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No. 774.
Vol. XXII.
December 9th, 1922.



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CHAPTER 1. Under Sentence!

"HOWWID!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form, who pronounced that it was horrid.

His aristocratic face was full of dismay.

The swell of St. Jim's was standing with a letter in his hand, after morning lessons at St. Jim's.

Blake and Herries and Digby had gathered round him. They had noticed the handwriting on the envelope, and they were interested; naturally, as the hand was that of D'Arcy's cousin Ethel.

Letters from cousin Ethel, generally, were received with pleasure and satisfaction. On the present occasion, Ethel's letter evidently did not produce its customary effect.

Had it been a letter from his tailor, enclosing a lengthy bill with a request for immediate payment, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could not have been more dismayed.

"Howwid!" he repeated blankly.

"What's horrid?" demanded Blake warmly. "Isn't that letter from cousin Ethel?"

"Yaas."

"Is she coming to St. Jim's?"

"Yaas."

"Do you call that horrid?" demanded Herries.

"Yaas."

"Well, you image----" said Digby indignantly.

"Weally, Dig--"

"When is she coming, though?" asked Blake.

"This aftahnoon."

"Oh!"

And all the chums of Study No. 6 looked very serious.

"It's simply howwid," said Arthur Augustus, in deep distress. "Ethel is comin' to stay a few days with Mrs. Holmes. That would be vewy nice, in any othah circumstances. In the pwesent cires, it is simply howwid!"

"It's awkward!" said Blake slowly.

"The deah gal is awwivin' by the three twain," said Arthur Augustus. "She suggests that if I can get leave from lessons, I may meet her at the station. Of course, I can get leave to meet a vewelation comin' to the school. That is all wight. But--"

"But--" murmured Dig.

"How can I possibly let Ethel know that I am undah sentence of a floggin'," said Arthur Augustus distressfully. "She will heal it as soon as she is in the school; it is weally the talk of the place. Of course, I shall explain to her that it is a mistake of the Head's; but it is simply howwid, all the same!"

"It's a bit rotten," admitted Blake. "I don't see how it can be kept dark, either. Somebody will tell her--Trimble or Mellish, at least, will find a chance of doing that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"She'll hear, anyway," said Herries. "Gussy will be yelling when the Head lays on the birch. All St. Jim's will hear him."

"Weally, Howwies--"

"Isn't it just like Gussy to get fixed up like this?" said Blake, in a tone of exasperation. "He was bound to get booked for a flogging the day Ethel is coming."

"Weally, Blake--"

"Just like Gussy!" agreed Dig. "Gussy all over."

"You uttah asses!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "I suppose I did not ask the Head to sentence me to a floggin', did I?"

"You're always asking for some trouble," said Blake, "and generally getting it. It will be rotten for Ethel."

"Beastly!" said Herries.

"It is uttahly howwid," said Arthur Augustus. "There is only one thing to be dona, deah boys."

"What's that?" grunted Blake.

"I must wequest the Head to put it off," said Arthur Augustus.

"Fathead!"

"Wats! I shall mention to the Head that he is labahin' undah an ewwah, and that pwopahly-speakin' he ought not to flog me at all. Then I think that he ought to be willin' at least to postpone the mattah till next week."

D'Arcy's chums gazed at him in silence. They were wondering what would be the effect on the Head if Arthur Augustus put the matter to him in that way.

"No time to be lost," said Arthur Augustus. "It will be time for lessons soon. I shall catch the Head in his study aftah lunch." And the swell of St. Jim's started for the Head's study.

"Gussy!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"For goodness' sake, don't talk rot to the Head!" exclaimed Blake.

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

"But I am not goin' to talk wot to the Head, Blake," he answered. "I am goin' to put it to him plain, that is all. It is true that he has found me guilty of playin' a twick on Mr. Lathom—a vewy wotten twick. That does not altah the fact that I am innocent, does it?"

"Oh dear!" groaned Blake.

"I vewy much doubt wethah it is consistent with my personal dig to submit to a floggin' at all, in the cires," said Arthur Augustus. "But aftah weflection, I have decided to let the Head have his way."

"Go hon!" murmured Dig.

"But I shall certainly wequest him to postpone it. I trust that he will play up like a sportsman, you know."

And Arthur Augustus walked off with quite a confident manner. Blake and Herries and Dig followed him—feeling far from confident. They believed in the noble Gussy; he had stated that he was innocent of the outrage that had taken place in the Fourth Form master's study, and they took his word. But naturally the Head, who had found him guilty, would take a different view—a very decidedly different view. That was a fact which somehow did not seem to find lodgment in the aristocratic brain of Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's tapped at the Head's door, and the deep voice of Dr. Holmes bade him enter.

Blake and Herries and Dig hung about the door after Gussy had entered, anxious to know the result.

The Head raised his eyebrows at the sight of Arthur Augustus. The great Gussy was not in favour just then.

"You should not come here, D'Arcy," said Dr. Holmes severely. "If you are thinking of making any appeal to me, it is useless, and you may go."

"The fact is, sir--"

"That will do, D'Arcy."

"But I have not finished, sir," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "I undahstand, sir, that you are goin' to flog me in Hall at six o'clock."

"That is correct."

"I trust, sir, that you would have no objection to postponin' the mattah till this day next week."

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir."
"Leave my study at once!" said the Head, in a voice like the rumble of thunder.
"Certainly, sir, if you wish; but you have not yet answered my question. You see—"

Dr. Holmes rose to his feet.
"D'Arcy, you are sentenced to a severe punishment for an unworthy and miserable trick on your Form master. That sentence will be carried out."

"Yaas, sir, but considewin' that I am innocent—"

"What?"
"Considewin', sir, that you are makin' a sewious mistake in the mattah—"

"Bless my soul!"

"Considewin' that, sir, I weally think you might etwetch a point—"

"Gussy!" came an almost agonised whisper from Blake at the doorway.

Arthur Augustus did not heed. He was in the full flow of eloquence, and he went on cheerily.

"I have a vewy important weason for wantin' the mattah put off, sir. Othahwise, I would not twouble you. It is weally wathah wotten to flog me at all, when I have done nothin'. Takin' that into considewation, sir, I weally think you might put it off for a week."

"D'Arcy!" gasped the Head. He reached for his cane. "Hold out your hand, boy!"

"Mum-mum-my hand, sir!"

"I am sorry to cane you, when you are to be flogged after lessons," said the Head. "But your impertinence leaves me no other resource. Hold out your hand!"

"But, sir, I assuah you—"

"Your hand!" thundered the Head.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Swish!

"Now leave my study, D'Arcy! Another word, and I shall cane you again, more severely!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, pointing to the door with his cane.

Even Arthur Augustus realised that it was useless to say more. With as dignified a carriage as was practicable, with an aching hand squeezed under his arm, the swell of St. Jim's quitted the study.

"Oh, you ass!" gasped Blake.

"Nothing doing!" said Dig. "Of course not; we could have told you that, Gussy. I wonder the Head didn't flog you on the spot; you asked for it."

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away, with his hand tucked under his noble arm, and a lugubrious expression on his face.

CHAPTER 2.

No Leave.

MR. LATHOM frowned.
It was nearly time for afternoon classes, when Mr. Lathom was due in the Fourth Form room. But the little gentleman was busy in his study, when Arthur Augustus presented himself at the door.

Before Mr. Lathom, on the study table, lay a volume bound in calf.

It was a magnificent edition of P. Virgilius Maro; but its magnificence had been sadly dimmed by wanton damage. The calf covers had been slashed with a knife; several pages had been slashed across; the damage was severe enough to make a book-lover weep. And that edition of Virgil had always been the apple of Mr. Lathom's eye—a highly-prized treasure. The Form master was repairing the damage to the book, with patient hands; but much of the damage was beyond repair. And as it was D'Arcy of the Fourth who had been found guilty of that damage, it was natural that Mr. Lathom should frown at the sight of his elegant form in the doorway.

"Kindly do not enter my study, D'Arcy!" he snapped.

"I wish to speak to you, sir."

"Then be brief."

"I am awfully sowwy, sir, that you suppose that I would damage your pwopahity in that unfeelin' way, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

"If you have come here to protest your innocence, D'Arcy, against the plainest evidence, you may save your breath," said the Fourth Form master coldly.

"Weally, sir—"

"Go at once!"

"It was anothah mattah upon which I wished to speak, sir," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "I wish to wequest leave from lessons this aftahnoon for—for an houah."

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Mr. Lathom flushed with anger.

"You venture to make such a request, in the circumstances?" he exclaimed. "Certainly I shall not give you leave!"

"But, sir—"

"Go!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, half rising to his feet, with a gleam over his spectacles.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy retired hastily. It was only too clear that the master of the Fourth was not in a reasonable mood, and that there would be no leave for the swell of St. Jim's that afternoon.

D'Arcy bent his steps in the direction of the Fourth Form room, where the Fourth were gathering now. The fat voice of Baggy Trimble was heard as he came up.

"Sure you wouldn't care to buy this pocket-knife, Blake?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Like to look at this fountain-pen, Herries?"

"I'll shove it down your back if you show it to me!" growled Herries.

Baggy Trimble snorted. Several days had passed since he had sent a postal order to Messrs. Shonkey & Co., of Houndsditch, for an assortment of articles to be sold among his friends. And Baggy had found business very bad.

Fellows did not seem to want his articles. Even when Baggy put the prices down so low that he stood to make only a hundred per cent profit, his articles did not go.

Indeed, it was doubtful whether the enterprising merchant of St. Jim's would be able to dispose of them, even at a loss!

Fountain-pens that would spurt but not write, pocket-knives that would not cut, and studs that would not stand the strain of a collar, did not seem to appeal to the juniors somehow. And as all the articles had been made in Germany,

there was some prejudice on the subject, too. More than one fellow, instead of purchasing articles, had actually kicked Baggy for offering him German goods.

"Here's Gussy!" grinned Mellish of the Fourth. "Gussy's soft enough for you, Baggy. Try Gussy."

"Weally, Mellish—"

Baggy Trimble turned an expansive smile upon Arthur Augustus.

"Can I interest you in this pocket-knife, Gussy?"

"Wats!"

"What about this splendid cork-

screw?"

"Wubbish!"

"You've had one bargain off me already," urged Trimble. "That splen-

did silver penknife that you used to cut up Lathom's book with—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Must have been a jolly good knife, to judge by the damage it did," said Baggy. "You admit that, D'Arcy?"

"You uttah wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I have already explained that I threw that wotten knife away, and that some howwid boundah must have found it and cut up Lathom's Virgil with it."

"Tell that to the marines!" sneered Mellish.

Arthur Augustus turned on Percy Mellish, with a glitter in his eyes that made the cad of the Fourth back away hastily.

"I thwashed you yestahday, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus. "Do you want me to wepeat the thwashin' to-day, you wottah?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Mellish.

"If you pwesume to doubt my word, Mellish, I shall have no wesome but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Doesn't the Head doubt it?" sneered Mellish.

"The Head is labahin' undah a misappwehension. Besides, it would be bad form to thwash the Head."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fourth-Formers, quite taken by storm at the idea of Arthur Augustus thrashing the Head.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no weason whatevah for this widiculous mewwiment," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. But the juniors evidently did, for they roared.

"What about this corkscrew, Gussy?" recommenced Trimble. "It's a jolly useful article—"

"Oh, dwy up!"

Arthur Augustus turned his back scornfully on the St. Jim's merchant. Figgins of the Fourth touched him on the arm in the passage, with an affable grin. Figgins was flushing a little, and he flushed still more as he met D'Arcy's inquiring eye.

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Editor.



Figgins raised his cap with one hand, and tore open the carriage door with the other. "How jolly to see you again, Miss Et.," he said, as he assisted the welcome visitor to alight. "Yes," answered Miss Cleveland. "It is very good of you to come and meet me. I suppose Arthur could not come so you have come instead?" (See page 6.)

"I hear that cousin Ethel is coming this afternoon," murmured Figgins. "I heard Blake say—"

"That is quite wight, Figgins."

"If you'd like a fellow to go with you to the station and meet her—see Miss Cleveland to St. Jim's, you know—"

"In that case, Figgins, I should ask Blake, or Hewies, or Dig, or Tom Mewwy, natuwallly."

Figgins coughed.

"I—I thought perhaps you would like a New House chap!" he murmured.

"Bai Jove! What could have put that ideah into your head, Figgy?"

Figgins's rich colour deepened.

"As a mattah of fact, howevah, I am not goin' to the station to meet cousin Ethel," said Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Lathom, for some weason best known to himself, has wefused me leave from lessons."

"Oh!" ejaculated Figgins. "But—but Miss Cleveland will need someone to see her to the school."

"I pwesume that she will take the station cab, Figgins."

"That cab's an awful old crock!" objected George Figgins. "I'm always expecting that old hack to fall to pieces."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"If there should be an accident—"

"I see no weason whatever to suppose that an accident might happen, Figgins."

"Well, you—you see—"

"I don't, deah boy."

"Hem!"

Mr. Lathom appeared in the Form-room passage, and the juniors crowded into the Fourth Form room. Figgins hesitated in the passage. Figgins was convinced somehow that Miss Ethel Cleveland required an escort to the school, and he was still more convinced that he would like to be the escort.

D'Arcy had been refused leave, but that only made it more

imperative for Figgins to go. So Figgy determined to try his luck.

"Excuse me, sir—" murmured Figgins deferentially.

"Well, Figgins?" said Mr. Lathom, pausing, good-humouredly. All the little gentleman's wrath was reserved for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; to the rest of his Form he was the same benignant gentleman as of old. And he liked rugged old Figgins—nearly everybody at St. Jim's liked Figgins.

"A—u—a—" began Figgins lucidly.

"What?"

"A visitor's coming to the school to-day, sir," said Figgins.

"A young lady who's going to stay with Mrs. Holmes. Her cousin is unable to get off lessons to meet her at the station. As we're friends, sir, I—I thought—"

Mr. Lathom blinked at him over his glasses.

"Who is the young lady?" he inquired.

"Miss Cleveland, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Lathom. "I should be sorry if any neglect were shown towards that young lady, on account of her cousin's reprehensible conduct, which makes it impossible for me to grant him leave."

"Ye-e-es, sir. So—so I thought, if you'd give me an exeat, sir, I'd go to the station."

"That is very kind and thoughtful of you, Figgins."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Figgins.

"Such a request from some of my boys I might suspect to be dictated by a desire to elude lessons," said Mr. Lathom kindly and ponderously. "But in your case, Figgins, I am sure that that is not the case."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You may go in time to meet the train, Figgins; you will return to the class-room as soon as practicable."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said the delighted Figgins.

And the first lesson that afternoon was barely over when

George Figgins rose from his place and departed with a bright and happy countenance. His chums, Kerr and Wynn, grinned; but a good many of the Fourth looked decidedly envious. Mr. Lathom had said that it was very kind and thoughtful of Figgins; but every fellow in the Fourth—even Mellish, or Trimble—would have been capable of the same kindness and thoughtfulness in the circumstances. But it had fallen to the kind and thoughtful Figgins to look after Ethel that afternoon, and he proceeded to the task like a fellow who was walking on air.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins Sees Light!

COUSIN Ethel looked out of the carriage window as the train stopped at Rylcombe, and smiled.

A long-limbed figure came racing across the platform, as if Figgins had spotted the right carriage by some secret magic known only to himself. At all events, he was alongside the carriage even before the train had stopped.

Figgy raised his cap with one hand and tore open the carriage door with the other.

Miss Cleveland had doubtless expected to see her cousin Arthur on the platform. But certainly she did not seem displeased to see George Figgins.

"How jolly to see you again, Miss Ethel!" said Figgy, as he assisted the welcome visitor to alight.

Ethel smiled sweetly. Figgy took possession of a bag and a rug and an umbrella. He regretted that there was no heavy trunk for him to shoulder. Miss Cleveland gave another glance round the platform.

"Arthur was not able to come?" she remarked.

"Well, no," said Figgy, colouring a little. "Gussy wasn't able to get off lessons, as it happens. Rather rough on him!"

"It was very kind of you to come instead."

"I was jolly glad to come!" said Figgins, in his frank way. "Lots of fellows in the Fourth looked as if they'd have liked to punch my head when I got off. Shall we walk to the school?"

"Oh, certainly! But my bag—"

"Light as a feather!" said Figgins.

The bag wasn't quite so light as a feather, but its weight was little to Figgins. He walked cheerily out of the station by Miss Cleveland's side. Outside the station they passed Grimes, the grocer's boy, with his basket, and Grimes raised his cap to Miss Ethel. Figgy knew that Grimes thought him a lucky dog, and it made him still more cheerful. He gave old Grimey a very affable nod.

Rylcombe Lane was wet with recent rain, and there was a cold wind off the downs. But Ethel did not seem to mind, and George Figgins would not have noticed a snowstorm or an air-raid just then.

"You seem in very great spirits," Miss Ethel remarked, as they emerged from the village into the lane.

Figgins coloured again. Blushes came very easily into Figgy's rugged face.

"Well, everything's so awfully jolly, isn't it!" he said.

"Even the weather?" asked Ethel, with a smile.

"Well, the weather's been a bit beastly," admitted Figgy.

"But, after all, what does the weather matter? Of course, it's interfered with the football a little. But football isn't everything."

Certainly Figgins wouldn't have expressed that opinion to anyone but cousin Ethel. Ordinarily, Figgy gave the impression that he considered football everything—and then some, so to speak. But cousin Ethel's bright eyes always had a remarkable effect upon George Figgins of the Fourth.

"I hope my cousin is well?" said Ethel.

"Going strong!" answered Figgins.

"He isn't in trouble with his Form master, I hope?"

"Oh! Ah! Eh?" said Figgy.

"Mr. Lathom has given you leave, of course?"

"Oh, of course!"

"Then he must have had some reason for not giving Arthur leave?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes!"

Figgy's honest face looked less bright. He felt that his own cheery spirits were rather out of place, considering the sword of Damocles that hung over the noble head of Arthur Augustus. Figgins had been very sorry to hear that Gussy was sentenced to a flogging; but he had quite forgotten all about it in his delight at meeting cousin Ethel again. After all, how could a fellow help feeling "bucked," when actually he was walking along by the side of Miss Ethel, carrying her bag, her rug, and her umbrella? It was enough to buck the veriest misanthrope.

But Figgy realised that Ethel would look upon the matter very seriously when she came to hear of it. He was sorry for Gussy, but he could have borne Gussy's troubles with a certain amount of fortitude. But a matter that was very serious to Ethel was dreadfully serious to George Figgins.

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All of a sudden it dawned upon Figgy's mind that D'Arcy's flogging was a much more important matter than he had hitherto supposed.

Ethel would be sorry, upset; she might even cry. At that awful reflection Figgins felt thoroughly ashamed of feeling happy.

The change in Figgy's face could not escape Miss Cleveland's notice. "It was as if the sun had gone in."

And the girl looked a little anxious.

"Tell me about it," she said quietly.

"About—about what?"

"About Arthur's trouble."

"I—I didn't say there was any trouble, did I?" asked Figgins.

"No; but there is."

Figgins had often wondered at the wonderfully keen penetration sometimes displayed by the gentler sex. Now he wondered again. How had Ethel guessed that there was any trouble?

"Is it serious?" asked Ethel.

"Serious!" stammered Figgy.

"Arthur is in some disgrace with his Form master. Is that it?"

"Well, in a way."

"Won't you tell me?"

"You—you see, you weren't to know!" stammered Figgins.

"I—I—I never thought you could guess like this. Blake thought some cad like Mellish—I mean, some cad might tell you, and we were jolly well going to punch him if he did. They'll be awfully ratty if I tell you."

Ethel was very grave now.

"But you must tell me," she said. "Anyway, I should ask Arthur at once, so you may as well tell me now. I am very anxious."

Figgins coughed uneasily.

"Arthur was foolish enough to run away from school once," said Ethel. "It is not anything so serious as that?"

"Oh, no!" said Figgins at once. "Not at all."

He was glad that he was able to say that much.

"Then what is it?"

"Only a licking," said Figgins.

"A caning?" asked Miss Ethel.

Figgy suppressed a groan. He had hoped that Ethel would be satisfied with that, and ask no more.

"Well, you see—," he stammered.

"Worse than that?" asked Ethel.

"I—I'm afraid it's a flogging," said Figgy reluctantly.

"Oh, poor Arthur! But I am sure that he has done nothing to deserve a flogging!" exclaimed Ethel, in great distress.

Figgins could have kicked himself for not being more circumspect. He had intended that wild horses should not drag the secret from him. Now—he hardly knew how—he had told Ethel all about it. The distress in her face gave Figgy a pang at his honest heart.

"I jolly well wish I could be flogged instead, if you feel it so much about Gussy!" he said fervently.

"That would not be any better," said Ethel. "But what has Arthur done? Is it some mistake or injustice?"

"Hem!"

"Won't you tell me?"

"I'd better, now, I think," said Figgins. "You—you see, yesterday old Lathom—"

"Mr. Lathom!"

"Mr. Lathom," said Figgins, abashed. "Yesterday, Mr. Lathom was in one of his tantrums. I—I mean, he was cross. His corns give him jip in rainy weather, you know—"

"Oh!"

"He fairly ragged us all in class," said Figgins. "He caned Mellish for mucking up his construe, and caned Gussy for cheek. Of course, old Gus never meant to be cheeky; he was only talking to Lathom like a Dutch uncle. But Form masters are Form masters you know. Gussy got it. And—and in the afternoon Lathom was out, and Gussy—hem!"

"Yes?"

"When Lathom came back he found that somebody had been in his study, chopping up a volume of Virgil—a very special edition, you know, of that tommy-rot, awfully precious to Lathom. He found Gussy's penknife on the floor. And Gussy's impot was on the table; he'd left it there while Lathom was out. So—so it came out that Gussy had done it—"

"You mean, Mr. Lathom supposed that he had done it?"

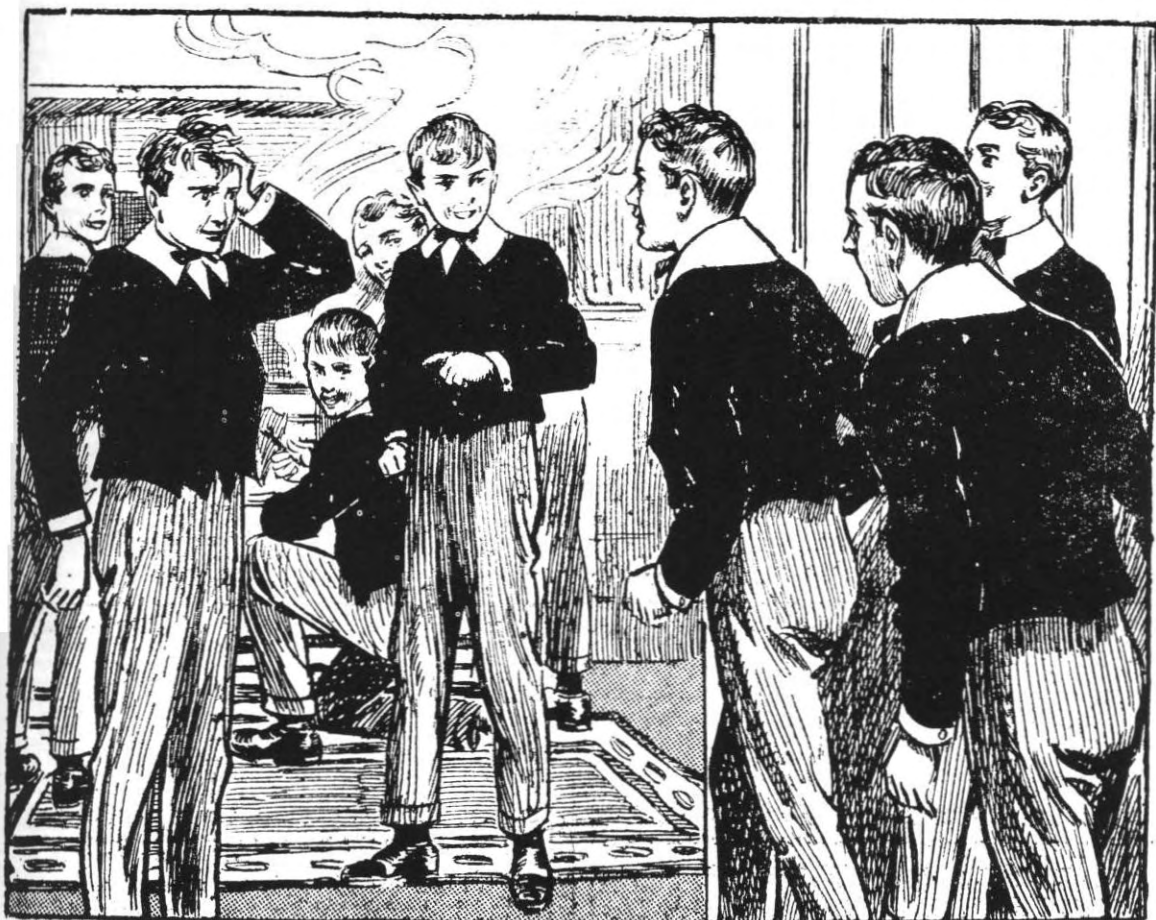
Figgins coughed.

"Arthur denied it, of course?" said Ethel.

"Oh, yes!"

"You believe him, of course?"

Now, up to that very moment, George Figgins had felt that if any evidence against any fellow could possibly be conclusive, the evidence against Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was so. He believed, like most of the St. Jim's fellows, that



Watty D'Arcy & Co. looked round as the Terrible Three pushed open the door of the Form-room and entered. "We want to find a fellow who was tapped on the napper the other evening by something chucked out of a study window in the School House!" said Tom Merry. "Well, here he is," answered Watty. "Trot out, young Manners!" "You!" exclaimed Harry Manners of the Shell. "Yes, little me," answered Reggie, rubbing his head. (See page 12.)

D'Arcy, smarting under a severe punishment which he regarded as unjust, had acted hastily, without thought, to make his Form master "sit up."

But it was evident that Cousin Ethel did not think so.

Figgins was, therefore, under the stern necessity of changing his opinion on the spot, or else deepening the trouble in Ethel's face.

His choice was very quickly made.

Indeed, when he saw what Ethel's opinion was, Figgy wondered how he could have been such an ass as to think anything different for one moment.

"Believe him!" he repeated. "Believe him! Oh! Ah! Why, everybody knows that Gussy's word is as good as gold!"

"But his Form master does not believe him?"

"Well, no! You see, the evidence—"

"And his friends—in his study—"

"Oh, Blake and Herries and Dig back him up," said Figgins.

"You're bound to back up a fellow in your own study. Fancy me believing anything against old Kerr, or Fatty Wynn Frinistance. And Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther take the same side. And—and I of course."

"But the others—"

"Well, most of the fellows think that Gussy was in an awful wax, and took it out of Lathom that way. You see, Lathom was pretty tough on him in class, and Gussy didn't deserve it. So—that's an excuse—"

"I am sure Arthur would do nothing so mean," said Ethel.

"Of course he wouldn't," agreed Figgins, wondering why this had not been so clear to him before.

"And even if he had, he would not condescend to tell untruths."

"Last thing in the world he would do," agreed Figgins.

"When is the punishment to take place?"

"Six o'clock, I think."

"And the guilty person has not been discovered?"

Figgins coughed again. The Head, the Housemaster, the Form master, and nearly all the school, had no doubt what-

ever that the guilty party had been discovered. But with Figgins, Miss Ethel's little finger weighed more in the balance than all St. Jim's, with the remainder of the county of Sussex thrown in.

"No," said Figgy.

"Has he been searched for?"

"Well, you see, they think they've got him," explained Figgins awkwardly.

"The Head's a just old chap, you know. He wouldn't flog a chap unless he was guilty—"

"What?"

"Unless he thought he was guilty. I mean, of course."

"So the guilty person is escaping scot-free, while Arthur is to be punished?"

"Ye-e-e-es."

"That is very serious," said Ethel.

"Awfully serious," said Figgins. "Rotten, I call it."

"Beastly! I—I wish you could make the Head think as you do, Miss Ethel. It's a beastly shame, and very rough on poor old Gussy."

"Can't anything be done?" asked Ethel.

"They were within sight of the gates of St. Jim's now. Figgins gnawed his lips as he walked on in silence. He was quite willing to believe that Gussy was innocent. But the evidence remained unaltered, and the evidence had satisfied the Head and the Housemaster.

Figgy did not see that anything was to be done.

Taggles, the porter, touched his hat to cousin Ethel as she came in, his crusty face breaking into a genial grin. Ethel nodded to him pleasantly, and walked on to the Head's house with Figgins. In the porch of the Head's house they stopped, and Figgy seemed in no hurry to ring.

"There is still time for something to be done," said Ethel.

"Yes—oh, yes!" said Figgins.

"Cannot you do anything?"

"Oh! I! Ah!"

"You are very clever," said Ethel.

"Am I?" exclaimed Figgins in surprise.

"Yes, and clever enough to find out who really damaged Mr. Lathom's book. I am sure of it," said Ethel. "You'll try, won't you, and save my cousin from an unjust punishment?"

Figgins drew a deep breath.

"I'll try jolly hard!" he said. "I—I'll pile in! I—I'll find out somehow—I'll do it or burst a boiler, by Jove!"

"Thank you so much!" said Ethel, with a sweet smile. "Perhaps your Scottish friend, Kerr, could help you. He is very keen."

"Of course!" exclaimed Figgins, elated. "Old Kerr's the chap. If Gussy is innocent——"

"What?"

"I mean, Gussy being innocent, old Kerr is the chap—the very chap," said Figgins. "I'll get Kerr on the job immediately after lessons. Old Kerr's got a head on him, you bet. Fancy my not thinking of that before!"

And Ethel gave Figgy a squeeze of the hand as she went into the Head's house—a reward for which Figgins would have faced unnumbered foes; and Figgins returned to the Fourth Form room in a state of great elation.

CHAPTER 4. Nothing Doing!

TOM MERRY had a serious expression on his face when the Shell fellows came out of their Form-room that afternoon.

Tom was feeling worried.

Manners and Lowther shared his feelings, and they were

"But who the dickens was it?" said Tom Merry, in some perplexity. "It's really a job for a dashed detective, you know. I suppose Ferrers Locke would bowl the rotter out in next to no time; but I'm blessed if I can!"

"Same here," said Manners.

"Whoever it was, fixed it up pretty cleverly to put it on Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "Somebody who had his knife into Gussy, anyhow."

"Gussy hasn't any enemies," said Tom. "There's Trimble. Gussy was waxy with him for selling him a rotten German penknife that broke—the rotten knife that Lathom's book was slashed with. But Trimble wouldn't have the nerve to play a trick like that on a Form master's property."

"Not likely!"

"I've got an idea, though," said Tom. "Lathom seems to have been on the war-path in the Fourth Form room yesterday morning. He whacked Gussy, and Gussy's supposed to have done this in revenge. Perhaps he whacked somebody else. That might be the party. Let's see the fags and ask them."

"May as well," said Manners, not very hopefully.

Baggy Trimble came up to the Terrible Three in the passage. He had a set of sleeve-links in one fat hand and a pocket-knife in the other. He held them up temptingly.

"Only a bob a time," he said. "Now's your chance. All the rest have gone like hot cakes."

"I don't think," said Lowther.

"I've been waiting specially for you fellows to offer you this chance," said Baggy. "Now, look at this!"

"Seen Study No. 6?" asked Tom Merry.

JAMES SEDDON. The Pivot of Bolton Wanderers F.C. Read What Our Special Representative Says About This Famous Player.

THE old saw that a prophet hath no honour in his own country has often been applied to football, but we can regard James Seddon, the lengthy centre half-back of the Bolton Wanderers club as a notable exception. He is a "Bowton" lad born and bred, and is now one of the most popular members of the team which plays in the town of his birth.

If it is of any advantage for a centre-half—and few people will doubt it—to be possessed of plenty of inches, then Seddon undoubtedly has this asset, for his one and a half inches over six feet enable him to tower over most of the centre-forwards with whom he comes in contact, and, incidentally, of course, enable him to get the ball quite frequently when it comes to him through the air.

There are possibly two or three better men in his position to be found in the country, but not many, and there is certainly no more wholehearted worker on the field of football. From start to finish of a match he is always in the thick of the fray, and at times when he has been captain of the Bolton side he has set his colleagues a splendid example, for, in addition to being very good, he is also very fair in his methods.

Seddon also comes as near as any man now playing to what might be described as the ideal athlete, for he is all bone and muscle, without an ounce of superfluous flesh to reduce his capacity for hard work. Possibly, in his early days, he overgrew his strength a bit, and when he first began to play for the club of his native town some nine years ago, it was noticed that occasionally he tired before the end of a gruelling contest. Nowadays, however, he can stick it with the most energetic of colleagues or opponents.

There has not been a great deal of romance in the football life of this centre-half, for the simple reason that the Wanderers of Bolton is the only big club with which he has played. When he left school he declared that he had no intention of taking up football seriously, but at sixteen years of age he was induced to turn out for a junior club at Chorley—Hamilton Central. After he had been with them a couple of seasons, the management of the Bolton club thought it was about time they began to take notice of the doings of the local lad, and accordingly he was signed on by the Wanderers in the 1913-14 season. At that time he was only eighteen years of age, but he actually played in one First Division match during the campaign, and if he was not a tremendous success, he showed sufficient promise for the Wanderers people to feel justified in retaining his services.

In the following season he appeared in half a dozen matches, and then came the war to interrupt his development as a footballer. For three and a half years he was on active service in France, and did not actually leave the Forces till June of 1919. Then he took to football in real earnest, and, getting a regular place in the Bolton team, he appeared in twenty-four League matches, developing along the right lines all the time.

In the following season he was chosen captain of the club, and in 1921 he was given the maximum £250 benefit. It can be reckoned from the foregoing that Seddon is only now 26 years of age, so there should be many years of usefulness in front of him, and one of these days he may realise the height of his ambition and be chosen to play for England. There are more unlikely things in football than that.

NEXT WEEK'S FREE AUTOGRAPHED PHOTOGRAPH—JOHN MACDONALD. Everton F.C.

looking serious, too—even Monty Lowther was serious for once.

The Terrible Three, generally as bright as the sun at noon, seemed to be under a cloud.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the flogging they were thinking of. They believed in D'Arcy's innocence. It required a mental effort to believe in it, against the evidence; but the Terrible Three had made the effort and succeeded.

They agreed that the state of affairs was rotten; but there was nothing to be done. And they had heard that cousin Ethel was coming that day, which, of course, made the state of affairs rotter.

Tom Merry had been thinking it over in the Form-room, instead of giving his best attention to Mr. Linton's valuable instruction. But there seemed no way out of it. If Gussy was innocent, some other fellow was guilty; but who was the other fellow?

Arthur Augustus took the view that the other fellow, whoever he was, would own up before an unjust flogging was administered. It was up to the fellow, and he was bound to do it. Arthur Augustus' faith in human nature was sometimes quite touching.

Tom Merry & Co. did not share his faith. The guilty party had kept his own counsel hitherto, and he was likely to keep it.

The fellow who would commit such an act of vandalism must be a mean sort of fellow, and a mean sort of fellow would not own up and take the flogging in Gussy's place. That was fairly certain.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 774.

"They've gone up to the study," Trimble grinned. "Looking like a set of moulting owls, you know. He, he, he!"

"Come on!" said Tom.

"I say, are you going to buy this— Yaroooooooh!"

The St. Jim's tradesman sat down in the passage with a bump and a yell, and the pocket-knife flew in one direction and the sleeve-links in another. The Terrible Three walked on.

The door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage was open when the Terrible Three arrived there. Blake & Co. were all at home, looking decidedly glum. Arthur Augustus, indeed, looked the most cheerful of the four.

"Trot in!" said Blake gloomily.

"Pway come in, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus graciously.

"Ethel's come," said Herries. "Rotten, ain't it?"

"Beastly!" agreed Tom Merry. "I suppose she will have to know all about the flogging."

"It's wathiah wotten, deah boys."

"Look here, there may be time yet to nail the right party," said the captain of the Shell. "When Lathom was on the war-path yesterday, did he pitch into any other Fourth Form chap as well as Gussy?"

"Yes—Mellish," said Blake.

"Mellish! Did he get it bad?"

"Quite as bad as Gussy."

Tom Merry's face brightened.

"Mellish is the sort of worm to feel revengeful, and to play a dirty trick, like damaging property," he said.

"Yaas, wathiah!"

"It may have been Mellish all the time."

"We thought of that!" growled Herries. "But if it was Mellish, he's mum. He never went to Lathom's study with his lines; he got lined extra this morning for not having finished them."

"But suppose it was Mellish who found the penknife when Gussy threw it away?" suggested Tom.

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"How do you know?" demanded Tom.

"You see, I had thrashed Mellish for chippin' me about buyin' that wotten penknife ffrom Twimble."

"All the more reason why he should try to fix this on you," said Tom.

"Yaas, if he was mean enough."

"He's mean enough for anything," said Manners decidedly.

"Yaas; but in this case it was imposs. You see, I thwew the knife away in this study."

"In this study? Then—"

NEXT WEEK'S SPECIAL

AUTOGRAPHED PHOTOGRAPH

will be _____

"Out of the window," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Then it must have fallen into the quad."

"Yaas, wathah! It dropped on somebody's head in the quad," said Arthur Augustus, with a grin.

"How do you know that?"

"Because I heard him yell, deah boy."

"Who was it?"

"I haven't the faintest ideah. You see, it was aftah dark, and I couldn't see the chap. I thought it might be a mastah; so I vegarated it was wathah judicious not to inquiah into the mattah," said Arthur Augustus sagely.

"Then how do you know it wasn't Mellish whose head it dropped on?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Because Mellish was indoors, deah boy. I left the study immediately, and Mellish was still in the passage heah."

"Oh, that settles that!" said Tom. "The fellow who got the penknife on his napper was most likely the fellow who picked it up."

"I vegarated that as vewy pwob."

"And that's the fellow who slashed Lathom's book, I should think," said Blake. "It couldn't have been Mellish, and I'm blessed if I can guess who it can have been!"

Tom Merry knitted his brows, and his hopeful look departed. His suspicions had fallen vaguely upon Percy Mellish, the black sheep of the Fourth, for want of some other object for them to fall upon. But his inquiry seemed to have cleared Mellish, rather than to have implicated him in the mysterious affair.

"It is vewy wemarkable," continued Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Lathom believes that I damaged his book on Wednesday aftahnoon, you know, and does not believe my statement that I threw away the wotten knife on Tuesday evenin', and had nevah seen it since till it was pwoduced in his study. It is vewy odd that a gentleman of Mr. Lathom's yeahs should fail to see the facts. Do you fellows think that poor old Lathom is goin' off his wockah?"

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"There s-ems to be nothing doing," said Tom Merry, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "It's jolly mysterious! I suppose it's not much good trying to find the fellow who picked up the knife. He couldn't admit it without giving himself away."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Nothing doing!" groaned Blake. "Gussy's going to be flogged in an hour's time, and it's an awful disgrace for this study! And it's just rotten luck that Ethel happens to be here at the time."

"Yaas, that's the worst of it," said Arthur Augustus. "I have been thinkin' of a way of avoidin' that extremely unpleasant state of affairs. You fellows wemembah that I wetered ffrom the school once—"

"We remember you ran away, like a silly goat!" grunted Dig.

"I have been thinkin' that, in the circumstances, it might be advisable to weter again," said Arthur Augustus. "I should leave a lettah explainin' to Dr. Holmes that I have wetered to save him ffrom committin' an act of injustice, and makin' an ass of himself, you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"What do you fellows think of the ideah?" asked Arthur Augustus, looking round at the juniors inquiringly.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"Jabberwock!"

The replies of Tom Merry & Co. indicated without dubiety that they did not think much of the idea. Before Arthur Augustus could make the indignant rejoinder that rose to his aristocratic lips, there was a tap at the door of the study, and Figgins & Co. of the New House walked cheerily in.

CHAPTER 5. Business Looks Up!

THIS splendid combination tin-opener and corkscrew—

The St. Jim's merchant was going it again.

In Study No. 2, in the Fourth, which belonged to Trimble, Mellish, and Kit Wildrake, Baggy had a number of his "articles" spread on the corner of the table, apparently for the purpose of tempting his study-mates.

They did not seem to be tempted, however.

Percy Mellish scowled; and Kit Wildrake looked impatient. Every junior at St. Jim's by this time was thoroughly fed-up with Trimble the Tradesman. In season and out of season Baggy "trotted out" his "articles," and offered them for sale; gathering more kicks than halfpence in his business-like career.

"Suppose you go back to the Boot Leg Ranch, Wildrake," he suggested. "You'll be glad of a combined tin-opener and corkscrew—"

"Can it!" snapped Wildrake.

"I suppose there ain't any shops in British Saskatchewan, where you come from?" asked Trimble, blinking at him.

Trimble's knowledge of geography was fearful and wonderful.

"You fat mugwump!" said Wildrake. "If you offer me any more of that trash I guess I'll jam it down your pesky neck!"

And the Canadian junior walked out of the study.

"Silly ass!" grunted Trimble. "Fancy missing a bargain like that, Mellish! You wouldn't, would you?"

"I jolly well would!" growled Mellish. "Don't offer me any of your German rubbish, you fat chump!"

Trimble eyed Mellish curiously.

"You don't want that tin-opener and corkscrew?" he asked.

"No, you dummy!"

"Not at half-a-crown?"

"Not at half a farthing."

"Better think it over, old chap," urged Trimble, still with that curious expression on his fat face. "I know you've got some tin—you had a remittance yesterday. Better buy that corkscrew."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Same price as the silver penknife I sold Gussy the other day," said Trimble. "Are you taking it?"

"No!" roared Mellish. "Shut up, for goodness' sake!"

"Of course, if you don't want to buy a big bargain, while you've got the chance, I sha'n't press it on you," said Trimble, with dignity. "I'll take it to Study No. 6."

"Do! They'll kick you out, and it'll do you good!"

"I don't think they'd kick me out this time," said Trimble, with a grin. "I've got something to tell Gussy about that jolly old penknife he bought off me—something he'd like to hear."



JOHN MACDONALD

(The Stout Defender of EVERTON F.C.)

ADD IT TO YOUR WONDERFUL COLLECTION!

Percy Mellish started, and looked quickly at the fat junior. "About the penknife? What do you mean?"

Trimble gave his study-mate a fat wink.

"You remember saying the other day, when I sold it to Gussy for half-a-crown, that the same penknife could be bought in Wayland for sixpence or a bob?" he said.

"I don't remember—"

"Well, you said so, anyhow!"

"May have!" growled Mellish. "Suppose I did. What does it matter? What are you driving at?"

"You made out that I had done Gussy—"

"So you had."

"Gussy bought that knife with his eyes open," said Trimble. "It was you that broke the blade, pretending to test it. If Gussy chucked that knife away afterwards, it was his own look-out, not mine."

"It's pretty clear that he never chucked it away," said Mellish, eyeing Trimble narrowly. "That was only a yarn he spun to Lathom, after the knife was found in Lathom's study."

"You see, I happen to know that he did chuck it away," said Trimble coolly. "I offered him money back on it, and he couldn't accept because he no longer had the knife."

"Rot!" muttered Mellish. "Even if he did chuck it away, he got it back when he wanted to rip Lathom's book."

"You knew he'd chucked it away," said Trimble, unheeding. "I know that. And you knew you could get a penknife exactly like it in Wayland for a shilling, at Silverstein's shop."

Mellish gave a great start. His eyes seemed to burn, as they were fixed upon Baggy Trimble's fat, grinning face.

"What do you mean?" he muttered huskily.

"You went over to Wayland on your bike yesterday afternoon, when you ought to have been doing your lines."

"I—I went to Abbotsford."

"Oh, good! If you went to Abbotsford, it's all right," smiled Trimble. "I thought perhaps you might have gone to Wayland."

"Well, I didn't."

"Then it wouldn't hurt you if a master went over to Silverstein's and asked them whether—"

"Shut up, you fat rotter!" hissed Mellish, with a terrified glance at the open door.

"Certainly, old chap," said Trimble amicably. "Let's get back to business. Are you taking this corkscrew at half-a-crown?"

Mellish looked at his fat study-mate long and silently. Trimble, with a bland smile, held out the wonderful combination tin-opener and corkscrew, which looked as if it could safely be guaranteed not to open tins or draw corks.

"It's a jolly good article," he said. "Petter bag it while you've got the chance. I feel sure I could sell it in Study No. 6."

"You fat rotter!" hissed Mellish.

"That's enough!" said Baggy; and he turned to the door.

"I'll look for trade in Study No. 6. I'm sure D'Arcy—"

"Hold on!"

"Too late!" said Trimble haughtily. "You've refused my goods. I sha'n't offer them again. I'm not begging for custom."

"Look here—" breathed Mellish.

"I can sell the stuff in Study No. 6—I'm sure of that. I'm sorry I can't let you have this wonderful corkscrew, Mellish. If you want it, the price has gone up to three bob."

Mellish gritted his teeth hard. But he extracted three shillings from his pocket, and handed the coins to Trimble, receiving the valuable "article" in exchange.

"Sure you want it?" asked Baggy considerably.

"Yes!" hissed Mellish.

"Mind, I'm not pressing it on you. You understand that?"

"Yes!" breathed Mellish.

"All serene, then!" said Baggy airily. "Ta-ta, old top! I've got to call in at the tuck-shop before tea-time."

And Baggy Trimble rolled out of the study, with great satisfaction in his podgy face. He had succeeded in doing trade at last—at last he had secured a customer. And, in the circumstances, it looked as if Percy Mellish would have to be a regular customer of the St. Jini's merchant, so long as the supply of "articles" lasted.

Baggy was happy and satisfied; but Mellish, left in the study, with a pale face and perspiring brow, felt anything but satisfied or happy. There was a deep dread now at the heart of the cad of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 6.

The Scotsman on the Case!

GEORGE FIGGINS bestowed a cheery nod on the seven juniors in Study No. 6, as he entered with Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"The whole merry family at home?" he said brightly.

"And not expecting visitors from the New House!" said Blake bluntly. Jack Blake was too worried to waste any politeness on fellows from the rival House just then.

"Weally, Blake—" remonstrated Arthur Augustus.

"Bow-wow!" grunted Blake.

"Pway excuse Blake, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "The fact is, we are wathah up against it just now, and we are all feelin' wathah wotten and watty."

"All serene," said Figgins. "We've come to help."

"Bai Jove!"

"How can you help?" asked Tom Merry. "Gussy's going to bag a flogging in less than an hour, and we've just come to the conclusion that there's nothing to be done."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You see, something's got to be done," explained Figgins. "Gussy's not going to have that flogging. It's rather important!"

"I am glad you realise the importance of that, Figgay,"

said Arthur Augustus. "A fellow's dig suffahs vewy much fworm a flogging!"

"Well, I wasn't exactly thinking of your dignity, old chap," said Figgins. "But Ethel—"

"What?"

"I mean Miss Cleveland, looked awfully cut up when she heard—"

"Gweat Scott! What uttiahly cwass ass has told cousin Ethel anythin' about it?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great distress.

Figgins reddened.

"You—you see—" he stammered.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You know I walked from the station with Ethel," said Figgay. "Well, I wasn't going to mention it. But she asked about you, and then, somehow, she guessed exactly how it was. But it's turned out lucky."

"Blessed if I see how!" said Tom Merry.

"Ethel's quite certain that Gussy never did the trick," said Figgins.

"Yaas, I was suah that Ethel would take that view."

"And the way she put it, made it quite clear to me," said Figgins. "I really wondered I hadn't seen it before like that. Of course, it's as clear as daylight that Gussy never did the trick."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!"

"Well, you needn't thank me," said Figgins. "I admit I never saw it myself till Ethel put it so clearly. Then I wondered how I could have been such an ass. But the long and the short of it is that Ethel suggested putting Kerr on the job. So I've brought him over. Just like Ethel to think of that!"

Figgins looked round Study No. 6, apparently expecting a burst of enthusiasm.

But the assembled School House juniors did not "enthuse." They stared at Figgins.

"Blessed if I see how Kerr can do anything we can't do!" said Blake morosely. "What are you getting at?"

"We've been looking into it," said Manners rather warmly. "We can't see anything to be done. I fancy we can see as far into a brick wall as any New House boulder!"

"Yes, rather!" said several voices, with emphasis.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Fatty Wynn hotly. "You fellows will admit that Kerr's got more brains than this whole study put together."

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah—wats!"

Kerr's quiet voice broke in. The cool, clear-headed Scottish junior had come over to the School House to be of use, not to join in a heated argument while the precious minutes were flying. And in his clear-headed Scottish way, he kept that fact in view.

"Just a word, you fellows! There isn't much time before Gussy has to go up before the beak and take his gruel. Let's all put our heads together and see if there's anything doing."

"There isn't!" said Blake, rather obstinately.

"Nothing that I can see," said Lowther.

"But Kerr—" began Figgins.

"Yes, Kerr—" said Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, we all know that Kerr's pretty keen," he said. "Let's hear what Kerr thinks about it. It won't do any harm, if it doesn't do any good."

"Yaas, that's so."

"Giss Ferraes Locke Sexton Blake Kerr some details," grinned Monty Lowther.

"In the first place, I presume that you are quite convinced of my innocence, Kerr?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"We'll take that for granted to begin with," said Kerr, rather diplomatically. "No good beginning on the supposition that you're guilty."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry gave the Scottish junior a quick glance. It occurred to him that Kerr had an open mind on the subject so far. Probably it had not come into Kerr's mind to doubt till Figgins requested his chummy assistance in the matter. And Tom could guess that Kerr had resolved to see what could be done to oblige Figgins—keeping an open mind on the subject till he had ascertained the facts.

"From what I've heard," went on Kerr, "D'Arcy threw the knife away on Tuesday—"

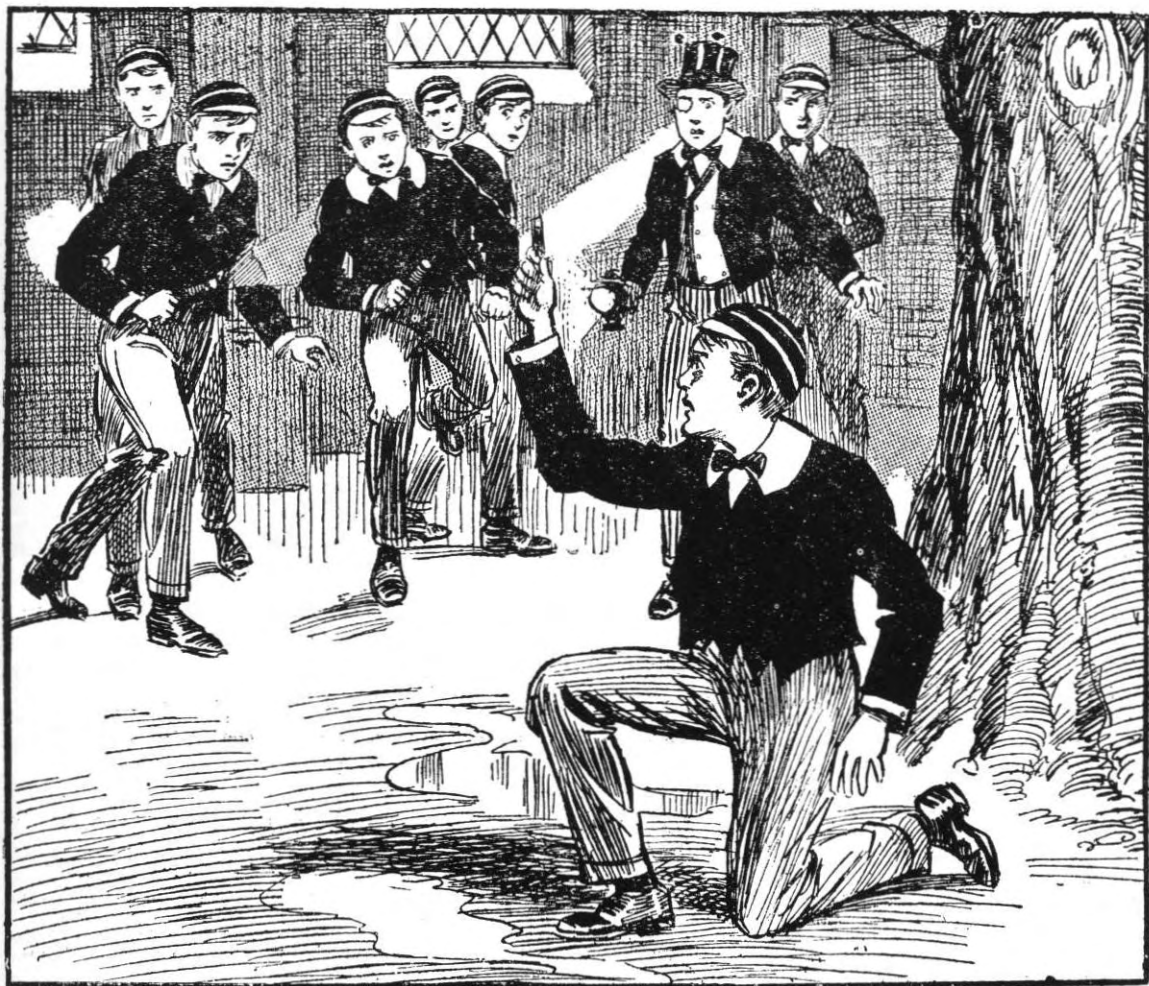
"Tuesday evenin', deah boy. I was feelin' waxy at bein' chipped about the wotten thing, and chucked it out of the study window."

"A dangerous thing to do," commented Kerr. "It might have fallen on somebody's head!"

"It did!" grinned Blake.

"Whose?" asked Kerr quickly.

"I could not see in the dark, deah boy, and instead of lightin' the gas in the study, I thought I had better cleah, in case it was a mastah's nappah the wotten penknife had dropped on."



The circle of searchers carefully examined the path, then two or three puddles were tested with searching fingers. Suddenly there was a yell from Levison of the Fourth. "Here you are!" he cried. He held up a muddy hand that had been groping in the puddle. In the muddy fingers was held a broken penknife. (See page 13.)

Kerr smiled.

"Now, the knife was picked up in Lathom's study on Wednesday afternoon, after the Virgil had been slashed with it," he said. "Taking it that Gussy was dead in that act, we want to find out who picked up the knife. The fellow whose head it dropped on will remember the circumstance. Have you spotted him?"

"Of course not," grunted Blake.

"Why 'of course'?"

"He's not likely to own up, as he's the fellow who slashed Lathom's giddy old Virgil."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Isn't it plain enough?" asked Blake warmly. "Chap must have looked round to see what had dropped on his napper. Seeing that it was a penknife, he picked it up."

"That seems pretty probable," said Tom Merry.

"And as the knife was used to slash Lathom's book, it was done by the same fellow," said Dig.

Kerr nodded slowly.

"Possibly," he said. "Probably, in fact. But it's a giddy coincidence that the penknife dropped on the very fellow who wanted such a thing, as he intended to play a dirty trick and put it on somebody else."

"Well, that giddy coincidence is too much for the Head," said Blake ruefully. "He doesn't think it happened."

"Neither do I," said Kerr quietly.

"You think the penknife dropped in the quad, and somebody else came along and picked it up another time?" asked Herries. "But that's almost as big a coincidence."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No; I don't think that either," said Kerr.

"Then what the merry thump do you think, if you think anything at all?" demanded Manners.

"I think you chaps must walk round with your eyes shut

when you're making an investigation," said Kerr, with a grin. "The first thing of all is to find the chap who was hit on the napper by the falling penknife."

"Do you think he'll own up, if he's the fellow who earned Gussy's flogging?" howled Herries.

"Not at all. But if he isn't—"

"If he isn't, he never had the knife, and so it's no good looking for him," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kerr smiled sweetly.

"He may have picked up the knife without having used it on Lathom's book," he said, "or the knife may have been quite lost and never found at all. In that case, the fellow in question can tell us just where it dropped, and we can look for it."

Nine juniors stared blankly at George Francis Kerr. Even Figgins and Fatty Wynn were staggered.

"Look for it!" babbled Blake. "There's no need to look for the knife. It was found in Lathom's study after the book was cut—with bits of cut paper jammed in it. Lathom's got it now."

"Are you sure it was the same knife?"

"The—the—the same knife?"

Every fellow in the study stammered those words, blinking at Kerr.

"Yes, the same knife!" said Kerr. "Are you sure?"

"Of course!" gasped Blake. "Every fellow in the school had seen that rotten German silver knife that Trimble sold Gussy. Why, you'd seen it yourself!"

"That's so," said Kerr, with a nod.

"Gussy recognised it as his knife, when it was trotted out as proof in Lathom's study," said Tom Merry.

"Quite so."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"All the same, I want to know whether it was the same knife," said Kerr coolly.

"There wasn't another knife like it at St. Jim's," said Manners. "Trimble had only one in his collection of rubbish, and nobody else would be likely to bring such rubbish into the school."

"Quite so. There wasn't another knife like it at St. Jim's," assented Kerr. "But there are probably some tens of thousands just like it outside St. Jim's."

"Wha-a-at?"

"That's so," remarked Herries. "I heard Mellish say they could be got for a tanner each at Wayland, when he was chipping Gussy about it."

"Mellish!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a start.

Kerr laughed a little.

"Mellish was licked yesterday, as well as Gussy," he said. "Mellish is a good deal more revengeful than jolly old Gussy. And Gussy was pitching into Mellish yesterday, too—"

"He provoked me vewy wottenly, Kerr."

"Quite so. I really think, you fellows, we'd better find out what became of Gussy's knife, and if it's found, then it will be pretty clear that the knife found in Lathom's study wasn't Gussy's—"

"Hurrah!"

George Figgins fairly roared. His faith in his Scottish chum was justified. Every face in Study No. 6 was brighter now. Cousin Ethel's visit to St. Jim's was, after all, a fortunate occurrence, for it was owing to cousin Ethel that the Scotsman was upon the trail. And it really looked now as if light could be seen ahead.

CHAPTER 7. Help From the Third!

TEA was due in the studies, but there were ten juniors of St. Jim's at least, who did not give a single thought to tea. Even Fatty Wynn forgot tea-time—which was a record in itself.

Tom Merry & Co. were too busy now to think of tea.

Up and down and round about St. Jim's went the Co., seeking, searching, questioning.

A fellow was wanted who had been tapped on the head on Tuesday evening by an article thrown from a study window.

Figgins & Co. went back to the New House, to inquire up and down that house. Tom Merry & Co. devoted themselves to the School House.

Other fellows soon joined them in the quest.

Talbot of the Shell, Kangaroo, Levison and Cardew and Clive, Dick Julian and Wildrake, and a dozen more fellows, joined up with great keenness as soon as they knew what was toward.

It was possible, of course, that the unlucky recipient of the discarded penknife had been a master or a prefect. In that case, there was probably a caning due to Arthur Augustus for his carelessness. But that was a very small consideration, in the circumstances.

But the searchers naturally left the masters and prefects till the last. The search was extended among all the junior Forms to begin with.

It was soon clear that nobody in the Shell or the Fourth knew anything of the occurrence. And the Terrible Three visited the Third Form room to inquire there, while their comrades were engaged elsewhere.

Most of the Third were in their Form-room, of which they had the free run till the hour came for evening prep, when Mr. Selby would come in to "take" them. There were fearsome preparations for a fearsome feast going on round the Form-room fire. Wally & Co. of the Third were busy, and hardly designed to glance at the Shell fellows as they came in. Only Reggie Manners called out:

"Scuttle off, you Shell-fish!"

"Wally, old bean—" began Tom Merry.

D'Arcy minor looked round from a half-burnt herring.

"Don't worry!" he answered. "I'm cooking!"

"Never mind that now," said Tom. "It's about your major, Wally."

Wally grunted.

"I can't help it about my major, can I? What does he go round asking for trouble like this for? I suppose I can't go and tell the Head he's not to flog Gussy because he's my major?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; but you may be able to help us get him off, kid."

"Oh!" said Wally.

He jumped up, abandoning the half-burnt herring to Levison minor.

"What's the game?" he asked.

"We want to find a fellow who was tapped on the napper on Tuesday evening by something chucked out of a study window in the School House."

"What on earth for?" said Wally, in amazement. "Anyhow, here he is. Trot out, young Manners!"

Manners minor rubbed his head reminiscently. Apparently

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it was upon the head of Reggie Manners that the "article" had fallen.

"You!" exclaimed Manners of the Shell.

"Little me," said Reggie. "If you know the fellow who chucked the thing, tell me. I'm going to smash him!"

"I'll help!" said Wally generously. "We'll jolly well teach the silly idiot a lesson about chucking things around in the dark. Must have been some potty ass."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances of deep satisfaction. So far, Kerr's theory seemed to be working out well.

"Tell us just how it happened," said Tom.

"Nothing to tell," said Wally. "We three—Reggie and Frank and me—were doing our trot round the quad for exercise. All of a sudden Reggie gave a howl like a Hun—"

"I didn't!" roared Reggie.

"You jolly well did!" said Wally. "Just like a wild Hun!"

"I just called out a bit," said Reggie to the Shell fellows.

"I was startled, of course, by something dropping suddenly on my napper in the dark. Just a slight exclamation."

"A regular howl!" said Wally obstinately.

"Look here, Wally, you cheeky rotter—"

"Look here, young Manners—"

"Hold on!" interposed Tom Merry hastily. There were signs of a dog-fight at hand, and the investigators had not come to the Third Form room to witness a dog-fight. "Did you see what dropped on you, Reggie?"

"How could I see in the dark?" demanded Reggie. "Have some sense—even if you are in the Shell!"

"Did you pick it up?"

"Why should I have picked it up?"

"Then you don't know what it was?"

"Of course, I don't!"

"I suppose it dropped on the ground after hitting you on the head?"

"Unless it flew up into the sky," said Manners minor sarcastically.

"Where were you exactly at the time?"

"In the quad."

"Anywhere near the School House?"

"Shouldn't be likely to be trotting round the New House?"

"Were you far from the window of Study No. 6?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Think a bit," urged Tom earnestly. "It's very important."

"Can't see where the importance comes in. I want to punch the silly ass who chucked it, that's all."

"It wasn't far from the window of Study No. 6," said Levison minor. "About a dozen yards, I should say. I thought at the time that the thing, whatever it was, had been slung out of a window from one of the Fourth Form studies."

"That settles it," said Tom, with great satisfaction.

"Now, I want you kids—"

"Us what?" demanded five or six indignant voices.

"You estimable young gentlemen of the Third."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I want you to show me exactly where you were at the time. Come out into the quad now."

"It's dark now, ass!"

"We've got lanterns and electric torches and things. Come on."

"We're cooking—"

"Never mind that!"

"Never mind that!" said Wally, with crushing sarcasm. "We gave a shilling for those herrings! But never mind that! Oh, no!"

"Wally, old man, the thing that dropped on Reggie's napper was Gussy's penknife. If it can be found, Gussy won't get his flogging."

Wally of the Third jumped.

"You couldn't say that before!" he snorted. "Trust a Shell fellow to jaw and jaw and never talk sense. We'll come."

And quite an army of the Third followed the Terrible Three. Two minutes later all the Co. knew that a clue had been found, and a crowd of bike lanterns and electric torches were gleaming in the winter dusk in the quadrangle.

CHAPTER 8. The Discovery!

"JUST about here—"

"No—here—"

"Farther on, I think."

There seemed to be a difference of opinion among Wally & Co. of the Third.

"Just about here," repeated D'Arcy minor obstinately.

"You dry up, young Manners! How do you know just where it was, in the dark?"

"Well, how do you, if you come to that?" demanded

Manners minor.

"Don't jaw, Reggie, old chap. Look here—"

"It was a bit farther on," said Frank Levison.



The Head, having finished questioning Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turned his attention to Baggy Trimble. "Can penknives like this be obtained at any establishment near at hand?" he asked. "Oh, yes, sir," answered Trimble, "but if you are in want of a really good one and cheap, I'll manage it for you." The Head was amazed at Baggy's ridiculous answer. "You utterly stupid boy!" he fumed. (See page 16.)

"Bosh! It wasn't!"

"Wally, you ass——"

"Levison minor, you chump——"

"Pway excuse me for intewwuptin' you, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy politely, "but may I wemind you that time is getting on. In a quartah of an hour——"

"You hear what Gussy says!" said Wally sternly. "You're wasting time, and you'll get him flogged yet."

"You're wasting time, you mean!" roared Reggie.

"Look here——"

"I dare say a licking would do him good, too," said Reggie Manners. "The more the Fourth are licked, the better, in my opinion."

"You're a young ass!" growled Manners of the Shell.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah——"

"Let's make a wide circle round, and close in," said Tom Merry, interrupting the argument. "That's bound to turn it up if it's still about."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

The juniors, under Tom's direction, were strung out in an ample circle, enclosing the spot where the three fags argued. With lanterns and electric flash-lamps, they scanned the ground, closing in slowly towards the centre. If the discarded penknife was still where it had fallen, it was not likely to escape that close search.

And it was very probably where it had fallen. For in places the ground was muddy, and there were puddles, where any small article would have been hidden at once after falling.

"What the thump's this game?" asked the voice of Kildare of the Sixth. The captain of St. Jim's came up in amazed inquiry. The flashing of lights and buzzing of voices in the dark quad had drawn him to the spot.

Tom Merry explained, while the search went on.

Kildare whistled softly.

"The knife that was used in Mr. Lathom's study is still there," he said. "If another knife is found here, it will look as if some person bought a penknife like D'Arcy's specially for the purpose of cutting up Mr. Lathom's book and throwing suspicion on D'Arcy."

"That's what we think," said Tom.

"You suspect some fellow personally?"

Tom was silent.

He suspected Mellish of the Fourth very strongly, but it was not his business to mention that circumstance to a prefect of the Sixth. Kildare gave him a sharp look.

"Answer me, Merry. You needn't give the name."

"Well, we do suspect a fellow in the Fourth," said Tom.

"For what reason?"

"He was up against Mr. Lathom for a licking, same as D'Arcy was—and also D'Arcy had given him a licking. So my idea is that the rotter was killing two birds with one stone, in playing this trick."

"Oh!" said Kildare very thoughtfully. "A trick on Mr. Lathom—and a licking for D'Arcy. It's pretty thick. But—well, I'll help you look for the knife. If it's found, it's just as well to have a prefect present as a witness."

"Thanks, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's joined in the search. Wally & Co. were still wrangling as to the precise spot where they had been when the unseen article dropped out of space on Reggie Manner's head. Meanwhile the circle of searchers closed in slowly but surely.

The gravel on the path was carefully raked over, the grass border was examined inch by inch, two or three muddy puddles in the path, left by recent rain, were tested with searching fingers. And suddenly there was a yell from Levison of the Fourth.

"Here you are!"

"Found it?" shouted Figgins.

"Yes!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a rush of the searchers to surround Ernest Levison. He held up a muddy hand that had been groping in a puddle. In the muddy fingers was held a broken penknife.

"That's it!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hip-pip!" shouted Herries. "That's the giddy goods! Hurrah!"

(Continued on page 16.)

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THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR!

By Edmund Burton.

Another of the Amazing Ex-
ploits of ANTHONY SHARPE
—Investigator.

The Cry in the Rain—The Secret Cellar.

IF you have any knowledge of the busy manufacturing town of Linchester, in the Midlands, you must also know the wide stretch of rolling moorland which surrounds it for miles on every side. In fine weather it is a favourite spot for those who love to indulge in long country rambles; but during the wet season no place under Heaven could be more desolate or uninviting. There are few houses on Linchester Moor, and what inhabited buildings there are lie well scattered; so that the whole district is incomparably lonely.

Anthony Sharpe was in the habit of taking a run down here now and again, when circumstances permitted and whenever he felt that he required a "breather"; so, on this day in late autumn, we find him trudging back towards Linchester, wet, miserable, but as ravenously hungry as his invariably fit condition could make him.

The morning had been gloriously fine, giving no hint of the terrific downpour to follow, and Sharpe had set out quite confidently, armed with no better protection against the elements than a very questionable waterproof and a stout walking-stick.

It is to be feared that he was a more successful detective than a weather prophet, for when he had tramped some five or six miles from the town the rain had literally descended in bucketfuls, and, no shelter being near, there was nothing for it but to hurry back as fast as he could.

The downpour had just ceased as he reached a point a mile or so outside Linchester, where he presently perceived a man coming towards him, evidently making for the village of Minford on the other side of the moor. He was not a prepossessing individual by any means, and Sharpe, more from custom than anything else, took a good look at him as he passed. His work as a detective had ingrained that habit of studying folk within him, and the practice came as naturally as eating his regular three meals a day.

"Looks like clearin' up now," remarked the man civilly enough.

"Yes, it does," grunted Sharpe. He was feeling much too uncomfortable for conversation, and the weather was a topic he particularly abhorred to-day.

But as he walked on the investigator simply could not get the man's face out of his mind. His long acquaintance with criminals of various kinds told him that it was not a good face. There was something furtive, something cunning about the expression which he did not like, and he was seldom far out in a diagnosis of this sort.

"You came from that house a little farther on," he reflected, "for your cap, coat, and boots are quite dry; and I know there's not a square inch of shelter, save that, between this and Linchester. You wouldn't have had time to walk from the town without getting soaked, for the rain only stopped a few minutes ago, and— However, I don't see why I should worry—"

"Help!"
Sharpe was passing that selfsame house now, and pulling up short in his tracks, he stared about him questioningly, presently fixing his eyes upon the building itself. It was a ramshackle place, little better than a ruin, and seemed quite deserted. Yet that cry. Where had it come from, if not—

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"Help! Oh, help here!"

There was no mistaking it this time, and the detective darted towards the door. He pushed at it, but it would not budge. However, the windows, from which all traces of glass had long since disappeared, were only protected by flimsy shutters, and he quickly effected an entrance that way.

Crossing the room on the first floor, a rickety flight of stairs presently confronted him, and, as the second cry seemed to have come from overhead, he sprang up them swiftly. Three doors opened from the landing—two of them standing ajar, whilst the third was bolted on the outside. A slight shuffling noise came from beyond the woodwork, and he rapped on the panels with his stick.

"Anybody there?" he cried.

"Yes, yes!" came a voice—a woman's. "For heaven's sake get me out of this, whoever you are!"

Sharpe unfastened the door and passed cautiously inside. The room was almost in pitch darkness, owing to the fact that the window had been boarded up. He struck a match and saw a woman lying bound hand and foot on a mattress in the corner. She had been gagged also, but had managed to work this free—a knotted handkerchief, which now hung loosely round her neck.

"Well, madam," said the detective, as he untied the cords. "What's all this about? It seems a nice position for a lady to be in, eh?"

She made no reply for a moment. Seemingly terror had struck her temporarily dumb; then suddenly she found her tongue again.

"He—he locked me in!" she managed to gasp.

"He? Who?" asked Sharpe, mystified.

"The—the man who left just now."

"Oh!" the investigator ejaculated, swiftly recollecting the queer-looking individual who

had passed him outside on the rain-lashed moor only a few minutes before. "A tall chap, with a dark moustache, eh? How does that description fit?"

"Yes—yes, that's he!" she confirmed. "You seem to know him. You're not a friend of his—"

"Oh, no!" Sharpe interrupted her with a smile. "I don't know the—er—gentleman personally. Indeed, I've never seen him before, to the best of my recollection. But come, my good woman; why did he put you up here? It seems a silly sort of trick to play."

"I can't say," she replied, in perplexity. "A couple of hours ago I started out from Linchester to go to Minford, but I got caught in the rain and tried to find some shelter against the front-door below, when all at once it opened and I fell backwards into the arms of a man—that man—who was coming out. I was a good bit surprised, for I thought, like everyone else about here, that this place had been deserted for years past. It used to belong to an old chap who lived and died here by himself, and it went to rack and ruin afterwards through nobody else ever occupying it. I tried to explain, but that—that ruffian wouldn't listen; said I was spying, and dragged me up here, where I've been till you found me. I wasn't spying on anyone, of course; why should I? But I haven't thanked you, sir, for coming—"

Sharpe held up his hand.

"It's all right," he said; "don't trouble about that! Your story is rather interesting, and I'd like to have a look over the house. Will you wait here for a few minutes, until I come back?"

She nodded, and the detective retraced his way downstairs.

He passed from room to room, but there was nothing to be seen save a litter of dust and rubbish, which must have taken years

THE STRUGGLE ON THE MOOR!



Noiselessly as a cat, the detective rose, and before the man was aware of his presence Sharpe's hand was clapped over his mouth, effectually choking the cry of alarm which rose to his lips.

to accumulate. Finally, he went back to the hall, and, striking a match, looked down at the bare boards.

Several sets of muddy footsteps were distinctly visible here—some of long standing, and others quite fresh—and he traced them to the big, old-fashioned kitchen at the rear. Then a gasp of astonishment suddenly burst from his lips.

For the tracks ended abruptly in the middle of the floor!

He struck another match, and stooped down. The flagstones looked solid enough, but along one side a narrow crack was visible, which would hardly have been noticed by Sharpe were it not for the sudden termination of the footprints.

He dug his fingers into the crevice, and pulled up strongly. A portion of the floor about three feet square moved upwards quite noiselessly on well-oiled hinges, revealing a gap in the centre of the kitchen. A ladder ran down into the darkness, and, having listened intently for a minute or so, the detective cautiously descended.

Lighting another of his few remaining vestas—for, unfortunately, he had forgotten his pocket-lamp—he looked about him. He was in a small cellar, along one wall of which ran a low bench.

He crossed over, and nearly dropped the match in his amazement, for the bench was littered with a miscellaneous collection of curious-looking tools, moulds, ladles, and small pieces of money. A bundle of Treasury-notes lay at one end, neatly held together by a rubber band.

Sharpe picked these up and examined them minutely, holding his eyes close to their surfaces until his matches were exhausted.

"Phe-e-ew! 'Snide' Harry's work, for a fiver!" he muttered presently. "Well, who on earth would have thought of looking for that most amazing of crooks down here? All this, of course, explains the rumour I heard in Linchester this morning about the bad money that's being circulated round the neighbourhood. But Snide Harry—By James, it's a bit of a revelation!"

Some months before, Sharpe had succeeded in breaking up a gang of expert coiners in London, after several weeks of weary and trying work shared between the regular police and himself. All the members of the clique had been arrested, save their chief, Snide Harry, who had, apparently, vanished into thin air during the confusion caused by the sudden raid.

This had always been rather a thorn in the detective's side, for Snide Harry was one of the cleverest forgers of paper-money who ever existed, his marvellous imitation of the watermarks being an achievement almost to admire, so perfect was the work. And it was this fact which enabled Sharpe to place the culprit now, for these notes would have deceived the keenest trained expert alive if once passed into circulation. The coins were also well-made, though not so good as the paper-money, and evidently some had been suspected already when offered in the Linchester shops; hence the rumour which Sharpe had overheard earlier in the day.

"Snide," it may be mentioned in passing, is the slang term for counterfeit coin.

Sharpe replaced the sheaf of notes, and, after a further look round the cellar, went back to the upper room where the woman was waiting for him.

"Well," she asked, "did you find anyone?"

"No," he smiled back; "but I've found several things, Mrs.—"

"Rogers," she said—"Mrs. Anne Rogers."

"Well, Mrs. Rogers," the investigator nodded, "I may as well take you into my confidence, since you certainly deserve to know a little of what has been puzzling you. You'll know all later on, if things work out as I desire—and they should, with your valuable assistance. This house is not quite so innocent as it looks, and that fellow who made you a prisoner had very good reasons for doing so, according to his own lights."

"Why, sir, how do you know that? And—who are you, if I may ask?" queried the woman.

"I am a detective. Mrs. Rogers—name of Sharpe, though most likely you have never heard of me. However, that's neither here nor there. The main point is that I want you to do exactly as I direct, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, sir!" she agreed instantly. Though a countrywoman, born and bred in the neighbourhood of that wild moorland, she was wide awake enough to know a straight man when she met one.

"Right!" continued Sharpe. "Now I'm going to bind and gag you just as you were

when I arrived." He glanced at his watch by a stray shaft of daylight that streamed through a spilt in the boards across the window. "It's getting on in the afternoon now, but you needn't be afraid. I think I can promise to set you free by this evening—or to-night, at latest—if all goes well. It may be rather uncomfortable, but I fear it's necessary in the interests of justice. Should that fellow return and find you had escaped—well, it might upset my plans completely. You agree?"

Scenting something to gossip about at some future date, Mrs. Rogers was quite willing, and in a few minutes Sharpe had her safely trussed up.

"Now, not a word if anyone comes here!" he warned, as he left the room; and her eyes smiled good-humouredly at him over the gag, though it was rather too dark for him to have noticed it. She had more than her share of pluck, had Mrs. Anne Rogers.

Anthony Sharpe's Plan—A Tight Corner!

SHARPE hurried to Linchester Police Station, where he gave the inspector in charge a full account of what had taken place.

"Yes," nodded that officer, as the other concluded, "I know the house well. It used to be occupied by an old chap, locally known as Mad Matt, who was found dead there eventually. He was supposed to be a miser, like most people who live alone, and, of course, the usual 'haunting' yarns got about afterwards. No one would go near the spot once the sun had set."

sec. No; they'll probably come singly and at intervals."

"How many d'you expect there'll be?"

"Eight or nine, I should say, judging by the footprints—S'sh! Here's someone now!"

A murky form was approaching the house, and from the build of the figure Sharpe believed it to be that of the man he had met earlier in the day. Noiselessly as a cat the detective rose to his feet and crept silently in the other's wake. Then, ere the man was aware of his presence, Sharpe's hand was clapped over his mouth, effectually choking the cry of alarm which rose to his lips.

With the help of the inspector, the captive was borne back to the hollow and laid on the grass.

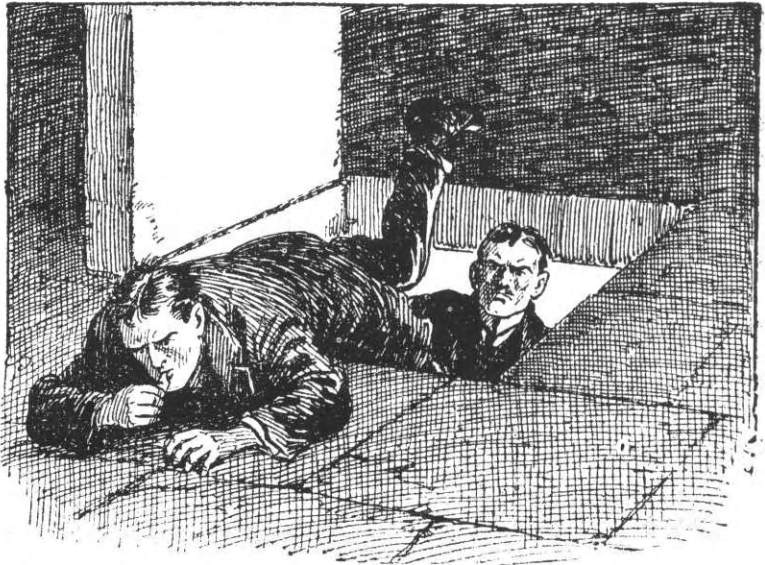
"Yes," murmured Sharpe, "just about my build." Now, keep him quiet till I get his things off!"

The man seemed thoroughly cowed, and gave little or no trouble. In a short time Sharpe had attired himself in the long overcoat and cap, whilst the addition of a false moustache turned him into a very passable imitation of the prisoner.

"Now, Inspector," the detective whispered, "as soon as you hear my whistle you know what to do. Make no move till then, on any account!"

The officer nodded, and Sharpe crossed over towards the house. He pushed at the door, which swung open, plainly telling that one or more of the coiners had already arrived.

The detective well knew that he was



As Sharpe rolled out on the kitchen floor, an iron grip fastened on his ankles, and he felt himself dragged backwards. Frantically he pulled his whistle from his pocket and managed to blow a single blast upon it.

Sharpe nodded, then grinned broadly.

"Well, I fancy there are a few very substantial 'spirits' hovering about that house now," he said. "Rather dangerous spirits, whose best place would be in more secure confinement!"

He remained closeted with the inspector for a little while, with the result that, shortly after dusk had fallen, several constables were safely hidden in various hollows within a short distance of the mysterious house on the moor.

Before leaving the place earlier, the detective had fixed up the shutters by means of which he had forced an entrance, so that there was nothing to arouse suspicion.

Sharpe was lying alongside the inspector in a depression nearest the building, but, as yet, there were no signs of anyone approaching.

"Think they've gone in?" whispered the officer, at length.

"No; not all of them," Sharpe returned. "There would hardly have been time for that. These gentlemen would scarcely be foolish enough to march up in a body, you

literally putting his head into the lion's mouth, and that a rush by the police would probably have ended quite successfully, since there seemed to be no outlet from the underground cellar save through the trap-door in the kitchen. But he wanted to make certain of Snide Harry this time, since he knew from personal experience that that gentleman was as slippery as the proverbial eel. Added to this, Sharpe was not quite sure that all the gang had now arrived, and he wished to bag the lot if possible.

He made his way to the kitchen and coolly raised the trap. Some half a dozen men were below, and they looked towards the ladder as the detective climbed down.

"Hallo! That Bill?" said one.

"Yes," Sharpe mumbled indistinctly.

"Caught cold, Bill?" asked another.

"No bloomin' wonder, in such weather!"

The detective nodded, and sat down on an upturned box. The cellar was illuminated only by three or four candles, and he thanked his stars the light was none too good.

(Concluded on page 26.)

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"COUSIN ETHEL TO THE RESCUE!"

(Continued from page 13.)

"Give it to me," said Kildare quietly.

Levison of the Fourth handed over the recovered article. Kildare wiped it on his handkerchief.

Evidently the penknife, after smiting Reggie Manners on the head, had dropped to the ground, and since then had lain in the puddle on the gravel path, unseen and unsuspected. But for Kerr it might have lain there for weeks and months undiscovered.

The German-silver handle was dulled, but otherwise the article was the one the juniors knew well. The larger blade was broken, the smaller one bent. Kildare examined it carefully.

"This is your knife, D'Arcy?"

"It is certainly the wotten knife Twimble sold me, and that I threw away on Tuesday evenin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"When a similar knife was produced in Mr. Lathom's study yesterday, you recognised that as your own?"

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah! They are exactly alike—even to the broken blade. I supposed some cad had found my knife and used it on Mr. Lathom's Virgil. Natuwall I thought it was mine. I should not be likely to suspect that an awful wottah had specially bought a penknife just like mine, and broken the blade, too, to get me into a scwape."

"It looks now as if that is the explanation," said Kildare quietly. "The finding of this knife proves that Mr. Lathom's book was not cut up by your penknife, whomever the other one may belong to. The knife in the study was the evidence against you, D'Arcy, and that falls to the ground now. It is rather a pity this knife was not searched for before."

"Yaas, wathah! But, you see, we nevah even dweamed that there were two of them."

"Quite so. Who suggested this search, then?" asked Kildare.

"It was really cousin Ethel," said Figgins.

"Miss Cleveland?" exclaimed the prefect in surprise.

"Well, Miss Cleveland suggested setting Kerr on the job," explained Figgins. "Kerr, of course, suggested the right thing to do."

"Of course!" grinned Blake.

"Yes, of course," said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Where would you be now if Kerr hadn't chipped in, I'd like to know?"

"Admitted!" said Blake heartily. "Scotland for ever! Kerr, old man, I'll buy you a new haggis for this—if you'll tell me what a haggis is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Darrell of the Sixth came from the direction of the School House. He looked round on the excited crowd in surprise. "Time for Hall!" he said. "The Head's told me to take D'Arcy in. Is D'Arcy here?"

"Yaas, wathah, Dawwell."

"Come with me," said the prefect.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"I will come with you with pleasuah, deah boy," he said. "I wathah think there isn't goin' to be any floggin' now."

"I'll come, too," said Kildare, with a smile. "I must take this penknife to the Head at once, and explain to him, and you'd better be present, D'Arcy. Trot along!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with deep satisfaction, as Arthur Augustus followed Kildare to the School House.

"All serene!" said Figgins, with a grin. "What?"

"Looks like it!" said Tom.

Three cheers for Kerr, though he's a New House bouncer!" called out Levison of the Fourth.

And the three cheers were given with a will, and followed by three more, and then the Scottish junior was hoisted on the shoulders of Tom Merry & Co., and carried in triumphant state to the New House.

CHAPTER 9.**Right as Rain!**

DR. HOLMES adjusted his glasses, and looked at two German-silver penknives that lay on his writing-table before him.

The expression on his face was very grave.

Mr. Lathom was in the study, and his face was also very grave, and showed some emotion.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood there, quiet and respectful, but with a slight smile upon his aristocratic face. The hour of D'Arcy's justification had come!

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"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "These two penknives are exactly alike, Mr. Lathom. Now that they are together, it would be difficult to tell one from the other."

"Quite so."

"D'Arcy's statement that he threw away the penknife as useless, is now substantiated," said the Head. "Kildare has told us how it was found, and there is no doubt upon the subject."

"None at all," said Mr. Lathom.

"The evidence that D'Arcy was the person concerned in damaging your property now falls to the ground."

"It does!" said the Fourth Form master.

"This other knife was used, and left in your study," continued the Head. "It could scarcely be by chance that it is an exactly similar penknife, with the larger blade broken in the same way."

"Impossible."

Dr. Holmes' brow grew sterner.

"I fear there is no doubt that the person who committed the act of vandalism in your study, Mr. Lathom, deliberately obtained a penknife resembling D'Arcy's, in order to leave it on the spot and incriminate an innocent boy."

"I fear so!" said Mr. Lathom, looking very distressed. "I regret very much indeed that I did not accept D'Arcy's word. I have always known him to be a truthful and honourable lad. But the evidence seemed so convincing—"

"Pway don't mench, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I ovahlook the occurence entirely, sir."

Mr. Lathom coughed.

"It remains to discover who committed this rascally action," said the Head. "That, I think, will be simple, now that we know so much. The injury to the book was an act of revenge, undoubtedly—"

"I had punished D'Arcy that morning," said Mr. Lathom.

"And—and so—"

"Quite so. But possibly there was some other member of your Form with whom you had had occasion to be severe?"

"Certainly; there was Mellish."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started a little. All the juniors were fairly well convinced of the right name of the guilty party, since the finding of the lost penknife had exonerated D'Arcy. But they had had no intention of giving the culprit away. It looked now as if there would be no need of that. The juniors were satisfied with clearing Arthur Augustus, and saving him from the flogging. But the Head, obviously, was not satisfied to let matters rest at that point.

Dr. Holmes leaned his chin on his hand, and pursed his lips, thinking deeply.

"A very serious mistake has nearly been made," he said.

"I should never have forgiven myself had I punished D'Arcy and learned too late that there was a doubt of his guilt. We must proceed very carefully. Some boy, knowing that D'Arcy had thrown his penknife away, bought one exactly like it and played this trick, as it appears. Where did you obtain this penknife, D'Arcy?"

"Twimble of the Fourth, sir—"

"Trimble gave it to you?"

"He sold it to me, sir."

"Doubtless Trimble can explain where they are to be obtained. Kildare, will you fetch Trimble of the Fourth Form here?"

"Certainly, sir."

There was a pause while the captain of St. Jim's fetched Baggy Trimble. Baggy was looking alarmed when he was led into the study. The Head gave him a reassuring glance.

"Trimble, you sold this knife to D'Arcy?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Baggy. "I—I offered him his money back, sir, if he wasn't satisfied."

"Never mind that. Where did you obtain it?"

"Shonkey & Co., sir, in Houndsditch."

"What?"

"By post, sir," explained Trimble. "I—I sent a postal-order for articles, sir, to be sold among my friends. The penknife was among them. It was the only one. I let D'Arcy have it at a bargain, sir, because we're pals."

"Bai Jove!"

"You should not have paid money for such rubbish as this, Trimble," said the Head. "You have acted very foolishly. Are you aware whether any such penknife was obtained by any other boy in this school?"

"Hem!"

The Head fixed his keen eyes on Trimble. It was pretty obvious that the fat Baggy knew something.

"Answer me at once, Trimble. Are you aware whether any other boy here sent to the firm in Houndsditch for a knife similar to D'Arcy's?"

"Oh, no, sir! Not at all."

"Can penknives of this kind be obtained at any establishment nearer at hand?" asked the Head.

"Oh, yes, sir. Silverstein's, in Wayland," said Trimble. "But they really ain't quite so good, sir. If you're in want of a silver penknife, sir—"

"What?"

"Leave it to me, sir," said Trimble eagerly. "I'll manage it for you, sir. I'll get it cheap, and—"

"You utterly stupid boy!"

"Oh!" gasped Trimble.

"Doubtless this second penknife was bought in Wayland," said the Head. "An inquiry at Messrs. Silverstein's, no doubt, will elicit information. We shall learn whether any St. Jim's boy bought a penknife there lately. You may go, Trimble."

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Baggy. And he went. The Head turned to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Although the matter is not quite cleared up yet, D'Arcy, I believe that you are innocent of the cruel vandalism in your Form master's study," he said. "Your sentence, of course, is rescinded. You may go."

"Thank you vewy much, sir. I twust that on anothah occasion—"

"What?"

"I twust, sir," said Arthur Augustus firmly, "that on anothah occasion, you will take a fellow's word."

"Kildare, will you kindly take D'Arcy from the room, and send Mellish here?" said the Head.

"Weally, sir—"

"You may go, D'Arcy!"

"Certainly, sir; but pway do not take hold of my collah in that wuff way, Kildare! I weally think— Oh, bai Jove!"

"Cut off, you young ass!" said Kildare, laughing.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus cut off, to join his rejoicing chums. A few minutes later Percy Mellish entered the Head's study with a pale and harassed face and dry lips. Mellish had heard all about the finding of the lost penknife, and realised that it might mean a further search for the culprit; and in

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the midst of his uneasy cogitations on the subject Kildare of the Sixth had dropped on him and marched him off to the Head's study.

What was known, or suspected Mellish could not guess; but a guilty conscience drove the colour from his face, and his knees were knocking together as he stood before the Head.

"You need not be alarmed, Mellish, if there is nothing on your conscience," said Dr. Holmes kindly.

That was not very reassuring to a fellow who had something on his conscience! Mellish blinked uneasily at his headmaster, waiting for the blow to fall.

"Have you seen these knives before, Mellish?"

"One of them, sir," stammered Mellish. "D'Arcy's penknife, sir."

"The other one does not belong to you?"

"No, sir! Oh, no!"

"You did not commit the outrage in Mr. Lathom's study, injuring a very valuable edition of 'Publius Virgilius Maro'?"

"I, sir? Certainly not, sir!" said Mellish huskily.

"Very good. If you have anything to confess, Mellish, take this opportunity. I may mention that strict inquiry is to be made, and that I shall personally call on Messrs. Silverstein in Wayland, to ascertain whether any boy belonging to this school purchased one of these penknives there."

"Oh!" gasped Mellish.

The wretched junior's brain swam for a moment. He had felt so safe, so secure; and but for Kerr of the Fourth

he would have been safe still. But he realised now that the game was up.

His ghastly look was evidence enough; and the expression on the Head's face grew grimmer.

"If you are innocent, Mellish, I repeat that you have nothing to fear. Inquiry can only clear you of any suspicion. If you are guilty, a visit to Wayland will establish your guilt. If you have anything to confess, I advise you to make your confession now."

"I—I—" groaned Mellish.

"I am waiting for your answer—yes or no!"

"Yes," gasped Mellish hopelessly. He knew that falsehood would not serve him now. "I—I didn't mean—I—I never thought—I—I—"

His miserable voice trailed off.

"You did not think you would be discovered," said the Head. "You believed that an innocent boy would be punished in your place. You have acted basely and cruelly, Mellish. Your offence is much more serious than D'Arcy's was supposed to be—you have added treachery to an act of revengeful vandalism. I shall leave it to Mr. Lathom to decide whether you shall be sent away from the school."

"Oh, sir!" groaned Mellish.

He turned a beseeching look upon the master of the Fourth.

There was a struggle in Mr. Lathom's breast. He thought of the prized "Virgilius," cut and slashed by a cruel hand; and his face hardened. But the misery in Mellish's wretched face touched his kind heart, and he relented.

"I—I think a flogging, sir—" said Mr. Lathom.

"Very well," said Dr. Holmes, turning to Mellish. "You owe much to your Form master's clemency, Mellish, and I trust you will remember it. You will be flogged, and the flogging will be severe. Kildare, will you request Mr. Railton to assemble the House to witness a punishment?"

A quarter of an hour later, before the crowd of School House fellows, Mellish of the Fourth went "through it."

The Head did not spare the rod.

Mellish needed a lesson, and he had one; there was no doubt about that. When it was over, the cad of the Fourth limped away to his study, feeling that the life of a cunning schemer was not worth living.

"Wight as wain, deah gal!"

Cousin Ethel smiled. Study No. 6 presented an appearance of wonderful festivity. That celebrated apartment was newly-swept and garnished, with holly on the walls in honour of approaching Christmas, and new flowers in the jam-jars in honour of cousin Ethel. Everything in the study was spotless, from the clock, that did not go, on the mantelpiece, to the soap-dish that held the best fresh butter.

And there was a crowd of guests. Blake & Co. were entertaining in style. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were there, with Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn; and after cousin Ethel, Kerr was the guest of honour.

"Wight as wain!" repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I told these fellows all along that it was vewy improbable that that floggin' would be handed out—and I think I was wight. You fellows will admit that I was wight?"

"It's been handed out," grinned Blake. "Mellish has bagged it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah; and weally, I might have bagged it, you know, if you had not come to St. Jim's to-day, Ethel, deah gal!"

"I am very glad I came, then," said Ethel, with a smile. "But I think thanks are due to Kerr."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah! But what stwikes me as most wemarkable, you know, is this—that it didn't occur to me to look for that dashed penknife, you know. Somehow or othah I neval guessed that there were two of the wotten things—and Kerr did. That is vewy wemarkable indeed!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his aristocratic head.

The half-open door of the study was pushed farther open, and a fat face looked in. Trimble of the Fourth smiled with fat geniality at the assembled company.

"Thought I'd look in," he remarked. "I—"

Baggy Trimble got no farther than that. Cousin Ethel was elaborately unconscious of what followed; but Baggy couldn't be unconscious of it, for it was the St. Jim's tradesman who bumped in the passage.

And after Trimble's abrupt and painful departure, the great celebration in Study No. 6 went off in great style.

THE END.

(There are terrible ructions next week at St. Jim's. Be sure you read "THE FAGS' REBELLION!" by Martin Clifford, and learn how Wally D'Arcy & Co. get their own back upon their tyrannical Form Master.)

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The Most Sensational Soccer Story Ever Written!

The Spurs were in a bad way until the Masked Footballer dramatically took a hand—and that altered events.

CHAPTER 1.

A Rascal Felled!

JACK HILTON, the tall, athletic captain of the Hudderton Spurs, was on his feet at the dais at the end of the club-house, adjoining their ground at Hudderton, gravely looking round upon his small audience.

The rest of the Spurs were there, also Murdock the trainer, Standish, and W. E. Trent, directors; and Hagenstein, a blocky, flashily dressed man, who hunched his flabby bulk in the armchair by Hilton.

Silence, charged with tense expectancy, fell upon the room.

"Gentlemen, we are gathered here this evening to face some very unpleasant facts!" said Jack Hilton in a low, vibrant voice. "I have put this off as long as possible, but now it is time that you should know the state of our affairs. The Spurs are on the verge of bankruptcy!"

The hush was broken by a low rumble of voices, which died down, however, as the Spurs' captain resumed.

"We are now well into the football season, and have played all over England. But whereas other teams have been making steady headway, the Spurs have been beaten all along the line. Bad luck has persistently dogged us. Our team last year was considered one of the foremost in the land. People flocked in thousands to see the Spurs play. Now things are different. A dry rot has set in. We've tried hard to pull up, but—but it seems our moral has gone. None of us have felt the same since Travers let us down."

At mention of that name the rumbling broke out again, louder and angrier than before. Jack Hilton's handsome face, clouded, too.

"Billy Travers, considered to be England's champion winger, and who was practically the backbone of the Spurs, played the traitor on us three months ago!" said the captain bitterly. "The crash came, too, when we needed him most, when we had fixtures with all the hottest teams in the League. During the match with Blackton Rovers, he deliberately went out of his way to make trouble on the field, balked us wherever he could, and fouled so incessantly that he had to be ordered off the field to prevent a riot. The F.A. took up the matter, and then came the disclosure that Travers had been bribed into a plot to break up the Spurs. He was suspended for life, and he cleared out of England in disgrace! We never want to see him again, or there will be trouble!"

The Spurs players' eyes were glittering angrily at recollection of the greatest shock they had ever had in their lives. Hagenstein, who had also been listening intently, with his bushy eyebrows lowered and a peculiar sneering look on his face, let out a cloud of blue cigar smoke, and recrossed his legs with a grunt.

"I have called this meeting to discuss matters with you all!" Jack Hilton went on, a tremulous ring in his voice. "The Spurs are on their last legs. The team urgently needs money, or it will die out. We are all proud of the Spurs, proud of being sportsmen who play for the game only; proud of our team's traditions, and jealous of its future."

"Hear, hear!" shouted all the sturdy fellows in a chorus of approbation of their

captain's words. The Spurs' love for their team was like a fire that consumed them.

"Boys, the trouble is that our confidence has been shaken by the Travers' affair," said Hilton in a low voice. "It can only be restored by getting another player into our team who will be as good as Travers was at first. There is only one man in England capable of filling the gap. That man is Sim Newton, of Laverford United."

The Spurs looked aghast at their captain. Sim Newton, of Laverford United! The name was well known to them, of course. Newton had been "discovered" by Mundy, the famous trainer, playing in an obscure amateur team in the East End of London, and was now a full-blown professional.

Newton savoured more of the sawdust ring than the football-field; his ugly looks and manners were made much of by sporting cartoonists and critics. But as a winger, all England agreed that Sim Newton was a marvel.

Jack Hilton looked round with compressed lips. Then above the low thrum of voices came that of Murdock.

"You're right, Hilton!" hoarsely cried the trainer, jumping to his feet and looking up at the captain with flaming eyes. "A new player to take Travers' place will put new blood and life into the Spurs. Our boys haven't lost their cleverness—they're still a fine bunch of laddies. But they've got cobwebs in their brains, and their blood's stale. They want a reviver; and, as you say, Sim Newton is the best winger in England, and would work a change for the better in our team. But"—here Murdock's rugged face clouded—"I don't see how it's to be done!"

"That's just it!" spoke up big Tony Palmer, the Spurs' right-half. "We can't afford to recruit a crack player into the team, especially a top-notch like Newton! He's getting a fabulous salary from Laverford United—the Spurs couldn't pay him such a screw. Besides, what will it cost us to indemnify the United, even supposing that they're willing to part with Newton?"

"The directors and I have been in consultation on the matter for a week past," said Hilton. "We are now on the eve of an arrangement with the United. Sim Newton will play for us—at a big salary, of course. And it will cost the Spurs £10,000 to buy him from the United."

"Ten thousand pounds!" A dozen throats hoarsed the words in awe. "But it's impossible!" barked Murdock. "Where in blazes can we get the money from, unless—unless—" His eyes followed the captain's, and he found himself looking at Hagenstein.

The others looked, too, and understood. Mark Hagenstein was a moneylender—a vandal in the world of sport—who somehow managed to maintain a tolerable degree of respectability.

Hagenstein had made frequent overtures to the Spurs to become a director, but had always met with the cold shoulder. He was not the type of man who takes an interest in sport merely for its own sake. Back of all Hagenstein's interests was the greed of money—and something more sinister, it was rumoured.

"Mr. Hagenstein has offered to come to our assistance," said Jack Hilton in a low voice. "He is willing to let us have the necessary cash on terms set out in a contract he has brought with him."

"Terms—eh?" jerked Murdock. "What are they?"

"Let's see the contract!" demanded several voices.

Hagenstein gave a nod, and the contract was handed round. He watched with a sneering grin, to see what effect it had on the Spurs.

The reading of the contract elicited nothing but blank looks of dismay from the sturdy footballers.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Palmer, white to the lips. "Hilton, you know what this means—if we sign this contract? Hagenstein becomes governing director of the Spurs. We shall all be in his power—at the mercy of his whims and orders! The Spurs will buy a new player—at the cost of Hagenstein buying the Spurs!"

Hagenstein shrugged his shoulders. "Take it or leave it!" he said calmly. "Would you find another financier in the world ready to lend ten thousand pounds in hard cash, and another two thousand by instalments, to a football club that hasn't recorded a decent victory for three months, and are on the verge of bankruptcy? Financiers are not fools!"

"You're not a fool, at any rate, Hagenstein!" shouted Mick Rooney, red with anger to the tips of his ears. "Faith, an' we can see your point of view! You're a dirty dog to take advantage—"

"No good can come of talking like that, Mick!" said Jack Hilton, with a weary gesture. "Boys, we have only two alternatives. We're driven right to the wall!"

The Spurs knew that their captain spoke truly. The honour of their team was very near and dear to them. More so, now that ruin confronted them. They reluctantly decided, after a ballot, that Hagenstein's terms should be accepted, although it meant selling their souls to the unscrupulous moneylender.

With a leer of triumph, Hagenstein took out his fountain-pen and flourishingly signed his part of the contract.

The directors then signed, and it only needed the signature of Jack Hilton to make the contract complete and binding. The Spurs' captain was leaning over the table, and was about to put his name to the fateful document, when the door at the other end of the room was flung suddenly open, and a clear, ringing voice caused them all to wheel round in amazement.

"Stop!" A tall, masked man in evening-dress was standing in the open doorway.

The Spurs all jumped to their feet, regarding the mysterious interrupter in amazement.

He calmly closed the door behind him, and walked up the centre of the room.

The deep voice of the masked stranger broke the spell that his dramatic appearance in the club-house had cast over the assembly.

"Do not sign that paper!" he said, in a clear-cut voice, pointing a steady forefinger at the contract under Jack's pen. "Don't trust Hagenstein—he's a traitor. I have come here to-night to make the Spurs another offer."

They looked at him in wonder and awe. Hagenstein lifted his dabby carcass from the chair. His eyes dilated and his hands trembled like aspens as the stranger wheeled round upon him.

"You haven't got the whip-hand of the Spurs yet, Hagenstein, and you are never likely to have, so long as I am able to prevent it!" came the clear-cut voice through the mask. "Hilton, I want you to trust me—to consider my offer seriously. It isn't a cash offer, because I don't want you to buy Sim Newton from Laverford United. I am a footballer, and have come to put myself unconditionally at the service of the Spurs. I demand no cash outlay—not even a salary. All I want is the place in the team that was left vacant by the dismissal of Travers."

Jack Hilton drew a deep breath. "Who are you?"

"I am afraid I cannot tell you that." The eyes seemed to smile through the mask. "I have, however, taken an interest in the Spurs for some time past. I have been watching points, unknown to you. I knew that you were in such a plight that you were about to throw yourselves on the tender mercies of Hagenstein. Boys, I ask you to choose between that traitor and me. I believe I can do more for you than Newton ever will, although that sounds like a blow on my own trumpet. Give me a trial on the ground to-morrow, and if I fail to convince you that I'm as good a footballer as I say I am, I undertake to

provide you with all the cash you need, and shan't ask a penny interest. There's a straight offer from a sportsman. Will you accept?"

Hilton looked his well-made figure up and down, at the healthy flesh and the eyes that mirrored frankness and honesty. He caught an eager nod from Murdock, and then did not hesitate. There was no better judge of a footballer in Great Britain than Dug Murdock.

"We'll accept," he said quietly.

A cheer came up from the delighted Spurs as two strong right hands met in a warm clasp.

Hagenstein crouched against the table, his features working convulsively. He was consumed with rage and chagrin. He seemed about to hurl himself at the throat of the man who had robbed him of the contract.

The Masked Footballer bowed calmly to him.

"Good-evening, Hagenstein!" he said. "You might as well tear up that contract, for all the use it will be to you." He turned to the smiling Spurs. "Expect me at eight in the morning for the try-out. I'm off now!"

Bidding them good-night, he walked to the door with long, springing strides.

The Spurs were silent. They started, as if awaking from a dream, at the noise of the door as it closed behind the Masked Footballer.

Hagenstein, trembling with rage, took up his top-hat and flashy walking-stick. He strode to the door, and looked round with eyes darting malice and hate from under his lowered brows.

"You've turned me down, Hilton," he snarled. "We shall see what becomes of your mysterious friend, who hides behind a mask. Remember this—I'm not finished with the Spurs yet—not by a long chalk!"

With that he pushed his heavy bulk through the door and disappeared, whilst the Spurs stood silent. They all seemed to breathe an air of relief when Hagenstein had gone. With faces brightened considerably, they fell to discussing the dramatic advent of the Masked Footballer, and the arrangements for his try-out on the morrow.

CHAPTER 2.

The Spurs' New Recruit!

THE Spurs turned out next morning, fresh and eager to know what would transpire. The clock outside the club-house showed ten minutes to eight, as they strolled in a bunch on to the ground with Murdock and the directors.

It was a cold, snappy morning. The crisp sharpness of the air made their skin glow and their blood tingle. The ground was in perfect condition. A fresh breeze lazied across from the sea.

"Wonder if he'll turn up, boys?" said Stanton.

"Faith, an' last night's business still seems more like a dream to me," said Mick Rooney. "Sure, I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't come at all, at all!"

"Hark!" said Jack Hilton suddenly.

The quiet, rhythmic hum of a powerful car-engine was borne across to their ears from the road. They hastened over to the large wooden gates of the ground, and saw a large, handsome limousine drawn up outside.

"Morning, boys!" rang out a bright voice, and next minute a strapping figure in footer-togs, wearing a top-coat over them, his face completely shrouded behind a black mask, stepped from the car.

The Masked Footballer had kept his word! He shook hands warmly with them all, and accompanied the Spurs on to the ground, telling the chauffeur to wait.

Murdock rubbed his hands and smirked joyously when he saw the firm, muscular limbs of the Masked Footballer. The open jersey and knickers he wore showed him to be a splendidly-developed fellow—firm flesh and iron muscle built into a sturdy frame.

"He'll do!" chuckled Murdock to Jack Hilton. "If the masked chap doesn't give us a few surprises on the field this morning, I—I'll eat a goal-post. He's in fine form and sound condition—a footballer through an' through. I can tell 'em!"

Hilton laughed happily and went over to the others on the field.

The masked player was a most conspicuous figure amongst the Spurs. He was perfectly at home on the football-field—that much became evident from the moment the ball was set in motion.

Hilton partnered him and gave him a

chance to break through the Spurs' defence and make the goal. The Masked Footballer took possession of the leather sphere with his feet by a cunning lightning twist from Stanton. He punted it swiftly down the field in a manner that caused Murdock to rub his eyes and gasp.

He moved like a lightning-streak. It was as much as a normal pair of human eyes could do to follow the swift course of the black mask. Feet, body, and brain seemed to be a marvellous inter-connected piece of machinery in the Masked Footballer. He never faltered, did not make a single false move.

The Spurs' halves came at him like wolves, but he left them flabbergasted behind, still with the ball rolling at his feet. He shot it over to Hilton with marvellous precision when Rooney lunged his fourteen stone at him. As soon as he was clear of Rooney, Hilton let him have the ball back again. The Masked Footballer took it like a juggler, and got away with a speed and dexterity that made them all wonder.

He twisted like a snake round Derrick, and in the same instant as he righted his swaying body, he shot for goal.

Willoughby ran out at it, but only felt the rush of wind as the ball whizzed by and thudded into the net.

The Masked Footballer stood still then, and his clear, healthy laugh rang all over the field.

"How's that?"

"Magnificent!" cried Jack Hilton, hastening up with eyes and face aglow. "It was supreme! Travers himself couldn't have done it better! In fact, you're quicker than he used to be, and your footwork is a revelation! Surely you're a professional?"

The Masked Footballer shook his head.

"No; I am not a professional," he said gravely. "But I hope to be, soon, when I am playing for the Spurs."

"Why, mon, you're as good as signed on now!" croaked Murdock. "Come on, let's see some more of it! It's doin' my eyes good! I've never seen such playin'! Where's that ball, Willoughby?"

The Spurs' goalie, still with rather a perplexed look on his face, slung out the ball, and practise was resumed.

The football of the masked stranger amazed the Spurs. Jack Hilton found his heart beating wildly, joyfully, as he watched his lightning movements. Cheer after cheer rang out from the delighted Spurs at each new dextrous feat displayed by the Masked Footballer.

Murdock literally danced round the touch-line. He knew that such a player in the team would ensure the salvation of the Spurs.

Two other pairs of eyes were covertly watching the try-out from the other side of the fence.

Hagenstein had with him a beetle-browed fellow, whom anybody would have instantly recognised from the sporting photographs

and cartoons as Sim Newton, the demon winger of Laverford United.

Malignant rage suffused Hagenstein's face as he watched and listened, and the features of Newton were distorted into a snarl.

Hagenstein's car was drawn up round the corner, out of sight. He did not want the Spurs to know that he had come to watch proceedings.

"So that's the mysterious Masked Footballer—ugh?" growled Newton, leaning round at the moneylender. "No mistake about it, boss, he kin play! By gar! D'you see the way 'e got round the Irish chap just then? I wonder who 'e is?"

"I'll find that out!" hissed Hagenstein, between his teeth. "I'll get to the back of this, somehow, and get wise to what it means. This masked fellow is a better player than you, Newton; you aren't in the same street with him! Wait till the crowds see him play. There'll be no more songs of praise for Sim Newton, the demon winger!"

The face of the ugly fellow by his side took on a malicious, jealous leer. Newton's eyes flamed with hate as he watched the Spurs' new recruit. Hagenstein chuckled softly under his breath. He had been working on the ignorant fury of the man—moulding him to his own wishes by money and insidious words.

"We've got to get that Masked Footballer out of the way, Sim!" said Hagenstein. "He stands between you and your reputation. He also queers our chance of ruining the Spurs. You'll have to resign from Laverford United pretty soon. They're getting fed up with you, in spite of your cleverness. They say you're unreliable. Besides, the directors more than suspect that it was you who broke open the safe that night and stole—"

"Hold your tongue, hang you!" snarled the other, turning on him fiercely. "That's none o' your business, Hagenstein! Yes, I know I'll be leavin' the United soon. It was my idea to get into the Spurs to crack 'em up and earn your money. Now this guy in the mask steps in. I'm with you, at any rate, Hagenstein, in gettin' 'im."

The try-out of the Masked Footballer proved to the Spurs that in him they had found the very man they wanted. There was an enthusiastic scene in the club-house when they took him in after practise to sign on.

"Name?" he asked. "That doesn't matter, because I'm not giving my real name. I'll tell you some day—soon, perhaps. Here are my credentials from the president of the F.A. He alone, besides myself and Scotland Yard, knows my name. I'll put myself down as 'X.'"

And so "X," the Masked Footballer, became a member of the Huddersford Spurs.

He politely refused Jack Hilton's request to stay to lunch, and, smiling the Spurs adieu, walked quickly over to his waiting car.

The footballers all crowded round the gates, and silently watched him drive away.



The tall, masked man in evening dress halted in the centre of the room. "Do not sign that paper!" he said in a clear-cut voice, pointing a steady forefinger at the contract under Hilton's pen. "Don't trust Hagenstein, he's a traitor! I have come here to-night to make the Spurs another offer!" Everybody looked at the interrupter in amazement.

As the Masked Footballer's car moved away from the Spurs' ground, another car reversed from a side turning, swung round, and followed down the main road.

Hagenstein was at the wheel, with Sim Newton at his side. They watched the car in front with gleaming eyes as it glided over the tramlines, threaded its way through the town, and struck off for the open heath.

"This is where we follow and find out where he goes!" muttered Hagenstein. "Then maybe we shall know what to do to stop his game with the Spurs."

"Ugh-uh, boss!" grunted the burly winger. "I reckon 'e'd be surprised to know we're on 'is track so soon! Gar, they're changin' over!"

By this time the Masked Footballer's car had left Hudderton behind, and was throbbing along the road that cut across the lonely heath. There was no other traffic about. Hagenstein and his crony, looking ahead, saw that the Masked Footballer had changed places with his chauffeur, and had taken the wheel of the limousine.

"Wot's the idea, I wonder?" growled Newton. "Boss, 'e's puttin' on speed!"

Hagenstein savagely thrust the stub of his cigar into the corner of his mouth, and drove his foot down on the accelerator.

A wild race ensued between the two cars along the heath road.

"He shan't get away, I say!" muttered Hagenstein, crouching low behind the wind-screen. "Hold tight!"

The scrub bushes seemed to hurtle by like shots flung from a cannon; the whistle of the wind and the roar of the engine almost deafened them. But, although Hagenstein was letting her all out, he found that his car was not gaining an inch on the one ahead.

"The railway, boss!" hoarsely Newton suddenly. "We're comin' to the level-crossing!"

A gleaming trail of steel wound like a snake into the countryside before them, a puff of white smoke arose over the trees, and an engine's whistle screamed raucously.

"Slow up, for mercy's sake!" whined Newton, his eyes glued in terror ahead. "There's a train comin'! We won't get across in time!"

Hagenstein throttled down, and looked at the car ahead in amazement. The Masked Footballer had not relaxed his pace an iota—was driving his car at breakneck speed towards the level-crossing.

The shrill of the oncoming engine sounded again, and, looking to the left, they saw an express thundering round the bend.

"The gate's closin'!" Newton was on his feet now. "And the madman's goin' on!"

The wooden gates of the level-crossing swung to as the Masked Footballer's car roared up. The express was only a short distance away now. The man operating the gates looked with blanched face at the oncoming car with its masked driver, and saw that the man at the wheel intended to cut across the path of the express.

He flung the lever back just as the gates were a few feet apart. The Masked Footballer gritted his teeth, and crouched over the steering-wheel. The express shrieked its warning as it dashed towards the level-crossing. The big car tore through the now partly-open gates like a live thing, leapt the trembling rails, and roared through the other side.

Had it not been for its terrific speed and the presence of mind of the gatekeeper who swung the gates shut next instant, the car and its daring occupants would have been crushed beneath the oncoming monster, for a minute later the express thundered over the level-crossing at sixty miles an hour.

Hagenstein, leaning on the wheel of his motionless car, mopped his forehead, and gave vent to a muttered curse of impotent rage. Newton's tongue still clove to the roof of his mouth with horror at the daring exploit he had just witnessed. The long trail of coaches thundered by, and it was not until several minutes afterwards that the level-crossing gates came open again, leaving a clear path for Hagenstein's car to go through.

By that time the Masked Footballer had made good his escape.

Hagenstein spent half an hour fruitlessly searching for the limousine, and then drove back to Hudderton with Newton, swearing roundly.

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CHAPTER 3.

The Turn of the Tide!

HERE was not a sporting fan in the whole length and breadth of Great Britain who had not got the name of the Masked Footballer of the Hudderton Spurs on his lips at every football discussion within three weeks of that memorable day.

Jack Hilton and Murdock lost no time in sending the Spurs out for blood, reinforced with the Masked Footballer on the left-wing. The first match they played with the new recruit in their ranks was at Bolfield, a mill district in Lancashire. The Bolfield Rangers were a hot team, and, knowing the record of the Spurs for the past few months, they turned out on the field full of confidence, with a few thousand Lancashire lads round the ground ready to see the annihilation of the visitors.

But the game had not turned out quite as the Rangers' supporters had expected.

The crowd, noisy as only a Lancashire football crowd can be, became suddenly hushed with amazement as the Spurs trotted out on to the ground, and the Masked Footballer made his first public appearance.

The crowd did not quite know what to make of it. Neither did the Rangers. The electrified atmosphere was broken at length by hoots and shouts to the mysterious player to remove his mask. This he smilingly refused to do. So the game had started, with the Spurs' new recruit the cynosure of all eyes.

It was the mask, of course, that made him the centre of attraction at first. But when the crowd saw him play, watched his lightning antics with the ball, saw him streak round the home team's men and leave them behind like sheep, they sat up and blinked. It was not the mask, then, but his wearer's playing, that held the Lancashire lads spell-bound.

Never had a winger displayed such speed, such amazing dexterity with his feet and head. He seemed to be a cyclone with non-stop carrying propensities. He fairly knocked the wind out of the spectators, and the self-confidence out of the opposing team.

The Spurs went home that day with a 7-2 victory to their credit, and that night all England throbbed with the newspaper reports of the amazing match.

Who was the mysterious Masked Footballer? asked everybody. Where had the Spurs got him from? What was the secret of the man?

The next time the Spurs turned out for play was on their own ground. Tynebank Wanderers came to try conclusions with them, and spectators flocked from all over England to Hudderton to see the match. That day all available space round the Spurs' ground was crowded out; the turnstiles clicked till they could admit no more, and thousands were turned away.

The match provided thrills in plenty. The masked player was at the top of his form, and the Spurs had never been in better condition. The advent of the new player had put new life blood into them, their masked colleague's playing seemed to have galvanised them into a higher standard of play.

The Spurs fairly walked over Tynebank Wanderers; their magnificent playing sent the spectators into a wild delirium of applause, and when the final whistle went the Spurs had the majority of the 5-1 score.

The ground was instantly flooded with enthusiastic spectators; the Spurs were mobbed by their admirers, and several more daring spirits tried to drag the mask from the mystery winger's face. But Jack Hilton & Co. formed a phalanx round him, and protected him from the over-zealous crowd.

Press photographers got hurried snaps of him as he rushed away to his car, but the photos when they appeared gave no clue to the Masked Footballer's identity.

The Spurs were bombarded with questions from all quarters. The whole world of sport was curious about the new recruit. But Jack Hilton & Co. were as much in the dark as anybody. The Masked Footballer always came up to practise or to a match in his car, and as soon as play was over would make a hurried get-away in his car to an unknown destination.

The affairs of the Spurs soon righted themselves after they had played a few more matches to crowded gates. They swept all before them every time. They pulled off victory after victory, and so added to the glorious reputation they had so suddenly revived. The Spurs became looked upon as England's crack team.

Jack Hilton & Co. did not once go back

now they were on the up-trail. The Masked Footballer never let them down. They seemed to find something more wonderful and likeable about him every time they met. It seemed that theirs was an acquaintance of much longer than a few weeks, that although they could not see his face, they had known him long before.

He had captured the affection of the Spurs and the imagination of the public.

They knew that Hagenstein was still on the warpath, that at the back of his silence was being hatched a plot intended for their destruction. Hagenstein laid low during the weeks that witnessed the ties for the legion medals. The Spurs came off triumphant in all the ties. Then came the day of the semi-final with Chelmswich Orient.

"Say, boys," said Stanton, as he came into the Spurs club-house that morning, "have you heard the news? Sim Newton's left Laverford United. There was a bit of a fuss there, so I hear. Newton's been up to some dirty work, but the matter is being hushed up. Newton's signed on for Chelmswich Orient, and he's playing on our ground against us to-day."

"Whew!"

The Spurs were surprised to hear the news, although it had been rumoured in football circles for some time past that Sim Newton was not quite on the level, and that trouble was brewing between him and his directors.

"Faith, an' we didn't miss much when we decided on Mr. X instead o' Newton!" said Mick Rooney, with a widespread grin. "Our broth of a boy likes Newton hollow!"

"Rather!" smiled Jack Hilton. "The Masked Footballer has quite put Newton in the background as a winger. It will be interesting, boys, to watch them both at play this afternoon and compare them."

Crowds flocked to Hudderton that afternoon to witness the fight between the Spurs and Chelmswich Orient. Both teams had won their way into the semi-final by sheer cleverness and grit. The Orient came from Bristol way, and were considered foemen worthy of their steel.

Charabancs, cars, and vehicles of all descriptions fetched into Hudderton their noisy loads of football fans, who swelled the tide that flocked from the railway-station to the Spurs' ground.

The ground was packed, as usual, soon after the gates were opened.

A round of hearty cheering greeted the Orient when they trotted on to the field, but it was completely eclipsed by the gigantic roar that arose when the Spurs made their appearance. The cheers, rattles, and squeakers blared out louder still when a car drew up outside, and, already clad in his footer togs, the Masked Footballer stepped out and walked with sprightly step across the field and joined the Spurs.

Sim Newton looked at him with lowered brows, and exchanged a meaning look with Hagenstein, who was at the front of the grand-stand.

Just before the commencement of the game, a number of roughs got over the fence at the back of the club-house and crept over to the ground.

Nobody was aware of what was happening—with the exception of Hagenstein and Newton—until the roughs made a sudden charge from cover and bore down on the Masked Footballer, fighting the Spurs aside, cudgels and knuckle-dusters busy.

It all happened so suddenly that the crowd was taken completely by surprise. The Spurs were too amazed to offer much resistance, either, and shouts of horror arose when the Masked Footballer was seen to retreat to the pavilion with the gang of toughs at his heels.

"Good heavens!" muttered Hilton. "It's a plan to get our winger! They're going to queer him for the match—"

"Look!" screamed Stanton.

The Masked Footballer was at bay. He stood on the steps of the pavilion, facing the toughs, an ugly-looking revolver gleaming in his hand.

"Back, you scum!" his voice rapped out imperiously, and carried to every ear on the ground. "The first one who takes another step forward will get a bullet into him!"

The toughs drew back, cowed by the unexpected menace of the revolver.

Some of them turned as if to scurry away, for the angry Spurs and the Orient men were dashing over to the spot, and some of the spectators were clambering over the rails to get at them. But again the Masked Footballer's voice rang out, clear-cut and sharp:

"Don't move! I shall fire if any of you—"
Crack!

The revolver spat out a bullet at one of the roughs, who, more daring than the rest, essayed to make his escape. The ruffian screamed and fell to the turf, clapping his elbow.

"Good man!" roared Jack Hilton.

Next minute the toughs were set upon. Police and ambulance-men dashed to the spot. Despite the fierce struggles of the would-be assailants of the Masked Footballer, they were quickly made prisoners.

The police hustled them away in the Masked Footballer's car, otherwise the angry crowd would have lynched them.

The incident caused some delay in the schedule time for the kick-off. When order had been restored, and the crowd were assured by means of megaphone that the Masked Footballer was unhurt—news that brought a crash of cheering—the referee blew his whistle, and the semi-final commenced.

To the amazement of all, Newton was appearing at outside-right for the Orient, face to face with the Masked Footballer.

The Orient attacked hotly, and Sim Newton got the ball away and into the Spurs territory in really good style, although his playing lacked the careful cleverness that had marked his playing for the United in his early days. He was more reckless, burly, and quick-tempered.

The Spurs halves got him beaten, however, and Stanton, catching the ball neatly on his head from Rooney, slung it across to the Masked Footballer, who took it away like a lightning-flash, dribbling magnificently.

He got it down to the Orient citadel, and the Orient bunched round the goalmouth to protect it. The Masked Footballer had a kick like a howitzer, and there was no stopping his shots when the range was short.

The Spurs strolled back to the centre-line five minutes later amidst the thunderous cheering of the spectators. The mystery winger had crashed the leather clean through the legs of the Orient goalie and nearly burst the net.

"Good old 'Domino'!"

"You didn't mesmerise the goalie with your mask that time, bud!"

Phceee!

The game recommenced with a rush, right from the whistle. The spectators were treated to some magnificent football on both sides—a game such as only is seen when two strong teams meet. The black mask seemed to get the leather like a magnet draws a pin. Its wearer was a trump card that captured all the tricks.

The Spurs scored again, then the Orient got a goal, and just on the lemon-time whistle Jack Hilton slung the ball into the Orient's net from a crossbar rebound.

CHAPTER 4.

The Spurs' Dilemma.

DURING the interval Sim Newton had a conversation with Hagenstein. Jack Hilton & Co. were discussing Newton in the pavilion. They had noticed him playing dirty. The burly winger had been making an open dead-set at the Masked Footballer.

"Better keep your weather eye on him!" warned Jack Hilton, as they strolled on to the field again for the resumption. "Newton means to crock you if he can."

The mystery winger gave a short laugh, and his eyes gleamed through his mask.

The game recommenced, each team going into the fray with a do-or-die spirit. The Orient forwards, working with clockwork-like precision, swept down the field, and looked like making a goal of it, until the Masked Footballer came at Sim Newton like a panther. Newton had the ball, but when the player with the mask charged him, he let it go. In fact, everybody was surprised at the weak manner in which Newton parted with the leather. It evoked a chorus of cat-calls from the crowd.

"Ball made yer feet hot, Newton?"

"Praps you gotta nuther one hidden somewheres?"

The Spurs were carrying the leather down into Orient territory now. The Masked Footballer cut through the halves like a threshing-machine, some brilliant passing was enacted, and then he put in a shot that seemed to twist round the goalie's outstretched hands and landed in the net with a resounding thud.

"Goal!" howled the crowd.

Jack Hilton looked with glowing face at his left winger as they went back to the kick-off line. The eres that he looked into



The Masked Footballer stood on the steps of the pavilion, facing the toughs, an ugly-looking revolver gleaming in his hand. "Back, you scum!" he ordered imperiously. "The first one who takes another step forward will get a bullet into him!" The toughs drew back, cowed by the unexpected menace of the revolver.

through the mask had lost a good deal of their brightness, the Masked Footballer's breath was coming in laboured gasps, and he seemed to walk unsteadily.

"What's the matter?" asked the Spurs skipper, in amazement.

"Nothing—just a passing giddiness!" came the reply, with a forced laugh. "I'm all right now."

Play recommenced with the whistle, and the Masked Footballer charged into the thick of it again, punting, turning, tricking as cunningly as ever. Jack Hilton watched him, and laughed away the momentary anxiety he had felt. The Masked Footballer was as sound as a bell.

The Orient were attacking, and the play took place fiercely in the centre of the field. The Masked Footballer took the ball in a breakaway, and swooped down the field with it spinning merrily at his fast-moving feet. The Orient halves and backs came up; the crowd held its breath. The Masked Footballer was blazing a lone trail down to the Orient goal—was fooling the halves, and would trick the backs and the goalie.

Then a roar of amazement arose. The Masked Footballer suddenly back-heeled the ball towards Jack Hilton, without any apparent reason, for two Orient players were between him and Hilton, and one of them scooped it up voraciously with his feet and took it away.

But all eyes were still on the Masked Footballer. He gave a wild look round him, and then, as if he had suddenly lost possession of his senses, he turned and ran off the field.

A tumult of shouting arose, but the Masked Footballer did not seem to hear. Jack Hilton & Co. were running after him, as they were free to do, for his desertion had given the Orient a quickly-taken goal.

The Masked Footballer reached his car first.

He staggered inside it, the chauffeur started the engine, and even as the amazed Spurs dashed up, the limousine spurted forward through the gates and into the street, taking away with it the Masked Footballer in the middle of the match!

The Spurs crowded in the street, and watched the car disappear towards the heath. The Masked Footballer had deserted them. He had given the Orient a goal, and left the Spurs to finish the game alone!

The ground was in a pandemonium. The players were thunderstruck. They did not know what to make of the winger's behaviour.

"Yes," said Hilton dazedly, in reply to a hurried query from the referee. "Blow the whistle. We—we'll continue without him."

The score stood at 4-2 in favour of the Spurs, and they were a man short—the best player of their side. They gritted their teeth, and put up a grim fight with the attacking Orient. They gave up hopes of

goal-getting after that, but concentrated on defensive tactics.

So good was their defence, and so stubbornly did they keep it up, that they prevented the Orient from making more than one goal, although there were several close shaves. The match ended with the Spurs winners by 4-3.

Thunderous cheers—cheers of admiration and sympathy—arose for the Spurs. They had won the semi-final. But that thought did not concern them now the match was over. Their thoughts were all centred round the Masked Footballer and his unaccountable behaviour. Why had he deserted them? When would he turn up again?

The papers were full of it that evening. The Spurs were besieged by reporters, but they settled themselves in the club-house and refused to see anybody.

"I'm dashed if I can make head or tail of it, boys!" said Jack Hilton savagely, turning a white face to his fellow-footballers. "Although we knew nothing about him, he didn't seem the sort of chap who'd purposely play a low-down trick like that on us."

"There's something behind it, laddie!" said Murdock, his face set hard as his native granite. "He was playing the game of his life. Hagenstein knows something about it, I'll wager. Did you see the rascal laughing all over his face in the grandstand after it happened?"

Hilton nodded dully.

The evening wore on. The Spurs waited in the club-house, wondering whether the Masked Footballer would turn up and give an account of himself.

The clock was striking nine, when a car was heard outside. Several of the Spurs had gone home, and only Hilton, Stanton, Rooney, Derrick, and Murdock remained. Directly they heard the car stop, they dashed to the window and looked out.

"It's his car!" breathed Stanton. "But—-but he's not in it. The chauffeur's coming in!"

A few minutes later, the Masked Footballer's chauffeur stepped into the club-house. He handed Jack Hilton a slip of paper on which were written these words:

"Go with the chauffeur in the car. He will take you to me. Then I will explain all."

"THE MASKED FOOTBALLER."

Hilton and the others were galvanised into action at once. They thrust on hats and coats, and almost ran downstairs to the car. They sat back in the luxurious cushions and waited, with fast-beating hearts, while the chauffeur drove them swiftly through the night towards the Masked Footballer.

They sped through the Huddersfield streets, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 774.

where the newboys were still bawling the mystery of the Spurs' match that afternoon, and across the dark, lonely heath. At length they came out along the cliffs above the beating waves of the North Sea, and the car took them down the steep road declivity that led to the seaport town of Caverham.

The car stopped on a lonely road on the outskirts of the town, near the bay. A number of boats were at anchor between the breakwater and the harbour, and lights twinkled from some of them, like earth-bound stars out of the darkness.

"We get out here," said the chauffeur, in a clear, musical voice.

As Jack Hilton & Co. jumped out into the road, they saw two men in uniform come up out of the darkness. The chauffeur, who was apparently in high authority over them, put them in charge of the car and told them to take it away to its garage.

Then he beckoned the members of the Spurs down a rocky path that led to the beach.

Arriving there, they saw a large rowing-boat grounded, in charge of two men. At a word from the chauffeur they got in, and they were rowed away across the heaving sea into the darkness.

"We're going aboard that white schooner near the lighthouse," said their guide in a low voice.

The boat made for the schooner, was made fast alongside, and the wondering Spurs clambered on board, followed by their chauffeur guide.

"This way!" he said, leading them towards a brilliantly-lighted state-room.

CHAPTER 5.

Revelations of the Masked Footballer!

THEY crowded inside, and saw a man seated in an armchair against a bulkhead. The electric light played brilliantly on the well-remembered frame of the Masked Footballer. His face was averted as they came in, but he turned it quickly towards them.

His eyes were duller, they thought, than usual, as he regarded them through the slits in the mask he wore.

"Hallo, boys!" he said cheerily. "I suppose you've been wondering at my strange behaviour this afternoon during the match. I've sent for you to tell you everything. You remember when I took the ball so easily from Newton—when I charged him, and he gaby in weakly and let me get away with the leather?"

They nodded wonderingly. "Well, the miscreant had a purpose in doing that. I thought I felt a slight pricking in my arm at the time, but wasn't sure. I forgot about it in the excitement of the match, but just after I kicked that goal, you remember, I came over queer."

"Yes; I remember," said Jack Hilton quickly. "I passed it off, but it came back again soon afterwards," said the Masked Footballer grimly. "I felt a numb feeling all over me—it came suddenly, and I knew that I had been doped. I saw Newton and Hagenstein watching me eagerly. I remembered the prick in my arm when I charged Newton. I knew that I was going to be ill, and so took the shortest cut out of it, and cleared right away from the ground. I didn't mean to desert you, but to be taken ill on the field, attended by strange doctors and have my mask removed, was disastrous to my plans—then."

"Oh!" exclaimed Hilton, smiling. "I see!"

"Now I think I'll put you wise to who I am." He turned his head sharply, whisked off the mask, and then looked round at Jack Hilton & Co.

The Spurs players started back in amazement when they saw his face—looked at him with wide-open eyes incredulously.

"Travers!" breathed Jack Hilton. "Yes, it's Billy Travers who has been playing for the Spurs the last few weeks!" said the other, in a deep voice that trembled with emotion. "I'm sorry, you fellows, that I've fooled you all this time, and played under false pretences, but it had to be so. Listen—as Stanton made an angry movement forward. 'When you have heard my story, you'll think very differently of me. I adopted a disguise, masked my face, and came back to the Spurs in their hour of need. I waited until the last, until THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 774.

you were about to put yourselves in Hagenstein's hands, and then I could restrain myself no longer. I put on a mask so that you shouldn't know me, had my hair dyed and curled, changed the colour of my eyes by means of a harmless injection supplied by my friend here, who is an expert on such matters, and came to you, as you know, just in time to prevent you signing Hagenstein's contract. I loved the Spurs too much to see them go to the dogs under that rogue's control. It nearly broke my heart when the F.A. suspended me, and I became a traitor in your eyes.

"You see, the charge they brought against me was a false one. It was part of Hagenstein's plot to ruin the Spurs. He got at me first, as I was looked upon as your best player. He bribed my cousin, who is remarkably like me, to play in that match with Blackton Rovers, whilst I was kidnapped and kept a prisoner on the heath. The crimes that my cousin committed on the field were attributed to me, of course. The rascals between them built up a network of false evidence that I could not deny, with the result you know. I was hauled up before the F.A., was found guilty of the worst crimes a footballer and sportsman could commit, and was drummed out of football and out of the team I loved. I went, knowing it was useless to stick to my plea of innocence. I realised that the only chance I stood was to set out and prove my innocence. And this I have been doing ever since."

"Go on!" boomed Murdoch, gripping the table hard. "Go on, Billy."

"I have worked hard since then, probing every source of information, getting on the track of Hagenstein and his confederates in the plot," went on Billy Travers, with emotion. "In this I have been helped by my friend here, whom you have known only as my chauffeur. He is, in reality, Dexter Stone, the famous London detective, who took up my case for me."

Dexter Stone bowed gravely, though with a twinkle in his eyes, at the amazed Spurs players.

"Hagenstein has been playing into our hands lately," said Travers. "His curiosity to get behind my mask and, alternately, to get at me, proved his undoing. His gang, which represents all the scum of the hangers-on of sport in England, has been rounded up. Many other plots have been revealed, besides this one, to break up the Spurs. Hagenstein was behind them all. I reckon we've got up enough against him to send him to prison for the last ten years. All the necessary proofs of my innocence are in my hands, on board this ship now, and you chaps can see them willingly if you still doubt the truth of what I have told you—"

"Doubt you!" Jack Hilton said the words huskily as he stepped forward and gripped his old chum's hand. "Billy, old man, we believe you. And we're glad—glad that things have turned out like this. It took us some time to be convinced of your guilt, and then we hated to think it of you. This is one of the happiest moments of my life."

He released Travers' hand at last to give it to Murdoch and the others, who shook in turn. They couldn't say much, but their handshakes were eloquent of their feelings.

"Now I am free to be myself again!" smiled Billy Travers. "The mask was necessary, of course, as you would have kicked me out of the club-house that night if you had known who I really was. I don't blame you. Hagenstein made things look black and damning for me. But I've retaliated now, in full measure. And from to-night on I'm Billy Travers of the Spurs once more!"

The newspapers had a greater sensation in their columns next day when the Masked Footballer laid bare his secret.

Billy Travers, the champion winger, who had left the Spurs in disgrace and had been suspended for life, had come back with his honour fully vindicated, and with fresh honours reaped while playing anonymously as the Masked Footballer.

Hagenstein and Newton and the rest of the gang went to prison, and the air of British sport was thus cleared of a good deal of pollution. The Spurs duly won the great final for the Legion Medals, thanks to the fine play of Billy Travers, no longer playing as the Masked Footballer.

(Next Week!

"THE FIRE FIENDS!"

A Thrilling Story of Two London Firemen. Make sure you read it!

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."
 Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes
 Awarded for Jokes.
LET ME HEAR YOURS!

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER:—

"GETTING EVEN!"

"It is remarkable," said Mr. Grosaw, "how mean some people are. I had with me on a fishing trip two friends, who evidently were familiar with my reputation as an angler. Before we started, one of them made the following suggestion: 'We will agree that the first man who catches a fish must treat the crowd.' I agreed to this, and we started off. Now both these two fellows had a bite, but were too mean to pull them up." "I suppose you lost then?" remarked a friend. "Oh, no!" replied Mr. Grosaw. "I took good care that I didn't have any bait on my hook!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to N. E. Parton; Station House, 109, Talbot Road, Blackpool.

ON DUTY ELSEWHERE!

A certain young soldier had had the misfortune to lose one of his eyes in the war. He was, however, allowed to continue in the service on consenting to have a glass eye in its place. One day he appeared on parade without his artificial eye. "Nolan," said the officer, "you are not properly dressed. Why is your eye not in its place?" "Well, sir," replied Nolan, "I left it in me box to keep an eye on me kit while I am on parade." Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss B. Hutton, 40, Hunter Street, Clarence Road, Cardiff.

THE OPTIMIST!

A contractor borrowed a small and badly-worn car from a friend for an emergency trip. The owner apologised for the machine's rather bad condition. "Oh, that's all right," said the contractor. "I can drive anything that has four wheels." Then, calling to an employee, he was off. A little way down the road the contractor noticed the absence of a key to the ignition switch. Later, he discovered that the emergency brake did not work. After another mile he found himself rolling down a smooth, level road towards a bridge, and a second glance showed a six-foot gap between the bridge and the bank. Viciously he jammed on the foot-brake, only to find that it would not work. Fifty yards from the bridge he stepped hard on the reverse, but the pedal was stuck and would not budge. Turning to his companion he remarked cheerfully: "Well, here's hoping the petrol gives out!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to James Bogan, 98, Low Quarry Street, Hamilton, Scotland.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

EXCITEMENT IS NEVER LACKING IN THIS THRILLING SERIAL!



Our Grand
Serial of
Schoolboy
Adventure!

By
DUNCAN STORM.

Introduction.

JACK WABBY, JAMES READY, SWEET, and a Chinese named LUNG, chums together in the great school of St. Beowulf's, in company with JOHN LINCOLN, one of the governors of the school, and VISCOUNT WAFFINGTON, a relation of the Countess of Castlewood, are instrumental in capturing a gang of international burglars. At a private landing-stage, with a number of bags containing the supposed treasure, the little party await the arrival of the Trois Freres, a small craft which has been chartered to smuggle the ill-gotten gains out of the country. The crew aboard the vessel think only of the treasure, and pay little attention to the party as they board ship.

Safely aboard, Lincoln offers to pilot the vessel, whilst the crew go down in the cabin to make merry.

The robbers then open the bags, and discover that they have been deceived. They prepare to attack the Englishmen, only to find that they are locked in the cabin and made prisoners. They manage to gain an exit from the engine-room, however. A fierce fight then ensues, but the robbers are soon overcome.

After a most excitable journey, the Trois Freres reaches Barbham Harbour, where Mr. Lincoln hands over his little haul to the safe keeping of the harbour officials. After that the boys return to High March Castle, where John Lincoln tells them of his intention of taking them on a world tour. The boys have been back at school a few days, when Mr. Lincoln arrives to make the final selection of the party to accompany him. The bell clangs for the whole school to assemble in Hall.

(Now read on.)

Well Washed!

THERE was surprise on the faces of all the boys as the great bell pealed out. It was not often that it gave its signal for a general assembly, and everyone was wondering what was up.

Rumours were flying about concerning the fight in the Slaughterhouse, and the kids of the Lower School were saying that Slurk had killed a kid and that the police had got him and that he would be expelled. But the older boys knew that this was only kids' talk.

They looked curiously at Waff as he marched along with his new chums to the Hall. They were wondering where he had got his black eye and fruity lip. It was thought that he was a new boy. But, as a rule, new boys do not come to school well on in the term with a black eye and a fat lip.

So the excitement was intense when the whole of the school gathered in Hall, and the buzz was loud and insistent, till, of a sudden, the door at the end of the Hall was opened and Dr. Brockenbury, followed

by John Lincoln, Lady Castlewood, Blackbeard, and the other masters, made their appearance. Then John Lincoln rose in the dead silence and started to address the boys.

He told them how he had been born a poor boy, all on his own in the world, and how, when he was a youngster, he had run away to sea and had made his way to South Africa. He also told them how hard he had been obliged to work to get his living and some sort of education at the same time, and how hard work, good luck, good health, and a temperate life had brought him success till he was a rich man.

Then he told them how he had made up his mind to help other boys to travel the same road as himself, but without that tremendous struggle at the start. And thus how he had founded the hundred Lincoln Scholarships at St. Beowulf's for the education of boys of the Old Country and from all over the Empire, to be trained as good citizens and good fighters for truth, justice, and straight dealings, which were the foundation of this great Empire of ours, and its only true foundation.

"But to put you boys to school is not enough," said John Lincoln, warming to his speech. "I want to teach some of you in my own class, the class which comes outside school. This is the school of the outer world, and I have chosen from the Lincoln scholars five boys whose conduct has taught me that they will be able to help me in the expedition I am undertaking, to square up many a little affair in my own business which I have been obliged to neglect. The names of these boys are:—"

The school was breathless. They were certain that John Lincoln was going to name Buckley, the head of the school.

"James Ready!" announced John Lincoln.

A buzz of wonderment went through the school. They knew nothing of the adventures of Wobby and his friends or how they had come under the notice of John Lincoln. Jim Ready was quite a new boy at the school. A poor scholar, too! Everybody in the school knew that.

But Jim was well-liked, and a rousing cheer greeted his name. Slurk and his bullies who were sitting uncomfortably in their seats, looked at one another with incredulous eyes.

They could not understand why John Lincoln had chosen for his first companion a poor little towny cad.

But Slurk and his crowd were incapable of understanding the mind of a great man like John Lincoln, who saw in Jim Ready, quiet and steady, an ideal first hand in any expedition.

John Lincoln had modestly told Jim and his chums that he did not know much about boys. But a great judge of men must needs be a great judge of boys as well, and John Lincoln would have chosen the quiet, steady-going Jim before the more resourceful and mercurial Wobby. He knew that Wobby would take chances and leave things to luck. But he knew that Jim would never leave anything to luck.

"John Wabby!" came the next name, and it was greeted with storms of cheers.

The glum faces of Slurk and his chums cleared up a bit. They were glad to see the last of Wobby for a year or two, and the report said that the expedition would last all that time.

"Hope the rotter will get to Australia and stop there!" mumbled Slurk to his crosby, Sponge.

"Lionel Sweet!" announced John Lincoln.

"Three cheers for Stickjaw!" piped a shrill voice from the Lower School seats. And the Lower School cheered themselves blue in the face, for every one of them liked Stickjaw.

"Another good riddance!" sneered Slurk in a whisper.

"Lung Chi Chow!" continued John Lincoln. Another cheer. The Chinese boy was popular through the school and the fellows were glad that he was selected for the trip.

"Lal Singh!" announced John Lincoln. "And the sixth boy to accompany my expedition will be our young neighbour, Viscount Waffington, who will join the school on his return."

Waff blushed like a beetroot, for there were tremendous cheers from all the kids of the Lower School. The Lower School had now got the news of his fight with Slurk, their old enemy, and this new recruit was probably the most popular youth in the Hall at that moment.

But Mr. Lincoln had not done yet.

"I shall also take with me Mr. Teach; and Monsieur de Blanquiere will act as the scientific expert of the expedition," he continued; "so these young gentlemen who come with me will not entirely escape their lessons."

There were tremendous cheers at this, which might have meant anything.

But John Lincoln had yet another card up his sleeve.

"There is another fellow in the school who I think will benefit by a trip with us," he said. "So I am enlarging my party and I shall take Simon Slurk!"

The announcement fell like a bombshell. The whole school was quite taken aback.

Stickjaw looked blank with astonishment and disgust at this bit of news.

Lung's bland Chinese face showed no expression at all.

Wobby grinned. He had a very shrewd idea why John Lincoln was taking Slurk. Slurk was running near getting expelled from the school. Slurk might be reformed if he were taken away from his own gang. And what would be good for Slurk would also be good for the school.

"Hurrah, Waff-o!" whispered Wobby. "You'll be able to whop him every day. Look! He doesn't want to come with us—you can see by his face!"

Indeed, Slurk was looking pale. He had no desire to accompany one of John Lincoln's expeditions. He had read John Lincoln's book on his great journey across the Sahara Desert, and Slurk was not looking for any deserts, or sandstorms. Neither was

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 174.



One by one the bullies were rolled over into the fountain. Jack Johnson, the nigger, was the last to go. "In with him!" yelled the Lower School kids. "Wash the nigger white! Wash the nigger white!"

he looking for bush fights with unpleasant niggers who used poisoned arrows.

It took a minute or two for the boys to realise that Slurk was one of the chosen.

Then a hurricane of cheers went up from the Lower School. By no means the sort of cheers they had given for Stickjaw. They were cheers of relief that John Lincoln, at one stroke, had broken up the gang of bullies of which Slurk had long been the ringleader.

"Crums!" muttered Wobby to Jim. "The governor is a deep 'un. Knows more about this little old school than he lets on. He's stouped the gang at one swipe. He has knocked the king-pin out of that clique, and they'll go to pieces like lumps of sugar in a hot cup of tea. Look at Spongy's dial! Look at Mudd's face! They know that their puff is done, and that their crush are sent to the pack. I expect we shall see some other Slurks knocked out of the barrier before we come home again!"

Perhaps Wobby told more truth than he knew of. John Lincoln's expedition was to be directed against many men of the type of Slurk all over the world.

There followed cheers for John Lincoln, who promised that when the present expedition returned to the school he would take out a dozen selected boys again.

Every kid in the Lower School made up his mind that he was for the next expedition, and that he would become a shining example of good behaviour which could not be overlooked when the time came.

The Lower School was delirious with excitement. When the school was dismissed they trooped out into the great quad.

Wobby and Jim walked together. "I say," said Jim, "this is going to be no joke, taking that brute Slurk with us!" "Don't you worry about that, Jim," said Wobby. "I'm on to the game. The governor is going to give Slurk over to us to lick into shape. And we will lick him. But, my hat! What's this? The Lower School are putting up a revolution! Listen to 'em, the little Bolshies!"

There was a shrill shouting from the crowd of kids.

"Pogrom on Slurk!" they yelled. "Pogrom on Mudd! Pogrom on Spongy! Pogrom on Jack Johnson, the nigger!"

Slurk, who was walking with his cronies, turned pale. They were hardly able to believe their ears. The Lower School, which they had held in fear and trembling ever since they had come to the school, was turning on them like a pack of wolf-cubs.

Slurk would not have minded a dozen kids, or even twenty kids; but here were a hundred and fifty of them, mad with excitement, and all moving together in a threatening mass.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 774.

"I say, chaps," he muttered, "let's get out of this! We can't fight a lot of kids!"

He looked round him furtively, seeking a way of escape. But the kids were not going to allow him and his companions to escape them. There was a sudden rush of the Lower School as concerted and instinctive as a flight of birds.

They had drawn a cordon round Slurk and his pals, and had got them backing the fountain in the big quad.

A demon had entered into the Lower School, and, somehow, there was not a prefect in sight to enforce order.

The faces of the kids were white and determined. They meant to make up for lack of strength by numbers. They were going to attack Slurk & Co. as a pack of sparrows will mob an owl.

"Pogrom!" they shouted, their shrill voices frightening the sparrows out of the ivy to go and sit along the gutters in rows to watch this remarkable scene.

Slurk's ugly face turned pale as he faced the swarm of kids. But he smiled a greasy smile.

"I say, you kids," he said, "go away quietly. We don't want to hurt any of you!"

"No!" yelled a score of voices. "But we are going to hurt you!"

"Chuck 'em in the fountain!" cried a shrill voice in the background.

"That's right!" yelled a hundred eager voices, taking up the cry. "Chuck 'em in the fountain! Wash 'em!"

Slurk made a rush, backed by his friends. He saw that the kids meant business.

But as he rushed, the Lower School mobbed him. He was surrounded by a surging crowd, which, packing into a scrum, drove him and his chums back to the edge of the fountain.

"Duck him!"

"Souze him!"

"The kids are on the job now!" said Wobby, with a grin. "Young Waff has shown them that even a little chap can stouh a bully if he punches hard enough, and they are making a co-op of this. Oh crums!"

This last exclamation was wrung from Wobby as a dozen of the Lower School, regardless of Slurk's swinging fists, bore him back with a heavy splash into the fountain, sending the fat old golden carp flying round their native tank with alarm as they splashed with the bully in the water.

Mudd was down, too. The Lower School had rushed him over the edge into the chilly water and were sousing him.

Spongy was the next to splash, carried over by twenty wildly cheering kids, who tripped him in the stone edge, and held him under till he soaked as much water as if he were a sponge indeed.

Jack Johnson, the nigger, was the last

to go. Jack Johnson hated cold water at any time, and he fought madly. But the kids had learned his weak spot. They backed his shins, then, leaping into the fountain with him, rolled him over and over, shouting with joy as they surged round him waist-deep in the chilly water.

"Wash the nigger white!" they yelled. "Wash the nigger white! A pogrom! A pogrom!"

Never was there a more successful pogrom in the history of the Lower School. It was the kids' day out. Those who were not in the fountain leaped into its great basin to get a hand on Slurk and his pals, for the glory of saying that they had participated in the breaking up of the bullies of St. Beowulf's. There were more kids than water in the fountain, and great waves slopped over its edges.

Nothing was to be seen of Slurk and his pals. They were either buried under the water or buried under heaps of soaked and scrambling kids, till at last there was a yell of "Cave!"

There was a simultaneous rush from the fountains as the yelling, delighted Lower School leaped out of it, leaving Slurk and his gang standing miserable and diapiated objects in the disturbed and muddy water.

The false alarm of "Cave!" had arrived just in time to prevent them from getting drowned. Panting and dispirited, they crawled stiffly out of the fountain, vowing vengeance, but knowing that their reign was over.

"It's just as well that we are leaving this school for a bit," said Wobby. "The Lower School will be as cheeky as a pup with two tails, until they start quarrelling amongst themselves again. There will be no holding them. They'll have a feast to-night, and they'll drink ink. Now, come along, lads, and let us be packing!"

The Mysterious Watcher!

WOBBOY'S packing was premature.

He showed his chums how to pack properly for any expedition.

He taught them how to tie a diamond cinch on the back of any pack animal, the unhappy Lung being made to walk about the study floor acting as camel, or mule, or a donkey, as the case might be, whilst great loads were strapped on his back by box-cords that nearly cut him in halves.

"I don't want to be donkey any more," said Lung, after a couple of days of this sort of game.

"Come on, Lung!" begged Wobby. "Be a sport! Just let me show you that hitch again. If you once tie your pack like that, no mule can kick it off!"

But Lung was obdurate.

"Me fed up!" he said. "You be the donkey, Wobbee!"

"How can I be the donkey if I have to tie my pack on my own back, you silly Chink!" exclaimed Wobby wrathfully.

"What will be the good of you chaps, when we get to Africa, if you don't know how to load a mule or a camel?"

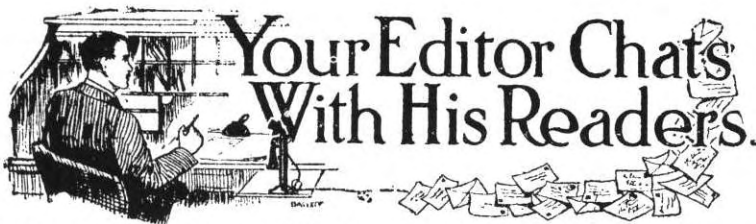
"We learn when we get to Africa," replied Lung, with his bland smile. "Whatee good of packing till we go?"

Day after day the boys waited, expecting to hear from Stubbs when the yacht would come into Barham Harbour to take them on board. But there was no news from Stubbs. He seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth. They made careful inquiries of John Lincoln's gamekeepers as to their master's whereabouts; but the gamekeepers could tell them nothing, save that the governor was in London, and was not going to shoot any more in the coverts of High March Castle.

Wobby was for making a secret excursion over to Barham Harbour to see if there were any signs of the Polo Star, the great, white-painted steam-yacht which was perfectly familiar to the boys by its photographs.

But Barham Harbour was out of bounds, and it was decided that the time for going must be too close to take any risks.

Slurk walked about the school depressed and silent. All the buck was out of Slurk now. He did not want to go on this expedition. And he had not even the heart to catch a fag and give him an arm-twisting, which was his way of cheering himself up when he felt low.



Address all letters: The Editor, "The Gem Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

My dear Chums,—To mention next week's story. It is about the best example of Mr. Martin Clifford's art I have read. You will say the same when you have read

"THE FAGS' REBELLION!"

The great point, the thing to remember, is that the magnificent yarns of St. Jim's possess this additional attraction—readers of long standing find an extra special interest, while fresh-comers only have one regret, namely, that they did not join the GEM circle long before.

TOBOGGANING.

Tobogganing is a thrilling pastime, full of ups and downs and the most inspiring surprises. Next Wednesday's GEM pays special attention to the grand sport.

You will read the next number of the "St. Jim's News" with extra zest.

It is a Special Tobogganing Number, and the contents are so thrilling that the master printer himself started trying what he could do on a tea-tray and the stairs leading down to the foundry. I recommend you to keep your eye on the coming Supplement of Tom Merry's real live paper. It is the goods!

"THE FIRE FIENDS!"

This is the title of next week's enthralling complete story—one of the brilliant and fascinating "extras" which are now a regular feature in the GEM. I am convinced you will say this yarn touches high-water mark, so far as dramatic power and grip are concerned; and, after all, one wants and expects all that in a tale dealing with the element which is a good friend and a dangerous enemy.

WOBBY AND HIS CHUMS!

There must be a word about our fine serial, "The Wolves of St. Beowulf's!" You will find next week's instalment more than usually gripping. Mr. Duncan Storm, with his interesting craft, the Trois Freres, and his capital set of characters is scoring again. But that's nothing. Mr. Storm always does score, and one likes him specially when he deals with out-of-the-way adventures, as here.

OUR AUTOGRAPHED PHOTOGRAPH!

Next week's GEM includes a real

prize in the admirable, glossy photograph, which will be given away. It shows a famous champion of the winter game.

JOHN MACDONALD,
Everton F.C.

Macdonald, the famous left full-back, has a name to conjure with, and everybody will be glad to possess the excellent portrait of him, with the doughty player's signature at foot.

CHRISTMAS IS COMING!

Excuse me pointing this fact out to you, for the interesting circumstance is already well known, and everybody is looking round for suitable presents for their friends. That task means no end of a problem in heaps of cases, but I might suggest that you can cut the knot and please anybody, boy or girl, or a senior, by securing a copy of the "Holiday Annual," with its marvellous variety of attractions. The Annual is as versatile as an up-to-date conjurer, and it will captivate both young and old. Its school tales are brimful of verve and gaiety and sparkle, and it gives adventure yarns characterised by the real spirit of romance. There it is! Nobody could wish for anything better!

GETTING READY!

It is reasonable enough to refer to the preparations made by our Companion Papers—the "Magnet," "Popular," and "Boys' Friend"—in honour of the festive time. The enlargements of the Companion Papers came just right, and I may as well say that each of these weeklies has a store of good things for Christmas.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR.

(Continued from page 15.)

"Well, that's all now, but Jack an' Harry himself," observed the first man. "They're late."

As he heard this, Sharpe blessed the fore-sight which had prompted him to postpone the raid, for Snide Harry had not so far arrived. Otherwise, it was ten to one that the ringleader would have given him the slip for the second time.

A shuffling of feet overhead presently announced the coming of someone else. The trap was raised, and two figures climbed down. Sharpe immediately recognised the first as Snide Harry, and the other man was, doubtless, the coiner, Jack.

"Now, lad, to work!" said the former. "We've a good deal to do. Where's Bill? Ah, there you are! Did you circulate those Sorins in Minford to-day?"

"Yes!" replied Sharpe huskily.

Snide Harry stared at him curiously. "Why, you're all stuffed up, man!" he exclaimed. "Here, try one of these tabloids!"

Knowing that to refuse would only arouse suspicion, the detective crossed over and held out his hand. The light from one of the candles fell brightly on his face in this

position, and the coiner gave an almost imperceptible start.

"How the deuce did you manage to get rid of that mole on your chin since yesterday?" he asked, touching Sharpe's flesh with his finger. "It was just here, I remember." Then, without the slightest warning, he seized the false moustache and plucked it away.

"I knew it!" he cried. "This is not Bill, boys! It's that cursed 'tec, Anthony Sharpe! Tom! Steve! The ladder—quick! Don't let him get clear!"

Seeing that further concealment was useless, the detective made a dash for the steps and sprang up.

Crack—crack!

One bullet buried itself in the side of the ladder, and another knocked splinters flying from a rung within an inch of his knuckles.

Crack! again, and Sharpe felt a searing, red-hot pain in his arm; but now he had reached the top and shoved up the trap with his shoulder. But even as he rolled out on the kitchen floor, an iron grip

fastened on his ankle, and he felt himself being dragged backwards.

Frantically he pulled his whistle from his pocket and managed to blow a single blast upon it. Then he experienced a sickening sensation of falling, his head struck something with a dull whack, and all became blackness.

When he came to himself, Sharpe felt the cool, night air playing on his face, and the inspector was pouring something down his throat.

"Well," the detective asked weakly, "did you get 'em?"

The officer gave a triumphant chuckle. "You bet we did!" he replied. "Harry and all! But it was a pretty close thing for you, sir. You've a nice little souvenir in your forearm!"

Sharpe rose shakily to his feet.

"I'm getting fairly used to close things," he said, with a wince, "so it doesn't matter much. Now, if you don't mind, I've an appointment with a lady on the first floor!"

The inspector grinned, and the detective went upstairs, where he unbolted the door and liberated Mrs. Rogers.

"That will be all to-night, madam," he said smilingly. "I'm extremely obliged to you!"

THE END.

(Look out for another of Anthony Sharpe's exciting adventures in the GEM in a fortnight's time!)

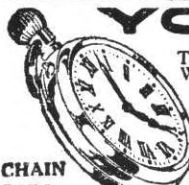
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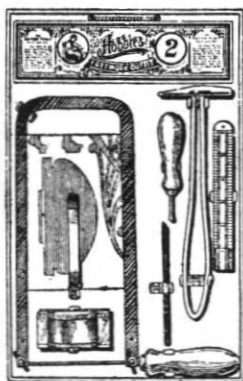
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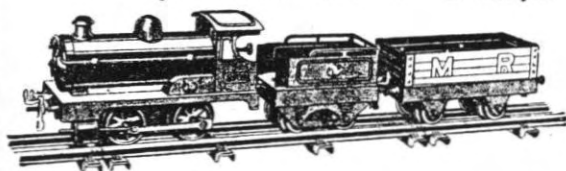
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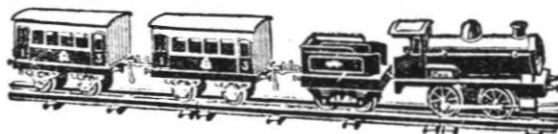
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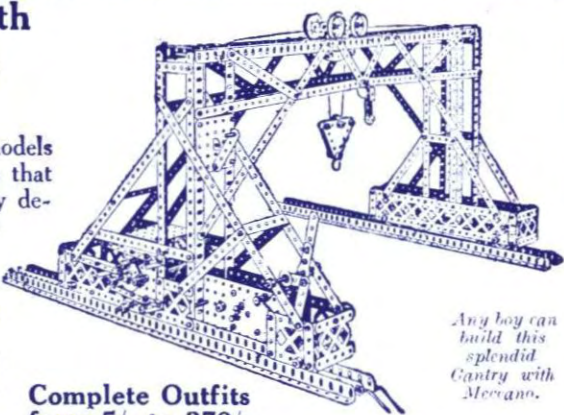


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