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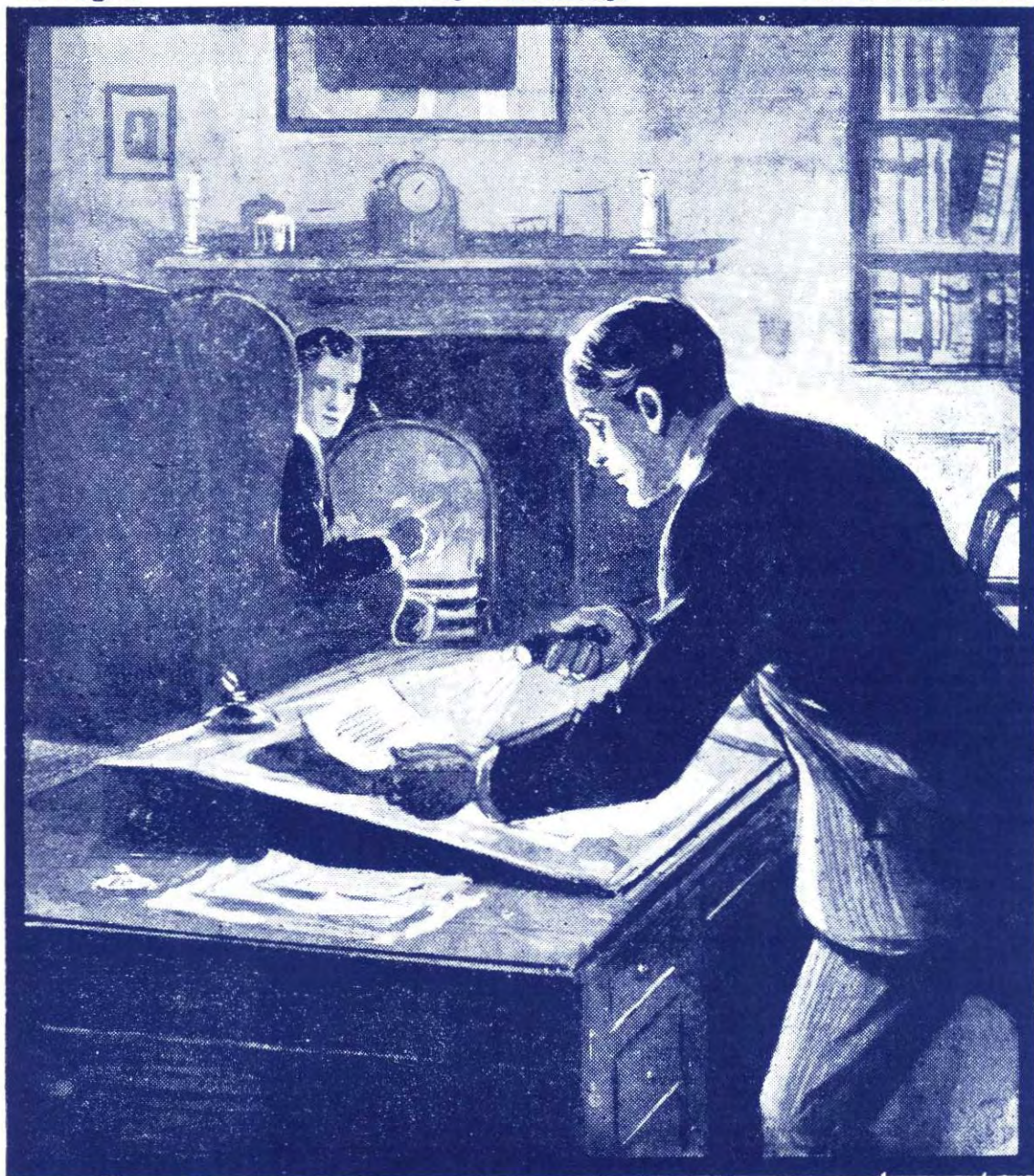
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LIBRARY

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Every Wednesday.

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THE FIFTH FORM MYSTERY!

(A Mysterious Incident from the Grand Long Complete School Story Inside.)

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EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

Next week's splendid long story of St. Jim's, entitled: "Self-Condemed," shows Mr. Martin Clifford at the top of his form. I do not hesitate to say that the yarn is the most powerful and dramatic the famous author has ever written.

Darrell knows somebody who is urgently, critically in need of the sum of fifty pounds. He works like a nigger to win the Founder's Scholarship, as his victory in the difficult examination would place him in possession of that amount of money; but he fails.

He must assist his friend, so he casts round for another means of raising the cash—a moneylender—and gets a loan.

So far, so good; but simultaneously with this happening, a robbery takes place at the school. Banknotes to the value of fifty pounds are stolen, and suspicion falls on Darrell, for it is known that he despatched a registered letter containing notes just after the theft. The whole thing looks black enough. Darrell is caught in a net, and the story reveals in tragic fashion how the very honour and lofty sense of principle of Darrell serve to drag him down.

You will also be ready to give a hearty welcome to the grand old captain, Eric Kildare, when his portrait appears in the gallery next week.

Kildare is a trump. Have you noticed how he never takes advantage of his authority?

I am making arrangements to give the artist a better show. It was time the half page illustrations came back. I know you prefer them. In next week's grand number you will see the improvement in question has taken effect. The Kildare portrait is positively a triumph, and, in a word, is worthy of the leader of St. Jim's.

Of course, you are collecting the splendid series of "Popular" plates, showing the many different types of railway engines. These constitute a record, and it would be a thousand pities if this unrivalled opportunity were not seized. Moreover, our Companion Paper, the "Popular," is a wonderful moneysworth, and its comic supplement—in which Baggy Trimble is concerned—would make a cat laugh.

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YOUR EDITOR.



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The FIFTH FORM MYSTERY



A Grand Long Complete School Story of Gerald Cutts and the Famous Chums of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Late Hours.

"DARRELL'S late!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better late than early," remarked Monty Lowther. "Punctuality is the thief of time."

The juniors in the Common-room in the School House could not help remarking on the fact that Darrell of the Sixth was late.

But they did not mind—not in the least. Nobody was specially anxious to go to bed.

It was a quarter to ten, and half-past nine was bed-time for the Shell and the Fourth. It was Darrell's turn of duty to see lights out for those two forms, and promptly at half-past nine Darrell of the Sixth should have been shepherding the juniors off to their dormitories. But Darrell of the Sixth had not turned up.

Now, if Tom Merry & Co. had been model youths, bent upon setting a shining example to the school and to the universe generally, they would have had their dutiful eyes upon the clock, and would have trotted off to dorm without waiting for the prefect to appear.

But they weren't.

Bed-time was never very welcome, and Tom Merry & Co. did not object to staying up. It was up to the prefect on duty to see that they went to bed. If the prefect forgot, there was no reason why the juniors should not follow his example and forget also.

So they stayed in the Common-room, wondering what had become of George Darrell of the Sixth.

Darrell, as a rule, was a very thoughtful fellow. It was quite unlike him to forget a duty. But evidently he had forgotten now.

"Ten minutes to ten!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. "Dawwell weally ought to be heah!"

"He's swotting!" remarked Manners of the Shell. "He's in for the giddy Founder's prize, you know, and he's digging into Horace in his study, I expect."

"Pewwaps somebody ought to go and wemind him," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let him rip!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We'll have another game of chess, Manners. I'll beat you this time."

"Not in your lifetime," said Manners.

"Dawwell would get into a wov if the Housemastah found us up at this time!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Let's hope he won't, then," said Monty Lowther. "Darrell can go on digging into merry old Horatius till midnight if he likes, and we'll make a night of it."

"Yes, rather!"

"Yaas, deah boys, but it is Dawwell's dutay—"

"It's a case of 'quis custodiet ipsos custodes'!" remarked Monty Lowther. "That's Latin, and classical, and fits the case."

"Does it weally, Lowthah? Do you know what that means, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, with interest.

"Fathead! Do you think I should quote Latin without knowing what it means?" demanded Monty Lowther indignantly.

"Yaas; I wegard it as vewy pwob—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Construe!" grinned Blake. "Put it in words of one syllable for Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It means, who peels the peelers," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! That does not sound to me like a pwopah twanslation, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "Are you sure you have got it wight?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, it is ten o'clock!" said Arthur Augustus. "I believe I am gettin' wathah sleepay, unless it is the effect of Lowthah's humour. Dawwell must have gone to sleep in his study."

"P'raps he's in a fit," suggested Baggy Trimble cheerfully. "He's been looking a lot down on his luck lately. He's jolly bad-tempered, too. He gave me a cuff this morning."

"Pwobably you asked for it, Twimble."

"He's rather a beast," said Trimble. "All the prefects are beasts, if you come to that. So are all the masters. The biggest beast of all is Mr. Railton, our Housemaster. Of all the beasts—"

"Shut up, Trimble!" said Tom Merry hurriedly.

In the open doorway there had appeared the stalwart figure of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

Baggy Trimble had his back to the door, and he did not see Mr. Railton. And he did not shut up. Baggy Trimble was so often told to shut up that such injunctions passed him by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"Rot!" retorted Baggy. "You know he's a beast, Tom Merry! Of all the beasts, I think Railton takes the cake, and I wouldn't mind telling him so to his face. I'm not afraid of a dashed Housemaster, I can tell you!"

"Trimble!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Baggy Trimble spun round like a fat humming-top at the deep voice of the Housemaster.

His eyes seemed to be starting from his head as he blinked at Mr. Railton. His fat jaw dropped, and he stood rooted to the floor. The effect of the ghost of Banquo upon Macbeth was a mere joke to the effect of Mr. Railton upon Baggy Trimble at that moment.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "Yes, sir? D-d-d-did you speak, sir?"

"You were speaking of me, Trimble."

"I, sir? Oh, no, sir!"

"Trimble!"

"I wasn't speaking at all, sir!" gasped the hapless Baggy, quite forgetful of his bold intention of calling Mr. Railton a beast to his face. "I—I was just looking at the chess, sir, and saying to Tom Merry that—that he ought to—to move his knight, sir! Wasn't I, Merry? I assure you, sir, that I never uttered a word!"

If Baggy Trimble expected that complicated denial to carry conviction, he was disappointed.

"You are a disrespectful young rascal, sir!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

"I, sir? Oh, no, sir! I—I was just saying to Lowther how much I—I respected you, sir!" groaned Baggy. "Wasn't I, Lowther?"

"If I had not overheard your words by chance, Trimble, I should punish you very severely."

"Oh!" gasped Baggy, feeling greatly relieved that the Housemaster had overheard his words by chance.

"But take care, Trimble!"

"Certainly, sir! I—I—I'll be as careful as anything. I—I was just saying to Blake—"

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"Silence!" Mr. Railton glanced at the clock. "It is nearly ten. Why are not you juniors in bed?"

The juniors were silent. They looked at one another, and looked at Mr. Railton, but nobody proffered an explanation.

"Whose duty is it to-night to see lights out in the junior dormitories?" asked the Housemaster.

"Darrell's, sir," faltered Tom Merry.

"Very good. You will go to your dormitories at once, and I shall speak to Darrell," said Mr. Railton.

The Shell and the Fourth got a move on at once. They trooped away to their respective dormitories without a word. Mr. Railton, with a grim brow, saw lights out for the Shell and the Fourth.

"I guess Darrell is booked for a row," Wildrake of the Fourth remarked when the Housemaster was gone.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "He is wathah a thoughtless chap. I am sowwy he is goin' to get into a waw, though. Now I come to think of it, we weally ought to have gone off to dorm without waitin' for him, you know."

"Rather a pity you didn't think of that sooner, Gussy!" remarked Blake. "That wonderful brain of yours wants winding up. It's slow!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Serve him right!" said Trimble. "He's a beast, and Railton's a beast, and I hope the beast will rag the other beast—"

"Shut up, Trimble!"

"Yah!"

"Dawwell's aftah the Foundah's Latin pwize," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I believe he is wathah a dab at classics. I thought of goin' in for the Foundah's pwize myself—"

"What?" howled B'ake.

"Nothin' surpwisin' in that, is there, Blake? You only have to do a papah on Howace—"

"And you're a dab at Horace, of course!" suggested Herries sarcastically.

"Weally, Hewwies, I twust I could do a papah on Howace! It is true that I have nevah looked at Howace yet, but I have no doubt whatevah that I could tackle him, if I put my bwains into it. But, seein' that old Dawwell was so keen on it, I decided to stand out, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from every bed in the Fourth.

"Weally, you fellahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus had provided the necessary comic relief. The idea of Arthur Augustus competing with Darrell of the Sixth in producing a paper on Horace entertained the Fourth to such an extent that they quite forgot to be concerned about Darrell.

CHAPTER 2.

The Swot.

MR. RAILTON was frowning a little as he descended the stairs after seeing lights out for the juniors. The Housemaster was rather punctilious on such matters as punctuality, and he expected the same of his prefects. In the lower passage he paused, and called to Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of the school. Kildare, who was chatting with Langton by the fire in the Hall, came up at once.

"It is Darrell's duty this week to see lights out for the juniors, I understand," said the Housemaster.

"That's so, sir!"

"I have just found the juniors still up at ten o'clock, and have seen them to their dormitories myself," said Mr. Railton. "I think you had better speak to Darrell, Kildare."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

Mr. Railton walked on to his study, and Kildare turned away towards Darrell's quarters. It was necessary for the Sixth-Former to be reminded that he had forgotten his duty; but Mr. Railton was always considerate. Instead of calling the delinquent over the coals himself, he left it to Kildare, who was head prefect, and Darrell's chum. In that way the necessary reminder was less of a rebuke.

Kildare of the Sixth tapped at Darrell's door, and entered the study. Darrell of the Sixth was seated at his table, but he did not look up as Kildare entered. There were several volumes open before him, and the pen was sticking in the inkpot, and there were sheets of foolscap covered with Darrell's fine writing. But the Sixth-Former's head had fallen on his arm on the table, and he was fast asleep.

"By gad!" murmured Kildare. "Darrell, old chap!" He came across to the table and shook the senior by the shoulder. "Wake up, old scout!"

Darrell awakened suddenly, and glanced up, rather confused. Then he started to his feet.

"My hat! I've fallen asleep!" he ejaculated.

Kildare smiled.

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"Looks like it," he said. "Do you know it's past ten o'clock, and you haven't buzzed the fags off to bed?"

"Great Scott!" said Darrell, with a startled glance at the clock. His face, which was pale and tired, reddened.

He made a stride towards the door, but Kildare stopped him.

"Railton's done it for you," he said. "He found the fags up and lively at ten. He's asked me to speak to you."

"Go ahead!" said Darrell, with a faint smile. "I deserve a royal jaw. I'd rather have it from you than Railton."

"Never mind the fags," said Kildare seriously. "But I'm going to jaw you, all the same, Darrell. You're playing the goat."

"How's that?"

"For the last two or three weeks you've been swotting and giving up games, and playing the giddy ox generally," said Kildare quietly. "You're overdoing it. You won't bag the Founder's prize at this rate!"

"I'm going to try!"

"That isn't the way to do it," said Kildare. "You ought to have more sense, Darrell. You're fagged out. What sort of a show will you make when the papers are given in on Monday if you're in the state you're in now?"

"I'm all right!"

"You're not all right!" said Kildare. "Why, you've just fallen asleep over your Horace!"

Darrell sat down again heavily. He was obviously tired out, and his eyes were drooping. Kildare sat on a corner of the study table, and eyed his chum gravely and rather anxiously.

"I've got to win through somehow!" said Darrell doggedly. "It's a bigger thing than I thought. Langton and Macgregor will both run me pretty close, if they don't beat me. And I'm afraid of Cutts of the Fifth, too!"

"Cutts is too much of a slacker to bag it!"

Darrell shook his head.

"He's a slacker, but he can work when he likes, and he seems to be set on bagging the prize on Monday. And I've got to get it somehow!"

"What rot!" Kildare raised his eyebrows. "Look here, Darrell, what game are you playing? It's not like you at all to be so keen after money. You don't want the miserable fifty pounds!"

"I do!"

"If it's the giddy distinction, it's not worth what you're putting into it," said Kildare. "And if it's the money, it's not like you. What's the matter with you?"

"I want the money!"

"Rot!" said Kildare.

Darrell smiled faintly.

"But it's a fact!" he said. "I really do want the money—and I must have it, Kildare! I want it badly!"

"Rot!" repeated Kildare. "I can guess why Cutts of the Fifth is so keen on it—I fancy he's in debt, owing to playing the giddy ox. But you haven't been backing gee-gees, I suppose?"

"Not likely!"

"Well, then—"

"I want the money!" said Darrell doggedly. "Never mind why—but I want it! I've got to have it! I'm going to bag the prize if it crocks me for a whole term!"

"You're not going the right way to work. You'll be stale when the day comes, and you'll muck it up, if you keep on like this!"

"I can't afford to take chances."

"Look here, you old ass!" exclaimed Kildare abruptly. "I'm not asking you any questions; but if there's something wrong—if you're hard up—you're not without friends. I haven't anything like fifty pounds, of course, but I've a good little bit, and you know that you've only got to say the word, if it's to tide you over something—"

"It isn't!"

"Then what the thump is it?" exclaimed Kildare. "Can't you tell a pal?"

Darrell hesitated. He looked pale and tired, almost drawn as he sat heavily back in the chair. His handsome face which was always grave and thoughtful beyond his years looked almost old now.

"It's a sort of obligation," he said, at last. "I—I don't mind telling you, Kildare. There's somebody who—who's in need of a helping hand, and I'm going to help!"

"Might have guessed it was something of the sort," grunted Kildare. "But this party, whoever it is, doesn't want such a whacking sum as fifty pounds, surely?"

"I've promised it!"

"Promised it!" ejaculated Kildare.

"Yes," answered Darrell, with almost a haggard look. "I counted on the Founder's prize—everybody thought it was almost a cert for me. That was before Cutts took to swotting for it, and—I didn't think much of Macgregor's chance then. I thought it was a certain thing for me, and I—I promised the fifty!"

"Well, you must be a thundering ass!" ejaculated Kildare.

"I know that."

"It's nobody at St. Jim's, of course?"

"No, no!"

"A relation?"

"N-no."

Kildare gave his chum a sharp look.

"I won't ask who it is," he said. "That's not the point, after all. You've got to keep your promise, if you can. But if you can't, you can't. No good crocking yourself, and failing, after all."

"I'm not going to fail," said Darrell. "I can't afford to. The person doesn't know about the exam; she only knows—"

"She!" exclaimed Kildare, with a jump.

Darrell crimsoned.

"I—I mean the person concerned only knows that I've got fifty pounds coming next week, and that it's an extra sort of thing, and I can part with it without missing it. Thinks very likely that it's a tip from a rich relation, or something. I haven't explained. You see, I took it for a cert. Now I've told you."

"But if you don't bag it——"

"I must bag it, and shall," said Darrell. "I've got to. Now I've told you, old fellow; and now, clear off, if you don't mind. I've got a lot more to do before bed."

"You're not going on to-night."

"I must."

"You're crocking yourself."

"I don't care, so long as I keep up over Monday."

"You must keep up over Monday at this rate. More likely to be in sanny with a nervous breakdown."

"I hope not," said Darrell, smiling faintly. "Now give us a rest, old fellow. Horace is no end of a twister, and I've got to dig deep."

Kildare slipped from the table. His face was troubled, anxious, almost angry. But it was evident that there was no arguing with George Darrell. He was already bending over his books.

"Well, you're an ass!" said Kildare.

Darrell did not answer; and the captain of St. Jim's left the study at last, greatly troubled.

Late that night, when all the rest of St. Jim's were fast asleep in bed, a single light glimmered from the dark mass of the School House. It came from the window of Darrell's study in the Sixth.

While the school slept, Darrell, with a wet towel tied round his aching head, was still grinding, determined to achieve his object, and going to work, as a matter of fact, in the worst possible way to achieve it.

CHAPTER 3.

Mysterious.

"WILDRAKE, old scout!"

Tom Merry called to Wildrake of the Fourth as the Canadian junior came into the School House the following evening. It was a considerable time past the usual hour for evening call-over, and Wildrake had not answered to his name when the roll was called in Hall.

"Hallo!" said Wildrake. "What's up?"

"You are—for a ragging," answered Tom, with a smile. "What the dickens do you mean by staying out an hour after call-over?"

Kit Wildrake made a grimace.

"I guess I was on a horse!" he replied. "Clean forgot call-over. I suppose I'm for it, now."

"I don't know whether Mr. Railton will take the horse as an excuse," said Tom, laughing. "Anyhow, you're to go to his study and wait for him. Better rub something on your paws ready."

"I guess I can stand it," said Wildrake. "I've had a terrific gallop on the moor. I was close on Wayland at the time for call-over, and couldn't have moseyed along on time if I'd thought of it—and I didn't!"

"You are wathah a thoughtless young stah, deah boy," chined in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy reprovingly. "You ought to wemenbah that you are not woamin' around the Boot Leg Watch now, you know."

Wildrake grinned.

"When I reach your age, Gussy—is it sixty or seventy?—I guess I shall grow into a serious and solemn old galoot like you," he said. "But I'm only young yet, you know."

"Weally, Wildrake——"

Kit Wildrake walked away to his Housemaster's study, not with happy anticipations. But he was quite prepared to face the music, and his gallop on Wayland Moor was worth a caning or a hundred lines.

Wildrake, the cheery and energetic youth from the Boot Leg Ranch, British Columbia, found it a little difficult to settle down to the even tenor of the way of things at St. Jim's. His greatest pleasure was to find himself on horseback, and he rode in a way that made the other juniors open their eyes. When funds ran to it, and he had the time, he would drop into the livery stables at Rylcombe for a mount, and enjoy himself in his own fashion. Many a time and oft, in the exhilaration of a gallop, he had quite forgotten time and space, and had turned up late for lessons or call-over. Naturally, Form-masters and Housemasters did not find that either grateful or comforting. As this was the second time in one week that Wildrake had cut call-over, it was very probable that he was "for it" this time. So his cheery face was just a shade less bright than usual as he tapped at the door of Mr. Railton's study, and entered.

It was deep dusk in the quadrangle, and the study was lighted only by a glowing fire in the grate. Mr. Railton was not there.

That evening Mr. Railton was dining with the Head, and he had gone to the Head's House after call-over. So, as he had left a message for Wildrake to wait in his study for him, the Canadian junior was booked for a considerable wait. Perhaps Mr. Railton considered that that was likely to impress upon the junior's mind that there was a time for all things.

Wildrake glanced round the dusky study and grunted. He was to wait, and he did not know how long Mr. Railton would be. He closed the study door, and debated whether he should light the gas, and help himself to one of the Housemaster's books to pass the time.

He decided that he had better not light the gas; it was rather a liberty on the part of a junior. Moreover, Mr. Railton's books were not likely to appeal to his taste. Sophocles and Euripides and Q. Horatius Flaccus were great



"The prefects are beasts, so are all the masters!" said Baggy Trimble. "The biggest beast of all is Mr. Railton, our Housemaster!" "Shut up, Trimble!" whispered Tom Merry hurriedly. For there, in the open doorway, had appeared the stalwart figure of Mr. Railton himself!

writers, but Wildrake preferred the MAGNET himself. But he considered that he was entitled to the use of the Housemaster's armchair while he waited, so he sat down in it, pulling it to the fender, rested his boots there, and reposed comfortably. His long gallop, and the walk home from the village afterwards, had tired him a little, and he was glad of the rest.

He leaned back in the armchair in the dusky study, gazing at the fire, and seeing pictures in the flames—pictures of his old home in British Columbia, and the wide grassy stretches of the Boot Leg Ranch, with the snowy caps of the Rocky Mountains in the far distance—pictures of the herds of steers and the stalwart cattlemen, the rushing waters of the Cascade River, and the gliding canoes paddled by dusky Kootenay Indians. Wildrake was happy at St. Jim's, but he often thought of his own home in spacious Canada, and there were a good many things that he missed.

The study door opened softly, quickly.

Wildrake had been in the study more than half an hour, and the fire was dying lower. He was thinking of replenishing it, when he heard the study door open, so softly and cautiously that a less keen ear would not have detected the sound. But all Wildrake's senses were very keen.

He did not move.

He knew that Mr. Railton would not open his own study door in that quiet, soft, stealthy manner. Someone was stealing into the study stealthily, evidently in the belief that it was untenanted; for all the House, of course, knew that Mr. Railton was dining with the Head that evening.

Wildrake grinned in the darkness.

Someone had stepped into the study with great caution, and closed the door after him almost without a sound. Wildrake "guessed" that it was some fellow who, knowing that the Housemaster was absent, intended to play some "jape" on him in his absence. Although Wildrake was "up" for punishment, that did not lessen the liking and respect he had for his Housemaster, and he did not approve of japes on Mr. Railton. He remained quite quiet, intending to give the unknown japer a startling surprise as soon as he got to work. Japes on Mr. Selby of the Third were all very well; Mr. Selby asked for trouble. But the popular Housemaster was a different proposition. He was liked by all the fellows excepting the hopeless slackers like Crooke of the Shell and Trimble and Melish of the Fourth. Wildrake judged that the stealthy newcomer was probably Trimble, and that Trimble had a supply of gum for the Housemaster's slippers, or a can of oil for his inkpot. So Wildrake sat tight and made no sound—for the present, preparing to give Trimble the surprise of his life!

He heard a deep-drawn breath in the darkness.

Only a faint red glow came from the fire; the room was in darkness outside its radius. Wildrake, deep in the high-backed armchair, was quite invisible.

The unseen newcomer paused at the study table, and hesitated there. Then he crossed quietly to the window, and drew the blind.

Then a light glimmered.

Wildrake did not move. He was very curious now. Somehow or other, this did not seem like a "jape," after all. There was something very odd, something strange, in the stealthy movements of the unseen newcomer. It was impossible to imagine why the unknown had "sneaked" into the study in that stealthy manner, unless it was for a jape; but, somehow, it struck Wildrake that there was something more in it.

The newcomer—whatever it was—was at the table now.

There was a tiny electric torch in his hand, and the light glimmered on the table, and the books and papers that Mr. Railton had left there. A whispering, muttering voice broke faintly on the stillness.

"Not here! Of course not! In—in the desk, of course!"

Wildrake drew a quick, deep, sudden breath. He was startled.

For he knew that voice.

It was not Trimble who had entered the study. It was not a junior designing a "rag."

The voice was that of Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth Form.

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprise for Cutts.

KIT WILDRAKE did not move.

His nerves were tense now.

Cutts of the Fifth—a senior of St. Jim's—was stealthily prying in his Housemaster's study, searching through the papers on the table, with the tiny electric torch in his hand.

His quick, deep breathing showed in what a state of tension Cutts was at that moment; how he feared discovery, and how impossible it would have been for him to explain his presence there if discovered. He required light for

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whatever he had to do—and he dared not light the gas—he had drawn the blind to conceal even the glimmer of the little torch from the quadrangle. What was Cutts doing?

Wildrake's sunburnt face set grimly.

He knew a good deal about Cutts—the sportsman of the Fifth! The juniors knew, or suspected, much more about Cutts of the Fifth than was known or suspected by the Head.

Cutts, of late, had drawn more than usual attention to himself, too. His entering for the Horatian prize was startling. Cutts had plenty of brains, and he could work when he liked; but he was usually satisfied with getting through the Form work, more or less creditably. Anything in the nature of "swotting" was very remarkable in Cutts. But a fellow could not hope to bag the Founder's prize without swotting. So Cutts of the Fifth had dropped many of his usual pursuits of late, and gone in for swotting in great style. He had a good chance of success, if he had not left his unusual exertions too late!

Wildrake knew all that, and he did not need telling why Cutts of the Fifth was groping about the Housemaster's study in the dark, while Mr. Railton was in the Head's House. All St. Jim's knew that Mr. Railton was preparing the paper for the examination on Monday.

Cutts evidently hoped to find, either the paper itself, or some of Mr. Railton's notes on the subject—something that would give him a clue for "mugging up" the subject.

It was a mean, unscrupulous advantage to take of the other competitors; but it was like Cutts! There was very little scrupulosity in his hard, cold nature.

But Wildrake thought of Darrell, burning the midnight oil, and grinding hard—working away in good faith for the prize that this unscrupulous fellow hoped to bag by a mean trick. Wildrake was glad just then that he happened to be waiting in the Housemaster's study.

Cutts moved across to Mr. Railton's desk, and stood fumbling with it. Undoubtedly the Housemaster had locked up the paper, if he had finished it. The desk was locked.

Stealthily, the Fifth-Former tried key after key from a bunch, and once or twice he muttered a curse. Evidently the keys did not fit.

Wildrake, leaning silently over the arm of the chair, looked round, and he could see Cutts now.

His eyes gleamed with scorn as he looked at him.

The faint gleam of firelight fell on Cutts, as he stood at the desk, showing the elegant lines of his very well-cut clothes. Cutts of the Fifth was rather a dandy.

A movement of the Fifth-Former brought his face into view for a moment; even in the gloom, Wildrake could see that it was deadly pale.

Cutts was running a great deal of risk in this surreptitious visit to the Housemaster's study; and he realised it. Probably Cutts' finances were in rather a desperate state; his selected gee-gees had probably run away with his money, as "dead certs" so often do.

The last key failed to fit, and Cutts returned the bunch to his pocket with a muttered curse, that rather startled the junior. Wildrake knew a good deal of Gerald Cutts, but he had not suspected him of possessing such a flow of language.

For some moments the cad of the Fifth stood irresolute, and Wildrake watched him in silence. Not for an instant had it occurred to Cutts that he was not alone in the study. "I'll get another bunch!" Cutts muttered the words almost inaudibly, but Wildrake's keen ear caught them. "It's a common lock enough; and with luck—"

He turned from the desk, and shut off the electric torch. He was moving silently to the door, evidently to go, when Wildrake stirred.

Cutts had failed in his quest; had he shown any sign of succeeding, Wildrake would have intervened sooner. But he did not intend to allow Cutts to escape scathless.

"Ahem!"

Wildrake coughed loudly.

Gerald Cutts stopped his stealthy movement towards the door, and stood rooted to the carpet, shaking in every limb. The terror that gripped him, at the moment, deprived him of the power of movement.

He knew now that someone was in the study; and the terrible thought was in his dazed mind that Mr. Railton was there, and had seen him!

"Ahem!"

Wildrake coughed again.

That fearful fright was Cutts' punishment, which he richly deserved. Kit Wildrake fully understood the wretched fellow's feelings at that moment; and he had no mercy on him.

Slowly, at last, Cutts moved.

He turned round, with haggard eyes, peering at the armchair. His face was white as chalk.

"Is—is it you, sir?" he stammered incoherently.

"Little me!" said Wildrake cheerily.

Cutts started violently.

The relief in hearing a voice that was not Mr. Railton's was immense; he was not, at least, detected by his Housemaster. But he was still in a state of fear, mingled now with rage.

"Who's there?" he hissed, between his teeth.

"Old me!" said Wildrake cheerily. "Don't you know my dulcet tones, dear old Cutts? Wildrake of the Fourth, old onion."

"You young rotter!"

"Gum! I guess I'm not the rotter in this happy little party," said Wildrake. "I'm here on order—not sneaking round looking for a chance to steal something."

Wildrake sat up, picked up the poker and jabbed the fire. The flames shot up, illuminating the study. The firelight shone upon Gerald Cutts' white, drawn face, his startled eyes, the beads of perspiration on his brow.

The junior rose to his feet, and stood looking at Cutts across the armchair, with a smiling face.

"Unexpected meeting—what?" he remarked.

"What are you doing here, Wildrake?" muttered Cutts thickly.

"Waiting for my jolly old Housemaster to come in and scalp me," answered Wildrake. "What are you doing, old bean? Or perhaps I should put it, whom are you doing?"

"I—I—" Cutts stammered. He tried to pull himself together. As a rule, Cutts of the Fifth had a nerve of iron; but his nerves seemed to be in tatters now. He was wondering desperately whether the junior guessed why he was in the study. Wildrake gave no sign of that knowledge. "I—I came to—to speak to Mr. Railton," muttered Cutts. "You—you startled me, Wildrake."

"I guess I did," assented Wildrake. "That was my intention, you sneaking galoot. Shall I mention to Mr. Railton that you have been nosing round his quarters in the dark?"

Cutts drew a hissing breath.

"I came to look for a—a book that Mr. Railton promised to lend me," he said.

"Let it go at that!" said Wildrake. "You weren't looking for currency notes or half-crowns—what?"

"You young fool!"

"You pesky rogue!" retorted Wildrake.

Cutts clenched his fists. The junior had made no reference to the exam paper, and Cutts felt now that he did not suspect the truth. It was a great relief; but in proportion to his relief was his rage. He advanced a pace towards the Fourth-Former, his eyes glittering.

Wildrake eyed him coolly.

"Forget it!" he suggested cheerily.

"Our merry Housemaster may drop in any minute, and if he finds a scrap going on in his study—Ha, ha!"

Cutts controlled himself.

Undoubtedly that was not a suitable time or place for wreaking his wrath upon the Canadian junior.

He stared at Wildrake with deadly animosity in his looks; but he was helpless, and he knew it. There was nothing to be done, and Cutts of the Fifth turned to the door at last, very anxious that Mr. Railton should not see him in the study.

The door closed on Gerald Cutts.

Wildrake laughed lightly, and sat down in the chair again. He had had his own reasons for not revealing his knowledge of the facts. He was not done with Cutts of the Fifth yet.

It was still another half-hour before Mr. Railton arrived in the study. He came in at last, and lighted the gas; and Wildrake stood up meekly and dutifully. The Housemaster eyed him sternly.

"How long have you been here, Wildrake?"

"About an hour, sir!"

"Very good! You did not appear at call-over?"

"Nope—I mean, no, sir!"

"And why?"

"I—I guess I was on a ride, sir, and forgot—"

"You must learn, Wildrake, that the rules of the school are not made to be broken," said Mr. Railton.

"I guess so, sir. I know I was to blame," said Wildrake frankly. "I'm not asking to be let off, sir."

The Housemaster's stern face broke into a snile.

"I am glad that you see the matter in that light, Wildrake. I have given you an opportunity to think it over. As you have been detained here for an hour I shall not punish you further. On the next occasion I shall cane you. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Wildrake demurely.

And he went.

CHAPTER 5.

Four on the Warpath.

TOM MERRY and Manners and Lowther, having finished prep, were thinking of adjourning to the Common-room, when Wildrake of the Fourth came in. The Terrible Three greeted him cheerily. They noted that there was an unusually serious expression on the Canadian junior's face.

"Finished?" asked Wildrake.

"Just!" answered Tom. "Coming down?"

"I guess I'd like a little pow-wow with you fellows first."

"Something up?" asked Manners.

"Yep!"

"Right-ho! Carry on!" said Monty Lowther.

"How did you get on with Railton?" asked Tom Merry.

"Does that solemn chivvy mean that it was a record whopping?"

"Nope! I waited an hour, and he let it go at that."

"I think I'd rather have had one on each hand," yawned Manners. "You're rather an ass, young 'un. When you get on a horse you seem to forget that there's anything else in the solar system."

"But what's happened?" asked Tom.

"You fellows know about the Horace prize—" said Wildrake.

"It's the big giddy topic now," said Tom, laughing. "We're not going in for it in this study. Gussy's thought of bagging it—"

"Ha, ha! I know. He's standing out for old Darrell's sake," chuckled Wildrake. "Lucky for Gussy; he would have burst his poor old brain-box. I've noticed that Darrell



Softly, barely audible even in the deep silence, came stealthy footfalls. They stopped at Mr. Railton's study door. There was a faint glimmer of starlight from the window, and it showed the figure of Cutts dimly. He had reached the Housemaster's door and was fumbling at the handle. "Now!" breathed Tom Merry. The four juniors emerged from the alcove.

of the Sixth has been looking rather rotten lately. He's overdoing the grind. Darrell's a good old sort." "One of the best," said Tom Merry. "One of the very best, in fact. What about Darrell?"

"Macgregor of the Sixth is going in for it, too, I think. He's not a bad chap. And there's several others," said Wildrake. "We don't have much to do with the Sixth or the Fifth, but fair play's a jewel. I don't see letting them be dishied by a sneaking cad who takes an unfair advantage—what?"

"Not at all," said Tom, puzzled. "But I'm blessed if I know what you're driving at. Who's taking an advantage in the exam?"

"Cutts of the Fifth!"

"He would!" said Tom, with a curl of the lip. "It would be like Cutts, if he could. But I don't see how—"

"Lend me your ears, as the johnny says in the play, and I'll put you wise," said Wildrake.

"Carry on!"

In a few succinct words Wildrake explained what had happened in the Housemaster's study. The Terrible Three listened, with their faces growing more and more serious.

"The rotten outsider!" said Tom. "There's not much doubt what he was after."

"No doubt at all!" said Manners. "Dash it all, this is rather thick, even for Cutts of the Fifth."

"He's got to be stopped!" said Monty Lowther hotly. "Why, think of old Darrell grinding away, and that cad trying to sneak the prize by a trick. Darrell's worth fifty of him. He's got to be stopped!"

"I guess that's how I've figured it out," said Wildrake quietly. "But a galoot doesn't want to tell tales. I can't very well report to Mr. Railton—and he mightn't believe that that was what Cutts was after if I did. Cutts would swear black was blue. Chap who would steal wouldn't balk at a thumping lie or two. But he's got to be stopped! I reckon I figured it out that you chaps would help me stop him."

Three heads were nodded at once emphatically.

"Count on us," said Tom. "What's the wheeze?"

"From what he did, and what I heard him mumbling, Cutts is going to get a lot of keys and try them on Mr. Railton's desk, where he keeps his official papers. He tried a whole bunch without any luck. I've been rather neglecting my prep this evening," Wildrake grinned. "I guess I've been honouring Cutts with some attention. He's gone out."

"Pretty late for going out."

"Exactly. He's got a reason. He's bagged a pass out of gates and gone; and I figure it out that he's gone to call on a locksmith and spend some money on a big bunch of keys."

"Most likely, in the circles," agreed the captain of the Shell after a moment's thought.

"Now, to-day's Friday," said Wildrake. "The exam's on Monday. Cutts hasn't too much time for getting to work. To-day he had a chance at the study, owing to Mr. Railton dining with the Head. He's not likely to have another chance like that. Isn't it pretty certain, especially after the scare I gave him this evening, that he will get out of bed and try his luck at night, like a giddy burglar?"

"Pretty certain to, I should think."

"After he's seen the paper he's got to give himself all the time he can for mugging it up," continued Wildrake. "He will wedge in with his new bunch of keys as soon as possible; in fact, it's a ten-pound note to a German mark that he tries on the burglar stunt to-night, unless he drops the stunt, which isn't likely."

"Clear as a giddy oracle," said Monty Lowther. "He's got to be stopped somehow, the awful rotter! He's not going to dish old Darrell like that, not to mention the other fellows. There's seven or eight in for the giddy Horace prize, and any one of them worth a hundred of Cutts."

Wildrake nodded.

"Correct! I guess I'm going to roll out of my little bunk to-night," he said. "I'm going to keep an eye open around Mr. Railton's study while the rest of the happy family are snoozing. But Cutts is rather a hefty galoot for a Fourth-Former to tackle, and he might cut up rusty—"

"Jolly likely, I think, if you catch him in the burglar act!" chuckled Lowther.

"Exactly. So if you fellows care to back me up—"

"Done!" said Tom Merry at once. "We'll roll out, too, and there'll be four of us to keep an eye on Cutts. I don't mind losing my beauty sleep to see fair play for old Darrell!"

"That's the idea," said Wildrake. "We don't want to make a fuss and a scandal, but we want to stop Cutts' dirty tricks, and we're going to do it! Whoever happens along to-night and lights on us is going to get a surprise."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "It's practically certain that Cutts is after the exam paper—it's scarcely possible to

suspect him of being after Mr. Railton's cash, and he was certainly after something. Anyhow, if he goes burgling in a Housemaster's study, he must expect—"

"What he will get!" grinned Lowther.

"My idea is to put a mark on him," continued Wildrake. "We shall catch him napping, and it ought to be fairly easy. If we had a can of paint—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Taggles keeps his green fence paint in the wood-shed," said Wildrake. "I've seen it there, with his can of turpentine. We could borrow about a pint of paint, and a gallon of turpentine to mix it thin, and that would make a first-rate wash for Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Terrible Three.

"He wouldn't get it all off by morning," said Wildrake. "He would show the marks to-morrow, and I fancy that would keep him off the grass afterwards. He would be afraid of the fellows getting to know where he had picked up the paint."

The Terrible Three chuckled joyfully.

Wildrake's fertile brain had hatched a scheme that exactly "jumped" with the ideas of the Terrible Three.

"Old chap, it's a real corker," said Monty Lowther. "You've become quite bright since you came away from Kalamazoo. Shows what St. Jim's will do for a fellow!"

"Fathead!" said Wildrake cheerily. "Is it a go?"

"It's a go!" said Tom Merry. "And I'll amble round to the wood-shed and annex the paint. We'll compensate Taggles afterwards, so that he won't raise Cain over it. Dear old Cutts—he will get a little bit more than he bargains for when he does the Bill Sikes act to-night!"

And so it was settled.

Four merry juniors were on the war-path; and it was just as well for Gerald Cutts' peace of mind that he did not suspect the fact.

CHAPTER 6.

Catching Cutts.

DARRELL of the Sixth saw lights out for the juniors that night—he was not forgetting his duties again. Some of the juniors glanced at the prefect rather curiously. Darrell's handsome face showed only too plainly the traces of his hard study, and his manner was quieter and graver than was his wont. Once or twice lately Darrell had shown signs of an irritable temper, which was so unlike him that it was evidence of the strain he was putting on himself. Baggy Trimble was late in the Fourth Form dormitory, as he had stayed to finish a bag of bullseyes in his study, and Darrell snapped at him as he rolled in, and made a motion as if to cuff him. But he restrained himself. After the prefect was gone, Trimble confided to the other fellows that Darrell was a beast—for which remark he was rewarded by a whizzing boot. Darrell was too decent and kind-hearted a fellow for most of the juniors to resent one or two little failings of temper in a time of strain.

Tom Merry & Co., in the Shell, were quite interested in Darrell; they liked him, and in their study they had agreed that Darrell was overdoing the swotting. Manners sagely remarked that he was getting himself stale for the exam, and spoiling his own chances, and Tom and Lowther agreed. It was a case of the looker-on seeing most of the game. Manners was right enough; but he could not venture to bestow his sage advice upon a prefect of the Sixth.

But with "old Darrell" grinding away like this for the Horatian prize, the Terrible Three determined more than ever that he should not be beaten by foul play, if they could help it. Personally, of course, it was no concern of theirs; but they liked Darrell, and as Wildrake had said, fair play was a jewel. Certainly it would have been of no use to give Darrell a hint on the subject; he would not have believed for a moment that a Fifth Form fellow of St. Jim's was meditating foul play in the competition for the fifty-pound prize. The matter had to be dealt with by the juniors themselves if it was to be dealt with at all.

Fortunately, the Terrible Three were quite prepared to deal with it; indeed, they were looking forward to handling the affair with great satisfaction to themselves. They had had trouble more than once with Cutts of the Fifth, and a little more trouble with him was quite welcome.

Tom Merry remained awake after lights out, to call his chums at the appointed hour.

It was not very easy for the junior to keep wakeful, after all the other fellows were asleep, and the night grew older. Tom sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes, and pinched himself occasionally, but still he nearly dozed off several times. However, he was still more or less awake when eleven o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower.

Mr. Railton generally went to bed before eleven; after that hour it was probable that his study would be deserted. So at any time after eleven, it was possible that Cutts would get to work. As the last stroke died away, Tom Merry slipped from his bed.

He shook Manners and Lowther in turn, and they yawned and gaped, and rolled out of bed.

The Terrible Three dressed quickly in the darkness.

Five minutes later they were on the dormitory landing, where a whispering voice greeted them.

"You fellows?"

"That you, Wildrake?"

"I guess so."

"Good!" said Tom.

"We shall have to hang on a bit," said Wildrake, in low tones. "Railton hasn't gone to bed yet."

"How do you know?"

"I reckon I've been watching the staircase."

"Got the paint?" asked Tom.

"Yep."

"Mind you don't spill any," murmured Manners. "We don't want to leave clues in this direction."

"Sure!" assented Wildrake.

"Hanging on" was rather wearisome, in the cold and dark; but the four juniors hung on manfully, waiting for the Housemaster to leave his study. They heard footsteps on the big staircase at last.

Keeping very carefully out of sight, they heard Mr. Railton go to his bed-room, and the door close quietly.

Ten minutes more were allowed to elapse, for the sake of security; and then the four juniors crept downstairs.

Mr. Railton's light was the last out in the School House; the whole building was in darkness now. Even Darrell, thoroughly tired out with a long evening's swotting, had gone to bed, and was fast asleep. Only four were wakeful—or, rather, five, for it was pretty certain that Cutts of the Fifth Form, was awake in the Fifth Form dormitory. Tom Merry & Co. softly approached the Housemaster's study, and took cover in the window-recess in the corridor close by Mr. Railton's door. There they waited—Wildrake with the large, open can of paint in his hand. A considerable quantity of green paint had been mixed thin with a liberal allowance of turpentine—there was about a couple of quarts in all, which the juniors considered would be enough for Cutts. Probably Cutts would have agreed that it was quite enough.

Another weary vigil passed. Cutts, if he was coming, was in no hurry. It was very likely that he would leave his attempt till after midnight; but the juniors could not afford to leave things to chance, and they had had to be on the scene early. They waited—nodding a little, in the dark recess—with a dismal feeling that perhaps Cutts was not coming after all, and that they had wasted their sleep for nothing.

Midnight tolled out.

It was a quarter of an hour later that a faint sound came to them in the stillness.

It was a creak on the stairs, under a cautious footfall.

The juniors breathed quickly.

Somebody was coming at last! There was not much doubt that it was Gerald Cutts, with his new bunch of keys for Mr. Railton's desk. Four juniors prepared for action.

Softly, barely audible even in the deep silence of the night, came the stealthy footfalls, and they stopped at Mr. Railton's study door.

There was a faint glimmer of starlight from the windows, and it showed the figure of the Fifth-Former dimly. He had reached the Housemaster's door, and was fumbling at the handle.

"Now!" breathed Tom Merry.

The four juniors emerged from the alcove.

They made little sound, but Cutts heard. He was turning the handle of the study door, and he suddenly let it go, and spun round, breathing spasmodically.

Then there was a rush in the gloom.

Three pairs of hands clutched at Cutts, and he was borne over backwards, coming with a crash to the floor.

The Fifth-Former was so taken by surprise that he made no effort to defend himself. He seemed quite dazed.

Crash! A heavy bunch of keys clattered down.

Cutts landed on the floor, crashing, with a gasping cry.

"Oh! What—who—"

"Got him!" chuckled Manners.

Probably Cutts' first terrified thought had been that he had run into a gang of burglars. A junior's voice reassured him. He began to struggle, silently, savagely.

"Caught in the act, my merry old bird!" grinned Monty Lowther. "No exam papers for you, Cutts!"

Cutts panted.

"Quick, Wildrake—"

"Hold him!"

"We've got him! Carry on!"

Cutts, on his back, was struggling savagely to rise, with the Shell fellows holding him down. Right upon him came the swishing paint from the can.

Splash! Swish! Swoosh!

"Grooooooooooogh!" came in gurgling accents from Cutts.

Green paint swamped on his face and chest and hair, and streamed all over him to the floor.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Good egg! Cut!"

It was time to cut, for the uproar had sounded to a good distance, and there was a sound of doors opening.

Manners thoughtfully picked up the bunch of keys, and the four juniors cleared off at a good speed. The paint-can was tossed into a box-room, and the Shell fellows rushed to their dormitory, and Wildrake sped into the Fourth Form dormitory. In a very few minutes they were in bed, and Gerald Cutts, gasping, spluttering, and fairly wallowing in green paint, was left to explain the startling circumstances to an astonished Housemaster.

CHAPTER 7.

Comic Cutts.

TOM MERRY & CO. turned out rather reluctantly at the clang of the rising-bell on Saturday morning.

They had missed a good deal of sleep, and they were feeling rather heavy-eyed in the fresh spring morning.

But they were quite cheerful. They were well satisfied with their night's work.

The Terrible Three strolled out into the quadrangle before breakfast, and there met Wildrake.

The Canadian junior greeted them with a merry grin.

"Seen Cutts?" he asked.

"Not yet," chuckled Tom. "I want to see him."

"Same here, I guess! He's blushing unseen at present," said Wildrake. "He's not come down with the rest of the Fifth."

"You fellahs know anythin' about it?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming along with Blake and Herries and Dig of the Fourth.

"About what?" asked Tom.

"Cutts."

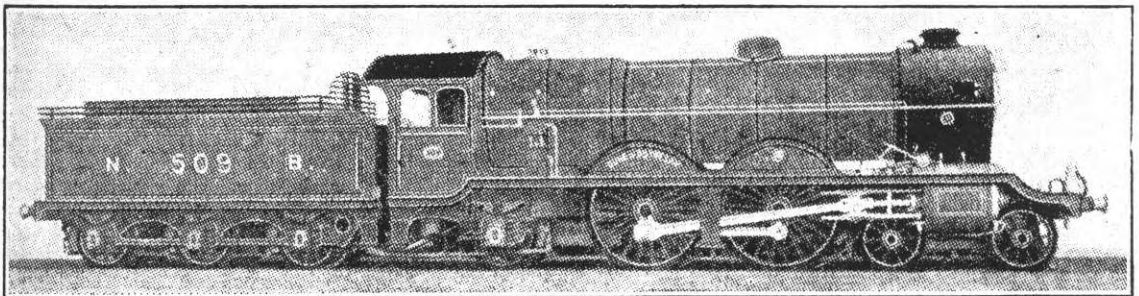
"Anything happened to Cutts?" asked Monty Lowther blandly.

"Yaas, wathah! I heah that there was a wow duwin' the night," said Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Wailton was woke up, and he came down and found Cutts. So I heah."

"There was paint about—green paint," said Blake.

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Paint?" repeated Tom.

"Yes, no doubt about it. The housemaids were still cleaning it up when I came down," said Blake. "No end of paint spilt in the corridor, close by Raiton's study door."

"Amazing!" said Lowther. "How could paint get spilled there—in the night, too?"

"It's weally vewy extwaordinawy!" said Arthur Augustus. "My ideah is that Cutts was goin' to play some jape in Mr. Wailton's study with a can of paint, you know, and he upset it in the cowwidah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That seems to me the most pwobable explanation," said Arthur Augustus, with a sage nod of the head. "Wathah an undignified pwocedin' on the part of a Fifth Form seniah—waggin' like you youngstahs, you know!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I say, you fellows heard?" Baggy Trimble rolled up, his fat face full of excitement and news. "Cutts—— He, he, he!"

"Hallo! More Cutts?" asked Tom. "What now?"

"He's green!" yelled Trimble. "He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho! Green as grass! Greener! He, he, he!"

"Gween!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

Trimble roared.

"I heard St. Leger talking to Gilmore about it!" he howled, in great merriment. "All the Fifth are jawing over it! They said Cutts was green all over. Paint in his hair and on his face. He woke them up in the middle of the night, you know, putting on the light in the Fifth Form dorm, and trying to clean off the paint. They say his washstand is all over paint; his sponge is a green rag! I cut up to the Fifth Form dorm to see. Cutts hasn't come down, you know. He wasn't there. He was in the bath-room. But there was paint on his bed, paint all around. He's been painted somehow. I cut along to his bath-room, and heard him cursing like anything. Nice for him if Raiton goes along and hears. He was scrubbing and scrubbing, you know, and saying things. Jolly strong expressions. He, he, he!"

"Bai Jove! I twust that Cutts was not sweawin', Twimble!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, greatly shocked.

"Wasn't he!" chorled Trimble. "You should have heard him! Cut along, and hear him now! He's still going strong!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Twimble! I wefuse to have my yahs polluted by Cutts' wascally language!"

"I'll tell you some of the things he was saying."

"Shut up, Trimble!"

"He was saying——"

"Dry up!" growled Tom Merry. "Kick him, somebody!"

"But, I say, you know," persisted Trimble. "What's happened to Cutts? Do you fellows know? How could he have got hold of all that paint in the middle of the night?"

"My hat! There's even something that Trimble doesn't know!" said Monty Lowther. "Clear off, Baggy, and make a round of all the keyholes in the house! That's your way of gathering information."

"Yah!"

Trimble rolled off, in quest of further news.

"But it's weally vewy mysterious," said Arthur Augustus. "Did you fellahs heah anythin' in the night?"

"Just a few!" said Wildrake. "You see, we were there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You were!" howled Blake.

"Bai Jove! What——"

"Keep it dark!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We don't want to figure in the case. Cutts hasn't mentioned our names to Mr. Raiton, or we should have been sent for."

And the Terrible Three and Wildrake proceeded to enlighten Study No. 6. Blake & Co. roared.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "But what on earth could Cutts have said to Mr. Raiton when he found him wallowing in paint at midnight?"

"Goodness knows! Some thumping lie, of course!" said Tom. "He couldn't have explained that he was there to try a bunch of keys on Raiton's desk."

"Bai Jove! No, Cutts was pwetty certain not to wefe to that," chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"He knows you sugared him?" asked Herries.

"Oh, yes!"

"He can't have told Raiton. I suppose he knows that you know what he was after, and he's afraid it would come out if you were called up by the Housemaster?" remarked Digby. "That's it."

"But, anyhow, he must have found it pretty steep to explain what he was doing at Raiton's door in the middle of the night," said Herries.

Tom Merry laughed.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 737.

"He's got enough to explain, without dragging us into it," he said. "I'm rather keen to see Cutts. I suppose he will turn up at brekker. I don't fancy he will have got all the paint off. It rather sticks."

"And he had a good dose!" chorled Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got his bunch of keys," continued Manners. "I'm going to tell him that he can have them back after the Horace exam on Monday. You fellows watch his face when I tell him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

Tom Merry & Co. went in to breakfast in great spirits. Their glances turned eagerly towards the Fifth Form table.

Gerald Cutts was there. From rising-bell to breakfast Cutts had been hard at work, with steaming water and soap and scrubbing-brushes. But he had not succeeded in getting rid of all the paint. There were still green patches to be seen—he was green behind the ears, his eyebrows had a greenish tinge, and his hair was sticky with green, and there was a lingering aroma of turpentine about him. His face was pale with emotion; the juniors could guess the almost demoniac rage that possessed him. All the Fifth Form table smiled—excepting Cutts. He glanced at Tom Merry & Co., and his eyes glittered with hatred. Manners made a sign to his comrades, and walked across to the Fifth Form table. Mr. Linton, at the head of the Shell, glanced at him.

"Manners——"

"May I speak to Cutts, sir?" said Manners. And before the master of the Shell could answer, Manners reached the Fifth Form table. If looks could have slain, the career of Harry Manners, of the Shell, would have come to a sudden termination on the spot. Fortunately, looks couldn't—even such basilisk looks as Gerald Cutts bestowed on Manners.

"About your keys, Cutts——" said Manners.

Cutts gritted his teeth.

"That bunch of keys, you know," continued Manners loudly, "I'm handing them to you on Monday, if you don't mind—after the exam."

Cutts sat silent, with a shiver of dread. For one terrible moment he feared that Manners was going to blurt out the whole story for a hundred ears to hear. All the Fifth-Formers were staring curiously at Cutts and the juniors, and fellows were looking round from other tables.

"You don't mind?" asked Manners calmly.

Cutts found his voice.

"No!" he gasped.

"I may keep them till after the exam on Monday?"

"Yes!" panted Cutts.

"Thanks, old top!"

Manners went back to his own table. Cutts of the Fifth kept his furious eyes on his plate, his face crimson now. There was a spasmodic gurgle among the Fourth and the Shell.

After breakfast, Cutts of the Fifth hurried out as quickly as possible. He was anxious to get away from observation. Kildare of the Sixth spoke to him in the passage.

"Mr. Raiton wants to see you in his study!" he said.

Cutts went without a word.

His heart was sinking as he faced his Housemaster. Victor Raiton's face was very grave and stern.

"I have been thinking over last night's incident, Cutts," said the Housemaster quietly. "It is very extraordinary. You stated that you heard a noise and went down, thinking it might be burglars——"

"Yes, sir!" muttered Cutts.

"I am not satisfied," said the Housemaster.

Cutts breathed hard. His explanation was lame enough; but it was the best that he could invent.

"This practical joker could not possibly have known that you were coming down if you left your dormitory because you heard a noise below," said the Housemaster. "You have told me that you did not recognise the person."

"No, sir."

"Am I to understand that the individual concerned was prepared, with a can of paint, to drench any person that might have come down——"

"I—I suppose so, sir——"

"The Fifth Form dormitory is a good distance from my study," said Mr. Raiton. "My own bed-room is nearer—and I heard nothing. It is a very extraordinary story. I am not satisfied, Cutts."

"I—I know nothing further, sir——"

"Very well," said Mr. Raiton. "The affair is very mysterious. You had no motive for intending to visit my study yourself, Cutts?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Cutts, with a pang of dread.

"If that had been the case, and some other boys suspected your intention, the matter becomes clearer."

"It—it was not the case, sir."

"Very good," said Mr. Raiton. "I am bound to accept your assurance, Cutts. But I repeat that I am not satisfied. You may go now, Cutts."

Cutts went.

His heart was heavy with fear now. What Mr. Railton suspected, how much he suspected, Cutts could not tell. But his surmise was very near the truth. Had he thought of the exam paper in his desk, and guessed Cutts' whole game? The Fifth-Former could not tell; but he realised that it behoved him to walk very warily now. He was at the mercy of the juniors, if they had chosen to tell what they knew. But he did not fear that. The fact that they had taken such measures themselves, was an assurance that they did not intend to "give him away." But it was an unpleasant and dangerous situation; a word or two from Tom Merry & Co. would have crystallised the Housemaster's vague suspicions.

One thing was quite certain—Gerald Cutts could not venture to make another attempt upon the Latin paper in the short interval that remained before the examination.

If the prize had been five hundred pounds instead of fifty, Cutts would not have ventured upon that attempt again. Disappointment and rage and fear combined to cloud Cutts' hard face as he walked in the quadrangle. He had failed—and he was under suspicion, to some extent, at least—and the prize he had sought to gain by foul play, was further off than ever. As he came in sight of a group of laughing juniors, Cutts' face blazed with rage.

"Gween paint, you know—" a cheery voice was saying.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Here's Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

Cutts, glaring at the merry group, came near "running amuck." But he restrained himself, and strode away, with the derisive laughter of the juniors ringing in his ears.

It was not Cutts' happy day!

CHAPTER 8.

Passing R and the Hat.

"CAN'T be done, Kildare!"

Darrell spoke almost gruffly.

Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, pricked up his ears as he came along the passage, and stopped before he turned the corner. Baggy was always interested in conversations that did not concern him.

"You can't cut out games like this, Darrell. We want you to play for the Sixth this afternoon."

"Baker of the New House will fill my place well enough."

"I know; but—"

"I've got to swot this afternoon, Kildare. The exam's on Monday. I can't afford to run risks."

"You're running big risks by sticking to it like this. Anybody will tell you that overdoing it isn't the way to bag a pot."

"I've got to stick it. I can't afford to lose the prize—I've told you so. I want the money."

"You'd be more likely to bag it if you showed a bit more sense, old chap. You're playing the ox!"

Grunt from Darrell.

"Well, if you won't, you won't!" said Kildare. "But you're an ass, old chap."

And the two Sixth-Formers separated. Kildare to head for Big Side, and Darrell for his study, neither of them suspecting for a moment that a grinning fat junior just round the corridor corner had made a note of all that they had said.

Baggy Trimble grinned as he walked away.

"Hard up, is he?" murmured Baggy. "Old Darrell hard up—can't afford to lose the money. He, he, he! That's why he's been sitting up late swotting for a prize! Hard up! He, he, he!"

Which expressed the worthy Baggy's sympathy for a fellow who was down on his luck!

For some time after that Baggy Trimble might have been observed to wear a very thoughtful look—if anybody had taken the trouble to observe Trimble—which nobody did.

Baggy was thinking.

His powerful brain was hard at work that Saturday afternoon, and the outcome was seen when the fellows came in for calling-over. After call-over, the fat Fourth-Former presented himself in Tom Merry's study. He had a grubby

notebook in one hand, with a stump of pencil, and a silk hat in the other. The Terrible Three looked at him in surprise and disfavour. They were not pleased to see Trimble—and they wondered what he was wandering about with a silk hat for. Baggy set the hat on the table.

"Chuck it in!" he said.

"What?"

"Contributions," explained Baggy.

"Which?"

"The Darrell Fund," further explained Trimble.

"Eh?"

"You see, this is how the matter stands," said Trimble. "Old Darrell— You fellows like old Darrell, don't you? Well, old Darrell is hard up."

"What the thump bizney is that of yours?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I'm his friend," said Trimble loftily. "I believe in standing by a fellow when he's down—what? Darrell has confided to me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

The idea of the reserved Sixth-Former taking Trimble of the Fourth into his confidence struck them as comic.

"But he has, you know," persisted Trimble. "We're rather friends, you know. He's frightfully hard up, and I understand that the bailiffs are in at home. Pretty awful, isn't it? That's why he's swotting so hard for the prize. Now, my belief is that Cutts will bag the fifty-pound note—Cutts is a dark horse. Or Macgregor—you know these Scotsmen. Darrell will be fairly left. Now, I'm not going to have that. I'm going to see him through."

"You fat idiot!" said Monty Lowther.

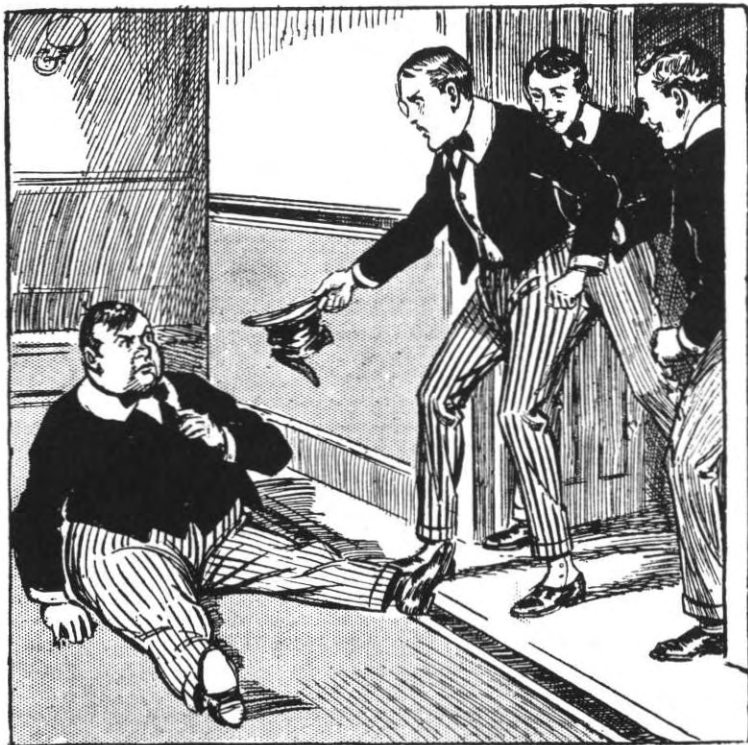
"I don't think you ought to call a fellow names, Lowther, for standing by a popular prefect in a time of distress," said Trimble. "I'm passing round the hat for him."

"D'Arcy's hat," said Manners, looking at it.

"Yes; I thought I'd better have a topper, as it will hold more."

"And why not your own hat?"

"Well, a topper will get a bit scratched and grubby, knocking round like this," said Trimble. "I've borrowed D'Arcy's hat. But never mind the hat; it's a question of contributions. How much shall I put you fellows down for?" Trimble wetted the end of his pencil in a business like way. "Say a pound each?"



"There's your hat, you fat wottah!" shouted D'Arcy. "Take it and go!" Baggy Trimble sat up breathlessly. "Tain't my hat!" he cried. "Whose hat is it, then, you fat boundah?" "Yours!" "What?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus dazedly. "M-m-m-my hat: My toppah! Oh cwumps!"

"Why, you—you—"

"You fellows like old Darrell, don't you? I'm heading the list with a five-pound note," said Trimble. "A bit generous—what; but, dash it all, I'm not mean about money."

"Where's the five?" asked Manners sarcastically.

"That's all right. I've put down the name and the amount at the head of the list, as you can see for yourselves. Did you say ten bob?"

"No."

"Well, how much?" asked Trimble. "You're not going to leave old Darrell in the lurch at a time like this, I hope?"

The Terrible Three looked at Trimble. They were rather accustomed to the fat and fatuous Baggy and his peculiar manners and customs. But he had succeeded in surprising them.

"You tallowy jabberwock!" said Manners in measured tones. "What do you think Darrell would say if he heard that you were passing round the hat for him?"

"Eh? Grateful thanks, I suppose," said Trimble.

"Tain't every fellow that would take the trouble."

"He would skin you, you fat idiot!" said Lowther.

"Did you say half-a-crown?"

"Not that Darrell's ever likely to hear of it if you raise any cash," went on Lowther. "This is another little trick for raising the wind for the tuckshop. Do you think we don't know you, you spoofer?"

"If you can't trust me, Lowther—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The fact is, Darrell does know," said Trimble boldly.

"He—he's asked me to see him, through. He told me, almost with tears in his eyes, that he was hard up—fairly on the rocks. The bailiffs are in at home, and they've taken the piano—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I've lent Darrell a few pounds," pursued the cheerful Baggy. "You needn't mention it, but I have. Now I hope to raise enough to see him through for a bit, by passing round the hat. Darrell's popular, and everybody can see that he's crocking himself with swotting for the Latin prize. I've remonstrated with him myself, in fact. 'Don't do it, old fellow,' I said to him. 'Leave it to me.' And he said, 'I will, Trimble.' He asked me to do what I could for him. After that, you fellows are bound to play up, don't you think?"

And Trimble blinked inquiringly at the Terrible Three. They did not answer. They couldn't. Trimble's statement had taken their breath away.

"Well, how much?" asked Baggy.

"You fat, spoofing lunatic!" gasped Tom Merry. "Get out!"

"But what are you giving me?"

"This!" said Tom, picking up a cricket-stump.

"Yaroooooh!"

Baggy Trimble left Study No. 10 without any contributions—a 'lick' from a cricket-stump could not be considered a contribution. He shook the dust of No. 10 from his feet in a great hurry.

"Of all the rotters!" gasped Trimble, as he progressed down the passage. "Fancy deserting old Darrell at a time like this!"

And the fat Baggy ambled into Study No. 6, in the Fourth, hoping for better results. Blake & Co. were there, at a late tea, and they regarded Trimble and his hat—still empty so far—with surprise and a marked lack of welcome. When the cheerful youth explained his mission, their surprise increased.

"You fidgetful ass!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "How dare you say that Dawwell has authorised you to pass round the hat for him?"

Jack Blake rose to his feet.

"Trimble's asked for it," he said. "Darrell would skin him for his impudence if he knew, and as Darrell doesn't know, it's up to us to skin him—what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, you know—" howled Trimble, as Study No. 6 closed round him.

Bump!

"Yooop!"

Baggy dropped his hat, and rolled headlong into the Fourth Form passage.

There he rolled and roared.

"Yah! Rotters! Gimme that hat!"

"Bai Jove! As a wule, deah boys, I stwongly disappwove of damagin' a fellow's hat," said Arthur Augustus. "But in the cires, I wathah think it would be justified. Jump on his wotten hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus set the example.

Crunch!

The silk hat collapsed. Blake took a kick at it, and passed it to Herries, who passed it across the study table to Dig, who met it with a hefty kick and passed it back to Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's kicked it into the passage after Trimble.

"There's your hat, you fat wottah! Take it and go!"

Trimble sat up breathlessly.

"Yah! Rotter! Tain't my hat!"

"Bai Jove! Well, the fellow who lent it to you is served wight," said Arthur Augustus. "Whose hat is it, you fat boundah?"

"Yours."

"What!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake & Co.

"Bai Jove! My hat! My toppah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus dazedly. "M-m-m-m-m-my hat! Oh, cwumbs!" Arthur Augustus rushed after the wreck. He picked it up, and scanned it, with feelings too deep for words. Then, with homicide in his looks, he turned on Baggy Trimble.

But that fat youth was fleeing. He vanished down the staircase—without the hat. In the circumstances, Baggy considered it advisable not to wait for the hat.

CHAPTER 9.

Darrell Loses His Temper.

BAGGY TRIMBLE of the Fourth had many little weaknesses—in fact, they were too numerous to mention. But there was one quality in him—he was a stickler. After the reception accorded to his wonderful scheme of passing round the hat for Darrell of the Sixth, many fellows would have dropped the benevolent idea with disgust. Not so Baggy. Whether for 'old Darrell's' sake, or his own, Baggy had frozen on to that idea, and he was still hoping for better results. When he rolled into the junior Common-room late that evening, with a hat in his hand, there was a general grin. Baggy's 'hat trick' was a standing joke by this time.

"Look here, you fellows—" began Trimble.

"Whose hat is that?" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Mine!" said Trimble hastily. "That's all right! Now, you fellows all know about the Darrell Fund, think —"

"Can it, Baggy—can it!" said Monty Lowther.

"I'm standing by Darrell," said Baggy Trimble firmly. "I've headed the list with five pounds—fellow can't do more than that. I've told old Darrell I'm helping him out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I want contributions, not cackle," said Baggy Trimble. "Here's the hat, and here's my list. Every fellow who contributes will have his name put down. Every penny will be accounted for, of course. Now, who's going to begin? Did you say five bob, Talbot?"

"No, ass!"

"What's yours, Wildrake?"

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"Nix, I guess."
 "Did you speak, Grundy?"
 "No," said Grundy of the Shell; "but I'm going to. You're a fat, rotten, sneaking spoofer, Trimble, and you're trying to rush us for cash. I've a jolly good mind to tell Darrell what you're up to!"
 "Oh, I say, don't! I—I—I mean, Darrell knows. I'm quite in his confidence. He told me with tears in his eyes that he's got the bailiffs in at home—begged me to do what I could," said Trimble. "He's frightfully hard-up—owes me several pounds now. I always thought you fellows liked old Darrell. Money talks! What are you putting into the hat, Levison?"
 "Fathead!"
 "What about you, Cardew? You've got lots of tin."
 "I'll wait till old Darrell mentions it personally!" grinned Cardew.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "If you fellows don't believe me——"
 "Believe you!" ejaculated Tom Merry.
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Poor old Darrell is waiting for the result," said Trimble. "He's no end down on his luck! I think you fellows might back me up. I've been over to the New House, and they've handed out nothing—simply nothing. Figgins kicked me——"
 "Good for Figgins!"
 "I think I've a right to expect support in my own House," said Trimble. "I'm taking all the trouble, and I sha'n't charge anything for expenses. It's not like ordinary charities, you know, where a lot of fat old johnnies bag nine-tenths of the oof for expenses. I'm going to hand over the whole sum to Darrell; he's right on the rocks, and he fairly begged me to pass round the hat for him——"
 A grip like iron was placed on Trimble's shoulder at that point, and he gave a gasp of terror.
 His lesson in the case of Mr. Railton, a few days before,

had not benefited Baggy in the least. He was standing with his back to the doorway, addressing the juniors, when Darrell of the Sixth came along to shepherd them off to their dormitories. Baggy's loud voice could be heard half-way along the passage outside, and George Darrell had had the pleasure—or otherwise—of hearing it as he came along. There was a gasp from the juniors as Darrell stepped into the room, and laid his grasp on Trimble's shoulder.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.
 The expression on Darrell's face was almost scaring. Baggy Trimble, as he blinked at him, wished that the floor would open and let him through.
 "You lying young scoundrel!" gasped Darrell.
 "Oh, I—I say!"
 "Nobody believes a word he says, Darrell," said Tom Merry.
 "I hope not." Darrell looked round, his face pale with rage. "Blake, will you go to my study, and fetch my ash-plant?"
 Blake went silently.
 "I—I—I say," groaned Trimble. "I—I—I—was—was acting like a friend, you know, Darrell. As you're hard-up——"
 Shake!
 "Yow-ow-ow! You—you see, I knew you were on the rocks, and—and I was passing round the hat for you!" gasped Trimble. "I—I say, wham-er you waxy about? I—I wouldn't mind a fellow passing round the hat for me!"
 Shake!
 "Ow! Wow! Ow!"
 Blake came down with the ash. The juniors looked on in silence. Darrell was generally the best-tempered of fellows, but he was evidently in a state of deadly wrath now. The long strain on his nerves had told. At another time, even Trimble's impudence would not have enraged him so much. Now it was clear the hapless Baggy was "for it."

(Continued on page 19.)

"My Readers' Own Corner."

Half-a-crown is paid for each contribution printed on this page.

If your name is not here this week it may be next.

THE HANDY MAN.

Colonel (to applicant for a job): "What I want is a man who can cook, drive a motor, look after a pair of horses, clean boots and windows, feed the poultry, milk a cow, and do a bit of painting and paper-hanging." Applicant: "What kind of soil have you got round here, sir?" Colonel: "Soil! What has that to do with it?" Applicant: "I thought perhaps, if the soil was clay, I could make bricks in my spare time."—Horace Smith, Rose Cottage, Little Shelford, Cambs.

SMART.

The teacher had been explaining fractions to her class. When she had discussed the subject at length, she wished to see how far the information given had soaked in. "Now, Bobbie," she said to a promising pupil, "which would you rather have—one apple, or two halves?" "Two halves, miss," replied Bobbie promptly, "because then I could see if it was bad inside."—Miss Rona Musgrove, 204, Park Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

THE SAME SOUND.

The class had had a lesson in hygiene, and the teacher was questioning the pupils. "Now, tell me, what are the tissues?" asked the teacher. Up shot a hand. "Please, teacher, they are what you sneeze with."—Laurence J. Gane, Springlands, Blenheim, Marlborough, New Zealand.

GEESSE IN BOOTS.

We have heard of puss in boots, but at Vilna, in Russia, a goose wears shoes. The birds have their feet dipped in tar, and are then driven over heaps of loose sand. This treatment provides them with effective foot coverings, and enables them to march all the way to the great goose market at Warsaw.—B. Brooke, 13, The Crescent, Tadcaster, Yorks.

THE LINGUIST.

Jack: "My brother takes up French, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew, German, and Scotch." Jill: "Goodness! When does he study?" Jack: "Study! He doesn't study. He runs an elevator."—Francis L. Ferguson, 37, Albert Street, Belfast, Ireland.

KEEP IT QUIET.

Officer (to sailor who has just rescued him from drowning): "Thank you, Smith. To-morrow I will thank you before all the crew." Sailor: "Don't do that, sir. They'll half kill me."—Lance Dennis, 225, Franklin Street, Adelaide, Australia.

PERPETUAL MOTION.

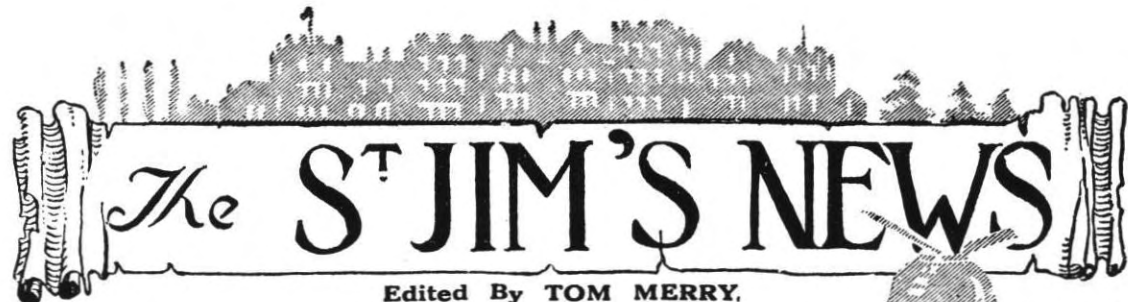
Struck by a notice, "Iron Sinks," in an ironmonger's shop window, a wag went inside and said he was perfectly well aware that iron sank. But the smart shopkeeper was ready for him. "I know it does," he said politely, "and time flies, wine vaults, sulphur springs, jam rolls, grass slopes, music stands, Niagara falls, moonlight walks, sheep run, Kent hops, holiday trips, scandal spreads, standard weights, india rubber tyres, the organ stops, the world goes round, trade returns, and——" But the wit had run for it. He came back in a minute after collecting his thoughts, and popped his head in at the door. "Yes, I know all about that," he said, "and marble busts."—A. E. Hebron, 194, Colston Street, Penwell, Newcastle-on-Tyne.



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The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

Societies and Clubs.

By ERNEST LEVISON.

IF you remember, a few months ago I published an article dealing with the Sixth Form Society. I gave a full description of the thing, explaining its exact purpose, besides all the other rigmarole connected with it. I also promised to continue the article when an opportunity served, giving a complete account of the other little bands which are organised throughout the school. There are many of them, authorised and unauthorised, and their rules and routines are about the jobbest lot one could ever try to conjure, or collect, as I have succeeded in doing.

I will commence with a reference to the Fifth. Philip Lefevre tells me there are two real clubs in the Fifth; one under his leadership, and the other, a rather "giddy affair," which is run by Gerald Cutts.

Lefevre's club is a small band, rather like an ordinary everyday guild. They frequently hold social evenings, and "starchy" lectures, with an occasional outing or picnic in the summer. They also organise sporting tours whenever a chance presents itself. About a third of the Fifth belong to it, and according to Smith major, the funds are good. The fees charged to belong to it are quite small. Lefevre and Smith gave me many facts about their rival party, Cutts & Co.

Cutts, St. Leger, and Gilmore are the leading lights in the Fifth Form Society. (I might mention, by the way, that gentle Gerald's references to "society" are taken as the biggest joke of the season by the juniors.) Besides this trio, there are Prye and Lee, and about half a dozen others.

The one great aim of Cutts' club seems to be to have a "good time," and as long as they can get that everybody else can go to the wind for what they care. Cutts is the president, and St. Leger the secretary. Their study is the grand meeting-room. As most of you well know, Cutts & Co. are only a crowd of smoky wasters, so for that reason I have not troubled to find out any further particulars about their club. They have a rather extensive membership, and I have heard the voice of rumour say before now that included in its ranks is a prefect of the School House Sixth!

The next affair we come to is in the Shell, and run by Aubrey Racke. To most of you it is the best-known club at St. Jim's.

The "Smart Set," however, is not a society or good rep'te. Exactly the opposite, in fact. Aubrey started it on its career soon after he came to St. Jim's, and has, by fair means or foul, managed to keep it going ever since. It has been fanned into a bright flame, and the gay dogs have flourished grandly, while at times, when a master or two "got tab" it was practically threatened with extinction.

The main object of Aubrey Racke's club seems to be to spend as much money as possible. Both Crooke and he are the sons of millionaires, and the amount of money the two fellows have at their disposal appears to be without limit. It was seriously suggested by a number of fellows the other evening whether Racke's gay crowd could not be disbanded, so that they could cease to contaminate the Forms to which they belonged. But as Gussy correctly pointed out, there is far too much money about for that!

Even if Racke's study parties were

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 737.

squashed, he would simply continue to run them elsewhere.

I belonged to Racke's set for fully nine months before my young brother Frank altered things, and I gave it up, so I speak, more or less, from practical experience.

The rules of the club are unique, and were originated by Racke, and smack of Racke from the first to the last. They are well worth publishing, and run like this:

RULE I.—All members must have been flogged at least once by the headmaster. If a member has been flogged more than once this will count in his favour.

RULE II.—Members must have at some time or other broken all the rules set down by the school authorities.

RULE III.—All members must possess fancy waistcoats, and sport them whenever possible. The secretary personally wishes that all members would also wear purple socks.

RULE IV.—On no account must a member be a non-smoker. It is desired that he should also be able to tackle a pipe, if so requested, besides the usual cigars and cigarettes.

RULE V.—Members must only smoke scented or Turkish cigarettes.

RULE VI.—All members are expected to attend the weekly banquet held in the back-parlour of the Green Man, at Rylcombe. The banquet commences at 11 p.m., and breaks up at 1.30 a.m. The attractions are many.

RULE VII.—No member should have any compunctions whatever about breaking bounds. The school only provides a meagre snack before bed-time, so the secretary has arranged for a real supper, to be served at the Green Man at 10.45 p.m. All members will be welcomed.

RULE VIII.—If a member does not carry out these rules, he will either be fired from the club, or fined, according to the rule disregarded.

These are just the few which come back to my mind. I think they will be sufficient to convince you that Racke's Smart Set Club takes the whole giddy cake, when it comes to nerve.

They have made many retreats for the furtherance of their merry games. When the hour is late, and all good people are in bed, they repair to the Green Man. On summer afternoons, when it is stifling hot, they make use of a shady glen, in the centre of Rylcombe Wood. When it is wet they go into the cellar of Pepper's Barn, and when the lure of the river attracts them, they hire a motor-boat, and dodge about the island dotted up and down the Rhyl. If it is too cold to go out of doors, they use Study No. 7, or, in the event of that being unsafe, the top box-room.

There are a few other clubs and affairs to which I will briefly refer.

Grundy's Club is a thing which has been running, according to Grundy, for years. Its president is George Alfred Grundy, the secretary, William Cuttibrer Gunn, and the hon. treasurer George Wilkins. Although it has apparently been running for years, this enterprising club has not attracted many members. In fact, up to the year ending December, 1921, it had attracted no members at all!

But Grundy is a hopeful kind of individual, and he says he is going to look up a book or two on how to run a club, with the object of making the Grundy Club a complete success. May fortune smile upon him!

Then there is the Skimpole Club, for Socialists and students of determinism. The grand president is Herbert Skimpole, but the members are at present—wanted!

Next comes the St. Jim's Parliament, the most successful junior affair going. There are over a hundred members, and so large is the organisation that Tom Merry has asked me to give it a miss in this article, as he intends giving it a larger description later on. The St. Jim's Scouts will be dealt with likewise.

ERNEST LEVISON.

Our Information Bureau.

SEE REPLY TO YOUR QUERY HERE.

Conducted by RICHARD JULIAN.

The junior captains of Redcliffe and St. Jude's are Fane and Lunn.

What are the colours of all the colleges mentioned in the companion papers?—They are as follows: Greyfriars, blue-and-white; St. Jim's, red-and-white; Rookwood, purple-and-green; Highcliffe, black-and-old gold; Courtfield County Council School, black-and-Royal blue; Bagshot, black-and-white; Rylcombe, green-and-black; Redcliffe, yellow-and-red; St. Jude's, red-and-green.

The House colours of St. Jim's and Rookwood are: St. Jim's, School House, orange-and-green; New House, purple-and-black; Rookwood, Classical, blue-and-white; Modern, green-and-yellow.

Baggy Trimble's weight is a trifle over fourteen stone, and Tubby Muffin's is somewhere about thirteen.

Mr. Ratcliff is fifty-two—three years older than his kindred spirit, Henry Selby.

There is no First Form at St. Jim's. Who is the ugliest fellow at St. Jim's?—Well, don't all speak at once! I will mention a few who would take a prize for anything but beauty. There is Monteth, with a delightful scowl, and Knox, with a kind smile which might freeze blood out of a stone, but nothing else; there is Aubrey Racke, with his delicately-moulded mouth—large enough to take a saucer—and ears like a donkey. Trimble, with a dial like the profile of a railway engine, and Skimpole, who might turn skimmed milk into Devonshire cream if he looked at it long enough. There are also Crooke, Clampe, Scrope, Chowle (oh, my jaw!), and Mellish, who would make capital successes—as targets at a fair.

Who is the best-looking fellow at St. Jim's?—Well, if Tom Merry were to comb and part his hair he might fill the breach, or he might not. On the other hand, if Jack Blake were to appear as a schoolboy, instead of as a cheeky scallywag, he would probably stand a chance of a place.

The boys of the Second Form at St. Jim's are, on an average, from ten and a half to twelve. The average weight is between five and six stone.

Towser's age is rather uncertain.

Monty-Lowther has no brothers or sisters.

Levison hopes to become a member of the Secret Service.

There is not the remotest possibility of

Aubrey Racke reforming, or any of the gay

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

dogs who form his "Smart Set." They must have their "good times."

Cousin Ethel's revues on the early adventures of Figgins, Blake, Monteith & Co. are voted far and away the best features which have appeared in the "Gem" supplement.

Some think Miss Cleveland sides with the New House rather than with the School House on account of her liking for Figgins. This is not quite accurate, because she has been known to favour Tom Merry, Blake, and her cousin in preference to the New House on more than one occasion.

St. Jim's has been a school for about four hundred years.

Manners and Dick Brooke are the brightest scholars in the Shell and Fourth respectively.

The Shell is the Form in between the juniors and the seniors. They are better known as the middle school.

Racke's Smart Set Club consists of Crooke, Serope, Clampe, Mellish, Chowie, Stagland, Adriance, Counts, St. Leger, Gilmore, and Cutts of the Fifth. An occasional member is Ralph Cardew.

RICHARD JULIAN.

The Grammarians' Greatest Jape

HOW ST. JIM'S WAS SAVED.

By George Figgins.

THE recent feud against the Rylcombe worms brought back to my mind an old jape. I reminded Tom Merry of the incident, who said it was well worth recording, and would make a topical piece of news. This jape occurred during one of the old wars, and for sheer, down-right audacity has never been approached or equalled since.

Mind you, it was not the handiwork of Gordon Gay. This happened long before his time. Frank Monk was the person responsible for its origination, young "Monkey" having been the captain of junior Rylcombe prior to the advent of Gordon Gay.

The war commenced by the Grams decoying our tame lunatic, D'Arcy, away to Rylcombe Wood. Their medium was an alleged letter from "a persecuted maiden." When the trysting-place was reached Gussy found the maiden all right, but before he had conversed with her five minutes he also found six Grammarians. Monk was the maiden in distress, and Gussy soon discovered he was their prisoner. They told him he was to deliver up the document the two schools had been fighting over for some weeks past, or else, as an alternative, submit to being soused in the mud pool. Naturally, Algeron's beastly waistcoat came before his school, and he gave his promise to send the document. As he was in honour bound, the thing had to be sent. Fortunately, Blake & Co. gave him a jolly good licking for his senselessness.

Gussy Captured.

However, a day or so later Gussy proved to be a blessing in disguise. He got caught by a Grammarian senior—Hake—and pitched into a ditch. After three sad attempts to stand such treatment, Gussy remained in the ditch till it was safe for him to scramble out. While lying there three Rylcombe juniors passed by, conversing in undertones. D'Arcy heard Monk faintly remark that "to-night would be the very time, as it was misty, and would be easy to slip into the grounds of St. Jim's without being noticed."

Forewarned is forearmed, and that night Tom Merry kept a very careful watch near the gates of St. Jim's when it was dark. He had barely been on his watch ten minutes, when a murmur of "All serene!" warned him that the foe was at hand. Three dark forms dropped noiselessly inside the school gates, and crossed towards the quadrangle with quick, silent steps.

Immediately they were gone Tom Merry turned to the gates. If I remember rightly, he drew a length of stout wire from the foliage near by, and wired the lock so fast that the gates could not be opened.

Then he turned his attention to the Grammarians, holding his whistle ready in his hand to call us up when we were needed.

A Memorial to St. Jim's!

The Grammarians had penetrated into St. Jim's—into the quadrangle itself—and erected a memorial to the memory of Tom Merry & Co.!

Wasn't it a stunt!

Fortunately Tom discovered it, for it would have been all up for the Co. had the school awoken in the morning to find a memorial, with a wreath and inscription, to the memory of their junior captain. It would have been the hardest knock either school had ever dealt, and the utter ridicule would have been unbearable.

Luckily it had failed—or was shortly going to fail.

Tom brought out the troops, and the Grammarians were pursued. But when they got to the gates Monk & Co. found they were trapped. The Rylcombe juniors were collared without any ceremony, and hauled along to the woodshed. Inside, Tom Merry brought to light the mourning-card which had been fastened to the wreath on the wooden memorial in the quad. The card read:

"In loving memory of Tom Merry & Co., linked to kingdom-come by Rylcombe Grammar School. Let them R.I.P."

Tom Merry made a statement that Monk & Co. would eat their words. And they did, too, literally! The card was torn into three sections, and before the Grammarians were released each portion had been masticated and devoured! The jape had been the most amazing ever tackled, certainly, but it had panned out in the favour of St. Jim's. If it hadn't done so you could bet it wouldn't have appeared here in print.

LETTERS I HAVE RECEIVED.

By TOM MERRY.

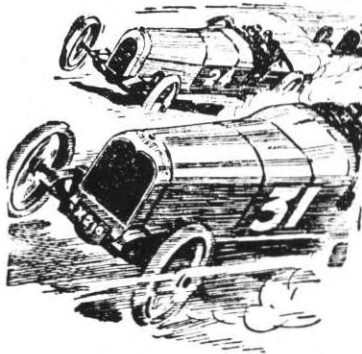
MISS AUDREY DUCKHAM (Merstham, Surrey).—Many thanks for that delightful letter I received just after Christmas. It was one of the nicest I have read! The single issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly" was very popular. I would have willingly continued to run it as a companion to this little mag, were there only room; but it will certainly appear again. Grundy's rubbish is always funny, whether in season or out. There is plenty of secret passage information to come; everything asked for will be dealt with in time. Neither cousin Ethel nor Doris Levison go to college at present. Ethel used to attend St. Freda's, but does not do so now. Mr. Selby is fifty—"member that killing affair over the recruiting-sergeant some years back?"—and Mr. Ratcliff is about fifty-two.

TED MILLAR (Aberdeen).—The last time Pepper's Barn appeared in the GEM was November 5th. It is sure to be introduced again shortly. We know about half a dozen or so juniors at St. Jim's who have sisters. Racke has a half-sister, named Gladys Sylvaire, whom he has never seen; Owen has a younger sister, Constance; D'Arcy has a cousin Ethel, but no sisters; Levison has a pretty sister, too well known almost to require mention; Macdonald's dashing young sister, Phyllis, has paid us a visit recently, together with the sister of Bob Dighy. Glyn has a sister named Edith, better known to older readers than recent ones. Some readers have been asking if Trimble has a sister. This is incorrect. He has a young brother, Teddy, of whom little has been heard lately.

THE SPORTS SYNDICATE!

By

Captain Malcolm Arnold.



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THE ISLAND OF PLEASURE



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READ THIS FIRST.

Donald Gordon and his brother Val leave St. Christopher's School, in company with Tommy Binks and Septimus Todd, a junior master, commonly known as "Scat," to join their uncle, who is on a big plantation in the Solomon Islands.

Captain Targe, in charge of the schooner Wittwake, learns of the party's quest. He plans to abandon the boat and leave them to their fate, with the intention of overthrowing the wealthy plantation owner and obtaining hold of his land. Targe, the black cabin-boy, hears of this, and warns the party. Unknown to the villainous captain, he places the boys in one of the ship's boats, and they are about to make their escape when Anna, the captain's daughter, taking the opportunity of getting away from the harsh treatment of her father, joins them.

Not long after the party has started on their perilous journey a severe storm breaks out. The party are thrown from the boat, but, luckily, get washed up on the "Island of Pleasure."

Cast on the island, they at once set about preparing their new home, refreshing themselves with various eatables which they find growing there. The regular disappearance of Val and Targe each afternoon arouses the suspicion of Tommy. After a laborious journey of investigation he spies them returning to the camp in a canoe. He joins them, and the party are nearing their quarters when they are startled by the sudden appearance of a schooner out at sea. A sudden fear enters the heart of the party as they recognise the Wittwake.

Meanwhile, Don, who is out on a hunting expedition in company with Scat, sees its mysterious light. Diving into the water, he swims to the reef to investigate.

(Now read on.)

Mysterious Movements.

DON GORDON was a powerful swimmer, and that long stretch across the calm lagoon was an easy task for his supple, muscular body. He swam straight out, heading for the reef, and as he drew nearer to it the murmur and fret of the breakers rustling against the coral acted as a guide for him.

The night was very clear and still, and the stars brilliant, so that at last Don was able to make out the rough silhouette of the coral barrier in front of him. He ceased to swim then, and began to tread water for a moment, keeping himself steady.

He was out to locate that mysterious light, and instinct told him that there was some danger associated with it. Poised in the warm sea, the youngster floated for a long three or four minutes; then once again he caught sight of the wavering beam. It was moving along the irregular barrier, and from the way that it arose and fell, it was obvious that the individual who was carrying it was having a difficult task to make his way over the slippery, weed-covered coral.

Don watched patiently, floating idly on the surface some twenty or thirty yards away from the reef, and at last he saw the figures with the light.

There were two of them, and as they drew nearer Don saw that the light was coming from a ship's lantern carried on a short pole. He watched the two figures descend a sharp angle of the reef, then they moved on again, and at last they were almost opposite where their silent observer floated.

Here they halted, and the lantern, swinging round, shed its light full on the shapes, and Don, motionless in the water, caught his breath sharply as he recognised the twin. They were Ralph Siddeley and Captain Targe. There was no mistake in that black-bearded, hulking figure. Targe was dressed in a pair

of white shorts and a shirt, the sleeves of which were wrapped up over his elbows, revealing his hairy, muscular forearms.

He was carrying a square object poised on his shoulder, and Ralph was bearing the lantern.

Ralph's voice sounded, and from its tone Don could hear that the scheming youngster was making some sort of complaint; but his outburst was broken off short by an angry oath from the man behind him.

"Get on, curse you!" Targe blared. "I know where we are. You leave it to me. You haven't got very far to go now. Get along, I tell you!"

And once again the light began to move along the reef, and now Don, thoroughly interested, commenced to follow it.

He swam with a breast stroke, taking care that he should make no sound. He found it easy enough to keep up with the two scrambling figures, for that weed-covered reef was by no means easy going.

Ralph and the skipper of the Wittwake must have covered another quarter of a mile, laboriously scrambling from reef to reef until at last they reached a spot that Don recognised. He had frequently observed it from the shore, and remarked on its curious formation, for at that part the reef broadened out to some thirty or forty yards wide, and already there were indications that far in the future it would take the form of a small island, as the busy animalcules continued their steady process of building.

On the west side of this platform lay a portion on which a drifting coconut must have found anchorage, and also sufficient nourishment to begin a precarious existence, for the long, slender trunk was some ten or twelve feet high already, and had formed a convenient mark by which the spot could be identified.

Don saw the light slide down the ledge and come to a halt; then once again the murmur of voices sounded, and he saw Targe's huge figure move between him and the light. He watched it as it passed across the wider space, and saw it halt and kneel down, at the same time making a gesture to Ralph to stop.

From the strained attitude of the kneeling figure, and the way that its head was turned, Don knew that Targe was studying something in the heart of the reef.

"I must get a closer view," the lad told himself. "I know it is risky, but I have to find out what the deuce has brought you here at this time of night."

He began to swim towards the reef, keeping well to the west of the wider patch of reef. Presently he found himself clambering up the rough, jagged coral, working his way laboriously from place to place until at last he was on the top of the reef. Then, on his hands and knees, he crept forward till he gained the spot immediately above the wider space.

Lying flat along the weed-covered coral, Don wormed his way to the edge of the ledge and peered over.

By this time Ralph had reached Targe's side, and was holding the lantern so that its light fell full into the centre of the space, revealing a deep pool full of limpid water.

The light seemed to shine right down through the crystal waters, illuminating the coral and weeds far below.

Targe, kneeling on the edge of the pool, was peering intently into the depths.

Again the murmur of voices came to Don, but he could not catch what was being said.

Presently Targe drew back and turned to where he had placed his burden, which now was revealed as a sack. Out of this sack Targe drew first a square box, which gave a hollow, metallic sound as he deposited it by his side, then a huge chunk of beef. With a nod to his companion, Targe took

the meat in his hands and cast it into the pool.

As the ripples leapt away in circles, and the silvery bubbles arose, Targe turned again to the pool. Ralph also knelt down, and, with the light thrust out as far as his arm could reach, he, too, peered into the pool.

"What the blazes are they doing?" Don asked himself.

The ripples gradually died away, and Don finally picked out a great mass of mud lying in the heart of the pool below. Even as he saw it, something moved on the left of the pool beyond the range of the light. There came snaking out from the darkness a slender black tentacle, a shimmering, flexible thing that shot unerringly towards the bait and wound round it. Then another and yet another tentacle followed, and there came out into the light a great black, patch-like mass, dragging itself forward by its long, terrible arms.

Don caught his breath with a quick horror. An octopus!

Repelled and yet fascinated, the lad lay along the ledge watching the terrible creature. He saw it begin to move back, carrying the mass of meat with it, the long tentacles waving and thrashing in the clear, crystal-like water.

He saw now that it had emerged from under a ledge some twenty or thirty feet below the surface, and it was into this ledge or lair-like space that it was creeping again with its burden.

So fascinated had Don been by the horrible creature that he had almost forgotten that there were other watchers, and it was only when he heard the scrape of a foot that he raised his head. He was just in time to see Targe regain his feet and turn to Ralph.

"I told you I was right," he said. "I haven't been here for two years, but I remembered this pool, and I also remembered its guardian! We could not find a safer place. Give me that rope!"

A length of rope was slipped from Ralph's arm, and Don watched Captain Targe tie the rope around the iron box, then, when it was secure, the burly fellow lifted the box, swung it outwards over the pool, then began to lower it down into the water, paying out the rope hand over hand.

The iron box went straight down, and finally came to a halt almost on the same spot as the meat had landed, then the rope was loosened, and slipped down through the water into a coil on the box.

A second later a black tentacle swung out again and slipped flexibly round the box.

There was something almost human in the way that the slender, black finger touched the new object, slipped round it from side to side, until at last, apparently satisfied that this was no foodstuff, the supple tentacle was withdrawn.

A hoarse laugh sounded, and Don raised his head. He saw Targe reach out and touch Ralph on the arm.

"That's all right!" the deep voice declared. "That squid has tested that it is not meat, and there it will remain—and Heaven help the individual who attempts to get at it!"

He drew Ralph back from the edge of the pool, and again his deep laugh boomed out.

"That's better than any safe made by man," he went on, "for there is an alarm down there that doesn't depend on electricity or anything else. The man who tries to get that box and its contents will never live to tell the tale!"

The light wavered as the two figures began to move off down the reef again, slipping and clambering over the wet weeds.

Don arose to his feet in the darkness, and watched the light appear and vanish as the two rogues moved onward, then, when they had almost disappeared, he slid down from

the ledge, and began to work his way cautiously around the lip of the pool.

He had almost reached the other side of it when his quick, trained ears caught a faint sound coming from the left. It was little more than a soft plop, such as a trout might give when rising for a fly, but Don came to a halt at once, his every nerve on the alert.

He leaned forward, listening intently, then the sound was repeated, and this time he recognised what it was. A wet foot slipping on the surface of the coral.

Holding his breath, Don waited, and the sound drew nearer and nearer, until at last he could hear the quick, stifled breathing of someone ahead.

The newcomer, whoever he was, was obviously working his way along the edge of the reef, and now and again a splash indicated that he was wading through the sea.

About five yards away from Don a shoulder of coral was thrust out above the level of the ledge, and Don, keeping his eyes on this spot, finally saw the shadow of a head and shoulders emerge, vanish for a moment, then emerge once more to work its way forward.

Don crouched in an attitude ready for a spring. He saw the newcomer claw his way up the slight slope, then straighten up. He was now standing on the edge of the ledge in full sight of Don, and the youngster, drawing a deep breath, prepared to spring.

He knew that a leap would send him full into the figure, and they would go headlong down into the sea together. Just as the supple muscles tightened there came a rustling, a thud, and a grunt of pain.

"Bad luck to it! I have t-trodden on a jelly-fish or something!" came the hoarse, anguished whisper.

So swift was the change that Don's muscles relaxed, and he gave vent to a gasp.

"Tommy, you owl!" he whispered. "Where the blazes are you?"

The figure poised in front of him turned and took a leap forward.

"Don, old chap!" said the voice of Val.

"Here, hang it! Help me, can't you? I can't get out of this. I'm stuck between two blinking spikes!"

The voice of Tommy was coming from beyond the shoulder, and, after gripping his brother by the hand for a moment, Don and Val swung down the slope into the direction of the sound.

Tommy was discovered tightly wedged between two jagged spurs of rock, and it took some effort before Don and his young brother could lift the heavy youngster to his feet again.

"What the deuce are you doing here?" Don asked.

"I can't tell you everything now," Val returned. "But we have been following Targe and that skunk Ralph! We've had a near escape, Don, and we don't know whether we're safe or not yet."

"Where is Taga?"

"We sent him back," said Val. "He's looking after the catamaran. We managed to work our way round behind the reef, past the boat. We couldn't keep up with Targe and Ralph; they have been miles along here, but we saw them coming back, and had to dodge down into the sea again."

"Dodge down into the sea is right!" said Tommy. "I've been hanging on to a piece of coral up to my neck in water for this last half-hour, and I'm sure there have been no end of fish nibbling at me. What a blinking adventure we've had!"

As he ceased to speak there came another sound that brought the heads of the trio round. The faint, far-off click of oars in rowlocks.

"It is the Wittywake's longboat," Val said to his brother. "Targe and Ralph must have reached it, and they are off again. Look, there's a light!"

Half a mile along the reef, and some two or three hundred yards out from it a light had appeared, and swung to and fro. Presently, from seaward, there came an answering beam.

"That's from the Wittywake," said Don quietly. "She must have sneaked in here when it was dark. Come along, you chaps; we'd better try to get back to Taga."

They started off along the reef then, and gradually the sound of the oars died away into silence. Finally, Don, who was moving ahead, heard a quiet, challenging whisper

from the darkness in front of him in Taga's soft voice.

"That you fellas?"

"Yes, Taga; we're all right!"

A few moments later they were gathered round Taga, who was standing with the catamaran floating beside the ledge where they had left it.

"Captain, he come back along with that Ralph fella, and they both seem mighty pleased with 'emselves!" was Taga's report. "They both go back to boat, and I see them go off to the Wittywake. Don't you fellas see dem lights?"

He pointed out into the darkness, but, although the trio of youngsters did their best to follow his direction, their European eyes failed to pick out what Taga saw.

"Got to give it up, old chap," Don said. "We've not got cats' eyes, and we'll have to take your word for it. Is it going away?"

"Yes, it ain't going away," Taga said; "and I guess you fellas not sorry!"

"Sorry!" Tommy repeated. "I hope the blinking thing sinks before it comes back here! We've had enough of it as it is!"

Another silence fell on the group, and it was Val who broke it at last.

"What were they after?" he said, turning to Don. "We could not see very much of them, but they must have come close to where you were, then they turned back for some reason or other. What was the idea?"

In the brief interval Don had already made up his mind as to the course he would pursue. He realised that there was some grim secret hidden away in that pool in the heart of the reef; but he wisely decided that it would be better not to let his chums know anything at all about it.

One thing seemed fairly certain, and that was that sooner or later that black-bearded captain of the Wittywake and his companion Ralph would return again to the pool. The fact that they had chosen to land on the reef at night seemed to indicate to Don that they did not desire the crew of the Wittywake to know what had taken place, and it was more than probable that their future visit would be carried out in the dark.

Don realised that if he shared his secret now with his chums it would only add a further burden to them, and the constant menace of the Wittywake's return might entirely remove the happiness that had been shared by the little group.

And so, as a stout leader should, Don decided to shoulder the whole responsibility himself. In doing so, he showed the manner of lad he was—strong, patient, and self-reliant, an ideal leader, in fact.

"Don't ask me what they were after, old chap," he replied, in as easy a tone as he could assume. "I simply saw the light, and swam out to see what was going on. They didn't seem to have any particular object in their task, whatever it was."

"Hump! Perhaps they came to the reef to gather oysters, or something," was Tommy's sage remark, that sent a chuckle of laughter round the group; and, under the cover of it, Don turned the conversation.

"You fellows will have to work that catamaran round into the gap eastward," he said; "and if I were you I would make a start now, for I forgot to tell you that I left old Seat waiting for me on the beach, and no doubt he's just about beside himself with anxiety by this time."

It was arranged then that Taga and Tommy should take charge of the catamaran, and work it down along the reef, through the gap, and up in the lagoon again, to pick up Don and Val.

"I don't want to take any chance," Don explained, "and I shall wait here and keep watch until you fellows come back. By that time the Wittywake should have got well out of sight."

Taga and Tommy clambered into the native canoe, then the catamaran was thrust off, the two youngsters took to the paddles, and the light craft moved off into the darkness, with the native at the bows.

"I don't know what we should have done if it had not been for Taga," Val said to his brother. "He had a pretty rotten time of it, and it proves that his heart is in the right place, for he never gave us away when he was taken on board the Wittywake. It was a narrow escape, for I'm sure if Captain Targe thought that any of the rest of us were here he would have landed his men, and hunted the place till he collared all of us!"

"I agree with you, Val," Don said slowly. "There is not much doubt that Captain Targe has got his knife into us, for some reason or other, and if he knew we were alive now he wouldn't rest until he had got us."

Two hours passed before the quiet dip of paddles in the sea indicated that the catamaran had worked its way round the reef and was moving through the lagoon.

Don sent a soft hail through the darkness, and was answered by Taga, then presently the squat shape of the catamaran loomed out of the gloom, and came on until its bows touched the reef.

Don and Val clambered on board, and a start was made for the beach.

Some forty yards away from the shimmering sand Taga, who was still in the bows, suddenly checked his paddle, and turned to his chums.

"That's Seat fella, over there, I think," he whispered. "You give him shout."

Don raised his voice, and, as he did so, a dark object that was visible against the sand arose swiftly.

"Thank goodness you have come back, Don!" Seat broke out. "I have had an awful job with Anna, here!"

It was only then that the chums on board the catamaran saw that Seat and Anna were standing together on the edge of the beach. The catamaran ran ashore, and the little group disembarked, then the girl ran forward, and caught Don by the arm.

"You should not have done it! You should not have done it!" she cried. "Seat has been trying to tell me that it was all right, but I knew it wasn't. Who was showing those lights, and what were they doing on the reef?"

Before Don could answer her, Tommy, in his usual impetuous way, had his oar in.

"It was your father, Anna," he said—



A length of rope was slipped around the iron box, then when it was secure the burly fellow lifted the box, swung it outward over the pool, and then began to lower it down into the water, paying out the rope hand over hand.

"your father, and that skunk Ralph. But it's all right; they have gone again."

Don managed to give Tommy a sharp dig in the ribs, then the leader reached out and took Anna by the arm.

"There's nothing to fear, Anna," he said. "The Wittywake has gone, and no one suspects our existence here. Come along. I'll tell you all about it!"

The others dropped back, and allowed Don and the slim girl to walk across the beach towards the camp together, Don talking quietly to the slender creature, and Anna speaking now and again in a thin, frightened voice.

"You should not have said anything about it, you fathead!" Val said, under his breath, to Tommy. "We all know that Anna is a pal, and would not do anything to harm us; but, hang it all, old chap, can't you see that she's in rather a difficult position here, for she knows jolly well that her father is up against us?"

"I never thought of that," Tommy returned ruefully; "in fact, I always look on Some Girl as one of us. I'm sorry I spoke!"

When they reached the camp Tommy, in his clumsy way, tried to make amends for his foolish speech. He lighted the lantern that Taga's cousin had dropped into the catamaran, and carried it up to where Anna's shelter stood under the cliffs.

Anna was seated on the edge of her leafy bower, with her small chin in her hands and her dark eyes very thoughtful, as Tommy approached.

"Here you are, Some Girl!" Tommy said. "I have got a present for you—a topping lantern, and it's full of oil!"

He reached up, and attached the lantern to one of the rough supports of the shelter.

Anna arose, and looked at the lighted lamp for a moment, then she turned to Tommy, with a swift nod.

"This is one of the Wittywake's lamps," she said. "How did you get hold of it?"

This time Tommy was much more cautious. "We—we found it on the reef, Anna!" he stammered. "Ralph must have dropped it when he got on board the longboat."

Anna came towards Tommy, and looked long and steadily into that youth's tanned, round face, then a little smile crossed the girl's lips, and she shook her head.

"You are rather a dear, Tommy," she said, "but you can't tell stories! Still, it doesn't matter! I don't mind how you came in possession of the lantern. It was nice of you to think of giving it to me!"

They shook hands then, and Tommy went across to the hut, where he found Scat laying out an ample meal.

The hut was lighted by a couple of torches of tough fibrous roots, which burst with a very clear flame, and gave forth a rather aromatic, resinous scent.

Over the meal Tommy had his first opportunity of giving a detailed account of his perilous journey over the rough cliffs, and his description of that verdureless, barren stretch aroused the deep interest of his listeners.

"We'll make an expedition," Don said at last. "It will be worth our while to explore that part of the coast, and also the caves that Taga and Val found, for it seems to me now that there might be reasons for us having to shift from here, although I would hate to do it, if it can be avoided."

They knew what he meant, and a silence fell on the group for a while, then Scat, blinking through his glasses, summed up the situation in his own quaint way.

"Better shift than be shifted, old chap! Besides, during the wet season, I am inclined to think that this part of the beach is all smothered with foam and breakers. What do you think, Taga?"

Taga grunted. With the true native fatalism and that traditional laziness of his type, he never worried about the morrow.

"I no' sure, but it no' matter much. We got plenty of grub, and plenty more in the forest! Who cares!"

Which was, perhaps, the deepest philosophy of all.

The Bee Hunt.

THE better part of three weeks elapsed before Don found it opportune to tackle the suggestion of the expedition again, but during that time the little group of castaways were by no means idle.

Taga was delighted with the blowpipe and the thorn darts. He and Tommy had gone off on a hunt of their own, and Taga had returned, bearing with him a great quantity of leaves of a curious cerated type.

A hole was dug in the sands, and the leaves placed in it, then Taga proceeded to sprinkle them with warm water; finally, the leaves were removed, and placed in a declivity in one of the rocks.

Tommy and Taga, armed with heavy stones, then macerated the leaves until they became a brown pulp, a mass from whence there arose a most abominable stench.

"What the blazes are you chaps doing?" Val demanded at last, when an extra strong whiff from the pulp drove him and Scat out of the hut.

"Don't ask me!" Tommy answered, stopping to wipe his brow. "Taga says that he can get a poison from these leaves that will make it easy to bring down any bird when hit by a dart."

Taga, squatting over the hollow in the rock, paused, his stone poised, and grinned.

"We nearly finished now," he said. "Bim-bi no smell, you see!"

An hour or so later, Taga, borrowing a strip of shirting, proceeded to carry out the final step of his experiment. The mass of leaves were tied in the shirting, then they were placed between two flat stones, and Taga and Tommy set their weight on to the upper stone, so that the leaves, crushed between the stones, began to exude a brown, thick fluid.

There was not much more than half a pint of the stuff, and Don noted that Taga scraped it off the rocks with considerable caution, using a splinter of wood, and taking care that his fingers did not come in contact with it.

Finally the fluid mass was placed in a half of a coconut shell, and Taga, climbing up the cliffs, placed the shell well out of reach. The mass of leaves was carried away and burnt, and Taga was careful to clean away all traces of the fluid from where the experiment had taken place.

Next morning, when Taga produced the coconut shell, Don found the stuff had congealed into a glutinous mass, and the native, bringing out his collection of darts, dipped each one of them carefully into the gluey substance. Under the rays of the sun the stuff dried quickly, and formed a varnish-like covering for the thorn darts.

"That's all very well, Taga," Scat said, "but if we have to poison the birds before we bring them down, what's going to happen to us who try to eat them?"

Taga grinned. "That stuff no harm you," he assured Scat. "All you do is just cut out place where dart hit—I show you. We go up to your garden to-night and have some sport there."

Among the many incidents that had happened during the weeks had been the arrival of Tommy one morning with a hat full of fluffy chicks, the result of his raid on the scrub-fowl's nest. Anna had been delighted at this addition to her family, and Don and Val had set to work to make a little shelter for the tiny creatures.

The scrub-fowl is a tough member of the bird family, and these day-old chicks flourished amazingly. Inside a week they had grown into scraggy, voracious creatures, and were so tame that they became almost a nuisance in the camp, for their hunger seemed unending, and they even bolted off with the choice tit-bits from the dinner-table.

"That's all right," Tommy said, when Val and Scat would protest indignantly. "Wait until they start laying, and give us fresh eggs every day! That's the sort of hunter I am—I bring the food here, and all you have to do is to turn it on!"

On the day Taga and Scat set off for their first bird-hunting expedition, Tommy sidled up to Val in a rather mysterious way.

Val had developed into the camp carpenter, for, with the aid of the axe and the knife, that had been dropped into the catamaran, Don's younger brother had set

to work to make simple, necessary articles for the interior of the hut.

One very useful object that Val had successfully tackled was a press, into which the dried coconut flesh was placed and subjected to compression in order to obtain oil.

It was true that the oil got so far had been rather scanty and coarse, but Val hoped to refine it later, for he knew that it would come in useful in the dark days that lay ahead, when the lamp would be needed to while away the long evenings.

"What do you want, Tommy?" Val asked.

"Look!" Tommy extended his hand, and Val saw an object that the fat fellow had carefully hidden in his palm.

"A bee," said Val.

"Quite right, young fellow-me-lad," Tommy answered, with a grin. "I—I killed it yesterday—at least, it landed on me, and I was nearly stung by it. It was while Taga was fishing about for those confounded leaves of his—and where there are bees, there is honey, Val!"

Tommy's round eyes widened, and he chuckled.

"What about it, Val?" he said. "Let's go and have a look. Wouldn't you like a nice bit of wild honeycomb, dripping with lovely golden honey? My word, it makes my mouth water to think of it!"

It was a very hot afternoon, and Val had been busy. He seated himself on a log, and glanced at the stout youngster in front of him doubtfully.

"It is not going to be an easy job, Tommy," he warned. "One bee doesn't make a hive. How are you going to find the hanged thing?"

"Listen for it!" said Tommy. "Bees always make a row when they are in their hive. There were a lot of them flying around me when I was waiting for Taga, and I could find the exact spot. Come along, old chap, and we'll give the others a pleasant surprise. Hurry up!"

Tommy's persistency won the day, and at last Val consented to accompany him.

They passed Don, who was hard at work on the yam patch, hoeing the brown earth, and the tall leader leaned on his pole as the two youngsters reached him.

"Where are you off to, you two?"

"Oh, just for a saunter around," said Tommy vaguely.

"Well, don't go too far," was Don's admonition. "I have decided that we'll make a start to-morrow morning to explore the cliffs, and I would like a chat with all you fellows to-night. Anna is going to prepare a great load of boiled yams and baked breadfruit, and we'll carry enough provisions for a couple of days. That ought to give us ample time to see all there is to be seen beyond the cliffs and get back again."

"That's all right, Don," Tommy declared. "We'll be back before sunset."

Tommy set off briskly through the jungle, following the well-defined path that led to the patch of banana trees; then, working their way round the patch, the two youngsters gained a dense growth of tall bamboo canes, and Tommy indicated a track through them.

"That's the way Taga and I went yesterday," he said. "It is not very far from here that I found the bee."

Reaching the other side of the canes, Tommy stepped across a clearing, and halted beside a certain tree.

"I know this fellow, too," he said. "Old Scat introduced him to me. He says it is bung-full of sago, a couple of hundredweight of foodstuff in it, if we could only get the fellow down."

As a matter of fact, they were on familiar territory, so far as Tommy was concerned, and he made no mistake in his direction.

It was under a huge tree, the branches of which were aglow with immense blossoms, that he halted at last and held up his hand.

"Listen!" he said. "It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and though it was shady in the jungle, the sun was hot overhead."

Val listened for a moment, then he heard a quiet, droning hum, the hum of millions of bees at work, and he saw now that there was a small cloud of bees round the tree, sucking out the honey from the depths of the great scarlet blossoms.

(Another grand instalment of this magnificent serial next week.)

"THE FIFTH-FORM MYSTERY."

(Continued from page 13.)

A powerful hand jerked the fat junior over the table, and then the ash rose and fell.

Whack, whack, whack!

Baggy Trimble's yells rang through the room and along the passage. But the cane went on lashing. Darrell's face was white and his eyes gleaming.

Lash, lash, lash!

"Oh! Ow! Help! Yooop! Help!" roared Baggy.

Tom Merry made a step forward. Baggy certainly deserved a severe licking, but there was a limit to all things. "Darrell—"

"Stand back!" rapped out Darrell savagely.

Tom Merry did not stand back.

"That's enough," he said. "You're forgetting yourself a bit, Darrell."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Darrell paused, and the look he turned on Tom Merry would have scared most juniors. But Tom stood firm. For a moment or two Darrell looked as if he would call the captain of the Shell, and give him his turn of the ashplant. It was only with a great effort that he controlled himself.

He did not touch Trimble again. He lowered the cane, and for a moment there was dead silence in the room; even Trimble had ceased to yell. With a visible effort, Darrell spoke in a calm tone.

"Get off to bed," he said.

"Yes, Darrell."

The juniors crowded out of the Common-room. With a fixed, set face the prefect saw lights out. He took no further notice of Trimble, who groaned energetically in bed, to show how severely damaged he was.

Tom Merry & Co. were keenly interested in the examination on Monday. All their sympathies were with Darrell of the Sixth, though they had doubts about his success. They hoped fervently that Cutts, at least, would be at the bottom of the list. If Darrell was beaten, as they feared, it would have been too utterly rotten for Cutts of the Fifth to prove the victor. But it was pretty clear that "old Darrell" had swotted too hard, and was not in the state best calculated to pull through. The juniors were in form when the competitors for the Latin prize went into a class-room reserved for the occasion. But during lessons that day Tom Merry thought a good many times of Darrell of the Sixth, and wondered how he was getting on with Q. Horatius Flaccus.

After lessons there was no news, as the result was not to be known till the following day. But Macgregor of the Sixth was observed to be looking elated. Evidently he, at least, knew that he had done well. Cutts did not look joyful.

"Cutts doesn't look like a giddy winner!" Monty Lowther remarked, and the juniors chuckled.

The next day there was much keenness to see the list. It was headed by the name of Nigel Macgregor of the Sixth. Lefevre of the Fifth came next, and the name of Gerald Cutts was at the bottom of the list. Tom Merry & Co. were chiefly interested in Darrell's name, which they found in the third place.

"Darrell's down and out!" said Wildrake. "I guess I'm sorry."

"Rotten!" said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

At the same time Darrell of the Sixth was pacing his study, white and restless. He had failed—failed! The word dinned in his ears. Kildare had looked in to speak to him; but Darrell was in no mood to talk, and the St. Jim's captain left his chum to himself, to his bitter disappointment. But it was more than disappointment; only Kildare knew what the loss really meant to Darrell. The unhappy fellow paced the study, unable to rest, tormented by his thoughts.

"I've failed! But I must have the money—I must have it! I've failed—failed! I've promised—and I've failed!"

And the look on Darrell's white face was one of desperation.

THE END.

(Will Darrell succeed now in fulfilling his promise? Read next week's grand long story and see for yourself.)

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