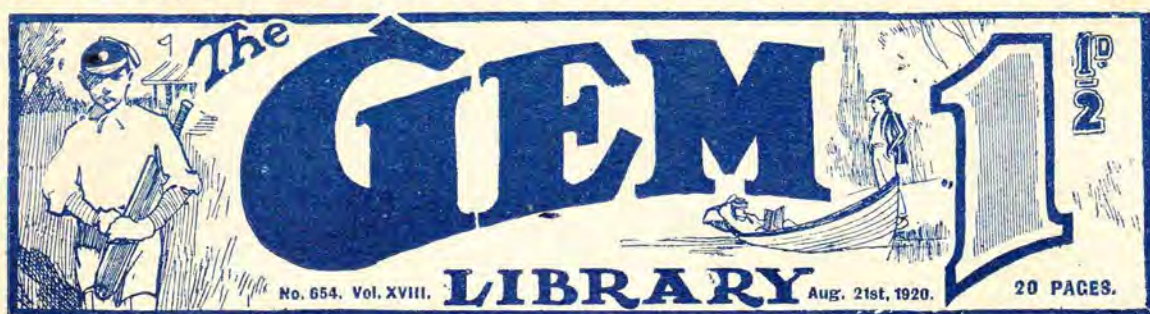


654
SPLENDID STORIES AND CASH PRIZES !



Two Grand Stories:
"A BATTLE OF HONOUR!" & "THE DUFFER'S DOWNFALL!"
In This Number.



SNATCHED FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH !

(A Dramatic Moment in the School Story in this Number.)

HAVE YOU TRIED YOUR LUCK? IF NOT, SEND IN YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO-DAY!



NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

SEA HEDGEHOGS.

Whilst at Scarborough I noticed two fishermen with big baskets and a bucket. I found they were selling sea hedgehog shells. These shells are the shape of a bulb, and as large as a teacup, with a circular hole in the bottom. The fishermen have to go a long way out to catch them. When caught, the sea hedgehog is covered all over with legs. The fish is taken out and sold. Then the shells are scraped, and show beautiful colours and markings. When polished, the shells are very charming ornaments for the table or mantelpiece.—Miss Margaret Ross, 19, Wood Hill, Leicester.

SENSIBLE.

Tom liked the look of the apples in Farmer Jones' orchard, and, poking his head through the fence, was about to enter, when he caught sight of the farmer. "Where are you going?" asked Mr. Jones. "Back!" replied Tom.—W. Spridgeon, Chapel Street, Alford, Lincs.

NOT INCLUDED.

Teacher: "Come and sit in this chair beside me, Tommy. You are not fit to sit with respectable people."—Eric E. Pope, 64, Hartington Road, Brighton.

THE THIMBLE.

There is a family in England whose fortune is due to such an apparently insignificant article as a thimble. The first thimble ever seen in England was made in London by a metal-worker. This was less than two hundred years ago. The article was called the thumb-bell, as it was worn on the thumb, and its shape suggested the rest of its name. This clumsy method of wearing it soon changed, and the name was altered to the present term.—A Griffiths, 56, Morley Road, East Twickenham, Middlesex.

TAWDRY.

This word claims its origin from a feast—the feast of St. Audrey. St. Audrey's Day was treated as a general holiday, and a fair was always held then, when cheap and common articles were sold. Thus, when an inferior article was bought, it came to be described as "only fit for St. Audrey's," and gradually this

description was changed to "tawdry."—T. R. Bate, 4, Watford Road, Croxley Green, Herts.

SUSPICIOUS.

An old dame walked up to a station porter and asked "Where do I get my train?" The man stared. "Where are you going to?" he inquired. "It's just like your cheek to ask that!" cried the old lady, as she turned round and put her question to another official, with the same result. "These people are extremely impertinent," she said. "I don't like it; but as you want to know, I am going to Paisley." She was shown to the Paisley train, and she thanked the porter who had put her right, but just as the train moved out she popped her head out of the window. "Ah, well," she said brightly, "you are had this time. I am not going to Paisley at all. I am going to Kilmarnock."—George Crawford, 51, Gateside Street, Largs.

GREAT WAKERING.

This is the name of a small village situated near the garrison town of Shoburness, and the seaside resort of Southend. The village in itself is not of great interest, but there are wonderful marshes lying near where all kinds of bird life are seen. The haymakers are busy here in summer-time. There are batteries of guns near the sea wall, and these fortifications are linked up with Shoburness by a military railway. Strangers are sometimes frightened pretty well out of their lives by the heavy practice of the guns.—Frank Collins, The Stores, Foulness Road, Great Wakering, Essex.

ROBIN HOOD.

Robin Hood, the famous outlaw and Saxon patriot, was bled to death by his cousin, Elizabeth de Stainton, prioress of a Cistercian nunnery at Kirkstree, near Brighouse, in order to win the favour of a powerful Norman, to wit, Sir Roger de Doncaster. The inscription on Robin Hood's tomb runs:

"Hear undernead dis laill stean
Lay robert, earl of Huntingdon.
Neer arcir ver az hie sa geud.
An pipl kauld iin robyn heud.

Sick utlawz az hi an iz men,
Vil england nivr si agen.

Obitt 24 kal; Dekembris, 1247."

Near Robin's grave is that of his traitress cousin. The translation of the Norman French on her tombstone is: "Sweet Jesus of Nazareth, grant mercy to Elizabeth de Stainton, late prioress of this house." Robin Hood's tomb had to be strongly railed round to keep people from chipping off fragments of the stone as charms against toothache. He was 87 when he died, and his birthday, May 1st, is still called Robin Hood's Day. After the death of their revered leader, the band dispersed. Many of them fell under the banner of Simon de Montfort at Evesham, August 4th, 1265.—E. R. Short, 57, Camm Street, Brighouse.

BETTER STILL.

"Horses?" said the American. "Guess you can't talk to me about horses. I had an old mare, Maizipop, who once licked our best express by a couple of miles on a thirty-mile run."

"That's nothing," said the Canadian. "I was out on my farm one day, about fifty miles from the house, when a frightful storm came up. I turned the pony's head for home, and, do you know, he raced the storm so close for the last ten miles that I didn't feel a drop, while my old dog, only ten yards behind, had to swim the whole distance."—Jack Gaskell, junr., 18, Mayfield Avenue, Halifax, Yorks.

A PERTINENT QUESTION.

A well-known golfer met an old friend, whom he asked to have a game. "What's gowff?" asked the other. The golfer took his friend to the links, and told him to watch closely. He took a small ball from his pocket and placed it on a heap of earth. He made a furious drive, and missed it. He tried a second drive, and once more missed the ball. "A grand game, gowff!" muttered the spectator. There was a third drive, with no result. "Yes, it is a grand game," came from the onlooker; "but what's the wee baa' for?"—Peter Ward, 42, McAslin Street, Townhead, Glasgow.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "Gem," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, The "Gem" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."



A BATTLE OF HONOUR!



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

By Martin Clifford.



CHAPTER 1 The School House Mystery.

OUT of the moonshine, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake, deah boy, I—"

"Yes, really, old top!" grinned Jack Blake of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's. "We are no end pushed for time as it is, and if you will jolly well stick yourself in the way we shall be late for prayers again."

"And get 'gated' for the afternoon," added Digby.

"And miss the boxing at Baxter's Booth," agreed Herries severely. "You've no idea what an ass you look standing there staring at yourself in the looking-glass as if you were just going to shave."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, turned a withering stare on Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries. His monocle was screwed securely into his eye, and although he had only just that moment got out of bed, his hair was neatly parted at exactly the right spot.

The swell of St. Jim's was not in the least flustered like the others. In fact, he did not admit that there was anything to be flustered about.

"We have heaps of time, deah boys, and theah weally is no need to wush about like wabbits—"

"Rats!"

"No need at all," repeated Arthur Augustus. "As a mattah of fact, I don't believe we are pushed foah time at all. You've been misled by your wotten cheap tickah, Blake, deah boy, if I may say so, and if you will onlay wemahin calm I will tell you the weal time."

Jack Blake stopped in his hasty scramble into his clothes. All the St. Jim's fellows ragged Arthur Augustus about his watch, but it really was a mag-

nificent instrument. It could be trusted to keep time even when the school clock failed.

Jack Blake banged Arthur Augustus on the shoulder.

"Well, what's your ticker say, old top?"

"Yes, what's the real time, Gussy?" The swell of St. Jim's moved leisurely to the other end of the dressing-table. He stretched out his hand, but that was about all he did do.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the trouble, ass?" demanded Jack Blake. "You don't mean to say your watch has stopped."

"I—I can't say, deah boy!"

"You can't say?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Not with absolute certainty, Blake," he explained. "I have no weason for thinkin' that it isn't still going, onlay—onlay it's gone, you understand!"

Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries did not understand at all.

They knew that Arthur Augustus always kept his valuable watch on the dressing-table, on a neat little watchstand he had made to support it.

The watchstand was still there, but the watch was not. The beautiful gold hunter had utterly disappeared.

Jack Blake's face went blank with amazement.

"My hat! You couldn't have left it in the usual place, Gussy!"

"I distinctly wemembah leavin' it theah, old chap—"

"But—but if it isn't theah now—"

Jack Blake's words were cut short by a sudden yell from Digby. That junior had just come from the washstand, and his face was still covered with soapsuds.

In the excitement of the moment he didn't think about wiping them off.

"My—my watch has gone as well, you fellows!"

"And mine!" suddenly yelled Herries. "Here, who is japing us, you fellows? If those Shellfish have been on the war-path again there are going to be ructions. I am not having my things sneaked by Tom Merry & Co. just for a jape—"

Herries stopped speaking, and turned his soapy face towards the opening door. The very fellows he had been speaking of were in front of him, for Tom Merry & Co. were coming into the room.

Tom Merry, hero of the Shell, led the way, but Monty Lowther and Manners were not far behind. There was subdued wrath on the faces of the Terrible Three as they stared at Jack Blake & Co.

Tom Merry broke the pause in a very brief way.

"Have any of you chaps been into our dorm japing?"

"Not since that night we came in and bolstered you Shellfish into a surrender," said Blake. "I shouldn't have thought you'd have forgotten that, Merry."

Tom Merry frowned.

"I mean, did any of you come in japing last night?" he repeated. "The fact of the matter is, most of our watches have been collared—"

"What?"

"And not only watches, but money as well," added Tom Merry. "Of course, if it's only a jape on the part of one of you kids, all well and good. I—I thought I'd better come and put it to you straight away, though, Blake."

"Yes, of course!"

"And you don't know anything about it?"

"Don't we?" said Jack Blake grimly.

"We know just as much as you do,

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anyway, for Gussy and Herries and Digby have all had their watches boned, too!"

"Phew!"

Tom Merry whistled softly.

Right up until this moment he really had thought the disappearance of the valuables from the Shell dormitory had been the work of some midnight japer. At the present moment there did not seem to be much hope that that was the solution, though.

The whole thing looked far more serious than a jape now.

Arthur Augustus turned anxiously to the others.

"Bai Jove, this is wathah wotten!"

"Yes, it's rotten enough."

"But I uttably refuse to believe that theah can be a thief among the St. Jim's fellahs!" declared Arthur Augustus firmly. "It is a wemarkable affair, but I quite wealise that theah is no one in the school who would wob me of my tickah. I shall be able to pprove that in a vewy short time, deah boys!"

"Eh?"

"Pprove it beyond all mannah of doubt, Tom Mewwy—"

"How?" asked the hero of the Shell.

"By some means or othah, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus coolly. "Pway leave the mattah entially in my hands, and the mystewy will vewy soon be solved."

"Rats!"

"But—"

"Oh, lie down, Gussy!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Cackling isn't going to help us in this matter, so you may as well switch off now as later. Hadn't we better report the affair at once to the Head, Merry?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I—I suppose so."

"It's a rotten business to report, of course, but I don't see what else we can do."

"No. We'd better report it."

Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther turned towards the door again. Of the whole crowd in the Fourth Form dormitory the three visitors from the Shell were the only juniors who were fully dressed, so the reporting would have to be done by them.

Tom Merry & Co. realised that, but they did not like their task. It was rotten to have to go to the Head with a story that must make everybody think that there was a thief in St. Jim's.

Still, there was nothing else to do. It was no good putting off the evil hour just because it was evil.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

"Come on, chaps!"

"Right-ho!"

"And I'll do the talking, if you like,"

Tom Merry added. "It's no good all of us butting in, and it's a rotten yarn to have to spin to the Head, anyway—Hullo, Kildare!"

Tom Merry jerked out the last words sharply.

Kildare, the brawny captain of St. Jim's, had just come into the dormitory, and it was not often that Kildare paid an early morning visit like this.

It was not often that Kildare looked as worried and concerned as he did at this moment, either. His face was quite different from its usual cheeriness as he stood facing the juniors.

"Any of you fellows out of your dormitories last night?" he demanded.

"No, Kildare!"

"You are sure of that?"

"Of course we are sure, Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's looked searchingly from one puzzled face to another, but evidently his scrutiny satisfied him. He turned on his heel.

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"I am asking because something very serious happened in the School House last night," he said deliberately. "A remarkably puzzling theft has taken place."

"You are wewewin' to my missin' tickah, deah boy—"

"No, D'Arcy; but I am referring to the school challenge cups," returned Kildare. "Every one of the silver cups have disappeared from the visitors'-room."

"Gweat Scott!"

"And I am afraid there is no hope of the thing being explained away by an absurd jape," went on Kildare. "A real theft has taken place, you fellows, and up till now there is no clue as to how the thief got into St. Jim's—if he ever had cause to get in."

"What do you mean by that, Kildare?"

"It's pretty clear, isn't it, Merry?"

"You mean that you think the thief didn't break into the school at all," said Tom Merry slowly, "and so he must be a St. Jim's fellow?"

"Yes, that's what I meant."

"Then you are uttably w'ong, deah boy!" cried Arthur Augustus. "You are makin' the gweatest mistake of your life, an' I will pprove it to you the moment I am pwopahly dwessed. I intend to have this wotten mattah cleahed up by dinnah-time, bai Jove!"

Kildare shrugged his brawny shoulders.

He hated the idea that a St. Jim's fellow must be the thief just as much as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did, but there was nothing else to think that he could see.

He left the room with a quick stride, and a very few minutes later the bell for prayers was ringing.

Tom Merry & Co. hurried down the stairs, and Jack Blake and his chums were not very far behind him. Arthur Augustus was the only one of them all who narrowly escaped being marked "late."

Still, he managed to slip into Hall in time.

"It was an awful wush, Blake!" he whispered. "Even as it is, I don't believe my tie matches my waistcoat—"

"Blow your tie!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And blow you, too, ass!" breathed Jack Blake. "There are more important things happening this morning than the matching of neckties with waistcoats, and if you weren't such a burblin' ass you'd see it!"

The Head came in at that moment, so Arthur Augustus had no time to plot out a fitting reply. He screwed his monocle in his eye instead and looked critically at the Head.

Dr. Holmes was very concerned-looking indeed.

He conducted prayers in his usual quiet, reverent way, then detained the whole school with a movement of his hand.

In a few brief words he explained what had happened.

The magnificent challenge cups which St. Jim's had been so justly proud of had completely disappeared.

Overnight they had been in their usual place in the visitors'-room; now they had utterly disappeared, and there was not a single clue to be obtained anywhere.

Other things, too, had been stolen. Already many of the fellows had reported the loss of valuable watches and the like, and the Head was obviously upset about it all.

"Of course, the police have been sent for," he announced, "and all boys who have lost articles are to give full particulars to their respective Form-masters at once. You can go!"

The fellows filed from Hall in great excitement.

Everybody was talking at once, and all about the same thing—the startling robbery.

Tom Merry was very grim-looking as he and his chums met Jack Blake & Co. in the corridor.

"We've just got to get our backs into this matter, Blake!"

"Rather!"

"Alweady we have decided to devote our whole aftahnoon to cleahin' up the mystewy!" declared Arthur Augustus. "We were goin' down to Baxtah's little twavellin' show to watch young Jim Baxtah box, but we have given up that ideah now."

"So have we!"

Tom Merry spoke quietly, but his eyes were very keen-looking. Jack Blake looked just as keen.

"The mystery has just got to be solved," he said grimly. "We can't have thefts taking place in the School House and not in the New House."

"I should say not!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake stopped speaking.

Coming steadily towards them was Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn, the leading spirits in the junior world of the New House. Figgins & Co. were very sympathetic-looking.

"I say, this must be rotten for you School House chaps!"

"Yes, it's rotten enough, Figgy—"

"Of course it is!" said Figgins heartily.

"That's why we three have come to lend you a hand."

"That's so!" declared Kerr.

"In fact, we've come over to clear up the mystery for you," added Fatty Wynn.

"Of course, we can't start our investigations right away, because we haven't had breakfast yet, and I'm rather peckish, but we'll start the moment we can. You needn't trouble about the mystery any further, old tops, for we'll find the thief for you!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake stared.

They appreciated the kindness of the offer of Figgins & Co., but they also realised the cheek of it. Arthur Augustus was inclined to glare.

"Theah is weally no need foah you chaps to twouble, Figgay—"

"It won't be any trouble!"

"Well, theah is no weason why you should put yourselves out, deah boys—"

"We sha'n't be putting ourselves out."

Arthur Augustus let his monocle fall from his eye, and stared witheringly at the grinning Figgins & Co.

"As a mattah of fact, we don't want your wotten help, Figgay!" he said quickly. "The mattah has been left entially in my hands, so theah is no need foah anyone else to wowwy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And theah is no cause foah wibald laughah!" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"The moment I have changed this wotten necktie foah a more wespectable one I shall go into the mattah of these wobbewies, and the thief may expect to be awwested any moment afaah that!"

And Arthur Augustus marched off.

A roar of laughter followed him, but he wisely took no notice of that. He walked on, his mind hovering between the two subjects of neckties and robberies.

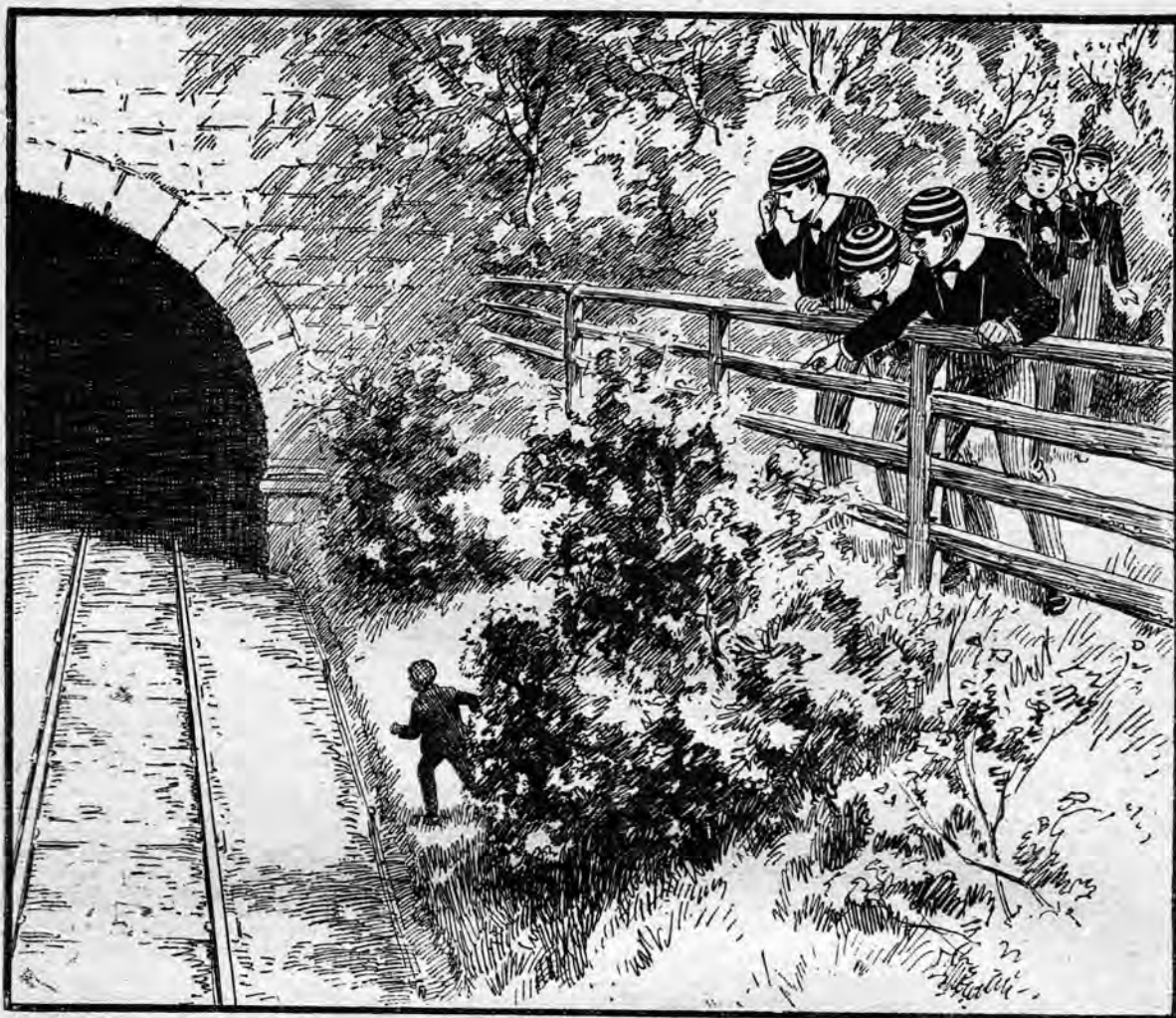
With his thoughts burdened with so much responsibility, Arthur Augustus rounded the corner of the passage with more pace than caution, and thudded right into Reilly's chest.

Reilly of the Fourth staggered back against the left-hand wall and glared at the swell of St. Jim's, while Arthur Augustus cannoned off until he brought up against the right-hand wall, and glared back.

"Gweat Scott—"

"Faith, and you're an utter ass, Gussy!"

"Weally, Weilly, you have no wight to wush into a fellah like a wotten bull in—"



"My aunt! What's that merchant doing down there?" said Blake, leaning over the fence. A little to the right of them, down by the gleaming rails, someone was moving steadily towards the entrance of the tunnel! (See Chapter 3.)

"Rats!" grinned the junior from Belfast. "The whole trouble comes through letting you out alone, Gussy, so I blame Jack Blake more than I do you. I sha'n't give you a hiding this time."

"Gweat Scott!"
"Only, next time you won't escape so easily," declared the grinning Reilly. And Reilly strode on.

Arthur Augustus stepped after him, indignant words on his lips.

"Weilly, you are a wuffian!" he cried. "You've put me in a wotten fluttah—Bai Jove, the wascal has cleahed off!"

Certainly Reilly had gone, so there was nothing for D'Arcy to do but continue his journey as calmly as he could.

He paused for a moment to readjust his monocle, and during that moment his eyes happened to be turned towards the ceiling of the corridor.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Gweat—Gweat Scott!"

And Arthur Augustus forgot all about his necktie, and was still staring when the gong went for breakfast.

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy's Discovery!

"BLAKE, deah boy, the mystewy is solved!"

Arthur Augustus panted out the words the moment breakfast was over, and Jack Blake's answer was a grin.

"Good going, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!" admitted the swell of St. Jim's, in great excitement. "I admit it has put me into no end of a fluttah!"

"All for a good cause, old top!"

"Yaas, I wealise that, of course. Tom Mewwy, deah boy, the mystewy of the wobbewy is quite solved now, you'll be glad to hear."

Tom Merry grinned even more noticeably than Jack Blake had.

"Go hon, old son!"

"No, weally, the mattah is quite cleahed up," said Arthur Augustus earnestly. "By puttin' two and two togethah I have discovahed how the thief got into St. Jim's, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake stopped grinning.

Past experience had taught them that Arthur Augustus was a slender reed to lean upon, but there was something in his manner that compelled them to listen to him now. In fact, Digby and Herries and Manners and Monty Lowther had gathered round with more or less expectant expressions on their faces.

Tom Merry was the first to speak.

"Get it off your chest, Gussy!"

"Yaas, deah boy, and you'll be weally startled when I weal the facts," began Arthur Augustus. "Pway gwasp the fact that when I left you all a short time

ago I was gwapplin' with the vavious clues to the mystewy—"

"What clues?"

"The genewal situation, perhaps I ought to have said, Hewwies, onlay pway don't intewwupt me. I was gwapplin' with the situation by thinkin' things ovah when it suddenly flashed across my mind—"

"Your what, Gussy?"

"My mind, Lowthah, you wottah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Personally, I cannot help considahin' waggin' in the pwesent sewious cires as wank bad form—"

"What flashed across your mind, ass?"

"The mannah in which the wretched thief got into St. Jim's, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, how did he get in?"

"Through the twap-door in the ceiling on the Fourth Form cowwidor, of course," answered Arthur Augustus. "That twap-door just outside our studday, Blake."

"Y-yes, there is a trap-door there."

"Wathah!"

"But—but what makes you think the thief came in by that way, Gussy?"

"Because the twap-door is a little way open, deah boy."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure, Tom Mewwy," said the swell of St. Jim's coolly—"just as sure

am that the twap-door wasn't open last night when we wethahed to bed."

"No; the trap-door wasn't open then, because I remember I threw a tennis-ball at it," agreed Jack Blake, a puzzled expression on his face. "How'd the thief get into the school that way, though, Gussy?"

"By simply waising the twap-door and dwoppin' down to the cowwidor floor, of course."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"So you are an ass!" snorted Jack Blake. "Anybody could get from the roof into the school, of course; but how'd anyone get into the roof from outside the school—eh?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You hadn't thought of that, had you, Gussy?"

"Well, as a mattah of fact, I haven't had time to weason it all out yet," admitted Arthur Augustus, with a far-away look in his eyes as if his brain were being overtaxed. "I think it highly pwob. that the thief has been hidden in the woof foah some considahable time, though."

"Without grub?"

"Vewy likely he bwought a supply of gwub with him."

"And very likely he didn't," said Tom Merry shortly. "It's funny about the trap-door being open—I'll admit that, but I don't see that it explains anything, do you, Blake?"

Jack Blake shook his head doubtfully.

"Can't say I do at present."

"Yet you are sure the trap-door was closed—My hat!"

Tom Merry stopped speaking to give vent to the exclamation in a very excited tone of voice. The other juniors looked at him anxiously.

"What's up, Tom Merry?"

"Why, that narrow turret in the School House wall!" said Tom Merry quickly. "That leads into the roof, doesn't it?"

"Y-yes!"

"Bai Jove! But theah are iron bars, deah boy!"

"That's so; but they are rusty old things that anybody could wrench away with his hands," declared Tom Merry excitedly. "I know, for I climbed up the ivy a day or two to get a cricket-ball that had got lodged up there, and I daren't trust my weight to the iron bars across the turret window."

"Phew!"

"Gussy, I believe you have solved part of the problem in your fatheaded way," Tom Merry went on. "If those bars are broken away, it's pretty clear how the thief got into the school. Let's go and see."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"As hard as you can!" panted Jack Blake. "We've only got a minute or two before the bell goes for first school."

Tom Merry did not answer.

Already the Terrible Three of the Shell were racing from the breakfast-room, but they were only a yard or so in front of Jack Blake and his chums of the Fourth Form when the quadrangle was reached.

Almost before Tom Merry had time to point up to the turret window far above him, Jack Blake gave vent to a cheer.

"Gee-whiz! Look here, Tom Merry!"

"What?"

"This," said Jack Blake breathlessly, and he held up a short length of very rust-eaten iron bar. "It was lying on the flower-bed just where you are standing, old top."

"Phew!"

"And look at these footprints, too!"

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"Yes, they are footprints, all serene," agreed Tom Merry. "It's clear enough now that the thief climbed up the ivy just as I did for that cricket-ball and— and got into the roof by breaking away the iron bars."

"Yes, that's clear enough."

"Bai Jove, yaas, and then got into the school by waisin' the twap-door and dwoppin' down to the floor."

"That's so!"

"And ten to one he left the school, when he'd sneaked everything he could lay his hands on, by the master's door!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "That closes on a latch, you know, and is never bolted or chained."

"Yes; that's how the rotter left, no doubt!" Tom Merry agreed. "He'd have no end of a heavy bag of stolen stuff to cart along, though, and I should have thought even the local policeman would have stopped a merchant carrying a sackful of silver cups and watches and things."

"Not if they didn't see him, deah boy."

"Ass!" grinned Tom Merry, becoming grave again very quickly. "Perhaps the rotter didn't go far with the stuff."

"You mean he hid it all somewhere?"

"Shouldn't wonder if he hid that."

"No, wathah not, for it would be a dweadfully heavy bag for a fellah to cawwy," said Arthur Augustus. "It was just flashin' through my mind that he had hidden the swag somewhere when you spoke, Mewwy, deah boy."

"Yes; but where?"

"We shall have to weason that out—"

"Yes; and it will want some reasoning, too," said Tom Merry doubtfully.

"I don't for a moment suppose the thief tried to get away with the stuff last night, because he wouldn't have had much of a chance, as there are no night trains. He may have got clear early this morning, though."

"That's so!"

"But we'll settle on what clues we have directly morning school is over," declared Tom Merry, "and we'll have a jolly good scout round this afternoon."

"Rather!"

"And keep your thinking caps on all the morning, chaps."

"Bai Jove, yaas!" declared Arthur Augustus. "Don't let your thoughts stway away fwom the wobbewy foah a moment, deah boys, and don't bweathe a word of my gweat discovewy to Figgins, as we don't want those New House duffahs meddlin' in a vewy important mattah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, don't get ratty just because Monty is an ass!" grinned Tom Merry. "We'll keep your great discovery a secret, Gussy, don't you fear! Bother! There goes the bell for first school!"

And Tom Merry & Co. and the chums of the Fourth filed into school in a state of suppressed excitement.

CHAPTER 3. In the Tunnel.

"**W**HERE shall we search first, chaps?"

Jack Blake asked this question as soon as dinner was over that day, but it was not a very easy question for any of the other juniors to answer.

They had the whole afternoon free, and they meant to devote it to attempts to trace the valuables stolen from St. Jim's. The question was where to start the search.

"Not much good searching the grounds themselves."

"Shouldn't think so."

"Wathah not, as the thief would have to be a feahful duffah to hide his stolen pwoperty in the school gwounds," agreed Arthur Augustus. "I considah we shall be much more likely to encounth success if we search the woods, deah boys."

Tom Merry and Jack Blake grinned.

The Rylcombe woods were pretty extensive and very thickly wooded, so it would be very much like looking for a needle in a haystack to hunt for the stolen cups there.

Still, a start had to be made somewhere.

"Yes, we'll make for the woods," said Tom Merry. "That is, unless anyone has a better idea."

"May as well try the woods first, anyway."

"Come on, then!"

The Terrible Three of the Shell and Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth moved in a body from the school quadrangle.

In the distance Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn could be seen also leaving the school precincts.

Tom Merry & Co. stopped.

"Old Figgys is on the war-path, chaps!"

"Bai Jove, yaas! It wathah looks as if they are goin' to search the woods, too!"

"Let's see which way they go."

Tom Merry & Co. waited patiently.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn came striding along the road. Their hands were in their pockets, and there were satisfied expressions on their faces.

Figgins nodded pleasantly to Tom Merry.

"Not playing cricket, Merry?"

"It doesn't look like it, does it, old top?"

"No; but it looks as if you were out searching for the stolen cups and things," said Figgins, with unpleasant sympathy. "If that's it, don't waste a fine, sunny afternoon like this, old chap, for those cups are practically found."

"Eh?"

"Within an hour or so," went on the lengthy leader of the New House juniors, glancing at his wrist watch, "we expect to put the police on the track of the thief. I thought I'd just mention it to prevent your wasting the afternoon, old son!"

And Figgins & Co. marched on.

Tom Merry and the rest of the School House juniors stared steadily after them. All of them knew that Figgins was not the type of fellow to bluff unless he had something to bluff about, and the whole three of them had certainly looked very pleased with themselves.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake exchanged uneasy glances.

"Those kids have a clue, Merry!"

"Looks like it!" muttered the hero of the Shell. "Figgins doesn't talk through the roof of his hat as a rule."

"No."

"And they are not going towards the woods, either!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye and shook his head.

"No, they are not makin' foah the woods, deah boys. It wathah looks to me as if they are goin' to Wylcombe village."

"Yes; but what for?"

No one could answer that.

Figgins & Co. might have a very good reason for hurrying in such a confident manner into the little town, but Tom Merry & Co. could not guess what it was. Jack Blake, at any rate, did not try very hard.

"Oh, blow Figgins."

"Bai Jove, yaas!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway let's get on with our



With his heart beating like a sledge-hammer, the captain of the Shell pushed open the door of a room marked "Dressing Room." He was greeted at once by a pleasant man. "Come right in, youngster!" (See Chapter 7.)

own washin', and search the woods, deah boys. Let's huvwy like anythin', as I am pweetty certain we are on the wight twack."

Tom Merry grinned.

He was by no means as certain about that as the swell of St. Jim's appeared to be; still, there certainly was nothing to be gained by standing there at the school gates doing nothing at all.

The whole party of seven moved steadily forward.

They marched in silence until they came to the railway cutting at the point where the line ran into a short tunnel.

Tom Merry stopped to watch a goods train rumble slowly into the tunnel, and the other juniors stopped with him. The seven leaned against the white fence enclosing the line for a moment or two.

The goods train rumbled on, disappearing in the darkness of the tunnel.

Jack Blake turned away with a brief laugh.

"We sha'n't find the stolen property this way, Tom Merry!"

"Just what I was going to say, Blake! Hallo!"

Tom Merry breathed the exclamation in an astonished voice, and leaned over the fence again.

Jack Blake joined him instantly.

A little to the right of them, down by

the gleaming rails, someone was moving stealthily in the few bushes that grew in a clump on the sloping embankment. Both Tom Merry and Jack Blake saw the vague outline of a human form at the same moment.

"My aunt! What's that merchant doing down there?"

"Can't be going to sneak the permanent way!"

"Or—or w'eck the twain, because it has already gone," ventured Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, the w'eckless wascal is makin' foah the tunnel!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake watched with keen eyes.

Whoever it was who was down among the bushes close to the railway-line he was certainly making a great effort not to be seen by anyone. The way he was creeping along among the bushes proved that.

And he was making for the tunnel.

Tom Merry & Co. were certain of that. Already the stealthily-moving form had reached the end of the clump of bushes, and a stretch of a dozen yards of permanent-way lay between him and the mouth of the tunnel. Tom Merry & Co. waited in astonishment to see what would happen next.

"Bai Jove! He's makin' a dash for it, deah boys!"

"Yes."

"An' wunnin' like a hare, too!"

There could be no doubt about that either.

The chap in the bushes had suddenly jumped into an upright posture, and was running hard for the mouth of the tunnel. Tom Merry & Co. all saw him distinctly, but only for an instant.

The chap disappeared as quickly as he had appeared. He fairly raced into the tunnel, and was instantly swallowed up in the darkness.

Tom Merry wheeled round in a flash.

"Blake, what's it mean?"

"Blessed if I know, unless—"

"Unless what?"

Jack Blake looked puzzled.

The individual they had just seen must have had a very strong motive for going into the tunnel at all, and that motive was not easily understood.

It wasn't as if the tunnel were a short cut to anywhere. The road was just as quick a way to the next station, for it ran parallel with the line all the way. Tom Merry & Co. realised that instantly.

What could this fellow have wanted to go into the tunnel at all for, then?

The question flashed across Tom Merry's mind, and the answer to it came in the form of another question.

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Had this affair anything to do with the theft at St. Jim's?

"Blake, do you think that chap was the thief?" asked Tom Merry. "And— and has hidden the stolen stuff in the tunnel?"

"It's possible!"

Arthur Augustus let his monocle fall from his eyes in his sudden excitement.

"Bai Jove! It's more than poss, deah boys!" he cried. "The same ideah flashed through my bwain, too. I am uttably certain that the stolen property is in the tunnel, and that was the thief we saw goin' for the cups, and my tickah, and all the othah things!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were still looking keenly at each other.

Certainly the railway-tunnel would prove a splendid hiding-place for the stolen goods. It was near St. Jim's, and could be reached from the school by crossing fields.

The thief would have had no difficulty in getting the stuff from the school to the tunnel in the dark.

The tunnel would be a perfectly safe hiding-place, too.

It wasn't once in a blue moon that any of the platelayers had reason to visit the tunnel. Stolen property could be hidden for weeks there in perfect safety.

Tom Merry saw that at once.

"We'll search the tunnel, chaps!"

"Rather!"

"Bai Jove, yaas!" cried Arthur Augustus. "I pwopose we wush in in a body and capture the wascal—"

"Wait a minute!"

Tom Merry looked quickly along the road, and caught Jack Blake by the arm. "What about you and Herries and Digby scudding as hard as you can for the other end of the tunnel?"

"And enter it from that end?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, and the rest of us enter it from here!" he flashed. "We shall have that mystery merchant between us then, and he oughtn't to find it easy to escape."

"Bai Jove, a wippin' ideah—"

"Yes, that's the notion, Merry!" cried Jack Blake. "Come on, Herries and Dig, old tops!"

"Right-ho!"

Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby raced away at their very best pace. They knew they could reach the other end of the tunnel in a very few minutes, and there seemed to be no chance of escape for the fellow they were after.

Tom Merry was quite satisfied about that.

"Mind, it may be a giddy-mare's-nest!" he panted, as he clambered over the white fence. "But I mean to hear what that chap has got to say for himself!"

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"And a rat in a trap isn't in it with him," said Monty Lowther. "As hard as you like, Tom Merry."

The hero of the Shell answered by racing into the tunnel at a fine pace. Arthur Augustus, Lowther, and Manners were close on his heels.

"Spread out fan fashion!" came Tom Merry's voice. "Cover up the whole line!"

"We are, deah boy!"

"And collar the beggar the moment you can! What's that?"

Tom Merry stopped for a moment to listen. Ahead there was the distinct sound of someone stumbling along in the darkness.

The fellow they were after had obviously taken to his heels.

Tom Merry grinned in the darkness.

Before ever the fugitive could reach the other end of the tunnel Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby would have arrived on the spot. The mysterious tunnel-prowler would run right into their arms.

Certainly it appeared to be a case of a rat in a trap.

CHAPTER 4.

Just in Time!

"LOOK out, you chaps!"

Tom Merry breathed the words in an excited whisper. The sound of footsteps in front had died away very suddenly.

"The merchant has stopped," Manners whispered back. "Perhaps he's hiding in one of those man-holes in the tunnel wall, Tommy!"

"Shouldn't wonder!"

Tom Merry stopped in some doubt.

If the chap they were so anxious to catch really had taken to one of the shallow recesses in the tunnel wall—built to protect platelayers when a train came through to interrupt their work—it would never do for Tom Merry & Co. to go blundering past him.

If the juniors fell into that mistake it would present the other fellow with his only chance of escape. Tom Merry racked his brains for an idea.

The only thing was to advance very cautiously now. The moment they passed the fellow in hiding ten to one he would double back for the tunnel entrance and take to his heels like the wind.

That he had stopped at all and hidden himself was pretty good proof that he had his head screwed on the right way.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

He wasn't going to be done now, if he could help it.

"Lowther, feel your way along the left wall of the tunnel, and try to find a man-hole!" he breathed.

"Right-ho!"

"And you do the same to the right wall, Manners!"

"Consider it done, old top," came the answer out of the intense darkness. "I suppose you and Gussy will keep to the centre of the permanent-way?"

Tom Merry forgot the darkness for the moment and nodded.

"Yes, that's the ticket!"

The juniors moved to their respective posts, and the four crept silently forward again. Not a word was said by any of them, and all the time they were straining their ears in the hope of catching the sound of footsteps again.

Instead, there was nothing but a grave-like silence.

For nearly a minute that lasted, then a curious thing happened. The ground Tom Merry & Co. and Arthur Augustus were walking on began to tremble in an amazing manner.

Tom Merry stopped dead again.

For an instant he could not understand that strange trembling at all, then a distant rumble was added to the startling movement. Tom Merry fairly gasped at the sound of that.

"Look out, chaps!"

"Bai Jove, yaas!" came Arthur Augustus' ringing voice. "Of course, I can see nothin' at all, but somethin' pwetty wotten is happenin'—"

"A train is coming, you ass!"

Arthur Augustus gasped audibly: "Gwreat Scott, I believe you are wight, deah boy!"

"Of course I am right!" yelled Tom Merry. "The engine will be into us in a minute. Gussy, where are you?"

Arthur Augustus gasped again.

"I don't quite know, deah boy, as it's so wottenly dark. My ideah is to get on the down-line if it's an up-twain, and on the up-line if it's a down-twain. The wotten part is that it will be dweadfully late in the day befoah I find out."

Tom Merry fairly yelled his answer.

"Get to one side of the tunnel, ass, and press yourself against the wall!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then do it!" yelled back Tom Merry. "You other chaps all right? Better lie down against the wall, I should say!"

"Yes, that's the ticket!"

Manners and Monty Lowther lost very little time indeed.

Neither of them had the faintest idea which way the train was coming, but they did not trouble much about that. They flung themselves flat down in the little gutter by the signal-wires at the foot of the respective walls of the tunnel.

Tom Merry rushed to the left and stumbled over Monty Lowther. Lowther caught at him with a firm grip.

"That you, Tommy?"

"Yes, old sport!"

"Where's Gussy, then?" flashed Monty Lowther. "My hat!"

Lowther's words were drowned in a terrific roar.

An express train had come thundering into the tunnel, the white engine-lamp showing up in a little round circle. The roar of the wheels on the metals was deafening.

The whole tunnel was shaking, too, and Tom Merry flung himself down near Lowther. With straining eyes the two juniors watched the engine-lamp rushing for them at sixty miles an hour.

It was a terrible, nerve-racking sight, but Tom Merry's head was perfectly clear.

He and Lowther were quite safe, at any rate, for the express was on the rails farthest away from them, but the others should be almost as secure.

Certainly the train would be much closer to them, but if they were lying down and pressing themselves against the tunnel wall they should come to no harm. The gutter beyond the signal-controls would be a fine little trench.

Manners could be relied upon to do the right thing. Tom Merry had no fear for his chum of the Shell. But would Arthur Augustus try some wild last-moment plan of his own?

Tom Merry's heart beat furiously at that.

The swell of St. Jim's had as much pluck as anyone in the whole school; but, in his own words, emergencies "put him in a fluttah." Tom Merry shuddered as he thought of that.

But the train was very close now, and everything seemed to be all right.

The light from the engine-lamps was



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thinning the darkness in front of the express, and there did not seem to be anyone standing on the line.

"Monty, it's all right, old sport!"

Tom Merry yelled the words, although he knew there wasn't the slightest chance of his being heard by his chum. The hero of the Shell just shouted in his huge relief; then a yell of horror left him.

A tall, slimly-built junior was coming across the line from the other side of the tunnel at a reckless pace.

Tom Merry and Lowther saw him quite distinctly.

It was Arthur Augustus, trying to change from one side of the tunnel to the other at the very last moment. In his horror Tom Merry tried to spring to his feet, but there was not time for that even.

Gussy had caught his foot in the metal rail, and was stumbling forward. He was actually falling in front of the on-rushing express!

Tom Merry and Lowther knew they would never forget that moment. The huge engine seemed to be almost upon the swell of St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus would never be able to recover his balance in time. It seemed an absolute certainty that he must be cut to pieces by the express.

And Tom Merry & Co. could do nothing to help their chum.

If the three of them had not been lying down every one would have made some attempt to help Arthur Augustus; but they were lying down. Long before they could get to their feet the whole thing would be over.

And Arthur Augustus would be cut to pieces!

So sure of that was Lowther that he shut his eyes. He could not have kept them open if he had tried, and see a chum meet such a terrible death.

With Tom Merry it was different.

He knew he could never be in time to render Arthur Augustus the slightest assistance, but it was part of Tom Merry's nature to fight to the finish. He was still trying to struggle to his feet.

Then an amazing thing happened.

Someone of about Tom Merry's own build and height and age sprang away from the other side of the tunnel. Without the slightest hesitation, the stranger hurled himself towards Arthur Augustus, and flung a sturdy arm round his waist.

The engine seemed to be right on top of both lads at the moment, but the chap Tom Merry had never seen before had been travelling at a terrific pace.

The impact of his collision with Arthur Augustus sent them both headlong forward, just clear of the engine when there had been scarcely a foot to spare.

The two thudded down in a heap between the other set of rails, close to Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell sprang forward, his face deathly white.

He remembered shouting something, but he did not know what he said, and no one heard him.

The express was dashing past, raising an echo in the tunnel with its hideous clatter.

It was past and out of sight in a flash.

But Tom Merry did not give the express another thought now. The whole tunnel was in intense darkness again, and shaking in the same strange manner, but not a sound could be heard from where Arthur Augustus and his unknown rescuer had fallen.

They may have been calling out, but Tom Merry could not hear them.

He stumbled forward in the darkness, calling in a hoarse, uneven voice.

CHAPTER 5.

A Great Plot.

"FLASH the light on again, Dig!" Jack Blake breathed the words in a low voice.

Of the whole party who had started to search the tunnel Digby was the only one who happened to have a pocket electric lamp with him.

He switched on the light now, and led the way into the tunnel at a fast run.

Not ten seconds ago the express had come dashing out of the tunnel, and Jack Blake & Co. knew that their chums must have been somewhere ahead when the train roared past them.

That all four had escaped seemed to be too much to hope for.

As white as a sheet, Digby crammed on the pace, the light from his lamp showing the way ahead. Behind him Jack Blake was shouting incessantly:

"Merry, are you there? Merry, old chap—"

Suddenly an answer came to the chums of Study No. 6.

"Yes, Blake, we're all right!"

"Onlay, huvwuy up with that light, deah boy!" came another well-known voice. "This wotten darkness, and othah still more wotten things, have put me into a feahful flattah. This way, deah boys!"

Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries dashed up.

The light from the lantern shone on a group of juniors, and Jack Blake cheered aloud.

Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Arthur Augustus were standing in a circle round a fellow Jack Blake had never seen before.

"Phew! How did you chaps escape?"

"You'd better hear how Gussy escaped first, Blake," said Tom Merry steadily.

"The ass was right in front of the engine, and this chap sprang in front, too, and saved Gussy's life!"

"Yaas, wathah, Blake!"

The fellow they were speaking of grinned, although it was rather a painful-looking grin.

"Oh, don't pile it on too much!" he said coolly. "It was lucky I was in time to yank you from in front of the train, anyway."

"Not much luck about it."

"I agwee with you, Mewwy, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "This chap saved my life with w'eckless bwavery, Blake, and I pwopose we get out of this wotten tunnel as quickly as we can and discuss the mattah!"

"There is nothing to discuss," said the lad who had saved Arthur Augustus. "I'd have been a fine sort of chap to have let another fellow get run over when I could yank him off the line, wouldn't I? Still, I'm ready enough to get out of this tunnel."

"Lead the way, Dig!"

Dig nodded, and went on in front, still using his pocket-lamp. Tom Merry and Jack Blake were just behind him, but neither of the School House juniors felt much like talking.

There was no doubt at all that the lad who had saved Arthur Augustus was the lad the St. Jim's juniors had been trying to capture. They had even thought of him being connected with the thefts at the school.

They did not think that now, though.

A thief wouldn't jump in front of an express train as this chap had. Tom Merry and Jack Blake were quite sure of that. There had been a serious mistake somewhere in ever thinking their new chum could be connected with the theft.

Tom Merry was very decided about that.

The moment he was out of the tunnel he turned to Gussy's rescuer:

"I say, what's your name, old chap?"

"Jim Baxter."

"Jim Baxtah! Bai Jove!" cried Arthur Augustus, in amazement. "You don't mean to say you are the wippin' boxah who is givin' shows at Baxtah's Twavellin' Booth, deah boy?"

"Yes."

"And—and you are down to box the Wayland Kid to-night for ten rounds?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Jim Baxter shrugged his shoulders, and grinned with dismay.

"I was down to fight the Wayland Kid, but now—"

Jim Baxter lapsed into dismayed silence.

"The match has fallen through, bai Jove?"

Jim Baxter shook his head.

"Not in the way you mean," he answered. "My stepfather fixed up the fight, although the Wayland Kid is a bit big for me. The match is all arranged and advertised, but—but I don't see how I am to go into the ring."

"Why not?"

"Well, look!" And Jim Baxter held out his left arm.

His wrist was terribly discoloured with a huge bruise, and all puffed up from a sprain. The idea of his being able to put boxing-gloves on for several weeks to come was absurd.

Arthur Augustus stared at the damaged wrist blankly.

"And you did that just now, deah boy?"

"Yes!"

"When you were wescuin' me?"

Jim Baxter shrugged his shoulders again.

"Yes; but it was my own fault," he explained. "Like an ass, I let myself fall on my hand, and this is the result! How I'm to meet the Wayland Kid to-night I don't know, and yet I must meet him."

Arthur Augustus looked his horror.

"But it's uttaly impos, Baxtah!"

"Impossible or not, it will have to be done," returned the young professional boxer grimly. "My stepfather has arranged the fight, and I'd rather face a dozen Wayland champions with a dozen sprained wrists than upset my stepfather!"

"I don't gwasp that ideah, deah boy!"

"You would if you knew my stepfather," returned Jim quietly. "He was a pro boxer himself once, and—well, I wouldn't dare to disappoint him over this fight, for it means a fiver to him whether I win, lose, or draw, and a great deal more if I win."

"But you can't possibly box, kid."

"I've just got to!"

Jim Baxter answered Tom Merry's question in a voice that told its own story. The young boxer dared not disappoint his stepfather.

The usually cheery face of the hero of the Shell went very grim.

"I suppose you mean your stepfather would—would—"

Tom Merry stopped speaking, and Jim laughed bitterly.

"Oh, you can speak out without hurting my feelings!" he said. "My stepfather would just lam into me until life wasn't worth living if I failed him in to-night's fight. Even if I were fit and got beaten I'd be in for another thrashing, but if I failed to go into the ring at all—well, I wouldn't dare do it, you chaps!"

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled curiously.

He knew instinctively that Jim Baxter

was speaking the truth, and a sudden rush of indignation swept over him.

By a fine act of pluck Jim Baxter had damaged his wrist, and because of that his brutal stepfather would make his life a misery. The injustice of the thing made Tom Merry's blood boil.

Jack Blake's eyes, too, were gleaming. "There's one thing certain, anyway," he said briefly.

"What's that?"

"Why, that you aren't going to fight the Wayland Kid to-night," returned Jack Blake grimly. "No matter what else happens, you aren't going to put on boxing-gloves with a wrist damaged like that, Jim Baxter!"

"I've just got to!"

"Wubbish!" cried Arthur Augustus. "I agree with Jack Blake, and I uttally wefuse to think of your boxing to-night, Baxtah, deah boy!"

"Not much good your saying that, sir."

"But I mean it, and pway don't call me 'sir,'" answered Arthur Augustus. "I uttally wefuse to allow you to go into the wing to-night!"

Jim Baxter grinned.

"How'll you stop me?"

"I haven't thought the mattah ovah yet, but I mean to stop you, deah boy, even if I have to disguise myself as you, and give the Wayland Kid a feeful thwashin' myself!"

"Eh?"

"My—my hat!" muttered Tom Merry, and he stared hard at Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's had spoken without thinking at all.

His suggestion had been nothing more than a hastily-spoken simile, but it had a wonderful effect on Tom Merry and Jack Blake. The leaders of the School House juniors stood staring at one another in silence for a moment or two.

The same thought was flashing through both their minds. Would it be possible for someone to represent Jim Baxter in his big fight at Wayland that night?

Not for a moment did Tom Merry think it would be possible, but he turned to Jim for all that.

"I suppose your father will be at the match?"

"No; but he'll hear all about it late to-night."

"You are sure he won't be there?"

Jim Baxter nodded.

"Yes, quite sure, for he's gone up to London to-day," the young boxer answered. "He's left me my instructions, though, and they are clear enough. I'm to be at the ringside at eight o'clock to-night, and the Wayland Ring people will provide me with a second if I don't take one over with me."

"And are you going to take one?"

"Haven't thought about it yet."

"Then you haven't arranged for anyone at all to go with you to Wayland?" asked Tom Merry quickly. "As things stand now you are to go there alone?"

"That's so."

"And—and are you known at Wayland?" asked Jack Blake breathlessly.

"Never been there in my life."

"My hat!"

Jack Blake breathed the exclamation in a whisper, and glanced at Tom Merry again. Tom Merry glanced back.

This scheme of impersonating Jim Baxter—mad as it had seemed at first—did not appear so utterly impossible, after all.

Tom Merry caught Jim by the arm.

"When are you going to Wayland, old chap?"

"By the seven o'clock train, I suppose."

"Right!" flashed Tom Merry. "Be

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on the station at a quarter to seven, and meet us in the waiting-room, will you?"

"If—if you like!"

"Then it's a promise," said Tom Merry. "Just walk straight into the waiting-room, and you'll find some of us there, and don't say anything to anyone about it. We are going to see you through this business somehow."

Jim Baxter gave the promise readily enough.

He hadn't the faintest idea what Tom Merry was driving at, except that perhaps these schoolboys wanted to come over and see the fight. He was willing enough for them to do that, although he knew it would be a pretty poor show he'd put up against the Wayland Kid now that his left wrist was almost useless.

"The best I can hope for is to take the k.o. right at the start," he thought, as he said good-bye to the St. Jim's juniors. "It will be just madness for me to attempt to box properly."

And the young boxer shuddered as he thought of what would happen to him when his stepfather came back by the last train that night and heard the result of the match.

CHAPTER 6.

Starting News!

"B AI Jove, what a wippin' ideah!" Arthur Augustus spoke in great excitement the moment Jim Baxter had disappeared down the road. Tom Merry and Jack Blake faced the swell of St. Jim's in surprise.

"What's that?"

"Eh, Gussy?"

"I say that it's a perfectly wippin' ideah, deah boys," repeated Arthur Augustus. "I have uttally made up my mind to impersonate Jim Baxtah to-night, and administrah a feeful thwashin' to the Wayland Kid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, don't make my ribs ache, Gussy!" chuckled the humorist of the Shell. "If you'd ever seen the Wayland Kid, you'd be about as keen to take on Joe Beckett!"

Tom Merry laughed, too, but he was soon grave again.

"Don't rag, you chaps, for this is a serious bizney—"

"Pwecisely—"

"And the point is, would the scheme work?" went on Tom Merry anxiously. "I dare say we could wangle a pass or two out of Kildare to go to Wayland, but could Jim Baxter be impersonated in the ring?"

"Why not?"

"Mayn't there be people watching who will have seen Jim?" said Tom Merry anxiously. "Apparently the kid has been going about the country boxing in his stepfather's booth, you know."

"He hasn't been to these parts before."

"That's true."

"And his wotten stepfather is away in London!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Baxtah told us so himself, so theah is not vewy much to feah. No doubt the Wayland Kid is wathah a tough nut to cwack, but that can't be helped. Baxtah saved my life, and spwained his w'ist doin' it, and I won't listen to the ideah of his boxin' at all to-night."

"Rather not!"

"And I am quite weady to take whatevah wisk theah is, deah boys."

"Eh?"

"You, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye, and viewed Tom Merry and Jack Blake through it with a withering glance. The tone of voice in which their

remarks had been made hurt the dignity of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Of course, I am goin' to see this match though, Blake—"

"I am, you mean!"

"You, Blake?" said Tom Merry, raising his eyebrows in mild surprise. "I thought it was all settled that if Jim Baxter was to be impersonated in to-night's fight I should be the impersonator."

"Just a little mistake on your part, then, Tommy," said Jack Blake blandly.

"A gweat mistake, you mean, deah boy—"

"A thumping great mistake!" agreed Jack Blake firmly. "Of course, as the best boxer in the School House, I shall have to meet the Wayland Kid—"

"What uttah wubbish! Baxtah saved my life, so, of course, I shall have to fight his wotten battles—"

"Oh, rats!"

The juniors stood round in a circle, all looking hard at Tom Merry and Jack Blake.

Undoubtedly those two were the best boxers in the School House just then, and so one of them would have to impersonate the young professional pugilist.

But which of them should it be?

Arthur Augustus' indignant interruptions were completely ignored in this all important question, and, as was natural, Digby and Herries were all for Jack Blake being the champion. As Manners and Lowther were equally in favour of Tom Merry, not much headway was made in the voting, for Arthur Augustus refused to vote for anyone but himself.

"It's uttah wot you two fellahs buttin' in—"

"Lie down, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to lie down, and I wefuse to have my claims ovahlooked!" declared Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "It was my wippin' clue that led us to the tunnel, and it was my ideah that Baxtah should be impersonated, and it's through me he spwained his w'ist—"

"Switch off!"

"Lowthah, deah boy, as a gentleman I—"

"Oh, do dry up!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were still facing each other.

They were always the greatest of rivals in all School House matters, but in the presence of a common enemy they always joined forces at once.

And they were facing a common enemy now in Jim's stepfather.

The whole idea was to save Jim Baxter from the anger of his brutal guardian. Both Tom Merry and Jack Blake realised that, and the best way to shield Jim was to provide the Wayland Kid with the strongest opponent.

Jack Blake was very clear on that point.

He gritted his teeth, and slipped his hands into his jacket pockets.

"You—you are a month or two older than I am, Tommy."

"That's so!"

"And a shade heavier, aren't you?"

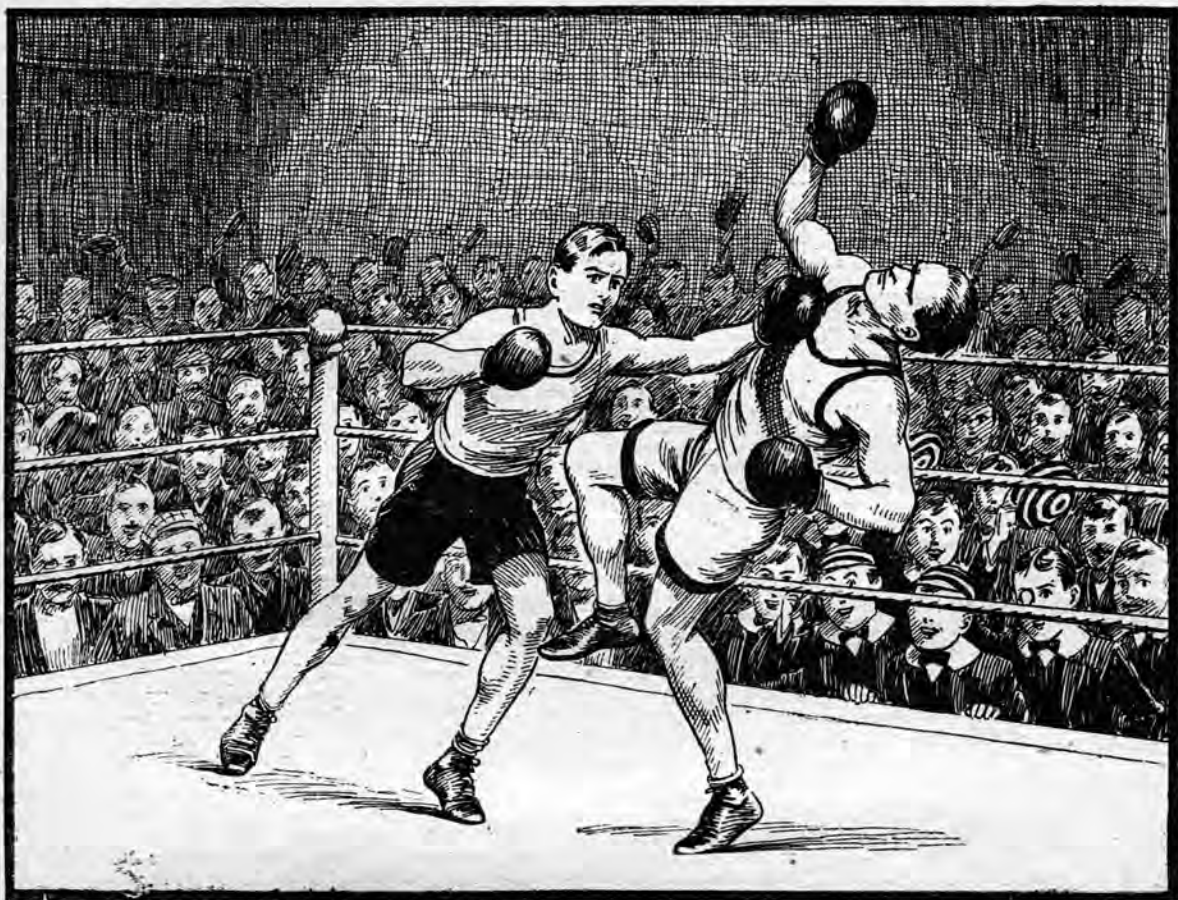
"I was when we weighed ourselves at the station the other day."

Jack Blake nodded.

As an exponent of glove-work he was quite as clever as Tom Merry or anyone else at St. Jim's, but an extra pound or two of weight would mean a lot when a splendid fighter like the Wayland Kid had to be faced.

Jack Blake thought of that, too.

He would have given all his pocket-money for a month to have been the one to take Jim Baxter's place in the ring at Wayland, but it wouldn't do. Those extra few pounds in weight might mean



Tom Merry saw that his chance had come. He darted in with his left glove. Thud! Then swept the right to his opponent's face, and the Wayland Kid dropped like a log. "One—two—three—!" began the timekeeper. (See Chapter 8.)

all the difference to the success of the plan.

Jim Baxter was the one to be thought of before anybody else. Jack Blake was very decided about that.

He turned to Tom Merry abruptly.

"I'll stand down, if you like, Tom!"

"You mean it, old chap?"

"Yes; because of those few extra pounds of weight you have, kid!"

Tom Merry flushed with pleasure.

Impulsively he held out his hand.

"Thanks, Blake!" he said quietly.

"You're a sportsman; but that's nothing new for you. I'll do my best before I take the count, anyway, and the scrap won't stop until that happens."

"Good enough!"

That was all Jack Blake answered; and he hid his huge disappointment finely.

He had done the right thing, and he knew it. It was no good being sorry about what couldn't be helped, and the idea now was to back up Tom Merry night and main.

In great excitement the juniors hurried back to St. Jim's. Kildare would be certain to be at the nets coaching the first eleven, and Jack Blake undertook to try and get the necessary permits that would enable Tom Merry and all to go to Wayland that evening.

"Mind; I may not be able to get permits for all of us, chaps!"

"Try your hardest, Blake."

"I'll try hard enough, Dig," answered the chief of Study No. 6 grimly, "and I sha'n't take no for an answer, or several of them; but if I can get only one or two permits, we shall have to cast lots for them."

"Y—yes!"

All the juniors agreed, but there was a long spell of suspense while they waited in the gymnasium for Jack Blake's return.

One moment hopes ran high that the whole party of seven would be able to go, then they were dashed to the ground. Jack Blake would have to be in his most plausible mood to gain permission for such a large party to make the evening journey to Wayland.

Still, Jack Blake had a way with him.

He tackled Kildare, and after ten minutes of steady argument came racing to the gymnasium waving a slip of paper in the air.

"I've done it, chaps!"

"All seven of us, Jack?"

"Yes, the whole seven," panted Jack Blake. "Had no end of a job, but I've managed it, and we can all catch the seven o'clock train to Wayland."

"Hurrah!"

"The permit is signed, too, so there's nothing else to worry about, but getting Tom Merry in trim."

"Right—ho!"

"And we'll start off with making the kid spar a bit," said Jack Blake grimly. "Shove the gloves on, Tom Merry, and imagine I'm the Wayland Kid!"

"Good enough!"

Tom Merry had the gloves on in a flash, and, perhaps unwisely, he sparred with a good many of the juniors. Still, it showed his keenness for the evening's fray, and keenness is half the battle in the ring.

After that the time slipped by quickly. Scarcely any tea could be eaten by any-

body owing to the excitement, but at last Tom Merry glanced at his watch.

"Time we were starting for the station, chaps!"

"Bai Jove, yaas—"

"Got my boxing-kit packed up in the bag, Lowther?"

"Rather!" said Monty Lowther eagerly. "There's a fine big sponge, too, to wash the blood off your face when you start stopping straight lefts from the Wayland Kid—Hullo!"

A tap sounded at the door.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged quick winks with the chums of the Fourth. Whoever it was who was paying Study No. 6 a visit mustn't hear a word of the plans for the evening.

Arthur Augustus unlocked the door leisurely.

"Who is theah, deah boys—"

"We are," came Figgins' quiet voice. "May we come in, Blake?"

"Y—yes."

"Oh, we haven't come to cadge a tea or anything like that!" went on the lengthy leader of the New House juniors, in a calmer and more deliberate voice than he usually showed. "We thought we'd just look in to tell you the news."

"News?"

"Yes, Merry, news about the St. Jim's thefts!"

Tom Merry started.

In the excitement over the forthcoming boxing match the St. Jim's theft had rather slipped from his mind. As a matter of fact, none of the seven School House juniors had given it a thought since they had left the tunnel.

Figgins smiled easily and sat down on the edge of the table. Kerr, and Fatty Wynn stood on each side of him. There was no doubt about it, Figgins looked remarkably pleased with himself.

"It's been a baffling mystery, chaps," he said.

"What has, bai Jove?"

"The St. Jim's theft of course!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy—"

"Only it isn't much of a mystery any longer," went on Figgins easily. "Luckily, Kerr and Wynn and myself were able to help the local police a great deal, for we practically discovered the stolen property for them."

"Then it has been discovered?"

"Every bit of it—"

"And actually brought back to St. Jim's?" asked Tom Merry blankly.

"It will be in a very short time!"

"Good egg!"

"Yes, it hasn't been a bad bit of business," Figgins said gleefully. "I don't want to appear conceited, but there are few fellows in the school—and none in the School House—who would have thought of searching the railway tunnel for the stolen property. Luckily, we did think of it, and so everything has been recovered."

"From—from the tunnel?"

"Exactly, Merry!" grinned Figgins. "It was all hidden snugly in a man-hole in the wall."

Tom Merry did not answer.

He glanced once at Jack Blake, and the chief of Study No. 6 glanced back. Once again the same thought was flashing through both their minds.

They, too, had gone to the tunnel to look for the stolen goods, and they had followed Jim Baxter there!

CHAPTER 7.

Keeping Their Promise!

"MIND, I don't say we hadn't some luck in hitting upon the tunnel right at the start!" Figgins said, after a pause.

"In fact, our only reason for suggesting that to the policeman was because it seemed a likely place."

"Y-yes!"

"And the notion turned up trumps!"

"I suppose it—it did."

"Of course, no arrests have been made yet, but the police have a clue," went on Figgins. "From what they said they expect to have their man within twenty-four hours."

"Do—do they suspect anybody?"

"Can't say, Blake."

"No names were mentioned, then?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Not to us, anyway," he answered.

"Still, that doesn't matter so much. We've got everything back for you School House kids, so you ought to be thankful. I looked specially to see if your watch were all serene, Gussy."

"Thanks—thanks feahfully, deah boy!"

"So that's that!" laughed Figgins.

"Next time you School House chaps run up against a mystery, don't waste time by making a hash of it yourselves. Just send to the New House for us if you want the thing cleared up. Cheerio!"

And Figgins & Co. departed.

Instantly a buzz of conversation broke out in Study No. 6, with Arthur Augustus the first to speak.

"Of course, it's uttah wot, deah boys!"

"What's utter rot?"

"About that wippin' sportsman Jim Baxtah havin' anythin' to do with the wotten wobbery—"

"Who said he had anything to do with it?"

Arthur Augustus lapsed into silence.

Certainly no one had said anything about Jim Baxter being connected with the theft until Arthur Augustus had

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spoken. Still, they were all thinking about it.

The swell of St. Jim's had given words to all their thoughts, and Tom Merry, for one, was glad that the ice had been broken.

He faced Jack Blake and the others steadily.

"It's no good pretending that suspicion isn't pointing to Jim Baxter," he said.

"The only reason we went into the tunnel was because we saw Jim going in there."

"And now Figgins & Co. have found the stolen property in the tunnel."

"That's true!" Jack Blake answered slowly.

The junior from the broad acres was a clear-headed fellow. Unpleasant as it was, he could not help thinking that Jim Baxter knew something about the stolen property being in the tunnel.

If he hadn't, why had the young boxer gone there at all? A railway tunnel wasn't the sort of place a fellow would want to explore on a sunny afternoon without a very good reason. Even Arthur Augustus had to admit that.

"I gwant that the affair is a vewy stwange one, onlay I am uttably sure Jim Baxtah isn't the thief—"

"Why are you sure?"

"Because he jumped in fwont of that expwess to save me fwom being cut to pieces, deah boy."

Tom Merry looked critically at Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's remark was not based on sound logic, and yet there was a good deal in what he said. A fellow who would break into a school and rob it might and left would scarcely be the sort of chap who would risk his life to save a stranger.

The two things didn't fit in somehow.

Tom Merry clung to that thought, and gritted his teeth.

"There's something in this we don't understand, chaps!"

"Gwanted, deah boy—"

"And Jim Baxter may be the thief, or he may not."

"That, of course, is true," said Jack Blake slowly. "What are you driving at, Tommy?"

Tom Merry remained silent for a moment or two.

"I was just thinking that we promised to do our best to shield Jim from his stepfather, Blake."

"Yes, we did that."

"And we did it because he damaged his wrist by rescuing Gussy with as plucky an act as I've ever seen."

"True enough!"

"And so I'm going to Wayland to-night," went on Tom Merry steadily. "If Jim Baxter is the thief—well, we shall be trying to do a thief a good turn, that's all. But we gave our promise, and I'm going to stick to it. I'm going to meet the Wayland Kid in the ring."

Instantly the little group of juniors cheered loudly.

Tom Merry had said the very thing they had wanted him to say, and Arthur Augustus' cheers were the loudest of all.

"Hooway! Of course, you are goin' to swap with the Wayland Kid, deah boy; and, of course, old Baxtah isn't the wotten thief. Theah is a w'etched mistake somewheah or othah!"

"Let's hope so, anyway!"

"And it's time to start foah the station, too, bai Jove!"

Certainly it was time to start for the station. In fact, Tom Merry & Co. had to hurry to reach the station waiting-room at a quarter to seven, and they made the journey in unusual silence.

With scarcely a word being said, it was agreed among them that nothing should be said to Jim Baxter about the stolen property being found in the tunnel.

Thief-catching was police work now, as far as Tom Merry & Co. were con-

cerned. All that they meant to trouble themselves with was the repaying of Jim Baxter for the fine way in which he had saved Arthur Augustus.

They all reached the waiting-room, to find Jim Baxter already there. The young boxer's wrist had swollen to an enormous size by now.

He met Tom Merry's eyes with a glance of dismay.

"It's quite impossible for me to go to Wayland now."

"Of course it is!"

"I—I couldn't even put the gloves on, let alone box," Jim added. "My left hand's useless."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, deah boy!"

There was a momentary pause. Then Tom Merry plunged ahead.

In a very few words he explained the plot to the young boxer, and Jim Baxter listened in amazement.

At first he thought they were pulling his leg. The idea that Tom Merry should meet the Wayland Kid in his stead staggered him.

"Why, he'd just massacre you, Master Merry!" Jim said blankly.

"I expect he will."

"You—you'd never have a look in!"

"I suppose not," answered Tom Merry quietly. "Still, I'm going to have a shot at it, and you are just going to stay here in Rylcombe and wait for the result."

"My—my hat!"

Jim Baxter was bewildered.

He tried some more arguments to show how mad the scheme was, but Tom Merry & Co. would not listen.

They had quite made up their minds on this affair, and Tom Merry brought the young boxer's arguments to an abrupt close.

"What about getting the tickets, Blake?"

"Herries has gone for them."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "The train's in, Baxter, so we'll say good-bye. We shall be back on the nine-thirty, so you'd better meet us here again."

And, with a brief nod, Tom Merry boarded the train.

All his chums followed him, in huge excitement. Monty Lowther in charge of the little bag that contained Tom Merry's boxing-kit.

The train rumbled out of the station, leaving Jim Baxter standing on the platform the picture of amazement.

Even now he did not seem to have grasped what had happened.

For a long time he stood there staring after the train, and by that time Tom Merry was putting the finishing touches to the plot.

Monty Lowther produced an ordinary cloth cap from the bag, and Tom Merry exchanged his school cap for it; then he changed his ordinary Eton collar for a soft, upright affair.

In the matter of clothes he had come prepared.

A pair of old grey flannel slacks and a sports coat did not suggest St. Jim's in any way, and by the time the train ran into Wayland everything was ready.

"Mind, don't take too much notice of me when I step into the ring," Tom Merry cautioned his chums, "and don't know me at all."

"Wathah not—"

"Only Jack Blake can come into the dressing-room with me, or someone will smell a rat."

"That's so!"

"And we'd better not walk together to the Ring," added Tom Merry.

"Blake and I will go on ahead."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

The train slowly came to a standstill, and Tom Merry and Jack Blake jumped out.

The chief of Study No. 6 was dressed very much as Tom Merry was, and the pair might easily have passed for a young boxer and his youthful second. They hurried on in silence towards the finely-appointed Wayland Ring.

They passed in through a side-door, and just glanced into the hall itself, and Tom Merry grinned.

There was the ring, all right, a properly-raised affair, with its sombre rope walls. All round it was a growing crowd of glove enthusiasts.

Tom Merry was going to have a fine crowd of spectators for his fight with the Wayland Kid, at any rate.

With his heart beating like a sledge-hammer, the hero of the Shell Form of St. Jim's pushed open the door of a little room marked "Dressing Room."

He was greeted at once by a pleasant, cheery-looking man.

"Come right in, young Baxter!"

"Thanks!"

"You're in good time, too," added the genial manager of the Wayland Ring, "and that's what I like to see. Brought a second with you, after all, then. Feel fit, I hope?"

"Fit as a fiddle!"

Tom Merry answered briefly, and commenced to undress at once, while Jack Blake hovered round him.

Of the two, Jack Blake seemed to be suffering from nerves the most, for the Wayland Kid had a fine reputation in the county just then.

For all his uneasiness, though, Jack Blake would have given anything to have been in Tom Merry's shoes at that moment. To meet a real professional boxer was not a chance likely to come a St. Jim's junior's way again for a long time.

Tom Merry was thinking of that, too, and his face was very set and grim-looking.

The Wayland Kid was not going to have it all quite his own way if Tom Merry could help it.

CHAPTER 8. Knocked Out!

"ON my left, the Wayland Kid! On my right, Jim Baxter!"

The promoter of the Jim Baxter v. Wayland Kid fight made the announcement to a crowded hall, and indicated the two boxers with waves of his hand.

Arthur Augustus and Lowther and Herries and the other juniors, who had forced their way close to the ring, held their breaths.

Tom Merry and the Wayland Kid were standing in their respective corners, and everything depended upon the next moment or two. Would anyone tumble to the fact that Jim Baxter was being represented by a substitute?

The juniors waited anxiously.

There was a fine, rousing reception for the two lads, and there was even a shout for the visitor to the Wayland Ring.

"Good luck to you, young Baxter!"

"Ho's plucky enough, anyway!"

"May the best lad win!"

They were fine, sporting cries, and Jack Blake, at any rate, heaved a sigh of relief. Tom Merry had not been recognised, then.

So far the plot was a huge success.

But would it remain a success? Jack Blake asked himself the question, and looked in dismay at Tom Merry's opponent.

Now that the Wayland Kid had slipped off his dressing-gown, he revealed himself to be a huge fellow.

He had the advantage of Tom Merry in height, weight, and age, and perhaps that was why there were so many cheers for the visitor. Tom Merry heard the cheers, and gritted his teeth.

Whatever happened, he meant to give these sportsmen a run for their money. The hero of the Shell of St. Jim's longed to hear the gong go.

"Seconds out!"

Tom Merry turned to grin, as Jack Blake slipped under the ropes, and the chairs were hoisted over the ringside. The decks had truly been cleared for action now.

Already the Wayland Kid was coming from his corner.

Grimly Tom Merry went to meet him.

An instant later the signal was given, and the Wayland Kid was in with a spring. Tom Merry was promptly sent staggering back, for quickness of this nature was not often encountered in the St. Jim's gymnasium.

The young professional hadn't wasted a second of time.

A fine, straight left-lead streaked for Tom Merry's face, and the St. Jim's junior was only just in time. He was back and out of distance with clever footwork.

"Good for you, Jim, lad!"

"Stand up to him, young 'un!"

Tom Merry heard the shouts, and waited. He was as cool as if he had been playing chess with Manners. He was just longing for the Wayland champion to rush in again.

The rush came almost instantly.

Again Tom Merry looked as if he were going to spring back out of distance; then he deceived everybody by lurching forward. His left was out like a streak of lightning, and he made connection beautifully in his opponent's face.

The Wayland Kid was back on his heels.

A huge roar went up, then it was doubled and trebled. Tom Merry had swept his right to the point of the jaw in a magnificent upper-cut.

"Hooway, deah boy!"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah, onlay— Gweat Scott!"

The Wayland Kid had rushed in again.

Never in his praiseworthy career had he been beaten in this particular ring, in front of his own admirers, and he didn't mean to be beaten now by the lad in front of him if he could help it. He dashed in, lashing out with both gloves in whirlwind fashion.

Tom Merry was driven back almost upon the ropes.

The St. Jim's junior sparred cleverly, but the weight was against him. Once it looked as if the Wayland Kid had the fight in hand already.

He jabbed Tom Merry in the ribs furiously, then swept his left glove to the face. Tom Merry took the punishment grimly, and managed to get out of distance again.

He was badly shaken, and did the wisest thing possible in sparring out the round.

The gong sounded with the two lads battling away, and honours were slightly in favour of the Wayland youngster.

Round two was his as well, until almost on the verge of time, when Tom Merry took revenge for the punishment he had received.

He met another of the Wayland Kid's rushes with a straight left, and the home champion was flung back. Tom Merry was upon him in a flash, but the gong sounded at the same moment.

Instantly Tom Merry dropped his hands to his sides, and there was a cheer in consequence.

The match was proving a fine sporting one.

The next round was all in favour of the Wayland Kid, but at the fourth session Tom Merry amazed the spectators.

He darted about the ring and scored again and again upon his more bulky opponent, and the concluding seconds were things to be remembered.

A last desperate attempt to regain lost ground was made by the Wayland champion. He dashed in, but he was badly short with his left lead, and Tom Merry had him with a beautiful right glove counter.

The St. Jim's junior was not satisfied with that, though.

His left was at work the instant following, then his right again, another terrific upper-cut, and the Wayland Kid was flung back right on to the ropes.

He hung there, and "time" saved him.

The gong went, and he was free to go to his corner.

Jack Blake's eyes were ablaze with excitement.

"Tommy, you'll get him if you're careful," he whispered. "He's miles ahead of you in points, but you'll knock him out yet!"

Tom Merry did not answer.

This professional match was proving so very different from the friendly sparring at St. Jim's.

At the old school there was no knocking out at all. Two fellows boxed over a certain number of rounds, and the winner was the one who had the most points to his credit.

The same thing was to happen here, but Tom Merry knew he had no chance of winning on points. If he meant to gain this fight for the absent Jim Baxter, the only chance lay in handing over the k.o.

Tom Merry gripped on to that idea as he left his corner.

His mouth was very set looking, and his eyes sparkling.

If he wanted to win he would have to do it pretty soon, for the punishment he had received was beginning to tell. There was no time to be lost.

Evidently the Wayland Kid thought the same.

He started operations with another of his whirlwind rushes, but Tom Merry was ready for him. The St. Jim's junior's left glove was at work again.

Thud!

Tom Merry had got home in his big opponent's face with a terrific shot.

"Now, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus fairly yelled his advice, but Tom Merry had taken it before it was given. He was in and under.

Like lightning he swept his left glove in again, and the Wayland Kid was down on his heels. Then the right, a terrific shot with every ounce of weight Tom Merry had behind it.

The Wayland Kid staggered back.

Tom Merry saw that, and realised his chance had come. He darted in with his left glove streaking out again.

Thud! Thud!

Tom Merry swept both left and right to his opponent's face, and the Wayland Kid dropped like a log. He rolled over, then the only sound that was to be heard in the crowded building was the time-keeper's steady voice.

"One—two—three—"

The Wayland Kid moved slightly.

He was making a game attempt to get up, but he could not.

"Seven—eight—"

Again the local champion tried to rise. Tom Merry stood well back, waiting. He was very shaken himself, but he was very grim, for he was taking part in this fight for another fellow's sake.

He really thought the Wayland Kid would recover in time, and then anything might happen.

There was a moment's breathless pause, then the fatal words:

"Nine—out!"

The Wayland Kid was down and out, and Tom Merry had won the fight when all the odds had been against him.

Jack Blake was under the ropes in a flash.

He gripped Tom Merry's arm in breathless excitement.

"Good for you, Tom!"

"Luck, of course!" panted Tom Merry. "But we must get out of this just as quickly as we can. I'm not taking the money that Jim Baxter is supposed to have won. Leave his brute of a stepfather to attend to that."

"Yes, quick as you like."

While the crowd were still cheering, Tom Merry and Jack Blake slipped from the ring. They ran all the way to the dressing-room, and Tom Merry caught at his clothes.

He slipped them on over his boxing things in his anxiety to be away. He was just putting on his coat when the door was pushed steadily open.

To the juniors' amazement a police-constable stood framed in the doorway. It was Mr. Crump, the well-known constable from Rylcombe.

Without looking at the juniors, he began reading from an official-looking paper he had in his hand.

"James Baxter, I arrest you on the charge of theft at St. Jim's College on the night of the fifteenth—"

"Eh?"

"On the night of the fifteenth. Bless my soul, you aren't Jim Baxter!"

Mr. Crump looked at Tom Merry, and scratched his head.

Of course, he knew Tom Merry by sight, so the present situation was completely beyond him.

"I—I came here to arrest Jim Baxter," he thundered, "and I find you in his place, Master Merry. It fair beats me, it does!"

"You have a warrant to arrest Jim Baxter?"

"I have that, for the theft at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry did not answer at once. Both he and Jack Blake felt sick at heart, but there was nothing they could do to help Jim Baxter now.

They had kept their word to the young boxer about to-night's match, but they could not do more. Tom Merry realised that sadly.

"Jim Baxter isn't here, constable."

"No, I see that!" muttered Mr. Crump. "I'd better go back to Rylcombe for further instructions!"

"Yes."

Mr. Crump moved from the dressing-room, and Tom Merry and Jack Blake followed him. They were still a few yards behind the police-constable when Wayland Station was reached, and then Arthur Augustus and all the other juniors crowded round.

Quickly Tom Merry told them what had happened, and all the laughter died out of the little party. No one felt at all like celebrating Tom Merry's great victory now that Jim Baxter was to be arrested.

And the arrest would take place very soon, too.

Jim had promised to be on Rylcombe Station to meet Tom Merry & Co. on their return, and Mr. Crump was already boarding the train.

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Tom Merry & Co. got into the next carriage, and the gloomy journey began.

It was pretty awful sitting there knowing what would happen the moment the train ran into Rylcombe Station.

Jim Baxter would, of course, come forward to congratulate Tom Merry, and then Mr. Crump would see him.

"It's—it's utterly wotten, deah boys!" "Beastly!"

The juniors lapsed into silence again.

The train was running into the station, and already doors were being opened. Tom Merry was the first to be out on the platform, but Mr. Crump was not many seconds behind him.

The moment the constable stepped out the local police-sergeant came hurrying up, and Tom Merry stopped dead.

The sergeant looked very flustered.

"Crump, did you arrest Jim Baxter?"

"No, sergeant, for the kid wasn't there!"

"Thank goodness for that!" breathed the sergeant. "We made a hash of that case, Crump, and there's nothing to be gained by saying we didn't."

"A hash of the case, sergeant?"

"That's what I said, Crump, and it's what I meant!" answered the sergeant testily.

"It was Jim Baxter's father we ought to have been after, for he was arrested in London this evening, and has confessed to the thefts here. The news has just come through on the telephone."

That was all Tom Merry and his chums heard, but it was enough. In the greatest excitement they raced to the waiting-room, and the young boxer came to meet them at once.

His face was very grave-looking.

Tom Merry broke the pause before Jim had time to speak, though.

"Jim, what's it mean about your stepfather being arrested?"

"It's true enough!"

"And that robbery at St. Jim's?"

Jim Baxter nodded sadly.

"My stepfather was guilty of that, I am sure enough," he answered. "I saw him going into the tunnel early this morning, so after I—I had heard about the robbery I went there, too, to see if he had taken anything that didn't belong to him and hidden it in the tunnel."

"Bai Jove, we saw you goin' into the tunnel, deah boy!"

"I tried not to let anyone see."

"We noticed that," answered Tom Merry quietly; "and we can understand why. You didn't want to give your stepfather away."

Jim Baxter nodded.

No one spoke for a moment or two, then it was Arthur Augustus who broke the pause.

"Bai Jove, we must talk things ovah, Baxtah, deah boy!" he said. "Vewy likely you would care to go abwoad—to Canadah, or somewheah—"

"To—to Canadah!"

"Well, it's wathah a wippin' place," said the swell of St. Jim's. "If the ideah appeals to you it can be easily awwanged through my patah. But we will talk all that ovah to-morrow, Baxtah, and I twust that you will come and have tea with me at the cafe by the station."

"Thanks awfully!"

"Wot, deah boy—uttah wot!" said Arthur Augustus. "The pleasure will be entirely mine!"

And Tom Merry & Co. left Jim Baxter with a strange light in his eyes, for this chance of getting to Canada and starting a real fresh life was the biggest that had ever come his way.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co., next week, entitled: "ALL THROUGH BAGGY!"—By Martin Clifford. Make a point of ordering your copy early.)

A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA!

By "COOOE."

(Continued from last week.)

"A very extraordinary thing," said Mr. Panton, as they walked down the track, "is that while there are fossil remains of the devil in Victoria and New South Wales, it is found alive nowhere else than in Tasmania. Another proof, I suppose, that Tasmania was long ago connected with the mainland."

Next morning the whole party stood round the carcass and laughed right heartily when Jack persisted in asking why this beast was called the devil.

"Well, you see for yourself, Jack, that he is as ugly as any devil could possibly be. Look at his face and snout, whitey-pink, half a bulldog, half pig, and its awful expression! Could anything be uglier or more repulsive?"

Jack looked at the creature, with its brownish-black hair, its flat, broad head, the white bands on neck and haunches making it still more fearsome, and felt something like disgust.

"There is another reason why it is called the devil, and that is because of its savage and untamable temper. A neighbour of mine caught two young ones in a barrel, but they began fighting at dark, and kept it up all night, barking, snorting, worrying each other. One escaped, and in two nights killed fifty-four fowls, six geese, an albatross, and a cat. When it was put in a cage, with iron bars as thick as a pencil, it twisted them and got away, and the blacksmith could not straighten them without tools. Fortunately, the devil will soon be extinct. Its flesh is said to taste like veal, but nobody cares to try it. It has teeth so strong that they can crack the largest bones. So furious is his rage, that if his leg is caught in a trap he will gnaw off the leg in order to escape. The tiger and the Tasmanian devil belong to the Dasyures, a name which means 'hairy-tailed.'"

When Jack got home to Victoria he had a wonderful story to tell his aunt about the queer creatures he had seen in Tasmania.

ONE day, during their stay in Darwin, Mr. Maldon proposed an excursion to the pearly-grounds, with a chance of a shot at a crocodile. Jack hoped the weather would keep fine, and Mr. Maldon laughed.

"That's what people are always talking about in Britain," he said, "but we never mention it here, because it's always fine. Hot, of course, but we knew that when we came, and dress and work accordingly."

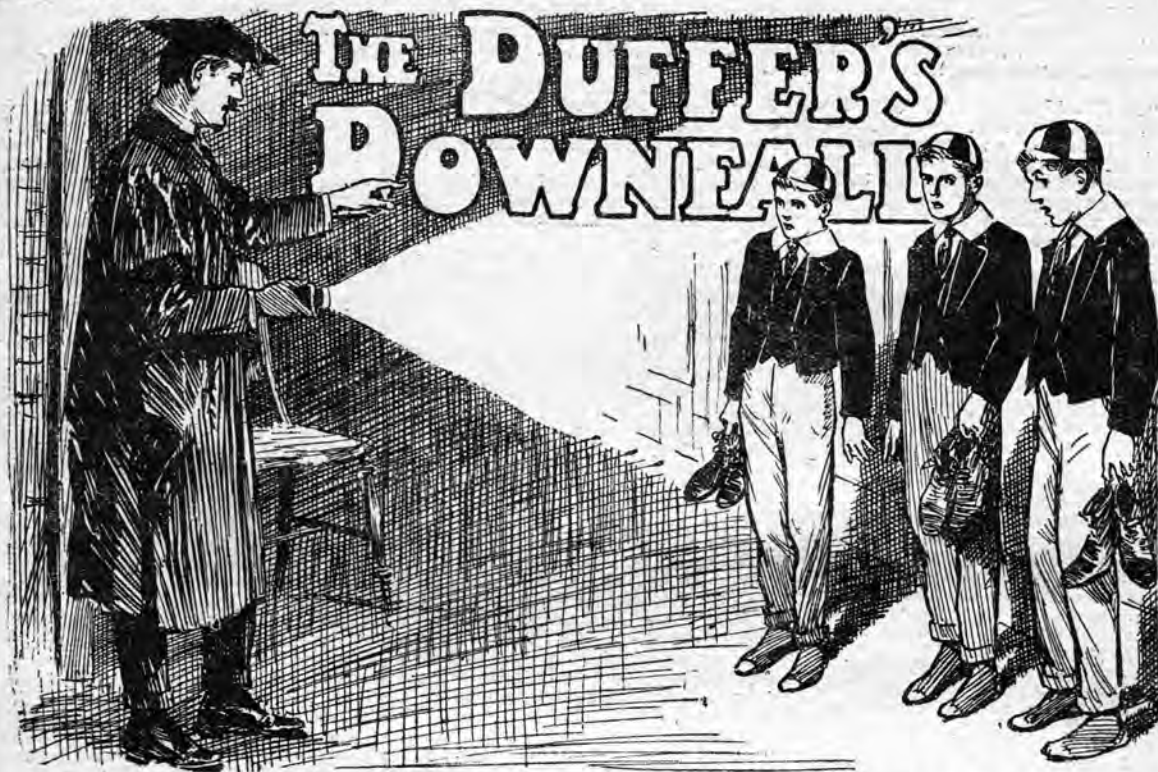
On the day fixed they mounted their horses, slung their rifles over their shoulders, and set off westward. In a couple of hours they were riding in view of a mangrove swamp, which sometimes crept up quite close to the road.

"Not a very inviting or safe place to camp," said Mr. Maldon, "for it is the haunt of snakes and crocodiles."

As the sportsmen had started very early in the morning to avoid travelling near midday, they arrived at a wayside hotel in the forenoon, put up their horses, and rested for a time. A gentleman whom they met at dinner told them he had just left the pearly fleet that morn-

(Continued on page 19.)

OUR SECOND COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.



A Splendid Long Tale of Dickie Dexter & Co., the Chums of St. Katie's.
By MICHAEL POOLE.

CHAPTER 1.

Jolly Roger is Perplexed.

MR. ROGER BLUNT was perplexed, puzzled, and penitent. He was perplexed over a certain little mystery which he had not yet solved, puzzled as to how on earth he ever was going to solve it, and penitent every time he thought of the fact that he had often boasted that he understood the human boy, and knew precisely and exactly how his little mind worked. "I don't!" said Roger to himself. "I have still much to learn. Bird was quite right. This is a task which requires the whole of my energies."

It has been remarked before that Mr. Blunt had had a very wide experience with boys of all sorts and sizes. His remarkable methods had been so successful that a year or two ago he had been persuaded to launch out as a coach for young men who had proved that no ordinary coach could get them through certain examinations.

In a short time Roger's select band of pupils had been bent to his will. They passed their exams. Others came, and almost before they entered Roger's lecture-room they knew that it was no use trying to dodge work under Mr. Blunt.

Hence, in quite a brief space everybody who came to Roger was just as good as good could be. And it bored Jolly Roger. What he wanted was to get up against a bright collection of boys or young men—he didn't mind which—who would try to worry his life out and make a really good fight against conforming to his wishes.

At that juncture Mr. Bird came along and told him about the Transitus at Katie's. Roger promptly accepted Mr. Bird's offer, and entirely approved the

idea of having the unmanageables and the untamed all in one Form. It was the sort of thing that appealed to Roger.

Time had passed. Slowly and firmly Roger had bent the gay youths of the Transitus to his ways. He liked them, and he felt quite sure that when they were men they would be a credit to Roger Blunt.

But as sure as ever Roger remarked upon the fact that the Transitus was now a perfectly disciplined, well controlled, and hard working little lot, something happened to upset his views.

That was why he was puzzled, perplexed, and penitent, just at present.

What he couldn't understand was why Dexter seemed to be cultivating a friendship with Duff; and why Curtis, secretly and mysteriously cutting cricket, would return just before prep in the company of Duff.

Of course, Dexter couldn't help finding trouble. Roger admitted that, and didn't mind in the least. All that Roger wanted to do was to be quite certain that he knew all about Dexter's little escapades.

But Dexter and Curtis were bright lads, who wanted excitement and amusement. Duff was at the bottom of the Transitus. Roger judged that his brain rotated at about one-tenth of the speed at which Dexter's and Curtis' moved. Why should they find pleasure in the society of the big duffer of the Form?

Then there was that awkward little problem concerning the night of the burglary which was still unsolved. There wasn't any doubt in Roger's mind that both Dexter and Duff had been out that night. And he knew how they made their exit from the school, too.

Of course, Roger could have accused them both point-blank, frightened them into a complete admission of their guilt,

and then marched the pair of them off to the Head. There would have been a frightful row, and Roger would have proved once again that nothing could escape his eagle eye.

But Roger wasn't that sort. He wanted to know all about it, and he made up his mind that he would know all about it!

Wherefore, he waited and watched. He set little exam-papers which were quite simple, and nobody saw anything in them. But Roger examined them very carefully afterwards.

In particular he studied the Duffer's performances with great diligence. It would take a fair-sized volume to explain Jolly Roger's theories in the brain-testing department, but you can take it from me that he was just chock-full of ingenuity when it came to jobs of that sort.

And he looked at the Duffer's papers and analysed them and weighed them up.

"Ah!" said Roger, when he had made all manner of calculations. "I have been lax—very lax! I have failed to observe the most remarkable phenomenon even when it is right under my eye! I am growing rusty and self-confident. This will never do!"

Then he went and hunted up Mr. Steed. Sammy Steed also knew a lot about the Transitus.

"What was your opinion of young Duff?" Roger asked. "Did you form the impression that he occupies the position of bottom boy in the Form because he lacks the intellect to rise higher? Or did you ever suspect that it was the height of his ambition to ornament the tail end with his bulky form for ever?"

Sammy shook his head sadly.

"Once or twice," he admitted slowly, "I did think that young Duff had a certain amount of intelligence hidden away

in some odd crevices; but I am very much afraid, Blunt— No! He's quite a nice boy, and without a trace of vice in him, but I don't think even you will ever manage to move him from his lowly post."

"Ah!" said Roger. "I see! I was merely interested, my dear Steed, because I have formed an entirely different opinion. I am going to attempt the impossible very shortly! My own belief is that he has purposely allowed his intellect to rust, and I intend to chip it off ruthlessly. Ask me about him in a month's time!"

Of course, the Duffer didn't know anything about this little discussion. His impression was that by now every master in the school regarded him as Katie's Duffer.

On the whole, the Duffer was the happiest fellow in the school. Nobody worried him, and he was free to follow his own devices.

But he was a sociable sort of chap, and it wasn't until he dragged the Kid into his little hobbies that he found a pal after his own heart.

In turn, Dexter wasn't the sort to keep a really good thing to himself, and he suggested that the Duffer might ask other members of Study No. 10 to join him at times. Old Dobbin, for instance, would simply love to go on a photographic excursion in that jolly little car the Duffer had a share in.

This explains how the Duffer broke his usual practice. Hitherto, when he had wanted a chum, he had asked someone who figured somewhere near himself in the Form list. Usually they had been scared off after the first afternoon's outing.

But when he got in tow with Study No. 10 things were different. Curtis, the noble Kangaroo from Australia, simply jumped at the idea of a night ride with the Duffer. The Kid remained behind on that occasion, but the Kangaroo told him all about it the following morning.

"Jumping snakes, Kid!" he said cheerfully. "Why didn't I know him before? He's the sort of chap we have in Australia! The Duffer! He's a fine chap, isn't he? We're going to arrange one or two little joy-rides, old son, and you and I will take it in turns on the back-seat arrangement."

"Good egg!" the Kid remarked. "I'm game! Anything to liven the dull, sad days of our childhood. Best of it is that old Roger doesn't know a single thing about it. There's quite a lot of things Roger doesn't know, little one. I could a tale unfold— Hallo, Duffy!"

The Duffer strolled up and joined them. He was smiling as usual, because his face was built that way. Then Bill Strong came along with old Dobbie.

"What's that yarn you were going to tell, Kid?" Curtis asked presently.

"It's a little story that's been locked away in my giddy breast for quite a long time," said the Kid. "Remember my stunt with that detective chap who came nosing round and tried to drag old Dobbie and me into the burglary business? Now you're all in the little secret! I'll let you know just what really happened. Get ready to gasp, Dobbie! Even you are going to have a shock, Duffy!"

"Go on, Kid!" they begged.

So the Kid told them the full and complete history of his meeting with the Dandy, and how he'd collared him on the night of the burglary and made a pact with him. The Dandy was to clear, and the Kid was to have the bag with all that he'd taken from the school.

After which came the story of the detective, and how the Kid found out that he had set a trap for him. The story has already been told, and it ended up

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with the detective being fastened up to a tree, and everybody, including the detective and the Beak, being completely convinced that the Kid was a high-souled little hero.

"And that's another little thing that Jolly Roger doesn't know!" the Kid concluded; but it is doubtful if they heard him, because they were laughing so much.

Old Duffy rocked with joy, and Dobbie nearly knocked his specs off, while Bill Strong roared, and Curtis clapped the Kid on the back.

"Well played, Kid!" he cried. "I wish I'd known at the time— Oh, my giddy aunt! To think you had all that on your little conscience while we were jumping round that detective! And Roger didn't dare to let him go, in case he was a burglar. And the Beak being dragged out! You're a giddy genius, Kid! 'Sh! Roger!"

Jolly Roger himself came strolling quietly across the court, and their faces at once took on a serious, solemn look as they touched their caps and murmured "Sir!"

Roger was smiling, and his eyes were twinkling, and he nodded to them genially, and just passed on.

But he had caught the Kangaroo's joyous "You're a giddy genius, Kid!" and he had observed the gladness of the five. He had seen Duff almost helpless with laughter. Why was the Kid a genius? And why was Duff so very, very friendly with the occupants of Study No. 10?

"Mischievous afoot!" said Roger to himself. "I would that I knew what young Dexter was saying! A tale of the past perchance—or one concerning the future? I must keep myself alert!"

CHAPTER 2.

Shocks for Three.

MIDNIGHT! And a pleasant, moonlight night, with stars twinkling, and the gentlest possible breeze stirring among the trees.

Of course, moon or no moon, everybody at Katie's was in bed—or supposed to be. Yet up in the top corridor of the School House a dark form reappeared quietly along, and, with the aid of a pocket-lamp, examined carefully the curious bolt on the door which led to the fire escape.

This emergency exit at Katie's was like the fire escapes at most places. Nobody worried about it. It was there in accordance with a rule, and the doors were never unlocked, although certain people in the school were from time to time informed of the precise method to be employed in case of fire.

But to-night Jolly Roger—for this was the dark form which was doing the stealthy midnight prow—sighed a sigh of contentment. The bar-lock was unfastened!

Once or twice just lately Roger had made a midnight visit to this corridor and tested the door. You see, he had a very strong suspicion that in some mysterious way one or two of the boys in his Form were using this very door for purposes of their own.

Roger didn't know it, of course, but just by coincidence he had missed the very night when the Duffer had taken Jimmy Curtis out this way.

Alas! success had bred contempt. At the moment when Roger was examining the bolt with such scrupulous care, and observing how the sockets had been judiciously oiled, a little yellow car was careering joyously along the broad highway about ten miles out of Dulchester.

At the wheel sat John Duff, and by his side was Jimmy Curtis. On the folding seat at the back was perched

Richard Dexter. They were all arrayed in thick leather coats, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that there weren't three happier or more contented youths in the whole of Great Britain this night.

Even Curtis admitted that in its wildest flights his mind had never run to such giddy heights as this. To walk calmly out of the school and go for a motor run at a time when they were supposed to be peacefully asleep—can you imagine any bright stunt to beat it?

It would be somewhere just after midnight when they pulled up at the side of the road, and the Duffer produced a thermos flask containing hot coffee, and then from another hiding-place brought forth a bag of sandwiches.

"Ever do anything like this in Australia, Kangy?" the Kid asked joyfully as he passed him the little cup with the coffee in it.

"Never!" Curtis admitted emphatically. "This beats anything I've ever read about! I guess this is where we smile at Jolly Roger!"

"Mustn't let him suspect, though!" warned the Duffer. "There'd be no end of a fireworks display if he got to know of it. That's why you've got to go very carefully with Roger."

"Of course!" the Kid agreed. "I'm doing the good little boy game with him now. He told me once that he knew everything, saw everything, and could even tell what I was going to think before I knew I was going to think it. He's not a bad sort, mind you, old Roger, only he will go about interferin' in things that don't really matter to him."

"All masters are the same," said the Duffer calmly. "They're bound to be. What they're out for all the time is the good little boy who spends all his time swotting. But the British Empire wasn't made by swots, and I'm all out for the Empire!"

"Same here!" Both the Kid and Curtis agreed most heartily. They had never thought of it in that light before; and, of course, it never struck them that it was men like Jolly Roger who really made them fit for the Empire job.

"We'll get back now," Duff decided presently; and they clambered into the car again, the Kid taking his place by the Duffer's side, while Curtis took his turn on the back seat.

Everything went, just as it always had done, like clockwork. The car was duly returned to the garage, and the heavy coats were taken off. They set out on their walk back to Katie's, and, with proper care and caution, they crept in the shadows till they came to the emergency stairs.

"Take your boots off!" whispered Duff. "Not a sound, now!"

Meantime, in the top corridor, Roger had made himself temporarily at home. A chair was brought in case he grew tired of standing; also he brought with him a very small wedge of wood which he put about a foot away from the big, heavy door.

A little experimenting soon settled the matter. The door would open so far, and then it would get jammed, but there would be just enough room for a boy to squeeze through with an effort.

One o'clock found Roger still sitting in the dark corridor. He was not impatient, and he occupied the time quite profitably by considering quite a lot of problems in connection with his Form.

But at one-thirty it began to grow a trifle chilly in that corridor. Roger rose and debated the question of strolling up and down, but unfortunately this was fraught with danger, as he might disturb other people.

Just when he was beginning to wonder whether, after all, he had made some mistake, there was a gentle sound from the door. Instantly Roger had stepped to the door and put his hand on it. Already it was open slightly, and the wedge was working.

He listened intently, and could catch the faintest possible whispers. Duff was just explaining that the door had caught but that with care they could manage to squeeze through all right.

"You go first, Kid!" he whispered, and Dexter gently forced himself through the aperture and into the blackness of the corridor.

Then he almost shrieked aloud, for a heavy hand descended upon his shoulder and gripped him firmly.

"Not a word!" hissed a voice in his ear, and just for an instant a light flashed on his face. "Stand by that wall, Dexter!"

In the darkness the Kid couldn't see anything more than a dim outline, but an unpleasant, paralysing thought stole through him that the very last person in all the world that Dexter wanted to see was managing this business. Jolly Roger was on the war-path again!

Curtis came struggling through the now tightly-wedged door. On him descended swiftly the strong right arm of Roger, and it sent a sickening, spine-shivering shock through his body.

"Oh!" Curtis gasped a little. "Ah!"

"Sh! Not a word, Curtis! Stand by Dexter—against the wall! Ah!"

For another dark form was appearing, and Roger again moved forward until the figure was safely inside the corridor. Then he repeated the performance, and Duff got the shock of his life.

"Any more outside?" Roger was gripping Duff firmly as he asked the question.

"N-n-no, sir!" chattered Duff. He wasn't a coward, but this sort of thing is enough to shatter the stoutest nerves.

"Stand there!" commanded Roger, and moved him to the wall with a swift bang which nearly knocked what little breath Duff still had right out of him.

The light was flashed on the three of them. They must have made quite a pretty picture for Jolly Roger's eyes, standing there with their boots in their hands, blinking in amazement not untouched with fear, but temporarily dazed by the swiftness and the silence of this attack.

Roger removed the wedge from the floor, and opened the door wider. For a few moments he flashed his light on the platform outside, just to make quite sure that his bag was complete.

Then he returned to his three captives, and once again dazzled them with his powerful little pocket-lamp.

"Close the door, Duff!" he ordered, and the bottom boy of the Transitus sought hastily for the spanner which performed the task so simply.

Jolly Roger kept the light on him and watched the performance with interest.

"Thank you!" Roger snapped the words out in a sort of dramatic whisper. "Now follow me! Remember, no noise—not a sound!"

They dared not even speak to each other—couldn't ask a single question as to how it had all happened, and what Jolly Roger had said to each of them.

How had he got to know? How much did he know? Not that it mattered very much, because he knew all that was necessary. This was going to be the biggest, fiercest row there ever had been, because the Head had given warning quite a long time ago that any boy who left his dormitory after lights out would be for the longest of long jumps.

Of course, he'd put it more politely than that, and taken a good deal longer to say it. But as they walked along the corridor and down the stairs and along another corridor each of them was thinking and wishing, and then wishing and thinking again, only harder.

If only Roger could be taken suddenly and seriously ill, or if he lost his memory, or if only the Kid could have one of his brain-waves and think out some perfectly sound reason why they'd been out, or if—

They had reached the pleasant sitting-room which was the private apartment of Mr. Roger Blunt. He opened the door, switched on the light, and stood like a frozen statue on one side, while they filed in.

He didn't tell them to come in. He barely moved a finger, but they knew just what they had to do.

"Well?" Roger stood facing the three of them at last, and all of them had their eyes fixed on him. There was something fascinating about Jolly Roger even at ordinary times; but at moments such as this you had that helpless, hopeless, must-keep-my-eyes-glued-on-him sort of feeling they say the little animals have when a snake starts to do the hypnotic business.

Not that there was anything of the snake about Roger! You felt that he ought to have been king of a cannibal island, cowing his subjects with one swift glance of his blazing eyes, or a hero in a book, flashing scorn on villains, and making them slink away to the uttermost ends of the earth, or else—any old thing except the master of the Transitus, reducing three poor harmless little schoolboys to a pulpy, pulverised mass.

Hours and hours passed—at least, it seemed so, but in reality it was only about fifty seconds before Roger spoke again. Fifty seconds is a jolly long time when you count it by shivers and trembles!

"What I wish to know," said Roger, in that dead-level icy-cold voice he could put on for this sort of job, "is where you have been, why you have been, and any excuses you may have to offer for your conduct."

No one spoke. Dexter was struggling feebly to get a grip of himself and to make sure that he wasn't dreaming all this. Duff and Curtis weren't really thinking at all. They were just watching old Roger's face.

"I am quite aware of the fact that this is not the first time such a thing has occurred," Roger went on in his best hard-steel voice. "On the night of the attempted burglary at this school, for instance. But that is a matter into which we will go later. There are many explanations necessary, and I would strongly caution you all to be very exact and precise in your statements. Duff!"

"Yessir!"

Duff gasped it suddenly, because it gave him a shock to hear his own name.

"I will hear your story first," Roger said. "And we will take to-night's episode also first. Other details can come later. You left here at what hour, Duff?"

"Please, sir, it was all my fault!"

The Kid had suddenly got that grip on himself he had been longing for, and he felt it was time he butted in.

"You dare to interrupt me?" demanded Roger fiercely, as he turned on Dexter. "Do I not know whose fault it is? Do you think you can still deceive me, Dexter? Be quiet, sir!"

It crushed the Kid. His grip went, and he listened dazedly to Duff's answers to Roger's swift examination.

There wasn't a shadow of surprise or wonder or anything except hard-hearted,

cold-handed justice on Roger's face as he listened. But you can imagine that deep down somewhere he got a queer sort of feeling as he began to learn the truth of these midnight jaunts.

A joke is a joke, and a boyish prank is just a little bit of foolishness; but when a schoolboy begins to have a car secretly stored away in a garage in the town, and tells you that he likes motoring in the moonlight because you get the full effect of the poetry of motion—then even Mr. Roger Blunt began to sit up and take serious notice.

"Tell me more about this car!" Roger snapped out automatically. "It does not belong entirely to you, but you have a working agreement, so you say. Explain to me, Duff!"

"One third of it is mine, sir—at least, it will be when I've paid up," Duff answered. "My brother paid the deposit, and he—well, he agrees with me, sir, that it is very important for a fellow to understand everything about a car, and he—he's seeing me through the business part of it, sir. It's quite a fair agreement!"

"Tell me!" snapped Roger.

Somehow, it was easier to talk about this side of the thing than to make up excuses, and Duff explained every detail of the fairly intricate agreement which he had signed with reference to the car.

And to himself Jolly Roger smiled. Here was the bottom boy of the Transitus making business deals, indulging in quick calculations, explaining quite clearly the working of the engine, and generally proving that he had quite a sound stock of that grey matter which it was Roger's joy in life to discover.

Skilfully and scientifically Roger examined each in turn. It was impossible for any of them to form the slightest impression of what was passing through his mind. He was like an automatic machine which jerked out a question every time you stopped talking.

It was no use trying the old stunts of leaving out the awkward parts, or putting up some feeble excuse for another part, or doing the pathetic act and pretending to be sorry. Roger washed all that out, and screwed them all up to the pitch where they just jerked out the truth and nothing but the plain, unwhitewashed truth.

Dexter told the whole story of his chase after the burglar and his discovery that it was the Dandy. He explained quite clearly how he knew that the detective's note—which pretended to come from the burglar in order to trap Dexter—was all spoof. And Roger never moved an eyelid, but just went on snapping out questions until Duff, Dexter, and Curtis hadn't anything more to say.

"Very good!" snapped Roger, at the end. "Sit down on that couch there—the three of you! I want to talk to you for three minutes! Just three minutes—no more!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Triumph of the Transitus!

ROGER stood before them very erect and upright. They sat on the edge of the couch, and they felt—just crushed!

They weren't nervous now. That had passed. And they simply realised that Roger was tremendously superior to them, and that he knew a lot more than they could ever guess.

"I need not tell you what the head-master would say were this to reach his ears," Jolly Roger began, very calmly.

"It will not be reported to him—unless you compel me to do so."

That rather pulverised them again, because this was the sort of thing that was bound to be reported to the Head. But Roger said it wasn't!

"I feel very angry indeed; I have felt very pained and angry for two or three weeks past," Roger went on in the calmest, firmest tones you can imagine. "In particular, Duff, my anger was roused some few days ago to the boiling-point against you. I set various examination-papers for your special benefit, and they proved very conclusively that not only do you make no attempt to learn the work set you, but even when you actually know it you deliberately avoid showing it—at times."

"In the matter of your escapade to-night my anger is so great that I am bound to exercise control, and I shall therefore not mention the word 'punishment' to you until a fortnight next Monday, when my anger will have died down. I will not, in a fit of justifiable temper, be responsible for turning you boys out into the world where, without my protection, it is quite certain you would come to grief."

"During the next fortnight you will be under my strictest personal supervision. I am very much afraid that you will have few half-holidays in that period. Duff will forget that he has been nicknamed the 'Duffer'; Dexter will endeavour to realise that he is no longer a child seeking some new mischief; Curtis will show that he is capable of being a credit to the school and to his people."

Roger got all this off his chest in a perfectly calm manner. It made it more impressive because they got the idea in their minds that there was a lot more behind it than he said.

Then he let a little smile come back to his lips.

"That is all! You will report to me at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon, and we will begin our fortnight's strict training! I don't want you to give me your word of honour that you will do your utmost to justify me in keeping your conduct to myself. Despite all that you have done, I still believe you are straightforward enough for that! Good-night, boys!"

He walked to the door, opened it, and the three of them passed out.

"Go to bed as quietly as you can," he warned them gently. And they murmured "Good-night, sir!" and went softly away.

They didn't talk about it very much. It was a queer sort of thing to talk about, because they didn't quite know where they were.

Even to Bill Strong and Dobbie, who knew all about their little trip, they weren't able to say much, except that Roger had collared them and was keeping the whole business secret for a fortnight.

"He's going to keep his eye on us, and all that sort of thing," the Kid told Bill despondently. "I wish—I mean, you never know where you are with Roger. We thought there was going to be the most terrific row when he nabbed us, and he just talked as though we were very naughty little children, and—Oh, my hat! We're in for a giddy fortnight, we are!"

The Duffer still smiled, but there

was a tired look about his eyes as though he'd forgotten something. Curtis simply shrugged his shoulders, and said that he reckoned the only thing was to go through with it, and then see what happened a fortnight on Monday.

"Anyhow, it's no good riling old Roger before then," he explained. "It was a fair cop, and if he isn't going to tell the Beak I reckon he's letting us down very lightly. Still—we'll see!"

On the following afternoon the three presented themselves at the Form-room promptly at two o'clock. Jolly Roger was there, and smiled gladly upon them.

Not a word did he say about last night's affair. Straight away he plunged into work—with a capital W. They might have been his pet scholars preparing for an important exam, if you judged by the way he talked to them.

He had a regular programme drawn up for them. But it was old Duff who got it the worst. He piled it into him thick and heavy.

"You can prepare that for to-morrow afternoon, Duff," he said joyfully. "If you can't get through it all in your spare time and in preparation school, come to my room after lights out! I know you don't need very much sleep!"

That was about the only reference he ever made to the midnight business. Once or twice he let Curtis off the afternoon swot, and one afternoon both Dexter and Curtis were off together. Nor was Roger himself on duty that day. But Mr. Gladridge, the mathematical master, was giving the Duffer extra tuition by special request! He understood that Duff himself had mentioned the matter to Mr. Blunt.

In class it was just the same. The Transitus had a pretty stiff time; but through it all Jolly Roger was cheerful and smiling, and never once showed the least sign of annoyance.

But everyone noticed the fact that he was devoting special attention to Duff. Curtis and Dexter had more than their fair share, but it wasn't quite so noticeable.

They noticed, however, that on nearly every afternoon the Kid and Jimmy Curtis wandered away to the Form-room, and that the Duffer joined them. Likewise it was observed that all three of them were qualifying for the position of first-rate swots.

"What's the giddy idea, Kid?" Bunting asked. "Has Roger legged you for something, or are you mugging up for some exam? I mean—"

"Shut up!" said the Kid. "I'm doing it because I like it. I want to be an example to all you chaps. I'm going in for a prize. It's because I love Jolly Roger. I'm going— Oh, don't make me talk! Run away, Bunty, and let me weep in silence and alone! Cut off!"

Jolly Roger drove his three pets very firmly, but not too much so. It was no good trying to dodge it at all. The Duffer had got into the habit of skipping his prep work, but old Roger cured him.

He had him to tea; he went to cricket with him for an hour, and coached him kindly and firmly. On the Saturday afternoon he took the three of them for a stiff walk, and jawed the whole way about the proper methods of learning.

They didn't know it, of course, but Jolly Roger was simply working off on

them for his own patent system of cramming for exams. Roger claimed that it was not only efficient, but it was thorough, and that what was learned could not be forgotten. Further, he claimed that it was a wonderful brain-brightening course.

The episode of the midnight jaunt had occurred on Wednesday night. A fortnight later both the Transitus and the Fifth got one of the periodical shocks which the Head flung upon them.

"The headmaster will hold an examination in all subjects on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of this week in the Fifth and Transitus Forms. The examination-papers set to both Forms will be identical."

The Beak's exams were serious affairs, especially when it was a full-dress affair. Add to which was the well-known rivalry between the Fifth and the Trans, and you can guess there was some excitement knocking round.

Sammy Steed lectured the Fifth on the importance of this exam. Jolly Roger pointed out to his little flock that, although hitherto the Fifth had been counted superior to the Transitus in the matter of intellect, he looked for a totally different result on this occasion.

As a matter of fact, there were two or three foregone conclusions about this exam. It was an absolute dead certainty that the Trans wouldn't have a show in the first five or six. They would be jolly lucky if one of their number scrambled in amongst the leading ten.

It was even more certain that the Fifth couldn't get the bottom place. That was the Duffer's.

"Swotting up for the giddy exam to-morrow, Smithy?" Bill Strong asked the captain of the Fifth genially. "Don't get the wind up too much! Our fellows aren't reckoning on more than the first ten places!"

Smithy smiled.

"All right, Bill! We are in a blue funk! Fact is, we've booked the first twenty places, but Sammy's worrying about our tail-end. We heard a rumour that the Duffer had started swotting—and we're getting nervous about Ruddock! You don't think the Duffer'll beat him, do you?"

He laughed joyously at his own humour. Ruddock would undoubtedly be the last man of the Fifth, but he would most assuredly be somewhere above the last ten. Those places would be reserved for the Transitus.

Duff, Curtis, and Dexter retired to the Form-room at two o'clock, as usual, on that Wednesday. They were getting very weary of the game, and the only bright spot which had cheered them was the thought that the Head's exam couldn't have come at a better time. Dexter and Curtis felt that whatever happened they would put up a pretty decent show.

The Duffer never expressed an opinion. Moreover, of late Roger hadn't been taking his three-points-to-a-line in the Form-room quite so much, but had been trying new systems, so you couldn't quite tell how Duff was progressing.

"I think we might have a holiday this afternoon!" Roger told them cheerfully. "The Head has chosen a very opportune time for his examination, and I feel confident that the Transitus will do justice to my teaching. You three will do your best!"

"Yes, sir," they murmured.

"I know, as I have known for quite a long time, the exact and precise weight of your intellects," Roger said, in his old manner. "I believe that I could write out even now the list of the results of that exam. Don't disappoint me!"

He bade them farewell, and they wandered forth.

"It will be funny if you don't come out at the bottom of the list, Duffer," the Kid said.

The Duffer shook his head sadly.

"Roger knows," he said; and his smile took on a queer little twist. "No good kicking. He came here to reform us, but I thought I'd keep out of his clutches. We'll all have to do our best in the next three days. You can't fool old Roger!"

And so for the next three days the boys of the Transitus and the bright youths of the Fifth wallowed in exam papers. The Beak knew all about what an exam paper should be, and these were calculated to probe their little minds to the full limit.

It was all written; the Head didn't indulge in any viva-voce tests at such times. Moreover, just to give the thing a proper atmosphere, both the Fifth and the Transitus sat together in the Big Hall, and for a fair part of the time the Head himself was in supreme command, with Jolly Roger and Sammy Steed playing a bobby's part.

Curtis admitted that he thought he'd done pretty well when the last paper had been handed in on Saturday. The Kid said that he was sure the Beak would be pleased. When they questioned Duff he didn't want to say much about it, but simply shook his head.

"I'm done!" he whispered. "I mean, after all, Roger— It'll be a downfall for me, but it'll be a decent uplift for him. I went all out this journey. Couldn't help it!"

It was somewhat enigmatical, but they didn't want to argue with him; and, anyhow, Monday would show the result. Most of the papers had doubtless been marked already.

On Monday morning Roger was brimming over with geniality, though he informed them that the results of the examination were not yet out. They would probably be posted up in the Hall that evening.

He called Duff, Curtis, and Dexter to him for a moment after morning school.

"To-day I should have delivered judgment on a matter concerning you three," he said. "It is deferred until to-morrow—after we have had an opportunity of judging the examination results."

But they didn't have to go to the Form-room that afternoon. Dexter, Dobbin, and Strong were at tea, when the door was suddenly burst open, and Bunting came in.

"Seen the results?" he gasped. "My hat, Kid! You've done it! What's taken you? And you've been going out for a splash, haven't you, Curtis? Good old Transitus! Won't old Roger be pleased? What about the Duffer now? My giddy aunt! The Trans haven't got anyone in the last eight! Smithy will kill you, Kid!"

They begged him to explain, but he couldn't, and, with one accord, they jumped up and rushed down to the Hall. There were the three lists. Fifth, Transitus, and Combined List. It was the Combined List they looked at first.

"My giddy aunt!" gasped the Kid. "Me—a little swot! Where's the Duffer?"

He looked at the bottom, but it wasn't there. Bunting had pointed it out to him before he found it. Duff was eighteenth on the Combined List; twelfth on the Transitus List!

There were quite a lot of other surprises in that list. The news ran swiftly round, and everybody came to see it. It was something of a shock to the Fifth to find that Dexter was head, but, worst of all, was the knowledge that the last eight places were filled by Fifth men! And the Duffer—Only six Fifth chaps had beaten him! And there were twelve Transitus fellows in the first eighteen!

The Duffer himself was dragged out and compelled to gaze upon the lists, though he didn't want to do it. He dragged the Kid on one side at last, and wandered away with him.

"I'm done for, Kid!" he said mournfully. "You see, I'll never dare go to the bottom again! And I've been there for years! It's Roger. He's planned and schemed all this! To-morrow he'll tell you and me and Jimmy Curtis that he's decided not to punish us. But think of the hundreds and hundreds of hours we'll all have to put in now in living up to that record! You'll see, Kid!"

And the Duffer was right. Roger called them to him on the morrow, and spoke kindly to them, saying that he was pleased with their work, and that the Head was pleased, and that Mr. Steed was also pleased, because it would make the Fifth buck up.

"Very pleased!" said Roger, beaming upon them. "Let me see. We had to discuss some question of punishment for a particularly outrageous breach of school discipline and rules? Yes. I have decided to let the matter drop. I know I am over-lenient, but I trust you will not take advantage of my weakness. There is only one thing. I shall expect—nay, I shall insist—that in future your work must be kept up to the high standard which you yourselves have set. Duff, you will do better with more practice. I shall keep my eye on you! But you will never again be the bottom boy, nor yet anywhere near it. Those days are gone, Duff! To-day I am coming to Dulchester with you to see that car of yours, and to discuss under what conditions you may still retain your share in it. That is all. Good-bye, boys! I shall not want you in the Form-room this afternoon!"

And that's why the Duffer has nearly lost his nickname now. In the Transitus they call him "Duffy," or just plain "Duff"!

(Another grand long story of the chums of St. Katie's next week, entitled: "THE GREAT RAG AT KATIE'S!" by Michael Poole. Make a point of ordering EARLY.)

Read the Magnificent New Serial, entitled:

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"PENNY POPULAR."

You will enjoy it!

A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA

(Continued from page 13.)

ing, and there was a talk of them moving farther west.

"In that case," said Mr. Walker, "we'll get away as soon as possible."

By five o'clock they were near their destination, and from a low sandhill Mr. Maldon saw the masts of the luggers, and was glad they were not too late.

"What's a lugger, Mr. Maldon?" Jack asked.

"Oh, it's a two-masted craft, about thirty-five feet long and twelve feet across the beam. The men who go pearling live on board, and do the diving from the luggers. But you'll soon see them for yourself."

At the bend in the road they came in full sight of the bay where the luggers were lying, and as Mr. Maldon was part-owner of the Mist, they left their horses at the building which served as a general store and pearl-shell station, and went straight on board.

Jack was immensely keen on everything he saw, and had no end of questions to put to the skipper.

"These luggers of yours seem to have no bulwarks, no rail to keep a man from falling overboard, or a sea from coming on the deck!"

The skipper laughed, and said: "In a few minutes, my boy, you'll see why there's so little freeboard."

Just then a native of Manila came along to take his turn at going down for shell, and the other members of the crew began to dress him in his diving outfit.

His boots were weighted heavily, and heavy weights were also fixed to his shoulders. Last of all his helmet with the great glass eyes was fixed over his head, closed, and connected with the air-pump.

Two natives stood at the air-pump to drive fresh air to the diver when he went down.

Everything being ready, the diver took the guiding line in his hand, slid down over the low side of the boat, and in a moment was out of sight. All that Jack could see was bubbles where he had gone down.

Then a tremendous row was heard at the air-pump, and when the visitors looked round the two Malays were seen fighting like wild beasts. The skipper rushed to the pump, and started it going, to keep up the supply of air to the diver far below. Jack sprang alongside him, and, taking one of the handles, bent to the work with all his might.

Mr. Thornton went to relieve the captain, who, along with Mr. Maldon, hurried to separate the Malays. A few good cuffs and kicks soon brought the natives to their senses, and they were soon again at the air-pump, but with no very amiable expression on their faces.

"It's always like that," said Captain Duncan. "You can't trust those chaps one minute out of your sight. They seem to get arguing and quarrelling, and utterly forget that the life of the man down below depends on them keeping at the pump. By to-morrow they will have forgotten all about this thrashing, and will likely be fighting again!"

Just then the diver signalled that he wanted to come up, and Jack rushed to the place where the guiding line was. Up popped the helmet, and in a second strong arms pulled the diver on deck and took off his helmet.

(To be continued.)

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2. Smith, J. (Fifth) ... 470
3. Curtis, J. (Trans.) ... 462

The Editor's Chat.

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

For Next Wednesday.

Our next splendid long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. is entitled

"ALL THROUGH BAGGY!"

By Martin Clifford.

In the style that has made the author so famous, it tells of the unlooked-for consequences which sprang from a hasty and ill-considered action on the part of Baggy Trimble, whereby much trouble is caused to many, more especially to Jack Blake & Co.

The next story of Dickie Dexter & Co.,

"THE GREAT RAG AT KATIE'S!"

By Michael Poole.

gives the secret history of the heroic measures adopted by the Kid to prevent the breaking-up of the old-established study partnerships in the Transitus. My readers will vote this a most ingenious story of rare quality.

The ever-popular

"HALF-CROWN PAGE,"

as "My Readers' Own Corner" is usually called, remains a feature of next week's issue, and the history of the adventures of

"A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA" is continued in a further especially interesting instalment.

HOPS.

Excuse my speaking of hops. I saw the gardens in the Crowhurst region the other day, and they looked about as flourishing as any hop-grower could wish. There have been many bad years of late for this crop, but it looks as though the present season is going to make up for past misfortunes. A hop-field is worth looking at. The hop has a growth which is beautiful in the extreme, and one of the features of Sussex consists of the pink-and-white oast-house where the hops are dried.

SHEER ABUSE.

It is on the cards that we shall soon have a new story about the Levisons. There is a persistent demand for one from a reader of immense enthusiasm living in the North of London. But it is not solely on account of the expressed desire of this correspondent that I have been arranging matters with Mr. Martin Clifford. But here is my point. There is a letter before me in which Ernest Levison is stigmatised as a sneering, oily toad, and worse than Trimble.

A CRITIC.

A correspondent, whose age is given as eight, sends me a criticism of Chat. He does not mind the way it is written, but he would like it all in the first person. I half-fancied it was so, but no matter. The point is, that this reader wants to have Chat dealing exclusively with the stories which are to come. That method really would not do. As a matter of fact, I shall not take very serious notice of my young friend's strictures, for at eight one does not know everything, and for months past my mail has contained letters telling me that Chat was all right!

DEADWOOD DICK.

Did you notice that the old Deadwood Dick coach—shown by Buffalo Bill in a long-ago exhibition—turned up in one of the discarded buildings of the poor old dismantled White City in West London? It was a curious find. Rather a bulky article to lose! But of late I have been receiving broad hints that the time has come for many things—including a revival of Deadwood Dick, Red men, cow-punchers, and all. Well, I have not as yet noted much indication that the return to these fine and ancient crusted subjects was urgent. Readers tell me they want the school stuff, and what a majority of readers ask for is what I am always prepared to provide.

AEROPLANES AND HARD WORK.

I am much indebted to Miss Patty Rapacholi, of Bunbury, Western Australia, for her sparkling letter. She tried working for her living in a department-store, and went through with it all right, to show her friends what she could do. There is the right spirit here. Miss Patty has in addition been up in an aeroplane, and now she wants one of these handy little affairs for her own. If her wish is gratified she will be dropping in on London to see the Companion Papers at close quarters. That is a cert, for she thinks the world of the yarns.

Your Editor



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