

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR! DODGES WORTH DOING!

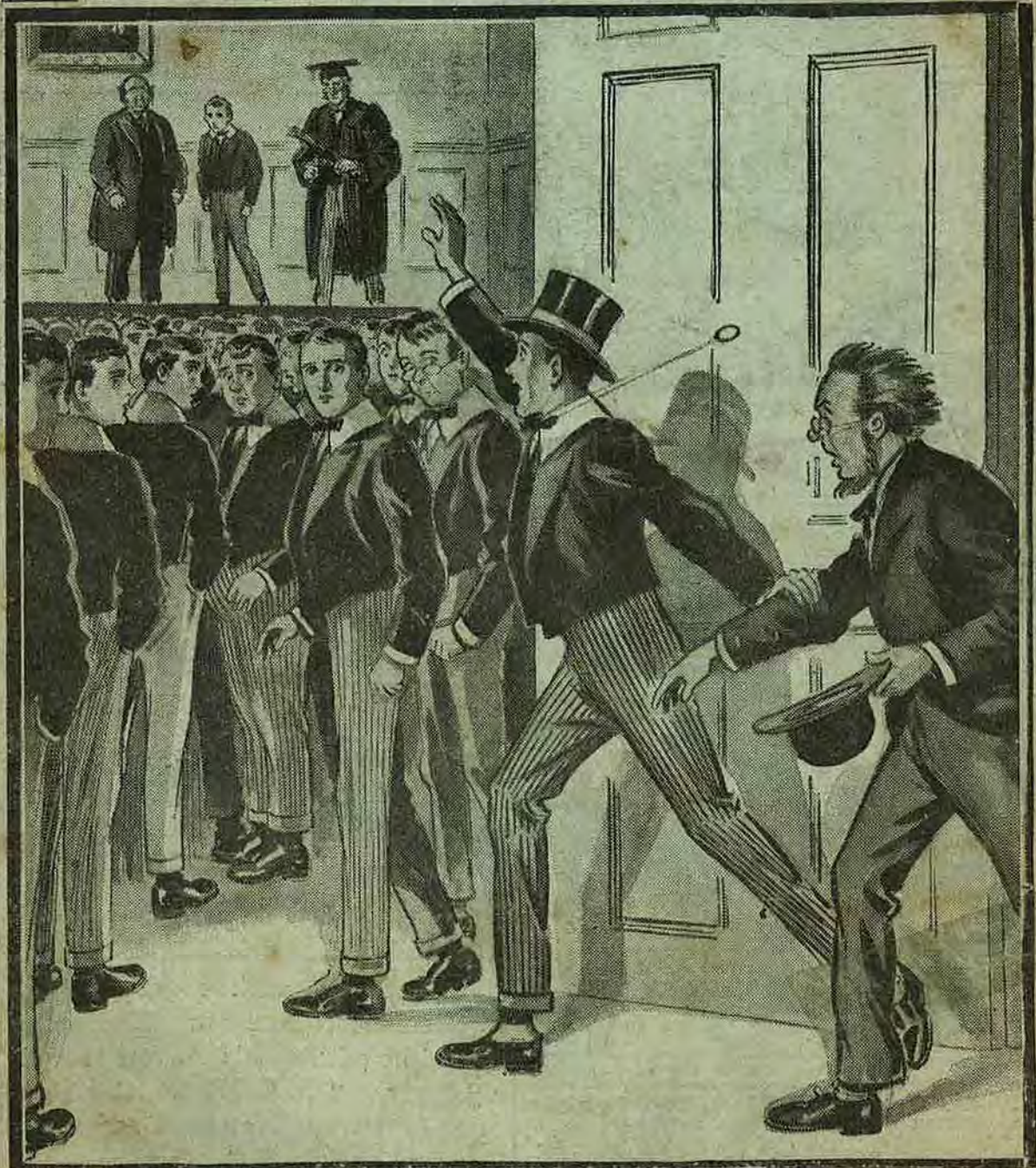
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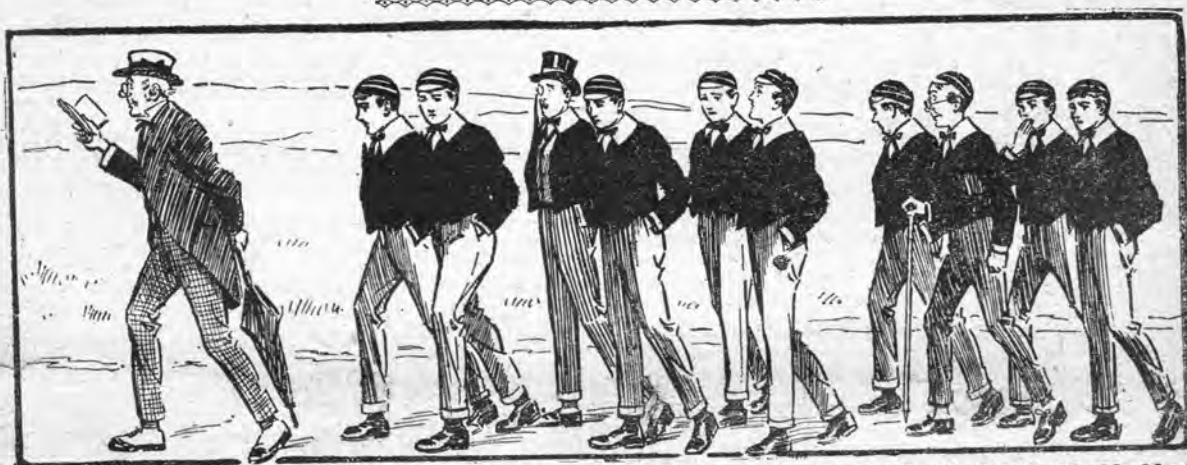


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AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR!

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale Dealing with the Adventures
of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



The Junior Science Club at St Jim's make a geological expedition with Mr. Lathom!

CHAPTER 1.

Mr. Lathom is Too Kind.

TOM MERRY stopped and stared, and nearly let the football slip from under his arm in his astonishment. He was quite taken aback.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and most of the fellows were thinking of footer practice. Tom Merry's chums in the Shell, Manners and Lowther, had already gone down to the football-ground. Tom had run upstairs for the Soccer ball, and as he came running down, whistling cheerfully and in great spirits, he found nearly all the Fourth Form of St. Jim's gathered in the hall.

That was surprising in itself, as naturally they ought to have been out of doors, thinking of footer. But the astonishing thing was their woebegone look.

Blake, usually the sunniest of the juniors, looked as if he were going to a funeral. Digby and Herries were giving one another commiserating glances. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, wore a worried look. Even Reilly's genial Irish face was clouded. Figgins & Co. of the New House, looked gloomy and glum. There wasn't a smile to be seen in the whole of the Fourth Form.

The Fourth-Formers looked as if some dreadful calamity had happened. A junior Form on its way to execution could not have looked more downhearted.

Tom Merry stared blankly.

The Fourth-Formers glanced at him in a dispirited way.

The sight of the Shell fellow, with a light coat on over his football rig, and the Soccer ball under his arm, seemed to plunge them into yet gloomier depths of depression. Jack Blake groaned aloud, and Figgins was heard to snort.

"What the dickens is the matter with you?" demanded Tom Merry, as soon as he recovered his voice. "Is it a flogging for the whole Form?"

"Certainly not, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his famous monocle into a lack-lustre eye.

"Detained for the afternoon?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"No!"

"Coming down to the footer practice?"

"Do we look as if we're coming down to the footer practice, fathead?" said Jack Blake, with another deep groan.

"Don't talk about footer practice to me, or I shall scream!"

"Put that Soccer ball out of sight!" growled Figgins.

"What do you want to inflict the giddy tortures of Tantalus on us for, duffer?"

Tom Merry was more and more amazed.

"What's happened?" he demanded.

"Nothing!"

"Nothing, deah boy!"

"Then what are you all looking as if you were going to be flogged for?" exclaimed the captain of the Shell.

"I wish it were only a flogging!" groaned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy pathetically. "We could get ovah a floggin', and get down to the footah. It's worse than that!"

"Well, it can't be the sack," said Tom Merry. "You Fourth-Form kids are a worry, but the Head can't be going to sack the lot of you!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Is it outbreak of measles or something? Are they going to march you all off to the hospital?"

Blake grinned for the first time.

"No, fathead!"

"Then what is it?"

"Can't you see we're all in our toppers and clean collars?" groaned Blake. "Can't you guess what's happened?"

"Blessed if I can. I know it's a bit queer to see you fags in clean collars, but—"

Next Wednesday:

"TOM MERRY MINOR!" AND "THE CORINTHIAN!"

"Bump him!" said Figgins. "That will relieve our feelings. It's bad enough without being chipped by beastly Shell duffers. Collar the grinning idiot and bump him hard!"

"Yaas, wathah, that's a wippin' ideah. Let's bump Tom Mewwy, deah boys!"

Tom Merry retreated as the down-hearted Fourth-Formers made a movement towards him.

He waved them off.

"Pax! Hands off—I'm sympathising. But what's the matter?"

"It's Lathom!" grunted Blake.

"Lathom! Your Form-master?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What has he done?"

"It isn't what he's done, it's what he's going to do!" groaned Blake dolorously.

"What is he going to do?"

"He's going to be kind to us!"

"What is there to grumble at in that?" demanded Tom Merry. "I've wished often enough that old Linton, our giddy Form-master, was as kind as your Lathom. Lathom is a jolly good little ass. He's a scientific chap, I know, but everybody has his little weakness, and Lathom's is geology. A man might have worse vices than that."

"I wish he'd take up drink or gambling instead!" snorted Figgins. "I wouldn't care if he played shove-ha'penny with the Head—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or if he didn't come home till morning. He could do those things without worrying us. But now—"

"Now!" groaned Blake.

"Yaas, now!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Now, it's simply howwid. Of course, it's up to us to treat Mr. Lathom decently, and take his kindness in the spirit in which it is meant. But—"

"I wish I knew the chap who invented geology!" said Herries viciously. "I'd take him into a quiet corner with my bulldog Towner!"

"Taking up geology?" asked Tom Merry, still more amazed. "What a giddy pastime—beats bug-hunting hollow. Very brainy, I must say. I thought Skimpole of the Shell was the only chap in the school who cared for geology. You don't mean to say you're chucking footer this afternoon to go and look for fossils?"

"Do you think we would if we could help it?" howled Blake. "Lathom's going to take us on a geological excursion as a favour—an act of kindness. He goes rooting about among filthy old stones himself and enjoys it. He's going to give us some enjoyment this afternoon. We're not ordered to go—only we can't say no. We're going to explore the giddy rocks and revel in Older Pliocene and Newer Pliocene, and Upper Miocene and Lower Miocene—oh, my hat!"

"And jurassic—" said Figgins.

"And triassic—" said Kerr.

"And silly-assie!" snorted Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

The Fourth-Formers glared at him. It was no laughing matter for them. So long as Mr. Lathom dabbled in geology by himself they were willing to give him his head, as Blake generously said. But when he wanted to impart the wonders of modern science—the fairy tales of geology, as he called them, with unconscious exactitude—to his suffering Form, and took them away from the football-field for the purpose—well, then the limit was reached. To walk out in orderly array, like good little Erics, as Figgins put it—to be chipped by the village boys and the Grammar School fellows, without being able to take vengeance on the spot, and to be expected to "enthuse" if a fragment of incomprehensible bone should be discovered amid a heap of incomprehensible stones; it was not a joyful prospect for the Fourth. And a football-field and a Soccer ball would be left behind while they were grubbing round the hill at the heels of Mr. Lathom!

"What are you cackling at, you silly chump?" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, bump him!"

And the exasperated Fourth-Formers rushed at the Shell fellow. In a moment Tom Merry was seized by many hands, and he descended upon the floor with a loud concussion.

Bump!

"Now laugh!" snorted Blake.

Tom Merry did not laugh—he yelled.

"Ow!"

"Give him another!"

"Yaas, give the wottah another, deah boys—"

"Are you ready, my boys?" asked Mr. Lathom, coming down the passage and blinking at the juniors over his glasses.

"Dear me! What is that?"

"Ow—yow!"

"Are you hurt, Merry? Dear me, you should not run downstairs in a hurry!" said Mr. Lathom. "It is very kind of you to help Merry up, my dear boys. It is very gratifying to see you gather round your schoolfellow in this way to help him, but do not crowd round him too much. I trust you have not hurt yourself, Merry?"

"Nunno!" gasped Tom Merry, as he gained his feet. "No, sir, thank you!"

"We will start now, my dear boys. We are going to have a most enjoyable afternoon," said Mr. Lathom, rubbing his hands. "Follow me!"

The Fourth-Formers followed Mr. Lathom, marching out of the School House in solemn array.

Tom Merry gasped for breath.

"Poor old Blake!" he murmured. "Poor old Figgy! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was sorry for the hapless victims of Mr. Lathom's enthusiasm, but he could not help thinking it funny, and he chuckled as he ran down to the football field.

But Blake & Co. did not chuckle. They followed Mr. Lathom out of the gates of St. Jim's with the solemnity of owls.

CHAPTER 2.

Saved by the Enemy!

MR. LATHOM trotted along quite cheerily and chippily. He was in his element.

He was happy, and his kind eyes beamed with benevolence over his glasses.

The Fourth-Formers marched on glumly.

They did not want to hurt their kind Form-master's feelings, and they did not want to offend him. But they could not look happy. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could only muster up a feeble smile when he met Mr. Lathom's eye. But Mr. Lathom was short-sighted, and he was wrapped up in the thrilling joys of geology. He only supposed that his boys were looking grave and thoughtful, which was eminently right and proper on the occasion of a geological excursion.

"And to think," murmured Jack Blake in despair, "that those Shell rotters are playing football at this very minute!"

"Awful!" groaned Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! It's enough to make a chap gwoan," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust my politeness will not give out before this expedish is ovah. But I can feel it wunnin' low."

"The only chance for us is meeting the Grammarians," said Kerr. "If we could get up a scrap with them, it would knock the geology on the head."

"Hear, hear!"

"Suppose we ask Mr. Lathom to stop at Mother Murphy's and have some ginger-pop and tarts?" suggested Fatty Wynn hopefully.

"Ass!" said Blake.

Mr. Lathom glanced round kindly at the murmur of voices. "We shall proceed through Rylcombe," he said. "Then we shall reach Broken Hill, which is singularly rich in geological examples. Is it not extraordinary to reflect, my dear boys, that at one period the whole of this region was under water—the waves of a prehistoric sea stretching as far as the eye could reach?"

"But doesn't water always reflect, sir?" asked Kerr, venturing to pull Mr. Lathom's respected leg very gently.

"Eh, what did you say, Kerr?"

"If this region was under water, sir, it wouldn't be extraordinary to reflect, would it? I've always noticed, sir, that one can see one's reflection in water."

Mr. Lathom stared at Kerr. Kerr was looking quite solemn, and could not be suspected of joking with his Form-master; and, indeed, a geological excursion was not likely to make any fellow feel humorous.

"You misapprehend me, Kerr," said Mr. Lathom mildly. "However, no matter. Here we are in Rylcombe. Pray

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(See column 2, page 26 of this issue.)

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Every Friday.



"Lift it out, my boys—gently, gently! It may crumble in the touch—though it certainly feels sufficiently solid! But after preservation in rock for millions of years—dear me!" The juniors, with a solemnity worthy of the great occasion, lifted out the hairy form, and laid it upon the floor of the cave. (See Chapter 8.)

keep in order as we pass through the village, and do not scatter about the street."

"Yes, sir."

Fatty Wynn's eyes lingered lovingly on the window of Mrs. Murphy's tuckshop as the army marched down the High Street. Outside Mrs. Murphy's shop, consuming ginger-beer at a little table, were three cheerful-looking youths in mortar-board caps. The St. Jim's fellows knew them at once—Gordon Gay and Frank Monk and Carboy, of Rylcombe Grammar School. The three Grammarians raised their caps to Mr. Lathom as he passed, and the St. Jim's master acknowledged the salute politely and walked on. But the Grammarians did not salute the juniors so gracefully. They grinned at them, as if there was something very amusing in seeing them in battle array, so to speak.

"Going for a nice little walk with a nice little master?" asked Gordon Gay.

"In nice little toppers and nice clean collars?" remarked Monk.

"How nice!" said Carboy. "Gussy, where did you dig up that necktie?"

Arthur Augustus turned purple.

"Weally, you wottah—" he began.

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"My boys, I have to step into Mr. Wedge's shop for a moment for the volume of 'The Geological History of Sussex,' of which I intend to read you a chapter this afternoon. Pray remain here, and do not scatter about."

And Mr. Lathom toddled into the book-shop.

"What's the little game?" asked Gordon Gay curiously. "Do they make the Fourth walk out like a little fag Form now?"

"We're going geologising!" groaned Blake.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And if we hadn't a master with us, we'd wipe up the ground with you cheeky rotters!" growled Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Gordon Gay chuckled. There was a syphon of soda-water on the little table with the ginger-beer, and Gordon Gay played with it carelessly.

"You haven't answered my question yet, Gussy," he murmured.

"Weally, Gay—"

"Where did you discover that face?" asked Gay, with an air of great interest. "And where did you dig up that nose? Did you find it on one of your geological excursions?"

"You—you uttah wottah!"

"Looks rather prehistoric to me," remarked Carboy, jamming a sixpence into his eye in playful imitation of D'Arcy's eyeglass, and scanning the swell of St. Jim's. "By the way, do you call it a face, Gussy?"

"What's in a name?" said Frank Monk. "Gussy wears it on the front of his head, so it must be a face, mustn't it? I suppose you're not wearing a mask, Gussy?"

"Certainly not, you wascal!"

"Then why don't you?"

"Eh?"

"You need one, you know, if that is really a face."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY

"TOM MERRY MINOR!"

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of
The Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his aristocratic nose. He deliberately dropped his eyeglass from his eye, and pushed back his spotless cuffs.

"Pwaw stand wound and scewen us fwom the book-shop, deah boys!" he said. "I am goin' to give these wottahs a feafuhl thwashin'!"

"Old Lathom will be out in a minute!" growled Blake.

"Blow Lathom!"

And Arthur Augustus, having finished his warlike preparations, advanced upon Gordon Gay & Co. The Australian junior gazed at him smilingly till he was within a couple of feet, and then he gently exerted a pressure of his thumb upon the syphon.

"Fzzzzzzzz!"
"Oh! Ah! Yawooh! Gwoooogh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as the stream of soda-water caught him full upon the face the Grammarians had passed so many rude remarks upon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gweat Scott! Ow, you wottah! Gwoooogh!"

Jack Blake, grinning, rushed to the rescue, but he reeled back with the grin fairly washed off his face as the syphon was turned upon him.

"Yah! Oh!" he howled. "Grooooh!"

"Lots of it," said Gordon Gay cheerfully. "Come and have some more. Will you have a taste of soda-water, Figgy?"

"Yow!" roared Figgins, as Gay turned the syphon upon him without waiting for a reply.

"Very refreshing on a warm afternoon," remarked Gay.

"Have a little, Herries?"

"Yowp! Oh!"

"Collar them!" roared Blake, dabbing at his face with his handkerchief. "The rotters! Collar them!"

"Here's Lathom!" muttered Lorne.

"Blow Lathom! Collar those Grammar rotters."

The Fourth-Formers of St. Jim's rushed in a crowd upon the three. Gordon Gay & Co. made a jump into the tuckshop. In the doorway they grinned at the excited St. Jim's juniors, and kissed their hands. But the Fourth-Formers were too excited to care for the fact that Mr. Lathom might step out of the bookshop at any moment. They forgot everything but the fact that the Grammarians were ragging them, and that they wanted vengeance, and wanted it at once. Jack Blake led a rush, and the juniors poured into the tuckshop upon the Grammarians.

"Collar them!"

"Bump the wottahs!"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, my hat," ejaculated Gordon Gay, "we've woke up a giddy hornet's nest!"

They had.

The rush of the Saints bore the Grammarians back into the tuckshop. They were collared and overwhelmed by numbers, in spite of their resistance. Mrs. Murphy, behind her little counter, gave a shriek of alarm.

"Young gentlemen! Oh, dear—oh, dear! Help!"

The tuckshop was swarming with juniors in a state of wild excitement. Gordon Gay, borne down in the grasp of a dozen hands, collapsed into a large box of eggs. Those eggs were marked twenty a shilling, and they were not sold so cheaply on account of their freshness. Gay crashed into the midst of them with a yell, and the broken eggs squashed and spurted round him, and the odour that rose from them showed that they would not have been really cheap at forty a shilling, excepting for election purposes.

"Oh, dear!" shrieked Mrs. Murphy. "Oh, dear! Police!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Blake. "Somebody will have to pay for those eggs, and the price ought to be high if it matches the eggs."

"Groooogh!" spluttered Gordon Gay.

"Shove the other rotters in," said Figgins. "We shall have to have a whip-round to pay for the eggs, so we may as well be generous with them."

"Leggo!" roared Monk. "Don't you dare to—Yaroooh! Ow!"

Squash!

"Pax!" roared Carboy. "I give you best! I give you—Yah!"

Squash!

The egg-box was a large one, and there was just room for the three Grammarians to squeeze into it. They sat tightly packed, with broken eggs squashing and squirting under and round them. The scent from the egg-box was terrific.

"Keep 'em there!" said Jack Blake, grinning. "This beats soda-water, don't it, Monkey?"

"Ow! Leggo!"

"How much that box of eggs, Mrs. Murphy?" asked THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 295.

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Blake. "We're treating our young friends to those eggs, and we're going to pay."

"Eight shillings, Master Blake."

And the juniors soon subscribed that sum. It was worth it, as Blake remarked. The scent alone, applied to the Grammarians, was worth double the money.

Gordon Gay & Co. wriggled in the egg-box, held there by a dozen pairs of hands. But there came a yell of alarm from the juniors outside the shop:

"Cave! Lathom!"

"Hook it!" said Figgins.

They scrambled out of the tuckshop. Mr. Lathom had stepped out of the book establishment with a heavy volume under his arm. He was blinking round in search of his vanished Form when the juniors came swarming out of the tuckshop into the street. Mr. Lathom looked at them chidingly. He imagined that the juniors had gone into the village shop for refreshment while they waited for him.

"My dear boys, pray form in line. You should not—Good heavens! What is that?"

Mr. Lathom dropped the Geological History of Sussex with a crash. He gazed in horror and amazement at three youths who came rushing out of the tuckshop after the St. Jim's juniors, smothered with yolks of eggs and fragments of broken shells. The scent they brought with them could have been cut with a knife.

"What—what—what—You wretched young hooligans! Go away!" shouted Mr. Lathom, as he saw that the three eggy youths were rushing to the attack.

Gordon Gay & Co. had lost their caps and their collars in the struggle. Their jackets were split, and they were smothered with dust and eggs. No wonder Mr. Lathom did not recognise them as the three polite youths who had saluted him so gracefully ten minutes before.

"Go away!" shrieked Mr. Lathom, waving his little geological hammer excitedly. "Go away, you young ruffians—"

"Yawooh!"

"My dear D'Arcy, have I struck you by accident? I am sorry. You wretched and foul-smelling young hooligans, go away at once, or I will chastise you—"

But the infuriated Grammarians did not even hear him. They were at boiling point, and they rushed right at the St. Jim's fellows careless of the odds. If they couldn't lick so many, they could impart to them the stickiness and the scent of the smashed eggs.

Blake & Co. knew it, and they backed away—not from the fists, but from the eggs.

Mr. Lathom rushed in between the foes, and the Grammarians' rush was stopped—by Mr. Lathom.

Exactly how the little Form-master was going to stop the rush of three excited and athletic youths was not clear. He had, perhaps, over-estimated his powers. The rush was stopped for one second as the trio came into collision with Mr. Lathom, and then Mr. Lathom rolled on the ground and the Grammarians rolled over him. Mr. Lathom's hat and glasses flew in different directions, and his geological hammer joined the "Geological History of Sussex" on the ground. He clutched wildly at the three eggy youths who were scrambling over him, and shrieked for the police.

"Rescue!" roared Blake.

Eggs or no eggs, the juniors had to rescue their Form-master. They rushed upon the vile-scented Grammarians and collared them and yanked them off Mr. Lathom.

Police-constable Crump heaved in sight in the village street, and Mr. Lathom sat up and shrieked to him.

"Officer, arrest those young hooligans! I give them in charge! Oh dear! Where are my glasses? Take them in charge, officer! Where is my hat? Dear me! Help!"

"Hook it!" murmured Blake; and as the St. Jim's fellows released them Gordon Gay & Co. vanished down the nearest turning.

Mr. Crump, portly and stout, arrived heavily upon the scene when they were gone.

"Wot's all this 'ere?" demanded Mr. Crump, taking out a notebook. "My heye! Drunk and disorderly in broad daylight! Your name, old gent—I want your name and address! Nice old spark you are—drunk and disorderly in broad daylight!"

"What!" shrieked Mr. Lathom. "How dare you? I am Mr. Lathom! I have been attacked by three desperate ruffians!"

"Mr. Lathom!" gasped the constable, recognising him. "Oh, lor! Sorry, sir; I didn't know you with that, heggy stuff on your face, sir! Assault and battery, I s'pose—attempted robbery in broad daylight! We'll have the rascals, sir! Can you give me their descriptions?"

Blake and Figgins tenderly helped Mr. Lathom to his feet. D'Arcy recovered his hat, and Kerr rescued his spectacles, which Police-constable Crump was just about to plant

a heavy boot upon. Levison slyly kicked the "Geological History of Sussex" out of sight round the corner.

"Yes, yes!" panted Mr. Lathom. "Pray take them in charge, officer! I will come to the station and charge them."

"One good turn deserves another," murmured Blake. "They charged him first."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys, this is no laughing matter! How dare you laugh? Where are the miscreants? You have allowed them to escape!"

"I didn't see them, sir!" said Mr. Crump stiffly. "I'm a-waitin' for their descriptions, sir."

"I was so confused, I hardly noticed. Three hooligans; that is all I can say."

"P'raps these young gents noticed them?" suggested Mr. Crump.

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "I will give you a description if you like."

"Pray do, Blake!" gasped Mr. Lathom.

"Three fellows nearly six feet high," said Blake; "or, say five feet ten. Would you say five feet ten or six feet, Figgins?"

Figgins grinned.

"Say five feet eleven," he said thoughtfully.

"With ginger whiskers one of them; the other two with black moustaches," said Blake.

"Didn't one have a beard?" asked Kerr.

Blake scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't swear to the beard," he said. "But none of them had been shaved to-day; I could see that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wot kind of clothes?" asked Mr. Crump, who was busy taking notes.

"Oh, rotten rags!" said Blake. "Not one of them had a collar on."

"Their jackets were torn and dusty," said Fatty Wynn.

"They looked horribly dirty, Mr. Crump."

"Ave you ever seen 'em before?" asked the constable.

"Yes, we've seen them hanging about Rylcombe several times," said Blake.

"I'll 'ave 'em before long, Mr. Lathom, sir. You can rely on that," said Mr. Crump, closing his notebook with a businesslike snap.

"I trust so!" panted Mr. Lathom. "I will come to the station and charge them with assault when you have arrested them, Mr. Crump. My boys, I am afraid we shall have to abandon our excursion for this afternoon. I do not feel in a state to continue it. We must return to the school."

"Oh, sir!"

"I am afraid there is no help for it," said Mr. Lathom. "I am smothered with broken eggs, and the smell is decidedly unpleasant. Let us return."

And Mr. Lathom, breathing very hard, started off. The juniors followed, and when Mr. Lathom's back was turned they ventured to exchange winks. They were not broken-hearted at the abandonment of the excursion. And they had discovered, as well as Mr. Lathom, that the smell of the eggs was decidedly unpleasant. They were very careful to walk to windward of their Form-master as they marched back to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

Monty Lowther—Football Instructor!

TOM MERRY & CO. were busy on the football field when the Fourth-Formers came in. Mr. Lathom went upstairs at once to change his clothes and to consider the problem of getting them cleaned, and the juniors made at once for the footer ground.

"Hallo! Got back?" asked Tom Merry, as the juniors came crowding up. "Have you settled the geology already?"

Blake chuckled.

"We've been rescued," he explained.

"Yaas, wathah—wescued by the enemy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The Shell fellows grinned as they listened to what had happened in Rylcombe.

"Rough on poor old Lathom!" said Manners. "But a jolly good stroke of luck for you. You can pile into the footer now."

"You bet!" said Figgins.

"You've got the pleasure of geology still in store!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "The giddy excursion is only put off—what!"

Blake looked alarmed.

"I didn't think of that. If he springs it on us on Saturday afternoon there will be trouble. There's a Form match on Saturday."

"Yaas, wathah! We shall weally have to wemonstwat with Mr. Lathom," said D'Arcy. "It would be imposs. to

cut a Form match. I am afward my politeness would not stand the strain."

"Sufficient for the day is the geology thereof," said Kerr. "Let's get on to the footer. We shall have to think of a dodge for getting out of it on Saturday."

And the juniors piled into the footer practice.

While the play went on a youth with a bony figure and an extremely large head, ornamented with tufts of hair, stood and looked on. He blinked at the players through his large spectacles in a thoughtful sort of way; but he was evidently not thinking of football.

Skimpole of the Shell did not take kindly to that game. Skimpole of the Shell was a genius. His knowledge of football was nil, and his knowledge of cricket was on a par with it. In class work he was not brilliant, but in abstruse subjects that made other fellows' heads ache Skimpole was easily first.

What he didn't know about Determinism and Atavism and Socialism and a heap of other "isms" wasn't worth knowing. And his knowledge of biology and geology and numerous other "ologies" would have filled whole volumes.

Skimpole smiled sadly as he watched the Shell and Fourth Form fellows punting the footer about. He marvelled that otherwise sane and sensible fellows should waste their time kicking about an inflated ball, when they might have been studying the peculiarities of rocks, caenozoic, mesozoic, and palaeozoic.

An idea was working in the mighty brain of Skimpole of the Shell, and he was anxious to impart it to the other fellows; and he had to wait while they punted about a mere football—fiddling while Rome was burning, so to speak.

When the hour of five tolled out from the clock-tower, however, the Terrible Three of the Shell came off the field. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were thinking of tea. Skimpole bore down upon them at once.

"Have you finished at last?" Skimpole asked mildly, as he blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"Yes, my son," said Monty Lowther; "but if you want to pile in, don't let us stop you."

Skimpole smiled in a superior way.

"I fear I shall never have time to waste on football," he said. "I have a new idea which I am anxious to tell you fellows—"

"You want to stand us tea?" asked Lowther. "Well, I don't mind; we've only got sardines in the study—Come on!"

"My dear Lowther, are you aware of the great and world-stirring discovery that has lately been made?" asked Skimpole chidingly.

The Terrible Three stared.

"Blessed if I've heard of it," said Tom Merry. "You're not referring to the discovery of America by Columbus, I suppose? We have heard of that."

"A vastly more important discovery than that!" sniffed Skimpole.

"Anything to do with photography?" asked Manners, with interest. "If it's anything new in colour photography—"

"I should hardly be likely to waste my time on that subject, Manners!"

"Why, you ass—" began Manners warmly.

Manners was an enthusiastic photographer.

"My dear Manners, what is it that the whole world is now discussing with bated breath—the one topic of the universe—"

"The Balkan War?" ventured Tom Merry.

"My dear Merry—"

"The offside rule in footer?" asked Lowther.

"My dear Lowther—"

"The rot in county cricket, of course," said Manners. "But we're done with cricket—"

"Pray do not be frivolous," said Skimpole. "I am alluding to the discovery of human remains in a geological stratum older than any in which human remains have previously been discovered. You have heard of the Dawsonian Woman?"

"Blessed if I have!" said Tom Merry. "Who is she—a Suffragette?"

"My dear Merry! Remains have been discovered which prove that the human race existed thousands of years earlier than was previously supposed—a flood of light has been let in on the prehistoric history of the human race. Yes, my friends, the human race is proved to be of immemorial antiquity—"

"You can tell that to Gussy!" yawned Tom Merry. "D'Arcy is very strong on pedigrees and ancestral lines. I haven't any use for them myself."

"Well," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully, "an ancestral line would be useful for hanging out the family washing!"

But Skimpole was proof against Monty Lowther's humour. "I have an idea—" he went on.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY "TOM MERRY MINOR!"

"Keep it," said Lowther. "Preserve it in ginger, or boil it in oil. Don't tell us."

"I desire to take you into my confidence, and share with you the glory of the discoveries I am going to make—"

"My idea is to form a geological club—"

"Never heard of such a thing," said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Lathom's got a geological hammer, but I never heard of a geological club!"

"I do not mean a club, Lowther, but a club!"

"Well, that's lucid, I must say!" agreed Lowther.

"Instead of playing football in your spare time, you shall devote your energies to aiding me in making discoveries, and share with me the glory—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'll tell you what, Skimmy," he said. "We can't take up geology instead of footer; but if you like, we'll teach you how to play footer instead of geology!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Manners heartily. "Come on, Skimmy! We were going in for tea, but we don't mind giving you ten minutes."

"My dear friends—"

"Don't trouble to thank us," said Lowther, taking Skimpole's arm. "This way!"

"I should hardly be likely to change—"

"No need to change," said Lowther, deliberately misunderstanding. "Play as you are!"

"But I mean—"

"You mean to become a good footballer," said Tom Merry, taking Skimpole's other arm, and helping to propel him upon the field. "That's right—a jolly good idea!"

"I tell you I—"

"Chuck that footer over, Blake. Skimpole wants a lesson in football!" called out Monty Lowther. "He's going to give up science for footer!"

"I protest! I do not mean—I—"

"Here you are!" grinned Blake. "Stop it, Skimmy!"

He kicked the ball towards Skimpole, and Skimpole stopped it—with his nose.

"Ow!"

"Pile in!" exclaimed Lowther. "Now, you've got to take the ball up the field—see—this is called a field—you shoved it through the goal—that's called a goal—you have to kick it with your foot—your pedal extremity is called a foot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows, I—I—I—"

"We've got to stop you doing it," Lowther went on instructing. "We shall charge you over if we can. Then we bump into you and floor you—that's called a charge. The row you make when you go down is called a howl. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Lowther—"

"You can look on me as your instructor," said Lowther. "I'm strong on instructing. I'll tell you the names of everything, as you are a beginner. Now, kick—the concussion between the foot and the inflated sphere is called a kick. The inflated sphere itself is called a football, from whence the name of the game is derived—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For example, this is a kick—"

"Yaroorh!" roared Skimpole.

"You have to plant your foot on the ball, just as I planted it then on your calf. Do you understand? I don't mind giving you another specimen to make it clear—"

"I—I understand! But—but—but—"

"You've got it wrong; there are no butts here. Butts are used in archery, not in footer. Now pile in. If we charge you over, you may be hurt—that is called a casualty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are seriously hurt, it is called a regrettable incident on the football field. Got that?"

"M-m-my dear Lowther—"

"Play up!" shouted Lowther. "On the ball! Run!"

"But, I tell you, I—"

"I'm doing the telling now; all you've got to do is to follow your instructions. Otherwise, I shall cause a violent impact between my digital extremities and your auricular appendage. That is called a thick ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked round in dismay. He was too serious and solemn a youth to understand anything in the nature of a joke.

"But, my dear fellows, I don't want to learn footer—"

"Fellow who doesn't want to learn footer is called a slacker, a mug, and an ass!" said Lowther. "He has to be reduced

from a perpendicular posture to a semi-horizontal attitude—that is called a bump. Are you going to pile in?"

Skimpole thought he had better. Several pairs of hands were already stretched out to reduce him from a perpendicular to a semi-horizontal position.

"Take it right up the field," commanded Lowther, "and look out! We're going to charge you off the ball if we can; and if you should get killed, that would be called a fatality!"

The unfortunate genius of the Shell kicked the footer away, and ran after it. The whole crowd of footballers whooped on his track. Some of them followed closely behind Skimpole, helping him on his way with gentle taps of their footer-boots behind. Others ran in advance to charge him off the ball. Skimpole ran for goal as he had never run in his life before, only anxious to escape.

"Charge!" roared Blake.

"Oh! Ow! Yaroorh! Help! Goodness gracious! Yah!"

The genius of the Shell disappeared under a crowd of sprawling juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footballers sorted themselves out. Skimpole sat up and gasped, and set his spectacles dazedly upon his bony nose.

"Oh, dear! Oh, my goodness gracious! Ow! Dear me! Yow! Yah! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Getting on famously," said Monty Lowther admiringly. "I see your nose is running red—that is called tapping the claret."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh! Ow! Oh!"

"I'll give you another lesson to-morrow," said Lowther kindly. "One good turn deserves another. Every time you offer me instruction in geology, I'll give you instruction in football. Ta-ta!"

And the Terrible Three walked away chuckling, leaving the unfortunate scientist of the Shell still sitting on the ground and gasping for breath. Among Skimpole's other gifts was a great knowledge of astronomy, but never, with the most powerful telescope, had he seen so many stars as he saw at that moment.

CHAPTER 4. A Dangerous Club.

"SEEN the notice?"

Jack Blake asked the question, as Tom Merry & Co. came down after tea in the study.

The Fourth-Former was grinning.

"No," said Tom Merry. "What is it—notice by the Head?"

"No; something more important than that."

"Something about the footer?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No; come and look!"

The Terrible Three followed Blake curiously towards the notice-board. There was a new paper pinned on it, and they recognised the sprawling handwriting of Skimpole of the Shell. They grinned as they read.

"NOTICE.

"H. Skimpole, of the Shell, invites all members of the Lower School to attend a meeting in the common-room at seven o'clock, to discuss the formation of a Scientific Club, of which H. Skimpole will be president.

"The meeting will be followed by a lecture, by H. Skimpole, on the subject of 'Human Origins,' illustrated by Mr. Lathom's jaw-bone, kindly lent for the occasion.

"(Signed) H. SKIMPOLE."

Tom Merry whistled.

"Is he off his rocker?" he asked. "He hasn't been practising as a dentist, I suppose, and extracting Lathom's jawbone?"

"Ha, ha! No," said Blake. "It's a specimen. Lathom believes that it is the jawbone of a prehistoric man, who lived and flourished thousands of years before the creation of the human race. He dug it up himself in the cave on Broken Hill, near Rylcombe, a long time ago, and he keeps it locked up in a box in his study. He trotted it out in the Fourth Form-room one day when he gave a lecture—a blessed old fossil. I daresay it belonged to some lost donkey that died in the cave."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's the jawbone of an ass, now, if it belongs to Lathom," yawned Monty Lowther; "and with Skimmy's jawbone, that will be two of them. Let's go to the meeting, and rag Skimmy bald-headed, and make him chuck it."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "We're bound to stand this wubbish from Lathom, but we're not bound to stand it from Skimmy. I pwopose that we wag the meetin'." Figgins & Co. are comin' ovah for a wag, too."

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 295.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

"Hear, hear!"

Skimpole of the Shell had had some doubts as to whether the meeting he had called would be attended or not. He had to confess with sorrow that his schoolfellows did not take a deep interest in human origins. They were unaccountably indifferent to the important question whether the human race originated in the alluvial mud of a tropical river ten million years ago, or whether it was hatched out of rotting vegetation in a primeval forest at the comparatively recent period of merely five million years ago. But Skimpole's fears were without foundation this time—the meeting was well attended. Before seven o'clock had struck, half of the Shell and the Fourth were in the common-room, and a contingent of the Third, Figgins & Co., and Redfern, and Owen, and Lawrence, had come over from the New House.

When Skimpole came into the room, he blinked round with pleasure at the numerous meeting gathered in his honour.

There was an encouraging shout at once.

"Go it, Skimpole!"

"My dear friends, I am glad to see so many of you gathered here," said Skimpole, rubbing his bony hands. "Look!"

He held up a peculiar-looking object.

It was a fragment of fossilised bone—and might have been anything. According to Mr. Lathom, and several scientific gentlemen to whom he had shown his treasure, it was the jawbone of a prehistoric individual who had flourished before the Flood, in company with the cheery mastodon and the merry megalosaurus.

Skimpole evidently regarded it with awe.

"What is it, entirely?" asked Reilly of the Fourth.

"It is a jawbone," said Skimpole. "It belongs to Mr. Lathom."

"Faith, and how is he getting on without it?"

"It is not Mr. Lathom's own jawbone, Reilly. It is the jawbone of one of the earliest of the human race, discovered in a cave near Rylcombe. The surrounding strata clearly proves that man existed in the pleistocene period."

"My hat!"

"Gentlemen, I have a great scheme to communicate to you—the formation of a scientific club. I am willing to be president. Under my direction, the club will search for further ancient remains in the cave near Rylcombe. We shall proceed there with picks and spades. And who knows but what we may discover the whole skeleton of a prehistoric man—an inestimable treasure. Our fame would resound to the furthest corners of the civilised world."

"Hear, hear!"

"In that cave are splendid deposits of the eocene period—the earliest of the Tertiary," resumed Skimpole. "My firm belief is that man was contemporary with the marine fossils unearthed in the eocene strata."

"You don't say so!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Anybody know what he is talking about?"

"Bai Jove, I give it up!"

"Think of the triumph if we should discover a fossil of the eocene period," said Skimpole, his round eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "Mr. Lathom has consented to patronise the Science Club. Gentlemen, I have a book here to take down the names of members. Pray come forward."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall spend half-holidays in digging for fossils," went on Skimpole. "Think how much better that will be than playing mere games."

"Bai Jove!"

"I can see myself spending my half-holidays like that—I don't think!"

"What shall we do to him?" murmured Blake.

"Something lingering with boiling oil in it," suggested Digby.

"Frog's march to begin with," said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"And bump him!"

"And scalp him!"

"Good egg!"

And there was a forward movement of the meeting—not to sign their names on Skimpole's list of membership, but to collar Skimpole. But just as Skimpole's fate was trembling in the balance, there was a warning whisper of "Cave!"

Mr. Lathom entered the junior common-room.

The forward movement was arrested. The juniors stared at the Form-master, who wore his most benignant expression.

"Ah, quite a large meeting, I see!" said Mr. Lathom, rubbing his hands. "I am very pleased to see this—very pleased indeed, my boys. I am glad to see you taking a deep interest in this most delightful study."

"Yaaaaa!" gasped D'Arcy.

"We're frightfully keen, sir," said Levison of the Fourth.

"I am glad to hear it, Levison. By the way, you have not done your lines, I think."

"I've been reading up geology, sir, and haven't had time," said Levison.

"Well, well, never mind! You need not do the lines, Levison," said Mr. Lathom kindly. "Pray do not let me interrupt you, my dear boys. I am here merely as a spectator—a very interested spectator. Pray go on exactly as if I were not present."

The juniors exchanged grins. That was hardly possible. If Mr. Lathom had not been present, they would have been marching Skimpole round the common-room in the frog's march; and under the eye of the Form-master it could hardly be done. But Skimpole chimed in gleefully:

"The fellows were just going to sign their names on the list of membership, sir. They all want to be members of the Science Club."

"Good; very good," said Mr. Lathom. "Pray go on. I shall be very interested to see how many names are on the list."

The juniors exchanged dismal glances.

It was impossible to tell Mr. Lathom that they had attended the meeting solely for the purpose of ragging the amateur lecturer. And as Mr. Lathom was waiting to see them sign their names, they could not very well draw back.

Tom Merry felt that he was in for it, and he signed his name first. The other fellows followed suit, and the roll of membership was crowded. Skimpole watched the proceedings with his eyes glistening behind his spectacles. His Science Club was achieving an undreamt-of success.

When the roll was finished, Mr. Lathom said he would address a few words to the meeting on the subject of geological discoveries of recent times. The meeting groaned under its breath. Mr. Lathom's few words took exactly an hour to deliver, and would probably have lasted longer, only that the Fourth Form-master had to leave to attend to other duties. When he had departed, the juniors gathered round Skimpole with deadly looks.

For a mortal hour they had had to listen to a learned dissertation upon primary, secondary, and tertiary periods, with Pleistocene, and Miocene, and eocene, and jurassic rocks and old red sandstone.

Only a few of them had ventured to sneak out quietly.

The rest remained, only comforted by the thought of what they would do to Skimpole after Mr. Lathom was gone.

Now he was gone, and the door had closed behind him, and the amateur scientist of St. Jim's was at the mercy of the Science Club.

Skimpole suspected nothing. He rubbed his bony hands gleefully.

"Now, my dear fellows, we will make arrangements for Saturday afternoon," he began. "Why, what—how—Help! Yah! Oh! Mercy! Yow!"

The president of the St. Jim's Science Club was in the hands of the members. He roared and struggled, but it was of no avail.

The juniors had the intense suffering of a whole hour to avenge.

They frog's-marched Skimpole round the room, they bumped him on the floor, they poured ink down his back.

They left him lying a wreck when they had finished, and firmly convinced that the Lower School had gone mad.

Skimpole lay upon his back, gasping for breath, and staring dazedly at a circle of threatening faces and brandished fists.

"Now are you going to chuck it?" roared Blake.

"My dear Blake—" stuttered Skimpole feebly.

"If you are ever heard to utter the word geology again you'll be bumped!"

"But, my dear Blake, geology is—Yaroo!"

Bump!

"I warned you!" said Blake.

"But—but—but geology—"

Bump!

"Yaroo! Oh! Help!"

Then, with their feelings somewhat relieved, the juniors streamed away. Skimpole picked himself up, and felt himself all over to ascertain whether he was still all there. He felt as if he wasn't.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Skimpole. "Oh, dear! What an extraordinary outbreak, when we were getting on so nicely. Ow! Oh, dear!"

And Skimpole crawled away.

Like the hapless engineer who was hoist by his own petard, he had been, as Monty Lowther remarked, knocked down by his own club. And Skimpole had a variety of aches in nearly every bone in his body as he crawled away to his study.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY

"TOM MERRY MINOR!"

CHAPTER 5.
Plotting a Plot.

"A, ha, ha!"
Thus Tom Merry.
The Shell fellows had just come out of the Form-room, on the day following the formation of the Skimpole Scientific Club.

Monty Lowther and Manners looked at their chum. Tom Merry's eyes were dancing.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Lowther.

"I've got a wheeze."

"Thought of a way of suffocating Lathom?" asked Manners eagerly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I'm beginnin' to think that he needs it," said Arthur Augustus, joining the Shell fellows. "He is takin' that wotten scientific club seriously, and now you Shell chaps are in for it as well as us."

"He lent me a book on old red sandstone this morning," groaned Manners. "He'll ask me presently how I like it."

"Howwid!"

"We belong to a science club, and Skimmy is president," said Tom Merry. "Skimmy wants to lead us on an expedition to discover some prehistoric remains. Well, why shouldn't he?"

"Eh!"

"It would please him to discover them. And if we arrange 'em in advance, there's no reason why he shouldn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You know the strolling players who've come to Rylcombe," said Tom Merry. "There are three of them—one plays the banjo, one the concertina, and the other one does songs and dances, and calls himself the prehistoric man. He dresses up in a skin, with a hairy mask over his chivvy, you know. It's an old dodge in the music-halls, and always makes the people laugh. Well, Bob Jones, the prehistoric man, is still in Rylcombe. The other two were run in yesterday for being drunk and disorderly, and Bob Jones is staying at the Red Cow till they come out. He can't go on the road again till they are let out of chokey, and he can't do his performance by himself, so he must be wanting a job. He's a very thirsty chap, too."

"But what—"

"Why shouldn't Skimmy discover a whole, entire prehistoric man in the cave?" asked Tom Merry. "It would be ever so much better than a mere skeleton, and would please him more. And if Lathom is so jolly well pleased with a mere jawbone, it stands to reason he would like to discover a whole prehistoric man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There are lots of gaps in the rocks there, where blithering idiots—I mean scientific investigators—have been at work," resumed Tom Merry. "We'll put Bob Jones into a fissure, and cover him up with rocks, and Lathom and Skimmy'll discover him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"It will be the joke of the season when it gets out, and Lathom will really have to chuck up the game," said Tom Merry. "He won't be able to say geology or prehistoric without making people giggle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, it's a wippin' ideah. I do not approve as a wule of pullin' the leg of a Form-mastah, but the mattah is gettin' sewious. Lathom is talkin' about anothah wotten excursion on Sataday aftahnoon."

"When we have the Form match to play!" growled Blake.

"Yaas. It's wotten!"

"Well, we can't play you if you're going hunting for fossils," said Tom Merry. "So it's up to us to rescue you and ourselves. Lathom has promised a lecture for the next meeting of the science club."

"Ow!"

"Let's go down to Rylcombe now and see Jones, and make arrangements for to-day," said Tom Merry. "Then we'll get Lathom and Skimmy to take the science club out for a walk after lessons—"

"Good egg!"

And the juniors walked down to Rylcombe, discussing the details of the plot as they went. They did not have far to look for Bob Jones. Outside the Red Cow, in the village, a crowd was gathered, looking on and listening to a weird performance.

A curious-looking creature was executing a weird dance, and singing in a hoarse and husky voice.

He was a short, stout man, dressed in a hairy skin that fitted closely to his body and limbs, and gave him the appearance of a wild animal.

His face was covered with a hairy mask, drawn over his

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head, and thick with rough hair. Behind him a stumpy tail whisked as he danced. The burden of his song was:

"I'm the prehistoric man!
I lived before the world began!
I used to climb the trees,
With the little chimpanzees,
And a pretty, prehistoric Mary Ann!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What a dweadful voice!"

The song having ended, the prehistoric man moved round collecting coppers from the onlookers with a hairy paw.

But, as often happens, the onlookers chose that precise moment for proceeding on their way, and the collection was not large.

The prehistoric man gazed dolefully at three halfpennies and a penny in his paw. Then he came towards the juniors.

"How's luck?" said Tom Merry sympathetically.

"'Orrible!" said the prehistoric man sadly. "Look at that, twopence-apenny for a song and a dance; and the other blokes in the stone jug! 'Orrid!"

"Would you like to earn a quid?"

The prehistoric man's eyes glistened.

"Would I?" said Mr. Jones. "Not 'arf!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "we want you to give a sort of performance to-day—quite easy, and it's a quid. What do you say?"

"I'm on. Rather!"

"All you'll have to do is to lie quiet and hold your tongue and pretend to be dead," explained Tom Merry.

Mr. Jones stared.

"That's a queer lay," he commented.

"That's the programme," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, I can do that. I lay I shall be really dead, and no pretendin', if the luck don't change," said Mr. Jones dismally. "Wot's the game?"

Tom Merry explained.

"It's a little jape—a joke, you know. We want to hide you in a cave, to let a chap discover you and think you're a fossil."

"A fossil! My 'at!"

"When it's all over, it's a quid for you," said Tom Merry. "And here's five bob to go on with as well. Is it a go?"

"An't it!" said Mr. Jones, by which he apparently meant that it was a go. "You jest give me the horders, and I'll do the rest."

And Tom Merry gave Mr. Jones precise instructions as to what was required of him. Mr. Jones promised faithfully to carry out his instructions, and the juniors returned to St. Jim's feeling very well satisfied. If the jape "panned out" well, the great discovery in the Rylcombe cave would become the joke of the school, and they felt that the enthusiastic Form-master would cease from troubling, and the weary would be at rest.

Mr. Lathom met the juniors as they came in. There was a look of concern on his face.

"I have lost a key," he said. "Perhaps one of you has seen it—the key of the box in which I keep my precious fossil. I must have dropped it somewhere."

"Sowwy, sir, I haven't seen it," said D'Arcy.

"Pray return it to me if you should find it," said Mr. Lathom. "The box is at present locked, and I am unable to open it."

Mr. Lathom walked away.

"Levison of the Fourth had a key in his hand this morning, after lessons," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I saw him showing it to Mellish in the quad as we went out."

"Just like that wottah to bone it and wowwy old Lathom!" said D'Arcy. "Lathom is always losin' somethin' or othah. Levison ought to return it to him."

"I'll see that he does," said Tom Merry.

The Shell fellow looked round for Levison. He found the cad of the Fourth in his study with Percy Mellish. The two juniors were chuckling.

"Hallo! What do you want?" demanded Levison, as Tom Merry came in.

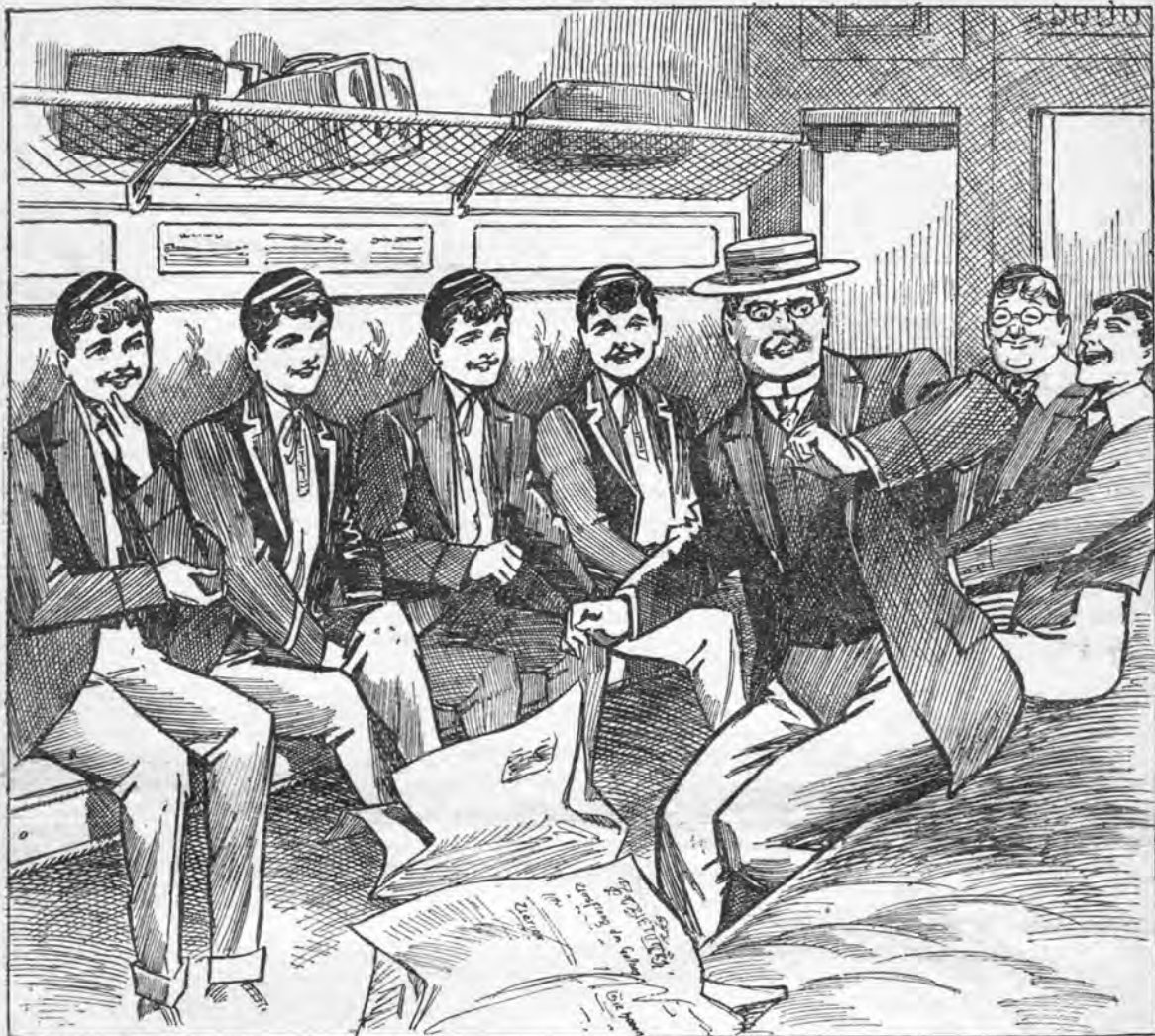
"Mr. Lathom's key, please."

"How do you know—"

"I saw you in the quad with it. And Mr. Lathom is inquiring for it. Why don't you take it back to him?" asked Tom Merry.

Levison chuckled.

"I'm going to get that blessed fossil out of his box and chuck it away," he explained. "It will serve him right for taking us out yesterday afternoon on a fool's expedition. Fancy old Lathom's face when he gets the box and finds that the fossil is gone! Ha, ha, ha!"



Grrrr! A deep threatening growl came from under the German's seat, and in a flash he had jumped up, the newspaper dropping to the floor. "Mein Gott! Dere is a dog there," he exclaimed. The juniors grinned, for they knew the Greyfriars ventriloquist was at work! (An amusing incident taken from the grand, long, complete tale of the chums of Greyfriars, entitled: "THE SNEAK'S REVENGE!" by Frank Richards, which is contained in our splendid companion paper, THE MAGNET Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish.

Tom Merry's brow grew stern.

"You're jolly well going to do nothing of the sort!" he exclaimed.

"What the deuce does it matter to you?"

"Old Lathom would never get over it. He's been offered fifty pounds for that blessed fossil, Blake says, and he sets a big value on it. It would be a rotten trick to destroy it," said Tom angrily.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"That's my business."

"Mine, too," said Tom Merry. "You can jape Lathom as much as you like—he's an awful worry, I know; but you're not going to destroy his property."

"Rats!"

"Mind your own business!" said Mellish. "We're jolly well going to make an end of his blessed prehistoric jawbone, and have done with it."

"You're not!"

"Who's going to stop us?" roared Levison furiously.

"I am."

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Will you hand me over the key?" said Tom Merry quietly.

"What do you want it for?"

"To take back to Mr. Lathom."

"You can leave it to me to take back," said Levison.

"After all, I don't want to keep his blessed key. I'll give it to him in the Form-room this afternoon."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"Yes; after you've destroyed the fossil," he said. "I don't trust you. I'm going to take that key back to him, please."

"Are you?" said Levison unpleasantly. "Well, find it if you can."

"Hand it over."

"More rats!"

Tom Merry closed the door of the study and pushed back his cuffs. The two cads of the Fourth viewed those proceedings with some alarm.

"Look here—" began Mellish uneasily.

"Are you going to give me that key?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, I'm not!" roared Levison.

"Then I'm going to lick you—and Mellish, too, if he chips in. I don't mind taking the two of you together," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I—I say, I don't want a row with you, you know!" stammered Mellish, backing away round the study table.

"Better give the beast the key, Levison."

Tom Merry advanced upon Levison with his hands up. The cad of the Fourth hesitated a moment, and then dragged the key from his waistcoat-pocket, and hurled it upon the floor.

"Take it, hang you!" he snarled.

"Thanks!"

Tom Merry stooped and picked up the key, and left the study without another word. Mellish looked ruefully at his chum.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY

"TOM MERRY MINOR!"

"That's a good jape spoiled," he said.

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'll make that interfering rotter sorry for it!" he muttered, "and I'll smash up that rotten fossil, too! I'll—"

Levison paused.

"You'll what?" asked Mellish curiously.

"Don't ask questions and I won't tell you any lies," said Levison curtly. "You gave me away the last time I trusted you. Go and eat coke!"

And whatever idea was working in Levison's mind, he did not confide it to his study-mate.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry made his way to Mr. Lathom's study, and greatly pleased that gentleman by handing him the recovered key.

"Thank you very much, Merry!" said Mr. Lathom gratefully. "Where did you find it?"

"Ahem! I—I picked it up, sir," said Tom Merry, without adding that he had picked it up on the floor of Levison's study. And he escaped before Mr. Lathom could ask him any more questions.

CHAPTER 6.

Levison is Mysterious.

THERE was considerable anticipation among the juniors during afternoon lessons.

Quite a number of them had been taken into the secret—in fact, all who could be trusted to be discreet about it.

And when Mr. Lathom started out for a walk with the Junior Science Club, there would be no lack of juniors ready to follow.

Instead of marching off glumly and in anguish of spirit as on the previous day, they would enter into the procession with joyfulness.

The discovery of a whole, entire, complete prehistoric man in the cave in the hill near Rylcombe would, of course, be extremely interesting to youthful geologists. And when the prehistoric man turned out to be alive, and no other than Bob Jones, the strolling performer, it would be more interesting still. The juniors wanted very much to see what Mr. Lathom's face would look like then.

So the juniors were unusually keen for lessons to be over, so that they could start on that geological expedition.

They were grinning cheerfully as they came out after lessons.

Skimpole, the president of the Junior Science Club, was at once surrounded in the Form-room passage.

"When is Lathom starting?" asked Tom Merry.

"We are starting at half-past five," said Skimpole. "I trust the whole of the members of the Science Club will accompany us."

"What-ho!" said the juniors.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! We're all on!"

"There isn't one of us who'd miss it, for his weight in jam-tarts," said Fatty Wynn.

"My dear friends, I am very pleased to hear this!" said Skimpole, beaming upon them through his spectacles. "I am glad to behold this enthusiasm. It shows that you realise the importance of the subject. Imagine the thrilling pleasure, my dear fellows, in making a discovery of, perhaps, thigh-bone or a double-tooth, by which the date of the human race could be pushed back another million years or so."

"Ripping!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! Simply thwillin'!"

"Makes us awfully eager to start, simply to think of that," said Monty Lowther. "I should sleep more soundly of a night if I knew exactly how many million years it was since your ancestors used to live in the trees and hang on by their tails, Skimmy."

"My dear Lowther, all our ancestors lived in trees, and certainly had tails," said Skimpole. "The missing link has never been discovered, and there is no evidence that it ever existed. But all the more for that reason, scientific men do not doubt that it did exist. Faith is required in these matters."

"Yaas; lots of it, appawently," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But pway do not insinuate that my ancestahs lived in twees and had tails, Skimmy. I wufuse to cwedit anythin' of the sort. I am willin' to believe it of your ancestahs, if you like—in fact, I should wogard it as vewy pwob., judgin' by appeawences."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is one of the best-established truths of science, my dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole gently. "Man is descended from an ape-like creature, closely akin to the monkey. That ape-like creature is the missing link."

"So the men descended from the monkeys?" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

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"Yes, my dear Lowther."

"And the monkeys descended from the trees, I suppose?"

"Eh?" said Skimpole. "My dear Lowther—"

"They must have," argued Lowther. "They couldn't have stayed up in the trees all their lives, even if they were hanging on by their tails. I consider it a scientific certainty that the monkeys must have descended from the trees."

Skimpole was never known to see a joke. His truly scientific brain was wanting in a sense of humour.

"My dear Lowther," he said gently. "You confuse the two meanings of the verb—to descend. You should read Darwin on the 'Descent of Man From a Lower Species'—"

Lowther shook his head.

"Darwin was off-side," he said. "You can't descend from a thing that's lower. You ascend."

"You misapprehend, my dear Lowther. I will explain at length—"

"No, you jolly well won't!" said Tom Merry. "Lowther can go on misapprehending. We'll all be ready at half-past five, Skimmy. We'll go down to the footer now."

"Very good!" said Skimpole. "I am very pleased to see this enthusiasm, especially after you fellows cut up so rusty last evening when the club was formed. I have reflected upon that extraordinary occurrence, and have failed to elucidate the motive which caused that unparalleled outbreak."

"It was only enthusiasm," said Lowther.

"It was an exceedingly strange form for enthusiasm to take," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "However—"

But the juniors did not stay to listen to Skimpole. They streamed away into the quadrangle. Levison, of the Fourth, was wheeling out his bicycle as they came out of the School House.

The juniors did not trouble to glance at Levison. The cad of the Fourth turned a scowling glance upon Tom Merry and then walked on with his machine. Outside the school gates he mounted, and pedalled away swiftly towards Rylcombe.

The chums of the School House were thinking of anything but Levison; but if they had seen his proceedings after he reached the village, they would certainly have been curious.

Levison alighted from his bicycle outside the locksmith's shop, and went in. Mr. Keyser, the locksmith, was there, at work, at his bench, filing a key. Levison glanced round the shop, as if to ascertain that there were no other customers present, before producing a little box from his pocket.

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked Mr. Keyser.

"I've lost a key," Levison explained. "I want you to give me one like it. It's a common sort of key, and I dare say you've got some just the same."

Mr. Keyser smiled.

"But if you've lost the key—" he said. "Can you describe it?"

"I've got a wax impression of it," Levison explained. "I lost it once before, and I couldn't open my money-box till I found it, so I took a wax impression of it at the time in case I should lose it again."

"Ah! If you have the impression—"

"Here it is."

Levison handed the little box containing the wax to the locksmith, and Mr. Keyser looked at it.

"Got one like it?" asked Levison.

"Not exactly; but I could easily file one down to be exactly like it, said the locksmith. "It's a common key enough."

"How long would it take?"

"Ten minutes."

"Then I'll wait."

Levison waited. In a quarter of an hour the locksmith handed him the key, which fitted the wax impression exactly. Levison paid for the key, and rode back to St. Jim's with a grin on his face.

He put up his bicycle and came into the School House. Mellish met him in the passage.

Hallo! Where have you been?" he asked curiously.

"Spin on my bike," said Levison, carelessly. "Is old Lathom in his study, do you know?"

"No; he's with the Head."

"Oh, good!"

"Where are you going?" asked Mellish.

"Nowhere in particular."

Levison strolled away, and sat down in the common-room, with a book. Mellish looked after him curiously, and then went out into the quad. When he was gone Levison left the common-room, and hurried to Mr. Lathom's study.

He tapped, in case the Form-master should be there, after all, and opened the door. The room was empty. Levison entered, and closed the door behind him.

In five minutes he came out.

His face was a little pale as he walked down the passage. At the end of the passage he started, and gritted his teeth, as Mellish came out of the window recess.

"What have you been doing in Lathom's study?" asked Mellish.

Levison gave him a furious look.

"You rotter! You've been spying on me!"

"Well, I knew you had something on," Mellish said. "Why can't you tell a chap? If it's a jape on old Lathom I'll help you with pleasure."

"You can keep your head shut," said Levison. "It's a jape, and it means trouble if it comes out that I was in the study."

"I'm mum!" said Mellish.

"You'd better mum," said Levison savagely. "You'll be an accessory now, as you know all about it, and you'll be in trouble as well as I if I should be bowled out."

"But what—"

"Oh, don't ask questions."

And Levison strode away, without satisfying his study-mate's curiosity. He walked down to the footer-ground, where the chums of the School House were punting the ball about. The juniors had started a match of seven a-side to pass away half an hour, and they were too keenly interested in it to have any eyes for Levison. The cad of the Fourth sauntered into the pavilion where the juniors had left their jackets. Again the eye of Percy Mellish was upon him, and Mellish was puzzled and devoured with curiosity. That his study-mate was engaged in some cunning scheme he was certain, but for the life of him he could not guess what it was.

Levison sauntered away from the pavilion and joined Mellish.

"Coming out for a walk?" he asked. "I've got a remittance to-day, and we can cash it at Mrs. Murphy's."

"Right!" said Mellish, at once. "But, I say—"

"Well, what?" snapped Levison.

"What's the little game?"

"Find out!"

And that was all the satisfaction Mellish could obtain.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Lathom in Luck.

PROMPTLY at half-past five the Junior Science Club were ready.

They were waiting outside the School House in numerous array when Mr. Lathom came out.

Skimpole was beaming with pleasure.

Skimpole's club was going strong.

He had hoped for success in forming that scientific club—but he had never dreamed that it would be taken up like this on all sides.

The Terrible Three were there, and Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, and Kangaroo and Glyn, and Clifton Dane, and Reilly, and Kerruish, and Ray, and Vavasour and Gore, and Wally, of the Third, with Curly Gibson, and Jameson, and Figgins & Co., of the New House, and Redfern and Lawrence and Owen; and there were many more.

Figgins & Co. fraternised with Tom Merry & Co. in the most amicable way.

House rows seemed to be a thing of the past.

Mr. Lathom noted it with a pleased smile. Generally, juniors of the rival houses at St. Jim's could not meet without mutual chipping and ragging.

But now the lion and the lamb were getting on famously together.

Under the influence of the enthusiasm for scientific investigation the juniors forgot House rows, and even abandoned football.

It was a triumph of science. Mr. Lathom felt very pleased indeed.

"Ha! I see you are ready, my boys," he said, with his little cough.

"Yes, wathah, sir."

"Quite ready, sir," said Monty Lowther, "and awfully keen."

"Burning for knowledge, sir," said Kerr.

"It's so kind of you to take us, sir," said Gore.

Mr. Lathom waved his hand.

"Not at all, my dear lads. It is a pleasure to me—a real pleasure. I am more pleased than I can say to see you all so keenly disposed towards scientific investigation. I congratulate you, Skimpole, upon the success of your Science Club."

"It is, indeed, very gratifying to me, sir," said Skimpole, who had a fine flow of language all his own.

"Quite so. Quite so. Well, let us start," said Mr. Lathom.

There were none of the solemn and gloomy looks that had distinguished the procession of the previous afternoon. All the juniors looked very cheerful—in fact, they smiled and

grinned and even chuckled as they marched along in the wake of the little Form-master. Several of them had armed themselves with digging implements, for the investigations that were to take place at the cave outside Rylcombe. If there were any geological discoveries to be made, they were determined to make them. Indeed, in their keenness, the Terrible Three went on ahead, promising to wait for the others in the cave.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther walked quickly, till a bend in the lane hid them from the sight of the procession. Then they ran at top speed.

"Must make sure that everything is in order," said Tom. "We shall be there a quarter of an hour ahead of the party, and we can see all in order."

Broken Hill was a rugged eminence a short distance from Rylcombe. The hill had been quarried at one time, but the quarries had long been abandoned. There were caves and deep gashes left in the hillside where the quarrymen once had worked.

As Mr. Lathom would have explained volubly, the opening in the hillside gave a geologist wonderful opportunities for investigation. In those distant ages when the south of England was a primæval sea, and antediluvian monsters swam about where now the sheep fed on the downs, all sorts of weird changes had been going on, leaving a history written in strata of rock for future geologists to read. Rocks of nearly every period seemed to be jumbled in the hill, representing millions of years, jostling one another in confusion. In that gap in the hill, Mr. Lathom, with his own hands and spade, had disinterred the famous jawbone—and he had found it in a stratum that was indubitably eocene. Therefore it was established that the early ancestors of the human race had lived and flourished in the eocene period. But Mr. Lathom's hopes went farther. Suppose a human fossil should be discovered in Secondary Rocks—!

At that thought Mr. Lathom's eyes would gleam behind his spectacles, and his hands would tremble with agitation.

In his mind's eye he saw himself revolutionizing modern science—adding millions of years to the calculations even of those scientists who have been most liberal with millions of years.

Indeed, Mr. Lathom had already thought of the title of the pamphlet he would issue on the subject—he would call it "Mesozoic Man!"

He could feel in advance the thrill that would run through the scientific world when "Mesozoic Man" burst upon the dazzled universe.

It was only necessary to make the discovery, and Mr. Lathom was so keen upon his theory that very little evidence would be needed to satisfy him.

The Terrible Three came into the cave, and found a stout man sitting there, imbibing liquid refreshment from a flask.

It was Mr. Jones. It was evident that the five shillings in advance had been spent in liquid refreshment. Mr. Jones's eyes were a little heavy and bleary, and his head sagged as he nodded to the juniors.

"Arternoon!" he said huskily.

The juniors looked at him in dismay.

"You ass! You're squiffy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther indignantly.

"Not er tall," said Mr. Jones—"not er tall! Only a little nip to keep up the spirits. I'm ready for the job."

"Where's your blessed skin?" asked Manners. "You ought to be dressed for the part now. The party will be along in ten minutes."

"I got it ere," said Mr. Jones, rising. "It won't take me two ticks. I puts it on outside me clobber, to make me bigger—see?"

He unfastened a bundle, and the hairy covering rolled out. With unsteady hands Mr. Jones donned his garb of the Prehistoric Man. It did not take him many minutes. The Terrible Three lent their aid. The ruddy face and bleary eyes of Mr. Jones disappeared under the hairy mask, and his red hair beneath the thick, bushy "crop" supposed to be characteristic of prehistoric men. In the dim light of the cave he certainly looked very startling, and it would have given the juniors themselves a shock if they had come upon him suddenly without knowing who he was.

"Orl right—hey?" said Mr. Jones.

"Yes. But you'll have to keep quiet."

"Quiet as a lamb," said Mr. Jones. "Fact is, I'm sleepy. I'll go to sleep. I've been workin' 'ard."

Drinking hard would have been nearer the mark, the juniors thought. But they were satisfied for Mr. Jones to go to sleep.

"You don't snore?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"I never 'eard myself snore," said Mr. Jones.

"You've got to lie down in this fissure, and we're going to cover you up with rocks," said Tom Merry. "We'll pile 'em on gently!"

"Orlright!"

"Either of you chaps know anything about these blessed

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rocks?" asked Tom, looking round. "I'd like to stick him in the most ancient of them. Lathom would be pleased most of all to find him in primary rocks. Know primary rocks?"

"Blessed if I do!" said Lowther.

"Same here," said Manners. "Never mind; any old rocks will do. Here's a fissure just about his size. Chuck him in!"

It was a fissure in the cave-wall the size of a coffin, and something of the shape. Mr. Jones laid himself down in it, and the juniors covered him in. The split cave-wall was a couple of feet from the ground, and had been left by some investigator who had been chipping out of the rock. There was just room for Mr. Jones to lay himself out at length comfortably. He immediately proceeded to go to sleep.

The Terrible Three selected chunks of rock, of which many were scattered about the cave, and packed them in carefully, giving the wall the appearance of being unbroken.

There were crevices enough to supply Mr. Jones with air to breathe; as Lowther remarked, it would be a bother afterwards if he should be suffocated. Fortunately, there was no danger of that.

In the subdued light of the cave, the wall had quite a normal appearance, as if the rocks packed in by the juniors had been there from time immemorial.

Mr. Jones was quickly hidden from sight.

All was now ready for the geological investigation.

The Terrible Three sauntered out of the cave, and saw the party in sight, coming up the incline, Mr. Lathom breathing a little hard.

As the Science Club arrived, the Shell fellows winked at their comrades, to assure them that all was in order.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "Quite a long walk. But now we are here, my dear boys. In this cave you will find wonderful examples of the Secondary or Mesozoic period. Follow me!"

And Mr. Lathom turned his glasses upon the cave-wall where the closed-up fissure hid the person of Mr. Jones.

He tapped on the rocks lately packed up by the Terrible Three with his geological hammer.

"Look at this wall!" said Mr. Lathom.

The juniors looked.

"This rock is of the Secondary period," said Mr. Lathom.

"Bai Jove!"

"I suppose it has been like that for thousands of years, sir," said Monty Lowther diffidently.

Mr. Lathom smiled.

"It would be nearer the mark to say millions, Lowther."

"And quite undisturbed, sir?"

"Quite!" said Mr. Lathom.

The Terrible Three looked properly awe-stricken, though it required an effort, considering that the rock had, as a matter of fact, been disturbed within the last ten minutes.

"How ripping it would be to discover a fossil in it!" said Lowther.

"Why not dig into it and see?" said Manners.

"That is what we are going to do, my dear fellows," said Skimpole. "I have brought an axe for the purpose. Pray stand clear."

Skimpole crashed his pick upon the rocks.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in alarm, as one of the chunks rolled out of the fissure. "You might do some damage with that axe!"

"My dear Merry—"

There was a grunt from the interior of the ancient rocks, which was fortunately drowned by the clatter of the falling stone.

"Give me the axe," said Tom Merry. "You're too heavy-handed, Skimmy. If there's a fossil there, we don't want to smash it."

"With pleasure, my dear Merry," said Skimpole, handing the pick to the captain of the Shell. Skimpole was not addicted to physical exercise. "I will take notes."

Tom Merry handled the axe carefully.

He knocked out chunk after chunk, and suddenly there was startled exclamation from Blake of the Fourth.

"Look out—there's something there!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Lathom ran forward.

He put his hand into the aperture, and almost trembled with emotion.

"Goodness gracious!" he ejaculated.

"What is it, sir?" chorused the juniors.

"My boys!" Mr. Lathom's voice was husky. "My boys, we have made a discovery!"

"Oh, sir!"

"I can feel the rough hair of some animal. Some prehistoric beast buried in rocks of the mesozoic period—perhaps some new species. The remarkable thing is that it is not a skeleton—the enclosure in the rock has evidently preserved the whole carcase, and it is intact. My boys, this specimen

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will be of incalculable value. Pray be careful. Remove the rocks slowly and with great care."

"Certainly, sir!"

And Mr. Lathom looked on with glistening eyes as the rocks were removed, and the form of the prehistoric man was disclosed to view.

CHAPTER 8.

A Lively Fossil.

MR. LATHOM felt almost faint.

His hands were trembling, his eyes were gleaming. There, in the narrow fissure of the rock, lay a still form—a hairy form. Preserved for millions of years in the heart of the rock, it remained to show modern ages exactly what had existed in the far-off mesozoic period.

Not a mere skeleton—though that would have been a great discovery. Somehow preserved by the rock, the whole carcase was there intact. And it was not the carcase of an animal! Not a mere mastodon or megalosaurus! It was a human form!

Mr. Lathom had made the discovery of the age—a discovery that would cause his name to be written in letters of gold in the annals of science. He had discovered the prehistoric man!

"Goodness gracious!" stuttered Mr. Lathom. "This—this is overwhelming. I—I must get my breath. Boys, that rock is of the Mesozoic period."

"Yes, sir!"

"And you all see that it has enclosed a human form!"

"Is that human, sir?" asked Figgins.

"Decidedly. The rough coating of hair is such as was undoubtedly the natural protection of man in the prehistoric period, when the climate was intensely cold. You can see that the creature, while having the form and features of a man, has a tail. You can see that!"

"Thereby hangs a tale!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Lift it out, my boys—gently—gently! It may crumble in the touch—though it certainly feels sufficiently solid. But after a preservation in rock for millions of years—dear me!"

Mr. Lathom mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

The juniors, with a solemnity worthy of the great occasion, lifted out the hairy form, and laid it upon the floor of the cave.

Then they stood round in an admiring circle while Mr. Lathom stooped over it to investigate. There was a sudden, amazed exclamation from the geologist.

"Good heavens!"

"Bai Jove, what's the mattah, sir?"

"It is warm," said Mr. Lathom faintly.

"Warm, sir!"

"Yes. Amazing—incredible—unheard of, as it seems, the creature is living!" Mr. Lathom stuttered. "Oh, if only the Royal Society were present now! Oh, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and Lodge, why are you not here at this moment?"

"Extraordinary, sir," said Tom Merry. "I've heard of insects being preserved in amber, and coming out alive and kicking after years and years."

"The close confinement in the rock has had the same effect upon this creature," said Mr. Lathom in an agitated voice. "Doubtless, in the earliest ages of man, his characteristics approximated more closely to those of the lower orders of creation. Indeed, it is an indubitable fact, otherwise we could put no faith in evolution. Like the polar bear hibernating in the ice, living without food for a whole winter, so this creature of a prehistoric period has slept in the heart of the rock while countless ages have rolled by."

"Bai Jove!"

"And it was reserved for me—me to make this discovery!" pursued Mr. Lathom. "Life has nothing more to offer now."

"Ripping, ain't it?" murmured Figgins. "I hope Jones won't wake up and spoil it."

But that was exactly what Mr. Jones was going to do.

There was a loud yawn from the prehistoric man, and a movement.

Mr. Lathom started back.

"Stand clear, my boys. It is quite possible that the creature may awake in its full senses and become ferocious."

"Gweat Scott!"

The prehistoric man sat up on the floor of the cave.

Peculiar sounds came from his throat, which was feeling remarkably dry. From some recess of his skin he drew a flask, and applied it to his mouth.

Mr. Lathom watched him with intense interest.

"Doubtless some hunter of that far-off period," he was murmuring. "He is provided with a flask, like a modern hunter. Indeed, there is a smell from what he is drinking which seems to indicate that spirituous liquors were not unknown to man in the mesozoic period."

Gurgle, gurgle!

The prehistoric man finished what remained in the flask, and was refreshed.

He blinked round at the juniors and the Form-master. The amount of refreshment he had taken had obliterated his memory of the bargain made with Tom Merry & Co. To tell the exact truth, the prehistoric man was drunk—dreadfully drunk.

The juniors observed that disconcerting fact, and regarded him with considerable uneasiness. Mr. Jones's two partners had been locked up for being drunk and disorderly. There was no telling what Mr. Jones himself would be like in a state of inebriation.

"Hoh!" said the prehistoric man. "Hah! Groogh! Whurrammi?"

"Listen, my boys," said Mr. Lathom in a whisper. "He is speaking in the unknown language of his period, before, probably, articulate words could be formed by human lips."

"Whurrammi?" pursued the prehistoric man, and to the juniors it was evident that he was puzzled by his whereabouts, and was asking, "Where am I?"

"Quiet, my boys." "Wotcher starin' at?" said the prehistoric man offensively. Mr. Lathom almost fell down.

It was not good English, certainly, but it was English; and to hear it upon the lips of a man who had lived in prehistoric ages—

"Wot I want to know is, what's the game?" pursued the prehistoric man. "Wot's the little game? Wotcher starin' at?"

He staggered to his feet. "Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom dumbfounded. "What—who are you?"

"I'm the prehistoric man," growled Mr. Jones. "I lived before the world began. I used to climb the trees with the little chimpanzees, with a pretty prehistoric Mary Ann."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. Mr. Lathom staggered back.

"It is a—a—a cheat—a deception!" he shrieked. "This—this scoundrel has dared to play a trick on me!"

"Hey? Who you callin' a scoundrel, old funnyface?" demanded the prehistoric man. "Not so much of your lip, or you'll get a wipe round the smeller!"

"You—you villain—you—" "Oh, you 'ook it!" said the prehistoric man. "Shet your tater-trap face."

"You scoundrel!" "That was too much for the prehistoric man. He made an unsteady rush at the Form-master, and gripped him, and they struggled wildly.

"Oh, good heavens! Help! Draggimoff!" shrieked Mr. Lathom.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, hold me, somebody!" moaned Blake. "My ribs are going! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Oh, dear! He is drunk, and mad, and dangerous! Help!"

"Scoundrel, ham I?" roared Mr. Jones sulphurously. "I'm a nonnest man. I'm the prehistoric man wot 'ave played to every crowned 'ead in Yurup. Take that! And that!"

Mr. Lathom took "that" and "that" because he could not help it. The juniors rushed to the rescue, and dragged off the prehistoric man. Mr. Lathom staggered away, gasping for breath, and very much agitated.

"Hold him!" he panted. "Hold him! I will have him arrested. I will! Hold him!"

Mr. Jones tore himself away from the grasp of the juniors. "Ave me arrested!" he roared. "Wot for, I'd like to know, funny face? My heye, I'll give you wotto, you himage!"

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Lathom, and he fled madly from the cave. The prehistoric man was rushing at him with clenched fists and glaring eyes, and not whole mountains of mesozoic rocks, or even palaeozoic, though chockful of fossils, would have kept Mr. Lathom in the cave another second. He dashed away at top speed, with the prehistoric man after him.

"Stop!" roared Mr. Jones. "Come back, you funkling himage. You've called me names, and I'm goin' to lam yer! Stop, I says."

But Mr. Lathom did not stop. Down the hillside he went with a speed that was very creditable in a middle-aged gentleman of sedentary habits.

After him went the prehistoric man, brandishing his fists and yelling in a manner worthy of the earliest prehistoric times.

The juniors could not follow. They rolled about the cave in hysterics, shrieking and yelling with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove, look at them!"

"Poor old Lathom! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Set a fossil to chase a fossil!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked at the science club in astonishment. He could see nothing whatever in these annoying occurrences to laugh at. But the other fellows could, and they laughed, they shrieked, and they roared till they seemed in danger of convulsions.

CHAPTER 9.

Skimpole Does Not Understand.

ST. JIM'S heard the story with great joy. The whole school talked of nothing else that day. In passages and studies there was a sound of incessant chuckling.

Even the Head heard of it, and was suspected of chuckling. Mr. Lathom did not chuckle.

He had arrived at St. Jim's in a breathless state, having fortunately escaped the clutches of the prehistoric man. Mr. Jones had imbibed from the flask not wisely but too well, and he came to grief at the bottom of the hill; but Mr. Lathom, under the impression that the prehistoric man was still after him, had trotted all the way to the school.

Mr. Lathom shut himself up in his study to recover from his terrible adventure.

The juniors came straggling in a few at a time, and then the story spread over the school.

Tom Merry & Co. did not refer to the part they had played in the occurrence.

All they had to say was strictly true—that the prehistoric man had been hidden in the cave, and had turned out quite a different kind of prehistoric man from the kind Mr. Lathom had at first supposed.

"And you don't know how he got there, I suppose?" Kildare of the Sixth asked, trying to look sternly at the juniors.

"He must have walked there," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "What do you think, Tommy?"

Tom Merry nodded solemnly.

"Must have," he said. "There isn't a tram-line, and I don't think he could have taken a cab in that rig."

Kildare laughed.

"Well, if you had anything to do with it, you had better keep it dark," he said. "Mr. Lathom will be annoyed, I should think."

"I shouldn't wonder if he gives up geological excursions after this," Blake remarked.

Kildare grinned and walked away. He had a very shrewd idea that the prehistoric man had been "planted" on Mr. Lathom by those enterprising young rascals, but it was no business of his, and he did not inquire further.

Exactly what Mr. Lathom thought about the matter, when he had had time to reflect, the juniors did not know.

Mr. Lathom was not a suspicious man, but it must have occurred to him that probably the members of the Science Club knew more about the matter than he did.

It was unlikely that Mr. Jones would have buried himself in mesozoic rocks for the purpose of taking a nap.

Nor was it likely that a perfect stranger would have originated the scheme as a jape on the geological Form-master.

Some of the juniors, if not all of them, had had a hand in it, and Mr. Lathom could scarcely fail to guess as much.

They had pulled his leg—the august leg of a Form-master!

But it was worse than useless to think of inquiring into the matter. The ridicule it had caused was bad enough already. Mr. Lathom only wanted the story to die away, and he was not likely to take any step that would bring it prominently into public notice again. And it would be difficult, if not impossible, to discover which were the culprits.

When they saw the Form-master the next day, the juniors regarded him a little anxiously, wondering how he was taking it.

There was an unusual stiffness in Mr. Lathom's manner. He was a kind-hearted and genial little man, but he could not forget very quickly the great shock his dignity had sustained.

And so he was much less genial than usual that day.

He made no reference, however, to the scene in the cave; neither did he refer in any way to any further geological excursions.

After lessons, Skimpole of the Shell lay in wait for Mr. Lathom as he came out of the Fourth Form-room. Skimpole of the Shell was as keen as ever. He had no intention of letting the Science Club be dissolved by a single untoward incident.

"A very unfortunate occurrence yesterday, sir," began Skimpole.

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A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Mr. Lathom halted, and gave him a freezing glare. He did not know but that Skimpole might have been a party to the prehistoric fraud.

"I have no desire to discuss it, Skimpole," he said stiffly. "I suppose you will be paying another visit to the cave, sir?" suggested Skimpole. "Owing to that unfortunate occurrence, we were hardly able to make any investigations. You left so suddenly—"

"Skimpole!"

"And though I would gladly have continued the investigations, sir, after your hurried departure—"

"Boy!"

"I could not do so, sir, as the fellows, for some reason I cannot comprehend, were excited to risibility."

"How dare you, Skimpole!"

The genius of the Shell blinked at him in surprise. "It is a fact, sir. They seemed to see something very funny in the incident. I cannot say for what reason, but such is the fact. I hope, however, that you will take the Science Club out again—"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"You hear me, Skimpole!" snapped Mr. Lathom. "B-b-but, sir, you are honorary president of the club—"

"I withdraw my permission for you to use my name!"

"Oh, sir!"

"I decline to have anything further to do with your ridiculous association, Skimpole! I suspect you, sir, of impertinence!"

Skimpole's jaw dropped.

"Mr. Lathom, I—"

"No more, sir! If you mention the matter in my presence again, I shall cane you!"

And Mr. Lathom marched away majestically. Skimpole blinked after him in the blankest astonishment. He could see no reason whatever why Mr. Lathom should be angry with him; but Mr. Lathom evidently was angry.

Skimpole was still trying to think it out, when the Terrible Three came along, and woke him up with three separate and powerful slaps on the back.

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole. "Oh! Ow! My dear Merry—"

"Wherefore this thusness?" asked Monty Lowther. "Are you trying to think out a geological problem—how prehistoric men get buried in caves—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am very much surprised," said Skimpole—"very much surprised indeed! I spoke to Mr. Lathom about another excursion of the Science Club, and he was angry—very angry. Can you think of any reason why he should be angry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It perplexes me very much," said Skimpole, in distress. "Mr. Lathom declines to be any longer the honorary president of the Science Club. That is a loss to our organisation—a very great loss!"

"Horrible!" sighed Monty Lowther. "Lend me a handkerchief, somebody; I want to blub!"

"Pray do not be so upset," said Skimpole kindly. "Although Mr. Lathom has withdrawn, for some reason that I cannot fathom, there still remains myself, and I shall endeavour to do my duty to the Science Club!"

"Th-thank you, Skimmy!" said Lowther brokenly. "You're very good!"

"Noble!" sobbed Manners.

"Manly!" said Tom Merry tearfully. "Generous!"

"That is, in fact, my aim," said Skimpole modestly. "By devotion to the interests of the Science Club, I hope to supply the loss of our respected honorary president. I shall do my best to make the club a great success. I have every hope of discovering another jawbone in the cave—perhaps a jawbone with the teeth intact. Indeed, it is within the bounds of possibility that other bones—a thigh-bone or a rib—may be unearthed. Think of that, my dear fellows!" said Skimpole, with glistening eyes.

"You're sticking to geology and things, then?" asked Lowther.

"Yes, indeed!"

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"Going to talk to us about geology, and osteology, and prehistoric fossils and mesozoic rocks, and things like that?"

"Certainly."

"Never going to give the subject a rest?"

"Never, my dear friends."

"Then there's only one thing to be done," said Lowther.

"Collar him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear friends," exclaimed Skimpole, in amazement, struggling wildly in the grasp of the Terrible Three, "I—I fail to comprehend—I—I consider—yah! Oh! Yah!"

Bump!

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, setting his spectacles straight on his bony nose, and sitting up on the floor to stare after the departing figures of the Shell fellows. "Dear me! I fail to understand the cause of this inexplicable conduct! If this is enthusiasm on the part of Merry and Manners and Lowther—ow—I must say that it is—yow—a very peculiar form of enthusiasm! Groogh!"

CHAPTER 10.

By Whose Hand?

TOM MERRY was on the footer-field about an hour later, when Toby, the School House page, came hurrying down to the ground.

"Master Merry!"

"Oh, run away!" called out Monty Lowther. "Master Merry's busy!"

But Toby did not run away.

"Mr. Lathom wants Master Merry in his study at once," he said.

Master Merry went off the footer-field looking a little dismayed.

"Sure he wants me, Toby?" he asked.

"Yes, Master Merry. And he's in a awful wax," added Toby, by way of friendly warning.

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"In a wax with me?" he asked.

"I think so, Master Tom."

"What the dickens for?"

"I dunno, Master Merry. But he rang the bell some—think awful, and ordered me to find you and send you to his study at once!"

"All right, Toby; I'll go."

Toby departed with a commiserating look. Tom Merry went into the pavilion for his jacket. His chums walked with him to the School House.

"Looks like trouble," said Jack Blake. "If it's a row about the affair in the cave yesterday, we're all in it, mind."

"Can't be that!" said Lowther. "That would have come out before, if it was coming out at all. It's something fresh."

"Blessed if I know what I've done," said Tom Merry; and then he knocked at the door of Mr. Lathom's study and opened it. Mr. Lathom was standing up, with a black frown upon his usually genial face, and a glitter behind his spectacles. Never had Tom seen the master of the Fourth in such a state of anger. There was evidently something very serious the matter.

"You sent for me, sir," said Tom Merry respectfully.

"Yes, I sent for you, Merry. Yesterday I lost the key of the box in which I keep my fossil," said Mr. Lathom.

"You found it."

"I returned it to you, sir," said Tom.

"Quite so. After you returned it to me, I had occasion to open the box, and the fossil was there intact."

"Yes, sir."

"But now," said Mr. Lathom, in a voice of thunder, "it is gone!"

"Gone, sir!"

"Yes, gone."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom, sincerely enough. He would not have damaged Mr. Lathom's precious relic for worlds, and he did not quite see what the matter had to do with him.

"But as it was there after I returned you the key, sir, I suppose you cannot think that I have had anything to do with it. I assure you—"

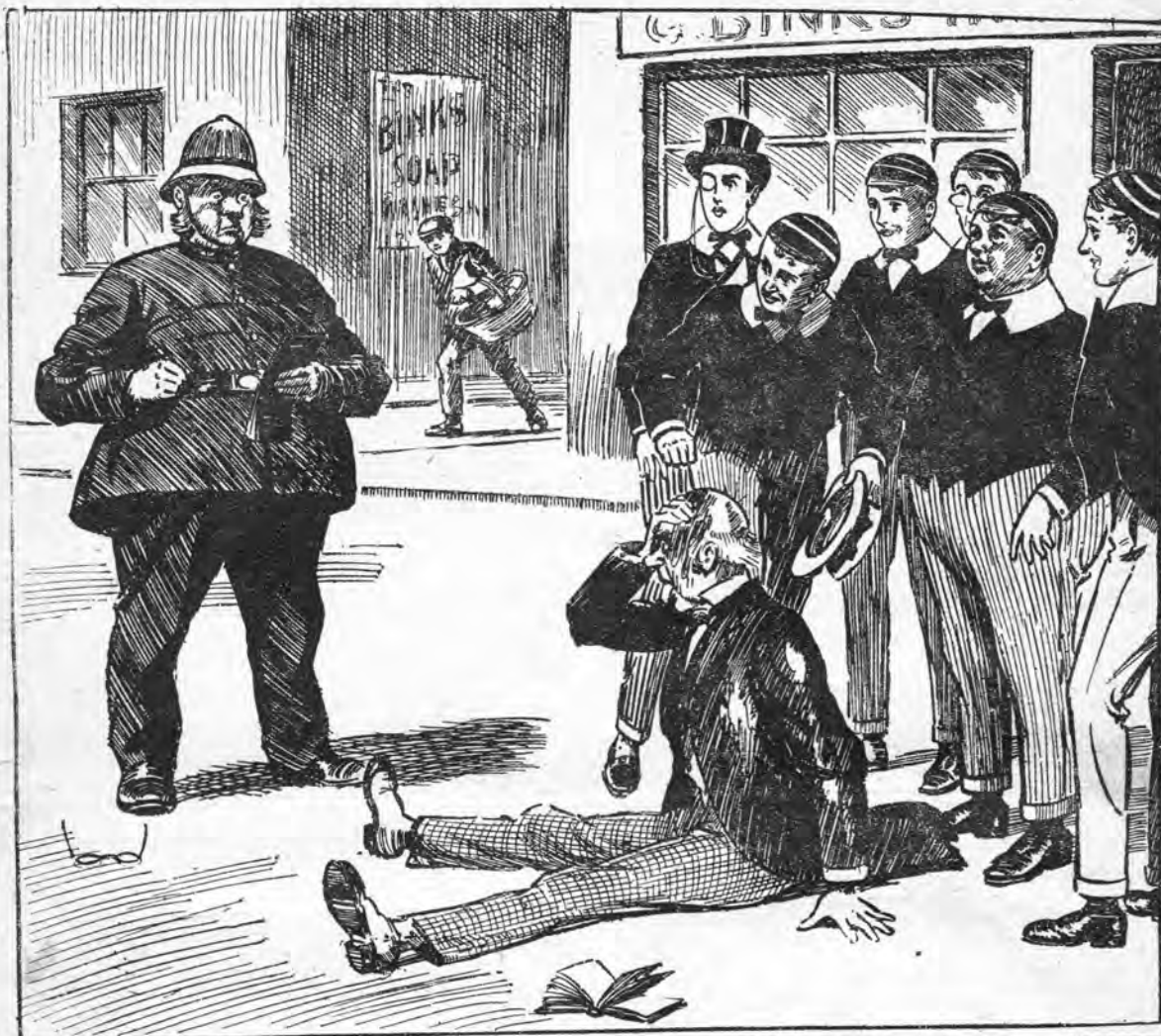
"You have not touched it, Merry?"

"Certainly not. Has the box been broken, sir?"

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

**TOM
MERRY
MINOR!**

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"Wot's all this 'ere?" demanded Mr. Crump, taking out a notebook. "My heye! Drunk and disorderly in broad daylight! Your name, old gent? I want your name and address! Nice ole spark you are——" "What?" shrieked Mr. Lathom. "I am Mr. Lathom of St. Jim's—I have been attacked by three desperate ruffians!" (See Chapter 2.)

"The box has not been broken. It has been unlocked. The key, however, is still in my possession, on my watch-chain. I have not lost it. There is, therefore, evidently another key of the same kind in this school, in the possession of the person who has rifled my box. Look at that, Merry!"

Mr. Lathom opened the lid of a mahogany box that stood on the table.

Inside was a sheet of paper, a fly-leaf torn carelessly from some book, and upon it was written, in large letters:

"RATS!"

The precious jawbone had been taken away, and that impertinent message had been left in the place of it.

Tom Merry stared at it.

"Have you seen that before, Merry?" asked Mr. Lathom sternly.

"Never, sir!"

"You did not place it there?"

"Most certainly not!"

"Very well! I should be glad to believe you, but this matter will require to be investigated. I have refused a considerable monetary offer for that fossil, and the person who has taken it is no better than a thief. If it is a foolish practical joke, I am willing to let him off with a caning if the fossil is immediately restored."

"I know nothing about it, sir."

"The key was in your hands. It has been in no other hands that I know of. Only a person who has had the key in his possession, could know how to get one like it that would open this box. It is not an uncommon key, certainly,

and there may be many like it in existence, perhaps in this school. You have no key like it, Merry?"

"No, sir! I didn't look at the key, and don't remember what it was like. It looked to me like any other key."

"Very well! Under other circumstances, Merry, I should like to take your word without proof. But I cannot be ignorant of the fact that you and your friends have made a jest of this kind of thing," said Mr. Lathom sternly. "About what happened in the cave yesterday, it is not my intention to speak; but this abstraction of my fossil, and the insolent note left in its place, are quite in keeping with what occurred then."

Tom Merry coloured.

"It is necessary for the fossil to be found and returned to me," said Mr. Lathom. "I have sent for you to ask you whether you have anything to say, before I place the matter in the hands of Dr. Holmes."

"I don't know anything about it, sir!"

"How long was the key in your possession before you returned it to me?"

"Less than five minutes."

"You found it, then, within a few minutes after I mentioned the matter to you?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Really! It seems as if you knew where to look for it," said Mr. Lathom, with unaccustomed sarcasm. "Where did you find it, pray?"

Tom Merry moved uneasily.

"I did not know where to look for it, sir," he said. "I

had seen a fellow with a key in his hand that morning; and when you mentioned that you had lost one, I thought that might be the one. So I went to him, and asked him for it."

"You did not tell me this, Merry."

"No, sir; it wasn't necessary. I brought back the key at once, and didn't think anything more about the matter."

Mr. Lathom looked at him searchingly.

"You did not note what it was like, and procure another key of the same kind?"

"I have said I didn't, sir."

"Were you aware that the fossil was worth a considerable sum of money?"

"Blake told me so, sir," said Tom. "He said you had been offered fifty pounds for it, for a museum, or something."

"That is correct. You see the seriousness of the matter, I hope. Besides the great value of this specimen to me, it has a market value of fifty pounds. Someone has abstracted it. It appears, from what you say, that my key was in another person's hands, although you did not tell me at the time. Who was this person?"

"Levison of the Fourth, sir."

"I suppose he will bear out your statement?"

"Mellish was with him when I took the key from him, sir."

"Very well; I will send for both of them!"

Mr. Lathom rang, and Toby appeared. He was despatched immediately for the two cads of the Fourth. In a few minutes Levison and Mellish came in, the latter looking decidedly nervous and uneasy. Levison, however, was quite cool and collected.

"Levison," said Mr. Lathom, "Merry tells me that you found the key I had lost yesterday, and that you handed it to him in the presence of Mellish. Is this the case?"

Levison paused a single moment. His brain worked quickly. It would not do to deny the whole transaction, as he was prompted to do. He had nerve enough, but he was very doubtful about Mellish. If Mellish blurted out what he knew, under the stern and questioning eye of the Form-master, Levison's he would recoil on his own head. That reflection passed instantly through Levison's mind; and he answered:

"It's quite true, sir. I found a key lying in the passage, and picked it up."

"Did you know it was my property?"

"Oh, no, sir! I asked Mellish if he knew anybody who'd lost a key, and he said he didn't. You remember that, Mellish?"

"Perfectly," said Mellish.

"Then Merry came into my study, and told me you had lost a key, sir, and said he wanted to take it back to you, so I gave it to him."

"You told me you had picked it up, Merry."

"I did pick it up, sir. It dropped on the floor when Levison threw it."

"Very well. How long was the key in your possession, Levison?"

Levison appeared to reflect.

"Might have been ten minutes, sir."

"Have you another key like it?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Have you procured one like it since?"

"I, sir!" exclaimed Levison, in astonishment. "Of course not, sir. Why should I?"

"Someone has procured a similar key, and opened this box and taken away the fossil, and left this insolent message in its place."

"Oh, sir! What a rotten thing to do," said Levison.

"I have since examined my key, and find traces of wax upon it," went on Mr. Lathom. "A wax impression was taken of it before it was returned to me. Either you or Merry must have done it, Levison, and then procured a new key."

"I don't know anything about it, sir."

"And you know nothing about it, Merry?"

"Nothing, sir!"

"It was one of you, and you both deny knowledge of the matter," said Mr. Lathom sternly. "One of you is lying!"

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Levison is known to be an untruthful boy," went on Mr. Lathom, with a severe glance at the black sheep of the Fourth. "But Levison, so far as I can see, has no concern in this matter. He was not connected with the party that went to the cave yesterday, where such a painful incident occurred."

"I hope, sir," said Levison virtuously, "that you wouldn't think me capable of playing a trick like that on my Form-master, sir."

"I have already said that you had nothing to do with it, Levison. I do not intend to raise the question of what happened yesterday," said Mr. Lathom, with dignity, "but it casts doubt on your statement now, Merry."

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"I am sorry you think so, sir."

"Someone has stolen—there is no other word for it—my fossil, which is worth fifty pounds. It must be restored. Again I offer to the guilty person to take it back, and to end the matter with a caning."

There was no reply.

"As you have nothing to say," said Mr. Lathom, "I shall have to appeal to the Head to investigate the matter. You three juniors will remain in this study, meanwhile."

Mr. Lathom quitted the room, and turned the key in the lock outside.

CHAPTER 11.

Found Guilty.

LEVISON grinned. "Well, you've done it now!" he ejaculated.

"What do you mean, you cad?" exclaimed Tom Merry fiercely. "Do you mean to say I had anything to do with taking the silly rubbish away?"

"Do you mean to say you didn't?" grinned Levison.

Tom Merry advanced towards him with blazing eyes.

"You cad! You took a wax impression of the key while you had it. Only a miserable worm like you would think of such a thing. You thought the key might be inquired after before you had a chance of using it, and you took the impression to be able to get a new one."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"If you can prove that, all serene," he said. "It will want proving, you know. I'm not the chap who plays geological jokes on Lathom. I didn't hire a music-hall performer to pretend to be a prehistoric man in a cave. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Mellish.

"But you did this," said Tom Merry. "It must have been one of us, and as it wasn't I, it must have been you."

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists.

"You cad! You told me you were going to take the fossil and chuck it away if I hadn't taken the key away from you."

"I don't remember anything of the sort. If you tell Lathom a yarn like that you'll have to prove it," said Levison coolly.

"Mellish heard you."

"I don't remember Levison saying anything of the sort," said Mellish calmly. "I think I remember his saying that he was just going to inquire of the Housemaster if anybody had lost a key."

Levison gave his chum an approving glance.

"Yes; I remember saying that," he remarked.

"You pair of rotten liars!" shouted Tom Merry, quite losing his temper. "I'll jolly well lick you and make you own up!"

"Going to have a rough-and-tumble in a Form-master's study?" grinned Levison. "Lathom will get ratty when he comes back."

"Are you going to tell the truth?"

"Yes. I've done that, and I'm sticking to it."

"You—you rotter!"

Tom Merry rushed at Levison. The cad of the Fourth put up his hands, and retreated round the table. The key, clicked in the lock, and the door opened, and Mr. Lathom appeared, with the imposing form of the Head behind him.

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.

"Merry!" exclaimed the Head, in a thunderous voice.

Tom Merry paused, and dropped his hands, flushing scarlet.

"You will kindly have no hooliganism here, Merry!" said Mr. Lathom acidly. "This conduct does not speak well for you, Merry!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir. F——" stammered Tom Merry.

"That is enough. Toby, come in!"

Toby, the page, followed the Head and the Form-master into the study, and the door was closed again. The Head was looking very grave.

"Mr. Lathom has acquainted me with this unfortunate occurrence," he said. "If both you boys persist in denying knowledge of the matter, I shall have to investigate it with thoroughness. Have you anything to say?"

"I haven't, sir," said Levison.

"And you, Merry?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. One of you has, or had, in his possession a key which will open this box belonging to Mr. Lathom. It is my duty to order a search to be made, painful as such a proceeding is to me."

"I'm quite ready, sir," said Levison meekly.

"You mean you've thrown away the key, you cad!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

"Silence, Merry! Toby, you will search Master Levison first."

"Yessir!" said Toby.

Levison stood out cheerfully to be searched. Toby went through his clothes in a very thorough manner. If Toby had been able to express his opinion, he would have declared without hesitation that Levison was the guilty party. Toby had suffered a great deal from Levison's mischievous and malicious nature, his position in the house making it difficult for him to retaliate on a boy in Levison's position. Toby would have given a good deal to discover that key in Levison's pockets, and his search was very thorough. But the key was not to be found.

Toby ceased the search at last.

"Might be in Master Levison's box, sir," he ventured to suggest.

"I'm quite willing for my boxes to be searched, sir," said Levison.

"That will come afterwards, if the key is not found here," said the Head. "But now search Master Merry, Toby."

"Yessir," Toby hesitated. "Skuse me, Master Tom!"

Tom Merry forced a smile.

"Go ahead, Toby! Don't mind me!"

Toby's hands went through his pockets. As his hand rested in Tom Merry's jacket-pocket, a strange change came over Toby's face.

"What have you found?" asked the Head sternly.

"A—a—a key, sir," stammered Toby. "It's under the lining, sir. I dessay it's the key of Master Merry's box, sir."

"We shall see," said the Head grimly. "Take it out."

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"I don't keep any keys in that pocket," he said. "I've got my keys in a bunch. And—and I didn't know there was a hole in the lining."

Toby found the hole in the lining, and extracted the key. Amid a breathless silence, he laid it on the table. Mr. Lathom took a key from his watchchain and laid it beside the one taken from Tom Merry's pocket. The two keys were exactly similar.

Tom Merry stared at them blankly.

"I—I—I—" he stammered.

"Well, Merry, what have you to say?" asked Mr. Lathom, in a harsh voice. "This key, exactly resembling mine, was hidden in the lining of your jacket."

"I—I don't know how it got there, sir."

The Head's lip curled with contempt.

"Pray do not utter falsehoods on the subject, Merry!" he said cuttingly.

"Falsehoods, sir!"

"Yes; falsehoods. If you expect me to believe that that key became hidden in the lining of your jacket without your knowledge, you must be very foolish."

Tom Merry's head swam for a moment. Then he uttered a cry.

"Levison! You cad! You put it there!"

"Nonsense!" broke in the Head sharply. "How could Levison put a key in your pocket without your knowledge?"

"I—I don't know. In the dormitory, perhaps—"

"Levison does not share your dormitory."

"I—I don't understand it. But—but—"

"You are discovered," said the Head coldly. "It is useless, as well as wicked, to throw foolish and unfounded accusations at Levison. I trust, Merry, that you will now have sufficient decency to end this farce and admit the truth."

"The—the truth!" stammered Tom.

"Yes. You—or some of your friends—played a most inexcusable prank upon Mr. Lathom yesterday. Mr. Lathom has made no complaint, and I do not intend to take up the matter. But you have now carried that prank, Merry, too far. You have abstracted valuable property, and you have lied about it."

"I—I haven't lied! I—I—"

"Silence! I command you, Merry, to fetch back immediately Mr. Lathom's property, from wherever you have hidden it, and restore it to him. You will then come to my study. I shall flog you, Merry, not so much for this foolish joke as for telling falsehoods and endeavouring to throw the blame upon an innocent person."

"But sir, I—I—I—"

"Go and fetch Mr. Lathom's property at once!" thundered the Head.

"But I can't. I don't know—I—I—"

"Have you dared to destroy it?"

"Certainly not! I haven't—"

"Then go and fetch it."

"I can't! I—I—"

"Leave this study at once!" said the Head sternly. "I give you one hour, Merry, in which to restore Mr. Lathom's property. If you do not recover it and restore it in that time, I can only conclude that you have destroyed it, or that you have disposed of it dishonestly. In either case, I shall expel you from the school!"

"But I—I—I—"

"Not a word more! Go!"

And Tom Merry staggered rather than walked from the study.

CHAPTER 12. Hard Pressed.

"**B**AI Jove! What's the mattah?"

"Tom, old man—"

"What the dickens—"

"Tom—"

The crowd of juniors all exclaimed at once as Tom Merry came out of the School House into the sunny quadrangle, with a face white as chalk.

They had been waiting for him, wondering what the trouble was; but they had never expected anything like this. Tom Merry seemed to be dazed. They knew at once that something serious had happened, and they were alarmed.

"Buck up, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "What is it? If Lathom's cuttin' up wusty about the pwehistowic man, we're all in it, and we'll stand by you like anythin'."

"Sure, and we're all ready to own up," said Reilly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It—it isn't that!" he said, with a gasp.

"Then what is it?" asked Lowther. "You look as if you'd got it right in the neck. Tom, old fellow, what's the matter?"

Tom Merry panted out what had happened in Mr. Lathom's study.

The juniors listened in dismay.

"Levison, of course," said Blake. "If he's destroyed the giddy fossil, he won't dare to own up, even if we rag him."

"More likely keeping it to sell!" snorted Herries.

"Levison wouldn't be above getting money for it and sticking to it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It must have been Levison!" panted Tom Merry. "It couldn't have been anybody else. But he denies knowing anything about it, and sticks to his yarn."

"And the key was found in your pocket?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes; stuck inside the lining."

"Phew!"

"And—and you don't know how it got there?" asked Blake hesitatingly.

"Of course I don't! I've never seen the key before."

"I—I say, you know, if you've japed old Lathom over his precious fossil, there's no harm in telling us," said Digby slowly.

Tom Merry glared at the Fourth Former.

"You silly ass!" he shouted. "Do you think I've told lies, then?"

"Well, no; but—"

"But what, then?"

"Well, I don't see how keys get into pockets without a chap knowing. It's jolly odd," said Digby, more tartly.

"Extremely odd," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But we are bound to take Tom Mewwy's word for it, Dig, deah boy."

"I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Monty Lowther warmly.

"Any fellow who thinks I've told lies can clear off and let me alone!" exclaimed Tom Merry savagely.

"Keep your wool on, kid!" said Kangaroo soothingly.

"It looks jolly queer, but I—I suppose Levison did it somehow. He's always playing some rotten trick on somebody."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I haven't the faintest idea how the key got there," said Tom Merry, more calmly. "I only know that I've never seen it before. It was shoved into my pocket by somebody, and it must have been Levison. When I took the key away from him yesterday, he said he was going to take away Lathom's fossil and chuck it away, and I wouldn't let him. That's why he has done this."

"Yaas, it's pweety cleah. The uttah wottah! We shall have to find it out and fix it on him somehow, and then it will be all wight," said Arthur Augustus hopefully.

"It's that rotten jape yesterday that makes Lathom suspicious of me!" groaned Tom Merry. "He thinks this is some more of the same, and he's got his back up about that already. The trouble is I've got to find the fossil and take it back in an hour, or the Head says I'm to be sacked for stealing it."

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Then it's got to be found," said Manners decidedly. "We can be pretty sure that Levison has it, and he's hidden it. We've got to find it."

"We'll find Levison first, and bump him till he owns up where it is," said Lowther.

"Good egg!"

The juniors looked for Levison. But Levison was not to be found, and neither was Mellish. They were well aware of the storm they had raised, and they expected to be looked for, and they were keeping out of sight.

After a quarter of an hour the juniors were compelled to give up the search for Levison.

Tom Merry was in almost a desperate frame of mind.

The Head had been in deadly earnest in what he had said. If the missing article was not restored within an hour, Tom Merry would be adjudged guilty of stealing or of destroying it.

Any further appeal to the Head was useless. And only Levison knew where the fossil was, and Levison was not to be found. And even if found, it was too much to expect that he would own up. For his own sake he dared not do so after the story he had told in Mr. Lathom's study.

"The wotten thing will have to be found," said Arthur Augustus disconsolately. "If we can take it back to old Lathom, it will be a wespite; and then we shall have time to find out and pprove that it wasn't Tom Mewwy who boned it."

"But where is it?" said Blake hopelessly.

The Terrible Three had come to the same conclusion. But where to look for the fossil—that was the question.

Arthur Augustus wrinkled his aristocratic brows in a deep effort of thought.

"The wottah wouldn't dare to destroy it in case it came out," he said. "He's hidden it somewhah. If this blows ovah, I shouldn't wondah if he twies to sell it; he's quite wottah enough. Pewwaps it's in his study."

"Let's go and look!" said Manners.

They went up to Levison's study in the Fourth Form passage. Lumley-Lumley and Rook, who shared that study with Levison and Mellish, were there, and when they heard what was wanted they willingly joined in the search.

Levison's belongings were ransacked right and left.

But no trace of the missing jawbone was discovered.

If Levison had hidden it, he had not hidden it there, and it was impossible to guess where it might be. There were a thousand hooks among the old buildings where so small an article could have been stowed out of sight.

And the time was passing on.

At six o'clock Tom Merry had to be present in the Head's study, to be flogged if he had restored the missing property, to be expelled if he had not.

It was useless for him to repeat that he did not know where it was; the Head simply would not listen to him.

A quarter to six rang out from the clock-tower.

Blake & Co. stood and discussed the matter in the quad. The Terrible Three were still pursuing the hopeless quest.

"What would Sherlock Holmes do undah the cires?" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "You know, you chaps, I have wathah a gift as an amateur detective—"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake crossly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Talk sense," said Herries. "What's going to be done?"

"It looks to me, deah boy, as if poor old Tom Mewwy is goin' to be done," said D'Arcy dismally. "Where can that uttah woattah have hidden it? Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boys; I'm goin' to think it out."

D'Arcy's brows wrinkled in a portentous frown. He was evidently making a big intellectual effort to think it out. His chums left him thinking it out, and wandered away to help in the search. Six o'clock striking brought Arthur Augustus out of his reverie. But an idea had come into the mighty brain of the swell of St. Jim's, and his eye was glowing behind his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove! I've got it!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came miserably towards the School House. Arthur Augustus waved his eyeglass to them.

"I've got it, deah boys."

The Shell fellows' faces lighted up.

"Got it!" exclaimed Tom Merry breathlessly. "Good luck! Where is it?"

"I was not wefewwin' to the fossil, deah boy."

"Oh, ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, shurrup!" said Lowther crossly.

"Pway don't be wude, Lowthah," said the swell of the Fourth severely. "I have not found the wotten jawbone, but I have got an ideah—"

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"Go and boil it!"

"I believe I have spotted the wottah's little game? Where are you goin' Tom Mewwy?"

Tom smiled bitterly.

"I've got to go in to the Head, to get the order of the book."

"It's all wight, I weally believe," said Arthur Augustus excitedly. "I'm goin' to look for the wotten thing now. Keep the old boy talkin', and if I find it—"

Tom Merry nodded hopelessly, and passed into the house. He had very little faith in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's idea that he knew where to look for the missing jawbone. The captain of the Shell went with a gloomy brow to the Head's study.

The juniors gathered round the swell of St. Jim's. The elegant Fourth Former was wildly excited, and Blake evidently believed that D'Arcy had thought of something sensible for once. He quoted the text about wisdom proceeding from the mouths of babes and sucklings.

"I wufuse to be regarded as a babe and sucklin', you ass!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I have worked it out in my bwain in the best Sherlock Holmes manner. Now, we are all agreed that Levison must have boned the bone."

"Yes, ass," said Lowther impatiently. "Get on."

"And he has hidden it somewhah—"

"Yes!" roared Lowther.

"Pway don't shout, deah boy. I don't like bein' woared at; it throws me into a fluttah. Now, Levison must have known that the wotten wubbish would be searched for, and it might be brought to light. Well, then, where would he be most likely to hide it?"

"That's what we've been trying to find out for the past hour," growled Blake.

"Yaas, but you haven't the detective instinct, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I've worked it out in my bwain. If the fossil is discovered, to support Levison's wotten accusation against our friend Tom Mewwy, it would have to be found among Tom Mewwy's pwops."

"Oh!"

"Therefore, my impwession is that it has been hidden in somethin' belongin' to Tom Mewwy—pewwaps in his twunk or hat-box!" said D'Arcy triumphantly.

CHAPTER 13.

The Judgment of Arthur Augustus.

"PHEW!"

The juniors uttered the exclamation all together.

Was it possible, after all, that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had hit upon the solution of the problem that had baffled them all?

"By Jove!" said Manners.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chirped gleefully.

"Wely on it, deah boys, I've got it!" he said. "You can always twust my judgment. I have often reflected that if I evah came to the awful necessity of workin' for a livin', I should make a wippin' detective. It's a gift, you know!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, if you can suggest a better theowey—"

"Ass! There's nothin' in it," said Monty gloomily.

"Levison would like the rotten thing to be found in Tom Merry's box, if it was found at all; but Tom goes to his box every day for something or other. If it was there he would have found it himself."

"Ahem!"

"Of course he would," said Blake, his face falling. "I'm afraid there's nothin' in it after all, Gussy."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "Levison might have hidden it undah othah things, or put it into Tom Mewwy's Sunday toppah."

"Tom would have found it on Sunday, then, and Levison didn't know Lathom would miss it before Sunday."

D'Arcy rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Pewwaps you're wight," he admitted. "All the same, my theowey is a jolly good theowey. You chaps know more about Tom Mewwy's mannahs and customs than I do, as you're his pals. Hasn't he any box or anythin' that he doesn't go in for anythin'?"

"There's his trunk in the box-room," said Lowther. "He's not likely to go to that until the end of the term, of course."

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors looked at one another quickly.

"Let's go and look!" said Manners tersely.

They lost no time. In less than a minute they were scampering up the stairs to the box-room.

They ran into the room, and Lowther lifted the lid of Tom Merry's trunk. Then his face, which flashed with hope, fell again. The trunk was empty. There were some old sheets of newspaper in it, and nothing more to be seen.

"Nothin' doing!" grunted Lowther.

"Wait a minute, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus leaned over the big trunk, and jerked out the sheets of newspaper.

Clatter!

Something hard fell from the newspapers and rattled on the floor. The juniors gave a yell of excitement.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

"Hurrah!"

"The giddy fossil!"

There it was—the precious relic—the jawbone of antediluvian date that Skimpole had displayed to admiring eyes at the first meeting of the Science Club. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed to grow an inch taller as he gazed at it through his monocle. His theory had been proved—he had hit upon the truth.

"I don't want to wub it in, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus gently. "But I weally must remark that pewwaps you will admit now that I was in the wight."

Blake gave his elegant chum a thump on the back that made him stagger.

"Right as rain! Hurrah!"

"Ow! You feaful ass! You've neahly bwoken my back!" wailed D'Arcy.

"Never mind that; this isn't a time to worry about trifles. This rotten thing has got to be taken to the Head—come on!"

"I'll take it, deah boys. As I discovaked it, it is up to me to pwsent it to the Head and explain to him."

"Buck up, then!"

And Arthur Augustus, with the relic of prehistoric times in his hand, dashed away for the Head's study in hot haste.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry was with the Head. Mr. Lathom was there, and both the masters fixed a stern look upon Tom Merry as he came in.

"You have come, I trust, to restore Mr. Lathom's property," said the Head severely.

"No, sir; I can't find it."

"What! Do you mean to say that you have lost it?"

Tom Merry met the Head's stern gaze steadily.

"I mean to say that I don't know anything about it, sir," he said quietly. "I had nothing to do with taking it from the box in Mr. Lathom's study, and I don't know what has become of it. I think Levison knows."

"You have said enough," said the Head coldly. "I have already told you my decision. I shall expel you from the school unless you restore Mr. Lathom's property to him."

"I cannot do it, sir, as I do not know what has become of it."

"Then you know what to expect. I——" The Head broke off as a thump came at the door, and it opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed in. Dr. Holmes rose majestically to his feet.

"D'Arcy, what is the meaning of this intrusion? How dare you——"

"It's all wight, sir!" D'Arcy waved the famous jawbone in the air. "It's found, sir!"

Mr. Lathom gave a cry of delight, and pounced upon the precious relic. The enthusiastic geologist looked as if he could weep over it. He almost hugged it.

"Ah!" said the Head, his frown relaxing. "Is that your property, Mr. Lathom?"

"That is it, sir," said Mr. Lathom, his face beaming. "This is the fossil, sir—the sole surviving proof of the human race in the Eocene period——"

"Ahem—just so!" said the Head hastily. He did not want to listen just then to the startling and revolutionary theories that Mr. Lathom drew from that fragment of bone. "Did you find it, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said the swell of St. Jim's proudly. "It's all wight, Tom Mewwy. I thought it out, you know, and that theowy flashed into my bwain——"

"Good old Gussy!" murmured Tom Merry gratefully.

"Where did you find it, D'Arcy?"

"In Tom Mewwy's twunk in the box-room, sir. I worked it out in my bwain that the wottah must have hidden it there——"

"Are you referring to Merry?"

"Mewwy! Certainly not, sir. I was wefewwin' to Levison."

"Oh!" Dr. Holmes turned to Tom Merry, his look more severe than ever. "It appears, Merry, that this property, which you deny having abstracted from Mr. Lathom's room, has been discovered in your box. Can you account for that?"

"Only that it must have been placed there, sir."

"And by whom?"

"By the same rotter—the same person who put the key into my jacket-pocket, sir," said Tom Merry, meeting the Head's eyes unflinchingly.

Dr. Holmes made an impatient gesture.

"Nonsense! I have already given you my opinion of that statement. How can you expect me to listen to such an accusation without a particle of proof? As the property has been restored, Merry, I shall keep my word. I shall not expel you, but you will be flogged soundly, sir, for your conduct. To-morrow morning, before prayers, the school will be assembled, and you will receive your punishment in public. You may go!"

"Weally, sir——" began Arthur Augustus.

"You may go also, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir, but if you will allow me to remark——"

"I will allow you to leave my study!" said the Head, raising his voice a little.

The Head picked up his cane, and Arthur Augustus followed Tom Merry out of the study rather hastily.

CHAPTER 14.

All Skimpole's Fault.

THEA in Tom Merry's study was a gloomy meal that evening. The captain of the Shell was gloomy and depressed. He had ample reason to be.

The sentence of a public flogging hung over him, and there was no appeal. Unless, in the interval, some proof of his innocence could be discovered, he was to be flogged before all St. Jim's on the following morning.

His chums were as gloomy as himself.

All the juniors believed firmly enough in Tom Merry's assurance that he had had nothing to do with the abstraction of the fossil from Mr. Lathom's study. That is to say, all the Co. and their friends believed in him. But fellows who did not know Tom Merry so well were more inclined to go by the evidence.

Arthur Augustus had saved Tom Merry by his brilliant discovery of the fossil in the trunk in the box-room. But in some respects that discovery had made matters worse. The trunk was Tom Merry's, and as Gore of the Shell remarked, he would want some proof before he believed that Levison or anybody else had hidden the fossil in Tom Merry's trunk. It might be so or it mightn't, and a fellow wanted proof.

"Goah is a wottah," Arthur Augustus remarked, in Tom Merry's study. "But there is some weason in what he says, and a lot of fellows say the same, you know. Aftah all, they weally haven't sufficient intelligence to work the mattah out in their bwains as I did. It requires a fellow of tact and judgment."

"How are you going to work Tom Merry out of the flogging to-morrow morning?" demanded Blake glumly. "There's another chance for your giddy tact and judgment."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I'm thinkin' it oval, deah boy!" he said. "I am twyin' to work it out in my bwain on Sherlock Holmes methods."

"Oh, blow Sherlock Holmes!" said Monty Lowther.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I think that is a wotten remark. I don't desire to wub it in, but I found the fossil, didn't I?"

"And made the Head more certain than ever that it was Tom who had boned it!" growled Lowther peevishly. "Why couldn't you find it somewhere else, while you were about it?"

"Weally, deah boy, I cannot wegard that as weasonable. I could only find it in the place where Levison had hidden it. Sherlock Holmes and Fewwahs Locke themselves could not have found it in any othah place."

"Right, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "You did a lot for me, old fellow, and I'm grateful. I'm afraid I've got to go through the licking to-morrow. It isn't the licking I mind—I could stand that. But for the Head to think I've been telling lies—and for old Lathom to suppose that I played a rotten trick on him—that's what I feel most. Lathom is an ass, but he has always been kind to us, and he must think me a rotter!"

"It was the prehistoric man did it," groaned Blake. "If it hadn't been for that jape, Lathom wouldn't have been so rusty."

"All Skimpole's fault!" grunted Kangaroo. "If he hadn't started his howling idiocy of a Science Club, we shouldn't have sprung the prehistoric man on him."

"All Skimmy's fault, of course!" growled Lowther. "Why couldn't he stick to Determinism?"

"Of course, we can bump Skimpole," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Yaas, wathah; but that won't save Tom Mewwy from bein' licked to-morrow mornin', deah boy," said Arthur Augustus with a shake of the head.

"Come in!" called out Tom Merry.

Skimpole of the Shell blinked into the study.

The juniors regarded him with deadly looks. They had just worked it out to their satisfaction that Skimpole was the

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cause of all the trouble, and Skimpole's visit to the study just then was a great deal like stepping into the lion's den. Monty Lowther rose to his feet and took a large bottle of ink from the shelf. Manners picked up a cushion. Skimpole did not observe any of these preparations. He blinked at the juniors cheerfully through his big spectacles.

"I am so glad to find you all here, my dear fellows," he said, rubbing his bony hand. "It will save calling a meeting of the Science Club."

"The what?" said Blake.

"My science club, my dear fellow. You are aware, of course, that there is a half-holiday to-morrow afternoon—Saturday."

"Go hon!"

"Some of the fellows will be playing football," said Skimpole, with a pitying smile; "but the members of the Science Club will, I trust, be better occupied."

"Bai Jove!"

"I have planned a visit to the cave outside Rylcombe, and a really thorough investigation of the strata there. You shall all help, every one of you."

"Oh!"

"You shall all share in the glory of the discoveries I hope to make. We will go immediately after dinner, and stay there till dark. We may be able to spend six hours together in geological investigations, my dear friends." And Skimpole beamed upon the juniors as he held out that enticing prospect.

"Six hours," said Blake. "Not enough. Why not get leave to go immediately after morning lessons, and take our dinners with us? We could put in another hour that way."

"My dear Blake, I welcome the suggestion with pleasure. I am indeed glad to see you so keen on the subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole looked surprised.

"I fail to see what you are laughing at, my dear fellows. It is a very, very good idea, I consider. What are you locking the door for, Lowther, may I ask?"

"I don't want anybody to come in and interrupt while we are slaughtering you, Skimmy," said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"My dear Lowther—"

"Collar the idiot!"

"But my—my dear fellows—I fail to comprehend—"

Manners launched the cushion, and Skimpole sat down on the study carpet. His spectacles slid down his nose, and he blinked over them in great astonishment.

Monty Lowther uncorked the large bottle of ink.

"Hold him!" he said. "Keep still, Skimmy, or you will be trodden on. Do you see this ink?"

"Yes, my dear Lowther. I am somewhat short-sighted, and without my glasses I do not see very clearly, but I certainly perceive a somewhat large bottle of ink in your hands."

"I am going to anoint you with it," explained Lowther.

"Wha-a-at!"

"I am going to pour it over your head. When you have had enough, you can swear solemnly never to utter the words geology or science club again. See?"

"B-b-but—ow! My dear Lowther, pray do not spill the ink over me. It is running down the back of my neck!" shrieked Skimpole, struggling in the grasp of the members of the Science Club.

"Never mind the ink," said Lowther. "We're willing to waste a bob's worth of ink for the good of the cause. Have you had enough?"

"Ow! Yes! More than enough—groogh! Oh!"

"Will you swear—"

"Groogh! Certainly not. I never swear. I am incapable of such a reprehensible proceeding, my dear Lowther. Gore swears sometimes, and I have reproved him for it. Ow!"

"Will you swear to give up geology, and science clubs, and things, and stick to some other less troublesome variety of lunacy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! My dear Lowther, geology is not a form of lunacy! Ow! That is quite a mistake. Most wonderful discoveries have been made—yow!—millions of years have been added to the age of the human race—groogh!—ow!—keep that ink away, you silly chump—yah! Upon the whole, my dear fellows, I am willing to dissolve the Science Club—yah!—ow!—groogh! Chuck it!"

"No more Science Club and no more geology!" demanded Lowther.

"Groogh! Yes—no; all right! Ow!"

"Chuck him out," said Lowther. "All the ink's gone. Roll him out!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, my goodness! Yow! Oh!"

Skimpole was rolled out of the study into the passage. The door slammed on him. The genius of the Shell sat up, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 295.

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streaming with ink, and jammed his inky glasses on his nose, and panted for breath.

"Oh, dear! I fail to understand this—groogh!—conduct, after the enthusiasm they displayed at first—ow! But I think—graw!—that—yow!—I will give up trying to enlighten them upon scientific subjects—groogh!"

And he did.

CHAPTER 15.

At the Eleventh Hour!

THE next morning there was a great deal of suppressed excitement when the juniors came down.

Before prayers that morning Tom Merry was to be flogged in public in the Big Hall.

Fellows looked curiously at the hero of the Shell to see how he was "taking it." Tom Merry looked a little pale, but he was quite calm.

His chums were looking very downhearted.

"Blessed if I feel inclined to go in to brekker," growled Jack Blake. "Where has that ass Gussy got to? Seen Gussy, anybody?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared in sight. He was on his bicycle, and riding down towards the gates. Blake & Co. rushed after him. It was a rule that juniors should wheel their machines out before they mounted, but Arthur Augustus was evidently in a hurry. Blake yelled after him.

"Where are you going, fathead?"

"Out, deah boy," called back Arthur Augustus, without slackening pace.

"Don't you know brekker's ready?"

"Yaas."

"Come back, you ass!"

"I wefuso to be called an ass."

"Will you come back?" roared Blake.

"Sowwy—can't!"

And Arthur Augustus pedalled out of the school gates, and shot away towards Rylcombe at a scorching speed.

Jack Blake gazed after the disappearing figure of the swell of St. Jim's in amazement.

"What bee has he got in his bonnet now?" he exclaimed.

"On the track of something, perhaps?" said Digby.

"Looking for a giddy mare's nest, I suppose. He'll get lines for missing brekker."

The Fourth-Formers went back to the School House.

Breakfast was a gloomy meal there.

It dragged through, Arthur Augustus's place at the Fourth Form table being empty. Mr. Latham's eye was upon that place, and he inquired sharply where D'Arcy was, and made a note of his absence. Unless Arthur Augustus had a good explanation to give when he came in, there was trouble in store for him.

He had not come in by the time the order was given for the school to assemble in Big Hall.

Monty Lowther and Manners walked on either side of Tom Merry, as the captain of the Shell went in with the rest. Kildare of the Sixth paused to speak to them as they went in. The captain of St. Jim's looked grave and concerned.

"I'm sorry for this, Merry," Kildare said. "I've got a hint to give you. If you owned up, and begged Mr. Latham's pardon, it's quite possible you might get off with a caning. The Head hates a flogging as much as anybody does."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I'm not likely to own up to doing a thing I didn't do, flogging or no flogging!" he exclaimed hotly.

Kildare regarded him curiously.

"You stick to it that you didn't do it?" he said.

"Yes, of course, I do."

"I'm sorry, Merry. The evidence seems pretty clear."

"I know it does," said Tom bitterly. "Levison's fixed all that!"

"I don't trust Levison; but—well, if you are innocent, Merry, I'm more sorry than I can say. But I don't see how the Head could decide otherwise than as he has done, on the evidence."

Tom Merry took up his place in the ranks of the Shell.

The whole school was assembled when the Head came in by the door at the upper end of the Big Hall.

Dr. Holmes was looking very grave and severe.

"Boys!" he said. "You know for what reason you have been assembled here this morning. Merry, come forward!"

Tom Merry stepped out from the midst of the Shell fellows. All eyes were upon the junior as he advanced up the hall. Tom Merry's face flushed a little, as he felt that curious regard from all sides, but he did not falter. Steadily and calmly he advanced.

He met the severe glance of the Head without flinching.

"Merry, have you anything to say before I mete out your punishment?" said the Head.

"Only that I am innocent, sir!" said Tom.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"Remove your jacket!" he said harshly.

Tom obeyed.

"You will take up Master Merry, Taggles."

"Yessir!" said Taggles.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed. For a moment resistance was in his mind. To be flogged—before all the school—under the miserable eyes of his friends, the mocking glances of his enemies—it was too much! Taggles, the porter, hesitated a little as he caught the blaze in the junior's eyes, and saw the involuntary clenching of his hands.

The Head saw it, too, and his stern frown darkened still more.

"Take him up, Taggles!" he repeated.

"Yessir!"

There was a sudden crash as the great door at the lower end of the hall was flung violently open. Heads were turned round to see the cause of the disturbance, and Dr. Holmes looked sternly along the crowded hall. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, breathless, with his hat on the back of his head, and his eyeglass streaming at the end of its cord, rushed in.

"Gussy!"

"My hat!"

"D'Arcy!" The Head's voice was like the rumble of thunder. "How dare you, sir, interrupt these solemn proceedings in this manner! I—"

"Pway excuse me, deah sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"It's all wight!"

"What!"

"I've got him, sir."

"Boy! What do you mean? How dare—"

"Come in, Mr. Keyser!" shouted Arthur Augustus; and a little, old man followed him into the hall, looking very breathless and confused. "This way, deah boy."

"Who is this?" thundered the Head.

D'Arcy marched his hesitating companion up the hall, amid a murmur of amazement from all the fellows there.

"Pway excuse my intewwuptin' the pwoceedin's, deah sir!" panted Arthur Augustus. "I am weally vewy sowwy, but I feel sure you would like to know that Tom Mewwy is innocent befoah you lick—I mean flog him, sir."

"What!"

"Eve got pwoof, sir," chirped the swell of St. Jim's.

"Is it possible?" The Head's look changed. "If this is so, D'Arcy, you have done me a great service, as well as your schoolfellow. But—"

"This chap is Mr. Keyser, sir—he is a locksmith fwom Wylcombe. It suddenly flashed into my bwain, sir, when I was thinkin' it out. I rushed down to Wylcombe on my jiggah, sir, to see Mr. Keysah, and asked him wethah a chap had had a key made at his place lately. I know Levison is a clevah beast, but it stwuck me that he might not have been able to make a key himself, so vewy likely he had gone to Mr. Keysah to make one. So I rushed off—"

"What do you mean, Levison?"

"Mr. Keyser wemembahs that a St. Jim's chap came in to have a key made on Thursday, sir, and he would wemembah the key if he saw it again, and he can identify the chap."

The Head breathed hard for a moment.

"Mr. Lathom, will you kindly show this gentleman the duplicate keys?" he said.

"Certainly!" said Mr. Lathom.

Mr. Keyser, very red and confused at finding himself the cynosure of three hundred pairs of eyes, looked at the keys the Form-master held out. He immediately selected the duplicate key.

"That is the key I made, sir," he said. "I filed it down while the young gentleman was waiting."

"Do you see the boy here for whom you made it?" asked the Head.

Mr. Keyser looked round. He was standing within a few

paces of Tom Merry, but his glance did not rest on him, as everyone present noted. Tom Merry's face had lighted up now. He gave Arthur Augustus a grateful look.

"Good old Gussy!" he said.

"I don't see the young gentleman, sir," stammered the locksmith.

"Would you have the kindness to look round, and see whether you can select him among these boys?" said the Head courteously. "A very serious accusation has been made, and if you can recognise the boy in question, it may prevent an injustice being done."

"I will do my best, sir, with pleasure."

And Mr. Keyser walked down the hall, scanning the faces of the juniors.

"Don't you twy to hide behind Hewwies, Levison!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Levison, stand out at once!" rapped out Mr. Lathom.

Mr. Keyser glanced at the cad of the Fourth.

"That is the boy, sir!" he said, pointing to Levison.

"Come here, Levison," said the Head, in a terrible voice.

Levison, white as death, staggered rather than walked up the hall.

The Head's look was terrifying.

"What have you to say, Levison?"

Levison had nothing to say. What could he say? He was discovered—once more his cunning had caused him to overreach himself—he had told too many falsehoods, for a fresh falsehood to be of any use to him now. He stood shrinking and stammering, his eyes on the floor.

"It is you, Levison, who are guilty! I thank you, Mr. Keyser! You have prevented a very serious injustice from being done. D'Arcy, I thank you. You have done very well, D'Arcy—very well indeed!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said Arthur Augustus innocently, and there was a chuckle.

"I am sorry, Merry," said the Head gently; "I am sorry indeed that this mistake has been made. I am only too glad it has been discovered in time. You may go back to your place, Merry. Levison, you will be flogged. You have acted disgracefully—wickedly."

"It—it was a j-joke, sir!" stammered Levison.

"Silence! Take him up, Taggles!"

And Levison was given, then and there, a flogging that he remembered painfully for many a long day.

When it was over, and the fellows streamed out of the Big Hall, Tom Merry was surrounded by congratulating friends—but Tom ran at once to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He grasped his hand, and shook it as if he would shake it off.

Blake thumped D'Arcy on the back, and Lowther shook his other hand, and Manners dug him affectionately in the ribs. The swell of St. Jim's gasped for breath.

"Pway modewate your transports, deah boys," he said.

"It's all wight! I know I'm a wathah clevah chap—but pway don't bweak my fingahs, Tom Mewwy. It's all wight! Whenevah you youngstahs are in a difficult posish, you can always come to me," added Arthur Augustus graciously. "It's up to a fellow of my bwain powahs to help you out of your little difficulties."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo!"

"Three cheers for Gussy!" sang out Monty Lowther.

And three times three for his hitherto unsuspected brain powers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the cheers for Gussy were given with a will. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the hero of the hour—but he bore his blushing honours with becoming modesty. It was only natural, as he said confidentially to Blake, that the fellows should realise sooner or later that he really was a fellow of tact and judgment—and Blake grinned and agreed.

THE END.

Next Wednesday!

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Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE!

A TONGUE-TWISTER.

Bill had a bill board and Bill had a board bill, and Bill's board bill bored Bill, so that Bill sold his bill board to pay his board bill. And then Bill's board bill no longer bored Bill.—Sent in by H. Jones, Liverpool.

TRANSFORMATION.

An old woman in a red cloak was crossing a field one day where a goat was feeding. What transformation took place? The goat turned to butter (burr her), and the old lady to a scarlet runner.—Sent in by M. Isaacs, Brynmawr.

EMBARRASSING.

The train was just about to start, when up ran a newly-married couple. The carriages were full, but at last they managed to see a vacant seat.
"Do you think we can squeeze in there, darling?" murmured Jack.
"Oh, no, dear!" replied the blushing bride. "Don't you think we had better wait until we get home?"—Sent in by J. Evans, Liverpool.

MEANT WHAT HE SAID.

A boy ran into a shop and asked for half a pound of tough steak.
"You mean tender, don't you?" asked the butcher.
"No, tough," replied the boy.
"You must be a funny lad, or else you've made a mistake."
"No, it ain't my mistake. It's for father's supper, see; and if it's tender he'll eat it all, but if it's tough I'll get a bit!"—Sent in by Miss G. Williams, Birkenhead.

SENSATION.

It was a very dull evening, and P.-c. 33 was pacing up and down the deserted road. Not a cook or a meal in sight, and another six hours before him!
Suddenly from a small house a little distance away came frantic cries:
"Help! Police!"
In haste, P.-c. 33 dashed up to the house, and a little boy opened the door.
"What's up here?" demanded P.-c. 33.
"That's my brother Bill yelling!" said the boy. "He's crying because ma is deaf and has such bad eyesight."
"Well, well!" said the officer, visions of the promotion floating away. "What a kind feeling the little chap has!"
"Yes, he's feeling!" retorted the youngster. "Ma's mending his trousers at the back, and he's got them on!"—Sent in by A. Fain, Portsmouth.

HE DIDN'T KNOW.

The ship was well on her way, when there came a cry of "Man overboard!"
The captain called to a new sailor, who happened to be an Irishman, to throw two buoys to the drowning man.
Seeing two boys walking along the deck, Pat immediately caught them up and threw them overboard.
"You silly rascal!" yelled the captain. "I meant cork buoys!"
"Bedad!" murmured Pat. "How was I to know whether they came from Cork or Tipperary?"—Sent in by F. Fullerton, Commercial Road, London, E.C.

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Every Monday.

GAVE THE GAME AWAY.

"I say, mamma," said a little girl to her mother, "are you going to sell our fowl?"
"Of course not! Whatever made you ask such a question?" queried mamma.
"Because I heard pa say to the new housemaid just now, 'Won't we have some fun when the old hen goes away?'"—Sent in by E. Garside, Peckham.

SNUBBED.

An American was staying at an English hotel, and, as usual, began telling tales of the hugeness of all things American. That night the landlord, determined on revenge, hid a live lobster in the sheets of the Yankee's bed. In the middle of the night the visitor was heard to utter a horrible scream. Five minutes later a voice called down from the banisters:
"I say, landlord, what's this in my bed?"
"That? Oh, probably it's only one of our English fleas!" was the crushing retort.
That American was never heard to tell any more tales at that hotel.—Sent in by J. A. Hope, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

A LESSON.

A schoolmaster in the country was delivering an address to the scholars, of which the following passage is an example:
"You boys ought to be very kind to your sisters. I once knew a bad little boy who struck his sister a blow over the eye. Although she didn't fade and die in the early summer-time, when the June roses were blooming, with sweet words of forgiveness on her pallid lips, she rose and hit him over the head with a rolling-pin, so that he couldn't go to school for more than a month on account of not being able to put his cap on!"—Sent in by W. J. Williams, Walsall.

QUITE TRUE!

An enthusiastic orator was sulphurously addressing a large crowd.
"Shall we take this lying down?" he bawled.
"No!" roared a voice from the audience. "The reporters are doing that!"—Sent in by G. Brown, Norwich.

JUST WHAT HE FEARED.

A lady with a wasp-like waist fainted in a city street the other day, and she was carried into a shop.
An Irishman who had witnessed the occurrence looked into the shop a few minutes later, and inquired:
"How is she now?"
"She's coming-to."
"Come in two, has she? Poor thing! I was afraid she would!" replied Mike mournfully.—Sent in by W. Ferguson, Belfast.

LOOKING FORWARD.

"Hallo, Bill! You do look pale and ill! Wot's wrong? Been ill?" asked the sympathetic friend.

Bill passed a heavy hand across his weary brow, and a sigh passed through his lips.

"No," he answered; "I ain't been ill. It's work, Tom—work from ten in the morning till nine at night, and only one hour's rest. Think of it, Tom—think of it!"

"Lumme!" ejaculated Tom. "And how long have you been on that job?"

"I ain't been there yet," replied Bill glumly. "I begin ter-morrow!"—Sent in by P. H. Bree, Leicester.

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THE CORINTHIAN.



A Magnificent New Story of the Old-Time Prize-Ring. By BRIAN KINGSTON.

READ THIS FIRST.

Hilary Bevan, a sturdy young Britisher of gentle birth, who has been living in the country, walks 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' house in Grosvenor Street, Hilary

FINDS HIS FATHER AT THE GAMING-TABLES,

where he has been for three days and nights.

Sir Patrick rises from the table an utterly ruined man. 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 Harley, beats him, and awakens the interest of a young Corinthian named D'Arcy Vavasour.

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.

Other wagers are also to be decided between the two bucks by a cock-fight and a shooting match. Sir Vincent accepts Vavasour's challenge, and Hil goes into training at a country cottage belonging to Vavasour, where the Corinthian's famous fighting-cocks are also quartered under the care of Jem Rider. One night Hil is awakened by a noise outside, and discovers a number of men in the act of setting fire to the pens where the champion cocks are confined. With the aid of Jem Rider, Hil succeeds in putting the men to flight, and two or three days later is introduced to George, Prince of Wales, who is to watch the shooting-match arranged between D'Arcy Vavasour and Sir Vincent Brookes. At the last moment the former receives a telegram to the effect that Captain Lidstone, who was to have shot for him, had fallen from his horse and broken his left arm. Saying nothing of this misfortune to anybody save Hil, he informs the others that it is time for them to start.

As soon as the others have left for the shooting-ground,

Hil hires a horse, and sets out himself. He arrives just as Sir Vincent Brookes is asking D'Arcy Vavasour to bring forward his nominee. Before the latter can answer, Hil announces that he is shooting for Vavasour. Sir Vincent Brookes has heard of Hil's prowess with the rifle, and, fearing that he will lose, he tells Hil that he has some bad news for him, which, however, he will not tell him until after the match. The match proceeds, and after a series of shots, the opponents are equal. Excitement is intense, for the next shot will determine the winner. "The finest match of the year! If I were not umpire, I should be inclined to back the lad!" said the Prince Regent, who was present.

(Now go on with the story.)

Bad News for Hil.

Sir Vincent drew away. His nominee was about to shoot, but he was feeling scant interest in the result. A matter of greater importance was troubling his mind. So the carefully-laid scheme to render the birds of D'Arcy Vavasour impotent to win the cocking match had come to naught. And through the agency of this tall, long-limbed boy, the son of his hated enemy. A blight upon the villains who had permitted themselves to be checkmated by a boy's arm! No reason to ask now why O'Donnell had not communicated with him. Failure was not worth relating.

Curse the boy! He had ruined the father; but of what avail was that if the son succeeded in ruining him?

Gnawing his lips, Sir Vincent failed to watch the captain's shot. The silence that followed did not disturb him. But the shout of applause that told of the failure of his nominee and the victory of Hil Bevan aroused him from his busy, sullen thoughtfulness. With an effort he drove from his face the expression of malignant hatred, and forced himself to smile.

"I have to congratulate you on victory, it appears. Truly, your nominee is a most wonderful marksman," he said, approaching D'Arcy Vavasour. "Well, sir, the first bout of our struggle is yours; time will prove who will be the ultimate winner."

"If time unaided were all I had to be apprehensive of, sir, I should have no fear of the result," returned Vavasour meaningly.

He failed to see the hand that Sir Vincent held towards

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY

"TOM MERRY MINORI!"

him, and went towards Hil and congratulated him with sincerity.

"You learned shooting in a good school, Ned," he said.

"A trick of eye and hand," Hil replied.

"With clean living and a good conscience, and a stout heart behind both. I had small hopes of you, Ned, I admit it, after your two misses. Well, you have won me the first hand of the play, perhaps the opportunity will come for me to prove my gratitude and confidence in you."

The speaker little thought how short a period was to elapse before both the gratitude and the confidence were to be put to the test.

Vavasour was called away, and Hil, suddenly remembering the remark Sir Vincent Brookes had made to him before the commencement of the shooting, and seeing him at that moment alone, went up to him to ask him for an explanation.

"You mentioned, sir, that you had a piece of news to communicate to me. Will you have the kindness to inform me what it is?" he said.

"With pleasure, Mr. Bevan—or, rather, I should say with much sorrow," replied the baronet quickly. "For it is no pleasure to me to be the bearer of ill-tidings to one who, like yourself, is so closely related to one of my oldest friends. Your father—"

"Is it necessary for you, sir, to bring my father's name into the matter?" Hil interrupted.

The fate that had befallen his father, and the knowledge that the man speaking to him was chiefly responsible, though absolute proof might be unavailable, brought a threatening tone into Hil's voice and an angry flush to his cheeks. The temptation was strong within him to take this false-tongued, evil genius, arrant villain in spite of his birth and position, in his strong hands and inflict the physical punishment that alone would have been a relief to his feelings.

Sir Vincent must have read what was passing through the lad's brain, for he stepped back a pace as though fearing immediate assault.

"That is as you choose," he replied. "But it happens that the news concerns your father. Of course, it rests with you whether you are willing to hear it or not."

There was something in the manner of the man, in the expression of his little, ever-moving eyes, that reminded Hil of what he had read of poisonous snakes. His last words suggested the lightning-like motion of the venomous reptile's tongue that is the preliminary to the striking of a fatal blow. A sudden fear gripped him.

"I will listen to what you have to say," he said, controlling himself.

"Your father's life is in immediate danger," Sir Vincent said, slowly and distinctly.

Now this was something Hil had not been expecting to hear, and the blow went home; but narrowly as the shifty eyes watched they could read nothing in Hil's face showing how hardly he was hit.

"I did not inform you before for the reason I gave; I did not wish to spoil your shooting," went on the baronet.

"When did you learn this?" Hil asked.

"But this morning, before leaving London. I had it from one who knows Sir Patrick Bevan well."

"Then he must know also where my father is. Where is that?"

"At Burnham, Essex," Sir Vincent said. "Only the barest details have come to me, I regret to say, so that I can tell you no more than that he has received a dangerous wound arising out of a quarrel over a game of cards."

Hil was not listening. He was staring with set eyes and pallid face straight across the lush green pastures to the trees lining the road beyond. He could scarcely realise that what had been told him actually could be. His father dying, and yet all about him was so fair and peaceful, and himself glowing with life and health and lusty strength, a few seconds before filled with the elation of his shooting victory. It was incredible!

Ignoring the lad's inattention, Sir Vincent was still speaking. It appeared that Sir Patrick Bevan had fallen into acquaintance with a gentleman resting at the same inn as himself. A game of cards had been suggested. They had played, and presently Sir Patrick had reason to believe—or thought he had. Who could say?—his opponent was not playing fairly. Impetuously he had accused the gentleman of cheating. The charge had been warmly resented; the lie flung back in the accuser's teeth. The only possible result between gentlemen had happened. A challenge was given and promptly accepted.

By candlelight in the room where they had played, the frightened landlord as witness, the duel had been fought. Attacking warmly, although opposing a much younger man, Sir Patrick had been severely wounded. It was said that the gentleman—

The even flow of words stopped. Turning on his heel, Hil

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went straight to the man who had been engaged in throwing up the pennies, and demanded of him the mare on which he had ridden to the ground. The field was deserted, the party of gentlemen having retired to the house. While the man was executing the order given him, Hil took pencil and paper from his pocket, and wrote. He had made up his mind. To his father he must go without delay. Not even the agreement made with Mr. Vavasour could be allowed to prevent him, even delay him for a moment. He felt sure Mr. Vavasour would be the first to admit the righteousness of his decision when he received the note being written and learned the cause. Whether or no, Hil knew that he was acting rightly.

Folding the paper, he gave it to the man who brought the mare, and, with a shilling, bidding him take the note without delay to Mr. Vavasour. Then he mounted, and rode away. Where was the road to Burnham, he did not know, but it could be found.

A mocking smile on his thin lips, Sir Vincent Brookes watched Hil until the road was gained, and he was out of sight. Then he turned and went quietly to the house.

"Faith, 'tis a new accomplishment of mine, and one vastly convenient," he told himself gleefully. "I had never suspected it of myself. And the fish bit easily; hook as well as bait swallowed. Well, well, others before Hilary Bevan have had profitless errands and survived. But a plague on his shooting! By Heaven, but I could wish the news were true."

And what he meant by these words Hil was riding to find out.

Hilary's Errand.

That ride from Amptill, in Buckinghamshire, to Burnham, in Essex, was an experience Hilary Bevan never forgot. He was going to an unknown place, riding a horse that did not belong to him, and leaving without explanation (other than that contained in the note hurriedly written and handed to Lord Alvanley's servant) the man to whom he felt he owed so much.

But that he was justified he had no doubt. Before all things he placed the duty he owed and the love he bore his father—and with his father lying in danger of death, his own place was by his side.

Later, the innkeeper at Leigh could be recompensed for the enforced loan of the mare. Later, a full explanation would be given to Mr. Vavasour, and Hil felt assured that Mr. Vavasour would agree that he had acted rightly. Had not D'Arcy Vavasour declared Sir Patrick Bevan to be one of his closest friends?

And he would be back in time for the fight with Fennel, of Birmingham. The thought of evading that obligation never entered the lad's mind. He was pledged to enter the ring as D'Arcy Vavasour's man, and he was bound in honour to do so. The battle was due in less than three weeks' time, but before that his father would be out of danger, or, if the worst happened—Hil swallowed a lump that rose in his throat at the suggestion of the awful alternative, and gave a shake to the reins, quickening the half-bred hunter mare into a swifter pace.

But in a few strides he checked her into a long, easy trot, the least fatiguing pace for a horse that is to travel a long distance. How far distant was Burnham he had but the vaguest notion, but he assumed a long ride was before him, and he was horseman enough to know the foolishness of taking the first part of a long journey at a great speed. He had no money with him for the hire of other horses, and would be forced to rely wholly upon the mare. Therefore he rode carefully, husbanding the mare's strength, walking her down the long and steep hills, and restraining her from breaking into a gallop, to which she was inclined.

And all the time he was praying fervently that no accident might befall his mount, or other hindrance arise, and that he would reach his father in time.

He had been promised two hundred guineas if he beat Fennel, and of that Harry Harmer had assured him he was quite capable. And Vavasour would surely understand.

Poor Hil! How was he to know that at that very moment D'Arcy Vavasour was seeking him, astonished and hurt at his disappearance? Or that the note he had written would never reach its proper destination? The keeper had seemed an honest enough fellow, and trustworthy.

Had Hil been aware of Joe Martin's fondness for a glass—or more—of home-brewed, he would have spared the time to find D'Arcy Vavasour and give him in person the reason calling for his hasty leaving. As it was, the keeper, finding his way to the servants' quarters, at once sat down with a quart mug of ale in front of him, and was speedily engaged in giving to the interested company a wordy and circumstantial account of the afternoon's wonderful shooting, with

much enthusiastic enlarging upon the wonderful marksmanship displayed by Hil.

Mug had succeeded mug until Joe had become slightly mixed of brain and hazy of eye. Bethinking himself of tobacco, he had lugged out his pipe, filled it, and put a hand in his pocket to find a scrap of paper wherewith to make a spill. Hil's note had come handiest, was twisted up, lighted at the kitchen fire, and the remnant thrown into the blaze when the pipe was fairly going. Later, Joe Martin had remembered his commission, hunted for the note, and failed to find it.

"Drat it!" he exclaimed testily. "I knows I had the letter; wherever can it be, now? Must ha' lost it. Well, least said, soonest mended. If I don't tell of th' letter, maybe no one'll ask for it, and none be t' wiser for that I lost it!"

And on this decision he acted.

When D'Arcy Vavasour found that Hil had not come up to the house as requested, a servant was sent to find him. The man returned saying that the gentleman was not to be found. Surprised that Hil should have departed so unceremoniously, Mr. Vavasour at length remembered that the last he had seen of the lad was in conversation with Sir Vincent Brookes. To the baronet he therefore went, with a civil question. But Sir Vincent carelessly replied that he had but addressed a few words to "Ned Harley," asking him where and how he had learned such remarkable shooting skill.

"After that he mounted the horse he had come upon and went off," said Brookes.

"He did not say where?"

Sir Vincent stared, then broke into a low laugh. He seemed to be vastly amused by the question.

"My dear Vavasour," he cried, protestingly, "you surely do not desire to make me suppose you believe your prize-fighter would amuse himself by retailing his own private affairs with me? I cannot be supposed to know where he went, or why he went. Crush me! But 'twould be too much of a jest."

The circumstances are peculiar, and such that I cannot believe Sir Vincent Brookes not to be interested in Ned Harley," returned Vavasour, with crisp meaning.

But again the baronet smiled.

"I protest, my dear sir; you presume me too curious," he said, indifferently, although his little eyes were searching Vavasour's face as if to find there some indication of the meaning lying behind the words he had uttered. "My interest in such as Ned Harley—against whom, personally, I have nought to say. He is a fine shot, and not indifferent as a boxer—is precisely that I have for the horse on whose ability to win a race or the reverse I stake my money. Your fellow did not inform me where he was going, and, believe me"—Sir Vincent bowed profoundly—"I did not ask him. I trust I am not guilty of the vice of impertinence."

"Yet I venture to believe"—for once in his life, D'Arcy Vavasour was genuinely irritated—"the interest Sir Vincent Brookes will feel as to the whereabouts of Ned Harley on a certain forthcoming date will have nothing impertinent in it."

He looked sharply at the other, but Sir Vincent met him with an easy smile.

"Ah, there you speak truly, Vavasour," he said, affably. "If your Ned Harley be not in the ring next Friday fortnight, then I shall be grievously disappointed; others, also, I can answer for my rascal, Ephraim Fennel. He looks forward to the meeting with much pleasure, I can assure you."

"It is well for him to take his pleasure now, then; the opportunity will probably be denied him later," Vavasour said shortly, and turned away.

Yet he was ill at ease; there seemed some vague portent of coming disaster in Hil's abrupt and unexpected departure, and he could not shake off the feeling. Knowing what he did, and suspecting more, his thoughts dwelt upon Sir Vincent Brookes, yet he could not discover any connection between the two on this occasion.

Refusing his host's invitation to remain the night at Houghton House, he drove early in the evening to Jem Rider's cottage at Leigh, hoping that Hil had preceded him there.

But there Hil was not, being at that moment on the eastward road out of Bishop Stortford, where he stopped for a few minutes to wash out the mare's mouth, and gain information of his further direction. But Harmer was waiting with much anxiety and some trepidation, which grew the stronger when his employers asked for Hil.

Harmer was sent at once into the village, much relieved to learn that his own responsibility for Hil's absence was lessened. But although the trainer discovered that a horse had been hired there by Hil, information was carried no

farther. Hil had not returned, and the landlord was angry and uneasy at the non-return of his mare.

There was anger as well as uneasiness in D'Arcy Vavasour's mind as he turned his horse's head Londonwards. Jem Rider ventured to warn him of the danger of driving along the North Road at night, highwaymen and footpads being still much in evidence, but the old man was curtly silenced. It might be, although no reason was conceivable, that Hil had gone to London. But the horses began to falter within an hour—they had covered more than fifty miles that day—and at Hatfield Vavasour was compelled to make a halt. Obtaining fresh cattle, leaving his own in charge of his servant at the Salisbury Arms, he continued the journey alone, reckless of the road stoppages.

But nothing had been seen of Hil at his London house; neither did further inquiry show that the lad had gone to one or other of the likely places he might have visited.

For a fortnight Vavasour had no news, and by the Wednesday of the week in which the fight between Hil and Fennel was to come off he was equally ignorant of what had happened to his man and where he was. Frequently he and Sir Vincent Brookes had met, and he had watched the baronet carefully. He made no attempt to express his surprise at "Ned Harley's" defection, or to conceal the fact of his disappearance. But from Sir Vincent nothing whatever was to be gained. His own surprise was too genuine,—so believed Vavasour—for it to be possible he should have had a hand in the lad's mysterious vanishing.

And Brookes' frequently-expressed surprise was genuine, though now and again, when in his private room at home, he would smile and chuckle to himself. He had not the faintest idea of Hil's whereabouts, or if aught had happened to him, but he did know that he had succeeded beyond his hopes.

In the sporting inns and the boxing academies the news was speedily made known, and much was said and more speculated upon the complete loss of all trace of "The Corinthian," which was the name that had been bestowed by the humbler performers and followers of the "fancy" upon D'Arcy Vavasour's man, in imitation of the title of the "Gentleman Boxer" by which Dick Humphries, Mendoza's great rival, was known.

"Blow me dickey! I don't know what to make of it. It beats me!" was Tom Belcher's expression; and in that was expressed the feelings of the majority.

That Ned Harley's heart had failed him as the prospect of meeting Ephraim Fennel drew nearer neither Belcher nor the major believed, and the few who did, and said so, found their views received so badly, that they aired them in private only. Two or three plain-speaking men—Cribb among them—did not hesitate to affirm their belief that Ned had been "got at." But how, or by whom, and with what result, was a problem over which they might wag their heads until they fell off.

But as the days went by, and Hil still remained fugitive, the more intense grew the excitement and the firmer D'Arcy Vavasour's conviction that his confidence had been misplaced.

"The father's weakness is gaming. Keep himself from it he cannot; never will he be able," he told himself bitterly. "Maybe the son has a weakness also; one I have not discovered. I am a fool ever to have believed I had found one whom I could wholly trust. And yet he came to shoot on my behalf; there was no reason why he should. Am I mistaken—too hasty? But if he— Well, time will show the truth, perhaps. But I doubt."

That the cocking match had gone in his favour had failed to give him the satisfaction old Jem Rider had derived from the victory. He had won two of the three events on which the important wager with Sir Vincent Brookes depended, but he was far from being a contented man. He was disappointed in Hil; his trust had been betrayed. Never before had he been so greatly drawn to any person as to the lad whom he knew as Ned Harley, and strongly suspected of owning an entirely different and better-known name. And now he felt that his instinct had played him false. His self-love was hurt.

"I have been creating a romance, and mistaken it for truth," he told himself bitterly.

But the real romance creator was Sir Vincent Brookes, and although he had not mistaken it for truth, he had found it infinitely more valuable than the latter.

Again and again had he found cause to congratulate himself upon the readiness of wit and fertility of invention that had enabled him to retail the purely fictitious story that had sent Hil post-haste to Burnham.

It did him credit, for it was invented entirely upon the spur of the moment. When he had told Hil that he had some news to communicate his only intention had been so to disturb the lad's thoughts as to put him off his shooting. Compelled to make good his words, he had conceived and

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 295.

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



related a story for which his cunning brain alone was responsible.

And what he had said Hilary had accepted as genuine. Little wonder that the baronet congratulated himself upon his talent as a maker of fiction.

And the fine effort of his imagination had succeeded beyond all expectation. Hil had gone to Burnham. What might have happened there or since to account for the lad's continued absence Sir Vincent was as wholly ignorant as D'Arcy Vavasour himself. It was a stroke of luck entirely, and as the gainer thereby, the baronet did not distress himself seeking an explanation. He had intended simply to gratify a mean vindictiveness; that it might assist him to win his triple bet with D'Arcy Vavasour was an additional, but none the less welcome, consequence. If Ned Harley were not on the ground when Ephraim Fennel entered the ring, then D'Arcy Vavasour would have to pay a sum large enough to rid Sir Vincent of all his present embarrassments.

A Great Shock.

TEN o'clock in the evening found Hil riding into the ancient town of Chelmsford. He had come forty-seven miles in less than five hours, and, his judicious nursing of her notwithstanding, the mare was beginning to show signs of fatigue.

From the ostler at the Saracen's Head, where a halt was necessary, both for the sake of his mount and himself, for he had not tasted food since midday, he learned that more than fifteen miles still intervened between himself and the little village of Burnham-on-Crouch. To Hull Bridge he would have a good road, beyond that, along the estuary formed by the River Crouch, the man preferred to say nothing.

The ride had not been without incident. Once he had been mistaken for an escaping thief. Twice—that was after it grew dark—slow-plodding wayfarers had assumed him to be a highwayman, and had piteously besought him to disregard them. One added quaintly that he would find a richer booty a few miles ahead in a gentleman who had already passed them.

He caught up this gentleman two miles outside Chelmsford—a square, stiffly-built young man, so far as Hil could see, who rode a raw-boned, powerful horse in a fashion that led Hil to suspect the exercise was not very familiar.

They fell into conversation, riding together to the Saracen's Head, and Hil could not resist the temptation of relating the incident of being mistaken for a gentleman of the road, with the recommendation that had followed.

"And a tight fellow you'd be, and one folks would be chary of meeting were it your profession," laughed his companion. "You can use a sword, I'll warrant?"

"I have learned fencing, truly," Hil answered.

"And you can shoot?"

"Passably well."

"And strong o' body with it, I dare swear, sir," the squarely-built man said, measuring Hil with an approving eye. "Can you put up a hundredweight above your head, half in either hand?"

"I think I might do so," replied Hil. He was pleased to find someone with whom to speak, and his companion was jolly-voiced and good-tempered. "And even hold them out sideways at arm's stretch."

"Nay, you can do that? Then you're a man, sir! I don't find many such. But I beg leave to doubt."

Hil was no boaster, but a challenge is hard to ignore, and in the yard of the inn he was reminded of his words.

"Let me see you, sir, make good your words," asked his companion, from whose appearance little was to be gleaned, for he was wrapped from head to foot in a voluminous dark blue cloak. "There'll be a couple of half-hundredweights about, and I'd surely like to see if you can do what you claim."

The weights were found, and, elevating them aloft, Hil slowly allowed his hands to drop until his arms were at right angles with his body. For a couple of seconds he held the weights out before lowering his arms.

"Gad!" the other ejaculated. "I'm glad I met you, sir! Where lies your road from now onward?"

"To Burnham."

"My own direction, sir." And there was no mistaking the speaker's pleasure. "You stay there long?"

"That I cannot say."

"You are luckier than I," the other grumbled. "For my sins I am planted there until Heaven knows when. I hope I may see you, sir."

They partook of a cold meal together, and it was almost midnight when, the landlord's advice notwithstanding, they left for the final stage of their journey.

(A long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 235.

"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 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."

Miss A. L. Spurr, 42, Troyeville Chambers, Troyeville, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers interested in flower pressing, etc. Age 17-18.

G. Bartlett, Aribi Street, Edendael, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers in England interested in postcards.

"W. H. Morris," Taumata, Crescent Road, Rosenbath, Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers interested in physical culture.

J. Vianelo, P.O. Box 383, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers in England and Scotland. Age 14-16.

W. Hindhaugh, Croydon, Camperdown, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers. Age 15-16.

M. Banks, 122, Capel Street, Windsor, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Wales. Age 17.

A. Aburn, Kimberley Hospital, C.C. South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader. Age 14-16.

J. Vedovitch, P.O. Box 277, Durban, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Bath. Age 14-15.

S. M. Every, P.O. Box 219, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers in England. Age 17-18.

G. A. Spedding, 258, George Street, Dunedin, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers interested in photography. Age 17-18.

J. F. East, Elsternwick, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in wireless telegraphy and postcards.

J. Schaffer, Box 784, Pretoria, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England. Age 17-18.

J. Murphy, 2, Moreland Road, Moreland, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Australia, interested in compulsory training. Age 15.

B. Barter, P.O. Box 3013, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader. Age 16.

Miss M. Clayton, Bowden Street, Camp Hill, Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers in South Africa or Scotland. Age 16-17.

N. Farrell, "Courier," North Street, Marrickville, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles. Age 16-18.

H. W. Price, c.o., Howard Smith & Co., Fremantle, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in the British Empire.

E. A. Carr, "Tydvil," Humewood, Port Elizabeth, South Africa wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps. Age 18-20.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

No. 2. GRAND NEW SERIES OF FOOTBALL ARTICLES.



One of the great charms of the fine game of football is that the person who plays it can ever be learning something new. Dodges can be picked up constantly, and some of the players who have been in the very front rank for many years are still learning the latest tricks of the trade. When I was with Manchester United, our outside right, Meredith, one of the best men who ever played in the position, would often be seen in the practice-field, performing new dodges with which to get the better of opponents. That is the way to get to the very top of the tree.

Hence, a very good reason why young players should spend a portion of their time watching the men who know the game from A to Z, and watching them intelligently. When their tricks have been picked up, the youth who is desirous of improving his game will go straightway home and commence to try some of the things he has learnt.

The difference between the tip-topper and the moderate man is often a question of dodges. There are tricks which may be performed by every man on the field, no matter what his position, and there are others which are specially suitable to one place on the field.

One of the great sources of strength in that fine full-back, Macken, of Newcastle United, is to be found in the perfection of a dodge which he has worked to such a state that it has become a fine art. I refer to his habit of playing the opposing forwards off-side. If he sees a player lying in wait for a pass further up the field than the man in possession of the ball, he makes a little run forward at the proper moment, with the result that when the pass is made the player who is receiving it is in an off-side position. This trick has to be played intelligently or it will lead the player into trouble. If the man to whom the ball is being passed does not happen to be in an off-side position, and the full-back runs forward, there is trouble in store, and a goal will as likely as not be the outcome of the blunder.

As a rule the free kick given from a place just outside the penalty line is a no use whatever to the side called upon to take it, for the simple reason that the defenders just line up their men in a solid rank, and the way to the goal is barred. That is their dodge, and one which has to be overcome by a dodge on the other side.

Quite a good way of taking a free kick under such conditions is for one man to shape as if he were about to kick the ball. Instead of doing so, however, he kicks over it at the last moment by arrangement, and up runs a man from behind to take the kick. I have seen more than one goal scored by this dodge. When, had the kick been in the ordinary way, nothing whatever would have resulted from it.

I mentioned Meredith above, and one of his favourite dodges is the back-heeling of the ball to the half-back. This half-back knows that Meredith may do this when in possession, so he follows up the forward. Instead of trying to beat the full-back, Meredith when tackled just backheels the ball to the half-back, who has often a clear run into goal. It is surprising what can be done by forwards who have a thorough understanding with the men immediately behind them.

The Sunderland right-wing pair, Buchan and Mordue, with the aid of their half-back Cuggy, have perfected a fine way of beating the defenders. The three of them working together bring the ball along in a triangular sort of movement. When the outside man has the ball the defenders naturally think he will pass to the insider, so the inside man is covered. But the outsider

just slips the ball to the half-back, who immediately takes up the running. Then the inside man will drop back to the half-back position, the outsider will take the inside berth, and the half-back will be up where the outside-right would be in the ordinary course. This chopping and changing about can only be done when there is a perfect understanding between the players, but when it is done it is very effective indeed.

Very much on a par with the back-heeling to one of your own side is the trick often practised by wing men of kicking the ball against the legs of an opponent when they are near their own goal line. If it is impossible to get in a centre, the outside man will just kick the ball against the defender's legs, and it will go over the line for a valuable corner kick.

There have been discussions as to whether the throw in is sufficient punishment for a player who kicks the ball out a lot. In cases of deliberate kicking out to waste time it is not, but the ordinary throw in is not made as much of as it might be. Some teams will slavishly wait for the half-back to come quite a long distance to throw the ball in. A much better dodge is for the forward who is nearest to the ball when it goes out to pick it up and throw in quickly without waiting for the half-back to come up at all. The half-back may be better at throwing in, but while you are waiting for him to come up to perform the duty it must also be remembered that your opponents are gathering their forces, and in consequence the throw will quite likely be useless.

One has to be careful with this quick throw in, however, or it will be a foul throw, and all the possible good effects of the quick throw will be more than wasted. For this reason it is not at all inadvisable for the forward to practise throwing in a bit when not playing a match.

A favourite dodge of the Aston Villa centre-forward—the side I played in last season—is to shape as if about to kick the ball which is coming from the side of the field, and then to jump over it, and allow it to pass on to a colleague who is probably unmarked, and in a much better position for having a shot at goal. We got quite a number of goals by this dodge last season. It is all the more effective because the full-back

can never be quite sure whether the centre-forward will resort to it or not.

The dodges which I have explained are worth doing; but there are other kinds of dodges, which are contrary to the spirit of the game, and not worth doing at all by sportsmen, dodges which enable a side to take a mean advantage over its opponents. Doubtful dodges, even if they are resorted to only by one or two members of a team, give the whole team a bad name, and this is one of the reasons why too "tricky" players are not popular with their clubmates. I have mentioned kicking out, a policy which should not be adopted.

Legitimate dodges are all right, and every effort must be made to master them; but, in our anxiety to win, let us not forget that at least football is a sport, and as such should be played in sportsmanlike spirit.

H. J. Halse

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 295.

By STEVE BLOOMER,
The Famous International.

Next Wednesday: "GOALS I HAVE KICKED!"

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

WHOM TO WRITE TO :
EDITOR
"THE GEM" LIBRARY
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE,
 FARRINGTON STREET, LONDON, E.C.

OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS
"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY
 EVERY MONDAY
 AND
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
 EVERY FRIDAY

For Next Wednesday.

"TOM MERRY MINOR!"By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

Our next splendid, long, complete story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's is particularly interesting and amusing. Things are usually pretty lively in the junior quarters at St. Jim's, as all my chums know, but the pranks of the latest recruit at the grand old school:

"TOM MERRY MINOR!"

cause all records to be eclipsed!

YOUR EDITOR ASKS A SPECIAL FAVOUR!

I have a special favour to ask of my chums this week, and, in asking it, I must draw their particular attention to the

Tickets of Introduction

printed on the cover opposite this page. The idea of the tickets is to provide a

Tangible Reminder

which can be given by my chums to non-readers of our magnificent companion paper, the "Penny Popular," together with a strong recommendation of that paper. By pasting the page of tickets on thin cardboard, and then carefully cutting out each one, my chums will have a bundle of handy tickets to give away to their friends. This is what I am asking each one of my loyal reader-friends to do. I want them to go to one of their friends, who has never yet sampled the delights of the "Penny Popular," and say to him or her—for I am specially looking to my large army of girl-readers to help me in this—"I am sure you would enjoy reading the "Penny Popular" so much. I read it, and think it's ripping.

Why not Get a Copy,

and see for yourself? Here is a special ticket of introduction, which the Editor gave me specially to give you, and to be presented to any newsgirl in the town."

Then, having parted from you, with your words still ringing in his ears, your friend will have the ticket in his hand, to remind him of your recommendation whenever his eyes light on it; and the result will be that sooner or later one of the local newsgirls will have that ticket presented to him—and another reader will be added to the long roll of "Penny Popites."

This is the scheme, then, in which I ask my readers' generous co-operation; and I know that I shall not have to ask it in vain.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Will the following readers accept my best thanks for their letters and suggestions? Mrs. Carlton (Dublin), Fred Taylor (Manchester), H. B. (Norfolk), C. Mills (Littlehampton).

Ardent Reader (Bishopsgate).—All queries for this column are dealt with in rotation. Your friend was correct in his statement.

Puggy (Wallington).—Thanks for letter. The Christian names you want are George, Patrick, and Francis. Kit the Gipsy was the hero of a story published in this journal some time back. Wally D'Arcy has again come into the "lime light" lately, as you will have seen.

B. Crellin (I. O. M.).—Start a Manx "Gem" and "Magnet" League by all means.

HOW TO WRITE A SHORT STORY.—No. 3.

By a Successful Author.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SHORT STORIES.

You have no doubt discovered that there are many different styles of short stories, and that different papers prefer different styles? Very well, then, it remains for you first to examine those different kinds of stories; secondly, to decide which type you think you can write best; and, thirdly, what papers favour the type you are going to write. My advice is, if you want to make any money in writing of any kind, never write unless you have some definite market in front of you. A man doesn't make a bicycle without knowing the market he is making it for—that is, if he's making it for a living. If he's making cycles as a hobby, he doesn't need to bother about markets. However, markets is a subject which will be dealt with later; so now for the nature of short stories.

Roughly, they may be divided thus—dramatic, either in form or in effect. The difference between the dramatic in form carries an air of the drama all through, but the story that is dramatic in effect may be told in an ordinary way; but the climax and the theme itself is highly dramatic. Under this heading we may include the detective drama, which is a series of climaxes and anti-climaxes, gradually leading up to a grand and unexpected climax, which puts the stopper on all previous thrills. It is a popular type of story nowadays, but it requires no little power of conception to write it, and one should be well up in detectives' methods, etc. In writing this problem story, there is no need to begin at the first chapter, as it is read. You can work backwards from a good anti-climax right to the beginning.

Then there is the impossible story, which is very daring in its conception, and although people will scoff at it, and say "Absurd, impossible," they will nevertheless read it closely, and be fascinated by it in spite of its impossibility.

Then there is the burlesque story, which is a rolicking skit on some recognised type of dramatic or other story. For instance, at the time when Boy Scouts were being boomed in the Press, a well-known London magazine made a hit with a story after this style: "Prime Minister at lunch. German shell smashes his glass." Boy Scout rushes in. "Germans have landed." "No hope!" groans the Prime Minister. "Yes, sir," said the Boy Scout, striking his staff on the ground. "The Boy Scouts are armed and ready." "Thank Heaven, we are saved!" exclaimed the Prime Minister, and he ordered another glass of milk and soda. I do not advise a beginner to tackle the burlesque story, though.

Of course, the love story predominates. The majority of stories have a love interest in some shape or form, and the secret of success is in treating this much worn theme in an original manner, and making people want to smile about it and sympathise, instead of knock the hero's and the heroine's heads together. The humorous story is perhaps the most difficult of all, vide the fact that its masters are in the minority. The cause of failure in so many would-be funny story-writers is the painful effort to be funny. Be natural in your style, and when your natural style becomes naturally funny you will have written a humorous story.

(Another of these interesting articles next week. Order a copy now.)

The Editor

PLEASE CUT OUT THESE TICKETS AND
DISTRIBUTE THEM AMONGST YOUR
FRIENDS—EDITOR, "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

No. 52. 4/10/13 TICKET of introduction to any newsagent in this town. Ask for the GRAND BIRTHDAY NUMBER of THE PENNY POPULAR On Sale Friday, OCTOBER 3.	No. 52. 4/10/13 TICKET of introduction to any newsagent in this town. Ask for the GRAND BIRTHDAY NUMBER of THE PENNY POPULAR On Sale Friday, OCTOBER 3.	No. 52. 4/10/13 TICKET of introduction to any newsagent in this town. Ask for the GRAND BIRTHDAY NUMBER of THE PENNY POPULAR On Sale Friday, OCTOBER 3.
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See Column 1 of "Your Editor's Chat."

THIS FRIDAY!

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3rd.

Three New Additions to
"The Boys' Friend"
3d. Complete Library
will be on Sale at all Newsagents.

No. 241:

"FOR LEAGUE AND CUP!"

A Story of Football and Adventure.
By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

No. 242:

"RIDING TO WIN!"

A Magnificent Racing Story.
By ANDREW GRAY.

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Or, Round The World for £1,000,000."

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SYLVIA POWER

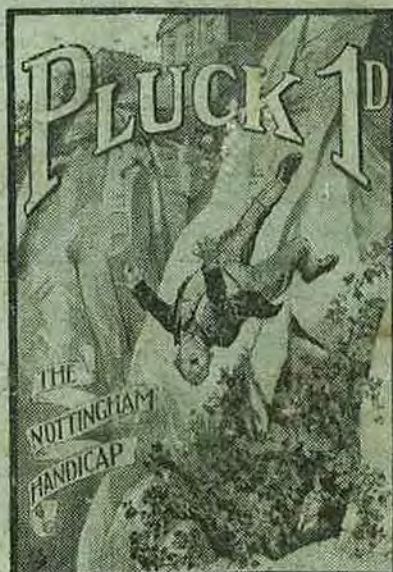
—The Girl in the Iron Mask.

No writer of fiction ever invented a more striking and mysterious character than Sylvia Power. She is altogether new and original, and her exploits will thrill you as you have never been thrilled before. Dramatic, realistic, and intensely powerful — every story of Sylvia Power is a masterpiece. You will want to read them all. The first appears in "Merry and Bright" (one halfpenny), on Thursday. Why not order YOUR copy now?

MERRY & BRIGHT

MORE INTERESTING READING

will be found in this week's



A small reproduction of the front cover of this week's PLUCK illustrating a stirring incident from one of the tales.

Out on Friday. Price One Penny.