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Vol. XXIV.
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MY DEAR CHUMS.—In the splendid issue of the "Gem" which is in your hands to-day, you will find the first set of pictures in our great Footballers' Names Competition. This is a really magnificent opportunity, of which every supporter of the "Gem" should avail himself. Have a good look at the pictures, and see what footballers' names they represent. It is worth a good deal of thought and trouble, for the prizes which are offered are as numerous as they are attractive—£30 in all, and running into thousands of pounds in value. Get your solutions ready this week, and then wait for the second lot. Keep to the instructions, which are simple in the extreme, and do not send in your solutions until you get the word. Everybody ought to enter for this wonderful competition. It has an invincible appeal to all sportsmen, for it is full of inducements. Make a careful study of the various points. This is a golden chance for hobbyists and everyone.

"THE PROFESSOR'S PERIL!"

By Martin Clifford.

For next Wednesday's number of the "Gem" we have another grand Talbot yarn. This fine story is packed with dramatic sensations, and the thrills are plentiful. We see the well nigh hopeless plight of John Rivers, who has fallen into the clutches of the nefarious Jim Dawlish—a fellow who sticks at nothing in pursuit of vengeance or of gain. There is a motor-car chase which is gripping in the extreme, but I am not thinking of giving away the points of this genuinely great story—one which shows the skill of the author of St. Jim's at its best.

We have the charming, sympathetic character of Miss Marie Rivers—always a prime favourite with readers of the "Gem," and deservedly so—thrown up into vivid relief. Miss Marie has figured in many fine stories of St. Jim's. There is a note of mystery about her; she is always there when wanted, and she has often proved herself the staunchest friend to a fellow who is in trouble. Once again she has a striking part to play. So with others whom we are always so glad to welcome to the pages of the "Gem"—Talbot, himself, for instance, full of grit and fight. Look out for this tale. You will admit right away that it is one of the first-class treats of this autumn season.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

There are many good things in this year's volume of the "Holiday Annual"—far too many, in point of fact, to enumerate in my Chat. But I must devote a word to the splendid 50,000-word yarn of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford, which is one of the big features. Have you made sure of a copy of this prize book yet? If not, you had better hurry up. Time is going. So are the copies of the "Holiday Annual."

"BRITAIN'S PERIL!"

By Edmund Burton.

There is a hearty laugh awaiting you next THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 819.

week in this amusing story of an invasion—that is to say, it was not an invasion at all. That's just where the laugh comes in. It was this way. A dreamy individual named Marcus made a mistake. Please make a note of this yarn. Read it, and laugh and grow fat. You are sure to laugh, anyway, even if the adipose result is not as the proverb has it.

TUCK HAMPER JOKES!

Amusing storyettes still continue to pour in on me; but what about your funny yarn—that extra good joke which you heard the other day, for instance? Don't let the good thing slip out of your memory. Jam it down on a postcard and send it along.

"THE TRIERS!"

Jack Crichton's stirring football serial is going along swimmingly. Apart from the football, which is top-notch, the thread of interest in this tense and dramatic story never misses once. Next week there are some startling situations. Your sympathy goes out to Jack Morton. He is a plucked one, a fellow who depicts the best there can be in a sportsman; but Fate has some nasty jars for him. You will be immensely interested in the upshot of next week's grand instalment.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS!

Mind, you see "Fed-Up With Football," John W. Wheway's entrancing serial in the "Boys' Friend," also the "Jolly Roger" tales by Michael Poole.

The "Magnet" next week gives a brilliant Greyfriars complete, showing Frank Richards at the top of his form; while its serial, "The Brotherhood of the White Heather," is a perfect blaze of sensation.

The "Popular" offers a smarter number than ever. The "Pop" programme is an absolute wonder—a quartette of complete school yarns, namely, Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, and Cedar Creek, with a prime serial, in addition.

Your Editor.

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TUCK FOR WALES!

IT CUT BOTH WAYS!

"My boy," said the principal of the firm to the prospective office-boy, "I like your appearance and your manner. I think you may do for the place. Did you bring a character?" "No, sir," replied the boy. "I can go home and get it." "Very well, come back to-morrow morning with it, and if it is satisfactory I will engage you at once." Late that afternoon the financier was surprised by the candidate's return. "Well," he said cheerily, "have you got your character?" "No," answered the boy; "but I've got yours, and I ain't coming!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to George W. Isaac, 99, Cornerswell Road, Penarth, South Wales.

INSIGNIFICANT!

Jones (to taxi-driver): "What will you charge to take me and my wife to the Plough Hotel?"

Taxi-driver: "Two shillings, sir."

Jones: "And how much for taking me alone?"

Taxi-driver: "The same, two shillings."

Jones (to his wife): "There, my dear, you see how much you are valued at!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Wood, A Sub. 95th Batt., 18th Bde., R.F.A., Kirkee, India.

HAD HIS OWN BACK!

A court house in a Yorkshire town stands near a common. During one of the cases that was being tried the counsel was in the middle of his speech for the defence when a donkey outside began to bray. The judge, who was notorious for his wit, put up his hand at this juncture, and said to the counsel: "Please stop a minute, Mr. Bird; I am unable to hear two at once." A little later, while the judge was summing up, the donkey brayed again, and the counsel, seeing an opportunity for revenge, stood up and said: "Would your lordship speak a little louder? There is an echo in the court?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Yelland, 69, Broadfield Road, Sheffield.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

A Welcome Guest!

"FIVE bob each, please!"

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth made that request—or rather, demand.

The fat junior blinked into Tom Merry's study, where the Terrible Three were changing into football garb.

Baggy's hand was outstretched, and there was a look of expectancy on his face.

"Shell out!" he said.

Tom Merry paused in the act of lacing his football boots. He stared at Baggy Trimble in surprise, not unmixed with indignation.

Baggy was an inveterate borrower, but to roll into a junior study and calmly command three fellows to shell out five shillings apiece was the limit of audacity.

"Well, of all the nerve—" began Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther gave a chuckle.

"Baggy seems to think we're a Relief Committee for Fat and Famished Porpoises!" he said.

"He's come to the wrong shop," growled Manners. "Travel, you fat sponger, before I dribble you into the passage!"

"Oh, really, Manners!" protested Baggy Trimble. "I'm not collecting five bobs for myself. I admit I'm hard up, but I shouldn't dream of accepting loans from my inferiors."

"Who, what, or which are you collecting for, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"A very dear old pal of mine," said Trimble. "He's arriving this afternoon on the three-thirty at Rylcombe. The very least we can do is to stand him a jolly good feed, and I'm looking after the arrangements."

"My hat!"

"Every fellow who gives five bob," Trimble went on, "will be allowed to take part in the feed."

Tom Merry grinned.

"How much have you collected already?" he inquired.

"Nothing."

"Well, we'll give nothing as well, and nothing added to nothing equals nix!" chuckled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble glared at the hilarious juniors.

"Mean beasts!" he said scathingly. "Stingy skinflints! Is this the way you're going to treat an old pal of mine? Aren't you going to give him some sort of a reception? Why, you ought to kill the fatheaded calf—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ought to be only too glad to fork out your five bobs for the good of the cause," said Trimble indignantly.

"I'm afraid the only person who would benefit if we shelled out, would be yourself," said Tom Merry. "You'd go and feed your face at the tuckshop, and your old pal wouldn't get a look in."

"Who is your old pal, by the way?" asked Manners.

"John Rivers," said Trimble airily.

The Terrible Three gave a start. It was a long time since they had heard that name. It was an illustrious name, though it had not always been so.

In the course of his career—a career packed with adventure—John Rivers had been a professor, a crackman, and a brave soldier. He was now a detective in the service of Scotland Yard. The baser part of his career, when he had been the master-mind of a gang of crackmen, was now

forgiven, though not forgotten. John Rivers had given up that game for good. Formerly a criminal himself, he was now at war with criminals, and his knowledge of their ways and haunts made him a very valuable man at the "Yard."

Baggy Trimble, had referred to John Rivers as his dear old pal. Baggy liked to make it appear that he was in the habit of hobnobbing with great detectives, and that he had personal friends in all the higher circles. But the St. Jim's juniors were not to be deceived by Baggy's bombast.

"You say that Mr. Rivers is coming?" said Tom Merry quickly.

Baggy nodded.

"How do you know?"

"I happened to hear Miss Marie telling Talbot."

"You eavesdropping toad!" growled Manners in disgust.

"Oh, really! How could I help hearing what Miss Marie said, when she yelled right across the quad? I heard her bawl to Talbot, 'I say, old bean, the old man's going to blow in this afternoon!'"

"You're fibbing, as usual," said Tom Merry. "In the first place, Miss Marie doesn't bawl. Secondly, she doesn't address Talbot as 'old bean.' And thirdly, she wouldn't dream of referring to her father as 'the old man.' I don't believe Mr. Rivers is coming at all!"

"But he is!" persisted Baggy Trimble. "He's coming specially to see me, I believe. We're awfully good pals, old John and I. And it's only right that he should be given a jolly good feed when he gets here. So if you fellows will raise fifteen bob between you—"

The Terrible Three made no attempt to raise fifteen shillings. They raised their football boots instead. And they not only raised them, but they planted them behind Baggy Trimble's plump person with great vigour.

"Yaroooooh!"

With a wild yell of anguish, Baggy shot through the doorway, and alighted on the linoleum in the passage.

The fat junior scrambled to his feet, but the study door was slammed in his face.

The Terrible Three had no more time to waste on Trimble. Baggy shook his fist at the closed door, then he rolled away to fresh fields and pastures new, in the hope of being able to raise subscriptions on behalf of his dear old pal John Rivers.

When Baggy had gone Tom Merry and his chums exchanged glances.

"Wonder if there's any truth in what Trimble said?" murmured Lowther. "It would be ripping to see Mr. Rivers again."

"Yes, rather!"

There was a tap on the door, and Talbot looked in. His face was a trifle flushed with excitement.

"Afraid I sha'n't be able to play in the footer team this afternoon, Tom," he said. "Glyn's keen on a game, so you can put him in. You'll lick Abbotsford without my help. The professor's arriving on the three-thirty, and I'm going down to meet him."

"Then it's true?" said Tom Merry. "Trimble's just told us Mr. Rivers was coming, but we thought he was romancing, as usual."

"He's coming, all serene," said Talbot. "He intends to take a holiday in this part of the world."

"Oh, good! Bring him along to the ground as soon as

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he comes. And after the match we'll ask him to tea in this study. Miss Marie, too, of course."

Talbot nodded cheerfully, and quitted the study.

Shortly afterwards the Abbotsford team arrived by charabanc, and Tom Merry & Co. went down to the football field to do battle with them.

Bernard Glyn played in Talbot's place, and he played a sparkling game. All the St. Jim's forwards, in fact, were in fine fettle. Tom Merry put the ball in after five minutes' play, and Jack Blake headed a grand goal shortly after.

The Abbotsford skipper packed his goal, and the visitors set up a strong defence.

The St. Jim's forwards swarmed round the goal like flies round a honeypot. But they failed to add to their score, and at half-time they were leading 2-0.

Midway through the second half John Rivers arrived on the ground, escorted by his daughter Marie and Talbot of the Shell.

The detective's appearance seemed to act as a spur to the St. Jim's eleven. They attacked hotly, and the Abbotsford defenders were run off their feet.

The spectators were treated to an exhibition of fireworks.

Tom Merry found the net with a smashing drive, and within a couple of moments Bernard Glyn followed his skipper's example. Then Harry Noble put on the fifth and last goal with a shot which threatened to knock the goalie clean through the rigging.

Abbotsford were a tired, trounced team when the final whistle sounded. Five goals had been scored against them without reply.

The St. Jim's fellows, with the exception of Fatty Wynn, had thoroughly enjoyed the game. Fatty, in goal, had scarcely had a shot to stop.

Tom Merry & Co. came off in great spirits. And John Rivers was instantly surrounded. Everybody seemed to be trying to shake his hand at the same time.

"Jolly pleased to see you, Mr. Rivers!"

"Hope you're in the pink?"

"Will you do us the honour of being our guest at a study feed?"

The professor—to give him the name which still clung to him—smiled at the enthusiastic throng. He was a little touched at the nature of the reception. It was overwhelming. He was surrounded, as it were, by a sea of friendly faces. And his arm was quite limp by the time the juniors had finished with it.

Tom Merry & Co. admired the professor with an admiration that amounted almost to hero worship. When they thought of the man's chequered past, of the atonement he had made in the Great War, and of the honourable life he was now leading, how could they help admiring him? For it had not been easy for the professor to turn his back on a life of crime, and to rise on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things.

"I am delighted to see you, my boys," said the professor, "and I shall have much pleasure in accepting your hospitality."

"Hurrah!"

It was a very merry party that sat down to tea in Tom Merry's study after the footballers had removed the stains of battle.

The professor occupied the place of honour at the head of the table. On his left sat Talbot, on his right Miss Marie. The rest of the company squeezed themselves in where they could.

Needless to state, Baggy Trimble's efforts to raise the necessary funds for the feed had ended in dismal failure. It was the Terrible Three, with the generous assistance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who financed the undertaking.

Ample supplies had been procured from the tuckshop, and all went as merry as a marriage-bell.

"It's good to see you again, father," said Marie Rivers. "It really seemed as if you had forsaken us."

The professor smiled.

"I've been frantically busy at the Yard," he said. "No sooner did I finish one case than another cropped up. My chief told me yesterday that I was rather overdoing it, and

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he insisted on my taking a holiday. And where could one spend a more restful holiday than in this sleepy corner of Sussex? I wired to the King's Arms, Wayland, and booked a room; and I also wired to you, Marie. And here I am, resolved to rusticate in the country for a week or two."

"It will do you all the good in the world, professor," said Talbot. "You're looking none too fit."

"I confess I'm somewhat off colour, Toff," said John Rivers, addressing Talbot by a nickname which had fallen into disuse. "But I shall soon feel my own self again. This Sussex air is like champagne after the stuffy atmosphere of London."

Tom Merry & Co. waited hand and foot on the professor. Had he eaten a quarter of the good things they pressed upon him, he would have been booked for a bilious attack. But the professor went warily. He talked a good deal more than he ate.

It was not every day that the St. Jim's juniors were honoured with the presence of a Scotland Yard investigator. They urged John Rivers to tell them of his latest and greatest captures, and when he modestly recounted some of his adventures they listened spellbound.

On the whole, it was as cheery a tea-party as had been held in Tom Merry's study for some time, and everybody was sorry when the professor announced that he must be going. The juniors had greatly enjoyed his narratives, and they only allowed him to go on condition that he promised to come up to the school every day during his holiday and tell them further thrilling tales of his experiences in the detective force.

Miss Marie and Talbot walked over to Wayland with the professor in the autumn dusk.

These three had much in common. In the old dark days their lives had been linked together. John Rivers had been the leader of a gang of daring crackmen, and Marie and Talbot had been members of that gang.

Now, as they tramped along the quiet country lane, those dark old days seemed like a bad dream.

The gang had broken up—for good, it seemed. Without the professor it was like a ship without a steersman. John Rivers, formerly the friend of the criminal, was now his worst enemy. And Talbot and Marie had long since left the path of dishonour for the narrower but nobler path of uprightness and straight living.

They talked of these things as they walked to Wayland. They had not cared to discuss them before the St. Jim's fellows.

"By the way, professor," said Talbot, "what happened to Jim Dawlish, the fellow who tried to set the gang on its feet again?"

John Rivers puffed grimly at his pipe.

"Dawlish," he said, "is spending rather a long holiday at Dartmoor. He's serving a seven years' sentence, though whether it will be remitted or not I can't say."

"He is a hateful type of man, father," said Marie.

"True, my dear. But we need not concern ourselves with Jim Dawlish. He will never cross our path again. The past, with all its associations, is a dead letter so far as we are concerned."

But the professor, shrewd and experienced man though he was, had forgotten that the past has an ugly habit of casting its shadow over the present. In fact, the "dead" past sometimes proves itself very much alive.

Outside the old-world hostelry known as the King's Arms, Marie and Talbot bade the professor good-night.

John Rivers took their hands in turn.

"Good-night, Marie! Good-night, Toff! I'll see you to-morrow."

But a much longer interval than a mere night was destined to elapse before the professor again set eyes on his daughter and his daughter's best boy chum.

CHAPTER 2.

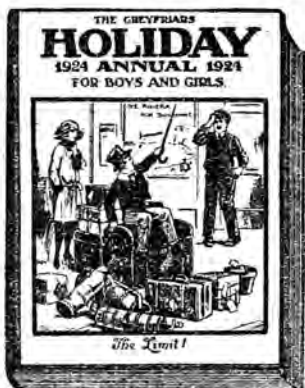
The Mysterious Cipher!

JOHN RIVERS reclined at ease in the smoking-room of the King's Arms.

The detective was alone. His feet were engaged in cosy slippers, his favourite briar was between his teeth, and he was at peace with the world.

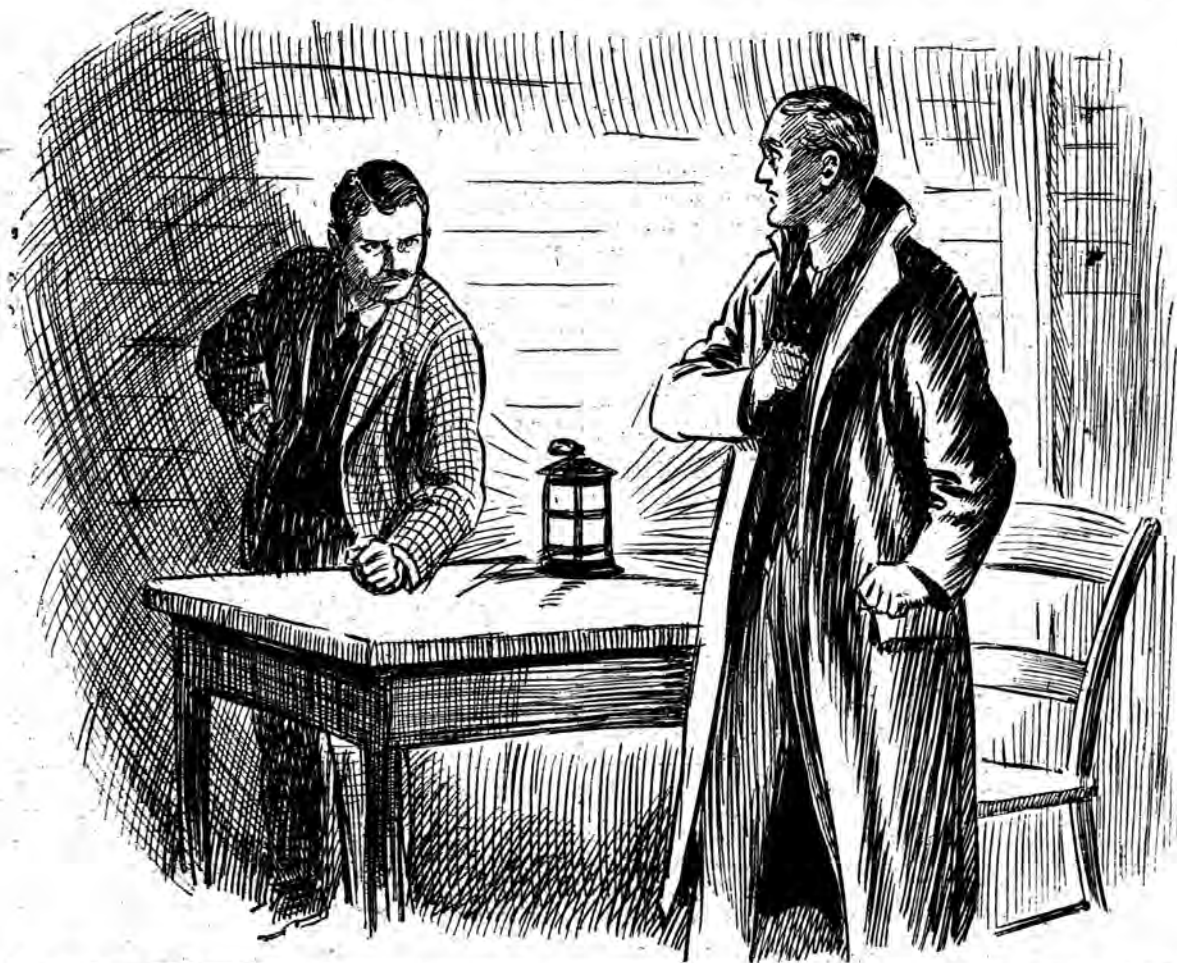
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"You—you were there when Doctor Garnett dropped down dead?" stammered Mr. Rivers. Dawlish nodded. "I was outside on the lawn, watching you, while you looted the safe in Garnett's library," he said. "I saw the old man come down in his dressing-gown, and I saw what followed. You, the trusted and valued servant of Scotland Yard, were that man's murderer!" (See page 8.)

After the breathless hurry and scurry of his duties at Scotland Yard, it seemed very peaceful down here.

In this quaint old Sussex inn, far from the maddening crowd, John Rivers would find complete rest for mind and body. At least, he hoped so.

Strangely enough, his thoughts kept turning towards Jim Dawlish. Try as he would, he could not banish that rascally reprobate from his mind. He began to wish that Talbot had never mentioned the fellow.

What did Dawlish matter now? He was serving a term of penal servitude at Dartmoor, with many others who had proved themselves pests to society. He was out of harm's way, yet he persistently intruded himself upon the detective's mind.

John Rivers forced himself to follow up a fresh train of thought, but it was useless. After forgetting Jim Dawlish for a few moments he would recall the man more vividly than ever.

The detective rose to his feet and started to pace to and fro.

His mind was no longer tranquil. These thoughts of Dawlish were strangely disquieting. John Rivers had a premonition that something was about to happen.

And, sure enough, something did.

John Rivers stopped short in his stride. He uttered a low cry of amazement.

A face had appeared at the french windows of the smoking-room. It was a familiar face—a face that the detective had already seen in his mind's eye. He now saw it in actual reality.

It was the face of Jim Dawlish!

For a moment John Rivers wondered if his eyesight was playing him false. He glanced keenly at the figure outside the window.

Yes; it was Dawlish right enough. The man was well-dressed, but he was hatless, and his close-cropped hair was a sure index to his previous address.

Dawlish smiled at the detective's confusion. He swung open the windows, and stepped into the room.

"Good-evenin', professor!" he said jauntily. "This is what you might call a dramatic meetin'."

Dawlish held out his hand. John Rivers hesitated before he grasped it.

"You are the very last person I expected to see, Dawlish," he said. "I pictured you doing penance at Dartmoor."

"I came out yesterday," said Dawlish. "Exemplary conduct while in prison secured me an early release. I went straight to London to find you, professor, but was told that you'd come down here for a holiday."

"What do you want with me?"

"Before we go into that," said Dawlish, "I should like a drink."

"Help yourself."

Jim Dawlish went to the sideboard, and mixed himself a whiskey-and-soda. Then he made himself comfortable in an armchair. John Rivers seated himself opposite his unexpected visitor.

Dawlish glanced round the room.

"We're not likely to be overheard here?" he said.

"No."

"Then I'll tell you why I've come. Durin' the last week of my time at Dartmoor, they made me an orderly in the prison hospital—quite a cushy job, after workin' in the quarries. In the course of my duties as hospital orderly, I got into conversation with an old lag who lay dyin'. He was servin' a life sentence, so I reckon he wasn't at all averse to shufflin' off this mortal coil. Just before he died he handed me a letter, which he told me to guard very jealously, an' post to his son as soon as I was set free."

"One moment," interrupted John Rivers. "Do not lose sight of the fact that you are making these disclosures to a detective."

Dawlish laughed.

"I'm not a fool, professor. If I thought you'd give me away, I shouldn't have come to you. Well, to continue. On leavin' the prison, I opened the letter that the old lag had given me, an' found it was in cipher—a most bafflin' jumble of letters that I can't make head or tail of. But of this I feel certain—the cipher relates to a secret hoard of plunder, the accumulation of a lifetime of burglary."

"If that is the case, Dawlish," said John Rivers at once, "I should advise you to have nothing to do with it."

"What?"

"You don't want to find yourself behind prison bars again, I suppose? Well, that it what will happen if you go prowling after stolen property."

"Bah! I'll take my chance of that!"

John Rivers knocked out his pipe on the hearth, and slowly refilled it.

"Evidently you have not profited by your imprisonment, Dawlish," he said. "You are determined to continue a career of crime?"

"I'm going to have a shot at getting rich quick, if that's what you mean."

"Well, take my advice, and don't. Even if this cipher does refer to plunder, and you discovered where it was hidden, you would not be able to dispose of it, because the jewels, or whatever they happened to be, would be traced by the police."

Dawlish laughed scornfully.

"You seem to have changed your views about the police, professor. In the old days you used to say they were a set of brainless buffoons. Now you speak of them as if they were experts at tracing stuff which was stolen years and years ago. I don't think I've anything to fear from the police. Look here, professor, you always had the skill of a magician for unravelling ciphers. This particular cipher is double-Dutch to me, and I can think of nobody who's likely to make head or tail of it but yourself. That is what brings me here to-night. Here is the precious document. Now, what about it?"

Dawlish produced a half-sheet of notepaper from an inner pocket. He handed it to John Rivers, and eyed him expectantly.

"What you seem to forget, Dawlish," said the detective, "is that I am now on the side of the law—not of the law-breakers. How can I possibly help you in this matter? I should be false to my vocation."

"Oh, cut out the high-falutin' stuff, professor!" said Dawlish impatiently. "I'm askin' you to solve this cipher. Will you, or will you not?"

"I will if I can," was the reply. "But, understand me, Dawlish, if I find that this cipher refers to a secret hoard of plunder, I must hand it over to Scotland Yard."

Dawlish sprang to his feet.

"You fool—you utter fool! Can't you see that there's a fortune in this for both of us? This cipher may refer to a hoard that's worth thousands of pounds, for the old lag who gave it to me had committed hundreds of burglaries in his time. You and I, professor, could go shares with the spoils, and be affluent for the rest of our lives!"

John Rivers was unmoved by this picture of prosperity.

"Don't try to kid me that you are now a thoroughly honest man—that your reformation is sincere," Dawlish went on. "I know it is merely a pose. Young Talbot has genuinely reformed, and so has your daughter; but you, professor, are too fond of a criminal career to throw it aside so easily."

An angry light flashed into the detective's eye for an instant. But he controlled himself.

"My reformation is not a pose, Dawlish," he said quietly. "It is a fact."

"I don't believe you. I'm a better judge of human nature than you think, professor. Once a crook, always a crook! Can the thingummybob change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Of course not! Neither can a born crook become a permanently honest man. It isn't natural."

"I don't wish to argue with you on that point—"

"Because you know jolly well that it admits of no argument. Show me the man who isn't to be tempted when there's a fortune dangled under his nose! What is your job at the Yard worth? Seven hundred a year? Pah! A clerk's salary! If we pooled this plunder, professor, we should be able to retire in luxury for the rest of our days!"

John Rivers smiled.

"I would rather have seven hundred a year and an easy conscience than the alternative you mention," he said.

Dawlish stared blankly at the detective.

"Talk about a changed man!" he said. "Who's been filling your head with all these goody-goody notions, professor? Who's been tryin' to tell you that honesty is the best policy? For my own part, I believe in the proverb that Providence helps those who help themselves. As you yourself used to

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say, in the palmy days of old, there are two classes in the world—the looters and the looted. I prefer to be a looter."

"A rash choice," said the professor. "I should have thought that your long spell of imprisonment would have made you resolve to go straight when you came out."

"Then you refuse to join forces with me, professor?"

"Absolutely!"

"If that cipher relates to hidden plunder, you won't go halves with me?"

"Most certainly not!"

Dawlish turned to depart.

"We shall see," he said. "I rather fancy you will change your mind before very long. For the present, we'll let the matter remain where it is, and we'll discuss it again as soon as you have solved the cipher."

"Are you going to remain in this district?" asked the professor.

Dawlish nodded.

"There's a disused Army hut on the fringe of Wayland Moor," he said. "That's where you'll find me. Get busy on that cipher, professor, and give me a look in as soon as you've solved it. I must say that this meetin' hasn't panned out so well as I expected. Good-night, professor!"

"Good-night!"

The french windows swung open, and Dawlish passed out into the darkness.

CHAPTER 3. The Solution!

THE professor sat smoking in silence. His thoughts were troubled. He had come down to Wayland with the idea of spending a restful holiday, and on the very day of his arrival an old confederate had popped up, like a ghost from the past.

In the days long past John Rivers and Jim Dawlish had been very thick. The professor had been the brains of the gang, Dawlish the man of action. Much water had flowed under the bridges since then. The professor had changed; Dawlish had not.

John Rivers was now on the side of law and order; Jim Dawlish was still a lawbreaker, just as reckless and unscrupulous as ever. His long term of imprisonment had not lessened him.

The professor had hoped that Dawlish would never cross his path again. So much for his hopes! Dawlish was here, in the same town. And the professor had an uncomfortable feeling that his old associate would make things very unpleasant for him, unless he yielded to Dawlish's wishes. But John Rivers had not the slightest intention of yielding. His feet were now planted firmly on the path of honour, and he was determined not to turn aside to the left or right. He had finished with the old game for good.

Dawlish had sneered at the professor's reformation. He had called it a pose. But it was no pose. It was permanent and sincere.

What of this mysterious cipher which Dawlish had brought?

The document lay on the table awaiting solution. The professor picked it up, and examined it keenly. He studied it for some moments, and then shook his head.

"This presents a very baffling problem," he murmured. "It is no common or garden cipher. Fortunately, I have brought my book of cryptograms with me. I may derive some help from it."

The professor went up to his bed-room and unlocked his suitcase. From a number of miscellaneous books and papers he selected a little red book—a private book of cipher solutions. He took it down to the smoking-room, and settled himself comfortably in the armchair.

Few things gave the professor such keen pleasure as solving ciphers. And he anticipated little difficulty with this one now that he had his little red book to help him.

But the book of solutions, though fairly comprehensive, did not take him far. He went through it from cover to cover—a process which occupied him over an hour—but he came no nearer to a solution of the secret message which the dying burglar had handed to Jim Dawlish.

"No go!" muttered the professor, tossing the book on to the table. "I shall have to solve this pretty problem with my own brain. It happens to be a rather tired brain just now, but I fancy it is equal to the task."

The hour was late, and the fire had burnt low. But the professor rocked nothing of time. He was intensely absorbed in what was, to him, a fascinating task.

He studied the cryptic message until he had it by heart. Then, with the aid of paper and pencil, he worked out one theory after another, taking a different key-letter each time. He brought all his mental faculties to bear upon the task in hand, but he came no nearer a solution.

"This cipher is mightily ingenious!" he murmured, half-admiringly. "That old lag knew what he was about when he constructed this extraordinary jumble of words. Probably



"Well, good-bye, Miss Marie—and good luck!" said Tom Merry, taking the girl's hand. "Let it be au revoir, and not good-bye," said Marie, with a faint smile. "We hope to be back very soon, with good news." Having shaken hands with Marie and Talbot, the Terrible Three watched them depart on their quest for the missing Mr. Rivers. (See page 13.)

the only living person who holds the key to this cipher is the old lag's son. And it would be futile to seek him out and question him. No. I must tackle this task single-handed. Sooner or later, either by a flash of inspiration or by slow calculation, I shall arrive at the solution."

Slowly the long night passed. But when the first grey glimmer of dawn came stealing in at the windows, it seemed to the professor that never had a night passed more swiftly.

His face was haggard in the grey light, and dark rings had formed round his eyes. He was in dire need of sleep, yet he felt he could not go to bed until he had accomplished his task.

And at last—at long last—he succeeded!

The professor closed his eyes in concentrative thought, and then came that flash of inspiration for which he had longed. "I've hit it!" he exclaimed, leaping to his feet.

He looked again at the cipher, with the light of understanding in his eyes.

The message which had baffled him so long was as clear as noonday now.

"Dawlish was quite correct in his surmise," he murmured. "This cipher does refer to a secret hoard of plunder."

The solution, at which the professor had arrived after long hours of concentration, was as follows:

"To my son,—You will find plunder to the value of many thousands of pounds in a steel box, which is hidden in a disused well at Wymering. I can't describe the exact spot; you must locate it yourself. The loot is useless to me now; I am a dying man. You are free to enjoy the spoils which it has taken me a lifetime to accumulate. Mind you tread warily in disposing of the plunder."

John Rivers wrote down the solution, but he left out one word—the most important word of all. He omitted

"Wymering," the name of the place where the plunder was hidden. He thought it wiser to carry the name in his mind, and not to commit it to paper. Then, when he showed Dawlish the solution, the rascal would still be ignorant as to where the treasure was buried.

Having written down the solution, leaving the name of the place blank, the professor put it in his breast-pocket.

"As for the actual cipher," he murmured, "I'll send it to my friend Calthorpe, at the Yard. He thinks himself quite a genius at deciphering cryptic messages. But if he manages to make anything of this, I shall be mightily surprised!"

The cipher was duly despatched to Detective Calthorpe, and the professor enclosed a brief note with it.

"My Dear Calthorpe,—Here is something which will interest you. Try your prentice hand on it, and see if you can solve the riddle. Shall be back in town on Wednesday.—JOHN RIVERS."

When the professor posted that letter the little town of Wayland was waking to a new day. Milk-carts were rattling through the streets, and several workers were astir.

"Their work is beginning—mine is ended," mused the professor. "Think I'll be getting to bed."

He returned to the King's Arms. As he dragged himself wearily up the stairs, a bright-eyed maidservant was coming down.

"I am going to bed," said the professor, "and I don't want to be disturbed. I am not at home to anybody, not even the most pressing callers. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Five minutes later the professor was stretched between the sheets, enjoying his well-earned repose.

There were visitors for the professor during the day, but they were sent empty away.

Jim Dawlish, who was on tenterhooks to know if the professor had solved the cipher, called no less than three times, and did everything in his power to obtain an interview with the professor. But the maidservant politely but firmly told him that Mr. Rivers could see nobody. Dawlish tried every dodge he knew to get round the girl; but she was not to be bullied, bluffed, or bribed.

In the afternoon, Toby, the St. Jim's pageboy, appeared, with a message from Tom Merry & Co. Would Mr. Rivers care to come up to the school and see a boxing tournament that was being held? But the professor had explicitly stated that he was not to be disturbed, and the maid told Toby that she would be unable to deliver the message until later.

It was not until dusk that the professor awoke from his slumbers. He was informed of the invitation from St. Jim's, but the boxing tournament would be over by now. In any event, the professor had more important things on hand.

After he had tubbed and dressed, and eaten a substantial meal, he set out in the direction of Wayland Moor. His objective was the old army hut which Jim Dawlish had taken over as a temporary abode.

The unwisdom of going to visit Dawlish in such a lonely spot did not occur to the professor. He feared no man. The fact that Dawlish was a treacherous and an unscrupulous rascal did not weigh with him. He was well able, he thought, to look after himself.

In the deepening dusk the professor strode on his way. It was going to be a wild night. A storm was rising, and dark clouds scurried across the skies. The wind whistled and wailed through the leafless branches of the trees.

Had the professor been a highly imaginative man he would have detected a note of warning in that whistling wind, bidding him turn back.

But the professor had no qualms. Indeed, it was in a mood of cheerfulness that he strode on through the shadows.

CHAPTER 4. A Coward's Blow!

DARKNESS hung like a pall over Wayland Moor.

Across that exposed, bleak space, the wind came sweeping in great gusts.

The professor was obliged to hold on to his hat, or it would have been whirled away into space.

A solitary glimmer of light shone through the darkness. It was the light of the lantern that gleamed in the window of the old Army hut. The professor, with the elements raging around him, battled his way in that direction.

"A queer sort of place for Dawlish to choose as his temporary quarters!" he muttered. "Why couldn't he have booked a room at the King's Arms? He's not hard up, judging by his appearance. He seemed very smartly dressed."

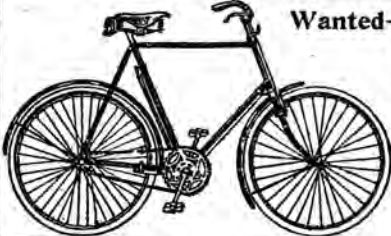
Fresh evidence of the fact that Dawlish was not hard up was soon forthcoming.

Close to the old hut stood a closed-in car. The professor almost ran into it in the darkness. Peering closely at the car, he saw that it was a very expensive make. Jim Dawlish must have had plenty of money to fling about when he came out of prison.

The professor thumped hard on the door of the hut.

"Come in!" called Dawlish.

The wind was so powerful by this time that when the professor stepped into the hut he had to exert all his strength to close the door after him. Having done so, he took stock of his surroundings.



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But for a small table and a couple of chairs, the little hut was innocent of furniture. There was not even a bed, and the professor concluded that Dawlish must have slept on the floor.

Dawlish had risen eagerly to his feet.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "I've been tryin' to see you all day, professor, but that minx of a maidservant at the inn wouldn't let me go near you."

"She was acting on my instructions," said the professor, with a smile. "I had been up all night, wrestling with that cipher, and I didn't want to be disturbed."

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"You have solved the cipher?" asked Dawlish eagerly.

"Yes."

"Let's see the solution!"

Dawlish stretched out his hand, which trembled with excitement.

"One moment," said the professor quietly. "I find that your theory was correct, and that the cipher does relate to a hoard of hidden plunder!"

"Oh, good! I knew it!"

"Therefore," went on the professor, in the same quiet tone, "my duty is clear. Before I show you the solution, Dawlish, I want you to agree that it should be handed over to the proper authorities—the officials at Scotland Yard."

Dawlish muttered a fierce imprecation.

"Agree to that?" he cried. "Not likely!"

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"It is the only course open to you," he said. "If you consent to this matter being placed in the hands of Scotland Yard, they will doubtless see that you are well rewarded."

"Pah! I don't want a paltry reward from Scotland Yard. I want the plunder!"

"That, I am afraid, is impossible!"

The professor's quiet, impassive manner fairly nettled Jim Dawlish.

"I wanted you to come in with me on this deal, professor," he said. "If you don't, then you're an utter fool! Think what it would mean to you, man, if we pooled this plunder! No more work and worry—no more slaving your soul out in the service of others. A fine house in the country, a staff of servants, a big bank balance—everything that goes to make life worth livin'!"

"It doesn't tempt me," said the professor. "It might have done years ago, but times have changed. And I have changed also!"

"I don't believe it!" said Dawlish angrily. "I can't and won't believe that you're a reformed character. But I think I tumble to your little game, professor. I'm not blind! It's pretty obvious to me that you want this hidden hoard of loot for yourself. You don't like the idea of going halves with anybody—"

"What nonsense!"

Jim Dawlish began to pace to and fro in the little hut. Outside, the storm raged in all its fury, and the gale buffeted against the window-panes, causing them to shake and rattle.

Dawlish scowled fiercely as he tramped to and fro. The professor, who had seated himself on one of the chairs, watched his one-time confederate in amused silence.

Presently Dawlish stopped short. Then he spun round, and glared at the professor, who was placidly engaged in loading his pipe.

"You refuse to come in with me on this deal?" he rapped out.

The professor nodded.

"We went fully into that last night," he said. "Don't let's have it all over again. I can clearly see where my duty lies in this matter; and there is nothing more to be said."

"Oh, yes, there is—lots more! You'd better make up your mind that you will come in with me, professor, or it will be the worse for you! You appear to forget that you are in my power!"

"What!"

The professor stiffened in his seat. He stared at Dawlish in amazement.

"If you refuse to join forces with me," Dawlish went on. "I can make things mighty unpleasant for you, and get you hounded out of your job. I've only to whisper a few words into the ear of your chief at Scotland Yard, and ruin and disgrace will follow!"

"What the thunder—" began the professor, in angry astonishment.

Dawlish smiled grimly.

"You remember a man called Garnett—an old scientist?" he said. "Ah, I see you do! Your face has gone as white as chalk! You imagined that old Garnett was dead and buried in every sense, didn't you? But these ghosts from the past have a habit of cropping up when you least expect them to."

The professor was silent.

"I happen to know," went on Dawlish, speaking with slow deliberation, "exactly how old Garnett met his death. There was a lot of comment about it at the time. It was a mysterious affair—nobody could quite make it out. The only person who can throw any light on the matter is myself."

"Dr. Garnett died from heart failure," said the professor. "Some people say so. Others incline to the view that there was foul play. I can support that view. I was there at the time. I saw exactly what happened."

"You—you were there?" stammered the professor.

Dawlish nodded.

"I was outside on the lawn, watching you while you looted the safe in Garnett's library," he said. "I saw the old man come down in his dressing-gown—it was about

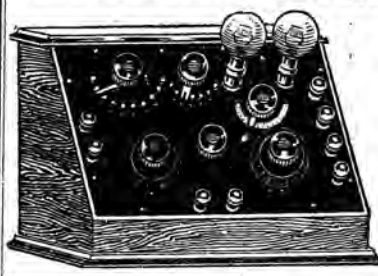
one o'clock in the morning—and I saw what followed. You, my pious professor—you, the trusted and valued servant of Scotland Yard—were that man's murderer!"

"That is a lie—a dastardly lie!"

The professor was on his feet. His hands were clenched, and he looked as if he would strike Dawlish down on the instant. But, by the exercise of great self-control, he restrained himself.

A few moments before it was Dawlish who had been ruffled, and the professor who had been cool. Now it was the reverse.

10 TWO-VALVE WIRELESS SETS AS PRIZES!



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"It's idle to deny it, professor," said Dawlish. "I looked in through the library window, and saw old Garnett lying on the floor. You were bending over him, with a jemmy in your hand. That was quite enough for me. I didn't want to be caught near the spot, and possibly arrested as an accessory to the crime. I bolted."

"There was no crime, and you know it!" said the professor fiercely. "What happened was this. Garnett came down into the library—he was a feeble and infirm old man—and I suppose the shock of seeing a cracksman at the safe was too much for him. Anyway, he suddenly collapsed. In falling, his head crashed against the fender. I at once bent over him, and found that life was extinct. The inquest showed that he had suffered from an advanced stage of heart disease."

"A pretty story!" sneered Dawlish. "That blow on the head wasn't caused by the fender. It was your jemmy, professor, that did the mischief!"

The professor took a quick pace towards his accuser.

"Do you dare to tell me that you actually saw me strike a blow?" he demanded.

Dawlish quailed a little.

"I saw quite enough to convince me that you had murdered the old man!" he said.

"You do honestly believe me to be a murderer?"

"I do."

The professor went back to his chair. He sat for some moments immersed in thought.

So this was what Dawlish had in mind when he said, "You are in my power." This was what he had meant when he said that he could make things mighty unpleasant for the professor, and get him hounded out of his job.

The professor knew that Dawlish would not be able to get him charged with the murder of Dr. Garnett. There was no corroborative evidence. It would be futile for Dawlish to tell the court that he saw John Rivers murder the old scientist. Unless he produced witnesses, there would be no case.

At the same time, if Dawlish made mention of this matter to the Scotland Yard authorities, the professor would be placed in a very unpleasant position. If there was the least suspicion that he had ever been involved in a murder case, he would be asked to resign his position in the detective force. Those who held responsible billets at Scotland Yard were expected to be like Caesar's wife—above reproach. And if this unsavory business were raked up, the professor's job would become insecure, even if he did not have to forfeit it forthwith.

Therefore the professor was, in a way, in Dawlish's power. But he had no intention of yielding to the scoundrel.

His reflections at an end, he rose to his feet.

"So this is your game, Dawlish—blackmail?" he said. "If I agree to come in with you and help you to find this plunder, and divide it with you, all will be well? But if I still refuse, then you will resurrect this affair of the old scientist, and bring an accusation of murder against me?"

"You've put it in a nutshell, professor," said Dawlish. "I don't like resorting to blackmail, but you've given me no alternative. Are you comin' in with me, or not? You'd better make up your mind quickly."

"My mind is already made up," said the professor. "I will give you my answer here and now!"

So saying he sprang straight at Jim Dawlish.

But the latter was prepared for such an eventuality. He had been keeping his right hand behind his back, and now he withdrew it suddenly, with a life-preserver in his grasp.

The professor drew back; but he was too late to save himself. The heavy instrument swirled through the air and crashed upon his head. There was a roaring in his ears, and a wall of darkness seemed to rise up before him. His knees sagged under him, and he had a sensation of falling through an infinity of space. Then came complete oblivion.

CHAPTER 5.

A Prisoner!

"F OOL!" muttered Jim Dawlish, gazing down at the still form of the professor. "If you'd agreed to my suggestion in the first place this wouldn't have happened!"

He crossed to the little window and glanced out half-fearfully. But he was soon reassured.

Outside, the storm raged with ever-increasing violence, and it was as dark as pitch.

Nobody was likely to be abroad on Wayland Moor at such an hour and in such a storm.

Dawlish withdrew from the window and knelt down beside the unconscious form of the professor. He plunged his hand into the breast-pocket of the detective's coat, and discovered what he sought—the solution to the cipher.

He took it over to the lamp, which was now burning low, and examined it eagerly. Then the expression of triumph on his face changed to one of dismay.

"The most important thing of all is missin'!" he muttered.

"A steel box, which is hidden in a disused well at—Where? Why didn't the professor write it down? I suppose he thought it safer to keep the name of the place in his memory. But I'll make him divulge it before many hours have passed!"

Dawlish thrust the incomplete solution into his pocket. Then, after satisfying himself that the professor would not regain consciousness for some considerable time, he turned down the lamp and strode out of the hut.

The wind blew fierce on the lonely moor. The grass was beaten flat; clumps of heather were broken down on every side. So powerful was the wind that Dawlish found it difficult to keep his feet.

Away in the distance twinkled the lights of the town. Dawlish made his way towards them. He was half running, and he stumbled from time to time; for the full force of the wind was behind him.

"It's a wild night, by Jove!" he panted. "So much the better for my purpose."

It did not take him very long to reach the King's Arms. He entered the hostelry, and asked to see the proprietor.

After a brief delay a stout, genial man came forward. He was a typical "mine host" of the olden days.

"Good-evening!" said Dawlish. "I've called to pay my friend's bill an' collect his luggage—Mr. Rivers, I mean. He's been unexpectedly called away to London."

Dawlish spoke in cool, matter-of-fact tones, and the proprietor saw no reason for suspicion.

"Right you are, sir!" he said. "I'll make out the bill right away."

Dawlish settled the account, which was inconsiderable. Then he was shown up to the bed-room which the professor had occupied. He calmly picked up the professor's suitcase, and bore it away. He bade the proprietor good-night quite cheerfully. The plump, genial man had "swallowed" the story about Mr. Rivers being called away unexpectedly. No suspicion crossed his mind.

Dawlish noticed, however, that the maidservant eyed him very suspiciously as he passed through the hall. It was quite obvious that she distrusted him. He hurried away from the place with all speed, before the girl could communicate her suspicions to the proprietor.

Back he went to the lonely hut on the moor. He dumped the suitcase into the car which stood without; then he strode into the hut.

The professor lay where he had fallen. He was still unconscious.

"Come along, my friend!" muttered Dawlish, stepping towards the inert form. "We'll take you away to a spot even more lonely than this, where there will be no fear of prying eyes."

Dawlish was possessed of herculean strength. And he needed it all, for the professor was no light weight. Dawlish gathered up the limp form in his arms and conveyed it to the car. He laid his burden at full length on the seat within; then he took his place at the steering-wheel.

Without headlights or rear-lights, Dawlish drove away. His eyes soon grew accustomed to the darkness, and he manoeuvred the car without much difficulty on to the road. Then he sped away in a southerly direction.

It was not a main road along which the unlighted car made its way. It was a quiet and deserted byroad. Dawlish

had no intention of getting on to the main road and running the risk of an encounter with the police.

He stuck to the byroads all the way, showing an almost uncanny knowledge of all the twists and turns.

At length a strong smell of ozone came to his nostrils. He was nearing the sea.

"We sha'n't be long now," he muttered.

It was on the summit of a deserted cliff that the car eventually stopped.

There was only one building in sight—a grim-looking house of stone, suitable for a hermit or one who wished to shut himself off from the outer world, like Eremita in his cell.

This part of the coast was very lonely and desolate. It was not served by the railways or charabancs. Only a very few holiday-makers ever found their way to this spot; and the holiday season was over now.

The square, ugly, stone-built house was the property of Jim Dawlish. He had taken it because of its remoteness. In this outlandish spot he would be free from the unwelcome attentions of the police.

Having halted the car, Dawlish jumped out and ran up to the front door of the house.

He gave three distinct tugs at the bell-pull, and he was soon answered. Pat Donovan, his colleague in crime, opened the door.

"Give me a hand, Pat!" said Dawlish. "I've got the professor here in the car. He's unconscious. I want to get him up into the top room before he comes round."

Donovan might have been excused for asking a heap of questions. But he did nothing of the sort. He was Dawlish's first-lieutenant, and he always obeyed him without demur.

Between them the two men carried the professor into the house, and up a long flight of stairs.

They conveyed their human burden into a little attic situated in the housetops. It was a musty little room, unfit for human habitation. A small camp-bed had been squeezed into it, but there was no other furniture.

The room was in darkness, but this did not seem to inconvenience the movements of the two men, who knew every inch of the house.

The professor was dumped upon the bed. He gave a groan, and began to stir.

"He's coming to," muttered Donovan.

Jim Dawlish nodded.

"Leave me alone with him, Pat!" he said. "I want to have a heart-to-heart talk with him."

Donovan promptly withdrew, and Dawlish lighted a small lantern which stood on the floor. He picked up the lantern and crossed towards the bed.

The professor's eyes were wide open now, and he was staring about him, as if trying to get his bearings.

"Where on earth am I?" he muttered faintly. Then he caught sight of Jim Dawlish, and he knew that, wherever he was, he was not among friends.

Dawlish seated himself at the foot of the bed, nursing the lantern on his knee.

"You are my prisoner, professor," he said.

Gradually the trend of events became clear to the professor. He recalled the heated discussion in the hut on Wayland Moor, and the cowardly blow which Dawlish had dealt him.

Where was he now? He had not the slightest clue. His surroundings were totally unfamiliar. And it was not likely that Dawlish would enlighten him as to his present whereabouts. He was in some stronghold of Dawlish's gang, that was certain.

The professor struggled into a sitting posture. His head was throbbing painfully, and all his strength seemed to have been sapped.

"Why have you brought me here?" he demanded.

"Can't you guess?" said Dawlish. "After I gave you that crack on the head I took the cipher solution from your pocket. But it was incomplete. There was one very important word missin'—the name of the place where the loot is hidden. An' I'm goin' to keep you here until you tell me the name!"

"That I will never do!" said the professor.

"Think again!" said Dawlish. "Don't be so hasty in your resolves, professor. I don't like bein' brutal, but you'll force me to be if you don't consent to my wishes. I want to know the name of that place—in fact, I'm dyin' to know it. Without such knowledge how could I go in search of the plunder? I should be chasin' a will-o'-the-wisp. You know, professor, where this loot is hidden, an' you're goin' to tell me!"

"I refuse!"

"You mean that?"

"Absolutely!"

And the professor did mean it. Wild horses would not have dragged from him the name of the place where the plunder was concealed. They could torture him and

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torment him, and starve him—yes, and kill him; but the plunder should not pass into the hands of this scoundrel.

Dawlish glared at the prisoner, and his prisoner glared defiantly back. There was a long pause.

"Very well," said Dawlish, at length. "You're forcin' me to be brutal. I'll leave you here, alone an' without food, until you come to your senses. Once you begin to realise what real hunger means you will speak. You may feel very determined an' defiant at the moment, but that will pass. Human nature is very frail, professor, an' when you are sinkin' through lack of food you'll be only too glad to give me the information I want."

The professor was silent. Dawlish eyed him grimly for a moment, then, without another word, he went, taking the lantern with him.

The prisoner heard the sound of bolts being shot into their places. He knew that the door was firmly secured, and that there would be no escape for him that way. And he had already noticed that the window was small, and that there were iron bars on the outside. He was hopelessly entrapped, but he was determined not to yield to his captor.

The long night dragged slowly by. It was followed by a day of interminable length, a day which seemed like ten to the professor, confined in that gloomy attic.

Nobody came near him. The house was still and silent, as if he were its sole occupant.

All comforts were denied him. He was both hungry and thirsty, yet no food or drink was brought to him. He groped in the pockets of his coat, hoping to find his pipe, tobacco, and matches. A pipe would have been a great consolation to him during that trying ordeal. But his pockets were empty. Dawlish had removed everything.

"Looks as if I'm booked for a bad time of it," murmured the professor. "But Dawlish can do his worst. He shall never know—not from my lips, at any rate—where the plunder is hidden."

Forty-eight hours elapsed before anybody paid a visit to the little attic.

The professor was in a very weak state by this time. That is to say, he was physically weak. But his spirit was undaunted.

It was evening, and Jim Dawlish unbolted the door and stepped into the narrow prison.

"Good-evenin', professor!" he said, with grim geniality. "Feelin' hungry?"

The professor made no reply.

"We've a nice roast chicken down below," said Dawlish temptingly. "You've only to say one little word, an' you can come an' join us at supper."

But the professor had no intention of saying that one little word. He preserved an obdurate silence.

"Come, come!" said Dawlish, with a show of impatience.

"It's no use holdin' out, professor. Sooner or later you'll have to give in. Why not sooner? It will save you a good deal of discomfort."

Still the professor said nothing.

"Possibly you are holdin' out in the hope that somebody will come along an' rescue you," said Dawlish. "Perish the thought! Very few people know of this lonely house. None of your friends know of it. I expect your daughter, at St. Jim's, will be gettin' anxious. So will Talbot. They will wonder what has happened to you, an' make search for you, probably. But they won't come so far afield as this. I've got you in a cleft-stick, professor, an' I mean to keep you here, without food an' drink, until you choose to tell me the name of the place where that plunder is hidden. It will pay you to speak out now. You will save yourself a deal of sufferin'."

The professor's brain worked swiftly.

Supposing he gave Dawlish a wrong name, a fictitious name?

In that case Dawlish would at once set off on a wild-goose chase, and the professor might have a chance to escape from his prison.

It was a plan well worth trying.

Dawlish watched the professor's face keenly. He thought he detected signs of wavering.

"Are you goin' to speak?" he asked.

"Yes, hang you!" growled the professor, as if he were caving in after a long struggle.

"Oh, good! I'm glad you can see which side your bread's buttered. Out with the name!"

"Kingsmere," said the professor, slowly and reluctantly.

"Where's that?"

"How should I know? It's up to you to find it."

"An' find it I will!" cried Dawlish, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "If it's the tiniest hamlet in the kingdom I'll seek it out. Why didn't you give me this information before? It would have saved you a lot of discomfort."

"Well, now that I have told you, I'm entitled to my freedom," said the professor.

"Not so fast, my friend. I'll wait till I get the plunder



As Talbot was turning out of one thoroughfare into another, a big, coarse-looking man butted into him—apparently by accident—and Talbot felt his wallet being deftly removed from his breast-pocket. He grappled with the thief at once. (See page 16.)

before I think of settin' you free. But you sha'n't suffer any more hardships. One of my pals will be left in charge of the house, an' I will instruct him to keep you supplied with food an' drink an' tobacco."

The professor groaned inwardly. He had hoped that Dawlish would leave him alone in the house. In which case he would have hit upon some means of escape. But evidently Dawlish had a confederate here, and he proposed to leave the rascal in charge of the house.

"Well," said Dawlish, "now that I know the whereabouts of the hidden hoard I won't let the grass grow under my feet. I'll start off to-night. First of all, I think, I'll pop up to London an' interview some of the members of the old gang. Maybe they will be able to tell me where Kingsmere is, an' whether it's a village or a hamlet, or just a cluster of houses."

"Am I to go halves with the loot?" asked the professor. "I'll wait till I've found it before we go into that," was the reply.

After further conversation, Jim Dawlish took his departure.

What he would say when he found that the professor had sent him on a fool's errand could safely be left to the imagination. His fury would know no bounds; and he would make things hot for the professor when he returned, baffled and empty-handed, to the lonely house on the desolate shore.

Yes; he would certainly make things hot for the professor—always provided that the latter didn't manage to make his escape in the meantime!

CHAPTER 6.

Two on the Trail!

"MISS MARIE!"

Talbot of the Shell hailed his girl chum in the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

The junior's face wore a worried look. So did Miss Marie's, for that matter. It would have been a pretty problem to decide which was the more worried of the two.

A couple of days had elapsed, and the professor had not shown up at St. Jim's.

On the day after the professor's arrival, Toby the page had called at the King's Arms with an invitation to Mr. Rivers to attend the boxing tournament.

Toby had been informed by the maidservant that Mr. Rivers was in his room, and that he was on no account to be disturbed.

Thinking that the professor might be engaged on some important business, neither Talbot nor Miss Marie had called on him. They concluded that he wished to be left alone for a while.

But two days had now passed, and the matter began to assume a serious aspect.

It seemed very strange, to say the least of it, that the professor should stay away from St. Jim's all that time, without even sending a note to say what was detaining him.

John Rivers was devoted to his daughter; he was on terms of the warmest friendship with Talbot; he was also very friendly with Tom Merry & Co. Yet he had not sent a message to any of them to explain what was keeping him at the hostelry in Wayland.

Miss Marie was beginning to feel alarmed, and she showed her alarm plainly in her face. Talbot was not less alarmed.

"No news?" queried Talbot.

The girl shook her head.

"I cannot understand it," she said. "It isn't like my father to keep us in a state of suspense. I am beginning to feel dreadfully worried."

"Same here."

"At the risk of interrupting father in some important research work, I think we ought to call on him, and solve this mystery."

"So do I, Miss Marie."

"Are you free to come now?"

"Yes."

They fetched their bicycles, and pedalled over to Wayland together. They spoke very little as they sped along side by side. A strange, indefinable fear had crept into the mind of each of them. Exactly what they feared they could not have put into words. But both felt very uneasy.

On reaching the King's Arms their worst fears were confirmed.

Mr. Rivers, the maidservant informed them, had left suddenly and somewhat mysteriously, two days before.

"He went out in the evening," said the girl, "and about an hour later a man called here. He said that his friend Mr. Rivers had been called away unexpectedly; and he paid the bill and took away the luggage."

"What sort of a man was he?" asked Talbot quickly.

"Can you describe him?"

"Yes. I took careful stock of him at the time. There was something about him I didn't quite like. I hope he doesn't happen to be a friend of yours, sir. I don't mean any offence."

"That's all right," said Talbot. "Tell us what this man was like."

The girl gave a detailed description of the man who had called on the night of the storm.

Talbot and Miss Marie exchanged glances of dismay. And they both voiced the same name simultaneously.

"Jim Dawlish!"

Neither of them had known that Dawlish had been in the district. They had not even known that he was out of prison. But the maidservant's description of the man tallied in every particular with Dawlish.

"I don't like the sound of this at all, Marie," said Talbot.

"Why should Dawlish call here, and pay your father's bill, and walk off with his luggage?"

Marie's face was pale.

"And why did not father come back here that evening?" she said. "He was not called away to London, or he would have let me know. I very much fear that there has been foul play—that Dawlish somehow got my father into his clutches and took him away."

"Kidnapped him, do you mean?" asked Talbot incredulously.

Marie nodded.

"It sounds rather far-fetched, I know," she said. "My father is well able to look after himself, in the ordinary way. But we must remember that Dawlish is full of cunning, and utterly without scruple."

"Yes; we know that from bitter experience, Marie. But why in the world should Dawlish want to kidnap the professor?"

"Possibly to induce him to return to the gang. They missed my father sorely. He was, as you are well aware, the brains of the concern. Without his leadership, the gang became a mere shadow of its former self. They would have given anything to get him back; and it seems as if they have taken drastic measures to do so."

"By Jove, Marie, I believe you're right!"

The maidservant had withdrawn; and the conversation between Marie and Talbot, conducted in low tones, had not been overheard.



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Turn to page 14 NOW!

They started to walk back to St. Jim's.

The mystery which surrounded the professor's sudden disappearance caused them grave forebodings.

It seemed only too probable that Jim Dawlish had, by some subterfuge, got the professor into his clutches.

Marie Rivers was deeply agitated.

"My father must be found!" she exclaimed. "I cannot bear to think what may have happened to him in the hands of that scoundrel!"

Talbot did his best to comfort the girl; but his own mind was gravely disquieted.

"I will ask Dr. Holmes to release me from my duties, so that I may go in search of father," said Marie.

"You can't go alone, Marie," said Talbot quickly. "I'm coming, too. At any rate, I shall move heaven and earth to get the Head's permission."

Tom Merry & Co. were standing in the school gateway when Marie and Talbot returned.

"You're looking as solemn as a judge and jurywoman!" said Monty Lowther. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Something is very seriously wrong," said Marie. "My father has disappeared."

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

In a few brief sentences Marie and Talbot told the juniors what had happened, and of the fears they entertained for the professor's safety.

Tom Merry & Co. looked very grave.

"This is a queer business, and no mistake!" said Manners. "But it may not be so bad as you suppose."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Tom Merry.

"We're going to get the Head's permission to go and hunt for the professor," said Talbot.

"Good luck!"

Marie and Talbot passed on to the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes received them kindly enough. He was deeply distressed to learn what had happened. He agreed, without any hesitation, to release Marie Rivers from her duties in the school sanatorium.

Talbot had a rather more difficult task to obtain leave of absence. But when he pointed out to the Head that he had an intimate knowledge of Jim Dawlish's haunts, and that it would not be good for Marie to go alone, Dr. Holmes gave his consent.

"You may go," he said, "and I sincerely trust you may be instrumental in finding Mr. Rivers. First of all, however, I will telephone to Scotland Yard, to make certain he has not returned there."

Marie and Talbot waited in the Head's study while he telephoned.

The message came through that Mr. John Rivers had not returned to the Yard. And the officials were astonished to learn that he had suddenly disappeared from Wayland.

They intimated that they would take the matter up at once.

Marie and Talbot quitted the Head's study, and packed such belongings as they would require.

Tom Merry & Co. watched Talbot while he packed. They were looking rather unhappy.

"How long are you going to be away, old man?" asked Tom Merry.

"I've no idea," said Talbot. "Perhaps a day—maybe a week. Depends on what luck we have."

"Got a clue of any sort?" asked Manners.

"No."

"Then it's rather like hunting for a needle in a haystack, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is, in a way. But, dash it all, I can't stay here and carry on as if nothing had happened. I shouldn't be able to settle down to anything. The professor's got to be found, and we shall seek him far and wide."

"Where will you start?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"London," said Talbot briefly. "I happen to know all the haunts of the old gang, and it's just possible that Dawlish may have taken the professor there."

"You—you surely don't think it's a case of kidnapping?" said Tom Merry.

Talbot lifted a troubled face to the Terrible Three.

"I hardly know what to think," he said. "All I know is that Dawlish has been in this neighbourhood, and suddenly left it; and the professor left just as suddenly, and apparently at the same time. What are you to make of that? Miss Marie's convinced that there has been foul play, and I must say it looks very much like it."

Having packed his bag, Talbot rose to his feet.

"Wish we were coming with you on this merry man-hunt," said Monty Lowther. "Not much use our asking the Head, I suppose?"

"Afraid not," said Talbot. "I had to move heaven and earth to get permission for myself."

The Terrible Three accompanied their chum down to the school gates.

Marie Rivers joined them in the quadrangle. She wore a travelling costume, and she carried a case.



"How d'you do, Toff?" said Dawlish, stretching his hand across the table. "This is a surprise meetin', an' no error!" Talbot did not seem to see the proffered hand. He looked steadily into Dawlish's eyes. "Where is Mr. Rivers?" he demanded. "You got him away from Wayland, and you're going to tell me where he is, here and now!" (See page 16.)

Marie's face was pale and troubled, but her eyes shone with determination.

Whether the search lasted a day or a week, or whether it ran into months, Marie was resolved to find her father.

"Good-bye, Miss Marie—and good luck!" said Tom Merry, taking the girl's hand.

"Let it be au revoir and not good-bye," said Marie, with a faint smile. "We hope to be back very soon, with good news."

Having shaken hands with Marie and Talbot, the Terrible Three watched them depart. Then they turned slowly back towards the school building, looking less cheerful than usual, and wondering how long an interval would elapse before they saw Marie and her boy chum again.

CHAPTER 7.

The Cunning of Dawlish!

ON reaching London, Marie and Talbot decided to separate—for a short time, at all events.

"I don't like the idea of your coming down to some of those thieves' dens in the East End, Marie," said Talbot. "You wouldn't be safe."

"Nonsense! It is my father's safety that matters, not my own."

"But in those frightful places—Angel Alley, and so forth—you would be taking your life in your hands," said Talbot. "Not that I shouldn't protect you, if there was trouble. But we should be two against a crowd. It wouldn't be wise for you to come."

"But what of yourself, Toff?" said Marie, giving Talbot the name by which she had always known him. "There will be danger—"

"I'd rather face it alone than drag you into it, Marie."

"But what do you suppose I have come to London for—to stroll idly around looking at the shops?"

"You need not be idle. You can go round to Scotland Yard, and see if they've got any news of the professor. And you must fix upon a hotel, too. There's a quiet one in

Westminster—Langley's. If you stay there, you'll be in close touch with Scotland Yard."

"And you, Toff?"

"I shall stay in the East End until I get news of some sort. I'll ring you up on the telephone every few hours, and keep you posted with all developments."

Talbot's plan seemed sound enough. But Marie would have preferred to take a more active part in the search. She realised only too well the dangers that lurked in Angel Alley, Paradise Court, and other salubrious thoroughfares where crooks and cracksmen had their habitation. But Marie would willingly have faced any danger so long as it helped in the finding of her father.

However, it was wise that one of the two should keep in close and constant touch with Scotland Yard. For at any moment one of the professor's detective colleagues might discover his whereabouts.

"Very well, Toff," said Marie, at length. "I'll consent to that arrangement. I won't say that I'm in love with it. I'd rather come with you to those awful places down east. I don't like the idea of your going alone."

"Don't worry about me, Marie. I can take care of myself. I'm going round to each of the old haunts in turn, in the hope of getting news of the professor. And, as I say, I'll keep you informed of my movements."

They shook hands, and stood silent for a moment.

Then Talbot turned and strode briskly away.

Marie gazed wistfully after him, until his athletic form was swallowed up in the stream of traffic. Then she walked away in the opposite direction.

Talbot hailed a taxi which came crawling along. He jumped in, giving instructions to the driver as he did so. He did not ask the driver to take him to Angel Alley, but to a rather more select thoroughfare near by. No taxi-driver who valued his life would have consented to go to Angel Alley. Even the police left it alone, unless compelled to visit it for the purpose of making a raid.

(Continued on page 16.)

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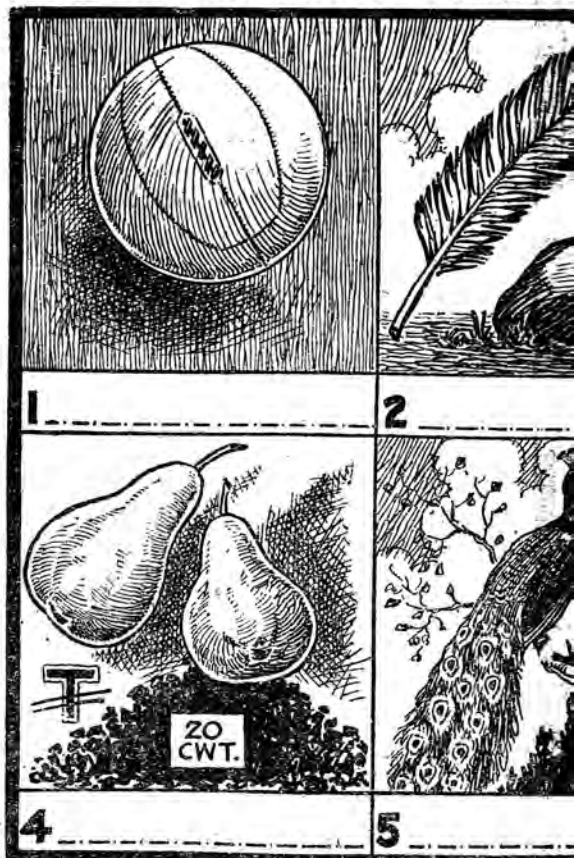
3.—All the prizes will be awarded. If two or more competitors tie, however, the prize, or prizes, or their value, will be divided, and the Editor reserves full rights in this respect.

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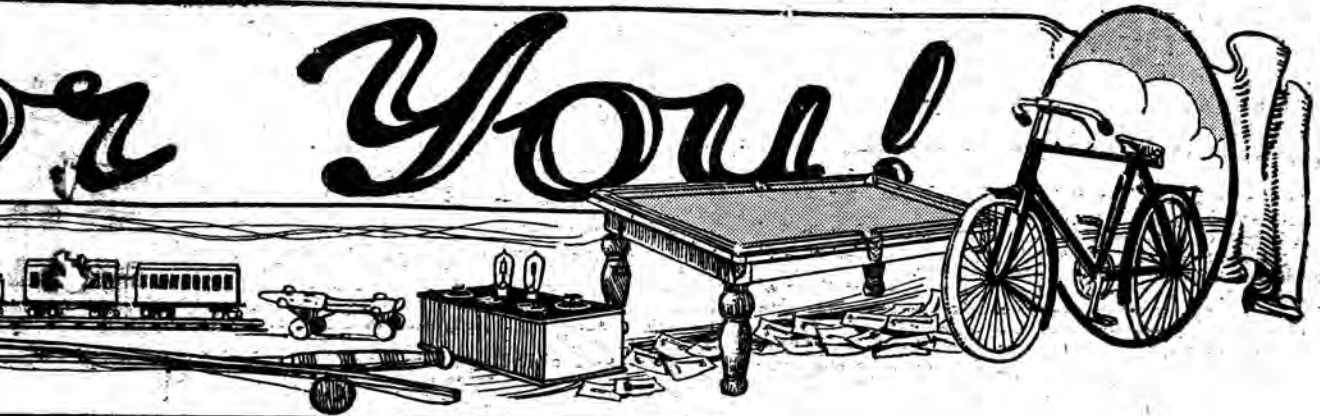
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is to write IN INK in the allotted space under each of the puzzle-pictures the name of the Footballer which you think the picture represents. Thus No. 1, here, the picture clearly means BALL. In the same way you have to discover the names indicated by the other five pictures.

In all there will be EIGHT SETS OF PICTURES, so keep your solutions until the other sets appear.

DO NOT SEND YOUR ENTRIES YET.

To help you still further there is a list containing the names of prominent footballers to choose from on page 26. Look out for the second set of pictures next week.

Readers of the "Champion," "Boys' Realm," "Union Jack," "Boys' Friend," "Pluck," "Boys' Cinema," "Young Britain," "Magnet," the "Popular," the "Rocket," and "Nelson Lee Library" are also taking part in the Contest, so that additional attempts may be made with the pictures from these allied journals.



and Your Friends. Get Busy Right Away, Chums!



(Continued from page 13.)

As the taxi bore him eastward through the busy streets Talbot sat silent and thoughtful.

A big task lay ahead of him. He had undertaken to find the professor—or, at any rate, to do his best—and he now realised the magnitude of that undertaking.

Among these teeming millions what chance was there of finding one particular man—a man who was probably being kept under lock and key in a closely-guarded garret?

But Talbot was not altogether without hope. His knowledge of London was, like Sam Weller's, extensive and peculiar. He was familiar with all the miserable slums of that large city. The dingy courts and the narrow alleys, thronged with children—Talbot knew them all. For it was in Angel Alley that he himself, as a youngster, had been cradled in crime.

If he could only find Jim Dawlish, or some member of Dawlish's gang, then he would be well on the way to finding the professor.

The taxi halted at last.

Talbot paid the fare; then he picked up his bag, and plunged into the very heart of the slums.

He was on familiar ground, but never before had these places seemed so dingy and sordid. In his early days he had been accustomed to them; he had known nothing better.

Talbot's appearance excited comment among the urchins who sat cowering on doorsteps.

It wasn't every day that schoolboys in Etons walked through the slums. And Talbot began to wish he had obtained a cheap suit of clothes, and a cloth cap and a muffler. He was certainly out of his element in Etons and a St. Jim's cap.

He came at length to Angel Alley, where his childhood had been spent.

It was here that the gang of cracksmen to which he had belonged had had their headquarters. It was in one of these gloomy buildings that they had held their meetings.

Talbot remembered the scene well. The years seemed to slide back, and he saw himself seated at a table with his father, Captain Crow, and with the other cracksmen—the professor, Hookey Walker, Jim Dawlish, Nobbler, and the rest.

How times had changed! But Dawlish had not changed with them. He and a few of the lesser lights of the gang had not followed the professor's lead and turned over a new leaf.

Talbot was in hopes of finding Dawlish here. And if he did, he would not be long in finding the professor.

Gripping his bag tightly and clenching the hand that was free, Talbot stepped into the gloomy building.

He ascended some rickety stairs, and went boldly into the room that he knew so well—the room where burglaries had been planned by the master-minds of the gang.

There were men in the room—hard-faced, dissolute-looking men. Their faces were not familiar to Talbot. Neither was his face familiar to them. They glared at him as he entered. One of them sprang to his feet.

"What d'you want here?" he demanded.

"I'm looking for—"

"Trouble?"

"No; for Jim Dawlish."

"Nobody of that name here. Get out!"

The man's manner was distinctly hostile. And the others were muttering fiercely. Doubtless Talbot had walked in whilst they were planning some coup, and the intrusion was far from welcome.

Talbot was wise enough to see that there would be trouble if he remained. And there was no need to remain. Dawlish was not here.

The junior beat a swift retreat down the rickety stairs. He had drawn blank in Angel Alley. He must try another thoroughfare that Jim Dawlish had been in the habit of frequenting—a place which went by the grimly facetious name of Murderers' Row.

As he turned out of one thoroughfare into another Talbot met with an adventure.

A big, coarse-looking man butted into him, apparently by accident, and Talbot felt his wallet being deftly removed from his breast-pocket. He grappled with the thief at once, fighting furiously. His bag had fallen to the pavement, and he had both hands free to deal with the pickpocket.

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Even as Talbot fought he had a fear that the man's palm might come rushing to his assistance. In which event, the junior would have lost both his wallet and his bag and received a terrible hammering into the bargain.

It was a short, sharp fight.

The pickpocket, though he towered over Talbot, was flabby and out of condition owing to his dissipated habits. Talbot hammered away at him with fierce energy, and presently he landed home a powerful drive to the jaw which caused the scoundrel to topple backwards and fall with a crash.

The wallet had been dropped during the scuffle. Talbot pounced upon it, and also retrieved his bag. Then he made off as rapidly as possible. His visit to Murderers' Row would have to be postponed till a more suitable occasion.

Dusk was now falling, and with the dusk came a dense fog. It seemed to settle over slumland without warning.

Talbot felt tired and dispirited. He peered through the fog at the dilapidated buildings, with their broken windows patched with paper, and at the phantom figures which moved to and fro through the murky gloom. He seemed to be in some dim, unearthly region, such as Dante had portrayed in his "Inferno."

Talbot's hopes of finding the professor had sunk almost to zero. It was as much as he could do to find his own way about, let alone running the professor or Jim Dawlish to earth.

"I'll give it up for a bit and go and get some grub," he muttered.

There were no palatial restaurants in slumland. Here and there was a coffee-stall, whose lights glowed with a dull lustre through the fog. Talbot didn't fancy a standing-up meal at one of these, so he pushed on until he came to a common eating-house, which was kept by a Chinaman.

The place was empty, for which Talbot was thankful. He went in, and seated himself at one of the bare tables. On either side rose a wooden partition.

A wrinkled old Chinaman shuffled on the scene, and Talbot ordered a meal. He didn't relish Chinese dishes as a rule, but he was ravenously hungry.

He was half-way through the meal and was beginning to feel a little more cheerful, when a pian came in and sat down opposite him.

Talbot took no notice of the newcomer. He went on eating. But presently he happened to look up, and he found that the man was gazing at him with a grim smile.

Instantly Talbot uttered a low cry of recognition.

"Jim Dawlish!"

Talbot had not met Dawlish for an age; but he would have known him anywhere.

"How d'you do, Toff?" said Dawlish, stretching his hand across the table. "This is a surprise meetin', an' no error!"

Talbot did not seem to see the proffered hand. He looked steadily into Dawlish's eyes.

"Where is the professor?" he demanded.

"The professor?" said Dawlish coolly. "Alive an' well, I'm glad to say."

"I didn't ask how he was, I asked where he was!" said Talbot. "You got him away from Wayland by some means; I'm certain of that. And you're going to tell me, here and now, where he is!"

Dawlish chuckled, as if he found the situation amusing.

"Don't be so dramatic, Toff, an' don't lose your wool. That isn't the way to behave to an old pal."

Talbot clenched his hands.

"Where have you taken the professor?" he demanded fiercely.

"Give me a chance to explain, then," said Dawlish. "You keep firin' questions at me, an' you won't let me get a word in edgeways. You were sayin' that I got the professor away from Wayland by some means. That's not so. He came of his own accord."

"I don't believe you!"

Dawlish shrugged his shoulders.

"Whether you believe me or not, I'm tellin' you the facts," he said. "I met the professor in Wayland. He was very pleased to see me, an' we had a long chat together. I asked him to give me his help in recoverin' some stolen plunder, an' I promised him that he should go shares with me."

"He refused, of course?" said Talbot.

"Yes—at first, but he soon changed his tune. I said to him, 'Look here, professor, if you don't join forces with me in this matter I can make things dashed unpleasant for you, an' get you hounded out of your job.' An' then I reminded him of a certain unsavoury affair of the past—a crime he committed, an' which I saw him commit."

Talbot gave a violent start.

Was Dawlish concocting this story just to frighten him? Or was there any truth in it?

Talbot well knew that the professor's past had been a very shady one. There were incidents in it which would not bear resurrection. It was quite possible that Dawlish knew of one of these incidents and had blackmailed the professor on the strength of it.

Dawlish went on speaking.

"I can see that there is a doubt in your mind, Toff, as to

whether I'm tellin' the truth. You may take this as gospel. I should have no object in concoctin' a tissue of lies. As I was sayin', I reminded the professor of this unsavoury affair, an' threatened to give him away unless he observed my wishes an' joined forces with me."

"You scoundrell!"

"Hard names don't hurt me, Toff," said Dawlish, with a grin.

"You're a blackmailer, and your proper place is in prison!" said Talbot angrily.

Dawlish remained perfectly cool.

"I had the professor in the hollow of my hand," he said.

"There were two courses open to him. Either he could refuse to join my gang—in which case I should have exposed an' ruined him—or he could have yielded to my wishes an' deserted his present post an' thrown in his lot with me, which is exactly what he has done. Bless you, the professor knew which side his bread was buttered! He wasn't goin' to run the risk of that affair of the past-bein' brought to light."

"What was the affair?" demanded Talbot.

Dawlish rose to his feet and peered over the tops of the partitions, to make sure there was no one else in the eating-house.

"It was a case of murder," he answered, in a low tone.

"Good heavens!"

Talbot's face went very white.

"I saw it with my own eyes," Dawlish went on. "It was in the old days, when the professor was the leader of the gang. He was carryin' out a job at the house of an old scientist—Dr. Garnett. I was out on the lawn, peerin' in through the french windows of the library. The professor was in the act of forcin' the safe when the old scientist came into the room in his dressin'-gown. The professor turned on him, an' felled him with a jemmy. I saw that the blow was a fatal one, an' I bolted, not wishin' to be found near the spot."

Talbot's eyes were wide open with horror.

He no longer doubted that Dawlish was speaking the truth. He could remember quite well the night when the professor had gone to the house of the old scientist. Afterwards, the professor had been very reticent about what had happened. Talbot had tackled him once or twice on the subject; and John Rivers had replied: "I never want you to mention the name of Dr. Garnett again in my presence."

All of which lent colour to Dawlish's story—that the professor had killed the old scientist.

"So you see, Toff," said Dawlish, "I had the professor in a soft stick. He simply had to come in with me, or I should have given him away."

"You could not have brought a charge of murder against him," said Talbot. "You had no other witnesses to bring forward."

"True, Toff! At the same time, I could have made things dashed awkward for the professor. Scotland Yard would have kicked him out at once, if they thought he had ever been involved in an affair of murder. The professor saw clearly that he was in my power, an' he made a wise choice, on which I congratulate him. He has come back to the gang."

Talbot groaned.

It was a stunning blow. This was worse—far worse than the professor being kidnapped. Had he been kidnapped, he would still have retained his honour. And now, it seemed, he had forfeited his honour by going back to a criminal career.

Talbot's heart grew as heavy as lead. Never had he loathed and detested Jim Dawlish so much as at this moment. But he was powerless to deal with the arch-plotters. Dawlish had scored all along the line. By means of blackmail he had induced the professor to go back to the gang.

What would Marie say when she learned that her father had gone back to the old life of lawlessness? Talbot felt that he had not the courage to tell her. She would be well-nigh heartbroken.

Talbot pushed away his plate. He could eat no more. He leaned his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands.

Dawlish seemed to gloat over the junior's misery.

"The professor is one of us now," he said. "He has come back, as I say, to take control of the gang, an' I am his first lieutenant. The best thing you can do, Toff, is to stop searchin' for the professor, an' go back to the school. The professor doesn't want to be found just now. He's engaged on crackin' cribs!"

Talbot groaned again in bitterness of spirit. He felt that he could not stay there and listen any longer to the triumphant, gloating remarks of Jim Dawlish.

He rose to his feet, and flung a silver coin on to the table. Then, without a word to Dawlish, he stumbled out into the street, where the damp fog enveloped him like a garment.

It seemed to Talbot that this was the end of all things. If John Rivers had gone back to a life of crime, then all

was indeed lost. It meant a victory for Wrong over Right: it meant the undoing of all the good the professor had done during these last few years; it meant that Marie would be heartbroken.

Small wonder that Talbot felt utterly cast down and miserable—more miserable even than the waifs and strays all around him, who wandered, homeless and uncared-for, the flotsam and jetsam of a mighty city.

CHAPTER 8.

A Bid for Freedom!

MEANWHILE, what of the professor?

He was still a prisoner in the lonely house on that desolate shore.

In the tiny attic at the top of the building he was passing through dreary days and sleepless nights.

Jim Dawlish had gone to London to enlist the aid of other members of the gang in searching for the buried plunder. But Pat Donovan was here, keeping close watch and ward on the professor.

But the prisoner was not having so bad a time now. At first he had been kept without food and drink. And his pipe and tobacco, which would have been a great solace to him, had been taken away.

Now, however, the professor was getting good food, and he was allowed to smoke.

Even so, his imprisonment was irksome. Here he was, pent up in a stuffy attic, with a bolted door on one side of him and a barred window on the other.

Pat Donovan brought him his food at regular intervals, but he never stayed long. He would chat to the prisoner for a few moments, and then withdraw.

Donovan was armed with a revolver, and he would not have scrupled to use it, had the professor made any attempt at escape.

Never did a caged bird pine for its freedom so much as John Rivers did now. He would have given anything to be free. He did, in fact, try to bribe Pat Donovan into giving him his liberty; but Donovan remained loyal to his leader, Jim Dawlish. To him had been entrusted the task of guarding the professor, and he carried out that duty with zeal and thoroughness.

The professor had sent Dawlish on a wild-goose chase. He had told him that the buried plunder was at a place called Kingsmere. In reality, it was at Wymering.

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There was no such place as Kingsmere, and Dawlish would probably spend several days chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. Then it would gradually dawn upon him that the professor had fooled him; and his fury would know no bounds. On his return to the lonely house by the shore, he would revenge himself upon the professor by subjecting him to all manner of hardships.

The professor knew this, and he was very anxious to make his escape before Dawlish came back.

For hours on end the imprisoned detective sat on the little camp-bed, trying to formulate plans of escape.

"The door is so securely bolted," he muttered, "that there's no hope of escape that way. As to the window, I could file away those iron bars if only I had a file. But even then this window is such a considerable height from the ground that I should be helpless. Truly this is a desperate plight!"

After thoroughly weighing the matter in his mind, the professor came to the conclusion that there was only one way of escape, and that was indeed a desperate way.

He must overpower his warder!

Pat Donovan was armed; the professor was not. Therefore, the dice were heavily loaded in favour of Donovan, and if the prisoner showed fight he would probably meet with serious mishap, even if he did not actually lose his life.

Grave though the risk was, the professor seemed to think it worth while. Anything was better than awaiting the return of the baffled Dawlish, and the serious consequences which would follow.

Having made up his mind to make this desperate bid for freedom, the professor loaded his pipe, and sat calmly puffing it, waiting for Donovan to come on the scene with his next meal.

He had not long to wait.

Footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and then a clatter of crockery on a tray.

The professor knocked out his pipe, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he rose to his feet, and tiptoed towards the door.

The bolts were shot back, and the door was thrown open.

Instantly the professor sprang at his man. He knocked the tray up into Donovan's face, and the warder gave a fendish yell as the contents of the hot-water jug shot over him.

Before Donovan was able to whip out his revolver the professor closed with him, and they fought furiously.

Donovan was a powerful man, but he was at a disadvantage. In the first place, he was taken completely by surprise; and secondly, he was scalded and half blinded by the sudden deluge of water.

However, Donovan recovered himself in an instant, and he grappled with the professor.

Together they wrestled and fought and swayed, and they were gradually working their way to the head of the stairs. Before they could realise the fact, they were over the top. Then they went rolling down the long flight, with arms and legs interlocked.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs Donovan happened to be underneath. In falling, the back of his head struck the floor with such an impact that he was half-stunned.

Donovan's hold slackened, and the professor tore himself free, and sprang to his feet.

He dashed towards the front door of the house. To his joy he found it unlocked. He wrenched it open, turned to take a last look at the prostrate and half-insensible form of his warder, and then he passed out of his prison into the glorious fresh air.

"Free!" muttered the professor. "I don't think I need hurry," he added, "Donovan isn't in a condition to follow."

He paused, and drank in great gulps of the fresh, keen air. A breeze blew up from the sea, fanning his fevered face.

For a succession of weary days and nights the professor had been confined in the stuffy little attic, and for a moment the air seemed too strong for him. He grew dizzy, and reeled a pace or two. But he quickly pulled himself together.

"Free!" he repeated, gazing along the wide expanse of desolate shore.

It seemed too good to be true.

The professor had anticipated a terrible fight for freedom. He had feared that he might stop a bullet in the process. But matters had worked out very smoothly and easily. A short struggle with his warder, a precipitous tumble down the stairs, and the rest had been dead easy.

Rejoicing in his new-found freedom, the professor strode away in the direction of the nearest village.

"I've no doubt Marie and the Toff have been very anxious about me," he murmured. "I'll relieve their minds by sending a telegram."

But the professor never got so far as the village post-office. No sooner did he enter the village than there was quite an uproar.

It was the local butcher who started it. From the little window of the attic in which he had been confined, the

professor had often seen this butcher arrive at Dawlish's house with supplies. He was a big, red-faced man, with a bull neck.

The butcher was now behaving very curiously. He came rushing out of his shop, shouting at the top of his voice:

"The looney's escaped—the looney from Ocean View!"

The professor gave a start.

"Ocean View" was the name of the grim, stone-built house in which he had been imprisoned. And it was quite obvious that this butcher took him for a lunatic.

It was equally obvious that the other people in the village thought the professor mad, for some of them backed away in alarm on his approach, and others, who were made of sterner stuff, advanced boldly towards him.

"Collar 'im, mates!" roared the red-faced butcher. "'E ain't safe to be at large. We shall 'ave 'im settin' fire to the village, or somethin' of that sort!"

The professor halted in anger and amazement.

"Stand back, you fools!" he shouted. "I'm no lunatic! I'm as sane as any of you—in fact, a thundering sight more so!"

But the braver spirits among the villagers closed in upon the professor. Their attitude was most menacing.

"Mr. Dawlish 'as told us all about you," said the bull-necked butcher. "One day, when I was deliverin' some meat at the 'ouse, I see a face up at the little barred window, an' I says to Mr. Dawlish, 'Who's that up there, sir, if I might make so bold as to ask?' 'Why,' says he, 'that's an 'alf-witted gentleman, an' Mr. Donovan an' me is takin' charge of 'im. 'E ought really to be in an asylum, 'cos 'e gets very violent an' dangerous at times. We 'ave to keep strict watch an' ward over 'im. If ever 'e should 'appen to get away, an' turn up in the village, you might 'ave the goodness to collar 'im an' bring 'im back.' An' that's prezackly what we're goin' to do!"

The professor was fairly staggered. He could understand, now, why his appearance in the village had caused such an uproar.

These people believed him to be mad. Jim Dawlish, with his usual cunning and foresight, had anticipated that the professor might escape, and he had forewarned the villagers, representing the professor to be a lunatic.

The simple-minded people had believed Dawlish's story, and they regarded it as their bounden duty to overpower the professor, and take him back to Ocean View.

A couple of burly men laid violent hands upon him, and others were standing by to render assistance, if necessary.

The professor saw that it would be futile to struggle.

"You fools!" he panted. "Dawlish has told you a cock-and-bull story. He is a criminal, and I am a detective, whom he has been keeping in custody!"

The villagers roared at this. It seemed to tickle them vastly.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"'E calls 'isself a 'tec!"

"Sure sign of madness, mates!"

In vain the professor protested his sanity. The more furious he became, the more it seemed to fit in with Dawlish's description of him as "violent and dangerous."

Unfortunately, the professor had no card to produce, as evidence of his identity. Dawlish had seen to that.

"Listen to me!" he cried desperately. "I am John Rivers, of Scotland Yard. You have only to get in touch with them, and they will corroborate what I say!"

There was a fresh burst of raucous laughter.

"'He's sufferin' from delusions, or what they calls Lucy Nations," said the butcher. "All loonies is like that. I used to know a poor feller who thought 'e was the Prime Minister. This chap thinks 'e's a 'tec. Let's get 'im back to the 'ouse."

Although he realised the hopelessness of putting up a fight, the professor was now so angry that he struggled fiercely to regain his freedom. Even the burly villagers, though possessed of prodigious strength, had much ado to overpower him. But they succeeded at last, and the professor was marched back to his prison.

It was outrageous luck. Within an hour of securing his liberty the professor had lost it again. A couple of stalwart men hustled and jostled him along the shore, towards the grim house that stood by itself in that wilderness of desolation.

The professor still tried to reason with them. But they had got it firmly fixed in their minds that he was a madman, and they merely laughed at him.

Presently the house came in sight, and the professor groaned.

Pat Donovan had recovered from the effects of his fall, and he was now standing in the doorway, with a malevolent grin on his face.

"So you've collared the looney?" he said, as the party came within earshot. "That's splendid! I'll see that he doesn't have a chance to break away again!"

"Oh, you villain!" panted the professor.

He was hustled into the house, and taken by force up to the little attic which he had hoped never to see again.

Donovan was highly delighted at the prisoner's recapture. He was also very relieved. He was answerable to Jim Dawlish for the safe custody of the professor, and had the latter got clean away there would have been serious trouble.

The village butcher, who had been mainly responsible for the capture, was given a five-pound note by Donovan. And the others were also rewarded.

When the villagers had gone, Donovan turned to the professor.

"You very nearly did the trick," he said, "but not quite. Dawlish had an idea that if ever you escaped you'd make for the nearest village, so he gave it out that you were a lunatic. Consequently, when you turned up in the village they pounced on you and brought you back. If there's any further attempt at escape— But then, there won't be. I'll see to that. I'm going to bolt this door, and I shan't bring you up any more food till Dawlish comes back. I'm not going to run the risk of havin' another tray knocked into my face."

The professor was silent. He well knew that his warder would have no mercy on him now. He would have to remain in durance vile, without food, until Dawlish returned from the wildgoose chase on which he had been sent.

And when Dawlish did return, matters would be worse instead of better. For Dawlish would be furious to think how he had been fooled.

The prospect that loomed ahead of the professor was far from rosy.

If only he had some means of getting in touch with those who were probably searching for him at that moment! If only he could get a message to Talbot and Marie!

But it was utterly impossible. And when the door closed upon him, and the bolts were shot into their place, black despair settled upon the professor. All hope of escape was dead in his breast. There was nothing for it but to remain in his stuffy prison and await the worst.

CHAPTER 9. Talbot Breaks the News!

MORNING came, but the fog had not lifted in London. It was blacker and denser than ever.

The conditions were damp and cold and cheerless. Probably the only persons who relished them were certain office-boys, who would turn up at their jobs an hour later than usual, not with tales of expiring grandmothers, but with harrowing stories of trains which had been hung up owing to the fog.

Talbot of St. Jim's was making his way westward through the busy streets.

Gloom had settled over London. It had settled over Talbot also.

The junior had a painful task to perform. He had lain awake all night, steeling himself for the ordeal.

He had to seek out his girl chum—Marie Rivers—and tell her what had transpired overnight—of his conversation with Jim Dawlish, and his fears for the professor.

The news that John Rivers had gone back to the old gang, and thrown in his lot with Dawlish, would be a cruel blow to Marie. Talbot hated having to be the instrument by which the blow should be dealt. But had he shirked the task he would have been a moral coward, and Talbot was never that.

He found it difficult, in the dense fog, to get his bearings. But at length he discerned the dim outline of the Houses of Parliament, and he knew that he was not far from the hotel at which Marie was staying.

"Poor Marie!" he murmured, as he strode along. "This is going to be a fearful shock to her. But I must see it through. She would have to know sooner or later."

He came to the hotel and ascended the steps. The lounge was brilliantly lighted—a cheery refuge from the fog without.

Marie Rivers was seated on a settee. She was scanning the morning paper, in the hope—the rather forlorn hope—of finding news of her father.

The girl was alone in the lounge. Talbot approached her without hesitation.

"Marie!"

She looked up quickly.

Talbot's face was a clear index to the nature of the news he had brought. He was looking grave and sorely troubled. And the dark rings round his eyes clearly showed that he and sleep had been under stranger strains.

"You have bad news, Toff?" said Marie, looking into his face.

Talbot nodded. He seated himself beside her.

Marie's face paled.

"My father!" she said quickly. "Tell me the worst, Toff. I am not afraid to hear it. He is—dead?"

"No," answered Talbot dully. "He is not dead—not in

the sense you mean, at all events. But John Rivers, detective and man of honour, is dead."

"Toff, you are talking in riddles. Tell me at once what has happened!"

"You can bear it—now?"

"Yes, yes. Don't keep me in this cruel suspense!"

Talbot faced the ordeal without flinching.

"Your father, Marie, has gone back to the gang. He has joined forces with Dawlish."

It was out now. But if Talbot had expected Marie to collapse, he was mistaken.

The girl rose quickly to her feet. Her eyes were flashing.

"I don't believe it!" she cried.

"Neither did I—at first," said Talbot. "But it's true, only too true."

Marie made a gesture of impatience.

"My father would never go back to the old life. He has forsaken it for good. Who has been putting this into your head, Toff? Who said this slanderous thing about my father, and made you believe it?"

"You are angry with me, Marie?"

"Indeed I am! To think that you, Toff, should believe this of my father! You know—at least, you ought to know—that he put the old life behind him long ago. His reformation was no pose, as some people seemed to think. It was real and sincere. He would never go back. He values honour too highly. He would starve rather than steal. Besides, do you imagine for one moment that he could be false to his present employers—the chiefs of Scotland Yard? And do you suppose he would be so utterly stupid, as well as criminal, to throw in his lot with that scoundrel Dawlish?"

Talbot remained calm under this outburst.

"If you will let me explain, Marie—"

The girl resumed her seat.

"Very well," she said coldly, "I will hear what you have to say."

Talbot plunged into his story.

"I met Dawlish last night by accident, down in the East End," he began. "I immediately tackled him on the subject of the professor's whereabouts. He replied that your father had gone back to the gang, and was engaged in cracking cribs. Like you, Marie, I was incredulous. I would not readily swallow such a story. But when Dawlish went on to say that he had the professor in his power I began to feel uneasy."

"What!" cried Marie, in amazement. "Dawlish had my father in his power?"

"Dawlish remembered a very unsavoury incident which happened in the old days. An old scientist named Garnett met his death in rather mysterious circumstances. Dawlish declares that he saw your father kill the old man."

Marie's face was deathly white now.

Like Talbot, she could remember quite well the night when the professor had gone to the house of the old scientist. And ever afterwards he had been very reticent as to what had really happened on that night.

Was it possible, reflected Marie, that her father was a murderer?

It seemed more than possible. And an icy chill seemed to run through the girl's frame.

Marie knew that her father would never have killed a man in cold blood. Even in his worst days his motto had always been, "No violence, unless absolutely necessary." At the same time, he might have dealt the old scientist a blow in the heat of the moment, a blow which was not meant to prove fatal, but which had proved so.

It was some time before Marie could speak. She was stunned by Talbot's revelations.

At length, however, Marie recovered her self-possession.

"Dawlish says he actually saw my father kill Dr. Garnett?"

"Yes."

"Can he produce any other witnesses?"

"No."

Marie drew a quick breath of relief.

"Then he has no case against my father," she said.

"No. He hasn't a case that would hold water in a court of law. At the same time, Marie, he could have made things very unpleasant for your father. He could have gone to Scotland Yard with his story, and the professor would have found himself in bad odour. He would have had to admit that he was present when the old scientist met his death, and there would be certain things that he might find it hard to explain away. He would have been turned out of his job, Marie."

"I do not doubt that, Toff," said Marie wretchedly. "I am beginning to see things more clearly now. Dawlish has blackmailed my father, and threatened to expose him unless he consented to rejoin the gang. They badly wanted my father, I know, because of his brains and genius. Without him the gang was a mere shadow of its former self. But do

(Continued on page 27.)

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EDITORIAL!

By TOM MERRY.

LET us eat, drink, and be merry!" That is the approved maxim of Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble, the two champion trenchermen of St. Jim's.

Well, they can certainly eat and drink; but they can't be Merry, because I'm Merry myself.

Study banquets and midnight feasts have always been popular at St. Jim's. Some fellows profess to despise a jolly good tuck-in, but in their heart of hearts they know that there are few things they like better. It's only natural that a healthy schoolboy, with an appetite as healthy as himself, should enjoy a bumper repast, and I feel sure that this Special Feasting Number of our little paper will be hailed with delight.

Mind you, I don't approve of sheer gluttony. I like to see a fellow enjoy his food, but I don't like to see him make a beast of himself. That's where Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble come in. The former can put away plenty of tuck when the spirit moves him, but he always knows when to stop. Baggy Trimble, however, would cheerfully go on stuffing till the cows came home, so to speak.

I have prevailed upon Fatty Wynn to contribute a few verses to this issue, and his inspiring "Ode to an Apple-Tart!" will raise many a smile, and make a few months water, into the bargain!

Baggy Trimble is going about looking very crestfallen. He has just read in a newspaper that in a few years' time we shall be taking our food in tabloid form. "Good-bye to the roast beef of Old England! Farewell to steak-and-kidney puddings and apple-dumplings, and other delightful dishes! Lunch will probably be served in the Form-room. A paper bag will be handed round, and each fellow will help himself to two tiny tabloids. No wonder Baggy Trimble looks glum at the prospect!

I hope all my chums will enjoy this number. It can't be eaten; but it will be "devoured with relish," which is much the same thing!

Tom Merry

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ODE TO AN APPLE-TART!

By FATTY WYNN.

Some sing of steaming sausages,
And some of saveloys;
Some make a fuss of asparagus,
And other table joys.
But there is one delight which warms
The cockles of my heart,
And 'tis to that I raise my hat—
The good old apple-tart!

Prate not to me of mutton-chops,
Or hefty ribs of beef;
Although I eat a deal of meat
It only gives me grief.
There's something else upon my plate,
Methinks I'll make a start.
Your sweetened crust I'll gently bu'st,
My noble apple-tart!

In the school kitchen you were made
By Mrs. Martha Mimms,
The smartest cook that ever took
A billet at St. Jim's.
And, oh, the rapture and the bliss
Which daily you impart!
Taken with cream, you are a dream,
My glorious apple-tart!

They've put a helping on my plate,
Enough to feed a mouse—
A tiny scrap that makes a chap
Inclined to growl and grouse.
Unless I get six helpings more,
I shall be "in the cart."
A filling feed is what I need,
My precious apple-tart!

You are delightful and divine,
And pleasant to the taste;
Yet other chaps leave lots of scraps,
Which is appalling waste!
The local doctor handed me
One day a diet-chart—
And he, you bet, did not forget
To mention apple-tart!

You could do with a pair
of Roller
Skates for
the winter,
couldn't
you?



(See page 14.)

THE HISTORY OF A SARDINE!

Told by Sidney Clive.

I WAS caught off the coast of Norway many years ago—I hesitate to say how many. Although I was called a sardine and packed in a sardine-tin, I am really a Norwegian brisling.

It was simply awful, being cooped up in a tin with about twenty others. There wasn't room for a fellow to shake his fin. And there was no hole through which a chap could breathe.

We were shipped, in due course, to England, and put up for sale at the grocer's in Wayland.

Our particular tin was purchased by Tom Merry of St. Jim's. Tom bought us for tea. He remarked to his chums that we should go down well with a dash of vinegar. But on reaching the school Tom found that Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess, had sent him a handsome remittance. So he bought a rabbit-pie at the tuckshop, in preference to us, and we were stowed away in the cupboard.

Our existence was completely forgotten for many months. We started to feel off colour. Some of my companions went bad, to put it bluntly. And even I did not retain the freshness of youth.

At last there came a day when the Terrible Three found themselves out of funds.

"What shall we have for tea, you fellows?" said Tom Merry.

"There's a tin of sardines in the cupboard," said Manners, with a flash of recollection. "They've been there for donkeys' years!"

"Then they won't be fresh," said Tom Merry doubtfully.

"Oh, rats! Sardines keep fresh for ever!"

Monty Lowther took the tin out of the cupboard and proceeded to open it. I was in the top layer of sardines, and I got a nasty jab with the tin-opener.

Tom Merry then stabbed me with a fork and conveyed me to his plate. He eyed me with extreme disfavour.

"I don't like the look of this sardine," he said.

"What's the matter with it?" growled Manners.

"It smells a bit—er—high."

"Well, this is high tea, isn't it?" said Monty Lowther humorously.

(Continued on col. 3, next page.)



TRIMBLE on the TRAIL!

By Monty Lowther.

"IS that the Wayland Stores?"

Baggy Trimble halted outside the door of the prefects' room, and pricked up his ears.

Cutts of the Fifth was talking on the telephone. He had called up the big stores at Wayland; and Baggy Trimble, with his usual curiosity, wanted to know what was in the wind.

"Cutts of St. Jim's speaking," said the Fifth-Former. "I want you to send over some supplies this afternoon. I'm givin' a special celebration in my study. I shall want a couple of your best cakes—one currant an' one seed—also a pound of butter, sugar, an' tea, two tins of sardines, two of peaches, two of pineapple, an' about five bobs' worth of assorted pastries. Oh, an' a two-pound pot of strawberry-jam. That's the lot. Send your boy up to St. Jim's with all the stuff, not later than five o'clock. Is that quite all right?"

Apparently it was, for Cutts rang off with a grunt of satisfaction.

Baggy Trimble scuttled away down the passage. He did not wish Cutts to know that he had been eavesdropping.

"So Cutts is having a big bust-up in his study, is he?" murmured Baggy, his eyes glistening. "It's no use my angling for an invitation. Cutts despises me. Superior beast! Even if I offered to fag for him, and get everything ready, he wouldn't even give me so much as a stale doughnut! And I happen to be awfully peckish at the moment! I could just about do with a jolly good feed!"

Baggy rolled out into the quadrangle, pondering the situation.

Presently a desperate idea occurred to him. They say that hunger breeds desperation; and it certainly did in Baggy Trimble's case.

"I'll hold up the boy from the stores on his way to St. Jim's!" muttered Baggy. "I'll collar the grub, and make off with it, and have the feed of my life!"

It sounded very simple. But it wasn't quite so simple as it sounded.

The boy from the stores would not be likely to part with the supplies without putting up a fight. True, he was only an under-sized youth; but Baggy Trimble didn't relish the idea of scrapping with him.

However, the situation was desperate. Baggy was hungry—ravenously so. He was "broke," and the tuckshop was closed to him. Unless he managed to commandeer some tuck he would have to have tea in hall—a most unappetising affair, consisting of thick bread-and-butter and weak tea.

"I'll do it!" muttered Baggy, clenching his fat fists. "I'll take a stroll towards Wayland, and hold up that brat of a boy when he comes along."

Fired with this resolve, Baggy Trimble rolled away out of gates. He vanished down the lane, in the direction of Wayland, and he kept a sharp look-out for the boy from the stores.

Presently Baggy was rewarded by the sight of a hand trolley, which was being

pushed by a small boy, about the size of a fag in the Second.

Apart from Baggy and the boy with the trolley, the road was clear.

The fat junior halted in the roadway. He saw that there was a fair-sized packing-case on the approaching trolley, and he had no doubt that the packing-case contained the supplies which Cutts had ordered on the telephone.

"Stop!"

Baggy rapped out the command imperiously.

The small boy halted and eyed the fat junior suspiciously from beneath the peak of his cap.

"Woder you want, fatty?" he growled.

"That packing-case!" said Baggy.

"I'm going to save you a journey by taking it up to St. Jim's."

The small boy looked grim.

"That you ain't," he said. "Which



Baggy Trimble had the shock of his life when he found that the packing-case contained household requisites and not tuck.

I've 'ad destructions to deliver it myself."

"Look here, don't be an obstinate young ass!" said Baggy Trimble.

"Hand over that packing-case, or I shall have to take it by force!"

"Go ahead, then!" said the small boy cheekily.

Baggy Trimble screwed up his pluck, and made a sudden rush at the youngster. He put all his weight—which was very considerable—into one hefty punch.

Biff!

"Yaroooooh!"

The small boy toppled backwards with a yell as Baggy's fist caught him full in the chest.

Splash!

The recipient of the blow had turned a back somersault into the ditch, which contained a foot or so of muddy water.

"Now's my chance!" muttered Baggy Trimble. And he picked up the handles of the trolley, and scuttled away down the road, pushing the plunder before him.

By the time the small boy had managed to sort himself out, Baggy was out of sight. He had turned off into the woods, and he trundled the trolley along the leafy footpath.

Baggy was still running, for he imagined he was being pursued. The perspiration streamed down his face as he tore through the wood with his plunder.

For nearly a mile Baggy followed that footpath. And then he sank down from sheer exhaustion.

"Oh dear!" he panted. "I feel half dead! But I'm safe enough now. As soon as I've had a rest, I'll find something to prise up the lid of this packing-case with."

After he had rested, Baggy looked around for something he might use as a lever. He could find nothing suitable; and then he recollected that he had in his pocket a jack-knife, which he had borrowed from Jack Blake.

The knife answered the purpose admirably, and Baggy prised up the lid with it, though the blade was broken in the process. Blake would probably have something to say about that later on.

On raising the lid of the packing-case, Baggy Trimble had the shock of his life.

Gone were his fond dreams of a glorious tuck-in, for there wasn't a sign of food in the packing-case. There were several bars of soap, and some tins of grate-polish, and some soda and starch, and other household requisites.

Baggy Trimble uttered a deep and dismal groan of disappointment. He realised that all his labour had been in vain, for that packing-case had not been intended for Cutts of the Fifth, but for the House Dame!

It was a bitter blow to Baggy. But his troubles were not yet over. He left the packing-case where it was, and walked back to St. Jim's in disgust.

On arriving at the school, he found that the boy from the stores had been there, and reported his act of piracy to the House Dame. That good lady sent for Baggy, and ordered him to go and fetch the packing-case at once, or she would report him to the Head. So Baggy had to fag all the way back into the woods for the packing-case and trolley which he had abandoned. And the errand took him such a long time that he was too late for tea in hall, and he was obliged to miss the meal altogether. Which was poetic justice!

THE HISTORY OF A SARDINE!

(Continued from previous page.)

Tom Merry lifted a small portion of me to his lips. He tasted me, and fell back in his chair with a choking splutter.

"I thought so!" he muttered. "The beastly thing's bad!"

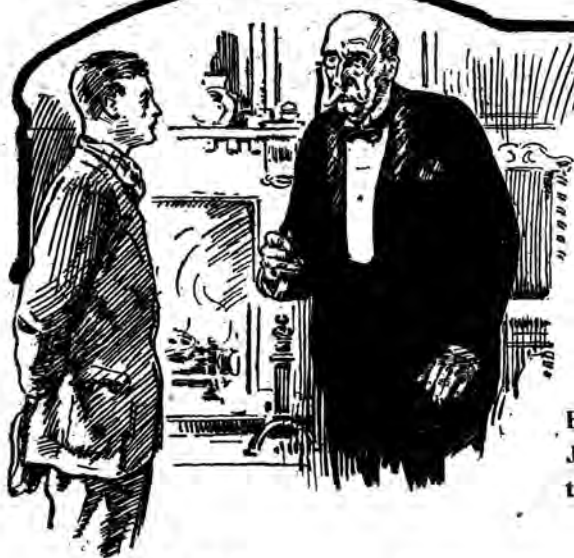
So saying, Tom Merry rose to his feet, picked me up by the tail, and bore me to the open window. The kitchen cat happened to be passing in the quad below.

"Catch, puss!" said the captain of the Shell.

And he hurled me out of the window. I landed on the flagstones with a sickening thud. But even the kitchen cat would have nothing to do with me. I was too far gone.

And here I lie, on the cold stones, awaiting a further bout of misadventures.

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THE TRIERS

BY
JACK CRICHTON



Black clouds gather round the head of plucky Jack Morton, but with the aid of his stalwart team of leather-chasers, he determines to make a bold bid for his rights.

CHAPTER 1. The Appeal!

JACK MORTON swung into the cottage, closed the door softly behind him, placed his bag down on the table, and then looked across the narrow room at the old lady who sat so quietly in her chair by the fire.

Asleep!

A soft smile came to the lad's face, and he was tiptoeing across the room, when suddenly his mother awakened, with a gentle start, and looked at him.

"Why, Jack lad!" she exclaimed, "You back? I must have fallen asleep!"

The boy bent and kissed his mother tenderly on the forehead. He was a fine, upright lad, of some seventeen summers, strong and powerful for his age, an open, manly countenance, square, powerful shoulders, and never afraid to show the world that he worshipped the very ground that his old mother walked on. Indeed, all the busy world of the northern town of Boltwich knew that Jack Morton was one of the best lads in the world, and popular, for wasn't he by far the most promising young centre-forward in Boltwich, and had he not kept his invalid mother in comparative comfort for some years now with his own capable young hands?

"Doctor been, mother?" he asked, a little later, as he sat down to the supper which had been awaiting him on the kitchen table, and trying to make his voice sound quite unconcerned.

Mrs. Morton gave him a quick glance. She had not risen from her chair, though usually it was her habit to busy herself about the lad when he returned from his long day's toil at Garton's factory in the town. Garton's and Clifton's were the two big concerns in Boltwich, making the town what it was, and great, indeed, was the rivalry between the two concerns, both in business, and in every sort of sport; but most especially on the footer-field.

"Yes, Jack," the old lady said in a moment, "he has been, and he told me again that I must go away at once!"

Jack did not speak for a moment. He had expected this. He had had a long talk with Dr. Garth a few days before, and then the good doctor had told him that unless a miracle took place his mother could not stand a long northern winter, but must get away to Cornwall or Devonshire, where it was warmer. Jack had listened, saying nothing. The doctor might just as well have told him to take his mother to South America. Where was the money to come from? Jack ate quickly, regarding his plate.

"Jack!"

"Yes, mother!"

He looked up, and then suddenly dropped

his knife and fork as he saw the expression in his mother's eyes. It was one that he had never seen before.

"When you're finished, lad, draw your chair up to me. There is something I ought to tell you—something I have never told you before, and which to-night I must tell you!"

Jack finished his supper quickly, and did as his mother had asked. He realised that there was something serious in the air, for his mother was the calmest and gentlest of women, and not the sort to make a lot of fuss about nothing.

"Perhaps I ought to have told you before, my boy," the old lady commenced; "but it was a matter of pride, and I should not speak now, had it not been for Dr. Garth. But he has frightened me, Jack, and I don't want to leave my lad yet."

"No, no, mother!"

"You must go and see Jasper Clifton!"

Jack opened his mouth and started to speak; but he was so surprised at his mother's words that no sound came from him. Jasper Clifton—or Sir Jasper, to give him his full name—was the head of the great Clifton Mills, by far the biggest concern in the town, as Sir Jasper himself was by far the richest and most important man in Boltwich.

Indeed, old Clifton was something of a mythical personage in Boltwich. He was so old, so rich, so uncompromising, so powerful, that, although now rarely seen by anyone, he lived like a revengeful spirit, ruling the lives of pettier mortals in the great town, and now Jack, who had, indeed, always rather congratulated himself that he worked at Garton's, rather than at Clifton's, heard his mother say that he must go to Sir Jasper. Miracles would never cease!

"Go to Sir Jasper!" he exclaimed. "Whatever for, mother?"

"Because Jasper Clifton is your grandfather, boy!"

"What?"

Mrs. Morton leaned across and laid a gentle hand on the boy's knee.

"Listen, Jack," she said, in a low voice, "and I will tell you the whole story. I—I am Jasper Clifton's daughter. I am Millie Clifton. Many years ago I was a happy girl in this town. Folks said I was fair to look upon. Certainly my heart was innocent enough, and I loved only life and to be good to those I loved, and I—I loved your father, Jack!"

She paused for a minute.

"He was just a workman in my father's mills, dear, and when my father discovered

our secret his rage—oh, well, it's many years ago now, and there is no good purpose to be served in bringing up bad memories; but, my dear, I loved your father, and I married him. I threw wealth, name, and comfort on one side, and gladly, and your father and I were married and went up to London, and my own father finished with me for ever!"

She sat then for some moments, looking into the boy's handsome, flushed face; then she smiled gently.

"You wonder why we came back? Well, dear, we fell on evil days in London, and we came back, hoping that my father would have relented; but he was harder than ever. Your father died, and I remained on here. We were forgotten. Our story was forgotten. Even your grandfather did not know that you and I were alone here, my boy, and as we were content in our little home I was too proud to tell you anything of the story, or go to my father; but now, my dear, I am old and ill, and I want you to go to my father and tell him that his little girl, Millie, is here in Boltwich, ill and wanting, and ask him to help me and to give you a helping hand, too, my boy. Will you go?"

The lad rose. The pallor on his face was great, but his shoulders were square, and there was an expression of quiet confidence on his lips.

"Of course I'll go, mother!" he said. "I—I don't think I want anything from a man who treated my father and mother like that; but he's going to help you now, or I'll know the reason why!"

CHAPTER 2. The Will!

THE Old Hall, where Jasper Clifton lived in no little style, outside Boltwich, was a wonderful old house—one of the finest in England, and the avenue up which one approached it, between long, rather gaunt lines of poplar-trees, was considered to be the best in the North of England.

To Jack Morton, that night, they seemed, however, rather ghastly sentinels, all of which observed him with a scrutinising eye, and seemed immediately to disapprove of him.

For Jack was not looking forward to the interview at all! He hadn't told his mother so. He was no coward, but the idea of bearding old Sir Jasper in his den was not a pleasant one, and he had lived long enough in Boltwich to be impregnated with the awe which followed the name of Jasper Clifton wherever it was spoken. And this man was his grandfather!

He reached the great house at last.

It was a blaze of light, an enormous place, the sound of gay music issuing from it, and

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

Jack had to brace himself to an effort before he could tug at the bell. But he did so at last, and almost immediately a footman opened the door.

"Round at the back, you—" he commenced, then looked forward into the night, and a broad grin came on to his honest face. "Hallo, Jack boy, it's you! What are you wanting?"

It was Ronnie Stevens, who played centre-half at times for Boltwich, and who had often played in minor club matches against Jack. They were best friends, and Jack thanked his lucky stars for the fluke that had brought Ronnie to the door in answer to his summons.

"Ronnie," he whispered, "do me a good turn. I've got to see Sir Jasper. It's a mighty important matter—"

"But, lad, there's a dance—"

"I know; but just go along and tell him there's someone from Miss Millie Clifton wants to see him!"

"Fhr!"

Jack laid a hand on the other's arm.

"Be a sport, Ronnie," he said. "You know I'm not a bad lot, and I wouldn't ask you this if it wasn't important. I've got to see the old man himself. If I go to the mill I'll see a clerk or a manager at the best, and I've got to see old Jasper himself. Will you do it, Ronnie?"

The footman's honest face broadened in a smile.

"Well, I'd do more for you, lad. You just stay there till I come back. Mind you, I don't suppose the old brute'll see you. He's in a raging mood to-night, because his pore was not to his liking at dinner; but I'll get that message to him."

He gave the lad another smile, and turned away, ever a good fellow.

He came back quite quickly.

"Come on, Jack!" he said. "That did it! Never saw the old chap so surprised in my life! Come along!"

Jack followed in the wake of the footman. A queer sensation ran through him as he passed through the big hall. "What a magnificent place it was, and once his mother's home! Smart guests sat about smoking and chatting, some to stare curiously at the work-lad who passed through the hall quietly after the footman. His heart was in his mouth, and then Ronnie Stevens threw open a door, and announced:

"Mr. Jack Morton, Sir Jasper!"

Jack went in.

He had never seen Sir Jasper Clifton before. The old man was too much of a myth for that. But he had seen photographs of him, and knew his face well; and it was strange to look at him and see his mother's eyes there, to observe the curious look in the handsome, stern old face, and to realise that this man and he were nearly related.

"Well"—the old voice was as cutting as an icy wind—"who are you?"

"Your grandson, sir!"

The old man put out a hand, and then drew it quickly back to his heart, as though he suffered from actual physical pain.

He did not speak for many moments. After a while, however, he moved a little farther into the room, as though he would get a better view of the lad's face, and there he stood staring at the boy, his hand at his heart, and a curious look of puzzlement on his face, his lips working, but not speaking.

"You—you are Millie's boy?" he muttered at last.

"Yes, sir!"

"Where—where is your mother?"

"She is in Boltwich, Sir Jasper," said Jack quietly, taking courage every moment, "where she has been for many years. My father has been dead ten years, and my mother would not have sent me to you had she not been very ill and in great need of help. So this evening she told me who I was—I didn't know before—and I have come to ask you, face to face, sir, whether you wish your daughter to die in Boltwich this winter, because I cannot afford to send her to a warmer part of the country?"

The old man's eyes had narrowed as the lad spoke, and slowly a smile came to his lips.

"You are—are very like your mother, boy," he said.

"I am very like you, sir," said Jack, with sudden inspiration, "because I am not afraid to speak my mind, when need be; and, although for my own self and for the sake of my dead father's memory, I would ask you nothing, I ask you to help my mother!"

The old man was silent, and then slowly

he lifted his great head, and broke into a loud laugh.

Jack watched him in wonder. At first he thought that the laugh was the forerunner of a rebuke, and that in another few minutes he would find himself being flung neck and crop out into the night.

But he was wrong, and suddenly his heart started to gallop as the old man came to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You're a real Clifton, boy," he said gruffly, "and the first I've seen since that fool of a girl took it into her head to disobey me. I'll help her, yes! Mind, I don't forgive her—I never forgive!—but I'll help her. And I'll teach someone else a lesson! Wait!"

He turned to the desk on one side of the spacious library into which the lad had been shown, and touched an ivory bell-knob. A footman answered the summons.

"Ask Mr. George to come to me at once," said Sir Jasper.

Jack started and looked at the old man. George Clifton was, of course, the old man's grandson—a man of over thirty, and a great power in the town, and Sir Jasper's heir. And now suddenly Jack realised that he was also his own cousin. It was strange, indeed, to feel himself accumulating relations like this. The door opened, and a tall, handsome man came into the room.

"Want me, sir?" he asked, then started, and gave Jack an insolent stare. "Hallo! Who's this?"

"Close the door!"

Sir Jasper spoke curtly—so curtly that Jack gasped, but the young man did not seem surprised. He closed the door, and then, with a queer look on his face, turned to his grandfather.

Sir Jasper had taken up a bunch of papers from his desk, and these he suddenly handed to George Clifton.

"Have a look at these, George," he said quietly; "these are a fresh lot of your bills I have received to-day and a communication or two about the way in which you have been behaving yourself lately!"

George Clifton uttered an angry cry.

"Really, sir," he cried, "am I to have to listen to this sort of thing in front of our own work-people, like this?"

A strange smile came to the old man's lips.

"This lad may be a workboy. No shame to him! I started as he has, and it seems a pity, George, that I had not the sense to make you also start like that! In front of you stands your cousin Jack Morton!"

"What?"

"Yes," continued Sir Jasper, "and the son of my daughter Millie. And, in order that you, to whom I have been so good, George, upon whom I have lavished everything, may realise that I am not an old fool, and do not intend to stand your nonsense all the time—in order that you may have a sharp lesson, not only am I going to help this lad and his mother, not only am I going to bring him into the business and put him on an equal footing with you, but to-night I am going to alter my will, and he is going to share equally with you!"

Jack gave a gasp. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own ears, but he managed to keep a silent tongue between his lips, realising that at moments such as these it was the best thing to do.

George Clifton gave a nasty sneer.

"Of course, sir," he said, "I cannot argue with you about your own business."

"You'd better not try!" said Sir Jasper. And then he turned to Jack: "Go back to your mother, my boy, and tell her you have seen me. Say that I do not forgive. I never forgive! But I will make her a suitable allowance, so that she need never want again. I will fix the whole thing with my solicitors to-morrow morning."

"Thank you, sir—thank you!"

The old man looked hard at the boy.

"And as for you, you will report yourself at my office to-morrow morning, and you will start to work for me! I will see what sort of stuff you are made of!"

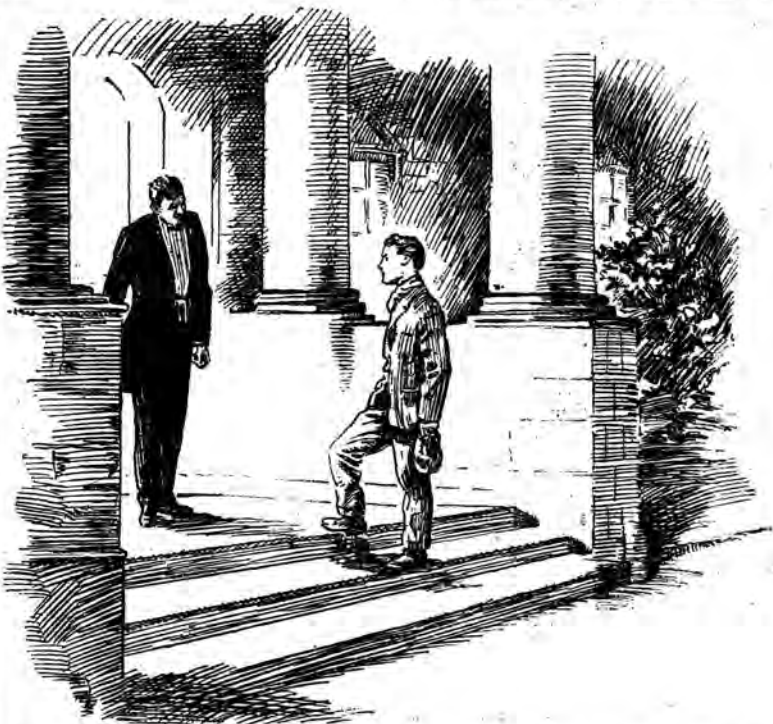
Jack started.

"I ought to give notice at Garton's, sir," he began, and then quickly, as he saw the angry flush which came to the old man's face, he realised his mistake—"I—I ought to!"

Sir Jasper turned very red, and Sir George gave a nasty little snigger. It was, perhaps, this last which saved Jack's bacon.

"I don't usually consider the welfare of Garton's, boy!" exclaimed his grandfather. "Will you be there?"

Jack did not hesitate. It was too big a chance. He still seemed to be in a whirlwind!



Nervously Jack pulled at the bell. Almost immediately the door was opened by a footman. "Round at the back, you—" he commenced, then, looking hard at Morton, a broad grin came on to his honest face, "Hallo, Jack boy, it's you! What are you wanting?" "I've got to see Sir Jasper," answered Jack. "It's a mighty important matter."

of a dream. His head was spinning, his heart galloping. He could not, for his mother's sake, afford to refuse such a chance as this.

"Yes, sir, thank you!" he said quietly. Sir Jasper then turned to George Clifton again.

"And as for you, sir," he snapped, "remember this. I shall alter my will to-night, leaving half my property to this boy and half to you. Now, I'm a judge of men—of human nature. There is good stuff in this boy, and while you devote yourself to the promotion of the Boltwich Football Club and neglect the firm, I dare say this lad will attend to his work as well as to his play. So make no mistake. If you drive me too far Jack Morton shall get all!"

A stony silence followed the words. Jack felt uncomfortable. George Clifton was chairman of the Boltwich Football Club, and although he had never made himself at all popular in that position, Jack was much too much of a good sportsman to care to hear the matter used as a threat.

"You can go, boy," said Sir Jasper, offering Jack his hand, and then turning to his desk. "Now, where is that will?"

CHAPTER 3. Turned Down!

JACK awakened the next morning with that very pleasant feeling of wondering what was the good thing that had come into his life. The sun was shining brightly for the northern winter, his mother had been touched beyond words by her father's action, and everything, as they say, in the garden was lovely.

He dressed quickly, and left home much earlier than ever, for although he was determined to take the position Sir Jasper had offered him, he had been treated decently at Garton's, and he had not the slightest wish to behave too badly. He was sure that if he could get to see Mr. Garton or one of the managers, his position would be understood, and he would be allowed to go on his way with good wishes.

So he was at the works early, and at once made his way to the office.

He was just asking for Mr. Garton, and was, as usual, being turned down by a superior clerk, when the head of the firm himself came into the office, and Jack, without hesitation, went straight up to him.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked.

The great man gave him a quick look. He knew Jack, for the lad played centre-forward for Garton's, and had been doing really well this season.

"Yes, Morton; what is it?"

Jack coloured.

He had intended to tell Mr. Garton the whole story, to tell him how he had discovered he was the grandson of the great Sir Jasper, and how he was going to Clifton's to take a half-share in the business; but here the lad's natural modesty stood in his way. There were so many clerks standing about that he hesitated to speak of himself, and he found himself stammering out the mere fact that he wished to leave his job.

"Eh?" snapped Mr. Garton. "Want to leave? Well, I'm not stopping you, am I! Go! I shall be turning hands off soon if business goes on as it is. But"—and, a rather curious look came into his eyes, for he had always liked the lad—"I suppose you know what you are doing?"

"I'm going to Clifton's, sir—to a good job!" the lad exclaimed.

Jack did not mean it to sound blunt at all. But, as a matter of fact, it sounded very blunt indeed, and it brought an angry flush to the man's face, and gasps to the lips of the clerks in the office. As it happened, Jack could not have chosen a worse moment for his words, though he did not know it. The previous day Sir Jasper had done Garton's a real bad turn in the business way, and Mr. Garton was smarting hotly under the fact this morning.

He gave a furious snort.

"Oh, going to Clifton's, are you, to a good job! I see! Well, then, go, and get out of my office quickly. I don't want any ingrates here! Go!"

"But, sir—"

"Get out!"

There was nothing else for it. Jack had put his foot into it, and he felt very sorry, but he realised that further argument would

only make matters worse, and also he realised that in a little while, when he had established his position at Clifton's, he would be able to meet Mr. Garton on a friendly and equal footing, and then they could shake hands and laugh about the whole matter.

So he hurried off, and was soon on his way to Clifton's. What dreams, what ambitions he took with him! He saw himself in a few years a rich man, and he determined then and there that never would he forget his old pals, never would he be proud or unkind.

He entered the offices at the great mills, and he noticed at once that there was rather a sombre air about the place. A clerk came forward to him.

"Yes?"

"My name is Morton," said Jack quietly. "Sir Jasper Clifton told me to report myself to him personally at ten o'clock this morning."

The clerk gave a strange start.

"Sir Jasper died during the night!" he said.

For a moment Jack could scarcely believe the words. He could not speak. He understood the silence in the office, and suddenly he felt very sad. He had liked the old man in spite of everything. There had been something "big" about him, and he had felt that in time they would be great friends. And now Sir Jasper was dead. It was all rather dreadful, all terribly sudden.

"Died!" he gasped. "But I only saw him last evening!"

"I know," started the clerk, and then paused, as the door opened and someone came into the office. It was George Clifton. He was looking very serious, and was already dressed in black. He was just passing through, eyes on the ground, without speaking to anyone in the office, when he lifted his head, and caught sight of Jack.

He gave a violent start, and turned more pale than he had been.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. Jack held his temper, remembering that his cousin had probably had a pretty bad time of it.

"Sir Jasper told me to come, you know—"

"Well, Sir Jasper is dead. Get out!" Jack gasped. He could hardly believe that anyone could speak quite like that at a moment such as this. But he turned quickly to the door of the office. This was not a moment for vulgar argument or abuse.

But he had only reached the door of the office when he heard George Clifton calling him.

"I'll have a word with you," he said. "Come in here!"

Jack turned, and saw that his cousin had thrown open the door of an inner private office. He wondered what was coming, but went through the door without speaking. He was determined to do everything he could to keep the peace, and not to do anything which could be considered unseemly at such a time as this.

George Clifton closed the door of the office, and turned on the lad. There was a look of cold fury in his eyes.

"Sir Jasper died of heart disease during the night," he said shortly. "It's bad luck for you, but that is that. You are not wanted here! Understand that! I am boss here now, and if you come hanging round here—I have nothing for you! You understand that absolutely?"

Jack flushed. The insolent cruelty of the words stung him to the quick, but he managed to keep his temper. It was upon

the tip of his tongue to remind the fellow that their grandfather had promised to help Mrs. Morton, and had said he would take Jack into the business, and give him half a share in his fortune, but he could not bring himself to mention such things at such a time as this.

"You understand?" asked George Clifton.

"Yes."

"Then get out and stay out!"

Jack turned, and left the office quickly. Nothing would have taken him back at that moment, for he felt that if his cousin spoke to him again in that tone he would forget everything, and would strike out. No man could speak to him like that!

So he went slowly back to his home, and half-way there he suddenly remembered that he had hung up his work at Garton's—and then, indeed, did the clouds begin to gather about the sun which had been earlier in the morning so very bright.

CHAPTER 4.

The Beginning of the Team.

FOR his mother's sake Jack Morton made one more effort to put things as they should have been as far as George Clifton was concerned.

For his single self he would have preferred never to have spoken to the fellow again; certainly never to have had the slightest thing to ask him as a favour. But Sir Jasper's death had knocked Mrs. Morton over, and it was absolutely essential that something should be done for the old lady now. Besides, Jack was out of work. He had been to Garton's again when he had recovered from the first shock of it all, but Mr. Garton had absolutely refused to see him, and he could not get taken on again. Clifton's, of course, was impossible; and, as for the rest of the town, things were very bad, and during the week which had passed he had been looking for work in vain.

There had been, however, one hope. He had mentioned it to no one, for he did not care to wait for dead men's shoes. But his grandfather had said that he should inherit half his fortune, and, indeed, the last words which he had heard Sir Jasper use had been when the old gentleman had asked for his will.

Perhaps when the will was read the lad would be rich—perhaps?

But he was not.

He received the news through his pal, Ronnie Stevens, at the Hall, who was present when the will was read, and the lad's name was absolutely missing from the document. Evidently the old man had not had time to make the necessary alteration.

It was hard luck, though for himself Jack had no very great complaint. At the time he had thought that it was rather hard lines upon George Clifton to be cut off like this for someone of whose existence the old man had not known ten minutes before.

But for his mother he must sink his pride; he must try to do something. After all, blood should be thicker than water. George Clifton was his first cousin. Even if he would do nothing else, perhaps he would give him work at the mill.

So on the day following the reading of the will Jack betook himself once again to the Hall, and asked for George Clifton.

This time it was not Ronnie Stevens who came to the front door, but a very superior butler, who looked upon the lad, in his humble garb, with ill-concealed contempt.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I'm Mr. Clifton's cousin!" Jack said stoutly. "My name is Jack Morton! I wish to see Mr. Clifton!"

A rather queer look came into the man's eyes, and it seemed to the lad that, after being on the point for a moment of saying that he could take Jack to George Clifton, the man changed his mind.

"All right!" he said. "Wait a minute in here!"

He took Jack just inside the front door, and left him there while he went away into the house.

The lad had to wait longer this time, perhaps ten minutes, and then Graves, the butler, came back to him.

"Come along!" he said.

Jack followed him without a word, and a minute later was being shown into the same library where his momentous and strange interview had taken place with his grandfather.

George Clifton was standing in the middle

**Have a Pot-Shot at our
GREAT FOOTBALL COM-
PETITION.**



**6 RILEY BILLIARD-TABLES
MUST BE WON!**



The ball struck the cross-bar like a cannon shot, then bounded back into play. Four lads jumped high into the air, and four heads reached for the ball, but it was Jack's that got there first. He sent the ball flying clean into the net out of the reach of the goalkeeper's outstretched fingers.

of the room, looking very grave and serious. He waited until the door was closed until he spoke.

"Well?" he said, looking up.

Jack looked at him rather awkwardly. He did not know quite where to start, although he had been considering the conversation all the way to the Hall.

"I've come to see you, Mr. Clifton," he said quietly, "because I want to know where I stand. I—I— You know I came to see Sir Jasper because of my mother?"

A cold, cruel smile came to George Clifton's lips.

"You came too late, young man!" he sneered.

"My mother is very ill!" said Jack.

Clifton made a contemptuous gesture, but did not speak.

"My grandfather said something about putting me into his will?" Jack then remarked.

A remarkable change came over George Clifton's face. It was contorted in fury, and he stood staring at Jack as though he would strike him down.

But it was only after a few moments that he found words.

"Well, he didn't!" he cried. "And it's no good you coming snivelling round here! I don't know you, and I don't want to! I've come into every penny of my grandfather's money, and I don't want to have anything to do with people of your kind! Your mother married some wretched loafer!"

Jack sprang forward, and for a moment his fist was raised, but he just managed to control himself.

"You speak of my father like that again!" he cried threateningly.

George laughed.

"I could break you in half, you young puppy!"

"Try, you cad!"

For a moment the two eyed one another. Then Jack made one great effort, ashamed of his loss of temper.

"Look here," he said, "I'm your own flesh and blood. I'm sorry if I lost my temper. I don't want anything under the will. All I ask, as man to man, for my mother's sake give me a job at the mill!"

George Clifton laughed in his face.

"You get out quick," he sneered cruelly, "and don't come back!"

Jack went very pale. He saw himself taking this word back to his aged mother—the daughter of the very man from whom George Clifton had inherited all his wealth.

"I'll get out," he said slowly, going up to the other and looking him in the eyes, "but I shall not forget, George Clifton, the way you have spoken to me to-day!"

Jack Morton turned, and in another minute had left the Hall.

He was white and cold with fury, and he did not hear his name spoken until Ronnie Stevens was close at hand.

Then he turned quickly, and found that young man at his side. He was not looking very pleased with life.

"Hallo, Ronnie!" he cried. "What's up?"

"Sacked!"

"What?"

"That brute, George Clifton, always had it in for me, and has just sacked me, and, what's more, has told me that he won't want me to play any more for Boltwich! What do you think of that?"

Jack stared, and then in a few words told Ronnie of his own interview with his cousin. He told the whole story, and Ronnie listened with ill-concealed amazement.

"Well, I'm dashed, Jack!" he said. "That's a queer start, isn't it? We are both in the same boat. My word, wouldn't I like to get even with George Clifton! I say, shall you and I agree that we'll never give in until we've shown him up?"

Jack started, and then gripped Ronnie's hand.

"You bet we will!" he said, and then thought: "But how—how are two poor lads like ourselves to start?"

They were walking along, and had just reached a large piece of common land outside Boltwich, where several nondescript football teams were kicking a ball about. Almost of a common impulse, the two lads stopped, and stood watching the rough-and-tumble game.

Then suddenly Ronnie gave a cry, and caught the other's arm.

"I've got it!" he cried excitedly.

"What?"

"The way to start getting our own back on that brute Clifton," Ronnie cried. "You know he is practically Boltwich Football Club. He's chairman, and he's made a fine mess of it. He's got a lot of cash in it, and has got everyone by the heels. We'll start a rival team, and knock Boltwich into a cocked hat!"

"But, Ronnie, my dear fellow—"

"It'll annoy him more than anything else, Jack, and it will give you a position in the town. I've played often for Boltwich, and you are one of the best centre-forwards in the town. We'll get up a team bit by bit—Why, hello, there's Steve Logan!"

As Ronnie spoke he pointed to a tall, young fellow who, like themselves, had been watching the youngster who had gained possession of the ball.

He came up to them, and Ronnie at once asked him what he was doing, and why he was not working at the mill.

"I've been sacked!" he said.

Ronnie gasped.

"Great Scott, Steve! Why?"

"Oh, that brute, George Clifton! He's started already. You know I once told him what I thought of him on the footer-field, and he has never forgiven me. I am sacked from the Boltwich team, too!"

Jack and Ronnie stared in surprise, for Steve was the right-back of the Boltwich team, and this showed that George Clifton was indeed losing no time in showing his position.

"Three of us!" muttered Jack.

Steve Logan looked at him.

"What do you mean?"

Jack quickly explained, and Logan's face darkened as he listened.

"He's a bad lot," he muttered, "and I should not be surprised if there was some dirty work with the will—eh?"

Jack started violently.

"I never thought of that," he said; "but, good heavens, there couldn't be!"

"Of course, you've got no evidence," said Logan; "anyhow, I'd give my boots to get even with Mister George Clifton! I'm older than you two, remember; I've got a young wife. And, look here, if you two are game we'll—well start a team to-day! My word,

yes—a team that won't be beat, boys! Come along—come along with me, now!"

Jack and Ronnie followed Logan, who went up to the group of raw lads who were having a strenuous time kicking the football about. One and all knew Steve Logan and Ronnie Stevens, for they were great people in the football world in Boltwich.

"Like to make up a game?" Logan asked. He looked quickly round. "We've just eleven," he said, in a moment, and pointed over to a team who were having shooting practice. "Let's challenge that lot over there to a short game—twenty minutes each way!"

The lads, of course, were delighted, and, headed by Steve Logan, they marched across the common.

They found that the side they had seen was a small local club, named the Hurricanes, well known for their keenness.

"Here you are, Jack," said Steve, giving the leather to Jack. "You are skipper of this outfit! Challenge them!"

"No—" started Jack modestly; but Ronnie gave him a shove forward.

"Yes, go on, Jack!" he cried. "You're our captain. You've got the biggest grouse against Clifton, and we'll follow you from to-day!"

Jack hesitated a moment longer, then he went up to the captain of the Hurricanes.

"Would you chaps care to have a bit of a game?" he asked.

The skipper of the other side looked at the nondescript lot of lads rather contemptuously. He had not recognised the two Boltwich players yet, and as not one of the lads were dressed in other than working clothes, that pride which is to be found in proper footer togs and a brilliant shirt made him rather contemptuous of Jack's offer.

"Wouldn't be much use, would it?" he said. "We've got our full team here?"

Steve Logan came forward.

"Let's have a try," he said.

The captain of the Hurricanes looked at him, then suddenly, recognising who he was, his whole attitude changed.

"Oh, all right," he said, "if you like—er—Logan! Didn't see you!"

The scratch team was arranged, Jack Morton going centre-forward.

Immediately the game was started Ronnie Stevens at centre-half and Jack at centre-forward found their form. The lads they had picked up were not great stuff, but

they were full of beans and enthusiasm, and exalted at the idea of having a game with two of Boltwich's best players.

The Hurricanes started some pretty work, but before they quite knew what had happened, Ronnie had snapped in on a pass which was a bit too scientific, and not quite strong enough, and in another moment had sent Jack away on his own.

Jack tricked a half-back, and slipped cleverly between the two backs who came for him.

He was alone now, and he went forward full tilt, his troubles forgotten, and only the keen love of the game in his heart.

As he steadied himself he saw the worried look in the eyes of the opposing custodian, and felt that he had him guessing. He took a breath, and shot low and hard, and had the satisfaction of putting his team in front within the first few minutes of the game.

This sobered the Hurricanes, who suddenly realised that it is not football clothes that make the footballer, and they started to give of their best.

But they found themselves face to face with Steve Logan. He was absolutely brilliant. Of course, he was in another class, and time and again he beat off the whole front line of the Hurricanes single-handed. Once or twice, seeing him too hard-pressed, Ronnie would drop back, and give him a helping hand.

It was only a rough-and-tumble game, but both sides were playing hard, and before the end of the first twenty minutes Jack had added another goal. He had discovered that he could trust his inside-left, a lad called Jim Fraser, and together they had terminated a very pretty bit of dribbling right up the whole length of the field with a sound goal.

In the second half the Hurricanes made a terrific effort. They had the wind and the sun behind them now, but they were a beaten side.

Steve Logan got the leather, passed to Ronnie, then ran forward shouting for it, and was away himself up the field like a flash.

Jack was at his side, and just as Logan himself was brought down outside the area, he got the ball. There were several players on top of him, but he shot through them, and kicked for goal. The ball struck the cross-bar with terrific force, and came bounding back into play.

Four lads jumped high into the air, and four heads reached for the ball, but it was Jack's head that reached it first. With a well-directed twist of his neck, the lad sent the flying sphere clean into the net out of reach of the goalkeeper's outstretched fingers.

Jack had scored a third goal!

Phoop! It was the call of time, and the team of lads gathered round the hero of the match.

Steve took his hand.

"Jack Morton," he said, "I've often heard about you, but I've never seen you play before. You ought to have been playing for Boltwich long ago. I'll be proud to play under you. Mark my words, we'll get a fine team together; the team—"

He stopped, as several of the lads looked round quickly.

Someone was coming towards them, someone looking very angry, and walking at a great pace. It was George Clifton!

He came right up to the players.

"Look here!" he cried furiously. "My grandfather gave this common to the town on condition that it was only for practice and not for matches. I shall have it back if—" He paused, and suddenly went red with rage as he saw Jack. "Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes," said Jack quietly.

"And Steve Logan!" said that worthy.

"And me!" chimed in Ronnie Stevens. "We've been having a little game."

Clifton bit his lip. He was very angry indeed. The fact of those three so calmly standing there in front of him rather took the wind out of his sails.

"I see!" he sneered. "And what team do you call yourself—the out-of-works, eh?"

Jack Morton shook his head.

"No, Mr. Clifton," he said quietly. "We are not that. We are a team of triers! Perhaps we don't look much, but if you watch us through the next few months, you'll find that we know how to play the game! Yes, play the game—which is more than men of your stamp can ever do!"

(Fate has dealt hardly with Jack Morton, but he does not intend to let the grass grow under his feet. There are some very startling situations in next week's grand long instalment of this ripping serial, so be sure and read it.)

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York.

"The Spectre of the Past!"

(Continued from page 19.)

you honestly believe, Toff, that my father gave way to Dawlish, and yielded to his wishes?"

"What else is one to believe, Marie?" said Talbot miserably. "Dawlish had the professor in his power."

"And you think that my father has joined him, and gone back to the old life?"

"I'm sorry, but that is my opinion."

They sat silent a long time.

Talbot felt desperately sorry for his girl chum. It had been no easy task to break such painful news to her, but he had not faltered.

And Marie, fond of her father though she was, felt her faith in him wavering. She gradually came round to Talbot's way of thinking.

What must have happened was only too clear.

Jim Dawlish had resurrected that unsavoury incident of the past, and had blackmailed the professor.

There had been two courses open to John Rivers. Either he could defy Dawlish to do his worst, in which event he would probably have lost his job at Scotland Yard; or, he could have given in to the blackmailer, and agreed to go back to the gang.

Both Talbot and Marie were forced to the conclusion that the professor had taken the latter course. Else why had he suddenly disappeared?

Dawlish had told Talbot that the professor was now engaged in "cracking cribs." And Talbot believed him. For if John Rivers had refused to rejoin the gang, surely he would have gone back to his duties at Scotland Yard?

But there was no news of him there. Marie informed Talbot that she had kept in close touch with Scotland Yard, hoping every hour to hear news of her father. But no news had come through. Detectives were engaged in scouring the country for their missing colleague.

This latter thought roused Marie into action.

"Toff," she said, rising to her feet, "we must find my father at all costs. We know all the places where the members of the gang meet from time to time. We will watch them. We will explore every possible place where my father is likely to be."

Talbot could not but admire the splendid determination of his girl chum. At the same time, he looked uneasy.

"I know you are brave, Marie," he said—"braver than a good many fellows I've met. But those fearful slums—"

"We will go to them together," said Marie.

And there was nothing more to be said.

Marie and Talbot set off on their quest. And then followed a succession of long, dreary, hopeless days—days of futile searching in sordid slums.

They visited all the old haunts. They went through perils and adventures. They faced privation and discomfort. But not a single clue turned up to lighten the labours of the searchers.

There was no news of the professor. He had vanished utterly and completely. And even the sleuths of Scotland Yard had failed to solve the mystery.

And so at last, utterly spent with their exertions, Talbot and Marie were compelled to abandon the search.

"We've done our best," said Talbot, "and we cannot do more."

Marie, who was in a state bordering on collapse, saw that Talbot was right, and that there was nothing to be gained by prolonging the fruitless search.

Heavy of heart, they stepped into the train that was to take them back to St. Jim's.

They believed, both of them, that the professor had gone back to the gang, and was pursuing a career of crime in some remote part of the country. They had tried to find him, and plead with him, and save him from the ruin and disgrace that would surely follow. But their quest had failed, and, crushed and dispirited, they made their way back to St. Jim's.

Those were indeed dark days for all concerned—for Talbot, who could scarcely bear to witness his girl chum's grief; for Marie, whose affection for her father was lasting and loyal; and for the professor himself, who was a prisoner in duress vile.

But just as the darkest hour heralds the approach of dawn, so the clouds would presently begin to lift.

THE END.

(Will brave John Rivers be able to extricate himself from his precarious position? Be sure you read next week's thrilling yarn, entitled "THE PROFESSOR'S PERIL!" Meanwhile, grasp the opportunity of entering our great Football Competition.)

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