

ERNEST LEVISON UP AGAINST IT!

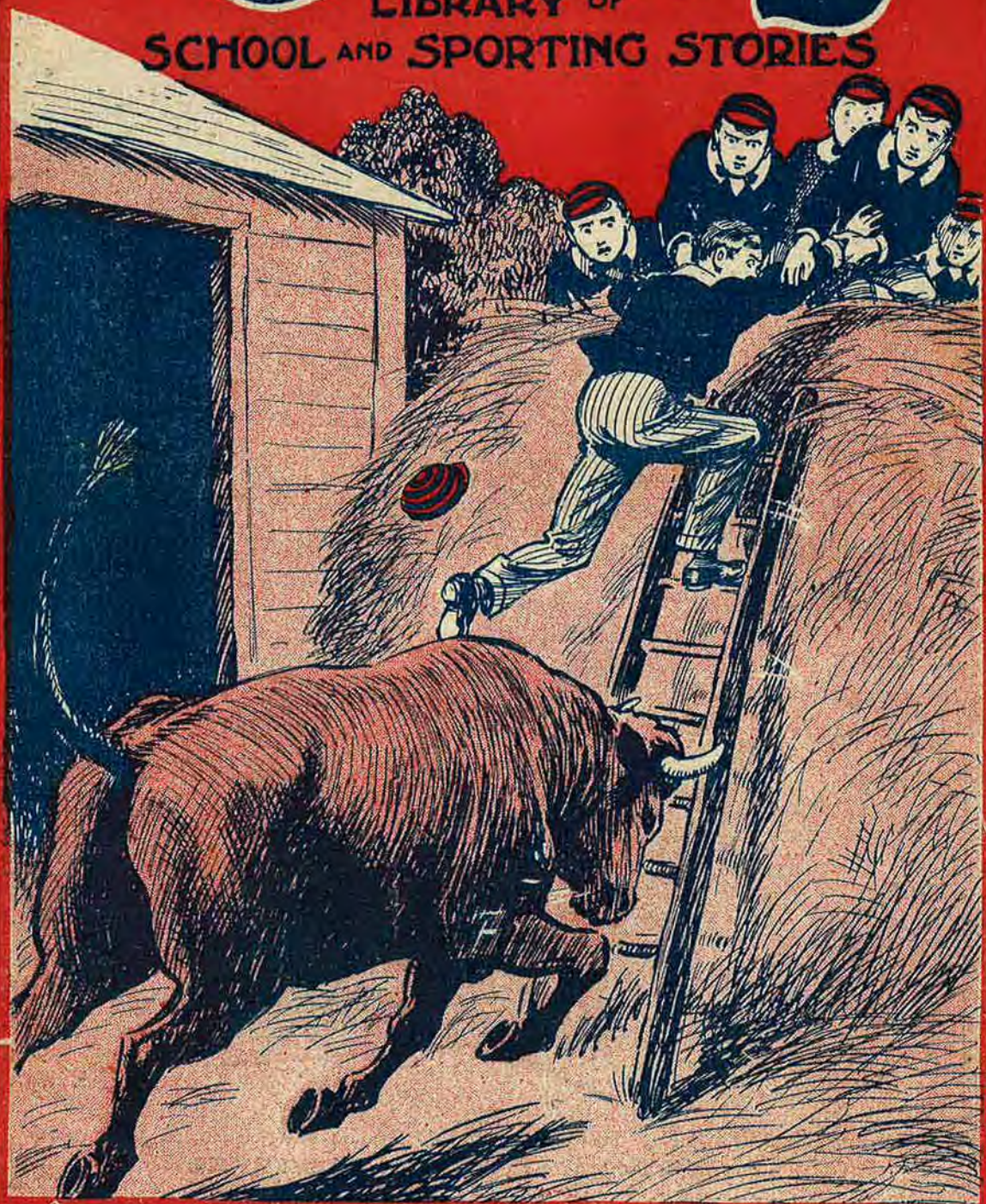
Read the Exciting School
Story Inside.

The GEM 2^d

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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1935.



IN THE NICK OF TIME!

Pulled up by many willing hands, Ernest Levison only just escapes being gored by Farmer Hackett's ferocious bull!
(A thrilling incident from the grand, long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, inside.)



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

MY dear Chums,—This week's copy of the "Gem" now in your hands is out to create a big sensation. The stories are tip-top. Just pass this issue on to some non-reading friend. You will make him a staunch Gemite. Tell him, also, about another big attraction out this week.

"THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY!"

This superb long complete story Library, price 4d., appears this week. The two first numbers are on sale now. They contain a magnificent yarn of St. Jim's, and a ditto of Greyfriars. Don't put off getting your copies. They are being snapped up with enthusiasm, just as I knew would happen. Never, if you can help it, miss a good thing. You need not miss this splendid Library if you push along right away to the nearest news-agent.

"THE MYSTERY OF HOLLY LODGE!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next Wednesday's tale of St. Jim's is just right for the holidays. It contains a prize mystification, and the theme runs along serious lines. There are queer goings on, evidently, at the country home of Monty Lowther's uncle. It was the most natural thing in the world for the humorist of the Shell to get an invite for Easter for self and chums. They were all looking forward to

the trip, but on a sudden, like a bolt from the blue, comes the news that Lowther's uncle has gone a-missing. Where the gentleman is nobody has an inkling. Mr. Bosammy, the private secretary, considers the time most unsuitable for the St. Jim's fellows to come, and, to do him justice, he does his best to keep them away. But Monty and his chums blow in, none the less, and soon get on the track of an amazing mystery. What is wrong with the secretary? Monty is not a suspicious fellow, as a rule, but in this prime story he has an outlet for his abilities as an amateur sleuth. A real live yarn, this, with St. Jim's playing first fiddle from first to last.

"THE ST. JIM'S NEWS."

Of course, being the gay springtime of the year, we had to have a "Special Fashions Number" of the "St. Jim's News." You will find many useful hints awaiting you next week about the proper curve of a silk top, and the right shade of a tie. As luck will have it, Gussy is an expert on dress. He represents the glass of fashion and the mould of form. D'Arcy never made a mistake when appraising the cut of a coat. He is not the man to be satisfied with a ready-made garment which racks up behind and hides the peerless whiteness of the collar. You never see him sporting trousers which

dangle uncertainly above the ankles. This Fashions Number comes in the nick of time for those who are renovating their wardrobe for the season.

"THE STOLEN GOD!"

By Lester Bidston.

There have been scores of requests for another yarn by this clever manipulator of amazing situations. In the next number of the "Gem" Mr. Bidston gives us a sensational story of the East, in which he introduces the two ever-popular hero chums, Lyle Lindsay and Jerry O'Gorman. The plot can be described right away as the most vastly ingenious conception which ever emanated from the Orient, and you will be puzzled enough by the disappearance of a priceless Indian god which has been torn from the Temple of Nana Tol. It was an incredible outrage, in the first place. Not a trace of the criminal is to be found. The chums are working in a thick pall of darkness. Not only is the god missing, but a white man named Nicholas Fend has vanished as well. Mystery follows mystery. Threat after threat is followed in vain, but at last the light breaks, and the discovery, which is made comes with a shock of surprise.

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

By Arthur S. Hardy.

Our Foster Serial has been swinging along now for weeks, but never once has there been faltering in the gripping interest. Next week we get some sterling chapters of the grand romance of life and the bounding leather.

THE TUCK HAMPER.

Owing to the length of our grand yarn of St. Jim's I have been compelled to hold over the Tuck Hamper feature this week. The popular page of amusing storyettes will appear next Wednesday without fail.

Your Editor.

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CHAPTER 1. Against Odds!

"DEAR me!" Herbert Skimpole of the Shell Form at St. Jim's was an exceedingly meek and mild youth, and he was wont to use rather meek and mild expressions. But though his remark on this occasion was no exception to the rule, his tone was full of alarm and dismay.

And Skimpole was alarmed—very much alarmed! He had been strolling along the green-carpeted footpath through Rylecombe Woods, his large, round spectacles glued to a volume in his thin, bony hands. It was a very big volume, almost as big as Skimpy himself, and it dealt with Determinism, and had been written by a certain Professor Balmcrumpet, whose devoted disciple Herbert Skimpole was.

Deeply absorbed in the learned volume, Herbert Skimpole almost bumped into the three juniors who had stepped into his path before he saw them.

But as he saw them, and recognised them, he pulled up short with the above expression of dismayed alarm.

"Dear me!" he murmured. The three juniors were Lacy, Carker, and Manton of the Fourth Form at Rylecombe Grammar School, and Skimpole did not need to note the unpleasant grins they wore to realise that they meant mischief.

There was usually a state, more or less, of warfare existing between the Grammar School and St. Jim's, and, moreover, Lacy & Co. were three of the biggest cads and bullies among the tribe of Grammarians.

So the hapless Herbert Skimpole closed up his book on Determinism, placed it under his arm, and blinked in great apprehension at the three grinning Grammarians.

"Dear me!" repeated Skimpole again. "Would—would you kindly allow me to—pass on my way, please?"

In answer to his nervous request Algernon Lacy raised a natty, patent-leather shoe and kicked the volume from under Skimpole's arm.

It dropped into a little muddy puddle at the side of the path, and, with a horrified cry, the juvenile student of learned "ism's" stooped and groped for his precious volume.

As he did so Algernon Lacy raised his shoe again, and, catching the stooping Skimpole in the rear, sent him sprawling on his face in the ditch.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Grammarian "nuts" roared with laughter. Baiting the innocent and inoffensive Skimpole was an entertainment after their own hearts, and one which entailed no risks to themselves.

"Groooh!" gasped Skimpole. "Oh dear! Groooh!" He staggered to his feet, his face and clothes smeared with

ROUGH ON LEVISON!

A Magnificent, New, Long Complete Story of the Exciting Adventures of the Two Levisons, and the Chums of St. Jim's.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

mud, and with the volume of philosophy clasped to his puny chest.

Lacy promptly sent him sprawling in the mud again. "Dear old freak!" grinned Lacy, gazing down at the grovelling Skimpole. "Now, what can he be searching that puddle for, you chaps? No tadpoles in there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With his nose, too!" said Lacy, shaking his head. "I suppose he's trying to smell 'em out."

"Groooh!" mumbled the hapless Skimpy.

"Yank him up!" grinned Lacy. "I was just hoping to meet one of these giddy freaks from St. Jim's. If only that fat freak Trimble would roll along now we'd be fixed up for a nice entertainment. We'd be able to set 'em cock-fighting."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"He'll have to amuse us himself, though," said Lacy. "Yank him up!"

Carker and Manton "yauked" the unfortunate Skimpole to his feet. They were none too gentle about it.

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole. "Pray desist, my dear—I mean, you rough fellows! Ow! Wow!"

Skimpole gasped and wriggled as Carker and Manton pinched and twisted his arms as they held him.

But not for long. Skimpole had a very big head with a bulging forehead, and his knowledge of free will and determination was peculiar and extensive, to quote Sam Weller. His brain was massive and teeming with scientific knowledge. But his body was weak, his frame puny. He was no fighting man.

Yet there was a limit, even for Skimpole. Though his frame was weak, his heart was stout enough, and suddenly he plunged out both fists at once with a gasp of defiance.

One of the bony fists connected with Carker's nose, and the other took Manton in the eye, and there was a combined yell. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lacy. "The little rabbit's showing fight!"

"I'll smash him!" howled Carker.

There had been little force behind the blows, but Carker and Manton were hurt for all that.

"There!" gasped Skimpole. "I strongly disapprove of fistieuffs, but I feel bound to— Yaroooooh!"

Skimpole's bony fists were swept aside as Carker and Manton made a savage rush at him. He howled as Carker's fist smote his nose, and he howled still more as the two of them started to punch his puny body viciously.

Algernon Lacy was highly entertained.

"Don't pulverise the microbe altogether, old beans," he grinned. "Leave something for our— Oh, look out! Someone's coming!"

The soft padding of running feet was heard, and the next moment a figure came into sight along the aisle of fresh

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greenery. It was a youngster wearing a St. Jim's cap, and at sight of him Lacy chuckled in great relief.

"All serene, you chaps!" he said quickly. "It's only that cad Levison's young brother. What a bit of luck! We'll set 'em against each other. Don't let him bolt!"

But Frank Levison of the Third Form at St. Jim's had no intention of bolting.

He stopped dead on sighting the Grammarians' victim, and then he hurried forward, his eyes gleaming.

"You beastly bullies!" he snapped indignantly. "Let poor old Skimpy alone, or I'll jolly well make you!"

"Oh, great pip!"

The three Grammarians fairly blinked at the St. Jim's fag. Carker and Manton almost released their victim in their surprise. For a Third Form fag to make such a threat against three bigger fellows was indeed the limit.

"You—your cheeky little worm!" gasped Lacy. "Why, I'll lick you until you can't stand for that!"

He made a rush at the youngster, apparently still expecting Frank Levison to bolt. But he was disillusioned when a small but exceedingly hard fist took him full in the mouth.

He staggered back, spluttering.

"Come on!" panted Frank Levison stoutly. "I'm not afraid of the three of you. You can bully poor old Skimpole, but you won't bully me so easily."

"You—your little fiend!" hissed Lacy.

For a moment the Grammar School dandy eyed the fag with glinting eyes, undecided. He was a funk of the first water, and he didn't at all like the warlike gleam in the fag's eyes.

"Go on, Algy, old chap!" urged Carker, with a grin. "Smash the little toad!"

The trace of a sneer in his chum's tone settled the matter for Lacy. He flushed redly, and then he went at the plucky fag with a savage rush.

Frank Levison stood his ground manfully, stopping the rush with a straight right and left which jolted Lacy to a standstill.

"You little fiend!" hissed Lacy. "I'll smash you to bits!"

The dandy needed no urging now. His face was black with rage and chagrin, and he attacked the younger boy savagely and desperately.

Carker and Manton watched with grinning faces, without attempting to interfere. Perhaps they were afraid to release Skimpole, or perhaps they were, like their gallant leader, afraid to face the fag's fists.

Backwards and forwards, now on the green path, now crashing amid the ferns and undergrowth, the fight raged. In a way, it was a most unequal combat, yet, in another way, it was not. Lacy was a head taller, and bigger and older to boot, but he was a hopeless funk, whilst Frank was stout-hearted and plucky.

"My hat! The blessed kid's getting the better of it," said Carker.

It certainly looked like it, amazing as it seemed. Lacy's mouth was bleeding, likewise his nose, and though Frank Levison had also been badly pounded, he was fresh in comparison with his bigger opponent. Cigarettes had not improved Lacy's wind, nor had slacking in general improved his physique. He was soft, and he was lacking in stamina.

But Frank was lively and as hard as nails. He danced about like a cat on springs, and every punch he delivered was registered on Lacy's flabby physique.

Even as Carker passed the grinning remark, Lacy stumbled, and went down with a crash.

He lay gasping and panting, his eyes glittering with fury and malice.

"Great pip!" gasped Manton. "Lacy, old man, do buck up for goodness' sake! You can't let that kid lick you."

"Ow!" panted Lacy. "Hang him, and hang you! Can't you fools lend a hand? Down the little cad! Trip him up, Carker, you grinning rotter!"

He jumped up and made an infuriated rush at Frank Levison, who backed before it, hitting out gamely. As he did so Carker obeyed his leader's injunction.

Releasing his grip on Skimpole he slipped a foot behind the St. Jim's fag, and tripped him up. Frank Levison went crashing down, and the two Grammarians flung themselves upon him, and held him down, punching him viciously as they did so.

The sight of the cowardly act was too much for the meek and peace-loving Skimpole. His pale blue orbs gleamed, and, wrenching himself free from Manton's grip, he jumped forward and hit Carker with a bony fist.

It took Carker on his rather prominent nose, and he reeled backwards—more from surprise than from the force of the blow. And at that moment there sounded the thud of feet, and a cheery voice rang out.

"Good man, Skimpy! Hit him again—harder this time!"

"Look out!" hissed Lacy. "It's that cad Gay!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 396.

CHAPTER 2.

A Little Mistake!

DOWN the grassy, woodland path three juniors wearing Grammar School caps came running. They were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Harry Wootton—three cheery-faced juniors from the Grammar School. At some distance along the footpath they had seen something of the fight, and they had arrived just in time to see Carker trip Levison minor up, and Skimpole's gallant rush to his aid.

Though Gordon Gay's voice as he called was cheery enough, his eyes gleamed a little as they took in the scene.

At sight of the three new arrivals Manton had slipped away through the trees, and as Lacy and Carker scrambled up from off their youthful victim they looked as if they wished themselves away also.

Gordon Gay & Co. were three of their own school-fellows, and they were relieved that the newcomers were not Saints. But, for all that, both Carker and Lacy were feeling decidedly uneasy. They knew that the three Grammarians were not the fellows to look with an approving eye upon bullying.

They were right there. It was very easy to see from their faces that Gordon Gay & Co. did not approve.

"Well," demanded Gordon Gay, glancing grimly from Frank Levison's battered face to the equally battered features of Algernon Lacy, "what does this rumpus mean? Great pip! You haven't been scrapping with this youngster, Lacy?"

Lacy scowled and flushed crimson.

"No good asking Lacy for the truth!" growled Frank Monk. "What's the trouble, kid?" he went on, turning to Levison minor.

Frank Levison was on his feet now. With a rather soiled handkerchief he mopped a swollen nose as he glared at Lacy.

"They were baiting poor old Skimpy," he panted. "I chipped in, and fought with Lacy. I'd have licked the beastly funk, too, if Carker hadn't tripped me up!"

Harry Wootton chuckled.

"Hear the little gamecock!" he grinned. "Jove! I believe the kid would have licked him, too!"

"I would—and I jolly well will if you chaps will see fair play!" cried the youngster, glowering defiantly at the discomfited Lacy. "Let him put his fists up, that's all!"

"Well, my hat!"

The three Grammarians stared at the war-like fag.

"Why not let 'em finish it?" grinned Frank Monk. "I believe the dashed kid could lick him!"

Gordon Gay shook his head. His good-natured face was grim and angry.

"What rot!" he snapped wrathfully. "Lacy's disgraced us enough without disgracing us more by being licked by a St. Jim's fag!"

He turned on the scowling Lacy scornfully.

"You howling cad, Lacy!" he said witheringly. "Up to your old caddish tricks again? You're too big a funk to tackle chaps of your own size. Three of you against a chap like Skimpole! Bah! You make me sick!"

Lacy's eyes glittered with fury.

"We—we were only pulling the fool's leg!" he hissed. "It—it's just like you, Gay, to be up against a fellow from your own school!"

"Own school be hanged!" said Gay, in disgust. "We're always up against bullying, whether it's done by Saints or chaps from the Grammar School, Lacy. And we're going to teach you better than to disgrace the school by playing such caddish tricks!"

"Look here—"

"Collar them!" snapped Gordon Gay.

He grabbed Lacy by the scruff of the neck, and his two chums did likewise with Carker.

"Here, leggo, you cads!" yelled Lacy. "I tell you we were—"

"You needn't tell us anything," said Gay coolly. "We've got eyes, my pippin. We can see the state Skimpole's in, and we saw how Carker tripped this kid up, and how you both attacked him."

"Let us go, hang you!"

"Not yet! You're going to get a good licking, and this kid's going to do the licking. There's a whacking great stick by your foot, Frank, old chap. Just chuck it over to young Levison!"

Frank Monk picked up the "whacking great" stick and threw it over to where Levison was standing.

"There you are, young 'un!" said Gordon Gay. "And remember you've got to lay it on stiffly!"

As he spoke the Grammarian leader twisted the squirming form of Lacy over a fallen tree-trunk hard by.

Frank Levison hesitated. He was by no means a vengeful youngster, and he felt a natural reluctance to "lick" a bigger fellow in that manner.



"Yo—you little whelp!" howled Jim Hackett, bringing the stick down with all his force upon Levison minor's shoulders. Lash! Lash! Lash! The youngster cried with pain, struggling in vain to escape the cruel blows. From the shelter of the thickets Lacy & Co. watched the result of their caddish plan in some alarm. (See page 8.)

"I'd rather not, Gay," he muttered. "I don't mind a chance to lick the end with my fists, though!"

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"My dear kid, you've got no choice in the matter!" he grinned. "I've made up my mind that you shall lick this beauty with that stick, and it's got to be done! And old Skimmey can lick Carker in the same manner. Just a little lesson for them, you see!"

"But really, my dear fellow—" began Skimpole.

"Now, don't start arguing!" said Gay. "Just hold this merchant a minute, Wootton!"

Harry Wootton left Carker in Monk's charge and held the squirming and furious Lacy. Gordon Gay took Frank Levison gently by the ear and led him to the stick.

"Pick it up!" he ordered.

"All serene!" grinned Frank Levison.

He picked up the stick—he saw there was nothing else for it, for Gordon Gay was not the chap to be trifled with.

"Now get down to business!" said Gay.

"You dare!" howled the frantic Lacy. "You dare lay that stick on me, you little sweep, and I'll make you—Yow-ow-ow!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Frank Levison had already got to work with the stick. It was a big stick, and Frank Levison's arm was far from being weak. Held by the wrists by Gordon Gay, and by the ankles by Harry Wootton, the squirming, yelling dandy was helpless.

Whack, whack, whack!

Frank Levison was warming up to the task now. He was determined now the job had to be done that he would make a good job of it.

And he did. He remembered several scores he owed the Grammarian dandy, and he proceeded to pay them off now. Though Lacy & Co. had taken good care not to war upon fellows of his own size and weight from the rival school, he had made it hot for more than one hapless fag who had fallen into his clutches.

Frank Levison made him pay for it now.

"Go it!" said Gordon Gay encouragingly. "Keep it up, kid!"

"Right-ho!" panted Levison minor.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yarooooop! Yow-ow-ow! Yocop!" roared Lacy.

Frank Levison stopped at last—when the stick broke in halves.

"That'll do, I think!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Now for Carker's turn!"

But there was to be no turn for Carker. At that moment several things happened.

As the two Grammarian juniors released Lacy the dandy straightened himself. He was almost weeping with rage and mortification. To be licked thus by a fag from St. Jim's was gall and wormwood to the lofty, supercilious Algernon. For a brief moment he stood, trembling as he glared at the St. Jim's fag; and then, with a howl of fury, he flung himself at the fag.

The sheer fury of his onslaught sent Levison minor crashing backwards, and in a flash the infuriated junior was on top of him, punching and pounding viciously.

And at that identical moment a fresh voice broke out—a voice full of excited wrath.

"Wescoe! Wescoe, dear boys! Gwammawian wottahs!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and next moment D'Arcy himself had reached the spot like a bolt from the blue.

Behind him came Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby, also of the St. Jim's Fourth, and Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners of the Shell Form.

Strolling along the woodland path, they had come within sight of the scene before the Grammarians had seen them. And, without stopping to ask questions, the noble Arthur Augustus had given vent to that war cry. At the same moment he had also flung himself full tilt at the astonished Gordon Gay.

It was a trifle impulsive on D'Arcy's part, and yet it was quite a natural mistake. Seeing Skimpole and Levison surrounded by Grammarians, and with Lacy punching away

at the prostrate fag, it was only natural that Arthur Augustus should deem it a case for "wesene."

At all events, he did—as did the rest of the chums. Tom Merry & Co. might have stopped to ask questions, but Arthur Augustus was already in action, and they followed him.

Gordon Gay went sprawling backwards beneath D'Arcy's charge, too astonished even to yell out. But Frank Monk grasped the situation, and gave a howl.

"Hold on! Hold on, you idiots!" he roared. "It's all right! Can't you see—"

"All right, is it?" yelled Jack Blake. "Well, see if this is all right, Monk."

He tapped Frank Monk on the nose, and Frank Monk roared again—with pain this time. But a tap on the nose is a painful thing, and Frank Monk promptly returned it with interest.

Next moment Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co. were "going it" hammer and tongs.

Frank Levison grasped the unfortunate situation, and he tried to set matters right.

"Hold on! Stop, you asses!" he shouted. "It's all right; they weren't touching us. Stop!"

But there was no stopping either Gordon Gay & Co. or Tom Merry & Co. now. It usually took very little to start a "scrap" between the two "friendly" factions of St. Jim's and the Grammar School. And Tom Merry & Co. had some excuse to scrap now—or they thought they had.

Herbert Skimpole and Frank Levison looked on helplessly as the two rival parties tramped about the glade locked in a deadly embrace, and hitting out freely and often.

Frank Levison made one last desperate effort to make the truth known to Tom Merry, but as he got a stray clump from Gordon Gay for his pains he decided to let the rivals "go it."

But it did not last long. Hopelessly outnumbered, the Grammarians were soon down, with the triumphant St. Jim's juniors swarming over them.

"Give in!" gasped Tom Merry as he planted his knee in Gordon Gay's heaving chest. "No good kicking against it, Gay, old chap. We caught you in the act, and we've got you beaten."

"You—you burbling, raving idiots!" roared Gay, still struggling frantically. "Lemme gerrup and I'll jolly well smash—Yaroooh!"

He howled as Tom Merry tapped him gently on the nose.

"Silence, varlet!" grinned Tom Merry cheerfully. "We caught you red-handed chivvying some of our chaps."

"We weren't, you idiot!" howled Frank Monk. "We

came along and caught that cad Lacy and his pals bullying Skimmey and this kid—"

"Eh? What's that?"

"What I say!" gasped Frank Monk wrathfully. "You—you burbling asses have made a mistake."

"That's right, Merry," said Levison minor, chipping in eagerly. "These chaps rescued us from those cads Lacy, Carker, and Manton. You've made a mistake. They weren't touching us; in fact, they held Lacy while I licked him with a stick. Lacy went for me because of that."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Pray allow me to add my testimony to Levison minor's statement," said Skimpole, who was looking exceedingly agitated. "Really, this is distressing, and most unfortunate. I must remark, Merry, my dear fellow—"

"Oh, dry up, Skimmey!" said Tom Merry, who was looking dazed. "Is that a fact, Gay? Did you rescue these chaps of ours from Lacy and his lot?"

Gay nodded, almost too overcome to speak.

"Well, my hat!" said the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"I'm sorry, you fellows!"

"Awfully sorry!" grinned Blake.

"Fearfully sorry!" returned Lowther.

"Rats!" snorted Gordon Gay. "You jolly well look sorry, I must say!"

He staggered to his feet as the St. Jim's juniors allowed their captives to get up. Monk and Wootton did likewise, and the three Grammarians glared at their grinning rivals as if contemplating a renewal of hostilities.

"Make it pax, Gay, old chap," said Tom hastily. "It was a mistake—an unfortunate mistake. We came up just as that cad Lacy went for young Levison here. We naturally imagined you were both in with them."

"What rot!" hooted Gordon Gay. "You know we're not the chaps to chivvy Skimpole, or kids like Levison. You ought to have known that. You—you burbling idiots!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Gay, old chap," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye. "I twist you will not wefuse to accept our apology, deah boy. It was wathah wough on you fellows, and we were perhaps wathah hasty."

"Just a little," agreed Tom Merry solemnly. "We just saw you, as we thought, pitching into our chaps, and we didn't stop to think, Gay. By the way, where are Lacy and his pals?"

Everybody looked round, but there was no sign of Lacy & Co. They had vanished.

"They've skedaddled," grunted Herries. "What did the rotters do?"

Frank Levison explained.

"And you went for Lacy?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes, and he would have licked him, too!" grinned Gordon Gay. "He's a little fire-eater."

"Good man!" said Tom Merry. "I wish I'd seen the scrap. I wish I'd come along sooner."

"B-r-r-r! I jolly well wish you had," groaned Gordon Gay, caressing a rapidly-swelling eye. "Perhaps you won't be so jolly quick to jump to conclusions another time, anyway."

"It was all Gussy's fault, of course!" said Blake. "He led the way and we followed, like asses. I vote we appease the wrath of these chaps by bumping Gussy."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus in alarm. "Pway don't wot, deah boys. I should uttably wefuse to be bumped, Blake. However, I have another suggestion to make. As some compensation to these Gwammer School wottahs, I suggest that we invite them to tea. I happen to be in funds to-day—"

"Good wheeze!" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Top hole!" agreed Frank Monk with a chuckle. "We'll accept your apologies on those conditions."

"Hear, hear!" cried Wootton heartily.

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus, beaming. "I twist you fellows don't object—"

"Not if you mean to ask us, too," grinned Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! There will be plenty for all, deah boy. We shall be quite a mewwy party."

"Good old Gussy!" grinned Jack Blake. "Now, that's what I call tact and judgment. Blessed if I knew he had it in him. Anyway, let's get on."

The juniors started to move away, nursing their hurts and re-arranging their disordered clothes. Frank Levison started off in the opposite direction, and Tom Merry called cheerily to him.

"Not coming with us, kid?" he called. "Better had, in case those cads are still about."

"I'll be all right," said Frank Levison grinning. "I've got to go into Rylcombe for my brother."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "Look out, though."

The Third-Former nodded and trotted away, and a moment later had vanished through the trees towards the village. The juniors, with Skimpole in their midst, started for St. Jim's in a cheery, chatting crowd. Apart from their

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incessant japing and scrapping, and their keen rivalry on the playing fields, Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co. were great friends, and the recent little affray was forgotten now, thanks to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's tact and judgment.

CHAPTER 3.

Algernon Lacy's Revenge!

"Ow! Ow! The—the howling cads! Hang them! Hang the lot of them!"

Thus Algernon Lacy. And the dandy's voice was hoarse with rage and pain.

While Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co. had been busy talking Lacy and Carker had taken the opportunity of sneaking away. At some distance along the woodland path they had come upon Manton, waiting for them, and now they had stopped, panting and breathless.

As Lacy panted out the above Manton eyed the two dishevelled Grammarians questioningly.

"What's happened?" he exclaimed. "I suppose that cad Gay took the part of those kids?"

"Yes," hissed Lacy. "The—the brute!"

"You might have known he would," said Manton. "Why didn't you hop it, like I did?"

"Oh, shut up, hang you!" snarled Lacy. "Think we wouldn't have if we'd had the chance? Ow! That—that kid! If ever I get the chance to get my hands on the little sweep I'll—I'll flay the little brute alive."

"He did lay it on," agreed Carker sympathetically. "Never mind—we'll get the kid some day!"

"Some day!" repeated Lacy, showing his teeth in a snarl. "I'll make the little fiend regret laying his dirty hands on me."

"You marked him, too," said Manton, trying to be sympathetic. "You fairly pitched into him when we got him down, you know."

"I'm not talking about the scrap!" hissed Lacy. "Do you know what the little cad did after you'd gone? He thrashed me with a stick—flayed me while Gay and Monk held me."

"Great pip!"

"Thrashed me!" repeated the dandy, his eyes blazing with passion. "A dirty little fag thrashed me! I'll make the little sweep wish he'd never been born!"

"Better leave the beastly little cad alone after this, I think," said Carker, shaking his head. "He'll only tell Gay, and there'll be more trouble for us. Besides, the kid's got a brother, remember. And you know what a hefty brute Levison major is."

"Hang him!" snarled Algernon Lacy. "I don't care! I'm going to pay that kid out whatever happens! And it's going to be thundering soon, too!"

"But—"

"Don't you see?" snarled Lacy, glancing back with glittering eyes along the footpath. "He was making for the village when he chipped in on us. He'll be coming back soon. We'll get him then."

"Hardly likely," said Carker. "He was in an awful mess, you know."

"Oh, dry up! We're risking it, anyway. Don't be such dashed finks! We'll wait behind those dashed bushes, and we'll pound him to a jelly when he does come along."

Carker and Manton did not appear at all keen on the idea, but they obeyed their leader, for all that. The three juniors took up their positions behind the screen of bushes and waited.

They had scarcely done so when the sound of someone approaching along the footpath was heard.

"Here he comes!" hissed Lacy.

But Lacy was wrong—as he discovered on peering out from ambush. Along the path a figure was slouching—a roughly dressed youth wearing corduroys and heavy, muddy boots and leggings.

"It's Jim Hackett!" said Carker eagerly. "Just the chap we were going to see, Lacy!"

Lacy nodded, and stepped out from the bushes. His eyes were glittering, as if an idea had just occurred to him. His chums followed him out on to the footpath.

The slouching figure came up to the waiting juniors, and the fellow seemed to recognise the juniors, for he stopped. Over his heavy, somewhat brutal features, came a wide grin. "Hallo!" he grinned. "Jest the fellers I was hopin' to meet! Comin' along to the old barn to-morrow afternoon?"

It was easy to see, both from the question and from the easy tone of familiarity, that Jim Hackett was no new acquaintance of Lacy & Co.

Lacy nodded.

"We'll be along about three, Jim," he said. "You can get the grub and stuff ready as usual. But never mind that now! Do you want to earn five bob, Jim?"

The youth grinned.

"All depends upon what it is, Mister Lacy," he said cautiously. "What's the little game?"

"It's as easy as falling off a log," said Lacy in a hard voice. "There's a youngster couping along this path in a few minutes, Hackett. He's a kid from St. Jim's. You aren't any too fond of St. Jim's chaps, are you, Jim?"

"That I ain't!" snapped Jim Hackett, an evil look coming into his eyes. "If it's anything up agen a St. Jim's kid—"

"It is," said Lacy, his eyes gleaming. "As I say, there's one coming along in a few minutes—any minute, in fact. I want you to give him the licking of his life! I want you to get a good hefty stick, and paste the little worm until he can't stand! Got that?"

Jim Hackett stared at the speaker, and then he chuckled. "I'm on!" he said. "Five bob, you said?"

"Yes."

"Sure the kid will be alone?"

"You needn't try it if he isn't," said Lacy, with a suspicion of a sneer. "Anyway, you're big enough to eat a dozen like him! Get a stick, and hide until he comes along, then!"

Carker and Manton were eyeing their leader in alarm.

"But—but hang it all, Lacy," gasped Manton uneasily, "that—that's a bit over the line, you know! Besides, the kid will only tell Gay, and we shall get it hot!"

"We're going to be out of it!" grinned Lacy. "Do you think I'm a fool? We'll be in hiding. We're going to know nothing about it. Come on, you fools! The kid will be along any minute now!"

Lacy dragged his chums behind the nearest thicket, and, though obviously not liking the project, Carker and Manton made no further protest.

Jim Hackett soon made preparations for his rascally project. He cut a thick stick with his clasp-knife, and then he hid amid the bushes.

His eyes were gleaming viciously, and it was plain that he relished the task apart from the question of the five shillings payment. For Jim Hackett was the son of Farmer Hackett—a blustering, bullying individual, who happened to be at daggers drawn with St. Jim's, and whose bullying son was equally at daggers drawn with the juniors of St. Jim's.

It was Lacy who heard the soft padding of running feet first, and he gave a warning hiss. He felt it must be Levison minor approaching, and he proved to be right.

Peering out from cover the dandy of the Grammar School recognised the youngster running towards them along the pathway, and he gave the word.

"Here he is, Jim! Now!"

Jim Hackett stepped out from shelter with the stick in his hands, and stepped swiftly in the path of the advancing fag.

Levison minor saw the burly, ominous figure barring his path, and stopped. He recognised the farmer's son at once, and he eyed him not a little uneasily. He saw at once that the fellow meant trouble.

"Let me pass, please," he said quietly.

"Eh? Who in thunder's stoppin' you from passin', young'un?"

Frank Levison did not answer that. He stepped aside himself and tried to squeeze past between the burly figure of Jim Hackett and the bushes.

It was just the chance the rascally farmer's son wanted. He wanted an excuse to start a row, and Frank had given it him.

"Ere," he exclaimed roughly, "who are yer pushin' agen, kid?"

"I didn't touch you!"

"Yes, yer did!" roared Jim Hackett, giving the fag a heavy cuff that sent Levison minor sprawling in a heap.

"I'll give you shovin' a chap outer the way like that! You St. Jim's kids thinks you owns the earth!"

Frank Levison did not answer. He scrambled to his feet, his head ringing, and then he jumped to get clear.

But Jim Hackett was much too quick for him. He had anticipated such a move, and he sprang forward, his rough hand closing on the fag's collar.

"No, you don't, my lad!" he snapped viciously. "I calls it a hinsult, pushin' me like that there! You got to be licked for it!"

"I didn't push you! Let me go!"

For answer the farmer's son twisted the hapless fag round and raised the stick aloft. It came down with a vicious swish again and again.

Lash, lash, lash!

Frank Levison bit his lips hard to keep back the cries of pain as the sick bit into his shoulders. But he did not take it quietly, for all that. He was not the youngster to take a beating tamely, like a dog.

Almost with the first lashing blow he twisted round and started to struggle, hitting out pluckily at the burly youth.

But Jim Hackett had the strength almost of a grown man, and the youngster's puny efforts were futile. The

farmer's son greeted his frantic efforts with raucous guffaws.

"Let me go!" panted Frank, tears of pain appearing in his eyes. "Oh, you brute!"

Lash, lash, lash!

The blows fell harder, and in desperation Frank Levison changed his tactics, and kicked out hard at the fellow's shins. Protected by leggings, as they were, the kicks reached home with no little force, and Jim Hackett yelled.

"You—little whelp!" he howled.

His heavy, brutal features became convulsed in fury, as Levison minor kicked and struggled vigorously. In a sudden excess of rage the fellow hurled the unfortunate fag to earth.

Frank Levison crashed down, half-stunned, and the next moment the stick was falling again—with all the rascal's rage and strength behind the blows now.

Lash, lash, lash!

Cries of pain escaped through the youngster's clenched teeth, despite his utmost efforts to keep them back. He wriggled, and squirmed, and rolled in his frantic efforts to escape the cruel stick, and the blows fell like rain on body, and hands, and legs, and even on his face.

From the shelter of the thickets, Lacy & Co. watched the result of their caddish plan in some alarm now.

"Stop him, Lacy!" breathed Manton. "The brute's letting himself go! He'll lame the kid!"

"Yes, stop him, you fool!" hissed Carker. "He's going too far."

"Rot!" muttered Lacy, though his eyes were scared. "We can't chip in now! We don't show ourselves, you fools!"

Manton bit his lip, and then, as a more intense cry came from Frank Levison, he rose to his feet, his face flushed with shame.

But he had no need to interfere—had he really intended to do so—for at that moment the thudding of the falling stick ceased.

To his sudden alarm, the farmer's son had discovered that the fag had ceased to struggle and cry—was lying still and motionless.

His mad outburst of furious rage left him suddenly, and he stared down at the motionless youngster with sudden fear in his eyes.

"It—it was the kid's own fault," he muttered thickly. "He—he shouldn't have kicked—"

Breaking off suddenly, he flung away the stick, and slipped to where Lacy & Co. were in hiding.

Lacy met him with a scared, angry face.

"You fool!" he breathed. "You went too far! Look what—"

"It was his own fault!"

"Shut up! Here's the five bob. Now clear, for goodness' sake!" hissed Lacy in an agony of fear. "We'd better all clear, too. If—"

"But look here—" began Manton.

"Run for it!" gritted Lacy. "We can talk to Hackett to-morrow, you fool! If anyone comes—My hat! Somebody coming now. Run for it!"

It was true enough. The cracking of a distant twig underfoot was heard, and the cowardly three hesitated no longer. Jim Hackett had already grabbed his money, and had vanished through the trees, and Lacy & Co. slipped through the thickets and went after him hot-foot.

CHAPTER 4.

Levison Major's Vow!

"YOU fellows seen my minor?"

As Tom Merry & Co., with their friendly rivals from Rylcombe Grammar School, passed under the old gateway of St. Jim's, Ernest Levison stopped them with that question.

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled, and Gordon Gay & Co. chuckled.

"Yes, we've seen him," grinned Tom. "He should be in the village now, Levison."

Ernest Levison's brow cleared.

"That's all right, then," he grunted. "I thought the young rascal must have forgotten. I sent him to Mellor's for my running-shoes. I shall want the things for the cross-country run to-morrow, and I didn't want to be let down."

"He'll be back soon, I expect," said Tom Merry. "Though I'm not sure that you'll recognise him, old chap. He's got a black eye, a swollen nose, a cut lip, a torn collar, muddy clothes, likewise a muddy chivvy; altogether, he looks a sight."

"Oh!" said Levison grimly. "Has the young ass been scrapping then?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who with?"

"Only three Fourth Form chaps from the Grammar School," grinned Lowther. "They were just two too many for him, though."

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"Great pip! What d'you mean?"

Tom Merry explained, and Ernest Levison's brow went grim.

"Just like the young ass to tackle a chap like Lacy," he said, grinning faintly. "But—but I'll have a little chat with friend Lacy when I meet him. I'll teach the rotter to lam my minor."

"It was your minor who lammed him!" grinned Gordon Gay. "He'd have licked him if Lacy's pals hadn't chipped in. And the kid fairly laid it on with the stick. You'd better warn the little fire-eater to give those beauties a wide berth after this."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, shaking his head. "Lacy is wathah a vengeful, unpleasant bwute, you know. I weally do hope the plucky little beggar weached the village all wight."

"I warned him to look out," said Tom Merry.

"Trust the kid to look after himself," grinned Blake.

The juniors moved on towards the tuckshop to get in supplies for the tea-party, and Levison stood in the gateway, his brow puckered into a frown. And then, with sudden decision, he started off up Rylcombe Lane at a trot.

The words of Arthur Augustus had made him just a little uneasy. He also knew the mean, spiteful character of Algernon Lacy, and he knew the Grammarian would never rest until he had "paid out" the St. Jim's fag for his humiliating experience at his hands. Supposing Franky had fallen in with the cads again—alone!

The thought made Levison grit his teeth, and he ran on with increased speed as the fear took hold of him. He soon reached the stile leading from the lane on to the footpath, and a moment later he was running through the woods.

He had not gone far, however, when his face went suddenly white, for he had caught sight of a small figure lying across his path. He knew before he was near enough to see the features that it was his brother lying there.

As he ran up, he caught the faint sounds of someone crashing their way through the thickets in the distance, but he ignored the sounds, and dropped on his knees by his brother's side.

"Franky!" he cried anxiously.

Even as he dropped on his knees, Frank Levison sat up dazedly.

"What—what—"

"Frank, old man!" panted Ernest Levison in an agony of fear. "What's the matter, what's happened?"

The fag started as he recognised his brother.

"Oh!" he gasped faintly. "I—I'm all right, Ernie—I will be in a bit, anyway. That—that brute—"

"Who did this, Frank?" demanded Ernest, his teeth setting hard as he noted his brother's bruised face, still stained with tears. "Is this the work of that cad, Lacy?"

The fag shook his head, and tried to get to his feet. Ernest gripped him fast and helped him up. He stood swaying unsteadily.

"It wasn't Lacy," he muttered. "It was that cad Jim Hackett. He laid into me with a stick—thrashed me until I suppose I must have fainted."

He looked round dazedly as he spoke, as if surprised to find that his attacker had gone.

"I heard someone running away as I came up," said Ernest Levison in a low, hissing voice. "So—so it was Jim Hackett, was it? Well, the—the brute! Tom Merry and the others told me about Lacy. I came to look for you, fearing the cads might trap you again."

"It was Hackett," said Frank Levison, his face still twisted with pain. "I met him on the path here. He said I pushed him. It was only an excuse to lay into me, I knew. He started to lam me, and I kicked back. I suppose he lost control of himself. Anyway, he—he fairly laid into me. It was awful!"

The elder boy's face was dark as he examined his brother's hurts.

"Oh, the brute!" he muttered savagely. "He'll pay dearly for this, Frank. But never mind him now. I must get you home quickly. Here, get on my back, kid."

"I can walk all right, you ass!" rejoined Frank, a faint grin showing round his white lips. "I'm feeling better now."

"But you're not fit to walk—"

"I'm walking!" said Levison minor, with a return of his old spirit. "My hat! What would old Wally D'Arcy and the rest of my pals say if they spotted me being carried home by my brother! No jolly fear! I'd get chipped to death, you ass!"

And he did walk, though Levison major had to help him along. Stout-hearted as he was, the brutal thrashing had sapped the youngster's strength, and besides being exhausted, he was aching and smarting from head to foot.

Levison major's face was as white as his brother's, and his eyes glittered as he escorted his brother out into Rylcombe Lane, and on to St. Jim's.

Why had Jim Hackett done it? He was very much "up against" St. Jim's, of course; he never failed to make an



Suddenly Ernest Levison felt a strong grasp close on his collar and he was wrenched backwards. Twisting round, the junior recognised the red, angry features of Farmer Hackett. "Fightin', hey?" roared the farmer, shaking the junior like a rat. "Hore, Jim! What's this mean?" "He's one of them blamed school kids, father!" snarled Jim Hackett. "Came 'ere and started on me for nothin' at all." (See page 10.)

opportunity of showing his hatred and spite. But why had he attacked the fag just that particular afternoon? Was it just coincidence, or had Lacy & Co. something to do with it?

"You don't think Lacy and his pals had anything to do with it, then?" Ernest Levison asked, as the two passed into the quad.

"I don't know, Ernie," muttered the fag. "I saw nothing of them, if they had."

"They had. I'll swear they had!" gritted Levison major, his eyes gleaming. "I've seen that brute Hackett hobnobbing with the cads more than once, Frank. But never mind, I'll get square for this. I'll find out the truth somehow. And as for Jim Hackett—"

He snapped his teeth, and his minor was alarmed at the grim look on his face. He grasped his major's arm.

"Ernie," he gasped, "you—you're not thinking of tackling that brute yourself?"

"I am."

"Don't!" begged Frank earnestly. "He's too good for any chap at St. Jim's. Even Tom Merry couldn't lick him. He's nearly a grown—"

"Leave the cad to me, Frank!" snapped Ernest. "I tell you I'm going to fight him, and I'm going to lick him—lick him as he licked you! That's that!"

He helped his trembling minor up the School House steps and into the hallway. It was teatime, and scarcely a soul was about; but as they crossed the Hall Mr. Railton, their Housemaster, came rustling towards them.

He stopped abruptly at sight of the two.

"Levison!" he exclaimed, his astonished eyes fixed on Frank Levison's bruised and haggard features. "What ever has happened, boy? Good gracious! You are in a terrible state!"

It was Levison major who answered.

"He's been attacked by a fellow named Hackett—attacked and beaten with a stick like a dog, sir!" he said, almost savagely. "The lout met him on the path through the woods and thrashed him until he fainted."

Mr. Railton stared at the hapless fag as if he could scarcely believe his own eyes and ears.

"Levison major," he ejaculated, "is that the truth? Do you mean to tell me that that wretched farmer's son has done this—this wicked thing? Why, the boy is in a fearful state."

"Hackett did it, sir," said Levison. "I found my brother lying on the path a couple of minutes afterwards."

The Housemaster's face set hard.

"This is beyond all reason and patience," he said. "It is not the first time, by any means, that the young ruffian has attacked younger boys of this school. It must be stopped. I shall ask Dr. Holmes to take drastic action at once, Levison. Meanwhile, you had better take your brother along to the matron."

"Yes, sir."

"I will see you concerning this later on, Levison," said Mr. Railton, laying a kindly hand on the fag's shoulder. "Rest assured that the matter will not be allowed to rest here."

He rustled away, almost crimson with angry indignation. But instead of going away to the matron Ernest Levison hesitated a moment, and then he seemed to come to a decision.

"You can go to the matron yourself, Frank," he said thickly. "I'm going out!"

"You—you're going—"

"I'm going to settle up with that brute!" snapped Levison major, his eyes glittering. "I'm going to find him, and I'm going to thrash him until he can't stand—if I have to drag the brute out of his own house to do it!"

"Ernie!"

"Don't worry about me, Frank. I can look after myself all right," said Ernest Levison. "Trot along to the matron, there's a good kid."

"Oh, Ernie, don't—don't—"

But Ernest Levison had already gone. He ran across the Hall, and vanished down the School House steps into the quad.

Frank Levison stared after him, and then he started as if to follow. He stopped again just as quickly, however, as he realised it was useless. In his present exhausted state he could not hope to catch his brother up, and, in any case, he knew that Ernest would never allow himself to be persuaded from his resolve.

For some seconds the fag stood in agonised indecision, and then hurried away towards the Shell passage. Great as was his faith in his brother, Frank felt certain that he would not have the ghost of a chance against the burly, hulking farmer's son. Moreover, there was no telling what Ernest might do in his present black mood. He was obviously going to the farm, and Frank feared that serious trouble might result.

But he never reached the Shell passage then, for a moment later he met his chums—Wally D'Arcy, Curly Gibson, and Manners minor.

The three fags stared at their chum in amazement.

"Great pip, Franky!" ejaculated Wally. "What the giddy thump have you been up to? Been through a mangle or a blessed coffee-grinder?"

"No time to tell you now, Wally," muttered Frank. "I want to get hold of Tom Merry. I'll see you afterwards."

He was hurrying past, but Wally caught him by the collar and yanked him back. Wally's face was grim.

"Half a mo, my pippin!" he snapped. "That won't do for us, young Levison. Great pip! You look like a blessed hospital case, Franky. We want to know who in thunder's been knocking you about like that."

"I'll tell you after—"

"You'll tell us now! Blow Tom Merry!" snorted Wally. "Who's Tom Merry, I'd like to know? Out with it, kid! Who's been lamming you like that?"

There was no help for it, and Frank Levison told his chums the whole story, briefly and rapidly. The faces of his chums were studies when he had finished. Wally D'Arcy almost exploded with excited indignation.

"Well, my hat!" he breathed, his eyes gleaming. "And that beastly lout licked you until you fainted, did he? Does anyone know?"

"Railton knows. I've just told him," said Frank. "He's going—"

"Bunkum!" snorted Wally. "What will the Head do—eh? He'll write a dashed letter, as he's done before, and that's all. That won't do for us."

"I know. But that's just what I'm in a hurry about, Wally. My brother's just gone to try to find Hackett—to the farm, I expect. He'll get in a hole by himself. I'm just going to tell Tom Merry, to ask him to go after him. I know he'll help."

Again Wally D'Arcy exploded.

"What about us, you ass?" he stuttered. "Isn't this a matter for the Third—eh? Never mind the Shell or the Fourth. Blow those old fogies! We're going to deal with this, my pippin!"

"But—"

"We'll jolly well see if that beastly lout's going to half kill one of our chaps!" shouted Wally excitedly. "Come on, you chaps! Let's round the fellows up. We'll give that lout Jim Hackett something to remember the Third by. You chaps game?"

"Yes, rather!" said Gibson and the others eagerly. "Good man, Wally!"

"Then come on!" snapped the warlike D'Arcy minor. "Rout out Jameson, Joe Frayne, and the rest of them! We'll need about a dozen to deal with that brute, you know. You trot off to the giddy matron, young Levison. Leave this to us."

"But—"

"Dry up! Now, come on, you chaps! We'll collar that brute if we have to raid the blessed farm to get hold of him. Cut off, young Levison!"

With that Wally led his followers away with a rush. Frank Levison stared after them, in greater alarm now. He loved a "lark" as much as his fellow-fags did, but he realised that the reckless Wally & Co. were in a dangerous mood, as was his brother; and he saw that this was going to be no lark. The thought that all of them might get themselves into serious trouble for his sake filled the fag with dismay.

He stood a moment longer, and then he hurried away, his pale face determined. He had the greatest faith in Tom Merry, and he felt that the junior captain was the fellow to bring a cool head to the affair. And a moment later he was

knocking on the door of Blake's study, knowing Tom Merry would be there.

It looked as if Jim Hackett was going to have a hornet's nest round his ears before the evening was out.

CHAPTER 5.

Trouble on the Farm!

ERNEST LEVISON ran hard when once he had left St. Jim's behind him. He was seething with fury. Usually a keen and level-headed chap enough, Levison major had plainly lost all his calm control now. And it was, perhaps, no wonder. The cruel and brutal thrashing his minor had received was enough to make any decent fellow burn with rage, and act without thinking.

For Levison major had not stopped to think now. His mind was in a turmoil of sympathy for his young brother, and in a burning rage against his brutal attacker. All he could think about as he ran across the fields towards Hackett's farm was to get to grips with Jim Hackett.

His fingers fairly itched to get a grip on the young ruffian. That the young farmer's son was fully a head taller, and stronger in every way, did not trouble Levison in the slightest. Nor did it strike him that he had a "nerve" to rush off to the farm to meet his enemy—to beard the lion in his den, as it were.

It was only when he came in sight of the farm buildings that Ernest Levison realised there might be difficulties in the way of getting hold of his enemy.

If Jim Hackett was indoors, he could scarcely raid the house and drag him out. Nor could he go to the door and request the youth to come out and be licked! And he might not have returned home yet.

The junior reached the outhouses of the farm at last, and he stopped and looked sharply about him. It was not a large farm by any means, and it was like its owner, exceedingly grubby and untidy. Neither Mr. Hackett nor his farm had a very savoury reputation.

"The brute!" breathed Levison, staring about him in some disappointment. "Oh, the brute! If only he'd turn up now!"

As if in answer to the junior's muttered hope the rickety door of a shed close by swung open and a familiar figure slouched out into the muddy yard.

It was Jim Hackett, and at sight of him Ernest Levison's eyes blazed, and he ran across to him without hesitation.

"Now, you brute!" he snapped, clenching his fists. "Up with your hands, my pippin!"

Jim Hackett gave a start, and stared as if thunderstruck at the St. Jim's junior. But he soon recognised Levison, and his gaping face twisted into an ugly scowl.

"Ere," he growled menacingly, "what the thunder are you doing 'ere?"

"I'm here to give you the licking of your life, you bullying rascal!" said Levison thickly.

"Eh? Oh, are you?" ejaculated Jim Hackett.

"I am. I'm going to give you payment for what you did to my brother this afternoon, you brute! Put your fists up!"

The farmer's son stared at the junior, and then his grubby face broadened into an ugly grin.

"You goin' to lick me?" he exclaimed derisively. "Well I'm blowed! Why, you little pup, I'll make mincemeat of you, dang me! Put me 'ands up, hey?"

With that Jim Hackett gave a growl and made a bull-like rush at his youthful challenger.

Levison neatly side-stepped, and Jim Hackett ran into a small but iron fist that caught him under the ear. The lout whirled round and all but fell.

He recovered himself awkwardly, and returned to the attack with a bellow of rage. That neat jab in the neck had stung him considerably.

This time Levison had no chance to avoid the furious rush, and he reeled under a hefty smack under the chin. The farmer's son's right followed his left, and the St. Jim's junior reeled again and went down in the mud.

It was a bad start for Levison, and he lay a moment, his head singing under the shock of those two heavy blows. He staggered up dazedly and backed before Hackett's charge, defending himself gamely.

But the fight was not fated to go on for long, for scarcely had a dozen blows been exchanged when an interruption occurred.

There sounded an angry bellow, and suddenly Ernest Levison felt a strong grasp close on his collar, and he was wrenched backwards.

Twisting round, the junior recognised the red, angry features of Farmer Hackett himself.

"Fightin', hey!" roared the farmer, shaking the junior like a rat. "Here, Jim, what's this mean?"

Jim Hackett dropped his fists and glowered at the junior.

"He's one of them blamed school kids, father!" he snarled, "Came 'ere and started on me for nothin' at all."

Attacked me just for nothin' afore I knew what was happenin', he did!"

"Well, I'm 'blowed!" ejaculated Farmer Hackett. "Come 'ere kicking up a disturbance, did he? Well, if he wants trouble he can 'ave it, Jim!"

He started to drag the junior along, but Ernest Levison set his teeth and began to struggle.

"Let me go!" he muttered. "I came here to give that brute a hiding—a hiding he's richly earned! He——"

"Hidin'!" blustered the farmer. "It's you as is goin' to get a hiding, my lad! Lend me a 'and, Jim! I'll give the young pup a taste of my whip! I'll give 'im comin' here with his rovin'!"

Jim Hackett grinned and rushed to his father's aid. Together they grasped the struggling Levison and started to drag him away.

It was just then that another interruption occurred—an interruption which startled Ernest Levison as much as it did the farmer and his son.

There came a sudden shrill yell, and over the low, broken wall of the farmyard poured a dozen breathless fags. At their head was Wally D'Arcy, of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

Ernest Levison fairly blinked at them, as did Jim Hackett and his father.

"Go for 'em!" roared Wally D'Arcy recklessly. "Down with the rotters, chaps! My bat! We're just in time!"

There was a rush of feet, and before the two bullies had recovered from their astonishment the fags were swarming recklessly over them.

Bellowing with wrath, the angry farmer hit out right and left, as did his son, but the reckless fags stuck to it, though they were sent reeling again and again. For some moments the astonished Ernest Levison scarcely knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Go it, chaps!" yelled Wally D'Arcy. "Into that blessed shed with the old chap! It's Jim Hackett we want!"

"You young asses——" gasped Levison. But the "young asses" were warning to the job, and Levison was not heeded. Indeed, as he saw the plucky fags reeling away before the savage blows, Ernest Levison woke up and started in on his own account.

He went for Jim Hackett, and thus left Wally D'Arcy and his chums to transfer their whole attention temporarily to Hackett senior.

That burly individual had little chance against the swarm of fags, and he was fairly rushed into the shed, bellowing with rage at the top of his husky voice.

"In with him!" gasped Wally D'Arcy.

Hackett sprawled forward into the shed, and Wally D'Arcy and his excited chums crashed the door shut. Then Wally rammed the wooden bar into the sockets and made it fast.

"Now for dear old Jim!" yelled Wally.

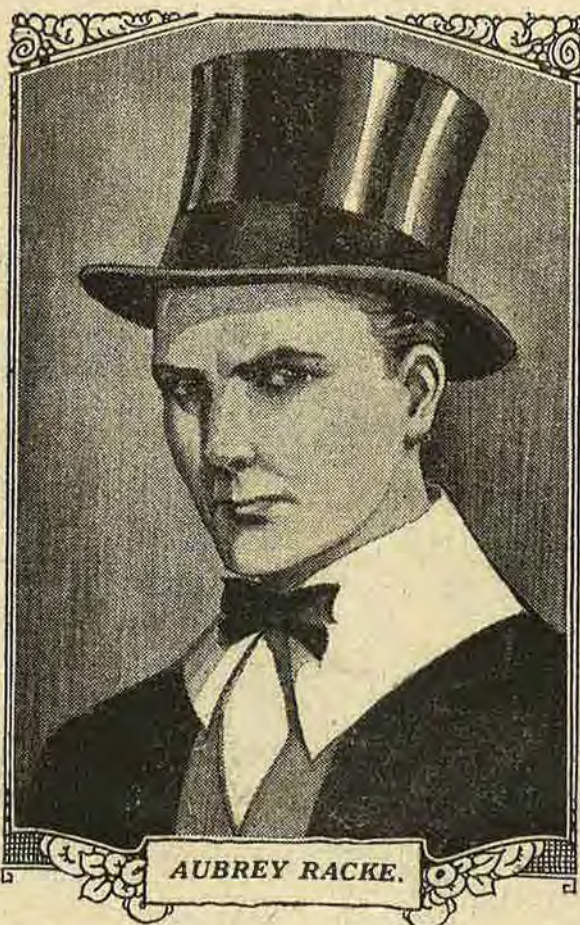
The fags made a rush for Jim Hackett, who had his back to the wall of the shed as he defended himself against Ernest Levison.

"Get away!" panted the Fourth-Former savagely. "Get away, you young idiots! Leave this brute to me!"

"Not likely!" snorted Wally D'Arcy, his eyes gleaming. "You clear away yourself, Levison major. You jolly well mind your eye. This is a matter for the Third to deal with!"

"Hear, hear! Smash the cad!" roared Jameson wildly.

The excited and reckless young rascals followed Wally D'Arcy as that fag made a rush. Levison major was



A member of Study No. 7 in the Shell, and the son of a war-profitteer. Purse-proud, snobbish, cunning and unscrupulous is Racke. He is the leader of the rotters' brigade at St. Jim's. None of the decent fellows at St. Jim's associate with him. More dangerous than his study-mate, Gerald Crooke, being more reckless and less cowardly. There is a yellow streak in Racke, but he can show fight when occasion demands.

brushed aside, and, in a flash the alarmed Jim Hackett was the centre of a yelling swarm of avengers.

Yelling for help, the young ruffian went down, and his struggle availed him little against such numbers. At that moment the hoist door, high up above the fags' heads, swung open, and the fat, untidy and gesticulating figure of Farmer Hackett appeared framed in the aperture.

"You young villains!" he roared hoarsely. "I'll have the law on you for this! Let my son alone! D'you 'ear? Hey, Sam—Joe——"

He bellowed wildly for help—apparently for two of his farm hands—but if they heard they heeded not. Perhaps they did not like the look of things. At all events, they remained out of sight. Wally D'Arcy chuckled.

"Never mind, old turnip face!" he chortled. "Come on, chaps, yank him— Oh, look out, you asses! Collar him!"

But the fags were a bit too slow. Their attention had been distracted by Farmer Hackett's unexpected appearance above them, and, giving a sudden mighty heave, Jim Hackett leaped to his feet.

He sent the fags scattering to right and left, and, sending Levison major spinning with a hefty punch, he bolted for his life.

"After the cad!" roared Wally D'Arcy. "Oh, good egg!"

The fags' angry yell ended on a note of relief, as Jim Hackett suddenly slipped on a bit of garbage and went crashing down in the muddy yard.

He was up again the next instant, but by that time Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Joe Frayne had raced in front of him, cutting off his escape towards the house.

Trapped between the two parties, Jim Hackett hesitated, and then with a gasp of alarm he raced for a small stack of hay standing a few yards from him.

A small ladder happened to be leaning against it, and he swarmed up desperately and snatched the ladder up after him. Dropping the ladder on the hay, he picked up a hay-fork and brandished it above his head.

"Keep off, you young 'ounds!" he roared. "Or I'll lame some of you."

"Done us, by jingo!" snorted Wally D'Arcy in exasperation. "Here, I've got it. Pelt the cad."

The excited fags made a rush for a heap of rotten potatoes and other rubbish that was close by, and a moment later the air was full of flying missiles.

Wally D'Arcy's first missile was a rotten potato, and it caught the luckless Jim Hackett just under the chin. He yelped frantically, and he yelped still more as a perfect hurricane of potatoes, cabbage-stalks, turfs, and other unpleasant articles rattled about his head.

He stood the bombardment for a minute, and then a hefty turf took him full in the mouth, and down he went in the hay. And, wisely, he stayed down.

"That's enough, Wally, you young ass!" cried Ernest Levison, running up just then. "You've gone far enough. There'll be the dickens to pay for this."

"Rot! You dry up, Levison major!" gasped the warlike leader of the fags. "Trot off home if you're funkng. We've not squared matters with that howling cad yet. Have we, chaps?"

"Rather not!"

"Come on!" snapped Wally, glaring up at the haystack.

"We'll soon get the beggar out of that. Lend me a hand with that hurdle, chaps."

"Hurrah!"

The fags ran to their leader's aid, and the next moment a large hurdle was being rushed to the spot. Ernest Levison's face was grim now. He saw that the excited fags were out of hand, and he saw there was going to be bigger trouble yet. The hurdle was placed against the side of the stack, and the next moment the fags were swarming up it.

CHAPTER 6.

A Fine Pickle!

"A T him, chaps! Roll the cad off!"

Wally D'Arcy was the first to clamber up on the haystack. He found Jim Hackett lying flat in the hay. The farmer's son had obviously not expected them to storm the stack, and he jumped up with a bellow of rage as he sighted the determined juniors.

Half the top of the stack had been sliced off flat, but there was little enough room, for all that. The furious lout snatched his hayfork and made a wild swipe at Wally. The fag dodged like lightning, and as the weapon fell he grasped it. There was a momentary struggle for mastery, and then Wally's chums took a hand.

They swarmed all over Jim Hackett, and he went down in the hay, yelling, with half a dozen fags on top of him. They were rolling over and struggling madly, when suddenly someone gave a warning yell.

"Look out! Oh, my hat!"

Swish! Crash!

"Yaroooooh!"

What might have been expected happened in a flash. The struggling forms rolled over the edge of the stack and went whirling downwards. Jim Hackett fell underneath, and he gave vent to a fiendish yell as he struck the stack-yard floor.

It was lucky that the struggling figures slithered, rather than fell off the stack, and it was lucky there was plenty of soft hay to fall upon. Otherwise there must have been broken limbs, for the drop was ten feet, at least.

But only Jim Hackett seemed to be hurt, and he was, apparently, very much hurt by the way he howled. In some alarm the fags jumped up, releasing him as they did so.

Jim Hackett promptly scrambled to his feet, showing that he was far from being injured. And just as promptly the breathless fags piled on to him again. They had him down in a flash.

"Got him!" panted Wally D'Arcy, looking about him eagerly. "Now we're going to put the cad through it in earnest. I vote—"

He paused, and a mischievous gleam came into his eyes as they fell upon a large, wide tub that stood by the brick wall of a pigsty, a few yards away. It was brimfull of pig-wash, and from the look of it, and the smell of it, it was far from being as fresh as it might have been.

"Just the very thing, you chaps!" grinned Wally D'Arcy recklessly. "We'll give the rotter a bath. He needs one, I must say. Into that pig-wash with him, chaps!"

"Good egg!"

The suggestion was received with acclamation, and the young rascals started to drag the fuming youth towards the tub.

"Lemme go, you young fiends!" he panted, his eyes filled with horror as he grasped their intention. "Oh, crumbs! You little 'ounds! Help! Help!"

But there was no help for Jim Hackett. From his perch on the staging on the hoist door of the store-shed his father was yelling huskily, but his threats went unheeded.

The St. Jim's fags half dragged, half carried the bully to the tub. More than one of them had suffered at the hands of the bullying Jim Hackett on various occasions, and they were determined to teach him a lasting lesson now they had the chance to do so. They knew there would be trouble to face afterwards, and they were determined to make a thorough job of it now they had started. It was a case of in for a penny, in for a pound with Wally & Co.

"In with him!" gasped Wally D'Arcy, with a chuckle.

"Just give him a hip bath to start with!"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

Struggling frantically, the hapless youth was rushed backwards at the tub. His clumsy feet clumped against it, and the fags pushed and jumped away.

Splash!

The farmer's son sprawled backwards and sat down in the unsavory tub of pig-wash, sending it spouting out on all sides. But the fags had expected that, and they had leaped back well out of range.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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There was a roar as the hapless bully sat in the pig-wash, his arms and legs flying wildly in the air. He fairly wallowed in the horrible stuff for a few brief seconds, and then he managed to get out by pulling the whole thing over.

He sprawled amid the swirling contents of the upturned tub, and then he scrambled up, his face red with rage. He was in a shocking state.

"Oh, my hat!" choked Wally D'Arcy, holding his nose and retreating. "What an awful smell! Fancy that chap wanting to bathe in that—Look out!"

The warning was needed, for, with a bellow like a mad bull, Jim Hackett made a furious rush at his tormentors. They scattered, yelling with laughter.

As if he realised the hopelessness of chasing the slippery youngsters, he turned and dashed away across the stack-yard.

His retreat was followed by laughter and cheers.

"Hurrah!"

"St. Jim's for ever!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Levison major, scarcely able to restrain a grin. "You've done enough now. Better clear, you young imps!"

"Well, I think we've about squared accounts," chuckled Wally D'Arcy. "Let's go while the going's good, chaps."

The fags nodded, their cheeky faces red with exertion and glee, many of their faces showing ugly bruises also, where they had come into contact with Jim Hackett's huge fists. They turned to follow their cheery leader—and then they stopped.

For the "going," as Wally had expressed it, was by no means good. As they stared towards the iron gate in the low wall of the stack-yard they saw a sight which made them gasp.

The gate was open, and into the stackyard was lumbering a great, ugly-looking bull.

"Mum my hat!" gasped Wally. "It's old Hackett's bull!"

There was no doubt about that. Farmer Hackett's bull was famous in the district—famous for its savage ferocity and evil temper. Only recently it had badly mauled a cowman. Evidently Jim Hackett in his furious rage had turned it loose upon the juniors.

But the fags did not stay to ponder over the iniquity of this latter probability. The bull had sighted them. It pawed the dirty ground for a second or so, and then it lowered its massive head and came thundering across the stackyard.

"Run for it!" yelled Wally D'Arcy.

But there was nowhere to run to—not for safety anyway. The farm buildings were behind them, and long before they reached the low wall of the yard, the bull would be among them.

Almost petrified with alarm, the fags stared in dismayed indecision, and then Ernest Levison's voice rang out.

"Up the haystack—quick, you kids!" he roared.

"Oh, great pip!"

A frantic rush was made for the ladder leaning against the stack. Ernest Levison waited for the last fag to get safely up, and then he pulled himself up. Wally D'Arcy grasped his arm, and fairly wrenched him into safety.

And only just in time! The next instant the bull thundered up, and the ladder crashed to splinters before his blind charge.

"Oh, great pip!" groaned Wally D'Arcy.

In a huddled group on the haystack, the fags blinked down at the raging animal as it backed away from the stack, with the ruins of the ladder sticking from its horns like great antlers.

Bellowing with rage, the bull shook and tossed its great head until the splinters of wood flew in every direction.

Then it backed again, and glowered up at the startled fags, its wicked-looking little eyes glinting redly. It regarded the group for a moment, breathing hard through its nostrils, and then lowered its head again and charged full-tilt at the haystack.

Thud!

The haystack fairly rocked under the weight of the charge. The bull's head and horns were almost buried in the thick mass of hay.

After a frantic struggle, however, the animal managed to withdraw its head, bellowing and blinking, and evidently hurt not a little by the sharp, prickly stalks of hay.

Fortunately, the animal did not try that game again! Still bellowing angrily, it trotted round and round the haystack, stopping now and again to regard the hapless St. Jim's juniors through its red-rimmed eyes.

"Oh, great Scott!" groaned Levison major, looking about him in great alarm. "This is a fine pickle, and no mistake!"

"Look!" hissed Wally D'Arcy suddenly. "I thought as much. It's that brute, Jim Hackett!"



The excited Third-Formers made a rush for a heap of rotten potatoes and other rubbish that was close by, and a moment later the air was full of flying missiles. Wally D'Arcy's first missile caught the luckless Jim Hackett under the chin. He yelled frantically, and he yelled still more as a perfect hurricane of potatoes, cabbage-stalks, turfs, and other unpleasant articles rattled about his head. (See page 11.)

The juniors looked, and were in time to see the drenched and bedraggled figure of Jim Hackett at the gateway. He was just closing the iron gate. And at that moment Farmer Hackett, from his perch on the hoist ledge, bawled across the yard, his voice triumphant.

Until then, on sighting the bull, the farmer had looked not a little alarmed at his son's vengeful action. But now, realising they were safe enough, but helpless to escape, he almost jumped with joy.

"That's right, Jim!" he bellowed. "Fasten that gate—keep him in! We've got the young 'ounds now!"

Ernest Levison paled a trifle.

"Make him take that dangerous brute away!" he shouted angrily. "You'll get into trouble for this, Hackett!"

"Likely I will!" sneered Farmer Hackett, with a wild guffaw. "I've got you tight, and I means to keep you there, my young bantams! You can stop there till mornin'!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"I'll teach you young 'ounds a lastin' lesson," went on the farmer vengefully. "It ain't no good reporting you to your 'admaster. I'll deal with you myself. You'll stay there till mornin'!"

There was a deadly earnestness in the farmer's grim tone, and the St. Jim's juniors knew he meant what he said. They stared at each other aghast. As they did so, Farmer Hackett bellowed to his son:

"Go round and unlock t'other door and let me outer this!" he yelled. "By hokey, I'll make Sam and Joe smart for keepin' outer the way like this!"

He vanished from the fags' sight as Jim Hackett ran away obediently, and vanished round the farm-building, apparently to let his father out of the store-shed by another door.

The fags and Ernest Levison groaned in dismay. The thought of a night out on the haystack was not a pleasant thought by any means. Moreover, now they were cooling

down, they realised they had enough trouble to face as it was.

But even as despair took possession of the St. Jim's avengers, a gleam of hope appeared on the horizon.

It was Wally D'Arcy who saw it first, and he gave a yell of astonishment.

"Look!"

The fags and Levison looked, and then they sprang up joyfully. Crossing the fields beyond the stackyard wall was a little string of familiar figures.

"Oh, thank goodness!" gasped Levison. "It's Tom Merry!"

All the fags recognised the oncoming figures now, and their hearts filled with hope. There were ten of them, and they were running hard towards the farm.

"It's Tom Merry's lot, and Blake's crowd," said Wally D'Arcy hopefully. "My hat! There's three Grammar School chaps with them, too!"

The fags soon recognised Gordon Gay & Co.

"My minor must have told them, and sent them along," breathed Levison. "I'm blessed if I know how they're going to get us out of this pickle, though."

"Neither do I!" groaned Wally.

Nor did Tom Merry and his fellow rescuers when they arrived on the scene and grasped the situation! They blinked in dumbfounded alarm at the huddled group on the haystack, and at the fierce-looking bull below them.

"Oh, bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The rest of the juniors were equally astounded and dismayed.

"Oh, great pip!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, staring blankly at the scene. "What—a hble to be in!"

"We've got to get the young idiots out of it somehow," snapped Tom Merry, setting his teeth. "Can you fellows think of anything?"

(Continued on page 16.)

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TOM MERRY



The St. Jim's News



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

JUDGING from letters which I have recently received, quite a number of GEN readers are very keen musicians—and, according to news of examination successes of which I have been informed in some of the letters, very clever ones at that—and they are naturally very interested in the musical activities of the juniors at St. Jim's. I have sent personal replies to several of these correspondents, answering certain questions with reference to the St. Jim's musicians; but as I am quite unable—much as I should like to do so—to treat every letter in the same manner, I have decided to publish this special "Musical" issue of the "St. Jim's News" for the purpose of not only giving certain asked-for information to my musical readers, but of putting before you all a short review of a side of St. Jim's life that is very rarely touched upon in the stories.

I must confess that it would not be true to say that we are a particularly musical lot of fellows here. Not that we don't care for music, mind you, but the fact is we get so little time for it. Somehow or other music and sport don't mix very well. You can't put in hours a day at five-finger exercises or at seraping a yard of horsehair across lengths of catgut, and keep up your form at footer or cricket to first eleven standard.

It's all right for those fellows like Monty Lowther and Manners, who started domino-thumping when they were in the nursery, and got a thorough grounding when they were kids, and only have to keep it up with a few minutes a day or an hour or so when they're in the mood.

Most of the fellows go in for something that doesn't take too much learning, and that you can vamp on, like the banjo or the one-string fiddle. Figgins plays one of those—fiddling things, I mean—jolly well, and he's just gone in for a posh one; I think they call it a phonofiddle, or something like that. It has a big metal trumpet attachment like a gramophone horn. Anyway, it's a great improvement on the first he had, which he made himself out of a cigar-box and a piece of broomstick.

We've got a very decent string orchestra in the school, but a half-dozen seniors and some of the masters and school staff are the mainstay of that. Miss Marie Rivers, for instance, is a splendid violinist, and she also plays the violoncello. Mr. Carrington plays the clarinet, while Herr Schneider, the German master, is a fine double-bass player, and he can also play the saxophone—a big, silver-plated one that's so much like the huge German pipe he's always smoking that we often wonder if he ever absent-mindedly fills it up with tobacco when he's practising and tries to smoke it.

As for Grundy's blowing his own trumpet, and Trimble's playing the jolly old lyre—well, the less said the better, perhaps; and, in any case, you hear enough of that sort of music, I dare say.

Tom Merry

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OUR JAZZ BAND!

By Richard Julian.

WE once made an attempt at raising a jazz band at St. Jim's—in fact, I might almost say that we did raise a jazz band; but, unfortunately, it disbanded almost immediately, not in consequence of any lack of keenness on the part of the members, however. If anything, they were a trifle too keen, that possibly being the very reason for the band's being so short-lived.

When the idea first began to take shape there was no lack of volunteers. It was rather the other way about. Instead of having a lot of trouble finding chaps to join, we had a lot of trouble finding excuses to prevent their joining.

The chief attraction seemed to be the drums. There is a very general impression that playing a drum is a fantastically easy sort of job. Anyway, that's how about twenty fellows who hardly know the difference between a bar of music and a bar of chocolate regarded it, and, as they were desperately anxious to join the band, and couldn't qualify as players of any other kind of musical instrument, they proffered their invaluable services as drummers. Of course, that's all very well, but you really can't have a score of drummers in a band of twenty-five or so. So we were reluctantly compelled to whittle the enthusiasts down to one.

And then we made our great mistake. Instead of making it clear to the disappointed candidates that we had no manner of use for their services, somebody suggested that, if they cared to obtain some kind of instrument that could be easily learnt, they might turn up at the practices and help us out. The consequence was that the first time we met, in addition to Noble's part-worn fiddle, Herries' cornet, Blake's banjo, Contarini's mandoline, my 'cello, Figgins' one-string fiddle, Lowther on the piano, and Redfern on the drums, there was a horde of chaps with those kazoo contraptions that you hum into. You know the kind of thing; there's a sort of diaphragm inside a wooden mouthpiece, and when you sing into it your voice sounds like a bee in a bottle—all buzzy.

Well, we didn't know quite what to do. Here were about twenty fellows all jolly eager to assist us by buzzing their kazoos for all they were worth, and nobody seemed to care for the job of telling them straight out that we should much prefer them to buzz off instead. So we made the best of it, and started off with a couple of ragtime items.

We were about half-way through the first when the door of the Hobbies' Club room, in which we were practising, burst open, and Kildare, Darrell, and North came in. They weren't empty-handed, either, though it wasn't musical instruments they were carrying, but ashplants.

And, oh, when they began to play—with their canes, I mean—the music was very weird and wonderful. I think the three of them would have made good drum-majors the way they wielded their canes.

As I say, the jazz band was very short-lived.

A FEW NOTES!

Composed by
Monty Lowther.

THERE are several musicians at St. Jim's, and no end of a lot of fellows who play musical instruments. I don't think there is any need for me to explain exactly what I mean by that statement. But you can take it from me that it is a distinction with a very big difference.

There is a third-class of melody-mongers, not particularly numerous, but, nevertheless, extremely obtrusive in their little way. I allude to the choice gang of ruffians—small, but very deadly—who favour Nature's own weapons, and do ghastly things with their vocal chords. Of this class D'Arcy is undoubtedly the shining light; and, although Gussy indignantly denies that there is any connection between his tenor solos and the bare patches on the ceiling of Study No. 6 where the plaster has fallen away, I don't really think there can be much room for doubt in the matter.

Of course, it's quite true that Herries' cornet may have something to do with the state of the ceiling, though if I had to decide between them, I should plump for D'Arcy's singing every time.

Joe Frayne of the Third is, to use his own expression, "a regular rib" on the mouth-organ, and he occasionally entertains his fellow-fags with spirited renditions of the latest popular songs round the fire in the Third Common room. Not that the Third are fond of music, but they're always ready to kick up a row, and singing choruses to Joe Frayne's mouth-organ accompaniment provides them with a gilt-edged opportunity.

Kerr can play the bagpipes—in so far, of course, as it is possible for the bagpipes to be played; and one term he brought a set or a bundle, whichever it is called, back with him. He used to go into a box-room in the evenings to practise, and after about a week of it Mr. Ratcliff sent for the New House matron and asked her if it was really necessary to have so many cats about the place; and, if so, couldn't they be properly fed so that they would keep quiet?

Relly once went in for a concertina. That's another diabolical contraption for using up good air to produce bad airs. It came to a tragic finish. Somebody bagged it out of his study one afternoon after a footer match when fires were being relit for tea, stuck a hole in it, and used it for a pair of bellows.

Noble had a violin given to him as a present a short time ago, and started to learn to play it. He became quite an excellent performer; anyway, on one occasion he brought tears to my eyes with it. Really, he hit me over the head with it in a study rag. It doesn't seem to have quite so good a tone as it did before that little incident. Most of the back is missing, and perhaps that has something to do with it. I can't say, as I don't know much about fiddles.

Look out for a feast of fun
in next week's "Great
Fashion" Number of the
"News."



GRUNDY'S TROMBONE!

By
William Cuthbert Gunn.

WHENEVER I heard chaps blithering piffle about things never being so bad that they mightn't be worse, and that you ought to be jolly thankful they're not, instead of grumbling, I used to say, "Bosh! You don't know what you're talking about! Just change places with me, and share a study with Grundy for a week—if you can manage to stick it as long, I'll bet you'd never have the cheek to say anything could be worse than that once you'd had a dose of it."

Needless to say, nobody ever accepted the offer. Everybody at St. Jim's knows George Alfred Grundy a trifle too well to have any hankers after making experiments of that kind.

But, all the same, I must confess that I'm beginning to change my opinion and to agree that perhaps it is true that however bad things are they might possibly be worse. You see, the truth is that last week Grundy broke out in a fresh direction, and made himself more of a blithering nuisance than usual, even; and when I say that, you'll perhaps have some slight idea of what Wilkins and I have been going through.

The trouble arose in consequence of Grundy's going into Wayland on his own one afternoon to see a film at the Picture House. I forget exactly what the picture was, but there was some boxing in it, and Grundy wanted to see it. Wilkins and I both cried off, though he wanted us to go with him, because we knew jolly well what to expect if we went. We've been to the pictures with Grundy before.

George Alfred has a thumping unpleasant habit of criticising everything and everybody, and he doesn't leave it at home when he goes to a place of entertainment. He keeps up a running fire of commentary all the while; and, knowing Grundy as no doubt most of you do by now, there is no occasion for me to tell you that his remarks are the reverse of complimentary.

So you can understand that the notion of accompanying Grundy to the pictures didn't appeal to us in the least, though afterwards we were jolly sorry we hadn't gone, after all. We might have kept him out of mischief.

Grundy arrived at the Picture House, and demanded a ticket for the circle, to be promptly informed that the place was full, and that dozens of people had already been turned away. Not a seat was to be had for love nor money; and though George Alfred argued with the girl in the box-office, the commissionaire, a programme-girl who came into the vestibule to get some change, and, finally, with the manager himself, he was in the end convinced that there really was no room in the place, and that it was quite impracticable to call in an architect and a few bricklayers and have the building enlarged on the spot for his especial convenience.

When he heard that there were several Grammarians inside he suggested that he should be allowed to go in and persuade one of them to give up his seat; but the manager hadn't lived in Wayland for a couple of years or so without learning something about the relations that exist between St. Jim's and the Grammar School, and he had rather more than a very good idea of the form that Grundy's "persuasion" was likely to take. And although he had not the least objection to plenty of excitement during the performance, he preferred that it should take place in its proper sphere—on the screen, and not among the audience.

Grundy finally went away in no pleasant frame of mind, and mooched about Wayland for an hour or two, completely at a loose end. He looked into shop windows and

drifted through the sixpenny bazaar. He spent half an hour getting his hair cut—not that it wanted doing, but he had to pass the time away somehow—and another half-hour arguing about politics (of which he knows rather less than nothing) with the barber. In the end he found himself strolling aimlessly along a side-street in which there is a frowsty old secondhand shop, lumbered up with all sorts of rubbish.

Grundy stopped outside the place and stood staring in at all the other rubbish—that is to say, the junk that was piled up inside, and suddenly he caught sight of something that made his eyes glitter.

There was a tarnished, battered old trombone lying across a pile of broken chairs.

Now, if there is one thing especially that Grundy has always cherished a secret longing to possess, it is a musical instrument of some sort or another, and preferably a brass instrument. Whether a trombone can correctly be described as a musical instrument I won't undertake to say, because I don't know enough about such matters to express any opinion, but I must say that if it is really capable of producing anything in the least resembling a tune, all the trombone players I've ever heard must have been unaware of the fact, or else they'd got queer ideas about tunes.

And as for Grundy ever learning to play one—oh dear! The only musical instrument—good, bad, or indifferent—that he'll ever stand a chance with is either a gramophone, a barrel-organ, or a musical-box—things with handles to turn or clockwork that you can wind up and set going.

Anyway, Grundy bought the trombone and brought it back to St. Jim's with him.

I think he must have tried a few experimental tootles with it on the way, because the next day there was a letter in the local paper from some old chap, who said it was disgraceful the way farmers allowed their cows to stop out in the rain and catch brouchitis, and that the Government ought to pass a law compelling them to provide proper shelter for their cattle, and that sort of thing.

Any old how, there's no doubt about the fact that Grundy started operations with his newly-acquired instrument of torture as soon as he'd reached St. Jim's, whatever he may have been doing before he got there. Of course, he hadn't any written music to play from, but as he couldn't have read it in any case that didn't make any difference worth mentioning.

By the way, I suppose you're all quite clear as to exactly what a trombone is? In case you aren't, I might explain: it's a sort of—well, what you might call a return-ticket kind of instrument. You know, there and back, or to and fro, if you prefer to put it that way. It gives you the impression that somebody started on the job of making a telescope and suddenly found he hadn't got any lenses to put into it, and didn't quite know what to do with it till he tried the idea of blowing down it, and discovered it made the sort of noise the cat died of, and—well, there you are, he'd invented a trombone by accident. And, in my opinion, it was a very bad accident indeed, and it's a pity he wasn't insured against it. When you see a brass band coming down the street the trombones are always in the front row. I suppose the rest of the band won't stand their being anywhere else; and I must say you can't blame them.

Fancy a cornet player, for instance, having to walk in front of a trombonist, trying to keep his attention on the job of churning out "The Maiden's Prayer," or "See the Conquering Hero Comes," knowing that at any old moment he's liable to be biffed in the back of the neck by a couple of yards or so of gaspipe that's taken the wrong turning. Of course, it wouldn't be so bad for the big drummer. With a whacking big stick in each list he could at least stand his ground.

Not that I've got any sympathy with cornet players. In my opinion they thumping well deserve the worst that comes to them, and I shouldn't weep salt tears if the whole gang of them got it in the neck with a trombone or a coke-hammer. Not after what happened in our study quite recently.

Goodness knows, Grundy was bad enough on his own, but he suddenly thought of something even worse than practising the trombone in the study. I dare say you can guess what it was from what I've said about cornet players.

He fixed up with Herries to play duets. We knew nothing of it until Herries walked in one evening, just as Wilkins and I were starting prep, with his cornet under his arm.

He hadn't been in the study two minutes, though, before we knew quite a lot about it—the dickens of a sight more than we wanted to, in fact.

Tanlarara! Briffiffiffum! Briffiffiffum!

They tuned-in, or tuned-up, or whatever they call it. I know what I call it, and it's nothing half as polite as either of those terms.

Wilkins and I, foreseeing what was going to take place, grabbed our books and skedaddled while our ear-drums were still more or less intact. We went straight to the Common-room, but even in there, with the door shut, it was impossible to escape the sounds.

And when Grundy and Herries really got going—well, there simply isn't a word in the English language to describe it.

I've heard of people murdering tunes, but this wasn't murder. It was slaughter, or else massacre. You've never heard anything like it in your life—at least, unless any of you happen to work in a boiler foundry.

Roootle! Toootle! Blare! Gerrumph! Bray! Boooooomph! Tataarara! Perooooom! Pom-pom-pom! Rrrrray!

More words can't convey the slightest impression of what it was like, so I might as well give up the attempt at once!

There was a continuous crashing and bumping noise that puzzled all of us at the time, but we afterwards discovered that this obligato of smashes and bangs was the sound of falling articles—ornaments, and so on—and the shattering of glass in picture-frames as the slide, or movable portion of Grundy's trombone went whizzing out in all directions, smashing everything that was in its path.

In the ordinary way the music—(?????) would not have been permitted to continue for more than a few minutes at the most; there's a limit to the amount of row we're allowed to kick up. But it so happened that on this particular evening most of the prefects and practically all of the masters were out of the House, so there was next to nobody to interfere with Grundy and Herries. The only break, in fact, in the place was Selby, the master of the Third, and it's not in his province to interfere with the Fourth and Shell unless the circumstances are very unusual. For the matter of that, they certainly were, and in due course Selby took upon himself to investigate.

He stalked up to the Shell corridor, and tracked the appalling row to its source—not a particularly difficult task, needless to say—and he arrived at our study just as Herries and Grundy were really warming-up to their work and getting in some of their choicest effects.

At the best of times Selby isn't particular about such little matters as knocking on doors before opening them, though it's only fair to him to say that on this occasion it would have been all the same if he'd knocked for an hour, unless he'd done it with a sledge-hammer. Anyway, he walked straight in just at the moment Grundy was trying to get a note that can only be obtained when the trombone is extended to its fullest extent. He didn't get the note; after all, because Selby's ear got in the way of the trombone as it was being pushed out quickly, with the result that, though the trombone didn't get properly pushed out, Selby did.

There was quite a lot of trouble about the affair, but the only part that concerned us was the confiscation of Grundy's trombone, which event has led to life being once more, if not exactly pleasant, at least fairly tolerable, in Study No. 3 of the Shell corridor.



ROUGH ON LEVISON!

(Continued from page 15.)

"Let's collar the blessed farmer, and make him chase his blessed bull away," suggested Gordon Gay.

"Where is he?" said Tom Merry, looking about him.

"I'm blessed if I can understand this, you chaps."

He puckered his brow in thought, and then his eyes gleamed.

"I've got it, you chaps!" he snapped. "It's a bit risky, but it's the only way I can see."

He whispered a moment to his chums, and then he shouted to the fellows on the stack.

"Hang on, you chaps!" he shouted. "I'll soon have you out of that."

"Buck up then, for goodness' sake!" called back Levison.

"That brute of a farmer will be here again in a minute. He means to keep us here all night."

"Does he?" snapped Tom. "We'll jolly well see about that."

Without hesitation, the junior captain of St. Jim's ran to the great iron gate, and, after a bit of struggling, he swung it wide open. Then he ran a few yards into the yard and started to yell and dance to attract the bull's attention.

He accomplished his desire quickly enough.

The bull wheeled slowly about, and stared at the dancing and yelling figure of the junior. Then, giving a bellow of fury, it lowered its head and came charging blindly across the stockyard.

"Now, you chaps!" panted Tom Merry. "Over that fence and into the other field for safety!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Here he comes! Quick, dear boys!"

The juniors obeyed their leader's orders. Tom Merry did not follow for a moment. He stood his ground until the bull was several yards away, and then he turned and bolted back through the gateway.

It was not a task for weak nerves; but Tom Merry had strong nerves and tons of pluck.

Outside the gateway, he twisted, and ran along the wall. Then, waiting until the maddened animal was well inside the field, he leaped over the low wall back into the stockyard again.

Like lightning, he dashed to the iron gate, and rushed it to. As it clanged into place, he slipped the bolt, and made it secure.

He was not a moment too soon, for the bull had wheeled, as if guessing the trick, and crashed against the fastened gate, even as Tom secured it.

Crash!

The gate shook mightily under the terrific impact. But it was strong, and it was built firmly into the stone wall, and the enraged animal backed away again, fairly bellowing with rage and pain.

Tom Merry laughed almost in the animal's face. Then he turned and yelled to those on the stack:

"Come on, now's your chance!" he roared. "Quick!"

A hearty cheer had greeted Tom Merry's plucky action, and now the delighted fags, and Levison major swarmed down from the stack, and raced for a second gate in the corner of the stockyard, where the wall joined the out-buildings.

Tom Merry joined them as they swarmed through it. They found Blake and the others waiting there, having climbed the fence that separated the two fields.

"Safe enough now!" grinned Tom Merry, glowing with satisfaction. "Hallo! Look out! Here's the farmer!"

As Tom Merry spoke he spotted Farmer Hackett, his face red with rage, and a big whip in his hands, rushing round the back of the farm-buildings. Behind the farmer were two scared-looking farm-hands.

"Now for it!" grinned Wally D'Arcy, his eyes sparkling.

"Let's down 'em and duck 'em in the duckpond there!"

"You young rascal!" snapped Tom Merry. "Haven't you had enough blessed trouble? Run for it! Come on!"

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"Yass, wathah, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry led the way with a rush, and his chums followed promptly. And Wally & Co. deemed it wiser to do likewise then. Farmer Hackett looked positively dangerous, and the fags did not want to tackle the three men alone by any means.

The whole crowd of them streamed across the field, running as hard as they could pelt.

"You young villains!" roared the enraged farmer. "Come back!"

It was a little too much to expect of the juniors in the circumstances, and they did not "come back." In the next field they glimpsed the disappointed bull rampaging about, but they didn't bother about him either.

Not until three fields had been crossed did the juniors stop running, and then Tom Merry glanced back and gave the word.

"They've given it up!" he panted. "All serene now, chaps! By Jingo, we're well out of that!"

"Yass, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused Wally & Co. "What a screaming lark!"

But Tom Merry did not laugh; he did not look upon it as a lark at all. His face was grim.

"There'll be trouble over this!" he said. "What happened, Levison?"

In low tones Levison related what had taken place.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tom Merry. "Wally, you young idiot, you'll get it in the neck for this!"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "We've squared matters with Jim Hackett, haven't we?"

Tom Merry was forced to agree to that, and a moment later the three Grammarians halted on reaching Rylecombe Lane.

"Here's where we part, you chaps," grinned Gordon Gay. "Glad to have been of service to you. Count us in over this feud with those rotters. Anyway, we'll keep it now—nearly our lock-up time!"

"And ours!" snapped Tom Merry, looking at his watch, in alarm. "Cheerio, you chaps!"

The Grammarians trotted away up Rylecombe Lane, and the St. Jim's crowd hurried away at a trot towards St. Jim's.

Only the Third-Formers, however, were grinning cheerfully and full of triumph. Trouble or no trouble, they had done what they had set out to do—they had avenged their chum and upheld the honour of the fags, and they were satisfied.

But the face of Ernest Levison was dark as they hurried back to St. Jim's. The fags felt they had "squared" matters, but he did not—far from it. He felt he had been robbed of his vengeance, and his mind was full of bitter fury.

CHAPTER 7.

Face to Face!

"READY, Levison?"

Tom Merry asked the question as he looked into Study No. 9 the following day after dinner. Tom Merry was in running kit, as were Levison and Sidney Clive, who were in the study. Levison major was just putting the finishing touches to a pair of running-shoes. It was a half-holiday—a glorious spring afternoon—and the St. Jim's juniors were preparing for the cross country run.

Levison looked up as Tom Merry spoke.

"Nearly ready, Merry," he said quietly. "I've only just got my shoes from the village. But—but I say, I—I wish you hadn't selected me as one of the hares, Merry."

"Oh!" exclaimed the leader of the Shelf, in surprise. "I thought you'd be jolly glad, old chap! Why—"

"I don't feel quite up to doing much this afternoon," said Levison, flushing slightly. "Look here, I suppose it's too late to back out now?"

"Well, no," said Tom Merry, frowning. "I can easily shove someone else in—D'Arcy, perhaps. He's a good man. If you're really not keen—"

"I'm not," said Levison. "I'll follow with the pack, of course."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, though he looked rather curiously at Levison. "I'll shove Gussy in."

He nodded and hurried away. Sidney Clive looked rather grimly at his chum. The story of the exciting happenings at the farm had spread among the juniors, and Clive had heard the story at first hand from his chum.

Like the rest of the Lower School, he expected serious trouble to result therefrom. In his bitter feud with St. Jim's the farmer never lost an opportunity of complaining—as Lowther claimed, a fellow couldn't look across one of his fields without being reported for it! And it had been generally expected that Farmer Hackett would come up to the school in a raging temper.

But he had not done so. As far as the juniors knew, he

had not even complained by letter. The evening and the Wednesday morning had passed without the expected trouble materialising.

It was a surprise—a great surprise and relief—to the juniors concerned. But by now they had almost forgotten the affair—certainly the careless, happy-go-lucky fags had done so.

But Sidney Clive knew perfectly well that Ernest Levison had by no means forgotten—or forgiven. He had been strangely moody and quiet ever since the previous evening. And Sidney fancied he knew the reason.

"Look here, old man," he said grimly, "this won't do, you know!"

"What won't?"

"You know what. You're still brooding over that brute Jim Hackett, old chap."

"Well, what if I am?"

"I fancy I know why you want to be in the pack this afternoon, instead of being a hare," said Sidney grimly. "You think you'll have a better opportunity of scouting round that blessed farm. You mean to find Jim Hackett this afternoon. Isn't that so?"

"I don't see why I should deny it," said Levison.

"I thought it was that. Don't be an ass, old man! Let the whole affair drop. Those fags paid him out last night, didn't they? What's the good of looking for more trouble?"

Levison looked up at his chum. His face was dark and ugly.

"This is my affair, Clive," he said, through his teeth. "I've said I'm going to pay that cad out myself, and I mean to keep my word. I'm going to lick him as he licked my young brother! That's not all, though. I've told you I believe that cad Lacy is at the bottom of it!"

"Yes, but—"

"I'm going to prove it—I'm going to make that brute own up to the truth," said Levison doggedly. "I'm going to wring it out of him, Clive."

"He's a rough handful, Ernest," said Clive hesitatingly. "Are you sure you're up to him?"

"Leave that to me, Clive!" snapped Levison. "Come on, let's get out now. It's nearly three."

Clive said no more then. But he mentally decided to stick close to his chum that afternoon as they made their way out of doors.

A big crowd of juniors in running attire were thronged just outside the gates. Kildare, the skipper of St. Jim's, was there, with a watch in his hand.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Harry Noble were the hares, and they looked fit and business-like, with their bags of torn paper over their shoulders.

"Just in time," said Sidney Clive.

The juniors joined the crowd of Shell and Fourth outside the gates. And a few minutes later D'Arcy and Noble swung away at a trot as the notes of three boomed from the school clock-tower.

The pack were soon shepherded into order by Tom Merry amid much laughter and larking. But after ten minutes' waiting Kildare gave the word, and, to the accompaniment of a terrific blast on Blake's bugle, the pack set off.

Levison major—purposely, it seemed to his chums—hung behind at the start and was among the very last to get going.

"Come on, you cripple!" said Sidney Clive cheerily. "We don't want to be also-rans!"

Levison said nothing, nor did he attempt to make up any lost ground. And Clive frowned and dropped back again by his chum's side.

For five minutes they ran on without exchanging a word. The trail was leading away from Rylcombe, and towards the heath. It was also leading well away from Hackett's farm, and Clive was scarcely surprised when his chum suddenly pulled up.

They were just entering Rylcombe Woods at the time, and they were still among the stragglers.

"I'm dropping out now, Clive," said Levison. "You know why?"

"You mean to hang round that blessed farm?"

"That's it. You go ahead, Clive. I don't want you, and I don't see why you should risk trouble."

"If you go, I go," said Clive, with a faint grin. "I'm not leaving you to the tender mercies of that brute, old man."

"Don't talk rot! I can manage him, I tell you. You shove on!"

"I'm coming with you, old chap!"

"Please yourself, then!" said Levison curtly.

And he swung round and emerged out into the spring sunshine again. Clive promptly followed. The last of the stragglers had passed them by this, and they were alone.

Levison turned, and, skirting the woods, he made a bee-line for the distant buildings of Hackett's farm. They ran on together in silence.

Quite suddenly Sidney Clive stopped and pointed across the fields.

"Look!" he said, in surprise. "Are they some of our chaps? On old Hackett's land, too?"

Levison followed the direction in which his chum indicated, and his eyes gleamed with interest. Two fields away a group of figures—obviously in Etons—was slouching along the inside of a high hedge.

As Levison looked the figures vanished inside a small, tumble-down, wooden barn at the end of the field.

"Looked to me like Grammarians," he muttered.

"I fancy I spotted Racke," said Clive. "Now what are the beggars up to, I wonder? If Hackett catches 'em—"

"Hackett won't touch 'em, I fancy," sniffed Levison, his lips setting. "It was Lacy's lot—I'm certain. And he's thick with Jim Hackett."

"But—"

"I see the game," said Levison. "They're up to their blagging games again, of course—cards and smokes in that barn. Come on. I bet that brute, Jim Hackett's, in with them."

"Look here, old man—"

Clive was starting a last appeal to his chum to drop his idea, but Levison was already running.

They reached the far hedge, and as they did so and squeezed through, Levison almost ran full-tilt into a burly form that had just jumped down into the same field from behind a thick hedge on their left.

It was Jim Hackett. As Levison sighted him he gave a growl of satisfaction. Before the startled farmer's son could even move, the junior slapped him hard across the face with his flat hand.

"Now, Jim Hackett!" he hissed, through set teeth. "We can settle our little matter properly now, without interference from anyone! Put up your dashed fists, you cad!"

CHAPTER 8.

More Trouble!

WITH the mark of Levison's blow showing on his rough, weather-tanned face, Jim Hackett started back with a savage exclamation.

He had been obviously making for the barn, and the sight of Levison and Clive there at that moment must have startled him. But he quickly recovered, and his features went red and congested with sudden rage.

"You—you little whelp!" he yelled furiously. "Hit me, would you? Why, I'll thundering well eat you for that! I'll—I'll—"

He started as if to throw himself at the junior, and then he seemed to see Sidney Clive closing up, and he jumped back.

"Yes, come on!" snapped Levison. "I'm waiting for you to eat me, as you call it, Hackett!"

The youth gave a snarl, his eyes glinting as he looked from one to the other of the juniors.

"Yaw!" he sneered. "Two of you—hey? You wants me to tackle you both—not much! One at a time, and by crimes I'll eat you!"

"You needn't worry about that," said Levison. "My friend's here to see fair play—not to fight. That's going to be my job only. He won't chip in, I'll promise you."

"Not unless you start any foul games," put in Sidney Clive quietly.

He realised that his chum would never be turned from his intention now, and saw nothing for it but a fight.

But his brow wore a worried look. Jim Hackett was nearer eighteen than seventeen, and he was as strong as a full-grown man almost.

Sidney Clive felt that his chum could scarcely hope to win—good boxer as he undoubtedly was.

But Levison did not seem to doubt his ability to win for a moment. He looked grim and confident.

"Come on," he taunted. "I'm waiting. If you've got a

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S CROSS WORD PUZZLE!

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watch with you, my friend can call the rounds. You can rely—"

"Rounds!" grunted Jim Hackett, wrenching off his coat. "We can settle this without no rounds. You've asked for it, and now you're going to get it."

And with that the youth made a sudden rush, and his right took Levison full in the face. It was as powerful a blow as it was unexpected, and Levison went down with a crash.

But he was up again in a flash, and his eyes were gleaming with determination as he met Hackett's second rush with a neat left under the chin that brought his enemy's head up with a jerk, and must have rattled every tooth in the lout's head.

The next instant they were fighting hammer and tongs.

Well-built and muscular as he was, Ernest Levison looked a child against his bigger antagonist. Big-bodied and powerfully limbed, the farmer's son looked a giant against the slim youngster in his thin running-attire.

With bitter enmity and savage rage in his glinting eyes, the big fellow made the most of his natural advantages now, forcing the youngster back by sheer weight.

But though he gave ground slowly, Levison kept his head, and contented himself with defence, knowing that his opponent's furious attack could not last for ever.

But as it was, he suffered severely, and twice in as many minutes, heavy punches from Hackett's huge fists sent him down.

Sidney Clive watched in some apprehension. He knew that any one of those hefty blows, getting well home, might easily finish the fight.

But Levison was not asleep, and he saw to it that Jim Hackett did not do any serious damage. He had seen already that the farmer's son knew little or nothing of boxing, and was relying solely on his strength and weight.

Again and again he rushed in, impatient to "mix" it, but Levison was always well inside the "mix," his left working with stinging upper-cuts.

Hackett's superior weight, oddly enough, both helped and hindered him. Rapid footwork was demanded in the rough, spongy ground, and being far more nimble on his "pins," the St. Jim's junior had a distinct advantage here.

Three times in swift succession the farmer's son caught Levison napping with stiff punches to the body that severely punished the junior, but Levison never lost his self-control, and he fought on steadily, making every use of wind and limb. He was cool as an iceberg, and his guard was rarely at fault.

But the pace was far too hot to last for long. Following a hurricane exchange of blows, the two broke away, both of them breathless and panting. But though obviously the more exhausted of the two, Jim Hackett gave a hoarse, panting growl, and returned to the attack with scarcely a pause. The stout resistance he was meeting with had astonished and exasperated him. His threat to "eat" his younger antagonist was not proving so easy to bring off.

A stinging right-hander had caught the big fellow full on the nose, and nothing is more painful. It seemed to upset his fighting completely—in other words he lost his temper.

He came on like a cyclone with a swinging right and left. But Levison remained cool and collected. With a dazzling display of twinkling footwork and side-stepping, he eluded the bigger fellow like a will-o'-the-wisp. Then he finished up with a wicked left-hook that spun and dazed the furious farmer's son.

The big fellow was visibly tiring now, and his breath was coming in great, audible gasps, painful to hear. It was the beginning of the end for him. The sheer fury of his mad attacks had spent and exhausted him—as Levison knew they would. The end of a round might have saved him just then, but his own desire to have a straight, non-stop fight, denied him that, and he suffered accordingly.

Sidney Clive was watching with gleaming eyes now. His fears had vanished by this. He saw that, barring accidents, the end was a foregone conclusion.

And he was right. Following that wicked punch, Levison sailed in in fine style, and in deadly earnest. Jim Hackett, vainly striving to cover himself before a rain of blows to face, ribs, and head, registered with deadly force, retreated before the damaging whirlwind.

Then Levison let him have another of his wicked left hooks. It smacked the bewildered Hackett clean under the chin, and he went crashing down.

It was the first time the farmer's son had actually gone down during the fight, but he was down now, and he stayed down.

With heaving chest and heated, bruised features, Ernest Levison waited. But his enemy failed to rise. He lay, leaning dazedly on one elbow, almost weeping with rage and deep mortification.

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"All over!" said Sidney Clive quietly. "Come on, Ernest; let's get out of this now!"

Ernest Levison shook his head. His badly marked face was set hard.

"I've not finished with this merchant yet!" he grunted. "Have you had enough, Jim Hackett?"

Jim Hackett nodded, and glowered up savagely at his victorious enemy.

"Yes, hang you!" he panted thickly. "Get away! Clear out, hang you!"

"I'm not going yet," said Levison. "You know why I wanted to lick you, Hackett? It was because of what you did to my young brother yesterday, chiefly. But there's another reason. It was necessary for a St. Jim's fellow to give you a sound hiding. It'll perhaps teach you to keep your bullying paws off St. Jim's fellows in future. If you ever do again, Hackett, I'll seek you out and give you the same again. Got that?"

Jim Hackett scowled up, and said nothing.

"And now there's something else," said Levison, grimly. "You didn't do that to my brother yesterday on your own account. You've licked and bullied St. Jim's kids before, I know. But you've never gone so far as that. Who put you up to doing it?"

Hackett did not answer.

"I know somebody did!" snapped Levison. "And I fancy I can guess who it was. I mean to know for certain, though. Who was it, Hackett?"

"Find out, hang you!" hissed the farmer's son. "By crimes I'll make you pay for this!"

Levison walked swiftly to the hedge and tore away a stout switch. He returned to the prostrate bully and stood over him.

"Now," he snapped, his eyes gleaming, "I'll give you one more chance to tell me, Hackett! If you don't tell me within a minute who put you up to thrashing my minor, I'll thrash you just as you thrashed that poor youngster! Out with it!"

"Leave me alone!" panted the beaten youth, almost in a whine. "Haven't you given me enough? I'm tellin' you nothin', hang you!"

"Out with it!" hissed Levison.

He raised the switch. Sidney Clive was eyeing him curiously and uneasily. He did not know what to make of his chum in his present black mood.

"Levison," he began, "let the rotter go now! You've licked him—"

"Shut up, Clive!" snapped Levison bitterly. "What about last night? Did he have any mercy on Franky? Now, you howling cad—"

He seemed about to bring the switch down, and as Jim Hackett glimpsed the determined eyes of his enemy his nerve broke down completely.

"All right!" he muttered desperately. "I'll tell you, hang you! I never intended to hurt the kid so much. I swear that! But he kicked me. He—"

"Who was it?" grunted Levison.

"It—it was one of them Grammar School chaps—Lacy. 'is name is. He put me up to doin' it. He was hidin' behind the bushes with 'is pals when I did it. He'd got some grudge agen the kid, he said."

Levison nodded, and his eyes glittered.

"So it was Lacy, then?" he breathed.

"Yes. I would never 'ave done it but for him!" muttered the fallen bully, glancing up apprehensively at Levison.

"Now perhaps you'll—"

"That's good enough!" snapped the junior. "I'll come now, Clive—"

He broke off short, struck by a strange, triumphant gleam that had suddenly appeared in Jim Hackett's eyes. And at that moment Sidney Clive gave an alarmed gasp.

"Look out!" he cried. "Run for it, Ernest!"

Even as Clive gave the urgent warning, the sound of thudding feet caught Levison's ears, and he glanced quickly towards the gap in the hedge.

Scarcely a dozen yards away, approaching the gap quickly, was Farmer Hackett, and behind the farmer showed the untidy figure of a farm-hand.

Whether the farmer had seen the fight from afar, and was hurrying hot-foot to the spot, the juniors did not know, nor did they stay to find out.

"Run for it!" cried Clive, hesitating a second. "Come on!"

He started off with a rush. Levison gasped, and turned to follow. But as he did so Jim Hackett leaped to his feet with surprising agility.

"No, you don't!" he snarled, making a grab at Levison. "I've got you!"

But the farmer's son spoke too soon. As his grasp closed on Levison's thin vest, the junior bit out straight from the shoulder, and at the same moment he wrenched himself free with a force that tore his vest almost from his back.

At the same moment the farm-hand sprang through the gap, and, finding his retreat cut off, Levison wheeled and



"Good heavens!" cried Wally D'Arcy, aghast. "Levison, you fool, get back!" But Frank Levison was already beyond recall, sliding down the mass of rubble, feet foremost, his face set and determined. Before the staring eyes of his chums he vanished over the brink of the chasm, and went hurtling downwards to the rescue of the drowning Lacy. (See page 24.)

dashed away in the opposite direction to which his chum had gone.

Clive had reached the far end of the field before he became aware that his chum was not following him, and he turned then to see Levison just vanishing through the hedge at the top of the field. He saw also that the two Hacketts and the farm-hand had followed Levison, but had now given up and were turning back.

"Oh, good!" panted Clive. "He's safe enough now!"

And with that Sidney Clive turned his face towards St. Jim's. He knew that it was useless now to follow the pack, and, giving up all idea of the paper-chase, he made at a brisk trot for Rylcombe Lane, feeling certain that his chum, whose white form had vanished from sight, would also make for home.

CHAPTER 9.

Out of the Frying-pan—

AS he slipped through the hedge at the top of the field Ernest Levison saw with some relief that his pursuers had given up the chase and were turning back.

"Oh, good!" panted the junior.

He stood watching the distant figures for a moment or two, and then he flung himself down in the grass, still keeping his enemies under observance through a gap in the hedge.

Until now he had kept himself going by sheer excitement and dogged will-power, but now he felt the full force of the ordeal he had just passed through. The fight had been a gruelling one on both sides, and besides being utterly spent and exhausted, the junior was aching in every limb and from head to foot. His body felt as if it had been pounded by a heavy hammer, and his face felt puffed and sore all over.

With heaving chest and panting breath, he rested on his elbow, staring back across the field for fully five minutes, and then, as he saw his enemies move away into the next field, he got up stiffly and looked about him.

To his surprise, he found himself in the field where the barn stood, and as he sighted it, the junior's eyes burned fiercely. Most fellows, after all that had happened, would have been contented to allow matters to remain as they were, but Levison was not made that way.

Always a fellow with strong characteristics—hard and unbending—Ernest Levison had no thought now of swerving from the task he had set himself. He had vowed to "square" matters with Jim Hackett—and whoever had been behind that youth—and now he knew the culprit, he was doggedly determined to go through with it. In the old days, when Levison major had been a "black sheep," he had been known as a "hard case." And though he had long ago given up crooked ways, and was now one of the best of fellows, he was still a "hard case" in more ways than one. No bloodhound that puts its nose to the trail was as ruthless and unyielding as Ernest Levison was when following up a trail he had set himself.

It was Lacy who had put Jim Hackett up to thrashing his minor—Lacy, the fellow who, since Levison had turned over a new leaf, had, like Aubrey Racke of St. Jim's, never lost an opportunity of sneering at him and of making things unpleasant for him.

And he was, the junior strongly suspected, in that barn now, spending the afternoon as was his wont in card-playing and smoking.

Tired and aching and exhausted as he was, the junior felt an overmastering desire to "have it out" with Lacy there and then. That Lacy's pals would be with him, and possibly Racke & Co. of St. Jim's, did not trouble Levison in the slightest.

Odds or no odds, he meant to settle with Lacy without delay, and, making up his mind instantly, the junior started across the field, careless of whether he was seen coming or not.

As he came to within a few yards of the barn he fancied

he heard an alarmed cry from within, and he ran forward quickly. He reached the door and tore it open.

Then he stood in the doorway, staring into the gloomy interior of the barn with eyes full of sudden alarm and amazement.

The barn was empty, but it reeked of tobacco smoke. On a box in the centre of the barn lay a few scattered playing-cards, also a few bottles of mineral waters, and a paper bag or two, apparently containing "grub." While at the back of the barn showed daylight, where two of the tarred planks of the shed wall had been wrenched aside, obviously a specially arranged exit used by the shady gang of secret "beggars."

All this Levison took in in one swift glance. But he saw something else at the same time—something which brought the cry of alarm to his lips.

In one corner of the wooden barn a heap of dirty straw was blazing furiously, flames licking up the side of the building.

"Great Scott!" gasped Levison.

In a flash the keen-witted junior realised what had happened. Lacy & Co.—if it was Lacy & Co.—had seen him coming, and had slipped away by their emergency exit, not daring to allow him to see them. And, in his hasty departure, one of them obviously had thrown away a cigarette-end, and had set the heap of straw alight.

That much seemed clear to Ernest Levison, though he did not ponder over the theory for long. Already the wooden wall, soaked with innumerable coatings of tar, was blazing and crackling madly. The whole shed was full with choking, swirling smoke.

Snatching up a rotting sack that lay to hand, the junior first closed the door to stop the draught, and then he rushed to the fire and started a mad attempt to beat out the flames.

It was a hopeless, futile task, as Levison soon realised. But he stuck it grimly, though his eyes were smarting and burning, and he was coughing violently as the hot smoke reached his lungs. That the barn was the property of an enemy did not even occur to the junior. It seemed to him the right thing to do, and he did it with all his might.

But he was forced to stop after a few sultry seconds. Nothing on earth could save the building now, he realised. Rushing to the door, he wrenched it open again and dashed out—full into the arms of Farmer Hackett.

"Collar the young villain!" roared the farmer, in a voice of hoarse rage. "By hokey, don't let 'im get away!"

As he shouted Farmer Hackett grabbed at the startled, gasping junior, and held him in a grip of iron.

"Take the young villain!" roared the farmer, as the farm-hand, followed by Hackett junior, came running up. "Don't let him get away on your life!"

The farmhand grabbed hold of the junior grimly, and as he did so Farmer Hackett dashed into the burning barn.

He was only in a couple of seconds, and when he dashed out again his face was crimson with rage.

"No good. Nothin' on earth can save the show!" he articulated, his face fairly swelling with indignant wrath. "By hokey, that there kid'll pay for this!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Levison jumped as the purport of the angry farmer's words came home to him. He turned and stared in sheer astonishment at the angry man.

"You—you think I set that place on fire?" he stammered, aghast.

"Oh, no, not at all!" snarled the infuriated farmer, with bitter sarcasm. "You didn't do it. Oh, no! It set itself on fire. You didn't come 'ere to do it, did you? We didn't see from that field over there, either. We didn't see you enter the barn, and we didn't wonder what you was up to, and come arter you to see, did we? Oh, no, you didn't do it, my lad!"

Ernest Levison caught his breath; his face paled a trifle. He saw in a flash that he was in rather an awkward position.

He looked about him helplessly, and his teeth set as he caught Jim Hackett's face set in a malicious grin, his eyes gleaming with sudden triumph.

"Don't—don't talk rot!" he cried, hardly knowing what he said in his astonishment at the charge. "Of course I didn't do it. I saw some fellows come here some time ago, and I came to see what they were up to."

Farmer Hackett did not deign to answer his denial.

"Take the young 'ound up to the farm!" he snapped. "Here's Joe coming along. We'll see to this. Not that anything can be done now. The old show's done for, that's certain."

The farmhand nodded, and, taking a firmer grip on the junior's bare arm, he nodded towards the distant farm.

"Come on, kid!" he said grimly. "Get a move on!"

And Levison, scarcely knowing whether he was on his head or his heels yet, "got a move on." Jim Hackett took his other arm with unconcealed glee, and, realising it was hopeless to struggle, the junior went, leaving the farmer standing with grim features, watching the destruction of his barn, which was now nothing but a blazing inferno. And five minutes later the junior was a prisoner behind locked doors at Hackett's farm.

CHAPTER 10.

Up Against It!

FOR nearly half an hour Ernest Levison was a prisoner in one of the out-buildings at the farm, and during that time he had plenty of opportunity to grasp his position, and the seriousness of it.

For it certainly was serious enough. He was charged with having set fire to the barn, charged with arson, and he had no means whatever of proving his innocence.

He had been seen entering the barn before the fire had been seen, and he had been seen to emerge when the place was well alight. And the farmer was his enemy. The motive was there. Levison realised that well enough, and a growing fear began to take possession of him, cool and iron-nerved as he was.

Supposing the enraged farmer made a police-court matter of it? He saw plainly that Farmer Hackett honestly believed he had committed the deed. He saw plainly, also, that, under the circumstances, it was the most likely thing the farmer, in his bitter hatred of St. Jim's, would do.

Certainly he could tell why he entered the barn, could tell of the group of juniors he had seen entering it earlier on, and of the cigarette-ends and other signs they had left behind them.

But the farmer was not likely to believe him. In his blind dash into the barn, Farmer Hackett could not possibly have seen anything through the swirling, blinding smoke.

He could prove nothing. There was only his bare word to support his story.

It was almost a relief to Levison when the door of his prison opened at last. Outside stood Farmer Hackett, his son, and the two farmhands. Any hopes of escaping the junior had entertained vanished at sight of them.

"Come on, outer that!" grunted the farmer. "See he don't get a chance to escape!"

Levison emerged into the spring sunshine, his face not quite so calm and collected as it usually was. He almost expected to see the burly, ominous form of Police-constable Crump waiting there for him.

But the familiar blue-uniformed form was not in sight. In the stackyard stood a pony and trap, however, and the farmer pointed grimly to it.

"In you gets!" he snapped.

"Look here!" said Levison desperately. "You're making a fearful mistake, Farmer Hackett. I swear I did not fire the barn. If you had looked about inside you'd have seen evidence that someone else—"

"Get in that trap!" snarled the farmer. "I ain't listenin' to no more lies from you. You were caught in the act, lad."

"But I tell you—"

"Get in!" roared the angry man, stepping towards the junior and brandishing a threatening whip.

Levison groaned and got in, realising the hopelessness of trying to clear himself then. The farmer climbed in and sat by his side. His son, his bruised face looking fiendish with unholy glee, climbed up into the back seat. There was to be no escape for Levison.

"Kim up!"

Farmer Hackett whipped up the pony, and the trap rattled out of the stackyard. A moment later it was bounding and lurching over a rough cart-track. Reaching Rylcombe Lane, the trap turned to the right towards St. Jim's.

"Oh, thank goodness!" breathed the junior to himself. His fear that the farmer was taking him to the police-station at Wayland was groundless then. Levison could have almost shouted with relief. Whether proved guilty or not, he knew he would get justice from Dr. Holmes.

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The trap bowled on, passing more than one tired junior in running attire, just returning home. Near the gates they passed Tom Merry, Blake, and Lowther together, and they stared at Levison in the trap in blank amazement.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Tom Merry in alarm. "That blessed farmer's got Levison. Oh, my hat! I suppose the ass has been to the farm kicking up trouble again."

"Well, the silly idiot!" gasped Blake.

"Perhaps he's met with an accident," suggested Lowther. "And dear old Hackett's doing the good Samaritan stunt."

"That's likely—I don't think!" sniffed Blake. "Come on!"

Anxious to learn what was amiss, the juniors put on speed, tired as they were. But when they reached the School House they learned that the farmer and Levison were already with the Head. For, having met Mr. Railton in the quad, he had heard the charge in startled amazement, and he had taken them straight away to the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes looked none too pleased as he recognised Farmer Hackett, but his face became thunderous as Mr. Railton briefly related the charge.

"What?" he exclaimed, in tones of great alarm. "Do you actually mean to charge this boy with having fired your barn, Farmer Hackett?"

The farmer twirled his hat in his fingers and grunted. Before the quiet, commanding personality of the Head of St. Jim's, some of the burly farmer's aggressive bluster left him.

"That I does!" he grunted. "He was caught by me myself in the very act. My son and one o' my farm-hands, we met him just as he was rushin' away, with the barn blazing behind him. And let me tell you this, Mister—unless I gets satisfaction, I'm goin' to make a police matter of it! Many a man would have done so already!"

The Head eyed him steadily.

"There is no occasion for threats, Farmer Hackett," he said tartly. "And while on the subject of the law, may I remind you of the contents of the letter I sent to you last evening. I have not yet made up my mind whether I shall bring a charge of assault against your son for the brutal and unprovoked attack he made upon one of my pupils last evening."

The farmer changed colour, and Levison understood then why he had not reported them yet over the trouble at the farm.

"That's all bunkum!" he blustered. "It ain't nothing to what your confounded kids have done! I s'pose you don't know as they came to my farm last night and made trouble all round! This here feller and some other kids! They locked me in me own shed, and arter pelting my son Jim with rubbish they shoved him in a tub of pigwash!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head, his brow growing grimmer. "I was certainly not aware of that."

"And that ain't all, neither," went on Farmer Hackett, his voice rising. "This here feller attacked my son just before the fire—hammered him something cruel! Then you talks about my son assauldin' one of your kids, hey?" ended the farmer, with a sneer.

Dr. Holmes bit his lip. He wasn't used to being spoken to in such a manner. He controlled his rising anger with an effort, and turned to Levison.

"You went to that farm yesterday, Levison?" he demanded ominously.

"Yes, sir."

"Although you are aware that the farm and vicinity is strictly out of bounds."

"Y-yes, sir."

"And you went again this afternoon?"

"I trespassed in Farmer Hackett's fields, sir," said Levison.

"Why?"

"I was determined to settle with Jim Hackett, sir—to thrash him as he thrashed my young brother yesterday," said Levison doggedly. "I met him, and we fought, and I thrashed him."

"Very well," said the Head, pursing his lips. "I can quite understand your feelings in regard to that brutal assault on your brother, Levison. You should not, however, have taken the law into your own hands, my boy. However, I wish to deal now with the more serious matter of the fire. Do you admit having fired the barn, Levison?"

"No, sir," said Levison quietly. "I certainly did not. When I entered the place I found it already burning."

"Why did you enter the place at all, Levison?"

Ernest Levison hesitated. It had been Lacy & Co., and Racke & Co. who had entered the barn, he was practically certain. But he had no proof, nor was he absolutely certain, and he was the last fellow to bring a charge without the proof to support it.

"I am waiting!" said the Head ominously.

"Look at him!" snorted Farmer Hackett. "He can't deny it, the young hound!"

"Farmer Hackett," cried Dr. Holmes angrily, "kindly refrain from using such expressions to boys of mine! And kindly allow me to deal with this matter."

The farmer subsided with a grunt.

"I can deny it, sir," said Levison, making up his mind at last. "I'll explain why I visited the barn, sir. When I knew Jim Hackett had thrashed my brother, I had good reason to believe that someone else was behind him—someone who had a grudge against my brother had paid him to do it."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Head grimly. "Go on."

"I suspected a certain fellow, sir—a fellow not belonging to this school. And when I licked Jim Hackett I forced him to own up. I was right. He gave me the chap's name."

Levison paused, and then he went on clearly:

"Just as he'd told me, his father and a farm-hand came running up, and I bolted. I stopped running in the next field, which was the one in which the barn stood. I remembered then, that, just before the fight, I'd seen some fellows enter the barn from a distance. I didn't recognise them, but I believed the fellow Hackett had named was amongst them. I was feeling furious, and I went to the barn, meaning to settle accounts with the chap there and then."

Levison paused again.

"I entered the barn to find nobody inside," he said grimly. "But I knew they'd seen me coming, and bolted. Some boards at the back were pulled aside, showing how they'd gone. And I found some old straw in one corner burning furiously. I tried my best to put it out, but the fire had got too good a hold. I then rushed out, and it was just then that Farmer Hackett caught me."

Levison stopped, and the Head exchanged a glance with Mr. Railton.

"Have you any idea, Levison, what the—the persons you mention were doing in the barn?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Levison, after a pause. "There was plenty of evidence to show that. I saw playing-cards scattered about, and I saw cigarette ends and matches. One of them must have flung away a cigarette end when he bolted, and it set fire to the straw."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Head. "I—I see, Levison."

He did see, as did Mr. Railton then. The junior's story was clear enough, and the earnest, sincere way in which he told it carried conviction to both Dr. Holmes and the Housemaster.

But it was not so with Farmer Hackett.

He glowered at the junior, his red face growing congested and furious as he realised that both masters were inclined to believe Levison's story.

"Bunkum!" he almost shouted. "It's all lies and bunkum! He did it—did it to pay us out, the little rat! I caught the scoundrel in the act! I tell you I ain't goin' to swallow that blamed yarn if you are, sir!"

The Head ignored the angry farmer's outburst. He was about to speak to Levison, when a knock came at the door. In response to the Head's invitation, a junior entered.

It was Sidney Clive. His manner was hesitating and uncertain.

The head stared at him rather impatiently.

"Well, Clive?" he snapped. "What is it? I am—"

"It—it's rather important, sir," stammered Clive, glancing at Levison as if seeking inspiration. "I've just heard about Levison—that he's charged with having caused that fire at the farm."

"Oh, indeed! And who told you, Clive?"

"Farmer Hackett's son has just told some fellows at the gate, sir," said Clive.

"Do you know anything about the matter, Clive?"

"I was with Levison this afternoon, sir—at least, part of the time. And I'm certain Levison couldn't have done it."

"Why are you certain?"

"Because—because— Well," stammered Clive, "I know Levison wouldn't do a thing like that, sir."

"Is that all you have come to tell me, Clive?" said the Head tartly.

"Oh—oh n'y, sir," stammered Clive, wondering how much Levison had told. "I don't know if Levison told you, sir, but he wasn't the only fellow who entered the barn this afternoon. We both saw some fellows going there—fellows I believe were more likely to do it than Levison."

"When did you leave Levison, Clive?"

"After—after—"

"It was just after the fight, when Farmer Hackett came

along, sir," said Levison, helping his chum out. "He ran one way, and I ran another."

"Oh, I see!"

The Head looked again at Mr. Railton. Some of the grinnings left his face.

"You have not spoken to Levison since leaving him at that time?" he asked.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Very good! I am glad you came to tell me this, Clive," said the Head, quite kindly. "It proves part of Levison's story, at all events. I wish you now to tell me, if you can, who the boys were you saw entering that barn?"

There was a silence.

"You do not know?"

"I only suspect, sir," said Clive quietly. "We could not see them clearly, and it wouldn't be fair to mention the names of fellows we only suspect."

"Quite so. Were they boys whom you would suspect of engaging in such—such questionable pursuits?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Have you anything further to tell me, Levison, which will help to prove your innocence of this charge?"

"Nothing, sir—excepting that I was dressed as I am now. It isn't likely I'd carry matches or anything like that about with me in running things, sir."

"Very well. For the present, both you and Clive may go. I will send for you later, when I have discussed this matter with Mr. Railton. I do not think—"

The Head was interrupted. For the last few minutes Farmer Hackett had listened, almost exploding with suppressed anger. But now he could contain his wrath no longer. He stooped over the desk, and brought his fist down upon it.

"Dr. Holmes!" he choked. "Am I to understand that you have swallowed the lies and stuff these lads have told you?"

"I have not yet arrived at any definite decision, if that is what you wish to know, Farmer Hackett!" snapped the Head icily. "As yet, however, I see no reason whatever to doubt the story told by these boys."

The farmer gave an exclamation of deep disgust.

"I knowed it, I knowed it!" he shouted furiously. "I knowed you'd back your blamed kids up! But let me tell you this, Mister Headmaster: That young imp burned my barn down, and he's got to pay for it. It's arson—that's what it is! We'll see what the police have to say about it—"

"Pray compose yourself, Farmer Hackett," said the Head tartly, though he was looking slightly uneasy. "You—"

"Compose myself, hey?" snorted the angry man. "Would you be composed if you'd had your property burned down by a young rip as oughter be in prison? Bah! I'm going to have satisfaction. That barn was worth fifty quid to me, and that kid's father or the school's got to pay up. Unless I gets it, and unless that lad is punished, I warn you as it's going to be a police-court job."

The Head's calm face showed no trace of the anger that seethed within him.

"Your threats do not intimidate me, Farmer Hackett," he said quietly. "I will give you the assurance now, however, that this matter shall be thoroughly investigated, and that justice will be done. Threats of police-court proceedings will not frighten me into committing an act of injustice. Mr. Railton, will you be good enough to ring for Marsh? Ask him to show this gentleman out."

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Railton.

"For the present, boys, you may go," said Dr. Holmes, turning to the juniors. "If I want you, I will send for you."

And Levison and Clive went, their faces worried and anxious. Though they could not help but see that Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton were inclined to accept Levison's story, they also could not fail to observe the Head's obvious uneasiness and dismay. If Farmer Hackett carried out his threat—as he undoubtedly would—it was unlikely that strangers would accept the juniors' story. And the prospect of the school being dragged into a police-court matter of such a nature was dismaying to say the least of it. Moreover, from the personal point of view, Ernest Levison had good cause to be worried. If the case went against them, there would be a heavy bill for his father to face—a bill, the junior knew, that his father could ill afford to pay.

CHAPTER 11.

Wally & Co. Chip In!

"YOU'LL never do it, Wally!"

"Don't talk rot, Jamson!"

"A blessed sparrow couldn't do it," said Curly Gibson.

"You shut up, Gibson! I'm doing it!"

"Don't Wally!" muttered Frank Levison earnestly. "It's not worth the risk, you ass!"

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"Oh, don't you start, young Levison!" snorted Wally D'Arcy. "You mind your eye! I've said I'm going to do it, and I am."

"But—"

"Dry up!"

Though somewhat exasperated, Wally D'Arcy's tone was quite cool and collected—which was surprising, considering the fact that he was about to essay an undertaking that would have taxed the pluck and nerve of fellows twice his age and strength.

With some half a dozen other young heroes of the Third, Wally was standing on a ledge jutting from the rocky face of Black Pool Quarry, a great rocky chasm, cut deep into the bowels of the earth. Below the fags—far, far below—glimmered the surface of Black Pool, smooth as a mirror beneath the straight-hewn walls of rock, silent and shadowy. Above their heads, ten feet or less, was the verge of the quarry, and the fags had lowered themselves on to the ledge by means of a short length of rope secured to a huge boulder near the brink. Like the stone quarries on Wayland Heath, Black Quarry was disused, and had been for long years. It was a lonely spot, desolate and forbidding, and rarely visited by anyone. Yet it had a certain wild beauty of its own on that spring afternoon, with the sun glinting on the red rock, where it was not hidden by brambles and dog-roses and creeping honeysuckle.

The fags had visited the spot on the previous half, and Manners minor, who was a bit of a naturalist, had seen—or fancied he had—a kestrel fly out of a crevice just below the verge of the rocky wall.

The prospect of getting an egg to add to his collection had prompted Manners minor to persuade his chums to make another visit for that purpose.

And Wally and the others, though lacking in enthusiasm for the actual egg-collecting, had needed little persuading. The element of danger, and the fascination of climbing, was quite enough for them. They had agreed with enthusiasm.

So now, while the Fourth and Shell were out on their cross-country run, Wally & Co. were engaged in an enterprise that would have caused the hair of certain scholastic gentlemen at St. Jim's to rise in horror had they known about it.

Armed with a short rope, they had slid, one by one, on to the ledge, and from there, having insisted upon being the one to tackle the risky task, Wally D'Arcy was to essay the climb to the nest.

And risky it was in all conscience! The nest was situated at the extreme edge of the sandstone, where it dropped sheer down the shuddering distance to the sleeping pool below.

Above it shelved the top layer of stones and earth, crumbling and treacherous. The fags had realised the impossibility of reaching the nest directly from above. And Wally proposed to reach it by following the ledge on which they stood, and which sloped gently upwards, in an ever-narrowing line, to the crevice twenty yards away.

So narrow did the ledge become before reaching the crevice, indeed, that it was scarcely visible, while the sandstone above it shelved outwards in an ugly bulge in more than one spot. It was no wonder that, now they were actually on the job, Wally's chums should attempt to dissuade their leader from the dangerous task.

But Wally D'Arcy had no intention now of being dissuaded from the risky enterprise. Even as he told Levison to "Dry up!" he set his foot forward to make the start.

But he never made the start, fortunately. For just at that moment Curly Gibson gave a cry, and pointed out across the sleeping countryside below, visible through the open gorge, where a narrow, winding cart-track led out of the quarry.

"Hallo, a fire!" he said. "Look!"

"Great pip! It's on Hackett's farm!" said Manners. "On the old hunk's property, anyway."

"Eh? What's that?" exclaimed Wally.

He drew back and followed the gaze of his suddenly excited chums.

"Jove, you're right!" he muttered excitedly. "Here, lend me your glasses, young Manners!"

Manners was already fumbling for the field-glasses slung from his shoulders, but Wally was before him, and snatched them from the case.

"Here!" snorted Reggie Manners. "Take care of 'em for goodness' sake. They're my major's."

"Blow your major!" said the high-handed Wally.

And he focused the glasses on the distant blaze. Then he grinned.

"It's only that tumbledown old barn," he chuckled. "Jove, isn't it just flaring up! I bet old Hackett's waw— Great pip!"

"What's up?"

But Wally did not answer. He was staring hard through the field-glasses, his face excited.

"Let's have a squint, you ass!" snorted Manners.

"Shut up a sec!"

"But the blessed glasses—"

"Dry up!" hissed Wally.

He remained staring through the glasses, standing rigid like a statue.

"What is it, you burbling ass?" demanded Gibson impatiently. All the fags were wondering that. They could see figures moving about the distant fire, but they could see nothing to get unduly excited about.

Apparently Wally could, however.

He remained staring for some little time, and then he handed the glasses to the exasperated Manners with a low whistle.

"Well, my only aunt!" he exclaimed, wrinkling his brows. "That was a jolly queer thing!"

"What was, ass?"

"I suppose you fellows couldn't see it," said Wally. "Why, just as I looked I spotted three chaps—fellows in Etons, I think—running away from the back of the barn."

"Phew!"

"Jolly fishy, I thought," said Wally. "Chaps wouldn't be running away from a blessed fire unless they'd been up to mischief, I suppose?"

"Rather not!"

"But that ain't all," said Wally grimly. "I was just in time to see another fellow—a fellow in white togs—run out of the barn. He ran straight into the arms of three chaps who collared him—the farmer and his men, I expect."

"Phew! That means it was one of our chaps if he was in white—one of the Shell or Fourth taking part in the paper-chase."

Wally nodded, and glanced at Levison minor.

"I don't know," he muttered grimly, "but he seemed to me jolly like your major, young Levison."

"What!" Frank Levison's face paled a trifle. "It couldn't be, you ass! What—what did they do with him, Wally?"

The fag's tone faltered. It was easy to see that, despite his words, he was afraid. In view of recent events, the fellow in white was more likely to be Levison major than anyone else at St. Jim's.

"They yanked him off to the farm," said Wally. "I couldn't see what happened after that. Here, lend me those dashed glasses again, Manners! Those chaps I saw seemed to be making this way. I'd like to spot who they are."

"I can tell you that, my pippin!" snapped Manners, who had been looking through the glasses. "They're coming right this way, and they're Grammar School rotters—Lacy and two of his pals."

He handed the glasses to Wally, and that fag nodded after a moment, and his eyes gleamed. He could see the figures clearly now. They were running in the shelter of the hedge, and rapidly approaching the old quarry.

"I believe it is Lacy and his pals," said Wally. "They'll be along here presently—making for home, I expect. I say, what about having a little chat with them about that affair in the woods?"

"Good egg!"

"We're seven to three," grinned Wally. "We'll talk to 'em like fathers. We'll make 'em regret laying their hands on St. Jim's chaps, just as we made Hackett regret it."

"Roll 'em in the brambles!" suggested Jameson.

"That'll do for a start," grinned Wally. "But they won't be along the top here for some minutes yet. Plenty of time for me to get to that dashed nest and back."

He looked reflectively along the ledge to the cleft where Manners minor had seen the kestrel emerge, or claimed to have seen it emerge.

As he did so something flew out of the cleft—a bird with glossy black plumage and a grey patch on the nape and back of the head.

"Why—what—what—" began Manners blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally D'Arcy. "Was that your kestrel, Manners?"

"Great pip! It—it's a blessed jackdaw!" ejaculated Manners, in disgust. "I must have been mistaken."

"Fancy mistaking a jackdaw for a kestrel!" chuckled Jameson. "Oh, my hat! Naturalist—eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" growled Manners. "I was a long way off when I spotted it. Anyway, that settles it, Wally. Chuck it, and come on!"

"Well," said Wally, rubbing his nose, "there certainly isn't much sense in risking your neck for a blessed jackdaw's egg, especially when you can find 'em by the dozen round St. Jim's. Yes, we'll call it off."

And, having come to that wise decision, greatly to his chums' relief, Wally grabbed the rope and hauled himself up. He was followed by his chums, and a moment later all seven fags stood together on the cliff-top.

"Now for dear old Lacy!" grinned Wally, looking about him. "Better hide, I think, or the cads will bolt before we can collar them. Here we are!"

He indicated a deep hollow near the path, with thick brambles and furze-bushes lining the path, making an ideal place for an ambush.

By this time the three figures of Lacy & Co.—if it was they—had vanished from sight behind a distant crag. But the fags knew they would be climbing from the lower ground, and would soon be passing along the footpath which ran along the top of the quarry and on towards Rylcombe.

Chuckling in anticipation, the fags dropped behind the bushes and waited. They had not long to wait. Voices and footsteps sounded, and, peering round the bush, Wally grinned as he spotted three Grammar School caps just showing above the level. They were followed by the faces and forms of Lacy, Carker, and Manton as those juniors came panting up the steep path.

"Steady!" breathed Wally. "Wait for the word, kids!"

The voices came nearer, and then they heard Lacy's voice clearly.

"Gad, but I'm fairly pumped, you fellows!" he gasped breathlessly. "Let's rest a bit. Safe enough now."

"Good egg!" grunted Carker.

The three Grammarians flung themselves down on the heather to rest.

"Jove! We're well out of that, Lacy!" gasped Manton. "Think anyone stopped us?"

"No; we took good care of that!" grinned Lacy. "I only hope old Racke and his pals got clear all serene. They ran the other way—towards St. Jim's, y'know. My hat! Fancy that cad Levison getting collared like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three shady youths yelled with laughter. They evidently found great joy and glee in the fact that Levison had got "collared." And Wally D'Arcy, who had been just about to give the "word," decided promptly not to give it yet.

"Quiet, you chaps," he whispered. "There's something wrong here."

Lacy's next words proved that.

"What a scream!" he grinned. "I shouldn't be surprised if old Hackett had the cad locked up."

"Locked up for what you did, Lacy," grinned Carker. "I say, you were an ass to throw that match down like that, old man!"

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Lacy, his face changing colour. "By gad, it mustn't be breathed even among ourselves! It was an accident. I chucked it down thinking it was out."

"We ought to have stopped to put the dashed straw out," said Manton uneasily. "We could easily have done it before it got a fair hold."

"How could we, you fool?" hissed Lacy. "We had to bolt when we saw that cad Levison coming. We couldn't let him find us there. Besides—"

"What was the cad after, I wonder?"

"Couldn't you see?" snarled Lacy. "He was after me. He must have seen us go in the dashed barn earlier on. Anyway, it's done now, and it serves the cad right whatever he gets!"

"Think he can prove he didn't do it?"

"How can he? He was collared red-handed," said Lacy, grinning again. "He can prove nothing against us. Jim Hackett knows we were there, and he won't split—we pay him too well. Besides, he daren't let his father know we go there, in any case."

"Levison's cooked!"

"Cooked brown!" grinned Lacy.

"Is he?" breathed Wally D'Arcy from behind the screen of bushes. "We'll see about that. Now, you chaps!"

Wally's voice ended in a yell. He had heard all he wanted to hear, and with his fellow warriors behind him he went for the Grammarians.

They were utterly taken by surprise—at least, all but Manton were. That youth had just jumped up, and was staring at the distant barn, which was now but a smoking ruin, when Wally shouted.

And at the sound Manton wheeled, saw the fags rushing at him, and bolted for his life.

"Never mind him! It's Lacy we want!" shouted Wally.

"What ho!"

Lacy and Carker, startled almost out of their wits, scarcely had time to scramble to their feet when Wally & Co. were among them.

"Roll them over the edge there," grinned Jameson. "They'll not be missed."

"No, we won't go so far as that," said Wally, into whose eyes had come a sudden gleam. "I'll tell you what. We'll lower them on to the ledge below, and let 'em stay there all night. How's that?"

"Good wheeze!"

Wally's chums realised that he had something up his sleeve, and they obeyed promptly as Wally gave his orders. Jameson pulled up the rope, which had not been touched, and a moment later the fags were tying it round the struggling Lacy's waist.

The Grammar School cad yelled with fear as he grasped their intention—or what he believed was their intention.

"You mad fools! Oh, you mad fools!" he shrieked. "You can't mean it! You can't mean to lower us down there!"

"Half a minute, you chaps!" snapped Wally. He looked down at the suddenly terrified face of the Grammarian.

"Now, listen to me, Lacy!" he said. "We mean to do it! We mean to lower you down there and leave you all night there unless you agree to do something we want you to do." Lacy stared up at him.

"And—and what's that?" he muttered. "Write down and sign a confession that it was you, and not Levison major, who fired that barn this afternoon," said Wally quietly.

CHAPTER 12.

How Levison Minor "Squared"!

"WHA-AT?" Algernon Lacy stared up at Wally D'Arcy's grim face, and all the blood seemed to drain from his face.

"What do you mean?" he stammered. "I—I know nothing about any barn!"

"Liar!" said Wally coolly. "We saw you running away, my pippin!"

"You—you saw?"

"Yes," said Wally cheerfully. "And not only did we see, but we heard you admit having set fire to it yourself some moments ago, old top. There are seven of us, and our word will go farther than yours will, I fancy, Lacy. You might just as well agree to sign it."

Lacy drew a deep, deep breath.

"It—is a lie!" he hissed. "I jolly well won't sign anything, you howling cad! You little sneaking toad! Think I'd dashed well do that? You can prove nothing, hang you!"

"Very well!" snapped Wally, his face growing grim again. "Over you go! Perhaps you'll wish you had when darkness begins to fall. It won't be pleasant down there, I'll warn you. Go ahead, you chaps!"

"Right-ho!"

"Stop!" shrieked Lacy in sheer terror as they began to drag him towards the verge. "You little fiends! I'll sign! I'll sign anything, confound you!"

Wally D'Arcy took out a pocket-book, and, borrowing Jameson's fountain-pen, he began to write. He finished, and passed the book to Lacy with the pen.

"Copy that out and sign it!" he snapped.

Lacy read the words. They ran as follows:

"I hereby confess that it was I, Algernon Lacy, who set fire to Farmer Hackett's barn, and not Ernest Levison. I was smoking in the barn, and I threw a lighted match among the straw."

"You—you rotter, D'Arcy!" breathed Lacy.

He hesitated, his face working with fury, and then he copied out the document, and, after another hesitation, signed it. Wally signed the document carefully and passed it to Carker.

"Countersign it, Carker!" he rapped out.

Carker did so without hesitation, though his face was livid.

Wally waited until the ink was dry, and then he handed the pen back to Jameson.

"Let 'em get up now," he said. "We've finished. Now, Lacy and Carker, my beauties, we've got you. We're seven witnesses who're ready to swear we saw you running from the barn and heard you admit you did it. Now we've got this to back our statements up. You can't get behind your own writing and signatures!"

Lacy staggered up and glowered at the keen-witted Wally.

"You—you're going to show us up?" he hissed.

"All depends on you," said Wally. "Now, listen! You can either go to our Head or to Dr. Monk and own up, or you can let us deal with it. But if you'll take my tip, you'll own up yourselves! It'll pay you—Look out!"

Wally's words ended in a gasp of alarm, for without warning Lacy had leaped forward and snatched the paper from his hands. The next instant he was flying for his life down the path.

"After him!" howled Wally.

In his blind dash Lacy did not realise the danger that was at hand.

"Look out, you fool!" yelled Wally D'Arcy suddenly.

But the warning came too late. As the Grammarian leaped away, cramming the paper into his pocket, he heard Wally's wild yell, and, becoming suddenly aware that he was on the steeply sloping shelf of crumbling earth and stones, he strove madly to pull himself up.

But too late! He was already sliding, and suddenly his feet went from under him and he shot downwards, faking with him a mass of rubble and loose soil. He reached the

edge of the solid sandstone rock, and then with a yell of terror he vanished over the edge.

The horrified watchers stood thunderstruck, as his hurtling body shot downwards, clean as a stone, to drop into the dark water below amid a shower of stones and debris.

"Good heavens!" cried Wally aghast. "Quick, you chaps! Down too—Levison, you fool, get back!"

But Frank Levison was already beyond recall, sliding down the mass of rubble, feet foremost, his face set and determined.

He had seen what the others had possibly not seen—that a stone had struck Lacy's head, and that when he came up he vanished almost as suddenly. If anything was to be done it must be done at once.

And Levison minor did it. Without thought of self, he meant to do his best to save Lacy, the fellow who had paid a hired ruffian to thrash him unmercifully.

Before the staring eyes of his chums he vanished over the brink of the chasm, went hurtling downwards, and struck the water, as Lacy had done.

He was on the surface again almost in a flash, however, and down he went again. This time when he emerged he was holding a still form in his arms.

All this Wally D'Arcy saw swiftly, and he did not wait to see more. He knew that, alone, it was next to impossible for the plucky fag to save the bigger fellow.

"Go down, you fellows!" he yelled. "There's a boat at the staging. Quick, you idiots!"

And with that Wally D'Arcy went to do his share. He went sliding down the incline, his reckless, good-humoured face set hard. He went over the edge with a rush, and dropped feet foremost into the pool, some yards beyond where Frank Levison struggled and fought for the life of his enemy and his own life.

The fags did not stay to see more. Leaving the terror-stricken Carker staring blankly downwards, they rushed madly down the steep path. It was not far, luckily, to the rough cart track, and, leaping down from a ten-foot drop, they reached it and raced madly for the staging.

Tethered to the rickety, rotting structure was a ramshackle boat affair, used by Farmer Hackett for pike-fishing in the pool. They tumbled headlong in, and with a single slash of his knife Jameson cut the rope, and, grabbing the oar, Curly Gibson pushed off.

The fag was by no means an expert with the oar, but he worked desperately, and sent the unwieldy craft along somehow, helped by his chums, who used scraps of wood as paddles.

They rounded a jutting crag, and as they did so Reggie Manners shouted almost hysterically in his relief.

The rest of the pool was in sight, and on it showed the struggling heads and shoulders of their chums. Levison minor still supported Lacy's still form, and Wally was helping as best he could.

Both appeared to be at their last gasp, however, and Jameson sent a ringing yell of encouragement across the silent pool.

"Hold on! Hold on!"

And Levison minor and Wally D'Arcy held on manfully. The boat rushed up, and willing arms grabbed them, and willing hands helped them and their unconscious burden into the rocking craft.

"You—you all right, Franky?" panted Wally as he dropped in an exhausted heap.

"Nearly," gasped Levison. "Phew!"

He collapsed, as his chum had done, and nothing more was said until the staging was reached. While they were lifting Lacy out of the boat on to the grass, the Grammarian opened his eyes and stared dazedly upwards, coughing and gasping painfully as he did so.

An ugly, jagged wound showed on his forehead, and with a cry of pain he put his hand up to it. Then he seemed to catch sight of Levison minor bending over him, and his hand dropped.

"It—it was you came after me, Levison?" he panted faintly.

Levison nodded.

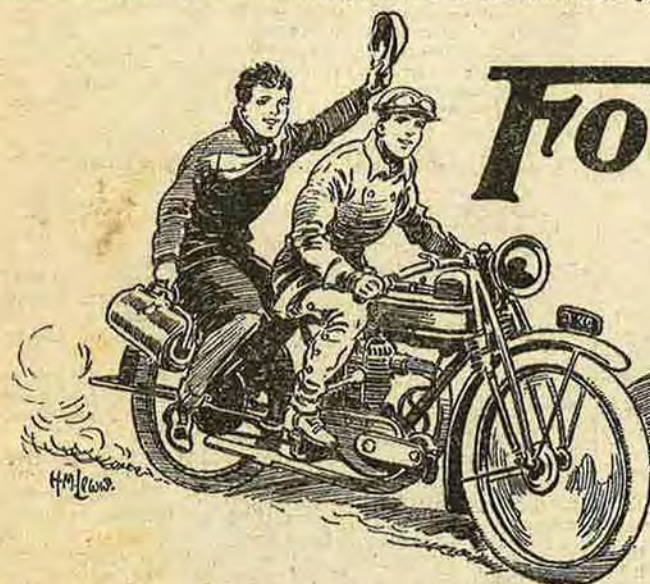
"I—I never expected you to square matters like this," gasped Lacy. "I—I've been a cad, kid. It's all right. You can get the paper; it's in my pocket. I'll own up; I'll clear your brother. I—I—"

His voice trailed away, and he closed his eyes. And at that moment the rest of the fags came rushing up with a hurdle. Levison minor, drenched, shivering, and exhausted as he was, helped to lift the unconscious junior upon it, but he did not dream of taking the paper from his pocket. As they were tramping away, however, Levison looked over at Wally, his eyes eager and shining.

"Think he meant it, Wally?" he breathed. "Think he means to own up?"

(Continued on page 23.)

Another shock for poor Hal Chester, and just as everything was going on so well, too!



FOOTBALL CHUMS!

By
ARTHUR S. HARDY.

(The Most Popular Football Writer
of the Day.)

A thrilling yarn, telling of the trials and tribulations of young Hal Chester, in his bid for fame on the footer field.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

HAROLD CHESTER, a well-knit youngster in his teens, and a member of the Kingsdown Football Club. His love for football earns for him the disapproval of

JAMES HENSON, his stepfather, a Nottingham grocer, in whose employ Hal Chester is. Like the rest of the employees at Henson's, Harold finds his governor a very hard taskmaster. First of all, his stepfather dislikes him; secondly, James Henson hates football; and, thirdly, he believes that he—Harold—is an idler.

An important match is down for decision on Saturday for which Hal had already been granted permission to assist his team. But when the great day comes Mr. Henson cancels his promise. Hal has pledged himself to play for his team. He was considered one of the best players in the club, and could not very well let his side down.

Suffering from a sense of injustice, Hal is determined to turn out for his team, come what may.

But luck is against the lad, for in the match he is badly fouled by a man named Stevens, one of the opposing backs. It is late when he returns home, weary and in great pain, and he finds the door locked against him. He meets an old school friend, however, in Tommy Bell, who is well in with the management of the Nottingham Football Club, and who gets him a place in the team.

Hal proves a great asset to his side, but, nevertheless, earns the enmity of some of the older players in the team.

Having realised his ambition, Hal pays a visit to his sick mother, and, on learning of his stepfather's slump in business, the lad offers to find the necessary cash to send his mother away. It is a rude awakening indeed for Mr. Henson to find Hal doing so well, and at football, too—the game he hated!

Hal sees his club's manager, and, after getting permission to accompany his mother to the seaside, returns to convey the good news.

He arrives at the office just in time to warn his stepfather against Stevens, the man who had brought so much trouble upon his shoulders, and who is applying for a vacant position in the shop.

Stevens, in consequence, is turned down. Seeking vengeance, the unscrupulous Stevens waylays the errand-boy that same day, and asks him where James Henson keeps his money. Finding the lad an easy pawn to assist him in carrying out his dastardly scheme, Stevens makes an appointment to meet him at half-past seven to talk things over.

Hal is away at the seaside with his mother when Bill Stevens, ably assisted by the traitorous errand-boy, carries out his burglarious mission. The two are disturbed in their work, however, for Mr. Henson makes a sudden appearance upon the threshold. Stevens rushes at the storekeeper and knocks him unconscious. Then, realising his fateful mistake, the rascally Stevens saturates the shop with oil, sets it alight, and hurries away, leaving the unconscious Henson to his fate.

(Now read on.)

The Rescue!

IT was late when Harold and Tommy Bell left Bert Roberts' house in Hillsboro' Crescent. They had thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and there was a merry ring in their voices as the lads bade their chum good-night.

"It won't be long, old man," said Harold, "before you're a regular member of the Town's League team. Mr. Bliss doesn't realise even yet what a treasure he has found. But you'll show him when we play the Villa on Saturday. You'll be coming to the City Ground for a bit of practice before then, won't you, Bert?"

"I'll look in on Tuesday—and perhaps Thursday. And if you're away at Silversea I shall see Tommy Bell and the boys," smiled Roberts serenely.

"And in any event we shall meet on Friday, Hal."

"Till Friday, then. Good-night, Bert!"

"Good-night, Harold lad!"

The pavements were wet, the football chums noticed as they hurried along the street.

There had evidently been a heavy fall of rain during their stay at Bert's, and it was now cold, with a mist clinging low to the ground.

But, overhead, there hung the moon, whose silver rays lightened the mist and made progress easy enough.

At a five-miles-an-hour gait they strode onward, for it was late, and the sooner they got to bed the better, they thought. They headed in the direction of the Stores, because that was the near way home, and Harold was once again telling his

chum how Bert had come to him on his Norton motor-bike that Saturday when he had played his last game for Kingsdown Athletic, when they turned into the street in which Henson's Stores stood.

The mist hung like a veil here, but, oddly enough, they could see a fair distance through it.

While speaking of Roberts' calling for him on his motor-bike in the rain, Harold automatically glanced ahead at the shop in which he had spent so many unhappy days.

Then he stopped speaking and uttered a low cry.

"Great Scott! Did you notice that, Tommy?" he asked.

"I could have sworn that I saw somebody come out of the Stores. Or was it a trick of the mist?"

"Don't know. I saw nothing," replied Tommy Bell. "But then I wasn't looking, Hal."

The two chums stopped to listen. No sound came back to them through the mist.

"It must have been fancy," murmured Harold. "For we would have heard steps if anyone had come out of there."

Nevertheless, he quickened his steps, and, upon reaching the iron door of the shop, pushed against it.

It was closed.

"It seems all right," he cried. "And yet—I wonder—" He frowned uneasily. "I don't know why, Tommy, but I feel uneasy about this. I feel as if there is something wrong."

He walked back and peered through the peephole in the shutter. There was a light burning in the shop, as usual, but, oddly enough, Hal could not see anything in detail.

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for the shops seemed even more thickly filled with fog than the street, and—

"Harold!"

It was Tommy Bell speaking, and his voice held a note of alarm.

"Yes, what it is, Tom?"

"I can smell burning! There is a reek of paraffin! Look! There is smoke curling out of the seams of the door here! Harold, the shop's on fire!"

With a low cry Harold leapt back and applied his shoulder to the door. He set the iron shutter shaking, but the door did not budge.

There was no getting in that way.

Harold was always a lad of action. His brain was clear and cool now.

"Tommy," he cried, "go to the side door and knock and ring; keep on knocking and ringing. If we can only wake Milly up we can get her to open the door. I'll throw something at Mr. Henson's window, and also at Milly's. We must rouse them somehow."

"Right you are, Harold!"

Tommy Bell ran to the door, and at once began to bang and rattle the knocker, and to push the electric bell, which they could hear ringing distinctly even from the street.

Harold, leaping into the road, began to search for something to throw. Some stones of fair size came readily to his hands.

Some of the smaller ones he rattled at James Henson's bed-room window, but there was no response. With deft aim and sure judgment, he sent some more bits flying up at Milly's window at the top of the house, but without result.

Harold began to feel desperate. If only he could get in now he might be able to save the premises. Fancy them sleeping soundly like that!

He sent a flint crashing through James Henson's window. Still there was no response to the crash of the splintering glass.

Harold's alarm increased. What on earth did it mean?

Had James Henson fired the shop and left the premises? Had something worse than that happened? For a moment he doubted, then, as he remembered the steadfast, grim, religious nature of the man, he knew that he had misjudged. James Henson might suffer, but he would not get out of his troubles by offending against the law.

The boy's face was white as, stooping, he found another stone. He stood well back before he hurled this, for every second he believed would be of value.

His arm swung over, and the stone flew. Crash! The lower pane of the servant's bed-room window was smashed to fragments, and a startled cry reached him now.

"Milly!" he shouted. "Milly! Don't be frightened! It's Harold! Come to the window, please!"

His words were heard, for he saw the face of the sleepy and frightened girl appear at the window.

"Mr. Harold, what ever is the matter?" she jerked out, only half awake.

"I believe a fire has broken out in the shop. I can't make my stepfather hear!" cried Hal Chester. "Put some things on, and then run down and let me in, please! Be as quick as you can!"

The face vanished. Harold, joining his chum, paced up and down.

What a time it seemed before he heard the rattle of the door chain and the sound of the bolts being drawn.

But at last the door stood open, and there he saw Milly, her hair all tumbled, her face white and drawn, and her eyes staring.

She had put on some clothes, and her feet were set in torn, worn slippers. He had swiftly an indication of her intelligence.

"Harold," she said, choking, "when I came down Mr. Henson's room door stood wide open, but there was no light burning. I switched it on. He wasn't there. He'd been to bed, though. I don't know where he is. I shouted, but didn't get any answer."

"Good girl!" nodded Harold. "Now, my dear, go up and gather together whatever you value and bring your things down into the street. You'll have time. Tommy, come and help me, will you?"

Harold dashed into the passage, made his way to the pass-door, and, finding it swing open to his touch, leapt into the shop.

He reeled backwards, choking and gasping, for the smoke was heavy there. The reek of burning oil was nauseating.

"Mr. Henson!" he managed to gasp out. "Are you there?"

He saw the flames leaping further in the stores, running along the floor, and lapping at the distant counters.

He staggered on to the office, and, bending down to look, he found it empty. Then, as he came back, he almost stumbled over a figure that lay in a heap on the floor.

Harold was feeling faint and weak from the smoke, and his knees were giving way. He reeled as he stood upright. Yet he managed to call:

"Tommy, help me—quick!"

Bell needed no urging. Harold's tone informed him of the need for haste.

Bending down, he stepped forward and saw the man who lay there so still.

Tommy Bell was as strong as a horse. His hands held firmly the man's shoulders, taking him under the armpits. Harold, holding him just under the knees, helped, and so they bore him out into the passage, where Harold banged the pass-door to.

Here the smoke fog was less dense. There was air to breathe.

Harold gained the strength to go on. Milly came racing down from upstairs, her arms full of clothing, and those pathetic little personal belongings which were worthless, but which she prized so dearly.

She dropped the things as she saw the form lying there. "It's the master!" she screamed. "Oh, oh, oh—"

"Don't, Milly!" commanded Harold. "Look after yourself and your things. Tommy, help me lift him again."

The two chums bore James Henson into the street, and carried him to the house next door, on to the side doorstep of which Harold sank, holding James Henson in his arms.

"Tommy," he said, in an awe-stricken whisper, "just look! See how he's been knocked about! He did not inflict these injuries himself. Don't you see what it means? The shop was burgled. He caught the man in the act, and the villain struck him down and set fire to the shop!"

"It must have been that man you thought you saw, Harold," returned Tommy Bell. "We must get the poor fellow into bed without delay, and run for a doctor. Do you think he's dead?"

Harold nodded, choking. But even as he did so he heard the injured man sigh, and felt him move.

"No," he shouted joyfully; "he lives, Tommy! We may be able to save him. Just bang that knocker, will you, old man?"

The Burning of Henson's Stores!

ONCE again the silence of the night and the echoes of the street were awakened by the strenuous banging of a knocker.

The neighbours were at last being aroused. Harold could hear the noise of windows being run up and the sound of voices calling:

"What is it?" "Who's there?" "What's the matter?"

Harold explained. "Use your telephone, and ring up the fire brigade, the police, and a doctor. Perhaps you'd better ring up the infirmary, and get them to send an ambulance at once—or the police ambulance might do. Only hurry! The Stores is on fire. My stepfather has been seriously hurt. We want the police!"

"All right!" cried a man's voice from somewhere above. It was Mr. Williams, the man who kept the ironmongery shop next door, a keen and intelligent man. Harold knew that he would do all that was required expeditiously and without mistake.

Now came the echo of running footsteps. People were streaming out of the neighbouring houses, and pouring along the street.

They gathered round Harold, staring at the limp and lifeless figure of James Henson in morbid curiosity.

A policeman came. Mr. Williams opened the door, and helped them to carry James Henson in. Then he brought some water and a sponge to bathe his damaged head.

And while they waited Harold told all that he knew. More policemen arrived. Then came the clanging of a bell and a shouting from the crowd now assembled outside, and Harold heard a fire-engine speed up and come to a standstill near by.

Then came more ringing of bells, the coming of a second engine, followed by a motor ambulance, with help. It

was this last that Harold had prayed for most of all. The injured shopkeeper was at once treated by expert hands, his wounds tenderly dealt with, and his head bandaged up. Then they placed him on a stretcher, and bore him out into the street, where police ordered the staring crowd to make room.

The stretcher was lifted to its place, and ran smoothly home. Then the ambulance men stepped into the lighted interior, and the motor sped away smoothly at a fine speed, bearing James Henson to the infirmary.

"Tommy," choked Harold, "I did my best! I could do no more!"

"You were wonderful, Harold!" replied Tommy, gripping Hal's hand. "If your stepfather's life is saved it will be entirely due to you!"

"And to Bert Roberts," remarked Harold, with a sigh. "For if it had not been for the lack of our going to his place in dinner to-night we should never have passed the Stores on the way home. Poor Mr. Henson! This seems to be the climax of all his troubles, Tommy. I feel frightfully sorry for him! He was never kind to me, or understanding at all, until quite lately, when mother fell ill, and I offered to take her away to Silversen. Then he seemed to change. He has struggled so hard and to such little profit. It seems cruel!"

Tears welled into Hal's eyes, and he choked.

Tommy understood it all.

"Dear old man," he said kindly, "don't worry. Life is full of troubles for the best and for the worst of us. How are you going to let your mother know?"

Harold's eyes opened wide.

"I shan't let her know—yet," he answered. "I must keep the news from her as long as I can. And a lot depends upon what happens. Let us go along to the infirmary. I want to hear what they say about my stepfather before I go to bed, Tom."

Together the two chums went out into the street.

There they were confronted by an amazing scene.

In front of the Stores and the houses that stood on either side of Mr. Henson's premises, the road had been cleared. Three fire-engines were stationed there, making vivid patches of brilliant red and glaring brass. Firemen were directing the water from their hose at the Stores. From the shop the smoke was pouring now in great clouds. The heat had buckled the shutters, but they still held their black curtain, serving to screen the raging furnace that lay behind.

There was smoke pouring out of the door, and flames could be seen leaping in the passage when Harold and Tommy ran to look, ignoring the command of a policeman to "Come back!"

Water tore down that passage in a torrent, making the flames bend and hiss, but it seemed to have little effect.

Harold could see nimble, brass-helmeted firemen hacking down the shutters. The only hope of saving the premises lay in getting the better of the fire that raged beyond.

Up and down the street Harold could see a sea of faces, pink faces, lit up by the glow of the fire which made itself seen through the chinks and seams of the shutters. Policemen kept them back.

At every window of every house could be seen more faces.

Harold and Tommy drew back now, and waited.

Harold wanted to see the end. He knew that the goods in the shop would be all utterly destroyed. What remained to be seen was whether the firemen would be able to save the contents of the house.

Harold did not know whether the belongings of his stepfather and mother were covered by insurance. His stepfather had been so hard up of late that he might well have refrained from paying the premiums.

In that case it would mean ruin—utter and irretrievable ruin.

After what seemed an eternity of time, the shutters were so hacked and broken that the flames and smoke poured through. The water was directed at the gaps that had been made, and was poured through the windows of the living-rooms above. More engines arrived. More hoses were run out, and more water poured upon the flames.

But the flames gained space. Soon they came pouring out of the first floor windows. Then they reached the windows of the second floor. Nothing the firemen could do could stay their progress. The house was doomed.

So furiously did the fire rage that the crowd was driven farther up the street, and even there the heat nearly scorched them.

At last the lower floor of Henson's house fell in. Then the second floor gave way. Next the flames attacked greedily at the roof.



Fighting their way through the blinding smoke Hal Chester and Tommy Bell approached the form lying outstretched on the floor. "Good gracious!" gasped Hal, dropping to his knees. "It's my stepfather!"

The house was simply a shell now, a shell filled with the raging fire.

Finally, the roof fell in with a crash, the sparks leaping and flying in all directions under a black canopy of smoke.

Only after that did the firemen begin to master the outbreak.

Harold and Tommy, waiting a hundred yards away, saw the smoke clouds increase in density and blackness as the flames died down.

"I think they have got the better of the fire at last," sighed Harold. "But all my mother's things and poor Mr. Henson's have been destroyed, Tommy. It means the end of everything for him!"

The two chums splashed through the running water that flooded the street, gained the pavement, and hurried onward in the mist, meeting people who came running from all directions as they turned their faces towards the infirmary.

There they were at once admitted, and together they sat in the ghostly silent hall of the institution, waiting for news.

For two hours and longer they waited, and then a man came down to them. He was the house surgeon himself, Harold discovered later.

"It is your stepfather, I understand, who was brought here," he said, addressing himself to Harold.

"Yes, sir. Can you tell me if there is any hope?"

"I am afraid there is very little hope. While life remains there is always a chance, of course, but he has been most brutally assaulted. The injuries are severe. I cannot disguise the fact that his condition is critical. We are doing the best we can. Perhaps I may be able to tell you something more definite by the morning."

Harold choked.

"Had I better send for my mother?" he asked. "She has been ill. She is away at the seaside—at Silversen."

The doctor frowned thoughtfully, and a moment later replied:

"Let matters remain as they are until you see me in the morning—I will let you know then," he said, with an encouraging smile. "There is no immediate danger. Will you give me your address? Thanks! If you are wanted urgently I will send for you."

Harold and Tommy left the infirmary. They were feeling dejected, low-spirited, and tired out now.

Slowly they made their way home to Mrs. Sandy's, but when they turned into bed that night neither of them could sleep. With anxiety in their hearts, they awaited the morrow.

(Don't miss next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful father-son story.)

"ROUGH ON LEVISON!"

(Continued from page 24.)

Wally nodded grimly. "Yes, I do," he said. "I've never seen him look like that. It's all serene, Franky."

And Wally was quite right. Lacy did own up. Whether he was truly remorseful, or whether he felt it best to own up rather than be shown up, they could only surmise. At all events, he did own up. That night Dr. Monk rang up Dr. Holmes, and, later, the Head of St. Jim's sent for Levison major and Levison minor. And what he said to the latter made that youngster blush crimson. Yet what the Head said was nothing to what Ernest Levison said when he got his brother alone.

That is the end—or nearly the end. Dr. Monk had an interview with Farmer Hackett, and how the matter was eventually settled the St. Jim's juniors never knew, except that Lacy's father had to pay the bill. But it was not fifty pounds. Far from it. Dr. Monk personally knew the barn, and made an offer which Farmer Hackett was glad enough to accept, especially when he knew his son had been in league with Lacy & Co.

Fortunately for them, Lacy did not "split" on Racke & Co., but Tom Merry & Co. dealt with that shady gang, and gave them good cause to regret having allowed Levison to be falsely accused.

THE END.

(There will be another exciting yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "THE MYSTERY OF HOLLY LODGE!" by Martin Clifford. Don't miss this splendid story, whatever you do, chums.)

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