

MEET THE "ARTFUL DODGER" OF ST. JIM'S—Inside!

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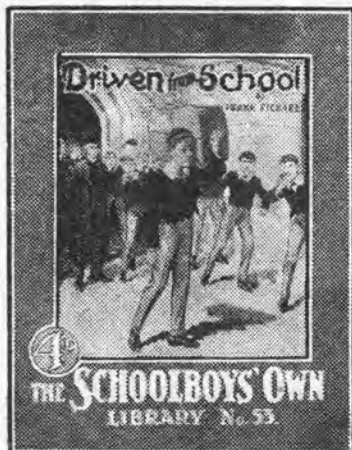
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WONDER OF WONDERS—IT'S TRIMBLE'S TREAT!

(See the topping School Story in this issue.)

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BY
**FRANK
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THE LARGEST STAMP!

A STAMP-COLLECTING reader from Leytonstone sends me a rather interesting query this week. Here's an extract from his letter: "Is the 1½d. Jamaica stamp the largest one in existence? I have it in my collection, and it's certainly the largest I've ever seen." Well, after a tremendous amount of delving into ponderous volumes I have managed to unearth the following information. "The largest postage-stamp ever issued was an American stamp for newspapers and parcels, value 2½d. It measured 4 in. by 2 in." Whether our friends across the Atlantic have issued another stamp to beat this "giant" since the reference-book containing the information quoted above was published I cannot say. But, in any case, my correspondent's specimen would look rather small beside this fellow measuring 4 in. by 2 in. Perhaps some other philatelist amongst GEM readers could throw more light on this subject.

THE BEST PUPPY!

R. T. J., of Salford, is very much exercised in his mind about the litter of puppies his pet terrier has recently presented him with. They are funny little things, he says, and it seems a rare pity that he must part with three out of the four. But father says that he must make up his mind quickly. Now the question that worries R. T. J. is which puppy he should keep? Naturally, he wants the best one. Luckily for my reputation as a general encyclopedia, perhaps, I can answer that seemingly difficult question. A breeder of dogs—who knew his job—once told me that the choice of a litter is best left to the mother. In carrying her puppies back to their bed the first of the litter she takes up will always prove to be the best.

WHO'LL WORK THIS OUT?

A letter from "A Very Old Reader" contains a rather startling mathematical teaser. "If you were to multiply the number 15 by itself," he writes, "and the result (225) by itself, and so on until fifteen results have been multiplied by themselves, writing three figures a minute for ten hours a day, working three hundred days a year, it would take you twenty-eight years to finish your little multiplication sum." Phew! I thank "A Very Old Reader" for this information, but I don't think I'll try it. And I venture to ask him if he has proved it by personal experience. If he has—well, he deserves a medal of some sort!

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"GRUNDY'S BARRING-OUT!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is a tip-top story of your old favourites with the one and only George Alfred Grundy "going off the deep end." You'll laugh loud and long over his latest stunt, but you'll like poor old Grundy just as much as ever when you've finished reading the story, although he's just as big a "fathead" as ever. Don't miss this treat, boys!

"BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!"

By Arthur S. Hardy.

Look out, too, for another ripping instalment of this popular adventure serial. Now that Adam Byrne has found his father and sister, it would appear that his mission is finished. But don't forget it, chums, he and his party have got to make their way out of the country, and there are hundreds of obstacles to be overcome before that can be accomplished.

Your Editor.

ROLLING IN MONEY! Baggy Trimble's impecuniosity is a standing joke at St. Jim's. Thus it comes as a great surprise to Tom Merry & Co. when they not only hear, but actually see for themselves, that the egregious Baggy is rolling in money!



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

BY
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Very Mysterious!

"LOVELY morning!" said Jack Blake dolefully. "Oh, ripping!" agreed Herries, with a sad sigh.

"Gorgeous!" groaned Digby. The chums of Study No. 6, minus the celebrated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, stood in the doorway of the School House at St. Jim's, looking out into the sunlit quad. They were not a happy-looking trio.

And yet one would have thought that a morning like this would have instilled them with the joy of living. The sky was blue, the air was tranquil, and the old elms were rustling in the faintest of breezes. The sun was shining down delightfully.

"It's a half to-day, too," said Blake.

Grunt!

"Cricket!" remarked Blake, with a touch of hope.

Grunt!

"Can't you chaps do anything else but grunt?" demanded Blake wrathfully.

Herries and Digby sighed deeply, and continued to stare across the quad with that same doleful expression. They could not have been more depressed if rain had been relentlessly falling down. But on such a morning as this their drooping spirits seemed unaccountable.

Baggy Trimble came sidling up.

"I say, Blake, old man—"

"Gurrrrh!" growled Blake ferociously.

"I suppose you couldn't lend me a bob—"

Blake gave a roar like a wounded rhinoceros.

"Clear off!" he bellowed.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Trimble. "You needn't jump down my throat! I—I only asked—"

"Scoot!"

"It's particularly important—"

"If you don't clear off," hooted Blake, "I'll wipe up the floor with you!"

"But as a special favour— Yaroooh!" howled Trimble. "You—you—"

"If you come back, I'll boot you again!" said Blake grimly.

The fat Fourth-Former rolled off, puzzled and pained.

"Talk about adding insult to injury!" said Blake, taking a deep breath. "Here we are, broke to the wide, and that fat idiot comes up asking for loans!"

"You didn't kick him hard enough!" said Herries.

The chums of Study No. 6 were only slightly mollified by the spectacle of Baggy Trimble scurrying off round the

elms. They felt that Fate had dealt hardly with them, and that life was bleak.

Jack Blake had been confident of receiving a tip from home that morning. Herries had expected at least a ten-shilling note, too. And, by a curious coincidence, Digby had prophesied the certain receipt of a cash remittance from his own people.

And there wasn't a letter between the three of them!

What was far more to the point, the only letter for Study No. 6, addressed to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, was about the most unpromising epistle that one could imagine—at least, to judge by the exterior. And Gussy, of course, was still trying on neckties.

Blake & Co. were sad, with the sadness of impecuniosity. Even the brightness of the gay morning failed to elicit a response. The brightest of mornings is apt to seem dull when one's pockets are empty.

"Threepence!" said Blake moodily.

"Between the lot of us!" groaned Herries. "Gussy ought to be boiled. What the thump does he mean by spending his last quid on three new neckties?"

"Six-and-eightpence each!" said Digby indignantly. "Why, it's a crime! A thing like that ought to be stopped by law!"

Blake nodded.

"The worst of it is, he does these things without telling us!" he said complainingly. "We carry on, under the impression that he's got a quid in his pocket, and then he suddenly springs the news that he's broke to the wide!"

"Disgraceful!" said Digby.

"Heah we are, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself arrived on the scene. He was dressed in all his splendour, his face was gleaming with good-humour and health, and he was apparently at peace with the world.

"Wippin' weathah!" he observed cheerfully.

"Bother the weather!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's the good of lovely weather when we're all stony?" asked Herries aggressively. "It's only a mockery! And to-day a half-holiday, too!"

"Weally, Hewwies, I cannot agwee with this attitude on your part," said Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to heah a wippin' mornin' like this referred to as a mockery."

"Rats!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"It's all your fault, Gussy, for spending that last quid of yours on three rotten neckties!" said Blake bitterly.

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"Unless we keep watch over you constantly, you have these fits of insanity!"

"Bai Jove! I wufuse—"

"Never mind what you refuse!" said Blake. "There's a letter in the rack for you, and we want to know if there's any money in it!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and he inspected Blake up and down from head to foot.

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as a person of feeble intellect!" he said firmly. "The lettah can wait. I considah— Yawwooh!"

"Grab him!" said Blake. "Now, all together!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus was banged hard against the wall.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "You uttah wuffians! You are wumplin' my collah—"

"Are you going to open that letter or not?"

"Yaas, you wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy.

He was released, and he breathed hard.

"As I have given my word, I am obliged to open the lettah!" he said frigidly. "At the same time, I vegard you as cwass idiots!"

"Don't regard us—regard your letter!" said Blake.

"You uttah ass!"

Arthur Augustus stalked to the letter-rack with his nose in the air.

"Bai Jove!"

There was a world of astonishment in Gussy's tone. He held the letter in his hand, and he took great care to hold it delicately between the tips of his thumb and finger. As his chums had previously noted, the letter did not have a very promising aspect.

The envelope was of common quality; it was grubby, and the pencilled superscription was written in a painful scrawl. And the postmark was "Wayland." As a receptacle for a crisp "five," this envelope was the most unlikely covering.

"Better open it!" said Blake gruffly. "If there isn't any cash in that letter we're going to bump you on the floor!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hard!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Stop trying to imitate a parrot, and open the letter!" roared Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

Arthur Augustus gave his attention to the letter again. Most of his correspondence bore an aristocratic aspect, as befitted the scion of a noble house. Grubby letters were seldom addressed to D'Arcy. But this one was not merely grubby, but painfully plebeian.

"This is weally wemakable!" said D'Arcy, in a surprised tone. "I have no ideah who can be witin' to me fwom Wayland. An' in pencil, too! It is fwightfully bad form to wite to anybody in pencil!"

"Open the letter, ass!" hooted Blake.

"Bai Jove! You needn't woah at me, Blake!" protested Arthur Augustus. "I have fwrequently weminded you that there is no necessity to woah at a fellow!"

"Burrh!"

"I do not vegard that as an intelligible wemark, Blake!"

"Unless you open that letter within the next three seconds we'll tear your topper off and stamp on it!" said Blake, in a sulphurous voice. "Now, then—one, two, three—"

"Pway, wait, deah boy!" asked Arthur Augustus frantically.

He inserted his noble thumb under the flap and tore the letter open.

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy is Touched!

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus stared at the letter with deep concern. He looked up, and noted that Blake and Herries and Digby were silently drifting away. They had detected the lack of any cash during the first tense moment, and their interest in the letter dwindled to nothing.

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

Blake turned. His noble chum's expression was so deeply tinged with heartrending concern that interest became awakened again. Herries and Digby turned, too. Arthur Augustus was looking spellbound.

"What's the matter?" asked Blake. "What's the idea of standing there, looking like a boiled owl?"

"I wufuse to be likened to a boiled owl!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It is necessary to wemind you, Blake, that I am fwrequently pwotestin' against these wiculous similes!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Who's that letter from?"

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"Bai Jove! I— Weally, Blake, I must wefuse to wreply!"

"What?"

"I wegret the necessity—"

"You silly fathead!" growled Blake. "We want to know who that letter's from."

Arthur Augustus suddenly folded up the epistle and rammed it into his trousers-pocket. The action in itself was significant, for Gussy paid no regard to his perfect crease. His mind was obviously exercised in no small degree.

His three chums stared at him in amazement.

"What's the idea?" demanded Blake. "We don't have any secrets from one another in Study No. 6, do we?"

Arthur Augustus looked distressed.

"The lettah is pwivate," he said confusedly. "I twust you will wespert the pwivacy of a fellow's lettah, Blake."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Blake.

"Looks jolly suspicious to me!" said Herries darkly. "That's the kind of letter a chap would get from a bookie, or—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Rot!" said Blake. "Gussy's too simple to have any dealings with bookies."

"You fwabjous ass!" shouted D'Arcy. "I should uttably wefuse to wecognise a bookie. I vegard all bookies as wascals!"

"Better not say that in public," grinned Blake. "You'll have the Bookmakers' Union on your trail with pickets!"

"You uttah ass!"

Arthur Augustus turned aside and walked out into the quad. He walked hurriedly, and glanced back once or twice, as though he were afraid of his comrades following him. But they didn't follow. They stood there, staring in astonishment.

"Jolly mysterious!" said Blake, frowning. "Why the merry dickens didn't he want to show us that letter? Private, eh? There's something fishy about this, my sons!"

"Gussy doesn't know anybody in Wayland," said Digby thoughtfully. "At least, nobody in the slums. And if that letter didn't come from the slums, I'll fry my boots!"

"I think we ought to do something," said Herries firmly.

"What can we do?" growled Blake. "Gussy says the letter's private, and we can't butt in on a fellow's personal affairs—even when he is a duffer!"

"Oh, blow him!" said Digby. "What the dickens are we going to do about our own position? Threepence between the lot of us! And we were talking about going for a picnic down the river this afternoon!"

"Don't talk to me about picnics!" said Blake bitterly. "That sort of pleasure is only for the idle rich! We poor paupers must starve!"

"Perhaps we can raise the wind somehow?" suggested Herries, with a touch of hope. "Tom Merry had a remittance from home yesterday, I believe, and he's bound to have some of it left. And Tom's a good sort!"

"We can hope, anyhow," said Blake. "Five bob would get us over the half-holiday at a pinch."

In the meantime, Arthur Augustus was leaning against one of the ivy-covered buttresses towards the rear of the School House. He had come here for seclusion. But he failed to observe that Baggy Trimble had followed, and was watching from a safe distance.

"This is fwightfully awkward!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, it makes a fellow wrealise things!"

He took the letter out of his pocket again, unfolded it, and re-read the contents:

"5, Baxter's Rents,

"Wayland.

"Dere Master Darcy.—Having herd as you are a very kind-hearted young gentleman, I appeal to you in the hope that you will help me in my great worry and trouble. My husband is dead, and it is more than I can do to feed my four little children. Pore dere, they are half-starved, and haven't had a good meal for weeks. And now I have lost my job at the factory, and unless I get three pounds nine shillings and sevenpence by to-morrow afternoon, which is Wensday, the landlord is going to throw me into the strete.

"I have no friends, and everything is against me. Lots of people have said how good you are, and what a kind heart you have. Can you help me, kind Master Darcy? I would not so lower myself, but my heart is broke for the little ones.

"If you are so kind as to help, my son will be at the style in Rylcombe Lane at two-thirty to-morrow afternoon. Please meet him, and let him know. He will just have time to get back before the landlord comes.

"With hopes as you will be as kind as I have herd, and hoping this finds you as it leaves me at present.

"Yours obediantly,

"MRS. MARTHA SMITH.



In deep meditation Arthur Augustus leaned against one of the ivy-covered buttresses at the rear of the school, unaware of the fact that Trimble had followed him and was watching at a safe distance. "This is fwightfully awkward!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "This letter makes a fellow wealise things!" Trimble pricked up his ears. (See Chapter 2.)

"P.S.—Please, Master Darcy, say nothing to any of your friends, and keep this terrible trouble of mine a secret. I trust you."

"Bai Jove! How fwightful!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Whatevah can I do? The poor old gal is apparently goin' to be turned out into the woad with all her family! How uttahn howwid!"

He read the letter a third time, and then stowed it away. "It is cawious how one is always stonay when cash is urgently wanted," he mused. "At othah times a fellow is fairly wollin' in monay! Bai Jove! I wathah wegwet sendin' for those neckties. Pewwaps Blake was wight in callin' it an unnecessawy extwagance."

Gussy pondered over the enormity of his offence.

What right had he to send for neckties when people were starving? Not merely people, but little children!

The swell of St. Jim's felt that he was up against one of Life's secret dramas. That scrawled note in his pocket wasn't a letter, but a human document.

His noble heart was touched.

But Mrs. Martha Smith did not merely wish to touch D'Arcy's heart, but also his pocket. And Gussy was appalled by the recollection that he was experiencing one of the leanest periods of the term.

A fiver, at least, was due from his pater, Lord Eastwood. But for some reason the remittance had not turned up.

The situation was almost tragic.

"I say, Gussy—"

Arthur Augustus started and looked round.

"Bai Jove, Twimble!" he said. "Where did you spwing fwom?"

"I—I just happened to walk by, you know," said Baggy. "Bad news, old man? Anything serious in that letter?"

"You fwightful eavesdwoppah!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "What do you know about a lettah, Twimble?"

"Oh, nun-nothing!" said Trimble hastily.

"If you are tellin' me whoppahs—"

"I'm not!" said Trimble indignantly. "As a matter of fact, I was just wondering if you could lend me a bob? I—I mean, half-a-crown? As one of your best pals, Gussy—"

"Bai Jove!"

"As I was saying, as one of your chums—"

"You fwightful young wascal!" roared Arthur Augustus. "If you descwibe yourself as one of my pals again, I'll give you a feahful thwashin'! I stwongly suspect you of spyin', you unpwincipled young boundah!"

And Arthur Augustus strode off indignantly.

Baggy Trimble grunted.

"Mean lot of rotters!" he muttered. "They won't lend a fellow a giddy penny! There's something fishy about that letter, though—and I'll nose it out, too!"

Baggy Trimble was curious. There was nothing unusual in this circumstance, for the fat Fourth-Former was never anything else but curious! That letter, however, had added an edge to his normal curiosity.

He knew well enough that Arthur Augustus had refused to confide in Blake and Herries and Digby. And this, in itself, was such an unusual state of affairs that Trimble was brimming with inquisitiveness.

Gussy was worried—and Baggy scented some secret. Perhaps D'Arcy wasn't so innocent and high-minded as the rest of the fellows believed! Perhaps Baggy could bowl him out in some shady little escapade. The very thought of this made the egregious Trimble quiver with eager anticipation.

CHAPTER 3.

Another "Touching" Scene!

"PWAY lend me your yahs for a moment, Mewwy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy confronted the Terrible Three of the Shell as they strolled across the quad from Little Side.

"I'll lend you both my ears for as many moments as you like, Gussy," said Tom Merry genially. "What's the giddy trouble?"

"I'm afwaid it is wathah sewious."

"It looks it," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You're pale and wan, Gussy. There's a haggard expression in your eyes. Do I detect a grey hair or two, or is it the flash of the sunlight?"

"I would wemind you, Lowthah, that this is no time for wottin'," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "The fact is, I am wathah hard up, an' I am desiwous of waisin' the wind."

"You're hard up?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a disease that attacks most of us at different times," said Lowther, shaking his head. "I've only just got over an attack, and by the look of things there'll soon be a relapse!"

"If one-and-threepence will be of any use to you, Gussy, old man, you're welcome to it," said Manners generously.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"It's all I've got," said Manners. "I'm like the widow—I'm offering you my mite."

"It is vewy genewous of you, deah boy, but I am afwaid the sum will be totally inadequate," said Arthur Augustus dubiously. "It is most necessaw that I should waise the sum of three pounds, nine shillin's, an' sevenpence."

"That's all right," said Lowther. "I can manage the sevenpence."

"You uttah ass!"

"Such is the reward for a generous spirit," said Lowther sadly.

"Weally, Lowthah, I did not mean to be wude, but it is widiculous to oflah me sevenpence when I am wequiw in' ovah threee pounds."

"I'd like to offer more, but it can't be did," said Monty.

"Well, I can manage thirty bob, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! That's fwightfully decent of you, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "I am feahfully obliged, deah boy!"

"Don't mench!" grinned Tom Merry.

He whacked out a pound note and a ten-shilling note.

"Does this mean that our boating trip for this afternoon is sandbagged?" asked Manners ominously. "I don't want to be critical, Tom, old scout, but you distinctly promised—"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry hastily.

Arthur Augustus beamingly took his departure. Thirty shillings at one go was decidedly good, and his spirits were already rising. He thrilled at the thought of being able to save Mrs. Martha Smith from being thrown into the road with all her children.

"Even if I can't bowwow the entiah amount, the landlord will pwobably welent, even if he gets only half the money," Arthur Augustus told himself. "Howevah, I shall twy to waise the full amount."

"What about that boating trip?" asked Lowther, when Gussy was out of earshot.

"I'm afraid it's off," said Tom Merry gently.

"What!"

"I've only got three bob left—"

"You—you hopeless ass!" roared Manners. "You footling chump!"

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"You frabjous cuckoo!" added Lowther wrathfully. "Go it, Manners, old man! Think of a few more choice terms! He's dished us out of that trip—and there isn't any cricket for us this afternoon, either."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Dry up!" he exclaimed. "When Gussy goes about asking to borrow money, you can be pretty certain that it's something urgent. Gussy isn't the sort of fellow to borrow at all, but the very fact that he's raising the wind proves that his need is great."

Blake & Co. came up.

"Did Gussy borrow some money from you just now?" asked Blake curiously.

"Yes; but you needn't look so worried—"

"I am worried!" said Blake. "I wanted to borrow ten bob from you myself!"

"Sorry! Too late."

"You'd better collar your pet lunatic, and turn him upside down," suggested Monty Lowther. "He's just touched Tom for thirty bob, and we're dished out of our picnic this afternoon. One of the most 'touching' scenes I've ever witnessed!"

"Thirty bob!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes, and he seems to be trying the same dodge on with Figgins & Co. now!" went on Lowther, glancing across towards the New House. "I think this needs looking into."

"It does!" said Blake grimly.

Arthur Augustus had just encountered Figgins & Co., and they were listening to him sympathetically.

"You will undahstand, deah boys, that it is only a tempowawy accommodation," Gussy was saying. "I shall pwobably be able to weturn the monay by to-morrow."

"We can trust you, Gussy," said the genial George Figgins. "The question is, how much do you want? Our points of view are a bit different, and while a fiver is a mere fleabite to you, it's a small fortune to me. If you're not asking for a small fortune—"

"Good gwacious, no!" said Arthur Augustus. "Two pounds will be ample, deah boy. I twust you will be able to manage—"

"I can run to a quid!" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "Only a quid!"

"That's all!"

"Thanks awfully, deah boy, but it is wathah urgent, an' I suppose I must be thankful for small mercies," went on Arthur Augustus. "Howevah—"

"Cheer up, Gussy!" smiled Kerr. "Here's the other quid."

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"I wegard you as bwicks, deah boys," he said happily. "You have wallied wound in the twue spiwit of fwendship. Thanks fwightfully!"

He pocketed the money with a serene smile, but Fatty Wynn was looking anxious.

"I hope you've got some more, Figgy!" he said.

"Rather!" said Figgins. "I've still got two bob."

"Two bob!" roared Fatty.

"And I'm wealthy with one-and-sixpence," added Kerr.

"What about our plan to go over to Wayland and have a big feed at the restaurant?" roared Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"Shush!" warned Figgins. "Gussy's looking distressed."

"Weally, Wynn, I sympathise with you twemendously," said Arthur Augustus, in an earnest voice. "It is fwightful to have one's plans knocked on the head."

"You hand one of those quids back, Gussy," said Fatty Wynn grimly.

"Weally, Wynn—"

"We want that cash."

"I uttably wefuse!" said D'Arcy frigidly. "Figgy and Kerr have lent me the cash in the genewosity of their hearts, an' I wefuse to pander to your gwedy demands. I wequiah the monay for a vewy urgent pwurpose. In fact, a fwightfully pwessin' mattah."

"What is this pressing matter?"

"I wegwet to say that it is uttably pwivate."

"That's all very well."

Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three came hurrying up. They looked so warlike that the New House trio instinctively prepared for battle.

"Pax!" said Figgins, in alarm.

"It's all right—we're not starting any House row!" said Blake. "Are we too late?"

"Too late for what?"

"Has Gussy touched you for any money?"

"A quid!" said Figgins. "And a quid from Kerr."

"That's three pounds ten he's borrowed!" yelled Blake. "What the thump—"

"Weally, Blake, I wish you would mind your own biznays!" interrupted Arthur Augustus coldly. "I fail to see what concern it is of yours if I bowwow some cash fwom these fellows."

"What concern it is of ours!" howled Blake. "I'll tell you what concern it is! We wanted to touch them, too!"

"Well, you won't do it!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "These chumps have lent everything they've got to Gussy, and we're dished out of our outing for this afternoon."

"Same here!" said Manners warmly.

Arthur Augustus looked at them sternly through his eyeglasses.

"Let me remind you, you selfish wottahs, that there is such a thing as considewin' othahs," he said. "The loss of your precious outin' is a mattah of no importance what-evah."

"It may not be important to you—but it's important to us!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Let's judge the thing for ourselves," said Monty Lowther judiciously. "We'll make Gussy tell us why he wants the money, and if we're not satisfied with his explanation, we'll burgle his pockets, and get it back!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I uttably wefuse to be burgled—I mean, I wefuse to be cwoss-examined," said Arthur Augustus, in alarm. "The whole mattah is pwivate. I wegret my inability to take you into my confidence, an' there is nothin' more to be said."

"Oh, isn't there?" growled Blake. "I'm going to say a lot more, for one!"

"So am I!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Same here!" broke in Manners.

"I am pained to see this exhibition of selfish gweed," said Arthur Augustus, with distaste. "I am twyin' to think of some excuse for your wewehensible conduct, but there appeahs to be none!"

"You—you exasperating ass!" said Blake sulphurously. "You silly dummy! Your own actions give you away."

"Bai Jove! I—I mean—"

"As a rule, Gussy, you wouldn't borrow a shilling from a millionaire!" went on Blake. "And now, all of a sudden, you're going about dunning people for quids!"

"That is an exaggerated statement," said Arthur Augustus hotly. "I have dunned nobody—"

"Well, you've done us!" interrupted Monty Lowther sadly. "Our river picnic is kyboshed. And being done is very much the same as being dunned!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Are you going to explain, or not?" roared Blake.

"I uttably wefuse to explain!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stalked off with his chin in the air.

CHAPTER 4.

Just Like Gussy!

DURING morning lessons, Blake and Herries and Digby made several unsuccessful attempts to make Arthur Augustus speak. But it became too dangerous. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, threatened Study No. 6 with detention if there was any further disturbance in that corner of the Form-room.

During morning break, D'Arcy maintained a stolid and frigid silence.

"It can't be a very important secret, Gussy!" declared Blake. "We're your pals, and you ought to take us into your confidence."

"Of course," said Herries. "We're all friends, aren't we?"

Arthur Augustus' frugidity melted.

"I'd like to tell you the twuth, deah boys, but it's imposs," he said.

"Rats!" growled Blake.

"If you are sayin' wats to me, Blake—"

"I am—and I'll say it again!" interrupted Blake. "Do you think we don't know you, Gussy? When this precious secret of yours comes out, it'll prove to be a storm in a teacup! You might just as well tell us the truth now, and save a lot of bother."

"I am not awah that there will be any bothah," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "The fact is, deah boys, this mattah is strictly confidential. It wowries me to keep you in the dark, but I have no alternative. As fellows of honah, you will realise that I am bound to secweeey."

"We don't realise anything of the sort!" retorted Herries. "Who's bound you to secweeey? And why? What's all the mystery about? Unless you can explain things—"

"Rats!" grunted Blake. "There goes the bell! Kick him, Herries—you've got the biggest feet!"

"Weally, Blake—"

They went into the Form-room again, and while Blake and Herries and Digby looked worried and gloomy, Arthur Augustus was wearing an expression of benign satisfaction. It is to be feared that he paid very little attention to his work. He was thinking of the unhappy Mrs. Martha Smith and her four children.

The worthy woman would not have appealed to Gussy's kind heart in vain.

The money was available, and the unfortunate family would be saved from eviction. Arthur Augustus naturally felt quietly elated.

He even thought about taking a trip over to Wayland during the afternoon, after handing the cash over to the messenger. He felt that an interview with Mrs. Smith's landlord would have beneficial effects upon that gentleman. Gussy, in fact, was seriously considering the project of "ticking off" the fellow. Any man, in Gussy's opinion, who could turn a family out into the road, was an utterly despicable rascal.

Morning lessons over, Arthur Augustus was left alone.

"It's no good trying to shift him," said Blake to Herries and Digby. "When he gets an idea into his head, it sticks there like a burr. We might as well save ourselves the trouble."

D'Arcy was relieved when he found that the persecution was over. His chums treated him as usual—as though nothing had happened.

And when dinner was finished, and the school clock pointed to the hour of two, Arthur Augustus prepared himself for his meeting with Master Smith. It really wasn't necessary for him to leave till two-twenty-five, for it was only five minutes' walk to the stile. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy believed in being on the safe side.

Manners put his head into Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and he found Blake there, alone.

"Where's that idiot Gussy?"

"Goodness knows!" said Blake. "I'm fed-up with him!"

"Well, we ought to do something," said Manners. "It's all very well for the fathead to borrow Tom Merry's money, but I don't see why we should suffer!"

"Neither do I," said Blake. "But what can we do?"

"Find him and tip him up!"

Blake shook his head.

"I'd do it with any other fellow, but not with Gussy," he replied.

"Why not?"

"Because Gussy is different," said Blake. "I suspect that letter, you know. He must have been pledged to secweeey by somebody, and he's too straight to tell even us. Gussy's all right—"

"Which letter?" broke in Manners.

"Oh, some wretchedly scrawled thing that came this morning!" replied Blake. "We don't know who it was from, or— Hallo! What the— Well, I'm jiggered!"

Blake was staring at the floor.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he repeated.

"It strikes me our plans are all jiggered, if that's what you mean," said Manners. "Gussy has taken all our available cash—"

He was interrupted by a loud chuckle.

"Just like Gussy!" grinned Blake. "He goes to a terrific amount of trouble to keep us in the dark, and then he leaves his giddy letter on the floor!"

"What?"

"Here it is, half under the table!" chuckled Blake.

He recognised it at once, having caught a glimpse of the epistle when D'Arcy had first opened it.

"I don't know whether we ought to read it," he said doubtfully.

"Rats!" retorted Manners. "Gussy is a soft ass, and he's probably caught a mare's-nest. Besides, if he doesn't want his letters read, he shouldn't leave them lying all over the floor."

"That's true enough," admitted Blake.



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And he read the letter aloud.

"Phew!" whistled Manners, at length. "That 'P.S.' did it, of course. Gussy was pledged to secrecy. And the soft-hearted chump borrowed the cash so that he could get this woman out of her troubles!"

"But you don't believe this tosh?" yelled Blake, staring.

"Eh?"

"You don't think it's straight, do you?"

"What do you mean—straight?"

"Why, the thing's as plain as the nose on your face," said Blake excitedly—"and that's plain enough, goodness knows!"

"You leave my nose alone!" roared Manners.

"Hallo! Trouble?" said Tom Merry, looking in at the door. "We've been scouting everywhere for you, Manners!"

"And I've been scouting for Gussy!" growled Manners. "We've found out why he's been so mysterious all the morning. The fathead left a private letter lying about on the floor!"

"I hope you didn't read it!" said Lowther sternly.

"Rot!" said Blake. "It's not a private letter. The thing's a fraud—a trick! It's just a spoof begging-letter, if I know anything about 'em! Somebody knows Gussy's fatal weakness, and—"

"What's the row about?" inquired Herries.

He and Digby had just sauntered in, and Blake looked at them approvingly.

"Good!" he said. "Now we're all here. Let's have your opinions on this precious letter. You read it out, Herries."

"What the merry dickens—" began Herries.

"Read it out, ass!"

Herries did so, and Tom Merry looked serious.

"Well?" asked Blake.

"Clear as daylight!" said Tom. "It's a fake!"

"I knew it!" roared Blake. "Where's Gussy? What's the time? My hat! If that idiot has handed the money over—"

"Oh, but hang it!" protested Digby. "We can't jump on Gussy for being kind-hearted to a poor woman who's in danger of being evicted—"

"Oh, help!" groaned Blake. "Do you believe this tosh, too?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Digby. "You don't think—"

"No, I don't!" snapped Blake. "I know! There's not one begging-letter in a thousand that's genuine—not this type, anyhow! The chances are that there's no Mrs. Martha Smith at all; and I've never even heard of Baxter's Rents!"

"Yes, it looks fishy," said Monty Lowther. "Anyhow, there's only one thing to be done. We've got to prevent Gussy from keeping that appointment—and keep it ourselves, instead."

"Just my idea," said Blake, nodding. "We shall be able to question this messenger, and if he's a wrong 'un we shall soon know it. But Gussy could be spoofed by any crook!"

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Well, we're in good time," he said. "It's only twenty-past two. We'll grab Gussy as he goes out—"

"He's gone!" interrupted Digby.

"What?"

"I saw him strolling out of the gates ten minutes ago!"

"Oh, lor'!" said Blake, in alarm. "That's done it!"

"No, it hasn't," said Tom Merry quickly. "Half-past two was the time for the appointment, and there's more than a chance that we shall get to the stile before Gussy hands over the cash. You know what a long-winded ass he is. He'll stand there jawing for five minutes before he gets down to action."

"All right, then—let's buzz off!" said Blake.

And, without any further demur, they buzzed.

CHAPTER 5.

Spoofing Gussy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY glanced at his watch. "Bai Jove! Only a quawtah-past!" he murmured, with satisfaction. "Oh, well, it is bettah to be early than late."

He leaned elegantly against the stile, and surveyed the general scenery. The afternoon was perfect, and this particular section of Rylcombe Lane was peaceful and calm.

The sun was shining from a clear sky, and the air was filled with the drowsy hum of insects. It was almost like a summer's day.

"Bai Jove! What a wippin' aftahnoon," said Arthur Augustus, addressing the atmosphere in general. "How howwid to think of people bein' turned out of their homes. Children, too! It's enough to make a fellow think pretty seriously."

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The minutes ticked by, and there was no sign of traffic in the lane. Not even a pedestrian hove in sight. Arthur Augustus looked at his watch again after a time, and saw that he was still in advance of the appointment.

"Seuse me, young gent!"

"Good gwacious!"

Arthur Augustus started violently at the sound of the voice behind him, and his eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord. He turned, and found a grubby-looking youth popping up from behind the hedge.

"Gwheat Scott!" said D'Arcy.

"Sorry if I give you a start, sir," said the youth. "Did I scare you?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I mean, nothin' of the sort! You fwightful ass! Scare me, indeed! What are you doin', bobbin' up an' down behind the hedge?"

"Askin' your pardon, young gent, I sort of come up quiet like," said the other. "You're Master D'Arcy, ain't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thought you was!" said the youth. "My name's Smiff."

"Bai Jove! Smiff?" said Arthur Augustus. "Oh! You mean Smith?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not, by any chance, the son of Mrs. Martha Smith?"

"That's me, young gent."

"Gwheat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus was painfully surprised. He gazed at Master Smith without the slightest joy. He had expected to see a very different sort of boy to this. In fact, he had pictured a pitiful-looking youngster, with a half-starved air about him. This youngster, however, was neither pitiful nor half-starved.

In fact, he looked very much like one of the Wayland louts.

There was a shifty expression in his eyes, his face was podgy and pimply, and the top of a packet of Woodbines protruded from one of his waistcoat pockets.

"Bai Jove! So you are Mrs. Smith's son?" said D'Arcy, feeling that it was up to him to carry on the conversation. "Weally, you know, I wathah expected to see somebody diffewent. I twust your matah is beawin' up well under the stwain?"

"She's all right, sir—only worried," said the youth hastily. "Did—did you bring that there money, like she asked in the letter?"

"As a mattah of fact, I did."

"You're a rare good sort!" said Master Smith, his little eyes glittering with eager greed. "If you'll 'and it over, young gent, I shall just 'ave time to get back afore the landlord comes."

The fellow seemed thoroughly conversant with the entire plan, and Arthur Augustus had no reason to suspect anything was wrong. He didn't like the look of this youth, but, after all, there was no reason why he should be suspicious.

"Your matah wequested me to loan her the sum of thwee pounds nine shillin's an' sevenpence," said D'Arcy. "As that is wathah an odd amount, I am makin' it an even thwee pounds ten."

"You're a rare good sort, sir," repeated Master Smith breathlessly.

He held out a grubby hand—a hand with two or three of the fingers badly stained with brown.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, with a start. "I twust your fingahs are not stained thwough smokin' eigawettes?"

The youth hastily withdrew his hand.

"I—I've been staining a floor at 'ome, young gent," he mumbled.

"In that case, it is diffewent," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I owe you an apology, deah boy. As one gentleman to another—"

"There he is!"

"Hi, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus turned, and found his chums and the Terrible Three hurrying down the lane. Master Smith looked thoroughly scared, and seemed on the point of bolting. But he thought better of it. D'Arcy had just pulled some currency notes out of his pocket.

"Bai Jove! This is wathah awkward!" murmured Gussy, in alarm. "Your matah expwessly wequested the mattah to be kept secwet—"

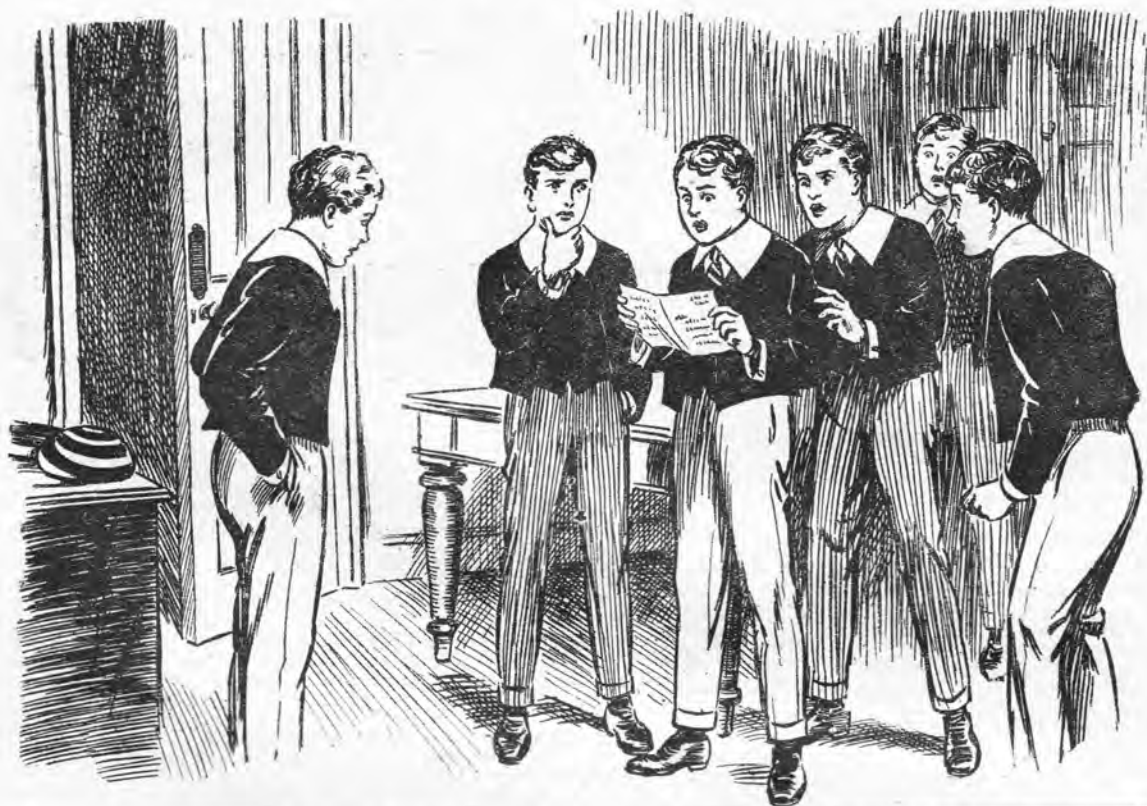
"Give me the money quick, guv'nor, an' I'll scoot!" gasped the youth.

"Yaas, wathah!"

But before Gussy could hand the notes over, he was surrounded by his comrades of Study No. 6, and the Terrible Three had pounced upon Master Smith.

"Ere!" gasped that startled lout. "Leggo!"

"Just a minute, my lad!" said Tom Merry grimly. "If everything is straight and above board, there's nothing for you to worry about. D'Arcy will hand you over the money, and you'll be able to get back to Wayland in time to pay off the landlord. But if we're not satisfied that you



Tom Merry looked serious as Herries finished reading the begging letter. "Clear as daylight," he said. "And no mistake!" "Where's Gussy?" inquired Blake. "If that idiot's handed over the money—" "Oh, but hang it!" protested Digby, "we can't jump on Gussy for being kind to a poor woman who's in danger of being turned out into the road." "Fathead!" snorted Blake. "It's a fake letter!" (See Chapter 4.)

are really honest, we shall hold the money back—and make inquiries."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I uttably object to this!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Good gwacious! How do you know anythin' about the biznay, anyhow?"

"We know everything, Gussy," said Blake tartly.

"Bai Jove! But I didn't tell you!"

"No, but you left Mrs. Smith's letter on the study floor." "Oh, deah!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "How fwightfully wemiss of me! I missed the lettah comin' down the lane, but took it for gwanted that I had left it in my othah clothes. This is vewy distwessin'."

Gussy was out up.

After all his efforts to maintain secrecy, the cat was out of the bag—and entirely owing to his own carelessness.

"Pway, take no notice, Smith, deah boy," he said, turning to the messenger. "Ewewythin' is quite all wight—"

"Is it?" interrupted Blake. "I'm not so jolly sure about that!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And I'm not sure about this fellow's honesty, either," added Blake.

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I wegard it as w'etchedly bad form, Blake, for you to question the integrity—"

"Rats!" interrupted Blake crossly.

Master Smith was looking very alarmed.

"'Tain't fair!" he complained. "It's a bit of a knock when a bloke is suspected of twistin' for nothink! My mother asked me to come 'ere, as that letter to Master D'Arcy proves."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wait a minute, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "That letter doesn't prove anything except that you've been requested to shell out three pounds ten. We want to be satisfied that this is the right messenger."

"How uttably widie!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "He has already told me that his name is Smiff. I should say Smiff."

"So it is!" said the youth, with fierce vehemence.

In fact, it was rather too fierce.

"All right, you needn't worry," said Tom Merry. "But when one of our fellows whacks out three pounds-ten, we want to be certain that he's doing the right thing. Who do you say your mother is?"

"Mrs. Smiff," said the youth. "Mrs. Marfa Smiff."

"That's quite wight—"

"Just a minute, Gussy," said Tom Merry quietly.

"I wefusc to have this chap cwoss-examined!"

"Where's your father?" asked Tom, turning to the lout.

"He's—he's up in Lunnun!" gasped the boy.

"Bai Jove!"

"J—I mean he's dead!" panted the unhappy Master Smith.

"And where do you live?" demanded Tom.

"In Wayland."

"What part of Wayland?"

"Down in Jackson's Rents."

"Which Rents?" demanded Blake grimly.

The lout looked thoroughly bewildered.

"I—I ain't sure!" he babbled. "Mebbe it ain't Jackson's Rents. I ain't got a good mem'ry— Oh, I know! Baxter's Rents—that's it! We ain't moved in there long."

"Weally, Smiff—I mean Smith—weally, this is wathah funnay," said Arthur Augustus, with the first tinge of suspicion. "I twust—"

"Oh, you haven't moved in there long?" asked Tom Merry.

"Not more than a fortnight."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "An' yet the landlord is goin' to turn you out this aftahnoon unless you pay three pounds-ten?"

"It must be a stiff rent," said Lowther dryly.

"And that landlord must be a bit of a brute," said Blake.

"Wot I mean is I ain't bin there more than a fortnight!" shouted Master Smith in desperation. "My mother's bin there for months, an' she's 'ad a 'ard time."

The juniors looked at him grimly. At the first sight of him they had been acutely suspicious. And now they were certain. But it was just as well to make assurance doubly sure.

"Grab him!" said Tom Merry briskly.

"Yes. Chuck him in the ditch!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

The Wayland lout was grabbed, and many hands whirled him towards the ditch.

CHAPTER 6.

Exposed!

"**E**REL, stow it, young gents!" gasped Smith desperately.

"Either you confess the truth, or in you go!" said Tom Merry. "Now then, you chaps. All together—one, two—"

"All right!" gasped Smith. "I'll own up!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You admit that your mother isn't in danger of being turned out into the street?" asked Blake. "You'll admit that was a fake?"

"Ere, be a sport!" pleaded Smith. "We didn't mean no 'arm!"

"What do you mean—we?"

"Well, it was 'Erb's idea."

"Who's 'Erb?"

"A pal o' mine," said the unhappy Smith. "We 'eard some o' them Grammar School young gents talkin' about Master D'Arcy, an' sayin' what a kind 'eart 'e 'ad, an' we thought mebbe we could raise a bit o' cash."

"We knew it all along," said Blake hotly. "You dirty trickster! You rotter! Getting money for charity, and playing on the feelings of a half-witted duffer who's got a chunk of butter instead of a heart!"

Arthur Augustus started.

"I twust you are not wewefwin' to me, Blake?" he said hotly.

"Yes, I am!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You're several other things, too, only I haven't time to say them," added Jack Blake.

"You cwass ass!" shouted D'Arcy. "I wefuse to be chawactewised as a half-witted duffah!"

"That's what them Grammar School young gents said," put in Smith quickly. "They was talkin' about Master D'Arcy, an' said as 'e was soft in the 'ead, an' could be spoofed easy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows!" protested Arthur Augustus. "It is wathah sewious when we heah the Gwammawians have been sayin' that I am soft in the 'ead—that is to say, soft in the head. It is a fwightful insult—"

"And can be only wiped out in blood," said Lowther, with conviction.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, we've heard all we want," said Tom Merry. "This fellow is a trickster and a swindler, and it's a lucky thing that we got down here in time. Let's give him a good bumping."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

The young rascal was firmly seized, and held so that he could not possibly break loose. Arthur Augustus was beginning to look hot and red with rising anger.

"Pway allow this wascal to go," he said.

"What?" exclaimed Blake, staring.

"Pway let him go, so that I can give him a feahful thwashin'!" said D'Arcy fiercely. "I considah that I have been victimised in the most shockin' mannah. A bumpin' will not be adequate. Pway let me give him a thwashin'!"

"He's not worth soiling your noble hands on, Gussy," said Blake. "An ordinary sneak-thief is respectable compared to this rogue. Let's bump him, and get it over!"

"Hear, hear!"

The others were in agreement, so Arthur Augustus could do nothing. At least, nothing on his own. But he helped vigorously in the bumping.

"Ere!" hooted Smith. "Lemme go, you young fools! Yaroooooh!"

Bump, bump!

"Yow!" shrieked Smith. "Whooooop!"

Bump, bump!

"You—you young blighters!" screamed the lout. "I'll 'ave the gang on you for this! I'll bring all my pals—Yarooooop! Oh, crikey!"

"Give him another for luck!" said Blake breathlessly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bump, bump!

The Wayland lout was allowed to escape at last. He fairly staggered down the lane, yelling at the top of his voice. When he got to a safe distance, he turned round and gave tongue to coarse abuse. But when Blake & Co. made a move towards him he bolted.

"I don't think he'll try any more of those tricks," said Tom Merry, breathing hard. "He deserved a lot more than he got, but I think he's had his lesson."

"And now Gussy can let you have that thirty bob back," said Manners pointedly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was about

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to return the monay, Tom Mewwy. Thanks awfully for chippin' in."

"You'd better thank yourself, Gussy," said Tom Merry, laughing, as he took the money. "If you hadn't been careless enough to leave that letter on the floor of Study No. 6 we shouldn't have known where to find you."

"Bai Jove! That's twue," said D'Arcy. "An' that weminds me. That lettah was fwightfully well done, you know. It deceived me completely."

"It didn't deceive me," growled Blake. "And it wouldn't deceive anybody but a born piecan!"

"I twust you are not wewefwin' to me as a 'piecan,' Blake?"

"That's just what I am doing," retorted Blake tartly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"And not merely a piecan, but a mug and a greenhorn, and a footling chump!" said Blake firmly. "Strictly speaking, you oughtn't to be at St. Jim's at all! They've got special homes for people like you!"

"Bai Jove! You insultin' wottah!"

"Well, aren't you a piecan and a chump?" roared Blake. "If we hadn't come on the scene, what about that money? You'd have given it to that chap—"

"Bai Jove! I am afwaid you are wight," admitted Arthur Augustus, with a start. "The world is full of wottahs, I am afwaid. I am uttably distwessed at the whole affah!"

"Yes, Blake, chuck it!" said Herries. "Gussy's an ass, but he did it out of the kindness of his heart. No need to jump on him any more."

"Thanks, Hewwies, deah boy," said Gussy gratefully.

"I'm trying to impress him, so that he won't do it again!" growled Blake. "Not that he'll ever learn. How can you expect a chap to learn, when he's only got a chunk of ivory on his shoulders instead of a head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally Blake—"

"Anyhow, Gussy, we'll keep it quiet," went on Blake. "We won't give you away to the other fellows. Why, if this story got about St. Jim's, you'd be the laughing-stock of the whole school. Everybody would be cackling at you and holding you up to ridicule."

"Yes, you can trust us to keep the guilty secret," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, there is no need to call it a guilty secwet," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I will admit that I was deceived, but my action was instigated by generous impulses."

"Exactly," said Blake. "Well, let the same generous impulse pay that two quid back to Figgins and Kerr. Then I can borrow one of them back again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am afwaid you are all fwightfully mercenawy," said Arthur Augustus sternly. "Howevah, it is a good thing that the beastly mattah is ovah an' done with."

But it didn't seem to be.

When Blake & Co. tramped through the gateway into the quad, Baggy Trimble was lurking about, and he had a fat grin on his face.

"Poor old Gussy!" he giggled.

Blake stopped in his tracks.

"What do you know?" he demanded, startled.

"I know a lot!" grinned Baggy Trimble. "Poor old Gussy! Borrowing money from chaps so that he can lend it to a Wayland lout! Fancy being spoofed by a dud begging letter!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I twust you will keep this mattah pwivate, Twimble?"

Blake grunted.

"You might as well ask an old fish-wife to hold her tongue!" he said tartly. "It'll be all over the school in ten minutes! You spying young worm! I suppose you were down in the lane, listening?"

Trimble looked aggrieved.

"The lane is open to anybody, I suppose?" he asked indignantly. "I've as much right as anybody else. It's a public road."

Blake was compelled to admit the truth of this statement.

"Not that I'd say anything, if Gussy doesn't want me to," went on Trimble. "You can rely on me, Gussy, old man."

"Weally, Twimble, I am afwaid—"

"If you can lend me ten bob, I'll pay you back on Saturday," went on Baggy, with a smirk. "I could do with a quid, but I dare say I can manage with ten bob, at a pinch."

Blake reached out an arm and grasped the egregious Baggy.

"If there's one reptile worse than a swindler, it's a black-mailer," he said curtly. "You don't get any ten bob out of Gussy, you fat insect!"

"Yow!" hooted Trimble. "Lemme go!"

"I'll let you go after I've given you a word of advice,"

said Blake. "Look here, Trimble, we've all decided to keep this matter a secret—just among ourselves—see? If we find the school talking about it, we shall know whose tongue has been wagging."

"I hope you don't think I should talk!" said Trimble indignantly.

"If you do, we'll give you the hiding of your life!" said Blake aggressively. "Understand? We'll make you smart for a week!"

"Yaas, wathah—an' I'll give you a feashful thwashin', too!" added D'Arcy. "You had bettah realise, Twimble, that we are not goin' to stand any of your fwrightful nonsense!"

They walked on, and Baggy Trimble grunted.

"Mean beasts!" he muttered, with a glare.

But, after a very short period of cogitation, he came to the conclusion that it would be wise to keep his mouth shut.

CHAPTER 7.

Trimble's Great Idea!

BAGGY TRIMBLE started.

An hour had elapsed, and St. Jim's was quiet and restful in the peace of mid-afternoon. From Big Side came the soothing clack of bat meeting ball, with an occasional sound of clapping.

But the quad was quiet and restful, and Baggy Trimble, after hovering near the tuckshop for some little time in vain, had rolled off to one of the elms, and was now leaning against it in an easy attitude.

Trimble had been thinking.

It was rather an unusual exercise for him, and his podgy face was showing signs of the strain. There were wrinkles on his forehead, and his eyes had a strange look.

"My hat!" he muttered. "Why not?"

He pondered still further.

That spoof begging letter to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been in Trimble's mind all the afternoon. It had astonished him that Gussy could have been hoodwinked so easily.

But perhaps there were lots of chaps with the same trusting disposition!

Trimble was glad now that he had kept mum. Nobody in the school—barring Jack Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three—knew anything about that incident, and it was agreed that it should be forgotten.

Fellows like Cardew of the Fourth, Talbot of the Shell, and Kildare of the Sixth were in complete ignorance of it. They would suspect nothing if they received an appeal for funds from some worthy applicant. There would be nothing to bring suspicion into their minds.

Baggy Trimble's mind was putting in overtime.

"Of course, that silly Smith chap did it all wrong," he decided. "It was an idiotic thing to come for the money himself, and to meet Gussy at the stile. Absolutely asking for trouble!"

That was the flaw in the whole scheme.

Baggy Trimble was not clever, but he was cunning. And he was particularly cunning when it came to a matter of obtaining money by mean and petty trickery. He was a past-master in the art. He had practised in the Fourth ever since he had come to St. Jim's.

Unfortunately, his "clients" were now well accustomed to his wiles, and they needed to be very sleepy before they "fell" for any of Baggy's money-extracting dodges.

But if Trimble could think clearly on any one subject, that subject was money.

And he reviewed the activities of Master Smith—assuming that the fellow's name actually was Smith—with pitying contempt. The Wayland youth had been crazy to come for the money himself. It had been a bad mistake, too, to make out a purely fictitious case of want.

How much better to have a genuine example!

"Why, if only he had picked on a real hard case, even Blake and those rotters wouldn't have suspected anything," muttered Trimble. "Naturally, when the swindling rotter was taxed, he had nothing to say."

His cunning brain continued its work.

"My only hat!" he muttered suddenly. "What about Mrs. Flagg?"

He was so startled that he jumped, and his eyes gleamed more than ever. Mrs. Flagg! Hadn't everybody been talking about her only the previous week?

Now, hers was a real case of hardship!

Mrs. Flagg was the wife of a local ploughman, and lived in one of the little cottages in Rylcombe. Baggy Trimble, of course, who always nosed out everything, knew all the facts.

If it came to that, everybody at St. Jim's knew them.

During the beginning of the previous week the ploughman had met with a serious accident while in the field. A horse had kicked him, or something like that, and he had fallen under the plough. One of his legs had been crushed. And now the unfortunate man was in the Wayland Hospital.

Accidents of that type were so rare in the neighbourhood that everybody had naturally talked about it. A good deal of sympathy had been expressed at St. Jim's.

There had even been some talk of getting up a fund for the poor woman, so that she could carry on until her husband was able to resume work. But it had come to nothing, and by now the matter was getting forgotten.

"Crumbs!" breathed Trimble. "If only— Well, why not? If any of our chaps got a letter from Mrs. Flagg they wouldn't ask any questions, would they? They've all heard about the accident, and they'd whack out like a shot."

Another long period of cunning thought.

"Yes, it ought to be easy!" decided Baggy at length.

He reviewed the position.

"Now, I happen to know that Mrs. Flagg has gone to Wayland," he mused. "She's gone there to nurse a sister, who's got rheumatism, or something. A pretty unlucky family, by the look of things. Well, anyhow, she's there, and I suppose she likes it because she can pop in and see her old man at the hospital on visiting days."

Baggy's eyes gleamed with eagerness.

"But here's the point," he reflected. "There's nobody in her cottage down in Rylcombe but old Jerry."

This thought seemed to give Trimble a great deal of satisfaction. Nobody actually knew what the old man's name was. At least, Baggy had never heard of it—and Baggy generally knew everything. In the village Mrs. Flagg's father was simply known as "Old Jerry" by all and sundry.

He was quite a character in Rylcombe—generally to be seen sitting at the door of the little cottage. He would spend hours there, just looking at nothing, and mainly exchanging a word about the weather if somebody happened to pass.

Occasionally he would go one better, and refer to his

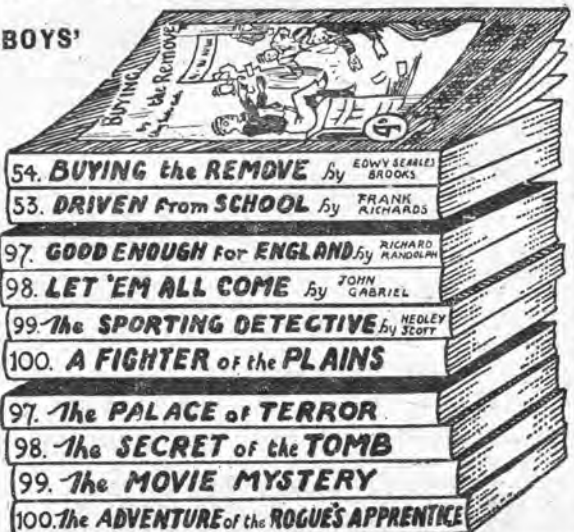
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"taters," and would even enlarge upon the crop prospects. Anyhow, Old Jerry was Mrs. Flagg's father, and just at the moment he was in sole charge of the cottage.

Old Jerry was a bit of a cripple, and it was said among the village youths that he was a bit "touched," too.

"If only I can think out something!" muttered Trimble, as he moved instinctively towards the tuckshop again. "My aunt! There's a lot of money to be had, if only I can think of the right way!"

And before tea-time Trimble had thought of it.

He was so excited that he almost forgot to go into Hall for the afternoon meal. Trimble generally went into Hall for tea, even when he had money in his pocket. He saw no reason why he should waste any food that was offered to him.

As soon as he had given up all hope of sponging on any of the other juniors for a second tea Trimble took himself off and went down to the village. He was in no hurry. His plan was all cut and dried, and now it only needed a little tact.

Nobody in the Fourth would have credited Trimble with the possession of any tact. He was regarded as a brainless young ass, without an ounce of honesty, or honour, in his whole composition.

But if Trimble possessed no tact, he at least possessed slyness.

And he thought he could see a way of insuring complete success in the greatest money-making stunt of his career.

He felt elated when he found that the High Street was deserted—deserted, that is, so far as St. Jim's fellows went. He walked on rapidly, and turned into the little gateway of Mrs. Flagg's cottage.

In a moment he was inside the front parlour.

After the fashion of such villagers, Old Jerry always kept his front door wide open on fine days, and visitors naturally walked right in. Baggy looked round eagerly.

"Oh, hallo!" he said, blinking.

He was nervous, but he tried not to be. He kept telling himself that there was nothing to be afraid of. It wasn't conscience which caused him any twinges, but a vague fear of what might happen to him if he was bowled out.

"Why, step in, young sir!" said a wheezy voice. "Sit ye down, young gen'l'man."

"Thanks!" stammered Trimble.

Old Jerry was sitting on the other side of the room. He wasn't so decrepit that he couldn't look after himself. Indeed, he had indignantly refused the offer of a neighbour to prepare his meals. Mrs. Flagg's father was a man of independent spirit.

He was a wizened old chap, bent with long years of hard work on the fields. Grey whiskers adorned his cheeks, and his mouth was practically toothless. He was gazing at Baggy from his watery eyes, and he was smiling with pride. It pleased him that one of the boys from the big school should visit this humble cottage.

Old Jerry was not one to discriminate. He could see that Trimble was from St. Jim's, and the rascally Baggy was thus hall-marked.

"I—I've brought a message from Mrs. Flagg," said Trimble.

"Oh, ay!" said Old Jerry. "From my Jane? How's pore Charley getting on?"

"Oh, he's better!" said Trimble. "He's getting on fine!"

"That's good—that's werry good!" said Old Jerry, nodding. "I thought as 'ow 'e'd pull up. An' how's Jane? 'Ow's my darter?"

"Oh, she's all right, too!" said Trimble. "Still over in Wayland."

"Lookin' arter pore Amelia," nodded Old Jerry. "Reckon it'll be close on a fortnit afore Jane comes back."

This was excellent news for Baggy.

"Oh, at least a fortnight—she told me so," he replied promptly. "You—you see, I generally go into Wayland every day, and she's asked me to do her a favour. She wants me to call for letters every day, and I've promised to take them to her."

"Letters!" said Old Jerry puzzled.

"Yes."

"Letters every day?"

"Yes."

"What's come over the gal?" said Old Jerry. "My Jane

don't get letters every day. One in a month is as many as she's like to get!"

"But—she's expecting a lot just now," said Baggy hurriedly. "People writing to her about her husband, you know."

"There ain't bin many yet," said the old man, shaking his head. "Which ain't to say as there mightn't be any."

"Well, anyhow, Mrs. Flagg wants me to call here every day, and to take the letters over to her. I told her I would. Most of us chaps at St. Jim's feel we'd like to do something, you know."

Old Jerry wagged his head.

"Ay, ye're good boys!" he said approvingly. "Real good boys—that ye are! If ye'll be so kind, young gen'l'man, ye'll be doin' my gal a real favour. Thank ye, young sir—thank ye!"

"Oh, it's nothing!" said Trimble magnanimously.

CHAPTER 8.

A Letter for Kildare!

KILDARE of the Sixth frowned. He was sitting in his study, in the Sixth Form passage of the School House. It was the next morning, and the sun was shining through with just the same brilliance as yesterday.

Kildare had a letter in his hand.

He had just read it, and he was puzzling over it. What was more, he was pondering about his finances. At the moment he only had twenty-seven shillings in his pocket. The fact rather worried him.

"I'd like to send the two quid to the poor old girl, but I'm afraid it can't be done," he murmured. "It's tough luck. They ought to have got up that fund in the first place, and made this sort of thing unnecessary. I'm jolly sorry for the woman!"

Kildare read the letter again:

"3, Myrtle Cottages,

"Rylcombe.

"Dear Mr. Kildare.—Might I make so bold as to ask for a loan of £2? There, I have said it straight out, so as to get it off my mind. I do hope that you won't think hardly of me.

"My little children aren't getting enough to eat, and, what with my husband being in hospital and my poor old father being too old to work, things are in a bad way. I don't want to ask for charity from the relieving officer or from the vicar, and if you make me this loan I shall be able to carry on.

"If you are so kind as to help, please send the money by post, addressed to me at above address. I wouldn't like you to come to the cottage, as the neighbours might begin to talk, and I'm sure you'll understand. And please don't say anything to anybody else about this, unless it's to a friend that you can trust. I know I can be sure that you will keep it a secret, so as I sha'n't be scorned by my neighbours.

"With hopes that you will be good enough to send the money. There's no need to write, as I shall know who it's from.

"Yours respectfully,

"JANE FLAGG."

Kildare put the letter down, and smiled sympathetically. "Poor woman; she's evidently up against it!" he muttered.

Never for an instant did he suspect the authenticity of that epistle. The captain of St. Jim's was a shrewd fellow, but there was no reason why he should doubt the authorship of this note.

The writing was just what he might have expected. It was illiterate and somewhat painful. He knew Mrs. Flagg's case perfectly, and had had an idea that she had refused district help. Obviously, a proud sort of woman. But with her children suffering she had been compelled to seek aid from somebody.

Just as Baggy Trimble had supposed, Kildare accepted the letter as authentic, chiefly because he knew of Mrs. Flagg's trouble. It was a genuine case. Moreover, she had asked him to send the money to her own cottage. How could there possibly be any trickery?

And what more natural than that the woman should ask him to send the money by post, instead of bringing it down personally? The visit of a St. Jim's senior to her humble cottage would certainly create comment.

The cunning Trimble had thought of everything.

It can be said at once for him that he had no idea of the enormity of his offence. He did not realise the heinous nature of his act—that of appealing for money for his own

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"Grab him!" said Tom Merry briskly. "Chuck him in the ditch!" The Wayland youth was grabbed, and many hands whirled him towards the ditch. "Ere, stow it, young gents!" gasped Smith desperately. "Either you confess the truth or in you go!" said Tom Merry. "Now, then, you chaps—all together—one—two—" (See Chapter 6.)

selfish ends in the name of a perfectly innocent victim. Mrs. Flagg herself was a woman who proudly refused any kind of charity, and this fact only added to the enormity of Trimble's offence.

But the fat young rascal did not realise that. He was so imbued with the idea of getting some money for himself that the method of obtaining it became purely mechanical in his mind. Bad as Trimble was, he was not nearly so bad as circumstances might label him. He was just unconscious of his offence.

Tap!

Kildare started as a tap sounded on his door. Darrell of the Sixth walked in.

"Decided anything yet about those orders for the new nets?" he asked cheerily. "You were going to look up one of the catalogues—Hallo! Anything wrong?"

He broke off, staring at Kildare.

"No, nothing!" said Kildare hastily.

"No bad news, I hope," said the other prefect.

"Shut the door, Darrell, old man," said Kildare quietly. "There's a letter here I want to show you."

Another of Baggy Trimble's shots had gone home!

He had thought of the possibility of Kildare being unable to find the two pounds at a minute's notice, but possibly Darrell or Baker could make it up. And a discreet word to the effect that a friend could be let into the secret might do the trick. Baggy was sure that the secret would go no farther, and that there would not be any talk generally.

"It doesn't look very inviting," said Darrell.

He took the letter, read it through, and then looked up.

"She asks you to keep this to yourself," he remarked.

"With a proviso that I can tell a friend in whom I can trust," Kildare reminded him.

"Thanks!" laughed Darrell. "Yes, I'd overlooked that bit. Poor old girl, she seems in a very bad way. What are you going to do?"

"I'd like to send her the money, but I happen to be a bit short of cash at the moment," said Kildare uncomfortably. "I'd send her twenty-five bob, only it's awkward to put silver into a letter, and I don't want to bother with postal-orders. I think I'll make it a quid—"

"Rot!" said Darrell. "I'm in on this. We don't often get the chance of being Good Samaritans for a really deserving cause. Here's my pound."

"That's decent of you, Darrell."

"Tell that to the Marines!" laughed Darrell. "Got an envelope? We'll tuck the money into it straight away, and post the letter in the school box. She'll get it this afternoon, then."

"No need to write, of course," said Kildare. "Yes, there is, though," he added, with a sudden thought. "I'm not going to let her think that I'm whacking out two pounds, and get all the credit—"

"My dear old ass, I'm one of those who like to do good by stealth!" chuckled Darrell. "Leave my name out of it. In fact, just push the notes into an envelope, address it, stick it down, and stamp it. Then I'll post it, and we'll forget all about it."

Kildare grinned.

"Have it your own way," he said good-naturedly.

Five minutes later, they went downstairs.

Baggy Trimble was hanging about in the neighbourhood of the school post-box. He pretended to be deeply immersed in the pages of a weekly school story journal, but his little eyes gleamed with gloating satisfaction when he saw Kildare drop a letter into the box.

"It's worked!" he muttered excitedly.

The two seniors strode off, and Baggy longed to be able to force open the box and get that letter at once. But he would have to wait. Supposing that it was actually addressed to Mrs. Flagg, it would probably be delivered by the afternoon mail. That meant waiting until lessons were over for the day.

Trimble wondered how he would live through the hours of suspense.

"Well, that's one of 'em, anyhow," he muttered. "I wonder what the others are doing?"

It was a fact!

Eric Kildare was not the only one who had received a letter from "Mrs. Flagg" that morning!

At that very moment, indeed, Lefevre of the Fifth and Cardew of the Fourth were conning their respective appeals from the worthy lady—or ostensible appeals from her. The

letters, needless to say, were precisely the same, word for word, as that which Kildare had received.

And neither Lefevre nor Cardew suspected.

Lefevre was an easy-going, good-natured senior, and he generally had plenty of pocket-money. Ralph Reckness Cardew, of course, was well known to be "flush," but he was also well known to be shrewd. However, Trimble had chanced it. If Cardew fell, then this would be a good augury for others.

And Cardew, apparently, did fall.

For Baggy Trimble, watching the post-box, was intensely gratified to see Ralph Reckness Cardew lounge up and drop a letter through the slit.

"Well, that's that!" murmured Cardew. "The dear old soul has my blessin'!"

"Speaking to me, Cardew?" said Trimble.

"Dear man, I was not," drawled Cardew. "The first time you catch me speakin' to you of my own volition—an' without bein' addressed by you first—you can send for the asylum ambulance!"

He strolled off, and Baggy Trimble grinned. He wasn't in the least offended. He had overheard Cardew's murmured words, and they had given him hope.

And then, only three minutes afterwards, Lefevre walked briskly up, dropped a letter into the box, and tramped off.

"My only hat!" said Trimble breathlessly. "All three of 'em!"

CHAPTER 9.

First Results!

M R. LATHOM closed his book with a quiet snap.

"You may dismiss!" he said.

The Fourth heard the welcome words with a sigh of relief. It was a sunny afternoon, and it seemed a sin and a shame to stew in the class-room. They trooped out noisily.

"He's a good old scout," said Blake. "He's dismissed us about four minutes before time. That's four minutes clean gain."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I think we had better wun upstairs an' change into flannels—Weally, Twimble, there is uttally no need to push an' wush in this fwantie fashion!"

"I'm in a hurry, Gussy!" said Baggy Trimble.

"I wufuse to be addressed as 'Gussy' by you, Twimble!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "You are gettin' too familiab, you cheeky wascal!"

"Let's bump him!" suggested Herries.

"Yaroooooh!" hooted Trimble. "Lemme go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble hadn't been touched, and Herries had only made the remark in a jocular spirit. But Baggy was so accustomed to being seized that he believed in the policy of shouting before he was hurt.

He rolled out into the quad, having only paused to get his cap. He made a bee-line for the gates and vanished into the lane at a brisk trot.

"What's come over Trimble?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise, as he came out from the Shell Form-room and observed the fat Fourth-Former disappearing. "I've never seen him hurrying so fast before!"

"Somebody after him with an ashplant, probably," said Monty Lowther. "It takes an ashplant or a cane to make Trimble run."

"But there's nobody after him," frowned Tom.

"Well, why worry about the little worm?" said Manners.

"I'm not worrying, but I'm suspicious," said Tom Merry. "Remember yesterday? Trimble knew all about that begging-letter episode with Gussy, and the school still knows nothing!"

"Very mysterious!" agreed Lowther, shaking his head.

"You mean, Baggy hasn't jawed to everybody?" said Manners.

"Exactly!" said Tom. "And when Trimble keeps mum, you can be pretty certain that it's paying him to hold his tongue. The mere threat of a hiding wouldn't keep him silent. We shall have to watch him!"

"Thanks!" said Manners tartly. "Personally, I've got something better to do!"

In the meantime, Baggy Trimble proceeded down Rylcombe Lane at a trot. He was unconscious of the comment he had caused. Indeed, he was quite satisfied that there was no possibility of his nefarious scheme being "blown."

He felt that he had acted too cunningly for that.

And now a tremendous anxiety filled him.

The afternoon delivery in the village had been made by this time, and if those letters which Kildare and Lefevre and Cardew had posted were addressed to Mrs. Flagg, they would now be at the cottage.

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Baggy could hardly contain himself.

"I shall have to be careful, though," he told himself. "I don't want Old Jerry to get suspicious. He's several kinds of an old fool, but he's not exactly an imbecile."

Thus, when Baggy presented himself at No. 3, Myrtle Cottages, he had assumed an air of forced calmness. He noted that Old Jerry was sitting in the doorway, and he slyly walked half-way past the cottage, as though he had forgotten all about his arrangement. Then he suddenly checked, went back, and opened the little gate.

"Afternoon, Jerry," he said agreeably.

"Good afternoon, young gen'leman!" said Old Jerry, touching his forelock. "Like as not ye've come for the letters?"

Trimble's heart leapt.

"As a matter of fact, I'd almost forgotten," he laughed.

"Jolly careless of me, of course; especially after I'd promised your daughter. Is there anything for me to take to her?"

"There be three," said old Jerry. "Come this artemnoon, they did."

"Oh, good! I—I mean, all right, I'll take them," said



CAMEOS OF SOL THE EARLY MORNING

WHEN morning brings its magic spell,
And Sol is brightly beaming;
We're up before the rising-bell,
And done with drowsy dreaming.
Let lazy slackers, if they will,
Lie snoring loud and frightfully;
We'll seek the cool, enchanting Rhy,
And dash and splash delightfully!

We all go pelting down the stairs,
A band of merry mortals;
Taggles, the porter, grunts and glares
As we dash past his portals.
Then down the lane, with lively pranks,
We gallop helter-skelter;
Halting at length beside the banks,
Our faces in a swelter.

A breathing-space; and then we strip,
Into our costumes hasting;
The grand enjoyment of a dip
Next moment we are tasting.
Tom Merry dives just like a bird,
Over the water skimmingly;
Splashes and gurglings then are heard,
And everything goes "swimmingly!"

Look out for
our next
jolly poem—
"LAWN
TENNIS
AT
ST. JIM'S"

Trimble. "I'm going over to Wayland presently, so I'll give them straight to Mrs. Flagg."

Old Jerry prepared to rise.

"If so be as you'll wait a minnit, young sir, I'll fetch 'em off the mantelpiece," he said—wheezily. "Whoa! My rheumatiz ain't as good as it ought ter be, considerin' this 'ere fine weather—"

"Don't trouble to get up!" interrupted Trimble hastily.

"I'll pop in!"

He squeezed his way through, grabbed the three letters from the mantelpiece, and fought down a desire to examine them closely. He tucked them into his pocket, and grinned amiably.

"It's werry kind o' you, young gent—"

"Rats!" said Baggy. "It's a pity if we can't do somethin' to help each other. It's no trouble to me, Jerry. I'm going into Wayland, so I might just as well take those letters."

He nodded, and hurried off.

"Now, that's what I call a kind-hearted young lad," mused

old Jerry complacently. "Some o' these 'ere boys from the big school is inclined to be 'igh-spirited, but they ain't none the wuss for that. 'Igh spirits is a good sign. Why, bless me old 'eart, I reckon as I was pretty 'igh-spirited in me young days," he added reminiscently. "Good luck to 'em, says I!"

The old man was quite unsuspecting, and Baggy Trimble felt convinced that everything was going very smoothly. Trimble, like most of his type, thought only of the moment, and never gave a thought to the future. It had not even occurred to him that there might be trouble later on—when, for example, Mrs. Flagg returned home, and when old Jerry chatted with her about the letters that had been supposedly conveyed to her.

Perhaps Baggy had thought of it in a vague kind of way, though. If so, he had told himself that he could easily deny all knowledge of the business, and Mrs. Flagg would think that her old father had been wandering. As she had not been expecting any letters, she would naturally assume that Old Jerry had developed an imagination.

Anyhow, Baggy Trimble felt quite safe.

He went through Rylcombe like a fugitive fleeing from

faith, and were, by all the laws of moral right, no more Baggy's property than the field in which he crouched.

But Trimble took a totally different view.

He had made the arrangement with old Jerry—he had written the letters to Kildare and Lefevre and Cardew—so it naturally stood to reason that these replies were his. The mere superscription on them was a trifle. Just an excusable subterfuge, in order to avoid complications.

In this way, Trimble stilled the small voice of conscience. "They're mine!" he muttered aloud, as though to re-assure himself.

And, without any further ado, he inserted a fat thumb under the flap of the first, and tore open the envelope. His hands shook as he felt inside for the enclosure.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "Two quid!"

He took them out. Two genuine £1 currency notes!

Nothing else—not a line to say who they were from. All the better. Trimble didn't want any tell-tale documents. It would be enough bother to destroy these envelopes. Besides, he had worded his letter so cunningly that the senders had naturally enclosed no letter.

"That's one!" he breathed triumphantly. "Two quid!"

He could hardly believe his good fortune—for, deep down in his heart, he had feared that the dodge might not work. For he had not forgotten the fate of Master Smith, of Wayland.

However, Baggy Trimble prided himself that he had handled this business in a much more masterly way than the clumsy Wayland lout.

He opened the second letter.

"Hallo!" he muttered, with a frown. "Only a quid!"

He searched the envelope thoroughly, but could only find two ten-shilling notes. Lefevre, of the Fifth, had sent two-thirds of his sole capital, and he felt that he had done as much as could be expected of him.

"Mean beast!" muttered Baggy disgustedly.

He glanced at the handwriting, and came to the conclusion that the "mean beast" was either Kildare or Lefevre. Considering that a pound had been enclosed, this comment of Trimble's was somewhat ungracious.

He opened the third letter with much trepidation. Perhaps this one would contain nothing! It was from Cardew—as he could tell by the handwriting on the envelope. And Trimble hadn't been sure of Ralph Reckness Cardew. That dandified Fourth-Former was something of an unknown quantity.

Rip, rip!

The envelope was broken asunder, and there reposed two pound-notes!

CHAPTER 10.

Trimble Stands Treat!

"Oh, crumbs!"

Baggy Trimble was staggered.

So Cardew had come up to the scratch, too! Success with all three letters! Baggy held five pounds in his hand! More money than he could ever remember having handled before, except on one or two rare occasions.

And, by a curious kink of his complex mentality, he told himself that this money was his own—his very own.

"A liver!" he gloated. "Oh, my hat!"

He had found a gold-mine, and no mistake!

So far, he had only tapped three possible sources of supply, and all had panned out handsomely. There were hundreds of fellows in the school, and heaps and heaps of them—particularly in the Senior School—were accustomed to having a few odd pounds in their pockets.

But "sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof." Baggy Trimble had five pounds in his possession, and he gave no further thought just now to the problem of getting further supplies.

This money was burning his palm already!

And his thoughts flew to the tuck-shop. He was hungry. He had forgotten it at the moment, but he was undoubtedly jolly hungry. And with a liver—Trimble's head swam at the thought.

Another idea occurred to him.

Why not treat some of the chaps? He toyed with the thought longingly. Caution was flung to the winds. He was far too big a fool to lie low and to keep this haul to himself. How often had he longed to prove to the chaps that his big talk about Trimble Hall was founded on fact!

He sprang into action.

Tearing up the three envelopes into tiny pieces, he dug a hole in the earth with his hands and buried the evidence. Then he put a piece of turf on the disturbed mould and trampled it down.

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SCHOOL LIFE.

MORNING DIP!

The form of Gussy then we seize

By way of a diversion;

Cries Lowther: "What a splendid wheeze

To give him an immersion!"

Under the surface Gussy goes

With many a choking splutter;

And when he's hauled up by his toes

Haughty rebukes he'll mutter!

We care not if the water's chill

As the Antarctic Ocean;

We strike out strongly, with a will—

The poetry of motion!

"Race to the boathouse!" Merry cries;

And after that stern tussle,

We gouge the water from our eyes,

And massage every muscle!

Soon we go sprinting back again,

Frisking in our frivolity;

Even a sudden shower of rain

Can't damp our youthful jollity.

Thanks to our early-morning swim

We feel in first-class fettle;

Ruddy of face, and lithe of limb,

Sportsmen of finest mettle!



justice. It was a warm afternoon, and Baggy was perspiring freely. But he did not even notice the discomfort.

His fingers were itching to tear open those three letters—and yet he dared not take any such action in the open road. He waited until he had got beyond the outskirts of the village, and then he dived through a gap in the hedge.

"Oh, crumbs!" he panted. "All this time!"

He crouched down behind the hedge, and pulled the letters out of his pocket as though they were packages of T.N.T. He looked at them fascinatedly. They were all addressed to "Mrs. Jane Flagg."

Just for a moment, Baggy hesitated.

A vague, dim realisation of his heinous offence came into his mind for a moment. But it was so transient that it had gone before he could even realise its presence.

These letters were not his at all. Although he had appealed for the money in Mrs. Flagg's name, nothing could alter the fact that they were the sacred property of Mrs. Flagg herself. They had been sent to her in good

By the time he cautiously passed back through the gap into the lane he was feeling in the gayest of spirits.

He had five pounds in his pocket—wealth undreamt of! And this wasn't money that had been borrowed and had to be repaid; it was his very own! Trimble had overlooked the fact that "Mrs. Flagg" had requested the cash as a loan.

He felt that it was his to do as he liked with.

And he had no remorse, either, regarding Mrs. Flagg. That letter of his was pure fiction. The woman wasn't in want, and her children had plenty to eat. Relatives were looking after her. So Trimble felt that he was depriving nobody by this action of his. The St. Jim's fellows had whacked out the money, that was all—and they could jolly well afford to!

They wouldn't lend him money when he asked them for it, so he was getting a bit of his own back.

As for Mrs. Flagg's good name in after weeks, when her husband was well again, this aspect of the affair escaped Trimble's attention altogether.

"Now for a good old spree!" he gurgled happily. "My hat! I'll make the chaps sit up! I'll make 'em sing small!"

He arrived at the school gates hot, flushed, and breathless.

"Good egg!" he panted.

Not only Jack Blake & Co. were in sight, but Levison and Clive and Cardew. The sight of Cardew caused him a twinge for a moment, but he was too excited to pay any attention to it.

The Terrible Three were over by the tuckshop, lounging against the doorway, soaking up ginger-pop through straws. It was nearly tea-time, but ginger-pop was always acceptable.

Trimble hurried up, very important and friendly.

"Anybody like an ice-cream with me?" he invited airily, "or a ginger-pop, or a lemonade?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Monty Lowther. "Our own Trimble has developed a sense of humour. Do you know any more jokes like that, Baggy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cut off, you footling young ass!" said Blake, frowning.

"Here, steady!" complained Trimble. "I'm inviting you chaps to come into the tuckshop for a feed or a drink. Any old thing you like! I don't mind. Hang the expense!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Poor old Trimble's gone off his rocker!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I haven't!" roared Trimble. "It's a genuine invite."

"In that case, we might as well accept," said Monty Lowther. "As soon as Trimble has borrowed enough money from somebody, he'll pay the bill!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got money!" howled Trimble.

"Whose?" asked Lowther.

"Mine, you rotter!"

"But whose was it before you boned it?" demanded Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it's mine!" bellowed Trimble. "I—I got it by post this afternoon, from Trimble Hall."

He paused, and took advantage of the momentary silence.

"My pater sent me a fiver!" he added casually.

He had anticipated a startling effect, but hardly the effect that actually occurred. The crowd round him burst into a yell of laughter, and the old quad echoed with the cackling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trimble's pater sends him a fiver!"

"Bai Jove! That's wathah wick!"

"Don't you believe it?" asked Trimble hotly.

"Well, frankly, it wants a bit of believing," said Tom.

"What do you call this, then?" demanded Baggy triumphantly.

He pulled the notes out of his pocket and held them aloft. He was enjoying this moment intensely. They had yelled at him and they had cackled. Now they would have to sing small. There was nothing like showing them evidence.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"It can't be real!" said Lowther. "Baggy must have spent hours manufacturing those things!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotter!" roared Trimble. "Do you take me for a forger? They're all genuine notes, and they came from Trimble Hall—my country seat, you know. I've always told you that my pater is rolling in money."

The juniors gathered round him, not only amused, but thoroughly interested. The sight of that money had put a different complexion on the affair.

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Trimble had invited them to invade the tuckshop at his expense, and quite a number of juniors thought the proposition a sound one. Many a time and oft had they treated Trimble, and it seemed inconceivable that he was actually thinking about reciprocating. It was an opportunity too good to be lost.

"They're genuine enough," said Tom Merry, as he pulled Trimble's hand down. "Let's have a look at them closely, Trimble."

"No fear!" roared Trimble, in alarm. "They're mine!" "You young ass! Do you think I am going to steal them?"

"I—I owe you ten bob—I—I mean, I don't!" gasped Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right; I sha'n't take the ten bob," said Tom Merry. "I'd given that up terms ago. But we want to be satisfied that this money is genuine. Some practical joker might have spoofed you, Baggy."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Trimble, in genuine alarm.

This aspect of the matter had not occurred to him, and he watched Tom Merry with acute anxiety while the latter examined the notes.

"They're quite good," said Tom at last.

Baggy Trimble recovered himself.

"I knew it!" he snapped. "My pater wouldn't send me dud notes! As a matter of fact, he's promised to send a lot more."

"Great Scott!"

Trimble developed the idea. He expected to get more money from this unexpected gold-mine, and it was just as well to pave the way. Nothing like giving the chaps a word in advance. What was the good of getting the money at all if he couldn't spend it?

"Yes," he said importantly; "my pater has just come into a lot of money—he's done a big deal on the Stock Exchange, I understand. And he's promised to send me a fiver every day."

"You uttah young ass!"

"Phew!"

"Perhaps a lot more than a fiver," added Trimble carelessly. "It all depends. If he's feeling in a good mood—as he's quite liable to—he may make it ten—or even twenty."

Tom Merry was looking rather suspicious.

"You're sure this money is from your pater, Trimble?" he asked.

"Of course I'm sure!" snapped Trimble. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it's not my business, but—"

"I'm glad you realise that it's not your business, Tom Merry," said Trimble, with dignity. "I suppose my people can send me lots of money if they like, can't they?"

He turned to the crowd, disliking the trend of the conversation.

"Well, who wants a feed?" he asked genially.

"I think I shall need something stronger than ginger-pop to revive me; but I'll try it," said Blake dazedly.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm feelin' wathah wummay myself," admitted D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! It is somethin' new for Trimble to stand tweat!"

And the crowd surged into the tuckshop.

CHAPTER 11.

The Gold-Mine!

"OH crumbs!"

Baggy Trimble was alarmed and dismayed.

His face was shiny and somewhat bloated—as one might have anticipated from the effects of excessive eating. There were crumbs on his ample waistcoat and a smear of jam on his cheek.

He stood in the quad, and his guests had gone.

In Trimble's palm lay a pound-note and some odd shillings.

"Oh, my goodness!" he muttered. "Over three quid! Over three-pounds-ten. All gone in one giddy feed!"

After the feast, the reckoning!

It was something of a shock to Baggy Trimble. He had intended to be thoroughly lavish, in order to impress the fellows with a correct idea of his great importance. But lavishness is one thing and recklessness another.

And Trimble realised, too late, that he had been very reckless indeed.

"But it was jolly well worth it!" he muttered, after some more thought. "The rotters can't accuse me of sponging now! I've spent over three quid on 'em, and I know who I am! They know jolly well that when I talk about the wealth of Trimble Hall I mean it!"

Baggy had referred to his father's "country seat" so many times that he was almost believing the fiction him-



Tom Merry & Co. were standing about talking when someone gave a loud yell. "Great Scott! Look at Trimble! On a motor-bike!" Baggy Trimble shut down the throttle and the machine jerked to a standstill. "Bal Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, "Who lent it you, Twimble?" The fat Fourth-Former looked round, cool and victorious. "Nobody lent it to me," he replied. "It's mine. Bought and paid for!" (See Chapter 12.)

self. He had forgotten, for the moment, that he had gained his cash from easily-deceived St. Jim's fellows.

But the thought returned to him and gave him comfort. Perhaps there were lots more easily-deceived fellows! He had hardly tapped the source of supply yet. Writing those letters entailed a good deal of hard work, but Baggy did not object. Work of that type appealed to him.

It was necessary to disguise his handwriting—although this, after all, was not a very important matter. For Trimble's "fist" was a nondescript sort of scrawl at the best, and would pass very satisfactorily as the illiterate writing of a woman of Mrs. Flagg's station in life.

All the same, Trimble was careful. He went indoors, and hoped that Mellish would not be in the study. Wildrake, he knew, was spending the evening with some of the fellows in the New House.

Trimble had to be cautious.

On no account must he allow his study-mates to suspect the slightest thing. He indignantly realised that they were suspicious of him at the best of times, and if they saw him writing a lot of secret letters, they might make inquiries. Mellish was particularly "nosey"—Percy Mellish being a bit of a black sheep himself.

"Hallo! Here's our dear old pal Trimble!" said Monty Lowther, as Baggy rolled into the Fourth Form passage. "Good old Trimble! The chap who spends money like water without noticing it!"

"One of the best!" said Manners heartily.

Trimble smirked.

"Oh, I like to be decent to you chaps, you know," he said airily. "We can't all be rich, and it's up to us more fortunate ones to be generous."

"Well said," replied Lowther, clapping Baggy on the back.

"Yow!" gasped Trimble. "You—you needn't be so violent, Lowther!"

"I always like to be friendly with chaps who stand fees!" said Monty, with a wink at Tom Merry and Manners. "We shall know where to come to if we want to borrow five bob."

"Very handy," said Tom Merry, nodding.

"Oh, I don't mind, of course," said Trimble. "You

fellows haven't treated me as well as you might, but I've got a forgiving nature, and I'll let bygones be bygones. As long as you treat me with respect in future, and recognise that we Trimbles are a cut above the average, I might cultivate you."

"My hat!" said Manners.

"I said I might, mind!" added Trimble coolly. "It all depends upon how you behave."

He walked on, adopting a swagger which ill became his podgy figure. He vanished round the corner, and the Terrible Three looked at one another.

"Insufferable young ass!" said Manners. "Did you hear that? He might cultivate us! He might!"

"That blow-out he stood us is turning over and over!" said Monty, holding his waistcoat.

Tom Merry grinned.

"It was your own fault, Monty—you shouldn't have started him off with your leg-pulling!" he said. "In future we mustn't accept any feeds from him."

"We're never likely to get the chance of another!" replied Lowther. "I haven't got over this one yet. As far as I can see, it'll remain one of the world's unsolved mysteries!"

In the meantime, Baggy had rolled into Study No. 2. Mellish was just making for the door, as it happened.

"Going out?" asked Trimble quickly.

"Yes, and your arrival makes me go quicker," said Mellish. "As a matter of fact, I've got an appointment with Racke and Crooke, of the Shell. If you like to stand us a feed, Baggy—"

"No fear!" said Trimble. "I've spent over three quid on treating you chaps already."

"Over three quid?" repeated Mellish, staring. "Phew! I heard you'd spent a lot—but three quid! Where the dickens did you get all that money from?"

"I had a fiver from Trimble Hall," said Baggy promptly.

"It's a pity you couldn't invite your own study-mates to the spread!" said Mellish, in a bitter voice. "There's still time to make amends—"

"Not likely!" said Trimble. "I asked you to lend me a bob yesterday, and you refused. I'm a bit particular about my friends nowadays!"

"Oh, rats!" said Mellish sourly.

He walked out, and Trimble breathed hard. He had the study to himself! Mellish was not likely to come back for an hour, at least. All the same, Baggy put a chair against the door, in case somebody should try to open it. He could easily explain that the chair had become jammed by accident.

So he sat down and wrote some letters.

He had purchased a box of cheap paper and envelopes from the village on purpose, and he kept them tucked away in the bottom of the cupboard. It would have been a fatal mistake to use any paper belonging to the school.

Before Trimble had finished, a dozen letters were ready—all of them exact replicas of the one which Kildare had received that morning. Then Trimble addressed the envelopes. They were to all sorts and conditions of fellows. Lumley-Lumley, Bernard Glyn, Talbot, Smith major, of the Fifth; Baker and Langton, of the Sixth. He wrote to some of the lesser lights of the Senior School, but he knew very well that they had always had plenty of cash.

Trimble was lucky. He had taken practically two hours over his letters, and he didn't realise it until he had stamped them, and was ready to run down into the village. He found that he had only just sufficient time to get there and back before locking up.

Even then, he would have to run all the way back, and race Taggles, the school porter.

Trimble did it by the skin of his teeth.

"Which you're lucky, young gent!" said Taggles, as Trimble panted in at the last second. "Another minnit, an' I'd have 'ad to report ye!"

Trimble recovered his breath in the quad. He was feeling elated. A dozen letters this time—and they were all posted.

And if he could get five pounds from three letters, what was he liable to rake in from a dozen? Well over twenty pounds, at the least! For Trimble had made one alteration in that letter, after all. Instead of asking for two pounds from each addressee, he had mentioned the sum of three pounds.

"They'll probably send two quid each, on the average," he told himself. "So if I don't rake in over twenty, they'll be a pretty mean lot! The worst of it is, I sha'n't be able to know which are the mean ones, because they won't write any letters."

He went to bed that night in a very wakeful mood. In fact, it was a long while before he could settle himself to sleep. The prospect of what the morrow would bring kept him on tenterhooks.

But at last he dozed off, and Nature had her way. Baggy Trimble knew no more until the rising bell clanged out.

He sat up, wakeful on the instant.

The next moment he was out of bed and dressing hurriedly. There was no reason for such haste, because he could do nothing until afternoon lessons were over. Even if he hung about the school post-box, hoping to see his victims drop their letters in, there was no chance of this for at least another two hours.

All the same, Baggy dressed himself at top speed.

He was restless. He had the thing on his mind so acutely that, once awake, his bed became distasteful to him. He wanted to be out, on the watch, keeping his eye on things in general.

Besides, he still had over a pound in his pocket, and he had made up his mind to patronise Dame Taggles before breakfast. It was always one of Trimble's laments that he never got enough to eat at breakfast-time.

"I must be still asleep!" said Blake, sitting up in bed, and rubbing his eyes. "Gussy, do you see what I'm seeing?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round.

"Weally, Blake, I do not undahstand what you are wewefwin' to," he said. "Howevah can you be asleep when you're obviously awake?"

"That's just it," said Blake. "I think I'm dreaming."

"You fwightful ass!"

"Well, can you see a sort of blob over there?" asked Blake, pointing. "A thing that looks a bit like a human being. In fact, it's a bit like Trimble."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It can't be Trimble, of course," continued Jack Blake. "Trimble's still in bed. He's always the last one out."

"You funny ass!" said Trimble, turning round.

"Yaas, wathah!" remarked D'Arcy. "I must wemark, Blake, that you are actin' in a vewy peculiar way."

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "Then it really is Trimble?"

"Of course it's me!" yelled Trimble. "I thought it was about time that I set you lazy fellows a good example."

"Bai Jove!"

"I don't believe in slacking in bed!" said Trimble coldly. "In fact, lazy people always make me sick."

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"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Baggy Trimble walked out of the dormitory with a superior air, and the rest of the Fourth-Formers stared after him in blank astonishment.

"Something's come over Trimble," said Cardew, with a yawn. "Dear men, I think we ought to take him down to the doctor. The chap's sickenin' for a fever or somethin'. He isn't himself!"

"There's something wrong with him, that's certain," agreed Blake.

But, after all, Trimble was not an important person, and nobody took much notice of him, or of his doings, during the day.

He was gratified to see nearly all his intended victims come to the school letter-box before morning lessons started. In just the same way as Kildare, they had decided to let Mrs. Flagg have their money as quickly as possible.

How Trimble carried on through afternoon lessons was a mystery to him. He seemed to be living in a nightmare. The afternoon went on for ever. Even Mr. Lathom noted his restless state, and Baggy was lucky to escape detention.

But all things come to an end at last—even lessons. And Trimble scooted down to the village at top speed, and was overjoyed to find nine letters awaiting him. A considerable bag!

Old Jerry was as genial as ever, and handed over the letters without demur. And behind that same section of the hedge in Rylcombe Lane, Trimble examined the treasure.

Fourteen pounds!

CHAPTER 12.

Trimble Surprises the Natives!

"MEAN rotters!"

Thus Trimble, in an indignant voice.

He was feeling quite disappointed. He had been so certain that he would receive well over twenty pounds that a cool fourteen seemed insignificant. And yet, only two days earlier, a sum like fourteen pounds would have taken his breath completely away.

"Fourteen quid!" he muttered. "Less than half what I ought to have got, the selfish beasts! Still, there might be some more letters in the morning. Some of them didn't reply—or perhaps they didn't post their letters in time."

As before, he destroyed his evidence by burying it under the turf. Then he emerged into the lane, and went up to St. Jim's with his heart beating very rapidly.

"I'll give 'em all a feed this time!" he muttered gloatingly. "Three quid, eh? I'll spend a tenner to-day! My hat! That'll make 'em open their silly eyes!"

But he suddenly paused in the middle of the lane.

Would it be wise to treat everybody on such a lavish scale?

Trimble had not gained a bump of caution, but he was thinking of himself. He would have no difficulty in explaining the money, of course. He would simply say that his pater had sent him three fivers to-day.

He wasn't going to be swindled out of that joy!

But couldn't he be more original to-day than yesterday? A feed was all very well, but he could fill himself up for under a pound, and what was the use of spending the other nine on fellows he held in contempt? If he meant to spend ten pounds, why couldn't he spend it on something entirely for himself?

But what?

He retraced his steps and went back into the village. A good blow-out would probably clear his brain, he decided. So he would go and have a feed at Mrs. Murphy's little bun shop in Rylcombe.

But before he reached Mrs. Murphy's he passed one or two other shops, including the establishment of the local cycle-repairer. And there, right in front of the shop, was a second-hand motor-bicycle. It was one of the small light-weights, a year or two old.

But it was in splendid condition, and the thing about it which fascinated Baggy Trimble was a card hung on the handlebars. This card announced to all and sundry the following legend:

"CHEAP—TEN POUNDS!"

Baggy Trimble caught his breath.

"Ten quid!" he muttered. "Oh, my hat! A motor-bike!"

He was almost carried away by the thought. Cutts of the Fifth owned a motor-bike. But Cutts was a very superior person. Nobody in the Fourth had one, or even dreamed of having one.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Trimble. "What will the chaps say if I sail into the quad on a motor-bike? All mine, too! Paid for in spot cash!"

He was not merely fascinated, but obsessed.

Wouldn't it be a lot better to spend a tenner on this machine than to waste it on a feed?

He reckoned up his resources.

With ten shillings left over from yesterday's haul he would still have four pounds-ten in cash, even after he had bought the bike. And he would send some more letters out this evening, too.

"Why not?" he said breathlessly.

A man came out of the shop.

"Looking over the motor-bike, sir?" he asked. "She's a rare bargain, if you'd like to invest in a good machine. I took her in exchange, and she's worth fifteen, if she's worth a penny."

"Oh, I know all about that," said Trimble, with a superior air. "As a matter of fact, I did think about buying a jigger."

The man knew something of Trimble's record.

"Cash down, mind, young gent," he said. "She's not really mine—I'm only selling her for a customer. It's no good offering me instalments, or anything like that."

Trimble tried to look dignified.

"Oh, I'll pay you in cash!" he retorted coolly. "But I'm not sure that I can ride the thing. I don't want to break my neck!"

"You can ride an ordinary bike, can't you?"

"Of course I can!"

"Then this is a lot easier," said the tradesman. "If you're going to buy, I'll give you a lesson or two, and have you proficient inside five minutes."

"I'll give you nine pounds—cash on the nail!" said Trimble, finally making up his mind with a rush. "Nine quid!"

"Ten's the bottom price."

"All right, then—there's no sale!"

"But I dare say I can manage it," said the other hastily.

"Let's have a look at the money, young gent."

Trimble flashed out his bundle of notes and separated nine. The man looked at them in wonder, and then became businesslike.

"She's yours!" he said promptly. "It's a sin and a shame, but I'm ready to do business any time. Nine quid, young gent—the bike's yours! I'll make you out a receipt. What's the name?"

"Trimble—Bagley Trimble."

They went inside, and Trimble came out three minutes later with the receipt in his pocket. Then, quaking somewhat, he took his first lesson. The machine was of very low horse-power, and only capable of seventeen or eighteen miles an hour. And the controls were so simple as to be fool-proof. Trimble was amazed at the ease of control.

"Why, there's nothing in it!" he said breathlessly at the end of ten minutes. "And that ass Cutts has always swanked about as though motor-cycling was as clever as walking a tight-rope."

"Oh, she's safe enough," said the dealer, grinning. "A mere kid could ride her. But you'll have to have a licence, Master Trimble."

"What?"

"You can't ride a motor-cycle without a licence," replied the other. "And this number will have to be transferred to your name, too. You'd better leave her with me until you've got that licence."

"Not likely!" snapped Baggy. "I've bought this jigger, and I mean to ride it. I can get the licence any old time."

And Trimble got astride the saddle, pushed off with his foot, and the little engine purred. He went off towards St. Jim's somewhat erratically, but there was very little danger, for the lane was almost deserted, and he did not dare to open the throttle to anything like its widest extent. He pottered up the lane at about fifteen miles an hour.

He expected to cause a sensation at St. Jim's—and he wasn't disappointed.

More by luck than anything else he managed to steer through the gateway, and he went purring across the quad towards the School House. Tom Merry & Co., Levison, Clive, and a number of other juniors were standing about, talking. The Terrible Three were just coming down the steps, and the chums of Study No. 6 were on their way to the playing fields.

But they paused when somebody gave a loud yell.

"Great Scott!"

"Look at Trimble!"

"On a motor-bike!"

Baggy Trimble shut the throttle, and the machine jerked to a standstill. He rolled out of the saddle, and stood there, triumphant and proud. He had got into the quad without any mishap.

"Bai Jove! Trimble!"

"Oh, we must be seeing things!"

"Yaas, wathah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Trimble on a motah-bike. Whatevah next?"

There was a rush, and Baggy Trimble was surrounded.

CHAPTER 13.

Still At It!

"TRIMBLE!"

"Where the merry dickens did you get that motor-bike?"

"Who does it belong to?"

"Yaas, wathah! Who lent it to you, Trimble?"

Baggy looked round, cool and victorious.

"Nobody lent it to me," he replied. "It's mine!"

"Yours?"

"Bought and paid for," said Trimble.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Who said the age of miracles had passed?"

"Yes, she cost me twelve quid!" said Trimble glibly.

"Then you've been swindled!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"I saw that bike in the village yesterday, and it was marked up at a tenner!"

"I—I meant a tenner!" said Trimble hastily.

"But where did you get the money to buy it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"My pater sent it to me," said Trimble calmly. "Didn't I tell you yesterday that he was going to send me a lot more cash to-day? I thought I'd buy a motor-bike and show you chaps up."

"My only hat!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

Trimble had certainly caused a big sensation.

"Do you mean to say that your pater sent you over ten pounds?" asked Blake incredulously.

"Fifteen, to be exact," replied Trimble. "I've often told you that my pater is a man of tremendous wealth—"

"Even wealthy paters don't send fifteen quids at a time to their sons!" interrupted Tom Merry. "You mustn't blame us, Trimble, if we're a bit suspicious."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It would be a different mattah if Twimble's word could be welied upon. But he has such a habit of tellin' whoppahs that—"

"I hope you don't think I'm lying?" asked Trimble indignantly.

"We're pretty sure of it," replied Blake. "You can't spoof us with this yarn about your pater! You're getting that money from some other source, and we want to know what it is!"

"Yes, out with it, Trimble!"

"Where's the bank you've been burgling?"

Trimble was alarmed at this open suspicion.

"I tell you I got it all from my pater!" he roared. "You—you rotters! I was going to stand you a feed, and let you go for rides on my motor-bike, but now I won't! Not likely! You can all go and eat coke!"

He prepared to move off, but Tom Merry interposed.

"Just a minute, Trimble!" he said. "You're coming with us to the village."

"What for?" gasped Trimble, in acute alarm.

"We're going to take that motor-bike back, and you'll have your money returned," replied Tom. "You've got a receipt for the cash, I suppose?"

"Yes, but—"

"The man ought to have had more sense than to take your money!" continued Tom Merry grimly. "You're not fifteen yet, and you haven't got a licence—and can't get one."

Trimble felt slightly relieved; he had feared worse. But he broke out into an indignant protest.

"It's my bike!" he roared. "And I'm going to keep it!"

"You're not!" growled Tom. "I'm leader of the Junior School, and you'll either do as I say or—"

"I won't!" hooted Trimble. "It's my bike!"

"You silly young idiot!" snapped Tom Merry. "Haven't you enough sense in that thick head of yours to know that I'm saving you from trouble? The sooner we can smuggle you out of here the better!"

"Eh?" bleated Trimble.

"If Mr. Railton catches sight of you with this machine—riding it without a licence—he'll be down on you like a ton of bricks!" continued Tom Merry. "Do you think for a minute that you'll be allowed to keep a motor-bike at St. Jim's, you footling young chump?"

Trimble goggled.

"But—but—" he began.

"Bai Jove! You are quite wight, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, nodding. "Twimble will be hauled in front of the Head if the mastahs get to know, an' then there'll be all sorts of iniquities as to how he came by this monay!"

"Wha-a-at?" bleated Trimble, in horror.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Come along!" he said curtly. "You didn't get that money from your pater, so don't trot out those lies again! Anyhow, this motor-bike is going back."

"I—I didn't know I was too young to have a licence!" said Trimble breathlessly. "I—I don't mind if you take it back. Here's—here's the receipt!"

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He took it out of his pocket, and Tom Merry glanced at it. "Nine pounds!" he said contemptuously. "I—I meant nine pounds at first!" said Trimble in a thin voice.

He was intensely eager now to get out of the quad—to get to the village—and to have his money returned. His feeble mind had not foreseen the possibilities that Tom Merry had outlined. If the Head made inquiries about that money he—Baggy Trimble—would be undone!

So Baggy was only too willing to accompany the escort.

When the village was reached the cycle dealer was rather scared, and, under the pressure of his determined visitors, he took the machine back and restored the money.

"You're a stranger in this village, aren't you?" said Tom Merry curtly.

"Just looking after the business temporary like," said the man nervously. "I ain't been here long, but I knowed enough not to trust young Trimble without the cash—"

"You ought to have known enough not to have taken his cash at all," interrupted Tom Merry. "Still, the thing's over now, so we'll say no more about it."

They went out of the shop, and Trimble was tugging at the Shell captain's sleeve.

"That's my money, Tom Merry!" he said breathlessly.

"I'm not so sure that it is," replied Tom.

"Oh, look here—"

"I've a good mind to keep this cash for a time," went on Tom, frowning. "I'm not satisfied about it, Trimble—"

"It's mine!" hooted Baggy. "My pater sent it to me, I tell you! You can't keep my money, you rotter!"

"No, I suppose I can't," said Tom Merry reluctantly. "You can have it, Trimble—but you're coming back to St. Jim's with us. What's more, we'll keep our eye on you. You won't spend any more of that money until we know the real source of it."

By this time Baggy was beginning to feel genuinely alarmed. Knowing the real truth about that money, he was aware of a hunted sensation. And he suddenly made a dash for freedom and bolted down the High Street before anybody could stop him.

"Lemme alone!" he howled. "Yaroooooh!"

"Oh, let him go!" said Blake disgustedly.

They were all astonished to see Trimble suddenly stop dead in his tracks and then turn about. Baggy was looking startled and dazed. There was no apparent reason for this.

No reason, that is, to the other juniors.

But Trimble had just received the shock of his worthless young life. There, approaching Myrtle Cottages, was Mrs. Flagg herself!

This was a staggerer for Baggy Trimble.

He hadn't expected the good woman back for another week at the earliest. And there would probably be some more letters arriving! Perhaps she had already learned about the letters which Baggy had so far collected!

So he turned on his heel and bolted—straight back to the fellows he had just been escaping from. He was so terrified that he ran into them before he knew it.

"What's the matter, you young ass?" demanded Blake curiously.

"Nun-nothing!" panted Trimble. "Lemme go!"

"All right—come with us!" said Tom Merry.

They marched him off, and Blake & Co. remained in the village, having decided to look in at Mother Murphy's.

But Herries wanted to go to the station first, to inquire after a hamper. Herries was expecting one from home, and his comrades raised no objection to an expedition of that kind. As they passed Myrtle Cottages, Blake happened to notice Mrs. Flagg in the doorway. He paused in his stride, and raised his cap.

"Evening, Mrs. Flagg," he said. "How's your husband?"

"He's very much better, thank you kindly, young gentleman," said the woman. "He's so much better that I've come back earlier than I meant to. I was afraid poor father wasn't getting looked after proper, either."

"Old Jewway, bai Jove!" beamed Arthur Augustus. "Pway cawwy my respects to the old gentleman, deah lady. I twist he's in wippin' health."

"Father's generally lively enough," smiled Mrs. Flagg. "Oh, and by the way, young gentlemen. Do you happen to know anything about any letters for me?"

"Letters?" repeated Blake. "For you?"

"Yes."

"But how can we know anything about them?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew, who happened to be passing, had paused to listen, and had joined the chums of Study No. 6.

"That's what I can't understand, sir," said Mrs. Flagg, looking puzzled. "I daresay father has been wandering, although it ain't like him to do that. But he swears that one of you young gentlemen from St. Jim's came here this afternoon, and took a whole lot of letters of mine. He had three yesterday, too."

"One of our chaps?" repeated Blake, in astonishment.

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"That's what father says," replied the woman. "Lor', I wouldn't have the impudence to even suggest it! But I can't understand what father means, all the same. You don't know nothing about it?"

"Wathah not!"

"Not a thing," replied Blake, shaking his head.

"Then I'm afraid father must be gettin' a bit queer-like," said Mrs. Flagg, lowering her voice. "Thank ye kindly, young gentlemen. I'm sorry to have bothered ye."

They raised their caps and moved away.

"There's something funny about that," said Blake, with another frown. "What does she mean—one of our chaps? Why the thump should a St. Jim's fellow go to her cottage, collecting her giddy letters?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "The thing is uttaly widic. I am afraid Old Jewway is goin' off his wockah!"

"Dear men, there's more in this than meets the eye," observed Ralph Reckness Cardew coolly. "It has been well and truly said that there is never smoke without fire."

"Weally, Cardew, I fail to see—"

"What you fail to see, Gussy, amounts to an awful lot," said Cardew. "Dear old scouts, am I right in sayin' that two an' two make four? Mrs. Flagg knows nothin' of her letters; a St. Jim's fellow has been here collectin' them; an' Baggy Trimble has recently come into an inexplicable fortune. To my feeble intellect, the thing seems as clear as daylight."

"It's all Dutch to me!" growled Blake. "What the dickens has Baggy Trimble got to do with it? You're not intimating that Mrs. Flagg's letters were full of money, I suppose?"

"Alas, I have been stung!" drawled Cardew sadly. "I know of one letter, at least, which contained two crisp and crinkly pound notes. Therefore, why not others? I know, because those notes were mine. I suspect a deep an' murky plot!"

CHAPTER 14.

Securing the Evidence!

BLAKE & CO. stared at Cardew in amazement.

"What are you getting at?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway be explicit, Cardew, deah boy."

"Yesterday mornin'," said Cardew, "I received a heart-rendin' note, ostensibly from Mrs. Flagg. I say ostensibly, because I now suspect otherwise. In this human document, she requested the loan of two of the crinkliest. Bein', as you know, a kind-hearted simpleton, I shelled out like a bird, and sent the cash. An', lo and behold, Mrs. Flagg knows nothing of it!"

"But I don't see—"

"An' yesterday evenin'," continued Cardew, "our worthy fellow citizen, Trimble, burst upon us with untold wealth. To-day, he has even untold-er wealth, an' if one letter, why not many? Dear men, there are innumerable kind hearts at St. Jim's!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Blake. "You—you don't think—"

"It is a hard suspicion, but I fear the worst!" sighed Cardew.

"Good gwacious!" said Arthur Augustus excitedly. "I weally believe that Cardew is wight!"

"Yes, but look here, Gussy—"

"Twimble, you wemembah, eavesdropped when that wascal frowm Wayland twied to swindle me out of three pounds by means of a spooof beggin' lettah. I expect that disgwaceful biznay put the wascally ideah into his head."

Cardew nodded.

"Gussy, you've got a brain somewhere, after all," he said approvingly.

"Weally, Cardew—"

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Blake. "I believe Gussy's right! Trimble did know about that beggin'-letter, didn't he?"

"Yes, and we were surprised because he kept mum," nodded Herries.

"The reason for Trimble's mumness is now apparent," said Cardew. "He kept Gussy's guilty secret because he wanted to make capital out of the same idea himself. But what a brain! Usin' a genuine case of distress as a foundation for his nefarious purposes! I fear that Trimble is a darker horse than we ever suspected."

"The young villain!" roared Blake furiously. "Why, he deserves to be bunked from the school, if it's true! He ought to be prosecuted! It's—it's sheer robbery!"

"Worse than robbery!" agreed Cardew. "After all, no self-respectin' burglar would take money like that in the name of charity. My only excuse for Trimble is that he is too big a fool to realise the nature of his crime. The poor fish probably believes that he has been quite smart."



Cardew lounged to the mirror and held up the blotting-paper. Blake & Co. gathered round, staring. Not many words could be distinguished on that much-used sheet of blotting-paper, but two words stood out like the fires of a beacon: "Jane Flagg." The evidence was conclusive. Trimble had blotted one of his letters immediately upon finishing it, and the signature had naturally been wet. (See Chapter 14.)

Blake & Co. were convinced at last. "But—but he's dangerous about the place!" said Blake fiercely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't think we'd better let the matter get to the Head's ears, though," said Ralph Reckness Cardew. "Trimble is bound to be bunked, an' there might be a lot of publicity. Dear men, imagine the sensational headlines in the newspapers! 'Grave Swindlin' Charge Against Schoolboy At St. Jim's!'—'St. Jim's School A Hot-bed Of Crime!' No, it would never do. We mustn't give the journalists a chance like that!"

"Bai Jove! There is somethin' in what Cardew says," admitted D'Arcy. "Pewwaps we had bettah deal with the mattah pwivately."

Blake took a deep breath.

"Well, thank goodness Tom Merry is keeping an eye on Trimble," he said. "We'll go straight back to the school, and have the thing out."

"What about my hamper?" asked Herries.

"Blow your silly hamper!" snapped Blake. "My hat! At a time like this, he talks about hampers! Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

At present they had no proof whatever against Baggy Trimble. They were certain in their own minds that he was guilty. But, in common fairness, it would be necessary to collect some evidence before accusing him. The circum-

stantial evidence was complete, of course. Trimble had known about that first begging letter. One of the St. Jim's fellows had been taking letters addressed to Mrs. Flagg from Old Jerry. Cardew himself had sent one of those letters, and it had contained money. And Trimble had recently splashed a lot of cash about.

It was all as clear as daylight, but there was no actual proof.

Jack Blake, however, was a fellow who went to work by direct methods.

As soon as St. Jim's was reached he strode straight to Study No. 2 in the Fourth Form passage. His idea was to tax Trimble with the plot and force a confession out of him. From past experience of the brainless Baggy, Blake felt almost certain that he would give himself away in his confusion.

But Study No. 2 was empty.

"Rats!" said Blake. "I thought Tom Merry was going to keep the fat young swindler locked up?"

"Never mind," remarked Cardew. "Now that we're here, wouldn't it be a somewhat brilliant idea to emulate the feats of Messrs. Ferrers Locke, Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee & Co., Limited? In other words, let us look round for clues."

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

It took them about three minutes to find some note-
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paper and envelopes at the bottom of the cupboard. There was also a sheet of blotting-paper, much soiled and crumpled. Cardew seized it and grinned.

"Elementary, my dear Watson," he murmured.

He lounged to the mirror, and held up the blotting-paper. Blake & Co. gathered round, staring. Not many words could be distinguished on that much-used sheet of blotting-paper. But two words stood out like the fires of a beacon: "Jane Flagg."

They were the words that caught the eye. Obviously, Trimble had blotted one of his letters immediately upon finishing it, and the signature had naturally been wet. The evidence was conclusive. There were lots of other "Jane Flagg" on that blotting-paper, but this was the only one that stood out boldly.

"Now for Trimble," said Cardew leisurely.

"First of all, we'll tell Tom Merry about this," growled Blake, in a wrathful voice. "By Jove! What a rotten young swindler! He deserves to be slaughtered!"

The Terrible Three were in Study No. 10 in the Shell passage when Blake & Co. tramped in.

"Hallo!" said Manners. "What the thump—"

"Where's Trimble?" demanded Blake aggressively.

"We've parked him with Talbot and Skimpole, next door," grinned Tom Merry. "He was too much trouble, so we told them to look after him for a bit. I believe Skimpole is reading one of his treatises."

"Then we're too late!" said Cardew sadly. "The villain is already being punished. I cannot imagine a harsher sentence!"

"Weally, Cardew, this is no time for such fivivulous wemarks," said Arthur Augustus sternly. "Pway wemembah the natuah of our mission."

"What is it—murder?" asked Tom politely.

Blake wasted no time in explaining the facts. And the Terrible Three grew more and more serious as they listened. The evidence of the blotting-paper was the final proof.

"The young scamp!" said Tom Merry at last. "The awful young crook! He can't appreciate what he's been doing, because even Trimble isn't as bad as that. The poor fool must have kidded himself that the offence wasn't very grave."

"Shall we fetch him?" asked Blake fiercely.

"Bring the prisoner to the bar," nodded Cardew dryly. And Blake & Co. hurried out.

CHAPTER 15.

Trimble the Philanthropist!

BAGGY TRIMBLE looked up apprehensively as he heard a tramp of feet in the passage. The next second the door of Study No. 9 burst open and Blake & Co. surged in.

Trimble leapt to his feet, gasping.

"Really, my dear fellows, I fail to see the reason of this tumultuous intrusion," said Skimpole of the Shell, as he looked up from a book. "I am in the act of reading Trimble a few passages of my latest brochure on the subject of magnetism. The subject is a most fascinating one—"

"So fascinating that Trimble is getting weaker and weaker," grinned Talbot, from the other side of the table. "I'm getting a bit washed out myself, to tell the truth."

"Never mind about magnetism," said Blake. "Trimble, we want you!"

"I—I won't come!" gasped Trimble, backing away. "If you touch me, Blake, you rotter, I'll yell the house down!" But Blake was in no mood for nonsense.

"Either you'll come quietly, or we'll drag you out on your neck!" he said fiercely. "And you can howl until you're blue in the face! Now, which is it to be?"

"I—I'll come!" breathed Trimble shakily.

They took him into Study No. 10, and Blake closed the door and put his back against it.

"Here he is," he said tensely.

"Trimble, you're bowled out," said Tom Merry. "We know exactly what you've been doing, but we want to hear your account of it. We're giving you an opportunity to own up. Where did you get all that money?"

Trimble licked his lips.

"My pater sent it!" he blurted out.

"Don't tell lies!" snapped Tom Merry. "You got that money by writing faked begging letters, in the name of Mrs. Jane Flagg, and you collected the answers, containing the money, from her cottage in Rylcombe."

Baggy felt his knees giving way.

"I didn't!" he panted desperately. "You're mad! I tell you that money came from Trimble Hall!"

"You fivightful young fibbah!"

"Why question him at all?" growled Blake. "We know the truth."

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"I don't know what you're talking about!" shouted Baggy Trimble. "I've never heard of Mrs. Flagg. I've never seen her. I don't know anything about her cottage in Rylcombe!"

"You've never heard her name?" snapped Blake.

"Never!"

"Then what's this?" roared Blake.

He held the piece of blotting-paper in front of Trimble's startled gaze.

"I—I've never seen it before!" gulped Baggy.

"Never seen it?" repeated Blake. "Then how do you account for the fact that we found it in your study cupboard?"

"Mellish must have been using it—"

"You—you despicable young toad!" hooted Blake. "Let's bump him now, and force a full confession out of him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Trimble nearly fainted. His face had gone greyish, and he was trembling from head to foot; his little eyes were starting with terror. He knew, moreover, that he was cornered. After all his precautions he was bowled out.

"Wait a minute," he said hoarsely. "I can explain it!"

"That's interestin'," drawled Cardew. "Go ahead. I always get a kick out of Trimble's explanations, they're so refreshin'ly novel. I wonder what entertainment he'll provide this time?"

"Go ahead, Trimble!" said Tom Merry quietly.

"The—the fact is, I felt sorry for Mrs. Flagg, so I organised a Charity Bureau for her," said Trimble, in desperation.

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors stared at him in a dazed sort of way.

"That's it—a Charity Bureau," repeated Trimble. "You—you see, I wrote those letters for her, knowing that she'd been hard hit. I thought she ought to have some money. In fact, I was disgusted with you chaps for being so mean!"

"Water!" said Herries feebly.

"You—you young liar!" growled Blake. "Mrs. Flagg doesn't know that you've been appealing for money in her name."

"That's right!" gasped Trimble. "I did it without her knowledge."

"What!"

"I believe in doing good by stealth," said Trimble.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Do you call it doing good by stealth to spend over three pounds of this charity fund on a feed?" rapped out Tom Merry. "Do you call it doing good by stealth to buy a motor-bicycle for another nine pounds?"

Baggy Trimble turned green.

"I—I only borrowed the money temporarily!" he muttered. "You see, I'm expecting a whacking great remittance from Trimble Hall—"

"You uttah wascal!"

"If you had your deserts, Trimble, you'd be sacked from St. Jim's within the hour!" said Tom Merry angrily. "Hand over all the money you've got!"

"I—I—"

"Look sharp!" roared Blake.

"Yow! Don't touch me!" shrieked Trimble. "I—I'll hand it over!"

He pulled out the nine pounds that had been returned from the motor-cycle deal. But Tom Merry noted the cunning little gleam in his eye.

"Now the rest!" said Tom.

"Eh?"

"Hand over the rest of the cash!"

"There isn't any more—"

"Why waste time?" roared Blake. "Come on, you chaps, let's tip him up! We'll soon have the rest of it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Biff! Crash!

"Whoooooop!"

Baggy Trimble went to the floor, with the chums of Study No. 6 falling over him. And within a minute a further sum of six pounds and some odd shillings was dragged out of him.

"Over fifteen quid!" said Blake breathlessly. "He's probably got some more hidden away somewhere—"

"I haven't!" shouted Trimble desperately.

His disclaimer was so vehement that Tom Merry knew that this, at least, was a truthful statement.

"How much did you have altogether, Trimble?" he demanded.

"Five pounds yesterday and fourteen to-day," breathed Trimble.

"Well, I think that's the truth," said Tom. "We know he couldn't have spent any to-day, because we collared him too soon. He spent over three on that feed yesterday, and that accounts for practically all of it. How much is there exactly, Blake?"

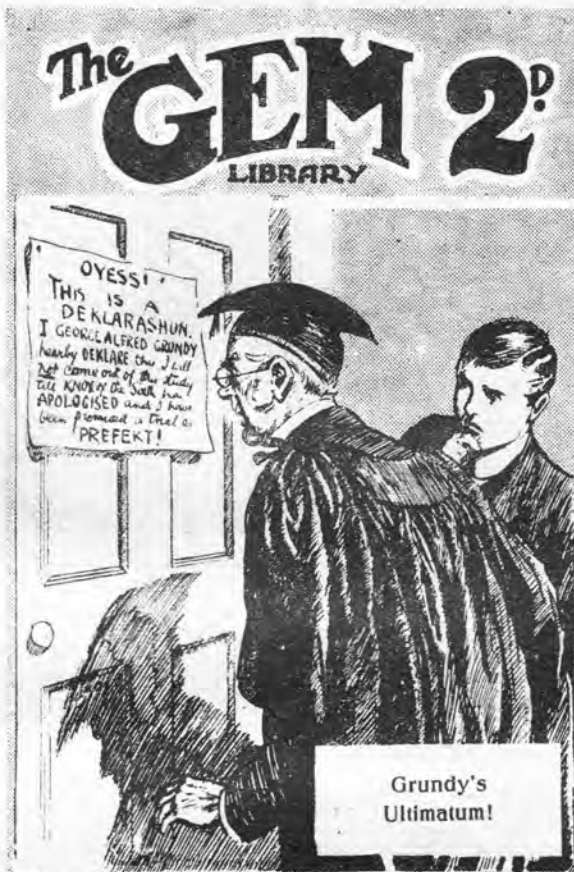
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"Fifteen pounds nine shillings."

"Three pounds eleven to make up," said Tom Merry nodding. "Naturally, this money's got to be returned."

"To the senders?" asked Blake.

"No, to Mrs. Flagg," replied the captain of the Shell. "It was contributed in good faith, and we'll see that it goes to the proper quarter. We won't ask Trimble who he wrote to. We'd better not know."

"But how are we going to tell Mrs. Flagg?" asked Blake dubiously.

"Leave that to me," replied Tom. "Now, I happened to have a fat tip from Miss Priscilla this morning, and I can manage thirty bob. Is there anybody else with cash in this room?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I can contribute a pound, deah boy."

"An' I'll make up the rest," said Cardew. "It strikes me I'm gettin' stung the worst of all, but as it's in a thoroughly good cause, why should I grumble?"

"It's a bit thick, you chaps having to pay for that feed Trimble treated us to yesterday!" growled Blake.

"I—I meant to give the money to Mrs. Flagg all the time—" began Trimble.

"Shut up, you!" roared Blake.

Tom Merry put all the money into his pocket.

"We'll go down to the village at once," he said. "Come on, Manners—come on, Monty! Can we trust you other chaps to give Trimble the bumping of his life?"

"You can!" replied Blake promptly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Baggy Trimble crumpled up.

"Lemme go!" he shrieked. "Yow! Yaroooooh!"

The Terrible Three escaped from the painful scene. They heard a few scuffles, a thud, and then Baggy's voice was smothered. They went on their way, without any com-

punction in their hearts. It was almost an hour before they returned.

They found Blake & Co. waiting in the quad.

"Well?" asked four voices.

"It's all right—she took it," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, but how the thump did you explain?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I have been wondewin' that myself," put in D'Arcy. "As a fellow of tact an' judgment, I wathah think I should have gone."

"Oh, cut it out, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"She was upset at first, of course," said Tom Merry.

"We explained that one of our chaps had started a sort of fund—we didn't exactly explain that he had intended the fund for himself. Anyhow, we made her thoroughly understand that the money was for her, and we said that there might be one or two other letters trickling in with cash."

"She didn't refuse to accept it, then?"

"She did at first, but we promised her that the matter would never become public, and that our chaps had sent the cash in the very best spirit," said Tom Merry. "We asked her to keep it, so that she could carry on nicely until her husband comes out of the hospital. It needed some wangling, but we succeeded."

"And where's Trimble?" asked Lowther.

"Don't ask!" replied Blake. "I believe he's gone to bed, as a matter of fact. Anyhow, you can take it from me that there isn't a bone in his body that doesn't ache, and not an inch of his fat skin that isn't sore. He's had a few hidings in his time, but this one makes all the others look like harmless spankings."

And the Terrible Three were satisfied. Whether Baggy Trimble was satisfied was quite another matter!

THE END.

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Father and Son!

"NONSENSE!" laughed Harry, with his customary cheery optimism. "It's nerves, old man! Let us ask the Hokahula."

The question was put through Muta, and answered.

Their guide pooh-poohed the suggestion. "All safe!" he cried. "Hokahula hunters and raiders never wander far from the city of Barcoomba without reason."

And when they emerged into the open again, with the country stretched like a map around them, though they used their powerful glasses and examined it carefully, they could find no trace of a lurking enemy. Yet those sounds Adam was positive he had heard kept pace with them.

Adam concluded that Harry was right—that his highly-strung nerves and acutely-tuned senses had played him false.

They passed into the forest land again, making fast progress, every member of the party being as hard as iron now.

Towards midday they decided to rest, and it was while they were selecting the place that things happened with startling and devastating suddenness.

"This will suit us to a T! We shall have a rock at the back of us, and can easily defend the position if an attack is made," said Adam, pointing.

Jimmy had put the machine-gun down, was preparing to set it in position. They had their firearms ready, and yet they had not a ghost of a chance of using them.

In a flash a hundred or more stalwart warriors, whose skins were of a brown-and-white, leapt out of the grass, where they had been lurking in ambush, sprang from behind trees and bushes, leapt down from the rocky wall Adam had referred to, and, moving with the speed of lightning, had seized and overwhelmed them as quickly as it takes to write a line.

Del Rivo, quick with his gun, had whipped his revolver out and raised it; yet before his finger could even pull the trigger he was on his back, pinned to the ground by a man whose strength was twice his own.

"Lumme!" yelled Jimmy Brown, as he tried to swing the machine-gun round.

Even Muta, swift as the eagle, crafty as the fox, was overwhelmed by three or four of the Hokahulas.

Their guide was tumbled over and pinioned in a second.

"Trapped like a lot of fools!" cried Harry, as he tried to struggle from the grip of the warrior who had pinned him down.

Then more of the warriors came—dozens of them—great giants of men, strangely marked, all armed with spears and jerrying bows and arrows slung across their backs.

Brandishing their spears, whose broad, flat, finely-pointed blades flashed in the sunshine, they aimed them at the hearts of their prisoners.

Then Muta, showing prodigious strength, and struggling up, with his captors hanging on to him like limpets, roared in the Hokahula tongue:

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"Dogs of Hokahulas! Take your hands from the black god, son of the Queen O-Kama. Release the white gods whose lives are sacred. Bow down to him who wears the sacred charm Oyorara upon his breast! Kill not the man of your race who has led us hither, lest famine and pestilence shall destroy our people. Whow! I have said it!"

And as they stared at him in awe, lowering their spears and eyeing him in silent wonder, Muta burst the bonds with which his captors had bound him and hurled the giant warriors who stood near by to left and right.

With a blow of his clenched fist, he knocked senseless the towering Hokahula who had lifted Adam from the ground and gripped him by the arm.

The attack on the guard caused the others to murmur. They raised their spears at Muta, who laughed.

Muta's hands tore at Adam's shirt, burst it open, so that the flashing charm he wore glittered in the blinding sunlight.

"Behold!" he cried. "See! He is the son of the great white god who has been made King of the Hokahulas; he is the brother of she whom your chief Beeda would marry. He came to us out of the air, and when the call comes he will leave the kingdom of the Hokahulas by way of the air. Whow! I have spoken!"

They looked. Uttering strange cries of wonderment, they moved forward, and when they saw the charm that Adam wore, they prostrated themselves on the dust, bowing their foreheads to the ground and spreading the flat of their hands upon the soil.

Now the prisoners were released.

Adam, to his amazement, found himself master of the situation.

The guide who had brought them was released and made much of.

Was it the white gods' desire to reach the city of Barcoomba, they were asked. And, upon Adam's answering, "Yes," roughly made chairs were swiftly fashioned out of the boughs of trees and fitted with stakes so that they could be carried. These were astonishingly comfortable, the adventurers discovered. The preparations completed, the party got into them and, borne aloft on the shoulders of the skewbald giants, were carried in triumph to the city of Barcoomba, which they reached an hour before the day closed.

Bearers carried their luggage, including the machine-gun and all their supplies.

Runners sped ahead with the great news. Between each member of the party and his bearers marched in close order a detachment of the Hokahulas, with spears carried at the same angle, their bows and arrows slung with singular uniformity, so that they were almost as well drilled as the English Guards.

They moved onward to the sound of weird, horned instruments and the chanting of strange songs.

Sandy McTavish, smoking a pipe, to the amazement and awe of the strangely-coloured men, lolled back at his ease, smilingly enjoying the treat.

Jimmy Brown took his triumph less modestly, issuing orders to the men who bore him that they did not understand.

"You're joltin' the bloomin' bus, yer mottled heathens!" Jimmy would shout. "Just go a bit easier!"

Del Rivo merely scowled, wondering maybe what awaited them at the end. Harry was philosophically content. No harm had come to them yet. If they could lay hands upon their machine-gun again they would have the situation in their hands.

And at long last they could see the thatched roofs of many great huts, tier upon tier, among the trees, an impressive sight even to those who had seen the greatest cities of the world, loom up ahead of them.

They entered the city of Barcoomba amid clouds of dust occasioned by the feet of the marching warriors, to find the streets lined by an immense crowd of women and children, all brown-and-white or black-and-white.

And then at last, in an open space, standing upon a raised dais or rostrum, Adam saw a bearded man, who wore spectacles, and whose robe of many hues singled him out as a great personality.

For an instant Adam looked, unbelieving; then, swinging himself out of his chair, he ran with the speed of the wind, with none attempting to stop him, to where the bearded man stood grave and motionless.

One more glance at close range, and Adam knew! His journey had reached its end. The miracle had happened—he had found his father—alive!

"Dad! Dad! Oh, dad!" he cried, as he hurled his arms round the professor. "Don't you know me? It's Adam—your son! Your message reached us over the wireless in England! So I came, and—and—"

The bearded professor blinked, looked at Adam, clutched him in close embrace, held him away again, and then, with a curious little smile, said:

"Why, God bless me, yes, so it is! My son Adam!" Just for all the world as if they had been parted only a school term, or had met casually in Bond Street!

And around them every man, and woman, and child, with their head bowed in the dust, Adam saw the Hokahulas prostrate in worship.

In a Whirl of Trouble!

AS Adam backed out of his father's arms and stared in amazement at the prostrate Hokahulas, a cloud that looked little larger than a hand drifted from the face of the sun whose radiance illuminated the scene with magic gold.

For a long minute the men remained prostrate. Then the professor, raising his hand and uttering a command in the native tongue, brought them to their feet again.

Adam now studied his father from head to foot. The robe the professor wore was of many colours and of native weaving. It shone resplendent in the sunshine. Upon his head was a strange-looking cap or crown made of skin and ornamented with uncut jewels and pieces of polished metal. His feet were encased in skin shoes, roughly made, and as Adam's eyes strayed to them the professor said in a tone of apology:

"My boy, the hand of the unskilled has no cunning. Now, were I a Northampton bootmaker I could have made a better job of it. Still, one cannot do everything. How's your dear mother?"

Adam smiled at the matter-of-fact tone.

"She was well and happy when I left her, save for anxiety as to what might happen to you and Rosa, dad," answered the boy. "How is sis?"

The professor's eyes blurred for one brief moment.

"Bless her dear heart!" he said feelingly. "Your mother will give us a right royal welcome when we come back to Studley, Adam. Er—er—your sister Rosa." Here his eyes wandered round a group of men with horned caps and quaint robes who stood near them. "Your sister is dangerously ill, Adam. I am afraid she—is dying—"

Adam fell back a pace, uttering a low cry. His eyes, dilated with horror, sought his father's, and, as the professor turned towards his son, Adam saw him draw down an eyelid, which dropped and lifted again with the rapidity of a camera shutter.

The professor, advancing a step, laid a hand upon Adam's shoulder, then broke into a long and monotonous burst of Hokahulese. What he was saying Adam knew not, but he saw the horned priests—Adam supposed that they were priests—bobbing their heads; heard Muta, who seemed to understand, utter loud lamentation.

Suddenly the professor changed from the Hokahula tongue to low and rapid English, stringing the words together so quickly that Adam had difficulty in following him.

"The chieftain of the Hokahula tribe—the man Beeda—would marry Rosa. An honour, no doubt. But—er—my dear boy, it—er—isn't done. Therefore your sister is suffering from fever—feigned. An attempt to stave off the evil hour. I have usurped the position of king to try and keep this mixed skin tribe in order—but matters were becoming desperate—the fabric wearing—er—pretty—thin, when you so opportunely arrived, my dear boy. Now we have respite. With a slice of luck we may win through. You have, I trust, brought arms with you?"

"A machine-gun and heaps of ammunition," smiled Adam, "but the bulk of our supplies lie back by the Silver Glacier."

"That amazing field of snow and ice," laughed the professor. "Well, well, there are quite a band of us now. With firearms to help us we ought to be able to make good our escape—if the worst comes to the worst. If only we can secure a man to guide us to the waterfall—the rest would be easy."

He turned, and throwing wide his arms, addressed the assembled crowd of natives, who, pressing near, answered with a mighty shout.

Never had Adam witnessed such a scene.

As the shouting died away and the crowd drew back Del Rivo advanced, smiling.

"Well met after all these years, professor!" he cried, extending his hand.

Adam watched his father intently. How would he receive the Portuguese?

"Julian, my dear fellow!" beamed the professor, as he clasped hands cordially. "This is indeed a great pleasure! The world is small. I had never expected to see you again; but you look well, my dear friend."

Then he swung round to embrace Harry Franklin. "Harry, my dear, dear boy!" he cried. "How you have grown! You gave promise of developing into a splendid man—and the promise is fulfilled."

Harry took the professor's hand in both of his. "It is splendid to find you so well, sir," he returned. "But I thought you said Rosa was—ill." Harry's fine, bronzed, boyish face became drawn with anxiety.

"Rosa is in point of fact well," whispered the professor in Harry's ear. "She has thrived amazingly—the most beautiful girl I have ever seen—more beautiful by far than even her mother was at her age. But you shall see and judge for yourself later."

Whilst Byrne was speaking Del Rivo had stepped up close. Adam, not wanting him to overhear, now pushed between, pulled his father out of the way, and pointing to a white rag that fluttered at the top of a stripped tree or pole that reared its pointed top eighty feet or more above the ground, asked what it was.

The pole was set up on a raised mound in the clearing so that it stood out clear from its surroundings. At the end of a road of cutting lined by tall, growing trees, Adam caught sight of a figure of gigantic proportions which seemed to sit enthroned—a mighty figure of stone. But it was the pole upon the top of which the white rag fluttered and not the image which intrigued him at the moment.

"That is a flag, my boy," said the professor. "From the moment the Hokahulas brought us here I have planned and schemed to escape with my dear girl. And I had that pole

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his three companions, HARRY FRANKLIN, SANDY McTAVISH and JIMMY BROWN, set out in search of Adam's father, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, who, together with his daughter ROSA, left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, and both of whom are now prisoners in the hands of a strange people at Barcoomba, which lies north of the Silver Glacier and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest. Soon after leaving Baruda for the interior, the adventurers, aided by MUTA, a native friend of Adam's, rescue from a horde of hostile natives JULIAN DEL RIVO, a Portuguese, who on claiming

to be a friend of Adam's father is allowed to join up with the party. Resuming their journey they fall in with a tribe of friendly pigmies, who lead them across the great icefields. Later they discover, tied to a post and dying with exposure, KYHTE, a native of the Hokahula tribe, who bears a written message from Professor Byrne. On regaining consciousness, Kyhte directs the party to the secret gateway of his native land where the professor is held captive.

The white men are moving in single file through the wooded country when Adam informs his chums that he has a feeling they are being spied upon.

(Now read on.)

set up so that it might be seen by any adventurer or explorer who might happen to penetrate into this unknown land. Small though the flag is it can be seen for miles on a clear day by anyone traversing the heights yonder."

Beyond the point of the professor's indicating finger Adam saw hills sloping up to meet the sky—mighty hills that ranged, he supposed, to the base of the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

Studying the fluttering rag, Adam said, with a smile: "I see you have literally nailed your colours to the mast, dad."

"It is the only shirt I had with me when I came," the professor explained. "Of what use is a single shirt to any man, Adam? When they provided me with garments I had that tree stripped and shaped, nailed the shirt hard to it with wooden pegs, and there the remains flutter now. Alas they have lost their usefulness—through time, storm, and sun."

"We will replace it with the Union Jack, dad," laughed Adam. "I have brought a mighty flag with me, and cleats and ropes and all. We'll have that pole down, rig it as a mast, and fly the greatest flag in all the world in the City of Barcoomba."

Now there came a sudden and violent commotion behind them. Turning, they saw the Hokahula, Kyhte, their guide and friend, with his hands tied behind him, being hauled towards the rostrum by two giant warriors.

In front of Kyhte and behind him stalked horned priests in strange garb, all solemnly chanting. The people followed in their wake.

Beside the unfortunate prisoner marched a brown and white skinned native, who must have stood at least seven feet high, whose body was draped in a magnificent skin, and who bore upon his shoulder an axe with a blade shaped almost square.

Kyhte was flung down at the professor's feet. Then began a fierce and lengthy parley, during which the horned priests spoke stiffly, haughtily.

The professor at last turned to Adam. His face was troubled.

"My son," he said, "the law of the Hokahulas decrees and deals death to any man who leaves the confines of the kingdom without leave. This man who was left to die of cold on the Silver Glacier has forfeited his life. They are about to execute him. And he was my messenger. I am afraid that even my influence will not serve to save him."

"But I can save him, dad!" almost shouted Adam. With a spring he hurled the horned priests aside, and pushed the giant executioner back upon his heels, even as he was about to swing the broad and heavy blade of his axe high above the bared neck of the kneeling prisoner.

"Muta, tell them!" Adam shouted, whilst the people screamed in horror at what they regarded as a sacrilege. "You speak their tongue. We must save this man—and if the charm Oyorara will not work and death threatens us—then I'll call on Jimmy Brown and Sandy to try what the machine-gun can do."

Muta had followed the procession on to the rostrum, anxious to intercede on Kyhte's behalf, but wanting a lead.

He had been standing all this while beside Sandy and Jimmy Brown, who had rigged up the machine-gun upon its tripod legs and stood ready for action.

The executioner, at a word from the priests, stepped forward again, once more raising his axe to strike.

"Knock him down, Mutt!" ordered Adam.

And then the great, huge-bodied black startled the Hokahulas—men, women, children, priests, and all—by swinging his clenched fist to the jaw of the executioner. The blow landing with crushing effect sent him flying on to the broad of his back with such force as to shake the rostrum. Down clattered the great axe with a clang.

And Muta, swinging wide his arms, roared in his deep, huge voice in the tongue of the people:

"Strike not the man Kyhte! His life is sacred! I, Muta, son of the witch and Queen O-Kama, say it! I am the descendant of the black god, father of Our People!"

The priests stared at him aghast—then advanced threateningly.

"The man is evil!" said one of them. "He lies! The Queen O-Kama whose life was forfeit died many moons ago. Do not believe him!"

Muta whirled his arms, caught up Kyhte, and tore him from the hands of the men who held the ropes that tethered him.

Then he caught Adam by the wrist and drew him forward.

"Open your dress—oh, white flyer—and show them the charm Oyorara!" he cried.

Adam tore his shirt wide open—slipped his arms out of the sleeves, so that the flashing charm so miraculously wrought could be seen by all as it flashed and sparkled in the sun.

Seizing the string of sapphires by which it hung suspended about his neck, Adam pulled it over his head and gave it into Muta's hand.

With a broad grin, the huge black swung Adam on to his shoulder and sat him there as if he were a child.

Then, raising high his right hand, the dangling charm held safely in it, he roared:

"The Black God and the White God of the Hokahulas have returned to the people, as it was foretold long ago. The Charm Oyorara, which gives peace and plenty and freedom from plague and sickness, has been restored to the Hokahulas. Kyhte, the wanderer, whose life was spared on the land of the cold death so that he might lead us to the City of Barcoomba, should be honoured by his people. If he dies—so will he who kills him die upon the instant, stricken down by the death-tube that barks. And famine and pestilence and darkness will fall upon the land."

The professor, stepping up to Adam, cried:

"My son, this fellow tells the tale well—though I know not how he learnt the language. If only one could perform a miracle to impress them now, all might be well—though I fear the priests—"

The horned priests had gathered in a sullen and anxious group.

Obviously they were afraid. The bulk of the people remained motionless, utterly taken aback by the sight of the glittering charm and the bellowing of the black man who spoke their tongue and told his story with the fluency of his mother.

And now a bird like a giant crow came flying slowly above the heads of the people.

As it drew near, Adam, struck by an inspiration whipped out his revolver. The great bird made an easy mark. Better kill a bird and impress the Hokahulas, than run the risk of massacre, thought Adam. Such a chance of impressing the natives might never occur again.

So, with a swift fling of his arm as he sat on Muta's shoulder, Adam drew the revolver he carried and shot the bird down dead.

As the report echoed loudly, the powder spat, and the bullet sped true to its mark, so the bird dropped heavily down upon the rostrum.

A cry of horror rang through the crowd.

With one accord they turned and fled, whilst Muta, setting Adam on his feet, saw the horned priests, arrogant no longer, bow their knees in worship of the wonderful charm.

"I think that's done it, dad!" laughed Adam, swinging round to glance at his father.

The professor stood rigid, pulling at his chin a little anxiously, Adam thought.

"You speak with some knowledge, Adam, my son," he said. "That may in very truth have done it. The bird you have shot is one of the sacred birds of the temple. It means death to lay a finger on one of them. I opine that it might have been better for us had we permitted that unlucky messenger to die—though, of course, one could not do that. Well, well; the deed is done. It's a mercy that black fellow has strength and wit—Dear, dear!" And he blinked down at the lifeless carcass of the great black bird. "To have shot an Oomba bird! It means a peck of trouble for us, I am afraid—and it may even cost us our lives!"

Adam, staring at him askance, forced a feeble smile.

"Oh, my grandfather's hat!" he cried.

The Professor's Story!

PROFESSOR GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE lived in a great palace made out of mud and twigs cleverly moulded and sun-dried by the Hokahulas, with heavy roof of thatch, and a series of apartments of large size, light and airy, after the manner of a great bungalow. Professor Byrne had designed it, superintended its construction, and was proud of the result.

The house, by far the largest and the finest in Barcoomba, stood in a clearing upon rising ground, and substantial defences of stakes and rushes—an impenetrable and unclimbable palisade—protected it from behind. In front it commanded a view of the town.

The servants' quarters were set apart from the big house or bungalow, and there a crowd of Hokahula females

cooked and attended to the needs of their king, whilst armed guards were stationed on point duty in the outer grounds from darkness to dawn.

The "palace," as the professor called it, contained many rooms, and after the adventurers had eaten and washed and drank their fill of the native beer—so Byrne called it—which was brought to them in great, cooling earthenware jars of crude design, they made a tour of the great, rangy building.

Adam's father apportioned a room to each of them; that nearest to him to Adam, the one next to it to Harry, Jimmy Brown—who listened in awe to everything, and went about with eyes popping half out of his head, bewildered and astounded at it all—and Sandy McTavish being given rooms near by.

Another apartment was set aside for their stores. Julian del Rivo was given accommodation at the rear of the palace in a fine, cool room that looked on to the open ground behind and the palisade. He grumbled at not being near his old friend the professor, but he had to put up with it.

Muta, the Black God of the Hokahulas, was housed in a room next to the largest apartment in the house—a great, vaulted room that took up the whole centre of the bungalow and was called the audience-chamber—whilst the rescued Hokahula, Kyhte, had a small room next to it.

Whilst they ate and talked a great and curious crowd gathered at a distance and watched, though none of the Hokahulas dared come nearer to the palace.

They spoke about many things—of home, of their journey, of the finding of Muta, of the death of O-Kama, of the rescue of Del Rivo, of the meeting with the pigmies, and of the last stages of their journey over the snow. The professor, for his part, touched lightly upon his adventures since he had been brought a prisoner, with his daughter, to the city of Barcoomba.

"It must have been the most amazing thing, Adam, my son," he declared; "for, by all the odds, I ought to have been a dead man long ago! I had been exploring and big-game hunting. I had wandered where no other white man had ever trod. Del Rivo here"—and the professor indicated the stolid Portuguese—"is the only other man I know who had up to that time penetrated as far as I had into the wilds. I had amassed great treasure of skins and trophies, and was thinking of retracing my steps. My loyal train of bearers and guides were encamped around me, when of a sudden, and without warning, an attack was made and my party was overwhelmed.

"I do not know to this day how it was I managed to save myself and Rosa. I used firearms upon mortal man"—here Adam's father shuddered—"for the first time in my life, I believe, and slew two or more of our assailants; and then, abandoning the scene of the massacre, I took Rosa with me, and we fled into the forest. It was a most unlucky affair, for it had been arranged that Del Rivo here, who had explored in a different direction, should rejoin my party within forty-eight hours at the spot where we had camped, and where we were to have made our way back to Baruda together."

Adam looked hard at Del Rivo. The Portuguese was smiling grimly.

"I returned to the appointed place to the minute, sir," he said, "to find the charred remains of your tents and the dead bodies of your natives lying stark in the burning sun. Thinking that you were dead, and feeling that the neighbourhood was dangerous, I fled—and you can scarcely blame me."

"No, no—of course not! You were wise," said the professor. Then he resumed his story:

"Rosa and I lived on herbage and such fruits as we could find. We spent the nights in the trees. But, finally, prostrated by fatigue and hunger, we laid ourselves down to die. And it was then that the blessed miracle happened. A party of prowling Hokahulas, sent out from their kingdom by the high priests and their chieftain, Beeda, to search for the wandering Queen O-Kama, came upon us, and, struck by our white skins, instead of killing us, bore us back to their own land, where I soon found myself worshipped by the strangest race of people I have ever seen."

"Adam, my boy, there are compensations to be found in almost everything, everywhere. I found the worship—or something to my nerves; and need I tell you that it did not take me long to gain a mastery over their tongue and to make the most of the situation. Soon after I sent forth my third letter—the one, no doubt, that reached civilisation and was broadcast to you at Studley—they crowned me king, Beeda voluntarily abdicating that proud position in my favour."

Professor George Willis Byrne, leaning forward eagerly, became serious now:

"But when this man Beeda—an estimable, if an ignorant native—conceived a passion for your sister Rosa, and in-

formed me through the high priest that he wished to make her his wife, things became—er—complicated, not to—er—say difficult. I foresaw a tragic and inevitable end to our sojourn here, unless we could contrive to escape from Barcoomba.

"By one pretext and then another I contrived to gain time—to hold off Beeda, to maintain my ascendancy over the priests and the people; yet I knew that an end must come some day. A week ago a party of raiders sent in pursuit of Kyhte, my last devoted messenger, returned to say that they had left the poor fellow to die in the snow."

"The priests enlarged upon my sending forth these messengers in defiance of the laws of the people, and tried to force my hand. Beeda became insistent. He would marry Rosa, he said. It was then I gave forth that she was sick nigh unto death; that only rest and the medicines I alone could concoct could save her. For days she has been confined to a small outhouse or hut—which I have since named the isolation hospital, for want of a better name, and where a friend of mine and I keep daily and nightly vigil." He sighed wearily. "What with the cares of State, my dear boy, and this constant watching, I must confess that my nerves were becoming frayed. Then you arrived, and the situation is now completely changed. Rosa is safe—"

Del Rivo, leaning eagerly forward, smiled.

"Professor," he said, "are you so sure? Remember, there are only a few of us, and there must be thousands of these Hokahulas."

"There are many thousands of them."

"Very well. Your machine-gun and your weapons may kill a few, if it ever comes to a fight; but these Hokahula warriors, who are like the pebbles on the beach, would sweep you off the earth, machine-guns or no machine-guns!"

He spoke with a sneering smile curving his lips. His manner, as always, seemed hostile. Adam felt his dislike of the fellow increase, if it were possible.

"Supposing it did come to a fight, Del Rivo? What is it you would want to do? Would you stand by us, or throw in your lot with the Hokahulas?" he asked.

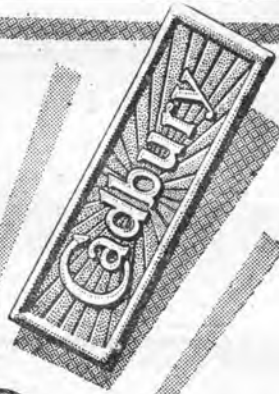
Del Rivo stared at Adam reproachfully.

"You hurt me deeply," he returned. "I am only looking at the possibilities, that is all."

"And meanwhile," said Adam hotly, "we have Kyhte, the guide, to lead us back to the waterfall—and the way of

(Continued overleaf.)

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escape, lies open to us. At the very first favourable opportunity we will take it."

They talked for long after that; and at last, towards evening, the professor said, having issued orders that had dispersed the curious and waiting crowd:

"And now, Adam, since you wish to see Rosa, let us go to the isolation hospital."

Adam told Jimmy Brown and Sandy McTavish to stay on guard at the palace.

The little Cockney, with a grin upon his tanned face that stretched from ear to ear, patted affectionately the machine-gun which he had set up to command the approach to the palace.

"Here I stand, sir," he cried, "with my little barker, till you tell me to come off dooty! And if there's any Hukihudi tries to put over any funny stuff, I'm the boy to riddle 'im like a bloomin' sieve!"

They left him there with Sandy McTavish, seated upon the front doorstep and smoking a pipe in deep content.

Through the rush-walled corridors of the professor's palace they made their way into the open, and at a distance, standing in absolute isolation, in such a position that nobody could approach it without being seen, was the hospital—a smallish building built on the same lines and of the same materials as the palace itself.

They had walked half-way across the clearing, when Adam, hearing a step behind him, turned to find Del Rivo on their heels.

The Portuguese, whose spirits had soared since they had come safely into Barcoomba, was smiling.

"If you will excuse us, Del Rivo," said Adam harshly, "this is a family matter. It concerns only my father and I and my friend Harry here."

Del Rivo, waving his hand gaily, still walked beside them.

"That I understand," he said. "I have no wish to intrude. But surely there is no objection to my taking the air in the palace grounds?" He spoke derisively. "Besides, I have met Miss Byrne many times, as your father will tell you. We are not strangers."

Adam said no more. He did not want to quarrel with the man.

As they reached the isolation hospital a figure rose to face them.

Until he showed himself, Adam had not the slightest suspicion that a man was waiting on guard beside the hut, and he stared at the fellow in blank amazement. The man was white. He wore knee-boots, which had been patched and mended again and again, the leather being all scraped and torn by thorns and twigs and being exposed to all weathers, without the means to properly polish them. Patched and discoloured knickers and a frayed shirt completed his garb. His hair was long and matted, and he had an immense black beard.

A curious-looking man he was, with a nose like a hawk and eyes deep-sunken in their sockets—small, glittering eyes that shifted restlessly and cunningly. In spite of beard and long, tangled hair, the nose and the strange eyes would have betrayed him anywhere. Once one had seen the face, he would never be able to forget it, and there was a man who recognised him instantly.

"By heavens! The man Symes!" howled Del Rivo, standing in a tense attitude, with fists clenched as if to strike and eyes that blazed with fury.

The startled stranger leapt back at the sound of the voice and the words of recognition. His jaw dropped; his eyes narrowed as if in fear. He raised his right arm to protect himself.

"Julian Del Rivo—alive!" he snarled.

Adam watched them both in amazement. It occurred to him as he watched—an odd thought—that they were afraid of each other.

But the Portuguese, an arrogant bully, was master of the situation.

After the first moment of surprise, he stepped forward, seized the man he called Symes by the shoulder, dragged him close, and gripped his hand so fiercely that the fellow cried aloud.

"Old friend—old friend!" he exclaimed. "The world is small! So we meet again! It is well. It must have been a miracle that brought me here!"

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