

A Powerful and Dramatic
Story of St. Jim's

"LEVISON MINOR'S PLIGHT!" By Martin
Clifford.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^d

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 908.
Vol. XXVII.
June 20th,
1925.



"LEVISON, YOUR BROTHER IS A THIEF!"

The angry Form-master's accusation rang like a knell in the ears of Ernest Levison of the Fourth Form.
(A Dramatic Incident from the grand school story of St. Jim's inside.)



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

MY DEAR CHUMS,—Next week's GEM will be a special Levison Number. The lead off is Mr. Martin Clifford's splendid St. Jim's yarn, "Levison's Sacrifice," showing Ernest Levison playing a part which will make him better liked than ever he was. Then we get a Study No. 9 issue of the "St. Jim's News." This is a treat which has been asked for many a time. Other fine features for next Wednesday are "Yorkshire Grit!" by Louis Alfriston, with Ben Derby in fighting form, and our famous serial of Pitboy Dave, the hero of the mine.

BIKING OUT OF LONDON!

A correspondent puts a very reasonable question about spins out of London. He lives at Shepherd's Bush, where the White City stands. It seems to me he is very fortunately situated, for he can get clear away from bricks and mortar pretty easily, and, as he is a novice, this is a special consideration. He wants to make for Chiswick, and then take the new Great West Road, which will take him out on the Bath Road. There is no better run than this, and the way leads into some of the finest country within reach of town.

PARAFFIN FOR JIGGERS!

Nothing like a bath of paraffin for clearing away the grit and coagulated oil. A bike does not need a lot of attention, really, but it does require a look over now and again, and the dust and dirt should be removed after a long run.

THE NEW HOUSE!

What is the New House made of? That query comes from a trusty Gemite in Cheshire. I might reply that the New House is built of brains, but that's too obvious. As a matter of fact, this important section of world-famous St. Jim's is constructed of the best red brick. My Cheshire friend also asks about the holders of the high jump record. Kildare, the captain, comes first with 5 ft. 4 ins.; Monty Lowther, of the juniors, has first place with 4 ft. 9 ins.

AN AMATEUR PRINTER!

A Leeds reader has started in as a printer.

He sends me a specimen of his work. It is jolly good—nothing of what may be styled cock-robin jumpiness in the style. How is he to get trade? That's what he wants to know. I counsel him to spread the news that he can turn out excellent work amongst his friends. Then he might try a small advertisement in a local paper. Lots of people want small jobs of printing done, such as concert handbills and trade announcements.

FROM BETTER TO BEST!

It is always cheery to get a tribute to the wonderful advance made of late times by the GEM, though there is nothing new in that. The GEM has been scoring fresh triumphs for years past. Certain readers are so intense in their interest that they are inclined to wax angry when some of the favourites in the St. Jim's series get shelved for a week or two.

LOYAL LEVISON!

That reminds me of what I pointed out above when I mentioned next week's school yarn. There is nothing finer to look at, nothing more inspiring than an example of spontaneous loyalty. It shows what lies behind, just what a fellow really has in him. With regard to next week's topping yarn, I am confident that it will appease the wrath of a constant supporter who is often writing to urge me to give more attention to the Levisons.

MORE TROUBLE!

A real grouse this time! It is about the hats sported by some of the girl characters who at odd seasons flutter into the story series. I am assured their hats, as the worthy artist presents them, are all wrong, out of date, and not suitable in any way. There has been a shindy over this matter. My delineator got quite nettled about it. He said he imagined he knew a hat when he saw one, and, speaking as an artist, he had no patience with some of the new fashions. So that's that!

YOUR EDITOR.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best storyette sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your joke, to me.

GOOD OLD NOTTS!

HABIT!

The sergeant caught P.-c. 999 asleep. "This is the third time I have caught you asleep!" he thundered. "Is it force of habit?" "No, sir," came the meek reply. "It's a habit of the Force!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to G. Currie, 45, Osborne Grove, Sherwood, Nottingham.

OVERHEARD!

Two men were talking at the races. "Do you know I can give you a really good tip," said one. "I got it straight from the horses' mouth." "Oh, and how did you manage that?" replied his friend. "Well, last night, I crept up to the stables and heard a 'hoarse' whisper!" answered the man, with a knowing wink. "Half-a-crown has been awarded to Harold Hentges, 28, Rathbone Place, London, W. 1.

TOO FLY!

Sambo and Rastus were sitting under a tree on a bench, talking. "Sambo," said Rastus, "what am dat flying 'round mah head?" "Why, dat am a hoss fly." "A hoss fly! What am dat?" "Dat am a fly, what buzzes round hosses, cows, and jackasses." "You don't mean to 'sinuate' I'se a jackass, do you?" "Don't mean to 'sinuate' nothing, but you can't fool dat hoss fly!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Grace Ford, 204, Coleraine Street, Montreal, Canada.

SARCASM!

The dear old lady was visiting the wards in a hospital. She came to a patient whose head was swathed in bandages. "Ah!" she said. "An accident. Was your head hurt badly?" "Oh, no," replied the sufferer sarcastically, "I got a nasty knock on the foot, and the bandages slipped up!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Stanford, N. 153, Mess 11, T.S. "Arethusa," Greenhithe, Kent.

NO USE TO HIM!

"I'll take this pair," said the young athlete, who had been looking at some rubber shoes. "The other pair will give you much better service in the long run," suggested the salesman. "Oh! But I'm not in any of the long runs; I'm only in the seventy-five yards!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to James Hutchison, 7, Eastbank Gardens, Shettleston, Glasgow.

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LEVISON MINOR'S PLIGHT!

A Thrilling and Dramatic Long
 Complete School Story of the
 Two Levison Brothers and Tom
 Merry & Co., at St. Jim's.
 BY
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Catspaw Required!

"YOU see—"
"You see—"
"You see—"
 Tom Merry, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, held up his hand.

"One at a time," he suggested.
"Or not more than two!" said Manners.
"You're no good as a trio," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. **"You don't sing in tune, you know."**
"Oh, come off!" said Wally of the Third crossly. **"Look here—"**

"Look here—" said Manners minor.
"Look here—" said Frank Levison.
 Evidently the three fags had something to explain. Equally evidently, each member of the Third Form trio supposed that he could explain better than either of the others.

Prep was not quite finished in Study No. 10 in the Shell. The Terrible Three were a little late; and they were interrupted by the three minors. Prep was over for the Third, or the three could not have arrived in the Shell passage. But the Third, of course, could not be late with their preparation, as they prepared in the Form-room with Mr. Selby. And Mr. Selby was a Form master with whom few of his boys ever ventured to be unpunctual.

"Will you fellows dry up?" asked Wally D'Arcy, with a glare at his comrades. **"Are we going to ask Manners major, or are we not going to Manners major?"**

"We are!" said Reggie Manners. **"Leave it to me, Wally! You talk too much, old chap."**

"Look here, young Manners—"
"Look here, young D'Arcy—"

"You're wasting time, you know," said Frank Levison. **"These Shell chaps don't want to listen to you ragging."**

"Right on the wicket!" said Tom Merry, laughing. **"The actual fact is, that we don't want to listen to you at all. We haven't finished prep, for one thing."**

"And we don't yearn for Third Form conversation at any time, for another," remarked Lowther. **"Shut the door after you."**

"Hold on," said Manners.

Manners of the Shell detached his attention from Latin prose, and laid down his pen. Prep was prep; but Manners minor was Manners minor! Manners of the Shell regarded his minor as a person of some importance, for reasons quite unknown to his chums. To them, Reggie was a cheeky little sweep. But the brotherly eye of Harry Manners doubtless saw something more than that in Reggie of the Third.

"Let's have it," said Manners. **"What's the trouble, Reggie? You're not on the wrong side of Mr. Selby again, I hope?"**

"I'm always on his wrong side," answered Manners minor. **"So would you be if you were in the Third. I don't believe Selby's got a right side. But it's not little me this time. It's Franky."**

"Little me!" agreed Levison minor.

Manners grunted.

"Then you can jolly well go to your own major, in the

Fourth," he said. **"One minor is enough for me, or a little too much."**

"You see—"
"Oh, do dry up and let me explain!" said D'Arcy minor. **"We want one of you Shell chaps to butt in. I should have asked Tom Merry, because he's got more sense; but young Reggie thinks you ought to butt in, as his major, Manners. It's quite a simple thing. Old Selby has bagged Franky's 'Holiday Annual'."**

"What?"
"Practically pinched it," said Reggie. **"You young ass!"**

"We're all reading it, you know," said Wally of the Third. **"It belongs to Franky, because his sister Doris sent it to him, but it's really ours, you know. Well, we were all reading it in the Form-room before prep, and then Mr. Selby came in, and Franky shoved it in his desk. Any harm in that, I'd like to know?"**

"None!" agreed Tom Merry. **"But I'm really blessed if I can see what you want to tell us about it for. Can't you tell some chaps in the Third?"**

"Give a fellow a chance to speak. That's the worst of you Shell-fish—you're all jaw," said Wally. **"Selby began finding fault with Franky at prep—you know he's always finding fault with somebody—"**

"Not without cause, I dare say."

"There you go again—jaw! Well, Selby made out that Franky wasn't paying attention, and finding the 'Annual' in his desk, made out that Franky was looking at it instead of listening to Selby's chinwag. Of course, he wasn't—were you, Franky?"

"No fear!"

"Whereupon—" resumed D'Arcy minor.

"Eh?"

"Whereupon—"

"Where on earth did you dig up that word?" asked Monty Lowther. **"Did you have it in prep?"**

"Whereupon," roared Wally of the Third—"whereupon, Mr. Selby collared the 'Annual,' and took it away. He told Franky he was going to keep it till the end of the term, and give it back to him then. After prep, he took it away with him, under his silly arm. See?"

"Walked off with it," said Reggie.

"My 'Annual,' you know," said Levison minor.

"Cheek!" said Wally.

"Awful!" said Tom Merry gravely. **"Unspeakable! The limit! In fact, the outside edge! Good-bye!"**

"Shut the door after you!" said Lowther. **"So kind of you to come here and tell us! Ta-ta!"**

But the three fags did not retire from Study No. 10. They had come there on business, and the business was not through yet.

"To come down to brass tacks," went on D'Arcy minor cheerfully. **"We've got to get that 'Annual' back. I've taken a squirt into Selby's study, and it's on the table there. Easy enough for a fellow to nip in and bag it—see?"**

"Nip in, then," said Lowther. **"I wish you'd nipped in there, in the first place, instead of nipping in here."**

"That's where the difficulty comes in," explained Wally. "You know Selby—he never forgets anything. He will miss that 'Annual' at once, and he will want to know who bagged it from his room. I suppose you don't think we can tell him lies? Besides, it's no good telling Selby crammers—he's too jolly keen. We're not going to touch that book while it's in his study. We want to be able to tell him, with perfect truth, that we haven't been inside his study. So we want one of you fellows to nip in and bag it, and hand it over to us! Do you get me?"

"My hat!"

"That's the idea," said Reggie Manners with a nod. "As you're my major, Harry, I want you to play up, old man. Selby will never think of asking in the Shell about it."

Manners picked up his pen.

"I'll give you some advice, instead," he answered. "Leave the book where it is."

"But we want it!" explained D'Arcy minor patiently.

"That can't be helped. Mr. Selby may be right, or he may be wrong, but in either case he's your Form master, and you're bound to obey him. Leave the thing alone."

"And that's the amount of sense they've got in the Shell," said Wally sorrowfully. "I keep on telling him that we want the book, and he advises us to leave it where it is. Are they all born idiots in your family, Reggie?"

"Look here, Harry—" began Manners minor.

"Rats! Don't bother any more."

"It was my idea all along to ask Tom Merry," said Wally. "You'll do it for us, won't you, Tommy?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't be done," he answered. "Levison minor shouldn't really have had the book in his desk at all. Form masters have to be obeyed, even if they're a bit hasty. Leave the book alone!"

"What about you, Lowther?" asked Wally.

"Nothing about me," answered Monty Lowther. "I'm not quite ass enough to butt into Mr. Selby's study and hunt for trouble. I have enough trouble with my own jolly old Form master."

The three fags exchanged glances.

"All serene," said Wally with undiminished cheerfulness. "We've drawn this study blank, you chaps. We'll try my major next, and if he doesn't play up, there's still your major, Franky. Come on, and leave those Shell kids to get their prep done, so that their Form master won't whack them in the morning."

Wally & Co. walked out.

"Wally!" called out Tom Merry. "Take my tip, kid, and leave the thing where it is. Mr. Selby isn't a master to be fooled with, you know."

"Bow-wow!" answered Wally of the Third.

Slam!

The door of Study No. 10 closed with a terrific concussion, and the three minors departed. The Terrible Three of the Shell resumed their prep, and Wally & Co. proceeded along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, in search of the assistance that had been denied them in Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus Does Not Play Up!

CRASH!

"Yawooooop!"

There were sounds of revelry by night, so to speak, as the three minors approached Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

Something was going on in that celebrated study.

Wally pushed the door open and looked in, with Reggie Manners and Frank Levison looking in over his shoulders.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Wally's elder brother, was sitting on the study carpet. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and he had a pair of boxing-gloves on his hands. Jack Blake was standing before him, also in boxing-gloves, with a grin on his face.

Herries and Digby sat on the study table, which had been pushed into a corner out of the way. They also were grinning.

Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble nose with his gloved hand.

"Bai Jove!" he said.

"Hurt, old chap?" asked Blake, with some concern.

"Wats!"

"You see, you jumped right on my fist," said Blake. "I was only going to give you a tap on the boko. But you biffed on like a bull at a gate, you know."

"Ow! Wats!"

The three minors grinned in at the doorway. Arthur Augustus looked very breathless and flustered, and his aristocratic nose was very red. He seemed surprised, too. Apparently he had not expected the boxing-match with his chum to pan out like this.

He struggled to his feet.

"Chuck it, old man!" said Blake. "I keep on telling you that I can knock you sky-high. Why can't you take a chap's word?"

"But you could not possibly knock me sky-high, Blake, deah boy. I have not the slightest doubt that I could knock you sky-high."

"Hear, hear!" said Wally of the Third. Gussy's services being wanted, in connection with Mr. Selby, Wally of the Third considered that a little soft "sawder" would not be wasted.

Arthur Augustus glanced round at the fags.

"Hallo, Wally! What do you want, deah boy?"

"Just a look at you, Gus," said D'Arcy minor affably. "You're such a nice pleasant chap to look at, you know."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Well, are we chucking this?" asked Blake. "You won't have any nose left if I punch it again, Gussy."

"Wats! Keep out of the way, Wally. I am goin' to show you somethin' in boxin', Blake. Mind, I am not goin' to hurt you."

Jack Blake roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Old pippin, you couldn't hurt me in fifteen years."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Go it, as hard as you like," grinned Blake. "If you succeed in damaging my nose, old man, I'll admit that you're the best boxer in the study."

"It would hurt you vewy much, deah boy, if I gave you one of my feahful blows."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Pile in, old man, and do your giddy worst," said Blake, chortling. "Here's my nose, and if you can hurt it, I'll own up you're best man."

Blake pushed his face forward, as if offering his nose for assault and battery. Blake of the Fourth was a good boxer, but it was possible that he was a little over-confident on this occasion. Arthur Augustus, with all his dandified ways, was a good man with the mittens, a circumstance of which his chum sometimes lost sight. Certainly, Arthur Augustus gave more attention to neckties, and silk socks, and silk-hats than to the boxing-gloves. Nevertheless, he was a doughty fighting-man when his noble blood was roused. And just now he was in a very determined mood.

There was no doubt that Blake was rather careless. He simply played with Gussy, as that noble youth came butting on with thrashing fists.

There was a sudden crash.

D'Arcy's left came out, rapidly and unexpectedly, and jarred on Jack Blake's nose with a terrific jar.

Blake went down as if a cannon-ball had smitten him. There was quite a crash as he sat on the floor of Study No. 6.

"Oh!" he spluttered.

"Right on the wicket," said Herries heartily.

"Good man, Gussy!" said Dig approvingly.

Blake sat and spluttered. In spite of the boxing-glove, considerable damage had been done to his nose, and a thin-stream of crimson ran from it. He dabbed at it in rather a dizzy way.

Arthur Augustus regarded him inquiringly.

"Is your nose hurt, Blake?"

"Ow!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally of the Third. "It looks like it. Judging by appearances, it's hurt." And Reggie and Frank chuckled.

"I asked you a question, Blake."

"Mooooh!"

Arthur Augustus peeled off the gloves. He jammed his eyeglass in his noble eye, and surveyed Blake, who was still sitting on the carpet dabbing his nose.

"Blake, deah boy, pway inform me whethah your nose is hurt," he said. "If your nose is hurt, you know, you have to own up that I am the best boxah in the studay. You remembah your own words."

"You silly owl!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You frabjous chump!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You crass ass!"

"I twust, Blake, that you are not goin' to lose your tempah, simply because I am the best boxah in the studay? I have fwequently told you that such was the case, you know."

"Fathead!"

Blake picked himself up. Grinning looks were cast on him from all sides, and Blake was undoubtedly annoyed. His sudden crash, following his rather "swanky" remarks, was a little ridiculous; it was a case of pride going before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Blake threw aside the gloves and pressed a handkerchief to his nose.

"If you are goin' to indulge in opprobrious epithets, Blake, this discuss had bettah cease," said Arthur Augustus with dignity.



"You kids are up to some mischief here," said Grundy, "and you want me to clear you off this staircase, where you don't belong! I'll do it!" And the burly and hefty fellow of the Shell began to do it. His charge was like unto the charge of a battering-ram, and Wally D'Arcy & Co. went whirling down the lower staircase, yelling, as George Alfred piled in (See page 6.)

"Ass!"

"I am waitin' for you to acknowledge that your nose is hurt."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries and Dig and the three minors.

Jack Blake looked fixedly at his noble chum. He was greatly inclined to rush on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and mop up the study with his noble person. Arthur Augustus, quite unaware of his thoughts, regarded him with innocent inquiry.

"You own up, deah boy?" he asked.

Blake breathed hard.

"I'm going to bathe my nose," he said, and he went to the door. Arthur Augustus hurried after him and caught him by the shoulder.

"One moment, deah boy. I am awah that your nose wequiah bathin', but pway do not forget the mattah undah discussion. Are you satisfied that I am the best boxah in the studay?"

Jack Blake did not answer in words. He suddenly grasped Arthur Augustus with both hands and knocked his head on the study wall.

Crack!

"Ooooooop!"

Blake walked out of the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rubbed his head and stared after him blankly.

"Ow! Bai Jove! What is the mattah with Blake, deah boys? He seems to be vewy watty this evenin' about some-thing! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries and Dig, and the three minors contributed a chortle.

"There is nothin' to cackle at, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus. "He has given me quite a painful jah on my nappah. Do you fellows think Blake was annoyed at my turnin' out to be the best boxah in the studay?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

Herries and Dig strolled out of Study No. 6, the boxing entertainment evidently being over. Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble head where it had come in contact with

the wall. He was surprised by Blake's unaccountable conduct, and he was pained.

Wally of the Third bestowed a wink on his comrades. Now was the time to tackle D'Arcy major.

"Gussy, old man, what a terrific fighting-man you are!" said Wally, in great admiration.

"Amazing!" said Reggie Manners, taking his cue from Wally.

"Terrific!" said Levison minor.

Arthur Augustus smiled genially.

"Yaas, wathah!" he agreed. "I fancy I am wathah a tewwific boxah when I get goin', you know."

"Top-hole, and no mistake," said Wally. "And then, look at your nerve, Gus! You've got nerve enough for anything! You'd have nerve enough to walk right into old Selby's study, wouldn't you?"

"I twust so, Wally; but I do not approve of your alludin' to your Form mastah as old Selby," said the swell of the Fourth reprovingly.

"I stand corrected," said Wally, with unusual and surprising humility. "Look what it is, you chaps, to have a major about—especially a major like my brother Gus! See how it improves a chap's manners."

"I am vewy glad that you see it in that light, Wally," said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously.

"I want you to do something for me, Gus," went on Wally, feeling that sufficient "soft sawder" had been bestowed.

"Give it a name, deah boy."

Wally of the Third gave it a name. He explained, with the rather vociferous help of Reggie Manners, and a few observations from Levison minor, how Mr. Selby had iniquitously confiscated the "Holiday Annual." And the three fags agreed with enthusiasm that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the very fellow to "nip" into Mr. Selby's study and recover the confiscated volume.

But the aristocratic face of Arthur Augustus grew more and more severe as he listened.

"Wally! Weggie! Fwank! I am surprised at you!" he

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said. "I am weally shocked at you! Have you nevah heard of such a thing as discipline? What you are pwoposin' is absolutely diswespectful to your Form mastah?"

"Go hon!" said Wally. "What does that matter, fat-head?"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Look here, Gus, we're relying on you," urged Wally.

"I wefuse to aid and abet you in this diswespect to your Form mastah, Wally, and I command you, as your eldah bwothah, to give up the ideah at once," said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor, in utter disgust. "Have we been wasting all this time pulling Gussy's silly old leg for nothing?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Wally——"

"Oh, cheese it, Gus!" said Wally. "If you're no use, you can't expect to be allowed to go on wagging your silly old chin at a fellow. Come on, you chaps; we shall have to try your major, Franky."

"Wally!" roared Arthur Augustus. He picked up a cricket-stump. "Wally! You are a diswespectful young wascal! Bend ovah!"

"What?"

"Bend ovah that chair, and I will give you a lickin'. You have asked for it, you young wuffian, and now you are goin' to get it. Bend ovah."

Wally exchanged a sign with his comrades. Three fags of the Third suddenly closed in on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and before he knew what was happening, Gussy was on the carpet of Study No. 6.

In the grasp of the three, he was rolled over, his aristocratic nose grinding into the carpet. Then Wally jerked up the cricket-stump.

Whack!

"Yawwooooh!"

There was a roar from Arthur Augustus, as the stump descended on his elegant trousers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three fags faded out of Study No. 6, slamming the door. Arthur Augustus rolled over again and jumped up, gasping with wrath. He groped for the stump and clutched it up, and rushed to the door and tore it open, and glared into the passage.

"You young wottahs——" he roared.

But the Fourth Form passage was empty; Wally & Co. had vanished.

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy Helps!

"WHAT the merry deuce——"

Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form, uttered that exclamation suddenly. Levison and Clive looked up from their prep.

The three were in Study No. 9, in the Fourth. Cardew had finished his prep, or rather, had left it unfinished, and was lounging in the armchair. Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive were still at work at the table. The door of Study No. 9 was hurled suddenly open, and three fags of the Third Form rushed breathlessly in and shut the door quickly after them.

Then they stood, rather breathless, grinning at Levison & Co.

"What's this game?" asked Levison of the Fourth.

"All serene, Ernie," said Levison minor. "There's a silly ass after us with a stump, I think——"

"Old Gussy!" chuckled Reggie Manners.

"My jolly old major," said Wally cheerily. "He was cheeky, and we stumped him in his study. We don't want to slaughter the poor old buffer, so we're dodging out of his way——see?"

"I see," assented Levison. "Well, keep quiet if you're going to dodge in here. We haven't finished prep yet."

"As if they could keep quiet!" yawned Cardew.

"The fact is——" said Wally.

Clive held up his hand.

"No jaw!" he said. "We're working."

"The fact is——" said Wally, apparently deaf.

"Leave it to Franky," said Reggie Manners.

"Look here, young Manners——"

"I say, leave it to Franky," persisted Manners minor.

"It's his major we're going to ask, so leave it to him."

"It's like this, Ernie——" began Frank.

"Like this," said Wally, with a glare at Manners minor.

"Old Selby——our jolly old Form master——"

"He's——" began Reggie Manners.

"Looks like getting prep done, at this rate," said Clive. "Cardew, you're doin' nothing; can't you get up and kick these noisy fags into the passage?"

"Oh, come off!" snapped Wally. "Look here, Levison major——"

"For goodness' sake, cut it short," said Levison of the

Fourth. "Shut up, two of you. Now tell me what's the row, Frank."

Levison minor explained.

For the third time that evening, the tale of Mr. Selby's iniquities was told. For the third time, it failed to elicit the indignant sympathy the heroes of the Third expected. Clive grinned, Cardew chuckled, and Levison of the Fourth frowned. Of the three, only Ernest Levison appeared to consider it necessary to heed as well as hear.

"Will you do it for us, Ernie?" asked Frank. "You see, old Selby won't think a Fourth Form chap—butted into his study after our book. He will ask in the Third, and we can all say we never went into his study. See? You can go in and get the book and hand it over to us."

"Fathead if you do," said Clive.

"You cheese it, Clive," said D'Arcy minor warmly. "We're not asking you; we're asking Franky's major."

"Franky's major got too much sense, dear youths," grinned Cardew. "Selby is a bad-tempered passenger to wake up."

"Look here," said Ernest Levison. "You ought not to have had the book in the Form-room at all, Frank."

"We've had that from Tom Merry," said Reggie Manners.

"We haven't come here for second-hand sermons, you know."

"Don't you cheek my major, young Manners," said Frank Levison warmly.

"Blow your major!" retorted Manners minor independently. "Who's your major, if you come to that?"

"Look here, Reggie——"

"Look here, Levison minor——"

"Will you dry up?" shouted Levison of the Fourth. "Now listen to me!"

"Right-ho!" agreed Wally. "We'll listen, if you're going to fetch the book for us. Not otherwise, of course."

"Nobody's going to take the book from Mr. Selby's study without permission," said Levison of the Fourth. "It was a bit harsh of him to take it away, but, of course, he thought Frank was reading it in prep. If you like, I'll speak to Mr. Selby and ask him to return the book, and explain to him that Frank will give his word he won't read it in prep."

"He won't believe you," said Wally. "Selby doesn't believe a chap. You see, the man's no gentleman."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Cardew.

"Well, that's the best I can do," said Levison of the Fourth. "I dare say he's got over his temper by this time, and I'll put it to him nicely. You fags clear off, and I'll go to Selby as soon as I've finished my prep."

The three fags exchanged glances.

Two of them, at least, were derisive, but Frank Levison was quite against the other two now. To Frank, his major's wishes were law, and, so far as he was concerned, the matter was settled.

"All right, Ernie," he said. "We'll wait till you've seen Selby."

"Will we!" said Wally and Reggie together warmly.

"Yes, we jolly well will!" said Frank. "Come on!"

He looked out into the passage. There was no sign there now of the wrathful Arthur Augustus. He left the study, and Reggie and Wally followed him. There was a warm argument among the three fags as they went down the staircase.

"It's rot!" said Reggie Manners hotly. "Selby won't take any notice of your ass of a major."

"My major's not an ass!" said Frank with equal heat.

"My opinion is that he's as big an ass as his minor, and that's saying a lot—an awful lot."

"If you want me to bang your head on the banisters, Manners mi——"

"Your major wouldn't recognise you afterwards," retorted Reggie.

"I'll jolly well——"

"Shut up!" said Wally, authoritatively. "Here's Grundy of the Shell. Let's ask Grundy. He's an ass, I know, but he's not a bad sort."

George Alfred Grundy was coming up the stairs, and he met the fags on the middle landing. Grundy eyed them rather suspiciously and disapprovingly. The great man of the Shell had had a great deal of disrespect, in his time, from the heroes of the Third. But Wally regarded Grundy now with a honeyed air of respect, looking as much as he could as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

"Grundy, old man——" he began.

"Not so much of your 'old man,'" interrupted Grundy.

"I don't take that sort of thing from fags."

"Hem! I mean——"

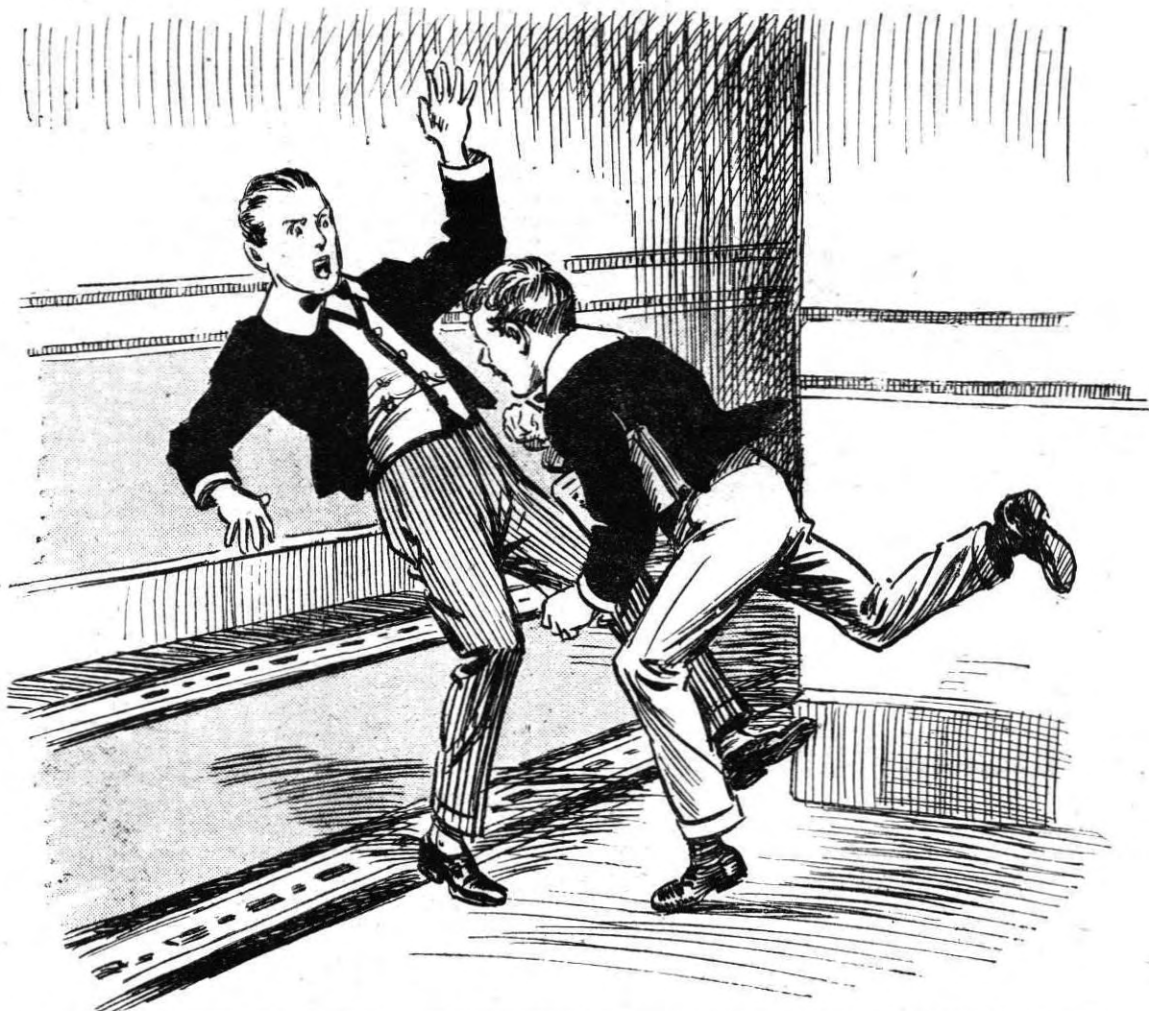
"What are you kids hanging about here for?" demanded Grundy, interrupting again. "Some of your fag larking, what?"

"We want you to do something for us, Grundy," recommenced Wally.

"So I will," said Grundy.

"Oh, you will? Good! You see——"

"I see! You're up to some mischief here, and you want



Bump! Aubrey Racke's gloomy meditations were suddenly interrupted as a Third-form fag, with a book under his arm, came scudding round a corner, and rushed right into the Shell fellow before seeing him. "Oh!" gasped Racke, staggering backwards. "Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Frank Levison breathlessly. (See page 10).

me to clear you off this staircase, where you don't belong. I'll do it. I'll do that for you any time," said Grundy. And he proceeded to do it.

Grundy of the Shell was a burly and a hefty fellow. His charge was like unto the charge of a battering-ram. The three fags went whirling down the lower staircase, yelling, as George Alfred Grundy piled in.

"Oh, my hat! You silly ass!"

"My only Aunt Jane! Yarooooh!"

"Whooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grundy of the Shell, staring down the staircase after the breathless fags. "Anything more I can do for you? Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently there was not. At all events, Wally & Co. did not ask for anything more. They sorted themselves out, shook enraged fists up the staircase at the hilarious Grundy, and departed, leaving George Alfred roaring.

"I'm jolly well fed-up!" growled Wally, stopping at the corner of Masters' corridor. "Look here, we've drawn them all blank, excepting Levison major, and he's no good. Let's chuck it, or else wedge into Selby's study ourselves and bag that giddy book."

"Leave it to my major," said Frank.

"Oh, bother your major!" said Reggie Manners. "Your major is as big a fathead as my major, or Wally's major."

"Quite!" agreed Wally. "These majors are really enough to turn a fellow's hair grey. It's against a fellow, having a brother in an Upper Form, so they might, at least, make themselves useful."

"Well, Ernie's going to do what he can," said Levison minor.

"And that's nix," said Reggie. "We shall never get that book away from Selby before bedtime, at this rate."

"Leave it to Ernie."

"Blow Ernie!" said Wally and Reggie together.

"Well, look here. I'll hang round the corridor, and if

Ernie doesn't get it off Selby, I'll butt in, somehow, and bag it," said Frank.

"That's a go?" asked Wally.

"Yes, honest injun."

"All right, then, we'll leave you to it, old thing. Come on, Reggie, let's go and kick Piggott."

And Wally and Manners minor departed, leaving Frank Levison on watch at the corner of the passage. And a few minutes later he saw Frank Levison of the Fourth approach from the opposite direction and tap at Mr. Selby's door.

CHAPTER 4.

Nothing Doing!

MR. SELBY, master of the Third, was not in a good temper.

He seldom was.

At preparation that evening, in the Third Form room, the Third had not found him pleasant. Possibly there were reasons for that. The Third were a rather trying Form. Generally, there was an electric atmosphere in the Third Form during prep.

After prep it was a great relief to the Third to see their Form master's back. Doubtless it was an equally great relief to Mr. Selby to leave the Form-room and the fags behind him, and get away to the repose of his own study.

Just now Mr. Selby had special cause of annoyance, quite unconnected with the trials his unruly Form inflicted upon him. He had dismissed the Third from his mind now.

He sat at his study table with a wrinkle on his brow and a slip of paper in his hand. That slip of paper was a French banknote for ten thousand francs.

Judging by Mr. Selby's angry frown, that rather valuable slip of paper had an irritating effect on him. It was worth, at the rate of exchange, about £110. That was what annoyed

Mr. Selby. For at the time Mr. Selby had drawn upon his savings to buy it, it had cost twice as much.

Few fellows at St. Jim's would have suspected the sour, irritable master of the Third of speculating on exchanges. Mr. Selby was angry and irritated with himself for having done so. He had taken good money out of War Loan for the purpose. And where was that money now?

In the good old days before the War the French francs went at about twenty-five to the pound. And when they fell to fifty there were many people who believed that in the course of time they would recover their original value, or something near it, and Mr. Selby was one of them. So one day, in a vacation, Mr. Selby had dropped into a bureau de change in London, and bought that banknote of the Banque de France, and he had locked it away in deep secrecy, ashamed to let anyone know that he was speculating. When the franc recovered its value, all he had to do was to send it along to his bank for exchange, or take it personally into the Exchange bureau, and receive back his original outlay and a hundred pounds in addition. And instead of recovering its value, the franc went lower and lower, and the billet-de-banque which had cost Mr. Selby over £200, was now worth about £110, and looked like going lower.

No wonder Mr. Selby was cross whenever he unlocked his desk and took out that unfortunate banknote to look at it.

It did not occur to Mr. Selby that what he had done was, in fact, gambling, and that he might as well have been backing horses. He did not look at it like that at all. He was shocked at people who backed horses, and rightly so. But, in point of fact, that was what his own action amounted to, and he had, so to speak, backed the wrong horse.

Although nothing would have induced him to admit that what he had done was a gamble, he experienced all the tormenting ups and downs, alternate hopes and fears, of a gambler. When francs were at 90, he felt very bad indeed; when they recovered to 85, he debated whether he should part with his banknote at that figure, but waited till they recovered a little more; and, instead of recovering, they rushed over the 100, and Mr. Selby, with horrid qualms, wondered whether they were going to follow the example of the German mark, and become absolutely worthless, in which case his hapless banknote would be worth the paper it was printed on, merely that and nothing more. In those days Mr. Selby talked in masters' Common-room on the subject of France and the French with a bitterness that surprised his colleagues, and made them wonder whether he was at heart a pro-Hun, his colleagues knowing nothing about the unfortunate banknote locked up in Mr. Selby's study, and never dreaming that he had been gambling in French currency.

Instead of blaming his own greed, Mr. Selby blamed the great nation which was recovering too slowly from the effects of the War.

He breathed more freely when the elusive franc recovered again, and watched its progress back over the 100, his hopes rising more and more as it neared 90. At the present moment, however, the franc was not quite back to 90, and Mr. Selby was angry with himself for not having taken what he could get when it was at 85.

Now he twirled his banknote in his lean fingers, and debated restively whether he should let it go at 92. It might recover to 75. Many people believed so. On the other hand, it might rush away to the 100 again, and never recover. Really, Mr. Selby's feelings were very like those of a punter at the races, watching a horse which he had backed with more money than he could afford.

Tap!

The Third Form master started as the knock came at his door.

Hastily he thrust the banknote inside a volume that lay on the study table. Not for worlds would Mr. Selby have allowed anyone to see that French banknote for so large an amount. He could picture the ironic smiles in masters' Common-room if it came out that he had been dabbling foolishly in the Exchanges, and had been badly bitten.

Tap!

"Come in!" snapped Mr. Selby.

He stared round irritably as Levison of the Fourth entered the study.

Fourth Form fellows had no business with the master of the Third, and Mr. Selby did not like Levison, anyway.

"What is it?" he exclaimed harshly.

"Excuse me, sir," said Levison, very respectfully. He could see that he had disturbed Mr. Selby at an unlucky moment. The Form master did not seem to be occupied with anything in particular. But it was plain that the interruption annoyed him.

"Kindly be brief, if you have anything to say to me!" snapped Mr. Selby.

"Certainly, sir!" said Levison, as meekly as he could. "1

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was going to ask you, sir, if you would be kind enough to let my brother have his book back."

"What!"

"Frank will give you his word, sir, that he was not reading the book in preparation," said Levison. "I've told him that he ought not to have had the book there at all, and he will be more careful another time, sir. The book is a present to him from my sister Doris. Perhaps you would be kind enough, sir, to be lenient with him this once."

Levison was putting it quite nicely, and Mr. Selby, though a very irritable gentleman, was not quite a Hun. Probably he would have listened to the voice of the charmer, as it were, but for one unfortunate circumstance. He had thrust the French banknote into the nearest book to put it out of sight, and that book was the very "Holiday Annual" which he had taken from Levison minor, and which had lain on his study table ever since.

To hand the volume over to Levison, he would have to take the banknote out under the surprised eyes of the junior.

So, instead of thinking of making any concession, Mr. Selby only frowned at the Fourth-Former and waved his lean hand towards the door.

"Certainly not, Levison! I am surprised that you should ask me such a thing!" he snapped.

"But, sir—"

"The volume will be returned to Levison minor at the end of the term. I have told him so. Leave my study!"

Levison's eyes glinted.

He had a temper of his own, though it was always kept in strict control. Mr. Selby's harsh manner was very hard to bear patiently.

"But, sir," he repeated, "as my brother will give you his word that he was not reading the book, he had simply placed it in his desk—"

"I do not accept your brother's word, Levison."

"Mr. Selby!"

"Levison minor is a very troublesome boy. I do not believe his statement for one moment. That closes the matter."

"You have no right to doubt his word, sir," said Levison, his anger breaking out. "You are his Form master, and you must know that he is truthful."

"What!"

Mr. Selby jumped up.

"No right!" he repeated. "No right! Are you in your senses, Levison? Is that the way to speak to a Form master?"

"If you'd ever found out my brother in a lie, sir, it would be different," said Levison sturdily. "But you can't say you have."

"I shall not discuss that with you, Levison. I shall not submit to impertinence from a Fourth Form boy! I shall take you to your Form master!" snorted Mr. Selby. "We shall see what Mr. Lathom says about this."

Levison compressed his lips.

"Come!" snapped Mr. Selby. "Follow me at once! I shall report this insolence to Mr. Lathom! Follow me!"

He whisked out of the study. Levison followed him into the passage with a grim and angry face. His visit to the Third Form master had done no good, that was clear.

He hesitated in the passage, but finally made up his mind to follow Mr. Selby to the Fourth Form master's study. Mr. Lathom's door closed on both of them.

A minute later a fag of the Third tiptoed along the passage to Mr. Selby's open door.

Frank Levison peered into the study.

It was empty, and on the table, in full view, lay the "Holiday Annual."

Levison minor gave a swift glance up and down the passage. No one was in sight.

He whipped into the study, grabbed up the "Annual" from the table, and darted into the passage again. A second more, and he was scudding away with the precious volume under his arm.

CHAPTER 5.

Racke's Find!

TOM MERRY threw down his pen.

"Thank goodness that's done!" he said.

"Penatibus et magnis dis!" yawned Monty Lowther. "Thank goodness we've got to the giddy Penates, and that lets us out!"

"You fellows are asses!" said Manners. "Some of this stuff is jolly good. Take it from 'classemque sub ipsa Antandro—'"

"Chuck it, old man; we're done!" said Tom Merry and Monty Lowther together.

The Terrible Three had prepared the section of the "Æneid" for which they were answerable to Mr. Linton in the Shell Form room on the morrow. And two of them, at least, did not want any more.

"Classemque," repeated Manners. Manners of the Shell

was a fellow of studious tastes, and it was related in the passages, with wonder, that he had been known to read Virgil for pleasure. Where the pleasure came in was a hidden mystery to most of the fellows.

"Chuck it!" exclaimed Lowther, taking up the inkpot. "Blest if I haven't forgotten already what a giddy classis is!"

"In this case, a fleet, you ass!" said Manners. "You'd better remember it in the Form-room to-morrow if you're put on to construe."

"It was a class or division of the Roman people last time I butted into it!" grumbled Lowther. "Now it's a giddy fleet. Seems to me like one of Humpty-Dumpty's pan-technicon words in 'Alice in Wonderland.' It means jolly nearly anything you like. Anyhow, I'm fed-up with it, and if you give us any more you'll get this inkpot."

"Fathead!" said Manners politely.

"Let's get down," said Tom Merry, with a yawn. "I dare say Virgil is a regular whale of a poet. I'll take your word for it, Manners. But you can have too much of a good thing. Let's get out."

Tom Merry threw open the study door. The Terrible Three came out into the Shell passage, and almost ran into Racke of the Shell, who was loafing there with his hands in his pockets, and a moody expression on his face. Manners and Lowther walked on to the stairs, but Tom Merry, after a glance at Racke, paused.

"Anything up?" he asked good-naturedly.

Aubrey Racke gave him a dark look.

"Yes," he said curtly.

"Come on, Tommy!" called out Lowther. "What do you mean by hanging about in bad company?"

"Ass!" called back Tom.

Manners and Lowther went down the stairs. Tom Merry, from a good-natured impulse, lingered. He was not on friendly terms with Racke; there was nothing in common between the healthy, cheery captain of the Shell, and the black sheep of the School House. But he could see that there was trouble and distress, as well as moodily ill-temper, in Racke's face, and Tom could feel for an enemy as well as a friend who was down on his luck. Racke, the slacker and loafer, was often enough in trouble with the master of the Shell, and he had manners and customs that sometimes brought down his House-master's wrath upon him. Tom could sympathise with a fellow who was in trouble, even if the fellow had asked for it.

"Got through your prep, Racke?" asked Tom.

"Prep! No!"

"I've finished. I'll give you a hand if you like."

"Thanks. But I'm not bothering about prep. Something a jolly good deal more important to think of. I'm hard up."

"You!" exclaimed Tom.

Racke of the Shell generally had more pound notes than Tom had half-crowns. As a rule, he almost exuded wealth.

"Yes, I!" growled Racke. "I've had rotten bad luck—I'm busted to the wide, and—and— But what do you care?"

"I think I catch on," said Tom. He did not need telling that the blackguard of the Shell had been backing losers. "You must be an ass, old man, to chuck away your tin like that."

"I'm not asking for a sermon!" growled Racke.

"I'm not going to give you one," said Tom, with a smile. "It's no bizney of mine. Is there anything a fellow could do?"

Racke stared at him. Somehow or other, he never could quite dislike Tom Merry; and he almost liked him at that moment. His glum and moody manner thawed very much.

"Sorry I snapped!" he muttered awkwardly. "I'm up against it, and that's a fact. My pater generally lets me have all I want; but he's drawn the line now, and sent me a lecture instead of the tenner I asked him for. It's jolly decent of you to offer to help, instead of going for a fellow when he's down. But you can't do anything."

"It's money, of course?"

"Of course."

"Well, if five bob—"

Racke laughed.

"Make it five pounds," he said.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom. "When you get into pounds, you leave me behind, you know. I've got five and three, and you're welcome to the five if it will be any good."

Racke laughed again, but quite good-naturedly.

"All serene," he said. "I won't rob you of your bobs—they won't do any good. Thanks all the same; you're a good chap."

And, with a nod, Aubrey Racke drove his hands deep into his pockets, and walked away. Tom Merry followed his chums downstairs. He was sorry for Racke, as he would have been sorry for any fellow down on his luck; but he was well aware that it was Racke's own dingy blackguardism that had brought his present trouble on him. And in that cheery talk in the junior Common-room, on the important subject of cricket, Tom Merry forgot the existence of the black sheep of the Shell.

Racke, too, did not give Tom Merry another thought, as he lounged moodily away. Tom's kindness had touched him for a moment; but he had no special use for sympathy. What he wanted was cash, and a good sum of it. Mr. Lodgey, at the Green Man, had been helping Racke in the noble task of winners, which somehow always turned out to be losers; and Mr. Lodgey had an account which required settlement; and Mr. Lodgey was beginning to grow very rusty and crusty over the non-settlement of the same; even to the length of threatening to call personally on his sporting young friend at St. Jim's. A personal call from Mr. Lodgey to collect a racing debt meant the end of all things at St. Jim's, for Aubrey Racke; and in that emergency his father had failed to stump up, and Racke was in a scared frame of mind.

He felt almost sure that Lodgey would hold his hand, for the sake of future profits; but not quite sure. The man was threatening, and Racke was a fellow to be frightened by threats. Crooke, his pal, had declared himself unable to lend anything—Clampe, his friend in the New House, had

simply shrugged his shoulders at the request; Mellish of the Fourth had laughed and told him to ask next door. Really, Aubrey's dingy friends seemed rather pleased to see the wealthy Racke, for once, hard up, and on his uppers. Only Tom Merry, a fellow who despised his pursuits, had a kind word to waste on the unlucky sportsman of the Shell.

"What the thunder am I goin' to do?" Racke asked himself, a score of times, as he loafed along the passages moodily.

He was in no humour for the society of the common-room, or for Crooke's company in his study. His position was an alarming one; for Racke, with all his recklessness, was a fellow of little nerve; he often kicked over the traces, and ran risks; but when the risks came near to him, he was generally scared and unnerved.

"What am I goin' to do?"

Bump!



WALTER ADOLPHUS D'ARCY.

The third son of Lord Eastwood and the younger brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. A member of the Third Form in which he holds the exalted position of leader. Like the majority of the fag tribe, this curly-headed junior is of a happy-go-lucky disposition. Wally, as he is usually called by his chums, is full of pluck, cheek and boisterous fun. Every bit as straight as Gussy, and in his different way as proud, but there is nothing of the dandy about him.

Aubrey Racke's gloomy meditations were suddenly interrupted.

A Third-Form fag, with a book under his arm, came scudding round a corner, and rushed right into the Shell fellow before seeing him.

"Oh!" gasped Racke.

He staggered backwards.

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Frank Levison breathlessly.

He reeled from the shock and sat on the floor, and the "Holiday Annual" under his arm went down with a crash, falling wide open.

"You silly young ass!" howled Racke angrily. "Where are you running to, you dummy?"

Levison minor sat and gasped.

"Oh dear! Is that you, Racke? Oh, my hat! I didn't see you! What the thump did you get into the way for, you Shell ass?"

"Can't you look where you're going?" snarled Racke. "Bolting round a corner like a blind bull! Take that!"

"Yooop!"

"And that—"

Frank Levison scrambled to his feet, as Racke lunged with his boot. Racke was exasperated, as perhaps was not to be wondered at in the circumstances. Certainly, Frank had given him a terrific shock, in his hurried flight from Mr. Selby's study with the recaptured volume.

"Keep off, you bully!" panted Levison minor.

"You clumsy young ass!"

Frank stooped and clutched up the "Holiday Annual" and Racke lunged out with his boot again as he did so. The fag swung the volume round with both hands, catching the Shell fellow on the side of the head with it.

Crash!

It was Racke's turn to sit down.

Frank Levison laughed breathlessly and scudded on with the "Annual," and vanished from sight.

"You—you—you!" gasped Racke.

He rose rather painfully to his feet, and as he did so, his hand came in contact with a rather flimsy slip of paper that lay on the floor. He stared at it blankly and picked it up.

That it was a banknote he could see at a glance; also, that it was not an English banknote.

The figures 10,000, and the words "dix mille francs," caught his eyes, and although, for the moment, he did not realise the magnitude of the sum, he knew that the value of that note of the Banque de France was great.

He crumpled it in his hand.

He had picked it up where the "Holiday Annual" had fallen. It occurred to him that it must have fallen from the book, though how a banknote came to be inside a book carried by a fag of the Third, was a perplexing mystery to him. Racke stood puzzled and undecided. Obviously, a French banknote worth more than a hundred pounds could not possibly belong to Levison minor; indeed, it was pretty clear that the fag had not known that it was in the book at all. But it belonged to somebody, and Racke was puzzled to know what to do with it.

He put it in his pocket and walked away with it. His intention was to take it to Mr. Railton, his Housemaster, who, of course, would soon have found who was the owner.

But before he reached Mr. Railton's study another thought had come into Aubrey Racke's mind—a thought that made him start and change colour.

He stopped dead.

For several minutes Racke stood quite still, strange expressions chasing one another over his face. Then, instead of proceeding farther towards Mr. Railton's study, he went up the stairs and headed for the Shell passage. And the banknote for ten thousand francs was still in his pocket.

CHAPTER 6.

A Shock for Mr. Selby!

LEVISON of the Fourth came out of Mr. Lathom's study, rubbing his hands, his face set and angry.

Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth, had listened to Mr. Selby's complaint and had taken official note of it to the extent of bestowing two "whacks" with his cane on Ernest Levison's palms. Mr. Lathom had no personal liking for Mr. Selby; but that only made him all the more careful to punish a member of his Form who had been impertinent to the Third Form master. And Levison, angry as he was, admitted that he had spoken to Mr. Selby in a way to which Form masters at St. Jim's were scarcely accustomed.

The door closed on Levison of the Fourth, and Mr. Lathom, having laid down his cane, took up the geological work he had been perusing—geology being Mr. Lathom's hobby. He expected Mr. Selby to go, but Mr. Selby did not seem in a hurry to go. Mr. Selby had, in fact, decided to get another person's opinion on the subject of his unhappy ten thousand franc note, without, however, revealing the

truth of the matter. So he made a remark on the subject of the Exchanges, and Mr. Lathom, with a sigh, came out of Old Red Sandstone and answered politely.

"Doubtless you follow the course of the Exchanges in your newspapers, Mr. Lathom?" the Third Form master remarked.

"Not at all," said Mr. Lathom. "I am not interested in financial news. Indeed, I doubt if I should understand the matter at all."

"But you are aware that the French Exchange is a matter of very great importance?" urged Mr. Selby politely.

"No doubt," assented Mr. Lathom politely.

"I believe that a number of people invested in French currency when it stood at a higher value," said Mr. Selby. "Suppose—I am putting a case—suppose that a man who invested in French currency when the franc stood at, we will say, fifty or fifty-five. Suppose he should realise at the present price of the franc, his loss would be considerable."

"Would it?" said Mr. Lathom.

"Undoubtedly, as the franc now stands at about ninety-two."

"Does it really?" asked Mr. Lathom.

Mr. Selby breathed hard. Mr. Lathom was polite, but he could scarcely be said to be interested in francs.

"The question for such an operator in the Exchanges," said Mr. Selby, "would be this—whether to cut a loss—a considerable loss—and eliminate the risk of a further depreciation of the franc, or to wait in hope of a substantial recovery. You follow me?"

"I—I think so—quite," said Mr. Lathom.

"Suppose you were in such a position, Mr. Lathom," suggested the Third Form master. "Would you realise or hold on?"

Mr. Lathom smiled genially.

"I really cannot say," he answered. "The question has, of course, only an academic interest for men in our position. Neither of us, I suppose, would be likely to gamble on the Exchanges."

"Gamble!" repeated Mr. Selby.

"Yes. And so it is rather difficult to consider what a gambler would do in such circumstances."

"These operations are not gambling," said Mr. Selby harshly. "They are recognised financial operations, just the same as buying stocks and shares for a rise or selling them for a fall."

"No doubt, no doubt!" assented Mr. Lathom, with an unusually keen glance at the Third Form master.

Mr. Selby realised that the Fourth Form master, unsuspecting as he was, had become rather curious, at least.

To have his unlucky speculation known, or even suspected, was the last thing in the world Mr. Selby desired. He wished he had not mentioned the subject. And yet he was extremely anxious to have an unbiased opinion on that tormenting problem whether to hold on or to sell.

"Of course, I was merely putting a case on a subject of great public interest at the present time," he remarked.

"Of course!" assented Mr. Lathom. But his glance still dwelt rather curiously on Mr. Selby's face.

"I study such matters, you know," said Mr. Selby. "Merely, of course, as a looker-on." Mr. Selby hardly realised that he was telling untruths. "But as you take no interest in the subject, Mr. Lathom, I will not inflict my reflections upon you."

And, with a curt nod, Mr. Selby quitted the study and went back to his own quarters. Certainly, he had not received much help from Mr. Lathom. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was a gentleman of practical common-sense and could have advised him, and Mr. Selby would have given much for his opinion. But he dared not broach the subject. He knew that Mr. Railton would see through him at a glance and would know at once that he had been speculating in exchange.

Mr. Selby re-entered his study in a cross temper and as undecided as ever what to do with his ten thousand franc note. One thing, of course, he had to do with it—take it out of the book where he had hastily concealed it on Levison's entrance and lock it up in his desk again. He stepped to the table and stretched out his hand to take up the "Holiday Annual" before he noticed that the volume was no longer there.

Then he stood and stared.

That handsome volume had been left lying on his table when he marched Ernest Levison away to Mr. Lathom's room. Now it was gone!

The study door had been left half open. Anyone might have stepped into the study and taken away the book. Someone, obviously, had done so.

"Levison minor!"

Mr. Selby had no doubt on that point.

The book belonged to Levison minor, and his brother had come there to ask Mr. Selby to return it to the fag. That request had been refused, and so the fag had taken the law



"Wait!" snapped the alarmed Mr. Selby. Levison minor waited, while—greatly to his astonishment—Mr. Selby opened the "Holiday Annual," and turned over page after page, looking sharply between the leaves, as if in search of something. Frank gazed at him, wondering what his object was. (See page 12.)

into his own hands, taking advantage of the Form master's brief absence from the room.

That much was clear to Mr. Selby. He compressed his lips hard, and his eyes glinted.

This was an act of disobedience and rebellion, calling for severe punishment. Still more important, it was necessary to recover the volume before the banknote was carelessly dropped from it and lost. Mr. Selby picked up a cane and left his study with an expression on his face that was sufficient to make any Third Form fellow feel uneasy if he saw it.

He proceeded at once to the Form-room, the usual gathering-place of the Third after prep.

He found most of his Form there, but his quick glance failed to discover three leading members of the Form—Levison minor, D'Arcy minor, and Manners minor. These three fags were generally found together, and Mr. Selby had no doubt that they were together now, enjoying the perusal of the "Holiday Annual" in company.

"Hobbs!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir!" said Hobbs of the Third, coming up, rather scared by the look on Mr. Selby's sour face.

"Do you know where Levison minor is?"

"No, sir. I haven't seen him since prep."

"He has not been in the Form-room?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Selby whisked out again. Of course Levison minor would not have gone there. It was the first place in which he would be looked for. Mr. Selby rooted along the passages and stared into the window-seats, but failed to discover the three minors. Finally he headed for the Fourth Form passage and threw open the door of No. 9 without knocking. Cardew of the Fourth was there. Clive and Levison had gone down, but Ralph Reckness Cardew was still lounging lazily in the armchair.

He did not rise as the Form-master whisked in, as a respectful junior should have done. He took no heed of Mr. Selby's entrance.

"Cardew!" rapped out the Form-master.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" yawned Cardew.

"Are these your manners, sir?" hooted Mr. Selby. "Have you not learned, Cardew, to rise to your feet when a master enters the room?"

"I didn't hear you knock, sir," said Cardew meekly, as he lounged carelessly out of the chair.

Mr. Selby had to suppress his feelings. As he had

omitted to tap at the door, Cardew had an excuse for affecting not to know that he had entered.

"Has Levison minor been here?" he snapped savagely.

"Yes, sir, some time ago."

"During the last half-hour?"

"No, sir."

"He has taken a book from my study," said Mr. Selby.

"I thought it probable that he had come here with it, as his brother aids and encourages him in disrespect and disobedience."

"Does he, sir?" asked Cardew, with an air of polite interest.

"Do you know where Levison minor is at the present moment, Cardew?"

"Haven't the least idea, sir. I'm not specially interested in the movements of the Third."

Mr. Selby gave him a look—and would gladly have given him a box on the ear. However, he could not very well do that, so he whisked out of the study, leaving the dandy of the Fourth smiling serenely. After the angry master was gone, Cardew lounged downstairs to the junior Common-room, where he found Levison of the Fourth talking with Tom Merry and Blake on the subject of the coming match with Greyfriars.

"Franky's done it, old bean!" said Cardew.

"Eh! What?"

"He's bagged that jolly old volume from Selby's study," said Cardew. "The good man is after him with a cane. There will be weepin' and wallin' in the halls of the Third!"

Levison knitted his brows.

"The young ass!" he said.

"Young duffer!" said Tom Merry. "Selby will make him sit up—and really, he has asked for it. He shouldn't have done that, Levison!"

"I know!" grunted Levison.

"Where is the young sweep?" said Cardew, glancing round the room. "He's not here, I see. Seems to have retired to some quiet spot to gorge on his prey like a giddy boa-constrictor."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chimed in, with a serious shake of his noble head.

"This is wathal wotten, you know, you fellows. It is tweatin' Mr. Selby with disrespect."

"And we all respect him so highly!" sighed Cardew.

"As a mattah of fact, Cardew, I do not respect Mr. Selby vevy much, personally. But somethin' is due to his

position. I am afraid my minah has had a hand in this, and I am vewy watty about it. I shall have to considah whethah to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"I'll look for the young ass, and make him take the book back," said Ernest Levison. "Thanks for giving me the tip, Cardew."

And Levison of the Fourth hurriedly left the Common-room. Meanwhile, Mr. Selby, having roamed up and down and round about the School House, in a vain search for three missing fags, had returned to his study in a state of wrath and anxiety, to which no words could have done justice.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

"GOOD, isn't it?" said Wally of the Third. "Jolly good!" agreed Reggie Manners. "But give a fellow room."

"I suppose there'll be a row!" said Levison minor.

"There always is, with Selby," said Wally. "Let's get through this while we've got the jolly old book. Shut up, both of you."

The three minors were in Tom Merry's study, in the Shell passage.

Looking for a quiet spot, where they could peruse the "Holiday Annual" in peace, they had found that study empty, the Terrible Three having gone down after prep. So they had coolly taken possession of it, turned on the light, and settled down to enjoy themselves, with the volume open on the study table, reading it together.

In most cases it would have been a risky proceeding for Third Form fags to take possession of a Shell study; the owner coming along would have been very likely to eject them with the help of a boot or a cricket-stump. But the three minors felt that they could rely on the good-nature of Tom Merry & Co.

There was a story in the "Annual" that interested them immensely; and they wanted to finish it before dorm. It was certain that Levison minor would be caned for raiding the book. That did not seem a very serious matter, especially to Wally and Reggie.

But it was equally certain that the book would be confiscated again, and locked up out of reach of the fags. So if they were going to read that special story at all, they had to read it now. There was time before dorm, and they settled down cheerfully to the pleasant occupation, in Tom Merry's study. It was not surprising that Mr. Selby had failed to find them; he had not thought of looking for the fags in a study belonging to Middle School.

But the three happy young rascals were destined to be interrupted, all the same. The door opened, and they looked round, expecting to see some member of the Terrible Three. But it was Levison of the Fourth who entered.

"Oh, Ernie!" ejaculated Frank.

"So you're here!" said Levison grimly.

"Here we are, old bean!" said Wally. "Don't butt in now, if you don't mind. We're busy."

"Which of you took that book from Mr. Selby's study?"

"I did, Ernie," answered Frank.

"You young sweep!"

Levison minor hung his head. It was not very heavily on his conscience that he had been a little disrespectful to Mr. Selby. But his brother's disapproval was a much more weighty matter. His lip trembled.

"I—I say, Ernie—"

"I've been looking for you everywhere," said Levison of the Fourth quietly.

"I don't see what you want to butt in for!" said Manners minor. "I jolly well wouldn't let my major butt in!"

"Same here!" agreed Wally.

Frank did not speak; he stood looking at his brother. Levison of the Fourth did not heed the other two.

"You oughtn't to have done this, Frank," he said, in the same quiet tone. "I won't interfere, if you don't want me to. I've no right to give you any orders, of course."

"I'll do anything you say, Ernie," said Frank, at once.

"Then take that book back at once to Mr. Selby, and tell him you're sorry you removed it from his study."

"All right."

"Rot!" roared Reggie Manners indignantly. "We haven't finished the story yet, and we jolly well shan't have a chance after Selby gets his paws on the book again. You mind your own bizney, Levison major!"

"Rubbish!" said Wally, with equal warmth. "Here, you get out, you Fourth Form ass! Let's chuck him out, you chaps!"

"Cheese it!" said Frank. "I'm going to do just as Ernie says."

"Blow Ernie!" snapped Wally.

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"Bless Ernie! I'm jolly well fed-up with your Ernie, I can tell you!" exclaimed Manners minor. "Who the thump is your Ernie, anyhow?"

The three minors were bosom pals; but there was no doubt that Frank attached more value to his major's opinion than to the opinions of his comrades. He picked up the "Annual" and closed it, and put it under his arm; a proceeding that was watched by Wally and Reggie in breathless indignation.

"I jolly well won't speak to you again, if you take that book back to Selby!" hooted Manners minor.

"Please yourself!" snapped Frank.

"And I won't, either!" howled Wally.

"Don't!" said Levison minor.

And he walked out of Tom Merry's study with the precious volume under his arm. Wally and Reggie glared after him; and probably there would have been a case of assault and battery on the spot, but for the presence of Levison of the Fourth. Ernest Levison followed his brother from the study, and Wally and Reggie stared at one another wrathfully.

"Sneakin young cad!" said Manners minor.

"Young ass, to let his major jaw him!" said Wally.

"Catch me letting Gus dictate to me! No fear!"

And the two fags walked away to the Third Form room, much incensed against their chum—for the moment.

Levison minor made his way at once to Mr. Selby's study.

As a matter of fact, he did not quite agree with his major's point of view; but that made no difference to him. Ernie's wishes were a law to him, and he never even thought of disregarding them.

He arrived at Mr. Selby's study, and as he raised his hand to tap at the door, he heard a sound of hurried pacing in the room. Mr. Selby, distressed and alarmed for the safety of his banknote, was moving about his study a good deal like a tiger in a cage. Frank tapped timidly.

"Come in!"

The fag entered.

Mr. Selby glared blankly at the sight of Levison minor with the "Holiday Annual" in his hand.

"Please, sir—" faltered Frank.

Mr. Selby almost jumped at him and grabbed the book from his hand. His relief was too great for words.

"I—I'm sorry I took the book away, sir!" mumbled Frank, following out his brother's instructions.

He expected to be caned. He was prepared for that. But Mr. Selby made no movement towards the cane that lay on the table.

"Wait!" he snapped.

Levison minor waited while, greatly to his astonishment, Mr. Selby opened the "Holiday Annual," and turned page after page, looking sharply between the leaves as if in search of something. Frank gazed at him, wondering what his object was. Page after page was turned, the expression on Mr. Selby's face growing blacker and blacker as he failed to find what he was in search of. Every page had been turned at last, and then Mr. Selby took the book by the cover and shook it, and shook it again. But nothing fell from it. And the Form master laid the book on the table once more, and, with meticulous care, turned every page again from the first to the last. By that time Frank Levison was in a state of absolute amazement, almost wondering whether his Form master was out of his mind.

Mr. Selby turned from the book at last. His banknote, which he had placed in it, was no longer there; that was certain. He turned on Frank Levison with an expression that scared the fag, and grasped him by the shoulder.

"Levison minor, where is it?"

"What, sir?" gasped Frank.

"You young rascal!" Mr. Selby shook the terrified fag in his rage and excitement. "You wretched boy! You—you thief! Give me the banknote you have taken from this book! Give it to me at once!"

CHAPTER 8.

Levison Takes a Hand!

FRANK LEVISON stared helplessly at his Form master.

In his excitement, Mr. Selby continued to shake him. But he desisted at last, and calmed himself with a great effort. His eyes fairly glittered at the amazed and scared fag.

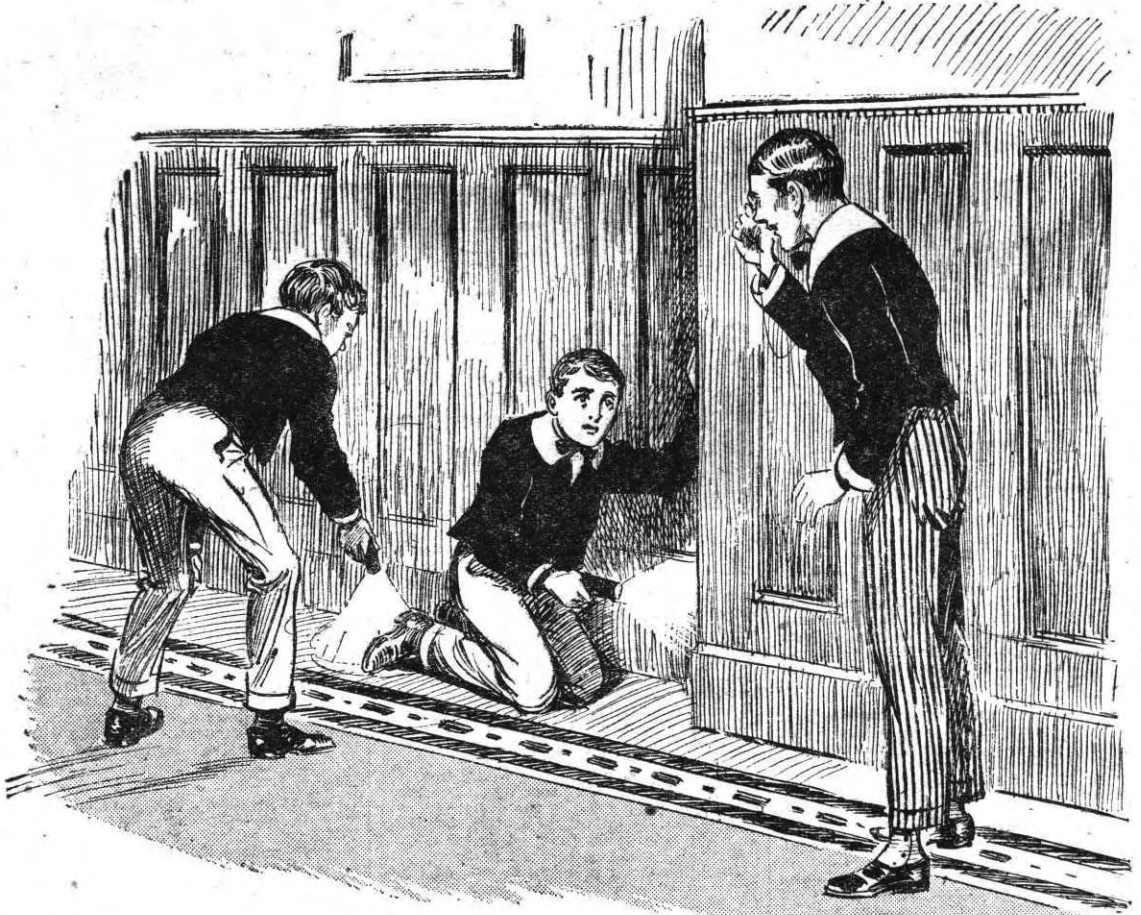
"Levison minor"—Mr. Selby strove to speak calmly, but his voice trembled—"if this is a foolish trick—I am willing to believe so—hand me the banknote at once!"

"Mr. Selby!" stuttered Frank.

"Probably you do not understand its value. No doubt you have taken it from the book, and are keeping it back for a foolish and insolent prank. I will pardon you, Levison minor, if you return the banknote at once. Do you hear? Give it to me, you wretched boy!"

"What banknote, sir?" stuttered Frank.

"Do not pretend ignorance, boy. Do you not understand that if you fail to return the banknote you will be charged



"Bai Jove! What's this game, deah boys?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked that question, in surprise, turning his celebrated eyeglass upon Levison major and minor. The two Levisons were engaged oddly enough, from the point of view of a casual observer. Each of them had an electric torch in his hand and they were groping and scanning and searching their way along the old oak corridor. (See page 16)

with stealing it?" Mr. Selby was still trying to be calm. "Have you not sense enough, Levison minor, to realise that unless you return the banknote immediately you will be adjudged a thief?"

"I don't know anything about any banknote, sir," stammered Frank, in bewilderment. "I don't know what you mean, sir."

Mr. Selby breathed hard.

"Levison minor, there was a banknote in this volume."

"There wasn't, sir."

"I placed it in this volume for—for safety. It was left on my table. You took this book away while I was speaking to Mr. Lathom in his study."

"Yes, sir; but—"

"The banknote was in it. Now it is gone. I am willing to believe that you had no intention of stealing it if you return it at once."

"I haven't seen it, sir."

"Boy!"

"I give you my word, sir!" gasped Frank. "I never dreamed there was anything in the book. I just grabbed it up from the table and cleared off with it. We've been reading it since, and D'Arcy minor and Manners minor never saw anything of the banknote. It wasn't there, sir."

"It was there, Levison minor. If your two associates saw nothing of it, it was because you had taken it from the volume before you joined them," said Mr. Selby harshly.

"I never even opened the book, sir, till I joined them."

"Falsehood is of no use, Levison minor, as there is no doubt that the banknote was in the book. Will you return it to me now?"

"I can't, sir, as I don't know anything about it."

"You prefer to be taken before the Head?"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Frank.

He stared at the Third Form master in bewilderment and terror. He was to be taken to the headmaster, accused of theft. It was difficult for him to realise the terrible situation that had so suddenly arisen. Poor Frank's knees knocked together as he gazed at the angry face before him.

"Will you try to understand, you stupid boy?" snarled Mr. Selby. "This matter is not a joke. You have taken the banknote from the book; you have hidden it to cause me annoyance. If it is not returned at once you will be charged with theft. In your own interests, Levison minor—"

"I haven't seen it, sir."

"Boy, if you deny what is obvious and certain, the only conclusion to be drawn is that you actually have stolen the banknote!" thundered Mr. Selby.

"Oh, sir, I—I swear I never saw it—never knew it was there! I know it wasn't there!" gasped Frank. "We should have found it if it had been there."

"Then I shall take you to Dr. Holmes. Come!"

Mr. Selby dropped his hand on the fag's shoulder.

But he relaxed his grasp again.

The boy had the banknote, or knew where it was. He was certain of that. He could scarcely suppose anything else in the circumstances. But it was borne in upon his mind that this would be a very difficult and unpleasant matter to explain to the Head.

He would have, of course, to give a description of the missing banknote, and it would have to come out that it was a French banknote for a large sum. His wretched speculation in exchange would be brought to light, and made the talk of the school.

Not only in masters' Common-room would his miserable gamble be discussed with ironic amusement, but all the St. Jim's fellows would hear of it. It would be the talk of the prefects' room, it would be discussed by the Fifth and the Shell; the fags would talk of it up and down the passages. Publicity was the very last thing Mr. Selby desired on this topic, and that was what he was going to get in full measure.

And then, suppose the frightened fag, in desperation, should destroy the banknote to hide the traces of his guilt? A match applied to it, and ten thousand francs would vanish into nothingness.

(Continued on page 16.)

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The St. Jim's News



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.



SHOCKIN'!

By Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

THE GENUS FAG.

By Monty Lowther.

THIS, as the heading has no doubt made you all aware, is a Special Third Form issue, but I am going to make it clear right away that in some respects the description isn't exactly accurate. We've had Third Form issues of the "News" before, but this particular one is quite different from anything I've ever previously published. In fact, it's rather by way of being in a class by itself, so far as special "Form" issues of the "News" are concerned.

Instead of being made up of contributions from Third-Formers, as the title would probably lead you to expect, this issue has been written by Shell and Fourth Form fellows, with the Third Form as the subject.

In short, it is simply an impression of the Third as seen from the lofty eminence of the Fourth and Shell. Twiggex-vous? Quite a neat idea in its way, isn't it?—though whether the Third themselves will think so when they get hold of a copy is quite another matter. However, that aspect of the affair isn't worrying me in the least, I might say; and, as far as I'm concerned, the Third is perfectly at liberty to think, say, and do—or attempt to do—just exactly what they thumping well like about it. I've no doubt that this copy of the "News" will be publicly burnt on the fire in the Third Form Common-room as a mark of utter and wholesale contempt of the Editorial staff of the "St. Jim's News" and all their works. But that isn't likely to cause me much inconvenience, so I will take this opportunity of informing the prospective executors of my inoffensive little paper that they are very welcome to get on with it.

After all, they're only getting back as good as they give, because they've pulled our legs often enough in the past, goodness knows, and I've even gone to the length of paying the way for them by passing contributions for ordinary Third Form issues that were distinctly the reverse of complimentary to the two Forms that are now enjoying a belated opportunity for repaying in kind. It's very unlikely that the fags will look at it in that light, of course.

As a matter of fact, I'm rather inclined to think the Third have been let off pretty lightly this time. With the exception of Monty's playful little contribution, nothing very drastic has been said about them—though I don't quite know whether they'll regard Gussy's few words as a deadly insult or a comic column.

Tom Merry

THE Third Form always puts me in a frightful flutter. It's truly terrible for a fellow to have to see such a horde of young rascals behaving in such an undignified fashion, and, worst of all, paying no regard whatever to their personal appearance.

Really, there are times when I positively shudder to look at some of them. The way they go about it is truly distressing. I wonder the matron doesn't take more notice of them, and insist on their changing their collars and cleaning their boots and brushing their hair, and wear gloves, and all that sort of thing. I truly believe that some of the reckless young rascals actually wear the same collar two days together. I accused young Wally of doing it the other day, and he admitted it—in fact, he said he sometimes wore the same collar for a whole week.

Wally is as bad as the rest of them. The other day I promised to take him into Wayland to purchase some new cricket kit for him, and he turned up at Study No. 6 with Gibson and Manners minor and Frayne. I didn't mind him bringing his friends, of course, but I did object—and very strongly, too—to the state in which they all turned up. Their hair was unbrushed, their collars were crumpled and soiled, their boots were covered with dust, and their ties looked like pieces of dirty string.

Naturally, I refused to take any of them out in that condition, and I told them to go away at once and make themselves presentable. And would you believe what they did? They took off their collars, turned them inside-out, and put them on again. They took off their caps, and licked their fingers and smoothed their hair down. And then they actually folded their caps up to make cleaning-pads for their boots.

They called that "having a bit of a spruce up." Goodness gracious! Fancy expecting me to take them into Wayland like that!

I think I shall have to suggest to Mr. Selby that he cuts out some of the Latin from the Third Form time-table, and possibly a little of the maths and history, and devotes the time to a little instruction on the subject of dressing properly. I am sure that a fellow of tact and judgment would be able to put the matter properly before Mr. Selby in such a manner that he would be brought to see the absolute necessity of some such form of instruction in these important matters.

As things are, the Third are left to themselves to go about and behave like little savages, and goodness only knows what they will be like when they are grown up. By the time they reach my age they will be utterly out of hand, I am sure.

THE small creature commonly known as "The Fag" is a cross between an insect and a reptile—and most of them look just like it, too. As a general rule, they walk erect on their hind-legs, although the usual appearance of their forepaws suggests that they have just been crawling on all-fours through thick mud. That, however, they would be extremely unlikely to do, as mud contains water, which is something that no self-respecting fag has anything to do with in any circumstances. In fact, they have a violent hatred of water, and the mere sight of it, especially when contained in a washing-bowl or bath, is sufficient to drive the average fag into a state of frenzy.

Curiously enough, they have a great fondness for another liquid—ink. Give them a bottle—or, better still, a jar—of this, and they will amuse themselves for hours, daubing it all over their faces, hands, and clothes in a highly decorative manner. If they are also supplied with a few sheets of blotting-paper, their cup of joy is filled and overflowing, for there is nothing they like better—with the exception of making themselves as grubby as possible—than manufacturing missiles of ink-soaked blotting-paper, and then going on the warpath.

The Selby bird—or, as the fags themselves allude to him, "old Beaky"—has got the sort of job that nobody who hasn't had several years' experience as a keeper in the monkey-house at the Zoo is qualified to take on.

Out of school hours fags are usually to be found congregating in a mysterious out-of-the-way region officially known as the Third Form Common-room. I allude to it as "mysterious" in view of the fact that they guard its precincts most jealously, and very few human beings have ever seen the interior of this retreat, though it is rumoured that it greatly resembles a lair of wild beasts, the floor being littered with bones—mostly of defunct kippers, which have been toasted whole over the fire amid scenes of jubilation reminiscent of cannibal orgies—and other debris of grisly and unorthodox meals. It is probable that the only individual capable of making himself at home there—apart, of course, from the fags themselves—is Pongo, the mongrel pup owned by Wally D'Arcy.

Fags are sometimes captured by Sixth-Formers and partly tamed for the purpose of being used as personal attendants; but, so far as I can see, none of the experiments that have been made in this direction have been attended with any degree of success. A lion-tamer might be able to do something with them, but short of that I don't think anybody could do much with any of them.

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THRILLS in the THIRD!

By Jerrold Lumley-Lumley

WARE, THE THIRD!

JUST recently some of the leading spirits of the Third Form have revived an old craze for roller-skating, and at the present moment it is in full swing—unfortunately for the rest of the school.

In fact, venturing out into one of the corridors on the Lower School landings is decidedly in the way of being a perilous enterprise. A fellow never knows, when he sets out from the Junior Common-room, whether he's on his way to his study or to the sanny. Of course, I don't mean to say that anybody deliberately sets out to go to the sanny; I'm merely pointing out that, though his destination may be his study, he's exceedingly liable to finish up in the sanny.

And if by great good fortune you do arrive safely at your study, you jolly well stop there until after the fags' bedtime, if you've got any sense. It's as much as a fellow's life is worth to go out again while they're still abroad, for you can't expect to tempt Fate twice in one evening and get away with it. You can take it from me that six stone or so of fag, whirling round a corner at top speed on well-oiled roller-skates, constitutes a very efficient projectile, and, one that, coming full tilt into the region of a chap's waistcoat, is liable to set him wondering whether the whole of the roof has fallen or only the bit he happened to be standing under at the moment.

Some of the young asses aren't content with invading the Lower School quarters, and several times a few of the more daring of them have ventured into the Fifth corridor. As might be imagined, this sort of thing doesn't appeal to the Fifth in the least, and I must say I have every sympathy with them for once. I know how jolly disturbing it is to be trying to devote one's attention to prep, and to have it distracted at intervals by the whirl and rumble of wheels, the clashing of metal, and the clumping of boots—the two-skate merchants are bad enough, but the one-legged skaters, who propel themselves along by prodding vigorously and continuously with the other foot, are even worse.

Really, a fellow can't get much work done in the middle of a racket of that kind, so one can hardly blame the Fifth for getting a bit restive when they discovered the excitement was beginning to overflow into their quarters.

CUTTS—AND A CALAMITY!

Of course, Cutts was soon on the warpath. In fairness, it must be admitted that the Fifth-Former had reason for getting his wool off. To be buffed in the middle of the back by a young cyclone just when one is carefully conveying an armful of crockery from one place to another is apt to be a trifle annoying, to say the least of it. And that's what happened to Cutts.

He was holding a sort of tea-party in his den, and he found at the last minute that he hadn't enough pots and pans to go round. So he made a tour of the corridor on a borrowing expedition, and he was just on his way back to his study with the plunder when Wally D'Arcy came streaking along.

Cutts didn't hear Wally coming, so he got one of the shocks of his life when he found himself reeling along the corridor as if somebody had fired a cannon at him. The crockery went flying in all directions, but mostly in the direction of the floor; and the worst of it was it wasn't only crockery. There were a couple of pots of jam and a jug of hot water. The jam merely dropped

on the floor, and made a mess of the linoleum, but the hot water shot out of the jug and made a mess of Cutts. He made a noise like a liner entering port, and sat down suddenly on the jam.

But even having all that jam to himself wasn't consoling to Cutts in the least at that moment. The only thing on earth that he desired just then was to lay his hands on whoever was responsible for his downfall, and, unfortunately, all that he could actually lay his hands on was—jam. Whatever he touched was smeared with the stuff, and when a couple more Fifth-Formers came out in a hurry to see what on earth had happened, they nearly had a fit when they caught sight of Cutts standing amongst the broken crockery.

Of course, Wally D'Arcy was nowhere to be seen. Long before this he had decided that it was no place for him, and he wasted no time in streaking back to the Third Common-room, where, surrounded by the rest of the lanky-fingered tribe, it would have been as much as Cutts' life was worth to try to get at him.

Not that Cutts wanted to get at him, as it happened, though Wally was decidedly well advised to take due precautions. But, as a matter of fact, Cutts was quite unaware that Wally was responsible for the mess he was in. His mind was running more in the direction of thunderbolts and dynamite-cartridges rather than of fags. He had a vague idea that a figure of some kind had sprawled over him, picked itself up almost instantly, and had vanished into the gloom at the other end of the corridor. But he was more inclined to believe it had been a fellow-victim of an earthquake shock of some kind than the actual cause of the catastrophe.

However, when he began to recover, and his mental processes—such as they are—got more or less into action again, he started putting two and two together.

It's possible that he might not have been quite so quick on the mark, but the Third made an error in sending out a scout to see just what was doing in the Fifth corridor, and Joe Frayne, who volunteered for the job, couldn't resist the temptation of going on his skate. Joe, it may be said, is possessed of but one roller-skate, and his method of progression, slower and less graceful than that of Wally and the other two-footed plutocrats, is also much less silent. The spare foot with which Joe is forced to propel himself is brought to the ground every yard or so with a thud that can be heard some distance away. Cutts heard it, for one, and, going to his study door, he was just in time to see Joe flashing off round the corner on his way to report "All clear."

REVENGE—AND ITS CONSEQUENCES!

Well, the sight of the fag streaking along in that fashion put Cutts wise, as Wildrake would say, to the situation, and in his usual unpleasant fashion he decided to square accounts with the Third.

He got a length of stout string, fastened it to a nail in the wainscoting of the passage opposite to his own door, and carried the other end into his study, where he sat waiting.

He didn't have to wait long, for in about ten minutes he heard the whirl and rattle of roller-skates in the corridor outside. Instantly he pulled the cord tight, and a second or so after it was jerked almost out of his hand. Somebody had tripped over it, and by the pull, whoever it was, must have been going at a jolly good bat when he struck it. At the same moment there was a startled yell, and Cutts, flinging his door

wide open, saw a small figure apparently endeavouring to imitate a catherine-wheel in the corridor outside. It was Curly Gibson, and he was doing his level best—so far as there was anything at all level in Curly Gibson's world at that precise moment—to recover his balance. Of course, it was a silly trick on the part of Cutts. He might have hurt a fellow seriously by tripping him up in that fashion. However, that's Cutts all over.

He made a jump to grab Curly Gibson, but Curly got to his feet—or his skates, to be more precise—just in time, and whirled off out of Cutts' reach. The trouble was that he whirled a trifle too much. He put so much beef into the push off that he lost control of his skates, and instead of being able to turn at the end of the corridor, he went straight on towards the top of the stairs. When he saw where he was making for he yelled blue murder; but the londest of yells won't act as brakes to a pair of roller-skates, and Curly went whizzing on as fast as ever.

Over the top step he plunged, and bump, bump, bump! down them he went, faster and faster. It looked as if he was due for a sticky finish when he got to the bottom, but, fortunately—for Curly, that is—Knox was coming up the stairs just at that time. I want to make it clear that the good fortune was entirely Curly's. I mean to say, Knox certainly hadn't any reason for congratulating himself about it.

Curly landed full tilt into his waistcoat, and Knox, startled as he was, had the presence of mind to clutch at the rail. It didn't prevent his going backwards down the stairs, with Curly on top of him, because he'd have needed a grip like a grizzly bear's to have hung on for more than a couple of seconds, but it helped to break the force of the fall a bit. So Curly Gibson and Knox went titerty-bump down about ten more steps, and then they had another stroke of luck, Knox sharing it this time.

They met old Selby on his way up, and, by grabbing hold of him as they were passing, they managed to persuade him to return with them and provide something nice and soft for them to finish the trip on.

They landed on the mat at the bottom in a mixed up sort of heap, and they were just beginning to sit up and sort themselves out when Cutts, who had been following them down, trod on one of Curly Gibson's skates that had fallen off and lodged on the stairs, and he, too, came down the last dozen steps and landed on top of the heap.

And the joke of the whole affair was that Selby, who was too dazed to know exactly what had happened, thought Cutts was responsible for the whole affair, and, refusing to listen to any explanations, reported him



Cutts flung his door wide open, and saw a small figure apparently endeavouring to imitate a catherine-wheel in the corridor outside.

to Raiton for roller-skating down the stairs; and Cutts, who dared not tell Raiton exactly what had happened, for fear of having to admit himself guilty of the rotten trick of deliberately tripping up Curly Gibson in so dangerous a fashion, had to shoulder the blame, and instead of being punished as the cause of the trouble, Gibson was actually sympathised with as one of the victims.

It's a queer world, isn't it?

THE END.

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ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:



LEVISON MINOR'S PLIGHT!

(Continued from

page 13.)

Mr. Selby felt baffled.

The punishment of the supposed thief was a secondary matter to his mind. The recovery of the money came first.

For several minutes there was silence in Mr. Selby's study, Frank not daring to move or speak while the Form master thought and thought, unable to make up his mind what to do.

Mr. Selby spoke at last.

"Remain here!" he said.

He left the study, and looked up and down the passage. Talbot of the Shell happened to be passing in the distance, and Mr. Selby called to him.

"Talbot, will you find Levison of the Fourth Form and send him to my study at once? It is important."

"Certainly, sir!" said Talbot.

Mr. Selby stepped back into the study.

"You—you've sent for my brother, sir?" stammered Frank.

Mr. Selby gave him a gesture to be silent. He waited impatiently for the arrival of Levison of the Fourth.

Ernest Levison came along in a few minutes. It had not taken Talbot long to find him and give him Mr. Selby's message.

Levison of the Fourth glanced at his minor and then at Mr. Selby.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

"Come in and close the door, Levison!"

"Yes, sir."

Levison of the Fourth obeyed in growing surprise. He could see, from Frank's white, scared face, that something serious had happened, though he could not imagine even remotely what it was.

"Levison, I have sent for you to use your influence with your brother," said the Third Form master. "He has committed a theft, and impudently refuses to return the money he has taken."

Levison almost staggered.

"What?" he gasped.

"I am unwilling to take the matter before the Head—unwilling to cause this boy to be expelled in ignominy from the school," said Mr. Selby. "I feel that he does not realise the seriousness of the matter. What he has taken can be of no use or benefit to him—none whatever. He could never dispose of it in safety. I am willing, therefore, to believe that he has taken it for a foolish prank, without intending to be a thief. Yet he refuses to return it. If you have any influence over your brother, Levison, use it now, before the matter passes out of my hands."

"Frank, you young ass!" said Levison blankly. "If you've taken anything belonging to Mr. Selby—"

"I haven't!"

"Mr. Selby says, you heard him—"

"He says there was a banknote in that 'Holiday Annual' when I took it from the study," panted Frank. "There wasn't! We should have found it. We were reading the book together, Wally and Reggie and I, in Tom Merry's study. There was no banknote in it!"

"How could there be a banknote in that book?" exclaimed Levison.

Mr. Selby coloured uncomfortably.

"I slipped it in the book, for safety, when you interrupted me here some time ago, Levison," he said. "I left the book with the banknote in it on my table when I took you to Mr. Lathom. It was gone when I returned."

"It wasn't in the book!" said Frank.

Levison stared from one to the other.

"You are sure you put it in the book, Mr. Selby?"

"Of course I am sure!"

"Then it must have been in the book when you raided it, Frank."

"It wasn't!" groaned Frank.

"Don't be a young ass!" said Levison sharply. "If Mr. Selby says it was there, it was there. The question is, what has become of it. You have not seen it?"

"No."

"You three young sweeps were reading the book together. None of you saw the banknote?"

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"No!"

"Where did you take the book when you left here?"

"I had it under my arm when I met Wally and Reggie in the Form-room passage. Then we went to Tom Merry's study to read it together."

Mr. Selby stood silent, watching. Levison of the Fourth reflected for a moment or two. As a matter of fact, Levison was much more fitted to deal with the matter than the hasty, irritable Form master.

"It's pretty clear, sir," said Levison, at length, "the banknote must have dropped from the book while Frank was scudding off with it. It's lying about somewhere between here and Tom Merry's study."

"Oh, that is possible, of course," admitted Mr. Selby.

Frank uttered an exclamation.

"Of course! I—I never thought of that."

"Did you drop the book at all?" asked Levison. "If you dropped it the banknote would be pretty certain to fall out."

"Yes," exclaimed Frank breathlessly. "I remember. I ran into a Shell fellow scudding round the corner of the corridor, and the book went to the floor. It fell wide open, too, I remember."

Levison looked relieved.

"That settles it," he said. "You'd better come and show me the place, and most likely we'll find it there. If you'd had sense enough to take my advice, and leave the book alone, this wouldn't have happened."

"I—I know," mumbled Frank, hanging his head.

Mr. Selby was breathing more freely now.

"You see the results of your disrespect and disobedience, Levison minor," he said. "Let this be a warning to you. You have exposed yourself to suspicion of theft, with the danger of being expelled from the school. Levison, take your brother, and look for the banknote at once."

"Yes, sir. Come on, Frank," Levison turned to the door, and then turned back. "What was the note, sir? In case any fellow has picked it up, I'd better be able to give a description of it."

"That is not necessary at present," said Mr. Selby hastily. Then he reflected that if Levison found the missing note he would indubitably see that it was a note of the Banque de France. "The fact is, Levison, it was a French banknote—a foreign note. There—there can be no mistake about it if you find it."

"Very well, sir," said Levison.

And he left the study with his brother, leaving Mr. Selby waiting in a state of deep anxiety for the outcome of the search.

CHAPTER 9.

The Search!

"BAI Jove! What's this game, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked that question in surprise, turning his celebrated eyeglass upon Levison major and minor.

The two Levisons were occupied oddly enough, from the point of view of a casual observer. Each of them had an electric torch in his hand, and they were groping and scanning and searching their way along the old oak corridor. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused to observe them in wonder.

"Lost somethin', deah boys?" he asked.

"I suppose you haven't seen a French banknote knocking about?" asked Levison.

"Bai Jove! No."

"One's lost—belonging to Mr. Selby. You can help look for it, if you like."

"Certainly, old scout," said the good-natured Gussy.

And D'Arcy's eyeglass gleamed and peered into dusky corners in search of the missing banknote. Levison had searched every foot of the way from Mr. Selby's study to the spot where Frank had rushed into Racke of the Shell, but the note was not to be found.

It seemed probable that the banknote had fallen from the book when Frank collided with Aubrey Racke, but it was nowhere to be seen. But as the fog had known nothing of its presence in the book, he might, of course, have dropped it at any point on the way to Tom Merry's study, so the search was being continued all the way.

By the time the searchers arrived at the Form-room passage they had attracted a considerable amount of attention. Arthur Augustus was the first to join up; but other fellows came around and inquired what the matter was, and lent their assistance. Blake and Herries and Digby, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, joined in the search. Then Talbot of the Shell came along, and Kangaroo and Glyn, and Julian and Roylance and Hammond, and several other fellows. When the party proceeded up the staircase it was quite a large party of Fourth and Shell, and several of the Third had joined up. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, came out of his study, and gazed at the army on the staircase, and inquired what they were doing.

"Banknote lost, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul! Who has lost a banknote?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Levison knows. Whose was it, Levison?"

"Mr. Selby's, sir," said Levison. "We're trying to find it for him, sir."

"Very good," said Mr. Railton. And, to Levison's relief, he went back to his study without asking further questions. Levison was extremely unwilling to mention the circumstances of the case; he hoped that the banknote would turn up and make an end of the matter. That Mr. Selby had suspected Frank of theft was a detail that was better left unmentioned, if possible.

Up the big staircase the party went, and then along the Shell passage to Tom Merry's study. Many of the searchers were puzzled, as Mr. Selby had no business in the Shell quarters, and it was odd enough to suppose that he had dropped a banknote there. But Levison of the Fourth led the way, and the other fellows followed on. Grundy came out of his study, with Wilkins and Gunn, and stared at the army.

"What on earth are you fellows up to?" he asked.

"Looking for banknotes, 'old bean,'" answered Monty Lowther. "Jolly old Selby has been wandering about shedding his wealth somewhere."

"Silly old ass!" commented Grundy. "But he can't have been up here."

"Just what I think. What makes you think it might be in the Shell passage, Levison?"

"That's where we've got to look," answered Levison, while Frank coloured uncomfortably.

The search went on, as far as the door of Tom Merry's study.

"Can we go in here, Tom Merry?" asked Levison.

Tom stared.

"Certainly, if you like; but Mr. Selby hasn't been in my study this evening, has he?"

"N-no. But—"

"But what?" asked Manners of the Shell rather testily. "What the thump do you mean, Levison? How could a lost banknote possibly be in our study?"

Levison flushed.

The search having proved fruitless as far as Tom Merry's door, only the study remained to be searched; but it was clear that that room could hardly be searched for a missing banknote without some explanation being given to the owners.

"The fact is"—Levison realised that he had to speak out—"the banknote was in that 'Holiday Annual' that the fags collared from Mr. Selby's study, and they brought it here to read."

"Cheeky young asses!" said Lowther. "In our study?"

"They had it here," said Levison. "We looked all the way here, so it's pretty clear it must have dropped out in the study while they were reading it."

"Does Selby keep his giddy banknotes stuck in books like bookmarks?" asked Manners. "Must be an ass. But, go ahead."

Levison went into Study No. 10.

His face was very troubled now; and Frank's face, as he watched him, was troubled, too. The banknote had not been found; and it was improbable, to say the least, that it could have fallen from the volume in the lighted study, in the presence of three fags without one of them having noticed it. Yet only the study remained to be searched.

Frank had noticed, too, that Levison, forced to give an explanation, had spoken of "the fags" collaring the book from Mr. Selby's study. He had not wished, apparently, to mention his brother specially; yet Frank had told him that he alone had taken the book.

Levison avoided his gaze as he stared about Study No. 10 in the faint hope of finding the banknote lying about the floor.

But it was not there; Levison had hardly expected that it would be there. The study was drawn blank.

"Well, that's the giddy finish!" said Monty Lowther. "Anything more we can do for you, Levison?"

"Nothing."

"Go back to Selby and tell him to be more jolly careful with his banknotes," advised Grundy of the Shell. "Sticking them in books! My hat!"

Levison, without replying, left Study No. 10 and went along the passage with Frank. He stopped at Study No. 7, tapped at the door, and looked in. Racke and Crooke were there, and there was a haze of cigarette smoke in the study.

"Racke," said Levison.

"Hallo!"

"You remember my minor running into you in the corridor downstairs a while ago—"

"I remember," said Racke. "I jolly well booted him, the young ass. If you've come here to make a row about it, Levison, you can get on with it. I'm not jolly well being latted over by silly fags, I can tell you."

"Never mind about that," said Levison. "Frank dropped a book when he collided with you, and it turns out that there was a banknote in the book."

Racke started a little.

"A banknote?" he repeated. "A fiver, or what?"

"No, a French banknote; Mr. Selby had put it there—the book had been in his study. Did you see anything of it?"

Aubrey Racke laughed.

"How could I see anything of it?" he asked. "Is this a joke, or what? Why should Mr. Selby stick French banknotes in a book? What the thump would he be doing with a French banknote, anyhow?"

"I don't know—but that's what happened," said Levison. "I thought the banknote might have dropped out when Frank dropped the book, and that perhaps you'd seen it—"

"If I had I should have picked it up, of course," said Racke, breathing rather hard. "This sounds to me a queer sort of cock-and-bull story, Levison. But if a banknote's been lost, whoever found it would take it to the Housemaster. Ask Railton."

"Very well!" said Levison quietly.

He left the study with his minor.

"Shut the door after you!" called out Crooke.

Levison shut the door.

In the passage he looked at his minor.

"Well, what's going to be done now?" he asked, rather grimly.

"I—I don't know, Ernie."

"We shall have to go back and tell Mr. Selby that we cannot find the note," said Levison uneasily. "Of course, a dozen fellows might have seen it and picked it up. In that case it will be taken to Mr. Railton. But Mr. Railton spoke to us on the stairs—he hadn't heard anything of it then."

He broke off.

"Look here, Frank, you're not playing the goat, are you? You haven't played any silly trick with that banknote, have you?"

"No!" gasped Frank.

"Did you see it at all, or know it was there?"

"I've told you not, Ernie."

"I know that!" muttered Levison.

Frank started.

"Ernie! You don't think—you can't think—Ernie—"

"Of course not," said Levison hastily. "But—but it's frightfully queer, as you must see for yourself. We've hunted high and low—and nothing's been seen of the banknote. It's not in the book, and it doesn't seem to have been dropped anywhere. Frank, what will Mr. Selby say?"

Frank's lips quivered.

"You—you think he'll suppose that I—I—I've taken it?" he breathed.

"I know he will!"

"Oh, Ernie!" groaned Frank.

There was a short silence. Levison clenched his hands.

"There's plenty of draught in the corridors—a flimsy banknote may have blown anywhere," he muttered. "And—and there may be fellows about who'd keep it if they found it—fellows like Trimble, perhaps. It's more likely that it's blown away somewhere."

But he spoke without conviction.

"Anyhow, we've got to go back to Mr. Selby," he said.

Frank followed his brother with a heavy heart. He had had time, by now, to realise what the matter looked like; he felt, with a chill of horror, that a black doubt had crossed even his brother's mind; he felt that it was only because he was his brother, that Ernest did not doubt him. What, then, would the other fellows think? What would Mr. Selby think? What was going to be the outcome of it all?

Levison knocked at Mr. Selby's door; and the Third-Form master met him with an eager, anxious stare of inquiry.

"You have found it?"

"No, sir!"

"No!" repeated Mr. Selby, raising his voice.

"We've looked everywhere, sir!" gasped Frank. "A lot of fellows helped. But—but we can't find it."

"It's quite possible that it's still about somewhere, sir," said Levison of the Fourth. "If a notice is put on the board some fellow may come forward with it. It may have been picked up."

Mr. Selby gave him a bitter look.

Publicity was no longer to be avoided. The matter had to become common knowledge now; and even so, there was a chance, a probability, that he would never recover his banknote. The Third Form master's feelings were bitterness itself.

"I believe nothing of the kind," he said. "The banknote was in the book taken from my study by Levison minor. Levison minor must account for it. I shall place a notice on the board. I expect it to lead to no result whatever, for I

(Continued on page 28.)

There's no bluff about Big Ben Derby, the willing lad from Yorkshire—he loves a straight fight!

CHECKMATE!

A Splendid Tale of
the Ring.

By Louis Alfriston.



CHAPTER 1. No Quarter!

SUNK in the depths of an armchair in his library at the big house on Hampstead Heath, Lord Barnston gazed savagely into the heart of the fire. Though to the casual observer his face wore the look of frozen calm for which he was so well known, those with more discerning vision could not have failed to perceive the look of brooding hate which shone from his cold eyes.

And, in truth, his mind was in a turmoil. His hate of Lord Keyingham, that the years had seemed only to make more bitter, and that had passed even from father to son, was fast drawing to a climax.

Until his rival's son came of age, however, and so into his property, there had been nothing at which Lord Barnston could strike. When that event occurred he struck, and when Lord Barnston struck he struck hard.

In every interest of the new Lord Keyingham's life, in every sport in which he took so great an interest, always there was some obstacle to retard or kill success.

This went on for four or five years, and if during that time Lord Keyingham's fortune was sadly depleted, as he gained in experience and strength, so he grew to be an opponent to be reckoned with.

The first set-back experienced by Lord Barnston was when his heavy-weight, Butcher Black, was beaten to a standstill by Lord Keyingham's untried novice, Big Ben Derby. Later, a rising light-weight, upon whom the older peer had set great store, was badly whipped by Little Cocky Withers, a member of Lord Keyingham's stable. Last, and heaviest blow of all, "Black Diamond," a near-champion negro heavy-weight who had been imported especially from America to make victory certain, had been knocked stone cold by Big Ben Derby.

Defeat at any time was bitter to Lord Barnston. What made it still more bitter now was that in each of those three fights he had engineered a scheme to make victory sure, but which, unscrupulous and dishonest as it was, had been circumvented. And, worst of all,

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through that last fight he had lost the help and support of his chief assistant crook, the notorious "Doc" Bludgeon.

His teeth clenched with a pressure which thinned his lips to a sharp, cruel line across his face. Lord Barnston rose from his chair. In that hour of bitter reflection his brain had formed a plan which had for its object the ruin, once and for all time, utter and irretrievable, of his rival.

Five minutes later, when the big car was speeding westward, that keen brain was still busy working out details. No use, now, anything in connection with the Turf. What few horses Lord Keyingham had he ran purely for sport, his betting limited to a few pounds in support of his fancy. It was only the boxing ring by which he could be tempted to invest large sums, for boxing was the young peer's passion.

The car pulled up outside the Cosmopolitan Club. With a curt order to the driver to wait, Lord Barnston mounted the steps without so much as a turn of his stern head. Thus it was that he failed to see the slight but agile figure lurking within the shadows on the opposite side of the road. In any case, it was not with Lord Barnston that the latter was concerned at the moment, but with his car.

Like a shadow the little man lurked within the bushes that concealed him from view, like a shadow he glided across the road to the rear of the car. A quick glance assured him that the square was still deserted. Haughtily, on the driving seat, the immovable and liveried chauffeur stared stolidly to his front.

Not two or three, but a full half-dozen times did Cocky Withers' corkscrew penetrate each of the rear tyres and the spare wheel slung at the back of the car, and so artistically was this done that the escape of air was hardly audible.

It was not until the car sank gracefully upon its back rims that the driver was aware that anything unusual had occurred. By this time Cocky Withers was safe once more within the shadows.

For over half an hour Lord Barnston's driver worked devotedly at his repairs, but as each puncture was filled in another became manifest. Finally, with a gesture of exasperation and the

raised voice of despair, he gave the job up as hopeless.

Which was the exact moment when Lord Barnston descended the steps of his club into the street.

Though this particular summons is forbidden by police regulations, both master and man were too fully occupied with the unexplainable calamity to the car to notice the shrill whistle which, proceeding from the other side of the square, summoned the taxi that had been lurking round an adjacent corner.

Instructing his man to telephone for new inner tubes, Lord Barnston got into the taxi, which at once drove off according to his directions. The shadow on the opposite side of the square faded away also. There was nothing more to be done that night.

It was indeed a strange destination for a peer of England at which the cab drew up—a narrow, ill-lighted and indescribably filthy street which, jutting out from one of the main thoroughfares of Limehouse, ended in a crazy jetty that thrust its rotting piles a few yards into the river mud. Had he been in his own car Lord Barnston would have dismissed it at some distance away. A somewhat grimy taxi, however, attracting less attention, he drove right up to the dingy, shuttered, and lightless building at the far end of the street.

Two knocks, a further three, and then two knocks more, followed by four single raps in slow succession, he gave before there was any response to his summons.

Then, cautiously and inch by inch, the door was opened until the furtive, disfigured face that peered through the opening grinned as though satisfied to the visitor's identity. Then, and not till then, was admittance granted.

Lord Barnston followed the shuffling figure up two flights of narrow, creaking stairs to a room at the back of the building—a room ingrained with the grime of years. The furniture, that never had been anything but cheap and tawdry, was so wormeaten and decayed that it was actually falling to pieces. The river-damp had penetrated the crazy walls until it stood out against the soiled and faded paper in great dripping patches.

The only light the room boasted, and which served only to increase the prevailing gloom, was an unguarded gas-jet

that hissed and spluttered at the farther end.

Once within the room, and with the door closed, the figure which turned furtively to face Lord Barnston was entirely fitting to the filth and squalor of the apartment; a bony, slinking creature with a long, coffee-coloured countenance, disfigured and made more repellent still by ancient and but indifferently healed scars.

It was, however, neither the scars nor the dirt which encrusted them that rendered the features so unutterably repulsive. It was the mouth, drawn upwards at the corners in a fixed and mirthless grin, that was the great danger-signal to those able to read the human countenance.

But even the mouth, repellent as it was, was as nothing to the eyes, which, however small actually, seemed smaller still in that they were entirely without depth, as though they were just dull discs of green, semi-transparent jade, dark and fixed and shallow as those of some more than usually deadly snake. And like the snake again, these eyes were adorned with neither lashes nor brows. A head that from forehead to nape of neck was as completely devoid of hair as a skittle-ball, added the crowning touch of horror to a countenance so indescribably evil as to be lacking almost to any semblance to humanity. And however intimately the district of Limehouse is associated with the Oriental, it was evident that this creature was neither wholly Jap nor Chinaman, but a mixture of one or other of those races with Spanish or Portuguese. A strange and sinister associate, surely, for one of Britain's peers!

"And how may I have the honour of serving my Lord Barnston?" the writhing figure inquired in a voice which, cracked and grating, was intended only to be insinuating.

CHAPTER 2.

A Plan of Campaign!

IT was close upon one o'clock in the morning before Lord Barnston climbed once more into the waiting taxi. But after his fare had discharged him outside the big house at Hampstead, even at that hour it was not too late for the driver to speed his cab directly for the Happy Huntsman, on the outskirts of Dorking, where were the training quarters of Big Ben Derby and Little Cocky Withers.

Two mornings later a hurry-up call brought Lord Keyingham hotfoot to the Happy Huntsman. There the little lightweight, Cocky Withers, greeted him with a face unusually serious.

"It's business only that's meant this time, my lord," he observed gravely, when he had unloaded himself of some part of his story.

His patron regarded him with undisguised amazement.

"How did you find this out?" he demanded.

A grin broke through the load of anxiety on Cocky's face.

"I went out to look for it, my lord," he said simply, and checked himself hastily. He was not one to take credit that belonged rightly to another. "At least, Fred Potter and I did," he corrected.

"And how did you come to get into touch with Potter?" further demanded the astounded peer. "And what's he to do with it, anyway?"

Cocky's grin widened.

"It was his taxi that drove me to Hampstead the night I followed Dr. Bludgeon to Lord Barnston's," he ex-

plained. "When I shinned over the wall to have a look what was going on, Fred kicked because he thought I was after something crooked."

Had it not been for the respect in which he held his patron, Cocky might almost have been accused of a wink.

"And he wasn't far wrong, either," he went on; "though it wasn't me that was the crook it was Lord Barnston, an' Doc Bludgeon. I told Fred I was working for you, and that put me ace-high with him. It seems you looked after his mother when she was ill, and got him a job into the bargain."

Pausing, the little lightweight cocked an inquiring eye towards his patron.

Lord Keyingham frowned. Although Fred Potter was by no means the first or the last person whom he had befriended, there was nothing he hated more than for any one of his innumerable acts of kindnesses to come to light.

"Carry on!" he instructed shortly.

Cocky sighed resignedly, and resumed:

"Well, I told Fred Potter there was crooked work afoot, and Fred said there was nothing he'd like better than to stand in to help put the lid on those who were trying to do the dirty on your lordship. So I kept his address, and promised to let him know if there was anything he could do to help."

For a full minute by the clock on the bar-parlour mantelpiece Cocky was silent. It was as though he did not know quite how to continue. Lord Keyingham looked up.

"Well?" he inquired sharply.

"Did you notice the expression on Lord Barnston's face as he looked across at you the night Ben knocked out the 'Black Diamond'?" Cocky asked slowly at last.

Lord Keyingham shook his head.

"I was too busy slapping old Ben on the back," he explained with his cheery smile.

But there was no responsive smile on the face of Cocky Withers. On the contrary his patron thought he had never seen the little lightweight look more serious.

"Well, I did!" said the latter impressively. "And if ever there was the mark of a fiend on the human countenance, it was printed on the face of Lord Barnston at that moment. Said I to myself, 'Cocky Withers, lord or no lord, that gentleman means mischief; he wants watching, and watching pretty close!'"

"I don't know why, my lord," he resumed after a pause, as though to arrange his thoughts, "but something seemed to tell me that after the way we'd out-bluffed him over that match, any revenge he was out for he'd start right away before he'd time to cool off. And so"—here Cocky made a gesture that was half dramatic and half apology—"after you'd gone that night I travelled straight up to London. The next morning I got in touch with Fred Potter and put a proposition up to him he fell for at once. Since that night, either Fred or myself, or both together, have tracked Lord Barnston everywhere he's been. We know who has called at his house, how long they've stayed, and pretty well what they went for. We know everywhere he's been and who he's talked to, and what about."

Lord Keyingham's face was a picture of mingled amazement and gratitude. Here were friends indeed, friends who, whatever their station, had proved their loyalty and devotion to the hilt! His voice was not quite steady when next he spoke.

"Where does Ben Derby come in on this?" he asked.

"He knows all about it," replied

Cocky. "He wanted to share the work in London, but he's too big for a tracker—he'd be spotted at once. So we left him on guard here, in case they tried any funny business at the Happy Huntsman."

Lord Keyingham nodded.

"That's all right," he said in a satisfied tone. "I shouldn't like old Ben to be left out." His voice hardened. "And what is it that you and Potter discovered?" he inquired tersely.

"For a few days, nothing at all," said Cocky. "Lord Barnston lived the life you'd expect from a gentleman in his position—clubs and hotels and dinner-parties and such. Then one night, or early morning—for it was close on two o'clock—a man rode up on a bicycle and turned into the drive. I couldn't see the man's face until I'd swarmed over the wall and looked through the window. And then I could see his lordship talkin' to a chap who looked like a broken-down jockey. Thinks I to myself, 'if that chap isn't a wrong 'un he ought to sue his face for libel!'"

"The trouble was," Cocky continued after a brief pause, "that him being on a bike and me on foot I couldn't follow him when he came out. And beyond him looking so much like an old lag there wasn't much about him I could describe to Fred Potter, who, partly because he's so much in the streets, and partly because of lodging with Inspector Murgatroyd of Scotland Yard, knows almost every crook in London by sight and where he lives."

"Outside on the gravel there, with my eyes glued to a chink between the curtains, I was on the look-out for anything special about him to describe to Fred, when suddenly he reaches out for his glass, which was on a table alongside his chair. And as he grasped his drink I saw that his right hand was short of two fingers."

That Cocky felt he had done pretty good work was evident by the gleam of pride in his eyes.

"I beat it straight back to London," he went on, "and roused old Fred out of bed. When I told him my tale he whistled as if I'd really said something."

"Finger-shy Sam!" says he. 'One of the Portuguese's runners.' He turned to me solemn-like. 'If Lord Barnston goes down to Limehouse,' says he, 'you'd better all watch your step.'

"And who's the Portuguese?" I asked him.

"Organiser-in-chief, field-marshal-elect, commander-in-chief, chairman, and general manager of half the crooks in London. Crime conducted while you wait. Burglaries committed with neatness, accuracy, and dispatch. Pockets picked at any hour. Sandbagging by time or contract. Buildings set fire to. Staff of expert forgers always available. Kidnapping carried out at shortest notice. Murders arranged for," says Fred, as if he was reading an advertisement. He put on his thinking-cap then, figuring the situation out. Then he looks up and says:

"The Portuguese never stirs out of doors, and it's only once in a month of Whit Mondays he'll see anybody himself, and then only someone very special who's prepared to pay through the nose. Generally everything's done through his agents."

"I shouldn't think Lord Barnston's the sort who'd do business with underlings," I said.

"Fred nodded.

"No," he said, "I don't think he is. Unless I'm mistaken, Finger-shy Sam went to make arrangements for Lord Barnston to call at Limehouse."

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As Cocky Withers ceased speaking Lord Keyingham looked up.

"And did he?" he inquired.

"He sure did!" confirmed Cocky emphatically. "Two nights ago—and stayed over an hour."

The two regarded each other seriously, and at that moment, after a discreet knock, the door opened, and Ben Derby came into the room.

"What do you think of it?" demanded Lord Keyingham, after they had exchanged greetings.

"I think," said the heavy-weight slowly from between set teeth, his usually open and good-tempered face grim, and his mouth like a steel trap, "if there's any monkey work around these training-quarters that whoever's responsible'll wish they'd stayed in Limehouse."

Cocky shook his head vigorously.

"There'll be nothing doing around here," he said definitely.

"I'm not so sure," Lord Keyingham spoke slowly, as if prospecting the situation in his mind. "You must remember the other party has no idea we know there's anything in the wind."

"From what Fred Potter tells me," broke in Cocky, "whatever it is will be done sharp and swift and with a quick get-away, all arranged for. And, what's more," he added, "it'll be a pretty bad business for some of us if they pull it off. The Portuguese doesn't deal in half-measures, believe me!"

Lord Keyingham looked up slowly, and Cocky Withers and Ben Derby saw that his face was rather strained.

"Of course, it's me they're after," he said simply. "As far as Lord Barnston's concerned, you two boys don't count."

And then it was that Big Ben Derby made his surprising observation. Good and clean lad as he was, and greatly as they liked him, neither Lord Keyingham nor the little light-weight credited the big Yorkshireman with any undue amount of brains. They were to learn then what afterwards they came to take for granted—that under that quiet, slow-moving exterior was a natural shrewdness, a capacity for getting down to the real heart of a question that is as rare as it is invaluable.

"To find out what the game is, what

about putting ourselves into Lord Barnston's place?" he said slowly. "Think what we ourselves would do in similar circumstances. I figure it out this way. He's tried to beat you at the sporting game, and the last three times he's only got it in the neck for his trouble. He's worked up to such a pitch now that he's got past all that. It's not through any sporting event he wants to get at you. It's you yourself he's after, to hurt or maim you—or worse!"

Lord Keyingham smiled rather grimly, a curious expression in his eyes, but he said nothing.

"But he's going to set about this in a way that can't be traced," Ben went on. "He's not out for trouble for himself. When anything happens to you, my lord," Ben wound up gravely, "it will be an 'accident!'"

"Yesterday morning as I was walking down Oxford Street a brick fell from a new building," said his lordship slowly. "It missed my head by about six inches. Then again, when driving my car through Kilburn in the afternoon a motor-lorry swung out of a side street, and I only got out of the way by swerving on to the pavement. Crossing Piccadilly this morning a two-seater car, disregarding the traffic policeman's signal, missed me by the skin of my teeth. The policeman took the number of the car, but—"

"That number will be a dud," broke in Cocky, with a quick glance of appreciation at Ben's shrewdness.

"Of course," said Lord Keyingham thoughtfully, "those three circumstances may have been accidental, but it's a curious coincidence they should all happen in such a short space of time."

Ben thumped the table so hard with his mighty fist that the heavy match-stand leaped inches into the air.

"Those were no accidents!" he said decidedly. "They were all part of a plan. This 'ere Lord Barnston's out to get you, and if one thing don't succeed he'll try another. In the meanwhile, what are we going to do? Are we to sit here," he went on, turning to Cocky, "until his lordship's carried home on a stretcher?"

Cocky shook his head vigorously, and

when he spoke his tone was as firm and definite as that of his companion.

"We are not!" he said. "We've got to smoke out that nest of wasps—and, what's more, do it without help. From what Inspector Murgatroyd tells Fred Potter, the police can't take a hand in the game. The Portuguese is too clever, and covers his tracks too well, to leave them any opening. It's up to us to make the game so unhealthy they'll be only too glad to quit playing it. In the meanwhile, my lord," he added, turning to the patron, "you've got to watch your step!"

Lord Keyingham smiled in friendly fashion at both men in turn.

"As it seems I've two very good friends here," he said, "perhaps you won't mind telling me how you're going to set about smoking out the nest?"

Cocky Withers looked at Ben, who returned his glance with interest.

"I don't know for the moment," the former said slowly. "It's going to take a bit of thinking out."

He was silent for a moment; then his expression cleared, and the light of a great idea shone from his eyes.

"You wouldn't like to give your butler and valet a holiday, my lord?" he said inquiringly.

Lord Keyingham looked up alertly. "What's the great idea?" he asked quietly.

"I was an officer's servant in the Army," said Cocky, "and know how to look after a gentleman's things. I don't suppose Ben here knows much about what a butler does, but I've no doubt he could make himself generally useful."

Ben nodded slowly.

"I'm a willing lad," he confirmed. "You mean," questioned Lord Keyingham, "that you'd like to live in my house to act as bodyguard?"

"You'd come to no harm with Ben and me by your side," said Cocky confidently.

Lord Keyingham glanced at the watch on his wrist.

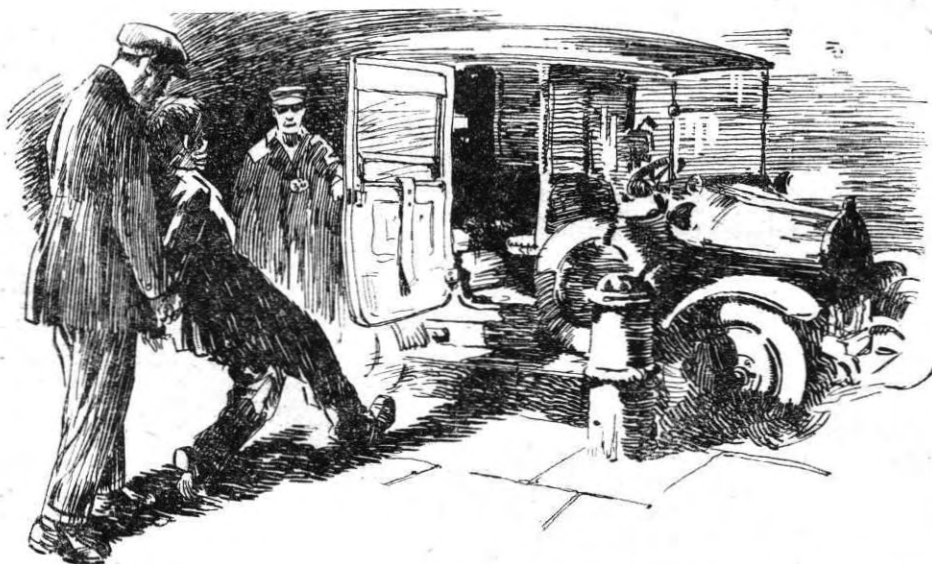
"If we start now," he said, an amused expression on his face, "we shall just be home in time for lunch. It looks," he added, "as though we are going to have some fun!"

CHAPTER 3. Checkmate!

FOR the first few days under the new arrangement nothing occurred to justify the suspicions entertained by the trio. Very unobtrusively, and often when he himself was not aware of it, Lord Keyingham was watched over by one or other of the two friends, though on account of his less conspicuous size this was done more often by Cocky than by the heavy-weight.

And then on the evening of the fourth day something happened which confirmed their suspicions up to the hilt.

That night there was a fight at Pa Doble's East End Home of Boxing, in which Lord Keyingham took particular interest. The



In the strong grasp of Big Ben Derby the hired assassin was hustled across the pavement and bundled into the taxi-cab which was waiting to receive him.

district in which the hall was situated was not of the best; it was, in fact, the centre of a pretty tough population. To add to its other disadvantages, the private entrance, which, in order to avoid the crowd, a few special friends of Pa's were allowed to use, opened on to a narrow and ill-lighted court.

Without going into their reasons, both Ben and Cocky did their best to persuade their patron not to attend this particular match. Once he had made up his mind to a course of action, however, Lord Keyingham was not easily dissuaded, and on this occasion he was more obstinate even than usual. The only course for the two friends to take, then, was to keep an especially close watch upon their patron's safety.

Also, and although Lord Keyingham had no knowledge of it, on that particular evening there was a bodyguard of three instead of the usual one or two.

For some reason he could not explain, Cocky was convinced that to-night, at any rate, there would be something doing, and, in consequence, had enlisted Fred Potter into service. For, though not a professional bruiser, Fred was a pretty useful man with his fists—of much the same slim, wiry build as Lord Keyingham himself—and with the additional resemblance to that nobleman of being as full of pluck as an egg is full of meat.

Their patron's three previous escapes showed Cocky that the enemy had a very close knowledge of the habits of their quarry, and thus it would be known that, in order to avoid the crowd, it was his custom to slip out of the back-door before the beginning of the last bout of the evening. At that time the court would be pretty well deserted, and thus provide an easy field for an assault.

They watched Lord Keyingham into the hall. At that time, beyond a shabbily dressed ruffian lurking close to the door, and whom Cocky suspected of being there to investigate the lie of the land, no one was about. Cocky noticed, however, that the moment their patron had turned into the door this spy disappeared.

On the side of the court opposite to the one in which was the private door was a row of small tenement houses, which, because they had been condemned as unsafe, were unoccupied.

Into the passage of one, the door of which was broken, and which was situated at the end of the court towards which Lord Keyingham would emerge, the three crowded themselves and waited for what might transpire.

Nothing happened for a couple of hours. Then, from the farther end of the court, they could discern dimly a group of figures, which, even as they watched, seemed to dissolve into the surrounding gloom.

By this the watchers knew that the enemy were sliding in single file down the darker side of the court. There would be something doing to-night!

Suddenly inspiration seized Cocky Withers.

"Stay here, Ben," he whispered to the big heavy-weight.

Then, grasping Fred Potter by the arm, he guided him out of the door, covered by the deep shadow of the tenement houses, and into the main thoroughfare. Once there they walked sharply down the road to the shelter of a shop doorway, where they could talk without interruption.

As quickly as possible, Cocky explained his plan.

Quick to perceive its uses, Fred Potter fell in with it at once.

He was the first to emerge from the



Feverishly, Lord Barnston thrust the straw aside. Then his face paled, for gazing up with eyes contracted with terror, and cheeks white with fury, was a human face. "Jasper Bloomer!" yelled his lordship.

doorway, but anyone sufficiently interested might have observed that, instead of the smart, alert taxi-driver, the man who without any attempt at concealment turned into the court was but a hunch-shouldered, shambling figure, who walked with body bent forward and right leg shortened to a limp.

Still in the same fashion, Fred turned into the side-door of the East End School of Boxing. A few moments later Cocky slipped into his old place of concealment in the doorway within which Ben stood sentry. Even that short interval, however, had enabled Cocky to summon Fred's cab, which, in charge of his brother Charlie, had been lurking within easy call.

Five minutes passed, ten minutes, with nothing happening. Then from out of the private entrance emerged the slight, dark-coated, and opera-hatted figure of Lord Keyingham, the silk scarf round his neck showing up white against the dark overcoat.

Immediately, and in full view of Ben and Cocky, two of the lurking figures detached themselves from the shadows and lurched over to their approaching victim. Two others ranged themselves across the court nearer to the outlet into the street. The fifth, who from his actions appeared to be the director of proceedings, hovered nearer to the street still.

From that instant things began to happen!

The two foremost figures closed in on the man it was their intention to maim or worse.

"Ave you got the time on you, my lord?" inquired the foremost.

The answer was short and dramatic, and came in the form of a left half-hook immediately below the angle of the jaw, which, lifting the ruffian fairly off his feet, spread-eagled him inertly against the wall, down which he subsided gently into a sprawling heap in the mud.

The wild rush of the other ruffian was met with a hard right to the body, followed by the thrust of a foot behind the heel and a quick forward jerk which threw him entirely out of balance. After which it was the work of a fraction of a second to apply the finish with another

short hook to the jaw. Thus two of the enemy were quickly out of business.

In the meanwhile, at the other end of the court events had been lively. Like two grim shadows, Ben and Cocky emerged from their concealment. It was Cocky, who, with a quick rush, tackled the two nearer of the enemy reserves, who, though wheeling sharply at his approach, were but half prepared to meet attack.

Bigger and heavier than the little light-weight, they still had no shadow of a chance. The one on the near side had not time even to get his hands up before he stopped a clip under the jaw which put him completely out of action.

Left to himself, and with the fate of his two companions as example, the second man took to his heels to run into a right drive from the top-hatted figure who had disposed so quickly and summarily of the advance guard.

And while this was going on, Ben had been busy with the fifth and last of the plug-uglies. All that hired assassin was aware of was a hand the size of a ham which closed over his mouth from behind, of an enormous knee which was planted firmly in the small of his back, and of another hand grasping both his wrists with the unyielding strength of a vice. Instantaneously he was whipped round, and at a quick trot shot forward to the street, across the pavement, and into the waiting taxicab which, with Charlie Potter holding wide the door, was waiting to receive him. Once inside, he was dumped on to one of the smaller seats with a force that almost thrust his teeth through the top of his head.

"If you move or speak," said Ben quietly, "I'll choke the life out of you and throw you into the gutter, where you belong!"

Within the court, with not a hair out of place, or his breathing quickened by a single heart-beat, Cocky Withers stood grinning into the equally cheerful face of Fred Potter.

"You'd better slip back into his lordship's dressing-room and replace his hat and coat," instructed Cocky.

Fred broke into a laugh.

"I sure had!" he grinned. "Though

I own I should like to see his face if, instead of his opera-hat and good dress overcoat, he had to put on my old billycock hat and thick ulster!" And, turning, Fred passed through the door of the boxing-hall.

By this time the four prone figures were beginning to show signs of consciousness. For a moment Cocky regarded their evil faces with an expression of wholesome disgust. Then from his hip-pocket he took three pairs of thin steel handcuffs, which without difficulty he adjusted by turn on their wrists. As final token of what Lord Barnston was up against, he produced from another pocket a paint-brush and a number of small pots of enamel.

He made an artistic job of it—one that, if it filled him with gratification, must have caused considerable inconvenience to the recipients. The face of one of them he painted a bright sky blue; the features of another he dyed a vivid and staring crimson; while the third, after treatment with a black enamel, presented the appearance of a highly polished negro.

Leaving word with one of the attendants to request Lord Keyingham to return to his house in Queen's Gate as soon as possible, Cocky entered the cab with Fred Potter, and it at once drove off.

Once inside the smoking-room, into which the prisoner was forced, little was said until the arrival of their patron, and in this very silence the ruffian found something sinister and unnerving.

He was seated on a hard chair in front of the fire, and round him, completely closing him in, their faces hard-set and relentless, were seated Ben, Cocky, and Fred Potter.

"What are you going to do with me?" the prisoner asked at last in a strained and husky whisper.

He was a man of about thirty-five years of age, with a dead white cadaverous face, from which his little beady eyes shot with feverish apprehension into every corner of the room.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked again.

Ben leaned forward, his hand closing over the leg of the chair upon which the prisoner was seated.

"Open your mouth before you're told," he said slowly, "and I'll tilt you backwards into the fire."

Thus, almost for the space of a full hour, the four sat, silent and motionless. With every moment that passed the prisoner's apprehension increased. Those three still figures seemed, to his imagination, quickened by terror, as some dreadful and intangible fate that closed about him and from which he was powerless to escape. If there had been any anger or upbraiding his fear would not have been so great; it was the cold and ruthless silence, the staring immobility of his gaolers, that unnerved him almost to the point of collapse.

And then, when his endurance seemed almost to have passed the human limit, the door opened and Lord Keyingham came into the room.

He stood in the doorway for a moment, regarding the strange scene with an expression in which inquiry and amusement were strangely mingled.

He had heard no word of what had transpired, and though he knew that something out of the ordinary was afoot, the position that presented itself to him at that moment was one that excited his curiosity to the utmost.

"Who is our friend in the chair?" he asked quietly, indicating the prisoner with a wave of the hand.

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Cocky, as spokesman for the party, went into a full explanation of all that had happened. As he listened Lord Keyingham's expression hardened and grew tense. Perhaps for the first time it was brought home to him that the long-drawn-out struggle between himself and Lord Barnston had entered into a new phase. Where before it had been a struggle for mere supremacy in sport, in which the opposition had not scrupled to abandon all ideas of sportsmanship and honour, it was now a battle to the death, with gloves off and weapons sharpened to kill.

The knowledge sobered him. As he regarded the slinking figure of the prisoner it was no longer with any sense of amusement. This man was a hired plug-ugly, for the sake of gain willing to descend to any foul play, not excluding even murder. He felt no mercy. It was a fight to a finish, in which one side or the other must go under.

But, much as he would have liked to commence immediate reprisals, it was not yet diplomatic to do so. In the meanwhile, the question arose—what was to be done with their prisoner?

Legal proceedings did not appeal to Lord Keyingham.

But it was certain that nothing short of physical torture would make the prisoner speak, and even then it would be extremely doubtful if he gave them any single portion of the truth. And, in any case, quite apart from the fact that not one of the four could bring themselves deliberately to inflict pain, what, after all, could the ruffian tell them that they did not know already?

It was certain they could not keep the man where he was. Neither Lord Barnston nor the Portuguese would lift a finger to effect a rescue.

They looked at each other questioningly.

"What's your name?" Cocky Withers asked the prisoner suddenly.

The question was shot out so unexpectedly that the answer came almost before the ruffian was aware that he had spoken.

"Jasper Bloomer," he said.

Cocky's face assumed for the moment an expression that almost might have been described as benevolent.

"Well, Jasper, m'lud," he said, as though thinking to make the best of a bad job, "I suppose, as you won't speak—and I blame no man for loyalty to his friends—we'll just have to send you back home."

The ruffian's face brightened, and then broke into a sneer. He thought that this was the easiest bunch of softies he'd struck for years.

Then suddenly Cocky turned alertly to Ben, at the same time tossing him a pair of handcuffs similar to the ones with which he had secured the prostrate heroes outside the boxing-hall, and a length of cord.

"Fasten him up, Ben!" he instructed quietly. "And tie his feet as well! Then stuff a handkerchief into his mouth to keep him quiet."

Waiting feverishly for the news that for some quite unknown but strangely disturbing reason had failed to arrive, Lord Barnston occupied the first part of that night in a restless pacing of his study.

At one o'clock, having persuaded himself that report of the night's proceedings would be furnished by post the following morning, he retired to bed.

But sleep did not come so easy.

One moment, at the thought that his sinister plans had miscarried, he would

break into a cold sweat of fear; the next he would be gloating that at last, after all these long years, his revenge was accomplished.

At three o'clock he fell asleep.

At three-thirty he was aroused to sudden and alarming alertness by a thundering at the hall door.

His heart beating like a trip-hammer he leaped from his bed. He could not wait for his servant to bring any message that had arrived.

He heard his valet groping his way down the stairs, listened to the unbolting of the heavy door. Then, instead of the low, murmur of conversation he had anticipated, came silence, a muffled exclamation, and then the padding of the man's footsteps as he remounted the stairs.

"A package, my lord," announced the man after a discreet tap.

"A what?" shouted Lord Barnston.

"A package," repeated Soames.

"What sort of a package, and who brought it?" demanded his mystified lordship.

"A big one, my lord," said Soames, "and the party who brought it didn't wait. It was just standing up-ended on the step."

"Bring it up here," instructed Lord Barnston shortly.

A brief silence followed, after which the man said:

"It's too large and heavy for one to lift, my lord."

"Then get one of the servants to help you!" shouted his master furiously. "Two men—ten men if you like! But do as you're told, and do it quickly!"

Five minutes passed. Then, with infinite straining and bumping he heard the toiling of some stupendously heavy case up the stairs. A moment later his bed-room door was burst open, and there staggered in the valet, Perks the butler, and two footmen. Between them they bore a massively constructed packing-case some seven feet long. It was nailed down, and further reinforced by heavy iron bands. At each end and at the top holes had been drilled.

"Open it!" instructed Lord Barnston shortly.

Hammers and crowbars were obtained at last, and the grunting footmen forced the iron bands apart and levered up the lid. Then they stood respectfully but curiously aside to allow his lordship to examine the contents.

For a moment it seemed as though the case contained nothing but straw. He dived his arms through the upper layers, however, and his hand rested on something which made him give vent to a quick cry of alarm.

Feverishly he thrust the straw aside. Then his face paled, for gazing up with eyes contracted by terror and cheeks white with fury was a human face.

"Jasper Bloomer!" yelled Lord Barnston.

Jasper Bloomer it was, gagged, bound, and handcuffed, but otherwise unhurt. And about his neck was a placard, upon which was printed in two-inch lettering:

"TO LORD BARNSTON, WITH MANY THANKS FOR A PLEASANT EVENING. FROM

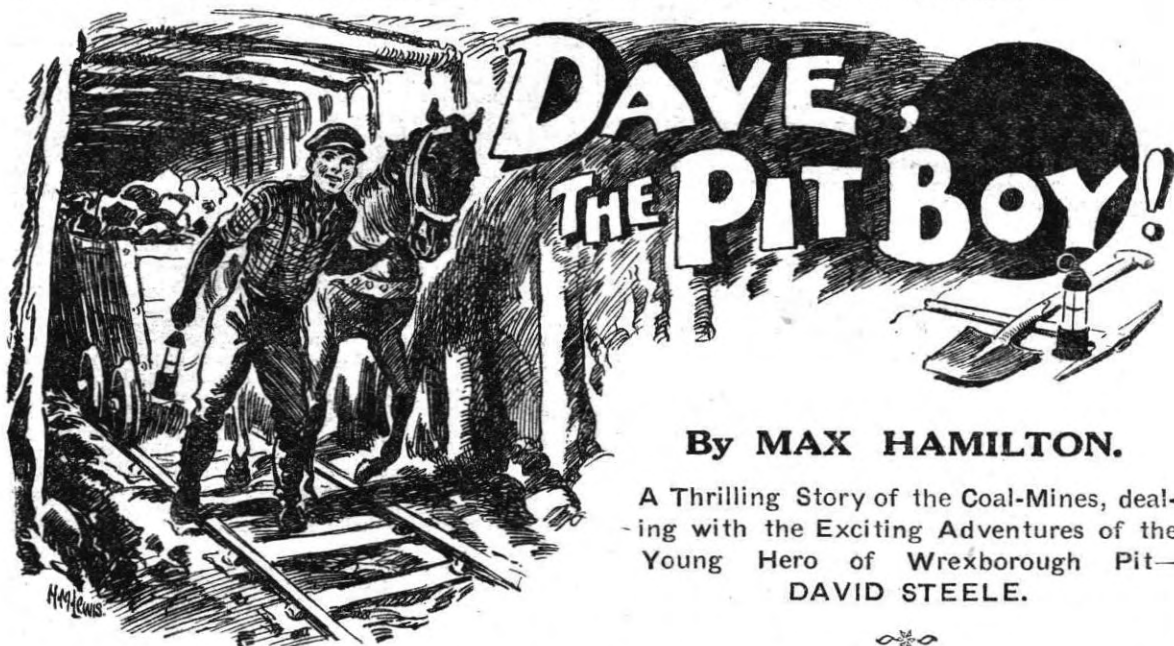
"KEYINGHAM."

It was checkmate, and Lord Barnston realised it!

THE END.

(Another rattling yarn of the ring next week, chums. "YORKSHIRE GRIT!" By Louis Alfriston. Don't miss it, whatever you do.)

George Scott, usurping his brother's place, proceeds to misuse the power and wealth the position gives him!



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 sets 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 had made many unsuccessful attempts to get the lad out of the way.

Later, by a strange coincidence, Steele gets wise to another plot to capture Scott. But he is unable to warn the mine-owner, for he is caught spying and made prisoner.

He effects an escape, however, and finds that Scott has been chained to a wall in one of the disused pits by his brother George, who has made an unavailing attempt to extort money from the wealthy mine-owner.

David brings a supply of food to the prisoner, and is attempting to get away again when he is startled by a sudden explosion, which wrecks the gallery and closes up the exit from the mine. A pitiful groan follows, and, on investigation, Dave finds Markham lying in an unconscious state with a deep gash in the head. The arch-villain, in trying to endanger the life of Dave, had been hoist with his own petard.

It was a terrible experience for Dave, and he is pondering over the situation when Markham, in a mad stupor, seizes him in a strong grasp, flings him across his shoulder, and carries him off.

"Now," says the miner, with an insane chuckle, "I'm going to take you to the place where I'm going to kill you!"

(Now read on.)

A Riot in Wrexborough!

WITH the energy of despair Steele put forth all his strength in a desperate effort to free himself. He might as well have sought to uproot an oak. The miner's arms held him like iron bands, and when he shrieked aloud for help a choking clutch was at his throat. When it was at length relaxed, he lay, panting and exhausted, in the madman's arms as the latter completed the ascent of the slope.

Suddenly Markham halted.

"That's where you're going," he said, with a sort of childish glee, nodding downwards as he spoke. "Down there! Look—look!"

Beneath him, and coming out of the very hill on which they stood, were visible in the darkness two lines of shining steel—the railway track, which at that point entered a tunnel some three-quarters of a mile in length.

It was probably some indistinct remembrance of his previous attempt to murder Scott on the railway line that had drawn the madman to it now, for he went on excitedly:

"Throw you down there? Yes, I'm going to throw you down. Then the train will come along, and no one will know—no one will know that we did it. Hush!"

He bent his head, listening keenly; and a low, muffled sound, growing gradually louder and louder, struck upon David's ears. He knew what it was—a train entering the tunnel at the other end.

The madman knew it, too.

"It's coming! It's coming!" he shrieked delightedly. "I'm just in time!"

In an agony of despair David clung to him, twisting his arms about his neck; but in vain. With a superhuman effort the madman tore his clinging hands away, and held the boy for an instant poised in the air above his head.

David heard the rattle below grow to a roar, heard a wild shriek of triumph from Markham, felt himself flung out and hurtle through the air, was conscious of a crash, and knew no more!

"'Tis a strange thing," said Mrs. Nichols, laying down her knitting, "for Dave Steele to have gone off like that, with never a word to us. Three weeks now since he went; and his poor mother writing every day to know if there's news of him. I can't understand it. He was always such a steady, trustworthy lad!"

It was not the first time that such a remark had crossed Mrs. Nichols' lips—in fact, scarcely a day passed without her saying something of the kind.

As she had said, it was now three weeks since David had left the house, with the statement that he might be rather late that evening; and since that time nothing had been seen or heard of him. No one seemed to have set eyes on him after he had crossed the threshold.

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For two or three days after his disappearance—coupled as it was with that of Markham—had created some excitement in Wrexborough. Inquiries were made, search-parties sent out on the moor—all to no avail. And then the matter was, if not forgotten, allowed to drop. Wrexborough, engaged in a fierce contest that involved its very livelihood, had no time to worry over the absence of David Steele.

For the owner of the Wrexborough mine was still deaf to reason and to mercy, and the town was filled with sullen, determined men, idle against their will—men who shook their fists when Scott's name was mentioned, and cursed him beneath their breath when they looked round on the homes in which, in too many cases, the pinch of poverty was already making itself felt. So bitter, in fact, was the feeling against him in the town that the colliery proprietor had been warned not to show himself there unprotected.

Another man might have shrunk back when he realised what hatred he was heaping upon himself, what misery he was causing to others; but George Scott was not built that way. He chuckled to himself over the sweetness of his revenge. Every day that the mine stood idle was so much of his brother's capital wasted, and made him, therefore, a poorer man. He would keep up the game until that brother was irretrievably ruined. And when that time came he himself would abscond with the few thousand pounds which he had been able to raise in William's name, and leave the latter to mend matters—if he could. That, he told himself, was a far more cunning revenge than the first mad impulse of jealous rage which had prompted him to attempt his brother's life.

And things were going smoothly with him. With David Steele—as he believed—dead at the bottom of the old shaft, the last obstacle to his success had been removed. He had at last got the better of the keen-witted boy who had so often got the better of him.

For he never doubted that David was dead. And as the days went by, and Markham did not return to tell him of the success of his evil mission, he imagined that his tool and confederate must have met with some accident, and shared the boy's fate. The conviction did not trouble him. Markham had done his work, and was no longer necessary to him. His disappearance was, in fact, a gain to Scott, since it saved him from paying the miner five hundred pounds he had promised him.

But he might not have been so easy in his mind if he could have heard some of the threats with which his name was coupled in Wrexborough town by men who were fast reaching the verge of despair.

The older and cooler-headed among the miners, indeed, counselled moderation; but some of the younger and more impetuous men were in that state of mind that precedes an outbreak of violence. And Scott did nothing to allay the smouldering discontent he had kindled; on the contrary, by word and action, he added fuel to the fire.

Such was the state of feeling in Wrexborough on the day fixed for a mass meeting of the locked-out miners—a meeting to which the more cautious among them looked forward with some uneasiness.

And that they had grounds for their fears was shown very soon after the meeting had commenced. It was held in the open air, on the football ground, for no building in Wrexborough could have contained the vast throng that had gathered together. Platforms had been roughly put together for the use of the speakers, some of whom were delegates from other districts, come to promise the men help and encouragement in their struggle against tyranny.

From the very first it was seen that a considerable number of the audience, if not the majority, were unfavourably disposed towards those who counselled patience. Nor was it to be wondered at, for only the day before an interview with Scott had appeared in one of the local papers, in which the colliery proprietor flatly declared his intention of "starving his men into their senses." Small wonder that these bitter and cruel words rankled.

And the general sense of the meeting was shown when Nathan Benn, after declaring that the men intended to stand out for their rights, added a word of warning to his comrades to see that they kept on the right side of the law.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a young man, who had been standing close to the platform, leapt upon it, and broke in upon his speech.

"What's the law to us?" he cried fiercely. "The law that gives him the right 'to starve us into our senses'!" And as he spoke, he snatched a copy of the "Wrexborough Chronicle" from his pocket.

The sight of the printed sheet had upon the meeting the effect of the red rag upon the proverbial bull. A hoarse shout of rage went up from nearly every man present. It was some moments before a coherent word was audible.

During the commotion which he had created, the young miner—it was Jim Stevens, the man who had threatened Scott on the day of the deputation—stood with his arms

folded, waiting for silence. Benn and one or two like-minded men tried to persuade him to go quietly away, and not to inflame the passions of the audience any further; but Stevens was one of the bulldog type that absolutely refuses to be turned from its purpose.

He waited until comparative silence reigned, and then, still holding up the "Wrexborough Chronicle," he went on: "He's going to starve us into our senses, is Billy Scott? And the law lets him do it. Lets him starve me, and not only me, but th' old mother I've got to keep out of my wages, and my sister what isn't strong enough to work. It's th' same wi' all o' you, mates. I'm not the only one what has womenfolk and others dependent on me. There's many of you that has five or six little ones as'll be askin' you for the bread you can't give 'em. But what does that matter? Seein' 'em cold and hungry'll bring us back to our senses, an' make us glad to fill Scott's pocket with our rightful wages!"

A wild yell interrupted the speaker, whose fierce, earnest words had reached their mark. Before it had subsided, the inspector in charge of the detachment of police who were present at the meeting was seen to be mounting the platform and approaching Stevens, and the yell changed into a growl that warned the official to be careful.

As a matter of fact, Inspector Rockliff was in a very difficult position. The small squad at his disposal was ridiculously inadequate for the task of controlling the riot which appeared likely to break out, and he had already sent a messenger off in hot haste to wire for reinforcements from Leeds and York. Actually, like everyone else in the district, he sympathised with the men; but it was his duty to preserve order, and he plainly saw that Stevens' words were inciting the meeting to lawlessness. Force, in the face of that huge concourse of miners, was an impossibility, and the inspector tried diplomacy.

"Come, Stevens," he said good-naturedly. "I think there's been enough of this. You don't want a charge of inciting a riot against you, do you? I should stand down for a bit, if I were you!"

But Stevens' blood was up. "Inciting a riot!" he cried fiercely. "And what have I said or done that's one half as bad as what's printed here, black on white, in the 'Chronicle'? Have I threatened to starve anyone? You go up to the Hall, Mr. Inspector, and put your bracelets on William Scott if you want to get hold of a man that incites a riot."

The concluding words were drowned in a roar of applause from all over the field, and threatening gestures warned the policeman that he had better retire while there was yet time.

"I warn you—" he began. But before he could complete the sentence a well-aimed stick had knocked his hat over his eyes.

It is astonishing how a little thing will cause a crowd to fire up and lose its self-control. The injury to the inspector, caused by whom no one knew, was the first blood drawn in the battle between master and man. In an instant the whole place was seething with movement and excitement.

Who started the cry it was impossible to say; but once it was started it was taken up by nine-tenths of the assembly.

"The Hall! We'll go to the Hall, and let Billy Scott see the men he's goin' to starve out!"

Inspector Rockliff, who, hatless and hustled, had struggled to the spot where his men were stationed, shrugged his shoulders as he heard the shout.

"That means mischief!" he muttered. His forebodings seemed likely to be justified. The miners had no intention of actually resorting to violence.

This the inspector knew well enough. He drew his men quietly off the ground, from which the whole concourse was now streaming through Wrexborough streets towards the other side of the town, where stood the house of the mine-owner.

The day had already reached its close, and darkness was rapidly descending, when the irregular tramp of feet, and the hum of many voices told the inmates of the Hall of the approach of the army of miners.

The Attack on the Hall!

THAT warning, however, was not the first one George Scott had received.

As soon as the miners were fairly on their way, the inspector had despatched one of his men to the Hall. Stripping off his cumbersome coat, the policeman, a strapping, long-legged fellow, had managed to outrun the rioters, even though obliged to make a detour to avoid them; and, panting and breathless in his shirt-sleeves, he had burst into Scott's presence.

In a few hurried words he gasped out his message. George Scott turned livid.

He was one of those mean-minded men who despise those in a lower position than themselves. He had rather enjoyed making his power felt upon those beneath him, and in his contempt for them it had never entered his reckoning that he was stirring up an actual peril for himself.

"What am I to do?" he exclaimed, wringing his hands. "Where is the inspector? Isn't he coming?"

"T'others 'll be here first," replied the young policeman, with difficulty suppressing his contempt, "and Inspector Rockloft told me to say, sir, that you mustn't rely on him for help. He can't do nothing against the whole town till reinforcements come, and it ain't likely they can get here for two or three hours at the soonest."

"Then what am I to do?" repeated Scott, his voice rising nearly to a scream. "Is he going to let them murder me?"

"They don't mean to murder you, bless you!" returned the constable stolidly, "though I'm not saying they wouldn't handle you a bit roughly if they got hold of you. The inspector, he says as how you'd better speak to 'em fair, and show 'em you're not afraid of 'em. Our chaps in these parts like a man as is a man, even when they're at loggerheads with him."

The constable did not mean to be sarcastic; but George Scott, at that moment, certainly did not look capable of showing the miners that he was not afraid of them. His teeth chattered, and his knees shook beneath him.

"It's that there interview in the 'Chronicle' what's done it," continued the policeman. "It's made 'em fair mad; and, beggin' your pardon, sir, and speakin', so to say, in a private capacity, it was enough to make 'em mad. You'd better smooth it over, and say the reporter chap took your statements down wrong. My advice is, go out to meet 'em cool and steady like; but if you won't do that, I should put up the ground-floor shutters. Whatever you do, the inspector says, don't you give 'em no excuse to start violence, or he don't know where it'll end."

Beside himself with fear, Scott darted to the library window.

"I won't stay here to be murdered!" he cried. "I'll be off before they come, and place myself under the inspector's protection. He'll be obliged to defend me then!"

He was unfastening the catch as he spoke, when the constable caught his arm.

"Listen!" he said significantly.

A hoarse murmur, growing momentarily louder and louder, came through the dusk.

"They're pretty well at the gate now," he said, "and no doubt they are on the look-out for you. If they catch you creeping away in the dark—well, they may be a bit rough."

Again Scott wrung his hands.

"Meet 'em like a man, sir," urged the constable once more. "It'll be the best policy."

But the man he addressed was in no condition to follow his advice. Once convinced that his retreat was indeed cut off, he sank helplessly into a chair, only to start from it a moment later with a cry of:

"The doors—the shutters! Fasten them! Quick! For mercy's sake!"

He rushed to the bell, and rang peal after peal. His evident fears communicated themselves to the servants, and lent wings to their efforts to make the house secure against the advent of the rioters; so that by the time the crowd of pitmen began to pour down the drive towards the building, every door and window on the ground-floor was securely bolted and shuttered.

On came the throng, and the sound of its sullen murmur, growing louder and louder, was enough to terrify a stouter heart than that in the possession of George Scott, who, crouching down by a first-floor window, his eye on a level with the sill, surveyed the men whom he had madly and wickedly driven to desperation.

Many of the pitmen had furnished themselves with lanterns and torches, and, in the light from these, their haggard, angry faces were seen threateningly uplifted towards the house.

For a minute or two the crowd surged and swayed around the building, and then young Stevens, elbowing his way to the front, marched coolly up to the door and inflicted a thundering knock upon it.

There was no answer, except a faint scream from one of the group of maids huddled together upon the stairs.

Again the knock was repeated, louder and longer than before.

"That's right!" shouted a voice in the crowd. "Rattle the knocker, Jim! Let the gentleman know as how we've come to call!"

"Seems as he's hard o' hearing!" jeered someone else, as Stevens laid his hand on the knocker for the third time.

As he did so, however, a window on the first-floor was thrown open. It was that at which George Scott had been crouching; but it was not George Scott who now showed himself to the crowd. It was Horrocks, the young policeman who, after vainly attempting to make the master of the house

pluck up courage to address the men, had thought it wisest to try and pacify them himself.

"Come, now," he said, "what's all this about? You chaps had better go quietly home."

"Had we?" was the shouted reply. "We've come here to see Billy Scott, and we're not going away till we have seen him. You can tell him that from us."

"You hear, sir?" said Horrocks contemptuously, turning to Scott, who had slunk away from the window. "You'd better show yourself; they'll think the more of you for it."

But Scott shook his head. He was trembling like a man with the ague, and devoutly wishing he had never started upon an enterprise which threatened to end so disastrously for himself. He would have given worlds now to be able to confess the truth. But to do so would not help him at



• By a dexterous shove between the shoulders, Horrocks propelled the reluctant Scott to the window into full view of the crowd.

the moment—the truth would rather tend to increase the fury of the pitmen against him.

As he stood, pale and shrinking, the jeering voices of the crowd floated up to him through the open window.

"Seems as 'ow Mr. Scott goes to bed early. You go and wake 'im up, Horrocks!"

"Gone to bed? No, not he! Hidin' under it, most likely!"

"Ay, he daren't face us—daren't face the men he ain't afeard to starve!"

There was a fierce roar, and then Stevens' voice was heard calling:

"Ay, but he shall, though—he shall!"

"We'll see 'un, if we fetch 'un out ourselves!"

"If we pull down the house to get at 'un!"

"For Heaven's sake, sir," said Horrocks, seizing the reluctant Scott, and dragging him towards the window, "show yourself, or they'll be tearing the walls down!"

And by sheer strength he forced the wretched man to the window, by a dexterous shove between the shoulders propelling him into the view of the crowd.

Immediately a mighty hoot went up—a storm of hisses and groans! It only ceased when Stevens, springing in front of the others, signed that he wished to speak.

"Mr. Scott," he said, "we're come to see you—the men you're going to starve—the men whose wives and kiddies and mothers you're going to starve. And we want to hear what you've got to say to us!"

Scott's lips moved, but no sound came from them. He was actually too terrified to turn tail—fear held him rooted to the spot. The men below gazed at his trembling figure in amazement; never, till that moment, had they suspected William Scott of actual cowardice. Till now, abuse and

jeer at him as they might, not one of them had ever doubted his personal courage.

The constable was right. Rough as many of the men were, they knew and respected pluck when they saw it, and had Scott met them boldly, not one of them would have raised a finger against him; but for a coward they had contempt as well as hatred.

"He's nothing but a half-bred cur, after all!" came in a boy's scornful voice; and, at the same instant, from the edge of the crowd a stone was flung at the lighted window—flung more as a mark of contempt than with intent to inflict injury.

The stone missed Scott; but—certainly against the wish of the thrower—it struck the constable full in the forehead, with such force as to bring him like a log to the floor.

There was a cry from the crowd as they realised that an innocent man had been injured; and had Scott known how to take advantage of the incident, he could have averted what followed.

But, in his mad panic, he imagined that an organised attack was beginning, and that he himself would be the next victim. Disregarding the policeman's warning against violence, he had slipped into his pocket a loaded revolver; this, in his unreasoning terror, he now snatched forth and fired wildly and blindly at the mob.

It was the most foolish thing he could have done. It roused the anger of the miners to fever heat.

Two out of the six shots took effect. One bullet lodged in Stevens' shoulder, and another gashed the cheek of a boy. Neither of the wounds were serious; but the firing of the shots was like setting a match to gunpowder. In an instant all the pent-up passion of the last few weeks burst into flame, and a shout for vengeance broke forth as the men hurled themselves against the locked door.

Sticks, stones, whatever they could lay hands on, hurtled through the air at the window, from which Scott had withdrawn himself only just in time.

Panting and trembling, he managed to close the shutters, listening all the time to the blows which were rained upon the door below—blows which sounded as if they must break it in each moment.

Bitterly now did he regret the mad, cowardly impulse which had prompted him to empty his revolver into the crowd.

His fear was all for himself; he scarcely heard the screams of the frightened servants as he crouched on the floor beside the senseless form of the young policeman.

The thundering at the door, the hoarse yells of the enraged miners, continued. Already—since it must be hours yet before help could come—he saw himself at the mercy of the rioters.

He wrung his hands and groaned; then, in a frenzy of despair, seized Horrocks by the shoulder, and tried, by shaking him, to rouse him from his stupor, in the frantic hope that the constable might be able to protect him. But Horrocks lay white and still, deaf to his agonised appeals, and the danger grew nearer every instant.

Suddenly the wretched man started and listened intently. Footsteps were tearing along the passage—footsteps which his terrified fancy magnified a hundredfold.

The rioters had succeeded in breaking their way in—they were coming! Frozen with fear, he stared at the door.

It was flung wide open, and a figure, pale, thin, and haggard, appeared on the threshold. As it did so, George Scott leaped to his feet with outstretched hands, believing that the face he looked upon was that of no living being.

"David Steele!" he shrieked. "David Steele, come back from the dead!"

David's Return!

IT was David Steele indeed who stood before the astonished eyes of the man who had believed him dead. Pale and thin as he was, it was small wonder that his would-be murderer believed him one risen from the grave.

And, indeed, his escape from death had been a miraculous one. Only an infinitesimal fraction of time had saved him from death on the night when Markham, in a state of madness, had hurled him over the mouth of the tunnel. Had he fallen a few seconds sooner he would have been thrown on to the line exactly in the path of the heavy goods-train; but, as it was, the engine and the first two trucks had already emerged from the tunnel, and the boy alighted in the middle of the tarpaulin covering the third.

Neither engine-driver nor stoker saw him fall, and the goods-train continued on its way through the darkness of the night, bearing with it a stunned and senseless passenger.

Not until next morning, when the train was more than a hundred miles from Wrexborough, was the boy discovered; and then, as the engine, in response to an adverse signal, came to a standstill, the stoker caught sight of what looked like a crumpled-up heap of clothes lying on one of the trucks—a heap which, on closer examination, proved to be a human figure.

How the lad had got there was, of course, an utter mystery to those in charge of the train—a mystery in which David was unable to aid them in clearing up. For the boy had not yet recovered his senses, and when he was promptly conveyed to the nearest hospital, his case was diagnosed by the doctors as concussion of the brain.

Thus, senseless and amongst strangers ignorant of his identity, he passed the next few days, dimly conscious at intervals, the rest of the time sunk in sleep or in stupor. It was not until a fortnight after he had been brought to the hospital that he woke up to actual comprehension of his surroundings, and remembrance of what had brought him to them.

His impatience to get back to Wrexborough was increased by the sight of a paper, giving a pessimistic account of the gloomy outlook in that town, and the want and misery that were already descending upon it. He was in a fever of anxiety to leave the hospital, and the doctors, seeing that there was something weighing on his mind—something that retarded his recovery as long as he remained there—allowed him to leave earlier than he would otherwise have done.

He had had a few shillings in his pocket at the time of his meeting with Markham, and this was handed back to him by the hospital authorities, and proved just sufficient to pay the railway fare to Wrexborough.

By the time he had got out of the station there he had quite determined on his course of action—namely, to go straight to George Scott and demand his brother's release, under pain of being instantly denounced and handed over to the police. The time for concealment had passed.

But when he left the station and stepped out into the street with eager, though tired, footsteps, he found that something abnormal was afoot in Wrexborough. The streets were filled with anxious, excited women, talking eagerly together; but there was hardly a man to be seen in the miners' quarter of the town. And even Mrs. Nichols' surprise at seeing him as he entered the door, was not nearly so absorbing as it would have been had she not been all agog with the news that the miners had marched in force on the Hall, and that it was said that the soldiers from Roxley Barracks were on their way to defend Mr. Scott against them.

The rumour had set Mrs. Nichols into a tremor, for, lame and stiff as he was, her Tom had insisted on attending the afternoon's meeting, and she had no doubt that he was among the throng around the door.

It may be said that David did not delay long before setting out in the same direction, and he reached the outskirts of the crowd at the moment that George Scott emptied his revolver into its front ranks.

The fierce yell of fury that followed the action told him that it was a suicidal one—that, could the miners lay hands upon Scott in their present frame of mind, his chance of escaping alive and uninjured would be but a poor one.

For the man himself David felt not the slightest pity. It would serve him right to suffer even the worst that could be inflicted by the men whom he had so shamefully wronged; but there flashed through his mind the thought that if George Scott were killed, not only would the reckless men who killed him have to suffer for the crime, but he would die, in all probability, leaving the mystery of his brother's disappearance unsolved.

The haunting thought that William Scott was dead had been with David ever since he had begun to recover from his illness, and he had hurried back to Wrexborough with the one desire to find out whether or no this was the case, and determined, if the worst happened, that the murderer should not escape justice.

No one noticed him as he joined the excited crowd. All were too intent on breaking into the house that held their enemy to see that the vanished David Steele had appeared among them again.

"Have 'un out! Have 'un out!" was the shout that was heard on all sides. "Break in the doors!"

"Ay, an' not the doors only! We'll pull down the place! We'll make a blaze for the countryside to see!"

The men's blood was up now, and there was no knowing to what lengths they might go. David would have stopped them if he could. He knew that their violence would only recoil on their own heads. But how was it to be done? He could hardly have made himself heard in that maddened, shouting crowd; and if he had been heard, no one would have listened to or believed him.

If only he could get inside the house! Coward as George Scott was, and with the fear of death staring him in the face, David did not doubt that it would be easy to wring the confession of what he had done to his brother from him.

Suddenly an idea struck him.

On his first arrival in Wrexborough he had passed two days at the Hall, and knew it well. He remembered that just outside, and almost brushing the window of the room in which he had slept, at the back of the house, were the branches of a huge pear-tree, and that at the time it had struck him that it would be feasible to climb up and effect an entrance by its means.

Why should he not do so now?

It took him some time to struggle through the throng that pressed and surged around the door, and make his way to the back of the house. Here the crowd was far thinner, and the lights so much fewer that he was able to climb up into the branches of the tree unobserved.

They creaked beneath his weight as he neared the window; but though more than once he thought they were about to snap, he managed to swing himself on to the sill in safety. Fortunately for his purpose, the catch of the window was unfastened. He raised the sash easily, and slipped into the room.

No one observed him as he entered the passage; the servants were all downstairs, and he met nobody as he hurried towards the room in which he knew George Scott to be.

As he burst the door open he saw Horrocks lying in a huddled-up heap on the floor, and the man he came to seek—George Scott—started up with a cry of horror, believing that it was a ghost that stood before him.

The boy sprang across the room and caught him by the arm.

"No," he said. "I've not come back from the dead—small thanks to you, though! I've come back alive, and I mean to have the truth from you, George Scott! What have you done with your brother?"

Still trembling with the shock he had sustained, George Scott leaned back against the wall. His white lip quivered, but no sound came from them.

A horrible fear shot through David's heart.

"He is dead!" he cried hoarsely. "And you have killed him! Then, if these men don't tear you in pieces first, you shall swing for it! I swear you shall, you murderer!"

And as he stood, with blazing eyes, the man he addressed seemed literally to cower before him.

"You have killed him," repeated David passionately; "but you shall pay for it! In five minutes the door will be broken in, and you will be paid. In five minutes—no; in less than that, for I'll go and open the door to them myself, and let them know the scoundrel that you are!"

He turned, and was about to dash across the room, when Scott seized his arm in a frenzy of despair. The terror that had previously deprived him of speech now lent him words.

"No, no!" he almost screamed. "He is alive! I swear it! I swear it to you on my bended knees!" And he actually sank upon his knees. "Help me to keep those men out, help to save me, for mercy's sake, and I will put everything right! I will give myself up to the police! I will confess everything!"

"He is alive?" exclaimed David. "Alive and unharmed?"

"Alive and unharmed," Scott repeated. And then, while a sudden flash of hope lit up his terrified eyes: "You—you got in without the others? There must be some way you know. Show it to me! Help me to get out of this, and I will give you my word of honour I will go straight to the police and give myself up!"

The man meant what he said at the moment. Fear of death led him to look upon the certainty of imprisonment as a happy alternative.

"For my brother's sake!" he pleaded, as David hesitated. "For the sake of the men, save me from them! Save me—save me!" he repeated frantically. "Show me how to escape! In another moment it will be too late!"

He spoke the truth on that point. Loud shouts of triumph from below heralded the approaching fall of the door.

It was of the men David thought in deciding—against his own instincts of contempt and hatred—to save the wretched creature who pleaded so frantically for life, if he could.

It might be possible for George Scott to escape their vengeance by the way he himself had entered the house. At any rate, he could try. But David knew his man too well by this time to trust to his word.



Standing in front of Scott and facing the rioters, David Steele held a levelled revolver in his hand.

It did not take him long to make up his mind.

"I will show you a way out—a way by which you may be able to save yourself," he said, "on one condition."

"And that is? Quick—quick!"

There was a writing-table in the room. David pointed to it.

"That you sit down and write what I dictate."

The wretched man knew that his life was in the boy's hands, and seated himself obediently.

"Quick—quick!" he gasped again.

"I, George Scott," dictated David, "confess that during the last few weeks I have impersonated my brother William, and I solemnly promise, should I escape from this house with my life, to immediately give myself up to the police."

George Scott's pen tore over the paper. He had one ear on David's words, the other on the sounds from the door.

"Now sign it."

The signature was added at a lightning pace.

"And give it to me."

The paper was thrust into David's pocket. The lad turned to the door.

"Come!" he said.

But just as he stepped into the passage, with Scott on his heels, he halted.

From the hall came the sound of splintering wood, of yells of triumph, followed by the tread of eager feet. The door had given way beneath the blows showered upon it. The rioters were rushing up the staircase, and the way of retreat was cut off.

David Sides with his Enemy!

INSTINCTIVELY Scott rushed back into the room whence he had just issued.

"I'm lost!" he exclaimed wildly. "I'm lost! They're coming, and I'm a dead man!"

He had not even the courage of despair—that fictitious courage which sometimes makes seeming heroes of cowards.

It was well for him that David was not only cooler-headed, but keener-witted.

He had George Scott's confession in his pocket, and he had undertaken to save him if he could. A sense of honour towards the wretched creature, as well as the desire to save his mates from crime, bade him do his best to aid him.

His eyes fell upon the revolver, which Scott, after discharging from the window, had laid upon the table.

"It's not loaded!" moaned its owner, as the boy seized it.

"So much the better," returned David coolly. "I don't want to fire on them. I only want them to think I can if I've a mind to."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the door was flung open, and the foremost of the rioters appeared on the threshold, only to halt suddenly at the sight that met their eyes; for David Steele, standing in front of Scott, held a levelled and, as they naturally believed, a loaded revolver in his hand.

There was a pause of astonishment as the boy was

recognised. Then Stevens, who, in spite of his injury, still headed the rioters, said angrily:

"David Steele, how on earth did you get here? And what are you doing, you young fool? Drop that revolver! You don't think we want to hurt you, do you?"

"I know you don't," replied David steadily. "But I am not going to take my finger off the trigger till I am sure you aren't going to do what you will be sorry for later on."

"You mean," snarled Stevens furiously, "that you are standing up for that?" And he pointed contemptuously at the shrinking figure of Scott.

"That is what I mean," repeated David quietly. "It'll be better for you all not to have blood on your hands, and you'll thank me for keeping you from it when you know the truth."

The last words were drowned in angry cries from the men who were crowding along the passage, and who, as they learned the reason for the delay, broke into shouts to their foremost comrades to "Down with the young 'un, and have Billy Scott out!"

Those in the front rank, however, were not in a great hurry to brave the chance of a shot at short range, and, angry as they were at the unexpected check, they hesitated to make a move forward.

David faced the threatening glances calmly. It was a game of bluff that he was playing—a game that a sudden rush on the part of the miners might at any moment bring to a disastrous close.

"Run at 'im all together!" yelled a voice from a safe distance outside the door.

David recognised the voice. It was the not very musical one of his old enemy, Skirling, the "Wrexborough Terror."

"You start the rush, Job," he called out. "Come on, and give the others a lead!"

(Will David succeed in holding back the angry mob? Next week's great instalment will be more thrilling than ever, so don't miss it.)

"LEVISON MINOR'S PLIGHT!"

(Continued from page 17.)

am convinced that the banknote has been stolen, and is now in your brother's possession."

"Mr. Selby!" groaned Frank.

"Silence! I shall now go to Dr. Holmes to report the matter," said Mr. Selby. "You know what the result will be, Levison minor! For the last time, before I go to the Head, will you return me the banknote?"

"I can't, sir! I—"

"Enough!"

Mr. Selby, with a black brow, swept from the study. Frank gave his brother a haggard look.

"Ernie!" he whispered. "Ernie! You—you believe me—for mercy's sake, Ernie, say that you believe me!"—He caught his brother by the arm, as Levison of the Fourth did not speak. "Ernie!"

"Yes," breathed Levison. "Yes, kid, I—I believe you! Yes—yes. But what will the whole school say?"

"I—I don't care, so long as you believe I'm not a thief," said Frank, with a white face.

"I believe you!" muttered Levison.

He left the study with his brother, his brows contracted. He believed Frank—he was determined to believe him.

And yet—and yet—

THE END.

(The whole affair seemed a mystery to Ernest Levison. His young brother was branded as a thief while he himself was powerless to help him! Be sure you read the next of this splendid series of stories entitled: LEVISON'S SACRIFICE! by Martin Clifford.)



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