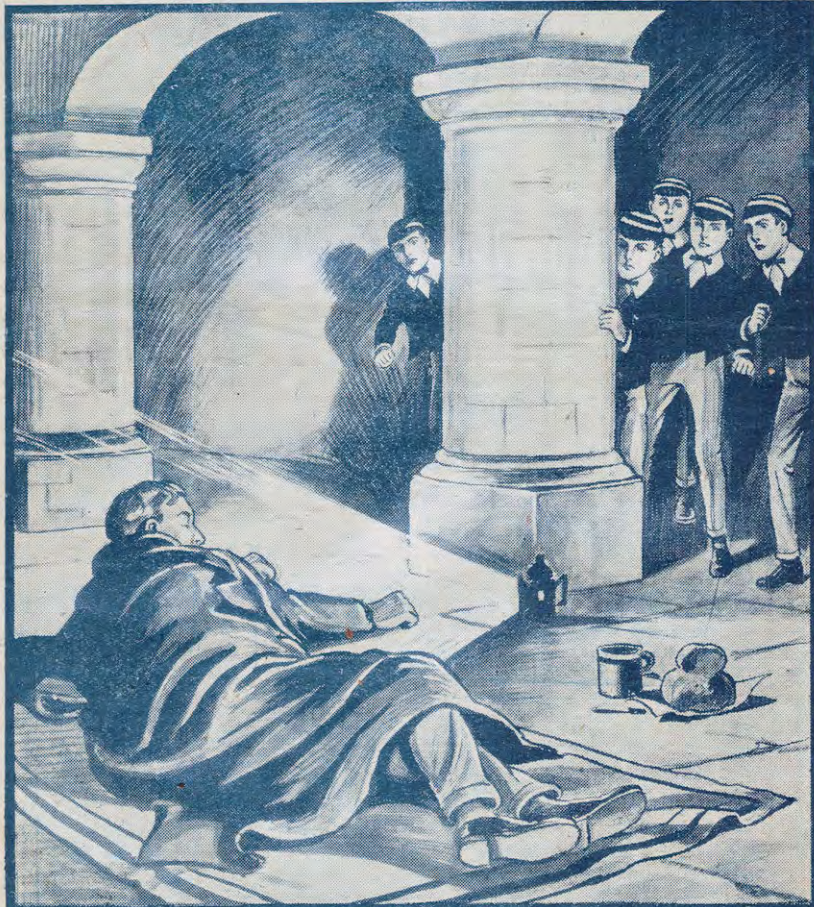


TWO GRAND SCHOOL STORIES IN THIS NUMBER.



THE REFUGEE OF ST. JIM'S.



TOM MERRY & CO. DISCOVER THE WANTED MAN IN THE VAULTS.

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



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.
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"TALBOT'S STOLEN STORY."

By Martin Clifford.

Next Wednesday's long complete story of St. Jim's describes exciting events at the famous seat of learning. Racke and Crooke are busy with their shady plots again, one of which, at any rate, hopelessly fails.

Talbot, who is always a hero, figures prominently through the loss of a valuable MSS., which has been sent to him for a special purpose by his uncle.

"TALBOT'S STOLEN STORY"

is not recovered in the present yarn, but the next week's splendid story explains everything, and the great mystery is solved.

Do not miss the two fine yarns. Order your copies of the GEM in advance.

STARTING LIFE.

Undoubtedly the fellow who is beginning with a new job in an office finds the life difficult. Everything is new to him. He is expected to know what's what, and, of course, he doesn't. Say it is a printing office. He finds himself in what seems to him to be a mad rush, with people tearing round, telephone bells ringing like fury all the time, and orders being shouted.

The new boy is told to answer the 'phone, and he makes a dash for the instrument. He has hardly as much as met a telephone before, and the voice at the other end seems to him to keep on saying "Tin" and "Br-r-r-r" and other absurd things which mean nothing.

"Tell him to speak louder," says a man who is passing. So it goes on, and the new hand goes off for lunch feeling that he can't stick it any more. But he does. The young bear had his troubles. So has the new office boy, but he worries through, and a month later he looks down considerably on the 'still newer hand who seems so clumsy and green.

The correspondent who writes to me about the life he is living will be doing the same ere long. I hope he will remember what he went through!

FRIENDSHIP.

A chum writes to me complaining of a friend who let him in. That is, my correspondent thought the other was a friend. It is the old, old story. Friendship is something which has to be tested in the fire. The other thing which masquerades as friendship is simply an impostor.

It is a good old story of the man in the East who had a big fortune and divided it in two. The first half he put away all safe and snug. Then with the rest he kept open house and asked everybody to dine. He carried on in fine style for months. Scores of chaps said they were his friends for life, and they all came to dinner every day. Heaps of them settled down or turned a week-end into a month. They borrowed cash till their remittances came and that sort of thing.

Then one day the giver of the feasts had an extra fine dinner party, and told them all to come. At the end he rose and said, "Now, you fellows are all my friends, I know. You have told me so plenty of times, and I want to borrow a bit from you. I haven't a penny left in my pocket. This kind of entertaining costs a rare lot, you see!" The guests stared and began to shuffle off home. They were friends as long as the money lasted, not longer. The generous individual was left alone in his dining hall, and how he did laugh!

"They were not friends," he said to himself. "Now I can start again with my other fortune and I shall know what chaps to leave out of my visiting list."

It is a good yarn with a hint fastened to the end like a luggage label, which may account for its having safely travelled through the centuries.

BAGGY AND BUNTER.

These two rival comics of St. Jim's and Greyfriars are often compared, but they are vastly different, as all who read the tales know. For there is far more of the knave about Baggy than there is about Bunter. Bunter does funny things without appreciating what they mean. He does not stop to think. Baggy is craftier, and he likes intrigue and making

mischief for its own sake. But neither of them is quite as bad as is imagined.

A correspondent says that Baggy is more modest than Bunter! Well, I should not have dragged in that quality in Baggy's case. A paralogism would probably find the modest lump very small. Some critics are too hard altogether on Trimble. Bad as he is we can still take note of what the poet said:—

"Believe not each aspersing word,
As most weak persons do,
But still believe that story false,
That ought not to be true."

Perhaps if people started out fresh with the idea that Baggy Trimble was a noble, courageous fellow, who never had a single thought for self, the fat fellow would try to live up to the ideal and assume a character which was not really his. Possibly in time this new role would grow on him and he would be honest and self sacrificing! Possibly not.

WORRIES.

Sometimes my mail bag is simply a sackful of worries. Many of them are imaginary. Fellows write and explain all about some big trouble, that is, they think it is big. As a rule the best plan with a worry is to let it swim—or sink. Pretty nearly everybody gets nervy in this way. Occasionally it is just the result of brooding. A fellow thinks he has been snubbed or cut, or left out in the cold. Often enough it is pure accident.

You cannot mix in the world without tumbling up against unhappy experiences and imagining matters are all wrong when they are really quite O.K. Even the chap who hid himself in a cave in the mountains so as to be out of harm's way would start worrying about himself. But loneliness won't do. It may develop talent, but character comes from taking the rubs in the crowd and putting up with difficulties.

Your Editor

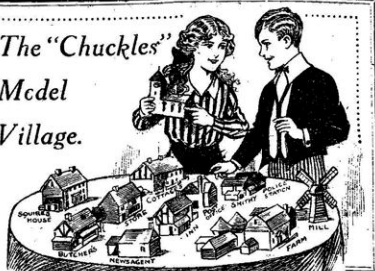
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THE REFUGEE OF ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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

CHAPTER I.

An Abandoned Raid.

"WELL, I'm blessed! It's the rummiest affair I ever struck. Who on earth could have raided us wholesale like this?"

Jack Blake made that remark as he and his chums, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, listened to a remarkable story from Tom Merry, whom, with his chums, Manners and Lowther, they had just met in the passage.

Blake & Co's study cupboard had been raided, but an extraordinary feature of the raid was the fact that money had been left which more than covered the value of the things taken.

Now Tom Merry reported a similar occurrence in Study No. 10, and had discovered that it had happened in several other studies.

Baggy Trimble was ruled out of the affair, as he would never have left money to pay for what he took.

"My hat! Could it—could it be Figgins?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "And yet it's not like those New House bounders to leave the cash to pay for the stuff. Besides there are other things missing as well as grub. Some bounder's walked off with our hearthrug. That's the queer part about it."

"Bai Jove, an' some feafal boundah's win off with my travellin' wug," exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wondah—"

"And my blessed bike-lamp," growled Digby.

"It must be those New House rotters," said Herries. "Who else could it be?"

"I'm inclined to think so too," said Manners. "The stuff couldn't have been taken in the day-time, or the raiders would have been spotted by someone. It must have happened last night."

"But why did they leave the cash for the grub?" asked Manners. "They could have bought their own stuff without going to all that trouble."

"The only thing I can think of is this," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "You

know how down on study feeds that rotter Ratty is. Well, it's quite possible that Figgys had arranged to give a supper on a large scale in the dorm after lights-out last night, and either old Ratcliff has prevented them getting the stuff in, or else they left it until the tuckshop was closed. And rather than put the feed off, they raided our cupboards."

"H'm, that's reasonable enough; an' it's just what old Figgys would do," agreed Blake. "Anyway, I vote we get our own back for this—and right quickly too. We've got a good many scores to settle with Figgys besides this, and I propose we raid 'em to-night and give 'em socks."

"What about pillows?" queried Lowther with a grin. "Pillows will hurt them more than socks."

"I'm game if you are," said Tom Merry, ignoring Lowther's humorous attempt.

"Right-ho!" agreed Blake & Co. heartily.

And so it was settled. And a moment later the School House juniors were wending their way to Dame Taggles' establishment beneath the old elms to discuss the matter further, over ginger-beer and pastries.

Had they known it the raid was not to take place that night.

The Fourth and Shell Juniors were on their way downstairs to the box-room window, when Tom Merry left the rest and hurried along to Study No. 10 for his electric torch, in case it should be needed. The others continued on their way. Tom Merry had not gone far along the passage when he stopped suddenly in alarm.

Ahead of him, a dim figure could be discerned slowly approaching along the passage. It was the tall figure of a man; and Tom Merry slipped into the shadow of a doorway with a gasp of alarm.

"Oh crumbs!" he murmured. "I bet it's old Railton. If he spots—Well, my hat!"

Tom Merry broke off his reflections with a start of surprise as he saw the figure vanish into one of the studies ahead.

"Queer, jolly queer," he reflected

grimly. "What the dickens does old Railton want in—? Hallo!"

Again Tom broke off, and pressed his back against the door behind him, as the man reappeared from within the study and came towards him.

And then, when the man came opposite to the hiding junior, a shaft of moonlight from the window at the end of the passage showed up the figure more clearly, and Tom stiffened suddenly.

The face was not the face of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, nor of any other St. Jim's master. Though the features were not clear, it was the face of a stranger without a doubt.

For one brief moment the junior stared at it in startled surprise, and then, with a stifled shout of "Burglars! Rescue, St. Jim's!" he flung himself at the legs of the marauder.

Crash!

There was a startled exclamation from the nocturnal prowler as the sheer force of the junior's onslaught brought him down with a crash.

He was up again the next second, however, with the plucky junior clinging to him like a leech.

"Got you!" gasped Tom Merry fiercely. "Give in, you rotter!"

"Let me go!" muttered the fellow hoarsely, striving to shake the clinging junior from him. "Let me go, boy."

"Rats!" muttered Tom Merry through his teeth, and his voice rang out along the deserted corridors once again.

"Help! Blake, Lowther! Rescue!"

From the direction of the box-room came an answering shout, and the man increased his frantic struggles as he heard it. But strangely enough, though he had ample opportunities, not once did he attempt to strike the junior.

Even then, the junior could not help feeling surprised at that fact.

Silently now, save for his heavy breathing, the marauder wriggled and writhed to free himself. And then quite suddenly, with the swift wriggle and swerve of a Rugby three-quarter, he broke from the junior's grasp and bolted along the passage.

Recovering himself quickly, the junior

swung round and raced in pursuit of the figure ahead of him.

With a thrill of satisfaction he saw the man reach the bottom of the stairs, and without a second's hesitation, turn down the dark passage leading to the lower box-room.

"Look out, Blake!" yelled Tom Merry swiftly.

But the junior's hope that the prowler would run into the arms of Blake & Co. was not realised.

Scarcely had he taken half-a-dozen steps, when, evidently seeing Blake and the swarm of juniors rushing towards him, the fellow swung round on his heels, quick as thought, just as Tom Merry reached the landing.

With an agile euvre, he neatly eluded the outstretched hand of the junior, and bounded lightly up the staircase.

"Quick, you fellows!" panted Tom Merry, as the startled Blake & Co. rushed up. "It's a burglar; after him!"

And, without waiting to see if his chums were following, Tom Merry set his teeth and tore up the stairs in pursuit.

He was bitterly disappointed that the nocturnal prowler had eluded him twice, but he was grimly determined that he should not do so a third time.

Needless to say, Blake and the rest had needed no second bidding to follow, and when Tom reached the landing above, they were hard at his heels.

The burglar—if burglar he was—had already vanished round the first passage, and the patter of his footsteps could plainly be heard in the silent corridors, and the sound was easy to follow.

"My hat! He seems to know his way about jolly well!" panted Jack Blake. "Looks as if he's making for the top box-room."

Tom Merry nodded without speaking.

And a moment later Blake's suspicion proved to be correct. As they turned on to the last passage, the moonlight gleaming fitfully through the window at the end of the landing showed up the figure of a man climbing the narrow staircase leading up to the top box-room.

"Making for the roof!" gasped Tom Merry tensely. "Quick—he'll escape yet!"

And, putting on speed, the junior captain fairly flew up the narrow staircase. At the tiny landing above, he hesitated. From the first room came the sound of a box being dragged hastily across the floor, and, taking a deep breath, the junior flung the door open.

He was just in time to see a pair of legs disappearing through the open skylight above, and without a second's hesitation Tom Merry sprang on to the box in the middle of the room, and, leaping up, grasped the edge of the skylight and hauled himself through.

The keen night air was chilly, and the junior shivered as he stood on the slippery leads and glanced swiftly about him.

Above him, a full moon shone down upon the ancient roofs and chimneys of St. Jim's, bathing them in a mystic radiance. But of the mysterious marauder he could see nothing.

As Tom stood staring about him, Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, Talbot, Lowther, and half a dozen other juniors swarmed through the skylight and joined him, breathless with excitement.

"Lost him?" panted Blake anxiously.

"Blessed if I can see—" Tom Merry was beginning, when he broke off and gripped Blake's arm, as a dim figure left the shadow of a near-by chimney.

Stepping swiftly across the leads, he reached the parapet and began to move

swiftly along, peering over the edge as he did so as if in search of something.

"Careless of danger in the excitement of the chase, the eager juniors followed Tom Merry as he dashed across the flat roof. But barely had he taken a dozen steps along the parapet, when he stopped dead, agast.

For the fugitive had paused at last, and placed one leg over the parapet as though he contemplated a leap into space.

"The—the fool!" panted Tom Merry.

"He'll be killed—"

Tom Merry broke off abruptly as a startling and utterly unexpected thing happened.

From behind him came a sudden, slithering sound, a stifled gasp of warning, followed by a sharp cry of horror that brought him round with a start, and almost stopped his heart beating.

He was just in time to see the form of one of his schoolfellows slither over the parapet, clutching frantically at the stonework, and vanish into space.

The suddenness of the catastrophe left the juniors petrified with horror and helpless.

Jack Blake was the first to recover himself somewhat.

"It—it's old Gussy!" he almost whispered through quivering lips. "Old Gussy's gone over!"

CHAPTER 2. In Deadly Peril.

IT was only too true.

In his haste and excitement, the swell of St. Jim's had slipped on the leads, and, unable to save himself, had slithered over the edge of the parapet.

Almost mechanically, Jack Blake, shaking like a leaf, forced himself to the edge and peered over.

But happily, what he did see was not the thing he expected and dreaded seeing. Instead of a huddled heap lying on the asphalt of the quadrangle eighty feet below him, he found himself staring into the strained face and terrified eyes of his chum, barely a yard below him.

He was clinging convulsively to a short thick lead pipe, probably the waste-pipe of a disused cistern; but whatever it was it had saved him.

"Hold on—for Heaven's sake hold on, Gussy!" cried Blake hoarsely. "Merry, Herries, help me—quick! Hold my ha—"

Jack Blake's words ended in a choking gasp, as a strong grasp fell on his collar, and he was hauled roughly back.

"Stand back!" ordered a deep voice sternly. "Hang on to my legs like grim death—now!"

On the instant the mysterious marauder for it was he—swung his body over the parapet. Lower and lower his body swung, whilst Tom Merry and Herries hung on to his legs with desperate strength.

"Help!" came D'Arcy's voice faintly. "The pipe's bending, dear boys!"

"Hold on, youngster!" cried the man cheerily. "I'll have you out of that in a jiffy!"

And next second a grip like a vice fell upon the strained wrists of Arthur Augustus, and as he felt himself lifted his hands released their grip on the pipe.

Up, up! The juniors felt the man's muscles tighten, and his breath came in deep gasps as he slowly lifted the helpless junior inch by inch.

And then, as Gussy came within reach, other willing hands were able to help, and the rest was easy.

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Blake, with a queer catch in his voice. "I—I thought old Gussy was done for that time!"

The stranger lowered the still shaking form of D'Arcy on to the leads, and stood for a moment breathing deeply.

"I should get this youngster to bed, you fellows," he advised quietly. "He's shaken up a bit."

And then, before the amazed juniors could raise a hand to stay him—even had they now wanted to do—he turned on his heels and strode alongside the parapet.

At the spot where he had paused before, he swung himself over the stonework, and disappeared before the startled juniors' eyes.

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Jack Blake.

"What on earth—"

Stooping, he peered anxiously over the parapet, and then he understood.

Beneath the spot where the man had vanished, and hidden here and there by masses of ivy, a thick, square drain-pipe dropped. And down this the mysterious stranger was lowering himself, deftly and swiftly.

The juniors watched him breathlessly until he reached the ground below, and setting off at a run across the moonlit quad, vanished round a distant corner of the school buildings.

"Well, my word!" breathed Tom Merry, breaking the silence. "That's a new sort of burglar, if you like! And—and we've let him go, after all."

"And good luck to him—burglar or no burglar!" muttered Blake fiercely, peering with a shudder over the parapet.

He's saved old Gussy from being smashed up down there. We chaps could never have lifted him ourselves.

"That's how I feel about it," admitted Tom Merry quietly. "He certainly deserves to get away. Anyway, he can't have got away with much—that's certain."

"I don't believe the fellow's a burglar at all!" exclaimed Manners decidedly. "He didn't look like one, anyway. His clothes were good; I noticed that particularly. And he spoke well, too."

"That's nothing to go by," said Talbot quickly. "Lots of cracksmen dress and speak like gentlemen."

"Well, whoever or whatever he is, he's gone, and it's no good standing gassing in the cold!" exclaimed Tom Merry briskly.

Assisting the still shaking Gussy through the skylight, the juniors returned to the passage, and it was there decided that Tom Merry and Jack Blake should go and report to the Housemaster what had occurred.

Mr. Railton had long ago retired for the night, but he quickly rose and dressed as Tom Merry related to him the night happenings, from the time of his meeting with the nocturnal prowler in the Fourth Form passage.

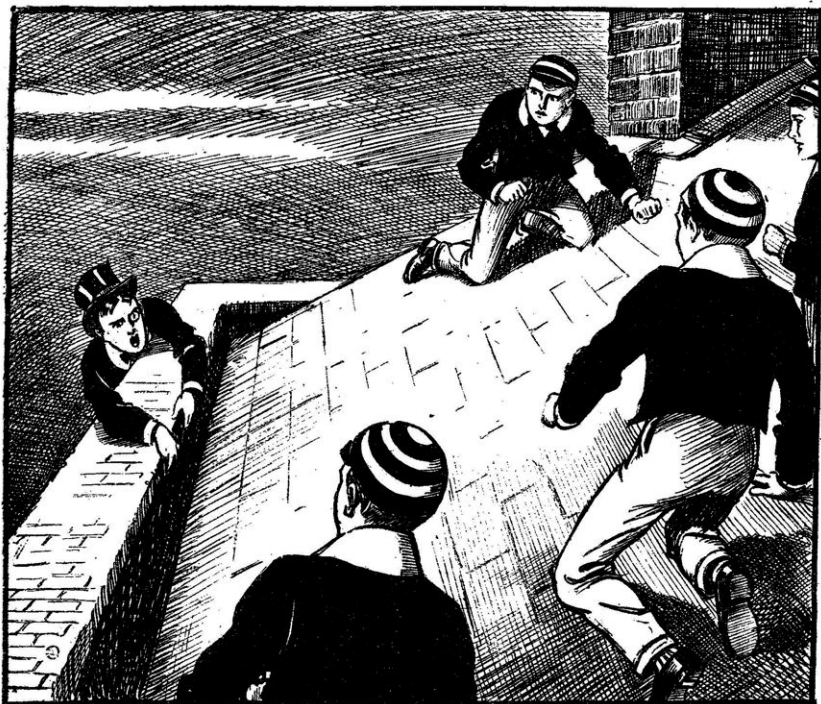
Immediately the astonished master began a systematic round of the Head's study and of the studies of the School House masters. But the inspection came to naught. As far as could be ascertained then, nothing whatever had been interfered with.

"Bless my soul! This—is this most extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Railton at length. "Nothing appears to have been disturbed. But there are still the junior studies. I think you said you saw the man enter one of the Fourth Form studies, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. He appeared to be carrying something. But when he came out again he was empty-handed."

"Very well; we will try them," exclaimed Mr. Railton.

But here again the search brought to



The juniors were just in time to see the form of one of their school-fellows slither over the parapet, clutching frantically at the stonework, and vanish into space. (See Chapter I.)

light nothing out of the ordinary—at least, until Study No. 6 was reached. And then, as Mr. Railton shone the light round the apartment, Blake gave a sudden start.

"Look, sir!" he ejaculated. "What is that doing here? It was not there when we went up to bed, I'm certain."

Mr. Railton smiled as his glance fell upon the article Blake indicated—a can of water, standing by the panelled wall of the study.

"I'm afraid that will have a simple explanation, Blake," he observed drily. "Probably one of the maids placed it there, and has since forgotten it."

Jack Blake frowned thoughtfully, but did not reply to that.

"We can do no more to-night, I fear," declared the Housemaster, when the last study had been visited with no further results. "I will telephone at once to the local police at Wayland, and report this astounding affair. Meanwhile, you had better go back to your dormitories, my boys."

"Very good, sir!"

And the next moment the two juniors were seeking their respective dormitories, more perplexed than ever over the startling happenings of that eventful night, and not a little relieved that the kindly Housemaster had—knowingly or unknowingly—omitted to press for details of the juniors' presence

in the passages of St. Jim's after "Lights Out."

CHAPTER 3. Strange Suspicions.

"HALLO! What's the matter with Baggy?"

Tom Merry passed that remark as the Terrible Three were strolling across the quad after dinner the next day.

They had been busily discussing the startling events of the previous evening—a topic of conversation, indeed, that all St. Jim's had been buzzing with that morning.

Though a rigorous search and the strictest inquiries had been made in the School House, nothing had been reported missing, nor had anything further come to light regarding the strange affair.

The general opinion among both masters and boys was that a burglary had been attempted—a burglary that had been frustrated by the unexpected meeting of the burglar with Tom Merry, of the Shell, in the Fourth Form passage.

But to the juniors who had been the principal actors in the drama, who had met the supposed burglar face to face, that simple explanation was disconcerted. To them, the affair remained a mystery—a mystery to which no amount of discussion, so far, had provided a satisfactory solution.

It was the sight of Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, acting in a somewhat strange and suspicious manner, that had called forth the above question from Tom Merry.

The fat junior had been standing in the shade of the leafless old elms, with his puggy nose glued to a folded newspaper. This proceeding in itself was not suspicious. But what did look suspicious was the fact that on the approach of the juniors he had hastily shoved the paper out of sight.

"Now, what's the fat merchant got there?" went on Tom Merry, frowning. "It's something that he doesn't wish us to see, that's certain."

"Perhaps he's studying the pedigrees of the starters for the Sillyass Stakes!" suggested Monty Lowther. "My hat, you chaps! If old Baggy's setting foot on the downward path, then we must put our paternal feet down!"

"It certainly does look fishy—or, rather horsey!" grinned Tom Merry. "Better investigate this. Collar the bounder!"

Baggy Trimble had been blinking at the approaching juniors uneasily. But when they broke into a run he gave a gasp of alarm, and bolted in the opposite direction.

"After him!" laughed Tom Merry. "I say, stop that steamroller, Blake!"

Tom Merry shouted the last order to

Blake & Co., who were standing chatting by the gates, and instantly the Fourth-Formers spread themselves out to intercept the bolting Baggy.

As he saw the new danger, the fat junior swerved desperately. But Blake was too quick for him, and easily made the ungainly youth a prisoner.

"Got you, my pippin!" he exclaimed grimly. "What's the porpoise been up to, Merry—pinching grub?"

"Nunno—not this time," gasped Tom Merry breathlessly. "But he's got something we'd like to squint at. Hallo! There it is!"

And, with a quick movement, Tom Merry snatched the folded newspaper protruding from Baggy's pocket.

"Here, gimme my paper!" howled Baggy, struggling frantically in Blake's strong grasp. "You rotter, that's mine!"

Tom Merry grinned as he glanced quickly at the paper.

"M-my hat!" he murmured. "It's not a racing paper, after all. It's just an ordinary morning paper—Hullo!"

Tom Merry broke off with a somewhat perplexed expression on his face as his eyes fell upon a paragraph boldly marked in blue pencil.

And no wonder, for the paragraph ran as follows:

"There are still no clues to the whereabouts of Henry Somers, the chief-cashier, and Robert Calder, the assistant-cashier, of the Deep Shaft Gold Mining Company, who are wanted on serious charges of embezzlement. Further examination of the books of the company show a series of defalcations amounting to at least £10,000, and extending over a period of three years.

"Henry Somers, the chief-cashier, seems to have disappeared utterly, and it is supposed he has made for the coast, and succeeded in getting clear of the country. His subordinate and accomplice in crime, however, has been traced as far as the little village of Rylcombe, in Sussex; but there all trace of him has been lost.

"A reward of £500 is offered by the company for information that will lead to the arrest of either of the fugitives."

Then followed descriptions and photographs of the wanted men.

Tom Merry stopped reading, and fixed a look of blank amazement on the face of Baggy Trimble.

"Well, my only hat!" he gasped.

"What on earth are you doing reading that rot? You—you don't mean to say either of those rotters is a relation of yours, Baggy?"

"I should jolly well think not!" snorted Baggy warmly. "Look here, Tom Merry. No good you chaps thinking of trying for that five hundred quid reward. I—I mean, it's all rot, of course, that chap being in hiding round Rylcombe."

"Ha ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry, beginning to see the motive for Baggy's interest in the announcement.

Very plainly the fatuous Trimble had his eye on the £500 reward; and very plainly, also, he had been afraid of anyone else seeing the paragraph, in case they should be attracted by it.

"Well, you—you ass!" grinned Tom Merry. "I suppose you are thinking of tracking down the giddy criminal and raking in that five hundred? Why, you couldn't track a stale red herring, you fat rot!"

"You wait!" said Baggy darkly, evidently realising that further concealment of his motive was useless. "You won't be jolly well hiding when you see me rake in that five hundred quid! And why shouldn't I? It says there—Baggy pointed to the paper, which Lowther was now scanning curiously—"it says there that that chap Calder has been tracked down to Rylcombe. Why, he might be hiding in Rylcombe Wood, or even in the old castle, or anywhere! Anyway, I'm jolly well going to track the villain down to his lair. Gimme my paper, Lowther, you beast!"

"Half a mo'!" said Monty Lowther grimly. "This paper's got Raiton's name written on it in pencil. I believe you've been poking about in his study, you fat burglar! Did you mark the paragraph, Baggy?"

"Nunno!" gasped Baggy quickly. "I found the paper in the passage outside, and Raiton must have marked it like that."

"Rats!" "It's a fact. And, I say, you fellows," said Baggy mysteriously, "there's something jolly queer about it. I think that rotter Calder must be a relation of Raiton's, because—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You see, it was like this, you chaps," gasped Baggy excitedly, evidently only too eager to air his startling news. "I—"

I happened to be passing the Head's study, and I heard—I accidentally overheard the Head and old Raiton talking about it; and Raiton seemed to be frightfully upset about the bobbies being after that chap Calder. He was fairly sobbing," said Baggy, drawing on his imagination a little. "I could hear him through the key—ahem—I mean, as I was passing. And then—"

"And then," remarked Lowther sarcastically, "I suppose Raiton's tears flooded the study, and washed the newspaper under the door into the passage—eh?"

"Nunno! You see, I slipped in afterwards—I—I mean, and then—"

"And then?" queried Tom Merry grimly.

And then that beast Kildare came up and kicked me along the passage," grumbled Baggy. "Said I was spying, you know!"

"Bai dove!"

"You you don't say!" breathed Jack Blake. "Well, now we're going to kick you across the quad, you fat, sneaking toad! Take that, and that, and—"

Baggy took "that," and "that," but he did not stay for more. He tugged himself free from Blake's grasp, and departed across the quad, roaring—

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Baggy the sleuthhound! I can see that bladder of lard tracking down a dangerous, desperate criminal."

Tom Merry's brows contracted.

"I—I say, you chaps," he muttered thoughtfully. "I—I suppose there's nothing in that rot the burbling chump was gassing about the Head and Raiton knowing—"

"I should jolly well say not!" chuckled Blake. "The babbling fool's always discovering mare's nests! Hallo! Who's this merchant?"

Jack Blake nodded towards the gates through which a stranger had just passed and stopped to speak to Taggles, the porter.

He was a short, thick-set, clean-shaven individual, dressed in dark tweeds, with a Homburg hat, and carrying a walking-stick. He looked commonplace to a degree, and only his eyes were at all noticeable. But they were shifty, and keen as a hawk's.

"Looks like a debt-collector or a bailiff," grinned Lowther. "My hat! Perhaps it is a debt-collector after Baggy. Dame Taggles may have put Baggy's bad debts in his hands, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's fairly having a heart-to-heart talk to Taggy!" exclaimed Herries.

"Hallo, he's tipping the old sport!"

"And Taggy's actually smiling! Here he comes!"

The juniors watched somewhat curiously as Taggles touched his hat and disappeared into his lodge, whilst the stranger came striding towards them. "Good-afternoon, boys!" he said cheerily.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" answered the juniors politely.

The stranger did not appear to be in any hurry.

He stopped and smiled agreeably at the group.

"Fine old place, this!" he observed chattily, allowing his shifty eyes to wander over the old school buildings. "Very fine place—very ancient, and all that. Heard a lot about the school, but never seen the place before."

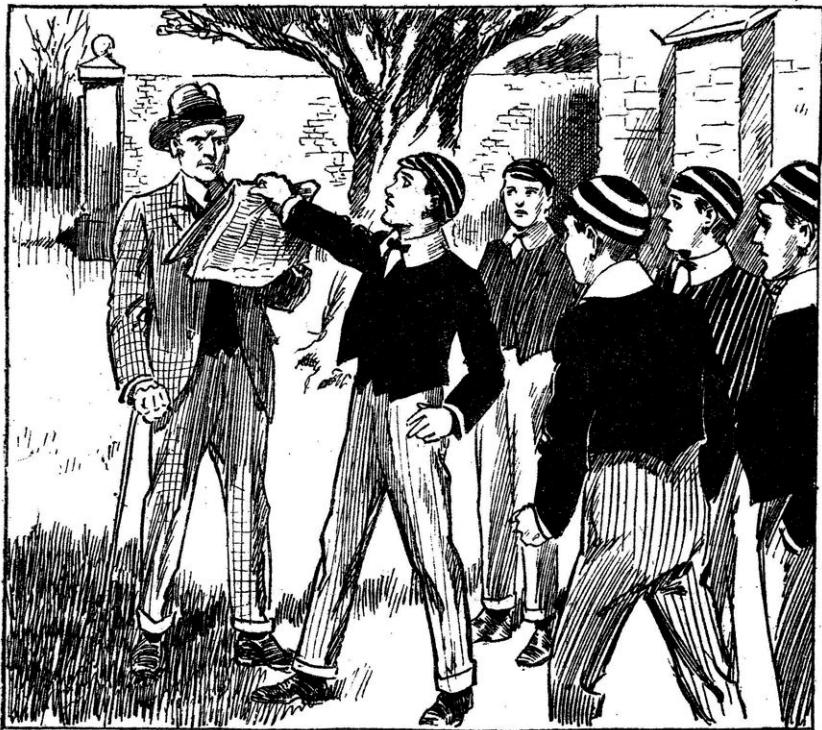
"Indeed, sir?" said Tom Merry politely.

"Yes. Friend of mine, though, was here years ago, lucky chap!" rattled on the strange gentleman. "Fine fellow.

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"There!" said Tom Merry with a soft chuckle. And, whipping the folded newspaper from his pocket, the junior jammed it with the marked paragraph and photo, face upwards, under the astonished stranger's nose. (See chapter 3.)

Good footballer, too. Expect some of you young gentlemen may have heard of him—name of Calder?"

Tom Merry gave a start, and shot a quick glance at the stranger.

"Yes, I believe I have heard of him before," he answered shortly.

"Ah, then, I dare say you've seen my friend also?"

"That's hardly likely if he was here years ago," answered Tom.

"Ha, ha! Yes. But I've no doubt he's visited his old school often since then—old boys' matches, and all that," laughed the gentleman softly. "Perhaps, though, you'd remember him if you saw his features again. That's his photo."

And, whipping from his pocket a photograph with startling suddenness, the stranger fairly jammed it before the astounded junior's eyes, watching him keenly the while.

Tom Merry gazed at it, and he could hardly restrain a gasp of surprise. There was no mistaking the features. It was the face of the photograph in the newspaper of the absconding assistant-cashier, Robert Calder.

"Yes," he answered slowly, striving to hide his astonishment. "I've seen that face quite recently—less than five minutes ago, in fact."

The stranger started a little.

"Ah, is that so?" The man's tone

was quite casual, but his eyes were gleaming. "That's splendid, now! Matter of fact, I've lost sight of my friend lately, and thought I'd perhaps get news of him here. Delighted if you young gentlemen can give me news of him—save me worrying Dr. Holmes. Now, when did you see that face, did you say?"

"There!" said Tom Merry, with a soft chuckle. And, whipping the folded newspaper from his pocket, the junior jammed it with the marked paragraph and photo, face upwards, under the astonished stranger's nose.

There was a chorus of chuckles from the juniors. But the inquisitive stranger flushed angrily, and his eyes glittered as he realised he had been spotted. Only for a brief moment, though; then he laughed amusedly.

"Ha, ha, ha! You young gentlemen will have your little joke," he smiled. "You're a sharp young chap, too. Then—then you don't think you've seen my friend Calder about here lately, I take it?"

"No," said Tom Merry bluntly. "And we wouldn't tell you if we had!"

And, turning on his heel, Tom Merry strode away, followed by his wondering chums, and leaving the astounded stranger standing as if rooted to the quad.

It was not until the juniors reached Study No. 6 that they suddenly connected the visit of the detective with the events of the previous night, and then their eyes shone with excitement.

But Jack Blake made a still more startling discovery the next moment. He saw, with an exclamation of amazement, that the screws which fastened the panel leading to the secret passage had been removed.

"Then he must be in the vaults!" cried Tom Merry. "What about an investigation to-night after lights out?"

"Yes, rather!"

"It's up to us to help the poor chap if we can," said Jack Blake. "He saved old Gussy."

"And he's an old St. Jim's fellow," said Manners quietly.

CHAPTER 4.

The Man from Scotland Yard.

"COME in!"

Mr. Railton turned a pale, harassed face towards the door as the short, stocky figure of

Toby Marsh, the page-boy, entered in answer to his call.

The popular and good-natured House-master was resting in his study after dinner, and his expression was strangely agitated, like that of a man who had

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recently received a severe shock—as, indeed, he had.

That morning Mr. Railton had opened his morning paper as usual, and almost the first item his eye fell upon was a reproduced photograph. It was the photograph of a face that was not only familiar, but near and dear to him—the face of his cousin and friend, Robert Calder.

Curiously, Mr. Railton had begun to read the letterpress that accompanied the photograph, and as he read the terrible news that his kinsman, and a fellow he regarded with affection and trust, had been branded as a felon, and that a hue and cry was out for him, he had been struck with horror.

Greatly distressed, the Housemaster had marked the item and taken the paper to Dr. Holmes, knowing that the Head had always taken the deepest interest in his old scholars.

And it was the ensuing conversation that Baggy Trimble, the spy of the Fourth, had overheard, and which had caused that over-curious youth to possess himself of the paper containing the news.

"Well, what is it, my boy?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, eyeing the pageboy somewhat impatiently.

"Which as 'ow the headmaster wishes to see you at once, sir!" said Toby.

"I will come immediately, my boy," said Mr. Railton, rising wearily from his chair.

A minute later Mr. Railton was knocking upon the Head's study door, and on entering, found that Dr. Holmes was not alone. Seated facing the Head was a keen, shifty-eyed man, dressed in dark tweeds, and idly twirling a Homburg hat in his hands.

It was the inquisitive stranger who had accosted the chums of the School House in the quad.

Dr. Holmes' face was extremely grave, and he gave the housemaster a sympathetic glance.

"Ah, Mr. Railton!" he said. "This gentleman is Mr. Preece, a detective from Scotland Yard, and he has called upon a very unpleasant errand. He wished to make inquiries regarding your—your cousin, Robert Calder, Mr. Railton."

The Housemaster gave a violent start, and his brow clouded. He returned the detective's salutation with a somewhat chilly bow.

"Indeed, sir," he answered.

"Mr. Preece," went on the Head drily, with a glance of evident displeasure at that gentleman, "for some reason or other, entertains the preposterous theory that Robert Calder is in hiding here at St. Jim's. He is also fully aware of your relationship to him, and has insisted upon an interview with you in order to ask you a few questions."

The Housemaster inclined his head a little, but did not speak. Dr. Holmes turned to the detective, who did not seem to be in the least disturbed by the obvious chilliness of his reception.

"Pray proceed, Mr. Preece," he requested coolly. "And kindly bring your business to as speedy a termination as possible. Both Mr. Railton and myself are busy men, and our time is of value."

The gentleman from Scotland Yard coughed gently.

"I regret that my duty forces upon me such a disagreeable task, gentlemen, but my business will not detain you many minutes, I trust," he exclaimed, turning a sharp penetrating glance upon Mr. Railton. "Have you any knowledge, sir, of the present whereabouts of your cousin, Robert Calder, against whom a warrant has been issued on serious charges of fraud?"

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Mr. Railton flushed angrily as his eyes met the suspicious glance of the detective.

Like Dr. Holmes, he had the honour and good name of St. Jim's very much at heart, and apart from his own shame at his kinsman being branded as a felon, he was intensely annoyed at the detective's presence near the school on such an errand—an errand that both he and Dr. Holmes considered preposterous, and calculated to accentuate the disgrace Calder had presumably brought upon his old school.

"No, I have not!" he replied curtly.

"Ah, you have not, I presume, seen or received any communication from your cousin within the last few days?"

"No."

"Have you any reason to think that your cousin would, if he were in trouble, come here with the intention of soliciting your help, might I ask?" pursued Mr. Preece.

"It would be the last thing I should imagine he would do," replied Mr. Railton, as if speaking more to himself than the detective. "He was my friend as well as my cousin. Always healthy, honest, and straight as daylight. He would never have risked dragging a friend into his troubles, even to save himself."

"Quite so, quite so," observed Mr. Preece snively. "And I suppose you went through your schooldays here as boys together?"

"That is not so," replied Mr. Railton quietly. "Calder was here at St. Jim's, but I was at Clavering in those days."

"That is quite correct," interposed Dr. Holmes. "Mr. Railton came to St. Jim's from Clavering School many years after Calder had left."

"Hm!"

The man from Scotland Yard appeared to be nonplussed for the moment.

"Then you can give me no information that will aid me in my task?" he asked at length.

"None."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said the detective politely.

He turned to the Head.

"There is one other matter I should like to mention before going, Dr. Holmes," he said. "The police inspector at Wayland has informed me that there was a supposed attempted burglary at this school two nights ago."

"That is quite true," exclaimed Dr. Holmes, arching his eyebrows a little. "Indeed, really, Mr. Preece, I will see what that has to do with the matter under discussion."

"Possibly not, possibly not," replied Mr. Preece gently. "But it was a very singular affair, was it not? If it is not asking too much, I should very much like to see one of the boys, who, I understand, took a leading part in the adventure."

Mr. Railton gave a violent start. The words of the man from Scotland Yard had caused strange thoughts to flush to his mind. But Dr. Holmes merely frowned with evident annoyance as he touched the bell, and a moment later Toby, the page, entered.

"Send Merry of the Shell to me at once!" he ordered impatiently. "You will find him in his Form-room, Marsh!"

There was a grim smile within the study, and it was only broken by the appearance of Tom Merry some seconds later.

The man from Scotland Yard gave a slight start, and frowned as he recognised the junior. But he passed no comment.

"Ah, Merry!" said the Head. "This gentleman is a police officer. Will you please relate to him as quickly and briefly as possible your adventures with that strange man the night before last?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom Merry, with a somewhat nervous glance at the detective.

And, next moment, he was relating once again the story of that night's startling happenings. But not until he had finished the recital did the detective speak.

"Ah, a very remarkable affair!" he then said carelessly, though his eyes were gleaming. "I suppose, young gentleman, you would not know the man again if you saw him?"

"I don't think I should," said Tom Merry quietly. "For one thing, we were too excited to notice him particularly. And, for another, it was scarcely light enough."

"You could not describe him?"

"No, sir."

"Ah, thank you, my boy! It does not matter much," said the detective, rising; and picking up his hat and stick, he turned to the Head.

"I presume you have no objection to my making further inquiries around the school, Dr. Holmes?"

"Not if your duty makes it necessary," replied the Head tartly.

"Thank you very much, sir! Good-afternoon, gentlemen!"

And, bowing to Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton, the man from Scotland Yard left the study, apparently quite satisfied with the result of his interview.

As for Tom Merry, the sight of Mr. Railton's obvious distress of mind, and the knowledge of what the capture of the fugitive would mean to him, decided the junior.

And, right or wrong, come what may, he was greatly determined that the man from Scotland Yard should not make a capture within the walls of St. Jim's, if he could prevent it.

CHAPTER 5. In the Vaults.

BOOM!

It was the last stroke of eleven sounding from the School House tower at St. Jim's. Barely had the deep tones of the bell ceased to vibrate on the still night air when the door of the Shell dormitory opened, and three dim figures emerged.

They were Tom Merry and his chums, Monty Loutcher and Manning, and they were fully dressed, and carried their boots in their hands.

The three juniors stood a moment outside the door listening intently. But the dark passages were deserted, and no sounds reached their straining ears.

"All serene!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Come on!"

Treading softly, the juniors moved cautiously along the passage to the Fourth Form dormitory, where they met Jack Blake & Co.

On their way to Study No. 6, Tom Merry stopped short suddenly.

"Hallo! Railton's not gone to bed yet," he murmured. "Look!"

It was true enough. From beneath the Housemaster's door came a faint gleam of light.

"Working late, I suppose," muttered Tom Merry with a frown. "Anyway, we're not turning back now. Better slip past quickly. Not a sound, though!"

Anxiously and nervously the juniors tip-toed swiftly past the study door, and not until they reached Study No. 6 did they breathe freely again.

Blake closed the door, and moving carefully in the darkness, produced from the recesses of the cupboard a bicycle lamp.

Striking a match he lit this, and by its light the juniors quickly put on their boots.

"Now for the secret panel!" said Blake, directing the beam of light on to the panelled wall by the bookcase. "My hat! Wonder if the beggar's on the prowl to-night?"

"Have to change that," said Tom Merry. "Doesn't look like it yet, though."

There was a slight click and a creaking sound as Tom Merry released the panel and slid it open, disclosing a dark aperture where a huge slab of stone was missing.

After a moment's hesitation, Tom Merry stepped through, and Blake handed him the lantern and followed, with the others behind.

"Better close the panel," advised Tom Merry. "It's quite on the cards that Railton has worked the thing out as we have done, and will come prowling round. We can easily open it again from the inside."

"Right-ho!"

The panel slid to, and the adventurers looked around. The place smelled musty and damp, and a chilly draught from somewhere made the juniors shiver.

As they stood huddled together in that secret hiding-place between the very walls of St. Jim's the juniors could not help a queer, eerie feeling of awe stealing over them as their minds went back to the days, centuries ago, when the original building of St. Jim's was a monastic establishment.

Though the secret passage was strictly forbidden to the juniors, it was not the first time they had explored it, and without hesitation Tom Merry turned the light downwards.

It revealed to view a narrow flight of steps leading, seemingly, into the bowels of the earth.

Dark and forbidding enough the blackness below looked, and Tom Merry gave a slight shiver as he led the way cautiously down the stone steps.

"Carefully!" warned Tom Merry. "These steps are jolly steep!"

Tom Merry's warning was necessary, for the steps were small, and descended steeply. Twenty steps the juniors negotiated; then came a few yards of level passage, damp and clammy beneath the feet, and a second flight of stone steps was disclosed.

Tom Merry flashed the rays of the lamp upon them, and began to descend. The air grew more dank and chilly, and the walls of glistening stone slimy to the touch.

The juniors advanced in silence, the gloom and loneliness of the place having an eerie effect upon them. Even Monty Lowther was subdued.

"Look out, chaps!" Tom Merry gave the whispered warning, as the steps ended suddenly, and the lantern gleamed on a wall of stone.

"Now for the revolving stone!" muttered Tom Merry, running the palms of his hands over the cold stonework. "Blessed if I haven't forgotten how to open the—No; here we are!"

Tom Merry's roving hand came to rest on a depression in the stone. He pressed hard, and immediately, with a slight rumbling sound, the massive slab of stone swung inwards, apparently upon a pivot.

The juniors now stood on the threshold of the vaults. Somewhere in the gloomy depths before them they believed the fugitive was hiding, and all of them were quivering with excitement as they realised that their suspicions were about to be put to the test.

"Keep your eyes open!" muttered Tom Merry, swinging the lamp round. "The poor beggar may get the wind up and go for us."

Breathlessly the juniors watched the

white arc of light as it travelled along the flagstones and over the massive walls. "Nothing doing!" murmured Blake. "Let's try the next one."

The seven juniors moved across to the second vault and halted beneath the arched doorway. But barely had Tom Merry started to swing the light round when Herries gripped his arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "In the next vault—a light!"

"What, yes!" breathed Tom Merry. "We'll have a squint first, though. Quietly, now!"

Through the archway of the third vault Herries' keen eyes had discerned a glimmer of light shining low on the flagstones, and, with hearts beating faster than usual, the juniors tiptoed across and peered inside.

And what they saw was what they had half-expected to see. On the floor of the vault stood a bicycle-lamp, and the scene within the radius of the light it cast was of the strangest.

On the flagstones were a couple of travelling-rugs and a hearthrug. Close by was a jug of water and a quantity of food and various other articles. Some of them the juniors recognised at once.

And lying on the rugs, with a greatcoat flung over him, was the figure of a man. His face was towards the juniors, and the light from the lamp shone full upon it. It was the face of the photograph in the newspaper.

Without a doubt it was Robert Calder, for whom half the police of England were on the look-out. And the juniors had little doubt that he was also the man they had encountered two nights ago.

The startled juniors gazed upon the scene as if fascinated. And then quite suddenly a stifled exclamation came from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove, dear boys!" he breathed softly. "The beggar's got my twavelling-wug!"

"And that's my blessed bike-lamp!" murmured Digby, staring.

"And some of that grub came from our study cupboard, or I'm a Dutchman!" whispered Manners.

"He's the raider, without a doubt," agreed Tom Merry. "But never mind that now. I don't like the idea of giving the beggar a fright now we have come. Anyway, here goes!"

And the captain of the Shell was about to reveal their presence to the fugitive when he gave a startled jump.

To their ears came a low rumble. It was followed almost immediately by the sound of firm footsteps in the vaults they had just left.

Someone was coming down the secret passage!

The refugee also had heard the sounds, for, with a startled ejaculation, he leaped to his feet and stared hard into the darkness that hid the watchers.

Fortunately, Tom Merry had turned the wick of the lamp low, and hidden the lamp beneath his coat. Standing as they were in the pitch-darkness, it was impossible for the man to see them.

"Quick!" hissed Tom Merry quickly. "Back here!"

Swiftly they followed Tom Merry as he felt his way into the deeper blackness of the vault, and barely had they halted together when the white light of an electric torch came through the archway, and behind, the dimly-seen figure of a man.

Apparently, like the juniors, he also saw the light in the far vault, for, to their relief, he strode straight through.

On the threshold of the vault he halted, with a cry of mingled recognition and dismay.

"Robert—you?"

The hidden juniors jumped as they heard the voice.

"Great Scott! Railton!" breathed Blake softly.

There was no immediate response from the man within, but his heavy breathing could be plainly heard.

"So—so my suspicions were correct," came Mr. Railton's voice heavily. "Good heavens, Robert! What does this—this awful business mean? Why are you hiding here? Does it mean that—that you are—"

The Housemaster halted as though he could not bring himself to say what he intended, but his meaning was obvious. And for quite a minute there was a tense silence. Then came the answer: "I am not guilty—I am innocent, Victor!"

The voice was husky, but the note of earnest sincerity in the tone was unmistakable.

There was a pause.

"Then—then why did you run away? Why did you not face the charge and fight it like a man?" demanded Mr. Railton sternly at last.

"Because, well, perhaps because I was a fool," came the answer miserably. "But even now I feel I did the right thing. I was at my club when the news came through on the tape that warrants were out for the arrest of Somers and myself. In a flash my position dawned upon me. Somers is a rogue. I had suspected him for a long time. But he is a clever rogue, and—and he hates me. And I knew then he must somehow have tampered with the books to indicate that I was his accomplice. Anyway, I bolted. But—but you believe me, Victor?"

"I would stake my life on your integrity, Robert," was the prompt and decided answer. "But—but, man alive, why, if you are innocent, did you not give yourself up and stand your trial? By bolting like this you have blackened your case beyond—"

"It was done on the spur of the moment," replied Robert Calder. "I reasoned it out that it would never do to catch me until they got me Somers. I saw at once that I must keep out of this way for a time. And now it would be madness to give myself up. You realise that, Victor?"

"Yes," said Mr. Railton grimly and hopelessly. "By bolting and lying low you have done the worst thing possible. But why did you come here? It was madness!"

"Because I was desperate, and I knew of no other place where I should be safe. And, believe me, Victor, I had not the slightest intention of making my presence known to you. I never intended to drag your name into this. I remembered the vaults and the secret passage, and I knew they would never dream of looking for me here."

"Then you are wrong, Robert! Even now you are in the gravest danger. A detective is here—"

"What?"

"A detective was here this afternoon, making inquiries concerning you. It was he who put me on the track of the truth, and I determined to put my suspicions to the test to-night. He knows—What is that?"

Mr. Railton broke off with a convulsive start as a half-stifled sneeze rang through the silent vaults. And it came from George Herries of the Fourth.

The juniors, hardly daring to breathe, had been unwilling listeners to the conversation. Standing motionless in those damp, chilly vaults, they soon began to shiver, and Herries had succumbed to an irresistible desire to sneeze.

"You—you ass, Herries!" breathed Tom Merry. "Quick—run for it!"

And, with a quick turn of the thumb, Tom Merry turned the light higher and led the way, helter-skelter, towards the revolving stone.

From behind them came a quick, alarmed exclamation, followed by a sharp command in Mr. Railton's voice:

"Who is that? Stop! Come back!"

But the juniors did not "come back." They had been forestalled in their errand to warn the refugee, and no good was to be gained by staying. They could guess what the Housemaster's feelings would be if he knew they had overheard all.

They reached the revolving stone and swarmed through. Blake was about to swing the stone into place, when he paused and listened.

To the junior's relief, no sound of pursuing footsteps could be heard.

"Good!" gasped Tom Merry. "No need to break our necks up these beastly stairs, then. The doctor not take it too easy, though. Come on!"

And Tom Merry led the way up the steps, and a few minutes later the seven adventurers passed through the sliding panel. Blake replaced the still smoking lamp in the corner. And then the juniors, in gloomy and thoughtful silence, took off their boots and crept up to their dormitories.

But it was long before sleep closed the tired eyes of the seven that night. Their minds were too full of the grievous trouble that had befallen their kindly Housemaster, and all of them were filled with foreboding as to how the business would end.

CHAPTER 6. Danger.

"MY hat!"

The juniors, on their way towards the gates after dinner next day, had just turned the corner of the porter's lodge when Tom Merry stopped suddenly and uttered that exclamation.

Standing by the door of the lodge, chatting with Taggles, was a keen-faced man in a Homburg hat—a man whose features were already familiar to the seven juniors. It was Mr. Preece, the man from Scotland Yard.

"Pumping old Taggy, I suppose," muttered Tom Merry, with a troubled frown, and coming to a halt. "I say, we'd better not let the bounder see us. He'll be asking awkward questions, and we don't want to have to tell him any whooppers. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The seven juniors were turning on their heels when a snatch of the conversation came clearly to their ears.

"You don't say," the detective was saying agreeably. "Ancient vaults beneath the old school—eh? And a secret passage, too. Very interesting—very!"

Then came an amiable grunt from Taggles.

"Wot I says is this 'ere; I don't hold no account of them things myself—damp and smelly, I calls 'em. But I don't see as 'ow I shouldn't show a gentleman round wot is interested."

Taggles' further remarks were lost to the juniors as they passed round the corner of the lodge and out of earshot.

The juniors came to a halt, and exchanged startled glances.

Tom Merry's face was very grave. "You—you chaps heard that?" he muttered tensely.

Blake nodded uneasily.

"Looks as though he's trying to get old Taggy to show him the vaults!" he

exclaimed slowly. "And there's no doubt Taggy will, if there's a chance of a tip out of it. Taggy doesn't know who he is; and he often does show visitors round. My hat, you chaps, the game's up if he does!"

"No doubt about that," said Tom Merry. "It means certain capture for that poor chap Calder, and disgrace and shame for old Railton. That is, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless we take a hand," said Tom Merry, setting his lips hard. "Look here, you fellows; we agreed to help this chap Calder, and here's a chance to do it! At all costs we've simply got to prevent that detective searching the vaults."

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy—"

"But how?" ejaculated Blake, in alarm. "We don't even know when Taggy will—"

"We must find out," said Tom Merry quietly. "I shouldn't be surprised if they tackled the job this afternoon. It's a half-day, and Taggy's got plenty of time on his hands. Anyway, I vote we drop footer and keep an eye on both of them."

"You're quite right, Tommy!" muttered Blake slowly. "I'm more than willing to take the risk. If it ends in trouble—well—"

Blake paused as Tom Merry gripped his arm tensely. From the front of the lodge came approaching voices and footsteps. A moment later the ancient figure of Taggles appeared. He was carrying a hurricane-lantern; with him, chatting cheerfully, was Mr. Preece, the detective.

The man from Scotland Yard glanced carelessly at the group, but as Tom Merry met his glance he saw that his eyes were glittering.

"Too late!" muttered Herries tensely. "Look! They're making for the cloisters!"

It was true enough. Taggles and his companion had crossed the quad in the direction of the cloisters, and, in view of the snatch of conversation the juniors had overheard, it was only too clear that their destination was the vaults.

It was only too clear, too, that unless the juniors acted quickly the refugee in the vaults was lost.

Tom Merry's brain worked swiftly.

"Quick!" he muttered. "Herries, Dig, D'Arcy—you chaps cut down to the vaults by the secret passage and warn Calder. Get him out, bag and baggage, into the underground passage. We'll tackle the detective Johnny at this end! Buck up!"

"What-ho!"

"Wely on us, deah boys!"

All realised there was no time to stand on ceremony, and without further ado the three Fourth-Formers shot across the quad and vanished into the School House.

"Now, you chaps!" said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "By hook or by crook we've got to stop the detective nosing round the vaults until those three have had time to get Railton's cousin clear. But if any of you chaps would rather not take the risk—"

"Rats!"

"Not likely!"

"Then come on!"

Wondering and excited, Blake, Lowther, and Manners followed Tom Merry as he trotted across the quad. What their leader proposed to do they could only guess. There was no time for questions, and they were quite content to leave the leadership in the capable hands of Tom Merry.

Into the dark and gloomy cloisters

Tom Merry led the way, but barely had he got to within a few yards of the entrance to the vaults, when he stopped with a muttered exclamation of annoyance.

Skulking round the top of the moss-grown steps, was the fat and familiar figure of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth, and his puddy face was ablaze with excitement and suspicion.

The juniors looked at each other. To take such an action as they contemplated with the spying Baggy sneaking about, was dangerous in the extreme. Baggy was about the last person they wanted to see just then.

"What rotten luck!" breathed Blake. "That fat fool—"

As though he had heard Blake's muttered words, Trimble gave a startled gasp and glanced round. As he recognised the four, he beckoned to them eagerly.

"What's the matter, you spying toad?" whispered Tom Merry, anxious and impatient.

Trimble's eyes gleamed.

"I—I say, you fellows," he gasped excitedly. "He—he's down there!"

"Who is?" said Tom Merry impatiently.

Trimble looked round him cautiously. "That villain, Calder, the absconding cashier!" he whispered darkly.

The juniors jumped.

"It's a fact!" babbled Baggy, almost bursting with pride and excitement. "I spotted him go down only a minute ago into the vaults with Taggy. I believe old Taggles is in league with him, you know. I've seen the beggar sneaking round the school these last few days, and I spotted what he was at once. I told you I'd got a valuable clue, Blake."

"You—you fat ass!" breathed Blake, in exasperation.

"I tell you it's true, enough!" gasped Baggy frantically. "And I say, you chaps, if you'll help me capture the villain, I'll stand you a stunning feed out of the five hundred quid reward. You've only got to knock him on the head, and hold him down while I fetch the police—Ow!"

Trimble broke off with a gasp of alarm as Tom Merry suddenly lost patience and gripped him angrily.

Baggy's little blunder in mistaking the detective for the man he was after was funny enough. It was the sort of mistake only Baggy Trimble—with the possible exception of George Alfred Grundy—would make. But the juniors did not laugh; the situation was too serious for that.

"Quick, you chaps!" gasped Tom Merry, exchanging a meaning glance with Blake. "The woodshed!"

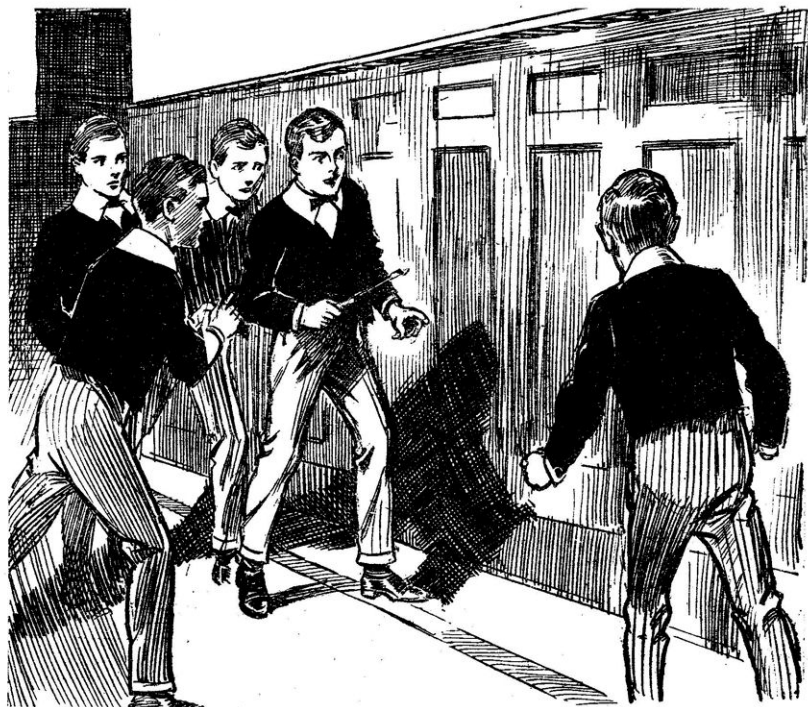
Next instant, yelping with surprise and dismay, the fat youth was rushed across to the woodshed a few yards across the quad.

"In with him!" muttered Merry.

Lowther kicked the door open, while Manners and Blake flung the kicking and struggling Baggy head first into a heap of sawdust and shavings. Tom Merry swiftly took down the key that hung on a nail behind the door, and banging the door, he locked it, and placed the key in his pocket.

"Buck up!" he hissed tensely. "We've wasted enough precious time with that burbling chump!"

And, anxious and fearful lest they were too late, the four juniors re-entered the cloisters, and a moment later were descending into the darkness of the vaults.



From behind the panelling came faint sounds of stumbling footsteps. They were quickly followed by the sound of someone fumbling with the rusty mechanism of the sliding panel. The occupants of the study waited, hardly daring to breathe. (See Chapter 8.)

CHAPTER 7.

A Risky Business.

TOM MERRY halted nonplussed.

The silence of the place was tomb-like, and the darkness intense. But suddenly a moving gleam of light appeared in the darkness ahead, and Tom Merry gasped with relief.

The light was but a short distance away, and it told him they were not yet too late.

Without hesitation, Tom Merry led the way towards it.

As they drew nearer the juniors advanced more cautiously, until, quite suddenly, Tom Merry stopped short with a low murmur of warning.

The light ahead had stopped moving, and the low murmur of voices came to the juniors' ears.

"Listen, you fellows," he muttered seriously. "We don't want to take any serious action unless absolutely forced. But if I do give the word—you know what to do. Taggy doesn't count; he'll get the wind up and bolt, I expect. And now let's creep nearer—carefully!"

With tense, set nerves, and hearts beating fast, the juniors crept towards the vault, whence the light proceeded, and peered inside.

Standing in the centre of the vault was Taggles; and the light from the lamp in his hand glimmered on the walls of stone, the vaulted roof, and the huge

flagstones. And, standing near the porter, with a somewhat impatient expression on his usually expressionless face, was Mr. Preece, the detective.

Then suddenly Blake gripped Tom Merry's arm almost convulsively.

From the distant vaults ahead came faint sounds of movement. In the dim recesses a faint light gleamed for a moment, and vanished, to reappear again a moment later.

Evidently Mr. Preece also heard the sounds, for he bristled with suspicion on the instant.

"That lamp! Give me that lamp, my man!" he muttered, in a grinding tone that made the startled porter jump.

And, without waiting for the porter's answer, Mr. Preece was about to snatch the lamp, when he spun round with a startled exclamation as Tom Merry's voice rang out:

"Now, chaps!"

Instantly, from the shadows, four youthful figures detached themselves and closed on the startled detective.

Crash!

In the grasp of four pairs of strong hands, the astonished man went down with a crash, and a savage exclamation. His stick rattled hollowly on the flagstones and his Homburg hat rolled away in the darkness.

As Tom Merry had anticipated, Taggles didn't count. He gave one wild yell of alarm, and bolted; and he took

the lamp with him. His clanging footsteps died away in the distance and the grim struggle went on in silence and pitch darkness.

The detective fought furiously, but he was taken utterly by surprise, and against the four sturdy juniors his struggles availed him little.

"Let me go!" he gasped at length, in a voice hoarse with fury. "What does this outrage mean? You shall suffer for this!"

The juniors did not reply. Though they hardly realised the seriousness of what they were doing they knew in a dim sort of way that it was serious.

If trouble ensued—as it would, almost certainly—they did not want the detective to be able to identify them by their voices.

As a matter of fact, the right or wrong of the matter had hardly been given a thought, in their desire to save the liberty of an old St. Jim's fellow, and a relation of a master they liked and respected.

For some moments the struggle went on as the angry detective squirmed and wriggled to free himself. But he was helpless in the junior's grasp.

From the distant vaults came further sounds of movement, followed by a low rumble, and then—silence!

But though the juniors guessed it was the closing of the revolving stone door, THE GEM LIBRARY. No. 637.

and the silence told them that their chums had succeeded in their task, they did not release their grip—they were taking no risks.

And, as if the detective also knew what that rumble meant—that his man was escaping, he gave a smoother ejaculation of fury, and redoubled his efforts to free himself.

"Let me go, you young scoundrels!" he ground out furiously. "This is a conspiracy; you are doing this to aid that man to escape! Do you realise what you are doing? Release me!"

There was no reply, and after another vain struggle, he gave it up at last, and relapsed into savage silence.

One minute, two minutes passed, and then Tom Merry gave the signal.

"Now!" Instantly the juniors sprang away from him, and before Mr. Preece could even sit up on the flagstones, the darkness of the vaults had swallowed them up.

Mr. Preece staggered to his feet and listened intently, his eyes striving to pierce the blackness around him. To his straining ears came the faint echo of footsteps on the flagstones in the distance. With a savage imprecation he started in the direction of the sounds.

But barely had he stumbled half a dozen steps when the sounds died away and silence fell.

Realising that his assailants had escaped him, the detective hesitated, clenching and unclenching his fists in baffled rage.

Then, from an inside pocket, he drew a small, black case.

It was a small, but powerful, electric lamp, and an instant later, a broad white light shot from it, and lit up the deep recesses of the vaulted room.

Without a second glance in the direction the juniors had vanished, the detective advanced through the opposite archway, and began to subject the vaulted rooms beyond to a systematic search.

The first three chambers he soon disposed of without discovering anything of interest. But on the threshold of the fourth, he paused and sniffed suspiciously. The room smelled strongly of a smoky lamp, and as the detective swung the light round, his eyes gleamed triumphantly.

On the flagstones lay a litter of waste wrapping-paper, burnt matches, and other odds and ends—plain evidence that the chamber had been occupied and vacated only recently.

More than suspicious now, Mr. Preece continued his investigations.

Ignoring everything else, he subjected the stone flags to a careful scrutiny. One thing he soon noticed; the floor of this vault, at least, was fairly dry, and the flags where he himself had entered, only showed the imprint of his own muddy boots.

But under the opposite archway, the floor was thick with muddy steps, crossing and recrossing; and now, fairly on the trail, the detective quickly followed them into the dark recesses beyond.

Through the next vaulted chamber, and the next, the trail led him; but here, instead of leading through an archway, the imprints ended abruptly against the massive stone walls of the vaults.

The detective paused, puzzled for the moment; then his eyes glittered, and, straightening himself, he shone the light upon the huge slab of stone facing him. For fully five minutes, Mr. Preece worked systematically, trying every inch of the wall within reach, and quite suddenly his persistence was rewarded.

There came a slight creak, and with a low rumbling, the heavy stone swung

round disclosing to view stone steps leading upwards.

Mr. Preece gave a grunt of satisfaction, and without a second's hesitation he stepped through and the stone swung to after him.

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Preece Gets Lett.

"A LL serene, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy called out that remark as Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Manners and Lowther, feeling their way in the darkness, came stumbling down the narrow stairway of the secret passage leading from Study No. 6 to the vaults beneath St. Jim's.

The three juniors—D'Arcy, Digby and Herries, were standing, excited and breathless, at the bottom of the steps, and their arms were loaded with blankets, rugs, provisions and the miserable odds and ends that had helped to make that wretched stone apartment habitable for the refugee.

And standing there, also, looking like a man who was not sure if he was standing on head or heels, was the tall, broad-shouldered form of Robert Calder, the refugee himself.

The sudden and unexpected arrival of the three juniors, their frantic warning, hurried explanations, and finally the hasty exodus from the vault had taken place in a few swift minutes, and he still looked dazed and bewildered.

"All serene, deah boys!" repeated D'Arcy, as the other four juniors came within the radius of the lamp. "Bai jove, Tom Merwy, you look quite wuffed!"

"I feel as though I'd been through a threshing machine," said Tom Merry with a quick, curious glance at Robert Calder. "That detective Johnny's a hefty brute, and no mistake!"

"My hat! So—so you had to tackle the beggar then?" ejaculated Herries with a low whistle.

"Yes, but we were only just in time. That fat idiot Trimble turned up, and we had to shove him in the wood-shed," explained Tom Merry. "We caught that detective just as he was getting a bit inquisitive; so we downed him and held him down until you chaps got clear!"

"Bai Jove!" "And what happened then?" asked Digby, breathlessly.

"We bolted! It was a bit ticklish finding our way out in the dark, but we managed it. And after stopping a sec to let old Baggy out of the wood-shed, we cut straight here. That's all!"

As Tom Merry finished, Robert Calder stepped forward, his face pale and agitated.

"This—is this is terrible, my boys!" he muttered huskily, laying one hand on Tom Merry's shoulder. "Believe me, I am deeply touched and grateful for your—your help. But—but you should not have done it. You surely did not realise what a grave step you were taking? I would rather have given myself up to that man than allow you youngsters to run such risks for my sake."

Tom Merry smiled. "You ran a far graver risk yourself, sir, when you saved old Gussy's life the other night," he answered awkwardly. "And—and you're an old St. Jim's fellow. But, excuse me, I don't think we ought to stay any longer here. Sooner or later that detective will find this secret passage. And I think I know of a place where you'll be safe for a time at least."

"Very well; for the present I am in

your hands, my boys," said Robert Calder, with a slight smile.

And next moment the refugee and the seven juniors were stumbling up the stairway. They had barely reached the second flight of steps, when from behind came a familiar rumbling sound—a sound that sent a chill into the hearts of the juniors.

Someone had entered the secret passage from the vaults. It was not hard to guess who that someone could be.

"For heaven's sake, hurry," gasped Tom Merry. "It's that blessed detective! My hat! He's a smarter man than I thought him!"

With frantic haste they hurried up the remaining steps, and a minute later had reached the secret panel. Blake was the first through, and with commendable presence of mind he dashed to the study door and locked it.

One by one they filed through the aperture. Tom Merry came last, and before slipping through he shot one swift glance behind him. Down in the blackness below, a white patch of light moved like a will o' the wisp. The junior waited no longer.

He slipped inside the study, and sliding the panel to turned to Blake.

"Your tool-box, Blake?" he muttered crisply. "We want screws and a screw-driver,—quick!"

"I have the screws!" said Robert Calder quietly.

And taking a handful of screws from his jacket pocket, began to slip them one by one into the holes in the panelling, whilst Jack Blake hunted feverishly for a screw-driver.

"I told them out the second night I came here," explained Mr. Raiton's cousin briefly.

"We guessed you had," said Tom Merry. "Hallo! here we are! Good!"

Blake had found a screwdriver and a chisel, and a moment later he and Tom Merry set to work to drive the screws with feverish haste.

They had barely found a couple home when Tom Merry stopped working suddenly and held out a warning hand.

There was a breathless silence within the study. And then from behind the panelling came faint sounds of stumbling footsteps. They were quickly followed by the sound of someone fumbling with the rusty mechanism of the sliding panel.

The occupants of the study waited, hardly daring to breathe. For fully five minutes the sounds went on; but the two screws had been driven well home and the panel did not move.

The listeners heard a muttered imprecation behind the wall and then followed footsteps descending the stone steps; and, after that, silence.

It was another five minutes before anyone dared to speak. Tom Merry broke the silence.

"My only hat! That was a narrow squeak!" he breathed. "But we're not out of the wood yet. I've thought of a place where you'll be safe for a time, Mr. Calder. But it means running the gauntlet of the Shell and Fourth passages to get there."

The refugee's brow clouded.

"If it means further risk for you fellows, then I forbid—" he began.

"The only risk is, if you happen to meet a chap or a master," interposed Tom Merry. "I suppose you have heard of Nobody's Study, Mr. Calder?"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove, what a weally wippinging—"

"Yes; if I remember rightly it is a room at the end of the blind passage

leading off from the Shell passage. But it was never used in my time," said Mr. Calder.

"Nor is it now," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Not a soul goes near it for weeks on end, and you'll be safe there until that detective Johnny gets fed-up and clears. At all events it's better than the vaults. But we'd better do it at once while the fellows are at tea. Some of us can carry the stuff along. Then Mr. Calder can lock himself in, and we'll see he doesn't run short of grub."

"You fellows are bricks!" said Mr. Calder huskily.

That was all the refugee said just then, but he fell in with Tom Merry's plan; there was really nothing else for him to do.

Blake unlocked the door and looked out. The passage was deserted, and from behind the closed doors came the rattle of tea-cups and the buzz of cheery voices. And a moment later the plan was being put into effect.

Tom Merry and Blake took stations at the end of the passages to signal at the approach of danger, whilst the juniors carried the fugitive's belongings—or rather his borrowed "belongings"—to Nobody's Study.

Then Mr. Calder himself marched boldly out, and by great good fortune everything went off without a hitch.

Within five minutes, the refugee had been safely installed in his new quarters without anyone but themselves being any the wiser.

Nothing further happened that evening, and the juniors went up to bed, feeling that they and the fugitive were safe for that night, at least, but full of troubled thoughts for what the morrow would bring.

CHAPTER 9. The Unexpected.

"BLESSED my soul!"

Dr. Holmes uttered that exclamation in a tone of great amazement and incredulity.

It was nine o'clock the following morning, and once again Mr. Prece, of Scotland Yard, was seated within the study of the headmaster of St. Jim's.

He had just finished relating to the Head the story of the attack upon himself by unknown juniors in the vaults, and of his subsequent discoveries the previous afternoon; and, as Dr. Holmes had ridiculed the theory that the wanted man was in hiding at St. Jim's, it was perhaps no wonder that he was amazed and incredulous.

But there was no mistaking the truth and significance of the detective's statements, and Dr. Holmes was also troubled and uneasy.

Mr. Prece had ended his recital with a demand for the discovery of the culprits, and a request to search the school for the man he was after—a request Dr. Holmes was fully aware the detective could enforce if necessary.

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head, after a pause. "I am amazed at your statements, Mr. Prece. But I do not for one moment admit the possibility of Calder being in hiding here. I can only account for what happened yesterday in the vaults to a regrettable and foolish practical joke on the part of irresponsible juniors."

The detective made an angry and impatient gesture.

On the previous occasion he had visited the Head his manner had been bland and smiling. This time, however, his face was grim and determined, and his eyes glittered angrily.

"And I am convinced that Calder is here," he exclaimed emphatically. "I

believe that the boys who assaulted me are friends of his, and did so in order to help him to escape. And I am determined to discover the culprits, Dr. Holmes. Had they not interfered that man would not have escaped me."

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"I can understand your desire to see the delinquents punished, Mr. Prece," he remarked drily, "but, really, I fail to see how that would help you in your task."

Mr. Prece pursed his lips.

"I have no personal desire to see them punished," he replied tersely. "But those boys are aware, I am convinced, of the whereabouts of the man I am after. They have broken the law, and are liable to severe penalties. To save themselves from the consequences of their offence, I am inclined to think they will give me the information I require."

The Head gave a start, and his brow clouded. He understood now the detective's real object in his keen desire for the discovery of the delinquents.

"I will certainly do all in my power to discover the culprits," he answered shortly. "But I fear it will be no simple matter. You admit you could not identify—"

Dr. Holmes broke off, and frowned with annoyance, as a knock sounded at the study door.

"Come in!" he called impatiently.

The door opened to admit Toby, the page. In his grubby hand was a buff-coloured envelope.

"Which as 'ow the foot-boy from the Crown and Anchor in Rylcombe brought this 'ere, sir," said Toby, hesitating between the Head and Mr. Prece.

"'E sez 'is boss told 'im he'd find the gentleman 'ere, and to say this 'ere telegram came just after 'e left this morning. Name of Prece, sir."

The Head motioned to Mr. Prece, who took the telegram, and Toby retired.

The detective tore open the envelope, and slowly began to decipher the message, whilst the Head drummed impatiently on the desk before him.

And then quite suddenly Mr. Prece gave a slight start of surprise, slipped the telegram into his pocket, and, picking up his hat and stick, he turned briskly to the Head, his face expressionless as ever.

"You will doubtless be glad to hear, Dr. Holmes, that it will not be necessary for me to worry you further with regard to this matter," he said crisply.

"My business here is at an end, sir."

"What—what—" began the astounded Head.

"This message is a wire from my chief at headquarters," said Mr. Prece, smiling slightly at the Head's astonishment. "It is to the effect that Henry Somers, the late chief cashier of the Deep Shaft Gold Mining Company, was arrested at Liverpool this morning in the act of boarding a liner for South Africa. He has confessed, and has apparently entirely exculpated his subordinate, Robert Calder, of any complicity whatever in his acts of fraud. I wish you good-morning, sir!"

And, with a slight bow to the bewildered Head, the man from Scotland Yard took his departure for good.

Dr. Holmes leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath of relief.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured. "I am astounded! I am bewildered! But—but Calder is innocent. He is in effect a wanted man no longer. Poor Raitlon will be delighted—simply delighted at the news."

And, leaning forward in his chair, the Head struck the bell on his desk violently, and a minute later was de-

spatching a messenger in search of the Housemaster of the School House.

After breakfast that morning Tom Merry and Jack Blake had an interview with Mr. Raitlon in his study, and it all came out then.

"My dear boys, I am amazed at your story," he said quietly, when Tom Merry had finished. "You did wrong—very wrong. Your actions might have had very grave consequences to yourselves. But—but"—the Housemaster paused, and laid a hand on Tom Merry's shoulder—"but you are splendid fellows, and I thank you and your chums from the bottom of my heart, boys. And now I must go and release the prisoner in Nobody's Study."

"But—but"—Tom Merry paused, and eyed the Housemaster in alarm. "But it's not safe, sir. It would be dangerous."

"Not at all," smiled Mr. Raitlon.

And in a few brief sentences he related all that had happened in the Head's study that morning—news, needless to state, that was received with delight by the two juniors.

"And now, boys," finished Mr. Raitlon gravely, "I suppose you realise it would not do for the school to become acquainted with the story. Can I rely upon you and your chums to keep your own council?"

"Certainly, sir!" replied both juniors quietly.

"Thank you, my boys!"

And the juniors kept their word.

That afternoon Mr. Robert Calder, Mr. Raitlon's cousin and a St. Jim's old boy, appeared in public as the guest of Dr. Holmes. His sudden appearance occasioned no surprise, as it was supposed he had arrived late the night before.

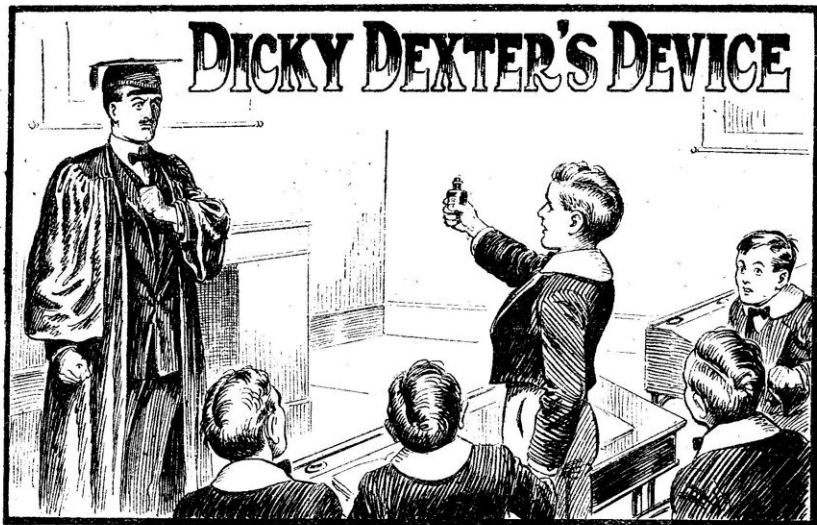
In the fulness of time Henry Somers was tried, and received his deserts; and some time later an item of great interest to the seven juniors reached them via Mr. Raitlon. It was to the effect that Mr. Robert Calder had been appointed to the vacant position of chief cashier of the Deep Shaft Gold Mining Company—an item of information that pleased Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. exceedingly.

THE END.

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CHAPTER 1.

The Great Resolves.

DICKY DEXTER never did things by halves.

After the episode of the sleep-walking act he had a new point of view regarding Mr. Roger Blunt.

Other fellows were slowly coming to the conclusion that Jolly Roger wasn't really a bad sort, but that it was best to go carefully with him. They hadn't experienced the Kid's sinking sensation when Jolly Roger had his heart-to-heart talk with him.

The more he thought about it the more the Kid realised what a wicked youth he had been. Within twenty-four hours he made a tremendous resolution.

In future he was going to be good! Not just ordinarily good, but real, bright, shining goodness that nobody could miss.

Within the next two or three days he took back the book on "Mind, Memory, and Mediums," in which he had learned all about sleepwalkers. In exchange, he brought from the local library in Dulchester a much larger book, the title of which was in big gold letters: "Twelve Noble Youths."

It was this book which finished it. Quite clearly he saw his real task in life. Of one of the noble youths, whose portrait was given in the book, his headmaster said:

"He was not content with being good himself; he wanted others to be good, too. Often when I found a boy in the school going wrong, and neglecting his work for foolish pleasures, I would call Lyander to my study and tell him the difficulty. And Lyander's bright eyes would shine as he gazed up into mine and answered 'Yes, sir.' Lyander understood. In a very short time that boy would be Lyander's closest friend, and following his example."

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Dexter felt that this was exactly the sort of job where he would shine. In his mind, he could see the Head calling him into his study, and putting his hand on his shoulder as he said, "Dexter, I fear that Smith, of the Fifth, is going right off the rails. You understand?"

Nobody had ever heard Mr. Bird, the Head of Katie's, use slang, but that is a mere detail. Dexter could positively hear the Beak saying it. He was just beginning on the real business of reforming Smith, in imagination, when in came Bill Strong and Dobbie. They were both in footer togs.

"Where've you been, you little slacker?" Bill Strong demanded. "This isn't the way to improve your game, Kid!"

"I've been improving my mind," the Kid answered. "There are times, Bill, when there are bigger and better things in life than chasing a leathern ball across the sodden turf."

"Good egg!" Bill agreed quickly. He knew, just as Dobbie did, that when the Kid turned on the heavy-father note he'd got something on his mind, and it was best to avoid argument.

He turned the subject swiftly and instinctively.

"Did you hear that yarn about Smithy and Sammy Steed?" Bill asked. "You couldn't have ragged old Sammy better yourself, Kid!"

"Oh!" said the Kid; and Bill told the story. By sheer braininess, Smith had kept Mr. Steed talking for the whole French hour that morning. The net result was that Smithy and three friends, who would most certainly have been for the high jump for not preparing the lesson, had not even had an unkind word spoken to them.

"He's a lad is Smithy!" Dobbie said admiringly. "Remember when the Kid kept Sammy on the same stunt? If you

could think out a new game for Jolly Roger, Kid—"

"Shut up!" Dicky Dexter burst forth at last. "I may have tried senseless tricks upon masters when I was younger, but I think I understand better now. Smithy thinks he's clever, but he is simply wasting the spring-time of his life in idle folly. He's one of the fellows I want to influence—"

"My hat!" said Dobbie. "He's turning pi!" said Bill Strong. "Steady, Kid! Take it gently!" The Kid regarded them pityingly. Then it struck him that both Bill Strong and Dobbie wanted influencing.

He talked to them, and they listened. But not for long. They began to throw coppers on the floor, then gently heaved their footer boots towards him.

The Kid rose, and went out. He found Smith's study, and the lanky humorist of the Fifth was at home. He was a big chap and had a bright smile, and he had the gift of speaking easily. He could even talk more fluently than the Kid.

"Want to see me, dear babe?" he asked. "Come right in! Take a chair. Have a biscuit? I've been hearing a lot about you and that noble scheme of yours to startle our revered friend Roger into doing little deeds of kindness. It didn't work, I hear. Your genius is wasted on fellows of that sort, Kid. You'll have to wait till you're grown up, like me. I only mention this in case you've got some little idea that you're going to drag me into some fancy stunt. There's a sort of look in your eye. But you can't, Kid! I'm not one of your pipi-kind myself, but there are limits! You said something, Kid?"

"I didn't come for that purpose," Dicky Dexter answered. "I came because I want to be your friend, Smithy. I want to influence you."

He said a lot more. For once Smithy was strangely silent. Then, suddenly and swiftly, he uprose and picked Dexter up. In the order he dumped him violently on the floor.

"You may pull Jolly Roger's leg, Kid," he remarked, not unkindly, "but this child is too old—much too old for your little wheezes!"

Dexter rose presently. In prep that night he wrote a long letter to his father, who was somewhere in South America, telling him what a good son he had got, and how the Head would probably be sending for him soon. Which just shows that Dicky Dexter didn't easily get discouraged!

CHAPTER 2. Jolly Roger is Puzzled.

"WE will now proceed, gentlemen, to the study of English history," said Jolly Roger. "Last evening, you would all learn the broad outline which I gave you yesterday morning. Dexter! Please repeat for the benefit of the class the dates of the House of Hanover."

In English subjects Dexter was really brilliant. Jolly Roger had already discovered that. He dropped on the Kid this morning because he just wanted to run through the prep work and pass on quickly to other things.

Dexter stood up.
"George I., 1714 to 1727," he began.
"George II., 1727 to—1727 to— I don't know, sir."

"Did you learn it last night, Dexter?"

Roger asked genially.
That's the sort of question masters always ask. They always expect, and get, the same reply—"Yes, sir," and then the game goes on. But the Kid altered the programme this morning.

"No, sir," he said; and his eyes met Roger's quite squarely.

"Ah!" Even Jolly Roger gasped.
"You admit quite frankly, Dexter, that you did not learn it? You didn't even trouble to look at it?"

"No, sir," said Dexter.
"The Transitus felt a sort of shiver go all round the room. Jolly Roger's smile had frozen on his lips, and the sparkle in his eyes was now an icy glitter.

"Of course not, Dexter!" His voice was withering. "You don't trouble to prepare lessons! May I inquire what you were doing in preparation school last evening? Of course, don't tell me. Dexter, if you would rather not! I should hate to appear inquisitive!"

The Kid looked at him with very wide-open eyes.

"I would rather not tell you, sir. It was purely a private matter."

For four seconds there was dead silence. Pure, unadulterated cheek Jolly Roger had met and dealt with, but this was something superlative.

Then some silly ass laughed. The next moment the whole of the Transitus was rocking with laughter. They couldn't help it. The Kid was getting his own back on Jolly Roger.

Just for a space the Form was almost out of hand. Someone started to cat-call. In a flash Roger was on his feet, his pointer crashed down, and he rapped out one word.

"Silence!"

It was like an electric shock. The command, the sudden fierce light in Roger's eye, the disappearance of his smile, quelled the Transitus. For two seconds Roger simply glared. You could feel his eyes searching for victims, and the Transitus began to shiver again.

"You may sit down, Dexter. I will see you at 12.30. There will be no break this morning! We shall study history instead!"

What a morning it was! Just a panting, breathless, gasping torture. They smiled feebly when it came to an end and felt soberly out. The Kid was left alone in his glory.

"What were you doing in preparation last night, Dexter?" Roger demanded.

He meant to be quite fair with the boy. He wanted to get right down to rock-bottom motives. Roger was like that.

"I was writing a long letter to my father, sir," said the Kid.

"Why didn't you say so in class?" rapped out Roger.

"I was afraid it would make the fellows laugh, sir," said Dexter. "I thought you would not like that, and I wanted to tell the truth and return here at this stage even Sammy Steed would have cut short the argument. When a boy starts in this line it is time to take stern measures. But Roger went on questioning. Finally he fixed Dexter with his glittering eye. He kept it on him for ten solid seconds, and the Kid never flinched.

"Very well, Dexter! I don't approve of your conduct, but I understand your explanation. You told the truth. That is sufficient. With regard to your preparation work—you will return here at two o'clock and work until four. I shall not be here myself, but I will leave the door for you. You understand? Two till four!"

At two o'clock that afternoon Dexter entered the empty Form-room. He did not leave until four o'clock. No one came during the whole of that time.

But Jolly Roger knew that Dexter had been there; it left him more puzzled and perplexed than ever.

It wasn't really a pleasant time for the Kid just at present. Nobody seemed to understand that it was just his goodness which made him so truthful. Even Bill Strong and Dobbie refused to believe that it was anything more than some new wheeze.

And the Kid wasn't the sort to go on just being good, and suffering in silence, and then go on being good. He wanted everyone to know about it, and to start being an influence right away. The idea of spending years and years on the job didn't appeal to him.

Yet he realised that his own reputation was against him. What was needed was some big, outstanding act. Somebody in the school would have to get goodness pretty quickly now that Dicky Dexter was good.

CHAPTER 3. The Influence in Action.

THERE was a secret society at Katie's.

It belonged to the Transitus, of course. But a few fellows from the Fifth were in it, too. It wasn't an ordinary sort of secret society. To begin with, it had really any secrets, and it hadn't any rules. Nor did they have regular meetings.

But it had a really tophole meeting-place. Part of Katie's had been built in ancient days, and there were still odd buildings that belonged to the old order. The laundry, for instance, had a queer sort of cellar, which was never used.

You went down steps from the outside and then along a dark passage. The masonry, getting old, had been strengthened with iron bars which practically blocked the way to the cellar proper.

To get to the cellar one had to duck down and crawl under the bars. It was here that the Ancient Order of the Wasps had their meeting-place.

So far this term the Wasps hadn't met, but secretly the word went round that

Bunting had got a hamper, and Timmies and Buckle had put something up. There really is something rather jolly about getting out of bed and running all manner of risks in order to spend an hour or so in a damp, but slightly warm cellar, and eating cold chicken and biscuits with possibly a cigarette afterwards.

Bill Strong told the Kid all about it.

"Usual idea, of course," he explained.

"One at a time—and no row. To-morrow night! You follow after me!"

The Kid smiled. He couldn't help it. Here was a real chance!

"Bill," he said. "I shall not go. I don't want you and Dobbie to go."

That began it. By the evening he had seen half a dozen fellows and urged them to abandon the idea. His efforts were quite easily a first-class washout. They told him so. Indeed, the word went round that the Kid was going to be ill, and that no one was to talk to him about the Wasps.

So that on the following day the Kid was lonesome. He realised quite clearly why this was; he knew, too, that this was his great chance, and he thought about it.

Slowly an idea came to his mind. In the afternoon he inspected the entrance to the Wasps' meeting-place. Afterwards he hurried into Dulchester and saw Charlie Challinor.

Charlie was assistant in Welldon's, the chemists, but was going to be a great scientist. He helped Dobbie with his photographs, and was an old friend of the Kid's. In a few minutes Charlie had improved the Kid's idea by two hundred per cent.

In due course the Kid returned to Katie's with one or two parcels. He did not take them to his study, however, but crept carefully to the cellar, where, in total darkness, he worked strenuously. It had to be done in darkness, because nitrate of silver—But Charlie Challinor had explained all that.

The Kid meant to lie awake that night. But he was so happy in thinking about the good he was going to do, that he fell asleep.

If you come to think of it, quite a lot of things had happened at Katie's that afternoon. Mr. Samuel Steed, for instance, was sitting in his favourite secluded spot, when he overheard two of the members of his Form talking.

By the time Mr. Steed had realised that they didn't know he was there, he had learned quite a lot about the Wasps and their plans for this evening.

What should he do? Should he warn the boys, or—

The boys settled it themselves by moving off at that juncture. They passed within a yard of Mr. Steed, but their heads were turned the other way. Mr. Steed realised that they were entirely ignorant of his presence.

The two fellows, Smith and Devlin, of the Fifth, moved very sedately along until they were out of Mr. Steed's sight. Then they stopped and looked at each other.

"That's frozen it!" said Smithy.

"What an ass I was! Why didn't we see him before?"

"He must have heard!" said Devlin.

"Every little word!" agreed Smithy.

"But I wanted to tell you—how was I to know that Sammy was sitting there? Something's got to be done!"

He thought earnestly; he consulted the others quietly. The leaders of the Wasps knew that Sammy Steed now knew all about their plans for to-night, and that Sammy thought that they didn't know he knew.

The Ancient Order of the Wasps acted swiftly. With commendable secrecy every fellow invited to the meeting to-night was warned that it was a wash-out. No Wasp was to approach or even look in the direction of the cellar.

Meanwhile, Mr. Steed was sorely troubled. You must understand that Mr. Steed was one of the best. He had a heart of gold, and his head simply bulged with brains. But as a first-class disciplinarian and a controller of Dexters and Dobbins he missed fire.

He knew it. With his reputation for brilliant scholarship results he could afford to admit it. In his present dilemma he sought out Mr. Roger Blunt, and told him the story. How, in the best interests of the boys, and in the name of discipline, did he handle this case?

Jolly Roger's eyes were sparkling. His smile was good to see. This was the sort of thing he really could deal with!

"Ah, ah, Steed! The Transitus of the Fifth you say will be there?" he laughed. "Splendid! I think their Form-masters will join their festive band. We will deal with this ourselves, my dear Steed! After to-night the Fifth Form will have a considerably increased respect for you! I have desired to come across something of this sort in order to place my little brood right under my thumb! They will improve rapidly after to-night!"

Dicky Dexter meant to make the Wasps get goodness quickly. So did Mr. Roger Blunt!

At eleven o'clock that night Mr. Blunt and Mr. Steed, wearing rubber-soled shoes, strolled quietly towards the laundry.

They descended the steps to the cellar. Along the passage Mr. Blunt led the way to the iron bar. This bar ran at an angle of about ninety degrees, and there was only one way of getting through—by bending down and going sideways.

As Mr. Blunt went under in the only possible way, something damp rubbed against his forehead. It was nothing but a mere touch.

Mr. Steed followed. They crept on. But there was no sign of the Fifth or Transitus boys!

"Queer!" Jolly Roger flashed his torch about. "You're quite sure this is the place, Steed?"

"Quite!" said Mr. Steed. "I'm sorry if—"

"One has to take risks!" Jolly Roger said cheerfully. "We'll have a look in the dormitories when we get back."

They went back the same way. As Mr. Steed crept under the bar, his forehead pressed against a queer strip of board which had been skillfully arranged to jut out from the wall. It had a strip of black velvet along the edge of it, and this was soaking wet.

Jolly Roger examined it.

"It looks as though they do come here," he said. "This thing hasn't been put up long. I suppose some ingenious fellow put it up to prevent them from hanging their heads in the dark? Very clever! Ah, ah!"

Nevertheless, when he wriggled under the bar his forehead pressed along the wet velvet. One simply couldn't help it. In any case, what did it matter?

In due course they visited the dormitories. Every fellow was sound asleep.

"Ah, well," said Roger, when they were back to his room. "We haven't accomplished much to-night, but we will keep our eyes open for future developments. You've got a yellow mark right across your forehead, Steed!"

"Thanks!" said Sammy, and took out THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 637.

a handkerchief. "I think you've got one too, Blunt! Must have caught against something!"

They bade each other good-night. They were both modest men, and neither of them looked in the mirror that night. Otherwise, they might have noticed that the yellow mark had become a dark brown!

CHAPTER 4.

The Black Brows of Roger.

Two people at Katie's rose early on the following morning. Jolly Roger was always up with the lark, and performed running feats and fancy exercises before breakfast. It kept him fit.

The Kid was up early because this was going to be his busy day. He wanted to start early on the job of making fellows good. He expected to be busy long before morning school.

You see the idea? The stuff which Charlie Challinor had given the Kid to put on the velvet was a sort of photographic mixture. It went black in the light, and soap and water wouldn't touch it. Charlie had seen the trick worked when he was studying chemistry, and he knew it was a good thing.

All being well, every fellow who had been with the Wasps last night would have been branded! Everyone of them would have a black band on his forehead and blue funk in his heart. In this stage they would be easy victims for the Kid. Only when the branded ones promised to be as good in future as Dicky himself would the Kid produce the bottle which would remove the mark of their wickedness from their brows.

Afterwards, the Kid intended that everyone should know that it was his influence which was making these fellows good. Jolly Roger should know it, the Head would know it, the whole school would know that Richard Dexter was a good influence.

You can imagine what Jolly Roger felt like when he looked in the glass that morning—after he had scrubbed and bathed and was glowing all over. Right across his forehead, just above his eyes, ran a broad, black band, nearly an inch in width!

He went back and scrubbed it again, he tried pumice-stone, loofah, and everything he could find. The black band refused to budge.

By the time that the first faint streak of despair was creeping down his spine there came a tap at the door. A moment later Mr. Sam Steed came into the room. Across his forehead was a broad black band—blacker even than Roger's, for the pumice-stone had jarred Mr. Blunt's band a little.

"You've got it, too!" Mr. Steed gasped. "What is it, Blunt? What can we do? Is it a complaint—or what? I can't get it off! One can't go to morning school in this fashion!"

"I don't know!" For once in his life Jolly Roger felt mad.

A horrible idea entered his mind. He recalled the wet stickiness of the velvet on the board. Supposing, too, the boys who had talked yesterday had simply been laying a trap for Steed?

"Somebody would surely suffer for this joke!"

He mentioned it to Mr. Steed. A few minutes later, an imperative message had gone to Smith and Devlin of the Fifth to come to Mr. Steed's room at once.

Amazed and bewildered, the two went. Only their clear consciences cheered them. They found Mr. Steed supported

by Jolly Roger, and both of them wore black bands across their brows.

"There wasn't any fooling," said Smith afterwards. "Jolly Roger raked us fore and aft. No use trying fairy-stories on him! He knew we knew about Sammy knowing, and we told him truly why the meeting was abandoned."

"But we didn't know anything about the blessed ornament on his and Sammy's countenance. He gave us two minutes to confess! No good! You can't frighten that child by talking about sudden death. I put my hand on my heart, and old Devlin shed salt tears of agony, and we up and told him we never, never could have thought of such a thing. Then he tried to paralyse us with his eyes. 'On your honour, Smith,' says he, 'you know nothing whatever about this most abominable outrage!'"

"On my word of honour, sir, I know nothing! Just like that I said it—the dramatic touch really strong. 'Right!' I believe you. You may go!" says Jolly Roger. Not a word of warning or anything. Just the plain, simple bullet, and old Devlin and I hopped out, and never stopped running till we got down to brekker. Phew! Makes me go hot and cold to think of it! There's going to be no end of a row about it!"

The Kid didn't hear this story. All he knew was that there were no branded brows in the Fifth or the Trans. He asked Bill Strong about it, but Bill said he didn't know, as he didn't go to the Wasps last night.

When Mr. Blunt marched into the Transitus room for the first hour, his brow was still black. But it was nothing to the stern and righteous anger in his heart.

The Transitus didn't laugh. Roger stopped even a faint smile. He went straight to his desk, but did not sit down. He stood very upright, and his face despite the band radiated fierce joy—the joy of the hunter who is about to slay. His eyes watched everything, and everyone got into their places as quickly as they could.

"Silence!" said Roger, and stopped to listen if anyone was daring to breathe.

"Another master and I!" he went on at last, in his icy, steely voice, "have been the victims of one of the most senseless and outrageous practical jokes I have ever known. Its result may be seen on my forehead. It may or may not be permanent; but may or may not have dangerous effects. Until medical advice has been obtained, it is impossible for me to say. Contrary to my usual practice, I am, in these exceptional circumstances, going to ask every boy in this Form one question."

He paused for a moment. You could hear fellows' watches ticking in their pockets—almost hear their hearts beating!

"Can any boy in this form throw any light upon this senseless outrage?"

He asked it slowly, clearly, and icily. For a fraction of a second every fellow held his breath.

But for no longer. The echo of Roger's voice had scarcely died away when what seemed to be a funny, perky little voice chirruped forth. It was rather like a sparrow chirping a back-answer to the whistle of the Scotch express.

"Please, sir, I can!" The Kid was on his feet. "It's entirely my fault but there's been a mistake. I can very easily take the marks off, sir!"

"Oh! You—you can explain— Ah!" The Kid was holding up a little bottle. "A dab of this on a piece of cotton wool, sir—"

(Continued on page 19.)

QUINTON'S HERITAGE.

Our Grand Adventure Story.

By ANTHONY THOMAS.



Banjarah mounted a box which stood near the fire. Then he lifted the earthenware jar forward, and the water began to fall on the fire. (See page 18.)

Blood Brotherhood.

THE wonderful night which had fallen, the dozens of fires which blazed up and showed so many details of the scene, exaggerating the weird dresses and strange adornments which so many of the natives wore, all combined to make a wondrously impressive picture.

Above it all, too, was a vague understanding of what Tim Daly had told Jim of the rite in which he was to take a part to-night. He was to become a blood-brother of Malkura, King of the Karradons. And Dick Willoughby would be with him, and Tim Daly. They would all, after to-night, be joined together as brothers!

The scene on which Jim Quinton now looked as he took his seat reminded him of that night when first he had reached the village.

On that occasion, however, Dillon Bracer had occupied the seat of honour next to the king, and Cyrus Kerzon had been there, and the elder Bracer. The end of that night had brought catastrophe to Quinton and Willoughby.

Jim was thinking of this, and even wondering how Dillon Bracer was now faring, when the king himself and his retinue of immediate advisers came to the specially enclosed place at the head of the square. There was no platform to-night, and right in front of where Jim sat, a fire was blazing cheerfully.

While Jim and Daly were greeting the king and his followers, various people

were busy with the fire. Some of the men were cutting up the carcass of a sheep, and Dick Willoughby was for a time almost more interested in this part of the business than anything else.

The task was not carried out in a slip.

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 rival party known as the Karradon Syndicate, which includes Dillon Bracer, a cad of the S. C. Form at Harwood's School, Bracer 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 Jim, Erik, and Dick Willoughby continue on to Karradon.

An attempt to install Dillon Bracer in Jim's place is frustrated by Daly, who has escaped captivity.

One day, whilst Jim and Dick are being shown round the country, the party put up at a hut in the forest. That night Kerzon and his followers appear, but they are forced to retreat.

A great battle eventually takes place, during which Jim and Dick capture Dillon Bracer, and take him back to the camp.

(Now read on.)

shod fashion, and the men were plainly experts at the work. They cut out certain parts and treated them as a chef might have done, then carefully arranged these pieces on long skewers, which were in turn fixed on queer contrivances over the fire itself.

Meantime, the king had banged his stick on the ground, a sign that he was about to speak. Everyone about him became silent, and not until then did the Bazarra Malkura begin to talk.

He spoke in his ordinary, somewhat harsh voice, and three or four of the men around him immediately repeated everything he said. As before, others took up the words, and so it went on, until the last man at the very fringe of the crowd knew what the Bazarra had said.

By now Jim could follow to some little extent what was said, but whether he would have grasped it all without Tim Daly's aid is very doubtful.

It was the king's victory speech. He was justifiably glad about the way in which his warriors had driven the Manzi from Karradon. He praised his fighting-men, and he praised their friends, the white men, who had aided them against the other white men.

Then Jim Quinton—Bazar Quinton, the Big Man—was brought in. It was not so much the flattering things the king said as the promises he made for the future—on Jim's behalf! They all knew what the old Bazar Quinton had done, and the young Bazar had come all the way from his country over the seas to help the Karradons. To-night, he and the king were to be bound together in blood brotherhood!

Tim Daly also made a speech, but he stood up and called out what he had to say, though even then much of it had to be repeated to those at the far end of the crowd. Again Jim gathered that Tim was saying pleasant things about him, and was promising the Karradons many good things in the future because the young Bazar Quinton was a big man.

By the time Tim Daly sat down again, the people who had been gathered round the fire just in front of him, and showing a certain amount of excitement over the cooking, had finished their tasks for the moment, at all events.

At normal times Mendijah, the medicine-man, would now have been the chief actor for a brief time. But Mendijah was a traitor, and was not here to-night.

In his place another elderly man, adorned and decorated just as wonderfully as the late medicine-man had been, stood just by the king.

On a sign from the Bazarra, he came forward and took from the little quiver which hung among the many other adornments by his side, a small arrow. As he did so, the king pulled open the light cotton tunic he wore, leaving his chest quite bare.

Tim Daly whispered to Jim, and he followed the king's example. On the hint from Tim, Dick Willoughby also bared his chest. Daly himself then sat down between Quinton and Willoughby.

What happened next might have appeared horrible and unpleasant under different skies. Here, it simply took on an air of mystery and weird solemnity. Jim had already learned in the time he had been in the Karradon country something of the secret which his father bore him had grasped so well. Full and proper respect must be paid to the native customs, even while the white man is struggling to introduce more civilised customs.

And the ceremony of blood brother-

hood had too strong a hold, was too deeply ingrained in the beliefs of the Karradons, to be treated as of no account.

The tall medicine-man, successor to Mendijah, was to-night acting as master of the ceremony for the first time. Jim watched him with curious interest as he took his short arrow and spent a moment or two in polishing the sharp barb at the end.

Then he leaned forward and made a swift little cut on the king's chest, just above the heart. It was, so far as Jim could tell, little more than a pin-scratch, but before he had time to look more closely, Ranjarah, the medicine-man, was leaning over Jim himself, and the little arrow was poised just about two inches from his breast.

The next second he felt the knife-like point touching him. Ranjarah straightened himself again and passed on to Tim Daly. Looking down, Jim realised that the arrow had made a clean, straight cut.

For a moment he almost felt inclined to laugh. It had seemed quite a trying little operation the second before, and now it was over there was really nothing in it.

But the ceremony itself was not by any means over. This was merely the preliminary, and even as Jim looked up again, another strangely-attired native was holding before him a kind of skewer, on the end of which was a small piece of cooked meat, still warm from the fire.

The Bazzara sitting next to Jim had already taken a similar skewer and lightly touched the wound made by the arrow. At that same moment Tim Daly whispered to Jim what he had to do now. The fellow, following the king's example and touched his chest with the meat, then turned to the king and solemnly exchanged their portions of meat. The king muttered something which Quinton took to be a kind of blessing on their friendship, and then transferred the piece of meat to his mouth.

Again Jim did as the Bazzara had done. Very solemnly they continued to stare at each other while eating the meat with considerable deliberation.

All this was repeated two or three times, but with certain variations. Just how it was all worked out was a matter which even Daly scarcely understood, but the twelve elect who were gathered about the king were so involved one with the other that it was now assumed they had all been joined with each other in blood brotherhood.

Both Jim Quinton and Dick Willoughby were now blood brothers of the Karradons. The king was their friend, and they were his. Whatever happened in the future, nothing could ever alter that.

Throughout the whole of the ceremony there was little or no noise from the great crowd of people who were gathered around the other fires in the square. Not until Ranjarah, the medicine-man, had carried out the last little rite did the feasting begin.

Ranjarah mounted a box which stood near the fire. In his hand he held a earthenware pot, partly filled with water, and he raised this above his head, gripping it firmly by the handles. For some two or three seconds he held it in this position while he repeated some very brief sentences in a loud voice.

Jim grasped something of what he said. It expressed the hope that the brotherhood of those who had been joined together this night would be as this fire was, able to consume even its natural and worst enemy, and to conquer everything.

Then he tilted the earthenware jar forward, and the water began to fall on the fire. There was really not a great deal of it, and as the fire was by now quite a big affair, most of it fell right at the edge. Some of it, however, Ranjarah managed to fling right into the heart of the flames, by giving the earthenware vessel an energetic jerk.

But the water, after a brief spluttering as it fell on the flames, had never a chance. Ranjarah held up the vessel again, much as a conjuror might exhibit some article which he had used to show that there had been no deception. The water had gone. It had been poured out to the fire, but the fire blazed away just as cheerfully as ever.

So would the brotherhood of the Bazzara, Malkum and the Bazar Quinton blaze, despite all the weak efforts of their puny enemies!

Something to that effect Ranjarah said before he descended from the box. And so concluded the ceremony of blood brotherhood in the tribe of the Karradons!

As Ranjarah stepped down the wailing of the weird pipes and the banging of drums, which had been quiet for a long time now, broke out afresh. Men began to jump on their feet and to rush about. Here and there three or four of them could be seen dragging a sheep along, while others were bearing vessels and great horns filled with liquid. The real feast of victory had begun!

Even those in the king's special enclosure relaxed their solemnity. Erik was up again, and he was making himself responsible for the meal which Jim and the white men were having—though the king and some of the others joined them.

Tim Daly felt that Jim had probably had quite enough of native methods for one night, and that he would be much happier to rejoice on an ordinary meal, skilfully prepared beforehand by Erik, than on any fancy concoctions of the Karradon cooks!

The scene in the great square was now one which held the two chums fascinated in wonder. On the night when first they came to Karradon they had seen a little of the dancing powers of the natives, but it was nothing to what took place to-night.

Some of the dancers worked themselves up into a perfect state of fury. The wailing and the shrieking of the band, the furious banging of the drums, and the cries of both the dancers and those who led them, made a deafening noise. It looked, in fact, as if it was just as well to play on which they looked had not been too engrossing and bewildering to occupy their whole attention.

Some of the separate groups apparently had small entertainments of their own. And all the time the eating and the drinking went on, nor did the noise ever seem to grow less for a brief space.

At last, however, Daly decided that the time had come for them to leave the revelry. The natives would probably go on all night, and it was just as well to leave them to it. The king had already announced his intention of retiring to his own house; and, after a very lengthy leave-taking, in which Daly acted the part of prompter to Jim, he and his personal attendants went away.

Very shortly after that Daly also rose. Quinton and Willoughby followed him, and Erik came behind them. Their departure did not interfere in any way with the continuance of the festival.

In the cool quietness of the guest-room at Quinton's dwelling-place they

lounge comfortably in the easy-chairs or on the sofas and talked of this amazing night of revelry.

"I was afraid you might want to kick against the queer business in the ceremony," Tim Daly said laughingly. "That's why I didn't tell you too much about it before it began."

Quinton made a wry face. "I can't say I'd like to be made a blood brother too often!" he admitted. "Still, when one is in Rome one has to do as Rome does! The same applies to the country of the Karradons, I suppose!"

"Yes!" Tim Daly nodded seriously, as though this raised some new doubt in his mind. "It's pretty hard at first to adjust your mind to the right point of view. Sometimes you've got to be hard; it's the only way. We've celebrated the victory to-night. To-morrow there's another job before us. We've got some prisoners, you know!"

"Yes!" Jim asked quietly, but there was something in Daly's tone which made him uneasy.

"The Manzi fellows, of course, will just have to work. We keep them here more or less as slaves for a time, until probably they begin to settle down among us, or something else happens. Mendijah is a prisoner, too, you know. He'll be a great trouble. Of course, he's a traitor. But he's been a blood brother of the king, which makes things very awkward. I don't quite know what the Bazzara will want to do about him."

"There's young Bracster, too," broke in Dick Willoughby. "What are you going to do about him? We can't very well turn him loose to find his own way back to civilisation again!"

"No, no!" Tim Daly rose to his feet, and there was a frown of worry on his forehead. "He's really at the root of our present troubles. Of course, Keaton and the elder Bracster were the real scoundrels, but we haven't got them. And young Bracster tried to rob you! He deceived the king. He'll pay the penalty."

"How do you mean?" Jim asked. "He'll be tried to-morrow," Daly answered. "We'll leave it to them. But you think it over, Jim! We try to run our justice fairly here, but there aren't many grades of wickedness. A man's on our side, or he's against us. And we've got to have a short way with our enemies. They never have a second chance."

He rose quickly, and before Jim could speak had held out his hand.

"I'm going to turn in now," he said quickly. "Tired out. You'll be one of Dillon Bracster's judges to-morrow. Good-night, Jim! Good-night, Dick!"

He went from the room, but long after he had gone Jim Quinton was talking with Dick Willoughby on this new problem which faced him. He did not like Dillon Bracster—but, whatever the cost, he could be no partner in a plan to take vengeance on him!

"After all," said Dick Willoughby slowly, "he's a Harmood's fellow, Jim, isn't he? We'll have to stick by him against anyone else, sha'n't we?"

"We shall have to stick by him," Jim Quinton repeated quite definitely.

And both Jim Quinton and Dick Willoughby felt that Bracster's enmity had been less dangerous to them than the necessity which had now come upon them to be his friend!

(There will be another grand instalment of this magnificent adventure serial next week. Order your copy EARLY.)

DICKY DEXTER'S DEVICE!

(Continued from page 16.)

"Ah! Cotton wool! Yes! Ah!"

Somehow Jolly Roger had changed. The glitter in his eyes had grown less, and his smile had grown feeble.

He told Mr. Steed afterwards that, in the first few moments, his brain reeled, and after that his strength became less.

Yet he broke the horrible pause at last.

"Very well, Dexter! You will accompany me from the room. Bunting, just take this note to Mr. Steed of the Fifth Form, please! Strong, I shall leave you in charge of the class during my absence. You will be responsible for the maintenance of order and quietness. You will proceed with your studies now!"

He walked to the door, but turned to make sure that Dexter was following him.

"Children," said Bill Strong when they had both gone, "we're living in strange times. The Kid—never said a word to me or Dobbie—he's a little marvel!"

That's how they all felt. The Kid's goodness had passed unnoticed; his capacity for a rag they all knew.

"He'll get the sack!" said Barron. "Pushed right out into the cold world! We shall never have another like the Kid!"

"Wonder what will happen?" mused Dobbie miserably. He hated the thought that the Kid would get the sack.

They discussed it, but only for a short time. Jolly Roger and the Kid came back to class in a few minutes, and there

was only a reddish mark on Roger's brow. In two minutes they were plunging into lessons. Everything was very flat after all the excitement.

Nor would the Kid say much. Not a word about how it had happened, but just the plain fact that Roger was going to see him later.

It was two days before the final judgment came. Meantime, Mr. Blunt had inquired deeply and carefully. He knew everything except one minor detail, and that was, where Dexter had got the stuff from.

In two days' time, the Kid was commanded to attend Jolly Roger in his private sitting-room at 4.30. He went bravely.

Just what happened no one ever knew. Even Mr. Steed received an unsatisfactory reply when he inquired what punishment had been meted out.

"I don't quite know whether I have been severe or not," said Jolly Roger. "As you know, I came to reform the Transitus, and I'm going to do it. Dexter interests me. I shall not be beaten by Dexter—but he puzzles me. The whole case wants handling carefully—very, very carefully!"

The Kid came back to the study at 5.30. Bill Strong and Dobbie questioned him at once.

"What's happened, Kid? Are you for the beak?"

"No!" said the Kid hopelessly.

"Roger's taking you himself?" Dobbie suggested. "You'll be the first he's taken for the bend-over act!"

"No." The Kid shook his head. "It's nothing like that. Wish it were!"

"What is it?" they gasped. "Tell us, Kid!"

Jolly Roger says—he says he believes I want to be good, but I haven't got the

right idea yet. I've got to go on trying. I—I'm going to have tea with him to-morrow!"

"Hard luck, Kid!"

"And every Thursday this term!" the Kid burst out. "Every Thursday! Got to go and have tea with Jolly Roger! Got to tell him about being good! Every Thursday! For a whole term!"

His eye fell on a book, nicely bound, and with gilt lettering. "Twelve Noble Youths," it was. In a sudden fury he picked it up, and flung it on the floor.

"The little toads!" he cried. "Miserable sneaking swots! I'm finished with that game! I'm sick of being good!"

"You've been overdoing it, Kid," said Bill Strong. "You want to grow good slowly—like Dobbie and me. It doesn't come natural with you. But we'll show you!"

"Oh, shut up!" said the Kid. "I'm tired of you chaps. I'm just wasting my time here. I'm going out!"

And that's how the swift, non-stop reform of the Transitus got delayed. Not that it upset Jolly Roger one little bit. He was still carrying on, and still smiling. And the more he thought of Dicky Dexter's device for making other fellows good quickly, the more he smiled!

THE END.

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Jim grasped something of what he said. It impressed the hope that the brotherhood of those who had been joined together this night would be as this fire was, able to consume even its natural and worst enemy, and to conquer everything.

personal attendant. Very shortly after Quinton and Willow and Erik came behin parture did not int with the continuance. In the cool quiet room at Quinton's

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