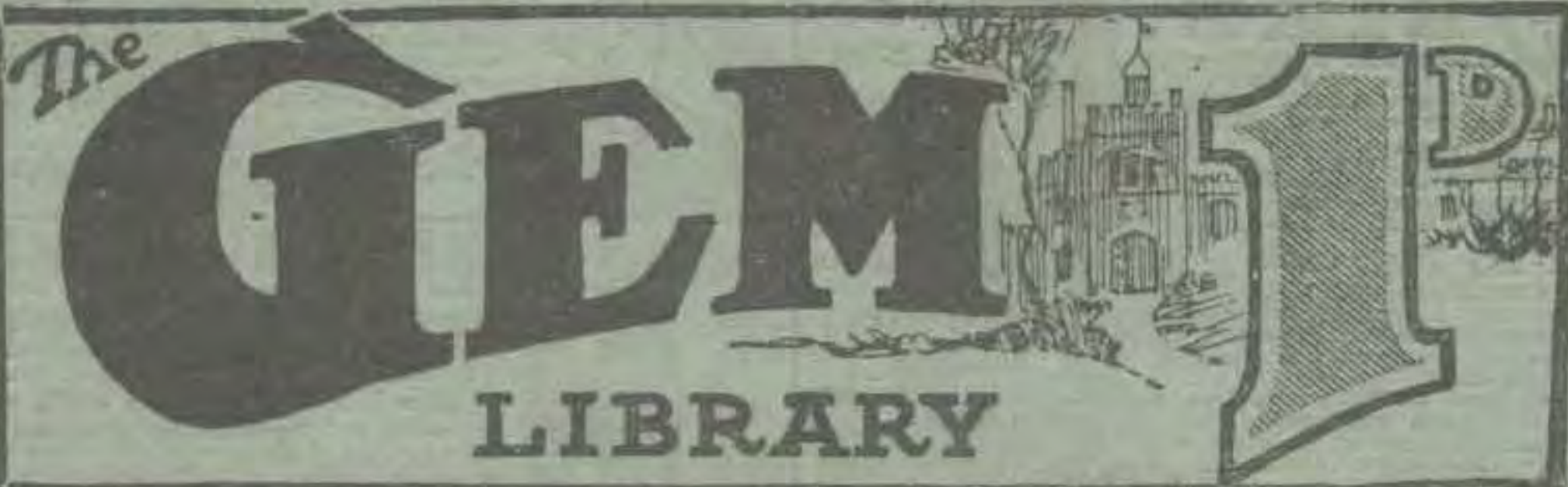


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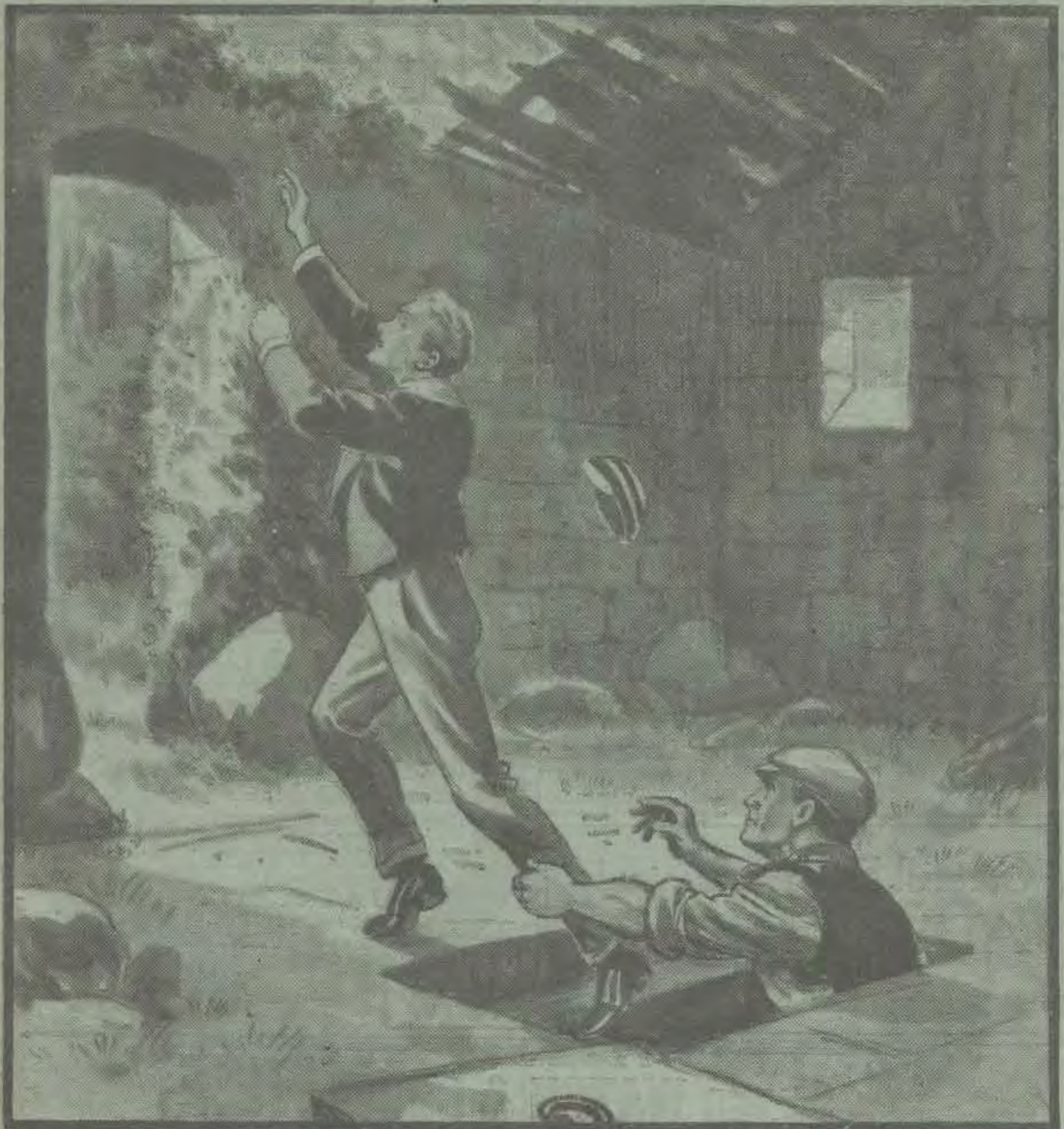
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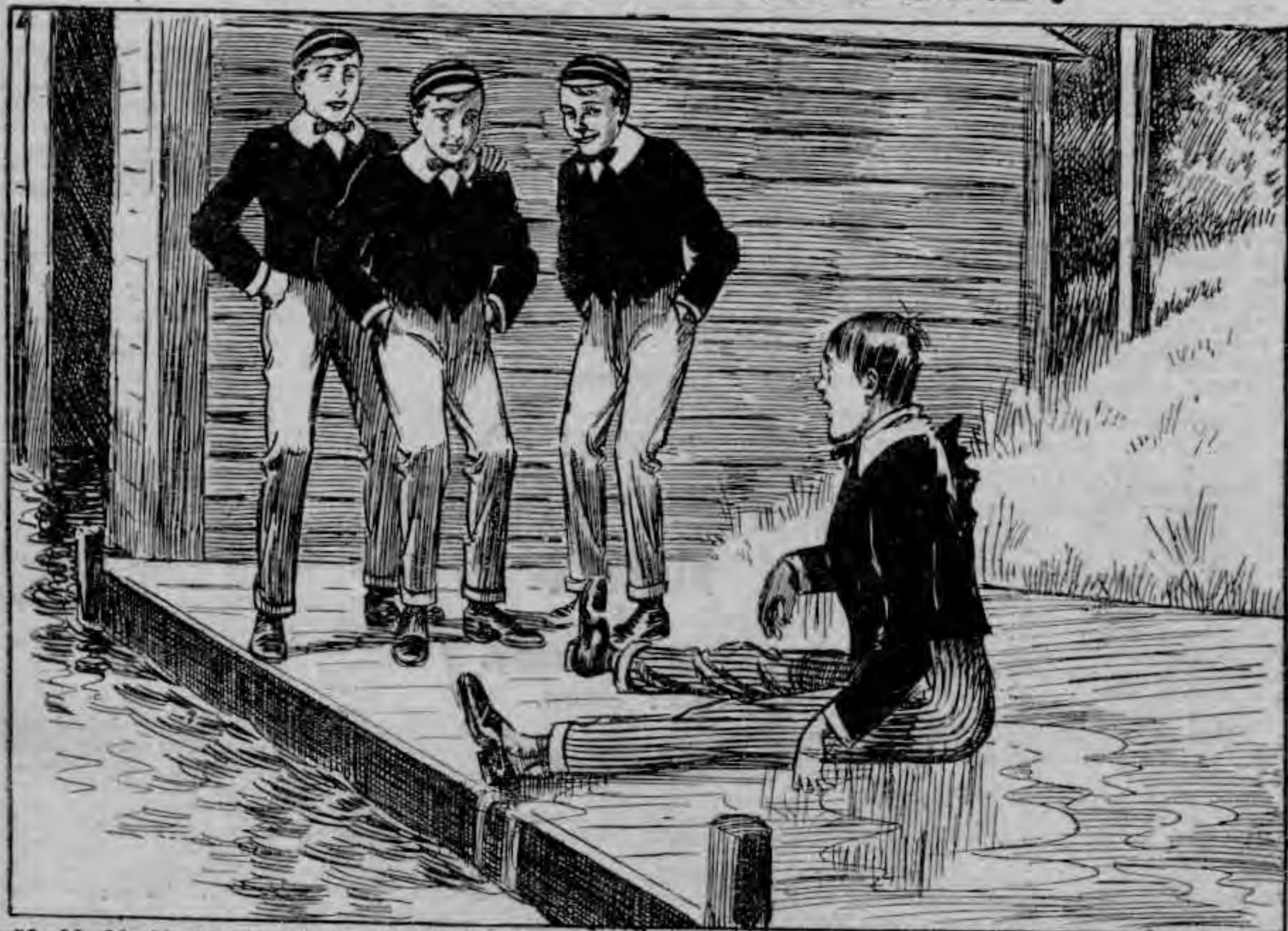


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THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND!

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Tom Merry & Co. looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he sat in draggled disarray upon the raft. "I utterly fail to see anythin' to gwin at!" said D'Arcy. "Naturally, as there's no looking-glass handy!" said Lowther. And the juniors roared. (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 1. A Hot Chase.

FATTY WYNN of the New House looked cautiously out of the doorway of the tuckshop at St. Jim's.

Fatty Wynn had been making purchases—extensive purchases. An enormous lunch-basket stood on the counter, crammed so full that the lid would hardly close. Dame Taggles had been busy for a quarter of an hour packing that basket under Fatty Wynn's superintendence. Now that it was ready, Fatty was looking out to make sure that the coast was clear. There was an expression of anxiety upon his plump face.

Figgins and Kerr, his chums, had gone down to the boat-house to get the skiff out. Fatty Wynn was to join them there with the lunch-basket. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and Figgins & Co. of the New House had planned an excursion up the river.

Fatty Wynn had been entrusted with the commissariat department—his experience in that line was long and varied. With a happy and beaming face he had superintended the

packing of the lunch-basket. But now a doubt assailed him at the last moment.

"Suppose those School House bounders should spot me, and raid the giddy basket?" Fatty murmured.

The thought made him turn quite cold.

He peered cautiously out of the doorway. It was time for caution. To raid a tremendous feed like that would be a big score for the School House juniors, the deadly rivals of Figgins & Co.; and if they spotted Fatty Wynn staggering away under the consignment of tuck, there was no doubt that there would be a rush.

Fatty's plump face fell as he looked round the old quad.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were standing under the old elms in full view, chatting together. Blake and Herries and Digby could be seen sunning themselves on the steps of the School House. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was crossing the quadrangle towards the tuckshop with his usual stately tread, his eye-glass gleaming in the sun.

"My hat!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "A regular hornets' nest."

Next Wednesday:

"THE RIVAL PATROLS!" AND "PLAYING THE GAME!"

No. 323. (New Series), Vol. 8.

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nest of the bounders! And if they spot the lunch-basket I'm done!"

He turned back into the tuckshop in dismay. He was still debating the knotty problem when the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy framed itself in the doorway. The swell of St. Jim's turned his famous monocle first upon Fatty Wynn, and then upon the enormous lunch-basket on the counter.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

Fatty Wynn grasped the lunch-basket, and swung it down, and prepared to make a dash for it.

Arthur Augustus grinned genially, and blocked up the doorway with his elegant form.

"Looks like wathah a big feed, Wynn, deah boy—what!" he remarked.

"Rats!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"Pway don't be watty, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "That's wathah a heavy basket for you to cawwy. Wait a minute, and I'll call some of the fellahs to help you. Then you won't have to cawwy it fah—only as fah as the School House. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

Arthur Augustus turned round and called into the quad.

"Blake! Tom Mewwy! Buck up! This way—"

The next moment Arthur Augustus gave a roar. Fatty Wynn had made a rush for the doorway, swinging the basket. The basket crashed against the elegant figure of the swell of the Fourth, and he went rolling into the quad. His elegant straw hat flew off in one direction, and his eyeglass in another, and Arthur Augustus measured his length upon the ground, and gasped:

"Bai Jove!"

Fatty Wynn scrambled over him, leaving the marks of his boots upon Arthur Augustus's hitherto spotless "clobber," and rushed for the gates.

Arthur Augustus sat up, panting.

"Bai Jove! Wescue, deah boys! Ow!"

There was a shout from the School House fellows. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came up with a rush. Arthur Augustus jumped up just as they reached him, and there was a collision.

The swell of St. Jim's went down again, with Monty Lowther sprawling over him, and Manners sprawling over Monty Lowther. D'Arcy gave an anguished gasp as he collapsed under the two Shell fellows.

"Ow-w-w-w-w!"

"Oh, you ass!" stuttered Lowther.

"You frabjous chump!" gasped Manners.

Tom Merry avoided the collision and dashed on in pursuit of Fatty Wynn. That plump youth was making for the gates at top speed, in spite of the weight of the basket.

Fear is said to lend wings, and the fear of having that big feed raided certainly lent wings to Fatty Wynn. He fairly flew. He reached the gates before Tom Merry reached him, and pelted on down the path to the river.

"Stop!" roared Tom Merry. "That's our basket! Stop!"

"Rats!" panted Fatty Wynn.

He rushed on. But Tom Merry was upon him now. The Shell fellow's grasp fell upon the fat Fourth-Former's shoulder, and he was swung round.

"Got you!" grinned Tom. "Now hand over the loot—"

Fatty Wynn was desperate.

Instead of handing over the loot, he handed out an uppercut with his left. It caught Tom Merry on the point of the chin, and took him quite by surprise.

"Grooh!" gasped Tom.

He crashed backwards into a thicket, and sat down there,

and gasped again as he found that the thicket was a thorny one.

Fatty Wynn gave a little breathless gurgle of laughter, and sped down towards the river again. In the distance he could see the skiff rocking by the landing-raft, with Figgins and Kerr in it. Fifty yards more to safety! Fatty Wynn, encumbered as he was, ran as he had never run on the cinder-path.

Out at the school gates came a whooping crowd of School House juniors. Manners and Lowther led the van. After them came Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, considerably ruffled and dusty; and, further behind, Blake and Herries and Digby, and after the Kangaroo and Reilly and two or three more. Quite a little army of School House fellows had spotted the lunch-basket, and joined in the chase.

Tom Merry scrambled out of the thicket just as Manners and Lowther came up.

"After him!" he shouted. "They've got a boat there, the bounders! We'll have the boat and the lunch!"

"Hurrah!"

The Terrible Three sprinted down to the river.

Fatty Wynn was gasping like an ancient bellows as he ran out on the raft. Figgins and Kerr, standing up in the boat, were watching the chase with anxious eyes. Figgins had an oar all ready to push off. The Terrible Three were only three or four yards behind Fatty now, and D'Arcy was close on their traces. It was a race to a finish.

"Buck up, Fatty!" roared Figgins.

"Put it on!" shrieked Kerr.

"Goooooh!" gasped Fatty.

With a final effort he reached the edge of the raft, and hurled the lunch-basket into the boat. Kerr caught it, and put it down.

"Jump!" yelled Figgins.

Tom Merry's hand was outstretched; his finger-tips touched Fatty Wynn's shoulder. But before his grasp could close Fatty leaped into the boat. The little skiff rocked and plunged as the Fourth-Former's weight was suddenly dumped into it, and Fatty rolled over breathlessly in the bottom. Tom Merry did not pause. He was about to spring, when the end of Figgins's oar tapped him on the chest, and he went backwards on the raft with a bump.

"No admittance except on business!" grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins pushed off.

Manners and Lowther halted on the edge of the raft. The quickly widening interval of water made them pause—as well as the oars wielded by Kerr and

Figgins. It had been a close thing, but Figgins & Co. had escaped. Fatty Wynn sat up in the bottom of the boat and grinned at the baffled raiders. But Arthur Augustus was not to be baffled. He came right on with a rush.

"Come on, deah boys!" he shouted. "Jump aftah me!"

"Stop! You can't do it!"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus jumped.

The boat was rocking away now, and the distance increased. Arthur Augustus jumped valiantly, and dropped a yard short of the boat and disappeared into the water.

There was a yell of laughter from Figgins & Co., and from the crowd of fellows on the raft:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus's head came up, and his watery eyes blinked round in astonishment as he struck out.

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Gussy!"

"Come back, you ass!" shouted Jack Blake, arriving breathless on the edge of the raft.

"Wats!" gasped D'Arcy. "Follow your leadah, deah boys!"

And he struck out for the boat.

Figgins was rowing now, and Arthur Augustus had no chance whatever of getting near the boat unless the New House juniors chose. Kerr picked up a boathook, and whispered to Figgins; and Figgy slacked down. D'Arcy drew near, and Kerr reached out, and hooked the boathook into his collar.

"Saved!" exclaimed Kerr dramatically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus wriggled on the boathook like a newly-hooked fish. "Gweat Scott! Leggo, you boundah! Ow! You're wuinin' my jacket! Gwooh!"

"I'm saving your life!" grinned Kerr. "It's all right; we sha'n't let you sink. I'm going to trail you after the boat all the way."

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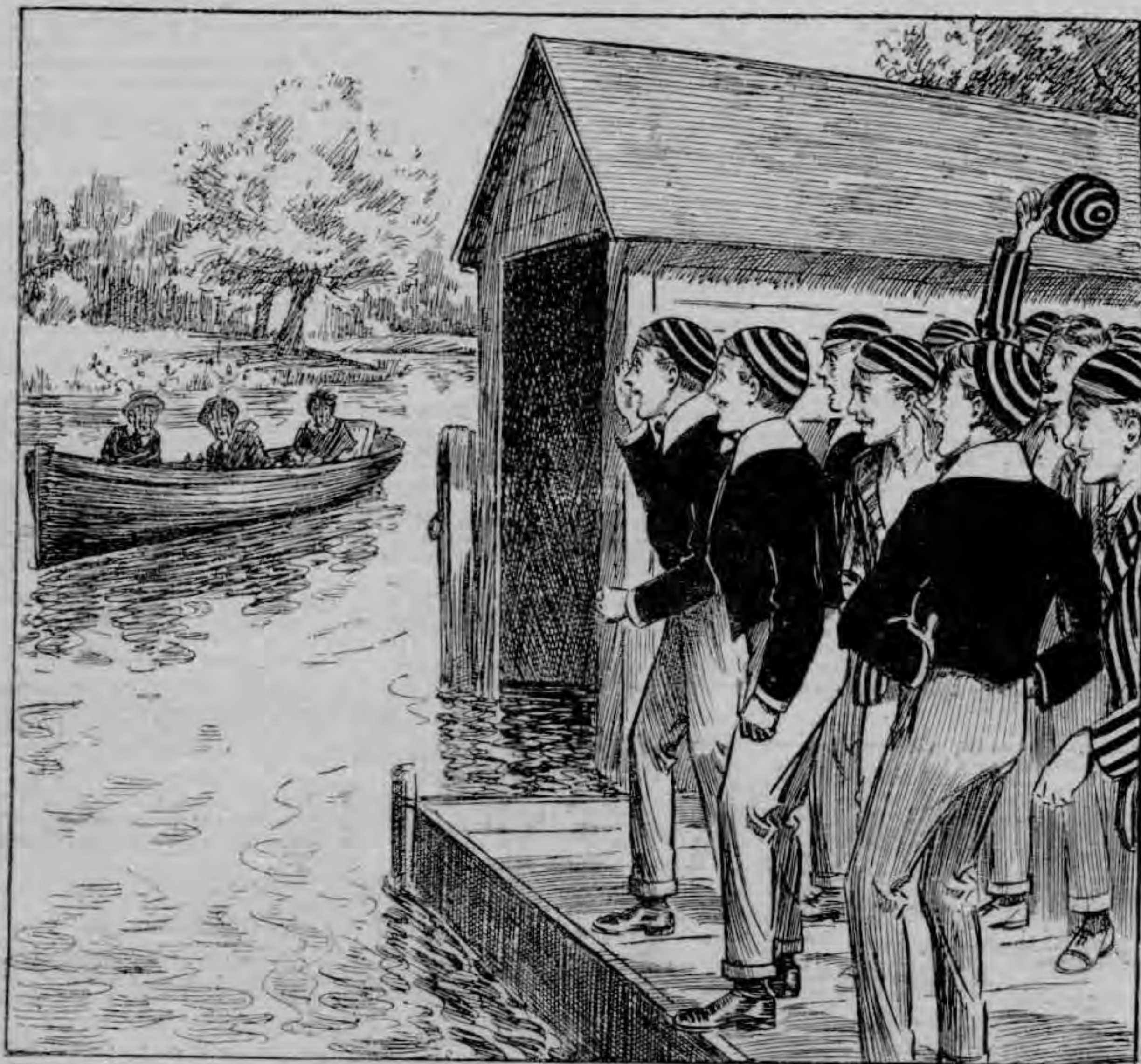
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A roar of laughter from fifty throats greeted the boat as it came round the bend in the river. "Ha, ha, ha! Look at the giddy zebras!" yelled Levison. (See Chapter 3.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottah! Gwooh!" The boat was getting way on now, and Arthur Augustus disappeared under the water for a moment. He came up, red and gasping. "Gwo-oh! Leggo! I wefuse to be twailed aftah the boat. Gwooh! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately, the collar of D'Arcy's jacket gave way, and the boathook came free, with a fragment of cloth upon it. The swell of St. Jim's was left behind, swimming and gasping. He struggled back to the raft, and Blake, laughing like a hyena, stooped and gave him a hand ashore. The swell of St. Jim's was dragged on the raft, quite breathless and exhausted, and he collapsed in a pool of water.

Kerr waved the boathook, with the fragment of D'Arcy's jacket on it, triumphantly, as the New House skiff pulled away up the river. And Figgins & Co., with one voice, sent back a yell at their rivals.

"Who's cock-house of St. Jim's? New House! Yah!"

And then they were gone.

CHAPTER 2.

Run Down.

TOM MERRY & Co. looked at Arthur Augustus, as he sat in draggled disarray upon the raft and grinned. They could not help it.

Arthur Augustus was a picture, but quite in contrast to the picture he usually presented to the eye.

There was a big gash torn in his elegant jacket by the boathook, and he was soaked to the skin, and he sat in a pool of water.

And he was wrathful.

"I uttably fail to see anythin' to gwin at!" he exclaimed.

"Naturally, as there's no looking-glass handy," agreed Monty Lowther. "But we can see it—and we'll take the liberty of smiling."

And the juniors smiled loudly.

"I wegard you as asses," said D'Arcy, scrambling to his feet, and squelching out water. "My clothes are uttably wuined. And those boundahs have got off. If you fellows had followed my lead we should have capchahed them, and looted the lunch-basket. Now they are goin' to picnic up the wivah."

"Are they?" murmured Tom Merry. "I fancy this is where we come in. Gussy, old man, if you don't want to catch cold, you'd better go and change your clobber."

"Yaas, wathah! But we are not gom' to let those New House boundahs have the gwin of us, I presume? Wait till I have changed my clobber, and I will lead you to victowry, deah boys. We will go aftah the boundahs and wun them down."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Blake.

"I sha'n't keep you waitin' moah than half an hour," added Arthur Augustus.

"I don't think you will," assented Tom Merry. "In fact, I don't think you will keep us waiting at all. Out with the boat, you chaps!"

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE RIVAL PATROLS!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"No time for jaw, Gussy, old man. We'll hear you do your chin-wag turn when we come back," said Lowther.

"Come and change your clothes, fathead," said Blake, grasping his drenched chum by the arm. "You'll catch your death of cold soon. We can't have you catching cold—"

"You are weally vewy thoughtful, Blake—"

"Of course; if you catch cold you'll give it to all of us in Study No. 6."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Kim on," said Blake. "Get out the four-oar, Herries; we'll go after the bounders. Those Shell duffers won't be able to nail them."

"Right-ho!" said Herries and Dig.

Blake rushed D'Arcy away towards the school, cutting short a number of further remarks he had to make; and Herries and Digby proceeded to get out a boat. Meanwhile, the Terrible Three were not losing a moment. Tom Merry's own special boat was being run down to the water as fast as they could run it. The Terrible Three intended to run Figgins & Co. down, and turn the tables upon them; partly because they wanted to prove to the satisfaction of the world in general that the School House was cock-house of St. Jim's; partly because it was a half-holiday, and could not possibly be better spent than in ragging the New House.

It was a glorious afternoon in early summer, and just the day for the river. To pull up the Ryll after the New House trio, rag them without mercy, capture their lunch-basket, and enjoy their picnic, was a programme that exactly suited the taste of the Terrible Three that afternoon. Tom Merry's boat was plumped into the water, and the three Shell fellows jumped aboard. Tom Merry and Lowther each took a pair of oars, and Manners sat at the lines. Figgins's skiff had disappeared round the bend of the river now. There were a good many boats out that afternoon, and voices hailed the Terrible Three from all sides with uncomplimentary remarks, as they pulled right on in pursuit, careless of the other craft they narrowly shaved.

"Clear off there!" bawled Thompson of the Shell, as the boat nearly ran him down in his light racing skiff. "Do you want all the river?"

"Yes, thanks!" said Lowther sweetly.

"You School House bounder!" roared Thompson.

Then he gurgled, as Lowther splashed with his oar, and a portion of the river bathed Thompson's crimson face. Thompson of the Shell jumped up, and waved both his fists furiously in the air after the School House boat as it shot onwards.

Monty Lowther smiled serenely.

"Sheer off, you young duffers!" shouted Kildare of the Sixth, as the boat crossed his bows. "Are you looking for a collision?"

"No; we're looking for Figgins," said Tom Merry. "Back water, Kildare, old man; we're in rather a hurry!"

"You—you young rascal!" spluttered the captain of St. Jim's. "I'll—I'll—" But the junior boat was gone before Kildare could explain what he would do.

"Getting out of the crowd now," remarked Lowther. "We got out of it as fast as we could; but some fellows are never satisfied. See Figgins yet, Manners?"

Manners shook his head. He was keeping his eyes open ahead for the New House boat, but it was not in sight. The river ran gleaming between high, wooded banks here, and the shadows of long branches danced on the waters. There was many a bend in the winding Ryll, and Figgins might have been only a short distance ahead without being in view. Tom Merry and Lowther bent to their oars.

"Where do you think they're going?" Tom Merry said, after a pause. "They might be clearing up into one of the backwaters for their giddy picnic, and we may overshoot the mark."

"Well, we can't explore every giddy backwater on the Ryll," Lowther remarked. "I noticed they had their coats in their boat, so they're most likely going some distance. Perhaps up to the Hermit's Island."

"That's out of bounds," said Tom. "Squire Lunsford doesn't allow trespassers there."

"At the more reason why those bounders should want to go there."

"Yes, that's so. We'll try the island, if we don't spot them on the way. Keep your peepers open, Manners."

"Right-ho! I'm looking out."

The juniors had the river mostly to themselves now. It was a good long pull up to the island against the current. There was an island lower down the Ryll, upon which the fellows often picnicked in the summer. But the upper island was further off, and was also out of bounds, and so the St. Jim's fellows did not often find themselves there. The island was uninhabited, and thickly wooded, and belonged to a local landowner, who sometimes let it for the fishing. Schoolboys were not allowed to picnic there; but that prohibition would

probably not make any difference to Figgins & Co. As a rule, the island was completely deserted. Once there had been a big board on the island, announcing the pains and penalties that would be inflicted upon trespassers. But some enterprising picnickers had used that board for fuel, and there was only the post left; so picnickers who came afterwards could justly plead that they did not know that trespassers would be prosecuted.

"See the island yet?" asked Tom Merry, after a long pull.

Manners nodded.

"Yes, rather! Bearing right down on it. I can't see those New House bounders, though. If they're there, they're ashore."

"Look out for 'sign,'" said Tom. "What's the good of being a giddy Boy Scout if you can't read sign? Any smoke?"

"By Jove! Yes!" exclaimed Manners, standing up in the boat, and shading his eyes with his hand. "The beggars have got a fire going, by Jove! They're there, right enough."

Tom Merry and Lowther rested on their oars, and screwed their heads round. Sure enough, there was the island, in the middle of the river, and from the darkly-wooded bank of the isle rose a thin column of bluish smoke. Evidently the picnickers had a fire going already.

"Easy does it!" murmured Tom Merry. "If we pull right on, they'll spot us, and they'll be ready for us. We're only three to three, so we've got to take them by surprise. Pull round the island, and land on the other side—what?"

"Good!"

"And quiet!"

The School House juniors grinned, and they pulled softly on, Manners steering for the channel to the left. The smoke disappeared from sight, hidden by the intervening trees. The island lay on the right of the juniors now, and they pulled in to its shore.

Lowther stood up in the bows. On this side of the island the trees and thickets grew right down to the water, and landing was not easy. Tom Merry pulled gently, till Lowther caught an overhanging bough, and drew the boat into the high bank.

"Right!" said Lowther.

Tom pulled in his oars, and laid them down. The boat rocked gently by the high bank of the island, under the cool shadow of the trees. The green thickets looked almost impenetrable.

The Terrible Three chuckled softly, as they made the boat fast to a willow that grew half in the water. They had only to land, creep through the thickets like Red Indians or Boy Scouts, and take the campers by surprise. Then a sudden rush, and Figgins & Co. would be captured.

"We'll tie 'em to trees, and make 'em look on while we eat their giddy lunch," murmured Monty Lowther gleefully.

"Good egg!" chuckled Tom Merry. "But shush! Figgins is a keen beast, and we don't want to be spotted."

"Shush is the word!"

The three juniors clambered out of the boat upon the high bank, pulling themselves through the thicket. They could not avoid the sound of snapping branches as they forced a way ashore. Beyond the thickets was an open glade, and they came out into it panting. And as they emerged into the glade, there was a sudden shout.

"Collar 'em!"

Three figures leaped upon the School House juniors, so suddenly that they had not a chance of defending themselves.

They went to the ground with three separate and distinct bumps, and in a second they were lying on their backs in the grass and ferns, each with a triumphant enemy seated on his chest pinning him down.

And from Figgins & Co., who had laid that successful little ambush for the Terrible Three, came a long cackle of triumph.

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

CHAPTER 3.

Woe to the Vanquished.

F IGGINS smiled loudly as he sat on Tom Merry's chest. Kerr was seated upon Manners, and Fatty Wynn's tremendous weight was planted upon the manly chest of Monty Lowther. The New House trio laughed loud and long.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, struggling to rise. "Gerroff!"

"Not just yet!" grinned Figgins, settling himself more comfortably on the chest of the captain of the Shell. "You're prisoners of war!"

"Caught in the act!" chuckled Kerr. "What about tying us to trees while you scoff our picnic—eh?"

The chums of the Shell looked very sheepish. Figgins &

Co., ambushed in the trees, had evidently overheard their remarks in the boat.

"Bless their innocent little hearts!" said Figgins genially. "They didn't guess that we spotted them pulling up the river. They never tumbled to it that we were watching them, and spotted their little game, and walked over to be ready for them, dear little innocent infants!"

"We'll make it pax!" said Tom Merry, with a sickly smile. "You've done us this time, Figgy!"

"Not in such a hurry with your blessed pax," said Figgins. "We've got you where your hair is short, my son. It takes two to make a bargain. You're prisoners of war."

"I say, Figgins, the kettle is boiling by this time," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "Don't let's waste too much time on these bounders."

"That's all right," said Figgins. "We'll send 'em back the way they've come. We'll tie 'em up, and put 'em into their boat, and float 'em off. The current will take them home."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" exclaimed Tom. "We shall be capsized."

"We'll leave you one hand free to steer," said Figgins generously. "We don't want you to be drowned. There would be nobody to rag if we lost our Terrible Three—terrible duffers I call you. You wouldn't catch New House chaps walking into a trap like this."

"Oh, pile it on," said Tom resignedly.

"Take this porpoise off my chest!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "He's squeezing me as flat as a pancake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, I'm going to tie you up," said Figgins, taking a whipcord from his pocket. "Don't struggle. The longer you make me about it, the longer Lowther will be squashed. Gimme your paws."

Tom Merry did not give his "paws." He began to struggle violently; but he had no chance. He was deep in the ferns on his back, and Figgins was on his chest, and had all the advantage. Figgins slipped a noose over his left wrist, and drew it tight, and then captured his right wrist, and looped the cord round it. In spite of the Shell fellow's resistance, his wrists were brought together, and Figgins knotted the cord. After that it was quite easy.

Tom Merry lay in the bracken with his hands tightly bound. Figgins jumped up, and passed to Manners, and Manners was even easier to deal with. Kerr pinning him down while Figgins tied his hands together. Monty Lowther was still more helpless. Fatty Wynn's weight reduced him to utter impotence. His wrists were pulled behind him and tied, the three New House juniors grasping him together. Then the prisoners were dragged to their feet. Crimson and breathless, the Shell fellows stood with their hands bound, and the victors danced a triumphal war-dance round them.

"Oh, don't play the giddy goat!" growled Tom Merry crossly.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kerr and Wynn.

"Shove 'em into the boat," said Figgins. "We'll adorn 'em a little, and set them going. Come on, you bounders!"

It was impossible to resist. The three Shell fellows were bundled through the thicket, and plumped into their boat, Figgins & Co. following them in.

The Terrible Three sat glowering. Manners was put in the stern, and his arm loosened sufficiently for him to manage the rudder-lines. But there was no chance of his getting out of his bonds; the captors had taken care of that.

But Figgins & Co. were not finished yet.

Figgins gathered a number of flowering twigs from the thicket, and stuck them in the bands of the juniors' straw-hats, giving them quite a festive appearance.

Then their boots were taken off, and hung round their necks. Meanwhile, Kerr had dashed away through the thickets to the camp, and he returned with a tin saucepan in his hand. The tin saucepan had seen service, and the underside of it was thickly blacked from the fire. Kerr moistened it with water, and, using his finger, traced deep black lines on the faces of the infuriated and helpless prisoners—black lines downwards from forehead to chin, giving them a remarkable and startling resemblance to zebras.

The New House juniors surveyed their handiwork with roars of laughter.

The Terrible Three were almost choking with fury by this time. Their faces, where the black lines did not cover them, were crimson with rage. They were, as Kerr remarked, quite an artistic study in red and black.

"You—you rotters!" gasped Lowther. "You're not going to send us off like this."

"Your mistake—we are!" said Figgins blandly. "Let the boat go!"

The New House juniors scrambled ashore, and Figgins pushed the boat out into the river. He gave it a powerful shove that sent it rocking midway into the channel.

Manners had the rudder-lines, and he kept the boat before the current. It floated slowly and lazily away towards the distant school.

Figgins & Co. returned chuckling to their camp.

There they were in full view of the boat as it floated away down the river, and they waved their hands and shouted mocking farewells till Manners steered round a bend of the Ryll, and the Terrible Three vanished from sight.

The chums of the Shell groaned in spirit as they floated away slowly on the lazy current.

Their aspect was so utterly ridiculous that they were in terror of meeting other boats on the river, and yet meeting another boat was their only chance of escaping from their predicament before they reached the school.

The mere thought of floating down to the school raft, into the midst of a crowd of punts and skiffs, in their present state, made them feel quite ill.

"Oh, my hat!" Tom Merry groaned. "The rotters have done us this time—done us fairly in the eye! Who'd have thought they were watching us come?"

"We ought to have thought of it!" grunted Lowther.

"Can't you get loose, you ass?"

"No. Can't you, you fathead?"

"Ow! No! Hallo! There's somebody on the bank; it's Levison of the Fourth!" exclaimed Lowther hopelessly.

"Steer for the bank, Manners!"

Levison and Mellish of the Fourth came in sight on the towing-path. They halted there, and stared blankly at the boat and its strange cargo. Then, as they recognised the Terrible Three, they burst into a yell of laughter.

"Will you let us loose?" shouted Lowther. "We're tied up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll steer the boat in if you'll let us loose."

"No fear!" chuckled Levison. "You look too pretty like that. I'm not going to spoil a good joke."

"It's a New House jape! Stand by your own House, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Levison.

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish.

"Will you untie us?" yelled Tom Merry furiously.

"No fear! Come on, Mellish! We'll tell the fellows what to expect!" And the two Fourth-Formers rushed away down the towing-path towards St. Jim's.

The Terrible Three groaned.

"That's done it!" gasped Tom Merry. "The whole blessed school will be ready for us now. We shall never hear the end of this."

"I've a jolly good mind to run the boat on the bank, and chance it!" gasped Manners.

"No good; we can't get loose," Lowther groaned. "We may meet Blake on the river—he was coming after Figgins. I suppose the silly duffers have been exploring the back waters, instead of coming up to the island as we did. If they'd come—"

"Oh, they hadn't sense enough!" growled Tom. "Now for it!"

The boat floated on round the last bend. They were in full view of the school raft now, and of innumerable boats. Levison and Mellish had spread the news, and every eye was turned up the river, to greet the appearance of the Terrible Three. One roar of laughter from fifty throats greeted them as they came in sight.

"What on earth—" exclaimed Kildare, coming out of the boathouse. "Why, what—Tom Merry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at the giddy zebras!" yelled Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners desperately steered the boat to the landing-raft. Two or three School House fellows kindly made it fast, and the Terrible Three were helped ashore. The raft rang with laughter from end to end.

"Who on earth mucked you up like this?" gasped Kangaroo, almost sobbing with laughter, as he untied Tom Merry.

"Figgins & Co.!" snorted the captain of the Shell. "Get me loose quick, for goodness' sake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And don't cackle!" roared Tom Merry. "It's getting on my nerves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kangaroo. "If you could see yourself, you'd cackle!"

The Terrible Three were free at last. They made a dive to wash the black lines from their faces; but the first effect of water was to smother their faces with the black, and make them look like Christy minstrels instead of zebras. The fellows stood round them, howling with laughter.

"Oh, come on, let's get out of sight!" grunted Tom Merry. "I'm fed-up!"

And the Terrible Three ran for the school, followed by yells of laughter from the crowd by the river. They dashed into the School House, and plunged into the nearest bath.

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room, and scrubbed their faces in hot water, with plenty of soap.

"We've been done this time!" Tom Merry gasped, through the lather. "Done brown!"

"Or black!" grinned Lowther.

"But we'll make Figgins & Co. sit up, all the same!" growled Tom. "Groo! I think I'm clean at last! And I'll punch Levison's head as soon as I see him, too!"

And he did, and derived some small consolation from that. But there was no doubt that the New House had scored this time, and that the Terrible Three had been completely and absolutely done.

CHAPTER 4. Caught in the Rain!

FATTY WYNN leaned back against a tree-trunk with a smile of enjoyment.

Figgins stretched his long legs in the grass. Kerr carefully stamped out the embers of the camp-fire.

The New House trio had enjoyed their picnic.

The defeat of the School House juniors had given it an added zest. Figgins & Co. had chuckled all through that gorgeous spread at the thought of the figure the Terrible Three would cut on their return.

"It was ripping!" said Figgins.

"Gorgeous!" said Fatty Wynn, with a sigh of content. "And there are still some tarts left, Figgy!"

Figgins sniffed.

"I mean it was ripping the way we diddle the School House bounders!"

"Oh, that!" said Fatty. "Yes, that was ripping, too! But, I say, wasn't it a gorgeous spread! I wish your pater would send you a remittance every day, Figgins. And to think that the School House bounders nearly collared it before we started!"

"They can't keep their end up against the New House!" chuckled Figgins. "Hallo! What's that? Rain, by Jove!"

Under the shade of the trees, the Co. had not noticed that clouds were overspreading the sky. But a spot of rain that dropped on Figgy's nose as he lay on his back in the grass, staring up at the leaves, enlightened him. Figgins sat up suddenly.

"Rain, by gum! What a sell!"

"Oh, rotten!" said Fatty Wynn. "We shall get soaked going back! A mile without cover! We shall get as wet as Gussy!"

Figgins rose to his feet, and stepped out from under the trees. Where the New House juniors had camped, a shelving bank of grass ran down from the trees to the water's edge. There was no longer a gleam of sunshine on the wide river. The sun had disappeared behind a bank of clouds, and the rain was falling—a sudden shower, which looked as if it would develop into something more than a shower.

The New House trio grumbled heartily. After that ripping afternoon, it was too bad for the rain to come and spoil it at the finish. The prospect of pulling back a mile on the river in a downpour of rain was not enticing.

"May blow over," said Kerr, scanning the sky anxiously. "Better wait for it, and give it a chance!"

"Not much shelter here, though," said Figgins; "and it's beginning to come down pretty thick, too!"

"We can dodge into the old cell for shelter," said Kerr. "It's only a few minutes to the middle of the island. Come on!"

"But if it lasts——"

"If it lasts we can go through it later. We sha'n't get any wetter by waiting a bit, and there's plenty of time yet before calling-over. And we've got the current behind us going home, even if we leave it late!"

"Oh, all right!"

It was evidently the best thing to be done. Figgins & Co. hurried through the trees towards the glade in the centre of the little island. There, amid the ancient beeches, lay the moss-grown ruins of the old stone cell. In the old days, when St. Jim's was a monastic establishment, the island had been part of the extensive domains of the monks, and a hermit had lived on the island—"on his lonesome," as the juniors would have described it.

It was from the hermit that the island took its name. Back in the days of the first Tudor the old monk had dwelt in the stone cell on the island, doing penance in silence and solitude for his sins, whatever they were.

The dissolution of the monasteries by Henry the Eighth, which had driven forth the Abbot of St. James's, had also put an end to the hermitage, and the stone building had fallen into ruin; but much of it still remained, overgrown with moss, and half-hidden by the thickets that grew round it.

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Its existence was hardly known, save to picnickers, who sometimes explored the island.

But Figgins & Co. had been there before—indeed, it was more than suspected that Figgins & Co. could have told who had burned the notice-board which denounced pains and penalties upon all trespassers.

The juniors hurried through the wood, the rain falling thicker and faster as they ran. Wet branches and twigs lashed their faces, and they were decidedly damp by the time they reached the glade. There, close under a huge beech that had been standing before Henry the Eighth came to the throne, lay the ruins of the hermit's cell.

Figgins & Co. ran into the cell, over the broken and mossy flagstones that formed the ancient floor.

The roof was far from intact; more than half of it had fallen in, but enough remained to shelter the juniors from the rain.

"Here we are!" panted Figgins. "Looks pretty cold and damp; but we're lucky to get any shelter at all here!"

"Yes, rather!" Fatty Wynn shivered. "That old johnny who used to live here must have had a pretty rough time! They say he used to live on bread and water. Awful!"

"I don't know!" grinned Figgins. "Some of those old johnnies didn't have such a hard time as they made out. They say that when St. James's Monastery was dissolved—I mean, dissolved—they found no end of casks of wine stored away in the cellars. There's a yarn that the hermit here had a cellar, too, where he used to keep good things galore—excepting when he had visitors, and then he trotted out the bread-and-water wheeze!"

"Don't see any sign of the cellar," said Kerr, looking round. "I fancy that's a yarn. If there was a cellar then, there would be a cellar now, and where is it?"

Figgins stamped on the thick stone flags.

"Might be under here," he said. "One of these flags might lift out, and there you are! Rather a good idea to come and explore some day, when it isn't raining! Might bring a crowbar and try, and we might find——"

"A mare's-nest!" said the unbelieving Kerr.

"Oh, rats!"

Outside the stone cell, the rain was coming down faster. The juniors, growling remarks about the weather, listened to the pattering of the drops on the leaves about the old cell. Suddenly Figgins started, and bent his head to listen.

"My hat! I can hear some of those bounders!" he ejaculated. "Have they been asses enough to come back in the rain? Must have been in want of a wash!"

The Co. listened intently. There was no doubt about it. They could hear the sound of someone brushing rapidly through the thickets, and coming in the direction of the hermit's cell.

"Not Tom Merry and his lot!" said Kerr, with a shake of the head. "I fancy they've had enough! Blake & Co. may have been after us, too!"

"Then they ought to have been here before this," Figgins remarked.

"Not if they searched the river for us; they didn't know we were coming to the island, you know. They've got here just in time for the rain."

The Co. chuckled.

"And they're making for this cell for shelter, same as we did!" grinned Figgins. "And the best of it is, they don't know we're here. Keep quiet, and jump on the bounders as they come in!"

"Good egg!"

It was very shadowy in the old cell, and the three juniors drew back on either side of the entrance, out of sight. The sound of footsteps and brushing twigs came nearer.

"Sounds like only one chap coming," Kerr said, in a whisper. "Can't be the whole gang. Just a lone scout, perhaps, coming to see if we're here."

"I shouldn't wonder!" grinned Figgins. "All the better. We'll nail him as he comes in, and then if it's Study No. 6 really that will leave only three of them to deal with. Take off your braces to tie him up with."

"Rats! Take off yours," demurred Kerr.

"Well, we'll take off his when we've caught him," said Figgins.

"Right-ho! Shush!"

The New House trio lay very low. The new-comer was close at hand now. Evidently the rain was making him hurry.

The juniors heard him break out of the thickets, and came at a run over the wet grass towards the cell. Then a form came running in through the stone opening, from which the door had long since vanished. And as it ran in the three juniors sprang upon it, and grasped it, and hurled it to the floor, and piled on it.

"Got him!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a sharp, sudden cry from the new-comer, and he struggled savagely in the grasp of the juniors

"Fury! What—who—"

"My hat!" gasped Kerr. "We've got the wrong pig by the ear!"

Evidently they had. It was a man and a stranger. Their grasp relaxed, and as they let go the man leaped to his feet, swung round upon them, and grasped at something inside his coat. The next moment there was a gleam of steel in the shadowy cell, and Figgins & Co. jumped back in wild alarm as they found themselves looking at the muzzle of a levelled revolver.

CHAPTER 5.

A Strange Encounter.

"**H**OLD on!"

"What the thunder—"

"Turn that thing away!" yelled Figgins.

The man they had collared stood panting. The three juniors backed away as far as the narrow limits of the cell allowed. The man was a powerfully-built fellow, with a dark, hard, clean-shaven face, and keen, quick eyes that glittered under the shadow of a soft hat pulled low over his brows. He was shaking with excitement, and it seemed to the juniors with fear. But the hand that held the weapon was steady enough. The levelled barrel looked directly at Figgins & Co., and the hammer was half rising under the pressure of the finger on the trigger.

The juniors stared at the stranger in blank amazement.

That a stranger should happen to land on the island and take shelter in the old hermit's cell was not surprising; but that he should be in possession of a deadly weapon, and should draw it upon them, simply took their breath away.

But as his keen, black eyes read their startled faces, and he saw that he had to deal with schoolboys, he lowered his hand. The revolver disappeared into his pocket again quickly, as if the man was anxious to get it out of sight.

Figgins & Co. drew a breath of relief when it had disappeared. The desperate look on the man's white, hard face had scared them.

"Who—who are you?" the man gasped. "How did you come here?"

"Who are you?" replied Figgins independently. "We've as much right here as you have, I suppose. And what do you mean by pointing a revolver at us? Suppose it had gone off, you thundering ass?"

The man's face set hard. He had a very square jaw that protruded when his teeth were set, and gave him a peculiar expression like a bulldog. His expression was savage and threatening. But the juniors could see that he was trying to pull himself together. The encounter had startled him more than themselves.

"I—I— You startled me leaping upon me like that," he said, his voice hurried and husky. "How dare you do so! Who are you?"

"We're us!" said Figgins, recovering his coolness now. "And I want to know what you handled that pistol for? You're not allowed to carry firearms about and point them at people, even if they mistake you for somebody else, and biff you. You jolly well ought to be locked up."

"It—it was not loaded."

"Wasn't it?" said Figgins suspiciously. "You yanked it out mighty handy if it wasn't. Who the dickens are you? Running away from the police, by any chance? Did you fancy we were bobbies on your neck?"

"Draw it mild, Figgy," murmured Kerr.

"Well, I'm not going to have a silly chump poking firearms at me," growled Figgins.

The man with the bulldog jaw seemed to have pulled himself together now. The hard expression melted from his face, and he smiled, a difficult, twisted smile.

"I am sorry I frightened you," he said.

Figgins snorted.

"You didn't frighten us," he said. "'Tain't so jolly easy to frighten us. Blessed if I didn't think you were a dangerous lunatic, though."

"But you must explain what you are doing here," said the stranger sternly. "You have no right on this island. It is private property."

"What right have you here, then?" retorted Figgins. Figgins, as a matter of fact, had really been scared, and it made him feel extremely nettled. He was feeling very much up against the square-jawed stranger.

"I have every right here. I have taken the island from Squire Lunsford for the fishing," said the stranger coldly. "My name is Brown—Mr. William Brown. No one but myself has a right to land on this island."

Figgins whistled.

"Well, that alters the case, if it's true," he said. "Excuse me, we've only got your word for it, and I don't like your looks."

Mr. William Brown gritted his teeth.

"Take care how you are insolent," he said. "I can have you prosecuted for trespass, if I choose."

"Rats! If what you say's true, I don't know how Mr. Lunsford came to let the island to a johnny who carries a pistol about him, and yanks it out at fellows!" growled Figgins. "You're a blessed heoligan, Mr. William Brown!"

"Leave this place at once!"

"In the rain?" asked Figgins, with a sniff.

"That is your own look out. You should not have come here."

"We're jolly well not going out into the rain," said Figgins. "even if I believed what you've told me, and I don't."

"I say, Figgy—" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"I tell you he's spoofing us," said Figgins. "If he's taken the island for the fishing, what has he come here for now? Not come here specially to fish in a downpour of rain, I suppose? And where's his rod and line? I suppose he's not going to fish with a revolver, is he? It's all bunkum. He's landed here to get out of the rain, and he's got no more right here than we have. Not so much, in fact, because this island used to belong to St. Jim's, and we have fishing rights here, only the Lunsfords have gobbled the place up, and the school governors won't go to law about it."

"That's so," said Kerr. "He can't have come here to fish now, so what has he come for? Just by chance!"

"I suppose he was boating, and landed here to get out of the rain," said Figgins. "That's it, isn't it, Mr. William Brown from nowhere?"

"Will you go?"

"No."

"Then I shall use force."

"Will you?" said Figgins, clenching his fists. "That's a game two can play at, or four, in this case. Don't think you can scare us with your blessed popper. We know you daren't use it. If you want to get rid of us, my pippin, you've got to commit three giddy homicides on end, and that's a big order."

The Co. grinned. Certainly the man, powerful as he was could not eject three sturdy juniors by force. As for his revolver, although he had snatched it out in a moment of alarm, it was, of course, absurd to suppose that he would use it on the schoolboys. He had clearly supposed himself at first to be in the grasp of very different persons—the police, perhaps, Figgins thought.

Mr. William Brown made a step towards the juniors, and they lined up to receive him. He paused, apparently realising that in a struggle with the three of them, he would not have much chance of victory. Outside, the rain was lashing down heavily, and Figgins & Co. would have risked a good deal rather than have submitted to be driven into it.

"You refuse to go?" Mr. William Brown muttered at last.

"Yes, rather."

"Very well, then; you will take the consequences," Mr. Brown's hand went into his coat again, and the juniors started. But it was only a cigar he drew out this time. He leaned against the mossy stone wall and lighted the cigar, his black eyes gleaming malevolently at the schoolboys the while.

"And what are the giddy consequences going to be?" asked Figgins sarcastically. "Are you going to boil us in bacca juice, or is it to be something lingering with boiling oil in it?"

"I shall report you to your headmaster. You belong, I suppose, to St. Jim's, the school down the river?"

"You can't expect us to tell you," said Figgins, with a grin.

"Who are you?" demanded Mr. Brown angrily.

"Liberal members of Parliament," said Figgins affably. "We've come down here for the afternoon to get away from Lloyd George."

The Co. chuckled as Figgy gave Mr. Brown that ridiculous information. Mr. Brown did not seem to see the joke. He scowled savagely.

"Mind, I don't believe a word about your having taken the island from old Lunsford," added Figgins. "That's a whopper. And we'll jolly well come here as often as we like. My hat! I'll come along here on Saturday afternoon with a whole crowd of chaps, and overrun the blessed show, just to show you that we don't care twopence for you and your blessed melodramatic revolver, Mr. William Ananias Brown."

The stranger did not reply. He stood leaning against the old stone wall, smoking. But his glance never left the juniors, and the juniors kept their eyes upon him. There was something about him that puzzled them, and would have alarmed them, if they would have admitted to themselves that they could be alarmed.

He was evidently listening, from time to time—listening

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in doubt and ill-concealed uneasiness. What was he listening for? What was he fearing would happen?

It occurred to Figgins that he might be expecting companions to join him there; but there was no sound of anyone coming through the rainy wood. It was perplexing, and a suspicion even crossed Figgins's mind that the man was not quite right in his head. But the face, the hard, cruel jaw, the firm-set lips seemed to express a nature especially collected and level.

It was more likely, Figgins considered upon reflection, that the man was hiding there. If he was some rascal in flight from the police, all his strange conduct would be accounted for. It was not a comfortable thought, to be shut up there with a man who might be a fugitive criminal, and who was certainly armed with a deadly weapon. Figgins felt relieved when the rain showed signs of slackening.

Kerr peered out into the weeping wood.

"I think we can chance it now, Figgy," he said. "It won't dry up to-night, anyway. Let's make a run for it."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "Good-evening, Mr. William Brown. If you come along here next Saturday, we'll have the pleasure of seeing you again!"

The man did not reply. Figgins & Co. left the hermit's cell, and hurried down to the place where they had camped. The rain was still falling, though lightly now, and they did not lose time. The boat was run down into the water, and Figgins & Co. jumped aboard and pushed off. Figgins looked round as he pushed off. He was looking for the stranger's boat, but there was no sign of it.

"That chap must have come in a boat," Figgins remarked. "He didn't land here. I wonder where his boat is? It would serve him right to tow it away, and leave him stranded!"

"We won't do that!" said Kerr, laughing. "I don't see the boat, either. He landed on the other side, I should think. I wonder whether he was telling us the truth?"

"Rats!" said Figgins. "He was out in a boat, and landed for shelter from the rain, that's all."

"He wasn't in boating clobber," said Kerr, "and he hasn't gone, now the rain's cleared off. And how the deuce did a stranger know anything about that old hermit's cell on the island, Figgy?"

"Blessed if I know. But a ruffian like that couldn't be the tenant of the place; and if he was, why should he come there in the rain?"

"Give it up," said Kerr.

But he was very thoughtful.

It was too rainy to argue it out then, and Figgins & Co. bent to their oars, and rowed back to the school, and they were decidedly wet by the time they reached the New House at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus Apologises.

FROM playing-fields and river the St. Jim's fellows crowded in as the rain began to pelt down.

While Figgins & Co. were seeking shelter in the old hermit's cell on the island in the river, the Terrible Three watched the rain from the hall window in the School House and grinned.

"Not so bad, after all," Monty Lowther remarked. "I fancy Figgy will get a bath before he gets home. They'll have to pull home in the rain. Hallo! Here come four rainy-looking merchants!"

The chums of Study No. 6 dodged into the House. They certainly did look rainy. They were wet through, and steaming.

"Wet?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Yaas, wathah!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wet through to the beastly skin, deah boys! It was weally Blake's fault, you know. If Blake had taken my advice—"

"Oh, rats!" growled Blake.

"Where have you been?" grinned Lowther. "Looking for a cheap bath?"

"We've been looking for those New House rotters!" growled Blake. "We were after that feed. But they disappeared into thin air, I think. We've searched every blessed backwater, half-way from St. Jim's to the Hermit's Island, and there wasn't a trace of them."

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"You were on the wrong track, old chap; they were gone to the island."

"How do you know?" demanded Blake.

"Because we followed them there and found them there," said Tom Merry loftily.

Blake & Co. evidently did not know in what a parlous state the Shell fellows had returned from their expedition, and the Terrible Three did not mean to tell them.

Arthur Augustus gave a little chirrup of triumph.

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Grand Scouting Story and Articles
in Next Wednesday's

"What did I tell you, Blake, deah boy? Didn't I wecommend nullin' up to the island and lookin' for the boundahs there—what?"

"You did," admitted Blake, "and if you hadn't suggested it, I might have gone there! But, of course, I thought it wasn't any good when you suggested it. I thought they were gone up one of the backwaters, and so did Herries and Dig."

"Yaas; but I wecommended—"

"Oh, don't say 'I told you so'!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "I don't see how these Shell bounders managed to spot them, either. It was sheer chance, I suppose. Did you fellows get in before the rain?"

"Long before!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

Blake grunted.

"And I suppose you scoffed Figgins & Co.'s feed on that beastly island! It's rotten! I never thought for a minute that they'd gone there."

"I wecommended—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "If you hadn't been such an ass, we might have gone to the island. But you were so sure about it, I took it for granted you were wrong. Did you Shell bounders scoff the feed?"

"Well, not exactly," admitted Tom Merry. "You—you see, upon the whole, we let Figgins & Co. keep the feed."

"What on earth did you do that for?" demanded Blake, with a stare. "If we'd run them down, we'd have had the feed off them quick enough!"

"Sort of took pity on them, you know," murmured Manners.

"Well, I think you're a set of silly asses!" said Blake politely. "I wish I'd had the chance! Come on, you chaps; let's get up to the dorm and change, or we shall be catching cold. I'm wet through."

"Yaas, wathah! If we had gone to the island as I wecommended—"

"Cheese it!"

"Yaas; but if we had gone to the island, we could have got sheltah fwom the wain—in the old hermit's cell, you know. If you had listened to me, Blake—"

"You listen to me!" said Blake, in a tone of concentrated ferocity. "If you say 'I told you so' again, I'll scalp you! Understand?"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Shurrrup!"

Herries and Digby had already started for the dormitory, to change their wet clothes, and Blake grunted and followed them. Arthur Augustus paused a moment for another word with the grinning Shell fellows.

"It was wotten!" he said plaintively. "Blake is weally wathah an obstinate ass, you know! I suggested that Figgins & Co. had gone to the island, you know, because it is out of bounds, and old Lunsford is watty when picnickers go there, so it would be just like those cheeky New House boundahs to go, you know. But Blake was as obstinate as a mule! He thought they had gone up one of the backwaters to picnic in the beastly woods. And we got caught in the wain, you know, and my clobber is quite spoiled! I wegard it as wotten!"

"Horrible!" said Monty Lowther. "Blake owes you an apology. I should insist upon an apology!"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Quite wight, deah boy! Hewwies and Dig were just as obstinate. They were certain the wottahs were hidden in one of the backwaters. And we got caught in the wain—"

"Gussy!" shouted Blake, from the stairs.

"And my clobber is wuined—"

"Are you coming, you ass?"

"And I wegard it as absolutely wotten—"

"Do you want to catch a cold, you silly fathead?"

"Comin', deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus went upstairs, and joined his chums in the Fourth Form dormitory.

The Fourth-Formers were soaked to the skin. They stripped off their clothes and rubbed-down with hard towels, making remarks all the time about the weather, about Figgins & Co., and about Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Blake seemed to take it as a personal injury that Arthur Augustus had recommended going to the Hermit's Island. D'Arcy's opinion, as Blake remarked, was generally that of an ass, and it was exasperating to find that he had been right on this occasion, when his advice had not been followed.

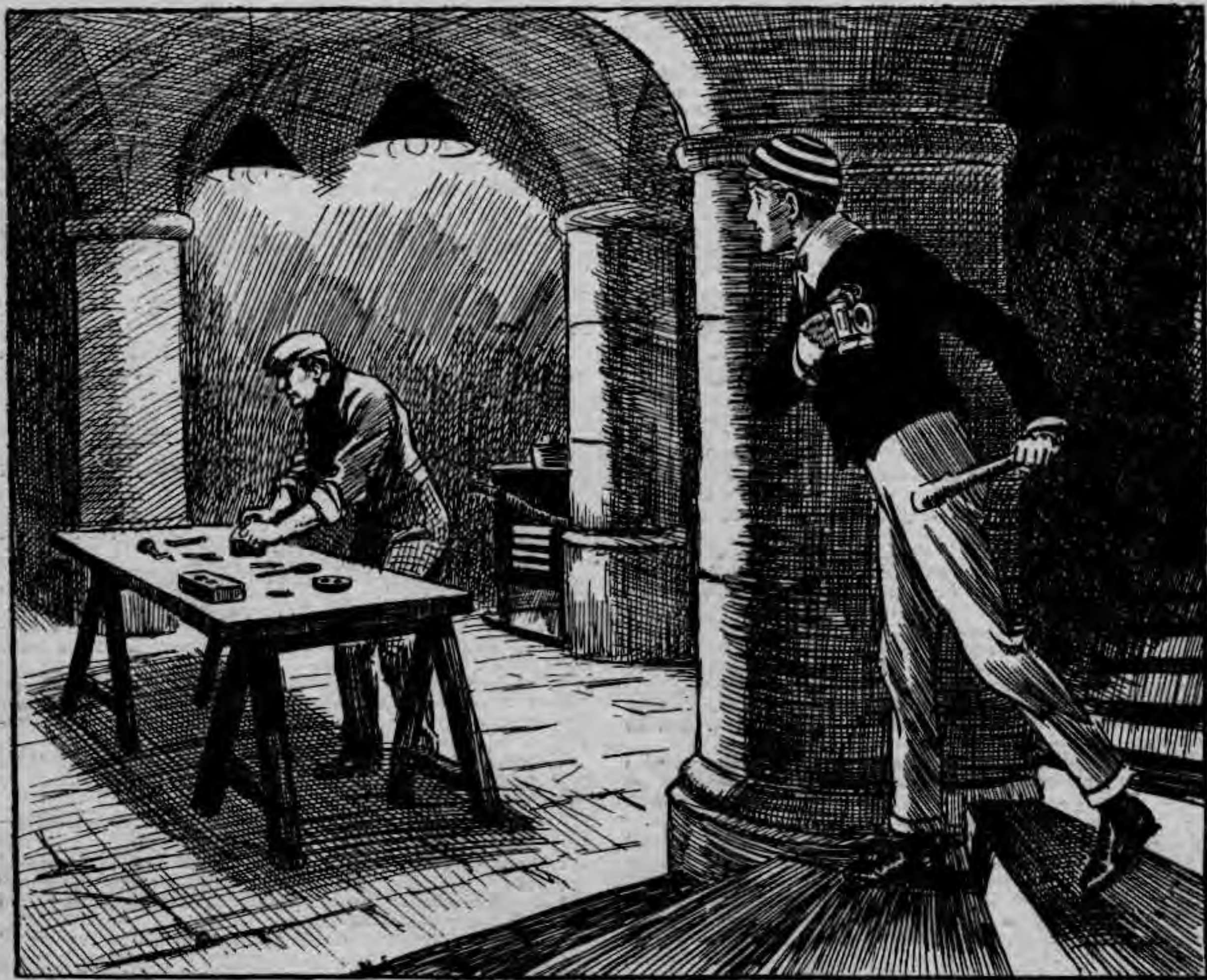
"You fellows owe me an apology," Arthur Augustus remarked, as he drew on his elegant bags after drying his elegant person. "If you had taken my advice, Blake—"

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I appeal to you, Hewwies. Didn't I wecommend pullin' for the island?"

"Fathead!" growled Herries.

"I appeal to you, Dig, deah boy! You are vewy well



Figgin's almost staggered for a moment as he realised what it was the man was doing. He understood it all now—he had discovered the secret of the island. (See Chapter 12.)

awah that I wecommended pulling for the island, instead of wastin' time muckin' about in those wotten backwatahs!"

"Chump!" said Digby.

Arthur Augustus groped for his eyeglass, jammed it into his eye, and regarded his chums with a withering glare.

"You uttah asses!" he said, in measured tones. "We've missed Figgin's & Co., and got wet in the wotten wain, all through your diswegardin' my advice. Anothah time, I twust, you will be willin' to follow my lead. In a case of doubt a fellow of tact and judgment is the wight leadah."

Jack Blake exchanged a glance with Herries and Digby.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he said, "I put it before the meeting that Gussy is the cause of our having mucked up this afternoon."

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

"Weally, Blake—"

"If Gussy weren't such a howling ass, we should have listened to him, and gone up to the island," said Blake. "It's owing to Gussy being a howling ass that we didn't. It's all Gussy's fault from start to finish."

"Every bit of it," agreed Herries.

"From start to finish," said Digby solemnly.

"I considah—"

"Gussy therefore owes the study an apology," pursued Blake; "and I suggest that we bump him till he apologises."

"Bai Jove!"

"Passed unanimously!" said Herries and Digby. And the three Fourth-Formers converged upon the swell of St. Jim's.

"You uttah asses!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "It is you who owe me an apology. If you had taken my advice—"

"Collar him!"

"If you had taken— Ow! Hands off, you wottahs!"

Yawwooh! I wefuse to be collahed— Yow-wow! Gweat Scott!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy descended upon the floor of the dormitory, and roared.

"Ow! You wottahs! Yow! Welease me at once! Bai Jove! I'll give you a feahful thwashin' all wound— Yawwooooh!"

"Apologise!" roared Blake.

"I wefuse to apologise! It is you who ought to apologise, as you know very well!" howled D'Arcy. "I decline to do anythin' of the sort! I— Yawwooooh!"

Bump!

"Say when!" said Blake blandly.

"Oh, you uttah wottahs! You are spoilin' my twousahs! Gwooh! Hold on!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as he was swung up for the third time. "On second thoughts, I apologise."

"Bump him for not apologiseing sooner!" growled Herries.

Bump!

And Blake and Herries and Digby, their good-humour quite restored now, walked out of the dormitory, laughing, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sitting on the floor, in a state of indignation that could not be expressed in words.

CHAPTER 7.

Called Over the Coals!

"GREAT pip!"

Figgin's of the Fourth uttered that startled ejaculation.

It was the day following the adventure upon the river. The Fourth Form had just come out of the Form-room, and

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE RIVAL PATROLS!"

streamed into the sunny quadrangle. The previous night's rain was quite gone, and the old quadrangle of St. Jim's glowed with sunshine.

Figgins had been relating to an interested group of juniors the curious adventure at the hermit's cell on the island in the river, when he suddenly broke off and uttered that exclamation, and stared at a man who had just entered the school gates.

Kerr and Wynn followed his glance, and they, too, ejaculated in surprise and alarm:

"My only hat!"

"He's come!"

"What's the row?" asked Tom Merry, who was among the group of fellows listening to Figgy's tale of adventure. "Do you know that chap?"

"Know him?" growled Figgins. "That's the fellow I'm speaking about—the bounder we met in the hermit's cell yesterday."

"Mr. William Brown!" said Kerr grimly. "He was telling the truth, after all, Figgy. And he's come to complain to the Head."

"Rotten!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "Figgy, you ass, I thought you were slanging him a little too much."

"I don't care!" said Figgins. "He was a rotten hooligan, and I'm glad I slanged him. But if he was telling the truth about being the tenant of the island, I suppose it means trouble. We were trespassing, when you come to think of it."

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Get out of sight!" said Tom Merry hastily. "He doesn't know you belong to this school for certain; and he doesn't know your names. If he doesn't spot you—"

"Good wheeze!" said Figgins.

The New House chums scuttled back into the Fourth Form-room, to lay low there. The man of the island had not seen them in the crowd of juniors. He was striding towards the School House, with a frown on his brow and his jaw looking very square. It was only too evident that he had come to make trouble for the trespassers.

Tom Merry & Co. all looked at Mr. William Brown with interest as he passed into the House. They did not like his looks. The face was hard as iron, and the eyes, under their heavy brows, had a glitter in them that was not pleasant.

"Not a brute, is he?" Monty Lowther remarked. "But it's all moonshine what Figgy was saying about his perhaps being a giddy runaway from the police, or something of that sort. He's the tenant of the island right enough, or he wouldn't be here. He doesn't look good-natured, but he's all right. Figgy was talking out of his hat."

Jack Blake had looked into the House after Mr. Brown. He came back to the group of juniors in the quad.

"Toby's shown him in to the Head," he said.

"Trouble for poor old Figgy!" remarked Redfern of the New House. "The chap looked as if he meant business."

"He doesn't know their names," Tom Merry remarked.

"Easy enough to find them, all the same. He'll make the Head parade the whole school to pick out Figgins & Co. by sight," said Redfern sagely.

"I suppose the Head will do it," said Blake thoughtfully. "After all, it isn't allowed to trespass on the island. Only, as a matter of fact, we've a right there. The school governors have never admitted Squire Lunsford's claim to sole control of the place, only they don't think it's worth a lawsuit. If that Johnnie makes trouble about a harmless little picnic on the island, I think it will be up to us to go there as often as we can and make things warm for him—what?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy heartily. "In this mattah it is up to us to back up Figgins & Co., though they are New House boundahs."

"New House what?" demanded Redfern.

"Boundahs, deah boy. Bai Jove, heah comes Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's came out of the House with a somewhat worried look. He bore down on the group of juniors.

"Any of you kids been trespassing on the Hermit's Island yesterday afternoon?" he asked, scanning their faces.

It was an awkward question. The Terrible Three had landed on the island in pursuit of Figgins & Co. But Mr. William Brown knew nothing about that, and he had not come to St. Jim's in connection with the Shell fellows. But the consciousness in the faces of the Terrible Three caught Kildare's keen eyes at once.

"I remember you three kids passed me, going up the river," he said. "Did you go up to the Hermit's Island?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we did," said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"Then follow me to the Head's study," said Kildare. "The fishing tenant of the island has come to complain about trespassers there."

"But I say—"

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"That's enough! The Head's waiting for you!"

The Terrible Three followed Kildare, looking very glum. It was sheer bad luck that the prefect should have dropped upon them like this. Figgins & Co. were the fellows who were wanted, but Tom Merry & Co. could not deny that they had been to the island when they were asked the question point-blank.

Kildare tapped at the door of the Head's study, and led the Shell fellows in. Mr. William Brown was standing there, still with a frown upon his face, and Dr. Holmes was frowning too. The Head of St. Jim's did not like receiving complaints concerning his boys, and Mr. Brown's complaint had been couched in the most unpleasant terms possible, and the Head's annoyance was most likely to be visited severely upon the delinquents.

"Ah, you have found them already, Kildare?" said Dr. Holmes. "Are these the boys, Mr. Brown?"

Mr. William Brown stared at the Terrible Three from under his thick brows.

"They are not!" he said.

Dr. Holmes raised his eyebrows.

"They are not the boys you have complained of?"

"No."

"That is very odd. Have these boys confessed to visiting the island yesterday, Kildare?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Brown clicked his teeth.

"It seems that quite a number of the boys of this school make a practice of trespassing upon other people's property," he said unpleasantly. "Unless it is stopped, and effectively, I shall have recourse to the police for protection."

Dr. Holmes frowned. The man had some right to complain, perhaps, but he seemed to be doing it in the most disagreeable manner he could.

"The boys will be punished, Mr. Brown!" he said icily. "You need have no fear of that. I do not allow trespassing. But if these are not the boys you have complained of, I do not see—"

"They have trespassed on the island, however, by their own confession," said Mr. Brown sharply. "I therefore demand their punishment along with the others!"

"It is your right," said the Head. "But the others—Come in!" he added, as a tap came at the door.

The study door opened, and Figgins & Co. presented themselves. From the Form-room window they had seen the Terrible Three marched off by Kildare, and they had followed.

They did not want to escape punishment at the expense of the School House fellows.

Mr. Brown uttered an exclamation at the sight of them.

"Those are the boys, Dr. Holmes."

"If you please, sir," said Figgins meekly, "we're the chaps, sir. Merry and Manners and Lowther hadn't anything to do with it, sir."

"It was us, sir," said Kerr. "We weren't doing any harm there, sir. And we didn't believe that man when he said he was the tenant of the island. It didn't seem to us to be true."

Mr. Brown's jaw seemed to look more like a bulldog's than ever. He turned to the Head with a sneer on his lips.

"That is a specimen of the insolence I received from them yesterday, Dr. Holmes."

"It wasn't insolence!" growled Figgins. "You acted like a rotten hooligan, and we slanged you, and serve you jolly well right."

"Silence, Figgins!" said the Head sternly.

"Well, sir, we—"

"Enough! You confess that you trespassed upon the island yesterday?"

"We confess that we went there, sir," said Figgins sturdily. "We don't call it trespassing. St. Jim's School has a right over the island—fishing and landing rights—"

"The island has been placed out of bounds, Figgins, because that is a matter of dispute, and the school governors have yielded the point. You will be punished for trespassing upon Squire Lunsford's property."

"Yes, sir, I know," said Figgins resignedly. "But those Shell chaps hadn't anything to do with it. They weren't in the hermit's cell with us."

"They seem to have landed on the island, by their own confession," said the Head.

"Oh, that was nothing, sir! They followed us there, and we bundled them off in a few minutes," said Figgins. "They weren't there ten minutes altogether."

The Head glanced at Mr. William Brown. Under the circumstances, especially as the Shell fellows had been accidentally caught into a confession, as it were, it would only have been decent of Mr. Brown to signify that, so far as he was concerned, they could be passed over when the punish-

ment was handed out. But evidently Mr. Brown had no desire whatever to signalise himself by being decent.

"I demand severe punishment for all the trespassers, Dr. Holmes," said Mr. Brown, in a hard, unyielding voice. "And I request your permission to see it inflicted."

Dr. Holmes's eyes gleamed for a moment. He would gladly have ordered the unpleasant visitor out of the house, but that was not feasible. Mr. Brown was within his rights in demanding that punishment. Dr. Holmes rose, and took his cane.

"I have no alternative but to punish you, my boys," he said. "You have broken bounds, and have trespassed; and you, Figgins, appear to have been guilty of impertinence towards this gentleman. I shall cane you all severely."

"I should suggest a flogging," said Mr. Brown.

"Thank you," said the Head urbane. "But my opinion is that a caning will meet the case. Hold out your hand, Figgins."

The Head did not err on the side of gentleness. Each of the juniors received four strokes with the cane, and they were swingers. Then the Head dismissed them with a gesture, and they left the study, with their hands squeezed under their arm-pits, and expressions of anguish upon their faces.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "The Head might have gone a little easier. There was no need to put all his blessed beef into it in that way."

"Never knew he had so much muscle!" groaned Monty Lowther. "Ow, ow, ow!"

"What do you think of that rotter?" said Tom Merry, with gleaming eyes. "He knows we three at least only just landed on his blessed island for a few minutes, and the Head knew we ought to be let off too. But he—"

"He's a cad!" grunted Manners. "A rotten, rank, outside cad!"

"I should like to have that hatchet face of his just within hitting distance in the gym!" sighed Figgins. "I'm sorry you fellows have been landed with this. It was your suggestion that we should get out of sight, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry grinned faintly.

"Well, it can't be helped," he said. "I didn't foresee that that ass Kildare would come plumping point-blank questions at us. It was jolly decent of you chaps to come and own up, though it didn't get us off. But it would have got us off if that cad Brown had a rag of decency."

"Here he comes!" growled Lowther.

Mr. William Brown came striding down the passage. He gave the juniors a cold glance as he passed, and they gave him looks of fury. He passed out into the quadrangle, and some of the juniors there bestowed heavy groans upon him as he strode down to the gates.

"Oh, the rotter!" said Figgins. "Look here, we're going to get even with that cad. It isn't as if we did any poaching on his beastly island. We never fished or anything; and it's really our island too. We're going to make that cad sit up for this, somehow."

"War is declared!" said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Hear, hear!" groaned the juniors.

And they went their way disconsolately, still squeezing their aching palms, and turning over in their minds all sorts of plans for making Mr. William Brown properly sorry for himself.

CHAPTER 8.

Dark Suspicions.

TOM MERRY & CO. gave a good deal of thought to the subject of Mr. William Brown during the next day or two. They had an intense dislike towards the gentleman with the bulldog jaw, and they felt that it was up to them to "get their own back" if they could. In that enterprise, as Figgins nobly said, it was up to fellows of both houses to pull together. School House and New House both had a score to settle with Mr. William Brown, and the only question was, how was it to be done? But that was a somewhat difficult question to answer.

The juniors learned some facts about Mr. Brown. He was undoubtedly the tenant of the Hermit's Island, as he had declared. He had taken the island early in the spring from Squire Lunsford, and possessed all tenant's rights there—for the fishing, as it was supposed. He put up at the Feathers Inn, some distance from the island, on the bank of the Ryll. But he was not always there.

Tom Merry and Co. frequently cycled down to the riverside inn, to demolish ginger-beer and cakes in the old garden, and George, the waiter, was an old acquaintance of theirs. When they found that Mr. Brown had a room at the inn, they asked old George about him, and the old fellow told them all they asked.

Mr. Brown did not seem much of a fisherman, George

thought. He often carried a rod and basket, but he never caught any fish; nor had old George actually seen him fishing at all. He was frequently away for three or four days at a time, and had, in fact, a season ticket from Wayland to London. He kept a boat at the inn, and pulled off to the island by himself sometimes, and sometimes with a friend or two whom he brought down from London. They generally had anglers' outfits, but George never saw any fish of their catching. Old George was, in fact, considerably puzzled by the guest of the Feathers, and he was quite garrulous on the subject.

The Co. were puzzled too.

They did not believe that Mr. William Brown was a fisherman at all. However unlucky a fisherman might be, he would catch something sometimes—and Mr. Brown never caught anything. A meditative or poetic person, certainly, might sit by the river with an idle line for hours; but Mr. Brown looked like anything but a meditative or poetic person. He looked like a hard business-man—hard and not over-scrupulous. He looked the very last man in the world to idle away hours by a sunny river with an idle line, pleasant as that occupation undoubtedly is.

What, then, did he want with the island?

The Terrible Three and Figgins & Co. had gone down to the Feathers together that afternoon for that talk with old George. As they cycled back along the towing-path they were very thoughtful. Figgins's brain was especially busy.

"There's something fishy about the man!" Figgins declared at last.

"Nothing fishy about him, you mean," remarked Monty Lowther. "He never catches any fish, at all events."

"Oh, don't be funny!" implored Figgins. "Keep that for the 'Weekly,' old man. There's something jolly fishy about him. Old George doesn't know what to make of him. He's not a fisherman any more than he's a Turk."

"Then what the dooce does he want with the island?" said Tom Merry. "He must be paying old Lunsford a good bit for it."

"That's the giddy mystery. He doesn't want it for the fishing—that's all spoo. The afternoon we met him there he came in the rain, and came straight to the old—"

said Figgins. "He hadn't a rod with him, even. Well, he wasn't after fishing then, was he?"

"Couldn't have been, I suppose."

"And he didn't pull out to the island in the rain for nothing—what?"

"Must be dotty if he did."

"And he had a revolver about him, and he yanked it out when we collared him, taking him for one of the School House chaps," said Figgins. "A chap doesn't carry a revolver for nothing."

"No; he has to pay for a licence," agreed Lowther, who never could resist the inclination to be funny, in season or out of season.

"Shut up!" roared Figgins. "I tell you, this matter is serious. As I was saying, he doesn't carry a revolver for nothing, and yank it out when somebody collars him, unless he's in fear of being collared seriously some time—that is, by policemen. He was scared out of his wits when we grabbed him that afternoon—right out of his wits. And he was mighty keen to get us out of the hermit's cell—even though it was pouring with rain. He was afraid of something—"

"What the dickens was he afraid of?"

"That's what we're going to find out," said Figgins determinedly. "My belief is that he's a scoundrel, and he's up to something against the law."

"Oh!"

"That's my opinion," said Figgins firmly. "Kerr and Wynn noticed, too, that he was afraid of something all the time we were in the hermit's cell with him, and he seemed to be listening all the time."

"That's jolly queer," said Tom Merry.

"Just look at the facts of the case," said Figgins. "Here's a man who carries a revolver, and yanks it out when he's touched; takes an island, and pays for it for fishing, and never fishes; gets into a wild rage because some chaps land on the island for a picnic, though he doesn't use the island for the only thing it's useful for—camping and fishing. The island's not a bit of use to him, yet he's paying rent for it; and he takes the trouble to come to St. Jim's and get us licked, to keep us from going near the island again. Now, isn't there a lot in that that wants explaining?"

"Well, it does look like it," admitted Tom Merry.

"There's a secret there, and it's something illegal," said Figgins, with conviction. "He didn't come to the hermit's cell on Wednesday afternoon for shelter from the rain, mark you. He came in the boat from the Feathers, and it must have been raining when he started. We know how

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long the rain had been going on. Well, then, he left the inn, though it was raining, and came there. What for?"

"Give it up."

"Well, anyway, he must have had an object."

"And you think—"

"I think there's some giddy secret about that hermit's cell," said Figgins, with conviction. "He came there for a special purpose. You know the old yarn about the hermit of the island having a well-stocked cellar? Well, suppose that cellar really exists—what? Suppose there's something hidden there—some secret or other—perhaps one of Mr. William Brown's friends there at the very minute we were there—that would explain why he was listening so anxiously. He might have been in dread all the time that his friend would come out into view."

"My hat!"

"But what on earth could be going on there?" asked Manners.

"Something against the law," said Figgins. "Perhaps it's a hiding-place for plunder. They may be a gang of burglars."

"Oh!"

"Well, perhaps it isn't so bad as that," said Figgins. "But there's something—something that Mr. William Brown is awfully keen on keeping dark—something that he's paying the rent of the island for, though he doesn't want it for the reason he gives—fishing. My belief is that it's something illegal. If it wasn't, why the dickens should he be so keen about keeping it dark?"

"Figgy, old man, you ought to be a lawyer," said Tom Merry admiringly.

"Well, I think I've worked that out pretty well," said Figgins, with some pardonable satisfaction. "And we're up against the cad. He's given us plenty of trouble, and we're going to get our own back. If he's up to some swindle, we'll show the rotter up—what?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Only we've got to spot what's going on before we can show him up," said Manners.

"Leave that to me," said Figgins loftily.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "No good leaving a difficult business like that to a New House chap. You admit that, Figgins?"

"That I jolly well don't!" said Figgins, with some heat. "If I want help, of course I'll call on you chaps, and let you take a hand. But for investigating, what is wanted is a cool head and a level brain—"

"Well, and where are you going to find those in the New House?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Here!" roared Figgins. "Mine!"

"Now you're being funny!" complained Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins crossly. "Look here, you chaps have got to stand out and leave that man to me. I spotted him first. I guessed he was a criminal to start with. And if he's a criminal, he's my criminal—see?"

"Bosh! Criminals are public property!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"I think—" began Kerr.

"And I think—" said Manners.

"You School House chumps—"

"You New House duffers—"

Fortunately, the cyclists arrived at St. Jim's before the argument proceeded further. They separated to go to their respective Houses in considerable wrath.

"The awful nerve of it!" said Figgins to his chums, as they went into the New House. "Why, we've got all the right in the matter! We spotted the rotter, in the first place. We slanged him on his own giddy island. We're jolly well going to keep this matter in our own hand—what!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. heartily.

And at the same moment the Terrible Three were expressing their opinion of the peculiarly crass obstinacy of Figgins of the New House.

"The silly ass!" said Monty Lowther. "Why, if he takes this matter in hand, he's simply bound to make a muck of it!"

"Not the slightest doubt about that," agreed Tom Merry.

"Of course, it's up to us!"

"Yes, rather!"

"In fact, Figgy will get himself into trouble if we let him run on," said Tom, with a wise shake of the head. "If only for Figgy's sake, out of kindness, we're bound to take this matter in hand ourselves."

"Hear, hear!"

"And we jolly well won't lose any time!" said Tom Merry. "To-morrow afternoon's a half-holiday, and it would be just like Figgy to go mooching off to the island then, instead of

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playing cricket. If that man's a giddy criminal, why, he may knock Figgy on the head! The inside of Figgy's head will never save the outside. Kids, we're going to strike while the iron's hot, and if there's a secret on that island, we're going to be the johnnies to discover it, and we're going to do it at once—to-night."

Manners and Lowther stared. They were not quite prepared for that.

"To-night!" repeated Lowther.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Manners.

"To-night," said Tom Merry firmly.

"But—how?"

"I've got a key to the boathouse, you know. We can get the skiff out easily enough. We'll take a bike lantern, and a cricket-stump each, in case of trouble. Then we'll explore the giddy hermit's cell. According to old George, Mr. William Brown is away in London now, so he won't be there to bother us."

"He might drop in suddenly. He did the time Figgins & Co. were there—"

"We must chance that," said Tom serenely.

"You ass! He'd report us to the Head. And what do you think we should get for being out of bounds and up the river at night, especially after the row there's already been about that beastly island?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Can't be helped," said Tom. "We're going to risk it. But we'll put on some old clothes and smother our chivvies with mud, and then—"

"Grooh!" sniffed Manners.

"Ass! It will wash off! An extra wash won't do you any harm. Then the rotter won't know us, even if he does see us. What do you think of the idea?"

"Rotten!" said Lowther.

"Simply rotten!" said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Then you can stick in bed, and I'll go alone!" he said.

"No, you won't!" growled Manners. "If you go, we all go."

"When father says turn, we all turn," sighed Lowther.

"Blessed if I like the idea of playing the giddy goat in the middle of the night. But I suppose you won't be happy till you get it. It's a go!"

And that evening, before the Shell went to bed, the Terrible Three made their preparations with great secrecy, not even admitting Study No. 6 into the secret. If they had told Study No. 6, Blake & Co. would have wanted to take a hand—indeed, Arthur Augustus would certainly never have allowed the expedition to take place without his personal superintendence. So Tom Merry considered that a still tongue showed a wise head. It would never do for a crowd to go.

When Darrel of the Sixth saw lights out in the Shell dormitory in the School House there was nothing in the manner of the Terrible Three to excite his suspicions. And the rest of the Shell were fast asleep before Tom Merry made a move.

CHAPTER 9.

An Expedition by Night.

"STEADY on!"

"Shush!"

"Steady on, I tell you, with that boat—"

"And shush, I tell you, with that giddy voice!"

"You ass, Lowther—"

"Shus-s-sh!"

Tom Merry paused for a moment to glare at his subordinate follower. The Terrible Three were carrying the skiff among them over the raft. They had slipped out of the School House quite easily—as a matter of fact, they had broken bounds on other occasions, and knew the "ropes."

The boat-keeper was fast asleep in bed long ago, and as the captain of the Shell had a key to the boathouse, it was easy enough to take the skiff out. But the night was very dark, and the boat bumped on the raft as the three juniors ran it down to the water.

"Better shush!" went on Lowther, with cheerful coolness.

"If we get spotted, you know—"

"Shut up!" growled Tom Merry. "Here we are."

The boat slid into the water with a gentle splash. The Terrible Three stepped into it, and Tom gently pushed off. They rocked away into the middle of the dark, murmuring river. Their voices died into silence in the quietude of the night. Now that they were fairly embarked upon that reckless expedition the seriousness of it began to dawn upon their minds—they had not thought much about it before. But if it should come to the knowledge of the Housemaster or the Head that they had taken a boat out on the river at nearly midnight, the results would certainly have been extremely serious for them.

And there was something almost eerie in the darkness and the silence of the flowing Ryll—something uncanny in the black woods that lowered on the shore.

Perhaps at that moment the Terrible Three felt some little inward misgiving, and wished that they were safe back in their beds in the Shell dormitory in the School House. But it was too late to think of that now.

Whether they felt inward misgivings or not nothing would have induced the Terrible Three to admit the fact to one another or to themselves. They were fairly started now, and there was no turning back. The lantern and three cricket-stumps lay in the boat. They were prepared for emergencies. They intended to explore the cell on the Hermit's Island, and discover its secret, if it had one. But that anyone but themselves would be there was not likely. Even if the old hermitage was being used for some secret and lawless purpose, it was not likely that Mr. William Brown or his friends would be there at midnight.

Hardly a star glimmered in the sky as the juniors pulled up the river. Not a gleam of light broke the black masses of the woods on either shore. When they passed the Feathers every light was out in the old inn, and they could hardly distinguish the building against its dark background of woods. The silence of midnight brooded over the river, and it was oppressive.

The juniors did not feel inclined to speak. In silence they pulled on. Manners was steering, and he was watching anxiously for the island ahead. In the darkness it would have been very easy to run ashore.

A blacker mass against the dark sky ahead showed at last that they were nearing the island.

"Go easy!" said Manners. "We're close on it now."

The boat jumped lightly on the mud. They came ashore in the place where Figgins & Co. had camped for the picnic a few days before. It was the easiest landing-place on the island. They laid the oars in, and scrambled ashore on the shelving bank of the island, and drew the boat up securely among the rushes.

"Well, we're here," said Monty Lowther.

"And we've got the place to ourselves, I fancy," Tom Merry remarked, with a glance round into the black shadows. "Lucky we know our way all over the island. We sha'n't be able to see much."

"There's the lantern," said Manners, taking it out of the boat.

"No light," said Tom. "It might be spotted from the land, if there's anybody about. Not that there seems to be anybody. But one can't be too careful when one is out of bounds at midnight."

The juniors chuckled a little. That was true. Some keeper in the woods along the river might have spotted a light on the island, and felt curious about it. If one of Squire Lunsford's keepers had seen a light there he would probably have come investigating, looking for poachers and night-lines.

Tom Merry took the unlighted lantern, and the cricket-stumps were picked out of the boat, and then the Terrible Three started for the interior of the little island.

It was only a couple of hundred yards to the deep glade in the midst of the trees where the ruins of the hermitage lay under the ancient beech. But the juniors were a quarter of an hour getting there. In the deep darkness it was not easy to find the way. In the glade, however, it was a little clearer, and they discerned the mossy masses of stone under a big beech.

"Nobody there now, at all events," Lowther murmured. The silence of the tomb greeted the juniors as they approached.

"Better not jaw, though," Tom whispered. "Shush!"

"Shush away!" said Lowther cheerfully.

They entered the hermitage cautiously. The old place was evidently untenanted. But if the cellar or vault existed under the old hermitage, as Figgins suspected, they needed to be careful. It was not likely, but it was possible, that someone might be there. And if the old hermitage was really the resort of a gang of criminals, they would be on the alert at all times. Figgins's theory had seemed rather "thick" to the Shell fellows. But, somehow, in the darkness and loneliness of the island, it seemed less improbable now. They remembered the hard, unscrupulous face of Mr. William Brown, and they remembered Figgins's mention of the revolver, and the remembrance was not pleasing at that moment.

Tom Merry lighted the lantern. For further investigations the light was essential, and it could not now be observed from the banks of the river. The glimmer would not show beyond the walls of the old hermitage.

The lantern light gleamed on the stone walls, thick with moss, overgrown with creeping plants. Tom Merry cast the light upon the square, heavy flagstones that formed the floor of the old cell. They were cracked in places, uneven, and jagged. But certainly they did not look as if they had ever been displaced since they were first set there by the builders

of the hermitage in the far-off days when Richard Cœur de Lion was King in England.

For a quarter of an hour or more the juniors scanned the cracked and defaced flags, with a muttered word every now and then, and then there was a pause in the search.

"No luck!" murmured Tom Merry.

"We haven't finished," said Manners, in a low voice. "There's this heap of brushwood in the corner. Shall we shift it?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

In one corner of the hermitage there was a mass of brushwood, twigs, dried foliage, tangled with growing ivy and creeping plants.

"Is it worth while?" Tom Merry murmured dubiously. "It doesn't look as if it's ever been moved."

Lowther cocked his eye thoughtfully at the heap.

"I don't quite see how it got there, though," he remarked. "The ivy's growing, and some of the twigs have fallen there from the trees, and the leaves, too. But that brushwood must have been chucked there by somebody. There wasn't a pile like that there last time I came here. That was last term."

"Well, we'll shift it and see," said Tom. "May as well be thorough."

He set the lantern down where its rays fell upon the corner, and the three juniors dragged away the heap. The stone flags were revealed underneath, covered with moss and with crawling tendrils of ivy. Monty Lowther dropped on his knees to make a closer examination, and he uttered a suppressed exclamation. He dragged a mass of the ivy aside, and revealed an iron ring set in the centre of a square stone. The ring was eaten with rust, but it was still unbroken. The chums of the Shell gazed at one another in surprise and triumph.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, under his breath. "That's a find!"

"So there is a vault, after all!" said Manners.

"Yes; and that's the way into it, you bet. The old ivy has covered up that ring for years," said Tom. "Nobody would have thought of dragging it away and looking under it. If anybody knows this place he must have happened on it by chance."

"Do you think—"

"We'll soon see. We're going to see what's under that stone."

Tom Merry grasped the iron ring. He noticed that it moved quite easily in its socket in the stone. He dragged at it, and the stone rose out of its place. The stone was flat, thick, and heavy, nearly a yard in length, and two feet across, and as it rose Tom could see that it was more than six inches thick. Yet it moved easily enough to his pull. It was evident that it was balanced upon some hidden pivot below.

The stone rose, and it stood upon end. Below was black darkness. The juniors gazed down into the deep pit at their feet. Tom Merry picked up the lantern, and cast its light into the depths below. Six feet down was a flooring of stone, with a cavity at one side, and there he caught a glimpse of a narrow flight of stone steps that wound downwards into the blackness.

"That's our way!" said Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther drew a quick breath.

"Suppose—suppose there's someone there!" Manners muttered uneasily. "I—I say, Tom, I'm not finking, but—but that's an awful hole to get into, if it should happen that there's someone there, someone who's afraid of being discovered."

Tom shook his head.

"There's three of us," he said. "Besides, I think there's nobody there. This place is used, I believe, but it's empty now. That brushwood and stuff was piled on the stone after it was last closed. That couldn't have been done from underneath."

"No, that's so."

"Come on!" said Tom. "In for a penny in for a pound, you know. We'll risk it."

"If they, whoever it is, should come while we're down there we shouldn't have much chance of getting out," said Lowther.

"And if he's a criminal remember that he's got a revolver."

"We'll close the stone after us," said Tom. "Easy enough to push it up from underneath. Suppose one of you chaps stay up here to keep watch. You can put the brushwood back over the stone, and make it look as it did before. Then, if anything should happen to us down here there'll be somebody to get help."

"Well, that's a good idea, but—"

"You two toss up for it," said Tom. "Of course, I'm going down. I'm leader, ain't I? Don't argue. Toss up for it. We're wasting time."

It was evidently the wisest thing to be done. If the juniors were going into danger, as was quite possible, it was best for one to remain above ground, to form a communication with

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the outside world in case of need. Lowther drew a coin from his pocket, and held it in his closed hand to Manners.

"Head or tail?" he said.

"Head!"

Lowther showed the figure of Britannia.

"You lose," he said. "I go! Cover up the stone, old son, and then lie low. If anybody should come scouting around he won't notice anything amiss. You keep out of sight."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry and Lowther dropped into the opening, and Manners passed the lantern down, and then the stumps. Then he closed the stone over their heads, replaced the ivy, and piled the brushwood back into its place. If Mr. William Brown, or any of his mysterious friends, should visit the hermitage from motives of caution they would find nothing amiss now. Manners sat on a chunk of the old masonry, to wait.

Ten minutes or so passed, and Manners, in the silence and darkness, almost dropped off to sleep, when a sudden sound awoke him to alertness.

It was a footstep outside the hermitage.

In a moment Manners was on his feet, his heart thrilling with excitement, and he crouched back into the cover of the ivy, in the corner of the cell further from the ringed stone.

Something like a black shadow passed in the old stone cell—Manners heard soft footfalls on the mossy flags. He could see nothing; but he knew that someone was there, within a few feet of him, and he hardly breathed. He heard faint sounds that told him that the heap of brushwood over the ringed stone was being moved once more. Whoever it was that had come there in the darkness, evidently knew the secret of the moving stone. If he had come a quarter of an hour earlier, he would have fallen upon the juniors, and Manners felt his heart throb at the thought.

Was it Mr. William Brown? he wondered. Whoever it was, he could be there for no good purpose at that hour of the night. The thought crossed Manners' mind that it might be Figgins investigating; but Figgins would have known nothing about the ringed stone—and the unseen new-comer had gone directly to it, like one who knows the secret well.

Manners heard the grind of the stone as it was raised, a soft thud as it dropped into place again. Then dead silence.

Someone—unseen, unknown—had gone down into the black depths, on the track of Tom Merry and Lowther, without knowing that they were there. Manners, with a thumping heart, stood hesitating, wondering what he had better do. He did not hesitate long. He stepped towards the stone, raised it once more, and looked down into the darkness below—looked and listened. At the first sound of alarm he was ready to rush down to the aid of his chums, and he listened intently, with beating heart.

CHAPTER 10.

At Close Quarters.

MEANWHILE, Tom Merry and Monty Lowther had descended the winding stone steps, which seemed to lead endlessly downwards into the darkness under the old hermitage on the island.

Tom Merry went ahead, with the lantern gleaming in his left hand, the cricket-stump grasped in his right.

Monty Lowther followed him close, also grasping his stump, and peering over Tom's shoulder at the winding steps that ran on and on.

The air was close and heavy, but the fact that it was respirable at all showed that there was some other opening

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besides that under the ringed stone. This secret recess beneath the island hermitage was ventilated by some hidden shaft, that had its outlet somewhere on the island in concealment. The builders of the place had planned it for hiding in case of danger, or for secret revels that were hidden from the knowledge of the world, and ventilating pipes had been necessary.

The stair came to an end at last, in a vaulted chamber.

The arch of the vault was of stone, with a broad sweep; the stairway opened from a wall of solid stone blocks into the vault. Beyond the vault was another, and yet another.

All was dark, save for the rays of the lantern in the junior's hand.

But a sense of warmth smote upon them—upon the stone stair it had been chilly, cold; but here in the vaults the air was warmer.

There could only be one explanation of that—artificial heat had been employed there.

The vault was in use by human beings—for what purpose they could not guess, unless it was as a hiding-place.

The two juniors stepped from the opening of the stairway, and stood in the vault, looking about them with peering eyes.

The vault was empty.

They stepped slowly and cautiously across the stone-flagged floor to the second vault. As they passed the stone pillar at the side, a red glow struck their eyes. It came from a small stove, in which a few embers were still burning.

The juniors halted, breathing hard.

The stove was yet lighted, and the vault, therefore, if not now occupied, must have been occupied very lately.

They gazed about them anxiously.

Not a whisper passed their lips. A sound might have betrayed them. For all they knew, the light might already have been seen by some hidden enemy.

Near the stove was a table formed of planks laid upon trestles. There were several boxes upon it, locked. There were a number of instruments, the nature of which the juniors could hardly guess in a hasty glance; but they recognised crucibles and moulds, though for what purpose the moulds were intended they had no enlightenment.

Keeping their eyes well about them, they listened intently.

The silence was broken by a slight sound now that they were in the second vault—a sound that came from the darkness in the further vault, the last of the three. It was the sound of a heavy and stertorous breathing.

"There's somebody there!" Lowther whispered at last.

Tom Merry nodded.

"He's asleep," he muttered.

"If he wakes—"

"He sounds as if he's in a heavy sleep. I'm going to see him!" muttered Tom Merry determinedly. "He's only one chap, anyway; he can't eat us!"

"I—I say—"

But Tom Merry was stepping forward, with silent steps, the lantern raised before him.

In the corner, behind the buttress of the third vault, lay a heap of sacks and old coats and drugs, and upon them a man lay asleep.

He was fully clothed, and lay with his head on one arm, his face half hidden. What the juniors could see of his face was half covered with a stubbly beard. It was a hard, ugly, brutal face, and there was an unhealthy flush in it, and that flush, added to the fact that an empty bottle lay upon the floor beside the sleeper, accounted for the heavy, lethargic sleep. The secret dweller of the vaults had been drinking heavily before he laid himself upon the sacking to sleep.

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

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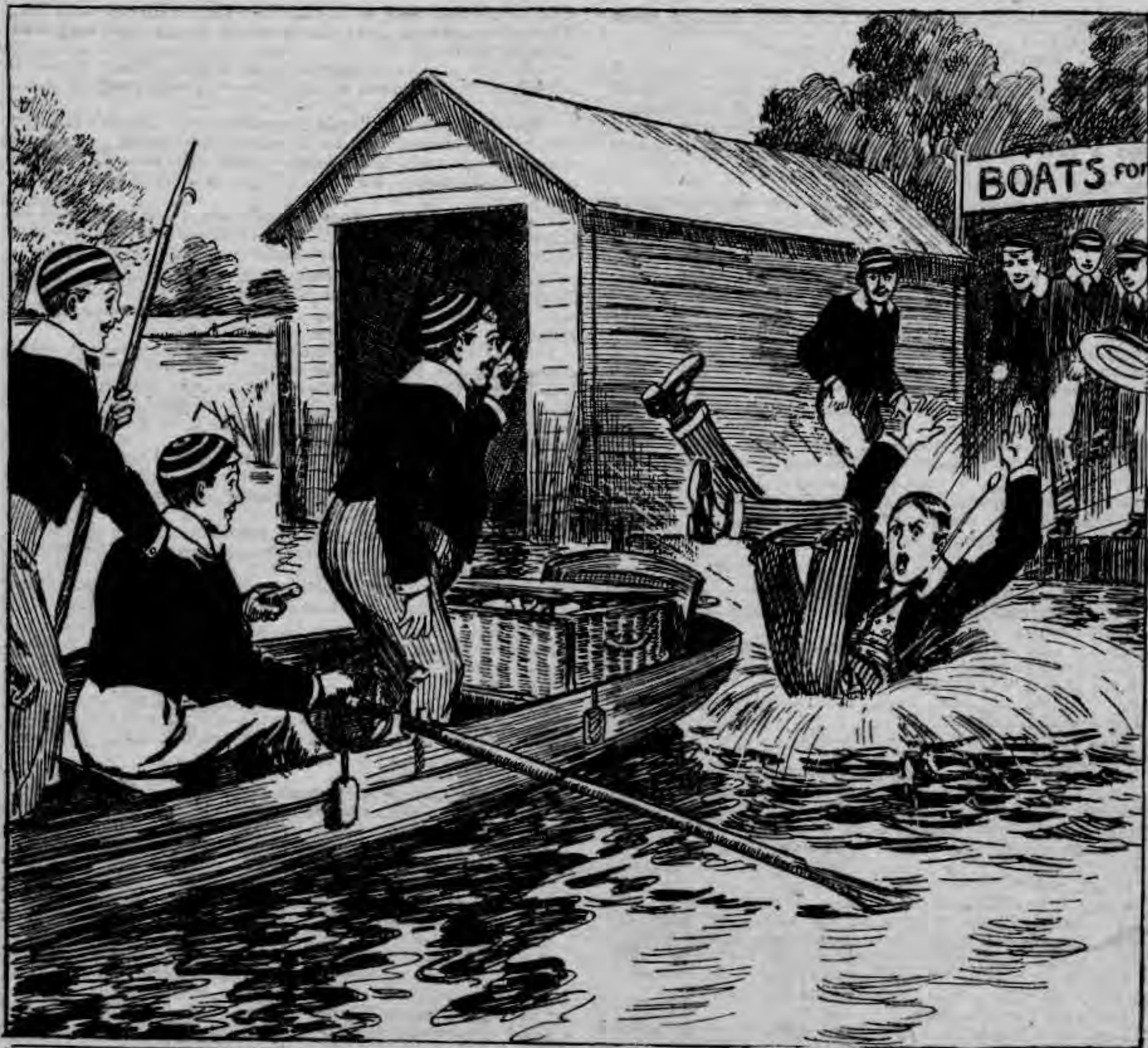
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"Come on, deah boys!" yelled D'Arcy. "Aftah me!" And he leapt valiantly for Figgins's boat. But he dropped a yard short, and disappeared into the water. And there was a yell of laughter. (See Chapter 2.)

Tom Merry was careful to keep the light from falling directly upon the sleeper's face. He did not wish to awaken him. Close by the rough couch lay a heavy life-preserver, within reach of the ruffian's hand. The two juniors backed away silently, and Tom Merry turned the wick of the lantern lower, keeping only a dim glimmer of light to show them their way without stumbling.

They drew back to the foot of the spiral stairway in the first vault.

"What the deuce does it all mean?" Tom Merry muttered, in perplexity. "There's some kind of work going on here."

"Looks like it! Some secret invention, perhaps; and they are doing it here to keep it dark."

"That man didn't look like an inventor. He looked like a hooligan, and he was dead drunk."

"Blessed if I know what the place is used for, then!"

"There's something fishy about it, that's a cert."

"It's not against the law to carry on work in a vault in secret," said Lowther, with a shrug. "They've a right to do it if they like, I suppose. It may be some secret invention, for all we know, though they don't look that sort. But if it's a den of criminals, Tommy, the sooner we get out of it the better!"

Tom Merry placed his finger on his lips. From above came a dull, heavy sound. It echoed faintly down the spiral stairway. Lowther's face went white.

"The stone!"

"Yes."

Tom Merry extinguished the lantern instantly.

The vault was plunged into the blackest darkness. Now that the lantern was no longer burning, they could distinguish a faint red glow in the darkness from the dying stove.

"Somebody's coming down!" Lowther muttered.

"Manners—"

"Manners agreed to stay there."

"Then it—"

"Somebody else—Mr. William Brown, very likely."

"Revolver and all!" muttered Lowther grimly. "We're fairly caught!"

"Not yet! He can't have seen the light—the stair winds, you know. We shall soon see whether he suspects we're here. This way!"

Tom Merry grasped Lowther's arm, and drew him away in the darkness. In his first scanning of the vault he had taken it all in; his training as a Boy Scout served him in good stead now.

Close by the opening of the stairway there was a deep alcove in the wall, probably used as a cupboard in old days, for there were still empty sockets in the stone where hinges once had been. Tom Merry had observed it, and saw that it was empty. He drew Lowther into it, and they crouched back as far as they could, making no sound.

A couple of minutes later they heard footsteps on the stairs. The new-comer was descending.

They listened, with throbbing hearts.

They heard the footsteps pass the last of the spiral stairs,

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and pass on into the first vault. Then they heard a voice in the darkness:

"Brick! Sam Brick! Are you awake?"

They knew the voice—the hard, metallic, tones they had heard in the Head's study at St. Jim's, in their interview with Mr. William Brown. It was the tenant of the Hermit's Island who had entered the dark vault, and was standing within a couple of yards of them, unconscious of their presence.

The Shell fellows hardly breathed.

There was no reply from the sleeping man—evidently Sam Brick, the name called by Mr. William Brown. They heard Brown mutter to himself, and pass on towards the further vaults.

Tom Merry squeezed Lowther's arm, and Lowther understood. They crept silently out of the alcove, and into the opening of the stairway. Without a sound, but with their hearts in their mouths, they crept up the stairs.

For they remembered the man's hard, cruel face, and the revolver. If there was a guilty secret hidden in that vault, and he discovered their presence—

For the first time they fully realised the danger they had come into.

There was a sudden gleam of light—clear, hard light—electric light, as they knew. Mr. William Brown had turned on an electric-lamp in the third vault. The light dimly penetrated the stairway, but the juniors were hidden from view from below by the wind of the stairs.

"Come on!" whispered Lowther.

"Shush!"

From the vaults came the voice of Mr. William Brown again—distant now, but audible. He was speaking in angry tones to the man in the vault, doubtless shaking him to wake him from his drunken slumber.

"Brick! Do you hear me? Wake up, man! You fool, you have been drinking!"

"I 'ad a drop afore I went to roost," said a thick, husky voice. "Wot's the 'arm? I ain't 'ere to work night as well as day, I s'pose, cully?"

"Have you heard—or seen—anything?"

"Wot was there to 'ear or see?"

"Listen to me! You remember what I told you—of the schoolboys who came on the island a few days ago?"

"Well? Let me 'ave that glass!"

"Let it alone, you fool; you've had more than enough! I've been uneasy ever since. You've seen and heard nothing?"

"Course not."

"Someone has been on the island. Do you hear me, you drunken fool? I have been on the rack ever since last Wednesday, when I found those schoolboys in the cell. I thought I had made sure that they would not come again; but when I got back to the Feathers to-night, I determined to look round the island—one cannot be too careful—"

"There ain't been nothing!"

"That is all you know. I tell you there is a boat moored in the rushes. I found it there when I landed!"

"Some poacher, arter the fishing, that's all. I know the poachers come on the island sometimes to set night-lines."

"Perhaps. But I am uneasy. You are sure—"

"I'm sure, of course. If anybody 'ad been 'ere—"

"Get up, man! It will be safer to search the place!"

Monty Lowther gripped Tom Merry's arm.

"For goodness' sake, come away!" he whispered.

Tom Merry pressed on up the spiral stair, with Lowther close behind. They ascended as fast as they could without noise. The cool air on their faces showed them that the stone above was open. A dim square, less black than the darkness around them, showed them the opening, and in the dim square they saw a head leaning over.

Whether it was Manners or a stranger they could not see. To speak was to betray themselves. But the watcher above had heard their accent, as they reached the top, and the silence was broken by a low, soft sound—a subdued call, in imitation of the curlew—the signal of the Curlew Patrol, to which the Terrible Three belonged. Then they knew that the peering head above belonged to their chum.

"Manners!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Tom! Thank goodness!" muttered Manners.

"Quick!"

He gave them a hand out of the opening. They breathed more freely when they stood in the hermitage again.

"You saw him?" Manners whispered.

"Heard him," said Tom. "It was Brown; we heard him speak."

"And he—"

"He didn't spot us, no fear! Get the stone closed—softly!"

With infinite care, all three grasping the iron ring, they lowered the stone into its place, inch by inch, taking care

that it did not thud as it closed. They did not wish Mr. William Brown to hear the warning sound that they had heard in the vault.

"Good!" muttered Manners, in relief. "He closed it after him, but I opened it, in case—I was ready to come down!"

"It's all serene now," said Tom Merry. "There's another man down there. There's something going on—some rascality. I don't know what. And that man Brown has spotted our boat. We've got to get it away quick. Come on!"

The juniors lost no time. There was nothing more to be done at the hermitage. They had discovered all that was to be discovered, and there was deadly danger in lingering.

They felt that instinctively. Even now Mr. William Brown and his companion were scanning the vaults for a sign of a possible intruder, and they might ascend at any minute to carry their search further.

Brown had evidently hurried to the hermitage after discovering the boat on the shore, to ascertain whether all was right there; but as soon as he was assured on that point, doubtless he would return to secure the boat. A cross-examination of it would enable him to trace it to St. Jim's. The Terrible Three fairly ran for the shore. Their boat was in the rushes, where they had left it, and near it was a small skiff, evidently the one in which Mr. Brown had come. They pushed off their own boat hastily, and jumped into it.

"Hark!" muttered Manners.

There was a sound of footsteps crashing through the under-woods on the island. Already Brown had emerged from the vaults, and was returning towards the boats. Tom Merry slipped his oars through the rowlocks and pulled. The boat glided away on the bosom of the deep, dark river.

They heard footsteps come down to the shore, and the muttering of voices. Then the sharp tones of Mr. William Brown:

"It's gone!"

"And we're gone too!" chuckled Monty Lowther softly.

"Only poachers!" said the thick, husky voice of Sam Brick. "Don't I keep tellin' you it was only fishin' poachers, guv'nor!"

"Pull!" whispered Tom.

Tom and Lowther fairly bent to the oars. The boat shot away into the night. From the shore of the island a sudden blaze of sharp white light shot out. It was a powerful electric lamp, and its long ray cut like a knife into the darkness of the river; but it fell short of the retreating boat.

A dozen yards of darkness separated the Terrible Three from the closest point of that shaft of light.

"Safe as houses!" murmured Tom Merry.

And they pulled hard and the boat glided fast away—fast beyond the reach of pursuit, if the men on the island should have taken to their oars in chase. Whether they did so or not, the Terrible Three could not tell; they had so great a start that the pursuit could not possibly have overtaken them if it had been made. But they pulled their hardest, and they were glad when the boat bumped upon the school raft outside the boathouse.

CHAPTER 11.

Figgins Stands Out!

"YAW-AW-AW!"

That was the sound with which the Terrible Three answered the clang of the rising-bell on the following morning.

They were far from feeling inclined to rise.

It had been past three o'clock when they returned to bed the previous night. The boat had been safely housed, and the juniors had crept back into the School House undiscovered; and they had turned in in the Shell dormitory, tired out, and slept like logs till the rising-bell woke them in the morning with its brazen clang.

The Terrible Three were far from being slackers, and as a rule they were among the first up in their dormitory; but on this particular morning they rolled over and yawned, and had to summon up their energies to sit up in bed.

"Up with you, you slackers!" called out Kangaroo.

"What's the matter with you this morning, fatheads?"

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

"The rising-bell's stopped," remarked Clifton Dane.

"You'd better get up. Blessed if you don't look as sleepy as owls!"

"Feel as sleepy as owls—boiled owls!" yawned Monty Lowther dolorously. "I say, somebody run down and tell Mr. Linton that I can't come into class this morning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I suppose we must get up," said Tom; and with an effort he rolled out of bed. "Turn out, you slackers!"

"I think I'll have another forty winks," said Manners drowsily. "Call me when—yow—ow— Keep that sponge away, you silly beast! Can't you see I'm getting up? Groo!"

And Manners turned out, minus the forty winks.

But the Terrible Three, in spite of a cold bath and a brisk rub-down, felt decidedly heavy when they went downstairs with the Shell. They had missed about four hours' sleep in the middle of the night, and they missed it very much. They yawned out into the quadrangle, hoping that the keen fresh air would liven them up.

"Blessed if I sha'n't go to sleep in class!" grunted Manners. "Not much of an idea, going out of a night, after all. I don't know how Cutts of the Fifth keeps awake in the daytime, after his late nights at the Green Man, blessed if I do!"

"Well, we mustn't nod off, anyway, or the fellows will begin to smell a mouse," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Nobody knows we've been out, so far!"

"And we'd better keep it dark," said Lowther. "I'm too sleepy to think it out now, but we've got to have a big think over what we found out last night. Still, it will keep!"

"Yes; the island won't float away," said Tom. "And there's the New House match this afternoon—we're playing Figgins & Co. again. We shall have to give the island a rest."

The Shell fellows found their drowsiness wear off as the morning progressed, fortunately.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, would certainly have cut up rusty if they had nodded off to sleep in the Form-room.

And they were keen enough about the cricket-match in the afternoon. House matches took place at regular intervals, and the juniors of St. Jim's were even keener about them than about school matches. Which House had the best record of wins was a disputed point, both Houses claiming to be top.

But as each House match came round, Tom Merry & Co. on one side, and Figgins & Co. on the other, made up their minds to knock their old rivals into the middle of next week, or still further along the calendar. The senior House matches were not half so important—from a junior point of view.

Tom Merry, as captain of the junior eleven in the School House, was busy that afternoon. The affair of the island, mysterious as it was, was driven from his mind. As Lowther had remarked, it would keep.

"I'm playin' this aftahnoon, deah boy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked affably, meeting Tom Merry as the juniors came out after dinner. "It's all wight!"

"Is it?" said Tom, looking doubtful.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been neglecting cricket of late, having been possessed with a weird delusion that he had powers as a ventriloquist, and he had chucked cricket in order to devote himself to that new art till he had been mercilessly clipped into chucking that in turn. Now he had taken up cricket again with renewed keenness; so, according to D'Arcy's point of view, the cricket prospects of the School House were assured for that season at least.

"Yaas! Wely on me, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm fwightfully keen about cwicket now, othahwise, I should wun down to the island this aftahnoon."

"The island!" said Tom, with a start.

Arthur Augustus looked very mysterious.

"Yaas, wathah!" He lowered his voice. "Do you know, deah boy, I've got wathah an ideah that somethin' or othah is goin' on there—somethin' undah the wose, you know."

Tom Merry suppressed a laugh. Arthur Augustus's idea was certainly right; but it was a little late in the day, considered in the light of what Tom Merry knew.

"It's nothin' to laugh at, you know," said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "I've thought a gweat deal about what Figgins told us, of his encountah with that Bwown boundah there. The man was a vicious beast to come heah as he did and get you fellows licked. Taken altogethah, it seems to me wathah suspicious. I don't like the look of that chap Bwown. Did you notice that he wore wolled-gold sleeve-links?"

"I can't say I did," said Tom, laughing.

"And his twousahs were vewy badly cut," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

"I didn't notice that. He may have tumbled over and cut them," suggested Tom.

"Wats! I mean they were badly cut by his tailah."

"Blessed if I should pay my tailor, if he cut my trousers," said Tom.

"You uttah ass! I mean the way they were designed!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, I see! You think they were cut by his tailor,

because his tailor was a designing man?" asked Tom innocently.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you might leave that to Lowthah, for the comie column in the 'Weekly,'" said Arthur Augustus. "You do not weally misundahstand me. I am convinced that you are only wottin'. Of course, a man might wear badly-cut twousahs and yet be honest. I don't deny that. I have heard that there are people who buy their twousahs weady-made," said D'Arcy, with a sage shake of the head. "Still, I don't like the look of the man. The cut of his twousahs offended me vewy much—and he has a shiftay look in his—"

"Waistcoat?"

"No, you uttah ass—his eyes!"

"Were his eyes cut too?"

"I wefuse to discuss the mattah with you, if you are goin' to make widiculous wemarks, Tom Mewwy. I wepeat that I wegard that man as a suspicious chawactah, and I should not be surprisid if he turns out to be a wettah. I think it extwemely pwob that he is heah lookin' for the tweasure of St. Jim's, which has nevah been found—and pewwaps he has a clue to it on that island. That would account for ewewythin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you will see," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I should wun down to the island this aftahnoon, only I am wanted to play badly this aftahnoon."

"You're not wanted to play badly; but I dare say you'll do it," said Tom, laughing.

"You ass! I mean I'm badly wanted to play. I'm simply not goin' to give Figgins & Co. a chance this aftahnoon," said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Well, I'll put you in," said Tom Merry, after some reflection. "Don't make it a pair of spectacles if you can help it, there's a good chap, Gussy!"

"Why, you—you—you—" Words failed Arthur Augustus at the mere suggestion that his score might be a pair of spectacles; and he was still struggling for speech when Tom Merry walked away.

The School House eleven were on the ground in good time. The stumps were pitched as early as possible in the afternoon, for the play was likely to last as long as the light. The Terrible Three were quite themselves again by this time. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane, and the four chums of Study No. 6, and Reilly and Brooke of the Fourth, made up the School House junior eleven.

The New House players were not quite so prompt as usual. When they arrived on the ground, a few minutes late, Tom Merry ran his eye over them, and missed Figgins. The New House eleven was composed of Kerr and Wynn, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, Koumi Rao, and Pratt, of the Fourth, and Thompson, and three more Shell fellows. The great Figgins was conspicuous by his absence.

"Hallo! Where's Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Standing out to-day," said Kerr, with a grunt. "We've been arguing with him, but he's as obstinate as a mule. He says it's time Reddy had a turn to captain the House team."

"Well, he's right there, you know," remarked Redfern. "It's all serene, Kerr. We shall lick these School House bounders!"

"Weally, Weddy—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Figgins standing out!" exclaimed Blake. "Well, it won't make much difference; we were going to wipe up the ground with you, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But I say!" said Tom Merry, with a troubled look. "What's Figgy's little game? Has he only stood out to give Reddy a chance—or has he got something on?"

"He's gone out," said Kerr.

The Scottish junior spoke rather shortly. Evidently he was not anxious to give the School House fellows information regarding Figgy's movements.

The thought had come into Tom Merry's mind that Figgins might have gone to the island. And, considering what the Terrible Three had discovered the previous night, there might be very real danger for Figgins there. If he searched the old hermitage as the Shell fellows had done, he might find the ringed stone. And if he found it he was certain to explore beneath it. And in the daytime he would find the ruffian Brick awake, if the man was still there, as he doubtless was.

"We're waiting for you, Merry," remarked Redfern, who had the coin in his hand, ready to toss. "Now, then—"

"But about Figgy—"

ANSWERS

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE RIVAL PATROLS!"

"Oh, never mind Figgy! If he prefers cycling to cricket, we can get on all right for once without him," said Redfern. "All the better for you chaps, anyway."

Tom Merry's face cleared.

"Oh! He's gone out on his bike."

"Yes."

"Right-ho! Toss!"

Tom Merry's mind was relieved. If Figgins had gone out on his bicycle, Tom concluded naturally that the island in the river could not be his destination. Redfern tossed the coin, had had the better of it, and the New House side sent their men in to bat. And Tom Merry led his merry men into the field. And then, in the rush and stress of an exciting game, all thought of the mysterious island and of Figgins of the New House was banished from Tom Merry's mind.

CHAPTER 12.

Figgins Finds the Secret.

AND where was Figgins gone?

A good many of the New House juniors, surprised by Figgins standing out of a House match, had asked him. But Figgins had not satisfied their curiosity. Kerr and Wynn were in the secret, of course. Figgins meant to take advantage of the half-holiday to explore the island, little dreaming that the Terrible Three had been there the previous night.

Kerr and Wynn wanted their leader to leave it till they could come, or to let them come as it was. But Figgins shook his head.

"We can't stand out of the House match, all of us," he said; "that would simply be chucking it away to the School House. Besides, one can do as well as three. It's only a matter of exploring the old hermitage, and finding out if there's a secret there—a secret vault or cellar. I fancy there is. I can do that on my own, while you fellows are knocking up runs for the House."

And Kerr and Wynn had to agree. Certainly all three could not have cut the House match. And Figgins did not want to leave his exploration till the next half-holiday. Besides, there was an outside match on then, just as important. So Kerr and Wynn went down to the cricket, and Figgins went out on his bicycle. All the other New House fellows knew that Figgins had gone out on his bike, and they supposed that he had gone for a spin, or gone to call upon somebody or other.

But Figgins was bound for the island. Figgins had thought the matter over very deeply. William Brown, the tenant of the island, lodged at the Feathers, and had a room overlooking the river. From his window, with a field-glass, he could scan the island in the daylight. Whether Mr. Brown was at the Feathers now or not Figgins, of course, had no means of telling. But he knew it was probable that a watch was kept on the island, either by Mr. Brown or some of his friends, if a guilty secret was hidden there. Mr. Brown would not risk another party of picnickers landing and perhaps exploring the place, if he could help it. And if a watch was kept, a boat approaching the island would be spotted at once; and Figgins would simply row into the arms of the enemy, and be marched back at once to St. Jim's, to be caned for trespass, and probably "gated" for a good many half-holidays to keep him out of such mischief in future.

Figgins flattered himself that he knew a trick worth two of that.

A boat approaching the island in the daytime could be spotted from half a dozen different points. But a swimmer might easily reach it unseen—especially from the upper river. That was Figgy's deep idea—to cycle up the river, past the island, and then swim off and land on the upper end.

Figgy was a powerful swimmer; and, aided by the current above the island, it would not take him many minutes to reach it.

Figgins, as he cycled up the towing-path, chuckled over the extreme "cuteness" of his little scheme. He had the joyful feeling of stealing a march on Tom Merry & Co. They would, of course, miss him from the House match. They would suspect at once that he was off to the island. And they would hear that he had gone out on his bicycle, and their suspicions would be lulled to rest; which was exactly what had happened.

And while the Terrible Three were unsuspectingly playing in the house match, George Figgins would be unearthing the secret of the island—if secret there was. He little guessed that the Terrible Three had been before him already.

Figgins passed the island, glancing across the intervening channel as he rode on. There was no sign of life on the island. It rose dark and green from the water, with the currents rippling through the willows that surrounded it.

Figgins gave it only one glance, and rode on.

A few minutes later he turned his bicycle into a path

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through the wood and jumped off. He concealed the machine in a thicket, and then crept back to the river-bank. He was fifty yards above the island, on the side of the river where the channel was at its narrowest. Close by the river grew a mass of tangled thicket and rushes, and there Figgins crouched to observe the island.

There was no sign of life there.

Figgins prepared for his adventure. He took his boots off, and tied them by the laces round his neck. His clothes he had to get wet—there was no help for it. He had to take them with him, and he could not carry them dry to the island. But in the blazing sun he hoped to dry them quickly when he had landed. He was in no hurry; he had all the afternoon before him. And he had donned his oldest clothes, so that the damage to them would not be a matter of importance.

He stuffed his cap into his pocket, with the dark-lantern he had brought—the latter enclosed in a tin box to keep it waterproof. Then he plunged into the river. He struck out diagonally towards the island.

From above, the current swept him down, and he only had to strike across, to land on the upper end of the island. In a few minutes he was floating gently under the overhanging trees, and he caught a bough and pulled himself ashore.

He was on the Hermit's Island.

If anyone had been watching for a boat, especially at the lower end of the island, he was not likely to have seen the swimmer, whose dark head had barely shown over the rippling water for a few minutes.

Figgins stood listening intently, however; he would not take chances. The water ran down him and formed a pool in the grass at his feet.

There was no sound, save the twittering of the birds. If a watch was kept on the island now, no alarm had been given.

Quite reassured, Figgins drew into the thicket, and selected a spot among the trees where an opening of the branches allowed the sunshine to fall in a golden patch. The sun was hot, and in the rays of it Figgins stripped, and wrung out his clothes and spread them in the rays to dry. Figgy was thoroughly enjoying the sense of adventure that was imparted to him by his method of reaching the island, and he prided himself, too, on the cuteness he had displayed. He did exercises to keep himself warm while his clothes were drying in the hot rays of the afternoon sun; and they were still somewhat damp when he put them on again. He was a little impatient to get to work. The island seemed to be deserted, and now was his chance.

Clad once more, Figgins penetrated to the centre of the island and came in sight of the old stone hermitage.

All was silent—sleeping, as it were, in the bright sunshine. Figgins tread cautiously into the old cell.

He remembered how Mr. William Brown had seemed to listen nervously there, and Figgins guessed that that meant that there was a hidden recess below the old cell—an opening from which Mr. Brown's confederate might have emerged at that very time. And Figgy did not mean his footsteps to give him away.

As the Terrible Three had done the previous night, Figgins scanned the interior of the old cell, looking for a possible opening in the stone flags of the floor.

He came at last to the heap of brushwood in the corner, and there Figgins's experience as leader of the Wolf Patrol of Boy-Scouts came in very useful. To an inexperienced eye the heap looked as if it might have lain there since it was piled by chance; but Figgins detected, as he scanned it, infallible signs that it had been moved quite lately. Figgy spotted several muddy twigs and leaves in the heap, far out of contact with the ground—and yet to become muddy they must have been in contact with the ground, probably as late as the last rainfall. The heap had been disturbed lately. Why?

The next minute Figgins was dragging it aside with eager hands, and eyes blazing with excitement.

He uttered a sharp exclamation as he saw the ringed stone as he dragged away the trailing roots of old ivy that covered the flags beneath.

"My hat, that's it!"

Figgins grasped the iron ring with both hands, and bent all his strength to the task, and very nearly tumbled over backwards, so easily did the stone rise under his pull.

The stone stood on end, and Figgins looked down into the darkness. There was no glimmer of light, no sign of life.

Figgins did not hesitate. He lighted his lantern, and dropped into the opening, and followed the stairs downwards. In one hand he held the lantern, in the other a cudgel. His heart was beating with excitement, and in his excitement he hardly thought of danger.

That there could be anyone in that dark, dreary recess

seemed unlikely. It might be used as a hiding-place, and visited occasionally—perhaps to hide loot of some kind; but Figgins did not think it likely that any man could have stayed long in such a place. He felt pretty certain that it was deserted now, but he was on his guard.

Lower and lower he went down the winding stair.

Suddenly he paused, and turned off the light of his lantern. There was a faint sound from the darkness below. It was a clink of metal.

Someone was there, after all.

And now that his lantern was darkened Figgins was aware of a faint glimmer of light stealing up from below.

The junior paused long.

He felt that he was running into danger now, but he would not retreat. After all, the way of escape was clear if he was attacked and could not defend himself. And he could use caution. He crept down the steps further and came to the opening in the vault. There he stopped again, looking before him.

In the second vault was a blaze of electric light over the trestle-table. The other parts of the vaults were in shadow. Beyond the buttress Figgins caught the red glow of the stove. A man was standing at the table, his profile towards Figgins, keenly and eagerly bent upon the work he was doing. What that work was Figgins could not make out; but he saw several instruments on the table, and he knew that the man was working in metal in some way. A yellow glimmer in the light caught his eye, and, to his amazement, he discerned a heap of golden coins at one end of the table.

Sovereigns! What on earth did it mean?

The electric light gleamed on the coins, and, distant as he was, Figgins could see that they were sovereigns.

Had he chanced upon some weird alchemist, pursuing in these dim recesses the researches of olden time for the philosopher's stone?

The thought crossed his mind for a moment, but it was followed by a flash of illumination, as it were.

The work going on under his eyes was, indeed, the making of gold, but it was spurious gold—coining!

Figgins almost staggered for a moment as he realised the truth.

Coining!

That was the secret of the island, that was the mystery of Mr. William Brown and his friends. That was why the island was rented for the "fishing" by a man who never fished, and that was why the tenant of the Hermit's Island had been so alarmed and infuriated by discovering the juniors in the old cell. They had been standing within a few feet of the ringed stone that covered up this black secret. No wonder the rascal had been alarmed. And Figgy understood why he had drawn the revolver when the juniors seized him in mistake; ever in dread of discovery, arrest, he had fancied that his den was raided by the police—that it was the hands of the officers of the law that had fallen upon him. Figgins understood it all now—and he had discovered the secret of the island.

The junior hardly breathed.

For with the discovery came the realisation of his terrible danger.

He had learned what would send Mr. William Brown to penal servitude when it was made known; and Figgy's business, of course, was to make it known as quickly as possible, and bring the police down upon the nest of coiners.

If he were found there before he could get away! And he was standing now with nothing between him and the coiner—only the shadows. If the man looked in his direction, across the intervening vault! Figgins had noted the heavy, savage face, the beetling brows, the bullet-head. He guessed what he might have to expect from such a ruffian, whom his knowledge threatened with a long term of imprisonment.

His heart beat almost to suffocation. Silently, but with thumping heart, Figgins turned to retreat. Perhaps he made some slight sound—it was not easy to turn on the narrow, spiral stair, and his clothes brushed against the stone—

The man looked round quickly.

His eyes, naturally, sought at once the stairway—the only entrance to the vaults. Since the happening of the previous night Sam Brick was probably more on the alert than usual. Figgins felt, rather than saw, that the man's eyes had turned upon him, and he stepped quickly upward, and his lantern knocked on the stone. It was only a slight sound, but it was enough—more than enough—for the coiner.

There was a hoarse cry in the vault, and the man came springing towards the stair. Figgins heard him coming. He dropped the lantern, useless now, and sprang madly up the stairs. Round and round the spiral he went as fast as he could clamber up, and below him he heard the rapid, heavy footsteps, the panting breath, of the coiner in pursuit.

If the man reached him—

Figgins panted on desperately, his brain almost reeling with

the rapid turns of the staircase in the darkness. Something touched his foot; he knew that it was a groping hand from below. The pursuer was close upon him.

The touch, as if it had been from the fang of a snake, sent a shudder of horror through Figgins; he bounded upward desperately. Would that dreadful stair never end—would he never see the daylight glimmering above?

Daylight at last—the open square above his head! He cleared the last step; but the hurried breathing was close behind him now.

Even as Figgins made a desperate spring to reach the cell above two strong and sinewy hands were upon him from behind, and he was dragged back.

CHAPTER 13.

Figgins's Doom.

FIGGINS shuddered as that powerful grip closed upon him from behind. He was dragged backwards in his last spring, and went heavily down to the stones. He twisted over fiercely, and strove to strike with his cudgel. But the hands that grasped him seemed to be the hands of a giant. He was like an infant in their clutch. Two savage eyes peered down at him. A heavy knee was planted in his chest. A hand grasped his wrist and twisted it mercilessly till he dropped the cudgel with a gasp of pain.

"Got you, you spy!"

Brick ground the word out between his teeth.

Figgins stared helplessly up at him.

Struggling was useless. The powerful ruffian could have killed him with a blow of his huge knotty fist. And the junior's heart grew sick within him as he read the expression that came over the ruffian's face. There was murder in the gleaming eyes. Brick's hand sought behind him. It came out with a closed knife in it, and the ruffian opened the knife with his teeth.

Figgins felt a horrible sickness within him.

"Now, why shouldn't I slit your neck like a spadger, you spying young 'ound?" the ruffian muttered.

Figgins did not reply; he only stared upward, as if fascinated, at the ferocious face above him. Whether the man meant murder or not Figgins could not tell. For a whole minute he lay in dreadful suspense, then he was jerked savagely to his feet with a grasp of iron on his collar.

"Don't give me any trouble, unless you want six inches of this sticker under your ribs!" muttered Brick threateningly.

And he led Figgins down the spiral stair.

Figgins went quietly, pushed from behind by the ruffian, for the stair was not quite wide enough for them to go abreast. But the grasp on his collar never slackened. They reached the vault, and Brick dragged his prisoner into the radius of the electric lamp, and scanned his pale, scared face.

"Schoolboy—eh?" he asked.

"Yes," said Figgins.

"One of them wot was 'ere before?"

"Yes."

"Was you alone 'ere this arternoon?"

"Yes."

"The truth, mind," said Brick, making a motion with the knife. "I'd out you as soon as I'd out a rat. Nobody else with you on the island?"

"No."

"I reckon you'll be outed, anyway, when Golden Jim comes!" muttered the ruffian. "But I'll leave it in 'is 'ands. My neck's worth as much as his."

He picked up a length of cord, and began to bind Figgins. The junior thought of resistance, but it was hopeless. With one hand the powerful ruffian held him helpless, while he bound him with the other. He tied the knots with cruel tightness, and did not spare them. In a few minutes Figgins was as helpless as a trussed fowl.

Then the ruffian pitched him roughly to the floor, and left him. He ascended the spiral stair again, to close the ringed stone, as Figgins guessed.

Figgins lay on the floor of the vault, almost dazed. He had discovered the secret of the island, and had at the same moment fallen into the power of the coiners. What was his fate to be?

That they would let him go, to bring the police down upon them, was impossible. They would try to secure his silence. How?

Fortunately, Kerr and Wynn knew that he had come seeking on the island. If he did not return he would be searched for. But by then—

The ruffian came back, and, after a malevolent glance at Figgins, resumed his work at the table. He knew that

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Figgins had seen his occupation, and he took no trouble to conceal the nefarious work he was engaged upon.

Figgins wriggled away to the side of the vault, and sat up, his back against the buttress, and feeling the warmth of the stove. There he sat, watching the coiner at work, his thoughts busily racing through his mind. The ruffian did not look at him again. He knew that he was safe.

He was to be left till "Golden Jim" arrived—whichever he might be. Figgins guessed easily enough that it was the criminal nickname of a coiner, and he wondered whether it was Mr. William Brown. When he arrived, Figgins's fate was to be decided. What was his fate to be?

He thought grimly that in these very moments the House match was going on at St. Jim's, and Kerr and Wynn were knocking up runs for the New House, little dreaming that their leader was in danger of his life! What an ass he had been to come to the island alone! he reflected bitterly. If his chums had been with him, or if he had been a little less reckless—But it was too late to think of that now. He had been reckless, and he was paying the penalty.

Hours seemed to pass—how long it was Figgy did not know, but it seemed like long hours. His limbs were cramped and aching with the thin cord that was tied with cruel tightness about them.

His fate hung upon the moment when the coiner's confederate arrived, and yet, in his pain and anxiety, he was glad to hear at last a step on the spiral stair.

A form stepped quickly from the stair, and as it came into the light Figgins's haggard eyes turned upon it, and he recognised Mr. William Brown. Mr. William Brown was evidently Golden Jim.

"Sam"—Mr. Brown's voice was sharp and anxious—"I found the ivy uncovered! Somebody has been there and cleared off the brushwood!"

"I've got 'im!"

"What!"

"There he is!"

Sam Brick pointed to the bound junior huddled against the buttress of the vault. The new-comer had not seen him.

Mr. William Brown spun round and stared at Figgins, his face turning deadly white, his eyes almost starting from his head.

"Here!" he gasped.

"I caught 'im," said Brick grimly. "It was two hours ago, I reckon. I left 'im for you, Jim. You can settle him for yourself 'ow you like."

A gleam of savage hate and ferocity came into Mr. Brown's eyes. He came nearer to Figgins, and peered into his white face.

"One of them," he muttered—"the fellow who cheeked me; I remember. So you came here spying, did you, you young hound, and you've tumbled on a secret?"

Figgins did not reply. He did not feel much like "stanging" now.

"You understand what you see here, I suppose?" Mr. William Brown demanded, with a wave of the hand towards the table.

Figgins nodded.

"You came along here?"

"Yes; but my chums know where I came," said Figgins. "If anything happens to me, my man, you'll suffer for it! I warn you of that! Kerr and Wynn both know that I came to the island this afternoon, and they'll search for me."

Mr. William Brown looked at him with sharp scrutiny. He was evidently trying to fathom whether the junior was telling the truth.

"If they know he's 'ere, Jim—" Sam Brick began.

Mr. William Brown shook his head.

"More likely a lie," he said thoughtfully. "He's telling us that to save his skin. If they know he's here, we can't dispose of him so safely; but if no one knows he is here, he can disappear without any suspicion."

Figgins felt a cold chill run through him as Golden Jim spoke with perfectly cool callousness. The life of the school-boy who had stumbled on his secret weighed little in the balance against the coiners' liberty. He realised that the two scoundrels were debating the question of his life and death with a view only to their safety. His first impression of Mr. William Brown had not been mistaken. The man was a harder and more unscrupulous scoundrel than he had deemed.

"Anyway, they can't know about the ringed stone and this vault," said Golden Jim, after a pause. "They'd have been nosing here before. This young fool had nosed that out. If they know he came here they know that he came on the island, that is all. Well, they can come and search the island for him if they like. They won't find him."

"They might find the stone," said Brick. "He found it."

"I'll take good care of that. There's a part of the wall of the old cell that only wants a shove to send it toppling

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over. We can both get out and cover up the ringed stone with such a heap of masonry that it can't be found. We shall have to keep out of here ourselves for a day or two till we're sure the coast is clear."

"But this kid—"

"He won't talk." Golden Jim bent over the boy whose fate they were discussing. "How did you get here? Did you have a boat?"

"Find out!" said Figgins desperately. He realised that the less information he gave the ruffians the better.

Golden Jim gritted his teeth.

"Get the stuff together, Sam," he said. "We'll clear out now. We'll give the place a wide berth for a few days."

"But—"

"The kid will be safe enough. He will be found drowned," said Golden Jim, with grim coolness. "That's the safest. He's picked up in the water, drowned, no marks upon him—it's an accident pure and simple. And it's easy enough to hold the whelp under the water for five minutes!"

Figgins shivered.

"But—but not in the daylight!" faltered Brick. "Dash it all, Jim—"

"Of course not!" said Mr. William Brown irritably. "It will be dark in a couple of hours."

"Then we can carry him up, and fix him for being 'found drowned; accidental death of a schoolboy.'" Golden Jim gave a ghoully chuckle. "He's brought it on himself, the young fool! It's safe as the Bank—nobody else knows of this vault—and as tenant of the island, I can keep trespassers off. Come on! Stick the finished 'duds' in your pocket, and come out."

While the ruffian collected the finished counterfeit coins, Mr. William Brown bent over Figgins, and gagged him effectually with a cloth. Then the light was turned out, and the two ruffians left the vault. Figgins heard their footsteps die away up the spiral stairs. And the junior of St. Jim's was left alone in darkness and in despair!

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry & Co. Go to the Rescue!

"BRAVO, New House!"

"Bravo, Reddy!"

"Hurray!"

The House match was over. The sun was sinking in the west, but there was still ample light for play. But it was not needed. Even without the mighty Figgins, the New House team had scored a crushing victory. Tom Merry & Co.'s luck was out. Fatty Wynn's bowling had made ducks and drakes of the School House wickets, and Redfern and Kerr's batting had been wonderful. And Redfern had the unlimited cheek as the School House fellows expressed it, to "declare" in his second innings, so as to be sure to allow plenty of time for finishing the match. And here it was, finished—the last School House innings left Tom Merry & Co. fifteen runs behind the required total, and the New House triumphed.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "the result is simply astonishin', deah boys. I had fully made up my mind to make a centuwy in our first innings, and I should certainly have done it if that boundah Wynn hadn't happened to take my wicket first ball!"

"Go hon!" remarked Monty Lowther sarcastically. "And what would you have done in the second innings, if Redfern hadn't caught you out for a duck's egg?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, Gussy has distinguished himself, anyway," remarked Tom Merry. "He's the only chap in the team who's scored a pair of spectacles—a duck's-egg in each giddy innings."

"A pair of wotten flukes, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should have made a couple of centuwies, only—"

"Only you forgot, and fancied you were playing noughts and crosses, and put down all noughts!" Blake remarked.

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"Weally Blake——"

"I wonder Figgy didn't come to see the finish of the match," Tom Merry observed. "He's gone for a jolly long spin!"

"Figgy will be pleased," Lowther remarked to Kerr, as they left the cricket-field. "You will surprise him when you tell him of the wonderful fluke."

"Fluke, be blowed!" said Kerr warmly. "We beat you fair and square. If Figgy had been with us, we'd have wiped you out with one innings!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "Still, Figgy will be pleased, and we'll make him stand an extra big tea when he comes back from the island."

"Shurrup, fathead!" said Kerr.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Has Figgy gone to the island after all?"

"Ask me another," said Kerr blandly.

"But Reddy said he had gone out on his bike," said Tom, his brow clouding with anxiety.

"So he has!" said Kerr.

"But he couldn't go to the island on his bike!" Manners exclaimed.

"Couldn't, could he?" agreed Kerr. "Come on, Fatty! These School House bounders are regular catechisers!"

"Stop!" said Tom Merry. "Kerr, tell me at once if Figgins has gone to the island! You don't understand—we were there last night——"

"Last night!" exclaimed Kerr indignantly. "You stole a march on us!"

"School House is always in the first," Manners remarked sententiously.

"Yaas, wathah! So that is why you boundahs were so sleepay to-day!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "It was vewy weckless of you to go without us."

"Like your cheek, I think," said Blake, with considerable heat.

"Look here!" said Tom, in a tone that made all the juniors serious at once. "This isn't a joking matter. If Figgins has gone to the island, he's gone into danger—real danger! Has he gone there, Kerr?"

"Well, he has!" admitted Kerr. "He's biked up the river, and he was going to swim off, in case a boat should be spotted going there."

"And—he hasn't got back?"

"No; it's time he was back!" said Kerr, glancing up at the clock-tower. "My hat! He's been gone four hours or more."

"Good heavens!" Tom Merry muttered. "What's happened to him? Kerr—you fellows—we've got to get down to the island—sharp! For all we know, Figgy may have been murdered!"

Kerr jumped.

"Murdered! What are you talking about?"

"I tell you there's a secret there—we found it out last night—something's going on there, though we don't know what it is," Tom Merry hurriedly explained the discovery the juniors had made the previous night, and his hearers listened with bated breath. "You see how it is," he went on. "Something's going on in that vault under the hermitage—something they're keeping deadly dark. The man we saw there was an utter ruffian. If Figgins has dropped on him and found something out—You see, they're doing some kind of secret work there, and the man might be at it in the daytime, and Figgy would spot it if he buzzed in. Then——"

"But—but what could they be doing there?" Fatty Wynn gasped.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't know; but it's something fishy—something that won't bear the light. While we've been playing cricket, goodness knows what may have happened to Figgy if he's fallen into their hands."

"Bai Jove! Let's be off, deah boys."

"But we may miss Figgy coming home——" began Herries.

"No; he'll ride back by the towing-path, and we shall see him if he does," said Kerr. "Let's get an eight-oar out and buzz off at once."

No time was lost. The thought that Figgins might be in serious danger was enough to buck the juniors up, tired as they were after a hard match. Kerr and Wynn, and the Terrible Three, and Kangaroo, and the four chums of Study No. 6 hurried down to the boat-house together. They did not forget to take their cricket-stumps with them. Some of the other fellows inquired curiously where they were going, but they did not pause to answer.

The junior eight-oar was run down into the water, and the crowd of fellows tumbled aboard. Eight of the juniors bent to the oars, and the boat fairly flew over the water, though they were pulling against the current. The sun sank lower in the west. There was less than an hour of daylight left.

Silently, grimly, the juniors rowed. And the island, a black mass against the sunset, came into view at last. The boat bumped on the mud, and the juniors scrambled ashore. There was another boat moored to the shore, and they recognised it as a skiff belonging to the Feathers Inn.

"Somebody else here," said Tom Merry.

"And here he is!" said Blake.

Mr. William Brown came hurrying down to the shore. He halted in the path of the juniors, his face dark with anger.

"So you are trespassing again!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah, Mr. Bwown!"

"We've come here to look for a friend of ours," said Tom Merry steadily.

"Why should you suppose he is here? What is he doing on my island? Poaching my fish?"

"No. If you will not give us permission to look for him——"

"I certainly shall not."

"Then we shall do without it. Come on, you fellows! I warn you, Mr. Brown, not to try to stop us. We shall use force."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Leave my island!" thundered Mr. Brown.

"Rats!"

Tom Merry led the way towards the centre of the island. In a few minutes the juniors reached the old hermitage. Mr. William Brown and his companion followed them.

Tom Merry uttered a sharp exclamation as he looked into the stone cell.

In the corner, where the brushwood had been piled, was now a mass of masonry. A fragment of the old wall had been tumbled over, covering up the ringed stone and its mantle of ivy with nearly a ton of stone and mortar.

That was proof enough. It was a deliberate attempt to hide the ringed stone from search. Golden Jim had believed that only Figgins had discovered it, and, but for the midnight expedition of the Terrible Three, the secret would have remained unknown; but now all was clear to Tom Merry & Co.

"They've covered up the stone!" Tom broke out. "What for? Because Figgins is down there!"

"Yaas, wathah! You scoundwels——"

Mr. William Brown was white as ashes now.

"The stone! What stone, boy?" he exclaimed. "What are you talking about?"

Tom Merry turned upon him with flashing eyes.

"We came here last night—we know the secret!" he said.

"Last night! You——"

"Yes; and we know about the vault, though we don't know what rascality you are up to there! But if anything has happened to Figgins, you'll pay for it, you scoundrels! Drag that rubbish away, you fellows!"

The juniors dragged the masonry away with hasty hands, careless of hurt. Mr. William Brown stared at them almost dazedly. Force was on the side of Tom Merry & Co.; he could not stop them.

He whispered hurriedly to his companion, and they stepped out of the old cell, and disappeared into the trees. A few minutes later the juniors heard the splash of oars in the river.

Faster and faster the juniors worked; but it was a long task. But at last the rubbish was cleared away, and the ivy was revealed. Tom Merry dragged it up, and disclosed the ringed stone. He grasped the ring, and the stone rose on end.

"Some of you stay up here!" Tom exclaimed hurriedly. "Those rotters might think of shutting us up down there! Herries and Dig and Kangy, you stay here!"

"Right-ho!"

Kerr was already leaping into the opening, and Fatty Wynn after him. Tom Merry was third, and then a crowd followed. In their hurry, the juniors had not thought of bringing a lantern, but most of them had matches. Matches flickered out, and showed them the way down the winding stair.

They came panting into the vault at last. All was darkness and silence there.

"Figgins!" shouted Kerr. "Figgy, old man! Are you here?"

"Figgy! Figgy!"

There was a faint sound in the darkness—the sound of a wriggling body. Kerr rushed in the direction of the sound, and stumbled over a form stretched on the floor in the darkness.

"Figgy!"

Another match blazed out, and Figgins was revealed, bound hand and foot and gagged.

(Continued on page 26.)

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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INTRODUCTION.

Geoffrey Foster, one of the most popular members of Grovehouse School, is elected to fill a vacant place in the school cricket team. His victory earns him the enmity of Bangley Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his chum Weames. Together they plot to ruin Foster. The latter's father, who controls a company with Jeffcock senior, is made responsible for the failure of the company, and a warrant is issued for his arrest. The charge preferred is that Major Foster made use of the company's money for his own purposes. After saying good-bye to his son, Major Foster flees the country. A trumped-up charge of robbery is brought against Geoffrey, and he is expelled from the school. After seeing his mother at his uncle's house, Geoffrey sets out for fame and fortune.

Geoffrey is offered a place in the Surrey County Cricket Club, and in his first match—Surrey versus Notts—he does some good work for his team. When he is at last dismissed at the wicket, he makes his way to the pavilion, and meets Bertha Morgan, the daughter of the Head of Grovehouse, who tells him she saw his mother a few days back, and that she was quite well. Her father then calls her, and she has to go.

(Now go on with the story.)

Surrey Win the Match.

Dr. Morgan looked stern and annoyed.

"Did I see you talking to Foster, Bertha?" he asked harshly.

"Yes, father," answered the pretty girl, looking fearlessly into his eyes. "I told him that I had seen his mother. I like him. I could not let him go by without telling him that."

"You will do me the kindness," said the Head of Grovehouse harshly, "never to be guilty of such foolish behaviour again. It is time for us to go."

Geoffrey, when he had taken off his pads, looked about the members' enclosure for another sight of the pretty girl; but he could not see her, and his heart grew sad as he thought of the unhappiness he must have caused her by having spoken to her before her father.

He could not forget that he was a pariah in Dr. Morgan's eyes, a branded thief and outcast, and his soul was full of bitterness for the injustice of this world.

Hewitt came to him.

"Cheer up, Foster," he said. "It's a long lane that has

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no turning, you know. And you'll come out smiling in the end. Wait a year or two, my lad, and all this tangle will straighten out."

"Not while my father is absent from England, his name blackened and besmirched!" cried Geoffrey bitterly.

"He will come back, my lad," returned Hewitt; then, looking towards the pitch, he cried: "Hallo, Turner has been run out. Gill won't last long. That's the finish of the innings, Foster."

Gill did not last long. He managed to score 5, whilst Jellotson, lashing away with the energy of despair, added a half-dozen more, and then was bowled for 5 by Hallam. The innings was at an end, and out of a total score of 225, including 1 bye, 5 leg-byes, and 1 wide, Jellotson, who carried his bat, had made 144, retiring to the enthusiastic cheers of the spectators, who, knowing that there was no time for further play, swarmed to the entrance to the pavilion to give the Grovehouse lad a rousing reception.

Notts batted nearly the whole of the second day, putting up a fine score of exactly 300. A. O. Jones making a century—105—and Surrey were set the task of getting 250 runs to win. Could they do it?

Their answer was a complete reply to their critics, who had declared that the side was no good. Playing with the skill and confidence that he had shown in the first innings, Jellotson pursued his ever-victorious career. When he had reached exactly 100, in playing across the wicket he mistimed a ball from Hallam, and was out l.b.w. Atterbury scored 29, falling a victim to the same bowler. Hewitt put on a masterly 91 not out, and Thomas, Williamson, Mason, and Wright, with seven extras to help them, hit off the rest of the runs.

Geoffrey was not called upon to bat; but in the Notts second innings he proved himself worthy of his place in the team by taking three wickets for 54 at a time when wickets were badly wanted. And so Surrey won a memorable game with five wickets in hand.

At Liverpool—Patrick Mulready Meets Geoffrey Again—His Amazing Story—Geoffrey Hears of His Father The Irishman's Decision—Unrest in South Africa.

The splendid beginning of Surrey was not a mere flash in the pan. They continued their victorious career, winning or drawing their matches, until in the course of events the side journeyed to Liverpool to play Lancashire.

Geoffrey Foster, who had played some steady innings for his side, and who was always worth his place for his bowling, accompanied them.

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He was always glad to get away from Kennington Oval, where the enmity of Ryan and several of the envious young professionals made existence anything but a pleasure to him. And yet he made the journey to Liverpool with mixed feelings. It had been announced in the papers that Bangley Jeffcock, the son of the well-known City financier, was to play for the first time for Surrey; and, dreading his enmity, as he had good reason to do, Geoffrey could not be at ease until the match was over. He knew well enough that Jeffcock was incapable of acting fairly with regard to him. The history of the past plainly revealed that; and Jeffcock had a double cause for hating him since the memorable battle between Foster and the Tea Taster at the National Sporting Club. The match was to begin on the Monday, and on the Sunday night—for the professionals had gone down to Liverpool on the Sunday morning—Geoffrey, leaving the hotel where they had put up, strolled through the almost deserted streets in the early morning, bending his footsteps towards the quay from which the ferry-boats start for Birkenhead, immediate piers, and New Brighton.

The boy wished to be alone with his thoughts, and he was not agreeably surprised, therefore, when he heard his name uttered, and saw a man step towards him.

"Mr. Foster!"

Geoffrey looked at the stranger, and, with a shock, recognised Patrick Mulready, the extraordinary being, once trooper in the 29th Hussars, who had already crossed his path once or twice, and whom he could not help feeling, at times, would wield a strange influence over his future.

Patrick Mulready was changed. His one great failing, according to his own account—and he never made any attempt to conceal it that Geoffrey was able to observe—was his love for drink. His dissipated, good-looking, but weak features bore signs which went to prove that he was only just recovering from a drinking-bout. His hands trembled, Geoffrey was quick to notice. That brick-red colour of his was not natural; it had been acquired by his over-indulgence in alcoholic stimulants.

The boy frowned. He did not feel well pleased at meeting the man again. And yet he felt that he could not help liking the poor fellow.

Patrick Mulready's clothes were ragged and dirty. His collar was none of the cleanest. His chin was black with a bristly growth of beard, and his tie had been roughly knotted with a carelessness habitual with him. Yet he held himself proudly erect, and his shoulders, big of bone, and broad, was squared in true military fashion.

Geoffrey regarded him in silence.

"Say you're glad to see me, sor!" cried the Irishman, with a piteous grimace. "Say you forgive me for getting you turned out of Mr. Grice's office. It was true every word that I uttered that day. I stole the petty cash. It seems I'm doomed to betray those I love and honour most in the world. But a time is coming when I may perhaps be able to pay some of it back. I was walking on the quay just now, praying that I might get a sight of you, and then you come along. Tell me if there isn't a Providence in that?"

"You've been drinking, Mulready!" cried Geoffrey, in disgust.

"Not since last night, on my word of honour!" cried the Irishman earnestly.

"Well, you can have nothing to say to me," said the boy coldly.

"I have, sor—I have!" said the man, taking hold of Geoffrey's arm. "I have something to say to you that you'd give the world to hear. After I left Grice & Mortimer's, I went back to Mr. Jeffcock's offices in the City—"

"What?" said Geoffrey, starting. "You went back there, after you had disgraced Mr. Jeffcock by betraying the trust of the employer to whom he recommended you? How can that be?"

"We served in the same regiment," said Patrick Mulready, with a meaning grin. "That's a tie that covers a multitude of sins. So Major Jeffcock gave me another chance."

It was a feasible explanation, with which Geoffrey was perfectly satisfied; but it went to his heart to think that this man—of whose honour and integrity he could not help having the gravest doubts—must always shine as a man of high courage, talent, and generosity.

"And has Major Jeffcock turned you away at last?" asked the boy.

"No," answered Mulready; "I've taken French leave, sor! I've run away, leaving not a word or a line behind me. I'm off to Africa as soon as I can get away from here. I'm going to take up me old profession. I'm going to enlist—but not in the regular Army."

"This can surely have no interest for me?" said Geoffrey impatiently. "I sometimes think you are out of your senses, Mulready."

"And I don't blame you, sor," returned the Irishman.

"But we can't stay talking here. People begin to notice us. Let us take the ferry across the river, and go to Birkenhead Park, where we can talk without attracting any attention."

"No!" said Geoffrey stoutly. "I have no desire for your company, Mulready!"

The Irishman looked at him with an earnest glance.

"You've no cause to regard me with any favour, I admit, Mr. Foster," he said. "And yet you'll remember that your father trusted me to carry a message to you when he was about to leave the country. I could easily have betrayed him to the police, if I'd wanted—but he trusted me. Supposing I was to say it was about him I wished to spake?"

Geoffrey started.

His cheeks paled. His frame trembled.

"Do you mean it?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," was the quick answer, and Geoffrey, without another word, led the way on to the ferry-boat, and a few minutes later they were being steamed across the Mersey in the company of a hundred or more holiday-makers. In silence they went ashore, and in silence they made their way to Birkenhead's lovely park, with its beautiful stretch of water, and here they came to a stop beside a seat that was set beneath the outstretching branches of a stalwart beech-tree.

Patrick Mulready was the first to seat himself.

"You say you are going to South Africa, Mulready," said Geoffrey, regarding the Irishman sternly. "Why is it you are at Liverpool, then, instead of at Southampton? You can't book a passage from here."

"I am going out on a cargo-boat," was the quick answer.

"One or two more chaps like me, who are restless at home, and can't settle down to a respectable life, are going out, too. There will be work for all of us out in the Northern Transvaal. Some of us will leave our bones to bleach in the sun, I'm thinking, and when my turn comes, as come it will, I only hope I shall be ready, and can go to my Maker with my conscious clear. Patrick Mulready has a lot to wipe off the slate, and it's not so easily done, either!"

The Irishman's eyes had a far-away look in them, and as Geoffrey took a seat at his side he shuddered, for he had a feeling upon him that the next time he set eyes on Patrick Mulready the end he spoke of would be very near.

"You were speaking about my father, Mulready," he said, in a gentler voice. "What have you heard about him?"

"Heard about him?" cried the Irishman, facing round, a look of hope and happiness shining in his eyes. "I'm going out to join him!"

"To join my father?" cried Geoffrey, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his senses.

"That's about the size of it, Mr. Foster. Look here! Here's a note from a chum of mine, who, when the war was over, was left behind in Africa, and given up for lost, so badly hurt was he. He was in hospital, but he survived, and ever since he has been a wanderer on the face of the earth, drifting from the diamond mines of Kimberley northward to Johannesburg, Pretoria, and to the very confines of Bechuanaland. He talks of great trouble in store for Britain through a rising amongst the natives, headed by the traitorous Dutch. He speaks of big events to come, sor, in which, please Heaven, I may take a part and do my duty like a man. It won't be long in coming, either. He says the rising will take place this very year, in September or October, most likely."

"But what has this got to do with my father?" asked Geoffrey, consumed with feverish impatience.

"Have you never heard of Joe Gost, the guide, hunter, roughrider, and pioneer, who has raised a small troop of horse, and who has been doing police work in defiance of his Majesty's Government upon the Bechuanaland frontier, and was the means of bringing about the arrest of Paul Pieters and his rascally gang of robbers?"

"Of course," said Geoffrey. "The daily papers were full of his name and conjectures as to his antecedents."

"Well, then," said Patrick Mulready. "Joe Gost is none other than Major Foster. He's true to the old flag, although he's an outcast and a felon flying from justice—and it won't be long before Britain will have cause to bless his name."

Geoffrey's anguish of mind as he heard this passed all bounds.

Joe Gost was looked upon as little better than a robber himself. He would have been taken with all his men if the mounted infantry sent out to apprehend him had been smart enough for their work; instead he had fled across the barren land, fleeing from kopje to kopje, and had disappeared none knew whither.

"Don't take it to heart, sor," said Patrick Mulready, laying a kindly hand on the boy's shoulder. "You never knew your father do anything he could be ashamed of, did you, sor?"

"No," replied Geoffrey, raising his head, ashamed of himself for the momentary doubt that had assailed him.

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"Nor I," said the Irishman. "Major Foster is the best and bravest man in the world."

"What about the London and County frauds, Mulready?" asked the boy.

"He was as innocent as I am!" said the Irishman, bringing his fist down on the seat with a bang. "I know it! I can prove it! I will some day!"

"You can prove him innocent—you, Mulready?" said Geoffrey, seizing hold of the man's throat in a fierce grasp. "Who, then, was to blame? Tell me—tell me!"

The ex-Hussar shook him off.

"I can't do it now," he said. "It ain't the proper time. If I was to speak out, nobody would believe me. Wait, sir—wait! I'll do my best to put matters straight when I see your father in Africa. Trust to me!"

"And my father is innocent?" cried the boy, standing erect, a load removed from his heart, his head raised in the glow of the setting sun.

"Yes," answered the Irishman. "I will swear it!"

"And what makes you so sure that this man Joe Gost is my father?"

Patrick Mulready held aloft a grubby piece of paper, upon which were scrawled some closely-written lines.

"A letter from an old chum of mine, him I was telling you about," he said. "And as soon as I knew I determined to go out and join Gost's Scouts, and do a bit of real work for the benefit of my country."

"It is dangerous work," said Geoffrey, pacing up and down, Mulready rising and walking by his side. "You all stand a chance of being taken, tried as traitors to your country, and shot. Heavy imprisonment is the least they can expect."

"Major Foster," whispered Mulready, "knows every inch of the country. He can speak the language of the natives as well as themselves. He is able to obtain information that no agent of the Government could ever get. My chum, Bob French, who was with the Imperial Light Horse throughout the latter part of the late war, says that Major Foster has discovered a plot against the Government, by means of which and a sudden rising of natives and hostile Colonials together, the Dutch hope to regain the Transvaal. The organisation is perfect. The plot isn't suspected. Major Foster, who knows, is going to defeat it. He means to get together a strong force fully armed, and to check the movement at the onset, relying on the reward of a grateful Government for pardon, when the rebellion is quashed. That is how he wants to try and clear his good name. The rising, my chum French tells me, will take place about September, as far as they can see, and nothing will stop it. The Government of South Africa have been warned, but they laugh at the whole thing, and so, you see, it takes a man like your father to take means to try and save the honour and credit of his country."

"Poor old dad!" said Geoffrey, with a troubled sigh.

"And so I'm going out. Some pals of mine, who would stick at nothing, and who are tired of home and a respectable life, are going out, too. There's thirty of us going out in the Hoboken, sailing to-morrow."

"You'll never be allowed to land," said Geoffrey.

Patrick Mulready winked.

"Trust us," he said. "We are most of us Irish, and there's nothing that a dare-devil Irishman can't do if he's made up his mind to do it."

The boy thought a while.

"Will you take out a letter to my father?" he asked.

"No, sor," answered Mulready. "I dursn't. Nothing must be found on us that would compromise us in any way. It is only by absolute secrecy that we can hope to carry our point. I'll tell Major Foster I've seen you, and that you are well, and that your mother is in health, too; that's all I can do."

"And my blessing!" murmured the boy brokenly.

"Ay, that to be sure, sor!"

"And so you and I must part like this, Mulready," Geoffrey went on, looking straight into the fellow's eyes.

"Yes, sor. It won't do for you to be seen speaking to me again. Mr. Jeffcock is in Liverpool. If he were to see us together, there's no knowing but what he might smell a rat. Will you give me your hand, sor?"

Geoffrey's young and honest palm grasped that of the tough and disreputable Irishman. There were tears standing in the man's eyes. When he spoke his voice was thick and husky.

"Say you think a little better of me—sor, now," he said brokenly.

"I do, Patrick—I do!" answered the boy. "My opinion is entirely changed. It's not your fault, I suppose, you can't go straight at home. It's the quiet life doesn't suit you, I suppose."

"That's it, sor," answered Mulready. "I was made for the woods, the camp, and the field. I can't a-bear living in a

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house. I can't a-bear respectability. It drives me to drink. There, there! I'm a good-for-nought, I am. Good-bye, Mr. Foster, and Heaven bless you!"

"Heaven bless you, Patrick Mulready," said the boy fervently, "and bring you safely through all your troubles."

The next moment Mulready had gone, vanished in the thickness of the trees, and Geoffrey, left to wonder at what had passed, pursued his way thoughtfully towards the park gates and the ferry.

Surrey v. Lancashire — Jeffcock's Unfair Attitude— Geoffrey a Failure—Rain Spoils Play—William Hewitt Speaks Out.

Geoffrey's meeting with Mulready, and the astounding sequel, had a marked effect upon the boy. He could not sleep at all during the night, and on Monday, when he turned up at the cricket-ground, he looked worn and worried, and Hewitt and Jellotson, who had arrived in Liverpool from London that morning, looked at him in amazement.

"Jeffcock been making things unpleasant for you, Foster?" asked Hewitt, regarding him closely.

"No," said Geoffrey. "I haven't seen him. You knew, of course, I cannot use the gentleman's stand."

"I'd forgotten," returned Hewitt. "Oh, well, you will meet him soon, and I dare say the beggar will be unpleasant enough. The more I see of Bangley Jeffcock at Sandhurst the less I like him. He's an unmitigated cad."

Lancashire won the toss, and the Surrey team, fifteen minutes later, turned out to field. Warm weather had come again, but there was rain and thunder in the air, and the fast-moving purple clouds that swept by overhead threatened every instant a deluge.

"I'm afraid, Jellotson," said Hewitt, "that we sha'n't finish this match. And Lancashire have certainly an advantage in batting first."

Jeffcock, clad in whites, and wearing the Grovehouse striped blazer, came sauntering along towards the wicket, hands in pockets, and looking as bad-tempered as his own irritable and selfish nature could make him.

"I thought they'd stand Foster down for this match," he said to Atterbury, loud enough for Geoffrey, Jellotson, and Hewitt, who were standing by, to hear. "I don't see why gentlemen should have to associate with such scum as that."

"You needn't associate with them if you don't want to," returned Atterbury. "You have the use of a separate entrance and exit to the field, and you can have a doorway made for yourself, I dare say, if you make a point about it, next time you play at Liverpool."

Jeffcock opened his mouth to reply, but thought better of it, and, mumbling something beneath his breath, he turned away, running up against Foster as he did so. He eyed the young professional up and down with a sneering, contemptuous glance, that Geoffrey took no notice of, and then went to his position at deep field, whilst Geoffrey went to mid-off, where he had done consistently well since joining Surrey.

Williamson and Turner bowled, as usual, and a partnership



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between the great Maclaren and Spooner produced 60 runs without any result to Surrey, before Atterbury instructed Foster to bowl. Geoffrey saw Jeffcock's sneering glance set on him, but, taking his run, he sent down a ball which was hit by Maclaren to the boundary. But the next delivery brought about his revenge, for England's captain was clean bowled middle stump by a beauty, and with 38 to his credit retired to make way for the International, Tyldesley.

Geoffrey got no more wickets, but he put Williamson in the humour, and Spooner, b Williamson, 35; Tyldesley, c Gill, b Williamson, 15; R. C. Hartley, b Turner, 2; Harry, lbw b Williamson, 2; Hornby, c Atterbury, b Williamson, 4, was the order of the procession to and from the wickets that followed.

Cuttell, Findlay, Kermode, and Hallows were all out to Turner or Williamson for single figure scores, and with the wicket playing badly Sharp, the Lancashire cricketer and Everton football player, with a not-out 45, was the only man to cause Surrey any trouble.

The side was all out for 147.

Then, no sooner had the cricketers retired from the field, than down came the rain. The shower was one of great violence, and soon it became apparent that no further cricket would be possible that day, and the stumps were drawn.

The next morning, upon the umpires inspecting the pitch, it was announced that no play could take place until after lunch, and Jeffcock, lighting a cigar, strolled moodily through the club-room in the pavilion and, taking his stand amidst a group of gentlemen, and within the hearing of Jellotson, Hewitt, Atterbury, and Captain Hilton, he said:

"Well, I'm not sorry. It is hard lines when one has to take one's place in the field in company with a thief and a blackguard. This is what cricket is coming to."

"Shame!" said Hewitt, flushing, for he guessed what Jeffcock was aiming at. "I don't think you ought to speak like that in public, Jeffcock."

"I was referring to one of our professionals," said Jeffcock, with an ugly leer. "He's not here now, but I shall have the dubious pleasure of standing near him presently."

"Who do you mean, Jeffcock?" cried Captain Hilton, striding up. "You have made your statement in the hearing of a number of strangers. Will you have the goodness to speak more plainly?"

"Everybody knows," said Jeffcock, flicking the ash off

his cigar with studied ease, "that Geoffrey Foster was turned out of the Grovehouse School for stealing the school club cricket funds. But what they don't know is that he was dismissed from the service of Grice & Mortimer, solicitors, of the City, for stealing petty cash entrusted to him."

"Which money," said Jellotson, quietly, "was stolen by Patrick Mulready, a tool of your own father's, Jeffcock. He owned up at the time, and was dismissed upon the spot. He afterwards was employed by your father, who evidently is not above employing dubious characters, and whose proceedings might be watched, perhaps, by the police with considerable advantage."

"Do you mean to imply that my father, Major Bangley Jeffcock, is dishonest?" cried Jeffcock, raising his voice.

Hewitt looked quickly round. Jellotson had been speaking in little above a whisper, being anxious to avoid a scene, but the attention of one or two gentlemen had already been attracted.

"If you are wise, Jeffcock," said the late captain of Grovehouse, "you will drop the subject. Your enmity to young Foster is well known. If you try to injure him, be sure the effort will recoil upon yourself. Jellotson and myself know Foster well, and know that he is innocent of the charge that was brought against him before he left Grovehouse."

"But he was accused of stealing?" said Captain Hilton, distressed.

"He was accused of stealing," said Hewitt, quietly and firmly; "but there are others who know more about the theft than poor Foster. Jeffcock, you shall know now why Foster left Grovehouse that night, if you don't know already. He had an appointment with his father in Elsworth village. Major Foster had come to bid him good-bye. The boy couldn't tell the truth for fear of bringing about his father's arrest. Of his own accord he sought out Simon Blake, the bookmaker, and asked him to say that he had been with him that night. He sacrificed himself for his father's sake. That is what both Jellotson and I knew before he left Grovehouse. The lad was a hero; so say a word against him now, if you can."

"You know Foster to have been guiltless?" asked Captain Hilton.

"I know him to have been guiltless," answered Hewitt calmly. "And so in future you will know what to think of Jeffcock's accusations against the lad. Come along, Jellotson, let us go and talk to the youngster! I know the presence of Jeffcock here has upset him. It would upset anyone." And he shot a keen glance at the bully that made Jeffcock turn his eyes the other way.

After luncheon a start was made, and a handful of spectators turned up to watch the play.

Atterbury and Jellotson opened the Surrey innings. The pitch was in a bad way, and it seemed that Kermode and Cuttall would do pretty well as they liked with the bowling. Indeed, they did so, for after the pair had laboriously taken the total to 10, the Surrey captain was bowled for 2; and on Hewitt coming in, Jellotson soon lost his wicket, having put on but 10. Williamson batted steadily, but made no attempt to hit, and, after William Hewitt had scored 6, in attempting a dangerous short run, he had his wickets shattered before he could get to the crease by a deft throw in by Sharp.

Jeffcock then went in, gazing about him in that conceited way of his, and playing with freedom, began to put on the runs. Williamson left, however, when he had scored but 6, and, when Foster joined his enemy at the wickets, he was made so nervous by the sneering regard of Jeffcock that he, with difficulty, took his centre and prepared to play.

"Thief?" cried Jeffcock, quite aloud, as Kermode sent the ball down; and Geoffrey, mistiming it altogether, was clean bowled for 0.

Jeffcock scraped up 19. Gill managed to hit 11, but the other batsmen on the spoilt wicket did nothing at all, and, with 7 extras to help them, the innings came to an end for 72.

Then down came the rain in torrents, and the steady soak continuing all the afternoon, play was again abandoned. The next morning it was still raining hard, and, no cricket being possible, the match was abandoned as a draw, and that evening the Surrey eleven returned to London, Geoffrey, at least, being heartily glad to shake the dust of Liverpool off his feet.

The lad could not help letting his thoughts dwell upon the devoted band of ne'er-do-wells who had gone out in the Hoboken on what he thought to be a mad, quixotic scheme of playing at soldiers. Mulready and the band of devoted adherents of Joe Gost to protect the Empire, indeed! The idea was a laughable one to the boy, accustomed always to view things seriously, and yet he had such confidence in his father that he wondered if, after all, there might not be something in it.

(Another splendid instalment of this grand serial next week.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 329.

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THE RAINBOW

The PENNY Coloured Picture Paper.

NEXT WEDNESDAY—

"THE RIVAL PATROLS!"

THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND!

(Continued from Page 21.)

The juniors crowded round him, striking more matches. Kerr bent down, and opened his pocket-knife. In a few seconds he had cut through the cords, and dragged away the gag.

"Figgy, old man, you're not hurt?"

"No!" gasped Figgins. "Oh crumbs—"

"What's the matter?"

"Cramp! Oh—oh!" panted Figgins. "All—all right! I'll be all right in a minute or two! I've been tied up—ow—for hours!"

"Thank goodness we've found you!" said Tom Merry.

Blake had found the electric lamp by this time, and turned it on. A blaze of light fell upon the juniors, and upon the table, littered with the work of the coiners.

"What have they been doing here, Figgy?" Blake exclaimed breathlessly.

"Coining!"

"My hat!"

Figgins rose rather painfully to his feet, leaning on Kerr's arm.

"I saw the rotter at work for hours," he said. "They've taken a lot of counterfeit coin away with them. You fellows have saved my life!"

"Oh, Figgy!"

"It's true," said Figgins, breathing hard. "They talked it over before me. To-night I was to be held under water, so that I could be found drowned without any marks of violence, to keep their rotten secret, the scoundrels!"

"Let's get out of this," said Kerr. "The sooner the police know about this, the better. Some of us had better go straight into Wayland—Figgins too, if you feel fit, Figgy!"

"What-ho!" said Figgins. "I feel fit enough for anything, to get those villains under lock and key! Let's get off!"

And Kerr helped Figgins up the steps, and the juniors of St. Jim's, almost breathless with the excitement of their discovery, crowded out of the vault.

An hour later Figgins was telling his story in Wayland Police Station, and that evening the coiner's den on the island was in the hands of the police. The name of Golden Jim, the coiner, was well known to the police, though his person was not; but the juniors were able to give an accurate description of Squire Lunsford's late tenant.

The search for the two fugitives began at once, and late that night they were arrested, both of them having a considerable quantity of counterfeit coin in their possession.

It was a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's. It came out that Mr. William Brown had belonged to the district in his boyhood, and twenty years before he had discovered the secret of the old hermitage, while poaching on the island. Lately the police had been close on the track of the coiners in London, and Golden Jim had thought of transferring the scene of his nefarious operations to that secret place.

It had been a cunning plan. He had rented the island ostensibly for fishing, and the rascals were careful to pass none of their counterfeit money in the neighbourhood. That was done on Mr. William Brown's journeys into distant quarters.

The police knew that a gang of coiners had vanished from London, but that was all they knew. But for the enterprise of the juniors of St. Jim's, the secret might never have been revealed.

But it remained a disputed point whether the honour was chiefly due to the School House or the New House. That point was never settled, but both Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. calmly took to themselves the lion's share of the glory for having been the means of bringing Golden Jim and his nefarious work to light by discovering the secret of the island.

THE END.

(Next Week's issue of "The Gem" Library will contain a special long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "The Rival Patrols!" by Martin Clifford. Order your copy in advance.
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 329.

Grand Scouting Story and Articles
in Next Wednesday's

"THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Gordon Fisher, Tutela, P.O., Brantford, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16.

W. E. Keene, Weetah, Scone, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 15-17.

E. R. B. Stanton, junior porter, Port Adelaide Railway, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 18.

Harold Martin, Post-office, Port Ahuriri, Napier, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles, age 15-16.

Colin Campbell, Lowburn Ferry, via Cromwell, Otago Central, South Island, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in the British Isles or Canada.

H. Walkers, Box 5, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps, age 16.

R. R. Lawrence, 1277, Dufferin Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers in the British Isles, age 17-18.

A. A. McDonald, 41, Clyde Street, Dunedin, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a Scotch girl living in Australia or British Isles (Australia preferred), age 15-17.

Miss Dorothy Boagey, Tyndall Street, Pahiataua, North Island, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 15-17.

Miss C. Bristo, "Palm Grove," Pinetown, Natal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers, age 18-21.

Harold E. Hinings, P.O. Box 2371, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the South of England (London preferred) age 16-17.

Arthur C. Twine, Lower Main Road, Observatory, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps, age 17-20.

D. Nolan, P.O. Box 451, Kimberley, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers.

Shirley Wood, 1342, Retallack Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 16.

Ralph Asherson, Calvinia, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles interested in stamps.

W. Steele, Post Office, Port Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in England, age 18-21.

Miss M. Stutchbury, Willoughby-Sumner Blk., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in Hampshire, England, age 14-15.

Miss D. Renshaw, 189, Johnston Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age 17-18.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

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For Next Wednesday.

"THE RIVAL PATROLS!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is a specially-written, long, complete story of the Scouts of St. Jim's, and is full of lively interest and humour. As the leader of the Curlew Patrol, Tom Merry is very keen on "keeping his end up" against the Scouts of Rylcombe Grammar School. Gordon Gay & Co., however, in the first test prove themselves to be more than a match for the Curlews, who return to St. Jim's discomfited. This gives Figgins & Co.'s patrol, the Wolves, a splendid chance, and they set out to retrieve the prestige of St. Jim's, with results that are somewhat unexpected.

In the great Scout contest, however, the Curlews show themselves to be the right stuff, and the question of superiority is decisively settled amongst

"THE RIVAL PATROLS!"**NEXT WEEK'S SPECIAL ISSUE.**

In giving a special Scout interest to next Wednesday's issue of "The Gem Library," I am making a new departure, but it is one which will, I feel sure, be given a hearty welcome by all my readers, whether they are themselves Scouts or not. The long, complete tale of the famous chums of St. Jim's is written in Martin Clifford's very best style—full of humour, interest, and schoolboy fun—while the special articles on Scoutercraft are of such a practical and interesting nature that they will be appreciated by all. One of these will be entitled,

"SUMMER SCOUTING,"

and will consist of helpful advice and sensible suggestions, written by a Scoutmaster of great experience. There will also be a splendid article called

"THINGS SCOUTS SHOULD REMEMBER,"

which is addressed primarily to my boy and girl Scout chums; at the same time, this article will prove interesting as well as profitable reading to all Gemites. There will be no increase in the price of next Wednesday's "Gem"—it will simply be a specially interesting issue, redolent of Scoutercraft, the green woods, and open-air, summer life in general. Tell your Scout chums about it. It is something which should not be missed!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"A Canadian Reader" (Canada).—"The Hypnotist of St. Jim's" was No. 65, "The Ghost of St. Jim's" No. 197, and No. 125 was entitled "The Joke Against St. Jim's." I am afraid I cannot carry out your suggestion at present.

E. A. W. H. (Belfast).—A catalogue of postage-stamps, with prices of same, can be obtained from Messrs. Stanley Gibbons, Ltd., 391, Strand, London, W.C.

A. B. C. (Swalwell).—I am afraid your question would take up too much space in these columns. If you will send your full name and address I will be pleased to write to you.

W. P. Buck (Tonbridge).—For various reasons it is impossible to carry out your suggestions.

Miss Nellie Tubby (East Twickenham).—Wally D'Arcy is 12 years of age, Merry, Lowther, Blake, and Digby about 15, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Herries, 14½, Kildare, 17½.

R. J. Deaves (Birmingham).—Very many thanks for your letter and good wishes. I am glad to hear you like reading "Chuckles."

T. W. Barnes (Birmingham).—More will be heard of Clifton Dane in the near future.

"An Old Gemite" (London, W.).—I cannot trace having heard from you under the nom de plume of "Old Gemite," nor do I remember your question. However, Tom Merry never knew the exact amount of his father's fortune. I will consider your suggestion.

T. Duckmanton (Warsop).—I will endeavour to carry out your suggestion some time during the next football season.

Miss Hilda Russell (Australia).—Very many thanks indeed for your long letter!

KEEPING FIT.

By C. D. Musgrave, M.D.

The Dangers of Excess.

The great advantage of outdoor exercise is that it involves fresh air, which in itself is a valuable adjunct to health. The most important point about it is that it should be regular and daily. A long tramp or a violent burst of tennis or some other game on Saturday afternoon can never make up for five days of comparative inaction. More than that, it is almost dangerous, as waste has meanwhile accumulated to such an extent in the system that, if it is suddenly stirred up, it is apt to produce severe headache or prostration. People are often puzzled and discouraged when, after a long walk or game at the end of the week, they feel so done up as to be unfit for anything for the next twenty-four hours.

Half an hour a day spent in walking, cycling, or playing an outdoor game is sufficient to keep the whole system in good order. The plan of walking to and from business, instead of going by tram is an excellent one, especially in the winter, when the dark evenings make exercise difficult to obtain after business hours. If a man lives over his business he cannot do better than go for a sharp walk before beginning his day's work. There is no better exercise than walking, and it is a pity that as a pastime it has fallen into neglect of late years. Cycling has the advantage of enabling one to get further afield, and affords a large supply of fresh air, but the cyclist is bound to confine himself to the road. The consequence is that he inhales a vast amount of dust at the same time.

The ideal form of exercise is to cycle to some place, leave your machine there, and then set off for a walk. By these means you get away from your ordinary surroundings, and also receive the benefit of the pure air of the meadow or the hill-top.

There are many people, however, who live in town and cannot reach green fields or hills except on holidays, and there are many wet days on which a country walk is hardly possible or desirable on account of the state of the roads. Yet there is one form of walking which is of great advantage under such circumstances, what we may term "the pavement walk." An hour's brisk tramp of this sort is a great boon to town-dwellers on a dull day, or on a winter's evening, when circumstances stand in the way of any other exercise.

Outdoor games, of course, have the advantage of adding the stimulus of competition and complete change of thought for those who have to work hard. But, as we have said already, they should be kept up regularly, and not carried to the point of exhaustion.

(Next Week: A Special Article entitled,

"Things Scouts Should Remember.")

HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA!

BY A SUCCESSFUL EMIGRANT



OFF TO CANADA

THIS WEEK:

Logging in the Back-woods.

The Scarlet Police.

Temptations for the Tenderfoot.



A HOMESTEAD IN ALBERTA

At the end of the summer season in Canada certain trades become slack, and many hundreds of men lose their employment. It is often the experience of young British emigrants to find themselves without a job at the commencement of their first winter in the new land. The first winter to the settler is often the hardest and most difficult in which to keep in work, because he lacks experience of the country. But, as I stated last week, in the backwoods the logging industry goes on apace and provides all-winter work for a large number.

The work in the woods is healthy and pleasant, and it provides a splendid way of putting in a profitable winter. Much of the work requires skill with axes, ropes, or machinery, but inexperienced men are often employed for "swamping," and other tasks. Swamping consists of clearing a path through the undergrowth with an axe to enable the fallen logs to be dragged out.

You can secure work in a logging-camp either by application at the offices of the lumber companies, or through the employment bureaus. Inexperienced hands are paid from about thirty dollars (£6) a month, and board. The life in the backwoods, sheltered from the cutting, wintry winds, can be enjoyed to the full by the healthy young Britisher with a taste for roughing it. Your muscles will harden, and your chest will broaden, whilst you earn good money, which cannot easily be spent.

And now for a few facts about the Royal North-West Mounted Police, the "pride of Canada." Whenever I visit England dozens of questions are fired at me about this famous body of men by lads who have read something of their wonderful achievements. And certainly, from the Arctic Sea to the American border, and from Ontario to British Columbia, the R.N.W.M.P. have made a name to be conjured with.

This constabulary was formed in 1873; when whisky-smuggling among the Red Indians was causing annoyance to the Hudson Bay Company, and, right from the time of their establishment, lawlessness magically decreased. Some of the exploits of the Scarlet Police—their uniform consists of a red coat, blue trousers with a yellow stripe, and a cowboy hat—have been almost superhuman. Not without cause are they the terror of the wrongdoer in the West. Some of the men have a thousand square miles of territory to patrol, and, in the winter especially, their work is indeed arduous.

One of these "sleuth-hounds of the trail" will, if necessary, track a criminal for weeks in the bitterest weather, and, unless he is frozen to death on his task, will bring his quarry back as certain as night follows day. Single-handed, a constable has been known to ride into a hostile Indian camp, and take out a man wanted for murder before the whole tribe. Truly, it has been said that "they who would wear the Scarlet Coat shall say good-bye to fear."

A story has been going the rounds in Canada of a Yankee who became tired of hearing of the marvellous exploits of the Scarlet Police. At last, in desperation, he turned to his Canadian informant and inquired sarcastically:

"Wal, how was it they didn't discover the North Pole?"

"Because they weren't told off for duty on the job," swiftly came the reply.

To join the Royal North-West Mounted Police you have to be a British subject between twenty-two and thirty years of age, over 5ft. 8in. in height, sound in mind and body, and with some knowledge of the management of horses. The term of service is three years, and the pay to begin with is one dollar (4s. 2d.) a day, and all found. Application to join the force has to be made to the Commissioner, at the

headquarters, Regina, Saskatchewan, or to the Comptroller, Ottawa, Ontario.

The Secretary of the Canadian Government Office, 17, Victoria Street, London, S.W., will be pleased to give further particulars to any young man who considers making an application to join.

In a previous article I mentioned that many inducements to spend money exist in the West, and, sad to relate, it is often the young Britisher, away from home influences, who indulges most freely in the unhealthy amusements provided. Of course, the saloons of the "Wild West" have been notorious in times past, and it is a common belief that hanging in each of them was a notice requesting customers not to shoot the bar-tender. If this was so, we can well believe that if a man refused to have a drink with another when invited, he was despatched on the spot, for even in those days it is considered a great insult to refuse a drink from a stranger, let alone a friend.

A logger, miner, or some other worker who has been out in the wilds for several months, and has consequently saved two or three hundred dollars (\$40 or £50), will usually make for a saloon directly on his return to town. Then everybody at the saloon-bar has to drink with him, and the foolish fellow continues to set up drinks until his savings has entirely vanished. I know a man who actually gave "bills" amounting to five hundred dollars (£100) to a bar-tender to pin up on the wall at the back of the bar for the purpose of having drinks supplied to him and everybody else who entered the saloon. Within three days the bar-tender took down the "bills" with the intimation that the five hundred dollars had been spent. It is quickly seen by sensible fellows that the saloons are good places to steer clear of.

Large cities in the West support many pool-rooms, where hundreds of men manage to get through quite a tidy amount of their earnings. The game of pool in its various forms—some of which give ample scope for gambling—must be entirely avoided by the young British settler, for it is one of those pastimes that can easily become an obsession. Many young men spend practically every evening playing this game, to the exclusion of a more profitable pursuit.

Each Western city has its "Chinatown," which is usually a squalid quarter, harbouring filth and crime. Yet, sad to relate, many white men lower themselves by haunting the Chinese gambling dens and lottery "joints." The "Chinks" are always on the right side in their gambling games with white men, as you may be sure, so to continually visit these places in the hope of making money, as I have known even young Britishers to do, is, to say the least, "a mug's game."

In Vancouver and other towns many raids on gambling dens have been made by the police, and in almost every instance to reach the gamblers the officers have had to traverse dark corridors and break through half a dozen doors, each made of solid wood six inches thick, and operated by an ingenious gambling device. But the gambling "joints," saloons, pool-rooms, and other places of the kind that flout themselves so glaringly before the eyes of the public should have no part in the recreations of the young emigrant who wants to get on in Canada.

In concluding this series of articles I should like to make it absolutely clear that I firmly believe that no other portion of the world can offer such glorious opportunities to the British lad who intends to emigrate as the Western provinces of the Dominion of Canada. The sober, persevering youngster with grit in his composition cannot fail.

THE END.

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