavour on the well-spread table.

"Horrible!" he exclaimed. "Fried bacon on a warm afternoon! It is enough to ruin your digestion for ever!"

"We like it, sir," said Bob Cherry. "Possibly, but that does not guarantee that it is good for you, Cherry. What are—er—those compounds?"

"They are veal and ham pies, sir," said Billy Bunter. "Jolly good ones, too, sir! Mrs. Mimble makes them herself."

"A small portion of one of them would make any of you a sufficient dinner," said Mr. Chesham severely. "As for this horrible repast, you must not touch it!"

The juniors looked furious. They did not trouble to conceal the fact. They were getting reckless.

"We are hungry, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"None of you will touch a morsel of this," said Mr. Chesham, firmly.

"You can take your tea in Hall at the proper time, and remember that in future this promiscuous feeding in the studies is prohibited."

"But—" "You must not argue with your master," said Mr. Chesham. "I should like you to remember, however, that I am acting for your own good, and in your best interests. I will take these wretched comestibles away with me."

And Mr. Chesham proceeded to gather up the four corners of the tablecloth.

"You're upsetting the tea, sir!" exclaimed Nugent.

"That is of no consequence."

"And the eggs, sir!"

"It does not matter; they are of no value."

"You have no right to take our food away, sir," exclaimed Harry Wharton. "No other master would ever treat us like this."

"You will take a hundred lines for impertinence, Wharton."

"I don't care! I say it's a shame!" Mr. Chesham's face flushed with anger; but it assumed its usually mild and benevolent expression in a few moments.

"I am sorry you should look upon it in that light, my boy," he said gently. "In the long run, I am certain that you will come to see that I am acting in your best interests."

He gathered up the cloth. There was a fresh crack of crockery and cutlery, and a splashing of spilt tea. The feelings of the juniors may be better imagined than described as they heard the cups and saucers smashing. Crockery was always at a premium in the junior studies. But, as Mr. Chesham would have remarked, the crockery was of no use to them, as they were to have no more meals in that room.

Mr. Chesham tied the four corners of the tablecloth together. The grease was congealing, but the tea was dripping through the cloth. The Form-master jerked it off the table, and carried it gingerly to the door, and disappeared. The juniors watched him till he was gone, and then they looked at one another.

"Are we going to stand this?" said Bob Cherry, in a low, concentrated voice.

"What can we do?" "We must do something to stop him. He ought to be sent back to Colney Hatch, where he belongs. We shall have to rag him back to his senses."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I think this is about the finish," he said. "We're entitled to have tea in our studies by the oldest custom of Greyfriars. The Head wouldn't uphold him in such a thing as this, I'm certain."

"Sure, we can't complain to the Head."

"I know we can't; but we're justified in taking any steps we can to bring him to reason. But at present the chief thing is to get a feed," said Wharton. "I'm hungry. I hadn't eaten a mouthful when that howling lunatic came in."

"I'm famished, too," said Bob Cherry. "And that bacon was nice, and the eggs were done to a turn."

"I say, you fellows, wasn't it lucky I had a snack at the tuckshop?"

"That's what we're going to do now," said Harry. "I've got some tin, and the tuckshop is open. Come along!"

The chums of the Remove left the study. There was a trail of tea along the passage, showing the way Mr. Chesham had gone with the confiscated feed. Several fellows were at their doors, and there was indignation in every face.

"I say, Wharton, study feeds are stopped!" exclaimed Skinner.

"Yes; we've just had ours collared."

"Are we going to stand it?" demanded Russell.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Not if we can help it. But I don't see what is to be done at present. I know it's rotten, but it looks to me as if we've got to grin and bear it."

The chums went on. They descended the stairs, leaving the Removites in a buzz of wrathful discussion, and made their way to the tuckshop. This little establishment, kept within the precincts of Greyfriars by Mrs. Mimble, wife of the Head's gardener, supplied most of the wants of the juniors. The chums of the Remove entered and stopped in dismay.

Mr. Chesham was standing at the counter, speaking to Mrs. Mimble, who had a very curious expression on her face.

"You fully understand, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Ye-es, I think so, sir."

"No boy in the Remove is to be supplied with anything eatable at this shop without showing you a permit written and signed by myself."

"Very well, sir!"

The chums of the Remove silently withdrew. Outside the tuckshop Bob Cherry began sparring at an imaginary face under the elm-trees.

"I didn't expect that," Harry Wharton remarked.

"It's checkmate," said Nugent.

"The checkmate is terrific, my worthy chums."

And the chums of the Remove walked disconsolately away.

(The jaded Form-master is certainly giving the Removites a thin time. Read what happens in next week's exciting chapters when he makes the juniors wear nightcaps.)

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