

THE BEST BOOK FOR LIVELY SCHOOL YARNS!

The GEM 2^D



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CHAPTER 1.

Easy Payments.

TOM MERRY dived his hands deep into his trousers pockets and brought them out again—empty!

Monty Lowther did the same, with precisely the same result.

Manners, more methodical, was turning his pockets inside out, in the hope of discovering some coin that had escaped previous searches. The lining was brought into view, but nothing more valuable.

The Terrible Three—the chums of the Shell in the School House at St. Jim's—had to face the fact that they were broke—"Broke to the wids!" as Monty Lowther pathetically put it.

"Stony broke!" said Tom Merry. "It's rotten, kids—specially rotten just now, for I want a new footer, and I want it badly. I was going to borrow the tin off one of you chaps."

"What a coincidence!" said Monty Lowther. "I want to buy a camera, and I was going to raise a loan out of you and Manners."

"Curious," said Manners. "I've run out of films for my camera, and I thought one of you chaps would be able to help me raise the wind." Tom Merry laughed—the merry, ringing laugh that people liked to hear.

"It's a giddy disappointment all round," he said. "That's the worst of this time of the term. You get into such a beastly stony-broke state. I shan't have any more tin till some time next week."

"And I shan't have any then," said Monty Lowther.

"I wonder if we could raise some from Study No. 6?" Manners remarked thoughtfully. "They're very often in funds, especially D'Arcy. Here they come—they look as if they want to speak to us. Turn on your sweetest smile, kids, and speak to 'em gently. Mind you don't call 'em kids, that's all!"

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, denizens of the famous Study No. 6 in the School House, were coming towards the chums of the Shell.

The three Fourth-Formers were looking very agreeable—extremely agreeable, considering that they were generally at war with the Terrible Three.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "How do you do?"

"Oh, ripping!" said Jack Blake. "Glad to see you fellows. Warm for the time of year, isn't it?"

"Well, it is a little," said Tom Merry, with an air of great consideration. "I find it rather warm. Don't you, Manners?"

"Yes, I was just thinking so," said Manners.

Blake looked at the Terrible Three curiously.

"I wanted to speak to you chaps if you're not busy," he said.

"Not at all," said Tom Merry hastily. "In fact, we were just wishing to see you fellows for a little talk."

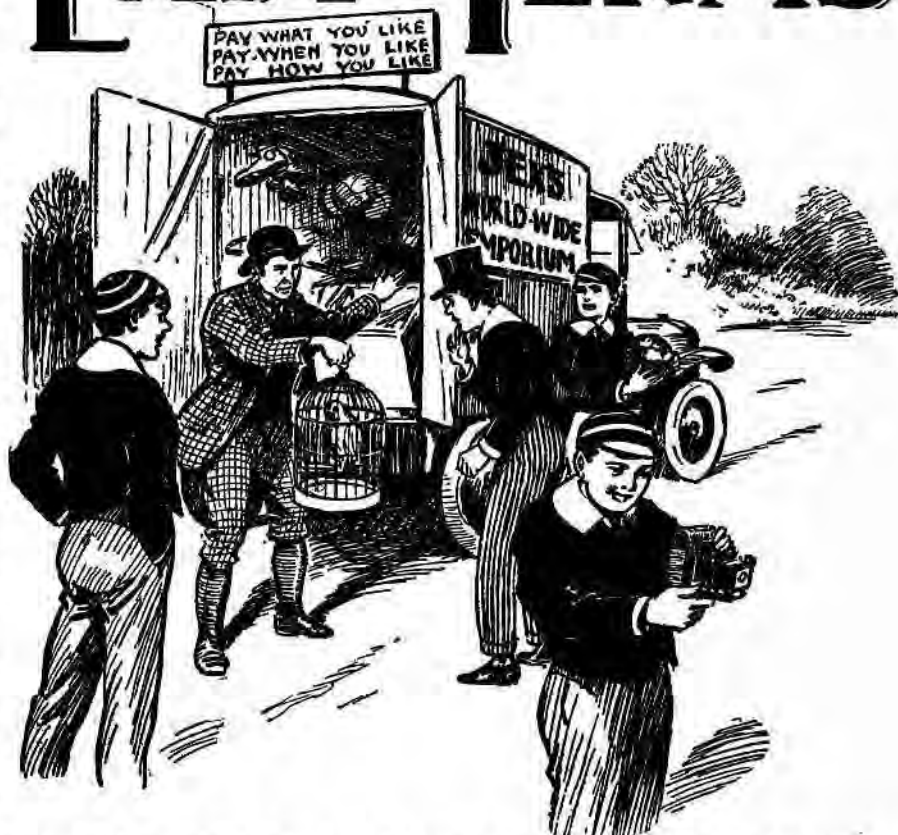
"Well, that's lucky."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—"extremely so. The fact is, deah boys—"

"I'm talking, Gussy."

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"EASY TERMS"



"I know you are, Blake; but I weally think that if you left it to me I could explain the matter to Tom Mewwy more lucidly," said the swell of the School House, shaking his head. "A matter of this kind requiahs tact—"

"Oh, dry up," said Herries, "and let Blake get on!"

"You see, chaps," said Blake, addressing the chums of the Shell in the most amicable way in the world, "it's getting towards the end of the term—"

"Yes, we've noticed that," said Tom Merry, rather ruefully.

"And we find that the exchequer has fallen very low," said Blake. "The funds have fallen into the sere and yellow leaf. Money is tight."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. They guessed what was coming now.

"And so," went on Blake, "knowing how flush you chaps generally are, we want to make a little raise, to tide us over till something turns up."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his eye. "I have written to my govannah for a fivah; but he-seems to be in no hurray to send it. Governahs are often verry slow when you specially want them to buck up. I have not heard ffrom my govannah yet, and I am bwoke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three laughed loud and long—they could not help it.

Jack Blake looked at them suspiciously.

"When you've finished cackling like a lot of giddy geese," he said, "perhaps you'll tell us why the cackle!"

"Excuse us, old fellow," said Merry. "But you see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, get on!"

"You see, when you came along, Manners, Lowther, and I had just been trying to borrow off one another, without success, and—ha, ha, ha!—when we spotted you, we decided

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FOR THE SAINTS!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

to make a raise out of you chaps—only you spoke first. Hence these smiles."

Blake made a grimace.

"Then you're broke, too?"

"Stony!"

"I say, this is rotten!" said Blake. "I want some new football boots. I don't like to write to the pater again, but I must have those boots."

"Yaas, and I have been thinkin' of a new jiggah," said D'Arcy. "You can get a weally wippin' jiggah for twelve guineas now, deah boys. I gave sixteen for my last one, and it has nevah been the same since that wagon went ovah it on Wylcombe Hill. Undah the cires I have been thinkin' of tweatin' myself to a new jiggah!"

"I don't want any football boots or a bike," said Herries, "but I could do with a feed at the tuckshop, and no mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Suppose we all put our heads together, deah boys, and twy to think out a way of waisin' the wind?"

"Certainly," said the Terrible Three at once; and they made a simultaneous dive at D'Arcy.

The swell of the School House gave a yell as three hard heads bumped against his.

"Oh, how can you be so wuff! What are you up to?"

"Putting our heads together," said Tom Merry innocently.

"Isn't that the way you meant?"

"No, certainly not!" said Arthur Augustus, rubbing his head. "I am afwaid, Tom Mewwy, that that was a delibewate misunderstandin'."

I meant—

"The only thing I can think of," said Blake, "is to pay a visit to the New House and see Figgins & Co. They'll lend us some tin like a shot, if they have any."

"Good ideal!" said Tom Merry. "Let's all go!"

"There's Figgy at the gate!"

The six School House juniors marched down to the gates of the school.

Figgins & Co. were standing there looking out into Rylcombe Lane. Figgins, long, lean, and athletic; Fatty Wynn, short and plump; Kerr, medium-sized, keen and canny—these were the chums of the New House at St. Jim's known far and wide as "Figgins & Co."

They looked rather suspiciously at the newcomers. When Study No. 6 chummed up with the Terrible Three it usually meant squalls for Figgins & Co., and the New House juniors were on their guard.

But the School House six soon showed that their intentions were not hostile.

"Figgy, old chap," said Tom Merry, "we—"

"Oh, dwy up!" said Arthur Augustus. "Why don't you leave me to explain the mattah to Figgay, deah boy? This mattah requiahs tact—"

Blake seized the School House swell by the shoulders, and shook him till his eyeglass dropped.

"Now, don't you interrupt again, Gussy!"

Tom Merry was going on with the explanation.

"You see, Figgy, we're all stony. We want to make a raise till we get some more tin from home. How are you kids fixed?"

"Who are you calling kids?" asked Figgins politely.

"A thousand pardons. I mean, what is the financial state of you young gentlemen?"

"Rotten!" said Figgins. "I was just making a calculation how far two bob would go towards a feed for three at the tuckshop."

Blake made a tragic gesture.

"Figgy, thou hast failed in the hour of need. Thou hast—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "I'll tell you what I'll do. You can come along to the tuckshop and take your whack in the two bobs' worth as far as it goes, and welcome."

Blake wiped away an imaginary tear.

"Figgy, you touch my heart. Never shall

it be said that Jack Blake of St. Jim's refused to accept a treat when it was offered him. Come on, kids!"

Tom Merry slapped Figgins on the back.

"Figgy, old kid, you're a Briton! You can't help being a measly New House waster, but, apart from that—"

"Tom Mewwy, undah the pwesent cires, you are called upon to be more courteous to our friend, the enemy," said D'Arcy. "I weally considah—"

"Cheese it! Come along!"

They walked down to the village together. They found Gaffer Jones in possession of Mother Murphy's tuckshop. Mrs. Murphy was a good old soul, and she had a cordial sympathy for juniors who found themselves in a state of impecuniosity. But whenever Mother Murphy's rheumatism became very bad, Gaffer Jones minded her shop, and Gaffer Jones had no sympathy with distressed youths.

His wrinkled old face brightened a little as nine juniors walked in. He had a financial interest in the tuckshop, and he thought he saw a prospect of good business. He could be agreeable when he liked.

"What can I do for you, young gentlemen?" he asked.

Figgins winked at his companions.

"We want a blow out," he replied. "Something really ripping, you know!"

"What would you like?"

Figgins turned to his followers with the air of a prince.

"What would you like, kids?"

The "kids" entered into the little joke.

"A dozen or so of those pies to begin with," said Tom Merry.

"Four dozen jam-tarts," said Monty Lowther.

"This big currant cake," said Manners. "We can manage the lot."

"We could do with all this basket of oranges," Blake remarked thoughtfully.

"What's your idea, Herries?"

"I was thinking that we'd better have this big bunch of bananas."

"Good!" exclaimed Kerr. "And six bottles of currant wine."

Fatty Wynn sighed.

"I should like a dozen or so of these jolly little pork-pies that Mother Murphy makes."

"Anything else, gentlemen?"

"You don't mind us having all that?" asked Figgins.

"Not at all—not at all!"

"It will clear out your stock pretty well."

"Never mind—never mind. There's plenty more where that came from," said Gaffer, rubbing his skinny hands.

"Always happy to oblige you young gentlemen."

"Well, that's really jolly good of you, Gaffer. I was a little doubtful about asking you to let us have that lot on tick; but now—"

"What?" roared Gaffer.

"You see, we're short of cash just at present—"

"You—you—you— Then you don't want these things?"

"Yes, we do; we want them badly, but we can't pay for them, that's the difficulty. Of course, we don't mind, if you don't."

"But I do!" shouted Gaffer. "You young—"

"Then you won't let us have that feed on tick?"

"No, I won't."

Figgins shook his head sadly.

"Then it will have to stand over. Sorry, you chaps!"

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Tom Merry. "We'll take

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the will for the deed. I consider Gaffer Jones a very hard-hearted and unsympathetic man."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it most ungentlemanly to wofuse to twust—"

"We shall have to put up with ginger-pop and some nuts," said Figgins. "Gaffer, old man, do the best you can for two bob, and don't forget that you're dealing with a chap who has seen better days."

Gaffer grunted. Two shillings was not much of a sura after what he had anticipated, but it was better than nothing. He served the ginger-pop, and the juniors took it out to the little tables in front of the tuckshop, under the big tree that grew at the side of the village street.

"Well, it's rather jolly here," said Tom Merry. "And this is good ginger-pop. We're all very much beholden to you, Piggy."

"Yaas, wathah! I pwopose a vote of confidence in the foundah of this feast—I mean a vote of thanks, deah boys!"

"Carried unanimously!" said Tom Merry. "Figgins, old son, may your shadow never grow whiskers! Pop, pop!"

The ginger-pop went the way of all ginger-pops. While they discussed it the juniors also discussed ways and means. The financial outlook was serious. As Blake said, money was tight.

A man was standing leaning against the tree, and his attention seemed to be attracted by the chatting of the juniors. He was a stranger to them, and they took no notice of him. He was a man of medium size, with a little foxy-featured face, and very bright, little twinkling eyes of an uncertain colour, and a very shifty expression. He was dressed in a suit of a very pronounced check, and his watch-chain would have been worth a good deal if it had been real. His complexion was shiny, and he wore several rings, each with a big imitation stone in it.

"You see," said Tom Merry, "we simply must raise the wind somehow. What am I to do for a new footer?"

"That's hardly so important," Blake remarked, "as what I'm to do for my football boots."

"To say nothing of my camera," said Monty Lowther.

"Excuse me, young gentlemen."

It was a silky, insinuating voice, and the juniors all looked at once towards the speaker. It was the man who had been leaning against the tree and listening to their talk. He came up to the little table with an insinuating air.

"Excuse me, young gentlemen! You are—excuse me—in some little temporary difficulty?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "But I really don't see how it need worry you, sir."

The man in the check suit made a deprecating gesture. "Now, don't be offended, young gents. I want to be your friend. I'm remarkably fond of boys, and I always like to help them out of their little difficulties. I should very much like to help you, if you'll let me."

He sat down in a vacant cane chair.

The juniors looked at him, and at one another. It was a great deal like impertinence on the stranger's part to intrude himself into their affairs, yet he looked so obliging that it was hard to sit upon him. Tom Merry, especially, hated to hurt anybody's feelings.

"I don't quite follow," he remarked.

"Yaas, suppose you explain, deah boy?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Certainly, with pleasure! My name is Jonas Jex. I dare say you've heard it."

"Can't say I have."

"Not heard of Jonas Jex, the head of the great Jex World-Wide Emporium?" exclaimed the stranger, looking amazed. "Well, you've surprised me."

The juniors looked at him with increased respect. The head of a world-wide emporium was evidently a big gun.

"Now, you young gentlemen are in want of some things, as I judged by what I—er—accidentally heard you say," said the stranger. "I am down in this district looking for new business, and I should be pleased to grant you the most favourable terms, for a start."

"What are you driving at?" asked Tom Merry politely.

"You may regard me," said Mr. Jex, "somewhat in the light of a fairy prince out of the 'Arabian Nights,' who supplies you with all you want just for the asking. You've only got to say what you want, and I produce it from my World-Wide Emporium."

"My hat!" said Figgins. "That's jolly! I'll have a motor-car!"

"Yaas, wathah, and I'll have a special twain!"

Mr. Jex smiled in a rather sickly way.

"We must draw the line at motor-cars and special

trains," he said. "But, for instance, one of you young gents is in want of a camera?"

"Yes," said Monty Lowther.

"Another is looking for a pair of football boots?"

Blake nodded.

"Then another wants a new football?"

"I do!" said Tom Merry.

Mr. Jex smiled in a beaming way.

"Well, you can have them for the asking. Just say the word, and I will send the order to my World-Wide Emporium, and the goods will be delivered to you on Saturday."

"You are joking, I suppose?"

"Not at all!"

"You don't mean to say that you are giving the things away?" exclaimed Tom Merry in amazement, doubting whether to regard the stranger as a benevolent crank or an amiable lunatic.

"Well, yes," said Mr. Jex, "I might say, with perfect truth, that we are giving the things away, considering the splendid quality of them, and the ridiculously low price we charge, and the important fact that you pay just when you like."

"Ah!"

"You see, the business of the World-Wide Emporium is run on our New Special Easy Payment System," explained Mr. Jex. "You take what you like, and you pay when you like, and as much as you like! Pretty simple, isn't it?"

"Well, that sounds all right, but where does your profit come in?"

"Profit!" said Mr. Jex, in a tone which hinted that such paltry considerations weighed very little with him. "Oh, profit! My dear young gent, our profit comes from the immense advertisement we receive by practically giving away articles of splendid value. For instance, suppose we supply you with a bicycle—"

"Yaas, I have been thinkin' of investin' in a new jiggah!"

"Well, we supply you with a bicycle—the latest thing, you know, free-wheel, back-pedal brake, three-speed gear, got up in splendid style—we charge you, say, twelve guineas—and, considering the quality we give you, that is barely over cost price. Well, you pay that twelve guineas off at a shilling a week!"

"That's not much!"

"I say, the giddy payments would last a long time, you know," said Kerr, who had a head for figures. "Twelve guineas at a shilling a week would last about five years!"

Mr. Jex nodded complacently.

"That is the great advantage of our New Special Easy Payment System!" he replied. "You take as long as you like to pay the money. We do such an immense and world-wide business that it does not matter to us in the slightest when the money comes in. If you are pressed at any time, you let us know, and we let the payment stand over for a month, or a year, or even longer, if you like!"

"That's jolly decent of you!"

"You see, we simply can't afford to be mean or hard," explained Mr. Jex, "even if we wanted to, for we depend for our profits on the immense advertisement we get, and if we displeased or disappointed our customers, where would our advertisement come in?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If you are satisfied, you recommend others to us, but if we treated you badly, we should suffer by the transaction," said Mr. Jex. "That's the point you must remember. Mind, all goods supplied are of the finest quality! Any reasonable fault found with them is attended to at once. In fact, you can send back anything you don't like, and either take other goods or have your money refunded in full!"

The juniors looked at one another. The offer of the generous Mr. Jex was certainly a tempting one. In fact, he really seemed like the right man in the right place at the right moment, as Blake remarked. His system of easy payments was about the easiest going, apparently, and, as he had pointed out, he simply could not afford to be hard or harsh.

Mr. Jex produced a little book and a pencil.

"Now, young gents, let me book your orders! Mind, there is no responsibility at all on your part. If you don't like the goods, you can send them back!"

"That will be giving you a lot of trouble!"

"The more trouble we take the better we like it. We want to please the public, and induce them to deal at the World-Wide Emporium," said Mr. Jex. "Now, I think you said a bicycle, young sir!"

"Yaas, wathah! I woadly must have a new jiggah!"

"Of course, you want a first-rate machine, all the latest improvements, quite up-to-date throughout?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I know we can suit you! Let me see, your name is—"

"Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

"Just write the name down there, will you? Here's a fountain-pen!"

"What's all that p'inted on the papah?"

"Simply the agreement! You agree to take the bike, and pay for it when you like, at your own convenience. This agreement is only a matter of form, just to keep a record at our head office!"

"That sounds all wight! There you are, my deah fellow!"

And the swell of St. Jim's wrote his name with a flourish at the bottom of the paper.

"Now, young sir, I think you said a new football?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

The stranger was very plausible, and seemed to be kindness and good-nature itself, and if he was a trifle vulgar—well, that might not be anything against him.

Mr. Jex did not appear to notice Tom Merry's hesitation.

"A fine, first-rate football," he remarked.

"The kind you buy at the best shops for fifteen-and-six. Our price—ten-and-six, paid in weekly instalments of sixpence."

"Well, that won't hurt you, Tom!" said Manners.

"All right," said Tom Merry, making up his mind. And he wrote down his name with the fountain-pen.

The paper produced by Mr. Jex was printed in very small type, and worded in legal phraseology, and not easily understood, and it would have looked so rude and suspicious to insist upon reading it all through before signing. And, as a matter of fact, if he had read it all through, Tom Merry would probably have been none the wiser, and would have had to depend upon Mr. Jex for an explanation of the legal terms. So it would have come to the same thing at the end.

"And now a camera for this young gent!"

"Yes," said Monty Lowther, not thinking of hesitating after his leader had gone into the thing. "I want a folding Kodak!"

"H'm! Our own pocket camera is much superior, and there is a guinea difference in the price," said Mr. Jex. "Suppose you take it, and if you don't care for it, we will exchange it without cost to you!"

Monty Lowther agreed.

"And what can I do for you other young gents?" asked Mr. Jex.

There was some discussion on that point. The terms of payment being so absurdly easy, it seemed a pity not to take advantage of the generous offers of Mr. Jex.

In the end, the pleasant-spoken Mr. Jex secured an order, and a signature, from each of the juniors of St. Jim's, with one exception.

Figgins purchased a fountain-pen; Manners some films for his camera; Herries a fishing-rod; Fatty Wynn a punching-ball; Blake a pair of football boots. Mr. Jex carefully noting the size; Kerr, the Scottish partner in the firm of Figgins & Co., was the only one who remained adamant.

"Then I can't persuade you to take anything, young sir?" asked Mr. Jex, after running over a list of desirable things, to each of which the canny Kerr replied with a shake of the head.

"No, thanks!" said Kerr.

"I regret it, for your sake, young gent! I may not be down in this district for a long time, and your chance will be gone!"

"Never mind!"

"You are sure you won't give an order?"

"Quite sure, thanks!"

So Mr. Jex gave Kerr up as a bad job. He folded up his papers, crammed them into his pocket-book, and rose. "The goods will be delivered on Saturday, young gents," he said, "and I venture to say that you will never regret dealing with the World-Wide Emporium. Lemme see! What would be the most convenient day for you to make your little payments?"

"Oh, about the end of 1990," said Kerr.

Mr. Jex smiled.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good joke! Shall we say the first instalment on Saturday next, and the rest to follow regularly every Saturday?"

"That's fair enough," said Tom Merry.

"My aim is to be perfectly fair. By treating you well, I hope to supply goods to every boy at your school," said Mr. Jex.

D'Arcy came shooting towards the juniors on his bike, ringing his bell furiously; the bicycle ran alarm into them, scattering them to right and left.



"And make your profit out of them?" said Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha! Now I shall be down here on Saturday—"

"I thought you said you wouldn't be here again for a long time?"

"Not to take orders, I meant," said Mr. Jex hastily. "I shall be here on Saturday to collect various sums of money, and you can make your little payments at the same time. Where will you meet me?"

"Somewhere near the school," said Tom Merry. "Say at the little stile in Rylcombe Lane?"

"Very well. I will be there at three o'clock Saturday afternoon, with the good you have ordered."

"Very good, sir!"

"Then good-bye, my dear young gents! Good-bye!"

And the beaming Mr. Jex took himself off.

Figgins rose to his feet.

"Jolly nice chap," he said, "and a jolly good system."

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry.

"Why wouldn't you have anything, Kerr?" said Figgins.

Kerr grinned.

"I'll see how it turns out. I don't trust these easy payment merchants. You see, suppose there's something in
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those giddy agreements you don't understand. And I expect there is. Perhaps he comes down on you for all the cash at once."

"Oh, he's such a decent chap!"

"Ahem! Perhaps he is. Perhaps he isn't. I've heard of those merchants. They sell you a piano, and you make a lot of payments, and then they collar it."

"Some of them, perhaps."

"Well, we may have got hold of one of the 'some,'" said Kerr.

"You're a suspicious beast, Kerr!"

"Perhaps I am. Perhaps I shall say 'I told you so' a little later on."

"Rats!"

"Well, we shall see what we shall see."

"I dare say. Did you work that out in your head?"

Kerr only smiled. He was in a minority of one now. But he waited for time to show.

"I put it to the vote," said Figgins, looking round, "that Kerr's a suspicious beast."

"Yaa, wathah!"

"Seconded!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Carried unanimously," said Tom Merry. "Kerr, you're a suspicious beast!"

Kerr grinned again.

"Wait and see!" he remarked sententiously.

The juniors walked home to St. Jim's, discussing their new purchases. They looked eagerly for Saturday, when the treasures would arrive.

Sure enough on the Saturday they came.

Mr. Jex brought them in a van, which he drove to the stile in the lane. Kerr felt rather left out of it, but he comforted himself with the wise reflection that they would see what they would see. Which was undeniable.

CHAPTER 2.

Disillusionment—and a Little Joke!

MR. JEX appeared on the following Saturday afternoon, and collected his "little payments," and kindly promised to be in the same spot, at the same time, on the following Saturday. The payments being so small, the juniors had been able to raise them without difficulty, in spite of the generally low state of the exchequer. And Mr. Jex departed satisfied.

The juniors were also satisfied—for the time. So far, the purchases had not disappointed them, and Mr. Jex's conduct seemed to be eminently fair and above board. He had actually asked them if they would prefer the payments to stand over till next week, which was kindness itself.

Naturally, the story of the purchases spread through the Lower Form of St. Jim's. Mr. Jex had made it known that he could be seen any time in the afternoon at the tuckshop in Rylecombe, and a considerable number of juniors, in a more or less impecunious condition, went there to see him.

A fresh crop of order for the World-Wide Emporium was the result.

Youngsters in the Shell, in the Fourth, and even in the Third, went down to see the generous Mr. Jex, and they made their purchases and signed their agreements without the faintest knowledge of what they were signing.

Young Gibson, of the Third, who went in for stamp-collecting, became the proud possessor of a stamp-album, with some wonderful specimens in it, at a ridiculously low figure, Mr. Jex saying that the World-Wide Emporium were only able to do it because of the immense advertisement they got thereby, which satisfied Curly Gibson.

Another week passed by, and Mr. Jex appeared for the next instalments. Some of the juniors accepted his offer of letting the payments stand over for a week this time.

"Coming down to footer practice?" asked Tom Merry, meeting Blake after school one day, as the Saturday was drawing nigh again.

"Just going," said Blake. "That your new tooter?"

He glanced at the ball under Tom Merry's arm.

"Yes," Tom coloured a little. "Seems a little flabby, doesn't it? I can't somehow get it quite hard."

Blake grinned.

"I've got my old football boots on," he said, looking down at his feet.

"Where are the new ones?"

"In my study. We are going to use them for fuel when we have a fire."

"Why?"

"Oh, they're coming to pieces, that's all! Sole came off one. T'other split 'own the side. Made of brown paper, I think, or something about as good."

"Yes," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "If Mr. Jex wants to sell me any football boots I shall tell him that football boots are barred."

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"Oh, don't!" said Blake, making a wry face. "I see you've started your rotten puns again. I had quite a rest while you were away from St. Jim's."

"Well, you missed a lot, and now you're going to have the rest," said Monty.

"Please don't, I say. Tom Merry, we've been done!"

"Done brown!" said Tom frankly. "I—I didn't like to say so, but I'm afraid that chap Jex is a swindler! This football isn't worth a bob!"

"My boots aren't worth the paper they were written on—I mean, the paper they were made of!"

"As we're confessing," said Monty Lowther, "I may as well own up that my camera is a—hastily fraud. The photos come out like blotches. Manners says there's something the matter with the lens. I don't know much about it, but I know it's no good."

"But he offered to exchange everything that wasn't up to the mark."

"Suppose we try him?"

"Well, we might as well, when we see him on Saturday. Let's go down to the footer now."

The juniors went to the football practice.

There was certainly something very much wrong with Tom Merry's new football, and he received a good many chipping remarks about it.

When it finally ripped open under Blake's foot Tom was rather relieved than otherwise.

They met Manners as they came off the field. He was looking wrathful.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "What's troubling you?"

"That swindler Jex."

"What's the matter?"

"Those beastly films—I've tried to use them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter. I've wasted time making twelve exposures, and I thought I had a jolly good set of negatives!" growled Manners. "The rotten things have developed like—like smudges. They're no good. Rotten! Beastly! A regular swindle!"

"That's hard lines!"

"I'm going to talk to Jex on Saturday," said Manners. "I'll ask him some questions. The beast! He told me his films were better than any at half the price. I've got ten bobsworth at a tanner a week. I'll tanner him! They're no good! All my time and trouble wasted. By Jove!"

"It's beastly!" said Tom Merry. "Only—only keep it dark a bit. Jex may keep his word. If it gets out Kerr will start saying he told us so, and I can't stand that."

"That's what I was thinking," said Blake ruefully. "We don't want to give that bouncer the laugh of us if we can help it."

Ting, ting, ting! Buzzzz!

A bicycle was shooting towards them, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the saddle.

D'Arcy was ringing the bell frantically.

"Get out of the way, deah boys! Get—Ow, I am weally vewy sowwy."

The bicycle ran right into the juniors, scattering them to the ground. Then it curled up, and D'Arcy went down with a bump. He sat up, rubbing the back of his head.

"I am weally vewy sowwy!" he gasped. "I hope I have not hurt you."

Tom Merry rubbed his shoulder, and Manners his leg. Monty Lowther caressed a shin and hopped on one leg. Blake was sitting down.

"You horrid image!" roared Tom Merry. "What do you mean by running into us like that?"

"I weally could not help it."

"Why didn't you stop?"

"I twied to! I weally twied to!"

"Ass! Haven't you got a brake?"

"The bwake has bwoken," said Arthur Augustus. "The wim bwake on the fwont wheel has actually bwoken in two pieces, and the back pedal bwake won't work."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Blake. "Gussy's bike is about as good as Lowther's camera. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughing mattah, Blake! I am payin' twelve guineas for that jigguh. The bwakes have gone now. The lamp never would keep alight, and the pump's useless. And I want the pump a lot, because I keep on getting punctures. The tyres are weally no good at all. They are more like bwown paper than wubbah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy picked himself up. He lifted the machine to wheel it away.

"I shall take this back to Mr. Jex on Saturday," he said. "I shall wemonstgate with him, deah boys, and insist upon receivin' a new jigguh."

"I hope you'll get it," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus wheeled his bike away, limping a little, and Blake followed him. The Terrible Three went on to the School House. On the way they passed Figgins, and Tom Merry stopped to speak.

"I say, Figgy, how are you getting on with your purchases?"

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins. "Fatty Wynn has been complaining about his punching-ball. Seems to be something wrong with it."

"What about your pen?"

"Oh, that's all right! It doesn't work very well," confessed Figgins, "but it looks nice and it's got a beautiful gold nib."

He produced the pen and handed it round for inspection.

Monty Lowther gave a chuckle.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "What are you cackling about, Lowther?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Nothing! Only the gilt is coming off your beautiful gold nib."

"It can't be. It's—"

Monty Lowther examined the beautiful nib closely and chuckled again. The flimsy gilt was coming off, and he could read the engraving on the nib, the "Wearwell."

"Ha, ha, ha! These things are sold at twopence a dozen!" he exclaimed. "Figgins, old son, you're a giddy donkey! You've been done, like the rest of us."

Figgins looked at his pen ruefully.

Now that his attention was called to it, he could not help noticing what Monty Lowther pointed out.

"I say, don't you say anything to Kerr about it," he said nervously. "I don't want him to start saying that he told me so."

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll keep mum!"

Figgins shoved the pen discontentedly into his pocket and strode off. The chums of the Shell went on towards the School House. The window of Study No. 6 was open, and a fishing-rod projected from it. Herries was trying his new purchase.

The line came dangling down. Tom Merry idly caught the hook, and at that moment Kildare came out of the School House. Kildare, the captain of St. Jun's, gave the juniors a pleasant nod as he passed.

"Hallo, Kildare, there's something on your hat!" said Tom Merry.

And he flicked his hand across the top-hat Kildare was wearing, and with the same movement fixed the hook into the band.

"Is there?" said the school captain. "What is it?"

"Oh, just a black band, that's all!" said Tom Merry, dodging out of the captain's reach.

Kildare laughed good-humouredly and walked on.

The line was being paid out from above, and so the captain of St. Jun's never noticed that the hook was fastened to his hat.

The Terrible Three stood watching with considerable interest to see what would happen when Herries wound in his line.

"It would be rather a surprise for Kildare to find that his hat had made up its mind to sail away," murmured Tom Merry.

"Yes, but my hat! You forget that Herr Schneider's window is just under Study No. 6—and, by Jove, there's the Herr sitting at it, too!"

"Holy smoke!"

It was too true. Herr Schneider had his window wide open in the autumn evening, to enjoy the sunset and the fresh air of the quadrangle, and he was seated in full view. He had a cushion on the window-frame, and was leaning on it, smoking a pipe and reading a newspaper printed in his beautiful Deutsch.

"Oh dear!" murmured Tom Merry. "When Kildare's hat goes—"

"It's gone!"

Herries was taking in his line.

Kildare's hat suddenly rose from his head and sailed through the air. A more astonished individual than Eric Kildare at that moment had probably never been seen in the old school.

He swung round, and the expression of bewilderment on his face was so ludicrous that the chums of the Shell could not contain a roar.

"Why, what—what—"

Herries, within the study above, was not looking out, and he was in complete unconsciousness of it all. But the weight on his line showed him that he had made a catch.

Kildare stared at his hat. It swung away at the end of the line towards the house, and came with a crash at the window of Herr Schneider.

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!" gasped Tom Merry.

The swinging hat dashed against the paper the German master was reading and forced it into his face. Herr

(Continued on the next page.)

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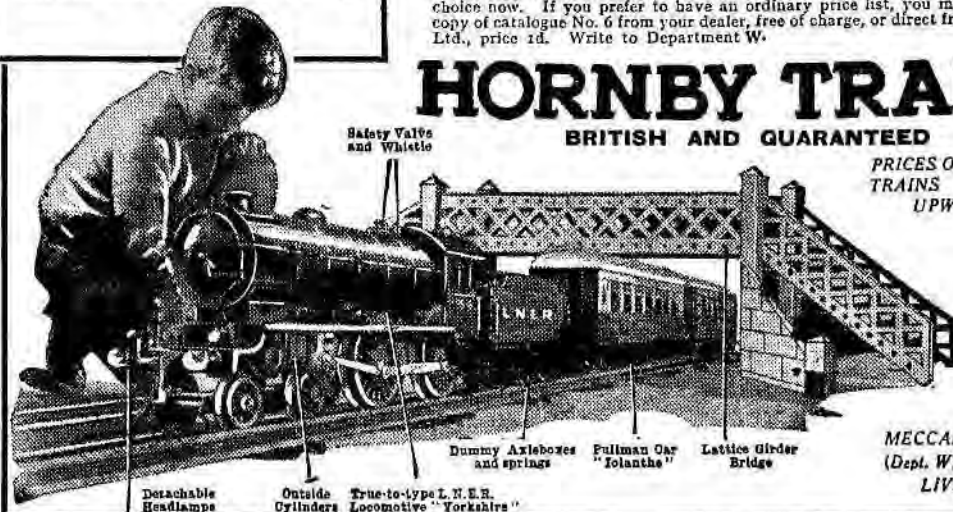
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Schneider started up with a fearful yell, his pipe dropping from his mouth and smashing on the floor.

"Mein Gott in himmel!"

The hat swung away again. Herries was looking out now, and he caught Kildare's amazed stare.

"What the dickens are you doing?" roared the captain of St. Jim's. "What do you mean by fishing off my hat?"

"My hat!" gasped Herries.

"No, ass, not your hat—my hat!"

"Mein Gott! Mein pipe! Mein pipe! Mein Gott!"

Herries let out the line again, and Kildare secured his hat and unhooked it. Herr Schneider stared out of the window in amaze as to what could have happened.

"Vat is all dot pefore? I have been struck after! Mein Gott!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Kildare. "Quite an accident!"

He gave the Terrible Three a wrathful glance.

"This is your work, Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare looked inclined to make reprisals for a moment; but his Irish good-humour prevailed, and he laughed and walked away. But Herr Schneider did not take it so calmly. He glanced round in search of a culprit, and caught sight of the fishing-line still hanging from the rod, which Herries was taking in as fast as he could.

"Ach! I see mit myself! Dis is a drick of to juniors! Ach!"

Herr Schneider plunged half out of the window and caught the line.

"I have it!" he shouted. "Now vo will see!"

Herries dragged on the line from the study window above.

"Hallo! It's caught something else now," he muttered.

Herr Schneider gave a yell. The pull on the line made it drag through his fingers till the hook came into his hand, and it hooked on and stuck fast.

"Ach! I am pleading mit mein hand! Mein Gott!"

Herries mad-frantic endeavours to get the line in, and Herr Schneider, danced and yelled. He succeeded at last in getting the hook away, and the line whisked up to the window of Study No. 6, and Herries reeled it in.

Herr Schneider adjusted his spectacles and dashed from the room. He knew that the cause of his woes proceeded from Study No. 6, and he was on the trail of vengeance.

CHAPTER 3.

Rough on Herries!

TOM MERRY laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks at Herries' operations as a fisherman. But as Herr Schneider disappeared from the window he became partly serious.

"I say, he's going for Herries!" he exclaimed. "This won't do, as it was our little joke. I'm going to own up." "So are we," said Manners and Lowther.

And they hurried into the School House. But Herr Schneider had lost no time, and he was much nearer to Study No. 6. He bounced up the stairs and into the study in a twinkling.

Herries was standing there, with the rod in his hands. He was opening and closing it to see how it worked. He had discovered faults in it, owing to the cheapness of the wood, and he was annoyed, but not so annoyed as Herr Schneider.

"Mein Gott! You young rascal, ain't it!"

He started. Herr Schneider, crimson with wrath, burst into the study.

"Anything the matter, sir?" asked Herries innocently.

The German master gasped.

"Anything the matter? I will show you pefore!"

He rushed at Herries. The youthful fisherman, astonished and alarmed, dodged him round the table. Herr Schneider gave the table a shove which sent it flying, and seized Herries. He gripped the fishing-rod with his right hand, and Herries collar with his left. Then he brought the rod into use, and the dust rose from Herries' garments.

"Take tat—and tat—and tat!"

"Ow!" roared Herries. "Are you dotty? What are you up to? Help!"

"And tat—and tat!"

"Ow! Oh crumbs! Help! He's mad!"

"And tat!"

Crack!

The fishing-rod was not built for usage like that. It smashed, and half of it went to the floor. Herr Schneider, panting, hurled the rest of it on the carpet.

"Dere! Dat vill be vun lesson!"

Tom Merry came running into the study.

"I say, sir, don't go for Herries! It was my fault!"

"Wat's tat you say, Merry?"

"I fixed the hook in Kildare's topper," said Tom Merry.

"Herries did not know."

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"Den you will take two hundred lines from te Schiller," said Herr Schneider. "As for Herries, he is punished because he fish out of de study window after."

And Herr Schneider marched off. Herries rubbed his person where the blows had fallen hardest.

"My hat!" he gasped. "This is a nice go! I thought the old chap was off his crumple! Nice sort of chap you are, Tom Merry, to get a chap into a fix like this!"

"Sorry!" said Tom. "Ha, ha, ha! Awfully sorry! I owned up, and what more could a fellow do?"

"I wish you had owned up a little sooner, then!" growled Herries. "He's bruised me all over! Look at that beastly fishing-rod?"

"It does look rather a wreck."

"I've only paid a bob off it!"

"Oh, that's all right! I'll stand it," said Tom Merry. "It was my fault."

"Rats! I don't want you to pay for it. That's rot!"

"I shall, all the same. You won't get Jonas Jex to change it for a new one now, old son. It oughtn't to have bust up like that. What was the figure?"

"Fifteen shillings."

"I'll settle it. Come on, kids! I should advise a little embrocation, Herries. You'll find it grateful and comforting."

And the Terrible Three departed, leaving Herries still rubbing his aching bones.

"Hallo, Tom Merry! Have you seen D'Arcy?"

It was Curly Gibson of the Third who asked the question. He was coming along the passage with a stamp album under his arm.

"Yes," said Tom. "He was just busting his bicycle in the quad. That a new album?"

"Yes," said Curly. "A jolly good one, with a good collection in it, too."

Tom Merry looked at him in surprise.

"Have you come into a fortune lately?" he asked.

Gibson grinned.

"No, but I have been lucky. I bought this of a chap named Jex, on the easy payment system."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

It was evident that all was grist that came to Mr. Jex's mill, and he was not inclined to spare even youngsters in the Third Form.

"Got a bargain, I suppose?" said Monty Lowther.

"Rather! The chap explained that he couldn't afford to do it at the price, except for the immense advertisement his firm gets by selling good things at a low figure."

The chums of the Shell smiled in a sickly way.

"What are you giving for the album?" asked Tom.

"Two pounds ten."

"Great Scott! A kid in the Third Form spending two pounds ten on a stamp album!" exclaimed Tom, rather shocked. "How on earth are you going to pay for it?"

"Oh, it's easy enough! I have eightpence a week pocket money, and I'm to pay half of that to Mr. Jex every Saturday."

"Well, that's easy enough, if the album's worth the money."

"It's worth five or six times the money," said Curly.

"It's only for the sake of the advertisement that they're able to do it. Why, there's a Cape of Good Hope stamp that is worth fifteen shillings alone!"

"Ahem!"

"Then there's a set of Jahalbad stamps that would sell for two pounds anywhere."

"Eh?"

"And a lot of the others are worth a shilling or one-and-sixpence each."

"And you've got all that lot for two pounds ten?"

"Yes."

"And Jex is going to live on the loss, I suppose?"

"You don't understand business, Tom Merry," said Curly, smiling superiorly. "It's the advertisement they get—"

"Oh, I know all about the advertisement. If the advertisement brings them customers like you, who pay two pounds ten in easy instalments for five pounds' worth of stamps, they will have solved the difficulty of getting rich quick."

Curly scratched his head.

"Perhaps they'll put the price up to future customers," he said. "Anyhow, I know big firms do lots of things for advertisement. Anyway, here are the stamps."

"Yes, there are the stamps," said Tom Merry. "What do you want D'Arcy for? Do you think he is going to buy some of you?"

"Yes. He wants two more for his Cape set," said Curly. "I'm going to let him have some at a bargain."

"On the easy payment system?"

"Not much!" said Curly promptly. "Spot cash. I shall let him have the two for ten shillings, which will be cheap to him, a good deal below catalogue price, and at the same time leave a decent profit for me."

"You young Shylock! If D'Arcy buys your stamps he's a bigger mug than I took him for!"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Oh, ask him!"

"I'm going to," said Curly; and he marched on with his stamp album towards Study No. 6. The Terrible Three went on to their own quarters.

"That chat Jex is a regular swindler," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Fancy Curly Gibson swallowing such a yarn! Of course, the stamps are forgeries."

"Rather!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm afraid Curly won't get much out of D'Arcy. We'll do some plain talking when we see that bounder on Saturday!"

Tom Merry nodded, and his eyes flashed.

To his frank and honourable nature there was something extremely repellent in the cunning of Mr. Jonas Jex, and he intended to utter some unpleasant truths when he met that gentleman again.

He was curious to know how Curly had fared in his philatelic venture, and when he met D'Arcy again he inquired.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"No, I didn't buy any stamps of young Gibson," he said.

"He offered me some at a very low figure. Yaas, wathah! But, you see, they were no good!"

"What was the matter with them?"

"Forgewies, my deah boy."

"I guessed as much! And the rest of the stamps in his album—are they any good?"

"Not much. The album is worth about three shillin's," said D'Arcy, "and the stamps are worth somethin' like five. The cheapest and commonest of them are genuine enough. The others are wotten forgewies. That man Jox is a wank swindler!"

"I'll see to it," said Tom, with gleaming eyes. "Curly is not going to pay two pounds ten for that rubbish!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm beginnin' to feel quite argy myself, don't you know. I am vearly annoyed about that jiggah. It isn't only the money, you know, but it makes a fellow feel such an awful ass!"

There were a good many of the juniors who had made up their minds to return their purchases to Mr. Jex on the following Saturday. It remained to be seen how the representative of the World-Wide Emporium would receive them.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry Settles Up I

"OH, here you are again, young gents!" said Mr. Jex, with an oily smile.

It was Saturday afternoon.

Mr. Jex was seated on the stile under the trees in Rylcombe Lane when the Terrible Three came along and halted in front of him.

They did not come empty-handed.

Tom Merry carried the wreck of a football, Manners a handful of films, and Monty Lowther a pocket camera.

Mr. Jex noticed the articles, and a glitter came into his little bright eyes, but he kept on the oily, agreeable smile. A somewhat unpleasant smile.

"Let me see," he said, consulting his little book, "I have a shilling to collect from Master Lowther, sixpence from Master Manners, and sixpence from Tom Merry. I could give you time on the payment if you are not ready."

"Excuse me, Mr. Jex," said Tom Merry politely. "I think you said that in case of satisfaction not being given the articles could be returned."

"And the cash would be handed back," said Manners.

"Without deductions!" chimed in Lowther.

Mr. Jex nodded.

"Certainly. Any article returned unused would be allowed for to the full value."

"Unused? You never said anything about that before!"

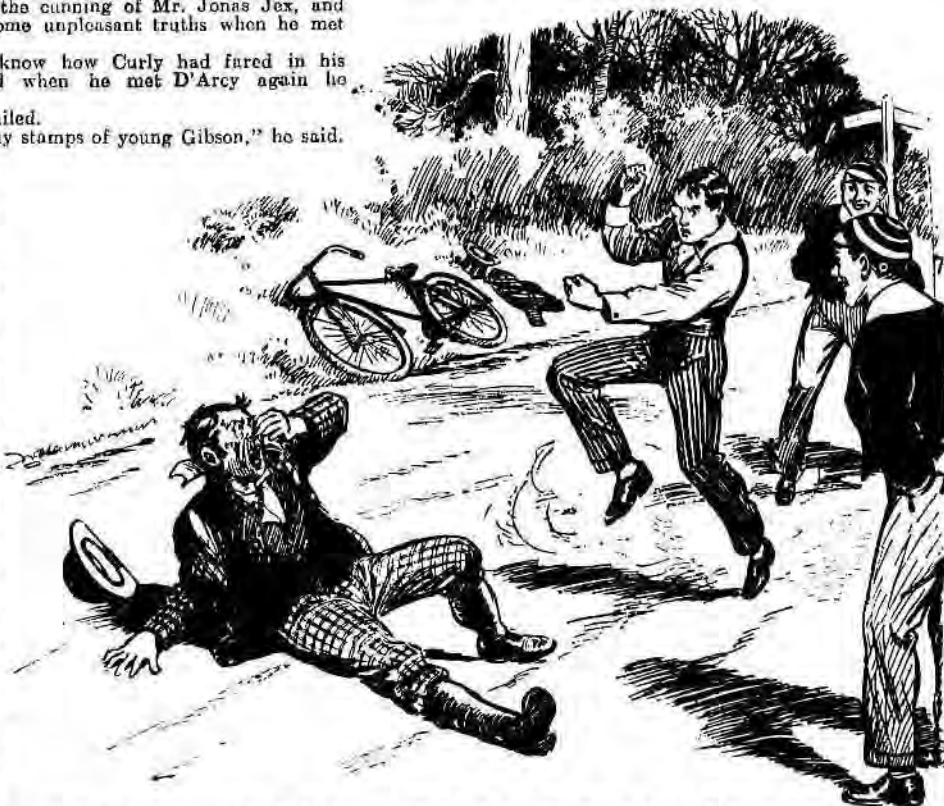
"It is in the agreement."

"What agreement?"

"The one you signed. I have a copy of it here." Mr. Jex drew a copy of the valuable agreement from his pocket.

"Here you are: It is agreed between Master Thomas Merry on the one part, hereinafter referred to as the purchaser, and the World-Wide Emporium on the other part, hereinafter referred to as the vendor, that—"

"Oh, ring off, please!"



With a right and a left D'Arcy knocked Mr. Jex down in the lane. A little surprised at his success, he danced round the rascal as he sat there rubbing his nose!

"We're not going to stay here all the afternoon!" said Monty Lowther. "Where's the bit that concerns us?"

"I'm coming to that. Let me see—Section 15. Any article not giving satisfaction will be taken back by the company, and full value allowed for same, provided it be returned within twenty-four hours in the same condition as when it was received."

"That's all very well. But this footer, for instance. How was I to know that it wasn't any good till I had tried it?"

"And these beastly films. They looked all right. How was I to know they were rotten bosh till they were used?" demanded Manners, rather excitedly.

"And this horrid camera!" said Monty Lowther. "You have to use a camera, I suppose, to discover whether it is any good, or not?"

Mr. Jex shrugged his thin shoulders.

"This is no business of mine. There's the agreement. You've signed it, and you've got to abide by it."

"Look at this football!" said Tom Merry. "Do you really think it was worth ten-and-sixpence—or a bob, for that matter?"

"I'm not giving an opinion. I am here to collect the money due to the firm."

"And this camera," said Monty Lowther. "Look at it!"

"I've no time to examine cameras, and I'm not interested."

"And these films," said Manners. "Look at this negative I brought to show you! Only look at it!"

"I'm waiting for the cash," remarked Mr. Jex.

"You will get nothing from us," said Tom. "I won't ask you to return what we have paid; you can keep that. But you'll get nothing more!"

"You have signed—"

"I don't care what we have signed. Here are your goods, such as they are. You are a thief and a swindler to sell such things!"

"Yes, and a dirty, dishonest rotter!" said Mowly Lowther.

"And a beastly cad!" said Manners.

Mr. Jex's face assumed a brick-red hue.

"You young rascals! You'll try to back out of your own agreement, will you? You'll try to swindle an honest man—"

Biff!

The wreck of the football smote Mr. Jex full in the face. He reeled back, and fell off the stile, just in time to escape the camera and the films which were hurled at him.

He scrambled up, crimson with fury.

"You young thieves—"

Tom Merry clenched his fists.

"Hold your tongue!" he exclaimed fiercely. "You have swindled us! You are a rogue and a swindler, and you ought to be sent to prison. You won't get another penny out of us. And, by George, if you speak like that again you'll get a hiding!"

The rascal was spluttering with rage.

But, though he could have settled one, or even two, of the juniors, the three of them were too big an order for Mr. Jex, and he consulted prudence.

"I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"You'll take your rubbish back, and clear out!" said Tom Merry.

"I'll come up to the school and speak to the headmaster about it. I'll see if I'm not to have the money you owe me!"

Manners and Lowther looked rather uneasy. But Tom Merry was as firm as a rock.

"You can go up to the school," he said calmly. "As for the agreements, they are not worth the paper they are written on, as we are under age."

"You—you young—"

"Take care!"

"So you think you know the law, do you? I'll show you!"

"I know enough not to be afraid of a scheming black-guard like you, Mr. Jex!" said Tom Merry contemptuously. "You cannot frighten me. You are a swindler, and you know perfectly well that you dare not go up to the school and speak to Dr. Holmes!"

"I'll show you!"

"You would get kicked out, if not given into custody. I might get called over the coals, but you know the doctor wouldn't allow anything to be paid you. But come up to St. Jim's if you like. I'll promise you a warm reception!"

Jonas Jex ground his teeth. He fairly cowered back from the flashing glance of the leader of the Shell.

Like all of his character, he could bully when he found himself dealing with the weak and irresolute, but when he met with firmness and courage his natural cowardice asserted itself.

He realised that bullying would not serve his turn, and as soon as he could master his rage he changed his tactics.

"I'll take back the things if you like, young gents," he said, with a whine in his voice. "It's plain enough in the agreement, but if you're not satisfied I'll take them back at my own risk. That's fair."

"Well, there are the things. Good-bye!"

"Wait a minutes, young gents. You ought to pay something for the damage done to the goods. Now you can't deny that!"

Tom Merry hesitated. The rascal's surrender was so complete that Tom, always generous, did not like to use his victory harshly.

"How much do you want?" he asked abruptly.

The rascal measured him with his eye.

"Say ten shillings," he replied, naming the largest sum he thought he could extract from the chums.

"Don't pay him," said Manners.

"I've got to lose on these things," said Mr. Jex. "Don't be 'ard on an honest man! I took you for young gents, and—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Here's your ten bob."

He took a postal order for ten shillings from his pocket. He had received it from his old governess only that morning. He handed it to Mr. Jex.

That gentleman's dirty fingers closed on it greedily.

"Come along, chaps!" said Tom Merry.

(Continued on the next page.)

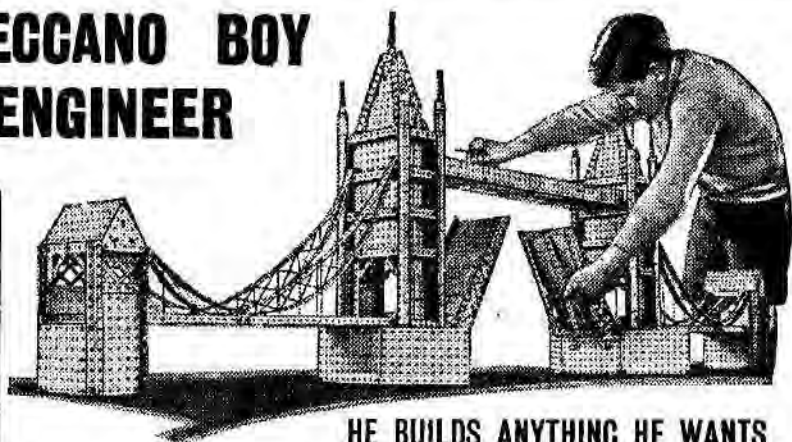
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The Terrible Three walked away.

"He oughtn't to have had anything," said Tom, with knitted brows. "But I could not argue with a chap like that. He makes me feel ill."

Mr. Jex, left alone, scowled savagely after the chums of the Shell.

He picked up the returned articles and put them out of sight. He had some more interviews coming off on that spot, and did not want his future visitors to know what had happened. All of them were not of the same calibre as the Terrible Three, and he did not expect to have so much trouble with them.

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Jex Has a Pleasant Time!

GEORGE GORE came along the lane ten minutes later and stopped at the stile. Gore was one of the later purchasers of the goods of the World-Wide Emporium. He had bought a cigarette-case, Gore being one of the "smart set" at St. Jim's, and given to secret smoking.

The case was very nice to look at—at first. But the supposed silver was only nickel, and the imitation leather was already giving. Gore took it out of his pocket as he came up to the stile.

"Good-afternoon!" said Mr. Jex. "Let me see. You didn't pay me last Saturday, did you?"

"You offered to let it stand over," said Gore.

"Quite so, but—"

"I don't like this case. It's a sham."

"It's a good one for the price. What do you expect for fifteen shillings?"

"Something better than that," said Gore. "You led me to believe that it was silver and real Russian leather. It's a swindle."

"That's your business. I gave you no guarantee, and you knew what you were buying. I'll trouble you for fifteen shillings, Master Gore."

"What do you mean? There's only a bob due, and a bob last Saturday?"

"You read the agreement."

"No, I didn't."

"That's all very well. Here it is, Section No. 14. 'If any payment lapses, for any reason whatever, the whole amount becomes due at once.'"

Gore looked alarmed.

"You didn't say anything about that before," he exclaimed.

"There it was, in black and white, for you to read if you had a mind to," said Mr. Jex. "You owe me fifteen shillings, please!"

"But—but you yourself offered to let the payments stand over," said Gore, in dismay. "I didn't even ask you. You offered."

"Naturally. I thought you had read the agreement, and knew what you were doing."

"Look here, I can pay you a bob—"

"I want fifteen shillings."

"I can't pay it! I won't! It's a swindle!"

Mr. Jex scowled. Gore's passionate utterance, and the evident alarm in the boy's face, showed that he was not of the stuff that Tom Merry was made of. Mr. Jex saw that he would be able to handle him.

"Won't you? You want to cheat me, do you?" he thundered. "You think you are going to swindle me. I'll show you! Going, are you? All right! I'll come up to the school with you!"

"For Heaven's sake—"

"Pay up, then, or I'll have you arrested! I'll have you expelled from the school as a thief! Hand over the fifteen shillings! Sharp—now!"

"I—I haven't got it," stammered Gore, pale as death.

"I—I—"

"Don't tell me any lies! Hand it over!"

"I—I can't! I haven't more than six shillings in the world! I—I—"

"Give me that, then, and I'll have the rest next week. By George, I'll show you if you can swindle me!" shouted Mr. Jex. "I'll show you! The headmaster would like to know that you bought a cigarette-case, wouldn't he? I'll show you up!"

"Shut up, for goodness' sake!" whimpered Gore. "I'll pay it! I'll pay every penny, only shut up! Supposing someone were to hear you?"

"I don't care who hears me. I don't—"

"Here's the six bob. You shall have the rest next week. Honour bright!"

"Mind that I do," said Mr. Jex, pocketing the six shillings discontentedly. "Get along with you! You're not an honest boy! Get along! And mind I have the other nine next Saturday, with a shilling for interest."

"Eh—eh, what?"

"A shilling for interest. That will be ten bob in all. Get along!"

"But—"

"Mind, I'll have no mercy on you if you fail!"

"But, Mr. Jex—"

"Oh, get along, do! I've no patience with you!"

Gore walked away unsteadily. Mr. Jonas Jex was showing the cloven hoof with a vengeance now. His oily manners had dropped from him like a cloak.

When Gore was out of sight Mr. Jex grinned to himself. "That's an easier sort of cove to deal with," he murmured. "I'll twist him round! I'll make him sit up!"

Hallo! Here's the young shaver with the stamp-album! I wonder if he's going to cut up rusty? I'll give him a lesson!"

Curly Gibson, of the Third Form at St. Jim's, was approaching. He had the precious stamp-album under his arm. He was looking very nervous.

"If you please, Mr. Jex," he began, "I want you to take this album back."

"But I don't please, sir," said Mr. Jex grimly.

"But you said—"

"Never mind what I said. That album's yours, and you can do what you like with it; stick stamps in it, or shove it into the fire. You owe me two pounds ten for it."

"But some of the stamps are forgeries."

"Are they? Which ones?"

"The Cape of Good Hope, the Jahalbad, and the—"

"Who says so?"

"D'Arcy told me so. He knows all about stamps."

"Perhaps he has taken the real ones out and put the others in?" suggested Mr. Jex callously. "Anyway, the stamps were all right when you had the album."

"Oh, D'Arcy wouldn't do a thing like that! It would be stealing."

"I don't care what he would or wouldn't do! You've got the album, and I want the money! Where is it?"

"I—I don't want the album. Tom Merry says it's a swindle, and that I'm not to pay you any more, and you're to take the album back."

And Curly Gibson held it out.

Mr. Jex kept his hands in his pocket, and made no motion to take the proffered article.

"I don't want your album. It's yours, not mine. I want my money. You paid me only eightpence instead of ninepence last Saturday—"

"You said I needn't—"

"Never mind what I said. You paid me a penny short, and so the whole of the money becomes due at once, according to the agreement."

"Oh dear—oh dear!"

"Have you got two pounds ten for me to-day?"

"I—I haven't more than a shilling," stammered Curly.

"You young swindler! I'll have a writ served on you."

The absurdity of the threat was not apparent to a boy of twelve. Curly Gibson, thoroughly frightened, burst into tears. Mr. Jex smiled with satisfaction.

"Yes, I'll have you sent to a reformatory, I will," he said. "I'll teach you to try to swindle me, you young rip!"

"I—I don't want to swindle you, Mr. Jex—I don't, really! But—but I haven't the money, or I'd pay you at once! Boo-hoo!"

"I don't see why I should let you off. You say I've sold you rubbish!"

"I—I take that back!" stammered the wretched Curly.

"You admit the stamps were all right when I sold them to you?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

"Good! You owe me two pounds ten. When can you pay up?"

"I—I can't pay. I have only eightpence a week. I'll give you all that, if you like."

"Can't you borrow any?"

"Only—only a few shillings, perhaps."

"Rot! Some of the boys at your school have lots of money. There's young D'Arcy, for instance, he's the son of a lord, and he has heaps of cash."

"He wouldn't lend to a boy in the Third Form. I couldn't ask him."

"You could find out where he keeps his money, and borrow some without asking him."

"How could I? Oh—do—do you mean I should steal his money?" gasped Curly, horror-stricken at the suggestion.

"You can do as you like!" thundered Mr. Jex. "Only mind, if I don't have at least ten shillings off your debt next Saturday, I'll have no mercy on you!"

Curly sobbed.

"Oh, don't be a little fool!" snapped Mr. Jex. "Shut up that snivelling. Mind, not a word about this to Tom Merry, or any of his friends. If you say a word on the subject to anyone, I'll get to know of it, and I'll have you arrested."

"Oh, Mr. Jex, I won't say anything—I won't!"

"Mind you don't! Especially to Tom Merry."

"He—he'll ask me how I have settled with you, and if he sees the album—"

"Ah!" Mr. Jex looked thoughtful. "That won't do! Look here, my lad, I'll take the album back if you like, and knock a pound off the debt for it. Then you'll owe me thirty shillings."

"Oh, thank you!" gasped Curly.

He handed the worthless album to Mr. Jex with a great deal of pleasure. The rascal tossed it behind a tree.

"Now, thirty bob, remember," he said threateningly; "and ten bob of it next Saturday at the latest! If you fail—"

"I—I'll try. But—"

"And if Tom Merry asks you about it, you're to say that I've taken the album back, and not a word more about our arrangements, my lad. If you tell him anything more I'll show you no mercy. I'll make you sorry for yourself!"

"I won't tell him anything!" gasped Curly.

"Mind you don't! Now you can go."

"Oh, please, Mr. Jex—"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Jex. "I'm not going to listen to your snivelling. Get along, you little brute! Get out of my sight!"

Poor Curly went sobbing down the lane. Mr. Jex grinned triumphantly. This was somewhat of a solace for his unsatisfactory meeting with Tom Merry.

During the next half-hour he had interviews with a good many more juniors from St. Jim's, and he showed himself in his true colours to most of them. Few had the firmness Tom Merry had shown. Most were terrified by his threats, and gave way utterly. Ignorance of the law, and fear of what might happen if the matter came to the headmaster's ears, made them like wax in the hands of the cunning scoundrel.

At length came Study No. 6. They had been detained on the football field for practice, and Mr. Jex was getting rather impatient by the time they arrived. After them he had only Figgins & Co. to deal with that day.

Study No. 6 came along together, D'Arcy wheeling the bicycle, Blake carrying the football boots, and Herries with his hands in his pockets.

"Hallo!" said Mr. Jex. "Here you are at last!"

"Couldn't come sooner," said Blake. "Here's your boots."

"My boots! What do you mean?"

"I mean that they're made only of brown paper, and I'm not going to have 'em."

"What do you mean? You've got to have them!"

"Have I?" said Blake, setting his teeth. "We'll see! You are a swindler! I'm not going to pay you anything more."

"Neither am I," said Arthur Augustus. "This jiggah is a beastlay wotten swindle! The bwakes are bwoken, the tyres are punctured all ovah, the—"

"I don't care! You should take proper care of your machine."

"I have taken pwopah care of it. But it is a wotten swindle. It's no good."

"That's your look-out. I'm not taking it back. I have no use for a damaged bicycle. You can't crawl out of your agreement like that. I suppose this young gent will be wanting me to take his fishing-rod back again next."

"No, I don't!" said Herries. "It was a rotten swindle, and not worth half what you charged; but it's got broken, so I am going to pay for it."

"If the article is broken the money becomes due all at once, according to Section 7 in the agreement," said Mr. Jex.

"Oh, keep your wool on! We've raised the tin, and here it is. We don't want any more of your precious easy payments. Just write out a receipt, please."

Mr. Jex counted the money and put it into his pocket.

"I've forgotten my fountain-pen," he said. "I'll give you the receipt next week."

"Here's a pencil."

"I'm not going to give you a pencil receipt. It's not binding."

"Then you give me back the tin."

"Nonsense! That is mine, of course. I—"

"Buck up with the receipt, Mr. Jex!" said Jack Blake, with a gleam in his eyes. "I give you one minute before we jump on you!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Jex looked at the juniors dubiously for a moment. Then he discovered a fountain-pen in his pocket, and wrote out a receipt, which he handed to Herries.

"Thanks!" said Herries. "Glad to have done with you."

"You young gens haven't paid me—"

"We're not going to," said Blake. "You ought to return the payments we've made. I suppose it's no good asking for them. There's your goods. You'll get no more money."

"I'll have the law of you."

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "You are a beastlay wogwe, you know. You weally ought to be awwasted. Undah the cires, you ought to be glad to get your wubbish back."

"You—you tailor's dummy!" spluttered Mr. Jex. "I'll teach you to talk to me, you—"

"What did you address me as?" asked Arthur Augustus, with great politeness.

"A tailor's dummy—a silly tailor's dummy!"

D'Arcy looked at Blake and Herries.

"My fwiends, do you considah that that person has a wight to address me in that extremely objectionable mannah?"

"Certainly not," said Blake.

"Rather not," said Herries. "He owes you an apology."

"You hear that, Mr. Jex. You owe me an apology."

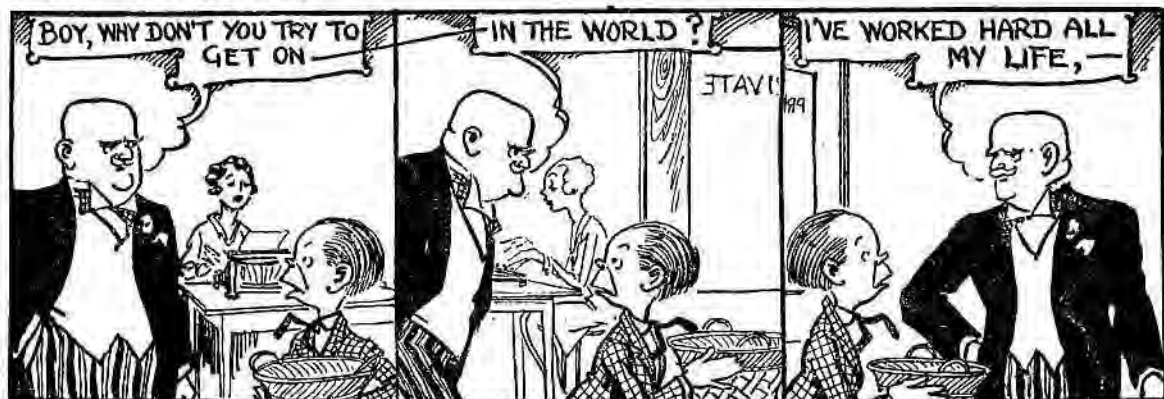
"I'll—I'll—"

"Are you goin' to apologise?"

"No!" yelled Mr. Jex.

D'Arcy took off his jacket and carefully rolled up his immaculate white shirt-sleeves. Blake and Herries giggled.

Potts, the Office Boy!



But the swell of St. Jim's was looking in deadly earnest. When it was a question of dignity, D'Arcy never took a back seat.

Mr. Jex eyed the war-like swell of the school curiously.

"What do you think you are going to do?" he asked.

"I am goin' to thwash you!"

"Ha, ha! Take him home and fasten him up," said Mr. Jex.

"Are you goin' to tendah that apology which I wequiah?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"Then pwepare for a lickin'," said Arthur Augustus.

He danced up to the rascal, and gavo him a rather unexpected tap on the nose. Mr. Jex uttered a yell and went for D'Arcy. But the swell of the School House showed unexpected form. He let out with his right and left in quick succession, and Mr. Jex sat down in the lane without quite knowing how he got there.

"Bravo!" shouted Blake and Herries together.

They had been ready to interfere, for, of course, a man against a boy wasn't fair fighting; but they soon saw that, though Mr. Jex had the advantage of age and size, he hadn't an ounce of pluck, and that he didn't care to face D'Arcy again.

Arthur Augustus, a little surprised himself at his success, danced round the rascal as he sat in the dusty lane, rubbing his nose.

"Get up!" he exclaimed. "I insist upon your wisin' immediately, so that I can thwash you! Get up at once, you wascal!"

"Look here, you let me alone!" growled Mr. Jex.

"I am sowwy, but it is quite imposs for me to let you alone until I have weceived the apology due to me," said Arthur Augustus.

"I'm not going to apologise to a bit of a kid!"

"Then get up and take your thwashin'!"

"Look here—"

D'Arcy gave him a gentle dig in the ribs with his boots. "Get up!"

"Lemme alone!" howled Mr. Jex. "I—I apologise!"

"Then I am satisfied," said D'Arcy, beaming. "I wegard that as quite satisfawwy. Now you may get up and take your rubbish away. Come on, deah boys!"

Study No. 6 went on, leaving Mr. Jex alone with his rubbish, and in about the vilest temper imaginable. He got up slowly, rubbing his damaged nose.

"I'll make some of 'em pay for this!" he mumbled. "Hallo, here are the other young rips!"

Figgins and Fatty Wynn were approaching. Their looks showed that they had seen the little dispute. Mr. Jex scowled at them. He saw that Figgins carried the gold pen in his hand, and Fatty Wynn the punching-ball.

"Here's your property!" said Figgins. "You're a swindler! We're not going to pay you anything! Good-evening!"

He pitched the pen at Mr. Jex, and Fatty Wynn followed suit with the punching-ball. Mr. Jex felt too dispirited to argue the point. Figgins and Fatty Wynn marched off.

The representative of the World-Wide Emporium looked ruefully at his valuable collection of returned articles.

"Never mind," he muttered. "They ain't all got the nerve of them young varmint, and I'll make some of 'em pay dear for all this."

Which was a very comforting reflection to Mr. Jex.

CHAPTER 6.

Kerr is Triumphant.

KERR, the Scottish partner in the famous firm of Figgins & Co., met Figgy and Fatty Wynn as they came in after their brief interview with Mr. Jex in Rylcombe Lane.

Figgins exchanged a quick glance with Fatty.

It was tacitly agreed that nothing was to be said to Kerr about returning the articles to Mr. Jex. Kerr's "I told you so!" would have been intolerable.

Kerr looked at them curiously.

"Where have you two been?" he asked.

"Been to see Jex, same old place," said Figgins carefully.

"Ha, ha, ha! Been making those easy payments?"

"Well, I went to see Jex," he replied. "I'm ready for some tea. Come on, kids!"

They went into their study in the New House. Kerr was grinning. Perhaps he had a suspicion in his breast of the true state of affairs.

"I think I want a little exercise before tea," he remarked.

"I'll have a go at that punching-ball of yours, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn looked uncomfortable.

"Why, where is it?" said Kerr, looking round. "You've taken it off the hooks. Has it busted?"

"No, not exactly."

"Have you put it away?"

"N-no!"

"Then where is it?"

There was nothing for it but to confess.

"I've returned it to Jex because it was no good."

"Ha, ha, ha! Got your first payment back?"

"N-no."

"Ha, ha, ha! I say, Figgy, lend me your fountain-pen, will you, for a minute?"

Figgins flushed.

"I haven't got it about me."

"I don't mind looking for it," said Kerr obligingly.

"Where did you leave it?"

"Oh, hang it, Kerr! I left it with Jex. It was a swindle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't see what there is to cackle about."

"I told you so. I—"

"Yes, I know you did!" growled Figgins. "Now, cheese it, and let's have some tea!"

They had tea, but Kerr did not "cheese it." He made incessant allusions to Mr. Jex, and the junior bargain-hunters, till Figgins and Fatty Wynn were quite wild. Finally, they made a frontal attack, and Kerr was driven out of the study.

He walked away clucking to himself. He went towards the School House, and became as grave as a judge as he encountered the Terrible Three.

"I say, Tom Merry, would you mind lending a chap your new footer for a bit?"

"I—I haven't got it with me," said Tom Merry.

"Shall I run up to your study for it?"

"Well, you see, it isn't there!"

"Oh, if you don't want to lend it—"

Tom Merry coloured.

"Well, the fact is, I've given it back to Jex. It was no good!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Where's your camera, Monty Lowther?"

"Given it back to Jex!" growled Monty.



Hold That One!

"And those splendid films, better than any at half the price, Manners?"

"I—I've left them with Jex."

"Ha, ha, ha! I told you so!"

The Terrible Three looked at one another sheepishly. They guessed that Kerr had seen them leave St. Jim's with the articles in question, and drawn his own conclusions when they returned empty-handed.

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear me smile!" said Kerr. "Oh, you giddy bargain-hunters! I told you so! I told you the man was a humbug! Ha, ha, ha—oh!"

The patience of the Terrible Three was not inexhaustible. They suddenly charged at Kerr simultaneously, and the triumphant Scotsman sat upon the gravel path with a concussion that jarred every tooth in his head.

"This is where we laugh," said Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three walked away laughing.

Kerr picked himself up. It was his day out, and he was not finished yet. A little later he looked into Study No. 6, where Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were at tea.

"Gussy, old chap, will you lend me your new bike for a spin round the quad?"

Blake gave Gussy a warning jab with his foot. He was as unwilling as the rest of Mr. Jex's customers to let Kerr have the laugh on his side.

"Ow!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What did you do that for, Blake?"

"Eh? What?"

"You brought down your foot on my toe with howwid force," said D'Arcy; "it was weally vewy wulf and uncalled-for."

"Oh, you're dreaming!"

"Then it was Hewwies! Hewwies, did you bring down your foot on my toe?"

"No, I didn't!" said Herries.

"Then it must weally have been——"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Blake, as he saw Kerr grinning broadly.

"I refuse to dwy up. My toe has been sewiously injuahed by the ewel and unpwovoked assault," said D'Arcy. "I weally think——"

"What about the bike, Gussy?" said Kerr.

"Oh, I am sowwy, but——"

"You can't ride it after dark in the quad," said Blake hastily.

"It isn't quite dark," said Kerr; "only just dusk."

"Too late for a bike, old man. Have some tea?"

"No, thanks; I've just had some. I'll risk it, if Gussy will lend me the jigger."

"The fact is, deah boy——"

"You can trust me with it, Gussy!"

"Oh, I can twust you all wight! But—excuse me a moment. There is somethin' undah the table wubbin' against my ankle!"

It was Blake's foot. D'Arcy stooped down to investigate.

"Blake, what are you stickin' your silly foot against me for? You are soilin' my twousahs, and causin' me pain in my beastly ankle! It is weally most inconsiderate."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

"I don't see what you are laughin' at, Kerr. Blake's conduct is most wude and unaccountable, and I shall have to sewiously considah whethah I can continue to extend my fwiendship to him. About the jiggah, I am sowwy, but I have returned it to Mr. Jex, as it was a wank swindle. The bwake's bwake, and the tyres are simply wotten!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I told you so!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wemembah you were vewy wude at the time."

"Ha, ha, ha! Where's your football hoofs, Blake?"

"If I had 'em on, I'd show you!" said Blake crossly.

"How are you getting on with that fishing rod, Herries?"

"Oh, rats!" said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ooch! You horrid beast!"

A couple of sardines landed in Kerr's countenance, and a herring followed. He dodged out of the study just in time to escape a loaf that crashed on the door behind him.

He left the School House. A minute later a pebble clinked on the study window of Study No. 6, which was open. The voice of Kerr was heard below.

"Hallo, kids! Did you get any of those easy payments back?"

Blake rose silently and gripped his teacup, which he had just filled. He stole towards the open window, taking care not to be observed from without.

"Have you got any——"

Blake suddenly leaned over the sill and inverted the teacup just over Kerr's upturned, grinning face.

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Swoosh!

Kerr gave a yell as the tea splashed all over his features. "Have some more?" inquired Blake. "Hand me the teapot, Gussy."

But Kerr did not wait for the teapot. He made a bee-line for the New House, spluttering and gasping, and Blake returned to the tea-table with restored good humour.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you, Kerr?" asked Figgins, as the Scottish partner came in, mopping his face with a soaked handkerchief.

"Oh, nothing!" said Kerr.

"You're looking as if you had run up against something."

"I'm all right. I'd like to have a go at a punching-ball——"

"Oh, cheeso it!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha! Have you been making any more bargains while I've been gone? Blessed if I shall let you chaps go



At the Head's command Tom Merry struck a match and relighted it—he stared at the amazing sight

out alone in the future," said Kerr. "These easy payments are——"

Figgins exchanged a glance with Fatty Wynn, and they suddenly gripped Kerr and plumped him down on his back on the floor.

"Sit on his chest, Fatty!" commanded Figgins.

"Right-ho!" said Fatty, obeying the order.

Figgins took the coffee pot from the table.

"Here, hold on!" gasped Kerr. "Pax! Pax!"

"That's all very well," said Figgins. "We'll make it pax if you'll agree to give that subject a rest. Not a word more about it!"

"Agreed!" said Kerr, with a nervous eye on the coffee pot.

And so he was allowed to rise undrenched. He had to keep his word, and the topic of the famous bargains made with Mr. Jonas Jex was henceforth tabooed in the study of Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Takes a Hand.

"FAG!"

Knox, the prefect, stood at his study door and called.

Curly Gibson of the Third Form came along the passage.

"Here you are, Knox. Do you want me?"

"Yes. Cut down to the post office and get me some stamps!"

Curly hesitated.

It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday at St. Jim's. There was plenty of time for Curly Gibson to go to the post office for Knox, and his hesitation was strange. He was usually one of the most obliging of fags.

Knox stared at him.

"Take the bob, you young duffer."

Curly did not hold out his hand.

"I say, Knox—couldn't you—couldn't you get somebody else to go?" he faltered.

"No, I couldn't! Why don't you want to go?"

"I—I—I—"

"You lazy young rascal! Take the bob and go at once!"

"I say, Knox, do let me off! I don't want to go to-day!"

"I—"



and bicycle lamp. "What does this mean?" gasped the Head, as the treacled and feathered Jex.

Knox seized him by the collar and shook him roughly.

"Now, what's all this rot?" he demanded. "Why don't you want to go to the village for me? What's the game, you young ass?"

Curly Gibson began to whimper.

"I don't want to go out this afternoon. I—"

"Then you've got to! Take that bob!"

Curly took it unwillingly.

"Knox, if you'd let me off—"

"Cut along!" roared Knox.

And he went into his study again, puzzled and annoyed, but never thinking that there might be a real reason at the back of Curly's strange unwillingness to go upon a very ordinary errand, and one he had performed a dozen times before without demur.

Curly went disconsolately down the passage, the shilling in his hand. He was looking the most miserable youngster

in St. Jim's. Suddenly a thought came into his mind, and his face brightened.

"Perhaps I can get the stamps off one of the fellows without going to the post office!" he muttered.

He looked into some of the studies. Most of them were vacant, for the afternoon was fine, and the fellows were out on the football field. But he found one fellow belonging to the Shell in his room. It was Gore.

Gore was seated in his study when Curly looked in. His head was resting on his hands, his elbows on the table, his whole attitude that of dejection and misery.

"I say, Gore, can you—" began Curly timidly.

Gore started at the sound of his voice, and looked up quickly. A look of passionate anger came over his white face as he saw Curly look amazedly at him.

"Get out of my study!" he roared.

"But, I say, I want you to—"

"Get out!"

Gore gripped a book to hurl. Curly, amazed and alarmed, dodged out of the study. The book crashed on the floor as he closed it.

The Third-Former wandered into the quadrangle. Seniors and juniors were busy at football practice. Curly looked on at the junior ground, where Tom Merry and his friends were at the good old game, and waited there disconsolately till the practice finished.

"Hallo, kid!" said Tom Merry, as he came off the ground, flushed and rosy, with a rather muddy football under his arm. "What's the matter with you?"

"Can you let me have a dozen stamps, Merry, to save me going down to the post office?"

"Lazy young bounder! A trot will do you good."

"I don't mind the walk, Merry. It isn't that. Only—only—" Curly broke off, the colour wavering in his face, and his eyes restless.

Tom Merry scanned him curiously.

"Come into my study after I've changed," he said crisply, "and we'll see."

The Terrible Three changed their things, and when they went into their study in the School House they found Curly Gibson already there. He was seated in the easy-chair, the shilling belonging to Knox still in his hand.

"Now then, kid," said Tom Merry, "what's the trouble?"

"I want a shillingworth of stamps for Knox, Merry. I don't want to go down to the village this afternoon."

"Now, look here, kid!" said Tom, in his kind way. "There's something more than that in it. You've got something on your mind. Out with it."

Curly's eyes filled with tears.

"It's nothing, Merry! I—I—"

"Have you been bothered by that scoundrel Jex again?"

"N-n-no!"

Tom Merry laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"Curly, you can trust me. I'll see you through. You told me that you had given that rotten stamp album back to the rascal, and that the affair was at an end."

"Y-y-y-es, so I did," said Curly.

"Have you heard from him again?"

Curly trembled, but did not speak. Tom Merry's frank face grew very dark and stern. He had no doubt now that the youngster had been frightened by the rascally representative of the World-Wide Emporium.

"Out with it, Curly."

The Third-Former began to cry. The Terrible Three looked at one another. The sight of tears was always distressing, and Curly evidently had something very much the matter with him. His tears were not idle ones.

"Out with it, Curly! I tell you I'll see you through. I did once before, you know, when you were up against it," said Tom Merry.

"You—you won't get wild?"

"Of course not."

"I—I didn't tell you the truth," whimpered Curly. "I—I was afraid to. He told me that if I told you anything about it he would—would have me arrested."

The youngster was crying now in real earnest. He was evidently frightened almost out of his wits, yet he instinctively felt a trust and faith in Tom Merry—instinctively relied upon that strong and generous nature.

Tom Merry knitted his brow.

"The beast! Tell me all about it, Curly."

Curly whimpered out the wretched story.

"He—he wanted to make me steal some of D'Arcy's money to give him," he faltered. "He said I could borrow it without asking. He—he came on me suddenly the other day when I was going to Rylcombe, and I hadn't anything to give him, and he said he would take me to the—the police station. I—I dare not go out to-day. I know he's

near the school. I saw him looking in at the gates once, and—and—"

Curly finished with a storm of sobbing.

The Terrible Three listened in silence, with knitted brows and gleaming eyes. This latest development of Mr. Jex's tactics was a little beyond what they expected.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry at last. "You little ass, Curly, to think that he would have dared to carry out his threat! He wouldn't dare to show himself at a police station. If he's taken the album back you don't owe him anything. The beastly rotter!"

"He'll—he'll pounce on me as soon as I go out, and—"

"Will he?" said Tom Merry. "We'll see! Chaps, that fellow has got to be got rid of. We don't know how many other kids in the school may be under his thumb as well as Curly. We're going to give him a lesson—something strong, that will make him think St. Jim's an unhealthy place for him in the future."

"Jolly good idea," said Monty Lowther and Manners together.

"Now, Curly, listen to me. You're not to see this rascal again, nor to give him any money. You've nothing whatever to be afraid of. We're going to give him a lesson that will put an end to his little game. If you ever see him again you're to tell me at once. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Curly, brightening up.

"Here's your stamps. Take them to Knox. Keep your pecker up, and don't worry about this business any more. He was only gassing, as you'd have known if you hadn't been a little noodle. Now, cut along!"

"You're—you're sure, Tom Merry, that he can't—he can't have me sent to a reformatory if I don't pay him?"

Tom Merry gave a roar.

"You young ass! Did you swallow a yarn like that? Of

course he can't hurt you. There's nothing to be afraid of—take my word for it!"

"Thanks, Merry—thanks, awfully!"

And Curly took his departure looking much happier than when he had entered that study. Tom Merry's brow grew stern again.

"We'll put that chap through something warm," he said. "We'll give him a lesson that will make his hair curl. What do you say to treacle and feathers? Tar and feathers would be proper, but we haven't any tar. Treacle is just as good, and we can get a big jar from the school shop before it closes. As for the feathers, we can rip open a bed for them!"

"Good idea!"

"We'll take Study No. 6 into it," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get the scoundrel in our hands, you know. If he's hanging about St. Jim's we shall manage that. Come along!"

And the Terrible Three walked away to Study No. 6, each of them with a determined expression on his face that boded no good to Mr. Jones Jex.

CHAPTER 8.

Treacle and Feathers!

"BLAKE, I—I want to speak to you."

It was George Gore who spoke. He looked hesitatingly into Study No. 6. It was at the same time that Curly was explaining matters to the Terrible Three in their quarters.

"You can come in," said Blake.

None of the chums of Study No. 6 got on well with Gore. There was a good deal of both the bully and the sneak in his disposition. But now he looked so white and wretched that his greatest enemy must have taken pity on him.

He came into the study. The chums looked at him inquiringly. He sank into a chair, and, to their surprise, burst into tears. They had never seen Gore in tears before.

"Here, I say, old chap," exclaimed Blake, "don't do that! What's the matter? We'll do anything we can for you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Buck up, old man," said Herries. "What's the trouble?"

"I know I've no right to ask anything of you," said Gore wretchedly. "But—but I'm in horrible trouble. I must have some money or I shall be ruined!"

"I say, it's not that fellow, Jex, is it?" asked Blake quickly.

"Yes, it is!"

"What has he been doing?"

"I—I bought a cigarette-case of him," said the wretched chief of the smart set at St. Jim's. "I was a fool. He said the payments would become due at once because I let a payment lapse. It's in the agreement, right enough, but I never noticed it, and he himself offered to let the payment stand over. He's a swindler. I owed him fifteen bob, and I paid him six, and he said he wanted a bob for interest on the rest."

"The rotter!"

"I sold my fishing-rod, and took him six bob on the next Saturday," groaned Gore. "He took it, and then said there was to be a shilling a day interest on the rest till I paid it!"

"You must be an ass!" said Blake candidly. "It was your parting with the money under threats that encouraged him to swindle you. If you had paid him the lot he would still have found some excuse for screwing out more." Gore gave a groan.

"That makes eight bob again now," he said. "It will keep on going up faster than I can pay it. I have only four shillings a week, and the interest is seven on his terms. I haven't sixpence in the world, and—and—"

"And what?"

"I've just met him outside the gates. He says unless I let him have at least five bob this evening he will complain to the Head."

"He wouldn't dare to! Dr. Holmes might row with you, but he'd take jolly good care that Jonas Jex got no more money from you."

"I don't know. According to the agreement—"

"What's the good of an agreement with a kid of your age? It doesn't bind you—it's a swindle, and doesn't hold good in law, as Jex knew when he made you sign it."

"I say, are you sure of that, Blake?"

"Of course I am."

"But—but it was a cigarette-case he sold me," said Gore



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wretchedly. "If the Head knew he would know about my smoking, and—"

Blake gave an expressive grunt.

"I don't like to rag a fellow who's down on his luck," he said, "but I must say you are a silly ass, Gore. Still, you ought not to pay him anything. Give him his cigarette-caso back and have done with him."

"If he gives me away to the Head—"

"The Head wouldn't listen to him if he dared to come here—which he wouldn't."

"I—I say I'd rather pay him," said Gore nervously. "If you chaps would lend me the money I'd be awfully obliged. I'd pay you over my allowance every week like clockwork, honour bright, if you'll see me through this."

D'Arcy's hand went to his pocket.

"I think you are a great ass, Gore," he said, "but if you'd wathah pay the boundah I shall be happy to lend you the necessary cash. Eight shillings, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Will a ten-shilling note do? I haven't any silvah."

"Thanks, D'Arcy! I shan't forget this—"

Gore backed off as Tom Merry looked into the study.

"Can we come in?" asked the hero of the Shell affably.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three came in. They glanced rather curiously at Gore, who turned his face from the light. The ten-shilling note was in D'Arcy's hand.

"We want you chaps to help us," said Tom Merry. "No reason why Gore shouldn't take a hand, too. That beast Jex has been frightening little Curly, and squeezing money out of him. We're going to put him through it."

Gore gave a start.

"What are you going to do?" he asked hastily.

"Treacle and feathers," said Tom Merry sententiously.

"The only question is—how are we going to get the brute into our study?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Gore, old man, that's a better idea than paying him. You said you've got to meet him this evening. Look here, you must get him inside the gates somehow, and then we'll collar him."

Gore hesitated.

"You in it, too, Gore?" asked Tom Merry. "Have you been paying him money?"

"He's going to show me up if I don't let him have eight bob to-night," said Gore. "D'Arcy's going to lend it to me. It's safer to pay him."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Tom Merry promptly. "D'Arcy's going to do nothing of the sort. That scoundrel has had too much out of us chaps already."

"It was a cigarette-caso I bought, and if he tells Dr. Holmes that—"

"Do you think the Head would listen to anything a rascal like that said? If he came here to speak to Dr. Holmes he would be chucked out on the spot."

"Of course he would," said Blake. "You've nothing to be afraid of, Gore."

"I'd rather pay—"

"It isn't a question of what you'd rather do," said Tom Merry. "You're not going to pay him. We're going to scare him off from St. Jim's for good. You chaps are with us?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If Gore's got to meet him he can trick him into our clutches, as Blake says. Now, do the sensible thing, Gore. Shove that ten shillings back into your pocket, D'Arcy. Blake, I call upon you to make Gussy put his filthy lucre away."

"But I've told Gosh I will lend—"

"But I've told him you won't. Blake, call that object to order."

"I wefuse to be called an object. I wefuse to be called to ordah. I wefuse—"

"Silence!" said Blake, taking up a stick. "Another word, and bang goes your eyeglass!"

D'Arcy relapsed into silence. A threat like that always subdued him.

"Now, Gore, what do you say? Are you with us? I give you my word that if Jex troubles you again after we have done with him we'll raise the money for you to pay him without asking you to refund any of it. That's fair."

"I'm agreeable to that," said Gore. "And I'd like to give the bound something for what I've gone through the last week or two. I'm with you."

"Good! Now for the details."

The details of the little plot were discussed earnestly by the juniors. Nothing was left to chance; that was not Tom Merry's way. A huge jar of treacle was purchased in the school shop, and feathers were obtained in any quantity. The scene of the coming punishment was finally settled. It was agreed that it would be difficult to convey the rascal into the School House without detection. Tom Merry suggested the woodshed, and the suggestion was adopted. So

was Blake's proposal that Figgins & Co. should be asked to take a hand.

Gore was cordially in the plot when he went out to meet Mr. Jex. As a matter of choice, of course, he would rather have treacled and feathered Mr. Jex than pay him. His fears having been relieved, he was glad of the chance of a little revenge.

It was near locking-up time, and the dusk was deepening. Mr. Jex was waiting in the lane not far from the school.

"Oh, 'ere you are!" he growled, as Gore came up. "Now, 'ow much have you got for me?"

"How much do you want?" asked Gore.

"I told yer. If I don't have five bob now on the spot, look out for squalls," said Mr. Jex. "Now, are you going to 'and it over?"

"No, I'm not."

"You young swindler! I'll show yer! I—"

There was a rush of feet in the darkness. Mr. Jex was swept off his legs, and in a twinkling he was down on his back, with a swarm of juniors scrambling over him.

"'Ere, what the—who the—"

"Collar him!" shouted Tom Merry.

They collared him fast enough. Mr. Jex struggled gamely, but he struggled in vain. There were nine juniors scrambling upon him, and he was helpless. He began to yell, but that was soon stopped. A handkerchief was rammed into his mouth, and his yells died away in inarticulate gasps and splutterings.

"Bring him along!"

He was lifted from the ground. The surprise of the attack and the fear of what was to come had dazed Jonas Jex. He hardly struggled as the triumphant juniors bore him along. It would have been useless to struggle. Each of his limbs was gripped by two juniors, and Gore had an arm tightly round his neck, while D'Arcy's hands were fastened in his hair. He was completely helpless.

The juniors carried him on at a rapid run. They went through the gates of St. Jim's in a twinkling, and in the dusk they were unobserved. Taggles came out to close the gates a few minutes later, but by that time the juniors and their prisoner were safe in the woodshed.

Mr. Jex was plumped upon the brick floor, and Tom Merry closed the door. Figgins lighted a bicycle lantern and hung it on a nail to shed light upon the proceedings. The rest were holding Mr. Jex captive.

Mr. Jex spluttered and gasped, but the gag choked his utterance. His eyes grew round with alarm as he saw the huge jar of treacle and the heap of feathers.

"Better tie him up, I think," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, withdrawing his hands from their affectionate grip on Mr. Jex's hair and surveying them with a great deal of disgust. "I positively wefuse to lay hands on that extremely unpleasant wuffian again. The howwid wottah uses nasty hair-oil, and I have made my hands howwidly dirtay. Look at them! I think I must wun up to the School House and wash them, if you will wait for me about a quarter of an hour, deah boys."

"Yes, I can see us doing that!" said Tom Merry. "You can go if you like, Gussy, but the circus will be over by the time you get back."

"I weally think you might wait. I cannot possibly remain heah with my hands dirtay. Now, can I? I am pwepared to make sawefices, but a follow must draw a line somewhere. I—"

"Cheese it! Stick your belt round his wrists, Figgins."

"Right-ho! Here you are! Kerr's can go round his ankles. Better take his coat off," said Blake, "and his waistcoat. My hat, what a giddy waistcoat! It beats D'Arcy's for colour. Let them hang on his wrists; don't take the trouble to untie him."

(Continued on next page.)



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Mr. Jex gasped and turned purple. Tom Merry removed the gag from his mouth.

"Have you anything to say why sentence of treacle and feathers should not be passed upon you, according to law?" he demanded severely.

"You young rips!"

"That is irrelevant personality."

"I'll be the death of you!"

"Anything else?"

"I'll 'ave the law on yer! I'll—I'll——"

"You admit, of course, that you are a beastly rotter," said Tom Merry. "You know that your sentence is just. You have extorted money from boys by frightening them; about the meanest sort of thing a chap could do, next to stealing. You ought really to be hanged, as a matter of fact, but we haven't any rope handy."

"I will run up to the School House and fetch some rope," said D'Arcy. "I could wash this off my hands while I am there."

"Ha, ha, ha! Upon the whole, we won't hang him. Beheading would be a good thing, though, and there is Taggles' wood-axe handy. Hand over that axe, Blake."

"Here you are."

"You young demons!" yelled Mr. Jex, half believing that Tom Merry was in earnest, so serious and solemn was his face as he took the axe from Blake. "You murderous young varmint, you will be sent to prison for this!"

"Would you rather be treacled and feathered?"

"No—yes—blow you! I'll—I'll——"

"The prisoner will be treacled and feathered at his own personal request," said Tom Merry. "He's a rotten brute, but I like to be obliging."

"Don't you touch me with that stuff!"

"Sorry, but we must! You see, we've got to give you a lesson. It will do you a lot of good, and we make no charge for the treacle."

"Ow! Keep off! I—ow! Oh!"

Tom Merry ladled the treacle out upon the red countenance of Mr. Jex with a liberal hand. The rascal's features gradually disappeared beneath it.

"Give him some feathers now," said Kerr. "Let him have both on the instalment plan—that will suit him!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, chuck over the feathers!"

"Gr-r-r-r! Lemme alone!"

"More!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, let him have enough! No good being mean about it!" He dropped the ladle, and seized the jar and inverted it over the head of Mr. Jex as he lay wriggling.

The uncomfortable rascal gave a fearful yell. The treacle clotted over his hair, his face, his neck, and ran down over his clothes. The feathers, liberally piled on him, stuck to him everywhere, until he disappeared under a mass of them.

His aspect was so comical that the juniors roared with laughter. The man was such an utter rascal that he deserved no pity, and he got none.

He squirmed on the floor of the woodshed, a mass of treacle and feathers, gurgling and gasping and yelling. The grinning juniors surrounded him, piling on the feathers, till the whole of them were sticking somewhere to the treacle.

"There, I think that will about do," said Tom Merry, surveying his handiwork with a great deal of satisfaction. "Do you think that will do, chaps?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Do you think that it will do, Mr. Jex?"

"You young 'ounds! I'll be the death of you!"

"This is a lesson! If you show your nose near St. Jim's again, or ever speak to any of our fellows, we shall serve you worse next time!" said Tom. "We'll keep an eye open for you, and if you come down this way again, just look out, that's all!"

Blake unfastened the rascal's hands and feet.

"There you are," said Tom Merry. "Now you can travel!"

"I'll—I'll half kill you——"

"My hat! What's that?"

The door of the woodshed was opening. In the excitement of the moment, the juniors had overlooked the fact that a considerable din was proceeding from the woodshed, which was likely to reach other ears.

They stared towards the door as it opened. Then there was a general gasp of dismay as an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown appeared in the doorway. It was the Head!

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CHAPTER 9.

Exit Mr. Jex.

TOM MERRY was swift to act. Even as the door of the woodshed opened, his hand was on the bicycle lantern, and it went out the instant the Head appeared.

Dr. Holmes stopped in the doorway. He had seen nothing, but the sudden extinguishing of the light was sufficient indication that something was going on there.

Mr. Jex, smothered with treacle and feathers, a considerable quantity of which was in his mouth, was staggering and mumbling incoherently. Dr. Holmes stared into the darkness.

"Dear me! Boys!"

There was no reply. The juniors kept as still as mice.

"Boys!"

Still dead silence, save for that mysterious sound of mumbling. The Head advanced into the shed, holding out his hands to feel his way. He gave a sudden start. His hand had come into contact with something—something sticky, and he withdrew it quickly.

"What—what is that?"

Mr. Jex lurched against him in the darkness. The Head gave a loud cry. The sticky Mr. Jex had imparted a considerable quantity of his treacle and feathers to the Head of St. Jim's, and had caught hold of him for support.

"Dear me!" gasped the Head. "A light! I command you to bring a light!"

There was no help for it. Tom Merry struck a vesta and relighted the bicycle lantern.

The Head stared about him. Alarmed as they were, the juniors could hardly help grinning as they saw the treacle and feathers adhering to the face and gown of their respected Head.

"What—what does this mean?"

"Gr-r-r-r!" mumbled Mr. Jex.

"Merry, explain at once!" thundered the Head. "What is the meaning of this?"

Tom Merry stepped forward. He did not know how the affair would turn out, but he was not afraid to own up to what he had done.

"If you please, sir, we've been treacled and feathering that rotter!"

"Who—who is it?"

"Chap named Jex, sir—beastly blackmailing bounder!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jex!" exclaimed the Head. "Ah, I have heard of the man! I have received information on the subject of his dealings with my boys, and had made up my mind to look into it. How did the man come here?"

"We brought him, sir!"

"I'll have the law on yer!" mumbled Mr. Jex.

"He's an awful rascal, sir!" said Tom Merry, encouraged by the view the Head took of the matter. "He's been extorting money from the kids. We thought we'd give him a lesson, and keep him clear from St. Jim's in the future!"

"Ahem! From what I have heard of the man he certainly deserves punishment. Mr. Jex, you will kindly take yourself off at once!"

"I—I've been ill-used. I've been——"

"Your own fault entirely. You have no right on these premises. If you do not instantly go, I shall give you into custody!"

Mr. Jex stumbled from the woodshed. Taggles, who was looking on, regarded him with amazement.

"Taggles," said the Head, "you will see that person off the school premises!"

"Yes, sir!"

And the porter marched the unfortunate rascal off. Mr. Jex had disappeared from St. Jim's, and the lesson Tom Merry had given him was not lost. He gave the school a wide berth after the experience of the treacle and feathers.

The Head looked at the juniors after Mr. Jex had gone.

"You have acted in an—outrageous way," he said. "But I admit that the man is a great rascal, and deserved punishment. I must think over this matter. You may go back to your respective Houses!"

And then the Head turned and stalked away, with as much dignity as was possible.

"The Head won't say another word about it," said Tom Merry confidently. "He's just as pleased as we are to see that scoundrel get his deserts, only he can't say so. We shan't see any more of Jonas Jex, and we shan't hear anything about this affair from the Head!"

And Tom Merry was right upon both points.

THE END.

(Next week's issue is the Christmas number of the GEM! It contains a ripping double-length complete yarn of Tom Merry & Co. called "ST. JIM'S FOR MERRIE CHRISTMAS!")

THERE'S GOOD STUFF IN—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

CHIRSTMAS is on the way, boys. Soon we shall be eating our fill of turkey and rich plum pudding. The Yule logs will be crackling on the hearth, and Christmas crackers will be making merry music as they are pulled asunder; laughter and song will fill the air, and we shall be merry! Christmas is a once-a-year festival and we quite naturally make the most of it. The GEM also does its bit to make this great occasion a real success. In next week's copy, which is a

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER

you will find a grand double-length story of Tom Merry & Co. It's so good that I've crowded out some of the usual minor features to make room for it. From cover to cover of the GEM this fine yarn goes and I feel sure in advance that all of you will be delighted with it. The title.

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tells you that famous Martin Clifford has entered into the spirit of the season. Once you've started this special double length story you won't want to put it aside until you've finished it. Tell all your pals to get this tip-top yarn, but first make certain of your own copy by ordering it in advance. Now let's turn a few pages of the notebook—

THE FREAK IN ARMOUR!

"It's a tank!" "It's not, it's a submarine!" Such an argument is likely to be waged over the latest addition to Britain's mechanical army—a super tank that can hustle over the most uneven ground at forty miles an hour, and what's more can cleave the water like a motor-boat. It just depends where you see this armoured giant at work. On the ground it looks what it is—a fast-moving armoured tank. Once it enters the water the general effect is that of a freak submarine, for only the turret of the tank and a portion of the front is visible through the spray it throws up. A crew of two men handle this vicious little fighter and they can do great execution with their machine-guns.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Shopkeeper (to new assistant): "My lad, you must always remember that whatever a customer says, he is right."

New Assistant: "Yes, sir!"

Shopkeeper: "Tell me, what were you arguing about just now?"

New Assistant: "The customer said you were a rotten swindler and ought to be hanged!"

OCEAN TRAVEL WITHOUT SEASICKNESS.

Ever been seasick? No! Then you are to be congratulated, for those of us who have experienced the unhappy pangs of mal de mer are not likely to forget them. But it looks as if sea sickness will soon be a thing of the past. From Italy comes a giant new liner which is fitted with special gyroscopes which it is claimed will keep the liner steady in the roughest sea. For years ship designers have persevered with the gyroscopic idea, but perhaps their worst failure in this direction goes to the Bessemer, a cross-Channel passenger steamer fitted with a "self-adjusting saloon" run on ball-bearings and gyroscopically stabilised. Ocean travellers prone to seasickness awaited the result of the Bessemer's maiden voyage with great interest. But when the good ship came into port she had a sorry tale to tell, for not only were all the passengers seasick, but practically the entire crew as well! The Italian "anti-seasick" liner, named the Conte di Savoia, is reckoned to start a regular service in 1932, and if all that is claimed for it be true, she will not want for a full load of passengers. Britain is not far behind. Naval experts have been busy for years trying to find the best stabilising method, not so much for the comfort of peace-time passengers, but to give our naval gunners a steady foothold in times of war when they have their gun-sights trained on an enemy.

GRATITUDE!

How would you like to be hugged by a gorilla weighing about three hundred and forty pounds? No takers! Yet that experience fell to a surgeon the other day after he had successfully treated the septic finger of a captive gorilla. The hug was in gratitude for what the surgeon had done, but those who witnessed it felt nearly as alarmed as the surgeon. To give you an idea of how strong a gorilla is, the story springs to mind of a tame gorilla weighing two hundred and thirty-eight pounds and a "strong man" weighing three hundred and forty pounds who once engaged in a friendly wrestling match. Despite the fact that the man's biceps measured twenty-one inches the gorilla had no difficulty at all in picking him up and doing what he liked with him. No wonder then the friends of the surgeon mentioned above, grew anxious when the gorilla handed out his hug of gratitude!

TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND—

How long would it take you to blow an ordinary inner tube of a motor tyre to

a size of twenty feet in length with a circumference of four feet eight inches. How long? An American boy knows the answer to that problem, for he performed this blowing feat in the space of eighty minutes. He broke the record for a "big blow"—he also broke the inner tube of the tyre, for with a loud protest it burst. But it just shows what can be done if you stick at it long enough.

WATCH THE MANTELPIECE!

The famous Adam Brothers, whose beautiful architecture gave the people of the eighteenth century something to think about, never could have imagined how burglars of the twentieth century would set their hearts on "collecting" mantelpieces bearing the Adam "trademark." Yet it is a fact that certain shady people with a mania for collecting antiques have cunningly entered houses where these famous Adam mantelpieces were to be found and calmly dismantled them and carted them away. That's burglary on a new scale. Yet it's a paying job, for these mantelpieces fetch anything from five hundred pounds to fifteen hundred.

PALS!

At the age of three a prize elephant was brought from the Sudan and installed in the New York Zoo. He grew and he grew—so much so that the experts reckoned he would some day be the tallest elephant in the world. In his prime he weighed five hundred stone and attained a height of ten feet eight and three-quarter inches—just a quarter of an inch shorter than "Jumbo the Great," who was a great attraction for forty years in Barnum and Bailey's circus. But the New York elephant, who answered to the name of Khartoum, achieved notoriety in another way. He positively hated men, yet he had a strange affection for robins. These "tiny tots" used to build their nests in his quarters without a trace of fear, and Khartoum was wont to touch their flimsy nests with his giant trunk as a demonstration of affection. Never once did this jungle monster ever show the violence or hatred to his robin friends that he exhibited to all mankind. Now, at the age of twenty-nine, Khartoum has died, the result of over-feeding and too little exercise. Whether he will be stuffed and placed in a museum for future generations to see has not yet been decided, but it is highly probable.

THE BEST OF ITS KIND!

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YOUR EDITOR.

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 1,241.

THE PRISONER OF THE VAULTS!

By

OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER I.

Where is Jimmy Silver.

"YOU fellows!"

Tubby Muffin put his head round the door of the end study in the Fourth passage at Rookwood and thus addressed the occupants.

The occupants in question were six in number. They consisted of Lovell and Newcome and Raby, who usually shared the study with Jimmy Silver, and the Three Tommies from the Modern House—Dodd, Cook, and Doyle.

It was unusual to see Classics and Moderns fraternising. But the rivals had, for once in a way, buried the hatchet and were now in deep discussion. They did not heed the fat visitor.

"Where the thunder can he be?" asked Newcome, as Tubby insinuated himself into the crowded study. "If it's all a deep jape on Jimmy's part—"

"You can put that idea right out of your nut, old bean," said Arthur Edward Lovell, in tones of decision. "This is no jape. There's usually some sense in Jimmy Silver's japes. But there'd be no sense in doing the vanishing trick and worrying the life out of his pals. Jimmy wouldn't do it."

"True, O king!" agreed Tommy Dodd, with a faint smile. "But there's the telegram. If that's genuine and really comes from Jimmy, then there's nothing to worry about. He just buzzed off for reasons of his own and he'll return in a day or so."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Well, the telegram isn't genuine, anyway," said Lovell, oblivious of the presence of Tubby Muffin. "We've already made up our minds on that point!"

"The Head takes it in."

"Well, the Head's an ass, then!" snapped Lovell. "We know jolly well that when Jimmy left us after that ghost-hunting bizny in the vaults he hadn't any intention of leaving the school. Why should he have changed his mind?"

"Perhaps got scared when the Head started chasing him!"

"Likely, isn't it—from Jimmy Silver?" grunted Lovell. "Running away would only add to the trouble, anyway. There's only one solution to it; old Jimmy's being detained somewhere against his will. And if you ask my opinion he's still down in the vaults!"

"You fellows!" bawled Tubby Muffin.

"But he can't be in the vaults now, old chap," said Raby, undeterred by the fat junior. "That was what we thought at first, of course. But how can we think that now that they've been thoroughly searched?"

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"Sounds impossible, I know. But I'm not convinced," said Lovell. "Hallo, Tubby! Didn't notice you!"

Tubby Muffin mopped the perspiration from his podgy brow and glared a basilisk glare.

"You—you fathead! I've been here five minutes at least!"

"Then why didn't you tell us?"

Tubby gasped.

"Mean to say you didn't hear me?"

Lovell looked at the rest.

"Well, I did hear something. A kind of whisper. Perhaps you fellows didn't notice it. Was that you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" snorted the furious fat junior. "I believe you all jolly well heard me all the time! Good mind not to tell you the news now; still, perhaps you ought to know. He's here!"

"Eh?"

"I just saw him in the quad myself, so I know it's all right," said Tubby Muffin. "Now, if you don't mind, I'll help myself to a bit of that cake of yours, Lovell. Whooooop!"

"That cakes's not intended for fat porkers!" said Lovell severely, yanking Tubby away from the cupboard by one of his fat ears. "Anyway, you haven't told us who's here yet. Name, please!"

"Ow! Silver, of course, you rotter!"

Six juniors emitted a simultaneous yell.

"Wha-a-at!"

"You've seen Silver in the quad?" yelled Lovell excitedly. "Why the thump didn't you say so at first?"

"Didn't get a blessed chance, anyway!" snorted Tubby Muffin. "Blessed if I can see what you're excited about, though; you expected him, didn't you?"

"Well, of all the fatheads—kim on, you men!" concluded Lovell, making a move for the door. "Bring that fat idiot along or he'll eat the study!"

"What-ho!"

"Beasts! Look here! All right, I'm coming!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

And he accompanied the rest—having no choice in the matter.

Led by Lovell, the juniors raced downstairs.

In the Hall they passed the Head and another gentleman. Usually the appearance of Dr. Chisholm would have put a stop to such a precipitate rush; but the juniors hardly noticed him in their present state of excitement.

They reached the steps of the House and came to a stop. Lovell gazed eagerly across the quad. He could see a group of seniors near the House, and Professor Carr, the

archæologist, in the distance. But he could not see Jimmy Silver. His face fell.

"No sign of him here!" he remarked. "Look here, Tubby Muffin, if you're pulling our legs—"

"I'm not!" gasped the fat junior. "If you'd only given me the chance of speaking I could have told you you've just passed him!"

"Passed him?"

"In the Hall!" nodded Tubby Muffin. "Didn't you see him with the Head?"

"Why, you fat idiot—"

"The Head was with a grown man, you fathead!"

"Well, what did you expect—an infant in arms?" hooted Tubby. "Blessed if I can make you chaps out! Of course, Jimmy Silver's pater's a grown man!"

"J-J-Jimmy Silver's pater?"

"You—you mean Mr. Silver?"

"Naturally!" grunted Tubby. "No need to give him a title, as I was only speaking to you, was there?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Silver—Mr. Silver!" groaned Lovell. "Then—then you didn't mean Jimmy Silver! Jimmy Silver's still missing!"

"Far as I know, he is!" said the fat junior. Then he grinned. "I say, you chaps, you didn't think I meant Jimmy Silver, did you? He, he, he!"

"Slaughter him!" gasped Lovell. "Just before we see Jimmy's pater—slaughter him!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Look here—" gasped Tubby Muffin.

They looked. Then they closed round the fat junior. Tubby Muffin felt himself jerked off his feet, whirled round in the air, then rolled down the stone steps of the House, to alight at the bottom with a fearful bump.

"Ow-ow-whoooo!" yelled Tubby Muffin.

"Now make yourself more clear in future!" snorted Lovell. "Leave him there, chaps. We'll go in, on the chance that we can see Mr. Silver!"

And the juniors followed Lovell indoors again, leaving Tubby Muffin to moan and groan on his own, at the bottom of the steps.

CHAPTER 2.

Mr. Silver is Sceptical.

PETER TUPPER, the school page, met the juniors in the Hall.

"Wanted in the 'Ead's study, young gents!" he announced briefly.

"All of us?"

"Hall of you!" answered Tupper, more explicitly. "The 'Ead said it was urgent."

"Then we're to see Jimmy's pater," said Lovell, with a nod. "Come on, you men!"

The juniors needed no second bidding. They were very anxious to place the facts, as they knew them, before Mr. Silver.

Jimmy Silver's father, a kindly faced old gentleman, whom the juniors had all met previously on happier occasions than this, greeted them with a nod. They could see at a glance that he was in a state of considerable perturbation.

"You already know Mr. Silver, I believe, Lovell," said the Head. "I want you to tell him what happened on the night when Silver disappeared."

"Well, there's little to tell that seems to have any bearing on his vanishing like he did, sir. But I can tell Mr. Silver just what we did."

"Do so with all the detail you can think of, my boy," said Mr. Silver. "You will understand, Lovell, that I am seriously concerned at the news. I want to get to the bottom of the affair."

Lovell nodded sympathetically, and proceeded to recount the incidents of the night of the "ghost hunt" in the old vaults of Rookwood. In the ordinary way Mr. Silver would have derived considerable amusement from the story of his son's successful attempt to disguise himself as a ghost and frighten Tommy, Dodd & Co. But it was evident that the humorous side of it made no appeal to him in his present state of anxiety. He listened in silence.

"Thank you, Lovell," he said when Lovell had finished. "To the best of your knowledge and belief, then, Jimmy had no intention whatever of running away from the school after you had finished?"

"None whatever, sir. We're all certain of that, aren't we, you fellows?"

"Oh, rather!"

Mr. Silver nodded.

"I hardly needed the assurance, but it is good to hear my opinion confirmed in this unanimous way. Dr. Chisholm, all that this boy has told me strengthens my belief that my son has met with foul play."

Dr. Chisholm bowed.

"I quite understand your anxiety, Mr. Silver, but I cannot bring myself to believe that that is the case. There is not the slightest reason to believe that any unauthorised persons were in the school grounds on the night in question."

"If a burglar or criminal were about, my dear sir, he would not announce his presence," said Mr. Silver rather tartly. "I am of opinion, anyhow, that the boy has been kidnapped."

"My dear sir—"

"You are going to point to the absence of motive," said Mr. Silver. "I agree that it is difficult to see one. But as we do not know the circumstances, we can hardly be expected to divine that. I suppose you have already considered the possibility that he may have returned to the vaults?"

Dr. Chisholm nodded.

"That suggestion was investigated at once. I can assure you, Mr. Silver, that the vaults have been searched most thoroughly."

"They are rather extensive, I believe?"

"That is so; but the search-party was sufficiently large to explore every corner of them. Furthermore, Professor Carr, an archæologist who is at present making a study of the Rookwood ruins, has since made a search himself. His knowledge of the vaults is such that I feel satisfied that nothing untowards could have escaped him."

"Well, Dr. Chisholm, I regret that I cannot feel equally satisfied," said Mr. Silver. "I have no doubt by this time that my son has met with foul play. That telegram was false. I am convinced of it. I should very much like, with your permission, to visit the vaults myself."

Dr. Chisholm nodded in cordial agreement.

"Do so, by all means, my dear sir. I wish you success in your endeavours to find a clue to the boy's disappearance, but I cannot think you will do so in the vaults."

"These boys may come with me?"

"With pleasure!"

"Then we will go at once. Are you able to come along now, boys?" asked Mr. Silver, turning to the juniors.

Lovell and the rest eagerly answered in the affirmative, and the entire party withdrew from the Head's study.

On the way out of the House the juniors took the opportunity of assuring their chum's father that they were with him to a man. They too, felt that Jimmy Silver's disappearance was not of his seeking, and they were only too willing to explore the vaults with Mr. Silver to see whether anything could be found to throw a light on the mystery.

They led the way across the quad and round the school chapel into the deserted old ruins which had in the distant past formed part of the main Rookwood building.

"There goes Professor Carr!" exclaimed Lovell, as the tall archæologist to whom the Head had referred passed them near the chapel. "Perhaps you'd like to speak to him, Mr. Silver?"

"Thank you Lovell, but I think for the present that we'll rely on ourselves. Is this the entrance?"

"Down the steps, sir. Here's a torch."

Mr. Silver took the proffered flashlamp and descended into the gloomy vault where the Fistical Four had so effectively japed Tommy Dodd & Co. just before Jimmy Silver's disappearance.

For the next half-hour he and the juniors roamed through the length and breadth of the chain of vaults which extended from that entrance underneath the older part of the school.

At the end of that time there seemed not the slightest hope left that the missing junior could be there. They had examined every inch of the ground under the old Gothic-arched roofing without result.

"I suppose there is nothing left but to return," remarked Mr. Silver, as they arrived back at their starting-place. "All the same, I am still not satisfied. I shall communicate with the police."

"Good idea, sir!"

"Possibly they will succeed where we have failed," said Mr. Silver hopefully. "As far as we are concerned, I'm afraid we must give up the vaults as a bad job."

And the search came to an end. It had revealed nothing. But Mr. Silver was still not satisfied.

CHAPTER 3.

The Prisoner.

"HELP!"

It was Jimmy Silver's voice. But, in spite of the fact that he was still at Rookwood, there was no chance of the shout being heard.

Bound hand and foot, the leader of the Fistical Four was lying on the flagstones of a little chamber, the existence of which was not even known to the Rookwood authorities.

How long he had lain there he did not know. It seemed

an eternity. At irregular intervals the secret brick door through which he had first seen his captor had opened, and welcome light had been brought to the little apartment, together with supplies of food. Then the tall man who brought it had set to work with pick and shovel, always burrowing deeper and deeper into the wall.

Jimmy Silver knew his captor by this time. He was none other than Professor Carr, the archaeologist who had, with the Head's permission, been studying the old Rookwood ruins. It was a surprising enough discovery, but Jimmy Silver had got used to it. What continually puzzled him, despite the desperate discomforts of his prison, was the nature of Carr's mysterious activities.

He was soon to learn the reason for the professor's seemingly endless labours.

As the echo of Jimmy Silver's last weary cry died away there was a sudden muffled sound from the other side of the chamber. A beam of light flashed across the inky darkness, and the Rookwood junior, saw a tall, dark figure framed against the dim light of the vault beyond.

"Help!" shouted Jimmy Silver again, exerting his lungs to their fullest capacity in the slender hope that somebody might be near enough to hear.

There was a laugh from the newcomer.

"Shout as much as you like, my young friend! If you imagine for one moment that I am likely to open this useful little aperture while anybody is within hearing, you are gravely mistaken!"

"You scoundrel!" choked Jimmy Silver, as Professor Carr stepped into the confined area of the little chamber and calmly swung the ponderous secret door back into position.

The visitor laughed softly.

"A harsh word, Master Silver! I prefer to regard myself as a victim of circumstances, the circumstances being that you unwittingly butted in before my work in this unpleasant hole was completed."

"How much longer do you think you are to keep me here?" demanded Jimmy Silver fiercely.

"Precisely as long as it takes me to find what I want," was Professor Carr's calm reply. "When I get that, my young friend, I propose to leave Rookwood for good. After I have reached a place of safety I shall write or telephone your headmaster, telling him just how he can gain access to this place and find you."

"You—you blackguard!"

"Fortunate that I own a fairly thick skin, isn't it?" smiled the professor. "But, come, Master Silver! Let me release your hands and give you something to eat, and you can proceed with your meal while I continue my work on this wall."

He swiftly untied the cords that encircled Jimmy Silver's wrists and placed on the ground at the side of him a bag containing sandwiches, cakes, and fruit.

Jimmy Silver was only too glad to fall to and appease his appetite. The food supplies which the professor had brought in had been by no means generous, and he was hungry.

Professor Carr turned away from his prisoner and began the work which Jimmy Silver was by this time getting accustomed to watching—the interminable tearing down of the brick and stone wall with a heavy pickaxe.

For the best part of an hour this work went on. Then the archaeologist threw down the pick and prepared to leave again.

"Patience, my boy!" he said, as he slipped the cord over Jimmy Silver's unwilling wrists. "I think, by the look of it, that I am near the end of my task."

"Perhaps the police will turn up before you can finish it!" suggested Jimmy Silver.

Professor Carr laughed.

"I think not. I took the precaution of sending a telegram to the headmaster in your name, telling him you were all right, you see! You wonder, I expect, what is the object of this destructive work of mine?"

"You're up to no good, that's a sure thing!" said Jimmy Silver frankly.

"Nor am I up to a great deal of harm!" retorted the Rookwood junior's captor quickly. "The treasures which I hope to unearth here have been buried hundreds of years. I feel sure I am hurting nobody by taking them for myself!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes opened wide.

"My hat! Then you're after the Rookwood gold-plate that was lost when Henry the Eighth plundered the place? You—you robber! You know full well that that plate, if it is ever found, will belong to the school!"

"I intend that it shall belong to me, my young friend!" laughed Professor Carr. "As to its being found, there is no question about that; the documentary evidence in my possession leaves no room for doubt."

"You—you swindling rotter!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "The Head was kind enough to allow you the run of the

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whole school, and you're going to repay him by robbing us!"

Jimmy Silver saw the man smile again as he extinguished his electric torch.

"You understate the case, Master Silver!" came Carr's mocking voice through the darkness. "It was only the knowledge of what was hidden in these vaults that gave me the idea of becoming an archaeologist in the first place. And now I must go; I shall return later."

There was a dim gleam of light for a moment as the secret door swung open. Then the aperture was quickly closed from the other side of the wall, and the prisoner of the vaults was left alone once more.

CHAPTER 4.

Tubby Solves the Mystery.

"GOOD-AFTERNOON, sir!"

Tubby Muffin made that remark, and simultaneously doffed his cap to Professor Carr, to whom the remark was addressed.

Afternoon classes had ended, and Tubby had rolled down to the tuckshop in the hope that Sergeant Kettle might feel sufficiently good-humoured to allow him a few tea-time delicacies "on tick." Outside the little school shop he had encountered the professor, walking away with a bag in which Tubby's trained eye saw unmistakable signs of tuck.

Tubby glanced at that suspicious-looking bag with considerable interest.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" he repeated, as Professor Carr continued on his way without a word.

The professor looked up and bestowed a curt nod on the fat junior.

"Good-afternoon! I am afraid I am rather busy just now. You will excuse me?"

"Certainly, sir; I quite understand that your work in the vaults keeps you busy," said Tubby agreeably, taking the same direction as the professor. "Some of the chaps say you must be a half-wit to spend days and days pottering about under the earth. Don't run away with the idea that I think like that, of course, sir. I'm sure myself that you find a lot down there to interest you."

"What are you talking about?" asked Professor Carr sharply, stopping for a moment to direct a look of deep suspicion on the loquacious Muffin. Then he continued his walk again, and added curtly: "As I told you, I am busy. Please do not bother me!"

"Oh, really, sir! I wouldn't dream of it!" said Tubby Muffin, with an injured look at the archaeologist. "All I was thinking was that you might like some help with that parcel. I'll help you by carrying it, if you like!"

"Thank you, but I do not require assistance!"

"If you'd like me to look after it while you carry on with your work, sir—"

"Will you please run away, or must I compel you?" asked Professor Carr, in a dangerously calm tone.

Tubby Muffin's eyes returned longingly to the paper-bag.

"I'll be sure to take great care of it— Yoooop!" he concluded suddenly, as the professor took a menacing step towards him.

"Now go!" rapped out Professor Carr.

He turned on his heel and strode away in the direction of the chapel.

"Beast!" said Tubby Muffin.

The fat junior stood staring after his intended host until he was lost to sight among the trees. Then, after a moment's deliberation, he rolled off in the same direction. Tubby was hungry. He somehow couldn't bear the thought that that interesting looking bag of tuck had gone from his sight for ever. How he could possibly get hold of it was a puzzle. But Tubby was ever an optimist in such matters, and, in the vague hope that chance would aid him in some unforeseen way, he steered for the old Rookwood ruins to which he guessed the professor had gone.

Half-way across the quad he ran into Raby of the Fourth. He halted for a moment.

"I say, Raby, like to help me take some tuck up to my study?" he asked.

Raby blinked.

"What's up, Tubby? Does it weigh a ton?"

"Oh, really! Of course not! Matter of fact, it's down in the vaults, I think. You see—"

"In the vaults?" echoed Raby, in astonishment. "New place for keeping tuck, isn't it?"

"Hem! The fact is, it isn't actually mine," explained Tubby cautiously. "That fatheaded professor chap has taken it down—spends half his time down there gorging, I fancy! I feel rather peckish, so I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to scout round and borrow it from him while he's not looking. I'll pay it back to-morrow, of course!"

"Well, you silly ass!" exclaimed Raby.

"Look here, old chap, you go down and fetch it up, and then we'll go halves. What do you say?"

"You—you fat imbecile!" was all Raby said. After which he went his way. Apparently there was no help forthcoming from him!

Tubby Muffin, with a grunt, carried on towards the ruins. In the ordinary way he would not have been at all keen on going down into the vaults alone. But the knowledge that someone was already there and, more than that, the knowledge that that "someone" carried a parcel of tuck, made a lot of difference.

After a moment's hesitation Tubby plunged boldly down the stone steps.

At the bottom he paused.

Then he gasped.

He had, of course, expected to see something of Professor Carr. But he had not expected to see him walking into what Tubby had always supposed to be the solid wall. Yet that was the amazing sight that confronted him now.

In the light of the professor's torch, he saw an opening, and beyond that the bound figure of Jimmy Silver of the Fourth!

"M-m-m-my hat!" stuttered Tubby Muffin.

An instant later he could have bitten out his tongue. Professor Carr wheeled round, and the dazzling light of his torch flashed into Tubby's eyes.

Tubby made a spring for the steps. But even as he reached the bottom step the man was upon him. A hand was clapped over Tubby's mouth, and an arm wound round his shoulders.

Shaking with terror, the fat junior felt himself dragged across the floor of the vault towards the secret chamber.

Two hours had passed.

In the white light of the professor's torch a weird scene was revealed. On the floor, bound hand and foot, were Jimmy Silver and Tubby Muffin. Standing near them was their captor. He was pointing to the great hole he had made in the wall. In that cavity the startled juniors could see an ordered array of gold and silver articles, such as their eyes had never looked on before.

"Labour well rewarded, my young friends!" remarked Professor Carr, with a chuckle. "It is fortunate that it has come to light so soon. With two prisoners on my hands, I should find Rookwood too hot to hold me very shortly."

"I—I say, sir, what about letting me give you a hand with it?" suggested Tubby Muffin. "I'm awfully good at lifting things about, and I can help you no end. Of course, I shall expect a share of the loot—"

"Silence, you fat young fool! I am leaving you now. I shall be back later—with a car. After which you will see no more of me. For the time being, then, adieu!" said the professor.

The light went out and the wall-door swung open. Then something happened—something that brought a yell of sheer joy from Jimmy Silver.

There was a rush of feet in the vault and a shout, in a voice which the imprisoned juniors recognised as that of Lovell.

"Collar him!"

There was a thud and a roar.

"You young villains! I'll—"

"Gimme that torch!" yelled Newcome, and the light went up again.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Jimmy Silver, noting, with inexpressible relief, that Professor Carr was helpless in his colleagues' hands. "How did you guess?"

"You can put it down to Tubby!" grinned Lovell. "He told Raby that this rotter Carr had taken grub down into the vaults—and I deduced the rest! Lemme get at that cord with a knife, Jimmy, old scout!"

"Welcome!" said Jimmy Silver. "I knew you'd get me in the end, you chaps: and, thank goodness, you've got that scoundrel, too!"

In less than five minutes Jimmy Silver and Tubby Muffin were on their feet again. Then, with the baffled criminal in their midst, the excited juniors crowded up the old stone steps into the daylight.

The quad contained a fair sprinkling of fellows as they emerged from round the chapel, and there was a shout as Jimmy Silver was spotted.



There was a sudden rush of feet in the vault, and a voice, which the prisoners recognised as Lovell's, shouted: "Collar him, chaps!"

"Great pip! Here he is!"

"Where have you been, old scout?"

A crowd assembled from all directions, and very soon it was reinforced by fresh and important arrivals in the shape of the Head and Mr. Silver himself.

"Jimmy! So they've found you!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver's father, almost hugging the prodigal in his delight. "You're safe and sound?"

"Fit as a fiddle, thanks, pater!" grinned the leader of the Fourth. "In spite of having to live underground all this time!"

"Then you were in the vaults, after all!" said Mr. Silver.

"Bless my soul! I can scarcely believe it!" murmured the Head, fairly blinking at the returned junior. "How came you to stay there all this time, Silver? And what is Professor Carr being held for?"

"I can give one answer to the two questions, sir!" replied Jimmy Silver. "Professor Carr's object in spending so much time in the vaults was not, as we supposed, to gather material for a book on Rookwood."

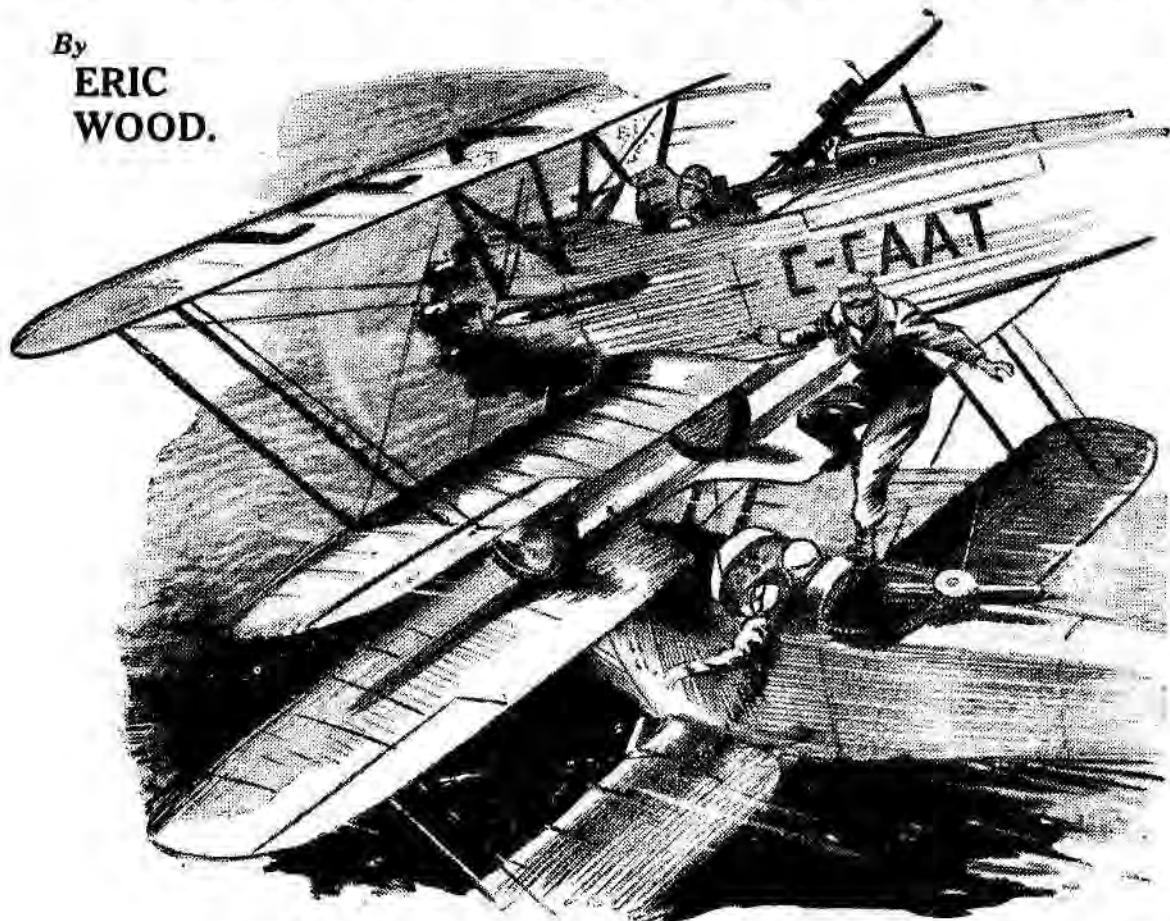
(Continued on page 28.)

MORE HAIR-RAISING AIR THRILLS!

COMPLETE STORY.

"WINGS" OF THE MOUNTED!

By
**ERIC
WOOD.**



CHAPTER 1.

A Strange Discovery!

JIMMY WELFORD—"Wings" of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—and his observer, Hal Rawlings, who comprised the flying detachment of the Mounted, saluted to attention before Commissioner Hinkson, in Regina, headquarters of the force.

"Beg to report, sir, as per instructions from Edmonton," said Wings. "Have just flown in, sir."

"Ah, yes!" said Hinkson.

"Reports of your work have been excellent. I have asked your chief to detail you for temporary duty on the International boundary. We're having considerable trouble over dope-smuggling from the States. Enormous quantities have been coming in, and, although we have picked up some stray cargoes on this side, we haven't been able to trace them back to the central office in the States, or to the distributing centres this side. Inquiries, however, have established the fact that airplane engines have been heard in the vicinities where our men have taken the smugglers. Also, the jobs have been done on moonless nights. They also have been done at places far apart, and ordinary methods have proved unavailing against the smugglers, largely owing to the vast territory to be covered. Therefore, I thought of you."

"Thank you, sir!" Wings spoke for himself and Hal Rawlings. "We'll do our best, sir."

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"I'm sure you will," the commissioner smiled. "You'll have a free hand, even to the extent of crossing the boundary. I've fixed that up with the American authorities, who have agreed not to interfere with an airplane carrying the insignia of the Mounted. I wish you luck!"

"Thank you, sir," Wings said again, and, saluting, the claims marched out. "Say, Hal," Welford grinned when they were alone, "we've got some job ahead—looking for

someone we don't know, doing business by mysterious methods. Only thing in our favour is that the business seems to be done on dark nights always, but as against that there's a whole stretch of a jolly old Continental boundary to be patrolled."

"It'll be a sheer fluke if we find anything," granted Rawlings. "If the smugglers are using a plane they can nip over, dump the stuff at

appointed places, and get back without anyone being any the wiser. That's what they've been doing, and I can't see we stand much better chance against 'em. However—"

"We should worry!" Wings grinned, and promptly got to work preparing.

The chief thing was to establish petrol supply dumps along the boundary, and he had only to give orders for this to be done. He and Rawlings spent much time on tuning up their plane, fitted an extra petrol tank, saw that the floats they had had fitted as complement to the wheels were O.K., and finally felt satisfied.

**The Bad Men of the Border
Had a scheme for "running" dope,
But soon as "Wings" and Hal
arrived
They hadn't got a hope!**

"We can go fifteen hundred miles without loading up," said Wings. "To-morrow night's a moonless night—I've consulted the almanac on that point. Suggest we make our first ramble then."

"Okay with me!" said Rawlings, who was testing out the machine-gun mounted in the rear cockpit—his own. Wings had already seen to his synchronised one in the fore cockpit. They knew something of the Yankee dope-gangsters, who did not hesitate to sling lead about when considered necessary.

For two dark nights, therefore, the Flying Detachment winged its way along and over the boundary, flying high, because, as Wings had it, if the smugglers were using a plane they would go for the ceiling until time came for dumping their cargo.

But for two nights a blank was drawn by the fliers, although on the morning following the second night telephone inquiry to headquarters brought the disconcerting information that a car had been stopped fifty miles across the boundary and found to contain a Chinaman and a case of dope!

Wings got the location.

"Reckon we can cut that part out to-night," he told Rawlings. He ran through the records of interception. "There's an eastward trend," he decided, "and it's east we go to-night, Hal."

"East or west doesn't matter to me," Rawlings grinned, "so long as we're on the go with a chance. Anyone hear an engine last night, Wings?"

"Nobody did," was the reply. "But it was fifty miles from anywhere, and only an accident the car was picked up."

That night Wings sent the plane high up—high up and lightless—yet not so high that Rawlings could not, with the aid of his night-glasses, pick out the lights of down below. It was certain the smugglers would have some ground-lights to guide them, even if they had to land in the dark. In great concentric circles Wings flew, then, shooting out for some miles and reverting to his circling. Now he dived low, now he climbed high, but always working eastwards.

Suddenly Hal yelled through the phones.

"Go down, Wings, and make that circle again. Spotted some queer-looking lights."

Wings cut off for the circling dive, and presently Hal said:

"There are five lights, arranged in a cross—red one in centre, two whites on a line through, and two green on another line through. Must be sunk, because I can't see 'em all the time. Gosh"—Wings had had to set his engine going again now—"gosh, they've gone out, Wings!"

Welford had been making a slight bank at this moment, and in doing so he caught a glimpse of the blue night sky. Also of something else! Like a tiny bit of party illumination there showed high above him for a brief second a cross—a cross that tallied in design with that which Rawlings had been describing to him. Then it went out, and Wings could see nothing but the sky.

He snapped his jaws to Hal, adding:

"I'm climbing to find out what it means."

He gave the engine the gun, and the machine began to climb at a great speed. At something like a thousand feet higher than when he had seen that cross of lights, Wings was aware of an unwanted rocking of the plane. It seemed to be having to force its way against something other than the air.

He barked the information to Rawlings, saying:

"Something's holding back the right wing, Hal." As he did so he shifted a hand from the control and flashed a powerful torchlight. "Losh—look!" he exclaimed, holding the light there for a moment. Rawlings looked, and saw that a cable was trailing obliquely down, and that the plane's wing was touching it.

"There's a machine almost above us!" snapped Rawlings. "That cable's trailing down, at an angle, of course. Looks as if there must be something at the end of it. Douse the light, Wings! I'll investigate. I'm going along the plane. Keep at that cable."

"Okay!" came from Welford, and Rawlings, disengaging from the phone and slipping from his safety-belt, clambered on to the lower plane. They were travelling at over a hundred miles per hour, and the wind-rush snatched at Rawlings, who, however, grasped the struts as he wormed his perilous way along the plane. He came at last to where the plane pressed against the trailing cable. Holding on with one hand, with the other and his teeth he lashed his powerful torch to the cable, light downwards, switched on, and followed the beam of light.

He had tied the torch to the cable to ensure the accurate direction of the light, which he could not have had by holding it. His eye travelled down with the light, and

the white splurge of its finish showed him a bulky bundle at the end of the cable.

Hal smiled grimly as he saw it. He crawled back to his cockpit, having left his torch on the cable.

"Get away from the cable now, Wings," he told Welford, after informing him of what he had seen, "and—climb! That torch of mine'll serve as a guide to us! We'll know the other plane's above, and have an approximate location!"

Wings Welford grunted. It wasn't going to be easy to get away from that trailing cable, which in itself was a distinct danger. If anything happened to get it tangled up with the under-carriage nothing but disaster would ensue. If as Wings manoeuvred, it but touched the propeller, there would be an end to the Flying Detachment.

"Got your 'chute on, Hal?" Wings asked; and Rawlings assured him he had.

Wings dared not slow down, because if he did so the cable would follow the slacking plane, and the bundle at its end would have a tendency to ride upwards, with possibly serious results to the Service machine. To bank on the other wing would be equally dangerous, for the cable would probably send the machine over at too great a tilt when Wings was not expecting it.

The next few moments were tense ones. Wings handled his sky-riding mount delicately, drawing it gradually to one side, the cable scraping along the wing. Long before the plane seemed to leap forward as a dog leaps from a leash, Wings and Rawlings had seen that the latter's torch was above them—which meant that the higher-up machine was hauling in the cable. Actually, Wings got his plane away from that cable only just in time; a split second later and the heavy package at its end would have been drawn up into collision with the wing!

Like a night-flying bird that package shot upwards past the end of the wing as Welford brought it away from the cable.

"And now, Wings," rapped Hal Rawlings into the phone, "do your damndest, old man, before they have that cable in and the torch can't help us any more!"

"You bet!" snapped Wings Welford, and the plane roared wildly as he gunned the throttle full. Somewhere above was someone who was engaged on something he must do in the darkness. Therefore, it called for investigation. Therefore, it might be that it was the folk the Flying

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Detachment were looking for. Everything pointed to that—the signal lights below, the lights on the plane, the laden cable. What else could all these things mean?

Even as he was thinking of this, Wings Welford gasped. A moment before all had been darkness, except for that now tiny spot that was Rawlings' lashed torchlight. Now the world seemed a blaze of light—light that bathed the Service machine.

"They've got a searchlight!" Wings yelled into his phone—as if Hal Rawlings could not see that for himself.

The searchlight streamed down the air. Rawlings, in better position than Wings, could see the beginning of the beam, and his quick mind reckoned its distance.

"No more than five hundred feet away and above us," he told Wings. "And—Gosh, old chap! They're coming down at us!"

"Good—it means a fight!" snapped Welford. "Get ready!"

CHAPTER 2.

A Fight in the Dark!

BOTH Wings and Rawlings knew that the mystery plane would know they were "official," for their machine had the Mounted insignia on top and beneath, in order to allow American fliers to recognise them. The fact that the machine above was coming down, keeping the Flying Detachment bathed in its light, suggested that trouble was in the offing—and it was breaking out within a very few moments.

Por-lunk—r-rip—z-zip! Wing fabric snapped as bullets tore through from above. One ricocheted off Hal's machine-gun, and, as it sped past his head, nipped a piece out of his ear lobe—which made him angry. Another smashed the altimeter on the dashboard before Wings, who sent his machine over in a sharp bank, made a half-loop, and then came out of it to begin climbing up to meet the raider.

The searchlight's white finger groped for the Service machine, picked it up but Wings had it climbing out of range of the other's guns. Long since Hal's torch had disappeared.

"As long as they keep their searchlight on," Wings bawled into his phone, "we're all right for tackling 'em—while we've got them at the disadvantage that they can't see us plainly!"

He knew that the other fliers would be able to pick out his plane as a vague blot in the darkness, but that wouldn't be much help in the scrap which Wings meant to try to bring off.

Then, suddenly, the searchlight went out. Welford cut off his engine for a second. He could then hear the terrific roar of the other machine. He switched on again and climbed higher—he wanted height if he could get it. Spasmodically, the searchlight glared out, groped, did not find the detachment, and went out again. Spasmodically, too. Wings cut off, and so located the enemy. Once, when he went silent, he missed the thrum of the other's engine—and knew the enemy was adopting similar tactics.

Welford's machine had a searchlight on board, but he did not mean to use it—yet. Its eye might be too dangerous a mark for the enemy.

Came suddenly a moment fraught with dramatic and terrific possibilities—nay, probabilities. Wings had climbed high, and had cut off in order to try to locate the foe. The moment he did so he was aware of a thunderous noise racing towards him.

He peered into the darkness and gasped. Right ahead, on a level with him was a splotch in the darkness.

It seemed to Wings that a head-on collision was inevitable.

Yet he kept his head. That clear brain of his worked quickly almost, it seemed, automatically. He put the nose of his machine down, and "gunned" for top speed. He tore downwards at the maximum, and a second later knew he was beneath the other machine because of the spatter of bullets that came from above.

But Hal Rawlings was now using his swiftness machine-gun as the plane swooped under the enemy. The tracer-bullets glowed queerly in the darkness—and Hal knew that some of his shots were spraying the enemy plane.

Then Rawlings prepared himself for Welford's next manoeuvre. He knew what was coming. Wings was going up in the first bend of a loop. Hal was able to keep his gun

(Continued opposite.)

EASTWOOD SHIELD LEAGUE.

ST. JIM'S AND ROOKWOOD IN FORM.
'FRIARS STILL OUT OF LUCK!

B, "OLD BOY."

OLD RIVALS FIGHT HARD!

ST. JIM'S are the team of the moment, and when I reached the school ground, I found a huge crowd in attendance. Tom Merry & Co., fresh from their 4-2 win over Rookwood, and their 6-1 victory of last week at Abbotsford, were entertaining their ancient rivals from Rylcombe Grammar School—Gordon Gay and his chums.

I remembered that Gussy had told me that St. Jim's are determined to retain the Shield presented by Lord Eastwood, and if they go on as they are now, there is no doubt that they will manage it!

On the ground I met Harry Manners, the third member of the Terrible Three, a little disgruntled because he had been left out of the side. But Tom Merry is too good a skipper to tamper with a winning combination, and even Manners admitted that no fault could be found with St. Jim's as they stand. Manners was consoling himself with his big reflex camera, hoping to get some graphic snaps from just behind the goal. He took up his position just behind the goal defended by Rylcombe—whether in expectation of seeing Tom Merry pop the ball through and provide the snapshot I didn't ask!

Gordon Gay smiled when I asked him if his men were fit. He said they were fit enough to give the Saints a licking, and could I ask for more? I certainly couldn't, and watched with appreciation the way in which the Grammarians punted the ball about prior to the kick-off.

From the whistle both sides were hard at it—no quarter asked and none given.

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It was fair and above-board—but a needle game if ever I saw one. Both keepers were rapidly tested—Fatty Wynn as usual grappling with the situation in efficient style, and Carboy at the other end bringing off a fine save under the bar.

Throughout the first half supporters of both sides were on tenterhooks—but no goal came to whet their appetites. The ball bobbed hither and thither—but there was always a ready foot or the swift paw of a goalkeeper, to keep it out of the net.

When the whistle blew for the interval, both teams were puffed right out—as was natural enough. I have rarely seen two elevens go so hard through a first period.

Lemon-time fled too quickly for them, and on the restart it was plain that the speed must slacken. And with that slight falling-off came the long-awaited goals. A snap pass close in gave Blake a chance—and with a lightning deflection he put the ball well past Carboy. Almost before the cheering had died down, Frank Monk of the Grammar School dribbled right through

to beat Fatty Wynn all ends up with a regular crackerjack of a shot!

Then came casualties. D'Arcy, in rushing to intercept a pass, collided with Wootton major and both of them went down, "winded." While they were recovering, Rylcombe forced the pace again and Gordon Gay headed in right under the bar, giving Wynn no chance whatever. Wootton returned to the field, but D'Arcy was still hors de combat. Then, with ten men, St. Jim's showed what they were made of. Tom Merry rallied his men, and they bombarded the Grammarians' goal right and left. It was a matter of minutes before Harry Noble, alias the Kangaroo, came loping up from centre-half to take a great first-time shot that hit Carboy, and knocked him, ball and all, into the back of the net! At 2-2 Gussy returned, feeling seedy but game, and St. Jim's attacked with renewed fury. This time it was Tom Merry who feinted past the Rylcombe backs and drove the leather home, while a wild roar came from the home crowd and the whistle shrilled simultaneously.

A great finish to a great match! Gordon Gay & Co. could on their form have beaten anybody but St. Jim's—for St. Jim's this season are playing wonderful football. They now head the league, and it will take a strong team to challenge them.

Rookwood won at Claremont, and, so I hear, showed fine form. Greyfriars, with a reorganised side, still lack practice, and were beaten 2-1 at Redclyffe. A friend of mine at Redclyffe phoned me that the Friars played a splendid game—without Peter Todd, whose ankle still troubles him—and were unlucky not to force a draw.

(Unfortunately, results of last week's matches were received too late for publication, but as is mentioned here, St. Jim's beat Abbotsford by 6-1.)

RESULTS.

ST. JIM'S .. 3 RYLCOMBE
GRAM. SCHOOL 2
Blake, Noble, Merry, Monk, Gay.

Teams.—St. Jim's: Wynn; Figgias, Kerr; Redfern, Noble, Lowther; Talbot, Levison, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy. RYLCOMBE: Carboy, Willis, Wallace; Jones, Wootton maj., Smith, Tadpole, Monk, Gay, Wootton maj., Woolley.

BAGSHOT .. 0 ST. FRANKS .. 2
Grey, Tragellis-West

BANNINGTON .. 3 ABBOTSFORD .. 3
GRAM. SCHOOL 3 Fane (2), Williams.

Dexter, Bird (2) ROOKWOOD .. 2
Dodg, Lovell, Morrington.

CLAREMONT .. 1 REDCLYFFE .. 2
Judd (2). GREYFRIARS 1
Linley.

spewing steel-jacketed bullets—until the moment when Wings Welford had the nose of the machine back, pointing to the foe. Then Wings' gun spoke as the under-carriage faced the ceiling!

Only for a second or two, and then Wings was riding the air, still on his back, only to finish the loop, even-keel out, and begin climbing, climbing—with Hal flooding the darkness with the searchlight.

The beam of it broke upon the other plane. It was a two-seater biplane, and pilot and observer each had a gun. Both of them were spewing lead up at the Service plane, which now had the height.

For a few seconds Wings' gun was blinded; but he banked over, turned, and came into action with his nose pointed at the enemy. A raid of lead made him swing off the direct line that would have brought him over the other, and he rolled to evade the burst of fire that spat from the gun in the rear cockpit.

The enemy pilot promptly looped, in the determined endeavour to ride above the Mounties, but Wings countered the move by climbing higher, while Hal poured bullets into the enemy.

There wasn't any doubt that it was an enemy, because Hal's searchlight had revealed the absence of any marks on it. Honest planes are never in the air without them. This one, too, was painted black all over—fitting camouflage for a night-flying machine on criminal venture!

Wings caught the foe while it was on its back. He rolled his machine this way and that—and always his gun and Hal's were ripping out bullets.

"Gosh, Wings!" yelled Rawlings suddenly. "We've done something! She's dropping out of control!"

He meant the enemy machine, not their own. Wings looked and saw that the plane had gone into a side-slip. In matter of seconds it would develop into a tail-spin—and disaster! He could not see, despite the vivid glare of the searchlight, that any real damage had been done to the machine, and yet it was out of control.

"Have got the pilot, maybe!" he barked back at Rawlings. "We'll follow her!"

But even as he slid into a dive after her she righted herself.

"Wonderful!" gasped Wings. "Whoever did that's a great flier! My word!" he gasped again. The searchlight had shown him something. There was a man huddled down in the fore cockpit, and another was reaching over from the rear, clutching the controls. "We shot the pilot, and his partner's saved the ship!" he shouted. "Hal, I'm riding him down!"

CHAPTER 3.

Hal Does His Stuff!

RIGHT over the tail of the enemy Wings placed his plane, and, in case the fellow didn't know it, scattered a round of bullets through the already tattered right wing. The answer was an attempt to roll away—but Wings was there. He was there each time the man tried to slip away from under; but the enemy wouldn't go down—he flew forward instead!

"Shall I let him have it good and plenty, Wings?" Hal asked. "Bound to get him in the end, fighting this way!"

"It wouldn't be a fight!" snapped Wings. "He can't hit back! I'm going to ride on to the top of him and force him down!"

"Hey!" gasped Hal Rawlings. "Oh, all right—what you say goes, Wings!" he added, as he realised what Welford meant.

Few men in Canada could handle a machine as Wings could, and Rawlings didn't mind what his chum tried.

Nevertheless, he knew there was a nerve-racking experience ahead of him.

There was!

Wings Welford dived for the enemy, who thought he now had a chance to slip away. But Wings came righted again, and forced the other to an even keel. Again Wings played the trick—and so was closer. Again the other pilot tried to evade him but failed. And Wings was much closer than ever. Then, suddenly, Rawlings knew that Welford had pulled off the stunt; their wheels were on the top of the other plane.

And Wings had shut off his engine!

Dead weight was the Service machine on the other plane—and Hal's swivelled gun was pouring a hot, leaden stream down past the flier, to let him know that a swing of the gun would bring the bullets at him instead of into space.

Suddenly Wings heard a chuckle in his phone.

"Gosh, Wings!" Hal was saying. "Hold it like this—and I'll get that fellow!"

Welford half-turned, and saw that Rawlings was slipped out of his safety-belt.

"Don't be a—!" Wings began; but he saw that Rawlings had already discarded his phone, and, therefore, could not

hear him. Also, Rawlings was looking away—so that he should not see the frantic motions which Wings was making, ordering him not to essay the foolhardy stunt he so obviously had in mind.

Hal grinned to himself, for out of the tail of his eye he saw those motions, though he took no notice of them. He threw his legs over the coming of the cockpit, and landed on the enemy plane!

He slid down the camber of the wing on to the body, claved for hand-hold, and then dropped into the rear cockpit—just as the pilot—who so obviously had been wondering what to do in the circumstances, nose-dived in a bid for freedom from the incubus of the Service plane. A few seconds later and Rawlings might have been hurtling through space.

The whole thing had happened in an incredibly short time—it was only that which saved Rawlings, for the enemy was evidently a rapid thinker. What he did not know, however, was that he had a passenger aboard.

Wings Welford went into a glide after his man. He was handicapped now—he could not use his gun for fear of sending the enemy to destruction—and Hal Rawlings with him!

"Ought never to have done it!" Wings growled.

He was indeed handicapped, because the searchlight wasn't much use, even though Hal had fixed it. Only when Wings was in one relative position to the enemy was the light any good to him—and he tried to maintain that position as he followed the other machine. He could not now get down on to the back of the enemy—but he could, and did, ride his tail.

He let the fellow have whistling bullets rip past the plane as a reminder of his nearness, and yet the pilot rode even keeled and ahead—not down. It was as if he realised that the Mounties did not mean to shoot him down—but wanted him alive.

Wings laughed nastily.

"I've got it!" he said. "The beggar's making for the States, and thinks I'll have to chuck up the game when we're over the boundary—if I know I'm over! He doesn't know I've got permish, to go over and do what I like!"

Welford realised that the enemy would know that the Mountie's instruments would tell him when the boundary was crossed—the speedometer would give him that information. Wings felt that this was the only explanation of the enemy's refusal to be ridden down—that, and the fact that he obviously believed the Mounties wanted to take him alive.

"All right!" muttered Wings. "Let him think on—Hal's on the spot. Wonder what he's doing?"

He could not see. Had he been able to he would have seen that Hal Rawlings, on entering the rear cockpit, had jerked his Service revolver from its holster, had spun the cylinder, closed it, and then deliberately reversed the weapon.

Next moment he was pressing the butt into the back of the man who lay half over the partition between the two cockpits.

It must have given the fellow a nasty jolt, for Hal felt the spasm that ran through his body.

Then the fellow tried to back-kick at Rawlings, but Hal had foreseen that and evaded the kick. The enemy could have no doubt as to the meaning of Hal's pressure on his back. It was an order to go—down!

He took no notice, however—simply held the machine on a level, forward keel.

"All right—take that!" snapped Rawlings to the man, who could not hear the words but felt the impact of Hal's gun as Hal swung himself half along his back and thumped him on the back of the ear.

The fellow slumped sidewise, and the plane wobbled perilously. But the man was not senseless, only partially stunned. He somehow got a hold of himself, and, aware that a sudden lurch might send his tormentor flying into space, rolled the plane sharply and unexpectedly the other way. Hal Rawlings crashed into the coming, and was almost gone. But he saved himself, and hurtled back as the pilot righted the machine. It was then that Wings Welford brought his machine into that position which sent the searchlight spraying over the other—and Hal had a vision of the huddled figure in the cockpit raising a hand—a hand in which gleamed the blue-steel of an automatic!

Hal had thought the pilot dead, but he had only been knocked unconscious by an almost spent bullet after a ricochet. He had come round at the critical moment—and here was his automatic levelled at the intruder who had come from heaven knew where!

Hal saw the spurt of flame from the barrel, ducked, felt the bullet bore through his flying helmet, and then, a split second before Wings' light shifted, fired at the levelled hand.

Like lightning then did Hal move. He relied entirely on the light from the dashboard. It was sufficient for his purpose. His revolver-butt smashed down on the nose of the temporary pilot's neck, the fellow went slumping aside again, hands relinquishing controls, and Hal Rawlings had flopped himself over into the cockpit, kicking his man further to one side so that he dropped on to the other.

Whereupon Hal dived for earth. Wings knew that Hal would not be able to use the enemy's searchlight, so he rode hard on Rawlings' tail and gave him light—light enough to enable Hal to make a fairly comfortable landing, after which Wings himself got to terra firma.

"Not so bad, you blamed idiot!" shouted Wings, as he grabbed Hal's hand. "I mouthed at you, and made faces at you, not to try it, but—"

"Ever been in a blind arc, Wings?" Hal grinned. "Say, let's examine our catch, shall we?"

"We will," said Wings—and they did so.

Their axes soon made short work of the large iron chest they found in the plane. It was this which had been at the end of the cable. That cable had an ingenious grapple which could be opened by an electric current from the machine. Obviously, the plane went low to earth, let down the cable with its package of dope—yes, there was dope in it! The package was allowed to drop to earth without risk of smashing, and someone was there to pick it up.

"Stick work, Welford!" the commissioner told Wings, as he and Hal sat in his office, telling the story. "I congratulate you both. Er, by the way, Rawlings, did you change from one plane to the other on instructions, or was it a hunch?"

"Excuse me, commissioner," put in Wings quickly—he did not want anyone to know that his chum had, as it were, disobeyed orders—"excuse me, sir, but Rawlings and I are—er—are on a level in this flying game. It's true I'm senior, but as you will perhaps understand, sir, it's sometimes very necessary for us both to work just as the—er—opportunity comes along!"

"I understand!" Hinkson smiled. "It was Nelson, wasn't it, who put his telescope to his blind eye? Yes, I understand, boys. Well, good luck to you both on your next job! Shake!"

They shook.

Don't forget, chaps, next week's issue is the special Christmas number of the GEM. Don't miss it. Order your copy now!

THE PRISONER OF THE VAULTS!

(Continued from page 23.)

"Good gracious!"

"His real object was to find a secret chamber in which part of the school treasure was deposited for safety hundreds of years ago, and to annex the treasure for himself."

"Bless my soul!"

"On the night when I was lost, I went down into the vaults to hide," explained Jimmy Silver. "There I found a cavity in one of the walls. It was a secret doorway, the door being a section of the brickwork. This man was in the room beyond. He attacked me, made me a prisoner, and kept me there till now."

"D-d-dear me!"

"He has worked there every day with a pickaxe, burrowing through the wall, sir. To-day he found what he was after."

"The—the school treasure?" gasped Dr. Chisholm. "You refer to the treasure which was said to have been appropriated entirely by Henry the Eighth?"

"That's it, sir. If you go down to the vaults now, though, you'll see for yourself that Henry the Eighth didn't have it all!"

"Well, my hat!"

The exclamation came from one of the fellows—not, of course, from the Head, whose august lips could hardly have been expected to utter anything so undignified.

When the Head did speak his voice was quite shaky from the shock of Jimmy Silver's revelations.

"Silver! You have, it seems, rendered an inestimable service to the school. I am indeed thankful that you have emerged unharmed from your ordeal. As to this—this person whom I have known as Professor Carr—"

"Who demands his immediate release?" put in the unmasked professor, with an assumption of fierce indignation.

"I propose to leave that matter to the police," said the Head drily. "Meanwhile, I have no intention whatever of giving you an opportunity of escaping!"

And that was the Head's last word on the subject. Professor Carr was not given his freedom—which was just as well, since he was destined at the trial which took place later, to be shown up as an habitual though educated criminal, thoroughly deserving of the sentence of imprisonment which he received.

THE END.

(Boys, there's a bumper number of the GEM out next Wednesday! It's the Christmas issue and contains a special double-length yarn of Tom Merry & Co.)

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