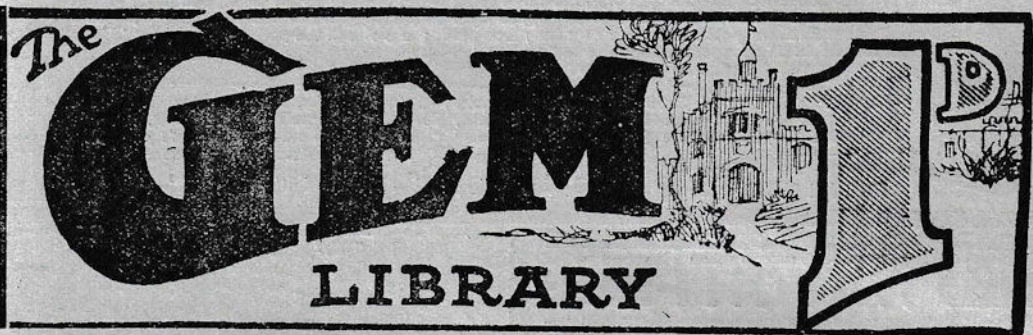


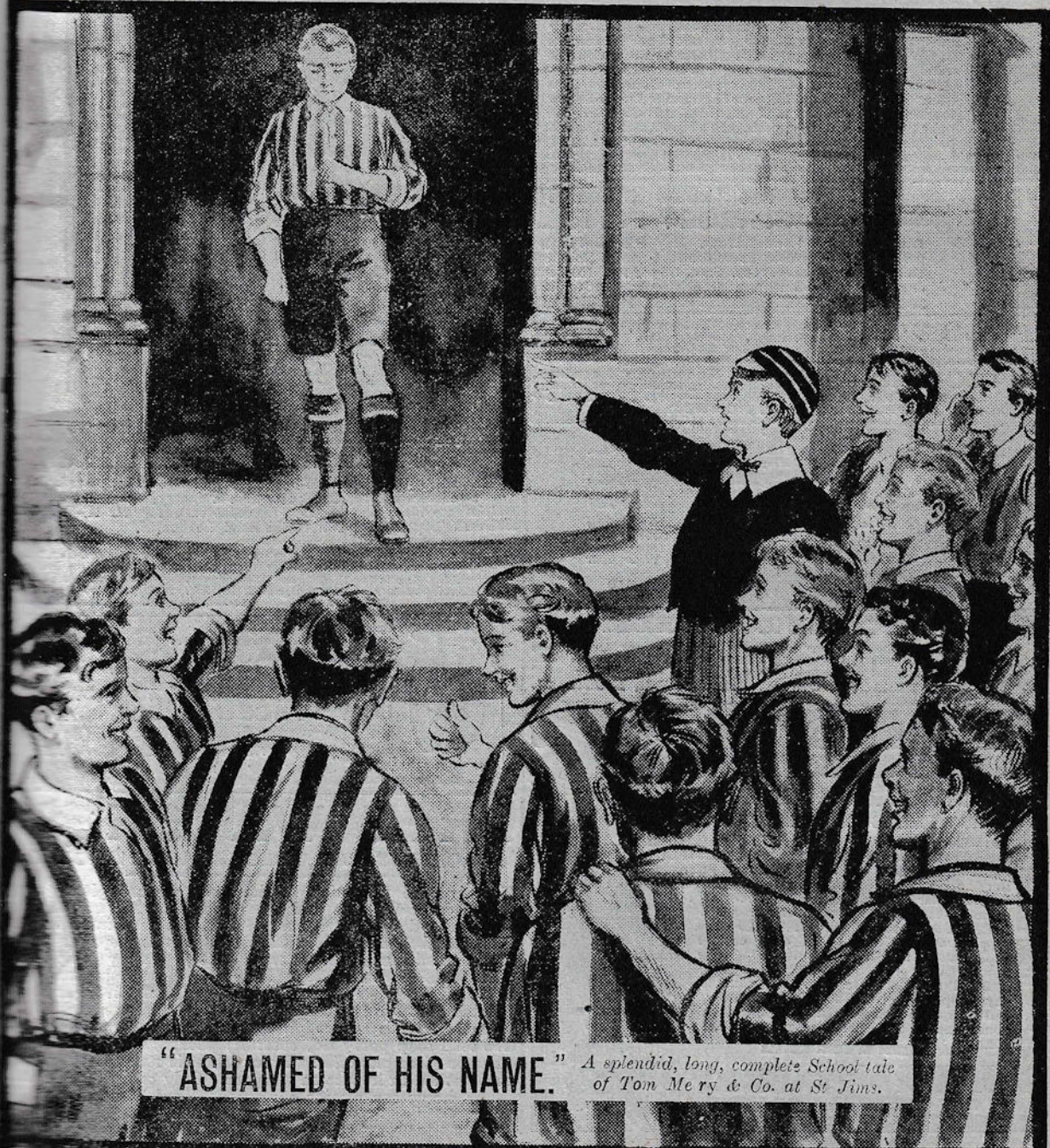
IN THIS ISSUE: SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!

By R. S. WARREN BELL.

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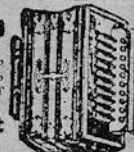
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CHAPTER 1. For Two Pins!

"**V**AVASOUR!"

"That's it!"

"Sounds a swagger name," said Monty Lowther of the Shell, with a yawn. "Another giddy aristocrat like the one and only Gussy, I suppose!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Vavasour!" said Gore of the Shell with a sniff. "I'll Vavasour him, if he comes any nonsense, anyway. What's his front name?"

"Guy!" said Tom Merry.

"My hat, thicker and thicker!" said Gore, with another sniff. "I'm quite anxious to see Guy Vavasour. If there's any rot—"

"Oh, bosh!" said Tom Merry. "No reason to suppose that the new kid is going to put on side, because he happens to be named Guy Vavasour. Chap can't help his name, any more than he can help his face—that's why we're not down on you, Gore."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter with my face?" bawled Gore.

"The question is, what isn't the matter with it?" drawled Monty Lowther. "But Tom Merry's right, you can't help it, and we're not down on you."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arey, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. "And I twust you are not goin' to be wude to the new chap, simply because he happens to have a respectable name, Goah."

"If he puts on any side—" began Gore angrily.

"He can't done so yet," said Tom Merry pacifically. "You haven't seen him yet, Gore. Wait till he puts on side."

"His name's enough for me!" growled Gore.

Ashamed .. of .. His Name!

*A splendid long, complete school tale of
the chums of St. Jim's.*

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

"Weally, Goah—"

"Oh, rats!"

The group of juniors were in the hall of the old School House of St. Jim's, after lessons on a spring day. They were discussing a new boy who had just arrived; a junior, who was going into the Fourth or the Shell, they didn't know which. They knew that he was to be a School House boy, that was all, and that made them a little curious about him. If he had been going into the New House, they would not have interested themselves in Guy Vavasour at all.

Mellish of the Fourth, the sneak of the School House, had caught sight of the new boy as he descended from the station hack, and was shown by Toby, the page, into the Head's study. Mellish's report was that he looked like a swanker; but the other fellows discounted Mellish's evidence very much. Mellish was only too likely to take a dislike to a fellow because he looked straight and decent; indeed, Mellish's dislike, as Monty Lowther remarked, was a compliment to anybody.

Gore and Crooke, and two or three others, were against the new boy, however, before they had seen him; partly because Tom Merry & Co. showed a disposition to speak of him in a friendly way.

The new boy was with the Head now, and the group of juniors meant to see him as he came out. They had nothing particular to do just then, and interviewing a new "kid" was as good a means of killing time as any other.

"What's he like, Mellish?" asked Manners of the Shell.

"You've seen him?"

Mellish sniffed.

"Rather tall and slim," he said. "Dresses like a tailor's dummy—like Gussy here!"

"Weally, Mellish—"

"Turned out nobby from head to foot, and looks as if

Next Wednesday:

"THE LAST HOPE!" AND "SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!"

the earth isn't quite good enough for him to walk on," added Mellish.

"Fits in with the name," said George Gore. "Well, if he comes into the Shell, we'll show him we don't stand any swank."

"Yes, rather!" said Crooke.

"In fact, it would be a jolly good idea to rag him a bit for a start, and show him what's what to begin with," said Gore.

"You won't!" said Tom Merry quietly.

Gore glared.

"Why won't we?" he demanded.

"Because there will be thick ears served out if anything of the sort is tried on," said Tom Merry serenely. "You're not going to bully a new boy, simply because he is a new boy, while I'm around."

"I quite agree with my friend Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon Gore of the Shell in a very severe way. "I should certainly refuse to allow anything of the sort."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake of the Fourth. "Shut up Gore, for goodness sake!"

Gore grunted angrily.

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

There was a general movement as the new boy came down the passage from the Head's study.

He was certainly an elegant looking youth.

He was taller than most of the juniors there, slenderly built, with a fair face, and clear cut features, and fair hair curling over a high forehead. He was dressed most elegantly, in the best cut clothes, and, indeed, looked quite as well-dressed as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's; than which there was no higher praise.

He glanced at the juniors inquiringly.

"You're the new kid?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas!"

The new boy spoke in a somewhat drawling voice, as if it were almost too much trouble to speak at all, and his accent was very like that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. D'Arcy felt his bosom warm to him at once. It occurred to him immediately that here was a congenial spirit come to St. Jim's at last.

"Vavasour, eh?" said Gore.

"Yaas!"

"What form are you going into?" asked Tom Merry.

"Shell!"

"That's my Form. I'm Tom Merry, captain of the Shell."

"How do you do?" said Vavasour.

"And I'm Gore of the Shell," said the owner of that name, in a far from friendly tone, "and I don't stand any nonsense."

Vavasour looked at him, raising his eyebrows slightly.

"Indeed!" he said.

"I mean that," said Gore.

"Yaas?"

"Goah, deah boy, pway don't be wude and wotten to a new-comah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You will give him a vewy bad impression of the mannaahs of this coll."

"I'd give him an impression on his silly nose for two pins," grunted Gore.

"My nose?" asked Vavasour.

"Yes!"

"For two pins?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Good!"

Vavasour, with perfect coolness, felt over the lapel of his elegant jacket, and extracted therefrom a couple of pins. He laid them in the palm of a very white and well-kept hand, and extended that hand to George Gore. Gore stared at it as if it were some curious zoological specimen, and wondered what it meant.

The juniors grinned. Vavasour's manner was perfectly

grave and serious, and it was hard to think that he was making fun of George Gore, the bully of the Shell. The burly Gore looked as if he could crumple up the elegant newcomer with a single drive of his heavy fist; and he was not a safe fellow to make fun of.

"What do you mean, you ass?" blurted out Gore angrily, and growing very red in the face.

"You said you would make an impression on my nose for two pins," said Vavasour, in his drawling voice.

"Yes, I did, and—"

"Well, there are two pins—and here is my nose."

Gore drew a deep breath of rage. There was a chuckle from the group of juniors. Gore doubled up his big fists, and rushed at the new boy. Tom Merry & Co. looked a little anxious. They did not want to see the slender fellow hammered by the burly bully of the Shell. But he had challenged Gore, and it was impossible to interfere. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a wise grin upon his aristocratic face.

"There's more in that chap than meets the eye, deah boys," he murmured. "Our respected friend Goah won't ewush him so easily as he thinks."

Arthur Augustus was right.

Gore rushed at the new boy with his heavy fists thrashing out, and it looked for a moment as if Guy Vavasour would be swept away before him, if not slaughtered where he stood. But only for a moment.

Then the delicate white hands came sweeping up, and Gore's big fists were knocked into the air—and Gore rushed right upon a hard set of knuckles.

"Biff!"

"Grooch!"

Gore staggered back. Between the impetus of his own rush, and the force of the blow, he had received a terrific drive, right on the nose, that brought the water with a rush to his eyes.

He staggered back—two, three paces, and sat down with a bump.

"My hat!"

"Bwavo!"

"Grooh!" murmured Gore, dabbing at his nose with his fingers, and taking them away crimsoned. "Grooh! Oh! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My nose is still waiting," said Vavasour gently; "and you have not yet earned the two pins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore staggered up, and jammed his handkerchief upon his flowing nose. He gave the new boy a glare, and stalked away.

"Nuff's as good as a feast," grinned Monty Lowther; "and Gore has had enough. Now, scemish, it's your turn."

"I don't want to quarrel with the new chap," said Mellish, in alarm, backing away. "I—I don't believe in jumping on new kids."

"You did five minutes ago."

"Your turn, Crooke."

"Oh, rot!" said Crooke.

And Crooke and Mellish walked away before the argument could be carried any farther. After George Gore's experience, they did not want to sample the powers of the new Shell fellow.

Vavasour looked round with a quiet smile.

"I'm sorry to cut up like this my first day here, you fellows," he said. "But it really wasn't my fault, was it? I'm not a quarrelsome chap, and I don't want to row with anybody."

"Good for you!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Gore has only got what he was asking for, and it will do him good. But, blessed if I should have imagined you could hit out like that! You—excuse me—you don't look like it."

Vavasour laughed.

"You see, Gore fancied you must be a spooney because your name's Vavasour," said Blake, with a chuckle. "If you had been Smith—"

"What!"

Vavasour's expression suddenly changed. The pleasant smile died away from his face, and a gleam came into his eyes. He took a step towards Blake, and Jack Blake stepped backward in sheer astonishment.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "What's the row? I'm not ragging you!"

"You said—"

"I was going to say that if your name had been Smith instead of Vavasour, Gore wouldn't have jumped on you," Blake explained. "No offence in that, that I can see."

"Oh, all right!"

"Only, if you're spoiling for a fight, you can come on," said Blake warmly. "You'll find me a tougher nut to crack than Gore, I can tell you."

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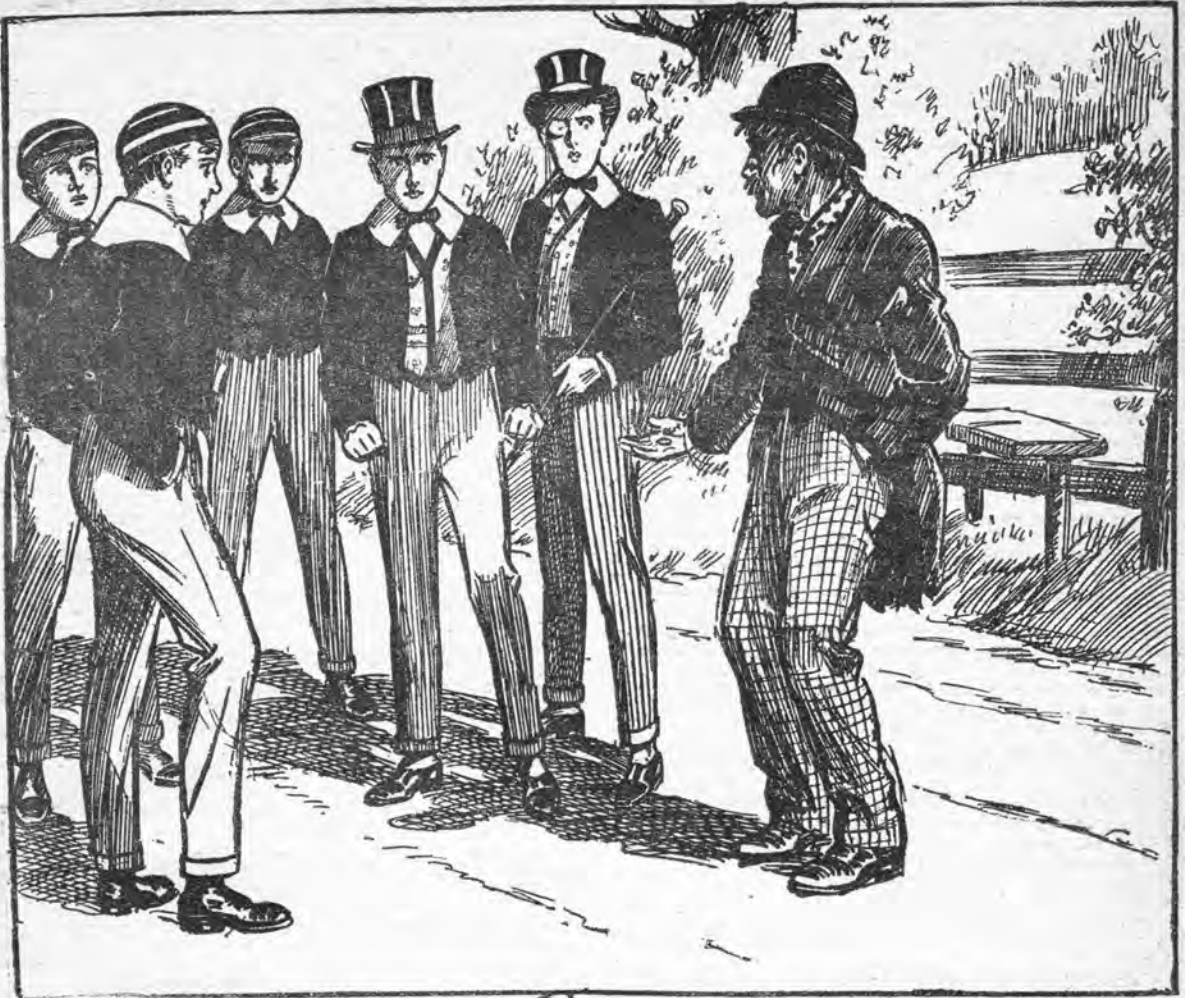
(See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)

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"You had better get off now," observed Vavasour, who was strangely pale. "I'm go'n'," said Mr. Smiley, with a loving glance at the glimmering sovereign in his dirty palm. "I'm going, Master Vavasour; but you won't mind speaking a few words to a pore man first." (See Chapter 5.)

Vavasour smiled.

"But I'm not spoiling for a fight," he said. "I want to be friends with everybody who will let me. It's all right. At the present moment I'm looking for the refreshment department. Anybody know the way to the dining-room?"

"We're just going to have tea in my study," said Tom Merry hospitably. "Will you come and have tea with us?"

"By Jove—yes! Thank you so much."

"I was just goin' to ask the new chap to come to Study No. 6, Tom Mewwy."

"Too late!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've bagged him now. Besides, he's coming into the Shell, so he belongs to us, anyway. Come on, Vavasour; a chap who has a daisy right-hander like that deserves a good tea."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Vavasour laughed, and walked away with Tom Merry. And the group of juniors broke up, realising that however soft and dandified the new fellow looked, he evidently wasn't so soft as his looks implied. And Gore, bathing his nose in the Shell dormitory, and feeling as if it had suddenly grown two sizes too large for him, realised it too, and made up his mind to leave the new boy severely alone; at least, so far as fistcuffs were concerned.

CHAPTER 2.

The New Boy Comes to Tea.

TOBY, the School House page, met Tom Merry on the way to the study, with a letter in his hand. Tom Merry recognised the handwriting of his old governess—Miss Priscilla Fawcett. He took the letter with considerable satisfaction. He was always pleased to receive a letter from Miss Fawcett. True, the kind old lady filled up much space in

her letters with instructions about keeping his feet dry, and wearing flannel next to the skin, and always having a hot water-bottle in bed on cold nights, and so forth; but it was all prompted by affection, and so Tom Merry bore it cheerfully. But more valuable than the advice the letter contained, were the postal-orders that generally accompanied the advice. Whether it was the thought of the advice, or of the postal-order, that brought satisfaction to Tom Merry's face as he took the letter, we will not undertake to say. He opened the letter, while Monty Lowther laid a solemn hand on Toby's shoulder and swung the astonished page round as he was going away.

"What do you mean by it?" demanded Lowther severely. Toby stared.

"W-o-o-ot, Master Lowther?" he ejaculated.

"You have just brought this letter to Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Master Lowther."

"In your hand?"

"I can't carry letters with my feet, Master Lowther," said Toby meekly.

"What about the silver salver?" demanded Monty Lowther loftily. "Next time don't forget the silver salver, Toby. I suppose you want to grow up to be a decent, fat, and respectable butler, don't you? Well, the next time you bring a letter for our study, remember the silver salver, especially when we have a new boy of the most high-class kind with us, as we have at present."

Toby grinned, and jerked himself free from Monty Lowther, and departed. Guy Vavasour turned a little pink.

"Anything in the letter, Tommy?" asked Manners.

"Ten bob."

"Hurrah!"

"Them's my sentiments," said Monty Lowther heartily.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD,
Order Early.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE LAST HOPE!"

"The funds were already at par—I mean, we already had five bob, and this makes fifteen. We shall be able to have a decent tea, and those kids from Study No. 6 can come. Hand me the filthy lucre, and I'll get in the grub, and you can get the fire going, Tommy; and you, Manners, can fetch in the guests!"

"Right you are."

Monty Lowther slipped his arm through Vavasour's.

"You can come and help me carry in the grub," he said.

"The what?"

"Grub."

"Oh," said Vavasour, "you mean the things for tea!"

"I mean the grub," said Monty Lowther; "in other words, the prog."

"I will come with pleasure, my dear fellow," said Vavasour.

"Thank you, my dear fellow! I suppose you've got room in your pockets for plenty of saveloys and jam-sponges?"

Vavasour started.

"I—I'd rather not carry them in my pockets, if you don't mind," he faltered.

"Come on!" said Lowther, apparently not hearing. "This way to the tuck-shop. I shall want you to help me bargain with Mrs. Taggles to get 'em cheap."

"My dear fellow—"

They disappeared down the passage. Tom Merry and Manners grinned at one another.

"Monty means to rot the new chap!" grinned Manners. "Well, it may do him good. He's hefty with his fists, but he's just a little bit too lackadaisical for my taste. It's Gussy over again, condensed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther had a solemn face as he walked Guy Vavasour down to the tuck-shop, in the corner of the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, behind the elms. Lowther was the humorist of the Shell; but no one would have suspected him of being a humorist from his looks now. When Monty Lowther wanted to "rot" some unhappy victim, he could look as solemn as a whole set of owls. The extremely elegant manners and the easy, drawing voice of the new boy had marked him out as an appropriate victim, and Lowther did not see why he should not enliven himself with a little fun at the new boy's expense.

Dame Taggles smiled sweetly at the sight of Monty Lowther with the postal-order and five shillings in his hand.

"Help me order the grub, Vavasour, old man," said Lowther. "Do you like pickles?"

"Ah, I never touch them!"

"Are you fond of German-sausage?"

"Ahem—no!"

"I suppose you like whitebait?"

"Yaas."

"Good! Then we'll have some sardines."

"Eh?"

"You see, Mrs. Taggles doesn't keep whitebait, but sardines are really just as good—same thing, really, you know, with a difference."

"Ya-a-as," said Vavasour, somewhat puzzled.

"Sardines, Mrs. Taggles, please."

"Yes, Master Lowther."

Monty Lowther issued orders royally, and the pile of good things rose high on the counter before him. They were fastened up in a bundle, which Lowther gave to the new boy to carry. Vavasour eyed it hesitatingly.

"Can't it be sent?" he asked.

"Why can't you carry it?"

"Well, you see, I don't really like carrying parcels like a shop-boy."

"Carry it like some other sort of boy, then," said Lowther seriously.

"Couldn't you carry it?" suggested Vavasour.

Lowther shook his head.

"I've got to keep an eye open for Figgins," he said.

Vavasour looked astonished.

"Who's Figgins?" he asked.

"Chap in the New House. He's out there with Kerr and Wynn, and it would be just like those New House bounders to raid our grub."

"By Jove! Do they do that?"

"They do—they does," said Lowther.

"I wonder it's allowed."

"It isn't aloud—it's done on the quiet, you know."

"I didn't mean that—"

"You see, we raid their grub when we get a chance," Lowther explained. "Perhaps that's their reason. You see, the School House is cock-house of St. Jim's, though Figgins & Co. never seem able to see it, somehow. Jam that parcel under your arm, and put those tins of sardines in your trousers' pockets, and come along."

"But—but it will make my pockets bulge."

"I know it will. Buck up!"

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

"But—but I say—"

"Hurry up!"

Monty Lowther paid for the purchases, and left the tuck-shop. Vavasour hesitated a moment, and then took the parcel under one arm, and the tins of sardines under the other, and followed him. Outside, under the elms, three juniors were waiting with smiles on their faces. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn & Co. of the School House. And their sweet smiles showed that they had a hostile eye on the consignment of good things for Tom Merry's study.

"Now, you run for it," whispered Lowther. "They're going to rush us, and I'm going to cover the retreat while you bunk."

"While I what?"

"Skedaddle," explained Lowther.

"Oh!"

"Out of it!"

Monty Lowther did not wait for the enemy to attack. He made a sudden rush at Figgins & Co., bumped Fatty Wynn over, and caught Figgins and Kerr round the neck. Their heads came together with a loud crack, and there was a louder yell.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

Vavasour ran for the School House. A couple of tins of sardines clanged on the ground as he ran, but he did not stop for them. He disappeared into the portals of the School House, while Monty Lowther kept the New House trio occupied. Figgins & Co. had laid violent hands upon Lowther, and he was on his back on the ground, with Fatty Wynn sitting on his chest now.

"What are you up to?" roared Figgins indignantly. "What do you mean by biffing into us like that when we were—"

"Just admiring the view," said Kerr.

Lowther chuckled.

"The view of our grub," he remarked.

"Well, you ass?"

"Pax," said Lowther blandly, "the grub's safe now, so you can lemme gerrup! Take that porpoise off my chest!"

"Bump him!" growled Figgins.

"Hallo," said Fatty Wynn, "that new chap has dropped the sardines!" And the fat Fourth-Former dashed to secure the prizes.

Lowther was on his feet in a moment, and he ran for the School House before Figgins and Kerr could collar him. He paused a moment in the doorway to kiss his fingers to the breathless New House juniors, and then strolled calmly up to Tom Merry's study. Guy Vavasour had deposited his parcel on the table. Monty Lowther was considerably dusty, and he jerked out Vavasour's cambric handkerchief in an absent-minded sort of way to dust down his trousers and rub his boots. Vavasour regarded him in horrified surprise.

"I—I say, that's my handkerchief!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; that's all right!"

"You're making it horribly dirty!" yelled Vavasour.

"Well, you can't rub boots with a handkerchief without making it dirty," said Monty Lowther, in an argumentative way. "Don't be unreasonable!"

"You—you ass! Why can't you use your own?"

"My own!" said Lowther, in surprise. "I don't want to get my own handkerchief into that state. What queer questions to ask!"

He handed the soiled handkerchief back to its owner. Vavasour allowed it to drop to the floor. Evidently he did not want to touch it with his slim, and elegant fingers. Tom Merry laughed.

"Shut up rotting, Monty!" he exclaimed. "Remember that Vavasour is a guest within the giddy gates! Don't mind him, Vavasour; he was born funny!"

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"Yes, he looks it," agreed Vavasour.
 "Oh, do I?" exclaimed Lowther, who, like many humorists, did not exactly like humorous remarks when directed towards himself. "Look here, you fathead—"

"Shut up, Monty! Here come the guests!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, followed by Blake and Herries and Digby, came in. Kangaroo of the Shell followed, and Reilly of the Fourth. Then the party was complete. And all the party lent a hand in preparing tea in Tom Merry's study, with the exception of Vavasour. That elegant youth stood and looked on.

CHAPTER 3.

One Little Weakness.

TEA in Tom Merry's study was always a pleasant and cosy meal; and when he was in funds, and had company, it was a merry one. Nearly a dozen fellows made rather a crowd for a junior study; but they were used to crowding. Vavasour stood by the window looking on at the preparations, and as he was a new boy and a guest, the juniors let him do so, excepting Monty Lowther. The extreme elegance of the new junior seemed to provoke Lowther somehow, and he delighted in finding tasks for Guy Vavasour, and the tasks were of the least elegant description.

Vavasour was requested to stir the fire, and he wrapped a sheet of paper round the handle of the poker before he picked it up. Monty Lowther asked him to fill the kettle, and he took up the kettle in rather a gingerly manner. Truly, the kettle was not in the most cleanly state, from having been jammed down into the fire on many occasions. But hily-fingered particularity was not approved of in junior studies—especially by Monty Lowther.

As Vavasour came in with the filled kettle, Lowther took it from him with a jerk, that spilt a considerable quantity of water over Vavasour's elegant trousers. Vavasour gave a yell.

"By Jove, look what you've done!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lowther, in great distress, so overcome by the mishap that he held the kettle a-slant, and a fresh stream of water poured from the spout over Vavasour's gleaming boots.

Vavasour jumped back.

"Ow! You ass!"

Tom Merry caught Lowther by the hair, and jerked him away. Then it was Monty Lowther's turn to yell.

"Yow! Leggo!"

"Well, stop it!" said Tom Merry. "You mustn't be funny with a guest. It's all right, Vavasour; it will get dry."

"Water always gets dry in the long run," said Manners.

"The only thing that doesn't ever dry up here is Monty Lowther," remarked Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as wathah wotten soilin' a fellow's clothes, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"It's all right, Vavasour!" said Kangaroo. "If Lowther starts being funny again, we'll bump him baldheaded!"

Vavasour nodded; but the state of his boots and trousers evidently worried him. He kept as far as he could from the humorous Lowther after that. Tea was ready at last, and the juniors sat down round the table, and anywhere else where they could find room to sit. Vavasour's face cleared under the kindly influence of tea and hot muffins and cheery talk. The talk turned upon the new boy himself. New boys were expected to give an account of themselves, and Vavasour was not at all reticent.

"Been to school before?" asked Manners.

"No; I've had a tutor," said Vavasour. "First-class man."

"Oh!" said the juniors.

"Vavasour is first-class in every way," said Monty Lowther, with a solemn wink into his teacup. "He comes from a first-class place. Tell us about the baronial hall at home, Vavasour, old man!"

"Well, a chap needn't be ashamed of having been born in a baronial hall, that I know of," said Vavasour loftily. "We have a fine old place down in Kent—dates from the time of the Conquest. My ancestors—"

"Your aunts?" asked Lowther.

"Aunts! I didn't say aunts!"

"No; but your aunt's sisters would be your aunts, wouldn't they?"

"Look here!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a severe look at the Shell humorist through his eyeglass. "I wegard the subject of ancestahs as a most important one. Did your ancestahs come ovah with the Conquewah, Vavasour, deah boy?"

"Yaas. Sir Hugh de Vavasour was at the Battle of Hastings. But they were a great family in Normandy before the Conquest," said Vavasour.

"There wasn't any Undesirable Aliens Act in those days," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

"Shut up, Lowthah, you ass! I think it vewy pwyob that Vavasour is a weliaton of mine," said D'Arcy. "The D'Arcies were connected with the Vavasours in the weign of King John. You belong to the Kent Vavasours, old fellow?"

"Yaas."

"Then it's the same family," said D'Arcy triumphantly. "We're a sort of distant cousins, you know. There was a mawwiage in the weign of King John."

"Very distant cousins, I should think," yawned Blake.

"Get off your hobby horse, Gussy, old man!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's in a name?" said Digby. "You can't beat Smith for a really good old English name."

Vavasour turned red.

"I wish you'd drop that!" he exclaimed irritably.

"Drop what?"

"I don't like jokes of that sort."

"But I wasn't joking."

"Oh, rot!"

"Vavasour's got some relation with that awful name," said Blake solemnly. "It hits him on the raw."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vavasour jumped up.

"Look here, I'm not going to stand this! I—"

The juniors stared at him in astonishment. It was evident that the new junior was really angry, and there was a painful pause. Why any fellow should be angry at such a harmless little joke was a mystery.

"Sit down!" said Blake gracefully. "I withdraw my remark. But you must allow me to observe that you are an ass!"

"Chap can't help belonging to a good old family, and being proud of it, too," said Vavasour sulkily.

"Yaas, wathah, I quite agree with our friend Vavasour. I wegard you as an ass, Blake."

Vavasour sat down.

Tom Merry skillfully turned the subject to football, and the clouds cleared. On the subject of football Vavasour could talk, and his talk showed that he knew how to play the game.

"We'll give you a trial in a practice match to-morrow, Vavasour," said Tom Merry. "If you're any good, we'll put you down as a reserve for the junior eleven."

"Yaas," said Vavasour. "Good!"

"By the way, what study has Linton put you into?" asked Lowther.

"No. 8."

"Scott, that's Gore's study!"

"Who's Gore?"

"The fellow whose nose you punched."

"Well, I can punch it again if he doesn't get on with me," said Vavasour easily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When tea was over, and the guests had departed, the Terrible Three of the Shell cleared the table, and took out their books to work. Monty Lowther bestowed a comical look upon his chums.

"What do you think of the new chap?" he asked.

"Well, he's all right," said Tom Merry.

"Very high-class," grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"We've all got our little weaknesses," he said. "Vavasour's is swank. But it isn't very bad, and I dare say it will soon get knocked out of him."

"Yes, I think that's very likely. If he talks about the baronial halls here, it will get to be a standing joke."

"He will learn to drop that."

"And the first-class tutor—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mustn't discuss a departed guest," said Manners severely. "I'm surprised at you, Lowther. But why on earth was he so ratty at the suggestion that he might have a relation named Smith?"

"Couldn't be connected with anything so common," grinned Lowther. "He'd better say so to Smith minor of the Fourth, or Smith major of the Sixth. Then there will be trouble in the family."

"Well, everybody's an ass on some point," said Tom Merry. "Vavasour's an ass on that point, that's all. After all, you know, if he's been brought up in an atmosphere of old-family and blue-blood bosh, he can't help it, you know. Now, give me the Latin dic, and shut up!"

And the Terrible Three set to work. They had not been working long when the study door opened, and Gore of the Shell put an excited face into the room. The three juniors looked at him.

"Is it true?" demanded Gore.

"That's according to what you're alluding to," said Lowther. "It's true that you're an ass, if that's what

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you mean! It's true that you're a fathead! It's true that—

"Is it true that that thing is going to be shoved into my study?" roared Gore.

"What thing?"

"That new thing—Vavasour."

"So I hear."

"I won't stand it! I've got Skimpole already, and he's enough to drive a chap dotty!"

"That accounts," said Lowther thoughtfully.

"Accounts for what?"

"For your mental state."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I might have known you were going to be funny," snorted Gore. "I wish you'd keep all that for the 'Weekly.'"

We're not bound to read the comic page, so it doesn't worry anybody there. But if they put that tailor's dummy—that—that image, into my study, there'll be trouble!"

"I fancy you'll get the trouble, Gore," said Tom Merry.

"Better take it calmly. He's a decent enough chap."

"That won't recommend him to Gore," said Lowther.

"I'm not going to stand it. I tell you—"

"No good telling us," said Lowther. "You'd better go and tell Mr. Linton, or the Head. Tell 'em that if Vavasour's put into your study, the result will be gore—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!"

Gore departed and slammed the door behind him. "There's going to be trouble in No. 8," Manners remarked.

"I fancy Vavasour can take care of himself," said Tom Merry, laughing.

And the Terrible Three went on with their preparation.

CHAPTER 4 Not Pleasant for Gore.

GUY VAVASOUR opened the door of Study No. 8, and entered.

He had a bag in his hand, and a stack of books under his arm. He had come to take possession of his quarters.

There was only one junior in the study when he entered. He was a youth with a very large head, and an especially large forehead, adorned with little tufts of hair. He wore a pair of very large glasses, and he turned them upon the new boy as he came in.

"Hallo!" said Vavasour. "I think this is my study."

"You are very welcome," said the spectacled junior benevolently. "I fear that Gore will not be pleased, judging from some observations he has already made upon the subject. But I trust that Gore will reflect upon the matter, and realise the uselessness of opposing his individual judgment to the decision of the Form-master, and also the obligations of hospitality towards a stranger only newly arrived."

Vavasour stared at the speaker.

He had never heard such a flow of language from a youth of under fifteen before, and it surprised him.

"You belong to this study?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm Skimpole!"

"I'm Vavasour," said the new junior, putting his books upon the table, and his bag upon the chair. "So there will be three of us?"

Skimpole nodded genially.

"Yes, there were two of us before, and the addition of a unit increases the number to three, undoubtedly," he said. "I may remark that I am very glad you have come, Vavasour. I do not find Gore a pleasant study-mate."

"I am not surprised at that."

"I trust that we shall find that we have some things in common," said Skimpole, with a beaming smile. "Are you interested in the subject of Determinism?"

"What is that?"

"Ahem! I see you do not know the subject at all. Have you ever reflected upon the need for social amelioration?"

"Great Scott!"

"You have perhaps given some thought to Evolution?"

"Not that I remember."

Skimpole rubbed his bony hands together.

"Then I shall be delighted to be the humble instrument of your enlightenment upon these important matters," he said.

"Thanks!"

"Not at all. It is my duty," said Skimpole.

"Oh, I see!"

Skimpole blinked round the table, and opened a huge volume. Vavasour glanced at it curiously. The title was: "Determinism; being a Treatise in Proof of the Fact that Everything that is as it is, is as it is, and not otherwise. By Professor Balmycrumpet." It was evident that Skimpole

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of the Shell had original tastes, and it was not surprising that George Gore did not share them. Skimpole of the Shell, was, in fact, a genius. He took interest in all kinds of weird subjects that would have made any other fellow yawn himself to sleep. Skimpole was a Determinist, and a Socialist, and an Evolutionist, and several other "ists." He was deeply interested in the important question whether the human race originated in a speck of jelly floating in a primeval sea, or in the mud on the bank of some tropical river, and whether it happened only a million years ago, or a hundred millions. Skimpole, like most geological persons, was not particular to a million years or so. He was truly scientific in one respect: that, whenever a favourite theory required it, he was always willing to add or to subtract a few million years to round his theory off.

"Now!" said Skimpole. "There's no time like the present, and it's always an excellent plan to commence at the commencement. Professor Balmycrumpet says—"

"Thanks!" said Vavasour politely, "but I'm going to do my prep."

"That is not really important, especially as you only arrived to-day," said Skimpole. "Mr. Linton will excuse you I'm sure. But you may never have another opportunity of learning what Determinism is."

"What is it?" asked Vavasour.

"It's the belief of—of the Determinists, you know."

"And what is a Determinist?"

"A fellow who believes in Determinism."

"Quite clear!" said Vavasour, grinning. "Can you explain all those things as lucidly as that?"

Sarcasm was quite lost upon Skimpole of the Shell. He nodded genially.

"Certainly!" he replied. "Now, as a Determinist, I hold the view that nobody is to blame for anything. Heredity and environment account for everything—a chap's actions are determined for him before he is born. For instance, suppose that you were a liar—"

Vavasour started.

"What?"

"Suppose, for instance, you told a lie—"

"You ass, what do you mean?"

"I'm only putting a case," said Skimpole deprecatingly.

"Suppose you told a lie; you would not be to blame, because you would be influenced to do it by some part of your character. You didn't make your character yourself, did you?"

"I don't remember doing it, certainly!"

"Therefore, you are not responsible for what your character makes you do," said Skimpole triumphantly.

"Suppose you commit a murder—"

"Eh?"

"I don't say you would—"

"You'd better not!" said Vavasour warmly.

"It's not to your credit if you wouldn't, though. It's simply your heredity and environment acting on you, one way or the other. Chap who commits a murder is no worse than a chap who doesn't; he can't help himself, and therefore it is wrong to hang him."

"But in that case, the chap who hangs him can't help doing it, either," said Vavasour, "so it can't be wrong."

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Ahem! I—"

Before Skimpole could get any further, the door opened again, and Gore came in. George Gore glared at the new boy.

"So you're here?" he said.

"Yes, I'm here," said Vavasour.

"I heard they were going to shove you into my study," growled Gore.

"It's my study, too!"

"Rot! Look here—"

"Pray don't interrupt us now, Gore," said Skimpole, blinking at the bully of the Shell through his huge spectacles. "I am just giving Vavasour some very interesting instruction in the theory of Determinism."

"Oh, ring off!"

"A true reformer never rings off, Gore. Now, Vavasour, supposing that Gore goes for you, as he very likely will, you must not blame Gore. The subtle influence of some savage ancestor is working in his nature—some ancestor who roamed the primeval forests, and probably devoured his fellow-men."

"What?" roared Gore.

"My dear Gore, you are undoubtedly descended from a race of primitive cannibals, whose ferocious instincts are yet

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alive within you," said Skimpole. "Do not think that I blame you. No chap can resist the influence of his heredity, coupled with that of his environment. Professor Balm-crumpet says—"

"Shut up!"

"No, he does not say that," said Skimpole in surprise. "He says—"

"Fathead!"

"No; that expression is not used in any of his fifteen volumes. He says—"

Gore strode towards Skimpole, jerked him off his chair, and sat him down on the study floor with a terrific bump. Then he seized the great volume of Professor Balm-crumpet, and brought it down on Skimpole's head. Skimpole was not an astronomer, among his many sciences; but he saw as many stars at that moment as if he had been the greatest of astronomers, armed with the most powerful of telescopes.

"Ow!" roared Skimpole.

Gore threw the heavy volume on the floor, and kicked it across the study.

"Now shut up!" he roared. "I'm fed up with your rot!"

"Ow! Determinism is not rot!" exclaimed Skimpole. "That is a very common impression, I know; but it is quite a mistake—"

"Dry up!"

"My dear Gore, I am far from blaming you for this," said Skimpole, blinking at Gore as he sat on the carpet. "The savage instincts of a brutal ancestor are breaking out in you—"

"Good!" said Gore. "Therefore I'll give you some more."

"Ow, ow! Yaroooh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

The head of the unfortunate Determinist caused clouds of dust to rise from the carpet, as Gore knocked it on the floor.

Vavasour was laughing; but he stepped forward now, and caught Gore by the shoulder, and jerked the bully of the Shell away from his victim.

"Chuck it!" he said curtly.

Gore glared at him.

"Hands off!" he growled.

"Let Skimpole alone!"

"Mind your own business!"

"I'm going to mind Skimpole's business at present," said Vavasour cheerfully. "You're not going to bully him!"

"Hands off, I say!"

"He can't help being a silly ass!" said Vavasour. "No occasion to jam his head on the floor. Let him alone, I say!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll make you!"

Vavasour's grip tightened upon the bully of the Shell, and Gore was swung across the study. It was evident that there was a very great deal of strength in the slim and elegant frame of Guy Vavasour. Gore reeled against the study wall, and stood there, panting, his eyes burning as they fixed upon the new junior.

"You—you rotter!" he gasped.

Vavasour pushed back his spotless cuffs.

"If you want any more trouble, you can come to me, and let Skimpole alone," he said. "I'm not going to have any bullying in this study."

Gore panted. But for his previous experience with Vavasour, he would have hurled himself upon the new boy and hammered him. But he knew now which way the hammering would go. With a sudden movement, Gore caught up a heavy inkstand from the table and made a spring towards Vavasour.

But Vavasour was not caught napping.

If that savage attack had gone as Gore intended, Vavasour would certainly have been very badly hurt. But it didn't. Vavasour sprang to meet him, and a quick blow almost paralysed Gore's right arm, and the inkstand fell upon the floor with a crash. Then came Vavasour's fists, right and left, left and right, crashing into the face of the bully of the Shell, and Gore went down like a log.

But he did not lie there. Vavasour bent down and grasped him, and sent him whirling out into the passage. Gore sat up in the passage, blinking stupidly, at the new boy in the doorway of the study.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Oh!"

Vavasour shook an elegant finger at him.

"You won't come into this study again till you've promised to behave yourself!" he said.

"Ow!"

"You can cut off!"

"Yow!"

"If you come in, you'll get pitched out again, on your neck!"

"Grooh!"

The study door closed. Gore did not open it again.

CHAPTER 5.

A Strange Meeting.

"HOW long is that blessed Gussy going to be?"

Tom Merry asked the question.

The Terrible Three were leaning on the stile at Rylcombe Lane, in a row.

They were waiting for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. D'Arcy and Vavasour were at Mr. Wiggs', the tailor's, in the village. D'Arcy and Vavasour had chummed up very much during the few days Vavasour had now been at St. Jim's. Whether or not they were related, owing to that marriage between members of the D'Arcy and Vavasour families in the reign of King John, certainly they had many tastes in common. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had taken Vavasour with him to see his tailor; an excursion quite after Vavasour's own heart. The Terrible Three had been in the village with them; but Mr. Wiggs' little shop was not so pleasant a place to them as it was to D'Arcy, so they walked on, and were waiting for him in the lane. D'Arcy had said that he wouldn't be more than five minutes. Twenty minutes out of the five, as Monty Lowther put it, had already elapsed. But there was no sign of D'Arcy or Vavasour yet from the direction of the village.

"Oh, he'll be hours!" growled Manners. "Wish we hadn't said we'd wait. We ought to have known our Gussy better."

"Well, you kept us waiting ten minutes at the photograph shop," said Lowther.

"That was different. I was getting films."

Tom Merry laughed.

"New waistcoats are far above rubies, and far above films, with Gussy," he remarked. "But he'll be along soon, I suppose."

"Here comes somebody," said Lowther.

A pedestrian came in sight from the direction of Rylcombe. But it was a personage very different in appearance from the elegant swell of St. Jim's, or the almost equally elegant Vavasour.

A man of under middle size, with a coarse, red face, and a stubbly three days' growth of beard on his chin, and the unkempt look that men have who are accustomed to late nights, and plenty of them. The flush in his face showed that the man was under the influence of drink at that moment, though he was not intoxicated. His clothes were shabby, and the bowler hat he wore rakishly on the side of his head would not have done credit to a ragman. He was a young man, probably under thirty, but dissipation had set a deep mark upon him. The juniors of St. Jim's glanced at him, and then turned their glances away. He was not a pleasant object to look at. He seemed very incongruous and out of place in the country lane, among the woods and green hedges.

He stopped as he came opposite the juniors, and looked at them.

"Evenin'," he remarked.

"Good-evening," said Tom Merry shortly.

"Got a half-crown to spare, young gentlemen?"

"No."

"Make it a bob?"

"I've got nothing for you," said Tom Merry. "You look as if you'd spent more than half-a-crown to-day in liquor."

The man scowled.

"That's none of your business, young cocky," he said.

"Quite so; if you don't ask me for money. If you beg, you must expect to get plain English," said Tom Merry calmly.

"I'd stand the price of a cake of soap, if I were sure you'd use it," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"I've had 'ard luck," said the man. "I'm out of work."

"You're not in a state to be in work, I should think," said Tom Merry, in disgust.

"I got the push," said the stranger pathetically. "Old Smith, he gave me the push, for no fault of my own. I've been trying to drown it, that's all, young gentlemen. If you could give me half-a-crown to 'elp me on my way? I've tramped all the way from Kent 'ere."

"Man in blue looking for you?" asked Manners sympathetically.

The stranger held on to the stile, and the Terrible Three drew a little farther away. There was a scent of rum and whisky about the stranger that did not please them.

He blinked at the schoolboys with a bleary gaze.

"Wot if a chap took a drop too much?" he said. "Ain't I worked for old Smith this 'ere ten years? But there wasn't no standing him arter he made his money."

"You'd better go back to old Smith," said Monty Lowther. "If a policeman comes along and finds you hanging on to the stile, he'll run you in."

"Me and young Smith was pals," said the man dreamily.

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"But since old Smith made his money, young Smith have become a reglar toff."

The Terrible Three laughed—they could not help it. These confidences from a man they had never seen before struck them as comic. The laugh seemed to encourage the tipsy stranger, for he came a little closer, and went on:

"I got the push."

"Jolly well deserved it, too, I should say," observed Monty Lowther. "I don't know who old Smith may happen to be, but he's a jolly sensible chap to give you the push, I should think."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

"And if you come any closer to me, I shall give you a push, too," said Lowther.

"Hallo, here's Gussy at last!" said Tom Merry.

The two elegant youths came in sight. The tipsy stranger leaned heavily on the stile, and blinked at the new-comers as they joined the Terrible Three. Then suddenly his intoxication seemed to clear, and he gave a low whistle. His bleared, uncertain eyes were fixed upon Guy Vavasour.

"My eye!" he murmured.

"Sowwy to keep you waitin', deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I twust you have not waited long?"

"Nearly half an hour," growled Lowther.

"Sowwy. But Mr. Wiggs was showin' us some new waistcoats—"

"Rippin' waistcoats, too," said Vavasour.

"Same voice!" murmured the man at the stile. "It's 'im!"

"Howevah, I'm weady to return to St. Jim's now," said D'Arcy. "Is this chap a friend of yours, Tom Mewwy?" And he turned his eyeglass upon the tipsy gentleman hanging to the stile.

"No, he isn't!" said Tom Merry warmly. "He begged of us, that's all, ass!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

Vavasour glanced at the man, and started.

A strangely pale look came over his aristocratic, well-cut face, as his eyes fell upon the shabby, tipsy stranger.

The man leered at him.

"Appy to see you agin, sir," he said.

Vavasour stared at him.

"You ain't forgotten Smiley, sir?"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in amazement. "Surely you don't know that fellow, Vavasour, deah boy?"

"No!" stammered Vavasour.

"Vavasour!" repeated Mr. Smiley, in astonishment. "Is that young gentleman's name Vavasour?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I've made a mistake," said Mr. Smiley, with a disagreeable grin. "I wasn't expectin' to 'ear that the young gentleman's name was Vavasour. My eye!"

"My name is Vavasour," said the new boy at St. Jim's haughtily.

Mr. Smiley grinned again.

"My eye!" he said.

"I don't know you!"

"My eye!" was all Mr. Smiley said.

"But if you're hard up, I can let you have some help," said Vavasour, feeling in his pocket.

"That's a kind and generous young gent?" said Mr. Smiley encouragingly.

Vavasour's gloved fingers came out of his waistcoat-pocket with a sovereign in them. He held it out to Mr. Smiley.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered an exclamation. He was very careless with money himself; but giving a sovereign to a tipsy mendicant on the high road seemed to him to be going altogether too far.

"Weally, Vavasour," he remonstrated, "the man will only get drunkah than he is now, and get locked up, you know."

"Don't you worry, young gent," said Mr. Smiley, as he took the sovereign in an exceedingly dirty finger and thumb. "If I was locked up, my generous friend Mr. Vavasour would come and bail me out. Wouldn't you, Mr. Vavasour?"

He laid a strange, sarcastic emphasis upon the name that puzzled the juniors.

Vavasour was strangely pale.

"You had better get off," he said.

"I'm goin'," said Mr. Smiley, with a loving glance at the glimmering sovereign in his dirty fingers. "I'm goin'. I'm thirsty. I 'eard you were at school now, Master Vavasour, but I didn't know where."

"Come on, you fellows!" said Tom Merry.

"Old on a minute, Master Vavasour," said Smiley. "You won't mind speakin' a few words to a pore man wot has got the push?"

Vavasour hesitated.

"Go on, you fellows, will you?" he said. "I don't know

what the man can have to say to me, but I may as well humour him."

"He may wot you!" said D'Arcy anxiously.

Vavasour laughed; but there was an anxious ring in his laugh.

"No danger of that," he said.

"I wouldn't 'urt such a generous young gent," said Mr. Smiley. "That kind-hearted young gent will 'elp me agin' when I'm 'ard up, I know that."

"I should certainly wefuse to do so."

"You don't know what a kind 'eart young Master Vavasour 'ave got," said Mr. Smiley.

"Weally, you wuffian—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry.

It was evident that Guy Vavasour wanted to be left alone with the mendicant, though for what reason the chums of St. Jim's could not guess. Tom Merry & Co. walked on down the road, leaving them standing together, and a turn of the lane hid them from the sight of the juniors.

Tom Merry and his companions walked on to the school. They did not speak, though each of them was thinking, to himself, that the matter was very queer. It looked as if the man, who called himself Smiley, knew Vavasour, had known him before he came to St. Jim's. There was a veiled threat in his manner towards the elegant schoolboy, and it seemed to Tom Merry & Co. that Vavasour had stayed to speak to him, against his will. Yet why should he have yielded to the man's demand if he didn't want to? That was a puzzle. The juniors expected Vavasour to overtake them in a few minutes, but he did not. They reached St. Jim's; and it was ten minutes or more later when Vavasour came in, and then he was flushed as if he had been hurrying. And he did not speak a word about the curious encounter in the lane. The chums of the School House did not refer to it—but they wondered.

CHAPTER 6.

Vavasour's Friend.

MELLISH'S unpleasant, cackling laugh was audible in the common-room that evening, when the Terrible Three came down after doing their preparation. They glanced at the cad of the Fourth as they came into the room. Percy Mellish and Gore and Crooke were standing in a little group, talking together, and chuckling, as if over something that pleased them very much.

"Back-biting somebody!" growled Monty Lowther.

Gore glanced towards the chums of the Shell, and chuckled again. Mellish cackled once more. Gore had been in a very bad temper the last few days. All the House knew how he had been ejected from his own study by the new boy, and that he had not been allowed to take up his quarters there again until he apologised to both Vavasour and Skimpole. That apology weighed upon Gore's mind. The bully of the Shell did not relish having had to eat humble pie; and his dislike of Vavasour had intensified into something very like hatred. Mellish and Crooke sympathised with his feelings. The fact that Tom Merry & Co. had taken up the new boy would of itself have been sufficient to turn the cads of the School House against him.

"Well, what's the cackle?" demanded Monty Lowther, meeting Gore's glance. "What rotten plot are you hatching now?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking up from the depths of an armchair, where he had been studying the deeply-interesting columns of the "Tailor and Cutter," one of his favourite publications. "You have been intewwuptin' my weadin' with your whisperin' and cacklin', you boundahs!"

"Oh, it's nothing!" said Gore airily.

"Nothing at all," said Crooke.

"Only something that Levison happened to see," remarked Mellish.

And then the three of them chuckled again.

"Levison!" growled Tom Merry. "Levison happens to see lots of things that don't concern him. What keyhole has he been spying into now?"

"Not a keyhole this time," said Gore. "It was in Rylcombe Lane."

"What was?"

"What Levison saw."

"What on earth was it he saw, then?" demanded Tom Merry puzzled. "What on earth is the mystery about?"

"About a friend of yours!" sneered Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry stared.

"A friend of mine?"

"Yes."

"A new friend," explained Mellish.

Tom Merry frowned.

"Do you mean Vavasour?"

"Yes, we do."

"And what did Levison see?"

"Tell 'em, Levison."

Levison of the Fourth was sitting by the window, watching the group of juniors with a gleam in his greenish eyes. The greenish gleam became very spiteful as he turned his glance upon the Terrible Three.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Tom Merry. "What rot have you been getting up now?"

"I saw Vavasour with his friend," said Levison.

Tom Merry started. He remembered the meeting with the shabby stranger, Mr. Smiley, and he wondered if Levison had seen Mr. Smiley too. Levison of the Fourth had a peculiar knack of seeing things that did not concern him, especially when it was very inconvenient to others for him to see them.

"I wonder you didn't see them too," said Gore. "You came in this afternoon only ten minutes or so before Vavasour, I remember."

"And you were down in the village with Vavasour," said Mellish.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"Never mind what I saw or did not see," he exclaimed, "I know how to mind my own business, which is more than you fellows seems to be able to do."

"Then you did see them!" exclaimed Gore.

"Oh, shut up!"

"I saw—" began Levison.

Tom Merry interrupted him without ceremony.

"Nobody wants to know what you saw," he exclaimed. "Shut up!"

"Hold on!" said Lorne of the Fourth. "No harm in his telling us, Tom Merry. I suppose Vavasour needn't mind."

"I saw Vavasour with a shabby rotter, who was talking to him like an old chum," said Levison spitefully.

"That's rot!" said Tom Merry. "I saw the man—he called himself Smiley—and he was a beggar, and half squiffy. He begged of us, and then of Vavasour, and Vavasour gave him some money. That was all."

"Then why did he call Vavasour an old pal?"

"He didn't, that I know of."

"Well, he did, that I know of," retorted Levison. "I heard him."

"You listened?" said Tom Merry, with a curl of the lip.

"I was coming up the road, and I heard him," said Levison.

"He said 'You won't go back on an old pal.'"

"Oh, rot!"

"Then Vavasour saw me, and caught hold of his arm, to make him understand that he was to shut up," grinned Levison.

"Bosh!"

"Well, I saw it."

"You see lots of things," said Monty Lowther. "Wonderful gift you've got for seeing things that don't concern you."

"Well, I think it does concern me," said Levison loftily. "It concerns all of us, when a St. Jim's fellow has friends of that sort. It's a disgrace to the school!"

"Well, so are you; but it hasn't seemed to worry you much, so far," said Monty Lowther flippantly.

Levison scowled.

"Hallo, here's Vavasour!" exclaimed Lorne. "He can speak up for himself. I say, Vavasour, who's your friend?"

Vavasour, who had just entered the common-room, looked at him inquiringly.

"I don't understand," he said. "What friend?"

"The old pal you met in Rylcombe Lane to-day," said Mellish.

Vavasour changed colour.

"Queer old pal for a noble and haughty Vavasour!" chuckled Gore.

"What rot!" said Vavasour lightly. "The man was squiffy, and he was over familiar, that was all."

"But you know him?"

Vavasour shrugged his shoulders.

"You've seen him before?" persisted Gore.

"Yes," said Vavasour calmly. "I've seen him before. He's a man who's done some work at one time for my father, at Vavasour Lodge, and he thinks he has a claim on the family in consequence. He was a good workman before he took to drink, and I'm sorry to see him down on his luck. So I gave him a quid. Any more questions to ask?"

"Is that all?" said Gore.

"Yes, that's all."

"He called you his old pal?"

"He was squiffy, as I've said."

"Well, I think there's something more in it than that," said Gore obstinately. "In my opinion, your antecedents want looking into, Vavasour."

Vavasour strode towards him.

"I've had bother enough with you," he said. "But if you

want some more, you've only got to step into the gym., and I'll oblige you, with or without gloves."

Gore made a step backward.

"You can't carry it off like that," he said. "I'm not going to fight you again. I admit that you can lick me, and that's settled. But—"

"Well, you had better hold your tongue, then."

"Vavasour has explained it perfectly clearly," said Tom Merry. "The man himself told us he had been sacked by somebody named Smith—"

Vavasour looked round quickly.

"Somebody named what?" he asked.

"Smith."

"What else did he say?"

"Hallo! Vavasour's getting curious!" grinned Levison. "He thinks that Mr. Smiley has told you something, Tom Merry."

Vavasour laughed in a rather forced way.

"The man is a drunken blackguard, and he may have said anything," he said.

"Drunken blackguard, eh?" said Gore. "Is that why you gave him a quid?"

"I was sorry for the poor brute, as I said."

"Tell us what else he said, Tom Merry," said half a dozen voices at once.

"Nothing else that I remember," said Tom Merry. "Nothing of any consequence, anyway. And if he had said anything against Vavasour, I shouldn't have believed it."

"Thank you!" said Vavasour.

"Yas, wathah! I wegard you as a wottah, Goah, twyin' to make somethin' out of nothin' to score off Vavasour. If I were Vavasour, I should wegard it as my duty to give you a fearful twashin'."

Gore shrugged his shoulders, and quitted the common-room. But the subject did not die; and a good many curious glances were cast at Vavasour after that.

CHAPTER 7.

Skimpole Puts His Theory into Practice.

SKIMPOLE of the Shell came out of the School House with a big book under his arm. The book was the famous volume of Professor Balmyscrumpet, Skimpole's inseparable companion. It was Wednesday afternoon—a non-noday at St. Jim's. But Skimpole of the Shell was not thinking of footer. There was a beaming smile upon Skimpole's face, showing that an idea was working in his mind. A little crowd of juniors were standing outside the School House, with overcoats on over their football things, waiting for the time for the kick-off in the House match between the School House juniors and Figgins & Co. and the New House junior team. Having nothing better to do for the moment, they hailed Skimpole, with the idea of passing a few cheerful minutes chipping that gifted youth.

"Hallo, Skimmy!" said Monty Lowther affectionately.

"How are the down-trodden millions getting on?"

Skimpole being a Socialist, was very strong on the subject of submerged tenths, down-trodden millions and horny-handed sons of toil. Skimpole blinked reprovingly at Lowther through his big spectacles.

"This is not a subject for jesting, Lowther," he said. "You should not jest so upon the misfortunes of the down-trodden—"

"Jest so!" agreed Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I only asked how they were getting on," said Lowther. "I understand that when Socialism comes in, there will be no submerged tenth. It will be reduced to a submerged eleventh or twelfth, or perhaps to a vulgar fraction."

"Poverty will be completely abolished under Socialism," said Skimpole, beaming with joy, as he got upon his favourite topic. "Everyone will work—"

"Howwid?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"There will be an aristocracy of talent," pursued Skimpole. "Every human quality will have an opportunity of shining forth."

"Not first, second, or third?" asked Lowther.

"Really, Lowther—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am now going forth," resumed Skimpole, when the juniors left off laughing. "I am going to Rylcombe—"

"Then you'll have to go third," persisted Lowther, who could never leave off even a bad pun till he had worn it to death. "There's no fourth class on the railway here."

"I am going forth—"

"With a third-class ticket!"

"Cheese it Monty!" said Manners. "Put on a new record!"

"I am going forth—"

"Hallo, here's Tom Merry!" said Blake. "Come on, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 265.

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Tommy, or we shall be late, and Figgins & Co. will be waiting. We've got to lick the New House this afternoon!"

"Yaas; wathah!"

And the juniors melted away, leaving Skimpole of the Shell alone with his big volume.

Skimpole blinked after them through his big spectacles with a sad expression.

"It is extraordinary how the youthful mind shrinks from grappling with really important matters," he murmured.

"I should be perfectly willing—in fact, delighted—to enlighten their minds upon such pressing matters as Socialism, and the improvement of the environment of the submerged tenth, and instead of that they prefer to play foolish games. It is extraordinary!"

And Skimpole shook his head sadly and wandered forth. It did not occur to Skimpole that he would have been better occupied upon the football field himself. To Skimpole's mighty brain, it was quite clear that football was a waste of time, when there were great questions like Determinism to be settled.

Skimpole, for once in a way, was flush with money. As a rule, he was short of that useful article; which was, perhaps, one reason why he believed in the urgent necessity of what he termed a re-distribution of wealth. An uncle of Skimpole's had come down unusually handsome, and Skimpole had three pounds in his pocket, and Skimpole, like a true enthusiast, was prepared to translate his theories into practice. According to Skimpole's principles, he had no more right to that three pounds than anybody else had, and he was prepared to share it with the down-trodden millions. Skimpole was going forth that afternoon with the express determination of doing good. As he was ready to part with his three sovereigns, he was not likely to be long in want of an object for his intended goodness.

He found the object very quickly. Truly, he was not a pleasant object to look at; but as a true Determinist cannot logically blame anybody for anything, Skimpole did not blame the man he met for being under the influence of liquor. He only sorrowed at the sight, and reflected that, under Socialism, such things would be impossible—perhaps not having it very clear in his mind how they were to be made impossible.

The man was leaning on the stile in Rylcombe Lane, and blinking in the spring sunshine. He blinked at Skimpole, and Skimpole blinked at him. Skimpole was very pleased with the meeting.

"How do you do?" he asked affably.

"Hey?"

"It's a nice afternoon!" said Skimpole. "I fear you are in want, my friend."

The man stared at him blankly.

"Stony!" he said. "I've just parted with my last tanner for—food."

"For drink, I should have thought," said Skimpole.

"Ain't touched a drop for weeks," said the man. "I'm a teetotaler, young gentleman. If you could 'and me 'arf-a-crown to 'elp me on my way—"

"I trust I can do more than that," said the benevolent Skimpole. "I have three pounds, and it is all at the service of the poor and needy."

"Mad!" murmured the stranger. "Dotty!"

"Not at all," said Skimpole, "I am a Socialist!"

"Ho!"

"Pray excuse me for having fancied that you were under the influence of drink," Skimpole went on. "I know that hunger in the extreme state has the same symptoms as intoxication. Want and exposure account for your trembling hands and your thick enunciation."

"Wot?"

"What is your name, my friend?"

"My name's Smiley!"

"Dear me! I have heard that name before, somewhere," said Skimpole. "You are in want, my friend?"

"Starving!" said Mr. Smiley pathetically.

"Come with me!"

"Hey?"

"Come with me, and I will give you food and drink, and provide you with a somewhat improved suit of clothes, and a bath, which you sadly need," said Skimpole.

"Gammon!"

"I am quite in earnest, my unfortunate friend. Pray, come with me, and you shall have everything you require."

Mr. Smiley blinked uncertainly at Skimpole. But it was evident that the youth was in earnest, and Mr. Smiley, fully convinced in his mind that he was mad, decided to accompany him. It might be worth while, especially as Skimpole had said that he had three pounds. If Mr. Smiley found anything like an opportunity, those three pounds would change owners very quickly.

Mr. Smiley staggered a little as he detached himself from the stile. Skimpole held out a supporting arm.

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"Pray lean on me, poor friend and brother," he said. "You are reduced to a state of weakness by want. But I will help you. Lean on my arm."

Without leaning on Skimpole's arm, Mr. Smiley would probably have been unable to walk at all—though it was not hunger that was the matter with him. He leaned very heavily on Skimpole, and the genius of the Shell piloted him to the gates of St. Jim's. As he led him in, there was a terrific yell from the direction of Taggles' lodge, and the school-porter came hurrying up.

"You get hout of 'ere!" he shouted.

"Hey?"

"My dear Taggles," said Skimpole reprovingly, "I am surprised and shocked that you should act so brutally towards a brother in distress!"

"That 'orrid tramp ain't no brother of mine!" said Taggles, who was not a Socialist, evidently. "He's drunk!"

"You are frequently under the influence of gin, yourself, Taggles. But this poor fellow is not intoxicated. He is suffering from extreme want; a result of the disorganised social conditions we live under—"

"He's drunk!" roared Taggles, "and tramps ain't allowed in 'ere!"

"My dear Taggles—"

"Houtside!"

"I refuse to have my friend ordered out!" said Skimpole with dignity. "Pray come with me, my poor fellow! Kindly keep your distance, Taggles!"

Taggles stood thunderstruck as Skimpole piloted his zig-zagging friend across the quadrangle towards the School House.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Taggles. "My only hat!" And he retired to his lodge. Skimpole and his friend disappeared into the School House.

CHAPTER 8.

Skimpole's Brother.

"BEATEN 'em!" said Jack Blake with satisfaction. "Beaten the New House! That last goal was a regular daisy, though I kicked it myself!"

"Yaas, wathah!" I must say that you have played up vewy well, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You all backed me up vewy well—"

"That's more than you did for me!" growled Tom Merry. "You stopped to stick in your eyeglass, when you ought to have stopped a pass!"

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"Never mind; we've beaten 'em!" said Blake. "Now I'm ready for tea. As Gussy didn't do much playing, I think he ought to get the tea."

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake!"

"Vavasour will get it," suggested Monty Lowther. "Vavasour is verry handy at filling kettles and cleaning frying pans and things!"

"My dear fellow—" began Vavasour. Vavasour had been a keen onlooker at the game, not having been able to play. Vavasour had shown much keenness for football, and Tom Merry was already thinking of giving him a place in the junior team; though that was likely to meet with some opposition.

"You are an ass, Lowthah," said D'Arcy. "and I do not wegard it as in the best of taste to chip my friend Vavasour!"

"I stand corrected!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Yaas, wathah! I think—"

"What with?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, here we are!" exclaimed Jack Blake, throwing open the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage, while the Shell fellows went to their own quarters. "Hallo! It seems that tea's ready!"

The four juniors stared into the study.

Well they might stare.

They had expected to find No. 6 empty, and the fire out. But the fire was burning merrily, and the study was not empty. It had two occupants. One was Skimpole of the Shell. The other was his brother—in a Socialistic sense—the disreputable Mr. Smiley.

Mr. Smiley was seated in the arm-chair, with his feet on the fender. His battered bowler hat was on the back of his head. Skimpole was looking after him well, and Mr. Smiley was making huge raids upon the substantial meal upon the table.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Blake, Herries, and Digby together.

"Ah, is that you, Blake?" said Skimpole.

Mr. Smiley looked round with an affable smile. He was still under the influence of the gin he had lately consumed at the Green Man in Rylcombe, and it made him affable. The genius of the Shell blinked at the Fourth-Formers.



"Great Scott!" exclaimed George Wingate, "what's happened?" Those cads—"Wingate minor was stuttering with fury, "those cads—the Thirld—they've done this! I want them all caned!" (An incident taken from the splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, which appears in our grand companion paper "The Magnet" Library, this week. The title of the story is "THE CAPTAIN'S MINOR," by Frank Richards, and every Gemite should make a point of reading it. This week's "Magnet" is now on sale everywhere. Price One Penny.)

"Yes, it is," said Blake grimly. "What are you doing in my study?"

"Having tea."

"Yes, I can see that, ass! Who's this freak?"

"This is my brother."

"Your what—what?"

"My brother," said Skimpole firmly. "I trust you will excuse my taking possession of your study in this way, Blake? Gore cut decidedly rusty when I took my brother into my own study. You are aware that Gore shares my study with me, and Gore is a very disagreeable person, and does not understand in the least the desire to do good to one's fellow-creatures. He grew violent, and threatened to call in a prefect, so I had no alternative but to take Mr. Smiley to another study. I chose this one, my dear Blake. Of course, as a matter of fact, this study is as much mine as yours."

"How do you make that out?" asked Blake, pushing back his cuffs.

"Under Socialism, all studies will be nationalised," Skimpole explained. "Everything in the world, my dear Blake, belongs as much to everybody as to anybody. For example, if I sold your clock, in order to raise funds to help the submerged tenth, I should be completely justified in doing so. It is as much my clock as yours."

"You'd better not do it, all the same," said Blake. "There would be a slaughtered lunatic lying about soon afterwards, if you did."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Please come in," said Skimpole, blinking hospitably at the chums of Study No. 6. "You are quite welcome."

"Quite welcome in our own study!" roared Herries.

"Certainly, my dear Herries!"

"Well, my hat!"

"That's Socialism, is it?" said Blake thoughtfully.

"Yes, my dear Blake," said Skimpole beaming, "that is Socialism. Pray excuse me for using your tea-things. I have had the misfortune to break some of them; but, of course, they are as much mine as yours. Under Socialism all teapots and cups and saucers will be nationalised."

"And that's your brother, is it?" asked Digby.

"Yes, my dear Digby."

"You said his name was Smiley."

"Yes, that is his name."

"Then, how can he be your brother, fathead?"

"In a Socialistic sense, my dear Digby. Are we not all brothers?" said Skimpole reprovingly.

"Oh, I see!" said Blake. "Blessed if I didn't think it was a relation you had dug up. Where did you pick up that thing?"

"I found him on the road, suffering from want. As I chance to be in funds to-day, I determined to do good—in fact, I went forth this afternoon with the fixed intention of doing good!" said Skimpole. "I have taken the stranger in."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE LAST HOPE!"

"He's taken you in, I fancy. What he's in want of is soap and water."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And did you ask permission to bring that giddy tramp into the school, Skimmy?"

Skimpole shook his head.

"That would have been quite superfluous, my dear Blake. This school is as much mine as anybody else's; under Socialism of course all schools will be nationalised. Besides, permission would have been refused."

"Yes, I think that's very likely. Would you like some good advice, Skimmy? Under Socialism, I suppose, good advice will be nationalised, so you have as much right to it as anybody else. I'll give you some, anyway. Take your friend the quickest way out of St. Jim's before anybody sees him."

"But why, my dear Blake?"

"Because you'll get licked if he's seen here."

"I am prepared to suffer in the cause of the advancement of the human species, my dear Blake. All pioneers of true reform have to suffer. I do not expect to encounter unheated the ignorance and prejudices of the age."

"Great Scott, what a flow of language! Skimmy, old man, I won't lick you, because you can't help being dotty. But take that thing out of my study."

"I have already pointed out that it is not your study—"

Blake strode towards Mr. Smiley, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Time to go," he said

"Hey!" said Mr. Smiley.

"This is my room—get out."

"My dear Blake—"

"Shut up, Skimmy! Smiley, if that's your name, you're superfluous here. Will you get out?"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Smiley, with a dizzy glare at Blake. "I'm quite comfortable 'ere. I'm 'aving tea with my young friend. I've got another young friend at this 'ere school, too, wot I'm anxious to see afore I goes."

"Rot! Skimmy's the only lunatic here!"

"My dear Blake—"

"Master Vavasour is my friend," said Mr. Smiley, with dignity. "I ain't goin' without seein' 'im."

Jack Blake started, and he gave Herries and Digby a quick glance. They remembered the name Smiley now. This was evidently the man whom Levison, of the Fourth, had seen Vavasour meet in Rykcombe Lane.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass and looking more closely at the shabby figure sprawled in the armchair. "I know that chap now. It's the wottah we met in the lane the othah day, who begged of Vavasour."

Mr. Smiley looked at him.

"Ow do you do?" he said affably. "Glad to meet you agin."

"I am not glad to meet you, you wuffian. I wogard you as a vewy disreputable person. Pway wotire from this study."

"I ain't goin' without seein' my friend Vavasour."

Blake hesitated. He was very much exasperated at finding a tipsy tramp installed in his study; though it was impossible to be very angry with Skimpole. His first thought was to take Mr. Smiley by the shoulders and sling him out; but if the tipsy fellow showed fight, it would mean a row, and that would certainly get Skimpole into trouble. If the masters discovered Mr. Smiley in the School House, it would most certainly mean punishment for the junior who had brought him there. The fact that he was Skimpole's brother, in a Socialistic sense, would not influence them at all.

"Pray sit down, and have tea with us, Blake," said Skimpole. "I hope you are not so snobbish as to fancy that you are superior to Mr. Smiley in any way."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, I think I am, a little bit," said Blake. "Mr. Smiley is de trop—Mr. Smiley is going out, and he can choose the door or the window. It's a free country, so he can choose which he likes. Is it to be the door or the window, Mr. Smiley?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm goin' to see my friend Vavasour."

"You're going out."

"I ain't!" said Mr. Smiley.

Blake compressed his grip on the man's shoulder, and jerked him out of the chair. Mr. Smiley reeled against the tea-table, and fell across it with outspread arms, and there was a terrific crash of crockery.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Skimpole.

Blake gave a yell.

"Oh, you fathead! You've smashed all our crocks!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Mr. Smiley straightened himself up rather dazedly. His good humour was gone now, and there was a very warlike THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 265.

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expression upon his face. He doubled up his fists and put his back to the wall.

"I ain't goin'!" he announced.

"You'll be put out, then."

"Come hon!" said Mr. Smiley.

"Collar the cad and run him out!" said Herries impatiently.

"I'll lend you a hand."

"Perhaps you had better retire, Mr. Smiley," said Skimpole. "You have finished tea. I will accompany you, and read you a chapter from Professor Balmyscrumpt's volume—"

"I ain't goin'!"

"My dear Smiley—"

Biff!

Skimpole's dear Smiley hit out as the amateur Socialist came towards him, and Skimpole sat down suddenly on the hearthrug.

"Oh!" gasped Skimpole.

He sat on the hearthrug, and clasped his nose with one hand, and set his spectacles straight with the other.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I really—"

"Serve you right!" growled Blake. "What did you expect if you brought a drunken tramp into the place, you fathead."

"My dear Blake, I do not blame him. Ow! My nose is exceedingly painful! Ow! He is not to blame. This is a savage instinct, derived from some remote ancestor, which—"

"Are you going, you blackguard?" exclaimed Blake.

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Smiley. "Not until I've seen my young friend Vavasour."

"Then you'll get the order of the boot. Come on, you fellows!"

"My dear Blake—"

"Shut up, Skimmy, and get out of the way! Collar the cad, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the four Fourth-Formers collared Mr. Smiley, and, in spite of his struggles, he was whirled round and whipped through the doorway into the passage. But Mr. Smiley, under the combined influence of gin and rum—or of heredity and environment, as Skimpole would have declared—was in a fighting mood; and he struggled desperately in the passage. There was a crash and a bump as Mr. Smiley and the four juniors went to the floor together, in a struggling heap.

CHAPTER 9.

Somewhat Mysterious!

"GREAT Scott!"

"Who is it?"

"What's the giddy row?"

"My hat!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

Most of the School House juniors were coming in to tea about that time, and there was a crowd upon the spot in a few moments. Fourth-Formers and Shell swarmed round the struggling heap outside the door of Study No. 6.

Vavasour came along with the Terrible Three, and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Bernard Gyn rushed up after them. Gore, of the Shell, and Levison and Mellish and Reilly and Lorne, and a dozen others, came out of their studies. The crowd thickened in the Fourth-Form passage, and there were exclamations and inquiries on all sides.

"Who is it?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement.

"Looks like—"

"It's Smiley!" yelled Monty Lowther, catching a glimpse of the man amid the struggling juniors.

"Smiley!"

"The tramp!"

Skimpole blinked out of the doorway of Study No. 6.

"It is my friend Smiley," he said. "My brother, and your brother, in the sense of Socialism. I brought him in here to tea, and for some reason Blake is behaving rudely to him—"

"Great Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing whatever to laugh at," said Skimpole.

"I regard this as outrageous conduct on Blake's part. This study is as much Smiley's as Blake's, and—"

"Smiley!" muttered Vavasour. "Here!"

Gore gave him a malicious look.

"Your friend, Vavasour!" he said,

Vavasour did not reply.

"Let him alone, Blake," said Levison. "You've no right to handle Vavasour's friends like that. Why shouldn't Vavasour have a friend in if he wants to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I did not know he was here," said Vavasour, pale to the lips.

Mr. Smiley wrenched himself out of the grasp of the panting juniors, and staggered up.

"I ain't goin'!" he gasped. "Not without seein' my young friend Vavasour. He's goin' to 'elp a poor cove, he is. Where's Vavasour?"

"Here he is!" exclaimed the delighted Gore.

"Here he is, Smiley!" grinned Mollish.

Blake grasped the tramp again.

"Out you go!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah! The howwid beast has cwumpled my waistcoat, and disawwanged my collah! I am goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Collar him!" roared Herries.

"Lend a hand, you chaps!" exclaimed Blake. "We've got to get him out before the prefects hear the row, or there will be a lot of trouble over this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ands off!" yelled Mr. Smiley.

"Better out, you silly duffer!" said Tom Merry. "You've no right in here, you know that very well!"

"My dear Merry—"

"Shut up, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry, giving the amateur Socialist a gentle push on the chest, which caused him to sit down in Study No. 6.

"Owl! I say—"

"Ring off, you ass! Now, Smiley, you're going out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Elp!" roared Mr. Smiley, as the juniors grasped him.

"Don't let 'em chuck out an old pal, Master Vavasour! Lend me a 'and!"

Vavasour stood quite still.

"Lemme alone!"

"Master Vavasour—"

"Vavasour's not going to help you, you silly chump!" said Monty Lowther, getting a good grip on the back of Mr. Smiley's neck. "Now then, come on!"

"Orright!" roared the enraged Mr. Smiley, glaring at Vavasour as he staggered down the passage in the grasp of the juniors. "Orright! You'll go back on an ole pal, will yer? You'll see an ole pal 'anded like this 'ere! I'll tell 'em something, I will!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry.

"I ain't goin' to shut up! I'm goin' to tell you something about that there young impostor!"

"Hold your tongue!" said Vavasour, striding forward.

"Impostor—eh?" grinned Gore. "We're getting to it now! Out with it, Smiley! Let's have the whole story!"

"That there young bounder wot pretends to be a gentleman—"

Vavasour grasped the intoxicated man by the shoulder and shook him.

"Hold your tongue, Smiley!" he said. "The fellows don't mean to hurt you! Come with me quietly, and I'll see you out of gate! Let him alone, you fellows! He'll come with me quietly, won't you, Smiley?"

Smiley gave him a surly look. Tom Merry & Co. released him. They were struck by the white misery in Vavasour's face. The boy looked as if he had received a fearful blow, and the expression on his face almost scared them. Mr. Smiley stood gasping, and exhaling rich odours of gin and rum.

"Come on, Smiley," said Vavasour, "you mustn't make a row here, you know!"

"I duuno that I'm goin'," said Smiley. "You wouldn't stand by an ole pal when I arst yer. I'm goin' to tell 'em all about Smith's Entire—"

"Come on, Smiley!"

"Look 'ere—"

Vavasour whispered in the man's ear. Smiley gave a sullen nod, and allowed Vavasour to lead him away. The crowd of juniors stood looking on, as the elegant Shell fellow and his disreputable companion disappeared downstairs.

What did it mean?

What was there in common between Guy Vavasour and this drunken, disreputable rascal? It was an amazing mystery.

"Smith's Entire," said Gore, puzzled. "What on earth did he mean by Smith's Entire?"

"He's drunk," said Tom Merry. "He was just babbling."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Gore sneered.

"Yes, you'd like to hush it up, for Vavasour's sake," he said. "It's as plain as anything can be that that rotter knows something about Vavasour—something that Vavasour doesn't dare to let us know!"

"He's got him under his thumb," said Levison. "You all saw how quickly Vavasour chipped in when the rotter said he was going to tell us about him."

"Yes, rather."

"Faith, and it's quare!" said Reilly. "But Vavasour's all right!"

"All wrong, you mean," said Levison. "There's some-

thing jolly fishy about all this, and you all know it very well. I think the Head ought to be told. It's a case of blackmail, that's what it is! Vavasour is under that fellow's thumb!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry.

He looked anxiously down the stairs, wondering if Vavasour would succeed in getting clear with the now quieted Mr. Smiley. The din in the junior passage must have been heard below. Vavasour was hurrying his companion as much as he could; but Mr. Smiley was in an obstinate mood, and he refused to be hurried. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, strode towards them as they were nearing the door.

"Who is this?" demanded Kildare, staring at the tramp.

"Did you bring this man into the school, Vavasour?"

"No," said Vavasour. "A chap brought him in to give him a meal, and I'm seeing him off the premises."

"Oh! See him off at once then, and tell the chap if he brings any more tramps into the school there will be trouble!"

"Yes, Kildare."

Vavasour piloted the man to the school gates. A number of curious fellows followed them. At the gates Mr. Smiley seemed to have recovered his good humour—the moods of intoxication are very changeable. He insisted upon shaking hands with Vavasour for good-bye, and Vavasour submitted, wincing—the proceeding being watched by fifty pairs of curious eyes. Then Mr. Smiley went zigzagging down the road, and Vavasour walked away. He did not return to the School House; but walked round the path by the old chapel in the dusk of the falling evening, evidently wanting to be alone. It was hours later when Vavasour came into the School House, and he was still looking pale.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry Means Well.

VAVASOUR was alone in his study doing his preparation, when Tom Merry came in. The new junior had the study to himself just then. Skimpole was somewhere, deeply engaged in the study of social problems.

George Gore had declared that he didn't care to share a study with a chap who was on familiar and pally terms with drunken tramps, and he had transferred his belongings to Crooke's study, Crooke having kindly consented to take him in.

Vavasour certainly didn't like George Gore's company in No. 8; but the reason Gore gave, in public, for the change, was a bitter blow to the elegant junior. Vavasour had proved that he was a good fellow enough, since he had been at St. Jim's; but there was no doubt that he had put on a considerable amount of "side." In a fellow bearing an ancient and honourable name, and coming of rich and distinguished people, a certain amount of "side" was perhaps to be considered. But as Gore and Levison & Co. did not fail to point out, they had only Vavasour's own word for all the grandeur of the Vavasour family and home, and the only connection of his that had been seen at the school was a tipsy tramp.

If Mr. Smiley was a specimen of Vavasour's friends, a considerable amount of discount would have to be taken off his description of his people. There was no doubt that the appearance and the strange words of Mr. Smiley cast a very grave doubt over Vavasour's own story. His appearance, certainly, was aristocratic, and he undoubtedly had plenty of money. But the fellows compared notes, and found that no one knew his people. Of course, there were scores of fellows at the school whose people were not known to the other fellows. But it was an added circumstance against Vavasour.

If Vavasour really belonged to a distinguished family, and had been brought up in the lap of luxury—if he had a magnificent home to which fellows might be invited—then his "side" could be pardoned.

But if it was not so—

If there was nothing "fishy" about Vavasour's antecedents, what did the words of Mr. Smiley mean? If Vavasour was not afraid of the tipsy fellow, why had he shown himself so anxious to keep Smiley from talking? Why had he allowed the ruffian to claim him as an "old pal," without venturing to close the man's mouth. If he had nothing to fear from the fellow, his course was clear—he could have knocked him down quite easily.

The story that Smiley was an old servant of the family who had gone to the bad would not hold water, many of the fellows thought. He did not look like a family servant, for one thing. He looked more like a public-house potman, who had been "sacked" for bad conduct. And that he had some hold over the new boy was hardly to be doubted.

It was fishy, as Gore declared. It showed that Vavasour's antecedents and connections were not all that they should be. And the enemies Vavasour had made rejoiced in "rubbing it in."

Vavasour was looking very gloomy when Tom Merry came into the study.

Tom Merry nodded cheerily.

"Busy?" he asked.

"No," said Vavasour.

"Doing your prep?"

"Yaas."

"If I'm in the way—"

"Not at all, my dear chap! Sit down!"

Tom Merry sat down.

"I've come to jaw to you," he said. "I don't know how you'll take it, but I'm going to speak as a friend, because I feel friendly towards you."

Vavasour smiled.

"Thank you!" he said.

"There's been a lot of talk about that man, Smiley," said Tom Merry.

Vavasour compressed his lips.

"I don't want to talk about him," he said, in a low voice.

"I understand. But that's what I've come to speak about. I don't want to meddle in your private affairs, Vavasour. But you're new here, and I'm captain of the Form you belong to, and I thought I ought to speak," said Tom Merry. "You needn't tell me anything if you don't want to, but I thought you ought to know what's being said in the House."

Vavasour made a weary gesture.

"Oh, all right, go on!" he said.

"You've shown all of us that you're a decent chap," said Tom Merry. "You've swanked a bit—excuse me, won't you?—but a fellow who belongs to a big family, and has heaps of money and titled relations, generally does swank a bit. You don't mind my calling things by their right names, do you?"

Vavasour grinned awkwardly.

"I didn't mean to swank," he said.

"No, I know you didn't; it's just training," said Tom Merry. "Fellows accuse Gussy of swanking sometimes, but he doesn't mean it; only he's the son of a lord, and he was brought up having everything he wanted. He's never seen any hard times, and he's always been kow-towed to by crowds of people. And it gives him a sort of manner that ill-natured people call swank, though there isn't a better chap existing than D'Arcy. It's the same with you, I suppose—the same surroundings had the same effect."

Vavasour winced.

"There's no harm in all that," went on Tom Merry. "But that man Smiley has made a queer impression on the fellows. In the first place he was a ragged tramp coming along here, and he begged of me, yet he has been staying in Rylcombe ever since, putting up at the Green Man, and spending money like water. His carrying-on has become the talk of the village. He has been fined twice, and paid the fine in gold. He gets tipsy every day, and pays for it, or they wouldn't stand him at the Green Man. Where he gets the money from is a mystery. Some of the chaps know about his goings on, and they think that he gets the money from you."

"Do they?"

"Yes. Gore started it, I think, and the fellows believe it. And, really, you know, the way you chipped in to prevent Smiley being chucked out of here. It really did look as if you were afraid he would say something about you—as if he was holding something or other over your head."

"Is that what you think?"

"Not at all," said Tom Merry instantly.

"I know you're a straight chap."

"Oh!"

"But the other fellows don't. And I want to put it to you as a friend, Vavasour. Hadn't you better make some explanation?"

"It's nobody's business but my own, I suppose?"

"Well, no, if you put it that way," agreed Tom Merry. "But the fellows will go on surmising. It will grow to be a regular scandal, you know—especially if that man Smiley stays in the neighbourhood. Have you met him since that day we were together?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because Mellish says he saw you together near the Green Man in Rylcombe."

Vavasour did not reply.

Tom Merry waited a moment or two for an answer to his question, but the answer did not come. Vavasour's lips were closed.

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"Of course, it's your own affair," resumed Tom Merry, somewhat discouraged. "But I'm speaking as a friend to you about it. You've given the impression that that man has a hold over you."

Vavasour did not speak.

"Of course, it's all rot to suppose that you could ever have done anything to put yourself in his power. I know that."

"So that's been suggested?" said Vavasour bitterly.

"I'm afraid it has."

"It is not true."

"I know it isn't. It's rot!" said Tom Merry, at once. "But the other theory is that there is something fishy about your antecedents."

"Do you think so?"

"I couldn't think so without thinking that you've lied to us about your place and people," said Tom Merry curtly; "and I don't think that. I think that you had better tell the fellows plainly what the matter is. There's no need to keep it a secret, if it's honest and above board, that I can see."

"Well, suppose I don't—what then?"

"Then I'm afraid Gore will have it his own way. He makes out that there's something fishy about your people, and that Smiley knows it."

Vavasour was silent.

"Of course, there's nothing to be ashamed of, if one's people are hard up, or anything of that kind," said Tom Merry. "If it were the case, and you'd said so, nobody would have thought the worse of you. We have a chap here—chap named Brooke—who works for his living after school hours—he's a day boy—and we all like him. The snobs here don't matter. But—if you come from a poor place—you've talked a bit off your hat, I must say, and—the best thing you can do is to own up."

Vavasour felt in his pocket, and drew out a pocket-book with a cover of Russian leather and a gold monogram. The pocket-book was worth ten guineas at least. Vavasour opened it calmly, and took out a wad of banknotes.

"I suppose you know what they are?" he said.

Tom Merry stared.

"Fivers!" he said.

"Tenners!" said Vavasour.

"My hat!"

"And I've got ten of them here!"

"Great Scott!"

"And I can have as many more as I like to ask for!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Better pin 'em up on the wall in the common-room for the fellows to look at," he said. "That will dispose of any idea that your people are poor."

Vavasour returned the pocket-book to his pocket.

"It's not safe for a kid to carry all that money about," said Tom Merry. "If the Head knew, he'd write to your father about it. A hundred quid! My hat!"

"I think that that settles the matter," said Vavasour.

"I've already subscribed ten guineas to the sports fund, too."

A poor devil from nowhere couldn't do that, I suppose?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, that's settled," he said. "But—but look here, Vavasour, does that mean that you're not going to explain?"

"I've got nothing to explain."

"About Smiley claiming you as an old pal."

"He was drunk."

"Yes, but he meant that; he had some idea in his head. And—excuse me, but we all saw—we couldn't help seeing, that you made him shut up when he was going to say something about you."

Vavasour did not reply.

"What did he mean by Smith's Entire?"

"Better ask him."

"The fellows are asking one another; and they remember that you cut up rusty, for no reason, when Blake made a joke about the name of Smith."

"Did I?"

"You did. Levison has suggested that you have some disreputable relations of that name. If you have, it's not your fault, and it's nothing for you to be ashamed of. But why all this blessed secrecy?"

"I've got nothing to say."

Tom Merry rose.

"Then I've come here for nothing?" he asked.

"I'm afraid so."

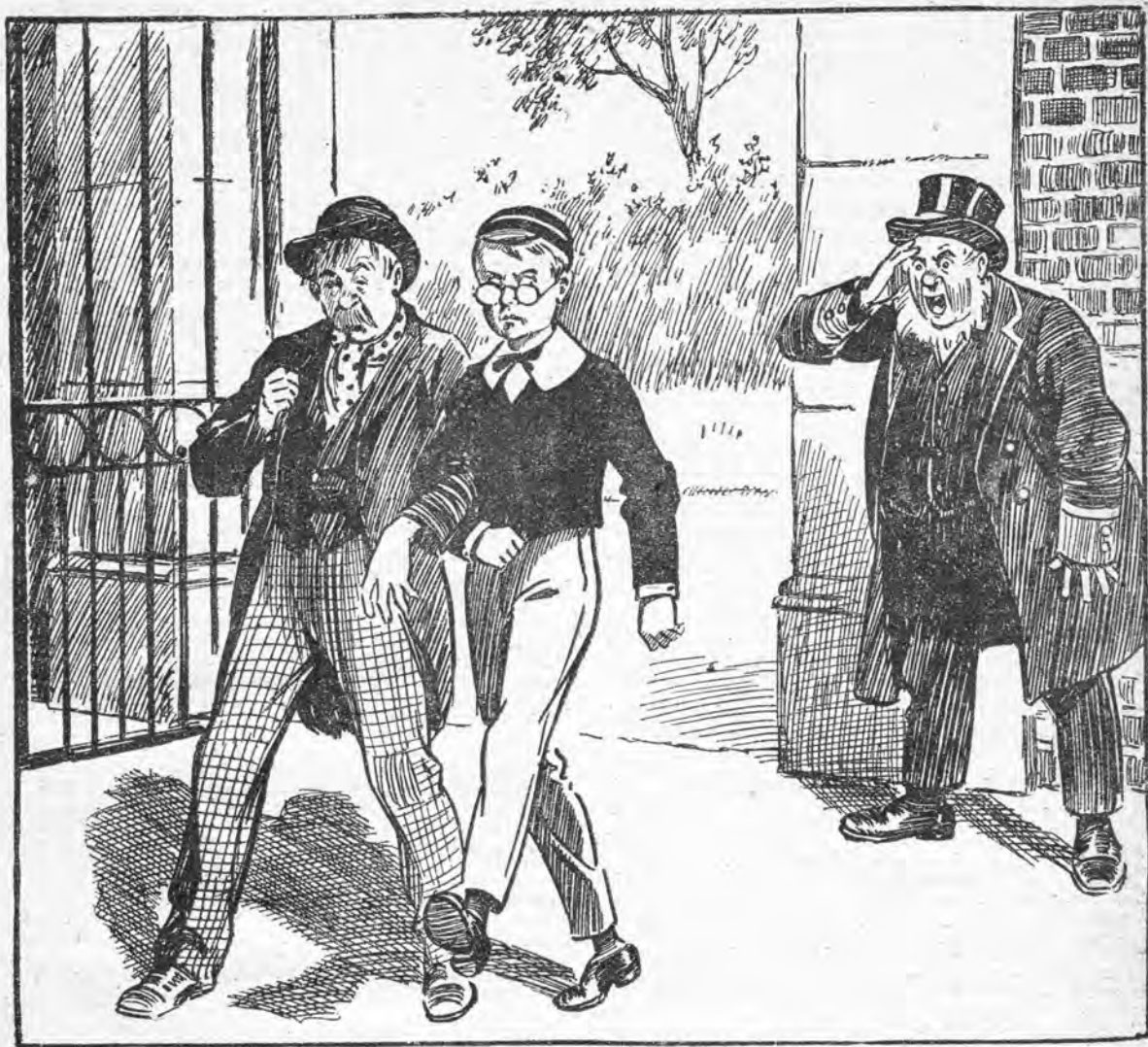
The captain of the Shell coloured.

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"You are frequently under the influence of gin yourself, Taggles," said Skimpole, marching Mr. Smiley in at the gates. "This poor fellow is not intoxicated; he is suffering from want, a result of the disorganised social conditions we live under——" "He's drunk!" roared Taggles, and tramps ain't allowed in 'ere!" (See Chapter 18.)

"I'm sorry!" he said. "I wanted to help you out because you're a new chap; but you don't take it as I meant. I'm sorry!"

"I know you meant well," said Vavasour. "I thank you. But I don't care to discuss my private affairs with the fellows simply because they are inquisitive. That isn't the way of a—Vavasour."

"Oh, if you're going to mount the Vavasour high horse, I'm done," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Well, I'm off."

"I'm much obliged to you."

"Not at all."

Tom Merry left the study.

He looked very thoughtful as he went. He had meant kindly by the new boy, but his visit to Vavasour had been useless. It was no longer to be doubted that Vavasour had something to conceal; though what it was, was a mystery. He certainly was not a poor fellow posing as a rich one. He was as rich as any fellow at St. Jim's. D'Arcy of the Fourth never had anything like so much money; even Lunley-Lumley, the son of a millionaire, was never known to have a hundred pounds in his possession. Poverty was not Guy Vavasour's secret. He had proved that beyond the shadow of a doubt. But he had a secret. What was it? Tom Merry reflected that it was no business of his, and he was quite

ready to let the matter drop and think no more about it; but the other fellows in the School House did not share his views in that respect. If there was something very shady about Vavasour's antecedents, he had to pay for all the "side" he had put on at St. Jim's.

Left alone, Vavasour's brows knitted. He looked troubled and wretched. He rose from the chair and paced to and fro in the study, thinking. He settled down to his work again at last, but he found it very difficult to keep his attention upon it.

CHAPTER 11. D'Arcy's Opinion.

"I REGARD it as disgraceful!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that statement in an unaccustomed high voice in the junior common-room.

Fellows turned round on all sides to look at the swell of St. Jim's as he spoke.

Arthur Augustus's cheeks were very pink, and there was a gleam in his eye behind his famous monocle.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Kangaroo of the Shell. "What's biting you now, Gussy?"

And there was a laugh.
 "Nothin' is bitin' me, you duffah!"
 "Gussy is holding an indignation meeting all on his own, that's all," said Jack Blake, glancing up from the chess-board, where he was playing with Digby. "Go it, Gussy!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "What's the trouble, Gussy?" asked a dozen voices.
 "Somebody's been inking his waistcoat!" said Lorne.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Or sitting on his Sunday topper!"
 "Nothin' of the kind. I was speakin' of Vavasour—my friend Vavasour."
 "Then I quite agree with you," said George Gore heartily.
 "It is disgraceful, and I've said so all along. I think it's a disgrace to the school."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I do not mean what you mean, Goah."
 "Never mind. I mean what I mean, and what you mean doesn't matter twopence," said Gore cheerfully. "You're right, it's disgraceful."
 "You uttah oes! I mean it is disgwaceful the way my friend Vavasour is bein' tweated in this House!" said D'Arcy witheringly.
 "Oh, rot!"
 "Bosh, Gussy!"
 "Ring off!"
 "Go home!"
 "I decline to wing off. I've chosen this time to speak, so that all the fellows can hear me," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly. "Just because a wagged wuffian speaks to Vavasour, and Vavasour gives him a soveveign out of charity, you all wound on the chap, and say that there's somethin' shady about him."
 "So there is," said Gore.
 "Wubbish!"
 "If there isn't, why doesn't he explain his connection with Smiley, and own up why he gives him money?"
 "I don't believe he gives him money."
 "He hasn't denied it," said Crooke.
 "Natuwally, he would wefuse to be questioned and hauled ova the coal by inquisitive wottahs. I should wefuse, just the same."
 "Rats!"
 "I wepeat that I wegard it as disgwaceful. Vavasour is a weally stwaight and decent chap, and I feel vewy friendly towards him. You chaps are scandal-mongahs!"
 "What?"
 "Scandal-mongahs!" repeated D'Arcy firmly.
 "Why, you cheeky ass—"
 "You fathead!"
 "Shut up!"
 "Do you want to be bumped?"
 "I should uttably wefuse to be bumped. I wegard this set that is bein' made against Vavasour as bein' disgwaceful. I wegard it as the duty of all decent fellows to wally wound him."
 "Rats!"
 "I am goin' to do it—"
 "How do you rally round?" asked Kangaroo. "Let's see you do it!"
 "Weally, Kangy—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I am goin' to wally wound Vavasour," repeated the swell of St. Jim's, "and I think it is up to all my friends to do the same. I call upon them to do so."
 "Vavasour had better explain first," said Monty Lowther.
 "He wefuses to gwatify idle cuwiosity."
 "Oh, rot!"
 "If you chawactewise my wemarks as wot, Lowthah, I shall have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin'!"
 "Oh!" said Lowther, looking alarmed. "In that case I withdraw the word rot, and substitute rubbish!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I have noticed," resumed D'Arcy, with a warlike look at the humorist of the Shell, "that not only cads like Goah—"
 "Here, draw it mild!" exclaimed Gore.
 "Not only cads like Goah and Mellish, but some decent chaps have been givin' old Vavasour the cold shouldah, since the affair with that wottah Smiley."
 "Faith, and let him explain, then!" said Reilly.
 "I am standin' by Vavasour, though thick and thin," said D'Arcy. "I shall wefuse to speak to any chap who doesn't treat Vavasour with pwopah respect."
 "Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "Anybody who wants to be relieved of the pleasures of Gussy's conversation knows the way now."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You are a silly ass, Lowthah! Old Vavasour is one of the best, and I decline to see him tweated wottenly."
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Blake yawned portentously.
 "You'd better persuade him to tell the truth about the matter, then," he said.
 "Does that mean that you wefuse to wally wound him, Blake?"
 "My dear kid, I don't care twopence about the matter one way or the other," said Blake. "But Vavasour has put on a lot of side since he's been here. We've heard about Vavasour Lodge, and the motor-cars, and the crowd of servants in livery, and the giddy ancestors who came over with William the Conqueror. I wasn't there, so I can't say whether they did or not. If Vavasour has been telling a straight yarn, it's all right; but if he hasn't, it's not all right. I don't like spoofers, myself."
 "Do you mean to say that Vavasour is a spoofah?"
 "I don't say so. But it's up to him now to prove that he isn't."
 "Wats!"
 Blake yawned again.
 "Well, let it go at that," he said.
 "I wefuse to let it go at that. I considah—"
 Lorne, of the Fourth, came into the common-room, with a letter in his hand, and a somewhat excited look on his face.
 "It's come!" he said.
 "You are intewwuptin' me, Lorne."
 "Go hon! I say, 'you chaps,' said Lorne, "I've got a letter here from my brother. I haven't opened it yet."
 "Oh, blow your brother!" said Gore.
 "This will interest you, Gore."
 "How will it?" demanded Gore. "I don't know your blessed brother, and don't want to!"
 "My brother lives in Kent, near Sevenoaks," Lorne explained. "I thought of writing to him and asking him about Vavasour Lodge, and all the rest. If it's such a stunning place, and such a giddy grand family, something ought to be known about it in the neighbourhood, and I thought of asking my brother to tell me."
 D'Arcy's brow darkened.
 "I don't wegard that as playin' the game," he said.
 "What rot!" said Gore, interested at once. "If Vavasour has been telling the truth, there's nothing for him to be ashamed of about his place and people. Why shouldn't Lorne write to his brother about it?"
 "Yes, why not?" said Levison.
 "It looks to me like spyin'!"
 Lorne coloured.
 "I didn't mean it like that," he said. "I didn't think it was spying. We don't know what to make of Vavasour, and his yarns about a stunning place don't agree with Smiley calling him an old pal. It's as much for his good as anything else, to have the truth known about him."
 "Something in that," said Blake. "But if you're going to read out that letter, Vavasour ought to be here to hear it."
 "Yaas, wathah! I don't wead it out behind his back!"
 Lorne flushed angrily.
 "I don't mean to read it out behind his back, if you put it like that!" he exclaimed. "You can fetch the fellow in, if you like."
 "Fetch him in!" exclaimed Gore. "Let him hear it, and we'll hear what he's got to say."
 "Vewy well; I'll fetch him. Don't wead it out till I come back."
 "Right!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy left the junior common-room in search of Guy Vavasour. The juniors gathered eagerly round Lorne, who held the letter unopened in his hand. At last, it seemed, the facts were to be known about the new boy who had mystified and puzzled them. They waited eagerly for the return of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 12.

Nothing to Say.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, warm with indignation and loyal faith, hurried up to Vavasour's study. Vavasour was there with Skimpole. Skimpole was talking at great length upon the subject of the evolution of the human race, and settling the question definitely within a million years or so. Vavasour was staring into the fire without saying a word; a fact to which the genius of the Shell was quite blind. Skimpole, delighted at having found so good a listener, rattled on without pausing to take breath; and he was going strong when the swell of St. Jim's looked into the study. Skimpole paused for a moment to blink at D'Arcy with a beaming smile.
 "Pray come in, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed. "I am just

explaining a most interesting matter to Vavasour. I am telling him—"

"Yaas, Vavasour, old man, you're wanted."

"Please do not go away now," said Skimpole. "I shall be delighted if you will remain, D'Arcy. I was just proving to Vavasour that the fact that the intermediate creature existing between man and monkey—"

"Vavasour—"

"The fact of this creature's existence is a proof positive of evolution. That this creature existed at a certain period is undoubted by any true scientist. It is true that myriads of bones of pre-existing animals, and of subsequent animals, have been discovered, and none at all of this link—the missing link. This would prove to sceptical minds that the missing link never existed. But such evidence does not weigh at all with the truly scientific mind. In fact, the mere fact that there is no evidence at all of the existence of such a link, proves its existence, to a mind really capable of receiving great scientific truths—"

"Pway shut up, Skimmy. Will you come with me, Vavasour?"

"Certainly!" said Vavasour, rising.

"If you're not too interested in Skimmy's wubbish—"

"I haven't heard a word of it."

"Dear me!" said Skimpole.

Vavasour left the study with D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus linked his arm in the new boy's.

"What's on?" asked Vavasour, observing the excitement in D'Arcy's face. For the moment the swell of St. Jim's had forgotten the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Come down to the common-room. Lorne's written to his brother at Sevenoaks, asking him about your people—"

Vavasour staggered.

"Lorne—what?"

D'Arcy looked at him in surprise.

"It's all wight, isn't it?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes," said Vavasour thickly. "Of—of course!"

"Lorne didn't mean any harm. I told him it was a wotten thing to do; but he didn't look at it like that."

"I—I see."

"He's got an answer ffrom his bwothah now," D'Arcy explained. "He's going to wead it out to all the fellows."

"Oh!"

"We thought you ought to be pwsent to hear it wead out," explained Arthur Augustus; "that is only fair play."

"Thank you," stammered Vavasour.

"Of course, if his bwothah knows anythin' about your home, it will beah out all that you've said," remarked D'Arcy.

"Of—of course."

"I know you're not afwaid of anythin' in the letter, old chap."

"I'm not afraid of anything or anybody," said Vavasour, with a touch of his old lofty manner.

"Yaas, wathah, I was sure of that! Come on!"

"All the fellows there?"

"Yaas; a big crowd."

"And Lorne is going to read the letter out?"

"Yaas."

Vavasour halted in the passage, and jerked his arm away from D'Arcy's.

"Well, I won't come," he said.

"But—"

"If Lorne has been spying into my private affairs, and the other fellows want to know what he's spied, they can go ahead," said Vavasour bitterly. "No need for me to come. Tell them to do as they like."

"But weally—"

"I shall not come."

"But you must come, deah boy!" urged D'Arcy, in anxiety. For a moment a black doubt crept into the loyal, unsuspecting mind of Arthur Augustus himself. "If you don't come, when I've come to fetch you, it will give them an impression that you're afwaid of what Lorne's bwothah has to say."

"I don't care."

"My deah fellow—"

"I won't be spied upon and questioned," said Vavasour. D'Arcy nodded.

"Quite wight; I undahstand that. But this is a diffewent mattah. Bettah come in with me, just to show you don't care."

Vavasour hesitated.

"Come on, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, and taking Vavasour's arm again, he marched him into the common-room.

Vavasour had quite recovered his self-possession now.

He entered the junior common-room with D'Arcy, his head held loftily erect, and his lip curling scornfully.

He certainly did not look like a culprit come to judgment; indeed, he looked more like an accuser or a judge himself.

There was a murmur in the crowded room as the new boy entered. Vavasour looked neither to right nor to left. He walked haughtily in; looking, as Gore growled to Levison, as if the floor wasn't quite good enough for him to walk on.

"Here he is!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas, here he is, weady to beah what your bwothah has to say, Lorne," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "My fwend Vavasour has nothin' to be afwaid of."

"I don't say he has," said Lorne, looking somewhat shame-faced. "And, look here, if Vavasour objects, I won't read out the letter."

"Vavasour doesn't object."

"Let him speak for himself," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What do you say, Vavasour?" asked Blake.

Vavasour shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

"I have nothing to say," he replied. "You can do exactly as you like. I consider all this beneath my notice."

"Beggah on horseback," murmured Gore.

"I don't see that it's beneath your notice, what all the fellows in your House think about you, Vavasour," said Tom Merry, somewhat nettled.

"I don't care what they think."

"Then you ought to care," said Manners.

"Nonsense."

"Look here—"

"I think all this is caddish spying," said Vavasour, in a very clear voice. "I repeat that it is beneath my notice, and I shall say nothing more."

"Read out the letter, Lorne."

"Read it out."

"Well, if Vavasour objects—" hesitated Lorne, with a glance towards the cold, haughty face of the new boy.

Vavasour did not speak, and made no motion.

"Silence gives consent," said Gore.

"Oh, go ahead, and get it over!" said Kerruish.

"Very well!"

Lorne opened the letter. A dead silence fell upon the juniors of the School House. Nobody wanted to miss a word of the letter. Lorne glanced over the letter.

"Ahem—new footer—h'm—extravagant young rascal, what do you want a quid for? Hum—that isn't it! Oh, here it is—here's Vavasour!"

Lorne read over the paragraph in the letter in which the name of Vavasour occurred. His face went a little red as he looked up again.

"Read it out!" yelled Gore.

Lorne hesitated.

"I repeat, that I won't read it out, Vavasour, if you object," he said.

Vavasour made no sign.

"Better read it out now," said Tom Merry gruffly. "Whatever it is, it will do Vavasour more harm than good, if you keep it dark after saying that."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

A deeply-troubled look was coming over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic visage. A chill of doubt was creeping into his heart.

"If Vavasour doesn't say no—"

Vavasour did not speak.

"Very well! Here goes!" said Lorne.

The juniors listened with breathless attention while Lorne read aloud:

"By the way, about the question you ask—about the new boy with you. I know the name, Vavasour. There is a Vavasour Hall near here, and it is a very old family in this part. But your Vavasour can't belong to it, as the Hall belongs to Sir Gilbert Vavasour, who is a childless old bachelor. There is no other Vavasour that I know of; and I never heard of Vavasour Lodge. Perhaps you've got the name of the county wrong."

"Is that all?" asked Gore.

"That's all," said Lorne.

"Not much," said Gore. "But it's pretty clear. I suppose your brother knows the place well enough, Lorne?"

"My people have lived there for years," said Lorne.

"What have you got to say, Vavasour?"

Vavasour was silent.

"Nothing," sneered Levison.

"It's pretty clear that there's no such place as Vavasour Lodge, and it's all blarney," said Mellish, with his disagreeable cackle. "I thought from the first that Vavasour was swanking about nothing."

"The school will know what to think of his swank now," sneered Levison.

"All rot!" said Tom Merry; but not very heartily. "Vavasour Lodge can exist, I suppose, without Lorne's blessed brother having heard of it."

"Rats!"

"Speak up, Vavasour, old chap!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously.

Vavasour found his voice.

"I've got nothing to say," he said, in a cold, steady voice, "I refuse to be spied on and questioned. Fellows who think me a liar can have nothing to do with me. A Vavasour doesn't concern himself with dirty tattle. That's all."

He walked to the door. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated a single instant, and then hurried after him, and slipped his arm through Vavasour's. The swell of St. Jim's was loyal to the last.

But Arthur Augustus was the only fellow in the School House who still believed in Guy Vavasour.

CHAPTER 13.

Gore Knows What to do.

"WELL," ejaculated Tom Merry, "if this isn't rotten!" It was rotten, there was no doubt about that. Saturday afternoon had come, and there was a House match on for that afternoon.

Figgins & Co., of the New House, had been narrowly beaten in the last match, and they were meeting the School House team again this afternoon, burning to avenge their defeat.

The School House juniors had won by a single goal, kicked in the last minute of the match, and there was no doubt that they had been lucky to win.

Indeed, Figgins & Co. held the view that the victory had morally been with the New House, and they offered to wipe up the ground with Tom Merry & Co on the next opportunity. And Tom Merry & Co. had been only too-willing to give them the chance to try.

But the worst of bad luck had befallen the School House junior team.

Blake, Herries, and Digby had had an upset on the river, and had had colds, and couldn't play. Kangaroo had hurt his ankle in practice, and had to be left out. Four of the best men in the School House team had to be replaced, and though there were plenty of fellows eager to replace them, it made the outlook very doubtful for the School House.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, it was true, had announced his

intention of really putting his beef into it this time; but even that did not reassure the School House junior captain.

"Only one thing to be done," said Blake, sniffing into his handkerchief. "The best men are crooked—"

"There's nothin' the matter with me, Blake, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I was speaking of the best men, Gussy. The best men being crooked—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"The best men being crooked," pursued Blake calmly, "you'll have to shove in the best you can get, Tommy."

"I'm thinking of Gore," said Tom Merry musingly. "He can play footer when he likes."

"What about Vavasour?"

"Yaas, wathah!—what about my friend Vavasour?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly.

"H'm!"

"He's shaped well in practice," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! My friend Vavasour—"

"Vavasour may be your friend, Gussy, but I fancy you're the only friend he's got here," said Tom Merry bluntly.

"Weally, Tom Wewwy—"

"Well, that's so," said Blake thoughtfully. "He seems to be proved to be a spoofer!"

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I considah—"

"But that's nothing to do with footer," said Blake. "After all, Tommy, we want to beat the New House."

"Yaas; and I considah—"

"I don't know how the other fellows will take it," said Tom Merry. "I can't say I like the chap myself. Chaps who tell whoppers can't expect to be liked."

"He hasn't told any whoppahs, deah boy."

"You're an innocent old duck, Gussy."

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an innocent old duck!"

"I'll speak to Vavasour," said Tom Merry, making up his mind. "After all, he's a good player, and he would be useful. And the Vavasour Lodge, and the giddy ancestors yarr hasn't anything to do with Soccer."

And Tom Merry went to look for the new boy.

Guy Vavasour was in his study.

Since the affair of Lorne's letter from his brother, Vavasour



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had been given the cold shoulder by a good many of the School House fellows.

As Monty Lowther said, it didn't matter twopence what sort of a place he came from; but there was no need for him to lie about it.

And most of the fellows had made up their minds by this time that Vavasour had lied about his place and his people.

There was no direct proof, certainly; but as Vavasour refused to explain, the fellows considered that the facts spoke for themselves.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy still believed that it was aristocratic haughtiness that prevented Vavasour from entering into explanations. But he was the only fellow in the House who believed it.

Vavasour gave Tom Merry a steely look as he came into his study.

"I want you," said Tom Merry.

Vavasour's lip curled.

"Any fresh discoveries?" he asked.

The captain of the Shell flushed.

"I'm not going to speak about that," he said. "It's your own business, I suppose? I want you to play in the team this afternoon."

Vavasour started.

"The School House junior team?"

"Yes."

"The other fellows won't like it, considering how they've been treating me lately."

"That's all right."

"I don't know that I care to play, under the circumstances."

"It's for the House," said Tom Merry. "We've got four men crooked, and we want you. And if you put up a good game, Vavasour, it may bring the fellows round a bit, and make them think better of you."

"I don't want to bring them round. A Vavasour—"

"Well, will you play?"

Vavasour hesitated a moment.

"I'll play if you like," he said.

"Then get into your things."

"All right!"

"I'll wait for you down below," said Tom Merry. "The kick-off's at three, so there's no time to waste."

"I'll be with you in a jiffy," said Vavasour.

Tom Merry rejoined the group of juniors at the door of the School House. Blake gave him an inquiring look.

"He's going to play," said Tom Merry.

"Good!"

George Gore came out of the School House and tapped Tom Merry on the arm. The junior captain looked round.

"You haven't finished making up the team, I hear," said Gore.

"Yes, I have."

"I was going to offer to play," said Gore, with a scowl.

"I was going to ask you," said Tom Merry, "only—"

"Only what?"

"You've been neglecting footer practice for weeks, and I've found a chap who hasn't, that's all."

"I could put up a good game."

"I dare say; but Vavasour will put up a better," said Tom Merry.

"Vavasour!"

"Yes; he's playing outside-right."

Gore gritted his teeth.

"You're leaving me out, to put in that liar and spoofer!" he exclaimed. "A chap who tells lies by the yard!"

"I don't want to hear all that; and there's a chance that Vavasour is true blue, too. Gussy believes he won't explain just out of obstinacy."

"I said aristocratic reserve, Tom Mewwy."

"Same thing."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Look here, if you're going to play that cad, Vavasour—" began Gore hotly.

Guy Vavasour came out of the house as he was speaking, with an overcoat over his football clothes. He caught Gore's words, and flushed.

"Are you speaking of me, Gore?" he said quietly.

Gore turned furiously upon him.

"Yes, I am!" he exclaimed. "I say it's disgraceful to put you in the team—a chap who has told lies by the bushel!"

"Biff!"

Vavasour's right shot out like lightning, and Gore rolled off the School House steps, and sat down violently in the quad.

"Bwawo!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Gore sprang up.

"Now, come on, if you want any more, you cad!" said Vavasour, between his teeth.

Gore looked for a moment as if he would accept the invitation. Then his hands unclenched, and dropped to his sides.

"I won't hammer you!" he said savagely, with a glare of deadly hatred at the new boy. "I know something worth

more than that! You've got my place in the team! I'll make you sorry for it before the day's out!"

"I think it's rotten!" said Crooke of the Shell. "Look here, Tom Merry, if you put that fellow in the team—"

Crooke had no time to finish. Vavasour's fist caught him on the point of the jaw, and he rolled on the ground.

"Ow!" gasped Crooke. "Yow! Ow!"

Vavasour, without another glance at the cad of the Shell, walked away towards the football ground with the Co.

Crooke slowly rose to his feet.

"The beast!" he muttered. "He's got a fist as hard as nails! Look here, Gore, are we going to stand this?"

Gore gritted his teeth.

"I'm not!" he said.

"You can't lick him!" said Crooke.

"You can't, either. But we can show him up," muttered Gore. "That fellow Smiley is still in Rylcombe."

"Blow Smiley!" said Crooke, rubbing his chin.

"Look here!" said Gore, lowering his voice. "It's pretty clear that Smiley knows all about Vavasour, and is getting money out of him."

"Looks like it."

"It must be some rotten, disgraceful secret, or Vavasour wouldn't be paying him to keep quiet."

"We all know that," growled Crooke.

"We know where to find the man," pursued Gore, in the same cautious tone.

"That pub is out of bounds."

"We've risked that before," sneered Gore. "It wouldn't be the first visit to the Green Man for either of us."

"What on earth are you getting at?" demanded Crooke mystified. "I suppose we could go and see Smiley, if we liked, but what good would it do?"

"We're not short of money," said Gore. "I've got a pound or two I'd spend cheerfully to get even with Vavasour, and you've got plenty of tin."

"I'd stand a fiver to get even with him," said Crooke.

"But—"

"Then let's go and see Smiley."

"What for?"

"To get the story out of him, whatever it is."

Crooke shook his head.

"If he's making money out of Vavasour by keeping it dark, you can jolly well bet your hat that he'll keep it dark," he said.

"Not when he's skiffy," said Gore coolly. "I know that sort—once fill him up with whisky and rum, and he'll blurt out everything. He gets a quid or two out of Vavasour every now and then—they've been seen together—but he spends it all as fast as he gets it. If we stand him all he can drink, and get his tongue loosened, and then plank down a few quids, he'll blab out the whole story."

Crooke's eyes glittered.

"My hat! It looks all right," he said. "But—but there would be a fearful row if it came out that we were at the Green Man, standing booze to a rotten tramp."

"Who's to know? We've simply got to say that the man told us—and that'll be strictly true. It's our duty to clear up this giddy mystery, you know."

Crooke grinned, and rubbed his chin again.

"I'm on!" he said.

"Good!"

And the two cads of the Shell left the school to seek Mr. Smiley in Rylcombe; while Vavasour, unsuspecting the storm that was about to burst upon him, was playing football for his house against the New House team.

CHAPTER 14.

The Hero of the Hour.

"PLAY UP; School House!"

"Go it, Vavasour!"

"Goal! Goal! Hurray!"

There was a big crowd of juniors round the football-field. Some seniors had joined it, too, and were cheering heartily.

Figgins & Co., and the New House team generally, had been looking forward to an easy victory. As Figgins remarked, they could beat the School House any time, barring accidents. And now, with four of Tom Merry's team crooked, it ought to have been as easy as rolling off a log. But it wasn't.

Three of the empty places in the team had been filled with very average players. But the fourth place—outside-right—was filled by a player who surprised the wisecracks.

Blake and Herries and Digby and Kangaroo, in spite of the fact that they were crooked, had joined the crowd watching the game. And they yelled as loudly as anybody.

And there was something to yell for, too.

Tom Merry had a keen eye for form in a footballer, and he had hoped that Vavasour's inclusion in the team would help

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the School House to win; and his hope had been more than realised.

Vavasour kicked the first goal for the School House in the first five minutes of the game; and Figgins & Co. stared.

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgins. "That new chap is hot stuff!"

"Oh, Fatty!" said Kerr, with a reproachful look at Fatty Wynn, who was looking very astonished in goal.

Fatty Wynn turned pink.

"Well, that was a scorcher!" he said.

Tom Merry clapped Vavasour on the back as they walked back to the centre of the field.

"Good egg!" he said. "Keep that up!"

Vavasour smiled.

"I'll try," he said.

And he did try—with great success.

He did not score again in the first half; but Tom Merry scored twice from passes by Vavasour from the wing, passes that came just when and where they were wanted, and the juniors cheered Vavasour as much as Tom Merry.

"He's a giddy dark horse," said Blake enthusiastically.

"Blessed if I care twopence whether there's a Vavasour Lodge or not—he's a jolly good footballer!"

"Three goals to one!" said Kangaroo, with great satisfaction. "Figgins & Co. won't pull it off so easily this time!"

"No fear!"

The New House juniors lined up for the second half with grim determination.

Fortune favoured them at first.

Two goals came to Figgins, and the score was level.

Then for some time the tussle went on without a goal to either side. Sometimes the School House goal was hard pressed, and sometimes the struggle raged before the New House citadel; but Fatty Wynn was not found wanting. Fatty Wynn sent out the leather every time, and the New House cheered their plump champion.

Jack Blake glanced up at the clock-tower.

"Ten minutes to go!" he exclaimed. "Play up, School House!"

"On the ball!"

"Wake up, you fellows!"

That was unnecessary; the School House players were wide awake enough. But the New House men were equally wide awake.

Then there came a roar.

"Bravo, Vavasour!"

"Go it!"

"Kick! Kick!"

Vavasour had brought the leather down along the touch-line, and he looked round for a fellow to take the pass. But Tom Merry was on his back, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was far behind; and the New House halves and backs were closing on Vavasour. The new boy paused a second, and then kicked—a long kick from the far wing that looked next to impossible.

But the ball went home, true as a die; and Fatty Wynn in goal leaped at it a second too late!

Blake yelled.

"Goal!"

Goal it was.

The ball was in the net, and there was a deafening roar of cheering and hand-clapping.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Bravo, Vavasour!"

"Hurray!"

It was a wonderful kick, and it was no wonder that the School House crowd shouted themselves hoarse.

Blake chuckled gleefully.

"Two minutes to go," he said. "The New House will never get level now. Vavasour's kicked the winning goal."

And Blake was right.

Figgins & Co. made the most of the few minutes left; but they had no chance, and the referee's whistle rang out to tell that the match was over.

Four goals to three!

The New House were beaten again, and this time the New House fellows could not say that it was a fluke.

They had been beaten after a gruelling game, which left all the players gasping, and they had been beaten by fine play.

Vavasour had kicked the winning goal, and kicked it under the greatest difficulties. The new boy was the hero of the hour.

As the teams came off the field, Figgins slapped Vavasour on the back.

"Jolly good, Vavasour!" he exclaimed. "You ought to be in the New House. That's where you ought to be. You're wasted in the School House."

Vavasour laughed.

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"Weally, Figgins," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "we should wese to part with him, We are proud of Vavasour!"

"What ho!" exclaimed Tom Merry heartily. "I'm jolly glad to put you in, Vavasour. You've won the match for the House!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bravo, Vavasour!"

"Hurray!"

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Vavasour, drawing back.

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah, wats! You've won the match, deah boy."

"Up with him!"

"Hurray!"

And up went Vavasour upon the broad shoulders of Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, and he was borne off towards the School House amid a cheering crowd.

The New House fellows joined in the cheering. It was Vavasour who had beaten them, but they could admire a tough opponent—a foeman worthy of their steel.

The cheering crowd arrived at the doorway of the School House.

George Gore stood upon the steps.

Gore had his coat and cap on, and had evidently lately come in. There was a disagreeable smile upon his face; and Crooke, who was with him, was chuckling. The cheering crowd halted, and Vavasour was set down.

"Hurray, Vavasour!"

"Hurray, Smith!" said Gore.

"Hurray, Smith!" echoed Crooke, with a giggle.

Vavasour started.

"What are you silly asses cackling about?" demanded Tom Merry. "Don't begin any of your rot now, or you'll get bumped! Vavasour has just won the House match for us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're not rotting," said Gore. "I suppose we can cheer Smith if we like, can't we?"

"Good old Smith!" chuckled Crooke.

Vavasour was deadly pale.

"What do you mean by calling him Smith, you fatheads?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"It's his name."

"His name's Vavasour, chump!"

"His name's Smith, fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Ask him!" grinned Gore. "Look at him!"

All eyes were upon Vavasour.

He stood still, silent, his face deadly white. All the colour, all the happiness, had died out of it now, and his eyes had a hunted look.

The shouting died away. It seemed to the juniors as if there were the chill of a tragedy in the air.

The silence lasted some moments, which seemed like hours.

Tom Merry broke it.

"Look here," he said, "we're fed up with this persecution of Vavasour. I don't care twopence whether he has gassed about his people or not, I know he's a jolly good footballer, and he's won the House match."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You can shut up, Gore!"

"I suppose you care whether a fellow comes to St. Jim's under false colours?" said Gore. "I think we all ought to care if a fellow comes here under an assumed name!"

"It's a lie!"

"It's the truth!"

"Speak up, Vavasour, old man!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy encouragingly. "We all know that Goah is lyin'. He's a wottah! Speak up, deah boy!"

But Vavasour did not speak up.

The hunted look intensified in his eyes; his face was like chalk. And a grim, uncomfortable silence fell again. Gore went on:

"I've been to see that man Smiley. He got tipsy—and talked. He's told us the whole story. Vavasour's not Vavasour at all; it's all bunkum about his people, and Vavasour Lodge, and all the rest of it. He's lied from beginning to end. His name's Smith—and he used to be a pal of Smiley's, when his father, old Smith, kept the pub."

"What!"

"It's not twue, you wottah!"

"It's true, every word of it, and he dare not deny it!" said Gore calmly.

Vavasour was silent.

Why did he not speak?

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt a chill creep over him.

He knew at last that his loyal faith had been misplaced; that he had placed faith in a fellow who had deceived him—who had tried to deceive them all—and would have been deceiving them yet, but for the accident of his recognition by Smiley.

"His name's Smith!" said Gore with a grin. "His father kept the Vavasour Arms, near Sevenoaks! He was

a butler in the Vavasour family before he kept a pub! Smiley was his potman! Young Smith used to hold horses and that kind of thing about the pub. Old Smith made money, and he's a brewer now—head-cook-and-bottle-washer of Smith's Entire!"

"Smith's Entire!" said Tom Merry mechanically, remembering what Smiley had said. "I—I see now! Oh!"

"Vavasour, dear boy—"

"Call him by his right name!" said Gore. "His name's Peter Smith!"

"Peter Smith!" said Levison. "Ye gods! Rather a change after Guy Vavasour! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you cad!" said Blake roughly.

"He came here under a false name, under false colours!" said Gore. "He was ashamed of the name of Smith, and ashamed of the pub! Guy Vavasour—the only Vavasour about him is the Vavasour Arms, where he used to hold horses!"

"You've said enough," said Tom Merry quietly, "no need to rub it in! You can hold your tongue now; it will be better for you!"

Gore thought so, too, and he held his tongue.

"Say somethin', Vavasour, old man!" said D'Arcy miserably. "You've only got to say that the cad is lyin', and we'll believe you!"

Vavasour did not reply.

A change came over his pale, thin face—his features worked—and with a sudden sob, he covered his face with his hands, and rushed into the house.

CHAPTER 15.

Staunch Friends.

THE crowd of juniors broke up in silence.

Their faces were clouded.

There was no doubt in any mind of the truth of the disclosure. Vavasour's manner proved the truth of it clearly enough. The wretched boy had made no attempt at defence; no attempt at sustaining his former attitude of lofty contempt. He had broken down under the accusation—he had given away utterly. The story was true; he had come to St. Jim's under false colours—he had money, certainly, but nothing to boast of—the very name he had seemed so proud of was not his own.

If the exposure had come at any other time, the St. Jim's fellows would probably have laughed over the matter, and considered that it served the impostor right.

But it came at a moment when Vavasour was the hero of the House—he had shown that he had coolness, courage, determination, and loyalty.

And those qualities were a great set-off to the snobbish weakness which had caused him to enmesh himself in this network of lies and deceit.

If he had attempted to brazen the matter out, the fellows would have felt less uncomfortable about it. But his utter surrender had disarmed them; even his enemies. Gore, who had brought this to pass, was surprised himself to feel that he was not happy over his success. The taste of his triumph was bitter in his mouth. The agony of humiliation and shame in Vavasour's white face haunted Gore's memory; and he wished heartily that he had left the fellow alone.

Crooke, and Levison, and Mellish, had no such feelings of remorse. They rejoiced. But they rejoiced quietly—for, strangely enough, the fellows who now knew Vavasour to be a humbug, felt angry and annoyed with those who had spied out the facts and exposed him. Vavasour deserved to be shown up, certainly! but those who had shown him up had acted like cads, and the less they had to say the better. And when Mellish cackled on the subject, he was bumped along the passage by Kangaroo and Blake, and his cackle was heard no more.

Vavasour had gone to the Shell dormitory.

The other fellows respected his feelings, and left him alone there.

His feelings were not to be envied.

What thoughts were in the wretched boy's mind, as he sat upon his bed, still in his football clothes?

Black shame had fallen upon him!

He had lied—and his lies were found out. He had boasted—and his boasts had proved to be false. He had assumed a name that was not his own—and his real name was known. How could he ever hold up his head at St. Jim's again? How could he look anybody in the face? He must go—that was all! Go from the school in shame and humiliation—the school he had grown to love, the place where he had won honour and esteem. If he had not played the fool in this way—if he had not been ashamed of things in which there was really no shame—if he had told the truth, he would have been liked and esteemed on his own merits. He knew that now. But he had been a snob—and this was the penalty! It was a heavy penalty!

The dusk was deepening over the old quadrangle of St. Jim's—the shadows thickened in the dormitory.

Still Vavasour sat upon the bed, motionless, save for the sob that shook him at intervals.

The door opened at last.

Vavasour did not look up.

Several fellows came in; they came towards him: Vavasour raised his head—he saw Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, Lowther, Kangaroo, Manners, and several more.

A bitter look came upon his handsome face.

"So you've come!" he said.

"Yes, we've come!" said Tom Merry quietly.

"You might let me off this," said Vavasour, "I'm going!"

"Going!"

"Yes! I suppose you don't think that even a liar, and a boaster, and a swanker, could have the nerve to stay here after an exposure like that?"

"It's all true, then, Vavasour?"

"Don't you know it is?"

"Well, yes!"

"We're sowwy, Vavasour, old man!" said D'Arcy miserably.

"There's nothing to be sorry for!" said Vavasour bitterly. "You least of all—you trusted me after the others suspected. I played a fool's game, and I deserve this!"

"What did you do it for, Vavasour?" asked Tom Merry. Vavasour made a weary gesture.

"Because I was a fool and a snob, I suppose. I was the son of a public-house keeper—he kept the Vavasour Arms—and old Sir Gilbert Vavasour had always been kind to me, and took a lot of notice of me. I always had tastes above my station, and—and I didn't look like a horse-boy, did I? Then my father made money, and—and I had new prospects. We changed our name—you know that can be done legally. I wasn't satisfied with being Peter Smith—my father became Mr. Vavasour—I became Guy Vavasour! Why don't you laugh?"

"I don't feel like laughing!" said Tom Merry.

"Vavasour's my name now—legally. I was born Smith. I was an ass! That's all! I came here under false colours—I was a liar from beginning to end! I didn't mean to be—but one thing led to another, and—and here I am. I shall be gone to-morrow, and you can remember the joke to laugh over."

"Nothing of the kind," said Tom Merry. "I thought you had some idea of this sort in your mind, and that's why we came. We don't want you to go."

Vavasour stared.

"You don't want me to go?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Because you're a good chap, and we like you!" said Tom Merry, at once. "You've done wrong—or rather, you've been a fool! A fellow who is ashamed of his name and his origin is a fool! There's nothing in either to be ashamed of! But—but I can understand how you got into it, and—and if you were nothing but a snob, we should be glad to see the last of you. But you've proved that you're the right sort—excepting for this humbug, you've been straight and decent. And now it's all over, we know you will be straight—and you will have friends to back you up, too. We're all ready to stand by you, and give you a chance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

"That's what we've all come to say!" said Manners.

"It will be all right," said Tom Merry. "Stay here, and all this will be forgotten—all we shall remember is, that you're a good chap and true blue!"

The tears were running down Vavasour's cheeks.

"But—but the other fellows!" he muttered.

"They'll follow our lead. They're not against you—even Gore has just said to me that he's sorry he meddled in the matter. You've got to stay here, Vavasour, and face the music like a man—and you'll pull through all right!"

"I'll stay!" said Vavasour.

It was not an easy thing to live down—but Vavasour lived it down. His borrowed plumes had been shorn from him; but that gave his own good qualities a better chance of showing themselves—and, indeed, things were easier to Vavasour himself when he no longer had the weight of a deception on his shoulders. And from that day, there was no "straighter" fellow at St. Jim's than the boy who had been Ashamed of His Name.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Wednesday, entitled: "The Last Hope," by Martin Clifford. Also a further grand long instalment of "Sir Billy, of Greyhouse," by R. S. Warren Bell. Order your All-School Story "GEM" in advance. Price One Penny.)

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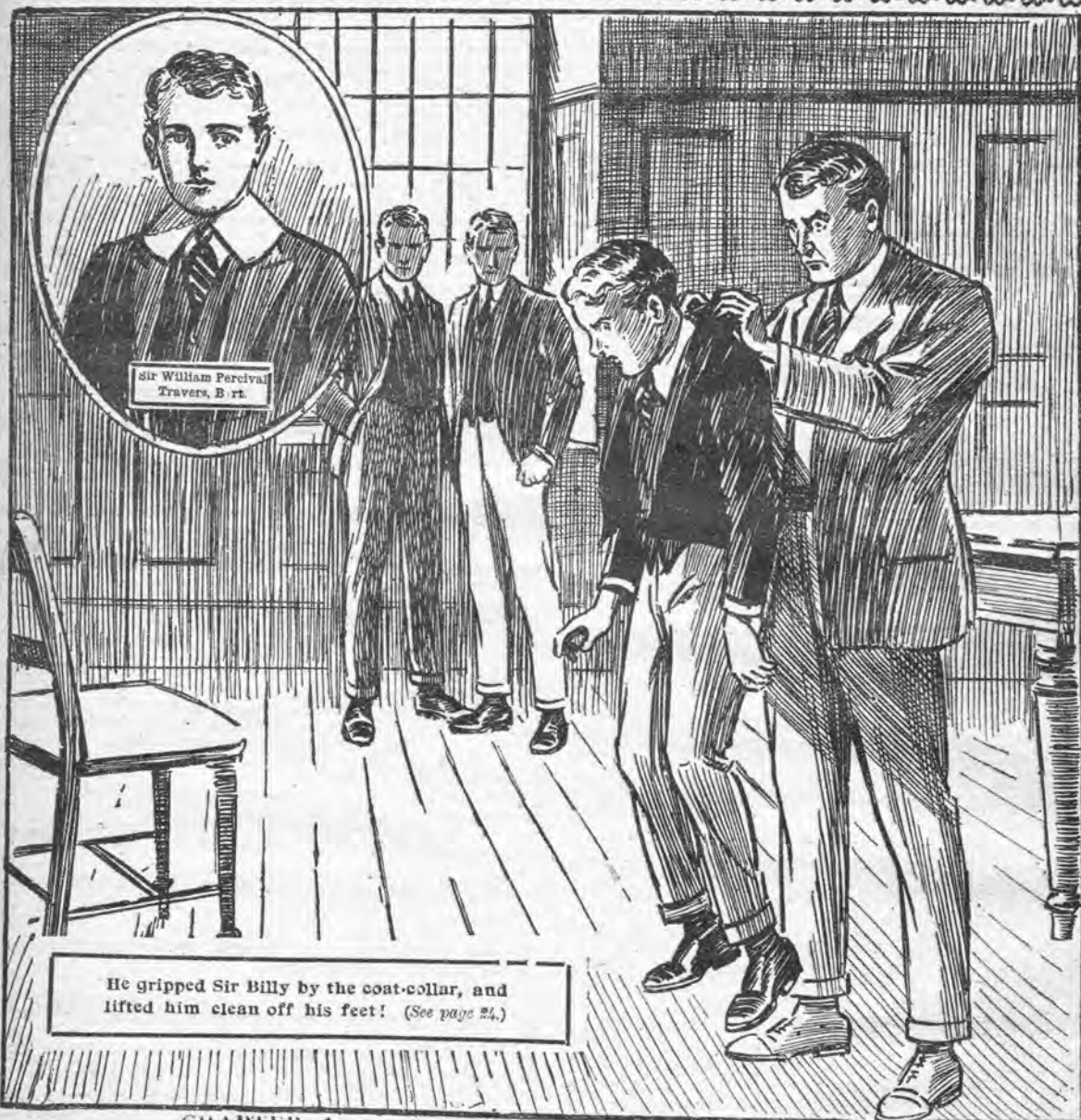
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CHAPTER I.

Sir Billy!

FIGHTING GREYHOUSE" was the sobriquet it had earned for itself. During the five-and-twenty years that Henry Leicester had ruled the school, a resort to fists as a climax to a hot dispute was the natural order of the day. Dr. Leicester winked at it, and pretended not to see black eyes and swollen lips when the possessor thereof was construing two yards away from him. Indeed, the Head with difficulty restrained himself from beaming approval on the bearer of such fistic decorations.

He was a believer in rough and ready—in letting the fellows settle their differences in the manner that came most

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natural to them. Sometimes an earnest new master would suggest to him that these sanguinary conflicts must have a brutalising effect on the combatants, but Leicester would pooh-pooh any such remarks.

"Sir," the old gentleman would say, in his big voice, "Greys are not made of putty; they've got to grow up and be men. Greyhouse has sent many a fine soldier to fight for his country; they wouldn't have done so well if I had kept them all wrapped up in cotton-wool. Let 'em have it out, sir; don't appear to, but let 'em. If you catch 'em at it, give 'em fifty lines, and tell 'em not to do it again."

So "Fighting Greyhouse" became a scholastic by-word,

Our Companion Papers.

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and doubtless scared off many timid mothers from sending their boys to such a terrible place; on the other hand, brawny squires liked the nickname, and sent Dick and Tom and Harry there to get the nonsense thrashed out of them, and thrash it out of other fellows.

So Dr. Leicester reigned over Greyhouse for five-and-twenty years, and when he was made a bishop, a new headmaster was appointed in his stead, who, as it was soon to appear, disapproved strongly of the "noble art."

George Patterson, a distinguished mathematician, was Dr. Leicester's successor. On the first evening of his term the new Head summoned Wardour, captain of the school, to his presence. Master and boy shook hands—Wardour rather suspiciously, the headmaster with cordiality—and Wardour was invited to be seated. Then the Head began to pace the hearthrug.

"Now, Wardour," said he, "as captain of the school, I shall look to you for help and assistance very frequently. I want to rely on your support—you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"The first thing I am going to do," said the Head, coming to a standstill and fixing his eyes on the captain, "is to stop the—or—the pugilistic encounters for which Greyhouse has gained an unenviable notoriety. There must be no fighting. You and your fellow-monitors have power to give lines and to cane—do both if necessary, and stop the fighting. I will have it stopped!"

"Very good, sir," said Wardour quietly.

"I am glad you appear to realise the position," said the Head very affably, "because I want to work with my monitors, and especially with my head-monitor. There is one thing," he went on, "which I should like you to bear in mind. Next October you, in the ordinary course of events, will avail yourself of the Greyhouse Oxford Scholarship. I understand that this scholarship, which is of considerable value, is invariably offered to the captain of the school, with," he added emphatically, "the headmaster's sanction. On one or two occasions, it has been found necessary to pass over the captain in favour of a more deserving boy. I trust that will not be the case next October—in fact," he concluded more kindly, "I am sure it won't be. That is all I have to say for the present. Another time I will mention to you some other reforms I have in my mind. My predecessor," added Mr. Patterson, "was—er—a worthy man, a—er—ripe scholar, and—er—a gentleman, but opinions differ as to the way a great educational establishment like this should be carried on. Good-night, my boy!"

"Good-night, sir!" said Wardour; and so they shook hands again and parted.

As Wardour strolled back to his room his thoughts reverted to the unmistakable threat—for it was nothing less—which the Head had uttered regarding the scholarship. If the fighting wasn't stopped, then it was good-bye for him to an Oxford career, his chance of getting his cricket blue, of becoming a double-first, or holding the Union entranced with his eloquence—good-bye to the dream which every fellow with any ambition in him has when he enters upon his "Varsity career."

Well, he must stop the fighting—those were his orders. The Head's word was law, and the first man to uphold that law must be the captain of the school. Wardour set his jaw firmly and walked on. One other thought entered his mind. For the sake of his home-people he must retain his right to the school. His father could ill afford to send him to Greyhouse—but he did, being an Old Grey himself; still less could he afford to pay for him at Oxford, with five other sons in all stages of knickerbockers and peg-top trousers coming on.

"It's a sad business," thought Wardour; "but I must go through with it."

And so he soundly cuffed two gentlemen of the Lower School who were enjoying a dust-up in the corridor leading to his study, and went on in a happier frame of mind. That cuffing was the thin end of the wedge.

"Now, young man, just you listen to me for a few moments!"

The speaker was a fat, good-tempered-looking person, whose name was Joseph Soames, and whose profession was that of a solicitor. He was in evening-dress. Opposite to him, at the other end of the dinner-table, sat a lady in green silk, thin, silent, tired-looking. This was Mrs. Soames. On Mr. Soames's right hand was a boy of twelve—a delicate-looking fellow, with regular features and fair hair. This was Mr. Soames's ward. The ward's name, to give it in full, was Sir William Percival Travers, only surviving child of the late Sir Claude Percival Travers, whose death had taken place in Egypt quite recently. This event explained the boy's black clothes. There being no relatives or friends whom the late Sir Claude had not quarrelled with, the successor to the baronetcy had been consigned to the care of the family lawyer.

"Henceforth," continued Mr. Soames, as he skinned a walnut, "you are to regard me as your pa."

"Yes," said the boy.

"I am your pa—in the eyes of the law—until you're twenty-one," continued Mr. Soames; "so you must do as I tell you, and not give any trouble. You follow me?"

"Yes, sir!"

"That's right! Well, William, my boy, I'm going to send you to school—to a fine, thumping, public school. It'll be a bit different from your soft tutor chaps. Greyhouse—that's it. Regular old place—and a pretty dear place, too. There won't be much left out of your income when your bills are paid, let me tell you. You'll stay there till you're eighteen or nineteen, and then we'll send you to Oxford or Cambridge—or perhaps into the Army!"

"Hada't you better be going round to the Wardours?" interrupted Mrs. Soames; "they are early people, you know."

"To—be—sure," replied Mr. Soames. "William, my lad, finish your wine—why, bless me, you haven't touched it! Never mind; put on your hat, and come along."

The boy obeyed with alacrity, for he was itching to get away from the dinner-table. Mr. Soames donned his overcoat, and they sallied forth.

There were very few people about in the old county town of Petershall as the stout solicitor and his slim snip of a ward walked at a smart pace through the silent, moonlit streets. Those who knew Mr. Soames stared curiously at his companion—the small boy in the black clothes, with the broad, white collar that ladies love so. The good folk of Petershall had heard something of the lad's history. Kind hearts in Petershall felt sorry for him; kind eyes glanced pityingly at him as he pegged along by the solicitor's side.

A big house, with rather worn steps. A peep over the wall at the garden disclosed a muddy football, this and that of boy life, a disused rabbit-hutch, an old shoe or two, and a rag of a cap. William Travers took it all in, and sighed in his heart for brothers—even if they licked him.

"Major Wardour at home?"

"Yes, sir. Will you walk in, sir?"

Mr. Soames and his charge entered the house. The hall—much like the garden—gave token of growing sons in abundance. A scuffle, and voices above. The visitors peered up. Five heads were visible; five pairs of bright eyes were watching them. Dimly below one observed nightshirts and bare feet.

"If you don't be off to bed you'll get the stick!" was jovial Mr. Soames's warning, as he caught sight of them.

A tall, broad-shouldered man, with a grizzled moustache, came out of the dining-room.

"Ah, Mr. Soames. Pray come in!"

"Thanks, major. Er—this is Sir William Travers—my ward—Major Wardour."

"How are you, my boy?" exclaimed the old soldier, whose warm hand-clasp proved mighty cheering to the solicitor's young companion. "You are very welcome. Dick, here is Mr. Soames, and a future schoolfellow of yours. Travers, this is my son Dick, of Greyhouse."

"Captain of Greyhouse," added Mr. Soames impressively.

"How do?" said Dick Wardour, carelessly shaking hands with the new arrival. "Glad to see you."

"Thank you," was all Travers could think of to say, as he looked up at the big fellow standing—as it seemed—yards above him. He felt that it was very good of Wardour to shake hands with him.

"Coming up this term?" asked Wardour, as the seniors began to talk to each other.

"Yes."

"Um—ever been to school before?"

"No—never."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve and a half."

"You're a trifle young to enter, but you'll do all right if you run straight and don't allow yourself to be sat on. Read much?"

Travers meekly enumerated the authors he had tackled—with the help of his soft tutors. Wardour whistled.

"You'll be put in the Lower Fourth—easy. You'll be the youngest chap in it, too!" And he went on to explain to Travers what the Forms were, the ages of the fellows, and a multitude of other school matters, while his father and Mr. Soames discussed local matters together.

At length ten o'clock struck.

"Well, we must be going. Come, William. It's not every boy who has the advantage of knowing the captain of his school before he gets there. I may take it that you'll keep an eye on him, Mr. Wardour?"

"Oh, yes!" laughed Dick. "I'll keep an eye on him; but, of course, he must fight his own battles."

Then the visitors went, and Travers lay awake half the

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night, thinking what a fine school Greyhouse must be, and what a fine fellow the captain of Greyhouse was.

Thus the forlorn little boy was launched upon the great ocean of public-school life. As Wardour had said, he had to look after himself, and fight his own battles; but he fought them very feebly, and was considerably knocked about in the course of his first term. "Sir Billy" was the nickname which he earned by innocently printing his full title, "Sir William Percival Travers, Bart.," across the flyleaf of the first lesson-book—a Virgil—dealt out to him.

The book was shown all round the Lower Fourth, and great was the laughter, greater the storm of jeers, and overwhelming the number of sly kicks, pushes, and ear-pullings he received from those of his Form-mates who were of a malicious and bullying disposition. The lad was soon taught that a simple "Travers" was all that he was to be known by at Greyhouse, save when he was addressed as Sir Billy, which was nearly always.

A worse fate befell Sir Billy than the ragging of the Lower Fourth. Idling about the corridors of his House—he was in South House, and so was Wardour—one day during the first week of the term, thinking how nice it must be to be dead, he was hailed in stentorian tones by Eccles, captain of football, whose rightful fag was in hospital with mumps. Eccles wanted somebody to get tea for him and "wash up" afterwards, so he bagged Sir Billy forthwith.

Eccles, whose hand was as heavy as his shoulders were broad, retained Sir Billy after his fag proper was released from hospital, and Wardour felt sorry for Billy. The captain would have bagged the youngster for himself had he not been already suited. Wardour knew Eccles's nature. Eccles was rich, popular—in a way—on account of his prowess as a three-quarter back, and lorded it over every fellow, big and little, with the exception of a few in the Sixth, chief of whom was the captain of the school. Eccles was envious of that position. He knew that the captaincy might have been his had he possessed those very desirable things called brains. As it was, he had only been promoted to the Sixth because, having turned nineteen, he was really too big to remain any longer in the Upper Fifth, where he had stuck for three years, gaining marks by the simple process of making the clever fellows do his exercises and coach him in his construing.

So Sir Billy, never at all happy, became most despondent, and let his mind dwell more than ever on the pleasures of lying in a quiet grave where he would be out of reach of Eccles and the smaller bullies in the Lower Fourth.

Now and again Wardour gave the young 'un an encouraging pat on the back, and told him to cheer up. Every fellow, he added, must go through this sort of thing at first; it would be all right afterwards. But Sir Billy derived little joy from looking forward to the future; his aches and bruises kept his mind intent on the present.

When he went "home"—that is to Mr. Soames's—for Easter, he was very little happier. The Wardour boys, with the exception of the Greyhouse captain, despised him, and considered him a "moke"; they would, perhaps, have resorted to other methods than taunts if it had not been for their eldest brother, of whom they stood in wholesome awe.

Sir Billy sighed away his short Easter vacation, and, with a deeper sigh, returned to Greyhouse for the summer term, to find his master no whit changed. Eccles knew Wardour took an interest in his fag, and bullied that fag accordingly.

This was Wardour's term, he being the crack cricketer of the school. Footballs were put away, and Eccles's popularity was consigned to limbo with them. He formed part of the tail of the First Eleven. Wardour was the idol of Greyhouse in the summer; he was the big scorer and the mighty hitter. Eccles was nobody. Therefore, Eccles took it out of Sir Billy, knowing that this method of retaliation could not fail to annoy the captain of the school, who, by the way, had not forgotten his orders, and since January had been putting down all fighting with a stern hand.

CHAPTER 2. A Cowardly Act!

"Hi, Brown!"

"Yes, Eccles?"

"Send Travers to me, and look sharp about it!"

"Yes, Eccles."

It was seven o'clock in the evening, and Eccles, lounging across two chairs in the seniors' common-room of South House, was in a very bad temper.

South had just wrested the championship from Headmaster's in the final of the House matches. Eccles had been bowled for a duck, and Wardour had rattled up a century. This had not tended to put Eccles into a sweet frame of mind. Furthermore, not having worked up his Plato from a crib that morning, Eccles had made hopeless blunders in his

construing, and had been severely hauled over the coals by Mr. Forbes, the Greyhouse classical swell, who had used words which plainly evinced the fact that he considered the mighty Eccles a dunce. All circumstances considered, therefore, Eccles did not feel amiable.

"Please, Eccles, I've looked everywhere, and can't find Sir B—I mean, Travers!"

Brown, of the Lower Fourth, had come back without executing his errand, and now stood trembling before the great man.

"You can't? Come here! Closer, closer! Wait, though! Get me that drill-stick!"

It was whimperingly fetched from the corner.

"Now bend over! No; you're too near! Further off—further, I tell you! Now then, take that, and that, and that! And now"—flinging the stick at the sobbing junior—"go and find Travers, and don't come back without him!"

Several seniors, preferring the airy common-room to the stuffiness of their studies, were standing near the window, talking over the events of the match. They took no notice whatever of Eccles; such scenes were only too usual to call for any comment. Besides, Eccles was not a man to be tampered with.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, during which Eccles remained silent, and nursed his wrath. Then Brown reappeared, with Sir Billy at his heels.

"Oh, here you are a last! You can go, Brown!" (Exit Brown in a great hurry.) "Now come here, you sneaking, white-lipped little brute!"

Sir Billy did not cringe or whimper, however; nor did he look his fag-master boldly in the face. The fellows by the window, more interested in the new arrival than they had been in Brown, could not help observing that Sir Billy wore a dazed, puzzled expression. There was no sign of fear in his eyes; he regarded Eccles—as it seemed to Eccles—rather curiously, vaguely, as if he were calculating what amount of fresh torture might be in store for him.

"Now," said Eccles, heaving himself up and glaring at the Lower School boy—"now, Sir William Percival Travers—now, you young pig, I have an account to settle with you! When I changed for cricket after dinner I found that my boots had not been cleaned, and so had to scrape them myself. Now then, what have you to say?"

Sir Billy, having nothing to say, said it.

"What have you to say?" thundered Eccles.

Still Sir Billy stared blankly at his persecutor. He could not have spoken then had you offered him twenty pounds a word. He seemed to be dreaming. What with the heat—some juvenile tormentor had stolen his hat—and what with Eccles, and the Lower Fourth fellows, and grinding for exams, he felt more than a bit queer. He was conscious that Eccles was talking to him, but did not quite know what Eccles was saying. Once he fancied Eccles's lips shaped the word "boots," but Sir Billy didn't know anything about boots, or anything else for that matter—at that moment.

Some curiously, some a little pityingly, the big fellows by the window awaited the issue of this very one-sided conversation. They had not long to wait.

Quite overcome with passion, Eccles lifted his heavy hand and hit the little boy across the face with cruel force. Sir Billy tottered back, but did not utter a cry.

"Oh, sulky—ch?" cried Eccles, springing off his two chairs. "I'll teach you!"

He gripped Sir Billy by the coat-collar, and lifted him clean off his feet. Then, letting him fall to the floor, he bent down and mercilessly struck his fag across his white cheek again and again. Then, by way of finishing the task he had in hand, he picked Sir Billy up and flung him into a corner.

But as he did so—as Sir Billy fell all in a crumpled, limp, forlorn heap, as the fellows by the window turned away, feeling sick and disgusted, even the hardest of them—Wardour entered the common-room. One glance showed him the situation. His heart jumped into his mouth when he caught sight of Billy's pallid face, with blood coming from the lips. He confronted Eccles.

"You coward!" he said.

And he let out at Eccles so straight and true that Eccles reeled over the chairs he had been recently lying on, breaking the back of one of them in his fall, and so measured his length on the floor.

But, with a bellow, he was on his feet again.

"You shall pay for that!"

Before he could spring upon Wardour, however, half a dozen fellows had interposed.

"Not here, Eccles—not in the common-room, man!"

"I'll meet Eccles," said Wardour quietly, "behind the gym. after tea. I'm going to see what's wrong with this kid now."

So saying, he knelt down by Sir Billy. Eccles still struggled to get at Wardour, but the others held him back, remonstrating with him as they did so.

"Not in here, Eccles; it wouldn't do. There'd be an awful row!"

At length Eccles ceased his struggles.

"Very well," he muttered; "behind the gym. after tea."

With these words he allowed himself to be led to his own room.

"Travers, what's up?" murmured Wardour kindly, as he bent over Sir Billy. "Come! Can't you hear me? Get some water, one of you fellows; he's fainted!"

Water was promptly brought. Soon Sir Billy's fair hair was a draggled mass, and his collar and shirt were soaked, but still he did not open his eyes.

"I'll take him to the matron," said Wardour, lifting the little chap very gently.

When Mother Parkes, matron to South House, saw Sir Billy, she sent for the doctor straightaway.

"What has happened, Mr. Wardour? Poor little boy! He's not been at all himself lately. He should never have been sent here. What with his lessons and the other boys' unkind ways, poor dear, he's almost going wrong in his head! But he's bleeding! Who has done this?"

"He—he fell down," said Wardour; "someone was rough with him. I'm—I'm inquiring into it. It's all right, Mrs. Parkes; I'll see into it. Please say nothing to any of the masters or the Head; leave it to me!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Great Fight.

One of the seniors must have been indiscreet, or perhaps the row in the South-room was observed by a boy in the corridor—at any rate, the news ran round the hall, as quietly but as surely as possible, that Wardour was going to fight Eccles behind the gymnasium directly tea was over.

Half an hour intervened between tea and prep, so there would be plenty of time for the maul.

There came an unwonted hush over the hall, and the solitary master on duty, sitting at the high table with a book—according to custom—wondered greatly thereat. Appetite vanished; the greediest Greys reaped a perfect harvest of "slabs." Stealthily whispering took the place of the usual babel. Under ordinary circumstances the final House match would have been the subject of excited and high-voiced discussion; but the coming fight far, far transcended the House cricket in importance. Such a thing had not happened in the memory of the oldest there—the captain of the school fighting with another monitor!

The Greys could only gulp their tea—they couldn't eat—and when the master on duty hammered the table for grace, every fellow was on his feet in a second, quivering with excitement. Then pell-mell Greyhouse poured out of the hall, down the long quadrangle into the playground, across it, and brought up finally on the old milling-ground behind the gym. It was a suitable spot. No window overlooked it. It was a bare space, with a tall, dense hedge on one side, and the back of the gym, on the other—about as private and as nice an arena as you could well wish for.

Conversation was still carried on in low tones. It soon got to be known that the fight was all about Sir Billy. Sir Billy's guardian had asked Wardour to keep an eye on the "beastly kid," and all that, and Wardour couldn't very well do anything to another monitor for licking his own fag, or he'd have walked into Eccles long ago; but this time Eccles had been extra nasty, and Wardour had knocked him down.

"And gave him a couple of pretty eyes. Didn't you see them getting black at tea?"

"Pat won't give Wardour the schol. if he hears of this."

"What does Wardour care? He's always got plenty of tin."

"No; his people are jolly hard up."

"Well, he's going to fight Eccles."

"D'you think he'll whack him?"

"Can't say—hope so. Eccles is beastly strong, and bigger than Wardour."

"But Wardour is too good for him with the gloves."

"But this is fists, you ass—different! If Eccles uses his weight cleverly, Wardour will be whipped to a cert."

"Not he! He's too quick!"

"Well, it'll be a jolly good mill—Hallo! Here's Eccles! Not what you'd call sweet-looking, is he? Glad I'm not his fag."

"Shut up! Look—here's Wardour! I say, don't he look glum?"

"It's not funk. Tell you what—I'll bet you a bob he licks Eccles!"

"Oh, you never pay up! No good betting with you! Here, let's get near the front. Shove up, Greyhouse!"

"Don't jaw! Look, they're peeling! By Jove!" And the speaker stopped with open mouth to gaze upon the combatants' sinews.

Such were the "voces populi" that preceded a dead hush. Wardour and Eccles had stripped down to their undervests.

Hallam, a chum of Wardour's, was holding the captain's clothes, while Bannerman, of the Upper Fifth, was looking after Eccles. The other fellows in the Sixth were pushing back the crowd and making the ring larger.

"Greyhouse rules," said a big fellow with a watch; "each round to last two minutes, with half a minute interval, and fight till one has had enough, and says so, or is knocked out and can't come up to time. Stand back, will you! Get back, I say!"

The crowd receded like a circular wave. There was now a complete silence; every one present was on the tip-toe of expectation.

"Get ready!" said the umpire, looking at his watch. "And don't forget to break away when I call 'Time!'"

The two seniors stood up to each other—Eccles with a dark look on his heavy face, Wardour white and determined. The silence was so intense that the ticking of the umpire's watch could be heard distinctly by those near him. The umpire gave the signal, and stepped to the side of the ring.

Eccles immediately lunged savagely at Wardour, who stepped quickly back, so that the other's blow fell short. Eccles followed him up and lunged again. Still Wardour simply avoided him. Three or four times Eccles let go from the shoulder with all his force, but Wardour coolly turned his head, parried the blows, or dodged nimbly out of the way. Eccles stood still, breathing hard, and looked at him. Some of the young 'uns were beginning to think that Wardour was faking it. Why didn't he go in and finish Eccles off? The seniors knew better, and didn't ask absurd questions.

"Time!"

The moments of grace over, they faced each other again. Eccles, whose second had given him a tip or two, didn't rush in so wildly this round. He waited. Nothing loth, Wardour danced round him, hit him on the neck, then rapped him over the nose, and was giving quite a scientific display of what agility can do with mere brute strength, when Eccles let out with extraordinary force and got well home over Wardour's heart. The captain fell back against the ring of spectators. Seeing his advantage, Eccles followed up with another of his bull-like rushes; but Wardour had just enough breath to be able to dodge the savage blow Eccles intended to plant on his jaw. Had this reached its destination, the fight would have ended then and there, and Eccles would have bullied Greyhouse, great and small, with impunity during the remainder of his stay at the school.

A great gasp of relief went up from the crowd when it was seen that Wardour had escaped the blow, and luckily the round ended at that moment, Wardour thus gaining a brief respite.

"Time!"

The third round commenced.

Wardour looked as confident and even more sternly bent on thrashing the other than he did at first. Eccles had plucked up spirit after getting in that straight left. It was evident that he intended to force the fighting. They sparred swiftly for a few seconds, and then Eccles brought his right round with an ugly swing. He forgot his guard, but Wardour saw his chance and jumped in with a smart right and left over the body, and finished with a crack between the eyes which made the spectators shiver. Eccles lunged blindly, blinking like an owl the while. Wardour parried the great swings of his adversary, and hammered away for dear life, now on the nose, now on the jaw, on the body, on the neck, and again between the eyes. Still Eccles, grimly accepting the punishment, fought game as a pebble. The round over, they sat panting and bleeding until the brief half-minute ended, when they jumped up like mastiffs, and, paying small attention to the maxims they had imbibed from the gym-instructor, went at each other with both hands. Once Eccles sent Wardour reeling back with a smashing blow over the ear; but Wardour faced him again, and the Greys around yelled and cheered in a deafening chorus, shrieking out advice and warnings until the place was a pandemonium of tumultuous cries.

"Time!"

But as Wardour turned towards his corner, Eccles, disregarding all the laws of honourable combat, rushed madly at his opponent.

"Look out, Wardour!" cried a hundred voices.

The captain twisted round just in time to dodge his head. Eccles's huge fist shot past his cheek, just grazing his hair. Then Wardour put all his righteous rage into a tremendous hook-hit which took Eccles beneath the chin, and fairly lifted him off the ground, ere he fell in a heap.

"I declare Wardour the winner!" cried the umpire. "Eccles fought foul."

But Wardour was the winner in any case. Eccles couldn't get up.

When it was seen that Eccles was unable to renew the combat, a tremendous cheer broke forth. Again and again

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 265.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,
Order Early.

it peeled out. The terror of Greyhouse had been vanquished. Every kick or blow he had ever inflicted was avenged.

Wardour put on his coat and walked over to Eccles, who was just coming round.

"Here, take my arm, old man," he said. "I hope you're not hurt much?"

Bannerman assisting, he raised Eccles to his feet, and gave him his coat. Eccles sulkily took the frankly extended hand of his conqueror.

"It was a fluke," he said, scowling. "Next time it will go differently."

And then he walked away, leaning on Bannerman's arm.

As for Wardour, he, as in duty bound, went straight to the Head and told him that it had been his painful duty to break a rule he himself was supposed to enforce, in that he had just concluded a fight with another monitor.

CHAPTER 4.

How Wardour Went Back to Greyhouse.

Sir Billy, looking pale, went home a week after the other fellows did. Mr. Soames met him at Petershall station.

"Well, William," cried the stout solicitor, "what's all this I hear about your getting into trouble?"

"It wasn't my fault. I couldn't understand him," said Billy meekly.

They began to walk along the quiet streets towards Mr. Soames's house.

"Somebody knocked you down—eh?"

"Yes—at least, I had a licking."

"Queer way of administering punishment, must say."

What's his name—Meccles, Teckles—"

"Eccles," corrected Billy, with a faint smile.

"Ah! Nice sort, wasn't he—gentlemanly and all that, but quick-tempered?"

"He was the biggest cad at Greyhouse!" cried Billy, with unthought wrath. "He bullied everybody, and almost killed me. And Wardour stuck up for me, and licked Eccles, and they took his scholarship away; and—and—and—it was all my fault, and I don't care if I die now! I've ruined old Wardour!"

With this Sir Billy burst into tears for the first time in the solicitor's memory. Never before had he seen his ward so distressed.

"Here, cheer up, William. It's not so bad as that. Here, don't cry, little man; we'll put that right. Tell me all about it."

So Sir Billy dried his eyes and told Mr. Soames all about it.

It had been common talk at Greyhouse that Wardour had lost the scholarship owing to the plucky way he had championed Sir Billy. When Wardour sadly took his departure from Greyhouse, he was escorted to the station by all the fellows who were catching later trains. In the history of the school there had never been such a "send-off" before.

Well, Mr. Soames heard Sir Billy out; then, without delay, he hunted up the printed particulars he possessed of Greyhouse School, and found out who the governors were. Then Mr. Soames wrote letters, and held interviews, and actually went as far as Scotland to interview the Rev. the Headmaster of Greyhouse. All this time Wardour was stewing up for a Civil Service exam., his dreams of a Varsity career having been dispelled by the Head's decision regarding the Greyhouse Scholarship, which was given to the second monitor—a quiet, studious sort of fellow that nobody cared much about.

A governors' meeting was held a few days before the Christmas term began, and Mr. Soames attended it by invitation of the chairman—General Lord Chilvers, V.C.

Mr. Soames talked, the governors listened, and presently Lord Chilvers turned to the Head.

"It seems to me, sir," said he, "that this Wardour has the right sort of stuff in him—the kind of fellow we want at Greyhouse—eh?"

"He was an excellent captain, and helped me in every way," said the Head, "but after enforcing very satisfactorily the rule I made about fighting, he broke it himself most flagrantly at the end of the term. I could not recommend him for the scholarship. I put it to your lordship—do you think I could?"

"You acted quite properly," said the chairman—"quite properly. He could not take the scholarship after breaking the rule in that way. Rules must not be broken. But, sir, the scholarship is given, I believe, to the captain of the school if, during the past twelve months, he has conducted himself well and upheld the rules in a creditable manner. Briefly, the captain of Greyhouse gets it if he has run straight during the three terms previous to his leaving?"

"That is what it amounts to," said the Head.

"Then," replied Lord Chilvers, gazing round the table, "what would you say, gentlemen, if Wardour remained another year at Greyhouse? That will obviate the difficulty. His father must have served under me in Afghanistan—"

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to be sure! it must be the very Wardour that saved my life! Now, gentlemen, I put it to the vote. If this boy behaves himself during the next three terms, we'll give him the scholarship?"

There was no dissentient voice. The headmaster was quite agreeable to the arrangement, as he really liked Wardour. So then Lord Chilvers wrote to Major Wardour, and they lunched together and talked of old times.

"One good turn deserves another," said the general to the major. "You knocked that Afghan rascal on the head—I'll see that your boy gets to Oxford safe enough!"

As for Sir Billy, when he got to know what his guardian had done for Wardour, he wondered how on earth he could ever have disliked Mr. Soames. As for the Greys, when they learnt that Wardour was going to put in another year at Greyhouse, and found it was Billy's guardian who had "worked" it, they forgave Billy nearly everything.

All the same, when Sir Billy returned to Greyhouse at the commencement of the Christmas term, he was still feeling very miserable. It was not his nature to be boisterously high-spirited at any time, a melancholy expression having descended to him from his ancestors, as well as a rather gloomy way of looking at things, but he could chirp upon occasions, and had been known to burst out laughing. It was a comfort to him to reflect that he would not have to stay at Greyhouse all his life.

In time he would grow up, go forth into the world, and belong to a club. In the holidays, Mr. Soames had told him that his name had been put down on the books of a great London club, and Sir Billy, who was informed at the same time that he would not have a chance of being elected a member for twelve or fifteen years, had got an idea that when he was a man he would live at his club, and spend his time sitting in a leather armchair reading the "Times," or scowling out of the window. There, at any rate, he would not be bullied; if any one ran after him—say, a fierce old colonel—he could call a cab and drive away.

You must know that Lord Chilvers, while paying a visit to Major Wardour, at Petersham, had made Sir Billy's acquaintance, the result being that Billy went to stay with the great general for a week, and had been made much of by his lordship's wife and daughters. It was during this visit that he was introduced to his future club. He was rather indignant, at the end of his visit, when Lady Chilvers and her daughters kissed him affectionately on the cheeks, and was glad no Greyhouse chap saw them. It was better, however, thought he, than being kicked.

Well, he was miserable at the opening of this Christmas term—more miserable than usual. If it hadn't been for Lord Chilvers, Wardour would have lost the Greyhouse scholarship—he hadn't won it yet, indeed—all through Sir Billy. If, after Eccles had licked him, Sir Billy had got up and gone away, there would have been no row between Eccles and Wardour, and no fight. But Sir Billy had just lain still "like a dead cat," and so Wardour had licked Eccles and forfeited the schol. This was how the Greys argued the case—this was the view they took of it. Of course, the maul between Eccles and Wardour was one of the most exciting pages in the history of Greyhouse, but the Greys would rather have gone without the fight and seen Wardour collar the schol.

So, although the affair covered Wardour with glory, it didn't do Billy too much good, and though he was now in his third term, and beginning to settle down and fall quite easily into the Greyhouse slang, his path was not strewn with roses. Another cause of his unpopularity was that, on account of the excellent coaching he had received from his tutors before he came to Greyhouse, he found himself, in school, above many boys considerably bigger and older than himself. At the end of the year his Form-master said he might get his remove into the Upper Fourth. Naturally, Sir Billy's scholarship and general prowess in matters intellectual did not win him the love and goodwill of the dunces beneath him, although they occasionally deigned to make him help them over a knotty point in Greek or algebra.

But Sir Billy was not only unhappy because he was unpopular with the Lower Fourth. He was unhappy because the fellow he now fagged for, a monitor named Hallam, was not on speaking terms with Wardour—who was, naturally, Sir Billy's king, hero, and everything else grand, and brave, and worthy of honour. It therefore gave Sir Billy pain when Hallam—who was once a great friend of Wardour's, and had seconded Wardour in the fight with Eccles—fell out with the captain, and the pain increased as, ever watchful, he observed the little fissure in their friendship widen into a great, yawning gulf.

(There will be another splendid long instalment of this grand new serial story in next Wednesday's issue of *The Gem Library*. Will you please hand this special number on to a friend, so that he can read the story without missing the opening instalment.)

NEXT
WEDNESDAY

"THE LAST HOPE!"

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Nurse Millington, care of H. Baskett, Superintendent Indian Police, Kohat, N.W. Frontier Province, India, wishes to correspond with boy or girl in Newport, Mon.

L. R. Davies, Box 106, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with South Wales or Australian reader.

F. P. Hill, 124, Princes Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English or Irish girl reader, age 17 to 18 years.

Julia Jones, Wyndham, Service Street, Hampton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with English boy readers, age 16.

D. H. Cairns, Day Dawn, West Australia, wishes to correspond with Parisian readers.

Edwin James, 113, Market Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with English readers, age 14 or 15.

M. Twomey, 6, Spring Street, Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia, wishes to exchange picture postcards with Scotch or Irish readers.

George Quinn, Box 53, Pt. Adelaide (Post-office), South Australia, wishes to correspond with a Catholic boy or girl.

J. Ellis, Wood Street East, Hamilton, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in Rotherhithe.

Mary Morris, Box 991, G.P.O., Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with British boy, age about 17.

(Miss) I. Maclean, Adams Street, Coraki, Richmond River, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with British readers, age about 20.

G. Hurtle, 94, George Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in all parts of the world, with a view to philately.

M. S. Baxter, Box 101, Newcastle, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with an English girl reader, age 16 or 17.

J. W. Germain, Darton Street, Sandwell, Port Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with an English girl reader, age 14 to 15.

Edward Noltie, 2451, Waverley Street, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with British boy or girl, age 15.

L. L. Lee, 873, North Bridge Road, Singapore, wishes to correspond with an Irish or Welsh reader.

T. Portas, Box 4, Hastings, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with British girl, age 17 or less.

Murdock Campbell, 83, Russell Street, Westport, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a Scotch reader, age 13 or 14.

F. Spiers (age 16), 134, Moorhouse Avenue, Christchurch, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a reader interested in conjuring.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 265,
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OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"THE LAST HOPE!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Our next long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's, entitled as above, relates how Tom Merry, through no fault of his own, drifts into wrongdoing until, almost before he realises it, he finds himself in danger of being branded as a thief. Desperate situations call for desperate measures, and Tom Merry stakes everything on a final, forlorn chance of redeeming his honour.

"THE LAST HOPE!"

is written in Martin Clifford's best style, and, together with the second grand instalment of our wonderful new Public-school serial,

"SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!"

forms a budget of good reading matter which it would be hard indeed to beat.

N.B.—There is a tremendous rush on "The Gem" Library just now, so my regular readers are warned to

ORDER IN ADVANCE.

A Club for Swansea Readers.

I have much pleasure in giving publicity to the following letter from one of my Swansea chums, who writes on behalf of the Swansea Gemites' and Magnetites' Club:

"Swansea Gemites' and Magnetites' Club,
Swansea.

"Dear Editor,—I beg (on behalf of my club) to put our club before your notice. The object of this club is to introduce 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet,' and, of course, 'The Penny Popular' to those who have not yet started reading them. Now, our club only consists at present of seven members, and I desire to get more to join, and the only way I can get in touch with possible members is to ask you to publish the following notice:

"ALL READERS WHO WISH TO JOIN OUR LEAGUE,
PLEASE COMMUNICATE WITH W. D. JAMES,
10, SHORT STREET, SWANSEA."

"The more members we get, the more readers we shall get for you.

"My League wishes to put the following question before you, and I have written it out on a separate sheet. I hope you will answer same, as it is sure to be of interest to every reader.—Sincerely yours,

"W. D. JAMES."

The query my correspondent mentions, runs as follows:

"Kindly let us know what the following signifies: Every time we have a new Sovereign on the throne, the head of each Sovereign on the coinage faces a different direction, whereas on the postage stamps the head always remains facing the same direction?"

Firstly, I must say that I am glad to hear from Master W. D. James, and I wish all prosperity to the Swansea Gemites' and Magnetites' Club. I have no doubt the publication of this letter will have the desired effect of increasing the membership. Now, as to my chum's query: There is no definite reason why the heads of successive British Sovereigns should be reversed on the coins and not on the postage stamps. The practice was originated on the coins, I believe, simply as a compliment to the reigning Sovereign, and was never extended to the stamps. It is one of those practices which must simply be put down to custom. The precedent having been once established, the custom was continued, and will no doubt be persisted in now for many a long day.

Replies in Brief.

"An Old Reader" (Worcester).—Go to the studios of the play producers. They will give you all information.

F. Omahony (Cork).—Refer to our "Back Numbers Department," The Broadway, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.

F. Barnes (Ardwick).—See answer to J. Omahony.

"Factory Lad" (Doncaster).—Very many thanks for photo and letter.

"Harold A." (Fulham).—Use milk instead of ink. Upon rubbing with a dirty finger it will appear. Paper without a shiny surface is best.

A. C. (Leytonstone), and others.—I hope to publish a "Gem" portrait gallery in a very short time.

Miss R. Roberts (Sydney, Australia).—Many thanks for your nice letter. I am sorry not to be able to accede to your request, but I am quite unable to supply my photo to all the many readers who have been kind enough to ask me for it.

T. W. Holbrook (Shrewsbury).—I am sorry your letters have not been answered before. I am afraid it is hardly feasible for me to have a story written on the lines you suggest.

E. Angel (Notting Hill).—I am afraid I cannot give you the required information. You could get it by writing to The Editor, "The Aeroplane," 166, Piccadilly, London, W.

HOW TO BECOME A RAILWAY SERVANT.

By railway servants, I mean porters, guards, ticket-inspectors, and stationmasters, all of whom are under one common control—that of the superintendent of the line.

There are several classes of porters. First there is the platform porter, whose duty it is to open and close the carriage doors, call out for the benefit of passengers the train's destination, and, in fact, to make himself generally useful to the travellers. For this work he is paid from 16s. to 19s. per week, in addition to "tips."

Next we have the porter who is solely employed for labelling luggage. He receives from 18s. to 22s. per week, which is supplemented by tips.

Then we have the porter who stows luggage away, fetches luggage from people's houses, and so on. Besides obtaining tips, he receives about 17s per week from the company.

We now come to guards. First, there are the passenger guards, of which there are three classes—(1) those on local trains; (2) those on slow trains running on a main line, and (3) guards on expresses. These men receive from 25s. to 40s. per week, according to which class they are in.

Then, on a long journey, the guard, after having accomplished a part of the journey, is relieved by another man, who is paid 27s. per week as relief guard.

A ticket-inspector, who has to inspect tickets at certain points and collect excess fares, is paid from 35s. to 40s. per week, and has the chance of becoming a permanent inspector on a corridor express.

Should you wish to secure a post in one or other of the above capacities, personal application to the stationmaster of the station nearest your home should be made. He will then write to the superintendent of the line, if he approves of your application.

Stationmasters are responsible for the condition and order of their station, and are of three grades. (1) Those in charge of large stations, who have once been clerks of the company, and are paid a large salary, and (2) those who have come from other company's stations, or (3) those who have once been porters or guards on the same line. Both (2) and (3) are paid from 25s. to 47s. per week.

Next Week: How to Become a Postman.

THE EDITOR.

READ THIS GRAND STORY!

THE ANARCHIST TRACKER!

A Thrilling, Long, Complete Tale, Dealing with

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF

SEXTON BLAKE, DETECTIVE

AND TINKER AND PEDRO—HIS ASSISTANTS.



Spearing stepped neatly into the cab, and gripped the Anarchist in a hold as powerful as that of a bear. Sexton Blake opened the trap, and looked down into the cab. "Where to, sir?" he asked with a smile. "Scotland Yard!" Spearing jerked shortly. (See page 8.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Fight in the Street—A Recruit for Mr. Montague Small.

IT was just before eleven o'clock one dark night that a tellish man, walking with a particularly stiff bearing, turned into Great Mare Street, Soho, a thoroughfare which has not a very enviable reputation. A good many men find a home there, and they are men of the type who, despite the fact that they seldom seem to work, keep on living in comparative comfort. Most of them are Anarchists—some dangerous, some comparatively harmless.

At the present time there were more Anarchists than usual inhabiting Great Mare Street. In a few weeks' time, England was to receive a visit from the young King of Hervia, against whom the Anarchists bore a bitter grudge; and by a curious coincidence there was unusual activity in Anarchist circles in London.

Consequently, the authorities had decided to keep a very careful eye upon Great Mare Street and its neighbourhood, and more especially upon one Peter Svenk, a notorious Anarchist leader, who was living there under the name of Mr. Montague Small.

The man who turned into Great Mare Street paused under one of the few street-lamps which chance or intention had not overlooked, and pulled a letter from his pocket, as if to read the address on it. The light, slanting down upon his face, revealed the rather broad features and fair moustache of a typical German, while when he tilted his hat back he showed a mop of fair, closely-cut hair, which seemed to stand straight up on end.

Muttering something in German, and thrusting the letter back into his pocket, the man walked briskly down the street with the carriage that told of service in the army of the Kaiser Wilhelm. The street was deserted at this hour, possibly because there was an uncomfortable drizzle of cold rain in the air; but as the German reached about the middle—a spot at which a turning branched off to either side—a man emerged from an alley and stumbled up against him.

"Himmel!" the German growled savagely, his eyes flashing in warlike fashion.

The man who had stumbled into him pulled himself together, threw back his shoulders, and stared aggressively at the German. He was a bigish man, apparently of the artisan class, and rather seemed as if he had been drinking. If he had been sober, surely he would have apologised and passed on.

"Call it my fault, don't yer!" he growled.

"I should you advise out of mein vay to stand," the German snapped; "or I vill your brains punch!"

"Ho!" the other observed sarcastically, at the same time rolling back the cuffs of his coat. "Will yer, yer undesirable alien?"

This taunt apparently raised all the fighting instinct of the German, and, with a deep-throated growl, he sprang at the other man. Hands locked, legs were intertwined, and both fell to the muddy pavement, fighting for all they were worth.

Out of a side street came the bulky form of a very large policeman, and a second later he was mixed up in the fight too, which, by chance or design, was taking place right under the light of a lamp.

The fight did not last much longer now. By a dexterous wriggle, the artisan managed to struggle free from the fight and take to his heels, and a moment later the fat policeman had gone off in hot pursuit. Only the German, a red cut on his forehead, remained behind.

With a staggering motion, he rose to his feet, and supported himself by leaning against the lamp-post. His face was ghastly, an effect which was heightened by the stain of blood.

From the house that stood nearest a white-haired man peered cautiously from

one of the windows, and Sexton Blake—for it was the detective who was impersonating a German—saw him. All had happened precisely as the detective had planned. A man employed by him had pretended to fight him, while Chief-Inspector Spearing of Scotland Yard, disguised as a constable, had finished the business.

Now it only remained to be seen whether the desired climax would be attained. As Sexton Blake stood limply against the lamp-post, with the knowledge that he was being watched by Mr. Montague Small himself, outside whose house the fight had been planned to take place, his hopes rose considerably.

As if fainting, the detective slipped down to the pavement, and groaned loudly. Apparently he never glanced towards the window, but in reality not a motion of Mr. Montague Small's escaped him. He moaned again as he heard the door of the house open, and again, more feebly, as Small bent over him.

"What is wrong, my friend?" the latter asked quickly, after glancing up and down the street.

"Der police," Sexton Blake answered; and, though his voice was faint, he managed to instil a very savage note into it. "It was for mein honour I to fight have been forced. Ach, mein kopf—der police—mein head!"

Once more Mr. Montague Small glanced up and down the road, then down again at the well-built man before him. He and his brother Anarchists were always willing to add good recruits to their ranks. It was that knowledge which had caused Sexton Blake to adopt this plan.

"You are with friends," Mr. Montague Small said; and his foreign accent was more noticeable than usual. "Perhaps we shall be able to show you a way to vengeance."

"Vengeance?" Sexton Blake echoed eagerly, and, apparently by a great effort, rose to his feet. "It is that you of Anarchists are?"

"Hush!" Mr. Montague Small ordered sharply; but there was a look of triumph in his eyes. "Let me help you in to where your—brothers are waiting."

And Sexton Blake, leaning heavily upon the arm of Mr. Montague Small, allowed himself to be conducted into the house. His plan had succeeded better than he had dared to hope, and he had gained admission to the house which of all others he most desired just now to enter.

There was danger within those four walls, too; but that was quite of secondary importance to the detective, even if he gave it a thought at all.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Home of the Anarchists—A Great Speech—An Awkward Moment.

SEXTON BLAKE found the inside of the house in Great Mare Street to be distinctly badly lighted—anyway, so far as the hall and staircase were concerned. The former was quite bare of furniture, too. The rooms, however, were much better fitted, as Sexton Blake could see at a glance as he passed them.

"Where do you take me?" he asked feebly, in his thick, guttural English.

"Wait," Mr. Montague Small answered readily. "I take you to those who will help you to your vengeance—to those who are banded together against all oppression and tyrannical government!"

The detective swung his right arm upwards, the hand clenched.

"Long live Anarchy!" he cried.

"Long live Anarchy, brother!" Mr. Montague Small echoed in a whisper.

Sexton Blake felt particularly pleased with himself, for his highly-trained brain, always ready to receive and make use of the smallest impression, received one now. He was certain—as certain as if he had seen them—that Montague Small had bombs in this house. It was the triumphant note in the Anarchist's voice that told Sexton Blake this; and he was glad, more than ever, that he had succeeded in getting into the house.

Passing down a longish passage, Small pushed open a door, from which led a flight of stone steps, evidently leading down into the cellars of the house. Your Anarchist is fond of cellars—as any detective will tell you—even when he can safely hold his meetings in the ordinary rooms of a house. Possibly it lends that spice of mystery and danger to the proceedings which is necessary to keep him from wavering.

"You must follow alone here, brother," Small whispered. "The stairs are narrow."

"I follow, mein friend," Sexton Blake answered, purposely staggering against the wall and stumbling on the top step to show that he was weak.

The cellars, dimly lighted by a solitary gas-jet, were reached, and Small, pushing open a door, stepped into the only decently-lighted place that the detective had as yet seen in the house.

This was a large cellar, capacious enough to hold a hundred people; the walls and ceilings merely whitewashed, oil lamps hanging from hooks giving the light. The place was barely furnished—just a long table, and benches round it. On these benches sat a score or so of men of different nationalities, most of them smoking.

On the walls many sentences had been scratched, in as many different languages, all of them Anarchistic in their significance. Some had been written in red ink, probably so that they should appear to be inscribed in blood.

As Mr. Montague Small entered, Sexton Blake staggering behind him, every head was turned sharply in his direction, and several men rose to their feet as they caught sight of the stranger. One or two moved their hands instinctively towards their pockets.

"A new brother," Mr. Montague Small announced, speaking in French, a language which is usually spoken by Russians, Poles, Germans, and Italians. "A new brother, who is hot for vengeance. Already he has suffered at the hands of the cursed law. See where they have left the red mark upon his brow!"

Sexton Blake looked round from side to side, a wild glare in his grey eyes, and leant against the wall as if for support.

"Vive l'Anarchie!" he cried hoarsely, in French that smacked heavily of a German accent.

"Vive l'Anarchie!"

The cry was taken up and repeated by every man present.

Holding the detective's arm, Mr. Montague Small led the way to the head of the table, seated himself on the bench, and motioned the other to do the same. Sexton Blake obeyed, then drew a handkerchief from his pocket and bound it round his temples. He feared that in the strong light the nature of

his fake wound might be discovered. With the bandage round his head, he looked ferocious enough even to please the Anarchists, who eyed him keenly.

"Now, tell us who you are," Small said, "and we will tell you the glorious reason why we are here to-night; of the noble work—the world-awakening work—that we are here in England to fulfil!"

Sexton Blake, with his extensive knowledge of Anarchists and their methods, had reckoned upon all this, so that he was quite prepared to answer this demand. He rose to his feet rather weakly, and supported himself by resting one hand upon Montague Small's shoulder.

"My name is Adolph Schmidt," he said, speaking in French, his voice weak as if with suffering, "and I have been in this monarch-ridden country for six months. My Germany was bad enough, with its compulsory service in the army and its Kaiser; but here—the detective flung his arms up, and shook both hands in the air—here it is that Anarchy should live, for here it is that oppression is greatest, where the rich are richest, the poor poorest, and each man's hand is turned against the other!"

A murmur of approval greeted these words, and Sexton Blake continued:

"That is why I am glad that the things of to-night have happened, for they have brought me to you, who are trying to have vengeance for these wrongs, that I, too, may help in the great work. I am ready and willing!"

Sexton Blake sat down, and he saw that the men who had eyed him suspiciously no longer did so. His speech had won them over, and they were ready to regard him as a brother Anarchist.

"Swear him in!" a man cried from the farther end of the table. "Swear him in, Brother Svenk!"

Before Small lay a large book, a small knife, and a quill pen. He opened the book, and turned to the detective.

"Are you ready to join the brotherhood?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," Sexton Blake answered enthusiastically, "if it will bring me to my vengeance."

"Then bare your right arm."

Sexton Blake knew what was coming, for it was a custom of a good many of the Anarchist brotherhoods, and he did not hesitate. He rolled the sleeve back from his right arm, and he did not flinch as Small cut a nick in the flesh with the little knife. A few drops of blood flowed from the wound, and these the man caught dexterously with the quill pen.

"Sign!" he commanded.

And Sexton Blake, feeling a triumph which he took good care not to show, signed "Adolph Schmidt" in his own blood in the roll book of the Anarchists.

"And now to our great work!" Montague Small cried.

"And may our new brother bring us luck!"

The man paused, and looked round to see that every man present was paying proper attention before he continued.

"To-night," he said, "we are met here to settle the last matter with regard to ridding this earth of that tyrant the King of Herva. All is ready. It only now remains to choose the human instrument that shall finish the noble work."

Once more Sexton Blake rose to his feet, his eyes flashing, his whole face twitching with excitement, for he was a magnificent actor.

"Let me the work do, brothers!" he cried, in broken English. "It is that I persecuted have been. Let mein hand the work finish!"

Sexton Blake had little hope that this move would succeed, but he considered it worth trying. If he could get himself appointed to throw the fatal bomb, all would be well, and that was all that he desired. Small and his gang might go free for all he and Spearing cared, so long as the king left England in safety.

Montague Small rose to his feet, too, and laid a hand on the detective's arm.

"See what a recruit I have brought you, brothers!" he cried.

Murmurs of approval arose from all sides, from all but a man who was drinking from a bottle.

[Sexton Blake scents danger from the solitary Anarchist who does not join in the general chorus of approval which greets the new recruit. For a moment the awful thought occurs to the daring detective that his disguise has been penetrated—that he is discovered. But he has gone too far now to draw back, and he determines to go through with his self-imposed and infinitely dangerous task to the bitter end, and trust to luck and to his native wit to bring him safely out of the tight corner. How he succeeds in baffling the evil designs of the Anarchists, in spite of every peril, is thrillingly told in the long, complete tale of this famous detective, contained in No. 21 of "The Penny Popular." This splendid companion paper to "The Gem" Library also contains, every week, a grand complete story of Tom Merry's early school days, and a magnificent adventure story of Jack Sam, and Pete, the three famous comrades. Buy a copy of "The Penny Popular" to-day, and, when you have finished reading it, pass it on to a friend who may not have seen it.]