

TUCK HAMPERS AND HALF-CROWNS FOR READERS See
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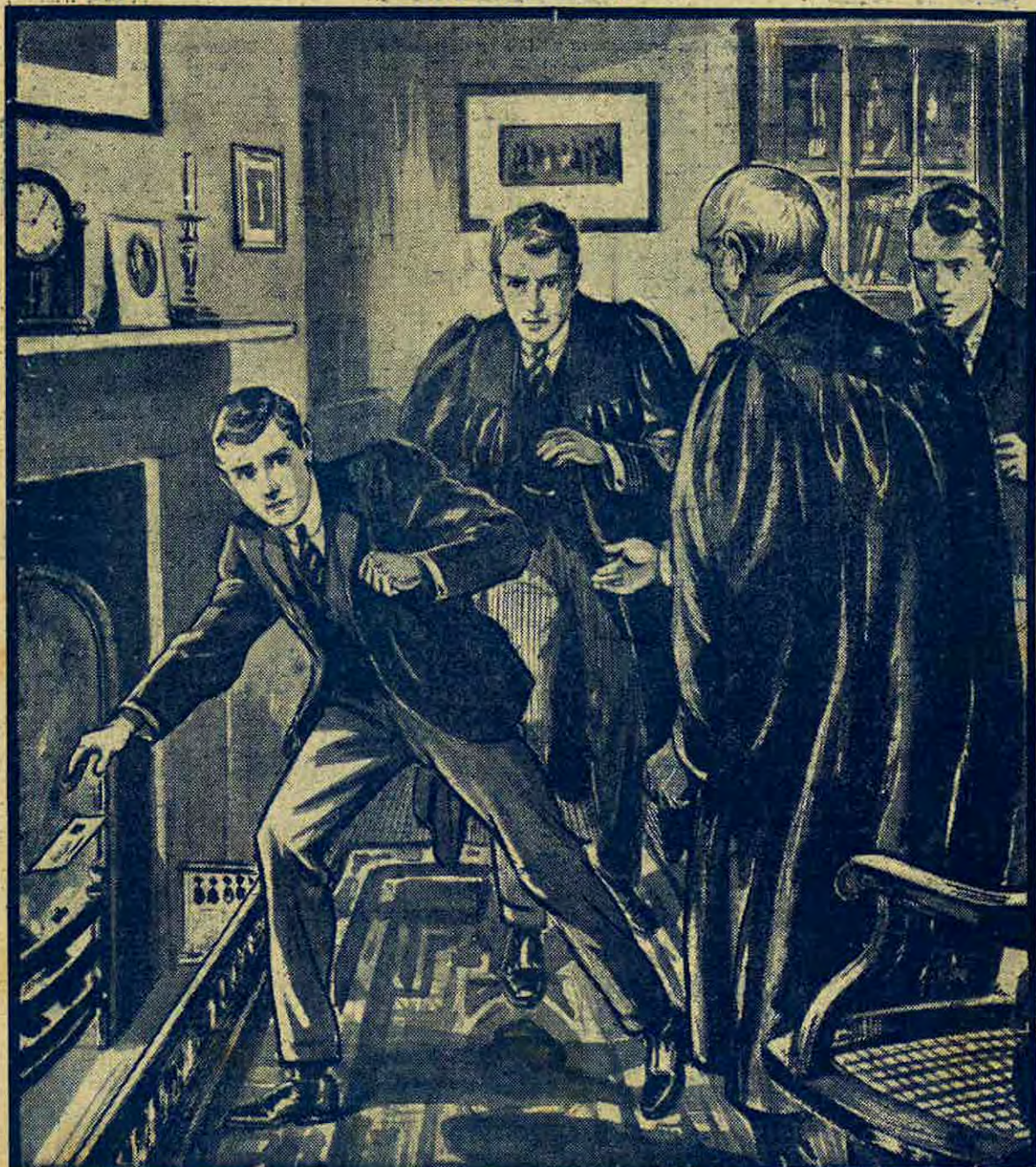
The GEM 1¹/₂ LIBRARY

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Vol. XXI

20 Pages.

Every Wednesday.

April 1st, 1922.



THE PROOF OF HIS INNOCENCE!

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

:: EDITORIAL CHAT ::

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
 "THE GEM" Every Wednesday
 "CHUCKLES" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

My Dear Chums,—

Next week's fine story of St. Jim's is called "Wildrake's Winning Way." This yarn is a grand wind-up to a dramatic series. In it we see what happens when the clever Canadian junior takes a hand. A first-rate student of humanity is Wildrake. From the first he had his doubts, but he is not the fellow to let on without being tolerably certain of his ground. It is gall and wormwood to Wildrake that a fine chap like Darrell should be living under a black cloud of suspicion. Wildrake knows Darrell is all right. He understands that what Darrell is up against is the artful scheming of some cunning plotter. But this much Wildrake does know—Darrell is true.

It is common knowledge at St. Jim's that Gerald Cutts was as keen after the scholarship prize as Darrell. What is not common knowledge is this—that the wily Cutts had fifty pounds from somewhere; he certainly did not get the sum from a moneylender, the same as Darrell; therefore, in Wildrake's reasoning, Cutts must have come by this fifty pounds by dishonest means.

The story shows a test of strength—strength of mind, a battle of wits, really, between Cutts and Wildrake. The battle is long and strenuous, and the upshot is startling in the extreme.

I am certain Mr. Martin Clifford has never written anything more appealing than these tales about a fatal misunderstanding, and the consequences which come from a false accusation. They help so largely to make the stories of St.

Jim's a household word all through the Empire.

Don't forget, the stories to come will be just as gripping!

We are all no end glad to see the portrait of Kildare, whose likeness has been long awaited. I have had any number of requests from readers all over the world to hurry up with the portrait of the captain of the school. I am also in receipt of the most friendly letters from correspondents in Ootacamund, Johannesburg, and elsewhere, asking for more Talbot Tales. I shall try to oblige.

I have serious thoughts of starting a Rally-Round Club. Every day that passes convinces me of the necessity of an organisation of this sort. What say you? It seems to me we want such a club. It would be a centre for hobbies of all kinds, and would interest all sportsmen. As summer comes on, cycling-readers feel the need for such a club, and the stamp-collector and natural history enthusiast always require just such a help as a well-run club affords.

Next week I hope to give full particulars of the "Rally-Round Club," also the splendid Free Offer I am making to all readers joining.

Make a point of ordering your "Gem" early, and see for yourself."

NEW OFFER TO READERS!

A very special bit of news, which will interest all readers of the "Gem," concerns the popular "Readers' Own Corner" feature. For the future I intend to award a splendid Tuck-Hamper each week to the reader who sends in the best storyette. This grand offer will still further increase the popularity of our "Readers' Own Corner," in connection with which thousands of useful little paragraphs containing much interesting information reach me from all parts of the world. Besides the prize par which wins the Tuck-Hamper, all stories used will be awarded half-a-crown, as heretofore.

YOUR EDITOR.

"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.

ABLE TO PAY.

Lawyer: "Well, Fred, as you want me to defend you, have you got any money to pay me?" Fred: "No; but I've got a mule, some chickens, and a hog or two." Lawyer: "These will do nicely. Now, what do they accuse you of stealing?" Fred: "Oh, a mule, some chickens, and a hog or two!"—G. E. Teck, 70, Bearwood Hill Road, Winhill, Burton-on-Trent.

PATIENT STUDY OF SMALL THINGS.

A young artist once called upon Audubon, the great student of birds, to show him some drawings and paintings. Audubon examined the work and said he liked it all very much. "There are defects, though," he said. "Look at the legs of this bird. They are painted nicely, and the scales are exact in shape and colour, but you have not arranged them correctly as to number." "I never thought of that," said the artist. "Quite likely," replied Audubon; "but you want to be accurate. Now, upon this upper ridge of the partridge's leg there are just so many scales. You have too many. Examine the legs of a thousand partridges, and you will find the same number of scales." The lesson shows how Audubon became great by the patient study of small things.—A. Bramwell, 5, Douglas Place, Bordesley Green, Birmingham.

LONG, LITTLE, AND SHORT.

A tall girl named Short long loved a certain big Mr. Little, while Little, little thinking of Short, loved a little lass named Long. To make a long story short, Little proposed to Long, and Short longed to be even with Little's shortcomings. So Short, meeting Long; threatened to marry Little before Long, which caused Little, in short, to marry Long. Query, did tall Short love big Little less because Little loved Long?—William Claxton, jr., 476, Gloucester Street, Christchurch, New Zealand.

THE LYRE BIRD.

The Australian lyre bird is a most beautiful creature, said to be a variety of the bird of paradise. It runs very quickly, and springs very high. It can also call extremely loudly. It is a consummate mimic and ventriloquist, and can imitate to perfection the notes of all other birds, also the barking of dogs, the sawing of wood, and the clink of the woodman's axe. It has earned for itself the title of the Australian mocking bird.—Edward Reid, c/o Mrs. Wenzel, 48, Ross Street, North Richmond, Melbourne, Victoria.

SETTLING THE BUSINESS.

The sun was shining outside, and Tommy was tired of the arithmetic lesson. He stood before the master, waiting to be told that he could go. "Your last problem is wrong," said the master. "You must stay." Tommy glanced anxiously at the clock. "How much am I out, sir?" he asked. "Five-pence." Tommy put his hand in his pocket and produced five-pence. "I'm in an awful hurry, sir," he said, "so do you mind if I pay the difference?"—Roy O. Haddon, 79, Broad Street, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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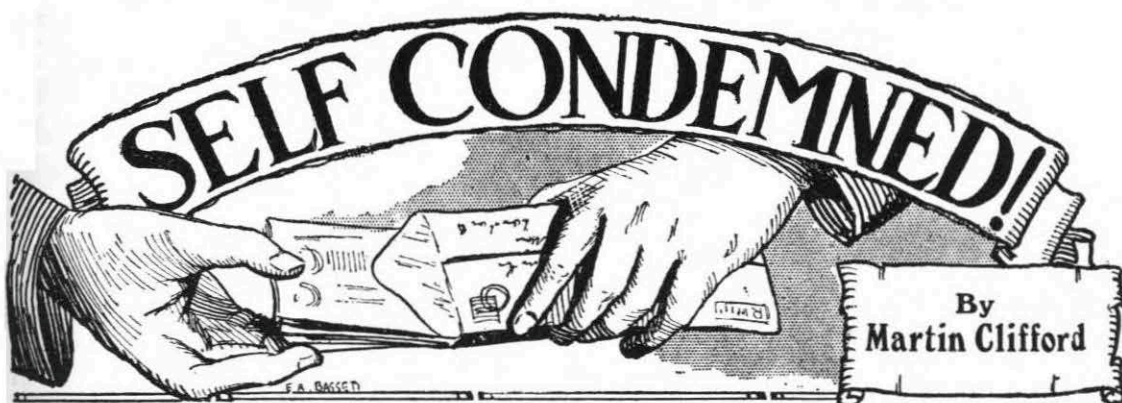
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A Grand Long Complete Story of St. Jim's, telling how Darrell tried to help a friend in distress and the drastic results.

CHAPTER 1.

Declined Without Thanks.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stopped at the door of Darrell's study, in the Sixth Form passage, and raised his hand to tap.

Then he lowered it again without tapping.

Arthur Augustus seemed to be in a state of doubt. There was a deeply thoughtful expression on his aristocratic face. He raised his hand once more, and nearly tapped, but stopped in time.

Then he paused, and resorted to polishing his eyeglass—his usual resource in moments of difficulty.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"It is weally wathah an awkward posish!"

For the third time Gussy raised his noble hand to tap; but he paused once more. There was a voice audible in the study—the voice of Kildare of the Sixth.

"Anything I can do, old chap?"

Darrell's voice answered:

"Nothing, thanks. I shall manage all right, somehow."

"It was rotten hard luck missing the Founder's prize."

"Yes, rotten. Can't be helped, though."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus again.

He was quite distressed. Certainly he did not want to listen to the conversation going on in Darrell's study. For the fourth time, he raised his hand to tap, and at the same moment the door opened, and Kildare came out.

The captain of St. Jim's almost ran into D'Arcy as he came out of the study. He stopped and frowned.

"You young ass, what are you doing here?"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"What are you up to?" snapped Kildare.

If it had been Trimble of the Fourth, Kildare would have taken it for granted that it was eavesdropping; but such a suspicion was impossible in the case of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I came heah to speak to Dawwell," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I was goin' to tap when you opened the door, deah boy. You weally quite made me jump."

"Young ass!" said Kildare, and he walked on down the corridor before Arthur Augustus could reply to that remark.

Arthur Augustus stepped into the study. He had not quite made up his mind, when the door opened, whether he would enter or not; but the matter was now settled for him.

Darrell of the Sixth glanced at him, rather impatiently. Darrell's well-known good temper had been rather failing him of late. The worry of "swotting" for the Founder's prize had told on him; and since the exam, in which he had failed, some of the juniors declared that Darrell had been like a bear with a sore head. That was an exaggeration; but certainly George Darrell was not so good-tempered as usual.

"What do you want?" he asked, looking at D'Arcy across the table, with very little welcome in his looks.

"Nothin', deah boy."

"Well, why have you come to my study, then?"

"To speak to you, if you have a few minutes to spare, Dawwell," said the Fourth-Former.

Darrell was about to answer impatiently, but he checked himself.

"Well, go ahead!" he said.

Arthur Augustus closed the door carefully and came across to the study table. There was something almost mysterious

in D'Arcy's manner, and the Sixth-Former regarded him with increasing surprise.

"Well, what on earth is it?" he asked.

"I twust you will excuse me, Dawwell—"

"Cut it short!"

"In the cires, deah boy, it is scarcely possible for me to cut it vewy short," said Arthur Augustus.

"Look here, you young ass—"

"Weally, Dawwell—"

"If you have anything to say, for goodness' sake say it, and clear!" exclaimed Darrell impatiently.

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"It is wathah a delicate mattah," he said.

"What rot!"

"Hem! I twust, Dawwell, that if I make a wewerence to your personal affaihs, you will give me cwedit for good intentions, and will not wegard it as anythin' in the nature of impertinence."

"What a-a-?"

"I am weally not the sort of fellow to butt into mattahs that do not concern me, you know," explained D'Arcy. "But in the pwesent cires, I wathah think that I am justified in weighin' in."

Darrell stared at him.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are driving at!" he said. "Tell me what you mean, and cut it short."

"It is a vewy wemarkable thing that fellows are always tellin' me to cut it short," said Arthur Augustus. "Blake and Hewwies and Dig are always makin' the same wemark. And Tom Mewwy—"

"Never mind Tom Merry now. What in the name of all that's idiotic have you come here for?"

"The fact is, deah boy—"

"Well?"

"I had a lettah fwom my patah this mornin'—"

"Well?"

"The govannah sent me a fivah."

"How on earth does that concern me?" demanded Darrell.

"That is what I am goin' to explain, if you will be wathah more patient, Dawwell. I get wathah put out, you know, when fellows keep on intewwuptin' me, and tellin' me to cut it short. I was vewy sowwy to see that you didn't wope in the Founder's pwize, Dawwell."

"Thank you."

"Not at all, deah boy, we all wanted you to bag it," said Arthur Augustus. "Macgwegah is a decent chap, and we congwatulate him; but we should have been vewy glad to see you bag it. The only consolation is that Cutts of the Fifth was at the bottom of the list. I was vewy glad of that."

"Is that what you came here to say, D'Arcy?"

"Not at all, Dawwell."

"Then would you mind coming to the point?"

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, certainly not—that is, I am comin' to the point as fast as I can. I feah, deah boy, that losin' the fifty-pound pwize has left you in wathah a hole."

"What?"

"I twust you will excuse me for wewerrin' to the mattah," said Arthur Augustus. "In the cires, it flashed into my bwain to come along, knowin' you to be wathah hard up, you know—"

"You cheeky young ass!" ejaculated Darrell, his face crimsoning.

"Weally, Dawwell—"

"How do you know anything about my affairs?" snapped Darrell. "I suppose this is some more of Trimble's tattle?"

"Yaas, But—" The prefect reached for a cane—a proceeding that made Arthur Augustus start.

"I don't know whether you mean to be an impertinent young jackanapes, D'Arcy—"

"Bai Jove!"

"But that is what you are—"

"Weally, Dawwell—"

"Hold out your hand!"

"Bai Jove! What for?"

"To be caned for your cheek."

"But I was not intendin' in the least to be cheekay, Dawwell," explained Arthur Augustus hurriedly. "I assuah you."

"Now, then, sharp's the word," said Darrell.

"But, weally—"

"Are you going to hold out your hand or not?"

"Certainly, deah boy, if you insist upon it; but, weally, you are actin' undah a misapprehension. I know it is wathah unusual for a Fourth Form chap to lend a fivah to a pwefect of the Sixth—"

"What?" yelled Darrell. The prefect almost dropped the cane in his astonishment.

"But in the circs, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, "knowin' you to have suffahed frow a gweat disappointment ovah the pwize, you know, I thought I would put it to you. I should be vewy pleased to lend you my fivah, Dawwell, if it would be any use."

Darrell of the Sixth stared at the happy Gussy.

He seemed scarcely able to believe his ears.

It was true that Darrell of the Sixth was in financial difficulties just then—which the tattling of Baggy Trimble had made known up and down the School House. But the offer of a loan from a junior in the Fourth Form was more than enough to take his breath away.

"You silly young ass!" he ejaculated at last.

"Bai Jove! That is wathah a stwong expression, Dawwell. Of course, this is quite in confidence, you know," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "I shall not mention it to anyone. If the fivah would be of any use in the pwesent circs, Dawwell, I should be vewy pleased."

Darrell's grip tightened on the cane, and he came round the study table. Arthur Augustus faced him tranquilly, confident in his good intentions. For a moment Darrell seemed about to take Gussy by the collar, and lay the cane round his noble person. But the innocent good nature in Gussy's cheery face disarmed him. He lowered the cane.

"You utter young idiot!" he said at last.

"Weally, you know—"

"I suppose you mean well, you crass young ass!"

"Yaas, wathah! I always do, you know."

"Well, I won't lick you," said Darrell, after a pause. "Get out of my study!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Travel!" said Darrell, pointing to the door with his cane.

"Oh, vewy well!" Arthur Augustus went to the door.

"But, as a mattah of fact, deah boy—"

"Get out!"

"Yaas; but you have not told me—"

"What?" demanded Darrell impatiently.

"Whethah you would like the fivah or not, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

Darrell glared at him. He had thought that he had made that clear. Apparently it was not clear yet to Arthur Augustus' powerful brain. So the prefect proceeded to make it unmistakably clear. He strode towards the swell of St. Jim's, with the cane raised in the air. That was plain enough even to Arthur Augustus, and he hopped hurriedly into the passage as the cane came down.

Whack!

"Yooooooooooooop!"

Gussy caught it with his shoulders, as he disappeared through the doorway. Darrell slammed the door after him, and burst into a laugh. It was impossible to be angry long with the swell of the Fourth.

But Darrell's laugh died away quickly, and the grim, sombre look returned to his handsome face. He threw down the cane, and returned dejectedly to his chair. Darrell of the Sixth was facing trouble—and he was in deep waters just then.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy Doesn't Mention It.

"H OLD on!"

"What the thump—"

"Collar him!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out of the Sixth Form passage at a rapid run, his eyeglass streaming at the end of its cord, and he almost ran into three Shell fellows as

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he emerged. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther could have avoided the collision, but they did not seem to want to do so. Playfully they collared the elegant Fourth-Former, and brought him to a halt, and jammed him against the wall.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus breathlessly, "Weally, you fellows—"

"What do you mean by racing in the corridors?" demanded Tom Merry severely. "Don't you know that the House-master has put down the hoof of authority on racing in the corridors?"

"I was not wacin' in the cowwidahs, you ass. Pway welease me! That uttah chump is aftah me with a cane—"

"Which chump?" asked Monty Lowther. "You must be a little more explicit, old scout. They're all chumps in the Sixth, you know."

"That uttah ass, Dawwell—"

"Oh, Darrell!" said Manners, with a chuckle. "Better keep clear of Darrell till he's got over the result of the exam. But what makes you think he is after you, fathead?"

"He wushed aftah me like a wild Hun, you know. I thought he was wagin' on my twack!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, it is not a laughin' mattah," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You have wuffed my collah, and disordahed my tie. I weally cannot undahstand why Dawwell went for me with his cane. He is 'gettin' fwrightfully badtemphed. I am suah that theah was nothin' to offend him in offahin' to lend him my fivah because he is hard up."

"What!" yelled the Terrible Three, in chorus.

"I am not goin' to mention it to anybody, of course," said Arthur Augustus. "I told Dawwell that I should not mention it to anybody, and I won't!"

"You don't mean to say that a Sixth Form prefect has borrowed any money from you—a kid in the Fourth?" ejaculated Manners.

"I object to bein' chawactewised as a kid in the Fourth, Mannahs. As for bowwowin' money, Dawwell somehow seemed to misapprehend. Instead of givin' me a plain answah, he wushed at me with a cane."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no weason whatevah for laughin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I shall certainly not be in a hurwy to offah to lend Dawwell a fivah again, if he is evah so hard up. I cannot help wegardin' him as ungwateful."

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

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus walked away with great dignity, leaving the chums of the Shell chortling. They were not so surprised as Gussy was, that Darrell of the Sixth had replied to that generous offer with his cane. Arthur Augustus regarded it as a matter between one gentleman and another, overlooking the great gulf fixed between the Fourth and the Sixth Form.

Kit Wildrake of the Fourth was on the landing as Arthur Augustus went upstairs, and he gave the swell of St. Jim's an inquiring grin.

"Been in the wars, Gussy?" he asked.

"Not at all, deah boy. Only thweo wuff asses collahed me," said Arthur Augustus. "Is my tie stwaight?"

"Nearly an eighth of an inch out," answered Wildrake gravely. "I guess I figured it out that there must have been an earthquake."

"Pwobably that ass Lowthah wuffed it," said Arthur Augustus. "It is wathah hard cheese on a well-dwessed fellow to have to win the gauntlet of a lot of thoughtless youngstahs. Dawwell of the Sixth might have had more sense, bein' a pwefect—"

"Has Darrell been goin' for you? What's the trouble?"

"None at all, deah boy. He seemed to get wathah excited when I offahed to lend him my fivah—"

"Oh gum!"

"I feah that Dawwell is gwowin' a little hystewical, owin' to the stwain of the exam," said Arthur Augustus. "That is weally the only way I can account for it."

"Fags don't lend money to the Sixth, do they?" said Wildrake, with a grin.

"As a wule, no; but I am not exactly a fag, Wildwake. Besides, I told Dawwell I should not mention it to anybody, and I am not goin' to, although he wufused the offah in a vewy wuff and wude mannah."

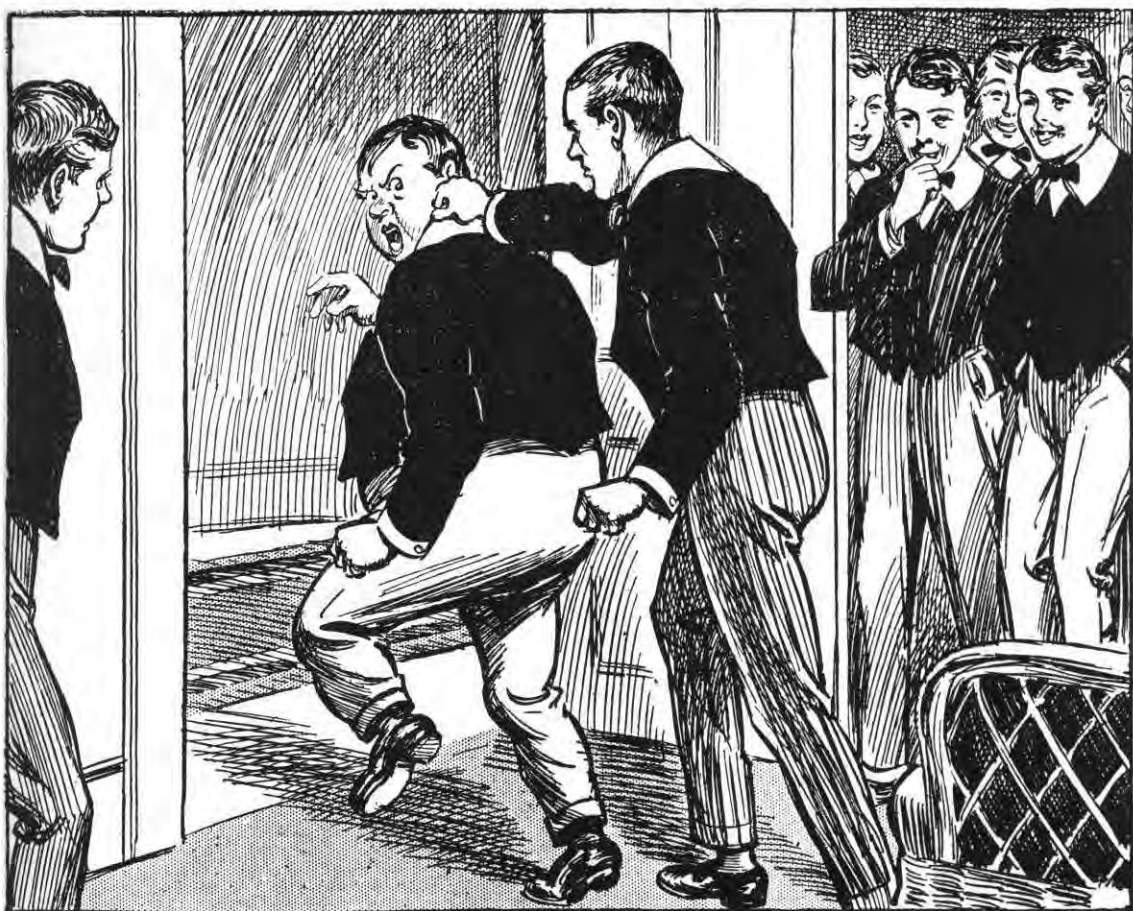
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus went on to his study—No. 6 in the Fourth. He was in need of a looking-glass, to put his tie quite straight—a most important matter. Blake and Herries and Digby were in the study, and they met their noble chum with expectant looks.

"Changed it?" asked Blake.

"No, deah boy. I do not think I need to change it," said Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to put it wight befoah the glass."

"Eh? You're going to put your fiver right before the glass?" said Blake dazedly. "What do you mean—if you mean anything?"



"Dear man," said Cardew. "Do you want me to help you out, Trimble?" "Yes, rather!" said Baggy eagerly. Cardew detached himself from an armchair and came over to Baggy. To that fat youth's surprise, Cardew seized him by the collar and whirled him towards the doorway. "Here, wharrer you up to?" roared Trimble. (See page 8.)

"Oh, I thought you were alludin' to my tie, Blake!"
"Blow your tie! Haven't you been to the tuckshop?" demanded Blake warmly.

"Not at all. I have been to see Dawwell."

"Bother Darrell! It's tea-time!"

"What the thump did you want to see Darrell for?" demanded Herries.

"Perhaps I had better not explain that, Hewwies."

"Why not?"

"Because I told Dawwell I should not mention that I had ofahed to lend him my fivah, deah boy."

Blake gave a jump.

"You—you offered to lend old Darrell your fiver?" he ejaculated. "You frumpious owl—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Did he lick you?" asked Dig.

"I fail to see why he should lick me for makin' a generous ofah, Dig. For some reason I am not acquainted with he got wathah excited, and went for me with a cane. I put it down to hystewics."

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

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Good old Gussy!" sobbed Blake. "As the fiver's had a narrow escape once, we'd better get it changed quickly. Lucky you didn't offer to lend it to Cutts of the Fifth—he'd have bagged it. Let's get along to the tuckshop and change it, if you're not thinking of offering to lend it to Mr. Railton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or the Head," said Blake humorously. "I don't know how Dr. Holmes is fixed for dibs just now, and he may be in want of a little loan from a chap in the Fourth."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, if you're not lending it to the Head, let's take it to the tuckshop and have tea!" said Blake. "It's not safe with you, that's a cert!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his fiver were marched

off together to the school shop, where Lord Eastwood's generous tip was changed, and a portion of it immediately expended upon refreshments, liquid and solid. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wore a thoughtful look as he left the tuckshop with his chums.

"Perhaps we have been wathah hasty," he remarked.

"How's that, old bean?"

"If Dawwell changes his mind about the fivah it is too late now, you know."

At which Blake & Co. only chuckled. They did not think it likely that the prefect would change his mind on that subject; and if he did, the fact that it was too late was not likely to worry Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 3.

A Surprise for the Terrible Thr e.

"YOU young rascals! What are you doing here?"

"Wha-a-at?"

The Terrible Three simply blinked at Darrell. It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday, and Tom Merry & Co. had walked over to Wayland Town. There was a new picture showing at the Cinema Royal, and Monty Lowther was interested in it. So Tom Merry and Manners had allowed their chum to take the lead, and he had led them over to the market-town.

From the High Street the three juniors were taking a short cut to the cinema through a side street in the oldest part of Wayland—a narrow street, with old houses, some of which were turned into offices and shops.

They came along the rather sloppy pavement in a cheery row, thinking of anything but trouble; and they fairly jumped when Darrell of the Sixth suddenly loomed upon them.

The Sixth-Former of St. Jim's was standing near a rather

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dark doorway, that gave access to a staircase in an office building. He started as he saw the three juniors, and strode towards them, his face dark with anger and annoyance.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated savagely. The juniors could only blink. That angry and utterly unreasonable question startled them.

From a bully like Knox of the Sixth it would not have been so surprising. But old Darrell was anything but a bully, and not at all given to interfering with the juniors without cause, as a rule.

"Do you hear me?" rapped out the prefect, as the juniors in their astonishment simply stared at him.

"Ye-es," stuttered Tom Merry. "What's the row?" "I suppose we can walk to Wayland on a half-holiday, if we like," said Manners warmly. "It's not out of bounds."

"Besides, you can see what we're doing, dear man," said Monty Lowther coolly. "We're walking! It won't run to a taxi, so we're walking! Catch on?"

Lowther's humorous answer did not placate the angry prefect. His face was dark, and his eyes glistened.

"Go back to the school at once!" he snapped.

"What?"

"You hear me?"

"But we're not out of bounds!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You've heard what I've said."

"But we're going—"

"You're going back to St. Jim's immediately, and you'll take a hundred lines each for arguing with a prefect!" said Darrell grimly.

"My only hat!"

The chums of the Shell could scarcely believe their ears. This would have been rather "thick" even in a bully like Knox of the Sixth. In a fellow like Darrell it was astounding. The rank injustice and unreasonableness of it were amazing.

"Go back to St. Jim's?" repeated Tom Merry blankly.

"Yes, at once!"

"But it's a half-holiday—"

"Do as you're told!"

Darrell's look and tone were harsh and uncompromising. There was rebellion in the faces of the three juniors.

If they had been dealing with Knox they would have defied him at once, prefect or no prefect. But their old liking and respect for Darrell restrained them. They felt more amazement than resentment.

Darrell, grim and inflexible, was waiting for them to turn back and go. The juniors exchanged glances.

"Look here, Darrell—" said Manners.

"We're going—" began Lowther. But he was not given time to explain that they were going to the cinema. Darrell interrupted sharply.

"Go back to the school instantly!"

Tom Merry gulped in a deep breath. His respect for Darrell was put to a very severe strain at that moment.

"We'll go, Darrell," he said with an effort. "I don't know in the least what you're driving at, but we'll go. Come on, you fellows!"

"But—" began Lowther again.

Tom Merry pulled Lowther's arm, and the three juniors turned back, and walked off the way they had come. Darrell, with an unbending brow, watched them out of sight.

Tom Merry & Co. did not speak as they tramped away through the High Street. They were looking, and feeling, exasperated. But Tom, at least, was trying to feel patient under a sense of wrong and injustice.

"Look here," said Manners, as they reached the stile on the footpath through the wood. "We're fools to stand this! Darrell's a prefect, but he hasn't any authority to send us back to school on a half-holiday for nothing. We're giving away our rights."

"Tom is!" grunted Lowther. "I wouldn't have turned back. You wouldn't have stood it from Knox, Tom."

The captain of the Shell shook his head.

"Not from Knox!" he agreed.

"Then why the thump should we stand it from Darrell?" demanded Manners hotly.

Tom's face was serious and thoughtful.

"It's rather thick," he said. "But, dash it all, Darrell's a really decent chap, and he's often been decent to us. We can stand it for once when he steps over the limit. When he thinks over it he'll know that he's played the goat. We don't want trouble with a fellow we like. There's something up with Darrell, and if his temper goes—"

"Prefects ought to learn to keep their tempers!" growled Lowther.

"Does everybody do exactly as he ought, always?" smiled Tom Merry. "Why, old chaps, even we are not absolutely without fault sometimes."

Lowther grinned.

"A hit—a very palpable hit!" he assented. "Still, it's jolly thick. Old Darrell must be wandering off his rocker."

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"There's something up," assented Tom. "He was swotting hard for the Latin prize, and he lost it. It's told on his nerves. We don't want to rag a chap who's down on his luck. For once, my sons, we can afford to do the Good Little Georgie stunt. After all, we can go to the pictures on Saturday."

"That's all very well," grunted Lowther. "But—well, I dare say you're right, Tom. Old Darrell seems to be up against it, somehow, and we don't want to rag him on top of it. But why the merry thunder doesn't he want us in Wayland this afternoon? What can it possibly matter to him whether we're there or not?"

"I give that up!" said Tom. "Let's have a ramble through the woods. It's good enough here in the merry springtime. Wildrake's nosing round the woods this afternoon. We'll look him up and get some scouting tips from him—straight from the horse's mouth, you know."

"Any port in a storm!" grunted Lowther.

The Terrible Three strolled down the footpath, and they came on Kit Wildrake of the Fourth a little later. The Canadian junior gave them a cheery nod.

"Fed up with the pictures already?" he asked.

"Not exactly," said Tom. "Pictures are barred this afternoon, for some giddy reason that we don't cotton on to."

"I guess that sounds like a riddle."

Monty Lowther burst into a chuckle.

"Let's ask Wildrake," he said. "Perhaps he can figure it out. He can figure out lots of things. I kinder guess and calculate and reckon. By picking up Darrell's trail in the High Street he ought to be able to tell us why merry old Darrell won't let us go to the pictures."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wildrake looked rather perplexed. His look grew serious as Tom Merry & Co. explained what had happened in Wayland.

"What do you make of it, Wildrake?" asked Monty Lowther, still humorous. "Do you read the 'sign' this time?"

Wildrake nodded.

"I guess I can smell a rat," he answered. "Where were you when Darrell dropped on your trail?"

"Taking a short cut from the High Street to the Cinema Royal?"

"I guess you'd be going through River Street, then?"

"Right first time."

"And where did you raise Darrell?"

"About half-way through the side street."

Wildrake nodded again. Evidently some idea was working in his mind, and the Terrible Three regarded him curiously. They knew the amazing acuteness of the junior from the Boot Leg Ranch, but they did not see how he was going to find any explanation of Darrell's amazing conduct that afternoon.

"Got it?" grinned Lowther.

"I guess I've a sort of idea in my cabeza," said Wildrake. "You fellows know, of course, that Darrell's frightfully hard up for some reason lately. Trimble got hold of it somehow, and spread it over the school. He was hard-hit by losing the fifty-pound prize."

"Ancient history!" said Manners.

"Correct; but it may have a bearing on this. If Darrell was about half-way through River Street when you found him, he must have been pretty near to the office of Mr. Gordon Gluck."

"The giddy moneylender who advertises in the Wayland paper?" said Manners. "So he was, almost outside the door of the place, I think."

Tom Merry looked startled.

"Wildrake, you can't think—"

"I guess it looks like it," said Wildrake quietly. "Darrell's awfully hard up. He loses the money prize he'd been swotting for, and you fellows suddenly happen on him near the door of a moneylender's office, and he cuts up rusty without any reason. I guess it looks to me as if old Darrell was calling on Mr. Gluck to raise the wind, and was startled almost out of his wits by St. Jim's fellows dropping on him just then."

"My only hat!" said Manners. Monty Lowther whistled. The Canadian junior's explanation was startling enough, but it was undoubtedly one that fitted the circumstances.

"He might even have thought you were watching him," said Wildrake. "Of course, if he'd been cool he'd have known you wouldn't do such a thing, but he wasn't cool. If it's as I've figured out, it's a pretty serious thing for him, a prefect of the Sixth getting into dealings with moneylenders. It means losing his position if it comes out. It might mean the sack from the school as well. Dr. Holmes would be pretty tough, I reckon, on a prefect more than on anybody else for a thing like that. Prefects are supposed to set a shining example to the school. If it's so, Darrell must have been scared."

"Dash it all," muttered Tom Merry. "It—it looks—"
He paused. "Poor old Darrell! He must be pretty deep



Trimble pushed open Darrell's door without knocking, and rolled into the study. Darrell was seated at his table, and in one hand he held a registered envelope. Into that envelope he was carefully packing banknotes. Trimble's eyes widened like saucers. In his blank amazement he stood rooted to the study carpet. (See page 8.)

down if he's driven to that. I—I suppose you've got it straight, Wildrake. It's the only way to account for his breaking out on us like that."

"What a yarn for Trimble if he got hold of it!" murmured Manners.

"For goodness' sake, not a word about it!" said Tom Merry hastily. "You won't mention what we've told you, Wildrake?"

"Nary a word!" said Wildrake. "It would be bad for Darrell if it got out. Least said, soonest mended."

"Speech is silver—sometimes," remarked Lowther. "Silence is golden—always. Let's forget it."

It was not easy to forget the curious happening, but it was easy, at least, to resolve to keep it extremely dark, and that the Shell fellows and Wildrake did. If "old Darrell" was down on his luck to the extent of getting mixed up with shady proceedings, certainly they were not the fellows to give a falling man an extra push.

There were no pictures for the Terrible Three that afternoon. But they spent quite a happy half-holiday rambling in the woods with Wildrake, and picking up tips on scoutcraft from the Canadian junior, which was probably better for them than "pictures." At all events, they were very cheerful when they came in to tea, and they brought in remarkably healthy appetites with them.

CHAPTER 4. Amazing.

"ROTTER!"

Thus Baggy Trimble.

Trimble of the Fourth was aggrieved. He was airing his grievances to an unsympathetic Common-room.

"Fifty lines!" went on Trimble. "I can tell you fellows I'm getting fed up with Darrell! Fifty lines, you know!"

"We've got a hundred each!" said Tom Merry. "We're going to do them—some time. Don't worry!"

"That's the worst of it," said Trimble indignantly. "You haven't!"

"Eh?"

"That awful rotter Darrell," continued Trimble, "that fearful beast, that—that unspeakable Hun Darrell, you know—"

"Weally, Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"That frightful rotter Darrell," continued Trimble unheeding, "that frabjous blighter, you know, called me in the corridor and told me to take a message to Merry and Manners and Lowther."

"Oh, he did, did he?" ejaculated Manners.

"Yes. Said I was to tell you chaps that you need not do the lines he gave you in Wayland this afternoon," said Trimble.

The Terrible Three exchanged a quick glance. Evidently "old Darrell" had reflected and had repented of his hasty injustice, as they had felt pretty sure that he would. The cancelling of the lines was the only reparation he could make.

"Good old Darrell!" said Lowther.

Trimble snorted.

"Yah! Rotter, you mean! I just said that a prefect oughtn't to show favouritism—just a remark, you know—and he gave me fifty lines for cheeking him! Fancy that!" said Trimble hotly.

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Blake.

"Well, it is 'avouritism, isn't it, letting those chaps off their lines?" demanded Trimble. "He never lets me off!"

"Perhaps you don't deserve to be let off, Twimble," suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, how do those Shell bounders deserve to be let off, if you come to that?" snapped Trimble. "What did Darrell give you the lines for, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry did not answer that question.

"Can't you answer?" inquired Trimble.

"I'll tell you, old fat top," said Monty Lowther. "He gave us the lines to—to—"

"To what?"

"To write," explained Lowther.

"Oh, don't be a funny ass!" growled Trimble. He oughtn't to let you off more than other fellows. I call it favouritism. I said so, and the brute gave me fifty. You fellows ought to do my fifty for me, as you've got let off a hundred each."

"How-wow!"

"Or you can do them, D'Arcy, as you're so jolly fond of standing up for Darrell."

"Wats!"

"I think somebody ought to help me out," said Baggy, in an injured tone. "There's just one decent thing about Darrell—he never looks at the fist. He wouldn't notice. Who's doing half my lines?"

"Echo answers who?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"I say, Talbot, if you like—"

"I don't like!" said Talbot of the Shell tersely.

"What about you, Levison?"

"Nothing about me, fatty."

"Cardew, old chap—"

"Dear man!" said Cardew. "Do you want me to help you out?"

"Yes, rather," said Trimble eagerly. "You're not such a rotter as these rotters, Cardew, old fellow. You'll help?"

"I'll help you out with pleasure!" said Cardew.

"Good man!"

Cardew detached himself from an armchair with a yawn, and came over to Baggy. To that fat youth's surprise, Cardew seized him by the collar and whirled him towards the doorway.

"Here, wharrer you up to?" roared Trimble.

"Helping you out."

"Why, you beast—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't mean help me out of the room, you silly ass!" roared Trimble. "I meant help me out with my lines."

"I meant helpin' you out of the room, dear man."

"Yaroooooh!"

Baggy Trimble, helped out by Cardew, sat down with a bump in the passage and roared. Cardew smiled serenely and returned to his armchair. A yell of laughter followed Baggy out.

The fat junior scrambled up and glared into the Common-room.

"Yah! Rotters!" he howled.

And having discharged that Parthian shot, the fat Fourth-Former rolled away dismally to his study to write out his imposition. It was getting near bed-time, and Trimble had not left himself very much time for the impot.

He sat down at his study table, and started, with many grunts and groans. There were more blots on his foolscap than lines, when Trimble had worked his way through fifty verses of Virgil. There were nearly as many smudges as blots, and nearly as many orthographical errors as smudges. The imposition was, in fact, quite a striking one, and worthy of Baggy Trimble at his best.

Such as it was, it had to be taken to the prefect. Baggy Trimble carried it downstairs, and presented himself at Darrell's study in the Sixth.

It was Trimble's little way to be as impertinent as he dared on all occasions. He opened Darrell's door without knocking and rolled into the study.

"Here!" he was beginning.

Then he broke off in sheer, blank astonishment.

Darrell of the Sixth was seated at his table, and in one hand he held a registered envelope. Into that envelope he was carefully packing banknotes. There was a wad of them—how many Trimble could not see—but he knew that there must be at least four or five, possibly nine or ten.

Trimble's eyes widened like saucers.

Darrell of the Sixth, the senior who was known, far and wide, to be hard up—Darrell had a sum of money in his hands which probably amounted to fifty pounds or so!

In his blank amazement Trimble stood rooted to the study carpet, his mouth open, like that of a fish out of water.

Darrell sprang to his feet, his face flushing crimson. He hastily shoved the banknotes and the registered envelope under a book—but too late. Trimble had seen them.

"Trimble! What do you mean by coming into my study without knocking?" he shouted.

"My—my lines!" babbled Trimble.

Darrell was round the table in a flash. He took the fat junior by the collar and boxed his ears.

Then Trimble went out of the study with a whirl, and the door closed after him.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Grooogh! Oooop!" spluttered Trimble, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

He staggered to his feet. Breathless and bursting with wrath, he limped away to the Common-room.

"That rotter," he spluttered, as he came in breathlessly.

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"Oh, cheese it, Trimble," exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently. "You talk too much! Dry up!"

"That rotter's pitched me out of his study," howled Trimble. "I've a good mind to go to Mr. Railton—or the Head! Biffed me, you know, and pitched me out, as if I could help seeing him counting up his money like a giddy miser."

"That's good!" grinned Mellish of the Fourth. "Darrell hasn't much money to count up, I fancy."

"He had his hands full of banknotes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not stacks of gold?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Nunno! Banknotes; dozens of 'em!" said Trimble breathlessly. "Tried to hide 'em as I came in! Hundreds of pounds, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole Common-room roared. They knew Trimble's yarns of old; but this yarn, as Lowther remarked, took the whole cake. Hundreds of pounds in a study at St. Jim's was really too rich.

"Well, perhaps not hundreds," said Trimble. "Fifty pounds at least, though. Wads of banknotes, you know."

"Go it!" said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "A few days ago you were going to pass round the hat for Darrell because he was hard up. Now he's got hundreds of pounds. Are you sure it wasn't thousands?"

"Make it millions!" suggested Roylance.

"I tell you I saw them!" howled Trimble. "Like a giddy miser—nosng over his money! He pitched me out of the study."

"Serve you wight, you fat boundah."

"I say, though, where did Darrell get all that money from?" said Trimble. "I know he was jolly hard up. Now he's rolling in it."

"Have you missed your diamond pin?" asked Cardew gravely.

"Eh?"

"Or the magnificent gold watch King George gave you last time he was at Trimble Hall?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Otherwise, there's no accountin' for Darrell's sudden wealth," said Cardew. "Almost makes a fellow suspect that you're lyin', Trimble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He was stuffing the banknotes into a registered envelope," said Trimble. "Going to send it off by post somewhere. Must have been, you know. He was as mad as a hatter because I saw all that money. I wonder where he got it? If you fellows don't believe me—"

"Believe you!" ejaculated Grundy of the Shell. "Do you think anybody would swallow a yarn like that, you fat idiot?"

"It's true!" yelled Trimble.

"If giddy old Pontius Pilate had known Trimble, he would have reason to say, 'What is truth?'" remarked Cardew. "Trimble's varieties of it are really strikin' and original."

"Yaas, wathah."

"I tell you it's straight!" shouted Trimble excitedly, greatly exasperated at being disbelieved when, for once, he was telling the facts. "Darrell had a bundle of banknotes—fifty pounds at least—in his study!"

Kildare of the Sixth came into the Common-room. It was dorm time. The captain of St. Jim's gave Trimble a stern look.

"What's that rot you're talking, Trimble?" he exclaimed. The juniors expected Baggy Trimble to wither under Kildare's stern eye. To their surprise, Baggy stuck to his guns.

"It's not rot!" he answered. "I saw it all! Darrell had a lot of banknotes in his study—"

"Don't be a young ass."

"Fifty pounds at least!"

"Silence, you young duffer," snapped Kildare. "If you must spin idiotic yarns, keep off Sixth Form prefects. Take a hundred lines, Trimble."

"It's true!" shrieked the hapless Baggy.

"Another word of your silly nonsense, and I shall cane you!" said the St. Jim's captain.

"Oh dear!"

Baggy Trimble restrained his wrath and indignation as best he could; there was no arguing with a prefect's ashplant. He was simmering as he rolled away to the Fourth Form dormitory.

For once, Baggy had related a startling story that had a foundation in fact, and it met with no more belief than his other startling yarns. It really was hard lines on Baggy; but perhaps just what he deserved.

CHAPTER 5. Something Up!

"SOMETHIN'S up, deah boys."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that observation early on the following morning, in very serious tones. "Somethin's up!" he repeated.

"We're all up!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Even Trimble's up."

"Weally, Lowthah—I mean that there is somethin' goin' on—"

"Your chin, old man," said Lowther affably. "It generally is going on, isn't it?"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Something is up, though," said Tom Merry seriously. "I saw Mr. Railton as I came down, and he was looking as solemn as a judge."

"Kildare, too, I guess," said Wildrake. "I saw him, and he looked as if he'd seen a ghost."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's a giddy order that nobody's to go out of gates, too!" said Blake. "Not that we're likely to before brekker; but there it is. Taggles is keeping his eagle eye on the gates now."

"Darrell's gone out!" remarked Dig.

"Bai Jove! Dawwell has?"

"I saw him wheel out his bike," said Dig. "He went by the side gate, of course—the one the prefects have a key to. Taggles couldn't have stopped him. I suppose the giddy fiat doesn't apply to prefects, though."

"It applies to the seniors," said Blake. "I noticed that Cutts of the Fifth was stopped. Taggles told him no one was allowed out."

"Yaas, I observed that," said Arthur Augustus. "Cutts looked wathah annoyed. Cutts weally thinks he is a more important person than he weally is, you know. That is why I reckoned that there was somethin' up. Taggles must have had his ordahs froom the Head, you know."

"Well, what's happened?" asked Herries.

"Haven't the faintest ideah, deah boy. But there is somethin' up," said Arthur Augustus seriously, with a shake of his noble head. "Somethin' has gone w'ong somehow, somewhah."

Kildare of the Sixth came out of the School House, and all the juniors looked at him. If there was "something up" it was very probable that the head prefect knew what it was. And undoubtedly there was a cloud on Kildare's usually cheery face.

He came over to the group of juniors.

"Do you know whether anybody left your dormitory during the night, Merry?" he asked.

Tom looked astonished.

"Not that I know of, Kildare," he answered.

"You didn't happen to wake, by any chance?"

"No; slept like a top."

"And in your dorm, Blake?"

Blake shook his head.

"I woke up once," he said. "But I never heard anybody shifting. I say, Kildare, has there been a jape?"

"Some thoughtless youngstahs playin' pwanks—what?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It is rather more serious than that," said Kildare.

"There has been a robbery."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"So that's why gates are barred this morning!" said Dig.

"The giddy thief isn't to be allowed to scud with his loot—what?"

"You don't know of anybody who's tried to go out, I suppose?" asked the captain of the school, looking at Tom Merry.

"I don't, Kildare."

"Only Dawwell, deah boy."

"Darrell! What do you mean?"

"Darrell's gone out," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"What rot! Why should Darrell go out before brekker?"

said Kildare testily. "Don't talk nonsense!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"But he has gone out!" said Digby, rather warmly. "I saw him go out on his bike, Kildare."

For a moment the captain of St. Jim's was silent, a strange look on his face. The next moment he spoke abruptly.

"My question did not apply to prefects, of course. I meant juniors."

"Bai Jove! If you are thinkin' of a possible thief, Kildare, I fail to see any reason why you should think of a juniah. I am a juniah, at pwsent!" exclaimed D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"You're a young ass," said Kildare; and he turned away, the cloud deeper on his face.

He left the juniors in a buzz of excited comment. Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass thoughtfully.

"I remarked that there was somethin' up, didn't I?" he

said, with some satisfaction. "I wathah thought I had spotted somethin', you know. But I cannot help thinkin' that Kildare is makin' a mistake about a wobbewy. Pwobably some young ass has been playin' some sillay twick, you know. There cannot be a wobbewy without a thief—"

"Not really?" ejaculated Lowther.

"It would be imposs, Lowthah."

"Go hon!"

"Yaas, wathah! And I should wefuse to believe that there was a thief at St. Jim's, without the vewy cleawest evidence," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "It is wathah too howwid a thing to believe easily. And I must remark that Kildare seemed to me vewy cheeky. Faury takin' it for gewanted that if there was a thief it would be a juniah!"

"Well, Kildare's a senior!" grinned Lowther.

"I wegard it as cheek! Of course, it might have been Twimble—Twimble is a juniah. But weally, I should find it vewy hard to believe that even Twimble was a thief. Ah, heah he is! Twimble—"

"Hallo!" said Trimble.

"Are you a thief, Twimble?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Pway don't get excited, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus soothingly. "I was merely askin' you a question."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah, deah boys!" said D'Arcy.

"Pway be sewious. If you are a thief, Twimble—"

"You silly ass!" yelled Trimble, in great wrath. "Who's a thief?"

"I weally do not know at pwsent, Twimble. I am askin' you for information."

"You—you—you frabjous idiot!" spluttered Trimble.

"Wharrer you mean?"

"You see, Twimble, you are about the worst chawactah in the school," explained Arthur Augustus. "You have vewy lax ideahs with wegard to pwopahity. You bag a fellow's cake without compunction, and you howwow a bike without permish, and leave it all mudday and dirty. Of course, that is quite diffewent froom stealin', but it is vewy wepwehensible. I twust, Twimble, that you have not gone a step furthah on the downward path?"

The expression on Trimble's face was extraordinary, and Tom Merry & Co. yelled. Arthur Augustus was quite serious.

"You—you—" spluttered Trimble. "You call me a thief, and I'll go to the Housemaster."

"I was not callin' you anythin' of the kind, Twimble. I was simply askin' you a civil question."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys! It is a vewy sewious mattah if Twimble has committed a wobbewy."

"I haven't!" yelled Trimble.

"Are you suah, Twimble?"

"Yes, you blithering idiot!"

"Vewy good. I accept your assuwanee, deah boy. I am vewy glad that you have not committed a wobbewy, Twimble. You see, it appeahs at pwsent that somebody has committed a wobbewy, and natuwallly I wegard you as the most likely person."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you born idiot!" gasped Trimble.

"Weally, Twimble—"

Two or three Sixth Form prefects came out of the School House, with worried looks. They brought an order from the Head for the whole House to assemble in Hall at once—before breakfast. Only the School House were called in—the New House was not concerned in the matter whatever it was. Tom Merry & Co. went in with the rest. Baggy Trimble made a rush for the stairs, and Mr. Railton's voice called to him sharply.

"Trimble! Where are you going?"

"Only to my study, sir."

"Come down at once!"

"B-b-but, sir—"

"Do you hear me?"

Baggy Trimble rolled back. The Housemaster eyed him grimly.

"Why were you going to your study, Trimble, when the school is assembling by the Head's order?"

"I—I—"

Eyes were turned on Baggy Trimble on all sides. If the fat junior had desired to draw suspicion upon himself, he could hardly have done so more effectively. Trimble flushed.

"Answer me, Trimble!" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"I—I—I was going for—for some toffee, sir—" stammered Trimble.

"Toffee!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir! As—as we're called up before brekker, sir, and—and I'm hungry," stuttered Trimble. "The—the Head may keep us a long time, sir—you know he's rather long-winded, sir—"

(Continued on page 12.)

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The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

Kildare Again Contributes.

CARDEW'S NERVE.

A FEW weeks ago that young ass Merry managed to wangle an article out of me for his blessed Lower School rag—the "St. Jim's News," I think they call it.

To this day I am not quite clear how he managed to do it, but I have an idea that it was Darrell who rather turned the scale in his favour. It is all very well for Darrell, but he did not know what he was letting me in for.

The cheeky young sweeps have actually had the nerve to ask for another.

I suppose Merry realises how narrow an escape he had of going out of my study on his neck the last time he came to see me about the matter, and was not keen on risking it again. He sent Cardew this time. That bright and elegant youth is, it appears, a sub-editor, or something.

I do not know how he got the appointment, but if the qualification was cheek, he certainly deserved it.

He is the most peculiar junior with whom it has ever been my lot to deal. He has a degree of serene self-confidence, assurance, and self-possession that I have met with in only one other person in all my life, and that was an American book-agent, who tried to land me with a set of volumes on "Self-Help." (The merchant in question "Self-Helped" himself to my fountain-pen before I managed to get rid of him.)

The way in which Cardew approached me in regard to the article is sufficient evidence of his powers.

It took him less than thirty seconds to convince me that I was exceptionally privileged in being allowed to write another article. The amazing nerve of it took my breath away. From the time that he opened my study door to his leaving me with a careless nod, I was more or less under a sort of spell.

Rushden was in the room when he came, and I think it is an illuminating sidelight upon the affair to say that all through the interview Rushden was under the impression that I had promised to write the article, and was trying to get out of it.

"Dear old bird," said Cardew, and did not turn a hair when he saw me reaching for an ash-plant. "I've just called in to say that we should like to have your copy for the 'News' some time to-morrow."

"Eh—what copy? What 'News'?" I asked in amazement.

He smiled genially.

"Oh, your next article for the 'St. Jim's News,' you know. We've decided to put another in this week, old top."

"Have you? And may I ask who has come to this interesting decision?"

"Certainly! The jolly old editorial staff, dear old boy!"

"Did it occur to you that I might have something to say in the matter?" I inquired.

Sarcasm was lost upon him. It usually is. I suppose he's too much of a master of it himself to be affected by other people's.

"Not at all," he said calmly. "Why should it?"

I heard Rushden gasp, and I breathed a trifle hard myself.

"You see, you're skipper of the school," went on Cardew, "and we can't permit you to neglect your duty."

"There are some duties that I make a

special point of attending to!" I said grimly, with a glance at the ash-plant.

"I have heard so," replied Cardew coolly.

"If you aren't outside this study in two seconds you will be in a position to afford first-hand evidence on the subject," I hinted warningly.

"Good enough," said Cardew, nodding.

"Then we shall have it to-morrow?"

"Have what?"

"The jolly old article!"

"Certainly not! I haven't the faintest idea of writing one for you."

"About a thousand words," he continued, as though I had not spoken.

"You won't get a line!"

"Any subject you like, you know. We're not particular."

"I tell you I'm not going to write anything at all!"

"Well, the sooner the better, but don't put yourself out. To-morrow evening will do. Thanks! Very kind of you!"

"But I say that I won't!"

"Not at all! We're only too pleased to print it!"

And the study-door closed behind him. I

gazed at Rushden, incapable of speech.

No Help For It.

"What the merry dickens did you promise them for?" he asked. "I'm certain they're had enough without encouragement from the skipper. Look at that rotten article they printed about the Sixth Form Society."

"Philip Rushden," I said impressively, "this visit of Cardew's is the first I have heard of this matter, and I most certainly have not promised the young beggars anything. It's as much of a surprise to me as it is to you."

Rushden stared at me.

"My aunt! But—but Cardew said—"

"I can't help what he said!" I snapped.

"I know nothing about it!"

"Then why didn't you sling him out?"

he inquired curiously.

And that is where he really had got me

beaten, because, for the life of me, I could not have explained it.

Darrell came in to talk about the team, and Rushden told him all about it. Darrell seemed to think it was remarkably funny, and sat in my easy-chair laughing his hat off. I told him he had better go and offer to write a comic column for them if he was so full of humour, but he actually said that he did not want to poach on my preserves, and that it was my own fault for writing such a first-class article last time and whetting their appetite.

And hang it if, before they went, the two of them did not persuade me that I ought to give the youngsters what they wanted.

With the work of the footer team, the Sports Club, the Sixth Form Debating Society, and my extra cramming, to say nothing of the fact that I am editor of the official school magazine, I think I have got enough to hand without being called upon to contribute to a Lower School joy-rag that at times isn't in particularly good odour among the powers that be on account of certain irreverences relating to masters and prefects that more than occasionally find their way into its pages. But I've broken the ice, I suppose, by acceding to their request on the last occasion, so I can hardly plead dignity as an excuse for refusing.

Also, when I came to think it over afterwards, I could not help laughing at the cool way in which Cardew came to me. But I warn the editorial staff, whoever they are, that I have looked out a special ash-plant to be reserved for any more of them who come on the same errand. After all, there is a limit to all things—excepting, perhaps, their cheek. And I will find out if there is not some way of pulling up even that if they are not careful.

Kildare Speaks Out.

Still, although it entails many obligations, the life of a captain of a public school like St. Jim's has many compensations, and, on the whole, it is very pleasant. At least, I find it so, and I suppose, like many other things, it is what you make of it. Most of the other prefects are a decent enough set of fellows, and I get on jolly well with them; and the same remark applies equally well to the rest of the school. Of course, there are a certain number of black—or, at least, dirty grey—sheep among them, and a proportion of slackers who need keeping well up to the mark. As captain of the Lower School, Merry finds that out, and although I rarely interfere with the juniors unless I am bound to do so, I notice a good deal of what goes on, even if I generally turn a blind eye to most of it. After all, it is better that Merry should attend to these matters in a semi-official manner, without bringing me into them, because I should often be compelled to make reports to higher authority, which would mean that the culprits would be dealt with in a far more drastic fashion, and I am certain that Merry's methods are as effective without hurting the reputation of the school. Too many expulsions and birchings, the reports of which are apt to spread in the outside world, do not add to the prestige of a school, and I am certain that many such regrettable incidents have been avoided by a timely Form-ragging, or the sentence of a Dormitory Court of Justice. Even in the Upper School I sometimes elect to deal summarily with an offender whose misdeeds, if reported to the Head or a Housemaster, would gain him the order of the boot.

And as Merry takes a lot of responsibility in these matters off my shoulders, perhaps I am not altogether disinclined to oblige him with regard this article for his paper. But, as I have said before, there is a limit.

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Rough On Selby!

By Curly Gibson (Third Former).

(The following article was sent in to me by Curly Gibson, of the Third Form; but I have spent some time in going through it, correcting the spelling and fixing the grammar into shape. In the present form it is readable, which is a jolly sight more than could be said for it when I received it.—Tom Merry.)

It all began through old Selby lamming into Wally D'Arcy. All for nothing, mind you—well, at least, Wally only hit him on the back with a lump of blotting-paper soaked in copying-ink, and a fellow who'd get his rag out about a little thing like that is a beastly Hun, say what you like. Besides, old Selby ought to be getting used to that sort of thing by now. Anyway, it happens often enough.

Of course, I'm not saying that it wasn't partly Wally's fault. The silly ass shouldn't have let himself be caught.

But even then six lashes with a cane and a couple of hundred lines is too blessed thick. And Wally doesn't stand for that, take my word. None of us would, especially from the Selby bird.

And he made Wally show up those rotten lines, though his hands were so sore he could hardly write. We helped him out as much as we could, but we didn't mean that to be the end of the matter.

There was a meeting in the Third Form Common-room that evening, and if old Selby had only have heard some of the things that were said about him, and some of the suggestions that were made for having revenge, he'd have gone out in a hurry and insured his life.

Joe Frayne wanted to boil him in oil, but we all said that was too uneasy, and besides there wasn't enough money in the whole of the Form to buy the quantity of oil that would have been necessary to soak the old beast.

Wally was feeling too sick to say much at all, but when he did speak he came out with the best suggestion of the lot. Old Wally's got brains, I will say that for him, though he does act the ass a bit at times, like his major.

I suppose it runs in the family, and they can't really help it; and, anyway, Wally isn't quite such a howling idiot as his brother. (I hope old Gussy reads this.—T. M.)

Wally is pally with some fags over in the New House, where they swot "stinks," and things like that. I don't see the use of it unless you're going to be a blessed chemist when you grow up; but, anyway, I'll admit that it comes in useful at times. This was one of the times.

It seems that there's some sort of muck that's especially whiffy. It buzzes like rotten cabbages, Wally said. But when I got a sniff of it later I decided I'd never go into a greengrocer's shop again, in case there were any cabbages a bit on the ancient side lying about. I don't want any more of it.

It's called carbon di-something-or-other, and when Wally told us about it we saw at once that it was just the stuff for old Selby.

One of the fellows bunked over to the New House, and fetched some of it back in a little bottle. It was like water, only a

greenish-yellow colour, and when Frayne took the stopper out—my hat, the niff of it would have knocked elephants over!

More and more we saw it was just the stuff to give old Selby.

The worst of it was we didn't quite know how to work it, but Wally went and saw Figgy, and Kerr gave him a tip.

It seemed that the best way was to get some thin glass tubes, the smallest they use in the laboratory, which Kerr supplied to us, and to put the stuff in these, and then leave them about in Selby's room, where he'd break them without knowing.

We didn't see how we were going to do it at first until Wally hit on the idea of putting them into the door-frame, and the tops of drawers, so that when the door was shut or the drawers moved they'd get smashed.

We had to wait until the coast was clear, but it didn't take long to place them all, and we watched the old bird go back a bit later.

He went in and shut the door, as usual, and for a while nothing seemed to happen.

We were beginning to think something had gone wrong, but Wally explained that the stuff was probably taking a bit of time to warm up to its job.

But when it did get going, Selby knew about it.

Paid in Full.

We could hear him stamping about in his room, and presently the door opened, and he came out with his handkerchief stuffed in his face.

"Oh, really! Oh, tut-t-t!" he was gasping. We could hear him from where we were.

"Disgusting! Horrible! The vilest of smells!"

Now that wasn't true, because the New House fellow told us that there are some stinks worse than that, but they're not so easy to make on the spot. Still Selby is on the Classical side, so perhaps he doesn't know much about chemistry.

Latham has the next room to Selby, and I suppose that some of the niff must have drifted in to him, because old Beaky hadn't been puffing and blowing in the corridor for long before the next door opened, and Latham looked out.

"Really, Mr. Selby," he said, in that mild way he has—a bit on the soft side, but he's a decent old freak, really—"there appears to be a most unpleasant odour somewhere! Have you noticed it?"

Just like that he said it. "An unpleasant odour," and then asking old Beaky if he could smell it! And we were beginning to get whiffs of it where we stood, round the corner of the corridor.

"A smell, sir!" roared Selby. "A most vile, disgusting stench, I call it! How can I have failed to notice it, since it has driven me from my room?"

"Oh—er—indeed!" murmured Latham. "I wonder what it can be?"

He took his handkerchief away, and tried a specimen sniff. The stink put in an uppercut, and he dived back into cover.

Selby didn't take his nose-wipe away to talk; he just spoke through it. Old Beaky's always talking either through his hat, or the back of his neck, so I suppose that chin-wagging through a handkerchief comes easy to him.

Anyway, we could hear what he was saying.

The stink was getting more and more

noticeable. In fact, by now you could almost see it. Some of the Sixth came along to investigate, as it was crawling into their quarters.

Some of the fellows thought that the drains had gone wrong, and there were all sorts of suggestions being made; but everybody could tell that it came from old Selby's room.

He and Latham went in, and started poking about, opening drawers and so on, and, of course, they were breaking more tubes all the while, and so the stink was getting worse and worse. In the end they had to come staggering out, and they were as wise as when they went in, except that Latham said he'd got a faint idea it smelt like something he used to use in the lab. when he was swotting chemistry for his degree.

That gave them an idea, and they sent over to the New House for Professor Gordon, the science master, and he jolly soon told them what it was.

But he couldn't say how it came there, nor how the stink could be removed, and that's what old Selby was worrying about, because the corridor wasn't fit to breathe in, and his room couldn't be entered.

In the end he had to pass the evening in the masters' Common-room, and have all the windows in his rooms opened till he went back to bed. And that worried him like anything, because he hates a draught and the cold, and besides, the stink was still there—quite a lot of it.

The worst of it is, he doesn't know it was who did it, and we can't tell him, so that he isn't aware that it was our revenge for the rotten way in which he treated Wally.

But, at any rate, we have the satisfaction of knowing that we've paid him out for it.

Letters I Have Received.

By Tom Merry.

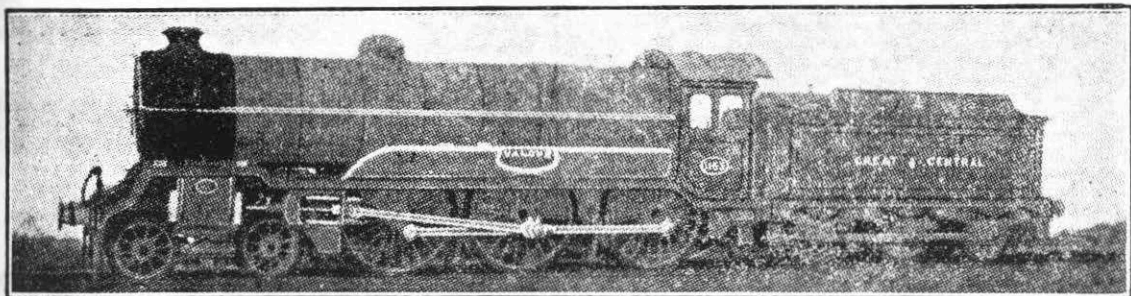
Ronald H. (Paisley).—Many thanks for your most interesting letter. Here is the list of the masters you want: Headmaster, Dr. Holmes; Sixth Form, Mr. Raiton; Fifth Form, Mr. Ratcliff; Shell, Leslie M. Linton; Fourth Form, Philip G. Latham; Third Form, Mr. Selby; Second Form, Mr. Carrington; French master, Monsieur Adolphe le Blanc Monry.

Grace J. (Portsmouth).—Portraits of Lowther and Talbot have already appeared. The others will come along in due course. Monty Lowther is the best junior pianist at St. Jim's. I can't tell you the names of all the seniors who can play. Can Gussy play the piano? Well, according to Curdew he can create a discord which speedily brings a person of authority on the scene to see if there is a murder taking place.

"Boh" (Isle of Man).—Some of the rotters at St. Jim's are: Knox, Cutts, Gilmore, St. Leger, Prye, Racke, Crooke, Scope, Clamp, Chowle, Melish, Trimble, and Gore.

Sidney B. (Blackburn).—There is not a great deal to know about Gerald Cutts. He belongs to the School House Fifth, and shares his palatial study with St. Leger and Gilmore. He is 5ft. 9ins. in height. His people, who are very wealthy, keep him well supplied with pocket-money, and he goes to London theatres with his study-mates fairly frequently. He will appear in our portrait gallery very shortly.

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Self Condemned.

(Continued from page 9.)

"What!"

"I—I mean——"

Mr. Railton gave the fat junior a very searching look.

"You are a very stupid boy, Trimble! Go into Hall at once!"

"Yes, sir!" groaned Baggy. And he followed the crowd into Big Hall, minus his toffee.

In Big Hall the roll was taken by the Housemaster. Every fellow belonging to the School House answered to his name, with one exception—Darrell of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 6.

Blac Suspicion.

KILDARE of the Sixth tramped across the quadrangle, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep frown on his brow.

There was trouble in Kildare's mind—trouble weighing heavily on his heart. Several fellows, who glanced at Kildare in the quad, remarked that old Kildare was taking the affair of the robbery very seriously. They did not guess the black thoughts, the haunting fears, that assailed and oppressed him in spite of himself. It was impossible, Kildare told himself—blankly impossible and unthinkable! Darrell—old George Darrell—was straight as a die; the straightest fellow breathing. But fifty pounds was missing from the Head's study, and back into Kildare's mind had come the strange tale of Baggy Trimble—of Darrell in his study counting banknotes. And Darrell had gone out before breakfast, on his bicycle, and had not yet come in.

Breakfast was over now, and Darrell had not returned. A prefect of the Sixth was allowed little licences denied to lesser mortals; he could cut a meal if he liked, on a special occasion. There was nothing in that, in itself! But on this especial morning of all mornings! The coincidence was at least startling.

Kildare leaned on the little green gate, to which all the Sixth Form prefects had keys. It was by that gate that Darrell had gone, and he would return the same way. Kildare was anxious to see his chum; his heart was aching now with anxiety. It was not that he suspected Darrell—he could not suspect him. But he realised how it looked—and that others would suspect where he could and would not. Already he had noted the glance exchanged between the Head and the Housemaster, when it was learned that Darrell alone of all the School House was absent that morning.

Kildare was the most miserable fellow at St. Jim's that morning as he leaned on the gate and waited. Why did not his chum return? He drove away the haunting fear that he might not return at all. That at least was inconceivable. If he feared that, he was relieved on the one point at least as a bicycle came whirling up the road and George Darrell jumped off. Darrell came up to the gate, key in hand, and started a little as he saw Kildare.

"Hallo, old chap!" he exclaimed. "Miss me at brekker—what?"

"Yes," said Kildare, in a strained voice.

"I've had a spin round Wayland on the old jigger," said Darrell.

Kildare nodded.

"Come in!" he said. "Had any brekker?"

"Yes. I found I should be late back, so I stopped for a snack," said the Sixth-Former. He opened the gate and wheeled in his machine. "You're looking jolly serious about something, old man. Anything up?"

"Yes!"

Darrell seemed to be in unusually good spirits. He looked like a fellow who had got a weight off his mind.

"Well, what's up?" he asked good-humouredly, as he clicked the gate shut. "I suppose Railton doesn't mind my getting brekker out for once?"

"Oh, no."

"Give it a name, then!" said Darrell, smiling.

Kildare breathed more freely. Surely suspicion could not gather on the head of this frank, smiling fellow, in whose face honesty and integrity shone as clear as the sun at noon-day. It was obvious that Darrell suspected nothing—that he did not know what had been discovered in the school—or else he was acting his part with amazing ability.

"I'm not to tell you," said Kildare. "You're to see the Housemaster, Darrell."

"Nothing serious, surely?"

"Mr. Railton will tell you. Put up your bike and come in."

"All serene!"

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Kildare walked with Darrell to the bike-shed, and then to the School House. Darrell glanced once or twice at his troubled face, in a perplexed way. But his own face remained cheerful; he seemed to have a fund of good spirits that morning.

"You seem unusually chirpy, old fellow," Kildare could not help remarking.

"I am!" said Darrell. "I've got something off my mind. That—that little worry I told you about, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's started violently.

"Not the worry about the money?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"The fifty pounds—the money you hoped to bag on the Latin prize—"

"That's it!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Kildare.

Darrell looked at him.

"I don't quite make you out, old man," he said, in wonder.

"I rather thought you'd congratulate me!"

"Darrell! You—you've raised fifty pounds?"

"Yes."

"How, in Heaven's name?"

Darrell's cheery face clouded a little.

"I think I'd better not tell you that, Kildare. I've not raised it in a way I like or approve of myself. But it was the only way—and I had to do it. I promised the money to an—an old friend in distress, as I told you, and she—she never knew there was any difficulty about it. I was fairly floored when I failed to bag the Founder's prize. I've been a bit knocked over since; but I thought of a way out, and I've managed it. But I think I'd better not tell you the details—you won't mind?"

"Darrell!" groaned Kildare.

Darrell stopped and stared at him, struck by the horror in Kildare's face.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What the thunder are you looking like that for, Kildare? What—"

Kildare gripped his arm.

"When did you raise this money, Darrell? Tell me that!"

"Yesterday."

"At what time?"

"Late in the afternoon."

"Oh heavens!"

"I don't understand you, Kildare!" said Darrell, rather sharply. "You're looking at me as if—as if—"

"Mr. Railton's waiting for you," said the captain of St. Jim's abruptly. "I'm forbidden to say anything to put you on your guard—"

"On my guard?" repeated Darrell.

"I've said too much already. But—one word! I—I—I suppose you can explain to Mr. Railton how you raised the money?"

"Explain to Railton! He won't know anything about the matter at all!"

"If he did, could you explain?"

"No!" said Darrell.

"Darrell! Why not?"

"Well, I couldn't!" said Darrell shortly. "Not that I'm likely to be asked. You've not mentioned my private affairs to Railton—what I told you in confidence?"

"Not a word! But it is true, Darrell, that Trimble saw you in your study last evening, with a wad of banknotes—"

"The spying little rotter—yes!" said Darrell, frowning. "I pitched him out of the study!"

"I heard him yarning about it among the juniors, and gave him lines," said Kildare. "I thought it was some of his usual bunkum. But it will be all over the school!"

Darrell looked perplexed.

"Even if it is, I don't see how it matters," he said. "You simply perplex me, Kildare. What on earth's the matter this morning?"

"Go in and see Mr. Railton," said Kildare huskily; "he will tell you. For mercy's sake, Darrell, be careful what you say and do! I can't say any more—I've said too much already! Go in!"

"But—" stammered Darrell.

"Go in! Go in!"

Kildare turned away abruptly. Darrell gave him a puzzled stare and went into the School House. His face was not so cheerful now. There was an excited squeak from the corridor as Darrell came in.

"Here's Darrell, you fellows!"

"Shut up, Trimble!"

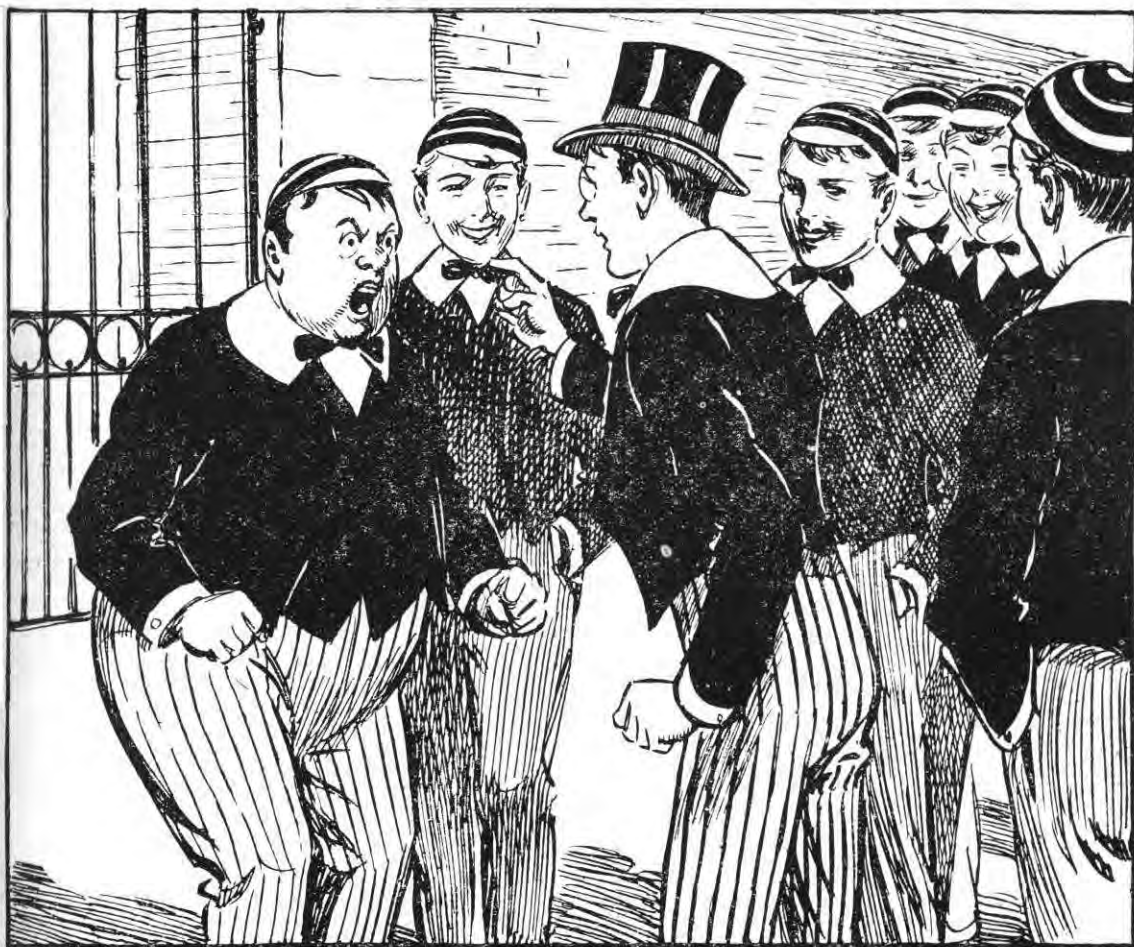
"He's come back!" squeaked Trimble. "What a neck, you know!"

"Shut up!"

Darrell swung round towards Trimble, a glint in his eyes. The fat junior backed away promptly.

"What do you mean by all that, you young ass?" asked the prefect.

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Trimble. "Nothing at all! I—I don't think you've been out of gates to hide it."



"Are you a thief, Twimble?" asked D'Arcy. "Wha-a-at?" yelled Trimble. "Pway don't get excited, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus soothingly. "I was merely askin' you a question." "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry and Co. "Pway don't cackle, deah boys. It is a vewy sewlous mattah if Twimble has committed a wobbewy."

(See page 9.)

"What? Hide what?"

"N-n-nothing!"

"Darrell!" Mr. Railton appeared in his study doorway. "Kindly come into my study at once!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Darrell.

And he went. Baggy Trimble was silent until the door had closed on him, and then he burst out again.

"I thought he'd bunked with it, you know! What a neck to come back here!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"I fancy it's clear enough after what we were told in Hall," Trimble declared. "You fellows can see for yourselves."

"Shut up, Trimble!" growled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! If you venchah to bweathe a wotten suspish wegardin' old Dawwell, you fat wottah, I will give you a feahful thwashin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You can see for yourself!" hooted Trimble.

"Dry up!"

"Wing off, you fat boundah!"

And as Trimble did not ring off as commanded, two or three juniors collared Trimble and sat him down in the corridor with a heavy bump. Whereat Baggy Trimble roared, and Tom Merry & Co. walked away with clouded faces. They had silenced Trimble; but they could not silence the miserable uneasiness in their own breasts.

CHAPTER 7.

The Sixth-Former's Secret.

MR. RAILTON was looking very grave as Darrell stood before him in his study. The Sixth-Former was grave, too. He realised that something very unusual was on the tapis, though he did not know what it was. But a deep disquietude was seizing upon him; he hardly knew why.

"You went out very early this morning, Darrell," said the Housemaster quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"I will tell you at once, Darrell, that a certain discovery was made by Dr. Holmes early this morning. Orders were given that no one was to be allowed out of gates, and the roll was called. You were absent."

"What has happened, sir?"

"I will come to that in one moment. Do not think, my boy," said the Housemaster kindly, "that you are under suspicion? You are being questioned simply because you were the only person out of gates, and I have no doubt whatever that you are able to give a perfectly satisfactory explanation. I am sure that it is only a coincidence, and the Head is as sure as I am. So it is left to me to put a few questions to you to clear up the matter beyond doubt. You will tell me how it happened that you went out so soon after rising-bell and stayed out till this moment."

"I went out on my bicycle, sir," said Darrell. "It's not the first time I've taken a spin before brekker!"

"I had no doubt that the explanation would be something perfectly simple," said Mr. Railton, "and it is as simple as I expected. I only require your assurance, Darrell, that you went out simply for a spin and had no other object in view."

The Sixth-Former hesitated and coloured.

Mr. Railton's eyes were on his face; not suspiciously, but very keenly. The flush of colour in his cheeks naturally did not escape the Housemaster.

"Had you any other object in view, Darrell?"

"I went out to post a letter, sir."

"To post a letter?" repeated the Housemaster. "It is usual to post letters in the school box."

"It was a registered letter, sir."

"That alters the case, of course," Mr. Railton's look was growing a little harder. "Doubtless it is only a coincidence,

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but I shall have to ask you some further particulars now, Darrell. You have been absent something over an hour. It would not take half so long to ride down to Rycombe to register a letter at the post-office."

"I went over to Wayland, sir."

"Simply to register the letter?"

"Yes, sir!"

"For what reason, Darrell, did you ride three times as far as was necessary for your purpose?"

Darrell did not reply. The colour deepened in his face, he seemed at a loss for words.

"I am waiting, Darrell."

"I have no objection to explaining, sir," said the Sixth-Former quietly. "But I have a right to ask what is the object of this questioning. It is not usual for a Sixth Form prefect to be called up like this and questioned like a tag who has been out of bounds!"

"That is correct, Darrell. I have said that something has happened—a discovery has been made. I desired you to explain your movements of your own accord before acquainting you with that discovery. For your own sake, it would be better for you to do so. I think, Darrell, that you should leave it to your Housemaster's judgment."

"Very well, sir," said Darrell. "I will explain. You know that the little post-office at Rycombe is a grocery-shop, too—a little place where the village folk tattle. Registered letters in a little hole like that attract attention. The address would be read and talked about, very likely. I did not want that to happen in this case. So I rode over to the head post-office at Wayland."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I am aware of it, Darrell; but I am not aware of any reason why the address on your letter should be kept secret even from the village folk. Any amount of tattle could do no harm on the subject of a letter addressed to your father or your relatives—or your friends."

"That was my reason, sir."

"Very good! I am forced to conclude that your correspondent in this case was not a member of your family, then, or one of your family friends."

Darrell was silent.

"Will you tell me to whom the letter was sent, Darrell?"

"There is no reason why I should do so, sir."

"There is a good reason."

"I cannot tell you, sir!"

"Then it is not only the tattle of the village post-office you feared, but the knowledge of your Housemaster?"

"I feared nothing," said Darrell proudly. "But a fellow has private affairs about which even his Housemaster has no right to ask him questions."

"Have you ever found me inquisitive, Darrell, or interfering in matters beyond my sphere?"

"Never, sir! But—"

"But what?"

"It's a private matter, sir," said Darrell, flushing. "It might be—be misunderstood. I prefer to say nothing. I think, sir, that you should tell me the object of this questioning. Am I suspected of anything?"

"You are not likely to be suspected unless by your own act," said the Housemaster. "I will tell you what has happened—what you would have learned with the rest of the House if you had been present at roll-call. There has been a robbery in the School House."

Darrell started violently.

"A robbery?"

"Yes!"

The Sixth-Former raised his head proudly.

"I can't imagine, sir, that you could possibly think of me in connection with such a happening," he said.

"I should be the last to do so, I think," said Mr. Railton.

"But you compel me, Darrell, to consider the possibility."

"Mr. Railton!"

"Early this morning Dr. Holmes discovered that fifty pounds in banknotes had been taken from the desk in his study," said Mr. Railton. "It was not taken during the night, as the desk is always locked at night, and the Head unlocked it this morning. It was taken some time during the evening; someone must have entered the study either while the Head was at dinner, or later, when he was in this study with me. There is no doubt whatever that the money was taken by some person in the School House—some boy belonging to this House. That it might have been a junior is possible; but a senior boy has more access to the Head's study—a junior found there would be punished. A senior, especially a prefect, would have some excuse ready to make. Nothing of any certainty is known, so far; but the Head gave immediate orders that no one was to be allowed out of gates. You are the only person who has been out of gates, so far, Darrell; and you went out to post a registered letter to an address with which you refuse to acquaint me. For your own sake, I beg of you to be more frank."

Darrell stood quite still.

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It seemed, for an instant, that he was turned to stone. His face was white as chalk.

"The school was gated, of course, so that the thief should have no opportunity to convey his plunder to a safe hiding place, if he had not already done so," said Mr. Railton. "It is most probable that the theft took place after lock-up last evening. After what I have told you, Darrell, will you tell me to whom you posted a registered letter at Wayland on this especial morning?"

Darrell's face grew haggard.

"I can't, sir."

"Why not?"

"I can't."

Mr. Railton shrugged his shoulders.

"You realise, Darrell, that you are placing yourself under very grave suspicion?" he asked.

"I hope not, sir."

"You may accept my assurance on that point," said Mr. Railton dryly.

"I can't help it, sir. If there's going to be a row—a disgrace—I can't have an innocent name mixed up in it."

"It is not usual for schoolboys to register letters," said Mr. Railton. "I should say that it is very unusual. Why did you register this letter, Darrell?"

"For—for safety, of course."

"Then it contained something of value?"

"Ye-es."

"Money?"

"Yes," stammered Darrell.

"In the form of banknotes, doubtless?"

"Yes," almost whispered Darrell, with a haggard look.

"What was the sum?" asked Mr. Railton grimly.

No reply.

"Was it fifty pounds?"

"Yes," said Darrell desperately.

"How did you come into possession of such a sum of money?"

No answer.

"I had observed," said Mr. Railton, "that you worked very hard for the Founder's prize of fifty pounds, and it was not been difficult to see that losing it was a heavy blow to you. But you lost it—and yet you tell me that you were in possession of fifty pounds this morning, immediately after the theft in the Head's study. What do you expect me to think, Darrell?"

"I should not have told you if I had stolen the money," said Darrell. "I'm telling you everything I can."

"You have told me too much, or too little. For the final time, Darrell, will you tell me where you obtained this money?"

Darrell had a bitter look.

"What's the good?" he said. "I'm ashamed of the way I came by it, though it was honest enough; it wasn't the Head's money. But you wouldn't believe me, and it would make matters no better if you did. I've got nothing more to say, sir, excepting that I never knew a syllable about this robbery until you told me yourself."

Mr. Railton rose.

"You had better come with me to the Head, Darrell. The matter must be placed in his hands now."

"Very well, sir."

Darrell of the Sixth followed the Housemaster from the study.

CHAPTER 8. Darrell's Disaster.

TOM MERRY & CO were going in to lessons now, and they caught sight of the Housemaster and Darrell in the corridor. Even without Baggy Trimble's tattle, the juniors would have known what to think, from the looks of the prefect and the Housemaster. As yet, nothing had been done beyond the bare announcement of the robbery; there had been no searching, no general questioning. Darrell's absence at roll-call had been noted by every fellow in the House; and that, added to Trimble's story of the banknotes of the night before, settled the matter in a good many minds.

Tom Merry & Co. did not believe it, but they were deeply troubled. They liked Darrell and respected him, and it was impossible for them to believe that he had fallen so low. But they could not help seeing what it looked like. And now the sight of Darrell with the Housemaster clinched the matter—for it was obvious that it was an accused delinquent that Mr. Railton was taking to the Head's study.

Darrell walked with head erect, looking neither to the right nor the left; Mr. Railton's face was grave, and set like iron. Some of the juniors paused to look at them; and Kildare, on his way to the Sixth Form-room stepped quickly towards his chum to intercept him.

"Darrell, you've explained—" he began.

"Darrell has explained nothing Kildare," said Mr. Railton. "For that reason I am taking him to Dr. Holmes."

"You—you can't think, sir—" stammered Kildare helplessly.

"It rests with Darrell whether he gives a frank explanation," said the Housemaster. "Come!"

"May I—may I come, sir?" said Kildare. "I—I think you might let me be present, sir. Darrell's my chum, and I may be able to help, too."

"Come if you like, certainly."

Kildare went with them towards the Head's study. A group of Fifth-Formers in the corridor exchanged glances.

"What's the merry trouble about, I wonder?" said Cutts of the Fifth. "They can't suspect Darrell of pinching the Head's banknotes."

"Looks as if they do," said St. Leger. "All rot!"

"There's a yarn that he was seen counting up banknotes in his study last night," said Gilmore of the Fifth.

"Rot!" said St. Leger.

"Well, it's the talk of the fags."

"Sorry for Darrell, if it's so," said Cutts reflectively.

"Sudden temptation, you know, or somethin' of that kind. You never know these quiet, reserved chaps; they're dark horses, and you never can tell when they're goin' to break out."

And Gerald Cutts strolled towards the Fifth Form-room with his companions, evidently not very much troubled by Darrell's disaster.

"Bai Jove, it's wotten!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to his chums. "It weally looks as if old Dawwell is suspected, you know."

"What did the ass go out for before brekker?" said Levi-son. "He was asking for it."

"Tisn't only that!" said Blake sagely. "Railton would have asked him about that; but if he explained, he wouldn't be taking him to the Head. There's more than that in it."

"Bai Jove! What else, deah boy?"

"Blessed if I know—but something," said Blake shrewdly.

"Railton wasn't looking like a giddy Gorgon for nothing."

"But it's impossible that Darrell—" began Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess they're nosing after the wrong moose," remarked Kit Wildrake. "Darrell's as square as they make them. Railton may have heard Trimble's yarn—Housemasters get to hear things—"

"But that was all bunkum," said Grundy.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It wasn't!" yelled Trimble. "I tell you I saw Darrell with the banknotes. Tom Merry believes it, anyhow. Look at him."

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom gruffly. And the captain of the Shell went on to the Form-room with his chums, in a very worried and miserable mood.

There was a general atmosphere of discomfort in the St. Jim's Form-rooms that morning. The happening had left an unpleasant taste in everybody's mouth, as it were—though some fellows were already remarking that it was lucky that the thief had been caught so quickly. Poor Darrell's guilt was already taken for granted in a good many quarters.

Meanwhile, the accused senior was standing before the Head, facing the inquiry, in the presence of the Housemaster and his fellow-prefect, Kildare. Kildare's loyal face was full of faith; but the faces of the two masters were set and stern.

Mr. Railton had given the Head a succinct account of what Darrell had admitted—or, rather, had told him. The Housemaster put it with perfect fairness. Darrell had told him freely what he might have concealed, that was certain. If the unhappy boy was a criminal, he had not the cunning of one—his crime was more than clumsy. But the facts were there—and the facts were condemning in themselves.

Dr. Holmes listened quietly, with his eyes on Darrell's face, and Kildare's troubled countenance grew longer and longer. His faith did not waver; but his fear showed plainly.

"You are satisfied with the account Mr. Railton has given me of your interview with him, I presume, Darrell?" asked the Head.

"Quite, sir."

"You know the impression it must make on me?"

No answer.

The Head made a gesture.

"I should be very slow to believe you capable of a dishonest action, Darrell. But someone in the school has filched a sum of money from my desk. That person, when found, will be expelled in ignominy. You must see that suspicion points very strongly towards you—not only on account of what you have admitted, but chiefly on account of what you have concealed. I must ask you to make a complete confession. You posted fifty pounds in banknotes in a registered letter this morning. Where did you obtain the money?"

Darrell did not speak.

"Unless you explain, Darrell, you stand condemned for theft, and the inquiry ceases at this point!" said the Head grimly.

Kildare moved a step nearer his chum.

"For goodness' sake, Darrell, tell the Head!" he breathed.

"Are you mad? Can't you see—?"

Dr. Holmes motioned to Kildare to be silent.

"Your fellow-prefect is giving you sound advice, Darrell," he said icily. "If you have any explanation to give, give it before it is too late. To my mind, it is utterly impossible for a boy—even a Sixth Form boy—to raise fifty pounds at short notice but if you have done so, tell me in what manner."

Darrell's lip quivered.

"I borrowed it!" he said at last.

The Head raised his eyebrows.

"No one in the school could have lent you such a sum. Of whom did you borrow it?"

"Outside the school," muttered Darrell. "I—I know it was wrong, sir. I wouldn't have owned up, but—but if you're going to think me a thief I'd better tell you. I—I wanted the money, and I'd lost the Founder's prize. I went to a—a moneylender."

"Darrell!"

"You made me tell you, sir!"

Kildare's face lightened. The confession was serious enough on the part of a Sixth Form prefect. But anything was better than the imputation of theft.

"Very good!" said the Head quietly. "You admit having acted in a way disgraceful to yourself and to your school, Darrell. I presume that the moneylender in question will substantiate your statement?"

"I—I suppose so, sir," said Darrell wretchedly. "I suppose he will if I ask him. He wouldn't give me away otherwise—the man's honest in his own way."

The Head smiled dryly.

"Possibly!" he said. "His name?"

"Gordon, Gluck, in Wayland," muttered Darrell.

"I have heard of the man—well-known as a rascally character," said the Head. "His evidence would not be of much use, as he would certainly speak falsely if it served his turn. You state that you received fifty pounds in banknotes from this man?"

"Yes," said Darrell, almost inaudibly.

"On what security?"

"I—I signed a paper. He knows my people are well off; and—and I dare say he knows I'm honourable," said Darrell. "I shall pay him by degrees."

"On the subject of your having dealt with moneylenders, if it is true, I will not speak now," said the Head. "A more serious matter must be dealt with now. We will take it that this moneylender handed you fifty pounds in banknotes yesterday. These notes have already left your possession?"

"Yes."

"Did you note the numbers?"

"No, sir."

"I am more careful in such matters," said the Head dryly.

"I have a list of the numbers of the notes that have been taken from my desk. In order to establish your innocence, Darrell—if innocent you are—one easy step only remains to be taken."

"And that, sir?"

"The numbers of the notes may be compared," said the Head. "I have my list at hand. If it does not agree with the list of numbers of the notes you despatched by post this morning, obviously the notes were not the same. You will then be exonerated from the charge of theft. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"But what?"

"But I've sent away the moneylender's notes already."

"That is a matter of little moment. A telegram can be sent to the person to whom it is addressed, requesting that person to send immediately a list of the numbers. You follow me?"

"Thank heavens!" broke out Kildare, his whole face brightening. "Why, it's as easy as falling off a form, Darrell! The Head has saved you!"

"I truly hope so!" said Dr. Holmes. "Darrell does not seem so delighted as you, however, Kildare. Darrell, I require you to give me the address of your correspondent at once, so that the telegram may be despatched without delay."

"I can't, sir."

"Darrell!" breathed Kildare.

"Silence! What do you mean, Darrell, by saying that you cannot?"

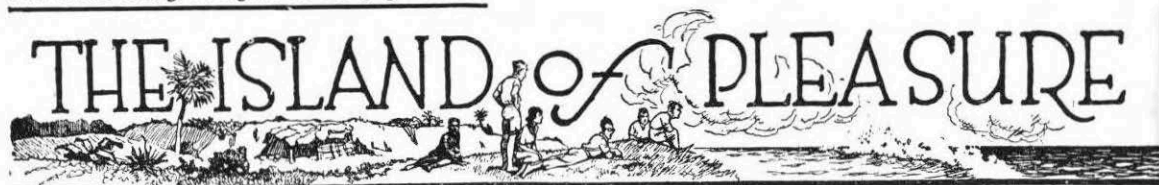
"I can't have the name mixed up in—in this—" stammered Darrell. "I—I can't let the—the—the person know there's any trouble about the money! I can't."

"When your honour and good name are at stake, Darrell, you must let minor considerations go. I command you to give me the name and address."

Darrell did not speak.

"Very well," said the Head. "Very well. You drive me to the conclusion, Darrell, that the notes you despatched by

(Continued on page 19.)



Our Magnificent Story of Daring and Adventure.

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 Wittywake, 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. Taga, 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 their 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. Later one night the happy party are startled by the sudden appearance of a schooner's lights out at sea. Don's suspicions are aroused, and he swims out to the reef to investigate. Keeping watch, he sees Captain Targe, together with Siddeley, land and deposit a box into the bed of a pool. Suddenly the tentacles of an octopus slip flexibly round the box, drawing it below the surface of the water.

Don is returning to the camp when he meets Tommy and Val, who are off on a honey-hunting expedition.

(Now read on.)

On The Track.

ON the trees were creepers, and most of them were bearing gigantic blooms of every hue and variety—in fact, the small space was like a wonderful flower-garden.

Tommy turned to Val with a triumphant grin.

"This is where they get their honey all right, old chap," he said. "I reckon they ought to be able to smell it miles and miles away. All we have got to do now is to discover where they come from."

Val shrugged his shoulders.

"Find the bee-road home, eh?" he said. "But we haven't got wings, old chap, and it won't be so easy as you think."

Yet they set to work, and after searching for five or ten minutes, they discovered that the flight of the busy creatures was taking place from east to west, to and fro, from the scented, flowery dell.

It was very hot in the jungle undergrowth, and Tommy, pressing his way through a mass of creepers, stumbled over a fallen forest giant, and seated himself on the lichen-covered side with a grunt of exhaustion.

"Where are you, Val?" he called.

Val had been making his way through the jungle more to the left, and he emerged presently, looking very hot and tired.

"No luck, Tommy?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so— Yes, by Jove, listen!"

Tommy leapt to his feet and beckoned to Val to approach. While Val was still three or four yards away he saw the stout figure drop on his knees, and Tommy put his head against the lichen-covered trunk, then across his fat face swept a swift smile of infinite content.

"The beggars are inside here," he breathed. "It sounds like—like a t-tuppenny tube. Listen!"

With his ear close to the trunk, Val heard quite clearly the steady drone of the busy life that was moving inside, and presently

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they found the entrance to the nest—a deep knot-hole on the left of the trunk.

As they watched it they saw a large number of tiny bees enter and emerge, and any doubt that they might have had vanished then.

"What did I tell you!" Tommy said, swelling his chest proudly. "I should not be at all surprised if this blinking trunk is not full of honey."

Val looked at him long and steadily for a moment, then laughed.

"No doubt it is, old chap," he admitted; "but how are we going to get at it? Have you any idea what would happen to you if you attempted to get at the honey now? You would be stung to death!"

By way of reply, Tommy thrust his hand into the loose folds of his ragged shirt and drew out a mass of fibrous material.

"I'm not such a fool as you think," he said calmly. "I have seen our old gardener at home at work on the beehives. All you have to do is to smoke them out, and I have brought some stuff to do it with. You just leave it to me, young fellow-me-lad; I'll show you how to handle bees!"

A Battle with Bees.

"YOU hit him fair. He come down all right, Mr. Scat," whispered Taga, in a stammered, eager tone.

Scat, his arms fairly trembling with excitement, raised the long blow-pipe, and, poising it, placed the end between his lips.

He and Taga had wormed their way through a dense mass of undergrowth, and now were kneeling behind a screen of bushes, from the centre of which there grew a tall palm-tree.

It was Taga's quick eyes that had caught the flight of the bird, and he indicated it to Scat as it perched itself on one of the broad leaves.

Only those who have aimed their first gun can understand the tense excitement that ran through the tutor. The blow-pipe was steadied, and Scat, drawing a deep breath, sent the little dart on its way.

It was a sheer case of beginner's luck; that tufted thorn went straight to its mark. From the branches above there arose a terrific squawking, then a great fluttering and beating of wings, and down through the broad leaves came a plump bird.

Taga leapt to his feet and let forth a whoop of delight.

"Bravo! You fine shot, you fella! Come along! Get him!"

He ran through the bushes, and Scat, rising to his feet, followed the slim, brown figure.

It was not until Scat came up to where Taga was kneeling that he discovered what it was he had shot.

"Great Scott! It's a p-parrot!"

The bird lay with its crumpled wings under it, and its curved beak and crest was a very familiar sight.

Taga whipped the plump body up and made as though to twist the bird's neck, when Scat, reaching out, took the limp body away.

"Here, hang it, Taga! I didn't know it was a p-parrot!"

Taga looked round, and the long, troubled face of Scat made him stare for a moment in amazement.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Why, don't you see?" said Scat. "It's a parrot!"

"That's all right, Mr. Scat; you find him very good eating. Parrot want a lot of beating, and that fella full up with nuts and corn, too!"

Scat had dropped the blow-pipe, and was still holding the great white bird in his hand. To him there was something wrong in the whole affair. Until that moment Scat's only knowledge of parrots was that they were more or less household pets in cages.

"I wish you had told me, Taga," he said.

"I aren't take this back to the camp! I'm absolutely ashamed!"

Taga was obviously quite at a loss to explain Scat's extraordinary attitude, but, with that easy-going way that the native always adopts with the white man, the slim, brown youngster nodded his head.

"You no like him, eh? All right, put him on ground again."

"What do you mean?"

Across Taga's face there broke a quiet smile.

"I go make fun of you fellas. That stuff I make from leaves no deadly poison; it just make birds go crazy for a moment. Put him down. You watch him."

Greatly wondering, Scat placed the white creature on the ground. To him it seemed as though the parrot was dead, for it had lain in his hands with head and crest trailing.

"I hope you are not trying to make fun of me, Taga?" Scat said, blinking solemnly through his glassless spectacles.

"No, no! I no make fun. You watch."

The words had hardly left Taga's lips when Scat, watching closely, saw a slight tremor run through the ruffled, feathered body, and a moment later, looking very like a sick man, the parrot arose to its feet. Its head was down on one side, and it was obviously very dazed; but it commenced to move away, its wings trailing on the ground.

"By James, I—I wouldn't have believed it! But I'm hanged if I am going to let go! Anna would like it as a pet!"

Second thoughts are not usually as successful as first ones. Scat, having first of all given the bird its freedom, now decided to change his mind. As he plunged forward, life seemed to return to the bird, and it made a hop out of Scat's hands.

Then began a humorous chase. The parrot, reeling like a drunken man, ran hither and thither among the thick bushes, with Scat puffing and panting after it. Now and again the bird would try to fly, but it made only a very sorry attempt, covering some two or three yards, then being forced to descend again. Yet it gave Scat a busy and bustling ten minutes before, finally, with a whoop of delight, the lanky tutor flung himself on the bird, cornering it under a low bush.

The parrot turned promptly and stuck its hooked beak into Scat's wrist, changing that shout of joy into a cry of anguish.

Taga, on running forward, saw Scat rise to his feet with the parrot hanging on to his wrist.

"Take it off—take it off! Quick—quick, Taga!" cried Scat.

Taga made a deft clutch and caught the bird round the neck. Twisting it, he made it release its hold. For a moment it flapped its wings madly until Scat, pulling himself together, made a grab at the powerful wings, and the two hunters succeeded at last in tying up the creature by its sinewy feet.

"And I thought you were dead, did I?" Scat said, glancing at the wound in his wrist. "By Jove, you don't look like it now!"

To complete the parrot's discomfiture, a scrap of rag was slipped over its head and tied round its neck; and then, and not until then, did the white creature cease to struggle.

"I should not be at all surprised if it doesn't make a j-jolly good talker, Taga," Scat said, putting his head on one side. "It can certainly screech loud enough."

"Yes, him screech plenty and scare every bird for miles," was Taga's dry comment.

The parrot was secured under a bush, and Taga went back to find the blow-pipe again; then he and Scat continued their way through the jungle. As they paced onward, Taga explained about the mysterious brown juice.

"I no want that Tommy fella to get playing round with them darts," was his comment. "I tell him they poisoned, but it not true."

"What happens if a man gets struck by one of the darts, Taga?" Scat asked. Taga shook his head.

"I no ever seen one get wounded with that stuff," Taga answered. "We no use it on our people. Meb'e it do same it does with the parrot, but I not know."

They had a weary trudge for the best part of a mile before they had the chance of another shot. This time it was a flock of pigeons that had settled on a high tree.

Taga and Scat took heavy toll; those silent darts, speeding noiselessly through the trees, seemed to have a more deadly effect on the pigeons than they had on the parrots, for as soon as they made a hit a plump bird fell without a cry or a flutter of wings.

It always lay with Taga to pick up their quarry and complete the task of killing the bird by giving it a quick, deft wring of the neck.

Scat, who was really a most kindly soul, always turned his head away when the native performed these operations.

They had killed nine or ten plump pigeons before the rest began to realise that something out of the common was happening to certain of their numbers, and arose from the tree with a loud beating of wings to surge on over the forest.

Scat had taken one of the plump birds, and, on parting the feathers, he discovered the dart embedded in the breast. Withdrawing the thorn, Scat saw that it made only a very tiny puncture, and the flesh around it was not even discoloured.

"Are we quite safe in eating this, Taga?" Scat asked.

"Yes, that stuff no harm you, unless it get into a wound. Look, I show you!"

Taga produced one of the thorn darts, and scraped it with his nail until he had removed the brown, varnish-like coat; then he calmly rolled the stuff into a ball, put it into his mouth, and swallowed it.

"Here, hang it, Taga!"

The native grinned.

"You no think I do that if any danger, Mr. Scat," he said to the lanky tutor. "It no harm any fella who eat 'im."

Taga had procured a cleft bamboo, and into this the birds were slipped. Then, with his trophies over his shoulder, Scat began to make his way back to the camp. They found the parrot under the bush where they had left it, and four o'clock in the afternoon discovered them climbing down over the barrier of rocks into their sheltered retreat.

Don came out of the hut, and Scat felt a real thrill of pride as he laid the trophies of the chase at his leader's feet.

"By Jove, Scat, that's top-hole!" Don said.

There had been occasions, not so many months ago, when Scat had been inclined to regard Don as a mere schoolboy, but that time had passed, and the tutor's face glowed at his quiet words of praise.

"I-I didn't get them all, Don," Scat confessed. "Taga, of course, is the better shot."

Taga was some five or six yards behind Scat. The native was bearing the parrot, and, after Don had inspected it, a stake was knocked into the earth; then Scat sacrificed his steel watch-chain in order to make a suitable anklet and hold for the bird.

A cross-piece was fixed on the upright, and it was with considerable satisfaction that Scat, having fixed his chain and placed the bird on the cross-piece, removed the rag from its head and called to Anna.

"Anna, come here! I've got something for you."

The girl was hard at work in the kitchen, but she turned and came round the corner of the hut.

The parrot, that had sat rather dazed for a moment, gave tongue then with a wild, unearthly screech, at the same time attempting to fly; but the short chain balked it, and it came fluttering to the ground.

Anna, with a little cry of delight, ran forward to where the stake was fixed in the ground.

"A parrot! How clever of you, Scat!" the girl cried.

"I-I should not go too near it!" Scat warned, glancing at his injured wrist. "It will be tamer later on."

Don and Scat left Anna and Taga to try to get on friendly terms with the parrot while they went off over the rocks towards Turtle Bay. It was Don's intention to get some fresh turtle flesh that night so that it might be cooked and ready for their journey on the following morning.

Being the eldest of the castaways, Don

found it advisable now and again to turn to Scat for advice, and he was glad of the opportunity now.

Scat had not questioned Don too closely concerning the events on the reef, but the tutor had realised all along that something out of the ordinary had happened.

"I am really anxious to see what sort of ground lies on the other side of the island, Scat," Don began, "for I have a feeling that sooner or later we may have to shift. Taga is always prophesying what will happen when the storms come, and, apart from that, I would not mind making a move if we could find another site with plenty of water and food."

"Seems a pity that that hut should be wasted!" Scat commented.

"Oh, we may be able to save some of the timber," was Don's reply. "If we find a decent spot on the other side, I suggest pulling down the hut making a raft of most of the timber, and taking it round. The reef runs practically along the island, I'm sure, and it would not be a very long journey. We could use the catamaran for towing purposes."

He looked at his companion. "In fact, I would rather not leave any traces of our being there at all if I could help it," he said.

"Why, are you afraid that someone may come to try to find us?"

"I don't exactly know what I'm afraid of, Scat," Don returned, his brows drawn together in a thoughtful frown; "but I feel we are not safe where we are."

He paced forward for a hundred yards or so in silence, then looked at his companion again.

"I may even want you to help me in a little job of my own, old chap, but that can wait until we return. There is a secret out there in the reef, Scat, and I won't be satisfied until I find out what it is. I know that to discover it I'll have to take a risk, and want you to be there to help me."

The mere fact that Don Gordon, the self-reliant, should ask anyone to help him meant that the task was one of more than ordinary importance, but even Scat, imaginative though he was, did not dream of the grim enterprise that had gradually developed itself in Don Gordon's mind.

In order to find out Captain Targe's secret it would be necessary for Don to risk death. That box, lying on the coral bed of the pool, guarded by that slimy monster of the deep, was a prize that Donald Gordon had set his heart on.

"You can rely on me, Don," Scat said. "I'm—I'm not much good at—at many things, but I'll back you up all I can."

He held out his hand, and Don shook it.

"I'm not going to let you belittle yourself, Scat," Don said. "For I can tell you candidly that we all have a deal to thank you for here. You have done more to make our lives possible than anyone else in the party, for it was you that found all those edible fruits and berries, and that garden of yours promises well. We used to clip you a bit about botany and nature study, Scat, but, by James, they have turned up trumps now!"

By this time they had reached the edge of Turtle Bay, and Don noticed that already the tide was beginning to run out.

The smooth sand above the high-water mark bore indications that turtles had been there the previous night. The queer, double tracks which the flappers of the animals make as they move across the sand were visible in many places.

Don seated himself on a rock, and turned to Scat again.

"Pity we can't collar some of these creatures and keep them," he said. "As a matter of fact, there's just a deuce of a lot of work to do, and just a little time to do it in, that a fellow's head simply reels."

He waved his hand towards the bay.

"There's no end of food goes up and down there every night," went on Don. "If we could only get hold of them and put them in some place where they could not get away, then we'd have enough food for a year! But it can't be done in a moment; we can only move slowly, inch by inch, and feel our way. I suppose we ought to be thankful we've got along as well as we have."

He indicated the curve of the rocks on which they sat.

"You see what I mean," he said. "If I had a little gunpowder, or even a cartridge or two, I could blow a hole there, and the sea-water would fill it. We'd have a pond then, fifty or sixty yards wide, that would always be full of sea-water, and yet would be too high for the turtles to crawl out of. I reckon that if we put half a dozen of those great reptiles into our pond, we'd have enough meat to last six months."

He stopped, and gazed thoughtfully in front of him.

"Taga has been trying to smoke some turtle flesh, Don," Scat remarked. "He didn't get on very well, because it wasn't the right kind of wood, for the flesh wasn't quite sound enough. If we could have another cut at it, for, after all, in the old days, you know, before people thought of bringing turtles alive to England, there used to be no end of dried flesh imported, and it is even done on a smaller scale to-day."

"Right you are, Scat!" said Don. "Then that will be your job when we get back from this expedition of ours. I'll turn out the whole party, and we'll get as many turtles as we can, then we can build a big smoke, and see what we can do to get a store of the flesh. I'm not grumbling, Scat, old chap, you know, but—well, I want to make sure. There might come a time when we will find ourselves having to undergo a state of siege, and we must be prepared for that!"

Scat was sitting with his elbows on his thin knees, and his long jaw resting on his knuckle's palm.

Don's serious talk affected the tutor, and a silence followed; then Scat's eyes were suddenly attracted to the belt of jungle that ran along the top of the beach. A thin feather of smoke was rising from somewhere in the dense growth, and, with a quick cry, Scat rose to his feet.

"I say, Don, what's happened over there?"



With his ear close to the trunk, Val heard quite clearly the steady drone of the busy life that was moving inside. The two looked at the entrance to the nest, a deep knot-hole on the left of the trunk. As they watched it they saw a number of tiny bees enter and emerge.



Scat was the first member of the party to reach the top of the boulder and look over. Then Don and Val reached him, followed by Taga and Tommy, and for a time the five breathless explorers stared down at the scene that opened itself to their gaze.

he stammered, pointing in the direction of the smoke.

"Don't know," Don returned. "Val and Tommy went off in that direction that afternoon, I believe. We'd better go and investigate."

They hurried along the beach, keeping just above the edge of the sea. They were some twenty or thirty yards from where the smoke was rising when first one yell, then another and another broke out, followed by a great trampling and crashing of twigs and leaves, and out from the belt of jungle leapt a stout, familiar figure.

"G-great Scott! Tommy's gone mad!" Scat exclaimed, halting and staring at the sight.

It looked as though Tommy were performing a wild type of war-dance, for he leapt in the air, yelling and flinging his hands about madly.

Don stood still, but Scat, remembering his official position as tutor to the stout youth, ambled forward a pace or two.

"I say, Tommy, what on earth are you doing? What is the matter with you?"

At the sound of that familiar voice Tommy turned and began a frantic dash towards Scat. When he was within ten yards of the tutor, Scat saw that flying all round Tommy was a band of forest bees, and now and again they would dart in at the stout figure, and Tommy's hand would slap at them, while another yowl of pain went up, indicating when the sting had come.

Before Scat could realise what had happened, Tommy had reached him, and the inevitable followed. So far as those bees were concerned, any human body was their natural prey, and a particularly vicious, striped insect made a dive for Scat, stinging him on the chin.

"You—you silly ass!" Scat barked out, dropping back a pace. "Take the beastly things away—take the things away! Go into the sea, you fool!"

It was the one really sensible piece of advice, so far as Tommy and his troubles were concerned. The stout youngster swerved in the right direction, and he and Scat tore down the beach as fast as their legs could carry them, to plunge into the salt water.

Don, having realised now what had happened, backed off to a safe distance, and watched the final phases of that quick battle take place in the sea.

Suddenly someone broke out from the

jungle close to Don, and the tall leader turned round to see his brother.

Val was staggering under a huge load, something that he had wrapped in a great leaf, and as he drew near to Don, the elder brother caught sight of the edge of a huge honeycomb; then the meaning of Tommy's disaster was made clear.

"Better get that well along the beach, old chap!" Don called to Val, as he rose to his feet. "If the bees scent that honey, they'll follow you. Go right along as hard as you can cut. I'll wait for Tommy and Scat!"

Val was wise enough to obey that injunction, and headed off across Turtle Bay, while Don walked down to the edge of the sea.

There were one or two persistent little warriors, making a vain endeavour to carry on the fight, and Scat and Tommy had to dive again and again, until at last the bee army took themselves off. Then, and not until then, did Tommy and his tutor come ashore.

"I feel as though I had been in a—blinking electric battery!" Tommy groaned, as he came forward. "I bet I'm a sight!"

Later on, when they counted Tommy's wounds, they found he had been stung forty or fifty times.

Scat had also been stung two or three times on the head and shoulders, and they were a very mournful, and rather embittered pair as they trudged back to the camp, with Don between them as peacemaker.

"You always seem to get into trouble, Tommy," Scat said; "and, what is more, you bring others into it. Why the dickens didn't you run into the sea at once, instead of carrying those infernal little beasts along to me?"

"You shouted to me," Tommy replied; "and, besides, you're going to eat the honey, so you might as well have a sting or two to pay for it."

"What happened?" Don asked.

"Oh, I made a slight mistake!" said Tommy. "We started the fire all right, and I got it under the whacking great trunk, where the hive was, but I didn't smoke 'em long enough, and when I broke through the bark of the tree I must have struck a lively patch that hadn't been reached by the smoke."

When they arrived at the camp they found Anna gloating over the huge honeycomb, and Val was able to add his report of the affair.

"Tommy was too darned impatient! I just hung behind the bush until the trouble was over, then I found the rest of the bees that were left in the hive as tame as mice. I just pushed them off the comb, and took as much honey as I could carry; but there's tons more up there yet, and we ought to have had twice as much."

"Humph! It's all very well for you to grumble, old man!" Tommy commented. "But if I hadn't drawn off the live ones I don't suppose we would have got any honey at all."

Which was one way of looking at it.

Taga Holds Back.

AN hour after sunrise the little exploration party was gathered outside the hut, ready for its start.

It had taken all Don's powers of persuasion to prevail on Anna to remain behind.

Tommy had magnanimously offered to take

her place and keep guard over the hut, but this suggestion had been turned down, as it deserved.

"No fear!" said Don. "I'll need you my son. We've a whacking lot of grub to carry, and we'll all have to take our share."

There was still a certain puffiness on some parts of Tommy's body, and, although he groaned now and again, as he shouldered his load, he had more or less recovered.

Taga and Val headed the party; Taga armed with the blow-pipe, while Val carried the axe. Tommy and Scat followed them, and Don, a wise leader, brought up the rear of the party, so that he could see what was happening to the others and could be ready to help them if required.

Each of the youngsters carried a fair load of food, and Don had a small canvas bag filled with roasted and ground coffee, which Anna had prepared for them on the previous night.

The slender girl accompanied her chums through Scat's yam-patch; and, finally, farewell was waved by her to Don, as he turned his head for a moment before the little line plunged into the jungle.

It had been decided to follow Tommy's track to the spot where he had lain waiting for Taga and Val to appear, and Tommy had been asked to go ahead. He started off boldly enough, and the party followed him.

The jungle seemed to become thicker and thicker, and at last, in a narrow ravine, through which they had had to force their way laboriously, Tommy came to a halt dead against a rugged, brown cliff, some fifteen or twenty feet high.

"Well, what's wrong now?" Val asked.

The straggling party had closed on each other, and Tommy, turning round, had to admit the truth that had been forcing itself on him for the last ten minutes or so.

"I—I have—have lost my way," he said. "I've never seen this blinking place before!"

Scat dropped his bundle, and for a moment looked at his pupil. The sweat was pouring from the tutor's brow.

"I knew it!" Scat said. "You're the most helpless ass, Tommy! I could have sworn that no one had ever come into this part of the jungle before. Why on earth don't you let people know when you're at a loss?"

It would have taken very little for Val and Scat to have fallen on Tommy there and then, and Don had to intervene.

The task of extricating themselves from their position was handed to Taga, and Tommy was forced to keep in the rear.

Don's choice was a sound one, and just before noon Taga led them out of the jungle and across a turf cliff. They halted on the edge of the bleak, barren stretch that ran along behind the black cliffs.

It was certainly a dreary, desolate place, in striking contrast to the beautiful jungle through which they had come.

The only individual who seemed to find any pleasure in it was Scat, for he turned to Don, rubbing his hands together.

"Undoubtedly volcanic, Don," Scat said. "This is splendid!"

He indicated one long patch of black that seemed to run like a river between hard boulders.

"That's lava," he continued. "This is going to be frightfully interesting!"

"Glad you like it!" was Val's comment. "To me it looks like the edge of the world."

They had a meal there, getting the water from a small spring that ran down over the edge of the cliff.

The water was slightly bitter to the taste, but Scat assured them it was simply the iron that was in it. It certainly seemed to have a tonic effect on the party, for, when they arose to resume their journey, they set off at a quicker pace.

There was a slight breeze from seaward that also helped to make their progress a more pleasant one, yet the task was arduous enough, for, instead of keeping along the cliffs, as Tommy had done, Don led them over the desolate patch, working his way up for the peak-like rise.

There were spots where the boulders rose nine or ten feet above their heads, and they had to work their way slowly, painfully along the great cracks and fissures.

In the first part of the journey Scat had been allowed to keep to the rear, but again and again Don had looked round, to find that the tutor was missing. He had halted the

party and called for him. But Scat was finding much to interest him among the great boulders, and the haversack slung over his shoulder began to bulge with specimens that he picked up on his journey. Finally, Scat was forced to march between Val and Tommy, and was warned that no further geological studies would be permitted!

"Plenty of time to come back here later on, if you want to, Scat," said Don. "I dare say it is jolly interesting to you, but we're exploring just now, and we've no time to waste."

"It is wonderful, Don—wonderful!" Scat returned, in a whisper. "There is iron ore here, also other metals, and sulphur, too."
"That's all right, old chap," Don replied. "I'm quite sure that we'll be jolly grateful to you presently, but we haven't the time to spend now."

"It is a perfect gold-mine!" Scat said again. "You can see exactly how the island was formed. A great subterranean upheaval took place, and the earth was forced up from the sea in a volcanic eruption; then the coral grew round it, and that explains why we thought it was a coral island at first."

The last four or five hundred yards up that slope was a task that tried the little party to the uttermost.

One great boulder had to be negotiated by each member of the party. Taga climbed on Don's shoulders, then, lying on top of the boulder, the native helped the others up one by one.

Ten or twelve yards from the top a final rush was made, the whole party showing their eagerness to see what was beyond.

Scat's long legs carried him ahead of the others, and the tutor was the first member of the little party to reach the top and look over on the other side.

They heard his gasping breath of amazement, then Don and Val reached him, followed by Taga and Tommy, and, for a long moment, the five breathless explorers stared down at the scene that opened itself to their gaze.

(There will be another grand long instalment of this magnificent serial in next week's issue of "THE GEM LIBRARY." Make sure you order your copy early.)

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WILDRAKE
takes a hand,
and some
very dramatic
developments
result.

DON'T MISS
IT!

SELF-CONDEMNED!

(Continued from page 15.)

post were the notes taken from my desk yesterday. But you shall have every chance. A receipt, containing the address, is given at the post-office for a registered letter. That receipt you must now have in your possession. Hand it to me."

Darrell's hand went to his waistcoat pocket instinctively.

His face was haggard.

Dr. Holmes stretched out his hand. Darrell slowly drew the little flimsy slip of paper from his pocket. But he did not hand it to the Head. His hand closed over it convulsively.

"Will you hand me that post-office receipt, Darrell?"

"I—I can't, sir!"

"Then it will be taken from you by force," said the Head.

"Mr. Railton—Kildare—"

With a sudden stride Darrell reached the fireplace. The slip of paper fluttered from his hand into the flames. In an instant it was consumed.

For a second there was dead silence in the study. Then the Head rose to his feet, towering in his wrath.

"This is too much!" he exclaimed. "You have destroyed under my eyes the proof of your guilt! Unhappy boy! I will waste no further words on you! You are guilty!"

"I—I—"

"Silence! You are expelled from the school, Darrell—expelled in shame and ignominy, as a thief and a rascal!" thundered the Head. "Leave my study!"

And, with faltering steps and a face like chalk, George Darrell of the Sixth went out.

Tom Merry & Co. heard the news after morning classes. "Darrell expelled!" breathed Tom Merry. "It—it doesn't seem possible! Darrell expelled for theft! Good heavens!"

"It's rotten!" said Arthur Augustus dismally.

"I guess this gives me the knock-out," said Wildrake thoughtfully. "I guess I can't quite swallow it yet."

"Can't be any doubt about it, if he's sacked!" said Blake. Wildrake knitted his brows.

"I wonder!" he said.

He did not say any more then. But he was thinking—thinking hard.

THE END.

(What are Wildrake's thoughts? Next week's splendid long story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "WILDRAKE'S WINNING WAY," will tell you.)



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