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**KERR'S PATENT FIRE-EXTINGUISHER DISTINGUISHES
ITSELF !**

(An unexpected incident in the long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. at
St. Jim's, entitled : "The **BOGUS INVENTOR** !" in this issue.)

EASY MONEY! Aubrey Racke, the cad of the Shell, disregards the urging of his conscience when he hits on a dishonest way of pocketing fifty pounds, for he makes the mistake of thinking that he can't be bowled out. But Fate deals him a knock-out when he least expects it!

THE BOGUS INVENTOR!

A Magnificent New Extra Long Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Cheery Chums of St. Jim's,

By
Martin Clifford.



CHAPTER 1.

Work for Baggy Trimble!

I SAY, Racke—

Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, approached Racke of the Shell cautiously.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Aubrey

Racke.

"As—as one of my pals, Racke—"

"I'm not one of your pals!"

"As one of my pals, I thought I'd ask you to do me a favour—"

"If you call yourself one of my pals again, I'll bang your head against the wall!" said Racke curtly. "I might as well tell you I'm not in a good temper this afternoon, Trimble, so you'd better not worry me. Clear off while you're safe!"

St. Jim's was very quiet on this particular half-holiday. A drizzling rain was falling, and most of the juniors were contenting themselves with quiet occupations in their own studies. And these quiet "occupations" would have astonished a visitor at St. Jim's just then, for the Lower School, almost to a man, were "inventing." Many and weird were the results of this craze that had swept over St. Jim's as a result of the "Inventions" Competition Mr. Bernard Glyn had inaugurated, from George Alfred Grundy's "sailing bicycle," to Monty Lowther's special fountain-pen which, he claimed, would write either one of three colours by the simple manipulation of a button. There was no doubt about it, St. Jim's had taken the competition to heart, and one and all were striving to produce an article of general utility that would "catch the judge's eye," so to speak, and incidentally the first prize of fifty pounds.

But Trimble, restless as usual, and on the look-out for anything that might be going, had accosted Racke in the Shell passage, just outside the door of Study No. 7.

"I—I wanted to ask you something special, Racke," said

Baggy Trimble wheedlingly. "It's important, you know, and—"

"Go and eat coke!"

Racke entered his study, and found Scrope lounging on the sofa. Scrope was another black sheep of the Shell, and he hastily pulled a cigarette out of his mouth.

"Ooooooh!" he gasped.

He sat up, dabbing his mouth.

"You ass!" he growled. "Why couldn't you cough, or something, to give me a warnin'. This beastly cig stuck to my lip, an' I've half-skinned it!"

The door opened, and Trimble insinuated himself inside.

"I say, Racke—"

"Get out of here!" roared Racke, whose temper was certainly sharp that afternoon. "Unless you get on the other side of that door within three seconds, I'll—"

"I was wonderin' if you could lend me half-a-crown!" said Baggy Trimble hastily.

"You can keep on wonderin'!" said Racke, with a glare.

"I'll pay you back at the end of the week," said Baggy.

"I'm expecting a big remittance from Trimble Hall—"

"You want to borrow half-a-crown, do you?" interrupted Racke thoughtfully.

"Yes, please, Racke!"

"What about the half-crown I lent you Monday?"

"Eh?"

"You promised to pay that back to-day—"

"I—I made a mistake!" gasped Trimble. "My big remittance from Trimble Hall isn't coming till Saturday, so—"



"Oh, kick him out!" said Scrope savagely. "Why the thump did you lend him any money at all, Racke? It only encourages the beastly little sponger!"

"I'm glad you came here, Trimble," said Racke. "I'd forgotten all about that other half-crown, but I won't press you for it. In fact, you'd better work it off."

"Work it off?" stammered Trimble.

"Yes; you can go to the bike-shed and clean my jigger," replied Racke. "Clean it thoroughly or I'll skin you!"

Scrope grinned, and Baggy Trimble looked startled.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "I—I wanted—"

"I don't care what you wanted," interrupted Racke. "This ought to teach you to keep your promises, Porpoise! As you can't pay that half-crown back, I'm willin' to accept labour in lieu of it. Not many chaps would be so generous."

"Oh, but look here—"

"Cut off!"

"I'm not going to clean your rotten bike!" roared Baggy defiantly.

"You're not goin' to clean my bike, eh?" said Racke.

"No, I'm not!" bellowed Trimble. "I'd rather pay you back that loan in cash. You can't force me to do your dirty work, Racke. I won't clean your jigger!"

Racke gave a leap, and reached the door before the startled Trimble could open it. The next moment, Baggy's car was seized in a firm grip.

"Yow!" he howled. "Yaroooooh!"

"You won't clean my bike—eh?" said Racke.

"Ow! I—I mean, I will clean it!"

"Sure?"

"Whooooop!" hooted Trimble. "Yes! Wow! I'm sure!"

"All right; get to work on it straight away!" said Racke, as he opened the door. "If I find you've neglected the work, or skimped it, I'll pulverise you!"

"Won't you lend me another half-crown?" pleaded Trimble.

"If you do the bike properly, yes."

The fat Fourth-Former went out of the School House, made a dash through the drizzle, and reached the bicycle-shed. He found one or two other fellows at work there, but he took no notice of them.

Racke's bicycle was not in a very bad condition, and Trimble made light work of it. He couldn't understand why Racke should want it cleaned, and he did not realise that Racke had invented the task on the spur of the moment, with the sole idea of getting rid of him.

Trimble rolled back to the School House, and hurried to Study No. 7 in the Shell passage.

"It's finished!" he said triumphantly, as he went in.

Racke looked up.

"Good!" he said. "Just in time. I'm goin' out!"

"Going out?" said Baggy. "Just after I've cleaned it?"

"That's my business," growled Racke. "You can cut!"

"What about that half-crown?"

"Which half-crown?"

"Why, you promised to lend it me," said Trimble, with a growing sense of uneasiness.

"Now I come to think of it, I did say something of the kind," put in Racke. "But I don't remember sayin' that I'd lend it to you to-day."

Trimble went red with indignation and alarm.

"Aren't you going to pay me?" he yelled.

"Not to-day!"

"Why, you rotter!" yelled Trimble. "I wouldn't have cleaned the bike if I'd known! Look here, if you'll give me that half-crown now, I'll tell you something."

"I'm not interested."

"It's something about your bicycle."

"Clear off, confound you!" snapped Racke curtly.

"You ought to keep your promises, Racke," said Trimble, boiling. "Every decent chap keeps his promises. If I tell anybody I'll lend them some money, I do it!"

Racke rose to his feet.

"I told you once before that I'm not in a sweet temper this afternoon!" he said dangerously. "You'll have that half-crown when I choose to lend it to you—and I don't choose now. Are you goin', or shall I chuck you out on your neck?"

"I want that money—"

Racke took a step forward.

"Yaroooooop!" yelled Trimble. "I—I'm going—"

CHAPTER 2.

The Invention Craze.

SCROPE looked up and yawned.

"You're not really goin' out, are you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"On a filthy afternoon like this?"

"I've got an appointment with that new bookie chap at the Green Man," replied Racke.

"A fat chance you'll have of gettin' any money off that fellow!" said Scrope.

"He owes me a couple of quid."

"Trimble owed you half-a-crown!" retorted Scrope.

"Well, it's worth tryin', anyhow," said Racke obstinately. "I was hopin' that you'd come down with me, old man—"

"Sorry; but I don't fancy risking a flogging," yawned Scrope. "You silly ass, if you're seen dodging into the Green Man you'll get a swishing!"

"There's not much risk on an afternoon like this," replied Racke. "Be a sportsman, an' come along—"

"Rats! I've got an appointment with Clampe, over in the New House, in ten minutes. He's rolling in money, an' a little game of banker ought to shift some of it from his pocket into mine," said Scrope. "I'm hard up, too."

"Clampe's got plenty of cash, has he?" said Racke. "Who told you?"

"The ass was flauntin' it about this mornin'," replied Scrope. "Somethin' like eight or nine quids, I believe."

"An' I'm down to my last five bob!" said Racke savagely.

"All because of that rotten horse yesterday—"

"Yes, you'll find me in Clampe's study, in the New House," nodded Scrope.

Aubrey Racke went out, and as he went downstairs he saw a group of juniors in the doorway. The famous chums of Study No. 6 were there, to say nothing of the Terrible Three and Glyn & Co.

"Let a chap get by!" said Racke irritably.

"Make room for his Royal Highness!" said Monty Lowther, executing a salaam. "Pass, O potentate!"

"Idiot!" snapped Racke, turning red.

"If you're interested in inventions, you might as well stop and see the demonstration!" grinned Jack Blake. "Kangaroo is now about to show us the mysteries of his patent hat umbrella."

"I wathah think it will be a fwest!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his noble eye. "I have no wish to discourage you, Kangaroo, dear boy, but I must remark—"

"No, you mustn't!" said Blake. "Your remarks aren't wanted, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Wait until Noble has given the exhibition, anyhow," chuckled Tom Merry. "Go ahead, Kangaroo!"

The Australian junior grinned.

"I haven't said much about my patent yet, but you'll be surprised when you see it," he said. "Wait a minute, Racke—you might as well see it."

"I'm not interested in your silly inventions!" said Racke.

"Bat Jove! I regard that as a wude remark, Wacke!" said D'Arcy. "Supposin' we keep the wotlah indoors until the demonstration is ovah?"

"Good idea," said Blake. "No exit, Racke!"

"You silly idiot—"

"Rats! It's time you learned manners!" Racke fumed, but he did not dare to precipitate any unpleasantness.

"Of course, an invention of this sort isn't necessary in Australia," said the Cornstalk junior. "We have glorious sunshine there pretty nearly all the time. But in England, with rain every hour or so—"

"Fathead!"

"In England, with showers daily—"

"Ass!"

"All right; have it your own way!" grinned Kangaroo. "Get ahead with the demonstration, and don't jaw so much!"

"I'd like to put it on record that I haven't helped Kangaroo with this invention in the slightest degree. I'm saying this as a safeguard, of course."

"We understand," said Monty Lowther. "You don't want your reputation to suffer."

"Let's have a look at the hat, Kangaroo, and don't waste any more time," said Blake. "If you've been spoofing us—"

"Rats!" said Noble. "Here it is!"

He produced the patent hat from a large brown-paper bag, and it was noticed that he handled it very gingerly. The headgear was, to all intents and purposes, an ordinary-looking bowler.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the cackle for?" asked Noble indignantly.

"You thumping ass! We don't wear bowlers at St. Jim's!" yelled Blake.

"This hat isn't designed for school chaps," said Kangaroo coldly. "It's a patent that'll be put on the market for general use. A hat and an umbrella all in one. Look how many umbrellas are lost every day! But people don't lose their hats, do they?"

"Something in that!" admitted Tom Merry.

"And look at the general nuisance of an umbrella," went

on Kangaroo enthusiastically. "When it's dry, you poke it into somebody's ribs, or forget that you've got it with you; and when it's wet, it drips all over your shoes, and—"

"We'll admit all that," interrupted Lowther. "But where does this creation of yours improve on these defects?"

"Why, the thing speaks for itself," replied Noble. "You needn't hold it at all; it simply rests on your head like an ordinary hat, and when a shower starts you press a button."

"And what happens?"

"The top of the hat springs out and forms itself into an umbrella," replied Kangaroo. "No trouble in holding it—no fear of having drips run down your neck, or anything. The wearer is in the very centre of the umbrella, and perfectly protected."

"In other words, the wearer is the stick?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing funny in that," said Noble. "Lowther's right. Of course, the wearer takes the place of the stick. That's the whole idea of the invention. You watch!"

He placed the hat on his head firmly, and pulled it far down. The juniors watched, grinning. Being polite, they did not point out to Kangaroo that he looked a freak.

"I'll go out into the rain and demonstrate the thing properly," said Noble. "You stand in a group and look on."

"Here, let me get past—" began Racke.

"Rats! You'll have to wait!" said Manners.

They stood at the doorway, watching. Harry Noble walked out into the rain, and he raised a hand and touched a little projection under the front part of the brim.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The top of the hat sprang into life. Long metal stays shot out, umbrella-like, and a thin silk fabric stretched out over them. Something went wrong for a moment, and the mechanism stuck half way. But a hasty adjustment by the inventor was enough.

The umbrella was in position, and Kangaroo strode up and down, fully protected against the rain.

CHAPTER 3.

No Luck for Racke!

TOM MERRY grinned.

"Well, it's not so bad," he admitted. "But you haven't let us try the thing ourselves, Kangaroo. How much does it weigh?"

"Only seventeen ounces," said Noble proudly.

"Bai Jove! I should utterly refuse to wear such an atrocity!" said Arthur Augustus, shocked. "Good gracious! My topknots are a mere fraction of that wretched weight, Kangaroo."

"Well, you can't have everything," said Monty Lowther. "This is an exceptional hat, incorporating an umbrella. Just the thing for getting through a crowd with. I should love to wear one when I'm climbing on a bus in Piccadilly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass, you'd naturally close it before getting on a bus," said Kangaroo.

"Oh, can you close it?" asked Blake.

"Of course you can!" growled Kangaroo. "You've only got to touch the button and the whole thing folds up into an ordinary hat again."

"And then you get a shower-bath?" asked Monty.

"Rats! I've thought it all out," said Noble. "There's a water-tight compartment in the top of the hat, and when you get home you simply empty it."

He was rather piqued. His audience, apparently, was not taking his invention seriously. He had spent a lot of time on it—over three weeks, in fact—and he was rather proud of it.

"How about ladies?" asked Lowther politely. "Have you made a special model for ladies? One with feathers and things round the top? You might have some ribbons hanging behind, concealing a hidden gutter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This hat is for gentlemen," retorted Noble stiffly. "Of course, I shall make some improvements yet—"

"Such as a chin-strap?" asked Blake. "If you don't have a chin-strap, you'll lose the thing as soon as a gust of wind comes along."

"Just what I was thinkin', deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"You silly asses, you've only got to put your head to the wind, and the hat automatically keeps on!" replied Noble. "You see, the principle is so sound that— Whoa! What the merry— Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Very opportunely a gust of wind had just swept round the School House, and Noble only just rescued his hat in the nick of time. The wind had playfully got beneath the umbrella, and had lifted the whole contrivance off its inventor's head.

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Noble jammed it on again, with an air of defiance.

"I wasn't prepared," he said gruffly.

Another gust of wind came down, and the edge of the umbrella wobbled ominously, and something snapped. The next second the entire contrivance seemed to collapse.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Noble, dancing about madly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Whooooop!" gasped the Australian junior. "Hi, quick! Ow! Something seems to have gone wrong!"

The others rushed to his assistance, and the wreckage was removed. Kangaroo rubbed his head gingerly.

"Or crumbs!" he gasped. "About half a dozen of those giddy spikes came adrift and dug into my napper! Groooo! I'm hurt!"

"Here endeth the first lesson!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"The first and the last, I should say," said Bernard Glyn.

"I'd like to congratulate you, Kangaroo, old man, but this seems to be a sad moment."

Noble looked at the wreckage ruefully.

"After all the trouble I took, too!" he said. "The principle's all right, though—you can't get away from that. I expect I've used the wrong materials. I made the hat too light."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps you'll let me go now?" asked Racke sourly. "I'm not interested in these kiddish inventions."

"Haven't you perfected your great patent yet?" asked Lowther in surprise.

"What great patent?"

"Why, I understood that you were getting out a device for altering the spots on playing-cards," said Lowther. "Or was it a patent for consuming cigarette-smoke the instant it leaves the cigarette?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very funny," sneered Racke. "If you can't do better than that, Lowther, you'll soon lose your reputation as a clown!"

He stalked off, and Lowther turned red.

"Bai Jove! That was wathah a nasty one," said Arthur Augustus. "If I were you, Lowther, I should give him a faithful thwashin'!"

Monty grinned.

"He's not worth it," he replied lightly.

Baggy Trimble was running after Racke, having spotted him from the tuckshop. He reached the black sheep of the Shell just as the latter was bringing his bicycle out of the shed.

"I say, Racke—"

"Get out of my way!" snapped Racke.

"I want to tell you something about your jigger."

"I don't want to hear it!"

"If you'll lend me that half-crown, I'll— Yarooooop!"

Baggy reeled over backwards as Racke gave him a violent push. He sat down in a puddle and roared.

"Ow! You rotter!"

"Sit there, an' cool off!" said Racke acidly.

"I sha'n't tell you now!" yelled Trimble. "I sha'n't tell you anything, and it'll serve you right if you break your neck!"

Racke paused as he was about to mount.

"What do you mean—break my neck?" he demanded.

"Nothing!" booted Trimble. "Go and eat coke!"

"If you've done something to this bike—"

"Yah!"

Trimble bolted, thoroughly disgusted with Racke and life in general. Baggy was always discontented on a damp afternoon. He never knew what to do with himself, and most of the fellows were either irritable or short-tempered.

"I hope that rotter comes a cropper!" he muttered, as he paused behind the door of the gym. "I wanted to tell him, but he wouldn't let me. Not likely! Mean beast!"

Trimble's information had been somewhat important.

Strictly speaking, he should have reported the matter to Racke without any demand for cash. But Trimble badly wanted that half-crown loan.

Racke's bicycle chain, in fact, was weak.

In cleaning the machine, Trimble had discovered that one of the links was half-broken. The chain still operated, but there was every possibility of its snapping.

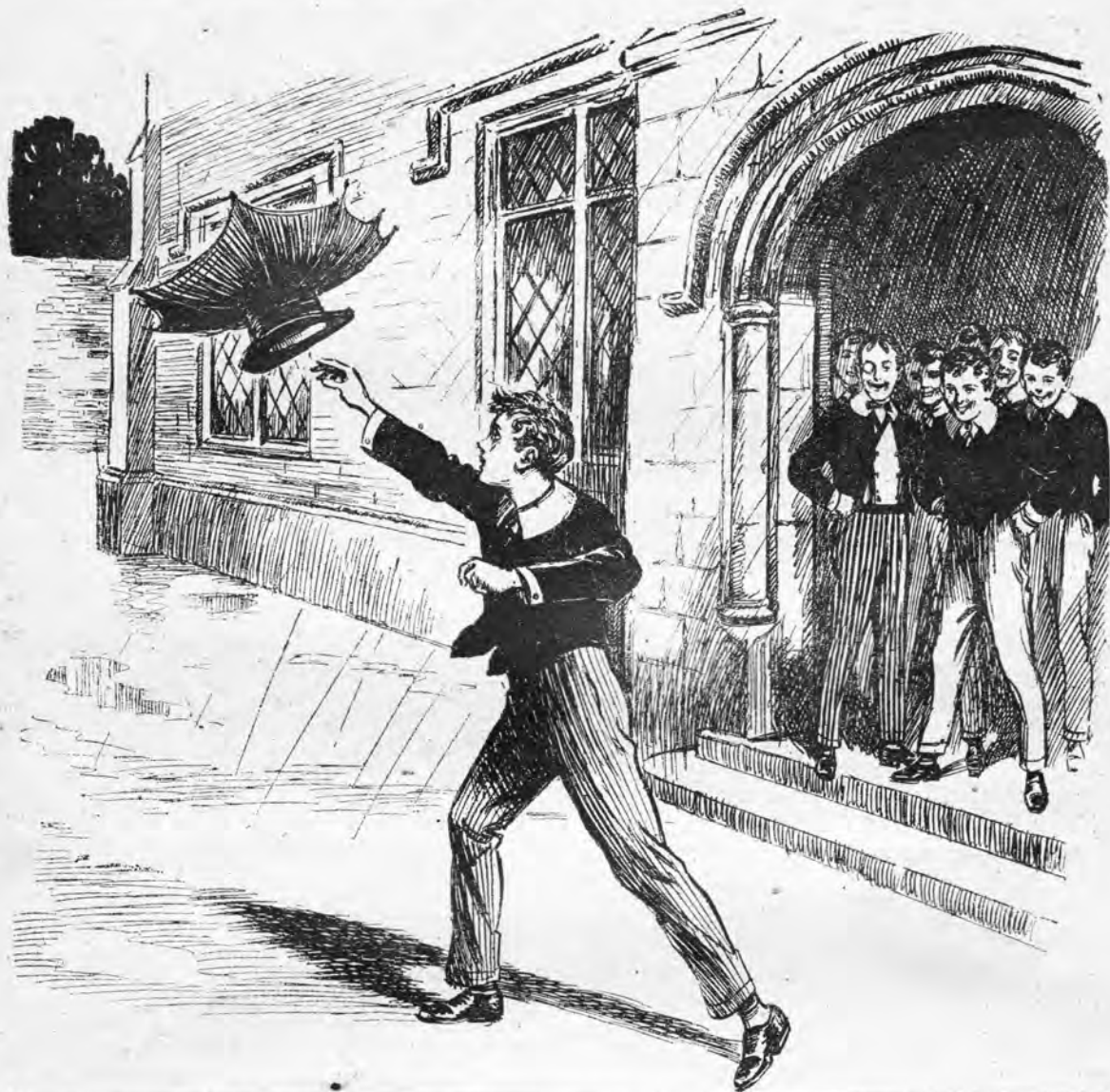
Racke, on his way down from Rylcombe Lane, was rather worried.

He felt that there was something wrong with his machine, but he was quite certain that Trimble would never have dared to tamper with it. However, as no mishap occurred, Racke thought of other matters.

There was no hard riding on the way to Rylcombe, and so the chain was not severely tested. It held. And Aubrey Racke arrived at the Green Man without disaster.

He didn't actually stop outside that questionable little public-house, but he went farther on, and entered the post-office. Here he purchased a couple of stamps, and when he came out he took stock of his surroundings.

He wanted to be certain that his movements were not being observed. He would get into serious trouble if a



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perfect or a master saw him slinking into the Green Man, for, naturally enough, none of the St. Jim's fellows were allowed to patronise public-houses.

But Aubrey Racke need not have concerned himself.

On this drizzly afternoon the village was deserted. When he actually did make a bolt towards the back door of the little inn there wasn't a soul in sight.

But Racke felt relieved.

"Neatly done, Master Racke," chuckled Mr. Joliffe, the landlord. "But I ain't so sure that I ought to allow you here in the afternoon, like this. I might get my licence took away."

"Rubbish!" said Racke. "You can tell that to the marines. Nobody can take your licence away for sheltering a guest. I'm the only chap to catch it hot, if I'm spotted."

Mr. Joliffe, who knew this, grinned.

"Well, your friend ain't arrived," he said, leading the way into the little back parlour. "Late, ain't he?"

Racke glanced at his watch.

"Yes, he ought to have been here ten minutes ago," he said. "Confound him!"

"Don't you be disappointed if he don't turn up," said the landlord. "I know them sort. Can't be relied on no-how. I'll let you know as soon as he comes in, Master Racke."

"Thanks."

The landlord departed, and the blade of the Shell was left to himself.

His thoughts were none too amiable. His shady acquaintance was already overdue, and Racke did not deceive himself. The chances were the man wouldn't turn up at all. And Racke had badly wanted to collect that money off him. It was only a matter of a pound or two, but Racke had an idea that he would never see the colour of it.

He wasn't in any pressing need of money, but Racke was one of those fellows who considered himself to be a very big man. And he never felt the part unless he had plenty of money in his pocket. He had had a bad stroke of luck with a "gee-gee" the previous day. Not that this experience was likely to teach him a lesson.

Racke considered that he was fully as "doggish" as either Cutts or Prye of the Fifth. Being short of funds was a serious affair for Racke, for it debarred him from playing cards with the other shady "sportsmen" of St. Jim's.

And here he was, down to shillings.

"Rats!" he muttered disgustedly, after twenty minutes had elapsed. "The swindlin' blighter isn't comin'! I might have expected it. Now I'm dished!"

He got up restlessly and went to the window. It was raining harder than ever, and the very road had taken on a depressing, mournful aspect. Racke was beginning to feel that life was gloomy.

"Better get back, I suppose," he muttered, as an idea

decurred to him: "I'll try old Clampe. Perhaps I can touch him for a liver."

This was a somewhat forlorn hope, but there was no harm in toying with the idea. Leslie Clampe, of the New House Shell, was not the kind of fellow to lend money easily, even to an old-crony like Racke. Still, it was one thing to know that Clampe had plenty of money.

Racke was preparing to go when he gave a start. He could hear voices. Perhaps that man had come, after all!

He sat down again, and two strangers were ushered into the little parlour.

CHAPTER 4.

Racke Strikes a Bargain!

RACKE felt a pang of disappointment.

These men were not of the type he desired to see. Obviously, they were not connected with his own racing friend. In fact, they were in no way connected with racing at all, if Aubrey Racke was any judge.

One was tall and slim, and the other stoutish and jovial-looking. They were both well dressed, and had the air of prosperous commercial travellers. But Racke wondered what possible business they could be transacting in a sleepy village like Rylcombe.

The men looked at him curiously.

"Afternoon!" said Racke, nodding.

"How do!" said the stoutish man, nodding.

It seemed to Racke that they both regarded him with distrust for a moment and even with a trace of apprehension. He couldn't quite understand it. He had never seen them before in his life.

"Wretched day," said the taller of the pair. "From St. Jim's, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Racke, nodding.

"Do they allow you to hang about in these places?"

"Well, not exactly," replied Racke, with a smile. "But Mr. Joliffe is a pal of mine. On the strict Q.T. you know. I don't believe in bein' goody-goody an' dull. I like a bit of sport now an' again."

No more was said for the moment.

Drinks were brought in for the pair, and Racke sat in his own chair, slightly interested. A glance out of the window had shown him that it was raining harder, and he decided to wait a bit.

His companions scarcely seemed at their ease.

For if Racke had never seen them before, there were some other St. Jim's fellows who had.

And the twain were not quite comfortable in his presence.

In fact, they were rather daring in coming to Rylcombe at all. For these men were Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin, the two rascals who had made repeated attempts of late to get hold of Bernard Glyn's crude-oil carburettor.

They had seen this device quite by accident one day in Wayland, and being apparently gentlemen of leisure, they had remained in the neighbourhood ever since.

Mr. Twist was a man with considerable motoring experience, and he had known, after a very cursory examination, that Glyn's carburettor was a winner. He had decided to secure it.

At first it had seemed quite a simple task.

Mr. Twist's idea was to approach the boy and get him to sell the thing for a mere pound or two. But this idea had soon been knocked on the head. There had been a few complications, because the rascals had mistaken Skimpole for the inventor of the carburettor, and they had even gone to the length of kidnapping the unfortunate Skimpmy.

Still more daring, they had boldly entered the school, had ransacked Glyn's study, and had got away with the carburettor, only to discover, upon examination, that it was a rough experimental model, minus the vital section which vaporised the crude-oil.

Mr. Martin had wanted to give up the whole thing and clear out. But the other man was an obstinate loser. He refused to give up the chase so lamely.

"We'll have one more shot, Martin," he had declared.

"We'll stay at the village inn and see what comes along."

And Aubrey Racke had come along.

At the moment, neither Mr. Twist nor Mr. Martin saw any possibilities in Racke. But they dared not go near St. Jim's again, and their only possible course was to get hold of Glyn's carburettor by means of an intermediary.

Mr. Twist was an astute man.

Racke, he could see, was not the healthy type of school-boy. He was a very different fellow from those who had once thrown him into a ditch. And his very presence in this public-house denoted the fact that he was something in the nature of a black sheep. Mr. Twist was well acquainted with the methods of public schools.

"Waiting for somebody?" asked Mr. Twist, at length, as though to make conversation.

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"No," said Racke. "I was, but I've given it up. The beggar hasn't turned up. A bookie chap."

"Oh!" said Mr. Twist. "They're unreliable customers, at the best, unless, of course, you deal with the big ones. But surely you'd get the sack if any of your masters heard about this?"

Aubrey Racke laughed.

"Life wouldn't be worth living unless we took a chance now and again," he replied lightly. "It's pretty dull at a hole like St. Jim's."

"So I understand," said Mr. Twist. "I happen to know a gentleman in this neighbourhood—Mr. Glyn. I understand his son is at the school."

"That's right," said Racke.

"Friend of yours?"

"Not exactly," replied Racke dryly. "I don't mix with Glyn's set. Too slow for me. Glyn and Tom Merry and Blake and that crowd would scalp me for bein' in a pub. They're a saintly lot."

Mr. Martin was rather uneasy. He did not like his companion's cross-examination. Racke was quite interested. He pretended to be indifferent, but he had an idea that these men had an axe to grind. They would surely not have become so friendly otherwise.

He thought he saw an explanation of their presence. They were probably the agents of some big firm who wanted to put a deal over on Glyn's father. And if they could get in with Bernard Glyn himself it might help them.

"I'd rather like to meet this young Glyn," said Mr. Twist casually. "I hear he's something of an inventor."

"Oh, he fools about with mechanical things, I dare say," said Racke. "I don't take any interest in that sort of thing."

"What's his latest concoction?"

"No good askin' me," said Racke. "I couldn't tell you—Oh, yes, though! That carburettor of his—"

He paused and caught his breath in.

And in that flash Racke had got the measure of his men. The very thought of Bernard Glyn's carburettor had started his memory working. There had been a good bit of talk towards the end of the previous week. Two men had got into the School House, and had walked off with some of Glyn's stuff. Racke hadn't taken much notice at the time.

"Oh, a carburettor!" said Mr. Twist indifferently. "Oh, well I suppose these boys have their own amusements—"

"You can't fool me!" grinned Racke.

"Eh?"

"I've got your measure," said the black sheep of the Shell. "You're rather interested in the carburettor, aren't you?"

Mr. Twist looked at him keenly.

"How can I be?" he asked. "I've never heard of it before."

"No?" said Racke mockingly.

"Confound your impudence—"

"Rats!" grinned Racke. "You didn't get into the School House last week an' toddle off with some of Glyn's tin-pot mechanism, did you?"

Mr. Twist was rather alarmed.

"You young fool!" he said angrily. "What nonsense—"

"Oh, you needn't worry. I sha'n't give you away," smiled Racke. "As far as I'm concerned, you're welcome to the beastly carburettor. Good luck to you if you get hold of it!"

"Gosh!" muttered Mr. Martin, feeling his brow.

"I suppose there's something in it—eh?" went on Racke. "Commercial possibilities, an' all that? Well, Glyn's father is practically a millionaire, so you won't be robbin' anybody if you borrow his patent an' put it on the market for yourselves."

Mr. Twist could see that he could be quite frank with this rascally youngster. In fact, he saw something else. Racke had apparently been sent by Providence. He was, in a way, the missing link.

Mr. Twist drew his chair up.

"Look here, young man," he said quietly, "are you ready to earn a tenner?"

"Ten pounds?" said Racke. "Try me!"

"I can see that it's no good bluffing you—"

"Not a bit," interrupted Racke coolly. "I've got you taped!"

"All right, we'll be frank," said the man. "As a matter of fact, my friend and I are in the motor business, and we're particularly interested in that carburettor. Do you think there's any chance of Glyn selling us the rights?"

"Not one in a thousand."

"We'd give you a tenner if you could work the thing for us—"

"Glyn wouldn't sell for fifty times that amount," interrupted Racke. "He's got his father behind him, and money doesn't interest him, anyhow. It's no good you tryin' to buy the thing. Far better borrow it."

"Borrow it?"

"Didn't you try to borrow it last week?"

"You're a smart kid!" growled Mr. Twist. "Look here,

we'll get right down to business. If you'll bring that carburettor down here this evening, and then forget all about it, I'll give you ten pounds."

"Nothin' doin'!"

"Of course, I'm only joking," said Mr. Twist hastily. "I want to do a square deal with the boy—"

"Make it twenty, an' you'll have that carburettor," said Racke coolly.

This time Mr. Twist mopped his brow. He had been afraid that he had gone too far—that Racke would not countenance the deliberate theft of Glyn's device.

For that, of course, was what the suggestion amounted to. "Oh, you'll take twenty, will you?" asked Mr. Twist, with relief.

"Twenty, an' it's yours," replied the unscrupulous Shell fellow.

Here was a good chance to get some money! Aubrey Racke was not particularly troubled with a conscience, and he set no store on Bernard Glyn's invention. If these men were fools enough to pay good money in order to get hold of it that was their concern. Personally, Racke thought the thing was worthless.

And so he told himself that no harm could be done by purloining the apparatus and handing it over.

The job would be quite simple.

His own study was in the same passage, and he could watch his opportunity. It would be a minute's work to slip into Study No. 11, find the carburettor, and remove it. When Glyn discovered his loss he would assume that those men had been in again. Nobody would ever dream of suspecting Racke.

And, later, he could slip down to the Green Man, collect his money, and the thing would be over.

Racke had it all planned out nicely.

CHAPTER 5.

A New Development!

"YES, I'll do it for twenty," said Racke complacently. "You young scamp!" growled Mr. Twist. "I thought you were too honest for the job when you started objecting, and now I find that all you want is more money. You won't get twenty!"

"Then you won't get the carburettor," drawled Racke.

"Look here, my young spark, business is business," said Mr. Twist grimly. "Twenty pounds is a big sum, and double the amount I offered. I don't mind risking a tenner on this thing, but no more. The chances are that it'll prove worthless."

"Oh, it's a marvellous invention!" said Racke dryly.

"I'll pay you ten if you bring it down here—"

"Twenty!"

"And another ten if it proves the goods," said Mr. Twist.

"By gad!" said Racke. "What do you take me for—a mug?"

"No," said Mr. Twist. "I apologise. I can see that you're not a mug. You're afraid I'll forget the other tenner—eh? Well, let's split the difference, and settle it at fifteen."

"Done!" said Racke promptly.

He hadn't expected as much as this, even, and he was feeling victorious.

"All right, young 'un, what time can you be down here?" asked Twist.

"Better leave it open," replied Racke. "I can't give any definite hour, but it'll probably be between seven and nine. And what about a fiver on account, just to show there's no ill-feelin'?"

Mr. Twist smiled.

"You'd like it, wouldn't you?" he retorted. "No, my lad. You'll get your money when you bring the apparatus, and not before. You might run off with the fiver, and call it a day. I've been stung before. You won't find me tricky when you deliver the goods."

"Well, say a couple of quids—"

"You can say it if you like, but there's nothing doing," interrupted Mr. Twist. "You do your work and you'll get paid. It's one of my principles never to pay people in advance."

Racke rose to his feet.

"You win!" he grinned. "I thought I'd try it on, anyhow. But if I don't see the money to-night—"

"You'll see it."

Racke nodded and went out. He was feeling very pleased with himself. Fifteen pounds was a big sum, even for him; and, as far as he could see, it was an absolute certainty. These fellows would never dare to choke him off without any money, after he had brought the carburettor. A game of that sort would be too risky, for Racke could give them away. For their own sakes they would keep faith.

After he had gone Mr. Twist took a deep breath.

"That was easy!" he said, reaching for the whisky-bottle.

"By gosh, you scared me!" said Mr. Martin, lifting his glass. "I'm not sure that it's safe, Twist. That boy—"

"I'VE BEEN UP ALL NIGHT!"

"Gosh, I am tired! Mind you, it's my own fault. You know that bit they stick in the papers about tellin' the news-agent to deliver your copy every week—saves you gettin' wet feet going round for it, and all that sort of thing. Well, I did it! I said to our news-agent: 'You might stick the "BOYS' REALM" through the letter-box on Wednesday mornings!' My idea was, that I'd get it a bit earlier and have a look at it over breakfast. I went to bed Tuesday night—an' blow me if I didn't lie awake all night listening for the old 'REALM' to plop on the mat when the bloke delivered it! You see, they've got Jack, Sam and Pete running in it now—and Pete's a proper scream! I wouldn't miss it for anything, and it's only tuppence. My club's just joined the 'Realm' Football League—and we're right after one of those Championship Cup's they give away. But no more lying awake for me. I'm goin' round to collect the old paper on Wednesday's; the newsagent's going to put it by."



The Boys'
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Every
Wednesday.
Price
Twopence.

"Safe as houses!" interrupted Mr. Twist. "Do you think the boy dare blab? He'd get expelled from the school if a word of this came out."

"Well, I'm jumpy," confessed the other.

"You needn't be," chuckled Mr. Twist. "This boy is just the very link we needed. He can get that carburettor, and bring it down to us, without anybody being the wiser. It's a cert, and we can make ourselves comfortable here until this evening."

Racke, in the meantime, was cycling home. He was well aware that he was venturing near the edge with this proposition. He was sailing near the wind.

But he badly needed money, and fifteen pounds was a prize worth taking.

And so easy to get hold of, too! That was the very beauty of it.

It wasn't a time for hesitation, either.

The entries had to be handed in on the morrow, and there would be no further opportunity of getting hold of Glyn's invention once it had been placed in the lecture-hall with the other "exhibits." It was this evening, or never.

Racke rather regretted that he hadn't told Mr. Twist of this, for the information might have given the man such a jolt that he would have sprung that other fiver.

However, it was no good thinking about that now.

"I shall be all right if I get the fifteen," said Racke complacently. "Of course, it'll need some cautious work, but I'm not scared of that. Even if I'm found in Glyn's study, I can trot out the excuse that I'm lookin' for him. I shan't be suspected—"

Crack!

With a sudden sickening jolt Aubrey Racke's right foot shot down. He was just at the top of his pedal stroke, and the chain broke at that crucial second.

Racke swerved giddily, and he skidded on the wet surface and lost control.

Crash!

Yowp!

Racke gave a yelp of pain as he hit the ground. He sat up in the muddy road, his face screwed up with pain. One of the pedals had caught him a terrific whack on the shin.

"Oh gad!" he groaned. "Confound! What the—"

He picked himself up painfully, and lifted his machine. A glance was enough to assure him that there was no great damage. The chain had smashed. A suspicion occurred to Racke.

"I'll flay Trimble alive for this!" he muttered. "The vindictive little beast! I'll bet he took out the bolt from that link! No, I don't suppose he did, though."

Racke remembered that Trimble had tried to warn him

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and that he had refused to listen. He wound the chain round the stay, and prepared to walk to St. Jim's.

"Confounded nuisance!" he muttered savagely. "Thank goodness, the rain's stopped, anyhow. I'll ask Trimble what the deuce he means by not tellin' me about this chain, the young worm! He knew all the time!"

He tramped on, consoling himself by thinking of the things that he would do to Baggy Trimble. Then he noticed the approach of a stranger. A man was coming along the lane, trundling a clumsy kind of truck. It was littered with pots and pans, and a small brazier, with a glowing fire in it, was hanging from the under-carriage.

A travelling tinker, obviously.

Racke scarcely gave the man a thought, and would have passed him by. But the tinker was apparently a man of business. He touched his cap and pulled his truck to a halt.

"Accident, sir?" he asked.

"Eh?" said Racke.

"Trouble with the chain, young gent?"

"Yes, the confounded thing's broken!"

"I'll repair it for a shilling, sir," said the tinker eagerly. Racke hesitated.

"How long will it take?" he asked.

"Not more than ten minutes, I suppose, sir, if it ain't too bad," said the man. "Let's have a look at it. I'll soon put you right!"

Racke allowed the man to take his machine. After all, there was no tearing hurry, and the rain had stopped. And it was better to have the chain mended straight away.

"Only a simple break, sir," said the tinker cheerily.

"All right—go ahead!"

The tinker was a smallish kind of man, with rather a refined face and a bronzed complexion. A man who spent most of his time in the open air. He looked a simple sort, too.

"Rum weather, sir," he commented, as he got to work on the chain.

"Yes," said Racke.

He wasn't feeling particularly talkative. Aubrey Racke was several kinds of snob, and he did not believe in encouraging the tinker by chatting with him in a familiar way.

Racke's attention wandered to the pots and pans and the general impedimenta of this travelling workshop. There was a soldering-iron and an emery-wheel and a small grindstone.

Racke became interested in a peculiar-looking kettle which stood on the top of the truck close to him. Racke wasn't at all attracted by kettles in general, but this one was different.

It seemed to be quite a novelty, in fact.

Racke picked it up out of idle curiosity, and turned it over.

"Ah, I doubt you won't make much o' that, sir," said the tinker, smiling.

"Rot!" said Racke. "It's a kettle, isn't it?"

"Ay, it's a kettle, sure enough; but I'll wager you've never seen the like!" said the man, with a touch of pride in his voice.

"As it happens, I'm not particularly keen on kettles," said Racke sarcastically. "Haden't you better get on with your work, instead of talking about kettles? I'm in a hurry."

"Beg pardon, young gent!" said the man, quite unruffled.

But as he proceeded with his task he shot one or two glances at Racke. And there seemed to be a certain satisfaction in his eyes when he noted that Racke was examining that kettle with even greater interest than before.

CHAPTER 6.

Racke Gets An Idea!

THE kettle was certainly interesting. Obviously, it was hand made. And, quite as obviously, it was the work of this travelling tinker. Under any other circumstances, Racke would not have given it a second glance.

But with time on his hands, he looked at it quite closely.

"My own idea, sir," remarked the tinker.

"Oh!" said Racke. "I didn't know that kettles were new. I've always understood they were quite an old institution. We're always learnin' things, of course."

He intended to be facetious, but this sort of thing was lost upon the simple tinker.

"Yes, I thought it out a year or two ago first of all," he remarked chattily. "Didn't do much with it at first—haden't the time. But I've managed to get it made, between jobs, as you might say. I ain't a boastful man, sir, but I will claim as that kettle is a fair masterpiece. I never see the like of it, anyhow!"

"It's pretty roughly made," said Racke disparagingly.

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"Oh, mebbe!" agreed the itinerant. "I ain't saying nothin' about the make of it. Just rough tin, sir, and copper tubes. All made on this cart o' mine, between whiles. But it's the idea that's the thing. A rare idea, sir, although it's me own, an' mebbe I shouldn't say so. I call it my patent geyser kettle."

"Well, get on with that chain!" said Racke tartly.

The tinker grinned.

"I'm one o' them as can whistle an' drive, sir," he replied. "Joe Brass—that's me. I ain't known much about these parts, but there ain't many villages in Hampshire that don't welcome old Joe when he trundles in."

"Thought you'd have a look at Sussex—eh?"

"That's the idea, sir," smiled the tinker. "Fact is, I've got an uncle up Abbotsford way, an' he's ailin'. Thought I might as well come a bit out o' my tracks an' have a look at the pore old chap. Business all the way, so to speak. Chaps like us can't afford to take 'olidays, sir. But it ain't a bad life, on the 'ole!"

Racke was losing some of his irritability.

The sociable nature of Joe Brass was catching. The man was so obviously good-natured that it was almost impossible to remain unpleasant with him. Besides, he was harmless enough.

Racke turned the kettle over again, and became interested in a large number of copper tubes which wound round and about the base. Many of them went straight into the body of the kettle.

There was no ordinary spout, either, but a kind of tap, low down in the body of the kettle, protruding a good distance outwards.

"The thing's dotty!" said Racke, curiosity getting the better of his snobbishness. "You can't put this kettle on an ordinary fire—"

"Ah, you don't understand the idea of it, sir!" said Joe Brass. "That kettle will produce boiling water quicker than any other kettle in the world! Sounds boastful, don't it? But I've tested it! You can put cold water in that thing, an' within thirty seconds—twenty-eight, to be exact, by this very watch o' mine—there's continuous boilin' water comin' out of it!"

"Rot!" said Racke incredulously.

"Fact, sir!" said Joe Brass. "An' it's me own invention, too."

"Invention!" muttered Racke, with a start.

"Yes, young gent," said the man. "A rare time I've spent on the plannin' of it, I can give you my word!"

"You just put it on the fire, an' get boilin' water?"

"Within thirty seconds."

"Just the sort of thing for the home, I should imagine," said Racke, with a grin. "Not a bad idea for our school studies, either. How would she work on a spirit stove?"

"Couldn't have nothin' better," replied Joe Brass.

"Boilin' water in thirty seconds—eh?" mused Racke. "I don't believe it, of course—"

"I'll show it ye, if you like!" said the man quickly. "Soon as I've finished this chain, I'll boil 'er for you."

"All right, I'll time it."

"An' so ye may!" replied the tinker.

It was easy to see that he was piqued. He didn't like any doubts cast upon his little invention. The thing was a thoroughly workmanlike job, and its crudities were of minor importance. It was the idea that mattered.

Racke stood watching Joe Brass as he finished the chain. But he wasn't thinking of the chain at all. His mind was dwelling on that kettle.

And to-morrow was the last day for entering for the "Inventions" Competition! Aubrey Racke's cunning brain was working rapidly. This kettle, as he could see, was just the type of thing that any schoolboy could have made. Many fellows of a handy turn of mind, with a good soldering set, could have built this ingenious article, once the idea had been mapped out.

Racke had never done any soldering, but that point did not concern him in the least.

This man was simple, and he would probably sell his kettle without a quail. And Racke could enter it in the competition, and walk off with the second prize of twenty-five pounds!

It was a big thought.

An even bigger one occurred to him. Perhaps this kettle might be awarded the first prize of fifty pounds! Racke grew quite excited at the idea. After all, the thing complied with every possible rule of the competition—far more so, indeed, than the majority of the other entries.

It was simple, it was cheap to produce, it was of universal appeal, and it was totally novel in design. The judges, in looking over the many weird and wonderful contrivances, would immediately pounce on this as a sound, reliable job.

Yes, it might even win the first prize!

The fact that his thoughts were grossly dishonourable did not occur to Aubrey Racke at all.

Hitherto, he had regarded the competition with contempt



"Get out of the way!" snapped Racke. "But—but I want to tell you about your jigger," said Baggy Trimble. "If you'll lend me half-a-crown I'll—Yarooop!" The fat Fourth-Former broke off suddenly and reeled over backwards as Racke gave him a violent push. He sat down in a puddle and roared. "Wow!" "Now sit there, an' cool off!" said Racke acidly. (See Chapter 3.)

—realising full well that he was quite out of it. But this chance meeting with Joe Brass might make all the difference!

The kettle would get one of the three top prizes, without any question whatever. Even the third prize of ten pounds was worth taking. And who would know?

Racke would boldly state that he had made his kettle in secret—even away from the school, should any of the juniors prove inquisitive on the subject. He would declare that he had sprung it as a surprise on the last day.

Some of the fellows might be sceptical, but they couldn't prove anything. By to-morrow this tinker would be clear out of the village; and by the time the prizes were awarded he would be clear of the district altogether.

Yes, it was a chance in a thousand.

"There you are, sir!" said the tinker briskly.

"Eh?"

Racke looked up with a start.

"She's all right now, young gent," said Joe Brass, jerking his head in the direction of the bicycle. "As trim as ever. That'll be a shillin', if you please, sir."

Racke paid the money, and added a further sixpence.

"That's all right!" he said generously. "You can look upon the tanner as a tip."

"You're a real gent, sir!" said Joe Brass.

Racke laughed.

"Well, I'll be goin'," he said. "Good-afternoon—"

"Ain't you goin' to see the kettle, sir?"

"Oh, yes!" said Racke, pausing. "I suppose I'd better see it boilin'. There's nothing like havin' the thing proved, is there?"

He deliberately pretended to be careless. Not for a moment had he intended to depart, but he did not want the tinker to imagine that he was at all keen. A glance up and down the road had assured him that nobody was within sight.

And nobody was likely to be, either. It was just beginning to drizzle again, and it was tea-time. Everybody at St. Jim's would be busy.

"Go ahead!" said Racke, yawning.

Joe Brass produced a small spirit-stove, and he soon had it going. It was one of the roaring type, and gave out a strong, powerful flame.

"I've got plenty o' water in this can, sir," he said, as he took hold of the kettle. "You can see for yourself that I'm only puttin' cold water into it."

"Yes, that's plain enough," agreed Racke. "But you can't tell me that it'll boil within half a minute! I wasn't born yesterday!"

The man chuckled. He was obviously enjoying himself immensely. He wanted to see this schoolboy's discomfiture when this remarkable kettle functioned.

"Got your watch, sir?" he asked. "There, he's on!"

"Right!" said Racke. "I've noted the time."

He watched the second-hand of his watch, and when twenty-eight seconds had ticked away, he looked up sharply.

"Well?" he said. "Where's your boilin' water?"

Zurrrrrh!

"There you are, sir!" shouted the tinker exultantly. "Thirty seconds to a fraction! She always gives that signal when she starts boilin'!"

He took one of his pans, and turned that curious tap on the kettle. A bubbling stream of boiling water came bursting out. Aubrey Racke was convinced. It was only with difficulty that he controlled his excitement.

"That's pretty good!" he admitted grudgingly.

"Never see the like, did ye, sir?"

"Wait a minute," said Racke. "What's goin' to happen if you don't turn that tap on?"

Joe Brass gave a triumphant cackle.

"Ah! You think she'll bust, eh?" he chuckled. "Not she, young gent—not she! There's a valve at the top, an' if you didn't want no water, the whole lot would come out in steam. So safe, a child could use it. You see, over half the water in this kettle is still what you might call cold. Some of it's a bit hotter, an' the rest is boilin'. And as long as you keep her over the fire, she'll give boilin' water."

"Jolly good!" said Racke.

"It seemed to me that all ordinary kettles was wrong," continued Joe Brass. "Why should you wait for two or three pints to boil when you only wants half a pint? So I sets my wits to work, an' this little kettle o' mine will give you boilin' water within thirty seconds—an' keep on givin' from then until it's empty. Ay, an' there's another advantage, too. After you've took half out, you can fill 'er up again with cold, an' she'll still keep on givin' boilin' water all the time!"

Racke was more and more thrilled. "Seeing is believing," and Racke had seen. He was absolutely certain that this kettle would win either the first or second prize in the competition—providing, of course, that it was made to appear the work of a schoolboy.

Racke looked at Joe Brass keenly.

"By gad!" he said. "I rather like this little gadget! Just what I want for my study. How much do you want for it?"

CHAPTER 7.

A Little Speculation!

JOE BRASS looked surprised.

The idea of anybody buying his kettle was apparently new to him. Racke was anxious, although he pretended to be indifferent.

But he could see that the man was wholehearted in love with this tin-and-copper child of his brain. He was so full of pride of it that he was smiling all over his face and bubbling with the pride of ownership.

"How much, sir?" he repeated. "Why, bless me, I ain't never thought—the fact is, she ain't for sale, sir."

"What rot!" said Racke, a pang of acute disappointment shooting through him. "Not for sale! But you haven't made this thing for your own use, have you? It's not a toy?"

"No; but it's the fust model I've turned out," said Joe Brass. "I'd sell it to ye soon enough, sir, if I'd another, but I ain't. No, she ain't for sale, sir, axin' your pardon!"

Racke gritted his teeth.

It was just like losing fifty pounds! By this time his last doubt had flown. He knew—he positively knew—that this kettle would walk off with the first prize. Why, even Glyn's carburettor would not stand a chance against it, for Glyn's invention was a motor attachment, and could not possibly be called an article of universal appeal, such as a kettle.

Racke looked at the tinker desperately, although he strove to conceal this anxiety of his. The dishonesty of deliberately entering something which was not his own did not occur to him.

"I'll tell you what," he said, lifting up the kettle, and looking at it. "It's only made of tin and a few copper pipes. I've seen better kettles than this for half-a-crown—although I'm willing to admit that the idea is good. I'll give you ten shillings for it."

Joe Brass shook his head very decidedly.

"No, sir," he said. "Why, that took me weeks to think out—ay, an' many hours to make, too. I don't count my time as very valuable, but ten shillin's wouldn't be no sort o' payment. The tin an' copper is worth about a shillin', I dare say, but that ain't what counts. A young gent o' your intelligence ought to know that."

Racke did know it, and he laughed.

"Oh, well, I don't want to be mean," he said. "I'll give you a pound!"

Joe Brass allowed a puzzled expression to cross his face. A pound was quite a lot of money to him. Very often he went a whole day without making as much as five shillings.

"Is it a deal?" asked Racke.

"I'm rare sorry, young gent," said the tinker in distress. "I can't do it—I jest can't part with 'er. I ain't made no plans of the thing, and, mebbe, I couldn't make another jest the same."

This was a piece of excellent news for Racke. If this fellow was such a fool as to forget his own design, all the better! Certainly, there would be no chance of him bringing an action after Racke had had the kettle patented!

Racke could see that there was a fortune in it. Placed on the market properly, it would be an amazing commercial success.

"Oh, nonsense!" he said scoffingly. "Of course you could make another. That's all tommy-rot. Funny thing, I've set my heart on that kettle."

"Can't be done, sir," said Joe Brass in a weaker tone.

Racke realised the necessity of inventing something plausible. This man was probably a simpleton, but he had had the brains to invent this kettle, and he might think it peculiar if Racke persisted without giving a reason.

"We chaps at the school always like to go one better than

one another," he said laughingly. "I shall make all the others jealous, you see, if I have that kettle in my study. So I don't care what I pay. Hang it, I'm not mean! I'll give you a couple of quid. No—two pounds ten! There you are, Joe Brass—two pounds ten for your kettle!"

The tinker stared incredulously.

"Two pounds ten!" he repeated, in an awed voice.

"Yes!"

"She's yours, sir!" said Joe Brass huskily.

That sum had been altogether too much for his resistance. And he knew, inwardly, that he would be able to reproduce the kettle. In fact, a vague kind of business instinct was beginning to find birth in Joe Brass' slow brain.

With two pounds ten he could get the materials to make a dozen of these kettles, and even more than a dozen! Then he could sell them—

"She's yours, sir!" he repeated.

"Right you are!" said Racke, hardly able to restrain his gleaming joy. "I haven't got the money on me, of course, but if you'll bring that kettle up to the school in half an hour, I'll pay you in cash."

"You ain't got the money on you, young gent?"

"Of course not!" said Racke lightly. "I don't go about rolling in money. Come up to the school in half an hour—no, twenty minutes, if you like—and I'll meet you at the door of the New House."

Racke had realised that he was practically broke, but he remembered that Clampe was "rolling in money," according to Scrope. He would borrow this cash from Clampe, and get the kettle straightaway.

Quickly, he gave the tinker directions as to reaching the New House.

"And don't forget to wrap that kettle up well," he added.

"I don't want any of the other chaps to see it until later on. I mean to play a little joke on them."

"Ah, you boys!" smiled Mr. Brass. "Allus up to your tricks!"

If Racke was pleased, so was Joe Brass. Fifty shillings struck him as being a colossal sum, and even now he could hardly believe that he would get it. Racke, in his eagerness, made a tactful blunder here. He should certainly have told the tinker to remain where he was, and he should have fetched the money, and come down.

But in his excitement, he chose the simpler way, and never gave the matter a thought.

Without wasting any time, he jumped on his bicycle, and cycled swiftly to St. Jim's. He leapt out of the saddle against the New House doorway, and ran in. He hurried upstairs to Leslie Clampe's study and burst in. Clampe was alone, contrary to Racke's expectations. He had anticipated that Scrope would be there.

"Don't trouble to knock!" grinned Clampe.

"Sorry! I was in a hurry—"

"That's all right, old bean!" said Clampe. "Just in time for tea. Sit down an' make yourself at home!"

"Where's Scrope?"

Clampe's smile vanished, and he scowled.

"We were havin' a game of banker, an' the blighter cheated," he said. "Of course, he swears he didn't, but I'm not blind. Anyhow, we had a shindy, an' he cleared off."

Racke wasn't sorry.

"Well, look here, Clampe, old man, I want you to lend me three quid," he said.

"Do you know any more?" yawned Clampe.

"Any more what?"

"Funny jokes!"

"Confound you, I'm not jokin'!" growled Racke.

"My mistake!" said Clampe. "I thought you were!"

"I want three quid—"

"My dear man, why come to me?" asked the New House scamp. "I'm not rollin' in money—"

"Scrope said you had plenty of it."

"Scrope's a liar!"

Racke looked desperate. He had made his arrangement with Joe Brass, and he would look an utter fool if he had to back out of it now. Besides, he stood a marvellous chance of winning the top prize of fifty pounds. He leaned over the table.

"Look here, Clampe, don't be a pig!" he said gruffly.

"I've lent you quids an' quids at different times. Lend me three pounds now, an' I'll pay you back on Saturday. That's a promise. Hang it, I'll pay you three pounds ten, you giddy Shylock! How will that suit you?"

Clampe glared.

"I don't want any rotten interest!" he snorted. "It's a pity if one friend can't accommodate another! You seem so blessed keen on this money that I'll whack out. Three quid, eh? All right!"

He took a bundle of notes from his pocket and counted out three of them.

"Haven't you got two tens?" asked Racke anxiously.

"You're particular, aren't you?" said Clampe, as he obliged.

"Thanks, old man!" said Racke, his eyes glowing. "I won't fail on Saturday!"

"What the deuce do you want this cash for so suddenly?" asked Clampe curiously. "Somebody dunnin' you for a billy?"

"Yes; somethin' like that," said Racke evasively. "In fact, I've got to go out now—"

"Rats! Stop here to tea!"

"I'll come back for tea in about a quarter of an hour," said Racke, edging towards the door. "If the invitation is still available, I'll accept then. Thanks, old man! You're a good old scout!"

He passed out of the study before Clampe could say anything further.

The black sheep of the New House sat looking thoughtfully at the closed door. He was frowning, too. He knew that he could count on Racke to pay the money back, but this incident struck him as being mysterious.

"Can't make it out!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Never saw old Racke in such a stew before!"

CHAPTER 8.

Joe Brass Comes to Stay!

RACKE tramped down the stairs, and then he hung about in the New House doorway. If the tinker was prompt, he would be here within two or three minutes. In fact, there was no reason why Racke shouldn't go out to meet him.

At this stage of the proceedings, Racke suddenly appreciated that he should have arranged things like this at first. He made a move towards the gates, but then he came to a halt.

Joe Brass had just appeared.

Racke dodged back into the New House doorway. There were one or two other fellows in sight, and he deemed it unwise to meet the man in the open quad, so that everybody could see the money transferred, and the parcel exchanged. There were lots of suspicious fellows about, decided Racke.

Joe Brass came up, and hesitated at the bottom of the New House steps.

"All right!" said Racke anxiously. "Come in!"

"Ah, there you are, young gent!" said the tinker. "I was beginnin' to wonder—"

"You needn't wonder anythin'," said Racke. "You've got that parcel? Good! Hand it over! Here's your money!"

The transaction was completed within a minute.

"Thank ye, young gent," said Joe Brass gratefully. "Mebbe I'm taking advantage of ye. I'd like ye to know that that kettle o' mine took a lot o' thinkin' out—"

"That's all right," said Racke hastily. "Bother the kettle! A bargain's a bargain, an' I'm perfectly willin' to stick to it. But look here—you can do me a favour, if you like."

"Anythin' you say, young gent."

"Well, don't tell anybody that I've bought this kettle off you," said Racke. "I want to keep it a secret until to-morrow, an' spring a surprise at a little party I'm givin'. If you tell any of the fellows, it'll be all over the school in no time."

Joe Brass winked.

"Leave it to me, sir," he grinned. "I understand."

"An' while you're about it, you'd better clear off as quickly as you can," said Racke. "If any of the masters see you hangin' about here, they might get annoyed."

This, of course, was a gross misstatement. But Joe Brass was not to know it. He touched his cap respectfully.

"Anythin' you say, young gent," he replied, "and thank ye kindly."

Racke nodded, and went straight upstairs. At first, he had intended carrying his prize across to his own study in the School House. But Crooke was there, no doubt, and Crooke would perhaps ask awkward questions.

So Racke went upstairs, and risked the chance of any of the New House juniors meeting him. As luck would have it, he reached one of the end cupboards of the upper passage, and he quickly opened it. Then he thrust his parcel on to the top shelf, and closed the door again.

"Phew!" he whistled. "Thank goodness!"

He went straight back to Clampe's study, and tramped in.

"Well, here I am!" he announced cheerily.

"You soon got rid of the tailor!" said Clampe.

"The tailor?"

"Or was it a bookie?" grinned Clampe.

"Oh, that fellow!" said Racke hastily. "Blow him! Let's have some tea, old bean! Thanks muchly for the loan! I won't forget you on Saturday."

In the meantime, Mr. Joe Brass was making his way out of the New House, downstairs. And, as luck would have it, Figgins & Co., the cheery trio of the New House Fourth, came tramping up the steps. They were tired and hungry, after a long trudge in the drizzle. But Figgins & Co. were cheery enough. A little rain did not frighten them.

"Hallo!" said George Figgins. "Visitors!"

"At least, one visitor!" said Kerr.

Joe Brass touched his cap.

"Looks like clearin' up, young gents," he remarked, with a glance at the sky.

"Just what I was saying," said the lanky Figgins, with a curious glance at the tinker. "Looking for somebody? Perhaps we can help—"

"No, young gent, thanks all the same," said Joe Brass. "I'm just goin'. I've seen the party as I came to do a bit o' business with."

"Hold on!" said Fatty Wynn. "Are you the owner of that workshop on wheels out in the lane?"

"That's my little lot, sir."

"You're a tinker, eh?"

"Been one ever since I was a lad, sir," replied Joe Brass.

"We don't often see you round here," remarked Figgins. "There's generally another man."

"Hampshire's the county I mostly works in, sir," said the man. "But I'm goin' through Sussex this time, just for a change, like."

"Don't be so beastly inquisitive, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn. "I was just thinking about that wonky frying-pan, you know."

"You're always thinking about food, or cooking utensils!" retorted Figgins.

"There's a saucepan, too," added Fatty. "This man can do the repairing we need. There's several odd jobs he can get busy on."

"Not a bad idea," agreed Figgins. "Perhaps we shall get some decent cooking then."

"Why, you rotter!"

"If there's anythin' I can do, young sirs."

"Yes, you can bring your brazier, and your soldering things, and come up to our study," said Fatty Wynn. "You might as well do the jobs on the spot. We'll be getting tea ready, and you can have a cup with us, if you like."

"Thank ye very kindly, sir."

"Rats!" growled Fatty. "You're welcome enough."

Fatty elected to go out into the lane with Joe Brass, and to escort him back, in case any of the masters tried to stop him. It was far better for the man to bring his materials straight up to Study No. 4. He could then do all his jobs without any interruptions, and be in the dry, too. A little drizzle was falling—the last gasp of the bad weather, as it were.

Naturally, Joe Brass was pleased.

The two-pounds-ten in his pocket was sufficient cause for satisfaction, and there was more work for him, too. He couldn't help noting the different tone which Figgins & Co. employed, as compared to Racke. The cheery New House trio was cordial and jolly, and treated Joe Brass as one of themselves. Racke had never lost his supercilious air of superiority.

"Are ye sure this fire will be all right in your room, sir?" asked the tinker, as he unhooked his brazier. "Mebbe, I'd best bring the things out into the road, and—"

"Rats!" said Fatty Wynn. "We've got several jobs, and you might as well be doing them while I'm getting tea ready. I can tell you just where the holes are."

"But this fire, young gent—"

"We've got a big iron tray in the study," said Wynn. "We can shove it on the end of the table, and that brazier will stand as safe as houses. Come along! Get your solder and tools and things."

Joe Brass busied himself. He had not dared to call at St. Jim's on his way past, and it was pleasant to find the boys themselves calling in his services. It was quite possible that some of the other fellows would find some jobs for him to do.

Just then Mr. Ratcliff came by.

Fatty Wynn raised his cap respectfully—not that he actually felt any respect for his Housemaster—and Mr. Ratcliff paused.

"What are you doing here, my man?" he asked inquisitively.

"It's all right, sir—just one or two repair jobs," put in Fatty Wynn. "Saves the trouble of taking them down to the blacksmith's."

Mr. Ratcliff frowned. He was an unpleasant man, and whenever he could do anything of an ill-natured character, he was only too ready to chip in. Also, he had a grievance.

"I trust this is nothing to do with any of your absurd inventions?" he asked suspiciously.

"Great Scott, no, sir!"

"I'm not so sure—I'm not so sure!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"It is one of the strict rules of the competition, Wynn, that every entry shall be the work of the entrant. If you are

getting this man to help you over a difficult problem, I shall have to forbid—"

"Why, I'm only getting him to mend my frying-pan, and solder the saucepan!" protested Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"Very well, Wynn—I hope you are telling me the truth."

Mr. Ratcliff passed on, and David Llewellyn Wynn glared after him.

"Interfering old bounder!" he muttered. "He's taking a big interest in the competition, all of a sudden. Just nosing about, I suppose. Thought he'd caught me bending, the old rotter!"

Joe Brass was looking uncomfortable.

"One of the masters, I take it, young gent?" he asked.

Fatty Wynn groaned.

"I hate to admit it, but he's my Housemaster!" he said dolefully. "We do our best to conceal him from strangers, but now and again he manages to show himself. He's a miserable old fogey!"

Joe Brass looked rather shocked, but he did not realise how the inhabitants of the New House were continuously provoked.

Mr. Ratcliff was always poking his nose in somewhere, and coming down heavily. In the New House, he was about as popular as a fog at a football match.

He had a strong grievance against the recent inventions. They had been cropping up almost daily, and Mr. Ratcliff had suffered considerably. This had been largely his own fault—although it must be admitted that in one or two cases he had been distinctly victimised.

As a consequence, he regarded the whole competition with aversion. And if he could trip anybody up, he was only too ready to do so.

"I don't want to get into no trouble with the masters, young gent," said Joe Brass doubtfully. "Mebbe I'd best stay out here. The gent seemed kind of ratty, in a way o' speakin'."

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"Well, that's his name—Ratty!" he explained. "It's his nature, too. Of course, he's really Mr. Ratcliff, but we always call him Ratty. I think the walls would fall down if he ever smiled!"

CHAPTER 9. Kerr's Patent!

"**H** EAH we are, deah boys!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he presented himself with the other members of Study No. 6 at Figgins' door in the New House.

"Walk in!" said Figgins hospitably.

"Make yourselves at home!" invited Kerr.

"That's what we've come for," said Jack Blake, as he and the others entered Study No. 4. "Hallo, where's Fatty?"

"Never mind about Fatty!" said Kerr briskly. "I've invited you over here to see my patent fire extinguisher."

"Bai Jove!"

"Your what?"

"Your which?"

"My patent fire extinguisher!"

"Then we've been swindled!" roared Blake.

"Look here—" began Figgins wrathfully.

"You silly asses, we thought we'd been invited to tea!" said Blake, with a snort.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tea was the idea!" said Herries firmly.

"Rats!" grinned Kerr. "I asked you to come over so that you could see my patent. Of course, if you like to stay to tea afterwards you're perfectly welcome!"

"Oh, well, that's different!" said Blake. "Where's the fire extinguisher? We'll give it a look if you like, and then we can start on the feed."

Blake spoke as though Kerr's patent fire extinguisher was of no importance whatever.

"You silly fatheads!" said the Scottish junior, with a glare. "Bother the tea! It isn't ready, anyhow, and Fatty Wynn is messing about with an old tinker—having some of his frying-pans and things mended."

"Can't we get tea without Fatty?" asked Digby.

"He's the chief cook," said Figgins, shaking his head.

"Then it is a swindle, after all!" growled Blake. "We might have expected something like this from you New House dummies! We come over here to tea, and all we get is an invitation to look at some idiotic fire-lighter!"

"Fire extinguisher!" said Kerr.

"Well, what's the difference?" demanded Blake. "Thank goodness, to-morrow's the closing date. These inventions are a bit too thick for me! There's a new one cropping up every hour!"

Figgins frowned.

"I'd like you to remember that you're my guests," he said gruffly. "It isn't the usual thing for guests to talk in this tone to their host! Where the dickens did you leave your manners?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I must remark, Blake, that you are uttably lackin' in the cowveet pwopwities. As guests, it is our duty to place ourselves at the disposal of our host. Kindly twot out the fire extinguishah, deah boy. We're fwightfully interwested."

"Oh, fwightfully!" said Blake.

"Dying of curiosity!" added Herries.

"Quivering all over!" said Digby.

Kerr looked at them suspiciously.

"I don't believe it, but say it again," he said tartly.

"We'll sing it if you like!" grinned Blake.

"My fire extinguisher is something different from anything that has ever been invented before," went on Kerr.

"That's funny!" said Blake. "The exact words that Kangaroo used about his silly umbrella! The same words that Redfern used when he showed us his saloon bicycle! The same words—"

"But this patent of mine is different," interrupted Kerr.

"There it is. Have a look for yourselves!"

He pointed upwards dramatically, and Blake & Co. stared.

"That thing?" asked Blake.

"Yes, that thing!" said Kerr indignantly. "There's no need to use that disparaging tone, though. Anybody might think I'd pointed out a spider on the ceiling!"

"It's not bad," said Blake generously. "Looks a bit lopsided, though."

"Reminds me of one of Fatty Wynn's puddings," said Digby.

Kerr nearly exploded.

"You—you frabjous—"

"Chuck it!" grinned Figgins. "They're only kidding you!"

Kerr controlled himself. As a rule he was very cool-headed and calm. It took a great deal to disturb the equanimity of this canny Scot. But this afternoon, when his own particular invention was under inspection, he was inclined to be touchy.

The patent fire extinguisher was actually impressive.

It was a big, ornamental object attached to the ceiling.

It seemed to be made of metal, but had been whitewashed—or white enamelled—in order to match the ceiling itself.

In Blake's opinion it resembled a kind of squashed pumpkin, and this was not a bad simile. There were no wires, or rods, or any means of control. The thing just hung there independently.

"Well, what's the idea of it?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I fail to see how that thing can be of much use, Kerr. Why, it won't hold more than three or four pints of watah."

"Six, to be exact," said Kerr. "Not water, either. It's full of a special chemical fluid which has a marvellous effect on flames."

"And if you want to turn it on, do you ask it nicely?" asked Blake. "I can't see any levers, or anything—"

"That's just the idea of it," replied Kerr proudly. "There aren't any levers at all. The thing's absolutely automatic."

Arthur Augustus moved hastily away.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "I trust there is no dangah—"

"My dear fathead, you're as safe as the Bank of England," grinned Kerr. "The valve can't open until the temperature in this room reaches such a terrific heat that you couldn't breathe in it."

"Then what's the good of it?" asked Herries bluntly.

"We'll suppose a fire starts," replied Kerr. "There's nobody here, and the room gradually gets alight. You all know that heat rises to the ceiling, and in a very few minutes the top part of this room would be like an oven."

"Go it, professor!" said Blake.

"Rats! I'm only telling you elementary facts," growled Kerr. "Well, as soon as the heat gets to a certain point, the valve of my fire extinguisher automatically opens. And instantly a powerful nozzle comes into play."

"Oh, a nozzle?"

"Yes—a whirling nozzle," explained Kerr. "It sends the extinguishing fluid over every inch of the room, and the fire—no matter how fierce—is extinguished like a shot."

Blake & Co. were impressed.

"Have you tried it?" asked Blake.

"He'd better not!" said Figgins firmly.

"I haven't actually tested it in this room," replied Kerr.

"For some unearthy reason, Figgins and Wynn seem to have a prejudice against it. Even as it is, they're worrying the life out of me to take it down. They keep looking up at the thing as though it might bite them."

"Perhaps they're afraid it'll leak!" grinned Blake.

"It has leaked!" growled Figgins. "Only last night I was having tea, and a blob of stuff fell into my giddy cup, and oozed over the top like oil."

"It's a good job you saw it in time!"

"That's just it—I didn't!" roared Figgins indignantly.

"I took a good gulp of it before I found out! It tasted like tar and paraffin, and goodness knows what else! In my tea, mind you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid you are careless, Kerr, dear boy," said D'Arcy sternly. "I shall take good care to remain on the other side of the woom."

Kerr grunted.

"All this fuss!" he said. "There's nothing to worry about—I've mended the leak now, anyhow. Naturally, I tested the apparatus outside, but it's not the same as a real test in a room. I wanted Figgins and Wynn to put papers over everything, so that I could give a practical demonstration. But I'm afraid they're both short-sighted."

"We may be short-sighted," said Figgins; "but we don't want any spectacles of the sort you crave for!"

"Very funny!" sniffed Kerr.

"But, look here, I seem to have seen something like this before," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Where?" asked Kerr in an anxious tone.

"Why, at Harrods, or Selfridges, or somewhere like that," replied Blake. "They've got these nozzles all over the ceilings, and they come into action automatically, too."

moment the door of Study No. 4 burst open, and Fatty Wynn ushered Joe Brass into the already crowded apartment.

CHAPTER 10.

Ratty Catches It Again!

"HERE we are!" said Fatty Wynn cheerfully.

"Bai Jove!"

"What the merry dickens—"

"Who the thump—"

"Joe Brass!" said Fatty, with a wave of his hand: "Joe, these are the chaps. Make yourself at home, and get to work as soon as you like. Here you are—stand the brazier here."

Fatty Wynn pushed the tablecloth back and put an iron tray on the bare wood. And Mr. Brass set his brazier on the tray, and the glowing, smokeless fire sent forth a warm radiance.

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE!

THE HOCKEY MATCH!

FAST is the fun on Little Side,
Where hockey is proceeding;
And merry schoolboys slip and slide,
Bruises and bumps unheeding.
Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and the rest,
Grow keener every minute;
They play up with tremendous zest
And fairly revel in it!

Hockey's a novel game to play,
A welcome change from Soccer;
There are beginners in the fray,
Scoffed at by many a mocker.
Grundy, for instance, swings his stick
Fiercely behind his shoulder;
He'll have to drop that little trick
Before the game's much older!

He barges here, he charges there,
Like a great clumsy giant;
Hustling and bustling everywhere,
And hurling shouts defiant.
In vain the referee exclaims:
"Stop! That's a foul, you duffer!"
Grundy enjoys these boisterous games,
And victims have to suffer!

Gussy, in his new hockey-shirt,
Looked very neat and dapper;
But soon a shower of mud and dirt
Enfolds him like a wrapper.
He is begrimed from top to toe,
Just like a fallen jockey;
Says he, "I much prefer, you know,
A cleanah game than hockey!"

From end to end the conflict veers
Before our eager vision;
And merry music greets our ears
Of sticks in sharp collision.
Tom Merry's men press heart and soul,
And play up meritoriously;
But Fatty Wynn, who guards the goal,
Holds them at bay victoriously!

And when the game is fought and won,
None linger where the mud is;
Soon they are seated, every one,
In cheery, lighted studies.
Where doughnuts grace the festive
board,
And jam is spread in layers;
A study feed's a fine reward
For weary hockey players!



Kerr looked relieved.

"They're different," he said. "I haven't pinched my idea from them, you chump! They use water—from the ordinary mains. This invention of mine is self-contained, and can be hung up in any old room you like. Imagine how useful it'll be in country houses, where they haven't got any water supply! Think of the great mansions which have been burned down during the last two or three years! All of them could have been saved if my fire extinguishers had been installed in every room!"

"You may be right," said Blake. "But now that we've done our duty, what about the reward? What about tea?"

"Yaas, wathah! Twot out the gwub, deah boy!"

"Can't do anything without Fatty," said Figgins. "If we start getting tea ready behind his back he always kicks up a fuss—"

"Oh, well, here he comes!" said Kerr.

A tramp of footsteps sounded in the passage, and the next

"I don't want to be inquisitive, but what's the exact idea?" asked Blake politely. "We come here to tea, and we get nothing but fire extinguishers and pots and pans! If this is a workshop, say so, and we'll go and find some tea somewhere else."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins gave Fatty Wynn a glare.

"What about tea?" he demanded. "We've got guests here, you ass! Can't this tinkering wait until afterwards?"

"Guests?" said Fatty Wynn, looking round. "Where?"

Blake & Co. tried to look important.

"Oh, these chaps?" said Fatty. "I didn't know they were coming to tea this afternoon."

"Didn't I invite them?" asked Kerr.

"I thought they were only coming to look at your silly invention."

"We've looked at the invention, but what about the

compensation?" asked Blake. "As you're so jolly busy, we'll get back to the School House and find our own tea!"

Joe Brass scratched his head.

"Mebbe I'm in the way, young gents," he said uncomfortably. "I'll clear out, an' come back again when you ain't quite so full up."

"No, you won't," said Fatty Wynn. "You go ahead with your pot-mending, old son. I can get tea ready on the other side of the table, here. There's no reason why we shouldn't all get busy."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake. "As long as there's some tea coming, we'll stop. We'll have a look at this gentleman wielding his various implements. Anything to while away the time."

"I wathah think we should gwacefully wetiah," said Arthur Augustus doubtfully. "I have a feelin' that we are in the way, deah boys. Fwightfully sowwy, Figgay, but—"

"Rats!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgay—"

"You're our guests, and you'll stay for tea," said Figgins firmly. "We're not going to have you School House chaps saying that we're lacking in hospitality. Never mind this chap. He won't be in the way."

"I wathah think you are an optimist, Figgay," said Arthur Augustus. "I have nothin' against the man, but it seems highly probable to me that he will be verry much in the way."

But the New House trio would not hear of their guests leaving, and Joe Brass was told to go ahead with his work as though he had the room to himself.

Fatty Wynn busied himself with a spirit-stove and a kettle, and Figgins & Co. helped with bread-and-butter, ham, tongue, sardines, and other delicacies.

Aubrey Racke, coming out of Clampe's study at about this time, was feeling completely at ease.

He assumed that Joe Brass had completely gone by this time. Racke would have had a shock if he had looked into Study No. 4 at that moment. It had never occurred to Racke that the tinker's services might be engaged by some of the other juniors.

He got his parcel out of the cupboard at the end of the passage, went boldly downstairs, and hurried over to the School House without anybody noticing him.

Racke did not go to his own study. He went straight upstairs to a box-room, and looked that precious parcel in his own trunk.

"Good!" he murmured, with relief. "I can trot out the kettle to-morrow, and spring it as a surprise on everybody. And nobody can prove that I didn't make it."

He turned over a new idea in his mind. It might be worth while to run into Wayland on his bicycle, and buy a soldering-iron and some solder. Perhaps he could get some second-hand stuff; and then, if any of the fellows became suspicious, he could bring out his tools as a proof of his recent industry.

And Joe Brass, all this time, was in Figgins' study in the New House!

The tinker was progressing well, but the guests were not very interested in his activities. Tea was practically ready.

Space was limited, but this was nothing unusual in a junior study. Blake had commandeered a corner of the mantelpiece, Arthur Augustus was using the top of the cupboard, and Kerr was sitting on the coal-box. The rest had distributed themselves round the room in various odd places.

The air was filled with the perfume of hot tea, the smell of soldering flux, and the fumes from the brazier. In fact, the fumes from the brazier even wafted out into the passage.

And Mr. Ratcliff, prowling about on one of his usual tours, paused. He sniffed the air suspiciously.

"Ah!" he murmured. "I wonder!"

His thin lips became set in a straight line. He remembered Fatty Wynn's association with the tinker, outside the gates. And this was Wynn's study!

Mr. Ratcliff opened the door and strode in.

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Bai Jove!"

They all stared at the Housemaster in silence. D'Arcy had half a sardine poised on his fork, midway to his mouth, and in his agitation the succulent morsel became detached and dropped down Gussy's waistcoat.

"Yawoooooh!" he gasped. "Bai Jove! This fwightful sardine has uttably wuined my waistcoat!"

D'Arcy's complaint broke the spell.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff nastily.

"It's all right, sir—only a few pots being mended," said Figgins.

"Who invited this man indoors?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I did, sir," replied Fatty Wynn.

"Then you had no right to do so, Wynn—none whatever!"

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snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "How dare you take these liberties?"

Fatty gaped.

"But there's no harm done, sir," he protested. "The man's only repairing a frying-pan, and a saucepan, and—"

"That is not the point!" interrupted the Housemaster curtly. "I do not allow these liberties in this House! The man must go at once! And you, Wynn, will write me three hundred lines—"

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" gasped Fatty.

"But we didn't know that you'd object, sir!" protested Figgins. "There's no harm in having a few cooking things repaired!"

"Another word from you, Figgins, and I shall cane you!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "This man has no right in the building, and I blame Wynn entirely—"

"Ain't your pardon, sir, I didn't know as I was doin'—"



"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff. "It's invited this man indoors?" thundered the Housemaster, turning to no right to do so!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I do not allow such ill will write me three hun-

wrong," said Joe Brass in distress. "The young gent says he wanted—"

"That's all right—that's quite all right!" interrupted Mr. Ratcliff coldly. "I am not blaming you, my good man. But you will take your implements and leave at once!"

"Very good, sir," said old Joe respectfully.

Figgins & Co. fumed. And the chums of Study No. 6, who were fortunately outside Mr. Ratcliff's jurisdiction, watched with indignation. They sympathised with their New House rivals. It certainly was thick to have a Housemaster of this kind knocking about the place.

"Look here, sir, can't the man finish his job first?" asked Fatty Wynn rebelliously. "He won't be more than ten minutes—"

"The man must go at once!" interrupted Mr. Ratcliff. "Good heavens! The idea of bringing an open fire into the room! The whole place might have been burnt down! It is fortunate that I happened to pass this door."

"That fire is safe enough, sir," said Figgins. "It's only a brazier, and it's on a tray—"

"I did not ask for your comments, Figgins," shouted Mr. Rateliff. "I say the fire is dangerous! Let that be enough! Puff! The air in this room is positively deadly! And the heat, too! Good gracious! I wonder that you can breathe!"

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Bai Jove! I twust there is no dangah frowm your fah extinguishah, Kerr?" he asked in alarm. Good gwacious! It would be howwid if—"

"My bat!" muttered Kerr, glancing up.

His acute ears had suddenly become aware of a faint kind of hissing. And now he noticed, for the first time, that the brazier was standing on the table, immediately beneath that apparatus of his!



"ht, sir," said Figgins, "only a few pots being mended." "Who ds the tinkah?" "I did, sir," replied Fatty Wynn. "Then you had sakes in this House. The man must go at once! And you, Wynn, red lines!" (See Chapter 10.)

The significance of this had not occurred to him before.

Mr. Rateliff had exaggerated. The fumes were comparatively slight, and the heat was by no means overpowering. The window, indeed, was wide open.

But this did not prevent the waves of intense heat from the brazier from wafting straight upwards to the fire extinguisher. And the brazier had been standing there for twenty minutes, at least.

"I say!" ejaculated Kerr. "We'd better—"

Zauuuurrrrh!

A curious gurgling noise came from overhead, immediately followed by a sort of whirr. Several drops of something splashed down, some of them blobbing on the table, and some entering the fire.

"Look out!" yelled Kerr, in alarm.

"What on earth—" began Mr. Rateliff.

Zurrrrh! Swoooooh!

After that preliminary warning, the fire extinguisher came into operation with uncanny effectiveness.

With a clattering rattle, the nozzle commenced whirling round, and a fearful deluge of liquid came spraying down, smothering every corner of the room and every person in it.

CHAPTER 11.

Quite Successful!

"YAWOOOOP!"

"Look out, there!"

"Get away from the door—"

"Good heavens! What—what—"

Study No. 4 was filled with shouts. A deadly kind of rain was hissing down, and it seemed incredible that that container could hold no more than six pints.

Mr. Rateliff, indeed, had an idea that a hog-head had been used, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had visions of a hundred-gallon cistern somewhere on the floor above.

The rain continued—a black murky, evil-smelling rain. The study was smothered in the most terrible fashion. The walls streamed with the stuff, the table dripped with it, and the victims were taking on a very mottled appearance.

And still the spray came down.

"Get out of the way!" raved Mr. Rateliff, holding a hand to his face, and trying to fight his way to the door. "Good gracious! I am blinded! What has happened? There is some disaster—"

"It's only my fire extinguisher, sir!" shouted Kerr.

"Bai Jove! You ottah dummay!" ejaculated D'Arcy in horror. "My clobber is ruined! I am lookin' worse than a scarecrow!"

"The thing's a success!" said Kerr exultantly.

"You ewass idiot!" shrieked D'Arcy. "What about my clothin'?"

"Oh dear!" gasped Blake. "I'm soaked!"

"It's stopped now, thank goodness!" said Herries, as he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

Mr. Rateliff danced with rage.

"Am I to understand, Kerr, that this is some of your handiwork?" he hooted.

"Bust my skin!" observed Mr. Brass.

"It's my fire extinguisher, sir," said Kerr. "It's all right now. The container has emptied itself."

"All right!" thundered Mr. Rateliff. "You—you young imbecile! How dare you say that everything's all right when I am in this dreadful condition? I shall take you to the Head, Kerr, and have you soundly flogged, you wretched boy!"

"But it was an accident, sir."

"Bah!" hooted Mr. Rateliff.

The word "accident" only served to infuriate him. It was like showing a red flag to a bull.

During the past week or so Mr. Rateliff had been the victim of several such "accidents." He did not take the sensible view. If he had not been in this study interfering, he would have been safe.

"Accident!" he roared. "I don't believe you! You have done this deliberately, on purpose to victimise me, you young rascal. And you shall be flogged within an inch of your life!"

Mr. Rateliff tore the door open and stormed out.

"Weally, Kerr, I considah that you deserve it," said Arthur Augustus sternly. "You have ruined my clothes—"

"What about ours?" roared Blake.

The Scottish junior grinned.

"Well, the patent is a success," he said calmly.

"A success!" shrieked Blake. "Do you call it a success to ruin the study, and half-drown everybody in your filthy chemical?"

"That's only a detail," said Kerr.

The others didn't think so, and in painfully frank language they told George Francis Kerr exactly what they thought of him and his precious invention.

Kerr was quite unmoved.

"Yes, you can stand there and grin at your silly contraption!" said Figgins wrathfully. "You won't grin quite so much when you're hauled into the Head's study and swished!"

"I sha'n't be swished," said Kerr coolly.

"I twust you will weecive a feahful thwashin'!"

"Then you can trust all you like, Gussy," said Kerr.

"When I explain to the Head that it was an accident, and when Figgins and Wynn back me up, the Head will let the thing drop."

"So you think we'll back you up—eh?" said Figgins.

"You'd better think again!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"My dear chaps, when it comes to the point, you'll rally round the old firm," said Kerr calmly. "Accidents will happen, even with the best-regulated fire extinguishers. If it comes to that, it was your fault, Fatty!"

"My fault!" gasped Wynn.

"Yes; you put that brazier on the table."

Figgins started.

"My hat!" he said. "So you did, Fatty! You careless ass!"

"That's right, blame me!" hooted Fatty Wynn. "Do you think I haven't got anything better to do than to think of Kerr and his silly inventions?"

"I'm sorry, young gents—I'm rare sorry!" interrupted Mr. Joe Brass, when he could get a word in edgeways. "I reckon this is my fault for comin' in. I oughter 'ave known better. I'll be goin'—"

"No, you won't!" said Figgins.

"Don't forget old Ratty's order——" began Blake.

"Ratty's safe for an hour, at least," replied Figgins. "This man could stop here, and help to clear up this mess. Ratty can't object to him for doing work like that. What do you say?" he added, turning to the tinker. "Will you lend a hand?"

"Ay, young gent, to be sure, if so be as you think it's safe," said Mr. Brass willingly. "I'll take me coat off to it, if you give the word."

"You can take the word as given," replied Figgins.

"I trust you will excuse us, you wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "Let us return to the School House, dear boys."

"Yes," said Blake, "we'll get out of this lunatic asylum!"

"You silly idiots!"

"You New House cuckoos!"

"Rats!"

"And wats to you, you boundahs!"

Blake & Co. went off, looking sadly soiled and the worse for wear. Figgins and Fatty Wynn began to recover their usual spirits. Kerr was in high feather.

"I always said that my patent would be a big success, but I hadn't expected a practical demonstration of this sort," he said genially. "My hat! Just have a look at that brazier!"

"It's a rare rum 'un!" said Joe Brass, scratching his head. "Blamed if that fire ain't out—clean out, like it was swamped with water, an' it didn't get no more than a sprain!"

"That proves the efficiency of my mixture," said Kerr.

Figgins looked at the brazier in astonishment.

"Yes, it seems pretty effective," he admitted. "But what about the rest of the study? Look at the walls! Look at the floor!"

"Look at us!" said Fatty Wynn warmly.

Kerr was callously indifferent.

"You make too much fuss," he said coldly. "It's only a little chemical. It smells a bit niffy, and it's blackish; but it'll all brush off when it's dry. There's no need to kick up such a thumping shindy. Why can't you learn to take these things in a broad spirit?"

But Kerr, of course, was prejudiced.

It was his invention, and he was naturally disposed to make light of the catastrophe. And he had no qualms regarding Mr. Ratcliff's revenge. In all probability, the master of the New House would think better of his threat after he had cooled down.

"You'd better put the kettle on, Fatty," said Figgins. "We shall have to wash this floor with hot water, and the walls, too."

"Ay, you could do with one o' my patent kettles here, young gents," said Mr. Brass. "Boilin' water in half a minute. That's the sort you want for a job like this."

"Our kettle's good enough," said Figgins.

"Mebbe, but this one o' mine is a rare novelty," said the tinker, with the pride of the inventor. "I'd like to show ye one, only I haven't got one handy——"

He paused, wondering if he was breaking faith with Racke.

He concluded that he wasn't. After all, he had only promised Racke that he wouldn't say anything about that particular kettle. The design, of course, was still the property of Mr. Brass.

"Ay, 'tis a queer sort of kettle, this one o' mine," he went on, always enthusiastic when he got on that particular subject. "Made arter the style of a geyser, young gents. Toobs, ye understand. That's the principle of it—toobs. Boilin' water within thirty seconds. Ay, an' I guarantee that, too."

"Bother your old kettle," said Fatty Wynn, as he lit the spirit-stove. "We want to get this study into a bit of order. Pull yourself together, Joe Brass, and get to work."

Figgins & Co. had heard the tinker's references to his kettle, but they had not heeded. The man's talk had gone in one ear and out of the other, so to speak. The three juniors were far more interested in the condition of their study.

And after an hour's hard work the cosy little study was looking almost itself again. There had been no sign of

Mr. Ratcliff, and Figgins & Co. concluded—correctly—that the Housemaster had decided to let the matter drop.

Joe Brass was further gratified by a payment of five shillings for his services, and at last he took himself off, and Aubrey Racke was still unconscious of the fact that the tinker had been within the school walls for so long.

CHAPTER 12.

Not Like Racke!

SCROPE of the Shell grunted.

"Pretty thoughtful this evening, aren't you?" he said, as he looked across the study at Racke.

"Eh?" said Racke, with a start. "Speakin' to me?"

"Yes, I am."

"I was thinkin'," said Racke hastily. "Why the thump did you have a bust-up with Clampe this afternoon?"

Racke hadn't been thinking about that at all, but he had no intention of telling Scrope the real subject matter of his ruminations.

Scrope scowled.

"Clampe's a liar!" he snorted. "The rotter said I cheated, an' he was cheating all the time! Won four bob off me, anyhow—four bob within ten minutes, as clean as a whistle!"

"Oh, well, it's not my bizney," said Racke, yawning. "I expect you'll kiss an' be friends in a day or two."

"Idiot!"

Racke went out of Scrope's study, and wandered off into the quad. He wanted to think. Truth to tell, he was uneasy.

He was beginning to regret his plot with Mr. Twist.

After all, it was decidedly on the shady side. Racke was not bothered with any scruples; but theft, when all was said and done, was theft. And he rather drew the line at burglary.

He didn't care a snap for Bernard Glyn's carburettor, and he considered that Glyn was an idiot for taking so much trouble over it. But to sneak into Glyn's study, and deliberately take the thing, was thick.

Racke's views were changing.

During the afternoon, he had viewed the prospect with equanimity. It was an easy way of getting fifteen pounds.

But since then he had discovered a far easier way of getting fifty.

That kettle would undoubtedly win the first prize. Racke was convinced of this. The more he thought of it, the more certain he became. And he felt that he was perfectly safe.

"I've a good mind to have nothin' to do with the rotten business," he told himself. "It's a bit too risky. If anythin' came out, an' the beaks got to hear of it, I should be bunked from the school."

Racke had many times steered near the outer edge, and his luck had generally held. But he had sense enough to realise that such luck couldn't last for ever. And the less risks he took, the better.

Why should he bother about Mr. Twist's fifteen pounds when he was certain of a cool fifty within a couple of days?

The game wasn't worth the candle.

"No; I'll make a virtue out of it," he grinned to himself.

"By gad! That's what I'll do! An' it'll settle the hash of those beggars down at the Green Man, too!"

Aubrey Racke had no compunction about "double crossing" the men he had plotted with. Racke's conscience was a negligible quantity.

He was afraid that the men might come up to the school and inquire for him. But he had a plan to obviate this.

He sauntered back into the School House, and made his way to Study No. 11. Glyn & Co. were at home.

Tea was just over, in fact, and Bernard Glyn and his study-mates were clearing up the remains, previous to starting on their prep.

"Busy?" asked Racke.

"Fairly," replied Glyn. "It all depends upon the visitor, of course. We're always busy when you look in, Racke."

The black sheep of the Shell closed the door and smiled.

"That's no way to treat me when I come here with a warnin'," he drawled, sitting on a corner of the table.

"The fact is, I think you ought to know that a couple of men are interested in that carburettor of yours."

"What?"

Glyn and Dane and Noble stared.

"What do you know about those men?" asked the schoolboy inventor.

"Not much—but quite enough," replied Racke.

"I thought the rotters had cleared out of the neighbourhood," said Kangaroo. "They tried to pinch Glyn's invention last week, but they failed. Have you seen them, Racke?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"This afternoon."
"Where?"
"They're stayin' down at the Green Man."

"One of your favourite haunts," nodded Glyn dryly.

"Oh, rats!" frowned Racke. "Don't try to be clever! I met these two blighters in the lane this afternoon. It was rainin', an' I was shelterin' under a tree. They came up, an' asked me if I knew you, Glyn. They asked if you were one of my friends."

"I hope you said I wasn't," said Glyn.

Racke scowled.

"As a matter of fact, I did!" he retorted. "I told them I wouldn't have you as a friend at any price."

"Look here—"

"But I didn't come here to indulge in a slangin' match," continued Racke coolly. "I led these beggars on, an' made them think that I was one of your worst enemies—"

"That's better!" said Glyn.

"I gave them the impression that I was perfectly willin' to do you a bad turn—"

"Why an impression?" asked Glyn. "As far as I can see, you just told them the truth."

"Look here!" roared Racke. "If you're goin' to insult me, I'll clear out!"

"Go ahead!" said Bernard Glyn, with a chuckle.

"Well, these men tried to bribe me—that's all!" said Racke.

"They tried to?"

"They tried to!" insisted Racke, with a glare.

He didn't like the incredulous tone in Glyn's voice.

"But they didn't succeed?" asked Glyn, wondering.

"No, they didn't!" snapped Racke. "They wanted me to pinch your carburettor, an' they offered me fifteen pounds to take it to them to-night!"

"I'm not surprised," said Glyn. "And what did you say?"

"I accepted, of course."

"Naturally!"

"You idiot!" snarled Racke. "I accepted on purpose—meanin' to come an' tell you all about it."

"And you met these men this afternoon—about three hours ago?"

"About that."

"You've been a long time comin' to warn me, haven't you?" asked Glyn.

"Oh, that's easily explained," put in Clifton Dane. "Racke must have found out that your carburettor isn't here! Or perhaps he suspected the men of being broke!"

Aubrey Racke scowled more than ever.

"You footlin' idiots!" he shouted, alarmed by Dane's chance shot. "I meant to come an' tell you all the time! Great gad! Do you think I'm a thief? Do you think I'd burgle your beastly carburettor?"

"Well, no," admitted Bernard Glyn. "Chuck it, you elaps! Thanks, Racke, for giving me the tip. So these men wanted to bribe you with fifteen quids?"

Racke was somewhat mollified.

"Naturally, I spoofed them up, and made them think that



Racke picked up the kettle out of idle curiosity, and turned it over. "My own idea that, sir," remarked the tinker. "I ain't a boastful man, sir, but I claim as that there kettle is a fair masterpiece. All made on this cart o' mine, between whiles—a rare idea, sir, although it's me own. I call it my patent geyser kettle. Joe Brass is me name!" "All right," said Racke, "get on mending that bicycle chain!" (See Chapter 6.)

I was ready to do their dirty work," he replied. "So I came along here to warn you. You'd better be on the look-out."

"These men are staying at the Green Man?" asked Bernard Glyn.

"Yes, so I understand."

"We'll see about it," said Glyn grimly.

"That's what I was hopin'," replied Racke. "The sooner they're bunked out of the neighbourhood, the better. I wouldn't touch their filthy money, of course—you can be sure of that!"

He lounged out of the study and took a deep breath.

There were two causes for this expression of his feelings. Glyn & Co. had come rather too close to the truth for Racke's liking. But Racke did not regret his decision. He had learned that the carburettor wasn't in the study to be pinched! So he would have had all his trouble and risk for nothing, even if he had carried on with the project! It was far better to let the whole thing drop.

In Study No. 11, Glyn & Co. were looking rather dazed.

"Racke, you know!" said Glyn. "I can't believe it!"

"You mean, you can't believe that he would refuse a bribe?" asked Kangaroo. "Fifteen quids, too! It wants some swallowing!"

"By Jove, it does!" said Dane.

"Racke is just the fellow to take on a job like that—and I believe he meant to do it, too!" went on Glyn. "But he must have thought better of it, so he came to me and gave his pals away. Trying to make himself out good and virtuous."

"That's about the size of it," agreed Kangaroo.

"It's not like Racke to do anybody a good turn, anyhow," said Glyn. "As I understand it, he met these crooks, and they talked him round. But since then he's thought better of it. There may be some hopes for Racke, after all."

"I suppose it's true?" asked Dane.

"How do you mean?"

"No chance of a trick?" asked the Canadian boy. "Don't forget that old Skimmy was kidnapped last week by those rotters—when they thought that he was the real inventor. Perhaps it's just a wheeze to get hold of you, Glyn."

Bernard Glyn shook his head.

"I don't think so," he replied. "Racke wouldn't lend himself to a crooked stunt like that, bad as he is. Besides, their only chance of kidnapping me would be if I went down to see them alone. Of course, I'm going to the Green Man—straight away."

"You're going?" echoed his chums.

"Yes!" said Glyn. "But not alone!"

CHAPTER 13.

On the Warpath!

TOM MERRY looked up as the door of Study No. 10 opened.

"Come in!" he said cheerily.

The Terrible Three were just starting their prep. Bernard Glyn & Co. walked in, followed by the chums of Study No. 6. They came in like a long procession.

"When I said 'Come in,' I wasn't exactly inviting an invasion," said Tom Merry politely. "Any more? Haven't you got a few dozen others at the back of the procession?"

"We'll enlarge the walls, if you like," said Lowther obligingly.

Bernard Glyn, who had waited by the door, closed it.

"This is serious, old man," he said grimly. "We want your help."

"Somebody needs bumping?" asked Manners.

"You remember those two men who kidnapped Skimmy last week?" asked Glyn.

"Of course," said Tom Merry. "We went and rescued Skimpole out of that old barn up the road. And those men, in the meantime, sneaked into the school, and grabbed your old carburettor, Glyn."

"They took the wrong one—and only half of it, then."

"That's what I meant," said Tom. "What about them?"

"They're in Rylcombe now—at the Green Man."

"That's the very place in Rylcombe where I'd expect to find them," nodded Tom Merry. "You're not suggesting that we should go and drag them out, are you? After all, it's not our duty—"

"Yes it is," said Glyn. "They got hold of Racke this afternoon, and offered him fifteen quid if he would steal my real carburettor, and hand it over to them. I think we ought to go down in a body, and bunk those crooks out of the village."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augutsus firmly. "This is one of those occasions, deah boys, when it is only right an' pwopah that we should take the law into our own hands."

"That's our general opinion," said Blake, nodding. "Glyn had told us all about it, and—"

"Wait a minute," said Tom Merry. "How do you know that these men offered Racke a fifteen quid bribe?"

"Racke told me."

Tom Merry jumped.

"What!" he shouted.

"Fact!" said Glyn. "It's a bit staggering, I know; but the job seemed too thick, even for Racke."

And Glyn gave further details.

"H'm!" said Tom Merry, at length. "It's a good idea to go and boot those crooks out. But we want to be sure of our ground before we act, you know."

"We are sure, aren't we?" asked Blake.

"Well, there's only Racke's word to rely on."

"That's true enough," admitted Bernard Glyn. "But even Racke wouldn't have any object in inventing a story like that. It must be true. How can we prove it, anyhow?"

"That's just the point," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"We'd better take Skimpole along with us," he added. "That'll do it."

"Why bother with that long-winded ass?"

"Because he can identify them as the men who kidnapped him," replied Tom Merry. "Even if this yarn of Racke's is a fake—which I don't believe—we shall still be justified in bunting the rotters out of the village, as a punishment for their dirty trick on Skimpole, and also for burgling your original carburettor, Glyn."

"By jingo, that's true enough!" said the schoolboy inventor. "Skimmy will recognise them at once, of course."

"I regard this as a bwain-wave, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus approvingly. "Wacke is an unweliable wottah, an' it would be a fwightful affair if we gwabbed a

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couple of perfectly innocent men. It would be like Wacke to twick us in that way."

"But by taking Skimpole along, we shall be on the safe side," said Tom Merry. "If Skimmy recognises them, we shall know that Racke's yarn is true, because it'll prove that they're the same two men."

"Can't we recognise them ourselves?" asked Blake. "We threw them into a ditch once—"

"That was nearly a month ago, and it was dark at the time," said Tom Merry. "We might be practically certain in our own minds, but I believe in being positive. So fetch Skimmy, and we'll go forth."

"Buckle on your swords, get your pistols ready, and away for the combat!" said Monty Lowther, rising to his feet. "By the time we've finished with these fellows, they'll give Rylcombe a wide berth—and the very mention of St. Jim's will make them 'Chiver' like a table jelly."

"Kill him!" said Blake, glaring.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Pway wefwain fwom makin' your wotten puns at a time like this, Lowthah."

Bernard Glyn hurried out, and went next door to Study No. 9.

"Good!" he said, as he looked in. "You're alone, Skimmy. You're wanted!"

Herbert Skimpole looked up and blinked.

"Really, my dear fellow," he said eagerly. "I trust that you have brought me a message from Mr. Ratcliff?"

"No, I haven't."

"I am desolated!" went on Skimpole, with a groan. "Tomorrow is the final day for this great competition, and Mr. Ratcliff is still holding my Thought-Reading Machine. It is a most unwarrantable trespass upon the liberties of the individual. What right has Mr. Ratcliff to confiscate—"

"Whoa!" gasped Glyn. "Give it a rest, Skimmy!"

The genius of the Shell had a serious grievance.

He had taken his wonderful Thought-Reading Machine to Mr. Ratcliff during the previous week—having been spoofed by Racke & Co. into the belief that Mr. Ratcliff was interested in the thing.

But Skimpole had soon learned otherwise.

Mr. Ratcliff had not only sent Skimpole off with "a flea in his ear," so to speak, but he had locked up the precious invention in his own cupboard. And since then Skimpole had not seen it, and Skimmy, as a result, was a worn and haggard caricature of his usual self.

Not that he need have really worried. Mr. Ratcliff had already sent the machine into the lecture-hall, ready for the judging. But Skimpole's creation would naturally stand no chance, since it was a freak apparatus of the first order.

"I have been seriously considering the prospect of approaching the headmaster on the subject," continued Skimpole. "Indeed, the contemplation of this policy has been exercising my mind for the past day or so. I consider that Mr. Ratcliff has acted in—"

"Well, never mind about Ratty," said Bernard Glyn hastily.

"But, my dear Glyn, I do mind!"

"We want you to come with us to the village," said Glyn briskly. "A whole crowd of us are going, and we're going to bunk a couple of rotters out of Rylcombe."

Skimpole looked bewildered.

"I sincerely trust, my dear fellow, that you do not expect me to participate in this rough and violent amusement?" he asked with concern. "I am always willing to do anything within my power, but I must really protest again—"

"They are the men who kidnapped you last week, Skimmy!"

"Dear me! Indeed!" said Skimpole. "My dear Glyn, that throws a different light upon the horizon. I shall undoubtedly join in this castigation of two unparalleled rogues!"

"Well, you won't need to join in exactly," said Bernard Glyn, with a chuckle. "Will you know those men if you see them again?"

"Most assuredly!"

"It was dark when you were taken away—"

"Ah, my dear Glyn, but the ruffians struck several matches in my presence, to say nothing of using a torch-light," said Skimpole. "I had many opportunities of studying their criminally-marked physiognomy. I shall find no difficulty in identifying 'those two reprobates.'"

"Good!" said Glyn. "That's all we shall require."

"Haven't you got that ass yet?" came a voice from the rear.

"Pway buck up, Skimmay, deah boy!"

"Yank the fathead out!"

Herbert Skimpole was yanked out, rather bewildered. And before another five minutes had elapsed the whole party was on its way down to the village. They reckoned that they would have nice time to get back before locking up.

"Have you thought out how we shall carry on?" asked Blake, as they coasted down the slope. "We can't very

well barge into the Green Man and haul the chaps out, can we?"

"We shall have to use a little tact," said Tom Merry. "I thought about bringing Racke along at first, but I decided not to, on second thoughts. I'll go in and tell old Joliffe that those two men are wanted outside."

"It's a bit wiskay, deah boy," said D'Arcy, shaking his noble head. "If a mastah or a pwefect happens to spot you—"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "A couple of words of explanation would put matters right."

"It would be more spectacular if we could raid that beastly pub and pull the men out by force," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Yes, but we shouldn't be on the right side if we did that," said Tom. "We've got nothing against Joliffe in this particular affair. We know he's a fat rascal, but we don't want to get into trouble with the Head."

They cycled on, and were approaching the Green Man when Bernard Glyn gave a whistle.

"My only aunt!" he said excitedly. "Here's a bit of luck!"

"The very men themselves!" said Tom Merry.

Messrs. Twist and Martin, all unconscious of their impending fate, were strolling leisurely along the village street in the very middle of the road!

CHAPTER 14.

Wanted!

"B AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus jumped from his machine and looked at the approaching men with a gleam of aggression in his eyes.

"Do you know 'em, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "These are the two frightful wotahs who told me that they were sendin' their sons to St. Jim's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah, you burblin' duffahs!" said D'Arcy sternly. "Skimmay, I twust you cowwobowate my identification?"

Skimpole was blinking at the approaching men through his spectacles.

"Yes, certainly!" he said. "These are undoubtedly the two rascals who had the audacity to carry me off by force last week. Without any question, these are the unprincipled vagabonds!"

"You're sure?" said Tom Merry.

"My dear Merry, I am convinced," said Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we're lucky," said Tom Merry. "No need to go near the Green Man at all. First of all we'll tax the beggars, then we'll give them a good bumping, and run them out of the village."

"Supposing old Crump butts in?" asked Blake.

"If I know anything about our pet bobby, he'll keep well out of it," said Monty Lowther. "Crump isn't a glutton for fighting."

By this time Messrs. Twist and Martin were quite close at hand, and they were not feeling exactly easy in mind. There was something rather significant about the manner in which the St. Jim's fellows had placed their bicycles against the side of the road. There was something still more significant in the fact that they had now formed themselves into a human barrier.

But it was impossible for the men to turn back, or to ignominiously bolt. They couldn't be sure that these preparations were antagonistic towards themselves. And they felt that the schoolboys would never dare to molest them on the open road in full daylight.

"Just a minute, gentlemen," said Tom Merry coolly, as he stepped forward.

The men paused, and felt that the blow was about to fall.

"Well?"

"Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin, I think?" said Tom Merry, remembering the names which Skimpole had given at the time of his kidnapping.

"I'm Mr. Twist," said the taller of the two men. "What do you want?"

"I want to tell you that we're going to run you out of this village," said Tom Merry coolly.

"You infernal young—"

"You needn't try any bluff," interrupted Tom, his eyes flashing. "You bribed one of our fellows this afternoon to steal Glyn's carburettor! You offered to pay him fifteen pounds, didn't you?"

Mr. Twist looked blankly bewildered.

"You're mad!" he said in amazement.

"Bai Jove! I twust we're on the wight twack!" murmured Gussy.

"Very cleverly done, Mr. Twist, and I congratulate you,"

said Tom Merry. "It's rather unfortunate for you that Mr. Martin is present. He isn't able to control himself so well."

Tom Merry had not missed the other man's violent start. Mr. Martin was now looking mottled in complexion, and he was evidently a badly-scared man. It was idle for Mr. Twist to dissemble his dismay while Mr. Martin's face was an open book.

"You fool!" hissed Mr. Twist, swinging round.

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I—" Mr. Twist brought himself up with a gulp.

"Now you've given yourself away, too," said Tom Merry grimly. "So much the better. I'd like you to understand, both of you, that people who try to bribe St. Jim's chaps are on the look-out for trouble."

"Let's bump them now!" roared Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"Grab them!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Stand back!" snarled Mr. Twist in dire alarm. "It's all lies—lies! We've never seen this confounded boy! We haven't made any arrangement with him!"

"The treacherous young hound!" babbled Mr. Martin.

"After arranging everything so clearly, he blabs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors couldn't help yelling. While Mr. Twist was doing his best to brazen out the situation, his companion was nullifying his efforts.

"Can't you keep quiet, you fool?" roared Mr. Twist.

"If I meet that kid I'll skin him!" snarled Martin.

Tom Merry & Co. needed no further evidence. Racke's story was substantiated. Not only that, but both Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Skimpole had recognised the pair.

"Grab them!"

"Hurrah!"

"Back up, St. Jim's!"

"Tramp, tramp, tramp!"

Messrs. Twist and Martin only heard that ominous tramping of feet. They were bowled over, and there wasn't even a fight. They were simply flung to the ground and held there. Then, after a moment, their aggressors sorted themselves out, and the men were lifted.

Bump, bump!

"Yow!" hooted Mr. Twist. "Yaroooh!"

"Whoooop!" shrieked Mr. Martin.

"Now then, again!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bump, bump!

Again and again the rascals were bumped hard on the wet ground.

"Yaroooop!"

The precious pair were beginning to wish that they had never been born. They certainly regretted the day that they had been foolish enough to take an interest in Bernard Glyn's carburettor. Ever since they had started on this quest they had met with rebuffs. And this disastrous punishment was the culmination of their campaign.

"That's enough!" said Tom Merry breathlessly. "Get up, you rotters—and be thankful that we don't hand you over to the police."

"You'll hear more of this!" snarled Mr. Twist savagely.

"I'll have you prosecuted for assault."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get a move on!" ordered Tom Merry. "You needn't spin a yarn that you've got luggage in the Green Man, because we don't believe it. Your sort don't carry luggage! March!"

"Confound your impudence!"

"March!" roared the juniors.

And the two rascals had no alternative but to march.

A dramatic interruption came, however. The procession was less than half-way through the village before a motor-car drove in sight, and the juniors were surprised to see that it contained a plain-clothes' man and three uniformed constables. They were apparently from Wayland.

The plain-clothes' man, who was evidently an inspector, pointed at the two rascals, and the car was pulled up.

"Just a minute, boys!" shouted the police officer.

He jumped out of the car, and the juniors adroitly surrounded Twist and Martin as they were about to make a break for freedom.

"Yes, the game's up!" said the inspector grimly. "We hold a warrant for your arrest, my men!"

The pair crumpled up. Without any chance of escape, they submitted to be handcuffed. All the fight had been knocked out of them by the juniors, and they were bundled into the car by the constables.

"What's the charge, inspector?" asked Tom Merry. "We knew they were a couple of wrong 'uns, and we were just drumming them out of the village."

"Thanks, young men!" said the inspector. "You've helped well. These men are well-known car thieves, and

they've been dodging us for five or six weeks. But at last we located them in this neighbourhood. Do you happen to know where they were staying?"

"At the Green Man."

"Splendid!" said the inspector. "We shall probably find a stolen car in the garage. You boys have done good work!"

"Bai Jove! Car thieves!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I knew they were crooks of some sort!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "One glance is enough to tell any fellow of tact an' judgment that they are uttish soundwells!"

"It stands out a mile!" agreed Monty Lowther. "Rummy how a chap could mistake them for a couple of gentlemen who wanted to look over the school so that their sons could—"

"Weally, Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus had turned very pink at Monty's sly dig. But he soon forgot all about it. The rascals were effectively cleared out of the neighbourhood now, and they were not likely to trouble St. Jim's again.

CHAPTER 15.

The First Prize Winner.

"GREAT SCOTT!"

"Racke!"

"It's—it's idiotic!"

Big Hall buzzed with amazed comment. Two days had elapsed, and Mr. Bernard Glyn was standing on the dais, announcing the prizewinners in the "Inventions" Competition.

And Aubrey Racke had won the fifty pounds first prize!

"After very careful consideration," Mr. Glyn went on, "the judges have come to the conclusion that Entry No. 15 is by far the most ingenious invention. It fulfils every condition of the competition. Let me congratulate you, Master Racke, on your really clever kettle."

"Thank you, sir," said Racke coolly.

"The whole idea of it is brilliant," continued Mr. Glyn. "It is a marvel of ingenious design. It can be cheaply produced, and is undoubtedly of universal appeal. Everybody will want one of these kettles when they are put on the market. I shall make it my business—if you will permit me to finance the scheme, my boy—to have this design patented and protected in your name."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Racke. "I was wonderin' if you would be so kind."

"The second prize will be awarded to Exhibit No. 8," said Mr. Glyn. "Let me congratulate you, Master Kerr, on your ingenious fire-extinguisher. It is a very clever appliance."

"Good gracious!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff, in discomfiture.

The third prize of ten pounds was awarded to no less an individual than Ralph Reckness Cardew, for an exceedingly simple device for opening and closing windows. It was so modest that nobody had taken any notice of it. But the judges had recognised its simple merits. It was a sidelight on the competition that the most elaborate and spectacular entries were quite out of the running.

Skimpole was not only amazed, but filled with a burning indignation. His thought-rending machine, which should certainly have obtained the first prize, was not even awarded a consolation prize. In fact, it wasn't even mentioned by Mr. Glyn at all.

"A very mysterious circumstance," said Skimpole mournfully. "I can only conclude that there has been a gross mis-

carriage of justice. My machine has obviously been neglected by the judges, and I place the blame on the shoulders of Mr. Ratcliff."

"Dry up, Skimpole—you never stood an earthly!"

"Really, my dear Glyn!"

"What about my carburettor?" went on Glyn. "Not even an honourable mention!"

But he was wrong. His father referred in the most eulogistic terms to the carburettor—but pointed out that Glyn, as his own son, could hardly expect to receive a prize in this competition. Apart from which, the carburettor had been designed before the inauguration of the competition—and it was, moreover, scarcely able to fulfil the conditions of the competition.

The motor-car, although becoming more and more popular, could hardly yet be described as an article of universal appeal. And in addition to all this, the carburettor was not absolutely perfected. The problem of vaporising crude oil was not, it seemed, fully solved.

And so the school was allowed to dismiss.

Racke was feeling very pleased with himself, and he was inclined to crow. He had the prize-money in his pocket. Fifty pounds—unfortunately, in a cheque. But it was a perfectly good cheque.

"Wacke, you lucky beggar!"

"Yes, Racke, but how did you do it?"

A crowd surrounded the black sheep of the Shell.

"Still waters run deep!" grinned Racke coolly. "While the rest of you were gassin' about your silly inventions, I was quietly makin' mine. I don't believe in talkin' too much!"

"By gad, you're deep all right!" said Crooke admiringly.

"But you said you took no interest in the competition?" shouted Harry Noble. "When I was exhibiting my umbrella, you distinctly said—"

"I spoofed you, that's all!" said Racke calmly. "Do you think I wanted everybody to be pesterin' me to show them that kettle?"

"Kettle?" said Figgins thoughtfully. "Rummy! I seem to remember! H'm! I can't quite get the hang of this!"

"None of us can!" said Blake suspiciously.

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is frightfully funny that Wacke should invent anythin' but a pack of lies!"

"I don't believe he invented that kettle at all!" said Lowther.

"I agree with you, Lowthah," said D'Arcy. "To my mind the whole thing is frightfully suspicious."

"You fellows had better be careful what you say!" growled Racke angrily. "I've been awarded the first prize, an' you can all go an' eat coke! Just because I have enough sense to keep mum, you think I'm swindlin' somebody out of their rights!"

He strode off defiantly.

And although there was a lot of comment, nobody could deny that Racke had legitimately received the first prize. And, after all, he was such a deep fellow that it was quite like him to work in secret. But nobody had ever credited him with possessing any mechanical ability.

"There's something fishy about that kettle of Racke's," said Figgins, as he and his chums went up to their study in the New House. "Congrats, Kerr, old man, on winning the second prize, but I think you ought to have had the first!"

"I'm satisfied," smiled Kerr.

"Satisfied!" said Fatty Wynn. "And he's Scotch!"

"Ass!" said Kerr.

"About that kettle, though," went on Figgins. "I seem to remember something about a kettle, somewhere," he added, halting in his stride. "Now, where the dickens did I—Great Scott!"

He broke off, staring excitedly.

"Well?" said Kerr.

"That old tinker!" gasped Figgins.

"Old Joe Brass, who was here on Wednesday?"

"Yes," said Figgins. "Don't you remember? He was telling us about a kettle of his that was capable of being boiled in thirty seconds! And this kettle of Racke's—"

"Phew!" whistled Kerr. "I remember now, too! But we were so busy at the time that we hardly gave the old boy any attention. And Racke was hanging about the New House that afternoon!"

"If it comes to that, why did the tinker come here at all?" asked Figgins, with a sudden thought. "Did—did Racke arrange to buy his kettle, and—My hat!"

"I can see it all now! It's a swindle!"

"Great Scott!"

"The rotter!"

"We ought to do something!" Figgins went on, in a sober voice. "We can't allow that swindler to keep the first prize!"

"Not likely!" said Kerr, as he went into Study No. 4.

"It's yours!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly.



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A motor-car suddenly hove in sight, and Tom Merry & Co. were surprised to see that it contained a plain-clothes' man and three uniformed constables. The plain-clothes' man pointed at the two rascals in the midst of the St. Jim's juniors and the car was pulled up. "Just a minute, boys!" shouted the officer. "We want those fellows!" (See Chapter 14.)

"I'm not thinking about that," said Kerr. "But it's a dirty trick for Racke to claim the credit for an invention he never invented! What about Mr. Glyn's offer to have the thing patented, too?"

They discussed the matter excitedly.

And Leslie Clampe, in his own study, was standing near the table, with a startled expression on his face. Figgins & Co. had paused outside his very door, and he had heard most of their talk. Clampe was a snob and a rotter; but he wasn't a fool.

Within two minutes he was racing across to the School House. He burst into Study No. 7, in the Shell passage, and found Racke, Scrope, and Crooke chatting.

"Hallo!" said Crooke. "Come to congratulate our dark horse?"

Clampe was looking grim.

"I say, Racke, what about that two-pounds-ten you borrowed from me on Wednesday?" he asked pointedly.

"What did you want it for?"

"Why, to—to pay somebody!" stammered Racke.

"You're a liar!"

"By gad! What the—"

"You borrowed that money to buy your precious kettle from that old tinker!" said Clampe.

"What!" gasped Scrope. "You don't mean—"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Crooke.

"You're mad!" shouted Racke desperately.

"I've just heard!" went on Clampe. "That tinker was in the New House that afternoon, and he told Figgins all about that geyser kettle of his. Give me twenty guids of that prize money, and I'll keep mum!"

Clampe's righteous wrath was exposed. He was only thinking of himself, after all!

But retribution was near at hand for Racke.

Baggy Trimble, seeing Clampe's hurried arrival in the School House, had applied his ear to the keyhole of Study No. 7. And now he was bubbling with news as Figgins & Co. came hurrying in to consult with Tom Merry.

"Quick!" gasped Baggy. "Clampe's just gone to Racke's study, and he's demanding twenty guids for his silence! That kettle was invented by an old tinker—"

"My only hat!" said Figgins. "Then we were right!"

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. came on the scene,

and after brief consultations, they tramped along to Racke's study. They burst in with purposeful expressions.

"The game's up, Racke!" said Tom Merry curtly. "You stole that idea for your kettle from a travelling tinker, and you're coming with us to the Head!"

Racke backed away, pale to the lips.

"It's my own invention!" he roared.

"You uttah swindlah!" shouted D'Arcy. "You impostah!"

"Drag him along!"

Racke resisted.

"Listen!" he panted. "I—I'll admit that the old tinker spoke to me about his rotten kettle, but it's just a coincidence—"

"Rats!"

He was howled down, and he knew that the game was up. Once more Aubrey Racke was forced to the conclusion that the way of the transgressor is hard!

Aubrey Racke was lucky to escape expulsion.

Dr. Holmes, indeed, took such a serious view of the affair that he was inclined to "bunk" Racke from the school at once. But Bernard Glyn's father was distressed at the thought of the competition—which he had inaugurated—culminating in such a disgrace for one of the boys.

So he persuaded the Head to settle the matter by giving Racke a public flogging, which he did.

Mr. Joe Brass, of course, was searched for and found, and he soon proved that the geyser kettle was his own invention. And Mr. Glyn promised to set up the man in a good business and to finance his invention.

The first prize, of course, now went to Kerr, and the other prizes were altered accordingly.

And Aubrey Racke, as he slowly recovered from the painful effects of that castigation, came to the conclusion that inventions, and everything connected with them, were things better left alone where he was concerned, at any rate.

THE END.

(Next week's GEM will contain another splendid yarn of Tom Merry & Co. entitled: "THE BOY FROM RUSSIA!" Make sure you read it!)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 997.

AT THE MERCY OF THE SKELETON MEN! Stranded in the African jungle, cut off from civilisation and with but faint hope of rescue, Adam and his pal, Harry, find themselves being pursued by a host of natives who resemble living skeletons rather than human beings!



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By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

A Strange Apparition!

"I'll be down in a jiff!" yelled Harry cheerfully.

Crash!

Down came a box which Adam believed, as he saw it thud into the sodden soil and give a bound over, was a case of ammunition.

By George, that was one to Harry! But then, Franklin had always been a chap with a practical turn of mind, looking ahead, always looking ahead.

The rain had by this time ceased. The sky began to lighten, so that Adam would have been able to make out the near-by trees even had there been no burning aeroplane to illuminate the scene.

He kicked his legs free of the negro's entwining hands.

"I say, look here, you know," he expostulated. "If you can understand English, don't play the giddy ox, but get up, or sit down and behave yourself."

The black man raised his head so that the glare of the flames fell upon it. Adam was able to study his features for the first time. It was a strange face of the usual negro type, with broad, flattened nose, high cheekbones, and widely dilated nostrils, but there were differences. The mouth was big, thick-lipped, as usual, but when opened displayed an amazing double row of huge but well-shaped white teeth. The eyes were big, and held that curious

expression midway between innocence and cunning which is characteristic of the native. But his hair did not cluster in those characteristic tiny, bristly, stubbly curls, being longer and softer Adam saw, and his ears were like sails. Curious ear-rings of copper or maybe wood, Adam thought, in the brief but appraising glance he shot at him, were set in the lobes. Round his neck was set a necklace of shells.

The body of the man, huge, broad, muscular, was most striking. Adam had never seen such another man, either white or black. The arms were big and muscular, and the whole body of the wounded native indicative of amazing strength.

He swung himself upward, so that he sat upon his heels staring wide-eyed at Adam, his right hand set to the bleeding wound in his side.

"Save me from the White Bone Men, baas!" he pleaded pitifully.

"Yes, but where are they?" asked Adam, leaning back against the tree to avoid the missiles dropping from above.

The native swung his left arm dramatically behind him, then in front.

"There—and there—everywhere—in the forest. They speared me, but I ran and ran, and then the storm came, and saved me." This he managed to convey in his curiously broken English. "Just before it came dark I heard the whirring of wings. News had come before that the white

WHO'S WHO IN THIS STORY!

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his chum, HARRY FRANKLIN, and a band of trustworthy followers, set out in search of the former's father and sister, news having been received from WALTER BEAVAN, a settler in Baruda, that the great white explorer, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, and his daughter, ROSA, who left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, are alive and well, but prisoners in the hands of a strange people at Baroomba, which lies north of the Silver Glacier and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

Well equipped with guns, stores, provisions, two aeroplanes, and wireless apparatus, the party reaches Baruda, the first important

stage of their journey. Here they meet Beavan, who proves that the message he received is genuine. Adam and his companions part company with Beavan and continue their journey. But Fate is against them, however, for they drive into a terrific storm. Adam's plane nose-diving and crashing among the thick trees and bursting into flame.

Adam, flung clear of the machine, is shouting to his chum to jump clear of the burning wreckage, when a weird individual, a gaping wound in his side, comes grocelling at his feet, begging protection.

"Get a move on, Harry," calls Adam. "I've a visitor here."

(Now read on.)

flyers were on the way. Then you fell from the sky, and I knew that I was safe."

"The deuce you did!" said Adam, half-scooping and extending a hand to raise the native. "Well, you must be a bit of an optimist, that's all I can say. And, look here—"

He got no further, for, directing his eyes beyond the upraised head of the man, Adam saw a something standing four paces away, lit up by the reddish-yellow glare of the burning plane, that startled him and interrupted his speech.

Never had Adam seen the like of this. Had he not been momentarily paralysed by the sight, he would have screamed aloud.

The thing that stood there was a skeleton.

It stood six feet high, an alarming sight with its bony face expanded in a ghastly grin.

But Adam noticed, as he stared at it in dumb fascination, that in the big deep sockets of the skull rolled shifty eyes. Simultaneously with its appearance, there came a vivid flash of lightning which, crashing down from the riven clouds, struck the tree in which the aeroplane was hanging and brought down with it a shower of burning particles.

At the same time, just before the thunder crash echoed, something heavy tumbled through the branches of the great tree and thudded on to the soft ground near where Adam stood.

Then the thunder crashed, and Adam's jangled nerves danced again.

He could not move. He felt as if he had been turned to stone.

And he might have remained inert for long had not the ghastly apparition in front of him suddenly swung aloft its right arm and pointed a gleaming spear-blade right at the broad back of the crouching native.

Something in the horrified expression of Adam's face caused the poor fellow at that moment to turn his head.

"Whow!" he yelled. "White Bone Man—" And he lost into a torrent of native gibberish indicative of extreme terror.

It seemed to Adam that the skeleton smiled. Instinctively he knew that before another fraction of a second passed the spear would be driven through the body of the native. It was time to act!

Adam just upturned the muzzle of the automatic so that it bore upon the ghastly-looking spectre of the forest.

At the same moment the automatic spoke the skeleton seemed to move upwards on to its toes. It remained for a brief moment poised in this position, its right arm stretched to its limit, the spear pointing downward. Then the body rocked forward, the spear fell from loosening fingers, and with a last nervous action the man, whoever he was, fell prone downward with his head close to the giant tree.

As the body lay almost at his feet, Adam saw in the bright glare of the fire that the back was just the same as the front of it—that of a skeleton. But he saw now that there was flesh belonging to it as well as bones, if indeed they were bones.

Suddenly a burning shower tumbled on to it.

Then the frightened native swung himself on to his feet, and, throwing wide his arms, executed the steps of a dance.

"How! Whow! It is my witch-mother said—the white men who fly in the air have saved me. The White Bone Man is dead!"

He seemed strong in spite of that ugly-looking wound in his side, and, approaching the figure that lay so still, he spurned it with a savage kick. Adam saw that flesh yielded to the blow of the foot. This apparition that lay there was obviously a man.

The White Bone Men!

AND now something stirred behind him, causing Adam to pivot and swing up once again the automatic which had already served him so well.

Then he grinned sheepishly; for it was Harry Franklin who stood there in sodden clothes, his face smudged with earth, for he had tumbled through the branches of the tree from high above. But the creepers which hung from it had broken his fall, so that he got away with nothing worse than a severe shaking.

"All right, old chap; put the popgun down," smiled Harry. "But, I say, what did you bag?"

He stared in amazement at the big black man with the bandy legs, and then at the figure which lay so still upon the ground.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, his face lengthening and paling. "You don't say— My hat! I wonder who he is?"

"A White Bone Man—whatever that may be," volunteered Adam.

"Hekebu— White Bone Man," the wounded native explained, grinning; and he stooped and, picking up the spear,

made as if to drive it through the body which lay at his feet.

"Just as you say," agreed Harry, nodding; and then, catching a sound above them and noticing that the deluge of fire particles was increasing, he shook himself, stood back a pace, and stared upwards.

"Great suffering snakes!" he yelled, as he gripped Adam's arm and drew him backwards. "Look out!"

They tumbled or staggered a dozen paces away amid the forest trees; the black man, after glancing above him to discover the cause of the alarm, plunging headlong after them.

They were not one moment too soon, for down from the great tree crashed the wreck of the burning aeroplane, bearing with it the huge branches on which it had been suspended. It seemed, as it came, that the petrol-tank burst, for bubbles and tongues of living fire leapt and eddied everywhere.

Up above they could see the burning tree giving out flames which leapt and devoured leaves and creepers, branches and boughs; the wind, blowing strongly, carrying the fire farther into the forest.

The tumbling wreckage dropped right on to the body of the dead Hekebu, making of itself a funeral pyre.

Where they stood the friends knew that they were safe—at any rate, for a moment. But their next move lay in the lap of the gods.

The hiss and crackle of the flames, the heat of the fire began to dry out everything around them, and they could see the golden runners eating into the heart of the forest.

"Adam," said Harry Franklin seriously, "it's a case of out of the frying-pan and into the fire, I imagine. It looks as if we're going to be burned alive."

Which way would the fire run? Would it drive ahead of them, leaving a great tract of forest at their backs open for them to seek shelter and safety in, or would it circle round them and cut off every avenue of escape?

For a moment Adam hoped that the sodden vegetation and the saturated earth would smother the flames. But no. As they stood amid the forest, watching beyond the pathway or glade in which the aeroplane had fallen, they could see the golden sparks and the red embers creeping to right and left and straight ahead.

The gusty wind drove the fire onward. Now and then air eddies brought back choking clouds of smoke, that stung the nostrils and made the eyes run.

The heat from the perishing aeroplane caused their clothes to steam as they watched and waited.

"What shall we do, Adam?" asked Harry. "I can't show you the way to go home from this place. I wonder if Battling Siki here can be of any help?"

He frowned down thoughtfully at the native who had stationed himself cross-legged upon the ground, his back set against a tree-trunk, and who was examining the wound in his side as if he were quite proud of it.

"What is your name, friend?" asked Adam of the black.

"My name Muta," the man answered, with a smile.

"Then, Muta," said Adam, "can you tell us where we can find a safe hiding-place until the dawn, when we can find our friends?"

He choked as he finished, for it came to him then that the others in the second aeroplane—Sandy McFavish, Jimmy Brown, and the six natives—might have died long ago. Certain it was that the storm must have overwhelmed them also. They had only been but a short distance behind. They

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could not have flown onward in this day suddenly transformed into night.

"Yah! Muta find a way," smiled the native, still busy examining his wound and wiping away with handfuls of powdered earth the stream of blood which had run down his powerful lower limb.

Harry Franklin, kneeling down beside him, examined the wound.

"That's a nasty one, old chap," he said. "But it's not so bad that it might not have been worse. Sorry I've got no bandages. They're all burnt up. How did you get that dose?"

Muta stretched a grin. He was composed and easy in his mind now.

"Hekebus—White Bone Men. They came to where Muta and his mother live in the forest, and they burn us out. Mother she go—can't say where. She witch-woman—she not die. They take Muta and stand him for target. They shy spears at him, and Muta run. One hit him here, and then he get away in the forest and dodge till the storm came, and with it the white deliverers."

"You seem to have had a tough time of it, Muta," smiled Harry; "and that graze has bitten deep." He had it in his mind that the wound would drain all the life's blood out of the poor fellow, and his thought was read by the cunning native.

"Muta live," he said, with a nod. "He not fear the White Bone Men now that the flyers of the air with the tubes that bark death have come to save him."

"I see."

Harry stared into the forest ahead of them. It presented an amazing sight. Everywhere the fire was spreading, drying up the sodden earth and trees and hanging creepers, devouring the undergrowth as it swept on; so fierce a furnace now that not even such a storm as that which had beaten the aeroplanes down would have served to put it out.

His boyish face lengthened in gloom. The fear came to him then, and it occurred to Adam also simultaneously, that the other plane must have been forced down back there where the fire was raging. How far the forest stretched he did not know, but they had been flying over it for what had seemed an interminable period of time seeing only occasional breaks ahead amid the trees, and if Sandy McTavish, Jimmy Brown, and the friendly natives were alive and anywhere within the track of the raging fire, they would be burnt up by it—cremated alive.

And they, left here with little in the way of stores, could scarcely hope to survive for long, unless they had the luck to find their friends, or meet with friendly natives.

As Harry watched the progress of the fire the sky began to lighten perceptibly. They could see a fog of smoke rising high above the trees. Just at that moment Adam, raising his automatic, fired once, twice into the air.

"I say, what's the joke?" asked Harry.

"If Sandy McTavish, Jimmy Brown, and our natives in the second plane have escaped, they may hear the signal and join forces," Adam explained.

Harry nodded, and then, looking at Muta, he noticed that the grotesque native was staring about him as if scared, shaking, his eyes bulging, and he knew that he was terrified.

"What's the trouble now, Muta?" he asked.

"The noise—the bang-bang—bring Hekebus on us! White Bone Men kill!" grinned the negro sheepishly.

Harry, smiling grimly, turned to Adam.

"There's that about it, of course," he said. "Adam, old boy, I think we had better save what we can and get into the screen of the forest. And we'll hope that the fire has smoked our skeleton friends out. They are evidently not the sort of people who ought to be encouraged."

Adam, Harry, and Muta, who seemed instinctively to understand, began to haul the cases thrown from the aeroplane across the glade. There Muta, making signs they understood, and showing extraordinary activity, seeing how severe was his wound, began to fashion cords or ropes out of the trailing creepers which hung down from the trees.

These he tied about such packages as they would be able to carry, and so they began to prepare for their journey, feeling heavy of heart because no answering shot had come in response to Adam's double signal.

In which direction should they march? What should they do? Where were they going? How could they hope now to reach the land of the Hukahulas, or find the Mountain of the Hidden Crest?

The question was decided for them by circumstances over which they had no control. They had made their hurried preparations for the journey, screened by the forest trees on the windward side of the clearing. And well it was

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that they had taken this precaution, for now Muta, who was peering out of their shelter, began to shake like a jelly again, his big teeth clashing together like castanets. Making a peculiar gulping sound, he rolled his big, animal-like eyes at Adam, and pointed, with a shaking arm, into the glade.

"White Bone Men—they come!" he chattered.

Adam and Harry looked. Standing not a hundred paces away, and grinning at them—for his quick eyes had caught a movement among the trees, and had spotted them instantly—was just such another apparition as that which had so startled Adam when the skeleton man whom he had killed had come out of the forest to slay Muta.

The light was good enough now for them to see that the figure was that of a magnificently built negro, whose body was painted to resemble a skeleton, the bones of head, body, arms and legs being represented, in a crude but effective and realistic way, in whitish paint or vegetable stain.

The man who had come out of the forest was armed with a round shield of dried hide, and held in his hand a deadly-looking spear.

He stood staring at them, and then, raising the spear above his shoulder, the hand held close to the neck, he uttered a fierce war-cry, and came on at the run. He could move, too. His feet spurned the ground with incredible rapidity, and it was plain that he intended to slay.

Muta, who seemed to dread these men, dropped on to his knees, clasping his hands together and moaning as he rocked from side to side.

"Who!" he howled as he closed his eyes.

The White Bone Man was close upon them when Harry fired. He hated to do it, but it was plain that he had to kill or be killed. As the shot rang out the skeleton man leapt upward, dropping his spear, and throwing wide his arms, and fell prone upon the ground.

At the same moment the glade became alive with tall, powerfully-built natives, fully armed, some of them bearing bows and arrows on their backs, each armed with a spear, and carrying a protective shield, and fierce, defiant cries echoed terrifyingly through the forest glade.

They had seen their comrade fall. They were bent on revenge.

Muta, springing up, picked some of the luggage from the ground and slung it on his back. From a distance came a peculiar, deep-toned sound like the beating of a drum—tom, tom, tom, tom!—which added to the eeriness of the situation.

Adam saw the skeleton men gather in front of their dead brother, heard them shouting and gesticulating. And although it seemed that he and his chum were doomed, Adam could not forbear to look, so amazing was the sight.

And as he stared and listened to the excited talking of the armed warriors of the forest, he saw emerge from among the trees unarmed men, who bore, suspended from their shoulders, barrel-shaped drums, on which they beat their hands as they marched. Tom, tom, tom, tom!—keeping perfect time. It was a war-signal, Adam supposed, as, stooping, he picked up a rifle.

"Muti," said Harry, turning to the powerful black, "I suppose our friends out there will eat us alive if we don't get out of this—"

"Hekebus—kill!" growled Muta, pointing into the heart of the forest. "Muta find a way. Know a place. Stand and fight. Quick, quick, quick!"

"Quick's the word, all right!" said Harry, turning to Adam and nodding his head. "I've scared our friends out there by shooting that man down, Adam, old son. But their fright won't last for long. The sooner we make a move, the better, for we don't stand a dog's chance here!"

Each slung a package on to his back, the ropes Muta had made being adjusted and tied rapidly so as to afford them comfort. Each slung a rifle.

Muta had stepped ahead, parting the undergrowth of the forest with his hands.

Behind them echoed the savage cries of the skeleton men and the monotonous beat of the drums: Tom, tom, tom, tom!

Adam hesitated, setting his teeth grimly.

"I've half a mind to make a stand here and fight it out—and die, if need be! Sandy McTavish and the others ought not to be far away, Harry. It might be better than dying of insect-bites in the heart of the forest."

Adam was becoming morbid. It was the killing of those skeleton men which had got on his nerves, Harry supposed. But what else could have been done?

"We're not dead yet, Adam," smiled Harry, whose own nerves were pretty well frayed by this time. "We've either got to stand here and fight to the last gasp, or trust to Muta and follow him. Let's take the second chance."



The moonlight was good enough now for them to see that the figure was that of a negro, whose body was painted to resemble a skeleton. He stood there, staring at them, his spear raised above his shoulder. (See this Page.)

The Ruined Temple of the Forest God.

THE shrieks, cries, and lamentations of the Hekebus rose louder and louder. Muta, coming back from among the trees and shaking with fear, called to Harry and Adam.

They went to him, moving along through the trees like snakes. Then Muta picked out a narrow trail, which gave them fairly easy walking.

The light faded until they could only just see. Wild animals scattered as they marched on in single file. The cries and the drum-beats behind them began to die away. On they went, until at last they could hardly see at all. Soon it would be quite dark. Then they would be forced to call a halt. Their situation was nerve-racking in the extreme.

They were lost—lost—lost! Their friends were lost. It was possible even that the skeleton men might have killed them if they had come down in the aeroplane anywhere near the place where their own had fallen. On they tramped—on and on. And at last, pausing for breath in an open track amid the trees, Harry wiped his forehead and sighed deeply.

Muta, whose endurance was amazing, grinned as he looked back.

"You'll have to find a place for us to camp for the night, Muta," said Harry. "We can't go on for ever!"

"Me find it. There!" shot back Muta, as he pointed among the trees. "Not very far away—"

"And thank goodness, Adam!" laughed Harry. "We have shaken off Muta's pals. The sacrifice of that one life has probably saved us—and them, too. There's not a sound. That's a bit of luck, at any rate. We'll rest in this place to which Muta here is leading us, and in the morning we'll make another attempt to signal Mack and the rest. We may have better luck then."

"And, at all events, it's nice to think those White Bone Men aren't following us," smiled Adam.

The words had scarcely left his lips than from somewhere near at hand behind the screen of trees came the beat of a drum—tom, tom, tom, tom—

The sound was repeated behind them. It was taken up on the left of them. It seemed to be answered ahead of them.

This way and that Adam and Harry turned as they strained their ears to listen, and, in spite of their inborn courage, they shivered.

They had endured enough for one day. They had lost their plane—they had lost their friends. They had killed, and men were in pursuit of them who meant to kill. They had not eaten. Their nerves were on edge; they were parched with thirst. And even now, at the wane of the day, they were to be given no rest.

Tom, tom, tom, tom, tom, tom!

The dull, steady beat of the drums made their pulses

leap. Muta, quivering like a jelly, once more rolled his eyes.

"Hekebus, on war march. Kill, kill!" he exclaimed.

He seemed to want to drop where he stood and wait for the advancing death.

Harry seized him roughly and urged him on.

"Find us some place which we can defend. After all, we can kill, too, if it comes to that," he said harshly. "Pull yourself together, Muta. Don't be scared of these chaps. We can save you and ourselves, without fire-guns, if you give us a chance."

The drum-beats seemed to be closing in on every side. If they could have seen their enemies it would not have been so bad, the boys felt.

They might have shinned up a tree and waited, instead of wandering on. But what would be the good of that with enemies swarming all round them—wild men, whose instinct would inevitably lead them to the right spot?

"There's only one thing to do; we must trust Muta," said Adam.

Harry nodded and whipped out his automatic. He could just see the burly figure of the misshapen black standing a few paces away from him, trembling.

Harry showed him the weapon.

"Find us a resting-place," he said, "or—"

Muta did a skip and uttered a yell. He suffered almost an extremity of terror from his fear of the Hekebus, but also he had seen what these fire-guns could do, and he was afraid of them as well. The thing he liked best in the world was his own hide, maybe.

At all events, when he had recovered from his first rude shock he moved forward, following the trail which they could not see, but which he found readily enough in the tangle of trees and undergrowth, and pushed on, glancing nervously back every now and then to see what Harry was doing with the automatic.

At his heels they trailed, and in their ears, seeming to approach nearer and nearer with every step they took, they could hear the beat of those warning drums closing in.

When Muta at last struck a clearing, and leapt, in the moonlit darkness, towards a heap of ruins which rose like a castle in front of them, for night had come, Harry and Adam felt that they had reached the limit of human endurance.

Muta uttered whispered cries, executed a joyful dance, and pointed upwards to where the pile rose, a mass of tumbled stones, all black save where silvered by the moon.

"Whow!" he cried. "Temple of the Forest God. White Bone Men afraid. Not come here. We safe."

"Thanks, old son!" gasped Harry. "Glad to hear it. Maybe we can rest and eat and sleep in safety now."

They followed Muta upwards as he crawled among boulders and masses of stone, until they found, almost the

height of a house up from the ground level, a spot where the stones had been cleared away. Here, glistening in the silver moonlight, they saw a pool of rainwater lying in the bed of stone from which wild animals scattered at the sound of their tread.

They threw themselves flat and drank greedily of the pool.

Never had Adam swallowed water that seemed so cool, so refreshing. Their thirst cured, they began to take stock of their surroundings.

The ruined temple—for such they supposed the rude pile must be—stood in the middle of a clearing, beyond which the forest circled deep and vast. It seemed to them, as they walked about the places, that they might be able to defend it effectively for a while if they were attacked, for from every point the tumbled and broken heap of boulders slanted down from where they stood on the ground level, and at no place would they be easy to climb.

On the other hand, they would be able, with their rifles and their automatics, to defend the position readily enough, providing their enemies did not make a combined attack from all sides at once. And even then, with their modern death-dealing weapons, they would render a goodly account of themselves.

Having made their survey, they broke open one of the cases they had brought, prised open some tins of meat, and ate. After which they stretched themselves out to rest where they could keep one eye on the moonlit clearing. Sleep, they all felt, just now was out of the question.

Oddly enough, during the last stage of their journey through the forest, the beat of the drums had ceased. Either their enemies had abandoned the pursuit, or else they were closing in upon them in silence.

Adam now asked Muta what he thought about it.

Muta grinned as he stared about him.

"Hekebus frightened of Forest God," he explained. "Many moons ago"—and he began to open and shut his fingers, counting rapidly—"White Bone men killed the tribe of the Forest God and destroyed the Temple. Then famine and fire and pestilence fell upon the skeleton men and nearly wiped them out. So they no come near the temple of the Forest God."

"Meaning this place?" said Harry.

"Yhah, yhah, baas."

"Maybe that's why they've ceased their drumming," smiled Harry, turning to Adam. "At all events, here we are, and it's comforting to have a wall of stone about us. Maybe those chaps will let us alone now that we have reached here in safety, Adam; and if only we can link forces with Sandy McTavish to-morrow—"

Muta, uttering a startled cry, rose to his feet.

"Yhah! Look!" he whispered, pointing.

And there in the moonlight, below the great broken pile of the ruined temple, Adam and Harry saw by the bright light of the moon a White Bone Man who, his black skin merging with the darkness of the ground, and the white painted skeleton design seeming to shimmer in the silver rays, looked like a mass of bones. The moonlight struck silver from his spear blade.

As he stood he raised the weapon above his head and uttered a piercing cry, which received instant answer from the forest.

And then, as before, came the dull beat of those death drums, now quite close at hand.

Tom! Tom! Tom! Tom! Tom!

Muta grovelled in fright. Plucky though he was in so many ways, he seemed terror-stricken by the mere sight of these white-painted skeleton men.

And now out of the forest they came, the skeleton army, their spears shimmering in the moonlight.

"It seems to me," grunted Harry, "that our friend Muta has got it wrong. If these chaps were ever afraid of the Forest God and his temple—this being same—they seem to have got over it by now, and— Hallo, here comes one of 'em!"

The armed warrior who had first appeared, having shouted to the others, moved to the narrow way up which the fugitives had come.

Evidently he was not afraid, and he intended to make sure.

"I say, Harry, old chap," growled Adam, "does it mean that we shall have to take another life?"

"Looks like it!" growled Harry.

"I hate to do it, old man. After all, they've done us no harm."

"All right—let's wait and see if we can parley with him, using Muta here as interpreter," advised Harry, as he showed his automatic. "Then if the worst comes to the worst we can shoot."

So they waited, Muta shivering with terror.

They stood near the top of the narrow way. The skeleton man, nearing the top, saw them. Rigid as a statue he stood, with the spear held ready to throw.

So they looked at each other, none moving.

"Muta," called Adam, "come and tell our friend here that we mean no harm."

In obedience, Muta screamed something.

At the sound of his voice the skeleton warrior, uttering a savage cry, hurled his spear, and the weapon, missing Adam's head by the fraction of an inch, would have pierced Muta to the heart had he not fallen flat, with a howl of fright.

"They will kill! They come! They fear the Forest God no more!" howled Muta, in a quivering voice. "We are lost! How! Yhah! Yhah!"

And it was true. Having hurled his spear, the skeleton man, holding in his hand a knife with a curved and hideous blade, leapt to where Adam and Harry stood.

Up the pathway behind him came others, leaping at an incredible speed. Out of the forest emerged the men with the drums, beating them dully as they came.

It was time to act.

"Shoot! We can't help it, Adam!" hissed Harry through clenched teeth.

Even as he spoke, he fired point-blank at the bounding savage. The black, throwing his arms wide as he leapt, tumbled backwards over the wall of rock. Adam, firing at the line of skeleton men who followed, sent another sprawling headlong.

The flash of the weapons, the heavy report of exploding cartridges, and the death of their comrades, sent the others scuttling below like rabbits to their burrows, and silenced the beating drums.

"A respite, at any rate!" growled Harry, drawing a deep breath. "But what hope have we got when the morning breaks and they can see, and close in on us on every side?"

Adam smiled sadly. What hope, indeed, he thought.

And then his heart leapt, for clear and sharp upon the night air sounded the unmistakable report of a gun.

"Harry," he yelled, "was that an echo?"

"Hardly—the echo of our shots died long ago, but—"

Bang!

There came a second gunshot, far away, but clear as an Alpine bell—and Adam yelled.

"Friends! There are friends close at hand—white men—out here! And armed with rifles! It is hardly believable. Wonder who they can be, Harry?"

Bang!

There came a third report. It sounded as far away as before, and it was impossible to locate the direction from whence it came.

But Harry smiled and nodded.

"I reckon it's Sandy McTavish and Jimmy Brown," he said. "And if that is so they must have come down safely in the other plane."

(Will Harry's surmise prove to be correct? On no account must you miss next week's grand instalment of this enthralling story, chums.)

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"D'ARCY'S COMIC OPERA!"

SEVERAL readers have written in praise of the above-mentioned story of St. Jim's which was published a few weeks ago, and in each case the writer has asked for a "full score" of Gussy's opera. For once in a way I am unable to oblige these loyal readers, as, of course, Mr. Martin Clifford did not write the opera in full. I will admit that the verses published at various intervals in the story were exceedingly funny, and these contributed largely to its success. All the same for that, I doubt very much whether my readers would have enjoyed that particular issue of the GEM as well as they did if it had contained nothing but the opera. If these readers who have written me will give the matter a little thought, I am sure they will see that the "opera" only provided the theme for the story, and not the story itself.

HE STAMMERS!

H. L., of Oxford, writes and tells me that his chum stammers, and he wants to know of a cure. Well, when I was at school a pal of mine stammered pretty badly, and it was just as embarrassing for me to listen to him as it was awkward for him to talk to me. So we put our heads together to find a cure. For half an hour a day I used to get this pal of mine to read aloud from a book. In three months this treatment was beginning to show results; the stammering wasn't so noticeable. And in a year my pal only broke into stammering when he was over-excited. Quite simple, you will admit, although let me add that it required a little will power to keep to this programme of half an hour's reading aloud every day. I recommend H. L., of

Oxford, to bring this cure to the notice of his chum, and persuade him to give it a trial. It's worth trying, anyway.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR!

There is no need to think that this paragraph is dealing with specific letters. It is not. I mean it to be a simple, right-on-the-wicket tribute to the innumerable readers who write to me from a lot of different parts of the world and say straight out what they think of the stories in the GEM. And the best letters come to the GEM. Not a doubt of it. Others may say the same thing of other papers, but I stick out for the GEM. It is a funny thing this letter-writing. The most satisfactory letters are those in which the writer has just expressed his or her ideas. There is no greater mistake than the notion about a few stilted phrases making a letter. It is having something to say and feeling it. Then a letter is interesting.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"THE BOY FROM RUSSIA!"

By Martin Clifford.

This novel story of Tom Merry & Co., the chums of St. Jim's, will go like hot cakes. As the title suggests, a new boy comes to the old school, and things begin to happen the moment he arrives. Don't miss this yarn, whatever you do!

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By Arthur S. Hardy.

There will be another grand instalment of this adventure serial in next week's bumper issue that will keep your interest at concert pitch. Look out for it!

"AN APRIL FOOL TRAGEDY!"

That's the title of the next jolly poem from the pen of the St. Jim's Rhymester. It deals with "April 1st"—the day of jokes and leg-pulls—and it goes with a swing. Order your GEM in good time! Cheerio, chums!

Your Editor.

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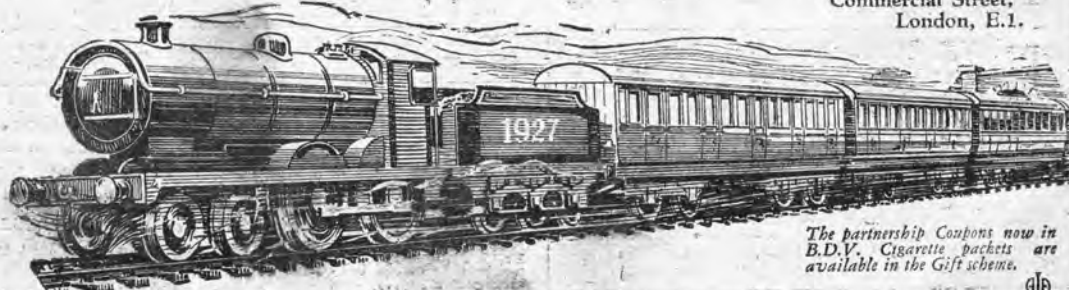
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