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THE PAPER THAT EVERY BOY SHOULD READ !



THE SECRET OF THE CASTLE!



TRAPPED IN THE OLD CASTLE!

(A Thrilling Scene in the Splendid Long, Complete, School Tale in this Number.)



The Editor's Chat.



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

For Next Tuesday

TOM MERRY & CO.'S NEW ROLE.

By Martin Clifford.

The grand, long, complete story of St. Jim's for next week tells in a very graphic manner of a railway strike on the local line to the school. Tom Merry & Co. eager and willing to be of service to the community generally, also keen on such a new experience, step into the breach, with the consequence that the aristocratic Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is seen as a porter!

TOM MERRY & CO.'S NEW ROLE

is a very unusual story, and one that every reader will thoroughly enjoy, and no one should miss it!

MORE INFORMATION.

It is always a pleasure to receive such a letter as comes to hand from C. Faircliff, of Gravesend.

"I am a new reader of the Gem," writes this correspondent, "and I do not know which boys belong to the different studies."

Now, in a story series, of course, as my chums will perceive, it is not possible to give a tabulated list of details of this kind. Such points are referred to in a yarn if they are required in the telling, but not otherwise. Wherever feasible, I give lists, and our Who's Who was extremely popular; but new readers are always arriving, and they feel out of it. I shall remember the need.

Space is limited, but on occasions it will be possible to give some particulars, while the "Holiday Annual" is by way of being a standing record. The studies which matter most in this instance are No. 7 (Sherry), Racke and Crooke; No. 10, Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners; No. 9, Talbot, Skimpole, and Gore; while other studies which are dealt with frequently are the following: Fourth Form, Study No. 5, Julian, Hammond, Reilly, and Kerrish; No. 6, Blake, Digby, Herries, and D'Arcy; No. 9, Levison, Herries, and Cardew; New House, Study No. 4, Figgis, Kerr, and Wynn; No. 5, Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence. This is

not all, by any means. I could not supply a tithe of the details which are asked for. I only wish it were possible to do so.

THRILLING ADVENTURE.

It is rather curious to note the occasional demand for old-time romance—romance such as Jules Verne could deal with so ably. I was asked the other day whether I could not have some of the stories of the famous French author in the Companion Papers. This idea sounds all right, but while Jules Verne would please some, I much doubt whether he would grip the majority of my readers.

Nothing here detrimental to the clever writer who lived so quietly at Amiens and turned out such a prodigious number of tales.

Jules Verne anticipated most of the inventions which have come along in recent years. He had motor-cars travelling at any speed you like; likewise a gigantic elephant, called Behemoth, which could go through the jungle and swim rivers and lakes. Behemoth went by steam, I believe, and a very handy companion he proved for the explorers who took him with them—or he took them, to speak more correctly.

Jules Verne wrote of the moon in fine style, though his method was vastly different to that of H. G. Wells, whose fine yarn "The First Men in the Moon," I caught on so well, though, personally, I never could quite get on with Bedford.

Such writers of scientific mysteries as these have covered the ground which is now being investigated by learned professors. Verne made light of sidereal messages, also of aerial navigation. His voyage across Africa was notable, also the story describing adventures amidst the eternal ice.

A writer I knew once told me that, in his opinion, Jules Verne's stories were like so many skeleton frameworks. They left the reader to imagine a great part. There is nothing wrong in this system so long as it is not carried to excess. But, of course, Jules Verne nowadays, admirable as he was, would strike in many directions an old-fashioned note. We have travelled so far since his day.

A Glasgow chum who writes to me is an immense admirer of Wells, and he is not by any means alone. I expect a good many of my friends have read Wells' "Invisible Man," described as grotesque romance. Perhaps the description was right, though it was so thrilling that one forgot the grotesque part. The notion of a man, a dabbler in science, mastering the art of making himself invisible but not his clothes, was quaint and daring enough. The pity seemed to be that the theme could not be carried further.

A REQUEST FROM WINNIPEG.

Two of my chums in Winnipeg, namely Stanley Oswald and Stanley Bowdler, ask my assistance in finding a missing friend. I am very glad to do as they ask. The notice they forward is as follows:

"Will Donald McKenzie please communicate with S. Oswald, 175, Donald Street, or S. Bowdler, 229, Spence Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada?"

McKenzie is an old friend of theirs, and they are very anxious to get in touch with him.

A QUESTION.

F. Bottomley, of South Tottenham, asks whether Tom Merry & Co. cannot make a tour of the British Isles, or something like that, and get abroad a bit more? I suppose the term "something like that" means easy trips to Ockney or Shetland, or week-ends at Dublin? Well, it is not very practical. School stories should, for the most part, have their scenes laid at the school. School-boys very seldom go globe-trotting, and though this well-read correspondent may be keen on foreign climes, my experience is that the majority prefer yarns about affairs at home.

Your Editor



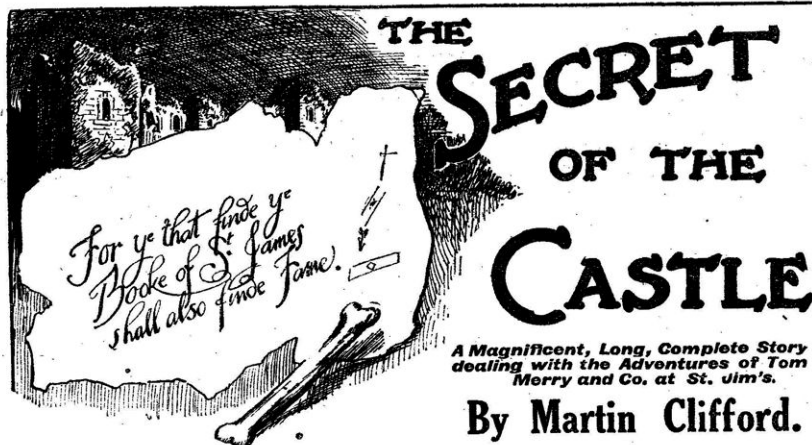
"The Hooded Man!"

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CHAPTER 1.

On Wayland Hill.

"OUT you come, you slackers!" Tom Merry uttered that remark as he poked his head into Study No. 6 of the School House at St. Jim's.

Jack Blake, the leader of the study, looked questioning at his chums, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, George Herries, and Robert Arthur Digby.

They shook their heads solemnly. "Slackers, did you say?" asked Jack Blake, turning to Tom Merry, who had entered the study with Monty Lowther and Manners.

Tom Merry nodded coolly. "That's the exact word I used!" he said. "You chaps are slackers to stop indoors a lovely afternoon like this! Why, it's like a midsummer day!" "Weally, Tom Mewwy!" expostulated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You must admit theah's a towible wind blowin'!" "What of that, dummy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy! I absolutely refuse to be alluded to as a dummy!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I must ask you to withdawah that wemak!"

"Rats!" retorted Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps—out into the giddy open air!"

Jack Blake rose from the chair in which he had been sitting.

"You said 'slackers,' I believe?" he said seriously. "What time did you get up this morning?"

"Ahem!"

"You see—"

"What time, Tommy?" asked Blake again.

For some reason Tom Merry did not want to answer that question.

"Are you coming, or are you not?" he asked hastily.

"What time—"

"Rats! We're going out!" Jack Blake chuckled.

"We were up before rising-bell this morning—the whole giddy lot of us!" he said. "Herries wanted to see if Towser was ready for killing—"

"My hat!" ejaculated Herries indignantly. "You know jolly well that I wanted to give him a bath, Blake!"

"That's how you put it!" snorted

Blake. "Personally, I consider it a jolly good idea to kill Towser!"

"My hat! I'll—"

"Weally, Hewwies, you must admit that Towser is a frightful mongrel," said Arthur Augustus. "He has no—"

Herries glared at D'Arcy and clenched his fists.

"Shut up!" he roared. "Towser is all right; it's only the silly bags you wear that Towser doesn't like."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther warmly. "Gussy's trousers are enough to give any dog rabies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you chaps come to discuss Gussy's bags?" asked Jack Blake pleasantly.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned.

"No, we didn't. As a matter of fact," said Tom Merry, "we came to see if you slack—ahem!—I mean, if you chaps would come to the old castle on Wayland Hill with us."

"Oh, I see!"

Jack Blake nodded, and looked at his chums.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and the juniors were free. There would be no lessons or prep that day.

"What do you say, Gussy?" asked Herries. "I'll take Towser. Do him good to have a run round."

"Then that settles it, as far as I am concerned," said D'Arcy decidedly. "If Towser goes, I simply refuse!"

"Why, you dummy—" snorted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—" began D'Arcy coldly.

But Jack Blake settled the question for his chums.

"We'll come, Tommy!" he said firmly. "Get your caps, you chaps!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated and looked down at his beautifully-creased trousers.

"I weally must change, deah boys!" he said hastily. "It is suah to be mudday at the old castle, and I'll get my trowsahs dirtay!"

Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, gave a snort.

"Of course, Gussy, if you're going to ramble round Wayland Hill on your hands and knees—" he began.

"Bai Jove! I didn't say anything" of

the sort, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "I was wewewin'—"

"Oh, come on!" growled Blake. "We're wasting all the giddy afternoon discussing your bags, Gussy!"

"Sha'n't be a few seconds, deah boys!" said D'Arcy.

And the swell of St. Jim's hurried up to the dormitory to change.

Tom Merry & Co., with Blake, Herries, and Digby, walked slowly out of the School House and towards the gates. But after waiting five minutes D'Arcy was still absent.

"I'll go and fetch Towser—" began Herries.

"You won't!" snorted Jack Blake. "You'll let Towser stay in his giddy kennel!"

"Look here, Blake! How would you like to be chained up all day and all night?" demanded Herries warmly. "Old Towser wants—"

"What Towser wants and what he'll get represent two different questions!" interrupted Monty Lowther. "What he really wants is a dose of poison!"

"What's that?"

"Rats!" said Herries warmly. "Towser is jolly well coming, whether you want him or not!"

And George Herries, with another indignant snort, went off to fetch his dog. Towser was a bulldog, and, in Herries' opinion, the finest specimen of a bulldog that was ever seen.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy invariably referred to Herries' pet as a "mongrel." The fact was that Towser seemed to take a dislike to Arthur Augustus' trousers whenever the two met. And D'Arcy thought far more of his trousers than most people thought of their whole wealth.

Tom Merry was about to suggest moving on when both Herries and D'Arcy put in an appearance. Herries had Towser on his chain.

"Heah we are, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Wasn't long, was it?"

"Only twenty minutes!" growled Blake. "You dummy! What do you want to get yourself up like that for, when we're going to ramble round the old castle?"

Arthur Augustus looked at Blake in surprise.

"Weally, Blake!" he said remonstratingly.

tively. "I've only put my old twousahs on, and an old coat and toppah, deah boy! Suahlay—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther. "If that's your oldest rig-out, Gussy, you must be no end of a nut in your best!"

"Yass, wathah!" said D'Arcy innocently. "I must admit I look wathah posh in my best wig-out, deah boy!"

"Posh as a tailor's dummy!" said Blake, with a chuckle. "However, here's Herries—"

"Ow! Hewwie, you wottah, take that—"

"Over!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy leapt nearly two feet in the air as he felt Tower's nose rubbing against his leg. Tower's presence was thus made known to the swiftness of St. Jim's for the first time.

"He's all right, Gussy!" said Herries comfortably. "He only wants to kiss you!"

"Ow! I don't want the beastly mon-gwel—"

"Gussy's not keen on being kissed," said Lowther, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's all right, Gussy!" broke in Lowther.

D'Arcy subjected the humorist of the Shell to a freezing stare through his monocle, and turned loftily to Blake.

"If you chaps are goin' to stop heah all day," he said, "I'm goin' to take a walk—"

"Well, my only Aunt Sempronia!" snorted Blake. "And we've been waiting an hour for you!"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, you exag-gewate!"

"Don't let the dummy start talking!" growled Digby. "Come on, let's get a move on!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked on at a brisk pace towards Rylcombe, Herries bringing up the rear with Tower.

"Bethah take the twain!" said D'Arcy.

"My hat! We'd better not do that, Gussy!" said Lowther, in alarm.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned to Lowther, with an expression of surprise on his aristocratic face.

"Why not, deah boy?"

"Because the railway company might not like our pinching a train," said Lowther solemnly. "Personally, I'm not anxious to spend a year in prison."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, I veward you as a waggin' wottah!" snorted Gussy indignantly.

"You know perfectly well that when I said take a twain, I meant take a twain to—"

"My hat! That's just what I'm saying!" said Lowther.

"A twain to Wayland, you ewass ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Why do we want to take a train to Wayland, Gussy?" asked Blake innocently.

"Bai Jove! I mean, take a ticket to—"

"Gussy, you're getting into taking ways!" said Tom Merry solemnly.

"You'll be taken to the lock-up, my son, before you're very much older."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus stared at the juniors through his monocle with all the dignity he could muster.

"I should wewget to eweate a disturbance deah boys," he said loftily. "But if you persist in waggin' me, you'll get to—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Lowthah! I shall have no wewsource but to administrah a fealful thwashin'! Pway—"

But Jack Blake considered the ragging of Arthur Augustus had gone far enough.

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"Shut up, you chaps, and cut along to the station," he said. "Tommy, look after that prize lunatic of yours, and I'll watch over our little bundle of trouble with a fatherly eye."

"My hat! Don't you call me a lunatic, Jack Blake—" began Monty Lowther warmly.

But Tom Merry and Manners grasped their chum's arms and hurried him towards the station.

"And I wufese to be alluded to as a bundle of twouble—"

"Kim on!" said Jack Blake briskly.

"There's a giddy train coming in, Gussy, and if you want to take it to Wayland, you'll jolly well have to grab it when it's standing still!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Grab him, you chaps!"

Digby grabbed one arm, and Blake grabbed the other, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was whirled towards the station.

"Ow! Yow! Pway desist, Blake you—"

"Rats!"

As the juniors drew near Rylcombe Station they could hear a train approaching.

And, with a tight hold on their chum's arm, Blake and Digby ran their hardest for the station.

D'Arcy's topper was jerked to an angle that was far from being elegant.

The swell of St. Jim's could feel it falling to the back of his head, but as his arms were firmly held by Blake and Digby, the topper remained in that position.

Monty Lowther was being served in much the same manner. But he had no topper to worry him.

"Lemme go, you fatheads!" he gasped. "I'll jolly well punch your napper, Tom Merry!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"And I'll scrag you, Manners!" panted Lowther furiously. "Lemme go!"

"Excellent!" said Manners, with a grin.

Wayland, Tommy-tickets for the giddy crowd!" shouted Blake, who was rushing D'Arcy along some few yards to the rear of the Shell fellows.

Tom Merry released his hold of Monty Lowther as they reached the booking-office at Rylcombe Station, and called for tickets to Wayland.

"Don't forget one for Tower!" yelled Herries.

Tower's stumpy legs were pattering swiftly on the ground, but they could not get along as fast as the juniors were travelling. And Tower was too heavy for his master to carry.

"Kim on, Herries!" shouted Blake.

"I'm coming!" panted Herries.

"Gee-up, Tower, you beast! Run, you fat boulder!"

Tower put on a spurt—he had to, for Herries was dragging hard on the chain.

The train for Wayland was in before the juniors were on the platform, and they scrambled into a carriage. Herries came panting up a few seconds later, grabbed Tower, and almost flung him into the carriage as the train started.

Then he tumbled in himself.

"Yow! Hewwie, you're on my toes!" cried D'Arcy, in anguish.

"Ow!"

"Shouldn't have such big feet!" growled Herries, as he scrambled across the compartment. "Where's Towsey!"

"Blow Towshah!" snorted D'Arcy indignantly. "What about my toes?"

"Sorry!" said Herries ungraciously. "But if you will grow such big feet, you must expect to get them trodden on!"

"Weally, Hewwie—"

"Here, Towsey! Come on, old fellow!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, thus interrupted, subjected his chum to a frigid stare, and sat back in the seat.

The juniors alighted from the train at Wayland Junction, which was the nearest station to Wayland Hill, on which the old hermit's castle stood.

But as they approached the station exit, Monty Lowther stopped.

"My hat!" he exclaimed in alarm.

"Gussy, you've forgotten something!"

D'Arcy looked concerned at once.

"Bai Jove, deah boy! Did I leave my glove—no, I have them heah! My scarf is—"

"No—the train!" said Lowther seriously. "You told us you were going to take a train—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!" snapped D'Arcy. "Lowthah, you are a waggin' wottah!"

"Don't mench!" chuckled Lowther.

Ten minutes later the juniors were on Wayland Hill, looking up at the old castle. The ground was not too soft—not so soft as D'Arcy's head, as Lowther mentioned—so there was really no reason why they shouldn't go to the castle.

And the juniors set their faces towards it, and mounted the hill.

CHAPTER 2.

The Curio Hunters.

"GOOD-AFTERNOON!"

Tom Merry & Co. started as they approached the old castle.

They had thought they would be alone, for it was seldom anybody visited such a lonely spot as Wayland Hill.

That greeting came from a doorway of the castle itself, and a moment later two gentlemen appeared.

"Good-afternoon!" repeated one of them cordially.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Tom Merry politely, and the juniors raised their caps.

"Curio hunting?" asked the man quietly.

"My hat! Never even gave it a thought!" said Tom Merry. "Just having a ramble round, that's all!"

The gentlemen looked relieved as the juniors raised their caps again—with the exception of D'Arcy, who raised his topper gracefully—and passed on.

They evidently were curio-hunting in the old castle, and what was equally evident, they did not want anybody else to be hunting round.

But Tom Merry & Co., when they reached the bend of the path that ran round the old castle, looked at each other questioningly.

"My stars!" exclaimed Tom Merry, halting suddenly. "I never thought of looking for curios in this old place, you chaps!"

"Blessed if I did, either!" said Jack Blake.

"Wathah not, deah boy! But theah's no wewson why we shouldn't start!" said D'Arcy eagerly.

"The place simply abounds with secret passages and rooms," went on Digby quickly. "Jolly good fun to search round all the walls for secret springs; and, besides, we might find some curios!"

"You chaps don't want any more curios," said Lowther solemnly.

Jack Blake & Co. stared.

"We haven't one, you ass!" said Blake indignantly.

"Oh, yes, you have!" said Lowther. "I'm surprised at you, Blake—"

"What have we got that might be called a curio, deah boy?" demanded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I believe you want to keep us out! Pway don't be selfish, deah boy!"



Herries kicked hard at the stairs. The wood crashed into splinters under the blow, and he toppled slightly forward. "My hat!" he exclaimed, as he steadied himself. "The blessed place is hollow, at any rate!" (See Chapter 2.)

Monty Lowther glared at the aristocratic junior.

"Ass!" he said witheringly. "What I meant was that Blake & Co. had got one curio—one that will never be equalled in the giddy time of man!"

"Bai Jove! I fail to see——"

"There's not a glass here, Gussy, or I would show it to you!" said Lowther seriously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Lowthah! I——" began Arthur Augustus hotly.

"Shut up, Monty, you ass!" growled Tom Merry. "There'll be a dust-up before many minutes have passed——"

"That's quite right, Tom Merry!" ejaculated Gussy. "I'm goin' to administer a faithful thrashing——"

"You're going to leave it until we get back to St. Jim's!" interrupted Blake firmly. "Do you think we want to let these old gentlemen know you're always wanting to fight somebody, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy was touched on his tender spot. To fight in public was the height of bad form, in D'Arcy's opinion.

"I'll let you off until we return, Lowthah!" he said magnanimously.

"Saved!" said Lowther fervently.

But for a moment it looked as if Monty Lowther was not to be saved. For Arthur Augustus glared at him so wrathfully that it appeared as if he was going to throw himself at the humorist of the Shell.

But Jack Blake saved the situation.

"About the curios!" he said hastily. "What do you think about it, Gussy?"

"I think it a good ideah!" said Arthur Augustus, turning from Lowther to his leader. "We might find somethin' verry valuable, deah boys, and as the old castle is anybody's p'perty, theah would be no harm in our stickin' to it!"

"What it?" demanded Manners.

"By 'it' I mean any old curio, deah boy!" explained D'Arcy. "One nevah knows, does one?"

"No, Gussy, one don't, as the fags would say!" said Tom Merry. "I vote we return to the place where we saw the old fossils——"

"Old gentlemen!" corrected D'Arcy softly.

"Fossils I said, and fossils I mean!" growled Tom Merry.

"But——"

"And then trot inside the castle, and

see if we can unearth any of its giddy secrets!" wound up Tom Merry.

The plan was agreed upon, and the juniors returned along the path. As they reached the old stone doorway, they saw the forms of the two curio-hunters turning down the hill towards Wayland.

"They've had enough!" said Digby.

"Pity we didn't bring a lamp!" observed Monty Lowther. "Gussy, why didn't you think of bringing a lamp with you?"

"Bai Jove, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy in surprise. "I weally did not think of it!"

"You wouldn't!" growled Lowther.

"Did you, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy softly.

Lowther flushed, and changed the subject hastily. But D'Arcy looked round at the juniors with a beaming smile. He had scored over the humorist of the Shell very neatly.

"Where are we going to start?" asked Lowther.

"At the beginning of the old hall," said Tom Merry.

The juniors turned and walked through

the old doorway into the great hall of the castle.

It was not the first time the juniors had been inside the old castle. There had once occurred some dramatic incidents in the vaults of the old place, when Levison's sister had visited St. Jim's.

The hall itself was made of stone—the walls, floor, and ceiling were all stone.

It was a quiet, dismal sort of place, and the juniors shivered slightly as they stood in the hall.

"What a blessed creepy place!" said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "But don't get nervous, deah boy! I'll look after you!"

"My hat! You couldn't look after a kid!" snorted Manners.

"Pewwaps not, deah boy. But I can look after you!" said D'Arcy, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Gussy's getting quite bright!" said Lowther, with a grin.

"He'll be getting a bright eye, if he checks me!" growled Manners darkly. "Bai Jove, Mannahs! If you—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry, and his voice went echoing and echoing round the old hall. "Stick to the bizz in hand."

"What bizz?" asked Blake. "Seems to me we're just standing in the giddy old place and looking up at the ceiling!"

"Start searching the walls for secret springs!" suggested Digby.

Tom Merry shook his head. "No good doing that, you chaps," he said. "It's the wooden walls of the rooms upstairs you want to tap for secret springs. These walls would not act like that!"

"Wathah not, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, with a nod. "I thought of that myself!"

"Then come upstairs!" said Jack Blake.

He led the way along the hall to the great stone staircase. There were sufficient holes in the walls to give them light enough to see where they were going.

They reached the first floor, and stood at the top of the stairs, staring about them. There was something weird and fascinating about the old castle.

St. Jim's was known to have been built in the fifteenth century, but the castle was certainly standing on the top of Wayland Hill years before that. Some of the oldest families in Wayland had relics of the castle which had been handed down as heirlooms.

"I don't think it would be any good going in there," said Blake suddenly, and his voice, though low, sounded all over the hall.

He pointed, as he spoke, to an aperture in the wall which had once been a doorway. But it was dark and forbidding beyond the aperture, and, as the juniors had no lamps, a search there would be useless.

"No, that's no good!" said Tom Merry. "Let's tackle the second floor. I've never been up there!"

"Nor have I!" said the other juniors in unison.

They discovered that the flight of stairs that led to the second floor was made of wood. The stairs creaked under their weight as they mounted them, and the sound seemed almost unreal as it went echoing and echoing through the old castle.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "This is a ghostly sort of place!"

"Wish we'd brought lamps!" growled Blake. "It's getting darker as we get higher!"

Blake was correct. It was certainly not so light halfway up the great wooden staircase as it was down on the first floor. And as they mounted, so it became darker.

Herries brought up the rear, with Towser still on the chain. Herries did not want his pet to go rambling over the castle on his own accord, for he knew not when he might find him again. The castle was a tremendous building, and anybody could hide in it for months and never be found.

But Towser suddenly stopped dead on the stairs.

"Come on, Towsey!" said Herries, tugging at the chain.

But Towser refused to "come on," and stood sniffing at the stairs.

"Perhaps he's found a rat!" said Tom Merry, looking round, as Herries spoke.

The juniors stopped as they saw that Herries' dog was not mounting the stairs with them.

"Come on, Towsey, old fellow!" said Herries, with another tug at the chain.

"Come on, old chap! Come, you beast! Towser, you rotter!"

Herries' affectionate appellations began to grow less affectionate as Towser obstinately refused to budge.

"Let him go!" said Tom Merry.

"What! I'd never find him again!" said Herries indignantly.

"Good job, too, bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

"I believe there's something there," went on Herries. "If there's any treasure in the place, trust old Towser to find it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther, his voice sounding deafening in the great stone building. "Towser's more likely to find a bone—or a kipper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries paid no heed to the laughter of his chums. It was not often that Towser refused to obey an order of his master's. The juniors made out that Towser pleased himself in everything he did, and that Herries gave his orders to suit Towser's doings.

But Herries had some control over his pet, and when he ordered the bulldog to "come on," it usually did so. But on this occasion Towser simply refused to budge.

Herries knelt down on the stairs, and peered closely at the old, rotting wood. But he could see nothing that could account for Towser's strange behaviour.

"Come on, old son!" said Blake impatiently. "Leave Towser there to worry out the bone for himself!"

"It isn't a bone!" said Herries quietly.

"There's something under this stair!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry briefly.

Herries flushed, and looked up at the leader of the Shell.

"I say, Tommy," he remonstrated, "that's hardly necessary, is it?"

Tom Merry stared.

"What do you mean, fathead?" he demanded.

"Well, I really believe there's something here," said Herries coldly. "After all, we're out to find curios, and Towser generally comes along when I pull his chain. There's no need for you to say 'rats' when I make a suggestion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh, my hat!"

"He means rats—rodents—chump!" said Blake. "Don't be an ass!"

"Oh!"

Herries looked rather crestfallen as he muttered an apology to Tom Merry.

The leader of the Shell nodded, and went down the stairs towards the bulldog. Towser was sniffing at a corner of the stairs, and when Tom Merry tried to move his head Towser simply growled.

"There's something," said Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know if it's rats or a bone!"

Tom Merry spoke as if it was bound to be one or the other that was attracting Towser's attention; but Herries was already convinced that Towser had "detected" hidden treasure.

"I'm going to bust that giddy stair!" he said resolutely.

The juniors looked at one another unsafely.

"I say, Herries, old chap," said Lowther slowly, "this place doesn't belong to us, you know."

"Who does it belong to?" demanded Herries warmly.

That was a question the juniors could not answer. The castle had belonged to an old hermit, but he had died years before. And there was no claimant to the property, and it had long been looked upon as a public curiosity.

"Well, don't bust in the stair," said Tom Merry. "Bust the side. You know where I mean—the support of the stair above."

"Undahnneath the stair above, deah boy!" supplemented D'Arcy.

Herries nodded, moved his dog's head, and kicked hard at the spot suggested. The wood crashed into splinters under the blow, and Herries tottered slightly forward.

"My hat!" he exclaimed as he

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Mellish took a magnifying glass, paper and pencil, and in a few moments had copied the plan and message from the old parchment found amongst Tom Merry's papers. (See Chapter 4.)

steadied himself. "The blessed place is hollow, at any rate!"

The juniors hardly expected it to be anything but hollow. They gathered round the broken stair, peering into the darkened aperture. The light was not too good, but sufficient for the juniors to see that the stairs were made as if boxes had been nailed one upon another.

"Push your hand in," said Tom Merry.

Herries, after a moment's hesitation, did as he was bid.

The next moment he withdrew his hand, for his fingers had grasped something cold.

"A bone!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Towser, he's found a treasure!" gasped Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Towser made one snap at the bone, and caught it with his teeth. Herries, flushing at the hilarity of his chums, let it go as if it had been red-hot.

"There's—there's something else!" he stammered, and groped frantically at the broken stair.

For a moment he could feel nothing but cobwebs and dust. But suddenly he felt something stiff, and his fingers closed upon it.

He dragged it forth to the light, and stared down at what he held.

The juniors ceased to laugh as they saw that Herries had found something beside the bone that Towser had all too evidently sniffed.

It was a piece of parchment; it looked like a piece of pigskin. It was covered with dust and dirt, whilst a spider had spun a cobweb over both sides.

"My hat! Looks like a piece of meat!" said Blake.

"That's something else Towser smelt out," said Lowther, with a grin.

But Towser, still holding the bone, just poked his nose forward, sniffed twice, and turned his head away.

"It's nothing to eat," said Manners, with emphasis. "Rub it with your hand-kerchief, Herries!"

Herries snorted.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Gussy, lend me your wipe, old son!"

"Wats!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Carry it home. It might be a piece of skin, or off the cover of a book," he said. "Here, I'll carry it, Herries."

Herries handed it over without a word, and rose to his feet.

"Whatever it is," he said triumphantly, "you must admit old Towser found it!"

"Towser found the bone, you ass!" said Lowther disparagingly.

"Well, perhaps he did," said Herries.

"But if that is a piece of gold, Towser gets the credit."

"And we'll get lost if we don't start back," said Tom Merry. "It's getting too thundering dark to hang about here!"

The juniors agreed, and turned down the stairs and out of the castle. They had found something, but what it was they did not as yet know.

But Tom Merry, as he felt the dirt-smothered thing in his pocket, had a feeling that there was something going to happen as a result of Herries' find!

CHAPTER 3. The Parchment.

"NOW for it!"
Thus Tom Merry.
He was sitting at the table in Study No. 10 of the Shell passage. Blake & Co. were there, and Manners and Lowther were busily making cocoa at the fire.

There was a damp rag before Tom Merry, and in his hand he held the dirty article discovered by Herries in the old castle on Wayland Hill.

The juniors had stopped for tea in Wayland before proceeding to St. Jim's and it was now nearly time for bed.
"I shouldn't make it too wet," said D'Arcy suddenly. "Theah might be w'ithin' on it, deah boy, and you'll wash it off!"

"Chaps don't write on bits of beef!" snorted Blake.

"Weally, Blake, we have no ideah what it is yet," said D'Arcy, fixing his monocle more firmly in his eye. "Tom Mewwy is just goin' to prove that it is meat."

But Tom Merry did not prove that it was meat. He proved otherwise.

Taking the rag in his hands, he rubbed carefully at the dirt. It came away fairly easily, leaving a piece of white skin. And there were certainly some written characters on the parchment.

"My hat!" said Herries excitedly. "A clue to some giddy treasure!"

Tom Merry did not answer. He was trying to make head or tail of the writing on the parchment. But the characters were too faint.

"Does your monocle magnify, Gussy?" he asked suddenly.

"Only a little, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "But I've a magnifying-glass in the studay!"

"Would you like to get it?"

"With pleasuah, deah boy!"
And the obliging wot of St. Jim's slid off the table where he had been sitting and left the study.

"What do you make of it, Tommy?" asked Blake.

Manners and Lowther had finished making the cocoa, and crowded round to peer at the yellowish parchment in their leader's hand.

"I don't know yet," replied Tom Merry. "But we'll jolly soon see!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not long gone. He came into the study, a powerful magnifying-glass in his hand, a few minutes after he had left.

"Heah you are, deah boy," he said.

"Thanks muchly!"

Tom Merry examined the parchment under the glass, and the watching juniors saw his eyes suddenly gleam. Surprise, then stupefaction, flushed across the Shell fellow's face.

"M-m-m-my hat!" he ejaculated.

"What's up?" asked the juniors in unison.

"M-m-m-my stars!" gasped Tom Merry. "Book of St. Jim's! Oh, jiminy!"

Blake snatched at the parchment, but Tom Merry drew it away.

"I—I—say, you chaps," he said, "listen to this!"

He peered again through the magnifying-glass, and read:

"For ye that finde ye olde book of Saint James shall also finde fame."

The juniors gasped.

"My hat! An old book! What the Dickens does that mean?" asked Jack Blake.

"Great pip!"

"Jumping Rattlesnakes!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Anythin' moah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes," replied Tom Merry. "There's a plan of some kind—evidently the place

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where the old book is hidden. But I'm blessed if I know what it means!"

"Let's have a look!" said Blake.

"No; better leave it to me," said Lowther, with a sage nod of his head.

"Rats!" said Manners. "You know jolly well that I'm the chap to solve the giddy mystery!"

All the juniors examined the parchment in turn, but they could not make head or tail of the plan. Tom Merry made a large copy of it on a piece of paper, but that helped them not one bit.

"M-m-m-my hat!" exclaimed Herries. "Fancy old Towser finding that!"

"He didn't, you ass!" growled Tom Merry. "It was a bone he was after!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. The juniors stared at him in surprise.

"What's the matter with you now?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy again.

Monty Lowther snorted.

"He's drifting again!" he said. "Let him talk to himself!"

"Wats, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I refuse to talk to myself! I've tumbled to the secwet, deah boy!"

The juniors stared again.

"Potty!" said Blake.

"Off his dot!" murmured Tom Merry. "It's all right, Gussy, old chap—"

"The bone, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "That has some bewain' on that plan!"

"Eh?"

"No fellah would put a bone with that parchment undah the stairs, unless it had something to do with the parchment," explained D'Arcy. "That is obvious, deah boys!"

The juniors looked at one another. They had not thought of that.

"Gussy's right!" said Tom Merry decisively. "I don't know how he thought of it, but—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you know perfectly well that my bwin is superior to your own!" said D'Arcy frigidly.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry coolly.

"If you say 'wats' to me, Tom Merry, I'll—"

"Do you usually kick up a shindy in another chap's study, Gussy?" asked Blake mildly.

D'Arcy frowned, and bit his lip. As a visitor to Tom Merry's study, he could not kick up a "shindy," as Blake called it.

"I'm sowwy, Tom Mewwy!" he said coldly. "I shall have to wait until I meet you in the gym, deah boy!"

"Thanks so much!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "I'll try and keep a bright heart until then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I refuse. I shall have to leave ough studay in a minute, Tom Mewwy!" said D'Arcy stiffly. "I considah you're takin' advantage of the fact that I'm a visitah!"

"What's that got to do with this giddy bone and parchment?" broke in Herries. "Settle your quarrels outside—"

"We're not quawwellin', Hewwies," said D'Arcy. "I absolutely refuse to quawwel with a fellah in his own studay!"

"About the bone, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Your suggestion that the bone and the plan have something to do with one another is sound. But the question is—"

"What?" said the juniors together.

"Exactly!"

"Dish out the cocoa, Monty," said Manners. "And we'll think it out while we're drinking it. But, look here, you chaps, this has got to be kept dark."

"Rather!"

"Mum's the word, deah boys!"

On that point the juniors were agreed. It would not do to let the whole of St. Jim's know that they had discovered a parchment, bearing words which suggested that there was an ancient book hidden in the old castle which had some connection with St. Jim's.

It was obvious that the reference to Saint James could only be of St. James's College—cut down to St. Jim's, for short, by the pupils thereof.

And Monty Lowther dishied out the cocoa to Blake & Co. and the young studymates, and the juniors settled down to think what the bone had to do with the plan on the parchment.

But their hopes of keeping the matter dark were destined to fall through.

Baggy Trimble, the fat sneak of the Fourth, had been passing Study No. 10 in the Shell passage when he heard the word "plan."

Baggy Trimble could think of little else besides food. And "plan" must assuredly mean that Tom Merry and Blake & Co. were making plans for a feed.

Trimble firmly believed that he who got in first at a feed was entitled to the largest portion. And the fat junior had no scruples in listening at the keyhole in an endeavour to find out where the food was to be placed prior to the feed.

But it was nothing about food that Baggy Trimble heard. It was about the book referred to on the parchment Herries had found under the stair in the old castle on Wayland Hill.

At first he was inclined to turn away in disgust. But as he listened, Baggy Trimble began to grow interested, and listened intently.

He hurried away to Study No. 2 at last, in the Fourth Form passage, which he shared with Percy Mellish, a junior whose ways were not the ways of the majority of the Fourth-Formers.

Percy Mellish was a cad of the first water. He had few friends in the Fourth or any other form. Only fellows of his own kidney would have anything to do with him.

He was in the study when Baggy Trimble entered, a smile on his fat face.

"My hat, Mellish!" exclaimed Trimble. "There's something doing!"

Mellish stared.

"What are you talking about, you fat idiot?" he asked, with a sneer. "On the track of somebody else's feed again?"

"Rats!" snorted Baggy Trimble. "Listen!"

In a few moments Mellish was acquainted with what Baggy Trimble had heard at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage. Quite the majority of fellows in the Fourth would have kicked Baggy Trimble out of the study when he acknowledged having played the eaves-dropper.

But not so Mellish.

When Baggy Trimble had told his story, Mellish's eyes were glistening.

"Look here, Baggy!" he said. "I'm blessed if I know what the plan means. But if it interests Tom Merry and his crowd, then it interests me! If the book of St. James is valuable, moreover, why shouldn't we have the cash, instead of them?"

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Trimble, his eyes almost starting out of his head.

"Do you mean we should p-p-p-pinch their plan?"

"Why not?" asked Mellish coolly.

"M-m-m-my hat!" stammered Trimble.

It was some time before the fat sneak of the Fourth could get over his astonishment. Then visions of feeds unlimited came before his eyes—feeds purchased from the proceeds of the sale of the book of Saint James.

Baggy Trimble had not yet thought of the fact that the book had to be found before it could be sold. Had he thought of it, it might have troubled him as much as it was troubling Tom Merry & Co.

Before they could further discuss the matter, the bell rang for bed.

CHAPTER 4.

Mellish's Scheme.

"A NYBODY awake?" Mellish asked that question in a low voice.

The lights had been put out in the Fourth Form dormitory more than an hour before Mellish sat up in his bed and asked the question.

"There was no reply." "Blake!" Blake was fast asleep, and did not reply.

Mellish called half a dozen names, in the same low tones, but he received no answer.

He slipped out of bed, pulled on his jacket over his pyjamas, and crept out of the dormitory. Baggy Trimble, who would have known where the sneak of the Fourth was going was fast asleep, and Mellish allowed him to remain in that happy state.

Baggy Trimble was a useful accomplice in some ways, but as a night marauder Baggy Trimble was useless.

Mellish crept up into the Shell dormitory, and softly opened the door. There was not a sound, save for the steady breathing of the sleeping fellows.

"Anybody awake?" asked Mellish, in the same low tones he had used in his own dormitory.

There was no reply, and Percy Mellish crept into the dormitory and walked on his toes towards Tom Merry's bed.

The sneak of the Fourth was perfectly sure where the hero of the Shell slept. Practically all the Fourth-Formers knew where to find any particular Shell fellow, and the Shell fellows were acquainted with the exact whereabouts of the Fourth-Formers after lights out.

"Merry!" whispered Mellish. Tom Merry did not reply, for the simple reason that he was fast asleep, and did not hear Mellish—a fact for which the cad was duly thankful.

Mellish did not hesitate any longer. He felt in Tom Merry's pockets and extracted all the papers they contained, and with them tightly clenched in his hand, the sneak of the Fourth crept out of the dormitory.

"So far, so good!" he muttered, as he closed the door softly behind him.

Mellish did not at once return to his own dormitory, but crept into the nearest study and shut the door. Then, taking a small piece of candle from his pocket, he lit it and stood it on the table.

But the sneak was careful enough to place an envelope under the candle first. Grease on the table would have told a tale.

Then, from another pocket, Mellish took a magnifying glass, paper and pencil, and in a few moments had copied the plan and message from the old parchment found amongst Tom Merry's papers.

Snuffing the candle, the sneak of the Fourth thrust it into his pocket with indifference to the fact that the grease was running.

Five minutes later he had replaced all the papers in Tom Merry's pockets, and was back in the Fourth Form dormitory. "Mellish!"

Mellish whitened suddenly, and he gave a gasp of fear.

"Y-yes!" he whispered. "It's all right—it's Trimble!" said the fat junior. "Have you got it?"

"Shut up, you ass!" growled Mellish. "Somebody might hear! I've got it all right!"

Baggy Trimble gave a fat chuckle, and Mellish crept back into his bed. The fat junior wisely forbore asking more questions until a more suitable opportunity presented itself.

The fact that he had acted in a mean manner did not prevent Percy Mellish from sleeping well. There was no sign that he had been up during the night.

No. 51.—LESLIE CLAMPE.



A cad and a rotter of the New House Shell Form. Has no chums among the decent fellows of St. Jim's. Has been associated with Blake and Crooke and the rest of the cads of the school in all manner of low-down pranks. Has so far managed to avoid expulsion, but his time may come.

when he tumbled out of bed at the sound of rising-bell the next morning.

In fact, he was up earlier than usual, for the sneak of the Fourth was never very eager to turn out.

It being Sunday morning, there would be no classes, and the juniors dressed straight away for chapel.

Blake & Co. did not speak to Tom Merry until after chapel, when they met the Shell fellows in the Fourth Form passage.

"Hallo, Tommy!" said Blake cheerily. "Coming to the castle to-day?"

Trimble, who was standing by the door of Study No. 2, chuckled softly.

"No," answered Tom Merry. "I think the best thing to do is wait until Wednesday. We can then get some tea in Wayland after the search. If we go to-day, we shall have to return before it is dark—there's only the one train, you see."

"There's the bikes," said Blake. "But I think you're right."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy approvingly. "We shall probably get hungry afteh the search, deah boys, and can go to the tuck-shop for tea."

The other juniors being agreeable, the plan suggested by Tom Merry was settled.

Trimble conveyed the news to Mellish with all speed.

"They're not going to start the search until Wednesday afternoon," he said. "That gives you plenty of time."

Mellish nodded. "That's so," he said. "I think I'll get the letter written."

Baggy Trimble hurried to get pen and ink and paper. It seemed to the fat junior that the quicker he moved, the sooner would start the time of unlimited feeds.

Mellish sat down without troubling to thank his fat accomplice, and puckered his brow thoughtfully. He glanced several times at an advertisement in a Sunday paper, and from there back to the notepaper in front of him.

Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he scribbled industriously for five minutes. He hung down the pen at last, blotted the letter, and passed it across to Baggy Trimble, who was watching him from the depths of the armchair.

"How do you think that will do?" he asked.

Baggy Trimble took the proffered letter, and read it through quickly. Had either Tom Merry & Co., or Blake & Co. seen it, they would have found plenty of food for thought—and plenty of reason for wiping the study floor with the cads of the Fourth.

"That will do," said Trimble, when he had finished reading. "My hat, you'd make a first-class criminal, Mellish!"

Mellish flushed. "Oh, would I, you fat freak!" he snorted. "Not such a prize porker as you'd make, any old how!"

"Oh, really, Mellish—"

"Rats! I'm going to the post."

And Mellish left the study, bearing the letter in his hand, and banging the study door behind himself.

Baggy Trimble gave a fat chuckle as he mentally pictured the feeds that the adoption of Mellish's plan might mean to them.

"My hat!" he murmured. "If it only comes off!"

It has been written that the plans of mice and men often go wrong. Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. had made plans that morning, and so had Mellish and Trimble.

It was absolutely certain that one of the plans would not work out properly. The question therefore arose—who was to succeed? Tom Merry & Co., with their chums of the Fourth, ought to succeed as they were acting strictly on the straight.

But Mellish's plan was a cunning one, and purely on that account might be successfully carried out.

On Tuesday morning there arrived a letter for Mellish, which Baggy Trimble promptly carried to Study No. 2. Mellish received it with shining eyes when he had looked at the postmark, and quickly ripped open the envelope.

It took him but a few seconds to read the few typewritten words.

"Mr. Ferguson, of Ferguson & Ferguson, is coming down to Rylcombe to-day to discuss the matter, Baggy," he said, as he placed the envelope and letter in the fire. "I'll meet him at the station."

Baggy started. "Tisn't a half!" he exclaimed. "How are you going to get away?"

Mellish smiled. "Oh, I can easily bluff old Lathom!" he said with a sneer. "I'll ask him if I can go to meet an old friend, who is passing through Rylcombe on his way to London. The silly old buffer will give me permission all right!"

Mellish proved correct. Mr. Lathom, quite unsuspecting the real reason for

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Mellish's desire to leave afternoon classes early, accepted his explanation and granted the request.

Thus, at five minutes past four o'clock that afternoon, Percy Mellish was waiting for the train from London to arrive. The train came into the station at ten minutes past the hour, and pulled up with a jerk.

There was only one passenger who alighted, and Mellish made his way towards him and raised his cap politely.

"Mr. Ferguson?" he asked quickly.

The passenger nodded.

"That is my name," he replied. "And you are Master Mellish?"

"Yes," answered the junior from St. Jim's. "Perhaps you'd care for some tea, sir?"

Mr. Ferguson nodded.

"A splendid proposition!" he said agreeably. "One can usually appreciate the beverage after a railway journey."

"Rather!" said Percy Mellish. "This way, sir!"

The subject which had brought Mr. Ferguson to Ryelcombe had not broached until they were seated before a table in the Ryelcombe confectioners, and tea had been ordered.

Mellish thanked his lucky stars that he had sufficient money to stand the tea. It would have been considerably less impressive if he had had to converse with Mr. Ferguson on the railway platform.

Mr. Ferguson was a man of middle age, his hair turning slightly grey at the temples. His expression was one that could be called benevolent, although his eyes were steel-grey and keen.

Mellish avoided those eyes as much as possible, they sent a shiver down his back.

The first part of Mellish's plan had met with success—he had before him Mr. Ferguson, of Ferguson & Ferguson, curio dealers, of Charing Cross, London!

CHAPTER 5. The Compact.

"NOW, Master Mellish, we'll get to business!"

Mr. Ferguson snapped his mouth shut when he had uttered that remark.

Mellish nodded.

"The position, roughly, is this, sir," he said slowly and in a low voice. "I have in my possession an ancient parchment, a copy of which I sent you. It refers to an old book. The castle was built long before the fifteenth century, was St. Jim's—that's my school—was built."

"Yes?"

"The book, therefore, must be valuable. What I want to know is, what are you prepared to offer me for the book when it is found?"

Mr. Ferguson looked surprised.

"I gathered from your letter that the book was already in your possession!" he said quickly. "Is not that the case?"

"Well, hardly," said Mellish. "I know where the book is, and I want to know that I have a buyer for it when I've got it."

Mr. Ferguson frowned.

"I quite thought you would have the book, my boy," he said. "I need not have stopped here, it appears."

"Well, there is no reason why you should not see that it is an antique book, sir!" said Mellish eagerly. "Could you come with me to the old castle on Wayland Hill and help—ahem!—I mean, find it?"

"What, now?"

"No; it is too late in the day. Can you go to-morrow?"

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Mr. Ferguson hesitated, and consulted a small notebook he took from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Yes, I think so," he said at last. "I've an appointment in Wayland to-morrow, and could meet you afterwards."

"Good!" said Mellish. "I'll be at the station with lamps at two-thirty. How will that do?"

"Quite all right!" said the dealer briskly. "It is understood that I, on behalf of my firm, make you the first offer."

"Rather!" agreed Mellish.

But Percy Mellish knew perfectly well that Mr. Ferguson, of Ferguson & Ferguson, would not necessarily be the buyer of the book. Much depended on who offered the highest price.

Mellish saw his victor into the Wayland train before he returned to St. Jim's. The snail of the Fourth was in high spirits. Everything was going the right way so far.

But Percy Mellish received a shock when he reached the school.

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. had gone to the old castle on Wayland Hill.

Baggy Trimble met him with the information when he arrived in Study No. 2.

"What have they gone to-day for?" asked Mellish uneasily.

"Blessed if I know, Mellish," said Baggy Trimble. "But they got permission to go over on their bikes. They took lamps, and a few cakes and things with them. That's all I know."

Mellish frowned.

"Hang!" he said bitterly. "That puts the tin lid on it! I've made a compact with the Ferguson Johnny to take him to the castle and help find the book to-morrow afternoon! The rotters might find the blessed thing to-day!"

Baggy Trimble shook his head and chuckled.

"No!" he said with emphasis. "I happen to know that they have not yet been able to make head or tail of the plan! It's very vague, as I heard D'Arcy say."

Mellish took from his pocket the paper on which was copied the plan from the parchment Herries had found in the old stair at the castle.

He studied the plan for a few minutes, and looked up at the fat junior.

"It's a bit stiff," he remarked. "Blest if I can make head or tail of it!"

Baggy Trimble's grin suddenly vanished. He had thought the book was as good as found. But Mellish seemed to think otherwise.

"My hat," he ejaculated. "Don't say you won't be able to find it! Let's have a look!"

The two sneaks sat down at the table in the study, their heads bent over the copy of the plan.

And there was certainly cause for mystification. The plan consisted of two straight lines formed in the shape of a cross, and under the bottom line was marked {33}. Underneath the figures appeared a mark that looked like an arrow.

Beneath the arrow was a small star, and directly below that was an oblong, which might have meant anything. But in the centre of the oblong was drawn a diamond.

"My stars!" groaned Baggy Trimble, as he peered down at the plan. "That's a giddy jig-saw puzzle, if you like!"

Mellish grinned uneasily.

"That Ferguson Johnny will make something out of it, I'll bet!" he said hopelessly. "He must be used to muckling about with this kind of stuff!"

"Let's hope so!" said Baggy Trimble.

"What we've got to hope is that the beggars don't find it before we get there to-morrow afternoon!" said Mellish shortly. "But I don't suppose we shall be beaten."

"We'll get licked if we don't do our prep!" growled Trimble. "Blake & Co. and the Shell fellows haven't any to do."

"Lucky beggars! Crawled round. Latham and Linton, I expect!" said Mellish, half-sneeringly and half-angrily.

And the occupants of Study No. 2 settled down to their prep.

Meanwhile, Blake & Co., with Tom Merry & Co., had cycled over to Wayland Hill, and had left their machines at the foot of the incline below the castle.

They had asked permission to go to Wayland, not from Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton, but from Mr. Railton, the School Housekeeper. And the cause they had given was perfectly honest—one they had said they were on the track of something that might be of great interest to St. Jim's.

Mr. Railton, knowing the juniors as he did, made no demur. He stipulated that if they did not do their prep that evening they were to get it done first thing in the morning. They agreed to that with alacrity.

Baggy Trimble was therefore mistaken when he informed Mellish that the two Co's. had no prep to do.

Up on the hill the juniors lighted the big lamps they had borrowed from Taggles, the school porter.

"Now, I vote we settle the matter of the plan first," said Blake. "It's no good hunting all over this place for secret springs in the hope of finding the right one. That would take years!"

"Yas, wathah, Blake! I must say I agree with you, dear," said D'Arcy.

"Then, as Gussy agrees with Blake, he must be right!" said Monty Lowther firmly. "That's that settled, at any rate!"

"But the plan isn't!" said Tom Merry practically. "I think the suggestion was that we should look for a mark 33 on the walls first of all. Then perhaps we should be able to find out what the oblong arrangement means."

"Yas, wathah, dear boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"But I adhere to my statement, Tom Mewby, that the bone has something to do with the giddy mystery!"

Manners sighed.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured. "Haven't we jawed that over, Gussy? You had four cups of cocoa on Saturday night thinking about it, and even that didn't help you!"

"Weally, Mannahs, you must admit that theah is sound sense in my remark —," began D'Arcy.

"Light the giddy way, Gussy, and not so much jaw!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Mind your napper, Gussy!" shouted Monty Lowther in alarm.

The swell of the Fourth ducked his head quickly and passed into the old stone hall of the castle. The juniors chuckled.

"Nearly biffed your napper that time, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther.

D'Arcy raised his head and looked behind him. He could see no reason why he had been warned to duck his head.

"Weally, Lowthah, I see no reason why I should have ducked my nappah," he said severely. "I trust you weren't wotting?"

"Oh, no!" answered Monty Lowther. "I was thinking you might knock your head as you entered the old door."

Arthur Augustus stared at the humorist of the Shell in surprise.

"Weally, Lowthah, you must know



"Bai Jove, Figgay!" exclaimed D'Arcy, the elegant swell of St. Jim's no longer, for the dust of the old castle seemed to have been accumulating on him since the place had been built. "Figgay! How did you come to be heah, deah boy?" (See Chapter 8.)

that the old doorway is nearly twenty feet high!" he said. "What—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for hilawity, deah boys I—"

"We do, though!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus stared at his leader. "I trust you're not gettin' nerry, deah boy!" he said anxiously. "Wely on me, I'll see you safely through!"

It was Blake's turn to stare.

"Who's getting nerry?" he demanded warmly.

"Well, you appear to be talking a lot of wot!" said D'Arcy. "I thought pewwaps the darkness and silence of the castle was gettin' on your nerves, deah boy."

"Ass!" said Blake witheringly.

"Bai Jove—Ow!"

D'Arcy broke off with a yell as somebody pinched his arm.

"What did you do that for?" he demanded, swinging round, to meet Tom Merry.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Just to let you know that there are other people here besides Blake and yourself," he said. "Gussy, if you're going to stop in this giddy hall all night and argue, when are we going to find that book of Saint James?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"There he goes again!" groaned Lowther.

D'Arcy fixed his monocle more firmly

in his eye and surveyed the Shell juniors with withering scorn. Then he turned to Blake.

"I say, Blake, deah boy," he said loftily, "I pwesume we can continue the search without Tom Mewwy and Lowthah?"

"Eh?"

"Because I'm afwaid I shall have to thwash them within an inch of their lives!" went on D'Arcy firmly. "I wegwet to have to spoil the harmony of the company, but—"

"We'll jolly well spoil the beauty of your face, you dummy!" growled Tom Merry. "We've been in this giddy hall ten minutes, and haven't budged an inch! Berr! Shut up!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy—"

But Tom Merry was gone. He had tired of Arthur Augustus' remarks, and was proceeding up the stairs, lamp in hand.

"Come heah, you Shell wottah!" shouted D'Arcy. "I'm—"

"Shush!" said Blake.

"Eh? I mean, I beg—"

"Don't wake the baby, ass!" said Blake severely. "How do you know that there is not somebody living here?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter of the juniors echoed and re-echoed through the great stone building.

Blake followed Tom Merry up the stairs, leaving the swell of St. Jim's to

glare defiance and wrath at his back.

They gathered round the stair which Herries had broken on the Saturday before, and held their lamps high whilst they looked round at the greyish walls.

"This is where we ought to start, I think," said Tom Merry slowly. "Have a hunt round, you chaps, and see what you can find."

"I'll try the landing overhead," said Blake. "Come on, Herries!"

Herries followed Blake up the stairs and Tom Merry, with Manners and Lowther, swung their lamps round from where they stood, peering intently at the walls for the sign "53."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, obliging yet silent, was examining the first floor landing with Digby.

"I firmly believe the bone has something to do with the plan," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I am suah that when we have selved the middle of the bone bein' with the plan we shall have no difficulty in findin' the book, Digby!"

"Perhaps not, Gussy," said Digby, with a thoughtful frown. "You are probably right in your contention."

"Hi! Come up here, you chaps!"

Blake's voice sounded as if he was shouting through a megaphone in the great building. He positively drowned Digby's words to D'Arcy, and the two juniors raced after Tom Merry & Co. up the stairs.

Blake's eyes were shining as he stood on the landing of the second floor.

"Look!" he said excitedly. "Look at that giddy place!"

The juniors stared at the spot indicated by Blake's outstretched finger.

From where they stood it appeared like a great black cavity in the wall. The light from the lamps did not show any floor beyond the black square that seemed part of the wall and landing.

"I tripped up slightly," explained Blake eagerly, "and the giddy wall dropped back! My hat! 'Spose we've tumbled on the right spot first time!"

"Great pip!"

Tom Merry took a step forward and held his lamp in front of him. The reason why there appeared to be no floor was then made apparent.

The floor was there right enough, but it was pitch-black, unlike the grey walls of the hall and landings. The juniors could not see the ceiling.

The Shell leader turned to the juniors. "May be worth following up," he said slowly. "Shall we have a look round this place?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy eagerly. "I weally think Blake has accidentally tumbled on the woom wheah the book is, deah boys!"

"Only don't touch the walls!" said Herries hastily.

"Why not?" asked the juniors in unison.

"Because the giddy wall might fly back into its place again!" said Herries. "I'm not anxious to spend a night in this rotten place!"

"My hat! Herries is right!" said Tom Merry approvingly.

"Yaas, wathah! Come on, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his lamp held high in the air and thrust well forward, led the way into the dark cavity in the wall.

The other juniors followed, but they could see nothing beyond the range of their lamps.

"M-m-my hat!" ejaculated Blake. "What a creepy sort of— Ow!"

The juniors swung round on their heels as they heard a slight, ghostly click behind them. They stood, fascinated, their eyes almost starting from their heads, as they saw the wall moving quickly into the opening.

"Look out!" roared Tom Merry, and sprang forward.

But he was too late!

The floor upon which they stood shivered as the wall slid back and met the sides with a dull, unearthly thud.

"Trapped!" gasped Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 6.

The Missing Juniors.

"B"ED, you kids!"

Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, poked his head into the Fourth Form Common-room to make that remark.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, who shared Study No. 9 with Ernest Levison, looked up quickly.

"I say, Kildare!" he cried.

Kildare, who had turned almost immediately to rouse the juniors from their studies, hurried back into the Common-room as he heard his name called.

"Hallo?" he asked cheerily.

"Blake & Co. haven't returned," said Cardew. "Are they stopping out all night?"

Kildare started.

"Eh? Are they still out?" he asked quickly.

"Yes. At least, I haven't seen them since they returned, if they are back."

"I'll have a look round!" said Kildare, and, with a nod, passed on.

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The juniors made their way up to the dormitory in couples, chatting as they went.

But there was no sign of Blake & Co. Kildare hurried along the Fourth Form passage calling for Blake. But he received no answer.

Leaving the Fourth Form quarters, the captain of St. Jim's walked quickly to the Shell studies. He poked his head into No. 10, which was usually occupied by Tom Merry & Co. But the study was in darkness.

He left the door open, and knocked at No. 11.

"Come in!"

Kildare went in. Harry Noble, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn were there, poring over a game of chess that was being played by the two first-named.

"Seen Tom Merry?" asked Kildare.

"No; they went out somewhere, with Blake & Co.," said Glyn. "Haven't they come back?"

"Don't know," said Kildare. "Where did they go, do you know?"

"No; they didn't say," said Harry Noble. "I say, Kildare—"

"Bed, you chaps!" said Kildare, and hurried away.

Two minutes later, he was knocking at the door of Mr. Railton's study. He did not wait to be asked to enter, but walked straight in.

Mr. Railton was sitting before the fire, reading a newspaper. He looked up quickly as the captain of St. Jim's entered.

"Nothing wrong, Kildare?" he asked, as he noted the Sixth-Former's puckered brow.

"Did Merry say when he was coming back, sir?" asked Kildare, by way of reply.

"Back! Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "They should have been back long ago, Kildare!"

"I can't find them, sir!" said Kildare. "I wondered if they'd permission to stay out late!"

"Indeed! I gave them no such permission," said Mr. Railton. "Have any of the juniors seen them, Kildare?"

"I asked Noble, Glyn, and Dane, sir, but they did not even know where they were going," said Kildare. "Perhaps some of the Fourth-Formers might know something, sir! I'll go up to their dormitory!"

"Please do, Kildare, and let me know if they are there!" said Mr. Railton.

He ran as the door closed behind the stalwart captain of St. Jim's. It was unlike Tom Merry & Co., and Jack Blake & Co. to stay out beyond their appointed time.

Kildare hurried up to the Fourth Form dormitory.

"Blake!" he called.

"Not here!" answered Micky Mulvaney.

"Guess they're still out!" said Jerrold Lupton Lupton shortly.

"Anybody know where they went?" he demanded.

"Yes, rather—ow! Mellish, you beast—"

Baggy Trimble broke off with a howl as the cad of the Fourth pinched his arm.

"Shut up, you fat ass!" whispered Mellish fiercely.

But Kildare came striding down the dormitory, and stopped before the fat junior of the Fourth.

"Do you know where they went, Trimble?" he asked sharply.

"Y-y-yes, please, Kildare," said Trimble, and Mellish groaned aloud.

"Where?" snapped Kildare.

"Out on their b-b-bikes, Kildare," said Trimble nervously.

"Oh, you prize fathead!" growled Kildare. "What the dickens do you mean?"

Kildare, dummo; I only know they went out, Kildare," said Trimble hastily.

"Then what did you shut up for—sounded as if somebody pinched you!" said Kildare sternly. "I suppose you're not keeping anything dark?"

"Me?" ejaculated Trimble, who had had time to recover himself. "Not at all, Kildare. I wouldn't do such a thing! Mellish accidentally trod on my toes, and I yelled. That's all!"

Kildare glared at the fat junior, and from him to Mellish. The sneak of the Fourth dropped his eyes, and proceeded to undress.

"It was an accident," he muttered.

Kildare turned without a word, and walked quickly out of the dormitory back to Mr. Railton's study.

"They went out on their bicycles, sir," he said, as he closed the door. "That's all I can find out."

Mr. Railton looked annoyed.

"That's the worst of giving juniors passes!" he said. "They invariably exceed the limit of time given them!"

Kildare shook his head.

"Tom Merry & Co. wouldn't do that, sir!" he said quietly. "Nor would Blake and his chums. They're not that kind, sir!"

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I think I'd better go and see Dr. Holmes, Kildare," he said. "Perhaps you would see lights out in the dormitories!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Kildare left the study with Mr. Railton, and they parted at the top of the stairs at the end of the corridor. Kildare looked as anxious as Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry & Co. were not the kind that took liberties with passes granted them. They played the straight game. Something must have happened to the juniors, and Kildare was anxious.

Mr. Railton found the Head was not in his study, and went over to his private quarters, where he was received at once.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Mr. Railton," said Dr. Holmes.

Dr. Holmes, the highly respected headmaster of St. Jim's, looked anxious as he noted Mr. Railton's worried expression.

"I gave Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell permission to go out this evening, sir," said Mr. Railton quickly.

"And Blake, D'Arcy, Herries and Digby went with them. They have not returned."

"Dear me!" said the Head, with a frown. "That is indeed very reckless of the juniors, Mr. Railton. Did you state a time on their pass?"

"Yes, sir; I stipulated nine o'clock. I understood they required permission to go out, as they were searching for something that might have been of interest to the school, sir," said Mr. Railton.

"They are juniors that can be trusted—I saw no harm in granting their request."

"Quite right, Mr. Railton—quite right!" said Dr. Holmes hastily. "A most extraordinary request, however. Have you any idea what they meant?"

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I'm afraid not, sir!" he said.

"Merry is a junior who can be trusted; he would not ask the favour if he were not fully justified in doing so. They have something up their sleeves, but I repeat, sir, they are to be trusted!"

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Doubtless Mr. Railton. Perhaps they went out of the district and lost their train back?" he said.

"They took their bicycles, sir, as Kildare ascertained from the juniors of the Shell and Fourth," said Mr. Railton.

"I should have thought they would have

telephoned had they met with an accident, or sustained punctures."

The Head nodded.

"They—they might have fallen foul of some unscrupulous persons!" he murmured distrustfully.

Mr. Raitlon smiled.

"It would take a good number of unscrupulous persons to hold seven juniors as plucky as they are, sir," he said lightly.

Dr. Holmes nodded again.

"I will 'phone the police, and ask if anything has been seen of them, Mr. Raitlon," he said. "I do not think there is cause for you to worry further over the matter."

"Thank you, sir!" said Mr. Raitlon.

And he returned to his own study.

Kildare was awaiting him.

"They have not returned, sir—" said the captain of St. Jim's quietly.

"No; but I think there is no cause to worry, Kildare," said Mr. Raitlon, with a smile. "They are pretty good chaps, you know."

"Rather, sir!" replied Kildare. "I'll get off, then, sir. Good-night!"

"Good-night," Kildare said.

But the juniors in the Fourth and Shell dormitories had not dismissed the matter quite so quickly as had Kildare and Mr. Raitlon.

Mellish and Trimble knew where they had gone, but they did not speak. It was no business of theirs, as Mellish remarked to Trimble in a whisper, and if they had come across rotten roads and had dozens of punctures, which would necessitate their walking from the castle to St. Jim's, then so much the better.

Mellish, needless to say, did not speak the minds of the rest of the Fourth.

There was real anxiety for the absent juniors, especially as no one apparently knew where they had gone.

But even Mellish did not give one thought to the possibility of the two Co.'s being trapped in the old Castle on Wayland Hill.

CHAPTER 7. In the Castle.

"MY hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. stood staring at the wall when it had swung to its proper place, immediately after they had entered the secret room.

"Trapped!" said Tom Merry. "My hat! Here's a giddy go!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But there'll soon be a wosue-party out, deah boys!"

"Perhaps!" said Herries dolorously. "We didn't say where we were going, you know."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, Hewwies!"

"You wouldn't!"

Tom Merry chuckled light-heartedly.

"Don't start rowing," he said. "There's enough to think about without that. I expect Baggy Trimble knows where we came. He jolly well knows everything, the fat freak!"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy! I must say Baggy Twimble is a fat sneak. But I weel don't think he would tell anybody when he knew we were not back: The cad would be jolly glad we were up against somethin'!"

Blake nodded.

"Gussy's right," he said. "The question is, what are we going to do?"

Tom Merry looked at the lamps doubtfully.

"Will the lamps last out the night, do you think?" he asked.

"I filled them myself," said Blake.

"They might, if we turn them down a bit."

"Then we'll do so," said Tom Merry.

"I'm blessed if I care about spending the night here with a light! It would be jolly creepy in this dingy hole without a light, though!"

The lamps were turned down. The position was not improved by their doing so, for it narrowed the white patch of light in which they stood. Beyond the patch they could not see.

"I'm jollay glad we brougnt some gwub!" said D'Arcy. "We shan't starve, and there'll be a search-party out before long, deah boys. Keep a light heart!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Speaks like a giddy old grandmother!" chuckled Lowther. "We're all right, Gussy; it's you we worry about!"

"Veeally Lowthah, I fail to see any reason for you to wowsy gwah me!" said D'Arcy stiffly.

No. 52.—PATRICK REILLY.



From Ulster. One of the four chums of whose little band Dick Julian may be looked upon as leader. Has a keen sense of humor, and a great love of a practical joke. Full of fun and good spirits, and altogether a thoroughly decent little fellow. Popular with all but the eads. (Study No. 5.)

"What about the crease in your bags?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

"Bust the bags, deah boy!" said D'Arcy firmly.

"Wh-wh-what!"

"The posish is one in which one cannot care about bags, deah boy," went on Gussy serenely. "The thing is, keep a stout heart!"

"Good old Gussy!" murmured the juniors.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys—I mean, not at all!"

For all his elegance, and his great thought for his appearance when he was in an awkward position, the swell of St. Jim's was a companion to be admired. He cared not, at such times, for his clothes, he cared only for the well-being of his chums.

Arthur Augustus, too, was possessed of plenty of pluck. Not for worlds would he have admitted that the creepy old castle sent shivers down his spine, or that his thoughts were wandering to the comfortable, warm bed in the Fourth Form dormitory at St. Jim's.

"I think, as we're not tired, the best

thing to do is continue the search," said D'Arcy practically. "No good moping 'vahn the fact that we're trapped, deah boys!"

"Good old Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Talk about pouring oil on troubled waters! You're a chap to be with in time of stress!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy innocently. "Twust me to buck you up, deah boys!"

The juniors did not laugh, although they wanted to. D'Arcy never thought for an instant that Tom Merry & Co. and his own chums were quite capable of keeping their spirits up without his help.

"Then let's look round," said Tom Merry. "We might find a decent snug place to sleep later on."

"This is a room, not a wilderness, you chump!" said Monty Lowther. "Where the dickens do you think the place ends?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom Merry lightly. "But we'll jolly soon find out!"

He led the way round the room, holding his lamp cautiously in front of him. But, after moving a couple of dozen paces, he came face to face with a blank wall.

They moved in the opposite direction, and met with the same success.

"Twy walkin' wound the sides of the woom," said D'Arcy. "Theah might be a door, or somethin'!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Blake, you take your chumps—I mean, chums—round one way, and I and Manners and Lowther will meet you at the other side of the room," he said.

By the way in which Tom Merry spoke one might have thought they were indeed in the wilderness that Monty Lowther had mentioned. But the fact was that the room was very large; it was fully twenty yards long and as many broad.

The ceiling they could not see, so they could not form any opinion as to how high it was.

Tom Merry & Co. commenced to walk round the room in one direction, keeping close to the walls, and Blake & Co. followed their example, and moved in the opposite direction.

At the second corner they came to Tom Merry gave a cry.

"Stairs!" he said excitedly. "Over here, you chaps!"

Blake & Co. hurried across the floor to where Tom Merry & Co. were standing. They needed no showing to see that Tom Merry was right.

The stairway went downwards, and formed a striking contrast to the massive stairway in which they found the ancient parchment.

The one they were now facing was scarcely wide enough to admit of two people passing down the stairs side by side, whereas the main stairway would permit of quite half a dozen fully grown men to walk up or down abreast.

"Coming down?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy instantly. "Might be a secwet way of escape for the fellahs that used to live heah, deah boys!"

The juniors nodded, and Tom Merry and Manners led the way down the stairs. They went cautiously, for they knew not what lay beyond the range of their lamps.

"What's ahead, Tommy?" asked Blake.

"Blackness!" said Tom Merry tersely.

"Nevah mind, deah boys! Stick it!" said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

Tom Merry came to the end of the stairs at last, and they were in what appeared to be another huge room. There

was not the slightest gleam of light that would show there was a window, although the juniors knew full well that the moon was high in the skies, and the night consequently bright.

"Another giddy room!" said Manners. "Blessed if I know where the air comes from! There's no window that I can see."

It was a puzzle, for the air was quite fresh down in the room.

"We must be on the first floor now," said Tom Merry musily. "We started on the second floor, you remember. Cos Blake and Herries went up, whilst Gussy and Dig went down to the first floor. We stood at the middle of the stairs, where Herries busted in the stair."

"Yaas, wathah! I call that veal deduction!" said D'Arcy admiringly.

"Therefore, there should be another flight of stairs leading to the ground floor," said Tom Merry quietly. "Come on, round the room, like we did upstairs."

"What-ho!"

The juniors' spirits rose as they marched round the dark stone room in the same manner they had adopted when Tom Merry found the flight of stairs.

They were meeting with a certain amount of success, and were thus encouraged.

It was Blake's party that found the second flight of stairs leading downwards.

"Here you are, Tommy!" cried Blake.

"We've got 'em here!"

"Ripping!" said the Shell Co.

They ran across the room to where Blake & Co. were standing.

There was another flight of stairs leading downwards, very similar to the one that Tom Merry & Co. had found on the floor above.

"Come on!" said Blake.

"Better let us go first!" said Tom Merry.

"We—"

"Rats!" growled Blake.

He led the way down the stairs, with D'Arcy at his side, and about thirty feet below came into still another room.

"Round the room again!" said Blake jubilantly. "There must be a giddy exit here!"

"What-ho!"

The excitement rose as the two parties started the search round the room, but as they began to near each other the juniors grew more concerned than excited.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "I don't believe theah's a way out, deah boys!"

D'Arcy proved correct. The two parties met at the far corner of the room, but they had not passed any door or stair that might let them out of the old castle. They stared at one another in dismay.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We're no better off than if we were up the giddy stairs!"

"Wathah not, deah boys!" said Gussy dolorously.

"Anything in the centre of the room?" asked Blake hopefully.

The juniors had not looked there, and the radius of the lamps was insufficient to allow them to see from where they stood. They moved, with one accord, towards the centre of the room. But all they found was a huge table, which seemed to suggest that the place had once been a dining-hall.

"An old table!" said Manners disgustedly.

Tom Merry nodded and yawned.

"Well, I don't know about you chaps, but I'm jolly tired," he said sleepily. "I think the best thing we can do is get on that giddy old table, and close our peepers in slumber!"

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The other juniors, somewhat disheartened that the search had met with little success, nodded their heads in agreement.

The table was covered with dust; but, as Manners remarked, it would make the table all the sifter for them to lie on. The juniors crawled on top of the table, making pillows with their overcoats.

Fortunately, it was quite warm in the room.

"Set a lamp on either side of the table, in between any two of us," said Tom Merry. "We don't want to be in the giddy dark in a place like this. Too jolly creepy!"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say that's a good ideah, Tom Mewwy!" said the swell of St. Jim's approvingly.

Ten minutes later the juniors were stretched out on the table in the secret room of the old castle, fast asleep. A lamp was set in between each couple—one at the head and one at the feet.

CHAPTER 8.

The Book of St. James.

"B Al Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy woke up with a start, and peered around him in a bewildered manner. On either side of him were stretched his chums, still fast asleep.

For a moment Arthur Augustus could not quite make out what had happened to him in such a position. But as he lost his drowsiness he remembered how the wall had slid back in the room above and trapped them.

He glanced at his watch.

"Bai Jove! Nine o'clock!" he exclaimed. "Tom Mewwy! Blake, deah boy!"

He shouted the names, and the juniors rolled restlessly on their sides.

"Wake up, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, shaking Herries, who was nearest him.

"Wake up!"

"Shurrup!" growled Herries. "Taint rising-bell, you silly dummy! It's quite dark!"

"Wats!" chuckled D'Arcy. "You are in the old castle, deah boy!"

Herries sat up, with a start, and rubbed his eyes.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "I'd forgotten this stunt!"

The other juniors awoke at the sound of voices, and sat up.

"Great pip!" said Tom Merry, rubbing his shoulders. "I'm jolly stiff—I know that! Not so soft as our little cots—what?"

"Wathah not, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ruefully. "One's twousahs get in a frightful state in a place like this!"

"Don't start grumbling, Gussy!" said Blake sleepily.

"Wats! I'm not grumbling, deah boy!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "Come on, you fellahs! It's time Mannahs dished out the grub he's got in his pockets!"

"Gee-whiz! I'd forgotten the supper we brought with us!" said Manners, with a chuckle. "Here, shell out, you fellows!"

He threw two or three little packages on the table as the juniors slid their "beds." They were opened, and the contents—which consisted of cakes and buns—were eagerly devoured.

"Not what Baggy Trimble would call a feed!" said Tom Merry, with a grin. "But better than nothing!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors munched away in silence for some minutes. The lamps were rapidly getting short of oil, and they had need to hurry if they were to see what they were doing much longer.

Manners suddenly dropped his cake, and he stooped to pick it up, with an exclamation of disgust. But instead of gripping the cake, his fingers grasped a small iron ring.

"A lamp!" he cried excitedly. "Bring a lamp, you chaps!"

Lowther snatched at a lamp, and held it down to the floor. There was a small ring attached to a great stone flag in Manners' hand.

"Lug it up, Manners!" said Tom Merry excitedly.

Manners pulled on the ring with all his strength, but only succeeded in moving it an inch.

"It's jolly heavy!" he gasped.

"Betah let me have a shot——" began D'Arcy.

"No; put a scarf beneath the ring—I mean, through the ring," said Tom Merry quickly. "Two or three of us can have a lift then!"

"Yaas, wathah! Heah you are, deah boy!"

D'Arcy handed over his scarf. Tom Merry slipped it through the ring, and handed one end to Manners.

"When I say three—heave!" he said curtly. "One—two—three—"

"Up she comes!" gasped Manners.

He pulled on the scarf with all his strength, and the stone flag came up, and was dragged sideways by the juniors. They peered down the cavity, to see still more stairs, but they did not go far down.

"A short stairway this time!" said Tom Merry. "Come on! We'll see what luck this brings!"

The smallness of the cavity would only allow of one junior going down at a time, and Tom Merry led the way, holding the lamp well up until his head was on a level with the floor.

There were only nine stairs, and then Tom Merry discovered himself to be in a small tunnel, which led directly under the castle.

"Come on, you chaps!" he cried.

"Nine stairs, then a tunnel!"

"My hat!" said Blake. "I'm coming!"

In a few moments all the juniors were down in the tunnel.

Tom Merry led the way along it until they came to the end. Here they found themselves in still another room.

"Same old search for stairs!" said Digby quickly. "Come on! The lamps won't last much longer!"

They searched, but met with no success. They also failed to find a stone flag in the floor or walls bearing a ring which might mean another cavity.

They stopped their searching at last, and peered dismally at one another.

"No luck!" said Tom Merry.

"Blessed if this isn't the most annoying show I've ever been in. We get hopeful at each new discovery, and then we finish up with a bang against a dead wall!"

"Rotten!"

"Beastly luck, deah boys! But keep a stout heart! Theah must be a search-party out now!"

"Let's hope so!" said Blake. "I'm getting jolly peckish!"

"Same here!"

Tom Merry put his lamp on the floor with a sudden gesture of annoyance.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Why on earth don't we start conserving our supply of oil! Come on! Empty some from your lamp into mine, Blake!"

The idea was adopted, and soon the juniors had only two lamps going. The rest of the oil was being saved, for the lamps were put out.

The reduced light did not raise the spirits of the juniors. They searched and searched the room, but could find nothing that would help them in any way.

At last they grew tired, and sat down,

and remained in that position for something like four hours, chatting to keep up their spirits. Then, one by one, they dozed off to sleep, until only Tom Merry remained awake.

And as he allowed his thoughts to wander, he found himself mentally studying the plan on the parchment.

"Bone!" he murmured. "Gussy must be right. There must some reason for it being there; the silly chumps who hid the parchment would not try and be funny by leaving the parchment something to eat!"

The absurdity of the statement would have appealed to Tom Merry more if he had been wide awake. But he was not wide awake—he was distinctly drowsy.

Suddenly he gave one yell, which woke up the juniors and brought them with a bump to their feet.

"Wh-wh-what's up?" gasped Blake, clenching his fists.

"Who is it?" demanded Manners excitedly.

They stared down at Tom Merry, who alone remained in a sitting posture. The Shell captain's face was aglow with excitement, and his eyes were almost starting from his head.

He leapt to his feet.

"Bone!" he exclaimed. "Gussy was right!"

Blake looked anxious. He thought for a moment that Tom Merry's brain had been affected by the night in the castle.

"B-O-N-E!" went on Tom Merry.

"Back of north entrance—that's where we are!"

For a moment the juniors did not grasp what Tom Merry was getting at.

But as they realised that he had taken each letter of the word "bone" separ-

ately, and made words beginning with each of the letters in turn, they grew as excited as he.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a beaming smile. "I nevah thought of that, deah boy! B-o-n-e—back of north entrance! Bai Jove!"

"That's it, you chaps! I'll bet that's right!" said Tom Merry eagerly.

"We're at the back of the north entrance to the castle. Just you work it out—it came to me all of a sudden!"

"It's a wonder something else didn't come to you all of a sudden!" growled Blake. "My hat! You half-frightened the wits out of me—thought you must have seen a real spook, at the least!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silly ass!" growled Blake.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Now we've to look for the cross!"

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IN THE NICK OF TIME! It wanted but twenty seconds to the hour, when there was a sudden swirl in the crowd, a shout, and high up in the air there spun an old black hat, floating over the heads of the ring-siders and flickering down within the ropes. "I fancy," said Sir Charles calmly, "that this must be my man!"

IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE OF

"THE BOYS' FRIEND."

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Come on, you chaps! Let us search round!"

The search took longer than the searches for the stairways had taken, for the lamps were fewer in number. But they found the cross on the wall at last.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Herries suddenly. "Here—look! The cross!"

"Now what about the rest of the plan, Tommy?" asked Blake eagerly.

The excitement of the juniors was intense. They felt they were on the verge of great happenings.

"Two parallel lines—I know—P for paces—33 paces!" shouted Manners. He started across the room, counting the paces as he went. But thirty-three paces brought him to within three yards of the opposite wall.

"No go!" he murmured, with keen disappointment in his tones.

"Try thirty-three paces at a tangent—like the lines!" said Blake suddenly.

He started across the room at a tangent himself, and came fush against the wall. But he had no lamp, and could see nothing beyond the wall itself.

"Bring a lamp, Tommy!" he cried, turning his head. "I'm up against the wall!"

Tom Merry brought a lamp, holding it in front of him. The juniors crowded round, gazing at the wall.

"The oblong—a brick!" said Monty Lowther. "Any brick got a diamond-shaped cut on it, Tommy?"

Tom Merry looked and gasped.

Just above Jack Blake's head was a piece of stone, shaped like a brick, and in the centre of the oblong was cut a diamond.

"There it is!" cried Tom Merry excitedly. "Just above your head, Blake!"

Blake put his hand up to the stone without a word, and rubbed the indentation. The stone moved!

"It moved!" he yelled. "I'm going to push!"

He pushed hard on the mark, and almost before the juniors could blink their eyes, the wall had fallen away in front of them, leaving a cavity broad enough to admit two men abreast!

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Manners. "Am I asleep?"

"I'm dreamin'!" murmured D'Arcy gully.

"But I'm very much awake!" murmured Tom Merry; and he walked straight into the cavity.

He found himself in a small cupboard, and, as he held the light above his head, he saw a shelf. It appeared to be cut out of the wall of the cupboard, and ran right round the room.

And in the centre of the shelf was a book—there was no doubt about it!

"Got it!" shouted Tom Merry.

He sprang forward and grasped the book in his hands. It was covered with dust and grime.

The juniors almost ran over each other in their haste to get to Tom Merry. There was hardly room to breathe by the time they were all inside the cupboard-like room.

But the surprises were not over. D'Arcy, coming in at the rear, could not see Tom Merry, but he saw a small strip of what appeared to be white paper, and examination proved it to be daylight.

"Bai Jove! Blake! Mewwy!"

The juniors turned at the excited shriek of their schoolfellow.

"Pull on this stone!" said D'Arcy.

"Theah's daylight, deah boys!"

The juniors, almost forgetting the book in their new excitement, got their fingers in between the slabs of stone, and jerked hard upon it.

It slid back, and revealed a square of daylight through which they could crawl with ease.

"Outside!" said Tom Merry briefly.

He set the example by dropping to his knees, and, with a tight clutch on the book found in the cupboard or room, crawled out into daylight.

At the same moment there was the sound of footsteps, and a gasp of amazement caused Tom Merry to look up.

"Figgis!" he yelled.

"Tom Merry!" roared the newcomer.

"Oh, my hat!"

He hugged Tom Merry to his chest as the Shell fellow struggled to his feet, and waited him round the passage in which they had met.

"Figgy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Shurrup, you silly ass! Shurrup!"

Figgis stopped in his wild dance to survey the captain of the Shell. At the same moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared from the small hole.

Fatty Wynn and Kerr, who, with Figgis, formed the rival Co. of the New House at St. Jim's, came rushing on the scene. And one by one the School House juniors, who had spent the night in the old castle, crawled from out of the hole.

"Bai Jove, Figgy!" exclaimed D'Arcy, the elegant swell of St. Jim's no longer, for the dust of the old castle seemed to have been accumulating on the junior since the castle had been built. "Figgy! How did you come to be heah, deah boy?"

Figgis chuckled.

"My hat! There's half St. Jim's searching the giddy place for you chaps!" he exclaimed. "Railton and Dr. Holmes are all here!"

"M-m-my hat! What's up?"

"Up!" repeated Figgis sarcastically. "Only that you chaps have been missing since last night! Your bikes were found at the foot of the hill this morning by the police, and they informed the Head. So, instead of spending our half on the footer field, we came to search for you in the old castle! Now perhaps you'll—"

But at that moment Dr. Holmes, a very worried frown on his brow and Mr. Railton by his side, came from round a bend in the old passage.

"Merry! D'Arcy!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "Thank Heaven!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. warmed towards the Head as they saw the obvious joy and relief their appearance gave him. But it was a few moments before the Head could obtain silence in which to question the two dishevelled Co's, for the fellows from St. Jim's seemed to spring out of the very earth.

In a few moments the passage was crowded, and hardly anybody noticed the book under Tom Merry's arm—the fellows looked upon the juniors as if they were curiosities.

"Now, Merry!" said Dr. Holmes. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain!"

In a few sentences, Tom Merry told how the party had found the old parchment, their belief that the box of Saint James might be a valuable curio, and their subsequent adventures in the castle during the night.

"Here is the book, sir," wound up Tom Merry. "It may be valuable to St. Jim's, and if that is the case, I am sure my chums want nothing more than to see it stowed away—ahem, I mean put in the School library."

"Heah, sir!"

"What—ho!"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

Dr. Holmes took the book and opened it carefully. Its pages were not soiled

as was the cover, but they were yellow with age. The Head read part of a page, his brow wrinkled with amazement.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, and for the headmaster of St. Jim's, he was almost excited. "Mr. Railton, an extraordinary book! Very valuable, too! This relates how a meeting of gentlemen, headed by a man who was known as Saint James, decided upon the building of our school!"

"Remarkable!"

"Great pip!"

"My hat!"

"However, we must return to St. Jim's with the juniors!" said Dr. Holmes. "They look as if they need a bath!"

They did, and when they had had a bath, they repaired to Figgis & Co.'s study in the New House, where Fatty Wynn laid out the finest feed known at St. Jim's.

The book proved to be of great value, and was duly presented to the school with an illuminated address, which bore the signatures of the juniors who had solved the mystery of the castle—at least, as far as the parchment was concerned.

Mellish's part in the business was never known, for he met Mr. Ferguson at the appointed time, and informed him that the book was found. The news caused the dealer to bite his lips with annoyance, and he turned his back on the sneak of the St. Jim's in sheer disgust.

Mellish did not tell the dealer that his real reason for giving up the hunt was because half St. Jim's was in the castle at that moment, searching for the two Co's!

But, had Percy Mellish found the book, it certainly would not have gone to the St. Jim's library!

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "TOM MERRY & CO.'S NEW ROLE!" Order your copy EARLY!)

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START IT TO-DAY!



Jim Retrieves his Position

LOOK out, Jim!" Dick Willoughby called, and then shouted to Bracster, who was watching the Karradon with tense interest. "Bracster, Bracster, stop that idiot from playing any tricks! Play the game, Bracster!"

Just for an instant Dillon Bracster started, then checked himself, and did not turn his head to face Willoughby. What was happening behind them neither Jim nor Dick Willoughby could tell, but the noise had now developed into a perpetual booming, as though every man in the crowd were humming one note all the time.

But at present all Quinton's interest was centred on the big Karradon with the bow. Very carefully he was drawing back the arrow, and was balancing the bow as though to make quite certain of his aim. There was no doubting his intentions now.

Probably the only two in the whole assembly who did not notice any outside event were the Karradon and Jim Quinton. Each was fascinated by the other. Somewhere, a long way off, Jim could hear Dick Willoughby's voice calling to him excitedly, but his whole mind was concentrated on the performance of the man with the bow. Everyone else, even Mendijah, had faded from the picture.

"He's just about got it!" Jim thought, as the Karradon stopped his see-sawing motion with the bow.

Whether Jim's judgment was right or not he never had the chance of learning. Something blotted out the picture. The little arrow left the bow, but its aim was futile, and it merely twisted in the air and fell on the platform.

"I thought he'd manage it!" Dick Willoughby was still calling out, and Jim grasped his words now. "Good old Daly! That was some sprint, Jim! Did you see him bowl those fellows over? Hello! Here comes your friend, the king, isn't it, old son? Now for some fun!"

On the platform the big Karradon with the bow was standing with his hands by his side, staring at Tim Daly. The latter was gesticulating in a way which was unusual for him, and, with his back to Quinton, was apparently laying the law down to Mendijah and Kerzon.

He swung round at last, but took the precaution of jumping clear of the platform. For a moment he stood right in front of Jim, and his arms were raised aloft, while he shouted aloud with all his power.

Then he stepped forward swiftly, and had released Jim from the post in almost

less time than it takes to record. Into Jim's hands he pushed a knife.

"Get Willoughby free!" he jerked. "Then keep close to me! There may be a row!"

Daly turned away quickly, and for the next few moments Jim was fully occupied in getting Dick Willoughby free. When he had accomplished this, and told Dick what they had to do, he found that Tim was some distance away. He had rejoined the king, Malkura, and there were several others who had gathered round.

On the platform Kerzon was talking excitedly with Mendijah and Dillon Bracster was keeping close to them both. The tall Karradon with the bow still stood in exactly the same position, and appeared to be too utterly surprised to move.

"Let's get alongside Tim!" Quinton told Willoughby again. "He's trying to make a speech or something."

They pressed forward, and no one attempted to stop them. For the moment the situation was somewhat the same as it had been last night, when the king had given his decision. Everyone was anxious to discuss the situation, and try to find out just where they stood.

Jim gathered this much from Tim Daly's quick sentences when at last they managed to reach him. And here there

READ THIS FIRST.

Jim Quinton, by the will of John Quinton, his father, is to succeed to a mysterious position at Karradon, in Africa.

Jim is accompanied by Tim Daly, Erik, and Nijellah, who have come to escort him to Karradon; also his school chum, Dick Willoughby.

Eventually the party reaches Africa, also a ritual party known as the Karradon Syndicate, which includes Dillon Bracster, a cad of the Sixth Form at Harwood's School, Bracster senior, and Cyrus Kerzon. A fellow named Plazman, head of the Syndicate, remains in England.

Later Daly and Nijellah are captured by the rival party, and Erik and Dick Willoughby continue on to Karradon. On arriving there, they find Dillon Bracster installed in Jim's place with the native king, Malkura. A fight ensues, and the king, Jim, Dick, and Erik are overpowered, the two cubs being thrown into a hut.

Later Tim Daly returns. By a meeting of the natives is called by Mendijah, the medicine-man, and Jim and Dick are tied to stakes before the platform. After the speech Mendijah points to Jim, and a Karradon steps forward, and, placing an arrow in his bow, points it towards Jim.

(Now read on.)

was another pleasant surprise for both Jim and Dick Willoughby. Standing just behind the king was Erik, and he wormed his way through the little crowd the instant he caught sight of Jim.

"Bazar! I am glad!" Erik's eyes were shining, and his mouth twisted into a queer little smile of welcome. "I failed last night. Kerzon is very clever. But to-day—"

He waved his hand significantly because a long conversation was out of the question. So far, Jim's impression of the country of the Karradons was that it produced more noise and uproar than forty speech days at Harwood's School could have done.

Tim Daly and the king had managed to hold a brief consultation, however, and Tim now turned to Jim.

"Feeling all right?" he asked, and Jim nodded. "We're going to collar Kerzon and young Bracster—if we can. Want to avoid any fighting? Never know where it leads to with this crowd! Keep together!"

Daly's fears were only too well-founded. Under Bazar John Quinton and Tim Daly the Karradon men had been trained, organised, and disciplined, but the old love of fighting for fighting's sake had not been stamped out, even though it had been kept in check.

Last night's excitement, followed by the unusual events of to-day, stirred their blood again. Many of them scarcely understood what the situation was, and certainly were not very concerned in the quarrel between the white men, ready though they were to welcome Bazar Quinton's son.

Kerzon had brought with him a contingent of Manzi warriors, and last night these old enemies had been welcomed. In addition to these, he had sent out messages which brought in some of the men from the Maraki country. These latter had for years past been on friendly terms with the Karradons, and their rulers had sworn blood fellowship together, and had prospered under Quinton's guidance.

But the restraint was off them now. Old quarrels were quickly recalled. Before Tim Daly, accompanied by the king, could reach the platform the trouble had begun. It was intensified by Kerzon and Mendijah, who had left the platform and gathered together all those who were willing to support them.

Daly acted as swiftly as he could. Orders were sent to the musicians and drum-men; the king himself was calling on his own friends to gather the men together, and some of the Bazar's own warriors were already seeking Kerzon and his friends to make them prisoners.

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Daly himself had given them strict orders that bloodshed was to be avoided at all costs, but he had not a great deal of hope that when the critical moment came his instructions would be remembered.

"I want you to stand by the king, Jim!" Daly told Jim presently. "We're trying to get the people to keep out of the fighting business, and gather round this place. Keep your eyes open for trouble; but stick it as long as you can. You come along with me, Dick!"

Willoughby and Tim Daly disappeared a few moments later among the crowd, but Erik remained behind on the platform, and Jim was not sorry to have his company. It was not that he fussed any part of the programme, but he would have preferred to go with Daly and Willoughby into the excitement rather than stand, very stiff and upright, by the side of Malkura.

He kept to it, however, and Erik stuck just a little way behind him, but in easy reach. The music-makers had by now received their orders, and, added to the din the people themselves were making, was the sound of the drums and wailing horns going once more.

"This call began to take effect presently, and Jim, starting out over the seething square, began to think that there was a tendency for the struggling to die down, and quite a fair number began to surge towards the platform where he stood.

Erik called his attention, as quietly as he could, to what seemed to be a fierce conflict at the far end of the square, and quite near the main entrance through the thick fence which surrounded this collection of huts. Jim shaded his eyes and tried to distinguish just what was happening.

"Kerzon and Braester!" Erik told him. "And Mendijah and others! They are fighting against the Bazar's guard!"

For a time Jim thought he could distinguish his two chief enemies, and once he could have sworn that he saw Dillon Braester make a hasty dash for the opening in the boma, or fence. Apparently he was successful, for Jim saw him no more, and presently all the combatants seemed to disappear through the entrance.

"They have gone!" Erik confirmed Jim's impressions. "They cannot run far. It is too hot for white men, and they will die!"

Jim wondered. Standing there by the side of the king of the Karradon's, and gazing out over the now quietening mass of natives, the glare and heat seemed to blot out the square and the huts and the boma beyond; but here he was back at Harmood's again, and was walking down the drive. For a brief space he could almost imagine he felt the cool breezes and the quiet calm beneath the great trees.

The picture was spoiled for a moment as he saw another Harmood fellow. Dillon Braester was before him, his face filled with hatred and passion, and he was gasping out threats.

"You'll pay for this, Quinton! I'll have you crawling to me presently! I'll bring you down!"

"Bazar, Bazar!" Erik's voice brought him out of his day-dream. "You are not well! Sit down for a while, Bazar!"

Quinton blinked, and tried to see again the realities before him. It had been something more than a day-dream into which he had fallen; but here he was back again, staring out on the great meeting-place of the Karradon people, and Dillon Braester had just disappeared through that queer hole in the fence.

"I'm all right, thanks, Erik!" Jim struggled to keep a proper grip on himself, but it needed all his will-power to force himself to stand upright, and to keep his eyes fixed steadily ahead. "Just feeling thirsty, you know; that's all."

"Here is Meljor Daly," Erik said, and turned to the group that was mounting the platform.

Daly had his arm through Willoughby's, and Quinton, turning to look as Erik spoke, felt inclined to smile at the queer look on Dick's face.

Daly put him down gently in the chair, where only a short time before Dillon Braester had been sitting. Then he turned to Erik, who seemed anxious to speak to him.

"I'm sorry, Jim!" Daly was speak-

off. You've got to keep fit and well, Jim. There's work waiting for you here."

"I shall be ready for it," Jim struggled to raise a laugh, and rose to his feet again. "I'm all right now."

Daly insisted, however, that he should go and rest. Erik would mix some medicine for him, and see that food was prepared while Tim himself would be with them in a very short time.

A few moments later Quinton and Willoughby, accompanied by Erik and various Karradon boys, had left the platform, and were going away from the crowded square. Malkura still stood in the same position, a black, shining statue, staring out over his people.

The noise was subsiding as they went



Quinton's interest was concentrated on the performance of the man with the bow. The Karradon very carefully drew back the arrow, and was balancing the bow as though to make quite certain of his aim. (See page 17.)

ing to Quinton now. "You're about as played out as poor old Willoughby here. I guess you've had too much of a good thing. Come and sit down for a time, and I'll get you a dose of something to put you right."

And in truth both Jim and Dick Willoughby had stuck it to the very last. "It's a poor sort of welcome you've had to Karradon!" Tim Daly growled. "But the row is settling down now, Jim. I'm going to get you along to where you can rest and get over this. The Bazar and I will soon wind up these proceedings."

"What about Kerzon and young Braester?" Quinton asked.

"They've got away for the moment," Daly told him. "They won't get far—at least, I hope not. If Kerzon and Mendijah start raising the countryside it's going to be awkward. But we won't worry about that for the present. Erik will take you along to your own residence. It isn't a palace exactly, but you'll find it fairly comfortable as houses go in this part of the world. Put these over your head and neck to keep the sun

away, and the Bazar had raised his stick as a sign that he wished to speak. The big meeting which was to restore the Bazar to his place, and acclaim Jim Quinton as the successor of the great Bazar Quinton had begun. And Jim Quinton himself would not be there.

Nor would Dillon Braester. That, at least, was some consolation to Jim as he walked slowly towards the house which had been his father's.

Quinton's New Home.

IT was some little distance to Bazar Quinton's "ramzan," or kraal, as it would be called in other parts of Africa. This was Jim's first sight in full daylight of the collection of huts of which he was now master.

To reach them they had to pass through a great gateway which separated the Quinton establishment from the king's, of which it was a duplicate on a small scale. A plan of the two would have shown a large oval, with one end slightly flattened, at which point a smaller oval was joined on. The square

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around which the Quinton huts were gathered was very considerably smaller than the great meeting-place in the king's ramzan.

There was sound reason in the arrangement of the two "estates" in this fashion, and Jim was to learn the object of it all later. For the present he was chiefly interested in seeing his new home, and in finding a temporary resting-place.

It would scarcely be fair to call the building to which Erik led them a hut. It was more than that, though in the main it was built of the same timber, brushwood, and grasses used in most of the lesser huts. But the exterior was more substantial, and a kind of veranda ran along the whole length. There were large windows, but in place of glass was tightly-stretched green mosquito netting.

John Quinton had been a man of big ideas, and the interior of the hut was a testimony to his efforts to improve on the ordinary native dwelling-place. He had divided the place into rooms, and one or two of them at least were furnished in purely English fashion, except for the fact that the walls, made of some sort of native cement, were only roughly painted.

The room to which Erik conducted Jim and Dick was quite a large, airy place, and after the heat outside it was pleasantly cool.

There were two or three roughly con-

structed but very comfortable couches, and Jim was very soon testing one of them.

"This is not so bad, old son!" Willoughby laughed presently, when Erik had brought in two silver tankards filled with a delightful lemon drink. "I can manage this for quite a long time!"

For the next half-hour or so Erik showed them something of what he could do. Presumably he had the help of some of the natives who had come with them, but the little man was the only one who came into the room.

They had just finished the best meal they had had for the past two or three weeks when Tim Daly came in. He was also showing signs of weariness, and dropped into one of the chairs near Jim's with a sigh of thankfulness.

"I think we can rest comfortably for the moment, anyhow," he said. "Everything has quietened down outside, and we're going to have a real feast, to welcome the genuine Bazar Quinton, in a few days' time. We're going to get some of the Maraki people over. What happens about the Mauzi crowd depends on Kerzon and Braester. They've managed to get away all right. Kerzon used his gun pretty effectively. They've been very lucky!"

For an hour or more they talked of all that happened, of how Kerzon had deceived the king by his story of a fight caused by Erik's treachery, and the

bogus Quinton. The king had at first believed the whole story, and Dillon Braester had been welcomed as the successor of the great Bazar Quinton.

"Nijallah and three other Karradon men are still in the hands of Kerzon," Daly went on. "We've sent messengers to the Mauzi tribe, demanding their immediate return. If they don't agree, we shall have to make them, that's all!"

It was plain that Tim Daly was not altogether happy in his mind about the situation. In the next two or three days he lived strenuously. During his absence in England, the organisation which he and John Quinton had built up so laboriously and carefully had become weak and slack. The defences of the country needed repair. Military, agricultural, and other work was tightened up again, and new orders were issued under the king's command.

"It's all for their own good," Daly told Jim. "The Karradons are a decent lot, but a lazy as sin, if you'll give them a chance. They worshipped your father because he stamped out disease and made it impossible for anyone in the country to go short of food. He only persuaded them to put in a fair amount of hard work, instead of loafing round waiting for a quarrel to turn up."

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Don't Wear a Truss.

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