

SPLENDID SCHOOL STORY AND POWERFUL NEW SERIAL INSIDE !

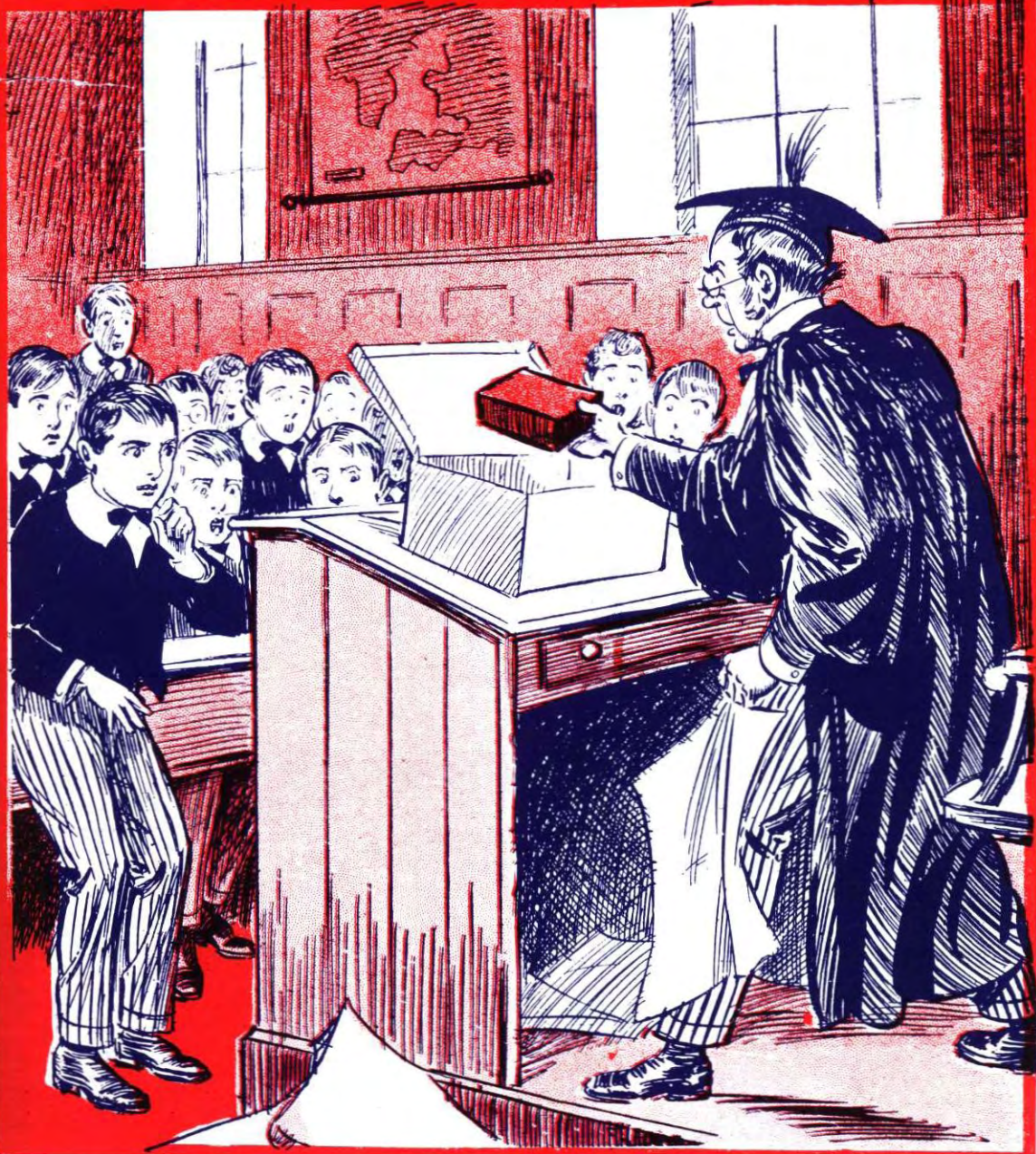
The GEM 2^D

LIBRARY

OF

SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 797.
Vol. XXIII.
May 19th, 1923.



A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR MR. SELBY !

(Read how the fags of the Third Form try to soften the heart of their severe Form master in the Rollicking, Fins School Story, entitled: "TAMING A TARTAR!" Inside.)

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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.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

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

My Dear Chums.—Look out for a top-hole story in next Wednesday's GEM! There is a big sensation at St. Jim's, and it is all concerned with a certain valuable which has been lost. A large reward is offered for the return of the missing article, and Trimble figures pretty considerably in the coming yarn of hilarity and mystification.

"FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!"

By Martin Clifford.

That is the title of the story. It need fear no comparisons. Your curiosity is piqued right away, and it won't be giving away anything to speak of if it is admitted at once that it is a brooch which has been lost. The discoverer of the trinket is as honest as the day, but a stranger to St. Jim's, and, of course, knows nothing of the workings of the mind of Baggy. This individual encounters Trimble, and so it happens that the whole business of the brooch is first broached to Baggy, so to speak. Of course, it is not the finder's fault, but can you be surprised that a crowd of complications ensue? It would be astonishing had it been otherwise, for we all know Trimble. It dawns upon Baggy that easy money is to be made over the matter, and he sets his wits working overtime trying to scheme out a source of revenue to replenish the empty Trimble coffers, as it were. The yarn will raise many a laugh, and you will be thoroughly interested in the stupefaction of some of the seniors who discover, alas, too late, that things are not quite as they thought. Anyhow, you will be downright pleased with next week's cheery story of the good old school.

"THE RANGER AND THE RUSTLERS!"

By Captain Malcolm Arnold.

Cattle thieves and other disturbers of the peace figure in this stirring story of the Western prairies. It is a record yarn, specially welcome in that it presents once again plucky Dave Elton, a man who has to perform the decidedly risky duty of rounding up desperadoes who have made themselves fair terrors to the district. This time Captain Arnold has got away with a better theme than ever, and he piles in the thrills and exciting incidents with a generous hand.

"THE SPIDER OF THE NORTH!"

Next week's instalment of the great serial of mill-land offers a big treat. It THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 797.

carries on with the great battle between daring Tom Compton and the insidious scoundrel who is plotting for the downfall and destruction of the mills. This crafty worker in the dark stops at nothing. Neither does Tom Compton. The youngster seems to be outmatched, but you will see from the stirring episodes recounted in next Wednesday's GEM, what real grit can accomplish. Conspirators sometimes happen to be too clever. They are apt to jump at the notion that the rest of the world is out and out stupid, and is only waiting to be fooled. You will be fascinated by all that happens in connection with a certain message over the wires. Who gets it? What is done about it? As for young Tom Compton, you can marvel at his smartness, but he is doing no more than many a keen youngster would have to his credit in like circumstances. Compton knows that things depend on him. It's just this sense of responsibility that brings out the best in a chap. He knows what is expected of him, and he plays up to the needs of the moment in topping style. Well, we see how a trap is prepared, and the upshot will surprise you.

The Cricket Competition!

You will appreciate the excellent problem presented next week. It will grip hold of any cricketer, and send the fame of the GEM even higher!

The Tuck Hamper!

I must just mention that the Tuck-Hamper feature is still going strong. I am always glad to see entries, and the best and merriest and newest storyettes will find a hearty welcome waiting for them in the famous Readers' Page of the GEM. Send in your postcards. If you do not win one week, you may the next.

Your Editor.

Readers' Notices.

Miss Christine Elliot, 32, Merchiston Road, Catford, S.E. 6, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere. Ages 15-16.

Miss Dorothy Vickers, Belle Vue Farm, Stanhope-in-Weardale, co. Durham, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; ages 14 up; interested in outdoor sports; all letters answered.

Stanley G. Cooper, 14, Wellington Street, St. James' Road, Southsea, wishes to correspond with readers; ages 18-20.

J. F. Williams, 127, Bourke Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

Peter Lassman, 23, Short Street, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Canada, the United States, and overseas generally.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Wit.

SEND IN YOUR AMUSING STORY NOW.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.

SOUND ADVICE!

A cyclist was riding down a country lane when his hat suddenly blew off. A passing countryman picked it up and handed it to the cyclist as he circled round, saving him the trouble of getting off his machine. "I weally must get some stwing to keep this confounded hat on," muttered the cyclist, as he wheeled off without a word of thanks. The other's reply was short but expressive. "Don't bother, guv'nor," he cried. "Get a nail!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to L. Woodford, Dinton, nr. Aylesbury, Bucks.

STRANGE!

Pat had just compared his watch with the famous clock on St. Paul's Cathedral and burst into a fit of laughter. "An' what are ye laughin' at?" asked his companion, a Londoner. "How kin I help it?" said Pat. "Here's my little watch made in Oireland by Mike O'Flaherty, which cost me three pounds, has beat yer big London clock an hour since yesterday mornin'!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Thornton, 33, Linton Street, Conran Street, Harpurhey, Manchester.

PROOF POSITIVE!

The angry customer was frantically waving his portrait before the photographer's face. "Do I look like this picture?" he raved. "The thing's an outrage! Why, you've given me an awful squint and the look of a prize-fighter! Now, answer me, and no nonsense about it! Do you call that a good likeness?" The photographer scanned the print, then looked at the customer. "The answer," he said, "is in the negative!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Hinkes, 27, Anatola Road, Highgate, N. 19.

MISUNDERSTOOD!

Little Mabel was discussing her history lesson with her mother. "Wasn't it awful cruel of King John to run over his poor subjects with motor-cars, mummie?" she asked. "But, my dear," replied her mother, "motor-cars were not invented at that time." "Oh, yes, they were," protested Mabel, "because teacher distinctly said to-day that King John crushed his subjects under heavy taxes (taxes)!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Jack Ferries, Whiteford, Piteaple, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

START READING THIS THRILLING AND DRAMATIC SERIAL NOW!



A plucky Lancashire boy sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire. This is famous David Goodwin's most powerful story.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

TOM COMPTON, a young piecer, formerly of Barton's Mills, sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire.

Mill after mill had suffered at the hands of this treacherous foe. At last Tom, by chance, actually catches the Spider in Barton's Mill. He gives chase, but the Spider, a sinister figure in blue goggles, makes good his escape. He drops a pocket-book, however, from which Tom Compton obtains valuable information.

Tom is unable to save Barton's Mill, which is blown up, the owner being killed. From that time it becomes Tom's only ambition to crush the Spider.

With only a few shillings in his pocket, he decides that work must be found before he can chance striking a blow at this hidden power. Answering an advertisement for a left-handed piecer, he unsuspectingly falls into the hands of his enemy. He escapes, however, by taking refuge in the house of a friend, Dick Stearns, who is employed on the "Clarion," the offices of which are next to those of the Spider's. Stearns offers to introduce Tom to Morton Kane, the wealthy proprietor, with a view to getting him on the staff. Before leaving, Tom meets Dennis Gale, a late worker at Corbith's Mill, which also has been ruined by the Spider's handiwork. Gale promises to assist Tom in his great venture.

"Yes, I'll help you fight the Spider," he said. "I'd give my life to be revenged on the brute who has ruined Joe Corbith!"

(Now read on.)

A Job at Last!

NEXT day Tom rose early, as soon as the light straggled through the windows, and, without rousing Stearns, hunted out pen and paper. An idea had occurred to him not to put all his eggs in one basket. This pocket-book was evidently of great importance. What if the enemy got it back?

He sat down and made a careful copy of all that was in the notebook, imitating every mark and stroke of the cipher-writing accurately. It took him an hour, but he breathed more freely when it was done; and when he had folded the copy and stowed both away in his pockets, he heard Dick Stearns splashing in his tub.

"Up early, young 'un," remarked Dick, as he came in to breakfast. "I must go in half an hour, and you follow to the office by ten. Don't be late."

He went to his daily task, and Tom sat down and thought the matter over, deciding on his plan of campaign. If he found Kane's employ bound him too much, and gave him no freedom of action, he would drop it.

At the appointed time he left the house and went to the office.

It was an imposing block, Hargreave Buildings—for such was the name of the edifice which contained the two rival powers. Built somewhat on the American plan, with steel frames, sumptuous waiting-rooms downstairs, six stories, and a lift to each set of offices, there was not a finer building in Dunchester.

The left-hand house showed only a name-plate in brass by the big central door marked "Schneider & Co." This, then, was the Spider's den.

Popularly, Schneider & Co. were known as a newly-established but wealthy cotton-spinning firm, owning some mills as well. And this was the truth, though not the whole of it.

The "Clarion" side of the building seemed to show life and prosperity and bustle; the Spider's half a grim, empty silence.

No clerks' heads showed at the window, no desks. No stream of callers and messenger-boys poured in and out.

"There's a threat about the place!" muttered Tom.

He went into the right-hand side, and soon Dick Stearns came down to him.

"He'll see you in ten minutes," said Dick. "Answer him straight, Tom, and look him in the eyes. I wish you luck!"

The call came, and a powerful lift whisked Tom Compton up to the second floor, where he was shown into a richly-furnished private room. In the centre, alone, stood a big, upstanding, well-built man of about fifty, clean-shaven, with a determined-looking face and piercing grey eyes. It was Morton Kane.

"Here's a man in a million!" thought Tom, as he stood to attention, cap in hand.

The big grey eyes looked him through and through in silence.

"You'll do," said Morton Kane, in a strong, decisive voice. "I give you a week's trial. Do you think you could write for a newspaper?"

"I think I could, sir," said Tom, his eyes glistening. "I've written one or two things before to amuse myself."

"It is a great weapon. You know I own the big newspaper, the 'Clarion'?"

"Never miss it, sir," said Tom.

Everybody knew the "Clarion," the most outspoken paper in Lancashire.

"I'll give you a trial in that direction," said Kane; "though, of course, it will only be an item among the much more dangerous work you will have to do. Anyway, write a careful article, hinting at the Spider's schemes, and if it's what I want it will go in the 'Clarion.' Write it to-morrow. Perhaps you will know more by then. And now good-bye, my lad. I'm busy."

Tom saluted, and turned to go.

"One more thing," said Kane. "Your salary will be two pounds. Good-day!"

Tom went out with a jubilant face. As he reached the door he cast a glance back into the room.

It was empty. Morton Kane had vanished.

"My word!" said Tom gleefully. "That's the sort of man I like to work for. And now to get a blow in at the Spider."

He went down two floors, and entered his friend Dick Stearns' room. Dick was away, and there was nobody in the room.

"Now to get rid of this cipher copy," thought Tom.

He looked round the room carefully. The desk that Dick Stearns used in his capacity as cashier and secretary was there; but that would not do. There was no way of making a regular secret hiding-place; and, besides, time was precious. A bookshelf let into the wall held a few volumes of reference, and Tom decided this would do for the present.

Then a thought struck him.

"All my eggs are in one basket again!" he muttered. "That won't do."

He searched the room swiftly, and by good luck found a sheaf of carbon copying-paper and a stylo pen. He sat down, and swiftly dashed off a second copy of the cipher-notes, and when it was done had in all three copies, taken at one sitting through the carbon-paper leaves.

Then he rose, went out of the room with the papers in his pocket, glanced into the neighbouring rooms, and came back. His experience had taught him caution. Then, with a sigh of relief, he slipped one copy into one of the books on the bookshelf, and left the office.

On his way downstairs, avoiding the lift, he stepped aside into a disused ante-room, slipped the second copy under the oilcloth on the floor, and went out into the street with the original in his breast-pocket.

"I guess that's made pretty sure," he thought.

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said. "Never know where spies may be. And now, as the Spider's men have tried decoying me, I'll do a little decoying on my own. We'll see who gets trapped this time."

He had left by one of the back warehouse entrances, and he made his way as quickly as possible to a gunsmith's shop in a side street. So far, at any rate, he was pretty certain nobody was on his track. He entered the shop, and purchased a small but heavy-calibre revolver of good workmanship, loaded it in the shop, and stowed it in his pocket.

"This isn't a thing to let off at one's enemies," he thought, as he went out—"not in this country. They'd have the right on their side then. But I fancy I shall find a use for it to-day. I've got an idea in my head, and if it comes off—"

He gave up all dodging and watchfulness, and strode into the main street, whistling as though he had not a foe in Dunchester. A driving rain thrashed the streets, and he stopped and purchased a macintosh, for more purposes than one.

"Now for headquarters!" he muttered. "And I shall need all my nerve to carry it through."

Interrupted!

HE made his way by back streets and byways as fast as he could towards the buildings that held the Spider's and Morton Kane's offices side by side. The rain had ceased, and he took off his macintosh and left it, with the revolver in its pocket, at a shop whose owner he knew, in passing. He made a circuit round the office buildings, and then, walking in a steady and business-like way, though his heart beat rapidly, marched straight through the great main door of the Spider's offices.

It was the slackest part of the afternoon, and there were few people about. Neither the doorkeeper nor the attendant took any notice of him, for he walked in as though he belonged to the place. The lift was already aloft, so he went up the stairs, and reached the first floor landing, every nerve on the alert.

"If I can get into his room," thought Tom, "at any risk I'll have a try to get the key to the cipher, and a clue to the whole mystery. If I get out of this place alive, it'll be a score."

"Who's there?" said a harsh voice from a room that opened on to the landing.

The boy recognised it in a moment. It was the voice of an old enemy of his, a former overseer of Barton's Mill.

"It's all right, Joe," replied Tom, in gruff tones, hurrying on till he was round the corner of the staircase.

"Here, stop a minute, mate!" said the overseer, coming out. "I've got news for tha. T' whelp's escaped, an' t' boss himself is after him. Wait a minute, can't tha?"

"Can't stop!" said Tom gruffly, hurrying on, and keeping the corner of the stairs between himself and the man. "I'll see you when I come down. Which is the boss' room now?"

"Why, same as before, No. 5, next floor," called the overseer, in astonished tones. "He's out, I tell tha. Man, tha surely isn't going to his room!"

"No; I'm goin' up above," replied Tom, grinning to himself at the man's horrified tones. And he heard the overseer go back into the room he had come from.

"Bad luck that fellow being in the THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 797.

place," thought Tom; "nearly gave me away. This is the room, I reckon."

He reached a well-furnished ante-chamber, and entered it. It was evidently a sort of waiting-room, but no one was there: A door opened through it into a second room, with a secretary's desk in it, also untenanted. Another door, heavily felted, and studded with brass nails, like a coffin-lid, led into the inner room of all.

"Unlocked!" muttered Tom, pushing it open.

He peered within. To all appearances there was nobody there, and he entered softly. It was a large, wide apartment, much like the one that belonged to Kane, the Spider's great rival, but there was a grimmer, mustier look about it. There were no sumptuous chairs or costly pictures, only a large desk littered with papers, two shelves full of ledgers and account-books, and, beyond the desk, a huge steel safe, with the keys hanging from one of its keyholes and its door nearly shut. On the door-hook hung the black cloak the Spider often wore; while thrown down on the desk, as if left hurriedly, were the ominous blue goggles and the eye-shade.

"They're infernally careless for a gang of wealthy conspirators!" muttered Tom. "Perhaps I'm in the wrong box, and there's nothing here but business papers."

His heart sank a little at the thought that his trouble and risk might be for nothing. He went to one of the shelves of account-books, and a large ledger, marked "P," caught his eye.

"What's 'P' meant?" he thought. "'Personal,' maybe. Let's have a look."

He hauled it down and opened it on the Spider's desk. A moment later he pursed up his lips for a silent whistle.

At the first page he opened he saw the name "Brently & Co."—a well-known firm of cotton-mill owners. Opposite the name was inscribed, in a clear hand, evidently recently written: "Mills to go; one by g. c. Parker deals with other."

"What's 'g. c.'?" thought Tom. "By Jove, gun-cotton, of course! I've struck it first go! This is one of the books he keeps the notes of his infernal dealings in."

He turned a few pages over, and saw the inscription, "Jessop's Mill," and opposite it, "d. Thursday 15th." He turned quickly back to the "B's," and saw "Barton's, d. Tuesday 13th," and over it a little gummed slip was pasted by the top edge, bearing the word "Done."

"Done!" muttered Tom, between his teeth. "I should think it was! 'D' means dynamite, of course."

He thought of the wrecking of his old employer's mill on that fateful morning when he first took up the great fight, and a fierce thrill shook him. A swift glance through the book showed him a dozen other records which he, knowing Dunchester as he did, could distinguish easily. A few lines or letters gave the record, in a cold, businesslike way, of small mills ruined, or burnt out, or wrecked by strikers, and next several of them were notes in the same cipher system that was in the notebook Tom had found the first day. A sudden thought struck him.

A thumb-index ran along the leaves, by which any letter or initial could be turned up at once. Tom opened the book at C, and saw the following:

"Compton, Thomas," with a few notes on his appearance, age, dwelling, and the mills he had worked at. Opposite it, on the balance side, was written "Dangerous." Over this was a pasted slip, with notes on Tom's adventure at the mill, marked with "F."

"Failed," said Tom grimly; "that's what 'F' means. You'll write many

another 'F' on your books, you murderer, before you succeed with me! And here's another slip, with notes in cipher, pasted over the rest. That holds the plot for the next attack on me, I'll bet, and it'll be a smart one! If I could only get the key to it, and— Great Scott, there's somebody coming up!"

A footfall sounded on the landing outside. There was a knock on the outer door, and it was pushed open. The footsteps came onward.

"Not the Spider's step!" thought Tom.

Springing to the door, he snatched the black cloak from its hook and put it on. Like lightning he darted back again, donned the goggles, and snapped the eye-shade round his head by its elastic band.

He huddled himself into the chair at the desk, and pored over the ledger, like some brooding vulture, just as the footsteps reached the door and a double knock sounded. He replied, in the suavest, clearest voice he could muster: "Come in!"

Imprisoned!

THE door swung open, and in walked Tom's former acquaintance, the overlooker. He glanced at the silent, shrouded figure sitting at the desk, and started slightly.

"I didn't know you was in, sir," he said humbly. "I beg pardon for disturbin' you, but I'm come to say—"

He hesitated, and stared with an astonished air at his supposed master.

"Well, out with it, fool!" said Tom. "You are wasting my time!"

The overseer shuffled, and looked frightened.

"Tis just reported, sir," he said rapidly, "that t' whelp Compton has been shadowed to this office, an' that he's entered t' building. I can't believe it's true, but—"

"Pah!" replied Tom. "Do you suppose he would dare? You are a pack of dunderheads, every man of you! I was with him myself but half an hour ago in the Stanlaw Gardens. What do you think of that?"

"Beg pardon, sir," snuffled the overlooker. "I thowt 'twas a mistake when they told me. Though 'twas Berners an' Fritz reported it, an' they baint often wrong."

"See here," said Tom, bending fiercely over the table, and glaring at the man through his goggles. "I want to know how long you are going to boggle and bungle over this cursed cub? I'll have the whole lot of you out before long. Why wasn't his throat cut long ago? You've had time enough."

"I—I'm very sorry, sir!" stammered the overseer, looking so scared that Tom could hardly keep down a chuckle. "The whelp's as bad a job as we've ever tackled, an' I believe he's never off his guard a moment. He's a match for any three of our best men. I own it! But we'll have him soon; this next move's a certainty."

"I believe you blunder after him on your own account," growled Tom, "instead of following my instructions, you thick-headed dolt! Now, repeat to me, word for word, the orders for the next move, as they've been given to you; and remember that if you fail to nail the cub this time you'll pay for it! Come, let's have it!"

He fixed his goggling stare on the overseer's face, and waited with a keen sense of triumph. This was a game worth the playing.

But the man's terror seemed to have suddenly disappeared. He was peering at Tom with a curious stare.

"You forget, sir," he said, "we've not been given the details yet, only the main plan. Thou has them in cipher in the ledger there, and if you'll read them out I'll not forget a word."

Tom tightened his lips. He had made a false step, and he saw a suspicious gleam in the overseer's eye.

"I'm glad to see you remember that much," he said gruffly. "You can go now. The details will be sent down to you."

"Ay, sir!" muttered the overseer, still staring hard at him.

Turning his eyes from his supposed master, he cast a rapid glance round the room, and the suspicious look deepened. He took a step towards the table.

Tom, realising that things were becoming dangerous, shifted in his chair, and gave the dry, harsh cough that he had noticed from the Spider. The effect was instantaneous. The overseer stiffened where he stood, and the suspicious stare gave place to humbleness again.

"What are you coming forward for?" snapped Tom. "Keep your distance, dog!"

"I—I beg pardon, sir!" stammered the overseer. "I—"

"No more!" said Tom. "Go! Stay! There is one more thing. Someone has been in these rooms in my absence!"

"No, sir, nobody. I'll swear!" quavered the overseer, for Tom had risen from his seat. "It's impossible!"

"I cannot find the key to the cipher!" said Tom. "Somebody must have tampered with it. Where is it?"

Once more the overseer peered keenly at him.

"Why, sir, tha always keeps it in the big safe. I know nowt about it—how should I?"

"Very well, then, go!" said Tom commandingly. "The details for the removing of the cub Compton will reach you in half an hour, and see that you do not fail this time, or you will pay for it. Now leave the room!"

But the overseer, breathing hard, had taken three rapid strides right up to the table and glared into Tom's face.

"Leave the room, is it?" he snarled. "I've found thee out! You'll niver leave it alive, for one! You whelp! Do you think you can fool me?"

He clutched at Tom's cloak, tearing it off, and the boy leaped to his feet. With savage snarl the overlooker whipped out a knife and rushed at him.

"You've reached the Spider's den," he cried, "but you'll niver live to tell o' it!"

He grabbed Tom by the shoulder, and made a savage upward lunge at him. The boy twisted like an eel in his grasp, avoiding the stroke, and, wrenching himself loose, sprang a couple of paces back.

The overseer rushed at him again, but the sturdy young piecer's fist caught him on the point of the chin with a force that clashed his teeth together and made him stagger.

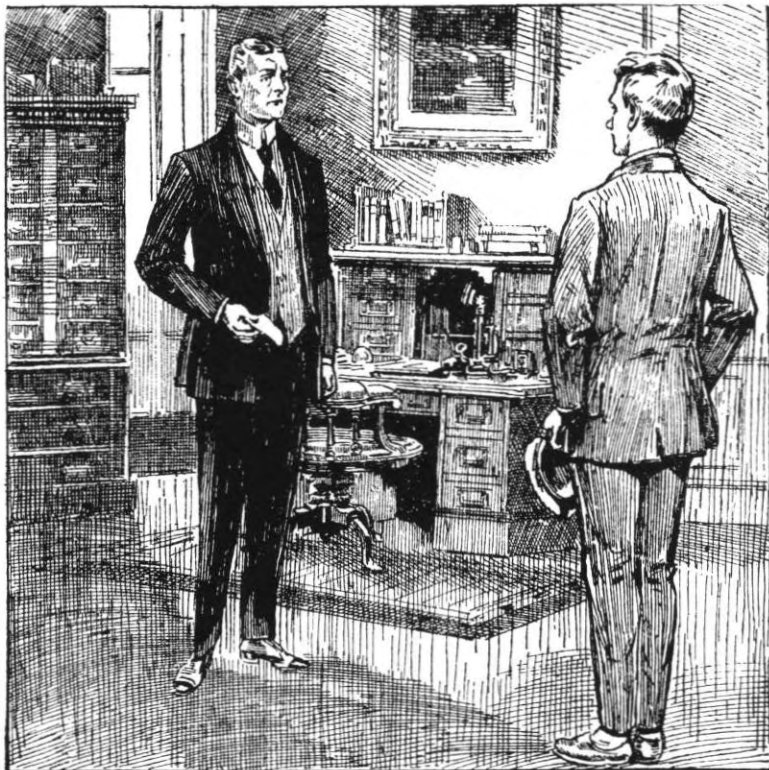
Before the ruffian could recover, Tom drove his left under the overlooker's jaw with the whole weight of his body, and the man lost his balance and fell, striking his head heavily against the corner of the big safe, and lay motionless and stunned.

"What now?" thought Tom, pulling himself together. "Heavens! What's that on the stairs?"

Outside he heard a heavy footfall, and the harsh, dry cough that he knew too well. More footsteps followed behind, and the outer door was opened.

"The Spider!" muttered Tom, his heart sinking. "And there are others with him!"

For one instant he hesitated. Then, catching up the cloak, he flung



The big, upstanding, well-built man looked Tom Compton through and through with his piercing grey eyes. "You'll do," he said in a strong, decisive voice. "I'll give you a week's trial with the 'Clarion.'"

it back on its hook. He tore off the goggles and eyeshade, and threw them on the table, and snatched up the fateful ledger.

There was no time to put it back on the shelf. He pulled open the door of the great safe, flung the book in, grabbed the prostrate overlooker, and dragged the man after him into the dark interior.

Then he pulled the door to, just as the heavy footsteps entered the room, and waited in the darkness with a beating heart.

"Idiots!" he heard the Spider's clear voice say. "Curse me if I know what I pay such a flock of thick-heads for! Only I can't be everywhere at once!"

"We—we did our best, sir," said a voice plaintively, "but the whelp had the most wonderful luck!"

"Luck!" snapped the Spider. "Pluck and brains, not luck! I wish I could get the cub on our side; I'd exchange him for the whole gang of you! As it is, he must be crushed and put underground without any more bungling! Ha! What's this knife on the floor?"

Tom quaked. He had not had time to pick up the overlooker's knife, which had been jerked across the room when he felled the man.

"It's Long Joe's knife, sir!" said a third voice. "I've seen it afore."

"Curse your nicknames!" said the Spider. "Send Long Joe, as you call him, up to me as soon as he comes in. Lord help you if I find any of you prying in this room!"

He stepped across to the safe and grasped the handle of the steel door; while Tom, setting his teeth, waited for the result, wondering how long he had to live.

But instead of opening it, the arch-enemy shut the great door with a resounding clang.

The keys were turned in the locks, and Tom heard the muffled voices and departing footsteps of the Spider and his men as they departed and left him in that dark recess alone with the man he had struck down, and without one hope in a thousand of ever leaving the building alive.

The Key to the Cipher!

AS the dead silence and the inky darkness closed down on him, after the last sound of the Spider's retreating footsteps died away, Tom felt himself cut off from the living world as completely as if he were buried alive and the earth piled above his head by the sexton. Yet in a few hours must come the awakening. What vengeance would his enemies take on him now they had got him fast?

"There's no way out of this," he muttered. "A prison cell couldn't hold me closer. What will they do? Will they start their beastly tricks on me, or will they just finish me off, now there's nothing to be got from me?"

He tried to think, but the darkness seemed to press on his eyelids and dull his brain. He sat for some time on the floor of the great safe, turning over, in a confused way, the events of the past twenty-four hours in his mind.

One of Tom's habits was to carry relays of candle-ends, matches, and bits of string in his pocket. He hauled out a piece of candle, lighted it, and looked round.

The overseer lay in a heap on the floor, still unconscious. The sides of the safe were fitted with shelves, on which were stacks of papers and bundles, bank-books,

cash-boxes, and files. There were no shelves on the back wall, however, which seemed a blank sheet of iron. Tom took a rapid glance round, and then turned his attention to the overseer.

"I'll soon fix you, my beauty!" he said, taking some string from his pocket. "You'll be coming to soon, and I don't want any scrapping matches with you all round the safe, or the alarm raised for your pals to come."

He bound the overseer's little fingers together behind his back, untied the laces from the man's boots, tied his ankles together, and looked round the shelves for something to serve as a gag. He found a baize bag, rolled it up, and tied it over his prisoner's mouth. Then he stretched the man out at full length and smiled grimly.

"You'll do for the present," he said. "I mustn't keep the candle burning much longer to use up the air."

He blew it out, and waited for over an hour in silence.

"By George," he said at last, "the air does come in from somewhere! There are two of us in here, and it's as fresh as ever. How's that?"

He lit the candle again, and it burned brightly.

"No bad air, anyway. And I've candle-ends enough for hours. What a piece of luck! Let's have a look round."

He rapidly turned over the packages and papers on the shelves, undoing and running through them. Some were ordinary business papers, dealing with the Spider's cotton interests, others were bills of lading. Presently, however, Tom found on the other side a shelf full of documents and account-books, that showed the enemy's darker practices, and among them was a little vellum booklet, which Tom opened eagerly, glanced through, and suppressed a cry of joy.

"The key," he thought—"the key to the cipher! Now, if I only were free, I have the game in my hands!"

A rustling stir on the floor interrupted him, and he put down the little book hurriedly and turned to the overseer. The man had opened his eyes, and was blinking stupidly in the candle-light. Then his gaze fell on Tom. He gave a gasp, and his face went an ashen-grey colour.

"So you've come to life, have you?" said Tom. "I thought I'd bumped you harder. Don't try to get up; you're bound hand and foot. And don't splutter like that. The gag won't come out."

The evil eyes of the man looked at Tom with a stare of terrified dismay, and the colour came and went from his cheeks.

Glancing contemptuously at the prostrate ruffian, Tom lifted a bundle of papers from the shelf, and opened his knife to cut the cord with which they were tied. The overseer started at sight of the blade, and flinched as if he had been struck.

"Ha!" said Tom, turning on him savagely. "You see the knife, do you? Now you are in my power! Strange, isn't it?"

He plucked the gag from the face of the man, who broke into a cold sweat at Tom's words, and trembled as much as his bonds would let him.

"Now," hissed Tom, "I'll start that tongue of yours! Remember, if you raise your voice above a whisper, you die! What have you to say?"

"No, sir—for Heaven's sake, no! I can't stand it! Don't set about me. I'll help you, sir. I'll tell anything you ask!"

"Begin, then!" growled Tom, flourishing his knife. "Tell me every secret you know about this cursed gang. Quick, man!"

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"I will," whispered the man, quivering with fright; "only put that knife away! I'll tell you. To-morrow night we've got to—"

"Stop!" cried Tom, quick as a whip-lash.

The man stared.

"You can hold your tongue, you shaking coward! I've brought you to the test, and that's all I wanted. I can find out on my own twice as much as you ever knew, without getting it from a trembling cur who'll give his master away as soon as he's in danger! That's the sort of trick your gang plays, and it's too dirty for me. Now you can lie and shake till I've finished!"

He laid hands on the man, who shrieked at his touch, put on the gag again, and turned him over, with his face to the wall. Then Tom seated himself comfortably, took up the ledger he had brought in with him, and the key to the cipher, and set to work, chuckling at the overseer's abject surrender.

"This is the trump card," he thought, opening the Spider's fatal ledger at his own name, "if only I could hope to live to play it. Now, then, to read the recipe for my own death!"

He pored over the cipher-key for ten minutes or more, and soon mastered it well enough to read the mysterious letters off fairly quickly. Then he turned to the slip of paper that was pasted beside his name in the ledger, and this is what he read:

"Compton. Not less than three. D. S. returns Friday night."

"That's to-night," thought Tom. "Who's 'D. S.'? Dick Stearns, of course!"

"Great friend of T. C. Sure draw. T. C. will be late at office—"

"Will he?" thought Tom. "They know more about Kane's office than I do myself. So I'm to be late, eh?"

"Call him to D. S.'s rooms over the telephone. Urgent. Say got clue to Spider's plans. Tell him to come at once. Finish both together; both dangerous, but T. C. worst. Full instructions and details by verbal message later."

Tom read the ciphered words with glee. He had solved the plot against himself. But the final sentence disappointed him deeply.

"So they're to decoy me to Dick's rooms by a false message over the telephone, and finish the two of us together," he thought. "By George, if I were only out of this, I'd let them manage the first part all right. What a little surprise I'd have ready for them! But that break-off's too bad. If only they'd put the full instructions here, I'd know exactly what they meant to do. Get a gang of ruffians to enter the house, back and front, and make sure of us, I expect."

He thought it over for some time, and saw what a likely plot the Spider had arranged against him, and also how neatly he could have defeated it had he been free.

"Too late!" he muttered, with a sigh of despondency. "There'll be no need for it now; they've got me safe enough as it is. I hope they won't get hold of Dick when I'm gone!"

Fierce, bitter rage at his own helplessness filled him, and he clenched his hands till the nails dug into the palms.

"Never say die!" he muttered, starting up. "Though there's only one chance in a thousand, I'll arm myself for it. If I could get out of here with this ledger and the other infernal documents, I could save a hundred lives. To work!"

He lit another piece of candle, and, hunting up a supply of plain vellum and paper from the shelves, sat down

and began rapidly to copy the notes in the ledger. Even if he could escape, it would not do to let the enemy know for certain that he had read the secrets; he would not take the ledger with him. Tom laughed grimly as he thought what his chances were; but he made a quick copy, and another of the cipher-key, which he put carefully back into its place.

The overseer's back was towards him as he lay, and he, at any rate, could see nothing of what the boy was doing. Nor was it likely the man knew much of his terrible master's inner secrets. But the job was a long one, and when it was done the last of the candle-ends guttered out. Tom carefully scraped up the remains by touch and put them in his pocket.

"I wonder what the time is?" he thought. "I seem to have been in here a week. Has the day dawned? And shall I see the light of another?"

Even as the thought passed in his mind he heard someone enter the room, and he sat still as a mouse. Presently came the sound of sweeping and dusting. It was the office-cleaner, preparing the place for the day. Then the sounds died, and all was silence for another hour or more.

At last came footsteps in the ante-room, the lifting of desks, and the murmur of voices; and, finally, the harsh, dry cough that announced the coming of the Spider. Tom gathered himself together, and prepared to face what the fates might send him.

The heavy, slow step of the arch-enemy entered the room, but not alone. There were others with him, but it was the Spider's suave, menacing voice that Tom heard.

"I believe," he said, "that in you two I have picked out the most intelligent of the gang of dolts and idiots that I employ! It is necessary that someone beside myself should share the knowledge of the cipher, so I am about to show you where the cipher-key is kept, and to instruct you in the use of it. Heaven help you if I find the secret ever leaks out!"

"You can trust us, sir!" said a deep voice.

"I can!" laughed the Spider grimly. "Because I hold the fear of the gallows over the heads of both of you! No man plays me false and lives to boast of it!"

He strode to the safe. Tom heard the key turn in one lock after another, and then the great steel door began slowly to open.

The Secret Hiding-Place!

THE ledger is gone!" It was one of the unseen men that had entered with the Spider who spoke. He himself uttered an ejaculation, and the door ceased to swing, remaining but a foot ajar.

"What?" said the Spider, hurrying across the room.

"It used to be on the shelf, surely!" said the first speaker. "Look here, sir!"

To Tom the delay seemed like a moment's respite to a victim with his head on the executioner's block. A dim light from the room entered the safe as the door came ajar, and as the Spider left it Tom raised himself instantly.

Was there a chance to make a bolt for it? He peered out through the chink. No. The door of the room was shut, and the three men were between it and the safe.

Tom turned rapidly, and stumbled over the form of the overseer. He lost his

balance, and, in throwing out his hand to save himself, brought it heavily against the back wall of the safe. To his utter amazement, the part his hand was on slid sideways into the rest of the wall, showing a dark cavity.

What it was Tom had no idea, but with the instinct of a hunted animal he darted into it; and then, remembering the overseer, dragged him in, too. The whole affair did not take ten seconds from the time the Spider left the safe, and Tom grasped the slid-back partition and drew it into place again, shutting himself in, just as the Spider stepped heavily to the door again.

"I must have left it in the safe," Tom heard the muffled voice say. "It must be kept there in future. Yes, here it is."

Tom crouched in the darkness of his new-found retreat, hardly daring to breathe. Would the enemy notice that the safe's contents had been handled? He had left it as tidy as he could. He heard the Spider rustling among the papers, and then withdrew.

"Now where on earth have I got to?" thought Tom. "Just at the last moment, too! It saved me for the moment, anyway. Maybe I can watch my chance now the safe's open, and make a bolt for it—unless I've locked myself in."

He drew a match from his pocket, struck it cautiously, and looked round. The malevolent glitter of the overseer's eyes was the first thing he saw, and the man looked as astonished as he was himself.

Tom held up the match. He was in a narrow, cell-like compartment, which evidently lay between the false back of the safe and its outside wall.

"By George!" muttered Tom, as the match burnt out and he lit another. "I see what it is. The Spider's secret hiding-place in case he's attacked. He's made himself a comfortable nest, too."

It was an extraordinary place, evidently planned with great care. At one end was a cushioned seat, and by it a small incandescent electric lamp, with a switch beside it. Tom pressed down the switch, and the lamp at once illuminated the place. Evidently it was connected with a fully charged accumulator. At the other end was a large locker with a wooden lid. Tom opened it, and saw a spirit-stand holding three full bottles, a sealed jar, a case of wholemeal biscuits, and a whole stack of tinned meats of the daintiest kind.

"My eye," thought Tom, "the old villain could live in here for days together, while the whole world was searching for him, and if the safe were brought away he'd escape with it! I'm jolly peckish. I vote myself a breakfast off that little secret supply there. Carried nem. con.!"

He found a tin-opener and some plates, a knife, fork, spoon, and even a serviette. The Spider had forgotten nothing.

Tom opened a tin of Strasbourg patty, and another of quails in aspic jelly, laid a place on top of the locker, and sat down to feed.

"They always allow a condemned man a good meal," he said, grinning. "No, Mr. Overseer, you wait your turn! You'll get yours when your betters have done."

The patty and the quails disappeared, helped down with biscuits. Then Tom foraged again, and found a truffled pheasant, which went the same way. He did not fancy the spirits, but the sealed jar contained good fresh water, which was welcome. He next attacked a bottle of preserved cherries, and dipped deep into four different pots of jam. And all the while he feasted he could hear his



The overseer, breathing hard, took three rapid strides towards the supposed Spider and clutched at his coat, tearing it off. "You whelp!" he snarled. "I've found thee out! You'll never leave this place alive!" Tom Compton wheeled round in his chair like a flash.

would-be destroyers conversing in muffled tones in the room outside.

"Ah!" said Tom, stretching himself out with a long-drawn sigh. "That's the best feed I've ever had in my natural. I'd like to breakfast with the Spider every day!"

He felt the carefully-made copies of the cipher and ledger buttoned inside his jacket. They were all secure. He glanced casually at the gagged and lowering face of the overseer on the floor.

"I guess we're pretty nearly quits, Mr. Overseer," he said softly. "Hallo! Are they going out?"

He heard the Spider's voice dismissing the other men, and the sound of their departure. The door of the room closed behind them.

"I'll try it now," thought Tom. "It's man to man at last, but that he's probably a hundred ways of giving the alarm and raising the house against me. To think this beauty on the floor is the only man alive who knows I'm in here!"

He drew the slide back gently, slipped through into the safe itself, and shut the slide again, leaving the overseer inside. Then he stole to the safe's door and peered out.

The room was empty, save for the Spider's sinister form sitting hunched up at the desk and brooding over the open ledger, his active, evil brain adding thread upon thread to the great, far-reaching web of his crimes. An electric button and a telephone lay close to his hand.

Tom's first impulse was to spring upon him, taking his chance of the arch-enemy's raising the alarm. The odds were long, for the Spider was a powerful man, and the noise of the encounter would certainly bring others to the rescue.

Before he had made up his mind, the

Spider rose suddenly and strode towards the safe. Tom crouched behind the door, every muscle ready for action.

"Just what I want!" he thought, as through the chink he saw his enemy approach. "Now for it!"

The Spider swung open the door. In a moment Tom had him by the collar and the arm, and, with a gasp of astonishment, the Spider found himself jerked headfirst into the safe with one vigorous pull, landing in a heap on the iron floor. Before he could recover himself, Tom had leaped over him into the room and slammed the safe-door to. Then the boy, with a chuckle of triumph, double-locked him in, plucked out the keys, and hurled them out of the window.

A smothered shout of rage came from the safe, but Tom, paying no heed to it, dashed to the table. He took up a pencil and right across the open page of the ledger he scrawled the words:

"Clean bowled! If you want your overseer, you'll find him in the back of the safe. Thanks for the breakfast.—Yours,
Tom Compton."

Then, as the noise grew louder behind him—as the imprisoned Spider beat and kicked on the safe's walls—Tom opened the door and slipped out.

The felt door of the room shut in all noise, and in the first ante-room was a secretary, writing industriously. He looked up, and Tom passed through unconcernedly. Neither did the clerks in the middle room take any notice of him. But as he entered the outer room a shrill, silvery whistle rang through the house, and the man who was seated at the solitary desk in the room started up at the sound.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed; and then, seeing Tom's face, sprang at him without another word.



"Now, then, wake yourself up," said the irate coffee-house merchant. "Does tha know tha has been here four hours? I shall have to charge thee for lodgin' next!" Tom Compton stirred lazily.

"The Spider's gauler, at your service!" returned Tom; and, slipping aside from the man's rush, he collapsed him low, and upset him with a heavy crash.

Darting out of the room, he flew across the landing. The whole house seemed to be humming. The lift was below. Anyway, it would have been useless; and Tom, flinging himself upon the banisters, slid down them at lightning speed to the next landing. Never stopping, he went flying round the curve, and away down the next flight, where a man rushed forward with an oath and tried to stay him. It was Parker, the sham policeman of the cells.

He soon found his mistake. Tom, lying with his chest across the rail, came down like a bullet from a gun, and struck the ex-policeman with a force that sent him crashing down the stairs, while the boy sped on unhurt. He landed with a swoop at the bottom, sprang over the commissioner's leg, which was thrust out to trip him up, and found himself in the street—free!

A Surprise for the Spider!

"HA, ha!" laughed Tom, as he ran along. "I shouldn't like to be the one who gets the Spider out! I never expected to see the streets of Dunchester again. Slamming him into the safe just saved me."

He put his best foot foremost. Nobody left the building to give chase to him. They did not dare "give away" the central office in that way, or pursue a boy from the doors of a supposed respectable merchant's building. Following his usual plan, Tom made for the main

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streets, and reached them in thirty seconds, losing himself among the people on the pavements.

As far as he could see, there was nobody after him. He stepped aside into a small coffee-house—not that he wanted anything to eat after his sumptuous meal in the Spider's hiding-place, but to have somewhere to sit quietly.

He placed himself in the furthest of the old-fashioned pew seats, ordered coffee, and ran rapidly over the late events in his mind. One of the secrets of Tom's success in struggles of this kind was that he never left anything to chance, but thought out all the likeliest results from the hints he gathered as he went along.

"He'll find the overseer," he said to himself, "but he won't learn very much from him. The ruffian didn't know I copied the cipher-key. The Spider may guess it, but he can't be sure. The great thing is that plot for decoying me to Dick Stearns', and making sure of us both at one sweep. They may give that up now if they think I've discovered it, but probably they won't suppose I have. It would be too much of a guess. Altogether, nobody knows how busy I've been all night. I'll go and see Dick, and we'll see what we make of it. If only they'll try it on!"

But, before Tom could rise, the rest he needed so much refused to be denied any longer. He sank back, overcome with sleep. The next thing he knew was that the coffee-house attendant was standing opposite him with a grim face.

"Does tha know tha has been here four hours?" said the man. "Ah shall have to charge thee for lodgin' next!"

"Put it down to my account," returned Tom, rousing himself. "Don't leave out the attendance, or the hot water! Remember me to the boots!" Nevertheless, he slid a hand inside his

jacket with some anxiety as he went out. It was all right. The copies and papers were still there.

"Dangerous, dropping asleep like that," said Tom to himself. "I needed it, though. Now for Dick's rooms. He won't go to the office to-day."

Before going, however, Tom went to the shop where he had left his macintosh the day before, and quietly drew from its pocket the revolver he had bought. Then, keeping a careful watch to see if he was shadowed, he went to Stearns' house. He found his friend at work at home among papers and letters, and the weary look in his eyes was not so marked. The two shook hands with a firm grip.

"Been travelling for Kane," said Dick; "only just got back. By Jove, Tom, you look done up! What's made a young rascal like you look so worn out?"

"I've just slept about four hours in a coffee-house pew," said Tom, "and that's about all the sleep I've had for four days."

"Ah! Have you begun already? What are you dodging round the walls for?"

"Don't want to show myself opposite the window," said Tom. "Sit down, old boy, and I'll tell you all about it as quickly as I can."

Tom told him in detail all that had happened during the past night.

"Phew!" said Dick, with a long whistle, looking at his young friend with amazement and admiration. "I didn't think any man would defy the Spider openly, and live."

"I'll do more than that," said Tom, "but he's striking at you, too, you see. He's had enough of your dark thrusts. We're both to be put out of the way to-night, as I told you. I believe they simply mean to make a sure job of it with knife and bludgeon, rough and ready. Surround the house and let their ruffians in, back and front. What do you think?"

"Forewarned is forearmed," said Dick, his eyes glistering. "With a six-shooter apiece, Tom, you and I could hold this room against ten!"

"We'll do it!" said Tom. "They won't drop the plan. They don't know I've come here. You must let me out along the roofs. They count on taking us unawares—that makes all the difference. I've a revolver in my pocket—a good one."

"I've got two upstairs," said Dick; "it's two years since I touched them, but I used to be a fine practice-shot with them once."

"There's the danger they may try something we don't know of," said Tom; "but with a pistol apiece, and our wits about us, we'll risk that. You've got a telephone here, I see."

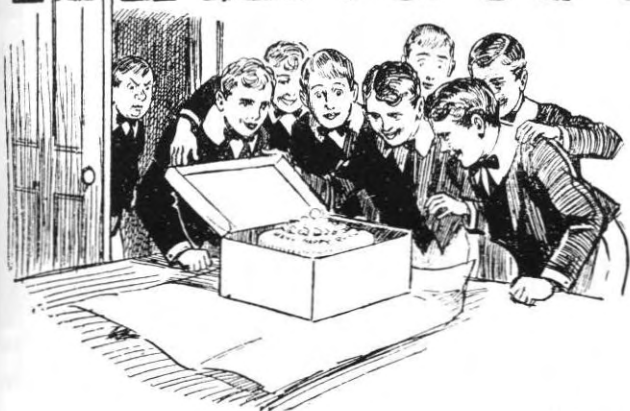
"Yes," said Dick. "Kane had it put up for me last year, to connect me with his office for special instructions. But it's the local company's telephone, and, of course, it connects with all Dunchester as well."

"Look here," said Tom. "If you should call me up, use the words 'Piece-up' as a sign, so I may know it's really you. I'll reply 'Half-time.' I'm to be at the office late to-night, the Spider's cipher-notes said. I shall soon know if that's true. And now I must go."

"Good-bye, old boy!" said Dick, gripping him by the hand. "Mind, if they try it, there's no putting them off or escaping. We'll just fight it out, shoulder to shoulder, and Heaven help the losers!"

(Another magnificent long instalment of this grand serial will be found in next Wednesday's GEM. Order to-day.)

TAMING A TARTAR!



The Heroes of the Third Form at St. Jim's have tried many methods of "getting even" with Mr. Selby, their severe Form master. But their latest scheme appears to be a masterpiece! This is one of the most entertaining school stories ever written by your favourite author—

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Kindness to Animals!

"STAND and deliver!"

Wally of the Third uttered that challenge. He presented at Tom Merry—not a horse-pistol, which would have been in keeping with the challenge, but an old bowler-hat.

Tom Merry looked at the hat, and looked at D'Arcy minor.

"What's this game?" he inquired.

"Bail up!" said D'Arcy minor.

"But what—"

"It's not a game," Wally of the Third condescended to explain, "it's a subscription!"

"A collection!" further elucidated Manners minor.

"We're raising the wind!" added Joe Frayne of the Third, in order to leave no doubt on the subject.

Tom Merry smiled, and bestowed an approving nod on the heroes of the Third Form.

"Good!" he said. "You're raising some cash to buy yourselves clean collars, is that it?"

"Look here—"

"Or hair-brushes?" asked the captain of the Shell.

Wally & Co. gave the Shell fellow a glare. Sometimes the fags of the Third looked as if they needed clean collars. Often they looked in want of a hairbrush. But they really were not likely to be taking a collection at St. Jim's to provide those articles.

"None of your Shell swank!" said Wally. "We're raising the wind for an object!"

"That's right—an object!" grinned Manners minor.

"What's the object?" asked Tom.

"Mr. Selby!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Our Form master," explained Wally. "He's an object—if ever there was one!"

"You'd better not let Mr. Selby hear you calling him an object!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But what the merry thump are you driving at? How can you be taking a collection for your Form master?"

"It's to buy him something," explained Wally.

"Coals!" added Reggie Manners.

"Coals of fire!" said Wally. "That's what Reggie means. We're going to heap coals of fire on his head, same as Good Little Georgie does in the story-book. Of course, we can't chuck real coals on his head—we'd like to, but it can't be done! So we're banking on coals of fire in a—a—a—metaphysical sense."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Do you mean metaphorical?"

"Well, I know it's meta-something-or-other," said Wally. "You know what I mean. Wild beasts can be tamed by kindness, and we're going to try that dodge on Mr. Selby. Catch on?"

"My only hat!" said Tom.

He stared at the heroes of the Third. Generally, Wally & Co. were more or less "up against" their Form master.

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, did not find life exactly a bed of roses. The kindest-hearted master would have had to keep a cane handy in dealing with the St. Jim's Third.

And Mr. Selby really was not a kind-hearted man.

He was severe, and he was suspicious, and he detested the high spirits of exuberant youth.

Had Wally & Co. been taking a collection to buy fireworks to put in Mr. Selby's Sunday hat, or a packet of tinctacks to distribute in his slippers and his arm-chair, Tom Merry would

not have been surprised. But taking a collection to make Mr. Selby a present was very surprising indeed.

"It's straight," said Wally—"straight as a string! You see, it's Mr. Selby's birthday to-morrow—"

"You're making him a birthday present?" exclaimed Tom.

"That's it—kind regards, many happy returns of the day, and all that," said Wally. "We hand it over with a neat little speech—a few well-chosen words, you know. Selby is certain to be pleased. It stands to reason that he's got a soft spot somewhere. We're going to touch it!"

"Oh, so you're going to tame the Tartar!"

"That's it! I read in a book the other day," said Manners minor, "that the most abandoned ruffians have a redeeming trait in their characters. That was how it was put in the book. Murderers have been known to be fond of white rabbits, and so forth."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry. "Mr. Selby would be flattered by the comparison. You'd better put that in the speech."

"Of course, we sha'n't put it like that, to Selby," said Wally. "I've got tact. We're going to buy him a handsome birthday present—something in good taste, you know, quite a good thing, so far as the cash will go. It's a bit of a worry that we're rather short of money. That's why we're taking a subscription. It will be heaping coals of fire on his head, and it ought to soften him a bit. Very likely it will turn out better than spending the money on marking-ink to pour on his shirts."

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom. "I hope so! Anyhow, I think I'd bar the marking-ink, if I were you."

"Well, how much are you shelling out?" asked Wally, in a business-like manner. "Coppers will do, silver would do better, and gold will not be refused. Banknotes specially welcomed."

"You must apply farther on for banknotes!" said Tom, laughing. "But I can stand a bob. Here you are. It's for a good object."

"Well, it's for an object," said Wally. "I hardly think Selby can be classed as a good object—but he's an object right enough. Thanks for the bob! Your pals contributing?"

"Manners! Lowther!" shouted Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther came up the passage.

"Cash required," explained Tom Merry. "These fags—"

"Can it!" interjected Wally.

"I mean, these respectable and esteemed young gentlemen of the Third Form are going to make their Form master a birthday present. Shell out your loose cash!"

"I expect at least half-a-crown from my major!" said Reggie Manners.

Manners grinned.

"Blessed are those that don't expect!" he said. "Here's a tanner!"

"What about you, Lowther?" asked Wally. "Silver—gold—banknotes—"

"Silver and gold have I none!" said Monty Lowther. "I have a note here you can have—"

"Oh, good! Hand it over!"

"It's a note from my tailor—"

"Ph?"

"Mentioning that he would like his little account. If you'd like to take charge of the matter—"

"You silly ass!" roared Wally. "Don't give us any of your secondhand jokes from 'Chuckles'! If you're hard up, coppers will do."

"Well, I can help you there," said Monty Lowther genially. "If you'd take the trouble to walk down to Rylcombe for them—"

"Eh, why?"

"And call at the police-station."

"The police-station—"

"Yes; you'll find plenty of coppers there!"

"You—you—your frabjous ass!" gasped Wally, realising that this was another joke. "Do you think we've got time to waste on your fatheaded puns? Shell out!"

Monty Lowther—having, apparently, exhausted his stock of humour—dropped three pennies into the hat.

Wally & Co. walked away, to seek other victims, leaving the chums of the Shell grinning.

Heaping coals of fire on Mr. Selby's head was a new idea—quite a new and surprising idea, and a great change from Wally & Co.'s usual methods of dealing with their unpopular Form master. The Terrible Three hoped that it would be a success. But they did not feel sure.

CHAPTER 2. Going Strong!

"YAAS, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form, beamed.

He was very pleased.

He adjusted his celebrated eyeglass in his noble eye, and glanced at Wally & Co., in the doorway of Study No. 6, with great approval.

Blake and Herries and Digby, the other occupants of the study, did not seem so much impressed. But Arthur Augustus was quite enthusiastic.

"Wippin'!" he said. "A wemarkably good ideah, Wally! I am vewy pleased to help!"

"Oh, good!" said Wally.

Arthur Augustus took out his handsome little Russia-leather purse. The heroes of the Third exchanged a look of satisfaction. Evidently they had done well in coming to Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

"I trust you fellows are goin' to contwibute," said Arthur Augustus, looking at his chums.

"Oh, blow Selby!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bother him!" remarked Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Bless him!" said Herries. "It's all through Selby that young Levison got into trouble, and cleared out of St. Jim's. Not that it matters, of course, what happens to a blessed fag. Still, Selby's a beast!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"But that's the idea," explained Wally. "You know they tell us in the natural history class that wild beasts can be tamed by kindness. Well, it's jolly kind to give old Selby a birthday present."

"Bai Jove! It's not respectful to compare your Form mastah to a wild beast, Wally."

"Besides, we're thinking about young Levison, too," continued Wally. "He's on the sick list now over at Greyfriars; but he's coming back to St. Jim's soon. As it turned out that Mr. Selby was making a mistake in being down on him, the Head has pardoned him for bolting; so that's all right. But you know Selby. He's got to overlook it because the Head's put his foot down; but very likely he will take it out of Frank somehow. We want to smooth him down and get him into a specially good temper for Frank."

Blake chuckled.

"I hope it will be a success," he said. "This study will stand by you, of course."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll do the handsome thing," said Blake generously.

"How much are you standing, Gussy?"

"Ten shillin's, deah boy."

"Good! Put in half-a-crown for me."

"Eh?"

"And another half-crown for me," said Dig.

"Bai Jove!"

"And another for me," said Herries heartily. "Dash it all, let the whole study back up this stunning wheeze!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Go it, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus looked a little perplexed.

"But aren't you fellows goin' to contwibute?" he asked.

"It comes to the same thing. We authorise you to contribute for us," explained Blake.

"Yaas; but—"

"We give you full authority," said Dig solemnly. "Up to two-and-six, mind. Beyond that sum you act on your own responsibility."

"Yaas; but—but, weally, you know, won't that be seven-teen-and-six from me, and nothin' from you fellows?"

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"And that chap thinks he knows arithmetic!" said Blake.

"I weally don't quite understand—"

"Shell out now, and understand afterwards!" suggested Wally.

"Yaas; but—"

"We've got the whole Fourth Form passage to do yet," said Manners minor.

Arthur Augustus detached a ten-shilling note from his purse, and dropped it into the hat. Then, slowly and thoughtfully, he sought in his pockets for half-crowns, and dropped three into the hat after the currency note.

"Thanks!" said Wally. "That's good!"

And the fags marched out of Study No. 6 with great satisfaction. The collection was growing.

Arthur Augustus' noble mind was still a little perplexed. Somehow, it still seemed to him that he had contributed seventeen-and-six, and that Blake and Herries and Digby had contributed nothing. But opinion in the study seemed against that view; and Gussy gave it up.

Wally & Co. proceeded along the Fourth Form passage. In Study No. 2 they found Kit Wildrake, Mellish, and Baggy Trimble. Wildrake chuckled when they explained their mission, and dropped a shilling into the hat. Mellish grinned and shook his head. Baggy Trimble seemed interested.

"That's a jolly good idea!" he remarked thoughtfully.

"Isn't it?" said Wally. "How much, Trimble?"

"I suppose you couldn't cash a cheque?" said Trimble.

Wally grunted, and Manners minor and Joe Frayne sniffed. They did not believe in Trimble's cheques; they had heard of them before, all St. Jim's had heard of them, but the eye of mortal had not seen them. But Wally would not leave a chance untried. There was, after all, a remote possibility that Baggy Trimble was not swanking, for once.

"How much is it for?" asked Wally. "We can cash anything up to thirty bob."

"Hem! It's thirty pounds!" said Trimble calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mellish.

Snort from Wally.

"Go to Jericho, and take your thirty-pound cheque with you!" said D'Arcy minor crossly.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," said Baggy. "I'll ask Mr. Railton to cash the cheque for me, and then—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Or, perhaps, he mightn't have enough ready money on hand," said Trimble thoughtfully. "Perhaps I'd better leave it till I go to the bank."

Wally made no rejoinder to that. He was willing to take Trimble's cheque seriously, if there was something to come. Otherwise, it was not worth wasting breath upon.

"Come on, you chaps," said Wally. "We've got a lot more studies to do."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Trimble, jumping up. "There's something I can do for you kids, though I haven't any change at present."

"What's that?" grunted Wally.

"I'll help you collect."

"No help wanted," said D'Arcy minor. "We can carry all the tin we're likely to raise in the Fourth—especially if there's many fellows who have nothing but thirty-pound cheques about them!"

And with that sarcastic reply, D'Arcy minor quitted Study No. 2 with his comrades. Study after study was visited, till the fags arrived at No. 9. They found Sidney Clive and Ralph Reckness Cardew there, Ernest Levison being still away at Greyfriars.

"Heard from old Levison?" Wally asked.

"Letter from him to-day," said Clive. "He's going on all right at Greyfriars. Back at St. Jim's soon, I expect."

"We've had a letter from Frank," said Wally. "He's jolly nearly well, he says. We've got a dodge for getting old Selby into a good temper when Frank comes back."

"The age of miracles is past," said Ralph Reckness Cardew, with a shake of the head.

Wally chuckled.

"But it's a topping wheeze. Listen to me!" And Wally of the Third proceeded to expound.

Clive smiled, and Cardew chuckled. The South African junior dropped a shilling into the old hat, and Cardew followed it with a half-crown.

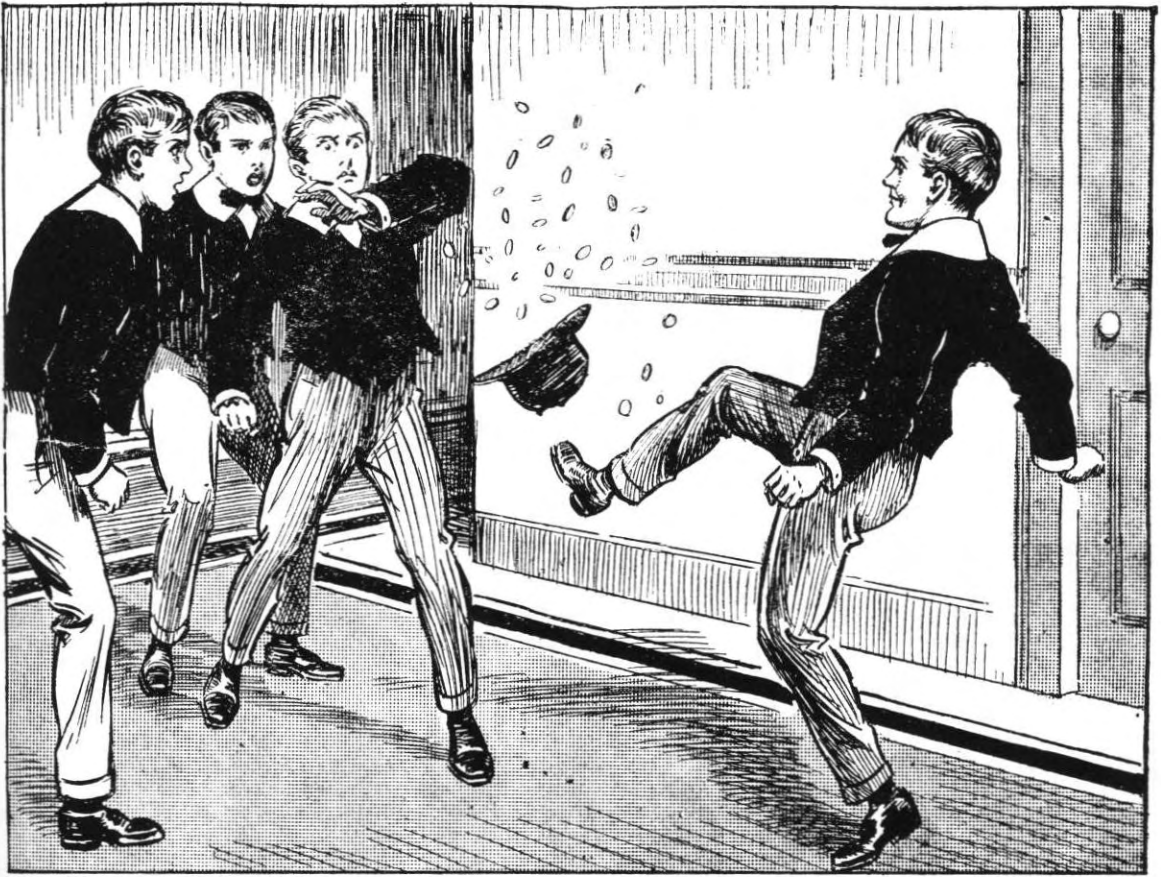
"Good!" said Wally. "You fellows don't seem to think it will have much effect on old Selby?"

"I have some doubts!" grinned Cardew.

"I've got a book about a chap named Georgie," said Wally. "Aunt Adelina sent it to me. This chap, young Georgie, was cuffed by his Form master at school, and he went and bought him a big bunch of flowers. It so touched the master's heart, that he was kind to young Georgie for ever after. It was heaping coals of fire on his head, you know."

"They've all got a soft spot," said Reggie Manners. "I've read in a book that even murderers—"

"What?"



"If you don't approve of our collecting for Mr. Selby, Grundy," said Wally D'Arcy, "you can go and eat coke!" "What?" roared Grundy. He took a kick at the bowler hat, taking Wally of the Third quite by surprise. The hat flew into the air and there was a showering of cash—chiefly coppers—on the passage floor. Wally gave a howl of wrath. (See this page.)

"Even murderers have been known to be fond of rabbits."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we're going to try it on," said Wally. "It can't do any harm if it doesn't do any good. You see, we've never really tried kindness with Selby yet. Putting jam in his collar-box only makes him worse. I know that from experience."

"And letting off crackers in his study fire doesn't do him any good to speak of," said Reggie. "This is a new dodge, and we hope it will have a lot of effect on Mr. Selby. He's bound to feel flattered at our noticing his birthday, too. Of course, we don't really care twopence about his birthday!" added Reggie confidentially.

"Go hon!" murmured Cardew.

Wally & Co. left No. 9, leaving Clive and Cardew grinning. They met Grundy of the Shell in the passage.

They stopped Grundy, and explained to him. Grundy frowned. Apparently Grundy did not approve. He raised a large hand, and shook his forefinger at the fags.

"This won't do!" said Grundy.

"Eh! What?"

"This is practically pulling your Form master's leg," said George Alfred Grundy severely. "That's cheek, in fags like you kids. You chuck up this rot at once. Do you hear?"

Wally & Co. blinked at Grundy of the Shell. Grundy was a lofty youth, but Wally & Co. wondered how he got the idea into his head that the Third Form would pay any heed to his commands.

"I don't approve of it," added Grundy, as a sort of clincher.

"Not shelling out?" asked Wally.

"Certainly not."

"Then you can go and eat coke."

"What?" roared Grundy.

"Coke!"

Grundy did not answer that in words. He took a kick at the bowler hat, taking Wally of the Third quite by surprise. The hat flew into the air, and there was a showering of cash—chiefly coppers—on the passage floor.

Wally gave a howl of wrath.

"Now—" began Grundy.

He did not have time to proceed. As if moved by the same spring, Wally of the Third and Joe Frayne and Reggie Manners jumped at Grundy. Before he knew what was happening, Grundy of the Shell was on his back on the floor, with the three fags sprawling over him.

"Yaroooh!" roared Grundy. "Gerroff! Leggo! I'll smash you—I'll—yoop!"

"Rag him!" yelled Frayne.

"Oh, my hat! I—I—I—"

Grundy struggled to his feet with three infuriated fags clinging to him. He staggered to and fro in the passage, with Wally & Co. still clinging. Fellows looked out of their studies all along the passage.

"What's the row?"

"Grundy, as usual."

"I'll smash them!" roared Grundy. "I'll—"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther arrived on the scene. They had observed Grundy's action from a distance.

"Collar him!" said Tom.

Grundy was promptly collared. He had almost freed himself of the fags, but three Shell fellows were a different proposition. Grundy was whirled off his feet in the grasp of the Terrible Three, with his arms and legs wildly flying.

"Oooooop!" roared Grundy. "Put me down, you silly rotters! Pumme down! Leggo! Oh, my hat!"

"Take him home!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally & Co. collected up their scattered cash, as Grundy was taken home by the Terrible Three. Manners major kicked open the door of No. 3 in the Shell, where Wilkins and Gunn jumped up in astonishment at the sight of their study-mate in the hands of the Terrible Three, suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, between heaven and earth.

"What the dickens—" ejaculated Wilkins.

"Leggo!" yelled Grundy. "Rescue!"

"We're seeing Grundy home," explained Tom Merry. "Here he is! I advise you fellows to keep him on a chain."

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Bump!

Grundy descended on his study carpet with a terrific concussion, which left him hardly breath enough for a yell. Tom Merry & Co. retired from the study grinning.

Wilkins and Gunn grinned, too. They couldn't help it. Grundy sat up and glared breathlessly at them.

"I—I'll smash them!" he spluttered.

"You look a bit smashed yourself, old chap," remarked Gunn.

"I'll spifficate them!"

"You seemed to have bagged the spifficating," said Wilkins.

"I—I—I'll—" gasped Grundy. "What are you grinning at, you silly asses? Where's the joke, you crass dummies?"

"Sitting on the floor," answered Wilkins.

"Why, you cheeky rotter, I—I—I'll—" gasped Grundy.

And Grundy looked so positively dangerous that Wilkins and Gunn thought it wise to stroll out of the study before he got his second wind. And in the passage Wally of the Third presented the bowler hat, and Wilkins and Gunn stood and delivered.

CHAPTER 3.

Nice for Knox!

TAP!

Mr. Selby glanced up and frowned. Frowning came quite naturally to Mr. Selby. He frowned much oftener than he smiled. Mr. Selby was one of those unhappy gentlemen who take life as a continuous worry, and see little or nothing in it to be cheerful about. Indeed, cheerful looks in others often gave him a feeling of annoyance.

"Come in!" he rapped out.

The door did not open.

As there had been a distinct tap at the study door, and as Mr. Selby had bidden the tapper enter, the door should have opened. But it didn't. Mr. Selby frowned more darkly, suspecting that some disrespectful junior had tapped his door in passing, and cleared off. Runaway taps at a Form master's study door were distinctly disrespectful.

Mr. Selby resumed his occupation. He was making up some accounts, and he had a little pile of silver and a ten-shilling note on the table before him. The Third Form master, pen in hand, was going carefully through the items of a little bill, which he intended to pay when he walked down to Rylcombe presently. If there was a halfpenny in excess on that little bill, it was not likely to escape Mr. Selby's eagle eye.

Tap!

Mr. Selby breathed hard.

It was another tap at his door—a sharp, distinct tap.

"Come in!" hissed Mr. Selby.

The door did not stir.

Evidently it was a second runaway tap. Mr. Selby sat and stared at the door, breathing wrath. The little account lay unheeded on the table before him; he forgot even the possibility of reducing its amount by a penny or a halfpenny. Some fag was playing tricks—tricks on him! Tapping at his study door and clearing off at a run, of course, in case he opened it. Mr. Selby could scarcely credit such an impertinence.

He wondered who the trickster was. D'Arcy minor, most likely; or Reggie Manners. He was quite well aware how Frank Levison's chums in the Third resented his severity, which had led that fag to take a rash step in leaving the school. He was far from dreaming of the great wheeze that was working in the minds of Wally & Co. It was practically certain that it was D'Arcy minor who was annoying him in this way.

Tap!

Mr. Selby bounded to his feet, and rushed to the door, flinging it wide open.

He glared into the passage.

It was empty.

Whoever had tapped had retreated with great swiftness, and was already out of sight round a corner.

Mr. Selby breathed deep, and closed his door and returned to his table. He had scarcely sat down, and dipped his pen in the ink, when there came another tap at the study door.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Selby.

Tap!

It was not uncommon for cheeky fags to attempt to "jape" their unpopular Form master. But this really was beyond the limit. This was unprecedented—unheard-of. Mr. Selby stared at his door with concentrated wrath.

He did not open it this time.

He rose quietly, picked up a cane, and stepped very softly to the door—and waited.

If the japer came again Mr. Selby was ready for him.

The instant the tap sounded on the door the door should

fly open, and Mr. Selby's cane should descend on the tapper before he had time to make his escape.

Mr. Selby almost grinned with anticipation. He felt something of the instinctive joy of the hunter as he waited for the japer to come along again and tap at the door.

Tap!

There it was!

The instant the sound fell upon his ears Mr. Selby's left hand was on the knob of the door, tearing it open; with his right he lashed out of the doorway with his cane.

It was done like lightning—a really swift and efficient performance, quite creditable in a gentleman of uncertain age.

And it was successful. There was no doubt about that.

The lash of the cane was answered by a fearful yell, in which pain and rage and astonishment were mingled.

"Yooooooooooooo!"

"You young rascal, I have caught you!" thundered Mr. Selby.

"Whoop! Oh gad!"

"Why—what—"

Mr. Selby checked a second lash just in time.

It was not a fag of the Third Form who stood there rubbing his shoulder and ejaculating. It was not a playful junior of the Fourth or the Shell. It was Knox of the Sixth. Gerald Knox, a prefect of the Sixth Form. Mr. Selby fairly blinked at him.

The ghost of Gerald Knox could not have startled him more than Gerald Knox in flesh and blood, standing there at that moment.

"Knox!" gasped Mr. Selby.

"Ow!"

"You!"

"Wow!"

"Is it possible, Knox?" shrieked Mr. Selby. "You—a Sixth Form prefect—have been playing childish pranks—unseemly, disrespectful pranks—"

Knox backed away in alarm. His impression was that Mr. Selby had gone mad. A Form master who lurked behind his study door, and whacked out with his cane when a fellow came to his study, could only be regarded as insane—dangerously insane.

"I—I say, sir—" stuttered Knox.

"What do you mean by it?" thundered Mr. Selby.

"I—I—" Knox backed almost the width of the corridor.

"I—sir—"

"I shall report this to Dr. Holmes!"

"So shall I!" exclaimed Knox. "I'd like to know what this game is, sir! You asked me to come to your study at half-past six, and when I come—"

Mr. Selby's look changed.

"Bless my soul! Was—was—was it not you who tapped at my door on—on previous occasions, Knox?" he said faintly.

"Eh? I tapped once."

"Upon my word, I—I have made a mistake!" stuttered Mr. Selby. "I—I really beg your pardon, Knox. Some—some impertinent junior has been tapping at my door incessantly, and—running away before I could catch him, so when you tapped I—I thought—"

Mr. Selby really was overwhelmed with confusion. A moment's reflection showed him how improbable it was that a Sixth Form prefect would be giving runaway knocks at a Form master's door.

"Well, you might have looked first, sir," said Knox, relieved to know that Mr. Selby was not mad. "You caught me an awful smack across the shoulder with that cane."

Knox rubbed his shoulder ruefully. He was hurt, and he was angry. Mr. Selby had explained; but his explanation, naturally, had not taken the pain away. The Third Form master was crimson with chagrin. He realised that he had acted in what could only be described as an extremely undignified manner.

"I—I am extremely sorry, Knox!" he stammered. "Very sorry indeed! Pray come in. I—I had quite forgotten, for the moment, that I asked you to call. I wish to consult you on a rather serious matter in which I think you can be of assistance to me."

Knox grunted.

"If you'll excuse me, sir, I'll call in later," he said. "I'd like to go and rub some Elluman's on my shoulder."

"Bless my soul! Are you really hurt, Knox?"

The prefect made a grimace.

"You can't slash a fellow with a cane without hurting him, sir! I shall have a thumping weal across that shoulder!"

"Oh dear! I regret exceedingly—"

"Ow!"

Knox of the Sixth tramped away. The awkwardness of the situation caused Mr. Selby great mortification, but Knox was not inclined to spare his feelings. Knox was hurt and Knox was annoyed.

Mr. Selby turned back into his study, trembling with wrath. He had been made to look ridiculous; and he had whacked Knox, the one prefect in the School House who he rather

liked—for the reason that Knox was as suspicious and sour and tyrannical as Mr. Selby himself. There was much in common between the master of the Third and the bully of the Sixth.

"Bless my soul," murmured Mr. Selby, "it—it—it really is very awkward. I was—was a little hasty! And—and the real delinquent has escaped! I—I think I had better go and speak to Knox."

And the Third Form master left the study and moved off towards the Sixth Form passage in a very disturbed frame of mind. He did not want any trouble with Knox of the Sixth, who was useful to him, and whose services he required, as it happened, just then. So he went to make his peace with Knox.

A minute after he had disappeared Monty Lowther of the Shell came along the passage. Lowther had been in the French master's study, and he came away from Monsieur Morny with a corrected exercise in his hand, thinking of anything in the world but Mr. Selby. But as Mr. Selby, in his haste and agitation, had left the study door wide open Lowther stopped. The Third Form master was not there—and the Third Form master was fair game for any youth with humorous proclivities. Monty Lowther grinned and stepped into the study.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Lowther as he saw the loose money lying on the table. "Careless ass to leave money about like that!"

Lowther had had a vague idea of pouring the ink into the clock. He had not much time to waste on Mr. Selby, but he was willing to give him a little attention. Now he changed his mind. There was a large, heavy ebony inkstand on the table. Lowther lifted it a little and pushed the ten-shilling note under it. The inkstand completely covered the ten-shilling note from sight when it was replaced.

Then the humorist of the Shell strolled out of the study—rather quickly. He arrived in Study No. 10 in the Shell with a smile on his face.

"Pat me on the back, dear men," he said to Tom Merry and Manners. "I've done a good deed."

"Whose leg have you been pulling now, fathead?" grunted Manners.

"Selby's. I've given him something to worry and nag about," explained Lowther. "That's what he enjoys, you know. Good boys ought to try to please their kind masters—and Selby will be no end bucked when he finds that he's really got something to howl about. But I sha'n't mention that I did it! I don't want his thanks."

CHAPTER 4.

Very Funny!

"H A, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"
Curly Gibson of the Third staggered into the Third Form room in a state of helpless merriment. He sat down on a form and howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally & Co. were there. The collection was finished, and the chums of the Third were counting up their gains. Quite a respectable sum had been realised.

Beside Gussy's ten-shilling note there were four half-crowns, half a dozen shillings, a good many sixpences, and a whole stack of coppers. Wally & Co. felt that they had done well.

D'Arcy minor, with a pencil and a scrap of paper, was working at an addition sum, making out the total. Reggie Manners and Joe Frayne were doing the same.

"I make it thirty-four-and-six!" said Wally.

"Thirty-four-and-ninence," said Manners minor.

"Wrong!" said Frayne. "Thirty-six-and-twopence."

"Fathead!"

"Same to you, old chap! You can't add."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Curly Gibson, in convulsions, on the form. D'Arcy minor glared round at him.

"Can't you keep quiet when fellows are doing arithmetic?" he demanded. "What are you going off like a Chinese cracker for, you dummy?"

"He, he, he!" screeched Curly. "Old Selby! Knox! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's happened to his nibs?" asked Wally, interested at once.

"He's caned Knox—"

"What?" roared the Third.

"Whacked him with his cane!" shrieked Curly. "By mistake! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Curly doubled up with excess of mirth.

The fags gathered round the ecstatic Curly. The collection lay unheeded on Wally's desk.

"Now, then, tell us what's happened!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Curly.

"Bang his head on the desk till he tells us!" suggested Hobbs.

"Good egg!"

"Here, leggo!" yelled Curly, as his comrades seized him to carry out Hobbs' suggestion. "Leggo!"

"Now, explain, you silly ass—"

"I'm telling you as fast as I can!" gasped Curly. "I was pulling old Selby's leg, you know—tapping at his door and then bunking round the corner before he could get it open—"

"Kid's game!" said Wally severely. "Nothing to cackle at in that!"

"Just when we're trying to please him, too!" said Manners minor warmly. "You're a young ass, Gibson!"

"That isn't all!" gurgled Curly Gibson.

"Well, spout out the rest," said Wally. "How did he whack Knox? Has he really whacked him?"

"Ha, ha! Yes! You see, Selby must have waited inside the door with the cane ready for me to come along again—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, fathead!"

"I never thought of that, you know. He'd have caught me as safe as houses, only I spotted Knox coming and backed round the corner; and then Knox— Ha, ha, ha!" Curly went off into an hysterical yell.

"Bang his head!"

"Go it!"

Bump!

"Yoop!" roared Curly, his laughter ceasing all of a sudden.

"Yow-ow! Stop it! Oh, my napper! Ow!"

"You'll get another if you don't explain jolly quick!" said Wally warningly. "Now then—"

"Ow!" Curly rubbed his curly head. "You silly owl! Knox was going to see old Selby, I suppose. Anyhow, he came up and tapped at the door, and then Selby— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bang his head!"

"Hold on!" yelled Curly. "I'm telling you, ain't I? Then Selby jumped out like a tiger and whacked Knox. Thinking it was me japing him again, you know! Whacked Knox fair and square!"

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Knox gave a yell you could have heard a mile off!" gurgled Curly Gibson, with great enjoyment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Knox!"

"Serve him jolly well right!" grinned Jameson. "The beast pulled my ear this morning!"

The Third Form fags yelled with merriment. For the moment there was only one opinion in the Third Form room—and that was that Curly Gibson had deserved well of his country.

But Wally of the Third returned to gravity. Undoubtedly it was a most hilarious incident, and it served Knox right. But it was ill-timed. These japes did not harmonise with the great stunt upon which Wally & Co. were engaged. While they were trying to tame their Form master by kindness here was Curly butting in the old way. So Wally, as soon as he could leave off laughing at the mental picture of Knox squirming under Mr. Selby's cane, fixed a stern look on Curly.

"You're a young ass, Gibson!" he said. "You're spoiling everything with these kid games! Selby will very likely think it was one of us—me, very likely. And to-morrow I've got to make a speech to him in the Form-room."

"Oh, rot!" said Curly. "You should have heard Knox yell! I tell you it's the jape of the term!"

Wally grinned. But he became grave again at once.

"You just chuck it, young Gibson!" he said. "Rags on Selby are barred. I'm going to keep you kids in order somehow. We've got to tame him and have him in a good temper when Frank Levison comes back."

"Rot!" said Curly again. "How much money have you raised?"

"Thirty-four-and-six."

"Thirty-four-and-ninence, you mean!" interjected Manners minor.

"You mean thirty-six-and-twopence," hinted Frayne.

"I mean thirty-four-and-six!" roared Wally. "Do you think I don't know how to do simple addition, you asses?"

"I don't think—I know!" said Manners minor. "Look here—"

"Anyhow, it's a sin and a shame to waste it on Selby," said Curly Gibson. "Why not blow it in a stunning spread for the whole Form? To-morrow's a half-holiday, and—"

"Not a bad idea!" murmured Hobbs.

"Jolly good, I think!" remarked Jameson.

Wally gave a snort.

"We've raised the money for a birthday present for Mr. Selby," he said. "That's what it's going to be spent on. We shall get a handsome present with thirty-four-and-six."

"Thirty-four-and-ninence—"

"Shut up, young Manners! Just fancy Selby's face when we present it to him in the Form-room!" said D'Arcy minor.

impressively. "He will be surprised at first. Then he will smile."

"Rot! Selby couldn't smile!" said Curly. "I believe it would crack his features if he tried to smile!"

"He will be no end pleased," persisted Wally, giving up the smile, as it were. Even Wally admitted that it was a rather wild flight of the imagination to think of Mr. Selby smiling. "He will be bucked! It will show him how his Form esteems him."

"But we don't!" objected Hobbs.

"If you're going to argue, Hobbs—"

"Well, I think—"

"No, you don't, old chap, you can't!" said Wally. "It's not in your line. Leave the thinking to me. In the book my Aunt Adeline sent me, young Georgie was cuffed by his master, and he went out and bought him a bunch of flowers, and softened his heart. Why shouldn't the same wheeze work with Selby?"

"Real Form masters ain't like that," said Curly Gibson. "You can put anything in a book."

"Well, of course, we're going to hand Selby something better than a dashed old bunch of flowers!" said Wally.

"But it's not only the present; it's the spirit of the thing, you know. It will touch his heart, and very likely make him benevolent."

"Murderers have been known—" began Reggie Manners. Bang!

The Third Form door flew wide open, and the discussion ceased all of a sudden.

CHAPTER 5. Scenting a Conspiracy!

MR. SELBY tapped at Knox's door in the Sixth Form passage and coughed. He was really feeling very awkward and disturbed. Knox was hurt and Knox was annoyed, and Mr. Selby felt that he was to blame. He coughed in quite a propitiatory manner as he opened Gerald Knox's door.

"My dear Knox—"

Knox of the Sixth was not devoting himself to Elliman's, as he had declared was his intention. His injury was not so bad as all that. He was, in point of fact, solacing himself with a cigarette when Mr. Selby tapped at the door, and he had barely time to drop it and put his boot on it when the Form master entered.

Knox stood with a rather red face, wondering whether Mr. Selby noted a whiff of smoke in the atmosphere.

If Mr. Selby noted it, he carefully made no remark upon it. He had come there to placate Knox; not to catch him in dereliction of duty.

"Yes, sir?" stammered Knox.

"I am really very sorry, Knox, for that most unfortunate misapprehension," said the Third Form master, subduing his crusty voice into as kindly a tone as possible.

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" said Knox. "It—it's passing off, Mr. Selby. If—if you wanted to see me, sir—"

"I certainly wished to consult you, Knox—"

"Shall I come to your study, sir?"

"I should be glad—"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

Knox was anxious to get Mr. Selby out of his quarters. He could not move without revealing the cigarette that was hidden under his foot.

"Then pray come with me, my dear Knox," said the Third Form master.

He stepped out of the study. Knox paused only a second, to kick the crushed cigarette out of sight under the table, and then followed Mr. Selby.

The Third Form master returned to his study with Knox. Knox followed him in, and closed the door.

Mr. Selby sat down.

"I may say, my dear Knox, that you are the only prefect in the School House in whom I have complete confidence," he said.

"You are very kind, sir!" murmured Knox.

"Speaking quite between ourselves, Knox, I am of opinion that Kildare, and Darrell, and Langton—in fact, all the Sixth Form prefects, are far too lenient with the Lower boys."

"I agree with you, sir."

"I have, however, the fullest reliance upon you," said Mr. Selby genially. "I think that, should Kildare leave, you should be made head prefect in his place. I have mentioned my opinion to Dr. Holmes."

"Thank you, sir!" said Knox, much gratified.

"On the present occasion, I believe you can be of assistance to me in the interests of discipline," said Mr. Selby.

"There is something going on in my Form—something of a secret nature—I may say, a conspiracy. Of this I am perfectly assured, from certain slight, perhaps trifling, incidents that have come to my notice."

"Indeed, sir!" murmured Knox.

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Mr. Selby was a master after Knox's own heart—Knox being a senior. Had Knox been a Third-Former, he would not have loved Mr. Selby. But he liked Mr. Selby's peculiar qualities, when he was safe from them. He was interested at once. Catching the juniors in a conspiracy, and punishing them all round, was a congenial task to Knox.

"I need not say that I believe D'Arcy minor to be the head of it, whatever it is," said Mr. Selby. "I am well aware that this boy resents the severity with which his friend, Levison minor, was treated—under a misapprehension, as now appears—at least, as the Head is now convinced. On several occasions, of late, I have seen D'Arcy minor and Manners minor whispering together—sometimes alone, and sometimes with others. This whispering has ceased the moment they saw me. On one occasion Manners minor said, 'Hush! Mr. Selby will hear!' as I came down the corridor. On another occasion I overheard Frayne say, 'Keep it dark till his birthday.' It happens to be my birthday to-morrow, Knox; so there is no doubt as to the person to whom he was alluding."

"It seems pretty clear, sir," said Knox.

"That some conspiracy—I suppose they would call it a rag—is now going on, I am convinced," said Mr. Selby. "I suspect that there is an intention to play some disrespectful trick on the occasion of my birthday; an occasion they would select, Knox, in order to give an additional emphasis to their impertinence."

"Very likely, sir."

"I admit, Knox, that I have been unable to discover anything very definite," said Mr. Selby, compressing his lips. "Whatever this conspiracy is, it is being kept very secret indeed. Probably you may be able to learn what is intended, and the identity of the culprits—"

"I will certainly try, sir!" said Knox, with a gleam in his eyes. "You may rely upon me, sir."

"Very good, Knox!"

Mr. Selby turned to his table, and Knox made a movement to go. There was a sudden exclamation from the Third Form master.

"Upon my word! I left this money here, owing to—to that unfortunate incident! And—and— Bless my soul! Where is the ten-shilling note?"

Mr. Selby jumped up in alarm. The silver was on the table where he had left it. The ten-shilling note had vanished. There was nothing else on the table, excepting the big, heavy inkstand, so evidently the ten-shilling note ought to have been in sight—if it was there. It was not in sight.

"Money—gone, sir!" exclaimed Knox.

"Gone!" said Mr. Selby. "Ten shillings—a ten-shilling note, Knox! It was left here with the silver. I was not out of the study five minutes. Who could—"

"The fag who was tapping at your door, sir, and for whom you mistook me when I came," suggested Knox.

Mr. Selby nodded angrily.

"Quite so—undoubtedly! The wretched boy was lurking about, to play his foolish trick, and he saw the money, and yielded to the temptation. This is terrible, Knox!"

"Terrible indeed, sir!" said Knox, though he was not looking displeased. Somebody was "for it" now, with a vengeance; and there was something gratifying in that, to the bully of the Sixth.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Selby. "This shows to what turpitude, Knox, impertinence and disrespect may lead. The wretched boy has started by impudence to his Form master, and finished by being a thief. What, indeed, was to be expected?"

"I—I suppose you're sure, sir; the note might have blown off the table, with the door open."

"I will look; but I am sure."

Mr. Selby looked round the study, and Knox helped him. But there was no sign of the note. That was really not surprising, considering that it was completely covered by the big inkstand on the table. But naturally neither Mr. Selby nor the prefect thought of looking under the inkstand. Certainly the note could not have blown there.

"There is no doubt," said Mr. Selby, looking greatly disturbed. "This is—very serious. There is a thief in my Form! The matter must be taken in hand at once. You, perhaps, Knox, may be able to find some clue to the wretched boy who has been here, while I speak to Mr. Raiton."

"I will try, sir."

Mr. Selby hastily gathered up the loose cash, and then hurried away to the Housemaster's study, to acquaint Mr. Raiton with this dreadful happening. Knox of the Sixth, after a moment's reflection, started for the Third Form room. It occurred to Knox that, by acting on the instant, he might catch the culprit with some sign of guilt about him, or even actually in possession of the note, or of tuck purchased at the school shop with it. Eager to distinguish himself as a keen and hard-working prefect—which he really was not in the



Tap! As the sound fell upon his ears, Mr. Selby's left hand was on the knob of the door, tearing it open. With his right hand he lashed out of the doorway with his cane. The lash of the cane was answered by a fearful yell. "Yoooooop!" "You young rascal, I have caught you!" thundered Mr. Selby. "Why—what—" Mr. Selby checked a second lash just in time, for it was not a fag of the Third, but Gerald Knox of the Sixth Form! (See page 12.)

very least—Knox trotted away to the Third, and burst into the Form-room in a great hurry.

Wally & Co., startled, stared at Gerald Knox.

But Knox did not even look at the fags. For on Wally's desk, plain to the view, right under his eyes, in fact, was a little stack of money, and in the midst of silver and coppers was a ten-shilling note!

"By gad!" ejaculated Knox. "The whole gang of them are in it!" He strode across to Wally's desk, and grasped the currency note, and held it up. "The stolen note! Which of you young soundrels stole this currency note?"

CHAPTER 6. Not Guilty!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fags did not laugh. They were too utterly astounded to laugh, or to do anything but stare at Knox of the Sixth open-mouthed. The laugh came from the passage, where Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell, were looking in. Apparently they had followed Knox to the Third Form room, where they heard his dramatic denunciation of the Third.

Monty Lowther laughed—in fact, he roared. He could not help it. He had wondered what Mr. Selby would do. But he had never supposed that the note under the inkstand would lead to a charge of theft; and certainly not that Knox, tracking down a non-existent thief, would pounce upon Wally's birthday-fund as stolen property.

It really was too rich; and Monty Lowther yelled, and Manners and Tom Merry yelled, too.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox cast an angry glare downward. "Stop that cackling, there!" he shouted. "This isn't a laughing matter. Someone will be expelled from St. Jim's for this!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Lowther. "Fain me, somebody!"

Knox turned to the amazed fags.

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Oh, yes!" stuttered Wally.

"I have found this ten-shilling note lying on your desk. This is your desk, I think?"

"That's mine."

"Do you claim this currency note as yours?"

"N-n-n-no."

Knox was not slow to note the fag's hesitation. Wally was in official charge of that note, as part of the Selby Birthday Fund; but certainly it was not his and he could lay no claim to it personally.

"It is not yours?" exclaimed Knox.

"N-n-no!"

"Does it belong to any boy in the Third Form?" Knox was quite categorical; he did not want to run the risk of making a mistake in a serious matter like this. Theft was a terribly serious thing, and meant instant expulsion from the school for the guilty party; but a fellow who brought a reckless charge of such gravity would have been booked for a very severe carpeting from the Head. Knox wanted to make absolutely sure—to make assurance doubly sure, as it were. He held up the note and stared round inquiringly and accusingly at the startled fags.

"Answer me, D'Arcy minor!"

"You—you see—" stammered Wally, taken quite aback.

"Give me a direct answer. Does this currency note belong to any boy in the Third Form?"

"No!" answered Wally.

"That's pretty clear," said Knox, with satisfaction. "Not much good telling lies about it, for that matter."

"Do you think I would tell you lies?" asked D'Arcy minor sulphurously.

Knox laughed.

"I fancy so—after stealing a currency note," he answered.

"Stealing it!" yelled Wally.

"Did you take this note from Mr. Selby's study?"

"From Mr. Selby's study?" said Wally dazedly. "No, you ass!"

"Don't be cheeky! Who did take it, then?"

"Nobody took it."

"You may as well make a clean breast of it," said Knox coolly. "You say that the note isn't yours, and does not belong to any boy here. Do you disclaim any knowledge of the note?"

"Of course not. I—"

"Who brought it to this Form-room?"

"I did," growled Wally.

"That settles it! Come with me," said Knox, dropping a heavy hand on Wally's shoulder. "You're wanted, my fine fellow."

"That's our note!" shouted Reggie Manners. "You're not going to bag our ten-bob note, Knox."

"D'Arcy minor states that it does not belong to any boy here," sneered Knox. "It's rather too late to back out of that confession now."

"It doesn't, but—"

"But what—"

Reggie looked at D'Arcy minor.

"Don't tell him!" said Wally.

"Keeping secrets, eh?" grinned Knox. "Well, I dare say Mr. Railton will get at the facts. Anyhow, it's pretty clear. Come along!"

"But—but I tell you—" gasped Wally.

"Come!"

Knox fairly jerked D'Arcy minor out of the Form-room, leaving the fags in a buzz of almost frantic excitement. The Terrible Three, in the passage, made room for the prefect to pass with his prisoner.

"It's all right, Wally!" said Tom Merry reassuringly.

"Don't worry!"

"Right as rain!" said Lowther. "We'll see you through."

Wally snorted as Knox hurried him on, followed by the chums of the Shell.

"I'm not worrying. What rot! But Knox isn't going to bag that ten-shilling note."

The charge of theft was too absurd for D'Arcy minor to dream of taking it seriously. Apparently he was worried by some lurking suspicion that Knox of the Sixth had felonious designs on the currency note which really was doing Knox an injustice.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lowther. "We must see this out, you fellows. I never thought it would be so rich as this. Like a giddy snowball starting an avalanche, you know. Follow on!"

The chums of the Shell chuckled and followed on. Knox arrived in Mr. Selby's study, with the ten-shilling note in one hand and Wally in the other. Mr. Selby had already returned there, accompanied by Mr. Railton. The latter gentleman was looking very disturbed and troubled. Knox walked his prisoner in, and pushed the door shut behind him with his foot; but it met Monty Lowther's toe, and remained ajar. The Terrible Three did not mean to miss the amazing denouement of Monty's little joke with the inkstand.

"What! You have found it, Knox?" exclaimed Mr. Selby, as he spotted the ten-shilling note in the prefect's hand.

"Yes, sir," said Knox complacently. "I lost no time, sir. I found D'Arcy minor in possession of this note, which he admits is not his."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Railton. "I can scarcely credit that D'Arcy minor—in fact—"

"There seems to be no doubt, however," said Mr. Selby sourly. "D'Arcy minor, was it you who gave runaway taps at my study door a short time ago?"

"No, sir."

"In the circumstances, I scarcely expect the truth," said Mr. Selby.

"I've told the truth, sir," said Wally, his eyes glowing. "You believe me, Mr. Railton, don't you?"

"I believe your statement so far, D'Arcy minor," said the Housemaster. "But it seems that Mr. Selby left a ten-shilling note upon his table, and that it is missing. Knox informs us that this currency note was found in your possession."

"That is true, sir."

"You have admitted that it is not yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you admit taking it from my study?" interjected Mr. Selby.

D'Arcy minor's eyes blazed.

"No, I don't! Do you think I should come along and bag your measly money?"

"That is not the way to address your Form master," thundered Mr. Selby.

"I'm not going to be called a thief."

"You impertinent—"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Selby," said the Housemaster, in a voice of authority that could not be gainsaid. "D'Arcy minor's guilt must not be taken for granted, by any means. If you have the number of your missing note, the matter can be decided without further waste of time."

"I do not take the numbers of currency notes—certainly

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not of ten-shilling notes," snapped Mr. Selby. "Nobody ever does, to my knowledge."

"Quite so. Then that will not help us," said the Housemaster. "D'Arcy minor, you state that this note is not yours. How, then, does it come into your present possession?"

"I—I'm in charge of it, sir."

"In charge of someone else's currency note?" said the Housemaster, raising his eyebrows. "Who is the other person, then?"

"You—you see, sir—it—it—doesn't belong to anybody specially," stammered Wally. "I—I'm in charge of it, that's all."

Mr. Selby gave a loud sniff. Knox smiled. Mr. Railton's face became very grave. Certainly D'Arcy minor's statements sounded like the confused utterance of a fellow conscious of guilt, and unable to think of any plausible tale to tell.

"That is a very extraordinary statement, D'Arcy minor," said Mr. Railton, fixing his eyes sternly upon the fag.

"Not—not if you knew how it was, sir," faltered Wally.

"I am waiting for you to tell me."

Wally hesitated. It was easy enough to tell about the fund; but the whole thing would be spoiled. Mr. Selby was not in a mood, at the present moment, to be pleased with the birthday-present wheeze. Wally debated in his mind how much he could tell without giving away the game, as it were.

His silence and hesitation left no doubt in Mr. Selby's mind, or in Knox's.

"Speak!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "If you have any explanation to offer, D'Arcy minor—"

"It—it's a fund, sir," gasped Wally at last.

"A fund?" repeated Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir. We—we've been taking a collection, for—for a special purpose, sir. That note's part of it."

"Hem! And for what purpose, D'Arcy minor, has this—this fund been collected?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

"Mr. Railton, has not this waste of time gone far enough?" exclaimed Mr. Selby. "The boy's guilt is as clear as daylight, and these reckless prevarications add to it."

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Monty Lowther entered. Tom Merry and Manners remained in the doorway.

"Excuse me, sir—" began Lowther.

"You will not be excused!" exclaimed Mr. Selby angrily. "How dare you intrude at this moment! How—"

"One moment, Mr. Selby," said the Housemaster. "Possibly Lowther knows something of this affair. Is that the case, Lowther?"

"Yes, sir," said Monty.

"Kindly tell us what you know at once."

"Certainly, sir. I can tell you that D'Arcy minor came quite honestly by that currency note, sir," said Monty Lowther demurely. "It is not the same note that was left on Mr. Selby's table, sir. I can prove that Mr. Selby's note was not taken by D'Arcy minor, sir, because—"

"Because of what, Lowther?"

"Because it wasn't stolen at all, sir!" said Monty cheerfully.

CHAPTER 7.

Sheer Neck!

MR. RAILTON looked hard at Lowther. The humorist of the Shell met his eyes calmly and steadfastly. Mr. Selby broke out furiously.

"Mr. Railton, am I to listen to this? I have informed you that my currency note is missing! Lowther dares to impugn my statement—"

"Lowther cannot intend to do that, Mr. Selby. We must hear what he has to say," said the Housemaster.

"The note wasn't stolen, sir," said Lowther. "I can prove that it is still in the study."

"It is false!" exclaimed Mr. Selby passionately. "I shall report your insolent words to the Head, Lowther!"

"I assure you, sir, I mean no disrespect," said Lowther meekly. "Only you are mistaken, sir, in thinking the note was taken away."

"Nonsense!"

"If what you state is correct, Lowther," said Mr. Railton, "you can point out where the note is now—at this moment."

"With pleasure, sir!"

Monty Lowther pointed to the inkstand on the table.

"What? What? There is no currency note on the table, Lowther," said Mr. Railton testily.

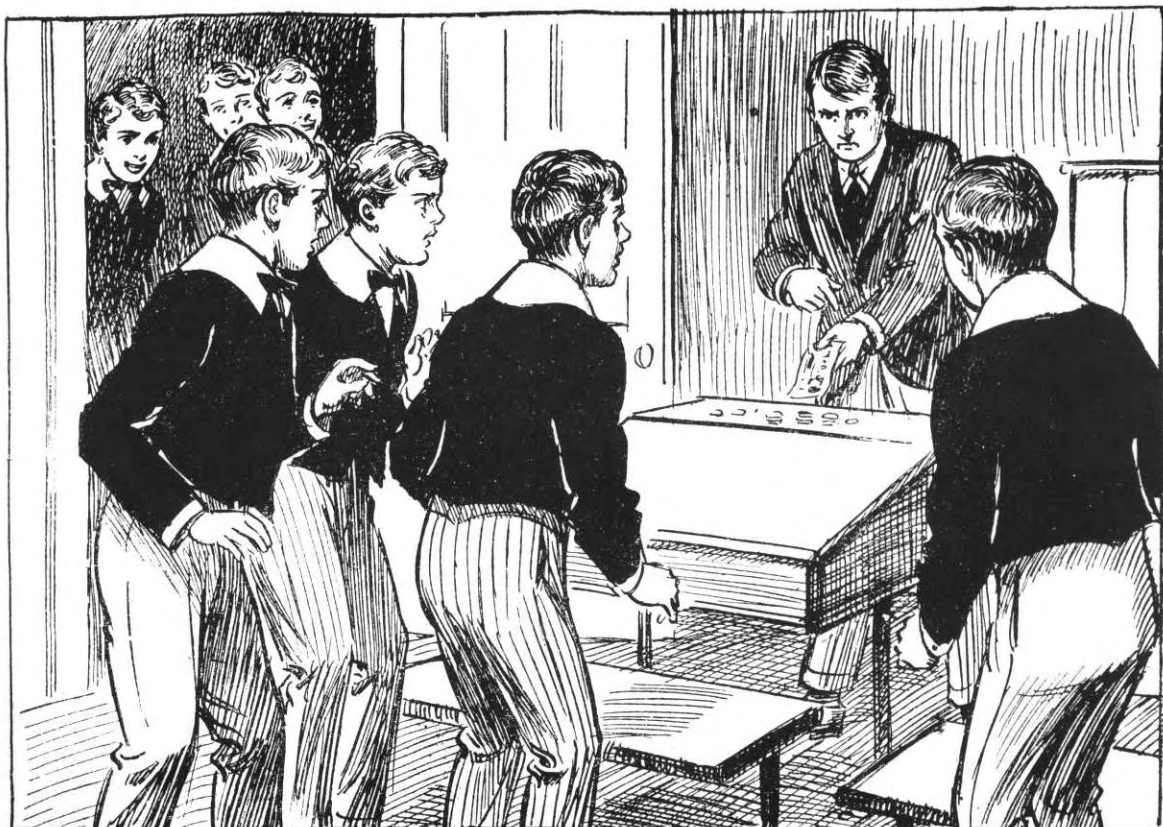
"Under the inkstand, sir."

"Under the—the inkstand?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps you will look."

Mr. Railton, with a dazed expression, lifted the big, heavy inkstand from the table. A ten-shilling note was revealed to view.

"Bless my soul!" stuttered Mr. Selby. Knox of the Sixth turned almost green. He glanced at the note on the table, and he glanced at the note in his own hand. He felt strongly



"By gad!" ejaculated Knox, as his glance fell upon the ten-shilling note which lay in the midst of the little stack of money on the table. "The stolen note! Which of you scoundrels stole this currency note?" "Ha, ha, ha!" The fags did not laugh. They were too astounded to laugh or to do anything but stare. The laugh came from the Terrible Three in the passage. (See page 15.)

inclined to kick himself, and still more strongly inclined to kick Mr. Selby.

"This is—this is most distressing!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "It appears, Mr. Selby, that your currency note is here all the time."

"It—it—it certainly would appear so," stuttered the Third Form master. "I—I—I do not understand it."

"A reckless charge of theft has been made," said the Housemaster. "Knox has made a most serious accusation against an honourable boy. Really, Mr. Selby, if you place a currency note under an inkstand and forget about it afterwards you should reflect before raising a hue and cry."

Mr. Selby wriggled under that rebuke.

"D'Arcy minor is evidently in honourable possession of this other currency note," said the Housemaster. "It is clear that it came into his possession as he states. Knox, you will return D'Arcy minor's property to him."

Knox passed the ten-shilling note silently to the fag. Wally of the Third grinned as he received it.

"Can I go now, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly, D'Arcy minor. I am deeply sorry that you should have been subjected to these unworthy suspicions." Wally of the Third escaped from the study. Mr. Railton fixed his stern eyes on Knox, and that youth hurried to exculpate himself.

"I assure you, sir, I was acting on Mr. Selby's instructions. I could not doubt the facts as stated by Mr. Selby, and as D'Arcy minor could not account for the possession of the note—"

"Quite so, Knox. I excuse you," said Mr. Railton, after a rather long pause. "You have acted hastily, carelessly, making a serious charge without due investigation; but certainly Mr. Selby caused this most unhappy mistake. You may go."

And Knox went—gladly. Monty Lowther would have retreated before this, but Mr. Selby had made him an imperious sign to remain. As the prefect departed Mr. Selby broke out—before the Housemaster could speak again.

"Mr. Railton, you appear to assume that I placed the currency note under the inkstand, and forgot it. I did nothing of the kind. I left it on the table, when I was called away

suddenly. I demand to know how Lowther of the Shell knew where it was."

"If you are sure of what you say, Mr. Selby—"

"I am positive, sir!" snapped the Third Form master. "Do you think, sir, that I should forget where I had placed the note—to such an extent as to believe it stolen? Someone entered my study during my brief absence, and concealed the currency note in order to give me a false impression. And Lowther must know who it was, or he would not have been able to point out the note."

"Is that the case, Lowther?"

"It is the case, sir," said the Shell fellow. "But—but I'd rather not mention the name, sir."

"You saw it done, Lowther?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"You saw someone enter this study and deliberately conceal the note under the inkstand?"

Lowther hesitated. "Well, sir, I was coming away from Monsieur Morny's study with an exercise, and I passed this room, and the door was open—"

"Quite so, quite so. You saw what took place, and you know the name of the boy who played this impertinent trick upon Mr. Selby?"

"Well, sir, I—I—"

"Do you know the name?" rapped out the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir," said Lowther.

"Kindly give it to me at once, then."

"I—I—I'd rather not, sir, if you don't mind. Fellows aren't supposed to sneak, sir," said Lowther.

"Nonsense!" thundered Mr. Selby. "Mr. Railton, is this impertinence to be endured? A shocking mistake has been made—your time and my time has been wasted—all through an insolent trick of some wretched boy with a misdirected sense of humour. Lowther cannot be allowed to withhold his name."

Mr. Railton knitted his brows. "I understand your scruples, Lowther," he said. "But I must insist upon your giving the name, in the circumstances. I cannot excuse you. The matter is too serious to be passed over."

Tom Merry and Manners, from the passage, gazed at Monty Lowther in silence. To "see Wally through" Lowther had

been forced to speak out—and how he was going to save himself, after saving Wally, was a puzzle. It really looked as if the humorist of the Shell was booked for a record licking. But Monty was quite cool. Indeed, with the eye that was nearest the door, he bestowed a wink upon his chums.

"You hear me, Lowther?" said Mr. Railton. "I insist upon knowing the facts. What the boys call 'sneaking' does not apply in this case, as you are acting under your House-master's orders. The name—at once!"

"The name!" rapped out Mr. Selby.

"Well, if you insist, sir—" said Lowther reluctantly.

"I do insist, Lowther."

"Well, sir, if I tell you the name, shall I be held blameless?" asked Lowther, hesitating.

"I have already said so."

"I—I mean, Mr. Selby looks so angry, sir," faltered Lowther—a most artistic falter, worthy of the best traditions of the junior dramatic society. "I—I don't think, sir, that I ought to be punished, if I give the fellow's name, sir, as you ask me."

"Certainly you will not be punished, Lowther. You need have no uneasiness. There is no reason to punish you. You are not held to blame because of what you saw."

"Oh, good, sir!" said Lowther. "Does Mr. Selby say the same, sir?"

"Certainly!" snapped Mr. Selby. "There is nothing for you to be afraid of, Lowther. Dismiss these childish fears. You have simply to give the name of the offender, that is all."

"Thank you, sir," said Lowther.

"We have wasted enough time," said Mr. Railton, frowning. "Give me the name at once, Lowther."

"Mine, sir."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Mine."

"Yours?" said Mr. Railton dazedly.

"Yes, sir!" said Monty Lowther meekly. "It's my name you want, sir. It was I who placed the currency note under the inkstand."

"You!" thundered Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir, please, sir!"

"Upon my word! This insolence passes all bounds!" exclaimed the Third Form master. "The boy has been deliberately wasting our time, Mr. Railton, and laughing in his sleeve—leading us to suppose that he saw another person play that wicked trick—"

"I never said it was another person, sir," said Lowther. "I only said I knew the fellow's name. So I do, sir. I've given it. C-c-can I go now, sir?"

"Go!" repeated Mr. Railton. "Not until I have administered a very severe punishment for the foolish trick you played upon Mr. Selby, and for bandying words with your Housemaster."

"Punishment, sir?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Certainly! Mr. Selby, will you lend me your cane? Hold out your hands, Lowther!"

"But—but you said I wasn't to be punished, sir!"

"What!"

"I call Mr. Selby to witness, sir. You promised that I should not be punished if I gave you the fellow's name."

Mr. Railton lowered the cane, gazing at Lowther as if spell-bound. Mr. Selby gasped for breath. The colossal nerve of the humorist of the Shell seemed to have "winded" them for the moment.

"Lowther!" gasped Mr. Railton at last. "When—when I—I said that you should not be punished I—I was unaware that it was your own name that you were going to give me."

"Oh, yes, sir, I know!" said Lowther innocently. "That's why I made you and Mr. Selby promise first, sir."

Mr. Railton gazed at him. Lowther's face was innocence itself—as innocent as a baby's. He was, so to speak, cooing the Housemaster as gently as a dove.

"Boy!" stuttered Mr. Railton at last. He lowered the cane—much to Monty Lowther's relief. Monty had hoped for the best, but he really had not felt at all sure how this "bluff" would work out. Apparently it was going to work out satisfactorily.

"Yes, sir," said Lowther. "May I go now, sir?"

"I gave you that assurance, Lowther, under a misapprehension—"

"Yes, sir. I knew you were incapable of breaking your word, sir," said Monty Lowther respectfully.

Mr. Railton breathed hard.

"I hardly know, Lowther, whether you are a fool—an utter fool!—or the most impertinent young rascal at St. Jim's."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Lowther deprecatingly.

"But a promise must be kept." Mr. Railton laid down the cane. "You may go, Lowther."

"Thank you, sir!" said Monty demurely.

He faded through the doorway and joined his chums. The Terrible Three lost no time in getting away from the spot. They did not even stop to take breath, or to emit a single chortle, till they were safe in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

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Then they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther wept.

"What you want at school," he gasped, "is neck—genuine neck! Old Railton is a brick, though. Selby would have scalped me, promise or no promise, if Railton hadn't been there! Railton's the real goods—a genuine white man, old Railton—even when you pull his leg! Did you fellows see Selby's face?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Baffled tigers weren't in it with Selby! Hungry lions bawled of their prey were smiling cherubs beside him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Manners.

"Oh dear!" gasped Lowther, weeping tears of joy. "Oh dear! Fan me, somebody! Selby's face will haunt me for months and months and months! It will cheer me when I'm down, it will buck me when I get that tired feeling! Did you spot his merry glance when I cleared? Oh dear!"

And Monty Lowther collapsed on the hearthrug in helpless mirth.

CHAPTER 8.

Stunning!

THE Third Form of St. Jim's did not enjoy lessons the following morning.

Mr. Selby never was a patient or a gentle master. But on this special morning he was more of a Tartar than ever. In fact, Tartar was an inadequate description; he was a Hun, a Prussian Hun. The outlook was really black for Wally's wonderful wheeze. It was Mr. Selby's birthday; but obviously he was not in a birthday mood.

Many things had combined to exasperate Mr. Selby. Lowther's jape and escape from punishment naturally irritated him. The ridiculous affair of the ten-shilling note which had been missing—or, rather, which had not been missing—angered him intensely. And Knox of the Sixth—his faithful henchman—had practically gone on strike. Knox had made a complete ass of himself in the affair of the missing note, and he was fed up—which was not surprising. Knox was anxious to have nothing to do with the Third, and nothing to do with Mr. Selby if he could help it—for the time being, at least.

Left without the aid of the irritated prefect, Mr. Selby felt at a loss to deal with the suspected conspiracy in his Form. He had relied on the spying Knox to "nose" out the facts for him.

That there was a conspiracy Mr. Selby was certain.

Wally & Co. were really not good at keeping secrets; and it was only too plain that something was "on" in the Third. Something disrespectful, some impertinent prank, some rascally trick to take place on his birthday—that was Mr. Selby's suspicion.

Had he guessed the actual nature of that "conspiracy," it is difficult to say what Mr. Selby's reflections would have been. But he was about the last man in the world to guess such a thing. That his Form were conspiring to make him a birthday present, with a flattering speech thrown in, was not likely to occur to his suspicious mind.

So that morning Mr. Selby, in class, was a Hun of the most Hunnish brand, and the Third Form suffered accordingly.

Glad were Wally & Co. when they were dismissed.

As it was a half-holiday that day they were safe from Mr. Selby until evening preparation—for which relief they were duly thankful.

Probably Mr. Selby was glad to have done with them; assuredly they were delighted to have done with him.

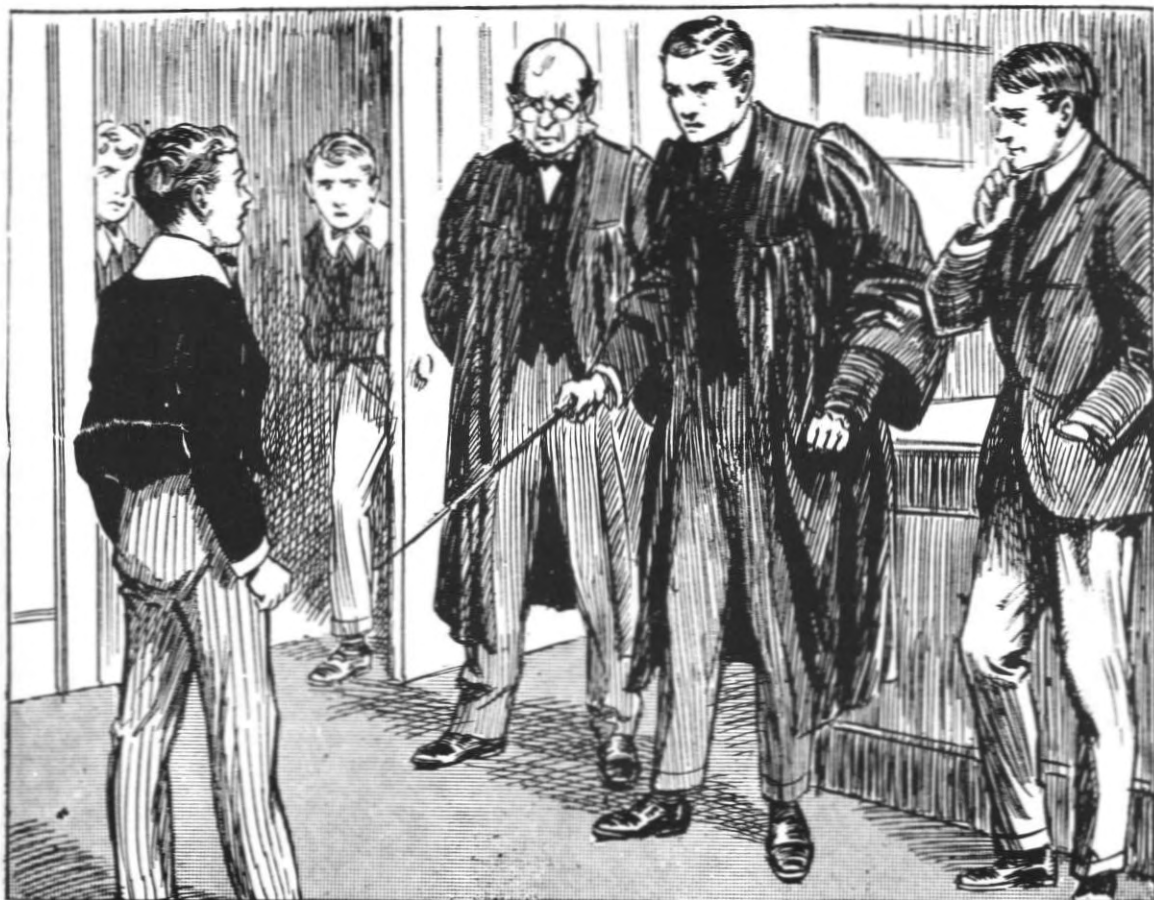
But at dinner their Form master eyed the fags sourly. He was certain of the existence of that conspiracy; but he had been able to "nose" out nothing so far. He was prepared to hand out condign punishment on all sides; but there had to be something done first—even Mr. Selby could not "run amuck" like a wild Malay.

After dinner, as he was keeping a watchful eye open, he had plenty of proof of the existence of the conspiracy, though no hint of its nature. For a crowd of the Third trooped away into the quad, where they grouped in a secluded spot under the old elms and entered into animated discussion.

Mr. Selby eyed them from a distance; but it was impossible for the Third Form master to hear what they were saying, or to approach them with the object of overhearing. He stalked away to his study in a bitter and suspicious mood.

Little did he dream of what the fags actually were discussing! The topic was Mr. Selby's birthday present. Further arithmetical calculations had fixed the amount of the fund at thirty-five shillings—a large and handsome sum, in the opinion of the Third Form fags. There was no doubt that it would purchase a handsome present, with which Mr. Selby was sure to be pleased. But the nature of the present was a matter that required earnest consideration.

Frayne said that they could get a wireless set for thirty-five shillings. But it was agreed that Mr. Selby wasn't likely to be interested in wireless. Besides, it was quite



"I call Mr. Selby to witness, sir—you promised that I should not be punished if I gave you the name of the fellow who played that joke on Mr. Selby." Mr. Railton lowered his cane, gazing at Lowther as if spellbound. "Lowther!" he gasped at last. "When—when I—I said that you should not be punished I—I was unaware that it was your own name that you were going to give me." (See page 18.)

certain that he would be too mean to pay for the licence. A fellow had to have some intelligence to be interested in wireless, as Wally sapiently remarked, and it was not to be expected of a Form master.

Reggie Manners suggested a gold watch. Hobbs inquired what sort of a gold watch they could get for thirty-five bob. To which Reggie tersely rejoined "rolled gold."

"Not good enough!" said Wally.

"What rot!" retorted Manners minor scornfully. "I suppose anything is good enough for Selby."

"Fathead! Not on an occasion like this. I was thinking of a box of cigars."

"I say"—Trimble of the Fourth had been leaning against an elm, giving a fat ear to the discussion—"I'll give you chaps a tip what to get, if you like."

Baggy Trimble had been betraying deep interest in Wally & Co. ever since Wally's visit to his study in search of subscriptions. The cash collection had a fascinating effect on Baggy.

His kind offer was received with a chorus of snorts and grunts of disdain from the Third.

"Go and eat coke!" said Manners minor.

"We don't want advice from the Fourth!" snapped Wally.

"What's that fat boulder doing here, anyhow?" demanded Jameson. "Roll him away!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Trimble eagerly. "I can tell you a really topping wheeze, if you like. I'm advising you as a friend."

"B-b-b-r!" said Reggie contemptuously.

"Oh, let him speak!" said Wally tolerantly. "He's a fat fool—ain't you, Trimble?—but he might have a wheeze. Get it out, Fatty!"

"What about a cake?" asked Trimble.

"A—a cake?"

"That's it! Birthday-cake, you know; people have cakes on their birthdays!"

"As if a man of Selby's age would care for a cake!" snorted Jameson. "I don't suppose he could digest cake."

"All the better for you chaps," said Trimble. "Look here,

you know. It's the compliment of the thing that will please Mr. Selby. He will feel flattered, pleased, and all that. It's not the value or use of the present—it's the present itself, the spirit of the thing. Showing respect, and kind regards, and all that."

"That's so," agreed Wally. "But—"

"And as he can't eat the cake himself," continued Trimble, "He's bound to ask you fellows to eat it."

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"You see," said Trimble, having by this time secured the respectful attention of the fags, "the gift will make Selby kind and pleased and benevolent, and all that. Finding that the present is a birthday-cake, he will have to get rid of it somehow, and, being in a good temper, he is certain to ask you chaps to join him in disposing of it. Practically, it will be standing yourselves a birthday-cake, and at the same time making Mr. Selby a present and pleasing him. See?"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, much impressed.

He looked round at his comrades. There was a general nodding of heads among the Third.

Trimble's suggestion struck the Third Form as being inspired by real genius.

They had never thought of this. How a fat duffer like Trimble had thought of it was a mystery; but, then, Trimble's intellect was, naturally, stirred by the mere idea of a cake.

The wheeze was really a stroke of genius. The present would be made, the whole hoped-for effect would be produced, the master of the Third would be pleased and gratified by his Form's respectful recognition of his birthday. And it was absolutely certain that the Third would be asked to join in disposing of the cake—there could be scarcely any doubt on that subject.

Smiling faces surrounded Baggy Trimble. Obviously, his valuable suggestion had taken the Third by storm.

"Well, I must say that's a good stunt!" said Reggie Manners. "Dash it all, I'll keep a slice of the cake for you, Trimble, when it's handed round. You deserve it."

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"You can get a tremendous cake for thirty-five bob," said Trimble, his eyes glistening. "A really huge cake, with iced top, you know, and marzipan, and good stuff in it. If you like, I'll take the money and go over to Wayland and fetch it for you."

"I don't think!" grinned Wally.

"Well, I've seen them at Blankley's marked thirty-two-and-six," said Baggy. "For the other half-crown you can get a nice box to put it in, and a ribbon to tie it up, you know."

"Good!"

"Topping!"

"Come on, you chaps!" said Wally. "We'll go over to Wayland and get that cake. It's a stunning idea. Couldn't be better! We'll keep some for you if it's handed round, Trimble—and it's practically certain to be. Come on, you fellows!"

"When are you handing it to Selby?" asked Trimble.

"In the Form-room, before we begin prep," explained Wally. "We shall see him there then. I've made up my speech. A few well-chosen words, you know, and then we hand over the present. Come on, you fellows!"

A dozen of the Third streamed out of the gates with D'Arcy minor. Baggy Trimble blinked after them very thoughtfully. Then he grinned. Great thoughts were stirring in the podgy mind of Baggy Trimble.

Tom Merry & Co. were at cricket that afternoon; but Baggy Trimble did not worry about cricket. Baggy loafed about the passage near the Third Form room.

He was there when Wally & Co. came back.

With great care and considerable secrecy the fags bore a cardboard box, carefully wrapped in brown paper, into the Form-room. Nearly all the Third gathered round to see it opened. Trimble peered in from the doorway.

The brown paper was removed, and a handsome cardboard box, decorated with red ribbons, was revealed.

"Let's look at it, you know!" said Hobbs breathlessly.

"Don't you begin picking at the plums, young Hobbs!" said Wally warningly.

"Look here—"

Wally removed the lid of the box. There was a general chorus of admiration as the cake was revealed.

It was an enormous birthday-cake. The top was solid marzipan, with the inscription "MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY!"

The fags stared at it hungrily.

"I—I say," murmured Jameson. "Suppose we—we—"

Jameson broke off without finishing his suggestion, as he met Wally's stern eye.

The box was closed again, and the ribbons re-tied. Then the cardboard box was placed in Wally's locker for safety.

It was to repose there till the hour of evening prep, when all the Third would be assembled in the presence of their Form master, and the great presentation was to be made.

Duty done, Wally & Co. gave their attention to cricket practice, and the Form-room was deserted.

It was not, however, deserted for long.

A fat face peered in cautiously soon afterwards. Baggy Trimble, seeing that the Form-room was empty, stepped in, with a canvas bag in his hand.

His round eyes were gleaming, his fat hands trembled with eagerness. He sprinted across to Wally's locker.

The locker was open in a moment, and Baggy, quivering with mingled nervousness and joy, lifted out the cake. Eager as he was, he did not venture to begin on it. The possibility that some fag might stray into the room haunted him. Swiftly, efficiently, Baggy lifted the cake out of the cardboard box, and dropped it into a bag.

He did not leave the box empty.

It was possible that Wally might go to the his locker again before prep, and if he moved the box, the loss of weight would betray the loss of the cake instantly. Trimble was prepared for that. From his bag he took some old newspapers and a brick. Trimble had come prepared. He wrapped the brick in the newspapers, deposited the bundle in the cardboard box, replaced the lid, and carefully tied the handsome ribbons.

Then, with his plunder in his bag, Baggy Trimble beat a hasty retreat from the Third Form room.

Two minutes later he was in the top box-room, with a gigantic cake on his knees, his fat jaws working as if by machinery, and a smile of beatific happiness on his face.

CHAPTER 9.

Not According to Programme!

TOM MERRY tapped Wally of the Third on the shoulder as he came in after cricket.

"How's the giddy birthday celebration going, young 'un?" asked Tom, with a smile.

"All serene," answered Wally cheerfully. "The jolly old presentation is coming off at prep. We've got the present all right."

"What are you giving Selby—a new set of canes?" asked Monty Lowther.

Wally grinned.

"You'd never guess!" he said.

"I trust it is somethin' appropwiate, Wally," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You bet! What price a birthday cake?" said Wally.

"Bai Jove! Does Mr. Selby care for cake?"

"I don't suppose so," chuckled Wally. "But the compliment of the thing is just the same, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"And he's bound to whack the cake out among the Third. Killing two birds with one stone. See?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally strolled away to the Third Form room in a happy and contented frame of mind. Tom Merry chuckled.

"Deep little beggar!" he remarked.

"Bai Jove! I weally cannot help thinkin' that this is wathah sharp practice, you know," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head. "Weally, it amounts to pullin' Mr. Selby's leg, you know."

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Cave!" murmured Blake. "Here comes Selby! Looks in a happy birthday temper. doesn't he?"

Tom Merry & Co. suppressed their smiles, as Mr. Selby whisked by on his way to the Third Form room. Certainly Mr. Selby did not look in a happy temper. He was frowning, and his thin lips were compressed. He did not look as if the Third were going to enjoy prep that evening.

Mr. Selby was more exasperated than ever, as a matter of fact. Sharp gentleman as he was, he had been utterly unable to get on the track of the supposed "conspiracy" in the Third.

That annoyed him. There were fellows deserving of punishment—fairly asking for punishment—and Mr. Selby had no pretext for administering punishment. It was an annoying state of affairs.

All the Third were in their places when Mr. Selby rustled into the Form-room, and went to his desk.

Wally of the Third drew a deep breath.

The hour had come!

Mr. Selby's expression was not encouraging. But surely that expression would change when he learned that his Form had combined to do him honour. Even Mr. Selby could not be proof against a kind attention like that.

Wally, taking his courage in both hands as it were, stepped out before the Form.

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"Mr. Selby! Sir!"
The Third Form master fixed an icy eye upon him.
"What is it, D'Arcy minor?"
"If—if you please, sir—" stammered Wally.
"Do not waste time, D'Arcy minor. If you have anything to say to me, say it."
Wally coughed.
"To-day, sir, being your birthday—" "
"What?" Mr. Selby's eyes glittered. Was it coming at last—the outcome of that long-suspected conspiracy?
"Your birthday, sir—" faltered Wally.
"How does that concern you, D'Arcy minor?"
"I—I—we—that is—you know, sir—the Third Form—think—we think—I mean, we think—that it being your birthday, sir, we thought—we all say, sir, many happy returns of the day, sir!" gasped Wally, greatly disconcerted by Mr. Selby's glare.
"Oh!" said Mr. Selby.
The whole Third rose, and shouted, acting on Wally's earlier instructions:
"Many happy returns, sir!"
"Hurrah!"
Mr. Selby stared at his Form, suspecting a rag. But his severe face relaxed a little.
He was unaccustomed to being gracious; but he realised that this was a time for a little graciousness.
"Thank you!" he articulated.
Wally felt encouraged.
"It being your birthday, sir, I—we—the Third Form, sir, have clubbed together to make you a little present sir, as a sign of our—our—our—"
"Esteem!" said Reggie Manners, in a thrilling whisper.
"Of our esteem, sir, and—respect."
"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Selby, so taken aback at this unexpected development, that he scarcely knew what to say. Was this the "conspiracy"?
Wally, in great spirits now, crossed to his locker, and lifted out the cardboard box, nicely tied with ribbons. Mr. Selby watched him like a man in a dream, as he carried the box across the Form-room, and placed it on the master's desk.
"There, sir—" said Wally.
"Bless my soul!"
"Our little gift, sir," said Wally modestly. "We—we weren't quite sure what you'd like, sir, but we've done our

best. We—we hope you'll like it. With—with our kind regards, sir."
Mechanically, Mr. Selby opened the box.
The Third Form watched him breathlessly.
The Form master started a little at the sight of the newspaper-wrapped bundle inside. He lifted it out.
Wally jumped.
He had left in that box a beautiful, huge cake, wrapped in tissue-paper. He was astounded to see the newspaper bundle.
The Third-Formers stared.
Mr. Selby unrolled the newspaper wrappings. Newspaper after newspaper was unrolled and laid aside, the Form master's expression growing more and more puzzled and perplexed. Horror and dismay fell upon Wally and the Third! What had happened to the birthday cake they could not guess; but only too obviously something had happened.
The last newspaper was unrolled, and Mr. Selby lifted out the final contents of the parcel—a brick!
He held up the brick.
The expression on his face was extraordinary. The Third-Formers stared, spellbound.
Wally wondered whether he was dreaming; whether this was some fearful nightmare. But it wasn't! It was dreadfully real.
There was a full minute of silence in the Form-room—a minute that seemed an age. Then Mr. Selby spoke.
"So this—this—this—" He almost choked. "This—this—" He hurled the brick to the floor, and Wally jumped. "I was aware—fully aware—that some conspiracy was proceeding in this Form: I was only too well aware of it! I was fully aware that members of my Form were combining to play some disrespectful, wicked prank on my birthday—fully aware of it! I should have hesitated to believe that you—that you would have dared to carry insolence and disrespect to this length. Without the evidence of my own eyes, I could not have believed it. Now I know—" He choked again.
"Oh, sir!" gasped Wally. "I—we—that is—" "
"Silence!" thundered Mr. Selby.
He picked up his cane. His eyes gleamed; his face was crimson with just wrath.
"For this offence—"

(Continued on page 27.)

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ANOTHER SPLENDID STORY OF THE WILD WEST!



SPORTSMEN'S LUCK!

by
GORDON WALLACE.

Rather exceptional is the luck which comes the way of the Six Stalwart Chums of Thunder Creek, in the adventurous Wild West.

CHAPTER 1. A Scare!

JIM RAVEN tore a turf up from the river-bank, and hurled it with force and precision at the head of the swimmer, who was cavorting about, fifty yards away from shore. The clod caught Pat O'Hara neatly on the back of the neck; and O'Hara sank with a gurgling yell.

When he came to the surface he trod water, and, turning his face to Jim, the leader of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek, he shook a fist.

"Bedad!" he said, spitting. "Can't ye let an energetic Sportsman train in peace and quietness, and me wanting to bate Banks in the swimming-match to-morrow?"

"That's why I threw the clod," said Jim, tearing up another, which he balanced in his hand. "You're in there to train for a last burst—not to play the mudlark! So swim, you mad Irishman—swim!"

"Faith," said O'Hara, who was the swimming member of that devoted little band of Sportsmen, though he was good at most manly sports, it is true—"faith, I'm sick of straightforward swimming, and why shouldn't I try some fancy tricks, and I being the only Sportsman that's worth two cents in the water? I'm after telling ye that I'll not be dictated to by—Ouch!"

The second clod caught him full in the face, and again he sank with a gurgling yell.

Undoubtedly, Jim Raven was a strict trainer, and the other four Sportsmen, assembled there on the bank of Rolling River, approved of Jim's drastic methods. For it was a fact that Pat O'Hara seemed unable to take anything seriously; not even his training. He was there in the water getting ready to meet the all-round sportsman, Banks, who had come up here with the avowed intention of showing the men working at Knapp's Bridge camp exactly what sport was. There was a bet in it somewhere, the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek understood; and, in order to tempt the bridge gangsters to compete with him, Banks—a decent fellow and quite a gentleman—had arranged for substantial prizes to be competed for.

Already Banks had met Jim Raven in the ring, and had found there were some people up here at Knapp's who knew as much about sport as he did. But the next sporting event was to be a grand swimming-match, and Pat O'Hara, the swimmer of the Sportsmen, had entered for it.

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But the other Sportsmen did not approve of Pat's antics in the water, when he was supposed to be training himself for hard, go-ahead swimming. This morning's event was going to be a race, not an exhibition of fancy aquatics. Hence the clods Jim Raven threw so correctively at the Irishman.

O'Hara was a long time coming to the surface, they noticed, after his second disappearance beneath the waters. Indeed, though they all knew he was like a seal in the water, some of them began to get a bit anxious for their comrade.

"Playing the goat again, of course!" growled Jim Raven. "That's just like Pat! He never can take anything seriously. If he's going to do something he changes his mind in the middle of it, and starts to do something else. Here he's supposing to be swimming—and he's suddenly started diving."

He watched the water anxiously. Soon he was peeling off his coat, as were the others.

"Been under a minute now," said Digger Harrison, the Australian Sportsman, beginning to kick off his boots.

"More than that," said Smiler Dickinson, the only born Canadian in the bunch. "Hope he hasn't got fouled down there. There's so much rubbish gets dumped into the river these days, from the bridge, that—"

Jim Raven, bootless and coatless now, raised his hands, and dived neatly into the flood.

The Rolling River was fairly swift-flowing here, which was a spot about a mile below Sam Knapp's bridge. Jim was not a wonderful swimmer, but he was a useful man in the water; so were all the others. And they dived in almost as soon as Jim.

"Hallo, boys!"

Even as Jim Raven was preparing to dive in search of his friend, Pat O'Hara's head reappeared above the surface, quite close to the anxious Sportsmen. He was grinning a little.

Disgust seized his comrades. They had been scared; they had got themselves wet through, and their dive in had been for nothing—just because Pat O'Hara had been playing the goat.

"Oh, all right, old stick!" growled Jim, and swam strongly for O'Hara, who read in Jim's eyes what his feelings were, and dived again.

Jim gave a yell and a gurgle as he felt a leg seized and was drawn under. Then he felt O'Hara crawling over him, and the graceless Irishman, astraddle of him, kept him down there till Jim began almost to choke. Then he rolled clear,

and, gasping, Jim came to the surface again, to see the grinning face of O'Hara twenty feet away from him.

"After him, and souse him well!" Jim ordered.

With a yell, all the Sportsmen set off in chase of O'Hara, who then decided to do some straightforward swimming.

An interesting water-chase followed, but O'Hara had them all outclassed, not to mention the fact that he was attired only in a bathing-suit, whilst his comrades were all quite half-dressed.

Tantalisingly, O'Hara kept just ahead of them, swimming upstream, until, after a quarter of a mile of it, the Sportsmen began to flag, to string out, and at length, to swim shorewards.

Jim Raven was the last of the pursuers to make for dry land. Treading water, O'Hara watched them, jeering rudely at their failure to catch him. The others had to walk back that quarter-mile to find their coats and boots.

When they reached the spot they found somebody mounting guard over their possessions.

Corporal Nevin, of the Mounted Police, was there, smiling and debonair as ever. They had not seen the corporal for over a week, and, in their pleasure at seeing him now, they forgot their wrath towards O'Hara, and eagerly waited for news of the world outside Knapp's bridge-building camp.

CHAPTER 2.

The Mysterious Stranger!

"IS O'Hara going to win to-morrow's swim?" asked Nevin. "Or will he decide to start high-diving, or something just at the most critical part of the race?"

"He might not start anything," grumbled Jim Raven. "Not until the race is finished will we believe Pat'll try to win it. And yet the fifty-dollar prize Banks' people offer will come in useful—for Syd."

"Fine little feller, Syd!" said Pete Craddock, the Yankee Sportsman. "Hope Pat does win the fifty—it'll keep the kid a week or two!"

It was rather odd to see the quite tender light that came to the faces of these irresponsible youngsters, who had voluntarily taken on the guardianship of an alleged stack-burner's little boy, and who now were constantly on the look-out to get money wherewith to pay for his keep and education. But, careless though they were in most matters—

particularly in money matters—they felt this responsibility they had taken upon themselves, for their friend Jack Patterson's sake, keenly. Any chance they saw to make a few dollars they eagerly jumped at.

"I think Pat'll win the race all right," said Nevin.

Just then O'Hara came swimming downstream at a wonderful pace, even though he was coming with the current. He used a powerful trudgeon stroke that made him cleave through the water like a torpedo, leaving scarcely a wake behind him, yet not appearing to put out much effort. His movements were the absolute poetry of motion, and all his comrades had to stop talking and watch him. They cheered O'Hara, who at length came ashore, and began to stroke water from himself.

"Will that satisfy ye, ye tyrant?" O'Hara demanded.

"What did you dive so long for?" asked Jim sternly. "We got the wind-up about you—though you're not worth it!"

"Just a passing fancy, bedad! I had nothing else to do," the Irish Sportsman grinned. "I got to the bottom—fifteen feet it is to the bottom there."

"Good diving!" said Nevin. He was looking out across the river now, and his gaze was intent. For almost a minute he gazed at a certain spot. Then he touched Jim Raven on the arm, and

pointed. For a moment Jim could see nothing but the quickly flowing water.

"Something bobbing there, eh?" he asked at length. "A chunk of wood, I should say."

"That's right," said Nevin. "But—well, I've been watching it for over a minute now, and it hasn't moved a foot downstream."

They all stared out at what looked to be nothing more than a fair-sized block of fairly new wood which was bobbing on the sunlit water, but, as Nevin said, was not going down with the stream. Had the corporal not pointed it out to them, they would not have seen anything extraordinary about this; though there was, undoubtedly, when they came to think of it. Thinking, anyway, was not the forte of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek.

"And small wonder at that," said O'Hara suddenly—"seein' that that block's connected with a cord that goes down to the bottom of the river! It was that what caught my leg, and I was curious. I followed it down to the bottom."

"And what did you find at the bottom?" asked Nevin quietly.

"Just a box, that the cord was tied to," said O'Hara. "A biggish box that was heavy. I tried to raise it; but I couldn't shift it. There's sand at the bottom of the river. It's the sort of

box that might have held cans of groceries for our cooks."

"Is there a boat or a canoe handy?" asked Nevin.

There was, as a matter of fact. Half a mile further upstream was a shack in which lived a half-breed who spent most of his time in the summer catching fish in the river, which fish he sold to Knapp's cooks. This man had a canoe.

"Then we'll borrow it," said Nevin.

"But what's the idea of a cord connecting a block of wood to a large box?" asked Jim Raven. "Somebody been playing some game?"

Nevin said nothing at that. He mounted his horse and rode upstream, leaving the Sportsmen where they were.

O'Hara dived into the river again, and swam out to the block, which he seized in his hands and held aloft. His chums ashore saw a length of cord come out of the water.

O'Hara dived again, and was even longer under water this time. But now the Sportsmen were not anxious about him. They waited on dry land, and watched the bobbing block curiously. Then O'Hara reappeared, empty-handed, and swam back to his pals.

"It's a fact," he said. "It's a box that's been very carefully nailed up, and must be heavily weighted, bedad. I couldn't shift it, though I tried again. Hallo! And who may you be?" O'Hara broke off suddenly as a man appeared



As the half-breed whipped out his knife, Jim Raven's left shot out and caught the man right between the eyes. With a yell he fell backwards into the river to disappear in a swirl of disturbed waters.

from a clump of bushes that grew near the river, less than twenty yards from where the Sportsmen were standing.

He was a stranger, so far as Jim Raven and his merry band were concerned. The Sportsmen thought they knew the faces of all the men employed at Knapp's camp by this time, having been working up in the Rolling River country for some weeks now. He was not one of Knapp's men, nor was he one of the few inhabitants of this isolated region. The Sportsmen knew everybody worth knowing for many miles around them.

He was a half-breed, at least. His face was dark almost as an Indian's. He had had smallpox once, and his face was deeply pitted with the marks now. His eyes seemed shifty, and just now he did not seem any too pleased with Jim Raven and his comrades. His lips were drawn back from his teeth in a nasty manner.

"What you want round here?" he demanded. "You swim, and you make plenty noise, begar! Beat it!"

The Sportsmen did not like his tone at all, and they showed they did not at once.

"Clear out!" said Jim Raven suddenly, and made a threatening gesture towards the half-breed.

The man took a step backwards, putting a hand behind him as he did so. At once Jim Raven was on his guard. Up amongst wild men that gesture is even nowadays commoner than is supposed. It generally means a man is feeling for a weapon.

Jim stepped up to the fellow, and even as the breed whipped out a knife he struck the man with all his force right between the eyes. The man yelled with surprise and the shock of the blow. Jim hit him again, and the man fell backwards. It was unfortunate for him, perhaps, that he had been so close to the water's edge at the moment; for he slipped right into the river, and disappeared in a swirl of disturbed waters.

"I'll show these knifing blighters!" growled Jim. "Nasty bit o' work, that gink!" He watched while the breed came to the surface, still gripping his knife. He was ready for the man to come ashore and renew his attack. Indeed, perhaps he rather wished the man would come again. For Jim felt as though he hadn't given him half enough to go on with. Jim, like the other Sportsmen, hated knifing tactics.

"Shall I go in and fetch the darlint out?" asked Pat O'Hara, as the man trod water and glared at them, but showed no inclination to land again.

"Wouldn't if I were you," said Jim. "I don't like that knife of his at all. What on earth did you pull it on me for, stranger?"

"Begar! I not pull it on you to keel you!" said the breed. "Even though you buft in on othaire people's business—yes!"

Then he turned suddenly and showed exactly the kind of swimmer he was; for he trudged through the water at a pace that made even O'Hara mutter admiringly, and swam straight for the floating and anchored block of wood.

When he had reached that—the Sportsmen watched him curiously—he seemed to tread water again, and his knife flashed. Then he went on swimming towards the farther bank.

CHAPTER 3. Under Fire!

JIM RAVEN gave out an exclamation and pointed to the river.
"Book at the block now!" he said.

The others did so. The block was now [THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 797.

floating merrily downstream as quickly as the current flowed.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Jim. "The gink's cut it loose!"

"Then it's back he's coming to explain himself!" said O'Hara, diving in and pursuing the man, who, however, had a good fifty yards' start—and maintained it.

He had landed before O'Hara could reach the opposite bank. And, ashore, he turned and faced the Irishman, knife in hand.

"Don't land; he'll get you before you can!" Jim Raven roared through cupped hands. "Pat, don't be a fool, man!"

Pat was not a fool, obviously. He, too, realised that if he attempted to reach land that knife would no doubt reach him long before he could defend himself. He turned and swam the two hundred yards that stretched between him and his chums. Those, with Jim Raven, saw the breed walk straight away from the river and vanish in amongst the trees.

"Well, that beats four of a kind!" Jim Raven said. "Looks to me to be something like a mystery here, boys!"

O'Hara landed once again and peeled off his bathing-costume. Though it was evening, the sun was still powerful, and he basked in it, drying himself, while the Sportsmen discussed this certainly extraordinary affair.

Before Pat was dressed a canoe came swinging downstream, paddled energetically by Corporal Nevin, who waved his paddle as soon as he saw his Sportsmen friends.

When opposite them the corporal backed-watered and began to paddle around a certain area of the water.

"What's happened to that block?" he called to the Sportsmen. "Been monkeying with it, boys?"

"No; it's been cut adrift," said Jim. "Come ashore, corporal, and we'll tell you all about it."

Nevin paddled ashore. Now his handsome face was considerably puzzled in its expression. He ran the canoe into the bank and stepped out of it.

They told him of their adventure. They described the appearance of the half-breed.

He listened to them and frowned.

"Something seems to tell me," he said at length, "that this mysterious stranger didn't draw the knife with any idea of knifing you, Jim. But he certainly did cut that block adrift with a reason. I'm interested in that box, O'Hara. Come into the canoe with me, will you, old chap? I want to make use of your diving."

O'Hara sighed, but redonned his wet costume. Nevin picked up a length of rope that lay in the bottom of the canoe.

"Will this reach to that box?" he asked.

"Sure!" said Pat O'Hara. "And then some!"

Nevin stared across the river for a moment, then nodded.

"I believe I can locate where that block was," he said. "Will you take the rope down and fasten it to the box?" O'Hara nodded.

"And another of you'd better come into the canoe to help us haul the thing up," the corporal said.

Jim Raven was the other one; and so the canoe left the bank.

"Now, dive, O'Hara!" said Nevin.

And O'Hara seized the rope and dropped overside.

Only a few seconds was he under water, then he reappeared.

"Got it!" he said. "Tied your rope on to what's left of the old cord. Can you two manage it?"

He swam about, watching them, while Nevin and Jim Raven began to haul on the rope. The canoe tilted badly once, until O'Hara, in the water, seized the gunwale of it. Then it remained level, and gradually the two dry men pulled away at the box.

The last bit of pulling was the hardest. Suddenly the big box appeared in sight. Nevin reached over and grasped the rope close to it.

"Now, heave!" he cried.

A sound whipped out through the evening stillness—a sound that caused O'Hara to let go the gunwale of the canoe in his surprise. For it was the unmistakable sound of a rifle-shot, and the bullet hit the canoe with a thump! It came out on O'Hara's side, narrowly missing the Irishman's head.

Jim Raven let go his hold on the box as something seared his arm, as though a red-hot knitting-needle had been wiped across it. The sudden weight thrown on Nevin's arms literally pulled the Mounted man out of the tilted canoe.

"Who fired that?" shouted Jim, looking shorewards.

But nothing of any man could be seen.

Nevin came puffing to the surface and reached up for the gunwale of the canoe. But by this time the frail craft was riding low in the water, and Jim Raven knew she was filling quickly. The bullet that had struck her had rent two great holes in her sides.

"Not much use coming back in here, corporal," he said. "She's sinking. Best get ashore as soon as possible."

He slid into the water himself. The canoe, lightened, then began to drift downstream. For a moment the three swam around each other; and then the rifle cracked again. The bullet hit the water close to Jim Raven's head. He stared in amazement at his friends.

Nevin's face now was a grim mask. He looked towards the shore from whence the shots came. Still he could see nobody.

"Best swim for it," he said quietly; and as he spoke another bullet came their way, actually grazing the tip of O'Hara's ear.

In all seven shots were fired at these three; and long before the seventh had whipped out, the friends of the three swimmers were dancing about and yelling in their excitement and anger. For it was evident that somebody was deliberately sniping at them—though why, it would have been quite impossible to say just then.

Several narrow escapes they all had. But they came to shore unhurt, save for Jim's arm and O'Hara's ear. At once they ran for the shelter of the trees. The rifle-shots ceased, and the Sportsmen stared at each other. When they had come down to train O'Hara for the morrow's race, they had little expected to meet with anything so thrilling and mystifying as this.

"It seems to me," said Nevin, lighting a cigarette, "that somebody on the other shore has a very good reason for not wanting us to get that box. Dash it! I can't make it out, that box! But it's a heavy thing, and there must be something worth while in it! Fellow all pockmarked—a breed—you said that fellow was?"

"Must have been the same chap who shot at us," said Jim Raven. "As I said before, a nasty little bit o' work! But the whole thing's got me, corporal.

ANSWERS
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The Sportsmen of Thunder Creek watched Nevin with long faces as he drew forth the contents of the box. "Rotten skins!" said Jim Raven. "And I hoped that—" "Not such rotten skins," said Nevin coolly. "Take another look at them, old chap. They're the best furs in the world, and worth four thousand dollars!"

I'm all tickled to death about this. Let's go for another canoe, and—"

"Bedad, let's go for another rope!" said O'Hara, his eyes glittering now. "I'll swim with it, connect it up with that box, and we'll pull it out of the river from land. It's only a matter of fifty yards."

"You're not going in the river again, old chap, with that rifleman on the other side, apparently willing to murder you," said Nevin. "Anyway, if there's to be any risk, that's my job, not yours. I'm paid for it!"

"Huh!" grunted O'Hara. "Jim, get as long a rope as you can from the camp. I know what I'm talking about. It'll be getting dark by the time you get back."

Nevin shook his head. But Jim Raven went to the spot where all the Sportsmen had tethered their saddle horses—horses that, as a special privilege, they were allowed to keep in Knapp's Camp—and there he mounted his own. In twenty minutes he had returned to his friends with a large coil of slender but strong rope on his shoulder. This he dropped at O'Hara's feet.

"Anything happened?" he asked.

"Not a thing," said Nevin. "But O'Hara's not going—"

"You be dashed!" laughed O'Hara; and he crawled on his stomach to the water's edge. He dropped in, and his friends came out from their cover sufficiently to be able to see him.

CHAPTER 4.

A Find—and a Reward!

O'HARA had swum perhaps twenty yards, when another shot whipped out. His chum saw the bullet strike the water very close to their wonderful swimming and diving comrade. And they saw O'Hara sink like a stone at the same moment, at which Jim Raven came to his feet, and made as though to dive in after O'Hara. "He's got Pat!" the leader of the Sportsmen shouted.

"Don't think so," said Nevin, dragging Jim down beside him again. "I can see the water being churned up. By Jove! What a swimmer Pat is! He's swimming under water now, see!"

The Sportsmen were all very anxious as they watched the disturbed water that told them O'Hara was still going strong. Swimming under water was an accomplishment with this Irishman. He seemed more like a fish than an air-wanting being.

There were no more shots; there was no target for the marksman across the river to fire at. And so the chums waited, one minute, two minutes, without seeing O'Hara's head.

The water was being disturbed again, and they could see that Pat was coming back, still under water! He had not come to the surface since starting off. At length he reached the bank, and his head appeared. He crawled out of the

river on his stomach, and in his hand he held an end of rope.

He was pretty well exhausted, though, by the time his friends were able to seize him and pull him into cover. But he seemed triumphant, and, at length, grinned.

"The next man that tells me sport's no good to anybody is going to hear from my solicitors!" he said. "Now, I reckon I'll be after letting you boys do the rest. Bet that's the longest time I ever stayed under wather at a stretch."

"We didn't time you; we were too anxious about you," said Jim Raven. "Well, and what about this rope?"

There were six stout and lusty fellows, not counting the weary O'Hara, to handle that rope. In the shelter of the trees they got a straight pull on it. They hauled and heaved like so many sailors, and Digger Harrison started up a chanty to help them pull in unison. And so, very gradually the coil of rope increased at their feet, until the box came up out of the water with a sucking sound. They went on hauling until they could touch the sodden thing by reaching out their hands.

Undoubtedly the box was very heavy, and perhaps the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek had visions of untold gold that it might contain. They all thought, first, of young Syd Patterson, their godson. If that box was full of gold, then they need

never worry about young Syd's future, they said, for a share of it would surely come their way for having saved it from the depths of the river.

"Pretty heftily nailed together," said Nevin, examining the box keenly. "Something valuable in there, all right! Some thief's taken this way of hiding his loot, I'll bet. Now, to get the thing open. Ah, well thought out, Jim!" For Jim Raven had brought from the camp, besides the rope, a useful hatchet,

"Thought we'd want something to open her up with," said Jim.

Half a minute later he had prised off the lid of the box. The first thing they saw was a sheet of tarpaulin. A moment later they discovered that the contents of the box had been most carefully wrapped up in that waterproof material. The whole contents came out in a bundle when they lifted on it.

"Heavy enough!" Nevin carefully flashed at the tarpaulin with a keen knife, and out fell, first, a hairy mass—fur!

The disappointment the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek felt was acute. They watched Nevin with long faces as he unfolded no less than six beautiful skins, and then disclosed an amount of broken rock that quite explained the weight of the submerged box.

"Rotten skins!" said Jim Raven. "And I'd hoped—"

"Not such rotten skins!" said Corporal Nevin coolly. "Take another look at them, old chap! The finest silver-fox pelts I've ever set eyes on, and six of them! By Jove! This lot's worth a good four thousand dollars!" He put his hand to his forehead, and appeared to think deeply. Then his brow cleared. He slapped his thigh. "Late last winter!" he added. "I remember now! An Indian trapper was murdered hundreds of miles north of here, and all his catch stolen from him! It was rumoured that the old Indian had six silver-fur-pelts. My hat! What a scoop for us! The Government is offering a fine reward for the apprehension of the murderer and the recovery of the pelts! Six silver foxes! Why, they're counted almost the most valuable furs in the

world, and almost any price can be got for them! Boys, we're in luck!"

Then he became professional. "Describe every point you can remember about that pock-marked half-breed," he said curtly. "I've got a tracking job on to-night."

"Want any help?" asked Jim eagerly. "No, thanks; this is about my weight," said Nevin, and sought his horse.

Mounting it, he rode upstream in search of a possible crossing for himself and his mount.

The Sportsmen of Thunder Creek packed the furs up again in the box and carried them back to Knapp's, where they handed them over to the timekeeper and storekeeper.

"So that's what happens when we try to train Pat O'Hara for his swimming match!" said Jim Raven. "Always did say Pat would do anything but the right job. Instead of training, he plays the goat—and lands a nice little reward for Syd."

"Bedad," said O'Hara, "it's the sport that did it! Some use your boxing and wrestling and running are! Why don't you specialise in something useful as well as pretty to look at?"

And it is to be feared that from then on there was little holding Pat O'Hara.

However, after a very hard-fought struggle, Pat won the swimming match the following day, beating the eccentric Banks by twenty yards. The course was over two miles of the Rolling River—one mile upstream and a mile downstream again.

At least fifty of the men employed at Knapp's camp went in for the event—and there were some excellent swimmers amongst the foreigners. But after the upstream half of the struggle, when all were swimming just as hard with the current, the stamina and fitness of Banks and O'Hara would not be denied; so that the last quarter-mile of all was just a race between Pat and Banks. And those of the camp who were not taking part in the race, also those who fell out of it and went ashore before it was over, followed these two from the bank and cheered them madly. For perhaps such swimming had never before been seen, not even by the Indians, who were also watching—and the Indians are just as much born swimmers as the beaver.

Banks was the first to shake the hand of the fellow who had beaten him so cleanly. There was no unsporting grumbling done by the vanquished one.

"At the same time," said Banks, "you Sportsmen are going to show me I'm not such a whale at athletics as I thought I was when I came up here. You Sportsmen, I'm afraid, are going to make me lose my wager—which was that I was to compete at every known line of sport with the best man in that line at any railway camp, and furthermore, I was to make sixty per cent of wins. You Sportsmen are going to make my percentage about point naught-naught—nothing!"

"You never know your luck," said Jim Raven, who was listening. He had known this before.

Eccentric though Banks may have been in coming up here to carry out the terms of such a wager, made with young Grogan, who was the son of the chief director of this construction company, Jim and the other Sportsmen were rather welcoming his eccentricity; for it meant plenty of sport for him and his comrades, not to mention ample opportunities to win big prizes—money that

was to be sent, when and if won, to pay for young Syd's upbringing.

Thus Pat O'Hara added fifty dollars to the godfathers' fund for Syd. But three days later, when an unshaven Corporal Nevin returned to camp, smiling happily and with a disconsolate-looking, pock-marked half-breed attached to his saddle-horn by a lariat, the corporal gave the Sportsmen to understand that there would be more cash coming to them shortly.

"Those pelts," said Nevin, "were specially caught for a big-noise millionaire in the States, who was paying five thousand dollars for them; wanted them to make a fur coat for his daughter. That millionaire offered a reward of five hundred for the furs' recovery. You've recovered them—or Pat O'Hara did by his splendid diving and swimming. So you'll get the five hundred. This half-breed is going to get something else; for he murdered that Indian trapper all right. He's confessed. He had a lot of trouble keeping the furs out of sight. The Mounted had a way of haunting him. He conceived the cunning idea of hiding them in the river during the time he was staying around here with a relative."

"Our luck seems to pay us better than our sport," said Jim Raven, when he and his pals talked this over together.

"If it hadn't been for the sport," Pat O'Hara chimed in, "we'd never have had any luck at all, at all! Especially this time!"

Which was perhaps quite true.

THE END.

(Be sure you read next week's splendid story of the Forest Rangers entitled, **THE RANGER AND THE RUSTLERS!** By Captain Malcolm Arnold. You will vote it a ripping yarn.)

THE RESULT OF THE "LUTON" FOOTBALL COMPETITION.

In this competition no competitor sent in a correct solution of the picture. The first prize of £5 has therefore been awarded to the following competitor, whose solution contained one error:

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The second prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following nine competitors, whose solutions contained two errors each:

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Twenty-three competitors, with three errors each, divide the ten prizes of 5s. each. The names and addresses of these prize-winners can be obtained on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

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"TAMING A TARTAR!"

(Continued from page 21.)

"Oh, sir!"

"For this offence I shall cane the whole Form with the greatest severity! You first, D'Arcy minor!"

"But, sir—" babbled Wally. "We—I— Oh dear!"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Selby.

Mr. Selby was not an athlete. He was tired when he had finished. But he was not so tired as the Third.

"How did it go?"

"Yaas, wathah! Was it all wight?"

Tom Merry & Co. looked into the Third Form room after prep—after having seen Mr. Selby depart—whirling past them like a thunderstorm.

A chorus of groans answered.

"Bai Jove! Wasn't it a success, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Groan!

"Didn't you please Mr. Selby?" asked Tom Merry.

Groan!

"Oh dear!"

"But what happened?" yelled Lowther. "Haven't you managed to tame the Tartar?"

"Oh dear! Somebody bagged the cake out of the box, and put in a brick!" groaned Wally.

"What?"

"Selby thought it was a jape on him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trimble, of course," mumbled Wally. "That's why he advised us to get a cake. I'm going to kill Trimble presently, when I feel better! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, get out!" yelled Wally. "Shy something at them, you chaps!"

Tom Merry & Co. retreated under a shower of exercise-books. In the Third Form room there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. And from that dreadful hour there was no suggestion in the Third of taming Mr. Selby by kindness. Kindness, evidently, was wasted on him; and the Third returned to their old methods. That night, when a tired Third Form master sought his room, a bag of flour descended from the top of the door upon his weary head; and the terrific yell that rang out from Mr. Selby brought comfort and solace to listening ears in the Third Form dormitory.

THE END.

(There will be another rattling fine story of the chums of St. Jim's next week, entitled: **"FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!"** By Martin Clifford. Make sure of reading it by ordering your GEM well in advance.)

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