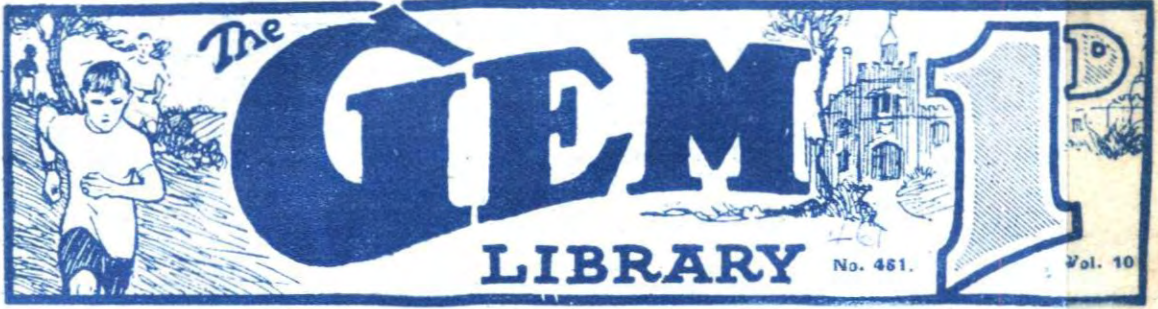


BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!

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



ATTENDING TO CROOKE!

(An Extraordinary Scene in the Grand, Long, Complete School Story in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY
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OUR — THREE — COMPANION — PAPERS!
"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
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EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY | EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday :

"LEVISON MINOR'S LUCK!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is another of the fine series of yarns centreing round Levison major and minor. It is but natural that Frank Levison, when he comes to understand the patience and generosity which Talbot has shown to his wayward elder brother, should be full of gratitude to the fellow who was once known as the Toff. Nothing would be too much for the warm-hearted youngster to do for Talbot's sake. He gets the chance of doing something, and he seizes it. Not one fellow in a hundred would have perceived the chance; not one in a thousand would have taken it, for to take it meant risking something, and entailed a good deal of nerve. But Frank does not hesitate, and his action turns out for the best. Readers must judge for themselves whether that was Levison minor's wisdom or merely

"LEVISON MINOR'S LUCK!"

THE IRISH TROUBLE.

I don't mean the big one; we go in very little for politics in this paper, thank goodness! I must not say that we don't go in for them at all, or readers with Radical leanings will at once write to remind me that Mr. Clifford once said a good word for the "Evening News," and that that gentleman, as well as his Editor, may reasonably be suspected of not believing that the Government is quite the best of all possible Governments!

What I mean is the smaller Irish trouble that has arisen through the publication of the very silly letter signed "J. T." So many communications referring to this letter have reached me that it is impossible to answer or quote from them all; and as for printing them in extenso, as many of the writers ask, that is simply out of the question.

I thank all those whose very loyal and pleasant letters have shown me that there are plenty of reasonable Irish folk—not that I ever doubted it, as far as that goes; but the unreasonable ones are so much louder that one is apt to exaggerate their numbers.

What remarks I have space to make this week must be devoted to those who seem to me to take a hopelessly wrong and impractical view of the Irish question.

One boy writes—in all honesty, I am sure: "How can we ever forget the cruel things that Englishmen did to Irishmen in the past? They were worse than anything done by the Germans in Belgium."

The latter statement I deny most emphatically. Having regard to the difference in the standard of civilisation between, say, the days of Cromwell and the twentieth century, no one who has studied the subject would make such an assertion as this. The sack of Drogheda, for instance, took place in the days when the sacking of a city was a common incident of warfare. Not so common as it had been in the middle ages, it is true, but, still, far less shocking to the conscience of the time than the German atrocities to the conscience of ours.

As for the rest of the argument, my dear boy, if you are going to hate me for what my (or someone else's) great-great-great-great-grandfather did to your (or someone else's) great-great-great-great-grandfather, where is the thing going to stop? What is the use of it? The people concerned are long since at rest. You and I never knew them. This hate is an essentially false sentiment, founded on folly, kept alive by the frothing of those who have their own ends to serve.

I will not talk about the Christian standpoint. Two thousand years or so of Christianity has not killed hate. But look at it this way.

For myself, I could hate a man who had gravely injured my father. My father I knew and cared for. I might not find

it easy to feel friendly towards the son of his injurer. But the resentment would certainly stop short of a grandson who had never seen either injurer or injured. One might as well hate the President of China or the Dalai Lama of Tibet!

Read any impartial history of Ireland, and you will learn that all the atrocities were not on one side. Irish kerns and gallowglasses did upon the soldiers of Elizabeth things to make the blood run cold when one merely reads of them. When in the far, far long ago English—or, rather, Norman—knights went over to meddle in the affairs of Ireland, they went at the invitation of an Irish king. Remember that!

Let us try to live in the present, and forget the past, with all its wrong and suffering. Or, if we must remember it, let us remember that on neither side was absolute right—that both sides did cruel things far best forgotten. Don't write and tell me that the Irish were guiltless in this respect, for all the weight of evidence is against any such contention. And don't tell me such utter rubbish as that the Sinn Féin organisation only wants Home Rule. It only shows that you do not grasp the first principles of the programme mapped out by them, which started with a practical boycott of every-thing English!

A LITTLE STORY FROM AUSTRALIA.

Here is something pleasanter than arguments on the endless Irish question. From Brisbane a girl reader writes to tell me of something she saw lately. Down on the beach quite a little chap was reading the GEM, when a tyrant elder brother arrived on the scene, berated him for reading our paper against orders, snatched it from him, and flung it into the sea. My girl correspondent made a rush to retrieve it; but a returned soldier on crutches said: "Just you leave this to me, miss. I'm on this job." He stood on his sound leg, and by the help of a crutch fished out the paper. Asked why he did it, his answer was: "Well, I was pretty lonely in the trenches, and that little paper was my best pal there."

I don't think that was quite the only reason; but it is a very nice testimonial for us, don't you think?

OUR NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, etc.

W. H. Parker (17), Northcombe, 59, Wellesley Rd., Great Yarmouth, would be glad to correspond with a soldier of 18-20—especially a Highlander.

Private F. R. Carter, No. 4217 B Coy., 3/8th Middlesex Regt., Transport, Bourne Park Camp, Canterbury, would be glad to hear from some of our older boy readers.

Miss Nora Corlette, 4, Fittion St., Wardleworth, Rochdale, would like to correspond with colonial girls—especially with Manx girls in the colonies.

Miss Violet Morris, c/o F. W. Watson, Esq., 7, Brazennose St., Manchester, would like to correspond with another girl reader between 15 and 17; and also to join a "Gem" and "Magnet" League in Manchester.

G. F. Anderson, 5, Seymour St., Observatory Rd., Cape Town, South Africa, would like to correspond with a boy of 14-16 in the United Kingdom.

E. Ogden, 26, Cook's Rd., Kennington, S.E., would like to hear from L. Nash, late of P.S. School.

Bert Gardner, Kildean, Stirling, wants to form a league among Stirling boy readers.

Your Editor

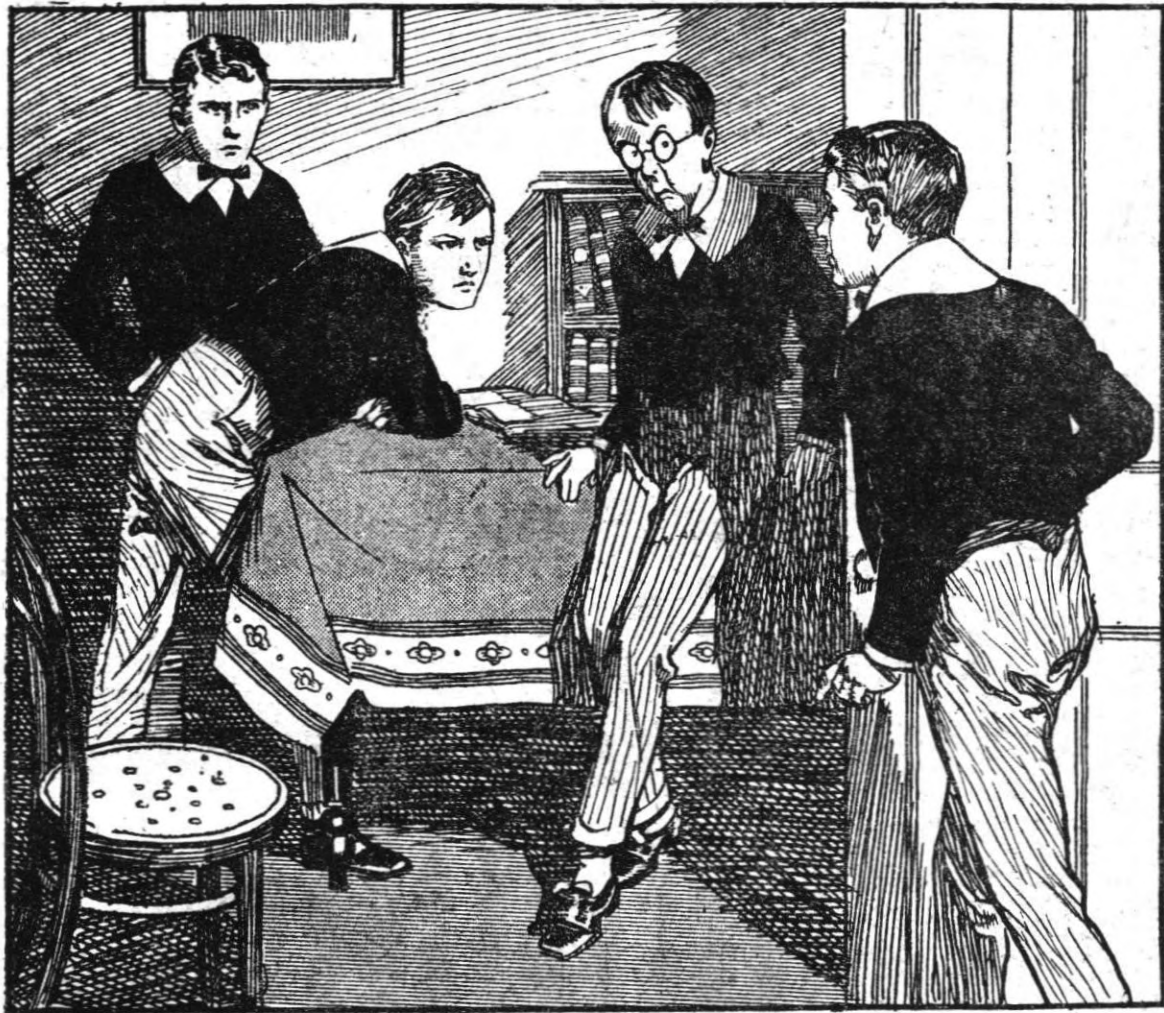
PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!

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



Gore pointed to the door, without speaking, as Crooke entered. "I say, Talbot," began Crooke.
(See Chapter 9.)

CHAPTER 1. Crooke is Too Funny!

"**C**ROOKE! You cad!"
Tom Merry spoke in a fierce whisper.
Crooke grinned, and shrugged his shoulders.
The Shell Form at St. Jim's were in the classroom for the French lesson. And in the presence of Monsieur Morny, Tom Merry could do nothing but whisper, though he would have given half a term's pocket-money to punch the cad of the Shell upon the nose at that moment.

Monsieur Morny was a patient little gentleman, but

Crooke's slackness had been a little too much for him that afternoon. The slacker of the Shell yawned over the lesson, taking full advantage of Mossoo's good-temper and patience, and he had worn both out at last. He had received a hundred lines of the "Henriade," to be written out before tea, as a warning. And Crooke was ratty.

Mossoo had told him to construct a sentence, and Crooke had constructed one, which he showed to the fellows near him with great satisfaction.

Into that grammatical exercise Crooke had contrived to weave an insult which, he considered, could not fail to make the French master sit up.

Racke, his chum, grinned over it with great approval. But

Next Wednesday:

LEVISON MINOR'S LUCK!" AND "FOES OF FORTUNE!"

No. 461. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, who were near, frowned at him angrily.

"Crooke! You cad!"

"Oh, shut up!" yawned Crooke.

"You're going to show that to Mossos?" whispered Manners.

Crooke nodded and grinned.

"He told me to make a sentence," he said. "He thinks I can't make a sentence in his froggy language. I'll show him!"

"You're not going to show him that?" said Tom Merry.

"I am, rather!"

"I'll punch your nose after lessons if you do!"

"Oh, rats!"

Monsieur Morny looked round sharply.

"You talk viz yourselves in zis class," he said. "Merry, I sink zat you shall speak."

"Yes, sir!" admitted Tom.

"I am sorry zat you do not treat your master viz more respect, Merry," said Monsieur Morny severely. "You take twenty lines!"

Crooke grinned with great delight. Tom Merry's interference on behalf of Mossos had been ill-requested.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

"Ve come here to study ze French," said Monsieur Morny. "Zis is not place for ze talk, n'est-ce-pas? I am surprise at you, Merry!"

Tom sat crimson and silent. He could not explain to Mossos, that was certain, so he had to grin and bear it.

"Crooke, is it zat you have made ze sentence zat I have tell you?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Crooke cheerily.

"I am surprise if you have construct a sentence zat is grammatic," said Monsieur Morny sarcastically. "You vill read out to me, Crooke!"

"Yes, sir!"

Crooke stood up and read out his sentence.

"Pourquoi pas aller a la guerre?"

There was a gasp from the Shell fellows.

Crooke's intention was plain enough, and Monsieur Morny did not fail to see it. The little Frenchman stood rooted to the floor, his face growing crimson.

"Crooke!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir!" said Crooke.

"Vat—vat is zat you mean?"

"Isn't the meaning clear, sir?" said Crooke, deliberately misunderstanding. "Isn't the French right? It means in English, 'Why not go to the war?' At least, that's what I meant it to mean, sir."

Some of the Shell fellows grinned.

The taunt conveyed in Crooke's precious exercise was undeserved, as well as unfeeling, for Monsieur Morny was long past military age, or he would have had no choice about going to war.

Crooke's idea was that he would be able to get at the French master in that subtle manner, and that Monsieur would be bound to accept his exercise merely as an exercise. He could not prove that the reference was intended for himself.

But the cad of the Shell's intention was too plain for Mossos to be left in the dark for a moment.

"Crooke!" he gasped. "You know verree vell vat I mean! In zat sentence you mean to insult me!"

"You, sir!" said Crooke, assuming an air of innocent surprise. "Oh, no, sir! That's just an exercise!"

"You refer to me, Crooke!"

"Not at all, sir! I shouldn't think of asking you why you don't go to the war," said Crooke calmly. "I dare say you've got jolly good reasons, sir, but I should think it impertinent to ask you what they were."

There was a chuckle from some of the Shell. Crooke was rubbing it in with great skill.

Monsieur Morny, like everybody else, had his little weaknesses. Mossos's weakness was a desire to look younger than he was. The juniors knew well enough that he dyed his little pointed beard and his waxed moustache. They suspected that he wore a wig. They knew that he wore boots a little too small for him; and Trimble of the Fourth had solemnly declared that he had seen a pair of corsets in the French master's room, which would certainly have accounted for Mossos's remarkably well-groomed figure.

Mossos, like many gentlemen of uncertain age, was in a difficult position. He did not like to blazon forth, far and wide, the fact that he was over forty-five, when he was trying to look thirty. But he shrank from being supposed to be dodging service at a time when his country needed all her sons for her defence.

As a matter of fact, nobody would have dreamed that the French master was so young as he fondly supposed he looked.

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With all his aids to a youthful appearance, he looked his age, as people generally do. Crooke knew perfectly well that Mossos was getting on for fifty.

Crooke's impertinence seemed to take Mossos's breath away for some moments. He stood and blinked at the cad of the Shell.

But he found his voice at last.

"Crooke, you are verree vell avare zat I am too old to go to join ze army in France!"

Crooke grinned.

No other master at St. Jim's would have entered into an argument with a junior. But the excitable and emotional Frenchman was easily drawn. And Mossos was touched on his tenderest spot, too. For, if he could only have been as young as he hoped he looked, he would have flown to Flanders.

"Oh, sir!" said Crooke. "Really, sir?"

"You are vell avare of zat, Crooke!"

"Not at all, sir! You look so young, you know!"

"Hein?"

"Your hair is so black, sir!" said Crooke calmly. "It's very rare for men over military age to have hair so black—unless they dye it, of course!"

There was a chuckle from the Shell. Monsieur Morny's face at that moment was worth a guinea a box, as Monty Lowther remarked afterwards.

"Crooke, you have dare to insult your master!"

"I, sir?"

"Oui, oui, oui!" shrieked Monsieur Morny, waving his hands. "You! You! Zat you have done. You say zat I am vat you call slackair, shirkair! N'est-ce-pas! Vicked poy! If it vas zat I could go, I run—I fly—I hasten viz me to keel ze Huns zat have invade my beautiful country. I offair my service, and zey smile—zey smile in my face, n'est-ce-pas? Now I am insult by a vicked poy! But you shall learn, isn't it, zat you go too far viz your vat you call sheek! Come here, Crooke! Venez ici!"

Monsieur Morny caught up Mr. Linton's pointer from the desk.

Crooke's expression changed.

The joke was a first-class one, from Crooke's point of view, but the humour vanished from it when the pointer was introduced.

"Venez!" shouted Monsieur Morny.

"I—I didn't mean—" stammered Crooke.

"I know verree vell vat you mean, you vicked poy! It is zat you pull ze leg, as you say in English. You will come here, toute suite!"

Crooke unwillingly came out before the class.

"Hold out ze hand viz you!" Swish! "Now ze ozzer!" Swish! "Now ze ozzer again! And ze ozzer!"

"Yow-wow-wow-wow!" howled Crooke in anguish.

"Now go back to your place, Crooke! I hope zat zat vill be one lesson for you, zat you insult not your master, isn't it?"

Crooke went back to his place, with a face that Monty Lowther likened unto that of a demon in a pantomime. Crooke was not humorous again during the French lesson; he was the most serious fellow in all the Shell.

CHAPTER 2. Flooring the Hun!

THE uttah wottah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, spoke in terms that thrilled with indignation.

The Fourth Form were out a few minutes before the Shell that afternoon; and when Tom Merry & Co. came trooping out of the Shell Form-room they found Arthur Augustus holding forth in the passage to a group of more or less sympathetic Fourth Formers.

Blake and Herries and Digby were quite sympathetic, being D'Arcy's own special chums, but they were grinning a little. Julian, and Kerruish, and Hammond, and Reilly, and Figgins, and Kerr, and Wynn, and several other fellows were grinning a good deal. Levison and Mellish and Trimble were chuckling audibly.

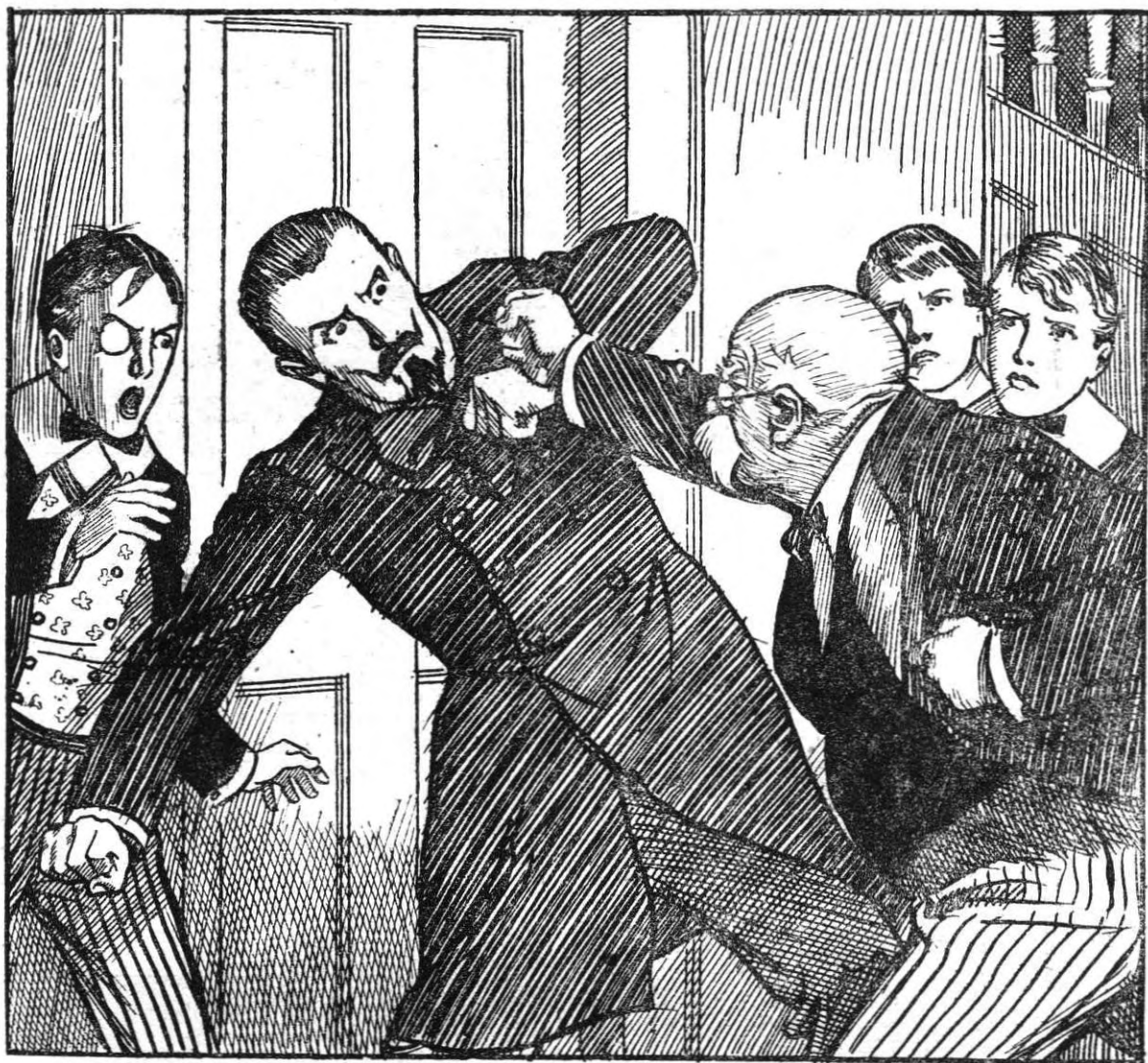
"The feahful Hun wottah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Are you talking about his Serene Bumptiousness, the merry Kaiser?"

"I was not alludin' to the Kaisah, Tom Mewwy. I was alludin' to anothah Hun wottah."

"It's Schneider again," said Blake. "We've just had German, with Schneider; and Schneider was ratty."

"We've just had French, and Mossos was a bit on the war-path," grinned Tom Merry. "Crooke was rather funny with Mossos, and got it in the neck. Have you been funny with Schneider, Gussy?"



Herr Schneider drove his fat fist straight at the French master's face, while the juniors looked on in horrified silence. (See Chapter 2.)

"I make it a point to tweek a mastah with wespect on all occasions, Tom Mewwy. I wegard that as good form. It is wathah hard to tweek a Hun with wespect, but noblesse oblige, you know. I weally do not see any weason for continuin' German lessens duwin' the war. I see no weason why we should not learn Wussian instead."

"Look at the alphabet, and then you would!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Well, pewwaps the Wussian alphabet is wathah difficult, Lowthah; but, at all events, it is a civilised alphabet, and not a lot of stwagglin', spidah-leggay wubbish, like the German alphabet. Besides, it would be wippin' to have a Wussian heah instead of Schneidah. The howwid boundah ought to be interned, in my opinion. All Huns ought to be interned. It is simply disgustin' that Huns should be allowed to wap the knuckles of the highah waces!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at, Tom Mewwy! Herr Schneidah had the feahful cheek to wap my knuckles with a wulah, simply because I put in 'das' instead of 'die.' How can a civilised bwain gwasp all their sillay, wotten gendahs? Why can't they leave off declinin' their silly articles? Bai Jove, if I were wewepresented at the Peace Conference at the end of the war, I should make it a condish that they should stop declinin' their silly articles!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I am uttably fed up with German articles!"

"Wait till we get Tariff Reform," said Monty Lowther. "Then German articles won't be imported at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, Lowthah! I am alludin' to the gwammatical article."

"In any case, after the way the Germans have been shown up in this war, I shall decline any German articles," said Lowther.

"Pway don't be a funny ass, Lowthah! I have had my knuckles wapped by a wotten Hun!"

"Awful!" said Tom Merry sympathetically.

"I wegard it as an indignity!"

"I've been caned by a rotten Froggy," snarled Crooke; "and I'm going to make him sit up for it somehow!"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the cad of the Shell.

"That is quite a diffewent mattah, Cwooke! There is no indignity in bein' caned by an ally. I dare say you asked for it, too. But I have been w'apped on the knuckles by a membah of a lowah wace—"

"Shush!" murmured Talbot of the Shell.

Herr Schneider, who had been in the Fourth Form-room, came out as Arthur Augustus was speaking.

A hush fell on the juniors. They had little doubt that Herr Schneider had heard D'Arcy's words. Herr Schneider was a particularly favourable specimen of his race; but that, as Lowther had observed, was not saying very much. He often heard things that were not intended for his ears, and he was often suspected of walking with intentional stealthiness, in order to hear things he was not meant to hear.

Herr Schneider did not pass on. He came towards the

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "LEVISON MINOR'S LUCK!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

group of juniors, his pale-blue eyes gleaming behind his glasses.

"D'Arcy! You speak of me?"

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus at once. The swell of St. Jim's would have disdained a lie at any time; but to lie to a Hun was doubly impossible.

"Vat is it at you call me?"

"I would wathah not wepeat my wemarks, sir. They were not intended for your ceahs."

"Vat you call me?" exclaimed Herr Schneider angrily.

"I have twied, sir, to tweat you with the wespect due to a mastah at this school," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "As my words were not intended for your ceahs, sir, I twust you will take no notice of them."

"Vill you obey me?" thundered Herr Schneider.

"Vewwy well, sir! As you insist upon my wepeatin' my wemark, I will do so. I alluded to you as a membah of a lowah wace, sir!"

The juniors looked on, breathless. There was no getting out of the fact that the German master was a member of a lower race, of course; but it required a considerable amount of nerve to tell him so.

Herr Schneider glared at the swell of the Fourth, quite speechless for a moment. He was already in a bad temper.

"Poy!" he gasped. "You—you dare to say—"

"I am sowwy to hurt your feelin's, sir," said Arthur Augustus considerably; "but since you insist upon heavin' my opinion, I have no wesource but to tell you the twuth. It is not exactly your fault, sir, that you were born in a degwaded country, a membah of a lowah wace—Yawwoooo!"

Arthur Augustus got no further.

Herr Schneider made a sudden jump at him. He seized Arthur Augustus by the collar with his left hand, and boxed his ears with his right with terrific energy.

"Yawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Leggo! You feahful Hun wottah, welease me!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Bai Jove! Gwooh! Oh, yah! Wescue!"

Some of the juniors made a movement forward.

It was a serious matter enough to interfere with a master administering punishment, but there was a limit.

"Herr Schneider," shouted Tom Merry, "stop it!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Look here, he's got to stop it!" said Blake between his teeth, as D'Arcy struggled vainly in the grasp of the angry German. "I'm not standing this!"

"Stop!"

It was a sharp voice that rung out just as the juniors were about to intervene. Monsieur Morny strode on the scene from the Shell-room.

The juniors fell back.

Monsieur Morny hurried towards the excited German master. He caught Herr Schneider's arm, and stopped a blow as it was descending.

"Monsieur!" he exclaimed.

Herr Schneider glared at him.

"Vat! Let me go at vunce!" he exclaimed.

"My dear monsieur, you must not strike ze poy like zat!" remonstrated Monsieur Morny. "It is zat you have ze temper lost. I beg you, be calm!"

Herr Schneider was not likely to be calm. He was quite out of temper, in a more towering passion than the juniors had ever seen him before.

"Avay!" he shouted. "Interfere mit me, and I vill knock you ofer!"

"Monsieur!"

"Go, den!"

"I vill not go," said Monsieur Morny calmly, though his cheeks were glowing. "You shall not use zat boy like zat. Let him go!"

"Mein Gott!"

Monsieur Morny fairly jerked Arthur Augustus from the German's grasp. D'Arcy staggered back breathless, and Blake caught him.

Herr Schneider made a savage movement towards him, and Monsieur Morny stepped quickly into the way.

"Stand aside mit you!" roared Herr Schneider.

"Monsieur, I zink you are out of your senses!" said the French master, with quiet contempt. "I beg you to be calm viz you."

"Bah! I knock you ofer, you leetle French frog!" roared Herr Schneider. "Run avay, as your countrymen dey run from mine!"

"Zey do not run!" exclaimed Mossosoo furiously. "It is ze Shermans zat run. Zey keel ze women and ze leetle children, and from ze brave Frenchmen zey run. Bah! I speet upon Shermans!"

That was the last straw. Herr Schneider drove his fat fist THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 461.

straight at the French master's face. The juniors looked on in horrified silence. A scrap between two masters was not only unheard of; it was almost unthinkable. But here it was—happening under their noses!

That heavy drive, with all the fat German's weight behind it, would have knocked Mossosoo flying if it had reached him. But the nimble Frenchman dodged, and the next moment his foot came up, and caught Herr Schneider just above the watch-chain. The fat German went backwards as if he had been shot, and rolled, gasping, on the floor. Monsieur Morny could not use his hands in the English way, but he could use his feet in the French way; he knew nothing of "la boxe," but much of "la savate." And he had felled the burly German like an ox.

The juniors looked on grimly. National customs and prejudices are strong; and though all their sympathy was with Mossosoo they could not approve of the use of the feet in a fight. But Mossosoo evidently regarded it as fair play.

Herr Schneider sat up, blinking dazedly.

But he did not rise. All the wind had been driven out of his fat body by the sudden concussion with the floor. Monsieur Morny waited a few moments, and then walked away down the passage.

The group of juniors dispersed. Herr Schneider picked himself up at last, and rolled away, muttering to himself. In the quadrangle, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rubbed his ears ruefully.

"Mossosoo was a little brick to chip in," remarked Tom Merry. "The Hun beast was piling it on too thick!"

"He was a weal bwick," said Arthur Augustus; "and, bai Jove, how he floored the fat boundah! I wathah wish he had knocked him down instead of kickin' him, but—but, aftah all, he isn't big enough to knock Schneidah down."

"Lucky the Head or the Housemaster didn't come along," said Figgins. "My hat! I've never seen two masters scrapping before! If the Head knew—"

The juniors could hardly imagine what would happen if the Head knew. Fortunately, the Head did not know.

CHAPTER 3.

A Warning to Crooke.

"I AM goin' to chip in!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark at tea-time in Study No. 6.

His noble brows had been wrinkled in thought for some time. Evidently the swell of St. Jim's was thinking something out.

"Time you did," said Blake.

"You agwee with me, Blake?"

"Certainly! If you don't chip in pretty soon, all the sardines will be gone," said Blake.

"All the ham's gone already," remarked Digby.

"And I'm finishing the eggs," said Herries. "You'd better chip in, Gussy, if you want anything at all."

"Wats! I was not thinkin' of tea," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I was thinkin' of Mossosoo."

However, the swell of St. Jim's helped himself to the sardines, now that his attention was drawn to the fact that the supplies on the study table were diminishing at a rapid rate.

"What about Mossosoo?" yawned Blake.

"That wottah Cwooke is plannin' somethin'," explained Arthur Augustus. "It appeahs that Mossosoo licked him this aftahnoon for bein' cheekay. I do not approve of bein' cheekay to a mastah. I wegard it as bad form."

"Perhaps Crooke didn't know that," suggested Digby. "In fact, he couldn't have, or he would never have had the nerve—"

"Pway don't be a funnay ass, Dig! You can leave wotten jokes to Lowthah; he can't help it. I wepeat that I am goin' to chip in. Mossosoo is a vewy decent little chap, and he is an ally. It is up to a chap to back up an ally, and I am not goin' to see Cwooke playin' wotten twicks on him. I am quite suah he asked for a lickin'."

"And he never gets all he asks for," agreed Blake. "We're not going to see Mossosoo japed by a cad like Crooke. But how do you know—"

"The wottah has been thwreatenin' what he is goin' to do!"

"Only gas, I expect."

"Vewy pwob, deah boy, as Cwooke is wathah a funk. But I think it is up to me to warn him that this study will not permit any twicks on an ally. I wathah think it is up to us to put our foot down."

"Hear, hear!"

"I am goin' to put my foot down," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I twust you fellows will put your foot down also."

"Certainly!" said Blake, and he promptly brought his foot down—upon Arthur Augustus' elegant boot.

There was a loud howl from Gussy, and he jumped up.

"You uttah ass! What did you do that for?" he roared. Blake looked surprised.

"You asked me to."

"Gwoogh! You feahful duffah—"

"I appeal to the whole study!" said Blake indignantly.

"Didn't Gussy ask me to put my foot down?"

"He did," said Digby.

"I heard him," said Herries solemnly.

"You have deliberately misundahstood me, Blake, you japin' wottah! You have spoiled the polish on my boot now, you uttah ass, as well as hurtin' my toe!"

"Awful!" said Blake.

"I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin', you howlin' ass!"

"Help!"

"Howevah, I will orahlook your idiotic joke, if you come and back me up in talkin' to Cwooke."

"Wait till I've finished your sardines," said Blake cheerfully.

"Bai Jove! I forgot I had not had my tea."

"Well, it won't take you long; there isn't much left," said Blake. "I've saved you a lot of trouble."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tea being finished in Study No. 6, the four Fourth-Formers went to look for George Gerald Crooke of the Shell. They met the Terrible Three in the passage, and Arthur Augustus stopped them.

"Pway come with us, deah boys—"

"There's still light for some footer," said Tom Merry.

"This way!"

"We are goin' to speak to Cwooke—"

"Wish you joy! I'm not," said Tom Merry promptly. "You can have my share of the pleasures of Crooke's conversation."

"I am goin' to chip in, Tom Mewwy. The wottah is plannin' some wotten twick on poor old Mossos, and I am not goin' to allow it. I wathah think it is time to put our foot down."

Monty Lowther drew back his foot, with the evident intention of repeating Jack Blake's little joke. Arthur Augustus jumped back.

"Lowthau, you uttah ass, this is no time for silly twicks! Pway follow me, and we will give that feahful wottah a warnin'."

Arthur Augustus led the way, and the Terrible Three followed. Seven juniors marched into Crooke's study.

Crooke and Racke were there, and they were smoking cigarettes. There was a haze of smoke in the room, and Arthur Augustus coughed.

"Hallo!" said Racke. "Come in for a smoke? Help yourself, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus' eye gleamed through his eyeglass.

"You are vewy well awah, Wacke, that I have not come in to play silly twicks. I wegard you as a wotten boundah, Wacke!"

"Thanks!"

"If I were a pwelect, I should give you a thwashin' for smokin' cigawettes, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"How lucky you're not a pwelect," yawned Racke. "Give me a sermon instead, dear boy. I like listening to your accent. It cheers me up."

There was a chuckle in the study, and Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on his followers.

"I fail to see anythin' to cackle at in Wacke's wotten impertinence," he said coldly.

"Never mind—we do," said Monty Lowther. "Get on with the washing, Gussy. Life's short, you know."

"I did not come heah to banday words with you, Wacke—"

"Why did you come here at all?" asked Racke. "Suppose you clear off?"

"I have come to speak to Cwooke—"

"You needn't trouble," remarked Crooke, blowing out a little cloud of smoke, which made the swell of the Fourth cough again.

"Cwooke, I am goin' to speak to you sewiously! I heah that you have been talkin' about goin' for old Mossos—"

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"I'm going to make the Froggy sit up!" he growled.

"What have you got to say about it?"

"I weuse to allow anythin' of the sort!"

"Go hon!"

"Mossos is a Fwenchman, Cwooke—"

"Not really? Well, I think I should have guessed that from his name, now you speak of it," said Crooke, in a thoughtful way.

"And the Fwench are our Allies, Cwooke—"

"You don't say so!"

"I do say so, Cwooke, and, therefore, it is up to all of us to tweek Mossos with vewy gweat considewation. You must wemembah, Cwooke, that our bwave boys have gone out to Flandahs to fight for Fwance—"

"Hardly worth the trouble, I should say," remarked Crooke. "I'd let 'em take their chance."

"I wegard you as a beastly wottah, Cwooke, if not a pwo-Hun!"

"Anything else?"

"Yaas, wathah! You are not goin' to be allowed to play any twicks on Mossos."

"Rats!"

"If you do, the House will take the mattah in hand, and you will weceive a vewy severe waggin'!"

"Are you the House?" asked Crooke, with an air of friendly interest.

"Ahem! I wepwesent the House in this mattah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "We are backin' up the Fwench against the wotten Huns, and we shall not allow any wotten twicks on an ally. That is a warnin'."

"Right enough!" said Tom Merry. "Mossos is a good little ass, and you're going to let him alone, Crooke."

"Right on the wicket!" said Blake. "You can play what tricks you like on old Schneider; he's a Hun, and don't matter. But Mossos is the merry apple of our eye, and you're going to let him alone. Savvy?"

"I'm going to do as I choose!" growled Crooke. "I suppose it's a free country, ain't it?"

"Not in war-time," grinned Blake. "We have compulsion now, and we're going to compulse you, if you play any tricks on Mossos."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You can take the tip from us," said Tom Merry seriously. "You're going to let Mossos alone. Otherwise, you'll get a House ragging."

"And we may as well begin by thwashin' the wottah now," said Arthur Augustus, pushing back his spotless cuffs. "Pway put your hands up, Cwooke!"

"Oh, get out!" said Crooke.

"Yes, come on, or there won't be any light for footer," said Blake, and he dragged Arthur Augustus out of the study.

Crooke kicked the door shut after the juniors, and scowled. Racke regarded him curiously.

"Going to chuck up the idea?" he asked.

"No!" said Crooke, between his teeth. "Do you think I'm going to be thrashed by a rotten Froggy? I'll make him sit up for it!"

"I don't see how."

"You'll see soon," growled Crooke.

And he sat down and lighted another cigarette. The visit of Arthur Augustus had made no difference to the cad of the Shell, unless it was to make him more determined. And a little later, when darkness had fallen, Crooke quitted the study with a gleam in his eyes. The cad of the Shell was on the warpath, but even to Racke, his bosom pal, he had not confided his intentions, whatever they were.

CHAPTER 4. Done in the Dark.

"YOU have enjoy ze game of football, isn't it?"

Tom Merry & Co. were coming in in the dusk as Monsieur Morny came out of the School House. The French master greeted the juniors pleasantly. Mossos took some interest in the great game of "football," though what he did not know about it would have filled large volumes.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry cheerily.

"Zat is a great game," said Mossos agreeably. "In my country zey begin to play zat great game, before zat ze war come. I have yatch him sometimes, in la belle France, and I sheer wiz me ven zey take ze vickets."

Mossos probably meant goals.

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"I suppose you're rather an authority on the game, sir?" said Monty Lowther gravely.
 "I learn something of him," said Mossos. "If I shall be what man I shall be footballer. Bon soir, mes enfants!"

"Good-night, sir!"
 Mossos walked out into the darkening quadrangle. It was his custom to take a trot round the quad in the evening. The footballers went in, and passed Crooke of the Shell in the hall.

Crooke went out into the quad.
 Arthur Augustus glanced after him for a moment.
 "Come on!" said Blake.
 "That wottah has just gone out aftah Mossos, Blake."

"Well, he isn't going to scalp Mossos in the quad," said Blake. "Come and get changed, fathead! There's prep yet."
 Arthur Augustus followed his companions upstairs. He had caught the look in Crooke's eyes as the Shell fellow passed, and it had roused his suspicions. But it was not very clear what harm Crooke could do Mossos in the quadrangle, and Arthur Augustus dismissed the idea from his mind.

The juniors changed in the dormitory, and came down to their studies. It was time for evening preparation. Blake & Co. were settling down to work in Study No. 6 when a sudden, sharp cry was heard from the quadrangle. The study window was open, and the sound came in sharply and clearly.

Blake jumped up.
 "What the dickens——"
 "Sounds like somebody hurt," said Herries.
 Blake ran to the window.
 From the thick darkness in the quadrangle came another cry—a cry of pain. Then a voice was heard—a voice he knew well.

"A moi! A moi! Help!"
 "Mossos!" gasped Blake.
 "Bai Jove!"
 "What on earth——"
 "Come on!" panted Blake, and he rushed out of the study.
 It was evident that something was happening to Monsieur Morny in the dark quadrangle.
 Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were racing down the passage. They had heard the cries.
 "Something's happened to Mossos!" exclaimed Tom.
 "Yes; come on!"

The juniors ran down the stairs.
 Several fellows were in the open doorway of the School House, staring out into the darkness.
 "Did you hear——" began Kangaroo of the Shell.
 Tom Merry ran on without replying. His comrades followed him, and a crowd of other fellows joined them.

What could have happened to Mossos within the walls of St. Jim's was a mystery, but there was no doubt that something had happened. He had called for help.
 Tom Merry dashed on in the darkness, and reeled suddenly as he dashed into a slinking form.
 He threw out his hand and caught hold of it.

"What—who——"
 "Let me go!"
 It was Crooke's panting voice.
 "Crooke! You cad!" cried Tom. "Where is Mossos?"
 What have you done?"

"I've done nothing. Let me go!" hissed Crooke.
 "Come on!" shouted Blake. "I can hear him."
 Tom Merry released Crooke. It was no time then to deal with the cad of the Shell. He rushed on after Blake.

Under the dark elms a faint voice was calling.
 "A moi! Mon Dieu! A moi! Help!"
 Blake almost stumbled over a dark form stretched on the ground under the trees. He halted, panting.
 "Mossos, is that you?"

There was a groan.
 "C'est moi!"
 "Got a match, anybody?" exclaimed Blake.
 A match flared out.

Monsieur Morny was stretched on the damp grass, gasping for breath. There was a trickle of blood on his face.
 "Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What has happened, sir?"
 "Mon Dieu!" the French master groaned. "I do not know. I am attack in ze dark. I am hurt! Mon Dieu! Help me, mes enfants!"

Three or four of the juniors grasped the Frenchman and helped him to his feet. Kildare of the Sixth came running up from the School House.
 "What's the matter here?"
 "Mossos's hurt," said Tom Merry.
 "Mossos——"

"Mon Dieu! I am attack! I am strike viz stick!" groaned Mossos. "I am attack in ze dark!"

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"Lean on me, sir," said Kildare. "Let me help you to the House."

"Zank you, mon garcon!"
 Monsieur Morny, leaning heavily on Kildare's sturdy shoulder, moved off slowly and painfully towards the house. He was followed by an excited and buzzing crowd.

"Who on earth can have done it?" exclaimed Talbot of the Shell. "The gates are closed; nobody can have got in."
 "Must have been a St. Jim's chap," said Kangaroo.
 "Bai Jove! It's pretty cleah who it was," muttered Arthur Augustus. "I saw the wottah followin' Mossos out."

"Crooke?" muttered Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "He—he wouldn't have the nerve," said Digby, in a scared voice. "It means the sack—worse than that, perhaps."
 "It was that wottah!"
 "He was in the quad," said Blake.

"Might have gone in——" began Herries.
 "He hadn't gone in," said Tom Merry quietly.
 "How do you know?"
 "Because I ran into him as I came out. He was coming towards the House from this direction."

"Bai Jove! That settles it!"
 "The awful rotter!"
 "We all knew he'd been planning something," said Tom.
 "But this——"
 "Bai Jove! This is weally the limit! He has acted like a wotten Hun!"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "We want proof first. And, anyway, we can't sneak about him. Keep your head shut at present."
 "We'll deal with him ourselves, if he isn't bowled out!" said Kangaroo grimly.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 The juniors followed the French master and Kildare into the House. Mr. Railton met them in the hall. The Housemaster looked in amazement and horror at the French master's white face, with the thin trickle of red that oozed from under his hair. His hat was gone.

"Monsieur Morny! What has happened?"
 "Somebody went for Mossos in the quad, sir!" said Kildare.
 "Is it possible?"
 Monsieur Morny groaned.

"I am attack in ze dark! Somevun he hit me viz stick! He hit me viz stick many times. Mon Dieu!"
 Mr. Railton's brow was like a thundercloud.
 "You saw who your assailant was, Monsieur Morny?"
 "I see nozzing in ze dark, monsieur. And it vas so sudden. I am take by ze surprise!"

"Then you do not know——"
 "I know nozzing, monsieur!"
 "Let me help you to your room, Monsieur Morny," said the Housemaster, taking the Frenchman's arm. "Kildare, please ascertain whether the gates are locked, and whether any stranger has been inside the walls."

"Yes, sir!"
 Mr. Railton led the little Frenchman up the stairs. He left the whole House in a buzz behind him.

CHAPTER 5.

A Mystery.

TOM MERRY & CO. had gone into the Common-room. They were looking very grave.

There was scarcely a possibility that the attack on Monsieur Morny had been the work of anyone outside the school. Such a theory could hardly be entertained for a moment, especially after Kildare had reported that the gates were locked, and that Taggles, the porter, was sure that no stranger had gained admission since dark.

Evidently the cowardly attack on the French master had been made by someone within the walls of the school.
 Tom Merry & Co. could be in little doubt as to whose hand had struck the cowardly blows. But they were in a difficulty.

They could not betray Crooke.
 In the first place, there was no actual proof that it was Crooke, though they did not doubt it for a moment. In the second place, the code of schoolboy honour forbade them to sneak.

Crooke certainly would not escape punishment; his school-fellows would see to that. There was no doubt on that point. But they could not betray him to the Housemaster. Angry and indignant as they were, they all agreed upon that.
 "Only," said Tom Merry, "there'll be questions asked, and what on earth are we to say?"



"You have been to the Doctor?" said Herr Schneider, blinking at Crooke over his spectacles. The junior nodded. (See Chapter 1.)

"We're certainly not going to tell lies to screen that scoundrel!" said Kangaroo warmly.

"Wathah not!"

"After all, we don't know anything about it," said Blake. "Nobody appears to have been in the quad excepting Crooke. And nobody but you saw him there, Tom."

"Yes, that's so. We can keep our mouths shut. But—but if Railton asks us if we know anything about it—"

"And he's bound to!"

"Bai Jove! It will be a doocid awkward posish!"

"Suppose we make Crooke own up?" suggested Manners. "He did it, and we all know he did it. He's almost bound to be bowled out. Railton won't let the matter rest. Let's go and see Crooke."

"Here he is!"

Crooke of the Shell came into the Common-room. His sallow face was white now, and he looked scared.

The grim looks the juniors bent on him seemed to make him still more uneasy. He came towards the group with faltering steps.

"Crooke, you cad!"

"Crooke, you uttah wottah!"

"Don't play the fool now!" muttered Crooke hoarsely. "Look here! Something's happened to Mosscoo! Somebody went for him in the dark!"

"You did!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

Crooke panted.

"I didn't!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove! Have you got the fearful cheek to deny it, you wascal?"

"I never touched him!" panted Crooke. "I swear I didn't!"

"Rot!"

"Don't tell lies now!" said Tom savagely. "Where were you running to when I ran into you in the quad? What were you doing there at all?"

"You went out after Mosscoo. I saw you, you wottah!"

"I—I know I did! But I never touched him. I—I was going to pelt him in the dark," muttered Crooke. "You know he licked me! I was going to get even with him. I was going to pelt him with rotten eggs, that's all. He wouldn't have known who it was in the dark!"

"And you went for him with a stick instead!"

"I didn't!"

"Then who did?"

"I don't know. I—I was getting after him under the elms when I heard him yell out!"

"Oh, don't tell lies!" growled Blake.

"I swear it's true. I—I was startled. I knew somebody was going for him, and—and I cleared off. I didn't want to be found there. I knew some silly idiots would think I'd had a hand in it, so I just ran!"

"Instead of going to help him?" exclaimed Tom Merry scornfully.

"Hang him! Why should I help him? I was jolly glad that somebody was pasting him!" growled Crooke.

"Well, that would be like you, if it was true!" said Manners. "But it isn't true. It was you who went for him!"

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"It wasn't! I swear it wasn't!"
 "Then who was it?" exclaimed Talbot.
 "I don't know. I can't see in the dark like a dashed cat, can I? I didn't see anything. I only heard him howl out. Don't you believe me?"

"No, we don't!"
 "Wathah not!"
 "You're not going to tell the Housemaster I was out of doors?" panted Crooke, his face white with terror. "Railton would be bound to think I did it, if the real party isn't found out!"

"You'd better own up, Crooke!"
 "I never did it, I tell you!"
 "What's the good of piling on lies when we know?" exclaimed Blake savagely.

"It's not lies! I never did it, I swear!" groaned Crooke.
 "I don't know who did. Levison, perhaps. He don't like Mossoo!"

Levison of the Fourth gave a sneering laugh.
 "I happened to be in my study," he said. "Lumley-Lumley was there with me, and Trimble and Melish too. You can't put it on me, Crooke!"

"Well, I don't know who it was. I don't say it was you. But it wasn't me. One of the New House chaps, perhaps!"
 "Wats!"

"You'd better own up!" said Manners.
 "I tell you——" Crooke broke off as Kildare of the Sixth came into the room. "Not a word, you fellows!"

"All juniors to go to the Hall!" called out the captain of St. Jim's.

"Right-ho, Kildare!"
 Tom Merry & Co. made their way to Hall. The school was called together, and it was evident that there was to be questioning.

Big Hall gradually filled.
 The New House fellows turned up with the rest. The inquiry was to embrace the whole of St. Jim's.

The New House contingent were surprised and curious, most of them knew nothing of the occurrence, so far. Blake explained to Figgins & Co., as the Fourth Form lined up in Hall.

"A School House chap, of course," said George Figgins at once. "We don't play that kind of Prussian trick in the New House!"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake crossly.
 He could not reply to Figgins as he would have wished, for he had no doubt himself that the author of the outrage was a School House fellow.

There was a murmur in the crowded Hall as the Head came in at the upper door. Mr. Railton had reported the matter to Dr. Holmes.

The Head was looking very stern. It was an unprecedented happening at St. Jim's, and Dr. Holmes was shocked and angry. It was pretty evident that there would be no mercy for the culprit when he was discovered. An assault upon a master was unpardonable in any case; but this case was aggravated by the mean and cowardly nature of a sudden attack in the dark upon an unsuspecting victim.

That the culprit would be flogged and expelled from the school, if discovered, was a foregone conclusion. It only remained to be seen whether he would be discovered; and the fellows felt that there could be little doubt on that point. There was a hush of silence as the Head spoke.

"A most shocking and outrageous thing has occurred," said the Head. "A master of this school has been deliberately attacked and assaulted in the most base and cowardly manner by some person at present unknown. That this action is condemned by all my boys as strongly as by myself, I am quite assured!"

There was a murmur in the Hall, which showed that all St. Jim's fully concurred.

"I can scarcely believe," continued the Head, "that this cowardly action worthy only of the most ruffianly hooligan, or the most brutal Prussian, has been committed by a boy belonging to this school. Yet there seems to be no doubt upon that point. Even if a stranger could be supposed to

have had a motive for coming here and committing this foul attack upon an unoffending gentleman, it has been established that no stranger could have been within the walls of St. Jim's at the time. My boys, the offender is among you! He will be cast forth from among you with the punishment and the contempt that he deserves. I call upon the wretched boy to come forward immediately!"

Serious as the matter was, some of the juniors could not help grinning. The culprit was scarcely likely to accede to that request.

There was a pause.
 "Very well," said the Head. "As the abandoned young rascal does not choose to admit his guilt, he will be discovered by the strictest investigation. Any boy who was out of his House after seven o'clock will stand forward."

"A lot of us went to help Mossoo, sir," said Tom Merry.
 "I am not referring to that, Merry. I mean any boy who was out of his House before Monsieur Morny was heard to call for help."

No answer.
 Evidently no one intended to come forward.

The Head waited for a few minutes, but it was clear that he was waiting in vain. Among the Shell fellows many expressive glances were turned upon Gerald Crooke.

Crooke stood firm, and did not speak. He had no intention of owning up to having been out of his House.

"Every boy will now be questioned individually by his Form-master," said the Head. "Every boy who declares that he was indoors will be called upon to substantiate his statement."

"That wathah settles it!" murmured Arthur Augustus.
 The questioning commenced. Mr. Railton asked the questions of the Sixth, as a matter of form; nobody supposed that the culprit was in the Sixth. Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master, questioned the Fifth. That also was a matter of form. The utter recklessness of the attack upon Monsieur Morny seemed to indicate that it was the work of a hot-headed junior. Mr. Linton questioned the Shell, and every member of that Form answered up promptly to the question as to whether he had left his House after seven o'clock:

"No, sir!"
 Crooke's answer was as prompt as the rest.

Most of the Shell fellows found it easy enough to prove an alibi. Tom Merry & Co. had mostly been together. Racke had been alone in his study; but several fellows had seen him leave it when the alarm was given. There was only one fellow in the Shell who found an alibi difficult to establish. It was Crooke. He had been indoors, according to his statement; he had been occupied in the dormitory washing ink from his fingers—an inkpot having been upset in his study.

Mr. Linton gave Crooke a sharp look, and told him to stand aside.

The questioning went on, Mr. Lathom taking the Fourth. Two fellows there were told to stand aside—Julian and Clive. Julian had gone to the tuckshop, and Clive had been in the library looking for a book. The Lower Forms—the fags—had been in their Form-rooms at prep, so they were clear of the matter.

The questioning over, Crooke and Julian and Sidney Clive were told to go to the Head. They walked up the Hall, followed by the glances of hundreds of eyes.

Dr. Holmes fixed his gaze upon them searchingly. The handsome, frank face of the South African junior disarmed suspicion; and Julian, too, met the Head's gaze with a steady glance. Crooke was looking pale and uneasy; but the risk of his position was sufficient to account for that.

"You three boys, apparently, cannot account for your exact whereabouts at seven o'clock," said the Head. "I must question you further. Where were you, Julian?"

"In the school shop, sir. Mrs. Taggles will tell you so."
 "I do not doubt your word, my boy," said the Head kindly. "But this is a matter for proof. Kildare, will you kindly ask Mrs. Taggles at what time Julian was in her shop?"

"Yes, sir!"
 Kildare left the Hall.
 "Where were you, Clive?"
 "In the library, sir!"
 "Alone?"

The South African junior smiled.
 "Yes, sir. It wasn't necessary to take anybody with me to look for a book."

"No, no! But it is unfortunate. Where were you, Crooke?"

"In the Shell dormitory, sir."
 "Alone?"
 "Yes, sir; but Racke knew I was there!"

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Dr. Holmes glanced at Racke. So did the Shell fellows. Racke spoke up with perfect calmness:

"There was an inkpot upset in the study, sir, and Crooke got some on his hands. He went away to have a wash."

"Darrel!"

The prefect came forward.

"Kindly ascertain whether there are traces in Crooke's study of an upset inkpot, and in the Shell dormitory of inky hands having been washed."

"Yes, sir!" said Darrel.

Mr. Railton stepped forward.

"I think I should say a word in respect of Clive," he said. "Clive came to my study shortly before seven to ask permission to take a book from the library, and I gave him the key of one of the cases."

"I fetched the book, sir," said Clive. "It's in my study now—'Treasure Island.' I was reading it when we were called into Hall."

There was a pause till Kildare came in. He brought a confirmation from Dame Taggles of Julian's statement, and Julian was told to stand back among the Fourth. Darrel came back a few minutes later. The Shell fellows especially listened to Darrel's report with interest. He reported that there was upset ink in Crooke's study, and an inky basin in the dormitory.

Tom Merry breathed hard as he heard it. As he had met Crooke in the quad, he knew that Crooke had lied. It was evident that Crooke had arranged these details later, in readiness for the investigation.

Dr. Holmes looked deeply puzzled and troubled.

"There is no evidence against either Crooke or Clive," he said. "It appears from your statement, Mr. Railton, that Clive has related the exact facts, and Crooke is cleared by what Darrel tells us. You may both go back to your places."

Clive returned to the ranks of the Fourth, and Crooke to the Shell. The latter was met by dark glances from his Form-fellows. Only Racke was grinning. Racke knew that Crooke had been out of doors at the time of the outrage, and he had been careful not to commit himself too far in helping out the alibi. He had not stated that he had seen Crooke in the House. He had done his best for Crooke without risk to himself, which was quite as much as Crooke could have ventured to ask of him.

All eyes were on the Head now. So far as the evidence went, everybody present was cleared of suspicion; yet it was considered certain that the culprit was present.

Dr. Holmes was evidently at a loss. He had expected the investigation to bear fruit, but it had resulted only in deepening the mystery.

"The school is dismissed!" he said abruptly. "The investigation will not stop here. The matter will be thoroughly sifted out. Dismiss!"

And the St. Jim's fellows filed out of Hall, excitedly discussing the affair.

CHAPTER 6. Brought to Book!

GEORGE GERALD CROOKE flung himself into the armchair in his study with a moody brow. Racke, with a sarcastic smile, lighted a cigarette.

"You're well out of that," he remarked.

Crooke scowled savagely.

"Why couldn't you swear that I was in the study with you, as I wanted?" he growled.

"No jolly fear! It might have come out. I've done my best for you, and the Head seemed satisfied."

"Anyway, I'm no worse off than Clive," said Crooke. "Not that anybody would be likely to suspect Clive. Still, I don't see why they should suspect me. I happened to be in the quad, but I had nothing to do with biffing Mossoo."

"What on earth's the good of keeping that up here?" asked Racke. "I'm not going to give you away."

"Don't you believe me?" snarled Crooke.

"Of course I don't!"

"It's the truth!"

"Rats!"

"I tell you I never touched the French beast! I was going to pelt him with rotten eggs—nothing more!"

"And you biffed him with the stick instead."

"I never touched him."

Racke laughed.

"Well, if you're so jolly innocent, what did you worry about an alibi for? No harm in being in the quad, if you didn't touch Mossoo."

"You silly idiot! They'd have put it down to me. All the fellows are putting it down to me, as it is, because they know I was out of doors. The Head would have jumped to it at once."

"You bet he would," grinned Racke, "and he would have been right, too!"

"I tell you I had no hand in it!" hissed Crooke.

"You can tell me that till you're black in the face, and I shan't believe a word of it. What's the good? I don't blame you. I think you've shown more nerve than I've ever given you credit for."

"I should have wanted some nerve, to go for a master with a stick, even a French master!" growled Crooke. "I haven't that kind of nerve. I should have risked enough biffing eggs at him. But I never thought of anything more than that."

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"If you didn't do it, who did?" he asked.

"I've been trying to think that out, and I can't. Some chap was lying when he said he wasn't out of the House, and he's got other fellows to lie, too, and back him up in it."

There was a tramp of feet in the passage, and the study door was flung open. Crooke started up in alarm.

Tom Merry walked in, followed by Manners and Lowther and Blake & Co. Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn, Reilly and Kerruish and Julian and Hammond came after them, and then several more fellows, till the study was crammed.

Crooke glared at his visitors. Racke, who saw trouble coming, slipped out quietly.

Crooke would gladly have followed him, but there was no escape for Crooke.

When the study would hold no more, the door was shut. Then the captain of the Shell addressed Crooke:

"I suppose you know why we're here, Crooke?"

"No, I don't!" snarled Crooke. "And the sooner you clear off the better I shall like it!"

"Very likely; but we're not clearing off just yet," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"You've been through the inquiry in Hall," said Tom. "You've lied yourself out of it there, and it looks now as if you won't be spotted. I believe Racke lied, too, and that you arranged the inkpot bizney between you. We know that you were in the quad, because I met you there."

"I haven't denied it to you," said Crooke. "I denied it in the Hall, because all that would have been put down to me if they'd known I was out of doors. I had nothing to do with biffing old Mossoo, but they'd have thought I had."

"You are sticking to that yarn?"

"It's the truth!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus contemptuously. "Weally, deah boys, we did not come here to listen to Crooke tellin' Kaisersimsa."

"We'll give the cad a hearing," said Blake. "Every rotter ought to have a hearing before he's found guilty. Sit on the table and judge him, Gussy."

"Vewy well! I believe in faith play, even to a Pwussian. I wegard Cwooke as a Pwussian. I shall be vewy pleased to act as judge. You can leave it to a fellah of tact and judgment. Cwooke, I find you guilty—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You aas, you're in a giddy hurry!" said Monty Lowther. "There has to be a lot of jaw in a law-court before a prisoner is found guilty."

"Weally, Lowthah, we have not come heah to heah you jaw, you know! I waise a pwotest against Lowthah jawin'!"

"Shurrup!" said Tom Merry. "Now, Crooke—"

"It's not allowed to tell a judge to shut up, Tom Mewwy!"

"Dry up!" roared Tom Merry. "Now, Crooke, as nobody actually saw you act like a rotten Hun towards Mossoo, we're willing to give you a hearing. Have you anything to say?"

"It's no business of yours, anyway!"

"We're making it our business. You can either be dealt with by us, or taken to the Housemaster. Do you want to go to the Housemaster?"

"No, hang you!"

"You prefer to be dealt with by us?"

"Yes, confound you!"

"I object to Cwooke's expressions, which are in vewy bad taste. Cwooke, you are found guilty—"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "LEVISON MINOR'S LUCK!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Back pedal," said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess Croke's got to speak!"

"Weally, Lumley——"

"Have you anything to say, Croke?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, as judge, it is my business to intewwogate the pwisonah. Have you anythin' to say, Cwooke?"

Croke cast a savage glance at the judge. But the juniors were in deadly earnest, and not to be trifled with. Croke decided to toe the line.

"I had nothing to do with it," he said sullenly.

"You were in the quad at the time?"

"You know I was."

"What I know is not evidence, Cwooke. Answer the question!"

"Yes, I was, confound you!"

"I wefuse to be confounded!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Hewwies, may I wequest you to punch Cwooke's head the next time he makes use of wude and oppwobwious expressions?"

"Certainly," said Herries.

"Look here, you silly idiote——" began Croke. "Oh! Ah! Yooop!"

And there was a pause in the proceedings while Croke was picked up from the carpet.

CHAPTER 2. Sent to Coventry!

"SHALL I give him some more?" asked Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That will do for the pwesent, deah boy!" grinned the judge. "Cwooke, you will kindly answer promptly and civilly."

"Yow-ow-ow!" mumbled Croke.

"You were in the quadwangle at the time of this feahful outwage?"

"Yes!" snarled Croke.

He did not venture to add any more opprobrious expressions. Herries' big fist was ready to keep order in court.

"What were you doin' there?"

"Looking for Mossoo."

"Bai Jove! I find the pwisonah at the bah guilty——"

"No, you don't!" said Tom Merry. "You are too previous, Gussy. What were you looking for Mossoo for, Croke?"

"Oh, vewy well! What were you lookin' for Mossoo for, Cwooke?"

"I was goin' to biff rotten eggs at him."

"Nothin' else?"

"No."

"Did you stwike him with a stick?"

"No, I didn't."

"Then who did?"

"I don't know."

"Can you suggest the name of any othah fellah who is so wotten and mean a cad as to stwike a chap in the dark with a stick?"

"Levison might have done it. I don't know any other chap who'd have had enough nerve," said Croke sullenly.

"It has been established that Levison was in his study with Lumley-Lumley, heah pwesent."

"I guess so," said Lumley-Lumley, with a nod.

"Then I can't guess who it was—— unless it was a New House chap."

"The New House chaps have been questioned in Hall, and have answered satisfactorily."

"Well, I can't guess who it was. How should I know?"

"Have you, or have you not, been uttahn' wotten thweats against Mossoo, because he licked you this aftahnoon for feahful impertinence?"

"I said I'd get even with him. I didn't mean biffing him with a stick, though. I never thought of such a thing!"

"Did you see anybody else in the quad?"

"No, I didn't. I can't see in the dark. It was so jolly dark

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out there that I couldn't find Mossoo to bung the eggs at him."

"Can you pwoduce the eggs as evidence?"

"I dropped them in the quad when I bolted."

"Why did you bolt, if you were not a guilty wottah?"

"Because I didn't want to get mixed up in the affair, of course."

"You heard Mossoo ewin' for help, and you wan away instead of attemptin' to wendah assistance?" said the judge sternly.

"Yes, I did!" said Croke savagely. "I was jolly glad somebody was biffing him, if you want to know!"

"You uttah wottah!"

"I object to the judge using opprobrious expressions," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem! I withdwaw that remark. Howevah, pway undahstand, Cwooke, that if I were not actin' as judge in these judicial pwoccedin's, I should wegard you as a feahful wottah!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Gentlemen," said Arthur Augustus, jamming his famous monocle in his eye, and looking round, "I wegard the pwisonah's guilt as established. He was in the quad, and he has lied about it to the Head. A fellah who will lie will do anythin'!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He was feahfully impertinent to Mossoo, and was vewy justly thwashed for it, and was heard rowin' vengeance. He is quite cowardly wottah enough to attack a chap in the dark. He denies it; but he has lied to the Head, and I take that as pwoof that he is also lyin' to us!"

"A giddy Daniel come to judgment!" said Blake admiringly. "Go it, Gussy!"

"I therefore find the pwisonah at the bah guilty of actin' in a mannah worthy only of a Pwussian Hun——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And I find that his guilt is aggwavated by wotten lyin', worthy only of the Kaisah or a wottah of that kind!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, the verdict is delivahed! Cwooke is guilty!"

"Guilty!" chorused the juniors.

Croke gritted his teeth.

"Now you've finished this tomfoolery, you may as well clear out of my study!" he said savagely.

"Not quite finished yet," said Tom Merry. "You've got to be sentenced!"

"Look here——"

"Yaas, wathah! We cannot give you away to the Head, Cwooke; we are in honah bound not to betway even a Pwussian weptile like you! We are bound to punish you ourselves, and show you what the school thinks of your wotten conduct! You are therefore sentenced to be sent to Coventry by all St. Jim's!"

"That's not enough," said Blake.

"Who is judgin' this case, Blake?"

"Rats!"

"If you say 'Wats!' to me, you ass——"

"Rats, and many of them!" said Blake. "The rotter is going to have something of what he gave Mossoo!"

"Pway allow me to finish, deah boy! I have been selected as judge, as a fellah of tact and judgment——"

"Bow-wow!"

"If you intewwupt me with widiculous ejaculations, Blake——"

"For goodness' sake, don't interrupt him!" implored Monty Lowther. "We've got prep to do yet. It's barely possible that he may finish some time, if he's not interrupted!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Get on with the washing!" bawled Manners.

"I wefuse to be woahed at, Mannahs! It thwows me into a fluttah when a fellah wears at me like a whinocewos! I was goin' to remark that Cwooke is not yet found out by the Head, but it is vewy pwobable that he will be found out shortly. When he is found out he will be flogged and expelled frowm the school. Undah these cires, a waggin' would be superfluous!"

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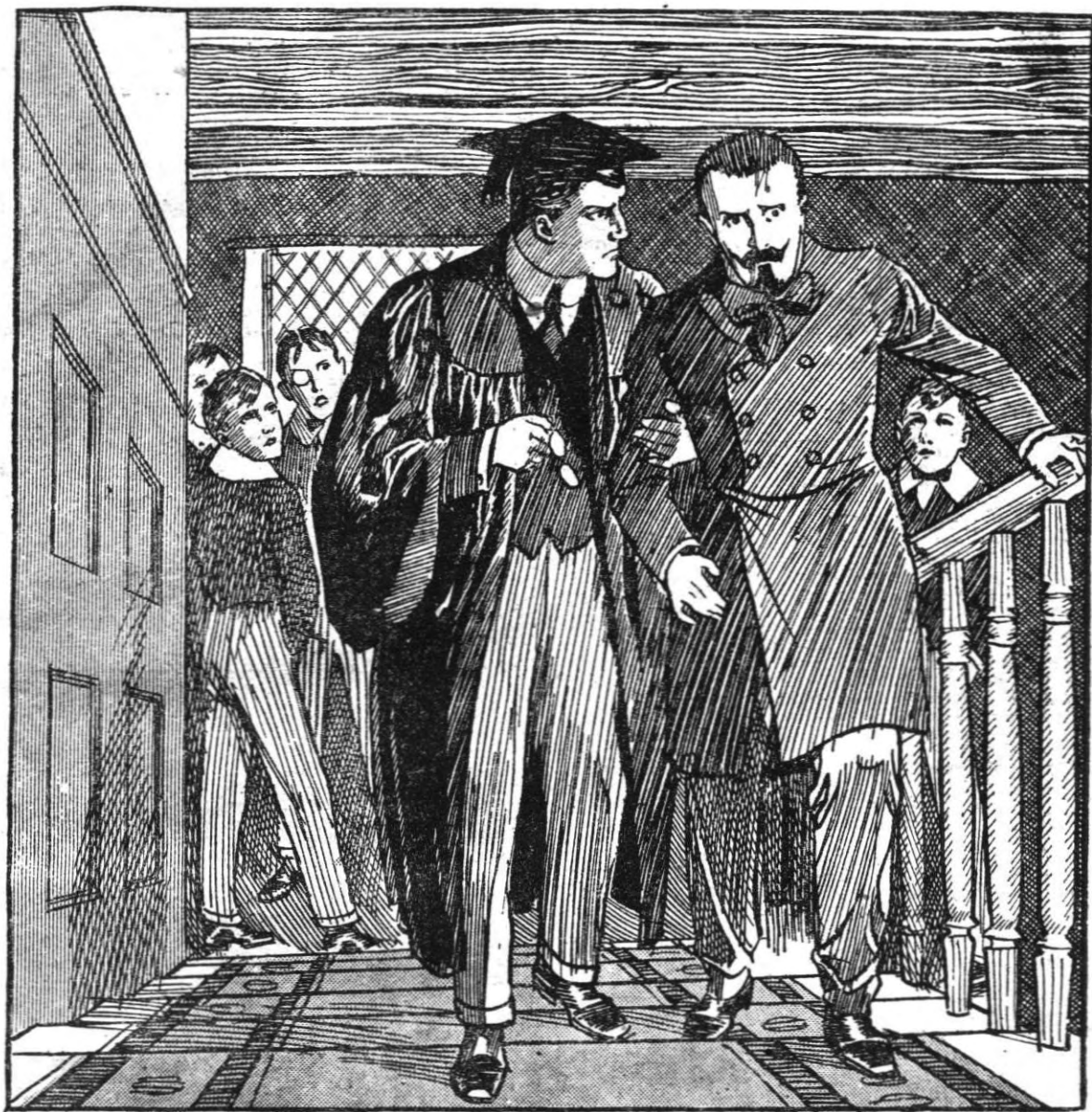
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"Let me help you to your room, Monsieur Morny," said the Housemaster, taking the Frenchman's arm and leading him up the stairs. (See Chapter 4.)

"Good word!" said Lowther.

"Superfluous," repeated Arthur Augustus firmly. "If Cwooke is not found out, we may give him a waggin' latah; but at pwsent it will be suffish to send him to Coventry!"

"Something in that," agreed Tom Merry. "He will get it in the neck right enough if he is spotted, and he won't need any from us. For the present the sentence is Coventry!"

"Passed nem con," said Manners.

"I wathah thought you would agree with me, deah boys. As a fellah of tact and judgment——"

"And jaw!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"You understand, Crooke?" said Tom Merry. "You're sent to Coventry. Any fellow who speaks to you will be sent to Coventry, too—not that I think anybody will want to speak to so rotten a cad! If you've got a rag of decency you'll get out of St. Jim's without waiting to be sacked!"

"I tell you——" panted Crooke.

"Gentlemen, the proceedings are now over. March! And, mind, not a word to that reptile as long as he disgraces St. Jim's with his presence!"

"Not a giddy syllable!" said Blake emphatically.

The juniors marched out of the study. They left Crooke gritting his teeth. He was glad enough to escape so cheaply, as he considered it; but he was alarmed and uneasy. Racke came back to the study a little later, and he looked at his study-mate very curiously.

"So it's Coventry?" he said.

"So it seems!" growled Crooke.

"Less than you might have expected," remarked Racke. "Between ourselves, Crooke, it was rather thick, bashing a chap in the dark with a stick! If it had been Schneider it wouldn't have been so bad; but Mossos ain't a bad sort!"

"I tell you I didn't——"

"Oh, cheese it!"

Crooke gave his pal a furious look.

"Are you going to join in, then?" he asked, between his teeth.

"I'll talk to you here, but I shall have to toe the line in public," said Racke. "I don't want to be cut by the whole House. Rather too lonely for my taste!"

"So you won't stand by a pal?"

"If you'd asked my advice, I should have told you to let Mossos alone. You did check him in the Form-room, and you couldn't expect him to take it lying down!"

"Well, when they come round, I'll come round, too. What did you want to buff Mossos like that for, anyway? It was a dirty trick."

"I tell you I didn't!"

"Oh, rot!"

The Terrible Three bore down upon Mellish and Crooke. They were looking very grim.

"You know Crooke's in Coventry, Mellish?" said Tom Merry.

"I'm not talking to him," said Mellish. "He's talking to me. He won't let go my arm!"

"We'll jolly soon make him!"

Crooke let go Mellish's arm, and the Fourth-Former scuttled off at once. Crooke gave the chums of the Shell a bitter look.

"What are you interfering for, hang you?"

The Shell fellows walked away without replying. Crooke drove his hands deep into his pockets, and strode moodily away.

At first Crooke had been glad to escape so cheaply at the hands of the School House fellows. Coventry seemed better than a ragging. But he was beginning to realise now that it might be worse.

Crooke was not a specially sociable fellow, but he detested loneliness. He was accustomed, too, to being a person of some consideration in his own set, on account of his plentiful supply of cash.

It was bitter to him to be avoided by fellows who had once been anxious to cultivate his friendship.

Levison, who had often borrowed of him—Mellish, who had always been extremely civil—Baggy Trimble, who had toadied to him—all avoided him now. And the more decent fellows avoided him still more markedly.

And his new position required getting used to. He would address a remark to some fellow without thinking, and a cold stare would remind him that he was not on speaking terms with anybody in his House.

Crooke's face was dark and sullen when he went into the Form-room for afternoon lessons.

After lessons, he joined the rest of the fellows in the passage, and they at once walked away in different directions.

He hurried after Racke, and took his arm. Racke jerked it away at once.

"Are you against me, too, you rotter?" hissed Crooke.

"I'm not going to be sent to join you in Coventry," said Racke. "I'll speak to you in the study but not in public."

"Hang you, you needn't speak at all!" snapped Crooke.

"Just as you like."

Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn were passing. They paused, and collared Racke, and bumped him on the floor of the passage.

Racke sprawled and roared.

"You silly asses! What are you up to?" he yelled.

Kangaroo & Co. did not reply; they left Racke to guess, and walked on. Racke staggered to his feet, scowling savagely.

"Look here—" began Crooke.

Racke gave him a savage look, and stalked away. He did not want another bumping for speaking to the barred junior.

Crooke, with a clouded brow, walked over to the New House. He had a friend there—Clampe of the Shell, another fellow like himself in taste. Clampe was lounging in the doorway; but he disappeared immediately at the sight of Crooke. Evidently he wanted nothing to do with his old associate.

Crooke gritted his teeth, and went on. Figgins & Co. met him in the Hall, and, without a word, they took him by the arm and walked him out of the House again.

"What are you up to?" snarled Crooke.

Figgins and Kerr and Fatty Wynn maintained a grim silence. They marched Crooke out into the quadrangle, bumped him on the grass, and left him there. It was a plain enough hint that he was not wanted in the New House.

Crooke picked himself up, and strode away in a black temper. He was barred by the School, and there was no escape from it; and he wondered savagely and miserably how long it was going to last.

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Linton on the Track!

THE mystery of the attack on Monsieur Morny still remained a mystery.

The Head and the Housemasters had been pursuing the inquiry, but they found no fresh information.

Monsieur Morny could give none; he had not even seen his assailant in the dense darkness of the quadrangle that night.

He could not even hazard a guess as to his assailant's

identity. And the juniors, who had satisfied themselves of Crooke's guilt, uttered no word in the hearing of masters or prefects.

It looked as if no discovery would be made, so far as the School authorities were concerned.

Monsieur Morny resumed his duties, though for some time he looked very pale and troubled, and he gave up his usual evening walk in the dusky quad.

Some of the fellows wondered whether there would be any further outcome of Mossos's quarrel with the German master; but there was none. The two masters sedulously avoided one another.

It was scarcely possible for a Frenchman and a German to be on friendly terms, of course; but hitherto the two had maintained, as a rule, a scrupulous politeness. But that had come to an end, and they avoided one another now with great care, and if they came in contact each appeared ignorant of the other's existence.

Their quarrel had, in fact, been almost forgotten by the fellows who had witnessed it, in the new excitement caused by the attack on Mossos and the punishment of Gerald Crooke.

Crooke was growing desperate as day followed day and brought no change in his exceedingly painful position.

Not a fellow would speak to him, or answer him if he spoke.

He had even tried to induce Baggy Trimble of the Fourth, whom he heartily despised, to keep him company, by standing treat at the tuckshop. But Baggy had been soundly bumped for speaking to him, and since then, Baggy had dodged him as if he carried the plague with him. Even the temptation of unlimited jam-tarts could not induce Baggy to risk another bumping.

Racke of the Shell condescended to speak to him in the study, where there were no observers; but even that came to an end in a day or two. For some of the Shell fellows heard the murmur of voices in the study, and they promptly invaded Racke's room, collared him, and rubbed his head in the cinders. That lesson was enough for Racke. From that hour he kept a grim silence, and spent no more time in the study than he could help.

Crooke's isolation was complete then.

It was getting on his nerves, and souring his temper—never very good. In his wretched loneliness, he sought to find friends among the fags; but the fags would have nothing to do with him. When he spoke to D'Arcy minor, that cheery youth gave him a tremendous sneer, and turned on his heel; and when Crooke, in a fury, seized his ear and pulled it savagely, Frayne and Levison minor and Reggie Manners of the Third, swooped upon him, and Crooke was rolled in the quad, and his ears were pulled, and he was left gasping and breathless—and all without a word being spoken.

Crooke began seriously to think of asking his people to take him away from St. Jim's at the end of the term, as the fellows hoped he would. But on Saturday he dropped into Talbot's study. Talbot of the Shell was his cousin, and had often tried to overcome Crooke's enmity with patient kindness—though he had given up that attempt of late. Crooke had always been his enemy—but he would have made friends with Talbot now, if he could.

Gore and Skimpole were in the study with Talbot when Crooke came in. Gore looked at him very grimly, and Talbot frowned. Even the good Skimpole gave Crooke a disapproving glance.

Gore pointed to the door without speaking.

"I say, Talbot—" began Crooke.

Talbot opened his lips and closed them again. He fully agreed with the sentence of Coventry passed upon Crooke, and he did not care to speak.

"So you can't speak?" snarled Crooke.

Talbot shook his head.

"And you're my cousin, and you've told me a dozen times that you'd be glad to be on good terms with me!" sneered Crooke.

Talbot spoke at last.

"That's all over," he said. "I tried to be friendly with you, and you served me a dirty trick. I want nothing to do with you!"

"You're speaking to the cad!" growled Gore.

"And suppose I tell our uncle the way you're treating me?" said Crooke. "What do you think Colonel Lyndon would say?"

"If he knew what you'd done, he would not expect me to speak to you," said Talbot.

"I've done nothing!"

Talbot was silent.

"Look here, you're not to jaw to him!" exclaimed Gore. "We've bumped Racke and Trimble for doing it. Do you want to be bumped?"

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Talbot smiled.
"I tell you I never touched Mossoo, Talbot!" said Crooke, almost appealingly. "Look here, you've got more sense than the other chaps. Can't you see that I'm telling the truth?"

"I can't believe you," said Talbot. "You've told me so many lies, Crooke, that you can't expect me to take your word."

"But it's the truth!"
Tom Merry passed the study door, which was open. He stepped in.

"Talbot, old chap, dry up!" he said. "I suppose we must make allowances for you, as that cad is your cousin, but you can't speak to him."

Crooke gave him an almost haggard look.
"I swear I never touched Mossoo," he said.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.
"Instead of being down on me, you rotters, why don't you try to find out who really did it?" snarled Crooke. "The chap's laughing at you in his sleeve all the time, whoever it was!"

"That cad's not going to tell his lies in this study!" said Gore, getting up.

"Perhaps it was you?" sneered Crooke.

Gore advanced upon him without replying, and Crooke backed out of the study. He went sullenly down the passage. Talbot had been his last resource, and that had failed. Bitterly as he disliked Talbot, he had unconsciously depended upon his kind and generous heart.

Crooke was growing desperate. The strain of Coventry was telling upon him; he felt that he was almost losing the use of his voice. It was a harder punishment than many raggings, and he realised it now.

When the Shell went into their Form-room on Monday, Crooke addressed Tom Merry in the presence of the Form-master. He fancied that the captain of the Shell would not venture to keep up Coventry in Mr. Linton's presence.

But he was mistaken. Tom Merry turned his back on him and went to his place.

"I spoke to you, Merry!" called out Crooke savagely.
Tom did not answer.

Mr. Linton, who had just come into the Form-room, looked round sharply. He made no remark, however, and the juniors went to their places.

But the Form-master's eyes were open that morning. He noted that Crooke was given a wide space on either side of him on his form. When the class was dismissed Mr. Linton beckoned to Tom Merry to remain behind.

Tom halted at the Form-master's desk as the rest of the Shell filed out. Mr. Linton fixed his eyes upon him keenly.

"I have noticed for some days, Merry, that something is going on in my Form," said the master of the Shell.

"Yes, sir," said Tom uneasily.

"It appears to me that Crooke is on bad terms with the whole of the Form. I have observed that he is generally avoided."

"Ye-es, sir."

"In fact, it seems that Crooke is sent to Coventry, as I believe you call it," said Mr. Linton.

Tom Merry did not reply.

"Is that the case, Merry?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"Has this been going on long?"

"Some days, sir."

"I am speaking to you, Merry, as head boy in the Shell," said Mr. Linton kindly. "You are captain of the Form, and have a good deal of influence over your Form-fellows. I take it that you are concerned in this matter?"

"The same as the others, sir."

"I do not generally interfere in matters that are not in my province as your Form-master, Merry, as you know. But it is possible that you do not realise how very serious a thing it is for a boy to be isolated and shunned by his schoolfellows. Surely Crooke cannot have given such very serious offence as to deserve this punishment to be prolonged?"

The captain of the Shell did not speak.

"I do not ask for particulars, Merry. But if this goes on, I am bound to take notice of it as your Form-master. It amounts to persecution. I trust that it is now coming to an end?"

"I—I don't think so, sir."

"You mean that Crooke is permanently sent to Coventry by his schoolfellows?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is a very severe punishment, Merry—more severe than you may think. It must make it impossible, in the long run, for Crooke to remain in the school."

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if he went, sir."

"But that is not quite for you to decide, Merry. I must ask you what cause of offence Crooke has given."

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Tom Merry's lips closed hard. He certainly did not intend to give that information.

Mr. Linton watched his face keenly.

"You do not wish to tell me, Merry?"

"No, sir."

"Whatever Crooke has done, or is supposed to have done, are you absolutely certain a mistake has not been made?"

"Quite certain, sir."

"Then Crooke admits it, whatever it is?"

"No; he denies it."

"You do not take his word?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Linton pursed his lips.

"I have known Crooke to speak untruthfully," he said. "Perhaps you are not to be blamed for refusing to accept his word. However, I shall question Crooke. This cannot be allowed to continue. You may go, Merry. Send Crooke here."

Tom Merry left the Form-room.

CHAPTER 10.

Before the "Beak."

MONTY LOWTHER and Manners were waiting for Tom in the passage, and they regarded him curiously.

"Anything up?" asked Lowther.

"Linton's found out that Crooke's in Coventry," said Tom abruptly. "He's asked me why, and I haven't told him. He wants Crooke."

"You're to tell him so?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can't! Go and tell Linton you can't take his message as the rotter is in Coventry."

Tom Merry grinned. He was not likely to tell his Form-master that.

"Crooke's got to be told," he said. "But I don't want to speak to him. Linton might really be a bit more tactful."

"Leave it to me," said Lowther, with a chuckle. "I'll tell him—without speaking to him, either."

Crooke was mooching moodily in the quadrangle when the Terrible Three bore down on him. The cad of the Shell looked up hopefully. But they did not speak.

Monty Lowther took a stamp of chalk from his pocket, and chalked on the wall of the School House:

"LINTON WANTS YOU IN THE FORM-ROOM."

Crooke blinked at it and at him.

"You silly chump!" he hissed.

Lowther calmly rubbed out the chalk, and walked away with his chums. Crooke scowled after them, and then slowly made his way to the Form-room, where the master of the Shell was awaiting him.

"I have sent for you, Crooke," said Mr. Linton, eyeing the cad of the Shell narrowly. "It appears that you are being shunned by the whole Form, and apparently by the whole school. I desire to know the reason."

"They're—they're down on me, sir!" stammered Crooke.

"I am aware of that. But why is this so?"

Crooke was silent.

"I must know the reason, Crooke!" said Mr. Linton. "Such a state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue, since it has come to my notice. The situation cannot be agreeable to you, I suppose?"

"It's rotten!" mumbled Crooke miserably.

"What have you done?"

"Nothing, sir!"

"Come, come! I have too high an opinion of my Form to suppose that they would join in a persecution like this for no reason. What offence have you given? I have no doubt that the matter can be set right."

"They—they think I did something, and I didn't," mumbled Crooke.

"But what was it?"

Crooke made up his mind to take the plunge.

"They think I went for Mossoo that night, last week, sir," he blurted out.

Mr. Linton started. He had not expected that.

"What? You are supposed to be the author of that cowardly outrage?" he exclaimed. "You informed the Head that you were within doors at the time."

"Ye-es, sir. But—but Mossoo had licked me that afternoon, and they think I did it out of revenge."

"And you did not?"

"No, sir. I shouldn't mention it to you if I had."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Linton, after a pause. "But the boys must have some reason for believing you guilty,

Crooke. They would not act in this manner without a reason. If they believe you guilty of that execrable action, it is not surprising that they avoid you; I should expect it of them. What is their reason for believing you guilty?"

"Because I was—was—because they—I mean, because I can't prove that I was indoors at the time."

"But the same applies to Clive of the Fourth Form, and there is no set made against him, I understand."

"Oh, they wouldn't believe anything against Clive!" said Crooke bitterly. "He's popular."

"You mean," said Mr. Linton sternly, "that your school-fellows believe that you are capable of such a base action, Crooke?"

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"That must be your own fault; you must have given them that impression by your general line of conduct. But that cannot be the only reason. I must conclude, Crooke, that you were not, as a matter of fact, indoors at the time, but that you were in the quadrangle, and that the boys know it."

Crooke trembled.

"You had better tell me the whole truth, Crooke," said Mr. Linton coldly. "If you are innocent, as you say, you need not fear punishment. But the matter cannot be allowed to rest where it is."

"I—I was in the quad, sir," said Crooke desperately. "But I never touched Mossos; I never even saw him. I swear that!"

"Then you spoke falsely in declaring that you were indoors?"

"I—I couldn't own up that I was out there, or the Head would have thought I had done it!" muttered Crooke.

"That is no excuse for uttering falsehoods!"

"I—I didn't have time to think," stammered Crooke. "I—I was afraid of getting mixed up in it, so—so I said I was indoors."

"You had the cunning to arrange evidence which seemed to prove your statement," said the master of the Shell.

"I—I was—was—scared, sir! I knew it would be the sack if the Head thought I'd done it. And I never did! I don't know who did."

Mr. Linton looked at the wretched junior as if he would read his very soul.

"You must come with me to the Head, Crooke," he said, at last. "The matter is in his hands, and it is for him to decide. You need not fear that justice will not be done. Dr. Holmes will weigh the matter very carefully before deciding."

Crooke gave a groan of utter wretchedness.

"That means that it's all up with me," he said huskily. "And I never did it; I swear I never did it!"

"Follow me, Crooke!"

With faltering steps, the cad of the Shell followed the Form-master. Mr. Linton tapped at Monsieur Morny's door.

"Monsieur Morny, will you kindly accompany me to the Head's study?" he asked. "I think that a discovery has been made concerning the attack upon you last week."

"I come viz pleasure, monsieur," said the French master, with a curious glance at Crooke.

A dozen fellows saw the two masters and Crooke on their way to the Head's study. Crooke's expression was quite enough to tell them what was in the wind.

"So it's come out at last!" remarked Kangaroo. "Well, Crooke won't be sorry to leave St. Jim's, I should think, under the circumstances."

"And the soonah the bettah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The howwid wottah makes me quite ill. He ought to be sent to Pwussia!"

The news quickly spread that Crooke of the Shell was up before the Head. The general impression was that the black sheep of the School House was booked.

"Well, it's his own fault," remarked Tom Merry. "If he'd taken his gruel quietly, Linton wouldn't have spotted anything going on. When Linton got on the track it was certain to come out."

"I don't suppose anybody will be sorry to see the last of him," said Monty Lowther. "After all, he'd have been sacked before if the Head had known the kind of rotter he was."

"It was bound to come in the long run," said Manners sagely.

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "I wegard him as a wotten Pwussian, and we do not want wotten Pwussians at St. Jim's, especially when they go for a chap in the dark like wotten cowards!"

"Mein Gott! D'Arcy! How dare you, you vicked pog?"

Arthur Augustus spun round. The juniors were talking in the passage, and Herr Schneider had come along, with his usual stealthy step, and he had overheard the whole of Gussy's unfortunate remark. Arthur Augustus backed away

promptly, remembering his last encounter with the Hun of St. Jim's.

"Weally, sir—"

"You speak of me like tat!" hissed Herr Schneider. His fat face was white, and his little round eyes almost bulged through his glasses.

"Bai Jove! I was not speakin' of you, sir."

"Vat! Tat is a lie! You say—"

"I was speakin' of Cwooke, sir," said Arthur Augustus calmly; "and I wefuse to be chawactewised as a liah!"

Herr Schneider glared at him.

"Crooke! Vat do you mean? Crooke, he is not a Pwussian!"

Arthur Augustus grinned a little.

"You are labahin' undah a misappwehension, sir," he replied. "When I speak of a chap as a Pwussian, I do not mean that he is a Pwussian, but only that he is a feahfully mean and wotten kind of cad, sir. The word Pwussian, sir, expresses all that, and it is generally wegardad as the most feahfully insultin' term that can be applied to any fellah."

"D'Arcy!"

"I wegard Cwooke as a Pwussian, sir, because he was guilty of a dirty Pwussian twick," explained Arthur Augustus patiently. "Biffin' a man in the dark with a stick is a thing that only a Pwussian would do, and if a chap does it he is bound to be wegardad as a Pwussian by all decent chaps."

"Crooke! But Crooke did not do tat!" ejaculated Herr Schneider.

"It has come out that he did, sir, and he has gone to the Head to be sacked for it," said Arthur Augustus.

"Mein Gott!"

The German master turned away without another word.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "I rather expected thunderbolts. But I suppose the Schneider-bird knows what Pwussians are like as well as we do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally wish Herr Schneidah would not sneak about listenin' in the Pwussian way of his," said Arthur Augustus. "It quite throwws me into a flutiah. Aftah all, he has lived long enough in a decent cownty to learn not to be a listenin', spyin' cad. But I suppose once a wotten Pwussian, always a wotten Pwussian! I weally wish he were goin' to be sacked along with Cwooke."

To which the Terrible Three responded heartily:

"Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER 11.

In the Neck!

DR. HOLMES' brow was stern and grim as Crooke stood before him in his study.

Crooke's feet had faltered as he entered that dreaded apartment. His heart was throbbing fast.

Mr. Linton evidently believed that the culprit had been found, and Crooke did not doubt that his opinion would be shared by the Head.

The master of the Shell had briefly explained what he had learned from Crooke, and the wretched junior trembled at the expression that came over Dr. Holmes' face. The good old doctor's face was generally kind and genial; but there was no trace of geniality about it now. Crooke was in the presence of a stern and grim judge, and he knew that no mercy was to be expected.

"It appears, then, that you spoke falsely to me, Crooke, when I questioned you last week!" said the Head, in ominous tones.

Crooke panted.

"I dared not own up that I'd been in the quad, sir! I—"

"Because of what you had done?"

"No, no!" gasped Crooke. "I hadn't done it, sir! I—I was afraid you would think I had."

"And why so?" asked the Head quietly. "If you were innocent, why should you suppose that you would be believed guilty? Another boy was out of doors at the same time, and he told the truth at once."

Crooke's tongue clove to his teeth. What could he say?

"You must have had some reason for supposing that you would be adjudged guilty," said the Head. "For all you knew, half a dozen boys might have been in the quadrangle at that time. They would naturally say so if questioned. You would naturally have said so, if you had been innocent. It would not have occurred to an innocent person to lie."

Crooke groaned. He could see that there was nothing for it but to be frank.

"I—I had a reason for being there, sir."

"And your reason?"

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"LEVISON MINOR'S LUCK!"

Crooke mumbled hopelessly. "You had gone out because Monsieur Morny was there?" demanded the Head sternly.

"Yes, sir," faltered Crooke.

"With the intention of making some attack upon him, then?"

"I—I was going to shy an egg at him in the dark, sir," stammered Crooke. "I—I know it was wrong, sir, but—but that was all. I never thought of hitting him with a stick. I wouldn't do such a dirty, cowardly thing to anybody!"

"I am glad you recognise that it was a mean and cowardly action," said the Head drily. "Upon your own admission, you intended to make an attack upon a master."

"Only chucking an egg, sir," groaned Crooke. "I'm sorry now that I thought of it; but Mossoo had cased me—"

"Do you venture to assert that you were punished undeservedly?"

"I—I was pulling his leg in class, sir," mumbled Crooke.

"Then you were very justly punished," said the Head, "and you were moved to attack him in the dark by mean spite and revenge."

"It wouldn't have hurt him, sir—just shying an egg. I know it was wrong," groaned Crooke. "But—but the fellows knew I was up to something, and—and I dared not own up that I was out there at the time, because—because—"

"Because of your guilty conscience," said the Head. "You intended to make a disrespectful attack upon Monsieur Morny, though not to hurt him, according to your statement."

"Yes, sir. I—I'm sorry! And—and because of that, I thought it would all be put down to me," mumbled Crooke. "The fellows all thought at once that it was me, and they said so, and I—I thought you'd think the same, sir."

"Doubtless I should have done," said the Head. "I certainly think so now. On your own showing, you intended to make an attack upon Monsieur Morny. You were on the spot when the assault occurred. Every other boy has proved that he was not on the spot. The matter rests upon you entirely, Crooke. How you can expect anyone to believe that you are innocent passes my comprehension."

"I—I am innocent, sir!"

"Even if the evidence were not so conclusive, Crooke, I could not believe you, as you have lied to me already."

Crooke only groaned. He was learning—a little late—that honesty is the best policy, and that falsehoods come home to roost.

"I regard the matter as cleared up beyond doubt," said the Head. "You agree with me, Mr. Linton?"

"Undoubtedly, sir!"

"And you, Monsieur Morny?"

The kind little Frenchman gave Crooke a sorrowful look.

"I zink zat it is clear, sir," he said. "I am sorry zat zat boy he dislike me so moosh zat he do such a zing. I have try to make ze boys like me, and I zink zat most of zem garçons zey like me. I am verree moosh shock and put out."

"The treatment meted out to this boy by the rest shows what they think of his conduct, Monsieur Morny. Crooke, you will be expelled from the school; you can scarcely expect anything less."

"I'm innocent, sir!" groaned Crooke. "I—I never did it. I don't know who did, but I didn't."

"Nonsense! You may go. Pack your box at once!"

"Monsieur le docteur," exclaimed Monsieur Morny, his kind heart touched by Crooke's utterly despairing look, "is it permitted zat I speak a word for zis wretched garçon?"

"Pray do not, Monsieur Morny! I could not allow such a boy to remain in this school," said the Head.

Monsieur Morny was silent. Crooke's face had brightened for a moment as the kind Frenchman spoke, but it clouded again. With faltering steps he went to the door. His face was white as he almost limped along the passage.

He was expelled—sacked from St. Jim's! Crooke had been guilty of many transgressions for which he would have been expelled if his character had been known in its true colours. The blow had fallen at last, and it had fallen unexpectedly.

"Crooke, mein poy!"

Crooke started. Herr Schneider was waiting in the passage, and he started forward as the Shell fellow came dejectedly along.

"You have been to te doctor?" said Herr Schneider, blinking at him over his spectacles. The fat German's face was strangely white.

Crooke nodded.

"Dey tink you have done tat ting—to hit Monsieur Morny on te head mit stick?" said Herr Schneider.

"Yes, sir. I didn't do it."

"And you are punished?"

"I'm expelled, sir!" groaned Crooke miserably. "I never did it, but they've sacked me. I—I don't know what I'm going to say to my people; they'll think I did it, and my

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father—" Crooke's voice broke, and he fairly burst into tears.

The German's fat face worked strangely.

"You are expelled from te school?" he muttered.

"Yes," muttered Crooke. "Expelled, and disgraced for life, for a thing I never did! I've done some things; I never did that. I wouldn't have done such a cowardly thing, I wouldn't!"

"Mein poor poy, I believe you," said Herr Schneider.

Crooke stared at him with wet eyes in utter astonishment. He had not expected to find a sympathiser in Herr Schneider. He disliked the Hun of St. Jim's as much as anyone else did. It was surprising to find that the Hun was the only person in the school who believed in him. Crooke was so astounded that he could only blink at the German master for some moments.

"You—you believe me, sir?" he stammered at last.

"Ja, ja!" muttered the Herr. "I am sorry for you, mein poy."

"I wish you'd tell the Head you believe me, sir," said Crooke eagerly. "It might make some difference."

"I will try, Crooke."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

Herr Schneider moved ponderously along the passage to the Head's study. Crooke reeled against the wall, almost overcome by his emotions. Was there a chance for him after all? "Hallo, here he is!" It was Blake's voice. "Sacked, Crooke?"

Crooke glared at the juniors.

"Yes, I'm sacked," he said savagely. "and you've brought it about through sending me to Coventry. You may find out some day who really did it."

"We've found that out already," said Tom Merry. "I can't say I'm sorry you're sacked, Crooke. If ever a fellow deserved it, you do!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As for its being caused by your being sent to Coventry, that's your own fault. You couldn't expect us to speak to you after what you'd done. And if you'd taken it quietly Linton wouldn't have known. You brought it to his notice yourself, and you might have known what it would lead to."

"Well, there's somebody who believes me, anyway," snarled Crooke.

"Nobody who knows you, I expect," remarked Monty Lowther. "Who's the trustful person?"

"Herr Schneider. And he's gone to speak to the Head for me," said Crooke savagely.

"Schneider!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Birds of a feather, you know," remarked Arthur Augustus sagely. "Schneider wouldn't think the same about it as we do, bein' a Hun, you know."

"I suppose that's it," said Tom Merry. "It's jolly odd that he should believe in Crooke; he knows Crooke's a liar, as everybody does."

"A Hun wouldn't mind that," grinned Lowther.

Crooke snarled, and moved away. He went slowly to the dormitory to pack his box. There was a glimmer of hope in his breast that Herr Schneider's interference might cause the Head to relent, but the glimmer was very faint. The German master's opinion was not likely to influence Dr. Holmes much.

Crooke packed his box, with a heavy heart. He had never done his school credit; he had never made the most of his chances at St. Jim's; he had never troubled to think of the good name of the old school. But to leave it under the shadow of disgrace was a heavy blow. And how was he to face his people at home? How was he to tell his cold, purse-proud father that he was expelled in disgrace—that he had come home with a stain on his name? And, even if he was innocent, he had only himself to thank for being found guilty. It was his well-known character that spoke against him, it was his reputation for untruthfulness that made it impossible for his word to be taken. He was a dog with a bad name, and he had earned his bad name by his own faults.

He knew it, but there was no comfort in the knowledge. Innocent or guilty, he had brought his punishment upon himself, and too late he wished with his whole heart that he had trodden the right path during his school days, instead of with deliberate perverseness choosing the wrong one. But repentance came too late.

CHAPTER 12.

A Starling Discovery.

"COME in!" said Dr. Holmes.

Herr Schneider entered the Head's study.

Mr. Linton had just left. He passed the German master in the passage, and was startled by the white, almost haggard look on the Herr's fat face.

But Monsieur Morny was still in the study with the Head when the German master entered.

Dr. Holmes looked curiously at the German's broad countenance.

"You are ill, Herr Schneider!" he exclaimed. Monsieur Morny remained elaborately unconscious of his old enemy's entrance.

"I am not ill, Herr Doctor," said the German master, in a faltering voice, "but I am mooch distress in mind. I haf shoost speak to Crooke."

"That unhappy boy has been expelled from the school," said the Head. "Surely you are not concerned about him, Herr Schneider? It has been discovered that he was the author of the infamous attack upon Monsieur Morny."

Herr Schneider breathed hard through his fat nose.

"I tink tat he is innocent, mein Herr."

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"That matter has been gone into thoroughly, Herr Schneider. There is no doubt of the wretched boy's guilt."

"He is expelled from the school!"

"Undoubtedly!"

"Mein Herr, I tink tat he is innocent!"

The Head made a slight gesture of impatience.

"Herr Schneider, you are aware of the circumstances, and I really see no reason why you should entertain such an opinion!" he said sharply.

"Den you vill not pardon him, Herr Doctor?"

"Certainly not!"

"Den I must speak out!" said Herr Schneider. "I gannot see tat poy expelled. Herr Doctor, it is not only tat I tink, but I know tat he is innocent!"

"Impossible!"

"I vas in the quadrangle tat night, sir!"

Dr. Holmes started.

"You were there, Herr Schneider?"

"Ja wohl!"

"Is it possible, sir, that you know anything about the matter, and have not informed me?" exclaimed the Head, in angry astonishment.

"Ja wohl! I know tat tat poy did not strike Monsieur Morny!"

"You can only know that if you know who actually made the attack!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes.

"I do know tat!"

"Then you saw the occurrence?"

"Yes, mein Herr!"

"It is extraordinary, Herr Schneider, that you should not have mentioned your knowledge to me before!" said the Head sharply. "If Crooke is innocent I shall be only too glad to learn the truth. Heaven forbid that I should do the boy an injustice! Who, then, was the guilty party, since you tell me you are aware of his identity?"

Monsieur Morny gave the German master a very sharp look.

"Mon Dieu!" he murmured, as a sudden, startling thought flashed into his mind.

There was only one explanation of the German master's strange agitation, and it came like a flash of light to Monsieur Morny.

Herr Schneider mopped his fat, perspiring brow with his handkerchief. He was evidently going through a painful ordeal.

"Ciel!" said Monsieur Morny. "Zat I never zink of zat! J'tais fou! And it is as plain as anything!"

"I do not understand you, Monsieur Morny. Have you guessed, then, the name of the culprit?" exclaimed the Head, puzzled and annoyed.

"Oui, monsieur! I zink so!" said the French master.

"But let Herr Schneider speak."

"Very well! Herr Schneider, I will say nothing about your having kept your knowledge secret all this time. Kindly tell me at once the name of the cowardly miscreant who attacked Monsieur Morny!" said the Head, with asperity.

"You insist tat I tell you, Herr Doctor?"

"Certainly, and at once!"

"It was not a poy of this school at all!" muttered Herr Schneider.

Dr. Holmes started, and a look of relief flashed over his face.

"That is indeed good news!" he exclaimed. "Then it was someone who does not belong to St. Jim's at all—some hooligan? I cannot understand why you did not tell me this before, Herr Schneider! It is inexplicable!"

Herr Schneider blinked at Monsieur Morny. His look was imploring. Little reason had Messoo to like the fat, overbearing German. But the kind, chivalrous heart of the Frenchman was touched. He could be generous to an enemy, when that enemy was down and at his mercy.

"Monsieur le Docteur," said the French master hurriedly, "I request zat you allow zis matter to drop. I know now ze name of ze person who strike me viz stick. It was not a

boy. It was a man—a man viz whom I have quarrel. I zink zat he is sorry for zat now, and I forgeve him!"

Dr. Holmes' brow was very grim.

"Before the matter can drop, Monsieur Morny, I must know the name! The decision in this matter rests with me!"

"It vas me!" muttered Herr Schneider, almost inaudibly.

The Head fairly jumped.

"Herr Schneider! You!"

"Ja, ja!"

"Good heavens!"

"Ze ozzer day zere is a quarrel between us," said Monsieur Morny. "It happen zat same evening."

Dr. Holmes looked utterly aghast. He understood now why the German master had not given him any information before. It was only the fact that an innocent person had been condemned that had forced Herr Schneider to speak. Hun as he was, his conscience was not quite tough enough to allow him to let a schoolboy suffer in his place.

"You!" gasped the Head. "You—a master in this school!"

"He knock me down!" said Herr Schneider. "I am in vun rage. I am valking under to trees, tink of tat, den he come! I not stop to tink of anything. I have my stick in my hand, and I strike, and he fall. I not mean to hurt him, but I vas in vun rage. Afterwards I am sorry—ferry sorry! But I am a Cherman, and tat Frenchman he knock me ofer before to poy!"

Dr. Holmes' face was a study.

"I knew nothing of this," he said. "I could scarcely expect you to be friends, but I certainly expected you to keep the peace. I hardly know what to do. After this, of course, you cannot remain here, Herr Schneider. I will not express any further opinion of your action, but you must understand that you leave the school immediately!"

"I—I suppose so, mein Herr!" mumbled Herr Schneider.

"And vere is it tat I go, in war-time? Mein Gott!"

"It is too late to think of that," said the Head coldly. "A quarrel between two masters is improper enough, but a brutal attack—"

"I have been ferry sorry for tat," mumbled Herr Schneider. "I am not bound to speak, but I could not see tat poy suffer for my fault!"

"That is true," said the Head, pausing. "But—but it is impossible to overlook such an act; and even if I were disposed to do so, Monsieur Morny—"

"I over look him!" said Monsieur Morny. "I beg you, monsieur, to pardon zat man, who is sorry for zat zing zat he have done! It is not his fault zat he is born a Sherman, and I forgive him!"

The Head suppressed a smile. Monsieur Morny attributed Herr Schneider's conduct to the fact that he was a German, and perhaps he was not far wrong. The fat Herr did not speak a word. It was clear enough that he was ashamed and repentant; and, after all, he had acted decently in admitting the truth to save Crooke from expulsion.

"Very well!" said the Head at last. "If Monsieur Morny overlooks your act, Herr Schneider, I shall say no more; but I need hardly mention that any repetition of such conduct—"

"Thank you, mein Herr!" said the Herr humbly. "And tank you also, Herr Morny. I am ferry sorry, and ferry much ashame!"

And there was no doubt that for once the Hun of St. Jim's had lost his excellent opinion of himself.

CHAPTER 13.

Explanations.

"M ON garçon!" Crooke of the Shell was sitting on his bed in the dormitory when Monsieur Morny came in. He looked up miserably.

"A discovery has been made, mon garçon," said the French master gently. "Ze truth he is come out. You are not expelled, Crooke, and I am sorry zat you have been suspect. Ze Head will announce zat to the school."

"Oh!" gasped Crooke.

Monsieur Morny left the dormitory, leaving Crooke almost giddy with the sudden relief.

But Crooke had quite recovered when the school was called into Hall to hear an announcement from the Head. His manner was his old swanking manner, and the juniors were astounded to see his confidence. They supposed that the school was assembled to witness a public expulsion. There was a buzz of astonishment when the Head spoke.

He explained briefly that Monsieur Morny's assailant had been discovered, and that the person was not a boy belonging to St. Jim's. He gave no further explanation. But he

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added that Crooke of the Shell, who had been suspected of being concerned in the matter, was proved innocent, and that the inquiry left him without a stain on his character.

The St. Jim's fellows crowded out of Hall in a state of amazement.

"Bai Jove! I'm jolly glad it wasn't a St. Jim's chap, aftah all!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "You fellahs will wemembah I said it was wathah thick, even for Cwooke!"

"I jolly well don't remember anything of the sort!" granted Blake.

"But who the dickens did it, then, if it wasn't a St. Jim's chap?" said Tom Merry.

"I suppose the Head knows. Perhaps he thinks it isn't our business," suggested Lowther. "He might, you know. You know these Headmasters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps you're sorry now for playing the silly fool!" growled Crooke, with a scowl. His narrow escape had not improved Crooke's temper or Crooke's manners. "I told you it wasn't me. I think you ought to apologise!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "I'm glad you're not sacked, if you didn't do it. But you meant to go for Mossos, and you lied about it, and if you hadn't been such a Prussian your word would have been taken. You brought it on yourself!"

"Of course, you won't own that you were in the wrong!" sneered Crooke.

"But we were not in the w'ong, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "We were in the wight! We regarded you as a lyin' Pwussian, and you are a lyin' Pwussian. You will admit that yourself, as a weasonable chap!"

"You silly ass!"

"I wufuse to be called a silly ass, Cwooke! However, we will let you out of Coventry now, though, as a mattah of fact, you weally ought to be expelled, you know."

"Oh, rats!" growled Crooke.

The St. Jim's fellows were glad enough that the truth had been discovered, and that Crooke had not been expelled for something he had not done; but, as he deserved to be expelled for a good many things he had done, they did not waste much sympathy upon him. They considered, and with justice, that Crooke had only himself to thank for having been barred by the School.

THE END.

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BRAMMARIA F.C. (15-16)—12-mile r.—E. Worthington, 41, Cornwallis Rd., Walthamstow.

Other Footer Notices.

F. Marshall, 11, McNeil Rd., Linnell Rd., Camberwell, S.E., wishes to form club (17).

J. G. Reed (16), 50, Lichfield Rd., Sneyton, Notts, wants to join club.

Netball.

Miss Maud Fitter, 41, Dymock St., Fulham, S.W., would like to arrange matches for her club.

Co responders Wanted.

By A. McKerrrow, 63, Haskell Rd., Shanghai, China—with readers of the "Gem."

By Boy-Telegraphist S. W. Taylor, Mess 12, H.M.S. King George the Fifth—with readers who will let him have back numbers.

By Miss Leah Joseph, 62, Sandringham Rd. Dalston, N.E.—with a girl reader of about 14.

By J. Brown, Thelma Studis, Horsham, Victoria, Australia—with boy readers in United Kingdom.

By Miss Alice Watt, P.O. Box 1064, Village Deep, Johannesburg, South Africa—with girl readers not under 14 in Canada or Australia.

By Max Purnell, c/o Mr. T. A. Cook, Rundle St., Adelaide, South Australia—with a boy reader.

By S. Harding, 49, Canterbury Rd., St. Kilda, Melbourne, Australia—with boy readers in England or Canada.

Private W. Dalton, R.A.M.C., and Miss E. Thompson wish to thank readers who sent them papers.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

By R. Hockey, 6, Belgrave Gardens, St. John's Wood, N.W.—"Master Marie," "Figgins' Folly," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," and "Talbot's Triumph."

Private Williams, No. 5372, M.R., C Coy., 1/10th Middlesex Regt., Lucknow, India, would be glad of copies of the companion papers.

Stoker H. Key, Mess 4, H.M.S. Repulse, c/o G.P.O., London, makes the same request.

By G. Crabtree, Rough Bottom, Mytholmroyd, near Hebden Bridge S.O., Yorks—Nos. 400-416 of "Gem"; double price offered.

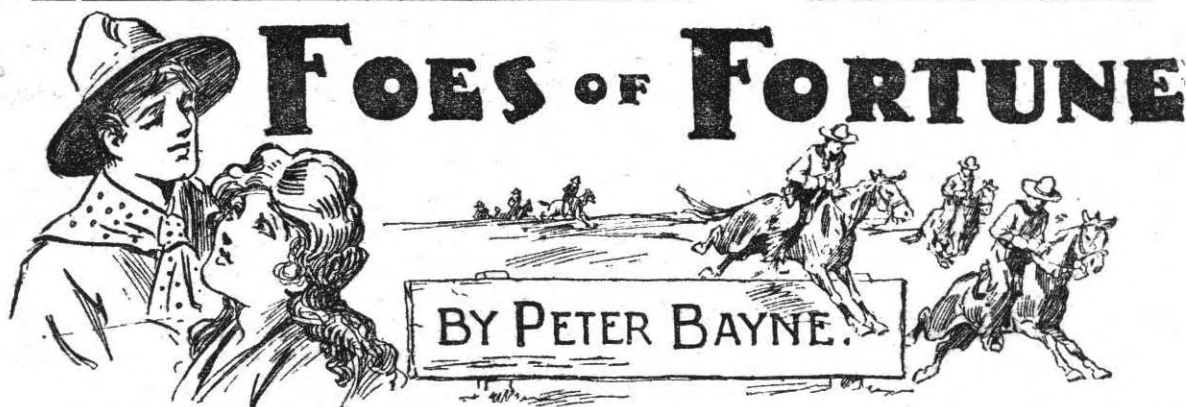
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NOW ON SALE! THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY, PRICE 2D.

A NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL.

START TO-DAY!



The First Chapters.

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, is attacked while asleep by a party of brigands, led by DIRK RALWIN. He is disarmed, and narrowly escapes with his life by plunging into the roaring waters of the Amazon. He is picked up by a small boat, which is carrying HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter, LORNA, to their home at San Ramo, a small settlement some miles away.

Carton's father (the son of CYRUS ROSS, a famous money magnate) has just died, and Cyrus Ross, with the rest of his sons and relatives, is drowned by the collision of the financier's yacht with a battleship in the Channel during a fog. Carton Ross is, therefore, the sole surviving member of the Ross family, and heir to millions, though he is unaware of it. Dirk Ralwin, who has stolen Carton's wallet containing papers which reveal his identity, hears of the great calamity which had befallen the family, and at once sets out for San Ramo, where Carton has gone with the Milburnes.

After destroying the house, the outlaws carry Ross away to their encampment. During the night, however, Lorna appears at his tent, having come to assist him to escape. He makes an attack on Dirk Ralwin, and succeeds in recovering his papers, but is afterwards overpowered by the brigand chief. Lorna rescues him by firing her revolver at Ralwin, who rolls over. Then Ross and the girl flee for their lives on the horses which she had brought.

(Now read on.)

A Stern Chase.

Well for the fugitives was it that they were as much at home on horseback as on foot. A loss of the stirrup-hold, a single swerve in the saddle would, going at the pace they were, have unsaddled them and sent them headlong to their death.

Yet, fine riders though they were, there were those as fine behind them. The pursuing outlaws were among the most daring and experienced horsemen on the whole American continent. They were splendidly mounted, and each and all of them were burning with desire to exact vengeance for the downfall of their leader.

Slowly but surely those who were leading in the chase gained on the fugitives. Looking back for the first time, Carton Ross perceived a long, straggling line of mounted men in the distance, the foremost of whom was no more than a mile away.

Ten minutes later the leading horsemen were nearer still, and they steadily continued to improve their position.

"I know why it is," said Lorna. "Their horses are fresher than our own, and, knowing the country as they do, they make use of the knowledge to their own advantage. There are paths and tracks familiar to them we know nothing about, and we lose time while they gain it. Still, we shall beat them yet."

The words were scarcely uttered when a rifle-shot struck the horse she was riding. With a convulsive bound it leaped into the air, falling heavily, and rolling over the side of the cliff into a ravine over a hundred feet below.

A cry of horror bursting from his lips, Carton Ross sprang from his saddle, and stared down into the chasm. The moonlight revealed to his eyes a startling sight. The horse, an almost indistinguishable mass, was lying at the bottom of the ravine, a dead and mangled carcass.

But high up the near side of the canyon, hanging to a bush whose roots had found a hold in a crevice of the rock, was Lorna. In falling, she had thrown herself from the saddle and clutched at the bush, so saving herself from a dreadful fate.

Yet it looked as if that fate was but postponed for a few brief moments. The bush was bending ominously under her weight, its roots were stretching and cracking, and the hard, dry soil that held them was crumbling and falling in a continual shower of dust and stones.

"Hold tight; but don't try to climb up, whatever you do!" cried Ross. "I'll save you!"

Turning to his horse, he unwound the rope that, for use in lassoing cattle, was coiled round the high pommel of the saddle. It was over forty feet in length, and of the toughest fibre. Making one end of it secure to a crag of rock, he let it fall, and his heart gave a leap of joy when he saw that it was more than long enough for his purpose.

As the looped end swung past her, Lorna caught the rope, first with one hand and then with the other. She was not a second too soon. Even as she cast free from it the bush gave way, and fell crashing to the bed of the ravine.

Exerting all his strength, Ross hauled up his living burden. It was strenuous work, but at last Lorna was level with the edge of the cliff. A moment later she was standing by her companion's side.

Then a clamorous outburst from the outlaws warned them that they were not yet out of danger. Their foes, encouraged by what had happened, had pushed on at redoubled speed. Those leading were no more than a hundred and fifty yards away.

"You're caught now!" shouted a taunting voice. "Surrender, or we fire!"

Setting his teeth hard together, Carton Ross clasped Lorna round the waist, and lifted her into the saddle of the white horse, he himself climbing up behind the girl.

A jerk of the reins sent the gallant beast off again at a fast and furious gallop. Instantly a dozen rifles cracked, the reports awakening a hundred echoes far and near, and the bullets whizzed and whined all round the fugitives.

"Bend down!" said Ross. "There won't be such a chance of your being hit then."

Another, and yet another volley followed, but not a shot found its intended mark. Onward rushed the white horse, its flanks lathered with sweat, white foam coming from its mouth and nostrils in a cloud.

The pace was terrific. How long could it be kept up? This was the thought that troubled Carton Ross as he heard the sounds of the pursuit close behind him. The bandits had ceased to fire, a circumstance that indicated their confident belief that they would speedily capture those they were pursuing.

Swiftly the features of the landscape were changing. The soaring cliffs and deep ravines became less numerous, and there were great stretches of almost level ground, carpeted with coarse grass, across which a horse might gallop at top speed without risk of a fall.

This, however, was more of an advantage to the pursuers than the pursued, whose mount carried the handicap of a double burden. The intervening distance grew less and less with alarming rapidity.

The whistling hiss of a rope sang past Ross, who looked round, to see one of the bandits preparing to make a fresh attempt to lasso him and pull him from the saddle.

Quickly he fired his revolver, and the man, taken by

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "LEVISON MINOR'S LUCK!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

surprise and discomfiture, dropped the rope, and reined in his horse with a startled jerk of the bridle.

"Look!" cried Lorna. "The river!"

In the distance, a mile away, the waters of the mighty Amazon shone in the moonlight like a sea of liquid silver.

On and on, gallant and untiring, galloped the white horse. The cool, refreshing wind from the great waterway imbued it with renewed strength. It was as if it knew that there, in the river, it would find ease and rest once more.

The grass grew thick and high in the valley reaches. Trees, centuries old, with an immense wealth of spreading foliage, cast perpetual shade by day and night. From the forest depths came the roaring of wild beasts and the shrill cries of startled night birds.

"There's only one thing to do," said Ross. "We must ride into the river, and trust to our luck to reach that island you can see. It's either that, or our capture by the bandits. Are you willing to take the risk?"

"Of course!" answered Lorna. "The only thing I'm afraid of is the loss of my freedom."

Saved again and again by some friendly tree that the horse placed between it and the outlaws, the two fugitives reached the shelving banks of the great stream, and a moment later the deep water received them.

The Island—Through the Jungle—The Old Fort—The Intruder.

When the white horse plunged into the river, both its riders slipped from their seats, and, holding to the bridle rein on either side, swam in company with their equine friend.

This not only relieved the noble brute of their weight, but it also lessened the chance of their being hit by the rifle shots that their foes commenced to fire at them. The firing almost immediately ceased, however; and, at an order from their commander, eight of the bandits rode their horses into the stream.

"They're determined to take us prisoners," said Carton Ross; "but I'm just as determined to disappoint them."

Lorna laughed as she heard the words.

"You seem to be leaving me out," she said. "None the less, I'm in perfect agreement with you."

The island for which the fugitives were heading was a large one. As they drew near to it they saw that it was densely wooded, and that its banks, rising steeply from the water, were bright with orchids of many colours.

Catching sight of a narrow creek, they guided the horse towards it. This inlet penetrated the land for a considerable distance, but as soon as they reached a point where the banks were almost level with the water they scrambled ashore.

Without pausing to ascertain the immediate whereabouts of their foes, they once more mounted their horse, and rode into the jungle that stretched before them as far as the eye could see.

For some time it was impossible to make much progress, owing to the density of the jungle growth. Then a track, running like a sinuous line through the high grass, was found. The discovery interested Carton Ross, and excited his curiosity.

"Someone has been here before us," he said, "and that quite recently."

Lorna looked doubtful.

"Are you sure?" she said. "The track may have been made by animals of some kind or another."

Ross shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said. "It's too narrow. Very possibly the island is inhabited by natives. If so, we ought soon to be seeing signs of them."

The path they were following, however, led them to no human abode. Its course was an amazingly irregular and winding one. Evidently those who made it had pursued the line of least resistance, avoiding the trees and bushes that formed a well-nigh impassable barrier, and keeping to the grass land.

Now and then a naturally open space of ground was passed, and in one of these little clearings were the ashes of a fire. They were cold, but as he was inspecting them Ross caught sight of a shining object on the ground that he picked up and examined with the greatest interest.

"It's a preserved-meat tin," he said, showing it to Lorna; "and I shouldn't wonder if it hadn't been left here by white men. Natives don't carry that sort of food about with them."

Encouraged by the thought that they might soon be with those of their own race, the fugitives rode on with quickened hope. For some time now, ever since leaving the banks of the river, they had lost all sight and sound of the bandits,

and the lifting of the danger that had pressed so hard upon them was in itself an omen of better fortune in the immediate future.

"Hark!" said Lorna, a few minutes later. "Can you hear anything?"

To the listening ears of herself and her companion, the night breezes faintly wafted the sound of someone singing. It was a fresh, clear voice, and the song was a rollicking ditty of the sea that Ross had often heard before.

"What did I tell you, Lorna?" he exclaimed. "There are white men on the island. Hurrah!"

"I can only hear one," said the girl. "He may be singing to keep himself company."

"Then he'll be jolly pleased to welcome us," Ross answered. "It must be mighty lonely for him if he is camping on the island by himself."

The ground suddenly took an upward rise, and between the trees the young travellers saw a glimmering blotch of light and smoke rising to the sky. Dismounting, they proceeded up the hill on foot. The summit of the height was crowned by an ancient building, long since ruined and dilapidated, that had been erected in the far-off days when the Spaniards ruled the land.

It was roofless, windowless, and the crumbling, old walls were supported by interlacing branches of parasitical plants of immense age and thickness. The beams of light that Lorna and her companion had seen came through the open casement of the ruined edifice, and lent to it a cheery aspect that was strikingly attractive amidst such a scene of desolation and decay.

The unseen singer sang merrily on. Mingled with the sound of his voice was the twanging music of a banjo played with no common skill and dexterity.

Pausing at the open doorway, Carton Ross and Lorna looked into a large, bare room, open to the sky, in the centre of which a wood fire was burning. A youth of about nineteen, with a freckled, sunburnt face, a pair of merry blue eyes, and a shock of curly brown hair, sat with his legs crossed on one side of the fire. He it was who was singing.

His clothes were worn and threadbare, and his boots were cracked and in holes. Plainly enough he had fallen upon hard times, yet his whole bearing and behaviour were suggestive of one who laughed adversity to scorn.

Opposite him there squatted the queerest-looking Chinaman that Carton Ross had ever seen. He was small and slight of stature, with a face yellow and shrivelled as a dried crab apple, and bright, twinkling black eyes that shone like coals of fire.

But what made his appearance so odd was the huge size of his head. It was too big for his body, and as it swayed to and fro over the banjo he was playing, it seemed that it must upset his balance and send him sprawling across the fire.

"Can do, Ah Ching," said the singer, as he finished the song. "That's enough for to-night. I'm beginning to feel as hoarse as an old crow. Put away the banjo and have a smoke. There's still some tobacco left to burn."

"You sing velly well—like a bird," declared Ah Ching, ramming some tobacco into the brass bowl of a long-stemmed pipe, "and if people lived here, you and me could make plente money."

"No doubt," agreed the other, laughingly, "but as we're the only folks on the island, we can't earn anything as street musicians."

Rising to his feet, he yawned and stretched his limbs. As he was engaged in this performance his glance alighted on the two travellers at the doorway. He gave a violent start, while an expression of the utmost surprise and bewilderment overspread his face.

"Bedad!" he exclaimed. "But I'm thinking, Ah Ching, that there are visitors to call on us."

Carton Ross, followed closely by Lorna, stepped into the room.

"We saw the lights here," he said, "and came up the track to investigate. We're utter strangers in these parts, and only landed on the island an hour or two ago."

"Then you came by boat?"

"No," Ross answered. "We were chased on horseback by a party of bandits, and were compelled to swim across from the mainland. Some of them followed us, but we've managed to give them the slip, and I shouldn't wonder if they've abandoned the hunt and gone away again."

"Bandits—oh?" said the young man. "They'll be a few of Dirk Ralwin's followers. I've heard of him. But you and the young lady there must be tired and hungry. Make yourself comfortable, and we'll soon have supper ready for you. Stoke up the fire, Ah Ching, and look lively while you're about it!"

For the next twenty minutes he and the Chinaman were

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

GREAT EPIDEMIC OF HAIR TROUBLES.

Remarkable Evidence Proves War Conditions Responsible.

LONDON HAIR SPECIALIST'S ONE MILLION GIFTS.

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GEM, December 9th, 1916.



FOES OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 20.)

busily engaged in preparing an appetising meal for the benefit of their unexpected guests. Fish, freshly caught that day from the river, and young venison were cooked over the fire, and served up with savoury vegetables by Ah Ching in a manner that would have done credit to a French chef.

While the travellers were enjoying the feast they exchanged conversation with their host, and all three were speedily on friendly terms. From what he told them it appeared that Roddy Garrin—for so the stranger was named—had been travelling with two men sent out from England by a famous botanical society to collect orchids in the upper reaches of the Amazon.

Disaster soon overtook the members of the little party. The two principals died—one from a wound caused by a poisoned arrow shot at him by a riverside Indian, and the other from marsh fever.

The native carriers deserted, after stealing all the money and provisions they could lay their hands on, and Garrin and Ah Ching, who proved faithful and devoted through it all, found themselves at last, stranded and penniless, on the island.

They had lived in the old Spanish fort for five weeks. Fortunately they were able to provide themselves with all the food they needed, but during that time they had never set eyes on a strange face.

"There were three of us here at first," said Garrin. "The other was a Yankee, a fellow named Huxton Fenner, but he deserted us when things had reached a crisis, and stole off one night from the island in the only boat we had left, the cowardly sneak! All I hope is that the alligators made a meal of him!"

"But why have you stopped here?" Ross inquired. "It's not a great distance to the mainland, and anyone able to swim could soon cross the river."

"True enough," said Roddy Garrin. "But we should be no further forward there than where we are. It would take us weeks to reach the nearest settlement, circumstanced as we are, and in the meantime some boat might touch at the island that we could have got away on. Besides, there's no fear of us starving, however long we are here."

As the fire burned low Ah Ching replenished it from time to time with fresh fuel, which he fetched from a pile of brushwood stacked up outside the doorway. The result was a heated atmosphere that speedily induced an ardent desire for sleep on the part of Lorna Milburne and her companion.

One after the other dropped off into a sound slumber that was soon shared in by Roddy Garrin, the Chinaman alone remaining wide awake. Crouching over the dying embers of the fire, Ah Ching, a fantastic figure with his enormous head and mummy face, smoked his pipe with an air of the most intense relish and enjoyment.

High overhead the sky darkened, and a rushing wind roared in the trees and screamed round the old fort with suddenly awakened violence. Absorbed in happy reverie, Ah Ching was oblivious to every sign of the coming tropical storm. The light of the fire faded to a dull glow, then slowly vanished, and was at last swallowed up in the black darkness that had crept over the room like a monstrous shadow.

And while Ah Ching smoked and dreamed of lost delights dear to the heart of the Oriental, a man, not knowing that the other was there, stole noiselessly past him on hands and knees.

Presently the intruder paused, drew a box of matches from his pocket, and struck one alight with a nervously-shaking hand. The leaping flame showed him the sleeping form of Carton Ross, and he bent down as if to search for something in feverish haste and excitement.

Roused into instant alertness, Ah Ching rose to his feet, and came stealthily up behind the stranger, who, as if warned by instinct that someone was watching him, turned his head and looked straight into the Chinaman's eyes.

A muttered oath broke from his lips, a cry of rage and surprise came from Ah Ching. The burning match flared out. There was a rush of feet across the room and out through the doorway, and then followed the sound of a horse galloping away at furious speed.

As a vivid flash of lightning tore across the black sky Ah Ching had a clear view of both the horse and its rider, who was none other than Huxton Fenner, the American, who had treacherously deserted from his comrades on the island.

The Storm—Ah Ching and the Jaguar—in Suspense.

Roddy Garrin heard of Fenner's reappearance with mingled feelings of angry astonishment and incredulity. It

was impossible for him, however, to doubt the correctness of what Ah Ching told him. "Like a thief in the night, the American had come and gone."

"The scoundrel took your horse," he said to Carton Ross; "and, but for Ah Ching, would either have done you some serious harm, or robbed you of those papers. He must have heard of their importance, and known that they were in your possession."

"In that case," the other replied, "he is in the pay of Dirk Ralwin, and was with the outlaws who followed us to the island."

"Very likely," said Garrin. "The rest of the gang won't be very far off. We must expect to see something of them before the morning."

All three went outside the fort. The wind was now blowing with hurricane force. Trees were uprooted and blown down in every direction. The air was filled with flying leaves and branches. An almost continual blaze of lightning flashed and darted across the sky.

"Fenner no come back this side yet awhile," said Ah Ching, with a bland and childlike smile. "The storm will keep him and his friends quiet. Hope they will be blown into the river."

The violence of the hurricane increased every minute. As the comrades listened to the loud uproar, it seemed to them as if their place of shelter must inevitably collapse, and bury them beneath its ruins.

Through it all Lorna remained in a deep, untroubled sleep. Lying with her dark head pillowed on her outstretched arm, and with the shadow of a smile on her slightly-parted lips, she looked a picture of calm and sweet repose, as the glare of the lightning dispersed the thick darkness, and turned night into day.

Suddenly a terrific clap of thunder boomed directly overhead. Next moment the rain poured down in a deluge.

"Lorna!" shouted Ross. "Wake up!"

He shook her arm, and she sprang quickly to her feet. Driven from their roofless abode by the fierce downpour, the refugees descended a wide, uneven flight of massive stone steps, overgrown by rotten fungus, to a dungeon where the Spaniards had once kept their prisoners.

Dark and gloomy though the place was, it afforded a welcome shelter from the storm. But it was damp and cold as the grave, and Ah Ching went up in the hope of finding some dry wood wherewith to light a fire.

He found a little, and threw it down to Garrin, who soon had it ablaze. Searching round for more fuel, Ah Ching caught sight of some withered branches that had grown out from the inside of the wall, and were draped with a curtain of green leaves, hanging down from fresh shoots of the ivy-like plant that had everywhere fastened a tenacious hold on the masonry.

The wall was easy to climb, and Ah Ching, pulling the dead wood from the living, quickly gathered a nice armful together. Dropping it to the floor, he was in the act of making his descent, when a flash of lightning revealed to his startled gaze a large jaguar sitting on its haunches, and staring up at him. The little Chinaman felt a cold shiver running along his spine. He gave such a start that his feet slipped, but he saved himself from falling by grabbing hold of a long, ropelike creeper that immediately began to swing to and fro like the pendulum of a grandfather clock.

The lightning flashed again. The jaguar was still sitting there. It was an old one, with decayed and broken teeth, and of a melancholy, woebegone appearance.

But Ah Ching only saw in it a fierce monster ravening for his blood. Desperately he clung to the swinging creeper, which cracked under his weight. He felt it breaking. It snapped, and, uttering a fearsome yell, down he went.

Plump! Ah Ching struck something that whirled round with a bounding leap. Like a limpet, he stuck tight to this violently agitated object, which pranced about and growled louder than he yelled. The jaguar, on whose back he had fallen, was even more frightened than he was himself.

After making several ineffectual attempts to shake off Ah Ching, the excited animal sprang to the head of the stone steps, and charged down into the dungeon. The confusion into which Carton Ross and his companions were thrown by this unexpected intrusion was changed into uproarious mirth when the jaguar, unseating its rider by a backward spring that deposited the little Chinaman in a sitting position on the floor, scurried off up the steps and out of the fort with the speed of a whirlwind.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried Roddy Garrin, rocking to and fro and holding his sides. "That was fine, Ah Ching—simply great! We'll thank you for a repeat performance."

Ah Ching, rising slowly to his feet, smiled ruefully, and shook his head.

"Velly solly," he said, "but nothing doing any more in that lino for this child. Suppose, you wanchee see me ride on that jaguar again, you go and catch him? My stop here until you get back."

(Another grand instalment next week.)