

"THE VALLEY OF FORTUNE!" Full o' Thrills
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THE GEM 2d



THE MIDNIGHT
PROWLER

featured in "UNDER
TRIMBLE'S
THUMB!"

SENSATIONS? RATHER! THRILLS? YOU BET! HUMOUR? NOT HALF!

Under Trimble's Thumb!

by MARTIN CLIFFORD

Baggy Trimble hasn't got two ha'pennies for a penny—until he stumbles upon some fellow's shady secret. Then, all of a sudden, he finds himself rolling in money, and landed into the adventure of his fat life!

CHAPTER 1.

Figgy Means Business!

GEORGE FIGGINS of the Fourth marched down the steps of the New House at St. Jim's with a very grim expression on his rugged face.

In the quad, Figgy turned in the direction of the School House, and marched across towards the School House steps with resolute strides. It was just after dinner on a Saturday afternoon, and the quad was crowded. But Figgy marched through the crowds, looking neither to right nor left of him.

"Hi! Figgy—"

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, hailed Figgins as he strode by. But Figgins did not seem to hear. He

marched on, up the School House steps, and vanished into the big doorway, leaving Tom Merry staring after him.

"What on earth's up with Figgy?" ejaculated Tom to his two chums, Monty Lowther and Harry Manners. "Talk about a blessed brown study—"

"I say, Figgy—"

In the School House entrance-hall, Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, addressed Figgins eagerly as the leader of the New House juniors marched towards the stairs.

Baggy, the fattest junior at St. Jim's, had intended to ask Figgy to lend him a bob. But Figgins did not, obviously, either see or hear Baggy. He strode on up the stairs with that grim, resolute expression still on his face, leaving Baggy in the middle of his sentence.

Baggy stared after him blankly.

As Figgins strode up the stairs, he met Herries and Digby of the Fourth coming down. Herries and Digby halted.

"Hallo, hallo!" grinned Herries. "What's the New House doing here? Come to collect the old jam-jars, do you think, Dig?"

As a general rule, Figgins would have retorted warmly enough to that humorous remark coming from a School House fellow. But on this occasion Figgy did not even seem to hear it. He strode on up the stairs, past Herries and Dig, without even glancing at them.

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Digby, in astonishment. "What's the matter with old Figgy?"

But there was no one to answer that question. Figgins had already vanished up the stairs.

He turned into the Shell passage and marched along it. The size of Figgy's boots was by no means small, and his tramping feet fairly woke the echoes.

But at last Figgins came to a halt outside the door of study No. 7. He crashed a fist upon it.

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"Come in!"

Figgins flung open the door of Study No. 7 and marched in.

"What the dickens—"

There was a sharp exclamation within the study at sight of the rugged figure of George Figgins. Figgins closed the door behind him and put his back to it.

Both the occupants of Study No. 7 were at home.

Gerald Croke, the burly cad of the Shell, was sitting by the fire. Aubrey Racke, who combined the qualities of dandy and black sheep to an almost equal degree, was standing before a mirror, adjusting his tie to his satisfaction. His jaw seemed to drop a trifle as he stared at Figgins.

Racke was looking a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. His immaculate trousers were creased to a knife-edge that even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, could scarcely have bettered. White spats adorned his feet, and a glossy topper graced his sleekly brushed head. A silver-headed stick and the yellowest of yellow gloves lay on the table beside him.

It was clear that Aubrey Racke intended to go out.

He had been smirking with great satisfaction at his reflection in the mirror when Figgins had entered the room.

—IN THIS FULL-OF-ACTION TALE OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

But now the smirk had died away abruptly, and his elegant figure seemed suddenly to sag.

Evidently the sight of George Figgins had come as rather an unpleasant surprise to the black sheep of the Shell!

"What—what do you want?" demanded Racke.

"I want you!" said Figgins tersely.

An uneasy light flashed into Racke's eyes; his thin face took on a twisted smile.

"Oh!" He moved a few steps from the mirror. Whether by accident or design, he now placed the table between himself and his visitor. "What do you mean? I—"

"You know jolly well what I mean!" snapped Figgins.



Racke's uneasiness was clearly increasing every moment. But when he spoke again his tone was loud and blustering.

"Look here, I don't know what you're talking about!" he answered truculently. "If you can't be civil, you'd better get out! See? Clear off! I don't know what you want here, and I'm hanged if I want to know. Get out!"

"When I've finished!"

"What do you mean—finished?"

"Finished talking, I mean," said Figgy tersely. "If so, I'll begin."

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Certainly, I'll look," nodded Figgins. His eyes ran up and down Racke's uneasy figure very coolly. "Now I've looked, I still can't make up my mind which you look more like—a crawling worm, or a maggot out of a cheese, or a blessed tailor's dummy!"

Racke went scarlet.

"Look here," he began again blusteringly, "I'm hanged if I'll stand here to be insulted—"

"You'll have to sit down to it, then," suggested Figgins.

"Look here—"

"I've finished looking, and I'm going to talk instead," said Figgins grimly. "About Miss Cleveland!"

Though he tried to look surprised, it was obvious enough that Racke had known all the time that that was what Figgins had come to talk about. But he did his best to look really astonished.

"Miss Cleveland?" he echoed. "Ethel?"

"Miss Cleveland to you!" said Figgins, in a dangerous tone. "I've come to warn you to keep off the grass, Racke—"

"What on earth do you mean?"

But Aubrey Racke knew very well what Figgins meant.

Ethel Cleveland, the pretty cousin of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, was in the Fifth Form at Spalding

Hall, a school for girls near Wayland. She was very friendly with a number of the St. Jim's juniors; but George Figgins, with his rugged face and lanky figure and his blunt, honest ways, attracted her, perhaps, more than anybody else she knew. At any rate, Ethel and Figgy were great chums.

But Aubrey Racke, too, had admired Cousin Ethel for a long time. He had had trouble with Figgins in the past over Ethel, for Figgins had no intention of letting a fellow of Racke's stamp have anything to do with his girl chum if he could help it. But on more than one occasion lately Racke had visited Spalding Hall, with the obvious intention of ingratiating himself with Ethel.

Ethel certainly had not taken any pains to conceal the fact that she had no wish for Racke's friendship—she knew Racke's reputation too well! But Racke could be very persistent when he liked, and he had declined to be snubbed. In fact, that very afternoon he had planned to go over to Spalding Hall in an attempt to induce Ethel to have tea with him in Wayland.

"What on earth do you mean, hang you?" repeated Racke, with glittering eyes.

"What I say!" snapped Figgins. "I'm warning you to keep off the grass, Racke. If you don't chuck pestering Ethel, you'll be very sorry for it. See? I thought I'd warn you."

A sneering smile appeared on Racke's unpleasant countenance.

"Thank you for nothing!" he snarled. "Who asked you to interfere?"

"As a matter of fact, Ethel did!" said Figgins, with heightening colour. "She told me that you had written to her to say that you would visit her this afternoon, and wanted her to have tea with you—although she had definitely asked you not to call to see her at Spalding Hall! I've come to tell you it'll be better for your health not to go this afternoon."

Though Figgins was keeping tight control of himself, his fists were clenched, and there was a steely gleam in his eyes which Aubrey Racke could not fail to notice.

"Indeed?" he sneered.

Figgins' eyes took in Racke's elegant attire, with a contemptuous look.

"I see you've dolled yourself up already for the occasion," he said quietly. "Afraid you've taken a good deal of trouble for nothing, Racke. Because you aren't going to visit Spalding Hall this afternoon—"

"Who's going to stop me?" snarled Racke savagely.

"Well, I might!"

Racke breathed hard.

He knew that Figgins was a fellow who always told the truth, and so he knew that it was quite true that Ethel had complained to George Figgins about his unwelcome attentions. But he did not choose to appear to believe.

"I can quite understand you don't want me to cut you out with Ethel," he said sneeringly. "But to come here and make up a lying story about Ethel not wanting to see me—"

"She's Miss Cleveland to you, you cad!"

Figgy's fists were tightly clenched, his face was red with wrath. But he still controlled himself.

When Ethel had told him of Racke's behaviour, Figgy had vowed to "knock Racke into the middle of next week!" But Ethel had begged him not to touch the black sheep of the Shell, and Figgy had more or less promised not to do so, for her sake. And Racke guessed that, and his courage returned.

He felt pretty safe from Figgins' hefty fists.

"I choose to call her Ethel!" he remarked coolly.

"You—you—"

With a grin, Racke picked up his gloves and stick.

"Get out of my way!" he said sharply. "I'm going out."

Figgins stayed with his broad back to the door. "Where do you think you're going?" he demanded between his teeth.

Racke tucked his cane under his arm and flicked a speck of dust from his sleeve.

"Mind your own business! Stand aside!"

He took a step towards the door. But Figgins stayed where he was, and Racke came to halt.

"Get out of my way!" he repeated blusteringly. "I tell you—"

"Think you're off to Spalding Hall?" grinned Figgins.

It was that grin that infuriated Racke, and caused his

eyes suddenly to flame. In his heart, he was madly jealous of Figgins; he would have given his ears for Figgy's place in Ethel Cleveland's regard.

"Yes!" he cried furiously. "I'm off to Spalding Hall, and you can make the best you can of that! Who are you to say who shall be Ethel's friends, hang you? You've tried to turn Ethel against me, I know, but—but—" He broke off, panting. "Get out of my way!"

Racke reached out a hand and grasped Figgins violently by the shoulder, in an attempt to drag him aside.

He might just have well tried to shift the Rock of Gibraltar.

Figgins knocked his hand contemptuously aside.

"I don't leave this study till you promise not to go near Spalding Hall this afternoon, Racke!"

Racke, beside himself with rage, seemed about to speak. But in his fury no words would come.

The next moment he had raised his walking-stick and struck Figgins a blow across the face.

"Take that, you cad!" he panted.

There was a startled cry from Gerald Crooke. Until now, Crooke had thought it wise to make himself as unobtrusive as possible. But now he sprang to his feet in alarm.

For a second or two Figgins stood perfectly silent, a red weal on his cheek showing where the cowardly blow had landed. His eyes were like cold points of steel. Racke fell back a step, frightened now at his own deed.

"I—I—" he began thickly.

He did not finish. Figgins took a sudden stride forward and snatched the silver-headed stick from the black sheep's hand. With a sharp splintering sound he snapped it across his knee, and tossed the broken halves into the fireplace.

Without a word, he began to peel off his coat. He tossed it on to a chair, turned for a moment to snap the key in the lock, and faced Racke again.

"Will you take off your coat?" inquired Figgins quietly. Racke licked his lips.

"No! I refuse to fight! Get out of this study!"

The next moment Figgy's clenched fist had landed on Racke's chin, and the black sheep of the Shell was lifted clean off his feet. He crashed on to the floor in a sprawling heap, taking a chair over with him, his hat flying.

In two seconds he was staggering to his feet, his face deathly white, his eyes blazing.

"You cad!" he almost sobbed. "Crooke—come on! We'll thrash him!"

He hurled himself blindly at Figgins, and Crooke, thrusting aside his chair, rushed to his aid, his fists clenched and his eyes gleaming.

Crash!

Again Figgins' left flashed out, straight from the shoulder. It took Crooke full in the mouth, and the burly Shell fellow went over like a sack of rubbish, and lay gasping in the corner of the room, his lower lip cut and bleeding.

He gave a dazed groan, and did not rise. Crooke had had enough already!

"Come on, you funk!" shrieked Racke.

But Crooke ignored his crows' appeal. And an instant later Racke staggered back before a smashing uppercut from Figgins' right.

After that blow in the face from Racke's cane, George Figgins felt very rightly that he was free now to give the black sheep the hiding of his life, despite Ethel's appeal to him to be lenient. And Racke was now in such a mad rage that he had forgotten his fear of the rugged leader of the New House.

Again he flung himself at Figgins.

A wildly-waving fist caught the Fourth-Former on the shoulder. But it was the last and only blow that Racke got anywhere near home. A smashing blow in the ribs caused him to reel; another blow took him in the mouth; a third in the eye. He tried blindly to strike back at Figgins' set, white face, where the red weal still showed plainly. But a terrific uppercut to the jaw lifted him clean off his feet again, and he toppled over backwards across the fallen chair, and landed in a heap on the floor in the opposite corner to Gerald Crooke.

And this time Racke did not rise.

He lay groaning and gasping, one eye half-closed, the other fixed on Figgins with an almost startling malevolence. Figgins glanced from one to the other of the precious pair.

A faint grin appeared on his lips.

"Had enough?" he inquired.

"Yes, hang you!" panted Racke.

"Good! Given up your little idea of visiting Spalding Hall this afternoon, or any other time, Racke?"

"Yes, hang you!" panted Racke.

"Sensible chap!"

Figgins picked up his coat and slipped it on in a leisurely way. He turned to the door and unlocked it.

Without another glance at Racke or Crooke, Figgy strode

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from the room, and tramped off along the passage, whistling cheerily.

In Study No. 7 Aubrey Racke limped painfully to his feet. Crooke followed his example. Racke turned on him.

"You funk!" he snarled. "Why didn't you help me?"

"I did," said Crooke sullenly. "But he knocked me silly!"

"You could have got up if you'd liked, hang you!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, dry up, you rotten funk!" Racke's own lip was bleeding now, and he, too, began dabbing with a handkerchief. "The hound! I—I'll make him suffer, though! I swear I'll make him suffer for this!"

"Better look out," muttered Crooke uneasily. "If you try anything against Figgins—"

"Oh, shut up, hang you!" snarled Racke. "I tell you I'm going to make him suffer!"

And in the voice of Aubrey Racke there was a malevolence that startled even Crooke!

CHAPTER 2.

Bad News!

"GREAT Scott!"

"Look at Racke!"

"My only hat! What a chivvy!"

Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth had just entered the quad through the big gateway, on their way back from Rylcombe, at tea-time. The chums of the Fourth had met Racke in the quad, and they halted and stared in astonishment.

Racke's face was certainly peculiar to look upon just then.

One eye was the colour of a rainbow, tightly closed; his nose the hue of a tomato, and considerably swollen into the bargain. His lips were swollen, too, and there was a dark bruise on his cheek.

It would be quite a long while before Aubrey Racke had got rid of those little souvenirs of his visit from George Figgins! And he was feeling very self-conscious about his appearance for the time being.

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

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle in his noble eye and surveyed Racke wonderingly.

"Bai Jove! Look at Wacke's chivvy!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's. "Whatevah have you been doin' to it, Wacke, deah boy? Arguin' with a steam-wollah, or boxin' with a steam-wagon?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. chuckled. Racke scowled at them.

"Oh, rats!" he snarled.

"Looks as if someone's been using you as a punch-ball," grinned Herries. "Who was it Racke—Carnera?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke scowled savagely at the grinning chums of the Fourth and hurried on. Blake & Co. stared after him.

"Racke's been scrapping with somebody, for a cert!" chuckled Digby. "Wonder who it was?"

"Looks as if he's had the licking of his life!" nodded Blake.

"Do the rotter good!" grunted Herries.

The four strolled on in the direction of the School House. As they were passing the Head's front door, it opened, and Dr. Holmes stepped out into the quad, with rustling gown. He was accompanied by an elderly gentleman, whose face seemed lined from a recent illness or from mental worry. The two turned in the direction of the New House.

Blake & Co. raised their caps to the Head, who gave them an absent nod. Blake gripped Herries' arm.

"See who that was?" he muttered.

"The Head, ass!"

"Chump! I mean, the old gent with him. It was Figgins' father," said Blake. "I remember seeing him once—"

"Oh!"

Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus stared after the Head's companion with interest.

"The old boy looked wowwied," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I twust there is no bad news for old Figgy."

"My hat! Yes, rather!"

The juniors watched the Head and Mr. Figgins disappear into the New House, and went on towards their own House, and up to Study No. 6 in the Fourth passage.

After their tramp to Rylcombe and back, the chums of the Fourth had hearty appetites, and soon a substantial tea had been prepared, with poached eggs and stacks of buttered toast. Tom Merry & Co. looked in, and readily accepted an invitation to stay to tea.

During tea, Blake referred to Racke's battered appearance when they had seen him in the quad. Tom Merry chuckled.

"Didn't you know?" he grinned. "Figgins gave him a hiding this afternoon. Racke's been pestering Cousin Ethel, and Figgy's given him a lesson!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gave an exclamation.

The swell of St. Jim's had himself a very deep admiration for his pretty cousin, and he did not altogether approve of her warm friendship for George Figgins of the New House. Not that he had anything against Figgins; but in the opinion of Arthur Augustus, he himself was more worthy of first place in Ethel's regard than any "New House boundah!"

"Weally, deah boys," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, with a frown on his noble brow, "I considah that the pwopah course for Figgins would have been to inform me of Wacke's behaviour, and left me to administah a feaful thwashin' to the boundah, wathah than take the mattah upon himself. As Ethel's cousin, I considah—"

"Oh, rats!" chuckled Blake. "Figgy was right to lick the rotter!"

"I considah—"

"By the way," broke in Digby, "we saw Figgins' pater in the quad just now, with the Head. He was looking pretty cut-up, we thought. We were wondering if there's bad news for old Figgins."

Tom Merry's brow clouded a trifle.

"I hope not!" he exclaimed.

Manners and Lowther nodded agreement.

Although Figgins was the leader of their New House rivals, Tom Merry & Co. all liked him.

The suggestion that there might be bad news for the lanky leader of the New House juniors damped their cheerfulness at once.

"I'll tell you what," said Manners. "After tea, what about buzzing over to the New House and looking Figgy up, to find out if there is anything wrong?"

"Good wheeze," nodded Monty Lowther.

The others agreed, and before long, with the meal over, the chums of the Shell and Fourth left the study in a body, on their way to the New House.

Dick Redfern, of the New House, was standing at the top of the steps with his two chums, Owen and Lawrence, when Tom Merry & Co. arrived there. At sight of the School House party the three New House fellows drew warily shoulder to shoulder. But Tom Merry grinned reassuringly.

"It's all right, you asses! We're visiting Figgy, that's all."

"Oh!" Redfern grinned. "Thought for a minute it might be a House rag. You'll find Figgy in his study. His pater's been to see him, but he's just gone."

"Figgy hasn't had bad news, has he?" asked Blake quickly.

"Bad news?" Redfern stared at him. "Not that I know of!"

"Oh, good!"

And, feeling a little relieved, the School House party entered the New House and marched up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage.

Figgins' voice called to them to come in when Tom Merry tapped on the door of Study No. 4. Tom pushed the door open and stepped into the room, followed by the others.

Figgins was alone in the study.

He was sitting by the fire, his face a little more pale than usual, staring at the flames. But at the entry of the School House fellows he glanced up quickly.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed.

"Hallo, old boss!" answered Tom Merry cheerfully. "We've just looked in to see you."

"Oh! Thanks!" Figgins rose to his feet, without his usual cheery smile. He was evidently puzzled by their visit. "Come in, everybody." He glanced at Tom. "Want to talk footer?"

"As a matter of fact, we've not come to stay," put in Blake. "Excuse our butting in, Figgy. We're not meaning to be inquisitive, but—well, there was a suggestion you might have had some bad news, and we wanted to make sure you hadn't, you see."

"Yaas, wathah! That's it, deah boy," nodded Arthur Augustus.

Figgins did not answer for a moment or two. He was looking suddenly tired and ill. And in a flash the School House fellows knew that they had been only too right in their guess!

Figgins must have had bad news of some sort, to be so different from his usual cheery self.



Figgins' clenched fist landed on Racke's chin, and the cad of the Shell was lifted clean off his feet!

"What's up, old chap?" exclaimed Monty Lowther anxiously.

Figgins smiled faintly, with an effort.

"As a matter of fact," he said, in rather a strained voice, "I've had some bad news. The pater's been to see me to tell me."

"Nothing very bad, I hope?" said Tom Merry, dropping a hand on Figgins' shoulder in a sympathetic way.

"Well"—again Figgins smiled faintly—"it is, rather. Dad has been to tell me that he has had a big financial loss. A staggering blow he's had, poor old chap. And—and unless I can win a scholarship, I shan't be able to stay on at St. Jim's!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Swot!

"Oh, my hat!" The exclamation broke from Blake in a tone of utter consternation.

There was dismay on the faces of the others as they stared dumbly at Figgins' troubled countenance.

"I don't seem able to realise it yet," went on Figgins, in a low voice. "I—I can't imagine having to leave St. Jim's!"

No one spoke. But the faces of the School House juniors were full of sympathy. They, too, could not imagine St. Jim's without George Figgins!

Though Figgins was the leader of their old rivals of the other House, and the rivalry between the two Houses had sometimes flamed out in quite a bitter antagonism in the

past, as a rule, the fellows of the two Houses pulled together well enough. Figgins, at any rate, had always been popular with the School House juniors.

The thought that he might have to go was a staggering one.

"Bai Jove! This is wotten!" breathed Arthur Augustus. Figgins smiled faintly.

"Thanks, Gussy! It is rotten. But there's still a chance, of course. The Armitage Scholarship comes off pretty soon, as you know. I shall send in my name to the Head to-night."

"That's the idea," nodded Blake eagerly. "Go in and win!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good luck, Figgy!"

"Thanks!" muttered Figgins. "I shall do my best to pull it off. But the Armitage is always pretty stiff, I believe. Still, I may do it. I mean to work like a nigger!" Again he laughed faintly. "I'm afraid footer is off as far as I'm concerned, for the time being," he added, with a glance at Tom Merry.

"Of course," nodded Tom. "It'll be a loss to the eleven, but we'll have to get along as best we can without you, old hoss. What you've got to do is to swot like the dickens and pull off the Armitage!"

"Wahah! I'm afraid swottin' is not much in your line, deah boy, but—"

"Shut up, Gussy, you ass!" muttered Blake.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake! I was only remarkin'—"

"Well, don't!" breathed Blake. "That's not the way to cheer him up, you idiot!"

"Look heah—"

Figgins smiled.

"Gussy's right," he cut in. "Swotting isn't much in my line, as everybody knows. I'm not too good at Form-work, I'm afraid. But if I work hard enough I stand a chance, anyway. There aren't many chaps in for the Armitage this year, luckily. Tompkins and Bates, of the School House, are in for it, I believe, and Brown of the New House. Trouble is, of course, they've been swotting for quite a time now. Still, I may catch up with them."

"Of course you will!" cried Monty Lowther cheerily, slapping Figgins on the back. "You'll win the Armitage on your neck, if you swot hard from now on!"

"I'll try, anyway," said Figgins, with a more cheerful look on his face than it had borne since the School House chums' arrival.

He turned to the bookcase and took out a number of school books, tossing them on to the table.

"If you don't mind, I'll get down to the job right away!" he exclaimed.

"That's the idea!"

"On the ball, Figgy!"

"I should particularly concentrate on Latin, deah boy," advised Arthur Augustus kindly. "I know your Latin is pretty wotten— Oh! Yawwoogh!"

Arthur Augustus finished his tactless remark with a wild yell, as Blake stamped on his foot.

"Oh! Yow! Blake, you uttah boundah, you twod on my toe!"

"Sorry," growled Blake. "Come on, Gussy, we'd better leave Figgy to start swotting!"

He took his aristocratic chum by the arm and opened the door.

"Vewy well," nodded the swell of St. Jim's. "Don't forget, Figgy, deah boy, to swot at Latin, because you're so vewy wokey at Latin—"

"Come on, you burbling dummy!" hissed Blake fiercely. "And shut up! What's the good of rubbing it in that his Latin's not up to much? You'll only depress the poor chap, and spoil his work!"

He dragged his aristocratic chum out into the passage, and the others crowded out after them, leaving George Figgins already opening his books on the table, with a do-or-die expression on his rugged face.

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Bai Jove! I had not thought of that, Blake, deah boy! I am afraid I was pewwaps a twifle tactless—"

"You always are, you burbling duffer!" snorted Blake.

"Bai Jove! I uttally wefuse to be addressed as a burbling duffah—"

"Br-r-r!"

"I considah—"

"Rats!"

And Arthur Augustus sniffed and ceased to argue, as the party left the New House and crossed the dark quad in the direction of the School House steps.

Their faces were grave and troubled.

Figgins' startling news had filled them with dismay.

Though they had done their best to cheer him on in his formidable task, they all knew that George Figgins did not by any means shine at Form-work. Figgy's abilities

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were more in the direction of footer and cricket and sport in general, at which he excelled.

Whether the athletic skipper of the New House juniors would be able, even with almost superhuman swotting, to pull off a valuable scholarship like the Armitage was a very doubtful problem.

CHAPTER 4.

Hope for Figgy!

THE news that George Figgins was "swotting" for the Armitage, and that if he failed to win it he would have to leave St. Jim's, came as the biggest sensation that the Lower School had known for a long time.

The cheery, athletic Figgins of the footer-field and the gym, everyone knew well! But a Figgins who confined himself to his study, surrounded by books, during every minute of his spare time, seemed so utterly unlike the Figgy of old as to be scarcely believable.

The change was startling!

But there was hardly a fellow in the Lower School who did not wish Figgins the best of luck. None of them would have disturbed him for worlds, when they heard from behind the closed door of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form passage in the New House the monotonous scrape, scrape, scrape of Figgins' pen.

But there was one exception to the general rule.

Aubrey Racke was full of vindictive delight over Figgins' misfortune, and he did not trouble to conceal the fact.

Racke had been maliciously determined to avenge himself for that thrashing he had received in his own study, in some way or another. He felt that he need not trouble further now!

To see Figgins leaving St. Jim's for good was a greater triumph than even he could have attempted to bring about. And that Figgins would fail to pull off the Armitage, and would have to go miserably, Racke felt convinced.

"He doesn't stand a hope!" Racke declared, with a venomous chuckle, to Gerald Crooke. "Not a giddy hope! Fancy Figgins trying to bag a scholarship! Gad!"

And Racke gave a harsh laugh.

"He's swotting pretty hard, though," said Crooke dubiously.

Racke made an impatient gesture.

"He can't win the Armitage, if he swots for a year! Take my word for it, Figgins will have to go crawling from St. Jim's like the blessed pauper he is."

In the junior Common-room, the general opinion, though less emphatic than Racke's, was that Figgins was certainly "up against" a tough proposition.

Clarence York Tompkins, one of the other entrants for the Armitage, was a Shell fellow, and therefore his work was naturally more advanced than Figgins', who was in the Form below. No one felt that Figgins was very likely to beat Harold Bates, either; for Bates was a quiet, studious fellow, whose ability in the Form-room more than balanced his lack of ability at footer.

The fourth entrant, Dick Brown, of the New House, was something of a dark horse. He had not been at St. Jim's very long, and was a quiet chap whom few of the fellows knew much about. But the fellows noticed now that Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, seemed always very satisfied with young Brown's work.

"But Figgy might do it!" said Blake hopefully, in the Common-room one evening.

"We must hope for the best, deah boys!" nodded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sagely. "It'll be fearfully wotten if poor old Figgy has to go!"

There was a snigger from Percy Mellish of the Fourth, who had just entered the room and crossed towards the fire, where Blake & Co., Tom Merry & Co., Talbot of the Shell, and several others were gathered.

"Figgins?" echoed Mellish, with another snigger. "He doesn't stand an earthly!"

Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, was something of a crony of Aubrey Racke's, and rather shared Racke's hopes that Figgins would fail miserably.

"Oh, rats!" snapped Levison of the Fourth. "Figgy's got lots of grit—"

"I'll lay ten to one against Figgins, if you like," suggested Mellish eagerly. "I— Yawwoogh!"

Levison had raised a boot, and it landed on Percy Mellish's weedy figure forcefully. Mellish gave a howl, and shot forward against the table.

"Ha, ha, ha! Goal!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"That'll teach you not to try betting in here, you rotter!" snapped Levison.

Mellish rubbed the seat of his trousers and limped away, glaring. He vanished out of the door, and slammed it behind him.

There was a grin on the face of Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth.

"You know, Levison, old horse," he murmured, "in spite of your well-placed kick on the person of our friend Mellish, I can't help thinkin' that the odds he offered were pretty fair! I fancy, dear man, they just about size up dear old Figgins' chances of winnin' the Armitage."

"Oh, rats!" growled Levison. "Figgins stands quite a decent chance!"

Cardew shrugged.

"As the poet says, the wish is sometimes father to the thought," he murmured. "You want Figgins to win this giddy scholarship, so you're kiddin' yourself he stands a chance!"

Levison glared at him.

"Don't be such a rotten Jeremiah!" he snorted.

Cardew grinned and said no more.

But Tom Merry, standing by the fire, realised gloomily that Cardew had summed up the situation very well. The fellows, for the most part, wanted Figgins to win, so they were trying to persuade themselves that he stood a fairly good chance of doing so; though in their hearts they all knew that his chances were very slim indeed.

But even as the thought crossed Tom Merry's mind, the door opened and Kerruish of the Fourth came hurrying in.

The first sight of his excited face told the crowd round the fire that he had news to tell.

"Have you heard?" yelled Kerruish.

"Heard what?" exclaimed Jack Blake eagerly.

"About the Armitage!" grinned Kerruish. "Tompkins has got chicken-pox! He's been carted off to the sanny—and he won't be able to go in for the Armitage now!"

There was a breathless silence in the Common-room for a few moments. Then Monty Lowther gave an excited cheer.

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, wippin'!"

"Good egg!"

Blake chuckled.

"Poor old Tompkins!" he grinned. "Rotten luck for him, but he doesn't really need to win a giddy scholarship, anyway. And old Figgins will stand twice as much chance now!"

Tompkins, a quiet, timid individual, whose inoffensive nature caused him to be quite popular among his fellow-juniors, was not likely in the present circumstances to get much sympathy from them!

Their faces were suddenly all very cheerful.

As Blake had said, the fact that Tompkins was out of the running had increased Figgins' chances for the Armitage tremendously—there was no doubt of that.

"Come on—let's go and tell old Figgy!" exclaimed Blake eagerly. "It'll cheer him up no end!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co., Tom Merry & Co., Talbot and Levison hurried from the room, and out into the dark quad. They crossed to the New House, and found Figgins, Kerr, and Wynne standing in the hall with dismal-looking faces.

"Heard the news?" yelled Manners.

Fatty Wynn and Kerr stared at Manners doubtfully, as though they suspected a School House "jape." But when they were told the news, they gasped. Their faces lit up joyously.

"My hat!" breathed Fatty Wynn. "How ripping!"

And they joined in the eager procession up the stairs.

Several other New House fellows, including Redfern & Co., also joined the crowd, and the Fourth Form passage was swarming with excited fellows as Tom Merry knocked on the door of Study No. 4.

"Come in!" came the voice of George Figgins.

Tom swung the door open, and grinned into the room.

Figgins was seated at the table, bending over his books. He stared up, and lowered his pen in astonishment at sight of the crowd of faces in the doorway.

"What the dickens—"

"Come to tell you the good news, old chap—" began Tom Merry.

"It's like this, deah boy—"

"Figgy, old chap—"

Figgins grinned faintly.

"If you wouldn't all talk at once, I might be able to hear something," he said patiently. "But I'm rather busy, so I'll be glad if you'll buck up."

"It's like this," chuckled Monty Lowther. "What's-his-name's got chicken-pox! Isn't it ripping?"

Figgins stared at him.

"What the dickens? Why should I think it's ripping that somebody or other's got chicken-pox, you asses?"

"But don't you see—"

"Hanged if I do!"

"It's Tompkins who's got chicken-pox!" yelled Redfern.

Figgins jumped.

"Great Scott!"

"And, of course, that puts him out of the running for the Armitage!" chortled Herries.

Figgins' eyes were suddenly shining.

"My hat!" he breathed. "Poor old Tompkins—it's rough luck on him. But—well, I won't pretend to be exactly sorry, in the circumstances—"

"I should jolly well think not!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"This means everything to you, Figgy, old horse!"

"You've only got to lick Bates and Brown now!" chuckled Kerr.

"Of course, Bates and Brown are not goin' to be easy to beat," put in Arthur Augustus sagely, "but you do stand a chance now, deah boy—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake!"

"Leave old Figgy to get on with his work now, you chaps," suggested Tom Merry cheerily. "We thought you wouldn't mind being interrupted to hear the news, though."

"Rather not!" said Figgins gratefully. "It's bucked me up no end, knowing I stand a fairly decent chance after all."

And the juniors trooped away from the study feeling very pleased with themselves.

Though he still had a stiff proposition before him, Figgins' supporters had a real hope at last!

CHAPTER 5.

Racke's Threat!

"HANG the luck!"

Aubrey Racke gave that savage exclamation.

It was later that evening, and Racke, too, had heard the news that had so excited the Lower School—the news that Tompkins was "out of it!"

The news had come as a bitter blow to the black sheep of the Shell.

He was tramping morosely under the leafless plms in the quad, his face dark, his lips set in a thin, vicious line.

Racke had been relying on Tompkins of the Shell definitely to rob Figgins of any chance of victory in the examination for the scholarship. Now that Tompkins was so unexpectedly out of the affair altogether, Racke was feeling more than uneasy.

He tried to persuade himself that even now Figgins was unlikely to beat the opposition against him—Bates and Brown. But he could not feel sure of it. And the

(Continued on next page.)

OH, GREAT! TOPPING!

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thought that Figgins might win the Armitage after all, and stay on at St. Jim's, made Racke grind his teeth with fury.

"Hang it!" he repeated savagely.

He glanced up at a lighted window overlooking the quad—Figgins' window.

Figgins, evidently, was hard at work!

There were still two weeks before the Armitage examination was to be held. And the way that Figgins was working had already startled Racke considerably.

He had imagined that Figgins would soon prove incapable of real "swotting" of the type needed to carry off a valuable scholarship. School work was well known not to be in Figgins' line! But Racke's surmise had proved very wrong.

Figgins was keeping his nose to the grindstone in a way that had caused Racke faint uneasiness even before Tompkins had gone into the sanny.

And now, with only Brown and Bates in against him, Racke knew that Figgins stood a fairly sporting chance of winning the scholarship he had set his heart upon.

An ugly gleam came into Racke's eyes as he halted, staring up at that lighted window in the New House building.

"But he shan't win the Armitage!" Racke muttered, fierce determination in his tone. "I'll stick at nothing to prevent him winning, hang him!"

The bell for call-over began to ring.

Racke, turning back towards the School House, saw the light in Figgins' study go out.

There was a dark, thoughtful frown on the pale face of the black sheep of the Shell as he entered the School House.

To himself he was repeating his savage threat, "He shan't win that scholarship! I'll stick at nothing to prevent him!"

For George Figgins the days that still remained before the day of the examination seemed to fly.

Every moment of his spare time was spent over books, until he began to look paler and thinner than usual, and Monteith, the captain of the New House, warned him in a friendly way against "overdoing it."

"You don't want to crack up, you know, kid!" he exclaimed, stopping Figgins in the Hall one morning. "You won't pull off that scholarship if you do!"

Figgins smiled faintly.

"Thanks, Monteith! But—well, I don't stand much chance unless I swot like the dickens, you know."

"Well, don't overdo it, that's all," repeated Monteith.

And the Sixth-Former strolled away, while Figgins went up to his study and rather wearily opened his books, to snatch ten minutes at his Latin prose between classes.

The bell for second lesson took him downstairs again. At the foot of the stairs he almost ran into another junior, with some books under his arm.

It was Dick Brown, the other New House fellow who had entered for the Armitage Scholarship.

Figgins halted.

"Hallo, Brown!" he said, with a faint smile. "How's things?"

Brown met Figgins' glance for a moment, then looked away hurriedly. He was a small, fair-haired youngster of rather delicate appearance. He coloured a trifle.

"All right, thanks!" he answered awkwardly. "I—I hear you're swotting hard."

"I am!" nodded Figgins grimly. He smiled. "I expect you are, too?"

"Yes."

"Well, may the best man win!" said Figgins frankly.

"Ye-es!"

"Come on, or we'll be late for old Lathom!" added Figgins cheerily.

The pair entered Mr. Lathom's Form-room together, and curious glances were cast in their direction.

That Dick Brown was working very hard for the coming examination everyone in the Fourth knew. Though he said little about it, it was evident that Brown was very anxious to win the coveted Armitage Scholarship—possibly as keen as Figgins himself.

It was Wednesday, a half-holiday. After dinner Figgins settled down at the table in his study, and began to work steadily. The shouts from Little Side came faintly to his ears now and then, causing him to glance up occasionally and listen rather wistfully.

There was a match on between School House and New House, he knew. He would have given a good deal to have been able to take part in it, or, failing that, to watch. But he shook the thought from his mind, and concentrated grimly on his work.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

His pen scraped ceaselessly in the silence.

A sudden tap at the door caused Figgins to glance up impatiently. He wondered who it could be who had come

to interrupt him. But as the door opened, in answer to his curt invitation, an exclamation of pleasure broke from him:

"Ethel!"

Ethel Cleveland was standing, smiling, in the doorway.

"I won't stay," said Ethel softly, as she stepped into the room. "I know how busy you are. But I've been watching the match, and I thought I would like to see you for a minute, to wish you the best of luck in the exam."

"That's jolly decent of you!" breathed Figgins, his eyes shining as he gripped his girl chum's hand. "You're looking fine! How's the match going?"

"Jolly well!" said Ethel brightly. "Redfern scored in the first five minutes, and the School House haven't equalised yet."

"Oh, good!"

Figgins glanced wryly at his books.

"Wish to goodness I was playing!" he said glumly.

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Ethel quickly. "All you must think of now is winning the Armitage; then, when you've won it, you can play all the football you want! And I know that you will win it, too! I feel sure of it!"

"It's ripping to hear you say that!" answered Figgins gratefully. "It cheers me up, you know."

"I'm glad! But I won't interrupt you any more now. I'll go—"

She turned towards the door. Figgins took a quick step after her.

"I say," he said quietly, "that rotter Racke hasn't been worrying you again, has he?"

Ethel's pretty face clouded for a moment. She shook her head.

"No. He hasn't been to see me again."

Figgins smiled grimly.

"I thought he wouldn't after I'd seen him!" He opened the door for her. "Good-bye, Ethel!"

"Good-bye! And good luck!"

She went, and Figgins sat down to his books again with a lighter heart.

With Ethel's good wishes ringing in his ears George Figgins felt that he could have won half a dozen scholarships easily just then!

CHAPTER 6.

A Secret Scheme!

GERALD CROOKE halted outside the door of his study and grasped the handle. He turned it, but found that the door was locked. He heard a stir within the room.

It was the evening before the day of the Armitage examination.

Crooke rattled the handle.

"Lemme in, Racke!" he called. "It's me!"

He heard the click of the key in the lock, and the door opened. He strode in, shutting the door behind him. The air of the study was pungent with cigarette smoke.

Racke had evidently been indulging in a "fag"—a dingy habit to which he was addicted. He fancied that it made him rather a "gay dog" in the eyes of his cronies; no doubt it did, since they were all dingy individuals of his own kidney.

Crooke grinned.

"Having a whiff?" he inquired.

Racke nodded, turning the key in the lock again.

"Yes," he said shortly. "I wish I'd known it was you. I chucked a fresh cig on the fire when I heard you at the door! Still—plenty more!"

He took from his pocket a gold cigarette-case. Racke's father was a War-time profiteer, who kept his shady son well supplied with money, and Racke liked to display his wealth in every possible manner.

Selecting a cigarette, the black sheep of the Shell dropped into a chair by the fire, and lit it.

"You're looking rather pleased with yourself," said Crooke, eyeing his crony curiously.

Racke nodded.

"I am!" he murmured, with a twisted smile.

"Well, I don't know that you've got much to feel pleased about, anyway," said Crooke bluntly. "I've been in the Common-room, and the fellows there think that Figgins stands as much chance as any of the three to pull off the Armitage!"

"Really?" grinned Racke.

"Yes! The way he's been swotting has been a blessed eye-opener! I wish I'd taken Mellish when he was offering ten to one against Figgins! He's only offering two to one against him now."

"I should take him, then," chuckled Racke.

Crooke stared at him.

"Look here," he said, dropping into the chair on the other side of the fireplace, "you seem pretty confident that

Figgins won't win! But only a few days back you'd got the wind up properly——"

Racke chuckled and blew a smoke-ring.

"What's happened to make you think now that Figgins doesn't stand an earthly?" demanded Crooke.

Racke shrugged.

"Just an idea of mine," he murmured blandly.

Something in his tone caused Crooke to draw a sharp breath.

"You don't mean you've hit on a way of queering his pitch?" he muttered.

Racke made a hasty, warning movement, glancing at the door.

There was a howl from Percy Mellish as Levi-son's boot took him in the rear, and he shot forward against the table. "Goal!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"You remember how the Head lost his keys in the quad a couple of days ago?" muttered Racke. "And Kildare found them? Well, I found them first! I went straight off to Wayland and had a duplicate of this made—here it is. Then I dropped the keys in the quad where I'd found 'em after that, and no one knows they've been in my hands at all."

"But what good is it?" asked Crooke in bewilderment.

"A lot of good!"

And in a lowered tone, his eyes gleaming maliciously, Racke told his plan. When he had finished, Crooke sat staring at him white-faced.

"You wouldn't dare!" he breathed at last.



"Quiet, you fool!"

"Great Scott! So you have!" breathed Crooke, staring at him with startled face.

A twisted smile appeared on Racke's thin face. His eyes gleamed venomously.

"Yes," he said between his teeth. "I have! I swore that Figgins shouldn't walk off with the Armitage—and he's not going to! I'll admit I was scared for a time, the way he's been working, hang him—but I'm not worrying now. I've thought of a way of making dead certain that he won't stand an earthly!"

He leaned forward in his chair and flung the smouldering cigarette into the fire. His fists clenched.

"I tell you Figgins will be at the bottom of the list!"

"But—but how can you work that?" muttered Crooke uneasily. "To-morrow's Thursday, the day of the exam——"

"I know that, you fool!"

"Well, you've not got much time!"

"I don't need it," grinned Racke.

"What's your scheme, then?" exclaimed Crooke eagerly.

With a thin smile, Aubrey Racke slipped his hand into his pocket and took out a small key. Crooke stared at it.

"See this?" grinned Racke. "It's a key to the Head's desk——"

"What?" gasped Crooke. "What the dickens——"

"I tell you I'm going to do it!" snapped Racke.

"If you're found out it would mean the sack!"

"I know that, you fool. But I shan't be found out!"

"But——"

Racke made a gesture of impatience.

"Don't look so scared, you fool! It's my funeral, anyway, not yours! And I tell you it's safe enough. I shan't take any risks, you can be sure of that. And Figgins——"

He broke off. His lips curled.

"Figgins will have to slink away from St. Jim's like the pauper he now is!" he said between his teeth. "I swore to get my own back, and I shall."

He laughed softly, and returned the key to his pocket. The look on his face was not pleasant to see.

His face darkened as he found Crooke's gaze still riveted upon him.

"For goodness' sake don't stare at me as if I'm a spectre!" he snarled.

Crooke's eyes did not move from his face, however.

"I—I say, that's a bit thick, isn't it?" muttered Crooke anxiously. "I mean to say——"

Racke interrupted with a harsh laugh.

"So you're getting squeamish, are you?" he said tauntingly. "Well, I'm not!"

Crooke flushed.

"I'm not squeamish," he mumbled. "It was you I was

worrying about, not Figgins. If you're found out you'll be sacked—"

"I've told you once I'm willing to take the risk!" snapped Racke. "Hang it, are you trying to unnerve me?"

"No, but—"

"Then dry up, hang you!"

Crooke lapsed into silence. Racke jumped restlessly to his feet. He moved to the window and drew back the curtain, staring out.

Across the quad a lighted window was shining golden through the gloom—the window of Figgins' study in the New House.

A twisted smile flickered over Racke's set face.

"He's hard at it!" he muttered. "Swotting! Well, it won't do him much good!"

Racke let the curtain fall back into place, shutting out the sight of that lighted window—the window of the room where George Figgins was working, with tired eyes—working against time, with his very life at St. Jim's at stake!

CHAPTER 7.

The Exam!

"HERE they come!"

Those words were breathed by a dozen pairs of lips.

It was the following afternoon, and a big crowd of juniors had gathered near the door of the Sixth Form room.

The Sixth would not be occupying that room this afternoon. Instead, they would be busy in the senior laboratory, while the three entrants for the Armitage Scholarship sat under the eyes of Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's, and struggled with the difficult exam paper that had been set for them by the Head himself.

"Here they come!"

At the end of the passage, the dignified figure of Dr. Holmes had appeared, rustling towards the door of the Sixth Form room.

Behind him, silent and rather pale, came the three entrants for the Armitage.

"Figgie looks a bit groggy!" muttered Kangaroo, of the Shell.

"So would you if you'd been swotting like he has," grunted Clifton Dane, the Canadian junior.

The juniors fell aside as the Head approached. Dr. Holmes rustled past them, and opened the door of the Sixth Form room, striding in.

Figgins, Dick Brown, and Harold Bates followed him.

Figgins' tired eyes had brightened for a moment at the sight of his two chums, Fatty Wynn and Kerr, and Tom Merry and his other friends of the School House, in the crowd by the door. He grinned faintly.

Bates grinned, too, at his friends in the crowd. But Brown glanced neither to right nor left, but marched into the Form-room with pale, set face.

It was evident that the ordeal was trying him severely.

"Good luck, Figgie!" muttered David Llewellyn Wynn, as his chum passed by.

"Go in and win!" grinned Tom Merry encouragingly.

"Yaas, wathah! Best of luck, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Thanks!" answered Figgins, in rather a strained voice.

He vanished after the others into the Sixth Form room, and the door closed.

"Well, that's that!" drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew laconically. "Now they're in for it, poor chaps! Thank goodness I don't have to tackle the Armitage paper this afternoon!"

He shuddered and strolled away. The others dispersed in the direction of their Form-rooms, for afternoon classes were nearly due to begin.

"I fancy Figgie stands as much chance as any of the three," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, as he and Manners and Lowther entered the Shell Form room a few minutes later.

"If only he doesn't lose his head—"

"Shouldn't think he will," put in Manners hopefully.

"He's a steady old horse, is Figgie."

"I don't see why he shouldn't pull it off," agreed Monty Lowther. "I'll admit I should never have thought he had an earthly of winning a scholarship—old Figgie shines on the footer field best! But after the way he's put his back into working for this, he ought to do pretty well."

"Good luck to him, anyway!" muttered Tom Merry.

Aubrey Racke was passing the three at that moment, on his way to his desk. He heard Monty Lowther's words, and for a moment a queer gleam came into his eyes.

He took his seat without a word, however; and the next moment Mr. Linton entered the Form-room, so that no further discussion of Figgie's chances was possible.

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But the juniors' thoughts were not with their work that afternoon!

All the fellows were thinking far more of the three silent figures now seated in the Sixth Form room, under the eagle eye of Dr. Holmes, hard at work on the papers that meant so much to them.

And there was scarcely a fellow in either the Shell or Fourth who was not inwardly wishing George Figgins the best of luck.

In the Fourth Form room, the three absent places where Figgins, Brown, and Bates usually sat made more vivid the fellows' realisation of what was going on in the Sixth Form room.

Lessons seemed to drag that afternoon! But the juniors were released at last, and a good many of them went out into the quad to stare up curiously at the Sixth Form room windows. The three entrants for the Armitage Scholarship would not be released for another three-quarters of an hour, however, and the fellows soon tired of watching those blank windows, and dispersed to their studies for tea.

Blake & Co. had been invited to have tea with Tom Merry & Co. In Study No. 10 the talk was never long away from the big topic.

"Well, we'll know to-morrow night," said Tom Merry at last. "The Head marks the papers to-morrow, and the results will be out about tea-time. So it's not much good arguing till then over Figgie's chances!"

He glanced at his watch.

"They'll be out in five minutes now!" he exclaimed. "We ought to roll along and give Figgie a cheer when he comes out!"

"Wathah, bai Jove!"

"Good egg!"

A crowd of juniors had already collected at the end of the passage leading to the Sixth Form room by the time that the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. arrived there. There was a faint hum of whispered conversation.

The minutes dragged by. Across the quad, through the window of the passage, the deep tones of the school clock began to strike the hour—five o'clock.

"All over," breathed Monty Lowther.

From beyond the door of the Sixth Form room the Head's voice could be heard faintly: "Stop now, please!" The scratching of pens from within the room ceased, and there was a rustle of papers.

A minute later the door opened. All faces were turned towards it.

"Here's Figgie!" muttered Tom Merry.

The lanky figure of George Figgins had appeared in the doorway. He paused for a moment in evident surprise as his eyes took in the crowd waiting in the passage.

"Give him a yell!" exclaimed Blake.

And a lusty cheer rang out from the crowd of juniors.

Figgins smiled faintly, and strode down the passage towards them. Brown and Bates followed him, Bates closing the door of the Sixth Form room behind him, shutting out the glimpse of the Head at the master's desk, pinning papers together.

In an instant Figgins was surrounded by his friends.

"How have you done, old chap?" queried Fatty Wynn excitedly.

"Think you've done well?" asked Talbot of the Shell, his eyes on Figgins' face.

Figgins laughed. Now that the ordeal was over he was looking brighter, more like his old self.

"Thank goodness it's over!" he exclaimed. "I don't think I've done badly, as a matter of fact," he added cautiously. "But it was a stiff paper. I didn't have time to answer all the questions, either. Still, the ones I did answer I think were pretty good, you know."

"Hurrah!"

Bates and Brown, too, had been surrounded. In answer to a question from Dick Julian, Bates shook his head.

"No, I didn't get time to answer all the questions, either."

"Think you did well?" demanded Bernard Glyn.

"Not bad, thanks," answered Bates, and pushed his way on through the crowd.

"What about you, Brown?" exclaimed Roylance. "How did you get on?"

Brown's face was still very pale. His hands seemed to be trembling a little in an odd way.

"I—I don't know!"

He hurried away.

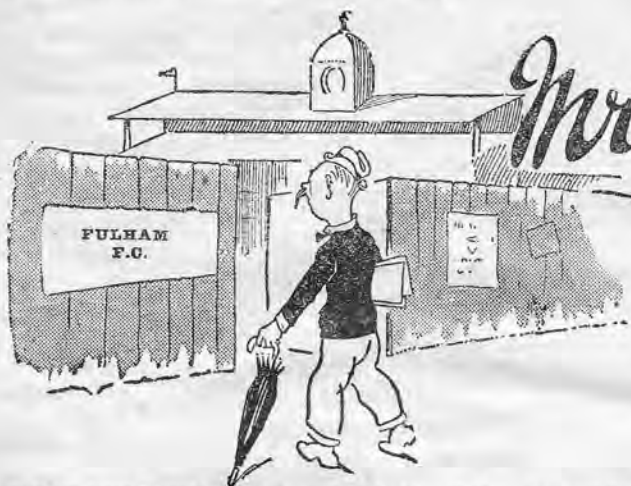
Fatty Wynn and George Francis Kerr linked arms with Figgins and marched him off to tea in Dame Taggles' little shop. A number of the fellows followed them, all eager to glean what information they could. But Figgins had evidently no wish to talk.

"Anyway, he's looking jolly cheerful!" grinned Monty Lowther. "That shows he can't have done badly!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

(Continued on page 12.)

GATHER ROUND, YOU FOOTER FANS!



Mr. Parker POPS IN TO SEE FULHAM.

Fulham haven't set the Thames alight—though they are next to it—in the football sphere; but they are full of optimism and the day is not far distant, says Mr. Parker, when Craven Cottage will "house" a First Division club!

Like Being at the Seaside!

BECAUSE of my habit of going to places where I was not particularly wanted, and to which I had certainly not been invited, it follows that I have been turned out from many famous grounds in my time. I have gone into a few, too, and I should say that one of the most interesting football grounds into which I have ever poked my nose is that belonging to the Fulham club.

Perhaps some of you don't know it, and those of you who do will forgive me passing on the interesting items about the Fulham Club ground to the ignorant. In the first place, it is most delightfully situated. If you go to Putney Bridge—which is the place where the Oxford v. Cambridge boat race starts—the walk along the river to the Fulham ground is just lovely. If the tide is coming in the effect is just the same as being at the seaside.

All sorts of strange ships go up and down the river and can be seen from time to time at Putney—or rather, at Fulham. And when the people sit in the stand at the Fulham ground they can see the masts of the ships passing up and down the river. As they can't see the river, the effect of these moving masts is rather quaint.

Anyway, the Fulham ground is so near to the river that when a full-back gets desperately anxious to waste a lot of time, he can, with an ordinary kick, put the ball right into the mid-riff of Father Thames. But Father Thames doesn't mind. He says it was one of the Fulham forwards trying to score a goal, and, that being so, no wonder the team fell into the Third Division.

The History of Craven Cottage.

THE ground has other interesting associations, besides being on the bank of the river which runs through London. It is called Craven Cottage, and lots of people have asked me why. When I got to the Cottage door, and Secretary Harry Fowler shouted "Come in!" I asked him about this Craven Cottage. In doing that I soon discovered that I had dropped right into the middle of a history class. But it was an interesting lesson, which my readers can dodge or learn at will. I couldn't dodge it, so I have to tell the story now.

There used to be a very famous cottage—named Craven—situated just about where the middle of the Fulham football pitch now comes. At that cottage lived in their day, many notable people, including, about the middle of the last century, Lord

Lytton. He used to be like me—a bit of a writer, as you doubtless know. Among the people entertained by Lord Lytton at Craven Cottage was Prince Louis Napoleon. So now you know that if and when you go to Fulham you may encounter the ghosts of some famous dead.

Fulham's Fine Fight.

THAT'S enough history. Let us now get down to these modern days. It looked like a bit of a tragedy—if not a big one—when Fulham went down from the Second to the Third Division at the end of the season before last. But the club has proved that life is full of compensations. They made a fine struggle of the race-back last season, and though they didn't manage it they took a lot more money at the turnstiles than they had done the previous season in the Second Division.

The clicking of the turnstiles—provided it is merry enough—always brings a smile to the face of Mr. John Dean. He is the chairman of the directors, and he has put a lot of money into the Fulham club. If I could tell you all the things which Mr. Dean told me about the Fulham club I should have no space left to tell anything about the players. He is such a talker. As he is also a manufacturer of window-blinds, he won't mind if I draw the curtain here so far as the things he told me about the hopes of himself and the other Fulham officials go.

No Lindrums!

THE training for the morning being over, I found the lads of the Fulham team in an upstairs room of the Cottage, which has been turned into their place of recreation. I shouldn't say there are any potential Lindrums on the staff at Fulham; indeed, with a bit of practice I could beat any of them. But they played their billiards and their snooker with great good humour.

There is one Irish International on the staff at Fulham—Alec Steele—and Scots players are very scarce. That may be one reason why McNab, who at least ought to be a Scot told me a really Scottish story. He said that there was a certain Aberdeen man who had made a lot of money out of a billiard saloon. He was helped to make that money by a most able assistant.

"When that Aberdeen billiard-saloon proprietor died," said McNab, "he left his assistant two snookers!"

Little But Good!

IN addition to being a cheery lot of fellows, these Fulham men are mostly small. I don't know whether Manager "Ned"

Liddell prefers them little or whether they have just happened. Ernie Beecham, the goalkeeper, is little as goalkeepers go, but he is very good both at football and cricket.

He comes from Hertford, and the people there are very proud, so I am told, of the fact that they are associated with such a fine keeper. Beecham himself assured me that his first goalkeeping effort was, strange to relate, on a fair ground. He went to this fair ground one day, and tried his luck at beating the goalkeeper—at a penny a shot. He was not very successful, but others found it comparatively easy to beat the goalkeeper. So, greatly daring, the boy Beecham

asked the man if he could go in goal and try to stop the "pills." The proprietor of the show allowed him to do so, and from that moment little Ernie thought himself a goalkeeper. It did not take him long to bring other people round to the same way of thinking.

Played for England.

FULL-BACK Rosier did a very natural journey when he joined Fulham, because he travelled from Southend, which, as you know—or ought to—is at the very mouth of the River Thames. His partner, "Sonnie" Gibbon, came much farther—all the way from Merthyr.

One thing they can produce at Fulham and that is good half-backs. Alf Barrett, the skipper of the side, and the good-looking boy of the family, has played for England this season, and Len Oliver, the right-half, unfortunately on the injured list for some time with a broken toe, was a reserve half-back for England in the same match.

Footballers—and Cricketers!

THE forwards are a mixture, but mostly on the small side. An exception is Jimmy Hammond, who has played cricket for Sussex, but is no relation of Wally Hammond, the England cricketer. Here it is right to remind you that they can put a very good team of cricketers into the field at Fulham. Twice running they won, on the cricket field, a cup which is played for every year by the football clubs of the London district.

Billy Price is a neat little forward, and another is Avey, one of the many recruits from amateur clubs round London. Avey once helped Leyton to win the Amateur Cup, and this season helped Fulham to knock Leyton out of the English Cup. That's the way this game of football goes.

As "father" of the team, there is outside left Frank Penn, who comes from the same place—Edmonton—as Jimmy Dimmock, of the Spurs.

One of these days Craven Cottage will be the home of a First Division club. That's how I feel after listening to the tales of optimism.

I suggested that the team lacked consistency, and reminded them that they beat Bristol Rovers by 6-2 and then lost to them the next day by 4-1. But I was reminded that it was Christmas when this happened, and a side should not be judged by holiday incidents.

"NOSEY."

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Under Trimble's Thumb!

(Continued from page 10.)

"Shouldn't wonder if he's pulled it off!" chuckled Blake. And it was with very hopeful countenances that the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. joined with Figgins' other supporters in giving the New House leader a cheer as he vanished into the tuckshop between Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

CHAPTER 8.

Under Cover of Night!

BOOM! The last note of midnight died away in the old quad.

It was raining, and the rain could be heard beating against the windows of the Shell dormitory, as a figure in one of the beds sat up, peering round through the gloom.

It was Aubrey Racke.

From the two rows of beds the quiet breathing of sleeping juniors could be heard.

Racke licked his dry lips and spoke softly.

"Anyone awake?"

There was no answer. A smile of satisfaction flitted over Racke's face.

Softly he slipped out from between the sheets, and pulled on a dressing-gown. He was about to put his feet into slippers, but changed his mind.

"Better not," he muttered. "Bare feet are quietest."

His hand slipped under his pillow, drawing out a small electric torch and a key. Thrusting them into the pocket of his dressing-gown, he turned and moved noiselessly towards the dormitory door.

It was very dark in the passage outside, and the linoleum was very cold to his bare feet. Racke groped his way towards the stairs.

The rain was beating against the window at the top of the stairs as the black sheep of the Shell began to creep down them. Racke gave a mutter of satisfaction.

The blustering rain would effectively drown any slight sound he might make on the stairs.

At the foot of the stairs he turned in the direction of the corridor leading to the Head's study.

He paused in the passage, listening for a minute or more. There was no sound but for the faint patter of rain outside. He moved on towards the Head's study door.

His groping hands touched the panels, and he felt for the handle. Swinging the door open without a sound, he stepped swiftly into the room, shutting the door cautiously behind him.

His heart was beating rather faster, but otherwise he was quite cool. Despite the terrible risk he was running, he did not hesitate in his purpose.

He took out his electric torch, and the narrow ray of light darted vividly through the blackness as he switched it on.

He swung it round. The windows of the room were heavily curtained, and there was no risk of the torchlight being seen from without, even supposing someone were awake to have seen it. The beam of light swayed over the walls and furniture, and came to rest upon the Head's big desk.

Racke drew a deep breath.

He stepped swiftly towards the desk, and with fingers that trembled slightly he took out the duplicate key from his pocket and fitted it in the lock. He turned it, and there was a faint click in the silence.

Racke flung a quick uneasy glance over his shoulder towards the door. It was only his guilty conscience which prompted that nervous glance, for there had been no sound from the passage. Then, slowly and softly, he opened the desk and flashed the beam of the torchlight within.

There were a number of neatly-docketed papers there, and with feverish fingers he began to search through them, with the electric torch lying where its light lit up the desk's interior. The faint rustle of the papers seemed startlingly loud in the silence of the night, despite the pattering of the rain on the window. Now and then Aubrey Racke glanced about him uneasily.

At last he drew a sudden sharp, hissing breath between his teeth.

He had found what he was seeking.

The Armitage entrants' exam papers!

With trembling fingers he laid them on the table beside

the desk. The top sheaf of papers, neatly pinned together, was Dick Brown's, as the name at the top showed. He tossed it aside, and his eyes gleamed as he saw the name at the top of the next sheaf—"G. Figgins."

His lips twisted into an evil smile.

Again he glanced round towards the shadowy door, listening. No sound! No doubt everyone in the building, save himself alone, was sleeping.

He picked up Figgins' papers, and turned over the sheets covered with Figgins' familiar writing with trembling fingers.

There were twenty-one pages in all, he found. The last page was only half-filled, showing where Figgins had been forced by the time-limit to break off in the middle of answering a question. Racke saw, with a mutter of satisfaction, that Figgins had begun answering that question at the top of the page.

In order to abstract some sheets from Figgins' exam papers, all Racke had to do was to find a previous page at which Figgins had finished an earlier question at the bottom of the sheet. If he stole the intervening sheets and altered the numbering of the last page to fit in, the Head would never suspect for a moment that any pages were missing when he came to correct them.

He began eagerly to search through the neatly-written sheets.

Page twenty-one, he found, completed a question at the foot.

Carefully unpinning the pages, he took out the seven sheets between the twenty-first sheet and the last, and stuffed them quickly into the pocket of his dressing-gown.

There was a pen lying on the Head's desk. With it, the black sheep of the Shell swiftly altered the figure nine at the top of the page to a two, so that the numbering there now appeared as twenty-two.

With a soft chuckle, Racke pinned the remaining pages together again—only twenty-two of them now, instead of the full twenty-nine Figgins had written. But, with the number of the last sheet neatly altered, as if by Figgins' own hand, no one looking at the depleted sheaf would ever be likely to guess that any pages had been removed. The Head, when he came to read the papers through, would simply imagine that Figgins had not answered the missing questions.

Now that his caddish task was done, Racke was anxious to get away from the Head's study as quickly as possible.

He replaced the exam papers in the desk where he had found them, and noiselessly closed and locked it.

"I fancy that cooks Figgins' goose!" he told himself, with savage satisfaction.

He picked up the electric torch and turned towards the door.

The rain was pattering loudly on the passage window as he stole out from the study, closing the door after him. He stepped hurriedly through the dim patch of light that fell in through the wet panes, and made his way silently towards the stairs.

Back in the Shell dormitory, Aubrey Racke crept towards his bed with beating heart. A stirring movement from Talbot's bed caused him to halt with blanched face; but Talbot had only rolled over in his sleep, as Racke realised a few moments later. He crept to his own empty bed, hastily slipped off his dressing-gown, and got in between the sheets.

In the darkness a twisted smile curled his thin lips.

"I'll burn those seven pages in the morning," he told himself. "They're safe enough in the pocket of that dressing-gown till then."

And with that satisfied thought the scoundrelly black sheep fell asleep.

CHAPTER 9.

A Shock for Racke!

THE clang of the rising-bell was echoing through the crisp morning air when Aubrey Racke opened his eyes again.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, Talbot, and Kangaroo were already tumbling out of bed. Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn were following suit.

George Alfred Grundy was still snoring lustily, his untidy, tousled head almost buried beneath the blankets. But Tom Merry and Talbot, grinning, grasped him by the ankles and hauled him out in a violent heap of waving arms and legs.

"Oh! Groooop!" gasped Grundy. "I'll wallop you—"

He tumbled to his feet, and hurled himself at the grinning figure of Reginald Talbot wrathfully; but Talbot neatly side-stepped, and Grundy, catching his feet against his own boots, where he had flung them down the night before, went sprawling, with a yell.

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy sat up breathlessly, gasping, and glared at the grinning faces of the Shell fellows.

He picked himself up, snorting.
"Cackling asses!" growled the great George Alfred.
"I've a jolly good mind to wallop the lot of you!"

Whiz!
A sponge, dipped in icy water, went sailing through the air as Grundy glared round. It landed on the face of George Alfred, and George Alfred sat down again, with a bump, and a gasp, and another yell.

"Oh! Yooooooooop!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You—you—you—"
Grundy staggered to his feet, struggling for words. But before he could vent his wrath on anyone there came a peculiar interruption.

It was from Aubrey Racke.
Racke had given a sudden, sharp cry, as of utter dismay. Like the rest of the Shell fellows, Grundy glanced round quickly.

Racke was standing by his bed, his hand groping feverishly in the pocket of the dressing-gown on the chair beside his bed. His face seemed strangely white.

For a moment or two he seemed unaware of the curious eyes fixed upon him, and continued to search in a feverish way through the pockets of his dressing-gown. Then suddenly he seemed to realise the attention he had drawn to himself by his involuntary exclamation. His hand came away from his dressing-gown almost guiltily, it seemed to Tom Merry, who was standing near him.

"What the dickens is the matter, Racke?" ejaculated Bernard Glyn.

"N-nothing!" stammered Racke.
"Lost something?" asked Tom Merry, staring at him.

"No!" said Racke thickly.
"You look as though you've seen a blessed ghost!" exclaimed Monty Lowther in astonishment.

Racke smiled in a sickly way.
"It's nothing," he said hastily. "I—I remember now. I thought for a moment I'd lost some money—"

"Do you generally keep your money in your dressing-gown?" asked Wilkins, staring at Racke.

"No, of course not!" Racke licked his lips, as if they had gone suddenly dry. "I dropped a pound note last night, though, just as I was getting into bed. I was thinking I had slipped it into my dressing-gown pocket, and when I didn't find it there, I thought I'd lost it. I was forgetting I put it in my coat-pocket instead."

He picked up his coat, and produced a pound note from an inner pocket.

"Yes, here it is," he said, with a laugh that seemed oddly forced.

"You look pretty rum about it," said Grundy bluntly.

Racke did not answer. He turned away. The juniors collected their towels and sponges for washing, and the incident of Racke's sudden, startled cry was soon forgotten.

But though he was now outwardly calm again, inwardly Aubrey Racke was a prey to consternation and horror.

For the pages stolen from Figgins' exam papers had vanished from the pocket of his dressing-gown in the night!

Racke's feelings during breakfast that morning were not enviable.

What had happened to the missing papers he could not imagine. But he knew that they could not have been in his pocket when he entered the Shell dormitory on the previous night after his visit to the Head's study. It was clear that he had dropped them on his way back to the dormitory, somewhere between there and the Head's study door.

He cursed himself for his carelessness. But it was too late now. The harm was done.

The question was, who would find the missing papers? And what would the person do with them?

It seemed highly likely that whoever found them would take it for granted they were rubbish, and not bother twice about them, but throw them away into some wastepaper-basket. But on the other hand—

What if their finder realised that they were part of one of the Armitage papers and took them to the Head?

Then—even though Racke's connection with the affair could never be known—his rascally plan would be of no avail. The missing pages would be returned to Figgins' paper, and Figgins might win the Armitage Scholarship!

In the Hall, after breakfast, Crooke caught up with Racke. He touched Racke on the shoulder, and the cud of the Shell jumped nervously.

"My hat!" ejaculated Crooke. "You're pretty jumpy!"

Racke glared at him.
"What happened last night?" muttered Crooke anxiously.
"Did you do what you said you would? And what was the matter with you in the dorm this morning? You—"

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Racke, glancing round uneasily.

There were several fellows standing about by the letter-rack and the notice-board. Racke gripped Crooke by the arm and hurried him upstairs to their study. Inside the room, Racke locked the door and faced Crooke with a face that startled the latter by its haggard look.

"I did it," nodded Racke tensely. "Yes, I did it! But on the way back to the dormitory I must have dropped the pages I'd bagged—"

"You dropped them?" gasped Crooke.

"Yes!" snarled Racke. "And I've got to find 'em before some fool takes them to the Head—"

"But—"

"I've already covered the ground between the dormitory and the Head's study," went on Racke, more quietly. "They aren't anywhere there now, so someone must have picked them up. The chances are the chap has just chucked them away somewhere, thinking they're not important—"

Crooke grasped him eagerly by the arm.

"The maids!" he said. "They'll have been sweeping early this morning. They must have found them, of course."

"Gad!" Racke's eyes lit up, and a look of intense relief came into his face. "That's it! One of the maids must have found them, for a cert!"

"No need to worry," grinned Crooke. "The maid that found them would chuck them away as litter."

The haggard look had left Racke's face. He nodded.

"You're right. That's what happened, sure enough. I needn't have worried. It was when I found they weren't in my pocket that I let out that yell in the dorm. The chaps noticed it, too, but I put them off all right with that yarn about a quid."

(Continued on next page.)



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He smiled viciously.

"With those seven pages missing from his paper, Figgins won't stand an earthly!" he muttered. He took from his pocket the key with which he had opened the Head's desk. "Before first lesson I'm going down to the river to chuck this key in."

"You'd better," nodded Crooke. "If that were found, it would be pretty awkward for you."

"I'll go and get rid of it now," grinned Racke.

He unlocked the study door and strolled out into the passage, whistling.

Crooke, collecting his books for morning lessons, saw his crony crossing the quad a minute later, from the study window, and grinned to himself. He watched Racke vanish in the direction of the gleaming waters of the Rhyl.

He was about to turn from the window when three figures appearing at the top of the New House steps caught his eye.

They were Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn.

Figgins was looking quite cheerful. It was evident that he had confidence in the result of the Armitage Scholarship which was to be announced that day. He knew that he had done well in his exam paper, and had every hope that he had succeeded in beating his rivals for the coveted scholarship.

Figgins & Co. crossed the quad in the morning sunlight and vanished from sight in the direction of the close, where half a dozen juniors were already punting a footer about in the interval before classes.

It was a long while since George Figgins had put his toe to a football, and he was evidently eager to do so.

For a moment Crooke felt a stirring sympathy for Figgins. But he dismissed the thought, and turned from the window with a shrug.

In Crooke's opinion, if Figgins chose to make an enemy of Racke, the results were his own look out!

CHAPTER 10.

Baggy Takes a Hand!

"SILENCE!"

The deep voice of Dr. Holmes rang out in Big Hall, and instantly the murmur of talk died away.

It was five o'clock, and the fellows were gathered to hear the result of the Armitage Scholarship.

The Head, a dignified figure in cap and gown, standing on the big dais, glanced for a moment over the sea of eager faces. Then he looked down at the paper in his hand.

"I have here," he announced in ringing tones, "the results of the examination held yesterday for the Armitage Scholarship."

"We know that," muttered Kit Wildrake, the boy from British Columbia. "Why doesn't he cut the cackle and get to the horses?"

There were one or two chuckles from the fellows near Wildrake. They reached the ears of the Head, and he glanced up sharply, with a stern frown.

"Silence!" he commanded in majestic tones.

The chuckles died away.

"Any further noise and I shall punish the offenders severely!" observed the Head.

"Oh ewumbs!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, under his breath. "He seems in wathah a waxy mood!"

That remark was certainly not intended for the Head's hearing. But the old Head had keen ears, and his eagle eyes flashed round in the direction of the swell of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy, you were talking! Take a hundred lines!"

Arthur Augustus gasped and went very pink, and said no more.

A pin could have been heard to drop in Big Hall after that, as the Head glanced again at the paper in his hand.

"The total number of marks possible in this examination was one hundred," he announced. "I regret to say that even the winning paper did not earn anything approaching that number of marks. In fact, each of the three entrants left a considerable number of questions unanswered altogether."

He coughed.

"The winning paper gained sixty-six marks. That was the paper given in by Brown. The second paper gained fifty-eight marks—the paper given in by Bates. The third paper gained forty-nine marks; that was Figgins' paper."

Dr. Holmes glanced up. For a moment his eyes rested on the deathly white face of George Figgins, standing near the front. Then he looked towards Dick Brown.

Dick Brown's face was shining with an almost incredulous joy.

"The winner, therefore, of the Armitage Scholarship is Brown. Brown, I congratulate you!"

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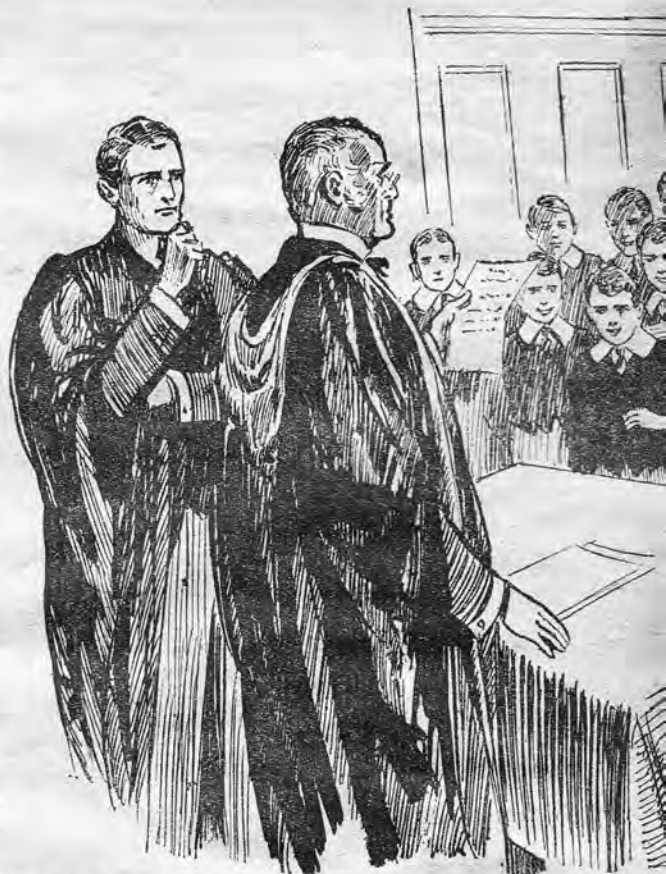
"Thank you, sir!" gasped Dick Brown.

"I wish to see you afterwards in my study, Brown. And—er—Figgins, I should like to see you, too, in half an hour's time. Boys, dismiss!"

The Head rustled from the dais.

To George Figgins, as he turned and stumbled away with the crowd out of Big Hall, everything seemed hazy and unreal.

He was vaguely aware that Kerr and Fatty Wynn were on either side of him, their faces filled with blank dismay. The sympathetic faces of other fellows appeared before his almost unseeing eyes like faces in a dream. Then he found himself going down the broad steps into the quad, and the cold air was like a tonic to his dizzy brain. His senses cleared.



There was a deep silence in Big Hall as the Head read out the results.

Bottom of the three! Despite his high hopes, his paper for the Armitage had apparently been the poorest of all. The Armitage Scholarship had gone to Dick Brown; and he himself, now that his father could no longer afford to keep him at the school, would have to leave St. Jim's.

Though his face, except for its unnatural paleness, betrayed nothing of the misery within him, Figgins' heart was sick and aching.

He felt a touch on his arm. Glancing round, he found Tom Merry beside him.

"Figgy, old chap—"

Tom's voice was oddly unsteady, Figgins noticed.

"Figgy, old chap, I—I'm awfully sick about this," muttered Tom, stumbly seeking for words to express his sympathy and his own unhappiness. "It's rotten! After what you told us, old chap, about—about—"

He broke off awkwardly. Figgins smiled in a twisted way.

"About my having to clear out if I failed to get the Armitage?" he finished on Tom's behalf. "Yes, that's so."

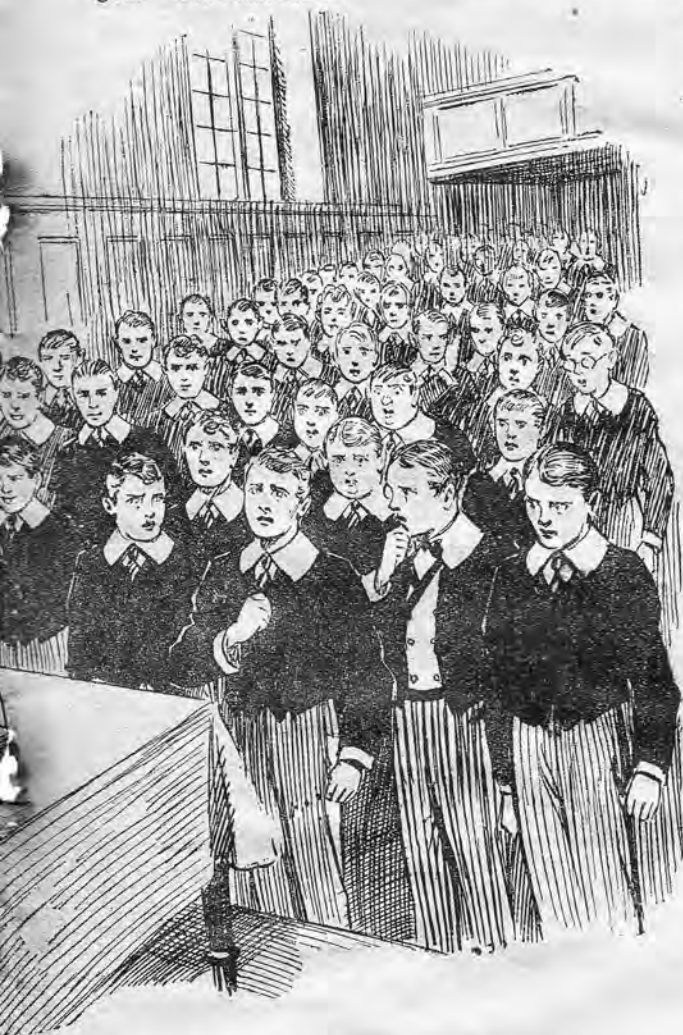
I shall have to go. I—I can't quite realise yet, Tom, but—

He could get no further. Silently he gripped Tom Merry's hand and moved on, with Patty Wynn and Kerr, in the direction of the New House, through the swarming crowd that still poured from Big Hall.

"Figgins!"
A voice caused Figgins to pause again. He found the delicate-looking figure of Dick Brown pushing towards him. "Hallo, kid!" said Figgins. He forced a smile. "Congratulations! Lucky chap!"

"Thanks, awfully!" muttered Brown in a low voice. "It's decent of you to say that. I—I'm sorry—"

"Sorry I didn't win?" put in Figgins, with a twisted grin. "Don't talk rot—"



mination results. When he had finished, George Figgins' face was

"No. I was going to say I'm sorry there aren't two scholarships," said Dick Brown. "One for you as well! I—I know what this means to you, of course, and I—I'm awfully sorry. But—well, winning the Armitage means a lot to me, too. You understand that, don't you? My—my mother—"

"That's all right, kid!" said Figgins almost roughly. "Don't look so worried. Of course, I'm sorry to have to leave St. Jim's, but that's not your fault. The best man won. And good luck to you!"

He took the hand that Brown held out to him, then strode on with his two chums. They vanished into the New House.

In the dusky quad the fellows began to disperse in talkative groups.

The result of the examination had come as a surprise to everyone, and to Figgins' friends as a staggering blow.

That Figgins, after his modest confidence, had only managed to gain forty-nine marks to Dick Brown's sixty-six left Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. and Figgins' other friends in the School House absolutely flabbergasted.

And knowing as they did that the result meant that Figgins would have to leave St. Jim's without delay, their faces, as they entered the School House, were blank with dismay.

But there was one fellow, at any rate, who was scarcely surprised at the results given out by the Head.

Aubrey Racke, as he mounted the steps leading to the School House doorway, was fairly hugging himself with glee.

There was a glowing light in his eyes, a thin smile on his face.

Though Figgins would never know that Racke had had anything to do with it, Racke knew well enough that it was he who was directly responsible for Figgins' unexpected failure. With those seven stolen pages added to the twenty-two pages which the Head had marked, without doubt Figgins must have topped the list, seeing that only three-quarters of his full paper had gained no less than forty-nine marks.

Racke touched his cheek. It was still a little painful, even now, from the bruise that Figgy's rugged fist had placed there that afternoon over two weeks ago.

"I fancy this squares things with the hound!" Racke told himself, with bitter malevolence.

Then he turned his head. As he had been about to enter the School House doorway a hand had grabbed his arm. Glancing down, he found the fat figure of Baggy Trimble beside him.

Racke shook off Baggy's clutching fat fingers angrily. "Hands off, hang you!"

Racke imagined that Baggy wanted to borrow money off him, and he had no intention of lending him any.

"I say, Racke, old chap—"

"Out of the way, you fat cub!"

"Oh, really, Racke! I want a word with you. It's jolly important—"

"Rats!"

Racke thrust Baggy roughly aside, and the Falstaff of the Fourth sat down with a bump and a gasp.

"Ow!"

Racke strode on towards the stairs. But in a few moments he heard scuttling footsteps behind him. Again Baggy Trimble clutched at his sleeve, and this time Baggy's face was red with wrath, and his eyes were gleaming with a very determined light.

"Look here," panted Baggy hotly. "I jolly well want to talk to you, you dingy rotter! And if you don't want to get kicked out of St. Jim's you'll jolly well listen to what I've got to say!"

Racke jumped. In a moment his face had gone deathly white.

With his guilty conscience, Baggy's mysterious threat had turned his heart strangely cold.

Baggy knew something!

"What do you mean?" answered Racke in a low, trembling voice.

Baggy grinned. There was a cunning gleam in his little eyes.

"That's made you change your tune, has it?" he sniffed.

He glanced round. The Hall was empty. With a triumphant snigger, the Falstaff of the Fourth tapped Racke on the chest with a podgy forefinger.

"Listen to me!" said Baggy truculently. "I want a word with you! In private!"

"I—I don't understand!" breathed Racke hoarsely.

"Don't you?" grinned Baggy gleefully. "Well—he, he, he—I know all about you and Figgy's Armitage paper!"

CHAPTER 11. Blackmailed!

FOR a moment Racke's face went almost yellow. His heart seemed to stop beating. Then he pulled himself together.

When he spoke again he had got control of himself, and his voice was quite quiet.

"I don't know what you are talking about, you fat ass!"

Baggy's eyes gleamed.

"Oh, don't you?" he sneered. "I tell you I know all about your little visit to the Head's study last night—"

Despite himself, an involuntary startled gasp escaped Racke.

"Quiet, you fool!"

He glanced round anxiously. But there was no one about. Baggy Trimble sniggered.

"So you don't know what I'm talking about?" he jibed.

"Well, you seem jolly scared of anyone hearing what I've got to say! And, anyway, you can't fool me! You see—

he, he, he—I've got those pages you took from Figgy's Armitage paper, and I've a jolly good mind to take 'em straight to the Head, and tell him all about it!"

Racke caught his breath. He gripped Baggy by the shoulder, staring down at the fat Fourth-Former's excited

countenance with eyes that glittered strangely from his own deathly white face.

When he spoke, his voice was as hard as ice.

"How much is it worth to you to keep quiet and to give me those papers? What's your price?"

Baggy chuckled.

"Now you're talking!" he murmured. "Let's go up to your study and talk about it!"

"Come on, then!" snapped Aubrey Racke; and he turned to the stairs.

Baggy scuttled beside him, his fat face alight with greed, his little eyes gleaming cunningly. Racke strode up the stairs with a face that was strangely set and very pale. Now and then Baggy glanced at his companion's thin features and grinned.

That he held the whip-hand he knew. Racke was at his mercy.

And Racke was a wealthy fellow, who could afford to pay heavily for the price of his silence. Baggy almost licked his lips at the thought.

In the Shell passage Racke pushed open the door of Study No. 7, and Baggy scuttled inside. Racke followed him, closing the door.

"Now," said Racke quietly, "where are those papers?"

Baggy sniffed.

"Think I'm going to tell you until you've paid for 'em?"

Racke bit his lip.

"How did you get hold of them, hang you?"

Baggy sniggered.

"I'd felt a bit peckish in the night," he explained. "So I went downstairs to have a snack, and I saw you coming out of the Head's study. And I saw you drop those papers out of your pocket, too, by the stairs there—"

"And you hung on to them, instead of taking them to the Head?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Blackmail—what?" said Racke harshly.

"Oh, really, Racke!" Baggy put on a very injured air.

"That's a rotten way of putting it! I didn't want to get you into trouble by taking those papers to the Head."

"How kind of you!" sneered Racke bitterly.

"I thought I'd tell you about 'em," explained Baggy, "and—ahem!—see if we couldn't come to some little arrangement. I don't want to get you into a row by showing you up—"

"But you will, unless I pay for your silence?" put in Racke calmly. "Well, if that isn't blackmail, I'd like to know what is!"

"Oh, really, Racke, old chap—"

"Chuck that infernal virtuous air!" snarled Racke, in sudden savage fury. "Let's get to business! What's your price, hang you?"

"I—I hope you don't think I'm trying to blackmail you," persisted Baggy stiffly. "I wouldn't stoop to such a thing, of course. It's simply that I'm doing you a good turn by not telling the Head, and so it's up to you to do me a good turn in exchange, old chap! What about—ahem!—five pounds?"

Baggy named the figure with a breathless gulp, his eyes fixed on Racke to perceive their effect. For a moment Baggy wondered if his price was too high, despite Racke's wealth. But evidently it was not. Racke put a hand into his pocket and took out a five-pound note.

Baggy reached out a greedy hand. But Racke drew the money back.

"Half a minute!" he said grimly. "Where are those papers?"

Baggy blinked at him.

"Eh?"

"The papers!" muttered Racke, with eager impatience. "You must give them back to me. Those pages out of Figgins' exam—"

Baggy's eyes gleamed cunningly.

The readiness with which Racke had produced the big sum of money he had demanded told Baggy very definitely that he held the whip-hand of the black sheep of the Shell. And he certainly did not mean to relinquish anything of his power.

"Rats!" he retorted. "You gimme that money first! I know you! Once you'd got those papers you'd try to get out of the stumping up, I dare say. Cash first!"

Racke ground his teeth.

"Look here, you fat cad—"

"That's enough from you!" said Baggy threateningly. "Hand over that fiver, or I'll go straight to the Head! I'm not going to see poor old Figgys leave St. Jim's when he ought to be staying on as the winner of the Armitage—not unless you hand over that fiver, that is!" he added hastily.

Racke's lips curled contemptuously, bitterly. But he knew that Baggy had him in a cleft stick. He was powerless to refuse Baggy's demand.

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"Curse you!"

He thrust the banknote into Baggy's clutching fingers. The Falstaff of the Fourth pocketed it gloatingly. He wagged a threatening finger at Aubrey Racke.

"This'll teach you the error of your ways, you rotter," sniffed Baggy loftily. "As for those papers, I'm hanging on to 'em! I refuse to give them to a rotter like you! And—and if you don't look out, I'll go straight to the Head with them!"

Racke's face went livid. He raised a clenched fist as if to deal Baggy a blow in the face, in his baffled fury.

But Baggy jumped back hastily, and pulled open the door.

"If you lay a finger on me, I'll show you up!" he gasped. "Don't you dare touch me!"

"Quiet, you fool!" stammered Racke. "I—I won't touch you!"

"You'd jolly well better not!"

And, with a sniff, Baggy scuttled out into the passage and shut the door, leaving Aubrey Racke staring, white faced, after him.

A low groan escaped him.

His evil plan regarding George Figgins had worked, bringing him his villainous triumph. But now, it seemed, he was to pay the price! Baggy knew, and held the proof of his rascality. He was utterly in Baggy's power!

CHAPTER 12.

The Last of Figgins!

"HERE comes Figgys!"

Monty Lowther muttered the words in a very miserable tone.

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. were standing in the quad, near the New House steps. It was on the following afternoon, and a big crowd of juniors had gathered to say good-bye to George Figgins as he left St. Jim's for good.

A cab was standing near the gates, with Figgys's luggage already placed on the roof. And now the lanky figure of the New House leader—who would be leader there no more—had stepped into view at the top of the steps.

For a moment Figgins seemed thoroughly disconcerted to find the big crowd gathered to greet him.

He faltered, and the colour left his face. Then, with firm steps, he strode down into the quad. Fatty Wynn and Kerr, who were accompanying him to the station, appeared a moment later. But it was upon Figgins that all eyes were fastened.

"Poor old Figgys!"

The crowd of juniors had surged forward, surrounding Figgins, everyone eager to shake him by the hand and give him a word of sympathy. Figgins let his hand be grasped mechanically, smiling with an obvious effort.

"Good-bye, Figgys!"

"Cheerio, old horse!"

"Best of luck!"

"Twilightfully sowwy to see you goin', deah boy!"

Figgins did not speak, but glanced round at the fellows with misty eyes. Kerr glanced at his watch, and touched him on the arm.

"Afraid it's time we got along, old chap, if we're to catch that train."

Figgins nodded, and turned towards the waiting cab.

As he was about to climb into it Tom Merry reached his side. He gripped Figgins' hand.

"Figgys, old chap," said Tom huskily, "good-bye! Come and see us one day, won't you? Don't forget St. Jim's."

"Forget St. Jim's?" echoed Figgins, with a little mirthless laugh. "I'll never do that, Tom!"

He tightened his grasp on the fingers of the captain of the Shell, and stepped into the cab.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn climbed in after him. The cabby whipped up his horse, turning it towards the gates.

Through the dense throng of silent juniors the cab rolled, bearing with it George Figgins of the New House.

The occasion was too gloomy a one for the fellows to give him a cheer. In sympathetic silence they watched the cab roll out of the big gates, and along Rylcombe Lane.

Before it vanished round the corner a head was thrust out, staring back.

It was Figgins. He waved his cap, and a score or more of caps were waved back to him from the crowd at the gates.

Then the cab vanished round the bend.

Figgins had gone!

"I say, you chaps!"

Baggy Trimble had put his head in at the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. It was tea-time.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced up. Blake picked up a book, Digby seized a cricket-stump, Herries took hold of a cushion, and Arthur Augustus lifted a footer boot from the floor.

"Scat!" roared Blake and Herries together.

"Oh, really, you chaps—"

"Hop it, fat egg!" exclaimed Digby, brandishing his cricket-stump. "We're not going to lend you any money and we're not going to give you a free tea either!"

"I don't want a free tea!" hooted Baggy indignantly.

"And I don't want to borrow any money—"

"B-bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus dazedly, lowering the boot he had been about to hurl in sheer amazement.

"Who said the age of miracles had passed?" gasped Blake.

"Oh, really, you chaps!" Baggy blinked at the four chums of Study No. 6 in a very injured way. "I wanted to invite your chaps to tea in my study. I'm standing a bit of a spread—"

"W-what?" stuttered Herries.

"He's burlbling!" gasped Blake.

To hear Baggy issuing an invitation to tea was certainly amazing. Baggy, the biggest tea-cadger at St. Jim's, was not the fellow to return hospitality as a general rule by any means.

"I'm—ahem—in funds," explained Baggy grandly, "and I thought I'd like to ask you chaps. Tom Merry & Co. are coming, so's Talbot and Kangaroo."

"Is the fat clam trying to pull our legs?" breathed Digby wonderingly.

"Oh, really, Dig! I always was a generous chap, you know. Big-hearted, like all the Trimbles. You see—ahem—an uncle of mine has sent me a fiver—"

"A whatter?" yelled Blake.

"A fiver!" smirked Baggy. "He's a very wealthy chap, my uncle. A fiver's nothing to him!"

Blake & Co. stared at one another. Then they stared at Baggy.

They could scarcely credit that Baggy really meant to stand a feed in his study. But if it were true that Tom Merry & Co. and one or two others had already accepted the invitation, there must surely be something in it. It was evident that Baggy had persuaded the Terrible Three of his genuineness, at least.

How the feed came to be in existence was something of a mystery. The story of the fiver from a wealthy uncle they definitely did not believe! But so long as the feed was there, it did not much matter how.

Blake jumped to his feet with a grin.

"Right-ho, Baggy!" he nodded. "We'll come. If you're not pulling our legs—"

"Oh, really, Blake!"

Bewildered and still only half convinced, the four chums of Study No. 6 followed Baggy, who was strutting proudly to Study No. 2, the study which he shared with Percy Mellish and Kit Wildrake.

Mellish and Wildrake were not at home, but the study was already crowded. The Terrible Three were there, and so was Kangaroo, and a few moments after Blake & Co.'s arrival the stalwart figure of Reginald Talbot appeared, staring into the study very dubiously, evidently as doubtful of the actual existence of a feed as Blake & Co. had been.

But Talbot's doubts, like those of Study No. 6, were instantly put at rest by the sight of the table in Baggy's study.

It was fairly groaning beneath the good things with which it was laden.

Cakes and tarts and doughnuts, tins of sardines, and

plates of ham, eggs, and pickles, and meringues and biscuits were set out in lavish profusion. It was a spread in a hundred, and Baggy's guests could not help but wonder if it was all a dream as they sat down round the festive board, with Baggy beaming hospitably at the head of the table.

"Pile in, you chaps!" smirked Baggy. "Make yourselves at home!"

And the chaps did!

If anything were calculated to take their minds off the gloomy subject of Figgins' departure from St. Jim's earlier that afternoon, to find themselves enjoying a munificent spread provided for them by Baggy Trimble of all people was the thing to do it.

It was almost unbelievable—yet it was true!

"Where the dickens can Baggy have got his funds from?" Kangaroo breathed to Manners.

Manners shook his head hopelessly.

"Goodness knows!"

"I say, Baggy, this feed must have cost you the dickens of a lot!" ejaculated Digby, as he helped himself to another slice of ham.

Baggy smirked.

"Rather! But that doesn't matter. Plenty more where that fiver came from!"

"You're expecting more funds?" gasped Talbot.

"You bet!" sniggered Baggy. "He'll jolly well have to cough up when I ask him, or—"

"Eh?"

Baggy stopped abruptly. He coloured.

"Ahem! I—I mean, my uncle is sure to come across with more hoodle soon. He—he told me to ask him when I wanted more, you see—"

"He must be a blessed millionaire!" said Monty Lowther wonderingly, helping himself to a slice of cake.

"He is!" nodded Baggy. "He's a millionaire all right."

The juniors glanced at one another. They could not quite believe Baggy, despite the magnificent spread he had so unexpectedly provided.

"Who is he, this giddy uncle of yours?" inquired Blake, staring at Baggy.

"What's his name?"

"Uncle—er—Fred," Baggy told him. "I say, wade into the tuck, you chaps!" he added hastily, almost as if

anxious to change the subject. "Have some more pickles, Herries, old chap!"

"Thanks!" said Herries. "I will!"

"Uncle Fred, eh?" put in Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I don't remember ever hearing about your Uncle Fred before, Baggy."

Baggy coughed.

"Nunno. You see, he's just got back from abroad."

"Oh! Where's he been?"

"Canada!" gasped Baggy. "He—he's been out there a long time! We thought he was dead, but he's turned up now—a giddy millionaire! Frightfully generous chap!"

"He must be, if he's sent you a fiver!" exclaimed Blake.

"Wahah, bai Jove!"

"Anyway, don't let's talk about him!" said Baggy peevishly. "Gussy, what about another tart? They're Mrs. Taggles' best."

"Thanks, dear boy! They're wippin'!"

"Good! Pile in!"

Baggy's guests demolished the good things with a will.

They were amazed, but they could no longer doubt the story of Baggy's mysterious uncle, who had turned up from Canada to shower pocket-money upon his fat nephew! The proof of the truth of Baggy's statements seemed to be on the table before them.

Baggy's guests departed at last to do their prep. Left alone in the study, with the table still plentifully spread,

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Next Week's STAR Programme!

There are so many good things on next week's bill of fare, chums, that it's hard to decide which to tell you about first. Still, here goes!

Item No. 1 is

"A ROGUE'S REWARD!"

—the second splendid story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, from the masterly pen of Martin Clifford. If you've read this week's powerful yarn—"Under Trimble's Thumb!"—all I need tell you about its successor is that it's every whit as good, if not better. Make sure of reading—

"A ROGUE'S REWARD!"

—a story you'll remember!

Item No. 2 is one you're waiting for, I know. The GEM has a reputation for serial stories of the highest class, and in

"THE VALLEY OF FORTUNE!"

we have one of the best yet. You've met Dick Blackwood and his fellow fortune-seekers this week (three of the best, aren't they?) and next Wednesday they're up to their eyes in breath-taking adventures that will hold you all the time. 'Nuff said!

Then there's our old pal, the ORACLE. I dare say you've noticed that the GEM's walking encyclopedia has made a New Year resolution, viz., namely, and to wit: "Better and better replies during 1930." You have? Then keep him busy, boys!

Last, but most decidedly not least, is our travelling busybody, Mr. "NOSEY" PARKER, who pops in to Newcastle United and has a high old time. You'll be interested in what he finds out about the famous Tynesiders.

Cheerio, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

Baggy sat down again with glazed countenance to enjoy a final snack.

He had already eaten about five times as much as anyone else, and his breath was coming with difficulty.

As he piled his plate with what was left of the ham and eggs, Baggy grunted a self-satisfied grunt.

"My hat!" he breathed. "This is ripping! I'll show the chaps how to splash money about, how to do things in style!"

He plunged a hand into his pocket and pulled out a handful of money, with eyes that gleamed greedily. He counted it over on the table.

"Still one pound nineteen and fourpence left!" he chuckled. "When that's gone I'll make Racke stump up some more! He, he, he!"

And with a greasy grin on his fat countenance Baggy Trimble got busy once again with his knife and fork, and sighed contentedly.

CHAPTER 13.

Something "Fishy"!

DURING the week that followed the departure of George Figgins, Baggy Trimble's sudden rush of wealth amazed everybody.

His funds seemed inexhaustible.

No longer did Baggy lurk in the Hall and touch people on the arm in attempts to borrow a shilling. His pockets were always full of cash, and he seemed to spend most of his time in Dame Taggles' little tuckshop. He stood several magnificent spreads in his study—more for "swank" than from a genuine desire to offer hospitality to other fellows, as the juniors realised. But there was no doubt that Baggy's teas were stupendous!

Such fellows as Percy Mellish and Scrope began to toady to Baggy in consequence.

The fame of Baggy's wealthy Uncle Fred, recently arrived in England from Canada, spread even to the New House.

With Baggy's new wealth continually in evidence before their eyes, Tom Merry & Co. could not doubt the existence of Uncle Fred. And yet, somehow, deep in their hearts, the Terrible Three could not help but feel faintly suspicious that there was more in Baggy's new-found riches than appeared on the surface.

Racke alone could have explained everything—and Aubrey Racke had the best of reasons for not doing so!

The black sheep of the Shell was utterly helpless in the face of Baggy's insatiable demands for funds. Again and again Baggy was visiting him with threatening demands for money, and all Racke could do was to pay up!

He had made several attempts to find the stolen papers that Baggy had in his possession; but though he had ransacked Study No. 2 during the absence of its occupants one afternoon, the search had been a vain one.

It was clear to Racke that Baggy had hidden the pages of Figgins' Armitage paper somewhere very safe!

He was helpless, furious, and baffled, utterly powerless.

And Baggy Trimble continued to strut about St. Jim's with a complacent smile upon his fat face, and his pockets lined with cash.

It was one evening more than a week after Figgins' departure from St. Jim's that Kerruish, the junior from the Isle of Man, burst into the junior Common-room.

A crowd of fellows were there.

Tom Merry was deep in a game of chess with Harry Manners. Monty Lowther, Talbot, Kangaroo, and Bernard Glyn were having a game of halma, and Blake & Co. were watching. Several others were gathered round the fire talking and reading. At Kerruish's sudden entry a good many of them glanced round.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Kit Wildrake. "You look excited! What's up?"

Kerruish crossed to the fireplace.

"I've just seen a funny thing—" he began, frowning.

"Well, it can't have been Gussy," drawled Cardew, "because Gussy's here."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Cardew! If you are twyin' to be funny—"

"Perish the thought!" yawned Cardew.

"I've just been over to the New House, to see Digges about some stamps he wanted to swop," went on Kerruish. "As I was coming back I saw Baggy in the quad, standing under the elms there, with Racke."

"Well?" queried Manners, who had glanced up from his game of chess.

"And Racke was giving Baggy money!" exclaimed Kerruish. "It was pretty dark, but I saw him give Baggy a couple of notes. Then they heard me, and moved away quickly."

"Bai Jove! That's queeah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in great astonishment.

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"Frightfully rum!" nodded Talbot, staring at Kerruish. "Are you sure?"

"Certain!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"What on earth should Racke be giving Baggy money for?" demanded Clifton Dane, of nobody in particular.

"That's just it!" nodded Kerruish. "Racke wouldn't give Baggy money for fun. There must be some reason. And seeing how frightfully flush Baggy has been lately—"

"Great pip! You don't mean you think Racke has been supplying Baggy with funds all the time?" cried Manners sharply.

"But Baggy says he's been getting remittances from his uncle," broke in Lennox.

"So he says," grunted Kerruish. "But that yarn's worth nothing, probably. We all know what a howling fibber Baggy is. Who's seen a letter arrive for Baggy during the last week?"

There was no answer. Evidently nobody had.

"According to Baggy's yarn, he must have been getting letters, with cash in them, every two or three days, at least," went on Kerruish. "But nobody's seen a single one of them! That's fishy, isn't it? And now I've seen Racke giving the fat fraud money—"

"It certainly looks pretty queer," broke in Tom Merry quietly. "But—"

He broke off. The door had opened, and Baggy Trimble himself had come rolling into the Common-room.

The talk ceased abruptly. Baggy blinked round at the crowd of juniors in rather a puzzled way. Then he rolled across towards the fire.

"Hallo, Baggy!" said Clifton Dane. "How's your uncle—the one from Canada?"

Baggy glanced at him quickly, rather suspiciously.

"He's all right," he answered. "Why?"

"Only wondering," grinned Dane. "Heard from him lately?"

Baggy nodded.

"Yes, rather! Had a letter from him this morning. He sent me a couple of quid."

As if to prove his assertion, Baggy plunged a hand into his pocket and took out two green Treasury notes, displaying them with a lofty air.

The juniors glanced at one another. It was a couple of pound notes that Kerruish had thought he had seen Racke hand to Baggy in the quad only a few minutes ago!

It was certainly queer!

"Sure your uncle sent you those?" put in Kerruish quietly.

Baggy blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Kerruish! Of course!"

"I saw Racke hand you a couple of quid in the quad just now, didn't I?" persisted Kerruish bluntly. "Have you got them on you as well?"

Baggy jumped. A startled look leapt into his eyes for a moment. It did not escape the keen scrutiny of the juniors.

"I—I dunno what you mean!" stammered Baggy. "You must have been dreaming. Racke didn't give me any money!" He blinked round nervously. "These quids came from my Uncle Fred, who's been in Canada, and just got back."

"We've heard that yarn!" grunted Clifton Dane. "Is it true, though?"

"Oh, really, Dane—"

"I don't believe it!" broke in Grundy. "If you ask me, the fat fraud's made up that yarn about his blessed uncle! It looks to me as if Racke's giving him money for some giddy reason, and they neither of 'em want anyone to know. S'pose you aren't blackmailing Racke, are you, you fat porpoise?"

Baggy turned pale. Grundy's careless remark was considerably too near the truth to be pleasant.

"Oh, really, Grundy—"

"Bai Jove! I wondah if Gwundy is wight?" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's quickly. "Baggy is pwobably blackmailin' Wacke, after havin' seen the wottah visitin' the Gween Man, or some howwible place like that—"

"I haven't!" yelled Baggy. "It's not that at all!"

"What is it, then?" grinned Kangaroo.

"I tell you Racke hasn't given me anything!" gasped Baggy. "This money's been sent me by my millionaire uncle from Canada—"

"What post did it come by?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"First post this morning," grunted Baggy nervously.

"Rats!" cut in Herries swiftly. "I was downstairs when the post arrived, and I'm jolly sure there wasn't a letter for you. There weren't many this morning, and I'd have noticed it for a cert if there had been."

"There was!" hooted Baggy desperately.

"If your uncle is so jolly fond of you as to be always sending you boodle, I suppose he'll be visiting you soon?" grinned Dick Julian.

Baggy blinked at him.

"Ye-e-es," he mumbled. "I—I s'pose he will."

Tom Merry gripped Figgins' hand. "Good-bye, old chap!" he said huskily. "Don't forget St. Jim's!"



"Good!" chuckled Julian. "I'll believe in your giddy uncle when I've seen him!"

Baggy seemed about to speak, but thought better of it. He blinked round nervously at the faces of the juniors, all fixed curiously upon his own. With an indignant sniff, the Falstaff of the Fourth turned and rolled to the door and vanished from the room.

In the passage outside he gave a gasp. "Oh lor'!"

It was quite clear to Baggy that unless he was very careful indeed the whole school would discover the truth of his ill-gotten funds, even though they did not know what his actual hold over Racke consisted of.

There was dismay in the face of the Falstaff of the Fourth as he rolled towards the stairs, and hurried as fast as his fat little legs would carry him up to the Shell passage.

He halted outside the door of Study No. 7 and knocked upon it. The harsh voice of Aubrey Racke bade him enter.

Baggy opened the door and entered the black sheep's study.

CHAPTER 14.

Racke's Plan!

"YOU, is it?"

Racke's voice was anything but genial as Baggy rolled into the room.

Racke was alone, seated by the fire reading a magazine. Baggy shut the door and rolled towards him.

"I—I say, Racke—"

"Get out!" snarled Racke. "I gave you some money ten minutes ago, didn't I? It's no good asking me for more now. I tell you you've skinned me, hang you! I've not got another cent till my pater sends me something—"

"It's not that," grunted Baggy peevishly. "I say, things are pretty awkward for me! The chaps don't believe that yarn about my uncle any more. Kerruish saw you give me that two quid in the quad just now—"

"What!"

"Kerruish saw us," growled Baggy. "And he's told the chaps. They think it's fishy!"

Racke's face had gone very startled. He stood up quickly. When he spoke his voice was hoarse.

"You fat fool! Did you give the game away?"

Racke was no less anxious than Baggy that the juniors should not know the true source of Baggy's supplies of cash. Though Baggy's demands had been anything but pleasant for the black sheep of the Shell, Aubrey Racke was living in perpetual dread lest the truth concerning Figgins and the Armitage Scholarship should somehow come to light. If the juniors found that he was being blackmailed by Baggy, awkward questions would undoubtedly be asked.

"Did you tell them anything?" hissed Racke, grasping Baggy's shoulder with a grip that caused Baggy to give a squeal.

"Ow! No! Leggo!"

Racke released his grasp, and stood breathing hard, his eyes glittering down into Baggy's.

"Look here!" said Baggy truculently. "You'll jolly well

have to do something! It's as much to your advantage as mine that the chaps don't tumble to the truth—more to yours, if it comes to that. You don't want it known about those pages you took from Figgins' exam paper—"

"Shut up, hang you!" muttered Racke, with a nervous glance at the door. "Keep quiet about that!"

"Well, what are you going to do?" growled Baggy. "It's up to you! Julian says he won't believe about my uncle until he sees him—"

"He does, does he?" snarled Racke. A thoughtful frown appeared on his thin face. Suddenly his eyes gleamed. "Gad! That's an idea!"

"What is?" demanded Baggy.

Racke grasped his shoulder.

"I can't afford to let the fellows doubt your yarn about this imaginary uncle of yours," he said grimly. "If the fellows won't believe it without seeing him, they'll have to see him, that's all!"

"But how can they see him, when he doesn't even exist?" hooted Baggy.

"Quiet, you fool!" Again Racke glanced anxiously at the door. "He may not exist, but that's no reason why someone shouldn't visit the school who's supposed to be your internal uncle!"

"M-my hat!" gasped Baggy, staring at him.

"I'll get hold of somebody to visit you here at the school," went on Racke. "Understand? You must pretend he is your uncle. That'll convince the chaps!"

"Rather!" chuckled Baggy. "Oh, good!"

"As for Kerruish, you must absolutely deny that he can have seen me giving you money!" snapped Racke. "Understand? I'll deny it, too. You didn't admit it, I suppose?"

"Rather not!"

"That's all right, then. Now get out!"

"I say, old chap, you'll be getting some cash from your pater soon?" grinned Baggy. "I shall want some in a day or two, I dare say—"

"Get out!" snarled Racke. "Get out of my sight, you fat thief!"

"Oh, really, Racke—"

"Clear out, I tell you!" said Racke savagely.

Baggy sniffed.

"I'll have you remember who you're talking to!" he said in a bullying tone. "You keep civil, or you'll be sorry!"

Racke controlled himself with an effort. He knew that Baggy held the whip-hand, and he dared not do anything but knuckle under.

"Sorry," he said thickly; though the look in his eyes was venomous. "I—I didn't mean to be insulting—"

"Well, you keep a civil tongue in your head!" warned Baggy, wagging a fat forefinger.

Baggy was fairly intoxicated with his sense of power over Racke. He glanced round the study and picked up the magazine that Racke had been reading on his entry.

"This looks an interesting mag," said Baggy blandly. "I think I'll take it!"

He tucked it under his arm, and turned towards the door. Racke choked.

But he said nothing. Baggy turned with his hand on the handle of the door.

"You'd better arrange that pretty soon, about the chap who's to pretend to be my uncle," he said with a sniff. "Don't waste any time!"

With a cool nod the Falstaff of the Fourth rolled from the study, leaving Aubrey Racke with a look upon his face that, if looks could kill, would have stretched Baggy lifeless on the threshold.

CHAPTER 15.

Baggy's "Uncle"!

"I SAY, you chaps—"

Baggy Trimble came rolling across the Close to where Tom Merry & Co., Talbot of the Shell, Levison and Clive, and Blake & Co. were punting a footer about. It was the following Wednesday, and the School House juniors were enjoying themselves in the Close while waiting for the dinner-bell.

"Tom, old chap!"

Baggy clutched with fat fingers at Tom Merry's sleeve, just as Tom sent the ball whizzing across towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well?" demanded Tom Merry impatiently.

"I want you to come and have tea with me this afternoon," explained Baggy eagerly. "My uncle is coming to visit me, and I thought I'd stand him a nice spread. My Uncle Fred, you know—the chap that's been sending me 'all that tin'!"

Tom stared at Baggy.

"Oh! You mean to say—"

"Yes, my Uncle Fred's coming to visit me!" repeated Baggy loudly.

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"What's that?" ejaculated Manners, who was standing near, and had heard Baggy's words—as Baggy had intended that he should.

"My Uncle Fred, from Canada," grinned Baggy. "He's coming to St. Jim's to see me this afternoon. I want you chaps to have tea with us."

"So it's true!" exclaimed Manners, in evident surprise.

"Oh, really, Manners—"

Baggy got no further. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had returned the rather muddy football, and it caught Baggy full in the face. Baggy sat down with a breathless yell.

"Oh! Yaroooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter from the fellows in the Close. Baggy sat up dazedly, his face covered with mud, as black as any nigger minstrel's.

"Yow! Oh! Mum—mummmmm!" gasped Baggy, rolling his eyes, which seemed to be the only white parts of his blackened countenance. "Grooooooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy scrambled up painfully, glaring at the chuckling juniors.

"You blessed cackling dummies—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Br-r-r!"

Baggy gave a furious snort and rolled away. For the moment, at any rate, he seemed to have forgotten the visit of his uncle that afternoon, and his desire for Tom Merry & Co. to have tea with that gentleman. All he wanted to do was to visit the bath-room just then!

But Baggy's statement had left the juniors with a topic of interest.

"So it's true about Baggy's uncle, then?" exclaimed Blake wonderingly. "He hadn't made it up after all."

"Evidently not," nodded Tom Merry. "We've misjudged Baggy this time."

"So he hasn't been gettin' his money by blackmailin', Wacke!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"I never thought that was very likely," grinned Sidney Clive.

"But if what Kewwuish said was twue, deah boy—"

"It can't have been," put in Talbot, shaking his head. "Kerruish must have made a mistake. Both Racke and Trimble have denied that all along, we know."

"Wonder what Baggy's uncle's like?" murmured Monty Lowther. "If he's anything like Baggy—"

"He can't be!" grinned Levison. "He wouldn't be such a generous chap if he was!"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

The bell for dinner sounded, and the juniors trooped off towards the School House.

Evidently Trimble had been spreading the story of his uncle's visit, for when Tom Merry & Co. took their places at the Shell table for dinner, they found that the other juniors were already discussing the subject.

It had caused quite a stir.

All the juniors had previously come to the conclusion that there was something "fishy" about Baggy's sudden wealth; and they had not been at all satisfied with Baggy's explanation of a generous uncle unexpectedly arriving home from Canada, after Kerruish's account of seeing money pass between Racke and Baggy one night.

But now it was generally agreed that Kerruish must have been mistaken, and that Baggy's story was evidently true.

"Lucky chap to have an uncle like that," remarked Gore enviously.

"My hat! Rather!" nodded Lennox.

After dinner quite a number of fellows strolled out to the gates, hoping to see Baggy's far-famed relation arrive.

Baggy had declared that his Uncle Fred would turn up at about two o'clock, and a few minutes before that hour a closed motor-car appeared round the bend of Rylcombe Lane, speeding towards the school gates.

"This must be him, you chaps!" grinned Baggy eagerly. "By the way, you know, you mustn't be surprised if he's a bit unusual to look at. He's been in the wilds of Canada so long that, of course, he doesn't worry much about dress, I expect. But he's got pots of money! A giddy millionaire, you know!"

"He won't be a millionaire much longer if he keeps on supplying you with tin at the rate he's started off!" chuckled Hammond of the Fourth a trifle enviously.

Baggy smirked.

The car turned in at the gates, and came to a standstill. The man at the wheel jumped out.

He was a tall man, with a weather-beaten face, and a hard-bitten look—evidently enough a man who was accustomed to the great open spaces! There was something sailor-like about his appearance. His clothes were neat, but, as Baggy had prophesied, not exactly smart.

The stranger glanced at the crowd of juniors, and advanced towards them with swinging strides.

His eyes instantly singled out Baggy Trimble.

As a matter of fact, the newcomer had never seen Baggy before, of course. But Racke's description of the Falstaff of the Fourth had been plain enough. The tall figure strode straight up to Baggy and held out a rough hand.

"Hallo, Bagley!" he said in a deep, rather rough voice. "You've not changed a bit since I last saw you, as a little nipper! I am your Uncle Fred."

Baggy winced at that big hand closed crushingly upon his own. Then he grinned. He would have liked to wink knowingly at his supposed uncle, but that, of course, was impossible in front of the other juniors.

"How do you do, uncle?"

"I'm fine, Bagley! You have got all my letters?"

"Rather, uncle!"

"And the enclosures, I hope, my lad?" went on "Uncle Fred" jovially.

"Rather!" sniggered Baggy, glancing round to observe the effect of all this upon the other juniors.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the supposed relation. "I believe in keeping a youngster well supplied in cash! I've not come back from Canada a millionaire for nothing, Bagley!"

Even if any of the juniors had had any doubts remaining concerning the source of Baggy's surprising affluence, they

would have been banished finally by that remark. Baggy chuckled inwardly.

"Come along to the tuckshop, Uncle Fred!" gasped Baggy. "I dare say you're a bit peckish after your drive down from London. This way!"

With a beaming smile on his fat face, the Falstaff of the Fourth trotted off in the direction of Dame Taggles' shop at his uncle's side. The juniors watched them vanish through the little doorway.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Levison. "Fancy having an uncle like that! He's wasted on a fat rotter like Baggy!"

"Absolutely!" chuckled Jack Blake.

"He looks like a giddy sailor to me," remarked Manners thoughtfully. "If I didn't know he was Baggy's uncle, I'd say, from the look of him and the way he walks, that he was a sailor of some sort."

"Well, we know he isn't," said Herries, glancing at his watch. "I say, it's time we got on to Little Side for the practice game, isn't it?"

The juniors dispersed. Whilst in the tuckshop Baggy Trimble and his bogus uncle, whose real name was Captain

(Continued on next page.)



"Generous Dick," who has offered 1jd. to start a pension fund for the Oracle, is advised by our hardy perennial to found a home for stray tortoises instead.

he once wished to refer in an address to a "loving shepherd," and set his scholars laughing by referring instead to a "shoving leopard"!

Q.—Is there a vacancy for an extra office-boy on the GEM staff?

A.—To "Eager Edgar," and about two hundred other readers, I regret I have the Editor's authority for replying—"No!" There may be, however, if the present representative of the species persists in whistling "Carolina Moon" for about six hours a day—but not until after the inquest, of course!

Q.—Where and what is the Alhambra?

A.—As you may know, Stanley P., there is a well-known music-hall of the name in London, but the Alhambra is a wonderful palace at Granada in Spain.

Q.—Whose face was said to have launched a thousand ships?

A.—Helen of Troy's. This expression was a tribute to her great beauty, supposed to inspire men to build fighting ships and seek battle for her sake. Other faces I know—I will mention no names—have been remarkable for their ability to stop buses!

Q.—What sort of hat did the Anglo-Saxons wear?

A.—There they go at it again! This is the sort of question, chums, that some of these young Third-Formers push into the post to make me spend days of tramping round museums, and to cause me to lose some of the few remaining hairs of my polished dome. Very kindly, as I thought, the office-boy offered to help me, so I got him the afternoon off, and we set out on our quest for correct and scientific information. We went westward along the Strand and the "O. B." got a bright idea and said that if I gave him the fare, he would go off and see if anything could be learnt in the highbrow air of Chelsea while I tried the British Museum and some of the principal hatters. All he seemed to have found out by the next morning though was that Chelsea had won. For my own part I had my pocket picked and had to walk home, having failed in my purpose.

Q.—Who wrote our National Anthem?

A.—No one knows for certain, Musical Mike. The words and music appeared in an English magazine in the year 1745. Regarding your second question as to whether King David of old invented the Jew's-harp I should say "No." Anyway, let's give him the benefit of the doubt.

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Q.—Can one tell the difference between the footprints of a cat and a fox?

A.—Yes, "Town Bred." From the description you give, however, I should judge that it was more likely a St. Bernard dog that was foraging around your dustbin. You will see by the illustrations the difference between the paw-marks of a cat, fox, and one or two other creatures. To obtain these remarkable records, our artist had to go out into the wilds of Wessex and spend a week-end in the vicinity of the "Spotted Goose" at Slump-ton-cum-Slump.

Q.—How many nuts do Londoners eat during the Christmas season?

A.—Something like 150 tons, "Wally," of Shadwell. If all these nuts were spread in a long line through Fleet Street, the Strand, and Piccadilly—they'd get cracked by the traffic.

Q.—Are there better things in the world than money?

A.—Certainly, "Deep Thinker"—but it takes money to buy 'em!

Q.—Are tall chaps lazier than short?

A.—Promptly on receipt of this question I summoned the office-boy, who is an authority on the subject of laziness. His answer was, "Yes—they're always longer in bed!"

Q.—Should he be a grocer?

A.—Among a great deal of correspondence I have received the following poignant letter from a fifteen-year-old reader who lives in the Midlands and wishes to be known only by the pen-name of "Worried Will." "Dear Mr. Oracle," he writes,—"I have just left school and am on the threshold of bizness life. My father is a retale grocer in B—, and he wants me to join him and help with the mvoices and accounts, but being fond of chemistry I want to take up a post if possible in a local liver-pill factory. If I got into the factory I would start with 17s. 6d. a week, and after a year get 2s. 6d. rise, and the same rise the next year while

I was larning, bringing me up to 25s. a week. My father will only pay me 15s. to start. What would you advice me to do?" By all means go into your father's retail grocery business, "Worried Will." If you can make 17s. 6d. plus 2s. 6d. plus 2s. 6d. come to 25s. you should be invaluable in keeping his accounts!

Q.—What is a gingall?

A.—A rest-musket, or light swivel-gun, of a kind used in India and China.

Q.—Who was W. A. Spooner?

A.—I have referred to this gentleman before, "Steadfast Chum." The Rev. W. A. Spooner was a well-liked don whose amusing confusions of speech have resulted in the word "Spoonerism" getting in our language. A typical example was when



Extracts from the sketch-book of our GEM artist after a visit to the country. The footprints of animals of the woodland. Reading from left to right, they are those of rabbit, stoat, weasel, polecat, squirrel, domestic cat, wild cat, and fox.

Gallon, of the s.s. Harvester, glanced at one another with knowing grins!

"All right?" muttered Captain Gallon, in a tone too low for Mrs. Taggles to overhear.

"Fine!" chuckled Baggy, as he helped himself to a tart from the dozen he had ordered.

But had he only been able to foresee all the consequences of Captain Gallon's visit to St. Jim's that afternoon, Baggy Trimble might have grinned less broadly!

Unfortunately for Baggy, he would not know that until it was too late.

As a matter of fact, he knew practically nothing of his supposed uncle. All he knew was that Racke had got into conversation with a likely-looking man in Wayland, that the man was the captain of a tramp-steamer, and that for a substantial consideration the stranger had agreed to playing the part of Baggy's uncle for a few hours. The car he had arrived in was a hired one, as Baggy knew.

Baggy imagined that after his "uncle" had driven away again that afternoon he would never set eyes on Captain Gallon again.

But in that, had he only known it, he was very much mistaken.

CHAPTER 16.

Missing!

"TIME I was going, Bagley!"

Baggy's bogus uncle rose to his feet, with a glance at his watch.

Tea in Study No. 2 had been a great success. The Terrible Three had accepted Baggy's invitation to that meal, and so had Blake & Co. of the Fourth. Wildrake and Mellish had been of the party, too, by right of the fact that it was also their study.

Baggy, as had become his custom since his recent affluence, had provided a lavish spread, which "Uncle Fred" had evidently enjoyed as much as the juniors.

He had told a good many yarns of adventures in foreign parts—Canada in particular. Though there was something about the man that Tom Merry, at any rate, could not quite bring himself to like, Baggy's "uncle" had certainly proved an entertaining companion.

But now it was apparently time for him to depart.

"I've got a long ride back to London, my lads!" exclaimed the tall visitor. "Time I went, I am afraid."

"Right-ho, uncle!" grinned Baggy. "I'll go with you to your car."

The party broke up, Baggy and his supposed uncle going downstairs together on their way out to the dusky quad.

As they emerged from the doorway of the School House, Captain Gallon glanced at Baggy with an intent scrutiny.

"I'm still in the dark, my lad," he muttered curiously, "as to why in thunder you wanted me to come here and pretend to be your millionaire uncle!"

Baggy grinned round hastily. But there was no one about, and his look of nervousness died away.

He grinned.

Baggy could never resist a chance of swanking.

"Well, you see," he murmured confidentially, as they moved across the dark quad to where the visitor's car was waiting, "I've got a fearfully rich uncle—a giddy millionaire—"

"Have you, by thunder?" muttered his companion, in a queer, thoughtful way.

"Yes, rather! But he—he's a shy sort of chap, you see," went on Baggy fatuously, "and he won't ever come to visit me here. And so a lot of the chaps won't believe it when I tell 'em I've got a millionaire uncle. I don't like swank, but when you've actually got a millionaire uncle, you like chaps to believe you, of course."

"Of course!" grinned his companion.

"And so I fixed this, to show 'em!" explained Baggy. "That chap Racke is a great pal of mine, and he fixed it for me, as you know."

"I see!"

They had reached the car. The man opened the door and switched on the lights.

"Care for a ride?" he asked suddenly. "Down the road to Rylcombe? There's a decent little tuckshop there, I saw. I dare say you could do with another snack, eh?"

Baggy's eyes gleamed greedily. Though he had had a huge tea, Baggy could always do with something further in the way of tuck.

"Rather!" he grinned.

"Hop in, then."

Baggy jumped into the car, and the sailor climbed in beside him. He touched the self-starter, and the engine began to purr.

With the headlamps raking across the dark quad, the big car swung past the lighted windows of the School House towards the gates.

It roared out into the road. Old Taggles, standing by his lodge, watched its red rear-light vanish round the distant bend.

"Which I don't 'old with them motors," grunted old Taggles. "Always a-runnin' of you down if you hain't careful! That's wot I says."

And Ephraim Taggles marched into his lodge, little dreaming that in watching the Falstaff of the Fourth drive away down Rylcombe Lane with his supposed uncle, his had been the last eyes at St. Jim's to see Baggy Trimble for many a day!

"Anybody here seen Baggy?"

Kit Wildrake had put his head in at the door of Study No. 9 in the Shell passage to ask that question.

It was late that evening.

Talbot, Gore, and Herbert Skimpole, the freak of the Shell, were seated by the cosy fire. They glanced up at Wildrake and shook their heads.

"No. Why?" inquired Talbot.

"The silly ass cut call-over, and Kildare wants to see him," explained Wildrake.

"He'll get licked," growled Gore, with a grin.

"You've not seen him, Skimmy?"

Herbert Skimpole, of the bulging brain and glimmering spectacles, lowered the fascinating volume entitled, "British Fungi, and How to Identify Them," which he had been reading, and shook his massive dome.

"Not recently, Wildrake, I fear. The last time I had cognizance of Trimble was just after dinner, when I requested him, quite politely, to return to me a loan of five shillings that I favoured him with a month ago. Considering his present condition of extreme affluence, it occurred to me that he might be only too willing to return the loan. But I fear he is a rude and selfish person, for he merely suggested that I should go away and devour coke. I pointed out that it is impossible for the human frame to digest such an unwholesome article, and that his advice was therefore ridiculous, but he was ill-mannered enough to walk off in the middle of my words—"

Wildrake, it seemed, was also ill-mannered enough to walk off in the middle of Skimpole's words. He closed the door, grinning, and approached the door of the next study—No. 10.

The Terrible Three were all at home. In response to Wildrake's query regarding Baggy Trimble their reply was emphatic.

"Not seen him," said Tom Merry.

"Nor want to," added Monty Lowther cheerfully.

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"Exactly!" agreed Manners. "Try the home for lost dogs."

Wildrake grinned, and tried the next study, that shared by Bernard Glyn, Clifton Dane, and Kangaroo.

"Baggy?" echoed Glyn, when Wildrake put his question. "Last time I saw him was in the quad with his uncle. Baggy was saying good-bye, I think."

"Well, Kildare wants him!" growled Wildrake. "He cut call-over, and he's in for a licking."

He left Study No. 11, and turned along the passage. A figure had appeared at the top of the stairs, coming towards him. It was Aubrey Racke.

Wildrake stopped him.

"Have you seen that fat ass Baggy?"

Racke shook his head rather grimly.

"No!" he snapped. "Why?"

"Kildare wants him for cutting call-over."

"What! Wasn't he in for call-over?"

There was a thoughtful frown on Racke's face as he moved on towards his own study.

From the window of Study No. 7, after tea, Racke had watched Baggy go off in his bogus uncle's car, with some surprise.

So Baggy had not yet returned!

"Queer!" muttered Racke.

It was not often that a junior missed call-over. When it did happen, it was generally on the part of one of the bolder spirits—certainly not a fellow like Baggy Trimble.

The fact that he was wanted by Kildare for the offence was proof enough that Baggy had had no pass.

As bed-time approached, Kildare himself, with frowning brow, was heard inquiring for the missing junior. But there was still no sign of Baggy, and there was still no sign of him when the Fourth went upstairs to their dormitory.

By that time Baggy's absence had caused a stir.

What could have happened to Baggy Trimble?

Bernard Glyn seemed to have been the last person to see him, when Baggy had been saying good-bye to his uncle in the dusky quad. Then it was discovered that Taggles had seen Baggy drive away with his supposed uncle in the latter's car.

That news doubled the interest over Baggy's mysterious disappearance.

The wrath of the authorities over Baggy's absence from call-over was now changed to anxiety. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, had informed the Head, and it was rumoured that Dr. Holmes had been on the telephone to the police. But there was still no sign of Baggy's return to St. Jim's, and in the dormitories, as the fellows went to bed, there was excited talk until lights-out, and even after.

But there was one fellow who did not join in the general excited discussion regarding Baggy's odd disappearance.

Aubrey Racke lay silent, apparently asleep, while eager whispers passed between the beds in the Shell dormitory.

But Racke was thinking hard, and there was a strange look on his thin face in the darkness.

When morning came, and the fellows in the Fourth Form dormitory awoke to find Baggy's bed still empty and unslept-in, the excitement rose to fever-pitch.

What had happened to Baggy?

It was a question which everybody was asking—and no one could answer!

Baggy Trimble had vanished.

After breakfast, Aubrey Racke stood at the window of his study, staring out into the quad, a prey to many conflicting emotions.



"Hallo, Bagley!" said the stranger, holding out his hand. "I'm your Uncle Fred."

Racke, certainly, would not be sorry to have seen the last of Baggy Trimble!

Racke's case was decidedly that of a bitter bit! With utter ruthlessness he had given full reign to his bitter venom against George Figgins, and—for what it was worth—he had triumphed. But he had had to pay the price of his villainous triumph! He had fallen, in his turn, into hands as ruthless as his own, and had been forced to suffer, with helpless fury, the torments of blackmail.

Racke had certainly no cause to desire the return of the missing junior.

But, knowing all he did, Aubrey Racke would have given a good deal to know more—to know for certain what had caused Baggy to vanish so mysteriously from St. Jim's, and what part Captain Gallon had played in that strange disappearance.

For that the man Gallon was in some way the cause of Baggy's vanishing, he felt convinced.

"What on earth can it mean?" muttered Racke, biting his lip, as he stared out, with unseeing eyes, into the quad.

Then a slow, twisted smile appeared on his face. He gave a shrug, and laughed harshly.

"Well, it's nothing to me! I'd be glad enough if Baggy vanished for good!"

The bell sounded. Racke picked up his books, and made his way downstairs to the Shell Form room.

Outside the Form-room door a crowd of Shell fellows was excitedly discussing Baggy's disappearance.

Racke did not join in the talk. Though he, knowing as he did that Baggy's supposed uncle had been an impostor, knew more than anyone else at St. Jim's, he certainly did not intend to tell what he knew to a soul! His own part in that affair would have been bound to come out then.

But during morning lessons Aubrey Racke could not keep his mind from that bewildering question that had so utterly mystified the whole school!

Where was Baggy Trimble?

THE END.

(It seems as if Racke has bitten off more than he can chew, doesn't it, chums? Look out, then, for the next grand story in this series, entitled: "A ROGUE'S REWARD!" You'll enjoy every line of it.)

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JOHN SYLVESTER.

Hard up and out of work, life seems dull to Dick Blackwood—until he is held up on the road at the point of a revolver! Then things happen with whirlwind swiftness!



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Night of Adventure!

THE cold night air roared against the face of Dick Blackwood as he opened the throttle of his motor-bicycle yet wider. She was doing sixty now. After five years' hard wear she was running as well as over. Actually, she had only been in his own possession for twelve months.

"But to think," he groaned, "I've got to sell her! That this is our last ride together!"

He gritted his teeth, conscious of hedges and telegraph-poles flying past, but conscious chiefly that when he reached London he would have to part with his machine.

Unfortunately, there was no help for it. The garage which had employed him had gone crash. The supply of mechanics, he was finding out, exceeded the demand. He had motored a hundred miles to-day after a job, but it had been already filled.

"I wish something would happen!" he thought; and then tried to force a grin.

After all, it was no use moping. Smile in the teeth of your troubles and they don't seem so bad. No doubt something would turn up.

At this point the road became more undulating. He slackened speed slightly. A few minutes later the white beam of his powerful acetylene lamp revealed something in the middle of the road. It was a man, his hand raised, and in the hedge was a car, with the lights turned off.

Something wrong, evidently. Dick felt almost glad. He would soon put it right. He welcomed the opportunity to exhibit his skill with the mechanism he loved. Shutting off the engine, he applied the brake. He brought his machine to a standstill, within a foot of the figure standing in the road.

A rather queer, unpleasant-looking man, with a scar running across his cheek. Dick formed an impression that he was a foreigner; and when he spoke this was confirmed by his perfect English—too perfect.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I have had a breakdown. Most foolishly I have come without my tools. Would you be good enough to lend me a spanner?"

"Sure thing!" said Dick, promptly alighting. "What's the trouble?"

"I think the carburetter is at fault."

"Not getting the juice—eh? I'll soon put it right for you!" declared Dick, unhitching his tool-bag.

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"You are extremely kind—"

"Not a bit of it! It's my job, you see. Got a torch?"

"Yes," nodded the man eagerly.

"Is the gas turned off?"

"Gas?" repeated the other vaguely.

"Petrol," explained Dick.

"Ah, I'll do so at once!"

Queer blighter, Dick thought. Swell car, too. Didn't seem to know much about it, though. Perhaps there was no petrol to turn off. He'd been served that trick before.

He opened up the bonnet. He was about to adjust his spanner when suddenly he felt something hard sticking into the small of his back.

"Put up your hands!" snapped a cold, metallic voice. "I've got a revolver here, and it's liable to go off!"

Dick gave a gasp, like a fish suddenly finding itself out of water. For a moment he couldn't believe it. It must be some joke. Within forty miles of London; this sort of thing was what you read about in fiction; it couldn't really be happening!

"Put them up!" roared the voice. "Are you deaf? If you think I don't mean it—"

But automatically Dick had complied. The odd part of it was that he didn't feel the least fear. He was thrillingly curious. To think that he, of all persons—rapidly approaching his last shilling—should be the chosen victim of highway robbery! It was rich!

At this moment another man approached. Evidently he had been hiding behind the car. He was tall and lean, with a saturnine face not easily forgotten.

"Now, then," he said peremptorily, "if you value your life you'll hand over those papers!"

"Do you mean my driving licence?" asked Dick meekly.

"You fool! This isn't a moment for joking. You'll hand over the papers you were carrying to Trent."

Interiorly, Dick's brain began to buzz with a new excitement; but outwardly his manner did not change.

"You've drawn a blank, I'm afraid. Case of mistaken identity. Who and what is Trent?"

The man gave vent to a guttural oath.

"If you think you are playing for time you'll find yourself in eternity mighty quick. I'll give you one more chance. Will you hand me those papers?"

"I only wish I could be more obliging," replied Dick softly. "You don't know how it hurts me to refuse. But I don't know anything about papers. I have never heard of Mr. Trent. My name, if it's of interest to you, is Richard Blackwood. You can examine my birth certificate by paying half-a-crown at Somerset House."

"You cheeky young cub! For two pins——"

"Search him!" broke in the man with the revolver impatiently. "He's only bluffing!"

The search was made. Dick's pockets were turned inside out. But the only result was the yield of references he had brought to show his prospective employers. These, however, halted proceedings.

"Dios! I believe he's speaking the truth! We've got the wrong man!"

For a moment the pressure of the revolver was relaxed.

"But I swear he's the living image——"

"It's your fault!" stormed the other. "Now we are landed with this half-wit! You'll have to answer for it to the chief!"

"He may still be bluffing. Search his machine!"

"And waste time when every minute counts! Listen!"

Dick had also heard the hum of a car. He could visualise the man behind him turning. That was his opportunity. Suddenly he whirled round and brought both hands down on the wrist of the man holding the gun. The attack was so unexpected, and he used such force that the man dropped the revolver.

It was too late to recover it. With an oath he grappled with Dick. He was powerful; but Dick, on the other hand, was nimble. He managed to jerk himself free, administering a right hook that sent the other staggering.

There was his companion to deal with, however. In the glare of the approaching car he looked hardly human in his rage. He swung up a small life-preserver, and Dick would have felt the weight of it if he had not ducked.

He had done some amateur boxing. So far from being scared, he hadn't enjoyed himself so much for years. For hadn't he complained about the dullness of his existence? And now, were not things happening fast enough to satisfy the most voracious appetite for adventure?

"Now then, you dirty dagoes!" he challenged. "Try me again. I'll take you both on!"

He was aware, as he spoke, that a car had drawn up in the road, and another man was leaping out. That heightened his confidence. He returned to his first opponent, who, failing to recover his revolver, had drawn a knife, and was crouching as though about to spring.

Dick feinted, and the man fell into the trap. The result was that he tried to parry the blow which never came; Dick aimed at the critical point, that vital space where the ribs end. Unfortunately, he struck an inch too high to be effective, and the knife descended, gashing his shoulder.

At the same time, within a foot of his head, the life-preserver, swung by the saturnine ruffian, described a downward curve. His skull would have been cracked if the new arrival, who had jumped from the car, hadn't intervened.

Dick realised that it was too dangerous to rely on his fists. He must get rid of that knife first. He closed again with his adversary.

There was a struggle going on behind him. Vaguely he was aware of its astonishing termination. An inert body was flung into the air like a sack of coals. It descended with a dull thud.

He struggled to get a better grip, but suddenly a knee was brought sharply into the pit of his stomach. The force of the treacherous blow sickened him for a moment. Before he could recover something crashed between his eyes.

He lost consciousness instantly. The next thing he remembered was blinking in a strong light. His head felt as though it were in an iron vice, which was being screwed tighter.

"What on earth—— Where am I?" he spluttered, as everything swam in front of his eyes.

Murder!

"FEELING better, sonny?"

That seemed ages after he had first opened his eyes. A cool bandage had relieved the throbbing of his head. He could even sit up and take stock of his surroundings.

He was in a small, cosy room, with bookshelves around the walls. There were also trophies and curios, a native shield, a longbow, and a blow-pipe. The man addressing him was the man, he instantly realised, who had leapt out of the car. He had an uncommonly ugly yet good-natured face.

Behind him, smoking a cigarette, was another man, rather ascetic-looking with extraordinarily keen blue eyes.

"Take it easy. You had a nasty crack. But you are

Young Dick Blackwood, who, through his grit and pluck, is chosen to go with the fortune-seekers to the Brazilian forests.



safe enough here. It was lucky, though, I came along when I did."

"What happened to the beggar?" stammered Dick.

"I shot him," was the reply. "I had to. He would have finished you else."

"You mean he's dead?"

"Certainly! And I guess his companion is wishing just now he had never been born."

Dick gasped faintly. This man was talking as though such things were an everyday occurrence.

"Can you tell me what it's all about?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"I suppose I've got to," said the other wryly. "By the way, my name is Trent—John Trent! And this is my friend—Mr. Robert West. We are in Mr. West's house at present, about half a mile from where you were attacked."

"Trent!" echoed Dick. "But they mentioned your name!"

"That's interesting. What did they say?"

Dick recounted exactly what had happened, giving the conversation almost word for word. Both men listened intently, and when he had finished it was Trent who spoke.

"You realise, of course, you were mistaken for someone else?"

"I'm not likely to forget it!" said Dick ruefully.

"The youngster you were mistaken for was coming here with something very valuable. He is about your build, although a year or two older. He still hasn't turned up. I'm afraid——" He broke off with a frown. "Suppose you tell us who you are?" he added, in a changed tone.

"That's easily done!" said Dick. And in a few words he described his rather unenviable position. "And now, don't you think I'm entitled to ask a few questions myself?"

Instead of replying Trent stood up. He moved off with West to the other end of the room, and they had a hurried conversation in an undertone. At first there seemed to be a slight argument, but finally West nodded.

"Perhaps you are right. It would be safer!" he said.

Trent returned.

"Haven't you got any parents, son?"

Dick shook his head.

"And you are on your beam ends? You are looking for a job?"

"Yes. Are you going to offer me one?"

"If you can call it by that name! I've got a good mind to! You've got plenty of pluck, and you know how to use your fists. You can be quite useful to us. I suppose you've never thought of going abroad?"

"I've never had the chance!" said Dick.

"Well, I'm going to give you the chance. I know next to nothing about you. I'm relying solely on a hunch; but I believe I know a white man when I see one! Apart from all that, to be frank, your butting in like this might have been awkward. I'll explain the reason presently. For one thing, I've killed a man to-night! I did it to save your life, and I've no doubt that before a coroner's jury I could

prove that. But an inquest would mean a long delay! It would also mean a most unfortunate amount of publicity. It would be fatal for the scheme I have in hand. So I'm going to rely on you to say nothing about your adventure to-night, whether you accept my proposal or not!"

Dick listened in growing astonishment. "But the police?" he managed to exclaim.

"What of them? They are not obliged to know, are they? I see——" Trent smiled—"I've shocked your law-abiding soul. But I don't propose to bring in the police, if I can help it. They could do us no good, and they'd only be an infernal nuisance."

For a moment a suspicion flashed across Dick's mind that this cheery, blonde giant might, after all, be a criminal. He must have betrayed what he was thinking by his expression.

"It's all square and above-board," resumed Trent. "But before I tell you any more, will you promise—in case you turn down the offer I'm going to make—you will say nothing about to-night's little show?"

Dick hesitated, then he nodded.

"I promise."

"Good! I believe you can be trusted. If I thought you couldn't be, you'd be lying out under the stars, instead of in here." He turned to West, who had remained thoughtful and taciturn. "Shall I tell him, or will you?"

"You!" said West crisply.

"Well, the question is—where to begin? You were asked for certain papers. That little dago who asked you is wanted for more crimes than I can count in South America. His companion is no better. So, you see, I had no more compunction in shooting him than shooting a snake. I was only cheating the hangman. An unconventional viewpoint, perhaps. But you'll agree that it was his life or yours?"

"Yes, I'll agree to that," nodded Dick.

"His name doesn't matter. The only name that counts is that of the man who paid him to do to-night's job. He calls himself Lopez—Senhor Pedro Lopez. He's a Brazilian, with a good drop of native blood. At one time he was a professor of mathematical physics at the University of Rio de Janeiro. So he's got brains—in fact, he's all brains. He's just a cold, machine-like intellect, if you follow me. I'm giving you these details because it's important you should get him focused right. When a man with a brain like that turns crook things get lively. Your ordinary policeman is no more than a dummy. A man like myself isn't much use, either. I represent the brawn in this scheme. West, here, does the thinking."

At this point West seemed about to protest; but his big, bluff companion hurried on:

"By this time, of course, you are bursting with curiosity. You want to know what the scheme, as I call it, is about. Well, like all schemes, there is money at the end of it—big money. The money lies at the back of the Amazon forests. As you probably know, they've never been thoroughly explored. Occasionally you hear of a man setting out to penetrate as far as he can go. But he doesn't return—not in nine cases out of ten. Either the fever gets him or the Indians. Or else he loses his way and dies of exhaustion. Because the point to remember is that the Amazon is

exactly the same now as it was a thousand, or even ten thousand, years ago. Civilisation just laps the edge of it. It's not pleasant, I assure you. I've seen as much of it as any man alive. I could tell you things that would make you bolt for the door and tear back to London on that bike of yours as fast as you could go."

"I don't think you could," rejoined Dick, trying to conceal his excitement. "But I'm beginning to see. You mean there's some treasure—"

"Treasure—fiddlesticks!" retorted Trent, with a broad grin. "Of course, there may be treasures buried away in unlikely corners. But I don't know where they are to be found. Even if I did, they'd only be jewels and gold. What we are after is a thousand times more valuable."

More valuable than jewels or gold? Dick blinked in bewilderment.

"A tiny particle, the size of a nut, would be worth ten thousand pounds. Have you got it now?"

"Not—not diamonds?"

"Diamonds—no!" exclaimed Trent. For a moment he looked at Dick fixedly. "Radium!" he added.

The secret was out. Not, of course—even if the news had been overheard that radium existed somewhere in the Brazilian forests—that it would be much use to anyone.

"At present," Trent continued, "most of the world's supply of radium comes from the Congo. But we believe there are much greater deposits in Brazil. In fact, we know there are. The fact is contained in an old record of exploration by some Spanish Jesuits in the seventeenth century. They crossed the Andes from Peru. They left a map. But the map, and the instructions, are written in a code. Harry Vernon—that's Mr. West's nephew—took a copy of that map to-day to the one man in England who is likely to be able to decode it—Dr. Sparling. He is due back here to-night. You were mistaken for him, and that's why you were attacked."

"But just a moment!" protested Dick. "I thought radium was only discovered recently."

"So it was. Those Spanish missionaries didn't know what they had found. They spoke of 'the earth that burns'—I believe that's a literal translation. They came to a place which the natives used for magical ceremonies. It's a sort of gorge, where prisoners-of-war were taken. After a while the unfortunate victims received terrible injuries—from no visible cause. We've studied the documents carefully. And West, here—who, as I said, is the brain of the outfit—is convinced that what those early explorers called the Valley of Death, is really an area rich in radio-active deposits."

"Works would have to be set up," put in West dryly, "to extract the radium. But it is so valuable it would be worth while doing so. Once we find the place, I have a backer who would finance the erection of plant, always providing transport difficulties aren't too great."

"They won't be—I'm confident of it!" declared Trent, a trifle impatient at the other man's scientific caution. "But the point is, we've got to get there and establish our claim before Lopez. He's moving heaven and earth to stop us. It's a dangerous game—I warn you. You've dropped into it by accident. If you care to remain with us, we'll take you. As I said, we can do with an extra member, and you are the sort of chap who'd be useful. On the other hand, if you feel it's too dangerous, and you give me your word of honour to forget everything you've learnt to-night—"

"Too dangerous!" broke in Dick scornfully. "Why, it's going to save my life! If you knew how I've been dreading the coming winter; whereas now—"

"It won't be monotonous, I can promise you!" laughed Trent.

West, however, didn't join in the laughter. He walked up to Dick.

"You must go into this with your eyes open. You mustn't think it's going to be a picnic. You mustn't think of the romantic side. There's very real danger for all of us—and a great deal of very unromantic drudgery and hardship."

"I reckon I can stick that," said Dick, looking up at him with blue, fearless eyes, "if you'll give me the chance—"

"Then you shall have it. All being well, we leave in two days. Can you be ready by then?"

"I'm ready now!" Dick declared. A smile touched West's thin lips. He glanced at Trent, as much as to say, "I'm satisfied. He's made of the right stuff." Then abruptly his manner changed.



Senhor Pedro Lopez, the suave arch villain, who is determined, by fair means or foul, to secure the fortune in the Valley of Death!

"Harry ought to be here by this time. I think I'd better ring up Sparling."

"Might as well," Trent nodded, also showing a sudden trace of uneasiness.

Without another word West picked up the telephone. He got through and began to speak; then all at once a look of horror crossed his face.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, swinging round. "Dr. Sparling has just been found in his study—murdered!"

West Investigates!
"MURDERED!"
But—

The two men exchanged glances. For a moment Trent seemed almost incredulous. Then he clenched his hands and a vein on his forehead stood out like whipcord.

West had replaced the receiver and his face was white and stern. He seemed hardly conscious of Dick's presence.

"We must act quickly," he said.

"What can we do?" gasped Trent, recovering his speech with an effort.

"It's obvious this is the work of Lopez. If he has got hold of Sparling's translation—"

"That finishes us!" groaned Trent. "There's an outside chance, of course. But what I don't understand is why he tried to set those roughs on the lad he believed to be Harry. If he had already got what he wanted it doesn't seem to make sense."

"It points to a last minute change of plan," said West thoughtfully. "Or else, in case of accidents, he decided to have Harry searched in order to make doubly sure. I suppose there was no means by which he could get into touch with his accomplices to tell them that he had already got what he wanted."

"Then you think he has got it?"

"Undoubtedly. He wouldn't have killed the only man who could decipher the document before it had been deciphered."

"But what can have happened to Harry?"

"That's what I am going to find out. I want you to wait here while I go along to Sparling's house."

Trent stifled a protest. His eyes suddenly blazed.

"If anything has happened to that boy—"

"I know," muttered West, and then he suddenly turned to Dick, who had been listening in stupefaction. "You see what we are up against. If you feel like backing out, I can't blame you."

"No; I'm not backing out," retorted Dick.

The rage on Trent's face momentarily melted. He laid his hand on Dick's shoulder.

"Scout fellow," he murmured. Then he turned abruptly to his companion. "You'd better hustle. Ring up as soon as you have any news. I wish to heaven I was going with you."

West lost no time. Without another word he snatched up his coat and left the room. His car was still outside and the engine was warm. A few minutes later he was crouching at the wheel, the speedometer needle oscillating at sixty.

He drove automatically, for half his brain was occupied in considering his best course of action. He knew—and so did Trent—that he was the best man for this delicate task. Trent was too generously impulsive, and as soon as he had become convinced that Harry was in danger, he would have enlisted the aid of the police and probably wrecked everything. But West saw very clearly that delay would be fatal.

If Lopez had murdered Dr. Sparling, he had done so in a

Dick felt the barrel of a revolver sticking in his back. "Put up your hands!" snapped a cold, metallic voice behind him.



manner which would throw no possible suspicion on himself. He probably had a water-tight alibi. They must fight him on his own ground, outside the law.

"But we'll get him," muttered West, "even if we have to deputize for the public hangman."

Meanwhile, time was the chief enemy. And there was the disturbing factor introduced by Harry's disappearance.

Entering London, West was reluctantly forced to drive more slowly. But he reached Cavendish Square as quickly as he dared. There were lights, he noticed, in every room in the house, and a policeman was standing on duty outside.

He brought the car to a standstill and sprang out. Instantly the constable hurried forward and demanded to know who he was. West brought out a card he only used when it was necessary, against his inclinations, to make an impression. It simply bore his name and the letters F.R.S.—the highest and most coveted distinction in the scientific world.

"You'd better see the inspector, sir," replied the constable, promptly changing his tone and touching his helmet deferentially.

West followed him into the house, and waited in the hall until a brisk, businesslike man in grey tweeds came out of one of the doors. He offered his hand with an air almost of relief.

"West?" he asked. "I hope you'll be able to throw some light on this ugly business. At present I don't mind admitting I can't make head or tail of it."

"I am afraid," replied West gravely, "I am not likely to be of much use to you, inspector. In fact, I've only just learned of Dr. Sparling's death."

"How did you hear of it?" asked the other quickly.

"I rang him up about an hour ago. I was horrified to learn that he was dead, and that foul play had been suspected."

"Suspected! I assure you there isn't any doubt on that score. But why did you ring him up?"

"A young friend of mine called to see him this evening. I wanted to know the result of the interview."

"What was the purpose of the visit?"

"Dr. Sparling was to have helped him in the matter of
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his future employment," answered West, not altogether untruthfully. But the next question took him by surprise.

"Was your friend's name Vernon—Harry Vernon?"

"Yes, but how—" began West, trying to repress his anxiety.

"I've followed up that clue," broke in the inspector, in disgust. "It leads nowhere. But I'm sorry to say Vernon had some bad luck. He was riding a motor-bike and he collided with a private car. He was taken to the Westminster Hospital with a broken leg."

West experienced an emotion of mingled alarm and relief.

"Is he badly hurt?"

"He's very nearly was. How he escaped is a miracle. According to his story, the car came straight at him. The driver made off, but we've got his number, and it won't be long before we nab him. There's nothing for you to worry about, however. The lad isn't hurt much, apart from his leg." He paused and frowned. "On the other hand I've got a great deal to worry about. I hoped at first that Vernon—who was the last person to see the professor alive—would be able to help. But he hasn't been able to tell us anything we don't know. He left Sparling at eight o'clock, and the murder wasn't committed until eleven."

West breathed more freely. It was plain enough what had happened. Harry had left the old man to finish the job of deciphering the documents. As soon as Dr. Sparling had completed the task, an invisible watcher had entered, killed him, and made off with the fruit of his labour.

"Would you care to see the body? Perhaps you can offer me a few suggestions. I don't often look for advice from outside, but in this case it would be welcome. It's the most fantastic crime in all my experience."

"Fantastic? But how did Sparling meet his death?"

"By an arrow!" was the reply, and the inspector was vaguely gratified by the astonishment provoked by his statement. "If you come upstairs you will see for yourself."

West followed him, his brows knit. The temptation to take the detective into his confidence was strong, but he knew it must be resisted. Trent had also killed a man that night, and a delayed explanation would be difficult to make. In any case, Lopez must have arranged it for any suspicion to fall on his satellites; before the meshes of the law could close around him he would be out of the country.

He was shown into a large, familiar room, lined with books, where he had often sat and smoked with Sparling. There was a desk in the centre, and seated at the desk an inert figure.

"We can't shift the body until we've finished taking photographs," explained the inspector, his voice dropping to an undertone. "The mystifying part is that the door was locked. It was only when the butler, alarmed at receiving no reply to his knocking, forced it open that the murder was discovered. What do you make of this?"

He crossed to the desk and picked up a small arrow, without feathers or metal barb. It was made of light wood, polished to a point like a thorn.

"It's a dart," said West, after examining it carefully. "It is identically the type of dart used in a blow-pipe by savages in the Amazon valley."



John Trent, the "brawn" of the fortune-seekers.

"Blow-pipe—savages—" The inspector repeated the words in bewilderment. "But in the heart of London—"

"Be careful how you handle it. I expect it's poisoned," West warned.

"Good heavens!" The inspector started back in dismay. "But who could have used it? The door was locked, and although it's true the window was open, only a monkey could have climbed up to that window."

"The natives in the Amazon forests are pretty nearly as agile as their ancestors," murmured West thoughtfully.

"Then what have I got to look for?" demanded the inspector, in almost comical amazement. "A bloomin' Tarzan?"

West shrugged his shoulders.

"It's your problem, not mine," he answered. "If you will excuse me now, I must go along and see young Harry Vernon."

The following morning Trent listened again to West's account of his inquiries. The big man sucked a cheroot and itched to get into immediate action.

"Lucky that chap came along last night. He will be able to keep Harry's place. I'll go and fetch him before we decide on the next step."

He hadn't to go far. Dick was just about to turn the handle when Trent opened the door.

"Hallo, son! How are you feeling?"

"Fit for anything!" responded Dick, with a grin. "Is there any more news?"

"Bit of a slump in that line. The dickens of it is that we're fixed to sail to-morrow. And we can't sail until we get the papers that Lopez has stolen."

"We shall have to," put in West. "If the worst comes to the worst we must just try to follow him."

"We can do better than that. We've got to find Lopez between now and to-morrow. But how?" He paused and stared through the window. All at once his right fist crashed into the palm of his left hand. "I've got it! Wait here a minute!"

Without offering any further explanation, he darted out of the room. Dick blinked and met the keen, faintly-humorous eyes of West.

"What's the idea?"

"I don't know," replied West, with a dry smile. "He's taken like that sometimes. I've never known such a man for wasting energy—or anyone with so much to waste, for that matter. Of course, he occasionally gets a brain-wave. We shall—"

Suddenly he broke off. There was a commotion outside. Trent was shouting, and a moment later the door burst open. An unkempt man was thrust into the room, followed by Trent, who carried a heavy Service revolver.

"Keep your hands up," he threatened.

Dick gave a gasp of surprise. The newcomer was the man who had attacked him the previous night!

(John Trent & Co. have received a severe set-back to their plans, haven't they, chums? But they learn anything from Masques? Don't fail to read next week's instalment; you'll enjoy every line of it.)

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