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A Splendid Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and the Run-away from St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford.





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RUNAWAY!

A Grand, Long, Complete
Tale of
TOM MERRY & CO.

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Goal!

"IMPOSS., dear boy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, did not mean to be exasperating when he made that remark. But it was often noticed about D'Arcy, of the Fourth, that he succeeded in being exasperating without intending it.

Perhaps it was the languid tone in which he uttered the remark. Perhaps it was the tone of finality he gave it. Perhaps it was the way he jammed his eyeglass into his right eye, and looked at Tom Merry as he spoke.

Be that as it may, the effect was distinctly exasperating; hence Tom Merry's terse and somewhat personal reply:

"Fathead!" D'Arcy gave his monocle another jam, as if to screw it right into his eye, and surveyed Tom Merry with considerable scorn.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" he began.

"Ass!"

"You feahful boundah—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Jack Blake, of the Fourth.

"If Tom Merry thinks he can do it, let him try."

"But it's imposs., dear boy."

"I know it is; but let him try."

"Oh, let him try!" said Herries. "He can do it about as much as my bulldog Towser could. But let him try."

"Look here—" began Tom Merry heatedly.

"Oh, we'll look!" said Digby. "Go ahead!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We are perfectly prepared to watch you make a silly ass of yourself, Tom Mewwy."

"Certainly," said Blake considerably. "If Tom Merry has a fancy for playing the giddy ox, why shouldn't we have an audience?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry turned red.

"I say I could send the footer right into the Farm-room door!" he bawled. "I tell you I've done it!"

"Fluke, dear boy."

"Yaas, wathah—a beastly fluke. You couldn't do it again, Tom Mewwy."

"Ass!"

"Weally—"

"Solvitur ambulando," said Monty Lowther. "Let him try. Go ahead, Tommy."

"Certainly. I'll show these Fourth-Form asses—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Stand back!"

"I decline to stand back. I—"

"But you're in the way!" bawled Monty Lowther.

"Oh! Undah those cires., dear boy. I shall be vewy pleased to stand back," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gracefully.

The Fourth-Formers crowded back to the side of the wide-flagged passage.

It was the Form-room passage at St. Jim's. At the end of it, the door of the Third Form-room was wide open. The doorway was flush with the wall of the passage, and at first glance it certainly seemed a difficult feat to do, as Tom Merry had undertaken to do—kick a footer along the passage into the doorway. For the ball had to turn at a right angle to go in.

But by catching the opposite wall in a certain way, and having a certain spin on the ball, the footer would do it; and Tom Merry had already done it once. The Shell fellow was rather proud of the feat, and the scepticism of the Fourth-Formers was distinctly exasperating. They insisted upon regarding it as a mere fluke; and perhaps it was. But Tom Merry firmly believed that he could do it again, any number of times, and he was prepared to try.

Kicking footballs about in the passages was not exactly in accordance with the rules of the school. But juniors have

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY & Co." and "THE IRON ISLAND."

short memories; and there were times when Tom Merry & Co. seemed quite ignorant of the fact that there were any rules at all in St. Jim's.

At all events, at this present moment they were not thinking of rules, or prefects, or masters, or any of those troublesome things, but of whether Tom Merry could or could not put a spin on the footer which would turn it into the Form-room door at the end of the passage.

It was really a favourable moment. The boys had not to go into afternoon classes for a quarter of an hour yet, and the masters, therefore, were not likely to appear on the scene just then.

That any master might for any reason have gone into a Form-room before the time for his class was a possibility that the juniors did not think of for the moment. Fellows cannot think of everything; and just now they were thinking of footers, not Form-masters.

"Go it, Merry!"

"Buck up, Tommy, my son," said Manners.

Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's special chums in the Shell, believed, of course, that he could do it. They made a point of it.

Tom Merry placed the footer for the kick.

"Hallo!" exclaimed a cheery voice, as a fag with a smudge of ink on his face came racing along the passage from the stairs. "What's the little game?"

It was Wally, D'Arcy's minor. Following him came Joe Frayne, also at top speed. They stopped as they nearly bumped into Tom Merry, and Joe stumbled over the footer and rolled on the linoleum.

"Ow! Crikey!" he gasped.

Joe would probably never be cured of saying "Crikey." Wally had tried to instruct him that "My hat!" answered the purpose equally well, and sounded better. But Joe, once the ragged waif of the London slums, and now in the Third Form at St. Jim's, could not break himself of all his old habits—not at once, at all events.

"Out of the way, you silly fags!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Rats!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Crikey!"

Tom Merry picked Joe up and set him upon his feet.

"I'm sorry, Master Tom!" exclaimed Joe breathlessly.

"It's all right, Joe."

Tom Merry always spoke kindly to Joe. He had been the means of bringing the waif to St. Jim's, and installing him there; and in all his trials at the school, Joe had never found the kindness of Tom Merry fail him.

"Crikey! I—"

"That'll do, Joe."

Wally pulled Joe back out of the way.

"Shut up, Joe!" he said. "Look here, what's the game, you chaps?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! Look here, old Selby will be along here soon, and if he catches you kicking footers about in the passages there will be trouble."

"Weally—"

"He's in a ratty temper to-day—a regular wax," said Wally, with a chuckle. "Jameson got it this morning—both hands. Old Selby had bacon for brekker, and it's always the same—he's got no digestion, you know."

"Weally, Wally, you must not speak of your Form-master in that disrespectful way," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"I regard it as howwidly bad form."

"Oh, rats to you, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Shut up—here goes!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

He had placed the ball again.

He retreated a few paces to get a run, spacing the kick out in his eye, carefully calculating the force and spin he would have to give the ball.

It certainly looked a difficult feat.

The Form-room door was a dozen yards away, in the side of the passage towards the end, and hardly one junior present believed that the ball would really enter the Third Form-room.

"Suppose old Selby's there?" murmured Joe.

Wally burst into a chuckle.

"What larks!"

"Shut up, you fags!" said Monty Lowther. "Now, then."

Biff!

Tom Merry kicked the ball.

With a whiz it went down the passage, swerving just as Tom Merry intended, touching the wall opposite the doorway, and shooting right across the passage into the open doorway of the Form-room.

And just as it did so, a thin form in cap and gown came striding out.

It was Mr. Selby, the master of the Third! Probably the noise in the passage had irritated him, and he was coming

out to see what it was about. He certainly chose a most unlucky moment for stepping out of the Form-room.

Biff!

There was a gasp of horror from the juniors.

Right upon Mr. Selby's ill-tempered face the ball banged, and the startled Form-master, with a loud cry, reeled back into the room.

Bump!

Almost frozen with horror, the juniors heard the Form-master fall with a crash inside the Form-room.

Then Tom Merry recovered his voice.

"Cave!" he gasped.

The juniors tore away from the spot. With a wild rush they escaped, scattering along the passages or into the studies. Mr. Selby, raging with wrath, came tearing out into the passage a moment later. But the passage was empty, deserted, and not so much as a heel was to be seen.

CHAPTER 2.

Joe Catches It.

MR. SELBY gasped in the passage—he gasped and snorted. Mr. Selby was a most suspicious and ill-tempered man, and he had not the slightest doubt that the trick had been played upon him on purpose. The juniors might have vowed, with tears in their eyes, that they had not known that he was in the Form-room. They might have pointed out that, even if they had known that he was there, they could not possibly have known that he would stop forth at the precise moment that the footer bounced in the doorway. But Mr. Selby would not have believed them; he would have paid no heed. He would have persisted in regarding the whole matter as a deep-laid plot, and in visiting the most condign punishment upon all concerned in it. He would probably have marched the whole party before the Head, and accused them of a long-meditated, deep-laid scheme to revenge themselves upon an unpopular master. The juniors knew him, and they did not stop to explain! They ran! Mr. Selby, snorting with fury in the passage, saw no one—heard nothing but the echo of his own snorts.

He raged down the passage, and raged back again. He rushed into the Form-room to look for the footer, hoping that it might furnish a clue. But it was an old footer, such as the boys used for practice, and there was nothing about it to identify it or its owner. Mr. Selby raged out into the passage again.

His face was dusty, his nose was very red. His eyes were inflamed with indignation and rage.

"Monstrous!" he gasped. "Infamous! Oh, dear—it is villainous! A plot—certainly a plot on the part of a whole gang of desperate young scoundrels! But I will find them out—I will punish them!"

He rushed down the passage. He caught sight of Knox, the most unpopular prefect at St. Jim's, with his grasp on the collar of a fag.

It was Joe!

The thought rushed into Mr. Selby's mind at once that Knox had seen the outrage, and had caught the perpetrator in the act of escaping.

"Knox!" he exclaimed. "Ah! You have caught him!"

Knox dragged the lad towards the Form-master. Knox disliked Joe very much, chiefly because he was under the protection of Tom Merry, the junior who was Knox's special foe in the School House. Knox, prefect as he was, had not found it safe to bully Tom Merry. He was quite mean enough to get at Tom Merry by bullying Joe Frayne, of the Third, when opportunity offered.

"Has he done anything, sir?" asked Knox.

"I ain't done nuffin'," said Joe, in the peculiar English he had learned in his early days as a waif in Blucher's Buildings, "I ain't done nuffin', sir."

"Where did you find him, Knox?"

"I heard some fellows rushing past my study, sir," said Knox. "I thought there was probably something up, and I came out. This boy was just disappearing round a corner, and I ran and collared him."

Mr. Selby's eyes glittered.

"You did quite right, Knox!" he exclaimed. "I have not the slightest doubt that this young scoundrel—this denizen of the gutter—was the perpetrator of the outrage. I have been assaulted—most flagrantly assaulted in the doorway of my own Form-room—by having a football hurled in my face."

Knox looked properly shocked. He knew better than to grin, which was what he was very much inclined to do.

"My goodness, sir!" he exclaimed gravely.

"Yes, Knox, it seems incredible, but it is true. Quite true! Look at my face, sir—look at it, bruised and injured by a brutal assault!" said Mr. Selby, who had quite a fine flow of language when he was excited. "This boy hurled a football at me with stunning violence, Knox."

"Why, sir, it's simply awful."
 "Quite right, Knox—quite right."
 "But what can you expect, sir," said Knox insinuatingly.
 "I suppose that was quite the thing in the slum where this young brute was brought up."
 "Yes, yes, undoubtedly. Undoubtedly, Knox."
 "I ain't done nuffin'!" whined poor Joe.
 "Boy!" thundered Mr. Selby.
 "Yes, sir."
 "Did you hurl that football at me?"
 "No, sir."
 "Don't lie to me, Frayne!" shouted Mr. Selby. "I insist upon knowing whether you hurled that football at me—your Form-master."

"No, sir."
 "Answer me truthfully, Frayne."
 "I'm doin' it, sir," said Joe sturdily.
 Mr. Selby snorted with rage. He did not believe Joe. He was too keen upon finding a victim to allow him to believe the fag's denial.

"Frayne!" he exclaimed. "I ask you again seriously, and I demand a truthful answer—did you or did you not hurl that football at me?"

"No, sir," said Joe.
 "You can't expect anything but lies from him, sir," said Knox.

"I suppose not," said Mr. Selby. "No, I suppose not. The wretched boy was brought up to lie, as he was doubtless brought up to steal."

"I didn't bring meself up, sir," said Joe sullenly. "I can't 'elp it."

"Don't be impertinent, boy!"

"Werry well, sir."

"You hurled that football at me—"

"I didn't, sir!"

"Then who did?"

Joe was silent.

Mr. Selby saw his advantage, and he pressed it. If Joe had not kicked the footer he had seen it kicked, otherwise why his hurried flight, which the prefect had interrupted? Mr. Selby felt that he had the boy either way now.

"Frayne!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see that football hurled?"

"Yes, sir," faltered Joe.

"Ah! But you did not hurl it?"

"No, sir."

"You know who did?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was it?"

Joe did not speak.

The Form-master set his thin lips. Knox compressed his grasp upon Joe's collar and shook him.

"Answer your Form-master, you cheeky young villain!" he said.

"I ain't got nothing to say."

"Frayne, give me the delinquent's name—give me the name of the unscrupulous young wretch who committed this heinous offence," said Mr. Selby, his flow of language growing really finer and finer as he proceeded.

Joe set his teeth.

"Speak, wretched boy!"

"I ain't got nothing to say, sir."

"Frayne," said Mr. Selby, in terrible tones—"Frayne, on a previous occasion I inflicted a severe punishment upon you for obstinately refusing to answer my questions."

Joe shuddered. Well he remembered that cruel, spiteful caning. His pluck in enduring it had first won him the good opinion of the Third Form, and had cemented his friendship with Wally for ever.

Could he face that again? Yes, rather than betray Tom Merry to punishment—yes, that or any other punishment—yes, death itself. There was a deep and heroic devotion in the breast of this lad who had been reared in a slum. Tom Merry had stood his friend through thick and thin, and towards Tom Merry Joe had a faith that never wavered. He would have laid down his life for the hero of the Shell.

"Will you answer me, Frayne, or will you face the consequences of disobedience?" thundered Mr. Selby.

"I ain't got nothing to say, sir."

"Follow me!"

"Yes, sir."

Knox released the fag, and returned to his study with a grin on his face. Knox was a firm believer in not sparing the rod. Any child in Knox's charge would not have been in danger of being spoiled by the rod being spared, if there were any truth in that old maxim.

Joe obediently followed the Form-master into the Third Form-room. Mr. Selby took a cane from his desk. His face was very spiteful.

"Hold out your hand, Frayne."

Joe obeyed. He went through the infliction of the cane

with the fortitude of a young Spartan. Hardly a gasp escaped him, though Mr. Selby gave him four cuts on each hand, and laid them on as the Head never did.

"You may go, Frayne," said Mr. Selby, "but this is not an end to the matter. I insist upon knowing the name of the young ruffian who perpetrated this outrage upon me."

A look almost of contempt passed over Joe's face. Any other master at St. Jim's would have allowed the matter to end with that severe caning. But Mr. Selby was not a sportsman. The youngest fags in his Form told one another that Selby never "played the game."

"I shall question you again to-night," said Mr. Selby harshly. "If you still refuse to answer me I shall cane you again, more severely. If you still refuse then, I shall repeat the punishment in the morning. I will break this disobedient spirit you have shown, Frayne."

The boy left the class-room without a word.

CHAPTER 3.

Mum's the Word!

TOM MERRY stopped, panting for breath.

The chums of the Shell had taken a passage that led them to the box-room stairs, and they had then gained their study in the Shell quarters by a roundabout route.

Tom Merry dropped into the armchair in the study, panting, and Monty Lowther sat on the table and gasped. Manners leaned against the wall.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"My word! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Narrow squeak!" panted Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha! Did you see Selby's chiv?"

"Right on the boko—his Romo-Greco boko!" sobbed Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three roared again.

Had it been any other master but Mr. Selby the chums of the Shell would have been sorry, though they would probably have laughed all the same. But they never thought of stopping and explaining the accident to Mr. Selby, and taking "lines." They knew that he would be suspicious and unjust, and that was an end of it.

They were glad enough to have escaped unrecognised. Of the fate of the others they did not know—the party had scattered, taking different routes. But the Terrible Three had little doubt that the rest had got clear.

"How were we to know the chap was in the Form-room?" grinned Manners. "Why, his own chaps didn't know—Wally and Joe."

"So we couldn't, naturally."

"Naturally! Besides, what did he want to put his head out of the door at that precise moment for?"

"Oh, it's his way—he's always doing something," said Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"By the way, what about the footer?" said Manners. "I gave Hancock two bob for that old footer. It's pretty old, of course."

"Confiscated, my son. Your two bob is completely done in," said Monty Lowther; "but it was worth two bob of anybody's money to see Selby go over."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry rose, still breathless. Between running and laughing he had a feeling as if he had been playing a particularly stiff game of football.

"I wonder how the others got off?" he remarked.

"Let's go and see."

"I dare say we shall find them in their study," Lowther remarked.

The Terrible Three went down the passage to Study No. 6. The sound of breathless laughter within it told them that the chums of the Fourth were there. Tom Merry pushed open the door.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were leaning against the wall, panting with merriment. D'Arcy stood in front of them with his eyeglasses jammed into his eye and a raised forefinger, admonishing the juniors.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is weally too bad—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, it was vewy funnay," agreed the swell of the School House, "but at the same time, I do not wegard it as respectful to laugh in this way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We must wemembah that Mr. Selbay, howevah little we may respect his chawactah, occupies the posish. of a mastah heah—"

"My dear Gussy, you talk like a book," said Tom Merry.

"Jolly long book," remarked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of
 Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the chums of the Shell.
 "Weally, you know—"
 "Glad to see you've got clear," exclaimed Tom Merry.
 "How did you get away?"
 "Oh, we dodged through the Fourth Form-room, and got out into the quad," said Blake, laughing. "It was all right."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "What about Wally and Joe?" said Digby. "Did they get clear?"

"I don't know—I hope so. I'll look for them. My hat! If Selby caught them running he would make it jolly warm for them."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "But did you see the Selby chivvy?" chortled Blake.
 "It was worth a guinea a box to look at. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The Terrible Three went on their way. Wally was found in the quadrangle, resting on a seat under the old elms. He was relating the adventure to an interested crowd of Third-Form fags. The trees screened Wally from the house and from any possible observation by Mr. Selby. The fags were very much interested, as their incessant chuckles testified.

"Right on the conk?" asked Curly Gibson, almost awestruck.

"Right on the boko!" assured Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Selby!"

"And Tom Merry kicked it?"

"He did!"

"Good for him! Bravo!"

"Stunning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "You should have seen Selby's dial! It went off like an alarm clock! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

By which it will be seen with how much love Mr. Selby had inspired his pupils.

"Hallo, you young scamp!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I see you're safe."

Wally grinned.

"Yes, rather! I'm all serene! Did you get off all right?"

"Yes."

"You really kicked the ball right on his chivvy?" asked Jameson.

"Really and truly?"

"Yes," said Tom, laughing. "It was an accident, of course."

"Oh, of course! He, he, he!"

"But it was, really!" said Tom Merry. "I certainly hadn't the faintest idea there was a Form-master close at hand, or I shouldn't have been kicking a footer about the passages. Has Joe got off all right, Wally?"

"I think so," said Wally, looking round. "Isn't he here?"

"He's not here?" said Higgs.

"Anybody seen him?"

"Not lately."

"I haven't."

"My only Aunt Jane!" Wally rose to his feet in some alarm. "I missed him in the Sixth Form passage, I remember, but I thought he had cut off by the side corridor. He can't have been nailed by old Selby. We were too far off."

"Well, he's not here," said Jameson.

"Phew!"

"Better look round for him," said Tom Merry seriously. "If Mr. Selby's caught him, and he's in hot water, I shall own up about the footer. I don't want Joe to be licked on my account; and if he was caught running, Mr. Selby would think he was the chap."

"You're right!"

"Let's look for him," said Manners.

And look for him they did. But Joe was lying very low. He did not want Tom Merry to know that he had been punished, and he kept very close till the bell rang for afternoon classes. Then he ventured out and joined the Third Form. The Fourth and the Shell had to rush off to their respective rooms, and Joe was saved from their questions for a time; but the Third Form were anxious to know what had happened to him. Wally caught him by the arm the moment he sighted him.

"How did you get off, Joe?"

Joe avoided his eyes. He wanted, if possible, to keep secret what he had suffered at the hands of Mr. Selby.

But the pinched, painful twitching of his face betrayed him. Wally gave him one hard look, and his grasp tightened upon his arm. He scanned the little ragamuffin's face keenly and searchingly.

"You've been licked, Joe."

A denial trembled upon Joe's lips. But he remembered THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 162.

his promise to Tom Merry—never, under any circumstances, or for any reason whatsoever, to tell a lie.

"Yes, Wally," he said.

"Selby caught you?"

"Knox caught me, and took me back to Selby—the beast."

"And I never knew!" Wally exclaimed remorsefully.

"You couldn't have done nothin', Master Wally," said Joe. "It's all right. I've been licked afore."

"Did he think you had punted that ball at him?"

"He wanted to know who did."

"And you didn't tell?"

"No," said Joe quietly.

Wally pressed his arm appreciatively.

"Good for you, Joe!" he exclaimed. "Good for you! It was hard cheese, but I'm glad you stood it without sneaking. Rather!"

"He could cut me to pieces afore I'd sneak about Master Tom!" said Joe.

"Good for you, young 'un!"

Joe certainly wasn't much younger than D'Arcy minor, and he was older in many ways; but Wally had a way of addressing him as young 'un. But Joe didn't mind.

"It was ripping of you, Joe," said Wally. "Old Selby was in an awful wax, I suppose?"

"Wot!" said Joe.

The Third Form went into their room. Mr. Selby was at his desk, and from his expression it could be guessed that he was still in a "wax," as Wally called it. The frown upon his face was quite Jove-like.

Joe had said nothing to his chum of the impending punishment of the evening. He meant to say nothing. For he felt that Wally would probably let Tom Merry know; and if Tom Merry had known, he would have gone straight to Mr. Selby and owned up as to what had been the truth in the matter. And then the punishment would have fallen upon Tom Merry; and Joe would have been cut in pieces before he would have allowed that to come to pass.

CHAPTER 4.

Tea for Joe.

TOM MERRY was waiting for Joe Frayne when the Third Form came out after lessons, the Shell having been dismissed a little earlier. As Joe appeared with the rest, Tom Merry ran forward to meet him.

Joe looked at him with a cheery smile. Mr. Selby had been harassing him that afternoon, but Joe had learned to bear the Form-master's bad temper. It was not so bad, as he had confided to his friends, as the bad temper of Bill Frayne, his supposed father, when he had lived in Blucher's Buildings. Mr. Selby was no saint, but he was an angel after Bill Frayne, and so Joe took him patiently. Mr. Selby would not have felt flattered if he had known of the comparison Joe made in his mind.

Tom Merry dropped a friendly hand upon his protégé's shoulder.

"Did you get clear, Joe?" he asked.

Joe looked troubled. He did not want to tell Tom Merry anything about the licking, but he knew that the question must come.

"Well, you see—" he began.

Tom Merry's face grew concerned at once.

"Selby didn't catch you, Joe?"

"Knox did."

"Oh! Have you been licked?"

"Well, I got a few cuts," said Joe, with great carelessness of manner.

"My dear kid!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Surely you told Mr. Selby that it was not you who punted the footer at him?"

"Yes, Master Tom."

"Didn't he believe you?"

Joe hesitated.

Tom Merry gave him a quick glance, and he thought he understood. He pressed the fag's arm affectionately.

"You mean you were questioned, and you didn't sneak, Joe?"

"Well, yes, sir," Joe admitted.

"I wish you'd let me know; I'd have come like a shot and explained to Selby," said Tom Merry, in great distress.

Joe grinned. He had known that very well, and he knew, too, that Tom Merry would own up "like a shot" if he knew of the further punishment that was to come. And for that precise reason Joe did not intend to let him know.

"It's all right, sir," he said.

"But it isn't all right, Joe. It was rotten of Selby to go for you," said Tom Merry. "I've a jolly good mind to tell him what I think of him, too."

"Oh, don't do that, sir!" exclaimed Joe, in great alarm.

"It's all right, sir. Least said soonest mended, sir."

"It's rotten your being licked."

"Well, it won't undo that, sir, if you jaw old Selby and get licked, too, will it, Master Tom?" said Joe, with great philosophy.

"The kid's right," said Manners. "It's rotten his getting licked, but it can't be helped now. I'll tell you what—you're a jolly good little kid, Joe, and you shall come and help me take photographs, if you like."

"Thank you, sir."

"Blessed if I'd take that as a reward for goodness," yawned Monty Lowther. "I had your camera once, Manners, and I got bored to death with it. Better keep off the grass, Joe. Helping Manners take photographs means holding the camera and bags of things."

"Oh, rats!" said Manners.

"I'll hold things for Master Manners with pleasure, sir," said Joe, grinning.

"Then come off and have a kick at the footer, Tom, while Manners shows the kid how to carry a camera," said Lowther. "Bring him into the study to tea, Manners, old man. I've had a remittance to-day, and I'm going to feed him up on jam and cake for being such a stunning little chap."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

Joe walked off with Manners as proud as a prince. The friendship of the Terrible Three meant a great deal to Joe, and their admiration of his courage and constancy was all that was needed to strengthen him in those virtues.

Joe was looking forward with uneasiness to his next interview with his Form-master. But under this genial influence he even forgot Mr. Selby. Sufficient for the hour was the evil thereof; it was no use meeting trouble half-way. A hard life had taught Joe Frayne that wisdom.

So, contriving to forget Mr. Selby and the future, Joe marched off with Manners, and soon had the honour of carrying his camera, and of even holding it while Manners took photographs—a very great honour indeed. When all the films had been used, Manners allowed Joe to compress the bulb, and to hear it click; but he stopped the ingenious youth when he wanted to open the camera and look at the photographs.

"They've got to be developed first, my son," said Manners. "I'll teach you photography one of these days, if you live long enough. Come in to tea now."

And Joe was taken in to tea.

Wally, as it happened, was feeding with a Fourth-Form fellow, a relation of Jameson's, and he had not been able to obtain an invitation for Joe. Whether Stiggins, of the Fourth, was too aristocratic to invite Joe Frayne, or whether the provisions were not likely to go round, was not known; but Wally had excused himself to Joe, and, hearing that Joe had an invitation to a Shell study, Wally pronounced that everything in the garden was lovely. So Joe went up to Tom Merry's study.

Tom Merry could not, as Joe had said, undo the licking his Form-master had given him. He could only make much of Joe, and show his appreciation of the little ragamuffin's self-sacrifice.

And all three of the chums of the Shell made much of Joe.

They had a tea ready that made Joe's mouth water. There were eggs and ham and pork-pies and other indigestible comestibles, to say nothing of cake and buns, and various kinds of jam.

Joe enjoyed that tea in the Shell study immensely, resolutely putting away from him any thought of what was coming later in the evening.

Of that, the Terrible Three had no suspicion. Joe did not utter a word on the subject, and Tom Merry naturally did not think of it by himself.

"How are your hands now, Joe?" he asked.

"Oh, they're alright, Master Tom," said Joe.

"Let's have a look at them."

Joe hesitated.

"I know how Selby lays it on," said Monty Lowther. "I saw Gibson's hands the other day after Selby had caned him—they were swollen like anything. It's a good idea to rub them with something."

"They're alright," said Joe uneasily.

"Let's see them, kid."

"But, Master Tom—"

Tom Merry looked quite alarmed.

"Look here, has that beast hurt you more than you let on?" he exclaimed. "If your hands are marked, after all this time, blessed if I don't take you to Kildare, and ask his advice about it. Selby ought to be stopped somehow."

"They're alright, Master Tom."

"Let me see them."

Joe Frayne reluctantly held up his hands for inspection. The chums of the Shell burst into a laugh. The hands did not retain the expected traces of the recent caning. But Joe's reluctance to show them was explained at once. They were smothered with jam, and sticky from wrist to finger-tip. In spite of many instructions on the subject, the waif of Blucher's Buildings had not yet learned to eat jam cleanly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry could not help laughing.

Joe turned crimson.

"You—you see, Master Tom—" he stammered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, I see," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's all right, Joe. Even jam can be handled in time, you know, if you stick to it."

"The jam's sticking to him at present," Monty Lowther remarked, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Joe licked his fingers. It was a way of cleaning them much in vogue in Blucher's Buildings, where Joe had had his training.

"Chuck that," said Tom Merry. "We'll give you some hot water in a basin."

"Thank you, Master Tom."

And Joe washed his hands. By the time tea was over, however, Joe's hands were almost as sticky as before, and when he took his leave of the chums of the Shell, and quitted Tom Merry's study, he went down the passage vigorously sucking his fingers.

CHAPTER 5.

A Hard Master.

MR. SELBY sat in his study, with a stern, unbending look upon his mean-featured face. Mr. Selby had a cane in his hand, and his expression showed that he was in a mood to use it. The master of the Third was waiting for Joe.

Tap!

"Come in," said Mr. Selby, in a rasping voice.

Joe Frayne entered the study.

The Form-master signed to him to close the door, and Joe obediently closed it. Then he came towards Mr. Selby, his eyes on the carpet.

The Third Form-master fixed his eyes upon Joe, with a greenish glitter in them. Mr. Selby was in his most spiteful mood.

"I trust you have come here to tell me the truth, Frayne," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Joe.

"You were the guilty party in the outrage that was perpetrated at the door of the Form-room this afternoon?"

"No, sir."

"You are aware of the culprit's name?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me the name."

"I can't, sir."

"Frayne!"

Joe stood silent, with a hunted look in his eyes. He knew that the unfeeling man was going to cane him, and he had a suspicion that Mr. Selby liked caning him. There was no escaping the punishment, whatever he said or did. Joe had a very clear realisation of that.

But if he could have escaped by betraying Tom Merry, he would not have done so. The thought would not even have crossed his mind.

At the same time, every nerve in his body was on the jar, as it were, at the thought of the cruel caning to come. Mr. Selby did not know, probably, how much he hurt his victims when he laid on the cane in his spiteful way. Joe's hands were still aching from the last infliction, and the prospect of renewed strokes made him shudder.

But he was prepared to face it.

"You have not answered me, Frayne."

"I ain't nothing to say, sir," said Joe hopelessly. "I'm sorry, sir."

"You know the culprit's name?"

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"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

"Yes, sir."

"You saw the outrage committed?"

"It was an accident, sir."

"You saw it committed?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you refuse to give me the name of the boy who hurled that football?"

Joe said nothing.

"Yes or no, Frayne," said Mr. Selby harshly.

"Yes, sir," said Joe desperately.

"You refuse?"

"Yes, sir, if you want to make me say it."

Mr. Selby drew a hard, hissing breath between his teeth. His grasp tightened upon the cane. The greenish glitter was stronger in his eyes. There are some men to whom petty persecution becomes a kind of pleasure, when long indulged.

"On a previous occasion, Frayne, you flouted my authority," said Mr. Selby. "I caned you, and the matter was at an end. I hoped that that would be a lesson to you. But it seems not to have been the case. So far from benefiting by my indulgence, you have become more insubordinate than ever. You again refuse to reply to my questions, and again attempt to make concealment."

"I'm werry sorry, sir."

"There is still time to do as I have bidden you."

"I—I can't, sir."

"Then I have no resource but to punish you severely, Frayne. I shall not let you go with a single caning, as on the previous occasion, because I see clearly that kindness only encourages you in your rebelliousness."

Joe licked his dry lips. He knew it was coming now.

"I shall cane you now," said Mr. Selby. "To-morrow morning I shall question you again, and if you refuse to reply to me, I shall cane you again. I shall repeat this process, Frayne, until you have answered my question."

Joe stared at him in dismay.

It was not only this caning, then—this and perhaps one more—but canings every day—twice a day—that he had to look forward to—unless he betrayed Tom Merry!

"Oh, sir!" he gasped. "I—I—I can't stand it, sir!"

"Then you had better act in a more respectful manner."

"I can't give you the name, sir. It would be sneakin', sir."

"Hold out your hand, Frayne."

Joe quivered from head to foot.

"Oh, sir! I—I—"

"Do you hear me, Frayne?" said Mr. Selby, in the same quiet, deadly tone.

"I—I— It's rotten, sir! It's beastly!" burst out Joe.

"Mr. Railton wouldn't never treat a pore lad like that, sir!"

Mr. Selby's eyes glinted. He knew only too well how the sturdy, kind-hearted House-master of the School House would disapprove of his conduct.

But that reflection only made him the more determined to carry out his intentions. Joe was in his Form, and it was for him to correct the lad. Mr. Selby did not stop to reflect that correction could be carried to the point of cruelty.

"I shall cane you more severely for your impertinence, Frayne," said the Third Form-master. "Hold out your hand at once."

With a hopeless look, Joe obeyed.

He was caned severely—four on each hand, laid on as only Mr. Selby knew how to lay them on. Joe bore the infliction bravely, though he could not help a tear rolling down his cheek with the pain of it.

"You may go," said Mr. Selby harshly, as he laid the cane on the table. "Remember, Frayne, that I shall question you again to-morrow morning, and if you do not satisfy me, I shall punish you more severely still."

Joe made no reply.

He left the study quietly, and stood in the passage, with his hands tucked under his armpits, squeezing them to assuage the pain.

His cheeks were wet with tears.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally. He was speeding along the corridor at his usual rate, but he stopped at the sight of Joe. "What's the matter?"

"Nothin'," mumbled Joe.

"You're blubbing," said Wally, in an accusing tone.

"I ain't," stammered Joe, belying his word by drawing his cuff across his eyes. "It's orlright, Master Wally."

"Old Selby been pitching into you again?" asked Wally sympathetically.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Oh, he's always at it, ain't he, Master Wally?"

"The beast!" said Wally.

"Poor old chap!" said Wally sympathetically, linking his arm in Joe's and leading his chum away. "I'm jolly sorry, you know. Come with me, and I'll give you something to rub on it. It's a ripping cure."

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Joe Frayne went quietly with Wally. All the spirit seemed to have been driven out of the boy, and he was unnaturally quiet, subdued. Wally's wonderful cure did not assuage the pain much, and Joe's hands were still aching and tingling when he went up to bed with the Third Form.

There was a strange expression upon Joe's face, too. He was not soft, by any means—in fact, his early life had made him as hard as nails. But there was a limit to the punishment he could take.

The thought of a caning on the morrow morning, upon hands that were still aching and swollen, made his heart beat almost to suffocation, with uneasy dread. But how was he to escape the punishment which he felt that he could not endure?

There was but one way.

And that was the thought that was working in the mind of the unhappy fag as he went up to bed with the Third.

CHAPTER 6. The Only Way.

DA RKNESS and silence in the School House at St. Jim's.

The school was sleeping.

Midnight had tolled out from the old tower, and hardly a light glimmered in a window in the great school of St. Jim's.

But there was one who was not in sleep—one who was restless, awake, with wide eyes staring into the darkness.

It was Joe Frayne, in the Third-Form dormitory in the School House.

Joe had not slept.

For hours he had lain there, while one by one the fellows dropped off, till at last the final good-night was said, and the fags slept.

Joe lay awake.

There was an aching pain in his hands still, and that was sufficient to keep him awake. But that was not all.

His thoughts were busy and restless.

As his wakeful eyes looked into the gloom unseeingly, Joe was thinking of many things. He thought of his old days in Blucher's Buildings, the bare garret, the drunken, brutal father—if Bill Frayne had been his father!—of the cold and hunger and wet, all his life, before he met Tom Merry, passing before his eyes as he lay.

What a change had come over his days—a change that was enough to make any lad lose his balance a little—a breathless change. It was through his befriending Tom Merry, in his humble way, when Tom Merry was down on his luck, and alone in London. Tom Merry had not forgotten him. In the grim garret in Blucher's Buildings, Tom Merry had told him that if he came into good luck again, he would never forget his friend of the slums—and he had remembered his promise. Through Tom Merry, Joe had come to St. Jim's—and the change had dazzled him.

Instead of poverty, hunger, and dirt, brutality and cold indifference—he had the friendship of the best fellows in the school—plenty to eat, plenty of clothes, money in his pockets. Many of the fellows had held out against him on account of his origin; but Joe's good qualities had overcome most prejudices. He had found his way into the esteem of the greater part of the Form he belonged to. With the kind aid of Tom Merry and his chums in leisure hours, he was beginning to get a grip upon the school work.

The difficulties that had beset his path seemed to be disappearing of their own accord. But now all was wrong again.

If Mr. Selby had been kinder—

He might have been kind. He might have understood some of Joe's difficulties, some of his trials, and might have been patient with him. But it was useless to think of that.

Joe felt that he could not face what was to come. The punishment he had already endured was bad enough. To face it again and again was impossible. Mr. Selby did not understand what he was doing when he cornered the lad in this way. There was a limit to the little wail's endurance.

Joe felt that if he were caned again, the pain would be too much for him. He would blurt out Tom Merry's name, perhaps—it was possible. He knew how Mr. Selby disliked the hero of the Shell. It would mean severe punishment for Tom Merry—perhaps a report to the Head, and black marks against Joe's protector. And what would he think of Joe?

There was only one way—to leave St. Jim's.

Joe had decided upon it.

He hoped that Tom Merry would not think him ungrateful—and he meant to leave a word for him. He hoped that Mr. Railton would not think badly of him—but he would have to risk it.

He must go!

In the poor lad's confused and troubled mind, it seemed



"Frayne, I suppose you realise now that you have done wrong in leaving the school without permission?" said Mr. Railton, laying his hand on the boy's shoulders. "Ye-es, sir," stammered Joe. (See page 19.)

that he had no other course open. St. Jim's and its ways were still strange to him, and he was feeling like a hunted animal in an unknown land.

The last stroke of twelve had died away when Joe sat up in bed.

The dormitory was plunged into silence and sleep.

"Any of you awake?" said Joe, in a low voice.

There was no reply—only a faint snore, and the sound of regular breathing. Joe slipped quietly out of bed.

He had placed his things ready. He intended to dress in his oldest clothes, and to take a few articles, undoubtedly his own property, in a small bundle. The bundle was now hidden under his bed.

It was curious enough. Joe had been brought up, in his den in the London slums, to lie and steal as he breathed and walked. But Tom Merry's influence had been far-reaching, even in so short a time. That Tom Merry should believe that he had taken away anything that did not belong to him, was an intolerable thought to the little waif.

He would take nothing—nothing but the oldest clothes he had, and a few things of little or no value, and some bread and cheese, already fastened up in his bundle. The money he had in his pockets, he would not take that. He intended to leave every penny of it in his note to Tom Merry.

The little waif drew near the high dormitory window. There was a shaft of clear moonlight falling in.

He drew a stump of pencil and a fragment of paper from his pocket, and by the light of the moon he wrote:

"Dear Master Tom,—I can't stand being cained again, and I think I ought to go. I hope you won't think I've forgotten how kind you've been to me. I shan't never forget that. I enclose the munny which does not belong to me as you give it to me.—JOE."

He placed the folded sheet in an envelope, and licked it, and stuck it fast. Then he debated in his mind where he should place it.

He decided upon pinning it to the coverlet of his bed. The boys' maid would find it in the morning, if the fags did not, and it would be taken to Tom Merry. He scrawled on the outside of the envelope—Master Tom Merry—and pinned it down.

Then, taking up his bundle, he went to the window.

To the nimble, active lad it was easy to climb out of the window. Holding his bundle, he clambered out, and hung for a moment or two looking into the darkness below. The moon glimmered wetly through a falling shower.

It was raining.

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But Joe did not stop. He scrambled down the rain-pipe, and reached the ground. After one look round him, he scuttled off in the direction of the school wall, where it bordered upon Rylcombe Lane.

In a few minutes he had clambered over the wet ivy, and dropped into the road. Then he turned his back upon St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Out Into the Night.

JOE FRAYNE paused to listen. There was darkness on the road, broken only by the fitful gleam of a lamp at long intervals.

The rain was descending thinly, but steadily.

Joe looked back towards the school.

He had heard an indefinite sound in the gloom, and it had immediately brought the thought of pursuit into his mind.

But there was no one behind him on the road.

His escape had not been discovered yet.

He turned his face towards Rylcombe and tramped on, his head bent to the rain. He was but thinly clad for such weather, and he was soon very wet.

It brought back a grim recollection of earlier days. Many and many a time had he been wet to the skin in those days, and he had crept to a cold garret in his wet rags to shiver till they were dry.

It was like old times now—and perhaps he thought of his warm, cosy bed under the roof of St. Jim's, as the rain came down. But the thought of Mr. Solby and the endless punishments followed that thought.

And he set his face resolutely away from the school.

Suddenly he paused, once more, to listen. The sound he had heard came through the gloom once more, and he recognized a voice.

"Beastly dark here."

It was the voice of Knox, the prefect.

"Rotten!"

The replying voice belonged to Sefton, a senior of the New House at St. Jim's. Joe trembled as he listened.

His only thought was that Knox had discovered his flight, and had followed him from the school.

He backed away into the hedge, heedless of the dripping of the rain from the branches, hoping that the two seniors of St. Jim's would pass him unnoticed.

He heard their tramping footsteps now.

To his surprise, he discovered that they were coming from the direction of the village, and not from the school at all. Knox and Sefton were returning to the school, not leaving it.

Joe stood in wonder. He realised that he could not, after all, be the cause of the two seniors being out of the precincts of St. Jim's.

Two dim, dusky forms loomed up in the rain.

Knox and Sefton passed him, both in overcoats muffled up to the ears, with caps drawn down over their faces. They tramped on to the school wall, and stopped at a little wicket-gate near the trees where Joe had taken refuge. In the rainy moonlight he could still see them.

Joe wondered.

Knox paused and fumbled for a key in his pockets. The prefects of St. Jim's, as well as the masters, had a key to that side gate.

It was pretty clear that Knox put the key to a use the authorities of the college never contemplated, and that the wicket-gate served him as a means of exit when he wished to break bounds at late hours.

"Haven't lost it, have you?" grunted Sefton.

Knox snarled.

"No. I've lost everything else at the Green Man, but I've got the confounded key here somewhere."

"Don't keep me standing in the rain all night."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Joe Frayne grinned.

The two seniors had evidently been making a surreptitious visit to the Green Man, and had lost their money with the sharpers there, and returned to the school in the worst of tempers.

The boy watched them in silence.

He remembered bitterly how hard Knox had been upon him—how zealously he had done his duty as a prefect, when it enabled him to be hard upon the junior from the London slum. And this was Knox—this fellow breaking bounds at night, and gambling in secret with a set of rascals at the village inn.

There was a click in the silence, and the gate opened.

Knox and Sefton went in, and disappeared, and the gate closed and was locked behind them. Joe drew a deep breath of relief. He wondered what Knox would have done if he had discovered him. But he was glad to be undiscovered. He tramped on his way in the falling rain.

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Steadily it came down!

There was a cold wind blowing from the moors, and it swept down the lane with the rain upon it, cutting through the thin clothes of the little ragamuffin.

Joe paused at the cross-roads.

The wind was beating upon him, and the rain had soaked him to the skin by this time. He was growing deeper and deeper in despondency.

Which way should he go?

Anywhere away from St. Jim's. But how was he to get to London? London, naturally, the only place he knew, was the only refuge he thought of.

There he could sell papers, and get some sort of a living—perhaps, with what he had learned at St. Jim's, do better still! But how was he to get there—with no money? It was impossible to smuggle himself upon a train, even, for all the trains had long ago left the little local station at Rylcombe.

He knew there was a night express that stopped at Wayland Junction. If he could stow himself away upon that—

The thought of the dishonesty of travelling without a ticket did not strike poor Joe. He had not been brought up to think of such things. He had learned honesty in his daily conduct at St. Jim's. But there were many more things he had to learn. And he was feverishly anxious to get away from the neighbourhood of the school, before search could be made for him.

He felt that Tom Merry would search for him when he discovered his absence. And he wanted to get away from all risk of being recaptured.

He tramped on by the road skirting the wood, towards the old market town of Wayland. Two o'clock was striking when he entered the town.

He knew that a night train stopped there, but he did not know at what hour. He crept to the railway-station, and found the outer door of the vestibule partly open. He stole in, and was passing upon the platform, when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

Joe gave a violent start, his heart beating hard with terror, and a sharp cry escaped his lips.

"Wotcher doing here?" demanded a voice.

Joe shivered.

"I ain't doin' no 'arm," he muttered.

"Get out."

Joe was led in an iron grip to the door, and the porter looked at him in the dim light of the single lamp burning, and then pushed him into the street. He shook a warning finger at Joe.

"You cut hoff!" he said.

Joe Frayne moved away.

He realised that it was useless to think of boarding the express now, when it stopped, and concealing himself there. He was not at all sure, either, that the express had not gone.

What was he to do?

With a heavy heart he tramped away into the country.

The rain was steadily descending.

There was a cloud over the moon, and the road was dark and desolate, and the only light came from the glimmer of the rain puddles.

Joe's feet swamped through the puddles as he tramped on miserably.

Where was he now?

He hardly knew.

The country was strange to him—he had never been so far from the school before since he had come to St. Jim's.

He had lost his direction, and in the darkness he could not read the finger-posts when he came upon them.

He tramped on, wet and weary.

He sat down at last by the roadside to rest, careless of the dashing rain, and the cold wet wind that seemed to search into his very bones.

He sat there wet and weary. In the east, a grey dull light was beginning to steal through the grim darkness, filtering through rainy clouds.

The dawn was coming—the dawn of a new day—a desolate day for poor Joe—dark and desolate for the runaway of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Discovery.

WALLY D'ARCY was the first to awaken in the Third-Form dormitory that morning. Wally was concerned about the weather. It looked like rain over night, and Wally was thinking about the state of the ground for footer that day. And so, as soon as he heard the rising-bell, Wally jumped out of bed and ran to the window.

"My only Aunt Jare!" Wally exclaimed.

It was still raining. But that was not all. The bottom of the window was open, and the raindrops were beating into the dormitory.

The top of the window was always open at night. But the bottom of it being open, showed that someone had specially opened it since the prefect had seen lights out on the previous evening.

"Who's been playing the giddy goat?" demanded Wally.

Curly Gibson sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"Blow that bell!" he exclaimed. "What did you say, Wally?"

"Who's been playing the giddy ox?"

"What the dickens—"

"What's up?" asked Hobbs.

Wally pointed to the window.

"Look there!"

"My hat!"

"Somebody opened it," said Fane.

Wally sniffed.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "I really believe I could have seen that for myself. Some silly ass has been breaking bounds, going down the rain-pipe."

"Jolly risky!" said Hobbs.

"Well, I've been down it myself," said Wally. "It can be done. But what fabulous ass has been breaking bounds, especially on a rainy night?"

"Your workhouse friend, perhaps," suggested Hobbs maliciously.

"Oh, shut up, Hobbs!" said Wally. "Joe wouldn't do it. He leaves that sort of thing to your rotters."

"Look here, young D'Arcy—"

"Well!" said D'Arcy minor, coming up to Hobbs' bed with his fists clenched. "Well?"

Hobbs' truculent look faded away at once.

"Oh, never mind!" he said.

There was a shout from Picke, further along the dormitory.

"Hallo! Young slummer isn't here!"

"What?"

"He's gone!"

"Rot!" said Wally angrily.

"Look at his bed, then," said Picke triumphantly.

Wally ran to Joe's bed. He stopped before he reached it, with blank amazement in his face. There was no denying the truth of Picke's assertion. Joe Frayne's bed was empty; he was certainly gone.

"My only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally.

Hobbs gave a sneering laugh. Hobbs, Picke, and Fane, Joe's special enemies in the Third Form at St. Jim's, felt that they scored now.

"Breaking bounds at night!" ejaculated Picke. "Going down to the pub in the village, I suppose. Nice for a kid of his age."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Wally irritably. "You know jolly well that he hasn't done anything of the sort."

"Where has he gone, then?"

"Explain that, D'Arcy minor."

"Blessed if I know," said Wally, staring at the empty bed in wonder. "I can't make it out. It's jolly odd that he should go out like this."

"Jolly odd that he ever came to St. Jim's at all, I think," said Hobbs, with a sneer. "He wasn't in his right place here, D'Arcy minor. Of course, he was bound to get sick of decent habits in time."

"He wouldn't get sick of yours," said Wally. "You haven't any."

"Look here—"

"Oh, shut up! I suppose he has gone out, as he isn't here," said Wally, in perplexity. "I can't make it out, specially as he hasn't come back."

"Perhaps he's been arrested in the village for disorderly conduct, or something," was Hobbs' suggestion.

"Perhaps you'll get a thick ear if you don't stop your silly rot!" roared Wally.

"Well, it looks like—"

"Shut up!"

"Well, he hasn't come back," said Curly Gibson. "He must be somewhere, Wally, and he must have gone somewhere in the first place. What do you think?"

"May have been an accident."

"Oh, rats!"

"Chap might break his neck climbing down that rain-pipe, if he slipped," Picke remarked cheerfully. "I don't suppose young rags has done that, though."

Wally changed colour. He ran to the window and clambered up, and looked out into the quadrangle.

He cast a quick, anxious glance to the ground far below, underneath the window of the Third-Form dormitory, and he drew a deep breath of relief as he saw that there was nothing there.

Joe Frayne had not fallen there, in quitting the dormitory, as Wally had feared for a terrible moment!

"Well, is he there?" called out Curly Gibson.

"No," said Wally, jumping down.

"Oh, I knew he wasn't. Where has he gone, though?"

"Bolton!" said Picke.

"You ass!" exclaimed Wally angrily. "What do you mean?"

"What I say. He's bolted. He's got sick of living in a respectable school, and he's run away, and gone back to his slum friends."

"Very likely."

"Quite so!"

Wally glared at the fags. It was pretty clear that the wish was father to the thought with many of them.

"You set of duffers!" said Wally. "Of course, he hasn't run away. Do you think that even if he were going to run away, he'd go without a word? Of course, he—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Gibson.

"What's the matter?"

"Look there!"

Curly Gibson was out of bed now. He had gone towards Joe's bed, and he now stood pointing to an envelope pinned on the coverlet. Wally had not noticed it before.

"What is it?" asked Wally, coming towards him angrily.

"It's a note."

"In Frayne's scrawl, too," said Picke.

"It's addressed to Tom Merry."

Wally picked up the note. His face was a study. The envelope, in the well-known sprawling characters of Joe Frayne, was addressed to Tom Merry. Wally stood looking at the note, turning it over and over in his hands, with dismay in his heart. The conviction was forced upon his mind of what this really meant—that Joe had, indeed, "cut," and run away from St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

The Runaway!

TOM MERRY was sitting on the side of his bed, fastening his boots, when the door of the Shell dormitory was thrown open, and D'Arcy minor of the Third came dashing in. So sudden was Wally's entrance that it made Lowther, who was washing, give a jump, and dab a soapy sponge into his mouth. Tom Merry ceased to pull at his laces, and looked round at Wally.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "You young boulder! What's this for?"

"You ass!" roared Monty Lowther. "Groo! What do you mean?"

"It's a letter—"

"Eh?"

"Groo!"

"Joe's bunked!"

Tom Merry jumped up.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"Bunked!"

"What—Joe?"

"Yes; and he's left this letter addressed to you, Tom Merry, pinned to his bed," said Wally hurriedly. "He's buzzed off in the middle of the night. We hadn't an idea, till I found the window open this morning, and this note pinned on his bed. For goodness' sake open it, and see if it says where he's gone!"

Tom Merry mechanically opened the letter.

Believing as he did, that Joe had fought his way through most of his troubles in the Third Form at St. Jim's. Tom Merry was astounded by the news.

He ran his eye hastily over Joe's note, and did not fail to observe a suspicious blur on the paper, as if a tear had fallen there while it was being written.

Tom Merry's face went quite pale.

Wally was watching him anxiously, and he gave a gasp as he saw how the Shell fellow's expression changed.

"He's really gone, then?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Wally."

"Why?"

"He says he can't stand being caned again."

"Old Selby was going for him last night," said Wally savagely. "The cad! Poor old Joe! I didn't know he was booked for another licking to-day, though."

Tom Merry frowned darkly.

"Has Mr. Selby been caning him again over that affair of the footer, Wally?" he asked.

Wally shook his head perplexedly.

"I don't know," he said. "I know he was licked again last night, but he didn't explain what it was for, and he didn't say he was expecting another licking."

"Poor kid," said Manners. "I suppose Selby was going to pitch into him until he gave you away, Tom, and the kid never told us so."

"It's rotten!" said Bernard Glyn. "Poor kid!"

Tom Merry's eyes were dim for a moment.

He fully understood the devotion which had prompted the action of the little ragamuffin. He thought he could fully

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follow the feelings which had driven poor Joe to take this desperate step.

"Well, it is rotten," said Kangaroo.

"The poor chap's bolted. But where's he gone?" Morny Lowther remarked. "He doesn't say in the letter, Tom?"

"No."

"Is he coming back?"

"I suppose not."

"Poor Joe!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Selby has driven him to this!" he exclaimed. "If I had had the least idea—"

"But you hadn't," said Manners. "So it can't be helped. Of course, Joe will be found and brought back again."

Kangaroo whistled.

"That means being expelled," he said.

"Or flogged."

"Well, there are extenuating circumstances," said Clifton Dane. "Joe's isn't an ordinary case."

Crooke gave a sneering laugh.

"No, it isn't," he explained. "I shouldn't wonder if the Head doesn't have him looked for at all. He may be glad to be rid of him."

"Oh, shut up, Crooke!"

"Well, I think—"

"Never mind what you think; shut up!"

And Tom Merry's eyes glittered in a way that made Crooke think it advisable to "shut up." It was not safe to say anything against Joe in the Shell dormitory just then.

Tom Merry finished dressing as quickly as he could, and hurried downstairs. Joe was gone, and of course the authorities of the school had to be notified. They would soon, of course, have discovered it for themselves.

Tom Merry looked for Mr. Railton. He knew that the House-master was an early riser, and generally worked in his study before breakfast, and he expected to find him there. Mr. Railton was there, and he looked surprised as Tom Merry came in with an excited face, and the little note in his hand.

"What is it, Merry?" he asked.

"It's Joe, sir."

"Joe!"

"I mean Frayne, sir—Frayne of the Third. Will you look at this, sir?"

And Tom Merry held out the note. Mr. Railton took it with a puzzled expression, and read it. Then his look changed.

"Does this mean that Frayne has left the school, Merry?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"He has run away?"

"Yes, in the night, sir. D'Arcy minor found a window open this morning, when he got up, and Joe's bed was empty."

"It is very strange. So far as I have noticed the boy, he seemed to be very tractable," said Mr. Railton musingly.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"He has been punished a lot lately, sir," he exclaimed, "and punished for nothing."

"Merry!"

"It's true, sir."

"He mentions coming in his letter," said Mr. Railton, glancing at poor Joe's scrawled note. "By whom was he called—a prefect?"

"His Form-master, sir."

"Ah!"

"Well, sir, Mr. Selby came out of the Third Form-room passage. I was kicking a footer there—" began Tom Merry.

"You should not have been doing that, Merry; but proceed."

"Well, sir, Mr. Selby came out of the Third Form-room just as the ball bounced in the doorway, and it caught him on the boko—I mean, the nose, sir."

"Well?" said Mr. Railton.

"We hooked it, sir, and Mr. Selby didn't know who it was."

"It would have been much better, Merry, if you had stayed to explain and apologise," said the School House-master severely.

Tom Merry flushed.

"Yes, sir, and so we would have done, if it had been you or Mr. Lathom, or even Herr Schneider, but we knew that Mr. Selby wouldn't understand. He would have thought that we had done it on purpose."

"Go on, Merry," said the House-master, discreetly letting that point drop. Probably he realised quite clearly that what Tom Merry said was correct.

"So we bunked, sir," said Tom Merry. "I—I mean, we buzzed off, sir. We didn't know that Joe was nabbed!"

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"Was what?"

"Caught, sir. We didn't know that Joe was caught till afterwards, when we found that he had been licked for not telling who kicked the footer."

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton.

"Then, when we knew that, we thought it was all over, and we tried to make it up to him," said Tom Merry. "But Mr. Selby seems to have kept it up. Joe was licked again last night, I don't know what for; and he seems to have expected another licking this morning, for he bunked over-night."

"It was you who kicked the football on that occasion?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you had known that Frayne was being punished—" "I should have gone to Mr. Selby at once, sir. I hope you don't think I'd have left poor Joe to take my licking!"

"I am certain you would not, Merry. But—it is quite certain that Frayne is gone?" the House-master asked.

"Quite, sir. D'Arcy minor found his bed empty, and the window open, and this note addressed to me. He hasn't taken any money with him either. He put all he had in the envelope with this letter."

"Why so?"

"I suppose he thought he oughtn't to take it," said Tom Merry. "It was rot. It was all his. My uncle makes him an allowance, you know, sir. It was his tin."

"That shows a very strict idea of honesty, however, Merry. The boy seems to have improved greatly since he came to this school."

"Very much, sir."

"I must acquaint the Head with this occurrence," said Mr. Railton. "It is very unfortunate. As it is possible that the boy may not have quitted the precincts of the school, after all, but may be hiding away near at hand, will you and some of the boys search the grounds for him?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Very good, Merry."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I—I suppose Joe—I mean Frayne—will be searched for, sir," he said.

"Of course."

"And brought back to St. Jim's?"

"Certainly, Merry."

"Will he be punished, sir?"

"Naturally."

"I—I—excuse me, sir," Tom Merry blurted out, "but—but will he be expelled, sir?"

Mr. Railton's face was very grave.

"I do not know, Merry. A boy who runs away from school can hardly expect anything else, but perhaps, owing to the peculiar circumstances of the case, the Head may take a merciful view of the matter. That is all I can say."

And Tom Merry left the House-master's study with a downcast face.

CHAPTER 10.

Towser is Called In.

"BAI JOVE!"

"Run away!"

"Gone!"

"Gweat Scott! I wogard this as wotten!"

"Rotten isn't the word!" said Tom Merry, as the chums of Study No. 6 surrounded him, eager for information.

"He's gone, and it's beastly!"

"The young boundah!" said D'Arcy. "He nevah said a word to me on the subject."

The others stared at him.

"Why should he say anything to you on the subject, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"He doesn't seem to have said anything to anybody," Digby remarked.

"Natuwally, he should have asked my advice," said D'Arcy loftily. "I had remarked to him on more than one occasion that I considahed him as bein' in some deguee undah my pwotection. I had told him that in any case of doubt he could always wely upon me to tell him the wight and pwopah thing to do."

"Go hon!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"So he's gone!" said Herries thoughtfully.

"Yes; clean gone!"

"It's wotten!"

"Beastly!"

"Old Selby's fault, of course!"

"That won't make it any better for Joe when he's caught, poor chap!"

"Wathah not!"

"Mr. Railton thinks he may not have got out of the school," Tom Merry remarked. "He wants us to look round the

grounds for him. Of course, he mayn't have got over the wall, or the rain may have kept him from going on. It's barely possible that he's hiding somewhere in the outhouses."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not likely, but we'll look," said Jack Blake. "I believe it's left off raining now."

"Bai Jove, Joe's clothes must be quite ruined, you know, if he was out in all that wain!" said Arthur Augustus, with great concern. "Mr. Selbay has weally a great deal to answah for."

"I'll go and fetch Towser," said Herries.

"Towsah!"

"My bulldog," said Herries. "Of course, if we're going to look for Joe we may as well get it over as quickly as possible. It's not nice out of doors this morning—muddy and foot, and dripping with rain."

"But Towsah—"

"Towser will take us straight to where he is if he's in the grounds at all," said Herries. "You know how Towser can follow a track."

"Well, I suppose he can follow some tracks," assented Monty Lowther. "I believe he could follow a railway track if he were tied up in the guard's van—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass!" said Herries. "My dog Towser—"

"I object to the pwesence of Towsah, Hewwies. That beastly bulldog has no wespect whatevah for a fellah's twousahs."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Bosh!"

"Undah the cires—"

"Piffle!"

And Herries marched off in search of Towser. D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and turned a look upon the retreating junior which really ought to have bored a hole in Herries's back, but didn't.

The juniors turned out into the quadrangle.

It was decidedly unpleasant out of doors. The ground was very wet, and there were still drops of rain falling, as well as splutterings from the roofs and trees.

But the juniors turned up their trousers and started on the search.

It was not improbable that the little waif's heart might have failed him when he found himself outside the building in the darkness and rain, and that he might have hidden in one of the outhouses till morning. Anyway, Mr. Railton wished them to search, and they searched.

Gr-r-r!

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"That beastly bulldog!"

Herries rushed up with Towser, or, to speak more correctly, Towser rushed up with Herries, for Towser was dragging on the chain and pulling his master along. Herries was quite breathless with his striving to hold the bulldog in.

"Keep that feahful beast away from my trucks, Hewwies, you ass!"

"Oh, blow your trucks! Towser!"

Gr-r-r!

"Towsy, old boy, quiet."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You have to show him something belonging to Joe, and he'll track him down like anything," said Herries. "Where's D'Arcy minor? He's got fifty times the sense of his major."

"Weally—"

"Right you are, old cock!" said Wally, coming up with his hands in his pockets. "What's wanted? Look after that beast of yours?"

"Have you got anything belonging to Joe?"

"Belonging to Joe?" said Wally. "What do you mean?"

"I want something for Towser to follow the scent of," Herries explained. "You know how Towser follows a scent—"

Wally chuckled.

"I remember his tracking down some kippers," he said.

"I don't know about his following any other scent."

"Look here, you young duffer—"

"Joe wasn't scented like a kipper," said Wally, with a shake of the head. "Towser would never be able to track him down."

"You fathead—"

"Why, if a dog could do it, my dog Pongo would do it like a shot," said Wally. "As for that Chinese idol you call a bulldog—"

The incensed Herries made a swipe at Wally, who promptly dodged. It was evident that the hero of the Third was no believer in Towser's wonderful powers as a tracker.

"Have you chaps got anything belonging to Joe?" asked Herries. "You gave him a change of clothes once, D'Arcy. Have you got any of his things left? Do help me—you've got fifty times the sense of your minor."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm sorry, Hewwies, but I haven't anythin'—"

"Oh, you ass! Have you got anything, Blake? Look here, you'd better lend me a hand in this—you're the only chap here with any sense."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I haven't any of Joe's socks or ties," said Blake. "I've got lots of sense, but I haven't the kind of scents that Towser will follow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Wally, fishing in his pocket. "Here's a handkerchief. Try him with that, Herries."

"Good!"

Herries took the handkerchief and held it out for Towser to sniff. Towser made a snap at it, and tore it away from Herries.

"He's got the scent!" said Herries.

And he stood expectant, waiting for the bulldog to take up the trail. The juniors stood round grinning. In spite of their anxiety for Joe, they could not help grinning. They had not the least expectation of seeing Towser follow any trail, but Herries evidently had. Herries watched him.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I considah—"

Herries held up his hand for silence.

"Shut up!" he said. "You'll disturb Towser if you talk."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Do dry up!"

D'Arcy relapsed into indignant silence. Towser had snatched the handkerchief, apparently under the impression that it was something to eat. If that was the case, he was quickly undeceived. He contemptuously tossed the torn handkerchief aside, and after a sniff or two laid down.

"He's getting the scent," said Herries.

Towser's eyes closed.

"Bai Jove, he's goin' to sleep!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally.

Towser's eyes opened and closed again. Herries gave the Third-Former a savage glare.

"If you can't keep quiet—" he began.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We haven't looked in the wood-shed yet," said Manners.

"Shut up, Manners!"

"But, you see—"

"Quiet, ass!"

Herries looked anxiously at Towser. The bulldog had his head resting on the ground, and was breathing regularly, with his eyes closed. The grins of the juniors grew broader.

Towser was asleep!

CHAPTER 11.

Good Dog!

HERRIES turned very red.

There was no denying that Towser had gone to sleep, and that was not exactly what was to be expected of a keen bloodhound-like animal like Towser—that is to say, not what was to be expected by Herries; the other fellows were not surprised.

"Bai Jove, I—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Towser mustn't be woke up," said Monty Lowther, in a hushed voice. "Sleep, baby, sleep! Did they wake the poor old doggy up, then?"

Herries glared.

"You utter ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries jerked at the chain on Towser's collar. Towser woke up. He must have had a neck of iron if he had not awakened then.

"Towser! Towsy! Go on, old boy!"

Towser blinked.

"We'd better look in the wood-shed," said Tom Merry.

"The bell goes for brekker in a few minutes."

"If Joe's in the wood-shed Towser will jolly soon lead us there," said Herries.

"I don't think!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't jaw!"

Herries jerked at the chain to get the bulldog started. Towser did not seem to understand. He made several attempts to settle down and go to sleep, but Herries jerked him too hard for that.

Finally, the bulldog allowed himself to be set in motion. He trotted off lazily, and Herries, with a triumphant look at the other fellows, followed him.

"Come on!" called out Herries.

"Where are you going?"

"Towser's on the track!"

"Rats!"

"Look here, Lowther, you ass—"

"May as well follow," yawned Blake. "It won't waste the Gem Library.—No. 162.

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more than a few minutes. I wonder whether Towser is after a kipper this time?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, come on," said Herries crossly, "and don't jaw so much! You disturb Towser, and put him off his form. You can't expect a bulldog to stand it."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Towser waddled on, Herries following him, and the rest of the juniors following Herries. Towser led them round the School House, and the outbuildings behind it, in the direction of the stables.

"That's where Joe's hiding," said Herries confidently.

"I don't think!" Wally remarked.

"Shut up, you fag! Don't you jaw to your elders!" said Herries snappishly. "Joe's hiding in the stables—a most likely place."

"But Taggles or Mike would have found him—"

"Rats! They haven't, or they'd have brought him in."

There was evidently no arguing with Herries. The party of searchers followed Towser. Before reaching the stables Towser changed his course a little, and quickened his speed.

"Oho! Joe's not in the stables, then," said Herries. "See how he's following the track! I think it's wonderful!"

"But where is he?"

"Towser will show us soon."

"Weally Hewwies—"

"Don't talk, Gussy—it worries Towser!"

"You uttah ass—"

"If you fellows want Gussy to muck up the whole hizney by jawing—" began Herries, in a resigned tone.

There was a chorus at once:

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Ring off!"

"Hallo, Towser's fairly on it now! Come on!"

The bulldog was making for the building where the St. Jim's fellows kept their pets. Certainly that was not a likely place for a runaway to hide in. But Towser made directly for it, and entered, with the excited Herries behind, and the juniors, growing very curious, following him in.

Towser made straight for his kennel.

"My hat!" ejaculated Herries. "Joe must have seen us coming, and he's hiding in Towser's kennel!"

"It's not big enough," said Wally.

"He might be curled up in it."

"He might be," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, stooping down and adjusting his eyeglass to look into the kennel. "He might be, deah boy; but as a mattah of fact, he isn't. The kennel's empty."

"Look out, Gussy!" roared Blake. "Mind your bags!"

Arthur Augustus made a wild spring to escape—in his mind's eye seeing the teeth of the bulldog tearing at his immaculate trousers.

Towser was not paying him any attention, however. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Blake, who was grinning.

"Blake, you ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Towser wasn't going to bite me!"

"Of course he wasn't!" said Herries. "Towser's rather particular what he bites!"

"You feahful ass—"

"I never said he was going to bite you," said Blake, in an injured tone. "I only told you to mind your bags. You've often said yourself that a chap ought to mind his bags, or they'll never keep a good crease!"

"You uttah fathead—"

Towser was making great efforts to enter the kennel. Herries looked very much perplexed.

"Blessed if I can understand this," he said. "Joe isn't in the kennel, but he must have hidden there, because Towser seems determined to get in."

"Perhaps he wants to go to sleep again," Monty Lowther suggested.

Herries did not deign to reply to this remark. He tugged at the chain, and jerked Towser's head out of the kennel. The bulldog growled discontentedly.

"Towser! Towser, old boy!"

Towser plunged into the kennel again.

"Give him his head," suggested Manners. "Just see what he will do!"

"Oh, all right!"

Herries slackened on the chain. Towser went into the kennel, curled up there, and closed his eyes. Monty Lowther's suggestion had been quite correct; he wanted, as a matter of fact, to go to sleep again.

The juniors grinned, and Herries's face became crimson.

"Towser isn't in form this morning," he remarked. "It's through Gussy talking so much, I suppose. When Towser

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has to listen to some silly ass chattering away, it always puts him off his form."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Herries, struck by a sudden thought, turned towards Wally, who was standing with a most exasperating grin upon his face.

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Hallo!" said Wally.

"Are you quite sure that handkerchief belonged to young Frayne?"

Wally shook his head.

"That handkerchief—Frayne?" he repeated.

"Yes. Are you sure it was his?"

"Oh, that handkerchief wasn't Joe's," said Wally cheerfully. "It was Curly Gibson's. I put it in my pocket by mistake."

"What!" yelled Herries.

"You don't think I have given you one of my own handkerchiefs, or Joe's, for your silly bulldog to chew up, do you?" said Wally.

The juniors burst into a roar.

They did not believe in the wonderful tracking powers of Towser, anyway; but it was irresistibly comic to think of the dog attempting to pick up Joe's trail from somebody else's handkerchief.

Herries stood staring speechlessly at the cool and self-possessed ornament of the Third Form for some seconds. Then he made a wild dash at Wally, and Wally made a dash to escape. They disappeared round the School House at top speed, leaving the other juniors roaring.

CHAPTER 12.

Uncomfortable for Mr. Selby.

MR. SELBY was feeling very uncomfortable. The news that Joe Frayne had run away from St. Jim's had come as a great surprise to him.

Mr. Selby was a dry, formal gentleman; he lived entirely by rule and compass, and anything unusual always disturbed and worried him. His view was that things ought always to happen exactly as they had happened before, and anything new was a worry, a trouble, and really almost a profanity.

That boys should be caned was right and proper. That they shouldn't like it was quite natural, though not so right and proper. But that a boy should run away from school to escape a severe caning was astounding. It seemed to Mr. Selby that after that, the only thing to be expected was the Deluge!

Mr. Selby wondered, while he shaved that morning, what punishment was adequate for Joe's offence.

Expulsion and a flogging first seemed to him appropriate. Indeed, had Mr. Selby been a Japanese of olden times, he would probably have selected something lingering, with boiling oil in it.

But flogging and expulsion would meet the case, perhaps. Mr. Selby thought—if indeed the Head took the same view of it as Mr. Selby.

But then a doubt occurred to the master of the Third.

Would the Head look at it as he did? He considered the Head extravagantly lenient in dealing with the boys.

Certainly the boys all liked and respected the Head, and there were few fellows at St. Jim's who would not have run miles to do him a service. All the same, Mr. Selby liked his own methods best.

If the Head failed to make an example of Joe—

Mr. Selby felt that in that case, his duty would compel him to remonstrate very strongly with the Head.

He descended in that virtuous mood. He had received a message from the Head soon after rising, informing him of what had occurred, and asking him to come into the Head's study as soon as he could.

He found the Head looking very worried.

Dr. Holmes had not breakfasted yet, and the news of Joe's escapade was weighing heavily upon his mind. Mr. Railton had given him the letter Joe had left for Tom Merry, and the Head felt that that letter required some explanation.

"This is a most unfortunate occurrence, Mr. Selby," said the Head, as soon as he saw the master of the Third.

"Most unfortunate, sir," agreed Mr. Selby.

"One of your pupils has run away."

"A very depraved boy, I fear, sir," said Mr. Selby. "That boy has given me more trouble than any other boy in my Form."

"Naturally, considering his origin," said the Head. "I asked you, as a special favour, to be particularly kind and lenient with him, Mr. Selby."

"Quite so."

"The boy seems to have been punished severely yesterday. Of course, I do not desire to interfere with the Form-masters

in carrying out their duties. I should be glad to know why Frayne was in such trouble, however."

"An outrage was committed—"
"You refer to the incident of the football in the Form-room passage, which Mr. Railton has explained to me?"

"Certainly."
"A mere boyish freak, Mr. Selby, which a hundred lines would have sufficiently punished," said the Head. "Besides, Frayne was not the guilty party."

"I had reason to believe that he was, sir."

"Merry has confessed that he kicked the football on that occasion."

Mr. Selby started.

"Merry, of the Shell, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Selby."

"Very good, sir. I did not know that; but Frayne certainly did. He stated to me explicitly when I questioned him, that he had seen the ball kicked, but refused to give me the name of the culprit."

"That was certainly wrong—yet under the circumstances—"

"I regarded it as a direct defiance of my authority, sir, and punished him accordingly."

"Very well; and that ended the matter?"

Mr. Selby flushed uncomfortably.

"No, sir. I regarded it as my duty to compel the boy to return to subordination, by telling me the name of the individual who committed the assault."

The Head's brows contracted.

"You punished him again for the same offence?"

"For refusing to give me the name—certainly."

"Was not that very severe, Mr. Selby?"

"I am sorry you should think so, sir," said Mr. Selby stiffly.

"And did that second punishment end the matter?"

"I gave him until this morning to decide to answer my question."

"And in the event of his refusing still to do so?"

"I intended to cane him again."

The Head was silent for a moment.

"As I have said," he observed at last, "it is against all my wishes to interfere with a Form-master in dealing with his Form. But I cannot fail to see, Mr. Selby, that this is not the method for dealing with boys in our days. The day of heavy punishments is past—long past—and it is better so. I did not think there was a master at St. Jim's who was desirous of reviving the traditions of the cruel days of our grandfathers."

Mr. Selby's face flushed a dull red.

He seemed at a loss for words.

"Am I to understand, sir, that you take the side of this insubordinate boy against me?" he exclaimed at last.

"No, Mr. Selby. But I must say that you have been too severe—much too severe—especially considering my personal request to you to deal gently with this boy."

Mr. Selby was silent.

"I must ask you," went on the Head quietly but significantly, "to modify your methods—to keep order in your Form with fewer punishments. If we cannot agree in principle it will be impossible for us to work together."

Mr. Selby gnawed his under lip. It was as plain a hint as he could need that unless he came round to the Head's views there would be no place for him at St. Jim's.

"Very well, sir," he said.

"This boy has run away now," went on the Head. "He left St. Jim's in the night—without money—and must have gone tramping away in the rain. What may have become of him? He may even die from exposure. I think in that case, Mr. Selby, you would be very sorry to have been so hard upon him."

The Form-master did not speak. But for a moment some trace of human feeling glimmered in his breast, and he wished he had not been so hard upon the poor lad.

"I have no more to say," said the Head. "I shall have the boy searched for, and found. He will be brought back to St. Jim's. The unfortunate part of the matter is that, under the circumstances, I do not see how I am to punish him. But that need not be discussed."

Mr. Selby left the study.

He was in a very uncomfortable mood indeed. The Head seemed to think that he was in the wrong, and a dim suspicion was forming in his own mind that he was perhaps in the wrong, just as the Head thought.

He was an unimaginative man. But he thought of the rainy night, the wet fields, the dripping trees—and Joe out in it all!

What had happened to the boy?

Mr. Selby at that moment would have been glad—very glad indeed—if he could have undone the doings of yesterday—if he could have gone into the Third Form-room and found Joe in his usual place in the Form!

CHAPTER 13.

Mr. Railton Approves.

ST. JIM'S was in a state of great excitement that morning. The whole school knew about Joe's escapade before breakfast, and it was discussed by all the Form from the Sixth down to the "Babes" in both Houses.

Many things had happened in the history of the old school, but for a boy to run away was rare—very rare indeed.

It was a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's—though no one expected Joe to remain away for nine hours, for that matter. Joe Frayne had bolted.

That was the news that ran through the school, and set everyone talking and wondering.

After brekkie Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to inquire into the matter. Tom Merry gave them full information.

Figgins & Co. were sympathetic. They were in the Fourth themselves, but they knew Mr. Selby, and had a keen sympathy for anybody who happened to be in that gentleman's Form. And they all liked Joe.

Joe might be a strange specimen to take his place in a Form at a big public school like St. Jim's. But the little ragamuffin had a heart of gold. Figgins and Kerr and Wynn knew that, and they had always helped Tom Merry & Co. to back up the little chap, and make things easier for him at St. Jim's.

"It's rotten!" said Figgins. "But what a stunning little brick, you know, to take lickings like that instead of giving a chap away!"

"He's a giddy little hero!" said Tom Merry.

"By Jove, yes!" said Kerr. "Of course, he'll be found. I hope the Head won't be hard on him when he's brought back."

"Well," said Figgins, "the Head doesn't understand Selby as we do—and he may think he ought to make an example of Frayne. Of course, it's no good us pointing things out to the Head."

The juniors assented to that. Certainly it would not have been of much use for the heroes of the Fourth to talk to Dr. Holmes on the matter. They might have been made examples of themselves for their impertinence.

"It's rotten!" said Fatty Wynn, who had been very silent, with a deeply thoughtful expression upon his face.

"Yes, it's beastly!"

"You chaps know whether he took any grub with him?" asked Fatty.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Good old Fatty!" he remarked. "You were bound to think of that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it's rather an important thing," said Fatty Wynn seriously. "He's out on the road, and you say he's got no money. He mayn't be able to get any grub, and that would be—"

"Awful!" suggested Figgins.

"Fearful!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, he'll be found soon, of course, and brought back. The Head has sent his description to the police-station in Rylcombe already."

Figgins sniffed.

"Lot of good that will do! Look here, you chaps, I've got an idea."

"Go ahead!"

"If Joe hasn't got any money he can't have gone far; and he was too late for the trains, I suppose. And he may have taken shelter out of the rain, and so lost a lot of time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, then, we may be able to find him. Suppose we try?" suggested Figgins. "It's a half-holiday this afternoon, you know, and we could cut the footer for once—the ground would be pretty sloppy, anyway—and spend the time looking for Joe."

"Bai Jove, I wogard that as a wippin' ideah!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"I considah it a most wippin' suggestion, Figgay, deah boy. Pwewaps it would be a good ideah for me to go and ask the Head—"

"Eh?"

"To ask the Head for some assuwanee that Joe will not be punished, you know, so that he will be willin' to return—"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"We'll get off immediately after dinner," said Figgins.

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 162.

Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEEK:

"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

briskly. "We may as well make up a party to go. Of course, Gussy won't be any good."

"Of course not!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"We'll let him come if he promises not to talk," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Good!" said Herries. "That will give Towser a chance."

"Towser!"

"Yes," said Herries, with a gleam in his eyes that looked ominous for anybody who should contradict—"yes, of course, Towser will be very useful. He had no chance this morning, with that ass D'Arcy talking all the time, and that other ass D'Arcy minor playing silly tricks."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"But it will be all right this afternoon," said Herries. "I've got a boot belonging to Joe, and Towser will track him down like anything."

"Towser will be more useful left at home, I should think," said Manners. "He looks so nice and peaceful in his kennel, and—"

"Chump!" said Herries.

"Look here, if you leave him at home I'll take his photograph for you," said Manners generously.

Herries glared at the photographer of the Shell.

"You ass!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I'd let you botch up Towser on your rotten camera? When I have Towser photographed I'll have it done by a chap with some sense. What do you know about dogs?"

"Look here, Herries—"

"Look here, Manners—"

"Oh, ring off, both of you!" said Tom Merry. "Let's go into dinner. Shut up, and come in! Meet you here after dinner, Figgy."

"Right you are!"

The chums of the School House went in to dinner. Tom Merry noticed that Mr. Railton, who was at the Sixth Form table, was looking very thoughtful.

The House-master made a sign to Tom Merry when he left the dining-room.

Tom Merry joined him in the passage.

"Nothing has been heard of Frayne, Merry," said the House-master.

"I feared not, sir."

"He has evidently left the school with the intention of not returning to it," went on Mr. Railton, with a wrinkled brow.

Tom Merry nodded. He had no doubt on that subject himself.

"At the same time," continued the House-master, "I do not think he can really have gone very far. He has no money, for one thing."

"I know, sir."

"It is not easy to smuggle oneself away upon a train either—and the trains would be gone, too, at the time he left St. Jim's. He would hardly venture into the local railway-station after daylight, when he would guess that his description was circulated. I have therefore every hope, Merry, that he has not been able to make the journey he probably intended—to London."

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, he may hide in the neighbourhood and wait for night."

"I thought it likely myself, sir."

"Then some of the juniors could not better occupy their afternoon's holiday than by making a search for him," Mr. Railton suggested.

Tom Merry smiled.

"We had already decided to do so, sir," he said. "About a dozen of us have arranged to do so."

"Very good, Merry! It was a good thought, and I hope you will be successful," said the House-master.

"If you please, sir—"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Suppose we find Joe—"

"I have every hope that you may find him," said Mr. Railton. "But go on, Merry. What is it that you wish to ask me?"

"If we find him, sir, he may be unwilling to return."

Mr. Railton's brow grew severe.

"You will bring him back in any case, Merry."

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Well?"

"Suppose—suppose we find him—could we hold out some hope to him of—of having lenient treatment, sir?" stammered Tom Merry. "It wouldn't be pleasant for us to have a hand in bringing him back if he were to be expelled."

"I quite understand your feelings in the matter, Merry. I have discussed this with the Head, and he has agreed to

leave the matter entirely in my hands, as the boy belongs to my House."

"Yes, sir—"

"And I can undertake, Merry, that Frayne will not be expelled—and I shall make his punishment as light as possible, owing to the very peculiar circumstances of the case."

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"Oh, sir! Thank you! We'll find him if we can, sir! We won't leave a stone unturned!"

"I wish you every success, Merry."

And Mr. Railton, with a genial nod, walked away, and Tom Merry rushed off to join his chums and begin the search for Joe Frayne, the waif of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 14. No Thrashings.

"G R-R-R!"

"Grooh-h-h!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Gr-r-r!"

"I insist upon you keepin' that beastly bulldog away, Hewwies! The uthah beast has no respect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Hewwies, deah boy—"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus walked round Blake, keeping the latter between him and Towser. D'Arcy wasn't afraid of the bulldog. The elegant junior had heaps of pluck. It was for the safety of his immaculate trousers that he feared.

Towser had a way of taking playful nips, and such a nip spelt ruin to the beautifully-creased garment that encased the limbs of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Towser followed D'Arcy, sniffing.

Whether he was being playful, or whether he fancied that he was entitled to one more free bite, we cannot say; but his proceedings filled the breast of the swell of St. Jim's with alarm.

"Hewwies, you ass—"

"Oh, chuck it!" grunted Herries. "Anybody would think that a chap had never been bitten by a bulldog before, to see the fuss you're making!"

"You uthah ass—"

"Towser doesn't hurt a chap, either, when he gives him a nip. It's simply his play."

"Weally—"

"Be a bit more chummy!" said Herries, with a snort. "Don't be an ass! If Towser wants to play with you, play up!"

"You fwabjous chump—"

"Rats!"

"If that wotten bulldog comes neawah to me, I shall stwike him with my cane!" yelled the swell of the School House.

Herries chuckled.

"I should be sorry for you if you did," he remarked.

"Keep him away!"

"Oh, I'll call him off if you like!" snorted Herries.

"Towser obeys the merest whisper from me. Come on, Towser! Towsy, old boy! Down, dog!"

Towser did not take the slightest notice.

He followed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the latter dodged round Blake, backing away all the time, in growing alarm.

"Towser! Towsy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Towser, old boy! Towser!"

"Call the beast away! Make him come!"

"Rats!" said Herries crossly. "Towser's not one of those spiritless mongrels that go wherever and whenever they're told! Towser's a live dog! He knows what he wants to do, and he does it!"

"You uthah ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake.

"Towser, old boy—"

"Here we are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, coming out of the house with Manners and Lowther. "You fellows ready?"

"Yaas, wathah! Hewwies insists upon bwingin' that feahful beast—"

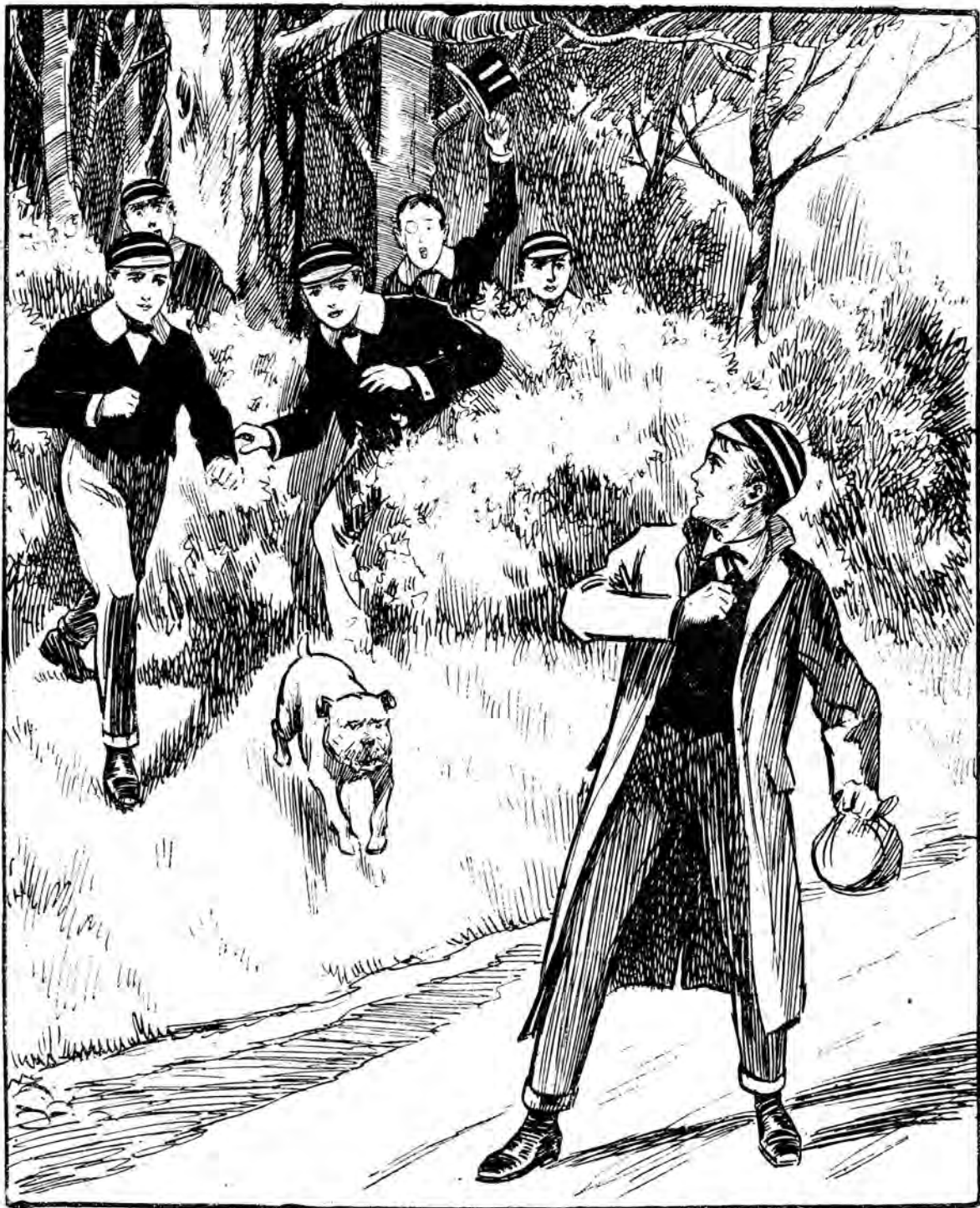
"Hardly a nice day for taking Towser for a run, Herries, old man," said Monty Lowther, insinuatingly.

Herries glared.

"I'm taking Towser to track Joe down," he replied.

"My dear chap—"

"I've got one of Joe's boots," said Herries, taking a boot out of his overcoat pocket. "Here it is. Towser will follow the scent like anything!"



Joe shrank away from the juniors as they burst through the bushes. He made a movement as if to bolt into the wood. "Crikey!" he muttered. (See page 15.)

"Wats!"

"Oh, you're an ass! When are you fellows going to start?" demanded Herries. "I think I've been standing about here long enough listening to Gussy talking rot!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Br-r-r!" said Herries.

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible wemark, Hewwies! It is a mere gwant, and I wefuse to weply to it!"

"Thanks!"

"Eh?"

"Many thanks!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Figgins & Co. are waiting at the gates!" remarked Digby. "When you chaps have done slanging one another we may as well start!"

"I am quite weady, but—"

"Come on, then," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Mr. Railton says that if we bring Joe back he's not to be expelled, and he won't be rough on him."

"Good old Railton!"

"Yaas, wathah! Mr. Wailton is a decent sort!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I fully approve of Mr. Wailton, deah boys!"

"Go hon!"

"Weally Lowthah—"

"Let's start, for goodness' sake!"

The juniors tramped down the wet drive to the gates.

Herries was dangling the boot before Towser's nose. Towser had sniffed at it, and discovered that it was not eatable. After that he seemed to lose all interest in the matter.

"He'll pick up the trail presently," said Herries.

"Wats, deah boy!"

"You ass!"

"Hewwies, before we pwoceed any furthah, I wish to have it distinctly undahstood that I refuse to be called an ass! I—"

"Fathead!"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs.

"I am sowwy to delay the pwoceedings while I thwash Hewwies, deah boys, but undah the cires, I have no wesoource but to administah a feashful thwashin'!"

"Chump!"

"Come on, you wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, prancing up to Herries.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

It was a savage growl from Towser.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped back as if he had trodden upon a live wire.

"Bai Jove!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Herries grinned and dragged on the chain. Towser was making efforts to get at the swell of St. Jim's, and Herries had to hold him in. Towser might not be able to follow a scent, but he never allowed his master to be attacked.

"Hewwies, you feashful boundah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I insist upon you tyin' that dog up somewhah while I give you a feashful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I insist—"

"Is this a conversazione?" asked Monty Lowther politely, "or is it a lecture with Gussy on his legs?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"If Gussy wishes to do a solo, I should think he might go into the study and do it, and let us get on."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors walked down to the gates. Towser kept close to his master. D'Arcy gave them all a withering look through his monocle, and followed.

Figgins & Co. were at the gates, waiting. Fatty Wynn had a lunch-basket in his hand. Wynn, of the Fourth, was not likely to neglect any precaution of that sort when setting out on an expedition.

The juniors grinned as they saw the lunch-basket.

"It's all right," said Fatty Wynn, with a satisfied smile. "If we get hungry, I've got enough here for a snack all round."

"Bai Jove!"

"You see, we may be led far afield looking for Joe, and it's no good running the risk of going hungry," Fatty Wynn explained.

"Weally, Wynn—"

"What is Herries bringing Towser for?" asked Kerr innocently. "He may be in the way if we have any tracking to do."

"Towser is going to track Joe down!"

"Ahem!"

"Look here, Kerr—"

"Oh, let him bring Towser," said Figgins. "I don't suppose he'll track down anything, unless it's the sandwiches in Wynn's basket. But—"

"Fathead!"

"Hullo! Hold on a minute!"

An active figure came flying across the quadrangle. It was Wally, of the Third, out of breath, with his cap on the back of his head.

"You bounders!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "You were going off without me, were you?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Blessed if I didn't forget your existence!" said Monty Lowther. "Can't remember every little thing, you know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You Shell duffer—"

"Weally, Wally, I considah—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! Let's get off! If Joe's found, I expect I shall be the chap that finds him!"

"Rats!"

"Same to you! Let's get off!"

And the searchers got off at last.

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CHAPTER 15.

Lost!

RAINY fields and trees and a lowering sky!

The rain had ceased, but the ground was swamped with wet, and the trees and the bushes were weeping.

On the wet, gleaming road, under the watery sun of the wet afternoon, a forlorn little figure was tramping along.

It was Joe Frayne.

The fog of the Third Form at St. Jim's was wet and weary, muddy from head to foot, drenched to the skin with rain.

Joe Frayne had had many a rough time in London slums. He had spent whole nights in the open air in rain, winter.

But in London he had generally found a doorway or an arch to sleep in. It was not like tramping under the rain in the country.

Here there was no shelter.

Joe had lost his way—lost it hopelessly, overnight. Towards dawn he had crept into a shed, and there, wet and weary, he had slept till the sun was high in the heavens.

It was past noon when he looked out of his shelter into the daylight.

It was day—but dark and dreary day—and Joe did not know in the least where he was.

Had he gone far from St. Jim's?

He did not know.

If he ventured out into the road in the broad daylight, and was still, as he feared, near to the school, he ran the risk every moment of being taken up—for he had little doubt that he would be searched for on all sides.

He thought it would be wiser to lie low until dusk fell upon the landscape once more.

He ate his bread and cheese, and shivered; but the question of remaining in the shed was settled by another, when a farm labourer came in and turned him out.

And now Joe was tramping on again.

Where was he?

During the short time he had been at the school, he had made few excursions further than the village of Rylcombe, and he did not know the surrounding country at all.

Was St. Jim's far or near?

Numbed and wet as he was, the lad kept a keen eye about him as he tramped on, looking to right and left with the hunted eyes of a fugitive.

A signpost at last.

Joe halted at the cross-roads, and looked up at the finger-post, reading it with eager eyes to see if it could tell him anything of his whereabouts.

He started as he read it, with dismay.

"Wayland, 3 miles. Rylcombe, 1 mile."

"My 'at!" said Joe.

He was only one mile from Rylcombe—that is to say, not more than a mile and a quarter from St. Jim's.

He cast a nervous glance about him.

There were three roads branching here—to Rylcombe, to Wayland, and to Pelham. It was in the last direction that Joe decided to go. He did not know where it was, but it was the furthest of the three from the school.

He tramped into the road.

He had not gone a dozen yards from the signpost, when he sighted a mounted constable, coming slowly along the road towards him.

Joe Frayne halted.

The sight of a policeman, from old association, always gave him a nervous and uneasy feeling.

To the dwellers in Blucher's Buildings, the constable had been the natural enemy—the foe to be tricked and eluded. And now, too, Joe knew that the police of the district might have been warned to look out for a boy who had run away from school.

This very man might be in search of him at this very moment.

Joe hesitated only a few seconds, and then turned and ran. The mounted constable called after him, probably surprised to see the boy suddenly run with no apparent cause.

Joe did not pause.

He dashed back down the lane, crossed it, and plunged through the hedge into the wood in the direction of Wayland and St. Jim's.

He did not pause till he had run a quarter of a mile into the wood, and the wet, drenching thickets were all round him.

Then he came to a halt again, gasping for breath.

"Crikey!" murmured Joe. "That was a close shave! I wonder if he was arter me? I 'spect he was. I've done 'im now, anyways."

He listened intently.

There was no sound of pursuit from the road.

But Joe knew that if the mounted constable was really

searching for him, he might be patrolling the lane, waiting for him to reappear from the wood.

As soon as he had recovered his breath, Joe plunged deeper and deeper into the thickets.

Round him bushes and trees were weeping with late rain; but the outcast could not get much wetter than he was already.

It was only by keeping in motion that he could keep his limbs from growing numbed with cold, and his teeth from chattering.

"Crikey!" said Joe, more than once. "This is orl right—I don't think! I wish I was back in Blycher's Buildings."

He thought of the Form-room at St. Jim's, too.

But he did not wish to be there.

He remembered the hard, sour face of his Form-master—no cruel, lashing cane—the continual punishments that had been promised him.

Joe did not want to be back at St. Jim's at the tender mercies of Mr. Selby. Even the drenched thickets were preferable to that.

But weariness was overcoming the little vagrant now. His feet were heavy as lead, his limbs aching with cold and fatigue.

He felt that he must rest.

But as he tried to seek out a dry spot to lie down and rest, he found everywhere pools of water, drenched grass and bushes—nowhere a dry spot.

He tramped on and on, with growing weariness.

At last he stopped.

He could go no further.

Overhead, watery gleams of sunlight came through dripping branches. It was well on in the afternoon, but there was little warmth in the sun.

The little ragamuffin threw himself down in the midst of the rain-soaked grass and fern.

He was worn out, and even the cold and wet in the grass was better than keeping upon his weary feet any longer.

Joe lay upon the rainy ground, and wet as he was, he fell into an uneasy doze, half sleeping, to start every now and then into broad wakefulness with a cold shiver.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright in the fern.

From the distant woods came a sound to his ears—it was the howl of a dog! Joe started and listened.

For the first time it occurred to him that perhaps he was trespassing, and that some keeper might find him there, and either take him back to St. Jim's, or hand him over to the police.

But the boy could do no more; he was worn down with fatigue. Half stupefied by cold and misery, he sat in the wet fern, waiting what his fate might be.

In the wood was a sound of footsteps and voices, and the sound was coming steadily nearer to the little ragamuffin.

Quite unknowingly, in his ignorance of the ground, Joe had lain down to rest close by a footpath through the wood.

He sat in the fern, listening.

Nearer and nearer!

CHAPTER 16.

The Searchers.

TOM MERRY & CO. halted at the cross-roads in Rylcombe Lane. Herries dragged on Towser's chain. Towser was inclined to walk right on.

"Better come on," said Herries, looking round at the rest. "Towser seems to be on the track. You see how eager he is to get on."

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Towser doesn't want to sit on the wet ground," said Monty Lowther. "That's what's the matter with Towser."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Which way are we going?" Tom Merry said thoughtfully. "Shall we inquire in Rylcombe first if Joe has been seen there, or cut right over to Wayland?"

"Rylcombe's been drawn blank," said Blake. "Mr. Railton was down there inquiring this morning. My idea is that Joe would make for Wayland, and try to get into the express when it stopped there in the night."

"If he did that, he's far away enough," Kerr remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, but the Head has wired to the London station about him. But my opinion is that he would be spotted trying to get into the train, and warned off."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"More likely he's tramping about the country, or hiding in the wood," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Running away from school isn't so jolly easy a thing as it sounds—especially when you've got no tin."

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"I think we ought to ask first at the station in Wayland,

whether any chap turned up there in the middle of the night," said Tom Merry. "We may get a clue that way."

"Good egg!"

"I wegard that as a wippin' ideah, deah boy. Shall we cut through the wood, or walk down to Wylcombe and take the twain?"

"Ass—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Chump! It will take less than half the time if we cut through the wood. What's the good of going miles out of the way?"

"I was thinkin' of the wet gwass in the wood. It will uttably spoil the appeawance of our boots, to say nothing of makin' our trowsahs damp, and spoilin' the shape—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally—"

"We're going through the wood," said Tom Merry. "But Gussy can take his boots off, if he likes, and carry them in his hat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Of course we're going through the wood," said Herries warmly. "I haven't the slightest doubt that Joe went through the wood last night. Towser will pick up his track in the wood, and lead us straight to him. What use would Towser be in the railway-train, I'd like to know?"

"As much as he is anywhere else," murmured Digby.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing! Towser can follow a railway-track, in a train—"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Or a cycle-track," said Monty Lowther. "But any other track—"

"I'm off," said Herries. "I can't stay here listening to this rot. Come on, Towser, old boy. Towsey! Smell him out, Towser!"

And Herries marched on with the bulldog.

The juniors followed, grinning. They turned into the footpath through the wood. The path was thickly grown with grass, and the grass was wet and drenched.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy trod very gingerly in the wet grass. He stooped and turned the bottoms of his trousers a little higher, and then stooped again and turned them higher still.

By that time he was showing quite a length of handsome silk socks, with an artistic design in pale pink on a blue ground.

"Good!" said Monty Lowther. "What an eye for colour you have, Gussy! You ought to have been a house-painter or something. But, look here, suppose we meet any ladies—"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass witheringly on the humorist of the Shell.

"Lowthah, I wegard you as a low beast!"

"Thanks!"

"And a—a—a—"

"Go it!" said Lowther encouragingly.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"I wufuse to entah into any discuss. with you," he replied.

"Hurrah!"

D'Arcy marched on with his nose in the air, and Monty Lowther chuckled. Herries turned round, with an anxious expression on his face.

"Would you mind shutting up, Lowther?"

"Eh?"

"It's you making that row, isn't it?"

"What row?" demanded Monty Lowther belligerently.

"Cackling."

"Look here, you ass—"

"You see, it disturbs Towser, and throws him off the scent. You can cackle some other time, I suppose?" said Herries peevishly. "Give Towser a chance."

"You silly chump—"

"Weally, Lowthah, Hewwies is quite wight! Your remarks are wude and annoyin', and your mewwimery, besides bein' unseemly, is quite out of place. I considah—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" said Herries.

"What?"

"You're annoyin' Towser."

"You uttah ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, Blake, old man!" said Herries. "Why can't you keep mum? Give Towser a chance."

"Oh, blow Towser!"

"Look here—"

"I wegard Towser as a twoublesome beast. I—"

"Shut up!" roared Herries.

"Weally, you know—"

"Quiet!"

D'Arcy relapsed into indignant silence. Herries, with a heightened colour, marched on with Towser.

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NEXT
WEEK:

"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 17.

Tracked Down.

"HIST!" Herries uttered that exclamation in a very cautious tone, about ten minutes later. The juniors had been tramping along the wet footpath, and had reached almost the heart of the wood.

Round them the trees and thickets shut out every other view, and the branches overhead cast a dusky shade upon them. From the wet boughs rain-drops were still shaking.

The party halted.

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

"Hist!"

"Well, I'm histing," said Monty Lowther. "Are you histing, Manners?"

"Yes," said Manners. "I'm histing."

"Are you histing, Blake?"

"Yes, I'm histing," grinned Blake.

And the juniors chuckled. Herries glared at them indignantly.

"Hist, you silly asses!"

"Well, we're all histing."

"It's a regular history lesson," Lowther remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hist!"

"Bai Jove, I wegard—"

"Shush!" said Herries.

"Shush!" repeated Lowther. "Are you shushing, Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, I'm shushing."

"Are you shushing, Figgins?"

"Yes, I'm shushing."

"What's the next part of the game, Herries?" asked Lowther blandly. "We're all shushing."

"You—you ass!"

"Well, I only want to know, you know."

"Shush!"

"I tell you we are shushing. What's the next move?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries did not deign to reply to Lowther's frivolous remarks again. He stood with his head bent, listening. The juniors all halted, watching him. Towser was trying to pull away from the leash, and that was an infallible sign to Herries that Towser was on the track. It might have meant that Towser was on the track of a stoat or a rabbit, but Herries did not think of that.

"Well," said Lowther at last, "when you've finished doing the living picture bizney, Herries, perhaps you'll tell us what we're to hist and shush for."

"Towser's scented something."

"No kippers here, either," said Monty Lowther, looking round and sniffing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove! I considah—"

"You'd better shut up and follow me," said Herries. "Towser's on the track. It's the scent of Joe's boot, of course, that he's following. Can you see any footmarks in the ground?"

The juniors scanned the ground for footprints.

Tom Merry & Co. had all had considerable practice as Boy Scouts, and if there had been a trail there, they would probably have been able to pick it up. But there was certainly no sign of a trail, excepting what they had made themselves.

Herries kept a tight grip on Towser's collar, and looked into the thickets. The bulldog gave a howl, and rushed off the footpath.

"Bai Jove! He weally looks as if he's aftah somethin', deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Rabbits," said Lowther.

"Most likely."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter now?"

"If we go off the path, deah boy, we wun gweat wisk of gettin' our clothes spoiled in these beastly wet bushes."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Suppose we stop here and have a snack?" Fatty Wynn suggested. "Herries can run whatever it is down, with Towser, and come back, and—"

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Come on!"

"I'm feeling a bit peckish—"

"Bosh! This way!"

"I always have rather a keen appetite at this time of the year," said Fatty Wynn. "I've got sandwiches here, and—"

Ow!" Figgins grasped his plump chum by the shoulder, and rushed him into the bushes after Herries.

Herries was keeping well ahead with Towser.

The bulldog certainly seemed to be on the track of something, for he tore on as fast as Herries could follow him, and several times almost jerked the chain away.

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But Herries held it fast.

Whatever it was that Towser was tracking, Herries meant to be in at the death.

There was a howl in the bushes, and a lean, shaggy cur leaped into sight, and Towser, with a fierce growl, rushed upon him. There was a roar from Wally.

"Look out! Hold him off! It's Pongo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry. "Towser's tracked Pongo down!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally rushed forward and caught Pongo up in his arm, just in time to save him from the teeth of the bulldog. From the safe shelter of Wally's arms, Pongo growled and barked defiance at Towser.

The juniors yelled with laughter.

Pongo had evidently got away, and followed his master to the wood, and Towser had scented out his old enemy. He was as far as ever from being on the track of the runaway.

Herries' face was a study for a minute or two.

"Whither next?" asked Monty Lowther sweetly. "Towser still on the track, Herries?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Is it time to shush again yet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm willing either to shush or to hist, if it will do any good. But—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, what—"

Tom Merry had bent down, and was scanning the ground with keen and alert eyes. He was the chief of the Boy Scouts once more, for the moment.

In the soft, rain-soaked soil, was the indentation of a boot—a mark recently made, and quite clear to the eye.

"Footprints, by Jove!" said Manners.

"Not ours, either!" exclaimed Jack Blake excitedly. "See, there they go—leading into the bushes. We haven't trodden there!"

"Might be Joe! But—"

"Herries, old man," said Tom Merry, without looking up, "have you got that boot—Joe's boot that you brought with you?"

"It's here," said Herries.

"Hand it over."

Herries handed the boot down to the junior, who was on his knees now, careless of the wet. Tom Merry fitted the boot to the track in the indented soil.

It fitted perfectly.

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "Joe's been here! It's his footprint!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Herries face lighted up wonderfully. He patted Towser on the head.

"I knew Towser was on the track!" he exclaimed.

"Towser!"

"Yes! Towser led us here, didn't he?" Herries exclaimed warmly. "And now you see for yourselves that we're on the track."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses—"

"We're on the track right enough!" exclaimed Tom Merry, rising to his feet. "That's Joe's footprint. He can't be far away."

"Bai Jove! What a stoke of luck!"

"Ass!" said Herries. "It's not luck! It was a mathematical certainty, from the moment I set Towser on the track."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Tom Merry followed the trail of the footprints in the soft soil. The track was easily enough to be seen. The juniors followed him eagerly.

There was a sudden movement behind a mass of bushes, and Tom Merry uttered a sharp exclamation.

"There's somebody here!"

"Look out!"

"Hurrah! We've found him!"

They burst through the bushes.

Joe sprang to his feet.

The runaway was found!

CHAPTER 18.

All's Well That Ends Well.

"Bai Jove!"

"You young bounder!"

"So we've found you!"

Joe shrank away from the juniors. He made a movement as if to bolt into the wood, but they were all round him now.

"Crikey!" muttered Joe.

"Bai Jove! I—"

"What do you think of Towser now?" demanded Herries triumphantly.

"Wats!"

"Chump!"

"I-I—I—" stammered Joe. "I'm werry sorry, Master Tom! I 'ope you ain't ratty with Joe. I-I thought I'd better go."

"You young duffer!" said Tom Merry. "It's all right, as we've found you!"

"Yaas, wathah! Come on, you young weekless boundah!" Joe looked apprehensive.

"I-I can't come back, Master Tom!" he gasped.

"You must!"

"B-b-but old Selby; he'll go for me wuss than ever," said Joe. "I-I can't stand the lickings, Master Tom. One, two, or three, I could stand; but I couldn't stand 'im keepin' on at me."

"Why didn't you tell me how it was?" demanded Tom Merry severely. "I should have explained to Mr. Selby."

"But—but—"

"Anyway, it's all over now. Mr. Railton has agreed that if we take you back, you're not to be expelled or flogged."

Joe looked relieved.

"But old Selby—"

"The Head was talking to him this morning," said Blake.

"He came out of the Head's study looking quite pink. I think Dr. Holmes has spoken to him plainly about it; and, in any case, Railton will stand by you."

Joe hesitated.

"Now, Joe," said Tom Merry, "you must come back. We've found you, and you've got to come back. I don't think you'll find things very hard, but you'll have to face the music, anyway. You're not afraid?"

"N-n-no, Master Tom."

"Gwin and beah it, deah boy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy advised. "Face it like a little man, you know, and gwin and beah it."

"I'll do as Master Tom says."

"That's right," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, your clothes are simply wuined!" said D'Arcy commiseratingly. "You must have had a feahful dwenchin', deah boy!"

"Must be awfully hungry. I should think," remarked Fatty Wynn, opening his lunch-basket. "Have some of these sandwiches, Joe?"

Joe accepted the sandwiches eagerly enough. He was faint with hunger.

The juniors watched him eat.

"Jolly glad we've found him, anyway," said Kerr, "and it was thoughtful of you to bring the grub, Fatty."

"You can rely on Fatty to remember a thing like that," grinned Digby.

"Yes, rather," said Fatty Wynn, whose mouth was as full as Joe's. "Besides, I get awfully peckish in this rainy weather, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, Joe," said Tom Merry. "You can eat as you go. You young ass! You'll be quite ill if you don't soon get a change into dry clothes."

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

Joe obediently tramped off with the juniors. Towser brought up the rear, still making occasional efforts to get at Pongo, whom Wally kept in his arms. Wally was undecided whether to welcome Joe as a long-lost brother, or to punch his head for running away without consulting him.

"You young chump!" said Wally severely. "You'll be ill, as sure as a gun. If you get laid up with a cold, won't I jolly well lick you, that's all."

And Joe grinned.

There was a general crowding round of the fellows when Tom Merry & Co. entered the gates of St. Jim's with the recaptured runaway.

"Here he is!" shouted Kangaroo.

Joe looked nervously and shamefacedly at the crowd of juniors. Tom Merry & Co. marched him straight on to the School House, amid all sorts of comments from the fellows. Knox, the prefect, was near the doorway of the School House, and he gave Joe a frown.

"What you want is a jolly good flogging," he remarked. "I'd jolly well give it to you, you impudent young beggar, getting out of the school at night."

"I wasn't the only one out last night," said Joe.

Knox started, and turned quite pale. He remembered his own escapade, and that Joe might have seen him—in fact, evidently had seen him, from what he said.

The prefect turned away, and did not address any further remarks to Joe, and for some time after that he avoided the fog. He was afraid that Joe might blurt out something which it would not have been pleasant for him to let others hear.

"You can report to Mr. Railton, while I take Joe up and get him some dry clothes, you chaps," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry rushed Joe up to the Third-Form dormitory. Wally, having bestowed Pongo in safety, followed them up, and insisted upon giving Joe a rub down with a rough towel, till the unhappy fog fairly begged for mercy.

But Wally was inexorable.

"I suppose you don't want to catch your death of cold," he exclaimed.

"N-n-no," said Joe; "but—"

"Well, you will if you don't have a good rub down—in fact, you will, very likely anyway. You've sneezed once."

"That was because you rubbed my nose hard."

"Rats! And you coughed."

"I was only trying to breathe. You were suffocatin' me!"

"Stuff!"

And Wally towelled away till Joe was in a red glow all over, and he felt as if Wally had been skinning him instead of towelling him.

But he certainly felt better when he stood in dry clothes, with his flesh all in a glow from the hard rubbing.

"Mind," said Wally warningly. "Be careful. If you catch a cold, I'm going to give you the licking of your life!"

Tom Merry took Joe's arm, and led him from the dormitory. He took him down to Mr. Railton's study. D'Arcy and Lowther were waiting outside.

"You've told him?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes. You're to take Joe in."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry tapped at the House-master's door, and entered with Joe. Joe Frayne was red and confused. After his escapade, he hardly dared to face the eyes of the House-master. But there was no help for it now. With downcast looks, Joe Frayne followed Tom Merry into the study.

Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"I am very glad you have been successful in your search, Merry," he said. "Frayne, I suppose, was willing to return with you?"

"He came quite willingly, sir, when I explained to him."

"Very good, Frayne."

Joe turned white.

"Y-e-e-s, sir!" he faltered.

Mr. Railton looked kindly enough at Joe. He laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Frayne, I suppose you realise now that you have done wrong in leaving the school without permission?"

"Ye-es, sir," stammered Joe; "Master Tom says so, sir."

"You are sorry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good! As you are sorry for what you have done, I shall not punish you; but you must give me your word, Frayne, that nothing of the kind shall occur again."

"Werry well, sir."

"I hope," said Mr. Railton, "that you will get on better with your Form-master in the future. Mr. Selby has consented to say nothing further about the matter that caused the trouble. As I believe you will keep your word, Frayne, I shall say nothing about your having run away; but I expect you to show by your future conduct that you are deserving of this leniency."

The tears glistened in Joe's eyes. He could not find his voice for a moment, and when he spoke there was a falter in it.

"Oh, sir, I—I sha'n't never forget 'ow good you've been to me, sir. You and Master Tom is the best friends I've ever 'ad, sir, and I—I'd do anything for you, sir."

Mr. Railton smiled kindly.

"Keep to that, Joe, and you will be all right," he said.

"Nothing more will be said about this matter. You may go."

And Joe Frayne left the study. His eyelashes were wet, but his face was cheerful and smiling.

Wally, Jameson, Curley Gibson, and several of the Third were waiting in the passage. They could tell by Joe's look that it was all right. The fags made a rush, and seized Joe, and bore him away with them, and a little later there was a grand feed in the Third Form-room, with Wally presiding, and the guest of the evening was little Joe, the Runaway!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK.

"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

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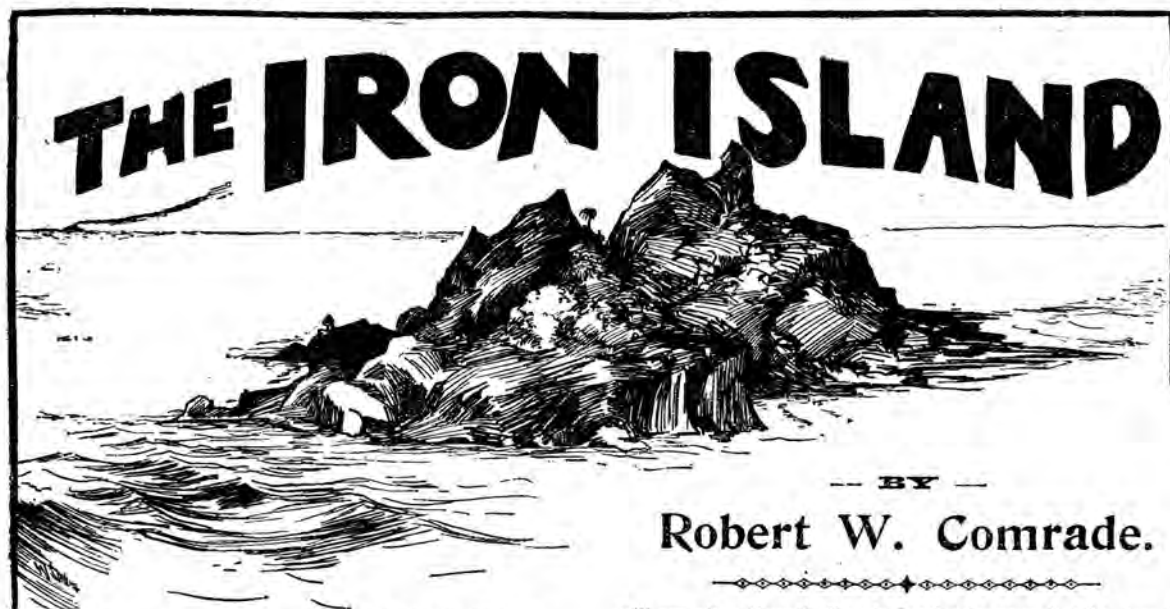
"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

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[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A Thrilling Adventure Tale.



— BY —
Robert W. Comrade.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RE-WITTEN.

Philip Graydon is a young Englishman, who for eight years was marooned on an uncharted island in the Pacific—the Iron Island—by a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, of which he was once a member. A lucky chance brings to his aid Dolores de las Mercedes, an accomplished young lady, who has incurred the displeasure of the French Government. Graydon escapes from the Iron Island, and lands in England with Dolores. As Frank Kingston and Miss O'Brien, the two begin a secret campaign against the pernicious Brotherhood, and seven prominent members are

BROUGHT TO BOOK.

Carson Gray, a detective, is on the track of William Haverfield for murder. The man, however, manages to elude him. Kingston tells Gray that he must "lie low" for a time, as Haverfield, being a member of the Brotherhood, the society will do their best to kill him.

Kingston learns that a meeting of the Brotherhood is to be held to discuss the fate of the detective, and also that James Cassell, the Brotherhood's Chief Agent for Canada, is to arrive the same night. He meets the man at the station, and, after drugging him, takes him to the house of Professor Polgrave. The man, who is a clever scientist and inventor, disguises him as James Cassell. "I shall not attempt to thank you for your assistance," says Kingston, "because I know such a thing would be distasteful to you."

(Now go on with the story.)

At Mount-Fannell's House.

"Exactly," said Polgrave. "You are the very kind of man I like. My services are always waiting to be made use of, as I said before, and it gives me the keenest delight to assist you in your noble work. What do you intend to do with this scoundrel here?"

"If you have no objection, professor, I will leave him here until I return. It is then my intention to carry him on the motor-car to the same common as before, and leave him there. When he recovers he will be absolutely at sea as to what has happened to him, for he will remember nothing after stepping into the car at Paddington Station."

The professor chuckled.

"It is a first-rate notion," he declared. "Really, my rescuer, you give your victims no opportunity of discovering their assailant. You have no intention of harming Cassell, then?"

"No," replied Kingston. "I shall deal with him later on. For the present I want to find out what passes at the meeting. I may not be back again here before one or two. Really, I am afraid I am a nuisance to you, professor."

"A nuisance?" cried Polgrave. "Never say that again, Mr. Kingston. You saved my life to-day, and I am, in consequence, always at your service; always your servant. I

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will see after Cassell all right, and take care that he does not recover consciousness."

"Then I will hasten away," replied Kingston. "I think I had better take his overcoat and cap, in case he was seen by any member of the Brotherhood."

Kingston donned the articles of clothing, both of them fitting him more or less well. If anything, Cassell was a little thinner than Kingston, but, having been absent for such a long time, that would not be noticeable.

The time was getting on, so Cassell's double, now that everything was ready, hastened to depart. Outside in the street he found the motor-car waiting for him. Fraser was at the wheel, and he started as he saw his master.

"Well, Fraser?" asked Kingston, with a glance up and down the deserted road. "What do you think of it?"

"By gum, sir, I should never have thought it was you!" exclaimed Fraser, in amazed accents. "How did the old dog do it, sir?"

"He is certainly a marvel, Fraser; there is no getting away from that. This disguise is not like my others, it is immovable; there is not an atom of paint on my face."

"Scotland Yard would give something to know of it, sir, I'll bet. Every time I look at you I feel a funny feelin' go down me. It don't seem as if it was you at all, sir."

Frank Kingston laughed.

"For the present, Fraser, I am another man, and after this I shall speak to you in a totally different voice. Drive now, straight to the Chief's house in Grosvenor Square. I want to be there, if possible, by the time the discussion commences."

"I'll do my best, sir. This car ain't such a flyer as your Daimler, but she'll move all right."

Kingston clambered into the tonneau, and a moment later the cab was travelling towards Edgware Road. The journey was not a long one, and, at that time of night, when there was practically no traffic about, was soon accomplished.

Lord Mount-Fannell's house was a blaze of light when Kingston arrived, and there were several curious loiterers about who looked at the supposed Cassell with curiosity.

"They could not have arrived so very long ago," thought Kingston as he walked up the steps in a first-class counterfeit of the American's lounging gait. The funkeys in the entrance-hall did not recognise him, so Kingston came to the conclusion that they had never seen Cassell. This was quite likely, so he produced his card-case—or, to be exact, Cassell's card-case.

"His lordship's at home, I guess?" he inquired, in exact imitation of the Chief Agent's nasal drawl.

"Yes, sir. What shall I say, sir?" inquired one of the funkeys, looking at Kingston just a little suspiciously—for, to him, the new-comer was a stranger.

"Say! What're your eyes for?" asked Kingston, holding out a card. "I've had this card-case in my hand ever since I come in!"

The man took the cardboard slip without a word, and

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disappeared. With an air of nonchalant ease Kingston produced Cassell's cigar-case from his pocket, bit the end of a weed, and stuck it in the corner of his mouth. A moment later he was puffing away in evident enjoyment.

To smoke was absolutely necessary, for, with Cassell being such a great slave to the habit, it would seem very peculiar if he didn't. He had not to wait long for the flunkie's return, this time much more respectful.

"If you will come into the library, sir, his lordship will be with you in a few minutes. The other gentlemen have only just gone down."

"That's real good," said Kingston. "I reckoned I shouldn't be far behind in the show."

He walked after the flunkie into the Chief's library. A bright fire was burning here, so Kingston sprawled himself comfortably in one of the easy-chairs. He intended saying as few words as possible, for Mount-Fannell was probably well acquainted with the Chief Agent's method of speech.

He had barely settled down when the door opened, and the dapper little figure of his lordship appeared. He was smiling genially.

"Ah, Cassell!" he cried, coming forward, with outstretched hand. "I thought you weren't coming to-night as it had got so late. I'm delighted to see you! You've been doing magnificently in Canada, and I'm proud to shake hands! By Jove! You haven't changed a little bit!"

"No; I ain't the sort of feller to go in for changes," replied Kingston, grasping Mount-Fannell's hand with apparent warmth. As a matter of fact, a thrill of triumph passed through him as he felt the Chief's hand on his arm. He was face to face with the man who was at the head of all the others. Had Kingston liked he could have killed Mount-Fannell outright then, and walked out unsuspected.

But that wasn't his policy, and, in addition, the Chief should be the last. He was No. 1—the first member of the Inner Council—and he should be the last to survive. By the time all the others had gone he would be made to realise that it would be his turn next; he would be made to realise that nothing on earth could save him from disaster—possibly death.

"You have brought your papers with you?"

Kingston took the cigar from his mouth in affected surprise.

"Say," he exclaimed, "you didn't want me to go over my little lot to-night?"

"I did think of doing so," replied his lordship.

"Well, see here," said Kingston, "I thought you'd be too busy attending to this here feller Carson Gray to mind about me. I only come to look on, and hear how things are going all round. I'm real sorry if I've put you out, Chief."

"It doesn't matter," replied Mount-Fannell. "You can call round to-morrow, and go into everything with me. Perhaps that will be the best, for there will be quite enough to occupy your attention to-night."

"Friend Haverfield seems to have been getting into hot water," remarked Kingston, throwing his cigar into the fire as Mount-Fannell moved towards the door.

"Yes, and by the look of it, Mr. Carson Gray will very soon be getting into hotter still," said the Chief grimly. "I am not quite certain of the facts myself yet, but if you will follow me I will take you to the Council Chamber. Haverfield is waiting for us to arrive before he commences his story."

"That's real considerate of him," drawled the counterfeit Cassell. "We'll get along down the stairs, and hear what he has to say for himself. Personally, I reckon Carson Gray's a sight too clever to be any use to our concern."

The Fate of Carson Gray.

Lord Mount-Fannell led the way down the stairs to the cellars. The last time Kingston had passed down them was when he had been disguised as Colonel Marsden, the once governor of Cragmoor Prison, who was now leading the life of an exile with Don Sebastian on the Iron Island, far away in the sunny Pacific.

Much had happened since then; not once had Kingston stopped in his campaign, and he could not help a feeling of triumph entering his breast as he thought of the manner in which he was routing the Brotherhood.

For he was routing it; with deadly persistence and regularity the members of the Inner Council were dropping out. And when they were all dealt with the organisation would be broken up; for, without the Inner Council, the common-members would be like a ship without a rudder.

The Chief opened the door of the massive strong-room, and the two stepped inside. Two or three minutes later they entered the Council Chamber—Kingston had walked past the doorkeeper, unchallenged, with the Chief—and as they did so a hush was perceptible in the conversation.

The miscellaneous collection of men looked up curiously at "James Cassell," for, being so seldom in England he was a comparative stranger.

"Fellow-councillors," said his lordship, "you all know the gentleman I have just brought in with me. He is not one of us—not an Inner Councillor. The position he holds, however, is equally as high; being, as you know, the Chief Agent for Canada."

For a few minutes Kingston found himself spoken to by several men, and he, quite at his ease, answered their questions and put others as if he were Cassell himself.

Then, as he produced another cigar and lit up, he glanced across at Haverfield. The big, thick-set man was seated in an easy-chair, his hands clasped over his bald head. And on his face was an expression of mingled anger, chagrin, and hatred.

The conversation suddenly stopped as No. 1 rose to his feet at the head of the table. He looked round for a moment in silence.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "we are nearly all here to-night, the three missing being either abroad or engaged upon work which cannot be left. There are quite enough of us here, however, to discuss the questions which I propose bringing forward to-night. The first and most important is the case of our fellow-councillor, Mr. William Haverfield."

The latter sprang to his feet excitedly, but Lord Mount-Fannell held up his hand. In spite of the Chief's small stature, he could be very commanding when he so chose.

"Please don't interrupt, Number 5," he said. "I will lay the whole matter before the Council before you need utter a word."

"But I wish to say—"

"You will have plenty of opportunity presently. Now, gentlemen, the case stands like this at present; in some unaccountable manner Carson Gray, the detective of Great Portland Street, got on Haverfield's track. Gray had been engaged by the relatives of Philip Whyte to bring the murderer to book."

"He very nearly succeeded, too," murmured Milverton.

"Yes. He very nearly succeeded. He is a clever man, otherwise he would never have detected Haverfield. Had it not been for the latter's spring chair he would certainly have been lost. But, more by chance than anything else, Gray seated himself in the chair soon after entering the house. In a moment, of course, he was helpless."

Kingston thought of making some interjection, then changed his mind, realising that he wanted as little attention bestowed upon him as possible.

"Having secured Carson Gray so effectually," said Mount-Fannell, "it was an easy matter to rope him up. There was only one thing to be done with him—send him on the same road as Whyte. It was either Haverfield's or Gray's life, so No. 5 naturally chose the latter."

"Gray was rescued, was he not?" asked one member.

"I am coming to that. He was carried below into the cellars and dropped into the tunnel. Now here comes the unaccountable part. Haverfield's servants absolutely swear that as Gray's bound form was shooting along the water, another form grasped hold of him, and was swept along with him."

"It is difficult to believe someone was there just at that critical moment," said the naval officer.

"Yet it was so. That somebody, whoever it was, knew what Haverfield was doing, and was there waiting for Gray to come along. Haverfield, of course, took alarm and left the house within fifteen minutes. And to show how necessary was his action, not an hour later the police burst into the house, and ransacked it throughout. And, moreover, Carson Gray was with them!"

"Who was the man who rescued him?" asked Milverton.

"That is a difficult question to answer. I can only surmise that it was Gray's assistant. However, it matters little to us who it was. The fact remains that Carson Gray has made a nice mess of things for us. He has absolutely ruined Haverfield, who is now a detected murderer, a fugitive from justice. He cannot stir from this house, even, while there is all this hue-and-cry after him."

"But that is not the worst!" cried Haverfield, starting to his feet again. "Carson Gray knows all about the Brotherhood; he has found us out, and the police may come at any moment. While he was bound in my chair he told me he knew all. And he does; he is aware of the names of all the Inner Councillors, and told me he was getting his plans ready to strike—to strike once and for all and kill the Brotherhood with one blow!"

Most of the members had heard nothing of this, and in a moment there was a babel of conversation in the room. Nearly every face showed great consternation. Kingston seemed as concerned as anybody. He knew, however, that Haverfield was lying, that the latter had no idea of Carson Gray's knowledge of the Brotherhood. Indeed, when Gray had visited the house in Chelsea he had been unaware that Haverfield belonged to the organisation at all. Kingston had expected this, however, and it came as no surprise.

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEEK:

"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

"This is serious, Chief!" exclaimed Milverton. "Carson Gray is at liberty, and can lay information at any moment!"

"I admit," said the Chief, "that the matter is of the utmost urgency, and must be attended to without the delay of an hour. I have not been idle, however. You say, Haverfield, that Gray is going to expose us to the police?"

"Yes," cried the other. "The Brotherhood is doomed!"

Lord Mount-Fannell snapped his fingers testily.

"Tut-tut, man; don't be absurd! The Brotherhood's perfectly safe if the right steps are taken. Carson Gray must die—and at once!"

"It is the only way," said one of the councillors. "And perhaps he will be safer underground."

"You're right," agreed Kingston. "Gray ain't the sort of man to take half-measures. When he does expose this show he'll do it whole-heartedly. I reckon there ain't a better way of keepin' him quiet than that which you just suggested, Chief."

"But it will be too late!" cried somebody. "The police may be on their way to this house even now. Great Scott, Haverfield, why on earth didn't you settle the fool before you dropped him into the sewer!"

"Pray don't get yourselves into a panic," said the Chief, looking round at the excited councillors. "Gray will certainly not act to-night, or to-morrow, come to that. I have made inquiries to-day, and it seems that Gray is confined to his bed, owing, doubtless, to the chill he caught while in the sewer. He will certainly not let the police act without his co-operation; without being himself present."

Kingston smiled to himself as the Chief said these words, for Carson Gray was in as good health as he had ever been. His enforced idleness indoors had had a good result after all.

"And," continued his lordship, "even supposing the detective did decide to make a raid to-night, what would be the result? In the excitement of the moment you forget that we are absolutely safeguarded. Not one of us keeps anything in our houses to give a clue, and this place is quite safe from detection. No matter how many police raids were made, we could meet them every time."

The men began to realise this now, and calmed down. Haverfield was chewing nervously at his cigarette, and suddenly spat it out impatiently.

"Gray must die, nevertheless!" he exclaimed. "Now that he knows the existence of the Brotherhood he will be a constant nuisance. Personally, I don't think he will strike the blow for several days, for, thinking he was going to die, he told me everything. He has several threads to draw together yet, and being laid up in addition, there is ample time to settle him before he makes a move."

"But he knows that we are aware he has discovered the Brotherhood," put in the barrister, Milverton, "so might possibly think we shall take alarm and flee."

"No," declared the Chief. "He will not think that. There are so many of us that the very act of disappearing would be guilt enough in itself. As Haverfield says, there is plenty of time in which to accomplish the work. It must be done to-morrow."

"To-morrow at the latest," said Haverfield, his angry expression changing into one of cunning triumph. Carson Gray had ruined him, so he should ruin Carson Gray, he thought vindictively to himself. It was all a question of revenge, for he knew perfectly well—or thought he knew—that the detective was in total ignorance of the Brotherhood. In this way both he and the rest of the councillors were at cross-purposes, for Gray did know of the Brotherhood of Iron.

"It will be best for him to die," declared Mount-Fannell, when the rest had realised that they were in no immediate danger. "He is a very smart man, and to him we owe the arrest of Dr. Anderson, one of our most useful members. It was all his doing from start to finish. How he discovered the facts, and knew Anderson had designs on old Sir Christopher Rawe's life is a mystery."

"I think now," put in Milverton, "Sir Christopher began to get suspicious, and secretly wrote to his lawyers. They, not caring to tackle the matter themselves, gave it into the hands of Carson Gray."

"That does seem the most probable, certainly," agreed the Chief.

Frank Kingston, seated in his chair listening interestedly, smiled again inwardly. The barrister's words showed the value of putting a few words into the newspapers.

"If that is the case," said Milverton, "then Carson Gray was not to blame. He naturally investigated the case when set to do it. Sir Christopher himself was the cause of Anderson's arrest."

"He is lost to us for ever," said No. 1, with a note of regret in his voice. "Indeed, some fatality seems to have come over the Brotherhood. It is appalling to think of the members who have fallen from our ranks during the last

month or so. The fate of Lowenwirth will always remain a mystery. Those accursed Indians had something to do with it for certain. We were fools ever to touch the job."

"That does not alter the present facts!" exclaimed Haverfield. "The point to discuss now is the fate of Carson Gray."

"Yes, Haverfield. It would perhaps be wisest to settle that point first. It is rather a difficult matter, for with Gray confined to his rooms access is not easy. To-day, however, I sent a man to spy, and he, by a stroke of luck, met Gray's butler. The two got talking, and our man invited the butler into a public-house. There he stood him so many drinks that when the fellow returned he was as near as possible drunk. The ruse had the desired effect, for before night the butler was summarily dismissed."

"By Jove!" said somebody. "That was not at all a bad notion. The situation is now vacant, I suppose?"

"Exactly! The first thing to-morrow, however, I am going to send my own under-butler to take the place. He will certainly be engaged, and can do all the work we require."

Kingston showed no sign of interest, although, as a matter of fact, he was memorising every word. This was the information he had come to discover.

"The point is, though, how Carson Gray's death is to be accomplished."

"It must be done," said the Chief, "in a manner which can leave no possible clue; in such a manner that Gray himself is the cause of his own end."

"That will be difficult, I'm afraid," said the barrister. "I fail to see how it can be done."

"Yet I have an idea that, if properly worked, it can quite easily be accomplished. In the event of it failing, however, I intend safeguarding ourselves by preparing an alternative."

And the Chief thereupon related his plans. Everybody listened with interest, some offering advice both good and bad. At length, however, a definite course was decided upon. It was a daring plan, and had Kingston not been present to hear of it, would undoubtedly have meant the death of Carson Gray.

Kingston had heard all, however. He had discovered that which he had come for, and felt satisfied accordingly. Haverfield, too, was looking pleased with himself. Had he not lied the Council would certainly never have decided to take the steps they intended.

And Kingston, in his present guise, could not possibly enlighten them as to Haverfield's fabrications. That would have to be done some other way on the morrow, after the first danger had been obviated. The next thing was to get away without arousing suspicion.

"Now that little matter is settled with," said the Chief, "I think we will go into the affair of Lowenwirth. There is a lot to discuss to-night, one way and another, and I hope everybody is feeling equal to the sitting. It will be at least three o'clock before we are finished."

"Gee!" exclaimed Kingston, taking advantage of the opportunity. "I guess I ain't up to that, Chief. It ain't twelve yet, an' I'm real tired. Travellin' don't seem to suit my constitution, somehow. I s'pose you won't object if I make for my hotel right now?"

The Chief looked across the table at "Cassell," who was yawning loudly. He smiled slightly.

"I think I can excuse you, Cassell," he replied. "You've had a long journey to-day, and, after all, not being a councillor, you can't be interested in our discussion."

"You've hit it, Chief. I don't seem at home here. My place is in Canada, and I reckon I'll git to bed without delay. You'll see me to-morrow about my affairs?"

"At twelve o'clock, if you will call round."

"Good enough! I'll be round here at noon slick."

Kingston rose to his feet, producing another cigar as he did so. Much as he disliked smoking, he did not hesitate to indulge in the habit now. It was part of his disguise, and he had to keep up appearances more than anything.

"Well, good-night, gents!" he exclaimed, ramming his hat on. "I'll leave you to worry over the discussion without my presence. I've got an idea I shall look more peaceful in bed than snorin' across one of these here chairs."

And the pseudo Chief Agent calmly walked out of the room, amid a general laugh.

"The doorkeeper will show you out," called the Chief.

"Thanks!" replied Kingston, as he walked down the long passage.

The wizened old fellow was dozing in his chair, but became wide awake as the other came up. Five minutes later Kingston stepped off Lord Mount-Fannell's garden-path into Grosvenor Square.

It was very quiet at that time of night, and no traffic about at all, except an occasional taxi or hansom cab. Kingston walked briskly down the street to a certain spot five minutes' walk away. Here he found Fraser with the motor-car.

"You ain't been long, sir," said the faithful servant. "I hope nothing's gone wrong."

"No, Fraser. I am glad to say that everything has passed off splendidly. I have learnt all I went to learn, and the information is such that I have now a very powerful weapon to wield. Mr. Gray's life would certainly have been forfeited had I not taken this step. As it is, I think we can foil the Brotherhood's plans very neatly."

Fraser grinned joyfully.

"By gosh, sir," he exclaimed, "I never enjoyed myself so much in my life as I'm doin' now! Talk about honesty bein' the best policy! Why, it seems years and years ago since I was a common-member of the Brotherhood, workin' myself to a rake, and runnin' the risk every day of bein' copped for burglary!"

"You find this work more to your liking, Fraser?"

"I can't express myself, sir. I may be a traitor, but I'm a good sort of traitor, an' as long as I live I'll always stick to the straight path. There ain't nothin' like it in the world."

"Fraser," said Kingston quietly, "you've spoken like a man. I knew from the first I could trust you. Give me your hand!"

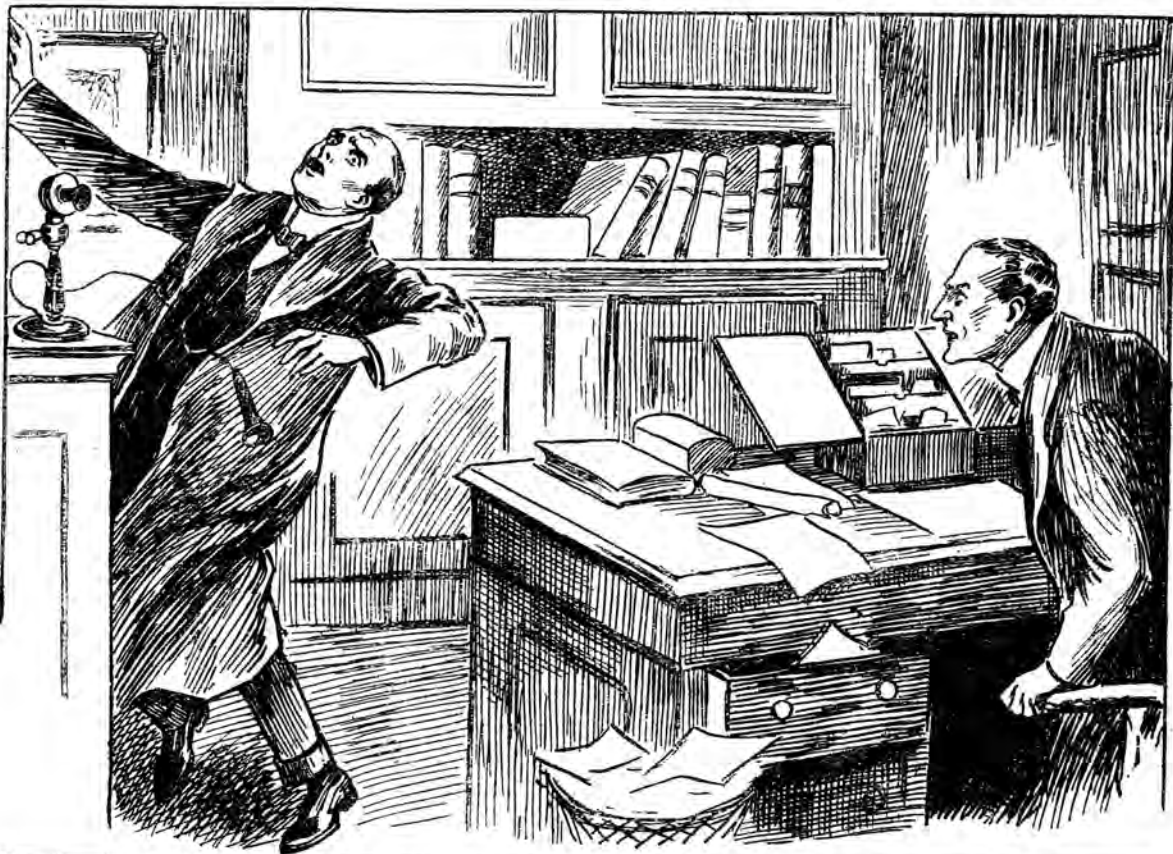
Kingston looked up and down the street carelessly as he pulled his gloves on. Nobody could ever have the remotest suspicion that he was disguised—that his own features were absolutely hidden.

He was feeling a certain glow of satisfaction as he lay back in the car a moment afterwards. He had passed through the adventure without the slightest mishap—without a single hitch. Indeed, disguised as he was, there was practically no danger of being discovered.

He was aware of the council's plans, and would be able to act accordingly. Carson Gray, in attempting to bring Haverfield to justice, had, to use a vulgar expression, bitten off more than he could chew. He realised that himself, and was contented to let Kingston get him out of the hole he had tumbled into.

The famous detective had not an atom of conceit, and freely admitted that Kingston was his superior in every way. Indeed, in the light of past events, he could not very well have done otherwise.

"So the Chief thinks he is going to settle Gray to-morrow?" Kingston mused. "By Jingo! it is lucky I know all. Gray



"Hallo!" cried the member of the Brotherhood into the telephone, "Are you there, Exchange? I say——" The rest of his sentence was drowned in an ear-splitting shriek, and Carson Gray rose to his feet in horror as he saw the man stagger backwards and collapse. (A thrilling incident in next week's instalment of "The Iron Island," in which Carson Gray checkmates the Brotherhood, but is immediately beset with a new peril.)

Cassell Learns the Truth of Kingston's Identity—Too Late.

Fraser flushed with pleasure as he felt the powerful grip of his master. He realised then, more than ever, what a debt of gratitude he owed to Frank Kingston, the man who had, months before, saved his life at Rio de Janeiro.

"But come, Fraser, we have no time for this sort of thing, strictly speaking," exclaimed Kingston. "Let us get back to St. John's Wood. I have no wish to keep the good old professor up all night."

"It do seem funny, sir, to see you like that," said Fraser, gazing at Kingston wonderingly. "Somehow I can't believe as you're the guv'nor! Yet I know you are, 'cos your voice! That old gent must be a fair wonder, sir."

"He is, Fraser, all that. Professor Polgrave is going to be of the utmost service to me and my work. I only met him to-day, and yet, before twelve hours have passed, I get him to lend me his assistance. But we can't continue talking here. Slip your clutch in, and we'll be off."

could never have the remotest suspicion of danger from such a quarter as the council have decided upon. I will put him on his guard, though, first thing to-morrow morning, then see about letting the Chief know of Haverfield's lies."

There was much to happen that night, though—much more than Kingston thought then, as he was being whirled through the deserted streets. Within a very short space of time he had reached the professor's house. The road now was absolutely deserted. Not even a policeman was within sight.

"Stay here, Fraser," directed Kingston. "I shall not be more than a few minutes, and when I come I shall bring the trunk back with me."

"Very good, sir."

Kingston pushed open the gate and walked up the neglected path. Arriving at the area door, he pressed the bell-push in the agreed-upon manner.

"You are back sooner than I anticipated!" cried Professor Polgrave, when he opened the door. "Come in, and tell me how you got on. Your prisoner has been as quiet as a mouse."

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"The chloroform is serving its purpose well."

"Yes. But you or I would have been awake long ago. The man's heart is in a very bad state, and he is altogether dissipated. I have looked at him once or twice, and he is as senseless as he was when you first brought him in."

"Doubtless he will soon come to when he is on the common," said Kingston, as he followed the old man down the stairs to the laboratory. "But I must ask you to excuse me, professor, from going into a long explanation. My car is waiting outside, and I wish to get this business over and done with."

"Of course," agreed Polgrave. "I shall not dream of keeping you above a few moments. Your disguise I can remove in a second. It acted well—oh? Ha, ha! good friend, there was no fear of your being discovered."

"Practically none, professor. I was accepted as the original without question."

"I know it," chuckled the hermit. "Upon my soul, Mr. Kingston, you are making me quite enthusiastic! I am interested immensely in this Brotherhood—in your campaign. You must pay me frequent visits, and let me know exactly how matters are shaping."

"I am afraid I shall be too much of a nuisance," replied Kingston, as they entered the brilliantly illuminated laboratory. "You will not want to be disturbed in your work."

"A nuisance!" cried Polgrave. "You will never be that, my noble rescuer. The more frequent the visits, the better I shall like it. At one time I hated company, but now that I have met you I realise how wrong I was."

"You are complimentary," laughed Kingston. "And I will do my best to comply with your wishes. But the trunk is gone," he added, looking round.

"Yes; I shifted it into the other room. It was in my way. Now I will remove your disguise while you relate to me what has befallen since I saw you last."

Kingston seated himself in a chair, taking it absolutely for granted that Cassell was insensible. This was due to no laxity on his part, for the professor had assured him that the Yankee was still oblivious of his surroundings. But was he?

Had either Kingston or Polgrave been able to see into the other apartment just then they would have been more than a little surprised. For, close to the door, listening with ears on the stretch, and trembling with excitement, stood James Cassell, very wide awake indeed!

The reason for his being there, while the professor had told Kingston—and really thought—that he was unconscious, needs very little explaining. He had recovered his senses in a partial degree about fifteen minutes before, but, being stupefied, had lain in the trunk motionless. The sudden ringing of the bell had awakened him into full life, and as the old hermit ascended the stairs to admit Kingston, so he scrambled noisily from the trunk.

It had all happened in a remarkably favourable manner for Cassell, for had Polgrave been in the laboratory he would assuredly have heard Cassell, and discovery would then have been inevitable. But the odds were in the Chief Agent's favour. In a few moments he had recovered from the first stupor, and wondered where he was. In the darkness—for the lights were, of course, switched off—he could just see a slit of light proceeding from beneath what evidently was a door.

With his legs becoming steadier every moment, and his brain clearer, he made for the door, wondering more than ever what had happened to him. But just as he was about to feel for the handle, the sound of voices reached his ears. He caught his breath in sharply, and realised that he might possibly learn something to give him an inkling as to where he was. There was a chance his captors, whoever they were, might not enter the room for some little time. Anyhow, no harm could come of remaining still and listening. Indeed, if he moved, he might possibly blunder over something, and disclose the fact that he was very much awake.

The first words he heard were those of Polgrave, saying that the more frequent Kingston's visits were, the better he would like it. Cassell could make nothing of the words, but he metaphorically pricked up his ears when the professor said he would remove Kingston's disguise. The latter was silent for a moment, then he spoke.

"As I told you, professor, I can only give you a bare outline of what has occurred at the Council Chamber to-night," he said. "I passed muster without question, everybody taking it for granted that I was James Cassell."

"Good heavens!" thought the prisoner. "The man, whoever he is, has been to the Chief's house disguised as me! Gee! but this looks serious."

He listened again, and stood there, trembling with excitement and expectancy.

"I have learnt exactly what the Brotherhood's plans are with regard to Carson Gray," continued Kingston, "and can, with a little careful work, succeed in saving my friend's life."

"The man is a detective, evidently," thought Cassell desperately, "and he knows everything in connection with our concern. Gosh! I've hit on something big, and no mistake."

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But what can I do? I ain't got a shadow of an idea where I am, and it's no earthly kinder use trying to escape by force. I reckon I'd better play 'possum, and take the first opportunity that offers."

He listened eagerly as Kingston proceeded to briefly recount the result of his visit to the Council Chamber, his whole frame pulsating with the emotion and alarm which had taken possession of him. He felt as if he wanted to burst through the door and dash away to headquarters and report this startling and terrible news. The existence of the Brotherhood was known to an outsider—to a friend of Carson Gray, the famous detective! Perhaps Gray himself knew! Cassell was absolutely true to his cause, and he realised, with stunning force, what this meant.

"Good!" chuckled Polgrave, after a few moments. "You have done splendidly, Mr. Kingston—splendidly! But listen! I have an idea: I can give you something which will help you wonderfully. I know you are in a hurry, but you must listen to this."

Cassell was possessed with an almost uncontrollable desire to burst through the door and see who the speakers were. He knew, however, that the man who had personated him was named Kingston. That was something, at all events. And as he listened to the plan Polgrave suggested to Kingston he grew more agitated than ever.

"By Jove, professor!" cried Kingston, "it is a splendid idea. Really, I have a lot to thank you for!"

"Tut, tut! my preserver. What I do for you can never make up for what you have done for me. Besides, having heard your wonderful story, I take a keen pleasure in lending you all the assistance I can. This Brotherhood is a blot on the country, and all my powers are at your service in your great war. I want you to promise that you will come to-morrow and tell me everything that has occurred. Will you do this?"

"I shall be delighted to do so," replied Kingston, "if you will tell me what time to call. I do not wish to interrupt you."

"I do not mind being interrupted. Come at any time; I shall always be here to welcome you. But you must be tired; you will get some sleep now?"

"Yes, professor: I mean to drive straight to the Cyril after leaving our friend Cassell on the common. When he wakes up he will know absolutely nothing."

Without waiting to hear another syllable, Cassell turned and tiptoed across the dark apartment, his hands outstretched before him. More by chance than anything else, he discovered the wide-open trunk, for he was too agitated, too torn with alarm and triumph, to act cautiously.

Yet, as he felt the trunk, he shook himself slightly, and forced himself to be steady. He obtained a grip on himself and, quietly as a kitten, laid himself in the trunk. Everything depended now on his nerve. His breathing was painful, jerky, and laboured, and he realised that he would have to get it under control if he was to escape with his life.

He was going to be taken to a common and left! This man, Kingston, did not mean to harm him; he had only used him to gain his own ends. And now, having done with him, he was going to release him, under the impression that he still remained unconscious!

What a splendid piece of luck it was!—and what a splendid piece of luck it would be if Cassell could keep up the deception! He was given a minute to compose himself somewhat, then the door opened, and a flood of light entered the apartment.

"He is quite unconscious," chuckled Polgrave, switching the light on. "See, he has not even altered his position. Pout! the smell of chloroform is plainly distinguishable."

"You think he will be unconscious until we reach the common?" asked Kingston, looking down on the motionless form of Cassell, who was passing through the ordeal of his life. "It is six miles from here."

"I am not sure he would last that time. The jolting of the car might waken him. I will apply a little preparation of my own which will have the desired effect, however. Just enough for half an hour."

The hermit passed back to the laboratory, and Cassell realised that perhaps it was the best thing that could happen. To be sent to sleep for another half-hour would be all the better. There would be no possibility, then, of his wakefulness being discovered. Nevertheless, it was a trying minute while the professor held a pad of wadding over his nostrils. The drug on it was not chloroform, but something which had a scent like the perfume of violets—very pleasant. Almost immediately, however, Cassell felt his senses waver.

"I think he will be quite safe for another half-hour now," said Polgrave. "Then, when he recovers, he will be somewhat surprised at his surroundings—oh?"

"Yes, professor, he will never dream of what has passed during his absence."

"A thought has struck me, though," said the professor. "Will not Cassell immediately make for the Chief's house, and tell him of his adventure? If he does that, Mount-Famell

will immediately know that the man who was in the Council Chamber to-night was an impostor. In consequence, all the plans you overheard to-night will be cancelled."

Frank Kingston smiled.

"I have prepared for that," he said, producing his pocket-book. "Read this, professor, and it will explain itself."

He held out a piece of notepaper, and Polgrave took it and read the contents. There were only a few words, short and concise.

"You are surprised to find yourself in this position. The reason cannot be explained now, but it is dangerous for you to go to headquarters at present. Remain at your hotel for two days, then report yourself. The step which has been taken was necessary for your own safety."

Underneath was the secret sign of the Brotherhood, and the hermit smiled comprehensively.

"Very good!" he said. "Very good, indeed! Cassell will think he has been placed in his peculiar position by the Brotherhood?"

"Exactly."

"And he will not go near the Council Chamber for two days, during which time the plans in regard to Carson Gray will have been carried out. Ha, ha, my brave friend; you couldn't have hit on a better plan!"

"It is the simplest and, I think, the most effective," replied Kingston, closing the lid of the trunk and securing it. "I will come to-morrow and let you know everything."

"Splendid!" chuckled Polgrave, as his companion took the trunk in his arms. "Good gracious me, how terribly strong you are! You lift that trunk as though it were empty!"

Kingston laughed and carried his burden easily up the stairs. Arriving at the top, he bade the professor farewell, and hurried to the roadway. The car was standing there, and Fraser was bending over the engine, having lifted the flaps of the bonnet.

"Anybody taken any notice of you, Fraser?" asked Kingston, as he placed the trunk on the roof.

"Only a policeman, sir. He came past, an' said a few words about old Mr. Polgrave bein' a peculiar gent."

"Yes, I suppose he has got the reputation of being very eccentric. It doesn't matter a jot, your being seen here, for the professor is a well-known character in this street."

He opened the door and clambered into the car, thereby letting Fraser know that he wanted to be off. Kingston was, of course, his own self again now.

The journey of six miles to the common was accomplished in fifteen minutes, and Fraser pulled up at the loneliest spot.

"This will do nicely," said Kingston. "Those bushes there will conceal him from the roadway."

"Will you leave the trunk and all, sir?"

"Yes, Fraser; it can give no possible clue, and to leave him lying on the sodden ground would be as good as murder."

Kingston lifted the trunk down and placed it at the back of some huge gorse bushes. In the darkness it would never be seen, and before half an hour had elapsed Cassell would recover consciousness.

"Now, Fraser," cried Kingston, "straight for home! It is close upon one, and certainly time we were both asleep. I have important work to do to-morrow, and must be up at least by seven-thirty."

"It won't be any good goin' to bed at all soon, sir!"

"You're right, Fraser, so hurry up and get away from this spot. Cassell can very well look after himself now."

The car was turned round sharply, and without delay set off back to the metropolis. Soon the red spot of light which indicated the rear lamp had disappeared round a bend, and the trunk, with Cassell inside it, was absolutely alone. Just there it was lonely in the extreme, for no street lamps lit up the scene. Some distance away, however, in the direction of London, could be seen the twinkling lights of a railway station.

Overhead the sky was obscured by thin, slow-moving clouds, and the air was damp and still. The lights of the station were not very bright, owing to the mistiness of the atmosphere. For ten minutes nothing whatever occurred; then suddenly a sound came from the trunk. The drug the professor had administered had lasted exactly half an hour, as he had stated.

The lid of the trunk was slowly raised, and, staggering a little, Cassell emerged. His eyes were burning feverishly, and, with an effort he pulled himself together. Strangely enough, this pleasantly-scented drug left him with a clear brain. He remembered everything immediately, and stood for a moment looking round.

"This is the common, sure?" he muttered quickly. "How am I to get to London? By thunder, I've hit on about the biggest thing that ever happened!"

Suddenly he felt for his watch. Then a surprised look entered his eyes, as he felt that it was wrapped in a piece of paper. He unwrapped it and struck a match, seeing immediately that the paper was a note. Kingston had placed it where it would be discovered almost immediately.

Cassell grasped the meaning of the words without a moment's delay. The match burnt out, and he stood there motionless, staring vacantly before him.

"The Brotherhood!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "It is signed by a member. Great Washington, this gets more serious than ever! There is a traitor among us; this man Kingston even knows the secret sign. Yet the wretch is not educated, although I guess he was a real gentleman. Some servant wrote it, I s'pose. I must rush right along to the Chief; it ain't more than one, and the meeting may last till two."

He bent over the trunk and found his hat and overcoat. In one minute he had donned these, looked round, and set off for the lights of the railway station.

"So the feller was goin' to keep me away from headquarters, eh? By gosh, if I hadn't come to, I should have been took in proper! But Kingston; I don't seem to recollect the name. I wonder who he happens to be? He knows absolutely everything about us, and, by what he said, is goin' to save Mister Carson Gray's life to-morrow. Seemingly he hangs out at the Cyril, so he can't be hard-up. Snakes, I'm kind'er puzzled over this business!"

In his eagerness and excitement he commenced running, and presently came upon a row of houses. A little past these was a road leading to the station. Cassell had no idea as to where he was, but the lights on the platform were full up, and it was reasonable to suppose that the last train had not yet gone.

And even as he hurried down the incline to the booking-office, a train entered the station. Cassell did not wait to purchase a ticket, but rushed through the office on to the platform.

"London?" he asked of the guard.

Yes, the train was for London, Cassell was informed. It was well-filled, and he realised that it was an excursion train, delayed in the usual manner. On inquiring from a fellow-passenger, he found that it should have reached London at half-past eleven.

"Guess it's a slice of luck," he told himself. "Things seem to be happenin' just correct to land me at the Council Chamber before the meeting closes."

Twenty minutes later he paid his fare at the London terminus, and hurried into the station yard. There were several taxis waiting idle.

"Here, cabby," cried Cassell, wrenching open the door of the foremost, "drive like the very dickens to Grosvenor Square! I'll give you a dollar over the fare if you're real slick!"

"What number, sir?" cried the chauffeur, starting the engine.

The Chief Agent told him, and while he was being literally whirled through the silent streets, he went over the startling events which had happened to him that night. By the time his destination was reached he had worked himself into a feverish state of excitement.

He flung the chauffeur a half-sovereign, and ran up to the front door. His urgent summons was answered by one of the two flunkies, who now admitted Cassell respectfully. He naturally thought it was the same man returned.

"Have the gentlemen departed yet?" he asked breathlessly.

"No, sir, not yet," replied the man.

"Then let the Chief know I am here. Tell him the matter is of the utmost urgency."

"Very good, sir!"

The flunkie left the hall, and Cassell paced up and down, muttering excitedly to himself. He turned abruptly as the servant returned.

"Mr. Haverfield will be here in a minute, sir."

Cassell did not answer, but continued his feverish pacing. He could hardly keep himself in check, and his eyes bulged from his face with the stress of the unusual excitement. He could feel his heart thumping painfully, but what was that at a moment like this?

"Ah, Haverfield," he cried, running forward to meet the councillor, "there is no time to talk—no time at all!"

"Really, Cassell, you speak in a peculiar manner," said Haverfield, as he hurried down the stairs, keeping pace with the Chief Agent. "What have you been doing since you left? You said you were going straight to bed."

"I have got news," replied Cassell, "urgent news!"

He was too distracted to hear Haverfield's question. Had he done so, he would probably have said that the other man was an impostor, that this was the first time he had entered the Council Chamber for years. But he didn't say it, for he had not heard the question.

Haverfield little guessed the purport of the news which his colleague had brought; he little guessed that Cassell knew the identity of the secret enemy who was responsible for the ruin of several of his fellow-members, who had caused the disappearance of Sir Robert Gissing and Colonel Marsden, who had brought about the downfall of Dr. Anderson and the death of Herr Bruckmann.

Frank Kingston, too, was at that moment slipping between the sheets, congratulating himself on the smoothness with which his plans were running. His mind was absolutely at ease. Yet for once he had made a mistake; he had not looked at Cassell immediately he entered the laboratory.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 162.

Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEEK:

"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

True, the professor had assured him that the prisoner was still unconscious. Kingston had taken the professor's word, and so had brought about the present state of affairs. Considering everything, no one was to blame, for Polgrave had kept the sharpest of eyes on Cassell. The latter had recovered consciousness just when he was by himself, and had feigned insensibility afterwards.

The truth remained, however, that James Cassell, the Chief Agent for Canada, was in possession of the fact that the man who was waging war against the Brotherhood so successfully was Frank Kingston, and that he lived at the Hotel Cyril. It was a stupendous piece of news.

And Kingston himself slept peacefully in utter ignorance of impending disaster. It seemed that all his work of the last few months, all his precautions to keep his identity a secret, and all his future plans were to be dashed to the ground and frustrated.

The secret identity he had so jealously guarded was to be made known to all the Inner Council. Before morning he would have the whole Brotherhood at his heels, and death would be practically inevitable; for Kingston could never hope to escape the attention of such a vast number of enemies.

Cassell realised the terrible import of his news, although he was not really a member of the English section of the Brotherhood. But he had heard of all the disasters which had lately befallen the councillors, and put two and two together immediately.

He literally ran up the passage to the little gate, and cursed angrily when the wizened old man demanded the password before going through. Cassell snapped it out and passed through, taking no heed of Haverfield's questions. He burst into the Council Chamber unceremoniously, and stood there, his hand on the door, his face as purple as a peony, and his eyes burning with uncontrollable excitement.

All eyes were turned towards him, and some of the councillors rose to their feet in alarm. Cassell's face clearly showed that something was very wrong.

"What is the matter?" cried the Chief. "Come in, man, and tell us what—"

Cassell lurched into the room, holding his hand to his side to ease the pain over his heart. He stood for a second silent; then burst forth excitedly.

"I have news," he cried, "news you can never dream of! The man who is responsible for the downfall of Don Sebastian, of Bruckmann, of Marsden—I know him! I know his name!"

Milverton grasped Cassell's arm.

"Explain yourself!" he demanded. "Be calm and—"

"Calm?" shouted the Yankee. "Great Washington, you don't know! This man is our greatest enemy, and I know who he is! He is unsuspecting of danger himself, as unsuspecting as any baby!"

"His name?" cried the Chief quickly. "His name, Cassell?"

"His name?" cried Cassell, bringing his fist with a thump on the table. "I reckon you'll be surprised; it is somebody you'll be sure to know—"

"Confound it!" cried No. 1. "get it out!"

"I will; his name is—Ah!"

Cassell had raised his hand in readiness to thump the table again, and his eyes were like living coals. Suddenly, however, his face became convulsed with pain, and the blood rushed from it, leaving it as pale as death.

"My heart!" he croaked, falling across the table. "I can't bear—ah!"

He raised himself up for a second, his face clearly showing the agony he was suffering. Then, before a hand could be held out to save him, he uttered a moan and crashed backward to the floor.

For one awful second there was the silence of death; then a babel of voices burst forth, and one of the councillors fell on his knees beside the prostrate Chief Agent. He wrenched open his waistcoat, and held a shaking hand over his heart; then he looked up in horror.

"Good heavens," he cried, "Cassell is dead!"

The Deadly Telephone.

"Dead!" echoed Lord Mount-Fannell. "It cannot be true! You are mistaken, Lyle—you must be!"

"Come and see for yourself," said the councillor quietly, rising to his feet. "Life is extinct."

The members were looking at one another with scared faces. The excitement they had felt on seeing Cassell's agitated manner had turned to awe now that they saw him lying on the floor still and expressionless in death. It had all been so dramatic, so unexpected, that they could hardly realise it.

The Chief did not need a second look to convince him that Cassell was indeed dead. It was a great shock, and when he spoke, his voice was subdued.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "this occurrence is most

unfortunate—unfortunate for two reasons. One, because Cassell was one of our most useful men—he had always been absolutely loyal to the Brotherhood, and was to this very hour. The reason for his death is over-excitement. It caused his heart to fail—a heart, I am afraid, greatly diseased by excessive smoking. You all know what a terrible smoker Cassell was. The second reason is that he evidently had news of the utmost importance to relate. So urgent was it, in fact, that he was in a state of extreme excitement and eagerness. Unless the matter was one of life and death, he would never have excited himself to such a degree as to cause his own decease."

"And he had the name on his lips," declared Milverton. "What a piece of wretched luck! What occurred during the time he was away from this house we can only conjecture."

Milverton, of course, was under the impression that Cassell had been to the Council Chamber once before that night.

"He could not have meant Carson Gray, either," exclaimed Lord Mount-Fannell, "for he was aware of our plans with regard to the detective. We had discussed them just before he left. No, he had learnt something within the last hour—something very much more important than anything we have discussed to-night."

"I agree with you," said one member. "He had learnt the identity of the secret enemy who is working against us so strenuously. But what is the good of talking? He has passed away now, poor fellow, and his lips are sealed for ever. In all probability we shall never learn the news which caused his abrupt death."

"I shall set men to work the very first thing to-morrow," said the Chief, "and try and discover where he went after leaving here at about midnight."

"They will not find out," declared Milverton, with conviction. "He might have walked, or hired a taxi, or ridden on a motor-bus. How are our men going to track him? The task is an impossible one."

"I am afraid you are right," agreed the Chief. "Nevertheless, there will be no harm in setting our men to work. Why did he get so excited? Had he remained calm, he would not have strained his heart to such an extent—he would have been living now, and we should have been in possession of his evidently vital news."

"It is a pity," murmured Milverton—"a terrible pity." No good could come of talking, however. Cassell was dead, and his discovery was lost with him.

"What is done cannot be undone," said Lord Mount-Fannell, in his ordinary voice. The effect of his colleague's sudden death was soon leaving his cold and flinty heart. "I shall make arrangements with regard to the removal of Cassell's body in the morning. After this regrettable incident, however, I do not think we will prolong the meeting further. We have discussed the bulk of the questions, and those which are left can be reserved for some future date."

So the councillors rose to depart. There was not one of them, however, who did not feel a pang of regret that Cassell should have died before delivering himself of his tidings. As Milverton had said, it was a great pity.

But, although it might have been exasperating to them, it was providential to Frank Kingston. It seemed as though Cassell had been struck down at the precise moment when Kingston's name was on his lips, so that the former could continue his splendid work against the Brotherhood of Iron without interruption. Cassell would have ruined everything had he spoken. He had not been allowed to speak, however; he had gone to pay the penalty of his misdeeds with the name of the Avenger unspoken.

Kingston himself knew nothing of it; he was under the impression that Cassell was alive and following the instructions which were written on the slip of paper. As events had turned out, it made no difference whatever to either his or the Brotherhood's plans.

So he rose the following morning at 7.30, his mind full of the work which he had planned out for that day. Precisely the same as usual he washed, shaved, and entered the dining-room to read the morning's papers before the fire.

He was lounging in his easy-chair when Fraser brought breakfast in. Apparently without a care in the world, he bade the valet good-morning. His eyes wore that old dreamy expression, and the usual inane smile was on his lips. What a marvellous personality they concealed!

He partook of breakfast leisurely, all thoughts of his work for the time banished. It was half-past eight when he had finished, and he laid the papers aside and glanced at the mirror to see that his tie was straight and his hair parted to his satisfaction. Then he lounged out of his room and crossed the corridor.

Dolores was in—had, in fact, just finished her breakfast, and she stepped forward eagerly as Kingston entered the room.

"I am so glad you have come, Mr. Kingston!" she

exclaimed, placing her dainty little hand in his strong one. "I am eager to learn what has occurred lately."

"I have come, Dolores, for the precise purpose of putting you in possession of the latest news," he replied languidly. "As I told you during our last conversation together, there would soon be another meeting of the Inner Council. There was one last night."

"Last night," repeated Dolores as he seated himself in his accustomed place on the couch. "I wonder what passed in that dreadful chamber?"

"You will not have need to wonder long, Dolores, for I attended it myself," drawled Kingston. "I am glad to say that my visit was not in vain."

She raised her beautiful eyebrows in surprise.

"You attended the meeting?" she cried. "Really, Mr. Kingston, you seem to be able to do almost anything you choose! Do tell me all about it."

"I will do so," he answered, "in a few moments. I like relating everything in sequence, so if you will allow me, I will tell you the events exactly as they happened."

And he thereupon told his fair companion of his meeting with Professor Graham Polgrave, of the coming of James Cassell, and of everything, in fact, which had occurred since he had last seen her.

Dolores was vastly interested, and watched his calm face eagerly as he recounted the events. He spoke of everything as if they were quite everyday occurrences—as if the conversation was merely small talk.

"What a marvellous man this professor must be!" she exclaimed when he had finished. "And how extremely useful he can be to you in your work! I should just love to see all his wonderful preparations, and the place in which he makes them."

"Perhaps an opportunity will present itself in the near future," replied Kingston. "I am sure the professor would be delighted to see you."

"I am afraid he would not care for me there," she said. "But, to change the subject, it is an ingenious manner in which the Council has decided to murder Mr. Gray. You will go round presently, I presume, and put him on his guard?"

"Yes, Dolores. There is ample time, however. The Chief said he was going to send his under-butler round so as to arrive at about ten o'clock. It is now not quite nine."

"And the telephone is to be rung at one o'clock precisely?"

"Yes, on the stroke of the hour a current will be passed through the instrument which will be sufficient to cause the death of three men. Should Carson Gray happen to touch the telephone, then I'm afraid he would bid good-bye to this world for ever."

"What a terrible way to commit the crime!" exclaimed Dolores, looking into the fire with a little shiver. "But, of course, Mr. Gray will be on his guard?"

"Of course," agreed Kingston. "I will see to that. When the Brotherhood find their plans frustrated, they will immediately set to work to kill Gray in another way. He must be got rid of immediately, for Haverfield, having lied to the Council, they think they are in constant peril of being betrayed. To-day Gray is receiving the Brotherhood's undivided attention."

They discussed the matter for some little time longer, then Kingston took his departure, promising to let Dolores know everything as soon as possible. He strolled out as though he were in reality the dandified fop he affected to be. His real masterful character was completely hidden.

At half-past eleven exactly he stepped out of a taxi in Great Portland Street, and ascended the steps of Carson Gray's front door. He was admitted by the landlady, and shown direct into the detective's suite of rooms. There was no sign of a butler whatever.

"Ah, Gray, still at rest?" cried Kingston, as he took his friend by the hand. "I suppose you are about sick of it, eh?"

"Sick of it!" said Carson Gray, in disgust. "I feel like a schoolboy hiding behind a hedge while the master who is after me passes the other side. I tell you, Kingston, before the day is out, I shall chuck it all up and go for a walk down Oxford Street!"

Kingston smiled.

"I can quite realise how you feel," he said. "It is most exasperating for an energetic man such as yourself being forced to remain indoors. But, really, you know how all-powerful the Brotherhood is, and how foolhardy a walk out would be!"

"Perhaps you are right. But tell me what happened at the meeting last night? You appear to have passed through the affair safely enough."

"Before I answer your question, Gray, I wish to put to you another. Has there been a butler here this morning applying for a situation—a man with a sallow complexion and gray side whiskers?"

Carson Gray took his pipe from the mantelpiece, and nodded.

"Yes," he replied; "he came some little time ago, and as he gave good references, I took him on. He is just such a man as you describe. Why do you wish to know, though?"

"Because, my dear Gray, the man with the grey side-whiskers happened to be a common-member of the Brotherhood!"

Gray dropped his pipe with a thud to the hearthrug.

"A member of the Brotherhood!" he echoed. "Good gracious, Kingston, you don't mean to say I am menaced in my own house?"

"I do mean to say it. It may interest you to know, moreover, that these windows and your door are being watched from at least three different quarters."

Carson Gray gazed at his companion a little blankly.

"Then I am not safe even where I am now?" he exclaimed. "Hang it all, the Brotherhood evidently means business!"

"There is no doubt on that point, Gray. But I want to ask you a question—where is this new butler now? I saw no sign of him as I entered."

"No; he asked my permission half an hour ago to leave and see about his box. I suppose, really, he is consulting with some of his fellow scoundrels?"

"He is certainly seeing about no box," replied Kingston. "Now listen carefully. I will tell you what the Council has decided to do to you. There is not sufficient time at our disposal for me to enter into full details as to how I managed to get into the Council Chamber, and so forth. All that I will reserve for another time."

"You will let me know eventually, however?" asked the detective.

"Of course. Now, the manner of your death is to be a very simple one. And you have to do nothing in order to save yourself."

"Do nothing?"

"Exactly. For your death is to be encompassed by a voluntary action of your own. All you have to do is to refrain from performing that action."

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NEXT
WEEK:

"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

Carson Gray laughed.

"By Jove!" he said, applying a match to the bowl of his pipe. "That does not seem to be very difficult."

"It is not difficult. At one o'clock precisely the telephone-bell will ring, and in the ordinary course you would immediately answer it. Should you do so to-day, however, it would inevitably mean certain death!"

"You mean to say—"

"I mean to say that you would be electrocuted before you could dream of danger. The Brotherhood have no inkling that their plans are known, so you are, therefore, to all intents and purposes, absolutely ignorant of any foul play in connection with the telephone."

"Great Scott! It is a devilish plan!" said Gray, with a glance at the telephone at the other side of the room. "I shall feel afraid to touch the confounded thing."

"You need have no fear. The death-dealing current will not be switched on until one o'clock."

"But how will the Brotherhood know that their plans have not miscarried? How can they prevent somebody else answering the 'phone? I am supposed to be in ignorance of it, and might very probably get somebody else who happens to be in this room to answer the call."

"Such a contingency has been prepared for. At half-past twelve Mr. Joseph Reynolds, one of the principal district superintendents, will pay you a call, relating a particularly ingenious piece of fiction for your especial edification. He will keep you engaged until the instrument rings, and will see that you yourself answer the telephone. He will also be ready afterwards to give evidence that the occurrence was a perfect accident, caused through some unknown happening among the telephone-wires. You see, everything is prepared."

"They evidently intend there shall be no hitch," exclaimed the detective grimly. "I have a lot to thank you for, Kingston, and I am eager to learn how you gained admittance to the Council Chamber."

"That will have to wait, Gray. Things will begin moving soon, so I had better clear out of the road. You thoroughly understand what you have to do?"

"Or, rather," said Gray, "what I have not to do. Yes; I think I have got everything clear. I cannot quite understand, however, why the butler is in my house."

"The common-member you refer to has received orders to assist in the necessary connecting of the wires at the telephone in your outer room. The instrument here is, of course, an extension?"

"Yes; but you said assist. From that I assume a further scoundrel is to have free entry into my rooms?"

"Very shortly. You see, once things do begin to move, they will all do so together. A man will call round, ostensibly from the telephone company, stating that certain alterations are to be made to your instrument. The only alterations he will make will be to intensify the current to a terrible extent. It has all been arranged with most remarkable speed and thoroughness."

"I am to allow them to do this work?"

"Decidedly. Let the ruffians think that their plans are working with perfect smoothness until the last moment. The only point you must remember is, not to touch the telephone."

"You may rest assured," laughed Carson Gray, "that I shall not do that. Where are you off to now?"

"I am going out, for you must remember that I was seen to enter your door by more than one member of the

Brotherhood. For that reason I wish to depart without delay. I shall not be far off, however, for I mean to keep a strict watch myself until the hour of one."

"Was it exactly wise for you to come here in your own personality?" asked the detective. "The emissaries of the Brotherhood, since you say they are watching, are bound to have seen you enter my door."

Kingston smiled as he placed his hat on.

"My dear Gray," he drawled, "you seem to forget that you are a servant of the public—a private detective. Why should suspicion rest upon me because I happen to call the same morning as the Brotherhood are endeavouring to compass your end? Besides, I am not so well known as to be recognised instantly by the watching spies. Ten to one they will take no notice of me; certainly, I do not appear worthy of notice."

Carson Gray could do nothing but agree with him, for Kingston certainly appeared a particularly inane-looking fellow as he stood there, attired in the very latest of West End fashions. Kingston descended the stairs, and very shortly afterwards was being driven in the direction of Oxford Street.

A few minutes later a rather slim individual, with grey side-whiskers, walked rapidly up Great Portland Street, and entered Carson Gray's rooms. The time was precisely twelve o'clock. From this time onwards things were beginning to move, although outwardly there was no apparent change in the morning's routine.

Carson Gray found it rather irksome seated in his consulting-room waiting for the events to happen which the Brotherhood fondly supposed would culminate in his death. So far he had seen no sign of any movement, and his new butler, Benson, certainly seemed an honest enough fellow. Gray had heard him come in, but thought it wisest to take no notice.

Benson was a common-member of the Brotherhood, and was merely in Gray's house in order to assist the pseudo telephone-man when he called to make the necessary alterations. And, as Kingston wanted events to take their natural course until the climax, Gray left him to himself. Benson seemed a very quiet sort of fellow, and proceeded to do his duties as if he was, in reality, Carson Gray's butler.

The outer telephone was in a room several doors away from Carson Gray's consulting-room, and Benson more than once examined the instrument. Had anybody been there to see, they would have noticed that he was expecting somebody, for every now and again he would go to the window and glance up and down the street. At last his expectation was realised, for a man with a black bag in his hand, and attired in a certain kind of uniform, ascended the outside steps and knocked at the door.

It was the man from the telephone company—or, rather, the common-member who was impersonating him. Benson admitted him to Carson Gray's suite, but gave no sign of recognition.

"I've come about the 'phone," said the man. "Got orders from the company that Mr. Gray's instrument ain't in working order. You might tell Mr. Gray that I'm here."

"Very good," said the butler.

He went to the detective's apartment and tapped on the door. In response to an invitation to walk in, he opened it, and stood respectfully inside.

"There's a man from the telephone company, sir," he said. "Says your instrument wants looking to. Shall I say it's all right?"

(Another Tong instalment of this splendid serial story next week.)



HOW DO YOU DO?

"SKIMPOLE'S PUPIL."

The weird and wonderful doings of the eccentric genius—and nuisance—of St. Jim's form the subject of our next story, but of course Tom Merry & Co., and all your old friends, are not by any means idle, as you will see.

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The Editor.

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Name _____

Address _____

Name of School _____

(Please write very clearly.)

Names and Addresses of the Three Boys marked with a **X** in the above Photograph, must be sent in before March 21st.

Then post this page to the Editor, "GEM" Library, 23-29, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.

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WILL BE SENT ON RECEIPT OF THE SIX NAMES AND ADDRESSES.

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Names and Addresses of the Three Boys marked with a **X** in the above Photograph, must be sent in before March 21st.

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over the
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6
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- 1 PACKET OF CHOCOLATE,
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