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Cutts started, and his blood thrilled to his heart, for suddenly from the opening in the ground a head and shoulders rose into view. The close-cropped bullet-head—the dirty, savage face, with four days' stubble of beard on the chin—the gleaming, desperate eyes—the mark of the broad arrow on the torn and muddy tunic—betrayed the convict. It was Jonas Racke—No. 101. (A thrilling incident in our long, complete school tale inside.)

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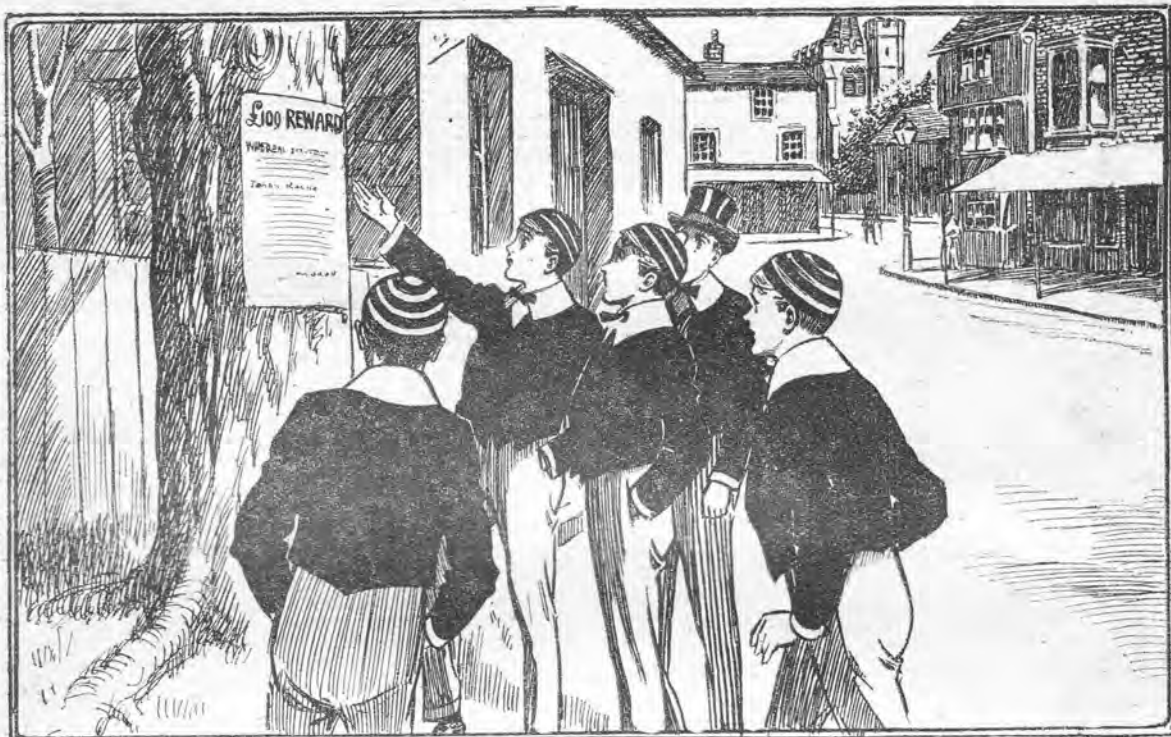


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£100 Reward! These words, in large letters, were to be read on most of the boardings and dead walls in Wayland and Rylcombe. There was unusual excitement in the quiet countryside. Jonas Racke—Convict 101—had broken out of Blackmoor Prison—and warders and mounted constables were seeking him far and wide.

CHAPTER 1. One Hundred Quid!

"**B**WOKE!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, asked the question. And Blake and Herries and Digby replied sadly and solemnly:

"Stony!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy received that reply with unexpected satisfaction. He nodded quite cheerfully, and in fact smiled.

"Vewy good!" "Good, you ass?" said Jack Blake. "I don't see anything good about it! I've just asked Tom Merry for a loan to tide us over till Saturday, and I find that he's stony, too! So is Manners; so is Lowther; so is Kangaroo. All on the rocks!"

"I am stony, thou art stony, he is stony!" said Herries ingubriously. And Digby went on—Dig being a great French scholar—"Nous sommes stony, vous etes stony, ils sont stony."

"Yaas, it's wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus.

Next Wednesday:

OUR GRAND WINTER NUMBER. PRICE 2d.

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"Howevah, as you are all stony, without any pwospect of waisin' the wind, pewwaps you'll be willin' to back me up in waisin' a weally considerable sum of money."

"Like a bird!" said Blake immediately. "Like a whole nest of birds! What's the little game? Have you found out where the Head keeps the funds?"

"Weally, Blake—" "Do you know a millionaire who's going home to night down a dark lane?"

"Pway be sewious!" "Or has Cutts of the Fifth put you on to a dead cert. for the Swindleton Handicap?"

"Pway listen to me, deah boys! In the first place, we are all stony bwoke. My patah has somehow failed to reply to the urgent telegwam I sent him, and that telegwam wan away with my last tannah. We are all bwoke to the wide, and it is sternly necessary to waise some money. I've hit on the ideah."

"Well, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," said Blake thoughtfully. "If you can raise enough for tea it will be a giddy blessing. Whom are you going to borrow it of? I've tried nearly all the Fourth and the Shell."

"I'm not going to bowwow it."

"Can't steal it; it's against the rules," said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake! We are goin' to earn the money!"

"My hat! How much?"

"A hundred pounds!"

Blake and Herries and Digby staggered against the wall of Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Farm passage in the School House. They seemed overcome.

"A hundred pounds?" said Blake faintly.

"Yaas."

"And we are going to earn it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He'll wake up presently," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I am not dwreamin'. We can earn a hundred pounds—quite easily, in fact; and the only difficulty is—"

"Oh, there's a difficulty?" asked Jack Blake sarcastically. "I was beginning to hope we should have the hundred pounds in time for tea. We'd have had an extra pot of jam. It would run to it out of a hundred pounds."

"Yaas, there's a difficulty. The question awises," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully, polishing his eyeglass, "whethah we should be justified in takin' the money afthah we had earned it. That is the point I am wathah doubtful about."

"Oh, that's all right! We are justified in taking anything we can get when it's tea-time, and there isn't a shot in the locker," said Blake. "I can settle all your doubts on that point at once. Just point out the chap who's got the hundred pounds, and we'll take our cricket-stumps and start on him."

"Hear, hear!" said Digby and Herries heartily.

"Will you be sewious?" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "We can get that hundred pounds quite simply, with a chap of my bwain powah to diwect the opewations. But I am not certain that we should be justified in takin' it. What we've got to do is to assist justice, and back up law and ordah."

Blake wrinkled his brows in reflection.

"Well, I don't approve of law and order, as a rule," he said. "But I'd back up law and order at a hundred quid a time, any day. One could stretch a point."

"In a sense, it is our duty as citizens to do the best we can in the mattah," Arthur Augustus remarked. "I suppose you agree with me there."

"Certainly," said Blake. "I don't know what you're talking about, but I agree with you. I always was an agreeable chap."

"But whethah we could take the money after wunnin' the chap down, that's what I'm wathah doubtful about."

"Whose the chap?" asked Blake, beginning seriously to wonder whether his aristocratic chum was a little bit off his "rocker." "And where is he?"

"He's hidin' in the woods."

"Oh, he's hidin' in the woods, is he?" said Blake. "And he's got the hundred quid on him?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then what's the good of running him down if he's not got the hundred quid?"

"We should get the hundred pounds if we wan him down," explained Arthur Augustus. "I suppose that's quite oleah, even to your bwain."

"Clear as mud!" agreed Blake.

"Might try in the New House," said Herries, who had been thinking. "Old Figgins would lend us a few bob like a shot—if he had any."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "We're not goin' to take Figgins & Co. into this ideah. Study No. 6 could do with the hundred pounds."

"Yes, we could do with a hundred, or even one!" said Blake, with a sigh. "Or even five bob wouldn't come amiss in the present state of the exchequer!"

"Then we ought to wiah in, deah boys, and wope in that hundred pounds. It isn't ewery day you have a chance to

pick up a sum like that. It merely wests to settle whethah we should be justified in takin' it."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligent wemark, Blake. In the first place, it is quite certain that a despewate chawwatah ought to be seized, isn't it?"

"Eh?"

"He ought to be locked up and put out of harm's way," argued D'Arcy. "I think there cannot be any dispute about that, deah boys."

"What the dickens—?"

"But whethah we can take the money—h'm! Of course, it could not be called blood-money, because it's only a question of collarin' the chap; he isn't goin' to be hung, or anythin' like that. Afiah all, if the Government are justified in offewin' us a hundred pounds for doin' it, we must be justified in takin' the hundred pounds. The Government ought to know best. They are oldah than we are—considerably."

"If we were in funds," said Blake, "I'd buy you a strait-waistcoat! Does this kind of thing run in your family, or are you the only dotty one?"

"You uttah ass!"

"Let's go over to the New House," said Herries. "We may be able to make a raise out of Figgins & Co., or Redfern."

Arthur Augustus planted himself before the open doorway of the study and raised his hand.

"I insist upon your listening to my wippin' scheme, you uttah asses! I tell you there is a hundred pounds pwactically goin' beggin'!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bow-wow!"

"You fwabjous chump—"

"Come on!" said Blake. "We'll go over and see Figgins. Are you going to get out of the doorway, Gussy, or are we to walk over you?"

"I wefuse to get out of the doorway, and I wefuse distinctly to be walked ova! I am goin' to explain to you cillay chumps—Yah, oh, ow! Bai Jove!"

There were hurried footsteps in the passage, and three juniors ran into the study—and into Arthur Augustus as he stood with his back to the doorway. They were Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell. Arthur Augustus staggered forward as the Shell fellows crashed into him from behind, and fell upon Blake's breast, his arms whirling round Blake's neck. Blake grinned cheerfully, and hugged his aristocratic chum so hard that D'Arcy gave a howl of anguish.

"Ow, ow! You ass! Wefease me!"

"Certainly!" said Blake.

He released Arthur Augustus so suddenly that the swell of the Fourth sat down on the study carpet. A little cloud of dust rose from the carpet, and a roar from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Yawooh!"

CHAPTER 2. Convict 101.

"HAVE you chaps heard?"

Tom Merry asked the question breathlessly. The Terrible Three had evidently rushed into Study No. 6 with news.

"That depends," said Blake. "We've heard Gussy talking like an ass for the last ten minutes. Nothing else."

"Weally, Blake—"

Arthur Augustus picked himself up, and searched about the study frantically for a clothes-brush. He was very dusty.

"Gussy has been dreamin' dream of hundreds of quids," said Digby. "We were talking to him gently and humourin' him. I've read somewhere that that's the best way with lunatics!"

"You fwightful ass, Dig—"

"But what's the news?" asked Blake. "New House been ragging you?"

"Oh, no," said Tom Merry; "more serious than that! There's a notice on the board—"

"I've seen notices on the board before," yawned Blake. "In fact, quite a lot."

"Ass! This is from the Head. Bounds are drawn in. Nobody to go out of the school gates until further orders, excepting in company with a master."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Rotten!"

"What on earth for?" exclaimed Blake indignantly.

"I'm jolly well not going to stand it, for one!"

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"THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM!"

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Suddenly a change came over the man's sullen, desperate face. As Cutts stood looking down upon him, the sunlight through the broken roof gleamed on Cutts's hard, clear-cut face. And a sudden flush of recognition came into the convict's eyes! He panted breathlessly. "Master Cutts!" (See Chapter 8.)

"Wathah not!"

"The convict," Tom Merry explained.

"Eh? What convict?"

"There's a convict escaped from Blackmoor Prison. Frightfully desperate character—he half-killed a warder in getting away, and he's hiding now somewhere in the woods or on the moor. And the Head is afraid he may go for us if he drops on us. Awful rot, of course; but just like these blessed headmasters!" said Tom Merry disparagingly.

"By Jove!" said Blake. "What's his name—or, rather, his number?"

"His name's Racke, and his number's 101," said Tom Merry. "There's a full description of him in the Rylcombe paper—a thick-set man, short and stumpy, with a bulldog jaw, and very strong. In broad-arms, of course—he hasn't been able to get a change of clothes so far as anybody knows. That's what he'll be looking for, of course—a change of clothes, and some change in the way of cash. I suppose it would be rather dangerous to run into him."

Blake chuckled.

"I don't suppose he'd want to change into Etons," he remarked; "and, even if he's a small man, he would be too big for our clobber. I don't see the danger, and I don't see keeping inside gates till the bobbies run him down. There

was a convict escaped before, and he was quite a harmless chap. You fellows saw him."

"This one is different," said Tom Merry. "He's an awful character. The paper says that when he was arrested he nearly killed two policemen, and he's expected to put up a fight when they collar him." You can guess how anxious they are to get hold of him—there's a reward of a hundred pounds offered for him."

"A hundred pounds!" exclaimed Blake and Herries and Digby together.

"Yes; a hundred pounds reward!"

"Is that what you were blabbing about, Gussy?" asked Blake, a light breaking upon his mind.

"I was not blabbin', deah boy!"

"Is that the hundred quid?" shouted Blake.

"That's the hundreded soreweigns—"

"Quids—"

"Soreweigns—"

"My hat! So Gussy was thinking of trailing down the giddy convict to his lair, and collaring the hundred quid!" chuckled Herries. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wergad it as a wippin' ideah!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "We should be backin' up law and ordah,

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COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE.

and welievin' the countwy of a vewy despewate chawactah. And the hundwed pounds would come in vewy usefuhl."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

"I fail to see anythin' whatevah to cackle at. You chaps know that I've got a gift as an amateur detective. You wememlah the time I spotted Levison in one of his wotten games—quite up to Sherlock Holmes or Sexton Blake! With me as the leadah, there is no reason why we shouldn't wope him in."

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"Fancy Gussy as a convict-hunter! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you fellows are goin' to back me up. You Shell chaps can come into it if you like; only, of course, it is undahstood that I am leadah! I don't want to put myself forward in any way; but a mattah like this wequires a fellow of tact and judgment!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you silly asses—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

The idea of the swell of St. Jim's tracking down the desperate No. 101 and capturing him threw the juniors almost into hysterics. They roared, and they yelled, while Arthur Augustus glowered at them indignantly through his eyeglass. The swell of St. Jim's was in deadly earnest, and he did not see anything funny in his scheme.

"If you wottahs cannot be sewious—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall ewoss ovah to the New House, and take Figgins & Co. into the ideah," said Arthur Augustus. "I gave you chaps first chance, as you are my fwends—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus stalked out of Study No. 6, and closed the door after him with unnecessary force. Blake sank into the armchair and gasped.

"Oh, my only Aunt Semproniah! If that doesn't take the cake—fairly put the lid on! Imagine Gussy hunting the giddy convict! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors roared again at the idea.

"I wonder what Figgins & Co. will say to his suggestion?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors waited with much curiosity for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's return from the New House. He came in about ten minutes later, and they stared. There was a change in the appearance of the swell of St. Jim's. He was hatless, there was dust on his elegant trousers and his handsome jacket, and his collar was torn, and his necktie had vanished.

It looked as if the swell of the School House had been discovering trouble on the other side of the quadrangle.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Have you met No. 101 already, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you ass!" gasped D'Arcy. "I have been twreated with gross disrespeht! I wegard Figgins as a wottah, and Kerr as a wottah, and Fatty Wynn as a wottah! Ow!"

"Didn't they cotton to the idea?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"Yaas, wathah! Figgins had the awful cheek to say that he had already thought of it himself, and they were goin' to wun down the despewado," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Of course, I remarked that I couldn't possibly allow that, and as they wefused to give up the ideah, I gave them a feahful thwashin'!"

"Well, you look as if somebody's been getting a feahful thrashing!" grinned Blake. "Did you leave them dead or dying?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They had the fwightful impertinence to chuck me out!" confessed Arthur Augustus. "I had not finished thwashin' them when they chucked me out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not wegard it as a laughin' mattah! Look at my elobbah! I wegard them as beasts! Of course, I am not goin' to allow them to hunt for my convict, if I have to thwash the whole of the New House!"

"You don't mean to say that Figgins & Co. are going to look for that hundred quid?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!"

"And they had the cheek to say that it would be one up for the New House, and they couldn't wisk spoilin' the whole thing by lettin' School House duffahs into it!" said Arthur Augustus, with deep indignation.

"The cheek!" said Blake warmly. "Look here, you chaps, if the New House is going for the hundred quid, it's up to the School House to do the same! They're not going to go one better than us!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry heartily.

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"It's our idea!" said Blake. "Gussy thought of it first. We'll look for the giddy convict; and if we find Figgins & Co. looking for him, too, we'll jolly well bump them, and rag them, and teach them not to poach on our ground!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, with great satisfaction. "Of course, it's undahstood that I am leadah!"

To which six voices replied at once, and with wonderful unanimity:

"Rats!"

CHAPTER 3.

Rival Convict-Hunters.

ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD!

Those words, in large letters, were to be read on most of the hoardings and dead walls in Wayland and Rylcombe.

There was unusual excitement in the quiet countryside.

Jonas Racke—Convict 101—had broken out of Blackmoor Prison, and warders and mounted constables were seeking him far and wide.

But in the deep woods and the wide moor that lay around St. Jim's there were many nooks and recesses where a desperate man could hide, and several days had passed without the track of the escaped convict being found.

That he was still in the vicinity was pretty certain, but his hiding-place remained to be discovered.

And the Head of St. Jim's, under the circumstances, deemed it wise to draw the school bounds as close as the school gates.

There was certainly danger in meeting the hunted man—hungry, desperate, and reckless as he was. So, at all events, it seemed to the Head. But the St. Jim's fellows did not take the same view.

They would rather have run risks than have been confined to the limits of the school walls.

Indeed, the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's would have been very pleased to join in the hunt which was exciting the whole neighbourhood, and some of the bolder spirits suggested a deputation to the Head on the subject, to ask permission. But nobody wanted to be in the deputation, so Dr. Holmes was not approached on the subject.

But, in spite of the new order about the school bounds, a good many of the fellows had made up their minds in private that they were not going to be left out of the fun. Figgins of the Fourth was quite eloquent on the subject in his study in the New House.

"It isn't the hundred quid!" said Figgins. "Of course, a hundred quid would come in handy!"

Fatty Wynn rubbed his well-filled waistcoat, and sighed.

"Yes, wouldn't it?" he said dreamily.

"But the beastly convict is keeping us penned up in the school!" went on Figgins. "The police won't be able to find him. He may be hanging around for weeks. We can't stay within gates for weeks, while they're looking in the wrong direction for Convict 101."

"Of course we can't!" agreed Kerr.

"If he didn't want us to collar him he should have chosen some other place to hide in," said Figgins. "He's no right to lurk about here, keeping us penned up. It's up to us to clear him out."

"Hear, hear!"

"Besides, the School House duffers have made up their minds to do it—at least, D'Arcy has, and the others won't let him run into danger alone. Now, it's up to us, as cock-house of St. Jim's, to give them the kybosh!"

"Yes, rather."

"Besides," said Figgins generously, "they'll be getting into danger, you know. They're not really up to a thing of this kind. We can't let those benighted kids run into danger."

"Certainly not!"

"So we're going to track down the giddy convict, and catch him," said Figgins. "It's his own fault for coming round here. We didn't ask him to come."

"How are we going to catch him?" asked Kerr. Kerr was a Scottish youth, and eminently practical.

"Oh, that's a detail!" said Figgins, with a wave of the hand. "There are lots of ways of catching him. We've got to—find out where he is, you know, and—and collar him, and—and then he will be caught, of course."

"Quite simple!" said Kerr blandly.

"It's a half-holiday to-morrow," said Figgins. "I suggest that we spend it in hunting for the giddy convict. The gates will be closed, but there's a wall."

"What about the footer?"

"We can cut the footer for once."

"But it's a House match."

"I know it is, but I've been thinking. We don't want to be pigs. Let the other fellows have a show in the House match," said Figgins generously. "Reddy talks a lot about being able to captain a footer team. Well, Reddy can be skipper to-morrow. After all, we've only got the School House to beat."

"There'll be a row if we're caught out of bounds."

"Let there be! Besides, we sha'n't be caught."

"Oh, all right!" said Kerr. "I'm game, if you are. Anyway, it will be a run, and as for staying within gates until the convict's caught, that's all rot!"

"Utter rot!" said Figgins.

And the next afternoon, instead of changing for the junior football match, Figgins & Co. prepared for their expedition. Over in the School House another party was preparing for the same business. Tom Merry was captain of the junior eleven in the School House, but Tom Merry, like Figgins, was feeling generously disposed to let another fellow have the honour that afternoon.

"I'm going to rely on you this afternoon, Blake," he said, meeting the Fourth-Former in the passage, and speaking very seriously.

"Are you?" said Blake agreeably.

"Yes. You're going to captain the team against the New House kids."

Blake shook his head.

"Can't be did!" he replied tersely.

"Oh, come, you're up to it for once!" Tom Merry urged.

"I'm up to it all the time, so far as that goes," said Blake.

"But I've got something else on this afternoon, and I'm going to ask you to fill my place in the team."

"Look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, Kangaroo can captain the team," he said. "I'm going to put in Reilly and Ray and Vavasour instead of Lowther, Manners, and myself. It's only fair to give them a look-in in a House match."

"And you can find four more, instead of us," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'm sorry to leave the team in the lurch, deah boys, but when duty calls, you know."

"I hear that Figgins & Co. aren't playing this afternoon," grinned Digby. "They're going on the same game."

"Well, if Figgins & Co. are out of the New House team our side needn't be up to concert pitch," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I'll give Gora a chance, and Kerruish and Rook. They're all pretty good."

There was good news that afternoon for fellows who were keen to get into the House junior team. Kangaroo, the Cornstalk fellow in the Shell, was glad to relieve Tom Merry of his duties as skipper, and, indeed, he remarked that he looked upon that arrangement as a decided improvement in the team. The Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 5 were at liberty to take the trail of the hidden convict. Arthur Augustus was thinking out very seriously the question of equipment. That was certainly an important matter. The convict might have a bludgeon, and, anyway, he was a muscular fellow, and very dangerous at close quarters. Arthur Augustus's opinion was that it was necessary to go armed.

"No good twyin' to tackle a wuff wuffian with our fists, deah boys," he remarked wisely. "You see, this man Wacke is a vevy wuff beast, and I don't pwesume for a moment that he would fight fair. He might give one of us a feahful cwack on the nappah with a stick, and where should we be then?"

"In hospital, very likely," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas; so I think we had better take arms with us."

"Legs will be more useful if we meet the convict," suggested Lowther.

"Pway be sewious, deah boy. We ought to go armed. I think I had better take a wevolvah, and then there will be no dangah."

"Not to the convict," agreed Lowther. "But what about us?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You're not going to play with firearms, my son," said Blake. "Besides, where are you going to get a revolver? We don't keep one in the study."

"Mr. Wailton keeps one in his studay, ever since the time there was a burglawy heah," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin' to bowwow it."

"Yes, I can see him lending it to you!" grinned Tom Merry. "Now, if you fellows are ready, we'll start. They're beginning the footer already, and we can get out now without being seen."

"I must weally have a wevolvah!"

"Come on!"

"Weally, you fellahs—"

"Take his other arm, Herries."

"You uttah asse! You wottahs! Welease me! I insist! Yawwoh!"

With his affectionate chums grasping him by either arm, Arthur Augustus was walked rapidly away, and Mr. Railton's revolver was left undisturbed. On the playing-fields there were two football matches going on, and it was a good opportunity for the juniors to escape unobserved. There was a corner of the quadrangle where the trees shaded the wall from view, and towards that spot Tom Merry & Co. directed their steps. As they came through the trees the sound of a voice fell upon their ears.

"Give me a bunk up, Kerr!"

It was the voice of Figgins of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The New House boundahs! The uttah waseals, they are goin' to look for my convict."

"Shush!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know—"

"They're going to be stopped!" said Tom Merry, peering through the clump of old elms. "There are only three of them, and we're going to stop them."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

"But they'll follow us when we're gone out," said Manners.

"No, they won't! Cut off to the house and get a rope while we collar them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners dashed away towards the School House. Figgins & Co. had heard the chuckle, and they looked round quickly on their guard at once. Tom Merry waved his hand.

"Charge, Chester, charge!"

And the School House juniors charged.

CHAPTER 4.

Held by the Enemy!

"BACK up, New House!" shouted Figgins.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn lined up at once. They had hoped to get out of the school unseen and unsuspected by their rivals of the School House. But they had chosen an unlucky moment. They were discovered, and the odds were against them. Tom Merry & Co. charged, and the New House trio were driven back to the wall, resisting manfully. Tom Merry and Lowther rolled over, roaring. But then Figgins went down, with Herries and Digby clinging to him, and Kerr sprawled on the ground under Blake, and Fatty Wynn was collared by D'Arcy. Tom Merry was up in a moment, and rushing to the aid of Arthur Augustus, and Fatty Wynn was brought down with a bump, and Tom Merry sat on his chest.

"Ow!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Gerroff my chest!"

"Done 'em!" grinned Blake.

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, deah boys! Down with the New House! Sit on him hard, Tom Mowwy, deah boy! The beast has ruined my necktie!"

"Gerroff!" stuttered Fatty Wynn breathlessly. "I've got jam-tarts in my pockets—grooh! you're squashing them! Ow! I'm sticky! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rescue, New House!" bawled Figgins.

But there was little chance of that shout being heard. All the fellows were on the playing-fields. But Herries jammed Figgins's handkerchief into Figgins's mouth, and effectually silenced him, in case some stray New House fellow should be within hearing.

Figgins gurgled in silence.

"Look here," gasped Kerr, "chuck it! We're going out!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Your mistake—you're not going out. Don't you know that it's wrong for juniors to go out of bounds?" he asked severely.

"Why, you rotter, you're going out yourself!" howled Kerr.

"Quite a different matter, my son. You New House kids have got to be kept in order. We can't allow you to break bounds in this reckless way. It's up to us, as cockhouse of St. Jim's, to look after you."

"You—you—you—" stuttered Kerr furiously.

"Besides, you're going to look for my convict," said Arthur Augustus, with great indignation. "I regard Convict 101 as practically my private property. Those hundred sovereigns and that convict belong to me. I'm whackin' them out with these fellows, but you New House boundahs are barred."

"We'll jolly well come, all the same, you beasts!" spluttered Fatty Wynn. "Ow! You're squeezing the jam through my clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't let you out of bounds," said Tom Merry, shaking

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his head. "You might run into danger, you know. Besides, the School House is going to rope in that giddy convict. You've got to give us your word, honour bright, not to break bounds to-day."

"Rats!"

"Here's the rope," said Manners, coming through the trees.

"Good egg! Tie all their wrists together."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. recommenced to struggle, but they were pinned down by the School House juniors, and they had no chance. Manners calmly proceeded to knot the rope round their wrists, and six wrists were tied in a bunch together. Manners did not spare the knots. He used up a good deal of rope, too. When he had finished, the three heroes of the New House were helpless prisoners. Then they were allowed to rise to their feet, and they stood looking at one another with infuriated looks.

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Figgins.

"Put the end of the rope round this tree and tie it," directed Tom Merry.

"What ho!"

The rope was securely bound to the tree. Figgins & Co. stood with their bunched hands on the bark of the tree. Tom Merry & Co. surveyed them with much satisfaction.

"Now, we'll let you loose if you'll give your word to leave our convict alone," said Tom Merry.

"Rats!"

"Yah!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Thus Figgins & Co.

"Right ho! Then we'll be off. Come on, you chaps!"

And the School House juniors climbed the wall one by one, and dropped into the lane outside. Monty Lowther was the last to go, and he paused on the wall for a moment to kiss his hand to the infuriated New House juniors. Then he, too, disappeared. A chuckle was heard floating back from the lane, and the School House party were gone.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another with feelings too deep for words. It was a sudden and inglorious end to their expedition before it had fairly started.

"Oh, the rotters!" murmured Figgins wildly. "We're fairly dished! And if we're found tied up like this, the whole school will simply howl over it."

"We've got to be found, or we shall have to stay here all the afternoon!" growled Fatty Wynn. "Better yell for help."

"Sherrup! We can work this blessed rope loose in time. Don't bring a gang of grinning duffers round us by yelping!" said Figgins crossly.

"It'll take a jolly long time," groaned Fatty Wynn, "and I'm sticky all over! I've got jam all over me! Grooh!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" Figgins was very cross. "Why couldn't you leave the tarts alone for once?"

"Well, we should have got hungry, you know; and—"

"Oh, cheese it! If you want to gnaw something, gnaw this rotten rope!"

And the three juniors started on the rope. But Manners had tied those knots scientifically, and they were not easy to negotiate. Half an hour passed, and the New House trio were still prisoners.

"And those rotters are hunting our convict all the time!" said Figgins sulphurously. "They'll collar him, and get our hundred quid."

"Let's yell!" said Fatty Wynn desperately.

"Hallo! Here's somebody coming!"

Footsteps approached the spot. Figgins's clouded face broke into a grin.

"Some more bounders coming here to break bounds," he murmured. "I suppose there'll be a regular procession this way, since the Head's order?"

"My hat! It's Cutts!" said Kerr.

Cutts of the Fifth came through the trees towards the wall. He caught sight of the three juniors, and stopped, and stared at them in amazement.

"You young asses! What are you up to?" he demanded.

"Let us loose, Cutts, old man!" said Figgins.

Cutts grinned as he saw how the New House trio were tied. Cutts was a School House fellow, but the Fifth Form were far too loopy to take part in the House rags with which the juniors made things lively at St. Jim's. And Cutts of the Fifth was very much down on Tom Merry & Co., so

there was really no reason why he should not have released the New House fellows. But he made no motion to do so.

"Who tied you up there?" he asked.

"A rotten gang of School House rotters!" grunted Figgins. "I say, cut this rope, will you, Cutts?"

"No, I won't!" said Cutts. "I suppose you came here to break bounds—eh? I don't see what else you'd be in this corner for."

"Ahem!"

"You know the Head's orders, I suppose?" said Cutts.

"Mind your own business," said Figgins independently.

"You're not a prefect—and you're not in our House, anyway. If you won't let us loose, you can go and eat coke!"

"Have any other juniors gone out?" asked Cutts.

"Find out!"

"Don't you know it's dangerous, with an escaped convict lurking about the place?" said Cutts. "Whoever tied you up there did you a good turn, and I'll leave you there." And Gerald Cutts went towards the wall.

"Why, you rotter," howled Figgins, "you're going to break bounds yourself!"

Cutts made no reply, but drew himself up on the wall. He had evidently come there with the intention of breaking bounds.

"Give my kind regards to the sportsmen at the Green Man," said Kerr sarcastically. "And don't forget to remember me to Griggs, the bookie."

"And put on a bob each way for me!" said Fatty Wynn.

Cutts made no reply to these remarks. Cutts was the black sheep of the School House, and Figgins & Co. had little doubt that he was bound upon one of his little expeditions which were whispered of among the juniors. Gerald Cutts cultivated manners and customs that would certainly have earned him the "sack" if they had become known to the Head.

It was not so very long since Cutts of the Fifth had plotted with a bookmaker to give away a match in which he played for St. Jim's, and Fatty Wynn had been the means of defeating him. That had not endeared the fat Fourth-Former to Gerald Cutts. The Fifth-Former glanced back at the tied-up juniors and grinned, and then dropped from the wall into the road.

Figgins grunted.

"No luck! The beast might have untied us! This is all through you showing him up over the Wallaby match, Fatty, you fat bounder!"

"Let's yell for some of the fellows," mumbled Fatty Wynn. "I'm sticky all over! And I'm getting hungry."

"Rats! We're not going to get a grinning crowd round us!" growled Figgins. "Wait till we get loose."

"Look here—"

"Sherrup!"

And Figgins & Co. worked away more or less patiently at the rope. They were released at last, and Fatty Wynn made a bee-line for the School shop. His exertions had made him hungry. Kerr regarded Figgins doubtfully.

"Are we going now?" he asked.

"Of course we are!" growled Figgins. "Do you think we're going to let ourselves be done in the eye by those School House bounders? Come on! Blow Fatty! He can gorge himself on jam-tarts while we're roping in the giddy convict!"

And Figgins and Kerr dropped from the school wall—rather late for their expedition—but, as Figgins said, better late than never.

CHAPTER 5. A Great Catch.

TOM MERRY & Co. halted in the wood, somewhat at a loss.

They had started out on the expedition chiefly with the intention of going one better than Figgins & Co. of the New House, and without any very clear idea of how they were to run down the hidden convict.

But that problem faced them now that they had arrived upon the scene of operations.

Somewhere in the dark woods that stretched for miles on miles, somewhere, perhaps, on the wide moor towards Wayland, the hunted man was lying concealed.

But where?

A dozen warders and mounted policemen had hunted for him for days, and they had found no trace of the man; only traces here and there where he had contrived to purloin food.

Tom Merry & Co. realised that they had taken on a task of an unusually large size, and they stood on the footpath and gazed at one another dubiously.

Round them the wind was whistling through the wood, bearing off the dead leaves that fluttered continually from

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the branches. The trees were so stripped of foliage that it was easy to see to a great distance into the wood. And the masses of dead leaves retained traces of a trail where a foot passed; but a good many feet passed on that footpath, from Rylcombe Lane to Wayland. The convict might have passed there, but there was no way of discerning his track from the others. He might be lurking near them in some spot where the trees grew in thick clumps, but if he was, they could not see him. After some moments of silence, Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"We might as well have left this to Figgins & Co.!" he remarked. "I admit that I don't know just where to jump on No. 101."

"Gussy's leader," said Monty Lowther. "Let's see where he'll lead us."

"Good," said Blake. "Let him run on ahead like a dog, and follow his instinct."

"Weally, Blake—"

"That will lead him to a tailor's shop," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys. The convict may be just behind, for all you know. We don't want to alarm him; my ideah is to take the wottah by surprise. If I had Mr. Wailton's wevovah I would covah him with it, and—"

"You couldn't," said Lowther, with a shake of the head.

"Why not?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"A revolver isn't big enough to cover a convict. You're thinking of an umbrella."

"You uttah ass! I mean I should covah him—I should point the revolver at him, you know, and say 'Hands up!'"

"And suppose he didn't put his hands up?"

"Well, he would, you know; it's only playin' the game to put your hands up when you're covahed with a wevovah. Howevah, owin' to you wottahs, I haven't any wevovah!"

"And you haven't any convict at present," grinned Manners.

"We're going to find him. I am glad you chaps have had sense enough to admit that I am leadah—"

"On, lead on, Macduff!" said Lowther. "If we're going on a wild-goose chase, we may as well be lead by one duffer as another. Pile in."

"I shall have to think it out a bit."

"What with?" asked Lowther.

Arthur Augustus did not reply to that impertinent question. He wrinkled his noble brows in deep thought, and pursed his lips, and a faraway look came into his eyes. He was evidently thinking hard. The juniors stood and looked at him with grinning faces. Monty Lowther drew a little behind the swell of St. Jim's, and made a motion with his hand in the small of D'Arcy's back, as if winding him up. D'Arcy was so deep in thought that he was quite unconscious of it. A roar of laughter from the juniors woke him out of his reverie.

"Weally, you fellows; Lowther, you ass; weally, this is too bid. I have to do all the thinkin', and weally, you shouldn't intewwupt; I've thought of a plan."

"Pile in!"

"The convict is most likely to be found in the place where he is most likely to hide, deah boys—"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Lowther, in astonishment.

"Did you work that out in your head, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, I did, you duffah. Now, when a chap's hiding' himself, naturally he looks for the place where he can find the best hiding-place. So I should think, deah boys, at all events. Suppose we twy the wuined castle first? A chap might hide there in the wuins, you know, and skunk away into the vaults if he was spotted there. We'll make for the old castle first, and have a look wuund."

"The police have searched it," said Blake.

"Yaas, but I twust we have more bwains than the police."

"Yes, I forgot that. Come on."

And the convict-hunters marched through the wood towards the old castle. It was a mere shell of a building—a ruin perched on the side of Wayland Hill. In the summer it was much frequented by picnkers, but in the chill days of November it was quite deserted save by an occasional tourist. The juniors came through the shattered gateway, picking their way among fallen blocks of masonry, towards the shaky steps that gave admittance to the vaults under the castle. There was no sign of anyone but themselves in the ruins—but Arthur Augustus halted suddenly, with all the eagerness of a keen Boy Scout in his face. He had discovered a "sign."

"Look heah, deah boys!"

Recent rain had softened the soil, and in the muddy earth there was the print of a foot! D'Arcy's eyes gleamed with excitement as he pointed it out.

The juniors gathered round and looked at it, grinning. It was the print of an elegant boot, such as a very well-dressed

fellow would wear, and was not likely to belong to the escaped convict. But it certainly proved that someone had recently been in the ruins.

"There is the wascal's footpwint, deah boys."

"Do they have fashionable bootmakers at Blackmoor Prison?" asked Lowther innocently.

"Ahem! The man may have changed his boots since he escaped. Naturally he would do so if he got a chance, in case his twack should be discovahed," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "This twack is vewy wewcent."

"How do you know?"

Arthur Augustus smiled with the superiority of a Boy Scout who knew his business thoroughly.

"Wegard it!" he said. "The impression of the boot is bein' filled up by the watah fwom this puddle—but it is not quite filled yet. It is only a mattah of minutes, howevah. My deah fellows, it is not five minutes since that footpwint was made."

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy's right. Of course, it wasn't the convict; but where is the chap. We can't see him here, and if he's left the ruins while we were coming up, we should have seen him."

"He must be in the vaults," said Blake.

"Then he has gone down without a light," remarked Digby, gazing into the gloomy opening. "If he had a light we should see some reflection of it. It's dark as pitch down there."

The juniors began to feel a little excited. Who could possibly have gone down into those gloomy vaults without a light, unless, indeed, he was a fugitive from justice who dared not risk making his presence known?

"Bai Jove! We're on the twack already, deah boys," murmured Arthur Augustus, greatly excited. "Don't make a wov; we don't want to alarm him. Listen! We may heah the wottah movin' about if he is there."

The juniors listened intently.

From the silence of the vaults there came a sudden sound—the sound of a foot clinking against a stone! Someone was moving there!

The juniors caught their breath.

"We've got him, deah boys! He's comin' up, and we'll nab him as he comes out," Arthur Augustus whispered excitedly.

"Get into cover—quick!" muttered Tom Merry.

The juniors backed away from the opening, and hurriedly crouched behind masses of masonry close at hand. If the man came up from below to leave the place, he would have to pass close by them, and he would be within reach. Before he could even see them, they could spring upon him.

"Jump the instant you see him," muttered Blake. "He's a desperate chap, and we don't want to get our nappers cracked with a bludgeon."

"Wathah not!"

"Listen! He's coming."

"Shush, deah boys."

The juniors crouched in cover, their hearts beating violently. Who could it be but the convict, lurking in those dismal and chilly recesses without a light? Anyone who had a fancy for exploring the vaults would certainly have taken a light. It was impossible to move about in safety without one. Undoubtedly it was Jonas Racke—Convict No. 101—and he was about to fall into their hands.

They could hear the footsteps clearly on the shaky old stone steps. Closer, closer, the unseen individual was out of the vaults now, in a moment more he must pass the mass of masonry that hid the juniors, and he would see them then.

A figure in overcoat and cap came past the edge of the masonry, and the juniors leaped at once—together! There was a loud yell from their victim as he went crashing down, with half a dozen juniors sprawling over him, clutching at him. And the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose in a chirrup of triumph.

"Huwway! We've got him! Huwway!"

CHAPTER 6.

Caught.

"W! Oh! Groogh!"

"Hold him tight!"

"Hands up, you wottah!"

"Ow! Ah! Help! Groogh! You young scoundrels! Let me gerrup!"

The prisoner was sprawling face downwards under the heap of juniors; but there seemed to them to be something familiar in the muffled voice that came from him, in accents of fury.

"I—I say, this ain't a convict," gasped Blake.

"Wats! It's No. 101—hold him—"

"Geroff! You young scoundrels, I'll lick you to death for this!"

"My hat! That's Cutis's voice!"

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A GRAND 50,000-WORD LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE.

"Cutts of the Fifth!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors released their prisoner as suddenly as if he had become red-hot all at once. They gazed at Cutts of the Fifth in dismay as he staggered to his feet, his face convulsed with rage. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's jaw dropped. Even Arthur Augustus had to admit now that it wasn't the convict.

Cutts of the Fifth was in an unenviable state. The convict-hunters, under the impression that he was No. 101, had not handled him gently. He had rolled in puddles and mud, and he was smothered from head to foot, and his collar was torn out.

He shook his fists furiously at the dismayed juniors.

"You young villains! I—I'll smash you! I—I'll—"

"Bai Jove, it's really Cutts, you know!"

"Awfully sorry, Cutts," said Tom Merry. "We didn't know it was you. We took you for somebody else—honour bright."

"You young liar!" howled Cutts.

"We took you for somebody else of the same kidney," said Monty Lowther blandly. "Another chap of your kind, Cutts—chap who very likely started as you've started—six-penny nap, and pubs of a night—and he's finished in prison. I hope you won't, but I have my doubts. Take warning by Convict 101, Cutts, old man. Turn over a new leaf, and become a good boy like us!"

The infuriated Fifth-Former made a rush at Lowther; but the Co. lined up at once, and Cutts, realising that he had seven sturdy juniors to deal with if he tackled one, paused. The big senior could probably have handled two of them, but the seven would have made short work of him. And they were quite prepared to do it. They were sorry for the mistake they had made; but they did not like Cutts. He was a bully and a blackguard, and they would have handled him with pleasure.

"It was weally a mistake, Cutts," said Arthur Augustus. "We apologise for the mistake most profoundly. From one gentleman to another, an apology should be quite suffish."

"Of course it should," said Blake. "If you apologise hard enough, it will get the mud off his clobber—perhaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are out of bounds, you young rascals!" said Cutts. "I'll report this to your Housemaster."

"Better report yourself at the same time," grinned Blake. "You're out of bounds, too, Cutts. Same order applies to the Fifth, you know."

Cutts bit his lip. That was quite true—indeed, he was more likely to get into trouble for breaking bounds than the juniors if it were known, for as a senior he should have known better. A certain amount of irresponsibility was allowable in a thoughtless junior, but a Fifth-Former was a senior, and a sense of responsibility was expected of him.

"Better agree to keep one another's little secrets," smiled Tom Merry. "We won't give you away, Cutts, if you're a good boy."

"You young scoundrel!"

"Better language, please. If you don't want to roll in the mud again, you'd better take care how you talk to us."

"Yaas, wathah! We certainly shall not allow you to apply such exceedingly opprobrious epithets to us, Cutts, deah boy!"

"What were you doing here?" said Cutts, between his teeth.

"That's our business."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You said you mistook me for someone else, and you mentioned the convict. Are you silly asses enough to be hunting for the convict?"

"Yaas, wathah—I—I mean, we're not sillay asses, but we're huntin' for the convict. We thought we had found the beast. What were you doin' down there without a light?"

"My lantern went out, you young ass, and I dropped my matches, and couldn't find them in the dark!" growled Cutts.

The juniors could not help grinning at that simple explanation of the fact that Cutts had been in the dark.

But the Fifth-Former had not explained what he was doing in the vaults even with a light, and they could not help wondering.

Was Cutts of the Fifth after that £100 reward, too?

"You'd better clear off," said Cutts. "By the way, can you lend me some matches, one of you?"

Gerald Cutts was feeling inclined to slaughter the juniors, certainly; but that was no reason why he should not ask a favour of them. Gerald Cutts was a decidedly practical youth.

Tom Merry passed a matchbox to Cutts.

"Now clear off!" said the Fifth-Former.

"Wats!"

"Why should we clear off?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You The Gem Library.—No. 301.

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know now what we're here for, and we're going on. My belief is that you're on the same track."

"What rot!" said Cutts. "Do you think I've got time to waste hunting for a convict! That's for the police to do!"

"There's a hundred quid reward."

"Rubbish!"

"Then what were you doing in the vaults?"

"Exploring them, that's all. I've a taste for—archaeology," said Cutts—"in fact, I'm taking it up as a study."

The juniors grinned. They knew that Cutts was not a truthful person when it suited him to be otherwise; and the explanation was decidedly lame.

"Well, we'll study archaeology, too," said Tom Merry. "If you've got a lantern, we can all study by the same light."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you clear off!" shouted Cutts angrily.

"No, we won't!"

Cutts glared at the juniors furiously; but they faced him with cool independence. They had as much right there as the Fifth-Former had, and they were not to be bullied. Force was out of the question against such odds, and Gerald Cutts had to make the best of it. He picked up his muddy lantern, jammed it into his overcoat pocket, and turned away.

"I say, Cutts, if you're going, you may as well lend us the lantern," called out Monty Lowther.

Cutts did not reply. He strode away, and disappeared among the masonry.

"He's afaah our convict," said Arthur Augustus. "I feel quite suah of that. The awful wotah! That convict's ours, and it's pwactically burglary on Cutts's part to think of collahin' him."

"Did our respected leader think of bringing a lantern with him to search the vaults?" Monty Lowther wanted to know.

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of it, deah boys! But that's all wight. It's only a quartah of an hour to Wayland, if you wun hard. Tom Mewwy can wun there and buy a bike lamp."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry.

"Pway don't be a slackah, deah boy. We'll hunt wound for twaces of the convict while you are gone, and keep an eye open for Cutts. It would be just like that wotah to come sneakin' back twyn' to collah our convict."

"Look here—"

"Who's leadah of this partay?" demanded Arthur Augustus lefily. "As commandah, I command you to wun to Wayland and get a lantern. Buzz off!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Blake. "Buzz off! Obey orders!"

"No mutiny on this craft!" chuckled Digby. "Buck up, Tommy!"

"I'm jolly well not going to run about all the afternoon!" roared Tom Merry. "I came out for a convict, not for a lantern!"

"Obey ordahs, deah boy. You call yourself a Boy Scout, and you back up against the ordahs of your commandah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I am surprised at you, Tom Mewwy. Wun off at once, and wun like anythin'!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"Well, I'll go," he said. "But if I ever undertake to follow your lead again, you frabjous, burbling jabber-wock—"

"I wefuse to be called a jabbahtwock! Cleah off at once!" said D'Arcy commandingly. "Here is a half-sovereign. Jollay lucky I had a wemittance this mornin'!"

Tom Merry took the half-sovereign and started off for Wayland. Then the other fellows began to explore the ruins for traces of the convict. No. 101 was certainly concealed somewhere, and the ruined castle was as likely a place as any other, and Cutts evidently thought so, too. But hard as they hunted, no traces were to be found. Cutts's track was found again, but that was all. If Jonas Racke, No. 101, had been there, he had been careful to leave no tell-tale footprints.

The juniors gathered again round the stairs leading into the vaults. Tom Merry was not in sight yet.

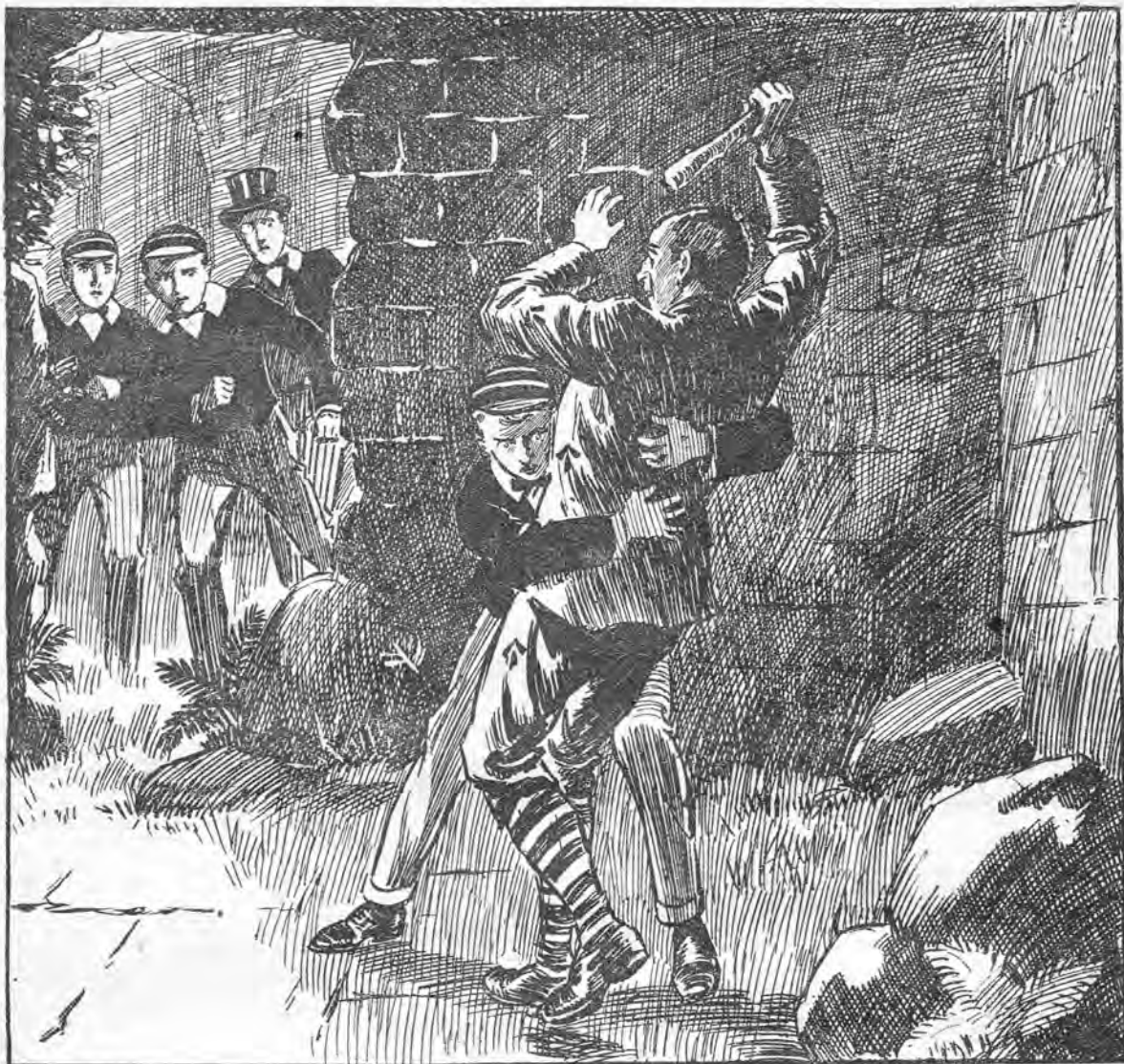
"Let's get down," said Blake; "we're wasting time. We've got lots of matches, and we can twist up Gussy's collar and tie to make a torch."

"Wats!"

"Well, the matches will do. I'm going," said Blake.

There were several boxes of matches among the juniors. After some hesitation they decided to start. Blake led the way with a wax-vesta flickering in his hand. They descended into the vaults, the glimmering matches casting a dim and uncertain light round them. Dark and gloomy, damp and chill, were the deep vaults stretching apparently endlessly under the old castle. The building above was in ruins, but those strong old stone arches had stood for centuries unchanged.

"Bai Jove, I wish I had that weyolvah!" murmured Arthur



Kangaroo threw his arms round the burly form of the ruffian and grasped desperately. "Help! Help!" he shouted. Redfern and Reilly and Fatty Wynn dashed into the cell to the rescue. "My hat! It's the convict!" they cried. (See Chapter 15.)

Augustus. "It would be vewy wotten if the wascal wushed on us all of a sudden."

"Ahem! Is would!"

"Still, as he isn't here, there's no danger," said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "Let's hunt for him, and hope we sha'n't find him."

"Bai Jove, what's that?"

It was a sudden crash from above. The juniors rushed back to the stair, and looked up. Above them was pitchy darkness, instead of the glimmer of daylight.

"Gweat Scott, the stone is closed!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in alarm. "The convict has shut us in!"

"More likely Cutts, you ass!"

"Oh, the wottah!"

The juniors rushed up the steps. The heavy oblong stone that closed the opening had been lying beside the aperture when they descended. It had evidently been rolled into its place by hands from above. But it was not quite closed. There was a thin streak of light to be seen. And through that narrow opening came the sound of a well-known voice.

"Caught!"

And the convict-hunters yelled in chorus.

"Figgins!"

CHAPTER 7.

Right on the Track.

FIGGINS and Kerr chuckled.

They had the same idea—of searching first the ruined castle. They had arrived late on the scene—certainly. But they had arrived in time to see the last of the School House fellows disappear down the steps to the vault. And then to close the stone upon them had been very quick work. The tables were turned now—it was Figgins who had the upper hand. He had wedged in a chunk of brick to keep the flat stone from completely closing, so that he could speak to the juniors below. But there was no chance of the Co. raising the stone from underneath. It was too heavy—especially with the weight of the New House juniors upon it.

"Figgins, you wottah," shouted Arthur Augustus, "waiss that stone at once!"

"Rats!"

"You feahful outsiders!"

"Rather glad to be an outsider just now," chuckled Figgins. "Better than being an insider, under the circus. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr. "This is where we smile!"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM!"

"Have you found our convict?" continued Figgins. "If you have, you can hand him over to us. He's our property."

"You wottah! He's ours!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Have you found him?"

"Not yet," said Blake; "but were going to. This is a School House job. Look here, get that stone up."

"No fear!"

"I ordah you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I shall give you a feahful thwashin' when I get out, Figgins!" said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard.

"You're got to get out first," said Figgins cheerfully.

"This is where we gloat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a wotten twick—"

"Nearly as rotten as tying fellows to a tree," chuckled Figgins.

"You wanted to hunt for our convict—"

"You mean you wanted to hunt for ours."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I wegard Jonas Wacke as our pwivate pwoperty. If you don't waise that stone—"

"No fear! You're going to stay there till you promise to let our convict alone," said Figgins. "My dear chaps, this job is above the weight of the School House. We're the chaps to tackle it. But I'll tell you what, when we get the hundred quid, we'll stand a feed and let you come."

"Wats!"

"Well, you'll stay there till you give your giddy parole to let our convict alone," said Figgins. "We're going to close the stone right down, and pile rocks on it. If you find the convict, you can keep him there. We'll come along again this evening and ask you whether you've changed your minds. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared another voice. "This is where I come in!" And the School House juniors on the stair yelled with delight: "Tom Merry!"

It was Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell had returned from Wayland, to find Figgins and Kerr sitting on the stone, and his chums imprisoned below. Tom Merry did not waste time. He rushed upon the New House juniors and smote them hip and thigh.

Figgins and Kerr had not been expecting that attack. They had supposed Tom Merry to be below in the vaults, with the rest of the School House party. His sudden arrival took them completely by surprise. Figgins went rolling over, and Kerr went rolling across him, as Tom Merry charged; and before they could rise, the Shell fellow gripped the stone and rolled it back with a terrific effort.

The stone crashed back into its former place, and the entrance was clear. In another second Figgins and Kerr were up again, and piling on Tom Merry—but too late! From below the School House fellows came up with a rush.

Figgins and Kerr were seized by many hands, and bumped over and sat upon. And the School House fellows chortled with glee.

"Tables turned once more," grinned Blake. "This is where the New House gets it in the neck."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky I sent Tom Mewwy to Wayland for the lantern. You see the advantage of having a fellow of tact and judgment for your leadah, deah boys."

"Of course, you know the New House bounders were coming here," Monty Lowther remarked sarcastically.

"You must judge by results, deah boy, and my awwange-ments have turned out a gweat success," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "Some chaps are born to command, you know. Now we've got to get rid of these boundahs, and look for our convict, before that wottah Cutts collahs him and wobs us of the reward."

Figgins uttered an exclamation.

"Cutts? Is he on the track, too?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly lot of nerve, to look for the convict by himself," said Kerr. "I don't think I should care to meet No. 101 alone."

"Three giddy parties searching for No. 101—to say nothing of the warders," grinned Tom Merry. "We can't stop Cutts, but we can bottle up the New House. Figgins old man, you've got to chuck it."

"Rats!" said Figgins politely.

"Then I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry, "we'll go Co.—us up against Cutts of the Fifth. Lower School sticks together against seniors."

"Good egg!" said Figgins. "I'm on."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you forget that I am leadah, and that all suggestions of that kind must pwocceed twom the leadah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely. "Figgins, The GEN LIBRARY.—No. 301.

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deah boy, I shall be vewy pleased if you will go Co. with us in lookin' for the convict."

Figgins grinned.

"Delighted, Gussy!"

"Done!" said Kerr.

"Vewy well," said the swell of St. Jim's, "it's a go. You can get off their necks, deah boys. Now, if you've brought that lantern, Tom Mewwy, we'll search the vaults, and collah the convict if he is there, without givin' Cutts a chance to step in and wob us."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry lighted the lantern.

Figgins and Kerr joined the search-party cheerfully. The juniors descended into the vaults, Tom Merry leading the way with the lighted lantern.

"Pway be on your guard, deah boys, and don't talk, in case the wottah heahs our voices," said Arthur Augustus.

"Bettah keep silent."

"Shurrup!"

"Don't be cheeky to your leadah, Blake!"

"Don't jaw, old chap!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"He must be wound up," said Monty Lowther. "I vote that we wait here till he runs down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are makin' a feahful wow with that cacklin', deah boys," said D'Arcy. "The wottah will take the alarm and cleah off if he is heah."

"No way out!" said Herries.

"Yes, there is, though," said Tom Merry, "some old scientific johnny who was exploring here last term discovered a bricked-up passage, and it was opened to see what was on the other side. I remember seeing it in the local paper at the time. They found a brick passage under the ground, leading away somewhere—to the monk's cell in Rylcombe Wood, I think."

"Yaas, I wemembah now. If the wottah takes the alarm, he can cleah out and escape to the woods. Pway be quiet."

"We'll look for the passage first, and see if there's any sign of him," said Tom Merry.

He led the way, flashing the lantern before him in advance.

The juniors were very much on their guard. They hardly thought that the convict was there—but it was possible—it was a likely enough place to hide. And if he was there, and they discovered him, he would certainly be a rough customer to tackle. If he had a bludgeon, and the will to use it, even nine sturdy juniors would need to be very careful in dealing with him. Indeed, it was quite possible that if the search-party discovered the convict, there would be a sudden flight instead of victory and capture.

"Here's the passage," said Blake.

The juniors halted.

A dark opening showed in the stone wall of the vault. Masses of brick lay about, as they had been left by the workmen months before, when the bricked-up passage was opened under the direction of a distinguished archaeologist. Beyond the opening the passage was dark and gloomy. The juniors shivered a little as they looked into it, and smelt the strong, close, earthy odour that came from it.

"Not a giddy cheerful spot!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"My hat! Look here!"

Tom Merry stooped suddenly.

On a jagged point of the broken brickwork was a fragment of cloth, evidently torn from the clothing of someone who had passed in a hurry in the darkness, and probably stumbled there.

And upon the fragment of cloth, as Tom Merry held it up in the light of the lantern, showed a well-known mark.

It was the broad arrow—the brand of the prison.

The juniors gazed at it with bated breath.

There was no doubt now.

The convict had been there.

The juniors looked at the tell-tale fragment as if they could hardly believe their eyes. They had entered upon the convict-hunt in a half humorous spirit, and with very little real expectation of coming upon Jonas Racke, No. 101. It gave them a thrill to learn that they were close upon him, after all; that he was probably at that moment within sound of their voices. They drew closer together, casting quick and uneasy glances round them into the darkness.

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus, "we're weally on the track!"

Most of the juniors had brought sticks with them, in case they should be wanted. They grasped their weapons a little more tightly now. If they came upon the hunted, desperate man, there was no doubt that their weapons would be wanted—and all their courage, too.

"He's been here," said Tom Merry, flashing the light round. "He may have heard us, or more likely heard Cutts,

when he was here, and bolted by this passage. If that's the case, he's got to the wood long ago. And—"

"And Cutts may have gone to head him off!" Blake exclaimed excitedly. "I was surprised that he cleared off so easily and left us in possession. He's finished here, and he's gone to lay for the convict at the monk's cell. He could cover the distance in half the time above ground, and he'd get there first."

"Gweat Scott! The deep wottah!"

"Let's get after him!" said Figgins.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"He's more than half an hour ahead, and it's not so long as that to the cell in the wood. If he headed No. 101 off, the rotter may have dodged back this way. We'll go through the passage."

"It's jolly risky," said Kerr.

"Oh, rats!"

"Pity I didn't bring Towser," said Herries regretfully. "Towser would smell him out like a shot!"

"Never seen a shot smell anything out," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Ass! I mean—"

"I repeat that it's jolly risky," said Kerr. "I'm game, if you fellows want to go, but it's a mug's idea. Let's get on."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Oh, we're not going to chuck it up now!" said Tom Merry. "There are nine of us, anyway."

"Time to run when we see the convict, too," Monty Lowther suggested cheerfully.

"Suppose you fellows wait here while I go for Towser?" suggested Herries.

"More rats! Come on!"

And, led by Tom Merry with the lantern, the adventurers plunged into the noisome darkness of the underground passage.

CHAPTER 8.

The Capture of Convict 101.

CUTTS of the Fifth stopped.

He had hurried down the hill from the old castle, and had taken a short cut through the wood, at a good speed. He had reached a deep glade, surrounded by trees half-stripped of their foliage by the autumn winds, and deep in dead leaves. In the midst of the bushes stood a little building of stone. It was the cell of a recluse, inhabited by monks doing penance, in the old days when St. Jim's was a monastery, and the ruined castle was a great and imposing building garrisoned by Norman soldiers. Now the monk's cell had fallen to decay—the roof was gone, and creeping plants grew inside and out, and moss patched the cracked stones of the floor.

There were two apartments in the old stone cell—the cell itself above ground, and a deep, dark cellar below. Into that hidden cellar opened the passage from the vaults of the old castle—a secret means of escape, and communication with the outside world in time of siege, such as most strongholds were provided with in those stormy days of old. For many centuries it had lain hidden, till it was explored by an enterprising archaeologist.

Cutts of the Fifth stopped outside the stone cell and peered in at the shattered doorway. Cutts was breathing hard from his haste. There was a glitter in his hard eyes, and his teeth were firmly set.

There were few fellows at St. Jim's who would have cared to encounter Jonas Racke, Convict No. 101, alone and unaided. But Cutts of the Fifth was one of the few. Cutts was a blackguard of the first water—the very blackest of black sheep. A public schoolboy who deliberately takes on evil courses finds many opportunities of gratifying his peculiar tastes. And Cutts had never neglected a single opportunity of that kind. It was an open secret among the fellows that Cutts broke bounds at night to play cards with a gambling set at the Green Man, that he had gone to race-courses on half-holidays, that he drank and smoked. But, with all his vices, it could not be denied that Cutts had one redeeming quality at least—a cool and determined courage, an iron nerve that nothing could shake.

Cutts knew his danger, but it did not cause him to hesitate for a moment.

It was the hundred pounds' reward he was thinking of.

His latest plunge upon the "gee-gees" had left Cutts in difficulties for money; his dead certs. had turned out to be dead certs. only for the bookmakers, and Cutts was badly in want of money.

He did not care a rap for the convict, or for the damage the man might do him if he retained his liberty. All he cared for was the fact that if he succeeded in laying the fugitive by the heels, or in bringing the police to his hiding-place, he would win the reward of a hundred pounds. And

that handsome sum of money would relieve Cutts of all his little financial difficulties, and leave him a considerable margin to tempt Fortune with anew.

Cutts was ready to run risks for that.

He had boundless pluck and an iron determination. He had thought the matter out coolly, and determined to run the risk. He had investigated the deep vaults under the ruined castle, and he had heard someone moving in the darkness there; and he had seen the fragment of cloth marked with the broad arrow. It was easy for him to guess the rest. The escaped convict had been there, the sound of Cutts's coming into the vault had given him the alarm, and he had fled by the underground passage to gain the woods, probably supposing that the police were on his track. And Cutts had hurried to the outer end of the secret passage to bar off his retreat. He knew that he could cover the distance above ground in half the time of the convict, stumbling and groping along in the darkness of the passage.

Cutts drew a life-preserver from his overcoat as he peered into the stone cell. All was quiet and still there. If the man was coming along the underground passage he had not yet arrived at the outlet.

If the ruffian attempted to escape that way Cutts intended to tackle him. If he remained lurking in the underground recesses, the Fifth Former, as soon as he was satisfied upon that point, would hurry off to Rylcombe Police-station for aid, and bring a party to run the convict down in his hidden recess.

Cutts waited and watched.

If the man did not appear in half an hour at the outside, Cutts would feel pretty certain that he intended to remain below ground. But until he was sure he did not dare to leave for help. He did not want No. 101 to dodge away and escape.

He waited patiently, his eyes on the interior of the cell, the life-preserver gripped in his hand. In the centre of the moss-grown cell was a square opening, giving admittance to the cellar below. By that opening the convict must come, if he was coming at all.

Click!

Cutts started, and his blood thrilled to his heart as he heard that slight sound in the stillness. It was the sound of a stone slipping under a stumbling foot.

His eyes gleamed as he watched.

Suddenly from the opening in the floor of the cell a head and shoulders rose into view. The close-cropped bullet-head; the dirty, savage face, with four days' stubble of beard on the chin; the gleaming, desperate eyes; the mark of the broad arrow upon the torn and muddy tunic, betrayed the convict.

It was Jonas Racke, No. 101.

The savage eyes glared round in search of a foe. Cutts kept well out of sight, peering at the man through a crevice in the old stones. The convict came higher, still glaring about him like a savage animal. A heavy bludgeon was gripped in his right hand, his grasp upon it was tight and tense. There was no doubt that he would use it, even to the extent of murder, rather than be recaptured. Yet Cutts did not falter, his nerve did not fail for an instant. He waited.

The man drew himself up and stepped from the stone stair into the cell. He was a short and powerfully-built man, full of muscular strength. In a struggle with him, Cutts, strong as he was, would have no chance. But Cutts did not intend to tackle the ruffian hand-to-hand.

He scarcely breathed as the convict came crouching towards the doorway of the cell, evidently with the intention of peering out and scanning the wood for enemies.

Cutts drew silently a little further back.

The bullet-head, the hand gripping the bludgeon, came into sight. And then Cutts, with instant precision, struck with the life-preserver.

Crash!

The man, quick as a hunted animal, started back, and saved his head, or the blow would have stunned him, as Cutts intended. But the life-preserver crashed upon his shoulder, and his right arm hung paralysed by his side, his bludgeon crashing down on the stones. The convict reeled back, with a hoarse, savage cry. He was helpless for the moment, and Cutts did not give him an instant to recover.

He leaped forward, and his left fist, clenched, hard as iron, caught the convict on the point of the jaw, and sent him crashing back into the cell.

The man went heavily down, dazed, half-stunned by the blow. Cutts was upon him in a second. His right knee was planted upon the convict's chest, pinning him down, and the life-preserver whirled in the air.

"Resist, and I'll brain you!" said Cutts coolly, without a shake in his voice.

The man glared up at him dizzily.

Dazed as he was he was about to struggle, but the weapon

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raised above his head was ready to descend, and he shrank convulsively from the threatened blow. It would have stunned him, if it had not fractured his skull.

"Don't, guv'nor!" panted the ruffian. "I give in! I give in!"

"You'd better!" said Cutts grimly.

The man blinked up at him wretchedly.

"Lemme off, guv'nor! You're a young gentleman—you ain't a warder—you ain't one of them blooming 'tocs! Watcher want goin' for a poor cove? S'elp me, I've 'ad a 'ard time of it in the cells, I 'ave! Let me off, guv'nor! Wot does it matter to you if I go?"

"It matters exactly one hundred pounds!" said Cutts coolly. "If you've got that sum about you, I'll take it, and you can go to Jericho, for all I care!"

"Blood-money!" said Jonas Racke hoarsely. "You want the price of a cove's life? That's wot you're arter, and you a gentleman!"

"Don't struggle!" said Cutts. "I shouldn't have the slightest compunction about brainin' you! You are a dangerous wild beast, and if your stupid skull were cracked it would be no loss to anybody. If you make any attempt to resist, down comes this life-preserver, and you won't know what happens next!"

With his left hand he drew a loop of cord from his pocket, and passed it over one of the convict's wrists, and tightened it. He had come prepared. The hunted look deepened in the ruffian's eyes. He made a motion as if to resist, but stopped. He knew that the murderous blow was ready to descend. For the moment Cutts, of the Fifth, the public school boy, gentleman as he would have called himself, was as ruthless and unscrupulous a ruffian as Jonas Racke himself. The man quailed under his steady, remorseless eye, and allowed his wrists to be drawn together, and bound with the cord.

Cutts worked quickly with his left hand. The two strong, hairy wrists were bound together, the cord knotted securely, and Jonas Racke was a prisoner.

Then Cutts rose to his feet, breathing hard.

The convict lay at his feet, panting. He was helpless now—his hands bound—and Cutts's weapon ready to strike. The desperate ruffian who had baffled the police for three or four days had been captured by Cutts, of the Fifth, single-handed.

Cutts looked down upon him, a grim smile of triumph on his face. There was, perhaps, a gleam of something like compassion in Cutts's look. The lawless blackguard of St. Jim's had something in common with the ruffian who lived by breaking the law. But if he pitied the hurt, dirty, miserable wretch at his feet, it did not make any difference to Cutts's intentions. Jonas Racke, Convict 101, was worth exactly a hundred pounds to him.

The man's look was hopeless, desperate, wild. He had long evaded the forces of law and order, but he was laid by the heels at last. And he knew that he had no mercy to expect from his captor. The seeker of blood-money was as ruthless as the warders or the police could have been.

But suddenly a change came over the man's sullen, desperate face. As Cutts stood looking down upon him the sunlight through the broken roof gleamed on Cutts's hard, clear-cut face. And a sudden flash of recognition came into the convict's eyes. He panted breathlessly.

"Master Cutts!"

Cutts started.

"You know my name?"

"Know your name!" The convict hissed out the words between his gritting teeth. "Know your name! S'elp me! Know your name, and know you, too, Master Cutts, though you don't know me—yet! Go to the police—fetch 'em here—and me over to them—tell 'em you've caught Jonas Racke—and I'll have something to tell 'em at the same time!"

Cutts compressed his lips, and stooped over the man, scanning his dirty, stubbly face. And then Cutts's face grew pale.

CHAPTER 9.

Catching a Tartar.

THE fear, the desperation, were gone from the face of the convict now.

He dragged himself to his feet, and stood facing Cutts, of the Fifth, his bound hands hanging before him. There was a mocking grin on his stubbly, savage face.

"Master Cutts! Fancy meetin' an old friend like you—'ere! You didn't know it was an old pal you was arter, I'll be bound! You didn't lay for to 'ave me tellin' tales about you, did you, Master Cutts?"

"You are Peter Dunn!" said Cutts, in a low voice. "You've changed—I didn't know you. I understood your name was Jonas Racke."

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Racke grinned.

"That's my name—as good as any other!" he said. "Coves in my line of business 'ave more'n one name, Master Cutts. The perlice was arter Jonas Racke at the time I knew you, and I was called by another name. But I've got a long memory for old friends, Master Cutts. I ain't forgotten you!"

Cutts bit his lip hard.

"If I'd known it was you, I should not have started after you," he said. "Of course, you know that, Racke?"

The convict nodded.

"I know you wouldn't have dared," he said. "I don't know that you wouldn't sell an old pal for a 'undred quid—you was always 'ard, Master Cutts—'ard as nails!"

"I sha'n't be 'ard on an old friend," said Cutts quietly. "I sha'n't take you to the station now. I'm sorry I hit you. This is a disappointment to me—I wanted the money!"

"Orses again—or cards?" grinned Racke.

"Both!" said Cutts coolly. "But that doesn't matter now. I'm going to let you loose, of course. You'll take your chance. If you're caught—I suppose you will be, in the long run, you'll hold your tongue about me? It won't do you any good to give me away."

"Cert'nly!" said Racke, with another grin. "I've 'eld my tongue so far, ain't I?"

"It was decent of you, but you were always a sportsman," said Cutts. "I'm sorry you should be in a hole like this. I'd help you if I could. Anyway, I shall let you go. Put out your paws!"

The convict held out his bound hands, and Cutts untied the cord he had knotted carefully on the sinewy wrists.

"You got something to smoke about yer, Master Cutts?" said the convict hungrily. "I ain't tasted terbacco fur—it seems years on end."

Cutts drew a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, and passed them silently to his peculiar friend. Cutts was perfectly cool and calm, though there was bitter rage in his heart. His scheme for making a hundred pounds had succeeded, only to be swept away like a house of cards at the last moment. He did not dare to provoke the enmity of Jonas Racke by handing him over to the police—that was all there was about it. He had to bear his bitter disappointment the best he could.

Racke lit a cigarette with the matches Cutts handed him, and grinned with enjoyment.

"Rather a change in the programme, this, ain't it, Master Cutts?" he said.

"A great change," said Cutts.

"And you're going to 'elp me," said Racke; "I'm in a bad way. Was it you who scared me outer the vaults? I thought it was the police."

"It was I. I should advise you not to return there, either—there are a gang of kids from my school searching for you there!"

"I'm in a bad way," repeated the convict. "I'm 'ungry. Ain't tasted nothing fur two days. I must 'ave clothes to get away in, Master Cutts!"

Cutts drew a deep breath.

"I can't do that for you," he said. "Think a minute! It means imprisonment to help a convict to escape the police. I'm sailing pretty near the wind in letting you loose now—you know that—and in holding my tongue about having seen you. I can't do more!"

The bulldog jaw of Jonas Racke seemed to become squarer, and the grin faded from his face. He stared savagely and threateningly at the schoolboy through the blue haze of the cigarette-smoke.

"You're goin' to 'elp an old pal?" he said. "You 'elp me, and I'll 'old my tongue, whether I'm caught or get away! But if you don't 'elp me, Master Cutts, I opens my mouth the minute the perlice lays 'ands on me! And you can lay to that!"

"Be reasonable!" said Cutts, inwardly cursing the greed of money that had led him to engage in the pursuit of the hunted man. "I've done all I can!"

"You're going to do more, or—"

"Or what?" said Cutts, with a steady glitter in his eyes.

"Or you'll be shown up!" said Racke savagely. "They can't send you to prison, I s'pose, as they can send me. But for a young gentleman in your position, it would be as bad, I reckon, to be disgraced, and kicked out of school. If your 'eadmaster knew that you came to see prize-fights, and laid money on them, I reckon it would be all up with you at your school!"

"I don't deny that!"

"And that ain't all I can say," pursued Racke—"not by no means! You remember the time you 'ad a big sum laid on a certain Peter Dunn, wot was fightin' the Bermondsey Bantam, Master Cutts? And it turned out that the Bantam was in wonderful form, and your money was going to be

lost. You know what happened to the Bantam. The police are still looking for the two individuals unknown who lambasted the Bantam in a dark lane, and left him lying with a cracked head. That was violent assault, Master Cutts; and if it was known that them two was you and me—

"You could not betray me without betraying yourself in that matter."

Racke chuckled.

"A little more won't hurt a fellow who's doing a ten-year stretch," he said. "I ain't got nothing to risk. Three months' and won't come 'eavy arter ten years' penal. But a month would settle you—for life!"

"You wouldn't be believed! You couldn't prove it!" said Cutts, pale to the lips now.

It was the most reckless piece of blackguardism that Cutts had ever been engaged in, and he had believed that it was buried, out of sight, for ever. But it bade fair to rise and haunt him now, owing to his unlucky capture of the escaped convict.

"Prove it!" said Racke reflectively. "I think I could. The Bantam caught sight of one of them as knocked him down—he'd know him again, too, though he wouldn't think of lookin' for him in a big public school—not unless he got a hint. P'raps my word alone wouldn't be taken. P'raps the Bantam's alone wouldn't convict you. But the two together would settle your hash, I reckon. Taken along with the fact that you 'ad big money laid agin him—and that could be proved. And I tell you the Bantam is mighty spiteful about it, and ain't forgotten it. You can't afford to quarrel with me, Master Cutts!"

Cutts knew that.

His heart was sinking. His greed for the blood-money had landed him in a fearful position. Hitherto, he had had no fear of this man betraying that past buried episode—the man, ruffian, as he was, had his own sense of honour, in his own way, and he stood to be imprisoned if the facts came to light. But now circumstances were altered. To a man condemned to ten years' penal servitude, the risk of imprisonment was, of course, nothing. Racke had nothing to lose now by betraying him, but Cutts had everything to lose by being betrayed. In spite of his coolness, his brain almost reeled as he thought of it—the whole of his secret career as a blackguard laid bare—his gambling, his visits to secret prize-fights, and that crowning act of ruffianism by which he had risked, not only his good name but his liberty. Whether he would be punished for that mattered little—if it came to light he would be utterly ruined, and that was enough.

Agitated as he was, he did not allow his face to betray his thoughts. Jonas Racke watched him keenly, but Cutts's hard, clear face remained unchanged.

"You're a good plucked 'un!" said Racke, at last. "But you've got to toe the line, Master Cutts. I'm sorry fur it, but there you are! I've got to keep away from the beaks. I ain't got anybody to 'elp me, only you. You can do it, and you must!"

"I will do it," said Cutts, with a reckless laugh. "I'm under your thumb, and it will be an adventure, anyway. What do you want? Clothes, food, money?"

"That's it," said Racke eagerly; "and I tell you, Master Cutts, you stand by me, and I'm as mum as an oyster, caught or not. You ain't nothing to fear from me, if you don't go back on me. S'elp me, I wouldn't ask you to run the risk, only wot's a cove to do?"

Cutts nodded.

"I'll help you!" he said. "You'd better clear out of this. You left a rag behind you in the vaults, and if those kids find it they may come along here. I'll get you some things at the school; and bring them to you after dark. You'll have to wait for me somewhere—in the wood will be the safest. Take the rest of the cigarettes, and here's a couple of quid, in case you have to bolt without seeing me. Mind, I'm going to do my level best for you, and I rely on your acting like a sport if you're caught after all."

"S'elp me!" said Jonas Racke. "I never was a nark. Mum's the word."

"Right-ho! Get into the wood now, and lie low. You'll hear the church clock strike at midnight, and at midnight I'll be ready for you. Come back here, then, and I'll be here. Don't fail."

"You bet!"

"And now, hark!"

From below came the sound of a voice. It came from the cellar underneath the mossy stone floor upon which they were standing.

"Heah we are, deah boys, and the wotiah's not heah!"

Cutts gritted his teeth. Jonas Racke made a spring for his bludgeon, a desperate look on his face.

"I'll run for the woods?" he muttered, with a quick, inquiring glance at Cutts. The Fifth-Former nodded quickly,

and the convict disappeared from the cell. Cutts stepped quickly towards the opening in the floor. There were only four steps from the cellar to where he stood, and if the juniors came out now they would infallibly see the convict as he ran for the wood. He was clearly visible through the gaps in the shattered walls of the old cell.

They had to be kept below until Convict 101 was clear, and that was Cutts's business now. He stepped to the opening with his fists clenched and a savage gleam in his eyes.

CHAPTER 10.

Very Suspicious!

TOM MERRY & Co. had followed the passage to its end. They crowded now in the cellar underneath the old stone cell, and Tom Merry flashed the light of the lantern round him.

"Nobody here!" he remarked.

"Oh, he's got clear, unless Cutts has headed him off!" said Jack Blake. "And I don't fancy Cutts could do it on his lonesome. Anyway, let's get out of this. I want to breathe."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry came first up the steps. The other fellows were crowding behind him. Tom started, and halted suddenly, as he caught sight of a figure bending over the opening above.

"Look out!"

"Bai Jove! Is it the convict?"

"Ahem! No, it's Cutts!" said Tom Merry, recognising the Fifth-Former. "You ass, Cutts, you gave me a jump! I thought it was the giddy convict for a minute."

"Keep where you are!" said Cutts grimly.

Tom Merry stared.

"Why shouldn't we come up?" he demanded. "We're jolly well not going to stay in this cellar. We've had enough underground to last us for a long time."

"Pway, don't be an ass, Cutts!"

"If you come up I shall knock you down!" said Cutts coolly.

"Why, you rotter—"

"You cad!"

"You fearful outsiders!"

"I believe he's caught our convict, and he wants to keep him to himself!" yelled Figgins excitedly.

"Have you got our convict, Cutts, you cad?"

"If you have got him, Cutts, you wotiah, I insist upon you handin' him ovah at once! I wegard him as our private property."

"Yes, rather!"

"Look here, I'm coming up!" said Tom Merry. "If you play the giddy goat, Cutts, you'll get hurt. Here goes!"

Tom Merry ran up the steps.

Cutts struck out without hesitation. Jonas Racke had disappeared into the trees now, but Cutts dared not let the juniors emerge until the man was at a safe distance. The blow would have sent Tom Merry rolling down the steps, but he dodged back, and avoided it, and Cutts almost overbalanced himself as his fist met with no resistance. As he lurched forward over the steps, Tom Merry sprang up again, and butted right into him bodily, and Cutts went reeling backwards.

Bump!

Tom Merry leaped out from the stair as the Fifth-Former fell, and the other juniors came swarming up after him. Cutts sprang to his feet, but it was too late, the juniors were pouring out, and there were too many for him to tackle.

"Now, what's the little game?" demanded Figgins indignantly. "Why don't you want us here? Have you found our convict?"

"You cheeky young scoundrels—"

"Pway moderate your language, Cutts! Othahwise, we shall pitch you down into the cellar!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

Cutts gritted his teeth. He was inclined to run "amuck" among the juniors, hitting out right and left. But there was no doubt that if he had he would have got very much the worst of it. The juniors looked suspiciously about the stone cell. Cutts's conduct was inexplicable, unless he had made some discovery he wished to keep from their knowledge.

Convict No. 101 was certainly not in the cell. The little place was crowded by the juniors, and there was no hiding-place in it large enough for a rabbit. Nor was there any sign of the convict having been there.

"Have you seen him, Cutts?" Tom Merry asked.

"Seen whom?"

"The convict."

"What rot! Of course I haven't."

"Didn't he come out this way?" asked Blake.

"If he had I should certainly have seen him, I suppose," said Cutts, lying with the ease and facility that comes of long practice.

"I cannot undahstand it," said Arthur Augustus.

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"I feel suah that he came this way. I think I heard him ahead of us in the passage once or twice—somebody, at all events, and that somebody must have come out. Hasn't anybody at all come out here, Cutts, deah boy?"

"Nobody, of course," said Cutts.

"Then it is vewy wemara."

"Very remarkable if true," said Kerr drily.

Cutts gave the Scottish junior a fierce look.

"Don't you believe me?"

"No, I don't," said Kerr coolly. "Why were you trying to keep us down there? There was something here you didn't want us to see. What are you here at all for? You're looking for Jonas Racke, same as we are. My belief is that you've watched him come out, and perhaps you know where to find him at this minute."

Cutts laughed.

"You're welcome to think so," he said. "I've got no more time to waste on you."

And Cutts left the monk's cell.

The juniors looked at one another. Cutts's actions certainly required explaining, and they could only be explained on Kerr's theory. That Cutts had found an old acquaintance in No. 101, and had let him go, of course the juniors had no means of guessing. That did not occur to their minds for a moment. It was more probable that Cutts had seen which way the fugitive went, and intended to track him down, and wished to keep Tom Merry & Co. off the scent.

"We'll keep Cutts in sight," said Tom Merry. "I suppose he has as much right to look for No. 101 as we have, but he has no right to try to stop us. If he knows which way the giddy convict is gone, and is following him, we'll follow Cutts, and he'll lead us on the track. I can't quite make Cutts out, but it's vewy suspicious."

"I wegard it as vewy suspicious indeed. We'll keep an eye on that wottah," said D'Arcy. "He's not goin' to twack down our convict."

And the juniors quitted the monk's cell, and followed on the track of Gerald Cutts. Cutts glanced back and saw them, and smiled grimly. He had guessed that they might follow him, and he had taken a direction opposite to that taken by Jonas Racke. He walked on quickly, the Co. shadowing him, and by a roundabout course reached Rylcombe Lane. Then he walked straight on to the school.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "The wottah's goin' home, deah boys."

"Looks like it," grunted Blake.

"Pewaps he is twyin' to deceive us—to throw us off the twack," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sagely. "We'll keep him in sight."

They kept Cutts in sight all the way down the lane to St. Jim's.

To their surprise, Cutts stopped at the gates of the school, and rang. The juniors watched him from some distance down the lane.

"He's giving away that he's been out of bounds," said Tom Merry. "Taggles will report him when he lets him in."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Blessed if I understand it. He'll get into a row for breaking bounds. The gates have been kept shut all day on purpose to keep the fellows in. Cutts will have to confess that he cleared out over the wall."

"It is vewy odd."

Taggles, the porter, opened the gate. He seemed surprised to see Cutts. The Fifth-Former went in, and the gate was closed and locked again.

"We're not going to trouble Taggles," grinned Figgins; "we get in as we got out."

"Yaas, wathah."

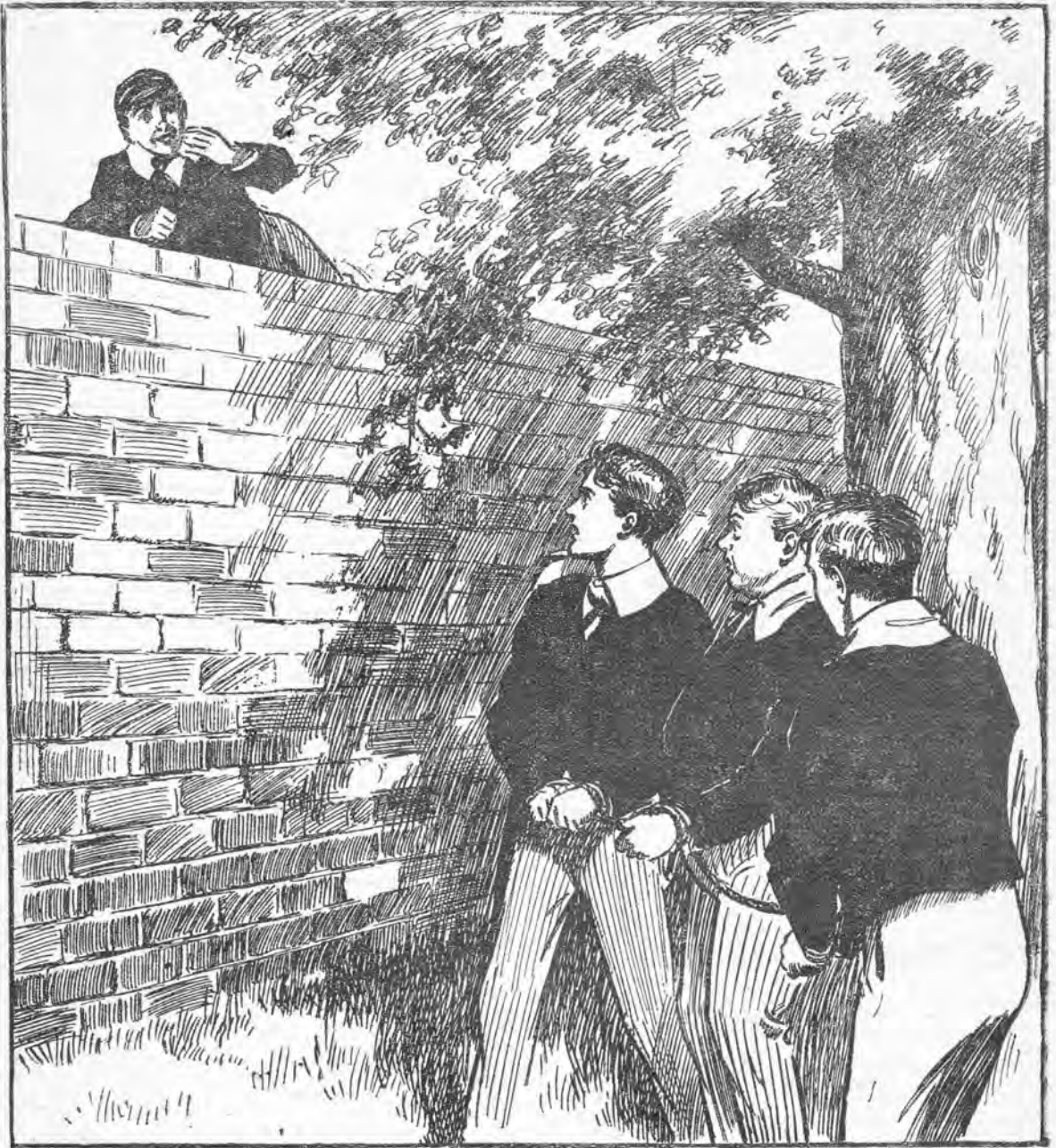
The juniors climbed the school wall, in the dusk, and dropped within, one after another. They came out from behind the trees, and strolled towards the School House. Gerald Cutts was just going into the School House as they caught sight of him again.

"Blessed if this doesn't beat the whole deck," said Blake. "What did Cutts want to keep us out of the monk's cell for, if he wasn't on the track of our convict?"

"I suppose he can't be off his wockah," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"I can't make it out," Tom Merry confessed. "He may have watched No. 101, and seen where he's hidden himself; and he may mean to get out again after dark and spot him and hand him over to the police. But it doesn't seem quite clear. And now he's given away the fact that he was out of bounds, and that's simply looking for trouble. Taggles will be sure to report him."

The juniors were puzzled. Cutts's conduct was extraordinary, and only of one thing could they be sure—that the cool and unscrupulous Fifth-Former had some very good reason for all that he did.



The School House juniors climbed the wall one by one, and dropped into the lane outside. Monty Lowther was the last to go, and he paused on the wall for a moment to kiss his hand to the infuriated New House juniors. "Oh, you rotters!" roared Figgins wildly. "We're fairly dished! And if we're found tied up like this, the whole school will simply howl over it!" A chuckle was heard floating from the lane, and the School House party were gone. (See Chapter 4.)

The juniors entered the School House and found Kangaroo full of news.

"We've beaten them!" was the Cornstalk's first remark.

"Eh! What?" In the intense interest of tracking down No. 101, Tom Merry & Co. had forgotten all about the junior House match.

"Two goals to one," said Kangaroo.

"Oh! The House match! Good!"

"I wondah where that wottah is now," D'Arcy remarked.

"Kangawoo, deah boy, did you see which way Cutts went?"

"Cutts! He's just gone into the Head's study."

"Bai Jove!"

That was the climax. Cutts had gone directly to the Head of St. Jim's. For what? The juniors could only wonder—but they were soon to know.

CHAPTER 11.

Dished!

"MASTER Merry!" Lynn, the boot-boy of the School House, put his head into Tom Merry's study, after a respectful tap at the door. The Terrible Three were getting tea in their study. Their long outing in the afternoon had made them very hungry.

Tom Merry gave Lynn a nod and a cheery smile.

"Hallo, kid! What's wanted?"

"I'm afraid you're wanted, Master Merry," said Lynn ruefully. "You and Master Lowther and Manners, sir, in the Head's study."

"My hat!" said Lowther. "What's the row now?"

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"Some beast knows we've been out of bounds, and has reported us," groaned Manners. "More trouble!"

"Cutts!" said Tom Merry abruptly.

"Cutts? He couldn't report us without reporting himself."

"He's worked it somehow—the rotten sneak. He's not a prefect; and he's no right to report us—it's sneaking, like a tag telling tales!" Tom Merry exclaimed indignantly. "By Jove, we'll let the rotter know what we think of him. Has anybody else been sent for, Lynn?"

"Yes, sir. All the young gentlemen in Study No. 6," said Lynn. "And Toby has been sent over to the New House for Master Figgins and Master Kerr."

"The whole giddy family," grunted Lowther. "Lucky for Fatty Wynn he stayed behind to feed. Go and tell the Head we're busy, Lynn, but as soon as we've had tea we'll give his order our very best attention."

Lynn grinned. He was not likely to take that message to the Head of St. Jim's.

The Terrible Three left their tea untasted, and descended, overtaking Blake & Co. on the stairs. Blake and Herries and D'Arcy and Digby were looking lugubrious. Figgins and Kerr came in, Toby, the page, having fetched them over from their own House. They were not looking cheerful.

"I say, this is jolly rotten, ain't it?" said Figgins. "That awful beast, Cutts, must have given us away."

"But he'll get it in the neck himself, too, I suppose," Herries remarked.

"No fear!" said Kerr. "He's got some scheme on—one of his blessed deep schemes. You can bet your Sunday socks that Cutts won't get into trouble. The trouble's for us."

"Yaas, I fash that is the case, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I shall put it to the Head, as an old sport—"

"Bow-wow!" growled Blake.

And the glum juniors made their way to the Head's study. Breaking bounds, after the special order issued by Dr. Holmes, was a serious matter—as they realised now for the first time. They had not given the matter much thought before—not expecting to be reported to the Head. But they were obliged to think of it now, and they realised that it was serious. Arthur Augustus remarked lugubriously, that the Head was certain to be "watty." And there was no doubt that the swell of St. Jim's was right there.

Dr. Holmes was looking decidedly stern when the juniors came in. Gerald Cutts was still in the study.

"My boys, a very serious matter has been brought to my notice," said the Head. "It seems that, in spite of my notice, that bounds were to stop at the school gates until further notice from me, you have left the school this afternoon."

The juniors hung their heads.

They had no defence to make.

"More than this!" continued the Head. "As you are aware, the school bounds were drawn in, owing to the danger of the escaped convict being met by any boys who went out. Such an encounter might prove very dangerous. I hear now that you have not only broken bounds, but you have actually been in search of the escaped convict—a very dangerous and desperate man, who might have done you serious bodily harm if he had been found by you."

"There were nine of us, sir," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah, sir; we could have handled him vewy easily."

"I doubt that," said the Head. "A strong man, probably armed, would not allow himself to be overpowered by boys. In any event, some of you would certainly have been seriously injured in the struggle with such a man. You foolish lads; do you not realise that one or more of you might actually have been killed in such a struggle?"

"We weren't afraid, sir," murmured Blake.

"Apparently they were not. But what should I have said to your parents in such a case? Do you think I restricted the school bounds for nothing, or for the purpose of curtailing your liberty? Did you not understand that I had good reason for my action, and that it was your duty to obey me?"

The juniors looked very shamefaced. The Head's tone was grievous rather than angry, and they realised more clearly than ever that they had done wrong. Punishment they were not afraid of; but it was decidedly unpleasant to feel that they had done wrong, and had caused concern and anxiety to the kind old headmaster, whom they all liked and respected.

"I—I say, sir, we—we're sorry!" stammered Tom Merry. "I'm afraid we didn't think very much before we went out, sir. It was just a lark."

"Yaas, sir; and I'm afraid I'm most to blame, as I was leadah, and got the othah chaps into it," said Arthur Augustus penitently.

The Head smiled a little.

"I am glad you understand that you have done wrong, at all events," he said. Then his face became stern. THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 301.

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again. "There is still a more serious side to the matter. I understand that you were actuated by a desire to obtain the reward offered for the arrest of that wretched man."

"Ye-es, sir!"

"I know that a hundred pounds is a large and tempting sum of money," said the Head. "But, not to mention that you had no chance of winning it, can you not see that it was utterly unworthy of you to think of doing so? That money is the price of a man's liberty—a man, certainly, who ought to be in prison—but it is not your duty to take on the work of detectives and policemen. You should be ashamed to touch such money, even if you had succeeded in winning it."

The juniors were crimson now.

They wished inwardly that the Head had caned them all round, instead of talking to them; it would have cut much less deeply.

"The money is, in fact, blood-money!" said the Head very severely. "For the police it is a different matter—they have their duty to do. But it would be disgraceful for you boys to touch such money."

"I—I suppose it would, sir," said Tom Merry.

"I had my doubts about it from the first," said Arthur Augustus dolefully. "I remarked to Blake that I didn't weally know whethah we were justified in takin' it. But we were hard up, sir, you see, and a hundred pounds meant tea in the study for the rest of the term."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"I am willing to believe that you acted without thinking," he said, "and I hope you realise now that it was unworthy of you to think of taking the money, even if you had had any opportunity of doing so."

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"I don't think we should really have taken it, sir, if it had come to that," said Tom Merry honestly. "We didn't think very much about it; but if it had actually come to taking the money, I think we should have left it alone, when we'd thought it out."

"I hope so," said the Head.

"You see, sir, we had to catch the convict first. That was the most pressin' bishnah," said Arthur Augustus. "We could leave thinkin' about the weward till aftahwards."

"You had not the slightest prospect, either of finding him or of capturing him," said the Head. "The police have been searching for him in vain. You were not likely to succeed where they had failed. It was a very foolish enterprise, as well as being very wrong."

"But we got on the track, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Nonsense. You may have fancied so, but you were certainly mistaken. Now, I shall not punish you, my boys, if you will give me your word not to leave the school again till the restriction upon bounds has been removed."

The juniors looked dismayed.

The Head was kindness itself—and they could not refuse such kindness—to say nothing of the severity of the punishment which would have followed such a refusal. But if they gave their word, they had to keep it. There was no question about that. And so they saw, in their mind's eye, the prospect of success fade away like a mirage. The intended hunt for the convict—successful rivalry with Cutts of the Fifth—and the elat of making such a capture vanished now.

They looked at Gerald Cutts, and their looks were not loving. The Fifth-Former had brought all this upon them, after he had been engaged in exactly the same enterprise himself. Their feelings towards the black sheep of the Fifth were very bitter at that moment.

"I suppose Cutts reported us to you, sir?" said Tom Merry at last.

"Yes."

"Did he report himself as well? If it's wrong for us to hunt the convict, I suppose it's just as wrong of Cutts, sir."

"What nonsense are you talking, Merry?" said the Head sharply. "You do not suppose that a senior boy would enter upon such a ridiculous expedition, surely?"

"But he was on the same tack, sir—I mean, he was doing the same as we were—looking for the convict!" exclaimed Tom indignantly.

"Nonsense!"

"I have already informed the Head why I left the school this afternoon," said Cutts calmly. "You can hardly make Dr. Holmes believe any nonsense of that kind, Merry."

"Cutts has told me all," said the Head.

"But—but—"

"Repeat what you have said to me, Cutts," said the Head. "The juniors seem to be under some misapprehension as to your motives."

"Certainly, sir. I heard by chance some foolish chatter among the juniors, which made me aware that they intended to search for the convict. I found that some of them had

broken bounds. I should have informed Kildare, as head prefect; but he was playing in a football match, and most of the prefects were playing, too, so I decided to act myself. Although not a prefect, I felt that it was my duty as a senior to look after the silly young duffers."

"Ahem! Your view was quite right, Cutts."

"I was afraid they might get into some danger, sir, and I left the school to look for them. I found them at the ruined castle, and they confessed that they were looking for the convict. I ordered them to return to the school, but they refused to obey as I was not a prefect. I returned to the school myself with the intention of reporting them to you, sir, at the risk of being regarded as a tale-bearer. As a senior boy, I felt that it was my duty to do so. If they had by any chance come upon the convict, some of them might have been seriously injured, perhaps murdered. I felt that for no consideration ought I to allow them to run such risks, and as they refused to listen to me, I had no resource but to place the matter in your hands, sir."

"You acted quite rightly, Cutts. I hope you understand now, Merry, that Cutts has acted in the matter from the best motives."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

He knew that Cutts was lying, of course; but it was useless to say so to the Head. The Fifth-Former's explanation was perfectly plausible, and the juniors could not prove it to be untrue. And Tom Merry, too, disdained to be drawn into a squabble and mutual recriminations with the unscrupulous rascal of the Fifth. He made no reply to the Head's question, and the other juniors were equally silent. It was useless, as well as humiliating, to bandy words with a liar.

"And now," said the Head, "upon receiving your promise not to repeat your conduct, I shall pass over what you have done. Of course, you will give your promise? I insist upon it."

"We promise, sir," said Tom Merry quietly. "We won't break bounds until the notice is withdrawn, and we won't try to track the convict down again."

"Very well. I have your word?" said the Head, glancing over the troubled faces of the juniors.

"Yes, sir," said all of them at once.

"Then you may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

And they went!

CHAPTER 12. Kerr Thinks It Out!

"**W**OTTEN!" That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's verdict, as the dismayed juniors gathered in Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

Tom Merry & Co. were decidedly glum.

They had been on the track of the convict. Although the Head smiled at the idea, it was the fact, all the same; and they had had hopes of success on a second attempt.

That, as Blake remarked, was knocked on the head now.

They had given their word, and their word was sacred. Not under any circumstances could they go outside the walls of St. Jim's until the Head's notice was withdrawn.

And that left the field clear for Gerald Cutts!

They realised that only too clearly. The cad of the Fifth, with his usual cunning, had cut the ground away from under their feet.

He had left the matter open to himself; he had closed it to Tom Merry & Co. Cutts of the Fifth had been one too many for them!

"It's quite wight about the reward," said D'Arcy. "When I come to think of it, you know, I wouldn't have touched it."

"We could have given it to the poor," said Herries. "I don't think I'd like to keep that kind of money, when I come to think of it; but we could have given it to the vicar for the poor in Rylcombe. They need it badly enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And that awful ruffian ought to be laid by the heels," said Manners. "He was put in prison for half-killing and robbing an old man, and he nearly murdered a warder in escaping. He ought to be shut up like a wild beast. I think we're justified in helping to get him collared, so long as we don't touch the reward."

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"But it's all up now," grunted Blake. "Cutts has done us in the eye. He's pulled wool over Dr. Holmes's eyes, but he can't take me in. I know his little game. He's simply cleared us out of the way because we're his rivals, and he's going on with the little game himself."

"No doubt about that," said Kerr quietly. "He knows we were on the right track, and he may think we know more than we do. Why was he so keen to keep us out of the monk's cell, and why is he so keen to keep us within bounds?

Depend upon it, the convict is hidden somewhere near that old cell, and Cutts knows it."

"The rotter!"

"The beastly spoofah!"

"And Cutts wouldn't have any scruples about collaring the reward," said Figgins. "The Head might talk to him till he was black in the face, but Cutts would collar the cash all the same, if he could do it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we can't stop him," said Monty Lowther. "He's dished us. We know now that he knows a lot, and if we followed him next time he goes on the war-path, we could find out what he knows. Very likely he suspected that we would, and that's why he's dished us with the Head. He's too deep for us."

"Perhaps we're not quite so dished as Cutts supposes," said Kerr in his quiet way.

The juniors all looked at Kerr with new hope in their faces. For the reward they cared nothing, and for the convict very little. But they were very keen to get even with Cutts, if they could, and to prevent the cad of the Fifth from "dishing" them. They would have given a very great deal for a chance of defeating the astute schemer who had played this treacherous trick upon them.

And Kerr, as all the juniors knew, was the fellow to think of a way out of the difficulty, if a way could be thought of at all. Kerr was as keen as a knife, and the canny Scottish junior was often found equal to problems that baffled his comrades. Figgins made no secret of the fact that Kerr furnished the brains of the Co. Indeed, it was pretty certain that Kerr could have made himself leader of the New House juniors, if he had ever wanted, or thought, of supplanting Figgins, an idea which would certainly never have entered his mind.

"Go it, Kerr, old man," said Figgins encouragingly. "I can see you've got some idea."

"Yaas, pile in, old chap," said D'Arcy. "As leadah, I am willin' to considah any suggestions fwom my followahs."

Kerr grinned.

"Look at the facts," he said. "Cutts has dished us like this because he knows where the convict is. That seems plain enough to me. So far as I can see, Cutts's intention is to get the man collared and claim the reward, though he's so jolly deep that you never know what he really is up to. Well, Cutts wanted to keep us away from the monk's cell. I take that to mean that No. 101 is there, or near there, somewhere. Cutts can't afford to let the grass grow under his feet. The man may be run down any minute. My idea is that he won't waste time. Now he's got rid of us, he'll be on the track again at once. It may not be safe for him to break bounds again before dark. He knows we shall keep an eye on him. I think he'll get out when we're in the dormitory."

"Quite likely."

"Yaas, but what's the good of knowin' that, deah boy? The trouble is that we can't follow the wotlah when he does get out."

"We can't," agreed Kerr. "We've promised to keep inside bounds, and we've got to do it. But we've only promised for ourselves."

"Ah!"

"We've promised, too, to give up looking for the convict. Well, we'll give it up. No. 101 can go and eat coke! But it's up to Cutts to give it up, too, as he's made us give it up; and we're going to make him. We've got pals who will help us—who haven't made any giddy promises."

"Bai Jove!"

"Fatty Wynn, and Redfern, and Kangaroo, and Reilly, for instance," said Kerr. "They haven't made any promises about bounds."

D'Arcy looked very solemn.

"But we can't let our friends look for the convict, Kerr. Our promise implies that we give that up altogether."

"I know that, fathead!" said Kerr pleasantly. "I'm not suggesting that our friends should look for the convict. That idea is chucked up for good. We've given our word, and we can't either break it or sneak round it. Putting up the other fellows to look for the convict would be practically breaking our promise. The convict can go and eat coke! He's off the card now. Our business is with Cutts."

"That's it!"

"Cutts has dished us, and we're going to dish Cutts. He's prevented us from looking for the convict. We're going to prevent him. That's my idea."

"Heav, hear!"

"My idea is to keep Cutts under our eye—after lights out, as well as before," said Kerr. "If he goes out—as I believe he will—he's got to be shadowed. We can't shadow him, but the other fellows can. They're not going to look for the convict. They're going to look for Cutts. Cutts is going to be stopped. Of course, if they came on the convict

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by accident, it would be their duty to collar him if they could. But the bizney is with Cutts. If he breaks bounds to-night, he's going to be shown up. He's shown us up, and lied to the Head about us. We're entitled to show him up in his turn. If he goes out, I suggest that our chaps collar him outside the school walls, and ring up Taggles, and bring Cutts in by force."

"My hat!"

"Then he can invent some fiore lies for the Head!" said Kerr. "We've got it in the neck through his giving us away. He's going to be bottled up in the same way."

"Good egg!"

"If he goes out——" said Tom Merry.

"I believe he will go out. He can't let the time pass. The convict may clear out at any minute."

"Quite so."

"Better still, the fellows can collar him and tie him to the school gates, and then ring up Taggles," said Kerr, with a grin. "He's going to have tit for tat—what he's done for us, we'll do for him."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as bein' perfectly justifiable to show Cutts up, as he's shown us up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll cut over to the New House, and fetch Reddy and Fatty," said Figgins. "You chaps get Kangaroo and Reilly here, and we'll put it to them."

"Right-ho!"

Ten minutes later the four juniors were in the study along with the Co., Fatty Wynn and Redfern of the New House, and Kangaroo and Reilly of the School House, were fellows who could be relied upon to any extent. And when the details of the matter were explained to them, they were quite keen to render aid in punishing the treachery of the cad of the Fifth.

"We'll collar the cad!" said Kangaroo confidently. "We'll take a rope, and rope him up to the school gates; and after that he can worry out what lies he likes, but he'll have to own up that he was out of bounds, and that he was telling lies this afternoon. That would follow, of course."

"Faith, and we won't miss him!" said Reilly. "It was a dirty trick, telling the Head about you, and we'll make him sorry for it intirely."

"What-ho!" said Redfern emphatically.

"We'll watch the beast!" said Fatty Wynn. "We'll keep an eye on him all the evening. I'll station myself in the tuckshop, in case he comes there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wynn——"

"We'll all keep an eye open for him till bed-time," said Tom Merry. "But if he goes, I fancy he will go after dark. But there are enough of us to keep the cad shadowed, and we'll make him sorry he told tales to the Head about us."

"Yaas, wathah! He ought to be wagged as a sneak!"

"Can't rag the Fifth," said Blake. "But we can show him up, and prove that he was lying this afternoon—and that will be better than a ragging."

And the juniors agreed that it would. And then the meeting broke up, with the understanding that Cutts of the Fifth was to be watched, and not lost sight of for a moment, by someone or other of the Co.

CHAPTER 13.

Kangaroo Makes Discoveries.

GERALD CUTTS was very busy that evening. He knew that he was doing a very risky thing, but there was no help for it, and he set about it with his usual coolness and quiet determination.

If he performed his part of the agreement, he knew that he could rely upon Jonas Racke to hold his tongue, caught or uncaught; but he had to pay the price of the secret.

He did not waste time in useless regrets for the greed that had led him, in the first place, to take up the hunting of the convict. It had lauded him in his present difficulty; but it could not be helped now, and it was futile to cry over spilt milk. And, as a matter of fact, there was something in the adventure that appealed to Cutts's reckless nature. It gratified him to think that while the rest of the school was fast asleep, he would be stealing through the dark woods, to meet the desperate man whom all the other fellows would have avoided as they would have avoided a wild beast. And, so far as he cared about the matter at all, his sympathies were with Racke. The man was up against all law and order—and so was the blackguard of St. Jim's, in his heart. There were few things that Cutts respected.

In his study—which he had to himself—he prepared the bag he was to take to the old cell in the wood. He had to obtain clothes for the convict, and that was his most difficult task. Money he was able to borrow in the Fifth—food he

obtained at the School tuckshop. But a change of clothes for No. 101 was a difficult matter. He might have obtained old clothes from Taggles, or the gardener, or one of the stablemen, but he dared not take anything that could possibly be identified as belonging to St. Jim's. In the event of the convict's capture, the police would inquire very strictly into where he had obtained a change of clothes. And if they were traced to the school, there would be very serious danger for the fellow who had supplied them.

There was nothing for it but to buy clothes, and that Cutts decided to do. He could get ready-made clothes at a shop in Wayland, where he was not known, and could give a false name there—indeed, he could make some slight changes in his appearance, so as to avoid the possibility of identification afterwards.

He could think of no safer plan.

To carry out that scheme, he had to visit Wayland before the shops were closed.

The Head's order made it impossible for him to leave the school in the ordinary way, and he had no choice but to break bounds secretly.

His plan was to take the bag with him, with the articles it already contained, and put the new-bought clothes into it, and conceal it in the wood, and at midnight return to it, to carry it to the place of appointment.

The plan was simple enough, and he did not see that he was likely to run any risk so far, especially as he had warded off the danger from the juniors.

He knew that Tom Merry & Co. could not quit the school after their promise to the Head; even if they had been capable of breaking their word, they would not have risked a flogging.

He did not fear them now.

Cutts waited till the November dusk was thickening in the quadrangle. He had told his chums Prye and Gilmore that he was going to "swot" that evening, and would sport his oak, so no one would be surprised to find his study door locked, and his absence would not be suspected in the Fifth.

And nobody outside the Fifth, of course, was likely to visit his study.

As the dusk thickened over the quad., Cutts slipped out of the house by a side door, with the bag in his hand.

The thick dusk concealed him from observation by chance passers—and it also concealed from him the fact that a keen-eyed junior tracked him across the quadrangle to the school wall.

It was Kangaroo of the Shell.

Cutts went through the trees, pitched the bag over the wall, and climbed after it, and the Cornstalk junior stood for some moments in hesitation.

The juniors were scattered—some of them in their studies, and those who were keeping watch for Cutts were at different points, looking out for him. Only Kangaroo had seen him slip out of the house by the servants' door.

If the Cornstalk went to warn his comrades, he would lose track of Cutts; and, on the other hand, if he followed him, he certainly could not think of tackling Cutts single-handed. It was a difficult matter to decide, but Kangaroo decided it by slipping over the school wall and shadowing Cutts. The sight of the bag in the Fifth-Former's hand had aroused his curiosity. What Cutts could be taking a bag out for was a mystery the Cornstalk could not fathom.

Cutts walked rapidly down the road, and took the footpath through the wood. Kangaroo followed him at a distance, catching shadowy glimpses of him every now and then. Cutts did not once look behind. Kangaroo expected him to leave the path and plunge into the wood in the direction of the monk's cell, but he did not. He strode right on to the Wayland road, and strode along it to the town.

Kangaroo was amazed.

"The rotter isn't after the giddy convict at all," muttered the Cornstalk. "It's something else—one of his rotten games, I suppose. Poof!"

But he kept Cutts in sight in the street.

Cutts turned into an alley, dark and shadowy, and Kangaroo paused. For a moment he fancied that Cutts guessed that he was followed, and was dodging. But as he hesitated, Cutts emerged into sight again, his appearance so changed that Kangaroo barely recognised him. His school cap had disappeared, and he was wearing a large tweed cap, pulled well down over his face, and had a thick muffler round his neck, with his overcoat buttoned up to the chin round it. And a moustache was sticking upon his upper lip.

Kangaroo whistled softly.

"Ten to one he's going to a rotten gambling-club," he murmured. "I know his little games. But why hasn't he left it till after calling-over? He will have to turn up at call-over with the rest of us, or he'll be missed."

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Cutts went on down the street.

Kangaroo watched him enter a shop, over which appeared in large letters:

"J. Moses. Outfitter."

And a large placard in the window announced that Mr. Moses' guinea suits were a marriage of quality and cheapness. That was the climax.

That Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, could be there to buy cheap, ready-made clothes was impossible. Not for himself, at all events. And if not for himself, for whom?

Kangaroo waited, in such a state of astonishment that he punched himself to make sure that he was awake. Was it possible that Cutts knew that he was on the track, and was leading him on a wild-goose chase? It was not likely. He would have been more likely to turn on the Shell fellow and lick him.

In ten minutes Cutts came out of the shop. He had no purchases visible about him, but if he made any they were doubtless disposed of inside the bag he carried.

He strode away down the street in a hurry.

Kangaroo hesitated a moment, and then boldly entered the shop. Mr. Moses, the dealer in reach-me-downs of great quality, was making an entry in a book.

"My friend gone?" asked Kangaroo coolly.

"A young gentleman has just been here," said Mr. Moses, rubbing his hands. "He has only just gone."

"Did he get the clothes?" asked Kangaroo, with an inward feeling that he had missed his vocation, and ought to have been a detective instead of grinding Latin in the Shell at St. Jim's.

"Yeth, certainly!" said Mr. Moses. "My thirty-shilling serge suit, medium size, with cap to match."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Kangaroo.

"Vat can I do for you, young shentleman?" asked Mr. Moses. "My guinea suits—"

"Thanks, I'm not buying anything!" said Kangaroo. "By the way, I suppose that was my friend, and I've missed him. You know his name?"

"Yeth—Mr. Jones," said the dealer in reach-me-downs.

"Thanks! I shall catch him if I hurry," said Kangaroo.

He hurried out of the shop.

Cutts had bought a ready-made suit of clothes and a cap, and perhaps other articles; Kangaroo had not stopped to ascertain. He had given a false name. Why?

Cutts had disappeared when Kangaroo came out of the shop.

From the direction he had taken, Kangaroo guessed that he was returning to the school; and it was hardly likely that he was going convict-hunting with a bag of clothes in his hand, anyway.

The Cornstalk ran all the way back to St. Jim's.

In Rylcombe Lane he caught sight of Cutts again, striding at a good pace towards the school, and without a bag. Somewhere or other en route the Fifth-Former had disposed of the bag of clothes.

Kangaroo dodged through the hedge and ran along in the fields for some distance, till Cutts was left well behind. Then he came out into the road again and dashed on to the school. He climbed the school wall, and dropped into the quad, and uttered a yell as several pairs of hands grasped him in the darkness.

"Got the wottah!"

"Hold him!"

"Fairly caught, breaking bounds!"

"Leggo, you asses!" stuttered Kangaroo.

And there was a gasp of surprise from the juniors who collared him.

"Kangy!"

CHAPTER 14.

Cutts's Secret.

TOM MERRY & CO. released the Cornstalk and stood round him, peering at him in the gloom. Kangaroo, out of breath after his rapid run, gasped and panted.

"Kangaroo!" repeated Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Did you go out after the spalpeen, Kangy darling?" asked Reilly.

"Yes."

"We found he was gone," said Tom Merry. "His study door's locked; but I climbed the ivy to his window and looked in, and found he wasn't there. Then we know he had skipped, and we thought he had dodged out without being seen."

"Rats!" said Kangaroo. "He wasn't likely to dodge me. We learn to keep our eyes open in Australia."

"Wats! I considah—"

"He's coming back," said Kangaroo. "Come away! He may be here any minute now."

"We thought we had him when you dropped in," chuckled Figgins. "Let's stay here and wait for him and collar him. We can prove that he was out of bounds, and report him, the same as he did us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's the little game," said Blake.

"No, I tell you!" breathed Kangaroo. "I've found something out; I've got something to tell you. I don't know what it means, but it's frightfully fishy. Come into the house. Never mind Cutts now."

Greatly impressed, the juniors gave up the idea of capturing Cutts as he came in, and they hurried into the house. Kangaroo did not speak again until they were gathered in Tom Merry's study, with the door closed.

Then he related his adventures.

The juniors listened with blank amazement.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Cutts must be frightfully hard up if he is weduced to buyin' ready-made clobber. I suppose that is the reason why he's so keen afiah the hundred poundseward. Poor beast! I can feel for a chap who has to wear cheap clothes."

"Ass! The clobber wasn't for himself."

"Weally, Kangaroo—"

"Cutts has been buying clothes, has he?" said Kerr thoughtfully. "And he took out a bag and didn't bring it back? And Fatty knows something about what was in that bag."

"Fatty does?" said Kangaroo.

The fat Fourth-Former grinned.

"Didn't I tell you I was going to keep watch in the tuckshop?" he said.

"Keep watch on the tarts, you mean," said Kangaroo.

"Well, perhaps I had some tarts while I was there," said Fatty Wynn. "You see, Dame Taggles has a fresh lot of tarts in to-day, and they're simply ripping. I only had eighteen, as well as the dough-nuts and the pineapple—"

"Blow what you ate!" growled Kangaroo. "What have you found out?"

"Cutts has been buying grub," said Fatty Wynn. "He bought three dozen sandwiches, and a pie, and some cheese and biscuits. He didn't want that kind of grub for a feed for himself; he has better things than sandwiches for his tea. He put them into a bag he had with him. I was thinking at the time that we might raid that bag—"

"Br-r-r!" said Figgins.

"This looks jolly queer," said Kerr.

"What do you make out of it?" asked Tom Merry. "Go it! It's your bizney as a Scotsman to think it out."

Kerr grinned.

"It alters the case," he said. "We were pretty certain already that Cutts knows where to look for the convict. We made up our minds about that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, when he clears out of the school, instead of hunting for the convict, he buys clothes, which he certainly doesn't intend to wear himself. I suppose he isn't dotty enough to buy clothes for nothing?"

"He couldn't," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "Clothes have to be paid for, you know. And Cutts must have paid cash at Mr. Moses's shop."

"Ass!" said Kerr politely. "I mean, he wouldn't buy clothes without a reason. He wants them—not for himself, we know that. Cutts wouldn't be found dead in a suit of reach-me-downs."

"I must remark that Cutts is quite wight there."

"They're not for Cutts, so they're for somebody else," said Kerr, whose quick, keen brain had grasped all the facts in their true perspective. "At the same time, he has been buying grub, which pretty certainly isn't for himself. He wouldn't buy three dozen sandwiches for a feed in his study."

"Well?" said all the juniors together. Some of them guessed what Kerr was coming to now, and they were breathless with excitement.

"Who is it that's in need of grub and clothes more than anybody else?" said Kerr quietly.

"Convict No. 101, of course," said Tom Merry, with a deep breath.

"Bai Jove!"

"And Kangaroo says he hasn't brought either the bag or the clothes back with him."

"That's so," said Kangaroo. "He got rid of them somewhere between Wayland and Rylcombe Lane. I know that."

"Then who's got them?" said Kerr grimly. "Kids, chaps, and fellows, we haven't quite tumbled to Cutts's little game—till now. I believe he was after the convict when we spotted him at the ruined castle. But something has happened to change his plans, or else we were mistaken then. Cutts isn't after No. 101 now to capture him. He's helping him to escape!"

A breathless hush followed Kerr's announcement.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, at last.

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A GRAND 50,000-WORD LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE.

"My hat!"
 "Oh, crumbs!"
 "Howly smoke!"
 "I believe Kerr's hit on it!" said Figgins excitedly.
 "There's no other way of explaining what Cutts has done. But why should he do it?"

"Yaas, explain that, Kerg, deah boy."
 Kerr laughed.
 "I can't explain that," he said. "I don't know. But in the newspaper reports about Jonas Racke, it's mentioned that he used to be a prize-fighter. We know that Cutts has been mixed up in betting on prize-fights. Racke may be an old acquaintance of his, and he may be helping him for old times' sake."

"Cutts of the Fifth isn't that sort!" said Blake promptly.
 "Well, no, he isn't," admitted Kerr. "Then I can't say. Perhaps the man knows something about him—Cutts has all sorts of secrets to keep, as we know; and this man Racke may know something that put Cutts under his thumb. Cutts is just the chap to get into a fix like that, with all his blessed foxy cunning. But whatever his reason is, it's pretty clear what he's doing. He's helping the convict to get clear—and my opinion is that he met him to-day at the monk's cell, and fixed it up with him."

"And that's why he was trying to keep us out."
 "Yes!"
 "My hat! Cutts is sailing pretty close to the wind this time!" said Tom Merry. "It means imprisonment to help a convict to escape."

"But we can't give Cutts away!" said Blake.
 "Wathah not. He is an awful yascal, but we couldn't wisk disgwacin' St. Jim's like that," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We shall have to keep mum."
 "Seems to me we're done, then," said Digby. "If Cutts has handed the clothes to No. 101, he won't be going to see him any more."

"Perhaps the man was waiting for him in the wood, and he handed him the bag as he came bark from Wayland," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

Kangaroo shook his head.
 "I don't think so," he said. "I was pretty close behind him, and he must have been quick about it. More likely shoved the bag somewhere for the convict to find."

"The question is, deah boys, what we ought to do?" said Arthur Augustus. "Cutts ought not to be allowed to help a desparate criminal to escape."

"Faith, and ye're right," said Reilly. "But phwat are we going to do intirely?"

"I can't understand it," said Tom Merry slowly. "Kerr seems to have worked it out all right, but why should Cutts do it? Is it possible—"

He paused.
 "Go on, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.
 "As leadah, I am quite willin' to hear your opinion on the matiah."

"Oh, rats!"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I was thinking he might be laying some trap for the convict in some way. Cutts is so jolly deep there's no telling where to have him," said Tom. "He may have shoved the clothes there for Racke to find, to tempt him to make a break and try to get away, and then he could give his description to the police. I don't say it's probable, but I'm certain that Cutts was after Racke, the same as we were, in the first place; and I don't see why he should change his intentions. Anyway, whether he's helping the convict, or whether he's trying to entrap him, we're up against Cutts all the time—we're agreed about that."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Whatever little game Cutts is playing, we're going to stop it, and frustrate his giddy knavish tricks."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "He played a dirty trick on us, and lied to the Head—and it's up to us to make him sorry," said Jack Blake; "but if he's finished with the convict, he won't break bounds again, and we're dished once more."

"Looks to me as if he's going to dish us all the time," remarked Redfern.

"We don't know that he's finished with the convict yet, whether he's for him or against him," said Tom Merry. "He may be laying a trap for him, in some way we don't catch on to, or he may be helping him. He may have hidden those clothes somewhere, intending to take them to him later. Anyway, I suggest keeping the watch on Cutts all the same, and spotting him if he breaks bounds."

"Yaas; as leadah, I considah that is best," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Cutts is so fiewtighfully deep, that we can't tell what he is up to; but if we catch him out of bounds, we can make him sorry for telling the Head about us. Cutts is goin' to be watched, and soonah or latah we shall catch him nappin'."

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Cutts was not feeling particularly easy in his mind just then; but he would have felt still less easy if he had known the decision that Tom Merry & Co. had come to.

CHAPTER 15.

An Unexpected Capture.

HALF-PAST eleven chimed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

The old school was wrapped in slumber. The last light in the last window had been extinguished, and all the fellows were—or should have been—fast asleep in the dormitories.

But, as a matter of fact, there were several wakeful fellows in the School House just then.

Tom Merry & Co. had not relaxed in their purpose. They had to admit that, as a matter of fact, they could not quite fathom what Cutts of the Fifth was "up to"; but whatever it was, one thing was certain, and that was that it was something rascally. And whatever it was, they meant to baulk it, in retaliation for his betrayal of them to the Head. Cutts had stopped that promising convict-hunt, just when the juniors felt themselves to be on the high-road to success, and they wanted very much to make Cutts sorry for his interference. And if the rascal of the Fifth was planning to help the criminal Racke to escape the officers of the law, it was very much "up" to them to chip in. While, if on the other hand he was scheming to entrap the convict, and finger the reward, they were still more determined to stop him. They did not intend to let him reap the reward of his act of treachery if they could help it.

After lights out, Fatty Wynn and Redfern had slipped out of the dormitory in the New House, and stolen quietly over to the School House. They were joined in the shadowy quadrangle by Kangaroo and Reilly, and Tom Merry and Blake. The latter two could not leave the precincts of St. Jim's, but they could help in keeping watch for Cutts. If the Fifth-Former came out of the house, they knew the way he must come—by means of the box-room window and the outhouse below. And, in the shadow of the outhouse, they kept watch and ward for him.

It was a weary vigil—the night was cold and chilly—but they did not give in. And as half-past eleven sounded from the clock-tower, they were rewarded.

There was a slight sound in the darkness, and they crouched back in the shadows as a dark figure dropped from the outhouse, within a few yards of them.

The juniors scarcely breathed.

They could not recognise Cutts in the darkness, but they knew by the size of the figure that it was not that of a junior, and they had no doubt whatever that it was the rascal they were waiting for.

The shadowy form stole away silently round the School House, and equally silently the juniors followed.

As he crossed the quadrangle, a gleam of starlight fell for a moment on his face, as he turned back to glance towards the house.

Then the juniors recognised him. It was Cutts of the Fifth.

His face was very pale—deadly pale, it looked in the starlight, and there was a drawn and tense look upon it.

Cutts did not see them in the shadows, and after one hurried look back, he ran on towards the school wall and climbed it, and dropped into the road.

The juniors were only a few seconds behind him.

"Out you go!" whispered Tom Merry. "We've got to stay here; but you four—"

"Right-ho!"

Kangaroo & Co. climbed the wall and dropped into the road.

Tom Merry and Blake remained behind. The temptation to follow the others, and see the end of the adventure, was strong. But their promise to the Head held them fast. They were bound in honour to remain within the school walls.

The Cornstalk and his companions knew what to do. Cutts had gone outside the school walls—he had broken bounds. And Kangaroo had a cord in his pocket, and they intended to collar Gerald Cutts by force, and tie him to the outside of the school gates. When he was found there, it would be interesting, as Lowther had observed, to hear what reason he would give for being out of bounds. It was very improbable that he would be able to lie himself out of the scrape, and he would be sorry that he had betrayed Tom Merry & Co. to the Head. It would be tit for tat.

But it was easier to lay that excellent plan than to carry it out.

When the four juniors dropped into the road, and looked round for Gerald Cutts, he had vanished from sight.

There was a November mist on the road, and it had swallowed up the end of the Fifth from sight.

The juniors scanned the road, and listened intently; but there was no sign and no sound of Cutts of the Fifth.

"Dished again!" groaned Redfern.

"Sure, and he's one too many for us," said Reilly. "Phwat are we goin' to do now, intirely? You're leader, Kangy."

"We'll make for the monk's cell in the wood," said Kangaroo. "If he's going to see the convict, that's where he'll head for. We can buck up and get there before him, and nab him when he comes."

"Suppose he doesn't go there?" suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, rats! We'll suppose we've missed him when we do miss him," said Kangaroo. "It's the only chance, anyway."

"Oh, I'm game! I've got some sandwiches, anyway," said Fatty Wynn, beginning to munch as he spoke. "Have one?"

"Oh, blew your sandwiches!" said Kangaroo crossly. "Come on! If you'd been thinking a bit more about business and a bit less about grub he mightn't have given us the slip."

"Well, he gave you the slip, too."

"Oh, don't jaw! Come on!"

The four juniors hurried away. It was useless to wait there for Cutts's return. He might be cautious enough to get into the school at some other point. Kangaroo & Co. hurried down the lane, and plunged into the wood, Kangaroo leading the way by a short cut. He knew the woods well, and even at night he was in no danger of missing the track. They heard three-quarters chime out from Rylcombe, and a few minutes later they came in sight of the old stone cell, glimmering in the glade in the dark wood.

Through the opening in the trees overhead the starlight glimmered down, pale and ghostly on the ragged grass and the drifting dead leaves.

The place was still and silent.

"Not here yet, anyway!" muttered Kangaroo.

"Let's get into the cell and wait for him there," suggested Redfern. "We shall be out of sight there. If he spots us he won't show up."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors cut quickly across the glade, and ran into the ruined stone building.

It was very dark inside, though there was a glimmering of starlight through the gaps in the shattered roof.

Kangaroo ran in first, and as he did so there was a hoarse exclamation from the darkness within.

"That you, Master Cutts?"

Kangaroo felt a sudden thrill.

A figure loomed up before him, a squat, thick-set, powerful figure, and the glimmer of starlight showed the broad arrows on the ragged clothes.

It was the convict!

It had not occurred to the juniors, in their haste, that the man might be actually concealed in the cell itself, if he was waiting there for Cutts.

But he was there, and the questioning words had scarcely passed his lips when he realised that it was not Cutts that he had to deal with.

"S'elp me!"

He leaped straight at the Cornstalk, his right hand in the air, with the murderous bludgeon in it.

If the Cornstalk had lost his nerve at that terrible moment he would have fallen at the ruffian's feet, stunned or worse, under the crashing blow.

But Kangaroo, surprised as he was, did not lose his courage. It was too late to back out, the ruffian was upon him. He did not even stop to think. By instinct he lowered his head, and rushed at the ruffian under the upraised arm, and evaded the blow, at the same time throwing his arms round the burly form, and grasping desperately.

"Help, you fellows!" he panted.

"My hat!"

"It's the convict!"

Kangaroo was strong and sturdy, and he was fighting for his life now. He knew that! But in a very few moments the muscular ruffian would have finished with him if there had not been help at hand. But Redfern and Reilly and Fatty Wynn grasped the situation in a moment, and they piled in to back up the Cornstalk.

Four sturdy juniors were grasping the ruffian now, and he could not use his bludgeon. Reilly dragged it away, and it crashed on the floor. The man fought like a wild animal, kicking, struggling, tearing.

But he went down with a crash, and the four juniors were on top of him.

They had not come there to meddle with the convict. They would gladly have avoided that fearful encounter. But there was no help for it now. They had to overcome the ruffian or take the consequences. And they fought for the mastery as fiercely as the ruffian himself fought.

In silence, broken only by shuffling feet and gasping breath,

the fearful struggle went on in the dimness of the old stone cell.

Reilly and Redfern had hold of the man's thick, powerful wrists, and in spite of his efforts he could not loose them, Kangaroo was on his chest, and Fatty Wynn's arms were wound round his neck in a deadly grip, almost choking him, Strong and savage as he was, the ruffian's struggles weakened at last.

Kangaroo dragged the cord from his pocket, which had been intended for quite a different person.

Redfern and Reilly dragged together the wrists of the exhausted ruffian, and the Cornstalk looped the rope round them, and knotted it.

Then the panting juniors were able to relax their efforts.

They held the convict, however, while the Cornstalk bound his feet with the remainder of the cord.

Jonas Racke lay helpless on the floor as they rose from the desperate struggle. They were breathless, dishevelled, and badly bruised, but they had won! The odds had been too much for Convict 101.

The man lay bound, and from his lips poured a torrent of curses and foul epithets, which effectually banished any compassion the juniors might have felt for him.

"Shut up, you brute!" said Kangaroo, in disgust. "Shove something into his mouth. I can't stand that!"

Redfern jammed his handkerchief into Racke's open mouth, and the convict was perforce silenced.

"My hat!" gasped Redfern, mopping his brow. "We've caught him! We've woke up the wrong passenger, but we've caught him!"

"Hurrah for us intirely!"

Kangaroo grinned breathlessly.

"We came here to catch Cutts, and we've caught the giddy convict instead!" he remarked. "We were blessed asses to run into him like that, but it's turned out all right. My hat! It gave me a jump when he came for me!"

"Sure, and it's worth a hundred quid, too!"

Kangaroo whistled. He had forgotten the £100 reward offered for the apprehension of Jonas Racke, Convict 101.

But he shook his head.

"That belongs to the whole Co. if it belongs to anybody," he said. "But I shouldn't care to touch it for one, and I don't suppose the Head would let us, either. If we hand this brute over to the police we shall have to confess that we were out of bounds to-night."

"But we must!" said Redfern. "We've got to."

"I suppose so!"

"Hush!" muttered Fatty Wynn. "Shush, you fellows! Here comes somebody, and I'll bet you a dozen jam tarts to a dough-nut it's Cutts of the Fifth."

It was Cutts of the Fifth. He had a bag in his hand, and he came quickly up to the doorway of the stone cell, as midnight chimed out from Rylcombe Church.

CHAPTER 16.

The Triumph of the Co.

CUTTS hurried towards the stone cell, little dreaming of what was to greet him there.

The sounds of the desperate combat had died away before the Fifth-Former reached the glade, and he had not the faintest suspicion that there was anyone in the cell with the exception of the convict.

He stepped into the doorway, and peered into the gloom of the interior.

"Are you there?" he muttered.

Kangaroo chuckled.

"Yes, we're here," he said.

Cutts started back.

"Noble! You—what—what—"

"Sure, and we're all here," grinned Reilly. "It's plazed we are to meet you, Cutts darling. Have you got the reach-me-downs for your friend Racke?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the sandwiches?" said Fatty Wynn, grinning. "Racke won't want them now. They'll give him some skilly in the police-station, you know. I'll have those sandwiches, if you don't mind. I've finished mine."

Cutts gazed at the juniors in blank amazement and terror. "What are you doing here?" he gasped, at last.

"Waiting for you!" chuckled Redfern.

"For me! What—"

"And just to fill in the time, you know, we've captured your friend Racke," said Kangaroo coolly. "You're a bit too late with the grub and the clobber. We're going to take your friend to the police-station."

Cutts, with a white face, stared down at the bound form of the convict.

Jonas Racke glared up at him. He could not speak with the handkerchief stuffed in his mouth, but his look was most expressive.

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A GRAND 50,000-WORD LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE.

"You've—you've caught him!" stammered Cutts.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

Cutts made a movement towards the convict. Kangaroo sprang into his way, his eyes gleaming.

"No, you don't!" said the Cornstalk grimly. "We didn't come here for him, but now we've got him he's ours, and you're not going to help him, Cutts."

"I—I— Why should I help him?"

"Blessed if I know. But I know you came here to give him clothes and things, and help him to get away from the police."

"I—I didn't. I—"

"Rats!"

"Let—let me speak to him," stammered Cutts. "I—I won't try to let him loose."

"You can speak to him, but if you try to touch him we shall pile on you," said Kangaroo warningly. "You're jolly lucky not to be denounced to the police for helping an escaped convict. And we'd denounce you, too, only we don't want to disgrace the school."

"Yes, rather."

Cutts had dropped his bag, and Fatty Wynn had already opened it, and found the sandwiches, and started upon them. The cad of the Fifth cast a desperate glance at the juniors. The expression of his glance showed that he was calculating the chances of a struggle, and Kangaroo & Co. were ready for him. But the Fifth-Former knew that he had no chance against the four of them, and the thought left his mind almost as soon as it had entered it.

He bent over Racke, and jerked the handkerchief from his mouth. A curse burst from the lips of the captured convict.

"You've given me away!" he muttered.

It was that fear that was tugging at Cutts's heart-strings—the fear that Jonas Racke would believe that he had betrayed him, and would betray him in his turn.

"I haven't, Racke!" he muttered hoarsely. "You've heard what these brats were saying. I didn't know they were here. They must have spied on you and found you out."

"We didn't come here for him," said Kangaroo. "We came here for you, Cutts, and we caught the wrong bird. But it's a more valuable bird, so we don't mind."

"Make them let me go!" the convict muttered hoarsely.

Cutts rose, his face white and desperate.

"Let him go, you kids. You don't want the reward. It's blood-money, anyway. What do you want with collaring him?"

"Duty!" said Kangaroo calmly. "We're going to take him to the station. This will be a giddy triumph for the School House."

"The New House, you mean?" said Redfern warmly.

"Oh, rats! Why—"

"Boah! I tell you—"

"Will you let him go?" muttered Cutts.

"No, we won't!" said the four juniors together. They might differ as to which House the credit of the capture belonged to, but they were quite agreed on that point. They had made the capture, and they meant to keep their prisoner.

"Look here—" urged Cutts.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Kangaroo. "It would be breaking the law to let him go now that he's caught. You know we can't do it. Blessed if I know how you've got the cheek to ask us, and admit that you've got a convict for a pal."

"You don't understand," said Cutts hoarsely. "I—ho—"

"No, I don't understand, and I don't want to," said the Cornstalk. "All I understand is that we're going to get this rotter to the station, and hand him over to the police."

Cutts gave a hopeless look at the convict, and passed out of the cell without another word. He could not help him now. Even if he had been able to get him out of the hands of the juniors by force, he could not expect them to be silent with regard to his action; and that would be as bad for him as anything Jonas Racke could say.

The Fifth-Former tramped away with misery and fear in his breast.

Jonas Racke must know that Cutts had not betrayed him—that he had done his best for him. He must realise that. But in his rage at being captured, might he not blurt out what he knew about Cutts, who, whatever he intended, had failed to help him? It was only too likely, and as the rascal of the Fifth walked away, the picture of ruin and disgrace was before his eyes.

Kangaroo & Co. did not waste a thought upon Cutts. They knew he was a rascal, though they did not know the motive of his latest example of his rascality. Their business now was with the convict, and for the sake of securing that valuable capture they could afford to let Cutts go. And the fear they read in his white, drawn face made them willing to let him off any punishment, so far as they were concerned. He was paying dearly enough for his treachery towards Tom Merry & Co.

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"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
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"Now for the station," said Kangaroo. "Hallo, he's beginning his picture-language again! Shove that hanky into his beer-trap, Reddy!"

And the convict's feet being loosened just sufficiently to allow him to walk, he was marched away by the triumphant juniors of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. were awake in the Shell dormitory when Kangaroo came quietly in. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning, and the chums of the Shell were getting anxious. Kangaroo came in alone; Reilly had gone to the Fourth Form dorm., and Fatty Wynn and Redfern to their own House. Tom Merry was sitting on his bed dressed. He uttered an exclamation of relief as the door quietly opened, and the Cornstalk stepped in and closed the door behind him.

"You've come back at last, Kangy!"

"Here we are again!" said the Cornstalk cheerily. "I've got a swelled nose, but otherwise no damage done, though it was a tussle with the rotter."

"Who—Cutts?"

"No, the convict!"

"What!" A dozen voices gasped out the word.

Kangaroo explained.

"Well, my only hat," said Tom Merry, "you've captured the giddy convict!"

"Exactly."

"And he's in the station now?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yes; safe as houses."

"Great Scott!"

"And there'll be a licking to-morrow for breaking bounds," said Kangaroo. "It must come out now. But it was worth it."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "And Cutts, what about him?"

"We let him alone. I think we can afford to let the poor blighter alone, too. It looks as if that man Racke knows some secret of his, and Cutts is in a mortal funk that he'll let it out now he's caught. He looked simply sick," said Kangaroo. "Cutts gets it in the neck this time, and we rope in all the glory. Now I'm going to bed."

And in three minutes the Cornstalk was fast asleep, for some time after that there was a buzz of excited talk in the Shell dormitory.

St. Jim's woke up to a sensation in the morning.

The whole school buzzed with the news.

Of Cutts's share in the matter nothing was said. Unless the convict betrayed him his secret would be kept. Tom Merry & Co. had no desire to see him expelled from St. Jim's, enemy as he was to them. But all the school knew that four juniors had captured the escaped convict, and handed him over to the police. Kangaroo, Redfern, Fatty Wynn, and Reilly were the heroes of the hour.

But their renown did not bring unmixed satisfaction. The Head sent for them, and camed them for having broken bounds, and as they rubbed their smarting hands, he complimented them on their courage. Kangaroo & Co. would willingly have dispensed with the compliments if they could have dispensed with the licking, too. But the smart of the cane faded away, and the glory of that great capture remained, and lasted much longer.

There was no doubt that they were entitled to the £100 reward, but the Head expressed his opinion very plainly on that subject, and the juniors willingly agreed that it should be handed over to the Cottage Hospital in Rylcombe. As for Cutts, he spent a good many days of racking anxiety, and the effect of it could be read in his pale and harassed face.

But Jonas Racke did not betray him, and at last the rascal of the Fifth was able to breathe freely. He had had a narrow escape, and he knew it, but whether it was a lesson to him was another matter. Jonas Racke went back to his well-deserved punishment, and Tom Merry & Co. had the pleasure of endowing a bed in the cottage hospital with the £100 reward!

THE END.

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SURE SIGN.

Aunt Eliza came up the walk and said to her nephew:
"Good-morning, Willie! Is your mother in?"
"Sure she is!" replied Willie. "Do you suppose I'd be working in the garden on Saturday morning if she wasn't?"
—Sent in by A. Simmons, Upper Edmonton, N.

Mr. Isaacstein: "Mr. Goldstein, did a gentleman come in here a leedle while ago mit his hat smashed and dirty and pay a new one?"
Mr. Goldstein: "Vell, maybe he might. I dunno."
Mr. Isaacstein: "Vell, if he did I claim a percentage."

Mr. Goldstein: "Vhy is dat?"
Mr. Isaacstein: "Pecause it vos my little Ikey vot throwed the panana peel on der pavement."—Sent in by C. R. Hurst, Leigh-on-Sea.

WASN'T HE LUCKY?

"He had crossed the Atlantic twenty-sivin times and niver got drowned but wanst."
"Indeed! And which one of his trips was he drowned on?"

"O'm not sure, but Oi think it was the twenty-sivinth."
"He was lucky. Many a man would have gone to the bottom on his first voyage, instead of waiting till the last."
"Right ye are. More people are drowned by water than by railroad wrecks."
"Ah, it's a fatal death, begorra!"—Sent in by C. H. Smith, Suffolk.

CARRIED OUT.

Contributor: "I sent in some very brilliant suggestions yesterday showing how you can improve your paper. Have you carried out any of my ideas yet?"

Editor: "Did you meet the office-boy with a waste-paper basket on the stairs?"

Contributor: "Yes."
Editor: "Well, he was carrying out your ideas!"—Sent in by H. Jones, Hull.

A LIGHT CHARGE.

Wife: "John, have you ever heard of the Charge of the Light Brigade?"

John: "Why, yes, dear! Here it is in this envelope."

Wife: "But, John, this is the gas bill."

John: "Well, dear, isn't that the charge of the light brigade?"—Sent in by W. Hutton, Belfast.

A PARTIAL RESCUE.

The seedy individual (who had come up just after the rescue):

"Are you the cove vot has just pulled my boy out of the sea?"

The other (modestly, after effecting a very gallant rescue):

"Yes, my friend. But that's quite all right. Don't say any more about it."

The seedy one stared.
"It isn't orl right. Vot about 'is bloomin' 'at?"—Sent in by J. Riggins, Glasgow.

Teacher (to class): "What did Abraham say when he came to the place where he was going to offer up his son?"

Tommy: "Please, miss, he said, 'There! I have forgotten the matches!'"—Sent in by Miss G. Llewellyn, Pontypridd, S. Wales.

A POINT OF LAW.

"Do you see that man over there?" The world-famous detective spoke in a low whisper, and his friend looked quickly round, scenting a mystery.

"Yes," he replied just as cautiously.

"Well, he's a professional forger!"

"Then why don't you arrest him?" asked the friend.

"Can't!" said the 'tec. "It's not breaking the law to make horseshoes."—Sent in by W. Jones, Monmouth.

A PROBLEM.

Little Willie had been given a pear by his father. After demolishing it he suddenly exclaimed:

"Father!"

"Well, sonny?" was the reply.

"If I had been a twin would you have given the other little boy a pear too?"

"Of course!" his father answered.

"Well, father, do you think it is fair to cheat me out of the other because I happen to be all in one piece?"—Sent in by Miss L. Shepherd, Littleborough, near Manchester.

THE SUPERSTITIOUS COSTER.

"Yes, it was superstition as made me marry my old woman," the coster confided to his friend. "Yer see, it was a toss-up between Mary Jane an' Anna, and I was going along wondering which ter 'ave, when I saw a cigar lying on the floor. Blowed if it didn't say 'Ave Anna' on it! So I 'ad 'er!"—Sent in by W. Marsden, Manchester.

TIT FOR TAT.

Very warm indeed had been the argument.

"Look at me!" cried the well-known lawyer, in crushing tones. "I never took a drop of medicine in my life. I'm as strong as any two of your patients put together!"

"Pooh!" retorted the successful doctor. "I never went to law in my life, and I'm as rich as any two dozen of your clients put together!"—Sent in by E. G. Payne, West Ham, E.

LIKE THE DEW, HE WOULD SETTLE.

"How kind of you," said the girl, "to bring me these lovely flowers! They are so beautiful and fresh! I think there is some dew on them yet."

"Yes," said the young man, in great embarrassment, "there is; but I am going to pay it off to-morrow."—Sent in by A. Wilkinson, Manchester.

WELL WORTH IT.

Mrs. De Smyth had lost her pet, a microscopic absurdity of a dog that she called Marcus. She was in deep distress, as two whole hours had passed since she broke the sad news to Scotland Yard, and dear Marcus was still absent.

Mr. De Smyth was just off for a month's golfing, and as he was saying farewell to his weeping wife—her tears were for Marcus—she implored him to insert an advertisement in the papers before he left London.

Her husband did not forget her passionate request, and next morning she read:

"Lost! A ragged lapdog with an absurd tail and one ear. Disgustingly fat and wheezy. Answers to the name of Marcus—sometimes. If returned alive, ten shillings reward will be paid. If stuffed, two pounds."—Sent in by F. Grosart, Glasgow.

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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 matches him for a thousand guineas against any boxer of his weight that Sir Vincent Brookes may select.

The fight takes place at No Man's Land, in Hertfordshire, and after a terrific mill, Hil is victorious.

Sir Vincent, hard hit by his losses, vows vengeance on Hil. He seeks out Sir Patrick Bevan, and, posing as his friend, persuades him to come forth from his retirement.

While Sir Patrick is at Sir Vincent's house, the latter informs him that he has news of Hil, and suggests that he should write and beg him to visit his father. Thus it comes about that Hil receives a letter from his father just as he is about to go to a supper at Lord Alvanley's house with his patron. Hil excuses himself, and Vavasour apologises to Lord Alvanley for his absence.

(Now go on with the story.)

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The Wager.

But a second surprise for the host and his guests diverted their attention from the first. Sir Vincent Brookes begged leave to present one well known to them all—Sir Patrick Bevan. All welcomed him heartily, good breeding preventing the slightest reference to the misfortune that had deprived society of his presence. All were most cordial, and, for the moment, Sir Patrick's anxiety about his son retreated into the background.

Only D'Arcy Vavasour, having greeted his old friend, stood apart. The letter to Hil and Sir Patrick's appearance needed some reconciling, and no explanation suggested itself. Sir Vincent seized the opportunity to approach Vavasour.

"I have to offer you my apologies, Mr. Vavasour," he began, with an ingratiating smile.

The stare that met him was insolent in its coolness.

"I cannot conceive any need for an apology from you," replied Vavasour drawlingly.

"For our—or—unfortunate—or—meeting in the lane," went on Brookes. "I was overexcited; indeed, I am willing to admit that I did not know what I was doing. I deeply regret my ridiculous recklessness, and can assure you, sir—"

"Sir"—and Vavasour's eyes were very cold, his tone contemptuous and by no means lowered—"I fear I am wholly as ignorant of that to which you are referring as I desire to be of your existence."

Turning on his heel, he moved to where stood Squire Oliver, and began to talk with him.

It was a plain and deadly insult, and the baronet's face went livid. Vavasour's words must have been heard by others. Biting his thin lips, his eyes restless, he retreated, conscious that more than one was looking at him curiously.

"You shall pay for this one day!" he muttered between his teeth.

During the progress of supper he remained very quiet, scarcely speaking. Nor was it until the servants had left the room, and tongues loosened by good wine were wagging freely, the conversation turning upon the battle between Ned Harley and Fennel that his voice was to be heard.

"What is that you say, Vavasour?" shouted Sky Blue Brayne from the further end of the table. "You will not back young Ned Harley again?"

"That is what I did say, Mr. Brayne," came the quiet answer. "Nor any other boxer. I have severed my connection with the Ring."

"After such winnings as Harley brought you?" queried Lord Yarmouth. "Did not the lad satisfy you?"

"He did. It is the conduct, not of those who fight, but of those who would use the fighters to their own despicable ends that has determined me to take such a resolution."

Half a dozen loud voices went to and fro across the long table. Above them, by dint of vast exercise of his lungs, Mr. Brayne made his heard.

"Then, my gad, sir, since you will not recognise a good man when you see him, and will risk nothing on him, I will!" shouted the young man. "I am ready to back Ned Harley against any man in England—none excepted!"

"No weight excepted?" roared a dozen immediately.

"Yes, gentlemen; I claim nothing for weight," rejoined Brayne, on whom wine and excitement were making only too obvious an impression. "I except no man. And, to show I'm in earnest, I will back Harley for ten thousand pounds. Ten thousand pounds, gentlemen, you can produce no man who will beat Ned Harley in a fair stand-up fight! Gad, I do think I have seen the man fight and do not recognise his quality?"

And then there was a dead silence: the magnitude of the sum at stake held the listeners speechless.

"Ten thousand pounds—no, guineas!" repeated Brayne, looking about the table, his round, foolish face beaming with a kind of stupid superiority and fatuous self-satisfaction.

"Ten thousand guineas; money in the stakeholder's hands to-morrow. Ned Harley beats all England!" He brought down his fist on the table with a bang that set the glass and silver ringing and jangling. "And I lay two to one!"

A Hopeless Task.

"The man is drunk," whispered Lord Yarmouth to D'Arcy Vavasour. "Also he is impetuous; it seems to me. I thought you had taken this Harley under your wing."

"Certainly he remains my friend," replied Vavasour quietly. "But he is free to find any backer he chooses. I have finished with the Ring."

"Indeed; a loss that! Did the fellow disgust you?"

"Harley? By no means. It was the conduct of some of the gentlemen decided me."

And then Vavasour heard himself addressed by half a score excitedly demanding what was his opinion of Mr. Brayne's challenge.

"Why," he replied, "it is one I had never offered myself."

"You fear your man would be beaten?"

"My friend," said the dandy gently, "I am not accustomed to be fearful. At the same time, I have sufficient sense to recognise the impossible."

"That means Ned Harley can't do it. Vavasour ought to know. Mr. Brayne is trying to smoke us. The challenge is preposterous."

These and other expressions of opinion flew across the table.

Brayne, the vacuous smile still on his lips, looked from one to another, still standing in his place.

"Gentlemen," he drawled, "you have all much to say in derision of my challenge, and the man I believe to be the finest fighter in England, but I notice not one of you is anxious to accept the challenge. Shall I repeat it?"

Recklessly prodigal in all matters of money as the young man was, always with a view towards making himself a conspicuous and talked-of figure in society, it is doubtful if Sky Blue Brayne would have issued his challenge but for the sly promptings of his neighbour—a tall and thin gentleman, who otherwise had been very silent—a gentleman named Cokeley. Cokeley's artful flatteries and cunning suggestions had been the reason for Brayne's astonishing challenge.

"Are we to believe that you really make it seriously?" inquired Lord Alvanley.

"My lord," replied the wealthy simpleton pompously, "in matters reflecting upon my judgment I do not jest. The challenge is serious. I regard Ned Harley as invincible."

A shout of uncontrollable mirth followed this statement, but without affecting Brayne. When it ceased, a quiet, well-bred voice was heard inquiring who Ned Harley might be.

Twenty pairs of surprised eyes were turned on the speaker.

"Sir Patrick Bevan, where have you been existing?" drawled Brayne incredulously.

Once again in his own element, Sir Patrick Bevan had for the moment forgotten his downfall. His old companions had been only too glad to see him, and had made such evident. Brayne's careless question reminded him acutely of his real position. But he had courage.

"I think it is well known that I have vacated the place I once occupied," he said, with dignity. "For some time I

have been in retirement, and events have transpired of which I am ignorant. I ask again—who is this Ned Harley?"

They told him. Three present could have told him the actual truth, but each had his reasons for withholding it. In two minutes Bevan had his son's doings in the Ring made known to him.

"And now, Sir Patrick, what is your opinion?" Sir Vincent asked, with flattering deference. "You have personal knowledge of every great fighter of the past decade and more; what think you of the chance of a lad not yet twenty, under twelve stone, against the best in England?"

"One who has fought but twice in the ring," added Sir John Shelly.

"And beaten age, weight, and strength each time," amended Captain Barclay. "I held the watch when Ned Harley fought his second battle, and a better fighter and gamer lad never took off his shirt."

"Which makes you inclined to agree with Mr. Brayne's challenge, captain?" asked Brookes.

"No; I won't go so far as that, good lad as Harley is."

"And what says Mr. Jackson?" asked Sir Patrick.

All eyes were turned to the master.

"I have seen Harley; I think highly of him. I endorse Captain Barclay's words. But I would not try a man too highly," was the answer.

"And so I would say," said Sir Patrick; "though I have seen nothing of this paragon."

"Nor shall you until he is in the ring—or just before,"

was Sir Vincent's mental comment. Aloud he said:

"Then, Sir Patrick, you would accept Mr. Brayne's challenge?"

Bevan's eyes flashed; but before he could answer Brayne

spoke.

"If Sir Patrick Bevan will back his judgment against

mine, I shall feel honoured. But I venture to say he will

regret it."

"Yours, sir, being the outcome of a vast experience,"

sneered Sir Vincent. "Well, Sir Patrick?"

The gambler's spirit in Bevan was still strong. Cunningly,

he had been led into this matter; subtle flattery had been

applied; he believed here was a chance to renew his shattered

fortunes. So much Brookes found opportunity to

whisper to him.

"Take up the challenge. You cannot lose. Harley is a

good man; but there are better. And Brayne, reckless fool,

deserves a lesson," came the soft whisper.

"Do you accept my challenge?" Brayne called loudly.

For an instant Bevan hesitated, his eyes travelling down

the table. They met at Vavasour's, but failed to read their

warning. They came back to Brayne, and the latter was

smiling derisively.

The gambler's mind was made up.

"Well, gentlemen," he said slowly, "you have asked me

for my opinion. I have never seen Harley; you all have,

and opinions seem to be divided. I can remember seeing Jem

Belcher in his first fight in London. You, Sir Thomas

Apreece, will call it to mind, I dare say. He fought

Paddington Jones, and he won, although he was barely

nineteen years of age. This Ned Harley may be a second

Belcher, I cannot say. But my own opinion I know, and it

is that fighters, such as Jem Belcher, are born but once in a

century; and in spite of all I have heard of this new

phenomenon I cannot believe such a lad is the best in all

England. I will accept Mr. Brayne's challenge."

And at this announcement, three-fourths of the table

broke into noisy and tumultuous cheering.

"I congratulate you, sir, on your—your courage,"

said Mr. Brayne, bowing low.

Sir Vincent Brookes smiled as a man well pleased with

himself.

But one man of the company felt grieved, although his

pale face showed no sign. Something, thought D'Arcy

Vavasour, is afoot, but what, he could not determine. Nor

did he see in what manner he might have intervened to

spare his old friend the amazing revelation that sooner or

later must come.

He withdrew from the gathering, which immediately fell

into warm discussion of the merits of the fighters of the

day. Brayne, too, left, and the discussion became warmer

and less restrained, suggestions as to Sir Patrick's choice

of an opponent for Ned Harley being freely offered.

Name after name was mentioned, merits weighed, and

qualities argued, Sir Patrick taking part with restrained

excitement. Finally, he sat back in his chair.

"My choice, gentlemen—there is no reason why I should

keep it secret—lies between Carter and Bully Power.

Spring is not yet well enough tried to be considered. In

Tom Shelton I have no confidence; and for George Cooper,

clever as he is, I am fearful. This Ned Harley hits hard, you

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say. Well, in Power or Carter he will find an opponent as willing to receive as to give."

There were those who disagreed with his judgment, but to challenge his decision, once made, was an impertinence of which none present would have been guilty. And certainly the punishing power of both the men named was admittedly severe. But Sir Patrick himself would have been surprised to realise, as in his excitement he did not, that in his choice he had been simply voicing the cunningly conveyed suggestion of his false friend. Without knowing it, he had been led into saying simply that which Brookes desired he should say.

It was near to ten o'clock the morning following when Hil, having left his horse at the mews where D'Arcy Vavasour's cattle were stabled, turned into St. James's Street. Rising with the dawn, he had snatched an early breakfast before returning from Horsham.

He was depressed. His errand, for the best of all reasons, had proved fruitless. Arriving at Horsham overnight, he had gone direct to the tiny cottage where his father lived, only to find it closed, and no one about to give him news of its tenant. Later, in conversation at an inn where he spent the night, he heard quite by chance that his father had left the cottage the previous afternoon, driving in company with a stranger to the yokels.

Of the genuineness of the letter he was thoroughly assured; the idea of forgery he at once scouted. And at the inn he obtained ample proof of the identity of the inhabitant of the empty cottage with his father.

Ultimately he concluded that Sir Patrick must have been called from the cottage after writing the letter. His first thought was to wait until his father's return, whenever that might prove to be. Then it occurred to him that the matter might not be so simple as it appeared, and that it would be well to inform Vavasour, and ask his advice.

Vavasour's own man opened the door when he knocked, respectfully wished him good-morning, and handed him a note.

"Brought here, Mr. Harley, the first thing this morning by a servant of Mr. Brayne," he said. "I was requested to put it in your hands without delay."

(An extra long instalment of this splendid story will be contained in next Wednesday's Grand Winter Number of "THE GEM" LIBRARY. Order EARLY. Price Twopence.)



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The only names and addresses, which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

H. Jones, Post Office, Murray Street, Gawler, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader.

Miss M. Crawford, 73, Corrie Street, Fairview, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 15—16.

F. Gray, care of Robertson & Moffat, Bourke Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader interested in postcards, living in England, age 14—15.

H. S. Clarke, Post Office, George Street, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 19—20.

C. W. Johns, Knight Street, Shepparton, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles.

T. Wheatley, Hygeia, Lyon Street, Ferang, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader, age 17, living in England.

J. Beal, care of Burns Philip, Brisbane, Queensland, wishes to correspond with readers in England or Canada, age 14—15.

Miss P. Raymond, care of Post Office, Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps, age 18—19.

Miss L. Lisle, Edgecliffe, P.O., Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers in the United Kingdom, age 14—15.

Wilfred McKay, 255, Wilton Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader interested in photography, age 14—15.

Miss E. Scott, 15, Charles Street, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 15—16.

Will Miss E. Austin, of New Zealand, write to this reader?

T. D. Stokes, care of T. W. E. Stokes & Son, Rata Street, Tokomaru, via Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 16.

Miss B. Armstrong, 4, Gordon Terrace, Military Reserve, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with boy readers, age 18—20.

N. Duncley, Main Street, Blenheim, Marlborough, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers, age 14.

J. O. Kleb, 353, Schubart Street, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 16—17.

H. Groves, 72, Edgevale Road, East Kew, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a British girl reader, age 13—14.

Miss Maggie Field, Manors, near Pinetown, Natal, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles, age 13—15.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

GRAND NEW SERIES OF FOOTBALL ARTICLES!



Above everything else the men in the half-back line must be workers. Of course, in the ideal football team there is no room anywhere for the player who does not want to put his whole heart into every game from start to finish; but in the half-back line there must be not only the liking for work, but the physical strength which will enable a young player to go through the whole of a gruelling game at top speed, and be almost as fresh at the end of it as he was at the beginning.

The reasons for the necessity of hard workers in the half-back line is fairly obvious. He is—or should be—going all the time. When his own forwards are attacking, the half should be up in the vicinity of goal with them, and when in its turn comes the time for his side to defend, then helter-skelter, the half-back must come to lend a hand—or, perhaps, I should say, a foot—in keeping the other fellows out.

There are times in the course of a match when forwards get a short rest, and when full-backs, too, need not do much except keep their eyes open, but for the half-back who wants to get through the whole of his duties there is no rest whatever. Therefore, if you have players in your team who are not as fond of hard work as they might be, then don't put them in the half-back line, or they will let the side down.

Remember that the half-back line is the backbone of a side. With a poor half-back line you will never win your matches, no matter how brilliant your forwards, or how safe your defenders. But if your half-backs are sound all through, then they will pull the side to victory, even if your forwards or defenders are nothing to boast about. Let me explain further, and in the course of the explanation the reader may pick up one or two tips as to how his half-back game may be improved. It is really so necessary for the half-back to be both an attacker and defender, that I can scarcely say which is the more important part of his duties. Much may depend on circumstance.

Anyhow, we will take the half-back's game so far as helping the forward is concerned first. Now, it is no good having the best forwards in the world if those forwards do not get the ball given to them in such a way that they can display their goal-getting ability—their cleverness, and all the rest of it. You may have a centre-forward who is a terrible man to shoot, but what is the good if he never gets the chance to put his power to the test because the half-backs do not give him the ball in the proper way?

Here, then, is work for the half-back. He must be ever pushing the ball up to the men in front of him. And he must not always make the obvious pass, either. Some wing half-backs feed nobody else but the men on their wing, but that is a mistake—they should occasionally bang the ball over to the other side of the field. To give the ball to the player with the best chance of doing something good with it is the idea.

When the pass has been made the half-back has by no means finished—he should follow up behind the forwards—so that if they are in difficulties the ball can be touched to

the half-back for him to take his part in the attack. If a team appears to have eight forwards when attacking, then rest assured the half-backs are doing their duty, and also look out for trouble for the other side.

Many a game has been won by a chance shot from the half-back, and this is another direction in which the half-back may be very useful to a side. In fact, was not the very last Cup-Final, played at the Crystal Palace, won by a goal rescued by a half-back? That should be sufficient evidence of the value of the half-back following up the forwards.

On this point of the half-back and the question of goal-scoring, I must be careful, however, lest I do more harm than good. Now, it is not really the half-back's part to score goals—that is the work of the forwards, and because of their position they should be given every opportunity of getting the ball into the net. A half-back is not justified in shooting a goal when there are other players on his side waiting for the ball, and in a better position for doing some damage with it. That must be the half-back's guiding star in this matter of shooting. Is there anybody else in a better position? If not, then the half-back can well go on and try his luck.

Passes along the ground, too, should be the idea borne in mind by the half-back who would attain to the ideal. It is so much easier for the average forward to get the ball under control if it comes to him along the turf than when he has to try to get it with his head. Full-backs, as a rule, are a bit bigger than forwards, and when it is a case of heads up, the defenders stand the best chance of getting the ball first.

I mentioned that a team which appeared to have eight forwards when they were attacking

was likely to do some damage in the course of the afternoon. In the same way, if that side appears to have five full-backs when the other fellows are trying to score, then there should not be much damage done by them that day.

Every player in the opposing forward-line should be covered, and, moreover, the half-backs should have an understanding with the full-backs before the game starts as to which men they will cover on the ordinary run of things.

The centre-half will, of course, keep a careful eye on the opposing centre-forward.

Then the wing half-backs will take either the inside wing men of the opposition or the outside. There is a good deal of difference of opinion as to which is the better policy of these two; but for my part I think it is better for the half-back to take the outside man, while the full-back takes the insider. But really it does not matter a great deal—the point is that the half and the full-back should have this understanding—that when the other players attack there shall be no cases of two players going for one wing man and leaving the other entirely on his own.

J. J. Brittleton.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 501.

Next Wednesday: "TIPS TO WIN MATCHES!" By WILLIAM HIBBERT, of Newcastle United.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

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For Next Wednesday,

OUR GRAND WINTER NUMBER

will make its appearance on Wednesday next, and a grand surprise it will prove for all my chums. To begin with,

A MAGNIFICENT COLOURED COVER,

superbly printed on the best plate paper, will adorn the outside of this splendid number, a new departure for THE GEM Library. First in the list of contents will come

"THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM!"

a glorious, 50,000-word long, complete tale of the famous Chums of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford. This talented author has excelled himself with a vengeance in this magnificent story, which deals with a mysterious affair that occurs at Eastwood House, the home of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, where a jolly holiday party of St. Jim's boys are being entertained.

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specially designed and printed, at great expense, for my "Gemite" chums, will be given away with next week's number. This game is something quite novel, and is entitled:

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Beautifully illustrated, our special GEM Library game is bound to prove an enormous attraction for the winter evenings.

The price of the wonderful budget of good things will be twopence, but my readers may rest assured that they have never before been offered such amazingly good value for this outlay as will be represented by next week's

GRAND WINTER NUMBER!

THE DENBY DALE PIES.

One of my Lincolnshire chums sends me some very interesting particulars of the famous pies which used to be baked in Denby Dale, Yorks, on great occasions. As my chum remarks, the figures given are almost incredible, but I believe them to be quite correct. Thanks for your interesting contribution, H. A.!

"Scunthorpe, Lines.

"Dear Editor,—I am writing to tell my fellow Gemites, and also Fatty Wynn, about some big pies made and eaten at Denby Dale, Yorkshire. There have been five big pies baked (on record). The first pie was baked after George III. recovered from a bad mental attack. In 1815 (conclusion of Peace) a pie was baked containing half a sheep, twenty fowls, and half a sack of flour.

"In 1837 (Jubilee) the largest pie of all was baked. There were over 300 pounds of crust, and 1,850 pounds of beef.

"The Repeal pie (1846) was 1 ft. 10 in. deep, and 7 ft. in diameter. It took ten and a half hours to bake, and held between 300 and 400 birds and game. Sixty thousand people visited the Dale on the occasion.

"The fifth pie was made in September, 1837. No dimensions are given, but 2,000 persons dined off it, and enough for 1,000 more was left. No game was placed in that pie, but there were 47 st. of beef, 1 calf, 1 sheep, 104 st. of potatoes, and 43 st. of dough.

"I don't suppose you can print all this, but I thought it might be of interest to your readers. The sizes of the different pies are all from good authorities, but nevertheless they are rather incredible. Wishing the good old paper every success.—Yours truly, H. A."

OUR MEASUREMENT CHART.

So many readers write and ask me questions in regard to their measurements, whether they are above or below the normal average, etc., that I think the measurement chart printed below will prove a useful guide to a large number of my chums who take a proper interest in their physical development.

(Owing to great pressure on our space, the usual article has been omitted, and will appear on this page next week.)

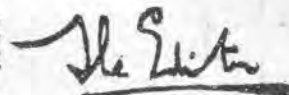


CHART OF IDEAL MEASUREMENT ACCORDING TO HEIGHT.

	5ft.	5ft. 1	5ft. 2-3	5ft. 3-4	5ft. 4-5	5ft. 5-6	5ft. 6-7	5ft. 7-8	5ft. 8-9	5ft. 9-10	5ft. 10-11	5ft. 11-6ft.	6ft. 1	6ft. 1-2	6ft. 2-3
Chest Contraction	30	30.6	31.2	31.8	32.4	32.9	33.7	34.4	35	35.8	36.6	37.3	37.9	38.6	39
Chest Expansion	34.1	34.7	35.3	35.9	36.7	37.6	38.3	39.1	40	40.5	41.1	41.8	42.3	42.7	43.1
Waist, ...	24.3	25	25.7	26.3	26.9	27.8	28.6	29.5	30.3	31.1	32	32.8	33.6	34.4	35.3
Upper Arm, R.	11.4	11.7	12.1	12.4	12.8	13.1	13.4	13.7	14.1	14.4	14.7	15.1	15.4	15.8	16.1
Fore Arm, R.	10.9	11.01	11.3	11.4	11.6	11.75	11.9	12.1	12.4	12.53	12.68	12.8	12.97	13.1	13.3
Upper Arm, L.	11.4	11.7	12.1	12.4	12.8	13.1	13.4	13.7	14.1	14.4	14.7	15.1	15.4	15.8	16.1
Fore Arm, L.	10.9	10.01	11.3	11.4	11.6	11.75	11.9	12.1	12.4	12.53	12.68	12.8	12.97	13.1	13.3
Thigh, R.	18.1	18.6	19	19.6	20.1	20.54	21.08	21.6	22	22.5	22.9	23.4	23.9	24.6	25.3
Calf, R.	12.2	12.4	12.65	12.8	13	13.2	13.35	13.49	13.7	14	14.3	14.6	15.2	15.6	16.1
Thigh, L.	18.1	18.5	19	19.6	20.1	20.54	22.08	21.6	22	22.5	22.9	23.4	23.9	24.6	25.2
Calf, L.	12.2	12.4	12.65	12.8	13	13.2	13.35	13.49	13.7	14	14.3	14.6	15.2	15.6	16.1
Neck	12.4	12.7	12.8	13.1	13.4	13.6	13.7	13.85	14.3	14.7	15.2	15.3	15.8	16.1	16.6

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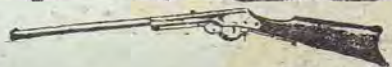
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