

OLD CHUMS AND NEW MAY MEET TOM MERRY & CO. ON PAGE 3.



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OFF TO THE SCHOOL-HOUSE ALLOTMENT!

(An Exciting Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Number.)



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.
Address: Editor, The "Gem," The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

"THE SECRET OF THE CASTLE." By Martin Clifford.

Next week's grand long story of the boys of St. Jim's is one that will delight and enthral all my readers, for it describes in a breathlessly interesting manner how Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. discovered the secret of the ancient castle on Wayland Hill.

They had most exciting adventures, for they became prisoners in the castle for the whole of one night.

"THE SECRET OF THE CASTLE."

is a story that you are absolutely certain to enjoy, so make a point of ensuring that you get your copy of the GEM by ordering it in advance.

THE OLYMPIC GAMES.

A correspondent in Antwerp asks me to send out a contingent from the famous schools to take part in the Olympic Games. The idea is excellent, but, I fear, unworkable. Besides, I am not at all sure that Baggy Trumble would be welcome in the ancient city, for the fat fellow would join on, you may take it for granted. Mr. Trumble does not care to be put out of a good thing, and most likely he has heard of the joys of Antwerp, as they were, that is, before the war.

Come to think of it, there is something inexplicably cheery in getting letters from Belgium, and to learn from them that the long-suffering little country is slowly getting back to its own, though it makes no less to be done occurs to the mind.

I saw another letter from Antwerp the other day. Life is getting normal in the cities, but in certain districts the desolation is awful. Years must elapse before the brave nation feels itself normal once more. The glass factories at Liege have to be rebuilt. Everything in these regions has to start anew.

BAGGY IN BELGIUM.

Olympic Games apart, I should like to have Baggy's impression of Brussels, where the sprouts and the carpets come from. How to get Trumble there is the point. He is almost too wide for some of the narrow little courts of the capital which danced so gaily before the Battle of Waterloo.

There is something wonderfully attractive about Brussels, and I say it notwithstanding the fact that I met the very toughest beefsteak that ever glistened on a grill in the city where the Cathedral of St. Endre rises so beautifully, and where prowling guides want to show you a heap of things you can look at very easily without charge or any trouble at all.

Brussels makes one think of something very smart and comfortable in the way of up-to-date towns. Certainly one of its theatres used to leak awfully. If you

were there on a rainy night the pit and stalls were dotted with umbrellas, which sadly impeded the view of the folks behind. But certainly Baggy, sampling the kind of dinner which is the vogue in Brussels, would provide an interesting picture. He would be satisfied—for the leathery steak is seldom met with—and he would be interesting on the subject of the battlefields of Wellington's day.

“NUMBER ONE!”

The correspondent across the Channel, to whom I have just referred, wants a copy of the first number of the GEM, also the "Magnet," but I am afraid it is not any manner of use advertising for them. If any reader possesses these rare specimens, and feels disposed to sell them, he should communicate with Miss Yvonne Frabris, 49, Waterloo Street, Antwerp.

But, as a matter of fact, the old copies are beyond reach. Here and there one may exist, but it is treasured up—bound in a volume, most likely. The owner knows he has something which is as scarce as a seat in a modern conveyance.

SIDCUP WANTS TO KNOW.

There is no lack of interest shown in a letter from Sidcup. The writer asks for the ages of the whole crowd of the characters. He will find a good many of these details in the "Holiday Annual," which is a sort of text-book for the stories, besides being a record fiction volume. The average age is fifteen, and so it remains. Fifteen answers most purposes, and what fifteen does not happen to know is quite inconsiderable. It is as with the famous don:

"He was the Head of Margherita College. What he did not know was not knowledge."

It is astonishing the number of things a fellow gets to know when he is quite young. Then the years roll on. He knows ever so much more, but, as a rule, he feels in his inner self that his information on most subjects is dwindling steadily. The man who knows he knows precious little always knows the most, though, which is some sort of consolation.

A PORTRAIT OF GUSSY.

It comes from a clever reader at Brixton. I am not going to say that he has struck D'Arcy to the life, for I prefer the truth, but there is a likeness to the more superb Gussy when he is dressed up regardless, and is going out to tea in company with his dandiest cane of the clouded kind.

Most folks have a good word for Gustavus—not all. Some think he is lackadaisical, and wastes time because he talks in a bit of a drawl. The opinion seems to be that he has quite overlooked the sage advice of the song:

"Time is money and money is time,
And don't you go forgetting it.
Always get as much money as you can,
But don't get 'time' for getting it."

Gussy has no sordid worries about money. Lord Eastwood has plenty, and the nobleman in question is pretty generous. But many readers do say they feel impatient with D'Arcy for his slowness of speech. Well, he can hardly help that.

And it is not invariably the glib talkers who are first past the post. See what happens with some of the heroes who have won through. They were deliberate speakers. Gussy is always being verbally hustled and interrupted. This is not quite fair. Listen to him trying to make a speech. After the first few words he is howled down, but his adversaries do not dislike him because of this foible on his part.

It is often enough a sign of extreme popularity when a chap is shouted at the very moment he rises to say a few well-chosen words. Some of these appeals to get on with the washing, or get to the horses, are empty and vain.

The fellow who seems to be a slow thinker, and who appears to waste other folks' time, may be, and often is, one of the fastest travellers to the goal. And that's that. Then some of the smartest like to pretend to be dull. Henry the Fourth of France always acted this way for his own ends, and one by one all who opposed him had to admit defeat.

A NEW PAPER.

An Edinburgh chum imagines evidently that to establish a new weekly an editor has to do is to touch a button and dash off a few orders, with the gratifying result that the thing is done. It is not all quite so simple.

My supporter in "Modern Athens" wants a paper which will deal exclusively with Frank Courtenay & Co. It is not a bad notion. I shall be on the qui vive for fresh possibilities.

In fact, this subject of papers has really no limit at all. Ever since the late Mr. William Caxton interested King Edward the Fourth with his exhibitions of printing, there has been, very naturally, a disposition to write up the news of the day. The paper is the only means of getting into touch with large numbers of people. The man who wants to say something has to write it down. If he tried to talk to everybody his larynx would soon give out. I am always glad to see new papers.

Your Editor



The School-house Allotment.

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Startling News!

"BUCK up!" said Tom Merry. "Wun like anythin', deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, grasping his topker just as a gust of wind threatened to take it. A party of eight juniors sped up Rylcombe Lane, making towards St. Jim's. They were Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three, also Reginald Talbot of the Shell, and Jack Blake, D'Arcy, Herries and Digby, the chums of the Fourth.

Dusk was now deepening, and shadows gathered at the sides of the quiet country lane.

The St. Jim's juniors put their best feet foremost, and sped up the lane as though they were on the cinder-path.

"Bai Dove!" gasped D'Arcy. "We'll be locked out if we don't hupwy, deah boys!"

"Taggles will be locking the gates now," grunted Blake. "Oh, Bust the lock!"

The stately edifice of St. Jim's came in sight over the trees, and next minute they were dashing up to the school gates.

All eight halted as they were confronted by closed gates.

"Dished, daddled, and done!" growled Blake. "The gates are shut!"

"Oh, cwumbs!"

The juniors stood outside in the gloom and looked glumly at each other.

They had been over to the Theatre Royal, at Wayland, to see the performance of "Hamlet." Coming out of the theatre after the performance, a large meeting had been in progress in the High Street, and the juniors had lingered to "see the fun," as Monty Lowther had expressed it.

It was a meeting held under the auspices of the National Mass Production Society, and there had been some stirring scenes at the meeting. Tom Merry & Co. had been keenly interested, and had quite forgotten the time. Consequently, when they had discovered their tardiness, they had set out at top-speed for St. Jim's, fearful that the gates would be locked ere they arrived.

"And now their fears were confirmed. 'Oh, hang!' growled Tom Merry. 'I

wish we hadn't stayed to that rotten meeting! Other chaps from the school were there, and I spotted Ratcliff, too, but they cleared off before us. It means more lines, chaps!"

Blake groaned. "And we've had enough lines lately," he said. "Well, there's no help for it! Let's ring the bell."

Talbot pulled the bell-rope, and the clang of the gate-bell rang out loudly on the evening air.

Soon the rumbling steps of Taggles, the porter, were heard, and then Taggles himself appeared, with a jingling bunch of keys, growling and grumbling.

"Oh!" said Taggles, as he unlocked the gates and allowed the boys to enter. "Which these is fine varry'n's on, I must say! Young rips! More noosance than they're worth! Which you are all to report to Mr. Railton but ones! Them was my instructions!"

Dolefully the eight belated juniors entered the gates, and Taggles set about locking up again after them.

"Which you all hort to be whipped, that's wot I says!" growled Taggles, surly at having been summoned from his comfortable kitchen, his blazing fire, and his beloved gin bottle. "As I've allus said, all boys should be drowned at birth, and —"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Blake, and he jammed the porter's hat down tight over his eyes.

"Yarooogh!" roared Taggles. "My 'at, I —"

"Ha, ha, ha," roared the St. Jim's juniors, and they wended their wayward footsteps across the Close and up the School House steps, leaving Taggles spluttering and struggling with his hat.

They were met in the hall by Aubrey Racke, Crooke and Mellich, the black sheep of the School House.

Aubrey Racke & Co. grinned as they saw Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. come in.

"Hallo, dear boys!" remarked Racke insolently. "Been to the meetin' and got a bit late—what?"

"Mind your own business!" growled Blake.

"Railton's waiting for you with a fine stout swisher!" pursued Racke, not noting the glint in Blake's eyes. "I

reckon somebody will cop it extremely hot—"

"Correct, Racke, and you're the somebody!" said Blake grimly. "Grab him, Tommy!"

Tom Merry and Blake fell upon Racke and bumped him over on the hard floor. Racke sent up a yell of rage and pain, calling upon his cronies to assist him.

But Crooke and Mellich stood aside and grinned as Racke smote the floor.

"There!" said Blake. "Now I feel more ready for the fray with Railton! Come on, boys, and prepare for a wiggung!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. left Racke to pick himself up, and made their way upstairs to their House-master's study, prepared for a "wiggung," as Blake had expressed it.

Tom Merry tapped at the door, and the deep voice of Mr. Railton invited them to enter.

Looking very apologetic, they all crowded into the room.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was just about to constitute himself spokesman and explain the situation with his usual tact and judgment, when the sight of another master in the room made him pause.

The other master with Mr. Railton was Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the master of the New House.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, as the juniors entered. "These boys were at the meeting, so perhaps they can explain."

The chums of the School House shot astonished, inquiring glances at both masters.

"Merry," said Mr. Railton, in a quiet, grave voice, "have you boys just returned from that—er—meeting at Wayland?"

"Yes, sir," spoke up the Captain of the Shell. "We—we were so interested in the proceedings that we quite forgot the time, and, when we discovered that we were late, we hurried back as quickly as we could."

"I see," said Mr. Railton. "Now, listen to me, boys. Mr. Ratcliff was also at the meeting, and he tells me that while he was there, somebody in the crowd appropriated his gold watch—"

"I had my pocket picked!" snarled the bad-tempered master of the New House. "My valuable gold hunter watch was stolen from me by somebody in the crowd, and I have my suspicions that it was a boy from this school!"

The juniors in Mr. Ratcliff's study stared at Mr. Ratcliff aghast.

"Wha-a-a-a!" ejaculated Blake, in a strained voice. "You—you don't suspect one of us, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Blake, my lad—" began Mr. Ratcliff.

"Please let me speak, Mr. Ratcliff," interposed Mr. Ratcliff icily. "The watch was not on a chain, and nobody, unless he knew of the presence of the watch in my pocket, would search in my waistcoat pocket for a watch. The boys of this school know that I am in the habit of carrying the watch without a chain, and—"

"And you suspect us of stealing it?" demanded Tom Merry, striding forward and fixing a steady, searching gaze upon the master.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was clouded and troubled, and he laid a restraining hand on Tom's arm.

"Merry," he said quietly, "Mr. Ratcliff does not mean—"

"I mean this, Mr. Ratcliff!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff venomously. "These boys were in the crowd near me, and I maintain that only a person aware of my habit of wearing that watch could possibly have stolen it."

"But Jove!" interposed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye and surveying the master frigidly through it. "Mr. Watchiff, as you are a mastiff, it is my duty to offhag you some respect, but undah the cirk-angsah at the fearful accusation you have brought against us! I would point out, mowevah—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in a tense voice. "Mr. Ratcliff, I fail to see why you have any grounds for suspecting these lads of being connected with the disappearance of your watch. They are well known to both Doctor Holmes and myself as thoroughly honest, upright boys, and the character they bear at this school has ever been of the best. I cannot believe that they took your watch, and suggest that you communicate with the police at once, and set them on the track of the pickpocket who must have been in the crowd."

Mr. Ratcliff panted with rage and fury. "Very well," he said in concentrated accents. "I shall acquaint the police of the theft of my watch, and, if the crime is brought home to a boy at this school, then he shall be responsible for the consequent disgrace. As my refusal to make adequate inquiries, Mr. Ratcliff, among the boys whom I suspect, the blame shall rest upon your shoulders!"

Mr. Ratcliff darted a venomous look upon the boys and upon Mr. Ratcliff, and, without another word, he strode from the room.

Mr. Ratcliff turned, with a grim, troubled countenance to the boys.

"Boys," he said, "I am sorry that Mr. Ratcliff has brought such an accusation against you, and I assure you that I do not for one moment endorse his belief. You should not mix with political meetings, however, when you see them being held in public—"

"It wasn't a political meetin', sir," spoke up D'Arcy. "The speakah belonged to the National Mass Production Society, and he was speakin' of the urgency of increased production throughout the country. He pointed out that only by utilizin' every asset, and by weclamin' waste assets, could

Gweat Brittain hope to pwospah. He said it was every person's duty to pwerent waste, and buck into the work of makin' use of everything, and incwease production, and—"

"My hat!" breathed Monty Lowther. "Gussy is like Tennyson's brook, he'll run on for ever at this rate."

Mr. Ratcliff was smiling.

"Indeed, D'Arcy," he said. "Well, I have no doubt that there is much wisdom in those words, but you should have thought of school discipline first, and not have lingered. You boys will take a hundred lines each for being late, and as regards Mr. Ratcliff's watch—"

"I—I think that the least said is soonest mended. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the chorus of the School House went bubbling over with suppressed excitement and indignation.

When they were outside, they gave vent to their feelings.

"Well, that takes the giddy biscuit!" said Monty Lowther. "Of all the outsiders—"

"Ratty ought to be scrogged!" said Herries.

Tom Merry's brow was clouded, and his eyes glistened angrily.

"Thank goodness Ratcliff takes no store by what he says!" said the captain of the Shell quietly. "Nobody but Ratcliff would dream of us taking the watch."

"Wathah not, deah boys!" said D'Arcy warmly. "I considah Mr. Watchiff a wank wotah, and it he had said much moah I should have felt it my painful duty to administrah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder," muttered Blake thoughtfully—"I wonder— You know, Racke and Crooke and Chowle and Clampe were in that crowd, and were quite close to Ratcliff at one time. I remember it quite well now, and these shady rotters are more likely to have boned the watch than—than us."

"Perhaps so," said Tom Merry quietly. "But it's no business of ours, Blake. If Clampe or any of his set of rotters took Ratcliff's watch, let them keep it for all I care, and let Ratty find 'em out—that's all. After what Ratcliff has said about us, let's have nothing to do with the matter. Let it go its own way."

"Yaas, wathah," said Gussy. "I quite approve of that methoh, Tom Mewey. Wats to Watty! Let him go an' eat coke!"

"Hear, hear!"

They made their way into the Common-room, and found it a buzz of excited conversation.

Baggy Trimble, the Peeping Tom of the Fourth, had, by some means or other, gleaned the news and imparted it to one and all.

All eyes were turned upon Tom Merry & Co. as they came in.

"Hallo, you chaps," called Kangaroo.

"What's this about Ratty having his watch pinched in a crowd at Wayland? Is it true?"

"Yes, it is true," said Tom Merry quietly. "And I'm jolly glad he lost it!"

"Why?"

"He's had the cheek to suspect one of us of taking the watch!" said Tom Merry hotly. "As if either of us would want his handly watch!"

Quite a clamour arose at this information.

"Look here," said Jack Blake, looking grimly round the room. "If there is any fellow here who thinks we took that watch, let him speak up!"

Nobody spoke for a while.

"Of course we know there's nothing in what Ratty says!" said Levison. "Ratcliff's a cad, and he deserves to lose his watch. I speak for all of you—don't I, chaps?"

"Rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry, still frowning. "I don't care who took the watch! I'll take no interest in the case whatever! Ratcliff and his watch can go to hang, and good luck to both of 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Aubrey Racke was there, surrounded by Crooke and Chowle and Mellish. The eyes of all four were gleaming.

"I suppose he didn't accuse any of us of taking the ticker, did he, Merry?" grinned Racke in a careless, easy manner. "We were there, y'know."

Tom Merry looked quickly at the cads of the School House, but he saw that they were all confidence and bravado.

"He didn't say anything about you," he said quietly. "Although—"

"Although what?" demanded Racke. Tom Merry bit his lip and turned away.

"Nothing," he said shortly. "I don't care who took the watch! The thief can have it, and serves Ratty right. Hang Ratcliff!"

"Heah, heah!"

CHAPTER 2.

A Great Idea.

"I 'VE been thinkin', deah boys—"

Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby looked up in surprise as their noble chum delivered himself thus.

"I've been thinkin'—"

"Go hon!" grinned Blake. "You shouldn't exert yourself to that extent, Gussy."

"I—"

"It's not good for you, you know," said Blake with a sage shake of the head. "So unusual for you, Gus."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't do it again, old chap," said Blake earnestly. "You never know—it might turn your brain."

Herries and Digby chuckled, whilst the noble Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glared most homicidally at Blake.

"Look heah, you chump," Blake, began D'Arcy heatedly. "Theah's no necessity for you to wot—"

"I'm not going to rot—not just yet, at any rate," replied Blake cheerfully.

"But, setting all jokes aside, Gussy, what have you been thinking about?"

"That meeting—"

Blake groaned.

"Don't get on that tack, Gussy," he implored. "We've all agreed to give that matter the giddy go-by, and let Ratty find his own watch."

"Yaas, I wasn't goin' to discuss that nastah, deah boys," said the swell of St. Jim's. "It's a mattah of much gweatah importance."

"Oh," said Blake. "Then get it off your chest, old son!"

"Ahem!" coughed Gussy, by way of a beginning. "I suppose you heard what that speakah chap said yesterday about waste, and utilising everything, you know."

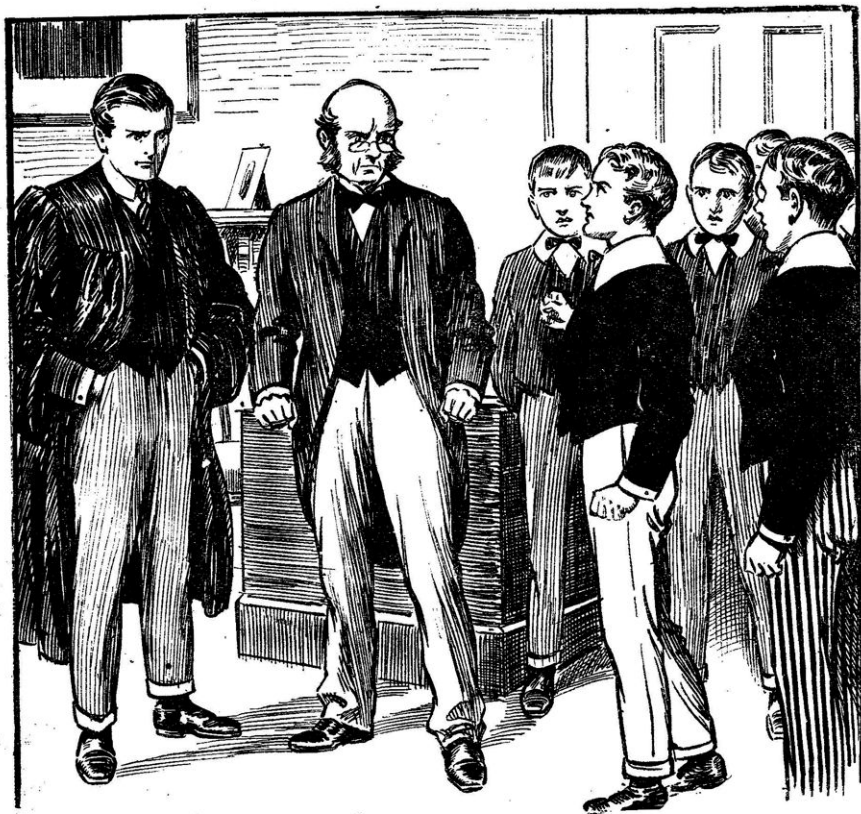
"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "So that's what you've been thinking about!"

"Yaas, wathah! I—"

"Bravo, Gussy!" chuckled Blake. "He's going to wear out all his old toppers and suits, buy no more fancy socks until the others simply fall off his feet, use up all his collection of stunning neckties—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake!" exclaimed Gussy.



"The boys of this school know that I am in the habit of carrying the watch without a chain," said Mr. Ratcliff, "and—and—" "And you suspect us of stealing it?" demanded Tom Merry, striding forward and fixing a steady, searching gaze upon the master (see chapter 1).

blinking at his humorous leader through his monocle. "I didn't mean—"

"What!" exclaimed Blake, in surprise. "Isn't that what you were driving at?"

"Ahem! Nunno; not exactly, deah boy," replied Gussy. "I was contemplatin' something fah more important. If you fellahs listen to me, I'll tell you."

"We're in for another sermon!" growled Herries, with a wry look.

"No, we're not," said Blake. "We'll give Gussy exactly five minutes to wag his chin. Now then, fire away, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove, I pwotest!"

"Yes," said Blake, nodding. "That's what the speaker johnny was doing—protesting."

D'Arcy glowered, seemed to swallow something in his throat, and proceeded.

"Well, you sillay chumps, I'll explain as briefly as poss," he said. "You know theah is a waste piece of land at this school, behind the pavilion?"

"Yes," said Blake wonderingly.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Lots!" said Gussy warmly. "My ideah is, to convert that waste piece of land into an allotment."

"Wha-a-at?"

"We'll have a School House Allotment, deah boys," said D'Arcy impressively.

Blake, Herries, and Digby stared at their noble chum in great astonishment.

"You see," went on D'Arcy, warming to his theme, "at times like the pwesent, when theah is a universal shortage, and the world's wescources are at an extremely low ebb, it is the duty of every patriotic British citizen to put his shouldah to the wheel and utilise every means at his disposal to increase pwoduction, and eliminate all the waste possible!"

"Gug-good heavens!" gurgled Blake, blinking at Gussy in amazement. "It sounds like a gramophone!"

"Pway don't wot, deah boy!" said D'Arcy severely. "It is a most serious mattab, I assuah you. Among most othah commodities, vegetables are at pwesent fetchin' pwohibitive pwices. We eat vegetables at this school—"

"Do we?" murmured Digby.

"Yaas, Digbay, we do!" said Gussy, with asperity. "We eat vegetables heah every day, and vegetables cost money!"

"Go hon!" grinned Blake.

Gussy glared at Blake, and proceeded, amidst three subdued chuckles.

"Vegetables cost money," said Gussy, as if that was a great discovery he had just made, or a most difficult problem in Euclid he had just worked out. "And it is our duty to cut down the school expences as much as possible. Theahfoah I—"

"Ergo!" grinned Blake.

"Theahfoah!" said Gussy warmly, "I am going to suggest that that waste piece

of land behind the pavilion on Big Side be converted into an allotment, for the purpose of providin' the school supply of vegetables. Don't you think it's a wipin' ideal, deah boys?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby roared.

"Weally, I tuthfully fail to see any cause for wibald newwiment!" protested Gussy, in great wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Who d'you think is going to work the allotment—Taggies?"

"Certainly not!" replied Gussy. "We'd do the work ourselvies!"

"Oh, oh!"

Jack Blake & Co. ceased to smile.

"Don't you see how we'll work it, deah boys?" asked Gussy. "We'd devote ouah whole attention to workin' on the allotment—on half-holidays, and befoah bewekkah in the mornin's, and aftah tea in the evenin', you know. I'd purchase the seeds, and I reckon that in a month's time we'd have grown enough vegetables to supply the school with grub!"

Blake drew a deep breath, and appeared thoughtful.

"My hat!" he breathed, after a moment's reflection. "There might be something in Gussy's where, after all. It would, of course, be run by School House fellows—"

"Yaas, wathah!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "See what a knock in the eye it would be for Figgins & Co., deah boys!"

"H'm!" said Blake. "What do you chaps think?"

"Not such a bad wheeze—for Gussy!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"There might be something in it," remarked Digby.

"All right," said Blake. "Come along, chaps, let's acquaint Tom Merry of our prize ass' wheeze! If Merry thinks there might be something in the idea, we'll ask Railton's permission, and start diggin' straight away."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the heroes of the Fourth left Study No. 6, and made their way to Tom Merry's study, which was No. 10 in the Shell passage.

Tom Merry & Co. were at home, and they listened in silence while Gussy explained his scheme.

Tom Merry & Co. seemed impressed.

"By gad, Gussy, I think you've bit on rather a topping wheeze!" was Tom

Merry's hearty comment. "It would mean cutting footer a bit; but, as you point out, it is for a patriotic purpose, and if we grow cabbages and potatoes and onions, and things like that, the Head is sure to be pleased."

"Yes, it's not half a bad idea," nodded Manners.

"'Out of the mouths of babes—', you know!" grinned Monty Lowther.

The Fourth-Formers glared.

"Weally, Lowthah, I considah that an asperion upon myself!" said D'Arcy severely. "Howevah, I have ouah moah important mattahs to chand than that of givin' you a feeful thwashin', so—"

"Oh, good!" breathed Lowther, in mock relief.

"I'm goin' stwaight away to Mr. Railton, explain to him how patriotic it is to use up all waste weseources, an' ask him whethah we can cultivate the waste piece of ground behind Big Side pavilion as a school allotment."

"Bray, Gussy!" said Blake. "You are the man for that job! Put it to Railton nicely, won't you?"

"Yaas, wathah! As a fellaah of tact and judgment, I cannot fail to succeed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Gussy, feeling very important, sallied forth to interview Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. discussed the matter while Gussy was away, and agreed that it would be quite a new thing to start a school allotment, and one which would no doubt arouse the envy of Figgins & Co., their rivals of the New House.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy returned from his interview with the Housemaster, and his aristocratic face was wreathed in smiles.

"All sewene, deah boys!" he said.

"Waiton turned up rumps like a Twojan. He seemed wathah amused at first, but when I pointed out to him how almost ewinimal it is nowadays to waste valuable land, he gave in. He said that, even if we didn't grow anythin', the work would do us good, and—keep us out of mischief!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well," said Tom Merry, laughing. "that's all right, so far. We'll show Railton that we are capable of turning our work to good account when we do start!"

"And when shall we start?" inquired Manners.

"Let me see," said Tom Merry. "Td better post a notice up, telling the fellows what's on, and asking them to lend their assistance in the diggin' of the ground. There are plenty of tools in the wood-shed, and the gardener could find us some more. I reckon we'll start on the job right away—that is, to-morrow afternoon."

"Good!" said Blake. "This will be a bit of a surprise for the others, won't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!" chirruped D'Arcy. "We'll grow potatoes like anythin', deah boys!"

And, the notice having been written out, it was posted on the school notice-board, informing the boys of the School House, Shell and Fourth, that work was to be commenced to-morrow morning upon the School House Allotment!

CHAPTER 3.

At Work.

"IT'S caught on!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"It's got a charm!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I feel quite—energetic in this clobber, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The noble swell of St. Jim's presented rather a curious aspect, as he, in company with a score of fellows from the Shell and Fourth, descended the School House steps next afternoon, which was Wednesday, and a half-holiday at St. Jim's.

In place of a glistering topper, Arthur Augustus wore a tweed cap, which, being several sizes too large for him, bunched up somewhat round his ears, and gave him a curious appearance.

Gussy had also discarded the vest of his usual immaculate attire, and gossied forth in an old Rugby jacket, an ancient fancy waistcoat, somewhat baggy trousers, and old boots.

"Anythin' will do for the allotment, deah boys," said Gussy cheerfully, shouldering a large gardening-fork. "I am—"

"'Yow! You clumisy ass!" shrieked Digby, skipping out of the way of Gussy's fork. "You nearly had my nose off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy blinked at Digby, and the others roared.

Every boy in the Fourth and Shell—with the exception of Racke and Crooke and Mellish, and other slackers of that kidney—had adopted the idea of an allotment with great enthusiasm.

All manner of weird and wonderful implements had been unearthed, discarded clothes had been dragged out, and that afternoon practically all the Fourth and Shell were salving forth to the rear of the pavilion of Big Side, there to commence digging operations.

Tom Merry & Co. led the way, in company with Jack Blake & Co., and a whole procession of grinning juniors followed, each bearing his own particular gardening implement.

Tom Merry had a spade, Monty Lowther had a huge shovel borrowed from Taggies, Manners had a hoe. Pickaxes, shovels, trowels, gardening forks, and even pitchforks were distributed liberally among the juniors, who, in their old garments, were ardent for the work before them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorled Wally D'Arcy, who, at the head of a troupe of fags, had turned out to watch the fun. "Look at old Gussy! Looks like a navy, doesn't he?"

"Bai Jove, Wallay, you young boundah!" exclaimed D'Arcy major, wheeling round with the gardening fork

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"Oh, deah!" gasped Gussy, as a stream of hot tar surged over his legs. "Yawwosogh! Oh, bai Jove! I'll slaughtah you, you——" "Racke!" howled Blake, and jumped in the air like a very dervish in order to escape the tar. (See Chapter 3.)

and glaring at his grinning minor. "Please wefrain from makin' jokes! We are doing a patwiotic and useful dutay, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The patch of ground at the rear of the pavilion was covered with grass. It had stood there, quite a small field, since time immemorial, and nobody, as yet, had found any particular use for it.

But the heroes of the Lower School at St. Jim's looked upon the patch of green sward with business-like eyes, and, doffing their coats and tucking up their sleeves, set to work with a right good will, to remove the grass, dig up the soil, plant seeds, and grow vegetables.

Even Herbert Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, was there. Skimpny had a large volume in his hand, which he consulted with many a furrow of his mighty brow. It was a book on scientific agriculture, and Skimpny was absorbing its illuminating pages, so that he could show his schoolfellows how to run the School House allotment on scientific principles.

"Well," observed Tom Merry, leaning on his spade and glancing critically round him, "there seems to be plenty for all of us to do. I say, Blake, you and your chaps start at the top end, and we Shell fellows will start at the bottom end. The first job is to shift the turf, and we'll race each other. Is it on?"

"It is!" said Blake solemnly. "And

the turf will soon be off! This way, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah! Work like niggahs, deah boys!"

Soon five and twenty fellows, armed with all manner of implements, were hacking away at the grass-grown field, determined to strip the field of all its turf or perish in the attempt.

"This is the way to get it up—in small square tufts!" said Kangaroo, who was performing wondrous feats of valour with a large size in coal-shovels. "See how it's done?"

"Oh, we know!" said Monty Lowther. "And we pile up the pieces of turf at the side—eh?"

"That's the idea!"

Jack Blake & Co. wired into their work with gusto, prepared to vie with Tom Merry & Co. in shifting the grass from their newly acquired allotment.

A crowd of chuckling fellows quickly gathered around the scene of these agricultural operations, and many were the funny remarks fired at the energetic tillers of the soil.

"Go it, Gus!" chortled Wally D'Arcy. "Look at your finger-nails—you've got ten allotments on your hands!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wate!" said Arthur Augustus, with a disdainful sniff, and he plied his fork with much vigour.

The St. Jim's gardeners warned to

their work, and much turf was shifted from the top of the allotment.

Work had progressed merrily for about half an hour, when a party of New House juniors, headed by the mighty George Figgins, strolled upon the scene and gazed upon the labourers with many grins and chuckles.

"Hallo!" grinned Figgins, whose faithful henchmen, Kerr and Wynn, were with him. "Lookin' for worms?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buzz off, Figgins!" snapped Tom Merry crossly, lifting a rather grimy face to glare at his rival from across the way. "We're busy!"

"So it seems!" grinned Figgins. "But what's the idea, anyway? Searching for the buried treasure of St. Jim's?"

"Rats! Sheer off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled the New House fellows.

"Take no notice of the silly clump!" said Tom Merry, addressing his fellow allotment-diggers. "They're only wild because we've captured the giddy pitch first. Pile in, boys!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And the boys piled in. Figgins glared at Tom Merry, and his chums looked wrathful.

"Cheeky ass!" snorted the valiant leader of the New House juniors. "We're not wild, are we, chaps? Just amused—that's all. It's funny to watch the little fellows digging away at the dirt. I ex-

poet Gussy will fetch a pail of water in a minute, and they'll all start making mud-pies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Jove Figgins, you utah chump!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, gazing for his monicole and looking sternly through it. "Pway wun away and play, and don't bothah! We're busy cultivatin' ouah allotment!"

"Oh, an allotment, is it?" gasped Figgins, opening wide his eyes in mock surprise. "What the merry thump do you reckon to grow on that—bananas?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Look here, you rotters!" hooted Blake, turning a red and wrathful countenance towards the scoffers. "If you don't clear off mighty sharp, we'll sling a few of these lumps of turf at you!"

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah, Blake!" cried Gussy. "Theah's plenty of ammunition, deah boys!"

The School House allotmenters brightened up at this suggestion, and many hands reached out towards the various piles of turf.

Figgins & Co. saw this manœuvre, and backed hastily away.

"Better cut off, chaps!" said Figgins, eyeing the School House fellows nervously.

"Leave the little chaps to play with their dirt! Come on!"

And the New House fellows sauntered off, leaving Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. to pursue their manual labours unintercepted.

Many came to look on and give advice, which was refused without thanks. Many came to scoff, and others to derive amusement from watching the juniors at their work; but Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. turned deaf ears unto all the gibes, and energetically dug away at their allotment, stripping it of its verdant covering.

Meanwhile, there were other enemies, besides Figgins & Co., out to make a farce of the School House craze for digging.

These fellows were Aubrey Racke, Crooke, Chowie, Clampe, Scrope, and Mellish. The black sheep of St. Jim's were hovering in the region of the woodshed. They had a little plot on hand.

"As soon as we can nab that tar-bailer we'll do it," said Racke. "Rather lucky for us that Taggles and the gardener happen to be tarring the bikeshed roof. He's got the complete giddy tar-boiling machine round there behind the woodshed, and I believe he and the gardener have knocked off for the afternoon. If we can get hold of that tar, we'll give that merry allotment a covering of it, and—my hat!—won't Tom Merry & Co. get mad!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Mellish and Chowie and Clampe.

Five minutes later, when the coast was clear, Racke, Crooke, and Chowie wheeled the tar-boiling machine out from behind the woodshed, and trundled it behind the housekeeper's block, towards the pavilion on Big Side.

From where Tom Merry & Co. were working, Aubrey Racke and his confederates were obscured from view by means of the pavilion. A senior match between the Fifth and Sixth was in progress on Big Side, so that Racke & Co. carried out their manœuvres without being discovered.

And the bushes at the side of the pavilion, screened from view by a small fence, the sneaks of the Lower School anchored the tar-boiling apparatus, and Mellish stoked up the fire.

"She's full of tar, and it's nice and liquefied!" grinned Racke. "We'll shove the giddy hose through that hole

in the fence and spring the tar on them by surprise. From where we are, we can shoot it at all angles, all over the place, and any chap who tries to get at us will receive the tar in his chivvy! Ha, ha, ha!"

The young rascals chuckled hugely in anticipation of their little joke.

At the other side of the fence, Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. were still very busily toiling at the soil. Most of the turf was now off, piled in small squares in heaps along the side of the allotment.

"Ready?" asked Racke, inserting the hosepipe through a hole in the fence, and directing it onto the newly-dug ground. "Turn the tap on, Crooke!"

"What-ho!" said Crooke; and he turned the tap which released the tar.

Out it flowed in a long, steady stream, and Tom Merry & Co. nearly jumped clear of the ground when they found that tar was being distributed over their allotment.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped the captain of the Shell. "I—eh? Mum-my hat! You—you cads!"

Tom Merry caught sight of Racke & Co. whose heads appeared over the fence.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Racke, directing the hosepipe so that the tar shot out in all directions over the ground. "We're irrigating the giddy allotment, Merry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, deah!" gasped Gussy, as a stream of hot tar surged over his legs. "Lawdough! Oh, bai Jove! I'll slap you, you—"

"Racke!" hooted Blake, and jumped into the air like a very dervish in order to escape the tar. "They—they're dosing our allotment with tar! Oh, scrag the cads!"

"Yah!" hooted Crooke. "If any chap comes near this fence, he'll get the tar in his chivvy!"

"Oh crumbs!" "He, he, he!" sniggered Mellish, who was enjoying himself.

The St. Jim's allotmenters fell back in consternation and dismay, and blinked in horror as they saw Racke & Co. giving their allotment a covering of tar.

"Oh, the rotters!" panted Tom Merry. "I'll flay them alive when—"

Swoosh!

A deluge of water swept upon them from the rear, and a chorus of victory arose from many throats.

The School House allotments turned, and beheld George Figgins & Co. in the rear, holding the garden-hose, which they had connected to a water-tap inside the pavilion. The heroes of the New House were pouring water in torrents upon the School House allotment.

"Oh, Jemima!" moaned Jack Blake, gougung water out of his ears. "We're attacked in front and behind—tar and water! Oh, my only Sunday topper!"

"Grooough!" "Yah-hoooh!" wailed Gussy, who was swept off his balance by a flood of water, and he sat crouched in a large puddle of tar. "Oh deah! Wescue, deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "We're watering the giddy cabbage-patch for you, old sons! We—Great pip! Who's that shoving tar over the ground?"

"Racke!" cried Paddy Wynn. "And there's one of our chaps—Clampe—with him! Oh, poor old Merry! He's got water in the rear and tar in front!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Racke & Co. Figgins' expression changed, and he looked grim.

"Here, that's carrying a joke too far!" he exclaimed. "I say, chaps, let's give those cads behind the fence a dose of water!"

"Hear, hear!"

The garden-hose was raised, and five discontented shrieks arose from behind the fence as a deluge of water swooped down in that direction.

"Over the top, with the best of luck!" sang out Tom Merry. "Quick, boys—nab those wasters before they get away!"

Half a dozen juniors, headed by Tom Merry, vaulted over the fence, and Racke, Crooke, Chowie, Clampe, Scrope, and Mellish were very quickly made prisoners.

"Got you, you cads!" gasped Tom Merry, dragging the howling Racke to his feet. "We'll teach you to shove tar on our allotment!"

"Nabbed them, Merry?" came the voice of Figgins in cheery tones. "Thought we'd give you a wetting; but, I say, though, chucking tar was a bit too thick. We chipped in, you see."

"You acted wippingly, Figgay, deah boy!" beamed Arthur Augustus D'Arey, walking gingerly after having got up from the puddle of tar. "Oh cwumbs! Jollay lucky! I put on some old cloddish for this job! Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" wailed Racke, struggling in the strong grasp of the captain of the Shell. "It was only—a—a joke!"

"Yes, and we're going to have our little joke now!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Chuck 'em over the fence, boys!"

The howling aueaks were bundled neck and crop over the fence, so that they floundered on the wet and tar-laden soil.

"Now," said Tom Merry, "we'll give them a taste of their own medicine. Tie them up on that fence, boys! There's plenty of rope in the pavilion."

Rope was fetched, and the six howling juniors securely bound to the fence.

Tom Merry indicated the piles of turf. "There's your ammunition, chaps," he said, "and there's plenty of tar. Dip your turf in tar, and take a few shies at those beggars on the fence. All you win you have!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

School House and New House fellows alike entered into the spirit of the game. Tufts of turf were used as ammunition. These were soaked in tar, and the boys ranged themselves at the end of the allotment, took aim, and fired at their leisure.

Bang! Whizz! Thud!

In the ranks of the Shell and Fourth there were some deadly shots, and most of the missiles hit home. They thrashed upon the persons of Racke, Crooke, Chowie, Clampe, Scrope, and Mellish, and the manner in which those luckless youths raised their voices unto the heavens, and bemoaned their fate, was truly wonderful to listen to.

They were soon plastered from head to foot in tar and muddy turf. Their faces gradually became covered with tar. They had tar in their hair, in their mouths and ears, and everywhere!

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Blake, taking aim, and directing an unerring shot at Racke's head. "One for his rob! Hoora!"

"Pile in, lads!"

"Let it rip!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Lettusalone—Grooough!"

Those were the remarks that arose upon the tar-laden air.

Some of the missiles, hurled by the juniors in the excitement of the moment, went wide of their mark, and many tar-covered tufts soared over the fence, and upon Big Side, where the senior footer match was in progress.

The Fifth Form goalie, Smith major, was amazed to have something clammy and heavy smite him in the back of the neck; and, looking up, was no less

amazed to behold many of these missiles, coming from somewhere behind the pavilion, whirling upon the footerground.

The game was at its hottest when the tarry tufts of turf began to pour upon the players, and Eric Kildare & Co. and Lefevre & Co. were flung into wildest confusion.

And from across the breeze came the shouts:

"Give 'em jip, boys!"

"Fire away!"

"Farooough! Yowp!"

Kildare's jaw set grimly, and, followed by the mighty men of the Sixth and Fifth, he strode off the field towards the pavilion.

"The young scoundrels!" muttered Kildare. "They've actually got the nerve to pelt us with tarr'd turf! They've messed up our match!"

But Kildare was more than ever surprised when he came upon the scene of the trouble, and beheld the squalling "Aunt Sallies" on the fence.

"You young rascals!" cried Kildare angrily. "Cease this at once!"

As if by magic the missiles ceased to fly, and the boys on the allotment fell back in dismay and consternation.

Kildare looked, with a grim frown on his face, at the scene displayed before him.

"What on earth does this mean, Merry?" he demanded.

Tom pointed to Racke & Co., now looking sorry wrecks, upon the fence.

"We're giving those cads some of their own medicine!" he said calmly. "They kindly turned the tar loose upon our ground, so we've turned it loose on them. Tit for tat, you know."

"Oh!" said Kildare, and his eyes lighted on the tar-boiler. "Did you bring this over here, Racke?"

"Yow-ow!" moaned Racke, blinking miserably at Kildare through an eyelid of tar. "It was a j-j-j-joke!"

"A nice sort of joke, you young rotter!" exclaimed Kildare angrily. "Here, Merry, and some of you others, let them down from the fence. By their looks, they appear to have had enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Amidst the laughter of the onlookers, Racke & Co. were released from their perches upon the fence, and allowed to stand up.

The spectacle they presented was so utterly absurd that the boys gazed upon them and roared.

Even Kildare had to grin as he noted what complete, hopeless wrecks Aubrey Racke and his confederates were.

"Well," said the captain of St. Jim's, becoming stern again, "I've a good mind to lick you, you reckless young scoundrels! You will take five hundred lines each, the five of you, and get them done by bedtime. The remainder of you boys will take a hundred lines each for creating all this other disturbance; and I think you'd better spend the remainder of the afternoon clearing off the tar, for you certainly won't grow potatoes and cabbages in that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rightho, Kildare!"

"Racke, Crooke, and Mellish, take back this tar-boiler at once!" said Kildare. "Let me hear of any more disturbance over here, and I shall request Mr. Railton to forbid you to work on this allotment!"

And Kildare, with a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth, turned on his heel, and walked back to the footerground, followed by his smiling colleagues.

"Well," said Monty Lowther, looking round ruefully and grinning, "this is a giddy go, and no mistake! Anyhow, we

had a good old game until Kildare nipped it in the bud. I reckon Racke & Co. had the most tar-rible experience—eh, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co., feeling considerably "bucked" by events as they had transpired, set to work with a will to rid their allotment of the tarry soil.

This was an extremely uncomfortable job, but as Blake remarked, they could not get more dirty than they were—an assertion which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy endorsed with much feeling.

Figgins & Co. strolled away, laughing, and discreetly refrained from turning any

No. 49.—GERALD KNOX.



The black sheep of the Sixth, and the worst fellow at St. Jim's. A gambler, a bully, and a cad. Is capable of stooping to almost any low-down business. A real terror to the rag tribe, and would like to be so to Tom Merry & Co., but those juniors have ways of their own of dealing with his sort. Has so far contrived to hang on to his office as prefect.

more water upon their School House rivals.

"My giddy aunt!" said Blake, when, dusk was falling and tea-time was nearing. "This has been an afternoon of excitement—what?"

"Yaas, wataah!" said Gussy, presenting a weird and wonderful figure in his old clothes, now covered, like his face and arms, in tar and mud. "But it's all severe, deah boys. The ground is practically all dug, and if we spend to-morrow evenin' on it, I reckon it will be all weedy for sowin' seeds on Saturday!"

"Hear, hear!"

And, looking rather the worse for wear, and feeling somewhat tired and hungry after their manual labours upon the soil of their allotment, the heroes of the School House trooped upstairs, where they invaded the bath-rooms and, having renovated themselves, repaired downstairs again for tea, feeling that they deserved well of their country, and with great hopes for the future of their allotment.

CHAPTER 4.

More shady Tricks.

"I WONDER whether Ratty's found his tigger yet?" said Monty Lowther when, an hour later, the Terrible Three were seated in Study No. 10.

"Oh, don't bother!" growled Manners.

Tom Merry and Manners were busy writing out the imposition Kildare had bestowed upon them that afternoon. Monty Lowther, ever a happy-go-lucky fellow, had not started his yet.

"Don't get your rag out then, old chap," said Monty good-humouredly. "I was just wondering, that's all."

"Well, don't wonder!" said Tom Merry. "Get on with your impot, you slacker!"

"H'm!" said Monty. "I think I will old son! You two have bagged the pens and the ink, so I'll use my fountain-pen. I—My hat! It's gone!"

Tom Merry and Manners looked up.

"What have you done with it?" asked Tom Merry irritably. "Nobody's pinched it!"

"N-no," said Monty thoughtfully. "Come to think of it, I remember it falling out of my waistcoat pocket when I was digging on the allotment a little while ago. I'll run down and see if I can find it—it's not quite dark yet!"

And Monty put on his cap and left Study No. 10.

Gaining the quadrangle, he made his way across to Big Side, where the School House allotment was situated.

Nearing the pavilion, Monty thought he saw some stealthy figures lurking in the vicinity, and he employed more caution in his movements.

Hiding himself behind the fence, he could distinguish three well-remembered figures. They were Aubrey Racke, and Scope of the School House, and Clampe, the black sheep of the New House.

The three young rascals had a wheelbarrow between them, and from this wheelbarrow Clampe was unloading a number of oblong articles which Monty could not make out at first.

He soon found out, though, from the conversation of the trio.

"The cads!" Racke was saying, in tones that were pure with bitterness. "I'll teach them to rag me like they did this afternoon! They stopped us messing up their confounded allotment with tar, but they won't find these bricks until they start digging!"

Monty Lowther gave a start.

"My word!" he muttered, under his breath. "So they are filling the giddy allotment with bricks! The rotters!"

Monty remembered that renovations were in progress in the domestic quarters of St. Jim's. The cycle shed had been tared, also the drive, hence the tar, which had played so prominent a part in that afternoon's operations; and a new wing was being built to the school stables, which accounted for the presence of bricks.

Racke & Co. had a large wheelbarrow full of bricks. Racke and Scope were digging numerous deep holes, and into these holes Clampe was depositing bricks.

The bricks were afterwards re-covered with earth, so that no trace was left to show that the allotment had been disturbed.

In silence, and quite unknown to Racke & Co., Monty Lowther stood there and watched operations, until Racke & Co., having deposited the whole barrow-load of bricks in the allotment, went away, chuckling over their scheme.

"Well, that about takes the cake!" said Lowther, in an undertone, and look-

ing about him rather seriously. "The cads have filled the allotment with bricks, so that we shall have the deuce of a job to dig them out again to-morrow. Oh, crumbs! What will Tommy say?"

Monty then searched for his fountain-pen and discovered it at last, trampled underfoot by Racke or one of his rascally cronies.

Monty Lowther's brain was working swiftly as he retraced his steps to the School House, and it was in great excitement that he dashed into Study No. 10, full of his news.

Unto Tom Merry and Manners did Monty Lowther unburden himself, and those two youths listened in great amazement and consternation.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" groaned Tom Merry, when the full significance of the news dawned upon him. "We shall have to spend hours now, digging up those bricks!"

"No, we shan't!" said Monty Lowther quietly.

Tom Merry turned a disconsolate face towards his chum.

"I don't see how we can avoid it," he said. "You heard what Kildare said this afternoon—if there was any more disturbance over the allotment he'd suggest to Mr. Railton that it was stopped, so we can't take those rotters by the scruff of their necks and make them dig the bricks up again. And, having gone so far with the allotment, we don't want to have to chuck it!"

"No fear," said Manners.

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"But I've got a dandy little wheeze," he said. "You know those rotten cads Racke, Crooke, Chowle, Mellish, Scrope, and Clampe have all got big imports to do for Kildare over what they did to our allotment this afternoon?"

"Well?" demanded Tom Merry, failing to see what Monty was driving at.

"Well," chuckled Monty Lowther, "don't you think that, if we asked Kildare very, very nicely, he would let Racke & Co. off their imports?"

"Let them off their imports?" gasped Tom. "What the dickens for?"

"Oh, because we are forgiving boys and should not like to see them being punished in that cruel manner!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You know, lickings never make a fellow learn, neither do lines teach a chap not to carry out scatter-brained japes on his dear schoolfellow's property. I consider that old Racke & Co. should be made to reform bit by bit, like good little Georgie. Lines won't reform them, but I think that, were they to be persuaded to help us in the digging of our allotment in the future, they would realise what truly noble work it is, and they would not have the heart to want to spoil it for us again!"

Tom Merry and Manners gazed at Monty in surprise.

"What on earth are you driving at, you duffer?" demanded Manners.

"Simply this," chuckled Monty; "we'll ask Kildare to let Racke & Co. off their lines, but instead, request them to do some digging for us. I think that, as we are the aggrieved parties Kildare might do the right thing."

Tom Merry and Manners looked admiringly at their chum.

"My hat!" said Tom slowly. "I begin to see the drift of your remarks now, Monty. You mean that Kildare might order them to do some digging on our allotment, and—they will dig up the bricks they themselves planted there?"

"Exactly!" said Monty Lowther. "Don't you think it's a good idea?"

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"Ripping," said Tom Merry, "if Kildare does as you suggest."

"Oh, I'll go along and talk to Kildare like a Dutch Uncle," said Monty Lowther confidently. "I shall point out what horrid slackers those chaps are, and how much more beneficial it would be to them, both physically and morally, to do some real, good, hard work, than grind out lines. I'm sure Kildare will see sense, and, to make sure, I'll cut along now!"

And Monty went, leaving Tom Merry and Manners highly elated over the idea, and anxious to hear whether Kildare would do as Lowther suggested.

Ten minutes elapsed, and then Monty returned.

"O.K., old sons!" he chirruped, his face radiant with smiles. "I talked to Kildare very seriously, and argued the point, and beseeched him with tears in my eyes, to let Racke & Co. off their imports, and instead, let them help us with the digging. And Kildare, after a bit of an argument, saw the point, and is going to tell Racke & Co. that they needn't do the lines, but must turn up at six o'clock to-morrow evening, to put in an hour's digging on our allotment!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Monty!" cried Tom Merry, falling upon his chum's neck and hugging him. "You are worth your weight in gold, my son! You've turned the trick on those cads neatly!"

"Yow! Leggo, then!" gasped Monty struggling in the embrace of his chum. "I—I say, though, Kildare more than hinted that I should—"

"If my own import was delivered before eight o'clock, Your fellows have finished yours, haven't you?"

"Yes, rather!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Manners is going down with Talbot into the vaults to develop some plates, and I'm just off to the printer's, to deliver the 'copy' of the next number of the 'Weekly'."

"Oh," said Lowther, "then I wonder if you'd mind running my fountain-pen into the jeweller's while you are down in the village, and ask them to repair it for me?"

"Certainly, old son," said Tom Merry. "Give me the pen. Thanks! You'll be left on your own to do your import."

And Tom Merry, taking up the necessary bundle of "copy," and placing Monty Lowther's broken pen into his pocket, departed on his errand to the village, wondering, though he had resolved to dismiss the matter from his mind, whether Mr. Ratcliff had recovered his missing watch, and also wondering who was responsible for the theft.

CHAPTER 5. Tom Merry's Ruse.

HALF an hour later Tom Merry had discharged his errand at the printer's. His next place of call was the village jeweller's, where he presented Monty Lowther's broken fountain-pen for repairs.

The jeweller shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Master Merry, but we do not excute fountain-pen repairs," he said. "The only man in this village who is likely to do that is Jacob Shalk, the pawnbroker, just past the station."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "I'll cut along there."

The captain of the Shell strode up the High Street, past the station, until he reached a dingy shop, dimly lighted inside, and displaying three brass spheres as a sign outside.

"Groooh!" said Tom, with a wry face, as he took stock of the pawnshop.

"Rather a mouldy-looking place, by

gum! But I'll take Monty's pen inside—no need to bother to go to Wayland."

So, entering by a side door, Tom Merry went into the pawnbroker's shop.

It was a stuffy, untidy shop, overcrowded with all manner of secondhand goods and chattels. At the end of a small counter was a wooden partition, and a door led into this was marked, "Loan Department."

There was nobody in the shop, but from behind the wooden partition there came the sound of voices.

Tom Merry started as he recognised one of the voices.

"Look here, Mr. Shalk, Joliffe said—"

"I care not what Joliffe said, mine pox, I cannot take der vatch!"

Tom Merry's hands clenched tight, and his eyes gleamed.

"M'm but!" he breathed in an undertone. "That's Clampe for a cert!"

Again came the unmistakable tones of Leslie Clampe, the cad of the New House.

"Then what am I to do?" Tom heard Clampe say in a strained voice. "I—I can't—"

Then the thick, oily tones of the Hebrew pawnbroker broke in.

"How did you obtain dat vatch—eh? It was not your own."

"N-no," replied Clampe. "I—I got it for Joliffe. I and some friends of mine owed the cad some money, and as he was pressing us, we—we got desperate. We got this watch, and Joliffe took it, saying we were square. But next day, when we called for a receipt, he told us that—that—"

"Zat der police were looking for der vatch—eh?" said Shalk, with an oily chuckle. "I know, mein friend. It belong to a master at your school—ha, ha!"

"Shurrup!" growled Clampe anxiously. "The—the police were looking for it, and Joliffe—the rotter!—gave me the watch back, saying he didn't care to take the risk of getting rid of it. He—he mentioned your name, and said perhaps you'd care to take it—"

"No, no—not me!" chuckled the pawnbroker. "I am like Joliffe—I do not care to take der risk. My advice is for you to keep der vatch till a reward is offered for it, and den give it up, saying you'd found it!"

The cad of the New House at St. Jim's groaned.

"Yes, I can see Ratcliff offering a reward for it—I don't think!" he said despondently. "Give me a quid for it, Mr. Shalk—"

"Sorry, but I can't do business, sir," said the pawnbroker saucily. "Good-evening!"

Tom Merry, to whom the whole of this conversation behind the partition had been audible, drew a deep breath, and stepped quickly aside, behind a bundle of old clothes, as the door opened, and Clampe, his face drawn and miserable, crawled out of the door in the partition, and slunk into the High Street.

A minute later the pawnbroker, a fat, rascally-looking man, emerged from behind the partition, and Tom Merry stepped forward.

Shalk looked at Tom in some surprise, but the St. Jim's junior spoke not a word of what he had just accidentally heard.

He presented the fountain-pen for repairs, and then walked swiftly out of the shop.

Sinking in the shadows of the High Street, Leslie Clampe could be seen not a hundred yards ahead.



Clampe nearly fell down. The eyes of his five confederates nearly goggled from their heads when they beheld the watch. "Gug-good heavens! stuttered Racke, like one in a dream. "Ratty's w-w-watch!" (See Chapter 7.)

Tom Merry's brain worked swiftly. "He's the cad who pinched Ratty's watch, then," he mused. "And Jolliffe turned him down by giving him back the watch when Ratty informed the police. Oh, my hat!"

At first Tom thought of confronting Clampe, and relieving him of the watch there and then. But into his fertile brain there crept another scheme—a scheme whereby the thief of St. Jim's would be punished for his rascality, and, at the same time, enable the watch to be returned to Mr. Ratcliff without awkward questions being asked.

Although he knew that Clampe deserved it, Tom Merry realised it was best not to let Mr. Ratcliff know how the watch had been parloined.

The honour of St. Jim's was more dear to the captain of the Shell than it was to Mr. Ratcliff.

The village theatrical shop was near by. The boys of St. Jim's were regular patrons of the shop, for the purpose of their school amateur theatricals.

The proprietor of the shop knew Tom Merry well, and readily acceded to his request for an old overcoat, muffler, mask, and cap.

Thus equipped, Tom Merry left the theatrical shop, and made his way in the direction of St. Jim's, the route he knew Clampe had taken.

It was now quite dark, and Rykcombe Lane was eerie and deserted.

Tom could see Clampe tramping along ahead of him, his head bent towards the ground, evidently deep in troubled thought.

In the shadow of some bushes Tom Merry hastily donned the dilapidated overcoat, muffler, and mask. Then drawing the cap well down over his forehead, the transformation was complete and striking.

Tom Merry looked a perfect ruffian. A nervous person meeting him in that dark, deserted lane would have run a mile away from that blackguardly-looking individual.

"Now to work the footpad trick on Clampe!" chuckled Tom Merry, taking swift strides up the lane. "I'll nab the watch, and leave him to his own cheery thoughts!"

Clampe was still plodding along in front. Walking on the grassy bank, Tom got a little ahead of him.

Then as Clampe drew level the dis-

guised junior sprang out and grasped Clampe by the shoulder.

"Arf a mo', young 'un!" he growled in a low, villainous voice. "Not so fast!"

Clampe looked fearfully at his masked assailant, and his face went pale with fright.

"Wh-what d-do you w-w-wan?" he quavered.

Tom Merry gave a deep-throated chuckle.

"I reckon I'm in need of some 'ard cash!" he growled, shaking the cowering junior roughly. "Nah then—and over all the cash you've got, and any more valuables besides!"

Clampe, his knees fairly knocking together with fear, groped into his pockets, and the first thing he drew forth was Mr. Ratcliff's stolen watch.

The pseudo footpad pounced upon the watch in a twinkling.

"Crikey!" he said, still in the deep, vicious voice. "This is a bit of all right—a real gold watch! I say, sonny, I don't want to be 'ard on yer, so I'll be content wiv this ticker!"

"You—you rotter!" panted Clampe, The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 632.

his face livid with fear. "You—you—"

"Ere, none o' yer fancy names!" hissed the masked villain. "I'll teach yer ter be so ungrateful of me kindness o' eart. This way!"

Tom Merry whirled Clampe round, and bore him, struggling and kicking, towards the ditch at the side of the lane. Clampe's struggles were futile, however. In that strong grasp he was as a babe. Over the brink he went, and there was an ominous splash as his form smote the murky waters and he sank.

"Yarough! Yerrugg! Yah!" "Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the masked rascal who had appropriated the watch. "No! you can crawl back ter school, my son! Good-tye-ee-ee!"

And Clampe was left struggling and gasping in the mud and slime of the ditch.

As soon as it was expedient, Tom Merry divested himself of his disguise, and, making a neat bundle of the overcoat, muffler, mask, and cap, retraced his footsteps with joyful heart to St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chuckled softly. "Poor old Clampe! He'll be on tenterhooks over the fate of that watch, I reckon. The cad! He deserves to be kicked out of St. Jim's, instead of into a ditch!"

And, chuckling mightily to himself, the captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's passed through the gates, and up to the School House.

CHAPTER 8.

The Miseries of Racke & Co.

"YEs gods and little fishes!"

"Who on earth is it?"

"What the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

These were the remarks that greeted Leslie Clampe, as he crawled in at the gates of St. Jim's half an hour later.

Tom Merry had seen to it that quite a collection of boys were at the gates.

And, when they caught sight of Clampe, in the light of the gate-lamp, they gave vent to their astonishment and amusement in the aforementioned manner.

"It's Clampe!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Clampe of the New House! Look at him!"

They looked at him and roared.

For Clampe was verily a sight to see and wonder at. The spectacle he presented to the view of his schoolfellows was so utterly ludicrous that, squirming though he already was, Clampe squirmed still more at their laughter.

He was covered from head to foot in green weed, slime and mud. His hair was plastered with it, and weeds hung gracefully from his ears and shoulders.

He was wringing wet, and his clothes clung to him in a manner that was far from comfortable.

He squelched horribly as he walked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Cardew of the Fourth. "Where hast thou been, my boyson? Probin' the depths of a duck-pond?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clampe blinked at the howling fellows in the lamplight, and squelched his way inside.

The boys fell back hastily to give him room to pass.

"Whew!" gasped Blake. "Somebody must have chucked him into the ditch by the look of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerrugh!" gurgled the melancholy Clampe. "You—you cads! Lemme alone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a hunted look round him, Clampe

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lifted up his feet, and struck out at full-speed for the New House.

"Squelch, squelch, squelch!"

"My word!" gasped Clifton Dane, amidst the laughter. "I wonder how he came to get chucked into the ditch? Grammar School chaps, I suppose!"

"H'm!" said Blake. "They'd hardly be in our quarter of the village at this time o' night!"

And, laughing at the discomfiture of Leslie Clampe, the St. Jim's juniors returned to the school for call-over.

After call-over, the Terrible Three assembled in Study No. 10.

Tom Merry was chuckling.

"What's the joke, Tommy?" inquired Monty Lowther. "Still tickled over old Clampe this evening?"

"Rather!" grinned Tom Merry. "I've got something to show you chaps!"

Monty Lowther and Manners looked inquiringly at their leader.

Tom drew something from his pocket, and laid it upon the table.

His chums feasted their eyes upon it, and gasped when they saw it.

"Mum-my hat!" ejaculated Manners, catching up the watch Tom had placed on the table. "Ratty's watch!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"The very identical!" he remarked. "Tommy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, looking at his chum aghast. "Where the merry dickens did you get it from?"

"Harken unto me, and I'll tell you," said Tom Merry: whereupon he proceeded to unfold the story of that evening's happenings to the wondering ears of his chums.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Lowther, when Tom had finished. "So that was how Clampe got chucked into the ditch!"

"It was only little me!" chuckled Tom Merry. "But, by gad, won't the rotter have a shock? He pinched the watch from Ratcliff, and Racke and Crooke and Chowle are in the swim with him, I reckon. Joliffe played him a dirty trick, and gave him back the watch. Clampe tried to pawn it; but that trick didn't act. He must have felt pretty sick to have had the stolen watch on his hands, but now it's been pinched—by a footpad, as he thinks—he must be suffering mental tortures untold!"

"Rather!" said Monty Lowther. "He thinks that the 'footpad' who relieved him of the stolen watch will be nabbed as soon as he tries to dispose of it, and then the 'footpad' will tell how he sneaked it from a schoolboy in the lane. And Clampe dare not deny that story, for we all saw him come in, after having been chucked in the ditch by the afore-said 'footpad'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorled Manners. "That's what Clampe will think!" said Tom Merry. "Little does he know that we've got the watch! His torturing thoughts will be sufficient punishment for him until to-morrow. And then I'm going to give him the shock of his life!"

"What's the wheeze, old son?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Well," said Tom Merry cheerfully, "the next job is to return the watch to Ratcliff, isn't it? You remember, too, that Clampe and Racke, and those rotters, have orders to dig our allotment to-morrow, don't you?"

"Ye-es," said Manners. "But what has the allotment got to do with the watch?"

"Lots and lots!" grinned Tom Merry. "Those cads are going to dig up Ratty's watch, besides the bricks they planted themselves!"

"My only Sunday topper!"

"See my idea?" said Tom swiftly. "They've got orders to dig our allotment

to-morrow evening. They will, of course, dig up the bricks they shoved in there themselves this evening. That was Monty's idea, and that's defeat for them, if you like. Now, what I'm going to do is this. I'll wrap this giddy watch up in a wooden box, and plant it in the allotment tonight. One or other of those rotters will dig it up to-morrow, and imagine their amazement when they find it is Ratty's stolen watch—the one they stole themselves, and then had stolen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clampe will have a blue fit, I reckon!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Tommy, old scout, it's a stunning wheeze! Let us work the trick now, before bed-time!"

"What-ho!" said Manners.

A wooden box was unearthed from the cupboard, and the watch placed inside it, accompanied by a note which Tom Merry wrote in a disguised hand.

Then the Terrible Three took it down to their famous allotment, and quietly buried it, along with a few of the bricks.

In the Common-room afterwards, they saw Racke and Scrope, and Crooke and Mellish in a corner together.

The face of each was drawn and anxious, and the quartette of cads seemed to have a great load of worry upon their respective shoulders.

"Hallo, Racke, old scout!" called Monty Lowther breezily. "What's worrying you? Lost a few dibs on the gee-gees?"

"No, I haven't—hang you!" muttered Racke, scowling.

"Then why are you looking like a suffering centipede?" demanded the humorist of the Shell, determined to twist Racke unmercifully. "Something's worrying you, that's evident!"

"Mind your own business!" snarled Racke. "I—"

"I know why it is!" struck in Manners. "They don't want to dig our little allotment for us to-morrow! Is that it, Racke?"

Racke vouchsafed nothing but a homicidal growl.

A chuckle went round the Common-room.

It was now general knowledge that Kildare, for some reason or other, had let them off their imposts imposed that afternoon, and ordered them to do an hour's digging on the morrow instead.

Racke & Co. had received those orders while Tom Merry was down in the village. The news had been received by the other juniors with great glee.

"Bai Jove, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Peavaps they are thinkin' about Watty's tickah!"

Racke darted at Gussy a quick, haggard look.

"What about Ratty's watch?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Haven't you heard, dear boy?" asked Gussy sweetly, blissfully unconscious of the volume of torturing thoughts that raced through Racke's mind. "Watty has just heard that you founch chaps, and Clampe and Chowle of the New House, were in the crowd at the meetin' as well as Tom Merry & Co. and us chaps. I suppose he suspects, you know, and I dare say he's asking Clampe and Chowle about it c'wah in the New House."

"Oh!" muttered Racke, his face al-low with foreboding.

The other fellows in the Common-room looked curiously at the four cads.

Evidently they were worrying over something.

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled softly to themselves as they watched the varying

emotions depicted on the faces of the black sheep of St. Jim's.

They could well imagine the nervous anxiety of Racke & Co., their inward quakings, misgivings, and suspicions. And in the dormitory, later on, the Terrible Three noted that Racke & Co. appeared in the throes of dread and apprehension.

Clampe had evidently acquainted them with the misfortune that had overtaken him and the stolen watch, and the six confederates were panic-stricken over what might transpire, row that the watch was in alien hands.

Bitterly they heap mental curses upon the devoted head of Mr. Abel Jolliffe, the vascally proprietor of the Cross Keys public-house, who had brought them into this trouble.

In all St. Jim's there were no more unhappy fellows that evening than Aubrey Racke, Leslie Clampe, Crooke, Chowle, Scrope, and Mellish.

CHAPTER 7.

Ratty's Watch Dog Up.

"KIM ON, my hearties!" said Jack Blake grimly. It was the following afternoon, and tea was over.

A crowd of determined-looking juniors surrounded Racke, Scrope, Crooke, and Mellish in the quadrangle.

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. did not mean to allow their enemies to slack the work before them.

Kildare had ordered them to put in an hour's digging at the allotment they had sought to ruin, and the heroes of the Lower School had made up their minds to supervise the operations, and see that Racke & Co. worked the hour to the full.

"You can't get out of it, mind!" said Monty Lowther. "You've got to do some real, hard work for once, you smoky cads!"

Racke and Crooke and Scrope and Mellish were hustled off in the direction of the allotment.

On their way they were met by Talbot, Kangaroo, and Levison, who bore Clampe and Chowle between them.

"We've got the lot!" said Blake. "And—here's Kildare!"

Kildare strode up, his brow grim. "Here they are, Kildare!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We're just taking them over to our allotment, and are going to put them to work!"

"I see," said Kildare. "No disturbance, mind, or there'll be trouble from me!"

"All serene, Kildare!" spoke up Jack Blake. "So long as they do the digging we'll let them get on with it. The hard work will do them good, you know—much more good than impots!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I considah it wippin' of you, Kildare, to act as you have done, bai Jove!"

Kildare smiled slightly and walked away.

"I'll come back at half-past six," he said. "And mind, if there's a row this allotment idea will have to be stopped!"

"Oh, Kildare!"

The crowd of juniors moved towards the allotment.

Six spades had been procured and set in readiness for Racke & Co.

These humiliated youths were shoved upon the allotment, and Tom Merry pointed to the spades.

"Pick 'em up and start work!" he said.

"Look here," panted Racke, "if you rollers are going to rag us—"

"There'll be no ragging," said Tom

Merry quietly, "if you don't slack. There are your tools, so fire away!"

Helplessly, and with the mocking laughs of the onlookers ringing in their ears, Racke and his five companions took each a spade and commenced to dig at the allotment.

They knew full well what was to be the result of their delving.

Racke groaned and looked round apprehensively as he dug up his first brick.

There arose a chorus of surprised cries at once.

"Who on earth shoved that brick in

No. 50.—SIDNEY CLIVE.



A sunny junior from South Africa. Very capable and hefty, full of fun, and as 'straight as a string.' A very useful man in the half-back line, and a good cricketer. Altogether, one of the brightest and most popular juniors of the Fourth Form. Is the great chum of Levison and Cardew, with whom he shares Study No. 9.

the ground?" exclaimed Herries. "And—mum—my hat! The ground is full of 'em!"

By this time Crooke, Clampe, Chowle, Scrope, and Mellish had unearthed their share of bricks.

There was no help for it. They had to dig, by Kildare's orders, and they could not dig without exposing the bricks.

The spectators, with the exception of the Terrible Three, gazed with open eyes and open mouths as the bricks were dug up from their allotment.

"Gug-good lor!" ejaculated Blake.

"What the dickens—" gasped Gussy, like one in a dream, and blinking at the bricks through his eyeglass. "G'wast Scott! The allotment is bwim full of them, deah boys!"

The six luckless tillers of the allotment soil groaned.

With widely-beating hearts they fervently hoped that they themselves would not be suspected.

"Look at their chivvies!" chuckled Monty Lowther in an undertone to Tom Merry.

"Wonder what they'll look like when the merry ticker is dug up?"

"My word!" grinned Tom Merry. "Their faces will be worth a guinea a box!"

Tense silence prevailed around the

allotment, silence broken only by the sound made by the spades as they scraped at the earth and brought to light bricks, and still more bricks!

"Well, that takes the giddy bum!" gasped Blake wonderingly. "Say, Racke, do you know anything about these bricks?"

"Find out!" snapped Racke, panting from his unusual exertions.

"Bai Jove, deah boys," observed D'Arcy, "I vewy much suspect that those boundahs know moah about the mattah than we do! What a wotten twick, anyway!"

"My hat," said Blake tensely, "if I knew they did do it I—I—"

"Hallo!" cried Monty Lowther suddenly, as Leslie Clampe, bringing a shovelful of earth up, also brought with it a small wooden box. "What's that, Clampe? Not a brick, I know!"

All eyes were directed upon the mysterious wooden box that the New House fellow had dug up.

Wonderingly, Clampe opened the box. His fingers groped within, and drew forth a gold watch, wrapped in a sheet of paper.

Clampe nearly fell down.

The eyes of his five confederates nearly goggled from their heads when they beheld the watch.

"Gug-good heavens!" stuttered Racke, like one in a dream. "Ratty's w-w-w-watch!"

"I—I—I—" panted Clampe, gazing horrified and awe-stricken at the watch he held in his hand. "It c-can't be the watch! I—I—I—"

"Ratty's watch!" yelled Manners. "How the merry dickens did that get there?"

Wonder and amazement were depicted upon every face present, especially upon the ashen visages of Clampe, Racke & Co.

"G'wast Scott, it is Watty's stolen tickah, deah boys!" cried Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Dug up from ouah allotment, bai Jove!"

"Mum—my giddy aunt!" ejaculated Blake.

Clampe looked round him wildly, and pressed a hand to his throbbing temples.

"It's a trick!" he screamed wildly. "I—I didn't—"

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Racke. "For goodness' sake keep cool! No body will tell—"

"What's on that paper round the watch, Clampe?" inquired Monty Lowther relentlessly.

Mechanically, Clampe unfolded the missive, and his startled eyes read what was written thereon.

This is what he read:

"To Mr. Horace Ratcliff, St. Jim's School.—Let this be a lesson to you not to behave like a brute at a crowded meeting. Last Tuesday evening, when making your way out of an audience in Wayland High Street, you pushed and jostled other people in a savage manner. In order to teach you a lesson, I appropriated your watch, and have retained it for a few days. You see how easy it is for an intentionally dishonest person to relieve you of your valuables when you behave in such a manner. I have buried this watch in a field in your school precincts and hope by the time you find it, you will have had a period of anxiety."

"Yours truly,

"H. O. NEST."

Clampe drew a deep, deep breath of relief and wonder.

The paper, as it fluttered from his

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fingers, was pounced upon by Baggy Trimble, who excitedly read it aloud. Cries of astonishment arose. Racke & Co. heaved sighs of jubilation.

"They were utterly at a loss to understand how all this had come about, but they realised that they themselves were not implicated, and this acted like flattering unctious to their souls.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" was Blake's mystified comment. "That about beats the band! So some joker in the crowd hooked Ratty's watch out of his pocket while he was showing his way out! And the joker, whoever he is, buried it here, for one of us to find!"

"It ticks everything I know!" said Kangaroo. "I say, chaps," piped Baggy Trimble suddenly, "here comes Ratty himself! Look out!"

Mr. Horace Ratcliff, a forbidding figure in cap and gown, strode upon the scene.

His gimlet eyes fixed themselves upon Clampe and Chowle.

"Ah!" said the New House master. "I have been looking for you, Clampe and Chowle. What are you doing here?"

"We—we were ordered by Kildare to do some digging on this—er—allotment, sir!" stammered Clampe.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Ratcliff icily. "I was not aware of it, Clampe. I want to ask you a few questions with regard to my missing watch—"

"It's found, sir!" blurted out Chowle.

"Wha-a-t!" Mr. Ratcliff wheeled round upon the Fourth-Former.

"It's a fact, sir!" cried Clampe, holding up the watch. "Here it is, sir—and here's a letter we dug up with it."

"Dug up!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff. "Who—who buried it?"

"Road that, sir!" said Clampe, eyeing the master nervously.

In silence, Mr. Ratcliff read the letter that Tom Merry had chivalrously indicated.

The boys watched, with great interest, the many changes that came over the sour face of the master.

Mr. Ratcliff crushed the letter in his hand, and seemed to gulp.

"Give me the watch," he muttered, glaring like a basilisk at Clampe.

The cad of the New House handed over the watch with alacrity.

Slipping it into his pocket, Mr. Ratcliff bestowed a look upon the grinning assembly of juniors which, if such looks could kill, would have stretched full thirty youths lifeless upon the disturbed surface of the School House allotment.

Then Mr. Horace Ratcliff strode away, his gown fluttering in the wind as he went.

The boys looked at each other as the form of the master disappeared in the growing dusk.

"Well," said Blake at length, "if this isn't the limit!"

"Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am in quite a lather, dear boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke looked appealingly round him.

"Look here, you fellows," he cried, "we—we dug up the watch, so you might let us off—"

"Rats!" cried Tom Merry, in ringing tones. "You are going to have one of the biggest raggings you ever had, Racke, and also those rotters you've gone with you, Chaps," cried Tom Merry, facing the others. "this gang of shady rotters are responsible for these tricks. Monty Lowther spotted

them working the trick last night, and got Kildare to alter their sentence."

"Great pip!"

"The cads!"

"It was a good wheeze of Monty's," said Tom Merry. "And we're going to see that they rid this ground of every brick. Then we'll make them load the bricks on to a barrow, and make 'em wheel it round and round the quadrangle until we like to let 'em go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly fine idea, Tommy!"

Racke & Co. looked haggard.

They were, however, shown no mercy.

Steen hands forced them to take up their spades again, and they were kept hard at work digging up bricks until half-past seven.

By that time the allotment was quite clear.

A wheelbarrow had been fetched, and Racke & Co. were forced to load this up with the bricks they had unearthed.

Rope had also been procured, and the six hapless youths were harnessed in rather a crude, but very effective manner, to the wheelbarrow.

Tom Merry sat on top of the bricks in the wheelbarrow and took the reins.

"Now I'll drive my merry donkey-cart round the quad!" he said. "Clear the way, boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke and his unfortunate companions simply had to obey.

They were at the mercy of thirty schoolboys, determined to wreak vengeance for the shabby tricks they had been played.

Tom Merry had a whip and he whipped his 'team' up.

With a chorus of agonized yells Aubrey Racke & Co. started off, dragging the wheelbarrow with them, containing a load of bricks, with Tom Merry perched on top.

"Go it, Tommy!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Look at the giddy charioteers! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gee up!"

"Whip behind, gu'nor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Staggering onward, lugging their load behind them, Racke & Co. were the cynosure of all eyes.

Fellows collected from far and near to witness the strange scene.

Tom Merry did not spare his whip. He considered that the black sheep of St. Jim's needed dire punishment, and he was merciless.

Round and round the quadrangle full half a dozen times went that motley procession, until Racke & Co. were limp as rags and utterly spent.

At last, when intervention by the prefect appeared imminent, Tom Merry relaxed so far as to get down from the barrow and allow the six laboured juniors to drag their load to the woodshed, where the bricks were taken from the wheelbarrow and the captives released.

Amidst the shoutings and catcalls of the crowd, Aubrey Racke & Co. crawled away, feeling that life was not worth living.

Verily, they began to realise, the path of the transgressor is hard.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorled Monty Lowther. "That's given 'em jip, my lads! They won't start any more of their pranks in a hurry!"

"And," murmured Tom Merry under his breath, "they won't be in a hurry to steal any more watches, I'm thinking!"

CHAPTER 8.

A Wash-Out!

"Oh, crumbs!"

Thus Jack Blake, next morning, before breakfast.

He and D'Arcy, Herries and Digby, together with a few more early-risers from the Fourth Form dormitory, had gone down to the allotment to view it in the morning light.

Their startled eyes beheld a sheet of water, like a magnified puddle or a miniature pond.

It had been raining heavily during the night and the water had settled in the allotment, which, dug shallow by the combined efforts of the amateur allotmenters and Aubrey Racke & Co., had been converted into an excellent receptacle for water.

Jack Blake & Co. gazed upon their submerged allotment with feelings too deep for words.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, polishing his monocle the better to survey the watery scene. "The allotment has disappeared, dear boys!"

At that moment, Tom Merry & Co., and a whole crowd of Shell and Fourth-Formers came up.

These youths also fell back as soon as they saw what had befallen their allotment, and blinked at it with dismayed eyes.

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Better turn it into a swimming-bath, Tommy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"I forgot this ground was so low-lying!" he said ruefully. "When we've had heavy rains before, even the footer-ground has been under water!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins & Co., of the New House, strolled upon the scene, and emitted chorles of high glee when they saw the watery waste.

"My word!" gasped Figgins. "Going for a paddle this morning, Tommy?"

"Or have you been over-watering the giddy ground?" suggested Redfern sweetly.

The School House fellows glared wrathfully at the amused New House fellows.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" sobbed Figgins. "What price your allotment now, eh, Tom Merry?"

"It looks a bit of a 'wash-out'!" grinned Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry grinned ruefully.

"You're right, it is a wash-out!" he said dolefully. "I'm afraid, chaps, our allotment is done in!"

"Oh dear!"

"So we're not going to have home-grown cabbages and potatoes!" said Ralph Beckness Carder. "Alas! for those fanciful flights of imagination, Gussy, old bean! This has put rather a damper on 'em—eh? What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. chuckled and strolled away with Tom Merry & Co. The others dispersed in various directions; but nobody felt in the mood for tending a flooded allotment.

"It's fizzled out properly!" said Tom Merry. "I say, Figgys, what's Ratty saying about his watch?"

"Not a word!" grinned Figgins. "The chap who played that giddy prank on him had a nerve, I must say! I wonder who it was?"

"Ah!" chuckled Tom Merry. "I wonder!"

And, as breakfast-bell rang, the Terrible Three vended their footsteps towards the School House.

"Tommy," said Monty Lowther, as they proceeded on their way, "your giddy idea worked like a charm—about Ratty's watch, I mean!"

"Yes!" chuckled Tom. "I happened to see the bad-tempered old bouncer shoving his way out of that meeting, and it occurred to me that that would make the pinching of the watch plausible. Of course, we bowled out, although they deserve it. You know what Ratty is—he'd have had one of 'em expelled, and think of the disgrace!"

Lowther and Manners nodded.

"They've had enough to go on with," said Tom Merry, smiling. "And they are still wondering how the watch came to be buried in the bricks, and who wrote that note."

"Racke half suspects you, I think, Tommy," observed Lowther.

"Ye-es, so I think!" replied Tom. "All the better—he'll know I've got my eye on him, then. As captain of the Form, it's my duty to see that the fellows don't get mixed up in shady affairs like that. Perhaps that will teach him, and the others of his rotten set, a lesson."

"Yes," sniffed Lowther. "Per-haps!"

"And, about the giddy allotment," said Manners. "I suppose we shan't do any more work on that, Tommy?"

"Not much!" smiled Tom. "The chaps are fed-up with it now, I think. But it's jolly lucky we started it, you know, for it was really by that means that Ratty's watch was discovered."

"Ye-es," said Monty Lowther musingly. "If I hadn't dropped my fountain-pen there, and got it broken, Tommy, you would never have gone to the pawnshop, and overheard Clampe's conversation about the watch, and thus recovered it."

"That's so!" agreed Manners. "The allotment served its purpose then, didn't it?"

And that is the history of the School House Allotment.

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QUINTON'S HERITAGE

By
Anthony Thomas



Malkani Decides.

THE Bazarra, without looking at Malkani, banged his stick three times on the floor and leaned forward a little. Then in a low voice he began to speak. Even then he did not seem to be addressing Malkani, but to be making a monotonous recitation to the few who were gathered around him. But it was Malkani who answered him, and for a few moments the two—mother and son—carried on the conversation together. At the end of it the Bazarra hit the ground once with his stick, paused for a time, then banged the floor three times.

He raised his voice now, and spoke so that everyone on the platform could hear him clearly. When he had finished Erik turned quickly to Jim.

"Malkani knew Bazar Quinton well," he said. "She cannot make any mistake. You will come to her, Bazar."

The old, gaudily-attired woman had risen to her feet again as Jim Quinton, with Erik by his side, stepped towards her. As he did so Dillon Braester was forced nervously along, and with him came Cyrus Kerzon and the medicine-man.

Despite the possible absurdity of it all, Jim felt a curious sense of the impressive side of this scene. The Bazarra was leaning forward on his stick, watching intently every movement of the figures who now comprised the group. Within a very short time two of the men had taken their places behind Malkani and held aloft two flaming torches, the light from which fell on the little group before Malkani.

The king spoke again slowly and impressively, as though anxious that no one should misunderstand his words. When he had finished Kerzon pushed Dillon Braester forward a little way and whispered to him to put out his hand.

Malkani took his hand in hers, and Quinton, watching the scene with wondering eyes, saw that his old enemy at Harmood's was trembling with nervousness. When Malkani released his hand and put her own up to his face Braester almost jumped back, and it was plain that he found the ordeal a trying business.

The woman's hand was going gently over Braester's face, and he managed to stand his ground. One would have imagined that Malkani was blind from her curious manner; but now and again Quinton saw her eyes flash, and noticed that they were fixed keenly on Dillon Braester's face.

She stopped at last, and drew back a The Best Library.—No. 652

pace, and before he quite realized it Quinton had gone further forward, and was holding out his hand to Malkani just as he would have done to a friend. It may be that, having seen the very simple performance which had taken place with Braester, he could afford to smile now that his turn came, but it is quite certain that he felt no sense of fear as Malkani gripped his hand. His chief feeling was of surprise that she had so much power in her hand, and instinctively he returned the grip.

She made a curious sound with her lips, then released his hand. Just as in Braester's case, her own hand reached up to Quinton's face, and he felt her fingers tracing the outline of his lips and quite gently stroking his nose. Again Jim found himself smiling, and forgot that a few moments ago he had been impressed by this ceremony.

Suddenly Malkani's head dropped, and the next moment she had taken hold of Jim's hand again, and was pressing it to her lips.

READ THIS FIRST.

Jim Quinton of the Sixth Form at Harmood's, Bigglesdale, by the will of John Quinton, his father, is to succeed to a great position at Karradon in Africa. A great deal of mystery is attached to the position which John Quinton really held; but he is supposed to have been almost as powerful as the King himself. Mr. Matlock, the late John Quinton's solicitor, makes known details of the will to Jim Quinton, who at once decides to carry out his father's wishes. He is then introduced to Tim Daly, Erik, and Nijelahn, a negro, who are to be his servants.

In their presence the solicitor hands to Jim a sealed packet of papers, which John Quinton had left solely for his son's perusal.

Jim has enemies in Dillon Braester, another Sixth-Former at Harmood's, Braester senior, Cyrus Kerzon, and a fellow named Flannagan, who call themselves the Karradon Squadrants.

Eventually the rival parties reach Africa, and Jim and his friends, including Dick Woolfpooby, a school chum who had joined the party, set out for Karradon.

Later Daly and Nijelahn are captured by Braester and his followers. Tim Daly, and Erik continue on to Karradon, and, on arriving there, find Dillon Braester and Kerzon with the native king, Malkura.

The King believes Braester to be Jim Quinton, and when Erik interposes, he sends for his mother, Malkani, to decide for him.

(Now read on.)

"Bazar Queennton! Bazar Queennton!" She screeched the words, almost as a parrot might have done, in a shrill but not very powerful voice, and then began to lick the back of his hand, making a queer, clicking sound as she did it.

For one brief instant a thrill ran through Jim Quinton. This old woman had recognised him and proclaimed him as Bazar Quinton's son! She had known his father—and Dillon Braester, backed by all Kerzon's subtlety, could not deceive her.

But the thrill did not last long, for the time had not yet come to indulge in day-dreams. The king was calling out, Erik was pulling Jim gently back, while Malkani had already backed to her own place. Erik tried to whisper very softly a running translation of what the king was saying; but Malkura did not speak for long, and the moment he stopped painedomium broke out.

Ranallah rushed forward, and with him came one of his friends. They were both smaller than Jim, but they seized him as though he had been a child and lifted him off his feet. In a moment he found himself held two or three feet from the ground with his face turned towards the great fire.

"Bazar Quinton! Bazar Quinton!" Ranallah was only intent on letting everyone know this great fact. Here was the real Bazar Quinton, and Ranallah had brought him to the Karradons!

Jim had a brief picture of what seemed to be a wriggling mass of black humanity relieved by vivid flashes of colour, all rising and shouting. "Bazar Quinton! Bazar Quinton!" filled his ears, but was drowned almost at once by the furious noise of the drums and the tins and the pipes.

He was on his feet again now, and Erik was shouting to him. For once the little man's eyes were dancing with excitement, and he was using his arms to express himself more thoroughly. Willoughby was gripping him by the hand and trying to shout to him, but the row by this time had become terrific.

It quietened again presently, and Erik managed to tell him that this was the time when he might be properly presented to the Bazarra. Jim turned at once to act on the suggestion, but found that the king was already on his feet, and was no longer in complete control of the people on the dais.

Two or three of the natives, headed by the medicine-man, were gesticulating wildly before him, apparently trying to convince him that a mistake had been made. Malkani and her attendant had already disappeared, and the excitement

which Jim had first seen among the crowd outside the dais had evidently infected those who were in this higher place.

Dillon Bracster was standing very close to Cyrus Kerzon, but the latter for the moment was more interested in the result of the argument going on around the king. Now and again he started forward and cried out a few words, but it had little or no effect.

Once again the Bazar himself brought matters to a climax. Jim could not help but admire the imperious way in which he swept his arm round, putting everyone from him, and for a moment standing before them as their ruler, whose word must be obeyed.

His stick came down emphatically and defiantly. It was a signal for silence because he desired to speak, and for a brief space, at all events, it had the desired effect.

He spoke deliberately and emphatically, but did not say much to those near him before he called out something to Raffallah and Erik, who were standing with Jim, while Dick Willoughby kept close at hand.

"Come Bazar!" Erik whispered. "The Bazar wishes to speak with you."

They stepped forward, but the same instant Kerzon also jumped from where he stood and barred the way. In his hand he held a revolver, and he pushed this almost into Quinton's face.

"Stay where you are!" he gasped. "Don't you move, or I'll settle your part in this business right away! I'm not bluffing! Gangra! Dillon!"

He was calling out to his friends even while he kept the weapon on Quinton. There was another sudden commotion, and Jim, turning swiftly to see what was happening, despite the threat of Kerzon's weapon, saw that the king himself had been seized. And just by his side Dick Willoughby, his fists clenched, but holding himself very tense and still, was looking into the barrel of a weapon which Dillon Bracster held in his hand!

"March straight before me!" Kerzon was commanding Jim Quinton again. "Don't try any tricks! You haven't won this game by a very long way yet!"

The Man Who Came Back.

WHEN, later on, Jim Quinton had time to consider in their proper sequence the events of this night it seemed to him to consist of a series of quick cinematographic scenes. There was the moment when Malkani pressed her hand to his lips, and the joyous thrill which raced through his veins when Raffallah and his friend raised him up and he heard the shouts of acclamation for Bazar Quinton.

A few moments later all this was blotted out. Kerzon was threatening him, and Jim realised that the man, if not mad, had at least reached the stage where he was prepared to take desperate courses.

He did not answer Kerzon immediately, nor did he obey him, but simply stood and looked at him fixedly. In his own mind Jim was trying to discover some way out of his present danger.

Just what was happening on the dais so far as the others were concerned he did not know; but, doubtless, in a few minutes someone would be free to help him.

"D'you hear me?" Kerzon was bawling at him. "Right about turn! March before me! I'll count three, and at the end of that—One—two—three—"

He got no further. Jim took all risks, and his arm shot out as though moved by a galvanic battery. Even as it moved

Kerzon pulled the trigger of his weapon; but it was just a fraction of a second too late, for Quinton's fist had struck his forearm. The bullet went a few inches wide, and before Kerzon could act again both Jim's hands were forcing the weapon still further out of the danger zone.

The very suddenness of the attack had taken Kerzon unawares and given Jim a brief advantage. Backing from him, Kerzon tripped over some object just behind him, and the next moment both he and Quinton had fallen to the floor of the dais.

For ten seconds or so after that the pair fought with wild fury. This was a different kind of fight from any in which Quinton had taken a part before. There were no rules and no science beyond that

Jim tried to raise himself from his back, and, as he did so, became aware, for the first time, that there was another figure lying near him, which moved instantly he turned towards it.

"Jim—Jim, old son, how are you feeling?" It was Dick Willoughby who spoke, and, despite the pain in his head, Quinton recognised his voice with a sense of joy.

Willoughby wriggled himself until he was in a kneeling position, looking down on Quinton, and the latter realised that his friend was also unable to use his arms. And Quinton was longing for a drink of cold water!

"What's been happening to us exactly, Dick?" Quinton now made an effort to sit upright. "I seem to have had a nasty



The tall, broad form of a white man, dressed in breeches and leggings, appeared in the doorway, and both Quinton and Willoughby flattened themselves instinctively against the sides of the hut. (See page 18.)

of exerting every ounce of his natural strength to the best purpose.

Once or twice Kerzon gasped out a call for one of his friends to help him, but Quinton was only concerned with getting the upper hand. Then suddenly he seemed to get a terrific blow on the head—and after that Jim Quinton forgot the fight and everything else.

It was not Cyrus Kerzon who had beaten him, but one of the natives he had bribed and bought with his wonderful promises during those few days he had managed to steal on Quinton's party. But it settled Jim's part in the fight.

How long Jim lay unconscious, or what happened to him during that time, he did not know, but when he awakened his head was throbbing so painfully that he was incapable of thinking clearly. When he tried to put his hands to his head he found it was impossible, since they were secured behind him in some way.

Gradually he realised that he was lying on the ground in some sort of hut. There was just a suspicion of light in the place at first, but this gradually, even swiftly, grew stronger and stronger, until he could see a doorway at the far end of the

jar, and don't quite remember anything after flooring that brute Kerzon. Where is he now?"

"I haven't seen him," Willoughby answered. "As a matter of fact, I've seen precious little of anything since old Raffallah lifted you up for the crowd to cheer. I was feeling very cheerful about that when that little beast Dillon Bracster tried to frighten me with a gun. I don't think he'd have had the nerve to use it, but even while I was thinking about the best way of collaring it for myself someone seized me from behind."

"So you didn't have a fight or anything?" Quinton asked.

"No amusement at all, old son!" Willoughby returned cheerfully. "They'd got me, and just bundled me over that platform affair, which rather knocked the wind out of me, and then made me do a gentle run as far as this place, where they simply left me. You came in a few minutes later, but they had to carry you. I've tried to explore the place a little, but there's two fellows with funny-looking swords sitting just outside."

"Kerzon seems to have won hands down," Quinton said bitterly.

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thought we'd settled him easily when the dark old lady gave the casting vote in my favour. However, it's no use crying about it now. What happened to Erik and Ranallah and the rest of the crowd? Kerzon can't have bought them all off!"

"I don't know, Jim. I saw nothing of them, to be quite truthful. There was some sort of a scrap going on, but I got pitchforked out of the whole thing too quickly to make any notes of the business. The most important thing at present is to get a drink. I'm parched! What's the prospect of getting at my water-bottle? They've still left it on me."

It was Quinton's suggestion that the best plan would be to make an attempt to free their arms, and, after a very brief argument, Willoughby made the first attempt to undo the rough straw rope which had been hastily tied round Quinton's wrists. He tackled the problem with his teeth, Jim lying face downwards on the ground while he worked.

It was not a simple task, but Dick Willoughby stuck to it with grim determination, and after more than half an hour of strenuous effort, Jim Quinton's hands were free. They were very stiff and sore after being cramped so long, and at first his efforts to unfasten Willoughby's bonds were futile.

Gradually, however, the use came back to his fingers, and in less than half the time Willoughby had taken with his teeth, Jim had freed his friend.

The first thing to do was to quench their thirst. Fortunately, Dick's water-bottle was practically full, and, even if the liquid in it was not quite so cold as they could have wished, the refreshment put new life into them.

By now the place in which they were being kept prisoners was comparatively well-lighted by the broad beam of sunlight which came from the open doorway. Now and again a shadow passed across—the figure of one of the natives who had been put there to guard the hut.

"There are two of them," Dick explained again. "Wonder what our chances are of getting rid of them? I don't quite care for the idea of sticking in this hole until someone comes along to drag us out. You never know what nasty ideas that fellow Kerzon may have in his mind about us. Let's investigate!"

"Right!" Quinton was quite in accord with the idea of getting out of this place, if it were possible. "We'd better keep to the side of the hut, and then there won't be the same chance of being seen. You keep on this side, and I'll go over to the other. Go slowly and keep your eyes open."

They acted on this suggestion. Very slowly they sauntered along the sides of the hut, watching the doorway all the time lest one of their guards should decide to look in. But apparently the two men outside were not worrying, and they had almost reached the entrance to the hut before any shadow fell across the beam of light.

Then someone did come, but it was not a native. The tall, broad form of a white man, dressed in breeches and leggings, and with a rifle slung over his shoulder, stood stock-still for a moment or two right in the doorway.

He appeared to be gazing about him, trying to accustom his eyes to the dim light, and both Quinton and Willoughby flattened themselves instinctively against the sides of the hut.

"Anyone here?" the man called out. "Quinton! Willoughby! Where are you?"

And at that Jim Quinton jumped forward quickly, for he recognised the voice, just as he now recognised the stalwart form. It was Tim Daly himself who stood there!

Tim Daly Explains.

"HELLO, Tim! It's all right! We were just going to try our hands at the escape business. We're anxious to get out of this place as soon as possible! What's been happening to you?"

Both Quinton and Willoughby were asking questions, and making quick explanations about their own position all in the same breath. They were overjoyed to see Tim Daly again, and showed it plainly. Daly, however, was more puzzled than pleased, and looked from one to the other with an air of perplexed wonder.

"You are trying to escape?" he asked. "From here? Why? What has happened to you just lately? I've only just managed to get here, and began to think that something was amiss when those two fellows at the door bolted as soon as I appeared. One of them was yelling out about ghosts! Let's sit down here for a few minutes, for I'm still pretty feeble."

In the dim light Jim had scarcely noticed the fact that Daly was a trifle thinner, and that the healthy tan of his face had taken on an unpleasant yellowness. Without another word, the three of them squatted together on the floor of the hut, and Tim Daly gave a very brief account of his own experiences since that night when they had been attacked at the camping-ground near the Dump.

He had been wounded, and but for the prompt measures which he had himself taken the result might very easily have been fatal. As it was, he was in no condition to make any violent effort to protect himself when the attacking party eventually seized him and his few companions.

Chiefly the attackers were members of the Manzi tribe, but they were led by Kerzon, Braester, and two or three other white men. It puzzled Tim Daly even now to understand how Kerzon and Braester had made their arrangements so swiftly.

"The only idea I can strike is that Flaxman cabled instructions from London to some of his people at Mombasa, and everything was prepared for Kerzon and company to make their landing. They must have been in touch with the Manzi people almost before we started from Port Florence."

Daly had gathered from the very first that Kerzon and Braester were prepared to come to terms with him. Indeed, Kerzon had definitely suggested that it would pay him better to throw in his lot with him, as otherwise he would never have a chance of seeing the Karradon country again. Tim had not taken any particular interest in the proposal.

The Kerzon party had expected that the rest of Daly's friends, including Quinton, would fall very easily into their hands before they reached the Karradon country; but, in their anxiety to push ahead, they had not been able to spend any time in making a search for them. Quinton's party, travelling by a different route, had taken a little longer on the journey, but had missed any danger from Kerzon's expedition.

"We went straight to the Manzi country," Daly explained. "The elder Braester and the other white men, who are agents of Flaxman, are still up there, waiting developments and instructions from Kerzon. I couldn't quite gather what Kerzon's scheme was, but apparently he's stuck to the old plan, and tried to push young Braester into your place."

That was what he was doing last night," Quinton answered. "A good job I made up my mind to come along," Daly laughed. "Nijallah and two or three of the Karradon fellows are still held as prisoners by the Manzi people. I didn't quite like the idea of leaving them to the mercy of the Manzi, but it was the only thing to do. They were under the impression that I was a very sick man, and didn't worry much about a guard, so when at last I decided to come here, I hadn't much difficulty in getting away. That's more than twelve hours ago, and I've been on the tramp ever since. Tell me what happened to you last night."

As quickly and tersely as he could Jim Quinton told the story of their entry into the country of the Karradons, and of what happened after the king had given his decision. Daly listened carefully to every word, and now and again put in a quick question.

"Erik and Ranallah are probably tied up somewhere, just as you were," he asked. "And the king, Hazara Malkura—what happened to him?"

"I couldn't tell you about him," Quinton answered. "I imagine Kerzon has got him safe and sound somewhere; but everything happened so quickly so far as I was concerned that there wasn't very much time to observe any details, or to form any clear impression. What is going on outside at the present time?"

"Nothing!" Daly retorted. "The whole place seems deserted. Even the entrance to the boma hasn't a guard, and I couldn't make it out. Then I saw the two fellows who were sitting outside you but here, and they bolted as soon as I came near them. It's a queer business, and I don't seem to have got the right hang of it yet. You say Kerzon seemed to be very friendly with one of the men near the king last night. What was the fellow like? Did you notice him at all? Not painted and decorated up to the eyes?"

"That's the fellow," Quinton agreed. "An old chap, but he seemed to be nearly as important as the king himself."

"As important as much," Daly said. "It's old Medjahidi, who's a sort of a physician or chief medicine-man here. Your father damaged his reputation a good deal, but never tried to rob him of his power, even though he was often a bit of a thorn in our sides. Evidently Kerzon has bribed him pretty well. They're a dangerous pair together. But we needn't go into that question now, as we ought to settle Kerzon's game promptly. Let's get outside, and begin to find out how the land lies."

He jumped to his feet, and Quinton and Willoughby followed his example.

"I hope we manage to get Erik—" Quinton began, but his voice was suddenly drowned in the most terrifying roar he had ever heard.

It was as though a dozen bands had all started to play on the same instant, and all out of tune. Drums were going, and trumpets blaring, and wild shrieks from streams were intermingled with the tremendous roar of a fohorn. It was deafen-

ing and stupefying, and the very walls of the hut seemed to shake with the noise.

Quinton made no attempt to continue his remark, but turned to Tim Daly for some explanation. But, as usual, Daly's expression did not indicate anything of what was passing through his mind. As the noise went on he began to fumble in his pocket, and produced at last—his pipe! Quinton and Willoughby could do nothing more than stand and watch him with a certain fascination as, very slowly and methodically, he filled and lighted the briar.

It was typical of Tim Daly, as Quinton had discovered before this. Tim never hurried or became flustered, and the more methodical and careful he appeared to be, so, one judged, the greater the cause for excitement.

By the time he had the pipe properly going the row ceased, almost as suddenly as it had begun.

"A bit startling at first," Daly asked, as soon as his voice could be heard. "That's rather an urgent signal, too. Everybody's wanted, except the old women. They'll all come in for miles round, so there's no need for us to hurry. If the whole tribe is going to have a general meeting, we shall be there. Only I'd like to know who's called it. No one except the king is supposed to get the whole tribe in, unless there's sudden danger of an attack. I wonder where Malkura is at present?"

The last question was spoken more to himself than to Quinton, and Jim made no attempt to suggest an answer. For another minute or so the little group stood silent, Daly evidently trying to weigh up the situation, while Quinton and Willoughby waited for his decision.

"I'd like to find out just what is happening, Jim," Daly said at last. "If I could get hold of Malkura it would clear the air considerably. But I'd rather go on my own just now, in case there's any trouble knocking round. Can you stick on here until I come back?"

"Of course we can!" Jim agreed at once.

"I think it's the best scheme," Daly assured him slowly. "I'm all at sea at present, and don't know what Kerzon may have in waiting for us. I'll wander round quietly, without advertising myself too much, and learn everything I can. Then I'll come back here for you two, and we'll probably take a fairly active part in the big meeting when they start."

He strolled to the door of the hut and looked out. Quinton was standing close behind him, and realised that they were not very far from the great open space where last night's revelry had been held, though the appearance of the place in the blazing sunshine was vastly different.

Hundreds of natives were already choosing their places. Over the platform, on which last night the king had sat, a dozen workers were fixing a great sunshade, and about the ground itself other lesser coverings, very light and flimsy, were being put up, while here and there other odd groups were clearing some of the debris of the fires.

It was all so methodical and regular that it had a quietening effect on Jim. His experience of last night, and the terrific din of a few minutes before had all strung him up to a pitch where he was prepared to find himself at any moment in a desperate fight for his life. But the scene in the great square was peaceful enough, and suggested a holiday carnival more than anything else.

Daly gave a few brief suggestions before he went off. They were to wait for him, and not show themselves to anyone before he returned. The two watched him go quite cheerfully; but

observed that he took particular care to keep in the shadow of the huts.

For some little time Jim and Dick Willoughby stood near the entrance watching the scene in the square. The work was quickly finished, and the crowd had swelled until in places they formed a solid mass, but everything was quite orderly, and without any unnecessary fuss.

"I think we'll have another rest," Quinton suggested presently. "I hope Tim brings back a decent supply of water, whatever else he does. That's my chief trouble at present! I've got a first-rate thirst!"

"Same here!" Willoughby agreed; and stretched himself by the side of his chum. A moment later he sat up suddenly, and at the same time gave Quinton a warning jab.

"Look out, Jim!" he whispered. "Visitors to see us! Quite a crowd, too! Do we get up, or lie low for the present?"

Quinton turned and looked towards the doorway. There were half a dozen figures just inside the entrance, but only one which he recognised, and that particular one he knew in an instant.

"Get up!" he said quickly to Dick Willoughby. "Old Kerzon again! Keep him talking until old Tim turns up!" Both of them jumped to their feet; but their idea of keeping Kerzon for a time by talking to him was doomed to disappointment. The moment he saw them move he had given a quick order to the natives who were with him. They were armed with short, but very business-like clubs, and they swung these round much in the same way as a gymnast exercises with Indian clubs, and came rushing upon Quinton and Willoughby.

"Don't you try any fighting!" Kerzon was yelling at them, and was evidently in a state of high excitement. "I'll shoot if you do!"

He brandished the weapon he carried, but there was really little need for his warning. Neither Quinton nor Willoughby had a dog's chance with their bare fists against this mob, and it was Quinton, who, remembering that everything was to be gained by waiting, called out to Willoughby.

"Give way, Dick!" he said quickly. "Our turn's coming soon!"

The Poisoned Arrow.

BUT in the square the great audience had settled down to places, though there was still a fairly steady stream coming from the main entrance to the boma. As yet there was no one on the platform, and it was towards this that Quinton and Willoughby were now hurried.

Jim felt no sense of fear, or even resentment. His chief feeling indeed was of surprise at Kerzon's methods, and this was intensified during the next few minutes. The tall, swarthy-complexioned friend of Adolph Flaxman did not let the grass grow under his feet, and he was intent just at present on rushing everything through. Just what he hoped to accomplish Quinton could not quite grasp, but it was evident that neither Quinton nor Willoughby could expect gentle treatment from their enemy.

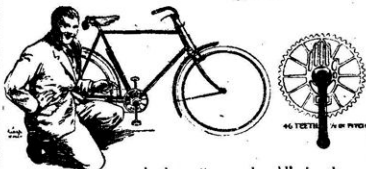
Under his commands the natives very quickly fastened Quinton and Willoughby to the two posts which had been put up a few yards in front of the platform. Of this particular part of the proceedings Quinton had not a very exact knowledge. The blazing sun, his

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thirst, and the effect of his recent experiences, all had their dazing influence upon him. Strong as he was there were limits even to Jim Quinton's powers of endurance.

Whether Kerzon realised this or not it is hard to say, but in a short time a rough sort of shade was erected over Jim's head, and a boiler of cold water was brought to him. Willoughby received the same treatment, and after that both of them were able to take more interest in the drama which Kerzon was staging.

On the platform the much-decorated native, Mendijah, occupied the post of honour, and next to him sat Dillon Bracer. Jim kept his eyes fixed on Bracer, but the latter was plainly only too anxious to avoid meeting his gaze. There were quite a number of other natives occupying important places, and presently Kerzon appeared, and sat down on the left hand of Mendijah.

Mendijah was giving the signal for silence with his staff. The queer droning of voices and the wailing of odd musical

instruments ceased for a time, and every eye was fixed on the old medicine-man. He did not get up to address the audience, but spoke in his normal hoarse voice to those round about him, and in a few moments the jabbering and the humming had begun again; but Mendijah still went on speaking. Quinton grasped the whole idea at last. As Mendijah spoke the men nearest him repeated what he said, the words were picked up by those just below the platform, who in turn passed them on, until the whole audience was repeating the speech.

It was not so easy for Jim to understand what it was all about, though he guessed that he figured in the matter considerably, and that he was being accused of false pretences and other crimes.

Mendijah stopped suddenly, but the repetition of his words still echoed and re-echoed amongst his listeners. It seemed to grow in volume until it developed into a wild shouting and yelling, and at this Mendijah rose slowly to

his feet. One of the natives near him stepped to his side, and Mendijah pointed to Jim.

The medicine-man's companion was a particularly fine-looking Karradoh, but his dress was quite simple. The chief thing Jim noticed was the wonderful belt he wore. In the sunshine it shone like burnished gold.

He was holding a small bow in his hand, and by his side was a quiver, from which protruded half a dozen little arrows. The whole thing appeared to be a child's toy rather than an effective weapon. Only when the big Karradoh drew out an arrow, and, stringing it, swiftly pointed it in Quinton's direction, did Jim realise the real danger he was now in.

Willoughby, too, had awakened to the meaning of it all, even though he had understood nothing of what Mendijah had said.

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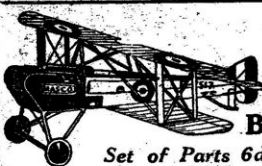
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