

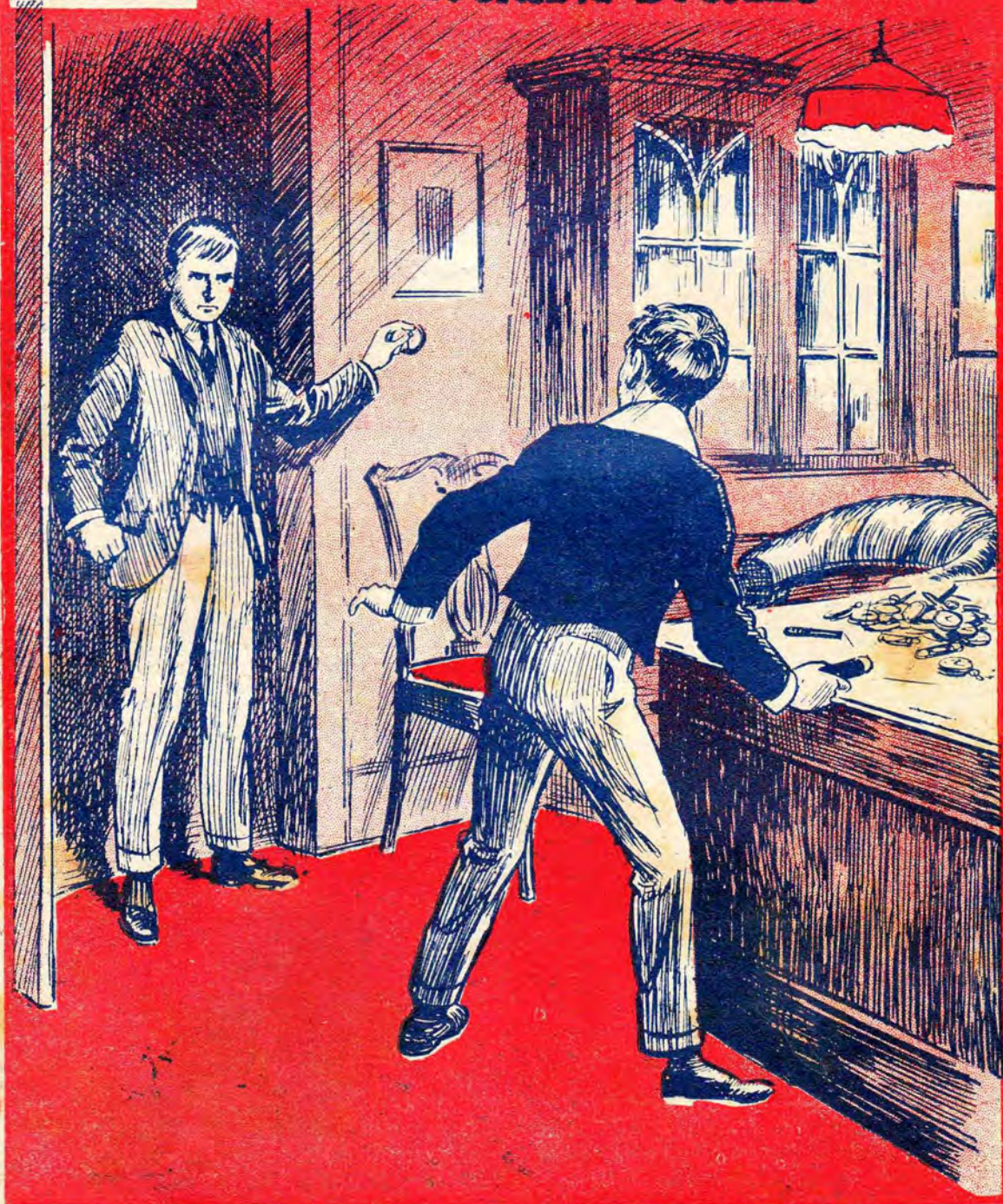
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"THE REFUGEE OF ST. JIM'S!" An Exciting School Story of Tom Merry & Co., in this issue.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 835.
Vol. XXV.
February 9th, 1924.



DIGBY IN A DILEMMA!

The electric switch clicked, and the voice of Knox the prefect broke the tense silence. "Digby! So I've caught you redhanded!" (A dramatic moment in this week's great school story.)



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
"THE MAGNET" Every Monday
"THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
"JUNGLE JINKS" Every Thursday
"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly.

My Dear Chums,—Another bumper number next week! Mr. Martin Clifford has been searching round for something entirely new, and he has succeeded in admirable fashion. The story of St. Jim's which you will find in the coming issue of the GEM will strike you at once as being quite out of the way.

"LEN'S LUCK!" By Martin Clifford.

It is a tale of a lonely and mysterious waif, who is encountered by Tom Merry & Co. as they came back from a footer match at Wayland. There is nothing very special in the meeting at first sight, but Leonard Lee, the waif, is a strange fellow. He declines the assistance which is promptly offered by the St. Jim's juniors. There follows an amazing impersonation, and round this plot, in which Len is the central figure, hangs a good deal of romance. Most likely your opinions will be divided as to the actions of the waif, but there will be only one verdict as regards the outstanding merit of the yarn. It is Martin Clifford at the tip-top of his best form, and it all goes with a swing.

I have just been reading a letter from a GEM reader, in which the writer says he likes stories which can happen, in preference to something which gets out of the range of ordinary imaginations. Well, this story could easily have happened. In this respect it hits the bulls-eye a mighty crack. But you want an author like Martin Clifford to come along and make the dry bones of hard facts live, so that you can feel that vivid, sit-up-and-take-notice sort of interest which is a golden guarantee the author has produced the goods.

A MUSICAL NUMBER.

There have been growls loud and deep about the absence of the "St. Jim's News." You will note that this omission has been made good. This week's supplement was a thumping triumph. Next week's will be a ditto ditto. Music is a subject which appeals to most. Of course, there are melancholy minded people who scorn the soft notes of the piano or the organ, and say they hate the pathetic wailing of the bagpipes. But one takes these opinions cum grano salis, like Cæsar did with his boiled egg. If space permitted I should have a lot to say in this connection about harmony, also concerning the merry, sparkling, tuneful issue of the "St. Jim's News," which you will find as large as life in THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 835.

next Wednesday's GEM. But there is no room to talk of the minstrels of St. Jim's, of the power and cadence of Arthur Augustus when he fairly gets going over some simple, sentimental ballad with a heart-stirring choke in every line. They all sing at St. Jim's. Take Baggy Trimble, for example. That inimitable lump of adipose always sings small. Some people say that singing is a lost art. There is not so much of it, anyway, as there ought to be. There are many points of interest in the coming supplement, so make sure of it. I never saw anything of better tone. The Music Supplement will score.

"JACK HAMILTON'S WONDER-BIKE!"

By Henry Valentine.

This is a splendid yarn of the track. The title is no misnomer, either. The whole thing hums with vitality, and if you had heard the humming of the motor-bike which falls so luckily, and so miraculously, into the possession of Jack Hamilton, you would be ready to attribute life to it. It was one of the fed-up machines, of which one hears now and again. The bike was not fed-up, but its original owner was suffering that way. He handed the racer over to Jack, who was a fine fellow, and who forthwith proceeded to make history with it, and pull off a win. Good history it is, too, the same as it is a first-rate yarn with a punch in it.

THE GRAND FOOTBALL COMPETITION!

Many readers are sending in inquiries as to the date of publication of results. All in good time, as the parrot said on an historic occasion. The work has been prodigious, but the judges have sat up all night to do it. They are getting ahead. All results will be made known in the Companion Papers at the earliest possible moment.

"TOM OF THE AJAX!"

Next Wednesday's instalment contains many startling developments. Tom Gale gets aboard the good ship Ulysses at last, and the bully Barr comes to grief in a merry mill. Our serial has been received with a furore. We can be proud of it as a dramatic yarn of sport, and of life at sea.

THE TUCK HAMPER.

I would suggest once again that entries might be sent in on postcards. This saves expense, and, after all, the brightest storyette which ever made you experience that curious, bubbly sensation behind the ears which comes after a hearty laugh, can be packed neatly into a p.c. I notice that the majority of competitors write small, neat hands, which is just as it should be. In early times folks wrote their letters with a handy stick dipped in mud, but we have got beyond all that now.

A BRAIN WAVE.

Thanks of the heartiest go to a Southampton reader who says he makes a habit of leaving a copy of the GEM on the table at his free library. "Whenever I go up there," he says, "I always find someone reading it." A very nice idea, that!

Your Editor.

HEDLEY SCOTT'S

LATEST SUCCESS!



A Powerful Stage and Detective Serial, featuring the world-renowned detective, Ferrers Locke, and his plucky boy assistant, Jack Drake.

JUST STARTING IN THE "MAGNET!"

Wrongfully accused, Frank Digby is forced to flee from St. Ormond's to seek shelter with his cousin Robert Arthur Digby of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. The fugitive finds staunch friends in Tom Merry & Co., and a safe hiding place in the old school, but little did he realise the trouble which was to follow.

THE REFUGEE OF ST. JIM'S!



A Magnificent New, Long
Complete Tale of Tom
Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Bad News for Digby!

"HUWHAH! Heah comes the charabanc, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth was standing on the School House steps when he made that exclamation. His chums, Blake and Herries, were in the hall, chatting to Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell. All were dressed in their football clothes. It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at St. Jim's. The weather was crisp and snappy, and just right for footer. The St. Jim's junior eleven were playing an away match with Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood that afternoon.

Gussy's exclamation brought the other juniors rushing eagerly out of the hall door.

"My word!" exclaimed Blake enthusiastically. "The giddy charabanc's arrived! Isn't she a stunner?"

A large, handsome, red charabanc had driven in through the gates of St. Jim's. It had been Gussy's idea for them to travel to Rookwood and back by charabanc, and this idea had been greeted with hearty acclamation by the other juniors—especially as Gussy, who had just received a fiver from his pater, was nobly standing the "exes."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry, as the charabanc drew up to the School House steps. "Now we shan't be long! Here come the others!"

Talbot, Clifton Dane, and Harry Noble came hurrying up, to be followed by Figgins & Co., who had run over from the New House.

The charabanc was soon surrounded by admiring juniors.

"Tumble in, kids!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't got much time to waste. Rookwood is rather a long way away, you know. The ride will tone us up for the licking we're going to give Jimmy Silver & Co.—what?"

"Rather!"

The members of the team "tumbled" into the charabanc. The front seats had been reserved for the players, and the rear ones were quickly filled by other juniors, eager to visit Rookwood as spectators.

"Now, are we all here?" said Tom Merry, looking round. "My hat! Digby's missing!"

Robert Arthur Digby of the Fourth was conspicuous by his absence.

"Bai Jove! Dig must be up in the studay, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "I remember now, he had a lettah, and he took it upstairs. The feahful ass! He has forgotten the time!"

Tom Merry jumped down from the charabanc, and Blake followed him.

"We'll go in and rout out the chump!" said the St. Jim's junior skipper. "Dig deserves to be bumped for keeping us waiting!"

Tom Merry and Blake hurried upstairs to the Fourth Form passage, and entered Study No. 6.

Digby was standing by the window. He had a letter crushed in his right hand. He turned as Merry and Blake entered, and the haggard expression on his face told them instantly that something had happened to upset Digby.

Instead of "blowing him up," as they had fully intended to do, Tom Merry and Blake looked anxiously at their chum.

"What's the matter, Dig?" asked Blake. "Bad news?"

Digby nodded.

"Ye-es," he replied, in a quiet voice. "Bad news of a sort. It's about my cousin Frank. You've heard me speak about him."

"Your cousin Frank of St. Ormond's?" asked Blake.

"Yes. This letter is from him. He's in terrible trouble at the school; in fact, he's under sentence of a public flogging and expulsion!"

Tom Merry and Blake both gave low whistles.

"My hat! What ever has he been up to?" asked the Shell captain.

"Frank's been up to nothing!" exclaimed Digby, his eyes flashing. "Frank is one of the best! He's as straight as a die, I can swear to that! Yet—they've accused him of assaulting one of the fellows of his school—a chap with plenty of money—and robbing him!"

Tom Merry and Blake looked grave.

"That's jolly rotten!" exclaimed Blake. "What proof have they against your cousin? The Head of St. Ormond's couldn't expel a chap without proof of his guilt."

"That's just it," said Digby miserably. "They've got proof—at least, they think they have. Some of the stolen property was found in my cousin's study. He and the fellow who was robbed were not on the best of terms. The other fellow, so Frank says, is an awful rotter, and he has pressed the matter to the full. My cousin is innocent; he tells me so in his letter, and I believe him. But the Head of his school won't. Frank is to be publicly birched—and disgraced—for a thing he didn't do."

"Hard lines!" exclaimed Blake. "But buck up, Dig! Don't let it worry you. Come along to Rookwood, and forget it for the time being. The charabanc is outside, and we're all waiting for you."

Digby gave a start.

"Oh, I had forgotten footer! Look here, Tom Merry, don't you think I'd better go over to St. Ormond's, and see the Head there, and tell him that my cousin—"

"I don't think you'd better do anything of the sort, Dig!" replied Tom Merry vehemently. "Don't be an ass, old chap! What could you do, anyway? You can't prove your cousin's innocence, just by going over to St. Ormond's. Better keep off the grass, old chap, and come along to Rookwood."

"Yes—this way, Dig!" said Blake, taking his chum's arm and leading him out of the study. "Things will turn out all right, so don't worry. You can't do any good by barging in over at St. Ormond's. Kim on!"

Digby suffered himself to be led away.

The juniors in the charabanc were waiting impatiently, and several lurid remarks were hurled at Digby.

The Fourth-Former did not take any notice of them, however.

He climbed up into his seat in the charabanc, and sat there moodily, his face looking hard and troubled.

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Monk! Monk!

"We're off!" chirruped Figgins gleefully.

The charabanc started, turned slowly, and then made its way through the gates of St. Jim's and along the Rylcombe Lane, en route for Rookwood.

The juniors aboard kept up a merry round of chatter.

The only silent one amongst them was Robert Arthur Digby.

He did not join in the laughter, but hardly spoke at all. It was apparent that his cousin's disgrace had come as a great blow to him.

Tom Merry cast several anxious glances at Digby.

Dig was a very useful player at inside-right, and Tom knew that, as Jimmy Silver & Co. were a very "hot" team, it behoved every member of the St. Jim's junior eleven to do his very best on the field that afternoon.

That Digby and his cousin Frank were greatly attached to each other was well known among his chums. Dig had often said that he wished his uncle would transfer Frank to St. Jim's.

"Dig's looking frightfully worried, isn't he?" said Blake to Tom Merry, as the charabanc hummed on through the wide, open countryside.

The junior skipper of St. Jim's nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "I quite understand how Dig feels about his cousin, but I do hope he won't allow it to affect his play. We're going over to Rookwood to give Jimmy Silver & Co. a licking."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry leaned over to Digby and tapped him on the shoulder.

The Fourth-Former gave a start, as though waking from a reverie.

"Back up, Dig!" exclaimed Tom Merry cheerfully. "For goodness' sake don't let worry muck up your play this afternoon! We've got a tough game in front of us, you know."

Digby flushed.

"Oh, I—I'm sorry, Merry!" he stammered. "I—I was only thinking about Frank, but I'll try not to worry."

And Digby, much to Tom Merry's relief, roused himself from his morbid thoughts, and joined in the conversation with the other juniors.

CHAPTER 2.

Well Played!

"HERE we are again!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You've come like lambs to the giddy slaughter—what?" grinned Tommy Dodd.

"Rats!" retorted Blake. "We've come to show you Rookwood duffers some real football!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The charabanc arrived outside the gates of Rookwood School, where Jimmy Silver & Co. were waiting, and the heroes of St. Jim's descended.

The Rookwood juniors greeted them with cheery friendliness, and led the way to their playing-field.

Ten minutes later the rival teams lined up, and Bulkeley of the Sixth, who was acting as referee, blew the whistle.

Jimmy Silver & Co., who had won the toss and were playing with the wind, attacked in grand style and carried the leather well down into the St. Jim's territory. A stiff tussle ensued, and then a roar arose from the St. Jim's juniors round the ropes. D'Arcy had secured the ball in a magnificent breakaway.

"Go it, Gussy!"

Gussy "went" it, followed up eagerly by his fellow forwards. Lovell captured the ball from him, but lost it again to a lithe figure that darted up and, with a snake-like movement, got round him and rushed up the field with the leather. It was Robert Arthur Digby.

"Oh, bravo, Dig!" exclaimed Tom Merry jubilantly.

Digby, determined to dispel his skipper's doubts as to his fitness, played magnificently. The Rookwood halves attacked him like a pack of wolves, but he evaded them, and, at the crucial moment, he passed to Figgins.

The lanky-legged New House junior was not slow to seize the opportunity, and he slammed in a red-hot shot that left Tommy Cook, in goal, gasping.

"Goal!" shouted the St. Jim's fellows jubilantly.

"Good old Figg!"

"Played, Dig!"

Tom Merry thumped Digby on the shoulder as the teams made their way back to their places.

"Jolly good, old chap!" he said heartily. "Keep it up!"

Dig nodded.

His face was flushed with the spirit of the game now. He realised that it was up to him to give of his best, and not to think about his cousin's misfortune—not until the match was over, at any rate.

Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed in straight from the next whistle with grim determination. Tom Merry & Co. responded nobly with a wonderful defence, and the spectators were treated to a

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classic display of footer. Each team played magnificently. Just before half-time Jimmy Silver equalised for Rookwood by a well-timed shot from a crossbar rebound.

The second half provided even more thrills than the first. Tom Merry & Co. had the slight advantage of playing with the wind, and they made the most of it.

Jimmy Silver and his merry men were out to do or die. They carried the leather down into the visitors' domain, but there met the famous St. Jim's defence. The half-back line held the invaders back like Trojans, and Kerr and Manners, the backs, were an impasse in themselves.

Tommy Dodd took a magnificent long shot at goal, which Fatty Wynn promptly biffed out again. Redfern seized the leather, passed to Manners, who in his turn headed to Monty Lowther. In this manner the ball was taken back, by brilliant passing, into the home half of the field.

Ten minutes later, after a fierce tussle, Jack Blake scored for St. Jim's. This was greeted by loud howls of delight from the visitors, and rueful looks by the Rookwood juniors.

Time was now getting on. Jimmy Silver & Co. put all they knew into their play, and, with combined efforts, they managed to bombard the St. Jim's goal.

Here Fatty Wynn, the St. Jim's champion goalie, came to the fore. He moved with a speed and precision that was amazing for one of such gargantuan bulk. His head and feet and fists seemed to be everywhere. As each shot came in Fatty Wynn promptly rammed it out again, sometimes leaping out, at other times arresting the progress of the whizzing leather when it was almost on the goal-line.

"Played, Fatty!" chirruped the St. Jim's fellows round the ropes.

Their jubilation turned to dismay at last, however.

Fatty slid on the turf, made greasy after the recent rain, in diving after a shot sent in by Newcome, and the leather thudded into the net.

"Goal!" roared the Rookwooders.

"They're equal!" gasped Tom Merry. "Chaps, we've only got ten minutes to go, and we'll score another goal or perish in the attempt!"

The final phase of the game was a succession of thrills. Each team did its utmost to register the deciding point. Play became fast and furious in midfield. The Rookwood fellows gave a sudden roar. Jimmy Silver had captured the ball, and passed to Tommy Doyle, the fleet-footed left-half.

Tommy Doyle sped like a whirlwind down the field, the ball rolling merrily at his feet.

"Now, Dig!"

Robert Arthur Digby gave furious chase. He charged Doyle, and sent him sliding between Lovell's legs. Jimmy Silver and Kit Conroy came pounding up, and Digby scooped the ball deftly into the air and headed it to Talbot.

Talbot let it bounce, and then, taking aim, he took a long kick.

Biff!

High over the heads of the players soared the leather, and it dropped at the feet of Tom Merry, who had run up to meet it. This was well in the Rookwood territory. The halves tore up, but Tom was away and past them like a snake.

He paused for a flash, centred, and then sent in the leather with such force that it might have come from a howitzer.

Tommy Cook leaped high in the air to meet it, but the leather fairly tore its way through his hands, and next minute the back of the Rookwood net bulged with the impact.

"Goal!" howled the St. Jim's fellows, in a delirium of delight.

"Well played, Merry!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. made a last desperate effort after the ensuing kick-off, but Bulkeley's final whistle rang like a death-knell in their ears.

St. Jim's had won!

Jimmy Silver grinned ruefully as the two teams filed off the field.

"Jolly good game!" he said to Tom Merry. "You deserved to win!"

"We had a tussle!" grinned Tom Merry cheerily. "Have your revenge next time you come over to St. Jim's, old chap!"

"You bet!" replied the young Rookwood skipper. "Now for some tea. We've a good spread ready for you chaps. We feel jolly peckish, so I dare say you are, too."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We're as hungwy as huntahs, bai Jove!"

And the St. Jim's juniors accompanied Jimmy Silver & Co. into the Classical side of Rookwood, where Tubby Muffin had prepared a magnificent spread for all.

CHAPTER 3.

The Runaway from School!

"NOW for St. Jim's!" said Blake cheerfully.

Tea was over at Rookwood, and it was time for Tom Merry & Co. to leave. The charabanc was standing outside the school gates, its engine humming musically.



The charabanc conveying Tom Merry & Co. was humming along the lane when suddenly Ralph Reckness Cardew, who was seated at the back, gave a shout. "Look behind, boys! There's a chase on!" The St. Jim's juniors jumped up and looked back. They saw a boy of about their own age pedalling along madly on his bicycle with a grey touring car hard on his track behind. (See this page.)

Jimmy Silver & Co., and Tommy Dodd & Co. saw their visitors down to the gates. They parted on their usual friendly terms, and with the usual amount of good-natured chaffing.

"Cheerio; you chaps!" called Jimmy Silver, when Tom Merry & Co. were all aboard the charabanc. "See you again one of these days!"

"Rather!"

Honk, honk!

The charabanc moved away, and, with Tom Merry & Co. standing up and waving farewell to the Rookwooders, it bowled along at a good speed, en route for St. Jim's.

Digby was infinitely more cheerful than he had been on the first journey. The part he had played in that great football match had brought numerous congratulatory remarks showering on him from his schoolfellows.

His face became overcast at times, but Tom Merry & Co. kept up a cheery round of conversation, and they made Digby join in, and thus kept his mind from worrying about his cousin.

They had passed through several villages, and were humming along at a fine speed along a narrow country lane that led to Rylcombe, when all of a sudden Cardew, who was sitting at the back of the charabanc, gave a shout:

"Look behind, boys! There's a chase on!"

The other occupants of the charabanc jumped up and looked back.

Startled exclamations arose.

A boy of about their own age, wearing a red-and-black school cap, was pedalling along madly behind them, his body bent over the handlebars of his bicycle, and a tense expression on his face.

Giving chase to the youthful cyclist was a grey touring motor-car, in which, in addition to the chauffeur, was a man and a schoolboy wearing the same cap as the other boy in front.

The man was standing up in the car, gesticulating and shouting angrily to the boy on the bicycle. This worthy paid no heed, but dug at the pedals for all he was worth.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle, and gazing excitedly along the road behind the

charabanc. "The car is chasin' the fellow on the cycle! He doesn't seem to stand an earthly, deah boys! The car is bound to catch up with him in a minute!"

As the cyclist approached the charabanc he rang his bell furiously.

Digby, who was leaning over the charabanc side, suddenly jumped up with a loud shout:

"Frank! Good heavens, it's my cousin Frank! He—he's run away!"

The car was very near to the schoolboy on the cycle now.

He looked up with a strained, haggard face at the St. Jim's juniors in the charabanc, as if mutely appealing to them for help. Then, hearing Digby's cry, his expression changed.

A glad light leapt into his eyes when he saw Digby beckoning to him.

"Bob," he cried, "they're after me—the warden and—and Barker! Cannot you block their way and—"

Honk, honk, honk!

The chauffeur of the car behind was blowing the horn furiously.

The man at his side was standing up, a look of rage on his thin, spiteful face. He waved wildly to Tom Merry & Co.

"Stop him! That boy is a runaway from school, and—"

"Look out!" shouted the chauffeur suddenly.

Jack Blake, sitting next to the driver of the charabanc, had grasped the wheel and turned the big vehicle so that it occupied the centre of the narrow lane.

Frank Digby was able to get by easily on his bicycle, but there was no room for the car to pass.

The chauffeur had to slow down.

"Go on—go on! Pass the charabanc! The young rascal is escaping!" almost shrieked the angry man at his side.

"I dare not, sir!" replied the chauffeur. "We'd go into the hedge if I did!"

The man fairly danced with impotent rage.

Tom Merry looked grave.

"I—I say, I wonder if we are doing right by blocking the road like this?" he said. "The man in the car is evidently a master of St. Ormond's, and—"

"No, he isn't!" exclaimed Digby, his face tense and flushed.

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"He's a warden—didn't you hear my cousin say so? A warden is a sort of glorified prefect—a chap whose business it is to keep order among the boys, and do odd jobs in the school. Not many schools have wardens now, but St. Ormond's is one of those that do. Keep that car behind, driver, as long as you dare. Frank must escape—he must!"

The chauffeur and the school warden in the car behind were raving. Frank Digby was now almost out of sight, pedalling furiously.

"Draw in to the left, will you?" shouted the enraged chauffeur. "I'll report you to the police for obstruction if you don't, and—"

"I'd better let him pass, young gents," said the driver of the charabanc. "It's a rule of the road that large vehicles like this must give way to others."

"I'll give you ten shillings to keep him back a little longer," panted Digby desperately. "If the car gets past, it will overtake Frank in no time."

The driver, however, turned the steering-wheel, and the charabanc drew in to the left.

The chauffeur of the car behind dug his foot down hard on the accelerator. But what with the warden's urgent harassing, and the excitement of the chase, the chauffeur misjudged his distance.

The car shot forward, and a cry of alarm arose from Tom Merry & Co. It seemed that next minute the vehicle would crash into the back of the charabanc.

The chauffeur saw his danger in the nick of time. He turned the steering-wheel sharply, and, instead of colliding with the charabanc, the car lurched perilously to the right, and went headlong up the bank at the side of the road.

"Huwah!" cried D'Arcy. "The car's done for now, deah boys!"

Gussy spoke the truth!

The bonnet of the car had shot through the hedge and cannoned with terrific force into a stone wall at the other side.

Crash!

There was an ominous rending noise, and a tumbling of bricks, and a concerted shout of dismay arose from the three occupants of the car.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "More haste less speed, old scout!"

Digby drew a deep, deep breath of relief.

"Get along with it, driver!" chuckled Blake. "We sha'n't be bothered again with that little lot behind!"

The charabanc driver grinned and increased the speed of his vehicle.

"Stop!" shrieked the warden, standing in the up-ended car and waving to the departing charabanc. "I command you to stop and take me aboard! I will pay you well, and—"

But his voice was lost in the roar of the charabanc's powerful engine.

"Thank goodness they're stranded!" exclaimed Digby fervently, as the warden's car disappeared from view. "I wonder where Frank is now? We ought to catch up with him soon."

Rounding a bend in the road, they saw the schoolboy cyclist about a mile ahead. It did not take the charabanc long to reach him.

Frank Digby turned, and he slackened his pace when he saw the charabanc.

"Where's the car?" he shouted.

"Up the bank—crashed into a brick wall!" cried Digby.

"They can't follow you now, Frank—not unless they pick up another car, and that isn't likely to happen, because this is a lonely road. Come up here with us."

"Oh, thanks!" gasped the runaway St. Ormond's junior.

"I'm just about beaten after that ride!"

Tom Merry & Co. ordered the charabanc to be stopped.

Frank Digby dismounted from his bicycle and flung it over the hedge.

"I sha'n't need that any more now," he muttered, as he climbed up into the charabanc.

He squeezed into the seat between Digby and Tom Merry.

"Right away, driver!" cried Blake.

The charabanc moved on, and was soon speeding along at a fine rate.

"What happened, Frank?" asked Digby eagerly. "Tell us all about it. I've been worrying about you ever since I received your letter."

And then in a calm, convincing way Frank Digby told his story.

"Ericson, one of the fellows of the Upper Fifth at our school, was attacked in the wood near St. Ormond's the other night and robbed of a lot of money and all the valuables he had on him. Ericson is awfully rich, and was always flashing his money about. He and I have not been on good terms for a long time—I licked him once for bullying a kid in the Second, and he never forgot it. He was always sneering at me because I was hard up. My people aren't well off, and the pater's business has suffered in the recent trade slump, and

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I haven't been receiving so much pocket-money as the other fellows. I happened to be out on the night that Ericson was robbed. And I was accused of attacking and robbing him."

Digby of St. Jim's clenched his hands tightly.

"As if you'd stoop to do such a thing, Frank!" he exclaimed.

"They found Ericson's gold and diamond tiepin hidden in my study," continued Frank Digby. "Ericson accused me, and he was backed up by his crony Barker, a worse rotter than himself, who has always been down on me. Barker is the chap you saw in the car just now, with Rathbone, the warden."

"Rathbone looked a bit of a tartar," remarked Tom Merry.

"He is a tartar!" came the quick response. "Rathbone is an out and out rotter! He keeps thick with Ericson and Barker, because they have plenty of cash, and they tip him well to wink an eye at the smoking and gambling parties they often have in their studies. But to the juniors he's a tyrant. He sneaks to the masters on the slightest pretext, and he loves to get a kid a hiding. And the worst of it is, the Head is so busy with other matters—he's writing a big scientific book now—that he leaves the warden to do pretty much as he likes. I can tell you, life at St. Ormond's isn't all honey for a junior who isn't liked by Rathbone, the warden."

"Thank goodness we've got no wardens at St. Jim's!" said Monty Lowther. "Knox, the prefect, is bad enough."

"Well, I got it in the neck properly!" went on Frank Digby. "Most of the chaps believe me innocent, but Rathbone, Ericson, and Barker have made things look black against me, and the Head decided to give me a public flogging, and then expel me. To cut a long story short, I broke out from the punishment-room at St. Ormond's this afternoon, and got away on my bike. I was on my way to St. Jim's to see you, Bob. I knew there would be a chase directly my escape was discovered, but hoped to get to St. Jim's in time, knowing that you would help me. Evidently the warden got wind of what had happened pretty quickly, and he and Barker came out in the Head's car to find me. They caught up with me on this road, and I was just giving up hope of getting away when you came along."

"Thank goodness we did!" said Digby of the Fourth.

"But it was the chauffeur's own fault that he ran the car up the bank. They won't catch you now, Frank."

"Not if I can help it, anyway," replied his cousin, setting his teeth grimly.

The St. Jim's juniors looked curiously at Frank Digby.

He was a handsome, well-knit lad, with honest blue eyes, and a manner that inspired complete confidence. His story rang true to the last letter. Tom Merry & Co. could not help liking and believing him, and their hearts went out in sympathy to the unfortunate lad.

"Jolly hard lines!" said Jack Blake, in his gruff, good-natured way. "We'll do all we can to help you, of course."

"Thanks!" replied the runaway schoolboy gratefully. "I'm afraid to ask you to help me, though, in case you get into trouble. It's rather a serious matter, you know, assisting a fellow in running away from school—although, of course, I was to have been chucked out to-day. Rathbone evidently guesses where I am going. He'll turn up at St. Jim's, and will start inquiries there."

Digby of the Fourth gripped his cousin's arm.

"Hang Rathbone! Let him come to St. Jim's!" he said between his teeth. "They sha'n't take you back, Frank—not until your name is cleared! I'll see to that! Come on to St. Jim's with me now, and we'll discuss ways and means when we get there. Rathbone won't reach there till long after us, anyway. You chaps will keep mum about this, of course!"

"Rely on us, Dig!" chorused the others.

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"We believe your cousin, deah boy, and he has our extreme sympathy. If theah is anythin' I can do to help him, I shall be only too glad, bai Jove!"

"Thanks, Gussy!" said Digby.

St. Jim's was reached at length, and Frank Digby went upstairs to Study No. 6 with Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 4.

Rathbone on the Track!

"NOW for a rumup!"

Monty Lowther made that remark.

The Terrible Three, Kangaroo, and Talbot were standing in the Hall in the School House at St. Jim's an hour later. Dusk had fallen over the countryside. The Shell fellows had just finished their prep and had come down to wait for the postman, in the fond hope that some stray remittances might turn up.

A car had drawn up outside, and a thin-faced gentleman had come in, followed by a big, surly-looking fellow in Etons, and with the St. Ormond's school cap in his hand.

It was Mr. Rathbone, the tyrannical warden of St. Ormond's, and Barker of the Upper Fifth of that school.



As Mr. Rathbone crouched on the window-sill he saw a schoolboy figure run across the Close in the darkness. Mr. Rathbone was not an athletic gentleman, but he was desperately anxious to catch Frank Digby, so he jumped. Bump! "Yarooooooh!" he yelled as he made a very ungraceful landing—on his hands and knees—on the hard asphalt below. "Ha, ha, ha!" came a chorus of youthful laughter from Tom Merry & Co. above. (See page 8.)

"I wish to speak to Dr. Holmes—at once!" snapped Mr. Rathbone to Toby, the page, when that worthy came up. "Tell him I represent Dr. Protheroe of St. Ormond's, and that my call is on a most important matter."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Toby; and he hurried away.

Mr. Rathbone saw Tom Merry & Co., and his small, jet-black eyes glittered spitefully.

"You are the lads who were in the charabanc that was the cause of the accident to my car!" he rapped. "Where is Digby—Frank Digby, the young miscreant who has run away from school?"

"I'm afraid we cannot tell you," replied Tom Merry calmly.

He motioned to the others, and they all turned on their heels and walked upstairs.

Mr. Rathbone clenched his fists hard together, and Barker made a movement forward, a dark scowl suffusing his brutal face. He evidently thought better of his warlike intentions, however, and subsided.

Five minutes later Toby returned with the message that Dr. Holmes would see Mr. Rathbone in his study at once.

Tom Merry & Co., and Jack Blake & Co., together with a number of excited juniors, watched the warden from the top of the stairs as he passed along the corridor on his way to Dr. Holmes' study.

Digby was there, his face grim and sternly set.

"There's bound to be a row now, Dig," said Tom Merry. "What are you going to say?"

"I shall tell the truth, that's all!" replied the Fourth-Former in a quiet, incisive voice. "My cousin left St. Jim's half an hour ago, and I do not know where he is now."

Aubrey Racke of the Shell sneered.

"I'll wager you know where he is going, Digby!" he said in his most unpleasant tones. "You can't pull the wool over my eyes. You are hiding your rotten cousin somewhere, and—Yah! What the—Yarooooh! Wow! Hands off, you rotter! Oooooooop!"

"Take that, and that, and that!" cried Digby furiously, hitting out straight from the shoulder at the cad of the Shell. "You dare speak of my cousin like that, you worm! He's worth fifty of you!"

"Wow-wow! Yah! Grooooh! Keepimoff!" howled Racke.

He dived through the laughing juniors and rushed headlong down the stairs, to escape the sledge-hammer blows of Robert Arthur Digby.

Baggy Trimble, and Mellish, and Scrope, and a few others who had laughed at Racke's remark, suddenly became serious when Digby's wrathful glance came to bear on them.

A few minutes later Toby came up.

"Which Master Digby is wanted in the Head's study at once!" he announced.

Digby gave a shrug and went downstairs.

Passing the Hall door he saw Racke talking to Barker of St. Ormond's, and a frown crossed his face. He paused, as if to speak to them, but walked on and tapped at the Head's study door.

"Come in!" said Dr. Holmes' deep, grave voice.

Digby entered.

Mr. Rathbone was there. The warden darted him a sharp, malevolent glance. His narrow face had the cunning of a fox's, and the venom of a tiger's.

"Digby, you are aware, of course, of your cousin's amazing escapade at St. Ormond's School?" said Dr. Holmes, looking hard at the Fourth Form junior. "Mr. Rathbone, a responsible person of that school, who has been sent by the headmaster to take back your cousin to receive his just deserts, informs me that you are harbouring the boy at this school. Is that so? I require the truth, Digby, and nothing but the truth."

"I will tell you the truth, sir," replied Digby, facing the Head fearlessly. "I admit I brought my cousin here, after meeting him on the road. We had a chat in my study, and he left St. Jim's half an hour ago."

"Where is the young rascal now?" demanded Mr. Rathbone harshly.

"I do not know where my cousin is," replied Digby, striving hard to suppress his feelings. "He is not at St. Jim's. I can tell you no more."

"Dr. Holmes, I believe this young rascal is telling lies!" burst out the warden passionately. "He and his reprobate cousin are as bad as each other, and—"

"Indeed, sir, I must ask you to refrain from casting aspersions upon the character of any boy belonging to this school!" rapped Dr. Holmes, his eyes glinting angrily. "You have no right, nor cause, to accuse Digby of falsehood. Digby is a lad of whom I have a very high opinion. Your behaviour, Mr. Rathbone, as a stranger here, is neither seemly nor courteous."

Mr. Rathbone's sallow face went pink.

"I am of the opinion, Dr. Holmes, that Digby knows more of the whereabouts of his cousin than he cares to say," he hissed between his teeth.

Dr. Holmes turned to Digby.

"What have you to say, Digby?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir, beyond what I have said already," was the quiet reply.

The Head rose from his table.

"I am afraid I can do nothing more for you, sir," he said to his visitor. "I wish you good-evening!"

"But, Dr. Holmes, I demand an inquiry!" stormed the warden. "Digby is concealing the truth. He—"

"I should consider it a favour, sir, if you would leave St. Jim's immediately!" rapped Dr. Holmes, his kind old face suffused with anger. "How dare you make demands of me! I regard your conduct as most insolent! Kindly go!"

Mr. Rathbone clenched his fists, gave a gulp, and then left the study.

Digby followed him.

The warden turned to him in the corridor outside, a baleful scowl on his face.

"I shall find your cousin!" he hissed malevolently. "Do not think that he will escape punishment. I will see to it that the longer you keep him from recapture the worse he shall suffer!"

"Oh, rot!" retorted Digby. "I don't care a rap for your threats, you rotter!"

He turned his back on the rascally warden and walked away.

Mr. Rathbone ground his teeth and made his way downstairs.

He was passing along the lower corridor that led to the Hall when a sound at one of the windows caused him to give a start.

He looked sharply in the direction of the window, and saw the figure of a schoolboy clambering out. He could not see the boy's face in the dusk, but the red and black cap he was wearing caught the warden's eye.

"Digby!" he shouted, making a dart forward towards the window. "You young rascal, then you have been hiding here all the time! Come back! Stop! Come back, I say!"

"Go and eat coke, Rathbone!" retorted the runaway from out of the window. "I'm not obeying your orders! Catch me if you can!"

Mr. Rathbone scrambled out of the window and crouched on the sill. He saw a schoolboy figure run away across the Close in the darkness.

Mr. Rathbone was not an athletic gentleman, but he was desperately anxious to catch Frank Digby, so he jumped.

Bump!

"Yaroooooogh!"

Mr. Rathbone made a very ungraceful landing—on his hands and knees—on the hard asphalt below, and he gave a yell that carried far across the Close.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a chorus of youthful laughter from above.

He blinked upward, and saw Tom Merry & Co. leaning out of an upper window. They had seen him jump, and had seen him land, and they were immensely tickled.

"Go it, bony!" chirruped Blake. "After him! You're not going to run on all fours, surely?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Rathbone scrambled up. He glared with impotent malice at the laughing juniors above, and then dashed off

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across the quadrangle in the direction he had seen the runaway take.

He saw his quarry lurking in the shadows by the school wall, and his heart beat wildly.

"Digby, stop! Come here!" he shouted.

"Rats!"

The fugitive ran off, this time making for the woodshed. Mr. Rathbone set out in full chase. His heart beat exultantly when he saw his quarry dash into the shed.

"Ah! I have him now!" he gasped exultantly. "He thinks I did not see him go in there!"

Mr. Rathbone reached the woodshed. He wrenched open the door and burst in.

Next minute he found himself crashing into a bewildering mass of ropes and woodwork in the dark. Before he had time to realise quite what it all meant there was a noise from above, and next minute it seemed to the startled Mr. Rathbone that the whole of the woodshed had collapsed on top of him.

Crash! Bang! Wallop! Thud!

"Yaroooooogh!" howled Mr. Rathbone, losing his footing as a heavy beam of wood struck him amidships. "What the—Yah! Gerrooogh! Wow-wow!"

Whizz!

A deluge of some powdery substance swamped down on him from above. It came from a sack, whatever it was, for a minute later the sack flopped on Mr. Rathbone's head as he lay there squirming on the ground.

"Yoogh! Wow! Yah! Help! Gerroooooch!" gurgled Mr. Rathbone.

There was a movement in the woodshed, and a boyish voice exclaimed:

"Hallo! You've upset the whole caboodle now, and no mistake! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. and a horde of juniors came dashing up. They seemed to have known to come to the woodshed. Jack Blake switched on his electric torch, and in the brilliant light a strange scene was disclosed.

There was Mr. Rathbone lying on the woodshed floor, surrounded by tumbled planks of wood, ladders, and ropes. A bump showed on his head where one of those planks had struck him. He was smothered from head to foot in grey cement, which had fallen out of the sack that dangled ungracefully across his shoulders.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "What ever made you come in here, Mr. Rathbone? Taggles, our school porter, has been doing some work at the stables, and he stacked all his materials in here to-day. It appears that you came in and upset the lot. How silly of you! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerrooogh! Yah! Woogh!" gurgled Mr. Rathbone, struggling to his feet. "I came here after Digby! Yow-ow! The young rascal is in here! Do not let him escape. I—Oh! Gug-good heavens!"

A schoolboy figure, wearing the St. Ormond's school cap, crept out from behind a pile of faggots in the woodshed.

It was not the runaway schoolboy at all, not the runaway schoolboy whom Mr. Rathbone was so anxious to capture, at any rate. It was Monty Lowther of the Shell.

"Dear me!" said Monty, with a stare of surprise. "You appear to have made rather a mess of things, Mr. Rathbone. I quite forgot to shout out to you, when I crept in here, that the shed was full of wood and cement and things, and that you would have to go carefully!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

"You—you—you—" stuttered Mr. Rathbone, gazing at Monty like a man in a dream. "Are you the boy who climbed out of the window?"

"I cannot tell a lie. It was I!" replied Monty solemnly. "Here is Barker's cap, Mr. Rathbone. That's what you were chasing me for, isn't it?"

"Barker's cap!" gurgled Mr. Rathbone faintly.

"Yes, I took it off the table in the Hall," said Monty. "Barker was busy talking to Racke—one of our chaps, you know—and he didn't see me sneak in and steal his cap. I'm sorry you've had so much trouble in recovering it, Mr. Rathbone."

Mr. Rathbone's face, where the cement did not cover it, went pink and white and red by turns. He seemed utterly at a loss for words. He realised how he had been hoodwinked into believing that he was chasing Frank Digby, and how he had been decoyed into the woodshed for the express purpose of falling into the stacked-up articles in there in the dark.

"You—you—you—" he stammered. "I—I have been hoaxed. I—I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors of St. Jim's.

Mr. Rathbone, with Barker's cap clutched in one hand, dived out of the woodshed and ran across to the School House, leaving a long, long trail of cement in his wake.

Barker was on the steps.

Mr. Rathbone did not go into the School House to lodge a complaint, as most of the juniors expected him to do.

Possibly he realised that he would meet with a cold reception from Dr. Holmes. He jumped into the car that was waiting at the bottom of the steps. It was a hired car, and the driver gave a glare when Mr. Rathbone entered and distributed the cement all over the cushions. Barker followed him in, and, at a curt order from the warden, the car-driver started the engine and let in the clutch.

Loud laughter followed the car as it rattled towards the gates, which Taggles opened. The car disappeared into the darkness of Rylcombe Lane, and Tom Merry & Co. just caught a glimpse of Barker in the lamplight standing up beside the cement-smothered warden, and shaking his fist furiously at them.

CHAPTER 6.

Hiding the Refugee!

BOOM! The last stroke of eleven died away on the night air at St. Jim's. In the Fourth Form dormitory all was dark and still. Silence reigned, except for the heavy snoring of Baggy Trimble.

Robert Arthur Digby sat up in bed.

"Are you fellows awake?" he asked quietly.

"Yaw-aw-aw!" came a sleepy grunt from Jack Blake's bed. "Who's that?"

"Only me," replied Digby. "Don't make a noise, Blake. I'm going out."

"My hat! What for?" gasped the leader of the Fourth, sitting up.

"To see my cousin," replied Digby, in a low voice. "He is coming back to St. Jim's at eleven. I told him how to get over the school wall. I'm going out to meet him—to hide him!"

"Whew!" whistled Blake, under his breath. "Where on earth can you hide him here? I'm afraid it can't be done, Dig, old chap."

"Yes, it can," muttered Digby. "I'll tell you when we get out. I want you to come with me."

"All serene!"

Jack Blake jumped out of bed readily. The two juniors hastily dressed and crept from the dormitory in their socks, with their boots tied together by the laces, and slung across their shoulders.

Outside, in the dark corridor, Blake turned to his study-mate.

"Now, Dig, what are you going to do?" he asked. "Where do you propose hiding your cousin?"

"Do you remember, some time ago, Gordon Gay, of Rylcombe Grammar School, broke in here and discovered a secret chamber down in the vaults?" muttered Digby. "He spoofed the school about a buried treasure, leaving a chart, giving a clue to the whereabouts of the secret chamber. Don't you remember we all followed the directions on the chart, and found the secret chamber, and we all rushed in, expecting to find the hidden treasure? All we found was Baggy Trimble, trussed up, lying in the room!"

Blake chuckled.

"Yes, I remember the giddy hidden treasure stunt of Gordon Gay's," he said. "My hat! I see what you are driving at now, Dig. You think that if we can find that secret room again it will make a hiding-place for your cousin?"

"That's it!" said Digby tensely. "Nobody knows the whereabouts of that secret chamber, except yourself and Tom Merry. The rest of us cannot remember how to find it. Will you lead me to it to-night?"

"What-ho!" replied Blake, with great heartiness. "I'm not sure that I remember the way myself, but I dare say I shall be able to find it. We shall have to go to the study to get my pocket-torch."

They crept down to Study No. 6. Jack Blake slipped his torchlight into his pocket. Digby filled his pockets with provisions from the cupboard, and he and Blake between them also took a travelling rug of Gussy's and two cushions.

Thus equipped, they stole softly downstairs, and let themselves out of the lower box-room window.

Keeping well within the shadows, they crossed the quadrangle to the school wall, where stood the old oak used by the juniors for breaking bounds.

As they approached a dark figure crept out of the darkness. "Frank!" exclaimed Digby. "Then you got in?"

"Trust me!" chuckled the runaway from St. Ormond's. "It was as easy as rolling off a form! I have been hiding in the wood all the evening. I hope you haven't got into trouble, Bob, about me?"

"No," replied his cousin. "The Head questioned me, but I told him the truth—that you had left St. Jim's, and I did not know where you were. I did not tell him, of course, that I had told you to return here at eleven. Rathbone got the Head's rag out by showing off his temper, and consequently I was saved from any further questioning."

"Good!" muttered Frank Digby. "Now, what are we going to do?"

"You come with us," said Digby quietly.

The three juniors moved away in the darkness, and disappeared into the cloisters. They walked under grim old arches, and entered the ruined tower at the end.

Frank Digby looked about him with great interest as Blake flashed his torchlight to and fro.

"Jolly ancient old place, this!" he exclaimed. "B-r-r-r! Just the place for a ghost!"

"St. Jim's is a very ancient building, you know," replied Blake. "This tower and the cloisters and vaults and most of the School House date back to pre-Reformation times. The vaults are full of secret passages, and we shall find 'em jolly useful now. We're going to hide you in a secret chamber down in the vaults under here. I hope you don't believe in ghosts, or suffer with nerves."

Frank Digby grinned in the darkness.

"Not much!" he replied. "I shall enjoy myself down here, and I can hide until the affair has blown over at St. Ormond's. It's jolly good of you chaps to take all this trouble."

Blake lifted the stone slab in the ruined tower floor, and they descended into the vaults.

All was pitch black and silent as the grave, and there was an eerie stillness in the dank air that caused the three juniors to shiver, in spite of themselves.

Blake showed the way with his torchlight. After some time spent in wandering among the tortuous passages of the vaults, they came at last to a point where a blank stone wall confronted them.

"This is the place!" muttered Blake. "Hold the torchlight, Dig, while I find the secret opening."

Blake went down on hands and knees, pressing each of the stone slabs in turn. At last he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

Click!

A large block of stone in the wall swung inwards, revealing a yawning black space beyond.

Clambering through, the three boys found themselves in a small chamber, its walls, floor, and ceiling composed of grey, crumbling stone. It was the secret room that Gordon Gay of Rylcombe Grammar School had discovered!

"Here we are!" said Blake cheerfully. "You'll be as safe as houses here, old scout!"

He and Digby set down the things they had fetched from Study No. 6.

"You'll need all these—and several things more, Frank," said Digby. "We'll make you as comfortable as possible. If you'll stay here in the dark, we'll cut off and fetch you a few more necessities."

"I'm awfully grateful to you chaps, but, really, I don't think you ought to run risks for me," said Frank Digby in a low voice. "You'd better return to bed, and I'll make do with what I've got."

"Rats!" said Blake heartily. "We'll manage all right—everybody in the school is asleep, and we'll take care not to rouse anybody. Come on, Dig! Sha'n't be long!"

"Right-ho!" said the refugee gratefully.

He stood there in the darkness of his secret hiding place, listening to the hollow echo of the others' footsteps receding into the black, lonely confines of the vaults.

Blake and Digby returned, after what seemed an eternity to the waiting junior. Herries and D'Arcy were with them. The chums of Study No. 6 were well laden.

Herries carried a chair and two blankets; Gussy brought in a lighted lamp and a box filled with provisions; Blake had a small stove, some crockery and books, whilst Digby brought in a camp bed belonging to the Boy Scouts' stores.

"Here we are again!" said Blake cheerfully, as they set down their burdens. "Everything is O.K. We managed to get this little lot out of the School House without waking anyone. This is where you take furnished apartments, old chap!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The table was placed in the middle of the vault, and the lamp, crockery, and books set down upon it. Jack Blake & Co. soon had everything arranged for the schoolboy refugee's comfort.

Frank Digby's eyes glistened as he turned to them.

"I cannot say how grateful I am to you chaps for all this," he said huskily. "For all you know, I may really be guilty of what they accuse me of at St. Ormond's. I am branded as a rotter and a blackguard—"

"Oh, rot!" said Blake. "We know you're true-blue, old chap, and we're helping Dig to stand by you. Do you think you'll be all right here?"

"Rather!"

"Good egg!" said Blake. "Now we'll be shifting back to bed. Good-night, old chap!"

"Good-night, and thanks awfully!"

Digby gripped his cousin's hand before he followed his chums from the secret chamber.

"Keep your pecker up, Frank!" he said. "Rathbone will never find you here. You can stay until things blow over, and in that time I hope the real culprit will be found. In any case, I'll see your pater, and try to make things easy for you."

"You're a brick, Bob!" replied his cousin huskily. "Good-night!"

"Cheerio!"

The chums of Study No. 6 left the vaults and crossed the quadrangle back to the School House. Clambering into the lower box-room, they closed the window softly and crept through the dark, silent corridors back to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Nobody stirred in there as they hastily undressed and got into bed.

But, unknown to them, there was one junior awake. Percy Mellish lay in bed, his eyes glinting and his heart beating wildly.

"So they've been out!" muttered the sneak of the Fourth to himself. "I wonder what their game is? I'll bet it had something to do with Digby's cousin. They're hiding him here somewhere! My word! The artful rotters!"

And Mellish lay awake for quite a long time, thinking of Jack Blake & Co.'s mysterious midnight errand.

CHAPTER 6.

Racke Takes a Hand!

"ANY news of your cousin, Dig?"

Tom Merry asked that question, looking into Study No. 6 next morning after lessons. Monty Lowther and Manners were with him.

Robert Arthur Digby was at home. He had evidently been turning out his things, for on the table lay a cricket-bat, a fishing-rod, a banjo, and a stamp album. The Fourth-Former flushed when he saw the Terrible Three.

"Come in!" he said. "I've been waiting to take you chaps into my confidence. I know I can trust you. Frank is at St. Jim's now—hiding in the secret vault that Gordon Gay discovered—you remember the one?"

The Terrible Three gasped.

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "That's a topping wheeze, Dig! How did you manage to get him in?"

In a slow, quiet voice Digby explained.

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"Well, that beats the band!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Your cousin will be as safe as houses, of course. Must be jolly lonely and creepy down there, though. Let's go along to see him."

"I shall be going there soon—when I've got rid of these things," said Digby.

"What are you going to do with them?" asked Tom Merry in surprise.

"Sell them!" came the quiet response. "I might as well tell you fellows that I'm pretty hard up, and my cousin hasn't any money, either, so that it will cost something to keep him going in grub and things. I must raise the wind somehow, and have decided to get rid of a few things—that's all."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry. "Look here, old chap, you needn't do anything like that. We've got some cash, and we'd be only too pleased to help—"

"I know, and it's very good of you to offer to help me," said Digby with a look of gratitude: "but I think it's up to me to carry this thing through alone. After all, it's my affair, and I'm responsible for Frank being here, if any trouble ensues. Thanks awfully, but I—I'll do as I say."

"The fact of the matter is, Dig, you're too jolly proud to accept money!" said Manners bluntly.

Digby bit his lip.

"Put it that way if you like," he replied. "I shall be glad of you fellows going down to see Frank, of course. It would cheer him up and take some of the loneliness away."

"We'll do that, of course!" said Tom Merry readily. "We shall have to do it on the quiet, though. Chaps like Racke and Mellish, if they got wind of what was going on, would be only too delighted to sneak and give your cousin away. See you in the cloisters in half an hour, Dig."

"Right-ho!" replied Digby.

The Terrible Three left, and Robert Arthur Digby gathered up the articles he had decided to sell.

He went along to the Common-room, where most of the juniors were congregated. Great was the surprise when Digby announced that the things he had with him were for sale.

"Goin' bankrupt, dear boy?" inquired Ralph Reckness. "I'll have the banjo—I've often fancied one. How much?"

"Ten bob," said Digby.

"Here you are!"

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Digby parted with his banjo with a pang. He was not an expert player, by any means, but the banjo was one of his most cherished possessions.

Grundy was in funds, and he willingly gave twelve shillings for Digby's bat, which was an excellent willow. The stamp album was soon disposed of, and many of the stamps sold separately among the juniors. Harry Noble purchased the fishing-rod.

Standing by the Common-room window, Racke, Crooke and Mellish watched the disposal of Dig's articles with gleaming eyes.

"There you are!" muttered Mellish. "What did I tell you, Racke? Digby has got his cousin hidden somewhere in the school, and he's had to raise the wind to buy grub for him."

Racke nodded. There was a cunning, spiteful look on his sallow face. Aubrey Racke was not a pleasant youth. He was the leading light of the rotters' brigade at St. Jim's, and there was nothing mean and despicable to which he would not stoop. His callow soul was still thirsting for revenge on Digby for the rough handling he had received at his hands the day before.

"We'll fox Digby, and see what he does," he muttered to his two cronies. "My word, I'd love to expose the rotter if he is hiding his cousin here. I'll nip their little game in the bud if I can."

"He, he, he!" giggled Mellish. "That would be one up against the goody-goodies, wouldn't it?"

Digby left the Common-room and made his way downstairs.

Racke & Co. followed at a respectful distance. They shadowed Digby to the school tuckshop, and saw him making large purchases with the money he had collected on the sale of his goods.

"He's going to take the grub to his cousin, wherever the rotter is hiding!" muttered Racke. "Keep out of sight, and don't make a noise!"

Digby, carrying two large parcels, came out of the tuckshop.

He looked about him cautiously, and, satisfied that he was not observed, he walked off quickly into the cloisters. He did not see Racke, Crooke, and Mellish skulking behind the elm trees.

"We're on the trail now!" chuckled Racke, as he and the other two young rascals crept out of hiding. "As I suspected, Digby has got his cousin hidden somewhere—in the old tower, perhaps, or down in the vaults. Come on! We mustn't miss this!"

They walked into the cloisters and made their way under the arches with great caution, keeping Digby in sight.

"He's gone into the ruined tower!" muttered Mellish gleefully. "He doesn't suspect we're on his track, and—"

"Hallo, you bounders! What's the giddy game?"

Monty Lowther's voice broke in with a suddenness that caused the three young rascals to give violent jumps. They turned, and, to their dismay, saw the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry & Co. looked grimly at them. They had been waiting in the cloisters, as they had previously arranged with Digby, and had observed all Racke & Co.'s movements.

The three black sheep of St. Jim's stood there gasping in confusion.

"What's all the mystery about?" demanded Tom Merry. "I suppose you have come down here to have a quiet smoke and a little game of cards—eh?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Racke.

"Well, you can clear off!" rapped Tom Merry sharply.

Racke & Co. hurriedly left the cloisters, their eyes glittering with rage and disappointment.

"It's no use going back there now—those rotters will see to it that we don't discover anything!" snarled Racke, halting under the elms. "Let's go down to Rylcombe and get some smokes."

Crooke and Mellish agreed to this suggestion, and the three dingy young rascals left St. Jim's.

They reached Rylcombe, and were passing the railway-station, when Racke suddenly halted and gave a gasp.

A burly fellow in Etons, and wearing a red-and-black school cap, had just emerged from the station. It was Gerald Barker of St. Ormond's.

Barker recognised Racke, and he hurried up to the three St. Jim's juniors.

"What are you doing here, Barker?" asked Racke curiously. "It's a long way from St. Ormond's, and—"

"Rathbone has got me permission to have time off and come over here to keep a look-out for young Digby," replied the senior, with a grin. "I'm telling you chaps this in confidence, of course."

Racke & Co. nodded eagerly, and Racke lost no time in telling Barker of Digby's suspicious movements, and the conclusions that they had arrived at.

Barker's dark eyes glinted, and an ugly look crossed his face.



Blake and Monty Lowther held the scowling senior down while Frank Digby ran through his pockets. Kildare's watch-chain, and medallions came to light, and also something which the refugees looked at in amazement. It was a small gold ring, with a single diamond set in it. "Good heavens!" muttered Frank Digby. "This is one of the things I am accused of taking." (See page 16.)

"Digby is hiding at St. Jim's, then—that's evident!" he exclaimed tensely. "I'll get him! I'll take him back to St. Ormond's to face the music, if it takes me a month! I've got carte blanche to do as I like here. Can I rely on you fellows to keep this secret, and to help me find Digby?"

Racke & Co. assented with great heartiness—especially when Barker invited them into a teashop, so that they could quietly talk things over.

And in the seclusion of the teashop back parlour the three young rascals of St. Jim's and Barker of St. Ormond's put their heads together and formulated plans for the capture of the schoolboy refugee.

CHAPTER 7.

The Hand of Fate!

TOM MERRY & CO., and Jack Blake & Co. were chatting together with Levison in Hall that evening when Kildare of the Sixth came up, carrying a box. There were several other juniors standing round, and Cutts, St. Leger, and Gilmore of the Fifth lounged near by.

"Just a tick, you youngsters!" said Kildare. "It's Hospital Day at Rylcombe, you know, and I have a box here for a collection. Now, who's going to contribute? No sum too large or too small!"

The juniors grinned.

Tom Merry & Co. turned their pockets out. Tom Merry slipped half-a-crown into the box, and Manners put in a florin. Monty Lowther's funds were at a low ebb, so that all he could afford was twopence.

He cheerfully put in his mite.

The other juniors brought forth their wealth, and silver and coppers tinkled merrily into Kildare's box.

At last all the juniors had contributed, with the exception of Digby.

"Now, Digby, what about you?" said Kildare, rattling his box.

Digby turned red.

"I—I'm sorry, Kildare, but I cannot afford anything just now," he stammered, conscious that all eyes in the room were upon him. "I'm broke!"

"Right-ho!" said Kildare cheerfully, and he walked away to seek further contributors.

"Broke already, Digby?" inquired Luke Scrope of the

Shell, with a sneer. "Why, you were rolling in tin this morning, after you sold your things in the Common-room. What have you done with the money?"

Digby did not answer, but turned on his heel and walked out of the Hall.

His face was crimson.

Curious glances followed him out.

"Poor old Dig!" muttered Blake. "That's rather given the game away, hasn't it? Of course, he blued all his money this morning on provisions for his cousin. The ass refused to let us help!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I'm afraid the chaps are beginning to think things about Dig," he said. "It's jolly rotten for him, poor chap!"

Tom Merry's fears were not without foundation.

The juniors not only thought about Digby, but they spoke their thoughts to each other. Digby remained in Study No. 6 that evening, and avoided conversation with his school-fellows, excepting, of course, his chums who were in his confidence.

Many curious glances were cast at Digby in the dormitory that night when the Fourth went up to bed.

He hastened into bed, and lay there sullenly, refusing to be drawn into any conversation. At last silence settled on the dormitory, and the juniors one by one fell off to sleep.

Digby did not sleep. He lay there, a multitude of disquieting thoughts racing through his brain. At length he sat up and called out softly:

"Anybody awake?"

There was no response.

He jumped out of bed, dressed, and crept from the dormitory. He had not seen his cousin since that morning, and wanted to have a chat with him.

Walking cautiously through the dark corridors, a sound brought him sharply to a halt. He stood crouching in a window alcove, his body tensed, eyes and ears strained.

Creak!

It was a footstep!

Peering through the gloom, Digby saw a shadowy figure pass the end of the corridor. He caught his breath. Was it a burglar, or—

The Fourth-Former set his teeth grimly, and followed, making no noise as he padded along the linoleum in his socks. The marauder, whoever he was, had gone down the

stairs. Digby followed, and caught a glimpse of his quarry in the corridor ahead—the corridor that led to the Head's study.

His heart beating fast, but otherwise feeling perfectly self-composed, Digby kept on. He heard the soft click of the Head's study-door closing. Had the marauder gone in?

At length he arrived outside the door. He bent down and listened, scarcely daring to breathe. He heard movements inside the room, and then the sound of a window opening and closing came to his ears.

The midnight prowler, whoever he was, had climbed out of the window and closed it behind him!

Digby opened the study door and looked in. Darkness everywhere! He had Blake's torchlight with him, intended for finding his way through the vaults.

He flashed the light on. The Head's room was empty!

He entered the room, closing the door behind him. What had the marauder come for? Had he suspected that he was being followed, after entering the room, and chosen the window as a ready means of escape?

Digby looked wonderingly about him in the torchlight.

Then a low cry of amazement escaped his lips.

Lying on the Head's table was a small pile of articles—watches, penknives, fountain-pens, and the like, evidently stolen from boys in the school.

"Good heavens!" muttered the Fourth-Former. "Then it was a thief who came in here! He probably intended robbing the Head, too, and— Oh!"

A sound at the door caused him to wheel round with a sudden cry of alarm.

The door opened, and somebody entered.

Snap!

The electric light went on suddenly, flooding the room with brilliance. Standing in the doorway was Gerald Knox of the Sixth!

The unpopular prefect of the Sixth gave a start on recognising Digby. Then a sneer crossed his face.

"So it's you, Digby!" The prefect's voice was harsh, condemning, and Digby felt his blood run cold with a vague, terrible apprehension. "Creeping about at midnight, robbing the other fellows while they slept! Ah! Here is your plunder!"

Knox's eyes glittered when he saw the pile of articles on the table. He snatched them up and gave a chuckle.

"Caught red-handed, by Jove!" he muttered. "This will mean the sack for you, you little sweep!"

Digby's tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. It was some minutes before he found his voice.

"I—I didn't steal those! Honour bright, I didn't steal them! I followed the thief in here! He went out of the window—"

Here Knox interrupted with a brutal laugh.

"Can't you make up a better yarn than that, Digby?" he sneered. "What are you doing out of your dormitory, fully dressed, in your socks, and with a torchlight? Can you explain that?"

Digby was silent.

He could not—dared not—explain, without giving Frank away. He was in a terrible situation. He saw Knox's eyes watching him malevolently.

"Ah! So that's floored you—eh, you little rascal? I'll call the Head, and perhaps you will explain to him—if you can!"

"Don't call the Head! Don't, Knox, please! For mercy's sake believe me! I am innocent, I say! I never stole these things—"

The unhappy boy's voice broke off, as he realised how futile it was to ask Knox for mercy.

Dr. Holmes was summoned. He came into his study clad in a dressing-gown, looking amazed. His kind old face wore a grim, stern expression after Knox had told his story—how he had been sitting up late, and had heard somebody pass his door, and had crept out to find out who it was. He told how he had discovered Digby, with a torchlight, in that room, and the stolen articles lying before him on the table.

Dr. Holmes turned to Digby.

"Digby, what have you to say? Do you deny that you stole these articles?"

"I do, sir!" replied the Fourth-Former miserably. "I, like Knox, heard somebody creeping about the corridors. I followed to this room, and heard the window open and shut. When I came in the room was empty, and those things were lying on the table. The thief had left them in his hurry."

Knox gave a brutal laugh.

"A likely yarn, sir!" he exclaimed. "Look at him! Fully dressed, and with a torchlight! Does he look as though he came here by accident?"

Dr. Holmes gave Digby a condemning look, and the miserable boy knew that the Head did not believe him. He could not expect otherwise, for appearances were so much against him. He dared not explain his movements, without revealing the fact that he had his cousin hiding in the vaults.

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And, whatever happened, Digby would not betray his cousin.

"Knox, we must be absolutely certain before condemning this lad," said Dr. Holmes gravely. "Kindly go round to all the dormitories and ascertain whether any other boy is absent, or has been absent. Examine the doors and windows on the ground floor."

Knox departed, and a quarter of an hour later he returned.

"All the other boys are in their beds, sir," he said. "I feel certain that none have been out. There are no traces of anybody having entered the premises from outside."

Dr. Holmes turned to Digby.

"Have you nothing to say, Digby? Cannot you explain?"

"I have nothing to say, sir," replied the junior in a low, set tone, "except that I am innocent."

Dr. Holmes' brow darkened.

"I am loath to believe you a common thief, Digby," he said. "Yet you must realise that I have no other alternative than to believe that—unless you give a satisfactory explanation of why you left your dormitory. However, I will go deeper into the matter in the morning. You may return to bed."

Digby went, and Knox saw him back to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Candles were alight, and the whole dormitory was in a buzz of excitement when Digby arrived.

"What has happened, Digby?" demanded a number of voices.

"You'll hear in the morning," replied the unhappy junior. "Leave me alone."

Blake and the others looked wonderingly at their chum. They bombarded him with questions, but he refused to make any communication.

Overwhelmed with the cruel trick that Fate had played on him, Digby felt stunned. He was unable, almost, to even think.

The other boys in the dormitory gradually settled down to sleep, but the first grey streaks of early dawn were creeping in at the windows before Digby dozed off into uneasy slumber.

CHAPTER 8.

The Refugee's Plan!

ST. JIM'S heard the news next morning.

Baggy Trimble, the scandalmonger and Peeping Tom of St. Jim's, retailed it eagerly to the school before breakfast even.

Digby had been caught in the middle of the night in the Head's room with a torchlight and fully dressed, and with stolen articles belonging to other fellows in the school—principally from the Fifth and Sixth.

After lessons Digby was summoned to the Head's room.

His chums were amazed and horrified at the news.

Later, the Head and Kildare came into the Form-rooms to make inquiries concerning Digby. It soon came out that the day previous Digby had sold many of his possessions, and that by evening he had not even a penny to contribute to the hospital box. These facts deepened the cloud of condemnation that hung over Digby. His story concerning the mysterious marauder that he had followed in the night was frankly disbelieved by most of the fellows of St. Jim's. His chums stood loyal, because they knew that he had told the truth. They knew why he had left the dormitory, but their lips were sealed. Digby, they knew, would not thank them for betraying his cousin in order to clear his own name.

Standing before Dr. Holmes in his study, after lessons, the unhappy junior knew that his fate was sealed.

"Digby, I have gone into the matter very deeply, and have tried hard to find some justification for believing in your innocence." The Head's voice was grave and ominous. "But in view of all the facts, and your inability to give a satisfactory explanation, I cannot but think you guilty. Digby, I am grieved and shocked, but nevertheless am sorry for you. I very much suspect that your silence has something to do with your cousin, who is a runaway from St. Ormond's, and have no doubt that you required money in order to help him. Such self-sacrifice is admirable, but your good nature has been violated by your having stooped to thieve—to rob your own schoolfellows. Digby, this is a very serious matter for me to deal with, and pending my decision you will remain in the punishment-room. You still have nothing to say?"

Digby set his teeth.

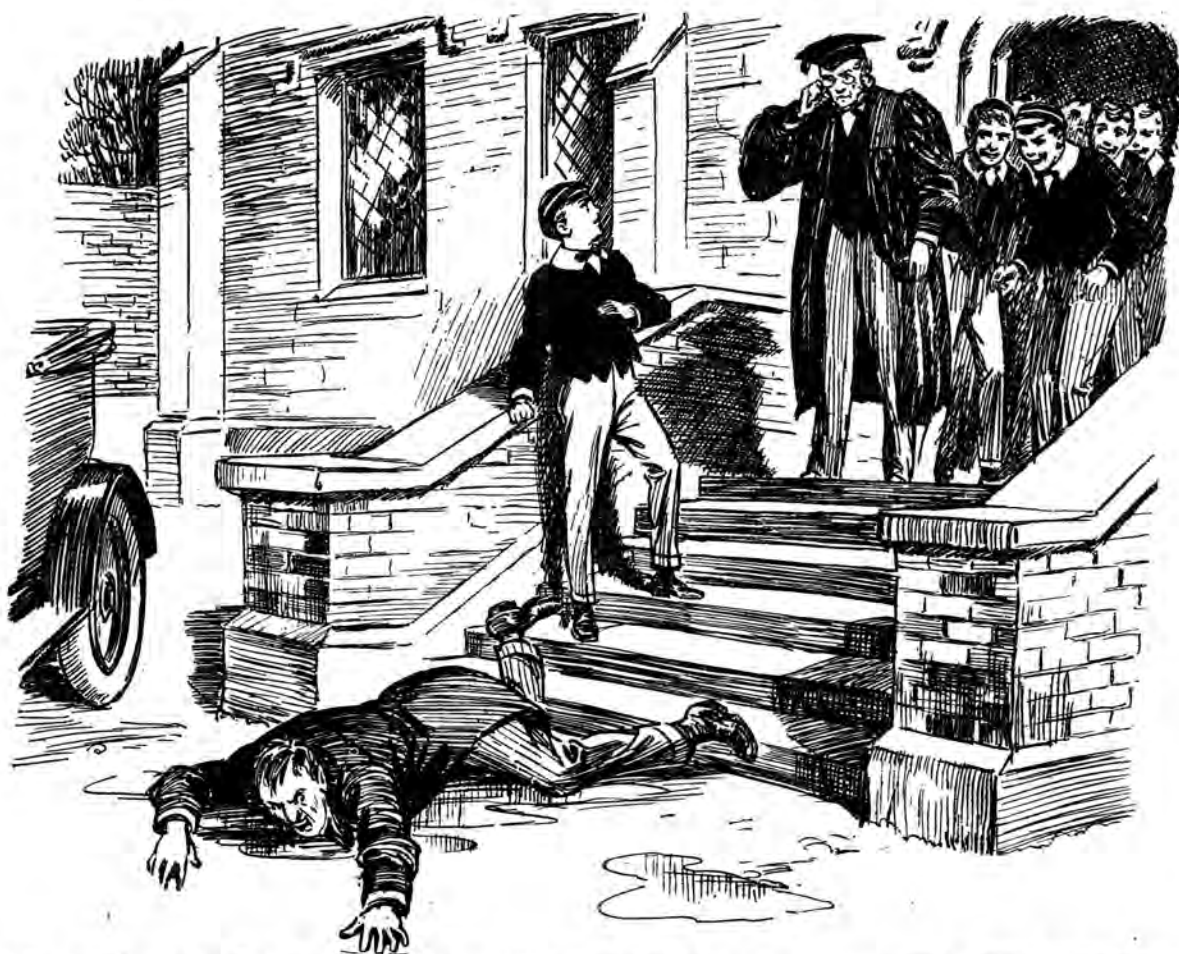
"Nothing, sir. I will abide by what you say," he replied in a low, even voice.

Practically the whole of the Lower School congregated to see Digby taken away to the punishment-room by Kildare.

His chums looked compassionately at him. They saw by Digby's white, set face how keenly the junior was suffering.

He was locked up in Nobody's Study, and left there, a prisoner—alone!

In Study No. 6 Jack Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, and the Terrible Three held gloomy consultations.



"Yarooooooh!" roared Mr. Rathbone as he pitched headlong into a large, muddy puddle at the base of the School House steps. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co. looking on. Then followed a sudden interruption. "Bless my soul! What is the meaning of this?" It was Dr. Holmes' voice. The austere figure of the Head had appeared in the Hall doorway. (See page 27.)

"Poor old Dig!" muttered Blake. "He won't give his cousin away, of course. I wonder who it was he followed to the Head's room? I—I don't think it was anybody belonging to the school. If the Head knew that Dig's cousin was hiding here he would immediately suspect him of being the culprit."

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry. "I vote we go down and tell Frank Digby all about it."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "This is a feahful posish, deah boys, and I weally don't know how it will end."

Tom Merry & Co. bided their time, and when the coast was clear they went down into the vaults and sought out the secret chamber where the schoolboy refugee was hiding.

When Frank Digby saw them a look of disappointment crossed his face.

"Where's Bob?" he asked. "Why hasn't he been to see me?"

Tom Merry told him what had happened.

The refugee of St. Jim's was overwhelmed with amazement and dismay.

"And Bob is suffering all this because of me!" he muttered, clenching his fists hard. "Although I'm not guilty of the crime they accuse me of, I'm not worth the trouble Bob is taking. Goodness knows who stole those things in the school last night, but I swear it wasn't me. I suppose I'd better give myself up and— Oh, I've thought of a way!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked eagerly at the refugee.

"Bob is in the punishment-room, locked up, and he can't get out!" said Frank in swift tones. "Supposing that another robbery took place while my cousin is under detention? Supposing somebody was to break into the school and make off with something valuable? My cousin, being under lock and key, would not be blamed. The theft could not have been done by him. That would clear him of any suspicion so far as theft was concerned, and Dr. Holmes will have to release him."

The School House juniors drew deep breaths.

"My hat, I see what you're driving at!" exclaimed Tom

Merry. "You propose to get into the school and take something—"

"That's the idea!" replied Frank Digby. "I should return the stolen article later, or leave it where it could be found. All I want to do is to get my cousin out of this terrible scrape. Will you fellows help me?"

"What-ho!" cried Tom Merry & Co.

They saw that if the refugee's plan was successful their chum's honour would be vindicated.

They remained in the secret vault, chatting and discussing plans with Frank Digby.

Dusk was deepening over St. Jim's when they crept out of the cloisters and returned to the School House.

CHAPTER 9.

Amazing Developments!

FRANK DIGBY paused in the cloisters of St. Jim's.

All was dark and silent under the grim arches. Across the Close was the stately pile of St. Jim's, numerous lights gleaming at the windows.

It was eight o'clock, the time which Tom Merry had informed him would be the best for the carrying out of his desperate plan.

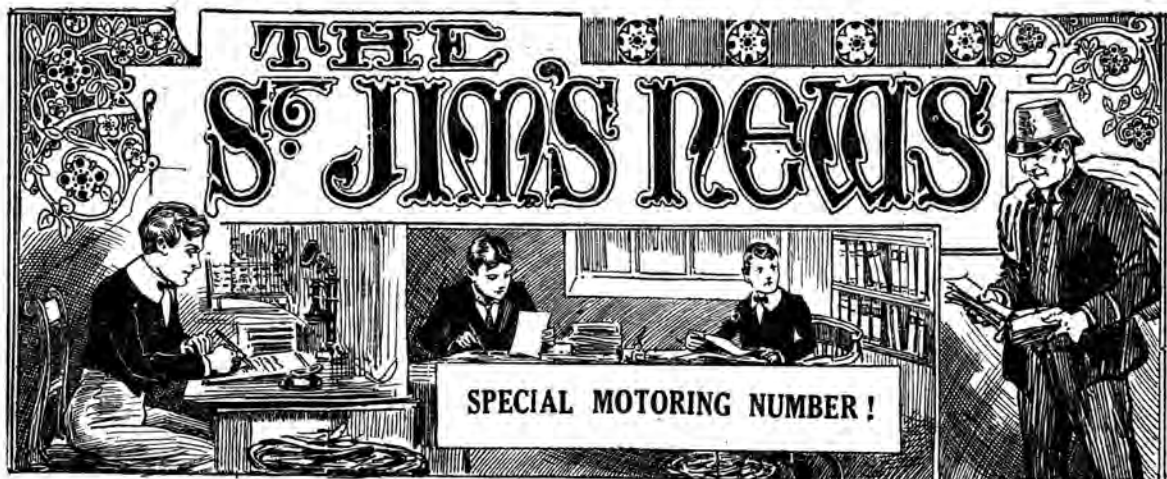
The seniors of the Sixth and Fifth were holding a meeting in the Lecture Hall. This would not be over until nine. There would not be many people about the School House, as the juniors would mostly be in their own studies, or in the Common-room.

The refugee of St. Jim's crossed the Close and the quadrangle. He found the box-room window, and, following Tom Merry & Co.'s instructions, raised the window and climbed in. Having closed the window behind him, he crept out of the box-room into the corridor outside.

Walking boldly, he made his way towards the Sixth Form

(Continued on page 16.)

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EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

My Dear Readers,—The number of mad, merry motorists at St. Jim's is very few. No roadhogs abide in our midst. There is an absurd rule that no fellow under a certain age shall be permitted to drive a car. There is another rule—a St. Jim's rule—which must have been drawn up by a frowsty old lawyer, for it runs as follows:

"No boy shall own, possess, drive, purchase, hire, or acquire a motor-lorry, motor-car, charabanc, or similar vehicle, during the time that he is a scholar at this foundation. This rule does not apply to motor-bicycles."

Well, there are a good many of us who would like to own, possess, drive, purchase, hire, or acquire a motor-car! Baggy Trimble would cheerfully give a term's pocket-money for the pleasure of snorting around in a Ford, or gliding swiftly through the leafy lanes in a Rolls-Royce. Most of us are ardent motorists at heart. And I wager that most of our readers are, too. That is why we are treating you to a Special Motoring Number.

Although we are inclined to kick against the rule I have quoted above, there is something to be said in its favour. It wouldn't do for all the St. Jim's fellows to have motor-cars. Fancy George Alfred Grundy tearing around the countryside, scattering chickens right and left! And fancy being stranded about a hundred miles from St. Jim's with a puncture, and no means of getting it repaired. There would be a few fellows late for lessons, methinks! And we should have Patty Wynn exceeding the speed limit instead of the feed limit, which he now does.

No! Most emphatically it would not do for us all to have motors. Not only would the lives of all the pigs and poultry in the neighbourhood be imperilled, but human lives also, for very few fellows would be able to drive with that skill and care which is so essential in these days of road-congestion. "Full steam ahead" would be their motto—with disastrous results!

(Continued at foot of next column.)
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RATTY'S RIDE.

By Dick Brooke.

When Ratty bought a motor-car,
In Nineteen-twenty-three,
The people flocked from near and far,
The wondrous sight to see.
It was a prehistoric bus,
Warranted not to skid;
But soon it fairly startled us—
'Twas the first thing it did!

It rushed towards us like a flash.
And Ratty yelled, "Stand clear!"
Then came a most terrific crash,
We grinned from ear to ear.
The window of the porter's place
Was soon a gaping hole;
And Ratty, with an anxious face,
Gasp'd faintly, "Bless my soul!"

The glass lay scattered all around
In twenty thousand bits;
And poor old Taggles, I'll be bound,
Had twenty thousand fits!
Then Ratty started off once more,
And through the gateway sped;
When suddenly there came a roar—
He'd nearly killed the Head!

Onward he rushed, both fierce and fast,
Along the road to Rylcombe;
A herd of country cows he passed,
But could not stop to milk 'em.
The village constable did scream:
"You're miles beyond the limit!"
Then Ratty rushed into a stream,
And simply had to swim it!

They fished the motor out that night,
We went to give assistance;
And Ratty? He was not in sight,
He meant to keep his distance.
His car was smashed to smithereens,
No longer smart and flashy;
In future, he'll go on the greens,
And wield the merry mashie!

(Continued from column 1.)

I hope you will like Bernard Glyn's description of Mr. Ratchiff's "joy-ride." It is the tit-bit of an issue which I venture to say is one of the best we have had.

Tom Merry

OUR MOTORING COLUMN!

By Dick Redfern.

(It is rumoured that in a few years' time schoolboys will be allowed to have motor-cars of their own. Our contributor anticipates this happy event.—Ed.)

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY has just purchased another car. This brings his total up to a dozen. Gussy is wondering where he is going to garage them all! His latest car is a two-seater, so Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby, his study-mates, are in for a good time. We should advise them to insure heavily before they go out with Gussy!

BAGLEY TRIMBLE was fined ten shillings at Wayland Police Court yesterday, for leaving his car unattended in the High Street while he went into the bunshop for a feed. It is curious that the car wasn't stolen whilst Baggy was feeding, because an old-iron vendor happened to pass the spot. But I suppose he considered the car was utterly worthless, even as scrap-iron!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY has again been convicted on a charge of exceeding the speed limit. P.-c. Crump pointed out there were ninety-nine previous convictions against him. Grundy's licence was suspended for life, and he was ordered to get rid of his car. I suggest that he puts it up for auction. I am prepared to bid fourpence!

AUBREY RACKE boasts that his latest car cost his millionaire father five thousand pounds. It is certainly a handsome car, beautifully upholstered. Aubrey will swank more than ever now, and there will be no holding him.

TAGGLES, the porter, was taken for a joy-ride the other day in Blake's car. When interviewed afterwards on the subject of his ride, Taggles said: "Which I don't 'old with these noo-fangled cars. Wot I says is this 'ere—let's go back to the good old days of carriages an' pairs. I've got bruises and bumps all over me body, an' I'm lucky to escape with me life. No more joy-ridin' with Master Blake!"

RATTY'S "RUNABOUT"!

By BERNARD GLYN.



"HALLO! Who does this old bus belong to?"

Monty Lowther asked the question, in tones of wonder. And Monty's chums crowded round to inspect the "old bus" referred to.

A three-wheeled car, with a torpedo-shaped body, was standing unattended in the St. Jim's quadrangle.

The engine had been left running, and every now and then it gave a loud, explosive snort which made the juniors jump.

From the exhaust of the car issued fumes of an unsavoury nature, which made Tom Merry & Co. press their handkerchiefs to their noses.

"Gwooooh! What a beastly effluvia, deah boys!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Who is the ownah of this cah, I wondah?"

That was what all the fellows were wondering. They had never seen such a queer-looking car before. It was a two-seater; at all events, it would have seated two ordinary persons. But if Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble had attempted to board the car together, the side-door would have "gone west."

The car looked as if it had been put together anyhow, instead of properly manufactured. It gave the impression that it might fall to pieces at any moment. Indeed, Monty Lowther remarked that it was evidently the latest "collapsible" car!

"I say, you fellows—"

Baggy Trimble came rolling up to the group of car-inspectors. He was all agog with excitement.

"That's old Ratty's car!" he announced breathlessly. "He bought it second-hand, over at Wayland."

"My hat!"

"How much do you think he gave for it?" asked Trimble.

"Twenty-five bob?" suggested Lowther humorously.

"Rats! Forty pounds."

"Then it can't be much of a car," said Tom Merry. "A decent motor-bike would cost that. Fancy old Ratty risking his neck in a horrible contraption like this!"

"I wouldn't wide in that cah for a hundred pounds!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emphatically. "As for old Watty, I sincerely trust he has insured his life."

"Shush! Here he comes!" muttered Manners.

Mr. Horace Ratcliff came striding on the scene. He was looking very pompous and important. He had invested in a second-hand car, and he was very proud of his purchase.

"Stand aside, you boys!" he commanded.

The juniors parted into two sections, leaving a gangway through which the Housemaster could pass.

"Might I inquire, Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff, "why you are holding your handkerchief to your nose?"

"Ahem! There's a strong smell of cheap petrol somewhere, sir," murmured Tom.

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I gave the top price for my petrol. It is absurd to suggest that it gives forth an unpleasant effluvia. Grooooh!"

Mr. Ratcliff choked and spluttered as he got in the way of the exhaust. And the juniors grinned.

The Housemaster clambered into the car, and endeavoured to coax it into action. It needed quite a deal of coaxing. Like the average seaside donkey, it stubbornly refused to go.

Mr. Ratcliff tugged at each lever in turn. Possibly he had forgotten which was the right one!

At last, after a great deal of wrenching and gasping and grunting on Mr. Ratcliff's part, the car suddenly made up its mind to go. And when it did get off



There was a loud shriek and a loud splash as Ratty's car performed a series of revolutions and then collapsed into the ditch.

the mark, it couldn't be seen for dust, so to speak.

There was a bang and a flash, and away went the torpedo-shaped horror, like a streak of light.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "Now we're off, with a vengeance!"

The car headed straight as a die for the school gates. Taggles, the porter, was standing in its path, and he hopped out of the way in the nick of time. The car shot past like a live thing, and careered wildly through the school gateway, and into the roadway beyond.

"My heye!" ejaculated the startled Taggles. "What I says is this 'ere, with all these mad motorists flying about life ain't safe. It's enough when the likes of young D'Arcy and the other young himps who possesses cars go mad, but when it comes to masters things are coming to a nice stage. And Mr. Ratcliff above all people! I suppose he will finish up on an ambulance. He'll have himself to thank for it, anyway."

He took another look at the fast departing car, and then shuffled into his lodge.

After experiencing a very anxious moment, Mr. Ratcliff contrived to get the car under control, and it travelled

along the road at quite a respectable pace.

Presently Mr. Ratcliff caught sight of a pedestrian whom he recognised as Mr. Selby, the master of the Third.

"Are you going to Wayland, my dear Selby?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes."

"Then pray allow me to give you a lift!"

The Housemaster slowed up, and Mr. Selby looked doubtfully at the car.

"Will—it will it be perfectly safe?" he faltered.

"Of course! I am a careful and cautious driver, and shall not expose you to the slightest risk."

Mr. Selby did not feel so sure about the matter. He had listened to Mr. Ratcliff's bounce before, yet knew for an absolute fact that the New House master had nearly come to grief on more occasions than one.

"You should have been with me over the week-end," continued Mr. Ratcliff. "I took a party of four up to London—you know the distance—well, the old bus got us there in just a little over two hours. Not bad going—eh? Jump in, my dear Selby, and I'll get you to Wayland in no time!"

So saying, Mr. Ratcliff opened the side-door, and Mr. Selby squeezed himself into the vehicle.

"There is only one thing you must remember," said Mr. Ratcliff. "When we take a sharp corner, you must lean heavily to the right or left, as the case may be. You will thus assist the car in making a successful turn. Is that clear?"

"Quite!" said Mr. Selby.

The car bounded forward, and was soon speeding along at a dizzy pace.

Mr. Selby clutched his hat, and called upon Mr. Ratcliff to moderate the speed. But the Housemaster appeared to be deaf, for the car bounded along at a greater pace than ever.

"My—my dear Ratcliff!" almost screamed Mr. Selby. "Pray apply the brakes! Do you not see that we are going down a steep hill?"

Mr. Ratcliff's method of applying the brakes was comical in the extreme. He had to lean over the side of the car, stretch his arm backwards, and grip a clutch which was stationed at the rear. This caused the car to slacken speed; for which Mr. Selby was truly thankful.

The steep decline was successfully negotiated, and the car leapt along once more—full speed ahead in the direction of Wayland.

There was a sharp turn to the left, and Mr. Selby, in accordance with instructions, should have leaned heavily to the left. Instead of which, he leaned to the right as the car took the turn.

What followed was not quite clear, either to Mr. Ratcliff or to Mr. Selby.

The car performed a series of revolutions, as if it were taking part in a gymnastic display. Each revolution took it nearer and nearer to the ditch, into which it finally collapsed, ejecting the two masters from their seats as it did so.

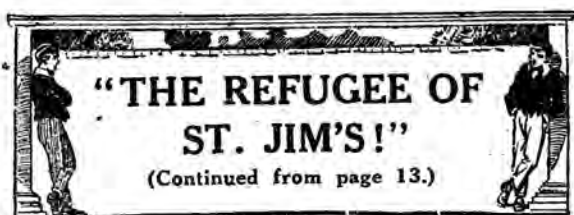
There was a loud shriek and a loud splash, for that ditch was overflowing with recent rain.

It was quite a long time before Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Selby could scramble ashore, so to speak. And what Mr. Selby said to his colleague will scarcely bear repetition!

Next day, among the small advertisements in the local paper, appeared the following:

"CAR FOR SALE! Will accept twenty pounds or nearest offer. Apply, Mr. HORACE RATCLIFF, New House, St. James' College."

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passage. He found Kildare's study without mishap, crept inside, and closed the door softly behind him.

Trying the drawers in the captain's desk, he found that Kildare had left them unlocked. He opened the top drawer, and immediately a low cry of satisfaction escaped his lips.

A handsome gold watch-chain was in the drawer, two gold medallions lying loose beside it. These medallions had evidently come off the chain, and Kildare had left them in his desk ready to take to the jeweller's for repair.

"Good!" muttered the refugee. "These will do splendidly!"

He slipped the chain and medallions in his pocket, left the drawer open, and hurried from the study.

Nobody passed him on his way to the lower box-room.

He opened the box-room window softly and clambered out. As he reached the ground there was a sudden rush of feet, and a muttered voice exclaimed:

"Grab him!"

Next minute violent hands descended on Frank Digby, and he was dragged backwards until, losing his footing, he staggered and fell.

His assailants gave him no chance to defend himself, although he struggled and hit out desperately.

Racke, Crooke, and Mellish had been lying in wait for him.

They had ropes, and while Crooke and Mellish sat on the refugee, Racke bound him securely and stuffed a gag in his mouth.

"Got you, my beauty!" chuckled the cad of the Shell exultantly. "We took you by surprise—what? Now we're all going back to your secret den in the vaults, to meet somebody who is most anxious to see you."

Racke had left the ropes on Frank Digby's legs sufficiently loose to enable him to walk. The three young rascals hustled their captive away across the dark Close, into the cloisters, and thence to the vaults underneath the ruined tower.

"We discovered your little hiding-place, you see!" chuckled Racke, as they led their prisoner through the darkness, their way lighted by Crooke's electric torch. "When we found it, you were not there. So we left somebody there to look, wait, and nab you if you returned, while we came out to find you. We saw you get in the box-room window, and I shadowed you to Kildare's study. You little suspected that you were being watched while you were at Kildare's desk! So you are a thief! Not only have you thieved at St. Ormond's, but you have started the same game here! My word, you shall smart for this!"

They arrived at the secret vault, and Racke & Co. hustled their prisoner inside.

The lamp was still burning. Frank Digby's gag was removed. He gave a start on seeing Gerald Barker standing by the table.

Barker gave him a look of mingled hate and triumph. "So I've got you at last, Digby!" he leered. "You didn't know that I had come to stay at Rylcombe, to look for you, did you? These chaps have been helping me. Where did you find him, Racke?"

The young rascal of the Shell explained.

"Whew!" whistled Barker. "Then he broke into your school captain's study and opened his desk! His motive was robbery, of course!"

"I saw him take something out of the drawer," said Racke. "We might have caught him red-handed, but I thought we had better bring him along to you, Barker, before letting the school know."

The rascally St. Ormond's senior nodded. He walked up to Frank Digby and searched his pockets. His eyes gleamed when he found Kildare's gold chain and medallions. He slipped them into his own pocket, and then stood, hands on hips, looking with triumphant spite at his victim.

Frank Digby wrenched at his bonds with all his strength. At last he found that he could get one arm free. Crooke approached him, with the intention of tightening the bonds, but was amazed to find a fist like a battering-ram come up suddenly and smite him on the chin.

Biff!

"Yarooooooh!" roared Crooke, collapsing on the stone floor of the vault.

Barker and Racke sprang forward, but next minute there was a rush of feet, and the Terrible Three and Jack Blake, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 535.

D'Arcy and Herries dashed into the vault, cuffs pushed back and fists flying.

"Gwab the wottahs, deah boys!" roared Gussy.

Biff! Wallop! Thud! Biff!

The new arrivals sailed in merrily to the attack.

Racke & Co. and Barker were taken completely by surprise. They turned like rats at bay and fought savagely, using feet as well as hands. But they were simply overwhelmed by Tom Merry & Co. Within a very short space of time the four young rascals were lying on their backs on the stone floor, each with a junior sitting on him.

"Oh, thank goodness you chaps came!" gasped Frank Digby, now released from his bonds. "I thought I was done for that time!"

"We came along to see whether you had worked the trick," said Tom Merry. "You can imagine we received a bit of a shock to hear voices coming from this chamber. We crept to the door without making a noise, wondering who was here. We saw you slog into Crooke, and then—well, we chipped in, and here we are!"

"I did work the trick," said Frank Digby quietly. "I took a gold watch-chain and medallions from Kildare's desk. I'll have them back again now, Barker, if you don't mind."

Blake and Monty Lowther held the scowling senior down while Frank Digby ran through his pockets.

Kildare's watch-chain and medallions came to light, and also something which the refugee looked at in amazement.

It was a small gold ring, with a single diamond set in it.

"Good heavens!" muttered Frank Digby, looking up at Tom Merry & Co. "This is Ericson's ring—one of the things which I am accused of taking!"

"Baj Jove!"

"What is it doing in this rotter's pocket?" growled Herries, in his blunt, pointed manner.

The schoolboy refugee's eyes gleamed.

"Perhaps—perhaps Barker is the real thief!" he exclaimed, with a quick intake of his breath. "He is a pal of Ericson's, but that wouldn't matter to Barker if he was really hard up and wanted to steal. Oh, if only I had proof!"

Barker's face was ashen pale, and he lay there on the vault floor panting with rage and fear.

"I found that ring in here!" he cried hoarsely. "Digby must have dropped it—"

"You liar! You cad!" burst passionately from Frank Digby's lips. "You know it has never been in my possession!" He turned to Tom Merry & Co. appealingly. "You don't believe what Barker suggests?" he asked.

"No, wathah not, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"We would sooner believe that Barker is the thief!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Look here, kids, last night's mystery isn't cleared up yet. Somebody got into the School House and robbed chaps while they were asleep, leaving his plunder on the Head's table and bunking out of the window when he heard Dig coming. Now, in my opinion, these rotters here know something about that. We'll wring the truth out of them!"

"Hear, hear!"

Racke, Crooke, and Mellish were hauled to their feet, howling.

"Now, you rotters, are you going to tell us the truth?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No!" roared Racke furiously. "I—I mean, I don't know what you're driving at! We know nothing, and—Yaroooooh! Yah! Leggo! Whooooooop!"

Racke was whirled over by Tom Merry and Blake, and he was bumped heartily on the cold, hard stone floor.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Racke roared.

Barker's hands and feet were tied, and then Crooke and Mellish were grabbed by the others and subjected to the same treatment as Racke was receiving.

Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Yaroooooh! Yah! Wow-ow!"

"Oooooooop! Ow-ow-ow! Stoppit! Yow!"

Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump!

Mellish was the first to give way, as Tom Merry had expected. There was no backbone in the cad of the Fourth.

"Wow-wow! Owp! Leave off! I'll tell you! Ooooooh!" he gurgled.

Mellish was allowed to stand up.

"Now, you rotter, out with it!" said Tom Merry. "You might as well make a clean breast of everything, Mellish—it will be better for you!"

"All right!" muttered Mellish, darting a side look at Racke. "We—we promised to help Barker get hold of Digby's cousin. We felt pretty certain that you chaps had him hidden down in the vaults here somewhere. Ow-ow! Barker was staying in Rylcombe; he had got permission to come over and hunt for Digby. We got Barker into the school at night, and we watched you fellows sneak down here, although we couldn't find out exactly where you went."

CHAPTER 10.

The Truth at Last!

"YOUNG rips! Stop! Come back, Hi says!" Thus Taggles, the old and ancient school porter, of St. Jim's.

He addressed himself to three juniors who had calmly taken his keys from their hook in his little lodge, and had opened the school gates.

Those three were Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy. Taggles rushed out of his lodge just as the juniors passed through the gates.

He waved wrathfully to them. "You little varmints! The nerve of it! Come back! Wot I says is this 'ere. I'll report yer! Gimme my keys, I—Ow-wow!"

Taggles received his keys on his nose. They were thrown deftly by Blake.

"Good-bye for the present, Taggy!" called Tom Merry. "Report us if you like! Tell the Head we've gone out to discover a thief."

"Young rips! Which you're breakin' bounds! Stop! Come back!"

But Tom Merry, Blake, and Gussy heeded not the voice of Taggles.

They ran on down the Rylcombe Lane, and disappeared into the darkness.

"I say, there'll be a fearful shindy about this if the thing fozzles out!" gasped Blake. "But still, we're game!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The Head will forgive us when we hand him back Kildare's watch-chain and medallions," said Tom Merry.

"But I'm hoping we sha'n't have to conceal anything—about Frank Digby, I mean. I'm positively certain that we shall discover proof that Barker is the real culprit at St. Ormond's."

They reached the village, and made their way to the Golden Cross Hotel, which was the only establishment of its kind that Rylcombe boasted. It was an old-fashioned, little inn, where "food and shelter for man and beast"—according to the notice outside—was provided.

The old gentleman who kept the Golden Cross Hotel received a decided shock when those three schoolboys crowded into his tiny office and asked to be shown up to the room that Barker occupied.

It required some little argument—and certain coin of the Realm provided by Gussy—before the hotel proprietor was prevailed upon to show Tom Merry & Co. upstairs.

Barker's room was on the second floor at the back. It was a tiny room, and sparsely furnished. On the chair at the bedside lay a suitcase, with Barker's initials on the front.

Tom Merry found that he had a key that fitted the lock, which was of a common type, and he soon had the suitcase open. He rummaged inside it, and a sudden exclamation burst from his lips.

"Oh, good egg! I've found something!"

He took out a small canvas bag. Inside this bag was a wallet with the initials "F. E." stamped on it. It contained some Treasury notes and one five-pound note. It also contained papers that made it clear to Tom Merry & Co. that the wallet belonged to F. Ericson of St. Ormond's.

Another ring, a pair of gold cuff-links, and a handsome gold hunter watch came to light.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle. "This fairly bowls out Barker, deah boys. He cannot plead that he took these things from Frank Digby when he caught him, because we can pprove that he didn't. The wottah won't have a leg to stand on."

"So Barker is the thief! Dig's cousin is cleared, and everything is all right!" breathed Blake. "Thank goodness for that!"

"Now for St. Jim's—and Barker!" said Tom Merry grimly. "We'll take this suitcase along."

The three juniors left Rylcombe and hurried back to St. Jim's.

Taggles opened the gates, glaring most homicidally at them.

"Which you're to report to the 'Ead hat once!" he growled. "Young rips! 'E 'ardly credited wot I told 'im. Wot I says is this 'ere. All boys is a nuisance, and they ought to be drowned at birth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Blake, and Gussy made straight for the cloisters. They went down into the vaults, and at last arrived at the secret chamber.

The others were still there, with Barker lying on the floor a prisoner.

Frank Digby looked eagerly at them.

"Well?" he asked, starting forward. "Have you discovered anything?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Look!"

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"It was clear to us, then, that Digby's cousin was hiding in the vaults. So Barker hit on a wheeze to start inquiries by the Head. His plan was to get into the school and rob some of the fellows. There would be a row when the thefts were discovered, and as nothing would be proved against anybody in the school, it would naturally be thought that Digby's cousin was hiding there, and was playing the same tricks as he had got into trouble for at his own school."

Tom Merry & Co. drew deep breaths.

"The cunning hound!" exclaimed Blake. "And so it was Barker who committed the thefts? It was Barker whom Digby followed to the Head's study and heard climb out of the window?"

"Yes," said Mellish, avoiding Barker's murderous looks. "Digby took him by surprise. Barker hadn't expected anyone to be about, and we had promised to stop in bed so that no suspicion should fall on us. He got out of the Head's window, and hid in the cloisters until the coast was clear for him to leave St. Jim's and get back to the Golden Cross Hotel, where he is staying in Rylcombe."

Tom Merry's lip curled contemptuously as he regarded the cowering rascal on the floor.

"You precious rotter!" he exclaimed. "We thought we had some prize cads at this school—those three, for instance—but I think you lick them. I would wager a whole term's pocket-money now that you are really guilty of what Frank Digby here is accused of!"

"The fact that he had one of the missing articles in his pocket certainly points to it," said Blake.

Tom Merry's teeth came together with a click.

"There's one way that we might be able to find proof, chaps," he said. "If Barker is the real thief he would have brought the rest of the stolen things with him. He would hardly leave them at St. Ormond's, and run the risk of their being discovered while he was away. In that case, he would have the loot hidden in his room at Rylcombe."

"My hat! You're right, Tommy!" exclaimed Manners. "If Barker is the thief that is probably where we shall find proof—in his room at the hotel where he has been staying."

All looked at Barker.

The burly fellow's face was livid, his hands twitching with ill-concealed nervousness.

"Don't you dare go to my room at Rylcombe!" he muttered thickly. "You'll find nothing there! I'm not the thief. You little fools are talking nonsense. Let me go now, and I—I'll give Digby a chance to get away."

This was greeted with roars of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not much!"

Tom Merry turned to Frank Digby.

"You can help keep watch on Barker till we return," he said. "As for these three rotters"—indicating Racke, Crooke, and Mellish—"they can go. If they dare open their mouths to anyone about you, Digby, being here, we sha'n't hold our tongues about the part they played in the robbery last night. I rather fancy that they will keep mum for their own sakes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Racke, Crooke, and Mellish were released. They went from the secret vault, scowling. They realised the truth of Tom Merry's words, and decided to lay low and say nothing concerning the refugee.

Arriving back in the School House, Racke & Co. found everybody excited.

"Haven't you chaps heard the news?" demanded Baggy Trimble, meeting them on the stairs. "Kildare's study has been broken into while he was at the meeting, and his gold watch-chain stolen out of the drawer of his desk."

Racke growled and turned away.

The mysterious theft of Kildare's watch-chain was being discussed everywhere. In the Common-room a crowd of Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers were holding debate on the matter.

"This will clear Digby, at any rate!" said Talbot. "He's still in the punishment-room, so it couldn't have been him. And it's ten to one that the chap who took Kildare's watch-chain is the one who stole those other things last night."

"The nerve of the thief, whoever he is, beats everything I ever heard of!" remarked Lumley-Lumley. "He must be a stranger to the school, otherwise he wouldn't have been such an ass to have tried another robbery so soon."

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton were discussing the same matter, in almost the same way, in the Housemaster's study.

"It is apparent, Mr. Railton, that the affair of last night and this evening's robbery are intimately connected," said the Head. "Digby has been accused of the latter, but it seems that the lad was speaking the truth, after all. He is innocent, and I shall have him released at once!"

"I agree entirely, sir," said Mr. Railton quietly.

The Head walked out of Mr. Railton's study, looking deeply worried.

He held up the suitcase. Barker's face went grey when he saw it. The colour changed to a sickly white as Tom Merry opened the case and produced the wallet and the other articles.

Frank Digby gave a joyous, half-incredulous cry.

"Ericson's things! Then Barker had them all the time! He is the thief! Oh, this is topping! I can hardly realise my good luck!"

Tom Merry gave Barker a condemning look.

"Well, you scoundrel, what have you to say?" he demanded. "We have bowled you out completely, don't you think?"

Barker cowered back.

"I—I confess!" he whined. "I was hard up, and wanted money badly to pay gambling debts. Ericson had more money than he knew what to do with, and it taunted me. I made up my mind to rob him. And I waited for him in the wood when I knew that Digby was also coming that way. I set about Ericson before I robbed him, so that people would not suspect me, as I was pally with him. I was mad, I know. I'm sorry. I—"

"Yes, of course, you are sorry. Sorry that we have found you out!" rapped Tom Merry contemptuously. "I don't think you have been haunted by any pangs of conscience since you robbed Ericson, you rotter! You have behaved like a worse scoundrel by hounding Digby as you have, knowing all the time that he was innocent and that you yourself were guilty. What a despicable road you are!"

"Let me go!" muttered Barker. "I—I'll clear off, and—"

"You'll go back to St. Ormond's and face the music, the same as you would have made Digby do!" cut in Tom Merry. "We'll take you along to see the Head now, and we'll tell him everything. Drag him up, kids!"

Barker was hustled to his feet, and, held firmly between Tom Merry and Blake, was taken out of the vaults and across to the School House.

They walked up the steps and into the Hall.

The first person they saw in there was Robert Arthur Digby. He was standing by the fireplace talking to Levison, Clifton Dane, Glyn, and Cardew.

Digby stood rooted to the floor in amazement when he saw his cousin with Tom Merry & Co., and Barker cowering in their midst.

"Frank!" he cried incredulously. "Why—what—"

"It's all right, Bob! Barker has confessed to being the thief, and we've got the stolen things here—most of them, at any rate!" exclaimed the runaway schoolboy happily. "It is wonderful, the way everything has worked out!"

Digby drew a deep, deep breath.

"So your name is cleared, Frank! Barker is the culprit! You are free! Oh, thank Heaven!"

It seemed to the Fourth-Former that a great, overpowering weight had been lifted from him; his brain was in a whirl at the good news.

"The Head set you free, then, Dig!" grinned Blake.

"Yes. Kildare has been robbed of a gold chain, and—"

"And I am the thief!" chuckled his cousin. "Honestly, Bob, I mean it! It was I who stole Kildare's chain."

"What the dickens for?" ejaculated Digby in a dazed voice.

"To take suspicion off you, of course!" laughed the other. "And, incidentally, that little robbery has been the cause of the truth coming to light."

And he told Digby of all that had happened.

He had just finished his amazing narrative when Dr. Holmes appeared in the doorway.

The Head of St. Jim's looked in amazement at Frank Digby and Barker.

"Dear me! Who are these lads? What are they doing here, Merry?" he asked.

"This is Digby's cousin, sir," said Tom, indicating the runaway.

"Bless my soul! The boy who is under sentence of expulsion from St. Ormond's School for robbery and violence!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "And this is Barker—the real culprit. He is also the one who broke in last night and left his plunder on your study table."

Dr. Holmes was frankly amazed.

"Merry, you astound me. Kindly explain."

Tom Merry, in a calm, even voice, explained everything. Seniors and juniors alike crowded round and listened eagerly to the Shell captain's words. Tom Merry did not dwell on the part that Racke & Co. had played in the affair—much to the relief of those three young rascals, who had hung on anxiously to Tom's every word.

Dr. Holmes drew a deep breath.

"Well, Merry, this is a most astonishing affair!" he exclaimed. "I am thankful that the truth has come to light, and that this innocent lad is now free to return to his school without a stain on his character. As for this miserable youth"—indicating Barker—"I think he had better be put

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into the punishment-room, and be kept there until somebody comes from St. Ormond's to fetch him."

"Ahem! Excuse me, sir," said Tom Merry. "Would you—ahem!—allow me to notify Mr. Rathbone in the morning? I—I hope you won't mind my asking, sir."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"Very well, Merry. It is a strange request, but it is granted," he said. "Kildare, here is your watch-chain."

"Thank you, sir," said the St. Jim's captain, and he grinned good-humouredly at Frank Digby.

It was evident that Kildare did not resent the liberty that had been taken with his room and his property.

Barker was locked up in Nobody's Study.

Frank Digby was assigned a bed in the Fourth Form dormitory for that night, and he kept the Fourth amused for nearly two hours after official "lights out" by his tales of the japes and pranks of his schoolfellows at St. Ormond's.

Tom Merry cycled down to Rylcombe Post Office next morning and despatched the following telegram to Mr. Rathbone at St. Ormond's School:

"Digby found; come fetch us; ask for me at St. Jim's.—BARKER."

He chuckled to himself as he left the post office.

"That ought to fetch the old bird!" he murmured. "Of course, I've a perfect right to send a telegram for Barker—especially as he is locked up in Nobody's Study, and is, therefore, unable to send it off himself. Ha, ha, ha!"

Morning lessons were over, and the boys of St. Jim's were coming out of the Form-rooms, when a car drove in at the gates of St. Jim's and halted at the foot of the School House steps.

In it was Mr. Rathbone, the bad-tempered warden from St. Ormond's. He was looking more like a wily fox than ever.

"Good-morning, Mr. Rathbone!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Have you come for Barker?"

"Yes—and for Digby!" rapped Mr. Rathbone. "Where are they?"

"Will you wait there, Mr. Rathbone, for a few minutes, please?" said Tom very respectfully. "I will fetch them."

Mr. Rathbone waited. He had no desire to meet Dr. Holmes again, knowing the opinion that that venerable gentleman held of him.

Tom Merry, Blake, and Monty Lowther went along to Kildare's study.

"Please, Kildare, Mr. Rathbone has called for Barker," said Tom Merry. "May I have the key of the punishment-room? You can rely on us to hand Barker over safely."

"Very well, Merry," said Kildare with a laugh. "Here you are."

The juniors hurried away to the punishment-room.

Barker was sitting on the hard bed. He gave them a sullen, malicious glare.

"Well?" he growled.

"Time for you to depart, you rotter," said Tom Merry sharply. "Rope him up, kids!"

Monty Lowther and Blake produced rope, and Barker's arms were bound to his sides, whilst his ankles were tethered so close together that he was only just able to hobble.

When commanded to walk, his weird movements caused Tom Merry and the others to go into hysterics of laughter.

Helped from behind by various boots, Barker hobbled downstairs to the Hall door, causing merriment to all who saw him.

Mr. Rathbone, standing at the bottom of the steps, almost fell down when Barker hobbled out.

"Mum-my goodness!" he gurgled in a faint voice.

"Barker! Wh-what does this mean? I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

The St. Ormond's school warden turned furiously to them.

"You little rascals! How dare you laugh! How dare you treat Barker in this manner! Release him at once, do you hear?" he howled.

But Tom Merry & Co. did not move—except when a cheery, curly-headed boy came out of the Hall door.

"Good-morning, Mr. Rathbone!" cried Frank Digby, for it was he. "Beautiful weather for this time of year—what?"

The astounded warden was quite incapable of speech for some minutes. He stood there, gasping and blinking at the runaway like one in a dream.

"Digby!" he managed to gasp at last. "I—I will take you myself, you little rascal! Come here at once!"

Mr. Rathbone did not wait for Frank Digby to comply with that request. He made a rush up the School House steps towards the runaway schoolboy.

"Look out!" shouted Herries.

Mr. Rathbone's heavy hand descended on Frank Digby, and he attempted to drag the junior down the steps with him.

"Rescue!" roared Jack Blake. "Back up, kids!"

(Continued on page 27.)

Harry Douglas is in pretty low water and it is only by the merest chance that he strikes lucky in the most unexpected way



CHAMPION BORN

An Exciting Story of Boxing Adventure
BY
GEOFFREY PROUT.

CHAPTER 1. Off His Course!

"**W**E'RE just about to receive our knock-out, lad!"

Harry Douglas swung round in his chair to face his father, who had entered the room at that moment. Harry was struggling with the accounts of the small wholesale paint business from which he and his father had scraped a living for the Douglas household—comprising, besides Mr. Douglas and Harry, patient, angelic Mrs. Douglas and sister Elsie. Mr. Douglas continued.

"Judson's going to foreclose."

The words struck Harry like a blow in the face. The little paint factory was mortgaged up to the hilt, and it was all they could do to meet their expenses, let alone the cost of living. Harry was aware that their instalments were not paid up, and the year was within two months of its end. They had three hundred pounds to pay to pull things even again.

Harry and his father had always thought the mortgagor—Mr. Judson—would give them more rope. Now he was going to foreclose—claim his rights to the full legal measure. That meant selling up Mr. Douglas.

"It—it means the end, then!" blurted out Harry. "What shall we do?"

"After selling out we'll perhaps have a hundred pounds, my boy. We must start some sort of a shop—a retail paint and oil shop or something. But we'll have our work cut out to live, lad, till it's got going. Our hopes for our 'Three Barrels' brand of paint are dashed to the ground."

"What can we realise on selling our private effects, dad? The Jou-jou will fetch fifty pounds. I'll write to Tresswick to see if his offer of fifty still stands. He said he'd buy the boat at that if I'd deliver her to Walton-on-the-Naze. That'll be fifty pounds more, anyway."

"Harry, you're a good lad," said Mr. Douglas, putting his hand on his son's shoulder. "Who knows, that fifty may mean our salvation from total ruin! I wish the boat were worth a thousand pounds, though. That would enable us to raise the mortgage and make our paint works pay. Then, uncrippled, we could soon build up capital. But there, thank Heaven I have you, my son, to keep my heart up!"

Harry wrote his letter and got an answer agreeing to the purchase of the boat—a smart little drop-keel, sloop-rigged, twenty-foot craft. So off the

youngster set from Barking Creek, in the Thames, where he had the boat wintering, for his last cruise in the Jou-jou. It meant a rather hazardous trip up the Northern Channels of the Thames Estuary to the Naze.

It was well for Harry that the tearing north-easterly gale which struck him when pointing up Hamford Water, close to his destination, did not pipe up a couple of hours previously, or his boat would have been a total wreck on the Naze. That would have been good-bye to the fifty pounds which might mean the salvation of the Douglas family. As it was, it caught him with a squared boom, dead aft. The Jou-jou, her lee coaming awash, streaked up the creek.

When off Stone Point Harry prepared to shorten in sheets and down helm to shoot into the sheltered Walton Channel. However, there was a sudden crack above, and the sloop's yard broke at the halliard strop. Harry leapt to the halliard, let go, and the sail came clounding and belying down on top of the boat.

By the time Harry had doused the beautiful union silk canvas to prevent it from tearing, the sloop was past Walton Channel and tearing on, helped by the flowing tide up Hamford Water.

Harry grunted.

"No getting up Walton Channel to-night," he muttered. "I'll have to look for an anchorage and make down the creek again to-morrow."

The Jou-jou, running under her jib, sped on along the narrowing channel. Extensive saltings—the waste land covered with sea herbage, intersected by mud-channels which fringe high water mark—flat, desolate marsh country beyond and the numerous islands at that part of the coast, stretched away on either hand.

It was a most desolate spot, made all the more desolate by the tearing nor-easter with its black squalls of stinging and hissing rain.

There was a small island just to the north of where Harry found himself, with curiously enough, a few scrubby trees on it. A gateway was just flooding with the incoming tide, and it struck Harry that it would make quite a cosy retreat. So, action following thought like a flash, Harry bore up and his boat swept into the narrow, cosy little channel.

To Harry's surprise he found he could travel up this gut for quite a long way.

"I'll run till I take the mud," he said to himself. "Then I can drop the anchor and make some cocoa. Hallo, what's that?"

His eyes were arrested by a hut, or it might be called a small bungalow, built of weather-boards and roofed with corrugated iron. It was evidently a gentleman's wild-fowling quarters. Harry suddenly decided to have a look at it, and beg some more fresh water if the place should be occupied.

He nosed the Jou-jou into the mud, rolled up the jib, sprang ashore, and then walked towards the bungalow with the petrol-can which he used as a water-breaker.

The place seemed deserted. There was no sign of life. Harry walked round to the back, and, on seeing the few small out-buildings at the rear of the place, he leapt back in surprise.

With a roar like that of a lion, a big bull-terrier sprang at the youngster, his teeth bared and his back bristling.

"Hold off, old man!" cried Harry. "I'm not a thief! Down, dog!"

CHAPTER 2.

Harry's First Fight!

THE dog held back, but not from fear, though Harry had raised the petrol-can menacingly.

Harry was fond of dogs and dogs of him, and it was the instinct of the snow-white, pink-eyed bull terrier which told him that Harry was not on mischief bent.

As the dog drew back, however, another roar sounded, and a big man with a face like a battered ham sprang at the lad from some bushes.

This man was a typical bruiser. His nose was broken, and on either side of the flattened bridge two little eyes, set very closely together, glittered. The man was a giant of strength, and, though obviously beyond prize-fighting age, was a most formidable person. He clutched at Harry, and the young man let his can clatter on to the ground.

"Hold off, you!" cried young Douglas indignantly. "What's the game? I'm only after water, if you can spare some."

"Water, is it?" snarled the man. "That's a likely yarn."

"Oh, if you can't spare any, and if you disbelieve me," said Harry with heat, "I'll go back to my boat!"

"Ad the cheek to bring yer boat up close to, 'ave yer? Well, you don't go back yet, my lad!"

Harry was about to move off when the man put a great heavy, hairy hand on his shoulder. His grip was terrible and

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it made young Douglas wince. The man swung Harry round to face him, and the young man noticed that the ugly features of the giant were distorted with fury.

"Spyin', an' then expectin' to sneak off!" growled the man. "Ye'll stop 'ere, me beauty, till me pals come back!"

"I'm hungry, thirsty, and tired," pleaded Douglas. "You can bring your pals down to gape at me in my boat. I want some cocoa and food."

"Ho, no, you don't!" said the man, shaking his head knowingly. "You'll stop 'ere!"

"I'm hanged if I will. Take your hands off, you!"

The man only grinned at this outburst. Harry struck out at that. He was tired and irritable. It was a rash thing to do, for though Harry was a splendid athlete and a good amateur boxer, the bruiser before him looked as if he could settle him with one hand behind his back.

Harry's blow struck the man on the cheek, but it seemed to have no effect save to throw the man into a very ugly temper. Down he crouched, fists in front of him. It was an invitation to fight, and Harry, now rather repenting that he had struck out, instinctively took up an attitude of defence.

The bruiser took this as an acceptance of his unspoken challenge, and the pair began to spar round each other, the dog sitting on its haunches and blinking at the operations quite unconcernedly.

Now, Harry had spent a very trying apprenticeship in the paint-works. Mr. Douglas had made the lad start at the bottom, and work up, like the men they employed. This had meant, for Harry, years of manual labour. What good it had done him he did not know, beyond the matters of business, till that moment. It had made Harry's muscles like whipcord, and he was thankful for it now, on the eve of the first real fight he had ever had.

The youngster took some very heavy punishment from the man before him. But he dodged all the blows that mattered—the ones that would have resulted in a knock-out. Harry could read into his opponent's very soul. He knew, somehow, before ever a blow was delivered, that the bruiser was going, the next second, to drive in an upper-cut, a jab, a straight left, or whatever the case might be.

As the pair were fighting, three other men came on the scene. Two were in running shorts and wore white sweaters. The third was a rather weedy-looking man, well dressed in a brown suit, and with an air of prosperity about him.

Harry dropped his hands as these men appeared, expecting that now an explanation would smooth things over. The bruiser took his opportunity. He jabbed savagely for Harry's face, but the blow landed on the side of the youngster's head and glanced off, expending most of its force in thin air. Harry had moved his head at just the right second by a mere chance.

Young Douglas' blood boiled. He forgot the newcomers, and paid all attention to the fight. A wild feeling of joy was surging in the young man's breast, as well as the feeling of anger. He was fighting an ex-professional pugilist, it was plain. He was not only holding his own against the other man's skill and tricks and sledgehammer blows, but he felt he was winning on points, too, for his opponent never delivered a blow which was not expected by Harry. As for Harry himself, his blows were like lightning, and nearly every time they hit their mark.

The bruiser's blows were now coming

in heavy and fast, on account of Harry's tantalising methods. Harry had to be entirely on the defence for many minutes. However, his opponent began to breathe very heavily, and Harry felt that he had a chance, if only he could evade those terrible jabs right to the end. Footwork would save him—perhaps even give him the victory.

"A born fighter!" muttered the man in the brown suit to his two companions. "An amateur, but a natural boxer. He fights with his feet and his head. Just the things that will bamboozle Pug."

Harry was now warmed up to the scrap. He found that, by watching his opponent's narrow-set eyes all the time, he could easily evade the blows which he could foretell. It seemed to Harry phenomenal, this thought-reading. The bruiser, though a terrible bitter, was a slow thinker, while Harry's thoughts were almost simultaneous with his actions. So it is small wonder that he outweighed the man called Pug in fighting power almost to the same extent as Pug outweighed him in pounds, reach, and physical strength.

"Ay, he's a plucked 'un," said one of the men in sweaters, "but he'll not have the strength to wear down Pug. It takes the kick o' a mule to knock out Dennicombe. What for that young man's 'ere it's easy to guess. Well, 'e won't get away again."

Pug Dennicombe by this time was pretty well blown, and Harry, exulting in his newly discovered power, played warily for an opening.

"Gosh, look at that wicked stamp wi' 'is left foot as 'e gets in a straight left!" muttered the newcomer, who had not, so far, spoken.

"Ay, an' yon rapid change o' balance as he swings round, cully," answered the other man in the sweater. "'E knows where to 'it, too!"

Strictly speaking, Harry did not know exactly where to hit. But he saw an opening, and he swung in a sledgehammer upper-cut which caught Pug on the point of the chin. This is a difficult point for a knock-out, but Harry's was a beautiful blow, more by chance than design, though the onlookers did not know it. Harry had struck the pinpoint spot where the nerve runs straight to the brain, and Pug goggled, dropped his hands to his side, turned half round, and then fell on his face. His breath was heard to hiss as he fell, then the man turned on his back, arms outstretched, knocked out!

CHAPTER 3.

A Job for Douglas!

HARRY stood over the senseless man, marvelling at the occurrence. But the three newcomers were standing round in threatening attitudes, and the youngster turned towards them.

"I'm sorry," he said; "but he laid his mutton fists on me. I only came to beg a drop of fresh water, for I've only about two pints left. Who is the owner of this place?"

"I am," said the man in the brown suit crisply. "What are you doing here?"

"Man alive!" cried Harry. "Are you all as wooden-headed as this man on the ground? I've told you why I'm here. Water! Had an accident in my boat, and have fixed myself up in the gut there for the night. What's unusual in that?"

"You'd better come inside, my lad," said the man. "Burke, see to Dennicombe. Come on, Fleet! We'll question this young man."

Harry followed the two men into the bungalow. He was offered a chair, and sat down.

"What's your name?" asked the man in brown. The others called this person Mr. Dewsbury.

"Harry Douglas."

"Well, tell us your business. We're not impertinent, Mr. Douglas, but you've proved yourself a smart boxer, knocked out an ex-champion, and are trespassing. We may explain why we are so suspicious of you in a minute."

Dewsbury was quite frank and pleasant, if curt. So Harry put aside his own grievances, and told them all the full story. The man called Burke and the ex-prizefighter, who had come round, had come into the room. Pug Dennicombe looked admiringly at Harry, greatly to young Douglas' surprise. He expected scowls.

"Well, I believe you," said Dewsbury, after Harry had finished his story.

"What say, you fellows?"

"I say, have a care!" muttered Burke; and Pug Dennicombe nodded.

"Ay he's no chicken at the game," he said. "I'll bet 'e's got Sanderley at the back o' 'im!"

As the name Sanderley was mentioned, all four stared hard at Harry, across whose face a wave of utter puzzlement passed.

"See, he can't be a spy!" said Dewsbury, breaking the silence that followed. "He's puzzled."

"Well, 'e's got brain enow to keep 'is thoughts from shinin' brightly out o' 'is blinkers!" remarked Burke. "Ye saw that when 'e was leadin' Pug on to bull tactics."

"I believe he's really an innocent sailing-man. I'm going to tell him," now voiced Dewsbury; and the two older men shrugged their shoulders, while the fourth person, a youngster who had hardly spoken at all, grinned.

Harry listened in wonder.

"Heard of Graham Power?" asked Dewsbury.

"Why, yes. He's a light-weight boxer to meet an 'unknown light-weight' soon. The papers are full of it."

"Well, there's the unknown light-weight there."

Dewsbury nodded towards the grinning young man he called Fleet—Bill Fleet. Puzzlement now gave place to intelligence in Harry's face.

"I see," he said. "I've stumbled up against your secret training quarters. You are the unknown light-weight's backer, of course, and one of you others his manager. But why all this secrecy?"

The men laughed, and Fleet said:

"Well, you are a green 'un, cully!"

Dewsbury explained.

"Power is the light-weight champion of England, as you know. Well, his challenge has been all bluff. He and his manager know that there are young light-weights in England who can make Power lie down. But they're keeping Power in his position by bluff, and making a good thing out of it on the music-halls. The purse of a thousand to him, win or lose, and two thousand to the winner, was a bait Power's manager thought no one would rise to. But I did. I found Fleet, and, barring foul play, I'll make money out of this; so will Fleet, so will these other two. Does that convey anything to you?"

"Only that Power's people will try to see your unknown light-weight, to weigh him up and to know on what lines to train Power. I understand your secrecy now."

The men all laughed again.

"Golly, you are green, cully!" now said Pug Dennicombe. "It means that they'll do anything to stop this fight, poison Fleet's food, break 'is blinkin' "

neck, drown 'im—anything! Now you unnerstan' why we's so secret-like?"

Harry was gaping in surprise.

"Surely the law is too complete for anything like that to happen?" he said, with wide eyes.

"Law fiddlesticks!" voiced Burke. "I tell 'e, young sir—but even now I'm suspicious as you're a spy—Power's manager Sanderley—an' maybe you know 'im better'n we do—will stiek at nothen!"

Harry was still gasping.

"Well, Mr. Dewsbury," he said at last, "I give you my word I'll keep my mouth shut."

But Dewsbury shook his head.

"I really don't doubt your honour, Mr. Douglas. But, you know, we can take no risks. Can you prove your story to us, prove that you are no spy of Sanderley's?"

"Sanderley's cute enough for 'is spies to prove anythin'!" put in Burke.

Harry was thinking rapidly. He had stumbled up against something hundreds of people would give lots to know about—pressmen, boxing enthusiasts, etc. The fight was dated for six weeks ahead, to take place at Marathon Park Hall, the place for all such meetings in the West End of London.

Why should he not stop here with these men, help them in their work, and so on? They'd be glad to know he was their 'captive,' for they still doubted him. He was, too, at a loose end himself, and his father could manage the winding up of the business quite well. He'd be just one less mouth to feed. Dewsbury would jump at the chance of feeding him and compensating him for his loss of time. He voiced his thoughts.

"If you only would, Mr. Douglas, we'd be very grateful," said Dewsbury. "It'll save us from changing our training quarters, still a secret from those who would like to know about them. I'll pay you well, for you'll be a first-rate light-weight sparring partner for Fleet. Pug Dennicombe is splendid for Fleet to practise his sledgehammer blows on, but you really do want someone with a quicker brain and handier footwork. You'll be much more like Power's style in that respect, though Power's a terrible hitter, too."

Harry looked at Pug, expecting to see a scowl. But Harry was learning something about a natural gentleman, however unbeautiful he may be of voice and feature.

"That's right, cully!" said Pug, nodding. "I ain't so young as I was. And I reckon even Young Fleet'll find ye a tough nut, begum!"

So Harry stayed, after arranging that the Jou-jou should be delivered to the purchaser at Walton, and that the fifty pounds should be sent to his father, with a note saying he was going to disappear for a couple of months. This would be posted in Walton, and Harry was to consider himself a prisoner of Dewsbury's at five pounds per week, his salary for being knocked about as sparring partner of Young Fleet, the "unknown light-weight boxer."

CHAPTER 4.

Nobbled!

THE receipt of the fifty pounds and Harry's hurriedly-penned note caused considerable consternation in the Douglas household. Mrs. Douglas was ready to wring her hands with alarm, and Elsie was dead white. Mr. Douglas, however, "Pshawed" all their fears away.

"The lad's not running away," he said, but without the ring of conviction

in his voice. "Something's happened. He's got a job, or has the prospect of a job, or something. He ought to have kept the fifty. After all, we have two months more before we need worry about Judson and his foreclosing."

For all Mr. Douglas' words the careworn man was deeply hurt at Harry's non-return. He told himself time and again that he couldn't blame the youngster for refusing to be saddled to a broken-down paint manufacturer all his life. Yet, in his heart, he felt that Harry had not played the game as he would have played it when young.

The daily work droned on as before, and Mr. Douglas' worries increased now there was no firm-voiced Harry to chide wrongdoers, to speak with creditors, and talk round customers who had half a mind to stock with "Three Barrels" paint.

And way up near the Naze the little nest of enthusiastic boxing men continued their work undisturbed. Although so widely different as regards type, notwithstanding the sameness of build, height, reach, and strength, Young Fleet and Harry Douglas struck up a firm friendship.

Fleet was really a very likeable fellow. He was a genius at the gloves, and, of course, was easily Harry's master. But, as the training went on, Harry became master of certain of Fleet's tricks, and the young boxing champion found it increasingly difficult to break through Harry's guard and get home a punch that would end the fight.

Harry gloried in the work. He spent hours at the punchball, in sprinting shorts, with the skipping-rope, and so on. He fed on the same food as Fleet, and, when laughingly challenged as to his motive, cheerily replied that he

wouldn't be content till he had at least once knocked out the redoubtable Young Fleet.

"An' ye'll do it, too, at this rate, Harry boy," Fleet had replied. "Gum, cully, you're gettin' slicker every day, an' you've twice the intellect I have. If you'll take my tip, you'll stick to the gloves—become a professional pug. Burke has had me in hand for years. He has kept me dark till I outgrew the feathers an' could enter the light-weights, where all the money is made. I tell 'e, cully, I can see the time when you an' me will meet in the ring to fight for the light-weight championship of England."

Harry used to laugh at Fleet's words, but he made no secret of the fact that he himself was in hard training—"to keep Bill up to the scratch," as he explained. So the days and weeks went on.

One day, when Harry was in the shed they called the gymnasium, his toes tapping on the floor, and his fist flashing out like lightning at the glancing and swiftly-swinging punchball, the door burst open, and Sid Burke, Fleet's manager, stumbled into the shed.

Harry sprang to his aid, raised the big, heavy man to his feet, and asked what the trouble was.

"Young Fleet—oh, my Heaven, they've nobbled him!"

"Nobbled?" cried Harry. "They've discovered our training quarters?"

"Ay, they've discovered it! Came in a rowboat. Eight o' them, Sanderley directin'. They rushed us on the runnin' track at Lower Gut. We 'adn't our revolvers on us. Oh, my 'Eaven! They've broken 'is forearm."

Harry dropped Burke and dashed across to the bungalow. He glanced at



As an opening offered itself, Harry Douglas swung in a sledgehammer drive which caught Pug on the point of the chin. It was a beautiful blow, and the bruiser's hands dropped helplessly to his side, his head dropped back, and he fell with a sickening thud to the ground.

the rowing-boat flashing away down the Hamford Water, and then charged into the living-room. Fleet was sitting on the couch, wincing with pain, while Dewsbury was binding up his forearm. Pug Dennicombe was sitting at the table, his head in his hands, sobbing like a child.

Dewsbury turned a white, strained face towards Harry, and Fleet smiled a wan smile.

"They've nobbled me, Harry boy!" said the young boxer. "As I've been explainin' to Mr. Dewsbury here, the honour of knockin' out Graham Power is now for you. What do you say, cully?"

But Harry said nothing. He just went hot and cold by turns. This splendid example of physical fitness, of carefully-nurtured talent, broken and useless with a fractured forearm! It was a tragedy.

A doctor was brought over for Young Fleet. He set the fractured arm, and said that, if given sufficient rest, it would not put Fleet out of the pale as far as boxing was concerned. But it would mean many months of rest.

The little party stayed on their island, but now they threw caution to the winds. There was no point in keeping secret about matters now. They quarrelled with each other, mooned about with black, frowning countenances, and generally led a dog's life in a cat's home. The only member of the little nest undisturbed was the bull-terrier—Snow Queen.

Conferences were being held. The fight had been advertised at terrible expense by Sidwell, the leading man in the boxing world, the financier of many a big fight, and the hirer in the present case of Marathon Park Hall. It was all to be wasted. Just as well chuck in their cards right away now. The light-weight they had to meet Power had met with an accident. Harry marvelled that none of the four there on that island gave a moment's thought to the law, to an appeal by which justice would be done.

"That won't mend Young Fleet's forearm, will it?" Burke had demanded savagely, when Harry timidly mentioned the matter at one time.

At last Bill Fleet, exasperated, got up from one of their sit-down conferences.

"You're the man with the money, Mr. Dewsbury, an' I s'pose I oughtn't to 'ave anythin' to say at all. But I tell you this. Barring me, there's the man to knock out Graham Power!"

Fleet pointed at Harry with his free hand, and Harry flushed.

"Rot!" said Dewsbury.

"I dunno," remarked Pug Dennicombe.

"Fleet found 'im tough at times," said Burke.

Dewsbury looked at Fleet with renewed interest.

"Well, Fleet, you're the man to say, if anyone can. Honestly, do you think it is in Douglas to meet a man like Power?"

"Not just now, but after four weeks' careful training, yes. Harry's been goin' it hard in trainin' wi' me. He's a man wi' an intellect, and he thinks. I've seen 'im wi' 'is nose in them anatomy books when we've been readin' novels. If I 'ad two thousand only between me an' perdition just now, Mr. Dewsbury, I'd plank it on Harry as the 'unknown light-weight,' by gum, I would!"

"It's worth talking over," said Dewsbury, a note of eagerness in his voice. Harry was not appealed to even once. He was now an animal under the discussion of his owners.

"Talkin' over. I should shay sho!" shouted Fleet. "There's double money in it, Mr. Dewsbury. With very, very careful training during the four weeks left Harry'll be able to meet Power. Don't forget as Power will be slacking off in 'is training till 'e 'ears as you're still ready to produce a boxer. Harry'll win. I know it! Then, when I'm fit again, I could answer Harry's challenge meself. The whole yarn's been told. Packed full Marathon, people fightin' an' scratchin' to get into the two-guinea seats. Gum, don't I wish I was a financier—what!"

At last Harry spoke. His face was white, and he was trembling slightly with excitement as he rose to his feet.

"I've been thinking, Mr. Dewsbury. I feel quite confident I could overcome Power. On the quiet, Fleet has been teaching me all the tricks of the American in-fighter who has no chance at the long game. I seem to know Power personally, his every movement, his every false look to fool his opponent. And I hate the man and his manager for their blackguardly attack on us here. If you give me a chance, Mr. Dewsbury, I'll fight till every rib is broken in my body before I'll take a knock-out. I'll stick to it till I'm a jelly. But I know I shall stand a great chance against Power."

"Thunder, I'll do it!" at last roared Dewsbury, banging the table with his fist. And Pug Dennicombe took Harry in his arms and gave him a hug, while Sid Burke slapped him on the back, and Dewsbury and Fleet looked on, an eager light in their eyes.

As for Harry, his brain seemed to be swimming. He saw already through a red mist, lit up by the brilliant arc-lights above, thousands and thousands of faces all round him, the ropes, the padded posts, the boards, and on the boards the form of Graham Power—knocked out.

And a thin, distant voice seemed to strike his buzzing ears. "A thousand pounds would enable us to raise the mortgage and make the works pay!"

The vision trailed away to nothingness, and the voice of Pug Dennicombe struck in on Harry's ears.

"I'm yer reg'lar sparrin' partner now, cully, an' if ye don't smash me jaw, bash in me ribs, and knock me to kingdom come I'll 'alf kill ye. All you've got to do is to learn to hit like the kick o' a steam-hammer, now, and Graham Power's at your mercy."

CHAPTER 5.

The Great Fight.

THE training of Harry Douglas had been completed in Cornwall, in a quiet little fishing village on the south coast. Happily, this place had been unvisited by Power's

people. The secret of the little clique of boxing enthusiasts had been well kept.

On the night of the fight Dewsbury took his seat close to the ring with Mr. Sidwell beside him. Glaring white light blazed down on the central structure in the great hall. A mass of starched shirt-fronts gleamed in the best seats, and heads peered out through the slits in various boxes containing who knows who. Women of Society, perhaps. Certainly celebrities who rared not for their presence to be known.

Sanderley was hard by in ill-fitting evening-dress, and stout old Sid Burke was at the other corner of the ring. Thousands of eyes were turned on Mr. Dewsbury, the man who had dared to back an unknown boxer against the redoubtable Graham Power.

A hush fell on the company there, like the dying of a summer breeze over young corn. All was still, and the voice of the referee was heard distinctly, after the bandages on the knuckles had been examined and passed. The referee was warning the principals against breaches of the rules. Then the gong sounded.

Dewsbury looked hard at Power. He was a light-weight, but only just. A formidable opponent he would have been for Fleet. For Harry, it seemed, he was an overpowering force. His face was evil, and his muscles were twitching already, in anticipation of delivering those smashing blows for which he was famous.

The boxers just touched gloves. Then Power leapt in, and Dewsbury winced as the blows flashed out—left, right, right, left. The great fight had begun.

Harry Douglas had side-stepped, ducked, and guarded as the terrible flashing fists streaked towards him. It left him gasping, but the young man was ready for Power's worst. He dodged round the champion, and, as Power altered his position, so Harry got in a smashing left to his opponent's mouth.

Blood flowed freely, and the crowd murmured. But it was merely a tap for a man like Power. At it again went the champion, and those who knew traced nervousness in his furious, animal-like onslaughts. Power was afraid of this white-skinned, slim boy of the perfect limbs who had dared to accept the challenge of England's light-weight champion.

The round ended with another terrible onslaught by Power, but the gong sounded just as Harry was forced into a corner, gloves over face and elbows well in to his sides.

The second round saw Harry gain the advantage in another furious attack by Power. Using his feet and his brain to best advantage, the young man dodged every blow that mattered—those blows which, it seemed, would have lifted him clean over the ropes had they reached home.

The skins of the fighters became blotched and red. Their faces showed signs of the desperate fight. But while fury showed in Power's evil countenance, a calm, quiet, deadly-serious expression of confidence showed in Harry's.

The third and fourth rounds were completed after the same manner. Power was expending immense energy in his efforts to finish the fight, Harry, though battered and slightly sick, still held his own, turning off, or dodging all the sledge-hammer blows of Power, and getting in a few punches here and there on his opponent's body.

Twice did Harry clinch to save himself. In one of the clinches he took two terrible kidney punches that left him greatly distressed. He ran away from Power, breathing as if suffering from the

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group, and, being forced to turn, did so just in time to block a series of frightful jabs at his ribs.

That was in the seventh round. The eighth round saw Harry so distressed that he fell into a clinch every now and again to obtain a few precious seconds of respite from his terrible punishment. Pug Dennicombe's face was like the face of a man stabbed and dying slowly.

"Where's that smasher I first knew of wi' 'Arry?" he muttered.

Sid Burke was breathing as if the air was foul, and his head sank lower and lower as he watched the fight.

The ninth round seemed the last. The tense, scarce-breathing thousands in that lofty glass-roofed hall waited for Harry's downfall. Confident of victory now, Power pressed the fight savagely, swinging in his blows like the driving of steam-hammers. Harry had been forced into a corner, and there he crouched, in frightful distress, one hand over his face, and the other, his left, outstretched, the fingers twitching in the wicked little hard glove.

Face blue and bleeding, chest with the skin broken and covered with yellowing bruises, breath being laboured right deep down into the stomach, Harry waited there for the blow that would end the fight. The onlookers, especially those who had watched the young man through his training, gripped hard at whatever they were holding—paper, their knees, handkerchiefs.

Power gathered himself together for a last panther-like spring and a terrible blow with his right. Harry was peering round the corner of his glove. Like a flash the champion leapt the width of the ring, the right came smashing forward in a clean, straight blow for Harry's jaw.

Harry ducked, and the blow glanced off, but it put Harry on his knees, and Power was at him again for another smash. Then the gong sounded, and Harry crawled into his chair, while Burke flapped oxygen into his face and men rubbed his legs and sponged his poor, mutilated, bruised face.

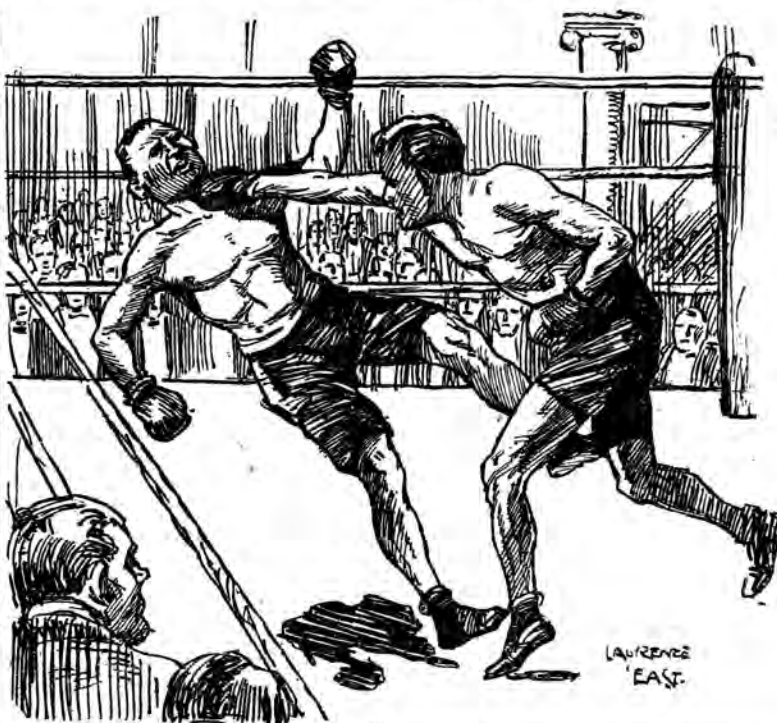
The boy took the next round in a pitiful state. He was merely on the defensive all the time. It was the tenth round, and it was plain to all he could not possibly last through to the fifteenth, where the fight would be stopped and the award made on points.

Power again resorted to smashing, overwhelming tactics. But a change had seemed to come over Harry. He was back in his corner, certainly, guarding his face, but those fingers of his left were twitching wickedly, and his bloodshot, puffed eyes were glaring curiously round the edge of his guarding hand. Sid Burke was already crying, breathing heavily and sagging forward like a man sickened to death. Still Harry's hand twitched.

In came Power with a rush. Right, left, right, left, thud-thud, thud-thud was heard the whole hall over. But Douglas still remained on his feet, though, it seemed, battered practically senseless by the champion's terrible fists.

Suddenly Harry came out of his corner, creeping like a rat, judging his distance for a dash for freedom. At him again came Power, snuffling like a dog, and swinging in with his fist till, it seemed, Harry must go down. Still the boy remained on his feet, his knees sagging, 'tis true, but still standing up to his opponent like a hero.

Then Harry began to hit. Pug Dennicombe sat bolt upright. He knew what those terrible swinging blows of Harry's portended. Thud, thud, thud, thud, they landed on Power's ribs, the champion's gasping breath being audible in the farthest recesses of that mighty hall.



Condensing all his strength into one terrible blow, young Douglas' right smashed with a sickening crash right on the point of Power's chin, lifting the champion clean off his feet. Power went soaring backwards.

Power began to go back before Harry's unlooked-for onslaught. Harry pressed him hard. Burke's eyes goggled from his head, and everyone watching gasping with surprise. The tables were turned in a few seconds. As by a miracle Harry was the aggressor, and Power the one fighting for his senses, retreating before the furious attack by his opponent.

Harry measured the distance down from the base of Power's bruised neck. Eleven inches. He watched the spot, and at last sent in an upward, glancing blow—not very hard, but splendidly directed—towards his opponent's solar plexus. Power, however, was still too wide awake to be caught. He blocked the blow, and skipped aside; Harry altering his balance as he swung round.

The boy's face was now terrible to behold. All there saw him gather the whole remaining strength of his body together. He condensed all that remaining strength into one terrible blow that would spell for him the victory or failure. It was his supreme effort.

He struck. The blow smashed with a sickening crash right on the point of Power's chin. The plexus blow had failed, but not so the smash on the chin.

Power was lifted clean off his feet. He went soaring backwards, his head flung back, his body to bring up against the ropes, which bounced him off again, back on to the boards, where he lay, perfectly still.

Harry staggered over, and with quivering legs stood over Power.

"One, two, three—"

Power did not move, though Harry stood ready, his fists clenched, and his jaw squared.

"Nine, ten!"

Like the opening of a hurricane bombardment, the crash of thousands of pent-up voices rolled from that mighty hall out into the street, to the tense waiters there. The new champion light-weight of England was in Sid Burke's arms, and Pug Dennicombe had thrown himself at

the pair, and was crying on Harry's discoloured back.

Sanderley was pushing away, fighting to prevent his being carried forward by the pressing crowd, all anxious to get near and pat on the shoulder the plucky boy who had knocked out Power.

"Here they are—here they come!" Mr. Douglas, padding excitedly towards the front door, prepared to give his famous son a wonderful welcome. Harry was approaching the house, with a young man of his own build who had his arm in a sling.

Soon the pair—Harry and Young Fleet—were in the house, with jumbled introductions going on all round.

"Two thousand, dad," Harry was saying. "Put us on our feet again. I shall have to stick to boxing for a while, though, but you work up a business, and I'll be in it in the end—"

"Not so far along, either," laughed Bill Fleet.

"How do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Douglas, a note of eagerness in her voice.

"Oh, only that as soon as my arm is better Harry boy won't hold the championship for very long, that's all. He's going to challenge, and I'm going to answer. That'll be another big thing at Marathon Park Hall—"

Mrs. Douglas had blanched, and Fleet had noticed it.

"Oh, don't you worry, Mrs. Douglas," laughed the generous young light-weight. "I'll put him under gently. He won't be up against an animal like Power next time."

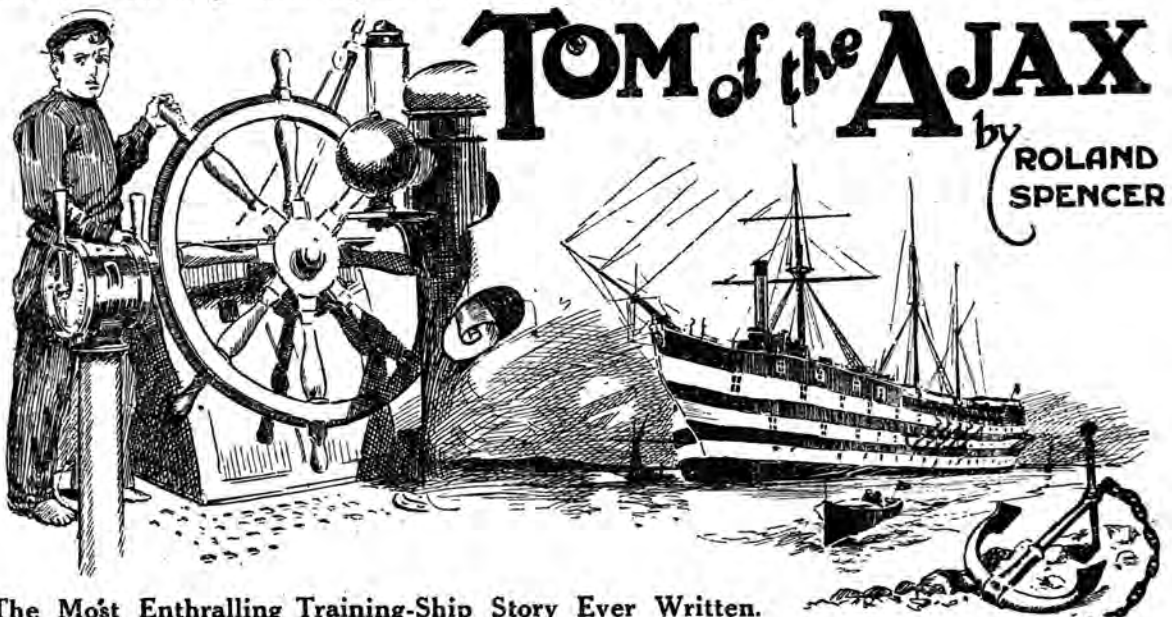
And unrestrained laughter chased away the last of Mrs. Douglas's fears. Then the party sat down to tea.

THE END.

(Look out for a thrilling yarn of the track, chums, next week, entitled: "JACK HAMILTON'S WONDER-BIKE!" By Henry Valentine. You will enjoy it.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 835.

Tom Gale has a powerful ally in Avalanche Hume, Detective!



TOM of the AJAX

by ROLAND SPENCER

The Most Enthralling Training-Ship Story Ever Written.

On the Night Train!

THE long-lighted express glided out of Harwich Station, swiftly gathering speed.

Tom, seated on a trunk in the guard's van at the end of the train, leaned back to make himself comfortable. Though he knew only too well how hot his reception would be on board the training-ship, he felt that there was nothing to be gained by looking forward to trouble before it came.

He hummed to himself as he looked out of the window at the stormy sky. He felt still that he did not care—that he would not mind if he never saw the Ajax again. Bad luck seemed to have been dogging his footsteps mercilessly of late, and everything had contributed to his present wild, reckless mood.

The guard, a broad-shouldered, pleasant-faced man, eyed the training-ship youngster curiously. He had had instructions to hand Tom over to the officer from the Ajax who would meet the train at the terminus. He guessed that there was trouble in the wind, but he could read character, and so did not attempt to sympathise with his charge.

The express raced on through the night. A storm was gathering; Tom could see the flicker of lightning gleam out among the black cloud masses, could see the trees of the flat countryside bend before the wind that whistled in ever-increasing strength. There was electricity in the air—he could feel it tingling along his nerves.

"Goin' to be a dirty night, sonny," observed the guard, peering out of the window. "Listen to the wind!"

"It's blowing all right," Tom agreed. But his thoughts were on the Ulysses; he could picture the barquentine racing before the wind next day, plunging through the foam of the savage seas with straining sheets and iron-tight canvas. Well, what did he care? Not a bean, he told himself savagely.

Above the roar of the express as it thundered westward through the storm a sullen mutter of thunder rolled out suddenly. Tom felt a queer thrill. A storm had always held a strange fascination for him.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 835.

His thoughts went back to that stormy night when he had climbed out to the great figurehead of the training-ship, with the intention of painting Ajax's giant nose a glaring crimson. He had not done so after all, but someone had, and he had suffered in that unknown's stead.

Not that that had been anything like such a storm as this promised to be. Tom looked out into the darkness, lit every now and again by the vivid glare of the lightning.

"There'll be some telegraph-poles blown down to-night, I'll bet my bottom dollar," remarked the guard.

Tom rose to his feet. His legs felt cramped in the restricted space, for the van was piled everywhere with luggage. To his right was the door that opened into the corridor of the rearmost carriage of the long train. And a sudden idea brought a silent chuckle to the youngster's lips.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM GALE, a sturdy-built youth and chief petty officer of the starboard watch aboard the famous old training-ship Ajax, which is moored near the southern bank of the Thames a quarter of a mile down the river from Fleetkith, falls foul of

STONKY BURR, C.P.O. of the port watch, a bully of the first water.

DICKY WEST is a cheerful ginger-headed youth and a staunch chum of Gale's. Trouble arises when Tom Gale is detailed, together with Stonky Burr, as a hare in a cross-country hare-and-hounds that is to take place. Hot words and a fight follow, and Burr is thrashed and left. It is then that a mysterious, sinister man in green spectacles approaches Burr. He gives his name as **KALCHE**, and he enlists the aid of Burr in a plot against Tom Gale, without, however, giving any reason for this.

Tom is puzzling the whole thing out in his hammock at night, when he is startled by a rending crash, and he feels the Ajax quiver from stem to stern. The next moment he utters a startled cry as a jagged hole appears in the ship's side, torn like paper by the stem of a huge red-rusty steamer which crashes into the Ajax. In the ensuing melee a pair of hands grip at Tom's throat, and he recognises the face of Burr. Before Tom can recover he is sent hurtling off the ship into the water. He escapes, however, and is returning to the ship when he is waylaid by Kalche. His cries for help are answered, and a crowd of the Ajax boys rush to the rescue.

Following this Tom falls an easy prey to a trick of Burr's, is disrated, and struck off the list of boys detailed to sail on the annual cruise round the British Isles aboard the Ulysses. A mad impulse seizes him, however, and, stealing out of his bunk at night, Tom plunges over the side of the Ajax, swims to the Ulysses, clambers aboard, and stows himself away in the chain-locker. His wild adventure comes to a sad ending, for, on reaching Harwich, he is taken ashore and delivered to the guard of an express for his journey back to the Ajax and punishment.

[Now read on.]

"I've a jolly good mind to stretch my legs!" he told himself. "And to give the old boy here a run for his money! Just so as he won't get too bored by this journey."

The guard was still gazing out of the window, watching the swiftly gathering fury of the storm. He did not notice Tom's movement as the youngster edged nearer to the door behind him. The first intimation the guard had of what was in the wind was a cheerful chuckle from Tom, the sound of three swift strides, and then the bang of the narrow door.

The guard leapt to his feet with a startled exclamation. It had all been done so quickly and neatly that he had to collect his thoughts before he quite realised what had happened. Then he darted for the door and swung it open, just in time to see Tom disappearing at the farther end of the deserted corridor.

Chuckling to himself, the training-ship youngster dived through the communicating section into the corridor of the next carriage. Behind him he could hear the thunder of the guard's footsteps, racing in pursuit.

More than one snoozing passenger sat up with a jerk, to see a youngster in the smart blue uniform of the training-ship Ajax, and a breathless grin, go tearing past, with the guard, very red in the face, thundering by half a minute later. Tom had kept his word; he was certainly giving the man a good run for his money, for the guard was no match in speed for the nimble youngster.

The guard was getting into a bad temper. At first his lips had been set tight and grim, but now he was panting like a high-power suction pump. Tom was still sprinting as freshly as ever from carriage to carriage of the long train, and then he was hauled up with a jerk.

He had come to the end of the run of corridors, a dead-end. For a moment he thought he must have reached the front of the train, till he realised that he could not have gone far enough by long chalks for that. But the communicating door that barred his way was undeniably locked, and the next instant the youngster saw the reason.

The long lighted train was racing round a curve, and glancing swiftly out

of the window Tom saw that a non-corridor coach divided the train. He had come to the end of his tether.

But had he? A daring, reckless scheme had flashed into his brain. He was hanged if the guard should get him yet! Tom meant to get all the fun he could out of his journey back to the Ajax.

At the far end of the section of corridor the guard came puffing and blowing into view. His cap was slipping sideways over one ear, and his face was bathed in perspiration. His lips moved incoherently as he tried to shout—and then Tom, with a reckless laugh, swung open the door by him. He heard a startled cry from someone in the carriage behind him as he stepped out on to the footboard of the lurching, rushing train.

The rush of wind held the door open as he swung himself clear. The wind tore at his hair and at his clothes, nearly dragging him from his hold. A glare of lightning swept through the sky above him.

For a moment he fought for breath. But the force of the wind helped him, pressing him against the carriage as it swept, half a gale, across the train. On either side of the line its hurricane force crashed through the trees that rose dark and storm-tossed to the wild night sky. Even the rush of the train could not counteract the terrific power of the wind.

Inch by inch Tom struggled along the rocking footboard. He could see the great trees flashing by as the train thundered on. Every muscle was tense and taut, his ear-drums throbbing. He had a glimpse of someone's face, someone who leaned out of the open window behind him and shouted frantically. Then he had swung himself past the end of the carriage, clinging as only a training-ship boy could cling to the bare hold afforded him.

His feet felt for the shaking buffers, and his hands grasped the metal ladder rungs that led up to the carriage roofs. There was a moment of breathless suspense, and then he was safe on the footboard of the carriage beyond.

The compartments of the non-corridor carriage were all but empty, and no one noticed the youngster as he fought his way along to the farther end. The guard, staring after the dark, lithe figure, had half opened the carriage door as if to follow. Then the man had drawn back, intending to stop the train. A dozen or more excited passengers were leaning out to watch the thrilling scene, and as the guard turned swiftly to carry out his purpose, an excited shout from a man at one of the windows arrested him.

"He's in—he's climbed in at the next coach but one!"

Tom, with the fingers of the wind leaving his hair and clothes in wild disorder, had swung himself in at the first corridor coach he came to. He boarded the carriage opposite to an empty compartment, and no one saw his entry but those wildly staring eyes from the coach he had left.

He closed the door after him and stood breathless and flushed in the corridor.

"Jove, that's diddled 'em!" he chuckled. "Suppose there's another guard on this part of the train—they must be going to slip those rear carriages somewhere—but he won't be able to know about me. Anyway, this journey isn't so boring as I thought it was going to be, after all!"

He moved off down the corridor. He felt that he could afford to let the guard take the next step now.

Something white lying at his feet caused the youngster to glance down. And the next instant a low cry of sheer amazement escaped him.

Lying there in the light of an electric globe that showed clearly the writing upon it, was a scrap of paper on which were scrawled half a dozen words in a handwriting Tom knew. He snatched it up, and stared in startled bewilderment at those few words: "He is on the nine-thirty train."

That was all. The scribbled sentence was unsigned, but Tom had no shadow of doubt as to the identity of the writer.

"By all that's pink! If that isn't the fist of Stoniky Burr, I'll eat my boots!" muttered the youngster.

What could it mean? This was the nine-thirty train that he was on; to whom could Burr's note refer if not to himself? And who could have dropped it there if not the man for whom Burr was tool and spy—Kalche!

"By gum! Kalche—on this train! He must be! Burr's told him, and now be—"

His words went unfinished.

Above the roar of the storm a terrible splitting crash came echoing down the howling fury of the gale. He heard the buffers of the coach crash against those of the coach in front, felt the jar and quiver that shook it; then it leapt on again for a second, with a ghastly scream of locked wheels. The carriage seemed to be flung bodily into the air.

"My heavens—my heavens!"

The cry of terror rang out from a compartment near. Tom felt himself thrown bodily from the corridor into an empty compartment beside him, felt the coach totter sideways. Desperately he clutched at the framework of the door. He tried to cry out, but his tongue seemed fastened to the roof of his mouth.

And in his brain one terrible thought hammered its ghastly message:

"Something's happened to the train; we're wrecked!"

Captured!

A STRANGLED cry of horror leapt up in the youngster's throat, only to be choked back. He still clutched at the framework of the door as the compartment tottered and quivered like a live thing wounded. His feet were slipping, slipping.

It was like an eternity to Tom Gale, an eternity of blinding horror. From down the train, penetrating his reeling senses, he could hear the crash of glass, the splintering of wood and twisted metal and then the cries echoing horribly above the storm. He felt himself thrown backwards, helpless, against the edge of the seat. His head sang from the blow as his clutching fingers strove vainly to grip something, anything—anything that would prevent his being sent hurtling against the glass that in another moment must be shivered to a thousand ragged splinters.

A final lurch, and then the ghastly crash came. Tom saw the windows fly to pieces, saw the door torn from its framework and twist inwards. He felt himself falling upon the splintered woodwork, felt a terrible blow on the forehead as he fought to save himself. And then everything went dark.

When his swimming senses returned to him he could still hear the shouts and cries around him and the thunder of the wind in the trees that towered beside the line. It was several moments before he could collect his dizzy thoughts. Mechanically he tried to struggle to his feet.

His hands were cut with glass, and something warm was oozing on his forehead. He thought for a moment that he was pinned down by the wreckage, but then he found that he could struggle free. How he managed it he never knew, but after what seemed an eternity he found himself swaying and reeling on



Inch by inch, Tom struggled along the rocking footboard. Every muscle was tense and taut, his ear-drums throbbing. He had a glimpse of someone's face—someone who leaned out of the open window behind him and shouted frantically.

his feet at the edge of the embankment, with the long line of wreckage stretching away into the darkness. It was like a scene from a nightmare; he could hardly realise that it was true.

"Wrecked! The train's wrecked! Wrecked!" he muttered stupidly.

A sudden flash of lightning lit up for a second the whole scene in a blinding violet glare. Fifty yards away Tom saw the mighty express engine itself lying smashed and twisted, the gleaming flames from the still burning coals dancing crimson and ominous in the clouds of hissing steam, while beneath the foremost wheels of the bogey lay the mighty trunk of a forest giant split nearly from end to end. And in a flash Tom realised what had happened.

Uprooted by the terrific wind, the storm had sent the great tree hurtling down across the line, right in the path of the on-coming train!

He felt sick with horror. The flash of lightning had shown him more than one dark form lying terribly still among the wreckage, with others, like himself, struggling stupidly to free themselves. Already a few running figures were racing along by the edge of the rails, shouting something he could not hear. Not far away someone groaned.

Tom turned to stagger away from the wreckage. But his knees gave way beneath him, and he tottered forward and fell. It was with difficulty that he struggled to his feet again, and a sudden cry of amazement broke from his white lips.

He was still clutching in his left hand that little scrap of paper with those words written upon it in the handwriting of Stoniky Burr!

Kalche—Kalche had been on the train, he felt sure. What had happened to him?

Somehow the thought rang in his aching head to the exclusion of all else.

Then, through the corner of his eye, he made out a dark form that struggled among the splintered framework of one of the carriages. He turned instinctively and reeled towards the man—a big, fat man, and somehow Tom found that he wanted to laugh, to roar with laughter, at the sight of that fat face so deadly white. Then he realised that whatever else happened he must fight against the hysteria that was seizing him.

He shook his head, as if to shake the dizziness from his brain. His mind was growing rapidly clearer as he stopped to help the man extricate himself. Tom found that he was suddenly quite cool and calm, though the sweat was streaming from his forehead, where the jagged glass-cut still throbbled.

The fat man was sobbing now as he tottered to his feet with Tom's arm supporting him. Tom opened his mouth to speak, and then suddenly he felt himself dragged backwards, and a hand was pinned across his mouth.

He struggled desperately. What could it mean? He saw the man he had pulled from the wreckage collapse in a faint. He could not help him now that he was attacked. What did it all mean?

As in a dream, Tom felt himself lifted bodily and dragged off into the darkness of the trees. He tried to cry out, but the hand across his mouth choked back his scream for help. And then a sudden instinct told him that it was Kalche—Kalche, unhurt in the wreck of the express, must have seen him standing there, had seized his chance!

Tom found that his right hand was

free, and he struck upwards and sideways at where he felt the man's face must be. He felt his fist crash on to his assailant's jaw, and heard the sharp cry that escaped Kalche then. But the next instant a staggering blow crashed home on the side of Tom's head, and a wave of blackness swam through his brain as he fell limp and senseless into his captor's arms.

It was a long time before Tom returned to consciousness. A low hum sounded in his ears, and it was some minutes before he realised that he was listening to the engine of a powerful motor-car.

He raised a hand to his aching head. He could feel it now, the gentle sway of the well-sprung car as it raced through the darkness. He raised his eyes heavily to look about him, and then a low exclamation escaped from his lips.

Seated opposite to him was Kalche—the man with the green spectacles!

Kalche's eyes were bent upon Tom, and the strange, sinister face, with its high white forehead and hidden eyes, sent a thrill of apprehension through the still dazed boy.

The man before him smiled—a smile icy cold. One lean hand was playing with the pointed black beard, and a low laugh came from him as he watched Tom's face. A second man was seated beside Tom, and he leaned forward to whisper to his leader.

So they had got him! While he was still unconscious they had procured a car, and now he was being driven through the night at break-neck speed to—where? Where were they taking him?

Kalche had won at last—this man who for some strange, unknown reason had been after him for weeks now. He was a helpless prisoner in Kalche's power!

At Kalche's Mercy!

"KALCHE!" The startled cry broke from Tom Gale as he stared at the lean face of the man seated opposite him in the rushing car. He had
(Continued on page 28.)

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NOT HIS DUTY!

During a particularly nasty dust-storm at one of the camps a recruit ventured to seek shelter in the sacred precincts of the cook's domain. "After a time he broke an awkward silence by saying to the cook: "If you put the lid on that dixie you would not get so much of the dust in your soup." The irate cook glared at the intruder, and then said: "See here, my lad, your business is to serve your country—" "Yes," interrupted the recruit; "but not to eat it!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to: Arthur Waite, 152, Tatton Street, Salford, Manchester.

THE POINT OF VIEW!

In a railway-carriage on the way up to London a youth had annoyed and disturbed the other passengers by loud and foolish remarks during a great part of the journey. As the train passed a lunatic asylum he remarked: "I often think how nice the asylum looks from the railway." "Some day," growled an old gentleman, "you will have occasion to remark how nice the railway looks from the asylum!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. C. Thomas, 33, Hill Crest, Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire.

EFFICIENCY!

Mrs. Flannagan was doubtful about the new patent carpet-sweeper, but the traveller was expert in singing its praises, and the result was that she invested in one. Some time later the traveller was passing that way again, and he called on Mrs. Flannagan and asked: "How do you find the new carpet-sweeper working, madam? Far better than the old-fashioned broom, isn't it?" "Shure," she replied, "It bates the ould broom into fits. Why, I can knock ould Flannagan three tomes as far with it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. C. Lawday, Claremont Cottage, Church Street, Gt. Malvern, Worcestershire.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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"THE REFUGEE OF ST JIM'S."

(Continued from page 18.)

"What-ho!"

Next minute Mr. Rathbone found himself surrounded by Tom Merry & Co., who had grim, determined looks on their faces.

"Over with the rotter!" sang out Tom Merry.

"Bump him!"

"Yaroooooooh!" howled Mr. Rathbone, as the juniors grasped him, dragged him from Frank Digby, and sat him down heavily at the top of the cold hard steps. "Release me, you little rascals! Yow-wow! I will lodge a complaint, and— Oooooooh! Yah! Help!"

Mr. Rathbone was given a gentle shove by Monty Lowther, and he went rolling down the School House steps, arms and legs waving wildly.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Crash!

Mr. Rathbone pitched headlong into a large, muddy puddle that lay at the base of the School House steps, near the car. There he lay, grovelling and moaning in a weird and wonderful manner, and all who saw him roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bless my soul! What is the meaning of this?"

It was Dr. Holmes' voice. The austere figure of the Head had appeared in the Hall doorway!

Mr. Rathbone struggled up out of the puddle. He had mud all over his face, and it was plastered literally over his clothes, too.

"Grooooooh! Yah! Dr. Holmes, I demand that these young hooligans shall be punished!" stormed the warden.

"They have assaulted me, and, moreover, have released that little miscreant, whom I have come over to take back to St. Ormond's! Yoo-hooh! They have treated Barker shamefully, and—"

"Really, sir, you must be unaware of what you have come for," said Dr. Holmes grimly. "It is Barker, and not Digby, whom you have to take back to St. Ormond's with you as a prisoner. Digby's innocence has been established, and the guilt brought home to this despicable rascal!"

The Head indicated Barker, who was cowering back against the balustrade, his sallow face white and drawn.

Mr. Rathbone tottered.

"But—surely there is some mistake!" he gurgled in a faint voice. "You have been deceived, and—"

"If you will step into my study for a few moments, Mr. Rathbone, I dare say I shall be able to convince you of the truth of what I say," retorted Dr. Holmes tartly.

The warden staggered up the steps and followed the Head indoors.

Ten minutes later Mr. Rathbone came out. There was a look of rage and bitter disappointment on his thin face, his lip was twitching and his beady eyes glittering.

Frank Digby stepped forward, smiling.

"I am ready to return to St. Ormond's with you now, Mr. Rathbone," he said. "We'll take Barker along, shall we? I'm longing for the school to know the truth."

Mr. Rathbone seemed to be quite incapable of speaking. Possibly he could not trust himself to speak. Tom Merry & Co. hustled Barker down the steps, and they pitched him unceremoniously into the car.

"Well, I shall have to say good-bye now, you fellows," said Frank Digby, turning to the others. "I cannot say how grateful I am for all you have done for me. Had it not been for you, I should still be a runaway, condemned as a thief and a blackguard."

He shook hands with Tom Merry & Co., and then with his cousin.

"Good-bye, old man!" said Digby of the Fourth huskily. "I wish you were staying here, but you must go back and let St. Ormond's know the truth. Don't let Barker escape, whatever you do."

"Trust me!" replied his cousin promptly.

The car turned out of the gates of St. Jim's and disappeared.

Tom Merry & Co. turned to each other, grinning.

"Well, that's that!" said Blake. "I'm jolly glad your cousin's name is cleared, Dig! We all like him. He's one of the best!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And that was the general impression left behind him by the Refugee of St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Another grand yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "LEN'S LUCK!" By Martin Clifford. Don't miss it.)

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"TOM OF THE AJAX!"

(Continued from page 26.)

recovered consciousness only to find himself a prisoner in the power of his mysterious assailant!

The sallow face of the man with the green spectacles was twisted with a smile of triumph. He pulled at his short, pointed beard with spidery fingers, watching his captive as a cat watches a mouse.

"Yes, my young friend, it is I—we meet again!"

The purring voice was strangely cold

—ice-cold, it seemed to Tom. He shivered. What was it about this man that sent a thrill of repulsion through his whole being?

Rain was beating against the windows hidden behind the drawn blinds. The storm seemed to be passing over, swept before the mighty wind that still howled savagely—the wind that had been strong enough to smash down the giant tree that had wrecked the train. Tom wondered how long ago it was that he had been there at the wreck.

His head was still aching, though his senses were clear again. His hands, cut by the broken glass of the carriage windows, had ceased to bleed; his forehead throbbed painfully where it had been gashed, and he raised his hand to his head, to find that a rough bandage had been tied round it. Kalche, or one of his men, had at any rate had that much decency, the youngster told himself almost with surprise.

The car was still racing on at breakneck speed through the storm. Where were they taking him?

"Yes, you've got me this time," Tom said coolly. "I don't know what your game is, or where you are taking me—"

"Takes it cool, boss, don't he?" said the man half admiringly. "Plucky youngster, I will say!"

Tom looked at the speaker—an immense, broad-shouldered man with the face of a professional pug, except that his hair was plastered down to the last word of smooth glossiness. Kalche's lips twisted in a sneer.

"Cool?" he said, and there was a queer flash from those green spectacles as he moved his head impatiently, almost as though the hidden eyes had gleamed balefully behind the glass. "Cool? Of course he's cool—it's in the breed!"

The giant beside Tom nodded, and Tom shot a quick look of bewilderment at Kalche. "It's in the breed"—what had he meant by that?

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