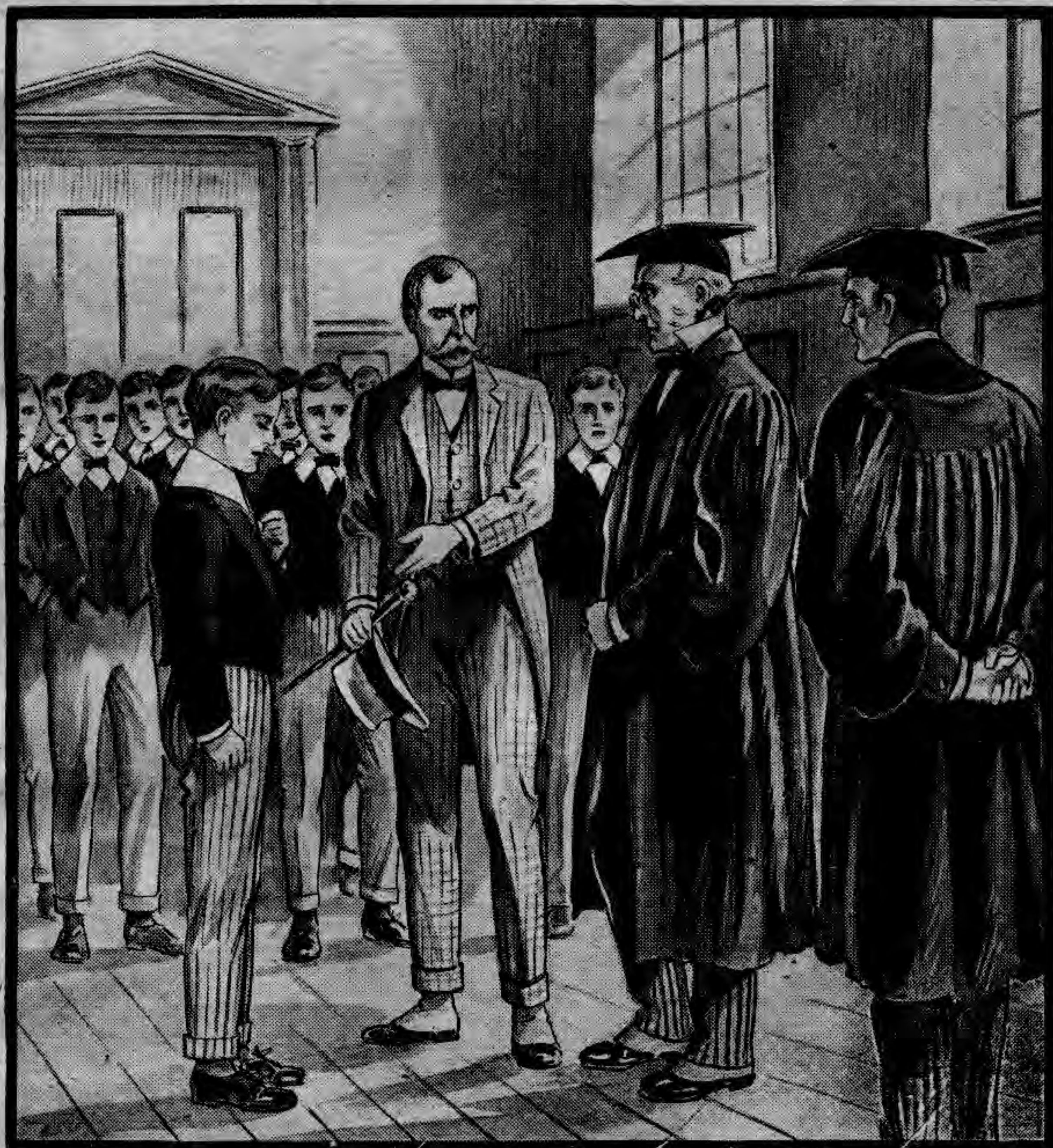


TOO CLEVER BY HALF!

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



“THAT IS THE BOY!”

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



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
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EVERY MONDAY ; EVERY FRIDAY ; EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday :

"THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!"

By Martin Clifford.

The really fine story which appears next week should please every reader, and should make special appeal to those who have been asking for yarns in which characters other than the Terrible Three, the chums of Study No. 6, and Talbot play the leading parts. Not one of these is in the foreground in next week's story, though all figure in it. The hero is that good fellow, Dick Redfern, of the New House, and the story tells how his longings for a journalistic life prompt him to run away from St. Jim's, and get a post on a Wayland newspaper. As Wayland is so near the school, he has to disguise himself; but, thanks to the aid of a friendly colleague on the paper, these difficulties are overcome. Redfern's escapade does not last long, however. He returns to his old place at St. Jim's in dramatic circumstances, bearing with him no end of encouragement for the future in the knowledge that he has made good in his brief spell as

"THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!"

WHAT BOYS AND GIRLS READ.

Both the "Evening News" and the "Pall Mall Gazette" have devoted some space lately to comments on a pamphlet issued by a Government school-inspector, Mr. Charles E. B. Russell. Mr. Russell, discussing the formation of school libraries, says that the choice of books should not be wholly restricted to such as are considered good literature and unexceptionable in every paragraph. He thinks many youngsters may be guided through an interest in "penny bloods" to an appreciation of the great masters of romance. In getting books for girls, he says, it is especially necessary to shun the sentimental type. The misguided ladies who write these books, he considers, often produce sickly, mawkish, petty trash of the parish-magazine order, or worse. Until a girl is ready for more grown-up books, she had better read boys' stuff, and get into touch with the boyish mind.

The "Pall Mall Gazette" says, and quite rightly, that a good many girls have seen to this for themselves.

Now, I think I may claim a fair knowledge of the sort of story that the healthy modern girl likes—a considerably greater knowledge than the writer of the pamphlet referred to, anyway. The gentleman who wrote the note in the "Pall Mall" seems to know something about the subject; possibly he has daughters of his own. Mr. Russell's talk about "penny bloods" rather puts him out of court as an authority, I think.

Why should a rousing story of adventure be styled a "penny blood" when it happens to appear in a weekly paper, and yet be classed on a much higher plane when it achieves the dignity of book-form and cloth covers? There are few papers for boys nowadays which deserve the old reproach of being "penny bloods." None of mine deserve it, I am sure.

As for those which do deserve it, I cannot agree that they have any special merit as reading matter for girls, while there are others which are free from the reproach. The good old "Boys' Friend" was founded mainly with the idea of fighting the penny dreadful on its own ground—giving stories without a dry paragraph from first to last, which should yet be clean and healthy. And its Companion Papers are all run on the same lines.

My reason for saying that I know something about the subject is this. From the outset my papers have been read by many girls. They now have thousands of girl-readers, who are, on the whole, even more disposed to write critical letters than the boys. I don't mean grumbling letters; it is the rarest of occurrences to get one of these from a girl.

These letters show me plainly what sort of stories suit best the girl who prefers the yarns written for boys to the stuff in which Emelina hangs to the neck of Lord Knozo, and talks piffle into his Adonis-like face.

They like school stories better than anything else, in the main. Tales of wild adventures only appeal to the minority. I am sure that there are very few of the girls who revel in the doings of the Famous Five and the Terrible Three who have much appreciation of anything which deserves to be called a "penny blood."

Nothing can be more certain than that no girl can get any harm out of sound, healthy school stories, such as they will find in my papers. For the "penny blood," properly called, it would be difficult to say as much.

AN AMERICAN READER TAKES THE LISTS AGAIN.

The American reader who wrote me from Toronto some little time ago, complaining of something said about President Wilson, is now kind enough to inform me that it was "pretty good and decent" of me to publish his letter. Well, I always believe in fair play. But when he goes on to say that I don't understand the international crisis between the United States and Germany, I cannot agree with him. I think we over here are quite as well able to form an opinion on that as any American. And when he adds: "What do you think of our good president now? His note has scared that Hun of a Kaiser all right!"—why, then he leaves me gasping for breath. I think not! Words are not going to scare Germany, and notes are just waste-paper to her!

NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, Etc.

H. C. Koolman, 1, Robinson Road, Tooting, S.W., wishes to form an amateur dramatic club, and would be glad to hear from readers over 14 interested.

William Allman, 49, Tabley Road, Lawrence Road, Liverpool, would be glad to correspond with boy-readers in Liverpool.

J. L. Hinks, 45, Belmont Street, Swadlincote, Burton-on-Trent, wants a few more members for the Swadlincote Correspondence Club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please. He would also be glad to hear from editors of other amateur magazines, with a view to exchange, and from presidents of other "Gem" and "Magnet" Leagues, in order to exchange notes.

G. Simms and D. Collins, care of Captain of Dockyard's Office (N.), Devonport, want more members for their "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to anyone in the British Isles. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Cricket and Football.

L. Barnett, 29, Maple Street, Fitzroy Square, W., wants to arrange matches in that district for the Regent C.C. (average age 14), Saturday afternoons after two o'clock.

G. C. Jacob, Hon. Sec., Mince Road C.C., 858, Old Kent Road, Peckham, S.E., wants to arrange home and away matches for his club for August and September.

W. J. Maud, 53, Water Lane, Brixton, S.W., wants boys (age 14½-16) from Kennington, Clapham, and Brixton to join in forming a footer club for next season. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

F. Lambert, 67, Whitefield Terrace, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants cricket fixtures for his team within reasonable distance, Saturday afternoons. Write or call.

Brookenhurst F.C. (average age 16) want home and away fixtures for next season, within a five-mile radius of Herne Hill.—Hon. Sec., 24, Hurst Street, Herne Hill, S.E.

E. W. Moeran and Alfred Berger, 35, Brookenhurst Gardens, Mill Hill, want to form a boxing and wrestling club (age 10 and upwards). Postcard to arrange interview to Moeran at address given.

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

TOO CLEVER BY HALF!

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



Baggy Trimble eyed the boathook, he eyed Blake, he eyed the oars; then he sat down with a groan, and took two oars. "I—I say, I—I'm not feeling quite up to rowing this afternoon, you know," he said, in dismay.
(See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER I.

Left on the Beach.

BAGGY TRIMBLE of the Fourth Form put his head into Tom Merry's study. There was an ingratiating grin on Trimble's fat face, which showed that he was, as usual, "on the make."

The Terrible Three of the Shell were quite busy. Tom Merry was slicing a loaf, Monty Lowther was buttering the slices, and Manners was jamming ham between them when buttered. A bag was open on the table, in which a jar of jam, and a packet of biscuits, and several bottles of ginger-beer and other articles, had been packed. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and a blazing summer's afternoon,

and the Terrible Three had decided in council that a picnic up the river was the "proper caper." Hence the preparations that made Trimble's covetous eyes glisten as he regarded them.

"You fellows want me, I suppose?" Trimble remarked.

Tom Merry looked astonished.

"Something wrong with your supposer, then!" he said.

"I should have it oiled!"

"He, he, he!"

"My hat! What are you he-he-heing for?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Tommy's little joke!" chuckled Trimble. "He, he, he! I can take a joke, you know! I'm going to carry your bag for you!"

Next Wednesday.

"THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!" AND "INTO THE UNKNOWN!"

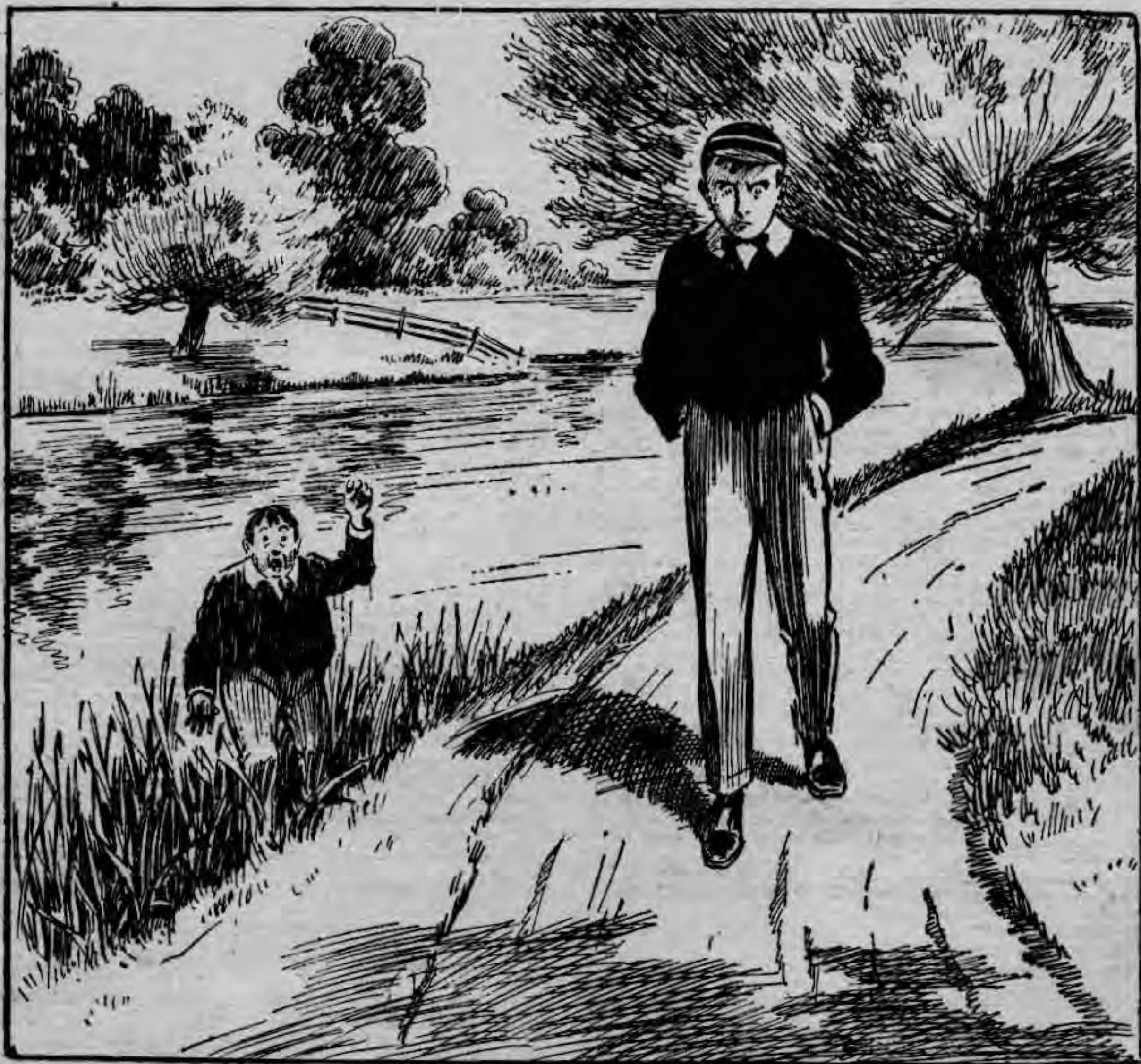
"You needn't trouble!" said Manners.
 "It won't be a trouble!"
 "Yes, it would—for us!"
 "He, he, he!" said Trimble of the Fourth, evidently determined to regard Manners' remark also as a joke. "Can I help you pack it?"
 "No, you can't! Buzz off!"
 "I'll steer for you, too!" said Trimble. "I'm rather good at steering!"
 "We're not going in a boat!"
 "Well, I'll drive for you!"
 "We're not going to drive!"
 "Well, I'll—I'll come with you, anyway!" said Trimble.
 "The fact is, I'm short of money. I lent D'Arcy my last quid this morning. I'm always lending chaps money, and when they don't settle up I find myself short of tin. The fact is, I'd like to come!"
 "Go on!"
 "Look here, you know, you want somebody to carry that bag!" said Trimble persuasively. "Cutts of the Fourth has asked me to go out with him this afternoon, with St. Leger and that set, but I've told them I'm sticking to my old pals!"
 "Then I'd advise you to stick to your old pals!" said Lowther. "I don't know who they are, but I recommend you to go and look for 'em!"
 The study door closed, and Baggy Trimble jumped back into the passage just in time. Trimble snorted. Evidently the boon of his society was not yearned for by Tom Merry & Co.
 Nearly everybody was going out that sunny afternoon. Baggy Trimble was in his usual stony state, and he had made up his mind, as usual, to attach himself to somebody who was too good-natured to kick him out. But the Terrible Three were "fed up" with Trimble.
 The fat Fourth-Former went down the passage grunting. He stopped at Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, where preparations were also going on. The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth could be heard.
 "I refuse to carry the sandwiches in my hat, Blake! I distinctly refuse to do anythin' of the sort!"
 Trimble looked in. Blake, and Herries, and Digby were making up little packages on the table. They were going up the river for the afternoon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was chiefly occupied in regarding his reflection in the glass, tilting his handsome Panama hat at precisely the correct angle. And he replied with great emphasis to Jack Blake's playful suggestion that he should carry the sandwiches in that handsome Panama hat.
 "I'll carry the sandwiches for you, you chaps!" said Trimble generously. "Don't you bother about that! I've just looked in to tell you I'm coming!"
 "Then you can look out again!" said Blake gruffly.
 "The fact is, I'm rather hard up this afternoon!" said Trimble confidentially. "I've lent Tom Merry my last five bob!"
 "Liar!" said Blake cheerily.
 "Ahem! I'm sure you'd like me to steer the boat——"
 "Bow-wow!"
 "Considering that Gussy is my old pal——"
 Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Trimble of the Fourth.
 "I refuse to be regarded as an old pal by you, Twimble! And I have a vewy atwong objection to your callin' me Gussy!"
 "Look here," growled Trimble, "if you rotters don't want me to come——"
 "Right on the wicket!" said Jack Blake cheerfully. "Shut the door after you, Trimble!"
 Trimble closed the door after him with a bang.
 Kangaroo of the Shell came down the passage with Clifton Danie and Bernard Glyn. The three Shell fellows were looking particularly cheery, and Trimble intercepted them at once.
 "Going out?" he asked cordially.
 "Yes!"
 "Good! I'll come!"
 "I shouldn't call that good—I should call that rotten!" said Kangaroo politely. "No fat Prussians wanted. Have you lent all your money to the Head and gone stony? Or have they forgotten to send you a cheque for a hundred pounds from Trimble Hall? If they have, I suggest reminding them! Ta-ta!"
 Kangaroo & Co. walked on grinning.
 Trimble snorted.
 Never had his popularity seemed at so low an ebb. As a matter of fact, nobody wanted to be bothered with a bounder who was generally complaining, always selfish, incessantly swanking, and an unconscionable bore. Even the kind-hearted Gussy had grown fed-up with Trimble—not before everybody else was fed up to the chin, as Blake expressed it.

"Well, this is rotten!" growled Trimble. "I suppose I shall have to try Cutts. And Cutts is rather a beast!"
 It was with doubtful feelings that Baggy Trimble turned his steps in the direction of the Fifth Form passage, to try his luck with Gerald Cutts. He knew that Cutts and St. Leger and Gilmore were going out that afternoon, and he knew that the dandy of the Fifth sometimes took a fag with him on his little excursions to make himself useful. Trimble was not willing to be useful, but he was willing to agree to anything if there was a feed in prospect.
 Cutts' door was open, and Trimble looked in hopefully. Cutts and Gilmore and St. Leger were there. They were arguing.
 "Better come with us, St. Leger!" Cutts was saying. "That fellow Griggs is no class, anyway!"
 "Oh, rats!" said St. Leger. "You meet him yourself sometimes!"
 "He'll skin you!" said Gilmore.
 "Rot!"
 "I tell you—hallo, what does that cheeky fag want?" growled Cutts. "Cut off, you fat toad!"
 "I say, Cutts, if you want a chap to carry your things——"
 "I don't!"
 "Look here, you know, I'm willing to——"
 "Are you willing to clear off!" asked Cutts politely. "Because if you're not I'll help you with my boot!"
 Trimble sniffed, and cleared off. But he waited about the end of the passage. He had discovered that the chums of the Fifth were separating for the afternoon, and he looked on St. Leger as a last resource. St. Leger came down the passage a few minutes later frowning. Trimble rolled in his way.
 "I say, St. Leger——"
 "Cut off!"
 "You're not going with Cutts!" said Trimble. "I'll tell you what—I'll come with you, if you like——"
 St. Leger took Trimble's fat ear between a finger and thumb, and Trimble's remarks finished in a wail of anguish.
 "Yow-ow-ow!"
 "Now, cut off, and don't be cheeky!" said St. Leger.
 "Yow-ow-ow!" Trimble backed away, glaring at the Fifth-Former. "You rotter, I know what you're going to meet Griggs for—I know that bounder Griggs of Wayland! You're going to play cards!—yar-o-o-o-oh!"
 St. Leger's boot cut short the conversation, and Trimble of the Fourth fled with a yell. He did not stop till he was safe in the quadrangle.
 "Yow-ow! Of all the rotters!" mumbled Trimble. "Hallo! there's Figgins!"
 Three juniors were crossing to the gates from the New House—Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth. Trimble dashed in pursuit, and overtook them at the gates. Fatty Wynn was carrying a packed basket, and Trimble's eyes lingered on it greedily.
 "I'll carry that for you," he said.
 "That you jolly well won't!" said Fatty Wynn promptly.
 "Look here, you know, I'll come along with you if you like!" said Trimble. "I don't mind going out with New House bounders—I don't, really! Leggo!"
 Figgins and Kerr took Baggy Trimble by the shoulders and sat him down in the gateway. Baggy gasped, and Figgins & Co. walked out smiling. Baggy Trimble blinked after them with sulphurous looks. His last hope had failed him, and he rolled away disconsolately to the school shop to make a desperate effort to persuade Dame Taggles to add some items to the account she already had against him—an effort that was doomed to be a complete failure.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unexpected Meeting.

"THIS looks a nice spot!"
 The Terrible Three halted.
 They were following the path along the winding Ryll, Tom Merry carrying the parcel, Manners his camera, and Monty Lowther strolling with his hands in his pockets. The sun was blazing down, and the shade under the trees by the river looked very cool and refreshing.
 "Right!" said Tom Merry. "And I'm getting jolly dry. Ginger-beer's the thing now!"
 "I haven't taken any photographs yet!" remarked Manners.
 "Don't!" suggested Lowther.
 "Oh, rot! What did we come out for?"
 "Not to watch you monkeying with a camera!" yawned Lowther. "We came out to slack because it's too hot for cricket. I'll have that camera to sit on, if you like!"
 Manners' only reply was a glare.
 The Terrible Three turned from the path and entered the



St. Leger was in no mood to be bothered by Baggy Trimble. He dealt the fat junior a cuff that sent him reeling, and strode on. (See Chapter 3.)

wood. Through the foliage a voice came suddenly to their ears:

"Nap!"

"My hat!" murmured Lowther. "'Tisn't such a lonely spot as I thought! That's St. Leger's toot!"

The next moment they were in sight of the speaker.

On a grassy bank under the trees St. Leger of the Fifth was seated, facing a young man in somewhat "loud" attire, whom the Shell fellows recognised at once. It was Mr. Griggs, who honoured the estate-agent in Wayland with his services, and was a great local nut and dog. Mr. Griggs was a weedy and pasty young man, who—to his own intense satisfaction—had not been considered good enough to be put in khaki.

Mr. Griggs had a straw hat on the back of his well-oiled head, a cigarette between his discoloured teeth, and cards in his hand. A flask was in the grass beside him, containing something probably a great deal stronger than ginger-beer.

St. Leger of the Fifth looked round sharply as the juniors came through the trees. His brow grew black and lowering.

Tom Merry & Co. were not at all likely to sneak, but it was a serious enough thing for a senior of St. Jim's to be caught occupied as St. Leger of the Fifth was occupied now. The young rascal's conduct had only to become known to Dr. Holmes for the "chopper" to come down hard and heavy. And the look of disgust on the faces of the juniors did not add to St. Leger's good-temper.

"You spying young cads!" he began hotly, starting to his feet.

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry unceremoniously. "We're

not spying, and you know it! We didn't know we were going to meet a blackguard here!"

"You cheeky hound!"

"Here's a chance for your camera, Manners!" cried Monty Lowther. "This would make a ripping picture! We could have it framed and hung up in the common-room!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With the title, 'The Road to Ruin,' or 'Evil Communications Corrupt Good Manners'!" said Lowther.

The juniors chuckled. St. Leger clenched his fists savagely, but the chums of the Shell were not afraid of St. Leger.

They were quite prepared to bump the Fifth-Former in the grass if necessary, and the nutty Mr. Griggs after him.

St. Leger realised that, and he restrained his temper.

"Clear off!" he growled.

"Oh, we'll clear off!" said Tom disdainfully. "We're not looking for this kind of company!"

"But what about that photograph?" said Lowther. "It would be a warning to all the bad boys in the school, you know!"

"Fathead! Come on!"

"I'll smash that camera if you handle it here!" growled St. Leger. "Clear off, and mind your own business! And if you jaw about me at the school I'll smash you too!"

"You can begin the smashing now, if you like!" said Tom Merry coolly.

"Now, don't you make a row 'ere!" said Mr. Griggs.

"You clear off, and don't interrupt a gentleman's game!"

"Bow-wow!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 441.

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!"

The Terrible Three passed on into the wood, and St. Leger, scowling and uneasy, dropped into the grass again. He was sure that the juniors would not betray him, so far as that went; but he was not at all sure that they would not talk about the incident, and any talk on the subject was dangerous.

"Precious rotters!" said Manners, as the Shell fellows went on into the wood. "St. Leger isn't quite such a rotter as Cutts, but jolly nearly. That fellow Griggs is skinning him. I could see that in his face! Where are we going to camp?"

"Get a distance from those rotters!" said Tom.

"Hallo, blessed if the wood isn't full of bounders this afternoon!" said Lowther a few minutes later. "Here's old Stringer!"

"Shush, you ass!"

The Terrible Three raised their hats respectfully as the tall, angular form of Major Stringer came in sight, striding through the wood. The old major was a governor of St. Jim's. He gave the juniors a nod and a smile, and stopped to speak. Tom Merry had once helped the major in a very plucky way when he was attacked by a gang of footpads, and the old gentleman had not forgotten it.

Tom Merry glanced back involuntarily, thinking of St. Leger.

The two gamblers had been left about twenty yards behind, but they were quite hidden from sight by the thick wood. If the major kept on in the direction he was following he was certain to walk right upon St. Leger and Griggs.

It was no business of Tom Merry's, of course, if St. Leger was caught in his rascality, and received the just reward of his misdoings. The major would certainly report him to the Head—it was his duty as a governor of the school. That would almost certainly mean the "sack" for St. Leger. And, disgusted as Tom naturally was with the Fifth-Former's dingy blackguardism, he would willingly have saved St. Leger from that danger if he could.

"Enjoying your half-holiday, what?" said the major cordially. "Taking photographs—eh?"

"Going to, sir!" said Manners.

"Manners would like to take you, sir, if you'd let him!" said Tom Merry.

Manners stared. As a matter of absolute fact, Manners, who was careful with his money, did not want to waste a film on the major. But he could only nod a polite assent after Tom Merry's remark.

The major smiled.

"Another time, my lad!" he said. "Another time! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

The major strode on.

He disappeared through the bracken, and Manners stared at Tom Merry.

"You duffer, you nearly made me waste a film!" he said.

"What on earth—"

"It's all up now!" said Tom.

"What is?"

"St. Leger. Major Stringer will walk right on him!" said Tom. "If he'd let you photograph him it would have kept him here a bit, and St. Leger might have taken the alarm!"

"Why, you ass, were you going to make me waste a film to save that rotter from being bowled out?" said Manners indignantly.

"He will get it in the neck!" said Tom.

"Serve him right!"

"Well, yes—but—"

"Let's get on!" said Lowther. "The major's certain to run on him, and we don't want to be called as witnesses."

"By Jove—no!"

The Terrible Three hurried on. Tom Merry's good-natured attempt to save St. Leger from the consequences of his sins had been in vain.

In a few minutes the Shell fellows had put a good distance between them and the spot. They did not stop till they had covered half a mile, and then they camped under the trees by the shining river, and soon forgot all about St. Leger.

CHAPTER 3.

Caught!

"YOUR deal!" growled St. Leger.

The black sheep of St. Jim's was in a decided bad humour.

Matters were not going well with him. The nutty Mr. Griggs had cleaned him out at their last meeting, and he had offered St. Leger his revenge. St. Leger's revenge seemed to consist in transferring all his ready cash to Mr. Griggs' pockets, so in this case it could not be said that revenge is sweet.

Mr. Griggs was smiling cheerily. Luck was running his

way; perhaps he was helping it a little, being a young man with great experience in that peculiar line.

"Rotten that those young cads should come on me here!" growled the Fifth-Former of St. Jim's. "Pretty serious for me if a thing of this kind got out!"

"Give 'em a hiding if they jaw," said Mr. Griggs, blowing a cloud of smoke as he dealt the cards.

"That wouldn't undo it."

Mr. Griggs shrugged his shoulders and dealt. St. Leger took up the cards, with a discontented frown. His supply of cash was running out, and his temper along with it. Unless luck changed, he had a prospect of being stony for a long time ahead, and the prospect was not pleasant.

A step in the wood startled him, and he looked round, with a furious scowl, under the impression that the juniors were returning.

But it was not Tom Merry & Co. A tall, angular gentleman stepped into view, and stopped dead at the sight of the gamblers under the tree.

St. Leger sat frozen.

He recognised Major Stringer, a member of the governing board of St. Jim's.

The major stared at him grimly.

There was a cigarette in St. Leger's mouth, there were cards in his hand, and there was a little heap of money on the ground beside him. Mr. Griggs at that moment was taking a swig from the flask.

The astonishment in the major's face gave place to an expression that could only be described as terrific.

"Huh!" he ejaculated.

Mr. Griggs put down the flask.

"Hallo!" he said familiarly. "Anything wanted?"

"I have nothing to say to you, sir," thundered the major—"nothing, excepting that you are an arrant blackguard, sir, to be leading a foolish schoolboy into this discreditable conduct!"

"Oh, my eye!" said Mr. Griggs calmly. "Anything else, old gent?"

"Yes—that if I have any insolence from you I will lay my stick about your shoulders, sir!" roared the major.

Mr. Griggs wriggled away in the grass. The angry old gentleman looked as if he could carry out his threat—and, though he was twice Mr. Griggs' age, he could have done it easily enough.

Major Stringer fixed his eyes upon St. Leger's flushed and dismayed face.

"You belong to St. Jim's!" he exclaimed.

St. Leger did not speak—he could not.

"Your name, sir?" thundered the major.

Silence.

"You are aware that I am a governor of the school, I presume?"

"Oh, my word!" murmured Mr. Griggs. He understood St. Leger's dismay now. He whistled softly. His private opinion was that it was "all up" with the black sheep of the Fifth.

"I demand your name!" said the major, taking out a pencil. "I have seen you at the school—I remember your face perfectly. I shall report this to Dr. Holmes. I shall see, sir, that you are expelled from the school you are disgracing!"

"Oh, dror it mild!" said Mr. Griggs, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Silence, sir!" thundered Major Stringer. "Boy, I have asked you your name!"

St. Leger's dry lips moved.

But he did not utter his name. He knew that the game was up, that his conduct would be reported to the Head, that disgrace and probably expulsion from the school must follow. St. Leger was not quite so great a rascal as Gerald Cutts, his chum and leader, and he lacked Cutts' iron nerve. What Cutts would have done in such a situation he did not know, but he knew that he was quite helpless and overpowered. On instinct he refused to give his name—though that was useless, as the major knew him by sight. The badge on his straw hat was sufficient evidence that he belonged to St. Jim's.

"Well, sir, I am waiting!" said the major.

St. Leger's lips closed.

"You refuse to give me your name! Very well, very well! I shall report your conduct all the same!" said Major Stringer. "I shall identify you at the school, sir! Very well, very well!"

And, with an angry snort, the old gentleman strode on and disappeared.

St. Leger did not move. His face was white now, and his hands were trembling.

"What rotten luck!" said Mr. Griggs sympathetically.

"Ere, 'ave a pull at this flask; it'll buck you up."

St. Leger shook his head silently.

"Goin' on with the game?" asked Mr. Griggs, after a pause.

Another shake of the head. St. Leger rose to his feet.

"I'm done for!" he said, in a gasping voice. "Clean done for! That old fool knows me—knows me well! I'm ruined!"

"Not so bad as that, I 'ope!" said Mr. Griggs, yawning a little.

"Oh, what a silly fool I've been! But—but who could have thought we should be spotted here?" muttered St. Leger. "What ghastly luck! I—I shall be sacked from the school—sacked in disgrace!"

"Can't you bluff 'im somehow?" said Mr. Griggs. "He don't know your name. Suppose you deny you ever was 'ere this afternoon?"

"How can I when he knows me and he's seen me?" St. Leger groaned. "I'm done for! What a fool I've been!"

He turned away without another word, and went through the trees with a swaggering gait. Mr. Griggs glanced after him, shrugged his shoulders, and gathered up the cards.

St. Leger came out into the path by the river. In the blaze of the sunshine his face was white.

A fat junior was coming along the towing-path, and he spotted the Fifth-Former and hurried up. It was Trimble of the Fourth.

"I say, St. Leger——"

St. Leger did not heed.

"My hat! You look queer!" said Trimble, eyeing him curiously. "I say, haven't you had the picnic? I—— Yaroooooh! Oh, you beast! Yooop!"

St. Leger was in no mood to be bothered by Baggy Trimble. He dealt the fat junior a cuff that sent him reeling, and strode on. Trimble staggered down the bank and rolled into a bed of rushes and six inches of water. He sat up, gasping.

"Groooh, hoooh, hoooh! Yooop! Gr-r-r-r! Rotter! Yah!"

Baggy Trimble dragged himself out of the rushes, dripping. He shook a fat fist after St. Leger as the Fifth-Former disappeared along the towing-path.

St. Leger did not heed him, he was striding away for St. Jim's. There was a faint hope lingering in his breast—perhaps Cutts could help him. The cool, clear-headed, astute Cutts—there was a chance that he might think of some way of escape from this fearful scrape. But the hope was faint, and St. Leger's heart was as heavy as lead as he tramped away towards St. Jim's in the bright summer sunshine.

CHAPTER 4.

Monty Lowther is Too Attentive.

"HALLO! You look wet!"

Baggy Trimble had arrived.

The fat Fourth-Former had been on the track of Tom Merry & Co. when he had encountered St. Leger of the Fifth. He was wet and he was muddy, but he had not given up the trail. And as the Terrible Three settled down comfortably to their picnic, Baggy appeared on the scene.

"Been taking a bath with your bags on?" asked Lowther, eyeing the Fourth-Former as he came up.

"Groooh!" said Trimble pathetically. "I—I say, you don't mind if I sit down here, do you? I've been treated most awfully!"

"So somebody's treated you at last!" said Manners. "Who was the fathead?"

"I don't mean that. It was that awful rotter St. Leger!" said Trimble. "He knocked me into the river!"

"Pass the sandwiches," said Manners.

"Thanks, this way," said Trimble. "I'm hungry, now you mention it!"

"Why, you—you——"

"I think you chaps ought to back up a fellow who's been bullied by a rotten senior!" said Trimble. "What about the rights of the Lower School?"

"I suppose you were cadging or something," remarked Tom Merry.

"I just spoke to him," said Trimble indignantly—"just in a friendly way, you know. He was looking quite white and sick, and I really wanted to cheer him up. My belief is that St. Leger has been up to something this afternoon."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do. Looked just as if he'd been caught at it. I hope he was, the beast!"

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. There was little doubt now that Major Stringer had dropped on to the reckless Fifth-Former, and that Cutts' pal was booked for serious trouble. But they had no intention of confiding to the Paul Pry of the Fourth anything that they knew on the subject.

"He knocked me right over," said Baggy. "I dropped into a foot of water. I'm wet."

"Better cut off and get a change," suggested Tom Merry.

"The fact is I'm too fatigued. I'm hungry, you know."

Tom Merry passed the sandwiches to Baggy Trimble.

"Well, as you're so pressing, I'll join you," said Trimble affably. "I thought I might fall in with you chaps. Of course, I wasn't looking for you."

"Of course not," said Tom Merry. "Were you born in Prussia, Baggy?"

"Eh? Certainly not! Why?"

"Then how was it you grew up such an awful Ananias?"

"Ahem! These are jolly good sandwiches! I'll have some more. Is that ginger-beer for me, Lowther?"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Lowther.

"Thanks, old chap!"

"If you call me 'old chap,' I'll brain you with a ginger-beer bottle!"

"Ahem! Been taking any photographs, Manners? I'm a jolly good photographer, and I'll give you some tips about it if you like."

Manners glared.

"Do!" he said. "I'll give you one in the eye for every tip you give me!"

"Ahem! Did you ask me to try the cake, Tom Merry?"

"No!"

"Well, I will, as you make a point of it. I say, this is a jolly good cake. Is this the only cake you've got?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you fellows going to have?"

"Oh, don't mind us!" said Tom, with heavy sarcasm. "It's a distinct pleasure to see a Hun bolting our feed. Pile in!"

"Thanks! That's awfully decent of you, Merry; I will. I'll stand you fellows a ripping spread in my study when D'Arcy settles up that quid he owes me," said Trimble, with his mouth full. "I hope you fellows will come down to Trimble Hall for the vacation. I'm getting up a party for the vac. There'll be a cricket-week, I expect, and some shooting, and so on; scores of guests, and a topping good time for everybody!"

"Have you finished with that cake, Trimble?" asked Lowther.

"Not quite. But I can finish it—that's all right."

Lowther jerked away what was left of the cake.

"These are rather good biscuits," said Trimble calmly.

"You don't mind if I sample them? Any more ginger-beer going?"

"Shall I open a bottle for you?" asked Monty Lowther politely.

"Yes, do!"

Lowther did.

There was a sudden spurt of ginger-beer, and it caught Baggy Trimble under his fat chin.

"Yaroooooggh!"

Trimble rolled over backwards, choking with the cake that stuffed his mouth to its fullest capacity.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yowwoowwooggh!"

Wild and weird sounds proceeded from Baggy Trimble. His fat face was as red as a newly-boiled beetroot, and he gasped and spluttered, and spluttered and gasped, as if on the verge of an explosion. Lowther jumped up.

"My hat! He's choking! Pat him on the back!"

"Gurrnggh!"

Lowther grasped Trimble by the collar, and rolled him over, and began to pat him on the back. He patted him as if he were beating a carpet.

"Gurrgh! Yow-ow! Stoppit!" shrieked Trimble.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow! You rotter! Stoppit! Chuckit! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble struggled desperately in the grasp of his rescuer. But Monty Lowther persisted in helping him. His pats came down on Trimble's fat shoulders with terrific force, and Trimble roared wildly.

"Yow! Yow! Yow! Help! Leggo! Yooop!"

"That enough?" gasped Lowther.

"Yow-ow! Yes!"

"Feel better?"

"Gerrooogh! Yes."

Trimble struggled out of Lowther's grasp, and glared at him.

"You silly idiot!" he roared. "You've jolly nearly dislocated my shoulder! Yow-ow! Yah, you rotter!"

"Hysterical!" said Lowther. "He wants some more."

Trimble backed away hastily.

"No, I don't! Gerroff! I don't want any more!" he roared.

"Yes, you do."

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Oh, crumbs! Rotter! Yah! Groooogh!"

Baggy Trimble twisted himself away, and fled. He paused

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at a safe distance to shake a fat fist at the yelling juniors, and vanished.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said Lowther. "He's gone. We shall be deprived of the pleasure of Baggy's company now. Luckily, there's still some of the grub left."

The Terrible Three finished without the assistance of Baggy Trimble. That fat youth was in a discontented and furious frame of mind. He had scoffed the lion's share of the feed, but he was far from satisfied.

"Rotters!" he grunted. "I believe they wanted to get rid of me! Beasts, after I'd invited them for the vac, too! Grooogh! I wonder where that beast D'Arcy is, and that beast Blake, and those beasts Herries and Dig. Br-r-r-r!"

And Baggy Trimble bowled away along the towing-path, with a very keen eye open for further victims.

CHAPTER 5.

Trimble Comes in Useful.

"B AI Jove! There's that boundah Twimble!"

"Lucky we've finished," remarked Jack Blake.

The chums of Study No. 6 were camped under the trees on the bank of the Ryll. The boat was moored to an old willow. Fortunately, Study No. 6 had disposed of the spread by the time the bounder of the Fourth discovered them.

Baggy Trimble came up with an ingratiating grin.

"Fancy meeting you!" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove! Weren't you lookin' for us?" said Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Not at all. I've been picnicking with some Shell chaps," said Trimble. "I took a stroll, and here we are. Can I help you?"

"Weally, Twimble——"

"I'm rather good at cooking on a spirit-stove," said Trimble. "I really want to make myself useful. That's my way. Where's the grub?"

The Fourth-Formers grinned. The grub had been disposed of, and, as the chums of Study No. 6 had healthy appetites, not even a crumb had been left. Baggy Trimble's unerring instinct had led him to the feed; but he had arrived a little too late.

Herries pointed along the towing-path.

"Cut off!" he said.

"Ahem!" Trimble sat down in the grass. "Ripping weather, ain't it?"

Blake closed one eye at his comrades.

"If Trimble's come to join us, we're highly honoured," he remarked. "Are you going to be one of us this afternoon, Trimble?"

"Well, as you're so pressing, certainly," said Trimble eagerly. "I say, can I unpack the grub for you?"

"The grub's been unpacked, and packed again," said Blake calmly. "You can't get at it now without surgical operations."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we're glad of your company," said Blake blandly. "You're just the fellow we want, in fact. Get those crocks into the boat."

"Eh?"

"You haven't come here to slack, you know. Pack those crocks into the basket, and shove it into the boat."

"Oh, I say——"

"I give you two minutes!" said Blake.

"Of course, I—I'll do anything to oblige you, Blake."

"You'd better!"

Baggy Trimble, with a very dismayed face, packed the crocks in the basket, and placed it in the boat. The chums of the Fourth followed him in, and Blake cast off the painter.

"We're going to give you a lift back to the school, Baggy," he said genially.

"Well, that's better than nothing, I suppose," said Trimble, with a grunt.

"And you're going to take an oar?"

"Eh?"

"Or, rather, two oars," said Blake. "I've heard you say that you're a ripping oarsman. Take the oars."

"Look here, you know——"

Blake picked up a boathook. His grinning chums settled

down in the boat. Baggy Trimble had turned up in time to pull them back to St. Jim's.

Baggy Trimble eyed the boathook; he eyed Blake; he eyed the oars. Then he sat down, with a groan, and took two oars.

"I—I say, I—I'm not feeling quite up to rowing this afternoon, you know," he said, in dismay.

"Then you shouldn't join a boating-party."

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Besides, you've told us how you wow on the lake at Twimble Hall, Twimble. We know what a wippin' oarsman you are. Go it!"

"I—I'm afraid I shall catch some crabs, and perhaps lose the oars," said Trimble.

"Better not," said Blake. "I'm going to give you a dig with this boathook every time you catch a crab—like that!"

"Yow-ow-woooooop!" roared Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's only a mile," said Blake. "You've rowed ten miles, according to your account. A mile won't hurt you. But this boathook will, if you don't buck up. If you lose an oar, I shall pitch you in after it. Go ahead!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Trimble.

The fat slacker of the Fourth bent to the oars. There was no help for it. Blake was inexorable.

Trimble never took any exercise if he could help it; and a pull on the river was a good thing for him. But he did not enjoy it. He slaved at the oars, with the perspiration running down his unhealthy face, and at every pull he emitted a deep groan.

"You're making a lot of row," said Blake.

"Yow! I'm exhausted! Yow!"

"Next time you yow, I'll give you something to yow for!"

"Yow!"

"There you are!"

Trimble uttered a fiendish yell as the boathook caught him in his plump ribs.

"Yoooooop!"

"Where that came from there's plenty more," said Blake affably. "Go ahead, and don't make a row!"

Trimble suppressed his groans. The boat proceeded towards the school at a snail's pace. But the picnickers were not in a hurry. By the time the boat arrived at the landing-raft Trimble was bathed in perspiration, and his fat face was red and glowing. He staggered out of the boat on to the raft.

"Feel that it's done you good?" asked Blake.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Don't you feel evah so much bettah, deah boy?"

"Groooh hoooh!"

"We'll always give you some healthy exercise like that when you come out with us, Trimble," grinned Dig.

"Wow-wow!"

"Hallo, Trimble, been rowing?" exclaimed Julian of the Fourth, who had just landed with Kerruish and Hammond.

"Taking up rowing, Trimble, what?"

"Yow-wow-wow!"

"He's rowed us home," said Blake. "Walked a couple of miles to meet us, on purpose to row us home! Ripping of Trimble, wasn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble of the Fourth limped away. He had had enough exercise to last him for weeks. He fairly crawled into his study and collapsed into the arm-chair.

CHAPTER 6.

Rogues in Council!

CUTTS of the Fifth came along the passage with a very cheery look, and threw open the door of his study. Cutts had had a very agreeable afternoon. He had spent it in company with racing men and billiard sharpers, which was Cutts' idea of a good time.

But he started a little as he entered the study. St. Leger of the Fifth was there, with a white and haggard face. Cutts closed the door quickly.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?" he asked.

St. Leger nodded.

"I've been waiting for you to come in," he muttered.

"You've been a long time, Cutts!"

"Yes. Keeping it up with the boys," grinned Cutts. "How did you get on? I needn't ask you, though. I suppose Griggs cleared you out!"

"That isn't it! I've been nailed!"

Cutts whistled.

"You don't mean to say the Head—or Railton——"

"It was that meddling old fool Stringer."

"My hat!" Cutts whistled again. "Major Stringer? Yow must have been an ass! Has he been to the Head?"

"He's going to-morrow morning."

ANSWERS

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



St. Leger sat frozen as he recognised Major Stringer, a member of the governing board of St. Jim's. "Huh!" ejaculated the major. (See Chapter 3.)

"Then you're booked!"

St. Leger made a savage gesture.

"Don't be a dashed Job's comforter, you ass! I want you to help me out."

"Well, I'll do my best," said Cutts, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. "You were an ass not to come with me, as I advised you!"

"Lot of good saying 'I told you so' now, isn't it?" snarled St. Leger.

"Don't get ratty! I'll help you if I can. Tell me just what's happened."

St. Leger explained the scene by the river, and Cutts listened attentively, blowing out little clouds of smoke.

"Well, you're in a dickens of a fix," he said at last. "The major is a blessed old ramrod—he'll keep his word. The Head will know all about it in the mornin'."

"I know that! What am I to do?" said St. Leger helplessly. "Hang it, can't you advise a chap? You really got me into this sort of thing, Cutts!"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be a whinin' cad!" he said. "If my time ever comes to face the music I shan't whine!"

"You're not in this scrape. What am I to do? I've thought of going to the Head and making a clean breast of it," said St. Leger miserably.

"And explainin' that you were led astray in the first place by a bad fellow, and that really you're a plaster saint and a very estimable sneak, and not a desperate plunger at all?" said Cutts unpleasantly.

St. Leger flushed.

"I'm not thinkin' of givin' you away, if that's what you mean, Cutts. It wouldn't do me any good, for one thing."

"You're right; it wouldn't!"

"I—I thought of seeing the major too, and—and making an

appeal to him," muttered St. Leger. "I suppose that wouldn't be any use, Cutts?"

"Not a scrap! The old fellow is as hard as nails. He thinks a lot of the good name of the school too, as he would put it. As for the Head, it's not much use making a clean breast of it, after you're found out. Better leave the Head out of it as long as possible."

"But he'll know everything to-morrow morning."

Cutts' brow contracted in an effort of thought.

"You say you didn't give him your name?"

"No. But he knows me by sight—he's been here often enough, and he's seen me more than once."

"Still, he don't know you personally," said Cutts thoughtfully. "He's just seen you about the school, that's all. It mayn't be impossible to prove an alibi."

"An alibi!" ejaculated St. Leger.

Cutts nodded coolly.

"Yes. What time was it the major saw you?"

"Just four o'clock. I'd heard it strike from the village just before he came up," said St. Leger.

"Four!" said Cutts. "Well, suppose you can prove that you were somewhere else at four o'clock this afternoon!"

"But the major knows—"

"He might be mistaken. It's only his word against yours, anyway, if you deny it. And if you've got good witnesses to prove that you were somewhere else the Head would have to conclude that he was mistaken. After all, he can't say that he knows you well. He's just seen you about, that's all. If they refer to Griggs, Griggs will bear witness that the fellow with him was a chap named Smith or Jones, and nothing to do with the school. I can get a tip to Griggs this evening on that point."

"But they won't ask Griggs—they'd know he'd lie to help me out."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!"

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"Yes; but in case they do I'll give Griggs the tip. Now, let's see!" Cutts' brow wrinkled. "Did anybody else see you about that time?"

"Tom Merry, and Manners, and Lowther saw me. They came on me while I was playing nap with Griggs. They were going on a picnic or something."

"That's unlucky. But those kids are not sneaks; they're cheeky young scoundrels, but they won't chip in, in a thing of this sort, to give you a shove when you're down. They'll hold their tongues," said Cutts. "Only, of course, they're no use for an alibi; they won't tell—ahem!—whoppers, and it's a particularly big and stunning whopper we want. Nobody else saw you?"

"I met young Trimble about ten minutes after—on the towing-path—"

"Trimble of the Fourth? Well, he's a born liar and sponger," said Cutts. "He would swear to anything!"

"But—but I knocked him down," said St. Leger.

"Well, you ass!"

"The fat little beast worried me, and I knocked him over. I was in a temper. He pitched into the river, I think!"

"Of course, you had to make matters worse," said Cutts, with a frown. "Still, Trimble's our man! He's a born liar—I've noticed him—and he lies till he half believes his own lies. If we could make it to his interest to believe that he saw you there at four o'clock instead of a quarter past, he'd more than half believe it—he would swear to it, anyway!"

"But he's a tattling idiot!" said St. Leger uneasily. "If you gave him money the fellows would notice it—he never has any money. And he would jaw."

Cutts made an impatient gesture.

"Yes—yes, I know all that! I've got to think it out. Suppose—suppose we could make out—" He paused, his brows wrinkling. "You say that Trimble was knocked into the water—then he was wet?"

"I suppose he was. But what does that matter?"

"It may matter a lot. Did anybody see you come in?"

"No; Everybody was out when I got back."

"Then you might have been wet?"

St. Leger stared at him.

"What in thunder are you drivin' at, Cutts?"

"Your alibi," said Cutts coolly. "What we want is a thumpin' lie, and that's what I'm thinkin' of. It's no good for a born liar like Trimble to say he saw you at such and such a time to get you out of the scrape, and at the same time to be spendin' money—it would be a bit too palpable. Only, we've got to get hold of a born liar to swear to something that ain't true, you see, so Trimble's our man! But—suppose you tumbled into the river this afternoon—"

"Eh?"

"And Trimble pulled you out?"

"Trimble pulled me out!" said St. Leger dazedly.

"Yes. That would account for Trimble being wet. And once you put such an idea into the head of that gassing young idiot he'd swank all over the school about it—and there's your alibi!"

"My hat!"

"Once Trimble gets such a wheeze into his silly head, and knows that you'll back him up in the yarn, nothin' will hold him in. The whole school will know it. And in a couple of hours Trimble will believe it himself—he's that kind of braggin' idiot. I know him, you see! Of course, we shall have to be careful. You'll have to play your part, of course. Get to the dorm, and drench your clothes with water and hang 'em out to dry. Go to bed early, and sneeze—a bit of pepper will make that easy enough. You're going to have a narrow escape of catching a bad cold. Leave Trimble to me!"

Cutts' eyes were glistening now. A deep and tortuous scheme was just after Cutts' own heart, and he was as keen on the cunning scheme itself as upon saving his pal from the consequences of his blackguardly folly. St. Leger stared at him helplessly.

His brain was not quite so quick and acute as Gerald Cutts'. He was scared, rather than reassured, by the cobweb of falsehoods Cutts was planning.

"But—but it's too thick, Cutts!" he exclaimed. "It's too thick! It will come out!"

"If it comes out, you're no worse off than you were before. As the matter stands, you're booked for the sack!"

"Yes, that's so."

"I think it will work. It's a chance, anyway; and it's the only chance you've got, St. Leger. Lucky Trimble was there, and can't be proved to have been somewhere else. Get to the dorm, and do as I told you before the fellows come in. I'll go and see Trimble." Cutts rose to his feet.

"Leave it in my hands, and I'll pull you through!"

"I—I suppose it's the only chance," muttered St. Leger, with dry lips.

"It jolly well is! Do as I tell you!"

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"I—I'll try it!"

Cutts nodded, and hurried out of the study. It was necessary to see Trimble of the Fourth as quickly as possible.

St. Leger, more slowly, made his way to the Fifth-Form dormitory to carry out his part of the scheme. If that precious scheme was a success, it would prove that Major Stringer was mistaken in supposing that he had seen St. Leger of the Fifth gambling with Mr. Griggs of Wayland. If it was not a success— But St. Leger did not dare to think of what would happen in that case!

CHAPTER 7.

Heroic!

"O H, dear! Ow!"

The mumbling voice of Baggy Trimble could be heard, as Cutts of the Fifth came along to his study. The fat Fourth-Former had not yet recovered from his pull on the river.

Cutts looked in. Baggy was sprawling in the armchair, and he was alone in the study. Levison and Mellish and Lumley-Lumley were still out of doors in the bright weather. Baggy was mumbling over his sufferings, and hoping that somebody would come in to tea—when there would be tea for Baggy.

He looked up hopefully as Cutts came in, then grunted as he recognised the dandy of the Fifth.

"Hallo!" said Cutts genially.

"Hallo!" grunted Trimble.

"Feeling tired?"

"Yow! Yes!"

Trimble blinked at the Fifth-Former in astonishment. Why Cutts should care whether he was tired or not was a mystery.

"Changed your things?" asked Cutts.

"Nunno."

"You'd better. You're likely to catch cold if you hang about in wet things!"

"Well, my hat!" said Trimble.

His astonishment was almost too great for words. He stared at Cutts open-mouthed.

Cutts came into the study, and closed the door. He sat elegantly on the corner of the table, looking at Trimble with the genial expression that surprised the fat junior so much.

"I'm afraid the fellows haven't done you justice, Trimble," he remarked. "You're a jolly plucky kid!"

Trimble's mouth was wide open with amazement. He bore a curious resemblance to a codfish at that moment. For the dandy of the Fifth to come to his study and praise him like this was astounding.

"It was you, of course?" said Cutts suddenly.

"Eh? What was me?" stuttered Trimble.

"It was you went in for St. Leger?"

"W-w-went in for him?"

"Yes. St. Leger would have been drowned if a chap hadn't pulled him out of the river," said Cutts. "He was so knocked over that he hardly noticed who it was, but he told me he thought it was Trimble of the Fourth!"

"My—my—my hat!" gasped Trimble.

He began to understand. St. Leger had fallen in the river; someone had bravely rescued him, and he, Baggy Trimble of the Fourth, was supposed to be the heroic rescuer.

Trimble did not tell Cutts that a mistake had been made. That was not Trimble's way. Cutts had judged his character quite correctly. The fat bouncer of the Fourth had no objection whatever to appropriating honour and glory that did not belong to him.

"It was a splendid thing to do!" said Cutts enthusiastically.

"I really ask your pardon, Trimble, for having been rather down on you sometimes. I didn't know, you see, what a really plucky chap you were!"

"Oh!" gasped Trimble.

"St. Leger told me exactly how it happened," went on Cutts. It was necessary for Trimble to know the details of the "whopper" he was to tell; but it did not even occur to Baggy's obtuse mind that Cutts was intentionally giving him those details. "He was strolling along the Ryll, when he stumbled on the bank near the Pool, and went in. A kid rushed down the bank, plunged in after him, and held him till he was able to get hold of a willow, and pull himself out. I must say, Trimble, that I was surprised when I heard that it was you!"

"Oh!"

"I should like to shake hands with you, Trimble. I've misjudged you, and I'm sorry," said Cutts, holding out his hand very frankly.

Trimble shook hands with him. Trimble was already beginning to swell with importance. He wondered dazedly

who had rescued St. Leger, and whether it was a St. Jim's chap.

But as St. Leger apparently believed that it was he—Trimble—who had done it, there was no danger of another claimant depriving him of his laurels.

The idea of "swanking" before the fellows as a hero was very attractive to Baggy, as he was well known to be a funk. The fellows would have to alter their opinion of him now.

"After this," went on Cutts, "I'm your friend, and so is St. Leger. If you ever want to ask any little favour, don't hesitate."

"I—I won't!" gasped Trimble.

"After what you've done, you've got a claim on both of us," said Cutts. "I shall see that all the fellows know how splendidly you acted, too!"

"Oh!"

"By the way, you'd better change your things," said Cutts. "It's nearly six now, so it's two hours since you pulled St. Leger out of the water!"

"Is—is—is it?" stammered Trimble.

"Yes; it was about a quarter to four, wasn't it?"

"I—I—I think so."

"I remember St. Leger mentioned that it was striking four as he got back to the school," said Cutts.

"I—I—yes, just so!" gasped Trimble.

"He ran most of the way to keep from catching cold," said Cutts. "Of course, you didn't get wet all over, as you only went in up to the waist."

"Ex-ex-exactly."

"Let me see, did you say it was a quarter to four or ten to four when you fished him out?"

"A quarter to four exactly; I—I think," said Trimble.

"I remember I heard the three-quarters chime from the village just—just before I saw him tumble in!"

Cutts suppressed a grin.

"Just so," he assented. "You ought to have come back and changed after that, Trimble. Where did you go?"

"I went and picnicked with Tom Merry."

"Oh! That was after four o'clock, wasn't it?"

"Yes; about a quarter-past," said Trimble. "After that I rowed Blake and some chaps home to the school."

"You must be made of iron," said Cutts admiringly. "Most fellows would have been knocked up by what you did for St. Leger!"

"I—I'm a rather athletic chap, you know!" said Trimble.

"You must be! St. Leger asked me to tell you to excuse him for not coming to thank you personally just now. He's taken rather a cold, and he's gone to the dorm," said Cutts. "He'll see you to-morrow. He told me to say he's ever so much obliged, and that he'll never forget it!"

Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth came into the study as Cutts was speaking. He looked surprised to find the Fifth-Former there.

"Well, I'll cut off," said the dandy of the Fifth, slipping off the table. "I hope you won't feel any ill effects, Trimble. Are you liable to take cold?"

"Nunno!"

"That's good! But I shouldn't like you to be ill after doing such a plucky thing!"

Lumley-Lumley jumped.

"Trimble been doing a plucky thing!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"A jolly plucky thing!" said Cutts heartily. "I'd never have thought it of Trimble! I'm sorry to say so, but I never did him justice!"

"But what the merry thunder has he done?" exclaimed the astounded Lumley-Lumley.

"He went into the Pool for St. Leger, who had fallen in. They might both have been carried away by the current, and drowned. You know what a dangerous spot it is," said Cutts. "A chap was drowned there once. Trimble plunged in, held on to a branch of a willow, and held on to St. Leger, and saved his life!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It was all the more risky, as Trimble is a poor swimmer," said Cutts. "If he'd lost his hold it would have been all up with him as well as St. Leger. Well, good-bye, Trimble; mind you don't catch a cold!"

"I—I say, Cutts!" gasped Trimble, as the Fifth-Former was leaving the study.

Cutts turned round genially.

"Yes, kid?"

"C-a-a-an you lend me five bob?"

Trimble eyed Cutts warily as he made that request. If he was a hero, if he had risked his life to save St. Leger, and if Cutts was awfully admiring and grateful, there was no reason why Cutts shouldn't make him a little loan. That was how Trimble looked at it. But, as he knew perfectly well that he hadn't rescued St. Leger, he was doubtful.

But his doubts were speedily set at rest. Cutts' hand went to his pocket at once.

"Certainly!" he said cheerily.

Five shillings clinked into Trimble's fat hand.

Trimble blinked at them, as Cutts, with a friendly nod, quitted the study. But there were the five shillings, in solid cash! Cutts' gratitude was worth something—St. Leger's, surely, would also have a cash value. Trimble realised that he was in for a good thing, and if he had had any doubts about playing the role of heroic rescuer those doubts would have been banished now.

In his mind's eye he saw himself the recipient of a long series of little loans from the two wealthy Fifth-Formers; it was a happy prospect of continual pocket-money until the gratitude wore out. And surely the gratitude was good for the rest of the term, at least!

Lumley-Lumley was looking curiously at Trimble. A heroic action even by Mellish or Crooke would hardly have surprised him quite as much as one by Baggy Trimble. But there seemed no room to doubt—certainly only a powerful motive would have made the lofty Cutts so civil to a junior, and the ready loan of five shillings seemed to clinch the matter.

"Well, my hat!" said Lumley-Lumley. "How on earth did you come to do it, Trimble? Blessed if I'd thought it of you!"

Trimble sniffed.

"Some chaps are plucky and some ain't," he said. "I happen to be one of those that are, that's all!"

"You've shown precious few signs of it before. But if you've done a decent thing for once, Trimble, I'll give you a word of advice—don't spoil it by cadging! Leave St. Leger's money alone."

"You mind your own business!" said Trimble. "I suppose I can borrow from a friend if I like? On the rare occasions when I happen to be short of ready-money St. Leger's my friend, and so is Cutts!"

Lumley-Lumley grinned.

"If you start palling with chaps in the Fifth they'll soon get fed up," he said warningly. "Especially such swanking bounders as Cutts and St. Leger. I guess you'd better go easy!"

"You're jealous!" said Trimble loftily. "You haven't any friends in the senior Forms—I have. I intend to see a good deal of Cutts and St. Leger. I get on well with them—they're chaps to my taste. I dare say I shall often be in and out of Cutts' study. You needn't ask me to take you. I shan't!"

"You'll get the order of the boot on your second visit, if not on your first!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley.

"Oh, rats!"

Trimble rolled out of the study. There was a new consequence in his manner as he strutted down the passage. Baggy Trimble was somebody now! He had performed a plucky action—at all events, it appeared to be believed that he had—and by this time Baggy, with his remarkable powers of imagination, half believed it himself. And so it was Baggy Trimble's turn to strike the stars with his sublime head.

CHAPTER 8.

Trimble the Hero!

"W EMARKABLE!"

That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's verdict.

Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth had told the story in the junior common-room. It was listened to in amazement and incredulity.

"Gammon!" said Kangaroo.

"Piffle!" said Blake.

"Draw it mild!"

"The silly ass is pulling our leg!"

"Rot!"

"I guess I only know what Cutts said," said Lumley-Lumley. "I don't see why Cutts should romance about it!"

"Is it honest Injun?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I guess so!"

"Wemarkable!"

"Blessed if I can catch on!" said Manners. "Trimble never struck me as a chap to go in for a fellow in a dangerous place. But you never know!"

"Bai Jove, you know, who'd have thought it? We haven't weally done Twimble justice!" said Arthur Augustus. "He's no swimmah, eithah!"

"Well, he must be plucky to go into the Pool, whether he had hold of a willow or not," said Talbot. "It's a dangerous place!"

"I'll believe it when I hear it from St. Leger," said Gore, with a sniff. "It's too jolly thick for me!"

"Hallo! Here he is!" exclaimed Levison.

Baggy Trimble came into the common-room. He was strutting. There was a shiny look on his face, and a smear of

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jam. Cutts' five shillings had already gone the way of most of Baggy's pocket-money—at the tuckshop.

All eyes were turned on Trimble.

"Here comes the giddy hero!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Behold the conquering hero comes! Were you asleep, Trimble?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tell us how it happened, intirely!" said Reilly.

"Oh, I don't care to talk about it!" said Trimble airily.

"I'm not a fellow to brag!"

"Ye gods!" said Lowther. "When did this sudden change take place, then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you know, don't you run a fellow down just because he's done a plucky thing!" said Trimble warmly. "Some of you chaps would have thought twice of plunging into the Pool—I know that! It's jolly dangerous!"

"I should have said you'd have thought three times!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "How did you come to do it?"

"Well, I suppose I couldn't leave the chap to drown!" said Trimble. "I wasn't going to mention it, but Cutts seems to think a lot of it. I'm not the kind of fellow to want to get into the limelight. Never was!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, it beats me!" said Blake.

Trimble snorted.

"If you'd known what I'd done perhaps you wouldn't have made me sag at rowing that boat home!" he said loftily. "Of course, I wasn't going to tell you!"

"That's what I can't understand," said Blake. "It would be more like Trimble to spout it all out at once—with trimmings!"

"Weally, Blake, you are wathah unjust to Twimble! He did not bwag at all of what he had done!"

"No; that's what beats me hollow!"

"Wats! Twimble, deah boy, I beg your pardon. I have always wegarded you as a fat, wotten boudah and a spongin' worm, you know, and I should nevah have believed that you could do such a plucky thing. I weally ask your pardon!"

"Granted!" said Trimble loftily.

"Blessed if I believe it now!" said Gore. "Where's St. Leger? Let's ask St. Leger how it happened!"

"Yes; that's a good idea!"

Trimble's act of heroism had excited general interest—in fact, it had made quite a sensation. It was so utterly unlike Trimble that it could not fail to do so. Quite a little army of juniors marched away to Cutts' study to see St. Leger.

They found Cutts alone there, and he looked at them inquiringly.

"St. Leger isn't here," said Gore.

"Where's St. Leger?" asked Tom Merry. "We hear that he fell into the river, and Trimble of the Fourth pulled him out."

"That's correct," said Cutts calmly.

"Then it's true!" exclaimed Kerruish.

"Quite true! Trimble is a plucky kid. You'd hardly think it to look at him, but actions speak louder than words!" said Cutts.

"But where is St. Leger?"

"He caught a bit of a cold, and he's gone to bed."

"Well, my hat! I suppose we can see him?" said Tom.

"Oh, yes; I don't suppose he's asleep!"

The inquiring juniors made their way to the Fifth-Form dormitory. St. Leger was in bed there, reading.

"Feeling bad?" asked Lowther.

"Well, rather seedy," said St. Leger. "Atchoo! Atchoo! I'm afraid I'm booked for a cold, but I'm trying to keep it off. Atchoo!"

"I say, did Trimble really pull you out of the river?" exclaimed Gore.

"Yes—plucky little beggar!" said St. Leger. "If he'd lost hold of the willow we should both have been drowned!"

"Bai Jove! It was wippin' of him!"

"Well, wonders will never cease!" said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I should have thought it!"

"Well, I shouldn't!" said St. Leger. "The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 441."

Leger. "But he did it, and I know he saved my life!"

"Well, my hat!"

There could be no further doubt now. The juniors left the dormitory, discussing the matter in wondering tones.

Tom Merry clapped Trimble on the back, when they returned to the Common-room.

"Good for you!" he said. "We're going to have a bit of supper in my study, Trimble. Will you come?"

"Yes, rather!" said Baggy promptly.

And he did, and disposed of the lion's share as usual, but for once he was more than welcome. Baggy Trimble was a hero in the eyes of the St. Jim's juniors now; and it looked like being an excellent thing for Baggy.

CHAPTER 9.

Not Quite so Heroic.

"IT'S jolly queer!"

Monty Lowther made that remark. The Terrible Three had finished their preparation and supper, and Baggy Trimble, after supper, had gone along to Study No. 6. Baggy intended to make the most of his new popularity, and he hoped that there was something going in No. 6.

"What's queer?" asked Manners. "Queer that Trimble should have acted decently? I agree with you."

"Not only that," said Lowther thoughtfully. "But—I can't quite catch on. You remember Trimble planted himself on us this afternoon."

"What about that?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, that must have been after he fished St. Leger out of the river. Trimble says that happened before four o'clock."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Well, isn't it queer?" said Lowther. "Trimble never said a word of the heroic rescue, and all that. But he told us that St. Leger had knocked him over, and he'd fallen into the water."

"By Jove, I'd forgotten that!"

"That is jolly queer," said Manners, with a nod. "Trimble's tale was that St. Leger had been bullying him, not that he had been rescuing St. Leger. Of course, both things might have happened."

"And then," said Lowther, "you remember the time we came on St. Leger and Griggs in the wood."

"I didn't notice," said Tom.

"I didn't, either; but I heard four strike from the village clock very soon afterwards."

"Yes, I remember that now," said Manners.

"So the time when Baggy fished St. Leger out of the river must have been very close to the time when we saw him playing cards with Griggs. He wasn't wet then, so it must have been after that."

"I suppose so!"

"But if it was after that, it was after four. According to Baggy Trimble, it was before four—ten minutes or a quarter of an hour."

"Baggy's mistaken the time, I suppose," said Tom Merry.

"It must have been after four that he fished St. Leger out. It couldn't have been earlier, or St. Leger would have been wet when we saw him in the wood."

"But if it was after four, that's queer, too, for it wasn't long after four that Baggy joined us, and scoffed our grub!"

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"What are you getting at, Monty?" he asked.

"Well, according to the time the thing must have happened, it really looks to me as if it didn't happen at all," said Lowther, with a grin.

Tom started.

"But it must have happened! Trimble is a regular Prussian for lying, I know; but why should St. Leger make out that he is grateful to him for saving his life, if it never happened at all?—Cutts, too?"

Monty Lowther shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to be suspicious," he said. "But it looks to me as if it can't have happened. There's some little game on!"

"But why?"

"Oh, I give it up! But I asked

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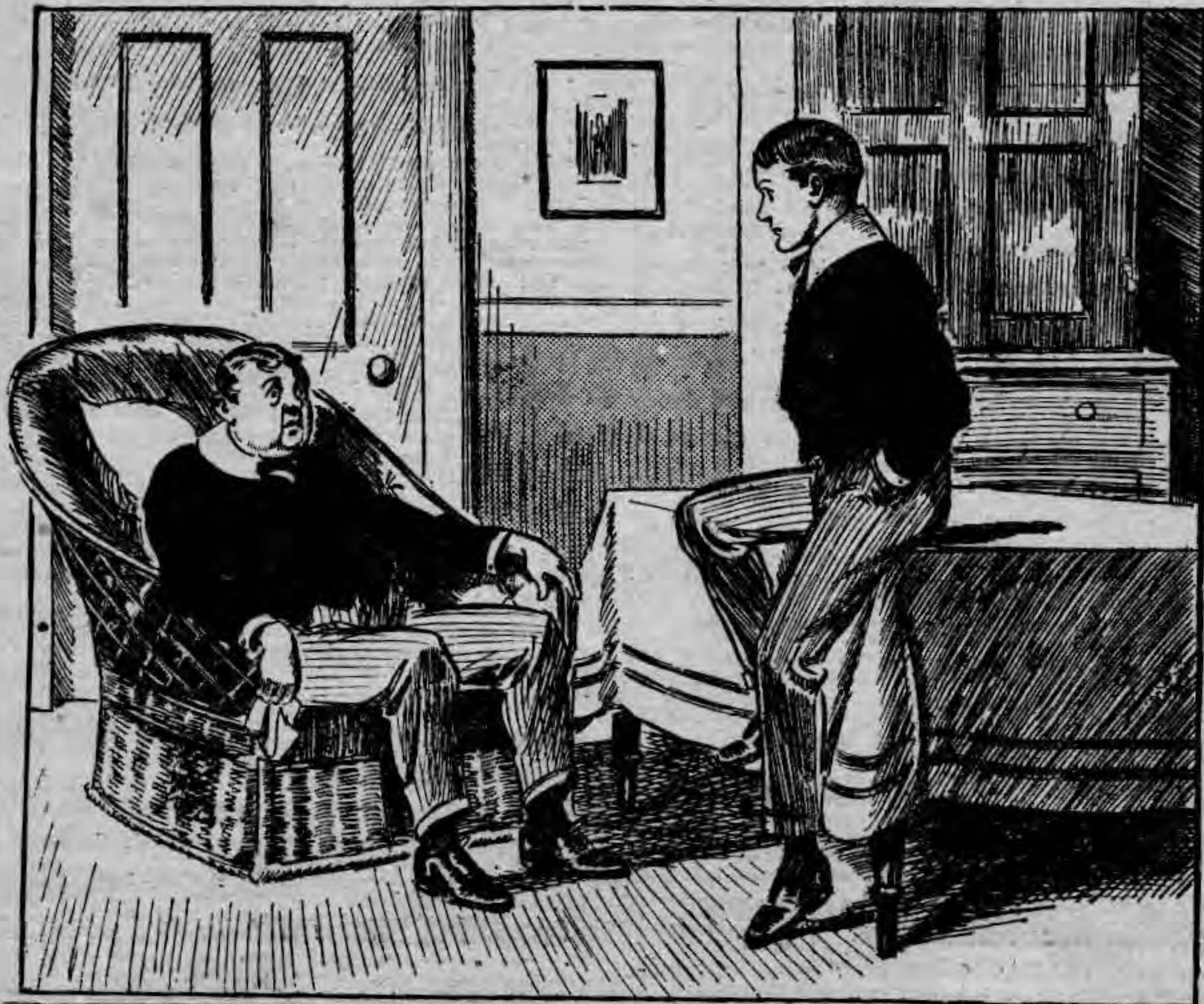
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OUT TO-DAY.



Cutts sat elegantly on the corner of the table, looking at Trimble with the genial expression that surprised the fat junior so much. "I'm afraid the fellows haven't done you justice, Trimble," he remarked. "You're a jolly plucky kid." (See Chapter 7.)

Trimble, and he remembers distinctly hearing four strike from Rylcombe, after he had rescued St. Leger. He says so. Now, we know that St. Leger was high and dry, playing cards with Griggs, right up to four o'clock at least—afterwards, very likely, unless old Stringer spotted him." Monty Lowther gave a sudden jump. "Stringer, by gum!"

"Well, what about Stringer?"

Lowther gave a yell.

"It's an alibi!"

"A which?"

"An alibi, of course! We knew that old Stringer must have spotted St. Leger. He's put up Trimble to this yarn, to make out that he wasn't there with Griggs."

"My hat!"

"If he was in the Pool, nearly a mile away, being fished out by Trimble, he couldn't have been in the wood gambling with Griggs," grinned Lowther. "That explains. It's a giddy alibi for St. Leger."

Manners and Tom Merry stared at Lowther. A few minutes' reflection was sufficient to show them that Monty Lowther had worked it out correctly.

"Well, of all the rotten spoofers!" said Tom, in utter disgust. "It was a queer yarn from the start. That settles it!"

"And that fat rotter is swanking around as a giddy hero!" growled Manners.

"He ought to be shown up!"

"Easy does it," said Lowther. "We've tumbled, but we've no right to give St. Leger away. It's the sack for him if he doesn't make out his case."

"Serve him right!" grunted Manners.

"True; but we don't want to have a hand in it. It would be sneaking. It's up to us to keep our heads shut."

"Yes, that's so. But let's go and see Trimble," said Tom.

Merry. "He's as much a fool as rogue, and now we suspect, we can soon see whether he's spoofing!"

The Terrible Three went along to Study No. 6. Baggy Trimble was there, seated in the armchair, holding forth; and Blake & Co. were listening to him with unusual patience and politeness.

"You see, I didn't really stop to think. As for the danger, I didn't care for that. I saw St. Leger in the water, and heard him cry for help, and just rushed in."

"It was jollay pluckay, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, I am plucky, you know," said Trimble modestly.

"That always was my strong point. Any more chestnuts?"

"Here you are," said Digby.

"Thanks! They're rather good! St. Leger was awfully grateful—so is Cutts. Cutts has offered to make me a little loan now and then, if I like. He lent me five bob."

"Weally, Twimble, it is wathah wotten to spoil the effect by howwovin' money on the stwength of it!"

"Of course, I'm going to settle up with Cutts to-morrow, when Julian settles up the quid I lent him."

"Under the circs, Twimble, I do not want to speak wudely. But I do not believe for one moment that you lent Julian a soveweign."

"Ahem! I meant Tom Merry. Tom was hard up this afternoon, and as he was going on a picnic, I couldn't refuse him."

"Couldn't you, you spoofing Prussian?" roared Tom Merry, stepping into the study.

Trimble jumped, and nearly choked over a chestnut.

"Oh! I—I didn't see you, Merry! Have—have some of these chestnuts?"

"So you lent me a quid this afternoon, did you?" demanded Tom.

"Nunno! I—I meant to say Lowther."

"Me!" exclaimed Lowther, following Tom Merry in.
 "N-n-no! Manners, of course!" gasped Trimble. "It was Manners. He came to me almost with tears in his eyes and begged for a loan, and—"

"I did?" roared Manners, striding in wrathfully
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble blinked at Manners.

"Not at all, Manners," he said feebly. "I wasn't referring to you. I—I—I meant Manners minor, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Twimble, you are a feahful fibbah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am assuahed that you must have Pwussian blood in your veins."

"So you lent my minor a quid?" said Manners, seizing Trimble by the collar and jerking him out of the armchair.

"Lend me a stump, somebody!"

"Yarocoh!" roared Trimble. "Leggo! It—it wasn't Manners minor! It was D'Arcy minor—young Wally, you know—"

"Gweat Scott! You feahful pwevawicatah, Twimble!"

"Don't lick him!" said Blake. "After all, he's done a plucky thing, though he's such a lying Hun!"

Bump! The fat person of Baggy Trimble was hurled back into the armchair, with a concussion that knocked all the breath out of Baggy. He collapsed into the chair and stuttered.

"That's a lie like all the rest," said Manners. "He didn't fish St. Leger out of the river at all!"

"What!"

"Look here, you know," gasped Trimble. "I did, you know! Cutts told me so. I—I mean, Cutts was awfully grateful about my rescuing his pal at the risk of my life. Ask St. Leger!"

"Weally, Mannahs, you are on the w'ong twack," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy wemarkable, but Twimble has weally shown pluck for once!"

"Dash it all, give the Hun his due!" said Blake. "It's clear enough that Trimble did that, Manners."

"Yes, rather!" gasped Trimble. "I'm used to jealousy, but I really don't think that Manners ought to run a chap down just because he's jealous—grooogh!"

"What time did you get St. Leger out of the river, Baggy?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Just before four—ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour."

"We saw St. Leger a few minutes before four," said Tom, "and he was dry, and certainly hadn't been in the river."

"Bai Jove!"

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"I—I might have mistaken the time," stammered Trimble.

"It—it may have been a quarter past four."

"You were scoffing our feed before that."

"Was—was I? I—I mean, it happened at exactly four o'clock. Now I come to think of it, I heard four striking just as I dragged St. Leger out of the river at the risk of my life."

"And that happened at the Pool, below the bridge?" asked Tom.

"Yes."

"That's a mile from where we saw St. Leger at a few minutes to four."

"Oh!"

"St. Leger must have got over the ground awfully quickly to drop into the river for you to pull him out," said Tom, laughing. "And after the giddy rescue, you reached us by a quarter-past four, did you? You did over a mile in fifteen minutes?"

"I—I—I'm a good walker," groaned Trimble.

"And when you joined us you told us that St. Leger had been bullying you, and knocked you into the river."

"Did—d-d-did I?"

"Yes, you did."

"That—that was only a figure of speech!" gasped Trimble. "What I intended to say was that St. Leger fell into, the river and I pulled him out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then it's all lies from beginning to end!" exclaimed Blake.

"Like all Trimble's yarns," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"But what's the little game?" asked Herries. "Trimble would lie rather than tell the truth any time. But what are Cutts and St. Leger lying about?"

"They've got a reason," said Tom Merry, "and a jolly good reason. It's necessary for St. Leger to prove that he was somewhere where he wasn't this afternoon."

"Oh!" Blake whistled. "I tumble!"

"Of course, it's no business of ours to give the rotters away," said the captain of the Shell. "But we're not called upon to listen to that fat rotter lying and bragging."

"Bai Jove, no!" said Arthur Augustus, in disgust. "Twimble, you wank outsiders, I wequest you to step out of this studay!"

"Look here, you know," said Trimble feebly, "it's true, you know. Cutts said so—I mean, Cutts will say so. I first heard it from Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean, I—meant to say, Cutts knew all about it. St. Leger's caught a cold. That shows he was in the river. He's gone to bed early, and Railton's been up to see him, and asked him if he'd like to see a doctor. He's told Railton about it, and Railton shook hands with me. That settles it, doesn't it?"

"So you've been spoofing Railton, too?" exclaimed Digby.

"Look here, you know, 'tain't spoof. Railton shook hands with me, and told me he thought much more of me than he'd ever done before. And—and about the time it happened, I remember now—"

"Oh, you remember now?" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Yes. It was really three o'clock. It was three I heard striking as I dragged St. Leger from the river at the risk of my life."

"Bai Jove! At three o'clock you were heah, Twimble, stickin' your extwemely unpwepossessin' face in at this studay door!"

"W-w-was I? I—I mean it was five o'clock. Yes, now I come to think of it, it was exactly five."

"At five o'clock you were rowing our boat home!" roared Blake.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Trimble.

"Wasn't it one o'clock?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically, "or half-past twelve?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you know—"

Jack Blake took Trimble by the ear, and led him to the door.

"You can go and tell your lies in your own study!" he said. "You're bowled out here, you know."

Trimble snorted.

"I might have expected this jealousy!" he said bitterly.

"Of course you would run a fellow down!"

"What?"

"I despise you!" said Trimble.

And he rolled away before Blake could recover himself sufficiently to reply.

CHAPTER 10.

Accused!

"S TRINGER, by Jove!"

The Terrible Three were chatting in the quadrangle after morning lessons the next day, when the tall, angular form of Major Stringer was seen crossing from the gates. The juniors exchanged glances.

The major's visit to the school did not need explaining.

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Certainly, the major, who lived in the neighbourhood, was not an uncommon visitor there. But Tom Merry & Co. could guess that he had called this time in connection with St. Leger's escapade of the day before. There was a grim expression on the old military gentleman's face, and it was easy to guess that he came upon an unpleasant errand.

He nodded kindly enough to the Terrible Three, however, as they "capped" him in the quadrangle. They watched the tall, soldierly figure disappear into the School House.

"Trouble for St. Leger!" said Lowther.

"Can't help feeling sorry for the poor beast," said Manners. "I know he's not such a rotter as Cutts. He's got his good points. You know he gave me a tip once when Cutts was getting my minor into mischief. I sha'n't say anything about him."

"No business of ours, anyway," said Tom. "We've nothing to do with the Fifth, and we don't want to sit in judgment on them."

And the Terrible Three strolled away, not quite easy in their minds. They had a pretty accurate idea of the scheme worked between Cutts and St. Leger since Baggy Trimble's spoof had been revealed. But the exposure of Baggy was known only to a few fellows, and they, of course, had no intention of sneaking. So the precious alibi might work, all the same. But if the major found his accusation denied, and a witness brought against him, it was possible that the Terrible Three might be called upon. The major had met them very near the spot where Griggs and St. Leger had been gambling, and if he reflected, it would occur to him that the juniors had probably seen something of it. If they were called upon to state whether they knew the facts, the position would be serious and awkward.

They did not want to sneak, and they shrank from the idea of exposing the network of falsehoods which Cutts had cunningly woven, for that meant serious punishment for the spoofers. But it was quite certain that, if they were called before the Head, they would not join in the lying. St. Leger had a right to their silence, but he had no right to expect that; and if he did expect it, he would be disappointed.

Major Stringer had been shown into the Head's study. In a few words the old soldier acquainted Dr. Holmes with the purport of his visit.

The Head's face was shocked and sombre as he listened.

"This is a painful duty to me," the major added, "but I could not leave you in ignorance of the matter, sir."

"Quite so! And I thank you!" said the Head. "You are sure that there is no mistake?"

"Quite assured."

"Yet you do not know the boy's name?"

"No; and he refused to give it. He is a senior."

"That makes the matter more serious. But as you are not personally acquainted with the lad, there is a possibility——"

Major Stringer shook his head decidedly.

"I have seen him about the school several times," he said. "I will pick him out in a very few minutes."

The Head touched the bell, and sent Toby for Mr. Railton. The School Housemaster came into the study, and the Head explained the matter to him. Mr. Railton listened, with a grave brow.

"Will you have the senior boys called together in Hall, Mr. Railton? Major Stringer will see them there."

"Certainly, sir!" said Mr. Railton, and he left the study.

There was considerable surprise among the Fifth and Sixth when the order went forth. Kildare and Darrel and Langton hurried about collecting the seniors from various directions. As the summons had not been expected, it took some time. Kildare found Cutts and St. Leger in their study. St. Leger was sneezing into a handkerchief when the captain of St. Jim's came in. His face was very pale. He had seen the major from the study window.

"You're wanted in Hall," said Kildare.

Cutts yawned.

"Anything on?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose so. I don't know what it's about," said Kildare, "but all the Fifth and Sixth are wanted."

"What a bore! Come on, St. Leger!"

"You've got a cold?" said Kildare, glancing at St. Leger.

"Yes, a bit of one. I fell in the river yesterday——"

"Yes, I've heard about that," said Kildare. "That fat little boulder Trimble pulled you out. Plucky of him."

"Yes, wasn't it? I—I suppose I'm bound to go into Hall?" asked St. Leger. "That rotten draughty place won't do my cold any good."

"Well, Mr. Railton said all the Fifth and Sixth. I think it's important, from the way he looked. You'd better come."

And Kildare went along the passage to the other studies.

"Better come," said Cutts. "You don't want to be specially remarked on, you know, as you would be if you stayed out. Keep on sniffing and snuffling, and keep your handkerchief to your nose. The old beast mayn't spot you."

"He will!" groaned St. Leger.

"Well, there's the alibi."

"I—I've got to see it through," St. Leger muttered. "What a dashed fool I've been! If I get out of this, it's the last mug's game for me!"

Cutts grinned. He had an idea that St. Leger's reformation would last exactly as long as his danger, and no longer. The two Fifth-Formers went down to the hall together.

There was a buzz of voices in the Big Hall. Most of the fellows had been called in from the nets, and they were not pleased at having their cricket practice interrupted.

The buzz died away, however, as the Head entered the hall by the upper door, accompanied by Major Stringer.

All eyes were turned upon Dr. Holmes and the major.

The Head's voice, as he spoke, was listened to with deep attention. He explained briefly that a senior boy of St. Jim's had been seen gambling with a bad character from Wayland, and had been reported by Major Stringer, a governor of the school. The Head called upon the delinquent to come forward.

No one came forward.

Some of the fellows looked indignant. The major was doing his duty, doubtless. But it wasn't pleasant for the high and mighty members of the Sixth to be hauled over the coals in this way like a set of mischievous fags. Monteith was heard to murmur that the major had better have minded his own business. Kildare did not look at all pleased. Cutts smiled in a sneering way, and confided to the Fifth-Formers his opinion that the old duffer had made a bloomer.

"If the boy does not come forward of his own accord, Major Stringer will identify him," said the Head, after a long pause.

Silence!

"Very well," said Dr. Holmes, compressing his lips a little. "Major Stringer, will you have the kindness to point out the lad you refer to?"

"Huh! Certainly, sir!"

The major strode down the hall, his quick steely eyes glittering at the seniors from under his shaggy grey brows.

Grim looks from the St. Jim's seniors met him. They weren't at all pleased by the inspection, and they didn't pretend to be. Lefevre of the Fifth made it a point to shrug his shoulders, and Cutts chatted with Gilmore in apparent ignorance of the fact that the major was there at all.

But the grim old major was not deterred by dark looks. He stopped before the ranks of the Fifth, and his eyes fixed on St. Leger. The latter had his handkerchief to his nose, and was snuffling.

"Let me see your face, please!" rapped out the major.

St. Leger started, and removed the handkerchief.

"I thought so!" said Major Stringer satirically. "It was you!"

"St. Leger!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the Fifth, who was there with his Form.

"Is that his name? That is the boy I saw."

"Kindly step out, St. Leger."

"Buck up!" murmured Cutts inaudibly.

But St. Leger was pale as he stepped out before the Fifth. He was detected, and only Cutts' scheme stood between him and disgrace and punishment. St. Leger meant to play the game out, but his heart was heavy. His supposed, cold, however, accounted for his pale and discomposed looks, to the eyes of his Form-fellows.

"Come here, St. Leger," said the Head quietly.

St. Leger advanced up the hall, with all eyes upon him. The major followed with his military tread.

"That is the boy, Major Stringer?"

"Yes, sir."

"You recognise him?"

"Undoubtedly."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!"

"What have you to say, St. Leger?"

St. Leger pulled himself together.

"What am I accused of, sir?"

"You have heard what I said, St. Leger! Yesterday afternoon Major Stringer found you engaged in gambling with a disreputable character from Wayland."

"Major Stringer is mistaken, sir."

"What!" thundered the major.

The Head drew a deep breath.

"You deny Major Stringer's accusation, St. Leger?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Boy!" thundered the incensed major. "This effrontery—"

Dr. Holmes made a gesture.

"St. Leger must be heard in his defence," he said. "It is now a question of proof. You may have been mistaken, major."

"I was not mistaken, sir!"

"At all events, if St. Leger can account satisfactorily for his time yesterday afternoon, the matter must be considered as settled in his favour. If St. Leger was innocently occupied at that time, he can prove it."

The major grunted.

"That will certainly settle it," he said ungraciously. "I have done my duty as a governor of the school in coming here to expose this young rascal. I did not expect him to have the effrontery to lie about it. Let him prove where he was at the time!"

There was a buzz in the hall. Dr. Holmes raised his hand, and there was silence. All eyes were fixed upon St. Leger.

CHAPTER 11.

The Witness for the Defence.

ST. LEGER stood quiet and calm. He had pulled himself together now. He realised what was at stake, and that he was fairly committed to the path of falsehood. He had left himself no escape from that.

Dr. Holmes' manner was not in the least harsh or condemnatory. He sincerely hoped that the Fifth-Former would be able to clear himself.

"You deny, St. Leger, that you were engaged as the major supposes?" he asked.

"Absolutely, sir!"

"In that case, Major Stringer must have mistaken some other person for you."

"I suppose so, sir."

"Where were you yesterday afternoon?"

"I went down the river with a book, sir. Mr. Ratcliff had found fault with my work in the morning, and I took my Horace out to have a good grind in a quiet place."

"You were alone?" asked the Head, a slight shade coming over his brow.

"Not all the time, sir. I did not go out till three o'clock."

"Was it after three, Major—"

Major Stringer broke in.

"It was at four o'clock that I found this boy gambling with a low blackguard in the wood," he said. "I am aware of the precise time, because I heard it chime and strike from Rylcombe Church."

"Where were you at four o'clock, St. Leger? You had not come in?"

"I was in by about twenty past four, sir," said St. Leger.

"Naturally, you came back directly," said the major.

"But at four o'clock, St. Leger—" said the Head.

"At that time, sir, I was by the river near the Pool, below the bridge."

"Is that the locality, Major—"

"It is not the locality, sir," said Major Stringer. "I saw this boy in the wood above the bridge, at least a mile from the Pool, at four o'clock."

"Did anyone see you near the Pool, St. Leger?"

"Yes, sir!"

The major started a little. St. Leger's reply came sharply and clearly. There was a murmur from the crowd of seniors. The general sympathy was on St. Leger's side. Most of the St. Jim's fellows believed that the grim old major had made a mistake.

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Railton.

The doctor's face had cleared a little.

"Someone saw you there, St. Leger? Someone belonging to the school?"

"Yes, sir—a junior in the Fourth Form."

"Ah! Not one of your own friends?" said the Head, his face clearing still more.

"No, sir."

"Please give me the boy's name."

"Trimble of the Fourth, sir."

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"Kildare, will you kindly find Trimble of the Fourth, and bring him here as quickly as possible?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The captain of St. Jim's left the hall.

Interest was almost at fever heat now. The major was gnawing his grey moustache. Not for an instant did he doubt that St. Leger was the fellow he had seen gambling in the wood. The major had a keen eye for faces, and he was quite assured that he was not mistaken.

But if St. Leger had a witness to prove that he had been a mile from the spot where the major had seen him, it was certainly very puzzling. If the witness had been one of his own friends in the Fifth, it would have been explicable, on the supposition that the fellow was lying to get a pal out of a scrape. But it did not seem probable that such a scheme could be concocted with a junior. The major was frankly puzzled.

Mr. Railton broke the silence.

"You had better tell Dr. Holmes the circumstances, St. Leger, in connection with your meeting with Trimble yesterday afternoon."

"Ah! You were aware of this, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir. A considerable amount of attention has been drawn to the matter, as it happens."

"Trimble of the Fourth pulled me out of the river, sir," said St. Leger. "I was walking along the river, reading, and stumbled down the bank, and went into deep water. Trimble rushed in after me, and caught hold, and held on to a branch of a willow-tree. That's how I caught my cold, sir."

"Bless my soul, I knew nothing of this! And this, you say, happened at four o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

"About that, sir. I know I reached the school about twenty past four, hurrying all the way."

"Trimble, of course, will bear out your statement?"

"I suppose so, sir. I believe he told most of the fellows yesterday about pulling me out of the river. He ran a good deal of risk, and the juniors have been making quite a hero of him about it!"

"This lets in a somewhat new light on the matter," said the Head, with a glance at Major Stringer.

"It does not shake my conviction for one moment, sir," said the major grimly.

"Well, we shall see what the junior says."

"The matter appears clear to my mind, sir," said Mr. Railton. "I was aware last night of Trimble's action. I think most of the House knew of it. It remains to be established whether this action took place at the time stated by St. Leger."

"We shall learn that from Trimble."

Kildare came back into the hall with Trimble of the Fourth. The worthy Baggy had been a little scared at first, till he learned that he was to give an account of his heroic rescue. Now he was swelling with importance. By this time Trimble almost believed that he had rescued St. Leger. Nobody else had come forward to claim the distinction, and Trimble was sticking to it, and he was not at all averse from spreading himself in public on the subject.

His fat, consequential air as he followed Eric Kildare up the Hall made some of the seniors grin.

"Trimble!" said the Head.

"Yes, sir," said Baggy confidently.

"I learn that yesterday afternoon you saw St. Leger fall into the river, and entered the water to help him?"

"Just so, sir! I didn't stop to think of the risk—"

"What?"

"I just plunged in after him, sir," said Baggy. "All the fellows say it was jolly plucky!"

The Head repressed a smile.

"Very good—very good! Do you remember what time yesterday you performed this action, Trimble?"

"Certainly, sir," said Trimble, remembering what Gerald Cutts had told him. "It happened at a little before four, sir—about a quarter to four, I should say."

"You are sure of the time?"

"Yes, sir; I heard four strike soon afterwards."

"You are absolutely certain that it happened before four o'clock?"

"Oh, quite, sir! St. Leger knows!"

"Never mind St. Leger now, Trimble. It is very important to establish exactly when this happened!"

"Cutts knows too, sir. He told me—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I told him, sir," said Trimble hastily. "We had a jaw about it in my study afterwards, sir. Cutts said he wouldn't have thought of me, and he was very grateful to me for saving his pal's life. He lent me five shillings—"

"Never mind that now!" said the Head hastily.

"One moment, sir!" broke in the major. "It appears to

me that that incident has a bearing on the matter. Trimble, did Cutts—whoever Cutts is—give you five shillings to tell this story?"

"Really, major!" murmured the Head.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Trimble cheerfully. "Cutts didn't know that the Head would ask me about it. I wasn't going to say anything about it at all, really, I'm too modest, sir. But Lumley-Lumley heard Cutts talking to me about it, and he told the fellows. I asked Cutts to lend me the five bob. I thought that wasn't much, considering that I had saved his pal's life."

"Then Cutts did not offer you the money?"

"Oh, no, sir! He was going out of the study when I asked him. It occurred to me that I was short of tin, owing to lending Figgins of the New House my last sovereign; and as Cutts has plenty of tin, I thought—"

"Where did this affair happen, Trimble?" asked the Head.

"At the Pool, sir—a very dangerous place. Only a jolly plucky chap would have gone in there, sir! But I couldn't see St. Leger drown, though he had refused to let me join in the picnic!"

St. Leger's colour was returning now. The worthy Baggy was giving first-class evidence in his favour.

"Trimble supposed that I was going on a picnic when I went out, sir," he explained. "He wanted to come, and I—I cuffed him for his cheek. I'm sorry I cuffed him now, considering what he did afterwards!"

"It was rotten of you!" said Trimble. "Still, I don't bear malice! Perhaps you'll let me come next time!"

"Then you are not on good terms with St. Leger, Trimble?" asked the major, eyeing the fat Baggy suspiciously.

"Oh, yes, sir, now!" said Trimble. "I wasn't yesterday; St. Leger was rather a beast. But that's all over now!"

The major was silent. If Trimble hadn't been on good terms with St. Leger the day before, there seemed no reason why he should lie in his favour. Dr. Holmes glanced at him.

"You are satisfied now, major?"

"I am not satisfied, sir! I am perfectly well aware that St. Leger is the boy I saw gambling with that blackguard Griggs in the wood! But if you are satisfied, I have, of course, nothing further to say!"

"I cannot but be satisfied," said the Head. "Trimble recollects clearly that he was helping St. Leger out of the river at four o'clock yesterday afternoon. At the same time, you saw someone unknown at a mile's distance from the spot. The person may have resembled St. Leger, but clearly cannot have been St. Leger. To my mind, St. Leger emerges from the inquiry without a stain on his honour!"

"Thank you, sir!" said St. Leger.

"I have nothing more to say, sir," said the major drily. "I have done my duty—a disagreeable duty. I can do no more!"

And, with a stiff bow, the major strode from the Hall. His opinion was not shaken in the slightest degree, but he realised that there was nothing more to be done.

"The matter closes here," said the Head. "St. Leger, you have proved your innocence to my complete satisfaction. I am sorry that you have been accused. You may go! Dismiss!"

And Big Hall cleared.

CHAPTER 12:

Trimble Sticks!

TRIMBLE was surrounded by a crowd of juniors when he came out of the School House. The worthy Baggy was strutting.

"What did the Head want?" asked Gore.

"What's the row?" inquired Skimpole.

"Oh, the Head wanted to know about my splendid rescue!" said Trimble airily. "It was a sort of gathering to thank me for what I did. 'Tain't every chap who has a governor of the school recognising his bravery in public!"

"Gammon!" said Reilly.

"Yes, gammon!" said Levison of the Fourth. "I know what was on. St. Leger's been accused of playing the giddy ox, and Trimble's proved that he wasn't where Major Stringer saw him. I heard it under the window!"

"So that's the little game!" grinned Mellish. "How much did St. Leger give you to spin that yarn, Trimble?"

Trimble sniffed.

"I don't know anything about St. Leger being accused," he said. "The Head was very particular in asking just when I fished St. Leger out of the river, that's all. I shouldn't wonder if Major Stringer is going to get me a medal, or something, or have my name put on the Roll of Honour of St. Jim's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see why not. They shove Old Boys names there—chaps who've gone to the Front. I suppose what I did was as plucky as anything that goes on in the trenches!" said Trimble loftily.

"I don't think!" chuckled Gore.

"Well, you wouldn't have done it, anyway!" said Trimble disdainfully.

"And I jolly well don't believe you did, either!" said Gore. "It's a yarn to get St. Leger out of a scrape. I can see it now!"

"Oh, rot! Hallo! There's my pal Cutts!"

Trimble rushed off to intercept Cutts and St. Leger, who had come out into the quadrangle together.

Cutts was smiling, and St. Leger looking immensely relieved. The alibi had worked like a charm, and St. Leger was out of danger. The good Baggy had been useful, and he was done with. But on that point Cutts had made a slight mistake. Baggy Trimble had no intention of being done with yet.

"Hallo, old kids!" said Trimble familiarly.

Cutts stared at him.

"Cut off!" he said briefly.

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Trimble indignantly. "Cut off yourself! I want to speak to my pal St. Leger."

"Oh, don't be a young ass!" said St. Leger. "Cut off!"

"Is that what you call gratitude?" said Trimble bitterly.

"What?" St. Leger had forgotten that he was supposed to owe a debt of gratitude to the heroic Baggy.

"You didn't say cut off yesterday, when I was risking my life to save you from a watery grave," said Trimble.

"Oh! Well, I say cut off now!" growled St. Leger.

"I was going to ask you if you could lend me a sovereign," said Trimble. "I've lent my last quid to Thompson of the Shell."

"Then you can go and ask Thompson of the Shell for it!" said St. Leger gruffly. "I've got no quids to chuck away!"

"Well, you ungrateful rotter!" yelled Baggy wrathfully. "Is that your thanks for having your life saved?"

"Oh, don't be a fool! Cut off!" snapped St. Leger.

"I won't borrow a quid of you," said Trimble. "If you offered it, I should refuse to accept it now. You can be an ungrateful beast if you like. But you owe me money."

"I owe you money?"

"Yes; my trousers were simply ruined by the water when I went in yesterday. They've got to be paid for."

St. Leger glared at Trimble. As Baggy had not been in for him at all, the claim for damages was decidedly cool. But Cutts pressed St. Leger's arm.

"Give him five bob," he murmured. "It was worth it."

St. Leger grunted, and handed out five shillings. Baggy Trimble's fat hand closed on it, but he did not budge.

"Where's the other fifteen?" he asked.

"You'd better cut off!" said St. Leger, breathing hard. "I've stood about enough of your cheek, you young cub!"

"You owe me a pound for my trousers, which were ruined. If you don't pay me, I shall appeal to Mr. Railton. He won't see me swindled."

"Swindled!" gasped St. Leger.

"Yes, swindled!"

Baggy Trimble blinked truculently at the two Fifth-Formers. It was not at all pleasant to Baggy to be thrown over like this as soon as he was no longer of any use. He had decided to pal with Cutts and St. Leger—already he had been bragging without limit of his pals in the Fifth Form. In his mind's eye, he had seen himself extracting loan after loan from the grateful Fifth-Formers. And he was not likely to part with those golden dreams all at once if he could help it.

"Besides saving your life, I've got you out of a scrape!" he said warmly. "If I hadn't fished you out of the river at four o'clock, the Head would have known where you really were at the time—"

"Shut up, you young ass!" said Cutts hurriedly.

"You see I know all about it!" grinned Trimble. "You needn't scowl at me, St. Leger. I'm not afraid of you!"

St. Leger clenched his hand hard. But he unclenched it again. He realised that he could not afford to quarrel with Baggy Trimble.

Trimble had borne false witness in his favour, and that had placed him under the thumb of the young rascal.

He felt in his pockets, and added fifteen shillings to the five that reposed in Baggy's fat palm.

"Now clear off, you blackmailing little scoundrel!" he muttered.

"Look here, you know—"

"Cut off, I tell you!" shouted St. Leger furiously.

Trimble cut off towards the tuck-shop. He was in clover now, and he intended to remain in clover. Cutts and St. Leger looked at one another grimly.

"Well, this is a pretty go!" said St. Leger savagely.

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"This is what your precious scheme has landed me in! I'm under that fat young villain's thumb now!"

"Better than being sacked from the school, I suppose!" said Cutts tartly.

St. Leger grunted, and swung away. It was, as Cutts said, better than being expelled, but it was not pleasant. He had a foreboding that he was not done with Baggy Trimble yet.

His foreboding was realised. That evening Trimble looked into the Fifth-Former's study, with an impudent grin on his fat face.

"I say, St. Leger, old chap," he said familiarly, "could you possibly manage to lend me half a quid?"

"No!" roared St. Leger furiously.

"Not after I saved your life?"

"Look here, you young scoundrel!" said St. Leger, in concentrated tones. "You didn't save my life. It's a lie from beginning to end!"

"Then who jolly well did?" demanded Trimble.

"Nobody did, you young cad!"

"Oh, come!" said Trimble. "You weren't drowned, were you?"

"I wasn't in the river at all, and you know it!" said St. Leger savagely. "And if you think you're going to keep on getting money out of me for your lies, you're mistaken! Get out of my study!"

"You mean to say that I didn't save your life?" ejaculated Trimble.

"You know you didn't!" yelled St. Leger.

"Oh, very well!" said Trimble, with dignity. "If I didn't, all right! If I've made a mistake, the best thing I can do is to own up. I can't allow fellows to go on believing I saved your life if I didn't. It's getting credit under false pretences, and that won't do for an honourable chap like me. I'm going to tell Kildare it was all a mistake. He will explain to Railton."

St. Leger licked his dry lips.

"You'll get licked for telling the Head lies!" he muttered.

"Not so much as you will for gambling with Griggs!" chuckled Baggy Trimble. "You see, I know all about it. Levison knows, too."

"I—I think I could spare you ten shillings," said St. Leger huskily. "It clears me right out."

"Never mind. I'll lend you some when Tom Merry squares up the quid I lent him," said Trimble comfortingly.

Baggy Trimble left the study with ten shillings jingling in his pocket and a satisfied grin wreathing his fat face. St. Leger sat with his hands driven deep in his pockets, and a deep wrinkle in his brow. He had escaped the major to fall into the clutches of Trimble; it was out of the frying-pan into the fire. And St. Leger was beginning to think that his last state was worse than his first.

CHAPTER 13.

Brought to Light.

TOM MERRY tapped Trimble on the shoulder a few days later in the quad. Baggy Trimble had come from the Fifth-Form passage, and he was scudding across the quad to the school-shop, when the captain of the Shell stopped him. Trimble gave him an impatient look.

"I'm in a hurry!" he snapped.

"So am I," said Tom. "We want to speak to you, Trimble."

"No time now," said Trimble. "The fact is, I'm hungry, and I'm going to the tuck-shop. I'm in funds."

"Yes, I know where your funds come from!"

"No business of yours!" said Trimble loftily. "If a pal of mine likes to lend me a few bob occasionally, after I saved his life—Leggo! Yow-ow! Look here, I've got no time to waste on you!"

"You're coming, all the same," said Tom cheerily.

Baggy Trimble had no choice about that; a grip of iron was on his fat shoulder. Tom Merry led him across the quad, and stopped under the elms. Lowther and Manners, and the chums of Study No. 6 were waiting there. The fat Fourth-Former looked alarmed as he found himself the centre of a frowning circle.

"I—I say, look here, you know," he said feebly, "I'm not going to lend you anything!"

"You uttah wottah, Twimble—"

"You're brought up for judgment," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, don't be funny, you know!" said Trimble. "If you think I'm going to lend you anything, you're jolly well mistaken. And I don't want any of your jaw, either. I've got friends in the Fifth, and, to be quite plain, I don't want to have anything to do with you fellows!"

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"Oh, squash him!" said Blake.

"Yah! Leggo!" roared Trimble.

Bump! Baggy Trimble sat on the ground with a heavy concussion. He sat there and blinked furiously and breathlessly at the juniors.

"Yow-ow-ow! Grooh! You rotters! Yow-ow!"

"Now lend me your ears," said Tom Merry calmly.

"You've been rolling in money the last few days, Trimble!"

"My pater sends me whacking big remittances, you know."

"Your pater does nothing of the sort."

"Look here, Tom Merry, I suppose I ought to know! Whenever I'm short of money, I just drop a line to Trimble Hall—"

"Beer profits have gone down during the war," said Monty Lowther seriously. "I don't suppose there's much tin to spare at the Trimble Arms."

"Tain't the Trimble Arms!" yelled Trimble. "It's Trimble Hall—our family mansion!"

"Not Trimble's Entire!" said Lowther, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotter, of course not! I tell you—"

"You've been screwing the money out of St. Leger," said Tom Merry. "You told a pack of lies for him the other day, and you've been screwing money out of him ever since. Every fellow in the Lower School knows it, and it's becoming a regular scandal. You're going to stop it!"

"Look here, you know—"

"St. Leger is a rotter, but you're not going to blackmail him," said Tom. "The whole thing was rotten; but what you're doing is what is called blackmail, and what people are sent to prison for."

"I suppose St. Leger can make me a loan if he likes, after I risked my life to pull him out of the river."

"He never was in the river, you lying Prussian!"

"Wathah not! You are a disgrace to the Fourth Form, and a disgrace to the School House, Twimble! The New House boundahs have heard about it, and they have been chippin' us. You are not a hewo at all; you are a blackmailin' scoundwel!"

"If you're jealous of a fellow's pluck—"

"Bai Jovel!"

"Nuff said!" said Tom Merry. "You're going to chuck it! It will come to Railton's ears sooner or later, with all the fellows talking about it. Every time you're found to have got money from St. Leger you're going to be bumped hard. See?"

"Why, you cheeky beast—"

"And now for a beginning! Collar him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yaroooh! Help! Yow-ow-woooooop!" roared Trimble.

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

"That's for a start!" said Tom Merry, shaking a warning finger at Trimble, as he sprawled breathlessly on the ground.

"Let it be a warning to you!"

"Grooooooogh!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked away, justice being done. Baggy Trimble sat up breathlessly, trying to get his second wind. Mellish of the Fourth came up with a grin. He had been an interested spectator of the scene.

"Serves you jolly well right!" said Mellish. "It's too thick, Trimble. Everybody knows you're getting money out of St. Leger—you've been seen pestering him lots of times, and he looks like a Hun when he hands it out. You ought to be punished. Can you lend me five bob?"

"No, I can't!" spluttered Trimble indignantly.

"How much did you stick St. Leger for this time?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Oh, all right!" said Mellish quietly. "I'm disgusted with you, Trimble! I'm going to mention the matter to Kildare."

"Here, I—I say!" gasped Trimble. "Don't be a sneak, you know! Perhaps I could let you have a bob or so."

"I want five!"

"Look here, St. Leger only gave me five," said Trimble.

"You're a blackmailing rotter, Mellish!"

"Ha, ha! That's good, from you! Well, halves, then!"

Baggy Trimble, with an angry snort, handed over half-a-crown, and Mellish grinned and walked away with it.

The glory of Trimble the Hero had departed—the facts were known far and wide now—and Trimble's unaccustomed access of wealth was a plain indication that he was getting money from St. Leger for keeping his secret. Indeed, Trimble generally asked St. Leger for a "loan" in the presence of other fellows, so that the unhappy victim could not possibly refuse or resort to violence. St. Leger's life for the past week had not been a happy one, and many times he had from his heart anathematised that cunning scheme of Cutts' which had delivered him into the hands of the pitiless Baggy.

Worst of all, the secret was not likely to be kept in the

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peculiar circumstances. Baggy Trimble was as much duffer as rascal, and he seemed almost to be asking to be found out. St. Leger had to borrow money right and left to satisfy his demands, and he had to be civil to the unspeakable Baggy; and sooner or later, he felt, the stupidity of the amateur blackmailer would bring the whole matter to light. St. Leger wished sincerely that he had faced the music without screening himself behind that elaborate network of falsehoods. The music had to be faced, after all, and the falsehoods had to be answered for also when the hour came.

Piggott of the Third joined Baggy Trimble as he was making for the tuckshop. Piggott held out a grubby hand.

"Halves!" he said.

Trimble glared at him.

"What do you mean?" he snapped.

"I was outside St. Leger's study," said Piggott coolly.

"He handed you five bob. I want halves."

"I'll jolly well punch your nose!" growled Trimble.

"St. Leger made me a small loan as I saved his life—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Piggott. "You've screwed five bob out of St. Leger, and you're going to hand me half-a-crown, or I'll go to Railton! Better square up!"

"You rotter, Mellish has had half-a-crown already!" groaned the unhappy Baggy. The business of a blackmailer did not seem to be thriving, owing to his want of caution.

"Well, give me the other," said Piggott coolly. "I'm hard up. You can screw some more out of St. Leger!"

"I won't!" howled Trimble.

"All serene—look out for Railton!"

Piggott turned away.

"Hold on!" muttered Trimble. "You can have the half-crown. I—I dare say St. Leger can make me another loan."

Piggott grinned and pocketed the half-crown, and Trimble returned disconsolately to the School House and sought St. Leger's study. He felt that it was hard lines—he had been bumped by Tom Merry & Co. for screwing that five shillings out of St. Leger, and now it was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. He was in a bad temper as he rolled into the Fifth-Former's study.

St. Leger was pacing to and fro with his hands in his pockets. He turned a furious look upon Trimble.

"What do you want, you young hound?" he said between his teeth.

"Ahem! I should like a little loan," said Trimble. "Dash it all, it isn't much, after I risked my life to rescue you, you know!"

"I gave you five shillings ten minutes ago."

"Mellish and Piggott have had that. They wanted halves," said Trimble sullenly.

St. Leger panted. What was the use of it? All the juniors knew by this time that Trimble was blackmailing him; it would not be long before the prefects knew, and the masters. What was the use of staving off the inevitable for a few days by submitting to this young rascal's demands?

The rage he had long restrained broke out. He made a sudden spring at Trimble and dragged him into the study.

"Here, hold on!" roared Trimble.

St. Leger caught up a cricket-stump. The astounded Baggy was pitched face-downwards across the table, and then the stump rose and fell.

Baggy roared. St. Leger was handling the stump as if he were beating a carpet. The unhappy Baggy writhed and roared and shrieked as the blows rained on him. Never had Trimble experienced so terrific a thrashing. For once in his life Baggy Trimble was getting what he deserved, and a little over.

Lash, lash, lash, lash, lash!

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Murder! Yooop! Yah!"

St. Leger had completely lost his temper. He lashed and lashed away, while Baggy Trimble's roars rang through the House. There was a step in the passage, and Mr. Railton strode into the study.

"St. Leger! What! Release Trimble at once! How dare you!"

St. Leger obeyed. He dropped the stump, and Baggy rolled off the table in tears. The Housemaster eyed the Fifth-Former sternly.

"How dare you use a junior like this, St. Leger? The boy, too, who saved your life only last week!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" yelled Trimble. "I'll tell them now, you rotter! Yow-ow! I didn't save his life! Yooowoop! He wasn't in the river at all! Yow-ow! He was playing cards with Griggs. Wow-ow-ow! Yah!"

Mr. Railton's brow became thunderous.

"Trimble, do you dare to say that you were deceiving the Head, that you bore false witness?" exclaimed the Housemaster, in a terrific voice.

"Yow-ow! Cutts told me to say it!" groaned Trimble.

"I—I mean, Cutts thought I was the chap who had done it. It was a dodge to get St. Leger off, the beast! And this is his gratitude. Yow-ow!"

Cutts of the Fifth looked into the study with an alarmed face. He turned pale as he heard Trimble's words. His cunning device had come home to roost now, with a vengeance.

"St. Leger, is Trimble's statement correct?" asked the Housemaster grimly.

St. Leger hung his head.

"Yes, sir. I—I'm sorry I didn't own up. That little beast has been blackmailing me ever since. That's why I thrashed him. Cutts wasn't to blame. I—I told him, and—and he believed me. It was my fault."

Cutts drew a deep breath.

"You will come with me to the Head," said Mr. Railton curtly. "You, St. Leger, and Cutts and Trimble."

"I—I say, sir, I wasn't to blame, you know. I—I—"

"Silence, Trimble! You appear to have been the worst!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "Not a word more! Follow me!"

The Housemaster strode from the study. In grim silence the three delinquents followed him. The game was up now; there was no mistake about that.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, there's goin' to be a wow!"

That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's opinion, and it was well founded. There was a buzz of excitement in the School House when it was known that Baggy Trimble and the two Fifth-Formers were shut up in the Head's study with the Head and Mr. Railton.

"It's the sack for St. Leger!" said Lowther. "Let's hope it's the sack for that awful rotter Trimble, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

Quite a crowd of fellows had gathered to see the delinquents when they came out of the Head's study. When they appeared, Gerald Cutts was as cool as ever, and St. Leger looked relieved rather than otherwise. Baggy Trimble was shivering like a very fat jelly.

The two Fifth-Formers strode away without a word; but Baggy was surrounded by an inquiring crowd. He blinked pathetically at the juniors.

"It's rotten!" he said. "Unjust, you know! Now, look here, candidly, do you fellows think I've been to blame in any way?"

The fellows could only stare.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry, quite overcome.

"The Head was waxy, for some reason," said Trimble, "and he seemed more waxy with me than with those rotters. Blessed if I know why! He said I had been getting credit for courage under false pretences. Of course, as a matter of absolute fact, I didn't pull St. Leger out of the river. But if he'd been in it, and I'd been there, I should have rushed to the rescue, you know, so it practically comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Bai Jove! Does it?" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Of course it does! But the Head couldn't see it," said Baggy aggrieved. "He said I was the worst. He said I had been blackmailing St. Leger. I suppose he was referring to some little loans St. Leger made me, of his own accord. Beastly way of putting it, wasn't it? Not good taste, I think."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Cutts is let off with a caution, because the Head thinks he was led into playing that trick by friendship for a fellow in a scrape," said Baggy. "He got a lecture. St. Leger would have been sacked, only it seems that his father's at the Front, and has been wounded, and the Head wouldn't let him have such rotten news at such a time, and so he's going to be flogged. And—and the worst of it is, that I'm going to be flogged, too. Me, you know! Blessed if I can see that I've done anything to be flogged for! It was all Cutts' fault, and he only got a lecture, and gated for six half-holidays. And I'm going to be flogged! Me! That's how a really plucky chap is appreciated in this school!" said Baggy bitterly. "Blessed if it isn't enough to make a chap give up trying to be an example to you fellows!"

"Oh, deah!"

"Well, that chap takes the cake!" said Tom Merry, as Baggy Trimble rolled away in great indignation. "Blessed if I know whether he ought to be in a reformatory or a lunatic asylum!"

Next morning there was an impressive scene in Big Hall, when St. Leger and Baggy Trimble went through it. And for the following half-dozen half-holidays Gerald Cutts' little excursions had to be given up, and the astute dandy of the Fifth had ample leisure to meditate upon his sins, and to regret that he had been "Too Clever by Half."

THE END.

(Another splendid story of Tom Merry & Co. next Wednesday, entitled "The Schoolboy Reporter!" Order your copy early.)

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"THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!"

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. Phanning, and a party of natives, of whom Phwan 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 eventually falls into the hands of a race of giants. Here they are captive for some time, and pass safely through many weird and exciting adventures.

Eventually they escape and get clear of the city. After pitching their camp at night, Reggie, Jimmy, and Larry go off in search of water. They ramble into a dense wood, where they find evidence of the proximity of a rival party. The tropical darkness descends upon them almost without warning, and they are unable to find their way back to the camp. They decide to climb a tree for safety until morning, from the branches of which, in the moonlight, they witness the spectacle of an enormous animal, which proves to be a giant sloth, being drawn down into the slime and mire of the marshes about a quarter of a mile distant. Finally it completely disappears, much to their disappointment, having hoped that they might capture it.

In the morning the boys return to camp, and after having related their experiences, the party moves on. Later they overtake the rival expedition, the leader of which is an Englishman, and a famous explorer. The members of the two expeditions accept the situation in a sportsmanlike manner, and are soon on good terms.

(Now read on.)

The Capture of a Living Giant Sloth.

Quickly the boys made friends with their new acquaintances, and Mr. Whittaker and the doctor were soon absorbed in telling the whole of their adventures to their new-found friends, and deeply interested in the adventures of the rival party. Then they fell to discussing the possibilities of getting the giant sloth.

The boys drank in every word. Horrold, the leader of the rival expedition, and his friend agreed that each side were to try and bag the game on their own initiative, but each, of course, agreed to help the other should the necessity arise. Horrold had already put a number of his natives to work at digging pits and making huge snares to try and entrap the sloth, as it was very evident that the brute was in the vicinity.

Towards sundown the boys, beckoning to Toothy Jim and Sing Loo, after they had got their camp ready for the night, crept quietly away.

"Sing Loo," said Reggie, "do you feel well enough to come with us?"

"Sing Loo plenty velly well," was the reply. "Sing Loo no leavee massas behind."

"Very well, then, Sing Loo," went on Reggie. "Jimmy,

Larry, you, Toothy Jim, and I will have a stalk on our own to-night for the giant sloth."

Sing Loo nodded.

Toothy Jim was somehow made to understand, and he replied by grinning in such a way that the boys thought he would swallow his head.

Then the three boys, just as darkness swooped down on the primeval forest, in company with their faithful friends, crept away from the camp.

Would they return with the giant sloth?

The three boys, full of the excitement of their secret expedition, cautiously proceeded with Sing Loo and Toothy Jim into the dense jungle that lay around them.

Reggie, knowing that their disappearance from their camp would cause the doctor and Mr. Whittaker great uneasiness, left a note in a big, scrawling hand on the saddle of one of the mules, to this effect:

"Gone in search of the giant sloth, with Sing Loo and Toothy Jim. We'll return when we've captured the brute!"

The boys, after taking as much food, drink, and necessities as they could carry, and seeing that the Chinaman and Toothy Jim had a good supply of everything, commenced their exciting chase of the prehistoric monster.

They had gone about two miles when they reached a long slope, which led down to a small valley, surrounded by dense shrubs and trees. In the midst of the valley and round its edges were slimy, reedy swamps. This was the very spot, the boys thought, which might be the haunt of the mighty beast of which they were in search. Among the things which they had brought were some very stout netting, ropes and chains, and picks and spades.

It was Reggie who first spied the unmistakable trace of some brute that had evidently forced its way through the trees and undergrowth down to the water's edge. There were evidences of brambles and branches having been torn aside, and where the marsh began to join the dry land were mighty footprints of some huge brute as it had left its mark there when coming to drink the cooling waters.

"I say, you chaps," whispered Reggie excitedly, "I'll almost bet my chance of capturing the giant sloth that this place is the very spot where he comes down to drink at nights."

"I won't bet against you," said Jimmy, "because I think you're right."

"So do I," chimed in Larry. "It's without doubt a dead cert. Suppose we wait about here. The brute has been here quite lately. And look here!" He broke off, pointing to a big bramble, on which hung some coarse, red-brown hair. "Here is some of our old friend's coat." And he stretched his arm and tore off a handful.

"My golly!" said Sing Loo. "This Chinaman got one velly big idea. We set to workee, and diggee velly deepee pit, so that giant slothee tumble in."

Toothy Jim was very busy examining the ground. Suddenly he stood up, and his face was changed from its usual

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vacant expression to one of interest and animation. He broke out into some of his wild patois, with a few English words interspersed, in which "animal, big trap, hole" were constantly repeated.

There was no doubt that Toothy Jim, with all his wild cunning, had thought it well worth while for everyone to set to and dig a deep pit.

In a few minutes they were all silently but desperately in earnest clearing away the undergrowth, near which the mighty animal had evidently been.

Reggie said that the pit must measure at least twelve feet deep, eighteen feet long, by ten feet wide.

It was a big undertaking, but nothing daunted the brave hearts of our young heroes, and the more work there was to do in connection with the bagging of their game, the better pleased they seemed to be.

Although there was not much time to lose before twilight set in and darkness swooped down over the land, they at once began their excavations. Before twilight had descended they had succeeded in digging to about three feet over the dimensions mentioned above; but darkness, coming on, terminated their efforts, and then they had to abandon their labours.

They took turn and turn about during the night at keeping watch, but nothing occurred to break the monotony. They were up at dawn next morning, digging, and continued all that day in shifts, busy with pick and spade. By the following afternoon, though somewhat exhausted after their labours, the trap was finished, and all that was now required was a network of leaves, grass, and light earth with which to cover it. This was done by interweaving reeds, grass, and leaves on a foundation of netting and string, and by the time the sun was setting this was carefully laid over the pit. So deftly was it contrived that no one, even from a very short distance, could have told that there was not solid ground.

And now came Toothy Jim's knowledge and cunning of the wild beasts and their ways. With as many leaves, succulent grasses, and reeds as he could carry, he followed the path that the huge creature had made, and strewed the tempting morsels all along the route till it was lost in the mazes of the jungle. Returning, the wily native put piles of food near, round, and over the pit. Then all was ready. There was nothing more to do but to wait, with guns and rifles at full-cock.

Darkness swooped down over that vast primeval forest and marsh. Strange sounds came to the ears of the watchers; the cry of some night-bird, the weird howl of some panther or other wild beast, broke out now and again. Then sometimes they would hear the sound as if of snapping of branches.

It was a still, wondrous night. The stars, like glow-worms in the blue vapour of the tropical climate, were sharply silhouetted against their delicate pall of dark velvet. The moon was full. It was extraordinary how everything, both near at hand and in the distance, stood out boldly and clearly.

The eyes of all were fixed on the pathway through which some mighty beast had evidently thrust and torn its way.

"This Chinaman, he velly tired of watchee, watchee, and nothing come."

"All right, Sing Loo, you old hypocrite!" whispered Reggie. "You know jolly well that you're only too glad that nothing has appeared yet. I don't believe you'd care a pigtail whether we are disappointed or not!"

"Me velly muchee wish to capture giant slothee," returned Sing Loo; "but it velly funny idea if giant slothee turnee round and capture us."

"Yes, Sing Loo," put in Jimmy. "And from what I've heard, he likes Chinaman's pigtailed better than anything."

Whereupon the Chinaman, thoroughly alarmed, immediately wound up his offending wisp of hair and tucked it down his neck.

Meanwhile, Toothy Jim, with subtle cunning, was creeping about the undergrowth, and climbing trees with marvellous agility and utter silence. Presently he came crawling back towards the boys, excitement, not unmixed with a little fear, showing in his eyes.

Holding up a finger, as if in warning that no sound should be uttered, he then pointed vaguely in the distance and said, in so low a whisper that Reggie could only just catch it, "Slooth," meaning that he had spotted the giant sloth coming towards them.

Instantly everyone was on the qui vive. No one stirred. Each boy could hear the beating of his heart, throbbing with tense excitement, as he lay flat down among the scrub, with rifle levelled directly in the path which they expected their game to take. Then there suddenly broke upon their startled ears the most terrible and frantic bellowings and screams—such as the young hunters had heard when they were up in

the tree and the huge brute had been entrapped in the marshes.

It was terrifying and unnerving—those awful screams and cries. The whole forest seemed to vibrate and shake with them. Louder and louder grew the noise. Some beast, in frantic fear or pain, was surely coming towards their chosen spot.

Clearer grew the sound of snapping twigs and falling branches. Perspiration, from pure excitement, was streaming down the faces of the boys, and Sing Loo, as they crouched in awed silence, waiting, waiting for what might at any moment burst upon their view.

Then suddenly, through the small clearing which some monster must have made comparatively a few hours previously, in the full light of the moon, the boys saw a sight which staggers the imagination to adequately describe.

An enormous creature, bigger than the largest species of African bull elephant, with a long, somewhat slender neck, and smallish head, covered with red-brown hair, came blunderingly into view. Now he raised his attenuated neck, and gave vent to horrid, piercing screams, shaking and twisting and writhing about as if vainly endeavouring to throw off something which clung round him.

His mighty bulk seemed to dwarf even the surrounding trees. Sometimes he seemed to drop right down on all fours, and come shuffling and scrambling along, at other times he would raise himself on his haunches and lash round fiercely with his mighty tail.

And then, as the monster came clearly into view, no wonder a gasp of incredulous amazement escaped the watchers.

Round the enormous giant sloth's neck there writhed and twisted a mighty snake, which slowly but surely was throttling the quadruped to death. Its vast thick coils were twined and twined around the neck of its prey. They could see its bright, slithering length encircling with deadly pressure the neck of its antagonist, while every now and again its horrid, evil-looking head was raised, and its quivering, forked tongue, with lightning rapidity, darted in and out of its black, gaping mouth, whilst it made treacherous and deadly snaps, with movements so quick that the eye could scarce follow them, at its enemy's head and eyes.

Its foul jaws were covered with a thick saliva, and the head and neck of the giant sloth were smeared over with this loathsome matter.

An involuntary exclamation of surprise and horror broke from the boys' lips. They were privileged to witness a fight between huge brute strength and subtle cunning—a battle which most assuredly no white people had ever seen before.

Onward through the clearing came the monster and the wriggling snake—straight towards the deep pit which waited for them.

"No one is to fire a shot unless I give the word," whispered Reggie, in a voice quivering with excitement. "If they pass the trap and come on towards us, then we'll give them every barrel we've got."

With every nerve and fibre in their bodies strung to concert-pitch, our heroes waited for what they prayed might happen. And happen it did.

Suddenly the giant sloth paused, and with one fearful scream of fear and agony, half-stiffed by the serpent's strangulating coils, jerked its neck about, hurling its head on to the ground, as it vainly tried to free itself from the noisome and deadly folds of the serpent. Then, as if in a last, despairing effort, it lashed round with its appallingly strong tail and leapt forward, now on its terrible haunches, now on all-fours, coming straight towards the pit.

In another moment, with a scream of baffled fury and terror, there came the sound of a mighty crash, and the giant sloth and writhing serpent disappeared into the now gaping pit.

The very earth trembled as the enormous prehistoric brute fell to the bottom. The impact of its enormous weight with the earth made the forest and marshes reverberate with the sound as if an earthquake had rent the trees and earth asunder.

And then, the brute, having realised that it was a prisoner, set up with redoubled fury, its dreadful trumpeting and screams.

"At 'em, boys!" shouted Reggie, springing up; and with the rest hard at his heels, he rushed towards the pit.

And what a sight it was that, in the full light of the moon, met the young adventurers' eyes.

Struggling, gasping, panting, screaming and yelling, the mighty bulk of the vast creature lashed and tore about in its narrow confines, seeking some outlet by raising itself on its powerful hind quarters, and pawing and tearing at the sides of the pit in impotent rage and terror.

There was something awful and immense about the whole thing that almost dominated the boys and held them dumb, inactive, as they gazed fascinated at the battle raging just

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beneath them. In strong contrast with the thundering roars and screams of pain and terror of the giant sloth, was the silent lashings and twistings of the cunning, evil-looking snake which did not for one moment relax its frantic efforts at strangulation.

It was a terrific fight, and it seemed to the boys that the giant sloth, in spite of his size, was getting the worst of it as, slowly but surely, the huge brute was being choked to death.

"It we're to capture it alive," said Reggie, "there is only one thing to do—blow the serpent's head off."

At that moment, Toothy Jim whispered something to Reggie, and indicated a lasso that was slung over his arm and shoulder. The wily native had run off to the nearest mule to get it.

Reggie, who had been gazing, fascinated, into the pit, where the life and death struggle was proceeding, turned round. In a second he grasped Toothy Jim's meaning, and motioned him to proceed.

The rest stood round and looked with awed stillness at the fatal pit. Then Toothy Jim ran back a yard or two, quickly and skilfully prepared his lasso. Then, with watchful eager eye, waiting for the precise second when the writhing snake should raise its horrid head to strike and bite again, he slowly swung his lasso to and fro.

Then the onlookers heard, for a fraction of a second, the whirr of the rope as, with unerring aim and judgment, the thrower launched it at the serpent's head.

The noose dropped right over the cruel jaws and fangs, resting in the thin part of the serpent's neck. And then Toothy Jim pulled sharply. With inexorable swiftness the noose tightened, and in another second, the snake was, in its turn, being strangled.

With all its force the writhing, twisting thing tried to jerk itself free from the deadly knot, and, with all its force, jerked its head and neck forward, but with the inevitable result of becoming a still firmer prisoner.

Toothy Jim, clinging on to the rope, was almost jerked off his legs by the tremendous strain. Sing Loo and Larry ran to his rescue and held on to the lasso with all their strength.

It was terrible to see the writhings of the snake in its death agony.

Suddenly Reggie whispered to Jimmy to take aim at the snake's head, but, at all costs, not to touch the giant sloth.

Quickly both rifles blazed. When the smoke blew away they saw that the head of the snake had been completely blown off. Even though the gigantic reptile was dead, the muscles of its sinuous length continued to contract, and its vast, slimy length slithered round the neck and head of the sloth. But it was soon over, and before long the scaly, shimmering coils were still.

The sloth had almost, but not quite, been strangled to death. Its enormous bulk lay in a half-crouching position in the pit, with its mighty forepaws resting against the side. Its head and upper portion of its long neck were covered with that horrid, greyish-black saliva of the serpent, and its eyes were half-closed. It was evidently breathing with difficulty.

But the greatest thing of all was that it was alive.

Proudly, and with hearts beating with excitement, the boys gazed at their wonderful achievement.

A Second Capture.

As the enormity of the whole thing came over them gradually, the boys, Sing Loo and Toothy Jim involuntarily gave vent to a deep sigh.

They felt immensely proud of their capture, but the full significance of their deed had not yet dawned upon them. It was Reggie who first spoke.

"After all we've gone through, it's worth it to bag our quarry, after all," he said.

"Rather!" echoed Jimmy and Larry.

"Sing Loo, he walkee all the way from China to see giant sloth in such a holee," put in the Chinaman.

As he spoke, Toothy Jim turned to Reggie, and put a warning finger on his lips. Some minutes previously his quick ears had caught the sound of something coming towards them from the jungle, and he had crept, unobserved, towards the noise. Now he had returned from his secret stalking to warn the others that they were in danger.

"What's the matter?" asked Reggie, in a whisper.

He managed to get out the one word "slooth."

"Another?" asked Reggie, in an awed whisper.

For answer, Toothy Jim held up a warning finger and stood in an attitude of acute listening.

Far away in the distance all the watchers heard something—a subdued noise of snapping twigs, and, every now and again a faint scream of rage—a dim echo of what they had heard the captive giant sloth emitting as it had thundered towards its doom.

"Our quarry's mate, coming in search of it," whispered Reggie.

The boys, Sing Loo and Toothy Jim were at once on the alert, and prepared to engage a new enemy.

The first thing Toothy Jim did was to lasso the giant sloth's neck with a rope and chain, and tie the ends securely to a very stout tree-trunk near by.

This having been done, the little party then took up points of vantage under cover, and up trees to await the oncoming of the monster which was bearing in their direction.

Sing Loo was in one tree with Larry, Reggie and Jimmy were in another, while Toothy Jim, with native cunning, armed with a rifle, revolver, and his faithful lasso, lurked well hidden under one of the bushes on the ground.

Every now and again shrill screams of rage and terror broke from the captive giant sloth. This was a guide for the direction its mate might take, and assuredly another giant sloth was coming towards the spot where the young adventurers were concealed.

"Get ready with your rifle," whispered Reggie to Sing Loo, and, by a prearranged signal, he warned the rest to do the same. The moon was still brightly shining, and as Reggie looked towards the beaten-down scrub and brambles through which the imprisoned giant had crashed when half-strangled by the snake, he started violently.

Suddenly a half inarticulate cry of amazement escaped him as he saw another giant sloth, though by no means such a large one as the captured brute, coming towards them.

When first he saw it it was scrambling and shuffling along on all fours, with awkward gait and clumsy heavings of its vast body. Its long neck was stretched out; it was evidently sniffing the air, and had long since scented the near vicinity of its mate. It was apparently both suspicious and angry. Suddenly it rose on its enormous haunches, and literally leapt forward, yards at a time, and then it burst into full view.

For a moment, as if scenting approximate danger, it paused again to sniff the air.

For a moment it stood, swaying its long neck to and fro, hesitating whether to go forward or to stand still.

And at that moment all the rifles blazed forth.

With a startled howl and scream of pain and rage it gazed round, then plunged forward again.

It had not been hit in a vital part, though the light of the moon revealed blood on its neck and shoulders.

Then, like lightning, it suddenly plunged forward in the direction from which the reports and smoke issued. It knew from which point the danger came.

Its screaming, combined with the captive beast's howls and trumpeting, made a terrible noise.

Frantic with fear and rage, the great creature blundered on, and came straight towards the tree, a few feet up on which Reggie and Sing Loo were crouching.

Again the boys and the Chinaman let the animal have every barrel, but, for all the harm the bullets apparently did, they might have been battering six-inch steel plates.

Then, with all its giant strength, before the rifles could be reloaded, it flung its gigantic weight against Reggie's hiding-place. The tree shook and quivered beneath the shock, like a stem that is shaken by a tornado. So utterly unexpected was the shock of the impact that Reggie, to the Chinaman's horror, and to the consternation of the rest, lost his hold, and fell heavily to the ground—the far side of the mighty brute.

In a flash the brave Chinaman had slipped to the ground by Reggie, and dragged the frightened boy to his feet.

But at that instant the sloth saw them.

With a scream of baffled rage and menace, it swung round with its vast body. Its great hind legs almost brushed the Chinaman as they lashed round.

With a yell of terror, Sing Loo, clinging to Reggie, half-dragged him with incredible agility away from those hammer-like legs. Then both took to their heels and ran as they had never run before. They heard the barrels of the other rifles speaking quick and sharp. But, apparently, the bullets had struck no vital part for, with a sort of awful roaring scream, the great creature swung round and started in pursuit of Reggie and the Chinaman.

In the terror and excitement of the moment they had dropped their rifles. There was nothing for it but flight.

Toothy Jim, Larry and Jimmy, had left their hiding-places in the trees in an instant, and fired at the sloth as he tore along.

"Hit, hit, hit!" yelled Larry suddenly, as the great creature suddenly went down on his haunches, emitting an awful roaring howl.

But it was up again in an instant, and its pace seemed to increase rather than decrease.

And now the Chinaman and Reggie, gasping and panting, with the mighty sloth gaining upon them, began to think

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INTO THE UNKNOWN!

(Continued from page 20.)

that the end was near. Desperately Reggie looked round and caught a fleeting glimpse of a vast gaping mouth, flaring eyes, and a huge bulk shuffling and jumping along, gaining, gaining over them.

"I can't keep up much longer," jerked out Reggie thickly to the Chinaman, who was just beside him.

"Tryee velly hard," gasped Sing Loo. "One little sprintee and we can getee aheadee—climb tree!"

At that moment both the runners heard two shots. There was a terrible screech of pain and rage from behind. The Chinaman glanced round and saw the giant sloth rolling on the ground.

Sing Loo gave a whoop of frantic relief.

"It's downee, downee, hitee!" he jerked out. "Upee this tree quicke!"

In another moment the Chinaman was hoisting Reggie up into a very stout tree. Reggie was all but completely spent by his exertions, and it was as much as he could manage to mount the branches.

But Sing Loo, ever mindful of his young charge, slowly but surely forced him up to the higher trunks.

A little distance back they could see the giant sloth twisting and writhing on the ground in its death agony. And then they saw two figures—certainly not Larry's or Jimmy's—come running towards the brute. At a distance of about twenty yards the new-comers gave the mighty monster a double-barrel each, and then the sloth lay still.

Breathless with running and excitement, Reggie managed to gasp out:

"It's the doctor and the English explorer!"

"Yes, yes," cried the Chinaman, "and they save you and this Chinaman from giant slothee."

Then they descended the tree and stumbled, in a half-fainting condition, towards the new arrivals.

"Good heavens, boy!" cried Dr. Phenning. "I'm thankful you're safe, and Sing Loo, too, and the two men were soon shaking hands with Reggie and the Chinaman.

"Larry, Jimmy, and Toothy Jim are just behind," went on the doctor. "We've seen them, and they shouted out they daren't fire too quickly or carelessly, for fear of hitting one of you two. But, anyhow, we're the first white men to bag a giant sloth. My friend and I put the last shot into him."

Reggie had now more or less regained his breath.

"We've got a live sloth caught in a pit," he said.

"You've what?" shouted the men.

"We've bagged a live one," reported Reggie, "about half a mile back." The two men were incredulous.

"If you've really done that," said the stranger, "you've beaten our little expedition to smithereens. Anyhow, shake, my boy! All's fair in love and sport!" And he held out his hand, which Reggie grasped and shook very warmly.

Then the others came running up, and very soon all were talking very excitedly.

"We were flabbergasted when we learnt you youngsters had gone off on your own," began the doctor, "and thought it was all some practical joke; but about an hour ago, we heard shots fired—we tracked your footsteps through the jungle, and were dead on your beat. Mr. Whittaker felt very anxious about you, so we determined to find you. So all's well that ends well."

Talking of their exploits and adventures, the boys led the stranger and the doctor to the pit.

When the two men looked upon the captured giant sloth, they were awed and silent with surprise.

The great creature, almost done, lay in a half-crouched position against one side of the pit, quite still.

The boys and Sing Loo graphically described the awful fight with the snake, and of how Toothy Jim had lassoed the writhing thing which had almost strangled the life out of the giant sloth.

"Well," said the stranger, "you've won a march on my

friend and me. To your credit is the fall and capture of the giant sloth, and the names of you boys will go down for all time as the first white men ever to see or capture such a monster. But if you'll allow my film friend to come down and make a 'movie' of it, as it lies in the pit, and further pictures of it when we can get it free, you'll confer an everlasting favour on us."

The boys proudly declared that they would be honoured to do anything they could. It was agreed that Toothy Jim, Sing Loo, and the doctor should wait by the captured brute, whilst the rest returned to their camp to tell the others what had happened.

Dr. Phenning and their new friend, the explorer, had brought a couple of mules and a few natives with them. They joined these, and were soon on their way back to their encampment.

When Mr. Whittaker heard the news, he was half-wild with excitement; but if he felt a little sore and jealous at not being present at such a wonderful sight as the capture of a supposed extinct monster, he said nothing, and showered generous congratulations on the boys for their extraordinary zeal and pluck.

They waited till dawn, then, taking more mules, stout ropes and chains, they all, including the film operator, with his film camera, repaired to the scene of the boys' triumph.

The doctor, Toothy Jim, and Sing Loo greeted the arrival of the new-comers with great thankfulness, as the huge captive sloth had been making stupendous but fruitless efforts to extricate itself from the hole. So violent had been its exertions that a large portion of the sides had caved in, and it lay half buried under a pile of loose earth.

The film operator soon got to work, and took a fine film of the enormous brute twisting and writhing in its prison.

The only way to try and subdue the great creature was by slow starvation; but one thing which Toothy Jim did with great skill and cunning was to so fix its head by ropes and chains that it was rendered immovable.

The party then fell to skinning the other enormous sloth which lay dead nearly half a mile away through the jungle. As may be imagined, it took a very long time to accomplish. They were all very busy for some days, skinning the brute, whilst the doctor looked after its bones, and took a number of excellent photographs. By slow degrees the bones were prepared and taken by the natives to the mules, and at last they turned their attention to the sloth in the pit, which by this time was in a state of complete exhaustion.

The length of the snake was, when measured, found to be twenty-four feet, and nearly four feet in its widest part, and of an unknown Boa Constrictor species. This was skinned, and the hide preserved.

It fell to the lot of Toothy Jim to lasso the giant sloth still more thoroughly. While it lay in utter exhaustion, the boys, and some of the natives, dug out all the fallen earth so as to make a passage for the stout ropes and chains to pass underneath its body. After very great difficulty, this was accomplished. Meanwhile the doctor, Mr. Whittaker, and the two new friends had been constructing an improvised but exceedingly strong crane, made of very stout and tough wood. This, with the aid of huge levers, thrust under the animal's body, was soon brought into successful operation.

Slowly but surely, inch by inch, the mighty monster was raised from the pit. Allowances had been made for a sudden and unexpected activity on the part of the captive, when it realised it was being raised in the air. And well this was so, for, when the cranes and levers began to work, its struggles and screams were simply appalling.

It lashed out with all its legs and stupendously strong tail, so that none dared get within reach of it. This went on for so long that, as a matter of course, sheer exhaustion followed, and after many hours of terrible strugglings and battlings, the mighty creature once more stood on terra firma, tied with ropes and chains so securely to trees that its escape was impossible.

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ALL CHANGE!

The whole population of a small provincial town had turned out in force to see a special new film which was being shown at the cinema. The place was packed, and some of the members of the audience appeared to be experiencing some difficulty in getting a view of the screen. One young fellow, growing very angry, at last tapped the shoulder of the occupant of the seat in front of him and said:

"Get your head out of the light! I can't see through wood!"

The lad immediately rose from his seat. "I can," he answered. "We'll change places."—Sent in by H. Chick, Mitcham.

SOMETHING FROM INDIA.

The inspector had arrived at the school when the examination was in full swing. A small child was asked:

"What are the chief products of our Indian Empire?"

The unhappy infant nervously proceeded to reel off a list she had learnt by heart.

"Please, sir, India produces: curries, pepper, rice, citron, chillies, chutney, and—and—"

"Yes, yes?" prompted the inspector. "What comes after that?"

Another infant's hand shot up.

"Well, you tell her what comes after that."

"Please, sir, india-gestlon!"—Sent in by J. Danovan, Cardiff.

THE TAILS OF THE KITTENS.

Strange squeaking sounds, coupled with much noisy clattering, betokened that something unusual was in progress on the kitchen stairs.

"Tommy, is that you? What ever are you doing?" called his mother from the hall.

"I'm bringing up pussy's new kittens to see you, mammy," replied a rather breathless and agitated voice.

"Oh, Tommy dear, do be careful not to hurt them!" admonished the anxious parent.

"It's all right!" came the reassuring answer. "I'm carrying them very carefully by the stems!"—Sent in by Miss E. V. Broadbridge, Walthamstow.

VERY COLD.

Henry (gazing intently at portrait of Julius Caesar): "See that picture over there, Bill?"

Bill: "Yus, I see 'im, 'Enery."

Henry (musingly): "Ain't that Nero, the feller wot was always cold?"

Bill: "No. You're thinkin' of Zero—anuvver chap altogether."—Sent in by W. E. Rickman, Southsea.

HE UNDERSTOOD.

The lady visitor, who was staying at a farm in the village, was very fond of relating the successes of her nephew at school & town. After having recited his achievements to a country native, she finished up by saying:

"I cannot tell you how pleased and proud I was when I heard that he had won a scholarship!"

"I can quite understand, what your feelings were, ma'am," replied the man, "our felt just the same when our pig won a medal at the show!"—Sent in by P. Howell, Bristol.

A CIVIL QUESTION.

Kind Lady (to wounded soldier): "How did you get wounded, my good man?"

Wounded Soldier: "By a shell."

Kind Lady: "Did it explode?"

Wounded Soldier (very bored): "No; it came up behind and bit me!"—Sent in by T. Parton, Harrow.

FULL INSTRUCTIONS NEEDED.

"Here, take this rifle!" cried an excited showman to a new assistant. "The leopard has escaped! If you find him, shoot him on the spot!"

"Yes, sir," said the precise youth. "But—but which spot, sir?"—Sent in by W. For-yth, Huddersfield.

TOO SEVERE.

An old lady received an invitation to spend the day with her sister. To reach her relative's house she had to travel by train—a thing she had never done before.

She arrived at the station in good time, and got into the right train.

All went smoothly enough, and the old lady was thoroughly enjoying the journey.

However, when nearing her destination an accident occurred, which resulted in an explosion. Many of the passengers were hurled from the carriages, amongst them the old lady, who landed in a field, fortunately receiving no injury.

She was soon able to proceed upon her journey, and arrived without further mishap.

When asked by her sister how she had enjoyed the journey in the train, the old lady replied:

"Very well indeed. But I don't like the way you're bumped out!"—Sent in by J. Paterson, Edinburgh.

SPRING TIME!

The Joneses were at dinner, and the second course had just been served. For some time there was a silence, broken only by the sound of knives and forks being vigorously used.

At last Mr. Jones, who appeared not to be making very good progress, said to his wife, "What is this?"—pointing at the same time to the joint.

"Spring lamb, of course!" snapped Mrs. Jones.

"Umph!" grunted Jones. "I've been chewing one of the springs for the last five minutes!"—Sent in by E. Kynoch, Cheshire.

FRIEND OR FOE?

"Say, Bill," said a new recruit to his chum, "what do you think of the new colonel? I can't understand him at all; he seems such a changeable sort of chap."

"How do you mean?" inquired his friend.

"Why, only last night," answered the first soldier, "when I was doing sentry-go, I challenged him, 'Who goes there?' and he said 'Friend!' This morning when I saw him he took no more notice than if he'd never spoken to me."—Sent in by E. F. Watson, Sheffield.

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