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"SAVING THE HEAD!" A Dramatic School Story of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

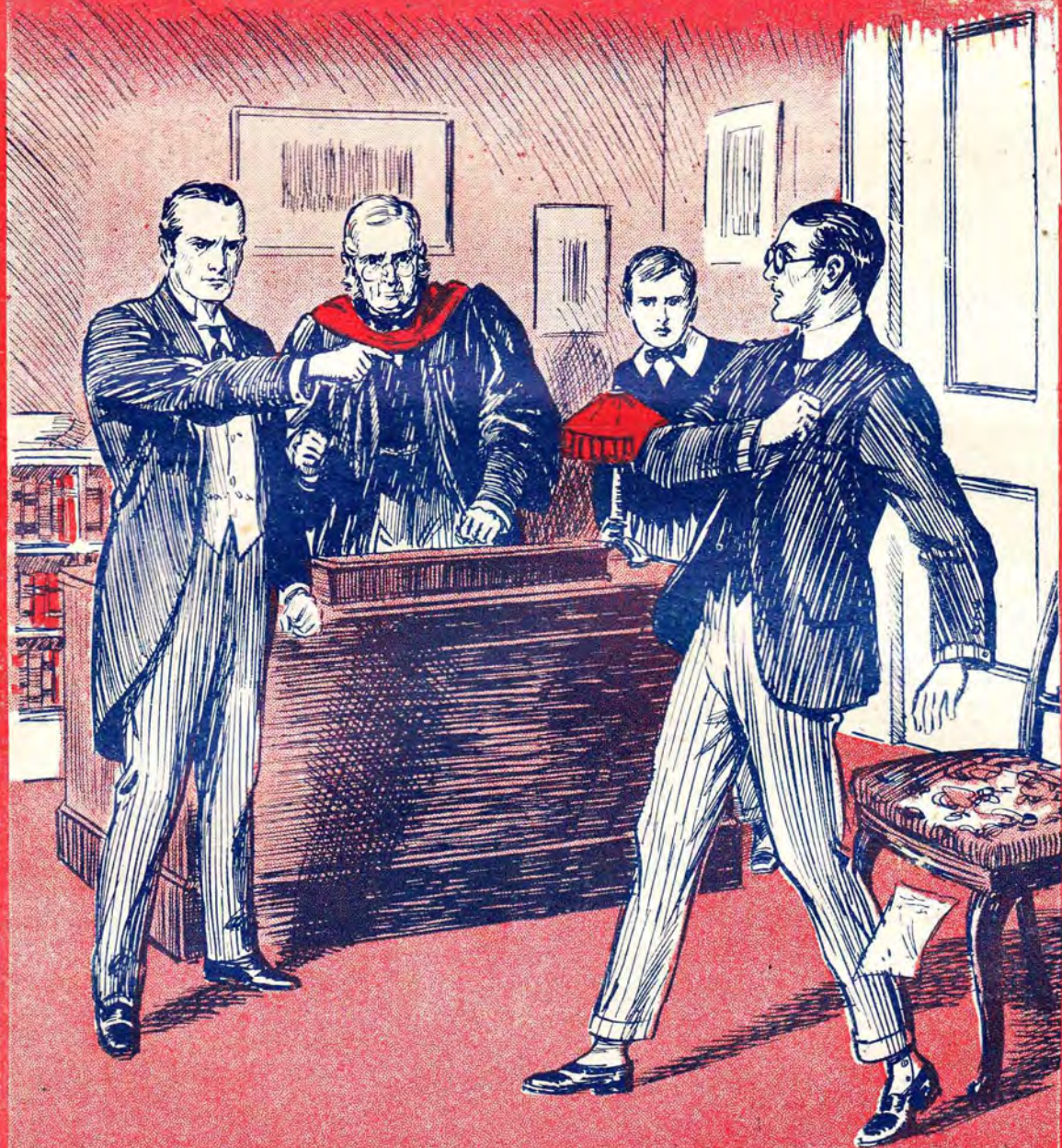
The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



SHOWING UP THE SWINDLER!

"I am afraid I am intruding, Dr. Holmes," said Mr. Lumley-Lumley dramatically, "but before you burn your fingers, let me warn you against that man—he's a swindler!"

(A tense moment from the grand school story of St. Jim's, inside.)

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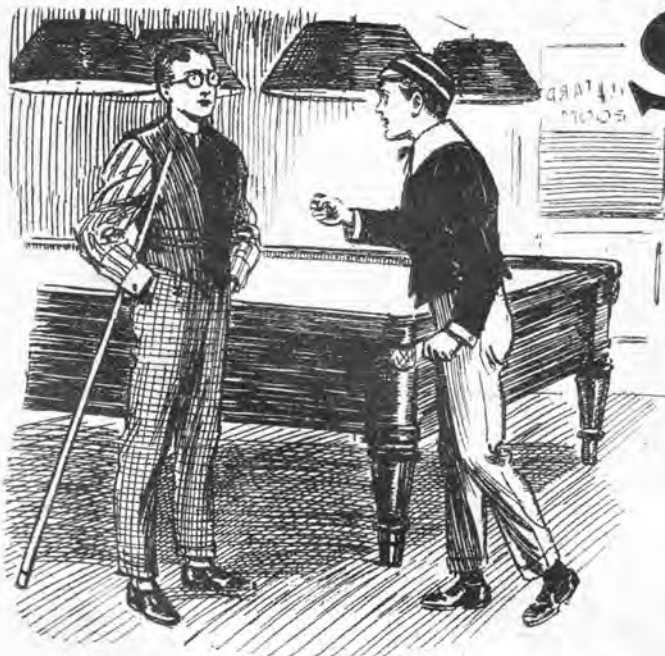
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SAVING THE HEAD!

A Magnificent Long Complete
School Story of Lumley-Lumley
and the Chums of St. Jim's.

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy's New Friend!

"ARE you jolly well coming, or aren't you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then come!" shouted Jack Blake of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's from the doorway of the most fashionable outfitter's shop for gentlemen Wayland could boast of. "We shall miss the train if you don't buck up!"

"Oh, there's plenty of time!"

"Duffer, there isn't! We've only got five minutes as it is, and Tom Merry and the others must be at the station by now. For goodness' sake come along, Gussy!"

Jack Blake spoke almost angrily, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy showed no signs of bursting into speed. In fact, the swell of the School House at St. Jim's presented exactly the opposite picture to rapid motion at that moment, for he was leaning elegantly against the counter, holding a necktie up to the light.

In front of him and on each side there were other neckties, heaps of them, and time did not appear to be troubling Arthur Augustus at all at that moment.

On the contrary, he appeared perfectly unruffled and comfortably at peace with the world. He even invited the exasperated Jack Blake to join him in the difficult task of making a purchase of neckwear.

"Pway don't stand wight out there in the doorway, deah boy!" he urged. "Just come and look at this gween tie. As a wule, I am not in favour of gween ties; but this is such a toppin' shade—"

"Rats to it!"

"Blake—"

"And rats to you!" shouted Jack Blake. "I'm going!"

"No, weally—"

"Yes, really," answered the chief of Study No. 6. "I'm not going to miss the train if you are. Good-bye!"

At that Arthur Augustus did show some slight alarm. Enough to cause him to put down the tempting green tie and saunter to the shop door. From there he could see Jack Blake quite easily.

But Jack Blake was running remarkably fast, and at the same moment the town-hall clock struck. In sudden and very real alarm, the swell of St. Jim's screwed his celebrated monocle in his eye.

"Gweat Scott, that clock must be w'ong!" he gasped. "I ntially wufese to believe the time is four o'clock. Oh, my hat, my own tickah agwees, though! Blake, wait for me!"

But the chief of Study No. 6 was quite two hundred yards away by then, going at a great pace. Just in front of him were Herries and Digby, and not very far ahead of those two Fourth-Formers could be seen Tom Merry, Monty Lowthor, and Manners of the Shell.

Without any further hesitation the swell of St. Jim's broke into a violent sprint, but he had scarcely reached the cinema

by the time Jack Blake was wheeling round into the station approach. That made Arthur Augustus sprint harder than ever, and he really did the distance in excellent time.

All the same, it must have been desperately close upon four-five when he reached the approach to the station, then fresh hope came to him. He had glimpsed another St. Jim's junior, and that junior was showing no signs of hurry at all.

To be exactly correct, he was stationary, leaning against a low wall just opposite the Station Hotel. Panting for breath, Arthur Augustus appealed to him for information.

"Is there plenty of time, aftah all, Lumlay-Lumlay?"

"Eh?" grinned Jerrold Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth Form. "Time? What for?"

"To catch the twain, deah boy."

Lumley-Lumley chuckled loudly.

"Oh, heaps, Gussy!" he shouted as the Fourth-Former raced past. "You can't jolly well miss it, because you've got twenty-four hours if you want the four-five! This afternoon's old slow and dirty left three minutes ago!"

But Arthur Augustus did not hear all that. All that was clear to him was that he had cut matters a trifle fine as he dashed through the station booking-hall.

Then he raced up the steps for the bridge, dashed down the other flight, and reached the right platform. But he reached it just about four minutes after the train had departed.

"Oh, gweat Scott, how wotten!" he gasped, sitting down wearily on the nearest seat. "Weally, I considah Blake behaved in a most unfriendly manuah in leavin' me. I'm uttably stwanded!"

There was no doubt about that, of course, but exactly how Jack Blake was to blame it was difficult to see. Still, it really was rather boring for Arthur Augustus, for the next train was not due to depart until six o'clock.

"And that's always dweadfully cowed!" moaned the Fourth-Former. "Bai Jove, I can't wait two wotten hours doin' nothin'! I shall miss call-ovah, too!"

Certainly that was not a very pleasant prospect, and the only alternative Arthur Augustus could think of was to have a second tea. He brightened up at that brain-wave, then thought of Lumley-Lumley. That completed the brightening process, for Arthur Augustus rather liked the hard-headed, outspoken junior from New York.

"A wippin' chap, weally," flashed through Gussy's massive brain. "Wondah if he's still leanin' against that wall?"

Quickening his stride, Arthur Augustus hurried from the station and glimpsed Lumley-Lumley at once. As a matter of fact, the millionaire's son was still in exactly the same position, leaning against the wall facing the front door of the Station Hotel.

Quite eagerly Arthur Augustus sauntered up.

"Bai Jove, I'm glad you haven't gone, deah boy!"

"Eh? Oh, it's you back again, is it?" grinned Lumley-

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Lumley. "Didn't feel like sprinting after the train, I suppose? Hard luck, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, it's wathah a bore; but now that you are here we can have a second tea, deah boy."

"Eh?"

"Just a light snack, you know."

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"Sorry, Gussy, can't be done!" he said evenly. "I'm waiting for someone. Leastways, I thought I recognised an old pal going into that hotel just now."

"Any pal of yours, deah boy, is a pal of mine."

"What's that?"

"I mean, bring your pal to tea as well," said Arthur Augustus. "You can introduce me, and we can have a wippin' time. Or perhaps it is someone I know already?"

"No, you don't know him."

"One of the new chaps at Wylcombe Gwammah School vewy likely?"

"Oh, my hat, no!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "There's nothing of the Grammar School touch about my friend from New York. If it comes to that, I don't suppose Flash Ike went to any school."

Arthur Augustus gasped audibly.

"Flash—Flash Ike?"

"Yes, that's his name," nodded Lumley-Lumley. "Knew him awfully well in the old days when I was hanging about in the Bowery quarter of New York, and my dad was looking for a way to make a fortune."

"Quite—quite an old pal, I gathah?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Lumley-Lumley. "Got his good points has Flash Ike, only some people wouldn't think so. Anyway, he had before he went to chokey."

"W-what!"

"Chokey," grinned Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. "Prison, you know. Don't know what it was for, but he went there all right. Ah, here he comes! Yes, by jingo, it is Flash Ike!"

In amazement not unmixed with horror, Arthur Augustus felt for his monocle and stared vaguely across the road. Coming jauntily out of the Station Hotel was a tall, stylishly dressed man with a distinctly prosperous air about him. Just the sort of gentleman Arthur Augustus would have imagined a stockbroker to look like.

And the man was crossing the road, apparently heading straight for the two juniors. Arthur Augustus gasped again, only louder this time.

"Bai Jove, you can't weally mean—"

"That that is Flash Ike?" whispered back Lumley-Lumley. "Yes, I do. It's Flash Ike all serene, only I don't suppose he calls himself that here in Wayland. I'll introduce you, Gussy, as you're so keen."

"Gweat Scott!" gulped the swell of St. Jim's, his monocle falling from his eye of its own accord. "I—I— Weally, Lumley-Lumley— Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus' mild protests tailed away into silence, for Flash Ike had reached the pavement. He was standing right in front of the two juniors, staring hard at Lumley-Lumley.

Lumley-Lumley laughed easily.

CHAPTER 2.

Flash Ike!

FLASH IKE, quite good-looking, and remarkably well-dressed, stared at Lumley-Lumley. Lumley-Lumley stared back. Then Flash Ike spoke up, in a cheery, pleasant voice.

"Gee, I know you, youngster!"

"Do you?" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "That's funny, seeing I'm not a Wayland chap. However, carry on!"

Flash Ike stared still more intently. He was obviously intrigued, and presently spoke again.

"Oh, I haven't met you before in Wayland, kid, but I have met you somewhere—"

"Really," commented Lumley-Lumley. "Not in New York by any chance—the Bowery quarter, I mean?"

At that Flash Ike streaked out his right hand.

"By jiminy, you are Lumley!" he rapped. "Son of old Jerrold. Boy, this is a wonderful meeting!"

"Bit on the curious side—yes," admitted the St. Jim's Fourth-Former. "Sort of taking a rest cure in Wayland, Flash Ike?"

"Shush!" urged the American. "My name's Oswald Searle!"

"Is it?"

"You bet!" laughed the American. "I've turned over a fresh leaf, I have. You can reckon Flash Ike died some time ago and Oswald Searle was born. But, say, laddies, what about a spot of tea, eh? I'll pay piper. Jest you introduce me to your pal, and it's toasted teacakes for three with doughnuts to follow."

"Just as you like," said Lumley-Lumley, with a grin.

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"D'Arcy, old top, I think you wanted to meet Flash Ike—"

"Bai—bai Jove—"

"I mean Mr. Oswald Searle."

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Delighted, deah boy!"

Somewhat overcome, the swell of the School House of St. Jim's shook hands with the American, and at once the three of them crossed the road to the Station Cafe. There Flash Ike, alias Mr. Oswald Searle, ordered a really tip-top tea, and Arthur Augustus had to admit that the man had a charming personality.

In fact, Flash Ike was right at the top of his form.

"My dear old Lumley," he exclaimed over the tea-table. "I trust sincerely that you have forgotten the old days. I hope you realise that a man may get into trouble early on in life and yet make good?"

"Huh!" grunted Lumley-Lumley.

"Yes, but that isn't very convincing," protested Flash Ike. He turned towards Arthur Augustus. "I am sure your friend agrees with me?"

"Bai Jove, yaas—"

"You agree that a man's past can be obliterated by subsequent good conduct—"

"Gweat Scott! Wathah!"

"Then put it there, sir!" said Flash Ike, thrusting out a hand, the fingers of which were well smothered with rings.

"I wish, sir, there were more like you in the world."

"Oh, cut that part out!" snapped Lumley-Lumley.

"My dear Jerrold!"

"Rats!"

Flash Ike shrugged his shoulders, but his quite good-looking face showed no sign of anger. Nothing, in fact, but a hurt sort of expression.

"All through life it is like this," he said sadly. "A man makes a slip early on, and the shame of that disgraceful action hangs to him. Even his own friends refuse to give him another chance."

"Oh, drop that rot, Flash Ike!" broke in Lumley-Lumley.

"My dear Jerrold—"

"And that part, too!" snapped the St. Jim's junior. "I'm not a fool!"

Flash Ike shrugged his shoulders again, and a still more pained expression came into his eyes. Arthur Augustus, who had not spent his early youth in the Bowery quarter of New York, was obviously impressed.

In fact, he went as far as screwing his monocle deeply into his eye and viewing Jerrold Lumley-Lumley through it with disapproval.

"Weally, Lumley-Lumley—"

"Oh, don't cackle, Gussy!" came the answer. "I'll dry up, if you like!"

Always Arthur Augustus hated to be told not to "cackle." So often throughout his career at St. Jim's that advice had been given him that it had rather got on his nerves. He gave Lumley-Lumley a withering stare.

"Perhaps, deah boy, it would be as well if you did dry up," he suggested. "Aftah all, Mr. Searle is standin' us this tea."

"Exactly, sir," chipped in Flash Ike. "But I don't blame Jerrold. You see, he knew me in the bad old days before I turned over a new leaf. He knows nothing of me in these days when I am employed entirely by the Associated Gushers Oil Company—"

"Associated Gushahs, bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "I wathah fancay I have heard that concern mentioned by my patah, Lord Eastwood—"

"Yes, of course!" interrupted Flash Ike eagerly. "No doubt Lord Eastwood contemplates buying a decent-sized block of shares. If such be the case, and you mention my name—"

"The name of Flash Ike?" chipped in Lumley-Lumley.

"Weally, Lumley-Lumley—"

"Oh, take no notice of Jerrold!" laughed Flash Ike. "He always would have his little joke. Still, if Lord Eastwood really is out to make easy money, Associated Gushers is his chance. Here, sir, take these leaflets. It'll make a lot of difference to you later on in life if your pater decides to take up a few of our shares."

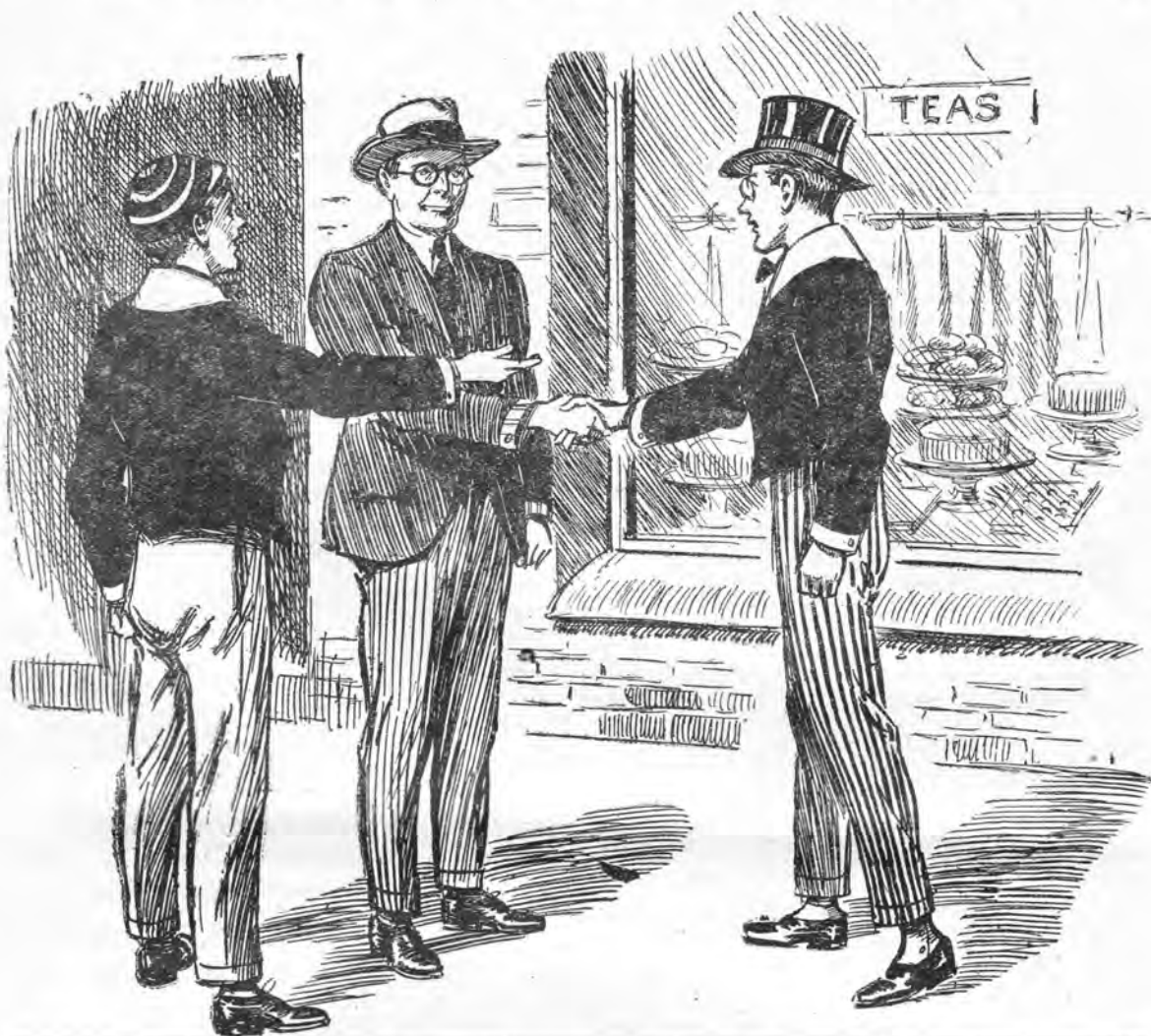
"Thanks, awf'ly, old bean!"

Arthur Augustus took the proffered pamphlets, and, as far as he could see from a casual glance, anybody investing five pounds in Associated Gushers seemed to be pretty certain of making half a million or so.

In fact, the figures were there in black and white, and the swell of St. Jim's could not help venturing a mild protest.

"But, Mr. Searle, if it is so awf'ly easy to make money so wapidly, why don't you buy up all the five pound plots of land yourself, what?"

"Eh?" muttered Flash Ike. "Oh, I haven't got the ready cash!"



"D'Arcy," said Lumley-Lumley, with a grin, "I think you wanted to meet Flash Ike——" "Bai—bai Jova——" "I mean, Mr. Oswald Searle," corrected Lumley-Lumley. "Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Delighted, deah boy!" Somewhat overcome, the swell of St. Jim's shook hands with the American. (See page 4.)

"I see, deah boy," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Of course, bein' short of the weady is a wotten handicap to any man. I'll send these pamphlets to my patah wight away, Mr. Searle."

While Arthur Augustus was speaking Lumley-Lumley had jumped to his feet. His watch was in his hand, and there was rather a scornful expression on his face. At the same time he gave the waitress a ten-shilling note.

"Yes, I want the bill all in one, please," he said.

"But, my dear Jerrold," protested Flash Ike, "I asked you to tea!"

"Did you?" snapped the St. Jim's junior. "I'm paying, anyway. D'Arcy, we shall have to slip along for the six o'clock train!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Alweady I have missed one wotten twain this aftahnoon! Now, where did I leave my coat?"

"Hanging on the rack, over there," answered Lumley-Lumley. "Slip across for it, you ass!"

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus strolled away for his coat, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley turned on Flash Ike abruptly. There was a curious glitter in the eyes of the junior whose early life had been lived out in the streets of the Bowery quarter of New York.

In that brief, blunt way of his he ground out a question: "What's the game, Flash Ike?"

The American smiled good-temperedly, but the hurt sort of expression presently replaced the smile.

"Jerrold, my dear old fellow, I have told you I have turned over a fresh leaf——"

"Humph! And I've asked you—what's the game? Why are you here in Wayland? What's it all mean?"

The pained expression on Flash Ike's face became intensified. He really did look rather hurt.

"If you must know, I'll tell you, Jerrold," he said. "Really, I wanted to keep it a secret. I—I have taken up philanthropic work."

"W-what?"

"The beautiful word 'charity' has touched me!" grinned Flash Ike. "In short, I am now in Wayland because I am anxious to do my fellow-creatures a good turn. Do you know, Jerrold, I often lie awake at night, thinking of new ways to persuade people to put their money into Associated Gushers so that they can all make fortunes."

"Brrr!"

"And I have found one dear old chap who must have been sent into this cold, hard world just to meet me!" chuckled Flash Ike. "Charming old guy who is nibbling like a young trout. Jerrold, my dear lad, my new pal is simply longing to make money out of oil. That's why I'm offering him Associated Gushers!"

"Is there any oil on the land?" snapped Lumley-Lumley.

"Eh?"

"Is it a real oilfield or a spoof, I mean?"

Flash Ike appeared to be thinking hard. Then he shook his head sadly.

"How am I to know, Jerrold?" he asked. "I am a philanthropist now, not a mining engineer. There may be oil under the Associated Gushers ground. I can't tell you. In fact, Jerrold, I don't really know where the ground is. As I told you, that beautiful word 'charity' has so touched me that I think of nothing else—— Ah, our young friend is back again."

Lumley-Lumley thrust his hands into his pockets and

frowned. He knew, of course, that Flash Ike was nothing more nor less than a plausible swindler, one of those smooth-tongued scamps who go about unloading on a trusting public absolutely worthless plots of land in America at high prices, and still more worthless shares in bogus companies.

But he did not feel that it was his business to interfere. After all, if people are fools enough to lose their money in impossible "get rich quick" schemes it is their own look-out, decided the junior, who had known the seamy side of life better before he was twelve years old than many men ever know it.

"No, it's not my bizney," decided Lumley-Lumley. "You can't help there being fools in the world any more than you can help there being Flash Ikes."

All the same, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was silent and frowning as Flash Ike walked with them to the station.

CHAPTER 3.

A Swindling Prospectus!

"THIS weally is wathah wemarkable, deah boy!"

The well-known voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy broke in upon Lumley-Lumley's thoughts as the train rumbled slowly towards Rylcombe.

The Fourth-Former turned with a slight start from staring out of the window. In the opposite corner seat sat Arthur Augustus, reading diligently.

"Yaas, it is extwaordinawy, Lumlay-Lumlay—"

"What is?"

"The wemarkable statements in this paper, deah boy—"

"What paper?"

"The pwspectus your fwiend Mr. Oswald Searle gave me," explained the swell of St. Jim's. "Bai Jove, it is an actual fact that one man invested five pounds in a single plot of ground on the Associated Gushers estate, and he is now worth a quartah of a million!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And anothah man—"

"Yes, I don't think!" laughed Lumley-Lumley. "Don't be a burbling ass, D'Arcy! That prospectus is all bunkum!"

"But the names an' addresses of the fortunate investors are given, deah boy—"

"I don't care if there are a whole directory of names and addresses!" ground out Lumley-Lumley. "The thing's a swindle! Throw the prospectus away, Gussy!"

But the swell of St. Jim's utterly refused to do that. He even looked amazed that such an extraordinary proposal should be made.

"Weally, Lumlay-Lumlay, don't be wedic!" he exclaimed.

"I pwomised to send this pwspectus to my patah—"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, I did, but I wathah fancay I shall studday it myself first," went on Arthur Augustus. "You see, I have a little weady cash, and a sound investment—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I mean, a fivah, say, with a wattlin' fine chance of makin' a quartah of a million out of it in a yeah or two. Gwest Scott, here is anothah investor who took two plots of land and has made a million. A million, Lumlay-Lumlay! Think of it!"

"A million what?" laughed the New York junior. "Mistakes?"

"No, pounds, deah boy—or perhaps they are onlay dollahs. But even a million dollahs—"

"Ass!" grunted Lumley-Lumley.

"Here, give me the prospectus, Gussy, because you'll make as much money throwing your cash in the sea as you would having anything to do with Associated Gushers!"

And before Arthur Augustus grasped what Lumley-Lumley meant to do, the New York junior had taken the precious swindling prospectus from him and was ripping it into fragments. Then he threw the scraps of paper out of the train window.

"There you are, D'Arcy!" he laughed. "If you consider

I have lost you a fortune, I apologise. You see, I know a little bit about these things, and you don't. And I happen to know Flash Ike too!"

"Bai Jove, that's twue, of course," admitted Arthur Augustus. "All the same, I pwomised Mr. Searle to send the pwspectus to my patah—"

"Yes, and your pater would have done what I've done with it. Lord Eastwood isn't exactly an ass!"

Arthur Augustus had to agree to that, too. Still, he couldn't help thinking about the extraordinary fortunes that prospectus declared could be made from a modest five pounds.

"Even a quartah of a million is a wemarkably good weturn fwom such a sum!" he said. "And I wathah fancay you are a twifle hard on your fwiend Mr. Searle, deah boy!"

"Rats! Flash Ike is just a swindler—"

"He may have been in the past, deah boy—"

"He is in the present, too, and will be so in the future!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "I know that chap, I tell you. He's just an oily swindler, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus was not altogether convinced, but he gave in in the end.

"Well, perhaps you're wight, deah boy," he conceded. "And I'm not altogethah sowwy you destwoyed the pwspectus. Aftah all, makin' a fortune must be a vewy fatiguin' bizney!"

"It would be a miraculous business to make one out of Associated Gushers!" laughed Lumley-Lumley. "Hallo, here we are at Rylcombe! Oh gee! Look at the time!"

"Bai Jove, we are wathah late wunnin' in!"

"Late!" echoed Lumley-Lumley in alarm. "I should jolly well think we are! And I had to see the Head before prep. Gussy, I'm going to hire a bike and fairly scorch up the road to St. Jim's!"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley dashed away, and within a very short time had managed to loan a machine. Then he did his best to exceed the speed limit in his dash to St. Jim's.

It really was not policy to be late at an interview with Dr. Holmes.

CHAPTER 4.

Lumley-Lumley's Discovery!

REACHING St. Jim's, Lumley-Lumley hurriedly made tracks for the Head's study.

His interview with Dr. Holmes in the dreaded sanctum was of no great importance. It had to do with a Fourth Form examination, in which Lumley-Lumley had rather shone, and no doubt the Head merely wanted to say a few kindly words.

The unfortunate part of it was the fact that Lumley-Lumley was undoubtedly late. Ten minutes late, to be exact, when he tapped hastily at the door.

He was by no means sure, but he thought he heard the words, "Come in!" Anyway, he opened the door and stepped into the study.

There was a screen just inside the room, so Lumley-Lumley could not see whether the Head was in his favourite easy-chair or not. In consequence, the Fourth-Former coughed gently.

No answer came, so Lumley-Lumley put his head round the screen. The room was empty but for himself.

"Oh, gee, he's gone!" muttered the New York junior, standing doubtfully by the table. "Wonder if I had better wait, or come back later?"

That was rather an important point, because it was quite possible that the Head himself was late for the interview. If so, then he might come in at any moment.

"And it'll look awful cheek if I don't wait," thought Lumley-Lumley. "On the other hand, I've got to get down to prep, so I can't stay here all the evening. Blest if I know what to do!"

He looked about the room in search of an inspiration, and quite by chance his eyes wandered across some papers lying on the table.

Ordinary papers most of them, such as exam questions and the like; but there was at least one printed form there. And it was at that form Lumley-Lumley was staring. Small wonder at that, though, because written across the folder in big black letters were the words:

"Associated Gushers."

Quite clearly Jerrold Lumley-Lumley saw those words, and just as quickly he understood. That folder was exactly like the precious prospectus Flash Ike had given to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Well, then, what did it mean? How came the swindling document to be on the Head's table? Surely by onl' one

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"What's the game, Flash Ike?" asked Lumley-Lumley quietly. The American smiled good-temperedly, but the hurt sort of expression presently replaced the smile. "Jerrold, my dear old fellow," he said, "I have turned over a new leaf." "W-what?" "The beautiful word 'charity' has touched me," grinned Flash Ike. "In short, I am now in Wayland because I am anxious to do my fellow creatures a good turn!" (See page 5.)

possible means—it had been given to Dr. Holmes by Flash Ike!

Although one of the last fellows in the school to pry into other people's business, Lumley-Lumley could not help noticing that quite a lot of figures had been jotted round the margin of that prospectus. Figures in the Head's handwriting, too, so that was almost proof that the old schoolmaster was interested in the prospectus.

Lumley-Lumley half turned away, then pulled up. Someone was coming along the corridor outside, and the next moment the Head came into the room.

He stepped at once to the table.

"Ah, yes, I wanted to see you, Lumley-Lumley," he said absently. "I am afraid I am late. Sit down, please!"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley sat down. As he did so he saw the Head pick up that swindling oil prospectus. But the Head did not crumple it up and throw it into the waste-paper-basket, which Lumley-Lumley thought was the proper place for it. Instead, he very carefully put it into a drawer in the table and locked the drawer.

Lumley-Lumley's face set a little. Beyond all doubt Dr. Holmes was very interested in that precious scheme Flash Ike had devised for the purpose of separating unsuspecting people from their cash.

And everybody knew that the Head was an unsuspecting person where money matters were concerned. In fact, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had often heard his millionaire father laugh over the Head's idea of financial affairs.

"An innocent old duck who oughtn't to be allowed near the Stock Exchange!" Mr. Lumley-Lumley had declared.

And it was true, of course.

The Head was a schoolmaster, and he knew nothing of business. To think of him having dealings with a man of Flash Ike's type was to think of the Head playing the part of a shorn lamb.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was quite clear on that part, but for the life of him he did not see how he could butt in.

Certainly he could tell the Head he had seen the prospectus on the table. Just as certainly he could not start a discussion on oil ventures off his own bat.

While Lumley-Lumley was trying to think of some way to warn the Head, Taggles appeared in the doorway.

"Which there is a gentleman to see you, sir," snuffled the school porter. "Says as how you're expecting him."

"The name, Taggles?"

"Mr. Oswald Searle, sir."

Lumley-Lumley's face set still more.

So Flash Ike had actually come to the school. He must have travelled in that six o'clock train with them, the Fourth Form junior decided. Or maybe he had come from Wayland in a taxi. In either case, this was proof positive that Flash Ike was enmeshing the Head in the toils of the Associated Gushers swindle.

Lumley-Lumley felt that he could not there and then warn the Head that the man he knew as Oswald Searle was also known as Flash Ike and that the scamp had been to prison.

It was the right thing to do, maybe, but Lumley-Lumley could not do it, for he had once been a pal of Flash Ike's. In fact, Flash Ike had done him a good turn or two back in those bad old days when Lumley-Lumley had been little better than a street urchin in the Bowery quarter of New York.

No, Lumley-Lumley could not give the swindler away in that fashion, for there was always a chance that the crook had turned over a fresh leaf.

Not that the cute Fourth-Former really believed that; but it was possible. Arthur Augustus, for instance, had considered it highly probable, and Lumley-Lumley was not so absolutely sure of his ground as to risk throwing Flash Ike's past in his face.

In any case, that was a caddish thing to do, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was not a cad. Far from it. He just couldn't let a man down who had shown him kindness in the days that were gone but scarcely forgotten.

But it was equally impossible to let Flash Ike have a free hand in persuading the Head to lose his money in a swindling oil concern.

Although Lumley-Lumley could not see at the moment how he was to prevent that disaster, he felt that it must be prevented. He half rose to his feet, meaning to say something in general about bogus oil-fields, but he was never given a chance, the Head, mistaking his reason for rising and rendering it impossible.

"Yes, yes, of course, it is practically time for your preparation, Lumley-Lumley!" he exclaimed. "I will talk to you to-morrow about your quite excellent examination paper. You may go, Lumley-Lumley."

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley went. But there was still a minute, or two to go before the bell for preparation. And during those few minutes Lumley-Lumley hung about in the

corridor, waiting for what he knew would happen—the arrival of Flash Ike.

And Flash Ike came, with Taggles leading the way towards the Head's room. The scamp—if he was a scamp—passed quite close to the Fourth-Former, and Lumley-Lumley did not miss his chance.

He caught at Flash Ike's arm.

Flash Ike chuckled.

"A bed of roses, isn't it, Jerrold?" he chuckled. "I mean, Dr. Holmes is just mad keen on 'Gushers.'"

"Look here, Ike—"

"No, can't stop."

"But I've got to see you before you leave the school," ground out Lumley-Lumley. "You must wait for me on Little Side until prep is over. It—it is important."

"Is it?" grinned Flash Ike. "So is my having a word with your headmaster. Chin-chin, Jerrold!"

And with a cheery laugh the man who was boosting Associated Gushers sauntered on.

CHAPTER 5. Refusing a Feed!

"LUMLEY-LUMLEY, old top, half a minute!" It was Jack Blake, chief of Study No. 6 of the School House, who sang out those words.

With Blake were Arthur Augustus, Herries, and Digby. Just behind them were Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners of the Shell, and all seven juniors had just come out into the quadrangle a few minutes after prep for a breather.

They were specially keen on stopping Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, who was swinging in through the gateway, a frown on his face, his hands stuffed deeply into his jacket-pockets.

"Yaas, Lumlay-Lumlay, we've been lookin' for you, deah boy," nodded Arthur Augustus. "We've got wippin' news for you!"

"Eh!"

"Top-hole news!" grinned Tom Merry. "Feel like a feed, old ass?"

"A feed?"

"A scrumptious. All tuck in!" declared Manners. "The sort of snack that would make Baggy Trimble feel quite faint if he knew about it and wasn't asked. Digby has had a hamper sent from home."

"And you are specially invited, old scout," said Digby generously. "Just the eight of us from the School House, and I'm sending across for Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn of the New House. Oh, I'm doing the thing properly, Lumley-Lumley!"

The junior from New York laughed.

"Sounds like it, anyway," he admitted. "Yes, I'll come with pleasure, Dig. Is the spread for to-morrow afternoon?"

"No, to-night."

"Eh?"

"Must be to-night!" declared Digby firmly. "We all cut tea specially—that is, all except that glutton Gussy."

"Oh, weally, Digby—"

"So you are a glutton!" grinned Digby. "Any chap who has two teas when he knows there's a special spread waiting later for him is a glutton! No, don't apologise, Gussy; we know you can't help it."

"Bal Jove, you wuffian!"

"Oh, ring off, ass!" laughed Tom Merry. "You're all right for the spread, Lumley-Lumley!"

"I—I am afraid not."

"What?"

"Got something to do, you know," ground out the American junior. "It's awfully decent of Dig to invite me, but really I can't come. Rather an important job of work on hand, as it happens."

"But—but the spread doesn't take place until long after lights out!" exclaimed Jack Blake in astonishment. "You didn't think we were going to have it in the study now, did you?"

"No."

"And you can't come to a feed after lights out?" went on Jack Blake, still more astonished.

Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"That's right, Blake," he said quietly. "I've a job of work to do."

Tom Merry & Co. were quite staggered. They could imagine no job of work possible after lights out, except the work of settling down for a hard night's sleep, or else attending just such a spread as Digby's was going to be in the spare room right away from the masters' quarters.

And most astounded of all the juniors was Arthur Augustus.

He screwed his monocle firmly in his eye and stared at Lumley-Lumley through it.

"My deah old bean, surely you have failed to gwasp the ideah, what?" he floundered. "You can't have work to do aftar lights out."

"But I have."

"Not—not swotting!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, in a voice which suggested horror.

"No, not swotting."

"Then what, deah boy?"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders. He was always known to have an obstinate streak in his make-up, the sort of streak it was no good arguing against. He showed that side of his character in this little dispute.

"It's private business, D'Arcy."

"Pwivate business!"

"Strictly pwivate!" nodded Lumley-Lumley. "Thanks awfully for the invite, Digby, but I can't come! Some other time, perhaps."

He half pushed his way through the group of juniors, but Tom Merry stood firm. The Shell junior looked quite concerned.

"Wait a minute, Lumley-Lumley, old top!" he exclaimed. "Something's worrying you—"

"Oh, that's all right!"

"Well, it's your business, not mine, of course; but if any of us can lend a helping hand—"

"It's awfully decent of you, Tom Merry!"

"But we can't?"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"No, you can't!"

"And you won't be able to join us at the spread in the spare room?" continued the hero of the Shell. "You have something more important to do?"

This time Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"Yes, I have something more important to do."

"Then that settles it."

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley made no answer. He just walked on, leaving Tom Merry & Co. to think what they liked.

And what were the friendly rivals of the School House to think, except one thing—that Lumley-Lumley's "important" business had something to do with breaking bounds—that the junior from New York meant to leave the school after lights-out?

Certainly there seemed to be no other possible explanation, as far as Tom Merry could see. He put the proposition in as many words.

"Lumley-Lumley can't have any 'important business' in the school, chaps," he said gravely.

"No, that's so—"

"In fact, we can awwive at no othah conclusion, except that Lumlay-Lumlay means to bweak bounds," added Arthur Augustus, in open alarm. "Everythin' points in that diwection—and, weally, it's wathah wotten!"

"Yes, it's rotten!"

"Well, there's nothing to be gained by talking about it," said Jack Blake, in his blunt way. "You know what Lumley-Lumley is? Won't listen to anybody showering advice about. He always would go his own way."

"A pretty rotten way, if he means to risk the sack by breaking out of school!" growled Manners.

"That's true, of course."

"Only it's no good talking," repeated Jack Blake. "We'd better get Harry Noble to join our spread, Dig. Old Kangaroo is always ready to take part in a late feast."

Digby of the Fourth nodded, and the juniors sauntered off in search of Harry Noble. All the same, there were worried expressions on their faces, for they could not understand Lumley-Lumley in his present mood.

And they all liked the junior from New York.

There was something about his calm courage, his easy ability at keeping his end up against big odds, that appealed immensely to the better type of junior at St. Jim's. And then Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was a sportsman, no matter what other failings he might have.

Of course, in the past it had not been quite like that.

In the old days—the bad old days, as Tom Merry & Co. characterised them—Lumley-Lumley had been an outsider—a rank outsider. No getting away from that, however one viewed it. Again and again he had been caught playing cards at the Green Man; time after time he had been in trouble for defying the masters and generally making a hash of things.

But all that had happened a long time ago. So long ago that many of his lawless acts had been almost forgotten;

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for if ever a junior had turned over a fresh leaf, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had.

And since the turning of that leaf there had been no seriously blotted pages. The American junior was a really good sort in these days.

And now this mystery had come along.

Lumley-Lumley was obviously in some sort of difficulty, and he had refused to take his chums into his confidence. Instead, he declined to join in a feast which any other junior would have given a week's pocket-money to attend. Instead, he had "important business" that prevented him joining in.

And that important business must have something to do with leaving St. Jim's after lights-out—a serious and risky thing to do. Tom Merry & Co. were sure of it, and were consequently very worried.

So worried, as a matter of fact, that they scarcely talked at all as they went in search of Harry Noble.

CHAPTER 6.

Breaking out of School!

IN his study Lumley-Lumley grappled alone with his problem. The moment preparation was over he had hurried out to Little Side, but Flash Ike had not appeared. Lumley-Lumley waited for nearly ten minutes, and still the American had failed to put in an appearance.

Then the junior had given up hope, and had returned to the school gates. From Taggles, in the lodge, he had learnt that Flash Ike otherwise, Mr. Oswald Searle—had left quite a long time ago, and that a taxi had been waiting for him, in which he had driven away. And that information had decided Lumley-Lumley.

Flash Ike had more or less succeeded in working his game on the Head. Dr. Holmes was about to be "clobbered." In other words, the respected Head of St. Jim's was in the net set by the cute American, and the dear old chap was probably in danger of losing his life savings in the Associated Gushers swindle.

Lumley-Lumley was practically sure on that point, and the obstinate streak in his make-up showed itself again. Dr. Holmes must be protected against himself, and that was the reason why Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had refused Digby's invitation to the spread. He meant to have a word with Flash Ike.

And, seemingly, the only way to do that was to beard the American in his den—otherwise, the Station Hotel, at Wayland.

Well, that was by no means impossible, as Lumley-Lumley viewed things. He had but to wait until lights-out, then slip out of St. Jim's, and catch the mail train, which passed through Rylcombe Station at 11.5.

A risky business, of course; but the junior from the Bowery Quarter was not unaccustomed to risks. He had always been rather inclined to laugh at them.

And the motive was sound. Dr. Holmes must not suffer at the hands of Flash Ike. In consequence, Lumley-Lumley was quite ready to break school.

In company with the rest of the Fourth-Formers, he repaired to the dormitory when the bell rang. He knew well enough that Jack Blake & Co. were only pretending to undress on account of the feast Digby was giving, but the American junior pretended not to notice. He himself undressed completely; but he had his clothes nice and bandy. And he had his eye on the luminous dial of his wrist-watch most of the time.

Long before Lumley-Lumley had any need to be anxious about the time he glimpsed Jack Blake & Co. slipping out of bed. In dead silence the chums of Study No. 5 put on dressing-gowns.

They had apparently forgotten Lumley-Lumley. Anyway, none of them came near his bed.

Grimly the American junior shrugged his shoulders under the bedclothes. He would have given a great deal to have been able to join Jack Blake & Co. in the cheery spread they had arranged.

But that was quite impossible, as Lumley-Lumley saw matters. His job was to get to Wayland by the 11.5 train and see Flash Ike. For until he had had it out with that enterprising American the St. Jim's junior could not move.

He had still to convince himself beyond all possibility of mistake that Flash Ike was scheming to rob Dr. Holmes of his cash. Once that was proved, Lumley-Lumley reckoned the rest would be easy.

"If necessary, I'll go straight to the Head and tell him what I know about Flash Ike," he thought, as he watched Jack Blake & Co. slipping silently from the room. "Only I've got to see Flash Ike first."

That seemed reasonable enough on the surface of things, for Lumley-Lumley had no real proof that Flash Ike was still a swindler.

Obsessed by this plan, the St. Jim's junior was out of his bed within a minute or two of the departure of Jack Blake & Co. from the dormitory. Just as silent as they had been, he slipped into his clothes, and then crept from the large room.

The rest was not specially difficult, for there were several passage windows which offered a means of breaking bounds. With calm deliberation, Lumley-Lumley chose one of them, made good his escape, and promptly scaled the wall surrounding the school grounds.

Once clear of the school the rest was plain sailing, for he had merely to saunter down to Rylcombe station and wait for the mail train.

He arrived at the station only a few minutes before the train steamed into the platform.

Quickly the Fourth-Former slipped into a third-class compartment, and the journey to Wayland was soon over. Then Lumley-Lumley gave an instance of that cool nerve of his. He sauntered through the doorway of the Station Hotel and tackled the night porter.

"A friend of mine, named Mr. Searle, is staying here," he said. "I want to see him at once—Mr. Oswald Searle."

"Yes, sir. You'll find him in the billiards-room. He is practising at the table."

As calmly as ever the St. Jim's junior walked down the corridor pointed out to him by the night porter, and he found the billiards-room easily enough.

He pushed open the door, and there was Flash Ike all right, cheery-looking and in his shirt-sleeves. He was just attempting a fancy shot as Lumley-Lumley entered the room.

Turning, he glimpsed the junior, and promptly banged the butt-end of his cue on the floor.

"Hallo, Jerrold! I had a sort of feeling you'd turn up," he laughed. "Going to play me a hundred level?"

"No!" snapped Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. "I haven't come to play games; I've come to have a word or two with you!"

Flash Ike laughed cheerily.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed, putting his cue back in the

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Mr. HENRY SELBY, M.A.

Master of the Third Form at St. Jim's. A rather sour-tempered and severe gentleman, and one who rules the juniors under his charge with a rod of iron. There is probably some excuse for his severity, for he has a very unruly crowd of youngsters to govern. Wally D'Arcy and his happy band of followers, though decent little fellows, are sufficient in themselves to tax the energy and patience of any master. Mr. Selby would, however, be far more popular if he would make a little more allowance for youthful high spirits.

rack. "Come and sit down, Jerrold! Nothing like a chat between old pals over old days—eh? And perhaps you'll be able to give me a tip or two to help me in my charitable work of making fortunes for other people!"

He laughed easily, although he was looking curiously at the St. Jim's junior all the time. Lumley-Lumley made no answer. He just crossed the big room to the fireplace, and stood leaning against the mantelshelf.

Flash Ike settled himself comfortably in the easy-chair.

CHAPTER 7.

The Swindler in His True Colours!

"WELL, Jerrold, what's biting you?"

Flash Ike broke the silence by asking that question, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley answered up quickly enough. There never was any of the boiling about the bush where he was concerned.

"I want you to tell me something," he ground out. "I want to know who it is you were speaking of this afternoon when you spoke of a man who was nibbling at your Associated Gushers swindle!"

"Swindle, Jerrold?"

"Well, it is a swindle, isn't it?"

Flash Ike laughed.

"Between friends, Jerrold, it is!" he admitted frankly.

"And the man you're 'cobbling'?"

"Can't you guess, old chap?"

Lumley-Lumley gritted his teeth. He could guess easily enough; that was why he had broken out of school and made this journey to Wayland.

"It's Dr. Holmes, headmaster of St. Jim's, you're out to rob," he said roughly. "That's right, isn't it?"

Flash Ike adopted his well-known hurt expression again. He even spread out his hands appealingly.

"Not 'rob,' please, Jerrold," he protested. "Dr. Holmes—most charming of men, so unsophisticated, not to say soft—really wants to have a dabble in oil. I, as a kind-hearted man, have 'Gushers' for sale. Do you think I could disappoint the innocent old duck?"

"Have you sold him any of the rubbish yet?"

"Not yet, Jerrold, but the ground bait is down," declared Flash Ike cheerfully. "My fish is nibbling. The deal is liable to take place at any moment now."

Again Lumley-Lumley gritted his teeth.

"That deal isn't to take place!" he rasped.

"Eh?"

"You're to leave Dr. Holmes alone," went on the Fourth-Former. "He knows nothing of business, and I'm not going to stand by and see him cobbled. It's got to stop, Ike!"

Slowly Flash Ike rose to his feet. He was still smiling, but, somehow, it was a different sort of smile. More fixed-looking, and it did not seem real.

And when he spoke next his voice had changed, too. It had become steely and menacing.

"Got to stop, Jerrold?" he repeated. "A little business deal between myself and Dr. Holmes, over which I have wasted hours of my valuable time, has got to stop? Who says so, Jerrold?"

"I say it!"

"Off your own bat?"

"Yes!"

The smile left Flash Ike's face altogether now. In place of it there was an almost vicious expression. He took a menacing step towards the St. Jim's junior.

"Suppose you keep off this particular plot of grass, my lad!" he rasped. "Suppose you mind your own business!"

"I'm not going to mind my own business," answered Lumley-Lumley. "I've told you that this swindle has got to stop as far as Dr. Holmes is concerned, and, by jingo, I mean it! Ike, I don't want to row, but if you don't drop the game, I shall find means of making you drop it!"

Dead silence followed those last words; then Flash Ike had something to say.

"You mean you'll inform the police?"

"I mean I shall take steps to stop Dr. Holmes being cobbled."

"Well, you can only do that by going to the police, or by splitting on me to Dr. Holmes!" cried Flash Ike. "No doubt a word from you to your headmaster will scare the old boy into showing me the door next time I call. But you're not going to do it, Jerrold!"

"I'm not going to stand still while Dr. Holmes is robbed."

"My dear lad, that is exactly what you are going to do," said Flash Ike. "For the simple reason is, you daren't do anything else!"

"You'll see whether I dare."

"But I know already!" cried the American. "I know you no more dare to go to the police about me than your father would dare!"

Behind those last words there was something hidden—something Jerrold Lumley-Lumley did not understand. What had his father to do with this business?

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All the same, Lumley-Lumley showed no signs of wavering.

"I suppose you mean something, Ike?"

"By gee, yes, I mean something!" agreed the American. "See here, Jerrold, you remember the days when your father wasn't Mr. Lumley-Lumley, the millionaire—when he was down on his luck, and you were just a Bowery quarter urchin?"

"Of course I remember."

"And you remember your father's first important financial deal," went on the American, "the floating of that motor-car business? Of course you remember; and you'll recall, I've no doubt, that ugly things were said about it—that it was known as the Lumley Car Swindle!"

The junior's eyes glinted a little, yet what Flash Ike had just said was true. There had been not over-pleasant things in the newspaper at the time Lumley-Lumley's father had floated that car combine.

In fact, the junior distinctly remembered reading, as a youngster, in one of the papers something about his father having neatly "cobbled" the public. And he remembered, too, that his father had laughed about it, just as if it was some huge joke.

Only it was more than possible that it was not quite a joke, after all. Out there in the States, in those days, business deals were not always as straightforward and above-board as they might have been. Lumley-Lumley was no fool, and he had gone through life with his eyes pretty well open.

All the same, he turned on Flash Ike angrily.

"If you're saying anything against my father, it's a lie!" he ground out.

"Now, Jerrold, none of the rough talk, please!"

"You'll get rough talk, and perhaps more, if you hint things against my father," answered the junior violently.

"Get that fixed in your mind, Ike!"

Flash Ike shrugged his shoulders.

"Who is saying things against your dad?" he sneered. "Do you think I hold it against a man for working a neat scheme for the purpose of parting fools from their dollars? Not a bit of it, Jerrold. That Lumley Car combine was real smart. I take my hat off to your old man over it."

"Then what have you brought it up again, for?"

"Just to remind you that your father's fortune was built up on what he made out of the car combine," said Flash Ike. "He's a millionaire now, and respected and all that. I was just thinking what a rumpus there would be if the newspapers got hold of the true story about the car combine, that's all."

"Meaning?"

"That you'd better keep off the grass about my deal with Dr. Holmes!"

"And if I don't?"

"Then things may leak out concerning your father, that's all!" snarled Flash Ike. "No, none of that clenching fists business, Jerrold, for I'm not falling for anything in the nature of a rough and tumble. I just want you to grasp that if you can queer my pitch, then I can make England just a shade too hot to hold your dad!"

"It's a lie—"

"Jerrold, the rough stuff again—"

"A dirty lie!" rasped back the St. Jim's junior. "You can't bluff me, Ike, and—"

The junior's words tailed away into silence, for Flash Ike was fumbling in his breast-pocket. Presently he brought to light a big bunch of letters, and the one he was looking for was half a sheet of notepaper with a few words in Mr. Lumley-Lumley's handwriting upon it.

The St. Jim's junior recognised the handwriting instantly. He waited in vague but growing alarm.

Then Flash Ike thrust the letter into the junior's hand.

"It's a lie what I have just said, is it?" he sneered.

"How do you account for that letter, then?"

In silence Lumley-Lumley read what his father had written to Flash Ike, and the words scribbled there seemed to have only one possible meaning.

"As you suggest, it is better that the Lumley Car Combine business be forgotten. Hence the enclosed cheque for £100."

That was all Mr. Lumley-Lumley had written, except to add his quite unmistakable signature to the note. In silence Lumley-Lumley read the words, while Flash Ike held out his hand for the return of the letter. Lumley-Lumley gave it up.

"You, an ex-gaolbird, to say anything about my father!" he said hotly. "You, a swindler all your life—"

"Look here, Jerrold—"

"You cad!" cried the St. Jim's junior. "You swindling, blackmailing cad!"

Lumley-Lumley swung from the billiards-room before Flash Ike had time to answer. The American "bucket-shop" scamp had certainly turned the tables on Lumley-Lumley—for the time being.



Flash Ike turned round as Lumley-Lumley entered the billiards-room, and promptly banged the butt-end of his cue on the floor. "Hallo, Jerrold!" he said, with a smile. "I had a sort of feeling you'd turn up. Going to play me a hundred level?" "No!" snapped the St. Jim's junior. "I haven't come to play games. I've come to have a word or two with you!" (See page 9.)

But that did not mean that the St. Jim's junior was beaten—far from it, for Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had always been a stickler.

It was simply that for the moment he could not see what his next move was to be, for certainly he could not risk damaging his father in the eyes of the world for something that had happened all those years ago.

All the same, Lumley-Lumley was still determined on one point.

If it were possible, he was not going to allow Dr. Holmes to be "clobbered." No matter what risks to himself, he was going to do his best to prevent Flash Ike robbing his headmaster.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had quite made up his mind on that point long before he found a taxi driver willing to take him back to the Rylcombe district at that late hour.

CHAPTER 8. Caught Out!

"**B**AI Jove, deah boys, I wathah fancy it is up to one of us to say a few words!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke with a note of determination in his voice, but the voice itself was not the loud, ringing one expected from a guest who has just enjoyed a really remarkable feed.

As a matter of fact, anything in the nature of a loud, ringing voice would probably have brought disaster to Arthur Augustus and the rest of the "feeders," because they were still in the spare room at St. Jim's, and St. Jim's is rather famous for efficient prefects like Kildare and Darrell.

No; it would have been madness to speak as Arthur Augustus wanted to speak, so he said a few words in a low whisper.

"Weally, deah boys, we cannot allow this occasion to pass without payin' our respects to the donah of the spweed—"

"Heah, heah!" breathed Figgins, the long-legged leader of the New House juniors.

"So say all of us," agreed Harry Noble, in a still lower whisper. "Finished, Gussy?"

"No, you duffah, I haven't weally begun—"

"Hard luck!" grinned the Cornstalk. "Get on with it, then!"

Arthur Augustus obliged by clearing his voice very softly, and then plunged ahead.

"My old and twusted fwiend, Digby, asked us all to a feed, deah boys," he whispered. "We came expectin' a feed, and instead, what have we weceived?"

"A feed?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"No, deah boy, a wattlin' fine banquet," declared the swell of the Fourth. "In all my long caweah of attendin' spweads, I nevah wemembah—"

"Exactly!" chipped in Tom Merry. "Gussy's through! Speech, Digby!"

"Yes, speech, Dig—"

"Up on your hind legs, old top!"

With a smile, Digby of the Fourth Form, jumped to his feet. All round him in the unfurnished spare room were grinning juniors. Spread out on the floor was the remains of what had certainly been an excellent feed, even if it had had to be enjoyed in the light of a few candle-ends.

The Fourth-Former made his speech, about the shortest on record.

Then glasses were raised to drink Digby's health, but the toast went unfinished, for Digby suddenly raised his hand.

"Shush!" he breathed, and swung round to the door.

As Tom Merry and the other juniors faced the door, they drew in deep breaths of alarm, for the unmistakable sound of footsteps in the corridor outside had reached their ears.

"B-blow out the light!" breathed Figgins.

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

The light was blown out, and the juniors lapsed into silence.

It may have been this which made the footsteps sound louder. More probably, though, the owner of the feet was nearing the door, and very likely was coming into the room.

And suppose he happened to be Kildare, the brawny skipper of St. Jim's? Tom Merry & Co. shuddered at the mere thought of that possibility, for Eric Kildare was not one of those seniors you could bluff.

He just asked questions, and straightforward answers had to be given. There was no beating about the bush where Kildare was concerned.

And it was Kildare, for a low, but distinct cough had sounded in the corridor, and Tom Merry had recognised it. Kildare was on the warpath!

"Oh, my only toppah!"

Arthur Augustus breathed the phrase to himself, then a new feeling of hope rose in his manly breast. The footsteps had stopped.

Maybe that meant Kildare had heard something, and was listening. Or did it mean that he had gone into some room?

None of the absolutely silent juniors could answer that question. Then, suddenly, a fresh sound carried to their ears—a scraping sound.

"Someone opening the passage window," whispered Jack Blake, his lips close to Tom Merry's ear. "Perhaps it isn't Kildare at all, but Knox or some rotter breaking bounds."

"No, it is Kildare—"

"Shush!"

A slight thud had followed that scraping sound, just the sort of thud that a window being closed might have made. Next minute, with startling clearness, came a voice, tense and grim.

"Who is that?"

It was Kildare who was rapping out the words. For a moment or two there followed silence, then came the answer.

"It is I, Kildare—Lumley-Lumley—"

"And you have been out?" thundered the voice of the St. Jim's skipper.

"Yes," sounded the meek voice of Lumley-Lumley.

"And you realise the consequences?"

As far as Tom Merry & Co. could tell, Lumley-Lumley made no answer to that last question, but, of course, he realised the consequences of his rash act. He had been caught out breaking one of the strictest rules of St. Jim's.

And, of course, the juniors in the spare room knew what Kildare would say next.

"You will report to the Head first thing to-morrow morning, Lumley-Lumley," Kildare said; but his voice was not specially angry.

In fact, he spoke in a way that suggested he rather hated his task, but hating it did not mean that he could shirk it.

There was nothing of the shirker about Eric Kildare. When he had been elected skipper of St. Jim's Dr. Holmes had known the type of senior who was taking over the reins. A generous fellow, only too ready to lend a helping hand to a junior in trouble, but always the sort of fellow to whom the word "duty" meant much.

Still, Kildare did not dismiss Lumley-Lumley there and then, as a good many prefects would have done. Instead he spoke again, gravely.

"You're asking for trouble, Lumley-Lumley," he said.

"Yes, I know—"

The Fourth-Former broke off suddenly.

"Well, what are you going to say to the Head?" went on Kildare.

The voice sounded a little distressed to Tom Merry & Co. on the other side of the door.

"I have an acquaintance in the neighbourhood," muttered Lumley-Lumley. "Someone I knew back in the old days. It was specially important that I should see him to-night."

Although Lumley-Lumley could not see, Kildare shrugged his shoulders in dismay.

"Not much of a defence, you young duffer!" he growled.

"Still, tell the Head. Go to your dormitory now."

"Yes, Kildare."

The sound of Lumley-Lumley walking quietly away along the corridor was audible to Tom Merry & Co. Then followed the sound of Kildare also leaving.

The juniors in the spare room remained silent for a while, then Tom Merry crept towards the door.

"The coast seems clear, chaps!" he whispered.

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"Well, then, let's wetiah—"

"Yes, we can slip along now," nodded Figgins of the New House. "Needn't trouble about us, you School House duffers; we can slip into the Cock House of St. Jim's easily enough."

Usually a remark like that would have brought much wrath down upon George Figgins' devoted head, but to-night not a word was said. In fact, all the juniors were strangely silent as they crept along the passage.

At the parting of the ways Figgins had another word or two to say.

"Merry, old chap, I'm sorry about Lumley-Lumley."

"Yes, it's rotten!"

"Pretty decent chap in these days, isn't he?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, one of the best—"

"Hard cheese!" growled Figgy. "Maybe the Head won't take a very serious view of the bizney. Hope he doesn't, anyway."

Again Tom Merry nodded, then, with Manners and Monty Lowther, he hurried silently into the Shell dormitory.

Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Kerr had, of course, to make their way cautiously into the New House, so it was only Blake & Co. who had any chance of having a word with Lumley-Lumley.

Not that that chance produced any result, for Lumley-Lumley was in bed when the juniors of Study No. 6 reached their dormitory.

"And asleep, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Yes, he's asleep."

There seemed to be no doubt about that, for the junior from New York was breathing very steadily and evenly. But Jack Blake wondered if that sleep was pretence or not as he clambered into bed.

Of course, Lumley-Lumley was rather famous for his nerve and unruffled way of meeting trouble; but surely, with the threat of expulsion hanging over his head, he must be really troubled to-night!

Yet Jack Blake need not have wasted his time wondering—for Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was really and truly asleep. He had dropped off almost as soon as he had got into bed because there was nothing to be gained by remaining awake.

The junior from the Bowery quarter of New York was like that.

CHAPTER 9.

Trouble for Lumley-Lumley!

"COME in!"

Sternly and gravely Dr. Holmes gave that invitation, and Lumley-Lumley entered the Head's dreaded sanctum.

Dr. Holmes was seated at his table, and in front of him was a slip of paper, the official report Kildare had handed in concerning Lumley-Lumley. Dr. Holmes picked up the slip of paper.

"Last night you left the school after lock-up, Lumley-Lumley," he said slowly. "Kildare tells me you have an acquaintance in the neighbourhood, someone you were very anxious to see. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why did you not ask for permission to go out?"

The American junior gritted his teeth. It had never occurred to him for a moment to ask for a permit; he had never even given it a thought. He felt lost for an answer.

The Head frowned at his silence, and his voice was very stern when he spoke again.

"I can only imagine you did not ask for a permit because your reason for wishing to go out was not of sufficient importance to gain you one," he said. "Lumley-Lumley when you first came to St. Jim's you gave me a great deal of trouble."

"I am sorry, sir—"

"So much trouble that on several occasions I was on the verge of expelling you," continued Dr. Holmes. "I did not do so, and up until to-day I have been very glad I did not, for you completely changed for the better."

Lumley-Lumley was silent.

"And now this has happened," continued Dr. Holmes sternly. "You have deliberately broken one of the strictest school rules, and you have nothing to say."

That was painfully true. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had nothing to say. He could not explain why he had broken out of school, because of Flash Ike's threat about his father. The American "bucket shop" swindler had effectually sealed the junior's lips.

Presently Dr. Holmes continued speaking.

"But for Kildare's intercession on your behalf, Lumley-Lumley, I should expel you," he said. "As it is, I am going to cane you very severely indeed. Before I do so,



"So you have dared to disobey me, Lumley-Lumley?" With a gasp of dismay, Lumley-Lumley turned to find himself face to face with Mr. Selby. There was an expression of grim triumph in the Third Form master's eyes as he glared at the Fourth Former. "I had my suspicions that you might disobey my orders," he went on, "so I followed you out into the quadrangle!" (See page 16.)

though, I want you to understand that I shall never be as lenient again."

"I understand, sir."

"Yet I am going to speak very clearly, so that there can be no excuse for a mistake," added the Head. "If there is a single further instance of your returning to your old lawless ways, a single serious breaking of an important school rule, then you will no longer be tolerated at St. Jim's. Please pass me that cane."

Lumley-Lumley took his licking unflinchingly.

That not a sound came from his lips was to his credit, for Dr. Holmes made it a very severe caning indeed. In fact, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's face was almost unruffled when Dr. Holmes put the cane aside.

"You may go, Lumley-Lumley," he said. "And remember what I have said."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

The millionaire's son left the dreaded sanctum, and he was so relieved that expulsion had not to come his way that he scarcely felt the pain of his licking.

"Lumley-Lumley, deah boy, pway sit down!" exclaimed Author Augustus, with real sympathy. "Perhaps, in the cires, you would like a cushion—"

Lumley-Lumley laughed heartily.

"No, that's all right, old top!"

"Just as you like, of course," agreed the swell of St. Jim's. "Howevah, I have paid one or two vewy painful visits to the Head's study in my time, bai Jove! Sure you won't have a cushion, deah boy?"

Again Lumley-Lumley refused, and started chatting to Jack Blake.

Really, there was the making of a very cheery little spread in Study No. 6 that evening just after preparation was over. The remains of Digby's hamper promised quite the right sort of feed, and the right juniors had been invited to the snack in honour of Lumley-Lumley's escape from expulsion.

Tom Merry and his chums of the Shell were there, of

course. Figgins & Co. had again come across from the New House, and, naturally, Digby's special cronies, Jack Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus, were among the invited.

Altogether it was a very cheery little party, and the remains of Digby's hamper slowly but surely vanished. Afterwards there came a chat, chiefly about cricket, because it was quite clear that Lumley-Lumley meant to say nothing about his trouble with the Head.

Maybe the chums of the Fourth and Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell had hoped the American junior would explain, but if so they were disappointed. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was as dumb as the proverbial oyster on that subject.

The cheery party was chatting merrily when the conversation was broken by the sudden appearance of Taggles, the school porter.

Sniffing slightly, Taggles looked round the crowded study until his eyes rested on Lumley-Lumley. Then he held out a sealed envelope.

"Which this 'ere came for you 'alf an 'our ago, Master Lumley," he said. "Delivered by 'and."

"A letter for me?"

Tom Merry & Co. noticed the junior's uneasiness, so they began talking about cricket again. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley tore open the envelope.

A single glance at the few words scrawled across the half-sheet of notepaper the envelope contained convinced the Fourth-Former that the message was from Flash Ike.

He read on in silence as Taggles withdrew. Not that Flash Ike had written a long letter. Merely a few menacing phrases.

"Unless you meet me in the lane by the football ground at half-past nine I shall know you have split. Then your father will suffer in a way that'll be a bit above your understanding."

That was all, but it was enough. Flash Ike was showing his teeth for some reason or other. Lumley-Lumley jumped to his feet.

(Continued on page 16.)

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EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

I'VE no doubt that there are plenty of cycling enthusiasts among the readers of the "St. Jim's News," and this is the time of the year when they are able to be out and about to their hearts' content. These fine long evenings, when lighting-up time is delayed to such an hour, enable you to get out right into the country for prolonged spins that make you feel that life is really worth the living. Motor-bikes are all very well in their way, but I don't believe that a fellow really gets more fun out of one than he can get out of a good, well-built push-bike.

And then look how handy a bike is. You can store it away in any odd corner, and fetch it out at a moment's notice, and it's always ready for immediate service. No petrol or oil to bother about, no licence required to ride it, and no tax to pay for the privilege of using it. They're all mighty big considerations, aren't they, chums?

Of course, there might be a little cleaning up to do now and again, but even then one of the fags will willingly oblige for a matter of a copper or two.

Yes; give me a push-bike every time. Most of the St. Jim's fellows possess them, as they're so jolly handy for slipping down into the village when anything's wanted in a hurry. Even the chaps who have got motor-bikes keep a push-bike as well, because they're not allowed to have motor-bikes at the school, and they'd be handicapped if they'd got nothing to use for short journeys. Fortunately, there's no rule against having push-bikes, though some schools bar them; I don't know why. There are certain regulations about not riding in the quad, and in and out of the gates, and so on, which, I'm afraid, aren't very rigidly adhered to. Most of the fellows mount as soon as they get their jiggers out of the shed, and ride off straightaway; and, though Taggles is supposed to see that nobody passes the lodge on a machine, he doesn't put himself about much beyond occasionally shouting: "Now, you know as you ain't supposed to ride that bike through 'ere, an' I shall report—!" By which time the rider has gone through the gates on to the road, and doesn't hear the rest of it.

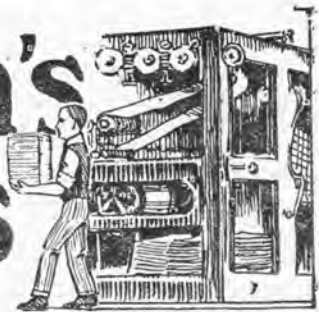
Of course, the rule about not riding through the gates was made solely in the interests of safety, because at times there is quite a fair amount of traffic along the Rylcombe Lane, and it isn't every motorist who slows down or takes any kind of precautions when passing the school. So that there is always a risk in whizzing out into the lane, as the high walls on either side of the gate prevent one from seeing what is coming along. But up to the present there has never been any sort of accident, and I trust there won't be.

Anyway, I hope that all of you, whether cyclists or not, will enjoy the contents of this special "Cycling" issue of the "St. Jim's News."

Tom Merry

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The St. Jim's News



CYCLISTS OF THE THIRD!

By Reginald Talbot.

GRUNDY says that he is the champion cyclist of 'St. Jim's'. I don't know exactly what he means by that, and I must say that I rather doubt whether he does himself. If he simply refers to the fact that he's got the finest mount in the school, I'll agree right away that he's saying no more than the plain truth. It was a present from his uncle, and I don't suppose the old gentleman got enough change out of a twenty-pound note to pay for more than two or three half-crown cigars when he settled the bill for it. And so if Grundy is basing his claim to being the champion cyclist at St. Jim's on the de luxe quality of his jigger, he's right on the wicket for once.

But, to tell you the truth, I don't think that's just what he is driving at. It's far more likely that he's got a notion that, as a rider, he is second to none, and in that case he's making a very sad mistake, because if anybody ever asked me to name the biggest dud who ever wobbled through the gates of St. Jim's on the saddle of a bicycle, I shouldn't have the slightest hesitation in saying: "Why, Grundy, of course!"

He went in for the two cycling events in the school sports last year. The first event was a slow cycling race. You know the kind of thing, I dare say. Everybody starts off level just as in an ordinary race, but instead of trying to get to the winning-post first, the idea is to get there last. It's really a test of balance and ability to control one's machine. Well, Grundy got right ahead of the rest of the field in his heat within the first few yards, and when he discovered that he was nearly at the winning-post while none of the others had completed more than a third of the course, he shoved on his brakes, stopped his machine dead, and, of course, promptly fell off, thereby disqualifying himself immediately. He afterwards explained his failure by saying that, of course, a speed-merchant like himself couldn't be expected to crawl along in that style; but just wait until the two-mile race came along, and then watch him! Just watch Grundy in the two-mile race—that was the tip to follow.

Well, I don't know whether anybody did take his tip and watch him, but if they did they had plenty of opportunity. He was the most conspicuous figure on the course in that event. He was pedalling along by himself about two hundred yards behind the stragglers, with the leaders about two hundred yards in front of them. In fact, on the last lap the winner and runners-up passed him, and he was a lap and a half behind when they passed the post. And then he said that he must have miscounted the number of laps he'd done, and put in one too many—perhaps two too many, in which case, of course, he was really the winner. And, what's more, I think he really believed it, too.

No, believe me, Grundy will never make a champion. Why, the majority of "racers" in the Third Form would make him look small. But, of course, George Alfred is wise enough not to match himself against them!

IF you go along by the main entrance to the gym and turn to the left, and then go round the corner, you'll come to the bike-sheds. The first portion is reserved for the use of the Sixth and Fifth, and then comes the Lower School part, which is considerably larger. Just beyond this is an open shed, with a row of stalls, and this will be found to be chock-a-bloc with a variety of old iron and general rubbish which you would no doubt at once assume to be the refuse-heap on which is flung all the smashed-up and worn-out parts from bicycles in the adjoining sheds.

But you would be wrong. It is not a refuse-heap at all—at least, not in that sense. It is the Third Form bicycle-shed, and its contents are bicycles belonging to Third-Formers.

Of course, the fags are permitted to possess bicycles in the same manner as the rest of the school. But in this, as in everything else, they have their own special method of doing things. Generally speaking, no fag owns a bike out and out. At best he only has a share in one, and those lucky young aristocrats who share one bike between two of them are reckoned the pampered darlings of fortune, especially if the bike is in anything like running order. One bike between two means that the owners need never dispute about who is to use the joint possession. They can always go out on it together, one on the saddle, and the other on the step, taking turn and turn about.

It is when five or six, or even seven, claim an equal share in the same bike that the trouble arises.

Only the other day I saw young Joe Frayne go riding out of the school gates with Manners minor standing on the back step and Teddy Trimble sitting uncomfortably on the crossbar, and when the trio got up the road, believe me, they picked up D'Arcy minor and Curly Gibson. Goodness only knows how the lot of them managed, but they did!

To look at some of the jiggers that are lugged out of the Third Form shed and pressed into service on a fine day, you'd be prepared to bet that they'd drop to pieces within the first hundred yards or so. They creak and rattle and squeak and clatter, but in some mysterious fashion they hang together and keep in commission. To see some old creak that ought to have been slung on the scrapheap ten years ago come wobbling down the Rylcombe Lane, with one fag on the saddle, digging away at the pedals, another on the step, and a third on the cross-bar, is a sight that is calculated to give a nervous person a bad fit of the colly-wobbles. The saddle-springs may be broken, and the front wheel badly buckled and roughly straightened with the aid of a hammer and a couple of bricks, and the tyres are more canvas than rubber, and the chain old and rusty, to say nothing of the fact that the handlebars are loose, which makes steering a matter more of luck than skill, but, still, it goes along, and that's all that counts with the cyclists of the Third.



By Dick Julian.

Bernard's Bone-shaker!

I DON'T suppose many readers of the "St. Jim's News" need to be introduced to Bernard Glyn, the tame inventor of the School House. Not a bad sort of chap, old Glyn, in spite of the fact that he's no end of a silly ass, and causes more trouble in one way or another than a wagon-load of monkeys. You see, when you've got an inventor, tame or otherwise, kicking about the place, you can never be certain what's going to happen next, but you can make a fairly safe bet that it's going to be something pretty lively.

One of Glyn's happy hunting-grounds is an old second-hand and scrap-metal shop in Wayland.

He was poking about one day amongst the piles of assorted rubbish in the shop when he came across something quite out of the ordinary, something that was not a scrap of use for any purpose whatever other than as a relic for a museum.

Naturally, it appealed to Glyn immediately, and he had it disentangled from the remainder of the debris and carted up to the school.

It came in a truck, pushed by the out-porter from Wayland Station, and two or three of us happened to be standing at the gate when it arrived, with Glyn walking at the side, looking as proud and pleased as if he'd just dug up the twin-brother to the Koh-i-noor diamond.

And of all things on earth, what do you suppose he'd brought to light? You'd never guess, so I'd better tell you straight out.

It was an old-fashioned high bicycle. You know the kind I mean, perhaps. They used to be called "penny-farthings." I think, because the two wheels are of different sizes. There's a big one in front and a tiny little one behind. The rider sits perched up on a saddle almost directly above the bigger wheel, and drives it along by two pedals fixed to the axle.

Glyn paid the man for bringing it, and then asked one or two of us to give him a hand in taking it across the quad towards the bike-sheds.

Some of the fellows were just coming off Little Side after cricket practice as we were trundling it across the quad, and they came running across to see what was what. I dare say they thought we were the beginning of a procession, and I'll bet we looked like it, too.

Two or three of the new arrivals had never seen anything like it in their lives before, and they made wild guesses as to what it really was.

But Blake made no mistake about it. He recognised it for what it was as soon as he set eyes on it, and, what's more, he declared that he'd known an old chap who had had one, and he'd learned to ride it. He volunteered to give a demonstration on this one, and Glyn, who was really rather keen to see his find in action, readily agreed to allow him to do so.

So Blake handed his hat to Digby, and started out to show what he could do. His first difficulty was to get on the blessed thing. There was no putting one foot on the pedal and just hopping on like a modern jigger. For one thing, the pedals were about the height of Blake's shoulder, and so he would have had to stand on his head to get his feet anywhere near to them, and that isn't what you could call a good taking-off position.

Anyway, we shoved Blake up to the crow's-nest, and gave him a good push off.

Then we stood out of the way—just in case. Not that we doubted Blake's claim to be able to ride it, but there's no sense in taking unnecessary risks.

House Rivalry!

The thing went wobbling forwards, with Blake on the saddle, digging away at the pedals. The gravel spurted in all directions, and so did a group of fellows towards whom he was steering—that is, if he was steering. He said afterwards that he had been, but to the rest of us it looked exactly as though the thing took him just where it wanted to go. The trouble, as far as Blake was concerned, was that, though at one time or another he might have known how to ride one of the things, he'd forgotten in the meantime.

Blake eventually came out of the saddle and landed on the hard surface of the quad with what a novelist would describe as a "dull, sickly thud."

But his attempt to ride the machine, in spite of its failure, had incited several other fellows to follow his example. They all saw, or thought they saw, exactly where he'd made his mistake, and they were confident they could better his performance. Figgins was especially keen, for he'd got an idea that this was exactly the kind of stunt on which his long legs would give him every advantage, and I must say there was certainly something in that line of argument.

Anyway, he had the next go, and succeeded in riding a few yards in a very shaky fashion before he came a cropper. Blake came up to the scratch again then, saying that he wasn't going to be licked by a New House duffer, and, with the aid of a spanner and a lot of struggling with rusty nuts, Glyn managed to make some alteration in the position of the saddle, and that enabled Blake to do better at his second attempt.

Then Figgy had another wrestle—in fact, the business became a sort of duel between Blake and Figgins, and School House and New House fellows present were soon backing up one or other of them as representing his House. If anything, perhaps Figgy, by reason of his lanky legs, had the better of the contest; but Blake's nothing if he's not a stickler, and he plugged away at the job of mastering the knack of balancing the jigger and pushing the pedals round, in spite of the fact that it was harder work for him than for Figgy.

At last Glyn had to take the machine away from them, for fear that one of the heads might come out and kick up a rumpus if it was seen being ridden about the quad; but we were all dead keen on knowing who was really the better rider, and it was decided that, at the next convenient opportunity, Blake and Figgins should have a race to settle the matter.

Dick Brooke, the day-boy, heard about it the following morning, and at once remembered having seen another machine of the same kind kicking about a barn on the Glebe Farm, and suggested that he should borrow it so that there could be a proper race, which, of course, would be far more satisfactory than timing first Blake and then Figgins.

Sure enough, he got permission to use the other, and, as Blake found it more suited to him than the first, he took possession of it. Both Figgy and he practised hard, and I should think the chemist down in Rycombe must have made a little fortune out of the bottles of liniment he sold to them.

A Rough Passage!

Finally came the great day of the race, and practically every member of the Lower School turned out to see the fun. The two were quite expert riders by then, and they started off at the signal in fine style. Figgy drew ahead during the first hundred yards or so, but Blake was soon level with him. A crowd of us were following on ordinary bicycles, though we might as well have walked for all the speed we needed. The

first bit of rise in the road found their weak spots, and they were both puffing and panting by the time they'd climbed to the top of what was really no more than a gentle slope. However, Blake was slightly in front, so from the School House point of view it was perfectly all right.

On and on they went—bump, rattle, thud, clang!—and finally came to the hill that drops down almost into Rycombe.

Now, up to then the job had been to keep those jiggers on the move, and, to judge by appearances, they'd been finding it to be the merry dickens of a job, too. But once they got over the brow of the hill, and commenced to descend, there was a very different tale to tell. The job now was to hold them back, and keep them steady, and the two riders soon discovered that the task of making the jiggers hop along when they didn't want to go was child's play compared with the task of stopping them when they did.

The brakes? Well, they didn't amount to much, and there was only one on each machine at that. Just a bit of iron that pressed down on to the iron rim of the wheel, and when it was applied it made the wheel wobble so much that the rider couldn't steer. So there was nothing for it but to sit tight, steer straight, and trust to luck that there was nothing round the bend.

And luck was out, for as soon as Blake and Figgy swept round the bend they saw



Willing hands assisted Jack Blake up on to the machine.

a big farm-wagon right in the middle of the road. They yelled, and so did we, but it takes more than yells and bicycle-bells to make a farm-labourer sit up and take notice when he's driving a wagon. Well, as neither Blake nor Figgy could stop, it was plain that they'd got to keep going, but it was equally plain that they couldn't very well go smack into the back of the wagon. There were high hedges on either side of the road, and the only gap was occupied by a pond, and a particularly muddy, slime-covered pond at that—not at all the sort of pond that would appeal to anybody as a suitable bathing-place. Still, it was clearly a case of choosing between the pond and the wagon, and, unpleasant as the thought of diving into the pond must have been, the thought of dashing into the back of that heavy vehicle was still more unpleasant. So Blake and Figgy steered for the only haven of refuge.

Flop! Splash!

They disappeared from view, and two geysers of mud and green slime shot into the air.

Ten seconds or so they reappeared, and the chap who could have said which was Blake and which was Figgins ought to be on the halls doing a thought-reading act. They were simply two green, weedy objects that bobbed up from the depths, and, for all we could have told, they might well have been a couple of water monsters that had swallowed Blake and Figgy, and come to the surface to see if there was any more grub coming their way.

Anyhow, that was the end of the great penny-farthing bicycle race—and the end of the penny-farthing bicycles, too, for they still repose at the bottom of the pond, embedded in mud.



SAVING THE HEAD!

(Continued from
page 13.)

According to the clock on the mantelshelf of Study No. 6 it was desperately close upon half-past nine, and, of course, the school gates were closed.

Still, Lumley-Lumley must see Flash Ike to-night. He could not go to bed without knowing what it was that had upset the American bucket-shop man. And he must make it quite clear to the swindler that he—Jerrold—had done nothing as yet to make Flash Ike vindictive.

Mumbling an excuse to Tom Merry & Co. Lumley-Lumley hurried from the study, his first thought being to hurry to Kildare's study and ask for a permit to go out for a few minutes. Then he remembered that Kildare was presiding at a prefects' meeting in the New House, and there was no time to go there.

He next thought of Mr. Railton, the Form master of the Fourth. But no, Mr. Railton was spending the evening with the Head, and so was Mr. Linton of the Shell. Lumley-Lumley remembered hearing the invitation given by Dr. Holmes.

It was an anxious time for the junior, for there was no time to be wasted scouting round looking for a friendly prefect who was not at the meeting, even if there was one to be found. Lumley-Lumley was graphically convinced of that by the sound of the school clock striking the half-hour.

And it was then that he glimpsed Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form, sauntering leisurely towards his room. Desperately Lumley-Lumley took an outside chance. He ran after Mr. Selby.

"Please, sir, can I speak to you for a moment?"

Mr. Selby stopped with a frown. He was suffering slightly from indigestion that evening, and indigestion always made the master of the fag Form a little uneven-tempered. He viewed Lumley-Lumley with anything but a friendly glance.

"Well, what is it?"

"I—I want to slip out of the school grounds for a moment or so, sir?"

"What?"

"To—to speak to a friend, sir," exclaimed Lumley-Lumley. "I know the Head would give me permission—"

The Third Form master frowned.

"Certainly not!" he fumed.

"But, sir—"

"At this hour!" cried Mr. Selby sternly. "On no account are you to go out. I never heard of a more extraordinary request. Ridiculous!"

He strode on, and Lumley-Lumley gritted his teeth.

He had done his best to gain permission, and he had failed. It was not his fault, as he saw things. Mr. Selby had not quite played the game in not making further inquiries.

A little embittered, Lumley-Lumley swung away towards the side door. Anyway, there was nothing to prevent him going into the quadrangle, nothing to prevent him making for the wall which overlooked a corner of the footer ground. By climbing that wall it was just possible he might be able to attract Flash Ike's attention, too—if Flash Ike had not already gone.

Seriously alarmed, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley broke into a run.

On reaching the wall he clambered up to the top of it, and there in the moonlight glimpsed Flash Ike in the lane. But the lane was some considerable distance from the wall, and Lumley-Lumley forgot that he, astride the wall, was in the shadow thrown by the ancient building of the School House. In consequence it was impossible for Flash Ike to see the junior.

Lumley-Lumley realised that presently, and called out as loudly as he dared. Even as the sound left his lips he knew the man in the lane could not hear.

And obviously Flash Ike was tiring of waiting. He kept looking up at the school clock, apparently watching for something. The clock struck a quarter to ten, and the American swung round on his heel.

He had been waiting for the quarter to end his vigil. Flash Ike was going away.

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Desperately Lumley-Lumley watched him.

For all he knew the bucket-shop scamp was going straight away to take action against his father. He had certainly threatened to do that.

Lumley-Lumley could not take the risk.

If he dropped down from the wall on the road side a fast sprint would take him to Flash Ike. Of course, it was breaking bounds again, but then no one could ever find out.

Only for a moment or two did Lumley-Lumley hesitate, for he was down off that wall almost as soon as the temptation came to him. Running hard, he was soon level with Flash Ike.

Almost viciously the American turned on the junior.

"So you've come at last!" he ground out. "By gum, you were wise—"

"Never mind about that part!" snapped Lumley-Lumley. "What's the trouble? Why did you write that note to me?"

Flash Ike glared menacingly.

"First of all, you tell me why Dr. Holmes wouldn't see me when I called early this evening—"

"How do I know?"

"Is that true?" rasped Flash Ike. "You haven't queered my pitch, eh?"

"I have done nothing at all!"

"Huh!" muttered Flash Ike. "That's all I wanted to know, Jerrold. You're keeping off the grass, then, and you're wise. I just wanted to make sure, because I reckoned it was funny Dr. Holmes didn't see me!"

He lurched away in the moonlight, and Lumley-Lumley raced back to the school wall.

There was a convenient tree close at hand, and it was as good almost as a ladder to Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. He clambered up it and gained the top of the wall.

He swung himself over, and was just about to drop in the quadrangle beyond when a stern, unmistakable voice rang out in the comparative darkness.

"So you have dared to disobey me, Lumley-Lumley!"

With a gasp of dismay the junior turned to find himself face to face with Mr. Selby. There was an expression of grim triumph in the Third Form master's eyes as he glared at the Fourth-Former.

"You have been out in spite of my direct order?" he snapped.

"I—I—"

"Answer my question!"

"I merely went a few yards on the other side of the wall, sir—"

"That is to say, you've broken bounds," interrupted Mr. Selby truculently. "When I forbade you to do so I had my suspicions that you might disobey, and I followed you out into the quadrangle. Lumley-Lumley, come with me at once to the Head's study."

In blank dismay Jerrold Lumley-Lumley obeyed, yet his face was calm and set-looking. Whatever trouble lay in front of him, he meant to keep a stiff upper lip.

CHAPTER 10.

Sacked!

"BAI Jove, what an uttuh duffah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke in a voice which was a mixture of dismay and amazement. With him were Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby. Also, in the quadrangle were Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell, and on the faces of all the juniors there was open alarm.

For the news had filtered through that Lumley-Lumley was to be expelled.

Exactly what had happened was not so clear. It was rumoured that Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had been caught by Mr. Selby breaking out of school the previous evening, but what the American's excuse was no one knew.

"He's to leave by the afternoon twain, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, aghast. "Taggles informed me, and it's quite twee. I wisked tacklin' Kildare."

"You are sure, Gussy?"

"I wegwet to say I am, Tom Mewwy. Lumlay-Lumlay is sacked!"

Others had the same story. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was to leave St. Jim's by the two o'clock train. The Head had expelled him.

Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane had heard the news, and Figgins & Co. of the New House knew all about it, so there could be no real doubt. Lumley-Lumley was sacked!

"It's absolutely wotten, deah boys!" declared Arthur Augustus heatedly. "At the pwesent moment Lumlay-Lumlay is in the punishment-woom, a close pwisoner. He is to go!"

"Rotten!"

"Absolutely wotten!" agreed the swell of St. Jim's. "As a student of human chawactah, I cannot help sayin' that the Head has made a wemarkable ewwor. I am perfectly convinced that Lumlay-Lumlay had a weally good weason for his extwaordinawy behaviour, bai Jove!"

"What reason, ass?" asked Herries.

"I wegwet to say I don't know, Hewwies; but he had a good weason!" declared Arthur Augustus. "I pwopose now, deah boys, to discovah why the uttah duffah bwoked bounds the second time."

"How, fathead?"

"By goin' to the punishment-woom."

"But you can't gain admittance to that."

"Vewy likely not, Digby, old top; but there are ways and means. No mattah what happens, I am goin' to have a word with Lumlay-Lumlay."

Without explaining further, Arthur Augustus turned on his heel and marched off into the School House. Quite mechanically, Jack Blake and the chums of Study No. 6 followed him, and behind them came Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther.

Tom Merry shrugged his well-knit shoulders.

"What does Gussy think he's up to?" he asked. "What's the good of going to the punishment-room, anyway? The door will be locked."

There was no doubt about that, of course. The door was very securely locked indeed, and the key had been taken away. Yet Arthur Augustus seemed quite satisfied.

Dropping to one elegantly creased trouser knee, he placed his lips to the keyhole of the locked punishment-room.

"Lumlay-Lumlay, deah boy!" he cried softly.

A sudden sound came from the room beyond the door as if someone had started to his feet. It was followed by the well-known, calm voice of the American junior.

"Hallo! Who is there?"

"I—D'Arcy."

"Well, what do you want?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye as an aid to thought, then answered:

"My deah old top, I want you to tell me ewevythin'," he said, in a paternal sort of voice. "I want you to explain why you bwoked school on the second occasion. I want you to desewibe who it was you went out to see."

"Rats!"

"Bai Jove! You young wascal—"

"And pray clear off, old chap," went on Lumley-Lumley. "You don't catch on to this business at all, so it's no good worrying. I'm to be sacked, and there's an end to it!"

"Yaas, büt—"

"Oh, do go away!" came the American junior's reply. "It's awfully decent of you to trouble, but where's the good? I've been caught out, so now I've got to go. That's logic, isn't it?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Then don't trouble any further," said Lumley-Lumley through the door. "The Head has been a regular sport to me, but, naturally, he had to come down heavy when Mr. Selby caught me out. I'm off by the two o'clock train, D'Arcy."

"And—and you won't explain mattahs?"

"No."

"Bai Jove, then it's no good our wemaining heah?"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley laughed his well-known reckless laugh.

"Not the slightest, old man."

"Gweat Scott, then we may as well wetiah!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "I wegwet to say, Lumlay-Lumlay, that I cannot help wegarding you as an uttah duffah not to place your twoubles in my hands. As a fellow of tact and judgment— Bai Jove, here's Selby!"

Naturally, the juniors outside the punishment-room scattered at sight of the Third Form master, but their way of escape was quite easy. There was a secondary staircase.

At the bottom of the staircase was the prefects' room. There Arthur Augustus called a halt.

"Half a mo, deah boys!"

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"I'm just goin' in here to telephone, Hewwies!" exclaimed the swell of the Fourth. "You see, Lumlay-Lumlay is in twouble—"

"We all know that."

"And when a fellow is in twouble," declared Arthur Augustus, "his patah is the wight man to consult."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Yaas, weally he is, Blake, deah boy," went on the Beau Brummel of St. Jim's. "I know what you are thinkin' of—that myself and my own patah—Lord Eastwood—don't always see eye to eye."

"My hat!"

"Why that widiculous exclamation, Mewwy, deah boy?" continued Arthur Augustus. "It is not my fault that my patah happens to be wathah pig-headed on occasion. However, when I talk him ovah to my way of thinkin' he is quite weasonable. As a result, I cannot help wegardin' that Lumlay-Lumlay's pwesent twouble is a mattah for his patah to considah!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Yaas, weally, Mannahs," went on the swell of St. Jim's.

"Lumlay-Lumlay is in vewy gweat twouble, and I pwopose at once to telephone to his patah."

"My—my hat!"

"Well, isn't it the vewy best thing to do, Blake, deah boy?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps it is, Gussy."

"I'm vewy glad you think so, too, Tom Mewwy!" declared Arthur Augustus. "When in doubt apply to the patah. Bai Jove, now, what is Mr. Lumlay-Lumlay's telephone numbah in town?"

None of the other juniors knew, but presently Arthur Augustus found a letter Lumley-Lumley had written to him during the Christmas holidays. To the left of the engraved heading there was a phone number, and that was enough for Arthur Augustus.

But at that moment the bell rang for second school, and Jack Blake caught at Gussy's arm.

"No time now, old ass!"

"Wats!"

"The bell's gone!"

"Yaas, I know," answered Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, that is not my fault. Pway explain to Mr. Wailton that I have an important telephone message to get through. Latah on I shall be in the class-woom."

"You ass, Gussy!"

"That's all wight, Blake!" declared Arthur Augustus serenely, slipping into the prefects' room, which was empty, and making for the telephone. "This is weally a vewy important mattah. Hallo! Pway give me numbah—"

But his chums could not wait to hear more. The bell for second school had ceased to ring, and all that was left to them was to race like mad for their respective class-rooms.

They left the corridor in which the prefects' room was situated just as hard as they could run, leaving Arthur Augustus still struggling to get through to Lumley-Lumley's pater.

Even as the juniors swerved away, though, Arthur Augustus got the number he wanted, and by a stroke of luck he was actually able to speak to Mr. Lascelles Lumley-Lumley, the millionaire, himself.

"Pway hold the line, Mr. Lumlay-Lumlay!" said the swell of the Fourth eagerly. "Yaas, wathah, I shall want an extwa thwee minutes. Quite possibly an extwa half-hour. Mr. Lumlay-Lumlay, sir, kindly listen verry intently, because this is a vewy important mattah!"

Arthur Augustus pulled up a chair, sat himself down in it, and explained matters as far as he understood them.

CHAPTER 11.

Awkward for Flash Ike!

"B AI JOVE, I believe that is Mr. Oswald Searle!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke the words half aloud as he reached Rylcombe Station after dinner that day. And what he said was perfectly true. Undoubtedly it was Flash Ike—otherwise, Mr. Oswald Searle—who stepped out of the "slow" from Wayland.

Not that Arthur Augustus stepped forward to greet the man Lumley-Lumley had introduced him to, because there was no time for that. The swell of St. Jim's had come to the station to meet Mr. Lumley-Lumley, the millionaire; not Flash Ike, the bucket-shop swindler.

"Although I can scarcely cwedit Lumlay-Lumlay's statement that he is a swindlah, bai Jove!" thought Gussy. "He is so vewy wespactable-lookin', and his twowsahs are remarkably well cwaised. Perhaps I ought to have told him about Lumlay-Lumlay being in twouble?"

But it was too late to think of that now, for Flash Ike had given up his ticket, and was leaving the station. Besides the London train was running in, and in his eagerness to meet Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's father Arthur Augustus forgot all about Flash Ike.

Hurrying to the ticket-barrier, the swell of the School House looked anxiously along the string of alighting passengers, and his face cleared at once.

"Bai Jove, he has come!"

Not for a moment had Arthur Augustus any doubt. Even if he had never met Mr. Lumley-Lumley before, he would have recognised the hard-faced gentleman striding towards the barrier as Jerrold's father.

There was the same keenness so noticeable in Jerrold's eyes; the same set, confident face. And Mr. Lumley-Lumley recognised Arthur Augustus almost as quickly. He thrust out his hand and gave the junior a grip that was just the reverse to flabby. It even made Gussy wince.

"Bai Jove, I'm glad you've come, sir!" said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Thank you!"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley hailed a taxi, and the two entered it.

"Now, tell me ewevything, repeating all you said over the telephone," said the millionaire calmly. "What has Jerrold

been up to? Why has he broken out of school on these two occasions?"

Arthur Augustus was at a loss to answer the last question. He knew no more than did Mr. Lumley-Lumley why Jerrold had broken bounds. All the same, the swell of the School House told everything he did know during that taxi drive up to the school.

Mr. Lumley-Lumley listened intently, but he said very little. He seemed quite content to let Arthur Augustus do all the talking.

At the school gates the millionaire told the taxi-driver to wait, then went striding across the quadrangle. Arthur Augustus followed, but drew back as they neared the front door. Naturally, he expected Mr. Lumley-Lumley to ring the bell and send in his card to Dr. Holmes.

But the American millionaire showed no signs of doing so. "You say Jerrold is to leave by two o'clock, D'Arcy," he said grimly. "We have no time to waste."

"No, sir, but—"

"Oh, I know where Dr. Holmes' room is!"

"Yass, wathah, so do I!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It is generally the wule, though, to—to—"

"Send one's name in, eh? Not when one is pushed for time. You see, I want to catch the next train back. Come with me, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus gasped again, only considerably louder. He was openly horrified at the prospect of Mr. Lumley-Lumley and himself marching unannounced into the Head's private study.

The mere idea of such a thing put Gussy into a hopeless fluster.

"I—I suppose it is all right, sir—"

"Yes, quite all right!"

"Bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus, as they reached the Head's closed door. "Gweat Scott! He isn't even knockin'—"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley's omission completed the flustering of Arthur Augustus, and he was a bright pink as he followed the millionaire into the study.

There he glimpsed Dr. Holmes sitting at his table, with a good many papers in front of him. In the Head's hand was his fountain-pen; and beaming benevolently down upon him was a man Arthur Augustus had seen once before that afternoon.

That man was Flash Ike!

A tense moment followed the arrival of Mr. Lumley-Lumley and Arthur Augustus in the room.

During it one or two curious little things happened. Dr. Holmes, for instance, coloured up slightly, appeared flustered and looked almost angry. Arthur Augustus went much pinker, but the real change came over Flash Ike.

That astute and persuasive American gulped loudly.

Amazement showed in his eyes as well, his lower jaw evinced signs of dropping, and all the time he was staring at Mr. Lumley-Lumley as if he were looking at a ghost.

Mr. Lumley-Lumley's face was quite unreadable, but those keen eyes of his missed nothing that was taking place in the room. Yet when he spoke his voice was absolutely unruffled, and very reminiscent of Jerrold's when that junior was up against trouble.

"I am afraid I am intruding, Dr. Holmes?" he rapped out.

"Well, yes, I am busy for the moment—"

"Business of a financial nature, I presume," nodded Mr. Lumley-Lumley. "Taking up a block of shares, perhaps; or maybe you're buying land?"

"I—I—"

"Nothing like putting your money into sound undertakings," went on Mr. Lumley-Lumley, apparently not caring an atom that he was behaving in a very extraordinary manner. "Of course, at any time you need advice concerning your investments, I should be only too pleased to give you a wrinkle or two!"

Dr. Holmes choked a little.

He was utterly taken aback at this amazing scene, and he was unable to cope with it. That anyone should burst unannounced into his private room, interrupt him when engaged in business, and talk about giving him "wrinkles," was beyond the headmaster of St. Jim's.

Obviously it was not beyond Mr. Lumley-Lumley, though. Just as calmly as if this was a general sort of conversation taking place in a club, he talked on.

"Those are share certificates I see you are about to sign, Dr. Holmes," he said. "If you like I will glance through them for you. I can see from here that they concern oil—and I know something about oil. Associated Gushers, by any chance?"

"I—I— Bless my soul—"

"Yes, I can see they are Gushers," went on the millionaire. "You propose taking up some land on the estate as well, then? Know anything about Gushers, Dr. Holmes?"

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"I— Yes—"

"That's good!" nodded Mr. Lumley-Lumley, never once looking at Flash Ike, who had gone as white as a sheet. "In a general way, sir, there are quite a lot of things you could tell me that I've never heard of, but one of them isn't oil. Still, you know all about Gushers, you say; so you've heard, of course, it's just a frame-up!"

Dr. Holmes stammered.

"A—a frame-up—"

"A swindle, sir," explained the millionaire. "One of those precious oil schemes without any oil in them."

"Are—are you sure, Mr. Lumley-Lumley?" gasped the Head, looking quite scared. "Mr. Oswald Searle has given me a very different account of the prospects of the oilfield—"

"Mr. Searle? Never heard of him!"

"Then pray allow me to introduce you, Mr. Lumley-Lumley," stammered Dr. Holmes. "Mr. Searle, this is Mr. Lumley-Lumley—"

"That's right," nodded the millionaire. "Only your friend doesn't happen to be Mr. Searle; he is generally known as Flash Ike—"

Dr. Holmes looked bewildered.

"Flash—Flash Ike?" he repeated.

"Yes; a notorious bucket-shop man, and one to be aware of," agreed Mr. Lumley-Lumley, pointing a dramatic finger at Flash Ike. "Let me see—how many times is it you have been to prison altogether? Three, to my knowledge!"

Flash Ike wetted his lips. Into his eyes there had come a vicious light, but that was completely overshadowed by the abject fear the man was in. He moved uneasily towards the door; but Mr. Lumley-Lumley stretched out his hand.

"Plenty of time, Flash Ike!" he rapped. "I came down here because I heard my son was in trouble. For some reason or other he broke from the school on two occasions, and I want to know that reason. Gee! Flash Ike, if you are at the bottom of this trouble, you've got something to stand there trembling about!"

Again Mr. Lumley-Lumley turned and faced Dr. Holmes.

"Surely you've heard enough to tear up anything you have signed connected with Associated Gushers," he said evenly. "Believe me, sir, you have escaped burning your fingers badly. Now, Dr. Holmes, I want to see my son; I want to know why you are turning my boy away from St. Jim's."

Obviously distressed, Dr. Holmes rose to his feet.

"But you received the letter I had posted on the mail train late last night?" he exclaimed. "I sent specially down to the station with the letter which explained everything."

"No, I haven't received any letter yet!"

"Nor the telegram I sent this morning, saying—saying what time your son would arrive home?"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"Nor the telegram, either," he answered. "But then I am staying in my London house at present. Dr. Holmes, none of this really matters; I just want to see the boy!"

"Yes—yes, of course!"

Dr. Holmes rang the bell, and again Flash Ike moved towards the door. Mr. Lumley-Lumley turned on him in a cold fury.

"Sit down!" he thundered.

Flash Ike's eyes sparkled, but he obeyed the command and dropped back into the chair.

Obviously the scamp was scared out of his wits. A minute or two later Toby, the page, came into the room, and Dr. Holmes gave the necessary order.

"Bring Master Lumley-Lumley to this room, please," he said quietly. "Here is the key of the punishment-room. At once!"

Toby hurried away to carry out the Head's orders. Meanwhile, in the study, the little group waited in silence.

CHAPTER 12.

,Saved from Disgrace!

QUIETLY Jerrold Lumley-Lumley came into the Head's study.

He was perfectly calm-looking, and he just nodded to his father. The millionaire nodded back, for neither of these two ever showed much of their innermost feelings to others. They were amazingly alike in the fact that their faces were unreadable.

Flash Ike shifted uneasily in his chair and wetted his lips again, as if they had developed the habit of becoming parched. Dr. Holmes looked stern.

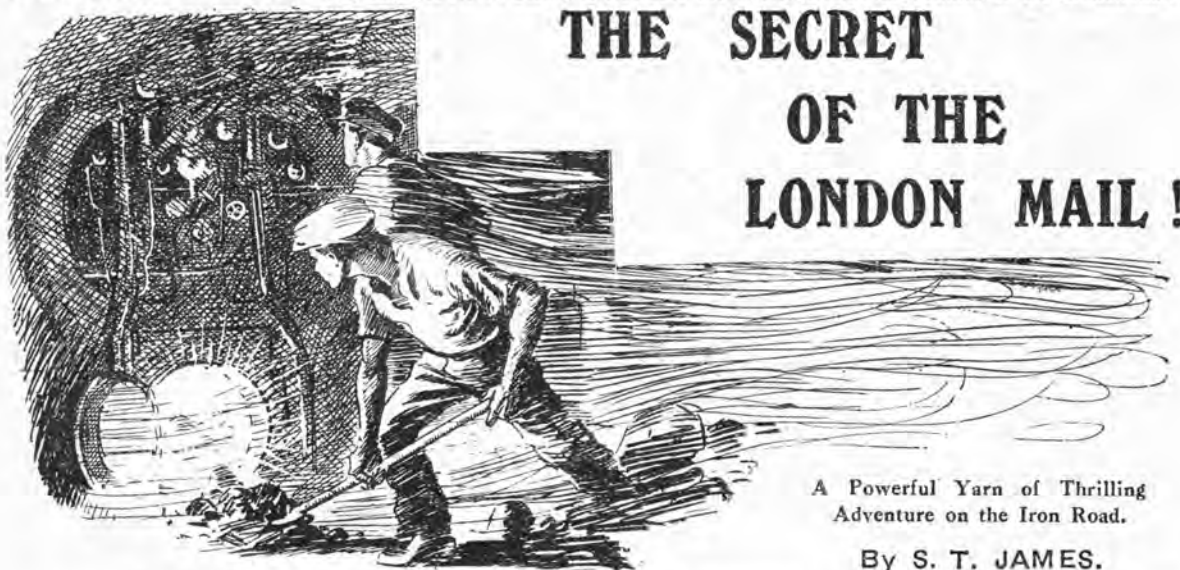
"Lumley-Lumley, once again I ask you to explain why you broke out of school," he said coldly. "If you have a good excuse, then tell me! I do not think any St. Jim's boy has found me hard or—unjust!"

"No, no, sir!"

"Then speak up, boy!"

(Continued on page 26.)

DANGER AHEAD! Inundated with reports of a disturbing nature, the divisional manager of the Northern Railway engages Harry Stacey to elucidate the mystery of the late running of the London Mail!



THE SECRET OF THE LONDON MAIL!

A Powerful Yarn of Thrilling
Adventure on the Iron Road.

By S. T. JAMES.

CHAPTER 1.

Something Wrong Somewhere!

IN the Derby office of the Northern Railway sat the divisional manager, a frown furrowing his wrinkled face, his white hair standing almost on end from worry. On the table before him was the day's correspondence, amongst it a report from the locomotive department concerning yet another case of late running by the London Mail. It was the fifth or sixth similar report, and though all the usual steps had been taken the trouble still persisted.

Side by side with the disturbing report lay a letter from the Chief General Manager:

"I am sending you an assistant," wrote Sir Herbert, in the genial conversational style that endeared him to the hearts of his subordinates; "he is Harry Stacey, son of one of our principal shareholders. Though young, the boy has been well trained in locomotive work and should be useful to you. I want him to gain experience so that he may be fitted for an administrative post. Of one thing you may be sure, he is absolutely trustworthy, and if necessary, can be engaged upon our most private work."

The divisional manager sighed as he re-read the letter, and touched an electric bell to summon his grey-haired chief clerk.

"Send the boy in to me," he said quietly; "then turn up the previous letters about our mail delays. I think I may set him at work."

The chief clerk elevated his eyebrows but made no spoken comment. Like the manager he was worried by these delays and thought if the boy failed they would be no worse off. More experienced men had failed already.

The door closed without a sound, opening again to admit Harry Stacey.

Lifelong experience had trained the divisional manager to read men thoroughly, and his searching gaze missed nothing. He expected a dandified youth in spats, with a monocle perhaps, and either a drawl or a lisp. This description admirably fitted nine of every ten shareholders' sons. Elevated above more worthy colleagues, they were prepared for good positions without much regard to efficiency. The divisional manager was sick to death of them, and his heart beat a trifle faster from relief when he

saw instead a sturdy youth of seventeen with sunburnt face, honest, determined and capable. There was neither monocle nor spats, and when he spoke—no lisp!

"You sent for me, sir," said the young man quietly.

"I've a job for you, Stacey!" The divisional manager's doubts had vanished, and he spoke with decision. "We are in trouble over the running of our London Mail. For nearly three months she has been continuously late. We have changed the engine crew repeatedly; we have used fresh locomotives, including the more powerful new ones built last year. Our inspectors have travelled upon the footplate, and our detectives in the brake-vans, but all without success."

He paused as the grey-haired chief clerk brought in the correspondence.

"You can read for yourself the explanations of the various men concerned," he continued, pushing across the pile. "Summed up, it is a case of what I call somniphathy. Invariably the train loses three or four minutes between Totley and Chesterfield. There is a three mile tunnel just outside Totley; usually she is to time on entering, a little late on emerging, and later still all the way to Chesterfield. We have very close connections at other places further south; any unpunctuality jeopardises the lot, and disturbs the working of several branch lines. Motor competition is very keen, and our passengers are taken forward by charabanc when the connection is missed. They claim the fare from us."

"You suggested somniphathy, sir?"

"Ah, yes!" The divisional manager permitted himself a smile. "It is a word we have coined to record that the enginemasters and inspectors have lied. According to the dictionary, somniphathy is a kind of temporary sleeping sickness lurking in the air, robbing men of control and memory alike, and leaving behind a hiatus that only imagination can fill. You follow me?"

"They lose the time and cannot account for it except by imaginary bad steaming of the engine?" suggested Harry.

"Either that or some gigantic conspiracy. The question is, what happens in the Totley Tunnel to rob observant men of their ordinary faculties? That, in my opinion, is the crux of the whole problem."

"It seems so, certainly," agreed Harry quietly, and there was an alertness about his manner that pleased the divisional manager.

"I propose then, to appoint you to work at our Sheffield sheds. The locomotive for the mail is always sent from Sheffield, and the men who drive are stationed there. Get amongst them, act your part well, and find out what the trouble really is. Amongst themselves they will talk more freely."

He held out a strong hand, giving a friendly and encouraging grip. Then, as Stacey turned to go he touched the bell to summon the grey-haired chief.

"I am sending the boy down to Sheffield as cleaner," he said smiling. "Also, I am having a driver transferred there. You must make the arrangements yourself, and to-day, too. Call the driver anything you like, and give him whatever history you like. The point is that he must appear on Monday in a manner that will not arouse suspicion."

"Stacey, the cleaner, is a stalking horse?" suggested the chief clerk quietly.

"Precisely!" agreed the divisional manager. "The new driver will be—myself!"

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble for Two!

THE Sheffield locomotive sheds are not too large, but they stable some of the biggest and best engines running.

Harry Stacey was soon at home in his humble role of greaser, for though his father was now a shareholder, the wealth was of comparatively recent origin. Educated at a council school and sent out to earn a living at the age of thirteen, Harry was essentially a son of toil.

The shed foreman, Dan Sheldon, a man of enormous stature, was a tyrant of the worst kind. He had a son, morally pampered and spoiled, but physically a replica of his gigantic father. Between the two, young apprentices and greasers had a very poor time.

Harry fell foul of the precious pair within a week of being in his new job. He was one of a cleaning gang, and they were stripped to the skin, scouring the inside of a boiler. Two very small

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and timid boys were amongst the gang, and upon one of these young Dan Sheldon picked his mark.

"Clumsy fool!" he snarled, aiming a blow at the victim.

"What's that for?" demanded Harry, as the boy fell backwards with all the breath knocked from him.

Dan Sheldon made no answer, but kicked at the prostrate body with his hob-nailed shoes. Then, as Harry stepped in his way, he struck without hesitation.

Harry took the blow on the fore-arm, and gave back a smart rap that rattled the bully's teeth.

"Want a hiding, eh?" snarled Sheldon. "Well, you'll get it!"

To the onlookers, the promise appeared a likely one. Dan was taller, thicker, and altogether more powerful than his opponent. He was not without science in his methods, and had the confidence of a long, unconquered career. Harry's guard was good, but not sufficiently strong.

Three stunning blows on the forearm seemed to paralyse it, and a fourth blow crashed past into his face. He swayed, lost his footing, and fell, whilst the victor let out a tremendous bellow of triumph.

But Harry was far from beaten. He climbed to his feet, and for perhaps two minutes boxed fiercely and breathlessly on the defensive. Then brute strength once again forced him back, but this time he recovered and hit sooner than Dan expected.

After that it was more like a massacre than a fight. The blood streaming from his nose transformed Sheldon into a raging maniac. He struck again and again, and every blow told.

The end seemed inevitable. Harry sagged weakly at the knees, and would have fallen, but, impatient of victory, Sheldon dropped his fists and kicked viciously at his rival's ribs.

It was a cowardly, despicable act, and the onlookers gasped with dismay.

Harry saw the kick coming, and as Sheldon's leg flashed towards him he grabbed at the ankle; then, using all his strength, he sent the bully toppling backwards, to land on the floor with a thud. Sheldon's head hit a wooden block; he gasped twice, wriggled, and lay quite still.

Very groggily Harry got up, and would have helped Sheldon up, too, but just as he stooped there came from behind a bellow louder than any before. It was the elder Sheldon, armed with a three-foot length of sodden rope, and inflamed with rage. He twisted Harry's arm cruelly, and held him, struggling, whilst the rope came cutting across the bare white back, taking skin from wherever it touched.

Harry had endured much, but such torture sent him mad. Somehow he twisted free, and, snatching up a wooden mallet, hurled it with all his remaining strength. Sheldon received the missile at the base of the ribs, and went down like a skittle.

"I'll thrash the life from ye!" he frothed, scrambling up and grabbing the wet rope-end. "I'll flay the skin from ye, head to foot!"

"You'll let him alone, foreman, and sharp, look you!" said a fresh voice; and the bully swung round to meet the eyes of a man quite as big and determined as himself.

"You, Jeeson?" he gasped. "You?"

"Me, you great slobbering brute! I'll have this bullying stopped. The lad shall report you, and I'll witness for him, look you."

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There was hate in the foreman's eyes, but fear predominated.

"Others have reported, too," he sneered.

"You've beaten them by lies and lack of evidence, no doubt," retorted the big driver calmly. "This time there'll be evidence from me, look you."

Tenderly he lifted Harry's battered body from the floor.

"You come with me, lad, and rest for the day. They'll not bother about your wages, look you, when we make our report."

Jeeson's rooms were close at hand, and after bathing Harry's battered face and rubbing his aching ribs they had their dinner.

"Now lie down a bit, lad," said the Welshman. "When you're feeling better we'll write our reports. And when you're ready for work again I'll take you on my footplate to fire a while. It's only a shunting trip, but it will keep you away from the shed."

"I'd rather not report them just yet," confessed Harry, leaning back upon the cushioned sofa. The weals across his shoulders ached abominably.

"No?" The driver did not seem unduly surprised. "Well, you know best, look you. I've only been here a few days, but I've heard queer things, and I'll not be surprised, whatever. The Sheldon's won't report you; they'll be glad to call it quits. Look you, they may even favour us awhile if we keep still tongues."

The shed foreman raised no objection when Jeeson asked for Harry as temporary fireman. As the driver had predicted, he was content to cry quits over the rough-and-tumble fight. He would take his revenge when and how opportunity arose; at present a truce was advantageous to him.

"We're shunting at Dronfield and Unstone, and taking a few minerals to Chesterfield," said the driver, as he backed his engine from the shed. "Tis a crazy old bus, and she smokes terribly. The tunnel is the worst of our ride, look you."

"Totley Tunnel is a queer place altogether," suggested Harry. "Even our crack expressmen meet with trouble, don't they?"

"Maybe so," murmured the big driver cautiously. "Did you notice the foreman this morning? He sprayed our coal with a hosepipe."

"To prevent it catching fire from sparks?" suggested Harry. "He often does that to express engines."

"Tis no part of his duty, then. And Sheldon never struck me as likely to work for nothing."

They were on the main line now, and presently a signal dropped to start them off on their work. It was Harry's first official ride upon the footplate, and he found plenty to interest him. For all that, Jeeson's words stuck in his mind, and would not be put aside. Calmly considered, the foreman's action was unaccountably peculiar. After all, why should Sheldon, of all men, trouble about the hosepipe? A word of instruction to subordinates would be quite enough.

As they tore through Heeley, Jeeson opened the throttle to whistle protestingly at an adverse signal. Nevertheless, he slowed down, and ran through Millhouses at not more than ten miles per hour. Crawling toward Beauchief, with the signal still at danger, he became impatient.

"It means that there is something slow on the line in front. Soon we'll be at Totley Tunnel, and to follow on through there will be terrible. The smoke will choke us before we're

through. Just look how the cranky old beast is puffing already!"

A dense cloud of thick, black smoke was pouring from the engine's funnel. She was an old machine, burning inferior coal, which, in spite of Harry's best stoking, gave considerably more smoke than heat.

The signals at Dore were still adverse, and they came to a stand alongside the station platform, with the yawning black mouth of the tunnel just visible in the distance.

Five minutes passed, then the line was signalled clear, and Jeeson opened his throttle once again.

There was a short, stiff incline leading to the tunnel, and he had no opportunity to get up speed, so they rolled in at about ten miles per hour, and were met by a cloud of smoke left behind by the preceding train.

Presently their own smoke was forced downwards by the tunnel roof, and the fumes became stifling.

Jeeson was coaxing from the decrepit old engine a gradual increase of speed, and Harry worked at the fire-hole till sweat dripped from every pore. But the tunnel was three miles long, and would take nearly ten minutes to negotiate.

Coughing and spluttering, Stacey seriously wondered whether he could last out the time.

Presently Jeeson turned from the controls, with a queerly twitching face. He was gasping for breath, and had a sodden handkerchief pressed over his mouth and nose.

"Never in all my life have I known anything like this!" he choked, and a minute later he collapsed upon the footplate.

Thicker, blacker, and still more powerful, the fumes gathered like a London fog. Harry felt his senses going, and moved unsteadily towards the throttle to shut off steam. Groping blindly amongst the controls, he found his fingers minus all sense of touch, and with a groan he, too, fell to the footplate. There he lay, whilst the engine raced forward, gathering speed rapidly.

Tearing from the tunnel, she rocked dizzily forward towards Dronfield, causing the station signalman to wonder what on earth was wrong.

All his signals were at danger, and the level-crossing gates were closed; but the engine crashed right through them, sending splinters in all directions.

Rushing to his switches, the signalman turned the runaway into a sand-drag, where the wheels would churn along in hollow, sand-filled rails till friction reduced the speed. At the end of the sand-drag was a derailing switch, and this a frantic stationmaster pushed over, having raced to the signal-box to do it; for there was a non-stop express only ten minutes behind.

"We laid the drag and switch only last week!" panted the stationmaster, turning to the white-faced signalman.

In the distance the runaway engine ploughed desperately through the sand, losing momentum with every yard. Then quite suddenly she lurched, staggered, and ran giddily forward into the soft, high sides of a disused sand-quarry. There she fell over and lay derailed, covered by a cloud of escaping steam and smoke. Mingled with the shooting flames was the pungent smell of burning cloth.

Twenty yards away was the main road, and now there came along a powerful, hooded motor, which drew up with a jerk. Two figures sprang out, and came running towards the smash.

A quick glance round satisfying them that the spot was deserted, they moved

down to where Jeelson and Harry lay amongst the sand. The stagger of the engine just before she overturned had pitched them out, and they were stunned from the fall. They had been fortunate to escape so lightly, for beneath the engine their caps were burning merrily.

Stooping down, the motorists lifted each prostrate body in turn and carried it quickly to the waiting car. Another glance round satisfied them that the countryside was still deserted and lifeless. With scarcely a sound the powerful car shot forward, moving toward the moorlands lying about the Totley Tunnel.

CHAPTER 3. Evil Work!

THE Totley moorlands stretched for miles, heather clad, and utterly deserted save by a very occasional poacher. Far from the main road was an old wooden hut, originally built for the comfort of gamekeepers, but now long disused.

Here the motorists carried the unconscious locomotive, first tying them hand and foot. Then the bigger of the kidnappers hurried away, leaving the younger to act as gaoler.

Presently Harry Stacey showed signs of consciousness, and when his senses fully returned he found himself gazing into the mocking, triumphant face of young Dan Sheldon.

"You?" he breathed, mystified. "Me!" gloated Dan. "Dad and I brought you here, and here you'll stay! When you're missed, people will say you funked and ran away. You'll be blamed for the smash and labelled cowards. Your name will be mud."

Harry understood the intention all too clearly, and his heart sank.

"We expected the smash," and waited for it," continued Dan, with relish. "We put it across you to pay off old scores—see? There was only one place where they could derail you."

"The spraying of our coal started it, look you," broke in Jeelson, who had recovered in time to put the puzzle together. "You put into the water something that would give off smoke and gas, and in the tunnel it overpowered us."

"Correct!" grinned Dan triumphantly. "Perhaps dad will tell you what he used, if you ask him. He'll be back in an hour when he has disposed of the car."

The two prisoners exchanged significant glances.

"One thing," said Harry at length, "we've solved the mystery of the tunnel. Now we know why our trains were delayed, and why the men lied about it. They could hardly confess themselves beaten by smoke. They would be the laughing-stock of the line."

"The truth would sound even less convincing than a lie," agreed Sheldon, grinning. Then he approached where

Stacey lay, and kicked his victim's ribs. "That's for you!" he jeered viciously.

Harry's eyes were fixed upon the open door, where he could just see the outline of an old boot-scraper, fixed firmly to the ground in its wooden socket. Though rusted and stained, its edge would still suffice to sever the ropes that bound him, he thought.

As Sheldon's prodding foot rolled him over and over, Harry hunched his bound-up feet and at the proper moment launched them in a terrific kick at the goating bully. They landed just beneath Sheldon's ribs, and the fellow dropped like a sack.

"Quick, Jeelson, roll on him!" urged Harry. "Keep him down while I cut the ropes!"

Jeelson dropped heavily upon the breathless Dan, but even as he did so a shadow fell across the doorway.

Looking up, Stacey and Jeelson saw the elder Sheldon.

"Ah, would you!" he snarled.

He advanced into the hut, and with callous brutality kicked Harry back to a corner.

"I came back very opportunely, it seems," he observed, after tightening

as cleaners without some secret motive. As for you"—he turned towards Jeelson—"you've your own confounded interference to thank! But for that, you wouldn't be here."

Daylight gave way to dusk, and dusk to darkness. Occasionally one or other of the prisoners would stir restlessly and wriggle with his bonds, but under the sharp scrutiny of two gaolers such efforts were doomed to failure.

As if to favour evil work, the moon disappeared behind a bank of deep black clouds, and presently the elder Sheldon rose from his seat, knocking the ashes from his pipe with great deliberation.

"Ready?" he asked, turning towards young Dan. The boy seemed terrified, but his father was cool as ever. "Pull yourself together," he urged. "There's no time for nerves."

Without answering, Dan picked up a long coil of thin white rope, which he slung across his shoulder. The elder Sheldon strolled to where Jeelson lay, and caught hold of the driver's heel.

"I'll take this one, Dan, and you can take the other," he said.

A moment later Harry found himself



As Sheldon's leg flashed towards him, Stacey grabbed at the ankle, then, using all his strength, he sent the bully toppling backwards to land on the floor with a thud.

the knots with which the prisoners were secured.

"The brute kicked me!" complained Dan, moving vengefully towards Harry. "Shall I kick him back?"

"Not now," cautioned the elder Sheldon. "In a few hours darkness will fall, and then we can dispose of them both. It is less than a mile to the nearest airshaft."

Like most other tunnels, that at Totley is ventilated by gigantic chimneys known as airshafts, rising through the earth from the tunnel to the surface far above. To fall down one of these would mean instant death.

"You will be tied together and lowered half-way down the shaft," continued Sheldon fiendishly. "Then we shall tie the rope to the ironwork at the top, and leave you to suffocate at leisure."

Stacey closed his eyes to shut out the hate in Sheldon's face.

"You came down here spying," continued the foreman. "I guessed that from the start. Your sort don't take on

being dragged across the hut towards the door.

"A few scratches won't matter to them now," commented Sheldon.

The heather-clad moorlands were soft, but the gorse stung and prickled like fury. Two stout gags had been fixed in the prisoners' mouths, so they were unable to shout for help though it would have been useless in any event, since the moors were absolutely deserted.

Climbing to the parapet of the airshaft, the younger Sheldon made the rope fast to the ironwork, while the elder Sheldon tied the prisoners together, face to face. Then, by tugging and heaving, they were lifted to the top. A gentle push, and they were swaying just over the parapet, with the black, threatening clouds seeming almost on their heads. From below came a whiff of engine-smoke, growing more and more pungent.

The Sheldons began to lower, and simultaneously the moon emerged from a bank of clouds. Looking up, Harry

saw the round aperture of the shaft diminishing in size until it seemed no larger than a threepenny-piece. Down and down they went, till he almost dared to hope that the bottom was near. Then the motion ceased, and they hung like the pendulum of a clock, swinging slowly to and fro.

With something like despair Harry realised that the position was almost hopeless. Whether the end came through suffocation or starvation it would inevitably be slow and painful. Sick with horror at the thought, he wriggled desperately, well seconded by Jeelson. Swinging and swaying, they bruised themselves upon the sooty sides of the shaft, quite insensible to pain. But wriggle and strain as they might, neither cords nor gag seemed to budge in the least.

Exhausted, they desisted at last, and the distant whistle of a locomotive seemed to mock them. Then there came from above a curious, unaccountable vibration of the rope, almost as if someone was straining to pull them up. For one wild moment Harry thought that perhaps the Sheldons had returned. But instead of going up they went down, just as a plummet falls. Fraying against the edge of the iron grating, the rope had broken in two.

Terrible indeed are the seconds when one plunges to an apparently certain death. If a drowning man's past rises up against him, how much more must a helpless victim suffer?

As they fell, they could hear distinctly the rattle of a goods-train passing below. It was a long train, containing some valuable and fragile merchandise, and across each wagon was stretched an enormous tarpaulin, tightly drawn and firmly secured. Stacey and Jeelson hit the very centre of one of these sheets, and it broke their fall, just as a fireman's blanket breaks the fall of those who jump from a blazing building.

Gathering speed, the engine rushed forward, emerging from the tunnel amidst a shower of sparks. Then, with scarcely perceptible slackening, she tore through Dronfield, whistling a defiant challenge. The darkness deepened, moon and stars retired behind the clouds, but the goods-train continued steadily on her southward course, lighting the sky by the flames flaring from her blackened smokestack.

CHAPTER 4.

Shocking for Sheldon!

HARRY sat up stiffly, and looked round in wonder that he was still alive. He was bruised from head to foot, but beyond that was not conscious of any serious damage. Jeelson was rather less fortunate, having been undermost when they fell. The driver's left arm hung limply by his side, broken above the wrist.

"And they say miracles never happen!" murmured Jeelson, turning painfully toward Harry.

A tall, thin man, in the uniform of the Northern Railway was standing against the fireplace.

"This is a waiting-room at Chesterfield passenger station," he explained. "I am the yardmaster; we found you in a wagon of the Sheffield to Bristol goods-train."

He was staring at Jeelson with growing wonder, for the driver's moustache was twisted to a degree that no natural moustache could ever attain.

"It is false, of course," confessed Jeelson, taking off the disguise and flinging it away.

Then he took a damp sponge and bathed his face in warm water, rubbing away any pencilled lines and other artistic decorations. From his mouth he ejected a quantity of plastic gum.

"Great heavens!" gasped the yardmaster, gazing upon the well-known features of the divisional manager.

"Jeelson—you?" muttered Harry, still too dazed to comprehend the full significance of the discovery.

Then the ambulance arrived, and they were taken to hospital. They would have stayed there, too, but for the insistence of the divisional manager.

"You can say what you like, and do what you like, but I will not stay!" he announced, when they had set his arm. "I know the risk, and I'll take it." He was white with pain and weakness, but his courage was undiminished. "I've a job to do at Sheffield, and unless I do it quickly the birds will have flown."

"There are the police; tell them!" urged the house-surgeon irritably. "Consider your boy, too. He is badly shaken up!"

"Stacey can stay if he pleases!" cut in the divisional manager firmly. "For myself I shall go, cost what it may!"

"Then go!" snapped the doctor, turning away. "I wash my hands of you!"

"I'm going, too!" announced Harry Stacey, ignoring the doctor's scowl.

A taxi took them back to the station to catch the midnight train, and in the seclusion of a first-class compartment they relaxed their aching limbs for a time. The divisional manager was faint from pain and exhaustion, but an indomitable will carried him forward.

"The account is one I must settle personally," he murmured from between white lips.

The yard-master had given them a small pocket-flask of brandy, and at Harry's suggestion the divisional manager swallowed a few drops.

"There is so much to explain," he murmured presently. "My masquerade as Jeelson, for instance. All along I intended inquiring into the mystery myself, but until you came I could not see how to do it without suspicion. I sent you down as a stalking-horse to cover my investigations. The Sheldons suspected you immediately; of me they have no real suspicion even now. It was my interference on your behalf, and my threat to take your part that brought me into their scheme of revenge. I never thought there would be such grave danger for either of us."

He paused for a moment, exhausted from the effort of speaking. Then, despite Harry's protest, he resumed.

"We must understand one another fully," he insisted. "You have done so well that I no longer wish you to work in the dark. To-day's adventures have shown us how our trains were delayed, and we know, too, who is the guilty party. But the most important part of the secret is still hidden from us—that of motive. Only Sheldon knows, and only from him can the secret be forced."

The train was running through several short tunnel sections between Heeley and Sheffield. Already the driver had shut off steam, ready to stop, and presently the grinding of brakes warned them to be ready.

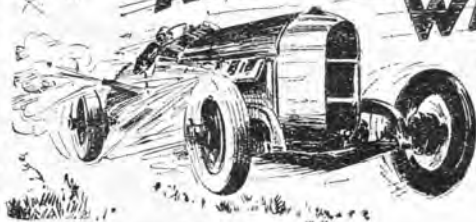
Harry assisted the divisional manager to alight, and an obliging porter called a taxi for them.

"Ordinarily, I should have walked back down the line to the locomotive sheds," explained the divisional manager. "Just now I am not fit. The taxi must take us round by road, and stop for us at the nearest possible point."

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From an inside pocket he produced two revolvers.

"You had better take one of these, Stacey," he said. "I carry them for emergencies, and by an oversight the Sheldons left them with me."

The taxi drew up with a jerk, and the driver came round to explain that the locomotive-sheds were now within two hundred yards.

"Climb the fence and the embankment, sir, then cross the line and bear to your right," he directed sympathetically.

"Wait for us here!" ordered the divisional manager, and, with an effort, he climbed to the lineside, where the lights of the locomotive-shed could be seen quite distinctly.

"Sheldon may not be here, of course," said the manager, as Harry took his sound arm and helped him over the rough places. "He may be at home in bed. Worse still, he may have cleared away altogether, though I hardly think so. You see, from his point of view there was nothing to fear. His disposal of the bodies was clever, and our disappearance was explained by funk over the accident. However callous the man may be, I hardly think he could go straight home to bed. Young Dan certainly could not. More probably they would work a night-shift, partly to compensate for their absence during the day, and partly to drown their thoughts—"

He broke off, for they were near the sheds now, and an uncanny silence possessed the place. Harry stole forward to reconnoitre, and through the open door he saw the area of shed illuminated by overhead electric arc lamps, with several locomotives hissing gently. Two drivers were making steam, a fireman was polishing some metal work, and a turntable was swinging gently round.

At the far end of the shed was the foreman's office, and in it sat the two Sheldons, apparently in close conversation. Harry was too far away to hear their voices, but by creeping round the side of the shed he reached a convenient window. There the divisional manager joined him, and low though the Sheldons spoke every word was audible to the listeners.

The clinking of glasses upon the side of an almost empty brandy-bottle showed that neither of the conspirators felt very brave.

"We make a mistake in coming here," confessed the elder Sheldon hoarsely. "I thought the work would ease our minds; instead we are attracting undue attention from everyone. Can't you pull yourself together, man?"

"It is terrible—terrible!" whispered the boy brokenly.

He hid his face in his hands, whilst his father mixed another glass of brandy, which he swallowed in a gulp. A little flush of colour chased away the ghastly pallor of his cheeks.

"I'm sorry now that we did it," agreed the elder man shakily. "There was nothing else for it beyond giving up our scheme. Just when we were doing so well, too. Every time the mail was late we profited enormously. At each station we had a charabanc waiting, and passengers who missed their connections were taken forward at a suitable fare. Usually they recovered the money from the railway, and the alternative was to wait several hours for another train. Even when we had paid our motor-men the profit was handsome. And the risk seemed to be nil."

"We—we ought to have stopped," whispered the boy.

Raising his hand, Harry Stacey tapped



Stooping down, the motorists lifted the prostrate body of Stacey and carried him quickly to the waiting car.

gently at the window, and the sound was altogether too much for the nerves of the Sheldons. Like two trapped wolves they glared around, and when Harry's face came slowly into view they broke down altogether. Shrieking like a lost soul, the younger Sheldon tried to run away, but his limbs positively refused to carry him, and he fell in a heap on the ground.

The elder Sheldon stood stock still, the pallor of his face gradually changing to a dreadful hue. Twice he tried to speak, but the result was inarticulate. Then two of the drivers came running inside, drawn by the shriek.

Meanwhile, Harry and the manager were hurrying round to the door, and as they entered the little group of workmen fell back to make room for them. The appearance of the divisional manager at midnight, in company with an apprentice cleaner, was certainly unusual, but formed no real reason for the collapse of the Sheldons.

A moment later the watchers were still more surprised, for as the foreman turned towards the visitors it became obvious that Harry Stacey, and not the divisional manager, was the cause of his fear.

"You—you?" he croaked. "Where is Jeeson?"

"I am Jeeson," said the divisional manager curtly.

He waved the curiously-eager spectators aside and shut the door. Then in a few brief words he explained the reason of his masquerade, leaving the foreman looking more deathly than ever.

"Attempted murder and several other counts," he finished grimly. "We know now why you did it. Your motor-charabancs were cleverly thought of, but they will cost you dear. You will clasp your hands behind you whilst Stacey ties them," he added.

Then they revived the younger Sheldon and tied him also, moving off towards the waiting taxi.

An astounded group of locomeen stood watching them go, but no explanation was given. The divisional manager was on the point of collapse, and had neither time nor strength for useless speech.

They moved across the line in single file, young Sheldon leading, followed by his father, with Harry and the divisional manager behind.

"Hurry!" said the manager curtly. "There's a train approaching!"

Glancing round desperately, Sheldon thought he saw a chance of escape. Hesitating, and pretending to stumble, he stopped, and they thought he was waiting for the train to pass. But instead he jumped across the line at the very last moment, hoping that the train would screen him from their shots long enough to hide in the darkness.

It was a mad attempt, for his foot slipped on the smooth railhead, and he fell directly in the path of the shrieking express. There was a dull thud, the racket of the passing train, and then silence save for the hysterical sobbing of young Dan Sheldon.

And no wonder, for twenty yards away lay something that had once been human.

They did not prosecute the younger Sheldon, after all. The divisional manager considered him sufficiently punished already. Instead, they found him another job, and gave him opportunity to start afresh, free from bad influences. His professions of gratitude were overwhelming; whether or not they were sincere only time could show.

"As for you, Harry," said the divisional manager, smiling, "the general manager writes to say he is appointing you to a well-paid, administrative post in another district. You deserve it, and I congratulate you. All the same, I would have liked to keep you."

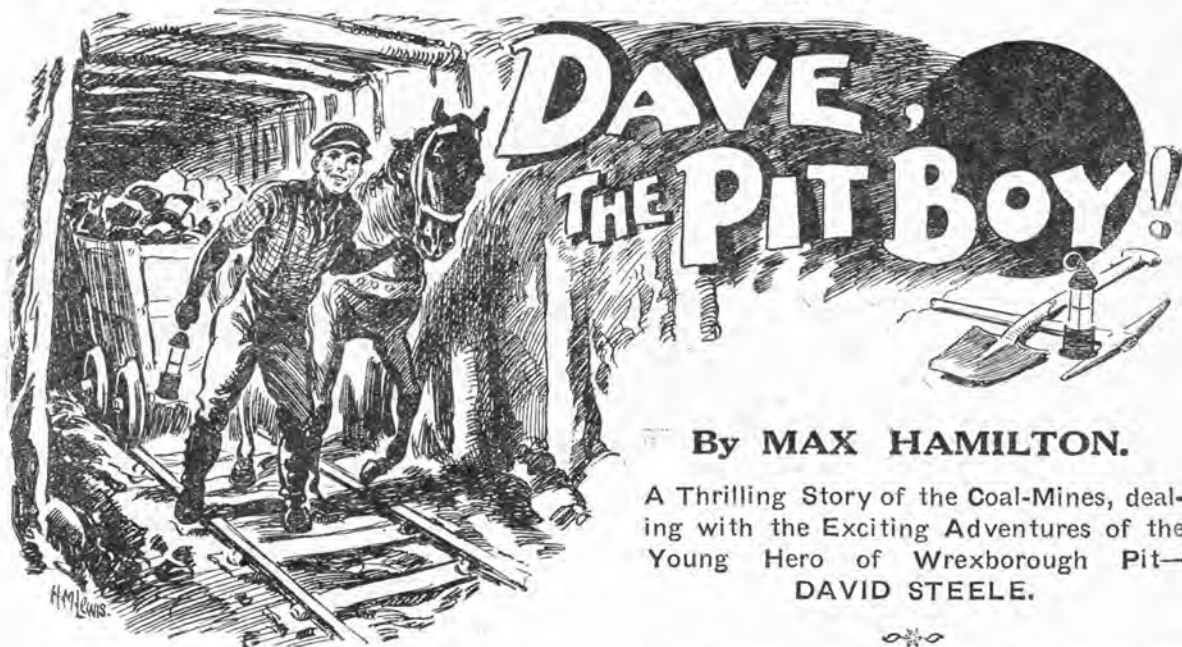
"Next time the mail is late I will come back to help you," promised Harry, smiling.

"Yes; but it is hardly likely the mail will be late again," said the manager confidently.

THE END.

(Look out for a thrilling story of theatrical adventure next week, entitled: "THE SIDDONS' RING!" by Philip Hardy. You are sure to enjoy it, chums.)

"GUILTY!" Through the hushed stillness of the court David Steele listened to the judge's solemn sentence!



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.

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 meets Markham, who, in trying to endanger the lad's life, gets hoist with his own petard.

Meanwhile, George Scott, having so far failed in his rascally mission, usurps his brother's place and brings his dastardly vengeance to bear upon the miners. Wrexborough is soon in a state of uproar, and George Scott's life is in jeopardy, when Dave makes a dramatic appearance in defence of his enemy.

Having escaped the power of the rioters, the crafty Scott turns again upon Dave, and takes from the lad's pocket a written confession he had signed a short time before. Then, leaving Dave a prisoner, he flees. The pitboy gains his freedom, and is fleeing from some of Markham's allies later, when he loses his way on the moor. In the dead of night he hears a cry of pain, and, following the direction from whence it came, he finds himself outside a disused house, from which someone had just made a hurried exit. Pushing open the door, David enters, to find a long, curved knife lying on the stone steps. He picks it up, but, too dazed to think clearly, and feeling utterly exhausted, he seeks repose in a heap of hay, the knife still clasped tightly in his hand.

A sound of voices suddenly arouses him, however, and, to his horror, he finds himself surrounded by a posse of police, who, having found the body of George Scott on the premises, accuse Dave of the murder.

Steele is placed in the dock at Wrexborough Gaol, and so black does the opposing side make the case against him that the lad's courage sinks.

Then, following the addresses of the lawyers on either side, comes the summing-up from the Bench.

With breathless anxiety, David listens to the judge's fatal words. (Now read on.)

The Verdict!

IN a long and able speech the presiding judge had summed up the case; and that summing-up, as many in the court realised, with a pang at the heart, was not favourable to Steele's acquittal.

It was impossible, the judge pointed out, to get over the evidence of the knife found in the boy's hands—the knife which had obviously been the weapon with which the murdered man's life had been taken. He left it to the jury to decide whether or not the prisoner's story of his meeting with a man whom he had been unable to recognise, or even see, a few paces from the scene of the murder with his subsequent account of his finding the knife in the darkness, was probable or not; but, for his own part, the tale seemed to him to make great demands on their credulity.

As for the witnesses for the defence, they had dwelt almost entirely upon the incompatibility of the alleged crime with the prisoner's previous character and conduct, the evidence of Mr. Scott, the murdered man's brother, being especially noteworthy in this respect. There certainly did seem a

difficulty in reconciling the two, especially after the prisoner's defence of the murdered man against the rioters; the jury must take that into consideration. On the other hand, the evidence was strong, and they must not allow themselves to be influenced by sympathy for the prisoner's youth and previous good record to the detriment of the ends of justice.

At the conclusion of the judge's speech the jury filed out to consider their decision; and David was escorted by the warders out of the court to await the verdict.

That period of suspense—and it lasted for nearly two hours—seemed to him the most sickening in his life. He sat like a stone, staring before him, refusing the food that was offered him, even when it was pressed upon him by a kind-hearted warder, who took pity at the sight of the boy's drawn, white face; and longing for, and yet dreading, the moment when the uncertainty should be ended.

At length someone touched him on the shoulder. He rose, his knees trembling beneath him, and once more took his place in the dock, trying to gather from the faces of the jurors the fate that awaited him.

In answer to the question as to whether their finding was that the prisoner was guilty or not guilty, the foreman rose and said, in an almost reluctant tone:

"Guilty! But we most strongly recommend the prisoner to mercy."

"On what grounds?"

"On the grounds of his youth, and the great provocation received in the murdered man's previous attempts upon his life."

David set his teeth. The foundation of the world seemed to be shaken beneath him. He was innocent, and circumstances had made him appear guilty in the eyes of his fellow-men; he was a proven criminal—a murderer!

The kindly warder, thinking that the boy was about to collapse, put his arm round him to support him; but the touch recalled David to himself. He drew himself up, and stood with a white, set face staring before him. His thoughts, after the first awful shock, were not for himself.

"Mother—poor mother! How will she take it?" was the one thought that beat upon his brain.

Then, through the hushed silence that had followed the half groan with which the verdict had been received, he heard the voice of the judge asking him if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him.

David's lips were white, but his voice was clear as he replied:

"Nothing; except that I am innocent."

Then came the judge's voice announcing that he would forward the jury's recommendation for mercy—a recommendation which, he added, the prisoner's extreme youth gave him hopes would be favourably received—to the proper quarters, followed by the customary, but none the less awful, sentence of capital punishment.

As the last words died away a shriek broke the silence. It came from Mrs. Steele, whose strength and composure had at last given way under the agonising strain.

"Mother—oh, mother!" cried David, the tears streaming down his face as he stretched out his arms to the sobbing woman.

But a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he was hurried out of the court; and, half believing that he was in some awful dream from which he would presently awake, he was taken back to the police-van, and so again to Wrexborough Gaol.

A Dash for Liberty!

"YOU must keep up a good heart, David! Never say die, my boy. It's a hard blow, I know; but everything that can be done for you is being done, and I haven't a doubt of your reprieve myself."

The speaker was Scott.

David looked up at him sadly.

"And what does a reprieve mean, sir?" he answered hopelessly. "Penal servitude—a lifetime of it! I don't know that I wouldn't rather be dead at once."

Scott laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You mustn't talk like that, Dave," he said gently. "While there is life there is hope, you know; and for my part I shall never lose the hope, the determination, to clear up this mystery of my wretched brother's death, and prove that you were not concerned in it. Even though life may seem intolerable to you for a time, you will know that you have friends whose one aim will be to clear your name and set you free again."

"You're very good, sir," David returned with a grateful glance. "You must forgive me if I've lost heart. It seems so impossible that the truth should ever be known. The man who committed the crime, and got off safely in the darkness with the money is hardly likely to own up, and there is absolutely no clue as to who he was."

Scott drew his brows together thoughtfully.

"I wonder," he said, after a moment's silence, "whether Markham, if he is still alive, could throw any light on the matter?"

"Nothing has ever been heard of him since that night when he went mad in the mine and tried to kill me, has it?" asked the boy.

"Nothing; it is most mysterious. If he had not been mad I should think he was in hiding somewhere, or had left the district, but a man in that violent condition must surely have attracted attention wherever he went. I myself have

investigated his haunts in the old mine, but I found no trace of him there."

"Perhaps," said David bitterly, "he was the man I met that night in the snow. If so, mad or not, he'll probably have sense enough left to keep out of the way. I don't think there's much to be hoped for from his direction, sir."

"We must try every direction," replied Scott resolutely, "whether it looks like furnishing us with a clue or not. And, meanwhile, David, you must do your best to keep your courage up—for your mother's sake. It will make her grief more unbearable than it is at present if she knows that you despair."

He had touched the right chord by turning the boy's thoughts from his own sorrow to that of his mother.

"How is she, sir?" he asked huskily.

"She was quite broken down at first, poor thing!" Mr. Scott replied. "In fact, the doctor has forbidden her coming to see you for a day or two, as he thinks the meeting would be too much for her in her present weak state. But she is living in hopes of a reprieve, David, and I do not think there is the slightest doubt that one will come very soon. Your youth is greatly in your favour; and then practically the whole town has signed a petition asking the Home Secretary to reconsider the sentence. And not Wrexborough only; your friend Mowbray has been working for you like a Trojan in Roxley, and has obtained a whole sheaf of signatures."

"Time's up, sir!" interposed the attendant warder respectfully.

David wrung his employer's hand. Scott's visit had done him good, and lightened the load of despair that had oppressed him since the trial.

Nor was Scott's belief in the granting of a reprieve at all unfounded. On the succeeding day the governor entered David's cell to inform him that the Home Secretary had seen fit to alter the sentence to one of penal servitude for life; and the boy was immediately removed from the condemned cell, which he had hitherto occupied, to another part of the prison.

Two days later the order was issued for his transference to Portland, where his term of penal servitude was to be spent.

He was allowed an interview with his mother before he left—an interview that, much as he had longed for it, yet went nearer to breaking down his courage. He saw Scott again also, and the mine-owner reiterated his assurance that he would never cease to work for David's freedom.

It was early morning when David, clad in the rough suit of a convict, marked with the hateful sign of the broad arrow, left Wrexborough Gaol. A thick white mist lay on the ground, and the air was chill with frost. The boy shivered as he was hurried from the prison gate into the "Black Maria," waiting to convey him to the railway-station. He had a strange, dull feeling that what he was going through was all some horrible dream—that he should wake up presently and find it was time for him to hasten off to his work in the pit.

When the station was reached, however, and he was forced to descend from the prison-van and cross the platform to the third-class carriage reserved for him and his escort, the



"Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?" asked the judge sternly. David Steele licked his white lips. "Nothing," he replied in a clear voice, "except that I am innocent!"

dream-like sensation left him. He realised only too acutely the misery and shame of his position; and he walked with drooping head and his eyes upon the ground, acutely conscious of the glances—some curious, some pitying—that were cast upon him by the passengers upon the platform. It was a relief to take refuge from their eyes in the carriage, and to see the warder, to whom he was handcuffed, promptly draw down the blinds on the station side.

Five minutes later the train was in motion, and David had begun his journey to Portland.

"I wonder," he thought dreadingly, looking round the carriage, "how many years it will be till I am in a train again?"

Even as the thought passed his mind the train plunged with a roar and a rattle into the first of the three tunnels that lay between Wrexborough and Roxley; and the warder, who had provided himself with a paper, laid it down, with a grunt of annoyance.

"Why the dickens don't they give us lights?" he growled, half aloud.

The tunnel was a short one. In a minute, or thereabouts, the train emerged from it, and the warder leaned forward to pick up his paper again from the opposite seat.

As he did so his prisoner started perceptibly.

He had seen—and his heart had given a little leap at the sight—that the handcuff by which he was secured to the warder was not properly fastened; in fact, it had actually come unclasped upon his wrist.

For a moment he could scarcely believe his eyes. Such a gross piece of carelessness was incredible—impossible! But a second glance assured him that, impossible or not, the thing was so.

Instantly his brain was at work, contriving, scheming how to take advantage of this piece of official neglect. And that advantage, he saw at once, if it was to be taken at all, must be taken immediately, for at any moment the hitherto unsuspecting warder might make the discovery that his prisoner was only fettered so long as he chose to remain so. But, to David's infinite relief, he sat motionless and absorbed in the study of his paper, until the train again plunged into darkness, as it entered the second and longest tunnel between the two stations.

It was in this tunnel that David had decided to make his desperate dash for liberty.

Both of the doors of the compartment were, as a matter of course, locked. The boy's first idea had been to leap up, make a dash for the window, lower it, and precipitate himself through it upon the line, be the risk to life and limb what it might.

But a second and better expedient was suggested by the construction of the carriage.

The compartment in which he and the warder were travelling was one of those old-fashioned ones, built with a small space between the roof and the partition cutting it off from the next one, a space of only a few inches, but sufficiently large—so, at least, the boy hoped—to enable anyone as slim as himself to squeeze through it into the next compartment. There one of the doors, at any rate, that on the platform side, would be unlocked, and the risk of dropping on to the line from a train in motion would, therefore, not be nearly so great as if he were to leap from the window.

A long whistle came from the engine as the train rushed

into the gloom of the tunnel. David drew a deep breath; then, as darkness closed over them, he sprang to his feet, wrenched his hand loose, gripped the edge of the luggage-rack, and swung himself bodily into it.

There was a shout from the astounded warder. Naturally concluding that his prisoner was making for the window, he leaped across the floor of the carriage with arms outstretched to grasp—emptiness! He turned and felt for him on the seats and under them, cursing the prisoner, the tunnel, the railway company for their parsimony in lamps, and himself for having come without a box of matches.

The boy was not there. There was nothing for it but to close the window, seize the alarm-cord, and pull it for all he was worth. And this the exasperated warder promptly did.

"The window hasn't been opened; then where, in the name of thunder, has he got to?" he asked himself.

The next moment he was somewhat enlightened.

From the neighbouring compartment came a chorus of extraordinary sounds—sounds that suggested that a whole carriageful of passengers were engaged in a free fight. Shouts, shrieks, the noise of people tumbling over one another, women's voices appealing to the guard to stop the train—all these brought enlightenment to the listening warder.

"He's got in next door!" he gasped in astonishment. "How did he manage it?"

The warder had guessed rightly. It was David's sudden and unexpected entrance into the next compartment that had caused the tumult. While his gaoler was instinctively making for the window, with the idea of preventing his escape, the boy had squeezed and struggled through the space at the top of the partition until he had succeeded in getting into the neighbouring compartment.

He had no time to lose if he was to leave the train unseen, since the end of the tunnel must now be close at hand. Without pausing an instant, therefore, he dropped from the rack.

He had intended to land on the seat; instead, he landed on the top of the substantial lady who occupied it, and who not unnaturally gave vent to a terrific yell. Extending her arms, she thrust her unseen assailant from her with all her might, with the result that David was precipitated against a man on the opposite side of the carriage. The back of the boy's head came in violent contact with this individual's nose; and, under the natural impression that he was the victim of an unprovoked assault, he struck out wildly.

Unfortunately, in the dark and crowded carriage, the blows which were intended for David went astray on a peppery old gentleman, who, believing that robbery with violence was the object of this extraordinary attack, proceeded to defend himself with great gallantry.

Thus, in a few seconds from the time David had entered it, the whole compartment was in a state of indescribable uproar. A pitched battle was in progress in the dark, and one might have thought that pandemonium had broken loose. Meanwhile, David Steele, the cause of all the tumult, was trying to struggle through it to the carriage door.

(Will the lad be successful? Will he be able to gain his freedom—a freedom that is rightly his? Be sure you read next week's thrilling instalment of this serial, chums.)

"SAVING THE HEAD."

(Continued from page 18.)

"Yes, out with it, Jerrold," rapped Mr. Lumley-Lumley. "What's the trouble? Have you got into a scrape of some sort?"

"No, father!"

"Someone else has, and you're lending a helping hand, then?" went on the millionaire. "Is that it?"

"No!"

"Well, then, this oily-tongued ex-gaolbird we knew in the old days as Flash Ike," demanded Mr. Lumley-Lumley, "is he mixed up in the business?"

For a moment Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was silent. He seemed to be carefully weighing up the words with which to frame his answer. In the end he made a request.

"Can—I speak to you alone, father?"

Inquiringly Mr. Lumley-Lumley turned to Dr. Holmes, but the Head was already on his feet.

"There is a small room adjoining this one," he said.

"Perhaps you will go in there!"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley inclined his head.

"Thank you! D'Arcy, see to it our friend, Flash Ike, does not leave us yet. Come along, Jerrold!"

Together father and son passed into the other room, and it was Jerrold who shut the door. Then, in that abrupt way of his, he faced his father.

"Dad, do you know why Flash Ike is hanging round St. Jim's?"

"To swindle Dr. Holmes. Yes, I know that much," came the grim answer. "I arrived here just in time to nip Ike's little plot in the bud. Don't know, but I rather think I have scared the scamp half out of his life!"

As Jerrold heard those words his eyes glinted. He took a step nearer his father and blurted out another question.

"Dad, tell me about the Lumley Car Combine you had something to do with years ago! Was it a swindle?"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley nodded, then laughed.

"Yes, a downright swindle," he admitted. "Unfortunately I didn't find that out till I was mixed up in it, and I burnt my fingers badly. Jerrold, that was about the only time in my life I was taken in. Felt it was up to me to pay off all the other people who had lost their dollars and—well, it nearly broke me before I was properly started in the fortune making business!"

(Continued on page 28.)



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

MY DEAR CHUMS,—There will be another bumper number of your old favourite school story paper next week. First and foremost is the powerful long story of St. Jim's, entitled: "THE PLUNDERED SCHOOL!" by Martin Clifford. To give away the plot and spoil the story is what I don't want to do, but it would interest you all to know that it features popular Reginald Talbot and his staunch girl chum, Marie Rivers. Talbot, as you know, has been in many tight corners before, but never such a position as you will find this one-time member of the Angel Alley Gang next week. Don't miss this exciting school adventure whatever you do. Another prime feature is our splendid short complete for next week: "The Siddons' Ring!" by Philip Hardy, a thrilling "behind the scenes" adventure you will all enjoy. Our topping issue of the "News" will take high honours, too, with its splendid "Sports" issue. Of course, Max Hamilton's thrilling serial will be presented by another long and exciting instalment.

"THE CRIMSON CLAW!" By Lester Bidston.

This is the title of our grand new serial now in preparation, the first instalment of which will be in your hands in the near future. It is a splendid detective yarn, and is calculated to cause a great sensation. As in the past, so in the future, will the GEM reign supreme in the serial line. I will have more to say about this wonderful treat next week, chums.

MAGNIFICENT FREE GIFTS!

You couldn't do better than get a copy of our topping Companion Paper, the "Magnet" Library, for every copy of this week's number will be found Two Free Cut-out Stand-up Photos of Famous Cricketers in Action. Nothing so good in the way of "insets" has ever been placed before the reading public. Start your collection now with Hobbs, the Surrey hero, and Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire record-breaker, and then go on until you have got the whole set. You will treasure them, believe me!

A SPIN INTO CORNWALL!

It wants doing, but a merry Bristolian—who, by the way, dotes on Cardew—made the trip, and he writes to tell me that never in his life had he dreamt that Cornwall was such a wonderful land. I am not surprised at his enthusiasm. The Far West is grand—the scenery, the whole life, and the scent of the sea. Falmouth is a harbour which beats most, Truro is delightful, and there are lots of fine towns and villages where the merchant on the jigger can find good accommodation quite cheap. Cornwall is not for all of us. It is too far, and we cannot all live at Bristol, which makes a good starting-point. But keep your eye on old King Arthur's land, ready for the opportunity which may materialise.

A, E, I, O, U.

How many words carry all the vowels? A correspondent in Perth puts this question. Frankly, I do not know, never having counted them; but facetious is one of the words which contain the whole vowel family party. Adventitious is similarly honoured.

A BAKER'S JOB.

"Genite," of Birmingham, might certainly do far worse than follow his bent. He says he would like to enter the baking business. He will most likely have to start being odd boy, running errands and so forth, but after a bit he will find opportunities coming along. He can learn to be a master baker. The hours are different to those prevailing in most callings, but he will soon get used to that. The keen worker will not find much difficulty in getting a small business of his own.

A BEANO ON A BARGE!

A chum of mine living in a Midland city writes to tell me of a sporting little holiday he had on a barge down the canals. It was not a beano in the ordinary sense at all. My correspondent chummed up with a bargee who owned his barge, and for a few shillings to help pay expenses there was a particularly jolly holiday amidst fresh scenery. You would be surprised at the charm and interest of the waterways which thread their way all over the country. Few know anything of them.

PADDLE YOUR OWN CANOE!

And touching this great question of how to take a holiday, the main thing is to spend your time off in a way that pleases yourself, always provided you can manage it without interfering with other people. A fellow has some sort of a prescriptive right to play an independent part when it comes to taking a holiday. It may be altogether against his ideas to go and dress up and stroll up and down at a seaside place. And who would blame him? That sort of holiday is pretty deadly at the best. You do not always want advice from well-meaning relatives, for they do not understand what's what.

Your Editor.



GET BUSY NOW!

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

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

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

CHEERS FOR CHESHIRE!

Easy!

Mistress: "Which way did the professor go, Mary?" I wanted him to post a letter for me." Mary: "I don't know which way he went, mum, but I'll soon find him. He's forgotten to cut the string of the parcel he is carrying!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Frank Judge, 10, Falkland Street, Birkenhead, Cheshire.

WATER STILL WINNING!

"Could you do something for a poor old sailor?" asked the seedy-looking wanderer at the gate. "Poor old sailor?" echoed the lady at work at the wash-tub. "Yes'm; I folered the wotter for sixteen years." "Well," said the woman, after a critical look, as she resumed her labours, "you certainly don't look as if you ever caught up with it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Ernest C. Higgs, "The House," Globe Works, Chatsworth Road, Clapton Park, E. 5.

T-T-TERRIBLY NERVOUS!

A very nervous man was once taking a friend out for a drive in his motor-car. On reaching a crowded, thoroughfare, the friend remarked: "My word, Jim, your engine's knocking badly." "Er—that's m-my knees!" replied Jim, with a sickly smile.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Saxby, Dale Hill, Ticehurst, Sussex.

A SLIGHT DEFICIENCY!

McTavish had received from the police a wallet he had lost. Eagerly he examined the contents. "Well, is everything in order?" demanded the officer. "Is the cash correct?" "Ay! The money's there a'right," grumbled McTavish, "but ye've had it a week. Phwat about the interest?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. E. Holdsworth, 44, Speeton Avenue, Horton Bank Top, Bradford.

AS ORDERED!

Suddenly a shriek of indignation echoed in the air. All those seated in the restaurant turned and regarded, with an icy glare, the young woman who had given vent to the sound. "Waiter," she said, "please take this portion of pie away. There are several pieces of straw in it!" The waiter looked wistfully at the pie, and then an amused expression flashed across his face. "But that's all right, miss," he explained, anxious to placate the angry woman. "You ordered cottage pie, and, of course, it's thatched!"—Miss Esther van Mierlo, 16, Burngreave Road, Pitsmoor, Sheffield.

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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 910.

"SAVING THE HEAD."

(Continued from page 26.)

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's eyes glinted again.

"Gee, dad, I've been a first-class fool!" he said evenly.

"Meaning?"

"That Flash Ike bluffed me you had a hand in the Car Combine swindle," answered the Fourth-Former quietly. "He showed me a letter in which you sent him a hundred pounds—"

"Yes, that's right," admitted the millionaire. "Flash Ike lost a hundred pounds in the combine, but he made no claim at the time. A month ago, though, he wrote me a letter saying he was down and out, and reminded me of the cash he had lost in the car concern."

"And you sent him the hundred?"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"Yes, a cheque; but next day I learnt in the city that Ike was behind the Associated Gushers swindle, and that was enough for me," he said. "I guess I stopped that cheque right away."

"Good!"

"Yes, I'm pretty glad myself now," said the millionaire. "Oh, if you saw that letter I wrote Ike, you'll have read what I wrote about it being better that the public shouldn't hear about the Lumley Car Combine! Yes, of course you did, and Flash Ike was smart to play that card. Convinced you I'd something to hide, eh?"

"I couldn't help thinking there might be something in it—"

"So there was, Jerrold," laughed the millionaire. "I guess I hold a position in the financial world now as being as cute as the next. I wasn't over keen on the Press getting hold of an age-old yarn concerning the Car Combine in which I was rooked like a kid. Not that it mattered a row of beans, really!"

"I never thought of that, dad!"

"Why should you?" replied the millionaire. "Still, I don't quite tumble to the business even now. You broke out of school to see Flash Ike, I take it?"

"Yes, to try and stop him robbing Dr. Holmes—"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley swung round towards the door.

"Gee! I get you, Jerrold!" he snapped. "The first time you went out was to put a spoke in Ike's wheel; the second occasion because you were scared about me, I guess, you are going to tell that yarn to Dr. Holmes, Jerrold!"

"And Flash Ike?"

"Oh, leave that guy to me!" came the grim answer. "I've got him trembling in his shoes as it is; before I've done with

him, he'll be close up to shedding tears. I'm going to put the fear of Old Harry into him!"

Mr. Lumley-Lumley opened the door, and together father and son went back into the Head's study.

By that time Arthur Augustus had slipped away, and he was holding forth in Study No. 6.

A specially crowded study it was, too, for Tom Merry & Co., and a whole heap more of the juniors had insisted upon being present to hear the news. As a matter of fact, it was such a dense crowd that the junior with the news was wedged up in a corner of the room, flattened against the wall.

"Pway give me bweathin' space, deah boys," he moaned. "As it is, I'm not only bein' crushed to death, but my clobber is getting wumpled—"

"Blow your clobber!"

"What's the news, ass?"

"That's what we want—the news!" cried Tom Merry. "What's happened? Is Lumley-Lumley to be expelled?"

"No, deah boys, I wathah fancy— Bai Jove, there is Lumlay-Lumlay!"

Not a shadow of doubt about that. The American junior had appeared suddenly in the doorway of Study No. 6.

The juniors crowded round him.

"Speech, Lumley-Lumley—"

"Get it off your chest, kid!"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley laughed.

"That's soon done, chaps," he said. "The Head's changed his mind about sacking me, and that's all that need be told, except that my father has come down handsomely in the matter of a cheque. I guess we cash that right now, and to-night the feed's on me!"

The juniors did not wait to hear more. Lumley-Lumley was not to be sacked, and that was all that bothered them. In unison they yelled their delight.

"Collar the kid, chaps!" shouted Manners. "Shoulder him, old tops! On the ball!"

And later, Dr. Holmes, hearing unusual sounds of mirth in the quadrangle, glanced through his window. He was startled at the spectacle of a Fourth-Former being carried shoulder high, right round the quadrangle. Then he recognised who the Fourth-Former was.

"Lumley-Lumley," he said half aloud, and anybody would have been able to tell from Dr. Holmes' face at that moment that no one in all St. Jim's was more relieved than he was that Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was not to be sacked after all.

THE END.

(There will be another ripping long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "THE PLUNDERED SCHOOL!" By Martin Clifford. Make sure of reading this topping tale by ordering your GEM well in advance.)



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