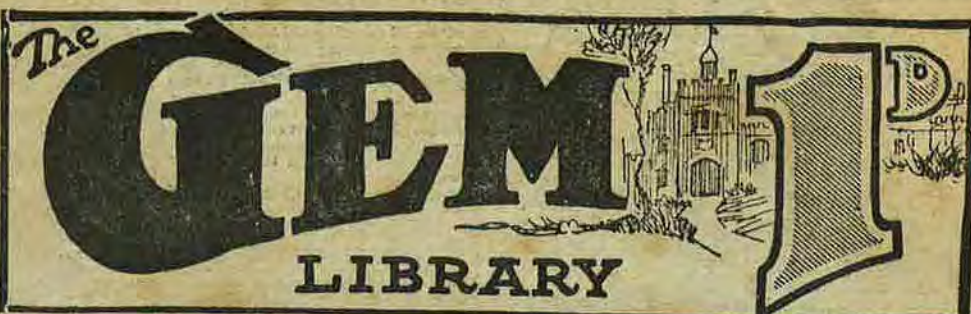


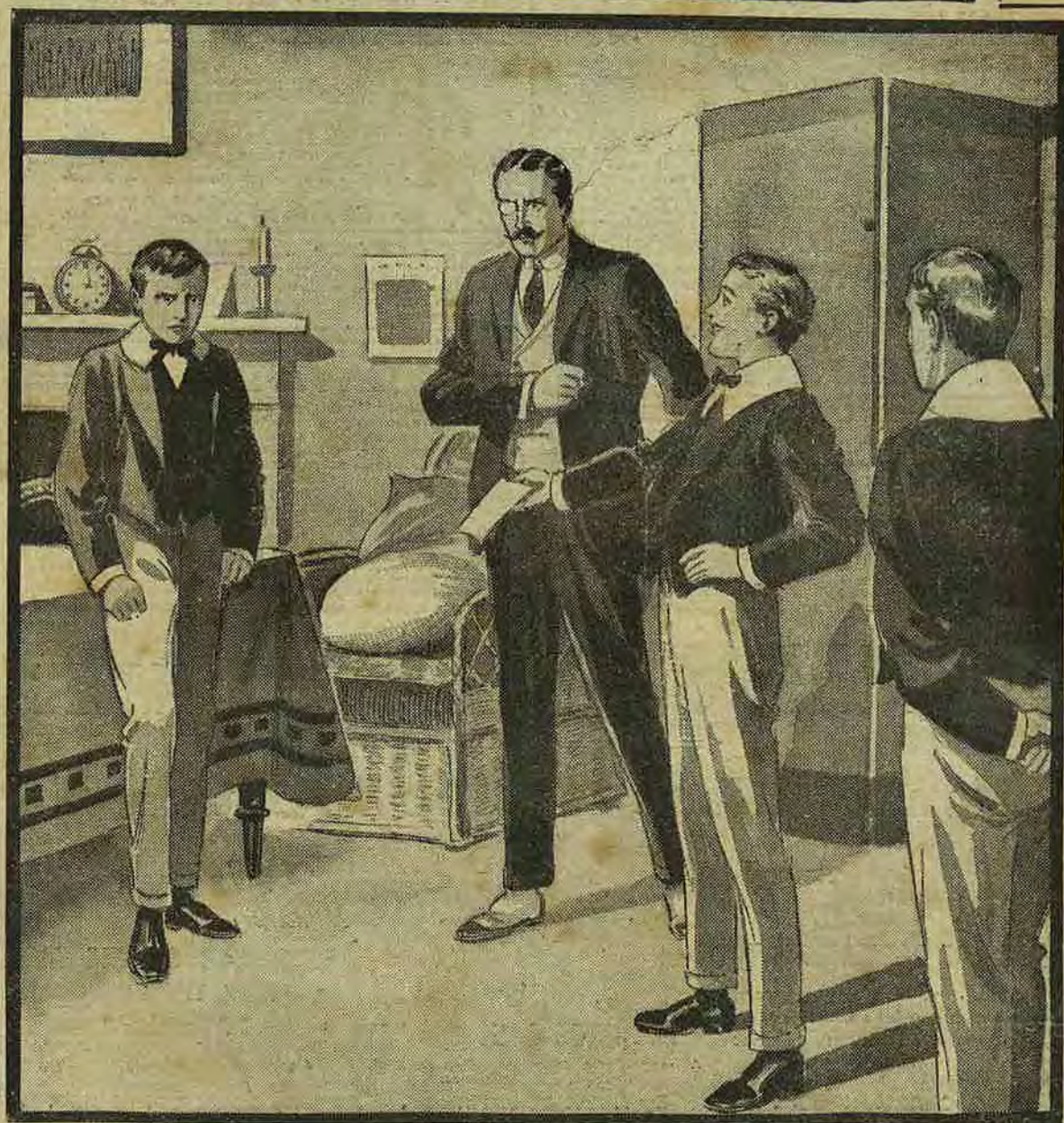
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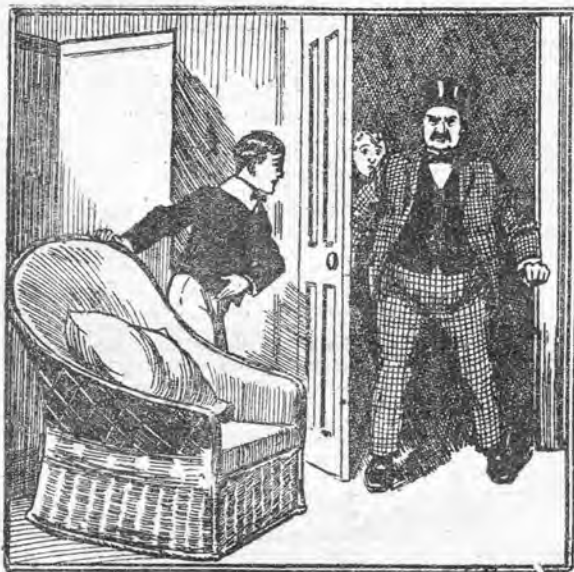
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CHAPTER 1. Taken to Tea.

DIGBY was sitting on the corner of the table in Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's, when Blake and Herries and D'Arcy came in. Dig had a note in his hand, which he had been reading for the fourth or fifth time, and there was a puzzled wrinkle on Dig's brow.

"It's all right!" announced Jack Blake.

"Quite all right!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy has come to the rescue like a man and a bwothah!"

"Come on, Dig!" said Herries.

Digby did not get off the table. He glanced at his chums, and then looked again at the note in his hand. Something about that note seemed to puzzle Digby of the Fourth; but he seemed pleased as well as puzzled.

"What's all right?" he asked, a little absently.

Blake looked surprised.

"Why, about tea, of course," he said. "Tom Merry came into the tuckshop while I was trying to soften Mrs. Taggles's hard heart, and get her to run a little tick until Saturday. These Shell bounders are standing an extra special tea in their study, and they've asked us to come. Hence these smiles. It's all right."

"Oh!" said Digby.

"Well, come on!" said Blake, still more surprised and a little indignant. "I should think you'd be pleased. We've been wondering whether we were going to get any tea at all, funds being in such a rotten state, and Gussy having wasted the last guinea in the study in reckless extravagance on new toppers—"

"Weally, Blake, it was only one new toppah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mildly. "I should not be likely to get more than one toppah for a guinea, I suppose. And I was not aware at the time that you chaps were stoney—"

Next Wednesday:

"FATTY WYNN'S HUNGER-STRIKE!" AND "THE CORINTHIAN!"

No. 291 (New Series), Vol. 7.

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THE BLACK SHEEP!

A splendid, new, long, complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Anyway, we're going to have tea with Tom Merry," said Herries, "so wake up and come along, Dig. What's the matter with you?"

"The fact is—" began Digby.

"The fact is, I'm hungry," said Blake briskly. "Come on!"

"I've had an invitation to tea—"

"It never rains but it pours," said Blake genially. "Who has been along asking us to tea now, like a giddy good Samaritan?"

Digby coloured a little.

"Not us!" he said. "Only me!"

"Oh! Only you!" said Jack Blake, with a sniff. "Don't say you accepted it, or I shall feel bound to bump you for deserting your pals in a time of distress."

"Yaas, wathah! It would be wotten bad form for you to accept the invitation, undah the cires, Dig," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"I haven't accepted it," Digby hurried to state. "I was going to ask the chap if you fellows could come, too."

"That's better. You needn't accept it now, as we're going to Tom Merry's quarters. Tell the chap you're much obliged, and you can't come, but you'll remember him next time we're stony. And come on! I'm hungry!"

"I suppose I could go now, as you chaps have got your tea somewhere?" said Digby.

"You can if you like, of course," said Blake, a little huffily. "If it's some special friend you don't want to disappoint. But Tom Merry has got sardines, and ham and eggs, and a cake."

"And strawbewwy jam!" said Arthur Augustus temptingly.

"And a pineapple!" said Herries. "As a matter of fact, we've accepted for you, Dig, so you'd better come along."

"Don't get an invitation from the Fifth every day," said Digby thoughtfully.

His chums stared at him. It was certainly rare for Fourth-Formers to be invited to tea by the great men of the Fifth. The Fifth were seniors, not quite so awe-inspiring as the Sixth, perhaps, but awfully majestic to the juniors. Between seniors and juniors there was a great gulf fixed.

"Do you mean to say that some Fifth-Form chap has asked you to tea?" demanded Blake.

"Yes."

"Well, that alters the case," said Blake considerably. "P'raps we'll let you go! Who's the Johnny?"

"Look at that," said Digby, holding out the note. "Young Frayne of the Third brought it to me ten minutes ago."

The chums of the Fourth looked at the note together. And all three of them frowned as they read the signature at the bottom. The note ran:

"Dear Digby,—I should be glad to see you to tea in my study, six sharp.—Yours,
G. CUTTS."

"Cutts of the Fifth," said Blake, with a portentous frown. "The blackest sheep at St. Jim's! The rotter! What is he asking you for? You sha'n't go!"

"Wathah not!" said D'Arcy. "I do not wegard Cutts of the Fifth as a suitable person for a youngstah like you to associate with, Dig."

"He's a betting cad!" growled Herries. "He plays bridge in his study, too, at nights—I know that. Keep clear of him!"

"And come along to Tom Merry's study," said Blake. Digby did not move.

"Chaps say a lot of things about Cutts," he remarked, "but he's been very civil to me lately. He helped me with Caesar yesterday, and saved me from a wiggling. I don't see that he could do me any harm. He has an awful swagger study in the Fifth passage, and fellows in his own Form are glad to go. I've heard of some of the Sixth hinting to Cutts to be asked into his study. He's jolly particular. It would be fun to have tea with the Fifth for once."

"Have you come into a fortune suddenly?" asked Blake.

"No, ass!"

"You haven't received a specially large remittance unexpectedly?"

"Of course I haven't!"

"Nor robbed a bank, and got the loot in your trousers' pockets?"

"No, fathead!"

"Then I can't see what Cutts wants with you," said Blake. "I can understand his making up to Gussy. Gussy gets fivers galore from his governor. Gussy has been buttered up beautifully by Cutts, but he's had the sense to let him alone."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I do not wegard Cutts as a person suitable to associate with," he remarked. "I have told him, in fact, that I do not approve of him."

"Well, he can't want to get anything out of me," urged Digby. "He knows I'm stony, and he knows I don't have a big allowance. I suppose you don't think he wants to teach me to play bridge and welsh me out of ninepence-halfpenny, do you?"

Blake reflected.

"I don't know what he's up to," he said at last, "but I know jolly well that he's up to no good. Perhaps he wants you to do something for him—carry a message to some beastly bookmaker, or smuggle tobacco into the school."

"I wouldn't do either," said Digby.

"Safer to keep out of his reach," said Blake. "Now, listen to your uncle, and don't be an ass. Come to Tom Merry's study. He's got ham and eggs and sardines—"

"And stwawbewwy jam—"

Digby looked a little obstinate. It was an honour to be asked to tea by a member of the mighty Fifth, and Cutts was well known for the excellence of his little feeds. And Cutts was merely a common or garden member of the Fifth, so to speak. He was the most swagger member of that Form. He was as well dressed as D'Arcy of the Fourth, which is saying a great deal. Cutts' opinion on a tie or a waistcoat was the very last word. If Cutts turned his trousers up, half the Middle School turned their trousers up. Cutts was the Petronus Arbiter of St. Jim's. Digby was flattered by the invitation, all the more because he could not possibly see how Cutts could profit by him in any way. He was not rich, and he was not distinguished. To Dig's simple mind, it was clear that Gerald Cutts meant to be kind, and that he was a decent fellow enough, in spite of the things that were whispered about him in the School House. He was a wild beggar in some ways, perhaps, but Dig was not bound to follow his ways.

Blake and Herries and D'Arcy exchanged glances. It was evident that Dig meant to accept the invitation. In fact, Dig was a little nettled at the grandfatherly ways in which his chums were taking care of him. Dig had a firm belief that he was quite able to take care of himself.

"Now, Dig, old man, you don't want to go to Cutts!" urged Blake.

"No harm if I do," said Dig.

"Well, perhaps not; but you can't touch pitch without being defiled, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Cutts is a wank outsidah!"

"Come on, Dig!" chorussed the three juniors persuasively.

"Rot!" said Dig. "Why shouldn't I go? I'm going!"

"To Cutts?"

"Yes," said Dig.

"Rats!" said Blake decidedly. "You're not! You're coming with us! If you won't walk, you'll be carried! We can't have you disgracing Study No. 6 by associating with Fifth Form bouncers! Collar him!"

"Look here!" roared Digby. "I—oh—Leggo, you asses! Leggo, you silly chumps! I—Yah!"

They did not let go!

They collared Dig, and whisked him off the table, and out of the study into the passage. Digby struggled violently in the grasp of his too-affectionate chums.

"Leggo!" he roared.

"Kim on!" said Blake.

Digby was rushed down the passage towards the Shell quarters. Unfortunately, there were three juniors in the passage, all of them laden with packages and bags, proceeding to Tom Merry's study. They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell, and they were taking in the supplies for that feed to which Blake was so keen upon taking Dig.

In the hurry and excitement of the moment, Blake & Co. did not observe them till too late. They rushed Digby down the passage, and rushed him right into the backs of the Terrible Three. There was a terrific collision.

"Oh!"

"Yah!"

"My hat!"

Bump—bump—bump! Crash! Smash!

CHAPTER 2.

The Feed that Didn't Come Off.

TOM MERRY went sprawling forward on his face. Manners and Lowther rolled over him, and Blake & Co. rolled over Manners and Lowther.

The parcels the Shell fellows had been carrying crashed upon the floor.

There was an ominous crash of eggs, and there was a spurting and splashing of yolks over the sprawling juniors.

"Oh, great Scott!"

"What the—who the—how the—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Gerroff!"

Tom Merry sat up dazedly. He felt that he was sitting in something sticky. It was the jam—the strawberry jam! The jar had broken on the floor, and Tom Merry was in the jam, which would never be of service again for a study feed!

"Oh!" gasped Blake, as he rolled off Lowther's neck, Lowther helping him off with a terrific drive in the ribs.

"Oh, my hat! Sorry!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ow, cwumbs! Sowwy, deah boys!"

"Didn't see you!" panted Herries.

Digby did not speak. Digby had dashed away up the passage, and disappeared round the nearest corner. The juniors did not notice his flight for the moment.

The Terrible Three of the Shell staggered up, and they looked daggers at Blake and Herries and D'Arcy. The jam was gone, the eggs were smashed, and even the ham was not attractive-looking now. Herries' big boots had squashed

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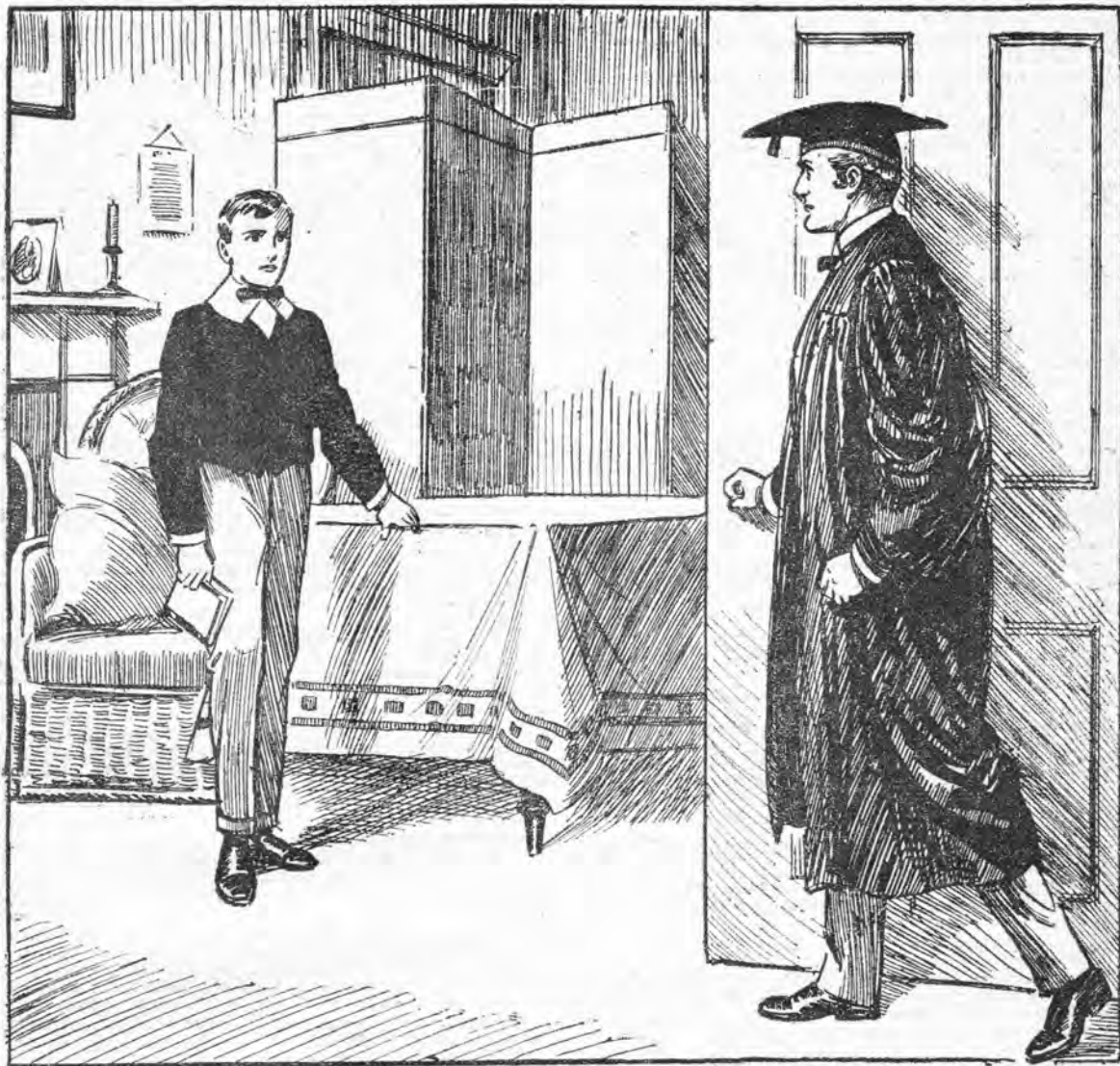
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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "FATTY WYNN'S HUNGER-STRIKE!" A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Cutts just had time to take up a "Football Annual" when a knock sounded at the door. "Come in!" said Cutts calmly, and Mr. Railton entered. "Has your visitor gone, Cutts?" he asked sternly. (See Chapter 4.)

upon it. The sardines, being in a tin, had escaped unhurt; but the sardines were all that had come through the disaster unscathed.

"You frabjous asses!" roared Tom Merry.

"You blithering cuckoos!" shrieked Manners.

"You chortling, burbling jabberwocks!" hooted Lowther.

"Awfully sorry!" gasped Blake. "We didn't see you in time; we were in a hurry. We were bringing Digby in to tea. Why, where is he?"

"Bai Jove! He's gone!"

"After him!" shouted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The three Fourth-Formers dashed at top speed down the passage, leaving Tom Merry & Co. in blank astonishment, amid the wreck of their provisions. Blake and Herries and D'Arcy disappeared round the corner in hot pursuit of Digby, and the Shell fellows looked at one another blankly.

"Mad!" said Lowther. "Mad as giddy hatters! In the name of all that's idiotic, what did you ask three raving lunatics to tea for, Tom Merry?"

"Quite potty, I should say!" gasped Manners. "Look at the eggs!"

"Look at the jam!" groaned Tom Merry. "Look at my bags!"

"The silly asses!"

"The frabjous chumps!"

"Scrape this jam off me, somebody!"

"I'm eggy all over!"

"The whole blessed lot mucked up!" hooted Lowther. "And not a blessed bob left to get anything else! I—I—I'll scalp those raving duffers! I'll slaughter 'em!"

"They won't get much tea now if they come!" growled Tom Merry. "There's only the sardines left! My word!"

The Shell fellows gathered up the fragments as well as they could, and bore them into their study. There they scraped off jam and smashed egg, with snorts of fury. That tea in Tom Merry's study had been intended to be a jolly little celebration. Tom Merry, in the kindness of his heart, had asked Study No. 6, as soon as he learned that Study No. 6 were stony. The result was not encouraging to kindness of the heart. Instead of the cosy and plentiful tea, there would be nothing but bread-and-butter and sardines.

Hence the Terrible Three were not in a good temper as they prepared that meagre entertainment.

And when, ten minutes later, Blake and Herries and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in breathless, the Shell fellows met them with grim looks.

"Haven't got him!" growled Blake.

"The young wottah's got away!" said Arthur Augustus. "We went like anythin' but he dodged us, you know. He's got there, the boundah!"

"Couldn't stay away any longer," said Herries. "Afraid you fellows might be waiting for your tea. Dig will have to take his chance!"

"Well, tea's ready, such as it is!" said Tom Merry grimly.

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"Dig won't miss much, at all events. There's a loaf and a half, and two tins of sardines!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Where are the eggs?" asked Blake, with interest.

"In the passage."

"And the jam?"

"On my trucks."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Blake, greatly incensed. "All through that young ass Digby! Never mind; sardines are good enough for me!"

"Yaas, wathah! And I'm quite fond of bwead-and-buttah!"

"Well, there's plenty of that!" said Tom Merry, as he served out the sardines with scrupulous exactitude. "And now you seem to be sane again, you might explain what you bumped into us for!"

"We were after Dig," said Blake, helping himself to sardines. "I say, this is all right. A good appetite is better than cream puffs!"

"Bettah a stalled ox and contentment therewith, than a dinnah of herbs undah uncomfy circs!" said Arthur Augustus wisely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What has Dig been doing?" asked Tom Merry.

"He had the cheek to go to tea with one of the Fifth, after the study had put its foot down on it," said Blake. "Of course, we told him he had to come here to tea—so we were bringing him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But he got away; and we couldn't actually chase him into Cutts's study," said Blake. "The Fifth would have dropped on us heavy if we got into their quarters!"

Tom Merry started.

"Cutts!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Cutts of the Fifth."

"He's the chap who's asked Dig to tea?" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

"He's the pippin!"

"Has Dig come into a fortune?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's exactly what I asked Dig; but he hasn't. He's stony, and Cutts knows it. Cutts was helping him with Caesar yesterday, and he was coaching him in fielding the other day. He's taken a fancy to Dig—what for, I'm blessed if I know. Can't see anything special in Dig myself, and I've chummed with him ever since I've been at St. Jim's," said Blake.

"Dig has his good qualities, but they are not the kind of qualities that would appeal to a boundah like Cutts!" said Arthur Augustus. "I regard it as weakness of Dig to allow himself to be taken up by Cutts of the Fifth!"

Tom Merry was looking very grave.

"He's with Cutts now?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"Cutts is up to no good, you can bet your Sunday hat on that!" said Monty Lowther emphatically. "We know Cutts and his little ways. You remember what Fatty Wynn of the New House says—he heard him scheming to give away the Wallaby match just to win money on it from rotten book-makers!"

"Kildare didn't believe it, but we did," said Tom Merry quietly. "Cutts must have been awfully hard hit over that. He had a big sum of money laid against St. Jim's, as we all know, from what Fatty Wynn told us, and he must have lost, as School won the match. If Dig had any money, I should think, now, that Cutts was after it, to get a loan to pay his debts!"

"But he's stony!" said Blake.

"Yes, that makes it queer."

"Only we're not going to let him have anything to do with Cutts," said Blake, with great decision. "It's not good enough. Fellows may paint Cutts blacker than he deserves, but I don't trust him a quarter of an inch!"

"Right!" said Tom Merry. "Look here, under the circs., I'll tell you something I haven't mentioned to most of the fellows. Cutts tried some time ago to get me into his rotten ways. He got me into an awful difficulty, and if my pals hadn't stood by me, I should have got done in—fairly done in—and should have had to get out of the school. Since then I've had my weather-eye on Cutts. He's not safe. If he's taken up Digby, it's because he's got some rotten turn to serve, and you can bet your socks on that! Dig isn't safe in his hands!"

"Only, Cutts can be jolly agreeable when he likes," said Blake reflectively. "Dig is an obstinate young ass, and we'll jolly well stop his going to Cutts's study."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"His father knows Cutts's uncle," added Blake thoughtfully. "Cutts has made that an excuse for taking him up, I think. But Sir Robert Digby has known Cutts' uncle ever since they were boys at school together, so Dig says, and if it made any difference to Cutts, he could have shown it a long time ago."

bit sooner than this. As a matter of fact, it's only for the last week he's been so keen on Dig."

"It's an excuse," said Tom Merry. "It's not his reason. Look here, you chaps, Dig ought not to be ass enough to be taken in by Cutts, of the Fifth; but if he is, he ought to be looked after. And if you fellows are going to look after him, we'll help you. The six of us ought to be a match for Cutts, whatever his little game may be."

"Hear, hear!"

And over the sardines the chums of the School House discussed the matter, and came to the resolution to back up old Dig, and save him from the unscrupulous clutches of Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth, though exactly what the danger was, and exactly how they were to rescue Dig from it they did not quite know.

CHAPTER 3.

Cutts' Young Friend!

CUTTS, of the Fifth, was in his study when Dig arrived there, a little breathless after the chase.

Cutts's study was one of the largest in the Fifth Form quarters, and it was well furnished. Cutts had an ample allowance from his father, and he spent it freely. He had ways of supplementing his allowance, too—ways that would certainly have earned him expulsion if they had been known to the Head of St. Jim's. Cutts betted on horses, and he played bridge for money stakes, and his luck was phenomenal. Fellows who were not in the dread secret envied Cutts, and wondered at his good fortune. The knowing ones declared that he was bound to come a cropper sooner or later. The knowing ones had been, as a matter of fact, quite right.

Cutts had come the cropper—and it was a terrific cropper. He had played high, and his usual luck had deserted him. He had laid heavy bets against St. Jim's in their match with an Australian team, and being in the St. Jim's eleven, he had tried to throw the match away, but he had failed.

St. Jim's had won, and Cutts, in his certainty that it was a "good thing," had taken odds of three to one. He had stood to win over thirty pounds, and he stood to lose a hundred.

He had lost the hundred!

Well provided as Gerald Cutts was with money, he had not the slightest prospect of raising anything like a hundred pounds, or the half of that sum.

It was ruin, and he knew it.

Yet, after the first terrible shock, when he had staggered off the cricket-ground with a face so white that people turned in the street to stare after him, Cutts had recovered from the shock, and regained his deadly coolness.

He had to fight now to satisfy creditors, to keep his secret, to ward off ruin, and to save himself from being shown up and expelled from St. Jim's.

He had made his bets on credit, and he had to pay, or else to be exposed and ruined. But he had not given up hope yet. He was devoting all his cleverness, which was great, all his nerve and coolness, to that struggle to save himself. And, so far, Cutts had not gone under.

How he had kept his head above water during the last few weeks he hardly knew.

But he had done it, and still ruin was staring off, though it threatened every day. He had raised small sums, somehow, and paid little bits on account here and there. He had sold his bicycle, and paid more on account. The end was pushed further off, but it was still near, unless he could make a big coup.

From his coolness no one could have guessed the fears and anxiety that infested his soul day and night. He had a nerve of iron.

Now, as he sat in his study waiting for his guest, he looked calm and cheerful, and Digby had no suspicion of the thoughts that were passing in his mind. Cutts, as a matter of fact, was listening. Dig's step in the passage had sent a thrill to his heart, though his face did not change. He had feared for a moment that it might be the step of someone else—someone whose visit he feared.

Two or three of his betting creditors, partly satisfied with small sums on account, had agreed to give him time—a short time, to raise the rest. But one, at least, was at the end of his patience, and that one, Jonas Hooke, had warned him that unless he received a remittance in full on Monday, Cutts could expect him at St. Jim's.

Cutts had sent him nothing; and to-day was Tuesday. The mere possibility of a bookmaker coming to the school to see him would have scared almost any other fellow at St. Jim's into a fit.

It had no perceptible effect upon Cutts. If Hooke came and told his story to the Head, Cutts would have to leave St. Jim's the same night in disgrace. It would be the end of his

career at the school—the end of his chance of getting the commission in the cavalry regiment upon which his heart was set. It would be the end of all things for him; the disgrace of being expelled from a school like St. Jim's would cling to him and brand him for life.

And yet Cutts was perfectly cool with that sword of Damocles suspended over his head. He greeted Digby with a nod and a pleasant smile as he came in.

Digby was looking and feeling a little awkward. It was great condescension for a Fifth-Former to ask a fag to tea, and Dig felt it. And he was dusty and breathless from his tussle with his chums of the Fourth, and he had not ventured back to the study, or to the dormitory, to make himself tidy again, for fear of being captured by Blake and Herries and D'Arcy.

Cutts gave him a rather curious look.

"Glad to see you, Digby," he said affably. "You've hurried—eh?"

Digby turned red.

"Yes, I—I've been in a scrap," he confessed. "Only fun, you know. I hope I'm not late, Cutts."

"Five minutes early, as a matter of fact," said Cutts, glancing at the handsome bronze clock on the mantelpiece.

Dig's colour deepened.

"I—I—" he began.

"All the better," said Cutts genially. "Sit down, kid. Tea's ready. My fag's just finished, and cleared out. Lift the toast up from the grate, will you?"

"Rather!" said Dig.

It was an open secret in the School House that Cutts, in spite of his ample allowance, was hard up, and hardly knew where to turn for a half-crown. But, all the same, he always contrived to have a good spread on his study table at tea-time. In some quarters, at least, his credit was still good. The local tradesmen knew that he was the son of a rich man and the nephew of a rich Army officer, and most of them allowed Cutts almost as much credit as he wanted. And Cutts had cynically reflected that, if the crash came, it did not matter much how much he owed. He might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!

Cutts' fag was a good cook. Cutts kept a cricket-stump in the study for him if he failed in that line. Dig's honest face lighted up as he saw piles of beautifully-browned toast, and boiled kidneys, and eggs poached to a turn. It was one of Cutts' very nice little "brews," and Dig wondered greatly that he should have asked a Fourth-Form fag. There were plenty of fellows in the Fifth, and in the Sixth, too, who would have been glad to come.

And Cutts was very friendly and genial over tea. He talked to Dig just as if Dig were a senior like himself, and did not treat him like a fag at all.

With the toast, the broiled kidneys, and the eggs, and the tea, and the jam-tarts to finish, and Cutts' geniality, Dig thoroughly enjoyed himself.

There was an expression of great contentment upon Dig's honest, cheerful face, and he felt very friendly indeed towards Cutts. He realised keenly that fellows had been too hard on poor old Cutts. He was the jolliest of fellows, and nobody ever was quite so black as he was painted.

When that pleasant tea was finished, Dig made a movement to rise. But Cutts made a detaining gesture.

"Don't go, kid."

Digby nodded, and sat down again, with a slight, uneasy feeling inwardly. It was whispered in the House that there were bridge parties and games of nap in Cutts' study after tea, and Dig uneasily remembered his chums' warnings. But, after all, if Cutts wanted him to play cards, he could say no—especially as he hadn't any money. He grinned involuntarily at the idea of Cutts pressing him to play when he was stony.

"Call my fag, kid," said Cutts.

Dig went to the door of the study, and felt very important as he called "Fa-a-a-ag!" down the passage. It was almost as if he were in the Fifth himself.

"Fag! Fa-a-ag!"

Curly Gibson, of the Third, came scudding along the passage. He glared at Digby as he saw the junior in Cutts' doorway.

"You cheeky rotter!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Do you mean to say that you've got the awful nerve to call 'Fag'? Why, you're only a beastly fag yourself!"

"Gibson," broke in Cutts' icy voice, "you'd better be civil to my guest!"

Curly's manner changed at once. He knew that the cricket-stump was ready in the corner of Cutts' study.

"Do you want me, Cutts?" he asked meekly.

"Yes, clear away these things."

"Yes, Cutts."

Curly Gibson, giving Dig an almost homicidal look, cleared away the tea-things. Dig sat in an easy-chair and watched him calmly. He was enjoying himself. It was the first time he

had fagged the Third. Curly Gibson's furious looks when Cutts' eye was not upon him tickled Dig greatly.

Cutts whistled to himself while the fag was there. Cutts was gone at last, pausing for a moment outside the door to shake his fist at Digby, as a hint of what he might expect by and by.

Digby grinned, and the door closed upon the exasperated fag, who had had to fag for the Fourth-Former sorely against the grain.

Digby waited for Cutts to speak. He was rather nervous that Cutts was going to offer him a cigarette; he knew Cutts' little ways. But the black sheep of the Fifth was gifted with endless tact. He did not offer Dig a cigarette, and he did not smoke one himself, much to the junior's relief. As Dig declared afterwards to his chums, Cutts was as respectable as a giddy Housemaster.

Dig could not help wondering what Cutts had to say to him. Cutts produced walnuts, and began to crack them, and invited Dig to do the same. Dig liked walnuts, and he was soon quite busy.

"Not pressed for time—hey?" said Cutts.

"Not at all," said Dig, who was a little apprehensive of being scalped as soon as he returned to Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

"I really owe you an apology," said Cutts.

"Me!" said Dig, with wide eyes.

"Yes. Your father and my uncle were schoolboys together, and they're still great chums. My uncle's often mentioned you in his letters to me."

"Has he?" said Dig.

"I've been going to take an interest in you for a long time," said Cutts. "But it's such a difficulty to see juniors. You understand that?"

"Oh, yes!" said Dig.

"And then your study has a bit of a prejudice against me, I think," said Cutts, smiling.

Dig did not reply to that. It was more polite to crack another walnut and leave the remark unanswered, and smile vaguely. He couldn't deny that Study No. 6 in the Fourth had a decided prejudice against the black sheep of the Fifth.

"I dare say you heard the jaw there was among the fags at the time of the Wallaby match," said Cutts, "about my laying bets against St. Jim's."

"Ahem!" said Dig.

"That fat fellow in the New House, Wynn, went to sleep behind a haystack, and dreamed that he heard me talking to somebody, or something of that sort," said Cutts. "Of course, he was talking out of his hat."

"Oh!" said Dig.

"You're too sensible a kid to believe all the chatter you hear, I'm jolly sure of that," said Cutts.

"I hope so," said Dig.

"Well, I want to be your friend, so far as a Fifth-Form chap can be friends with a junior," said Cutts. "What do you think?"

What did Dig think? To be offered in this genial way the friendship of the arbiter of elegance in the Fifth—to be taken up by a senior whose regard was courted by mighty men in the Sixth—who was engaged weeks ahead for "Sunday walks." It was so flattering that Dig could only stare with big, round eyes.

"You're jolly kind!" he managed to stammer at last.

"Well, I like you," said Cutts, "and our people are great friends, you know. By the way, my uncle is coming down to the school, and you'll see him. He's your father's oldest friend—Major Cutts, you know."

Dig nodded. Cutts had never shown the slightest sign of acknowledging any claim on the Fourth-Former's part because his father was the old friend of Cutts' uncle. Never till the last week, at all events. Perhaps Cutts was waking up rather late in the day to a sense of duty. Dig could not quite make it out. He had never supposed that Cutts cared twopence for his uncle or his uncle's friends. He reflected that you never really know a fellow till you've found him out.

"I shall be glad to see my father's old chum," said Dig, at last.

Cutts laughed.

"I suppose you know he's rolling in money," he remarked.

"You can be pretty certain that he'll tip Sir Robert Digby's son a quid at least."

Dig's eyes sparkled.

"I say, Cutts, your uncle must be a ripping old sport!" he said.

"He is," said Cutts. "Now, kid, will you lend me a hand? I've got some writing to do, and I've hurt my wrist in the cricket—that ass Knox gave me a ball right on my wrist. Do you mind?"

"Lines?" asked Dig. Was the secret out at last? Had

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Cutts taken all that trouble about the junior in order to get him to write out an impot?

"Ha, ha! No; I don't have lines. When I do, I tip young Curly to write them—he can imitate my hand a treat," said Cutts. "Levison of your Form does them for me, too—but I don't often have them."

"I dare say I could copy your fist, if you like," said Dig. Cutts shook his head.

"That's rather a dangerous gift," he said. "It will get Levison of the Fourth into trouble one of these days. No; I don't want you to do that. It's something else—but it's a secret. You can keep a secret?"

Dig left off eating walnuts. He was dismayed. A secret of Cutts—that meant something to do with Cutts' wild ways, and in his mind's eye Dig already saw himself the repository of guilty secrets of betting, and backing horses, and surreptitious visits to public-houses and gambling clubs.

"Oh!" said Dig. "I—I'd rather you didn't tell me any secrets, if you don't mind, Cutts!"

Cutts burst into a hearty laugh.

"You young ass! Do you think I'm going to tell you about bets and bookmaking?" he exclaimed good-humouredly. "It's quite harmless, only it's a secret at present. The fact is, I'm writing a play."

Digby jumped.

"Writing a play!" he exclaimed.

Cutts nodded.

"My hat!" said Dig. And he started on the walnuts again, his fears entirely relieved. There certainly wasn't any harm in Cutts writing a play.

"That's the secret," said Cutts. "You see, I've trusted you—but you'll keep it dark. Not a word, you know."

"Mum!" said Dig.

"Honour bright, eh?"

"Honour bright!" said Dig.

"That's all right. Now I'll tell you something about it," said Cutts dreamily. "It deals with a giddy young spend-thrift who's been plunging and getting himself into an awful hole. He tries all sorts of ways of raising tin, and fails, and finally makes up his mind to shoot himself."

"Oh, seissors!" said Dig. "That's rather thick, isn't it?"

"Plays have to be thick," said Cutts. "I've got it done up to the scene where he sits down to write to his father. He tells the old chap that he's in debt, that he owes sixty or seventy pounds, and doesn't dare to ask him to pay it, so he's decided to blow his brains out. Very pathetic, and all that. I've been thinking it out, and I want to get it written down before I lose the thread of it, you see—only my confounded wrist is so stiff I can't hold a pen!"

"I'll do it with pleasure," said Dig. He would have done much more than that to oblige the genial Cutts. That there could be any hidden deception under that frank explanation never occurred for a single instant to Dig.

"Well, there's a pen," said Cutts. "You'll find some notepaper in that desk—some of the school notepaper. That will do. I always use it—it saves the expense of buying manuscript, and I've been hard up lately."

"I could get you some impot. paper, if you like," said Dig.

"No; the notepaper will be all right. You'll find some there."

Digby found the notepaper, and dipped a pen in the ink and waited. Cutts reflected deeply.

"Begin—Scene II., Act Three!" he said.

"Right!" Dig wrote it down.

"Dear father—"

"Good!"

"I'm afraid you will be shocked by what I'm going to write!" dictated Cutts. Digby wrote it down in his sprawling, schoolboy hand.

Cutts remained immersed in thought for some minutes. Digby resumed operations upon the walnuts. The walnuts were very good.

"No, on second thoughts I won't begin like that," said Cutts. "Do you mind starting afresh?"

"Not at all."

"Take a fresh sheet, then. Don't put that in about the scene and act—I'm not quite certain that I shall put this in the third act. Begin it with 'Dear Father.' No—perhaps that's a bit too formal. How do you start your letters home yourself?"

"I always begin 'Dear Dad,'" said Dig.

"Good! That sounds better," said Cutts. "Might as well begin that way. Got a fresh sheet of paper?"

"Yes; I'm ready."

"Well, begin now," Cutts dictated, and Dig started the letter afresh:

"Dear Dad,—I'm afraid you will be shocked at this. I'm awfully sorry. I've got into frightful trouble. I'm so upset that I hardly know what I'm writing. Dear old dad, don't be too upset when you hear what's happened. I can't stand it any longer. I've been betting on horses, and I've lost a lot of money, and they've been worrying me for weeks and weeks, and I have been so miserable I wish I was dead. I can't stand it any longer, and I'm going to drop over the bridge on the Ryll to-night, and they won't be able to threaten me any longer. Good-bye, and forgive me.—Your miserable son, ROBERT."

"That's my own name, Robert," said Dig. "My name's Robert Arthur, you know."

"I named my poor hero after you," said Cutts, with a smile.

"Oh, I see! What about the name of the river? The river here is called the Ryll," said Dig.

"I'm going to alter that afterwards—the Ryll will do for the present," said Cutts. "Of course, that is only a rough draft."

"Of course!" said Dig.

Cutts took the letter, and read it over carefully, and nodded with satisfaction.

"I think that will be all right," he said. "Now, take a fresh sheet of paper, and we'll go on with the scene. Enter Sir Jasper."

"Enter Sir Jasper!" wrote Dig, on a fresh sheet of paper.

Cutts folded up the letter, and put it into his pocket-book. Then he went on dictating to Digby, filling several sheets of paper with the lines of the play. The lines rolled out fast enough from Cutts' fertile brain, and Dig was filled with great admiration.

They were still busy when the study door suddenly opened, and Toby, the School House page, looked in with a startled face.

"Please, Master Cutts—"

"Well, what is it?" said Cutts.

"There's a man says he will see you—a hawful man!" said Toby.

"Bring him in at once."

"He says his name is Hooke!"

Cutts rose to his feet. In spite of his nerve, his face was pale. The blow had fallen at last.

"Has anybody seen him, Toby?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Toby, looking scared. "I—I think not, Master Cutts. But he's speaking very loud, and—"

Cutts slipped a half-crown into Toby's hand.

"Bring him here, and don't let anybody see him!" he said.

"Yessir!" said Toby, scuttling away.

Dig was on his feet now, looking scared. He knew the name of Jonas Hooke, the bookmaker, of Abbotsford. That the man should dare to come to St. Jim's was astounding. If the Head discovered that he had come to see Cutts—

Dig knew that Cutts had brought it on himself—that he was coming the predicted "cropper" at last; but he could not help feeling sorry for him.

"You'd better cut off," said Cutts. "Thank you for helping me, Digby. It's a man I owe some money to. Don't mention about his coming here; I want to keep it dark if I can. I've been a fool, and I'm in an awful hole!"

Dig's soft heart was full of compassion.

"I'll keep mum," he said. "Rely on me!"

"Thanks!"

Dig scuttled out of the study. In the passage he passed the man Toby was piloting to Cutts's room—a fat, florid man, with a glaring fancy waistcoat, and a silk hat on the back of his head. Dig ran on, feeling sick at heart. Cutts had been kind to him; and Cutts, at that moment, was so close to being expelled from the school that Dig could not see a loophole of escape for him. Dig's face was clouded as he ran on.

CHAPTER 4.

A Precious Pair!

GERALD CUTTS stood by the table in his study, waiting for his unwelcome caller. His face was normal again now.

He had taken the sheets of the "play" that Dig had written for him, and thrust them into the fire. But the first sheet—the letter which Dig had signed so innocently and unconsciously with his own name—was still reposing in Cutts' pocket-book. All the rest that Dig had written was burnt; but that sheet—with nothing upon it to distinguish it from an ordinary letter was safe in Gerald Cutts' pocket-book. The spider had succeeded in his designs upon the fly—though it would have puzzled anyone but Gerald Cutts to say what use could possibly be made of that letter in Dig's sprawling hand.

ANSWERS

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The fat bookmaker appeared in the study doorway. His face was flushed with anger, and a little with drink. Probably Mr. Jonas Hooke had imbibed a little to screw up his courage to pay that visit to the public school.

"Ho, 'ere you are!" said Mr. Hooke.

Cutts nodded, with a pleasant smile.

"Yes; come in!" he said.

"Very nice and polite, ain't we?" sneered Mr. Hooke. "You'd rather I come in—eh? You don't want 'em to 'ear what I've got to say—eh?"

"Come in and sit down," said Cutts, with undiminished courtesy. "I can give you a cool drink after your walk—and I've something else for you!"

"If you mean to square up——"

"Of course I do," said Cutts pleasantly. "You can cut off, Toby. Come in, Hooke, old fellow!"

Toby, still looking scared—for he knew how serious the situation was for Cutts—departed.

Mr. Hooke hesitated a moment or two, and finally grunted and came into the study. Cutts closed the door, and pulled out an armchair for his visitor.

At that moment Cutts could probably have killed his visitor with the greatest pleasure in the world; but his manner was urbanity itself.

He was upon the very edge of the abyss, and he knew it.

Fortunately, nearly all the fellows were on the playing-fields, or else at tea in their studies, and Mr. Hooke had been piloted to the study unobserved—at least, Cutts hoped so. If the man had been seen, all was over. A prefect or a master would certainly come to the study to inquire what he wanted.

Merely having dealings with such a man was enough to get any St. Jim's fellow expelled from the school.

And even if he succeeded in placating Mr. Hooke, there still remained the problem of getting rid of him again unseen.

And yet Cutts did not seemingly turn a hair.

"Sit down," he said pleasantly.

"I ain't come 'ere to sit down!" growled Mr. Hooke.

"Oh, be pally!" said Cutts. "There's nothing to row about. I owe you some tin—and I'm going to pay you. What is there to be ratty about?"

"Got the money?" asked Mr. Hooke, with a sneer.

"I shall have it on Wednesday."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"And 'ow?"

"My uncle is coming to see me—he's lately home from Africa, you know—and he's going to give it to me."

"All of it?" asked Mr. Hooke incredulously.

"How much do I owe you?" said Cutts coolly.

"Fifty quid!" snapped the bookmaker.

"Just so—and twenty-five quid to Griggs," said Cutts. "Griggs is treating me more decently than this, Hooke. He's given me more time; he knows me."

"He can afford to wait, and twenty-five quid ain't fifty," said the bookmaker. "Ain't I always paid up on the nail when you've won from me—what?"

"Everybody knows you're a square man," said Cutts.

"That's it," said Mr. Hooke. "When you laid your bets on the Wallaby match, you didn't say you was bettin' on gas, and hadn't the ready to square if you lost. If you'd won you'd have 'ad nearly twenty quid from me in spot cash, and well you know it!"

"I know it," said Cutts.

"You asked for time, and I gave you a week. You asked for more time, and 'anded me a few quid. Then you says you can't pay for a few days—and then another week. I told you I was sick of waiting for it. If you won't pay, there's them that will. I said I'd come 'ere for my money, and I've come!"

"I don't see that that will help you much," said Cutts coolly. "You know as well as I do that gaming debts can't be claimed in law. And I'm a minor, too—you could get yourself into serious trouble for betting with a schoolboy!"

"Not so much trouble as you'll get into if you don't square," said the bookmaker significantly. "I know what your 'eadmaster will do if I go to him!"

"He would ring for the porter, and have you thrown out!" said Cutts calmly.

"P'r'aps. And you'd foller jolly quick—sacked from the school!"

"Within an hour!" agreed Cutts.

"Eh? You don't deny that?" said Mr. Hooke, rather taken aback.

Cutts laughed.

"What's the good of denying it, when you know it's true as well as I do?" he asked.

"Well, you're a cool 'and," said Mr. Hooke. "I know that!" He spoke with grudging admiration. "Why, if I

was seen 'ere this minute, you'd be ruined for life, and you know it!"

"I know it."

"I wouldn't be 'ard on a good plucked 'un," said Mr. Hooke, sitting down at last; "but I'm tired of waitin'. I've 'ad bad luck myself, and I need the money. I told you if you didn't square I'd come 'ere for the money, and Jonas 'Ooke is a man of his word. 'And over 'arf of it, and I'll wait a week for the rest. That's a good offer!"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"I couldn't hand you one per cent. of it at the present moment," he said; "but to-morrow I hope to square up to the last penny!"

"Waitin' to win something?" jeered Mr. Hooke.

"No; it's my uncle, as I said."

"Gammon!" said Mr. Hooke. "I never 'eard of an uncle that would 'and his nephew fifty quid for the asking!"

"Mine will!"

"And why?"

"Because I'm working it," said Cutts. "I've got a dodge for screwing it out of him—and more, too. I'm not going to tell you what the dodge is. If it fails, I am ruined, and you can do your worst. If I succeed, I can square up to the last stiver!"

"Well, you're a deep 'un!" said Mr. Hooke. "But I've come 'ere for my money, and I ain't going away without it!"

"I've told you how I'm placed," said Cutts, with a shrug of the shoulders. "If you choose to ruin me, you can; but it will cost you exactly fifty pounds. If I'm done for here, I shan't pay you a penny!"

The bookmaker stared at him from under his thick brows suspiciously. It was evident that the Fifth-Former had succeeded in making an impression upon him. There was a short silence in the study.

"To-morrow, you say?" said Hooke at last grudgingly.

"I shall have the money to-morrow. If it's a cheque, I may not be able to get it changed before the bank closes, and in that case I will pay up on Thursday. I'll send you a line to meet me outside the school after third lesson."

"It ain't good enough!" said Hooke surlily.

"Very well; then you can do as you like. Get me expelled from St. Jim's, if you like!" said Cutts, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes. "If I go under, I'll see that things are made warm for you. You will lose your money, and what reputation you've got left—all because you won't wait a couple of days longer, after you've waited weeks already. That isn't business, Mr. Hooke!"

"If I could trust you!" muttered Hooke.

"You can do as you like. I'm playing for my last chance here, and if I save myself, you'll get your money. I think it's a dead cert. But you can do as you like."

There was another silence.

"I'll wait!" said Mr. Hooke at last. "I'll wait till Thursday noon, and not a minute longer! If I don't 'ave the money—all of it, mind—by then, I go straight to Dr. Holmes!"

Cutts drew a deep breath.

"You'll have it—every penny!" he said.

"Well, see that I do!"

The bookmaker rose to his feet. Perhaps, in his heart of hearts, Mr. Hooke trembled at the thought of an interview with the stately Head of St. Jim's, and was glad enough for an excuse for not carrying out his threat.

"Then I'll travel," he said. "It won't do you any good for me to stop 'ere. I——"

Cutts gave a start.

"Hush!"

He held up a hand to enjoin silence.

In the passage there was a steady footstep—approaching the study—and Cutts knew that footstep well. It was the step of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's.

For a moment Cutts' heart turned sick within him.

He had succeeded so far with Jonas Hooke, and now he was caught—caught with the disreputable bookmaker in his study!

Mr. Hooke looked uneasy, too.

"Who is it?" he murmured.

"My Housemaster!" groaned Cutts.

"Good 'eavens!"

"Quiet! There's a chance yet! Get behind that screen! There's a cupboard there! You can get into it, and lie low! I'll bluff him if I can! Quick!"

The slow-witted man hesitated, but Cutts grasped him and pushed him behind the screen in the corner. There was a wall cupboard there, in which Cutts kept cricket-bats and footballs and stumps and other belongings.

The bookmaker stumbled into the dark cupboard, breathing heavily and hard. Now that it had come to the pinch the rascal was as unwilling as Cutts that the Housemaster

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should see him. He had seen the big, athletic Housemaster, and he had an uncomfortable conviction that if Mr. Railton found him there—whatever might happen to Cutts—he—Jonas Hooke—would be collared and flung out of the House neck and crop.

He huddled in the cupboard, panting for breath. Cutts replaced the screen, and turned back to the study table. He had just time to open a "Football Annual" when there came a sharp knock at the door.

"Come in!" said Cutts, without a tremor in his voice. Mr. Railton entered.

CHAPTER 5. Facing the Music.

MR. RAILTON strode into the study, with a deep frown on his brow.

He gave a quick glance round the room, and seemed surprised at finding Cutts alone.

The Fifth-Former rose respectfully, the book still in his hand.

Mr. Railton fixed his eyes upon him, with a sharp and penetrating glance. Cutts bore the scrutiny without flinching. His expression was simply that of respectful inquiry, as if he were waiting to hear what had brought the Housemaster to his study. As Mr. Railton was silent for some moments, Cutts' face gradually assumed a natural expression of slight surprise.

"Cutts!" said Mr. Railton at last.

"Yes, sir?"

"Has your visitor gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! You do not deny having had a visitor, then?"

Cutts looked more surprised.

"Why should I deny it, sir?" he asked. "I do not understand you."

"Listen to me, Cutts!" said the Housemaster firmly. "I have been informed as to the identity of your visitor. Do you understand?"

It was as much as Cutts could do to keep back a gasp of relief. Mr. Railton had not seen the man with his own eyes, as Cutts feared. There was a chance yet!

"I understand, sir," said Cutts.

"You deny nothing, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"No, sir. Why should I? I have not heard that Fifth-Formers are not allowed to receive callers in their studies after lessons, sir."

"Respectable men, certainly! You have received a bookmaker here!"

"I, sir!" exclaimed Cutts, in astonishment.

"You deny that?"

Cutts smiled.

"I certainly deny that, sir," he said. "I did not know you supposed that I had received a bookmaker here. There is some queer mistake, I suppose."

"I hope it will prove to be a mistake," said Mr. Railton drily.

"I can give you my word about that, sir. I hope you do not think I am the kind of fellow to have dealings with bookmakers? And if I were, you could hardly consider me idiot enough to let one come here to see me!" said Cutts, in surprise. "I am not a fool, sir—I know what such a thing would mean for me."

"Quite so. There have, as a matter of fact, been rumours about you in the House, Cutts—nothing tangible, perhaps—and I always make it a point to take no notice of gossip," said the Housemaster. "As you say, it would be so utterly and insanely reckless for a boy to receive a bookmaker in his study that it seems incredible."

The Fifth-Former smiled again.

"You may depend upon it, sir, that if I should ever take to bad ways, I shall be more cautious than that," he said.

"You have not, then, had any dealings with a bookmaker at all?"

"Certainly not!"

"Your visitor was not a man of that character?"

"No, sir," said Cutts, in an amused tone. "I should be glad to know who fancied that he was, and took the trouble to tell you, sir?"

"The man was seen coming into the House, and my attention was drawn to the matter by the porter," said Mr. Railton. "I questioned the page, and learned that he had shown the man to your study."

"That is quite correct, sir. Toby showed him in here."

"And his name—"

"Hooke," said Cutts calmly.

Mr. Railton started.

"You are aware that there is a bookmaker of that name, Cutts—a man with a most unenviable reputation—in Abbot'sford?"

"I have heard of him, sir," said Cutts, after a moment's pause.

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reflection. "There was a yarn about his getting some of the Greyfriars fellows into betting or something. I didn't take much notice of it, but I remember the name."

"That man was not your visitor?"

"It's not an uncommon name, sir," said Cutts. "It happens to be the same in this case. The Christian name is different, however. The bookmaker is called Hiram, I think, or some name like that—"

"His name is Jonas Hooke."

"Yes. Is that it?" said Cutts coolly. "My visitor happened to be John Hooke."

"It is curious that the names should be the same."

"Yes; isn't it, sir?" assented Cutts.

"And he is gone?"

"Yes; he stayed only a few minutes."

"How long has he been gone?"

Cutts reflected.

"About a quarter of an hour, sir, I think."

"Will you tell me who he was?"

"I have no objection at all, sir. He is a soldier who was discharged from my uncle's regiment for bad conduct, and has taken to tramping. I knew him years ago, when I was a nipper, and my uncle was stationed at Aldershot. He gave me some riding lessons when I was there visiting my uncle, and he remembered me. His tramping brought him to this part of the country, and as he was hard up, it occurred to him to come in here and ask for me."

"A most improper proceeding," said Mr. Railton, frowning.

"So I told him, sir. He was, as a matter of fact, a little the worse for drink. I told him he oughtn't to have come here; but I was sorry for the poor wretch, and I gave him five shillings, and told him to get out!"

Mr. Railton's eyes were fixed keenly on Cutts' face as he made this simple explanation.

Cutts looked perfectly calm and self-possessed, as if the matter was of no importance, and, in fact, bored him slightly.

Inwardly he was wondering whether Mr. Railton doubted him sufficiently to make a search of the study.

Cutts almost smiled at the thought of the denouement if the bookmaker should be found hidden in the cupboard, after that plausible explanation. The Fifth-Former was playing a desperate game, but never had he been cooler.

Apparently a search of the study did not enter Mr. Railton's mind. He was not of the spying kind, and he hated doubting anybody's word. And he could not believe that Cutts could be so cool and calm if expulsion were hanging over his head.

"So the man has gone?" he said at last.

"Yes, sir; as I said."

"Taggles certainly had the impression that he was Jonas Hooke."

"Taggles's acquaintance with bookmakers is probably more extensive than mine," said Cutts, with a smile. "I am afraid I do not know Hiram—I mean Jonas Hooke—by sight, so I cannot say anything as to a resemblance."

Mr. Railton drew a deep breath.

"I am sorry the man is not still here," he said. "I should have preferred to see him. However, I accept your assurance, Cutts."

"I trust so, sir. I should not like to have my word doubted."

"I do not doubt it. I am glad that you have been able to explain what certainly looked extremely suspicious."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton left the study.

Cutts smiled.

Not until the Housemaster's footsteps had died away did Cutts move. Then he went behind the screen, and found the cupboard door ajar, and the flustered face of Mr. Jonas Hooke looking out at him. The bookmaker was red and panting.

"My word!" he murmured. "My word! 'Ow you rolled 'em out, sir! Blessed if you didn't take my breath away! It was 'ot in that cupboard, too!"

"You'll have to stay here for a bit," said Cutts, coolly. "Railton thinks you're gone—so you can't go till the coast is clear."

"But I can't stay 'ere!" ejaculated Mr. Hooke, in dismay.

"You must! I'll see that nobody comes to the study again," said Cutts. "You'll have to stay here till dark, Hooke, unless you want to be caught. Railton has his malacca cane in his hand—you can guess what he'd brought it for. It was jolly lucky for you that you kept out of sight, as well as for me."

Mr. Hooke shivered.

"If he raises a 'and against me, I'll 'ave the law on 'im!" he muttered.

Cutts laughed.

"I don't think the law would say much about a House-

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With many a chuckle the juniors of the Remove-form of Greyfriars continued their work, till the last atom of paint had been squeezed out of the brushes on to the walls, and the last fragment of paper had been stuck on various parts of the study. "Walker will be pleased!" murmured Bob Cherry. "So will Quelchy! I don't think!" grinned Nugent. (For this remarkable incident, buy a copy of this week's issue of "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, and read "UP AGAINST IT!" by Frank Richards. Get a copy NOW before it is too late.)

master horsewhipping a bookie who came to his school," he said. "And if it did, it wouldn't mend you, Hookey—and you'd want mending after Railton had finished with you."

"Look 'ere—"

"You'll have to stay here till after dark, and then sneak out somehow," said Cutts coolly. "You've brought it on yourself, and must make the best of it. But it's all right. I can get you some sandwiches, and a whisky-and-soda."

"Well, that sounds orlright," said Mr. Hooke.

And Jonas Hooke had to make up his mind to the inevitable—and he stayed. And Cutts had the pleasant prospect of keeping the man hidden in his study for some hours to come—at the risk every moment of some accident revealing his presence there. Cutts was a cool customer, and he had an iron nerve—but he needed all his coolness, and all his nerve now. An accident—a mischance—one false step—one thoughtless word—and he was ruined—and he knew it! And he was as cool as ice.

CHAPTER 6. Called Over the Coals.

"HEAH he is!"
"Behold the deserter!"
"Tremble, villain!"

Those exclamations greeted Robert Arthur Digby as he entered Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage, after having had tea with the genial Cutts. Blake and Herries and Digby, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, were all there, waiting for him. They looked like a family of judges waiting for the criminal to come in—and now he had come!

Dig was feeling a little uneasy as he came back to Study No. 6. He could explain to the chums that the suspected and suspicious Cutts had not done him any harm. He hadn't played bridge, he hadn't put any money on a horse—he hadn't done anything excepting make a very satisfying tea and eat walnuts afterwards—with the exception of having written out passages in that "play" for Cutts. But that was a secret, of course—he had promised Cutts not to mention that he was writing a play.

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"FATTY WYNN'S HUNGER-STRIKE!"

Dig felt that his friends were very unjust to Cutts, and very hard on him; but he was afraid that they wouldn't listen to reason when he explained. And he was right in his foreboding upon that point.

"Look here," said Digby warmly, interrupting those hearty greetings. "Don't play the giddy goat, you know."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Have you anything to say my sentence shouldn't be passed on you according to law?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Digby.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Let's question the culprit," he said. "We must have the facts before we slaughter Digby. Have you been playing cards, Digby?"

"No, ass!"

"Making bets?"

"No, fathead!"

"Talking sport and races and things?"

"No, idiot!"

"Then what did Cutts want you for?"

"To have tea!" said Dig. "I've had it, too! And a jolly ripping tea it was. Boiled kidneys and eggs, and ripping toast, and walnuts to finish."

"That isn't the question," said Tom Merry severely. "We don't want to know what you had for tea, and you needn't give us all those gluttonous details, after you've mucked up our feed and reduced us to one sardine each!"

"A single, solitary, lonesome sardine!" said Blake.

Dig grinned.

"There was jam, too," he said. "Strawberry jam!"

"There would have been stawbewwy jam with us, if you hadn't smashed the jah in the passage, you ass. I do not considah stawbewwy jam a sufficient weason for desertin' your old pals. I wegard it as bein' similah to a hankerin' aftah the fleshpots of Egypt. I am disgusted with you, Dig!"

"Same here!" said Herries. "Disgusted!"

"Shocked!"

"Horried!" said Monty Lowther, with due solemnity.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankful Digby!" said Manners, with a sigh.

"Let us reason with him gently," said Tom Merry, holding up his hand. "Keep your little tempers, and talk to him like a Dutch uncle."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Dig glared at his anxious friends. All this concern for his welfare was gratifying in one way, but not in another. Tom Merry pointed a magisterial finger at him, and spoke severely.

"Do you mean to declare, Robert Arthur Digby, on your word of honour as a silly ass, that Cutts was not up to any tricks at all?"

"Of course he wasn't."

"Now I'll be serious," said Tom Merry. "Has he confided any secrets to you?"

"That's the question," said D'Arcy. "Has he given you any wotten secwets to keep, deah boy?"

"He hasn't given me any rotten secrets to keep," said Digby warmly.

Tom Merry was quick to notice the adjective.

"Not any rotten secrets?" he asked.

"No, I tell you!"

"Any secrets at all?"

Dig flushed. Cutts had told him, as a secret, that he was writing a play. There couldn't be any harm in a secret like that, certainly; but it was a secret, and he couldn't tell his chums.

"Don't ask me such a lot of rotten questions," Dig broke out. "Blessed if I don't clear out of the study if this goes on."

Tom Merry's face became very grave. The half-jesting manner of the other juniors vanished, too. Gerald Cutts had told Dig a secret—that was clear. And the juniors felt that their alarm was well founded. The blackguard of the Fifth had had a secret motive in getting Dig to his study, as they had suspected.

"Oh, don't look like a silly set of boiled owls!" exclaimed Dig irritably.

"Seriously, Dig—Cutts has told you a secret?"

"Suppose he has?"

"You mean that he has?"

"Not much good denying it!" growled Dig. "It's a harmless secret—you'd laugh if I told you, only I'm not going to tell you, as I promised Cutts."

"Now, look here," said Tom Merry, seriously. "I'll tell you something, Dig, that I haven't told anybody but Lowther and Manners yet. Cutts came to me one day, in a difficulty, and got me into keeping a secret with him. The mere fact that I had promised Cutts, and was mixed up in a secret with the blackguard, made trouble between my pals and me. That was how it started, and he jolly nearly got me into his filthy

betting—only I was too sick with him to give him a chance. I came as near disgrace as any chap could come, without being done in—and Cutts kept himself safe all the time. Now you know why I think Cutts is after no good with you. He started in the same way—giving you a secret to keep—that makes a tie between him and you, and puts up a bar between you and your chums, to begin with."

"I don't see why it should," said Digby uncomfortably. "It's a harmless secret. It's nothing whatever about breaking school rules—if the Head knew, he would only grin. All the masters might know without any harm being done."

"Then why is it a secret?"

"I suppose Cutts wants to keep it dark in case the fellows should laugh about it, that's all."

"Then why did he tell you?"

"He wanted me to help him, you see," said Dig, considering how much he could say without risk of revealing the fact that Gerald Cutts was writing a play. "He hurt his wrist in the cricket to-day, and couldn't write. So I just wrote down a few pages of it for him."

"A few pages!" said the juniors, in astonishment. "Lines?"

"No—not lines—but I can't tell you any more," said Dig.

"This is the first I've heard about Cutts having hurt his wrist," said Monty Lowther drily. "Hurt it in the cricket to-day, did he?"

"Yes—Knox bowled and hit his wrist!"

"His wrist was all right just before tea," said Lowther.

"Rot!" said Dig. "How do you know?"

"Because I saw him cuff young Tadd of the Second Form for bumping into him on the stairs," said Lowther. "He would have biffed him with his left, I fancy, if his right wrist had been hurt. But he didn't."

"Well, that was what he told me," said Digby. "I don't see why he should lie. He could have written the stuff down just as well as I, unless he was lazy."

"You won't tell us what it was you wrote down?"

"I've promised not to."

"Anything that might get you into trouble, if it were supposed to be your own stuff?" asked Tom Merry. "It's your handwriting, you know, as you wrote it."

Dig chuckled.

"No, ass! If you saw it, you'd only think it was meant for a contribution to the 'Weekly,' that's all. No harm in it at all."

The juniors exchanged glances. They did not know quite what to make of Dig's explanation. He was a sensible lad enough, but—but why should Cutts have told him a secret? That was the way Cutts had started when he was trying to initiate Tom Merry into his blackguardly ways, and Tom, in his unsuspicious simplicity, had fallen into the trap. But if Dig fell into the same trap, he would do it with his eyes open, after Tom Merry's warning.

"Well, my belief is that there's something fishy in it," said Monty Lowther at last. "Either Cutts is trying to fix Dig on to him by giving him some silly secret to keep, or else he's taking him in, and wants something or other in Dig's handwriting for some reason of his own."

"What utter rot!" said Dig.

"Might be a trick to get a specimen of Dig's handwritin' for something," said Arthur Augustus wisely. "Forjabs do that, you know, when they are goin' to forge a cheque, you know."

Dig laughed.

"I haven't a cheque-book, you fathead, have I?"

"I decline to be called a fathead, Dig!"

"Look here! I don't care about discussing Cutts like this," broke out Digby. "He's been very decent to me, and I don't want to hear him jawed about as if he were some blessed criminal. He's explained his reason to me. My father and his uncle were old chums, and his uncle is coming down here this week. I suppose Cutts wants his uncle to see us on good terms, that's all. He said his uncle will most likely tip me a quid. He asked me to write to his uncle yesterday, to say I should be glad to see him when he came down—"

"You wrote to Cutts' uncle?" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Why shouldn't I?" said Dig. "He's my pater's oldest friend. I shouldn't have thought of it myself, but Cutts suggested it. He said his uncle took a great interest in me, and that he would be flattered if I sent him a little note, saying that I remembered him, and so forth. So I did."

"You didn't tell us," said Blake.

"You're so rabid when Cutts is mentioned," growled Dig. "I suppose a chap is called on to be polite to his pater's old pal? I suppose you don't think Major Cutts is going to do me any harm—What? I suppose you know he's a distinguished officer, and only recently home from Africa?"

"I don't quite understand it," said Tom Merry. "It

might be that Cutts has been expected to look after you a bit, and now his uncle's coming down he's going to pretend that he's done it by appearing friendly with you. But—"

"That isn't all," said Lowther.

"Wathah not!"

"Look here!" said Dig angrily. "I'm fed up with this! Cutts has treated me decently, and I won't hear him run down!"

"You won't hear him cracked up here," said Blake tartly. "He's a cad, and a rotter of the first water, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Dig flushed red.

"Then I'll get out!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Dig—"

Slam!

Digby was gone, and the study door closed after him with unnecessary force. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another in something like dismay.

"That's the beginning," said Tom Merry quietly. "When Cutts got me into a secret with him, trouble with my pals was the first result. It looks to me like the same game over again. Though, as Dig hasn't any money, I don't see where Cutts is going to score. But he isn't doing it for nothing. You fellows, it's no good talking to Dig."

"Looks not!" growled Blake.

"But there's Cutts. We're all Dig's pals, and we're not going to see him taken in by Cutts. Let's talk to Cutts instead, and tell him plainly that he's got to let our chum alone, or we'll make it warm for him."

"Good egg!"

The juniors were feeling annoyed with Dig, but they were feeling intensely exasperated with Gerald Cutts. They were willing to leave the blackguard of the Fifth alone, why couldn't he let them alone? That Cutts meant mischief, in some cunning and underhand manner, they were convinced. In their present state of mind, it would be a relief to talk plain English to Cutts of the Fifth, and let him know what they thought of him. And without stopping to reflect on the matter, the chums of the School House made their way to Cutts' study.

CHAPTER 7.

Cornered.

THERE was a murmur as of voices in Cutts' study as the juniors approached it. They were treading lightly—not because they wanted to surprise Cutts, but because they were on dangerous ground. The Fifth Form passage was sacred to the seniors, excepting when fags were wanted, and a raid on the Fifth would have brought a crowd of big fellows out to hurl the juniors forth "on their necks." And half a dozen juniors making for Cutts' study looked like a raid—indeed, if Cutts turned rusty, it was pretty certain there would be a row, and the study might very possibly be wrecked. Tom Merry & Co. were quite prepared to go to that length, if necessary, to save their pal from the clutches of the wily Cutts.

Tom Merry knocked at the door, and turned the handle. The door did not open. It was locked. Inside the study there was dead silence. The murmur as of voices had died away instantly at the sound of the knock.

No reply came from within the study. Lefevre of the Fifth came along the passage, and looked at the juniors.

"Hallo, you fags! What do you want here?" he demanded. "That's what I say. What are you up to?"

"Coming to see Cutts," said Tom Merry blandly. "What's he got his door locked for? A smoking-bee, I suppose?"

"Don't you be cheeky," said Lefevre, considering for a moment whether he should chase the juniors along the passage. But as there were six of them, it occurred to Lefevre that he might be the person to be chased, possibly. So he shook a warning forefinger at them instead, and went into his study.

Tom Merry knocked at Cutts' door again. It opened in a few moments, Cutts himself opening it.

He stared inquiringly at the juniors. It seemed to Tom Merry that there was relief in Cutts' face. Perhaps he had expected more troublesome visitors than the heroes of the Fourth and the Shell.

"What do you kids want?" asked Cutts shortly.

"Want to speak to you, Cutts."

"I'm busy—"

"Sorry to interrupt the confabulation, whatever it is," said Tom Merry politely, "but we can't wait. It's important. Your friend can hear what we say—it's not a secret. We don't deal in secrets like you, you know."

"My friend!" said Cutts. "What do you mean? There's nobody here."

"Dropped him out of the window?" asked Lowther, with a grin. "You were jawing to somebody as we came along." Cutts laughed.

"I was going over my Homer aloud," he said. "I was talking to the assembly of Greek chiefs, and repeating the words of Agamemnon, if you must know. But if you've got anything to say to me, you can come in and say it."

He stepped back, and the juniors passed into the study. They did not believe for a moment that Cutts had been reciting Homer aloud. He was so false that they never thought of taking his word unless facts supported it. But the study certainly seemed to be empty. No one but Cutts was to be seen, and there was an open Homer on the table. Tom Merry looked round the study with a glance that Cutts understood quite well. He did not believe that Cutts had been alone.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Cutts. "I'm rather busy."

"Swotting over Homer?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! I should soonah have expected to find you swotting ovah the 'Pink 'Un,' Cutts, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Will you tell me what you want?" asked Cutts.

"Certainly, deah boy. You fellows had better leave the talkin' to me. I shall be able to explain to Cutts—"

"Shurrup!" growled Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"This is how it is, Cutts," said Tom Merry. "I haven't forgotten the time when you were trying to get me into your rotten manners and customs. Excuse me speaking plain English—it's a little way I've got. It seems to us that you are trying the same game on now with our pal Dig. We want you to stop it."

"Digby came to tea with me," said Cutts.

"Yes. He's not coming any more. We're going to scalp and slaughter him if he has anything to do with you," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

Cutts laughed heartily.

"For innocent kids, you seem to me to be jolly suspicious," he said. "What do you think I want Digby for? To borrow money of him?"

"We should think so, if he had any," said Herries.

"But he hasn't, has he?"

"Well, no!" Herries had to admit that. "But we don't trust you. You've got to let our pal alone. None of your rotten games for Study No. 6."

"Did you come here to ask for a licking?" said Cutts.

"You'd have to lick six of us!" Manners remarked.

"Yaas, wathah! If you cut up wuff, Cutts, deah boy, you will simply be askin' for a fearful thwashin', and you will receive it."

"I don't mind telling you why I've been kind to Digby," said Cutts. "My uncle asked me to keep an eye on him, on account of the old friendship between him and Digby's pater. They were boys together at Harrow. I want to please my uncle—for reasons that are no business of yours. I feel friendly to Digby, too—he's a very pleasant little chap, and very obliging. Are you satisfied now?"

"Is that all?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's all!"

The juniors exchanged glances. Cutts' explanation was reasonable enough. His motive for wanting to please his rich uncle was plain—a tip! Cutts, as if the matter was finished, sat down at the table again and started on Homer.

"Well," said Tom Merry, after a pause, "you can't blame us for not trusting you, Cutts, considering what we know about you. Will you promise to let Digby alone, and not ask him to your study any more?"

"Yaas, that will be all right."

"Certainly not," said Cutts. "How dare you think of dictating to me! However, my uncle is coming to-morrow, and he probably won't come to the school again, so very likely I sha'n't see Digby again after that. I'm not specially keen on the society of Fourth-Form kids. In fact, I'm pretty certain I sha'n't see him after that, since you must know all about it!"

"Oh," said Tom Merry, "then all this attention to Dig for the last week is simply to make your uncle think you've been looking after him—when you haven't."

"Your perspicacity does you credit," said Cutts sweetly. "It shows what a lot a chap can learn in the Shell if he's really intelligent."

Some of the juniors grinned. Cutts had a very stinging tongue when he chose to let it go.

"Well," said Tom Merry, unmoved, "it seems that you've been telling Dig a secret. He won't tell what it is—quite right, of course, as he's promised. But we suspected some move of that sort, and asked him—and jolted it out of him."

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that there was a secret. That was how you began with me, you remember."

Cutts gritted his teeth for a moment.

"I've had enough of this," he said. "Will you clear out?"

"Not till we've finished. Dig can't give away the secret, as he's promised. But we don't like secrets between Dig and you. It's dangerous. The only way is for you to tell us the secret, too. We don't want to know it—it's for Dig's sake. If there's no harm in it you can tell us; if there is harm in it, we shall know what to do, then. I'm not inquisitive—in fact, Manners and Lowther and I will step outside, and you can tell it only to Dig's study-mates—they can judge whether there is any harm in it. If you can tell Dig, you can tell them."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as a fair offah."

"What do you say, Cutts?"

"I say that I shall throw you out of my study if you don't clear out!" said Cutts, rising to his feet.

"Then you won't tell us?"

"I sha'n't allow fags to come here questioning me, if that's what you mean. Get out of my study, or I'll call some of the Fifth here, and make an example of you."

The juniors drew closer together, their eyes gleaming. They were prepared for trouble. Cutts' refusal to explain what the "secret" was renewed all their suspicions that had been allayed. Why couldn't he tell them, if there was no harm in it? They were as much to be trusted with a harmless secret as Digby was. Cutts made a step towards the door, as if to call on the Fifth for aid in ejecting the intruders. Then Monty Lowther's cool and drawing voice broke in:

"Why not call your friend behind the screen, Cutts, old man?"

Cutts stopped dead.

"What! What did you say?"

Lowther laughed lightly.

"Who's the Lady Teazle behind the screen?" he drawled.

"There's no one there," said Cutts. "What do you mean, you young fool?"

The juniors all stared at the screen. Monty Lowther, convinced that there had been someone in the study talking to Cutts, had had his eyes open ever since he had been in the room. The way the screen was arranged before the door of the wall cupboard had drawn his attention. There was nowhere else where anyone could have been concealed; and he had tried a shot at a venture—and Cutts' startled look showed him that his chance shot had hit the mark. There was someone else in the study, and Gerald Cutts was hiding him from view.

"Why don't you go on, Cutts?" asked Lowther pleasantly. "While you're calling the Fifth, I'll peep behind the screen. We've stumbled on quite an interesting little mystery. You chaps remember Reilly mentioned that he saw Toby showing a rough-looking specimen into Cutts' study just after tea? He's still here, and Cutts is hiding his light under a bushel. Won't you introduce us to your friend, Cutts?"

"Will you get out of my study?" said Cutts, between his teeth.

Lowther made a movement towards the screen. Cutts sprang in front of it in a twinkling.

"Stand back, you prying cad!" he shouted.

"So there's really somebody there!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Mind your own business."

"I wonder who the johnnie is?" murmured Lowther lazily.

"Is it Tickey Tapp, that you used to play roulette with, Cutts, old fellow? Is it old Griggs, the bookie? This is getting jolly interesting."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you going?" shouted Cutts furiously.

"No, we're not going."

"Wathah not!"

"Call the Fifth in," grinned Blake. "I dare say they'll be interested to see your friend. Like a giddy scene in a play—the hidden beauty behind the screen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts glared at the juniors. He dared not have the Fifth fellows in now—he dared not risk having the hidden Jonas Hooke brought to light. He was at the mercy of the juniors, and they knew it. Whoever his visitor was, they knew that he dared not let him be seen—his actions showed that.

"Better do the sensible things, Cutts, old man," said Tom Merry. "Trot out the secret, and give leave for Dig to tell us if it's the truth—that's what we want."

There was no help for it. Cutts had to give in.

"I'll tell you," he said slowly.

"The truth, mind!"

Cutts' eyes glittered for a moment.

"You can ask Digby, and say I gave him leave to tell you."

"I'm writing a play."

"Wha-a-a-a-at!"

The juniors simply stuttered at that unexpected revelation.

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"Writing a play!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Gammon!"

"Draw it mild!"

"That is the secret I told Digby," said Cutts calmly.

"You can ask him, and he's at liberty to tell you."

"And that is all?" Tom Merry asked, in amazement.

"That is all!"

"Well, my hat!"

"I don't believe it," said Herries grimly. "Any silly ass might write a play, of course; but what did you want to tell Dig for and make it a secret?"

"I told him in conversation—and it's a secret because I don't want to be chipped about it. If my play's refused, I don't want all the fellows to know. That's all. I depend upon you to say nothing, as you've forced it out of me like this."

"Oh, that's right enough," said Tom Merry—"and Dig's at liberty to tell us?"

"Yes."

"Good enough. Come on, you chaps, and we'll ask Dig," said Blake.

The juniors trooped out of the study. They were amazed and relieved. So harmless a secret as that was not a cause for uneasiness. Cutts drew a deep breath as he locked the door after the juniors.

"Hang them!" he muttered. "Hang them! But the young fools couldn't possibly suspect—they couldn't possibly! Digby didn't—and they can't!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked for Digby at once. They found him in the common-room, and he looked at them rather grimly as they came up.

"We've been to see Cutts!" Blake announced.

"Like your cheek!" growled Digby.

"He's told us the giddy secret, and he's given us leave to ask you, and you leave to tell us. You're released from your promise," said Blake.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Dig.

"Cutts says that the secret is that he's writing a play, and he doesn't want all the fellows to know in case he should be chipped about it. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"That's the secret he told you?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

Tom burst into a laugh.

"Well, we have been making a mountain out of a mole-hill, and no mistake," he confessed. "I never thought it was a harmless thing like that. But I don't trust Cutts."

"I think you've taken a jolly lot on yourself in bouncing it out of Cutts like that," said Digby sulkily. "I think you might have minded your own business, if you ask me."

"That's all right; we don't ask you!" said Tom Merry good-humouredly.

"And that's all there is in it?" said Blake musingly.

"Well, I'm beat!"

"That isn't all there is in it!" said Monty Lowther coolly. "There's something else behind it all. I know Cutts. There's something else."

"What is it?"

Lowther shook his head.

"Don't ask me; I don't know. But I'll undertake to say that there's something behind it. I don't know what yet! Cutts is too deep for us!"

"Rot!" said Digby emphatically.

"Yaas, I must say that it seems to me to be wathah wot, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"We shall see!" said Lowther. "Just you wait a bit, my sons, and we shall see what we shall see!"

And as that was certainly incontrovertible, no one attempted to controvert it.

CHAPTER 8.

Another Engagement.

TOM MERRY was the cynosure of all junior eyes in the School House the next day, when he came out of the Shell Form-room after morning lessons.

It was Wednesday—a half-holiday. The cricket season was coming to its end, but the remaining matches were being played out with undiminished keenness. That afternoon the School House juniors were very interested to know how the eleven was to be made up. Of course, in a House match there were certain players who were bound to be played; weak players having to be contented with chances in less important meetings or in practice matches. But the "tail" of the eleven was subject to changes, and a good many fellows hoped to find their names down.

Tom Merry was known to have the list in his pocket, ready

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

to be posted up on the board—hence the eagerness with which the fellows watched him out of the Form-room.

The regular House matches were over, the present one being an "extra" arranged chiefly for practice, the junior eleven being hard at practice to get into top form for their final tussle with the Grammar School, which was coming off shortly.

Tom Merry walked down the wide passage with nearly all the Shell and the Fourth after him, and stopped solemnly before the notice-board and pinned up his paper.

There were other papers pinned up there—notice from the Housemasters, notices to Forms from Form-masters, notices from the captain of the school, from the president of the Senior Debating Society, notices of fixtures of the first eleven; but the juniors of the School House passed them all over as things of little account.

What interested them was the notice in Tom Merry's big handwriting. Tom walked out of the School House immediately he had pinned up the paper. He wanted to save argument. The matter was settled, and it was no use talking.

Kangaroo of the Shell—otherwise, Harry Noble—read the list down, and was satisfied with it. Needless to say, the name of Kangaroo appeared there.

Merry, Lowther, Manners, Noble, Dane, Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Reilly, Kerruish.

That was the junior House eleven for the occasion.

"Well, that seems all right," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I trust you fellows are goin' to back me up this afternoon in givin' the New House a fearful thwashin'!"

"We're all in top form," said Blake. "And Dig is coming on well in fielding. We shall expect you to look out for Fatty Wynn's bowling, Dig."

Digby coloured.

"Me!" he said awkwardly and ungrammatically.

"You!" said Blake, with a nod. "Don't say you don't feel fit. You're as fit as a fiddle. I hear that Figgins & Co. are in great form, and Redfern and Kerr are specially on the warpath with their batting. We shall want a good field."

"I'm not playing!" said Digby.

Herries and Blake and D'Arcy all turned round at once, and stared at Digby in a decidedly discomfiting manner.

"I didn't know you were setting up as a humourist, Dig," said Blake pleasantly; "and I don't quite see where the joke of that remark comes in."

"It isn't a joke!" said Dig.

"It must be! You know very well you're playing. Can't you see your name in the list? or have you lost your eyesight or forgotten how to read?"

"I've got something else on."

"Nothing else is allowed on when it's a House match."

"Well, this isn't a regular House match," said Dig. "We finished our list of fixtures with the New House. This is an extra—really a practice match."

"You are playing, all the same. What in the name of all that's idiotic do you want to cut the cricket for?" demanded Blake.

"I don't exactly want to," said Dig; "but—but I've got something to do."

"You're not detained?"

"No; it isn't that."

"Then you're playing, my son."

"I can't!" said Dig, looking red and uncomfortable.

"Don't tell me it's anything to do with Cutts," said Blake, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, "because I won't stand it!"

"Hallo, who's talking of Cutts?" said Mellish of the Fourth, joining them. "You fellows heard about that?"

"Heard about what?" snapped Blake crossly. He did not like Mellish, and he did not like to be interrupted.

"Well, it seems to have been a fag in the Third who saw it," said Mellish. "I don't know if there's any truth in it. I thought you fellows might know, as you were with Cutts yesterday just before dark."

"Well, we don't know, whatever it is," growled Herries. "Has Cutts been found out at last? Is that it? Time he was away, anyway!"

"Jolly near it," grinned Mellish. "I thought you might know. The story is that a fag saw a man dropping out of Cutts' window last evening after dark—from what I make out, it must have been about half an hour after you fellows were there."

"My hat!"

The chums of the Fourth exchanged quick glances. They remembered the unseen man whom Lowther had discovered was hiding behind the screen. They had wondered what

had become of him. Evidently he had not succeeded in getting out of Gerald Cutts' quarters quite unperceived.

"I see you know something about it," chuckled Mellish. "It seems to be established that he was seen dropping from Cutts' window in the dark. And a chap says he heard somebody climbing over the school wall, and ran up to see who it was, and heard him drop into the road. He didn't see him. I say, who was the man there when you fellows visited Cutts?"

"Better ask Cutts!" said Blake shortly.

"But, I say, I want to know——"

"Rats!"

The chums of the Fourth turned their backs upon Mellish. They had no inclination to minister to the inquisitiveness of the Peeping Tom of the School House.

Dig was very silent as he went out into the quadrangle with his chums. He guessed whom that mysterious man was who was supposed to have dropped from Cutts' window after dark, and dodged out of St. Jim's unseen. It could be no other than Jonas Hooke, whom Toby had taken up to the study while Dig was there. Cutts had extricated himself from his dangerous predicament, it seemed, and Dig could not help feeling glad that the Fifth-Former had escaped discovery. But he did not mention a word of what he knew to his comrades. He had told Cutts that he would not mention it.

"Well, to come back to our mutton," said Blake, when they were rid of Mellish. "Is it anything to do with Cutts, this idiotic idea of yours of not playing this afternoon, Dig?"

"I'm going out for Cutts," said Dig.

"Where? A giddy secret, I suppose?" snapped Blake.

"No. He's asked me to go over to Abbotsford for him, on my bike, to take a message to Hallam, at Abbotsford School," said Dig. "It's about a swimming match."

"Why can't he write?"

"He says there's a hurry for it, and I couldn't refuse to oblige him. I wasn't sure Tom Merry would put my name down; and as it isn't a regular match I don't mind so much missing it. Gore can play instead. He'll be glad of the chance."

"Well, I don't know that there's any harm in your biking over to Hallam at Abbotsford," said Blake reluctantly. "There's nothing but that in it—simply a message to Hallam at Abbotsford School?"

"That's all!" said Dig. "I don't say I'm pleased at standing out of the game, but Cutts asked be to do it as a favour, and I didn't like to say 'No!' after he stood me such a ripping tea yesterday, and helped me with my prep. last night, too. It's little enough to do for a chap, and Cutts says it's important."

Blake and Herries and D'Arcy turned the matter over in their minds. It did not seem possible, deeply as they distrusted Gerald Cutts and all his works, to find fault in this. They had seen Hallam of Abbotsford, and knew that he was a decent fellow. It certainly would not hurt Dig to take a message to him.

"Cutts isn't going with you?" asked Blake finally.

"No, ass; he's got to see his uncle this afternoon!"

"But you want to see him, too, don't you? What about the quid Cutts said he would tip you—to say nothing of his being your pater's old chum?"

"That's all right! Cutts says he is staying the evening, and going back by the late train, and I shall be back before dark," said Dig.

"Well, I suppose you can go," said Blake grudgingly. "I must say I can't see any harm in it. But I don't trust Cutts, and I wouldn't miss the match for all the Cutts in Christendom—Comic Cutts, or Gerald Cutts, or any Cutts!"

"Well, I couldn't say 'No!'" said Dig.

"No; that's the kind of duffer you are," agreed Blake compassionately. "Now, in Yorkshire, where I come from, we can say 'No!' sharp enough, I can tell you!"

"Weally, Blake, it would have been wathah ungwacious of Dig to wefuse," said Arthur Augustus, with an air of deep consideration.

"Rats!" said Blake. "Let's find Tom Merry, and tell him the silly chump is staying out because he couldn't say 'No!' to Cutts or 'Bo!' to a goose. Come on!"

Tom Merry frowned when he heard that Dig was standing out of the eleven, especially in connection with Cutts; but his brow cleared when Blake explained.

"Can't see any harm in it, can you?" asked Blake.

"Well, no!" said Tom. "I suppose we must admit that even Cutts isn't a giddy Machiavelli, with deep-laid plots and schemes in everything he does. I think it's inconsiderate of him. He might have asked Dig whether he was booked for the afternoon first. But it's all right. I'll put George Gore in, and Dig can bike to Abbotsford—or bike to Jericho, if he likes!"

And after dinner, when the School House team went down in spotless flannels to meet their old rivals on the cricket-ground, Dig went to the bicycle-shed for his machine.

Dig wheeled his bike out, and paused to see the match begin before he started off. The School House won the toss, and Tom Merry & Co. batted first, Tom opening the innings with Kangaroo. Figgins & Co. went into the field, and Fatty Wynn took the ball for the first over. Dig watched him bowl, and heard the cheer that went up as the Cornstalk cut away the leather for two to start with.

Dig's heart was a little heavy as he wheeled his machine down to the gates, and mounted it. He would have liked very much to play in the cricket-match; but he could not refuse to oblige Cutts of the Fifth, who had been so very kind to him, and he made up his mind to it, and pedalled away towards Abbotsford.

CHAPTER 9.

Uncle and Nephew!

MAJOR CUTTS came down the road from Rylecombe with a Cavalry stride. He was a thick-set, square-shouldered man, with a complexion burnt bronze by an African sun, and a sword-cut across his cheek that gave him a somewhat grim appearance. When the major was angry—which was not seldom—that old scar would begin to glow, and the major's acquaintances looked upon it as a danger-signal. The major was a tough old soldier, who had seen service under many skies, and was as hard as hickory—outside, if not inside.

The major had walked from the station. He paused as he came in sight of the old stone gateway of St. Jim's, and glanced in. Taggles, the porter, saluted the major with the profoundest respect. Taggles did not know whom he was, but the major's manner impelled respect. The major gave him a kind word, in spite of his grim look, and paused to speak to him.

"Taggles, what?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Taggles.

"Glad to see you again," said the grim-looking old soldier. "You don't remember me? I came here years ago, Taggles, before I went to Egypt, when my nephew was a junior—eh? I suppose Master Cutts is about somewhere?"

"Major Cutts, sir," said Taggles—"I remember you now, sir. Quite so, sir. Werry kind of you to remember me, sir. Yes, sir, Master Cutts is in the School House, sir. Shall I show you the way, sir?"

"Don't trouble; I remember it."

The major passed on, and Taggles looked after him, and wondered what Major Cutts would have thought if he had known that his nephew had had another caller the previous afternoon, and no other than Jonas Hooke, the notorious bookmaker of Abbotsford. For although Cutts had explained the matter away so satisfactorily to Mr. Railton, Taggles knew perfectly well that Cutts' visitor had been Jonas Hooke, the bookmaker. But it was not his business to say so to Major Cutts, certainly. He felt that he would not have cared to be in Gerald Cutts' shoes if the major had known that little circumstance, however.

The major crossed the quadrangle, and Cutts, looking out of his study window, recognised the broad-shouldered man with the cavalry swagger. Cutts turned to Knox of the Sixth, who was in the study with him, and gawped.

"Cut off, Knox, old man. Here comes my uncle. Put those blessed bridge-markers in your pocket!"

And Knox grinned, and departed from the study with the bridge-markers in his pocket.

Cutts sat down at the table, and opened a Greek lexicon, a grammar, and a volume of Xenophon. He took from the bookshelf "Mugs on Fortification," and "Skeggs on the Care of Cavalry Horses," and laid the volumes on the table where they could not fail to catch the major's eye.

He was deep in Xenophon when a heavy stride came along the passage. The volume was the *Anabasis*—the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, the volume in which Xenophon relates the adventure of the ten thousand Greeks who marched home from the heart of Asia Minor—with a courage and determination only equalled by the courage and determina-

tion of modern readers who pursue the narrative to the end.

Tap!

Cutts rose to his feet as the door opened to admit his uncle. Toby was grinning behind the major in the passage. He had shown a very different sort of visitor into the study the previous day, and he could not help thinking of it at the moment.

"Uncle!" exclaimed Cutts.

And he ran forward to meet the major. Major Cutts shook hands with his nephew, giving him a grip that made Cutts wince.

"Well, Gerry, I'm glad to see you," said the major, scanning his nephew with critical eyes and some approval. "You've grown."

Cutts laughed.

"Yes; I was a nipper in the Second Form the last time you saw me, uncle," he said. "I remember the day you came. I'd had a licking for turning my trousers up. We don't let the fags do that here. I told you about it."

"You did!" grinned the major. "And you didn't blub, I remember. Where are you now—hey?—in the Fifth Form, I think?"

"That's it!" said Cutts.

"What we used to call a swot, I suppose?" said the major, glancing at the books on the table.

Cutts shook his head.

"Not a bit of it," he said. "I work hard—I'm not ashamed of that—but I play hard, too. I'm in the first eleven, and in the senior eight. But it's no good trying to get on without working, uncle, and I admit I slog a bit. I've taken up Greek, but I'm not neglecting the fortification and cavalry exercises, I can tell you. Only, don't look on me as a swot, please. I should be playing cricket this afternoon, but I've stayed in for you—and I was just filling up time with another dig at Xenophon."

"That's right," said the major, greatly pleased. "Work hard, and play hard. I heard about the school playing the famous Australian team, the Wallabies!"

"I was in the School eleven," said Cutts modestly.

"Good, my boy!" The major deposited his person in the easy-chair, Cutts remaining standing. "Sit down, Gerry. I want a talk with you!"

"Go ahead, sir!"

"Getting on all right in the school—hey?"

"I think the Head will give you a pretty good report, uncle."

"And still wanting to go into the Cavalry?"

"I've set my heart on that, sir. Of course, I know my father's made heaps of money as a merchant; but—but—Dash it all, uncle, you are in the Cavalry, and—and you wouldn't be anything else for heaps of money, would you?"

"Right, my boy—right!" said the major, with a chuckle. "I'll see that your father doesn't put any obstacles in your way. By Jove, sir, if he does, I'll alter my will, and leave all my Consols to another nephew, by Jove!"

"That would be hardly fair on me, would it, uncle?" said Cutts, with a smile.

The major laughed.

"Depend upon me to make it all right for you there," he said. "Your father agrees with me about that. Your father looks after you all right here? Plenty of tin—hey?"

"Oh, plenty, sir!" said Cutts. "And you have been so generous, it would have been all right, anyway. I spend a good bit on books—I'm keeping Sandhurst in view all the time, you see, sir—and I may have been a bit extravagant in riding horses; but, as I'm going into the Cavalry, that is really a necessity—don't you think so, sir? As a matter of fact, I've sold my bike to pay a bill at the livery stables. But I don't mind that; I sha'n't be in the cycle corps!"

"Oh, gad, that's too bad!" his uncle said. "You'll order a new bicycle—do you hear?—and tell them to send the bill to me!"

"You're kindness itself, uncle," said Cutts.

He had had inwardly a hope that the major would lay down the money.

"By the way, there's young Digby—old Bob's son," said the major. "You've been keeping an eye on him, as I asked you?"

Cutts became very grave. He did not reply for the moment, and the major's sharp eyes became sharper.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

**FATTY
WYNN'S
HUNGER-
STRIKE!**

A Grand Story of Tom
Merry & Co.
Don't Miss It!
Order Early.



There was an ominous crash of eggs, and a spurting and splashing of yolks over the sprawling juniors. "Oh! What the—who the—how the—" Tom Merry sat up dazedly, and felt that he was sitting in something sticky. (See Chapter 2.)

"Nothing the matter with Digby, is there?" he asked. "Bob Digby was my fag at Harrow, and I should be sorry if there was anything wrong with his boy!"

"He's in good health, uncle."

"Slacker at his work—hey!"

"I think not. I help him with his work sometimes," said Cutts modestly. "You see, he is in the Fourth Form, so I don't have anything to do with him, unless I look him out specially. I find time to help him a bit with his Form work."

The major nodded approval.

"That's right, Jerry. But what's the matter with him, then? Don't beat about the bush, sir. I can see you've got something on your mind."

Cutts hesitated.

"The fact is, uncle, there is—or, rather, was—something wrong about Sir Robert Digby's son," he said slowly. "But—but I don't know if I ought to tell you."

"You'd better," said the major. "I want to see him as well as you while I'm here; and if there's anything wrong, his father's got to know."

Cutts assumed an expression of great alarm.

"Not his father, sir! His father must not know! Good heavens!"

The major looked very startled.

"What do you mean, boy? What is the matter with young Digby? I insist upon knowing at once! Has he been getting into trouble?"

"Don't be angry with me, uncle. But if I tell you, it will have to be in confidence, and on condition that Sir Robert Digby isn't told a word about it, and that you don't say a word to Dig about it, either. I promised him to keep it a secret—and you wouldn't ask me to break my word, sir?"

"Certainly not. But—"

"I'm going to tell you—in fact, I must tell you, for I want you to help me, sir, in the matter; but not a word further. I may tell you, anyway, that Digby got himself into frightful trouble, and I found it out, and saved him from taking an awful step. If I never have anything else to be thankful for, I shall always be thankful for that," said Cutts.

"You saved him?"

"Yes, uncle."

"I'm glad of that, Gerry," said the major, his voice a little

husky. "I'm glad my nephew was here to help old Bob's son in the time of need. But you must tell me all—all, do you understand?"

"Not unless you promise not to breathe a word to Sir Robert, sir," said Cutts firmly. "It would be a fearful blow to him, and I promised Digby that his father should never know."

"Well, I promise that."

"Nor speak about it to Digby himself, either, sir. He would not dare to face you—in fact, only to-day, as soon as he heard that you were coming, he ran out and mounted his bicycle, and has ridden off, goodness knows where."

"Do you mean to say that the boy dare not meet his father's old friend?" exclaimed the major, aghast.

Cutts nodded.

"You don't know what's he's been through, sir. Besides, it's all over now, so far as Digby is concerned. I've promised him that his father shall not know, and that, if I tell you, you will promise not to mention the matter to him."

"You must tell me, Gerry."

"Give me your word, sir, not to mention it to the poor kid. I assure you that he is out of his trouble now, and has promised to keep straight, and has kept his word. I keep him very closely under my eye now, I promise you. He has had his lesson, and it has done him good. But if the matter were revived, I could not answer for what might happen. When I explain everything, you will see for yourself; and I gave Digby my word of honour, sir—the word of Major Cutts' nephew!" added Cutts.

"You should not have done so, Gerald; but, having done so, you cannot break it, certainly. Well, I promise what you tell me shall not pass my lips to Digby or his father. Now, tell me what it is? You have alarmed me horribly."

"I'd better show you the letter, sir."

"The letter. What letter?"

"The letter the boy had written in despair when I found him, and talked him out of his folly and helped him," said Cutts. "You know Digby's hand?"

"Yes. I had a letter from him yesterday."

"Then you will recognise this."

Cutts opened his pocket-book, and took out a folded letter. He opened it, and laid it on the table before the major. Major Cutts read it, and stared, and gnawed his grey moustache, and set his teeth hard.

For this was the letter:

"Dear Dad,—I'm afraid you will be shocked at this. I'm awfully sorry. I've got into frightful trouble. I'm so upset I hardly know what I'm writing. Dear old dad, don't be too upset when you hear what's happened. I can't stand it any longer. I've been betting on horses, and I've lost a lot of money, and they've been worrying me for weeks and weeks, and I have been going to write you, but I didn't dare to ask you for seventy-five pounds. I've been so miserable, I wish I was dead. I can't stand it any longer, and I'm going to drop over the bridge on the Ryll to-night, and they won't be able to threaten me any longer."

"Good-bye, and forgive me.—Your miserable son,

"ROBERT."

CHAPTER 10.

The Cheque!

THERE was a long silence in the study. The major gazed blankly at the letter he had read in Digby's handwriting. He knew the hand. He had Dig's letter in his pocket at that moment, and this was the same sprawling, schoolboy hand. The half-incoherent wording of the letter seemed to show the dreadful stress of mind under which it had been written. The major's eyes were dimmed as he looked up at last. Cutts was watching his face with keen, scanning eyes.

"Good heavens!" said the major at last.

Cutts gave a sigh.

"You understand now, sir, why Sir Robert must know nothing of it. I think it would have broken his heart if he had received that letter."

"Poor old Bob!" said the major. "I think it would. And you say that the foolish boy was actually going to send this letter to his father."

"I found him with it on the table before him, sir. He was half beside himself, crying as if his heart would break," said Cutts, with an artistic shake in his voice. "I had noticed that there was something wrong with him for some time past, and I had asked him questions; but he always evaded answering. But several times he asked me to lend him money, so I guessed that money trouble was at the bottom of it. The night he wrote this letter I had been struck by his looks, and I was very uneasy. I was, in fact, thinking about him, and I had gone out into the quad. to take a turn before going to bed, and was wondering whether I ought to

write to his father, or speak to the Head; but you understand that it would have been a delicate matter to risk getting the kid into trouble with his people."

The major nodded without speaking.

"I was in a most unpleasant frame of mind, as you can imagine," said Cutts. "Then I saw that there was a light in the window of Digby's study. It was an hour after the bedtime of the Fourth Form, and the study should have been dark, of course; and it struck me at once that Digby had come down for something, and I hurried to the study at once. He was sitting there, with this letter on the table before him. He had just written it, and I read it over his shoulder. Under the circumstances, I felt that I was justified in doing so, sir," added Cutts.

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Then I knew what he meant to do. He was going to get out of the school, and drop into the river. His troubles had unnerved him to that extent, and he was not at all himself," said Cutts. "He was worried to the pitch of suicide. I was so horror-stricken that I cried out something, and then he found I was in the study. He jumped up, and ran for the door, and I had to struggle with him to stop him. But I got him back, and locked the door, and talked to him. I needn't tell you what I said. I was rather upset myself, but I got the whole miserable story out of him. He had been led into gambling—putting money on horses—and had borrowed money, too, the rascals knowing that his father was a baronet, and knowing that Sir Robert would pay them to avoid a scandal. Of course, they couldn't have understood the pitch of desperation they were driving to boy to. Digby dared not write to his father to say he owed seventy-five pounds. He knew Sir Robert would never have paid such a sum. He was terrified at the thought of the exposure and scandal—and, of course, he would have been expelled from the school when the truth came out—and so he had made up his mind to do the mad thing."

"The scoundrels!" said the major.

"I talked him out of it. I made him promise to go back to bed," said Cutts. "But there was only one way I could influence him. I promised to pay the money for him, and set him free of his creditors. On his side, he promised never to mix with such rascals again; and he has kept his word, sir. A straighter, better kid than Digby couldn't be found in the school to-day. I give you my word about that, sir."

"I am glad to hear it, Gerald. I certainly think that such a lesson ought to have been enough for him."

"It was enough, sir."

"But you say you promised to pay the money, Gerald," said the major, puzzled. "Have you told anyone else about this?"

"No one, sir."

"Not your father?"

"Not a word, sir. My father would think me a fool. Business men take different views of matters, sir," said Cutts apologetically. "I hope you don't think it wrong of me to confide to you instead of my father? I felt that you would understand the case better, somehow; and you have been, in a way, responsible, as it was by your request that I took Digby under my wing, so to speak."

"That is right, Gerald. But if you have not asked your father for the money, how could you have obtained such a sum as seventy-five pounds?"

Cutts hesitated.

"I'm afraid you will blame me, sir," he said; "but think of the circumstances. In the heat of the moment, I promised Dig that I would pay his debts. He would listen to nothing else. I took him back to his dormitory, and took charge of this letter, and I may say, sir, that I did not sleep again that night. I was afraid he might still do something foolish, and I watched outside his dormitory door till morning."

"It was kind of you, Gerald."

"About the money. I raised it, and Digby paid the harpies who were threatening him, and got back the papers he had signed. I examined the papers, and we burnt them together in the study fire here."

"Then Digby is quite clear?"

"Quite. It is I"—Cutts smiled ruefully—"it is I who am in a fix instead. There was only one way to get the money, sir. I could not ask my father for such a sum, and you were still in Africa then, or, rather, on the steamer home. I raised seventy-five pounds from a moneylender."

"Gerald!"

"I was afraid you would condemn me, sir," said Cutts submissively. "But I could not think of anything else to do. The man—a man named Hooke—is fair in his way. I have paid the interest out of my allowance. It has kept me pretty short, I admit, but—but I don't complain of that. Uncle, I'll admit that I hoped that when you came home, you would help me."

The major was silent. His eyes were again on the letter

on the table, and he did not see the almost haggard anxiety with which Cutts was watching his face.

"Did Digby know how you raised the money, Gerald?" he asked at last.

Cutts shook his head.

"I did not tell him, sir. The poor fellow had enough to hear—it was useless telling him that, too. He could not help it. I did it on my own responsibility, after thinking and thinking and thinking to try to find some other way. I told Digby that if he would promise to go straight, and keep his promise, he should never hear a word of the matter again—from me, from you, from anyone. He has kept his word. Uncle, I know what a serious thing it is for a fellow of my age to have dealings with moneylenders. My only excuse is that it was not for myself, but to save the son of your old friend—the boy you had asked me to look after."

"You did right, Gerald. There was no other way, I suppose," said the major. "But it is surprising that a moneylender should make you such a loan. He must know that he could not recover it at law, as you are a minor."

"They know their business, sir. The man would only have to send his claim to the Head of St. Jim's, and I should be expelled from the school for having had dealings with him. He considered that my relations would find the money rather than that; he knows my people are right."

"You risked all that, Gerald, to save my friend's son—because I had asked you to take care of him," said the major.

"I did, sir, though I may say I like the lad very much myself. He is a fine fellow, and, as I said, as straight as a die now he's out of his trouble."

"You owe this man—this Hooke—seventy-five pounds?" said the major, after a pause.

"Yes, sir."

"What interest have you been paying him?"

"Five shillings a week, sir."

"The rascal! Why, that would be more than fifteen per cent.!" the major exclaimed.

"I had no choice in the matter, sir."

"The rascal shall be paid," said the major. "I will draw a cheque for the amount. His claim shall be met in full, and I should like to have the pleasure of kicking him downstairs, begad, as well! The name is—what—Hooke?"

"Better make the cheque to Hooke & Griggs—that is the name of the firm, sir," said Cutts, his hands trembling a little.

"Give me a pen!"

Major Cutts extracted a large leathern wallet from an inside pocket, and opened it, and produced his cheque-book. Cutts, in spite of his nerve, felt a little giddy. He had played out that cunning comedy with ruthlessness and unscrupulous determination; but he knew how much he was risking. Even now that he had gained his point, and swindled his uncle of the seventy-five pounds he owed to Hooke & Griggs, he did not feel safe—he knew he was not safe. Even yet, at any moment, his house of cards might come toppling down—an edifice of lies is never a safe erection. But his hand was firm as he passed the pen to the major.

Major Cutts wrote out the cheque, and Cutts could scarcely trust his eyes as he read: "Pay Messrs. Hooke & Griggs the sum of seventy-five pounds—£75." The major detached the cheque from the book, and blotted it, and handed it to Cutts.

"Send that to the man, and have done with him," he said.

"Uncle, how kind you are!"

The uncle made a gesture.

"I feel that I caused this, in a way, Gerald, by asking you to take care of Digby," he said. "But, mark me, if anything of the kind should recur, you are to communicate with me at once—let me know, and I will deal with the matter!"

"I shall obey you, sir. But I am sure nothing of the kind can occur—I have kept a very sharp eye on Digby, and I am quite satisfied."

"I am glad to hear that, at all events."

"I am sorry you won't see him, sir," said Cutts regretfully.

"I think you mentioned in your letter you had to take the six train back. I am afraid that Digby will stay out until you are gone."

The major shook his head.

"I shall see him!" he said quietly.

"But your train, sir?"

"I can send a telegram, and catch a later one."

"But—but you will say nothing to Digby. You remember

"I shall not forget my promise, Gerald," said the major, with dignity. "But I must see Bob's son before I go—I am decided about that."

Cutts was conscious again of a giddy feeling in the head. He had played out his dangerous game with success so far,

but—who could tell? Yet even then his nerve was of iron; his look did not change.

"I'm glad you can stay, uncle," he said. "I remember your catching trains was always like the laws of the Medes and the Persians."

"This is an exceptional matter," said the major.

"Indeed it is, uncle. I suppose I had better send this cheque at once?"

"Certainly! I will walk down to the post-office with you, and you can register it," said the major.

There was a curse in Gerald Cutts' heart, but his face was still smiling.

"That will be ripping, sir! Come on, then!"

Uncle and nephew left the study together.

CHAPTER 11.

Up to Gussy!

TOM MERRY glanced over the foaming top of his glass of ginger-beer, and remarked:

"That's Cutts' uncle!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded. Tom and Arthur Augustus were "out" in the House match, and Kangaroo and Reilly were battling for all they were worth, and Tom had crossed over to the tuckshop for a "ginger-pop."

Tom had to keep his eye on the field, but Arthur Augustus, as a common or garden member of the team, was taking things easy now, gently and delicately sipping iced lemonade through a straw.

D'Arcy let go the straw, and adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and took a careful survey of the soldierly-looking man who was leaving the distant School House in company with Cutts, of the Fifth.

"Looks a vewy decent sort!" he said.

"A little bit like Cutts in feature," said Tom Merry; "but a better specimen, I fancy. I've heard of him from my uncle—he's a major, and a good soldier!"

"Too good for that wascal Cutts!" said D'Arcy. "See how Cutts is makin' up to him. I myself heard him wefer disrespectsfully to his uncle in speakin' to a Fifth Form chap, and look at him now!"

"Retten humbug!" said Tom Merry, finishing his ginger-beer. "I'm off!"

Tom Merry walked back to the cricket. Jack Blake took his empty seat at the little table under the elm outside the school shop. Blake had gone down under Fatty Wynn's deadly bowling for 19.

"Warm, ain't it?" Blake remarked. "Did you say ginger, Gussy? Certainly—as many as you like—and ask 'em to ice it!"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He was going towards the major and his nephew. Major Cutts was approaching. The major had evidently caught a glimpse of the cricket-field, and wished to see the fellows playing. Besides the junior House match there was a Form match between Fifth and Sixth, and all the mighty men of the two top Forms were engaged in strife with the nimble willow and the elusive leather.

Kildare was hitting out to the bowling of Lefevre of the Fifth, and the hitting of the captain of St. Jim's was worth watching.

Major Cutts was an old cricketer—he had played at Lord's for Harrow in his time—and he was naturally keen on the great summer game.

Blake followed Arthur Augustus's glance curiously, and spotted Cutts and his uncle.

"Oh," said Blake, "old Cutts and young Cutts—eh?"

"Ynas, wathah!"

"Looks a tough old sport. Ginger-beer, please, Mrs. Taggles! No; don't get up—I'll come and fetch it!"

And Blake good-naturedly went in for the ginger-beer, to save the old lady getting up and putting down her knitting.

When he came out again D'Arcy's eyeglass was still fastened upon the bronzed major. The swell of St. Jim's was deep in thought.

"Tom Mewwy's uncle—General Mewwy—has met Majah Cutts! You wemenbah General Mewwy came here to see Tommay last week, Blake, old man? He spoke vewy highly of him. Upon the whole, I think it is due to him to explain, and it's up to me!"

"What bee have you got in your bonnet now?" asked Blake.

"I have not got a bee in my bonnet at all, you uttah ass!" said D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' about Dig bein' away, affah havin' w'itten to Majah Cutts that he was pleased to be goin' to see him to-day. The majah will think it wude, Dig not bein' here, and I veward it as bein' up to us to explain."

"Cutts will tell him," yawned Blake. "I say, Fatty Wynn seems to be right at the top of his form to-day. He took my wicket!"

"Blow Fatty Wynn!" said D'Arcy. "As a matiah of fact, Figgins seems to me to be the best man they have—he caught

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me out! But, speakin' of Cutts' uncle, I weally considah I ought to mention to him that Dig is sowwy he is out. I don't suppose Cutts will think of it, as he is probably thinkin' of sewewin' a big tip out of his uncle, and we can't have Study No. 6 supposed to be guilty of wudeness! Let us lose ewerythin', deah boy, but let us pweserve our good mannaahs!"

"But Dig will be back before the major goes, won't he?"

"Looks to me as if he's goin' now; they're goin' down to the gates, and takin' in the owicket-ground as they go."

"Well, pile in!" said Blake, with a grin. "Keep up the reputation of Study No. 6 for the manners of Chesterfield and the customs of Vere de Vere."

"I do not wegard it as a jokin' mattah, Blake!"

Arthur Augustus rose from his seat, and strolled across to get into the major's path as he came down to the cricket-ground. The swell of St. Jim's considered for a moment the possibility of dashing into the School House for a silk hat, as the visitor was a person whom he would have delighted to honour; but there was no time, neither would a silk hat have looked quite "en regle" with a cricket blazer. D'Arcy satisfied himself with raising his straw in the most elegant manner as the major came up.

Cutts of the Fifth gave him a stony look. He didn't want the major to get into talk with any of Dig's chums, if he could help it. A chance word might knock over his house of cards, and he knew it.

But Major Cutts, naturally, paused as the elegant and handsome junior stood in his path, with a polite bow and a lifted straw hat.

"Pway excuse me, sir," said Arthur Augustus, in his most winning manner. "I pwesume, sir, that you are Majah Cutts?"

"Quite right," said Cutts's uncle.

"I am D'Arcy, of the Fourth, sir. Pway excuse the liberty I take in addressin' you, but I am Dig's best chum."

"Indeed!" said the major.

"Yaas, wathah, sir; and I feel bound to expwess Dig's wegwet that he is not here to greet you, sir. We know all about your bein' his patah's old pal, and Dig would have been vewy glad to meet you heah; but he has had to go out."

"Is that so?" said the major, a little surprised. "Did Digby say that he wanted to see me, D'Arcy?"

"Well, I do not wemembah his words, sir," said D'Arcy, "but certainly he did wish to; and as you appeal to be goin' early, I thought I ought to mention that he will be vewy sowwy to miss you. He weally had to go out this aftahnoon—to oblige Cutts—"

"What!"

"Nonsense!" said Cutts, a dull flush rising in his cheek. For a moment his heart had stood still, at the horrible risk of his uncle discovering that he had purposely sent Digby away from the school that afternoon. His eyes gleamed with suppressed rage as he looked at the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy looked surprised.

"I do not like to heah my wemarks chawactewised as nonsense, Cutts," he said stiffly. "I certainly think you should have explained to Majah Cutts why Dig is not heah, as you know vewy well why he is not heah. It would be wotten to allow the majah to think that Dig has been wude and neglectful to his patah's oldest friend."

Major Cutts gave his nephew a curious look.

"I shall see Digby," he said. "I had intended to leave early, but I am staying later, as it happens, D'Arcy. When Digby comes in, will you tell him I want to see him?"

"With pleasuah, sir!"

And D'Arcy raised his straw hat again and stepped aside. Major Cutts and his nephew walked on to the cricket-ground.

"I am afraid Digby has misled the juniors about his going out," Cutts remarked casually. "He could not very well tell them, I suppose, that he was going out specially because he was afraid to meet you, sir."

"I suppose not," assented the major. "The young rascal seems to have used your name—eh?"

"It appears so. He fags for me sometimes," explained Cutts. "I suppose he told the kids he was fagging for me this afternoon, or something of the kind, if they asked him where he was going."

The major's brows contracted.

"I don't like that," he said. "It looks as if his reform is not so complete as you supposed, Gerald, if he has been telling lies on a slight occasion."

Cutts considered.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I gave him a message to take for me, and he may have gone out with it," he said, as if he had just remembered it. "He need not have gone to-day, as it was not important. But he may have made that the pretext for going out, and so kept within the truth in what he told the juniors."

"Still, I don't like it."

Cutts considered it better to let the matter drop there. He realised that he would have to see Digby and speak with him before the latter saw the major. If Major Cutts had kept to his original intention of leaving by an early train, all would have been well. Cutts would have seen him safely off before Dig returned—all chance of an explanation would have been avoided. But the major was grimly determined to see Digby—his pledged word kept him from apprising Dig of Cutts' lying tale—but a chance word might bring everything out into the light. Cutts was walking in very slippery places; and he realised it very clearly.

He was thinking over it as he stood watching the cricket by the old soldier's side. Major Cutts was watching Fatty Wynn bowling against Kangaroo with keen interest. Cutts hardly saw the cricket at all. His brain was busy.

"Any minute—any minute—it may come out any minute!" so ran his thoughts, in a kind of hammering chorus in his brain. "But what could I do? I've got the cheque, and those bloodsuckers will be paid! If they hadn't been paid, they would have cast me off. I know that! If the worst happens, he can't do worse than that now. I've really risked nothing. If I hadn't taken the risk, what I'm risking now would be a certainty instead of a risk. I've done the best that could be done under the cires., and if my luck holds out— Oh, if I could only get him away from St. Jim's! Why don't he go?"

The major would have been very much surprised if he could have been aware of the thoughts that were passing through the mind of his dutiful nephew.

"Well hit!" shouted the major, as the Cornstalk junior sent the ball away to the boundary. "That's a coming man, Gerry. Who is he?"

"Eh? Who?" said Cutts vaguely.

The major turned to stare at him.

"Didn't you see that hit?" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Oh, yes! Yes, rather!"

"Who's the kid?"

"Noble, of the Shell," said Cutts. "He's an Australian. Shall we be getting down to the post-office, uncle? I should



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like this letter to catch the collection, so that they'll get it to-night."

"Oh, certainly, my boy!"

The major turned somewhat reluctantly away from the cricket, and uncle and nephew walked down to the post-office in Rylcombe, where the cheque was duly sealed up in a registered envelope and despatched.

Cutts drew a deep, deep breath of relief when it was gone, and he had the receipt for it in his pocket. Whatever happened now, he was safe from Griggs and Jonas Hooke. Even if anything came out, his uncle would not be likely to stop the cheque. All he had to do now was to get rid of his uncle before the truth came out—and that was his one anxiety. Any kind of concern for the junior whose name he had blackened, whose reputation he had blasted in the eyes of his father's friend, did not enter Cutts' mind. He had no time to think of Digby—he was too busy thinking about himself!

CHAPTER 12.

Dig and the Major.

DIG came in after the House match was finished. His chums met him as he was wheeling in his bicycle. Dig was a little tired with his very long ride, but his first thought was for the match.

"How did it go?" he asked, as he caught Tom Merry in the quad.

Tom smiled.

"A draw!" he said. "We tied with the New House for exactly a hundred. Figgins came near knocking up some more, but Lowther caught him out just in time. Kerr was not out."

"Glad the House was not licked," said Dig.

"Delivered your precious message?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Major Cutts is here," said D'Arcy. "He asked me to tell you that he wanted to see you, Dig. I am pretty certain that Cutts has not mentioned that he sent you out this afternoon, for some reason. I felt that I was bound to point out to the majah that you did not intend to be disrespectful in goin' out. You had better explain to Majah Cutts that you had to go."

"Well, I didn't have to go," said Dig. "I went to oblige Cutts. Cutts will have told the major that, I suppose, if he asked after me."

"I'm quite sure he hasn't."

"Oh, rot!" said Dig.

And he wheeled away his bicycle. He was putting the machine up in the bike shed, when Cutts of the Fifth came in. Cutts had been keeping an eye open for Digby, and he spotted the Fourth-Former immediately he came inside the gates.

"Given Hallam my message?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dig. "Here's the answer."

Cutts took the note, and put it in his pocket without opening it. "By the way, my uncle wants to see you. It seems that your father specially asked him to see you, and tell him how you are getting on."

"Right-ho!" said Digby.

"The major is a bit rusty at your being out," said Cutts.

"Didn't you tell him—"

"I was just telling him, but he was so annoyed that I didn't dare to go on," said Cutts. "I have to keep him in a good temper, you know. It may mean a liver to me, and a quid to you, Digby, if he keeps his blessed temper while he's here. Be a bit tactful with him, won't you?"

Dig grinned.

"I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle," he said.

"Don't mention that I sent you over to Abbotsford. It will get his rag out at once. He supposes now that it was a message I happened to give you, that would have done at any time—let him go on thinking so."

"All right."

"He would be ratty if he knew I sent you out this afternoon. You'll be careful not to let him know it?"

"Rely on me," said Dig cheerfully. "I won't make any trouble between you and your uncle, Cutts; you may be sure of that."

For a moment Cutts' hard heart smote him. The generous confidence of the boy touched some chord within him. Little did poor Dig dream of the use the cad of the Fifth had been making of his name—of the letter he had so unconsciously written, in the belief that it was a scene in a play—little did he guess that Cutts had blackened his name without leaving a chance of clearing it, because he would never even know that it had been blackened.

"Thank you, Dig!" said Cutts. "You're a good kid."

Digby fastened his bicycle on the stand, and came out of the shed with Cutts.

"My uncle is in my study now," said the Fifth-Former.

"Will you come there and see him?"

"Yes; when I've got some of the dust off," said Dig.

"We're going to have tea," said Cutts. "It will be a decent spread, and the feed will help you to stand my uncle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come as soon as you're cleaned down."

"Right-oh!"

Digby went up to the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House to change, and Cutts returned to his study. He had left his uncle there, talking to Knox. Knox of the Sixth was entertaining the major with stories of Cutts' prowess in games, and the old soldier was listening with pleasure. He was very proud of his nephew, and he liked to hear about his great deeds on the playing-fields. And Knox, who intended to have a "whack" in Cutts' tip if it was a good one, piled it on for the major's benefit.

Curly Gibson, who fagged for Cutts, was preparing the tea. Cutts had guessed that his uncle would be pleased to be asked to a "study brew," and he intended that study brew to be a great success. With credit as yet unlimited, Cutts had plenty of supplies, and he had ragged Curly into being a clever and careful cook. The major, who had a keen appetite, looked on at the preparations with great satisfaction as he sat in the window chatting with Knox.

Knox took his leave when the Fifth-Former came back.

"Tea ready, Curly?" asked Cutts genially.

"Just on," said Curly.

"Good! When it's quite ready, go and tell Digby."

Curly sniffed.

"Blow Digby!" he murmured.

"Eh? What's that?"

"Fagging for Fourth Form kids!" muttered Curly.

"Yah!"

Cutts laughed.

"Shut up!" he said. "You can take half a dozen tarts when you've finished, kid."

Curly's face brightened up at once. Six jam-tarts would make a pleasant little feed for himself and Frayne and Jameson and Wally D'Arcy in the Third Form-room.

"So Digby's come back, Gerald?" the major asked.

"Yes, uncle. I've just seen him, and told him to come here to tea."

"Good!"

Curly Gibson departed, with the message for Digby and the jam-tarts for himself. In a few minutes Digby appeared in the study doorway, with a freshly-washed and glowing face and a spotless collar. He was a little shy with the grim-looking major, but the sight of the feed on the table made his face light up.

The major fixed his keen eyes upon the junior.

Dig's honest, simple face was hardly what Major Cutts expected to see after his nephew's description of what he had saved Digby from. Certainly, judging by appearances, no one would ever have suspected Digby of the Fourth of having been mixed up in gambling transactions with book-makers.

"Come here, my lad," said the major, not unkindly.

"You are Bob Digby's son—hey?"

"Yes, sir," said Dig.

The major shook hands with him.

"I've promised your father to see you, and tell him how you look," said the major.

Dig smiled.

"You can tell him I'm in top form, sir," he said. "You can mention that I want a new footer, if you think of it, sir. We're starting footer here soon, you know."

Major Cutts laughed.

"Did you know I was coming here to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. Cutts told me."

"And did you think it was quite respectful to your father's old friend to go out the afternoon I was coming?" the major demanded.

Dig gave Cutts a look of dismay.

"I—I—" he stammered. "I knew I should see you before you went, sir, or I shouldn't have gone out. Cutts told me—"

Dig was about to state that Cutts had mentioned to him that the major would be staying later, but a look from Cutts stopped him in time. He broke off in confusion.

"Oh! You didn't know I was going by an early train?" said the major, mollified.

"No, sir."

"You didn't tell Digby I was leaving early, Gerald?"

"I—I'm afraid I forgot to mention it to him, sir," muttered Cutts.

Digby stared blankly at Cutts. Cutts had deliberately told him that the major would be catching a late train, and that

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Dig would have ample time to see him after coming back from Abbotsford. It was quite clear now, even to Dig's simple and unsuspecting mind, that Cutts had known the major was going early, and had deliberately misled him. Why, Dig could not imagine. But the fact was clear enough.

Dig felt his face growing red. Cutts had lied to him, and had evidently also lied to his uncle. Dig did not know why, but he was troubled and worried by it. The warnings of his chums came back into his mind. Why had Cutts lied? Did Cutts want to prevent him from meeting the major? Why on earth should he? Was there—as Tom Merry & Co. persisted in thinking—something hidden behind all this? Was some deep game being played under Cutts' curious and unlooked-for kindness and friendship? Dig was not suspicious, but the thought would not be driven from his mind. He was feeling very uncomfortable, and even the sight of the excellent feed Cutts had provided did not wholly console him.

"Then you intended to see me, Digby?" the major pursued.

"Why, yes, sir."

"You expected to be back at the school before I left?"

"Certainly, sir."

The major scanned his face. Dig was a little red, but he was looking surprised, too, at this close questioning, and his honest face was a sufficient guarantee that he was not speaking untruths.

Cutts was in torture. He had been unable to prevent this meeting between his uncle and Digby. The major would not break his promise about the secret, but he was naturally determined to question Digby as much as he could without breaking that promise. And Dig's simple replies, full of honesty and straightforwardness, could not fail to impress the major. Already Major Cutts could see that his nephew had been, at least, mistaken in assuming that Dig had gone out that afternoon purposely to avoid meeting his father's old friend.

"Well, I am glad of that," said the major, after a pause. "I told your father I would see you, and send him news of you, and so I have stayed for a later train."

"It was very kind of you, sir," said Digby.

"Tea's ready!" said Cutts uneasily.

They sat down to tea, and Digby recovered his spirits. The ride had made him hungry, and the feed was really first-class. Dig began to enjoy himself, but Gerald Cutts was very far from enjoyment. For the major, naturally interested and anxious about Dig after what Cutts had told him of the junior's late difficulties and escapades, talked to the Fourth-Former incessantly, making him talk and drawing him out. And Digby ran on cheerfully. Dig had no objection to talking about himself, and his Form, and his work and his play, and he was quite willing to give the major all the particulars he wanted to know.

And as the major listened to the cheerful and innocent talk, the wonder grew and grew in his perplexed mind—how could this cheery, thoughtless, happy junior ever have been in the driven and desperate frame of mind he must have been in when he wrote that fatal letter—that letter telling of debts, difficulties, terror, and contemplated suicide? And in the major's puzzled face Gerald Cutts watched the wonder grow and grow, and his own anxiety grew in equal measure.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry Chips In.

"FAG!"

Cutts called from his study doorway, and Curly Gibson came trotting along the passage.

The major and Dig were chatting over the tea-table. Dig was giving the major a description of the great Wallaby match which the juniors had watched on that famous occasion, and Major Cutts was listening with keen interest.

His interest was not only in the historic match, but in Digby himself. He was scanning and judging the boy's animated face as he talked.

Cutts had gone to the door to call his fag. He was on tenterhooks. His own part in the great Wallaby match the major did not know, and some inadvertent word from Digby might give him away, and lead to fresh surmises. To his over-sharpened faculties just now it seemed that his uncle already distrusted him.

"Curly, take this note to Knox," said Cutts, in a low voice, scribbling on a sheet of paper and handing it to the fag.

"Yes, Cutts."

Curly took the note, but Cutts took it back a second later, fetched an envelope from the study, and sealed the note in it. Curly looked at him indignantly.

"Do you think I'd read your blessed note, Cutts?" he demanded.

"Cut along with it," said the Fifth-Former.

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And Curly sulkily departed. He did not like the distrust of himself implied by the careful sticking up of the note in the envelope.

However, he hurried off in search of Knox of the Sixth. Knox was not in his study, and the fag looked round the House for him. He inquired of Tom Merry as he met him in the lower passage.

"Seen Knox?"

"He was in the quad. a few minutes ago," said Tom Merry.

And Curly hurried off to look in the quadrangle.

He found Knox at last, chatting to Sefton of the New House. Curly dashed up to him breathlessly.

"Note for you, Knox, from Cutts."

And Curly vanished.

Knox opened the note, and gave a whistle as he read it, for it ran as follows:

"Will you get D. out of my study somehow?—C."

"My hat!" said Knox. "I wonder—excuse me, Sefty, I'm wanted." And with a nod to the New House senior, he walked away to the School House, looking very thoughtful.

Meanwhile, Dig was having the time of his life in Cutts' study, and Cutts was in a state of mental torment hard to describe.

A ripping feed, and a distinguished gentleman drawing him out, and making him talk about himself—naturally Dig was in high feather.

The kind major seemed to be deeply interested in everything that concerned Dig, and the junior was naturally flattered.

He was not at all averse to giving the old soldier the fullest particulars of everything.

"My nephew played in the Wally match, I understand," the major remarked presently.

Dig coloured for a moment—he remembered the unpleasant rumours in the Lower School about Cutts on that occasion. But it was not his business to give Cutts away to his uncle—he would have bitten off his tongue first.

"Yes, sir, Cutts was in the team," said Dig. "It was a ripping match, sir—and we beat them at the finish—beat the Wallabies, sir. There was a junior in our eleven—Fatty Wynn, of my Form. You should see him bowling."

The major smiled.

There was a tap at the door, and D'Arcy minor of the Third looked in.

"Is Digby here?"

"What-ho!" said Digby.

"Knox has sent me to say he wants you."

"Can't come!" said Dig. "Explain to Knox that I'm having tea with Major Cutts, and ask him to excuse me, young shaver."

"I'll 'young shaver' you!" murmured Wally.

He ran off. But he was back again in a couple of minutes.

"Knox says you're to go to his study at once."

"What for?"

"He wants you."

"I don't fag for Knox," said Digby independently.

"You had better go," said Cutts quietly. "I dare say he only wants to speak to you, Dig, and he'll let you come back."

"Yes; cut off!" said the major.

Dig rose reluctantly.

"I'm coming back to finish tea, anyway," he said. And he went out of the study.

When he was gone, the major turned to his nephew with a very perplexed expression. Cutts drew a deep, hard breath.

It was coming now, he felt. The major's expression was only perplexed—puzzled—but to Cutts' eye there was suspicion there. But he must allay it—disarm it. He felt that he could rely upon Knox to keep Digby out of the study. Knox did not know all his plot, but he had an idea of it, and was keenly interested in helping Cutts "tap" the major for a good-sized tip.

"It's very odd!" Cutts' uncle said at last.

"What is, sir?" asked the Fifth-Former.

"About Digby."

"I don't quite understand, sir."

"I have talked to him, questioned him, drawn him out in every way," said the major. "My idea was to see whether his character had been irreparably stained by his rascally experiences—whether he had really reformed. Gerald, he shows no sign whatever of having been through such experiences. If it were possible, I should suppose that you had made some egregious mistake—that Digby had never done a rascally action in his life. How he can be so free and talkative and merry, with such a thing on his mind, is more than I can imagine."

"I have taken it off his mind, sir, by helping him out," said Cutts, with a smile—a twisted and frozen smile.

"But he must remember it—if he has any conscience; it

must torment him a little," the major said, "I—I suppose there is no mistake. You have not taken too serious a view of the position he was in—"

Cutts felt a chill inwardly. He knew that the major was struggling against a doubt that was rising in his breast.

"You can judge of the position by Digby's letter, sir," he said.

"True!" said Major Cutts. "Give me that letter again, Gerald."

Cutts handed it over.

Major Cutts read it through slowly, conning it over carefully word by word. Cutts knew that he was making an examination of the handwriting, to make sure that it was actually in Dig's hand. The major did not distrust his nephew—he would not have admitted that thought to himself for a second. But there was something in the matter he did not understand, and it puzzled and worried him. Cutts' story did not agree with Dig's frankness and easiness. If the major had not seen Digby, he would not have entertained a doubt. But now—he was so perplexed that he could not make it out. He did not distrust Cutts; but he was unconsciously following a line of reasoning which led inevitably to distrust of Cutts.

"It is extraordinary," the major said, laying the letter on his knee at last. "But for this letter in Digby's handwriting, Gerald, I should think that you had dreamed it all."

Cutts forced a laugh.

"I could not very well dream the letter," he said.

"No," said his uncle. "The letter clinches it. But that lad—so frank and open and free—yet with such a burden of guilt upon his mind—Gerald, it is almost impossible that any boy could be such a monument of lying and deceit and hypocrisy as Digby has proved himself to be, according to this letter, and to what you have told me."

"But, sir—"

Cutts did not finish.

The half-open door of the study was flung open, and Tom Merry of the Shell burst in, his face flushed crimson with indignation, and his eyes blazing wrathfully.

"You liar, Cutts!" he shouted.

Cutts started to his feet. He was white as death.

"Get out of my study, Merry!" he hissed, springing towards the junior. "How dare you listen at my door, you spying young hound!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists, and faced the Fifth-Former with fearless scorn.

"Don't touch me, Cutts! I shall hit out if you do! You cad! You liar! So that is the meaning of it all—we knew you were playing some caddish game—you have been slandering Dig behind his back while you pretended to be friendly to him. You villain!"

"Stop!" shouted the major, in a voice of thunder, as Gerald Cutts hurled himself at the junior. "Gerald, stand back!"

"Uncle! I—"

"Stand back!"

The major was on his feet now, his eyes gleaming. He pushed his nephew back, and then frowned sternly upon Tom Merry.

"Now kindly explain who you are, and how you have dared to come here and call my nephew a slanderer and a liar in my presence," he said.

"I'll do that fast enough. I'm Tom Merry of the Shell—and I came here for Dig. Knox is keeping him to do lines—and Dig asked me to come here and explain to you that he couldn't come back!" said Tom Merry. "I had just got to the door while you were speaking. I hadn't the slightest idea of listening—but your voice is loud—and I couldn't help it. Cutts is telling lies, as usual, when he says I was spying. I didn't know he was slandering Digby till you said so—and when I heard that—"

"Is Digby your friend?"

"Yes—not exactly a chum," said Tom Merry. "But we've been pals ever since I came to St. Jim's. I know Dig well enough to know that he's square all the time; and if Cutts says he isn't, Cutts is lying—as he always is! All St. Jim's knows Cutts, and there isn't a fellow in the school who would take his word without proof."

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Do you understand that it is my nephew you are speaking of?"

"I understand that it is my pal whose character he has been taking away!" said Tom Merry fearlessly. "You are Dig's pater's friend—and he has slandered Dig to you. He has given you lying yarns to take to Dig's father, perhaps. Send for Dig, and tell him what your nephew has said! I don't know what it was. But you spoke of lying and deceit and hypocrisy—and anybody in the School House will tell you that Dig couldn't be a liar or a hypocrite any more than he could fly."

Tom Merry almost panted out the words in a blaze of indignation.

The major's stern look softened. Whether he believed Tom Merry's view or not, he could not be angry with a lad who stood up so promptly and fearlessly for his friend.

He looked at his nephew, and started. Gerald Cutts' face was perfectly livid. He knew that all was up now—and if ever guilt was written in any human face, it was written in Gerald Cutts' face at that moment.

The major looked at him long and hard—and a curious, worn look came over his own face.

"We shall have to go into this!" he said quietly.

CHAPTER 14.

The Way of the Transgressor.

CUTTS wetted his dry lips with his tongue. His brain was reeling now—his deadly coolness and self-possession seemed to be deserting him at last. But he made a tremendous effort to pull himself together. The game was up; but he would fight his ground inch by inch. Cool and steady lying might save him yet. There was the ghost of a chance!

"Go and fetch Digby," said Major Cutts. "Tell Knox I want him for a most important matter, and he must come; otherwise I shall appeal to the Head."

"Very well, sir!"

Tom Merry hurried away. He hurried to Knox's study, where Digby was sitting at the table dolefully writing lines. Knox was there, keeping an eye on him. Knox was doing his best for Cutts. Tom Merry came into the study without ceremony.

"Knox! Major Cutts wants Digby at once—it's very important."

"He can't go!" said Knox angrily.

"If you don't let him go, the major is going to ask the Head. Dig, you're to come at once. Cutts has been slandering you to his uncle, and I caught him at it. You've got to defend yourself."

"Oh, my hat!" said Dig.

And, leaving Knox standing puzzled and undecided, Dig followed Tom Merry from the study. As he hurried Dig along, Tom Merry explained to him, in breathless, jerky sentences, and by the time they reached Cutts' study Dig was in a state of white heat and indignation.

Meanwhile, the major had been speaking to his nephew—in very different tones from those Cutts had heard from him before. His uncle's voice was dry and hard.

"This must be thrashed out now, Gerald. You made me promise not to say a word to Digby. I presume that now, for the sake of clearing up the matter, you are willing that I should do so?"

"No, sir," said Cutts.

"If you refuse to have the matter cleared up, Gerald, I shall have to believe that you have slandered Digby to me, as Tom Merry declares."

"You have his letter in your hand," said Cutts.

"Will you let me show it to Digby?"

"You can please yourself, of course, if you distrust me?"

"I cannot please myself!" said the old soldier sternly.

"You have my word! But unless you allow me to show this letter to Digby, I must believe, sir, that it is a concoction of your own."

"Uncle!"

"I don't want to believe bad of you, Gerald. For your own sake, let me clear up this matter in the only possible way."

"Do as you like," said Cutts.

"You release me from my promise?"

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Yes."

"It is the only way you can be cleared of horrible suspicions, Gerald," said the major more gently. "I pray to Heaven that you may come out of this without a stain on your honour."

He did not speak again till Tom Merry came in with Digby. Digby bestowed a furious glare upon Cutts as he came in.

"Tom Merry's told me!" he exclaimed. "What have you been telling your uncle about me, Cutts? Let me hear it, and I'll prove it's all lies!"

The major held out the letter.

"Read that, boy!" he said harshly.

Digby read the letter at a glance; he held it so that Tom Merry could read it, too. Tom Merry stared at it blankly, taken quite aback; but Dig only looked surprised. He did not see why a scene from Cutts' play should be introduced into the discussion.

"Did you write that letter?" demanded the major.

"Yes."

"You wrote it, Dig?" gasped Tom Merry.

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"Of course I did!" said Digby. "Can't you see it's in my hand?"

"But—but—"

"Then my nephew's case is proved," said the major, with a deep breath of relief. "Gerald, I must ask your pardon."

"What's all that about?" shouted the amazed and exasperated Digby. "I suppose it's nothing against me, having written this foolery, is it?"

"What!" thundered the major. "You admit having been in debt owing to gambling; you admit having contemplated suicide; you admit—"

Digby stared at the major blankly for a moment, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter, boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dig. "Excuse me, sir; I can't help it. You don't mean to say you thought this was a real letter—a letter to my pater? Oh, crumbs!"

"What—what is it, then?"

"Cutts knows what it is!" howled Digby. "Has he been palming this off on you for a real letter? Oh, my hat! He was pulling your leg, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose I can tell your uncle about the play, Cutts?" said Digby, looking at the Fifth-former. "I say, Cutts, you're looking pretty white about the gills, old man. You thundering villain, was it all lies about the play—a trick to get me to write this letter, so that you could palm it off on your uncle? What the dickens good did it do you to do that?"

"Explain yourself, boy!" exclaimed the major. "Do you mean to say that that letter was not written to be sent to your father?"

"My hat! The dad would have had a fit if he got that letter!" grinned Dig. "It's not a letter at all—it's a scene in a play!"

"A—a—a play!"

"Yes, Cutts said he was writing a play, and as he had hurt his wrist, he asked me to take it down from dictation. There was a lot more of it; this is only from one scene," said Digby. "It isn't a letter at all—only a letter supposed to be sent by a chap named Robert in Cutts' play, you know."

"What have you say to that, Gerald?" said the major, in a voice like iron.

What had Cutts to say? Dig's statement was evidently true, and further and closer investigation could only prove it beyond doubt. Further investigation was of no use to Gerald Cutts.

The wretched Black Sheep of St. Jim's bowed his head in misery.

There was a long silence.

The major's face grew strangely pale and old.

"You must speak, Gerald, and before Digby," he said, in an altered voice. "Is his statement true?"

Cutts groaned.

"Yes."

"What you have told me about him is false?"

"Yes."

"Please go, my boys," said the major. "Digby, you can be satisfied with that. My nephew retracts all he has said against you. Tom Merry, I owe you a debt of gratitude

for having defended my old friend's son against a cowardly slanderer—though the slanderer was my own nephew. Please go."

Tom Merry and Digby left the study in silence.

Major Cutts fixed his eyes upon his nephew. Cutts of the Fifth stood with bowed head, white as chalk, despair in his face. The game was up now, with a vengeance.

"Why did you do this, Gerald?" said the major at last. "Why did you deceive me? Was it for the money?"

"Yes," muttered Cutts. "I—I—oh, what's the use of talking? You'll throw me over now. But you'd have thrown me over, anyway, if you'd known the facts; and you'd have known them in a day or two if I hadn't paid Hooke and Griggs."

"It was you, and not Digby, who has been gambling—who had lost so large a sum of money?"

"Yes."

"And this man Hooke—he was not a money-lender, but—"

"A bookmaker," said Cutts. "Yes."

"And you lied—and lied, and slandered my old friend's son, to obtain the money to pay him!" said the major bitterly.

"I should have been ruined!"

"You chose rather to blacken Digby's character—to lie and to slander?"

"It was the only way. Would you have given me the money if I'd asked for it—or would my father? I had to save myself. It's all up now—I know I'm done for!"

Cutts threw himself into a chair, and let his face sink into his hands.

The major looked at him long and doubtfully.

"You have acted like a scoundrel, Gerald!" he said at last, slowly, and in measured tones. "I cannot acknowledge a scoundrel as my nephew! I am, as you say, done with you! I shall not stop the cheque. You may take that as a final gift from me. You will never have anything else to expect! You understand? Good-bye!"

Major Cutts quitted the study. His heavy footsteps died away down the passage. Gerald Cutts was left alone!

There was an indignation meeting in Study No. 6 when Tom Merry and Digby told their tale to the chums of the School House. The Terrible Three and the chums of the Fourth, in a white-heat of wrath, resolved to make Gerald Cutts "sit up" for what he had done, and to make an example of him. But when they saw Cutts of the Fifth again their desire for vengeance melted away.

Cutts was looking white and worn, as if old age had fallen upon him suddenly, and the juniors realised that he had been punished enough.

"Let him alone," said Tom Merry. "He's got it in the neck this time—you can see that! He doesn't want any more from us!"

"Poor beast!" said Digby. "Yes, let him alone."

It was some time before Cutts of the Fifth recovered his old coolness and composure, and looked his old self again. Needless to say, his callous and unscrupulous plot, in which Dig had so nearly been a victim, was a lesson that was not lost upon the juniors. No member of the "Co." was likely again to have anything to do with the Black Sheep.

THE END.

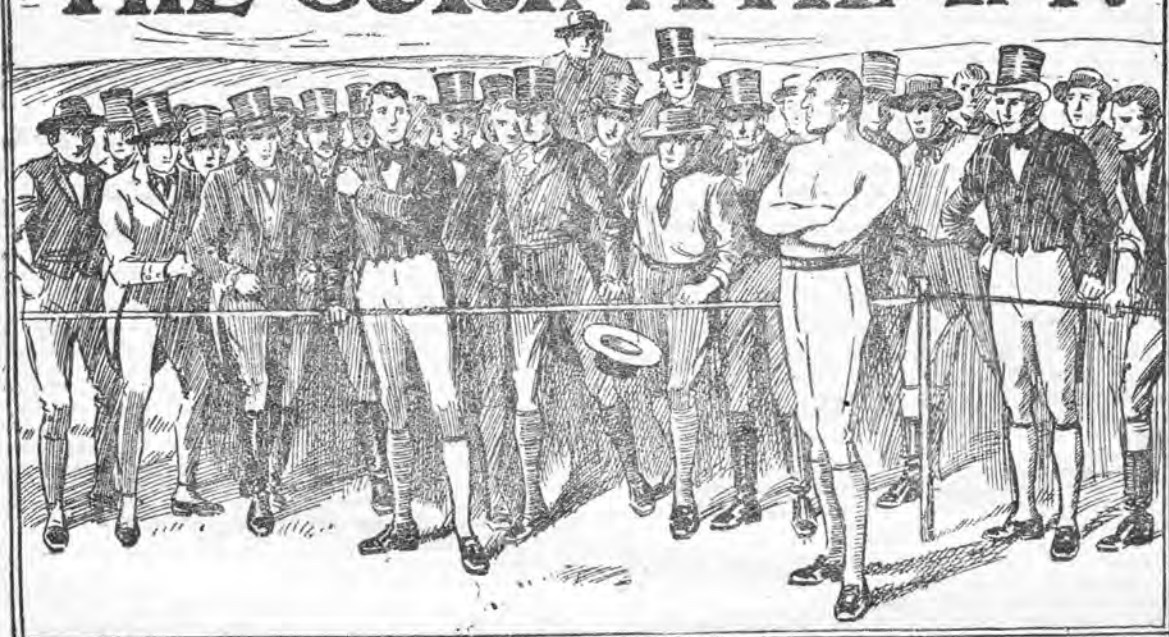
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THE CORINTHIAN.



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READ THIS FIRST.

Hilary Bevan, a sturdy young Britisher of gentle birth, who has been living in the country, sets out to walk to London

TO SEE HIS FATHER,

Sir Patrick Bevan, whom he has not met for three years. Arriving at his father's house, Hil learns that the latter has been absent for three days at the house of Sir Vincent Brookes, one of the leading bucks of the time. He also learns that Sir Patrick has earned the nickname of

"PLUNGER" BEVAN,

and is heavily in debt, having dissipated his fortune.

Bending his steps to Sir Vincent Brookes's house in Grosvenor Street, Hilary finds two sheriff's men waiting outside to arrest his father when he should come out. The lad enters the house, and

FINDS HIS FATHER AT THE GAMING-TABLES,

where he has been, without intermission, for three days and nights.

Sir Patrick rises from the table an utterly ruined man. Hilary, his heart full of grief, slips out of the house, and, engaging the two waiting sheriff's men in a fight, puts both of them to flight, thus saving his father from immediate danger of arrest. The sum for which a warrant is out against Sir Patrick is only twenty guineas; and in order to raise this amount, Hilary's next act is to accept a challenge offered in the prize-ring at Moulsey Hurst. His opponent is a Jew pugilist, Barney Isaacs by name, while Hil, fighting under the name of Farley, gains a decisive victory, and awakens the interest of a young Corinthian named D'Arcy Vavasour.

Hil seeks out Sir Vincent Brookes, and pays him the twenty guineas Sir Patrick owes, taking no trouble to conceal his contempt for the rascally Sir Vincent. The lad is powerless to avert the catastrophe, however, and on going to his father's house finds everything being sold up, and his father gone no one knows whither.

Hil decides to adopt the prize-ring as a career, and at a supper which is attended by the leading patrons of "The Fancy" Vavasour offers to match him for a thousand guineas against any boxer of his weight that Sir Vincent Brookes may select.

"Done!" snaps Sir Vincent, with an evil smile.

(Now go on with the story.)

Birds of a Feather.

It was a week after the wager had been made, and Hil was spending his last night in London preparatory to going down to the country to train for the coming battle with the man whom Sir Vincent Brookes had wagered would beat him.

Who the fellow was Sir Vincent had made known the evening before at a supper given at his house by Darcy Vavasour to a dozen or so sporting friends. He was a Birmingham man named Fennel, owning a big reputation in his neighbourhood, but had not been seen in the London ring.

By hearsay he was a strong, game fellow, over thirty years of age, and able to get close to Hilary's weight, and a hard and punishing hitter. Sir Vincent had expressed the utmost confidence in him, but when Vavasour had offered to increase the wager the baronet had declined. He had, however, expressed himself as willing to double the amount of the bet Vavasour had made that he would win the three events. This had been accepted.

The week had been a busy one for Hil. Every day had seen him at Jackson's rooms sparring with anyone who cared to put on the muffers with him, and from the professor himself he had received more than one suggestion that could be turned to profit. He had never felt better in his life, and was brimful of confidence.

And yet—the battle was to come off in a fortnight's time—Hil was not sorry to be leaving London. Not that he had anything to complain of in the treatment he had received. On the contrary. During the week he had stayed at the house of Mr. Vavasour, whose attitude towards him had been that of a friend and equal, rather than that of a patron of the fancy towards the pugilist whom he had backed to win.

That some of the dandy Corinthian's friends and acquaintances smiled and shrugged their shoulders in private at such eccentricity of conduct as the treatment of a fighting man as an equal ruffled Darcy Vavasour's feelings not at all. If they did not choose to follow his lead, he was quite content, as he made evident, to dispense with their company.

And as Darcy Vavasour was an acknowledged leader of their class, his whims and fancies, even one so extravagant as this, received respect.

For it was a curious age. Men such as Vavasour, while

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mighty particular of their honour, were wholly indifferent to appearances. Sir John Lade, for instance, dressed like a coachman, talked like a coachman, and was more often than not in the company of coachmen. Captain Barclay trained professional fighters, and gentlemen were equally as ready to run footraces for a couple of guineas with a chimney-sweep or a shepherd as a University man or a lord. The modern distinctions of sport did not exist. A good man was good enough to fight or run or play cricket against, no matter what his occupation. Sport, and good sport, was the only object.

Yet among the class to which Darcy Vavasour and his friends belonged Hilary Bevan felt hardly comfortable. He had lived in the country; they were men of the town. He could not feel interested in much that interested them. Their finicking regard for curious niceties of dress he could not understand. Yet, as he learned, some of these dandies were men who could hold their own in any sport—were boxers, fencers, daring horsemen, reckless of the safety of life and limb. Lord Alvanley, who attached such enormous importance to the colour and trimming of a waistcoat or the starching of his cravat, was also a hard rider to hounds.

There was even much about Darcy Vavasour with which Hil could find little sympathy. He attached vast importance to what the lad considered foolish trifles. And yet Hil had to admire him. One incident occurred while he and Hil were strolling one afternoon along Bond Street that gave proof of his real character.

Meeting them, a tall and burly, well-dressed man remarked to his companion as he caught sight of Vavasour and his companion:

"Lord Barrymore and Bully Hooper come to life again."

The words were spoken loud enough for Vavasour and Hil to hear, and the meaning was an offensive one, for the allusion was to the wild and dissipated young peer named, who, twenty years before, had made a friend of the dreaded prizefighter Hooper the Tinman, a bullying rascal who accompanied his aristocratic master upon all his mad and lawless sprees, and by his bull-like strength and terrible mauling powers saved Lord Barrymore time and again from the well-deserved punishment of his reckless actions.

Vavasour heard the remark, turned on his heel, and caught up the speaker.

"My good fellow," he said, voice and face unruffled, "I have not the disgrace of your acquaintance, but I wish to convey to you that you are a liar. Moreover, do you care to repeat your words, it will give me great satisfaction to chastise you for the impudence of speaking of me."

The man was surprised. He was a well-known character, a bully, and, with an ill reputation for shady turf transactions, a duellist. And he was half as big again as the pale-faced dandy.

"I shall say what I please," he said loudly.

And he repeated his words, adding thereto a still more insulting remark.

"It is impossible for me to call you out, as you are not a gentleman," replied Vavasour coolly, "but I may box your ears."

And he immediately laid one hand smartly on both sides of the fellow's face.

Instantly the man sought to pay him back in his own coin, and Hil was ready to lend his aid in defence of Vavasour, but a very few seconds proved that such was not needed. Cool and undismayed, Vavasour awaited the fellow's onslaught, evaded a damaging blow, and replied with a quick left and right that sent the recipient flat on his back in the gutter. Nor was he anxious to get up again.

"A pity such troublesome accidents cannot be avoided. I have split my glove," observed Vavasour, continuing his stroll as though nothing out of the way had happened.

But there was another reason why Hil was anxious to get away from London. He was anxious that his father should not become aware of the step he had taken. Quite unexpectedly he had seen John Foster, and from him had learned that Sir Patrick Bevan had gone to Coldharbour, stayed a couple of days, and left without intimating to anyone where he was bound. Hil suspected that his father would return to London, in which case a meeting was possible.

True, Sir Vincent Brookes was aware that Hilary Bevan and Ned Farley were one and the same, and in sheer malice the baronet, did he meet Sir Patrick, might communicate the fact of Hil's transformation into a pugilist. Hil believed that his father would not credit such news. To prevent it being confirmed by a question to himself was his desire. Of course his father might not return to London, but to Hil it seemed the likeliest thing that he would, and the lad was anxious to take no risk of a meeting.

A visit to jolly Ben Burn's hostelry to see Harry Harmer, into whose hands the business of Hil's training—not that he

needed a great deal—had been placed, occupied Hil's last evening in London, and there Vavasour accompanied him to give Harmer his final instructions.

For an hour and more they had sat in the inner parlour, and it had been something of a surprise to Hil to learn how very thoroughly his backer was learned in the most trivial details of training and the science of preparation. Even such practical men as Burn and Harmer could teach him nothing, it seemed, and, considering the manifold matters in which Vavasour was interested, Hil wondered how the dandy had found the time necessary to gather his intimate knowledge of the Ring and all belonging to it.

Ten o'clock had struck before Hil and Vavasour left the house, and as they stepped into the street the lad drew a deep breath of relief. To-morrow he would be miles distant, breathing the fresh, sweet air of the country, engaging once more in the open-air sports in which he delighted.

For training in those days was not the serious business it is now, the recent discoveries of Captain Barclay notwithstanding.

Besides, it was little in the way of training that a healthy, clean-living young fellow such as Hil required. He had no fat to be removed. His wind was sound, his muscles tough. Training, with him, would be little more than the accustoming of his muscles to the prolonged exertion that a long-contested battle demanded.

Punching the sack—an idea of Ben Burn's—swinging a heavy sledge-hammer, long walks and runs, would give him that.

Turning into the Haymarket, the two walked some distance without speaking. All at once Hil drew his companion's attention to a couple of men walking at a brisk pace upon the further side of the street.

"Sir Vincent Brookes, Mr. Vavasour," he said quietly.

Vavasour glanced across the street, dimly lighted by miserable oil-lamps.

"Yes; and accompanied by his jackal, Cokeley," he said.

"Ned, there goes a man whom one would do well not to trust."

"But you have acquaintance with him, sir," Hil answered.

"True; but I am acquainted with more than one to whom I give no trust," said the dandy. "My wager with him is an important one, but because I bet with him is no proof of my friendship. A dangerous man, Ned, and one to whom I bear no good-will. If for no more than that he has been the means of the downfall of a friend for whom I have had the deepest respect, I should dislike and despise him. A ruthless man, Ned, quick and cunning of brain, a fox for craft, a tiger for cruelty, and patient and untiring as a cat. How many men to him can trace their ruin I cannot say. It is sufficient for me that one of my dearest friends has been his victim. One of these days I trust his treatment of Sir Patrick Bevan will be suitably requited."

Hil started at this mention of his father's name, uncertain if it were by accident or design that his companion glanced at him while speaking. To cover his confusion he drew Vavasour's attention to the couple on the other side of the road. They had just been joined by another man, a dirty, villainous-faced rascal with all the appearance of the pick-pockets and footpads who made the passage through the London streets late at night dangerous for the timid and unprotected pedestrian.

"Sir Vincent Brookes has some curious acquaintances, Mr. Vavasour," Hil said hurriedly.

"Curious, no doubt, Ned, but not altogether surprising," Vavasour replied drily, following Hil's gaze. "The baronet is a man of many parts; more, I think, than the majority of his friends are aware. It is rumoured he is more intimate with the blackguards of the Ring and the Turf than a person moving in the company of gentlemen has any right to be. Still, I would not question his taste. No doubt he is satisfied. Birds of a feather, you know."

But in spite of his indifference, Darcy Vavasour had the curiosity to keep the baronet and his companions in view. He saw Brookes glance hastily around, as though not willing to be observed. And then an order seemed to be given to the footpad-seeming individual, who at once hurried ahead, to disappear into the mouth of a narrow court. Sir Vincent and Cokeley followed more leisurely, halted at the entrance to the court, again looked about them, and disappeared into the court.

"He appears not to wish to be seen," observed Hil.

"Nor do I think he did see us; we are in the shadow," said Vavasour. "Situated in that court is a low tavern, the rendezvous of thieves and other rascals. It would be interesting to know if our worthy friends have any particular reason for visiting it. But come, Ned; we will leave him to fish in his troubled waters. We have no need of such company."

Turning into Jermyn Street, they sauntered in the direc-

tion of St. James's Street, the baronet's name being left out of further conversation.

At the same time, neither could have failed to be interested had he been aware of the purpose which sent Sir Vincent Brookes to the tavern in the court off the Haymarket.

At the Swan Tavern.

Within a radius of three hundred yards of Leicester Square were gathered some of the most disreputable public-houses, night-houses, and dangerous gambling dens in the metropolis, and among these unsavoury haunts of the vicious the Swan Tavern was deservedly notorious. Tucked away at the end of the court, with a filthy alley running alongside it, and affording a means of swift outlet amid a maze of courts and dark passages, it was particularly well adapted as a meeting-place for persons desirous of secrecy.

As Brookes and his companion turned into the court, a man rose silently from the shadow of a doorway and barred the path. The baronet laughed, muttered a word or two, and the fellow drew back. Only those well-known to the landlord of the Swan, or who could produce some good reason, were allowed to pass into the court, and this fellow was a look-out. Occasionally, it happened that the "redbreasts," as the Bow Street runners were called, were anxious to pay a visit to the Swan, and though these justly-feared minions of the law could not be kept away, the presence of the look-out ensured that due warning of the "redbreasts" coming should reach the tavern's customers in time to allow of any persons who had cause to fear themselves "wanted" making escape.

The court was unlighted; no lights shone from the windows of the tavern, but Sir Vincent Brookes made his way without hesitation. Stopping in front of a low-intellect door, he knocked peremptorily. After the lapse of a few seconds, the door was opened by a short, stout man, in his shirt-sleeves, and wearing a round fur cap.

"What the deuce d'ye mean by keeping me waiting like this?" the baronet greeted him testily. "Surely you know my knock by this time?"

"Why, sure, cap'n," the stout man replied, with rude apology. "An' glad t' see ye all times. But we got to be careful. Someone's been openin' 'is gan a bit too wide, it seems, lately. Last night we 'ad the constables 'ere with a ferret (pawnbroker) an' 'is black box (lawyer), come arter a—"

"There, that'll do, Bates. I don't want to listen to your petty troubles," interrupted Brookes. "Let us inside. Is O'Donnell here yet?"

"Yes, sir, waitin' an hour or more, sir," the landlord said respectfully, carefully shutting and fastening the door behind his guests.

"An hour? Have you allowed him to get drunk?"

Bates broke into a hoarse laugh.

"Not me, sir. The Patlander said as 'ow he'd come on your business, an' I knew too much to let 'im 'ave all he wanted. Just a pint o' tuppenny, sir, not enough to hocus a babby. You'll find 'im bright an' lively as a kitten."

"The better for him," said Brookes.

Following the landlord, Brookes and Cokeley found themselves in a low-ceiled room, dark and unwholesome with the smell of stale tobacco, gin, and candle-grease. It was dirty; the furniture was old, heavy, and clumsy; the floor was covered with sand, littered with half-burned spills of paper, fragments of broken clay-pipes, and other refuse.

"Why don't you sweeten this hog-sty when you know a gentleman is coming into the room?" demanded Brookes angrily.

"Smells like a gaol," added Cokeley in disgust.

"Well, I can't say about that, sir," replied Bates, looking meaningfully at the ex-captain; but to his more important visitor he was more respectful. "It don't smell like no bed o' wall-flowers, y'r honour," he said apologetically; "but wi' such coves as I gets in 'ere sometimes, it's none so easy keeping things as they should be. They don't like no windows open."

"Tell O'Donnell I'm here, and have no desire to be kept waiting!" ordered Sir Vincent, taking out and waving in front of his face a handkerchief perfumed with lavender-water.

"Yes, y'r honour. An' would y'r honour—" Bates hesitated, one hand on the edge of the door.

"Well, what?"

"Like me to send in any refreshment, y'r honour? I've a rare tap o' brandy, real French, and just over. Or a bowl o' punch?"

"Punch. And take care, Bates, the glasses—my glass—are clean!"

Twenty seconds later there came into the room a tall fellow in a somewhat dilapidated suit of dark green, a blue-eyed, black-haired fellow, with a jovial, reckless expression. He nodded at Cokeley, made a bow to Brookes, and said he was pleased to see the latter. The baronet looked him over

carefully, the man smiling under the gaze of the ever-shifting eyes.

"They tell me you're sober, O'Donnell, and for once I feel willing to believe Bates," said Brookes.

"Deuce a bit, sorr, could I be the reverse?" And O'Donnell laughed. "'Tis not a lot o' liquor ye can buy when yez pockets are empty as a sack without a bottom to ut, an' though Mither Bates is a foine man, 'tis mighty little he's willing to let a man have without paying for ut."

"The better for you," returned Brookes grimly. "When I sent word I required to speak to you, it was a sober man I meant dealing with. The other kind are not to be trusted, until after the work is done, and then they may swim in liquor, drown in it, for all I care."

"Well, sorr, an' what is ut ye'll be wanting with me?" the man asked.

But it was not until the landlord had brought in the punch and glasses and retired again that Sir Vincent answered the question. Filling a glass, he pushed it across to the Irishman, helped himself, and sat down.

"You know Fennel—Ephraim Fennel, the Birmingham bruiser?" he asked abruptly.

"I do, sorr, as good a bhoys wid his hands as we'd find, did he but keep away from the drink. I saw him foight Gib-letts an' Sutton, the nagur, an' he'd 'a' bate Gregson if so be as it hadn't been worth more to him not to do it."

"And what of Barney Isaacs? Didn't he have a mill with the Jew once?"

"He did, sorr, an' if Barney had the science, Fennel had the hitting in him; but I misdoubt me but that Barney'd 've thrashed him in the end."

"Nonsense," put in Cokeley; "the Jew is a coward."

"Maybe, but it's me own money I'd have on Barney if they met. An' that's not only me own opinion, but ye'll hear others say the same."

"Then," said Brookes, "a man who could beat Isaacs without trouble ought to beat Fennel?"

"It's the same, I'd be thinking, sorr."

"Good. You're a blackguard, O'Donnell, and a coward to boot when it comes to honest milling, though handy in a fight at other times, as I've learned. And you know a boxer when you see him. Now, what would you say might happen if I had backed Ephraim Fennel against a lad, a new hand, who had beaten Barney Isaacs inside fifteen minutes?"

"Be th' powers, sorr, I'd say ye're after losing yer money!" declared O'Donnell excitedly. "An' who might be the lad, y'r honour?"

"His name is Ned Harley."

"Had a sparring bout with Scroggins at the Fives Court at Cribb's benefit," supplemented Cokeley.

And at this O'Donnell opened his eyes. He had found his way by hook or crook into the Fives Court, had watched Hil's bout, and he was a good enough man to recognise talent when he saw it. But for his unfortunate willingness to fight according to orders—in other words, win or lose, as his rascally backers had told him—O'Donnell would have been a prominent man in the Ring. But the recently-formed Pugilistic Club had come to learn of his weakness; there was a bar up against him; and he had descended to a hanger-on, a ring sharper and bully, and found himself, for a consideration, in the corner among those whose business it was, on occasion, though such things did not happen often, to create disturbances, threaten the officials, cut the ropes, or carry out any one or other of the blackguard devices by which dishonest boxers or their backers strove to avoid losing a fight or the stakes.

"And is ut him y'r honour's backing Fennel against?" he asked. "Sure, it's Fennel's coffin I'd be offering, could he be made to shantid up long enough. May I be so bould, sorr, as to ask who 'tis has the backin' o' this Ned Harley?"

"Mr. Darcy Vavasour."

"Indade?" And the Irishman muttered something under his breath.

He had not forgotten that it was largely owing to that dandy Corinthian, one of his own "crosses" had come to the hearing of the members of the P.O.

"Sure, but he knows a good man when he sees him!" he said grudgingly.

"Thinks so much of the kid, he was willing to back him for any money against any man of his weight in England, and Sir Vincent Brookes, as a true sportsman and patron of the Ring, accepted the bet," put in Cokeley.

"Well, sorr, if it's agreeable to ye, an' that's what ye're wanting wid me, I'll do me best to keep Fennel free from the liquor an' sober, an' hearten him for a foight; but it's a horse to a hen I'm thinking for th' youngster."

"If both enter the ring," said the baronet quietly. He filled O'Donnell's glass again. "The match is play or pay."

"Thankee, sorr! Y'r honour's good health!" And the punch was tossed off.

The drinker looked slowly from one to other of the gentlemen as though trying to make up his mind what was wanted

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of him; for it was for something more than to learn his opinion of the match that he had been summoned to meet Sir Vincent Brookes. The last words of the baronet suggested a clue.

"Ye're thinking some accident moight happen, sorr?" he asked.

"It has happened before." And the tempter looked at him squarely.

"Tis thrue. Now a dose o' the roight shuff!"

Sir Vincent shook his head.

"It doesn't always work. Men have recovered and won fights before now. However, that is a matter to be discussed later; there is other business afoot which needs to be dealt with before Master Ned Harley's. Any time within a fortnight will serve for him; the other matter is immediate."

"Ah, an' that's better, y'r honour!" said O'Donnell, and the puzzled expression that had not left his face during the conversation vanished. "Sure, an' if 'twas but one man y'r honour was intrested in, I couldn't be afther thinking ye'd want half a dozen bhoys to dale wid him."

"Then you have with you the rascals I told you I wanted?" said briskly. "As tight lads for a bit of a scrimmage as ye'd find out of Oireland."

"Then I'll go and look at them."

"Plase to follow me, sorr."

O'Donnell got up from his chair, and led the way along several short passages and flights of stairs until a large room on the further side of the tavern was reached. At last he threw open a door, and immediately his companions' ears were assailed by a rude chant sung, or shouted rather, in half a dozen different keys by twice as many men, who lounged or stood about in a low, square room, filled with the pungent smoke of vile tobacco. So thick was the haze, Sir Vincent and Cokeley could not see distinctly.

When they could, they had a view of as choice a collection of rascals as the worst prisons could have shown. The galleys was written in every hard, inflamed, forbidding face. Every man jack had a pipe between his fingers, and a mug of drink close at hand. Bitter rascals they were, and an expression of disgust came into the baronet's face as he beheld them. And they stared back at him in surly wonder mixed with expectation. They had been told to meet at the Swan as there was a job awaiting, a job that meant easy-earned money; but what it was and who wanted them they had no notion. The sight of a well-dressed gentleman fairly took them aback, also it awakened their ready suspicions. The singing stopped immediately the door opened.

For a minute or more Sir Vincent stood still, quietly surveying the crew; and these stared back at him, none speaking.

"My friends," began Sir Vincent, speaking very carefully. "I am in need of a few pairs of strong arms for a piece of work to be done, and our friend O'Donnell has called you here in the belief that among you I can be provided with these. But strong arms are of little use, except they have stout hearts with them. One question: Are any of you averse from fighting?"

There was a roar of laughter. Fighting! Why, that was their game! Their faces were evidence of the fact. When the laughter had subsided, the baronet resumed:

"In addition to being able to fight, the men I want must have bad memories. When the job for which they are selected is completed, they will do well to forget all about it. And they must do as they are told. Now, who are there here who can fulfil these conditions?"

They came forward in a body.

"Capital!" laughed Brookes. "This gentleman"—he placed a hand on Cokeley's shoulder—"will give you your instructions, and O'Donnell will be your leader to see that they are carried out!"

Then he went among them, picking out such as pleased his eye most, until he had selected seven. To the disappointed ones he presented a crown, "payment for the inconvenience they had been put to"; and, after a brief whispered conversation, he went out of the room, loudly cheered.

"Faugh!" exclaimed Sir Vincent, when he once more breathed fresh air. "Tis most inconvenient that a gentleman has to descend to such company; but necessity knows no law. Darcy Vavasour, my friend, I would be glad to give ten guineas to see your face when you learn your invincible gamecocks are prevented from winning you our match. As for you, Master Hilary Bevan—Ned Harley—we can deal with you later. Sure, it is vastly unpleasant to be compelled to go to such lengths for a gentleman to win his bets; but, unhappily, I have no choice. Confound my luck! Of what use the winning of one fool's money, when Fortune takes care that I shall lose still more heavily to another?"

(A long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday.)

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

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."

P. R. M. Kilborn, 476, Rathdowne Street, North Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with Scout readers, age 16—18.

Miss M. Brown, P.O. Box 132, Hastings, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Ireland, Scotland, or England, age 16.

W. McNaughton, Tulloch Cottage, 23, Tenth Street, La Rochelle, Johannesburg, wishes to correspond with readers in Edinburgh, age 15—18.

W. H. Johnson, 5, Stebonheath Street, Sydenham, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers in the British Isles, age 18—19.

J. Dobson, care of Te Aro P.O., Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia or England, age 16.

Miss J. B. Ellis, 137, Railway Cottages, Fordsburg, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in America, age 20—22.

A. Treadgold, 215, Barker Road, Subiaco, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards.

Miss A. Vivash, 85, Bridge Street, Northcote, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 21—25.

A. H. Green, Deakin Street, Beulah, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers, age 14—16.

F. B. Hoff, "Oslo," Francis Street, Ascot Vale, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in Ireland, age 16—17.

R. M. Sutherland, Ellis Road, Hawthorn, Invercargill, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 19—22.

T. J. Power, care of State Fire Insurance Department, Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England or Ireland, age 18—22.

N. Eggeling, 26, Tudor Street, Surrey Hills, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in San Francisco, age 18.

Miss Thursa League, Pynsot Street, Horsham, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Ireland or Canada, or any boy reader in Horsham, England, age 19—20.

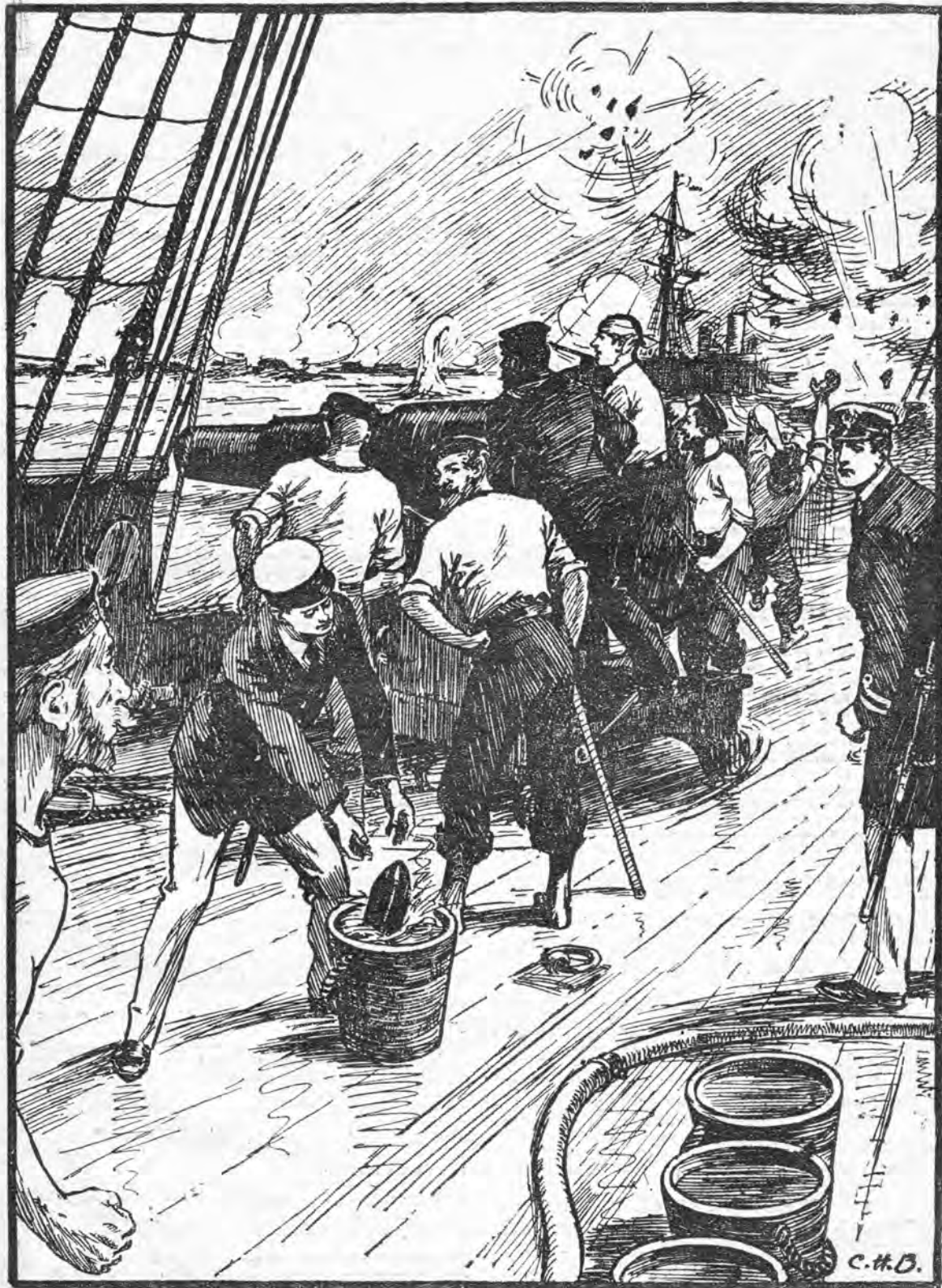
Miss M. E. Cowley, 5, Woolcott Street, Darlinghurst, Sydney, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in England, age 18—20.

R. Goldie, 16, Plant Street, Northcote, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

Miss M. Lees, 195, Harris Street, Pymont, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in America, age 16—17.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

FAMOUS FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG. No. 18



Specially drawn for "THE GEM" Library by C. H. Blake.

During the bombardment of Alexandria, on July, 11th, 1882, one of the British gunboats came in for a very hot fire from the guns in the Egyptian forts, and it was on this ship that one of that famous day's pluckiest deeds was performed. A live shell dropped clean on to the deck almost in the middle of one of the gun-crews. Quick as thought, Midshipman Cochrane pounced upon it, and carried it coolly to a bucket of water, plunging it in, and thus extinguishing the fuse just as the deadly missile was on the very point of exploding.

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OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"FATTY WYNN'S HUNGER-STRIKE!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Next Wednesday's splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's tells of the novel—for him!—form of protest adopted by Fatty Wynn of the New House against his treatment by Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master.

By the latter's orders, poor Fatty is put on a very limited diet indeed, and he expresses his disapproval of it in the most approved modern way. Fortunately for the fat junior, he can rely upon a certain amount of outside aid from Figgins and Kerr, his faithful chums, to assist him to hold out. The effect of his action is none the less powerful on this account, however, and

"FATTY WYNN'S HUNGER-STRIKE!"

creates a great deal of excitement at St. Jim's while it lasts.

A WELCOME SURPRISE!

I should much like to publish on this page a letter that I have just received from one of my thousands of "Penny Popular" readers and chums, but, unfortunately, space does not allow of this.

Some weeks ago my reader, who tells me that he is not in very affluent circumstances, sent in a couple of attempts to the "Poptets" competition, which is, as all my chums know, one of the favourite features of our splendid companion paper, "The Penny Popular." Having sent his two attempts in, according to the rules, my chum then promptly forgot the matter altogether. The affair by no means ended there; however, for on opening his weekly copy of "The Penny Popular" as usual the other Friday morning, what was my chum's delight at seeing his name in the list of prize-winners which appears weekly on page 3! Sure enough, the next morning's post brought a cheque from the Amalgamated Press, Ltd., for a very nice little sum indeed, and it was to acknowledge this that my lucky chum wrote me his nice letter.

My friend is particularly pleased in that this piece of good fortune came to him at the most opportune possible moment—just as he was going away for his holidays, in fact, when a substantial sum to add to one's pocket-money comes in particularly useful.

"Your cheque will enable me to have a right royal time of it while I am away," runs the letter. "And I should like to send a message to all your 'Penny Pop.' readers, and to 'Magnetites' and 'Gemites' as well. Tell them to take the chance while it is offered them, and go in for your splendid 'Poptets' competition for all they're worth every week!"

That is the message of this chum of mine who had such a splendid surprise just before going away for his holidays; and I am sure that all my readers who would like to give themselves a chance of having the same sort of pleasant surprise happen to them, will see the wisdom of this advice.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

H. Lazarus (Victoria Park Hospital).—Bob Cherry is the champion fighter of the Remove.

Will the following readers accept my best thanks for letters received? J. Greenhaigh (U.S.A.), F. R. H. Lynn (Hove), E. Y. (London, N.E.), "A Reader" (Leeds), W. Davies (New Kent Road, S.E.), H. J. Naylor (Blackheath), "The Terrible Two" (Ryde, I.O.W.).

NOVEL WEDDING PRESENTS.

At a recent marriage at Eastbourne an elephant was one of the wedding presents, though it is not stated why or whether the elephant was displayed along with the other wedding gifts.

When the late Hon Maurice Gifford, C.M.G., was married he gave his bride a distinctly novel brooch. During the Matabele War of 1895, Mr. Gifford, who was in command of the hastily-arranged "Gifford's Horse," was shot in the arm. The bullet was extracted, but subsequently the arm had to be amputated.

The brooch Mr. Gifford gave his bride, then, consisted of the bullet that had wounded him, mounted in diamonds.

HOW TO WRITE A SHORT STORY.

By a Successful Author.

Before I begin to chat to you about how to write a short story, boys and girls, let me make it quite plain that, far from being the easy task many people think it, it is one of the most difficult and exacting that can be undertaken. Apart from the imaginative side of the question—and even that has to be controlled to some extent—the writing of short stories is governed by rules as necessary as those which teach you to speak correct grammar.

The successful authors don't keep to these rules, though? Perhaps not—in a broad sense; but they have all gone through them first, and learnt their different values, before they dared dispense with them. Revision is one of the secrets of success. You must have plenty of patience to go through your work again and again, correcting, altering, and re-writing, ere you consider the story finished.

You cannot take a better example of this concentration and perseverance than Mr. Rudyard Kipling—in my opinion one of the greatest short story writers who ever lived. Mr. Kipling never considers a story finished. He will correct his first proofs in black, add another correction in red, send the whole thing back for another proof—and probably treat that in the same way—until his printers wonder if they will ever be able to publish his stuff.

As a beginner, you must depend upon plot, rather than style or cleverly-sketched characters, to make good your story. When you have had more experience your style alone will sell your story; but the person who wants to write stories that will sell must stick to strong, unusual, and daring plot construction.

In selecting a plot, get a strong idea, and work on it for a week or so, ere you begin writing. Don't make your characters appear merely as vehicles for carrying the dialogue and plot—make them natural and lifelike. Some writers advise working from character to plot—that is, you conceive a leading character, and just let him run through different situations of adventure, etc., thus building a story around him; whilst others advise building the plot first, and making a character to fit it. The former course is truer to art, but it is a method that is more likely to suggest itself to you after experience than in the beginning.

A beginner is far more likely to sell a story with a strong, gripping plot than an elaborate attempt at characterisation; and you want to write stories to sell, because that is generally the only test of their quality.

(Another helpful article on "How to Write a Short Story" next Wednesday.)

The Editor



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE!

THE VERY ONE!

"Where are those cigarettes I left on my desk?"
 "I haven't touched one, sir!"
 "Then how is it there is only one left?"
 "That is the one I haven't touched, sir."
 Then something touched him!—Sent in by J. Reilly, Glasgow.

PREPARED.

A train running on a line which was noted for slowness and unpunctuality, suddenly stopped in the midst of fields.
 "Guard," shouted a jovial passenger, "may I get out and pick some flowers?"
 "Afraid you won't find many about here," said the guard good-humouredly.
 "Oh, there'll be heaps of time!" replied the jovial passenger. "I've bought a packet of seeds!"—Sent in by Harold Bagnall, Lancashire.

OH, PAT!

"Pat, I'll give you eight in pence for a shilling," said an Englishman to Pat, his Irish friend.
 "Eightpence!" murmured Pat. "Done!"
 The coins changed hands, and the Englishman watched Pat's face as he slowly counted the eightpence.
 "Not bad, is it?" he smiled.
 "No," said Pat. "But, begorra, the shilling is!"—Sent in by C. R. Maddock, Lower Clapham.

OF COURSE!

Fred (rushing in breathlessly): "Poor Jim, the postman, has got the sack!"
 Frank: "What over for?"
 Fred: "Why, to carry his letters in, of course!"—Sent in by Miss D. Samuels, Lower Clapton.

NOT THE YOUNGEST.

Master Harold had returned after his first day at a kindergarten school.
 "Well, Harold," said a friend of his mother's, who was calling, "how do you like school? I suppose you are the youngest there?"
 "Oh, no!" replied Harold indignantly, drawing himself to his full height of four feet nothing, and throwing out his chest. "Oh, no! Some of our chaps come in perambulators!"—Sent in by G. Tesfil, Birmingham.

IMPOSSIBLE.

Miss Plutus: "But, Captain Howleigh, will you love me when I grow old and ugly?"
 The Captain (gallantly): "My dear Miss Plutus, you may grow older, but you can never grow uglier!"
 And when he went home he wondered why Miss Plutus rejected him!—Sent in by F. Tugwell, Cardiff.

TRY A GATEPOST.

"Whilst testing the capabilities of a new car in the country, a motorist stopped to pick up a farmer, who looked as though he might like a ride. The machine was going along pretty lively, when it skidded, and ran into a tree. Neither of the occupants was hurt, but as the ruralite picked himself up he remarked:

"Not half bad. But, I say, mister, there's one thing I'd like to know. How do you stop these contraptions when there aren't any trees?"—Sent in by L. Ely, Blackpool.

SURE TO COME UP AGAIN.

O'Rourke (who is being lowered down a well): "Hold on! Oi want to come up again!"
 Finnegan: "An' what for?"
 O'Rourke: "None of your business! If you don't pull me up and stop letting me down, begorra, I'll cut the rope!"—Sent in by G. Humble, Newcastle.

GOOD BUSINESS.

An Irishman was passing the open window of a lawyer's office, and poked in his head.
 "What do you sell here?" he asked.
 "Blockheads!" snapped the smart young lawyer.
 "Then you must have had a fine day, for I see you have only one left!" returned Pat, with a chuckle.—Sent in by A. Vann, Birmingham.

HE HAD THOUGHT IT OUT.

She: "Here's an interesting story of a man who begged to be sent to prison in place of his wife."
 He: "Aha! And yet you always declare that men are never self-sacrificing."
 She: "Well, this man's wife happened to be a washer-woman, and if she went to prison he'd have to work."—Sent in by Miss Katie Whitehouse, Cork.

HARD LINES.

A school-teacher was reading sentences to her class, and letting the children supply the last word.
 "The sphinx," she read, "has eyes, but it cannot—"
 "See!" cried the children.
 "Has ears, but it cannot—"
 "Hear!" they responded.
 "Has a mouth, but it cannot—"
 "Eat!" said the chorus.
 "Has a nose, but it cannot—"
 "Wipe it!" thundered the class.—Sent in by E. Cox, Southampton.

HER SECRET.

They were great friends, but although they were women, one of them had never told the other her age.
 "Yes," she was saying, "I've kept the secret of my age ever since I was twenty."
 "Really?" said her friend. "And you have never told anybody?"
 "Never!"
 "Never?"
 "Never. Never!—NEVER!"
 "Never given the faintest hint?"
 "Not the slightest!"
 "I expect you will give it away one of these days. You're bound to let the cat out of the bag one of these days when you least expect it."
 "Not likely! After keeping the secret for ten years, I am not likely to let it out now."—Sent in by J. Hill, Manchester.

AT THE CHILDREN'S TEA PARTY.

The minister of the parish church gave a tea-party, and school children were invited, the noble gentleman surveying all with evident satisfaction. On walking round he observed a small boy devouring nothing but cake, so he, passing the bread and butter plate, said:

"Johnny, won't you eat some nice bread-and-butter?"
 "No," came the answer.
 "No what?" said the minister.
 "No fear!" was the retort.
 Sent in by H. Meads, Partick.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short, Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED The Editor, "The Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this Competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

THIS SPLENDID ISSUE OF OUR COMPANION PAPER CONTAINS THREE LONG, COMPLETE STORIES AND A GRAND WEEKLY COMPETITION. MANY MONEY PRIZES!

The 1st POPULAR

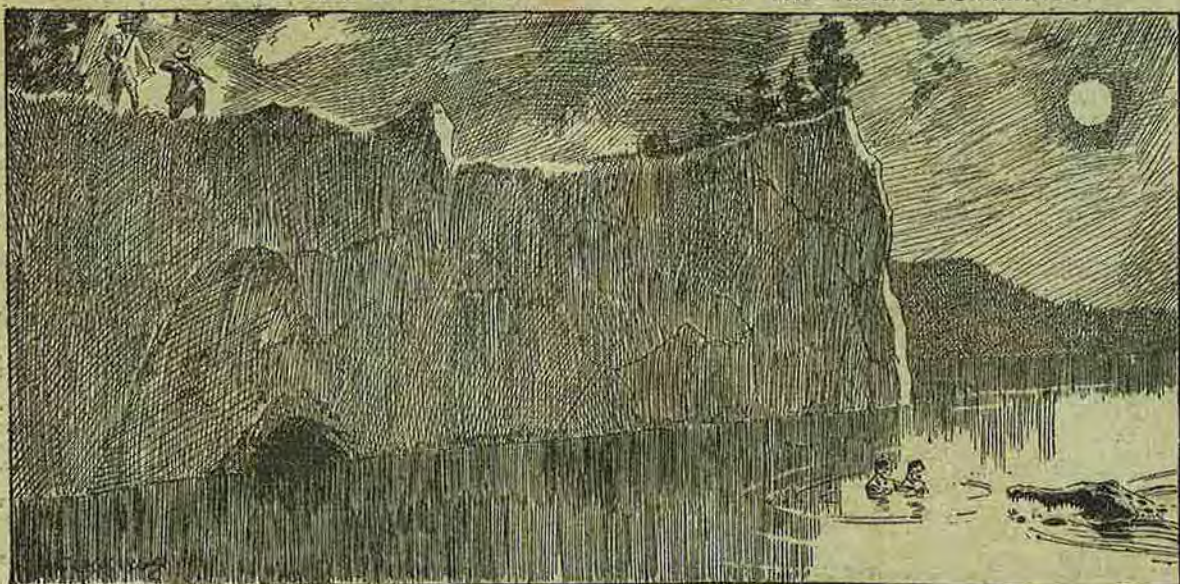
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"THE MISADVENTURES OF GUSSY!"



A Dramatic Scene in the Complete Tale of SEXTON BLAKE:
"BY THE KING'S COMMAND!"



A Thrilling Scene in the Long, Complete Adventure Story, entitled: "PETE'S PROOF!"