

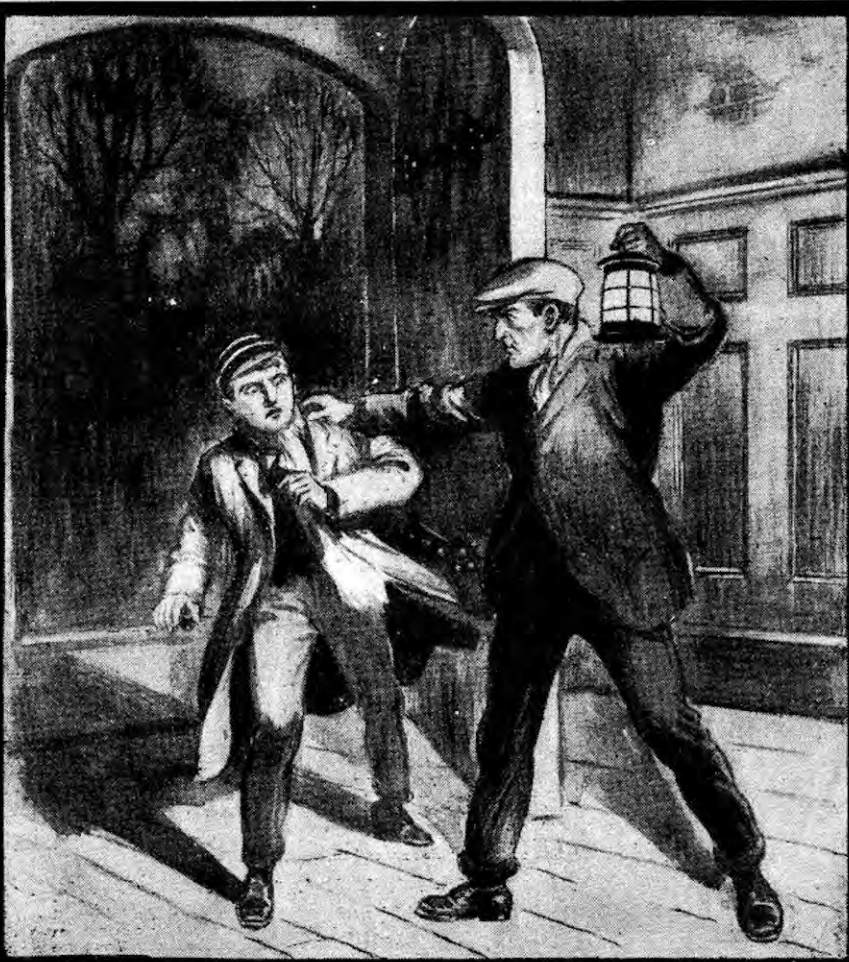
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THE MYSTERY OF THE MANOR! (TALBOT CAUGHT BY HIS OLD ENEMY.)

A Sensational Incident from the gripping Long Complete School Story inside.

My Readers' Own Corner

A Page of Interesting Paragraphs
Contributed by "GEM" Readers.

Conducted by Your Editor.

A SEASHORE FIND.

I found a peculiar stone on the beach at Brighton. It was quite black and round, with a little hole in the top about the size of a good-sized garden pea, while inside the stone was another little stone. Before the sea washed it, the stone must have been hard in the middle, with a thin layer of chalky substance. The sea is the cause of the peculiar form, for the action of the waves must have been to clear away all the chalk, leaving the small stone loose in the centre, and making the larger stone have such a curious shape.—Miss Eileen Mew, 17, Orange Street, South Wigston, near Leicester.

REAL FAME.

The lecturer was in Birmingham, speaking of great inventors, and at question-time he asked his audience if he had omitted any very celebrated man. "What about Stephenson?" shouted an Aston Villa supporter. "Oh, yes," said the lecturer. "I forgot the great Stephenson, the man who invented locomotives." "Not that Stephenson!" came from the back of the hall. "You forgot Stephenson who played centre-forward for us last Saturday, did the hat trick, and got us into the second round of the Cup!"—College, West Lavington, Wilts.

MISSING!

A Sunday-school principal was trying to make clear to his class the doctrines of the Declaration of Independence. "Now, boys," he said, "I will give you each three ordinary buttons. You must think of the first as Happiness, the second as Liberty, and the third as Life. Next Sunday I will ask you each to produce these buttons and tell me what they represent." The following week the teacher said to the youngest: "Now, Johnnie, produce your three buttons, and tell me what they stand for." "I ain't got 'em all," sobbed Johnnie, holding out two buttons. "Here's Life and Liberty, but mother sewed Happiness on to my pants!"—Miss I. Collier, 21, Hawthorn Road, Hillsboro.

A RHYME.

Half a pound of twopenny rice,
A pound of shilling bacon,
A pot of jam at pre-war price,
A snore, and then you awaken.
—Albert Giles, 18, John Street, Wood Bottom, Balden, Yorks.

MOTHER SHIPTON.

In the GEM for the week ending August 14th there is a statement referring to Mother Shipton: "All her prophecies up to now have come true." Not being well acquainted with them, I cannot judge to what extent her prophecies have been fulfilled, but the writer must have overlooked the fact of her foretelling that—

"The world to an end shall come
In the year eighteen hundred and eighty-one."

Moreover, it is probable that Mother Shipton saw the beginnings of the things she spoke of; but upon this point,

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having nothing to guide her, she, like many other prophets, went astray.—Miss Adelaide R. F. Fox, 42, Onley Street, Unthank Road, Norwich.

A GREAT REWARD.

Boy: "If you please, sir, I would like half a day off." Employer: "Grand-mother dead?" Boy: "No, sir. I want to go to a football-match." Employer (with emotion): "You are an honest lad,

and such truthfulness should not go unrewarded. I myself will come back to the office—after the game, and tell you who won!"—Miss Freda Bonner, 32, Oaklands Park, Ballsbridge, Dublin.

DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK.

A supporter in Swansea Vale tells me a chum of his fixed up a bell to the tassel of the bed-room blind, so that when he ran up the blind in the morning, he remembered that he had to take his homework to school. The plan answered all right, and my correspondent says he has decided on an even better scheme, namely, to put a heavy weight in your pocket. Only suppose you cannot remember why you put the stone there? That has happened before now. A fellow spent a week trying to think why he tied a knot in his handkerchief, and he was losing money all the time!—Trevor Jones, 1, Maes Gwyn, Brecon Road, Ystradgulais, Swansea Vale, S. Wales.

ASSENTIMENDED.

Edison is the subject of a curious story. He was wont to overlook meal-times entirely when absorbed in his discoveries, and one day he told his servant to bring him an egg which he could boil for himself in case he forgot his food. This was done, and, while making ready to cook the egg, the inventor suddenly thought of a new scheme. When the servant looked in she found her master holding the egg in his hand, while his watch was merrily boiling on the fire.—T. R. Davies, Fron-haul, Drefach, Llanarthney, Carmarthenshire.

TOO LITERAL.

The tired City man wanted a nap in his office. "If I should happen to drop off," he said to the office-boy, "call me at four o'clock." "Yes, sir," said the office-boy. The City man slumbered, and was awakened by the clock striking five. "James!" he thundered. "Why didn't you call me at four?" "Well, sir, you told me to call you if you happened to drop off. I looked in at four. You hadn't dropped. You were sitting in your chair sound asleep!"—Walter Hope, 6, Carlton Road, Mile End, E. 1.

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."



THE MYSTERY OF THE MANOR.

A Grand Long Thrilling Story
of the Chums of St. Jim's, by
:: MARTIN CLIFFORD. ::

CHAPTER 1.

Old Silas Martin.

"**T**OFF, this is glorious!" It was Marie Rivers, Talbot's girl chum, who spoke. There was a healthy glow on Marie's cheeks, and a sparkle in her eyes. And Talbot, too, looked as if he found life well worth living.

The two chums stood on the ice-bound surface of the lake in Wayland Woods. For days the lake had been frozen over, and that afternoon a grand skating carnival had taken place.

Nearly everybody at St. Jim's had attended the carnival, and the fun had waxed fast and furious.

Now that the winter dusk was descending, however, the crowd of revellers had melted away.

Tom Merry & Co., Jack Blake & Co., Figgins & Co., and the seniors and the fags were wending their way back to the school in a joyous procession. And Talbot and Marie Rivers were left together. They had just made a final circuit of the lake, and both were breathless but very happy.

"It's great, Marie!" panted Talbot, sharing his girl chum's exuberance. "I could go on skating for hours and hours—half the blessed night, for that matter." "So could I, Toff!" But we must be getting back, or you'll be late for locking-up!"

"Once more round the lake!" said Talbot. "Ready?"

Marie laughingly assented. She linked her hand in one of Talbot's, and they sped along side by side on their skates.

"This must be absolutely the last time, Toff!" said Marie. "It's getting dark so quickly that before long we shan't be able to see the danger-spots. The ice is awfully thin in places, and it's the wrong time of the year to take a cold plunge!"

Talbot chuckled. "We shall be all right," he said confidently. "And I promise you that this shall be the grand finale!"

They completed the circuit of the lake—it was absolutely the final circuit this time—and then, not without reluctance, they removed their skates, and set off in the direction of St. Jim's.

"We'll cut through the woods, I think," said Talbot. "It's quicker than going round by the road!"

"But it will be fearfully dark in the woods—" protested Marie.

"I know every inch of the way. Hang on to my arm, and you'll be all right!" "I'm not frightened, if that's what you're thinking," said Marie. "I was only afraid that you might lose your way!"

"No fear of that!" said Talbot, reassuringly.

They struck off through the woods, by a narrow, zigzag path, which Talbot had often traversed in darkness as well as in daylight.

The rest of the St. Jim's fellows, not caring to run the risk of losing their bearings in the woods, were returning to the school by road.

Talbot picked his way with caution, for he knew that there were many pitfalls in the dark recesses of the wood. There were also obstructions in the form of tree-stumps and mounds, and a false step might have meant disaster.

"You're a wonderful guide, Toff," said Marie. "If you pilot me right through these woods without a stumble it will be quite an achievement."

Talbot said nothing. He was too intent upon threading his way along the narrow, uneven path.

They were about half-way through the woods, at a place where the shadows lay thickest, when the sound of running footsteps came to their ears. Instinctively they halted.

The footsteps grew nearer.

Panting and gasping, partly with exhaustion and partly with terror, a man came tearing through the dense undergrowth. A moment later he emerged on to the pathway, close to where Talbot and Marie were standing.

"What the thump—" began Talbot, in amazement.

The man halted, pumping in breath. It was impossible, owing to the darkness, to get a clear view of his features; but he appeared to be a rustic. Talbot concluded that he was a wood-cutter.

That the man was terribly distressed there could be no doubt. He kept throwing furtive glances over his shoulder, as if he were being pursued by some dreadful monster.

Talbot strode forward and gripped the rustic by the arm.

"What's the matter with you, man?" he demanded.

"Oh! I—I've seen it!"

"Eh? What have you seen?"

"The gig-gig-gig—"

"Which?"

"The gig-gig-gig-ghost!" concluded the rustic, in terror.

Talbot had no faith in anything appertaining to the supernatural. Neither had Marie Rivers. They both laughed outright.

"Ay, you can laugh!" said the man, angry, in spite of his fear. "But you wouldn't laugh if you'd seen what I've seen. I'm a strong man, I am, as strong as an 'orse, an' I can stand up to anything in flesh an' blood. But when it comes to spooks—garstly spectres that ain't yewman—"

"Stop it!" said Talbot. "You don't seriously mean to say that you've seen a ghost?"

The man nodded vigorously. He had not yet fully regained his breath.

"What sort of a ghost was it?" inquired Marie Rivers.

"It were the ghost of old Silas Martin!" said the man impressively.

"And who might Silas Martin be?" asked Talbot.

The rustic gave a snort. He was evidently exasperated at Talbot's ignorance.

"You've never 'eard of Silas Martin be?" he exclaimed.

"Never in my life!"

"Then I'll tell you who an' what he was. But we'd better be pushin' on. I'm not goin' to bide 'ere!"

And the speaker threw another uneasy glance into the shadows behind him.

"You know where Melcroft Manor is, I suppose?" said the rustic, as he led the way along the footpath.

"Yes. It's only a few hundred yards from here, in the heart of the wood. I've seen it once or twice, and it's more like a gloomy old fortress than a manor-house."

"I've seen it, too!" chimed in Marie Rivers. "I understand the place has been standing empty for years."

"That's so, missy," said the man in front. "The last tenant was old Silas Martin—a miser an' 'ermit. He died ten years ago, an' 'is ghost 'as 'aunted the 'ouse ever since. That's why nobody 'as taken the place."

"What awful rot!" said Talbot. "I can't understand why people believe such twaddle! We're supposed to be living in an enlightened age, and yet there are fools who believe in spooks."

"There's several folk in these parts that 'ave seen the ghost at some time or another," said the rustic. "Like yerself, I've laughed at their stories. But to-night, not more'n twenty minutes ago, I saw that there ghost with me own eyes!"

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And a shudder ran through the man's frame.

"The fact of the matter is," said Talbot, "you've been drinking!"

"I haven't—I swear it! I had a pint of Guvment ale about a month ago, and since then I've been a puffy sober man!"

"You're absolutely certain that you saw the ghost?" said Marie.

"Certain, missy!"

"What was it like?"

The rustic hesitated. When asked point-blank to give a definition of the ghost; he seemed to be nonplussed. But presently he blurted out:

"I—I can't describe it exactly. But it's face was just like old Silas Martin's, and the finger—it wasn't a woman's finger, mark you—was all in white!"

"And where did it appear?" asked Talbot.

"At one of the winders at Melcroft Manor."

"You're positive you saw a white figure at one of the windows?"

"Positive!" was the solemn reply.

"Then why didn't you go and investigate?"

"Eh? Not me! As I said before, young gent, I can stand up to anything in flesh an' blood, but as soon as I clapped eyes on that ghost I turned tail. An' I wager that anybody else would ha' done the same!"

"Rais!"

"It's easy for you to talk scornful-like," said the man. "You haven't seen that ghost, an' I 'ave! It was a garstly, gruesome spectro—"

"You must have been suffering from hallucinations—"

"I dunno who Lucy Nations might be, an' I don't much care. But it's a fact that I saw the ghost of old Silas Martin. An' I won't go within a mile of Melcroft Manor again in an' hurry!"

Talbot was still incredulous. At the same time, he could not fail to be struck by the man's earnestness.

Not for one moment did the junior suppose that Melcroft Manor was really haunted by the ghost of its miserly tenant, who had died ten years before. But the affair was worth an investigation. It was possible that a practical joker had taken up his abode in the manor-house for the purpose of scaring the simple-minded country folk who lived round about.

Other possibilities occurred to Talbot, also, and he halted.

"Anything wrong, Toff?" asked Marie, stopping short with her clum.

"No, Marie. But I've decided, at the risk of being late for locking-up, to go to Melcroft Manor."

"Toff! You don't mean to say you believe in the existence of this ghost?"

"Of course not. But this fellow has been startled by something, and I mean to find out what that something is."

"Then I will come with you, Toff. But I fancy we are going on a fools' errand."

The rustic had halted, too. He was evidently in a state of great agitation.

"Don't!" he said hoarsely. "Don't go near the manor! You're exposing yourselves to danger! I tell you there's a spook—"

"Even if there is, it can't eat us," said Talbot.

The man uttered a further warning, which Talbot and Marie ignored. They were neither superstitious nor afraid. But they felt certain that there was a mystery connected with the old manor house, and they were determined to probe the mystery that very night, if possible. So, bidding good-night to the rustic, who was still endeavouring to turn them from their purpose, they retraced their

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steps along the footpath, and set off through the darkness, with Melcroft Manor as their goal.

CHAPTER 2.

Mystery of the Night!

TOM MERRY & CO. were not unduly alarmed by Talbot's absence, even though it was getting on towards locking-up time.

"He was with Miss Marie when we came away from the fete," said Monty Lowther, "and I expect they're taking their time about getting back to the school. I don't blame them. I was young myself once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Old Talbot will roll up soon," said Manners.

"He'll have to look slippy," remarked Tom Merry. "Taggles is just going to lock the gates."

The Terrible Three were standing in the quadrangle at St. Jim's, waiting for Talbot and Marie to return. But as yet there was no sign of them.

Taggles, the porter, closed the gates with a clang, and turned the key in the lock. Then he shuffled back into his lodge. It was a cold night, and Taggles wanted to get back to his blazing fire and his peppermint cordial.

Meanwhile, Talbot and his girl chum were making their way in the direction of Melcroft Manor.

It was a slow and difficult journey, for the footpath leading to the old manor house had been neglected for a number of years, and in some places it was almost obliterated by briar and bramble. And, of course, the two adventurers were handicapped by the darkness, which hung like a pall over the woods.

"Pity you haven't got an electric torch with you, Toff," said Marie. "I have occasion to come to this way again, I'll make a point of bringing one with me."

"I shouldn't care to make this journey alone," said Marie, with a shiver. "How much farther, Toff?"

"We're practically there now," said Talbot. "Yes; this is the place."

In a clearing in the wood stood the manor-house.

Although it was impossible to see the place clearly in the gloom, the dark outcrop of the isolated building gave it a sinister aspect. The house was centuries old, and as Talbot had remarked, it had the appearance of a fortress rather than a manor-house, for it was constructed of stone, and all the windows were barred. Close to where Talbot and Marie stood was a garden; or, rather, what had once been a garden. Now it was a veritable wilderness. The paths were overgrown with weeds, and the scene was one of wildness and desolation.

"Groo! I shouldn't care to live here!" muttered Talbot.

"Nor I," said Marie.

"The place has been neglected for ten years."

"Longer than that, I should say. I don't suppose old Silas Martin kept it in order while he was living here."

"I begin to understand now why the place has a reputation for being haunted. The sight of it fairly gives one the creeps. Ugh!"

And Talbot shivered. He was not frightened. At the same time, he felt far from comfortable. Like most fellows, he loved the light, and disliked darkness and desolation.

It was a still, frosty night. A few stars twinkled overhead, but they failed to illuminate the scene. And an ominous stillness, like that of some brooding fate, hung over the place.

But Talbot had no intention of retracting, and neither had Marie. If there

was anything to be seen at this lonely manor-house they were determined to see it.

"Better come and explore the place," Marie, whispered Talbot.

Why he whispered he did not know. Perhaps he was subdued by the desolation of the scene around him.

"But I doubt if we shall be able to get in, Toff."

"We'll soon see."

"Have you any matches?"

"No."

"Then what is the use? We can't possibly explore the place in the dark."

"We'll find out if it's occupied, anyway."

Together they stepped into the wilderness, which had once been a garden.

Talbot faced up at the windows of the house, and as he did so he gave a sudden start.

For even as he looked a light appeared at one of the windows.

It was not a very powerful light, and it seemed to be shed by a lantern.

Talbot stopped short, and instinctively his companion did the same.

"Look, Marie!" muttered the junior. "Somebody's there!"

"And the place is supposed to be untenanted!" said Marie, in a whisper.

"What faced it up at, Toff?"

Talbot made no answer. His eyes were fixed upon the window. And presently, in spite of himself, he trembled violently, and retreated a pace.

For a figure had suddenly appeared at the window—a ghostly figure such as the startled rustic had described.

Marie had seen the figure, too, and she uttered a low exclamation.

Despite their rooted disbelief in ghosts, Talbot and his girl chum could not help feeling alarmed.

There was something eerie and uncanny about that figure at the window. It was a figure shrouded in white, and the face could not be seen plainly, but Talbot fancied he caught a glimpse of long, white hair and a flowing beard.

The junior pulled himself together, and regained his composure. Then he began to study the figure at the window as closely as he was able. Even as he did so, however, the light was extinguished as suddenly as it had appeared.

"Toff!" Marie's voice trembled with excitement, and she gripped Talbot's arm. "Who—what was it?"

"Live it up!" muttered Talbot.

"Do you think—"

"That it was a ghost? Not a bit of it! I admit that it sent cold shivers down my spine, and I can quite understand that woodcutter fellow being scared out of his wits. But it couldn't have been a ghost. Ghosts don't exist."

"But the spiritualists say—"

"Too cold to stand here discussing spiritualism," said Talbot. "Come on, Marie!"

"But—but where are you going?"

"To investigate, of course."

Marie tightened the pressure of her grip on Talbot's arm, and drew him back.

"Nor now, Toff—not now! We have no light, and we have no means of defending ourselves in case of attack."

"That doesn't say much for myistic ability," said Talbot, forcing a laugh.

"Oh, I know you can fight! But that—that thing we saw at the window can't be fought with fists."

"Why not?" demanded Talbot.

"Because—because I don't think it can be human!"

"My hat! Surely you aren't beginning to believe in ghosts, Marie?"

The girl did not reply to this question.

"It will be unwise and unsafe to venture inside this place, Toff," she mut-

tered. "Of course, if you insist upon going, I shall come with you. But I'd rather—I'd much rather you gave up the idea."

Talbot was reluctant to do this. At the same time, he didn't want to cross Marie's wishes. After all, he reflected, he would have ample opportunity, later on, of exploring Melcroft Manor, and of discovering the identity of the ghostly figure which had appeared at the window. And when he came again he would make a point of bringing his electric torch with him.

"All serene, Marie," he said. "We'll be getting back to St. Jim's."

They glanced once again at the window, but it was in darkness, as were all the others.

"The ghost has evidently turned in for the night!" said Talbot.

He attempted to speak jocularly, but he was feeling strangely uneasy. And it was in thoughtful silence that he escorted his girl chum back to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

Doubling Thomases!

"YOUNG up! Which I'll report yer!"

It was Taggles, the porter, who spoke, as he came shuffling out of his lodge to unlock the gates for Talbot and Marie.

"Report away, Taggy!" said Talbot indifferently.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, Mr. Roilton shall know of these goings on!" said Taggles grimly.

"Let him down lightly, Taggles!" interposed Marie Rivers. "He can't be more than twenty minutes late."

"Oh, is that yea, Miss Marie?" said Taggles, peering through the gloom.

"Yes. 'I didn't know you was 'ere, or I shouldn't 'ave spoke afore to 'arsh. Or second thoughts, I'll doubleback Master Talbot's conduct this time. Good-night, Miss Marie."

"Good-night!"

And Taggles, having admitted the two late-comers and relocked the gates, went back into his lodge.

Talbot and Marie stood chatting in the frosty quadrangle for some moments, then they went their ways—Marie to the school sanatorium and Talbot to the junior Common-room.

Tom Merry & Co. had grown tired of waiting for their chum. It had been bitterly cold in the quadrangle, and they had caught the warmth of the Common-room fire.

There was quite a commotion when Talbot came in.

"Here he is!"

"Here's the merry wanderer!"

"Where have you been, Talbot?"

Talbot's questioners were seated round the fire in a semicircle. They promptly made way for the latest arrival, and Talbot seated himself in the glow of the fire.

Before answering any questions he glanced right and left of him, to see who was present.

The Terrible Three were there, with Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus & D'Arcy of the Fourth.

There were other juniors in the Common-room, but these were out of earshot.

"I—that is to say, we—have had rather an adventure, you fellows," said Talbot.

"Bai Jove! Got it off your chest, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I was returning through the woods with Marie, when a fellow—a wood-cutter, I think he was—came plunging through the bracken, and joined us on

the footpath. He was scared out of his wits, and he declared he'd seen a ghost!"

"My hat!"

"Whose ghost?" asked Tom Merry.

"The ghost of old Silas Martin."

"The old miser who used to live at Melcroft Manor?"

Talbot nodded.

"But Silas Martin's been dead ten years or more!" protested Manners.

"Yes, I know. And his ghost is supposed to haunt the manor-house."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

It was easy to see that Talbot's listeners set little store by ghosts. They were normal, healthy fellows, and they had no faith in the supernatural.

"You don't mean to say you believe that absurd yarn, Talbot?" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Of course not. I'm pretty certain that there's no ghost at Melcroft Manor. But there's something else there."

"What's that?"

"A mystery!"

"You're speaking in riddles, man!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Would you mind telling us what you mean?"

"As soon as we had left the wood-cutter fellow," said Talbot, "we decided to go and explore the manor-house—not because we thought there was a ghost there, but just to see that nothing unusual was going on."

"An' what did you discover, dear boy?" asked Arthur Augustus breathlessly.

"Did you hear the clanking of chains and the wailing of a grisly spectre?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"No. But we saw a face at one of the windows."

"Eh?"

"What sort of a face?" asked Lowther.

"A handsome one like mine, or a comely growth like Gussy's."

"We'll, Lowther—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was impossible to get a clear view of the face," said Talbot; "but it looked to me like that of an old man. I fancied I caught a glimpse of white hair and a white beard."

"You fancied!" echoed Jack Blake, and there was an infusion of scorn in his tone. "Are you sure you didn't fancy the whole thing?"

"Quite sure!" said Talbot. "And Marie will bear me out. There was a light in that particular room, and the figure at the window seemed to be draped in white."

"Ha, ha! The ghost of the murdered squire!" said Monty Lowther melodramatically.

Talbot flushed. He could see that his chums doubted him. Not that they supposed he was deliberately concocting a lie, but they attributed the whole thing to his fancy.

"You don't believe me?" he demanded.

"Well, it's asking us to swallow rather a lot," said Manners.

"You think this is a leg-pulling stunt?"

"Not at all. I think you've been giving your imagination too much rope."

"That's it!" said Tom Merry.

It was not really surprising that the juniors should be sceptical on the subject of the ghostly figure which Talbot declared he had seen at one of the windows of Melcroft Manor.

In the well-lighted Common-room at St. Jim's, before a blazing fire, it was difficult to conjure up any sort of belief in spooks and phantoms.

"I tell you this is no trick of my imagination!" said Talbot hotly. "I saw the figure at the window with my own eyes. Marie saw it, too."

"Then why didn't you investigate?" asked Tom Merry.

Talbot hesitated. He did not wish to make it known that Marie Rivers had



They were about halfway through the woods, at a place where the shadows lay thickest, when the sound of running footsteps came to their ears. Instinctively they halted. The footsteps grew nearer. Panting and gasping, partly with exhaustion and partly with terror, a man came tearing through the dense undergrowth. A moment later he emerged on to the pathway, close to where Talbot and Marie were standing. (See page 8).

tured him away from the old manor house, lest his chums should jump to the conclusion that his girl chum had shown the white feather.

"I thought I'd postpone the investigation till to-morrow night," he said at length. "Then we could all go together."

"Catch me going on a wild-goose chase of that sort!" growled Jack Blake.

"I feel quite sure, Talbot, that your imagination was playin' you twicks," said Arthur Augustus.

An angry retort rose to Talbot's lips, but he checked himself.

"Look here," he said quietly, "am I the sort of fellow to imagine things? And is Miss Marie the sort of girl who can't discriminate between fact and fancy?"

"Up till now you've always been a practical, matter-of-fact sort of fellow," said Tom Merry.

"And I still am. And when I tell you that I saw a figure in white at one of the windows of the manor-house, I expect you to believe me!"

"But the manor-house is unoccupied!" protested Jack Blake.

"It wasn't this evening, anyway!"

After a great deal of further discussion, Tom Merry said:

"May be something in it, you fellows. I vote we go along with Talbot to-morrow night, to make sure."

The others assented, not with any great heartiness, however. They could not bring themselves to believe that the isolated manor-house in the wood was occupied, either by human beings or by phantoms.

"We'll leave it at that, then," said Talbot.

And shortly afterwards Kildare of the Sixth, came into the Common-room to announce that it was bed-time.

The morning, in the interval between breakfast and morning lessons, Talbot decided to pay a flying visit to Melcroft Manor, to see if he could discover anything which might throw fresh light on the mystery.

He found the manor-house looking as it had looked for many years past—desolate, neglected, apparently deserted.

There was no sign of life anywhere. Talbot carefully scanned all the windows, particularly the one at which the figure had appeared overnight—but he saw nothing.

"Might as well take a look inside the place," he reflected.

And he made his way to the solitary entrance—a heavy, oaken door, with a triangular-shaped handle.

Talbot tried the handle, but in vain. Then he pitted his weight against the door, but it refused to budge.

"Locked on the inside, I suppose," muttered the junior.

And he gave up trying to force an entrance, and took a walk round the house, keeping his eyes open for any other means of ingress. But there was none.

As he walked, it seemed to Talbot that he heard muffled sounds—sounds which gave the impression that machinery of some sort was in motion beneath the earth. But he laughed aloud at this theory, and dismissed it almost as soon as it came.

The windows of the old manor-house, though at no great height from the ground, were strongly barred, and it was impossible to force an entry that way.

Talbot had heard that the place had been used as a stronghold in the time of the Civil War, and it was certainly an admirable hiding-place, tucked away as it was in the heart of the quiet Wayland Woods.

"Afraid there's nothing doing!" murmured the junior. "We shall have to wait and see what the evening brings forth."

And he returned to St. Jim's, arriving just in time for morning lessons.

CHAPTER 4.

Talbot Enters the Haunted Manor!

"NOW for the merry ghost!" said Monty Lowther. "I've a couple of cricket-stumps concealed in my waistcoat-pocket!"

In the dusky quadrangle at St. Jim's six juniors had assembled. They were the Terrible Three, Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Talbot. And the last named was the only serious member of the party. The others seemed to be regarding the affair in the light of a joke.

Talbot led the way out of the gates. He was the only junior who had deemed it prudent to bring an electric torch. The others declared that the darkness had no terrors for them, and they subjected Talbot to a good deal of friendly bantering as they went along.

"What are we goin' to do with the ghost when we've got him, dear boy?" inquired Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I vote we have him stuffed, and sent to the British Museum!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we'll have an inscription on him to the effect that he's the first genuine spook that's ever been captured," said Jack Blake.

"We've got to capture him first," said Tom Merry.

"And it's necessary to see him before we can capture him!" added Manners. "Without wishing to throw a damper on this business, I'm afraid this excursion's going to be a dismal wash-out."

"In that case, we shall at least have the satisfaction of giving Talbot a jolly good bumping!" said Jack Blake.

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Talbot irritably.

He plunged into the wood, and the others followed.

As they threaded their way along the narrow, winding path the juniors became more subdued. For it was intensely dark, and Talbot only used his torch occasionally. He felt that he would have need of it later on.

"Are we verry far from the manah house, dear boy?" inquired Arthur Augustus. "It's so jolly dark that I can't locate my surroundings, bai Jove!"

"We branch off here," said Talbot abruptly. "Come on!"

"Have we got to plough through all those brambles?"

"Yes."

"But think of my togs!" protested Arthur Augustus. "They will be utterly ruined!"

"Never mind, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther. "That's only your ninety-ninth best suit, so it won't matter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors turned off from the footpath, and forced their way through the dense foliage and the brambles. Occasionally there was a muttered ex-

clamation as somebody was pricked or scratched.

Those who were in the rear received the greater number of casualties, because the prickly branches swung back in their faces.

The ordeal was soon over, however, and the party stopped short in the wild, uncultivated garden of Melcroft Manor.

The scene around them was so desolately still, so desolate, and so uncanny that they shivered in spite of themselves.

Monty Lowther had been on the point of cracking a joke, but the jest died away on his lips. As he surveyed the dark, sombre structure of the old manor-house, and the bleakness of its surroundings, his sense of humour seemed to evaporate.

"What a howlible place!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And he voiced the thoughts of all present.

"Deadly show!" granted Jack Blake. "Which was the window that the ghostly figure appeared at, Talbot?"

"That one," said Talbot, indicating one of the upper windows.

"But there's no light to be seen."

"There will be by-and-by, if we wait long enough."

"Cheerful sort of place to wait—I don't think!" growled Manners.

"Instead of hanging about here in the cold, let's go inside the place."

"We can't," said Talbot.

"Eh? Why not?"

"There's only one entrance door, and that's locked on the inside."

"How do you know that?"

"I came here this morning, after brekker, to see if I could discover anything unusual."

"If we make a combined attack on the door, I dare say it'll yield," said Tom Merry. "It's worth trying, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah! This way, dear boys."

Aided by the light of Talbot's electric torch, the juniors made their way to the door.

After trying the handle in vain, they hurled themselves upon the stout oaken structure, but it refused to budge.

"N.G.!" said Tom Merry, at length, panting from his exertions. "I doubt if even a crowbar would force this door open. It's as solid as a rock."

The juniors desisted from their efforts, and went back to the spot from which they had first obtained a view of the house.

For upwards of half an hour they watched the place intently. But all was still and silent.

No light appeared at any of the windows; no ghostly figure came into view.

Presently Tom Merry glanced at his wrist-watch, which was of the luminous variety.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "We shall have to hurry! It's nearly look-up-time!"

"The ghost of old Silas Martin has evidently decided not to walk to-night!" said Jack Blake sarcastically. "We haven't time to bump Talbot for bringing us on this wild-goose chase, but we'll deal with him later! Come on!"

Everybody moved away from the spot with the exception of Talbot.

"Buck up, old man!" said Tom Merry. "We shall have to sprint like fury, as it is."

"I'm staying here for a bit," answered Talbot.

"Why, you clump? There's nothing to be seen!"

"I'm not so sure of that. I'm going to stick it out for another half-hour or so, anyway, to see if there are any developments."

NEXT WEEK!

Our Splendid New Serial,

"THE INVISIBLE HAND!"

Will Start. Don't Miss It!

"Ah! You'll be late for looking-up, and you'll get it in the neck!"

"I don't care!"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll leave you to it, then," he said.

"Come on, you fellows!"

"Talbot! I regard you as a swiss!"

"said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"There's nothin' to be gained by sayin' heah!"

Talbot seemed neither to hear nor heed. He remained where he was, close to a withered pear-tree, and his school-fellows, rebuking him for being an obstinate fool, left him. A moment later he was all alone.

It was a moonless night. Dark shadows lay everywhere, and Talbot, now that he was entirely on his own, felt strangely ill at ease. But he was as determined as ever to solve the mystery of Melcroft Manor. That there was a mystery connected with the place he felt certain. What of the light he had seen at the window? What of the white-clad figure which had appeared there? He had seen these things in actual fact, not in his imagination, and he conjectured that if he remained where he was he would see them again.

The minutes dragged slowly by. It was bitterly cold, but Talbot wore a thick overcoat, and a woollen scarf was entwined round his neck. Nevertheless, he felt half frozen, and he began to walk up and down to maintain his circulation.

The wisdom of waiting was soon apparent to him. For, about twenty minutes after Tom Merry & Co. had taken their departure, a light appeared at one of the windows of the old manor-house.

It was the self-same window which had been illuminated on the previous night.

Talbot's heart was beating faster than usual. He stopped short and gazed intently at the window. But he could see practically nothing.

"I shall get a better view if I shin up this pear-tree," he muttered.

And he at once put his plan into effect. He climbed up the tree until it was unsafe to venture higher, and then, gripping one of the branches, he made another survey of the lighted window.

He found that he was now able to see into the apartment. And what he beheld astonished him greatly.

The room was occupied by a very old man, with long white hair which fell about his shoulders. He also possessed a long, unkempt beard. He was shrouded in what appeared to be a sheet; and, although at first glance he might be taken to be the ghost of old Silas Martin, his antics were decidedly unghostlike. Talbot saw him in the act of raising a flask to his lips—a flask which evidently contained spirits.

"Whatever that quaint old freak may be, he's no ghost!" muttered the watching junior. "He's made of flesh and blood! And, what's more, he seems to be enjoying himself!"

The old man drained the flask, and Talbot saw that his gait became unsteady. He was laughing, too—the loud, un-musical laugh of a person well-nigh inebriated. Yet there was something menacing about that laugh, and Talbot shivered.

Presently the face of the old man appeared close to the window, and Talbot saw and heard quite plainly.

"Ha, ha! I am the—hic!—ghost of Silas Martin! Tremble!"

"First time I know that ghosts carried whisky-flasks about with them!" murmured Talbot, still clinging to his perch in the pear-tree.

And then, still gazing intently, the junior saw another man enter the



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apartment—a much younger man, whose features, even at that distance, appeared strangely familiar.

Talbot strained forward in order to obtain a better view of the man. And, even as he did so, he saw the "ghost" rudely thrust aside, and he heard an angry voice exclaim:

"You drunken fool! You'll be giving the whole show away!"

Expostulations followed. And then the light was suddenly extinguished, and the place was in utter darkness once more.

Talbot's heart was thumping against his ribs.

What did these things mean?

Who was the white-bearded, white-haired old man? Who was the younger man who had dragged him back from the window?

Try as he would, Talbot could think of no satisfactory solution to these posers, for posers they indeed were.

What was going on inside that grim building? For what purpose were these men there? And were they alone, or were others with them?

These questions chased each other through Talbot's brain as he remained suspended in the pear-tree.

There was nothing more to be seen from his perch, however, and he soon dropped down on to terra firma.

One thought was predominant in his mind.

Somehow, by some means or other, he must gain access to the old manor-house.

He was about to move towards the building when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and promptly jumped back into the shadows.

A moment later he saw two men approaching the entrance-door of the house. He had no conception of what these men were like, but he heard one of them rap three times on the oaken door, with a distinct pause between each rap.

After a brief interval the heavy door was swung open, a password, which

Talbot failed to catch, was uttered, and the two men disappeared into the gloomy building. Then the door was closed, and, judging by the sounds which followed the closing of it, it was barred and bolted.

Talbot was becoming more and more mystified. Of one thing he was certain, that the present occupants of Melcroft Manor were up to no good.

The place was evidently being utilised as the headquarters of a gang. But whether it was a gang of cracksmen or looters, or whether the men were fugitives from justice, Talbot could not tell.

The "ghost"—the old man with the flowing locks and the white beard—was probably being employed as an agent of the gang. It was, doubtless, his job to appear at one of the windows from time to time, and scare away any simple-minded rustics who happened to be in the neighbourhood of the house.

That was the only interpretation which Talbot could place upon the matter. Whether his surmise would prove correct, or otherwise, remained to be seen.

The St. Jim's junior pulled himself together, and stepped towards the house.

The spirit of adventure was strong within him. He knew that by seeking admission to the lonely manor-house he would be placing himself in peril. But his curiosity overmastered him.

He was bursting to know what was going on in the old house, which was alleged to be haunted.

He wished that Tom Merry & Co. had remained. But it was futile to think of calling them back now. So Talbot decided to see the thing through single-handed.

He advanced boldly towards the stout oaken door, and rapped on it three times with his knuckles, pausing between each rap. Then he waited.

A full minute elapsed. Then Talbot heard footsteps.

There was a sound of bolts being shot.

back, and then the heavy door swung open, revealing the younger of the two men, whom Talbot had seen in the room above.

The man carried a lantern, and his voice was full of suspicion as he rapped out sharply:

"Give the password!"

Talbot was at a disadvantage in not knowing what the password was. But he had made his plans, and he acted upon them.

Whilst the door was still ajar, he dashed through the aperture and into the hall beyond.

And then an iron grip fell upon the junior's shoulder, and, turning swiftly, he found himself face to face with his old enemy, Jim Dawlish!

CHAPTER 5.

A Prisoner in the Vaults.

"DAWLISH!"

Talbot rapped out the name like one dazed.

He had never expected to set eyes on Jim Dawlish, crackman and law-breaker, again. He had imagined, and with good reason, that Dawlish had gone to his account.

Some time previously a fierce struggle had taken place on the parapet of a lighthouse. The combatants had been John Rivers—Marie's father—and Jim Dawlish. And the latter, after a grim and gruelling tussle, had been precipitated from the edge of the parapet to the dark waters of the English Channel. Nothing had since been heard of him, and it was, therefore, concluded on every hand that he had gone to his fate, that he had been drowned in the swirling sea beneath.

And now Jim Dawlish had cropped up again, with an unexpectedness which caused Talbot to stagger.

What was the man doing here? What were his motives in taking possession of this lonely manor-house?

Still retaining his grip on the junior's shoulder, Dawlish shut and bolted the door.

The man was every bit as surprised to see Talbot as Talbot was to see him. He held up the lantern, so that its rays shone full upon the junior's face.

"So it's you, Toff? We meet again, rather sooner than either of us expected."

The words were accompanied by a low, mocking laugh.

"Dawlish!" repeated Talbot, in amazement. "I thought you were dead!"

"Sorry to disappoint you, Toff!"

"When you fought with John Rivers on the parapet of the lighthouse—" began Talbot.

"He bested me. But not for long. Men of my calibre aren't easily put out of action. I wasn't drowned, as you supposed, as John Rivers supposes. As you were picked up by some passing vessel?"

Dawlish shook his head.

"I still had my wits about me, an' I swam to the iron ladder of the lighthouse, an' clung to it. John Rivers rowed all around in a boat, to see if he could see anythin' of me; but it was too dark, an' I didn't reveal my whereabouts. I simply played 'possum until John Rivers had gone."

"But—but what are you doing here?" exclaimed Talbot.

"That's none of your business!"

answered Dawlish gruffly.

Talbot's eyes fearlessly met those of his old enemy.

"I'm going to make it my business to find out!" he said. "I know enough of you to know that you're up to no good. You've taken possession of this old manor-house for some shabby purpose,

and I mean to discover what that shabby purpose is!"

Dawlish laughed again. It was not a pleasant laugh.

"Whether you discover my secret or not doesn't matter in the least, Toff. Because you'll never be able to pass the secret on to others. It will die with you!"

"You mean—"

"That now you've set foot inside this place you're a permanent prisoner."

Talbot knew that the speaker was in earnest, and he began to reproach himself for his folly in entering Melcroft Manor on his own. He would have been wiser to postpone his entry until the conditions were more favourable.

But the step had been taken now, and there was no way of escape.

Talbot noted that Jim Dawlish carried a revolver, and the scoundrel would not have scrupled to use it in the event of the junior making a dash for freedom.

"Come upstairs, Toff," said Dawlish, with mock politeness. "I think you'd better go first, and then I shall be able to keep my eye on you."

There was nothing to be gained by refusing to comply with this command, so Talbot began to ascend the dingy stone staircase. Behind him came Jim Dawlish, holding the lantern aloft.

In this way they presently came to the apartment in which Talbot had seen the ghostly figure.

The ghost" was still there. He was seated on a low stool, with his back resting against the wall, and he was breathing stertorously. Evidently the contents of the whisky-dask had made him sleepy.

Of the two men who had recently entered the house Talbot saw no sign. He concluded that they must be in another room, or down in the basement.

Jim Dawlish set down the lantern. Then he strode towards the slumbering "ghost," and shook him violently.

"Get up, you fool!" he snarled. "An' the next time you fuddle your brains with drink it'll be the worse for you!"

So saying, he hurled the "ghost" across the apartment and through the open doorway. It seemed to be rather drastic treatment of an old man; but Talbot reflected that he might not be old at all. He was in all probability a young man made up to play the part of Silas Martin's ghost.

When they were alone in the apartment, Dawlish motioned the St. Jim's junior to be seated. And he himself sat down, keeping well away from the window.

"Now, Toff," he said, "I have you at my mercy."

Talbot said nothing.

"You've thwarted me many times in the past," Dawlish went on. "You've always been a thorn in my side. But the tables are turned now. I have you at my mercy."

"I think you said that before," said Talbot.

"An' I'll say it again, because the words have a sort of pleasant ring about 'em. I have you at my mercy!"

"And what do you propose to do?" asked Talbot. His voice was quite steady.

"Well, I could dispose of you," answered Dawlish thoughtfully, "an' no soul would be any the wiser. Few people ever come near this place, which is believed to be haunted."

"You knew what you were about when you selected this as your headquarters," said Talbot.

Dawlish chuckled.

"I couldn't have found a better place if I'd ransacked the country," he said.

"You use this house as a store for your plunder, I suppose?"

Dawlish did not answer this question. "We're wanderin' from the subject," he said. "I was sayin' that I could easily dispose of you without a soul bou'nd to the wiser."

"Kill me, you mean?"

"You use hard words, Toff. I prefer to call it 'disposin' of you.' Sounds so much more genteel, you know!"

And the speaker's harsh laugh echoed through the apartment.

Talbot's face was very pale. This was one of the tightest corners he had ever been in. But his courage did not fail him.

"If any harm comes to me, Jim Dawlish," he said, "you'll be made to suffer for it!"

"How?"

"My pals at St. Jim's—"

"Your pals can't help you now."

"They'll force an entry into this place—"

"But they won't know you're here. An' even if they did, they'd never be able to get in. Nothin' short of dynamite would shift that door downstairs."

Talbot was silent.

"I've got you in the hollow of my hand, Toff!" said Dawlish. "But I'll give you a chance of savin' your skin, even now."

Talbot's face lighted up. But only for a moment. He could guess what was coming.

"I've always wanted to get you as a partner, Toff," Dawlish went on. "You're clever beyond your years; I won't deny that. An' you'd to a valuable acquisition to my gang."

"You want me to become a crackman?" said Talbot bitterly.

Dawlish shook his head.

"You don't? Then what—"

"I'm a crackman no longer, Toff." Talbot looked incredulous.

"You're not going to tell me that you've turned over a new leaf?"

"No, sir, but I've discovered an even more payin' game than crackin' cribs."

"Yes?"

"Forgery, Toff!"

There was a pause.

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed Talbot, at length.

The taunt glanced off Jim Dawlish like water off a duck's back.

"In these days, Toff," he said, "a man must either live by his wits or starve. Honesty is the best policy. That's what they taught me at school. But, bless you, if we all tried to be honest, the workhous' would be packed to overflowin'!"

"You needn't try to justify yourself," said Talbot. "Nothing can justify forgery and rank dishonesty. Personally, I'd rather starve than get a living by crookery."

"Yet you did it once!"

"When I was too young, and too much of a blind fool, to realise what I was doing!"

"Then you won't throw in your lot with me?"

"No!"

"You won't be my right-hand man in this enterprise?"

"Never!"

Talbot spoke with spirit. He knew that the alternative meant—he had weighed everything in the balance—and he was determined to be true to his principles. Better to lose his life than his honour, he reflected.

For a long time silence fell between them. And when Jim Dawlish eventually broke that silence Talbot knew that he could expect no mercy from him.

"I'm goin' to give you one more chance, Toff," he said. "You've got

five minutes to make up your mind one way or the other. If you decide to join forces with me, all well and good. If not—well, you'll never leave this place alive!"

Talbot sat silent.

Slowly the minutes passed, and presently Dawlish spoke again:

"One minute to go, Toff. You'd better make up your mind!"

"You have had my answer!" said Talbot, in a low tone.

"You refuse to come into partnership with me?"

"Once and for all, I refuse!"

The time-limit had been reached. Dawlish pressed a bell at his elbow. Then, after a brief interval, two men came into the apartment. They were doubtless the same two whom Talbot had seen admitted to the manor-house.

Jim Dawlish held a muttered conversation with these men; then he waved his hand towards the St. Jim's junior.

Instantly the two men stepped towards Talbot, who, moved by a desperate impulse, decided to put up the best fight he knew.

Out shot the junior's fist, straight from the shoulder, and one of the men reeled backwards from a well-directed blow between the eyes. Then Talbot hurled himself at the other man, and a fierce struggle ensued.

Talbot could fight like a tiger when he was roused, and had there been only two men to deal with, he might have proved successful.

Jim Dawlish, however, was not idle. He sprang forward, bringing the butt of his revolver down upon the head of the plucky junior.

Talbot's knees sagged under him, and he went to the floor.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Dawlish picked up the lantern.

"Bring him along!" he commanded.

"Where to?" asked one of the men.

"To the vaults, of course!"

Dawlish led the way with the lantern, and the other two carried Talbot in inanimate form between them.

They went down flight after flight of stairs, until they reached a spacious cellar.

The cellar was lighted, and machinery of some sort was in motion. It was an elaborate apparatus, and it had only recently been installed there.

It was in this cellar, in the bowels of the earth, so to speak, that Jim Dawlish carried out his nefarious work.

But it was not this place that was destined to be Talbot's prison.

Dawlish set down the lantern on the stone floor. Then he removed a slab of stone, and a dark aperture was revealed.

Into this aperture Dawlish stepped, gripping the side of an iron ladder with one hand, and carrying the lantern in the other.

The two men followed, still bearing Talbot's unconscious form between them.

The iron ladder descended for a good distance into a gloomy and noisome cavern. The existence of this cavern was probably known only to Jim Dawlish and his confederates, though in Civil War times it had doubtless been employed as a refuge by Cavaliers or Roundheads.

Panting from their exertions, the two men placed Talbot's limp form on to the floor.

"Shall we bind him?" asked one.

"You know as well as I do," replied Dawlish, "that there's no need for that. There's absolutely no means of escape from this place."

"You—you're not goin' to leave the kid to die?" faltered the other man.

Dawlish laughed.

"He'll soon come to his senses—in more ways than one. When he recovers consciousness, an' finds himself stranded here, without food or light or comfort, he'll jolly soon decide to throw in his lot with us."

"An' if he doesn't?"

"Then he must take the consequences. But he'll know which side his bread's buttered, never fear."

After further conversation, the three scoundrels ascended the iron ladder to the cellar above.

The slab of stone was replaced, and Talbot of St. Jim's was a prisoner, confined in the gloomy vaults of Melcroft Manor!

CHAPTER 5.

Missing from School!

"**A** NYBODY know where Talbot is?"

Kildare of the Sixth asked the question, as he looked into the Junior Common-room at St. Jim's.

There was a grave expression on the handsome face of the Sixth-Former. For it was the juniors' bed-time, and Talbot had not yet come in.

Tom Merry & Co. were seated round the fire, excitedly discussing their chum's absence. They could not understand what had happened to Talbot, and had been expecting him any moment.

"He was with us just before locking-up time, Kildare," said Tom Merry, in reply to the senior's question.

"Where? Out of gates?"

"Yes—in Wayland Woods."

"What on earth were you doing there?"

"We went to interview the ghost of Melcroft Manor," Kildare," explained Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"But the spook didn't turn up," added Jack Blake.

Kildare frowned.

"What nonsense is this!" he demanded sharply.

"Melcroft Manor is supposed to be haunted by the ghost of old Silas Martin, who died there about ten years ago," said Tom Merry. "Talbot declared that last night, on the way back from Wayland, he saw a ghostly figure at one of the windows of the manor-house. And he wanted us to go with him to-night to investigate."

"And you went?"

"Yes. But there was nothing doing. We hung about a long time in the cold, and got fed-up, and came away."

"But Talbot remained," said Manners. "And we can't make out why he hasn't come back."

Kildare looked thoughtful.

"I shall have to acquaint Mr. Raiton with these facts," he said. "He'll probably order a search to be made."

"May we go, Kildare?" asked Merry.

"Yes—to bed! If Mr. Raiton decides to send out a search-party, the prefects will go."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I'm sure you'd rather be tucked up snugly in your little beds, Kildare," said Monty Lowther. "We can tackle this little job all right."

Kildare strode out of the Common-room without replying to Monty Lowther's kind offer. He went to Mr. Raiton's study, and informed the House-master that Talbot of the Shell was absent, and that he had last been seen in the precincts of the old manor-house in the woods.

Mr. Raiton decided to wait an hour, and then, if Talbot had not arrived by the end of that time, to send out a search-party.

Tom Merry & Co. had gone up to bed. Both the Shell and the Fourth Form dormitories were in a buzz.

All sorts of speculations were put forward concerning Talbot, but nobody supposed him to be in any danger. The general belief was that the junior had remained outside the old manor-house.



When they were alone in the apartment, Dawlish motioned the St. Jim's junior to be seated. And he himself sat down, keeping well away from the window. "Now, Toff," he said, "you've thwarted me many times in the past. But for you I should have made many rich hauls. But the tables are turned now, I have you at my mercy!" (See page 8.)

watching for the "ghost," and that he had forgotten the flight of time.

"Silly ass!" growled Manners. "He'll get it in the neck when he comes in!"

"We'll stay awake till he turns up," said Tom Merry.

"Of course."

The Terrible Three remained awake, propped up on their pillows, until the night was far spent.

But Talbot's bed remained vacant, and he failed to put in an appearance.

Finally, the juniors fell asleep, to be awakened at length by the harsh clang of the rising-bell.

Instinctively they glanced towards Talbot's bed.

It was still empty!

"Talbot hasn't come back!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in tones of perplexity and wonder.

"Unless he was brought back last night by the prefects, and housed in the punishment-room," suggested Harry Noble, the Australian junior.

"We'll soon see whether that's the case," said the captain of the Shell.

The juniors hurriedly dressed, and then they sought out Kildare of the Sixth.

The captain of St. Jim's was looking tired and irritable.

"Any news of Talbot, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"None!"

"My hat!"

"Did a search-party go out last night?"

"Yes. About half a dozen of us sacrificed our beauty sleep, and went to Melcroft Manor. There was no sign of Talbot, and the place was absolutely deserted."

"You saw nothing of the ghost of Silas Martin?" queried Monty Lowther.

"Don't be a silly young ass!" growled Kildare.

"Do you think another search-party will be sent out this morning, Kildare?" asked Manners.

"Shouldn't wonder. I don't suppose you kids will get a look-in, though."

"Which is rather a pity," said Monty Lowther, with a sigh.

"Where the mighty men of the Sixth have failed, we should be sure to succeed."

"Take a hundred lines, Lowther, for cheek!" snapped Kildare.

And he turned away.

The Terrible Three exchanged dubious glances.

What had happened to Talbot? Why had he not returned to the school?

They had not been unduly alarmed overnight; but now that all these hours had elapsed and there was no news of Talbot, they could not help feeling uneasy.

"If they won't let us join the official search-party, I vote we go out on our own after brekker, and see if we can get on Talbot's track," said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined the Terrible Three in the quadrangle.

"Hasn't Talbot turned up yet, dear boys?" inquired the swell of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"A search-party was sent out last night, but he can't be found."

"Bai Jove!"

"We were thinking of going along to Melcroft Manor after brekker," said Manners.

"Good! We'll come along, too," said Blake.

The continued absence of Talbot of the Shell caused a profound sensation at St. Jim's, and all sorts of rumours were rife.

The appetites of Talbot's chums suffered in consequence of his disappearance. They scrambled through the morn-

ing meal, and quitted the dining-hall at the first opportunity.

As they were going down to the school gates after breakfast they encountered Marie Rivers.

Marie had heard the news, of course, and she was looking very pale.

"We're goin' on the track of old Talbot," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Comin' along, deah gal?"

Marie nodded.

"I was just going on my own account," she said.

"But, of course, I should much prefer to go with you."

And Arthur Augustus regarded this as a direct compliment to himself, for he bowed gracefully in the polished manner of Vere de Vere.

"Any idea where Talbot's likely to be, Miss Rivers?" asked Tom Merry, as the party passed out of gates.

"I've been trying to puzzle it out," was the reply.

"And the only conclusion I can come to is that he went into the canon-house, and that he is being forcibly detained there as a prisoner."

"My only aunt!" gasped Jack Blake.

"What makes you think that, Miss Marie?"

"It may be my imagination, of course," said the girl; "but it's my belief that Melcroft Manor is a haunt of desperate men."

"But the place is empty——" protested Tom Merry.

"That remains to be seen."

Nothing further was said as the party struck off into the wood. In silence they wended their way to the old manor-house, and they found the place looking as it generally looked—still and deserted.

There was no sign of life to be seen.

True, there were footprints close to the solitary entrance. But, as Manners remarked, these were probably the footprints of the members of the search-party which had set out overnight.

Tom Merry tried the handle of the stout, studded door, and he shook his head.

"Locked!" he muttered.

Monty Lowther drove his boot against the formidable structure.

"If anybody's inside the place, they can't help hearing that!" he said.

And he kicked again with such force and vigour that he hurt his foot, and hopped to and fro in anguish, clapping the injured member.

"We can't possibly get this door open," said Jack Blake.

"And we can't get in at any of the windows, either," said Tom Merry, gazing upwards. "They're all barred."

The juniors remained there for some moments, beating a tattoo upon the door, and raising their voices in order to attract the attention of anyone who might be within. But no response came, and they eventually decided that there could be no one within the walls of Melcroft Manor.

"N.G.," said Monty Lowther, at length. "Better retreat, Tommy."

"Are you satisfied that the place is empty, Miss Marie?" asked Tom Merry.

Marie nodded.

"Hark!" exclaimed Manners suddenly. "Can you fellows hear a sort of rumbling sound?"

The juniors paused and listened. And they shook their heads.

"Must have been my imagination," said Manners. "Come on!"

And the members of the impromptu search-party withdrew from the old manor-house, and decided to renew their quest in the woods.

CHAPTER 7.

The Escape from Melcroft Manor!

TALBOT opened his eyes.

He sat up on the cold, damp floor of the cavern and peered around him.

Everywhere was darkness, black and impenetrable.

It took the junior some time to collect his scattered senses. But at length he recalled what had happened, and at the realisation of his sorry plight his heart sank.

Where was he?

He supposed that he was in the vaults of the old manor-house, for the place was musty and evil-smelling.

A low rumbling sounded overhead.

Machinery of some sort was at work, and Talbot surmised that the forgers were busy.

Dawlish had not told him what they forged. Banknotes, probably, or Treasury notes. And then the junior remembered to have read in the local paper that a good many spurious notes had recently been put into circulation.

Talbot's head was throbbing painfully, but he was able to think clearly.

He groped for his electric torch, but it was gone. Doubtless Dawlish had deprived him of it before having him conveyed to the vaults.

"I must find a way out of this place somehow!" muttered the junior between his clenched teeth.

He rose to his feet and groped around him.

And presently his hand came into contact with something cold and hard.

An iron ladder!

Talbot ascended it rung by rung; but, to his dismay, he discovered that there was no opening of any sort up above.

It occurred to him that the slab of stone immediately above his head might be a loose one; but, try as he would, he could not move it. He was caught like a rat in a trap.

Having assured himself that the ladder afforded him no means of escape, Talbot descended, and groped his way round the cavern.

Presently he found, to his delight, the opening of a narrow tunnel. He made his way along this, only to discover that he was in a cul-de-sac. For the tunnel came to an abrupt end.

Talbot returned to the cavern.

After further groping, he found that there were other tunnels, and he decided to explore each of them in turn, until he discovered an exit.

For the thought of remaining in that dark, cavernous vault, without food or warmth, was appalling.

Talbot felt certain that Jim Dawlish had abandoned him to a terrible fate.

Well, he would thwart his enemy. He would get clear of this place somehow.

He was ravenously hungry. The last meal he had eaten had been tea in his study at St. Jim's. How long ago that was he was unable to tell; but many weary hours must have elapsed since.

Grimly determined, Talbot started to explore the remainder of the tunnels.

Some of them proved to be longer than others, but none afforded an outlet.

And in the pitchy darkness Talbot was uncertain of his bearings, and he suspected that he had explored the same tunnels two and three-times over.

NEXT WEEK.

The Story of a Thousand Thrills.

"THE INVISIBLE HAND!"

Starts in

"THE GEM."

At last, weary from his exertions, he sank down on the floor of the cavern. He was well-nigh in despair.

The rumble of the machinery still sounded overhead, but the forgers seemed to have no thoughts for their victim.

Nobody came to see Talbot. Nobody brought him food or drink. He had already been many hours in the vaults, and he would be there many hours more, unless he could find some means of egress.

He rested awhile on the stone floor, and then, realising that the longer he delayed matters the weaker he would become, he resumed the task—the apparently hopeless task—of finding a way of escape.

After an hour of futile wandering, he sank down once more upon the floor, physically incapable of renewing his efforts. And after a time a merciful sleep came to him.

When he awoke, he was cramped and stiff, but he felt better.

"One last try!" he muttered. And he groped his way towards the extreme end of the cavern, where several tunnels began which he had not yet traversed.

He tried the first tunnel, which extended for a dozen yards and no more. He tried the second, which was much longer, but which afforded no outlet. Then, returning to the cavern, he tried the third tunnel, and he found that it seemed to continue indefinitely.

On and on he went, weak and faint and exhausted, but determined not to give up yet.

And presently it seemed to him that the air became purer, that the darkness grew less intense. It might have been his fancy, but he pressed on.

He must have proceeded for nearly a quarter of a mile in that gloomy subterranean passage, when, straining his eyes ahead of him, he discerned a faint streak of light. And his lips parted in an exclamation of joy.

Talbot quickened his pace. He was filled with a great hope, and the hope grew stronger at every moment as the streak of light became more distinct.

Presently he found that the tunnel sloped upwards, and that it grew narrower and narrower, until it came to an abrupt end.

Talbot stopped short, and looked about him.

A tiny shaft of light descended into the tunnel. The junior fancied that he heard the twittering of birds.

And then, looking upwards, he saw an aperture, through which he was able, with a great effort, to draw himself up.

He then found, to his unspeakable delight, that the aperture was the hollow stump of a tree.

A moment later Talbot emerged into the blinding glare of the sunlight.

He was free!

The hollow tree-stump was situated in a dense and unfrequented part of Wayland Woods, far away from any footpath. It was a means of entry to, and exit from, the tunnel, of which Jim Dawlish and his associates knew nothing.

Talbot's heart overflowed with thankfulness to the Providence Who had liberated him from the gloomy confines of his prison.

It was morning. In the branches overhead the birds were carolling joyously, as if they were aware of the junior's deliverance.

And then the sound of human voices fell upon Talbot's ear. And there were footsteps close at hand.

"Better chuck it now, I think, and get back to St. Jim's."

It was Tom Merry who spoke.

"I feel very distressed, dear boys, at not being able to find poor old Talbot!"

This from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We must try again later," said the voice of Marie Rivers. "There's no need," cried Talbot. "I'm here!" And then, overcome by the terrible ordeal through which he had passed, he fell swooning into the bracken.

CHAPTER 8.

The End of the Adventure!

TALBOT!" "My hat!" "He's fainted!" The St. Jim's juniors rushed towards their schoolfellow, who had reappeared in such dramatic circumstances.

For some moments Talbot lay white and still, and Tom Merry supported his chum's head on his knee, while Monty Lowther fetched some water from the brook which babbled by.

Talbot was in a terrible plight. His clothes were torn and dishevelled, and his face was scarcely recognisable.

Tom Merry & Co. were on tenterhooks to know what had happened, but some time had elapsed before Talbot was able to explain everything.

When at length the junior rallied, and he was able to speak, his chums listened spellbound to his astonishing narrative.

"So you were in the manor-house all the time?" ejaculated Tom Merry, when Talbot had related his adventures.

"Underneath it," corrected Talbot.

"And Dawlish thinks you're still there?" queried Marie Rivers.

Talbot nodded.

"But Jose! You must have had a dreadful time, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I have!" was the reply. "I've only been a prisoner for one night, but it seemed like years and years! At one time I despaired of ever seeing my pals again."

"Let's help you back to the school, old man," said Tom Merry.

"But Dawlish—"

"We'll deal with him later."

Assisted by his chums, Talbot returned to St. Jim's. And as he went, he was bombarded with questions.

The Head and Mr. Railton were chatting on the School House steps when the little party arrived.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Dr. Holmes, in surprise. "Talbot has returned!"

And, judging by his appearance, he has had a far from enviable time!" observed the Housemaster.

"Talbot!" said the Head, as the junior approached with his escort. "Where have you been? What has happened?"

Talbot was obliged to recount his experiences over again. The Head and Mr. Railton listened to his narrative in growing amazement.

"You—you have been imprisoned in the vaults of Melcroft Manor?" gasped Dr. Holmes, at length.

"Yes, sir."

"And you say that this scoundrel Dawlish—whom everybody had supposed to be dead—is utilising the manor-house as a forgers' den?"

"That's so, sir."

"Then the police must be communicated with at once, and the gang placed under arrest!"

"Dawlish could hardly have chosen a more convenient place than the manor-house in order to carry out his nefarious work," said Mr. Railton. "The house is believed to be haunted."

Talbot smiled.

"Dawlish had a human ghost on patrol, sir," he said, "with the object of keeping people away. One of the members of the gang was rigged up in a white shroud and long white hair and a flowing beard. I had seen him once or twice at one of the windows, and I admit it was enough to scare anybody!"

"You are tired, my boy, and hungry," said the Head kindly. "Go and ask the House-dame to give you some food, after which you may go to bed."



Dawlish led the way with the lantern, and his two assistants carried Talbot's inanimate form between them. They went down flight after flight of stairs, until they reached a spacious cellar. (See page 9.)

Talbot was soon enjoying the luxury of a good square meal. But he didn't go to bed afterwards. He wanted to be on the spot when Jim Dawlish and his confederates were arrested.

An hour later, the police-inspector and three constables arrived from Wayland. The Head explained the situation to them, and announced that he and Mr. Railton would accompany them to Melcroft Manor.

Tom Merry & Co. pleaded to be allowed to join the party, and after some hesitation the Head consented.

When the party arrived at length at the clearing in the wood, they received a rude shock. For the old manor house of Melcroft had been utterly demolished!

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head, in amazement.

"The place has been blown up, sir," said the police-inspector. "And only recently, too."

"It is obvious what has happened," said Mr. Railton. "Dawlish discovered that Talbot had escaped, and, realising his danger, he set a fuse, and blew the place to atoms, thereby destroying all evidence of his guilt."

"Do you not think it possible that Dawlish took his own life at the time?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"No fear, sir!" chimed in Talbot. "Dawlish values his own skin far too much for that. He's got clear away by now."

"He must be tracked down and apprehended, if possible," said the Head.

"With the knowledge that such an ardent scoundrel is at large, we shall not be able to sleep soundly in our beds."

"We'll do our best to get hold of him, sir," promised the police-inspector. "I'm afraid he'll get off lightly, though. There's no proof that it was he who destroyed this place, and that prior to its destruction he used it as a forgers' den."

"But we have Talbot's assurance."

"That doesn't constitute proof," said the inspector. "Still, Dawlish is a dangerous character, and we shall leave no stone unturned in our efforts to capture him."

Realising that they could gain nothing by remaining amongst the debris, the Head and Mr. Railton returned to the school, together with the juniors. And meanwhile, the police went on the track of Jim Dawlish, who could not have had a very long start.

Talbot was excused from lessons that morning. He went to his study, and slept soundly on the sofa, in front of a blazing fire.

When he awoke, close upon midnight, he found Marie Rivers standing over him.

"Feeling better, Toff?"

"I'm as fit as a fiddle now!" said Talbot, jumping up with alacrity. "My hat! What an awful slacker I am! I've been asleep all the morning!"

"I'm ever so glad you're safe, Toff!" said Marie, in tones of relief. "When you didn't return to the school last night, I pictured all sorts of dreadful things."

Talbot grinned.

"You thought I'd been collared by the ghost of Melcroft Manor—what?"

"Well, I could hardly be blamed for thinking that that weird figure at the window was a ghost. It was so unreal and unnatural."

"Wonder if our ghostly friend will ever be captured?" mused Talbot.

"He's been captured already."

"Eh?"

"And so has Dawlish."

"What!"

"They were both arrested on Wayland Moor, an hour ago. The police searched them, but failed to find anything which pointed to the fact that they were

forgers. Still, they were hustled off to the police-station, and I expect they'll get short shrift."

"It's a relief to know that Dawlish is under lock and key, anyway," said Talbot. "Just fancy the fellow cropping up again after all this time, when we thought he was drowned!"

"Some criminals are like cats. Toff; they have nine lives. And Dawlish always seems to fall on his feet."

"Hope the police put an extra guard over him," said Talbot, "or he'll slip through their fingers!"

But Jim Dawlish did not escape. The police saw to that. He appeared in court next day, with the accomplice who had posed as the ghost of Silas Martin.

Both scoundrels were subjected to a severe cross-examination, and Talbot was required to attend at the court.

But the guilt of the two men could not be definitely established, and eventually they were both committed to prison for six months as suspected characters. Had all their shady doings come to light, they would have been put away for a much longer term.

Jim Dawlish waved his hand mockingly to Talbot as he left the dock.

"After my brief holiday, Toff," he said, "we shall meet again!"

And there was something sinister and menacing in the words.

But Talbot didn't worry. He cycled back to St. Jim's in good spirits, satisfied that Dawlish would be well looked after for the next six months.

Tom Merry & Co. were waiting for their turn in the school gateway.

"How did Dawlish get on?" inquired Monty Lowther. "Is he going to be hauled up at the next Assizes?"

"No. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment."

"And the ghost?" queried Tom Merry. "He's got six months, too."

"But couldn't anything be proved against them?"

"No; they were too cute for that."

"Wonder if we should find anything if we explored the cellars of the manor-house?" said Jack Blake.

"The cellars have been blown to smithereens, you bet!" said Talbot.

"Still, we'll make sure."

After dinner, therefore, Tom Merry & Co. set out on their expedition.

They located, after a good deal of searching, the hollow tree-stump which communicated with the tunnel. They lowered themselves into the dark, narrow passage, and proceeded along it in single file. But when they had gone about two hundred yards they could go no farther, owing to the fact that the tunnel was blocked up by debris.

The atmosphere, too, was stifling, and the juniors were only too glad to beg a retreat. They had seen enough to convince them that Jim Dawlish had done his work thoroughly, and that the whole of his plant and machinery had been destroyed.

The affair caused quite a sensation at St. Jim's, and, indeed, throughout the countryside. And Talbot of the Shell was regarded as quite a hero, since it was he who had frustrated the knavish tricks of Jim Dawlish, and also succeeded in solving the Mystery of the Manor!

THE END.

(Another grand long story of the chums of St. Jim's next week, entitled: "TALBOT'S MASTER-STROKE!" By Martin Clifford.)

BOTTLED BUZZES.

It is Rumoured—

That David Llewellyn Wynne has just received an offer from a well-known film producer to act in one of his plays. The Editor and staff agree that it would turn out an expensive production were "Fatty" to act before the camera.

That news has leaked out to the fact that Bernard Glyn has invented an improved mouse-trap. We sincerely hope that the said junior will soon oblige with a like for the "ratty" Ratcliffe.

That Tom Merry recently received a letter from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, stating that she has been the victim of a burglary, and that her chickens have been stolen. Fowl play! the humorous Monty Lowther remarked.

That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said that had he been near the burglar he would have given him the "Beckett" punch. "Moran you could do!" again chimed in the humorous Lowther.

That Binks, the St. Jim's boot-boy, interested in the movements of Unionism, has thought it necessary to join the "Union of Quickshine Boys." We think it a "bootiful" idea, too.

That a report in the local newspaper states that a serious explosion has taken place in the vicinity of Cliff House. "Needless to say," the account reads on, "the girls were very much alarmed, whilst, others dropped many stitches in their jumper knitting."

That a glaring advertisement appeared in the same local "rag" entitled "Doubledutch Bros. Tailors and Outfitters, wish to notify the public that their trousers are coming down." (We have written them from here, and find it is only due to the high price of braces.)

That Tom Merry received an envelope addressed to the Editor, "Tom Merry's Weekly," and marked "absorbing" interest. On opening same, he found that it contained a piece of "blotting-paper."

That there has been an unprecedented rush on the GEM LIBRARY since our new feature, in the way of prints, has appeared on the back cover. We should like to point out the fact that there are more like the "Prints" of Wales to come.

That the only thing to bring down the weight of David Llewellyn Wynne is exercise. We suggest that he should take a brisk walk around Mr. "Fatty" Arbuckle.

That "Fatty" Wynne, having cut his left hand, has had orders to the effect that the "winged" arm must rest in a sling. Figgins & Co. are now able to send him for tuck, fearless of its being purloined.

That during a "heated" argument between Otto Gottfried Schneider and Adolphe le Blanc Morny, the former, overcome, "melted" away.

WHO'S WHO IN THIS WEEK'S "GEM" STORY.

(For the Benefit of New Readers.)

JIM DAWLISH, a man of ill-repute. A crackman and a criminal, and a member of the famous "Angel Alley" gang. Has since received many a set-back from Talbot, in his attempts to kidnap Marie Rivers. Many have been the burglarious attempts he has made at St. Jim's. None other than a common hooligan. Served in the Army, but when demobilised could not find an honest means of livelihood. Has since reverted to the life of crime. A blackguard through and through. Some time previously a fierce struggle had taken place on the parapet of a lighthouse. The combatants had been John Rivers—Marie's father—and Jim Dawlish. After a grim tussle, the latter had been precipitated from the edge of the parapet to the black waters below. Nothing had since been heard of him, and it was therefore believed that he had met his fate in the swirling sea beneath.

JOHN RIVERS, father of Marie Rivers, and formerly the leader of the "Angel Alley" gang. Has now forsaken

the life of a crackman for a more honourable calling. Has served his King and Country with distinction, and has won the admiration of both Marie and Talbot.

MARIE RIVERS, the school nurse of St. Jim's. Like the good soul she is, she is liked and respected by all at the school. Always ready to give one a helping hand. A real good chum of Talbot. Many of the attacks of the old gang to kidnap Marie have been frustrated by Talbot at the peril of his own life.

REGINALD TALBOT has been mentioned as the "Toff"—a nickname by which he had been known in the old days—days when he had followed the calling of a crackman. Is now a somewhat quiet and reserved fellow of the School House Shell, and one of the best. Steadfast and true. A staunch chum of Marie Rivers, the school nurse, who was also formerly connected with the "gang."

HARRY MANNERS, a worthy member of the Terrible Three. More studious than either of his chums. A good photo-

grapher, and a very clever mathematician. Always bright and cheerful, and interesting in his conversation. Perhaps not much of an athlete.

ERIC KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, and head prefect. A splendid athlete, and a general all-round good sort. Captains both the cricket and football elevens. Is respected by all; with the exception of the rotters, on whom he lays a heavy hand. Will pit himself against anyone and in any undertaking. Fearless and brave.

THE REV. RICHARD HOLMES, D.D., M.A., the respected headmaster of St. Jim's, and every bit worthy of his position. It can never be said that he is all work and no play. He is thoroughly interested in all of the school sports. Stern at times, and always as cute as a new pin. Is a great friend of all the juniors under his charge. Has no time for sneaks. Never deals out a punishment unless thoroughly convinced that the victim is deserving of it. One who is kind and considerate to all.

ANSWERS TO READERS.

"CA-BARGES, CA-BEANS & CAR-OTS" (Kerry).—No, Rugby is not played regularly at St. Jim's. Manners and Lowther are Tom Merry's two best chums, and study-mates. And, of the two—if you must really have a choice made—perhaps Manners comes first.

"DEAR OULD PAT" (Belfast).—Yes, Reilly of the Fourth comes from your town. So Cutts, the blade of the Fifth Form, is your favourite character? Well, there is simply no accounting for tastes!

P. ARCHIBALD DE VERE ESQ. (San Francisco) writes to say that down in "Frisco" all the fellows to whom he has shown the GEM described it as "ripping." Your letter was most entertaining; be sure to write again and cheer us up, Adolphus Montgomery—oh, beg pardon! I should have said Percy!

"CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK" (Bradford).—Skimpole, the study-mate of Talbot, in the Shell, to give him the introduction you say is necessary, is no good as an inventor. Skimpole's airship was his most famous invention, in memory, and it was perhaps his biggest failure! He also tried anti-air roller-skating, and improving Glyn's "lines" writing machine. Both of these resulted in either damage to himself or to others and property concerned. But in spite of the fact that he is studiously inclined, Form work has no appeal whatever. Brooke is the only day boy at St. Jim's at present, and he is an exception. He lives near Rycombe, and has a pretty sister. Glyn House is also near to St. Jim's.

"JIMMY" (Birmingham).—Odd, isn't it, the way some fellows go out to meet troubles? Talk about putting your

umbrella up before it rains! That's nothing! There are people tramping up and down the world who make a sort of fetish of worry. I honestly believe they would be unhappy if there were nothing special to bother about. That's that! This is not a good system. It is not doing justice to self and company. Sufficient unto the day, etc.—you know the rest. Pity some of the ceaseless worriers spend time asking whether the difficulties which may crop up the week after next can be faced. They should take the advice of the Bishop of London—keep your eyes on the light, and you will always have the shadow behind.

"PEGGY" (Barry) writes a simply wonderful letter, and something to say about growing up. She singles out Tom Merry, but he is not by any means alone in remaining as he was. My correspondent says that these favoured mortals continue young, while others leave school and go out into the world. I do not imagine an answer is required to this amusing letter. The secret of eternal youth is an open secret in a story series. The school porters go on just the same, too. And, pray, why not? Time was made for slaves, not for popular authors. If the favourite characters grew up, where would the stories be? Just picture the angry scenes if the suggestion conveyed in the letter in question were carried out! Continue to read about our famous boys in the GEM, Peggy, and you will remain young, too! Let me know how you like "The Invisible Hand."

"A NOSEY READER" (Naseby) asks me some "nosey" questions! Altogether a very nose-y affair! Well, here goes: Dick Julius has a Jewish nose, not conspicuously hooked. Dick Brooke has a

Syrian nose. Monty Lowther's is a cross between a snail and a Celestial. George Alfred Grundy's was Grecian originally, but in one of his pugnacious fights with Jack Blake, the worthy son of Yorkshire transformed it into a decidedly Wellington one. Kildare's is Celestial. Baker's, Knox's, and Dudley's are Roman noses. Cutts' and Crooke's are Grecian. "Aubrey" Racke's is something between a Grecian and a snub. That is all I can tell you at the moment, but I expect you will be satisfied with what you have "nosed" out—what?

FAMOUS "DOCTOR GEM" (Pompey).—I am most pleased to hear from you, old friend, and to hear that your mother not only approves of your reading the GEM and the "Boys' Herald," but reads them herself. Your recovery is simply wonderful. I have as much faith in Dr. GEM as you have. Any boy with an illness, given some real good reading to keep him bright, and from thinking of his troubles, stands a very good chance of pulling through. Yes, the recent yarn of Cardew was good, wasn't it? Cardew is a very entertaining chap. More of him as soon as possible. Good luck to you, and best wishes!

"A POLITE GRUMBLER" (Westcliffe-on-Sea).—The reason why there are not more stories about the less important characters is simply because they are less important. There is no First Form at St. Jim's. There are eleven students in the Shell passage. The School House Fourth is larger by over a dozen juniors. Before you see this, Marie Rivers and Talbot will be in the limelight again. Tom Merry is the best boxer in the Shell and the junior school.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 674.

BY
Michael
Poole

A Row in Study No. 10.

THERE were quite a number of people in Katie's who felt very sick about the way the Grimsditch affair had panned out.

But there was no one who felt it more than Mr. Roger Blunt. He had a queer and unpleasant idea in his mind that in some way or other he had mismanaged the whole job. When you've got a swift and calculating sort of mind like Roger's, it's very annoying to think you've bungled anything.

So Roger sat in his own room and tried to go through the whole thing again. He hadn't got very far, when Mr. Steed, popularly known as Sammy, came round to see him, and hear the full truth about all the wild rumours that were beginning to fly round.

"I hear that you have successfully settled that unpleasant Grimsditch affair?" Sammy began, in his mildly excited way. "Dexter and his friends were behind it again? I always thought that boy would go too far, Blunt. I like him really, but he's too wild altogether. What does the Head say about it? Of course he won't allow that kind of thing! One must take a firm stand somewhere, and though I always think—"

"I wish I did!" snapped out Roger. "But I'm only trying to think at present. I have not been successful, Steed."

"Then it isn't true about Dexter?" Sammy cried out, and it's only fair to say that he seemed quite pleased at the new thought.

"I don't know!" Roger was evidently very touchy this afternoon. "Sit down, Steed, and let me relieve my mind to you."

Sammy sat down, and Mr. Blunt drew a sheet of foolscap towards him, on which was written a queer sort of time-table.

"Here are the hard facts, Steed," Roger began again, in a very quiet and steady voice. "I would like your opinion when I have finished."

He went through every detail, from the time when he saw Dexter and his friends stealing quietly back to their dormitory to the present moment. He told of his chat with Grimsditch, and how it was pretty plain that Grimsditch knew, but didn't want to land anyone in trouble. There came the detail of the answers to

the questions which Roger had put to his whole Form that afternoon.

"Everything points to the fact that they intended to play a joke on Grimsditch, but carried it too far," Roger concluded. "But each one of them, quite definitely and firmly, asserts that they know nothing whatever about the hoax."

"Dexter and his friends are truthful boys," Sammy said slowly, then sat up quickly, and seemed to be listening intently.

"There's a row on somewhere," he asserted. "Do you think—?" "We'll go!" Roger decided swiftly. "It sounds like the Transitus corridor. I am interested."

Without another word the two masters rose and made for the Trans corridor. The noise was beginning to subside very considerably when they reached there, but there seemed to be a crowd struggling to get into Study No. 10. At this particular time the corridor itself was in semi-darkness, and none of the boys round the study door noticed the approach of the two masters. By the time the two had reached the study, the whole of the crowd seemed to have packed itself into the room.

Jolly Roger touched Mr. Steed on the arm.

"We'll remain unseen watchers for a time, I think," he whispered. "We need not interfere unless absolutely necessary, but it may be as well to observe what the game is."

Someone had put a light on in Study No. 10, and Roger and Sammy Steed, standing back in the shadows, had quite an interesting picture on which to gaze. The table in the study had been banged against the far wall. In front of it Roger could catch a glimpse of Strong, Curtis, and Duff standing in an attitude of defiance. On the table itself was Dexter, and he was shouting out something, but no one could tell just what it was because everyone else was calling out, too.

What had happened was quite simple. The yarn about Dexter & Co. being responsible for the outrage on Grimsditch had spread. Likewise the story of how the whole of the Trans had been put in detention simply because Dexter & Co. had refused to tell the truth.

Now Dexter, Strong, and Curtis were probably among the most popular fellows in the school. Duff, Dobbin, and Bunting

were regarded as jolly good chaps who'd never play a mean trick on anyone, even if they were always game for a giddy jaunt. Some fellows said they didn't believe the yarn about them; others said that if it were true, the school ought to let them know just what they thought about them.

In the end, it boiled down to a sort of deputation, whose duty was to wring the truth out of the whole six. It might have ended in a first-class row, but Smithy of the Fifth decided to take charge, and he kept the fellows who were in favour of snatching Study No. 10 and its occupants straight away well under control.

They marched in a body to Study No. 10, and, as luck would have it, found the whole six there. Promptly the crowd rushed in.

"We've come to hear the full yarn about this Grimsditch business," Smithy began, and if old Smith had been left to handle the job alone, probably everything would have gone quite smoothly. But, of course, about fifteen other fellows had to butt in, and start threatening what would happen if they didn't tell the truth.

Somebody thought Curtis was going to try and chuck him out, and another fellow, who was gently pushed back by a Bill Strong, also tried to throw his weight about. For about ten minutes the fun lasted. Bill Strong managed to get the table back against the wall, and Dobbin and Duff did their best to look after their chums' property. It's only fair to Smithy to say that he did his best to keep the mob in order.

"Fair play!" he yelled. "Keep quiet, you chaps! Steady, Bill! We've not come to rag you. Honour bright, we haven't!"

"It's a feud!" someone else called derisively. "Dickie Dexter's own feud—and we'll give him a taste of the real thing!"

"Give 'em a chance to explain!" Smithy cried, and heaved some of his own followers back. "Now, Kid! What about it? You fixed up the idea of this feud against Roger and got the Trans in a mess. Given the school a bad name and—"

"Rot!" Curtis yelled back. "Go and look after those beauties in the Fifth, Smithy. If the Trans want an explanation—"

"We do!" There were several fellows from the Trans in the crowd, and they gave no uncertain answer. "And we're going to have it!"

Goodness knows how long the row would have gone on if Dickie Dexter hadn't made a big attempt to do the orator's stunt. He jumped on to the table and held up his hand just like all the big speakers do. Somebody heaved a book at him, and another fellow threw a cushion. That ought to have been enough for Richard, but he wasn't going to be knocked out by a whole library of books, or a shopful of cushions. He dodged them, and kept on yelling out for silence.

"Let the Kid speak!" yelled Smithy. "Go on, Babe! We're listening!"

"I'm not going to make a long speech," Dexter shouted out above the din, and his shrill voice somehow had a quietening effect. "I'd like to tell the whole lot of you to mind your own jolly business and push off out of this study, but I've always been brought up politely, so I'll speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Hear, hear!" quite a number of the fellows agreed.

Bill Strong and Curtis had lined up in front of the table to protect the Kid. Duff was also struggling to get there, and Bunting and Dobbie were doing quite well as quieteners.

"Tell us about the feud!" someone yelled, and his shrill voice seemed to be a taunt. But it only made Richard smile contemptuously.

"There's still a feud on!" he shouted back. "Most of the Transitus, like the brave fellows they are, have backed out of it. But Bill Strong and old Curtis, Duff and Dobbie, as well as Bunting, are sticking by me. There's a feud! Get that fixed in your minds. And it's against Jolly Roger, who's trying to trick up a rotten case against us. We'll have to do with Grimsditch, and don't know how he got trussed up. We're ready to give our solemn word of honour to anyone. We weren't even out of the school that night, and I give you my word we'd even forgotten we'd ever left the dormitory."

"But why did you leave?" someone asked.

"That's our business!" the Kid retorted. "Nobody will ever know just where we were, and Jolly Roger can't tell the Book what he likes. But he's just gone too far this time. If we get the sack, we get it because the Transitus won't back us up against a master who goes sneaking round and sets traps to catch us and wants us to break our word of honour. And we are not going to do it. We'll go out with flags flying. That's all!"

Outside in the dim light of the corridor, Sammy Steed could see a quiet little smile, though Jolly Roger's lips.

"I think we have heard very nearly enough, Steed," he whispered; but they stayed for a few minutes longer.

Smithy was making a sort of reply to Dexter's speech, but compared with what Smithy could generally manage in the speech line it wasn't very great.

He simply said that if Strong and Dexter assured him and the rest of the fellows that they hadn't had anything to do with the Grimsditch business, they were bound to believe them, and that was the end of it.

Before he finished most of the chaps were talking together almost quietly, and all that the two masters could overhear was just a general sort of rumble. Even Dexter had jumped down from the table, and was talking quite reasonably with one or two other Trans fellows.

Mr. Blunt and Mr. Steed moved off. Not until they were back in Jolly

Roger's own room did Sammy begin to ask questions.

"I don't approve of eavesdropping," Mr. Blunt said presently; "but in this row I feel quite glad that I have learned how Dexter regards me. A little criticism now and again is excellent for all masters. Now, Steed, I've got to find out the truth before to-morrow morning, or my reputation is gone for ever. Let us imagine that we are detectives."

And just about the same moment Smithy of the Fifth was saying to Bill Strong and the Kid:

"You leave it to me, my lads! I'm going to do the great detective act this very night. There's something jolly queer behind old Grimsdy's story, and I know a thing or two that'll make him sit up. Jolly Roger will be in the cart to-morrow!"

Following the Trail!

THERE'S no doubt about it that when it came to real hard thinking Jolly Roger was a first-class won. In about ten minutes' time he had boiled the Dexter difficulty down to one or two possibilities.

"I'm going to inquire whether any of the six have had hampers, or even registered letters just lately," Roger told Sammy Steed. "That is a clue, and I shall follow it up."

So you can see old Roger hunting out the Recorder, and going through things with him. There had been hampers for Duff and for Bunting within the past few days.

"Ah, ah!" said Roger, and began to feel hopeful. "We must find out just what happened to those hampers."

It wasn't a very difficult job, because the Recorder remembered quite clearly that Scrimgore, the assistant-porter, had carted the packages away.

Jolly Roger promptly sought out Scrimgore.

Roger had really only seen Scrimgore once or twice, but he'd summed him up as a very good man and one of the sort who wouldn't sneak, but would be willing to give a helping hand now and again. So, quite briefly, Roger told the porter the situation about Dexter & Co., and how he was trying to gather evidence in their favour, and Scrimgore stood to attention like a soldier and never moved a muscle till Roger had finished.

"You mean, sir, that if it can be proved that they were only enjoying themselves in a quiet sort of way inside the school, then they wouldn't get into a serious row? But if it can't be proved that they were inside the school, then—"

"They will probably be expelled in disgrace!" Roger said. "And they won't say where they were on that night, sir?" Scrimgore asked.

"That is so," Roger agreed. "There's apparently some point of honour involved. If I knew what it was, I should, of course, understand and respect it; but as it is, I don't know."

"Yes, sir," said Scrimgore. "I am afraid, sir, that they are trying to protect me. I know exactly where they were from shortly after eleven o'clock, sir, until about half-past twelve. They had nothing whatever to do with this practical joke on the other boy, sir."

And right there and then Scrimgore told about the midnight feast. He told it in a way which made it sound as though he was personally responsible, and just did it because boys would be boys, and it was a good idea for him to keep his eye on them. But he recognized the fact that it would probably mean the sack for him.

Roger listened, and then began to smile.

"All right, Scrimgore," he said. "I won't say I approve of your conduct, because I don't. But I am, very much obliged for your help, and you have done those boys a good turn. You can keep a secret? I shall do my best to keep it."

When Roger left Scrimgore he was feeling ever so much better. He had proved himself absolutely wrong; but Roger was the sort of man who didn't care twopenny about himself so long as he got the truth. Of course, he hadn't finished the job yet. But he had satisfied himself that the Transitus boys were not to blame, and that cheered him tremendously. The question still remained: Who did the poor Grimsditch send and leave him out in the cold night air?

The best plan was to go along and have another chat with Grimsditch himself. In the light of what he now knew it seemed very queer to Roger that Grimsditch had almost admitted that it was Dexter & Co. There were quite a lot of funny suspicions in Roger's mind as he went to Grimsditch's study.

By now Grimsditch was reckoned to be practically fit and well again. The doctor had seen him, and he had been told to take things quietly for a day or two, but he was not put into hospital, or anything of that sort.

Roger tapped gently at the door of the prefect's study. The door was evidently one or two other fellows inside, and even from outside it rather sounded as though a fierce sort of argument was going on. Anyhow, no one answered Roger's knock, and the master of Transitus at last opened the door himself, and looked inside.

"Hope I'm not intruding," he began, and then stopped, because it was very clear that he was intruding.

Grimsditch was on the floor, face downwards, and Smithy of the Fifth was in the middle of his back. Considering what Grimsditch had gone through recently, it didn't seem to Roger that Smithy was quite playing the game.

But neither of the pair on the floor had noticed Roger's entry, and Grimsditch was gasping out something about leaving him alone, and the row there would be if Smithy didn't get out quickly, while the Fifth-Former was repeating certain demands.

"Will you promise to tell Roger the

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truth to-night?" Smithy was asking. "You've got to do it yourself, because I'm not going to sneak. Will you promise?"

"What's it got to do with you?" Grimsditch groaned. "Get out! How do you know?"

By this time Roger was standing right by the pair, and as Grimsditch twisted his head he saw the master. Almost in the same instant Smithy looked up, and observed that Jolly Roger was taking a genteel interest in his performance.

"Sorry, sir!" Smithy jumped to his feet at once. "I—I was just having a little argument with Grimsditch, sir."

"So I observe," said Roger. "But are the Fifth permitted to argue in that manner with prefects of the Sixth? Really, Smith, I am surprised. May I inquire what is the subject of the argument, or would you prefer to settle it later in your own way?"

It wasn't so much what Roger said as the queer little way he said it. Smithy felt a bit crushed, and Grimsditch didn't feel any better for it. Both of them felt that Roger had them at his mercy.

"I was just coming in to see you, Grimsditch, about that unfortunate experience of yours," Roger went on. "I gather that Smith came earlier, and is making inquiries on the same subject. Stay I sit down?"

It was all very nice and polite, and Roger was smiling kindly through it all. But his swift mind had grasped quite a lot of things, and he meant to manage this in his own way.

"Do you wish me to go, sir?" Smith asked meekly, but Roger shook his head.

"It is Grimsditch's study," he said. "If he would like you to stay, I should prefer it. But if he would rather you went, then I raise no objection. Similarly, if you would like to tell me what your argument is about I shall be most happy to act as confidential adviser. Quite confidential, you understand. Please forget for the moment that I am a master of the school."

Of course, even if Grimsditch had wanted to object to anything he couldn't very well have done so. As it was, he simply said that he didn't mind anything.

They got going pretty quickly after that. Smithy, it turned out, had a pretty good idea of why Grimsditch had

been into the town that particular night, and he jumped to a certain conclusion.

There wasn't any question of clues so far as Smithy was concerned. He came along and told Grimsditch that he'd got to tell the truth about his visit, and accused him of knowing pretty well just who the fellows were who had attacked him.

And now Grimsditch told the full and complete truth to Jolly Roger. It wasn't really a very complicated story, but it hadn't anything to do with anyone in the school.

One or two fellows during the past few months had been going into Dulchester at night to play certain gambling games at a little club.

At one time there had been perhaps half a dozen chaps from the Sixth and Fifth who went. Smithy was never one of them, but, being captain of the Fifth, he managed to learn quite a lot about it, and had warned off one or two fellows in his own form.

And, as a matter of fact, the Fifth fellows did drop it pretty quickly, partly because it was too risky, and partly because they simply lost money every time they went after about the first time. But Grimsditch was actually a winner of money, and that was why he, of all the fellows, kept on.

The real truth, as Grimsditch even explained to Roger to-night, was that he had found out certain little tricks on the board on which the game was played, and he took advantage of the fact. Last night he had actually won three or four pounds, but was accused of cheating. He got away all right, but various threats had been made.

Of course, the younger men at the club knew perfectly well that Grimsditch would never dare tell anyone about going to the club. They made up their minds there and then that not only would they get back the money out of which Grimsditch had in a way cheated them, but they'd jolly well teach him a lesson which he wouldn't forget.

Three of them lay in wait for him at the top of the drive, and it was these who trussed Grimsditch up, and took from him exactly the amount he had won that night. They knew perfectly well that Grimsditch would never dare tell about them, because it would mean telling the whole truth about his visits to Dulchester.

But to-night, under Jolly Roger's eagle eye, Grimsditch told the full truth. Smithy had already got part of it, and the rest he had guessed, and he was just trying to persuade Grimsditch in his own gentle way to go along and tell Mr. Blunt, when the latter came in.

"I fancy I should have found out the truth even without your assistance, Smith," Jolly Roger said, because he didn't want Smith to get too great an idea of himself. "However, now that we know the truth, I think we shall be able to deal with the matter quite well. In the circumstances, Smith, I trust that you will regard this as a secret?"

"Yes, sir," said Smithy.

And Roger gave him a quick nod, whereon the Fifth-Former left the room. Just what took place between Roger and Grimsditch doesn't really concern the story of the feud. As a matter of fact, it had to be reported to the Head, and Mr. Blunt himself went with Grimsditch.

A few days later it was understood that Grimsditch had resigned his position as prefect, and someone else in the Sixth had filled the place. But Grimsditch remained on at Katie's, because the Head apparently agreed with Jolly Roger that he had already been sufficiently punished by his experience of that night.

But Smithy did as he was told by

Roger, and didn't let out a word. Even when he saw Bill Strong on the following morning he only smiled at him cheerfully, and told him there was nothing to worry about.

Jolly Roger Still Rules!

OF course, the Noble Six from Studies No. 9 and 10 didn't know anything about Jolly Roger's discoveries, nor did anyone else in the Transitus.

But there was a ton of excitement knocking round that night. It had been the most exciting day even the Transitus could ever remember.

There was the early morning run and surprising discovery of a prefect bound and gagged, and other details, followed by Jolly Roger's harsh treatment of themselves, and the declaration of the feud; and on top of that had come the amazing events of the afternoon, when Roger had turned the tables on Dexter & Co., which seemed to kill the feud right away.

And after this most of the Transitus had decided on a feud against Dexter and his friends, but especially against Dexter.

What happened? It's rather hard to explain just how it all came about, but before you could count ten, so to speak, everyone realised that the feud against Roger wasn't off, after all.

One or two fellows guessed what had really happened, and that Dexter and his chums had only been having a midnight feast, and Roger had set a trap for them, and was now going to get them expelled.

It's queer how things swing round sometimes. Everything was gorgeously mixed up, so far as the Trans were concerned, but there were just two or three things which stood out quite clearly.

First of all, they realised that Jolly Roger was a clever man, and he had absolutely dished Dexter & Co.

Secondly, they realised that in the morning the six would be marched to the headmaster by Jolly Roger, and that it was about a hundred to one on the whole bunch being told to pack up here and then.

Even if the Head was inclined to be lenient, everyone felt that Dexter, Strong, and Duff would go. Curtis, Dobbin, and Bunting might get off with something less. Just why they would be divided up in this way no one quite knew, but somehow you felt that the Head would drop on the first three.

Then everybody began to realise what a rotten form the Trans would be if Dickie Dexter and Bill Strong weren't in it. At five o'clock they had all been up against Dexter; at half-past six he was easily the most popular fellow in the school, but Bill Strong, who came a good second.

"If they do go," said Benson to Drubb, "we'll give 'em a procession, and march through the town with them. There'll be no half-measures about the send-off. We'll show Jolly Roger, and the Beak, too, just how we think about masters who set traps to get fellows into a row. The Transitus isn't beaten yet!"

That's just how most of the fellows felt about it. The feud was going to go on and on now. In the dormitories that night a dozen different plans were discussed, and it ended up with forming a little committee to take charge of all arrangements the moment the Head's final verdict was known.

After prayers the following morning, the Form went up swiftly to the Trans room. Benson, monitor for the week, and General Secretary of the Committee to Carry Out All Arrangements, had a quick word or two with his helpers, and

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then the whole Form settled down in a most unusual manner.

When Jolly Roger came marching in, the Form sat as though it were the prize crowd of the school for goodness; but Roger could feel the excitement in his bones. He could feel, too, that every eye in the Form was watching him intently.

But Roger was smiling just as cheerily as ever, and opened his books as he always did before he banged the desk with his pointer.

"French grammar!" he commanded. "That is the subject for our first hour, gentlemen! I want your earnest and undivided attention, please!"

They opened their books without a word. That was the difficulty with Roger, that you never quite knew what he was going to do. Just as they'd found the right page, and decided that Roger hadn't come to show their feelings, Roger spoke again, and this time it was in a very quiet and pleasant voice.

"Before we do begin our morning's lesson," he said gently, "I feel that I ought to mention the matter which caused us all so much trouble yesterday. I want, first of all, to say that I was quite wrong in imagining that Strong, Curtis, Duff, Dobbin, Bunting, or even Dexter, had anything whatever to do with the attack on Grimsditch."

The Form gasped a little at that. It was the calm way Roger told them which surprised them, and the queer way in which he put Dexter last, as though it were a good joke.

"I am very sorry indeed that I made such a mistake, though I feel sure you will all agree that it was quite a natural one. If you had seen Dexter, and his friends coming about the school after midnight— But we won't go into that! It is sufficient to say that they were having a midnight feast, which is, of course, expressly forbidden by the rules of the school. I shall be glad if they will remain behind after morning school, when I will discuss the question with them."

Roger was beaming now quite in his best manner. You would have thought that he was thoroughly enjoying his heart-to-heart talk.

"I have discovered who it was that played the joke upon Grimsditch, and find that it is no one connected with the school at all," Roger carried on. "I am very glad. But I am very sorry indeed that this Form was detained yesterday afternoon. Very sorry! It was a mistake. A mistake on my part. Even masters make mistakes occasionally—but not so often as the boys in their Forms do. However, everything has really turned out very satisfactorily, and I am very pleased that any suspicion which was in my mind at one time has proved to be entirely unfounded. The honour of the Form is maintained!"

Roger sat up even more stiffly than ever, and he rattled out the last sentence in fine style.

"Hear, hear, sir!" Benson said, and the whole Form began to laugh. Roger laughed with them. For quite ten seconds everyone was smiling and laughing, and then Roger jumped to his feet.

"We will now turn to page one hundred and seventeen," he said, in quite a different voice, and everybody stopped laughing, and turned quickly to his book. "For a few minutes we will devote ourselves to the revision of this chapter on which most of you appear to be strangely weak. The subjunctive—"

The Transitus began real work again. The excitement was over.

There was just one little point to be settled, and twenty-four members of the Form waited anxiously at the end of the morning to hear what Roger had said to the Noble Six. They waited in the

corridor outside the Transitus Form-room.

Inside the room the six lined up sheepishly after the rest of the Form had filed out. Roger waited till the door had been closed on the others, and then turned to them.

"Ah, yes!" he nodded to them abruptly. "Let me see. I have lectured you previously on the hopelessness of trying to keep a secret from me? It is always a mistake. But we won't discuss it to-day. I think you had all better come and have tea with me to-morrow, when we can have a quiet chat on the subject. You might explain to the others, however, more fully than I can do in full class. Oh, and, by the way, the headmaster is very pained that the whole Form has been reported to him for being late at dinner yesterday. As captain of the Form, Strong, you may explain to them that they spent an afternoon in detention because of that. They didn't know it at the time, nor did I, but it is quite an excellent arrangement. You will tell them, Strong? And I shall see the six of you at tea to-morrow? Very good! You may go now!"

That was all! Jolly Roger was still beaming as they left him. Somehow the six felt washed-out because everything seemed to have fallen flat. Outside, in the corridor, the rest of the Form crowded round and begged for news.

"Oh, tell 'em, Kid!" Bill Strong begged. "It's a wash-out! I'm trying to grasp it all!"

"We're going to have tea with Roger," the Kid explained. "That's our punishment. And all of us spent yesterday afternoon in detention because old Glad-rags reported the Form for being late for dinner. So that's settled. Glad-rags and the Head will be pleased!"

"My giddy aunt!" said Benson, as he grasped it all. "Then—everything's settled? You're settled, and we're settled, and Glad-rags and the Beak will be happy!"

"And there isn't any feud with Jolly

Roger—or anybody?" the Worm asked. "He's got a way of settling things, hasn't he?"

Of course, the Worm was always a bit of an ass, but he spoke just what the others thought for once in a way.

"Good old Roger!" said Benson. "Let's give him a cheer—just for the fun of the thing, and to show there's no ill-feeling!"

"Right!" Bill Strong jumped at the idea. He felt that he wanted some touch of excitement, anyhow, and this was quite a good idea. "Three cheers for Roger! Good old Jolly Roger!"

They cheered. Dickie Dexter cheered as hard as any of them. So did Curtis and Duff, and Dobbin and Bunting weren't far behind. They weren't going to be expelled, and there wasn't a feud. Good old Roger!

The Duffers' Society was dead, but then you can always invent a new society. Scringore said later that Mr. Blunt was a good sort. Smithy, in a very mysterious way, told Bill Strong that very few people realised how clever Roger was. It wanted a fellow of real intelligence like himself, to understand, but he wouldn't explain what it was that he did understand. While Grimsditch—quite a lot of chaps were glad when they heard he was no longer a prefect, while Grimsy himself felt very thankful it wasn't anything worse, and made up his mind to get the prefect's job back again in a term or two.

And Dickie Dexter has finished with feuds—against Jolly Roger, anyway! Roger talked to them kindly when they went to tea, and Richard Dexter became one of the Good Boys of the Transitus—for nearly a whole week after the feud at St. Katie's had been killed!

THE END.

(Order next week's GEM at once in order to make sure of the opening chapters of our new wonder story, "The Invisible Hand.")



Dickie Dexter jumped on to the table and held up his hand. Somebody heaved a book at him, and another fellow threw a cushion. He dodged them, and kept yelling out for silence. (See page 35.)

YOUR EDITOR'S CHAT.

Address: Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farrington Street, London, E.C.4.

My Dear Readers,—In this number our rollicking short school serial, "The Feud at St. Katie's," comes to a close, and it will be followed in our next issue by the wender story, "The Invisible Hand." This story has been widely advertised, and I think it will create something of a sensation. There will undoubtedly be a huge demand for next week's "Gem," and I want all my regular readers to get their copy early in order that they may not be disappointed. It is quite certain that many newsgists will quickly sell out their copies. A point of great interest to my readers is the fact that this story has been filmed by the popular Vitaphone Film Company, and you will be able to see the film at your favourite cinema after you have read the yarn in the "Gem." Don't delay. Get your "Gem" early—you will not be sorry, I am positive. Many letters have reached me from my chums, who state how delighted they are with our new feature, "Pictures For Your Den."

There will be another excellent one in our next number. There are so many new features to discuss, that our grand long complete school yarn almost escaped my notice.

The story next week will be entitled "Talbot's Master-Stroke," and I am positive that you will find it a very entertaining one indeed. I am not going to spoil your interest by saying too much about it now, but when I mention that sport enters largely into it, and that there are many exciting contests, I am sure your eagerness to obtain our next number will increase. In this week's "Boys' Herald" there is quite a budget of interesting reading. The new stories about the comical monkey, "Marzipan of the Japes," are creating a good deal of interest, and every boy who likes a good laugh should read these rollicking stories.

TWENTY YEARS.

Some writers seem to imagine that the space of time mentioned here is a tremendous span. Look, for instance, at the case of Rip van Winkle, who went to sleep for a couple of decades, and came out an old, old man. But in real life twenty years is a term of time which often means little enough. Dumas was much nearer the mark in his book, "Twenty Years After," which showed D'Artagnan, the King's Musketeer, still

the same splendid fighting-man as he had shown himself in the earlier story. Of course, twenty years is a long time, but the fellow who begins to remember things which happened five, then ten years ago, will see what I am driving at. He does not, as a rule, feel that there has been much change, especially if his work keeps him in his old town or village. One may take it, however, that the novelist has come to regard a score of years as the big stretch which brings anything, and makes the young man old.

THE PICTURES.

I saw a scathing attack on the film the other day, and like many drastically expressed opinions, a lot of unfairness had crept in. Of course, there are pictures which had far better not have been made. They do nobody any good, and reflect immense discredit on their producers. But look at the vast number of pleasant cinematograph shows! Unfortunately, the bad will get among the good. The plain fact is there, however, that the tender and sympathetic stories told by the films are all to the good, likewise the cheery and humorous subjects which you find given at the picture-houses. And it is as well to remember, too, that for many a hard worker, to say nothing of the youngsters, the cinema provides an amusement which can be relied upon always, and does not run to a heavy cost.

Upon Editor



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