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A SCHOOLBOY'S SACRIFICE!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co



THEIR MISSING COMRADE!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON E.C.

OUR :: THREE :: COMPANION :: PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
 — LIBRARY — — POPULAR — — 1/2° —
 EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY | EVERY SATURDAY.



For Next Wednesday:

"THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!"

— By Martin Clifford.

In its combination of humour and pathos, this story is one of the very best which Mr. Martin Clifford has ever given us. A lonely soldier figures prominently in it, and I think all of us have learned in these days of war to have some sympathy with the lonely soldier—the man helping to fight our country's battles, with no one in the whole world to grieve much if he goes under. This particular man is a relative of Percy Mellish, quite the most snobbish fellow at St. Jim's. But the Mellishes have always steered clear of the Thompsons, for no better reason than that the Thompsons were poor; and when Percy Mellish learns that his cousin, Gerald Thompson, a private in the Loamshires, is coming to St. Jim's to see his old comrade in the trenches, Mr. Railton, the snobbish junior has all that is meanest in him aroused. By hook or by crook, he determines to keep Private Thompson away, though even fellows of his own kidney, such as Levison, Crooke, and Clampe, are rather surprised at his adopting this attitude at a time when to be a private in the British Army is regarded by every decent person as a cause for pride—not shame. How Tom Merry and his chums, the one and only Gussy playing a big part, circumvent the schemes of Mellish you will read next week; and you cannot fail to enjoy the manner in which the author describes the complete discomfiture of

"THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!"

A LETTER FROM AN AUSTRALIAN LADY READER.

It is always very pleasant to hear of a whole family appreciating one of my papers, as I often do hear; and this week I have been particularly pleased to receive from a lady reader, the mother of a family in far-away West Australia, quite one of the nicest and most enthusiastic letters I have ever had. This lady writes:

"One of my boys found a 'Gem' lying on the beach one day, and brought it home to read aloud to myself and my little girl, as he is in the habit of doing with anything he likes greatly. We enjoyed the story very much, and were laughing heartily over it when an older boy came in, and sat down to listen also. 'Disgraceful!' he snorted after a while. 'I am utterly surprised at you, mum! Not only encouraging these two kids to read such rubbish, but actually pretending that you enjoy it, just to please them! It's just about fit for kids of sixteen, too,' he concluded witheringly. But finding remonstrance in vain he departed, commenting (and most unfavourably) as he went on the condition of the family intellect."

"A few weeks later a cold confined this young man to his bed, and he requested some light reading matter where with to pass the time. I put a 'Gem' among the books selected for him. It was not long before a hearty burst of laughter brought us up to his door. We peeped in quietly, to find him nearly helpless with laughter at Skimmy defying the German spies from the window of the woodshed. The enemy had capitulated. The hatchet was buried. The flag of peace was flying! We departed again, unseen. 'Ah, mum!' chuckled Jack softly. 'Seems to me there's more kinds of sixteen than us three in this house. What do you think?'"

"Since then all the family not only read the 'Gem,' but watch for it every week. We passed a bundle of back numbers on to a neighbour, who was derisive at first, but soon wanted more."

"I have a little boy of seven, who is deeply interested in the weekly reading aloud of the 'Gem.' His favourite character is the famous Grundy. The other day we were trying to find a suitable name for a valuable young bull, and he settled the argument by saying that it must be named

'Gwunday.' 'But why Grundy?' we asked. 'Because Gwunday can neval be beaten, and nothing can beat this bull, eithah!' he declared triumphantly. So Grundy it was, for our 'Gussy'—he is quite like D'Arcy in his manner of speech, being short-tongued—had to have his way."

"Mr. Clifford has the gift of endowing his characters with such distinct and consistent personality that they seem really alive. And the artist deserves a share of the credit, too. One recognises the same faces and figures at a glance in his work. Skimmy in the woodshed pleased us so much that we had to keep it. It seems wonderful to me how, with so limited a sphere of action for his characters, Mr. Clifford can evolve every week such fresh and gripping stories. Will you tell both him and the artist how much a family in far-off Australia enjoy their work? All success to them both; and to you as well, for we don't forget your share in it all!"

NOTICES.

For Correspondents.

Miss Winnie Hunt, L2, Springfield Road, Guildford, would like to correspond with other girl readers.

Norman H. Freeman, 53, Chestnut Road, Moselay, Birmingham, would like to correspond with a boy reader in Australia.

Miss Vera Neil (aged 14) would like to correspond with a girl reader in this country; and her brother Roy (aged 17) with a boy reader of about his own age. Address: Standerwick, Annerley Road, South Brisbane, Australia.

A. Mackay, 4, Upper North Street, Poplar, E., would like to hear from Private H. Greaves, whose address he has unfortunately mislaid.

Will Ben Flanagan write to G. Queree, at 60, Cambridge Terrace, Hyde Park, London, W.?

For Cricket Fixtures.

Deeplish C.C. (Rochdale) want fixtures. Hon. Sec., Sydney Bardsley, 119, Milkstone Road, Rochdale.

Holy Trinity Boys' Club (Bow), average age 15½-16, want matches within six-mile radius of Bow.

Leagues.

Albert L. Hoy, 3, Ward's Place, Kilmarnock, wants more members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Fred Williams, 13, Mill Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to readers anywhere in the British Isles. He will be glad to hear from anyone interested. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

A. D. Whitehead, 45, Ringford Road, West Hill, Wandsworth, London, S.W., would like to form a fossil and curio club, open to readers anywhere. Will anyone interested write to him?

Harry Copestake, 84, Church Street, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent, wishes to form a local "Gem" and "Magnet" League, and will be glad to hear from anyone who cares to join.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

Private James Smyth, 1590, A Coy., 12th West Yorkshires, B.E.F., France, would be glad to receive back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet."

Miss H. Matheson, Queen's Lodge, Edgware, wants to buy the "B. F. 3d." issue containing "Tom Merry & Co.," and also any number of the "Gem" before No. 13.

Private A. Bailey, 5065, A Coy., 29th Manchester Regt., Hut 13, Reed Hall, Camp, Colchester, would be glad to have back numbers of both the "Gem" and "Magnet."

Drummer F. Tennant, 22494, C Coy., K.O.Y.L.I., The Camp, Withersna, would be very grateful to any reader who would give him an old camera.

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

A SCHOOLBOY'S SACRIFICE!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Marie Rivers took a chair by the bedside, and watched the stricken junior anxiously. Wilkins gazed about him with a bewildered air. "What is it, Wilkins?" asked Miss Marie softly. (See Chapter 11.)

CHAPTER 1.

When Friends Fall Out.

"**W**HERE'S that ass Wilkins?"

George Alfred Grundy of the Shell Form at St. Jim's repeated the question a dozen times as he patrolled up and down the corridor.

Like the monarch in the poem, the great George Alfred

Next Wednesday.

was apparelled in magnificent attire. He sported a gorgeously-striped vest, running shorts, and a pair of socks, the hue of which was dazzling in the extreme.

Grundy was about to embark on a cross-country run, and Gunn was waiting for him down at the gates. Wilkins, the other member of the celebrated trio, was missing, and Grundy was bawling through the building for him. He had been bawling for ten minutes, as a matter of fact; but his repeated cries had been productive of no result.

"**THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!**" AND "**INTO THE UNKNOWN!**"

No. 438. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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"Compound the chap!" growled Grundy. "He's keeping us hanging about all the afternoon! I wonder where he's got to!"

Now Grundy came to think of it, Wilkins had not seen or spoken to him all day, or with Gunn, either, for that matter. This was most singular, for Wilkins and Gunn were usually regarded as a sort of second edition of David and Jonathan.

But perhaps Wilkins was worried about something, Grundy reflected, and had gone mooning off somewhere alone.

Wilkins had a brother in the Army. He had recently been home on short leave from the Flanders Front, and the Head had permitted Wilkins and Gunn to go to the former's home for a few days. They had only just returned, so it was not unnatural that Wilkins should be thinking of his absent brother, who crossed the Channel again that day.

Grundy pursued his inquiries until he came to the library. It was usually deserted, and he did not anticipate finding Wilkins there.

But the unexpected happened. Wilkins was perched up on one of the window-sills, with an open book in his hand; but as the book was upside down, Grundy correctly surmised that he could not be reading it. Wilkins was in his Etons; he had not changed for the projected run.

"At last!" snorted Grundy. "I've been hunting for you high and low, Wilky, you old duffer! What are you stewing in here for? Have you forgotten the run, fathead?"

"I don't feel like running just now," said Wilkins grimly, "unless it's to escape from your company!"

"Why—What—My hat!" gasped Grundy, in astonishment. "What have I done to ruffle your feathers?"

"You know very well what you've done!"

Grundy ran his fingers perplexedly through this thick brown hair. He could not for the life of him understand his elum's attitude. Wilkins was usually amiability itself. There were little rifts in the lute occasionally, as there are in all friendships, but Grundy could think of nothing which accounted for Wilkins' manner on this occasion.

"Are you potty?" asked Grundy politely. "I haven't done anything to cause you to get your rag out that I can see."

Wilkins shifted impatiently in his seat on the window-sill.

"You needn't try to brazen it out!" he said.

"It was Grundy's turn to get angry.

"Brazen it out!" he repeated. "What the merry dickens are you talking about?"

"I think you're a beastly cad, Grundy!"

"Here, steady on!" said Grundy, clenching his big fists. "I don't allow anybody to call me a cad, you know!"

"Well, you are one, and chance it! It cuts all the more because I was fool enough to think you were my friend! After promising me honour bright that you'd say nothing to the fellows about—about my people being poor, and all that, you've blabbed it over half the school! Everybody will know by to-night!" concluded Wilkins bitterly.

Grundy flushed crimson.

"What a whopper!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I haven't breathed a word about your circumstances to anyone."

"Then how did the fellows come to know?"

"Give it up," said Grundy. "I know well enough they didn't get it from me. You asked me to say nothing to the others about your pater being badly off, and all that, and I've kept my promise."

"I don't believe you!"

"You call me a liar?" asked Grundy, his eyes flashing.

"Put it that way, if you like! You've pretty well ruined my life here! Everywhere I go fellows are sneering and jeering at me and my people—calling us paupers and what not. And it's all through you!"

Even as Wilkins spoke the door of the library opened, and Levison, Mellish, and Crooke, the black sheep of St. Jim's, came in, talking and laughing loudly.

"I knew it all along," Levison was saying. "His pater keeps a public-house or something, and he gets all his togs cheap at the pawnbroker's! You'll always notice that he wears cast-off things—never anything new! His people can't afford it! There's not much profit in the beer business since the new restrictions!"

"I should have thought St. Jim's had enough charity wasters already," sniffed Mellish. "What with that scholarship cad Brooke, and that low-bred brat of a street coster Frayne, we've about got enough. I wonder what my pater would say if he knew I had to rub shoulders with the son of a poverty-stricken publican?"

"He'd take you away at once," said Crooke.

"Of course he would! He'd be afraid I should wake up one morning and find my gold watch stolen, or something like that!"

Wilkins winced. Grundy looked incredulous. How had the GEM LIBRARY,—No. 438.

Levison & Co. got wind of the impoverished circumstances of the House of Wilkins?

Wilkins senior was not a publican, but he was poor—wretchedly poor. He was on the reporting staff of a local newspaper, which had reduced the staff and the size of the paper. The few employees who remained—too old to take a hand in the trenches—were paid miserable salaries, and it was little short of marvellous that Mr. Wilkins could afford to provide a first-class education for his son.

His abject poverty was known in the district in which he lived, though it had not gained currency at St. Jim's until now. And only one person could have made it common knowledge, Wilkins reflected. George Alfred Grundy, his familiar friend whom he had trusted; had committed a breach of confidence.

"You hear them?" asked Wilkins. "They insult me right and left, and not only me, but my people! My life's a misery now that you've told them!"

"I tell you I haven't breathed a word!" roared Grundy.

"And I say I don't believe you!"

There was a long, strained silence, during which Grundy glared up at Wilkins and Wilkins glared down at Grundy. Levison & Co., making several uncomplimentary remarks sufficiently loud for Wilkins to hear, strolled out of the room, Crooke asserting that it choked him to breathe the same air as a tavern-keeper's son.

"Are you going to take my word, or are you not?" hooted Grundy, when they had gone.

"Not!" said Wilkins. "What's more, I want nothing whatever to do with you! I thought you were a decent chap, but it shows how easily a fellow can be mistaken! You're a snob and a cad, Grundy! Yes; you needn't glare at me like that! I'm not in the habit of miming my words!"

That did it. Grundy was just as angry as Wilkins, and when Grundy was like that a fistic encounter invariably followed. Grundy was not much good at verbal quarrels. He lacked the art of repartee, and seldom hit upon the right sort of things to say until afterwards, when it was too late.

But as a fighting-man Grundy was not to be despised. He was hardly up to the weight of such Trojans as Tom Merry and Talbot. Nevertheless, he knew how to hit straight from the shoulder, and decided that in this instance he was perfectly justified in wiping up the floor with Wilkins.

"I've had enough of your cheek, George Wilkins!" he shouted. "And now you're going to answer for it!"

As he spoke Grundy gripped Wilkins by the legs, and pulled as if he were participating in a tug-of-war contest.

The result was startling. Wilkins shot down off the window-sill, and alighted on the floor like a sack of coal.

Then Grundy ordered him to come on, which Wilkins did.

The next instant the two juniors, who had hitherto been attached by ties of warmest friendship, were fighting like tigers.

CHAPTER 2.

Barriers Between.

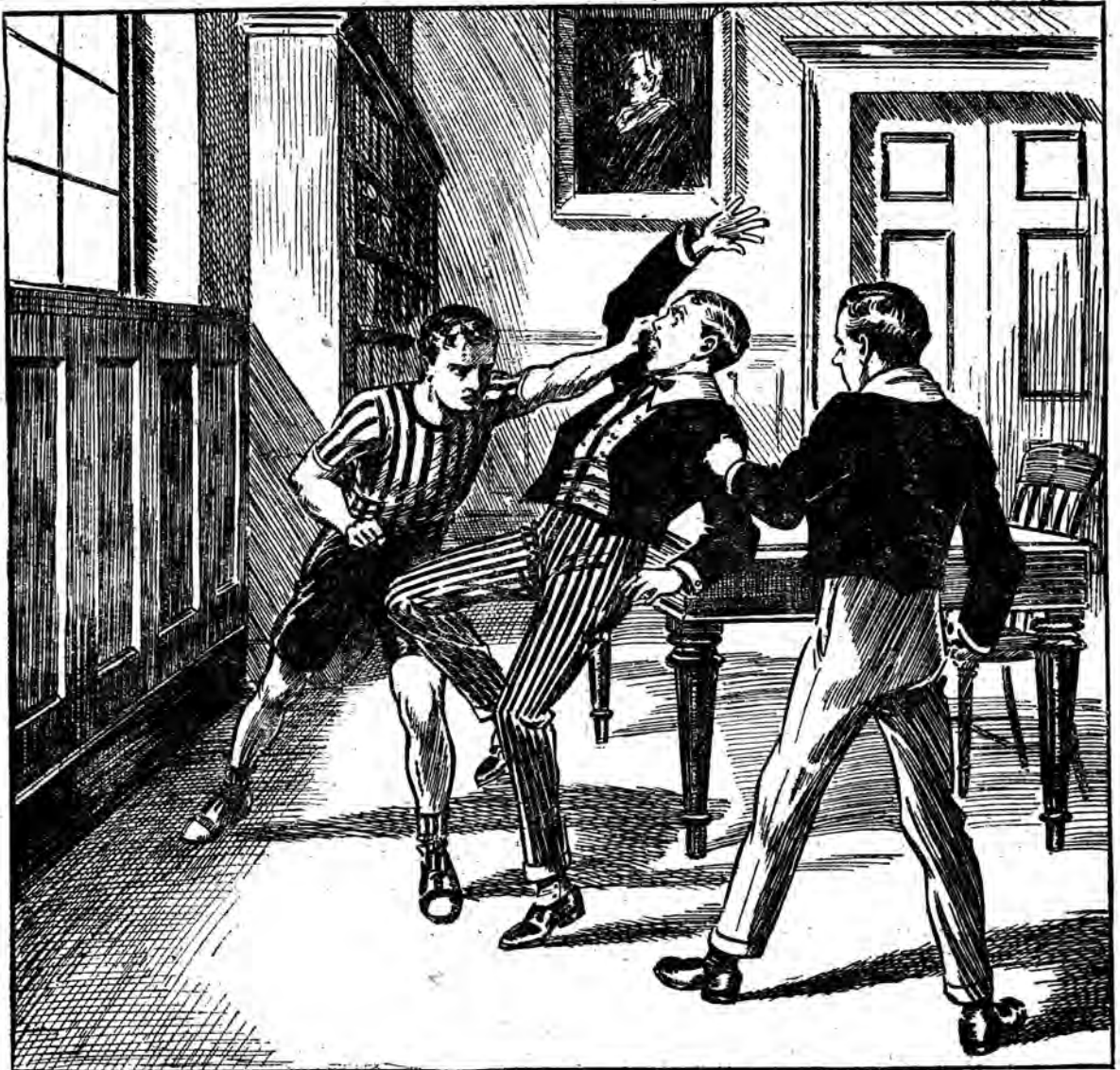
GRUNDY'S anger was not without foundation. He had spoken the truth in telling Wilkins that he had not breathed a word to anyone about the poverty of his people.

Levison had come by his information in this wise. He had a cousin hailing from the same village as that in which Mr. Wilkins resided, and this cousin, a lazy, ne'er-do-well, had seen Wilkins and Gunn the day before, recognised them as being St. Jim's fellows, and had written to Ernest Levison asking if he or anyone else at St. Jim's was aware that Wilkins' father lived in a house which was little better than a labourer's cottage, and that he had been writhing for a long time in the cruel grip of poverty.

Once this state of affairs came to Levison's ears it spread through the school with the rapidity of a fire through gorse. Most of the St. Jim's fellows had not yet learned that poverty is no crime, and they immediately became contemptuous in manner towards the unfortunate Wilkins, and gave him a wide berth.

No one had ever suspected Wilkins of being hard up, but then, his lack of means had been hidden by Grundy's lavish wealth. Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn had been in partnership for quite a long time, and though the fellows knew that Grundy financed the concern a good deal in the way of study feeds and so on, they did not know that he paid for practically everything from his own ample allowance. Therefore, the poverty of Wilkins had not been made apparent until now.

Wilkins was quite convinced that Grundy had betrayed



Biff! Arthur Augustus had intervened between Grundy and Wilkins, and he got the full benefit of the blow. Grundy's fist smashed full into his aristocratic nose, causing the youthful disciple of Vers de Vers to sit down violently on the floor, yelling like a dervish. (See Chapter 2.)

his confidence, and told all the fellows how the land lay. He did not know that Levison had a cousin at Willowton, where his father lived and worked. Levison's relatives were rolling stones that had gathered a lot of moss in the shape of money, and it was extremely unfortunate that one of them should have discovered the financial position and standing of Mr. Wilkins.

Meanwhile, the fight in the school library was going strong. Fury lent zest to the blows of the participants, and as in most scrimmages with bare fists, both sides suffered numerous casualties.

In the ordinary way Grundy, with his sledge-hammer punch, would have made short work of Wilkins; but the latter, spurred on by a sense of injury, put up an amazingly good fight. Grundy's right shot upwards through his guard, and smote him just below the eyes; but that only made him fight all the fiercer. He led Grundy quite a dance for the next few moments, swinging out left and right in swift succession, until the burly Shell fellow was almost dazed by the blows.

At this juncture the door was thrown open again—not by Levison & Co. this time. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who entered, a horrified expression on his aristocratic face.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed, adjusting his celebrated monocle and lounging elegantly up to the combatants.

"What's the twouble, deah boys! Gwunday, you duffah! Wilkins! What are you scwappin' for?"

No reply came from either of the fellows addressed. They were too deeply absorbed in the business in hand to take any heed of Gussy.

Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud!

Backwards and forwards, to and fro, the fighters rushed, hitting out furiously. It was obvious that the affair must soon end one way or the other. The claret was streaming from Grundy's nose, and his upper lip had put on flesh, so to speak.

Wilkins, too, was in a shocking state—worse than his opponent, if that were possible. One of his eyes had shut up shop, and the other seemed likely to follow suit at an early date, for he was blinking painfully out of it at his adversary.

"Stop it, you fellahs!" screamed Arthur Augustus, prancing about like a cat on hot bricks. "You've no right to knock each othah about like this! It's wevolutin'—howwibly wevolutin'!"

Grundy and Wilkins took no heed. They were hardly aware that a third party was present. Hammer-and-tongs, they continued to give and take with great gusto.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, in dismay. "I must stop the silly asses, somehow, or they'll half-murdah each othah!"

Then the would-be peacemaker rushed towards the combatants.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
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It would have been far more discreet on Gussy's part to have sat tight and done nothing. He would have done well to remember the old couplet:

"Those who in quarrels interpose,
Must often wipe a bloodstained nose!"

As it happened, Gussy sailed in at a most inopportune moment. Grundy had been gathering together all his strength for a desperate final effort; and when his big fist shot out it came with a force which was truly effective.

Biff!

Arthur Augustus had intervened between Grundy and Wilkins, and he had got the full benefit of the blow. Grundy's fist smashed full into his aristocratic nose, causing the youthful disciple of Vere de Vere to sit down violently on the floor, yelling like a dervish.

The sound floated out into the corridor, and the Terrible Three, who were strolling along in their cricket flannels, dashed into the library.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "I thought I heard Gussy's sweet treble. There's a scrap on, by Jove! Between Grundy and Wilkins, too, of all people! Good! We're just in time for the last act of the tableau!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy struggled to his feet. He produced a cambric handkerchief and dabbed his injured nasal organ.

"Broke in the wars, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Ow! Those howwid wuffians—those hooligans—"

D'Arcy hopped blithely out of the way the next moment. Grundy and Wilkins were going for each other again, and Gussy was determined not to act as a peacemaker any further.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther made no effort to stop the fight. They saw that it had nearly reached a climax, and that it would be unwise to drag the participants apart. If there was bad blood between them, it was far better that they should fight on to a finish.

The end was not long in coming. Grundy's marked superiority in height and weight and reach soon began to tell, and Wilkins was nearly blinded by this time. His opponent rose before him dimly, as through a mist, and whereas Grundy's blows invariably reached their mark, those of Wilkins were wild and feeble.

"Put him out of his agony, Grundy," said Manners.

And Grundy did. His left shot out with hurricane force, and took Wilkins on the point of the jaw, felling him like an ox. He came to the floor with a crash that rattled every bone in his body.

"Now, Gwunday," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs, "you can deal with me!"

The Terrible Three stretched out their hands, and the smell of St. Jim's was whirled back out of harm's way.

"You're no match for Grundy—not at present, at any rate," said Tom Merry.

"Wesease me! I insist!"

"You can insist until you're black in the face! You're not going to tackle Grundy!"

And D'Arcy was reluctantly held captive by the Terrible Three until his flaming passion cooled.

Wilkins sat up, with his hand clasped to his jaw. He looked as pitiable a wreck as it was possible to imagine, with his right eye closed, and his left rapidly following suit.

Grundy generously extended his hand. It was not his nature to be angry for any length of time, and now that he had dealt with the refractory Wilkins, he naturally imagined that the latter would be willing to make it up, and that things would resume the even tenor of their way.

But Wilkins made no movement towards a reconciliation. His feelings towards Grundy at that moment were on a par with the feelings of the average British Tommy towards the Kaiser or the Crown Prince.

"You can go to Jericho!" said Wilkins gruffly. "I'm fed up with you! A fellow who shows up his pal before the whole school like you've done is a howling cad!"

"Still harping on that yarn!" exclaimed Grundy, in surprise. "I tell you I never informed a soul!"

"And I say you did!"

"Then go your own way, and be hanged!" growled Grundy.

And, turning on his heel, he strode out of the room, slamming the door furiously behind him.

"What's he been saying about you, Wilkins?" asked Tom Merry.

Wilkins tottered to his feet.

"He's told all the fellows that my pater's a pauper, and all the rest of it, after promising he wouldn't betray our poverty to a soul!"

"But are you sure it was Grundy who started the yarn?"

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"Of course I am!"

"I'm inclined to think differently myself," said Tom. "We got the yarn from Levison."

"And he got it from Grundy, I suppose!" said Wilkins bitterly. "Nobody knew about our circumstances but Grundy. My life won't be worth living after this!"

"It don't matter to us how poor you may be," said Monty Lowther. "We shan't give you the cold shoulder."

"But most of the fellows will. They won't look at things in that light. I tell you I shall have a dog's life!"

Wilkins limped away to the nearest bath-room. He felt utterly dejected—more so that he had even been at any period of his school career. Grundy, he felt, had served him shabbily.

Wilkins had had great faith in Grundy. He was aware, of course, that Grundy was a rank duffer in many respects. He was a hopeless cricketer, a worse swimmer, and a poor sort of athlete generally. But Wilkins, though he had known his chum to be such a duffer, and had liked him none the less because of it, would never have dreamed that Grundy was a cad and a scandalmonger as well. The supposed knowledge pained him, and he spent the rest of the day in his own company, alone with his thoughts, which were darker than the blackest midnight.

CHAPTER 8.

The Vultures.

FEELING down in the mouth—what?" Levison of the Fourth clapped Wilkins on the shoulder on the following afternoon, which was a half-holiday. Grundy and Gunn biked over to Wayland to witness a big military cricket match, and Wilkins, feeling pretty much of an outcast, was mooning about the quad, finding the world a very different place to live in.

"Get out of it!" he growled, resenting Levison's interference.

"All right!" said the cad of the Fourth. "Keep your wool on! I only wanted to be chummy!"

Wilkins stared. It was not like Ernest Levison to profess friendship for anybody. Most of the fellows, in fact, were his enemies. His ways were not their ways, and they could not, and would not, stand Levison.

"Grundy's given you the cold shoulder," went on Levison, in a voice so unusually gentle and sympathetic that Wilkins would have smelt danger had he not been so immersed in his worries. "Directly Grundy knew you were down on your uppers he cut you dead," continued Levison. "Fine sort of pal that—I don't think! Why, he's even chucked you out of the study, hasn't he?"

"I went out of my own accord," said Wilkins.

"Whose den are you in now, then?"

"Nobody's. I have my grub in Hall, and clear off to the library when I want to be quiet."

"Don't you find that sort of thing rather rotten—miserable, I mean?"

"I shall get used to it in time, I suppose."

Levison stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Look here," he said graciously, "you can dig in with Mellish and me, if you like."

Wilkins looked hard at the speaker. He had always regarded Ernest Levison as a cold, callous, cruel fellow, utterly drained of the milk of human kindness. Yet here he was, offering Wilkins the free run of his study.

"Do you mean that?" asked Wilkins, after a pause.

"Every bit."

Wilkins put out his hand impulsively.

"Then you're a jolly eight more decent than I ever supposed!" he said. "Put it there!"

"Oh, I'm not like some chaps!" said Levison lightly. "I don't act like a beastly snob and cut a fellow dead just because his people aren't well-to-do. I leave that sort of thing to Grundy. It'll be rather a tight squeeze in our study, but I don't s'pose you'll mind that. I'm sure we sha'n't."

Wilkins nodded gratefully. He was in sore need of friendship and sympathy just then, and Levison's seeming sudden regard for him made a deep impression upon his mind.

But there was method in Levison's madness. It was not kindness of heart which had prompted him to suddenly open out to Wilkins in this way. He had good reason to believe—his cousin had mentioned it in his letter—that the circumstances of Mr. Wilkins were shortly to undergo a startling change. He was, in fact, to succeed to the editorship of the paper for which he now worked, and the position was a good one. Levison's cousin knew of this, but Mr. Wilkins himself was quite in ignorance of the projected change.

Levison had played his cards well. He knew that if he

could get thick with Wilkins it would be of considerable financial benefit to him later on, and that it would be a nasty rap over the knuckles for Tom Merry & Co., who would naturally dislike the idea of a decent fellow like Wilkins throwing in his lot with Levison.

The cad of the Fourth had started the slander about Wilkins and his people in order to bring Wilkins and Grundy to loggerheads. That was the first step. The second move was to adopt an attitude of friendship towards his future prey.

"I say," said Levison, with a shamefaced air, "I'm sorry—beastly sorry, I said rotten things about you yesterday in the library. I didn't mean to play the cad, honestly!"

"That's all right," said Wilkins.

"It was Grundy who started the yarn about your people being paupers, and I was silly enough to take notice of it at first," said Levison. "I sha'n't be such a rotter again in a hurry! Coming along to the study?"

Wilkins nodded. Levison slipped his hand through his arm, and together they proceeded to Levison's study. Mellish and Crooke were there, and the latter exchanged a wink with Levison as he brought in his victim.

The weather was glorious, and most of the fellows were either at the nets or bathing in the sparkling waters of the Ryll. But the slackers of St. Jim's had no use for outdoor exercise. They preferred to enjoy themselves in their own delightful way.

Levison drew out a cigarette-case, opened it, and extended it to Wilkins. The latter coloured, and shook his head.

"I don't smoke," he said shortly.

"Oh, rot! You're not under Grundy's paternal thumb now, you know! Be a man!"

So Wilkins abstracted one of the cheap-and-nasty cigarettes, but he didn't feel very much like a man as he lit up. He felt more like a cad. He knew that there wasn't anything British in smoking behind locked doors.

Then Levison, exchanging another furtive wink with Crooke, took a pack of not-over-clean cards from his desk.

"Who says banker?" he asked.

"Banker?" said Mellish and Crooke promptly. Then they looked questioningly at Wilkins.

"I don't play cards," said that junior, looking and feeling very uncomfortable.

"Neither did you smoke, but you're having a fag now," said Levison. "Might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb!"

"Besides," said Wilkins, a little grimly, "I've got no money."

Levison laughed heartily.

"My dear chap," he said, "anyone would think I brought you here with the sole object of fleecing you! Nothing could have been farther from my mind."

"Very well, then," said Wilkins resignedly. "I'll play."

But playing cards for the sheer love of so doing was not in Levison & Co.'s line. They wanted excitement, and they wanted money. Levison knew that Wilkins was as stony as the ground in the parable; but he knew, also, that by getting an IOU out of his new friend he would have a hold upon him so powerful that Wilkins would find great difficulty in shaking it off.

Wilkins demurred at first. Saying he would never consent, he consented. Moral courage was not his strongest point, and he soon became hopelessly entangled in the meshes of the net which Levison had so skilfully outspread for him.

Of course, Wilkins lost. He was as ignorant of cards and card-playing as a newborn babe.

An hour later Levison had his victim's IOU for a pound. How Wilkins could possibly raise such a sum he didn't for the life of him know. His pocket-money was almost nil, and he had no kind benefactors to whom he might apply. Levison carelessly said that it didn't particularly matter when the sum was paid up, and Mellish and Crooke, who each had a share in the loot, heartily concurred. But Wilkins was determined to make it a point of honour to discharge the debt at the earliest opportunity.

Later on in the evening he removed his belongings from Grundy's study to his new quarters. Grundy and Gunn had not yet returned from Wayland, and he went about his work without interruption.

As for Levison & Co., those young rascals were in the seventh heaven of delight. They had secured a new recruit, and had fleeced him hand over fist. In a few weeks' time, when Wilkins senior was adding materially to his store of wealth, the pocket-money of Wilkins junior would be liberally

increased as well, and then Levison and his cronies would be richer than they had been for quite a long time.

Verily, the outlook for George Wilkins was anything but rosy.

CHAPTER 4.

Driven to the Wall.

IT is always much easier to go downhill than up. That was how Wilkins found it. As the days passed, and the breach with Grundy grew wider and wider, Wilkins became quite a different fellow. He smoked and gambled, forsook the playing-fields in favour of Levison's study, and developed into quite a blade, a dog, and a goer.

But he told himself that he would pull up in time, if only he could obtain the money wherewith to discharge his obligations to Levison. The debt had assumed tremendous proportions by this time. It was a matter of three pounds—more pocket-money than Wilkins received in whole terms.

How could he possibly raise it? He knew nothing of the better financial position his father was to have in the future. And he feared Levison. Supposing the cad of the Fourth were to write to Mr. Wilkins, telling him, in a veiled sort of way, that his son had gambled and run head over ears into debt?

The thought was maddening. His father must know nothing of the ignominy into which he had fallen. He must get out of Levison's clutches at the earliest opportunity, and refuse to handle a card again.

Hitherto Wilkins had gone on gambling, hoping that his luck would turn. But he was past hope now. He saw that Levison & Co. outwitted him all along the line. They were clever and cunning—he was neither. No, he must raise the three pounds by hook or by crook, and then give cards the go-by once and for all.

But again and again the dread thought arose that he had no means of raising the wind, and so to extricate himself from his scrape. It was as easy as falling off a form to get into debt; it was the hardest thing in the world to get out of it.

The worry haunted Wilkins wherever he went. His appetite lost its keenness; he became flabby and out of condition. He could not sleep at night. He was haunted by fears of what Levison might do. For, with all his generous talk about letting the debt stand over, Levison was not likely to agree to wait an indefinite period for the money.

Wilkins had thought of approaching Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with whom he had always been on fairly good terms; but D'Arcy, even though he simply rolled in money, would not be prepared to advance three pounds in a lump sum, with very remote prospects of getting it back.

Wilkins began to grow desperate. Thoughts, strange and sinister, began to creep into his mind—thoughts of raising money by means of theft.

Would it be theft, he argued, to appropriate three pounds from somewhere and replace it by instalments? Conscience told him it would, but Wilkins was deaf to the voice of conscience just then. All he realised was that he must get the money quickly, and that, if he didn't, incidents of a very unpleasant nature might ensue.

The money was comparatively easy of access. More than three pounds, Wilkins well knew, was deposited in the cash-box kept in Kildare's study on behalf of the senior games' fund. The subscriptions had only lately been paid up, and Wilkins had seen the captain of St. Jim's put the money away and replace the key of the cashbox in his drawer.

Under normal circumstances, Wilkins would have thought no more of stealing that than of trying to fly to the moon. But in his present condition he was wellnigh distracted.

"I'll do it!" he said to himself over and over again. "Hang it all, it's the only way!"

The wretched junior's time and opportunity soon came to hand. A first eleven match was being played that afternoon against Abbotsford. Everyone would be out on Big Side to cheer St. Jim's on to victory, and the coast would therefore be clear.

Wilkins waited until the match had been in progress half an hour, then he wended his way to Kildare's study. His step was unsteady, and a wild light shone in his eyes. The whole business was horribly distasteful to him; but he set his teeth and went on, with grim resolve to see the thing through.

He turned the handle of Kildare's study door, and entered. The room was deserted, and the open window admitted the warm summer breeze. A bird twittered on the window-sill, but sped away on hearing footsteps within the study.

With trembling fingers, Wilkins went to the drawer, pulled it open, and extracted the bunch of keys which would give him access to the cashbox.

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

ANSWERS

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!"

He had barely closed the drawer when footsteps sounded without, causing him to pull up short, his heart thumping wildly.

The footsteps came nearer. Yes, there was no mistake about it. They were approaching the study.

The approach of danger has varying effects upon different people. Some remain irresolute, in an almost paralysed condition; others are spurred into instant action.

Wilkins belonged to the latter class. Quick as thought, he dived beneath the table, the bunch of keys clutched tightly in his hand.

Almost immediately the study door opened, and Kildare entered. His cricket-bat had split, and he had come to exchange it for another.

As he crossed the study, he tripped over Wilkins' bob, which was not properly concealed. The junior's heart ceased beating. He would be discovered. Surely Kildare would look for the cause of his being tripped?

But, as it happened, the captain of St. Jim's was too keenly anxious to renew his innings to take much heed of what was, to him, a trivial incident. He merely growled, and continued on his way. Wilkins could hear him moving about for a few brief seconds, which seemed hours to the haggard Shell fellow. Then the Sixth-Former quitted the study.

Wilkins allowed a full five minutes to elapse before he crawled out of his hiding-place.

"A near shave!" he murmured. "The luck was with me that time, and no error!"

He shuddered as he pictured to himself what the consequences might have been had Kildare found him there. He would have been unable to explain his presence in the study.

But it was no time for thinking. The St. Jim's innings might soon conclude, in which case it was likely that some of the seniors might enter the study.

Taking his courage in both hands, and endeavouring, but with indifferent success, to persuade himself that he was not really acting like a common or garden thief, Wilkins went to the cash-box and unlocked it.

There was money in plenty inside. Wilkins fought shy of the currency notes, lest Kildare should have kept the numbers of them. He extracted, instead, a couple of sovereigns and a pound's worth of silver.

He felt sick and dizzy as he locked the cash-box, and replaced the key. It was useless, hopeless, for him to try and persuade himself that he wasn't a thief. He had got into debt through his own folly, and he was stooping to base and dishonourable methods to get clear of the clutches of Levison.

For a brief moment he was almost persuaded to put the money back, and let the cad of the Fourth do his worst.

But there was his father to be considered. Mr. Wilkins was a man who took pride in his son, and regarded him as the embodiment of all that was honourable and upright. What would he say if he learned that his boy had forsaken the paths of decency, and become a gambler and a debtor? Wilkins knew that it would be a shock from which his parent would not easily recover. He therefore fought down his scruples, and disobeyed the dictates of his conscience. Stealthily he opened the door of Kildare's study, and passed out into the passage.

What was the next step? He would go to Levison, hand him the money, and let him clearly understand that he—Wilkins—would give him a wide berth in future. Then, perhaps, if he were lucky, the quarrel with his old chum might be patched up, and as soon as he had amassed three pounds he would replace it in the cash-box of the senior games fund, and everything in the garden would be lovely.

Then came the haunting thought that the theft would be discovered long before he had saved anything like so large a sum as three pounds. There would be an inquiry, a hue-and-cry would be made, and he would be expelled.

Wilkins had a horror of expulsion. It would mean ruin to him in every way, and would bring disgrace upon his father's house.

"I must brazen it out somehow," he muttered to himself.

Grundy passed him in the passage at this juncture. Their eyes met, but they did not speak, and Grundy proceeded at a more rapid rate, whistling "The Death of Nelson."

Wilkins' cheeks were burning. He seemed to read suspicion in the look Grundy had darted at him; though, as a matter of fact, not a soul as yet could have any notion that Wilkins had appropriated three pounds from the senior games fund.

The junior proceeded to Levison's study. The leader of the black sheep was alone.

"Hallo!" he said. "I was waiting for somebody to come along and relieve the monotony by having a game at cards!"

"Blow cards!" said Wilkins gruffly. "I've come to pay you this!"

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He laid the money on the table as he spoke.

Levison gave a whistle. It was the last thing in the world that he had expected just then, knowing as he did that Wilkins had not been flush of money.

The cad of the Fourth picked up the coins before Wilkins had time to change his mind about making the payment.

"Where the merry dickens did you rake this up?" he asked, as he pocketed the spoils.

"I—I've had a remittance," stammered Wilkins.

Levison stared.

"I didn't think your pater was in a position to chuck whole quids about like this!" he exclaimed.

"It wasn't my pater," said Wilkins, who, not being a natural liar, felt a sickening sense of revulsion at the deception. "A—a maiden aunt turned up trumps!"

"Did she, by Jove!" said Levison, glancing keenly at the speaker. "I wish I had a few maiden aunts like that, that's all!"

"You might give me a receipt for the amount," said Wilkins heavily.

"Why?"

"Well, because, to put it bluntly, Levison, you haven't a reputation for being straight, and all the rest of it. So, to be on the safe side, I'll thank you for the receipt!"

Levison scowled. He looked at first as if he wouldn't agree to the arrangement. Then, on reflection, he made out the necessary acknowledgment of the three pounds Wilkins had paid over.

"Thanks!" said Wilkins shortly. Then, looking Levison straight in the eyes, he added: "I want to tell you, Levison, that I'm fed-up with this study. The atmosphere is simply unbreathable. I'm sick of the smoking and gambling—not because it's wrong to do it, but because it doesn't give me an atom of pleasure. And another thing, while I'm on the subject, I more than suspect that you chaps have been cheating me!"

Levison sprang to his feet. His face was livid.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to sit tight and hear you slander me and my pals like this—~~if I know it!~~ The sooner you take yourself and your belongings out of this study the better!"

"That's all right," retorted Wilkins grimly. "I sha'n't stay here a minute longer than I can help! Here goes!"

He gathered up his belongings, and, without another look at Levison, left the study he had come to hate with all his heart, slamming the door furiously behind him.

CHAPTER 5.

One Loyal Chum.

DESPITE the air of independence he had shown in turning his back on Levison's study once and for all, Wilkins felt troubled and uneasy. He was in a wretched and unenviable position—that of finding himself friendless and studyless.

After his rift with Grundy, and his refusal to accept the latter's friendly overtures when the fight was over, he could not go back to his old quarters. That was a sheer impossibility, even if Grundy offered to treat him as a prodigal, and cook the fatted calf to celebrate his return, which wasn't likely.

"Hang it all!" he muttered. "I must get a study somehow, or where the dickens can I put my things?"

Humiliating though such a course was, he realised that his only plan was to tout round the various studies, and ask to be taken in. But he did not expect much sympathy from his schoolfellows in his extremity. Most of them who knew of his recent skirmish with George Alfred Grundy had taken the latter's part; but what weighed against Wilkins more than anything was the fact that he had recently been so thick with Levison.

"Still, I can but try my luck," reflected the junior.

He waited about for nearly an hour, at the end of which time most of the fellows came in from cricket. Then, taking his goods and chattels under his arm, he commenced his tour of the junior studies.

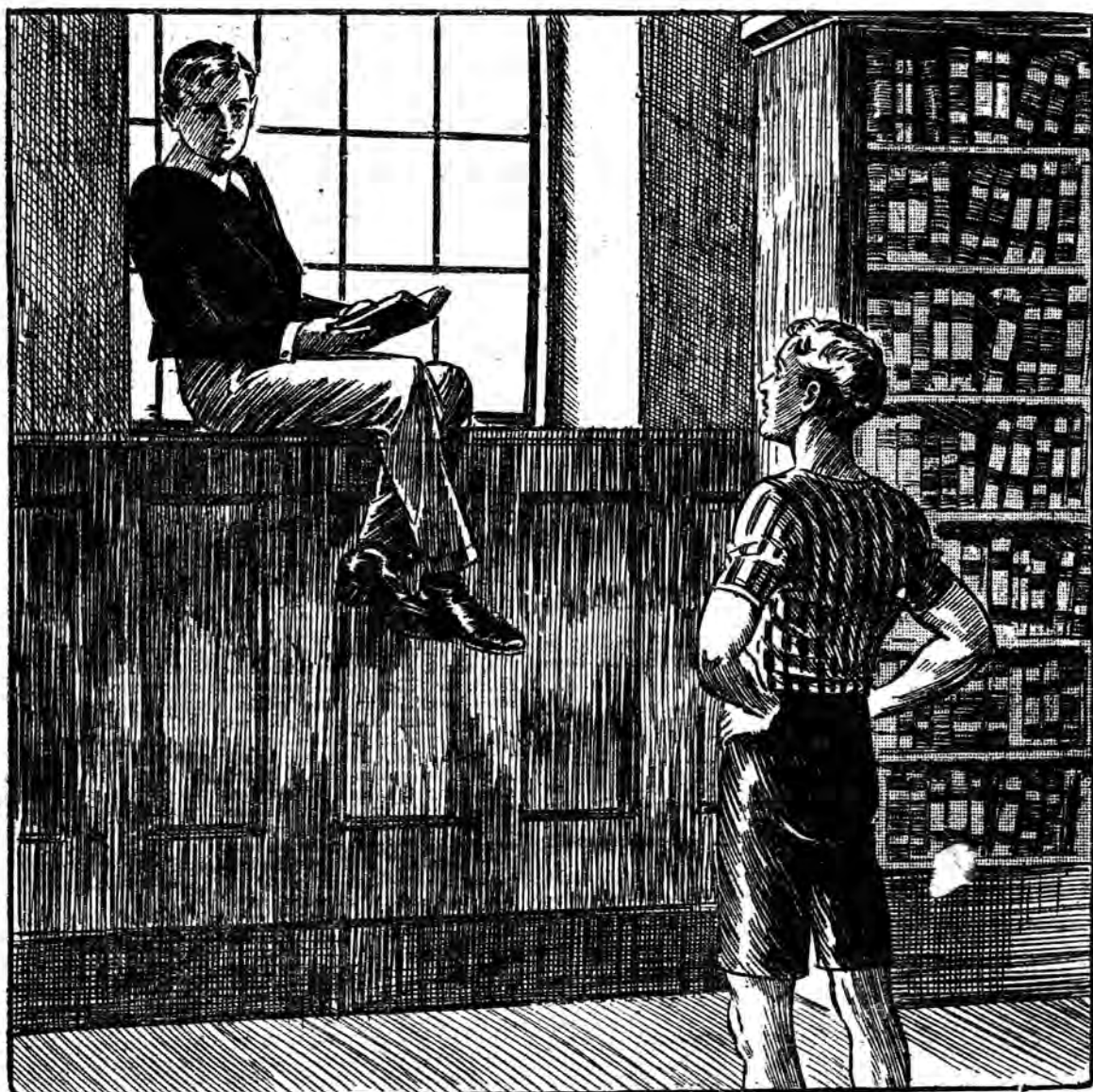
On all sides he was received coldly. The Terrible Three curtly told him that he had only himself to blame for his present predicament, and must get out of it as best he could, without any help from them.

Bernard Glyn said he was too busy with a big invention, shortly to take the world by storm, and added that he would not brook interruptions of any sort. So Wilkins, with a heavy heart, continued his quest.

He went next to the study tenanted by Harry Noble, the Australian junior.

"You might let me shove my things in here, and share this study," he said.

"I might," said Noble; "but, on the other hand, I might



Wilkins was perched up on one of the window-sills, with an open book in his hand; but as the book was upside down, Grundy correctly surmised that he could not be reading it. "At last!" snorted Grundy. "I've been hunting for you, high and low, Wilky, you old duffer!" (See Chapter 1.)

not. I like this study kept clean, with a healthy tone about it. The cheap cigarettes you've got into the habit of smoking would make the place niff for whole terms!"

"I've given smoking the go-by."

"Sorry, but I won't believe you till I get a bit more evidence than your bare word. It looks to me as though you've had a tiff with Levison, and you're trying to palm off your blessed society on somebody else! That sort of thing don't go down with me!"

"I tell you—"

"Shut the door after you!"

Wilkins staggered out of the Cornstalk's study. His burden was becoming more and more heavy, and the perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. He felt that unless somebody took compassion on him right speedily he would go mad.

Everybody had an excuse to hand for not taking him in. Some said their studies were already uncomfortably overcrowded; others had no desire to claim an associate of Ernest Levison as a study-mate.

At last, in desperation, Wilkins wended his way to No. 6 Study in the Fourth-Form passage. He did not doubt that his reception there would be similar to the rest.

And he was right.

Jack Blake and Digby, with woebegone expressions, were listening to certain weird noises proceeding from Herries'

corner. At the table sat Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was writing; or, to be more correct, trying to.

"What's wanted?" asked Jack Blake, as Wilkins knocked and entered, tottering giddily under his burden.

"I want to know if it's possible for me to dig in here," said Wilkins wearily. It was about the twentieth time he had made the remark that afternoon.

"Sorry," said Jack Blake blandly, "but you'll have to try your luck somewhere else. There's no room in the study, for one thing, and we don't want to be saddled with a smoky boulder, for another."

"That's straight from the shoulder," said Digby.

Exhausted, bereft of hope, and feeling that he might just as well be dead as living and moving in a sphere where he wasn't wanted, Wilkins turned away.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose kind heart was easily touched, rose to his feet, and, despite the protestations of his chums, followed on the heels of the outcast.

Wilkins went straight to the library—his one haven of refuge these days. He dumped his belongings down on the floor, and, seating himself at one of the desks, buried his face in his hands.

It was a new and strange thing for Wilkins of the Shell to blub; but he was blubbing now. The hot tears trickled through his fingers; he was unable to check their course.

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

What a maze of troubles had accumulated since that fateful split with Grundy! The more Wilkins thought about it, the more fully he realised that he had treated Grundy shamefully. Even granted that Grundy had set the story of his poor circumstances through the school—which Wilkins now began to doubt—he had no excuse for refusing to shake hands with Grundy after the fight.

And now there was this haunting affair of the games-fund money. The theft was bound to be discovered sooner or later, and Wilkins felt that his nerve would break down, and that he would be unable to brazen the matter out before the Head and the crowded assembly in Big Hall.

It was as if a sword was hanging over the wretched junior's head, likely to descend at any moment. He—Wilkins—was excommunicated from all he had held dear. His chums had, and with good reason, given him the cold shoulder. Troubles of this sort had never arisen in the past. He had glided gaily along on the placid waters of harmony, and his experiences had been those of the average junior at St. Jim's.

But in the last day or two a sequence of misfortunes had occurred. When troubles come, they come, not in single spies, but in battalions; and never had Wilkins realised more vividly the truth of Shakespeare's statement than now. He was alone—and friendless!

But at that very instant a hand fell upon his shoulder, rousing him with a start from his gloomy reverie.

"What's the twouble, deah boy?" inquired the sympathetic voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Wilkins looked up. His eyes were dimmed with tears, and the swell of St. Jim's knew that he was suffering real mental torture.

"I—I can't tell you," said Wilkins. "Everything's gone wrong. It's my own fault, I admit; but it's awful—simply awful! I wish I was jolly well dead!"

"Wats! That's not the way to talk, Wilkins!" said Gussy sternly. "Theah's always somethin' to live for an' hope for."

"Not in my case."

"Oh, that's all wot, you know, deah boy! Tell me exactly what's wong, without any beatin' about the bush, an' I'll see if I can help you."

"You can't," said Wilkins miserably. "Nobody can."

The swell of St. Jim's might have been expected to turn away impatiently at this, but he didn't. He saw that Wilkins was wavering; that he was meditating confiding all his troubles to his companion, in spite of his statement that nobody could help him.

"Look heah!" said D'Arcy. "Tell me ewevythin' wight f'rom the vewy beginnin'. I sha'n't breathe a word to anybody. You can twust me, deah boy."

There was something so frank and sincere in the words that Wilkins dallied no further. With grim directness he unravelled the whole wretched story, omitting nothing.

D'Arcy listened gravely to the recital, and was almost spell-bound when Wilkins described his raid on Kildare's cash-box.

"You—you don't weally mean to say you've stolen thwee quid?" he ejaculated.

Wilkins nodded.

"I was driven to it," he said bitterly. "If I hadn't settled with Levison, you can bet your boots he'd have made things warm for me, one way or another."

"The cad!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "The wotten, Hunnish cad! You were a feahful duffah to get in his gwip, Wilkins!"

"Don't rub it in, Gussy! I know I was a mad fool, and if ever I get clear of this beastly scrape, I'll have no more truck with Levison!"

Gussy's eyes gleamed.

"I can force him to return the money, which he won dishonestly, an' it can be replaced in the cash-box befoah the theft comes to light."

Wilkins laughed mirthlessly.

"You'll never get a brass farthing out of Levison!" he said. "He'll hang on to the tin tooth-and-nail. And it's no good exposing him, either. You'll only drag me down. We're quite helpless in that quarter."

"I am determined to get you out of this scwape, at all costs," said D'Arcy firmly. "Unfortunately, I haven't so large a sum as thwee pounds in my possesh at the pwesent moment. But I can collect it f'rom Tom Mewwy and some of the othahs who are pwetty flush. I'll waise it by to-morrow, at the latest, and put it back in the cash-box; and then, bai Jove, how is anyone to be the wisah?"

"It's—it's awfully good of you to do this for me, Gussy," said Wilkins, with emotion. "But—"

"But what, deah boy?"

"I don't know when I shall be able to pay you back."

"Nevah mind that now. Suffish unto the day is the evil thereof. You leave it to me, Wilkins, theah's a good fellah."

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I'll fix things up all wight. An' then, when the money's safely returned, you must make it up with Gwunday; you weally must, you know! Othahwise, you will have no studdy to go into, an' things will be downwight misewable."

"You—you're ready to overlook the fact that I've stolen money?" exclaimed Wilkins, half incredulously.

"Yaas, wathah! You acted undah gwave pwovocation, as they say in the police-courts. But I hope you won't foahget youahself so fah again."

"I won't!" said Wilkins fervently.

And he meant it.

CHAPTER 6.

The Supreme Sacrifice.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY rather enjoyed playing the role of a Good Samaritan. He bustled about with amazing energy for the next hour or so, in his endeavours to raise the three pounds which was essential to the welfare of Wilkins.

Naturally, the fellows were very chary about subscribing to a cause of which they were in complete ignorance. For obvious reasons, D'Arcy could not tell them the facts; but he waxed so eloquent on his mysterious mission that Tom Merry & Co. opened their hearts, and added between them a sovereign to the one that Gussy had already supplied as a basis of the collection.

The third pound wanted some finding; but Arthur Augustus was inexhaustible in his efforts, and an hour later the necessary sum had been duly collected. It only remained for Gussy to pay a surreptitious visit to Kildare's study, and replace the stolen money.

But that was easier said than done. The captain's study was not likely to be unoccupied at that period of the evening. Still, D'Arcy thought he might as well try his luck.

A shock awaited him when he reached Kildare's study—a shock for which he had been totally unprepared. A group of stern-faced seniors stood within, conversing in excited tones.

"It's been stolen, right enough," Kildare was saying. "Three quid in gold and silver! Now I come to think of it, a peculiar thing happened this afternoon. When I came in here to change my bat, I fancied I tripped over a boot or something that was sticking out underneath the table. I thought nothing of it at the time, but it's o' too probable that the thief, whoever he was, had been i' apted at my entry, and dodged under the table!"

"That's so," said Darrel gravely. "You'd better go and report to the Head, old man. The longer the delay, the less likely we are to nail the culprit!"

Kildare nodded, and swung out of the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy just had time to conceal himself in an adjacent doorway.

Here was a pretty go, he reflected, and no mistake! Just when the erring Wilkins was on the verge of being saved, the theft had been discovered! Fate could not have been more cruel.

To make matters worse, D'Arcy had no chance of slipping into Kildare's study, and replacing the money there and then, for Darrel and Rushden and Langton were there, still chatting over the dramatic discovery of the theft.

D'Arcy slipped from his hiding-place, and went in search of Wilkins, to acquaint him with the black news. Kildare, with Dr. Holmes close on his heels, passed the swell of St. Jim's as he lounged elegantly along.

He found Wilkins in the library, as usual. The Shell fellow looked up expectantly at D'Arcy's approach, but when he saw the expression on the Fourth-Former's face his jaw dropped.

"Hasn't it worked?" he asked anxiously.

Gussy shook his head.

"I waised the thwee pounds all wight, deah boy," he said; "but just as I was goin' to weplace it, the theft was dis-covahed, so it's no go. Kildare's fetched the Head, and I wathah think there'll be a geneawal assembly in Big Hall."

Wilkins went white to the lips. The toils were closing in upon him now with a vengeance. He would probably be brought out and cross-examined before the Head, and would find himself unable to brazen it out and act like an innocent person.

"Oh, what awful luck!" he groaned, in sheer anguish of spirit. "It looks as though I'm going to be bowled out, and sacked from the school! What ever shall I do?"

"Keep a stiff uppah lip, an' you'll win through all sowne," said Arthur Augustus kindly. "As a matlah of fact, I don't suppose you'll be questioned."

"I—I must brazen it out at all costs!" said Wilkins wretchedly. "Some fellows would be sacked without turning a hair, but in my case it would be different. It would kill my pater absolutely!"

"There's no earthly need to wowwy," said Arthur Augustus.

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st

"Keep amilin', deah boy! I don't think anythin' vewy dweadful is goin' to happen!"
At that instant Kildare put his head in at the doorway.
"Everybody is to assemble in Big Hall at once!" he announced.

D'Arcy linked his arm affectionately in that of Wilkins, and they left the library together. The corridors were full of fellows, all moving in one direction, and wondering what fresh breach of the rules had been perpetrated and discovered.

Dr. Holmes stood in solemn state on the raised dais at the end of the hall. He waited patiently until the last boy had taken his place; then he announced:

"My boys, I regret to have to make the statement that a serious theft has been committed in the school during this afternoon."

There was a stir among the vast assembly of fellows. They had expected trouble, but nothing of so sensational a nature. "Three pounds has been stolen from the cash-box of the senior games fund," the Head went on. "A most despicable robbery! It occurred whilst most of the senior boys were playing cricket. I now ask any boy or boys who can throw any light on the matter to step forward!"

No one stirred. In the great hall there was silence so profound that a pin might have been heard to drop.

"At what time approximately do you estimate that the theft took place, Kildare?" asked the Head.

"At about four o'clock, sir."

Dr. Holmes cast his eyes once more over the assembled throng.

"Was any boy in the Sixth-Form corridor at that hour?" he asked. "If so, I should like him to stand out!"

There was a stir in the ranks of the Shell, and George Alfred Grundy, very red in the face, shambled forward.

"Well, Grundy?"

"I walked along the Sixth-Form passage about four o'clock, sir," he said.

"Indeed! Did you see anybody?"

"Only Wilkins, sir," said Grundy, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

He had no desire to get Wilkins into trouble, but felt it was up to him to tell the plain, unvarnished truth.

"Wilkins, stand out!" commanded the Head.

With faltering steps, the fellow addressed made his way to the raised dais. He was confused and embarrassed, and his agitation was obvious to everyone.

"Why did you not come forward when I asked for the boys who were in the Sixth-Form corridor at four o'clock?" demanded Dr. Holmes sternly.

"I—I—" faltered Wilkins.

"You admit Grundy's statement to be correct?"

"Y-e-es, sir."

"What were you doing in the corridor at that time?"

"I was—was just taking a stroll round, sir," said Wilkins feebly.

"Really!" said the Head, with a touch of satire in his tone. "And what were you doing, Grundy?"

"I'd been to Rushden's study to get him his batting-gloves, sir."

"Is that correct, Rushden?"

"Quite, sir," answered the senior.

"Very well, Grundy; you may go to your place."

The Head then turned to Wilkins, who stood trembling before the dais, a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"I cannot help thinking, Wilkins, that your conduct is suspicious," said Dr. Holmes. "You are obviously frightened, and have failed to give me a satisfactory explanation of your presence in the Sixth-Form corridor this afternoon. Then, again, you failed to come out when I first asked. I am convinced that you know something of this affair, Wilkins!"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Wilkins wildly. "I'm innocent, sir—I'll swear to it! I didn't touch the money! I'm not a thief, sir! If any chap says I am, I'll dot him on the nose!"

"Enough!" said the Head austere. "Your hysterical manner tells heavily against you! If you were innocent of the offence which has been committed, your attitude would be totally different!"

Then Kildare stepped forward, and produced in dramatic fashion the blackest piece of evidence against Wilkins that it was possible to find.

"You might like to look at this handkerchief, sir," he said grimly. "I found it under the table in my study. It bears the initials 'G. W.' in the corner, and obviously belongs to Wilkins. As I told you when acquainting you of the theft, I tripped against the foot of a boy who was concealed under the table, and it's pretty obvious now that that boy was Wilkins!"

A breathless silence followed Kildare's relentless, incriminating words. The Head examined the handkerchief, and his face grew very grave.

"Further evidence would seem to be unnecessary," he said at length. "George Wilkins, I find it my unpleasant and painful duty to expel—"

Before the Head could finish the sentence, there was a sudden stir among the members of the Fourth, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his monocle streaming from its cord, his face tense and excited, fairly leapt from his place and ran up to the dais.

"D'Arcy!" thundered the Head, scarcely able to credit the evidence of his eyes. "Go back, sir! How dare you cause such a disgraceful and unparalleled disturbance?"

But the swell of St. Jim's stood his ground. Looking the Head unflinchingly in the eyes, he said very distinctly:

"I am the thief, Doctor Holmes!"

"D'Arcy!"

"I was stonay broke—I mean, hard up for cash, sir," went on Arthur Augustus. "I knew where the key of the cash-box was kept, and stole the three pounds, while most of the fellows were at cricket. I intended to sit tight 'an' say nothin', but I can't see anothah fellah suffah for a thing he nevah did!"

To say that the Head was amazed at this recital was to put it mildly. The fellows were amazed, too. D'Arcy a thief! To Jack Blake & Co., who were warmly and devotedly attached to the dandy of the Fourth the thing seemed incredible—a ghastly nightmare!

"It can't be true!" muttered Herries. "I'll never believe old Gussy's a thief—never!"

Dr. Holmes spoke again.

"But if you stole the money from the games fund, D'Arcy, as you say, how is Wilkins' handkerchief to be accounted for?"

"I must have bowvowed it frowm him," said the swell of St. Jim's readily, "an' forgotten to return it!"

Wilkins drew a deep, sobbing breath of relief. For a moment he forgot D'Arcy's danger in the knowledge that his own skin was saved. The fact that Arthur Augustus was making one of the biggest sacrifices it is possible for any boy to make did not dawn upon him until afterwards. All his thoughts centred upon the fact that his father would be saved the shame of knowing that his son was a thief.

The Head beckoned to Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Railton, who had been present at the proceedings, and conversed with them in low tones. Mr. Railton was seen to make some sort of an appeal, but the New Housemaster waved his arms protestingly, and rather a heated argument ensued. Finally, however, Mr. Ratcliff's words seemed to carry more weight with the Head, and, turning to Arthur Augustus, he announced:

"On your own confession, D'Arcy, you are a thief of the meanest and most despicable kind. It is hard to realise the fact, for I had always regarded you as a lad of the highest integrity and uprightness. No excuse, no justification can be found for your conduct, and you will be expelled instantly from the school!"

Silence, deep and impressive; and then Jack Blake sprang to the fore.

"It wasn't Gussy!" he exclaimed in a voice that rang through the great hall. "It's unfair and unjust to sack him! He couldn't have done such a thing!"

"Silence, Blake!" rumbled the Head. "Resume your place at once! I have given my decision, and it is unalterable."

With head held high, and with firm tread, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy passed out of Hall. As he did so, somebody started a cheer, and the sound was taken up on every side. It was easy to see that the majority of fellows didn't believe D'Arcy had taken the money. They had known him long enough to know that, whatever he might be in the way of a silly ass, he was certainly not a thief.

The Head endeavoured to check the growing volume of cheers, but with scant success. The terrific demonstration continued until Arthur Augustus was lost to sight.

Then, when the noise had abated, Dr. Holmes turned to Wilkins, who had now completely recovered his self-possession.

"I am sorry there was nearly a miscarriage of justice, Wilkins," he said; "but the evidence against you was of the blackest kind until that wretched boy, D'Arcy, came forward and confessed. You are now freely exonerated from blame or suspicion, and may go back to your place."

Wilkins obeyed, feeling like a fellow in a dream. Even yet, he could not realise the magnitude of the sacrifice D'Arcy had made.

Dr. Holmes then addressed the school at large.

"I trust there will be no further demonstration of sympathy with the unhappy lad I have been forced to expel. I am aware that D'Arcy was a popular boy, who will be sorely missed by many of his schoolfellows; but it would be quite impossible for me to continue to harbour a thief in the school. You may now dismiss!"

Rank by rank, file by file, St. Jim's streamed out of Big Hall, tremendously excited by the turn events had taken.

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Most of the fellows inclined to the view that neither D'Arcy nor Wilkins was guilty, and that the theft had been committed by a third person, at present unknown.

Jack Blake and Herries and Digby were wild beyond measure. They determined to follow in their chum's wake at the earliest opportunity, and to proffer him gifts of money and food and clothing, in case he needed them. From what they knew of him, D'Arcy would not go home. He would endeavour to make some sort of a start in life off his own bat.

And, meanwhile, the juniors of St. Jim's were determined to move heaven and earth to establish his innocence.

CHAPTER 7.

Out into the Night.

DARKNESS, deep and impenetrable, had fallen when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his head still held erect, his gait firm and steady, passed out of the old gateway of St. Jim's, and tramped along the main road.

All was peaceful and serene, and the far-reaching range of meadows lay restful and still. But storm-clouds loomed blackly in the sky overhead, and Arthur Augustus set down the Gladstone bag he was carrying, and buttoned his raincoat tightly about his neck.

He did not regret the sacrifice he had so nobly made for another's sake. Expulsion was a far more terrible catastrophe in the case of Wilkins than in his own. The Wilkins family were impoverished and extremely sensitive, and the shock that would be occasioned had Wilkins been expelled would have been well-nigh unbearable.

With D'Arcy it was different. Nearly all his relatives were on active service, helping to keep hostile Huns at bay. To the few that remained he would tell the truth—that he was not guilty—and they would believe him. The word of a D'Arcy was never doubted.

But Arthur Augustus did not mean to tell them in person. He would write to them, assuring them that there was nothing whatever to worry about, and would endeavour to get to London.

D'Arcy was a dreamer of dreams. His flights of fancy led him to conjure up vast and vivid possibilities with regard to the metropolis. There was a good deal of romance in D'Arcy's nature, and he pictured himself filling a high position in social life, surrounded by numerous friends, and living on the fat of the land.

How was he to get to London, he wondered. He had money, but not much. The needless collection he had made on behalf of Wilkins had been returned to the donors, and he himself had a sovereign, besides some loose silver amounting to about fifteen shillings. This, he reflected, would easily pay for his railway-fare, if he went by train, besides enabling him to keep his head above water for a few days, at least.

"It would be wisah not to go fwom Wylcombe," he murmured. "They would wecognise me at the station, and pwobably detain me, thinkin' I'd wun away. I think I'll walk into Wayland, an' go fwom theah."

He quickened his step, for the rain had begun to descend—slowly and steadily at first, but soon resolving itself into a pitiless, drenching torrent.

The way was dark, and not a soul seemed to be abroad in the first sweep of the storm.

But suddenly a burly form loomed up from the grassy bank at the side of the road, and a coarse, harsh voice exclaimed:

"Goteher! Goteher, by Jimmy!"

Simultaneously a heavy hand descended upon D'Arcy's shoulder. "Got any tin on yer?" the voice went on. "If you 'ave, jest you 'and it over, pretty smart!"

Arthur Augustus handed over—not the tin, but a sharp blow between the eyes, which made the ruffian reel.

"Take that, you uttah wottah!" he panted. "How dare you molest me in this wuffianly mannah?"

The gentleman of the road had the wind temporarily taken out of his sails; but he was on his feet again the next moment, and going for Gussy like an infuriated bull.

The expelled junior kept his head and hit out furiously. But this time the tramp put up a strong resistance. One of his big, swarthy hands clutched at D'Arcy's

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gold watch. His fancy waistcoat was ripped open, and the next instant the assailant had both the gold hunter and the chain in his possession.

Then he came on again at D'Arcy, who could see the venomous, vindictive gleam in the man's eyes.

D'Arcy was not a coward. Far from it. But it suddenly occurred to him how terrible would be his plight if this waster overpowered him on the high road.

He might lie helpless, unconscious, for hours, and his chances of reaching London would be considerably decreased.

So, although it went against the grain to have to do it, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took to his heels, leaving the tramp in possession of his gold watch.

He did not pause until he arrived, panting and breathless, at Wayland Junction.

The London train—the last one that night—was already puffing its way into the terminus, and D'Arcy hurried into the booking-office for his ticket, thanking his lucky stars that the vagabond he had encountered had not deprived him of his money.

"Single to London, please—first-class!" said Arthur Augustus.

The booking-clerk eyed the rain-soaked junior superciliously.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "And where have you sprung from?"

D'Arcy stamped his foot impatiently.

"Pwaw do not delay! The twain is already in, and I must on no account miss it!"

The man chuckled.

"I guess you're supposed to be at school—what?" he said. "You've run away, I take it. In that case, I'm not going to take the risk of letting you have a ticket."

"Weally, you wottah—"

But even as D'Arcy spoke, the train which had been stationary during his conversation with the booking-clerk, glided out of the station. Arthur Augustus watched it with a sinking heart. He had missed it! What was to be done now?

Glaring angrily through his monocle at the clerk who had detained him, Gussy stepped out into the street. A couple of taxi-cabs were drawn up outside the station, the drivers each being inside, reading the latest edition of the evening paper by a flickering light.

D'Arcy approached the first of the two vehicles. He knew the driver well. It was Joe Edwards, whose taxi had been hired on numerous occasions by the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy wrenched open the door, and peered in.

"Joe!" he muttered.

The taxi-driver, a little man with a fat round face, rallied sharply at the summons.

"Yessir! Why, 'pon my soul, it's Master D'Arcy! 'Ow come you 'ere, sir?"

"I am most anxious to get to London," was the breathless reply. "The quickah I get theah, the bettah I shall be pleased. I will make it well worth your while, Joe!"

Joe Edwards shook his head.

"Sorry, Master D'Arcy," he said. "Can't be did."

"Why not, pway?"

"Petrol won't run to it."

"Deah me! How vewy unfortunate!"

"Besides which," said the taxi-driver, peering closely at D'Arcy's dripping face, "it's easy to see as 'ow you've run away from school; an' I shouldn't like to get into no hot water for aidin' an' abettin' yer."

"Will your fwient take me?"

"I'm inclined to doubt it, sir. You might ax 'im. There's no 'arm in axin'."

But the other driver was loth to take on the transaction, for similar reasons to those of Joe Edwards. In taking a truant schoolboy to London at night, a taxi-driver would be running a serious risk.

"Then you cannot take me?" asked Gussy, his jaw dropping.

"Which I should like to more'n I could say," said Joe's friend, "but I dursn't."

"Then I shall have to walk it."

"Walk it, sir, on a night like this!" exclaimed Joe Edwards, aghast.

"I have no alternative," answered Gussy, a trifle wearily.

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OUT TO-DAY!



A couple of taxi-cabs were drawn up outside the station, the drivers inside, reading. D'Arcy approached the first of the two vehicles. He knew the driver well. "Joe!" he muttered. (See Chapter 7.)

"Go back to the school, like a sensible kid," said Joe, who was kindly enough at heart.

"But I haven't wun away, as ewewybody seems to think," said D'Arcy.

"Then wot's happened?"

"I was expelled."

"That's wuss still," was Joe's comment.

There was a pause, during which the driving rain forced an entry to D'Arcy's neck, causing him to gasp for a moment like a fish out of water. Then he said:

"Which is the nearest way to London?"

"Straight over the downs," said Joe Edwards, indicating the direction. "Then you'd ave to cross wot they calls the Devil's Ridge. It's well-nigh impossible in broad daylight, and sheer madness at night. Then you'd take the path to the right o' the first windmill you came to, an' that path'd bring you out on the main road. The signposts would do the rest."

"Thank you, Joe!" said Arthur Augustus. "What is the distance?"

"Forty mile all told, sir," said the taxi-driver. "You'll never do it."

"I've got to," answered D'Arcy simply. "So long, Joe!"

A moment later the darkness of the night had swallowed up Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he tramped northward.

Joe Edwards shook his head, slowly and sadly, saying to his companion:

"Which I should be werry much surprised, Jim, to see 'im get through on a night like this!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Devil's Ridge.

WILKINS of the Shell lay awake in his bed at St. Jim's, listening to the rain-drops against the window-panes, and thinking thoughts which were anything but pleasant.

He had descended to the lowest depths of selfishness in allowing the generous-minded Gussy to relieve him of the burden of guilt, and be driven from the school when all the time he was innocent as noonday.

Wilkins had had no peace since that memorable scene in Big Hall. Every minute since he had been tortured by thoughts of what D'Arcy had gone forth to suffer.

He was a coward, and he knew it. He hadn't the pluck and moral courage to go to Dr. Holmes and make a clean breast of the whole wretched business, even though he felt really and truly sorry for D'Arcy.

Anything was better than inaction in bed, and Wilkins felt a strong desire to get up and pace about the dormitory in his pyjamas.

Accordingly he tumbled out. A pall of blackness hung

over the main gangway between the beds, and he commenced striding to and fro trying to disperse the thoughts which kept hammering at his fevered brain.

Suddenly he stumbled over a slipper which lay in his path. He tried to save himself from falling, but failed, and landed with a crash in the middle of the dormitory.

He sat bolt upright, unhurt beyond a bruise or two, and listened intently. There was a rustling sound from one of the beds, and a voice—the familiar voice of George Alfred Grundy—exclaimed:

"Who's that?"

"Wilkins," replied the junior.

"What's the little game?"

They were the first words Grundy and Wilkins had exchanged for days past.

"I was out of bed, and tripped over a confounded slipper!" said Wilkins.

"But what—"

Grundy suddenly sat up in his bed and listened. From the landing without came the unmistakable sound of murmuring voices.

"What's that row?" asked Grundy. "Better go and have a look. It might be a raid by a rival dorm."

Wilkins hastened out on to the landing, and encountered three juniors, fully dressed, even to their raincoats, and bearing bulky packages. They were Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby, of the Fourth.

"What's on?" inquired Wilkins.

Jack Blake gave a violent start, but regained his composure at once on sighting the Shell fellow.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Well, we're going on the track of Gussy. He's pretty certain not to have gone home, and I expect we shall run across him in the neighbourhood. He's bound to be wanting grub and other things. Poor old Gussy!"

The chums of the Fourth were looking unusually dejected, and no wonder. Arthur Augustus had been a great favourite with them, and a good chum, despite his fussiness on the subject of apparel. They missed him sorely, and were determined to see that he should not suffer in his contact with the outside world.

"Can I come?" asked Wilkins.

He hated the idea of D'Arcy's whereabouts being discovered, lest the swell of St. Jim's, sick with himself for having made the sacrifice, should regret his action and return to St. Jim's to make a clean breast of the games-fund affair.

But Wilkins felt that he would not be able to endure the suspense of lying in bed, wondering how the search-party was faring. He must accompany Jack Blake & Co., or the harrowing suspense would drive him mad.

"Count me in!" he said appealingly. "I don't feel much like sleep, somehow, and should be awfully glad to take a hand."

"All serene," said Jack Blake, on reflection. He saw no harm in having an addition to the little party.

"I'm coming, too!" came a voice suddenly.

Unobserved, Grundy had stolen out to the landing, and divined what was afoot.

"That's all right," said Jack Blake. "Buck up and dress, you two, and don't wake the whole blessed mob up, for goodness' sake!"

Grundy and Wilkins promptly went back into their dormitory, dressing as hastily as the intense darkness permitted.

"It's only right for you fellows to know," said Jack Blake, when the two Shell fellows reappeared, "that you're running

a big risk in coming with us. We haven't anybody's permish, and if we get nailed it'll mean a pretty hefty flogging all round."

"That's all right," said Grundy. "Lead on, Macduff!"

Jack Blake led the way down the stairs and along the corridor to the box-office window. This the leader of the expedition opened, and a terrific gust of wind swept through into the juniors' faces.

Digby looked ill-at-ease.

"Do—do you really think the game's worth the candle?" he said nervously.

"Of course it is!" was Jack Blake's fierce retort. "We've got to find poor old Gussy, and give him some grub, and find out what he's going to do."

"And to tell him we know it's all rot about having stolen the three quid," added Herries. Then, by way of an afterthought, he said wistfully:

"I wish we'd brought Towser!"

"I don't," said Jack Blake promptly. "The beastly brute would give the game away in a jiffy with his confounded growling!"

"Buck up!" urged Grundy. "Every minute may be precious, you know."

As he spoke, there was a sound of footsteps advancing down the corridor, and the juniors turned pale.

"A master!" was the thought which leapt instinctively into their minds.

Then Jack Blake, who was the first to muster sufficient courage to face the intruder, gave a deep gasp of relief.

"Wally D'Arcy!" he exclaimed.

The midnight prowler was, indeed, the minor of Arthur Augustus. Wally had been lying awake for hours in his bed, unable to refrain from thinking of his major, and wondering how he was faring in the fierce storm which made the towering Sussex pines groan aghast, and raged over the countryside with demoniacal violence.

As in the case of Wilkins, Wally had been unable to endure the suspense any longer. He had risen and dressed, and intended to break bounds in order to try and ascertain his brother's whereabouts. For Wally, scamp and scapegrace though he was, was passionately and devotedly fond of Arthur Augustus; he would readily have laid down his life for his brother.

Great was Wally's surprise and pleasure on encountering Jack Blake & Co.

"You're going out after Gussy?" he asked.

Jack Blake nodded.

"You silly young ass!" he growled. "You gave us the fright of our lives! Get back to bed, unless you want us to wipe up the floor with you!"

Wally stood his ground with calm defiance.

"I'm jolly well coming along, or I'll know the reason why!" he said determinedly.

"Rats! You'll be blown away!" said Grundy.

"Oh, let him come!" Herries put in. "Hang it all, he's Gussy's brother, and just as anxious about him as we are!"

"All serene, then," said Jack Blake.

One by one, the little party of six clambered through the open window into the quadrangle.

"What a night!" muttered Digby. "Goodness knows how we're going to get on Gussy's trail. It's raining cats and dogs, and black as pitch."

"We can make inquiries, can't we, fathead?" said Jack Blake. "We'll go to Rycomb Station first, and on to Wayland if we hear nothing there."

It was difficult work, shinning over the school wall in the

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darkness; but the juniors surmounted it successfully, and then set out along the rain-sodden road.

It was scarcely likely that they would be challenged by a master or prefect now. No one would dream that six juniors would dare to do battle with the elements on such a night, when it was dangerous even to walk along a road, lest an adjacent tree should come crashing down, to maim or even kill the unfortunate pedestrian who chanced to be passing.

The search-party reached Rylcombe Station in half an hour. In ordinary circumstances the distance could be traversed in a few moments.

The station was in darkness, the last local train having left some time since; but a sleepy porter still lingered in the vicinity of the booking-office, taking a final survey of the premises with an electric torch before retiring for the night.

"Seen anything of a young, dandified-looking jesser?" was Jack Blake's greeting.

The railway servant swung round, startled. Then, as he flashed on his torch, and saw who the intruders were, he gave a surly growl.

"Which you young rips orter be in bed hages ago!" he said, with emphasis.

Jack Blake snorted impatiently.

"Have you, or have you not seen D'Arcy at all this evening?"

"The bloke with the monocle?"

"Yes, yes! Have you seen him?"

"Come to think of it, I 'ave."

"When?" asked Blake eagerly.

"Larst Friday arternoon. He called fer a parcel which was a-waitin' 'ere for 'im."

Jack Blake felt inclined to hurl himself upon the sleepy old porter, and dribble him into the nearest puddle. But he restrained himself with an effort, and strode away, followed by his companions.

"No go!" said Herries gloomily. "We've got to hoof it to Wayland now. Let's hope we get better luck."

The juniors proceeded on their way in silence. It was advisable not to speak, for the violence of the wind deprived them of breath.

At Wayland Junction the booking-clerk, who was just leaving the station, enlightened them somewhat.

"A boy answering to your description applied to me for a ticket to London while the last train was in," he said. "I refused him, thinking he had run away from school. Am I right?"

"Not exactly," said Jack Blake. "He was expelled for something he never did. We're anxious to find him and help him."

"Then I'm sorry I can't help you, young gentlemen. I don't for the life of me know which way he went after leaving the station."

Jack Blake thanked the man, and then it occurred to Wally D'Arcy to question the taxi-drivers.

"I know the cove you mean," said Joe Edwards. "He wanted me to take 'im to London in this 'ere taxi, but thinkin' he'd run away from school, I didn't want to load myself up with the responsibility. So he went off on foot."

"On foot!" echoed Wally D'Arcy. "You mean to say he's going all the way to London on Shanks' pony?"

"I s'pose so," said the taxi-driver. "If he gets over the Devil's Ridge, that is. This is 'ardly the sort o' night for takin' risky walks like that. Still, the young gent wouldn't listen to reason, so I 'ad to let him go."

"My hat!" muttered Wally. "Come on, you fellows! Gussy's gone over the Downs, and he'll have to cross the Devil's Ridge. Who knows but what he hasn't come a cropper and hurt himself?"

"Let's put the pace on," said Jack Blake, who had overheard the latter part of the conversation.

But to put the pace on, or to acquire any pace at all, was easier said than done. The storm had gathered in momentum; it lashed the countryside in its inexorable fury. Tiles

came clattering down from roofs; inn-signs swayed and cracked menacingly; and the rain still came lashing down, as if chastising the earth and the green meadows.

Far away in the distance loomed the massive range of Downs. The way was dark and dangerous, and the juniors had fears for the safety of Arthur Augustus. Supposing he were overcome with the pangs of hunger, or had missed his footing in one of the precipitous places? The thought was terrible.

Conversation flagged as the little party struggled gamely along. Wilkins had scarcely spoken a word throughout. He was on tenterhooks, gripped in an alternation of hope and fear. If D'Arcy were found, he was pretty certain to want to come back to the school to tell the truth; and then it would be Wilkins' turn to face the dread fate of expulsion. The wretched junior clenched his teeth tightly together, hoping and praying that, by some means or other, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had put twenty or thirty miles between himself and the loyal chums who were hastening to his succour.

Up to the last week, Wilkins had usually been in the background so far as exciting events at St. Jim's were concerned. And now, suddenly and without warning, Fate had accorded him the title-role in one of the greatest dramas in the school's history.

How was it all going to end?

CHAPTER 9.

The Splendid Coward.

DARK and dreary were the Downs in the grip of the storm. In the midst of the wind and the rain the members of the search-party proceeded.

And as they went, the storm reached its zenith, and terror fell like frost on their hearts, for they realised, even the bravest among them, the hopelessness of it all. How could they possibly trace Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on a night like this? It was as much as they could do to look after themselves.

The food they carried was rain-soaked and useless. They cast it from them, and would have abandoned the hopeless quest there and then and returned to their warm beds at St. Jim's, but nobody dared suggest such a scheme, lest he should be considered chicken-hearted by his fellows.

The darkness was so intense that it was necessary for the juniors to keep within arm's-reach of each other. They could scarce see a yard in front of them.

"We shall come to the Devil's Ridge soon!" shouted Jack Blake. It was necessary for him to shout, for the wind raged wildly.

"We must walk two abreast, then," rejoined Herries, whose whole frame quivered in spite of himself.

"Why do they call it the Devil's Ridge?" asked Wally D'Arcy. "I've heard of the Devil's Dyke, near Brighton, and the Devil's Punch Bowl, somewhere in Surrey; but this seems different."

"It's a tricky path connecting the hill we're on now with a much higher one," explained Digby. "Years ago, a young farmer attempted to cross it on just such a night as this. He lost his footing, and pitched headlong into the valley."

"Grooh!" shivered Grundy.

"His body was found next day," continued Digby solemnly. "The poor chap was smashed about something awful. They've called the path the Devil's Ridge ever since."

"And Gussy's crossed it!" panted Wally D'Arcy.

"We hope so," answered Jack Blake gravely.

As the juniors proceeded, so the way became more difficult. That part of the Downs was seldom frequented, save by shepherds. If anyone meditated tramping to London town, as Arthur Augustus had done, a great many miles were saved by crossing the Downs at that point, the main road and the railway each taking a somewhat circuitous course.

The little search-party began to regret having ventured out amid the tameless elements. For all the good they were doing Arthur Augustus, they might just as well have slept the sleep of the just at St. Jim's. The ungovernable tempest had caused them to be drenched almost to the bone. They were weary, worn, and stricken with hunger. The whole thing resembled a ghastly nightmare.

Wilkins suddenly stopped short and pulled out his watch. By holding it close to his face, he was just able to make out the time.

It was one o'clock.

Two more hours, and the first rays of dawn would filter through the clouds, lighting up the scene, and bidding the wanderers be of good cheer. Two more hours! But what a lot could happen in that period! A hundred tragedies might occur, a hundred changes come into being. To a

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!"

fellow playing cricket at the nets, two hours are as two minutes, so swiftly do they glide past. But to Jack Blake & Co., wanderers on the storm-swept hillside, it was an eternity.

Wilkins replaced his watch, and gave a start. He had been lost in reflection for a moment, and the others, he supposed, had gone ahead, for he heard no sound save that occasioned by the rushing wind and the never-ceasing rain.

Then, faintly through the storm, came a cry, not far distant from where Wilkins stood, irresolute.

"Hallo-o-o!"

Wilkins responded at once, and, after a few seconds had passed, Grundy was at his side.

"Is that you, Wilkins?"

"Yes."

"Where are the others?"

"Goodness knows! Gone on in front, I suppose?"

"Shall we shout?"

"Might as well."

The two Shell fellows sent up a tremendous shout, exercising the full force of their lungs.

They waited in an agony of suspense for the answer. None came. A mackling gust of wind blew right into their faces.

Again they shouted, and again met with no response.

"We—we're cut off!" muttered Grundy. "Come on! Let's try and catch up with them. No good standing here!"

With grim faces the two juniors strode along, peering through the darkness to see if they could discern their comrades. They continued to shout at intervals, but no reply came.

Grundy was leading, and he walked recklessly, carelessly, indifferent to the fact that his position was one of peril. Wilkins opened his mouth to caution him, but the words were uttered too late. He heard his companion stumble, and give a sharp affrighted gasp; there was a sudden crashing sound, and the next instant George Wilkins was alone on the hillside.

What had happened? Where was Grundy?

Wilkins stood still, his heart turned to stone. Fortunately for himself, he did not move forward, or he would have shared Grundy's fate.

The junior had matches in his pocket. He struck one, and peered in front of him. The wind extinguished the light almost immediately, but not before Wilkins had seen all he wanted to see. Grundy had fallen—fallen from the top of the Devil's Ridge!

Wilkins almost fainted with fear. Digby's story of the unhappy farmer rose vividly before him. Had Grundy shared a similar fate? Had he gone hurtling down into the valley below, never to see another sunrise? Wilkins shuddered.

As he stood there, shaking in every limb, within a yard of the fatal spot, the awful truth rose before him that he had parted with Grundy on anything but friendly terms. He had done Grundy a grievous wrong. Was he never to be given a chance of atonement?

Then of a sudden came a faint sound from below. Wilkins strained his ears to listen.

"Help! Help!"

The voice was Grundy's. He was, at least, still in the land of the living, and Wilkins offered up a silent prayer to Heaven in his relief.

Grundy! Grundy, old chap, where are you?"

"Hanging on for my life!" came the ominous reply.

It was easy now to guess what had happened. In falling, Grundy had clutched at a projecting root about half-way down the slope. He had already been holding on for some moments, and it was inconceivable that he would be able to retain his grip much longer.

Wilkins looked round wildly. A black-looking structure a few yards distant encountered his gaze, and he gave a cry of hope. He recognised the place at once as being a shepherd's hut. It was unoccupied, he knew; nevertheless, he thought he might be able to find a length of rope within wherewith to assist Grundy; and with all speed he dashed into the ramshackle old building.

Striking another match, he glanced about him, and behold, to his intense delight, the very thing he was looking for!

Snatching up the coil of rope, he hurried out into the open again, and came to the edge of the ridge.

"Hang on, Grundy!" he shouted, above the roar of the wind. "I'm slinging a rope down to you!"

So saying, he lowered the rope, hoping with all his heart that Grundy would have sufficient power and presence of mind to grasp it.

His hope was rewarded. The rope suddenly became taut, and Grundy's voice exclaimed from below:

"All serene!"

Then, hand over hand, Wilkins slowly hauled up the rope, with Grundy clinging tenaciously to the end.

The work was exhausting, for Grundy was no feather. THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 438.

weight. Moreover, Wilkins was already worn with fatigue and rendered sick and dizzy by exposure.

The perspiration stood out in great beads on his forehead as he continued to pull.

Inch by inch, higher and higher, Grundy ascended to safety. Wilkins was almost done, but he kept on keeping on, knowing that a human life depended on his tenacity and endurance.

How he was going to haul Grundy successfully over the edge he knew not. It seemed a superhuman task. But he lay face downwards on the slippery soil, and tugged and heaved in a frenzy of desperation.

Even in that awful moment Grundy could not help rejoicing. He had imagined, when he had clutched the root on the slope and shouted for help, that it was a forlorn hope, and had been surprised and delighted when the rope came dangling down. He blessed Wilkins at that moment—blessed him and loved him—for few fellows would have faced so fierce an ordeal as that with which he was confronted.

Wilkins felt himself slipping forward, nearer and nearer to the edge of the Devil's Ridge, but he cared nothing. All his thoughts, all his energies, were directed towards rescuing Grundy, the fellow he had wronged. His arms felt as if they were being wrenched from their sockets, but still he kept pulling with the same indomitable pluck and superb courage.

"Good!" panted Grundy, at last. "I'm all serene now, thanks to you, Wilky! You're a brick! You're one of the best! I shall always—"

Grundy stopped short, white to the lips with an unshapen fear. He himself had gained a footing on the ridge; but Wilkins, without warning, slipped on a treacherous piece of ground on trying to regain his feet—slipped, and went crashing down into the valley below.

His hands clenched convulsively, his lips quivering, Grundy stood still and listened, straining every nerve to do so.

But no sound smote his ears save the fierce surge of the angry tempest.

CHAPTER 10.

The Great Adventure.

GREY dawn spread over the countryside, turning all the dew to splendour.

For ninety minutes—ever since Wilkins had vanished from sight as completely as when the earth opened and swallowed up Korah—Grundy had roamed over the range of Downs, seeking for help.

Grundy possessed pluck in plenty. His fearlessness was his redeeming characteristic in the eyes of St. Jim's. But he knew that to attempt to descend into the valley would be merely to imperil his own life without being any material advantage to Wilkins—if Wilkins was alive, that was. Grundy ruminated on the fate of the former, and a cold fear gripped his heart.

It was too much to hope that Wilkins had encountered and clung to something during his descent. Even if he had, it was highly improbable that he had maintained his hold all this time—for a solid hand and a half.

Grundy's primary object in roving the Downs was to find Jack Blake & Co., and acquaint them with the gruesome details of the catastrophe. Then, when all together, they might be able to hit upon some means of going to Wilkins' succour.

The advent of daylight came as a boon and a blessing to Grundy. He was able to ascertain his position, and immediately made tracks for a shepherd's hut he espied, half a mile away from that which stood near the Devil's Ridge.

The sound of voices came from within, and Grundy promptly pushed open the door and entered.

A strange sight met his gaze. Sitting huddled up before a blazing peat-fire were Blake, Herries, Digby, and Wally D'Arcy. At the rude table sat Old Dan, the shepherd. He had been ministering to the juniors' wants, for empty cans which had contained hot tea, were on the table.

The little band of refugees leapt to their feet with one accord on Grundy's entry.

"Here you are!" exclaimed Jack Blake, in intense relief. "We hunted for you high and low, but had no luck. Then, an hour ago, we came to this shanty, and Old Dan's been making us comfy."

"It's ripping!" said Digby. "Not such a bad night's adventure, after all. Why, good heavens, Grundy! What's the matter?"

For the burly Shell fellow was pale as death, and would have fallen had not old Dan's arm shot out to support him.

"Wilkins!" Grundy managed to utter.

"What's happened?" exclaimed Jack Blake, who had expected to see Wilkins in the doorway.

"He's fallen—fallen from the top of the Devil's Ridge!"

"Then," said old Dan solemnly, "he's a goner, young gents, sure enough. No one never falls off there but what they don't perish. There was old Farmer Rankin—"

Jack Blake turned on the old man swiftly.

"There may be a chance," he said. "We're going to see, anyway. Look, it's light now, and the danger is minimised. Have you a rope long enough to reach right down into the valley?"

"I 'ave," answered the kindly old shepherd—"leastways, I've got several coils, an' if they're tied together they'll answer the purpose."

"Then buck up, and we'll go and find out what's happened to poor old Wilky."

"It was for my sake he did it," said Grundy, in tones vibrant with emotion. "I had come a cropper myself, and he hauled me up with a rope. I had the good luck to break my fall half-way down with some roots. When he'd got me up to safety again he went over himself. Oh, it's too awful for words! I shall go mad, I think!"

"Rot!" said Jack Blake. "We don't know what may have happened until we actually see for ourselves. Wilky may be as right as rain."

But Grundy was silent. Like Rachel of old, he mourned, and would not be comforted.

After what seemed an age, they reached the scene of the catastrophe, and old Dan, shading his eyes with his gaunt hand, peered down into the valley. Two hours had now elapsed since Wilkins had disappeared from sight. Was he still lying down below, unconscious, or had the lamp of life flickered out for ever?

"Can you see anything, Dan?" asked Jack Blake hoarsely.

"Is Wilkins—" began Grundy. Then his voice failed him, and he remained silent, turning his haggard face in mute appeal to the grey sky.

As if in answer to Grundy's prayer, the old shepherd said, excitedly:

"To be sure, I sees 'im! An' he bain't dead, neither, more's the wonder! He's beckoning to me for help."

"Lower the rope, Dan," said Wally D'Arcy, who, although the youngest, was the most self-possessed of all the juniors.

"But Wilky may not be able to hang on," said Jack Blake. "One of us had better go down. Hang it all, I will!"

And Blake insisted upon having one end of the rope tied round his middle.

This done, he nerved himself for the descent.

It was a risky proceeding, but Jack Blake never stopped to count the cost. Had the rope snapped, he would have been dashed into the valley below like Wilkins, with the possible difference that, whereas Wilkins was seemingly alive, he—Blake—might be killed.

Their faces white and anxious, the fellows on the ridge lowered the rope. Jack Blake's heart was thumping wildly as he neared the bottom. He was not thinking of himself, but of the helpless junior below.

Ten seconds more, and his feet alighted on the soft, treacherous soil, overlaid with fungus and dank reeds.

"Good for you, Blakey!"

The voice was that of Wilkins, though it was so faint and low as to be scarcely recognisable.

"Wilkins, old fellow! Are you much hurt?"

Jack Blake peered down into the pallid face of the Shell fellow, whose rescue of Grundy would stand out for ever as one of the most heroic deeds in the annals of St. Jim's.

"No bones broken," murmured Wilkins, forcing a smile; "but—"

"But what?" panted Blake.

"I'm going to be ill—very ill. I can feel it coming. How I managed to avoid breaking my neck or my back is a giddy miracle! I twisted my foot, and that was all. But since the tumble I've been lying here, and the storm made a sort of plaything of me. I'm chilled to the marrow, and I've got the shivers something chronic. I tell you, the last hour or two have been worse than a nightmare!"

"I can quite believe you," said Jack Blake solemnly.

He unfastened the rope, and made it tight round Wilkins.

"I'll hang on further up," he explained.

Then he signalled to those above to commence hauling.

A few moments later the rescue-work was complete. Wilkins, sick and dizzy with exhaustion and exposure, sank back on the ground in a swoon. The juniors regarded him anxiously.

"Better get the young gent along to the 'ut," remarked old Dan. "I'll soon put 'im to rights."

Many hands made light work, and Wilkins was soon stretched in front of the peat-fire in the shepherd's hut. Old Dan forced some brandy between his lips, and after a time the junior recovered.

"Wilky, old man!"

George Alfred Grundy was on his knees before his plucky rescuer.

Wilkins raised his haggard face, and a wild light shone in his eyes.

"Don't!" he muttered faintly. "Don't talk to me! I'm not worth it!"

"Not worth it!" ejaculated Grundy, in astonishment. "Why, you've acted like a giddy hero! I'll never forget what you did for me a few hours ago—never!"

"The question is, how are we going to get back to St. Jim's?" asked Wally D'Arcy.

Digby went to the door.

"I'll trot along to Wayland Station and fetch the taxi man," he said. "It's getting on for five o'clock, and he's pretty certain to be up and doing."

So saying, he strode out of the hut.

Some time later the taxi arrived. It drew up on the road several hundred yards distant, and the juniors were obliged to carry Wilkins to it.

Old Dan had insisted on wrapping a warm blanket round the hapless Shell fellow, and he accompanied the strange procession to the vehicle.

Jack Blake took something small and shiny from his pocket. He endeavoured to press it into the old shepherd's hand, but old Dan shook his head.

"Thank'ee kindly, young master," he said, "but I never lent a 'and with the idea of gettin' money for it."

"But your hospitality—" protested Blake.

"You was welcome to it, an' more," said old Dan. "I'd do much for the likes o' you an' that pore feller there."

He indicated Wilkins, who was being assisted into the taxi, while Joe Edwards, the driver, stood gaping in open-mouthed surprise.

"Well, if you won't take money, I insist upon you taking this!" said Jack Blake.

And he thrust into the old man's hand a massive silver watch.

Old Dan hesitated; but he did not wish to offend the junior, and accepted the watch, touching his forelock respectfully as he did so.

"It's werry kind o' you, young sir," he said gratefully. "I shall be able to see the time o' nights now. An' if ever you or the other young gents is passin' this way agen, don't forget to look me up for a cup o' tea an' a chat."

Jack Blake promised he would do so, gave the old shepherd's hand a tight grip, and squeezed into the taxi with the others. Taxi's are not made to accommodate six, but Wally D'Arcy perched himself in the front beside Joe Edwards, and the vehicle rattled off towards St. Jim's.

The summer sun streamed down in all its resplendent glory, the birds poured out their morning anthems with fine, fearless courage. The world had awakened in majestic splendour after the storm.

Nevertheless, the hearts of Jack Blake & Co. were heavy, and a cloud hung over their minds. They had failed to find Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; and Wilkins, who had gone so gamely to Grundy's rescue, was ill, and spent, and feeble. He became worse and worse as the journey proceeded, and a sinister terror gnawed at the juniors' heartstrings.

Was it possible that George Wilkins was about to enter upon that sleep from which there is no awakening?

CHAPTER 11.

Wilkins Plays the Man,

"WHAT the merry dickens?"

Kildare of the Sixth stopped short in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's.

The rising-bell was clanging out its notes on the fresh morning air, and Kildare had got up ahead of it, with the intention of taking a dip in the sparkling waters of the Ryll. He was in flannels, and a towel was slung over his shoulder.

The captain of St. Jim's halted in amazement as the taxi drew up at the school gates. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes. Was it possible that a party of juniors had possessed the brazen effrontery to go for a jorride in the early hours of the morning, before the others were astir?

But the grave look on Jack Blake's countenance as he stepped out of the vehicle convinced Kildare that something was wrong. He hastened to the gates, and bade Taggles unlock them at once.

"Blake!" he exclaimed. "What is the meaning of this?"

The junior explained, clearly and concisely. He admitted that he and his chums had broken bounds, and told the story, dramatic in its simple brevity and directness, of how Wilkins had, in saving George Alfred Grundy, come a cropper himself.

"He's ill," Jack Blake concluded; "dangerously ill! Will you help me to get him up to the samy at once?"

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Kildare nodded. He did not stop to ask a lot of needless questions, as many would have done, but at once lent a hand with Wilkins, who had relapsed into unconsciousness again.

It was the work of a few moments to relieve the unfortunate junior of his wet garments, and to place him between the warm, well-aired sheets. Just as the task was completed the door of the sanatorium opened, and Marie Rivers came in. Marie was an early riser.

"Good gracious! What is the matter?" she exclaimed.

"Wilkins is ill, poor fellow, through exposure. Will you remain with him while I go into Rylcombe on my bike for the doctor?"

Marie nodded, and Kildare left the room with Jack Blake.

Then Marie Rivers took a chair by the bedside, and watched the stricken junior anxiously.

Wilkins gazed about him with a bewildered air. Then the sight of the school nurse seemed to relieve him, for he sank back between the sheets almost contentedly. His lips were moving, and it was obvious that he was trying to say something.

"What is it, Wilkins?" asked Miss Marie softly. "You have been through a terrible time, and must not excite yourself."

"But I want to say—"

"Yes?"

"Oh, there's lots of things I want to tell you, Miss Marie! I—I doubt if I shall ever see another sunrise at St. Jim's."

"Nonsense, my poor boy! You must be delirious."

"I'm not," said Wilkins, in a quietly firm voice. "I'm in earnest, every bit. It's about Gussy—"

Marie Rivers caught her breath.

"Go on!" she said. "Did you see anything of D'Arcy last night?"

"No. I don't know if he's alive, or dead. He set out on foot for London, but whether he got there or not I don't know. What I wanted to say was, that he was expelled for my sake!"

"For your sake?"

"Yes. He had no more to do with the game-fund robbery than you, Miss Marie!"

"But what—"

"I was the chap who stole the three quid!"

Marie smoothed out the junior's pillow with deft fingers.

"Lie quiet," she said gently. "Your mind is wandering, and you do not know what you are saying."

"I've told you the plain truth, Miss Marie," persisted Wilkins, and his tone carried conviction. "Gussy has suffered for my sake. He knew what expulsion would mean to me, and he came forward to make a false confession. I—I had been gambling, and playing the giddy goat generally, and that was what led me to steal. In ordinary circumstances, I'd never dream—"

His voice failed him, and he said nothing for some moments. His throbbing head seemed to be on fire, and he saw again, as in a hideous nightmare, the awful past.

"The Head will have to know," he said, at length. "It can't be kept from him. I'm pretty certain I sha'n't get over this. I feel weaker every minute."

"Poor boy!" said Miss Marie.

Her long, dark lashes glistened with tears.

"You don't reproach me, Miss Marie?"

"Of course I do not. Hush! You must lie still now. The doctor is coming."

When the medico from Rylcombe had examined Wilkins, he shook his head gravely, and turned aside to speak to Dr. Holmes, who had followed him into the sanatorium.

"I can hold out very little hope for him," he said, lowering his voice. "The shock—mental and physical—the lad has sustained may prove too much for him."

The Head passed his hand over his brow.

"Poor lad!" he murmured. "I had better summon his father by means of a wire, had I not?"

"I hardly think such a course necessary at present," said the practitioner. "There is no immediate danger. Tomorrow, if he has a relapse, it would be advisable to notify his father, but whilst there is a chance that he will rally, I do not deem it advisable."

Then Marie Rivers drew the Head of St. Jim's aside, and told him of the confession Wilkins had made to her.

To say that Dr. Holmes was astonished is to put it mildly. The kind old gentleman was thrown completely off his balance, and grieved to think that he had been responsible for a miscarriage of justice.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What can have happened to poor D'Arcy? He may have been out in the awful storm which raged last night!"

"It is quite likely," said Marie Rivers. "Blake and some of his friends went to search for him—"

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"Yes, yes! I have learned full particulars of their escapade, and, in view of the fact that they have already been punished enough, I shall take no further action in the matter. But D'Arcy must be found at all costs. How utterly reckless of him to make such a sacrifice for the sake of another! And yet—and yet it was noble, too!"

"Very noble!" murmured Marie. Her eyes were shining. Henceforth, if Gussy returned safe and sound to St. Jim's, he would always be numbered among her favourites.

The Head quitted the sanatorium, leaving the doctor in attendance on Wilkins, and asking to be informed of any change in the patient's condition.

As Dr. Holmes rustled along the corridor to his own study, his brows contracted in a worried frown. Toby approached and handed him a telegram.

The Head tore it open with feverish fingers. Was further trouble to descend upon St. Jim's, disturbing the even tenor of its way?

The wire reassured him. It was from a gentleman with whom he was well acquainted—Mr. Ferrers Locke, the young and vigorous detective.

"Just met D'Arcy in London. Says he is expelled. Seems extraordinary, please instruct. Am detaining him at my rooms pending reply.—LOCKE."

Never did the Head reply to a telegram with so much alacrity as at that moment. On the prepaid form he pencilled the following:

"D'Arcy wrongly expelled. Send him back at once. Culprit confessed.—HOLMES."

Then the Head passed on to his study in a far more satisfied frame of mind than he had been in a few moments since.

CHAPTER 12.

Chums to the End.

THREE hours later, while morning lessons were still in progress, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lounged in at the old gateway of St. Jim's. He had experienced a terrible time the night before, though the storm had not been at its full height when he scaled the Downs, and he had managed to cross the Devil's Ridge in safety. When, after what seemed to him an interminable tramp, he had reached the metropolis in the morning, Ferrers Locke had borne down upon him, and had marvelled at Gussy's story that he had been expelled for theft. Ferrers Locke knew D'Arcy, and could not believe him to be guilty of so base an action. He, therefore, insisted on taking Arthur Augustus to his rooms, in order that he might dry his clothes and obtain food, for he was ravenous after his long pilgrimage.

The detective had then wired to Dr. Holmes, and on receiving the latter's reply that D'Arcy had been the victim of an injustice, he sent the junior back post haste to St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus could not understand it at all. He knew that Wilkins must have confessed, though what had induced him to think so he could not for the life of him comprehend. He was soon to learn.

The returned wanderer went first to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes received him in a manner full of self-reproach.

"D'Arcy, my boy," he said, extending his hand, "I have done you a grave wrong, and I ask your pardon for my hastiness in expelling you. I little dreamed, of course, that you would confess to an offence of which you were entirely innocent."

"That's all wight, air," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "All's well that ends well. Has Wilkins told you the twuth, air?"

"He confessed to Miss Rivers, from whom I gleaned full particulars. Poor boy! He has suffered acute mental anguish, and now he is prostrate in the sanatorium, hovering between life and death."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed D'Arcy, aghast. "How did that arise, sir?"

"During the night, Wilkins, in company with several other juniors, instituted a search for you. They reached a precipitous part in the Downs—the Devil's Ridge. I think it is called—when Grundy was unfortunate enough to lose his footing. He might have been dashed to death in the valley below had he not contrived to cling to some roots. Here he hung, in peril of his life, until Wilkins, in gallantly rescuing him, fell himself."

"Bai Jove! How awfully plucky!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in profound admiration. "I trust you will not think of expellin' him, Doctah Holmes, if—if he gets bettah?"

The Head smiled.

"In view of his frank confession, I shall be happy to say no more on the subject of that miserable theft. I shall, of course, explain to the boys that you are exonerated from all suspicion, but shall not divulge the identity of the actual culprit. Let us hope the poor lad will mend rapidly."

The Head's hope was well-founded. Wilkins survived the critical period of his illness, and the tide turned in his favour. This was due to two causes—the skilful, splendid nursing of Marie Rivers, and the fact that the affair of the theft no longer weighed upon the junior's mind. He was likely to be confined to his bed for some time, but that was only to be expected. The effects of that terrible night were not likely to wear off in the immediate future.

Wilkins was not the same. The same in outward feature, in colour of hair and eyes, but he was not the same in expression. He seemed a couple of years older. A wave had passed over his head, and he had come forth half-drowned. The eye had become more steady; lines had formed on his brow; his lips had lost their flexibility, and were closed and firm. It was obvious to all who saw him that he had emerged from his terrible ordeal a sadder and a wiser fellow, with far greater strength of character.

Fellows swarmed up to see him when he was pronounced sufficiently well for them to do so. But the visit he valued most was that of Grundy and Gussy, who came together.

Arthur Augustus cut short the junior's words of self-reproach, and, with a peculiar smile playing about his aristocratic features, took Grundy's hand and placed it in that of Wilkins, which lay on the coverlet.

"Now, you silly duffahs," he said, "I insist upon youah bein' firmah friends than evah! If you disobey me, Gwunday, I shall give you a feahful thwashin' heah an' now, and Wilkins shall have his dose when he gets bettah!"

Grundy laughed breathlessly. A wave of colour had mounted to his cheeks, making him look almost handsome at that happy moment.

"There's no need to press the point, Gussy," he said. "I don't think Wilky and I will fall out again in a hurry!"

"No fear!" murmured Wilkins, pressing his chum's hand hard.

"It was all a foolish misunderstanding," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You misjudged Gwunday, Wilkins. He was not responsible for spweadin' the tale that youah patah was in poor cires."

"I know that now," murmured Wilkins humbly. "If I'd known before, it would have saved me a good deal of torment."

"Levison was to blame," said Arthur Augustus. "Quite by accident I picked up this lettah. Wead it!"

Wilkins did so, Grundy looking over his shoulder. It was the letter which Levison's rascally cousin had written, telling of the poor circumstances of Mr. Wilkins.

"The cad!" exclaimed Grundy hotly. "To think that all this rumpus has been caused by Levison! What shall we do to the outsider?"

"Spare the rod this time," said Wilkins. "I'm not likely to chum up with Levison again. I've learnt my lesson, and I'm coming back to the old study again, if I may."

"Of course you may, you old duffer!" said Grundy, trying but clumsily to conceal his affection and regard for the fellow who had saved his life.

"That's settled, then," said Arthur Augustus, beaming upon the jubilant pair through his monocle. "Hallo, heah's Toby!"

The page-boy came in with a letter. It was addressed to Wilkins, and he recognised the paternal handwriting.

Like misfortune, joys never come singly. As if to crown the serene happiness in the heart of George Wilkins, came the following:

"My Dearest Boy,—You will, I know, be glad to hear that I have succeeded to the editorship of the paper. This post carries with it a substantial increase of salary, and your supply of pocket-money shall be trebled forthwith. Great news, is it not?—Your affectionate father, HERBERT WILKINS."

Wilkins gave a wild whoop of delight, and handed the letter to Grundy and Gussy, who congratulated him most heartily on his good fortune.

And so the clouds rolled by, heralding better and brighter days in store. There was very little fear of Wilkins ever going to the dogs, after all that had transpired. The bonds which bound him to George Alfred Grundy were renewed and strengthened; and he bore a lasting debt of gratitude towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who, with supreme unselfishness and true nobility of character, had made A Schoolboy's Sacrifice!

THE END.

(Another splendid story of Tom Merry & Co. next Wednesday, entitled "The Snob of the School." Order your copy early.)

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!"

BRIEF REPLIES & NOTICES To Readers of THE "GEM" LIBRARY.

Able Seaman J. Humphries, B 3, 4156, 14th Platoon, D Company, Anson Battalion, R.N.D., East Mediterranean Squadron, c.o., G.P.O., London, would be glad to correspond with girl readers of about 17-18.

P. Mudd, Drumpark, Dumfries, invites readers to join his first-class "Gem" and "Magnet" League.

Leonard Baskett, 15, Hall Street, Chelmsford, would like to hear from readers who have back numbers of the "B. F." 3d. Library for sale. Will pay half price.

C. Dagestine, 210, Garngad Road, Glasgow, wants to form a cycle club—girls and boys—in his district, and would be glad to hear from any likely member.

E. Bennett, 98A, Wycliffe Road, Battersea, S.W., wants to buy Nos 1—350 of the "Gem."

David Smith, 684, Govan Road, Govan, Glasgow, wants members for a "Gem" and "Magnet" Social League, open anyone in the U.K. Soldiers welcomed without payment of subscription. Stamped and addressed envelope, please!

F. Nightingale, Dennison Street, Queenstown, West Coast, Tasmania, would like to hear from his old friend, S. White, formerly of Armitage Road, East Greenwich.

T. W. Jamieson, 2, Grey Street, Norton-on-Tees, wants to buy the "B. F." 3d. Library issue entitled "The Film Detective."

R. W. Randall, 103, Whinbush Road, Hitchin, wants contributors to an amateur magazine. Stamped and addressed envelope, please?

H. C. Knight, 1a Ward, R.N. Hospital, Haslar, Gosport, would like to correspond with readers aged 17-18 in the Southampton district.

H. Roberts, 39, Fairview Road, Stamford Hill, N., wants to form a rowing club among readers in his district, and asks anyone interested to write to him.

The United Kingdom "Gem" and "Magnet" League has been formed for the purpose of sending copies of the papers to men at the Front. More members would be welcome. Secretary, 6, Brewery Street, Preston, Lancashire. London Representative: G. Bennett, 14, Noel Terrace, Forest Hill, S.E.

A. W. Willshe, 59, Skelton's Lane, High Road, Leyton, N.E., is anxious to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League in his district. Will those interested send stamped and addressed envelope, or call any evening after seven?

Signaller S. Scott, H.M.S. Bullwhale, c.o. G.P.O., London, who is serving on a mine-sweeper, would be glad to have copies of the Companion Papers.

A Canadian reader particularly wants to get Nos. 1, 3, 5, and 6 of the "Sexton Blake Library." Will anyone who has these numbers for sale write to the Editor, mentioning price.

Musician W. F. Clucas, 57 Mess, H.M.S. Revenge, c.o. G.P.O., London, would be grateful for back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet."

Droylesden Road A.F.C. (average age 16) want home and away matches in Manchester for next footer season.

G. Mitchell, 3, Neely Street, Belfast, wants more members (from anywhere in the United Kingdom) for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League, formed with the main object of sending parcels of papers to the Front.

Signaller James Walmsley, 24909, B Company 13th Battalion Manchester Regiment, M.E.F., Salonika, would be glad of copies of the Companion Papers.

Gunner Theodore Mitchell, 82759, A Battalion, 106th Brigade, 24th Division, B.E.F., France, asks for back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet."

Corporal Wallington, of the 3/5 Essex Regiment, thanks heartily all the many readers who replied to his appeal, and regrets that, owing to the number, he cannot possibly answer all.

Miss E. Booker, 60, Albert Road, Heeley, Sheffield, would be glad to hear of any "Gem" or "Magnet" League members up to the age of 18 on the Heeley side of Sheffield.

Alma C.C. (average age 12—14) want home and away matches within a 4-mile radius of Fulham. Hon. Sec.: M. Madie, 504, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.

A. R. Harriden, Station House, Sidley, Bexhill-on-Sea, wants to buy copies of the numbers of the "B.F." 3d. Library entitled "Britain Invaded," "Britain at Bay," and "Britain's Revenge."

(Readers will find a further List of Notices on cover, page ii.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 438.

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

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

This Week's Long Instalment
of a Magnificent New Serial
Story of Thrilling Adventure.

By DAGNEY MAJOR.

The Previous Instalments Told How

Mr. Thomas Whittaker, accompanied by his son Reggie, Jimmy Redford, Larry Burt, a Chinese servant named Sing Loo, Dr. Phenning, and a party of natives, of whom Phwaa Ben Hu, nicknamed Toothy Jim, is leader, sets out to explore Patagonia in search of a specimen of the giant sloth, which is believed to be still existent there.

The party reaches Patagonia, and fall into the hands of a race of giants. They are thrown into a cave containing a number of giant toads, against which they have to defend themselves for many hours. After a night of horror they are removed by the giants, who consider them to be in league with the gods, through the fact that they have preserved their lives against the deadly toads. Later, the party hold a council to devise some means of escape from the giants' city, when it is discovered that Sing Loo is gifted with the power to hypnotise. By skilful use of this they hope to escape.

(Now read on).

Sing Loo Experiments.

"Well," put in the doctor excitedly, "if Sing Loo can really hypnotise, what with the chloroform and the ether which, my dear Whittaker, you were thoughtful enough to bring, I begin to see daylight."

"So do I!" grinned Reggie, pointing to the guards outside.

"And they," chimed in Jimmy, with a grin that a shark might have envied, "will soon see night!"

"Of course," put in the doctor gravely, "we can try nothing until Larry is out of the wood. One attempt, and failure, would mean more hot lava than we could comfortably digest."

"How is old Larry?" asked Jimmy and Reggie together. For secretly they were both very anxious about the chum of whom they were so fond, but, boylike, they kept their anxiety to themselves.

"He's a bit better," said the doctor. "His pulse is less rapid and his temperature's dropped a bit. But he's by no means out of the wood yet. I hope by to-morrow morning we shall see a great improvement. But it'll be ten days, at least, before we can think of escaping. A sudden shock or change of temperature might prove fatal."

At that moment a great burst of hoarse, distant cries broke upon the ears of the prisoners. Every second the cries came nearer.

"What's that?" asked Mr. Whittaker, rising and going to the entrance of the house. At his first sign of rising and looking out of the doorway the guards instantly assumed a threatening attitude, and raised their spears. Mr. Whittaker did not cross the threshold, but looked across to the far side of the lake.

He saw a vast crowd of men and women giants, waving hands and shields in the air. Carried high in the air was a figure, clad in some long, flowing robe, whom the populace were evidently acclaiming as a hero. The procession passed

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from the leader's range of vision, but it was evident that they were coming nearer.

"I expect they're marching this way," he said to the others in the house. "They have to go round the river the long way, as they haven't yet mended the bridge that broke down yesterday."

Nearer and nearer grew the tumult and the shouts, till they drew up opposite the whites' dwelling.

The figure that was held aloft was none other than Toothy Jim. He was clad in a long robe, fashioned from grass and reeds, and it was evident that he was hugely enjoying the demonstration.

The yelling crowd lowered Toothy Jim, and, accompanied by two giant soldiers, he entered the expedition party's house, making his customary salaam to Mr. Whittaker as he entered.

The guards outside quickly dispersed the populace, and as soon as Toothy Jim was safe inside his guards left him and went outside.

"Now, then, Phwaa Ben Hu," said Mr. Whittaker, in his strange mixture of Patagonian patois and English, "tell us what's happened?"

Toothy Jim explained in his quaint way that he had met the priest whom he on the previous day had lassoed, and so saved from the lake of fire. Although the priest was furiously angry at having been thwarted of throwing Larry into the lava river, and had ordered the native's execution in the temple, the priest had been struck by the way in which the Great White Magician and Fire God—Dr. Phenning—had emitted smoke and fire and noise from a stick—the revolver—in the sacred building. The gods surely meant that the little copper-coloured man—Toothy Jim—was meant to live, so he had spared his life, but chiefly because Toothy Jim had that afternoon, after the whites had been installed in their house, saved the life of his little son.

And then Toothy Jim very modestly explained how he had saved the priest's little boy from being trampled to death by a huge animal who was a sacred guardian to the temple.

The great beast, which Toothy Jim likened to a rhinoceros, was accustomed to be fed by some of the children every day. It lived in a very stout compound, railed off from the temple by wooden palings and a solid stone wall. The boy had climbed on to the parapet, and, in holding out a dainty morsel of food to the creature, who was on the opposite side of the compound, slipped through the wooden palings—which were more than a foot and a half apart—and had fallen with a shriek of terror into the beast's lair.

Mad with rage, and scenting quarry, the mighty beast had charged at the boy; but Toothy Jim, with wonderful agility, and totally regardless of his own risk, jumped down into the compound and snatched the lad from the very jaws of the mighty brute as its teeth snapped together, missing the boy's toes by half an inch. Hence Toothy Jim was a hero, and had been raised to the dignity of wearing a long robe.

Mr. Whittaker praised the faithful native, who thought

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st

nothing of his escapade, and was glad to think that he would have Toothy Jim's cunning and resource to help them through the ordeal of escaping from the giant city.

Nothing more occurred that night, which was spent in sound slumber by all, except when they were taking it in turns to watch by Larry.

Next morning they were visited by an old priest, who gravely intimated that he was there to teach them their language. So it was very evident that the giant tribe meant to keep them in captivity for some time.

Sing Loo and the boys found their lesson very amusing, and more than once were sharply pulled up by Mr. Whittaker for laughing immoderately and for making faces at the old priest when he wasn't looking. Mr. Whittaker and the doctor paid most assiduous attention to their instructor, well realising how important it was to get some sort of smattering of the language.

Larry had taken a turn for the better, which greatly relieved the anxiety of everyone.

Some four days elapsed quite uneventfully, and the doctor and Mr. Whittaker were getting quite a smattering of words from their instructor, who came every day, and remained teaching them all the morning.

The old priest had a crude idea of drawing, which made matters easier.

Mr. Whittaker made a rough sketch of a giant sloth, and made it clear to the old priest that he wished to know what name the giant tribe called the beast.

His reverence at once replied, "Phaal-tal achta," which the doctor rightly interpreted as, "Mighty monster that lifts its neck to heaven."

It was evident, from what the priest made them understand by signs and grunts and words, that the giant sloth was either alive, or that one had certainly been seen living within recent memory.

The great brute was considered sacred to the giants, who kept its skin in the temple. Dr. Phenning tried with frantic eagerness to learn from the priest whether any white men had, within fairly recent years or recently, been seen by them. But the old man either pretended not to understand, or was obstinately determined to reveal nothing.

It was only because the doctor and Mr. Whittaker knew something of the Patagonian dialects that they were able to get a grasp of the giants' language, for the two tongues had many words, strangely enough, which resembled each other.

A further few days slipped away without any untoward incident happening. Larry was rapidly getting on the mend, and the doctor thought that they might venture to make plans for their escape without undue risk to the invalid.

All were getting tired of their confinement and weary of their enforced inactivity, save for an occasional trip round the wonderful Rock City with the usual guard of giants.

With keen eyes everyone had endeavoured to spot the entrance whereby they had made their first entry to the Rock City; but all the gates, of which there were six, were so alike that it was impossible to tell which one they had first come through.

Every time they passed the entrances they saw every gate guarded by four stalwart soldiers. How were they going to get past these huge men, even if they managed to trick and evade the vigilance of the soldiers around their house?

It was Sing Loo who suggested the dangerous but somewhat necessary experiment of seeing whether the soldiers who guarded their prison-house would succumb to his hypnotic influence.

The Englishman, the Chinaman, and Toothy Jim had made a common practice of treating their guards with as much respect and ceremony as would ensure the thanks and recognition of the big men.

One evening they had inveigled two of the guards inside their house, when the city was silent and its inmates wrapped in slumber. With every protestation of friendliness, the Englishmen received their guards, and while attracting their attention by showing them their clothes and some of the things rescued from their convoy, Sing Loo tried his hand at mesmerising the giants.

He succeeded beyond all their expectations. When the soldiers woke up from their trance or hypnotic slumber, they were very surprised, and not a little frightened; but when they convinced themselves that nothing evil had really happened to them, they laughed, and conveyed the idea that they must have accidentally fallen asleep. They then rejoined their comrades outside, placing their fingers on their lips, to signify to the whites that they must keep silent, or all would get into trouble.

"I think we shall be able to manage the guard on this side of the lake," said Mr. Whittaker, "for Dr. Phenning will make certain of a long, deep slumber by adding a little

chloroform after Sing Loo has done his part of the business. But the real work will begin when we tackle the guard at the city gates. One bungle, one slip, and the whole city will be roused. If we do get through, how on earth we shall manage if we can't find our convoy, I haven't any idea. We must just trust to luck. Anyway, we'll make a dash for freedom."

Flight!

They then proceeded to plan their details of escape. It was arranged that when the fateful hour came Dr. Phenning should look after Larry, and never leave the boy's side, in case, owing to sudden excitement, he should have a relapse; that Mr. Whittaker, under pretence of friendliness, should fetch inside the house two of the guards outside, and that Sing Loo should hypnotise them, and then Dr. Phenning was to administer a dose of chloroform to each of the soldiers, sufficient to render them helpless for some considerable time. The two other guards were to be treated in the same way. It was agreed that their dash for liberty should be made at about one o'clock in the morning—the hour when the city of giants was wrapped in sleep and silence, and when the moon would not be shining. The most difficult part of all would be to overpower the guards at the city gates, and open or climb over the great wooden barriers that shut off the Rock City from the outer world.

Firearms, because of the noise they would make, could only be used as a last resource.

Just as they had completed discussing these preliminary plans, the old priest who had been giving them lessons in his language entered the house. Outside, Mr. Whittaker noticed that there were several giants standing with litters, and the old priest made it clear that every one of the whites were to accompany him to some new destination.

Dr. Phenning carefully placed Larry in a litter, got in one himself, and all the others followed suit, save Toothy Jim, who walked.

Slowly the procession moved towards the temple; the crowds of the giant populace looking with curious gaze at the white people as they passed.

It was evident that something strange and novel was about to take place. In the distance, Mr. Whittaker could see a vast crowd of priests lined up within the outer precincts of the temple, where there was a new altar rigged up just outside the main entrance.

At a certain point on the top of the altar was an enormous mass of brass or gold (which metal Mr. Whittaker could not see from that distance), and smoke curled up from a big pile of fuel in the centre of the altar.

Neither Mr. Whittaker nor the doctor had brought their revolvers with them, and Reggie and Jimmy had not got theirs. And Toothy Jim had left behind his favourite lasso.

When the party were within the precincts of the temple, they saw, to their amazement, that several of the llamas and mules which belonged to their expedition were drawn up in front of the altar.

And then Mr. Whittaker knew that the very worst had happened—the giant priests were going to offer up as sacrifices the animals, which meant hope and salvation to the expedition party. And some of the mules were also evidently to be sacrificed, for a number of them had evidently been transferred from the place where they had seen them that morning, and had been brought to the city of giants.

Mr. Whittaker whispered to the doctor, whose litter was quite near his own, that something would have to be done to stop the fatal sacrifices.

Then the prisoners were assisted from the litters. When they came within the magic circle of the priests, their reverences all bowed to them, and a mighty shout went up.

Then suddenly there came a low, rumbling sound from under the ground on which they stood. It sounded ominous.

Reggie and Jimmy looked at Mr. Whittaker; even they knew what it meant. That rumbling meant earthquakes!

And then an extraordinary thing happened.

Suddenly the altar seemed to quiver. There was a crash, and the upper structure of the altar came down.

Yes, with a crash and a roar, the upper structure of the big altar came tumbling down. Two of the priests who stood beneath were struck by the falling debris before they had time to step aside. But their injuries were not serious.

Then came an appalling silence, broken now and again by those low, mysterious, subterranean rumblings.

A long, shuddering sigh of fear ran through the crowd standing round. Then Dr. Phenning did a bold thing. He took a few paces forward and held up his hand. A few in the crowd panicked and ran away. But the priests faced him and appeared to be ready for what the doctor had to say.

At last the British doctor spoke. Fortunately, among the words he had learnt from the giant instructor was "fire!"

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and "earth," and somehow or other, what with his rapid gestures, though slight command of their language, he made the priests understand that fire and lava rivers might play havoc with all unless precautions were taken. Also by a torrent of nonsensical language the doctor made it clear to all that if they sacrificed any of their llamas or mules belonging to the expedition party something terrible would happen.

Then one of the giant priests held both hands aloft and addressed the people, every now and again bowing low towards the doctor, as if in submission. There were low murmurs of assent.

Then a bodyguard of giants stepped forward, tethered the llamas and mules together, and drove them from the precincts of the temple.

The expedition party watched them go, and saw the beasts driven from the Rock City through the big wooden gate near the temple. At that sight Mr. Whittaker's heart leapt within him for excitement, for they had seen the very gate through which it would be best to make their escape.

The priests and people were now evidently more awed than ever by the doctor's influence. Apparently they thought that he had power over the earthquake and subterranean lava river.

What happened next none of the expedition party could ever give a really clear idea. They saw several little children led to the altar, where the fire still burnt fiercely. The doctor tried to interpose, but this time the priests ruled the roost, and would not listen to him. As the whites had no firearms, protest by that method was impossible. So Mr. Whittaker passed word to the boys to close their eyes, or, if the natives permitted, to turn their backs on the altar.

Somehow Mr. Whittaker managed to whisper a message to the boys.

"We are powerless to interfere over this horrible business. We are only seven of us against these copper devils, and protest from us now might mean death to us all."

What exactly passed the whites never knew, but instinct told them that it was something terrible. Everyone was unnerved, and all were greatly relieved when a mighty shout went up from the populace, and the people began to stream from the precincts of the temple.

Presently the party of whites were conducted to their litters, and were borne slowly to their dwelling. All the time on their way home those dull rumblings and slight earth tremors were heard and felt.

When alone, Mr. Whittaker held a conclave.

"It is evident," he observed, "that these priests and people have been accustomed to slight earthquakes and rumblings before now, and that they do not believe the doctor has any power to subdue these forces. My strong opinion is that they have got some plan for a secret test of the doctor's powers—a test which will be beyond his capacity. If he fails, the whole lot of us will either be sacrificed on the altar, or we shall be flung into the lava river. So to-night we must escape."

"I think we've all had enough of it," commented the doctor.

"I'd rather peg out making a dash for freedom," put in Reggie, "than fall into the hands of those priests."

"So would I," said Jimmy.

"And I," agreed Larry, who was now rapidly on the mend.

"What do you say, Sing Loo?" asked Mr. Whittaker.

"This Chinaman he velly muchee want a lide on llama," was the Chinaman's reply, which caused a laugh all round.

Toothy Jim briefly explained to Mr. Whittaker that until a few years ago sacrificing children for religious rites was no uncommon rite, and he supposed that the giant priests did the same thing. He agreed, with his crafty native cunning, that it was time they made a dash for liberty.

The party then began to make plans for their escape that night, leaving no detail to chance, but scheming thoroughly so as to make success as sure as it was humanly possible.

It was arranged that the guards outside their house should, two at a time, be invited inside, sent to sleep by Sing Loo, and finished off by Dr. Whittaker administering the chloroform, which the doctor kept concealed in a small bottle under his clothes.

When the four guards had been rendered powerless they were all to creep out, fully armed, and make their way to the gate by the temple, through which they had seen the llamas and mules driven.

There the guards would have to be overpowered with lightning speed by being gagged, bound, and chloroformed. No firearms, lest the report should arouse the whole city, were to be used, unless in the case of dire extremity.

The party hid among their clothes as much food and water as they could carry without being unduly hampered, and then sat down to wait for darkness.

The hours passed slowly, but night at last fell. Fortunately,

it was very thick and cloudy overhead. Without, it was pitch-black. The city was wrapped in stygian gloom. No lights were visible. The whites had been allowed one small lamp, whose feeble flare was extinguished by one of the guards every night at about ten o'clock.

Near that hour the giant guard entered the dwelling and indicated that he had come to put out the light.

With every protestation of friendliness, Mr. Whittaker offered him some food and milk, and as the man had been on duty for some hours he gladly accepted the invitation. Mr. Whittaker then made him understand that one of his companions would also be welcome, so the man went out to fetch in one of his fellows. Both soon returned, and, sitting down, gratefully partook of the refreshment.

Sing Loo, all smiles and courtesy, sat down in front of them, and allowed one of them, who evinced evident admiration and curiosity for the Chinaman's pigtail, to run it through his fingers. In a few minutes the man, succumbing to the hypnotic influence and passes of the Chinaman, fell asleep.

Then the other one, who first indicated that he wished to put out the light, became suspicious and troublesome. At any moment he might shout a word of warning to his companions outside.

Slowly, stealthily the doctor's hand, holding the chloroform bottle, moved towards the man's nostrils. Then like lightning the doctor whipped out his handkerchief, took out the bottle-stopper, and poured some of the anæsthetic on to it. Before you could say "one," the cloth was over his lips and nose, while Sing Loo with his strong fingers firmly held the giant. He struggled a bit, then suddenly collapsed, completely unconscious.

"I have given both men enough to keep them quiet for an hour at least," whispered Dr. Phenning. "Now for the other two."

Toothy Jim was chosen to go outside and inveigle the remaining two guards inside.

Presently Toothy Jim returned with the guards. It was evident that they were suspicious about something. Neither Dr. Phenning nor Mr. Whittaker liked their attitude. Presently, in spite of Reggie, Jimmy, Larry, and Sing Loo, who sat round the unconscious men, propping them up and pretending to talk to them, the new-comers scented foul play.

Just as one of them was about to rush out and raise the alarm, Toothy Jim, with a tiger-like spring, leapt at the throat of the nearest giant, hurling himself against the big man with all his strength. The two fell together with a crash to the ground, and Toothy Jim was just in time to clasp his hands to the man's mouth to stifle his cries.

At the same instant Sing Loo, Reggie and Jimmy had leapt on the other guard, Reggie wrenching away his spear, drawing it through the man's hand. It left an ugly red stream behind as its sharp edges cut deep into the copper flesh.

Never had the doctor administered chloroform to two people so quickly or under such strange conditions. Very quickly the last two of the giants were rendered unconscious. And now came the white's dash for freedom and liberty.

Cautiously they crept to the doorway. Without, all was still. It was inky dark. Dr. Phenning, with Larry, followed Toothy Jim, who led the way, next came Jimmy, Reggie, and Sing Loo, Mr. Whittaker bringing up the rear. Each boy and man grasped his revolver or gun. Then slowly, very slowly, scarcely daring to breathe, the party crawled and wriggled towards the gate by the temple, whither lay freedom and salvation.

It was terrible work. They dared only proceed a yard or two at a time, they had to pause and listen for any treacherous sound. And the darkness was such that there was, if they once turned out or got out of line, great danger of entirely losing their bearings.

The distance that separated them from freedom was about five hundred yards. Suddenly those behind Toothy Jim heard the crafty native give vent to a low hiss of warning.

With every trigger among them at full cock, they waited with breathless anticipation.

Then Dr. Phenning, still close behind Toothy Jim, saw the Patagonians' dim form leap vaguely up into the darkness.

There was a half-stifled gurgling noise, and all the doctor could see was a dim, black mass writhing and twisting on the ground. Half-stifled chokings and gurglings every now and then broke out from the black, struggling mass in front. Presently there was a tense silence. Then the half-perceived shroudy form of Toothy Jim came creeping back to the doctor. The faithful native gave the signal that the coast was clear. As all crept forward again, Reggie and Jimmy felt the warm big form of an unconscious giant as they brushed

(Continued on page iii. of the cover.)

passed, and as Sing Loo flitted by him, silently, quickly, he finished off the unconscious man with something cold, and hard, and sharp.

Gradually they neared the gate. How strong would the guard be there? Suddenly there was a half-stifled exclamation from Toothy Jim, and they saw a black shadow, as it were, leap into the air. Then came the sharp, metallic clang, as if metal had struck the solid rock of the City roadway.

The Pursuit.

Everyone held their breath. Toothy Jim had evidently grappled with one of the advance guards of the gateway, and he had lost his spear.

Then born on the still night air, there came a sharp cry of warning. Dr. Phennig, peering into the gloom, stretched out his left hand, grasped Reggie and Larry, and pushed them back against the side wall of the Rock City.

The line of escaping whites came to a dead halt. There was a moment of sickening suspense. Then there rolled past Dr. Phennig two struggling, twisting, gasping forms. In their locked embrace they touched the doctor. But he could see nothing clearly. He made a quick grab at the moving men, and caught hold of Toothy Jim's neck. The native whispered something in his ear, and then the doctor threw himself upon both. Panting, gurgling, grasping, the giant and Toothy Jim were entwined in a death struggle.

Quickly the doctor forced the wriggling men to be still by pressing on them with his knees with all his force. Then, snatching at his bottle of chloroform, and, hastily pouring some on to a cloth, he felt along the body of the giant guard till his hands touched his face. Then he clapped the anæsthetic to the man's nostrils.

Whispering to Toothy Jim to keep still, the doctor held the deadly narcotic under the giant's nose till the victim ceased struggling. Thus one of the guards at the gate were accounted for.

What was happening beyond? Had the remaining guards given a silent alarm?

At that moment, Reggie and Jimmy heard Mr. Whittaker whisper into their ears not on any account to fire, and to be careful lest their arms should go off by accident.

The boys knew that at any instant a spear might be thrust at them with terrible, silent strength from the inky void.

Suddenly a big, dim form brushed against Reggie as he crouched against the rock wall. Like a flash the brave boy sprang upwards and caught the man's throat with one hand, stifling his cries with his slouch hat at the same instant. Then Sing Loo, who had been creeping forward, also sprang.

Something warm and sticky spurted out on to Reggie's hand. The giant fell with just one gasp. Then lay still.

"Alle lighte," said Sing Loo's welcome voice, "big giant now gone join ancestors."

Another terrible, breathless suspense of waiting. Then the whites, inch by inch, crept forward again. And now they were under the gate. They had accounted for three of the guard—where was the fourth?

Quickly the word was passed along the line. They must make a dash for the barrier that separated them from freedom.

Toothy Jim, agile, and all eyes—for, owing to long practice he could see better in the dark than anyone else—was the first to get over the wooden structure, a climb of about ten feet. Then they waited for Toothy Jim to give some sort of signal on the other side of the barrier. What deathtrap lay behind that?

As Mr. Whittaker and the doctor, crouching in the deepest shadow near the gate, protecting the boys by standing between them, were waiting with bated breath, something whizzed past them.

With a dull "ping" it struck the wooden gate just above Mr. Whittaker's head. Quickly he thrust out his hand towards the spot from whence came the sound, and he grasped a big spear.

Then he gave the word for all to lie flat against the gate. Another spear came whirring by. Again it struck the woodwork and remained there. There was only one thing to be done now—make a dash for it.

Quickly Mr. Whittaker whispered the word "over gate," into Reggie's ear. The command was passed down. One by one the boys were got over. What lay the other side had to be chanced.

A perfect rain of spears began to whizz past, some passing harmlessly over the barrier, others penetrating into the woodwork.

Mr. Whittaker gave the doctor a leg up, and over went the medico. Then the expedition leader heard a scarcely perceptible muttered exclamation of pain from Sing Loo.

"What is it—what is it?" breathed Mr. Whittaker, in great stress and agitation. "Hit Sing Loo?"

"Sing Loo he speared through handee," came the whispered reply.

Rapidly Mr. Whittaker ran his hand along Sing Loo's arm till his own hand touched a spear. It had passed

right through the Chinaman's palm. Sing Loo was pinned to the gate. Though the brave Chinaman was in exquisite pain, he bore it all with the usual Chinese stoical endurance.

"You leave this silly Chinaman and getee over gatee," faintly murmured Sing Loo, without a thought for himself.

Mr. Whittaker set his teeth. If the worst came to the worst, he would not have to die alone, but would fight to the last for a brave friend and a faithful servant. Fortunately the Chinaman was pinned to the gate in a crouching posture, so that Mr. Whittaker was able to get a better purchase on the spear, when trying to pull it out, than otherwise he might have done.

"Now, then, Sing Loo," he murmured, "we either both die together, or that spear comes out. Set your teeth together while I pull."

"Heavee hanlee," whispered back the Chinaman.

It was a horrid business to do this in the dark, whilst all the time spears were hurtling towards them, some speeding harmlessly by, others grazing their clothes, or burying themselves in the gateway.

"Now!" whispered the leader.

Taking the spear by both hands, and putting his foot against the gate to give him greater leverage, Mr. Whittaker pulled at the spear with all his might.

Not a sound, not the suspicion of a wince, escaped the brave Chinaman, though the pain was excruciating. But the spear refused to budge. Again Mr. Whittaker tugged and strained with all his might, then gave one mighty jerk. Out came the spear, its sudden release sending Mr. Whittaker staggering back.

And at that moment there was a shout from behind him. With one bound he sprang forward again, and fell into the arms of the now almost fainting Chinaman.

"Over the gate—over the gate, Sing Loo!" he whispered. "Come, brave friend, you're not done yet!"

But the gallant Sing Loo was spent with pain, and, now that the cruel spear was withdrawn, blood was flowing freely from the wound.

"An effort, one little effort," implored Mr. Whittaker, grasping his faithful servant, "and you're over!"

As Mr. Whittaker helped to raise the Chinaman bodily on to the top of the gate, the Chinaman just having sufficient strength to grasp the top with his unwounded hand, a perfect fusillade of spears came thundering at the woodwork, and Mr. Whittaker was struck in the arm. Holding the Chinaman up with one hand, Mr. Whittaker leant desperately over the top of the gate, and whispered to those on the other side to help Sing Loo.

It was Dr. Phennig who answered.

"Quickly!" half hissed the leader. "We've no time to lose! They're after us on this side! Sing Loo's badly hit!"

Reggie and Jimmy quickly scrambled on to the doctor's shoulder, and somehow or other Sing Loo was safely, though roughly, brought to safety on the other side, but in an unconscious state.

Then Mr. Whittaker sprang to the top of the gate, and was just going to scramble down to the other side, when he felt his leg held in a vicelike grip.

"Hang on to my arms, for the love of Heaven," he almost shouted to the doctor, "or I shall be pulled back!"

Then, resorting to the last desperate chance, he sought for his revolver, and with his free hand let fly a chance shot backwards and downwards. A yell of terror and fear was the response, the hold on his leg slackened, and in another moment he was on the safe side of the gate.

"Quickly!" he panted. "There's no time to be lost! They're in pursuit! Everybody safe?"

"Yes," breathed the doctor. "But it was touch-and-go. I'll hang on to Larry, while you and Toothy Jim manage Sing Loo between you. Reggie and Jimmy," he broke off, "whatever you do, don't get separated from us!"

Stumbling up against one another in the dark, the escaping party put their backs to the gate, facing the dangers of the unknown rocky defile in which they now had to penetrate. Then Toothy Jim, whose eyesight was best in the gloom, took hold of Sing Loo's head and shoulders, while Mr. Whittaker held the Chinaman's feet, and went straight ahead.

Stumbling, staggering, and muttering, the party passed through the narrow gorge with what speed they could.

Scarcely had they gone five hundred yards before they heard a mighty shout behind them. The giants were in pursuit.

Then there broke upon their startled ears a tearing, rending noise, as if the very earth were being torn asunder. They felt the ground beneath their feet quiver and heave.

Then came stillness, and an awful silence.

(There will be another magnificent long instalment of this exciting serial story next Wednesday. Readers are advised to place a regular order for the GEM with their newsagents.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

A GHESS TRAGEDY.

The KING was in his counting-house—
The ledger open lay;
Cash had not been so tight with him
For many a long day.

He bit his nails, he tore his hair,
With worry he perspired;
A new spring bonnet, Paris made,
Was what the QUEEN desired.

"To wear my old one Sunday next,"
She cried, "would break my heart!
The BISHOP is to preach, and so
I feel I must be smart."

Her Royal mate, who loved her well,
Was seen his brow to smite;
In sheer despair, for lack of funds,
He muttered: "Oh, good KNIGHT!"

On all the CASTLE fell a gloom,
And when a courtier spoke,
It was to say, with bated breath:
"His Majesty's stone-broke!"

At length the monarch slowly rose,
With a determined frown,
Strode slowly through the startled throng,
And went and PAWN'd his crown!

—Sent in by Kevin Haugh, Dublin.

SWEATED LABOUR.

Pat and Mike were out looking for work, when they espied
a notice in a bookseller's window bearing the following words:

DICKEN'S WORKS
all this week for 5s.

"Does he, indeed," said Mike. "Well, that's his business;
but I'm after a better job than that!"—Sent in by W.
Griffin, Watford.

ALL TICKETS, PLEASE!

Ticket-collector (to Mrs. Juggins, in train with her little
son): "Come along now, mum, you'll have to pay for the
child. He's not under three."

Mrs. Juggins (hastily): "No, but if 'e 'adn't 'ave 'ad 'is
new suit on, 'e'd 'a bin under the seat."—Sent in by J. Holy-
oak, Chester.

NOT SERIOUS.

Doctor (to talkative lady patient): "I can assure you,
madam, that there is nothing serious the matter with you.
You only need rest."

Patient: "But, doctor, look
at my tongue—just look at
it! What does it mean?"

Doctor: "I think, madam,
that needs rest, too."—Sent in
by Roy Smith, Victoria,
Australia.

NEVER BEEN GASED.

An old farmer, who for
weeks had been tortured by a
nagging tooth, at last decided
to go to town and have the
offending molar extracted.

When he was seated in the
chair, the dentist inquired
politely:

"Will you have gas, sir?"

"Noa," replied the old
man, "I don't think so. Ye
see, we don't go in for gas at
our village. Ye'd better give
me paraffin!"—Sent in by
Joseph Garratt, Warrington.

A SERIOUS CASE.

A soldier, complaining to his officer that he felt unwell, was
ordered to the hospital. On inquiring as to the nature of his
illness, the doctor was informed that the poor "Tommy" was
suffering from pains in the head, chest, and feet.

He thereupon ordered the nurse to apply vinegar cloths
to his head, mustard poultices to his chest, and hot salt to his
feet.

"Begorra, doctor," exclaimed an Irishman in the next
bed, "put pepper in his mouth, and make a cruet of him!"—
Sent in by Private W. A. Smith, Salonica.

POOR FATHER.

Inquiring Offspring: "Pa, may I ask just one more
question?"

Patient Pa: "Yes, my son, just one more."

Inquiring Offspring: "Well, then, pa, how is it that when
night falls, it's the day that breaks?"—Sent in by J. Fergus-
son, Glasgow.

SOMEWHAT PREVIOUS.

A couple had arranged to meet the young lady's mother at
the entrance of a hall, where a concert was being given at
which they intended to be present.

"How very tiresome," exclaimed the young lady im-
patiently. "I'm sure we must have missed the first two
numbers; we've waited here some few minutes for that mother
of mine."

"Hours, I should say!" replied the young man, in an
irritable tone.

"Ours? Oh, Albert," exclaimed his partner, "this is so
sudden!"—Sent in by S. Shube, London E.

BAD FOR THE CONGREGATION.

One Sunday, during the evening service, the good minister
of a church paused in his sermon and beckoned to the vergier.

"Jones," said he, as the man reached the pulpit, "open a
couple of windows on each side of the church, please."

"Beg your pardon, sir," returned the vergier, with a look
of surprise, "did you say 'open the windows?'"

"Yes," was the cold rejoinder of the minister. "It is not
healthy to sleep with the windows shut."—Sent in by
R. McDonald, Ross-shire.

SANDY AGAIN.

Donald and Jamie entered a tobacconist's shop.

"Will ye have a cigar?" asked Donald.

"Thank you," responded his friend.

Donald ordered two threepenny cigars, and after both had
lighted up, he hurried away.

Jamie quietly took a few
puffs, then slowly turned to
the shopkeeper and said:

"Mester, you sell these at
five a shillin', don't ye?"

"Yes, sir," replied the to-
bacconist.

"Weel," said the Scotsman,
"here's a saxpence—give me
the other three."—Sent in by
Norman G. Pearson, Ton-
bridge.

WORK-SHY.

Applicant for situation:
"I've called about the situa-
tion you advertised, sir."

Employer: "Well, and can
you do the work?"

Applicant: "Work! I
thought it was a foreman you
wanted!"—Sent in by C.
Gadd, Stoke-on-Trent.

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