

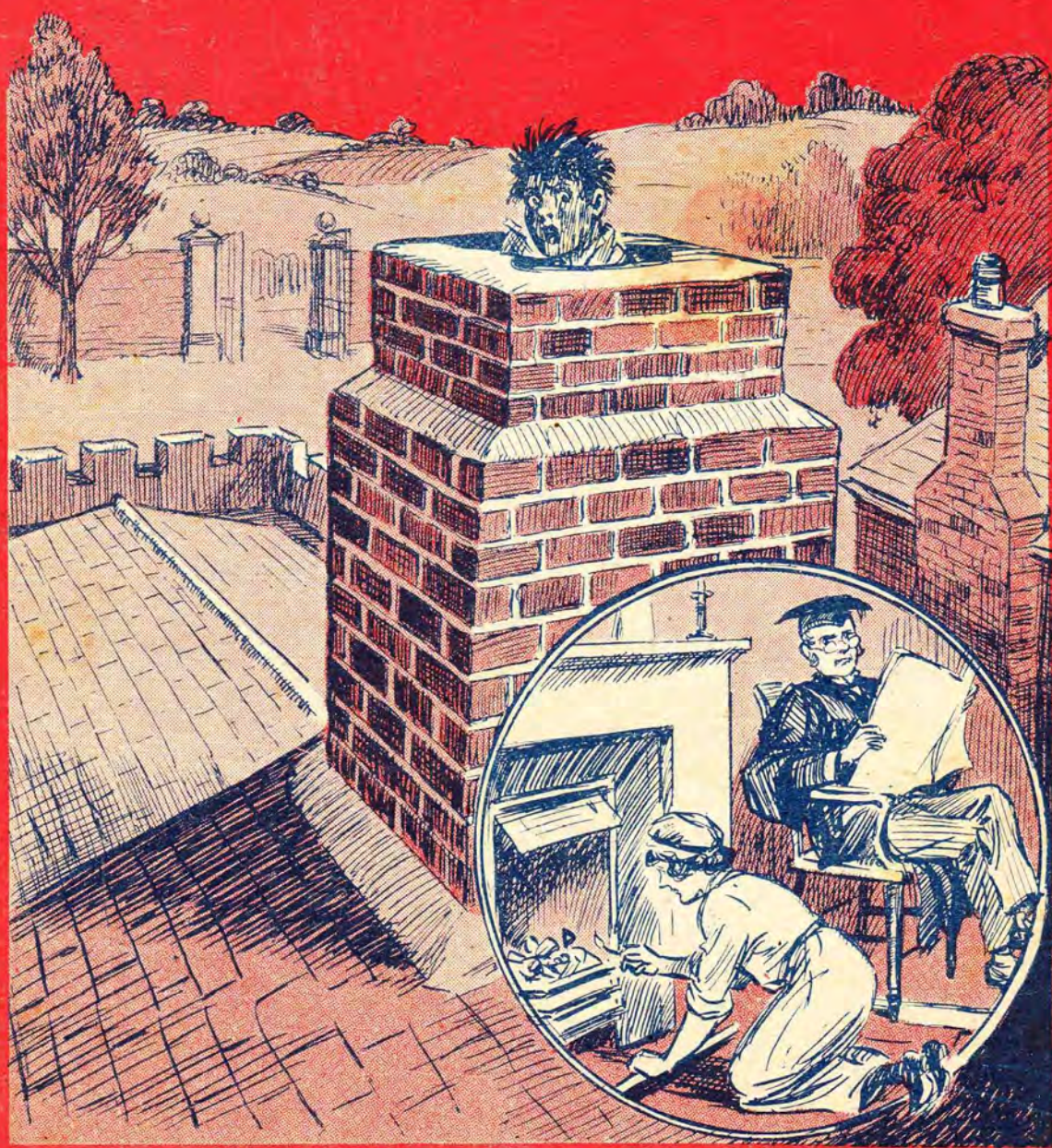
"The Third Form Adventurers!" An Amusing and Exciting School Story of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 902.
Vol. XXVII.
May 23rd,
1925.

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



D'ARCY MINOR'S AWKWARD POSITION!

The adventurous leader of the Third Form fags realises that his position is likely to become too hot to hold him!

(A startling incident from the grand School Story, 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.—There is one most extraordinary thing about money—namely, the shortage of it at times and seasons. Something or other happens to go wrong, and the expected supplies fail to come in. In our next week's magnificent issue of the GEM Mr. Martin Clifford sets himself the agreeable task of showing just a few of the unhappy inconveniences which accrue when cash is tight. He does this in a St. Jim's tale which will help to make history. It is a right down excellent yarn.

"D'ARCY'S DILEMMA!"
By Martin Clifford.

Gussy confidently expected a substantial remittance from his father, Lord Eastwood, but somehow the sinews of war failed to materialise. D'Arcy is let down pretty badly; but his chums have brains, and they think out an artistic wheeze for remedying the state of affairs. The idea for raising the wind is quite all right. It is a quickly-got-up sale. Somebody had to take auction, so to speak. But the trouble does not end there. Why did not Lord Eastwood mail his customary contribution? Echo answers, D'Arcy gets uneasy, and from that stage onward the yarn bristles with the strangest of strange events. In the adventures that follow Gussy and his high-spirited "minah" take a very active part. If you are introducing the GEM to a chum be sure to hand him next week's issue. The story is a splendid introduction to the merry crowd at St. Jim's.

"THE MYSTERIOUS UNKNOWN!"
By Louis Alfriston.

A top-hole story of Big Ben Derby and Cocky Withers figures in our next number. The nippy little lime-stone Londoner and his mighty chum find themselves in a tight corner, thanks to much dirty work. But the hour strikes for Big Ben in most fitting fashion, and we get a nailing good yarn of the Ring as a result, full of punch, and with no end of sportsmanship to boot.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

This paragraph is not to announce that our smart little Supplement will be in its place next Wednesday. Such cannot be the case. But the "St. Jim's News" will reappear very shortly. Its coming number will knock spots off all predecessors. It is to deal with Pepper's Barn, so look out. There have been countless thrills of excitement in connection with Pepper's mysterious stronghold. It has now become a seat of learning, and in the new Supplement we shall hear of the immense excitement pervading a certain sort of parliamentary meeting which is held in the barn. The great Pepper himself could hardly have anticipated such a scene as takes place. No need to be disappointed over the slight delay in the appearance of this extra good number. It will make up for the postponement by its excellence. I will return to this matter next week.

"DAVE, THE PIT BOY!"
By Max Hamilton.

There is a thrill in every line of next week's instalment of this amazing story of the mine. Dave's good friend, Mr. Scott, the manager of the mine, has a relentless enemy; but, though Dave knows this, and is ready to risk all to defend his protector, it is a sheer chance that puts the lad on the trail of a mystery which means everything to the threatened superintendent. Thrill follows thrill next week. We get a glimpse of treachery as black as the underground galleries. Dave looks on, but he is not the fellow to content himself with the role of a passive spectator of the deadly game being played.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

Our Readers' Page gains in popular liking every week. My best thanks to all chums who send in. This is the try again competition. If you don't win one week you may next. Use postcards.

THE "SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY!"

This grand "Library" of long completed of St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and the other famous schools is booming. Late-comers get sent away with the gloomy reply "Out of print." N.B.—Don't be late. Nos. 5 and 6 of the "Library" will be on sale everywhere on Friday, June 5th. Plank in your orders NOW!

GOING AHEAD!

That's the GEM all over. The GEM is the trusty paper which always has a laugh in it, and any amount to interest everybody. It never causes you a moment's anxiety or disappointment. Keep a regular order going, and you will never get let down. Look out for some extra good yarns of the grand old school. Besides that I have a crowd more noteworthy features on the way.

Your Editor.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 902.



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!
WIDE-AWAKE JOHNNY!

"Johnny, you have been a very naughty boy, so you can go to bed without any tea!" "But what about the medicine I have to take after meals?" said Johnny, with a smile on his face.—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Kenneth Walker, 10, Main Street, Shirebrook, near Mansfield.

A LITTLE DEW!

He was an ardent lover, an Irish lover, and practically a penniless lover. It was St. Patrick's Day, and in his hand he bore a pot of real Irish shamrock. "They were raised in the ould sod," he said, as he presented the pot to Biddy; "raised in the ould sod of Oireland." "Sure, now, Murphy," cried his lady, in delight, "how really swate of ye it is! How perfect they are and how fresh! Sure, I do believe that there's a little dew on 'em yet." Murphy flushed slightly. "Begorra, I know there is!" he reluctantly confessed; "but, praise heaven, it'll be paid to-morrow!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. W. Bowden, 56, Worcester Villas, Hove, Sussex.

TAKING NO RISKS!

A lady engaged a new maid and found her asleep for the third time in one afternoon in the kitchen rocking-chair. "What, asleep again, Mary!" said her mistress. "When I engaged you you told me you were never tired." "No, ma'am, an' I ain't," replied Mary. "But I should be if I never slept!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Willie Grieve, 10, Mid Street, Alth, Perthshire.

HE KNEW QUITE WELL!

"Now, children," said the teacher, "you will generally find birds where there are trees, and worms where there is earth. Can anyone tell me what you expect to find where there are fish?" The class seemed lost for a few seconds, and then up jumped little Johnny. "Well, Johnny," asked the teacher, "what would you expect to find?" "Chips!" came the innocent reply.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Cleaver, 129, Ingram Crescent, Hove, Brighton.

NOT A BAD IDEA!

Mr. Closefist: "How much are the eggs?" Shopman: "Twopence each new-laid, and penny each cracked ones." Mr. Closefist: "Well, man, crack me a dozen new-laid ones!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Lily Bell, 50, South Grove, Walthamstow, E. 17.

NASTY!

Customer: "I want a hat to suit my head." Hatter: "Yes—er—er— A soft one?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Sadler, 82, Thornhill Road, Handsworth, Birmingham.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

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

Furnished with a clue, Walter Adolphus D'Arcy and his merry band of Third Form followers set out in search of hidden gold.



THE THIRD FORM ADVENTURERS!

A Magnificent and Thrilling Long Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. and the Fags of the Third Form.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Pulling Lowther's Leg!

"LOWTHER! I say, Lowther! Stop, do, please!" It was Joe Frayne of the Third Form at St. Jim's who called; and Monty Lowther of the Shell, cycling through the High Street of Wayland on his way to the station, pulled up and dismounted.

Curly Gibson was with Frayne, and both fags appeared to Lowther's eyes genuinely troubled.

Lowther was not precisely on the best possible terms with the little band of fags who acknowledged Wally D'Arcy as leader. Only a few days before he had had occasion to cuff Reggie Manners, the most troublesome and refractory of the six, for cheek.

He had almost forgotten the episode now, and would have thought that the fags had quite forgotten it, had he thought about it at all, until the moment when he was hailed by Frayne.

"What's the matter?" he asked, good-temperedly enough.

"Franky—a policeman!" gasped Curly Gibson.

"Do you mean that young Levison's got into trouble with the police?" asked Lowther.

Curly nodded, telling himself that a nod was not a lie, only a movement of the head. It was generally reckoned to mean "Yes," of course; but it need not necessarily mean that.

Lowther was in a hurry to get to the station. It was now twenty past three, and he wanted to be there when the 3.25 down train came in.

To keep an appointment at the station he had cut cricket, to the disgust of his chums, Tom Merry and Manners major.

"Just round the corner there," answered Frayne. "That was where we saw him and the bobby, anyways."

"If it was any of the rest of you I'd see you all hanged before I bothered about you," said Lowther, rather snappishly. "But Levison minor really is a decent kid. He's the only one of you all who knows how to behave himself. I can't imagine how he could have got into trouble with the police."

"Me neither," said Joe Frayne, truthfully if ungrammatically.

Lowther wheeled his machine round the corner indicated. Frayne and Gibson followed him.

"He'll be in time yet if he starts off straight away," said Curly to his chum, in an undertone.

"Yes. We got to hinder him some'ow, Curly, or Wally will be mad with us," answered Frayne.

There was no policeman round the corner, and no Levison minor.

Lowther looked at the two with some slight suspicion. But they really seemed to be worried.

And they were. They had promised Wally D'Arcy to hold the Shell fellow up long enough to allow the 3.25 to come and go before he reached the station, and they were rather afraid they might fail.

Lowther glanced at his watch. The police-station was not out of his way, but to call there meant cutting things very fine.

Good-nature and his real liking for Frank Levison triumphed. He spoke a word or two to Frayne and Gibson, then mounted his bike and pedalled hard for the police-station. If Levison minor was in trouble he would probably have been taken there. Anyway, they might be able to tell something about him.

It was a nuisance, as things were. With time to spare, Lowther would not have minded. He was just a trifle flattered by the appeal to him, as to one for whom the Police Force held no terrors; and he did not dream of the guile that lay behind it.

Gibson and Frayne followed again. But they were on foot, and could not keep up with Lowther. In fact, they did not want to keep up with him. They had done what they had undertaken to do.

A stalwart constable came out of the door as Lowther dismounted. He was lighting a cigarette, which showed that he had just come off duty.

"I say, constable, have you got one of our youngsters here?" asked Lowther.

"What's he been doin'?" asked the constable in his turn.

"I don't know. But I was told—"

"Somebody been pullin' your leg, sir. Wait a moment, though. A little chap in the school colours did speak to me a few minutes ago as I was comin' off my beat. He asked me what was on at the cinema, an' I thought he was gettin' at me, for the picture-show ain't a minute's walk away from the corner where I stood, an' there was three or four more of them standin' by an' grinnin'. But he looked innocent an' serious enough, so I gave him a civil answer, an' he thanked me like a little gentleman. That was all. Nothin' to take him in charge for, was there? Somethin' behind it, though, I reckon, else why did they all grin that way? A bet, maybe. No harm done, as I see."

"Thanks!" replied Lowther, his brevity in strong contrast to the wordiness of the policeman.

But Lowther was in a hurry, and the constable was not.

"Did you want me, Lowther?" inquired a small voice from the rear.

The Shell fellow whipped round, to see Levison minor.

"No. Better ask Frayne or Gibson about it, if you want to know. I've no time to waste on you."

And Lowther remounted and rode hard for the railway-station. But he knew that he would not be in time, for before he got there he saw the train go out, and he had to stand aside while the passengers who had alighted gave up their tickets.

Meanwhile Levison minor had joined Gibson and Frayne on the other side of the road, and Manners minor and Jameson now added themselves to the party. Only Wally D'Arcy, of all the six, was missing. Wally had business elsewhere.

Four of the five chortled. Levison minor did not chortle. He was not sure that he quite liked it.

"Jolly decent of him, you know," he said. "It isn't everyone who would go to the police-station for a chap, especially when he was in a tearing hurry."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 902.

"Oh, Lowther's decent enough most times," admitted Joe Frayne.

"It was just his swank," said Reggie Manners.

Manners minor nursed his grievances, and he had not yet forgiven Lowther for that cuffing.

"He does swank a bit," remarked Curly. "It was swank his asking us twice to post those letters to the 'Daily Standard.' He wanted us to know that he was sending articles to a London paper."

"Well, if he hadn't done that we couldn't have had him on toast this afternoon," said Jameson.

"It isn't so dead sure that we've got him on toast," returned Frank Levison. "I don't call that crammer about me being taken up by a bobby really pulling his leg properly, because if he hadn't been a good sort he wouldn't have bothered. Most fellows wouldn't have."

"Franky's weakening!" sneered Reggie Manners. "He'd like to let Lowther off."

"No fear!" said Levison minor. "I reckon it's a jolly good scheme. But I shouldn't wonder if he saw through Wally's disguise. He's pretty sharp, and it really is a bit steep."

Lowther's heart sank when he saw the down platform quite empty.

It would be rough luck if he missed the man he had come to see. It might mean a big chance lost, he imagined.

For Lowther had strong literary ambitions, and during the last week or two he had been very hard at work on a series of articles.

A letter, pouring vitriol on public schools generally, which had appeared in the "Daily Standard," had prompted him to the writing of the series. They were short articles, but he had laboured hard on each one, to make it terse and full of matter, and had abstained, though with difficulty, from emptying the vials of his sarcasm on the offending correspondent of the newspaper.

He had asked that the first article should be returned at once if not acceptable, and had enclosed a stamped and addressed envelope. It had not come back, and in high hope he had written a second. That also seemed to have stuck, and a third followed it, completing the series.

Lowther opened the "Daily Standard" each morning with hands that trembled a little. But, so far, the first article had not appeared.

That morning, however, had come the letter. He had it in his breast-pocket now. He had read it a dozen times, though as yet he had said nothing to his chums about it.

Tom Merry and Manners had not always been as sympathetic as they might have been to his literary ambitions. It would be a triumph to tell them what had happened, what was now going to happen, unless by ill-chance and an untimely jape he had missed his luck, this afternoon.

For surely the editor of the "Daily Standard" would not have sent a representative to meet him unless his ability to write had impressed itself upon that personage?

And it was to meet a representative of the paper that Lowther had come.

What a score it would be if he could take the "Standard" man back to tea in Study No. 10! That would make Tommy

Manners open their eyes. But even if he could not come—even if no post on the paper was to be offered to Lowther—surely the articles were going to be accepted?

No wonder his heart sank when he found the platform empty.

Then he gasped. For out of the general waiting-room came the queerest little man Lowther had ever seen.

He was not much over five feet. He wore a silk-hat, a frock-coat that came almost down to his heels, and large white spats. He had grey side-whiskers that were at least forty years out of date.

Was it possible that anything so queer should pervade Fleet Street in A.D. 1925?

Lowther put that question to himself. But, after all, it was of very little moment to him what the "Daily Standard" man looked like. What he had to say was the important thing.

"Mr.—er—Lowther?" inquired the queer little man in a high, squeaky voice.

"Lowther's my name," answered the Shell fellow.

"Er—I—er—you got the chief's letter, I presume?"

The voice was deep now, and an uneasy feeling began to trouble Lowther. Neither the high, squeaky voice nor the deep one was natural, and those grey whiskers really were too atrocious to be true.

The queer little man had a glove on one hand, but the other was bare. Lowther caught sight of it, and at once knew that he had been taken in, though his brain was in a whirl as to just how the deception had been accomplished.

For on that hand, near the knuckle of the forefinger, was a small, new wart, and Lowther had seen that wart on the right hand of Wally D'Arcy only a few days earlier.

Moreover, the hand was not the hand of a man. It might have been that and yet lacked something of being perfectly clean; but it could not have been a man's hand and yet looked so young.

Lowther was quick to act.

He made a grab at the grey whiskers, and they came away in his hands. But they did not come quite easily.

"Ow!" ejaculated Wally, putting up a hand to his face. He had been liberal with the spirit gum, and parting from those whiskers was painful.

"My hat! He's on to it already!" exclaimed Joe Frayne. The other five fags had stolen on to the platform, intending to show themselves at the critical moment.

But they certainly had not expected the critical moment to arrive thus early in the interview. Wally had been confident that he could take Lowther in for at least several minutes, and only Frank Levison, who had a high opinion of Lowther's astuteness, and Reggie Manners, who always cavilled, had ventured to hint a doubt. Even they had hoped Wally was right.

"Yow! Yoooop! Stoppit. Lowther!" yelled Wally.

For Lowther, naturally furious, was cuffing him hard.

"You young swindlers!" cried Lowther, seeing the others now. "So this was all a put-up job, was it? Thought you were pulling my leg, didn't you? But I don't reckon you've pulled it as hard as you fancied. It didn't take me half a minute to see through you!"

He pushed Wally from him. The others gathered round.

"It wasn't quite as big a success as we'd hoped," admitted the Hon. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy frankly. "Still, we kidded you here, that's something, Lowther. You can't say we didn't score there."

"Oh, you got me here. I don't deny that. But how did you do it? I suppose you got someone to compose and type that letter for you? But I can't make out how you got hold of 'Daily Standard' paper and envelopes."

"We didn't," said Wally. "And we didn't get anyone to compose and type the letter, either. Do you suppose we jolly well don't know how to do a thing like that ourselves? Franky's no end clever with a typer, and we can spell all right—at least, I can, and Franky, and two or three more of us, if Manners minor can't."

"I can spell as well as you, any old day, D'Arcy minor!" protested Reggie.

Lowther took the letter out of his pocket. Until now he had not doubted its genuineness. "Daily Standard" was on the flap of the envelope, the name and address of the paper were on the sheet inside.

"Franky did that, too, with his little printing outfit," explained Wally. "Jolly neat, eh, Lowther? You wouldn't know that it wasn't real proper machine printing till you looked at it closely, would you?"

That was true enough. But the difference was visible when one did look closely.

"This was posted in London," said Lowther.

"That's easy enough," replied Wally. "We got a chap to post it for us."

Lowther was angry, disappointed, and hurt. This had taken him in one of his tenderest spots. He could not understand why they had done it.

"What was it all for?" he asked.

"For clouting me!" barked up Reggie.

"That it wasn't, then," said Wally. "At least, only partly. We didn't just cotton to that; but we couldn't pile it on you, Lowther, because there were too many of us for it to be fair."

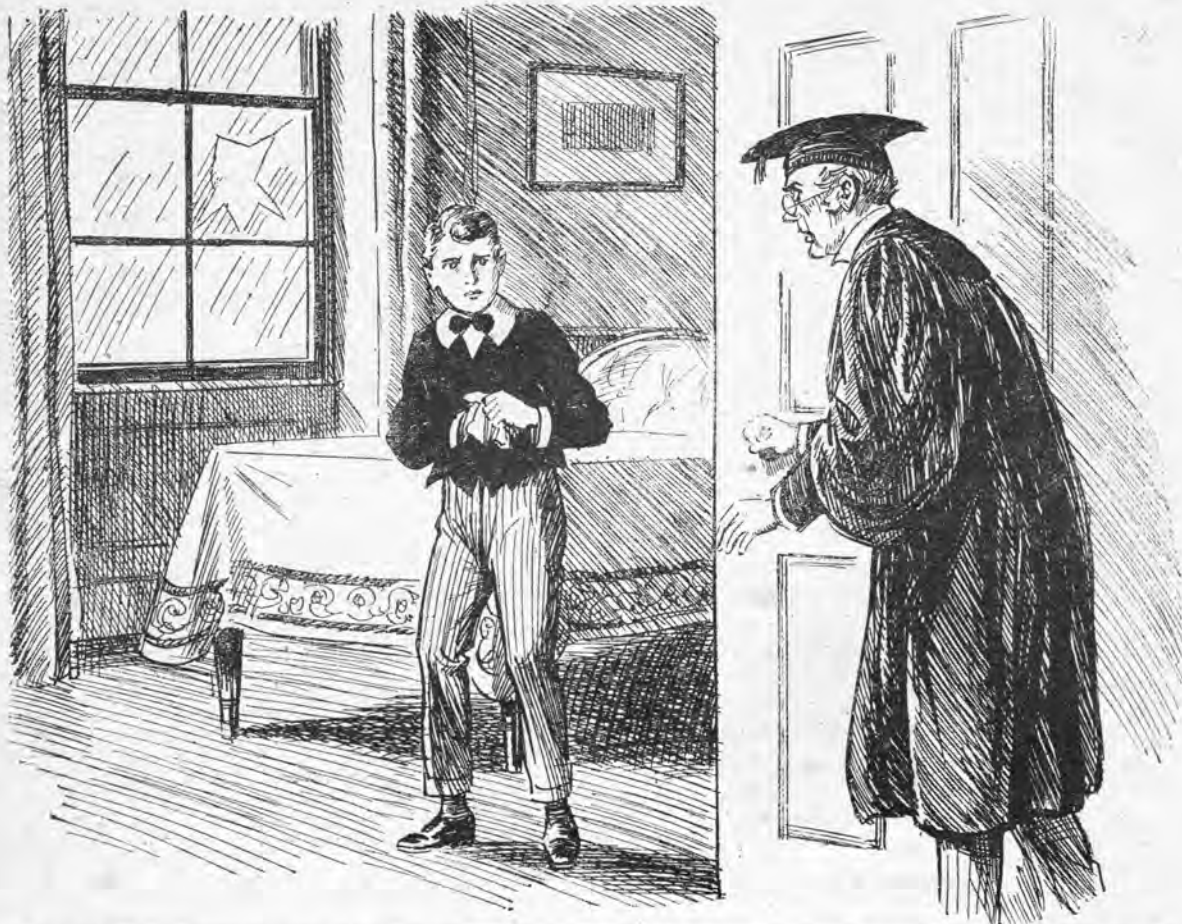
"But you needn't have given us so much of your rotten sarcasm," Jameson said boldly. "We hadn't checked you. It was only Reggie. But you laid into us all with your tongue like one o'clock."

CECIL PARKIN'S NOTEBOOK

Every week this popular Lancashire County Cricketer writes in **ALL SPORTS**—a series of amusing, personal reminiscences of famous players and matches, notes on county games, and everything of interest to the cricket enthusiast. Read them **TO-DAY** in

ALL SPORTS

Every Friday, 2d.



Frank Levison was standing staring at his bleeding hand when the door suddenly opened and Mr. Selby appeared. "Levison, what are you doing here?" snapped the Form-master. "Nun-nun-nothing, sir!" stammered Frank. "Did you break that window?" "Yes, sir." "How came you to do it?" "I was trying to get out!" said the tag, not wishing to lie. (See page 10.)

"I didn't say a thing that you didn't deserve. But that doesn't matter now, and I don't feel inclined to talk about it. Gibson, you lied to me, and so did you, Frayne."

"We didn't! We didn't tell a single crammer!" answered Curly. "For we did see Franky speak to a bobby, and all I told you was, 'Franky—a policeman.' And we didn't know where he was. We'd arranged that he wasn't to come back to us at once."

"That was to keep me from being at the station till after the train had passed, of course," Lowther said, rather bitterly. "I'll think twice before I help any of you out of a scrape again. But never mind, you've pulled my leg, and now I suppose that you'll go back to the school and chortle about it to everybody?"

"I sha'n't," said Levison minor contritely. "And I vote we don't any of us say anything."

"Oh, rats! Of course we shall tell the other chaps!" Reggie Manners said. "I bet your major will grin at it, Franky!"

That was the worst of it. The Shell and Fourth would grin. Even Lowther's best chums would think it no end funny.

"We'll keep it dark—on conditions," spoke Wally. "If Lowther will stand us all a decent tea we won't say a word to anyone!"

"You young blackmailer!" snorted Lowther.

"Rot! It's not blackmail! You don't want it told, and you ought not mind shelling out a bit to keep us from telling it."

The other five looked at Lowther hopefully. Their attitude amused him, angry though he still was. They were like a litter of puppies licking their chops in anticipation of succulent bones.

"I'll do it," he said. "But I won't have tea with you."

"Oh, I say, Lowther!" protested Levison minor. "No malice, you know."

"There's no malice; but you young bounders have scored off me, and you'd better watch out that I don't score off

you before you're many weeks older. Will a ten-bob note do you?"

"Yes; that's plenty. But I wish you'd come along with us, Lowther!" replied Wally. "After all, it wasn't such a mighty score. You twigg'd me almost directly. You've all got to promise not to say a word, you fellows—honour bright, now!"

They promised "honour bright," and Lowther knew that the promise would be kept. Reggie Manners made it reluctantly; but, having made it, he would not break it.

But Lowther was not quite appeased, and he would not go to tea with them. His refusal made them feel that what they had done did amount to something like blackmail. That feeling cast a slight gloom over the first few minutes of the tea—before the waitress served them.

It soon vanished, however.

CHAPTER 2.

Lowther Gives It Up!

"YOU can't do it, old chap!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, can't I?" returned Lowther. "We'll see about that! And why can't I, anyway?"

"Because it's beneath the dignity of a fellow in the Shell to play a trick like that on fags."

"Besides," Manners said, "you don't know what trouble might come of it. It would be bound to get them into a row with old Selby, and some of them might get sacked for it!"

Outside the door Reuben Piggott, the black sheep of the Third, pricked up his ears at that.

Piggott had been sent by Cutts of the Fifth with a message to Tom Merry. Ready to tap on the door of the study, he had caught a word or two from within that had arrested his attention, and now he was listening for all he was worth.

He knew, from what he had heard, that "them" meant his enemies, Wally D'Arcy & Co. Piggott reckoned that he had many scores to pay off on them, though, if a fair balance had been struck, it is a question whether there was

anything owing. If there was it was hardly Piggott's fault. He had never let slip a chance to do the brotherhood a bad turn.

It can hardly be said that he had seen a chance to do that in what he had heard as yet; but because it concerned them it interested him.

"Thinking about your blessed minor again, Manners?" said Lowther, with something more like a sneer than was usual with him.

"I have to think about him," replied Manners. "So would you if he were your young brother. For the matter of that, you have, and so has Tommy. You've both been no end decent in helping me to get the kid out of scrapes."

"He was the worst of the lot," grumbled Lowther.

But Lowther was partly mollified. It was quite true that he and Tom Merry had backed up Harry Manners in his efforts to keep Reggie in the straight path; but Manners' frank recognition of the fact pleased him at that moment.

"He didn't think of that scheme, though," Manners said. "He hasn't the head for it. Young D'Arcy and Frank Levison had most to do with it. They have a heap better brains than Reggie has."

"And they didn't score much," added Tom Merry. "When you spotted Wally so quickly you knocked the bottom out of it. I'm not sure that the score wasn't on your side."

Lowther could not see it quite in that way. He had told his chums nearly everything, but he had omitted to tell them that he had bought the silence of Wally & Co. with a ten-bob note.

That rankled. Lowther was not mean; he was generous, indeed. But he still regarded that ten bob as blackmail.

He showed his generosity now.

"I'll chuck it, then!" he said, with a sigh. "I can't go on with you fellows so dead against it. But it was a cast-iron scheme. They'd have fallen for it as sure as eggs are eggs, and they'd have been worse taken in than I was."

"I don't know," said Manners. "Mightn't they have found out that there never was any such fellow in the Third as Blagrove?"

"Hardly—because there was!" answered Lowther.

"And was he sacked?" inquired Tom Merry.

"He was."

"How did you find that out?" Manners asked.

"I've seen the leaving book. You remember that chap who came to see Gussy—no end of a good sort—who had been sacked donkey's years ago? Well, what he told us interested me, and I asked the Head if I might see the book. It was a kind of sidelight on the thing I was working at—those articles, you know."

Tom Merry nodded.

"By the way, have you heard anything more about them, Monty?" he asked.

In telling his chums of the trick played on him a week or so before—he had not told them anything until he had evolved his scheme to take down the fag fraternity—Lowther had been obliged to tell them of the articles sent to the "Daily Standard." To his surprise, they had not seemed at all disposed to jeer. Though they might chip him at times, they recognised the fact that Lowther had real journalistic talent.

Articles written by schoolboys had appeared on the magazine page of the "Daily Mail," as they knew. Monty Lowther was quite as capable of such work as any fellow of his age at any other school; and if the "Mail" accepted such articles, why should not another paper? Tom Merry and Manners would have rejoiced with their chum at such a bit of luck for him.

"No; I don't expect to now," answered Lowther. "That trick crabbled the whole bizney for me. They've gone into the wastepaper-basket, I suppose, though I think the editor might have had the decency to send them back."

"Never mind the articles just now," Manners said. "I wouldn't take it for granted that they were scrapped, if I were you, Monty. There's hope still. But about this fellow Blagrove. There's nothing in the rest of your yarn, I suppose?"

"But there is. He was sacked for association with undesirable characters, which looks like betting. I invented the sweepstake and the cash-box. But even if they made inquiries—which isn't a bit likely—they would find out that everything connected with Blagrove's leaving fitted in all right."

"Let's have a look at the letter you'd cooked up, old top," said Tom Merry.

Piggott was more intensely interested than ever. He counted it a rare stroke of luck that he should have been sent to tell Tom Merry that Cutts wanted to have the Form match next Saturday, and a still rarer one that he should have found the door ajar and this conversation going on.

Lowther produced the forged document—for such it might fairly be called.

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"My hat! You've taken some trouble to make it look genuine!" said Tom.

For the letter, which purported to have been written by Arthur Blagrove some two decades ago, really looked as if it were twenty years old. It was creased and dirty, and the paper used was like nothing in use at St. Jim's in these days.

"I went in for making the thing a dead cert," answered Lowther. "I can't see how they could have doubted it. And, believing it, they were bound to have a go for that cash-box, you bet!"

"But how were you going to get it in their hands without making them suspicious?" Manners asked.

"No great difficulty about that. Just walk into the Third Form room when there was no one about and stick it partly under the wood at the back, or side of someone's desk—D'Arcy minor's, or your minor's, or Frayne's. It wouldn't matter whose. Inside, of course. It would only mean the blade of a pocket-knife under and lifting ever such a little. But those desks are so old that the chances are it would be easy to find a crevice without that."

"I see," said Tom Merry. "Wally, or one of the other kids, finds the letter by accident—thinks it's worked out somehow after all these years—shows it to the rest, and then—"

"And then they're right in my trap!" said Lowther, grinning. "For they couldn't keep from trying for the treasure—ten solid gold sovereigns, comrades! I should have liked to make it ducats or doubloons; but Blagrove was a bit after the time of those noble-sounding coins."

"You may grin like a Cheshire cat; but it's no laughing matter!" Manners replied hotly. "Any of them—all of them—might have got sacked for it! You know what old Selby is."

"Don't get your hair off about it, dear boy. I've given it up, you know. Your precious minor won't get kicked out for trespass in the sanctum of the revered Selby, though I don't know that it would be more than he deserved if he did get the Order of the Boot."

"You really mean that you've chucked all idea of it?" persisted Manners.

Lowther began to get buffy again.

"Of course he has," said Tom Merry soothingly. "Hasn't he said so?"

"I should like to see him tear up that beastly forgery of a letter," growled Manners.

"You won't see me do anything of the kind!" retorted Lowther. "If you can't believe what I say without that you can do the other thing!"

"It isn't that I doubt your word, old chap," Manners said, more amiably. "But—well, it may be silly, but that seems to me a dangerous thing to have about."

The same notion had occurred to Piggott.

But it struck Piggott's mind from a very different angle.

Danger to Wally & Co. was pleasure to the black sheep of the Third.

He stole away now, his mind working busily. Cutts' message could wait. Piggott was not going to run any risk of having it suspected that he had heard that conversation.

A quarter of an hour later he stole back, after having watched the Terrible Three leave the School House in flannels for Little Side.

It was an off-chance that he would find the letter. But the chance was worth taking.

And he found it. Lowther had slipped it into his desk. He meant to destroy it later, but was too obstinate to do so directly after Manners had suggested its destruction.

On the way out Lowther glanced at the letter-rack. There was something for him, and his heart leaped and then sank again, as he saw "Daily Standard" embossed on the flap of the missive.

He tore it open. If this was another trick, he could see through it at once, he was very sure.

But it was no trick. It was good news—ripping good news!

The editor of the "Daily Standard" wrote to say that he had had Lowther's articles under consideration, and was intending to print the first two, with a few slight alterations. The third he thought unnecessary, as it dealt with aspects of public life which were not of sufficient general interest.

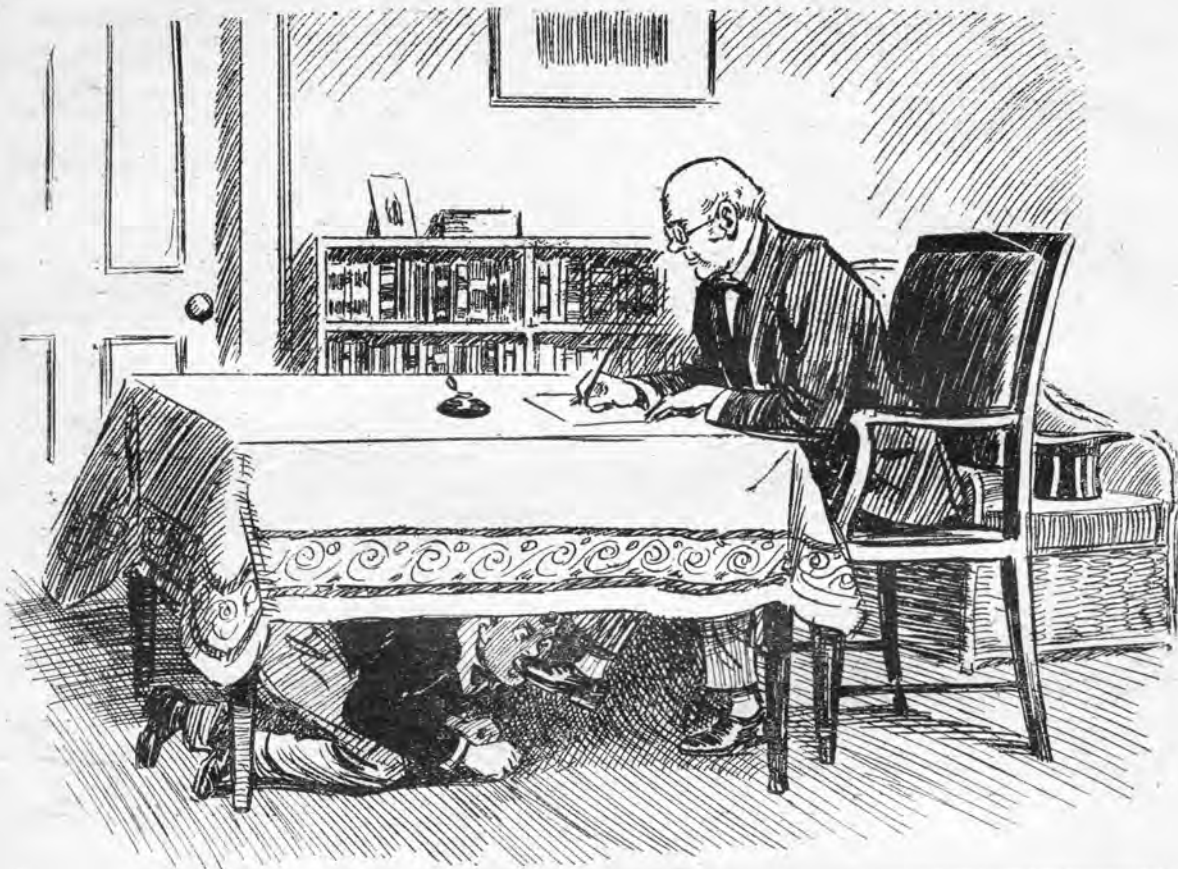
Lowther had thought the third the best. But he forgave the editor for disagreeing with him. He was wild with joy.

"Look here, Tommy—look here, Manners; it's turned up trumps, after all!" he cried. "They're going to use two of my articles. How's that, umpire?"

"I'm jolly glad, old chap!" said Tom.

"Same here!" chimed in Manners.

The news was all over the School House before bedtime that night. Mr. Railton heard it, and, meeting Lowther, congratulated him. Kildare, captain of the school, met him, and stopped to speak pleasant words. Knox, on the other hand, stopped to speak unpleasant ones, growling things about kids in lower Forms getting too big for their boots, and editors who ought to be slung neck and crop out of their



Unaware of the hiding-place of Curly Gibson, Mr. Selby sat down at his desk and wrote a note. He reached over to dip his pen in the ink and shifted one foot in doing so. It was rather unfortunate for Gibson, for that foot caught him on the nose. Mr. Selby did not feel the impact, but young Gibson did! (See page 12).

jobs for being silly asses. Most of the Shell and Fourth were pleased. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, while as pleased as anyone, wondered why the idea of writing those articles had not occurred to him. He was sure that he could have done them much better than Lowther.

Lowther forgot all about his scheme against the Third Form offenders. He even forgot their plot against him. He felt at peace with all the world—and never missed that bogus letter.

CHAPTER 3.

A Voice from the Past!

LOWTHER might have put that letter into the desk of any of the six, for he would not have felt it the decent thing to search among the varied belongings of the fags to make sure whose desk he had opened. He knew that they had managed to get together in the Form-room, and occupied the right-hand back row. But Piggott naturally knew just which desk belonged to each of them.

He chose Wally D'Arcy's, and he wasted no time. Within five minutes of his theft from Study No. 10 in the Shell passage he had hidden the letter under the side of Wally's desk, so that only a dusty corner of it showed.

It was easily enough done, and he had no need to use a knife. As Lowther had guessed, the desks, in use for many years, had warped in places.

Wally might not spot the letter at once; but he was bound to discover it soon.

Piggott read it before he tucked it away, of course. He chuckled over it. He was sure that Wally and the rest would believe.

The Third had prep in their Form-room, and Wally, fed-up with Caesar and quadratic equations, opened his desk to extract mental pabulum more to his taste than Latin or algebra. Even with Mr. Selby on guard it was sometimes possible, though risky, to steal half an hour or so for a detective or cowboy yarn.

As he took out the book he wanted, he saw the dusty corner of the envelope, and wondered what it could be. He tugged at it, and it came out.

"D'Arcy!" rasped Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir."

"Put down the lid of your desk, and get on with your work!"

Wally obeyed. But within half a minute he lifted the lid a few inches and sneaked the envelope out.

He contemplated it with interest. It was unaddressed and unsealed. It looked ever so old. That it did not belong to him, he knew; but it was from his desk, and he had surely a right to find out what it was.

He took out a sheet of paper, on which a few lines were written in ink that looked faded—owing to Lowther's having mixed water with it.

His eyes opened widely as he read those lines.

Thus they ran:

"This is for any chap in the Third who happens to find it, and the chink is his if he can get it. I am being sacked for betting and getting up a sweepstake and winning ten pounds in it. I gessed I was going to be sacked, and when old Varney had got me on the carpet and was called out of the room, I hid the money, wich I had in a steel cashbox, up the chimney. It's bad enough to be sacked, without that old roter taking the cash and sending it to a charity, wich he says he means to do. Giving it up woodent save me, I know, becaws they had foudn out too much about me. And I won't tell any of the chaps, for I don't trust any of them to play fare. Peraps their will be a more desent lot in the Third when this is found, and, if so, I will and bekweath this ten pounds to the chap who finds this. But he will have to get the chink for himself.

"(Sined), A. W. 'BLAGROVE'."

Was it any wonder that Wally thrilled?

Lowther had wrought cunningly. In its language and its bad spelling that letter was a typical Third Form production. Not for a moment did Wally D'Arcy doubt its genuineness.

He nudged Frank Levison, who sat next to him.

"Look at this, Franky!" he whispered. "I've just found it in my desk, tucked away under the side. But be careful that old Selby doesn't spot you."

Levison minor had conned his Caesar and finished his quadratic equations. He had leisure, though leisure was of little use to a fag under the eagle eye of Mr. Selby. Even had his work not been done, however, Frank would not have refused to look.

The letter made him gasp.

"I say, Wally, can it be true?" he whispered.

"Of course it's true, you young fathead! How can it help being true?"

"D'Arcy, if I have to speak to you again I shall cane you! Get on with your work!" came the voice of Mr. Selby.

Wally made a pretence of getting on. But it was hard even to pretend. Golden visions distracted him.

Since he might not talk, he scribbled on a scrap of exercise paper.

"What do you think of it?" were the words Frank Levison read.

"It's great!" Frank wrote.

"Jolly good luck for us!" scrawled Wally.

"Mean all of us?"

"Of course!"

"We've got to get it first, though."

"Oh, we can get it right enough, if it's still there."

The written conversation thus carried on seemed to entail little risk. The paper on which both wrote had only to be moved a few inches each time.

But the eyes of Mr. Henry Selby, always sharp, were specially sharp for Wally and his chums. Mr. Selby did not like any of the boys in his Form, but his chief dislike was reserved for them.

Frank Levison stole another glance at the letter.

"Bring that paper here, Levison!" grated the Form master.

Wally's heart stood still.

But he realised next moment that he might have trusted Frank. It was not the letter Frank took to Mr. Selby, but the scrap on which he and Wally had been writing.

"And what does this folly mean, Levison?" inquired the master.

Frank hated telling lies. But it was hardly a lie to say what he said then.

"It's a—sort of a game, sir."

"Dear me! A sort of a game, is it? It strikes me as an uncommonly silly sort of game. We will play another game with more reason in it. Stand out, D'Arcy!"

Wally stood out. The letter was in his pocket now, and he felt that he cared nothing for what Mr. Selby might do.

"It wasn't Levison's fault, sir," he said. "I started it."

"Oh, you started it, did you, D'Arcy? And just what does it mean?"

"Nothing in particular, sir. It's one of those games that keep you guessing till the end, and even the people who play it don't know what the end will be," answered Wally, inventing boldly.

"The players are about to learn what the end is," said Mr. Selby grimly. "Hold out your hand, Levison!"

"It was my fault, sir, really!" protested Wally.

"I am quite ready to believe that, D'Arcy. You will receive double the punishment given to Levison. But as he took part in the game he cannot expect to go scot-free."

Frank had three across the right hand, and took them without a sound. Wally had three across each hand, and grinned cheerily as he went back to his place, though he was careful not to start grinning till his face was turned from Mr. Selby.

"Sorry, Frank!" he whispered.

"What's the odds, Wally?" answered Frank pluckily.

They hardly knew how to wait till prep was over.

Piggott's eyes were upon them from time to time. The black sheep of the Third felt sure that the bait had been taken.

He was more sure than ever when Wally held back Jameson at the end of prep. Jameson was the one member of the fraternity who did not belong to the School House, and he and the rest of the New House Third-Formers were expected to be back in their own quarters within a few minutes of the hour at which prep ended.

"Is it anything important?" asked Jameson. "I don't want trouble with Ratty. He was down on me like a thousand bricks last week when you chaps had got kippers, and I stopped for a few minutes to help you wolf them."

"Ratty" was Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the master of the New House. He was probably more unpopular even than Mr. Selby, for his tyranny had wider scope. He was possibly more querulous and nagging. But he was not more sour. No one could be that.

"I've something in my desk—something no end interesting!" whispered Wally in the ear of the New House fag. "I'm going to tell the other fellows—Franky already knows—but you'd better clear, and hear about it to-morrow. Perhaps you won't want to be in it."

"You bet I shall if it's anything worth while," replied Jameson resolutely.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 902.

He went, full of curiosity, but preferring to defer it to gratification rather than risk more trouble.

Mr. Selby had gone. The Third had twenty minutes or so before supper. Wally drew aside Joe Frayne and Curly Gibson, and Frank Levison coaxed Reggie Manners away from a heated argument with Gibson, which looked like developing into a fight.

"Some silly rot, I'll bet!" growled Reggie.

"You won't say so when you know," replied Frank.

"Was it that you were caned for?"

"Yes."

"H'm! Must be something in it, then. You don't like being caned, I know, young Levison."

"You do, I suppose? Oh, come along, Reggie! If you really want to have a row with Gibson you can have it another time."

Reggie cast a wrathful look at the unconscious Gibson, who had forgotten all about him in those few seconds, and was now chaffering for a white rat with another member of the Form. It always annoyed Reggie when people did not take him seriously enough.

The meeting of the five took place in a box-room by the light of a candle-end.

Joe Frayne and Curly Gibson were convinced at once by the letter. But Reggie cast doubt upon it, not so much because he really doubted, as out of sheer awkwardness.

"May be all right," he said.

"What do you mean, fathead?" retorted Wally. "Why do you say 'may be'? Seems to me it must be."

"It might seem so to you, and yet not be so. You aren't always right, young D'Arcy."

"And you're pretty nearly always wrong, young Manners. Look at it! Anyone can see with half an eye that it must have been in my desk for donkey's years."

"In a donkey's desk for donkey's years!" gibed Reggie.

"But how did you come to find it now? You must have turned that desk out over and over again."

"Of course I have. But it wasn't really in the desk. It was tucked under the wood at the side."

"If there ever was such a chap here as Blagrove—"

"Stoopid! 'Ow could 'e 'ave wrote that letter if 'e wasn't 'ere?" struck in Joe Frayne.

"Who's to prove that he did write it? I say, if there ever was such a chap as Blagrove at St. Jim's, and he was sacked, and we could prove it, I should be sure this was O.K. But I shan't be sure till then."

"How else do you think the letter could have come there?" Curly asked.

"I don't know. How should I? It may be some wheeze of Wally's, for anything I can tell."

"Oh, don't be an obstinate ass, Reggie! Honour bright, it's no wheeze of mine, and I believe it's genuine. In fact, I jolly well know it is, and I reckon all that we've got to do is to see about getting hold of the chink."

"There's more than that to do," persisted Reggie. "Before we fool about in old Selby's den we'd better find out whether there ever was a chap named Blagrove here. And I'm jiggered if I can see how we're going to find out."

"I know!" cried Frank Levison. "Ask old Taggles. He's been here ever since the Flood, or thereabouts, and he can remember things and people all right if you tip him."

"Good egg, Franky!" said Wally, clapping Levison minor on the back with such vigour as almost to knock him over. "You're the chap for brains."

"It isn't a bad notion," Reggie said patronisingly. "I should have thought of it myself in a moment, I expect."

"Or in a hundred years!" Wally retorted.

"I say, Wally, it's jolly decent of you to let us go shares in this," said Curly Gibson. "You found the letter, and the money is yours really, if you like to hang on to it."

"Rats! We share and share alike. It will be nearly two quid each," replied Wally.

"He reckons we're to do our share of getting it," Reggie said. "I don't see that we've a fat lot to be grateful to him for. And he can't count. It won't be nearly two quid each; it will be just two quid."

"How do you make that out?" asked Wally.

"There are five of us, and I don't agree with you having more than the rest," Reggie answered.

"Do you think I'm as big a pig as you are, young Manners? I'm not asking for more. There's Jimmy, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose he'll have to be in it! But it will be a bit difficult for him, you know, as he's not in the House. I vote that if he wants to stand out we let him. If that letter's so old as you make out the cash will be in sovereigns, and that will be just two each."

"Jimmy won't want to stand out, you bet!" returned Wally. "You can, if you like, Reggie. You'll have to keep it dark, that's all."

"I'm jolly well not going to stand out!" snorted Reggie.

"Right-ho! I don't want you to. It's you that make all the measly objections. But I'm dead sure Jimmy will want to be in it!"

The event proved Wally right.

Jameson was as keen as any of them. He made light of the difficulty which the fact of his belonging to the New House seemed to create.

"I'm in and out here any time from nine in the morning to eight at night," he said. "It doesn't matter a rap when the search is made. It's only making sure that the old bear is out of his den and then sneaking in. I'll try first, if you like."

"No. We'll draw lots to settle the order," Wally said. "It's not likely the first one will strike lucky. Come to that, the cashbox may not be there now. The chimney must have been swept a dozen times since it was hidden."

The faces of the rest fell at the suggestion. Reggie Manners did not make anyone feel cheerier when he said:

"Come to that, it may never have been there at all. We've got to find out first whether there ever was any Blagrove, haven't we?"

"Taggles will tell us for half-a-crown," Frank said. "But it won't do for all of us to go to him. Two will be enough. I'll go for one. I don't think he bars me as much as he does some of you."

"I won't!" Wally said. "Old Taggles bars me hard enough. So he does you, Reggie; but you can go with Franky if you like. Only you'd better let Franky do the talking."

"I'll go," Reggie answered. "Look here, Wally, I haven't got any cash just now; but I'll bet you my next week's pocket-money that there never was any Blagrove!"

Lowther, though he had given up all idea of putting his scheme into action, might well have felt a glow of pride at its absolute water-tightness had he heard that.

It was little more than sheer obstinacy, a constitutional desire to differ, that moved Reggie. He had no definite suspicion of a plot. But if there had never been a Blagrove at St. Jim's, Wally & Co. might have given up the enterprise.

As it was, the other four waited while Frank and Reggie, with two shillings and sixpence, made up in small silver and coppers among them, and changed by grace of Reginald Talbot into a solid half-crown, went on their errand.

"I say, Taggles," said Frank, in his most friendly manner, "we want you to tell us something."

If Taggles liked any of the St. Jim's small fry, he liked Levison minor. But it was not in the nature of Taggles to be otherwise than grumpy.

"Which when Hi says is that wantin's one thing, an' gettin's quite another pair of boots," he answered.

"So it is. You might want half a dollar, Taggles, but that's not to say you're going to get it," said Reggie.

Taggles saw the gleam of silver in Frank's hand, and his manner softened.

"Not but what Hi might hoblige his properly treated," he said.

"You remember every fellow who was here in your time, I suppose, Taggles?"

"Yes, Master Levison. 'Undreds an' 'undreds of names could I reel you orf, an' put a face to each of 'em in my mind, as you might say. Most cheeky faces. But that's byes. When you meet a bye without no cheek in 'im you feel middlin' sure as 'e's booked to die young."

"I'm never cheeky, Taggles. You don't want me to meet with an early death, do you?"



CLIFTON DANE.

A staunch chum of Bernard Glyn and Harry Noble, with whom he shares Study No. 11 in the Shell passage. A Canadian by birth, and a real good and honest one at that. Being of a rather studious nature, Dane does not give too much time to play. He is always ready for a jape, nevertheless, if called upon. He can use the gloves, too, and has gained many clever victories in the school "ring." Although not a regular member of the school's footer and cricket elevens, Dane is always in readiness when wanted.

"No, Master Levison. Far be it from me! Which Hi will say that you got a 'cap more respect for your elders than most of them young rips!"

Taggles looked hard at Reggie. But his look made no impression whatever on that self-satisfied youth.

"Well, see here, Taggles: can you remember a chap named Blagrove?"

"'Course Hi can, Master Levison! An' talk about rips, there was one, if you like! O'n'y in the Third, though a biggish chap to be in your Form, an' bettin' an' carryin' on like a senior! Got sacked. 'e did, an' I can't recall as anyone was pertickler sorry for 'im. Which what I says is when you ask for it, don't you be surprised if you get it."

And Taggles looked hard at Reggie Manners again, as though the words he spoke contained a warning for Reggie.

They might have done had Manners minor heeded them. For Reggie had kicked over the traces in ways unusual with Third-Formers.

But Reggie heeded the words of Taggles not at all, as far as any warning they might hold was concerned.

There had been a Blagrove, and he had been just such a fellow as the letter Wally had found suggested he might have been!

That was enough for Reggie. He wanted no more talk with Taggles. He was burning to get at those sovereigns.

Somehow the notion of sovereigns appealed to them all far more than that of notes to the same amount would have done; and it was on this account that Frank Levison said:

"A goodish time ago, wasn't it, Taggles?"

"Ah, you may say so, Master Levison! Let me sec. Mr. Treherne was captain that year, an' old Varney was master of your Form. Queer old stick, that one—somethink after the pattern of Mr. Selby. Before Mr. Railton's time, it was. Ah, twenty years, more or less. Hi might put a hexact figger to it, but—"

"No need, Taggles, thanks! Here you are!" Taggles got his half-crown and retired into his lodge. Frank and Reggie cut off to tell their chums what they had learned.

CHAPTER 4.

The Company of Adventurers!

"TELL you what we'll do, Reggie," said Frank, as they hurried down the quad. "We'll form ourselves into a company of adventurers, like the old chaps in the days of the Spanish Main. You twig? The treasure is in the chimney in old Selby's room, and we are banded together to get it. We swear solemn oaths to be true to one another and secret as the grave, and each to do his best. And then we start in."

"Ugh! I don't care much for all that flummery," answered Reggie. "What I want is to be getting at those quids."

But that speech was due only to the principle of contradiction that was always strong in Reggie Manners.

He did not really consider Frank's notion mere flummery. If it had occurred to him he would have thought it no end good. And, though he sniffed at the enthusiasm with which the other four greeted it, he did not refuse to join the company.

It was inaugurated then and there. By the most solemn THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 902.

oaths they could devise the six swore to tell no one of that letter, to do all they knew how to get the treasure, and to divide it loyally when they had got it.

Then they drew lots to see who was to make the first attempt.

Six squares of paper numbered from one to six were put into a cap and well shaken up. Then they drew in alphabetical order, which gave Wally first dip.

He grunted with disgust when he found that it was No. 6 he had drawn.

Joe Frayne was next. He drew No. 3.

Curly Gibson followed, and No. 2 fell to his lot.

Jameson was next, and had No. 4.

Thus, No. 1 rested between the two who had interviewed Taggles.

"Bet you I get it!" said Reggie.

"I draw before you," answered Frank.

He took out one of the remaining squares.

"Number One," he said.

"Then my number's five! Just my rotten luck!" grumbled Reggie.

"Change with me, Franky!" urged Wally.

Frank shook his head.

"That wouldn't be fair!" he replied.

"I suppose it wouldn't," said Wally. "But I don't cotton to being last. I ought not to be last!"

"You won't have much chance. The others may muck it up, but I bet you I find it," said Reggie.

"You! It's just you I'm worrying about, you young fat-head! The rest may not find the chink; but I guess they'll manage not to get nabbed. But you're just the sort of silly ass that would go and get caught out, and spoil my chance."

"Silly ass yourself, young D'Arcy!" spluttered Reggie.

"Oh, chuck it!" said Frank, the peacemaker. "We've all sworn to do our best, and I'm sure Reggie will do his, if it ever comes to his turn. You needn't mind, any of you, if you don't get a turn. I may find the treasure, and I reckon if I do I'll clear out with it all serene, and not give old Selby a chance to drop on to me!"

"You don't feel farked, Franky?" asked Jameson.

"Farked? Are you? And if you're not, why should I be? I'll try it this very day, if I get half a chance!"

The resolute look on his face and the gleam of his blue eyes showed how little he feared the ordeal.

The chance came to him early that evening, half an hour or so before prep.

Piggott had spent a very enjoyable day, outside the hours he had been forced to devote to class-work. For two or three of the adventurers had been hanging about in the neighbourhood of Mr. Selby's study during all the time they were at liberty, and Piggott, himself unobserved, had watched them, and gloated over the trouble that was coming to them.

The scheme was working beautifully. They had swallowed the bait. And Piggott did not see how he could possibly have been suspected of having laid it.

Mr. Selby came out of his sanctum, and Levison minor, Manners minor, and Frayne dodged round a corner, only just in time to avoid being seen by him. He passed them within a couple of yards, his eyes set straight ahead, his gown swishing as he hurried.

"Now's the time, Franky!" whispered Joe Frayne.

"Right-ho! But you fellows clear out. If he should happen to come back directly and see you before he dropped on to me he would be sure to reckon you were in it."

"I say, though, you know, Frank, you don't think he's going to nab you, do you?" said Reggie, showing some feeling for once. "Better wait till we know the coast's clear, and not risk too much."

"We never know, really. He's in and out of his den at all sorts of times. I'm going."

"Well, don't you let 'im catch you up the chimney," said Joe Frayne.

He and Reggie moved away, and Frank stole into the study.

Piggott crept after him.

Frank did not close the door completely, but left it an inch or two ajar, so that he might hear Mr. Selby if he chanced to come back.

He did not hear Piggott. He was stooping and screwing his neck round to gaze up the chimney, when a hand stole round the edge of the door and noiselessly removed the key.

But he heard the key grate in the lock, and turned sharply at the sound.

All idea of exploring the chimney had to be given up at once. He was locked in, and for Mr. Selby to find him there, blackened with soot, would be about the worst thing that could happen for their project. The master's suspicions would be aroused at once; he might even have the chimney examined thoroughly and find the treasure!

Was this a silly joke of Reggie's? It was rather in his line.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 902.

No; Reggie would not play the giddy goat after such a fashion when he had sworn to do all he knew how to get the treasure. Besides, Joe Frayne was with him, and the trick was certainly not in Joe's line.

It might be someone trying to scare Frank, though. He went to the door and called softly:

"I say, whoever you are, let me out! I shall get in such a row if I'm caught here."

No voice answered, but Frank caught the sound of something very like a chuckle.

He thought of Piggott then. Piggott was spiteful, and never lost a chance of scoring off any of the fraternity.

But it was not easy to imagine why it should have occurred to Piggott to lock the door. For how could he know that the errand of Levison minor in the sanctum was an unlawful one?

"Are you going to let me out?" he called again.

Even Piggott might be satisfied with scaring him.

No answer came. Piggott had moved away.

Since by the door exit was impossible, Frank turned to the window.

It was open a few inches at the top; but the lower sash stuck hard when he tried to push it up. He struggled with it, his heart beating fast.

Footsteps sounded in the passage. Frank gave a desperate thrust upwards. His right hand slipped, and a pane was shattered. The broken glass tinkled on the flags below. The key grated in the lock.

Frank stood staring at a bleeding hand when the door opened and Mr. Selby appeared.

"Levison, what are you doing here?" snapped the Form master.

"Nun-nun-nothing, sir!" stammered Frank.

"Did you break that window?"

"Yes, sir."

"How came you to do that?"

Even if Frank had been willing to lie he could not have thought of any likely story.

Together the locked door and the broken window made it plain that he had not visited Mr. Selby's study to see Mr. Selby. For that matter it was the rarest thing for any Third-Former to come thither except when ordered to.

"I was trying to get out, sir," answered Frank.

"Oh, you were trying to get out, were you? But why? And who locked you in?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You mean that you will not tell!"

Frank let that pass. He saw a gleam of hope. Mr. Selby might think that someone had pushed him into the study, grabbed the key, and imprisoned him. Had that happened Frank would not have told. He would have done his best to get even later on.

It seemed that some such explanation had occurred to the master, for he said harshly:

"I will not endure these practical jokes, Levison! Perhaps you are not chiefly to blame; but you could not have been locked in if you had abstained from playing the fool in the passage, where you have no right to be. I shall punish you. Hold out your hand!"

Frank held it out—the right hand. He had forgotten about the cuts until he saw the blood dripping from them. Then he tried to substitute the left. But Mr. Selby had seen.

"Hem! I cannot cane you on that hand. You must have it seen to by the matron at once, Levison. Hold out the other!"

Mr. Selby's tone was not kind. There was no kindness in him. But it really was a trifle less harsh than usual, and the two strokes which fell upon Frank's left hand were the lightest he had ever had from his Form master.

"Now go and get that hand seen to," said Mr. Selby, laying down the cane. "And let this be a lesson to you. I will not have the boys in my Form using this passage as a playground."

"Yes, sir; I'll remember," answered Frank.

He was very nearly guilty of the indiscretion of thanking Mr. Selby, for he felt that he had been let off lightly, and that the chances of the rest had not been so much imperilled as they would have been had the Form master proved more suspicious.

He did not go to the matron. He wrapped a clean handkerchief round his bleeding hands, and got Joe Frayne to tie it up.

"Might have been worse," said Wally. "You've had your turn, Franky, and done your best, so you've got no more to worry about."

"I wish I knew who the rotter was that shut Frank in!" Reggie Manners said vengefully. "Look here, Wally, do you think anybody else is on to this?"

"How can anybody else be?"

"Well, we've talked a goodish bit, and someone might have heard. Or you might have left that letter—"

"Do you take me for a silly ass, young Manners?" snorted Wally.



"Cave!" whispered Kerr. "Here's Ratty!" Instantly Figgins & Co. made an attempt to hide young Jameson behind them. But Mr. Ratcliff was not so easily deceived. He saw the cowering gag behind the three New House juniors, and smiled a sour smile as he ordered him to stand forth. "Ah, Jameson, I perceive! And what have you been doing to get into this state, Jameson?" (See page 14.)

"Yes, sometimes. But I don't really think you'd be quite such a silly ass as that!"

"If anybody had got on to it," said Jameson, "he wouldn't fool about locking doors. He'd go for the cash himself, you bet!"

"We'd better be careful not to get talking too much, though," Wally warned them. "Young Manners is right there. Even the silliest chaps talk sense sometimes—just by accident."

"Look here, young D'Arcy, I'm not——"

"We know you're not—not quite all there! But that's not your fault. We're sorry for you."

"Time for prep," Frank said.

Mr. Selby dismissed prep a quarter of an hour earlier than usual. The Form thought his watch must be wrong, but forbore to suggest that possibility to him.

A few minutes later he passed the open door of the Form-room with his hat and coat on.

He cast a glance inside and at once spotted Jameson.

"It is time you returned to your House, Jameson," he said severely. "I have had occasion to speak to you before about loitering here. Don't let it happen again!"

He strode on. Jameson paid no heed.

"Now's your chance, Curly!" he said. "The coast is clear this time."

"I say—I didn't think—of course, I'm not finked—but I hadn't reckoned to go to-night!" stammered Gibson.

"Oh, of course you're not finked!" said Reggie scornfully.

"Dry up!" snapped Wally. "Curly's not finking it, but he'd counted on having his shot to-morrow."

"That was all," said Curly. "I'll go now, and punch young Manners' head when I come back."

"See here, old chap, if you don't care about going to-night I'll take your turn," offered Jameson.

"You won't, Jimmy! If there's going to be any messing about with turns I'll take it!" Wally said firmly.

"Why you any more than me? You come after me in the draw, don't you?" retorted Jameson.

"An' I come before you, Jimmy, so that's that!" said Frayne.

"I think I've got a right to the biggest say in the matter," replied Wally. "I found the letter and let you other fellows into it, didn't I?"

"That's right enough—and jolly decent of you, it was, old son!" admitted Jameson.

"Anyway, I'm going, so there's nothing to argue about," Curly said.

They were talking in low tones in the far corner of the Form-room, to which they had established a kind of proprietary right. Reuben Piggott sat at his desk a few yards away, seeming busy with a letter, but really straining his ears for anything that might reach them.

Not much did reach them; but Piggott had seen Mr. Selby go, and when he saw Curly Gibson detach himself from the rest and move towards the door he put his writing-pad in his desk and his fountain-pen in his pocket and strolled after him.

"Where are you going, Reggie?" demanded Wally, as Manners minor also moved towards the door.

"Oh, I'll be back in half a mo!" answered Reggie.

He was going to shadow Piggott. Manners major might not give his young brother credit for brains, and Wally might scorn his mental endowment, but Reggie was sharp enough. Possibly he was sharper in a matter of this kind than any of his chums, for his mind ran more to suspicion than did theirs.

Curly had disappeared, and for a moment Reggie fancied that Piggott had also. But then he caught sight of the black sheep dodging round a corner, heading for the Form master's study.

"Hi, Piggy!" he called, in a voice as unlike his natural one as he could make it.

Then he slipped back into the shadows of the dimly-lit passage.

Piggott reappeared. He stared down the passage, but could see no one. The call had made him feel uneasy, and he hesitated before turning back again to follow Gibson. He realised that the key trick could hardly be repeated, and that there was little to be got out of waiting close to the door of the master's study.

Then a familiar footstep sounded along the passage, and Reggie shrank back closer to the wall, while Piggott, considering boldness the best policy, accosted the master as he drew near.

"If you please, sir, there was a passage in the Xenophon to-day that I couldn't quite make out, and I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind explaining it to me," he said.

"My hat!" exclaimed Reggie under his breath. "There's nerve!"

"Your zeal for the classics does you credit, Piggott," said Mr. Selby rather dryly. "But I have no time to give you now. I had started out, but I found I had forgotten something, and came back for it. Show me the passage to-morrow, and I will elucidate it for you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Piggott humbly.

Reggie's brain worked quickly. Curly would be caught unless something was done. But if he had warning he might be able to hide until the master had gone out again. Probably it would only be a matter of a minute or so.

Reggie drew back a yard or two. Then he made a rush, seeming to come from round the corner, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Hi, Piggy!"

"What do you mean by making that outrageous noise in the passage at this time of the evening, Manners?" thundered Mr. Selby.

To make Mr. Selby thunder was exactly what Reggie had intended. Curly could hardly fail to hear him.

Curly heard, and Curly dodged under the table.

"Sorry, sir!" said Reggie. "I didn't think you were here!"

To himself he added:

"I didn't think he was, for I knew he was!"

Reggie's conscience could accommodate itself to circumstances.

"You will write me fifty lines, Manners!" snapped Mr. Selby. He passed on.

"Serve you right, Manners minor!" said Piggott viciously. "What do you want yelling after me for?"

"You be careful, Piggy! I've got my eye on you!" answered Reggie.

Piggott made no reply to that. He sheered off. Reggie only withdrew far enough to be unobserved by the master when he came back.

But the minutes passed, and Mr. Selby did not come.

Reggie grew worried. Taking a risk, he crept up to the door of the sanctum.

No sound came from within. The key had been removed, and Reggie stole a glance through the keyhole.

Mr. Selby sat at his table, writing. It was evident that he meant to go out again, for he had not taken off his light outdoor coat, though his hat lay on a chair beside him.

There was no sign of Curly.

Gibson, in his place of hiding, was growing very worried. He was a nervous youngster, though he did not lack pluck, and of all the six he was the least fitted for such an ordeal as this.

Mr. Selby's feet were within an inch or two of his face, and he dared not move. The scratching of Mr. Selby's pen almost maddened him. He felt as though he had been there for hours.

Actually it was, of course, only a matter of a few minutes, and imagination was largely responsible for the attack of pins and needles in his right leg which Curly felt now.

He was sure he must scream if he did not move that leg. He straightened it out, very careful not to make the least noise. But in one particular he was not careful enough. His foot now showed beyond the tablecloth.

Reggie had shifted away from the door. But he waited in the nearest hiding-place he could find.

"There's no depending upon old Selby!" he said to himself bitterly.

But Mr. Selby was merely writing a note. He signed it now, reached for an envelope, and shifted one foot in doing so.

His boot caught Curly Gibson on the nose. Mr. Selby did not feel the impact, but Curly did.

It took very little to make Curly's nose bleed. The blood gushed now.

Mr. Selby, still unconscious that he was not alone, put the note into the envelope and addressed it.

He got up, and this time his foot caught Curly in the chin. It was all that the luckless fag could do to stifle a howl of pain.

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But again Mr. Selby had felt nothing. He was just about to switch off the light, which had been necessary for his letter-writing, though it was not yet dark outside, when he chanced to turn his head and saw Curly's foot!

There were times when Mr. Selby displayed an activity hardly to be looked for in a man of his years. This was one of them.

In a twinkling he had snatched up a cane. He lifted the tablecloth. He struck!

"Ow! Yow! Yooooop!" yelled Curly, utterly taken by surprise.

"Come out!" thundered the Form master.

Curly dragged himself out, his face blood bedabbled and woeful.

"Really, Gibson, I am disgusted with you! I cannot imagine why the boys in my Form should consider my study an eligible place for blood-letting. What is the matter with you?"

Sitting on the floor and looking up into the master's face, while he dabbed at his nose with a handkerchief that had lost its pristine cleanliness, Curly mumbled:

"Please, sir, you kicked me on the nose, sir!"

"For that I cannot honestly profess any regret. What were you doing under my table?"

Curly did not answer. What was the use of any answer? He could give none that was in the least likely to be held satisfactory.

"Stand up, Gibson! Hold out your hand!"

Curly obeyed. He had yelled when the cane descended upon his legs, for that was unexpected. But he took three across each hand with the stoicism that was part of the clan's creed.

He was thankful to get off without further questioning. But for the fact that the master was in a hurry he would not have had that luck.

Mr. Selby picked up the key from the table and rather markedly locked the door behind him. Then he strode down the passage, and Reggie came out of his lurking-place and joined the woeful Gibson.

"I did what I could to warn you, Curly," he said.

"I know. Thanks no end, Reggie! Oh, I say, old Selby is a beast! He kicked me on the nose and made it bleed, he kicked me on the chin—and I'll bet it's swollen to twice its proper size—then he laid into my legs with a cane, and after that he gave me three across each hand! What do you think of that for a nice little lot?"

"He didn't kick you on purpose, I suppose? Yes, it's rough luck, old chap. I say, there's no chance for anyone else to-night. He's locked the door."

"I know. Oh, hang the treasure! I'm fed-up with it!"

"Never mind, Curly. You've had your turn. It's Joe next. By the time it comes to me I guess the old hunks will have smelled a pretty big rat."

CHAPTER 5.

The Adventurers Carry On!

MR. SELBY had not as yet smelled a rat. He might have done, however, had his mind not been busy with other matters than his Form.

The Adventurers had no chance next day. Joe Frayne, generally with one or more of his chums, hung about waiting. But the Form master kept to his study when not in the Form-room or at meals.

Saturday came. Saturday afternoon ought to offer an opportunity. Mr. Selby generally went for a walk on half-holidays.

Joe had to cut cricket, but Wally would not hear of any of the others doing so. It would be a bad example, he said, and enough of the Third shirked the game already.

So Joe waited alone for his chance. He did not mind. There was any amount of pluck in the former waif, whose early life had been so hard.

He saw Mr. Selby go at length, and stole along to the sanctum, very much afraid that he would find the door locked.

But it was not locked. It occurred to Joe that to lock it now might be quite a good move, and he turned the key. Then he made sure that the window-sash was working more freely than it had been two days before, when Frank Levison had been trapped through its stiffness.

The sash was still obstinate. Joe brought to bear upon it a ruler from the table, using this as a lever. The ruler snapped in the middle just as the sash yielded to pressure.

"Dash!" said Joe. "E won't 'arf make a fuss when 'e sees that. I'd better stick it up the chimney, then p'r'aps 'e won't think about it."

Little Frayne had prepared for what was before him by putting on the oldest clothes he possessed. Frank and Curly had both failed to get as far as the chimney, but Joe reckoned that he had an hour or two for his search, and he was ready to go right up if necessary.

The chimney was wide, and Joe Frayne was small. He

looked up, and saw that quite a big patch of blue sky could be seen.

"W'y, I do b'lieve I could get right up there an' come out on to the roof!" he murmured.

He did not guess that this device would be forced upon him by circumstances.

He thrust his right hand well up, and found a ledge. That sent a thrill through him, and as he felt along it he expected every second to clutch the box which held the mythical treasure.

Nothing!

From one end of the ledge to the other his hand had passed, and most certainly nothing but soot was there. Plenty of soot. Almost up to the shoulder he was smothered with it.

He put the two sections of the broken ruler on the ledge, and tried the other side.

Yes, there was another ledge there. The thrill re-awoke as he felt along it.

Nothing, except soot! Plenty of that.

Joe was not very sure how chimneys were built, but it seemed to him possible that there were other ledges above these. A doubt did occur to him as to whether Blagrove, seizing the momentary chance of the master being absent from the room, would have ventured to take time to go higher, but he dismissed that doubt.

Anyway, it was up to him to explore the chimney while he had the chance.

He stood in the empty grate, clutched one of the ledges, and pulled himself up.

The soot fell around him. It got into his eyes and made them smart. It got up his nose. It all but choked him. But he held on.

Now he stood straddled across the chimney, with one foot on each ledge. He felt for hand-hold higher up, and found it easily. The brickwork was uneven, and there were plenty of crevices. Some of them were big enough to have held a cashbox which would go into a boy's pocket, and when he found one of these Joe would not be satisfied till he had made quite sure that the cashbox was not there.

Hope rose and ebbed in him. Now he felt sure that the treasure must be in the next cranny searched, and again he told himself that he was a fool—that some sweep must have had it long ago.

But never once did he get as far as doubting that the treasure had been there.

He was coated from head to foot in the greasy black stuff. His face was as black as a negro's. But he did not feel as much discomfort from it as he had done at first.

Blagrove could never have got as far up as this. He might as well chuck it.

Then, as he was about to come down, he heard the angry voice of Mr. Selby, sounding queerly through the door and up the chimney, but plainly audible.

"Who is in there? Open the door at once, I command you!"

"Jolly likely, ain't it?" muttered Joe.

For a moment he considered the possibility of escape by the window.

But that was a slender chance at best. If he tried it he might meet Mr. Selby there, for the master would be likely enough to go round to the window when tired of shouting at the person he supposed to be inside.

The sight of Joe in his present state might scare Mr. Selby into a fit. Joe would not have minded that so much, but he did strongly object to the inevitable sequel.

There was only one way of escape—up the chimney and on to the roof.

So, while the irate master thundered outside the study door, Joe Frayne scrambled up the chimney with the agility of a monkey.

The opening was just wide enough to enable him to pass through without a squeeze. He pulled himself up and out, and crouched by the side of the chimney stack.

For the moment he forgot that to reach the roof was not in itself escape. The view held him.

Down there he saw the quad, empty just then; beyond it the playing-fields, dotted with white-flannelled figures; farther yet the spire of Rylcombe church and the roofs of the village and Rhyl gleaming silvery in the sunshine; still beyond Wayland Moor, and the smoke of Wayland on the horizon.

From the more distant view his gaze came back to the games in progress on the playing-fields. Over there the Shell, with Tom Merry as leader, met the Fifth. The Fourth had a pick-up game on, so also had the Third.

But the Third did not appear to be getting on, with their game. Some of them had clustered together at one end of the pitch, and it seemed to Joe that their faces were all turned his way.

Then he bethought him that the sooner he found his way down the better it would be for the Company of Adventurers and the safer for him.

Until then he had not considered the difficulty of getting down.

Now he realised that it was a very real one. There were skylights in the roof, but skylights fasten inside, and it would be a rare bit of luck if he found one unfastened. There were other chimneys, and to get down one of them might be possible, though risky. But which one? He did not want to find himself in the Head's study, or in Mr. Railton's.

Joe's head was steady enough. The distance between the roof and the ground gave him no qualms, for he never thought about it. But he went carefully as he crawled to the nearest skylight.

Fastened, of course! He could have expected nothing else.

He passed along the ridge of the roof to another.

No better luck there.

Then he glanced again at Little Side, with a vague thought that his chums would come to his aid if they only knew of his plight.

He saw the stumps gleaming yellow in the sunlight, but not a player near them. The Third-Formers had deserted their game, and were rushing for the quad.

Indeed, some of them were already there. From below came now their excited voices.

"What is it?"

"A monkey—one of those black ones! I wonder where it came from?"

"It's not a monkey, fathead! It's a sweep. But what did he want to get up on the roof for? You don't sweep chimneys from the top."

The unflattering likening of himself to a monkey did not reach Joe's ears. But the shrill voice of Curly Gibson came clearly up to him now.

"I say, Wally, it's Joe!"

"My hat! So it is! Here, come along, you fellows! Reggie, Jimmy, Frank!"

Jameson and Manners minor, Gibson and Levison minor, followed their leader at once. So did a dozen others whom Wally had no wish to lead at that moment.

Wally turned.

"We don't want you chaps!" he said. "This is our bizney. See?"

But they could not or would not see. They pressed on behind Wally and his comrades.

It did not matter much, after all. They knew that it was Joe Frayne on the roof; and Joe could be trusted not to let out what had taken him there.

Up to the highest floor pattered quick feet, and Wally, mounted on the shoulders of the sturdy Jameson, slipped back the catch of a skylight and pushed up the frame.

Joe Frayne wriggled towards the welcome avenue of safety, and his soot-blackened face, with the whites of his eyes rolling queerly, appeared above them.

"I say, you 'ave'n't 'arf brought a crowd along, Wally, old scout!" he said.

"I didn't bring them. The silly asses came," replied Wally.

"Stand aside, all of you! You don't want to get all messed up with soot," said Joe.

They stood aside, and he dropped from the skylight on to his feet.

"What have you been up to, Frayne?"

"Joe's started chimney-sweeping. How do you like it, Joe?"

"Shut up, you fatheads! I say, Wally, it wouldn't be a bad notion if you could get me a basin of water an' clean clothes up 'ere. If I go down to the dorm, like this there's goin' to be a 'ole 'eap of soot about."

It was quite a good notion. Frank and Reggie went off to get the basin and Joe's clothes. The place in which he stood was a box-room, and once all the incriminating evidence was cleared out of it the soot could be left to puzzle the maid who next visited it—weeks hence, likely enough.

Frayne stolidly refused to answer any of the questions which poured upon him. But neither he nor Wally could induce the crowd to clear out. The crowd regarded it all as a mysterious joke, and stayed to watch Joe strip and wash, and reclothe himself.

Curly Gibson went down and fetched some newspapers, and Joe's soot-smothered clothes were wrapped up in these. The parcel would have to be got rid of somehow; but that could be done later.

Piggott had not been playing cricket, and was not one of the crowd in the box-room. Reggie Manners noticed that fact. Reggie was full of suspicion against Piggott, though, naturally, he did not suspect the whole truth.

It was against Piggott, not against the Form master, that Reggie was watching when he left the box-room to wait at the top of the stairs. There would be talk afterwards, and Piggott would be sure to hear. But afterwards would be

too late for him to do anything. If he knew now he might contrive to bring Mr. Selby upon the scene.

Which was exactly what Piggott had contrived. Though he had not been on Little Side, he had seen Joe Frayne on the roof, and had he known at that time that Mr. Selby had cut short his customary walk, the Adventurers—and the rest, who knew nothing of what was at the bottom of all this—would have been caught in the box-room by the Form master.

But it chanced that Piggott did not see Mr. Selby till Joe was once more clean and decently clothed, by which time the Third Form master had entered his study by the window and unbolted the door.

"Oh, I say, sir, I don't want to tell tales, of course, but a whole crowd of fellows have gone right up to the top floor, and I believe they're going to get out of a skylight on to the roof!" he said breathlessly when he saw the master in the passage.

He dared not say more, though he knew that Mr. Selby really had no rooted objection to tale-bearing.

"Good gracious! Will the Form never give me any peace?" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

He darted back into his study and snatched up a cane. Then he rushed upstairs, blowing hard as he went.

Reggie heard him before he saw him, and caught a glimpse of the thinning hair on his head while he was still two flights below.

"Look out, you fellows! Here's old Selby coming!" he cried, darting back into the box-room.

The basin and the parcel were thrust into hiding at once. But the soot remained. If the Form master saw that questions would be asked, and trouble was certain.

"Clear out, before he gets here!" ordered Wally.

They trooped out, Joe Frayne in the rear. Joe was not sure that he had cleansed himself from every vestige of soot.

Mr. Selby was halfway up the last flight when they appeared at the top of it, and so badly blown that he was glad to stop, instead of expecting them to stand aside and make way for him.

It was no time for hesitation. Wally led the crowd down.

"What were you doing up there, D'Arcy?" snapped the master.

"We just went up to the box-room, sir," replied Wally. "There's no harm in that, is there?"

"Have you, or have you not, been on the roof?" inquired Mr. Selby.

"We haven't been on the roof, sir," Wally answered.

They had not. One of them had, it was true. But that was not quite the same thing.

"I have reason to believe that it was your intention to get on the roof, and that only my coming deterred you. Stand back, all of you except D'Arcy! Hold out your hand, D'Arcy!"

Wally obeyed, and took three strokes. One by one, the rest descended to the landing, and each had a like dose. The Adventurers thought they were getting off cheaply. The others hardly shared that feeling, and felt inclined to be bitter with Joe Frayne for letting them in for this.

Joe was the last to endure the penalty. He was vastly relieved when he found that he passed muster without any remark from the Form master. His relief was still greater when, having caned about half his Form, Mr. Selby stalked downstairs again without visiting the box-room.

Piggott, who had few pals in the Form, and was not too tender about the feelings of those few, chuckled with delight when he heard what had happened. The scheme he had stolen from Monty Lowther was working beautifully, he considered. And he hoped for more trouble for the enemy, feeling sure that they would not give up yet.

The Third played no more cricket that afternoon. The Company of Adventurers adjourned to a safe place by the Rhyl, and there Joe Frayne told his story.

"My hat! You've nerve enough, Joe!" said Wally. "Hope no one else spotted you on the roof, though."

"Are you sure the cash-box isn't there?" Frank asked. "Because if you are, it's no use anyone else trying to find it."

Joe shook his head.

"Can't be sure," he said. "There's so many 'oles where it might be 'id."

"And I'm going to have my shot, anyway!" declared Jameson.

"So am I!" said Reggie.

"And you bet I am!" Wally said. "I say, Reggie, old top, you did a bit of good work in warning us of old Selby's coming. If he'd seen the soot we'd have been fairly up a gum tree."

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Reggie swelled with pride. It was not too often that praise from Wally came his way.

"I'm not such a fathead as I look, you know, Wally," he said, assuming humility that he did not feel.

"No; you couldn't very well be," answered Wally.

That rather spoiled it. But, on the whole, Reggie was satisfied. He said nothing to the rest yet as to his suspicions of Piggott. He wanted the glory of finding out what the black sheep was at for himself.

CHAPTER 6.

The Last Attempt!

"MY word, young Jameson, what have you been up to?"

It was George Figgins, of the Fourth Form and the New House, who spoke. Behind Figgins were Kerr and Fatty Wynn, both grinning at the spectacle which Jameson presented.

For the New House member of the Company of Adventurers had taken his turn, and had found nothing but soot—plenty of that! He had counted himself lucky in getting out of Mr. Selby's study undetected, and luckier still in getting across the quad in the dusk without being seen by anyone.

And now, at the side door of the New House, his luck seemed to have reached its end.

In a general way, Jameson thought highly of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. But at this moment they were an abominable nuisance, for the last thing Jameson wanted was to answer questions.

"Oh, don't rot, Figgy!" he said. "I want to get in and clear this stuff off me as soon as I can."

"I should think you would," replied Figgins. "What's made you take to chimney-sweeping, young Jameson?"

"Cave!" whispered Kerr.

In an instant Figgins put himself in front of Jameson. Fatty Wynn interposed his solid bulk. Kerr did what he might to help in providing shelter.

But Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, was not so easily deceived. He saw the cowering fog behind the three New House juniors, and smiled a sour smile as he ordered him to stand forth.

"Ah, Jameson, I perceive! And what have you been doing to get into this state, Jameson?"

"Please, sir, I was looking up a chimney, and—"

"Is the unfortunate boy mad? Why were you looking up a chimney, Jameson? It strikes me as an exceedingly stupid thing to do."

"Yes, sir," agreed Jameson.

"For looking up a chimney, Jameson, I should not punish you. But for coming into my House in this disgraceful state I feel it my duty to do so. Come to my study! You, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, will also follow me. It did not escape my observation that you were trying to hide Jameson from me."

"He told me to stand fourth. That's where I was standing. But he wouldn't have seen the joke," whispered Jameson to Figgins.

"He certainly wouldn't. Sorry if we helped to get you into this scrape, kid."

"Oh, it's no odds! I might have run right into him if I hadn't met you, and you did your best to save me. I'm sorry that you're to catch it, too."

"Ratty's way!" murmured Figgins.

Nothing pleased the sour Housemaster better than to jump on those three; and quite possibly Jameson got off better than he might otherwise have done because of their sharing his punishment.

He was glad that no more questions were asked of him, and took his caning as the three took theirs. It was all in the day's work. Between them Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Selby did more caning than all the other St. Jim's masters together.

The fourth of the adventurers had taken his turn, and had found nothing.

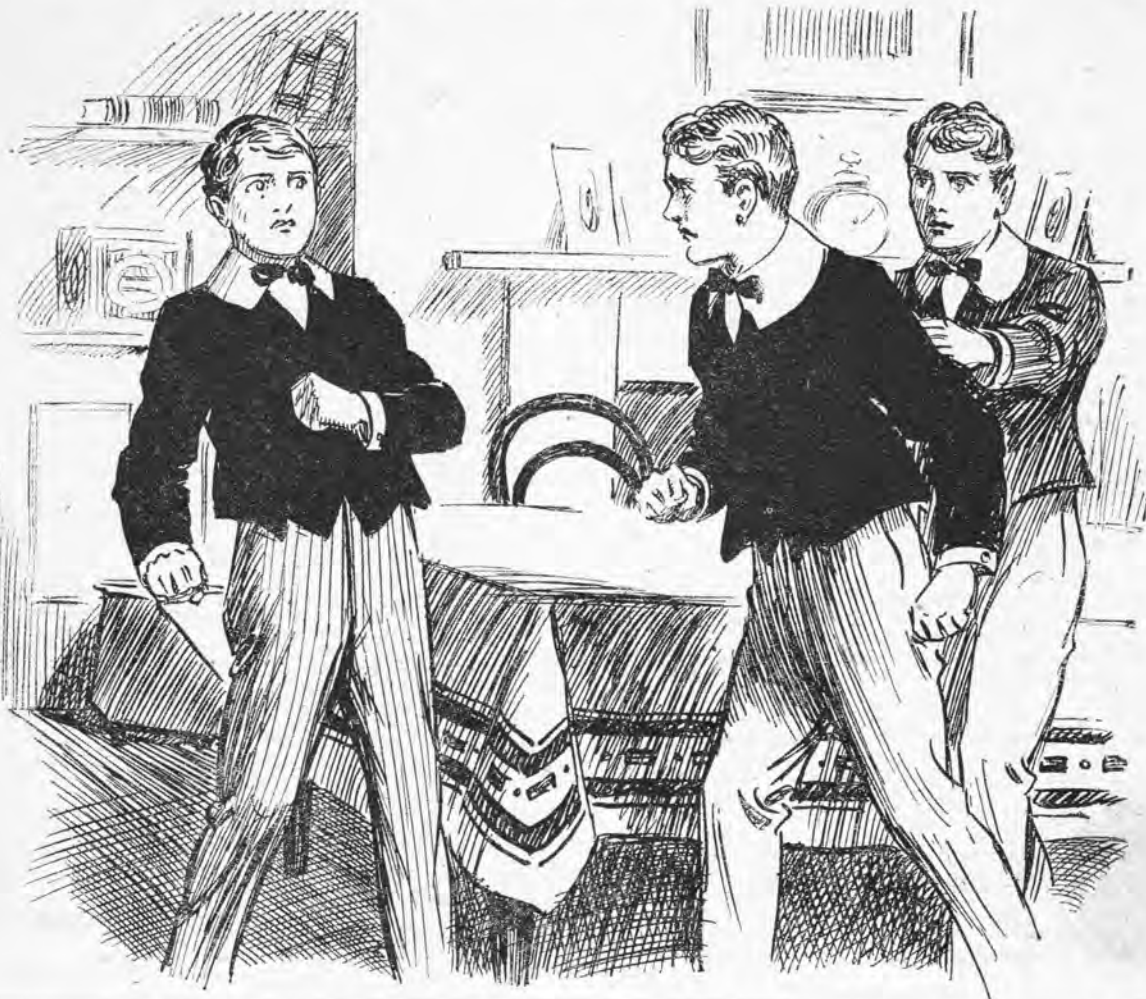
That was not surprising, as there was nothing to find. Some doubt as to whether there was anything had already seized their minds. But two more still had their turns to come.

Reggie's really did not amount to much in the event. But that was not his fault.

Hardly was he inside the room before Mr. Selby entered in a hurry, thrusting the door open and concealing Manners' mirror behind it.

There Reggie stood, pressed up against the wall, while Mr. Selby wrote rapidly for a few minutes, and then went to the door again.

He seemed to be waiting for someone. Reggie took his courage in both hands. To attempt escape was risky; but to stay was certain doom. Reggie slid out behind the master, and, while Mr. Selby faced one way down the passage, stole on tiptoes the other way, his heart in his mouth.



"You cad!" cried Manners, facing his chum with angry eyes and scarlet face, "I'm off to tell D'Arcy and Levison that their minors are to suffer for your beastly trick as well as mine. You've about done for yourself at St. Jim's, Lowther!"

"Steady, Manners, steady!" urged Tom Merry. "Wait and listen to what Lowther has to say first!" (See page 17.)

Round the corner he halted. He heard Mr. Selby speak to Toby, the page.

"Take this to Mr. Raillon at once," said the master.

Toby departed. Mr. Selby retreated into his sanctum, slamming the door. Reggie bolted.

"I'm sorry," he told his chums. "I didn't even get near the chimney. Directly I was inside, old Selby bobbed back, and I had to hide behind the door. I'll try again."

"Not jolly well likely!" said Wally. "Not till I've had a shot, anyway. I had a sort of kind of notion all along that I'd be the one to find it, though I did draw No. 6 in the lots."

Frank Levison and Joe Frayne looked at one another meaningly. Joe had come to the conclusion that there was nothing to be found, and he had convinced Frank. Jameson wavered, hoping for the best. But he had made quite a close search of the lower part of the chimney, and had found nothing. Curly Gibson and Reggie Manners apparently shared Wally's optimism.

Wednesday had come round before Wally got his chance. It was a bleak and cheerless day, far better suited to footer than to cricket, and, as cricket was not compulsory on that day, there was for once no Third Form game.

The Company of Adventurers had begun to feel that they had a personal grievance against Mr. Selby. Hitherto his habits had been regular. If he went for a walk, one might count upon his being gone for at least an hour and a half. He had never been in the way of bobbing in and out of his study like a rabbit in a warren.

But for the last few days there had been no relying upon him. It was almost as though he suspected something was doing, and had made up his mind to thwart the project.

They could not bear to wait until he had settled down to regular ways again, however; and as soon as he had gone on that half-holiday Wally made his venture.

He had resolved that there should be no half measures.

He would search every nook and cranny in the chimney. That seemed to him easy enough. Joe Frayne, who had tried it, knew that it was not so easy. But it was no good arguing with Wally.

Half way up the chimney he had worked, seeking diligently, when he heard a familiar voice.

Mr. Selby had come back!

"Hang him!" muttered Wally.

The master was talking to himself.

"It's cold enough for February," he said. "I really think I must have a fire."

And he rang his bell for the page, who in turn would summon one of the maids to lay and light a fire.

"Jolly lucky for me that Joe went up and got out," said Wally to himself. "My turn to do that now! And I don't believe I fastened that skylight; I can't remember doing it, anyway."

And he wriggled up higher.

There was not so much soot as there had been. Joe Frayne and Jameson had taken some of it away. But there was quite enough. Wally's eyes were half-blinded by it, and the taste of it was in his mouth.

But he was quite cheery. He had no doubt of being able to make his escape.

He reached the top, and thrust out his head. It was easy now.

Was it, though?

His shoulders stuck. The two or three inches more of width made all the difference. Joe had got out easily. Wally could not get out!

For the moment he was not even sure that he could get back. He had wedged himself tightly.

"I'm jiggered if we sha'n't have earned that ten pounds by the time we get it!" he told himself, hopeful still.

He wriggled hard, but still his shoulders stuck. It

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occurred to him that if the chimney had to be demolished in part to allow of his getting free, the treasure would never be theirs.

"Ah, that's better!"

Another squirm had liberated him. Then his feet slipped, and he all but crashed down.

For a few breathless seconds he hung by his hands, his feet scrambling for hold. Then he found it, and descended as noiselessly as he could.

Mr. Selby was still in the room. Wally could hear him moving about.

A knock sounded at the door. Toby's voice answered that of the master.

In a few minutes a fire would be lighted in the grate. Wally had his choice. He need not roast; he could get far enough up the chimney to avoid that. But he must either come down now, or risk suffocation by the smoke while he waited for Mr. Selby to go out of the room.

He might have to wait for hours. On the other hand, there was the chance that the master might go out while the fire was being laid and lighted. There was nothing Mr. Selby objected to more than having a woman fussing about in his study.

Wally made up his mind to wait. Anything seemed better than tamely to give himself up.

The maid came. But Mr. Selby did not go.

Beneath him Wally heard the crackle of wood. A slight warmth was perceptible. That was not enough to trouble him. But the smoke was.

The maid went. The smoke was getting into Wally's nose and mouth. He smothered one cough, though even smothered it sounded loudly to his ears.

But worse than a cough followed—a sneeze!

"A-tish-oo! A-tish-oo-oo-oo!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Selby. "What is that weird noise?"

The noise continued. The smoke had got right down into Wally's lungs, and he was helpless.

"It seems to come from the chimney," said the master, stooping before the grate.

"A-tish-oo! A-tish-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

Racked and shaken, Wally fell. Right upon his Form master he descended, and sent him sprawling on the hearth-rug, with a sooty and sneezing fag on top of him!

"How dare you? Who are you? What does this mean?" panted Mr. Selby.

"I—I've been up the chimney, sir. But I couldn't stay up after the fire was lit," answered Wally. "A-tish-oo-oo!"

"Don't sneeze in my face, you wretched boy!" snorted Mr. Selby. "You have gone too far this time, D'Arcy, and nothing short of expulsion will pay for your abominable behaviour!"

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CHAPTER 7.

The Truth at Last!

BUT it was not Wally alone who was in the toils. Putting two and two together, Mr. Selby perceived that Levison minor and Gibson must have been on the same errand as D'Arcy minor. Then he remembered the happening of the half-holiday, and visited the box-room.

The soot was still there, and the skylight was unfastened. Frayne, Jameson, or Manners minor? That was what Mr. Selby asked himself. One of the three it must have been.

He cut out Jameson for the time being, and sent for Reggie and Joe.

"Have you been up the chimney in this room, Manners?" he snapped.

"No, sir."

"Have you, Frayne?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it you who locked the door against me the other afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you get out?"

"Up the chimney, sir, an' on to the roof."

"Ah! This is evidently some deep-laid plot. You can go for the present, Frayne; but you may expect to find yourself in the punishment-room before night. Manners, send Levison minor and Gibson to me. I am determined to get to the bottom of this affair."

Confession that he had also been in it was on the tip of Reggie's tongue. But he kept it back. He thought it better to take counsel with Jameson before giving himself away.

He gave the Form master's message to Frank and Curly, and then looked round for Wally. But Wally was already in the punishment-room.

"Do you think I ought to own up at once, Joe?" asked Reggie miserably.

"I dunno. It depends on 'ow you feel, I should say. There ain't no need, reely. You on'y went into 'is room an' out again."

"But I was in it."

"We ain't goin' to tell 'im what it was, so that don't signify."

"He'll have it out of you. And if he does— Oh, bother it all, I'll go and see what Jimmy says about it."

On his way over to the New House, Reggie passed Mr. Ratcliff, who acknowledged his lifted cap by a scowl.

Mr. Ratcliff had heard of Wally's escapade, and he also had put two and two together. He was now on his way to talk with Mr. Selby. But his errand was naturally unexpressed by Reggie.

The New House master and Mr. Selby did not get on too well together. But they had one feeling, at least, in common: they both heartily disliked boys generally, and some boys in particular. Jameson was among those who had incurred Mr. Ratcliff's special aversion.

Frank and Curly were sent out when the Housemaster came in.

"I have heard what has happened, Selby," said Mr. Ratcliff, "and I feel it nothing more than my duty to tell you that a boy from my House—Jameson, to be precise—was undoubtedly mixed up in this inexplicable escapade in connection with your study chimney. I met him coming in two or three days ago, and caned him for being in a disgracefully sooty condition."

"Jameson—eh? I more than half suspected it. And I am sure that Manners minor was also in the plot, though what can have been the object of the plot is quite beyond my imagination. We will send for Jameson, and I will have Manners back again, Ratcliff."

But at that moment there came a tap at the door, and Jameson and Manners minor appeared in answer to the invitation to come in.

Jameson had not hesitated a second.

"You can do as you like, Reggie; but if Wally and Frank and Curly and Joe are all dropped on to, I'm going to stand by them!" he said.

"And do you fancy I'm not?" snapped Reggie.

Jameson clapped him on the back.

"Good for you, old scout!" he said. "There'll be no end of a row; but they can't sack all of us, and that may save Wally."

So they went off at once.

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Selby crossly.

"We've come to say that we were in it," replied Jameson.

"Manners minor most distinctly told me that he was not!"

"No, sir. I said I hadn't been up the chimney. But I was in it."

"In what?"

But that query got no answer. In the long run, the story might have to be told. But not one of the six would tell it in the absence of the rest.

"You can go. I was already aware of your complicity, Jameson, and I should have been surprised had Manners proved wholly innocent. I am determined to sift this matter thoroughly, and I shall at once acquaint Mr. Railton with it."

"Ratty's an old sneak!" said Jameson bitterly, as they went down the passage.

"There's another sneak about, Jimmy," returned Reggie. "Hasn't it struck you that Piggott has something to do with all this?"

"Piggy? How could he have? He's mean enough. But how could he?"

"I don't know. But, all the same, I believe he has. I know he's been hanging round old Selby's study these last few days."

A storm broke upon the head of Monty Lowther when the news came to the Shell and Fourth.

It came in the exaggerated form which news takes so often. The six were all booked for the sack—thus it ran.

"You cad!" cried Manners major, facing his chum with angry eyes and scarlet face. "You promised you wouldn't; but you were too spiteful to hold off. Because those kids—Oh, you rotter! I'm off to tell Gussy and Levison—their minors are to suffer for your beastly trick as well as mine. You've about done for yourself at St. Jim's, Lowther!"

"Steady, Manners, steady!" urged Tom Merry. "Wait and listen to what Lowther has to say."

He caught Manners by the arm. But Manners wrenched himself free. He was half-mad with trouble. Well he knew how he would be blamed at home if Reggie were sacked.

"Monty you didn't—"

"I said I wouldn't. Surely that's good enough, Tom? I've done with Manners once and for all!"

Lowther's face was haggard, and his voice was hoarse. He was innocent; but the thought of what he would have felt then had he been guilty almost broke him down.

That was not all he had to bear, however. Within five minutes Study No. 10 was invaded by an angry crowd.

Ernest Levison, almost too angry to speak; his chums, Cardew and Clive, who felt very much as though Frank were their younger brother, too; Arthur Augustus, up in arms for Wally; with him Jack Blake and Herries and Digby, and Reginald Talbot, who had chanced to be with Blake & Co. when Manners burst in.

Of them all, Talbot was the only one who kept cool, and he ranged himself at once with Tom Merry in defence of Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You were always a joker, Lowther, but you've carried your dashed jokes too far this time," Cardew broke in upon Gussy.

"Call it a joke, do you, Cardew?" said Blake hotly. "I don't. It's rotten!"

"If Frank's sacked—if Frank's sacked—"

Levison broke off. The words seemed to choke in his throat.

"Don't you think you'd better ask Lowther first whether he admits responsibility?" said Talbot.

"What does it matter whether he admits it? We know he did it!" said Harry Manners.

"You don't, and you can't," answered Tom Merry. "Monty's my chum. But if he did this, after promising he wouldn't, that's enough for me! I'm jolly sure he didn't, though."

"Let him deny it, then! Let him show that he still has that rotten, forged, Blagrove letter!" flamed Manners.

"I haven't it. I missed it from my desk, and thought you had taken it," said Lowther dully.

"Me?" stormed Manners. "Me go to your desk and take things?"

Lowther made a gesture of despair. He was hard up against it, and sick at heart for what he had once thought a rarely clever contrivance.

"Clear out, you fellows!" said Tom Merry firmly. "Something's gone wrong, and we must look into it. Talbot, you'll stay? Manners, you can do as you like about it. But I ask the rest to go."

When Tom took that tone his chums paid heed to him. They had little hope that any talk could help; but they went, and Harry Manners went with them.

"Monty," said Tom, "if that letter's gone, someone must have taken it and used it, as you had meant to use it. Question is—who?"

"It seems to me," said Talbot, "that the question is rather what's to be done to get those kids out of the trouble?"

"What can be done?" asked Lowther hopelessly. "I can go and own up—if you can call it owning up. But what's the use? It doesn't clear them, does it?"

"In part, I think," replied Talbot. "Selby won't be satisfied, but Railton and the Head will find some excuse in

it for them. But if you do it, Monty, you may have to go! For I'm afraid not even Railton will believe, as things are, that you only thought of playing the trick."

"Wait!" said Tom. "I've thought of a dodge. It may not work, but, again, it may. You can remember what was in that letter, Monty? You could do another like it? Well, then, do it, and drop it on the floor in old Selby's study! He's honest, I suppose, if he is sour and tyrannical, and that would be a bit of evidence that he couldn't keep back when it came to a full inquiry. They'd get it in the neck, all of them; but I don't fancy that any of them would get sacked."

"I'd better own up," Lowther said.

"But you've either got to own up to something that you never did or else tell a story that will convince no one," protested Talbot. "Tom's scheme is worth a trial, anyway. The masters will know what the kids were after, if it works."

"All right, I'll do it," answered Lowther. "But keep Manners away from me, you fellows. I can't stand the sight of him after the things he's said to me!"

Manners did not need keeping away. He stayed away of his own accord. He did his prep that night with Talbot and Gore and Skimpole, and did not show his face in Study No. 10.

The rewriting of that trick letter was one of the most hateful tasks Monty Lowther had ever taken on. When he had first concocted it he had been rather proud of his own cleverness. Now he felt utterly sick with himself.

But the hateful task was done, and Lowther sought a chance to get the letter where it might do good.

Meanwhile Piggott was worried in mind. It struck him that this affair was likely to hit hard several fellows in the Fourth and Shell—and he was not quite sure that he had covered his own tracks everywhere.

Lowther must have missed that letter. Lowther—and others—might suspect that someone had taken and used it. They might suspect him. They might even find some evidence against him.

If Lowther went along to Mr. Selby and told his tale fresh questions would arise.

Because of his dread of this Piggott still haunted the vicinity of Mr. Selby's study. And Reggie Manners shadowed Piggott, hardly seeing how Piggott could have been concerned, and yet suspicious that somehow he had been.

Reggie had not gone to the punishment-room. Wally occupied that alone. To have put anyone else with him would have been to halve the punishment for both; to put all six there was out of the range of possibility.

With the bogus letter ready, Lowther watched from the window of Study No. 10 to see Mr. Selby go out. He was very tired of watching before his chance came. But at last the master of the Third was seen crossing the quad, and Lowther bolted down at once.

Piggott saw him and followed. Piggott was peering round the door when Lowther dropped the letter close to the table, so that it might seem to have fallen from the pocket of one of the six.

To Lowther it seemed a thin chance. But Tom Merry had thought it worth trying. So he was trying it. If it failed he must tell his silly story and risk being disbelieved.

Hardly had Lowther got away before Piggott pounced on the letter. He tore it open without taking time to think; and his eyes grew big and his knees trembled as he read it.

He could not quite understand, but he scented danger to himself.

The danger was nearer than he guessed!

Reggie sprang upon him, grabbing at the sheet in his hand. Piggott yelled. Lowther came rushing back.

He found the two fags struggling together on the floor for possession of the thing he had left.

He had but barely yanked Reggie off Piggott when Mr. Selby and Mr. Railton appeared upon the scene.

"What does this mean, Lowther?" demanded the House-master angrily. "Is Mr. Selby's study never to be free from these intrusions? You have no shadow of excuse for being here Manners minor, I should have thought that you were deeply enough in trouble already. Piggott, what is that you hold?"

"I don't know, sir. I picked it up from the floor. Then Manners minor came at me like a tiger," answered the trembling young rascal.

He might take in the two masters, but he could not deceive Lowther. It was clear to Lowther now who was at the bottom of the trouble. Not everything was clear, naturally. He did not know of Piggott's eavesdropping; but at that he could guess.

Well, it was up to him! And he could not, on mere suspicion, drag Piggott in.

"I know what it is, sir," he said. "I'll tell you all about it."

He told his story with a crimson face, conscious of its lameness and sure that Mr. Selby would not believe. But he hoped that Mr. Railton would.

"Really, Railton, of all the incredible stories I ever heard this is the worst!" snapped the Third Form master.

"It is so seemingly incredible that, apart from my certainty that Lowther would not lie about it, I should believe it, since it is hard to imagine anyone's inventing it."

"Thank you, sir!" said Lowther. "It's true, every word of it. I'm sorry and ashamed that I ever thought of such a silly scheme—but I only thought of it. It wasn't through me that D'Arcy minor and the rest got the bogus letter."

Mr. Railton looked very hard at Piggott. Reggie Manners looked even harder. In fact, Reggie was glaring.

Mr. Selby apparently had no idea that Piggott was the culprit; Mr. Railton might have some doubt on the matter. But neither Lowther nor Reggie had any doubt at all.

"You can go," said the Housemaster to the fags. "Lowther, you had better stay. Mr. Selby might care to ask you a few questions."

"I have heard all that I wish to hear from Lowther," replied Mr. Selby sourly. "Whether he is telling the truth or not, I consider his conduct indefensible."

"He has done wrong, and he will be punished for it," Mr. Railton said. But there was no harshness in his voice as he told Lowther that he might go.

"I do not see how this story, even if we accept it, alters the situation in the least," said the master of the Third when the two were alone.

"But surely you must see that! D'Arcy minor and the rest were tempted, and succumbed. Though you were put to no slight annoyance, there was in it all no intention of disrespect to you. Oh, they did wrong—very wrong—but they have not erred past forgiveness."

"My view is that they have all deserved expulsion, and that some of them, at least, should be punished in that way."

"Then we differ entirely, Mr. Selby. You will, of course, put your view to the Head; I shall put mine. I think I know which Dr. Holmes will accept!"

"No doubt, no doubt! You have greater influence with the Head than I have, Mr. Railton."

"Does it occur to you that Piggott may have been more to blame than either Lowther or any of the rest?" asked Mr. Railton.

"It does not. I really see no particular reason for suspecting Piggott."

"I do. But I see no way in which his guilt is likely to be brought home to him, so perhaps we had better leave him out of account."

But others would not do that. The Third required less proof of Reuben Piggott's guilt than did the masters.

Mr. Railton was right. The Head could not see that any of the six merited expulsion. But he did see that all of them, and Lowther also, deserved punishment.

They got it, and accepted it cheerfully. Lowther returned from the first caning he had had at the Head's hands for some time to find Study No. 10 full.

Tom Merry and Talbot were there, Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus, Digby and Herries, Levison major and Cardew and Clive. But Lowther was hardly conscious of the presence of anyone but Manners.

"I've got an apology to make, Monty," said Manners. "I raved at you—I called you a cad and a rotter. I take it back. I think you've behaved like a brick, and I hope you can forgive me."

For a moment Lowther could not speak. He had believed the old friendship at an end, and the thought of that had been hard to bear. There was a big lump in his throat as he held out his hand and said:

"That's all right, Harry. I was to blame, though not as much as you thought."

"We were all in it," said Cardew. "All of us, that is, except the astute Thomas an' Talbot. An' we want to say that we take back anythin' we said, thought, or implied against you, Lowther."

"Heal, heal!" cried Arthur Augustus. "Vewy well put, Cardew! I'm sowwy, Lowther. I recognise that we were all gwavely at fault in thinkin' that you could be anythin' but what you have always been—one of the best!"

"Thanks, all of you!" answered Lowther. "Now, if you'd clear I'd be glad. You see, I've been caned by the Head, an' it's a luxury I'm not accustomed to. I feel that I should like to meditate over it in quiet."

The old cheery grin was on his face as they passed out. But when all but Tom Merry and Manners had gone he laid his arms on the table and his head on his arms, and his shoulders shook with sobs, though his eyes were dry.

Tom Merry stole out of the study and left Manners with him.

There was a spread in Study No. 10 a few days later, and Wally D'Arcy, Frank Levison, Reggie Manners, Jameson, Joe Frayne, and Curly Gibson were the guests, while Ernest Levison and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were also present. Lowther was the giver of the feast, and between Lowther and the six the hatchet was buried.

"Piggy?" said Wally. "No, we couldn't prove anything against Piggy—not really prove it, you know. But the whole Form agreed that he ought to have a lesson that would teach him not to do it again. So we made him run the gauntlet six times up and down the dormitory."

"And he wishes now that he hadn't—whether he did or not!" put in Reggie.

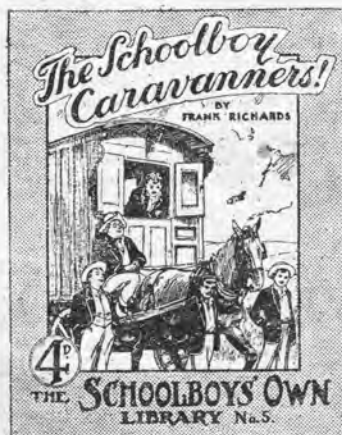
"I say, Manners," remarked Wally, "I'm beginning to think that your young brother isn't as hopeless as he seemed, do you know? He didn't show up half so badly in this bizney!"

"Oh, rats to you, young D'Arcy!" said Reggie politely.

THE END.

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CHAPTER 1.

Big Ben Butts In!

BIG BEN DERBY had arrived in London, but instead of the pavements being paved with gold, he found everyone too busy to bother about a grimy scarecrow, who, because work was slack, had tramped all the way from Yorkshire.

The only people who took any notice of him were the policemen, who moved him on when he tried to snatch a few minutes' sleep in the open.

In four days he had had but two meals; one was from a coffee-stall keeper whom he had helped to fix up his stand, and the other was from a man who gave him sixpence for looking after his horse and gig while he was in an eating-house in Whitechapel, to which locality the Yorkshire lad had drifted.

Ben, too, had spent the sixpence in the same eating-house.

It was fortunate he did so, for the food built up his strength to face an ordeal which bigger men than himself might have felt little shame in shirking.

It was in the middle of the afternoon when, wandering dejectedly down one of the side streets off the Commercial Road, Big Ben's attention was attracted by a great crowd that entirely blocked the narrow street, and which was surging excitedly backwards and forwards.

The centre of the throng swayed and jostled as if to keep a space clear for two figures, the heads of whom he could see bobbing up and down like corks in a choppy sea. Every now and then a sharp cry from a woman, or a hoarse growl from a man, would break through the prevailing hubbub, as if in protest at what was going on, though Ben could detect no particular inclination to afford more active interference.

What was happening looked to him very like a fight, and where there was a fight Ben liked to be there. He had used the gloves a bit himself in his time, and though possessing little or no science, he usually had won by the simple process of wearing out his man. It was said in his native town that if you wanted to knock Ben Derby out you would have to use a club.

Ben forced his way through that crowd like a liner through a swell. He wanted to be there in time for the finish.

But when he reached the front he found, not so much a fight, as a massacre. A ruffian who could not have been less than six foot four in height, nor under eighteen stone in weight, was belabouring a lad much smaller than himself. His face was so brutal-looking as to have lost all likeness to manhood.

In strength he was a veritable Hercules, strength which, at the moment of Ben's arrival, he was using with a fury almost demoniacal.

The Yorkshire lad's jaw thrust outward like the prow of a battleship, every muscle in his body tense and rigid. Although in his own district it was not the custom to use kid glove methods, a fight between Yorkshire colliers is a whole-hearted affair, with plenty of shrewd blows taken and given, much good blood spilt, and quarter neither asked nor given. A man fights until he can neither stand nor see.

But this was no fair match. The second man could not have stood more than five feet six, nor weighed above nine stone. Thus, as was only to be expected, he stood no shadow of chance against the ruffian who was so mercilessly battering him.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the insurmountable odds, he was so game that Ben was conscious of a thrill of admiration at the wonderful fight the little fellow was putting up.

For not by any means was the giant having matters all his own way. Dodging, swerving, ducking, side-stepping, the little fellow succeeded not only in avoiding quite a number of the man-killing blows launched against him, but all the time managed to keep up a perfect hail of punches on his opponent's body. Punches, however, which, though delivered with all his strength, had but little effect upon the iron frame they battered.

In the meanwhile the little fellow's face was streaming with blood, his knees were giving beneath him, and at the moment of Ben's arrival he was all but insensible.

"Stop it!"

The command came with a ringing challenge there was no mistaking. Ben Derby meant putting an end to that slaughter if he had to clean up the whole street to do it.

His voice, high above the murmuring crowd, reached the ears of the ruffian himself, who paused in his attack and turned savagely in Ben's direction. Evidently he thought that one menacing glare would put an end to the interruption for good and all. But he did not know Ben Derby.

"Stop it!" cried Ben again, in a more determined voice than before.

This time the ruffian obeyed. With a lunge that, landing fair and square on the forehead, put the little fellow down for the last time, he strode over to the Yorkshireman. And in the passage of those few yards Ben had time to realise

what a truly terrible proposition he had taken on.

If ever the lust of battle was written on the human countenance, it was upon the face of the giant who towered over Ben at that moment. The little red eyes, inflamed and glinting, spoke almost of murder; the loose lips were drawn back over yellow jagged teeth in a snarl of indescribable evil; the short mouse-coloured hair over the narrow, receding forehead bristled upright in insensate fury.

To one less sure of himself, or with nerves less resolute than those of the Yorkshire lad, the odds would have looked too great. In which connection, it may be observed, that at no time was Ben ever heard to speak of himself any warmer word of praise than that he was "willing."

This afternoon he proved that the boast was no lie.

"You looking for trouble?" the ruffian demanded hoarsely.

"Not exactly," said Ben, meeting the giant's eye with a glance as cool and steady as the other's was fiery and uncertain. "I'm only telling you to quit hitting a man half your size and weight."

There was something of quiet pride in the civilly spoken words that seemed for a moment to leave the ruffian guessing. He was not used to being stood up to. Ben learnt afterwards that he was the terror of the whole district.

Then, his eyes meeting Ben's, a look more evil than before came over his brutal face.

"Then I won't hit 'im again," he said.

Ben's expression lightened. Perhaps he would not have to fight after all.

"Good for you!" he said heartily.

"No!" The ruffian shook his head slowly from side to side, his grin increasing in venom. "I'll do better than that!"

He turned and began to walk back to the still prostrate form of his late opponent.

With the idea of rendering first aid to the latter Ben followed hard upon the ruffian's heels—and was only just in time to prevent the outrage.

Reaching the still form and watched intently by the crowd that the events of the last few moments had awed to silence, the bully raised his enormous boot, and launched the kick that was intended to land on the ribs of the unconscious lad.

But that kick never reached its objective, for a right punch with every ounce of Ben's fourteen stone behind it, got

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home first on the angle of the ruffian's jaw.

In every way known to the science of boxing the bully was at a disadvantage. Poised on one leg as he was for the purpose of delivering that kick, he was badly out of balance. In getting himself into position to launch the kick he had thrust his jaw outward and downward. No man in the world could have taken the punch Ben let loose at him and kept either his feet or his consciousness, and even if such a man existed, the bully was not the one.

The foot upon which he had been standing left the ground, and his whole body described a sweeping semi-circle through the air, to come to rest in a crumpled heap on the edge of the pavement.

Astounded at the result of the blow, Ben went over and looked at him. His first glance told him that whatever fight was destined to follow his interference with the bully was already over.

He turned his attention, then, to the smaller man, who by this time was sitting up, an expression of complete bewilderment on his battered face. The crowd was surging about Ben, shouting and gesticulating. Greatly to his confusion, he found himself the hero of the hour. He could not get to the little fellow for the people who patted him on the back and seized his hand, to shake it.

Eventually, however, he reached him. Bending down, he helped the boy to his feet.

"Thanks, mate," said the injured lad gratefully. Then he caught sight of the still-unconscious ruffian. "What in the world's happened to Butcher Black?" he asked.

His question was answered by a great shout from the crowd.

"The Butcher's got what he asked for!" said a very loud voice from close beside them.

Ben turned, to see one of the most remarkable figures his eyes had ever been privileged to rest upon. A middle-sized figure, clad in a screaming black-and-white check tail-coat with a pattern of violent red running through the texture; skin-tight trousers of the same material, terminating in white linen gaiters, and wearing the glossiest pair of brown boots imaginable. The waistcoat that enclosed the more-than-comfortable figure was of the same shade of staring red as ran through the coat and trousers, and was ornamented with twinkling brass buttons and a thick cable of gold watchchain. Surmounting the spotless white tie, with its enormous gold horseshoe-pin, and the glossy collar, was a face as red, almost, as the waistcoat itself.

A red face, true, but by no means a bad one. The wide mouth that stretched between the fat, clean-shaven cheeks was firm, but not cruel; indeed, it turned up at the corners in a way that betokened that its owner was by no means averse from a joke. The eyes, small and clear and blue, if shrewd and penetrating, were direct and fearless, and just now beamed good-naturedly on the huge figure of the Yorkshireman. On his head he wore a white tall-hat, and in his gloved hand carried a stick with a gold top the size of a door-knob.

The little fellow looked up at the strange figure, a wide grin creasing the bruises round his mouth and cheeks.

"He's got what he asked for, I can see that!" he said whimsically. "But what I want to know is, who gave it him?"

The stranger jerked his thumb to indicate Ben.

"This chap here," he said. "I was just breaking through the crowd to

stop the fight myself, when I saw him fetch Butcher a lift under the jaw that would have knocked out Jack Dempsey."

The little man turned impulsively to Ben. As far as his bruises allowed, he was smiling. What small portion of his eyes remained visible were shining with gratitude. He thrust out a grimy paw.

"Put it there, mate!" he said heartily. "I don't know who you are, but, anyway, you're the right stuff. Double shrunk and a yard wide! True blue! If it hadn't been for you, I'd have been killed."

Ben enclosed the smaller hand in his own, which was about the size of a ham. He looked, as indeed he felt, decidedly uncomfortable. He was only a willing lad from Yorkshire, and neither wanted nor expected praise.

At that moment the stranger clasped the arms of both the lads in a grip of quite surprising strength, eyeing the encircling crowd sourly as he did so.

"Let's get out of this," he said shortly. "I've something to say to you lads."

He led them to a ham-and-beef shop of respectable appearance, and after passing through the public part of the premises, entered a parlour at the back, where he was followed immediately by a white-aproned figure, who greeted him with considerable respect.

"I want," said the stranger, setting his white hat between the legs of his chair and thus displaying a mane of white hair, "three plates of the very best you have, three cups of coffee, and three breads. And," he added hastily, "pudding to follow."

When the first part of the meal had been disposed of, during which the two boys were watched with intent interest by the red-faced stranger, the latter, staring into the eyes of the smaller man, said abruptly:

"Guess you know who I am, Cocky?"

The one so addressed looked up sharply, a somewhat bewildered expression on his battered face.

"I'm new to these parts, guv'nor," he said modestly. "Came from Essex a matter of three weeks ago to see if I could pick up a fight or two, though I've had no luck yet. Except, of course, the one I ran into this afternoon, and that I didn't ask for." He eyed the stranger shrewdly. "But how did you come to know my name?" he inquired.

The stranger waved a fat hand.

"It's my business to know the name of every scrapper in the game," he said. "Whether they're heavy-weight champions or fly-weight novices, there's not half a dozen lads in England who ever earned money in the ring I don't know all about." He shook his head. "And if you was half as nippy outside the ring as they tell me you are inside it, you'd know all about Pa Dobbie, of Funland, the East End Home of Boxing," he added severely.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Dobbie," said the little man, whose name Ben discovered afterwards to be Cocky Withers. "I've been trying to get hold of you ever since I came to London. I only want a chance to show you what I can do."

Without replying directly to young Cocky Withers, Pa Dobbie turned abruptly to Ben, who had listened to the conversation in open-mouthed admiration and astonishment.

"Do you fancy yourself as a scrapper?" he asked curtly.

Ben shook his head.

"Not what you'd call a real boxer. Of course, I've done a bit in a quiet way up in Yorkshire," he said modestly.

"Stand up," instructed Pa Dobbie.

Wonderingly, Ben obeyed, and could almost feel the old man's eyes as they ran up and down over his six-foot-two of solid bone and well-trained sinew. But when those shrewd, penetrating eyes met his own, he did not shrink. There was nothing that Ben Derby had cause to be afraid of.

At last Ben was told to be reseated.

"Fancy your chance with Butcher Black?" asked Pa Dobbie. "I'll make it worth your while, if you put up a good fight."

All that Ben had seen of the Butcher had served to make him realise the man's almost superhuman strength and ferocity. He realised that he would be giving away a good four stones in weight, six inches in reach, and two inches in height. Also, he guessed, from the fact that the ears of his prospective opponent had been battered into the semblance of cauliflower, that he was a pugilist of long ring experience.

Even then Ben did not hesitate. He was out to get a living, and as long as it was honest, one way was good as another. Apart from that, he had taken an instinctive dislike to the Butcher, and felt that it would be no bad thing to be in the same ring with him.

"I'll fight him," he said quietly.

Pa Dobbie jerked his glance towards Cocky.

"Before we go any further," he said, "I want to know what your trouble was with the Butcher?"

Cocky Withers flushed, and his mouth grew into a hard line across his face.

"I was at the Soho School of Arms on Saturday night," he said, "and saw the fight between him and Battling Bill Baxter." He thumped the table so that the plates rattled. "The Butcher was supposed to have been knocked out in the tenth round, but he wasn't." The little man leaned across the table so that his face was within a few inches of that of Pa Dobbie. "If ever I saw a fight sold," he said, speaking slowly and impressively, "Butcher Black sold that fight on Saturday. He just lay down to it!"

Pa Dobbie's wide, red face remained entirely devoid of expression as the little man paused.

"Well?" he inquired at last.

Cocky made a wide and expressive gesture.

"That's all," he said shortly. "Except that I happened to meet the Butcher this afternoon, and told him what I thought of him. Next thing I knew he was cleaning up the road with me!"

Pa Dobbie nodded his head slowly from side to side before speaking.

"You're quite right," he said. "That fight was sold. The Butcher got two hundred pounds from 'Doc' Bludgeon for double-crossing his backer. It was a frame-up to get money out of Lord Keyingham."

He paused, drumming his fingers thoughtfully on the table. "I don't say but what his lordship wasn't somewhere near the tail-end of the line when brains were given out," he resumed; "but he's a real white man, and I feel I'd like to even things up a bit on his behalf." He turned once more to the Yorkshireman. "So you're willing to fight the Butcher, are you?" he inquired genially.

"Yes," said Ben. "But perhaps, as he got two hundred pounds on Saturday, he won't feel like going into the ring for a bit."

"If I know anything of the Butcher," Pa said fervently, "he will. Even at this moment he's out looking for you."

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He'll jump at it. It's better for him to get good money for knocking the stuffing out of you in public than to have a mix-up in the street, and run the chance of getting pinched for his trouble."

"If he's willing to fight me, I'm willing to fight him," said Ben stolidly.

Again Pa Dobbie remained for a few moments in thought before speaking.

"What I'm after is to put the Butcher out of business for keeps," he said at last. "We want clean boxing in this country, and while there's crooks in the game like the Butcher that isn't possible. But if I can only get him beaten to a standstill by a lad who is practically a novice, the Butcher's name will be in the mud."

Cocky, whose expression had grown more and more enthusiastic as Pa hammered home his points, gave vent to an exclamation of satisfaction.

"You can count me in on this," he said. "I'll act as trainer, sparring partner, second, or bottle-holder. Anything you like. And all free gratis and for nothing but my grub. I don't know the Butcher very well, but what I do know I don't like, and I'm all out for putting him out of business."

Pa Dobbie produced from his breast-pocket a wallet of formidable proportions, extracted a five-pound note from it, and pushed it across the table.

"No lad works for me without wages," he said shortly. "There is your first week's wages in advance." Then he added another two one-pound notes. "And that's to pay for lodgings and grub for yourself till to-morrow; also your fares down to Dorking, where you'll do your training."

Cocky pocketed the money with a grin.

"Thank you, my lord," he said heartily. "I was willing to work for nothing, but I can always give good wages a home."

"Take the afternoon train to-morrow," instructed Pa, waving the thanks aside.

"Four miles out, on the Sevenoaks Road, you'll find an inn called the Flying Huntsman. There you must ask for Gaffer Lucas, the landlord. Get yourself settled, and in two or three days I'll send down a heavy-weight sparring-partner for Ben."

The old man got up briskly from his seat, buttoned his coat over his red waistcoat, clapped on his white hat at its usual rakish angle, drew on his lemon-coloured gloves, and seized his gold-headed cane.

"And now, my lads," he said, "I'm leaving you. You'll get instructions, as soon as I've fixed up with the Butcher, when the fight's to be."

His expression changed suddenly to a cold and merciless scrutiny as he looked deep into the eyes of each of the boxers in turn. But as he turned once more away they saw that, as if satisfied, his face was creased once more into its old good-humoured lines.

"I'm a pretty good judge of men," he said slowly, as he walked to the door, "and I don't think I've made a mistake this time."

"We won't let you down, guv'nor, don't you fear!" cried Cocky Withers cheerily.

"I'm a willing lad, too," said Ben.

CHAPTER 2.

A Chance for Ben!

DURING the next few days Ben found Cocky Withers an entertaining companion, a first-class trainer, and, at his weight, a brilliant boxer.

Their quarters at the Flying Huntsman left nothing to be desired. Gaffer Lucas, upon whom Pa Dobbie's name acted like a charm, did everything in his power to add to their comfort.

Two or three days later word came that the contest was fixed for a fortnight from the following Saturday.

The message was brought by Long Mike O'Hagan, a heavy-weight with some reputation, and chosen because his size and methods of boxing were similar to those of the Butcher.

Black, Cocky Withers was all out for that end.

He had very great hopes of it, too. Ben was no flyer, at any rate, he was a tryer, first, last, and all the time.

It was true that, though a natural boxer, he lacked speed. But, as is the case with every born boxer, his moves were largely instinctive. He knew them without being taught. The trouble lay in the fact that he was apt to be a fraction of a second late in making them.

On the other hand was the asset that he was absolutely untirable. The longer a round lasted, and the more of them there were, the fresher Ben became. He lived a sober and active life, and these things told when he went into training. He started fair, without the handicap of late hours and dissipation to overcome before getting into his stride.

Another big asset was that his punch, when it landed, was like the kick of a mule.

Thus, as the days went by, Cocky began to have great hopes for the forthcoming fight. His own lightning speed, combined with the slower, but heavier



Just as the bully raised his enormous boot to launch a kick at the unconscious lad's ribs, Ben Derby's huge fist shot out and caught him neatly on the jaw!

Prepared as he was to accept without question anybody and anything chosen by Pa, Ben had no particular objection to his sparring partner. Indeed, he rather liked him; he seemed good-natured and anxious to please. A little too anxious, Cocky Withers thought.

From the first the little man had no kind of use for the new addition. There was something about Mike's perpetual smile, and oily, ingratiating manner, that to Cocky, who was a judge of character, did not ring true.

When he discovered, moreover, that O'Hagan had been chosen on the recommendation of a friend of Pa's, and that the latter had never actually seen the man for himself, Cocky began to understand.

Watching O'Hagan more closely than the latter had an idea of, he became more and more convinced that there was something going on that would require a great deal of clearing up. Day or night he never for a moment relaxed his vigilance. If it was within human power to assure that Ben Derby beat Butcher

deliveries of Mike, made a surprising improvement in Ben's style. The only cause for worry was the sparring partner.

After they had been in their quarters for about a week, Gaffer Lucas rushed into the gymnasium one morning in a state of great excitement. O'Hagan was off duty that day, but at the time of the landlord's appearance Cocky and Ben were in the middle of a strenuous round of boxing.

At the sight of the landlord's face, however, they stopped.

"What is it, gaffer?" inquired Cocky. "Lord Keyingham to see you," announced the landlord majestically.

A few moments later his lordship entered the gymnasium.

At first sight he was rather a vacant-looking young man, with a receding chin and a drawing, somewhat affected, manner; an impression, however, that was apt to fade on closer acquaintance. His chin may not have been large, but what there was of it was firm and well.

modelled, as also was his mouth. That young aristocrat was by no means as big a fool as he at first appeared.

Nodding kindly to Cocky Withers, he went straight over to the embarrassed Ben, with whom, despite the boxing-glove the other had not thought to remove, he shook cordially by the hand.

"I understand from Mr. Dobbie that you are training to fight Butcher Black?" he drawled.

As Ben was far too confused by the visitor's title and appearance to answer for himself, Cocky did so for him.

"Yes, my lord," he said respectfully. "And I think we're going to make a go of it."

Lord Keyingham's mouth hardened, and when he spoke again he forgot to drawl.

"Good!" he said shortly. He looked across at Ben. "There's fifty pounds for you"—his eyes travelled back to Cocky—"and twenty-five for you, if the Butcher's beaten."

"Thank you very much, my lord," said both lads gratefully.

"I may be easy-going," remarked his lordship quietly, "but a man doesn't double-cross me and get away with it."

A sudden thought struck Cocky, and when, after a few moments' further conversation, Lord Keyingham moved towards the door, the little boxer followed him.

"My lord," he said quietly, after they had crossed the threshold, "do you happen to know anything of a boxer by the name of O'Hagan?"

The other wheeled sharply, his expression stern and cold.

"Nothing to his credit," he said shortly. "He's one of Doc Bludgeon's gang."

"Does Doc Bludgeon happen to be a tall, thin chap, with a face like a ferret, and walks with a limp?" inquired Cocky interestedly.

"Yes," said Lord Keyingham shortly. "Why?"

"O'Hagan was sent down here as sparring partner, and the other day I happened to see him talking to a tall, thin, ferret-faced chap with a limp," explained Cocky simply, and waited for the explosion he suspected might follow.

But no explosion came. Instead, the other's face, which momentarily had

grown set and rigid, lightened suddenly to an intense satisfaction.

"Great Scott!" he murmured, as if to himself; and then again, "Great Scott!"

He seized Cocky by the arm, and led him outside to where the big Rolls-Royce was waiting.

"Listen," he said quietly, but with a tremor of excitement in his voice. "This is where I get my own back. On no account must O'Hagan know that I've been here. Before I leave, I'll give Gaffer Lucas the same instructions. If it leaks out, my plans will come to nothing." He paused, and when he resumed, his voice was slow and deliberate. "Doc Bludgeon, and the one behind him, are out to make sure of this fight as they did the last," he said. "That's the reason they are backing the Butcher so heavily—because they've sent O'Hagan here to 'noble' Ben Derby!"

Although Lord Keyingham spoke so impressively, the little boxer did not seem unduly excited.

"I shouldn't be surprised," he said calmly.

"They'll wait until the last moment before they do it," Lord Keyingham went on, "so as to keep the betting going as long as possible. Also, they'll do it in a way that can't be traced. People are beginning to get wise to them, and a scandal now might break up the gang altogether. Hence, all they'll do will be to dope him sufficiently to knock all the fight out of him, and thus render him easy meat for the Butcher."

He tapped Cocky impressively on the chest with a perfectly-manicured forefinger.

"Watch O'Hagan carefully," he said, "and watch every drink of any kind that Ben takes more carefully still."

With which, after a few moments in earnest conversation with the gaffer, Lord Keyingham drove away.

CHAPTER 3.

A Plan that Failed!

BECAUSE so little upsets a boxer in training, Cocky Withers conducted his watch on Mike O'Hagan without saying a word to Ben Derby. Nor, of course, was it suspected by Mike himself.

But however keen his observation, he could detect nothing in the manner or actions of O'Hagan that was in the least suspicious. The man's demeanour was as civil and ingratiating as ever.

He was not, however, unduly surprised at this want of confirmation of his suspicions. He believed that the time was not yet ripe for action. He knew that the critical period would be within twenty-four hours of the actual contest.

On the day of the fight, Ben was allowed to do no work of any kind. He just lay about, taking life easy.

The fight was timed for nine o'clock, and Pa Dobbie was to send a car for them at six.

About four o'clock in the afternoon the three boxers were lounging in their sitting-room. O'Hagan, who had been moving rather restlessly about for some time, suggested a cup of tea. Instantly Cocky was on the alert.

Nevertheless, he agreed that a single cup could do no harm to Ben's fighting powers, and pulled the bell to summon the waiter. And as his hand touched the old-fashioned bell-pull, his heart missed a beat. The rope offered no resistance to his tug; there was no connection between the bell and the kitchen. Had the wires been cut?

He made no sign, but went back to his seat.

No waiter came in reply to the summons.

Five minutes later Cocky pulled the bell again, but still there was no reply.

Then O'Hagan rose slowly to his feet.

Watching him closely, Cocky saw that his face was strained and anxious.

"Guess I'd better go and tell the waiter myself," remarked O'Hagan, going out of the room.

He was away for a good few minutes, and when he came back he carried a tray loaded with three cups of tea, and a plate of bread-and-butter, explaining that as the waiter was off duty—a statement that Cocky knew to be a clumsy lie—he had prepared the meal himself.

One cup he placed before his own place at the table, the second in front of Cocky, and the third in front of Ben Derby. The tea was very hot, and testing it with his lips, Cocky found to his satisfaction that it would have to cool a little before it could be drunk.

He looked up.

"What's the matter with you and me having a bit of cake?" he said to O'Hagan. "Even if Ben here is in training, there's no reason why you and I should starve. Be a good fellow, and fetch some in."

Rather reluctantly, and with a swift side-glance at the cup in front of Ben, O'Hagan went out of the room on his mission.

The moment the sound of his departing footsteps had died away, Cocky's actions were like lightning.

"Not a word, Ben!" he murmured warningly to the astounded heavy-weight.

Then, producing a tiny bottle from his pocket, he filled it, for future examination, from Ben's cup. The rest he poured out of the window. Next he half-filled the empty cup from his own and handed it back to the bewildered Ben, just as Big Mike's footsteps scudded in the passage outside.

Cocky had just time to lean over the table and whisper hurriedly:

"Not a word! I'll explain later. Go on drinking your tea. When you've finished it, act as if you were a bit sleepy and out of sorts."

Without the least understanding why, Ben nodded, and did his best loyally to carry out Cocky's instructions.

Thus, when O'Hagan re-entered the room with the cake, and saw that, to

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all appearances, the boxer had half-finished his tea, and later seemed to lose all interest in the coming fight and everything else, so languid and dispirited did he appear, there could be no doubt of the crook's confidence that the insidious drug he had been bribed to administer was doing its work of sapping the energy and strength and fighting spirit from the Butcher's opponent.

CHAPTER 4. A Rude Awakening!

AS soon as the car drew up outside Funland, where Pa Dobble and Lord Keyingham awaited them, with a muttered apology, O'Hagan withdrew, doubtless to inform Doc Bludgeon of the success of his plans.

That this was so was shown by the brisk outburst of betting which occurred as soon as the four men entered the hall.

And of those who led this campaign the most prominent was a thin, lame man, with a sinister, ferrety face, who shouted the odds to a merry tune. And, quietly and without fuss, Ben was interested to note that Lord Keyingham looked as many bets as he could find layers of the odds.

Thus the excitement continued until, the preliminary contests disposed of, the contestants for the main event stepped into the ring.

Gone now was all trace of Ben Derby's previous sleepiness. Watching his principal closely, Cocky Withers, who was acting as chief second, thought that never had he seen the big Yorkshireman so alert and quietly confident. That this condition did not escape the notice of the opposition was proved by the sudden silence of the hitherto strident voices that had been laying the odds against him. And of all those present the two who showed the most concern were Doc Bludgeon and Mike O'Hagan.

Lord Keyingham was amused to see the look of malignant rage that shot from the Doctor's little reddened eyes to Mike, and the expression of fear and consternation that instantly swept over the big pugilist's face as he caught the glance.

There was not, however, much time for thought before the actual commencement of hostilities. Glancing across at his opponent, Ben's heart almost sank at the task confronting him. Almost, but not quite, for with the Yorkshireman, the bigger the odds the braver the face he put on the task of beating them.

Yet the odds were indeed terrible. Seated in his corner, the Butcher looked what actually he was, a veritable giant. The muscles stood out from his enormous chest and arms in knotted mountains of sheer strength. His thighs, seemingly as big as barrels, were of the right proportion to support that gigantic frame.

And yet, looking closely, an expert might have felt inclined to shake his head. However huge and strong the frame, the skin that covered it lacked the lustre that was so noticeable in the case of Ben.

The Butcher's eyes, too, were dull and heavy. To Pa Dobble, Lord Keyingham, and Cocky Withers, it was obvious that, relying wholly on his vast strength and experience, and the fact that Ben would be doped, the Butcher had trained for this particular fight almost exclusively on alcoholic liquors.

When the bell rang for the first round, and the two faced each other from the centre of the ring, the contrast between them was so great that, at first sight, the match appeared a farce. To put a



Like lightning Ben Derby's left came over, and as his glove met the Butcher's jaw there was a sharp click like the impact of two billiard balls. The Butcher's knees sagged slowly from under him, and his giant frame swayed uncertainly.

man like Ben, big and game as he was, against such a giant as the Butcher, seemed nothing short of deliberate cruelty.

This idea was given strength to when, with a wild, mad bull rush, the Butcher swung his left to the side of Ben's head, and the latter, after all but turning a somersault, went down like a shot rabbit. Not one heavy-weight in ten could have taken that punch and got up and asked for more.

But not only did Ben ask for more; he both got and gave it!

He was slow, perhaps; but, like a lot of other slow people, he was mighty sure. Having once been caught napping with that particular punch, he would not have been caught with the same one again if the fight had lasted a week. And, encouraged vastly by his first success, the Butcher tried again and again to bring it over.

Every time he did so Ben hit him under the heart with his left. The blow travelled perhaps eight inches, but by the curious little twist of his body as it was delivered—a trick Cocky had taught him—and which assured that every ounce of body-weight would travel with it, it did the Butcher no good. He went to his corner at the end of the round puffing and blowing like a grampus.

Seeing this, Cocky winked and nodded at Pa and Lord Keyingham.

Obedient to his second's instructions, during the next four rounds Ben kept away from his man, slipping and dodging round the ring with a skill and agility that delighted Cocky Withers' heart. The Butcher trudged after him with almost equal speed, fanning the air with wild and terrific blows that Ben had no difficulty in avoiding. The only harm the Butcher did was still further to drain his own fast-declining strength.

It is true that one or two hefty punches got home on Ben, but on no part of his solid frame that mattered.

The rest of the fight was sheer farce. From the sixth round onwards there was only one man in it.

The end came in the ninth.

The Butcher lurched out of his corner like a tired hippopotamus. He was almost too exhausted to lift his hands.

With a faint surprisingly quick for a boxer supposed to be lacking in speed, one that was a gesture of the shoulder

more than of the hand, Ben made as though to swing the left to the mark. Confused and bewildered, the Butcher dropped his hands to guard the vulnerable spot. But like lightning Ben's right came over, and as his glove met the Butcher's jaw there was a sharp click like the impact of two billiard balls. The Butcher's knees sagged slowly from under him, his giant frame swayed uncertainly, and then, with a thud that seemed to shake the building, the giant hit the canvas.

When, ten minutes later, he was brought back to consciousness, it was to nurse a broken jaw.

Ben and Cocky were in the ear, waiting for Lord Keyingham to give the signal to start back to the Happy Huntsman, when Doc Bludgeon, his face pale and drawn with hardly-controlled fury, edged his way through the crowd.

"You've beaten me this time, Lord Keyingham," he hissed between clenched teeth, "but I'll turn the tables yet! And then"—his voice was incredibly sinister—"look out for yourself!"

Lord Keyingham raised his monocle and gazed coolly into the evil face that confronted him.

"You have made a mistake," he said mildly; "it wasn't I who beat you."

Pa Dobble, who was standing by with beaming face, broke into a great roar of laughter.

"His lordship's right!" he exploded. "You're like the Butcher—you beat yourself!"

Then his face turned suddenly grim; he looked his old antagonist very deliberately between the eyes.

"Just one other thing, Doctor," he said meaningly and in icy tones. "The next time you make up a bottle of medicine, see that the patient takes it!"

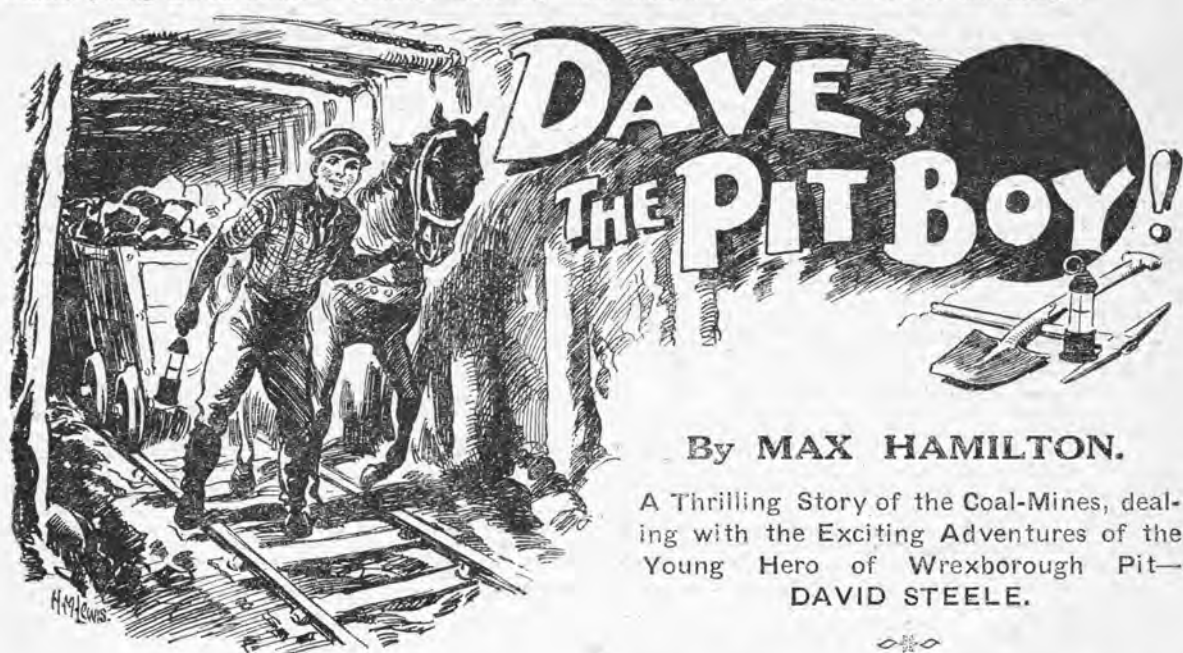
Lord Keyingham then turned to the waiting car, leaving the Doctor, baffled and furious, still standing in the gutter.

"Drive on, boys," he said, with a smile.

THE END.

(Look out for another of these thrilling boxing yarns next week, chums, entitled: "THE MYSTERIOUS UNKNOWN!" By Louis Alfriston.)

Plucky young David makes a dramatic discovery—and then falls into the hands of his enemy!



By MAX HAMILTON.

A Thrilling Story of the Coal-Mines, dealing with the Exciting Adventures of the Young Hero of Wrexborough Pit—
DAVID STEELE.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

LEAVING the little North-country village of Thorpe Western, **DAVID STEELE**, an ambitious young lad of fifteen, decided to try his fortune in Wrexborough.

With a few shillings in his pocket, and with a tramp of thirty to forty miles to his destination, the sturdy country lad set off.

Utterly tired out at night, the lad sought a sheltered place, into which he crept. But hardly had he dropped off to slumber when he was aroused by hurried movements near at hand. He was alert almost on the instant, and, on making investigations, found, to his horror, the bound figure of a man lying on the permanent-way at the mercy of an express train which was at that moment due. With great presence of mind, the lad dragged the inert form to safety just a fraction of a second before the great train rushed by.

But the perpetrators of the crime were returning; so, carrying the unconscious form, Dave took refuge beneath the arched stone bridge which carried the railway over a canal.

His presence was detected, however, and in an effort to escape the clutches of the unconscious man's assailants, Dave and his burden found themselves in the canal, sweeping helplessly through the arch and out into the open waters beyond.

Fortune was at hand, however, for the two were just able to scramble on board a barge which lay right across the canal. David then learned that he had rescued Mr. Scott, the owner of the Wrexborough coal-mines. David was offered a job in the mine, and gratefully accepted.

Mr. Scott's manner was very strange after that; for not only did he ask Steele to keep the whole affair a secret, but he also found the lad accommodation with a man named Markham, his own assailant!

Markham had recognised Steele, too, and, after having made an unsuccessful attempt to get David out of the way, he enlisted the services of Job Skirling, the "Wrexborough Terror." This bully fell foul of David in one of the galleries of the mine, but a fall of the roof took place, entombing both parties and a number of other men. After a period of tense waiting, rescuers loosened the mass of debris enough to allow David to crawl from the gallery.

"Are the others alive?" asked Scott anxiously.

(Now read on.)

David Makes a Discovery!

"I DON'T know, sir," gasped David Steele. "I know they are unconscious, for none of them answered when I called."

Scott groaned.

"Poor fellows; and it may be hours yet till we can reach them, or even pass them food, if they are able to take it."

"Let me take it to 'em, sir."

It was David who spoke.

"Nonsense, lad! I can't let you risk your life again! It was a more dangerous job than you imagined crawling through that opening. The wall might have crept at any

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moment, and come down on you! Besides, you are only fit for a rest."

But David stood his ground.

"I got through to save myself, so I can go back to save the other chaps," he said doggedly. "I'm the only one that can, for no grown man could squeeze himself through."

There was a murmur of applause. Scott hesitated, and then laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You're right, David," he said. "But I wish to Heaven I could take your place."

And he turned aside, covering his face with his hands, while David, with a couple of flasks stowed in his pockets, and provided with a lamp, recommenced his perilous journey. His head was clearer now, and he realised fully how perilous it was; how his every movement was liable to bring down upon him some mass of tottering rock that would crush him out of recognition.

As for the rescue party, they stood in breathless silence until a distant "All right!" told them that the dangerous passage was accomplished.

"Bravo, Dave!" shouted Scott. And the miners echoed his words excitedly.

It was some hours later when they forced themselves to the spot where the poor fellows lay, and found them alive—thanks, in all probability, in some cases at least, to the nourishment that David had brought and administered. The news of the boy's plucky feat had been carried to the pit's mouth, and loud as was the cheers that greeted rescuers and rescued, the loudest were for David Steele. In fact, but for Scott's interference, the boy would have found it difficult to escape from the throng that surrounded him.

And the fact of his increased popularity was not the only result of the accident in the pit for David. From that day forward Job Skirling and his gang molested them no more. Whether the "Wrexborough Terror" felt any gratitude or admiration is doubtful; but the tale of his cowardice had spread, and Job found himself deserted by even his most faithful followers. From henceforth Markham had nothing to hope for from his ally, nor David to fear from him.

For some time David's life in the mine continued uneventful enough; but the round of his daily duties did not prevent him from speculating on the mystery that surrounded his employer. Above all, he watched Markham.

Days passed, however, and nothing in the latter's conduct pointed to any further development of the mystery. Neither was Scott's nocturnal visit repeated—he and Markham, if they met, must have chosen some other rendezvous. In fact, it was hardly likely that they would venture on the experiment of drugging a possible listener every time they wished to talk in private.

More than once the boy almost decided to tell Scott that he had been a witness of his strange visit; but the idea that his employer might think he had been spying restrained him.

And this reflection decided him, for the present, to hold his tongue and keep his eyes open.

Thus a week or two went by, and he was almost beginning to believe that no further light would be thrown upon the matter, when one day his interest in it received a fresh and unexpected fillip.

It was on a Sunday afternoon. He had set out for a stroll, and, leaving Wrexborough behind him, he had wandered up the hills that surrounded it, and away over the moor beyond, when, two or three miles distant from home, he was overtaken by a sudden storm of rain.

Ordinary rain was not of much account to a country-bred boy, but this was a regular downpour; and David, who was not desirous of spoiling his Sunday best, made a bolt for the only shelter in the neighbourhood—some tumble-down building which stood in melancholy decay around what was known in Wrexborough as "th' owd shaft."

The old shaft was the mouth of a worked-out pit. Beside the black opening, round which the shrubs and gorse had grown, stood the weather-beaten walls of which once had been the engine-house and a shed or two; and it was in one of these latter that David took refuge from the storm.

He had been sitting down for some five minutes when the crazy door, which tottered on its hinges, was suddenly pushed open, and a man entered the building.

The place was in semi-darkness, the only light proceeding from the open door and the various holes in the battered roof; the new-comer, therefore, did not see David, whose presence he was so far from suspecting that he never even looked around him, as, walking straight up to the wall opposite the door, he thrust a piece of paper, which he had been carrying in his hand, into the interstice of two of the planks, turned on his heel, and left the shed as quickly as he had entered it, pulling the door to behind him.

The whole thing had been done so quickly that before David had had time to realise that the stranger had not, like himself, sought the shed for shelter from the weather, he was gone.

The boy sprang to his feet.

The light in the shed was dim; he had not seen the features of the man who had so suddenly appeared and vanished; but something in his gait and build was familiar. He ran to the door, opened it, and looked out, then rubbed his eyes. The stranger had disappeared.

For a moment David could not believe his own sight. The moor lay undulating before him, its wide expanse unbroken by even a tree. There was no one to be seen.

He ran round the sheds and the engine-house, examined them inside and out, and called—to no avail. In the space of a few seconds the stranger had vanished as completely and mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

Had it swallowed him up? Had he fallen down that black, yawning hole leading to the bowels of the earth? The boy's eyes grew round with horror at the thought. Had he in leaving the shed, unaware of the proximity of the disused shaft, stumbled into it, and been dashed to pieces in its awful depths, hundreds of feet below?

But if that were the case, surely a cry would have escaped him—a shriek of horror as he felt himself falling through the yielding air; a shriek that would certainly have reached David's ears.

Puzzled and bewildered, half inclined to believe that his eyes had played him false, David rose from the kneeling posture in which he had been peering over the edge of the shaft.

"I must have been dreaming!" he muttered. "It's rank impossibility for a man to disappear entirely, without a sign or a sound, in about half a minute! I must have been dreaming! And yet—"

He ran back to the shed as the thought struck him.

No, he had not been dreaming. The stranger had thrust something—a piece of paper—between the joints of the planking, and that piece of paper was still there; though so tightly rammed into its hiding-place, that if David had not seen it put there he would certainly never have discovered it. As he smoothed it out and held it to the light he saw that it was a half-sheet of notepaper, with a few lines in pencil traced upon it.

They ran as follows:

"Everything is ready for to-morrow night. Be here by ten without fail. I have made sure of him. This time we are certain of success."

There was neither signature nor address. What did it mean?

The boy's curiosity was roused to the highest pitch. The missive in itself was mysterious enough; but even more mysterious was the complete disappearance of the man who had brought and, no doubt, written it. Who was he? And who was the correspondent with whom he adopted such an extraordinary method of communication?

"Upon my word," thought the boy, "I seem to do nothing but tumble into mysteries. Here's another—a regular Sexton Blake problem. It's a jolly sight easier to work out than the Scott and Markham business, though; for, after all, I've only got to watch who comes here for letters to get some sort of a clue. And that's exactly what I will do. 'Everything is ready for to-morrow night.' I wouldn't mind betting a good deal that the gentleman who wrote that has a pretty fishy job on hand—helping himself to somebody else's spoons and forks, perhaps, or something of that kind. I wonder how long it will be before his friend calls for his note—which I'd better put back where he expects to find it."

He thrust the paper back into its place of concealment.

The next thing was to find a coign of vantage for himself. To stay in the shed was impossible; it was only by chance that the bearer of the missive had not noticed him.

The old engine-house offered the best post of observation. From it he could see anyone entering the shed, while he himself remained unseen.

"Not that that matters much," he reflected, "for the man who comes for that letter is not likely to guess that I've had a look at it already."

Feeling like a detective on a hot scent, he enconced himself at his post, his eyes fixed upon the door of the shed.

An hour passed by. The sun was nearing the horizon, and the detective business began to lose some of its attraction—in fact, the boy was seriously considering the advisability of postponing his investigations for the present, when the sound of an approaching footfall fell upon his ear; and the next moment a man came into view and walked straight to the door of the deserted shed.

David got farther back into his place of concealment, and drew a long breath of astonishment.

The man was Markham!

Into the Hands of His Enemies!

IT was not chance that had brought Markham to the old shaft that afternoon. When he emerged from the shed he held a crumpled piece of paper between his fingers—a piece of paper which he smoothed out, read with puckered brow, and then tore into small fragments and tossed away as he turned back by the path he had come.

Not till his footsteps had died into silence did David emerge into the open air.

His two mysteries, it seemed, were only one, after all. At least, the same man—Markham—was at the bottom of each. It was to Markham that the order to be "here at ten to-morrow night" had been addressed.

If David had been curious before, he was ten times more curious now. More, he determined to follow up the clue he had so strangely and unexpectedly obtained.

Who was the writer of the letter? The man who had seemingly vanished into thin air? Was it Scott?

That was his first idea. Dimly as he had seen the stranger, something about him had struck him as familiar, and he was certainly about Scott's height. But the next moment, in a flash, he recollected that the note was certainly not in Scott's handwriting. While he had been in his employer's house he had seen more than one specimen of his peculiar penmanship—peculiar because, in writing, as in everything else, Scott used his left hand in preference to his right. The note he had seen, on the contrary, was written in a running scrawl, quite unlike Scott's rather stiff, backward characters.

If not Scott, who was it?

Markham's companion on the night of the attempted murder!

The boy's eyes flashed at the thought.

"If it's that brute who tried to drown me," he muttered, clenching his fist, "and he has any little game on hand, I'll see if I can't do my best to spoil it for him! I owe him something for that night, and if Mr. Scott won't let me pay him in full, why I'll pay him what I can on my own!"

On one point he had made up his mind. At ten o'clock on the following night he, as well as Markham, would be at the appointed rendezvous.

He did not disguise from himself that the risk would be great. He was about to play the spy on men who had already shown themselves utterly unscrupulous with regard to human life. If he were discovered he could hope for little mercy at their hands.

Before he started homeward he had mapped out a plan of action for the following night.

To begin with, he must be on the ground before Markham and his accomplice. The shed where the paper had been concealed was probably their place of meeting, and he examined it with a view of concealing himself inside it. That a hasty glance showed him was impossible. He must

be content, therefore, to stow himself away in the old engine-house, and be guided by circumstances after the conspirators had arrived on the scene. It would go hard if he could not manage to overhear something of their conversation.

He would have given a great deal to talk over his plan with someone—to propose to one of the lads in the mine, for instance, to accompany him on his adventure—a proposal that he knew would be gleefully accepted. But loyalty to Scott held him back. It was possible, after all, that his employer was in some way concerned in this strange midnight meeting. If so, he—David—would respect his secret.

The next day seemed to the boy interminable. The hours simply dragged by. And when he met Markham in the evening he was afraid of betraying his excitement.

The miner, on his part, seemed perfectly cool. There was nothing in his conduct, as he sat, after tea had been cleared away, quietly smoking his pipe, to give the impression that he had any unusual undertaking on hand.

At half-past eight David rose, said good-night, and went up to his bed-room. A couple of minutes later he had dropped from his window into the street. He had previously examined the outside wall, and found that he could easily climb up to the window again. There was no necessity, therefore, for any of the household to be aware of his midnight expedition.

It could have been very little after nine when he reached the appointed spot and crouched down in the shadow of the old engine-house. The night was a clear one, and, from the position he had taken up, he could not fail to see anyone approaching the door of the shed.

The air was cold, with a touch of frost in it, and the boy began to shiver as the minutes, that seemed like hours, crept slowly by.

Suddenly he started.

"Markham, are you there?" said a voice that sounded close beside him.

There was no answer, and the next moment a man emerged into sight—a man who carried a lantern. He passed quite close to the crouching boy, as if awaiting a reply, and then entered the shed.

Five minutes later the sound of advancing footsteps became distinctly audible. Another figure loomed up through the night, walked to the shed, went in, and closed the door behind him.

Markham had come.

In an instant David had leapt to his feet, and, creeping cautiously as a cat, he advanced to the door of the shed.

He could hear nothing—nothing but an indistinct murmur of voices from within. Uselessly, he pressed his ear to the

door. The two men were evidently on the farther side of the building, and, for all the information he was likely to obtain, he might as well have been lying at home in bed.

In vain he crept round the shed, seeking for some chink which would enable him to overhear what was going on in the interior. Nowhere could he catch anything but a faint and quite unintelligible murmur.

"I'm done," he muttered—"done to a turn! No, I'm not, though! There's the roof!"

It had flashed across his memory that the roof was full of holes. If, therefore, he could get close to one of those holes, there would be nothing to prevent his hearing the conversation of the men almost as plainly as if he were actually with them in the building.

It was a risky job. At one end of the shed an old rubbish-heap reached half-way to the roof. There was no difficulty in getting on to it, therefore the danger lay not only in the likelihood that he would be heard by the men beneath him, but in the chance of the rotten planking giving way altogether and precipitating him into the shed.

Holding his breath, the boy climbed up. To raise himself to the sloping roof was easy enough. It was not so easy to crawl along on hands and knees without making a sound. Cautiously he crept on until he reached almost the centre of the building, and paused close to a jagged opening a foot or two across, through which the sound of voices came clearly and distinctly.

The two men must be standing exactly beneath him.

"He won't be such a fool as to come," Markham was saying.

"That's all you know about it," came the answer, with a contemptuous laugh. "He'll come, and come by himself, too, though with a very different object from meeting us. You don't give me credit for as much brains as I possess."

"What was the time you told him?"

"Half-past ten."

"It's getting on for that now."

"Yes. You don't sound cheerful, my friend. Don't be alarmed. We are two to one, and I'm not going to hazard your precious neck this time."

"Well, what have I got to do when he comes?" Markham asked surlily.

"Simply throw yourself upon him as soon as he is inside the door. Between us, we shall have him down in no time. There is a coil of rope in that corner. We must trust him up like a chicken, and then it only remains to escort him to his quarters. We must gag him as soon as we've got him fast. It isn't likely that there is anyone about, but we won't take any risks."

"Risks?" replied Markham bitterly. "We're risking a good deal in this business, it seems to me—risking a stiff dose of penal servitude at the least."

"That is where you make a mistake," rejoined his companion coolly. "The game is a perfectly safe one. It is impossible for anyone to find me out."

"Ay!" growled Markham. "Safe while we've got him, perhaps. But what is to prevent him splitting on us after he's given in—if he does give in?"

"His word," returned the other. "I know William Scott better than you do, my friend; and I know that his word, once given, he would hang on to it in the face of death itself."

Not a syllable of the conversation had escaped David. Incomprehensible as some of it was to him, he had at least learned the object for which the two men were met together. They meant mischief to Scott, and Scott, lured by a lying pretext, was on his way to meet them.

There was only one thing to do—to intercept and warn him of the danger into which he was unconsciously running. They expected him at half-past ten. Haste was necessary, for, though not yet in sight, at any moment he might arrive and fall defenceless into the trap prepared for him.

David waited to hear no more. He had been lying outstretched upon the roof, his head close to the aperture. Now he scrambled to his hands and knees, and began crawling back by the way he had come.

Perhaps his haste made him less cautious. At any rate, he had only advanced a foot or two when the planks beneath him cracked loudly and ominously. He paused, motionless, hoping that the sound had not attracted the attention of those beneath him.

"What's that?" he heard Markham say. "There's someone on the roof!"

A fierce exclamation from his companion followed.

"A spy!" he cried furiously. "Give me the lantern! If it is, I'll—"

Further concealment was hopeless. The boy's escape was henceforth only a question of speed. To leap from the roof to the ground and take to his heels in the direction whence Scott was coming was his best, if not his only chance.



David had been sitting down for about five minutes when the door suddenly opened and a man entered the building. The boy watched the stranger walk straight up to the wall and thrust a piece of paper in between two of the planks.

He sprang to his feet, and then a cry burst from his lips.

The rotten planking had borne his weight lying down, but it gave way beneath him the moment he stood upright. With a sound of splintering timber, one foot went right through the roof, and before he could withdraw it he heard a shout from below, and felt himself gripped tightly round the ankle. In vain he struggled; his captor only held him the faster.

"Tear away the boards and pull him through!" David heard him shout.

Then followed the rending of rotten timber as the hole was enlarged.

"Help!" shouted David, with the full strength of his lungs. "Mr. Scott, help, I say!"

But his cry remained unanswered, and the next moment between his own struggles and the efforts of his captors, he fell with a crash through the roof right upon the man who still clutched his leg—fell with such force as to knock him to the ground, at the same time upsetting and extinguishing the lantern.

David was uppermost. His adversary's breath must have been almost knocked out of his body. At any rate, he loosened his hold of the boy's ankle, and David scrambled out of his clutches and rushed towards where he believed the door to be, only to run almost into the outstretched arms of his other enemy, who had already placed himself in front of it.

By a backward leap he just saved himself from capture. But he was still a prisoner—a prisoner in the darkness. His only hope was in the arrival of Scott.

"Where are the matches?" he heard Markham shout from the door. "Strike a light and let's get hold of him!"

David's fallen adversary was by this time scrambling to his feet. The boy held his breath, expecting each moment the flash that would reveal his presence as he shrank against the wall, panting from his recent struggle.

"I've dropped them, confound it!" came back the answer. "Where are you?"

"At the door. I can't leave it, or he'll get out!"

"All right; I'll have him in a minute!"

His enemy was unconsciously almost touching David as he spoke, and the boy augured but little mercy from his tones. A sudden desperate idea came to him. Stooping down, he clutched at the man's foot, jerked it violently towards him, and, for the second time, brought him with a crash to the ground.

With a yell of rage, he recovered himself and turned on his invisible foe. And now began a fierce and exciting chase from end to end of the shed. Markham, afraid to leave his post at the door lest David should slip through it, could only listen while the pursuit went on, the boy twisting and doubling in the darkness, and more than once actually slipping through his enemy's fingers. Hither and thither they dashed, stumbling and whirling in the obscurity, David's only hope of prolonging the chase being to allow time for Scott to appear upon the scene. His foot struck the extinguished lantern as he ran. He stooped, snatched it up, and hurled it behind him with all his might. A fierce exclamation and the sound of shattering glass told that his random shot had taken some effect, but not enough to disable his enemy, who only increased his efforts to seize his prey. Again David doubled. But he was getting exhausted. The perspiration streamed from every pore, and it seemed to him as if this horrible contest, this chase in the dark, had lasted hours instead of minutes. The man was close on his heels; his outstretched fingers had brushed his clothes. The boy tried to spring on one side, but as he did so a hand seized his arm, and the next instant another was on his throat.

The hunt was over. He was helpless in his enemy's grasp.

"Help!" he shouted, in the hope that Scott might hear. "Help! Help!"

His cry was almost choked as the fingers round his throat tightened their grasp upon it.

"Hold your tongue, you young cub!" was hissed into his ear. "Hold your tongue, or I'll strangle you!"

David's captor was not far from carrying out his threat. The blood sang in the boy's ears, and he felt himself choking for breath.

"Listen!" cried Markham suddenly. "He's coming!"

He spoke truly. Footsteps hurried footsteps—were nearing the shed.

"Stand back from the door," whispered David's captor, pressing his hand over the boy's mouth. "Stand back—and be ready!"

The next moment the door was flung open.

"What's the matter? Who called for help?"



"Stand back from the door, Markham!" whispered David's captor, pressing his hand over the boy's mouth. "Stand back—and be ready!" The next moment the door was flung open, but before Scott could realise the situation he was dealt a blow that sent him reeling sideways.

The voice was Scott's.

For an instant his tall figure stood outlined against the doorway; then, as he advanced a step, Markham rushed out of the darkness and dealt him a blow that sent him reeling sideways.

The Plot of a Fiend!

OF the confused struggle that followed David retained but a vague and dim remembrance. He heard Scott's voice ring out in a shout of "You coward!" as he recovered from the unexpected blow and rushed at the giver of it; then the sound of shuffling, stamping feet as the two men closed, and, locked in each other's arms, swayed hither and thither in the darkness.

He made a last and desperate attempt to free himself from his captor and go to Scott's assistance—an effort that was answered with a swinging blow delivered with all the strength of a man's right arm. It fell full upon his forehead. Lights swam before his eyes; he felt as if he were sinking downwards into nothingness. And then his senses left him as his assailant, satisfied with his helplessness, dropped him to the ground and rushed to Markham's aid.

For a few minutes, by sheer pluck and weight of fist, Scott kept both his antagonists at bay. But the fight was too unequal to last for long. Attacked on both sides at once, he was overpowered and borne to the ground, where he lay prostrate, with Markham's knee pressing into his chest.

"Who are you?" he gasped. "And what do you mean by this cowardly assault?"

"You'll know who we are as soon as we can find the matches," was the curt reply.

And a moment later a faint splutter of flame shone through the darkness, and lit up the face of the man who had kindled it.

"George!" cried Scott.

"Yes, George," replied the other coolly, picking up the shattered lantern, and proceeding to relight it. "George, who has laid a very successful trap for you, my dear Will—one into which you have tumbled head-over-heels. Here, Markham, make him fast with this bit of rope. That's right. Now we shall have no more trouble with him for the present; for I warn you, Will, that if you attempt to cry out I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of stuffing a handkerchief half-way down your throat! As for the boy," he added, holding the lantern to David's inanimate face, "he's quiet enough."

"You've killed him!" exclaimed Scott fiercely.

"No," was the nonchalant reply, as the speaker laid his hand on David's breast. "I haven't. It would have served him right if I had, though. This is the second time he has interfered in my concerns. However, we'll consider what is to be done with him later on. It's you that I want to have a word with just now."

He turned to Scott as he spoke with a sneer upon his lips—turned to him a face that, save in expression, was the very counterpart of his prisoner's own. And it was not only in feature and colouring that the two men resembled each other. To the fraction of an inch they must have been of the same height, in breadth of shoulder, in gait and bearing, and even in trick of gesture they were exactly alike.

And yet in temperament no two men could have been more dissimilar than these two brothers—for brothers they were. George Scott, the elder, a wastrel and a gambler from boyhood, had broken his father's heart by his follies and vices, and had finally crowned a career of debt and extravagance by being convicted of forgery. On the day he was sentenced to a five years' term of penal servitude his father had disinherited him in favour of his younger brother, and his dying injunction to the latter had been never to allow the fortune which had been built up by honest work and endeavour, to pass into the hands of George.

Thus it had come to pass that George Scott was a poor

man instead of a rich man, and this was the reason that he hated his younger brother with a fierce and bitter hatred—a hatred that shone from his eyes, and twisted his lips into a thin line as he looked down upon the face of his captive.

"Well," he said brutally, "I've got you at last. You slipped through my fingers the other night, thanks to that young cub there. I take it there's small chance of your doing so to-night. You're mine now, my dear brother—mine to do as I like with—to put a bullet through your brain, if I choose, or toss you over the edge of the shaft yonder. You've fattened on the property that should have been mine all these years, and now I'm going to make you pay."

(It was a desperate situation indeed for Mr. Scott. With nobody to help him he was absolutely at the mercy of his rascally brother George. Can he possibly hold out or will George Scott succeed in his vile scheme? On no account should you miss next week's instalment of this powerful serial, chams. There will be a thrill in every line of it.)



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