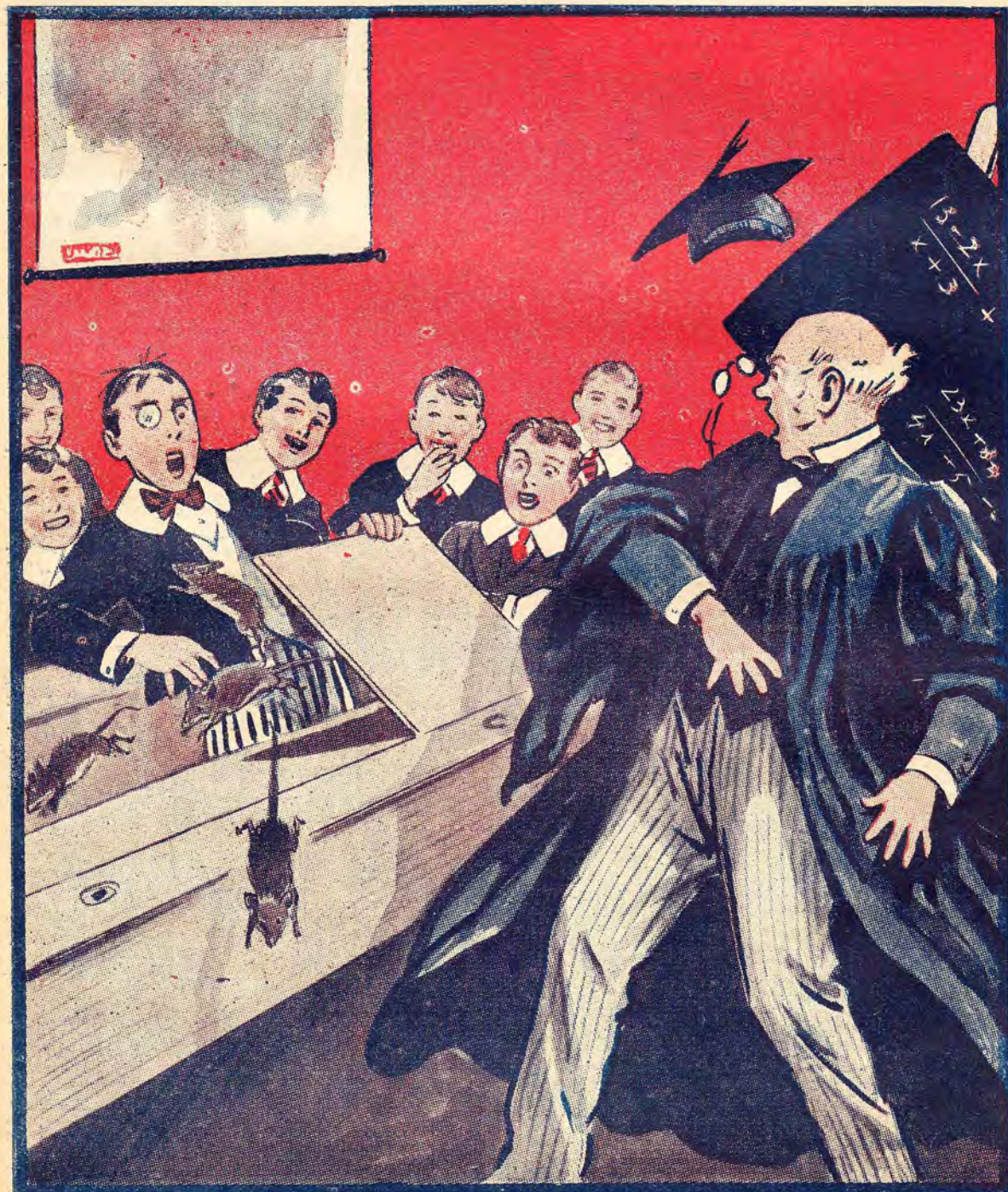


THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY AND—

The GEM

INCORPORATING THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY

2^D



UNDER SUSPICION!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



One of Gussy's famous "fivers" is missing—presumably stolen! And suspicion falls on Gussy's closest chum—none other than Jack Blake of the Fourth Form!

CHAPTER 1.

Rats!

"WHAT have you got there?"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry reddened.

He had asked Jack Blake a perfectly civil question as he met him near the door of the Fourth Form class-room at St. Jim's, and he naturally expected a civil answer.

Blake was coming quietly along the passage, with one hand concealed under his jacket, evidently holding something.

"Blake!"

"Well?" said Blake, with a grin.

"I asked you a civil question," said Tom Merry.

"Well, and I've answered it."

"If you are looking for a thick ear," began Tom Merry, pushing back his cuffs in a businesslike way, "I'm ready to oblige you. It's a bit beneath the dignity of a Shell fellow to have a dust-up with a Fourth-Former, but if you're in need of a lesson—"

"Oh, keep your wool on!" said Blake, with perfect good humour. "I'm not looking for trouble. I answered your question because you asked it."

"You said 'rats,'" said Tom Merry wrathfully.

"Exactly!"

"If you persist in being funny," said Tom Merry, "you will get a dot on the nose! What have you got under your coat?"

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"Rats!"

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled. He reached out with his right and gave Blake a tap on the nose that sent him staggering against the wall.

Blake gave a yell.

"You ass! They'll get 'loose!"

A bag dropped from under his jacket, with a flop on the floor, and there came a shrill squeaking from it that made Tom Merry start in amazement. There was no mistaking the squeaking of angry and excited rodents.

"Rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry in surprise.

"Didn't I tell you so?"

Blake stooped and picked up the cloth bag. There was a hole in one corner where a rat had been nibbling a way of escape. Blake held the bag cautiously by the string, to keep his fingers secure from the busy jaws within.

Tom Merry stared at the bag, and then at Blake.

"What on earth have you got them for?" he asked.

"What's the idea of carrying rats round in a bag?"

"I'm taking them into the class-room."

"What for?"

"Gussy."

"What on earth does D'Arcy want rats in the class-room for?"

"He doesn't want them," said Blake, with a grin, "but he's going to have them, all the same. You see, I'm going to shove them in his desk, and give him a jump. He left them on my hands, and that's the best thing I can think of doing with them."

Tom Merry laughed as he followed Blake into the class-room.

LONG COMPLETE STORY STARRING THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

"Surely Gussy didn't catch them?" he asked.

"No!" said Blake indignantly. "Binks caught them. Gussy saw Binks taking 'em out to drown 'em. He saved them from humanitarian motives, and gave Binks a tanner. Then he left them in the study, and they've been squealing there for ever so long. I don't know whether he was going to find them a home, or keep them as study pets. Anyway, I'm going to find them a home in his desk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've had enough of their squeaking in the study. I—Hullo, Skimpole!"

Blake was entering the Fourth Form class-room as he spoke, and he ran right into Skimpole of the Shell, who was coming out.

Skimpole started back, and caught his big spectacles, which were sliding down his nose with the shock.

A bundle of manuscript he was carrying under his arm slipped and nearly fell, but he saved it with a desperate clutch just in time.

"Really, Blake!" gasped the genius of the Shell.

"You ass!" grunted Blake. "What are you doing in our class-room, anyway? Scat!"

"I came—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Yes; but I—"

"Scat!" growled Blake. "Kick him out, Tom Merry, will you?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Anything to oblige."

"Really, Merry—"

"Outside, Skimmy."

Skimmy had been making for the door, but now he stopped still and stood his ground. He put the packet of foolscap—a couple of quires or more of it—under his left arm, and doubled up his right fist—a big, bony fist with very large knuckles.

Tom Merry and Blake watched the process in amazement.

"What's the little game?" asked Tom Merry, at last.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"I decline to go out of the class-room," he said. "I claim the right to enter, stand, sit, or remain where I choose, when I choose, and how I choose. I decline to leave the class-room."

Tom Merry chuckled, and Blake snorted.

The rats were gnawing their way out of the bag, and at any moment they might betray themselves by a squeak, and Blake, of course, did not wish his little jape on D'Arcy to be given away before it had been carried out. But when Skimpole mounted his hobby-horse he was not to be dismounted easily.

"Kick him out, Tom Merry!"

"I shall not allow Merry to kick me out," said Skimpole, with dignity. "Although I deprecate every form of violence, if Merry attempts to eject me from this class-room I shall strike him with violence upon the nose."

"Oh dear!" moaned Tom Merry. "Fancy being stricken with violence upon the nose! Skimmy, as you are strong, be merciful."

"Will you kick the idiot out?"

"Really, Blake, I regard the term idiot as being almost rude. It is hopelessly illogical, too, as you are mentally much more in approximation to idiocy. You see—"

"Outside!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Certainly not. I—"

"March!"

"I decline!"

Tom Merry advanced upon the Determinist of St. Jim's, and Skimpole, true to his threat, struck out with violence. But his bony fist only swept the air as Tom Merry dodged round him and took a grip on the back of his collar.

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole.

"March!"

"But I object—"

Biff!

Tom Merry's knee bumped on Skimpole, and propelled him towards the door. The genius of the Shell wriggled, and half a dozen sheets of foolscap escaped from the pack under his arm and floated away upon the floor.

"Ow! Pray desist, Tom Merry. I object to violence!"

"Will you march, then?"

"You see—"

"Go ahead!"

And Tom Merry, with an iron hand, marched the Determinist of St. Jim's out of the class-room and along the passage as far as the stairs.

Skimpole shed sheets of foolscap along the passage as he went, and had less than half his packet left by the time

they arrived at the stairs. There Tom Merry ran him up against the banisters.

"Now, are you going to keep the peace, Skimmy?"

"Certainly, Merry. It is necessary for me to collect up the paper I have dropped, as I am about to write out my contribution for the 'Weekly.'"

Tom Merry grinned, and released the genius of the Shell.

"Now, remember, there's a time for argument and a time not for argument, Skimmy," he said sententially. "Whenever you begin to argue, it's not time for argument; so whenever you start, it's time to shut up. Savvy?"

"Really, Merry—"

"If you would only bear that in mind, it would save you a lot of jaw, and your hearers a lot of listening," said Tom Merry severely.

"Really—"

"Why, now you're beginning again! Scat!"

Blake came along the passage, grinning.

Skimpole, after blinking dubiously at Tom Merry for a few seconds, as if trying to make up his mind whether the hero of the Shell was serious or not, went along collecting up his lost papers.

"All right, Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake nodded, with a grin.

"Right as rain! Gussy will have a surprise at lessons this afternoon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 2.

Blake Stands Treat!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came into Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and glanced round through his eyeglass.

Jack Blake was sitting in the window, looking out into the quad and exchanging chaff with a group of New House juniors below.

"Blake, deah boy—"

Jack Blake looked round.

"Hullo, is that you, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah! Where are the wats?"

"What wats?"

"The wats! You know what wats I am alludin' to, Blake."

"Oh, the rats!" said Blake.

"Yaas. Pway don't be an ass, you know. I purchased them fwm Binks for humanitarian motives, and I want to look aftar them. I have bwrought them some gwub."

And Arthur Augustus laid a packet on the table. His chum looked at it curiously.

"What is it, Gussy?" he asked, sniffing. "It seems to be talking through the paper."

"Pway don't be coarse, Blake. It's cheese."

"Oh!"

"I asked Taggles if he had anythin' that would do to feed wats, and he said I could have that cheese. He said it had been forgotten and wasn't any good, but would do for wats."

"Rats!"

"I suppose it's good enough," said D'Arcy. "The question is, deah boy, whethah I shall be able to tame these wats. Mellish says you can't tame wild wats."

"I've never heard of it being done," grinned Blake. "You won't tame those particular specimens of the wild rat, in any case."

"I don't see why I shouldn't twy," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It seemed vewy wuff on them to be ddowned like wats in a twap, you know. That's why I took them away fwm Binks. I can't let them go, as I told him I wouldn't release them in the House. Hewies was bwutal enough to suggest that I should give them to his bulldog."

"Well, Towser would like them."

"The wats wouldn't like it, Blake. I don't see why they should be tweated with cwelty because they happen to be wodents."

"Well, no, only a beast would hurt a rat, or anything else," said Blake, "but they ought to be killed. One can't have rats in the House."

"Yaas, but ddownin' is a howwid death. I was nearly ddowned once, when Tom Mewwy pulled me out of the wivah—a vewy bwave and genewous action on his part, for he uttably wuined his clothes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I cannot tame the wats I shall take them to a lethal chambah, and have them painlessly extwacted—I mean painlessly killed," said D'Arcy. "My Aunt Adelina is vewy stwong on cwelty to animals. She wote to me only yesterday, and mentioned that she was goin' to a meetin' of the Association for the Suppwession of Fishin'."

"More rats!"

"Well, she enclosed me a fivah, you know, so I am bound to wegard what she says with pwopah wespect," said Arthur Augustus. "Fivahs are gettin' ware now. The guv'nah says he can't keep 'em up since the Budget. I wegard it as wuff, I was thinkin' of witin' to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the subject, puttin' it to him as a sportsman."

"Good wheeze!" grinned Blake.

"But about the wats. I want to feed them," said D'Arcy. "Dig raises an objection to my keepin' them in the study. He says the cage niffs, and he won't stand it. Dig is vewy dense on the subject of humanitarianism. I can't keep them in the outhouse with the pets, because some beast would be sure to feed them to Towsah or Pongo."

"Very likely; but you can't keep them here."

"I am afwaid there is no othah wesource. Where are they, Blake? I trust you have not hidden them for a wotten joke?"

"The fact is, old chap, I've found them a home," said Blake blandly.

Arthur Augustus started.

"You've found them a home, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Wheah?"

"That's a secret for the present. You'll know this afternoon."

"Well, if it's a comfy home I don't know that I object," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Of course, you had no right to do anythin' of the sort without consultin' me, and I wegard you as an ass!"

"Thank you!"

"I am not sure whethah I ought not to give you a feahful thwashin' for your cheek."

Blake pushed back his cuffs.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"On second thoughts I will let you off," said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "I wegard you as an iwresponsible ass. I have taken the twouble to get this cheese for nothin'."

"Well, if you got it for nothing it must have been cheap, at all events."

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! I am goin' to change a fivah at the tuckshop. You can come with me if you like."

"Right-ho!" said Blake heartily. "Never shall it be said that I refused to help a chum to change a fiver in the hour of need. But you'd better kill that cheese first."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's simply talking, you know. It would have been rough on the rats."

"I will leave it here," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It certainly does smell vewy stwong. I had to cawwy it at armslength, you know. If I leave it on the table one of the fellows is bound to take it away—Hewwies or Dig can do it."

And D'Arcy left the packet of ancient cheese on the table. In the passage he ran his hands through his pockets in search of the five-pound note, and stopped with an expression of perplexity on his face.

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake impatiently. "It's only a few minutes to school."

"Yaas, but—"

"We shan't have five minutes in the tuckshop as it is."

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"You haven't lost the fiver, surely?"

"I hope not, but—"

"Never mind, I've got some tin. I'm flush to-day," said Blake, feeling in his pockets and producing a pound note. "Look!"

"Good, deah boy! But that fivah—"

"Never mind the fiver. We'll change this pound instead."

"Vewy well, but I wish I could wemembah where I left the fivah," said Arthur Augustus. "Fivahs are gettin' so scarce nowadays that I can't afford to lose one."

"Never mind; come on."

"Oh, vewy well!"

And Blake and D'Arcy went downstairs. They met Herries and Dig on the way, and when Herries and Dig learned where they were going, they promptly joined up.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell—were sunning themselves on the School House steps.

"Hallo! Whither bound?" asked Tom Merry cheerily.

"Tuckshop," said Dig. "Blake's going to change a pound. Blessed if I know where he gets these pounds! I never have any."

"I found this one," said Blake.

"Eh? You don't mean to say—"

"Ass! I found it in an old jacket of mine," said Blake crossly. "You don't think I'd stick to anybody else's money I found, do you?"

"Of course not, ass!"

"It was a tip from my uncle the last time he came to

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St. Jim's," explained Blake. "I shoved it in my pocket, and it slipped into the lining, I think, because when I looked for it I couldn't find it, and I thought I must have put it somewhere else. I was cutting up the old jacket this morning to make a pen-wiper, when the jolly old note came to light in the lining."

"By Jove! What a stroke of luck!"

"Yes, wasn't it? If I hadn't been so busy looking after Gussy's rats, I should have stood a feed."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's never too late to mend," said Tom Merry, slipping off the stone balustrade. "It's nice of you to invite us like this. Come on, kids!"

"Certainly!" said Lowther.

"With pleasure!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove! Weally, you know—"

"Oh, the more the merrier!" grinned Blake. "Come on! I say, Figgy, come and have some ginger-pop?"

"What-ho!" said Figgins of the New House heartily.

And several other fellows joined Blake, as the procession made its way to the school shop, kept within the precincts of St. Jim's by Dame Taggles, wife of the school porter.

Quite a little crowd poured into the shop, and Mrs. Taggles came out of her parlour with a bland smile upon her face.

"Ginger-pop and tarts," said Blake. "Buck up! There isn't much time."

"Certainly, Master Blake!"

"Wire in, you fellows. It's nearly time for school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, that's all right!" grinned Tom Merry. "It's wonderful the speed you can put on when the tarts are nice and you get them for nothing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake placed the pound note on the counter. As a rule, he was as careful as the average junior with his money; but this pound had come so unexpectedly that he felt that he was justified in "blueing" it. And, after all, all the fellows he was with had stood him feeds at various times, so the blueing of the pound was only paying off debts.

A fat, ruddy face looked in at the door.

"You fellows feeding?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Did you call me, Blake?" asked Wynn, coming into the tuckshop.

Jack Blake chuckled.

"No, I didn't; but you can come in, all the same. Go for the tarts, Fatty—dig into them. The bell goes soon!" Fatty Wynn needed no second invitation.

He had put a very good dinner out of sight, but he was always ready for a feed, and the speed with which he demolished the tarts, cakes, and buns was amazing.

Herries gave him a slap on the back.

"Go it, Fatty!"

"I'm g-going it!" gasped Fatty, with his mouth full. "This—this is very decent of you, Blake. Have you come into a fortune?"

"I've found a pound note."

"In whose pocket?" asked Mellish of the Fourth, coming into the shop.

Jack Blake looked at him.

"Is that meant for a joke, Mellish?" he asked.

"Ye-es," said Mellish, not quite liking the look in Blake's eye. "It was a joke, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you making that horrid row for?"

"I—I was laughing."

"Well, don't; it sounds like filing a saw. And don't make any more jokes. I don't like them—of that sort."

"Oh, all right! May I have some of the ginger-pop?"

"Certainly!"

Jack Blake suddenly loosened the cork of the bottle, and it flew out and caught Mellish under the chin, and the froth of the liquor spurted over his face.

Mellish gave a yell, and started back.

"Owl! Yow! Owl!"

"Oh, it's only a joke!" grinned Blake. "You're not the only joker in the Fourth Form, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beast!"

"Have some more ginger-pop?"

"Yah, you beast!"

And Mellish, mopping his face with his handkerchief, strode out of the shop. But he was not missed. Mellish was often called the cad of the Fourth, and he was generally disliked. He frequently made little jokes, but they always had an unpleasant edge to them, and left his victims with an uncomfortable feeling. And Jack Blake was about the last fellow in the world to take an ill-natured jape quietly.

Quite a number of fellows heard of what was going on in the tuckshop, and strolled in to lend a hand with the ginger-pop. Skimpole of the Shell and Gore and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn and Kangaroo and Reilly and Kerrish and Kerr came in. The little shop was soon full.

Suddenly a bell began to ring.



"May I have some ginger-pop?" asked Mellish. "Certainly!" said Blake; and he loosened the cork of the bottle. It flew out and hit Mellish under the chin and the froth of the ginger-beer spurted over his face. "Ow! Yow! Ow!" gasped the cad of the Fourth.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "That's the blessed bell!"
 "Never mind, there can't be much more of the pound left," grinned Digby. "How much change, Mrs. Taggles?"
 "Master Blake owes me one-and-fourpence as well as the pound," said Mrs. Taggles.
 "Go it, Blake!"
 Jack Blake grinned, and paid up. Then the juniors swarmed out of the tuckshop, and made their way towards their respective class-rooms.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy Gets the Rats!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was feeling in his pockets again as he crossed the quad with his friends. Skimpole of the Shell tapped him on the shoulder, and the swell of St. Jim's looked round.
 "You remember that I asked you for the loan of some foolscap for writing out my contribution to 'Tom Merry's Weekly'?" began Skimpole.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Well, I have taken it."
 "Eh?"
 "If I remember correctly, you told me to go and eat coke," said Skimpole. "You then left me abruptly. Of course, it was absurd to tell me to attempt to masticate such an unnutritious substance as coke, and I did not even think of doing it. However, I took the foolscap. I thought I would mention it to you."
 "Bai Jove!"
 "It would have been more graceful on your part to give me the foolscap, but I did not mind the trouble of taking it from your desk."

"Bai Jove!"
 "That is all, D'Arcy. I thought I would mention it."
 "Gweat Scott! I don't mind you havin' the papah, Skimmay; but I wegard you as a cheeky ass. I weally think I ought to give you a thwashin'."
 "Really, D'Arcy—"
 Blake grasped his elegant chum by the arm.
 "Buck up, Gussy! The bell's stopped!"
 "Yaas, but I wegard it as a duty to give Skimmay a feahful thwashin'. You see—"
 "Oh, never mind Skimmy! Come on!"
 "Yaas, but—"
 "Take his other fin, Dig!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Skimmay, I shall wefleet ovah this mattah, and if I decide to give you a feahful thwashin', I—"
 But D'Arcy was rushed off before he could finish his remark.
 Skimpole blinked at him through his big spectacles, and went off to the Shell class-room.
 Blake and Dig rushed D'Arcy after the rest of the Fourth towards the Form-room.
 "Pway welease me, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "I will come now. You are wufflin' the sleeves of my jacket, and thwowin' me into quite a fluttah!"
 "Well, come on, then, ass!"
 "I wefuse to be called an ass!"
 Blake snorted, and then went into the class-room. The Fourth were taking their places, and Mr. Lathom was already at his desk. Arthur Augustus sat down on the form beside Blake. There was a faint, peculiar sound
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proceeding from his desk, but D'Arcy did not notice it for the moment.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I wemembah now."

Blake looked at him.

"About the fivah," said D'Arcy. "I put it in my desk."

"Pheh!"

"I weally do not see anythin' to be astonished at, Blake. Why should I not put a fivah in my desk?"

"My hat! If the rats have got out of the bag," murmured Blake, "they'll gnaw everything they see, and—"

"What did you say, Blake?"

"Nothing."

Arthur Augustus turned to his desk again. He took hold of the lid, and raised it, little dreaming what was to follow. Squeak, squeak! Scuttle!

Four big rats leaped out of the desk, and Arthur Augustus gave a yell.

"Yawooh!"

There was an exclamation from the whole class as D'Arcy leaped to his feet. Three of the rats jumped down to the floor and disappeared, but the fourth leaped into the inside pocket of D'Arcy's jacket. D'Arcy always wore the lowest button of his jacket unfastened when he wore a jacket as at the present moment.

The rat found himself in cosy quarters, and remained there.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy. "It's a—a wat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really—" said Mr. Lathom. "Boys!"

"It's a wat!" yelled the swell of St. Jim's. "Yawooh!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled out in front of the class. The rat dropped to the floor, and scuttled off; but D'Arcy did

not see it go, and, under the impression that the rodent was still clinging to him, he tore off his jacket madly.

As he swung the jacket round, the end of it caught Mr. Lathom across the face.

"Oh!" gasped the Form master. He staggered back, and caught hold of his desk for support.

Arthur Augustus, too excited to notice what he had done, shook the jacket frantically in the air.

He waited for the rat to drop out, but as the rat was already gone, that naturally did not happen.

"Blake! Dig! Did you see the wat dwop?"

"No!" roared Dig.

"Bai Jove! It must have got into my waistcoat, then!"

And Arthur Augustus tore off his waistcoat, revealing the whitest of shirts. He shook the waistcoat in the air, but no rat dropped out.

"Bai Jove! Did you see him, deah boys?"

"No, no!"

"Go it!"

"D'Arcy!" gasped Mr. Lathom, thinking that the elegant Fourth-Former had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"D'Arcy, how dare you!"

"It's in your bags, Gussy!" spluttered Digby. "It must be! Go on!"

"Lock the door!" gasped Reilly. "Lock the door, in case Mrs. Mimms or Sarah should come in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy, I forbid you to proceed!"

"But, sir—"

"What do you mean by this—this extraordinary scene?"

"It's a wat, sir!"

"What?"

"There were wats in my desk, sir, and one of them jumped into my clothes, sir. I think it must have got away," said Arthur Augustus, putting up his eyeglass and staring round him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "It got away the moment you jumped up."

"Weally, Blake, you might have told me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy, this is—this is absolutely indecent!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Put on your things immediately!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Immediately!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, vewy well, sir!"

And the swell of St. Jim's donned his waistcoat and jacket.

Mr. Lathom looked at him severely through his spectacles.

"I presume that you have been the victim of an absurd joke, D'Arcy," he said, "otherwise, I should punish you."

"Yaas, sir! Some ass must have put the wats in my desk, sir."

"Take your place at once!"

"With pleasuab, sir!"

And Arthur Augustus sat down. Blake was nearly suffocating.

"You wottah!" whispered D'Arcy. "I shall wegard it as a duty to give you a feahful thwashin' aftah school!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Blake.

"It was you put the wats in my beastlay desk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was thwown into quite a fluttah."

"Oh, hold me, somebody!"

D'Arcy looked into his desk with a frowning brow. His search there occupied him several minutes. There was dust of gnawed wood in the desk, and fragments of paper that the keen teeth of the rodents had torn into shreds. It was mostly blank foolscap, of which the swell of the Fourth had a considerable supply in his desk.

Arthur Augustus turned a serious face towards his chum.

"I suppose you wegard this as a joke, Blake?"

"What-ho!" chuckled Blake. "I told you I had found the rats a comfortable home, you know."

"It is a wathah expensive joke."

"How so?"

"The wats have eaten my fivah!"

"My only hat!"

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"I'm sure there is someone talking," he said. "Silence in the class!"

And no more was said of the fiver or the rats.

CHAPTER 4.

The Missing Fiver!

JACK BLAKE wore a worried look. He gave Mr. Lathom several absent-minded answers, and earned for himself a steadily increasing quantity of lines. But he did not think about the lines. D'Arcy's fiver was weighing on his mind.



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Fivers were fivers, and if the rats had eaten the fiver, it was a serious matter. Five-pound notes did not grow on every bush, and it would be a heavy loss to Arthur Augustus, and to all Study No. 6.

If the fiver was really destroyed, the japo with the rats had turned out to be an expensive one indeed.

Blake was glad enough when lessons were over, and the Fourth Form was dismissed. After Mr. Lathom had left the Form-room he intended to make an examination. It was quite possible that D'Arcy was mistaken, and that the banknote was safe in some corner of the desk.

He made this remark to Arthur Augustus as the Form went out, but the swell of the Fourth shook his head.

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"But you didn't have time to search through the desk, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"I said you didn't have time—"

"There was nothin' in my desk but some foolscap, some books, and the banknote," said D'Arcy. "I pwesume that even you would not have been duffah enough to put the wats in there if there had been anything of importance."

"Well, I looked in, and saw only some books and papers," said Blake. "Of course, if the rats have a taste for Virgil or Toldhunter, there was no reason why they shouldn't have a bite."

"Weally, Blake—"

"But I never saw anything of the banknote."

"It was shoved undah the foolscap."

"I dare say it's there still."

"I've looked."

"Yes; but you're such a blessed juggins, you know. I'll have another look when Lathom's buzzed off."

"I decline to be chawacturised as a juggins. Pway don't poke me in the wibs in that wude and vulgah way, Mellish! I do not like it."

"I want to speak to you, D'Arcy," said Mellish of the Fourth.

"Want some more ginger-pop?" demanded Blake.

Mellish scowled.

"I wasn't speaking to you, Blake. I'm speaking to D'Arcy. I say, D'Arcy, can you lend me a few bob till to-morrow?"

"Sowwy, deah boy. I would with pleasuah, but I am stonay."

Mellish sneered.

"Better say at once that you won't," he said. "I know you had a fiver yesterday, because I saw you take it out of the envelope."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and turned upon Mellish with a fixed look.

"I twust, Mellish," he said, in measured tones—"I twust you do not doubt my word?"

"Oh, no," said Mellish, retreating a pace hastily; "certainly not! But—but I don't see what you can have done with the fiver in that time."

"It is weally no bizney of yours, deah boy."

"N-no; but—"

"As a mattah of fact, it has been caten up by wats," said D'Arcy. "I left it in my desk, and those wats have eaten it."

Mellish gave a whistle.

"More rats!" growled Blake. "I don't believe anything of the sort. More likely you forgot to put it there."

"I distinctly wemembah puttin' it there!"

"Well, you oughtn't to put a fiver in a desk, and leave it unlocked," said Digby. "It was like a careless ass."

"How was I to know that Blake would be playin' the giddy ox?"

"Here, Lathom's gone; let's go and have a look," growled Blake. "I expect it's still there and you've overlooked it."

Mr. Lathom was going down the passage. The chums of the Fourth made for the class-room door again, followed by Mellish.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came along from the Shell Room, and met them at the doorway. They looked in surprise at Blake's worried brow and the grave faces of the others.

"Anythin' wrong?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gussy says the rats have gnawed up a fiver," growled Blake. "I believe he's talking out of his hat, as usual."

"Most likely."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Let's go and see," said Tom Merry, pushing open the door of the Fourth Form Room. "Silly ass to leave a fiver in an unlocked desk, anyway!"

"Wats!"

Blake threw up the lid of D'Arcy's desk. There were plain traces of rats inside. The cloth bag Blake had carried them in was gnawed through, and a great deal of wood had been gnawed by the rodents in their attempts to

get out. The foolscap had been gnawed in some places, and the books, too, had suffered.

Blake turned out the contents of the desk, with a great deal of dust of gnawed paper and wood. But of the five-pound note there was no trace.

"Pway don't wowwy, deah boy!" said D'Arcy kindly. "It weally doesn't mattah! It only means bein' short of tin for a bit, and I don't mind."

Blake was examining the gnawed paper.

"I don't believe the fiver was here!" he exclaimed. "You must have put it somewhere else."

"Yaas, it was, deah boy. Now I wemembah, Dig was with me when I put it there, and he saw me lay the foolscap ovah it."

Dig nodded assent.

"I remember," he said.

Tom Merry looked curiously into the desk.

"Sure you didn't move it afterwards?" he asked.

"Quite sure, deah boy!"

"Well, if you didn't, someone did," said Tom decidedly.

"I'll wager a cricket bat against a penny stamp that the rats never had it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What makes you think so?" asked Manners.

"The rats wouldn't eat it. Why should they? They were gnawing round on all sides, trying to find a way out, and they may have gnawed the banknote along with the paper. But there would be some fragments of it left."

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course there would!" exclaimed Blake, with a look of great relief. "If they had scoffed the fiver, it stands to reason they would have left traces of it among this dust. There isn't a fragment of banknote paper here; I know that."

"We could easily tell it if there was," said Lowther. "Banknote paper is recognised easily enough. Let's look through the fragments."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

The juniors looked carefully through the gnawed fragments in the desk. But there was not the slightest scrap of banknote paper to be discovered. Had the rats eaten the whole of it, without leaving a vestige? It was unlikely.

"But," said D'Arcy, as they ceased to look, "if the wats didn't eat the banknote—"

"And they jolly well didn't!" said Tom Merry.

"Then where is it?"

CHAPTER 5.

Unpleasant for Blake!

DEAD silence followed D'Arcy's question. It opened up a new aspect of the case.

The banknote had been in the desk, as D'Arcy declared, and as Dig declared, too. If the rats had not, indeed, disposed of it, where was it? It certainly was not there now.

Where was the banknote?

The juniors looked at each other, uneasiness growing in every face.

"Well, that's a blessed conundrum!" said Blake, at last. "I suppose Arthur Augustus Fathead D'Arcy removed it, and forgot all about it."

D'Arcy shook his head quietly.

"I did not, deah boy."

"Well, the rats didn't have it," said Mellish, in a rather loud voice.

Mellish's eyes had a curious greenish glitter in them. The cad of the Fourth seemed to be thinking thoughts that afforded him a peculiar satisfaction.

"No; that seems clear," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus' brow clouded.

"But—but— Bai Jove!" he muttered. "If the wats didn't have it, you know, somebody must have taken it froom the desk."

"Impossible!" said Tom Merry, his cheeks flushing.

"Yaas, wathah! It seems to me imposs. The wats must have had it."

"Not likely," said Monty Lowther. "Some silly ass must have taken it for a joke."

"Wathah a wotten joke, I think, deah boy."

"Well, there's no other explanation."

"There might be," said Mellish.

Every eye was immediately turned on Mellish.

"What do you mean?" said Tom Merry quietly. "Do you mean to say you think there's a thief in the School House?"

"I shouldn't like to say that. But it's no good blinking at facts. You know as well as I do that the rats didn't gnaw up the banknote without leaving a trace behind."

"Yes, but—"

"It looks to me as if somebody has taken it. No gammon, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,332.

you know. You know perfectly well that it looks the same to you," said Mellish coolly.

"I hope not."

"What's the good of hoping? It's the truth we want."

"I don't see what it's got to do with you, anyway," said Manners.

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"It's got to do with all of us if there's a thief in the School House," he said. "Of course, if you fellows want to hush it up—"

"Who wants to hush it up?"

"Well, let's have it out, then. It's easy enough to trace the chap who took it, if it was taken."

"How?" asked Tom Merry quietly, his eyes steadily fixed upon the face of the cad of the Fourth.

"Easily. Find out if any fellow who hadn't much money lately has become flush of tin," said Mellish. "That's the easy way. If a chap has stolen a fiver, I suppose it would be because he was in want of money."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, and he wouldn't want to keep it to use as a parlour ornament or a pipe-lighter, would he? He would cash it, and spend the money."

"Yaas, that's so!"

"So if you see a chap who was broke yesterday, and flush of money to-day, make him explain where the tin came from," said Mellish. "That's my idea."

"It's not a bad idea," said Lowther. "I do believe Mellish has some underhand, caddish notion in suggesting it, but it's a good idea, all the same."

Mellish gave Lowther a venomous glance.

"If you find such a chap as I've said, make him explain," he said. "If he can't account for the money, look further. If he tells some cock-and-bull story to account for it, you'll know you've got him."

"There is weally somethin' in what Mellish says, deah boys. As you know, I have devoted a considerable amount of time in twainin' as an amatuah detective, and that is weally the course I should map out for a beginnin'."

"What do you say, Blake?"

Jack Blake started out of a brown study.

"It's not for me to say anything," he said, in a low, bitter tone. "Can you fellows see what Mellish is driving at?"

"No," said Tom Merry. "What do you mean?"

Blake smiled bitterly.

"I was stony yesterday, and flush of money to-day," he replied. "That's all."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake. I suppose you don't think anybody would be ass enough to suspect you?"

"Mellish does."

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't suspect anybody," he said. "As for what Blake says, I can only say, cap fit, cap wear. Blake has pointed out the facts, anyway, that he was stony yesterday and flush to-day. But, of course, he's had a remittance."

"I haven't had a remittance," said Blake.

"But you can explain how you got the money?"

"I won't explain to you," said Blake contemptuously.

"You remember what I told you, you fellows. I found that pound note in the lining of an old jacket."

"My dear chap, it's not necessary to explain to us," said Tom Merry. "Nobody would be idiotic enough to suspect you of boning another chap's tin. The only fellow here likely to do a thing of that sort is Mellish."

The cad of the Fourth turned almost green.

"You—you accuse me!"

"Nothing of the sort. But I won't allow you to make insinuations against a chap whose boots you're not fit to clean," said Tom Merry, his eyes flashing. "If I were Blake I'd kick you out of the room."

"Oh, all right!" said Mellish. "I don't say anything, but the fellows will draw their own conclusions. I don't say Blake took the fiver, and changed it, and made up a yarn about finding a pound note in the lining of an old jacket."

"Get out, you cad!"

"I'm going. I don't say, either, that Blake shoved the rats in the desk to make people think they had gnawed up the fiver to cover his tracks. Others fellows may say it."

Blake drew a deep breath.

"You cad!" yelled Digby.

He ran towards Mellish. The junior dodged out of the door and ran, slamming it behind him. By the time Dig got out into the passage Mellish was out of sight.

Digby returned wrathful into the Form-room. Blake was standing by the open desk, looking pale and worried.

"Don't be an ass, old chap," Tom Merry said awkwardly. "It's rotten, I know; but we all know Mellish is a low cad, and nobody at St. Jim's would listen to him."

Blake nodded without speaking.

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"I shall make it a point to thwash Mellish," D'Arcy remarked.

"But somebody took the fiver," said Jack Blake quietly. "Dig says he saw Gussy put it in the desk."

"Yes, I did," said Dig miserably. "He put it there right enough."

"And Gussy is sure he never moved it?"

"Yaas, I must say I am sure on that point, Blake, deah boy."

"Then it's been taken. You fellows all think that the rats couldn't have gnawed it up without leaving a trace behind."

"Well, one can't be sure," said Lowther. "Of course, the rats may have eaten it."

Blake shook his head.

"I don't think so myself," he said. "The rats would have left a fragment or two. No; the banknote was taken from the desk."

"I can't believe that there's a thief in the School House," said Tom Merry, shaking his head decidedly.

"It's barely possible that some ass has taken it for a joke, just to frighten Gussy," said Digby. "It's not likely, but it's possible."

"We'll find out," said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And, with decidedly gloomy faces, the juniors quitted the Form-room.

CHAPTER 6.

Gore Declines!

GORE of the Shell sat in his study.

The big, burly fellow, who had been called the bully of the Shell, but who had of late less and less deserved that title, sat in the armchair, his hands in his pockets, in deep thought.

He was alone in the study. Skimpole, with whom he shared it, was out somewhere.

Gore was thinking, and there was, for once, a pleasant expression upon his face.

Gore had found life much pleasanter of late at St. Jim's. Since the time when he had been "sacked," Gore had tried to turn over a new leaf; and, like most fellows who try hard enough, he had succeeded to a great extent.

And friendly looks from fellows whose friendship was of value seemed an ample compensation for the lack of his former amusements of kicking and cuffing the fags, and playing ill-natured tricks upon all and sundry.

Gore started as the door of his study was suddenly flung open.

He looked round. Mellish of the Fourth came in hurriedly, and closed the door behind him. He came over towards Gore with a flush on his face and a sparkle in his eyes. He was evidently labouring under great excitement.

Gore stared at him excitedly. Mellish grinned.

"News!" exclaimed the sneak of the Fourth.

"Oh!" said Gore, without much interest.

Mellish had been his chum, but their relations had been decidedly strained of late. The coldness was growing on Gore's part, much to the amazement of Mellish, who simply couldn't understand it.

That Gore was really desirous of leading a better life Mellish did not believe for a moment. He had never felt any such desire himself, and he did not credit it in another. He only imagined that Gore was playing some "little game," though why, and for what object, Mellish had to confess that he was not keen enough to guess.

"It's good news," said Mellish—"for us, I mean!"

"How—for us?"

Mellish lowered his voice.

"Look here, Gore, it's about time you let me into the secret, you know."

The Shell fellow stared at him.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"Oh, you know what I mean, well enough!" said Mellish impatiently. "You can take in Tom Merry and the rest with this goody-goody business, but you can't pull the wool over my eyes! I'm too fly!"

Gore's eyes gleamed.

"Is that so?"

"Well, rather!" said Mellish, with emphasis. "I can't quite see what your little game is, but, of course, you don't expect me to believe the thing's genuine?"

Gore shook his head.

"No," he said quietly; "I don't expect you to believe it's genuine. So long as Tom Merry and the others believe it's genuine, that's enough for me."

"Good! You admit it's a little game, then?"

"No, I don't. I don't want to talk to you about it,



"My only hat!" "Great Scott!" "Phew!" The three ejaculations were fired off like crackers by Jack Blake & Co. as Gussy came into the study. For the usually elegant Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked a wreck, and his face bore signs of hard fighting. "How on earth did you get like that?" asked Blake.

Mellish, or about anything else for that matter. I'd be glad if you'd keep out of my study."

Mellish's eyes glittered.

"Then you don't want to hear the news?"

"Not particularly. I expect it's some more of your rot!"

"It's right enough this time!" said Mellish eagerly. "I was there in the Form-room and saw them. Look here, Gore, we were both up against Blake and his friends, as hard as we could be, before you started this new wheeze. Blessed if I know what you're doing it for! But that doesn't matter now. Look here, here's our chance against Blake."

"Against Blake?"

"Yes. He's a thief."

Gore gave a jump.

"Blake a thief! Are you mad?"

"No, I'm not; though Blake must have been to take a five-pound note," said Mellish coolly. "He put some rats in D'Arcy's desk, and they gnawed up a lot of things, and Blake hoped the fellows would believe they had gnawed up the banknote among other things. See?"

Gore rose to his feet.

"Do you mean to say that D'Arcy has missed a bank-note?"

"Yes. It was taken from his desk—a fiver."

"Taken! Are you sure?"

"Well, they all agree on that point. Even Blake's own friends say that the rats couldn't possibly have gnawed it up without leaving a fragment behind to show that it had been there."

"But—but Blake—"

"You remember him standing treat to-day?" said Mellish, with great satisfaction. "That was out of the stolen money, of course. He was stony yesterday."

"I expect he could explain how he came by the tin."

"He has explained," grinned Mellish; "but it won't wash. Says he found a pound note in the lining of an old jacket. Pretty thick, eh?"

Gore did not reply.

"Of course, he stole the fiver, and shoved the rats in the desk to cover up his tracks," said Mellish.

Gore looked the cad of the Fourth steadily in the eyes.

"You don't believe that!" he said.

"How do you know? Why shouldn't I?"

"Do you believe it?"

"Never mind whether I do or not," said Mellish. "The fellows will believe it easily enough if we push the yarn well. Can't you see that this is our chance to pull Blake down off his perch? He'll never get over this if we handle the matter all right."

Gore set his lips hard.

"What do you suggest doing?" he asked.

"Now you're talking!" exclaimed Mellish, with great satisfaction. "Of course, I knew you were only humbugging all the time. It's easy enough for us—easy as rolling off a log. I'll manage it in the Fourth, and you in the Shell. We'll spread the yarn all over the House, and let the New House hear of it, too. Figgins & Co. of the New House will take it up, and there will be no end of a row. We'll make the juniors demand a general inquiry—a House committee to look into the matter."

"And then?"

"Well, that will be pretty rough on those rotters, for a start," said Mellish, with a grin. "You see, it's D'Arcy's banknote, and Blake's stolen it; that will make trouble in Study No. 6 itself. We'll have Blake up before a meeting of the juniors and make him explain, and make D'Arcy accuse him."

"Anything else?"

"Well, if we make fuss enough, it will get to the Head's ears at the finish, and he will inquire into the matter."

"And then?"

"I don't see how Blake can avoid being sacked from the school!"

"Sacked!" said Gore, with a start.

"Certainly! The Head sacked you for imitating a fellow's hand in a letter, for a jape. He let you come back; but he wouldn't let a thief come back. If we work this well, Blake will be kicked out of St. Jim's."

"If we work it well," said Gore thoughtfully.

"Exactly!"

Gore crossed the room to where a dog-whip hung on the wall, and took it down. He rang the lash in the air with a sharp crack.

Mellish watched him in wonder.

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

"I'm going to show you how I appreciate your suggestion," said Gore.

"Look here! I—"

Mellish made a wild spring towards the door. But Gore was too quick for him. His powerful hand was on the Fourth-Former's collar, and Mellish was swung back into the study. He gave a yell as Gore whirled him across the room.

"Stop! Oh! Ow! Yow!"

Lash, lash, lash!

The dog-whip lashed round Mellish's body and legs till he shrieked and yelled with pain. He tried to jerk himself loose, but in vain. Gore's grip on his collar was like iron. Mellish shrieked and struggled and yelled. And still the lash rose and fell.

"You cad!" gasped Gore, breathless with his exertions. "You cowardly worm! You rat! Take that, and that, and that! You worm!"

"Ow! Leggo! Yaroo!"

"And that, and that, and that!"

"Help! Murder! Yow!"

The door of the study opened, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, stared angrily in. He looked in amazement at the scene before him.

"Gore!" he almost shouted.

Gore released Mellish, who shrank, whining and blubbering, into a corner.

The big Sixth-Former fixed his eyes sternly on Gore.

"Gore, you are bullying again, then!"

Gore did not reply. He hung up the dog-whip, and then stood before the captain of the school, silent, breathing hard.

Kildare's scornful eyes ran over him as he stood.

"I thought I saw a change in you for the better, Gore," he said. "I suppose the lesson you got by being expelled has worn off."

Gore winced.

"Why were you thrashing Mellish in that brutal manner?" demanded Kildare.

"He knows," said Gore.

"I don't!" gasped Mellish. "I—I never did anything. I—"

"You will have to be cured of your bullying, Gore, whether Mellish did anything to provoke you or not!" said Kildare curtly. "Follow me!"

Gore followed the captain of St. Jim's downstairs without a word.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was standing at the door of his study, evidently waiting for Kildare. The noise made by Mellish had reached his ears.

"Well, Kildare?"

"It was Gore, sir, at his old tricks."

Mr. Railton turned a stern brow upon Gore.

"I thought so! Have you any excuse to make, Gore?" Gore hesitated.

"Come into my study," said the Housemaster.

Gore obeyed. Mr. Railton picked up a cane, and faced the bully of the Shell with a clear, scornful glance.

"Well, Gore, have you anything to say?"

"No-no, sir."

"Then bend over!"

There were six cuts for Gore, and he took them without flinching. Then he quietly vacated the Housemaster's study. He left Mr. Railton with a somewhat puzzled expression on his face. Mr. Railton could not quite make Gore out.

CHAPTER 7.

Mellish is Hurt!

"I SAY, Blake!"

"Hallo!"

"Will you lend me a few bob till Saturday?"

"Sorry, I can't!"

"Oh, come off!" said Mellish urgently. "I am hard up, you know, and I always pay my debts."

Jack Blake shook his head.

He was standing in the doorway of the School House, looking out into the sunny quad, but his brow was not sunny.

The face that was usually one of the most cheerful at St. Jim's was darkly clouded over. Jack Blake had a weight on his mind.

The banknote that had disappeared from D'Arcy's desk was a nightmare to him. It was the following day, and nothing had been heard of the banknote.

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It had not turned up, as Blake had hoped against hope that it would.

What had become of it?

The rats had almost certainly not destroyed it. It must have been taken from the desk. Who had taken it?

Was there a thief in the School House? It seemed impossible. And yet—

Mellish was eyeing Blake narrowly. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was standing near at hand, talking to Darrell of the Sixth. Both the seniors were near enough to hear what the juniors said.

As yet the affair of the banknote, openly discussed among the juniors, had not reached the ears of the Upper Forms.

But Mellish was fully determined that it should.

He had an opportunity now of wreaking his long-desired vengeance upon the fellow who had treated him with the contempt he deserved, and he was not likely to allow it to pass.

"Look here, Blake—"

Blake turned to him impatiently. He did not like Mellish, and he knew that Mellish suspected him, or affected to suspect him, of taking the banknote.

"Look here, Mellish!" he exclaimed. "I can't lend you any money, so let me alone. And don't speak to me—I don't like it!"

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"You ought to be jolly glad to get somebody to speak to you, under the circumstances," he said, with a sneer.

Jack Blake faced him with flashing eyes, his fists clenched convulsively.

"What do you mean, Mellish?"

The cad of the Fourth gave another shrug.

"You know jolly well what I mean!"

"I don't!"

"And as for being short of money, you jolly well know where to get it when you want it!" said Mellish.

Blake's chest heaved.

"That can only mean one thing," he said.

"Take it as you like!"

"You cowardly worm!" said Blake. "You know—you must know that I never touched Gussy's banknote!"

Mellish sneered.

"As for your speaking to me," went on Blake, "if I were a thief I should feel ashamed of being on speaking terms with a fellow like you!"

"You won't be on speaking terms with any fellow at St. Jim's, I expect, soon!"

"Put up your hands, Mellish!"

"Not here."

"Yes, here and now. Put them up!"

"I won't! I—"

Smack!

"Will you put them up now?" shouted Blake.

Mellish reeled back from the sounding smack from Blake's open palm.

The cad of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was little gifted with courage, but even he could not take that "lying down."

He put up his hands, feeling a little braver than usual from the knowledge that two prefects were close at hand, and would certainly not permit a fight to continue in the House hall.

Kildare and Darrell turned round and stared in amazement at the juniors. Blake was hitting out furiously. He received Mellish's taps without even noticing them, and landed out right and left in return.

In three seconds Mellish was lying on the floor, feeling as if an earthquake had happened, and he had been in the midst of it.

"Stop that!" roared Kildare.

He strode to the spot, and grasped Blake by the shoulder. "You young sweep! What do you mean by fighting here?"

Blake panted for breath.

"I'll fight anybody—anywhere—who calls me a thief!"

"What?"

Mellish staggered to his feet. His face was sickly in hue, between fear and rage, and the dark bruises on it showed up blackly against the skin.

Kildare released Blake, and turned a stern glance on the cad of the Fourth.

"Did you call Blake a thief, Mellish?"

"No."

"Well, he implied it," said Blake; "that's enough."

"It's a guilty conscience," sneered Mellish.

Blake made a fierce step forward, but Darrell caught him by the shoulder.

"Hold on, Blake!"

"You heard what he said."

"Keep your temper, lad."

"What does it mean?" said Kildare sternly. "What was that about a banknote, too? Tell me what it means, Blake. Is a banknote missing?"

"Yes."

"Whom does it belong to?"
 "D'Arcy."
 "He has lost it?"
 "I don't know."
 "It was taken from his desk," said Mellish. "Blake went to his desk, and put some rats in it. Then D'Arcy missed the banknote, and Blake started a yarn that the rats must have eaten it."
 "You lying cad!" broke in Blake savagely. "I said from the first that I didn't think the rats had eaten it."
 Mellish shrugged his shoulders.
 "Oh, I dare say you can vary the yarn to suit yourself!" he said. "Anyway, the banknote's gone, and Blake was in funds immediately afterwards, though he had been stony before."

"I suppose he received a remittance," said Darrell.
 Mellish chuckled.
 "Ask him."
 "I found a pound note in the lining of an old jacket," said Blake, and his voice faltered, and he turned red as he spoke. He realised how weak the explanation must seem, under the circumstances.
 Kildare looked at him curiously.
 "Anybody see you find it?" he asked.
 "No; I was alone at the time."
 "It's unfortunate. And nothing has been seen of D'Arcy's banknote?"
 "Nothing."

"Well, you'd better all look for it. I've no doubt it will turn up. I know that D'Arcy is very careless with his money. As for you, Mellish," went on the captain of St. Jim's sternly, "you had better be careful what you say. You implied, if you did not say, that Blake had taken the banknote!"

"Well, it looks like it, doesn't it?"
 "Never mind what it looks like. I know perfectly well that Blake is not a thief. There is no fellow in the School House I would not sooner suspect."

The tears started to Blake's eyes.
 He was feeling so downhearted and miserable, reading or imagining suspicion in every face, and those words of confidence went straight to his heart.

"Thank you, Kildare," he faltered. "I—I give you my word that I don't know anything about the banknote."

"I'm sure you don't, Blake."
 "And I'm sure of it, too," said Darrell. "It's absurd to suppose for a moment that Blake would have touched it."

"Well, I only say what it looks like," mumbled Mellish.
 "Be careful what you say, that's all," said Kildare.
 "Mind, if I catch you spreading any caddish foolery of this sort about the school, I shall make it warm for you."

"I—I—"
 "Oh, get away!"
 Mellish walked away, gritting his teeth. Kildare dropped a hand upon Blake's shoulder.

"Don't be downhearted, kid. I know this will turn out all right."

"Thank you, Kildare," faltered the junior. "It's—it's awfully decent of you to stand by a chap like this!"

"I know you are too decent to touch anybody else's money, Blake, that's all. I hope the banknote will turn up soon."

And Kildare strolled away with Darrell.
 The two prefects left Blake much lighter-hearted. But there was still a weight upon the junior's mind. Where, after all, was the banknote?

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy in the Wars!

"MY only hat!"
 "Great Scott!"
 "Phew!"
 The three ejaculations were fired off like crackers at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he came into Study No. 6.

Afternoon school was over, and Blake, Herries, and Digby were in the study. They had been discussing the missing banknote, and trying to form some theory to account for its mysterious disappearance from D'Arcy's desk.

But they forgot even the banknote as the door of the study opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in.

The swell of St. Jim's presented an unusual and startling sight.

Usually D'Arcy's appearance was almost overflowing with elegance, and dandies in the Sixth Form had given up trying to tie their neckties as D'Arcy tied his, and to wear their clothes with such absolute elegance.

But where was D'Arcy's elegance now?
 The perfectly fitting Etons were baggy and dusty. The jacket was ripped up at the back. The collar was torn out

(Continued on the next page.)



Do you know a good rib-tickler? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). A half-a-crown will be yours if the joke is published in this column.

DEER, DEER, DEER!

Jones: "Did you hear the joke about the three stags?"
 Bones: "No."
 Jones: "Dear, dear, dear!"
 P. KELLY, 7, McDowall Street, Johnstone, Renfrewshire, Scotland.

COMFORTING.

Nervous Old Lady: "Are people ever lost in this river?"
 Boatman: "Bless you, no, mum. We always find 'em next day!"
 M. PHILLIPS, Cartrefre, Conway Road, Penmaenmawr, North Wales.

MAKING SURE.

Centre-forward: "Gosh, I could kick myself for missing that penalty!"
 Captain: "Better let me do it—you might miss again!"
 W. STEPHENSON, 8, James' Park, Burntisland, Fife.

HE SAID IT!

Conceited Artist: "This, sir, is my best picture. Five thousand wouldn't buy it."
 Candid Critic: "You're right—and I'm one of the five thousand!"
 J. BOYD, 457, Kingspark Avenue, Bankhead, Rutherglen, Glasgow.

NOW AND AGAIN.

Old Lady: "Well, my poor man, what do you work at?"
 Tramp: "Intervals, mum!"
 L. D. HUNTER, 10, St. Helier's Avenue, Hounslow, Middlesex.

THE AWAKENING.

Big Game Hunter (who is boasting of his experiences in Africa): "I gripped the lion by his throat and we rolled over and over—"
 Bored Listener: "And then you fell out of bed!"
 J. WEST, 32, Fernthorpe Road, Streatham, London, S.W.16.

SNAPPY.

Diner: "Two sausages, mashed potatoes, and plenty of gravy, please."
 Waiter (calling down to kitchen): "Two airships on a cloud and make it rainy!"
 E. LOVE, 8, Moray Road, Tollington Park, Hornsey, London, N.

BACON TO ORDER.

Mike: "Begorra, Pat, that's a queer idea ye've got—feedin' pigs one day an' starvin' them the next!"
 Pat: "Sure, Mike, I likes me bacon wid a streak o' fat an' a streak o' lean!"
 P. CARTLAND, 41, Dale View Avenue, Chingford, London, E.4.

FOOTBALLS FOR JOKES!

From next Wednesday, TWO "GEM" FOOTBALLS will be awarded each week for the two best jokes that appear in this column, and the usual award of half-a-crown for all others published. Pile in with your jokes, chums, and try to win a football!

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and hanging by a single stud. The necktie was streaming over D'Arcy's left shoulder.

There was a cut on his lip, and a bruise round his right eye, which showed the strongest possible symptoms of closing.

The chums of the Fourth stared at him in blank amazement.

"Gussy!"

"Adolphus!"

"Gus!"

"Do I look vewy wotten, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"My only panama hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Rotten! That isn't the word! Look in the glass!"

D'Arcy crossed to the mantelpiece.

"Bai Jove!"

"How on earth did you get like that, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! I am afraid I do look wathah wotten."

"How did you get like that? Have you been fighting?" demanded Digby.

"Well, as a mattah of fact, deah boy, I shouldn't be likely to get like this unless I had been fighting," said Arthur Augustus.

He tried to jam his monocle into his eye, as usual, but failed in the attempt. The bruise round the eye prevented the rim from fitting in its usual place.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's happened?"

"Whom have you been fighting with, you naughty boy?" demanded Digby, in a tone of great severity.

"I wufuse to be chawacterised as a naughty boy, Dig."

"What was the row about?" asked Blake.

"The wow, deah boy?"

"Yes, the row. What was it about?"

"About, deah boy?"

"Yes, ass—"

"I wufuse to be called an ass!"

"You utter duffer!"

"I decline to be addressed as a duffah!"

"What was the row about?" shrieked Blake. "Why can't you explain?"

"Explain?"

"Yes, explain! EXPLAIN—explain!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Do you know what the word means? Or shall I get a dictionary and expound it to you?"

"I am quite awah what the word means, Blake."

"Then why don't you explain?"

"Explain what?"

"What you've been scrapping about?"

"Oh, weally, you see—"

"What on earth's the giddy mystery?" demanded Digby.

"Why can't you tell us what you've been fighting about?"

"Well, you see—"

"Well, whom have you been fighting with?" asked Herries.

"There was Mellish first—"

"Mellish!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Anybody else?"

"Yaas, Skeet of the Fourth!"

"What on earth were you fighting with Skeet for?"

"Well, you see—"

"Anybody else?" asked Dig, as Gussy hesitated.

"Yaas, wathah! There was Pweece of the New House."

"My hat! You've been having a warm time!" exclaimed Blake, in wonder.

"I am not a quawwelsome chap, deah boy."

"Did you fight them one at a time, or all at once?" asked Digby.

"One at a time."

"And they all licked you, I presume?"

Again D'Arcy tried to jam his monocle into his eye to give Dig a withering glare, and again he failed in the attempt.

"They did not lick me," he said, with dignity.

"Then you licked them?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good old Gus!"

"It was a dwawn battle with Hancock, I think, and honahs were easy as wegards Weilly," said Arthur Augustus. "I licked the othahs."

"My only hat! What on earth have you been fighting with Hancock and Reilly for?"

"Weilly made an impertinent wemark concernin' the state of my wight eye, and Hancock giggled in a wude mannah."

"And the others?"

"The othahs?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I have pointed out to you before, Blake, that I absolutely decline to be called an ass! I should be sowwy to have to thwash you aftah thwashin' those wottahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you will not dwive me to it."

"You haven't explained yet how you came to be fighting with Mellish and Skeets and Preece," said Digby.

"Bai Jove! I feel wathah wotten!"

"Is it a secret, then?"

"Not exactly a secwet, deah boy."

"Then explain."

"I wondah whether this bwuise will go down before to-morrow," said Arthur Augustus, anxiously surveying his darkened eye in the glass.

"If you don't jolly well explain yourself quick, you will have another optic to match it," said Blake darkly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Tell us what the row was about?"

"Undah the cires, I must wufuse to yield to thweats."

"You utter ass—"

"I decline—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake. "I never knew such an ass! You'd better go and borrow some beefsteak to shove on that eye, or it will be the size of an onion by to-morrow."

"Yaas, wathah! That's wathah a good ideah!"

And D'Arcy left the study.

The chums of the Fourth looked at one another in wonder.

"What on earth has he been up to?" exclaimed Blake. "Gussy isn't usually the kind of chap to get into five quarrels in a single evening."

"Blessed if I don't go and look into the matter!" said Dig.

"You coming?"

Blake shook his head.

"No; I'll stay here."

Jack Blake had stayed in his study a great deal that day. He felt an uncomfortable sense of being suspected when he was among his schoolfellows. In his study, at

Potts, the Office Boy!



least, he was safe from curious glances and sly innuendoes. Digby understood, and he left the study with a nod, leaving Blake chatting with Herries.

CHAPTER 9.

Signs of Battle!

DIGBY was absent from the study ten minutes.

Jack Blake glanced round when the door opened, and gave a whoop of astonishment. Herries stared as if his eyes would bulge out of his head.

Digby had left the study looking very neat and clean, as usual. He returned to it in a state more woeful than that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

His nose was red and swollen, his cheek bruised, his left eyes closed, his hair tousled, and his clothes covered with dust.

He came in quietly, and dropped into his chair with a gasp.

His chums stared at him blankly.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "What the—what the—"

"What's happened?" gasped Herries.

"Nothing!"

"Nothing! What do you mean?"

"Oh, I had a little row!"

"With whom?"

"Well, I've had a tussle with three or four fellows," said Digby. "It's all right. I gave as good as I got."

"But what was it about?"

"About?" stammered Digby.

"Yes. What have you been fighting for?"

"Oh, it was a sort of argument!"

"Blessed if you're not as mysterious as Gussy!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Why on earth can't you explain yourself?"

"Well, you see—"

"You've been quarrelling with somebody?"

"Ye-es."

"What was the cause?"

"The cause?"

"Yes, the cause!" howled Blake.

"You see—you see—er—"

"You silly ass! You're as big a duffer as Gussy! What's gone wrong in the School House this evening?" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.

"Nothing, but—"

"Oh, you make me tired!"

"It's all right," said Digby. "I had a little dust up over a—difference of opinion with some fellows."

"Rats!"

"That's what it was, really."

"What was the difference of opinion about?" asked Herries.

"Oh, nothing in particular!"

Blake and Herries looked at one another. They could not understand it in the least. First D'Arcy and then Digby had returned to the study in this state, and declined to explain how it came about.

Herries rose from his chair.

"For goodness' sake go and see what's the matter?" exclaimed Blake. "I shall think the fellows are all off their chumps soon."

"What-ho!" said Herries.

He quitted Study No. 6. Digby dusted and brushed

himself down, and restored himself to as much tidiness as possible.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy re-entered the study, looking somewhat improved in appearance. He had changed his clothes, but he could not change his skin, and the dark bruises showed up with startling distinctness upon his face.

"Do I look vewy wotten now, deah boys?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "Your own mother wouldn't know you, and Cousin Ethel wouldn't be seen out with you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You look a perfect horror!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"I'm blessed if I think we ought to allow you in a respectable study!" said Blake. "People seeing you come in and out will think we're a lot of rowdy hooligans."

"Weally—"

The door opened and Herries came in.

He sank down in the nearest chair, gasping.

His collar was torn out, his clothes were in disorder, his nose was streaming red, and there was a bruise under his eye.

Blake stared at him, almost petrified.

"Herries!"

"Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh!"

"My only hat! Have you been fighting, too?"

"Ow!"

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy looked at one another. Blake stared at all three in blank wonder and astonishment.

"What on earth's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Whom have you been fighting with, Herries?"

"Oh, some of the fellows!"

"What about?"

"A—a—about?"

"Yes, duffer! What about?"

"Oh, a—a—difference of opinion."

"Well, of all the frabjous asses I think you three take the biscuit!" said Blake wrathfully.

"Well, you see—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's like this—"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Blake crossly. "You make me tired."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Hallo! Who's that? Come in!"

There was a tap at the door.

In response to Blake's invitation the door was opened and three juniors entered the study.

They were the Terrible Three.

The Terrible Three were not dandies at any time, but they were usually neat and clean; but they were not looking neat and clean at the present moment.

Each of them bore the signs of recent warfare, in torn collars, bruised faces, and tousled hair.

Jack Blake simply stared.

"Tom Merry! Have you been fighting, too?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"Well, I had a little row with a chap."

"And you, Manners?"

"Well, you see," said Manners hesitatingly. "I had a difference of opinion with a chap in the Fifth."

"And you, Lowther?"

A MISFIRE!



"It was a little dust-up," said Lowther.
 "I suppose the whole blessed House is going off its dot!" said Blake. "I presume you can't explain what the row was about any more than those duffers there."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off! I—"

"Shut up! What was the row about, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, just a row, you know," said Tom vaguely.

"Well, of all the asses—"

There was a knock at the door again.

"Come in!" rapped out Blake crossly.

But the door did not open.

Instead, a slip of paper was pushed underneath, and there was a sound of retreating footsteps in the passage.

The juniors stared at the paper.

Why anybody should take that method of communicating with the occupants of the study was a mystery.

"I suppose it's a note for one of us," said Blake, at last.

"Pick it up, Gussy!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus picked up the paper. There was a single word scrawled on it, and D'Arcy's face went crimson as he read it. He crushed the note savagely in his hand.

"What is it?" asked Blake.

"Oh, nothing in particular, deah boy!"

"Show it to me!"

"It wouldn't intwest you, Blake."

"Do you mean that it's a note for you?"

"Oh, no; not exactly!"

"Then show it to me, ass!"

"I would wathah not!"

"What do you mean? Why?"

"It's a piece of wotten cheek, that's all."

"Show it to me."

Blake's manner was imperative. Arthur Augustus hesitated for a moment, and then, slowly and reluctantly, opened out the paper. The juniors looked at it, and Blake's face went white as he read what was written there.

It was one word.

"Thief!"

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole t' e Detective !

JACK BLAKE dropped the paper.

There was a painful silence in the study.

It was Tom Merry who broke it.

"Tear that paper up, somebody!"

Herries picked up the paper, tore it into little pieces, and flung them in the grate.

"Don't take any notice of that, Blake."

Blake nodded without replying.

"It's a cad's trick," said Tom Merry. "The rotter who shoved that under the door was afraid to show his face."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake nodded again.

He did not speak.

The junior, who was usually as keen as steel, and had all his wits about him, seemed to be stunned and dazed.

"That's really what we came about," said Tom Merry uncomfortably. "We want to speak to you about the matter, Blake. We think it ought to be looked into."

"Yes."

Blake's voice was hoarse and strange.

"I suppose that's what you chaps have been fighting about?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you see," said Tom Merry, "we agreed that if any chap hinted that you took the banknote, we would thump him at once, and try to knock a little sense into him; and a lot of chaps hinted it, so—"

"So there were rows."

"Exactly!"

"That's how it was," said Herries. "A Fifth Form chap said so in my hearing, and I let him have it under the chin. Of course, I was licked."

"You acted quite wightly, and I approve of your conduct, Hewies."

"But it's no good punching fellows' heads," said Manners. "You can't convince them that way. What's really needed is to find out what became of that blessed banknote."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What did become of it?" said Blake helplessly. "It's disappeared."

"It must be found."

"I suppose somebody took it," said Tom Merry. "We seem to be agreed that the rats couldn't have eaten it without leaving some fragments behind."

"That's extremely pwob, anyway."

"Then who took it?"

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"Blessed if I can guess."

"There's not a fellow in the School House I should like to suspect of being a thief," said Tom Merry. "Mellish is the meanest rotter, but I hardly think he would steal; besides, he's too cunning. He knows that a note could be traced by the number, and he would be afraid to try and pass it."

"I don't think it was Mellish."

"Then who?"

"I don't know."

"That's the hardest point," said Lowther. "The chap who took it may be afraid to pass it because of the number being known, and he may keep it back for weeks, or perhaps never have the nerve to pass it, and all the time—"



In a moment the enraged Blake had seized Mellish and had boys, ignoring the presence of Mr. Lathom. "Ow!" yelled gasped Blake, pomm

"All the time I shall be suspected of being a thief," said Blake bitterly.

"Not by any chap whose opinion is worth having," said Tom Merry quickly. "Hallo! Who's that?"

There was a tap at the door, and it opened and Gore of the Shell came in. Gore was looking very disturbed.

Blake's eyes blazed at once.

He had always been on the worst of terms with Gore, and the thought naturally flashed into his mind now that the Shell fellow had come there to taunt him.

"What do you want here, Gore?" he exclaimed abruptly. Gore coloured.

"I want to speak to you chaps," he said slowly and awkwardly.

"Well, you can speak, I suppose."

"It's about that—that affair."

"What affair?"

"The banknote."

Blake clenched his hands convulsively.

"Well, what about it?"
 "I—I only wanted to say that—"
 "Get it out!"
 "That I don't believe you took it, and wouldn't believe it, even if it were found in your pocket," said Gore. "I don't know whether you care for my opinion, but here it is. I know you didn't take it."
 Blake's expression changed.
 "Thank you, Gore!" he said.
 "And I—I wanted to say, too, that if I could do anything to help you clear up the matter, I would," said Gore.
 "It's awfully decent of you," said Tom Merry. "We were just having a little jaw on the subject when you came in. We—"



in chancery. They struggled among the forms and the startled "Help!" Thump, thump, thump! "Take that, you cad!" "And that—and that!"

The door opened again, interrupting Tom Merry. A large head, ornamented with tufts of hair and a pair of big spectacles, was projected into the study.

Skimpole blinked at the juniors in his benevolent way. "Ah, I see you are all here!" he said. "I want to speak to you. It's about Blake having taken that banknote."

In a moment there was a grip on the back of Skimpole's collar, and he was on his knees, and Digby and Herries were holding him there while D'Arcy picked up a cricket stump out of the cupboard.

Skimpole blinked at the juniors in great amazement and alarm.

"Really, you fellows—"

D'Arcy grasped the cricket stump.

Skimpole was favourably placed for a castigation, and Arthur Augustus began to castigate with a hearty good will.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

"Ow, ow, ow!" roared Skimpole.

"There!" said D'Arcy. "Will you apologise, you wottah?"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

"Ow, yow, yow!"

"You howwid wottah! Pway don't make that wow in our study; it offends my yahs!" said D'Arcy.

"Ow! Yow—wow!"

"Bai Jove, he's gettin' worse!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Have you had enough?"

"Ow! I consider that question absurd, D'Arcy. I have had more than enough. I do not like it at all. Pray leave off immediately."

"Then you will apologise to Blake?"

"I am unconscious of having given Blake any cause of offence, but I will apologise with pleasure, if Blake wishes it!" gasped Skimpole.

"Then you can get up, you howlin' duffah!"

Skimpole staggered to his feet. He blinked round at a circle of unsympathetic faces.

"Dear me!" he ejaculated. "I came here with the most friendly intentions, and I have been treated in a way that I can only consider almost rude."

"Bai Jove!"

"I came here to offer my services to help Blake. I—"

"Then you had a vewy unfortunate way of expvessin' yourself," said Arthur Augustus. "You were vewy lucky not to get a feahful thwashin'."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Oh, buzz off, Skimmy; we're busy," said Tom Merry brusquely.

The Determinist of St. Jim's blinked at him.

"Really, Merry, I have come here upon an important matter. As you know, I am now engaged upon a book on the subject of evolution, which will fix the period of the origin of the human race on this planet within a margin of fifteen million years—a degree of exactitude which science has never reached before."

"There's the door, Skimmy."

"I had, however, quitted this important work for the purpose of writing an article on Determinism for the forthcoming number of 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

"Never mind the 'Weekly' now, Skimmy. Buzz off!"

"I have now quitted my article for the 'Weekly' in the middle to help Blake in this matter," said Skimpole. "You may remember that I have had considerable practice and experience as an amateur detective."

"Great Scott!"

"I am willing to place my services at Blake's disposal," said Skimpole, pulling out an enormous notebook and a blue pencil. "I shall be glad of a few details."

"Ass!"

"Pray acquaint me with all you know of the matter," said Skimpole, in his best Sherlock Holmes' manner. "You can speak quite freely to me."

"You howling duffer!"

"Really, Blake, I came here to assist you. In the first place, you must treat a detective with absolute confidence. Did you or did you not take the banknote?"

"Outside!"

"I require a few details—"

"Travel!"

"If you did not take the banknote—"

"Bunk!"

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, kick him out!"

Violent hands were laid upon the amateur detective of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy opened the door, and Tom Merry and Lowther ejected Skimpole.

The genius of the Shell sat down in the passage with a bump, and his notebook and pencil were hurled after him. Then the door of the study was slammed.

Skimpole staggered to his feet.

He was feeling hurt.

On a good many previous occasions he had shown his wonderful abilities as an amateur detective, but somehow he had never been fully appreciated.

He adjusted his spectacles, and gathered up his notebook and pencil, and gasped for breath.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "This is very rude, and very stupid, too, as I could prove Blake's guilt or innocence, as the case may be, and save a great deal of uncertainty. I shall, however, look into the case on my own responsibility, without troubling about Blake's concurrence."

And Skimpole sought a quiet spot, where he could turn the matter over in his mind.

He went out through the door leading to the quadrangle and sat on the stone balustrade outside. There he wrinkled

(Continued on page 17.)

NOTES AND NEWS, FACTS AND VIEWS FROM—



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

HALLO, chums!—I've got a pleasant surprise to tell you about this week. As another football season is soon to commence, readers will welcome the grand news that, starting from next Wednesday, I am awarding every week two fine footballs for the two best jokes published in our joke column. These footballs are in addition to the usual half-a-crown prizes. So to the two readers each week whose jokes make the GEM Jester laugh most heartily will be sent two of these ripping footballs, while for every other joke used, half-a-crown will be awarded the sender. Watch out next week for the first two jokes to win footballs. Yours may be one of them!

Now, what other treats have we in store for next Wednesday? Firstly, there is a special St. Jim's story from the pen of popular Martin Clifford. It is entitled

"GUSSY'S SACRIFICE!"

Poor old Gussy gets tle in the soup properly in this magnificent story—and it's all the fault of his young brother, Wally. Gussy is sentenced to be flogged because he won't sneak on the chap who tipped a bucket of tar over Mr. Selby. Gussy wouldn't sneak in any case; but the offender is Wally, which makes it harder for Gussy to bear, for he knows his brother will be instantly expelled if he is found out! It is a dramatic situation, but Gussy deals with it in his own unique way. Read all about it in next week's stirring yarn.

Next, there is another full-of-thrills instalment of "ST. FRANK'S VERSUS FOO CHOW!" How do you like the new chums in the pages of the GEM? Great pals, aren't they? Follow the further adventures in China of the boys of St. Frank's for thrills!

In addition, of course, Potts, the office-boy, will amuse you again with another of his funny adventures, and lastly, your Editor will have some more interesting news to tell you.

ROAST CHICKEN!

These days it is possible to buy most forms of food in tins, but not all. Recently, one more tinned food has been added to the list—and that is roast chicken! Now that may sound very simple and perhaps you will wonder just why no one has tinned roast chicken before. Let me tell you that Mr. Ashby, the man who has just achieved this thing, has spent twenty thousand pounds in experiments to discover how it could be done. He discovered that if you roasted a chicken in the ordinary way, when the tin was opened there was nothing but a skeleton and some flesh in the bottom of the tin. He tried cooking at

very high temperatures and all sorts of other methods, but none of them was successful. At length he found that he could manage it all right by introducing a tasteless vegetable medium; but even then the medium used to give off fumes, and then the machinery had to be cleaned—at a cost of fifty pounds! Now, at last, all is well, and next year he hopes to market two million tinned roast chickens!

CHOCOLATE AT THE SEASIDE!

Don't forget, you fellows, that Messrs. Cadbury Bros. have contributed an enormous number of their famous Dairy Milk Bars for the consumption of readers who buy their copies of the GEM from beach-sellers, kiosks and other such places at most of our well-known seaside resorts. In addition, they have also contributed pound boxes of their delicious assorted chocolates as prizes at our Concert Party, Gala, and Cinema Competitions. Remember your chocolate—and your GEM—when you go to the sea!

SOME JIGSAW!

Are you a jigsaw puzzle enthusiast? If so, perhaps you would like to take on the job of Doctor Brown, curator of fossil reptiles in the American Museum of Natural History. He has got the most difficult jigsaw in the world to do—and I don't want to take his job away from him, believe me! He has twenty thousand fragments of the bones of a prehistoric dinosaur, and his job is to build up one complete skeleton out of the fragments. Just to give you some idea of the job, let me remind you that a dinosaur when alive measured something like seventy feet in length!

LOST BALL?

A cricket ball caused quite a lot of bother the other day on Clapham Common. The ball was hit by a lusty young cricketer and it evaded all the fieldsmen; but it was caught by the wheel of a passing tramcar, which immediately left the rails and proceeded to career up the road! The driver was able to stop the tram before any damage was done, and it was found that the only injury had been received by the cricket ball. It was a very serious injury, I believe; in fact, they say that the ball will never be the same again!

THE BACK GARDEN PLANE!

The day of the aeroplane for the back garden is definitely a step nearer; in fact, it seems that it is very nearly upon us. Don Juan de la Cierva, the inventor of the autogyro, has now invented a small model for the back garden. Although at present

the plane is only in the experimental stage, and therefore information about it is not being made public, it is understood that it will sell for not more than £300, which will make it the cheapest aeroplane ever known. It will be fitted with a twenty horse power engine made by a motor-cycle firm, and with running costs about half those of a small car. It will be possible to keep the plane in an ordinary garage, and a large garden will be sufficient for landing and taking off. Needless to say, at present the plane is very carefully guarded in order that no one may discover the design of the machine.

ODDS AND ENDS!

At Coslin, in Germany, there is a very old staircase. It doesn't go to anywhere! It just rises out of a garden, and at the end of it there is a covered platform, like a little summer-house. It was built by a landowner who wished to be able to obtain an uninterrupted view of the surrounding country.

You remember the other week about the man with the long name who was called "K" for short? Well, how's this? A man has been drowned in Lake Chargogagoggmanchauggagoggohuabunagum-augg! Tell me if I've spelt it wrong!

ADVENTURERS!

The seven men who set sail in the auxiliary cutter *Romance* on a voyage to the Cocos Islands, searching for treasure, were naturally expecting adventure, but their first one came sooner than they expected it, and it wasn't very pleasant. They started from Bristol, but between Minehead and Ilfracombe they encountered heavy seas. One by one the crew were laid low by sea-sickness, and though they battled bravely against it, eventually only the captain was left to sail the ship. The engine broke down and sails had to be used. Captain Manson, a well-known Antarctic Explorer, did his best, but luck was against him. The boom swung round and knocked him overboard. Luckily, he managed to climb back again and send distress signals. A motor-boat came to the rescue, and now the *Romance* is waiting for a refit.

QUEER TREES!

There is, in South America, a tree called the cow-tree on account of the fact that it gives "milk." It grows on the rocky sides of mountains and even though no rain has fallen for weeks, as soon as you pierce the trunk the "milk" begins to flow. It is sweet and nourishing, and every evening natives take jugs and draw the milk from the trees.

South Africa has a queer tree called the "sneeze-wood," for if you start to saw this tree you will be attacked by a frightful attack of sneezing, caused by the fine saw-dust. It is a very hard-wood tree, and as the wood lasts well under water it is used to a great extent for making piers.

ARTIFICIAL PEARLS.

George Dennison, of Hampstead, wants to know when artificial pearls were first made. The answer, George, is that a Parisian rosary-maker named Jacquin made them in 1680. His method was to fill tiny globes of glass with "essence d'orient," a preparation made from the tiny silver scales of a little fish called the bleak. Finally the cavity was filled with white wax which pressed the scales against the glass.

YOUR EDITOR.

UNDER SUSPICION!

(Continued from page 15.)

up his big forehead till it was deeply corrugated, and thought over the matter.

Three youths came up the steps, and they paused for a moment to look at Skimpole.

They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House—generally known as Figgins & Co.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Where's Blake?"

Skimpole started out of a reverie.

"Blake? Did you say Blake?"

"Yes, Blake!"

"Ah, Blake!"

"What are you mooning about?" asked Kerr kindly.

"Anything gone wrong with your rocker?"

"Certainly not, Kerr. As for Blake, I am afraid he is in a dangerous position."

"Phew! What's the matter?"

"Upon the whole, things look very black against him."

"Oh!" said Figgins. "You mean about the banknote?"

"Exactly."

"We've come over to see him about that," said Figgins.

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "We've licked four chaps in the New House for saying that Blake took the banknote, and we're ready to lick forty, if necessary."

"Just so!" said Kerr.

Skimpole shook his head sadly.

"That is very generous of you," he remarked; "but I'm afraid the case looks very bad against Blake. I have taken the case up professionally, you see, and I have brought my trained intellect to bear on the subject."

"Your trained what?"

"Intellect."

"Rats! You haven't any!"

"Really, Figgins—"

"And what fatheaded conclusions have you come to?" said Kerr disdainfully.

Skimpole blinked at his notebook.

"It looks very black against Blake. You see, I proceed on the methods of the most successful detectives of modern times. If a case was obvious, Sherlock Holmes refused to take it up. It was only a very deep and intricate case that interested him. It is the same with me. I cannot waste my brainpower on trivial matters. I have left my book on evolution and my article on Determinism to take up this case, and I intend to run it to a successful conclusion. Now, Blake is about the last chap one would suspect of stealing anything."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins & Co. together, very heartily.

"Therefore," said Skimpole, "he is guilty."

"What!"

"You see, on the Sherlock Holmes system, I decline the obvious explanation of the case. I suspect Blake because he was the last person one would naturally suspect."

"You ass!"

"Really, Figgins—"

"You frabjous idiot!"

"Besides, there is the further point that Blake, on being questioned as to whether he was guilty or innocent, showed violence."

"Go hon!"

"I, who went to Study No. 6 with the best intentions in the world, was ejected from the apartment with considerable violence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing, so far as I can see, to excite merriment in this matter, Figgins. I can only take this violence as a sign that a guilty conscience is at work."

"Ass!"

"And as the other fellows all back up Blake in this brutal violence, I can only conclude that they are all confederates."

"Lunatic!"

"Abuse is not argument, Figgins. It is perfectly clear to me that all these fellows were in the plot, and that is the theory I am now working upon."

"You'd better tell them so."

"Oh, of course, a detective cannot afford to be a respecter of persons," said Skimpole, in a tone of patient explanation.

"Was D'Arcy there?" asked Kerr suddenly.

"Yes, certainly. He treated me in a particularly brutal manner with a cricket stump."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see the cause of this explosion of merriment, Kerr."

"Ha, ha, ha! You frabjous-ass, it was D'Arcy's banknote that was taken! Is D'Arcy in a plot with the other fellows to steal his own banknote?"

Skimpole started, and rubbed his bumpy forehead thoughtfully.

"Dear me! That never occurred to me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall certainly have to modify my theory a little."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon the whole, perhaps I have been a little off the track. Things, however, look extremely black."

"Your blessed eyes will look extremely black if you talk any more of this piffle!" said Figgins warningly.

Skimpole blinked at him patiently.

"It is not piffle, Figgins. It is only your limited understanding that makes you regard the remarks of cleverer fellows as piffle."

"My hat!"

"You see, in different beings the process of evolution has reached different stages. In your case, I should say that the intellect still approximates to a very early period of development. I—Ow!"

Three pairs of hands dragged Skimpole off the balustrade.

"Ow! Leggo! It is utterly absurd, Figgins, to be offended by the plain statement of scientific facts."

Bump!

Skimpole was bumped down in a sitting posture with a shock that took all his breath away, and left gasping like a fish.

"There!" said Figgins. "That's for talking piffle about Blake."

"Ow!"

Bump!

"That's for talking piffle about the other chaps."

"Ow!"

Bump!

"That's for talking at all. Come on, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. entered the School House, leaving Skimpole sitting on the steps in a very dazed state of mind.

CHAPTER 11.

Figgins' Suggestion!

F IGGINS kicked cheerfully at the door of Jack Blake's study, and it flew open.

There was a sudden exclamation from within.

D'Arcy was standing just inside the door, and as it opened it caught him behind, and he staggered forward into the arms of Tom Merry.

Tom Merry fortunately caught him, and "passed" him to Monty Lowther, who gave him a gentle shove that sat him down in the armchair.

Arthur Augustus remained there, gasping like a fish, not quite knowing what had happened, but considerably disturbed by it.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

Figgins & Co. looked in.

"Hallo!" said Blake glumly.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Can we come in?"

"Oh, certainly!"

Figgins & Co. came in.

"Thought we'd give you a look up," said Figgins. "We've been punching noses over in the New House. To judge by appearances, there has been some punching going on on this side, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; a few asses had to have their noses thumped," he remarked—"only a few."

"Same on our side. It had to be done, and we did it. A painful duty—painful to the chaps who owned the noses, I mean."

"Bai Jove, you pushed that door open against me, Figgins!"

"Did I?"

"Yaas, wathah! You are a clumsy ass!"

"Is that the way you always talk to visitors, Gussy?" asked Figgins, in his blandest tone.

"I do not regard you as a visitah. I wegard you as a New House boundah."

"Peace!" said Tom Merry. "What have you come over for, Figg? I can see Fatty Wynn looking at the cupboard; but there isn't a feed on."

The fat Fourth-Former coloured.

"I—I—" he began.

"Shut up, Fatty!" said Figgins, with a severe glance.

"We didn't come here for a feed; but, you know, Fatty is always after grub."

"Oh, I say, Figg—"

"He's only eaten enough for a regiment of Dragoons today, so, naturally, he feels a little peckish."

"Look here—"

"But we didn't come over here to talk about Fatty's

appetite. It's too big a subject to tackle offhand. It's about that banknote."

Blake's eyes began to gleam.

He did not know quite what to expect from his old rivals of the New House. He was in a worried and anxious state of mind, though, or he would have known what to expect of Figgins & Co.

"It seems there's a banknote missing," said Figgins.

"Yes."

"Gussy seems to have lost it."

"It was taken from my desk, deah boy."

"Yes; we've heard all about the details," said Figgins. "Some duffers think Blake's taken it. Some cads pretend to think so. Hence these bruises."

"You are a wathah decent chap, Figgy."

"Go hon!"

"I weally mean it, I quite approve of your punchin' the stupid heads of the wottahs who venture to allude disrespectfully to our friend Blake."

"Good! Now that I know you approve, I shall sleep more soundly," said Figgins. "But to come to bizney, I don't think there's a thief in the School House."

"I hope not," said Tom Merry. "But then—"

"There's a mistake of some sort."

"I should be vewy glad to think so," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But, in that case, what became of the banknote?"

"That's what I'm coming to," said Figgins.

"Exactly!" said Kerr.

"You don't mean to say that you know anything about it!" exclaimed Gore, with a start.

"I've got an idea."

"Get it off your chest, then," said Monty Lowther. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—"

"Oh, cheese it! Now, my view is this. We all know what a duffer Gussy is—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"We're all agreed upon that, I think?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Have you come here to point out self-evident facts, Figgy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"No, I haven't!"



HIGH in the sky whirled and darted two planes—British and German—fighting a life-or-death battle. Ratatatatat! A burst of bullets came from the German; the British plane shuddered as from a terrific blow—and Chris Wren knew that for him the fight was over. His damaged machine whirled dizzily downwards CRASH!

Half dazedly Chris climbed out from amid the wreckage; to his surprise saw that his German conqueror had landed beside him. One look the two pilots took at each other; next moment Britisher and German—who but a few moments before had been hated enemies—were shaking hands like long-lost brothers!

This is only one of the amazing incidents in "Pups of the Bulldog Breed!" one of the seven magnificent stories in—

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"You are intewwuptin' me, Figgins!"

"Exactly. Now, as we are all agreed that Gussy is an extra-special, double-action, all-wool, non-skidding idiot, we—"

"Weally—"

"We must consider the possibility that he is making a big mistake. Suppose he never had a banknote at all, but only fancied he had one?"

"Weally, you ass—"

"We all saw it," said Blake.

"Oh," said Figgins, changing his ground, "that settles point Number One. Next point. Suppose he absently used the banknote as a pipe-lighter, and never put it into his desk at all. How is that?"

"Out!" said Digby. "I saw him put it in his desk."

"Ahem! But as we are all agreed that he's a howling duffer—"

"All!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Suppose he took it out of his desk afterwards, and spent it at the tuckshop without noticing what he was doing!"

"You uttah ass!"

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes; there's something in that. Gussy may have taken it out of the desk and forgotten all about it, and it may be in one of his pockets at this very moment."

"Nothin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy!"

"You know what an absent-minded beggar you are, Gussy!"

"I did not wemove the banknote from the desk."

"Well, that's my suggestion," said Figgins. "My idea is that Gussy has lost the banknote, and ought to be made to remember what he did with it. For that purpose I suggest ragging him."

"I uttably wefuse to be wagged!"

"We're quite willing to lend a hand," said Kerr. "If you fellows like to stand round in a circle, we'll take Gussy and bump him till he recollects what he did with the banknote!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should uttably decline to be bumped!"

"By that means," explained Figgins, "we should bump the truth out of him. You know his brain doesn't work very actively. That would shake him up. I really think it's a good idea, and we're willing to take all the trouble."

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye; but it was useless, the bruise there prevented it from sticking in its place, and it dropped on its cord again.

"Figgins, I weward you—"

"Well, what do you chaps say?" said Figgins, looking round.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, I don't think we'll take advantage of your generous offer, Figgy. I really think Gussy is right this time, and that he didn't remove the banknote from his desk."

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins. "The idea occurred to us, and we thought we'd come over and make the offer."

"Many thanks!"

"Weally, you know—"

"I hope this will be cleared up all right soon, Blake," said Figgins seriously. "Of course, you know that we know that it's all right."

"Rather!" said Kerr.

"Thanks!" said Blake. "It's very decent of you to say so!"

"I think most of the fellows say the same. Mind you let us know if you decide to bump the facts out of Gussy, and want us to lend a hand."

And Figgins & Co. quitted the study.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced round at his grinning chums.

"I fail to see any cause for mewwiment," he remarked. "I weward you as a set of wude beasts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway stop cacklin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus quitted the study, and closed the door with unnecessary violence.

CHAPTER 12.

A Scene in Class!

KILDARE of the Sixth tapped Jack Blake on the shoulder the next morning before lessons.

Blake looked at him with a worried look.

"Any news of the banknote yet?" asked the captain of St. Jim's.

Blake shook his head.

"No, not so far."

"It's very curious."

"Yes; I can't understand it. We've hunted everywhere. We've made Gussy go through all his pockets and things, though he swore he hadn't removed the note from the desk."

"And there hasn't been a trace of it?"

"Not a trace."

"And you have no idea what has become of it?" asked Kildare thoughtfully.

"Not the slightest, unless the rats gnawed it up. I didn't think so at first, but now it seems the only possible explanation."

Kildare knitted his brows.

"Something will have to be done about it," he remarked.

"The story is over the whole of the school now, and some of the fellows are saying unpleasant things."

Blake flushed red.

"You don't believe them, Kildare?"

"No, I don't. I know you are not a thief, Blake, if that is what you mean."

"Thank you, Kildare!"

"But something must be done. It seems that somebody must have taken the banknote. Does D'Arcy know the number?"

"No; he never takes the numbers of his notes; he's a careless ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! You're the cause of all the trouble. What the dickens do you mean by having fivers, when other chaps never have more than half-crowns?" said Blake crossly.

"Weally, Blake!"

"You can get the number, I suppose, 'D'Arcy?" asked Kildare.

"Yaas, wathah. I can ask my aunt."

"I think you had better do so," said the captain of St. Jim's. "If the banknote does not turn up to-day, the Head will have to know about the matter."

Blake's look was almost haggard.

"The Head?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"But—"

"Don't be alarmed, Blake; he's not likely to believe that you took it. Anybody might have gone to D'Arcy's desk."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I hope it will turn out that there is a mistake, and that the note was not stolen at all," said Kildare. "You had better wire to your aunt for the number, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, certainly!"

"Binks will take the telegram. You ought to have written at once."

"Yaas, pewwaps so; but I nevah can think of these things, you know."

Kildare nodded to the juniors and walked away. Blake and D'Arcy followed the rest of the Fourth into the classroom, Blake with a very gloomy face.

The matter would have to come to the Head's knowledge unless it was cleared up, he knew that; in fact, he wondered that Dr. Holmes was not already acquainted with it.

What would happen then?

There was no real evidence against Blake—only the facts that he had gone to D'Arcy's desk and that he had been flush of money afterwards, and could only give a very lame account of the way he came by that unfortunate pound note.

That was not enough to find him guilty upon.

Against all that was to be set his well-known character, his record at St. Jim's, the Head's knowledge of his honesty and truth.

Blake had no fear that Dr. Holmes would find him guilty. But, on the other hand, his innocence could not be made clear.

The shadow of suspicion would rest upon him.

Would it ever be cleared away?

For where was the banknote? If it had not turned up in two days, what reason was there to suppose that it would ever turn up at all?

Blake's heart was heavy as he thought of it.

His own friends would never doubt him, he knew that. The greater part of the fellows who knew him scouted the idea of his being guilty.

But there were some who believed him so, and there were others who cared little either way, but thought that the person against whom there was most evidence was most likely to be the guilty party, and that person, of course, was Blake.

The story would probably never die out, if the truth were not discovered now.

But how was it to be discovered?

Blake could see no way.

His face was very glum as he took his place in the Form. Mr. Lathom glanced at him.

The master of the Fourth had already heard of the story from the prefects, and he understood Blake's position, and felt for the junior.

He was careful to pass Blake's absentmindedness over

very lightly, and to take no notice of the continual slips he made.

Blake was not in a fit state to work.

With that one black worry on his mind, he could not bring his attention down to his daily tasks.

But suddenly he started.

He had opened his Virgil, in case Mr. Lathom should call upon him to construe, and as he did so, a word in thick black letters stared at him from a paper inserted in the book:

"THIEF!"

Blake turned white.

The words were written in Roman letters, to disguise the identity of the hand that had written it; but Blake had little doubt as to that identity.

It was the same hand that had pushed the cowardly note under the door of Study No. 6. Only Mellish was mean enough for that.

Jack Blake glanced round at the cad of the Fourth. Mellish was looking towards him, and their eyes met. Mellish changed colour.

Blake's eyes blazed. Unless Mellish knew what he had just found in his book, there was no reason for that change of colour and the guilty start he gave.

Blake needed no further proof.

His blood boiled up, and he started to his feet. For the moment he forgot that he was in the Form-room, and forgot that he was in the presence of a master.

He reached over towards Mellish, and seized him by the shoulders and dragged him from his seat.

Mellish gave a startled howl.

"Leggo! Oh!"

Mr. Lathom looked on, petrified with astonishment.

"Blake—Blake, what are you doing?"

Blake did not even hear him.

He was pummelling Mellish as if he were a punching-ball, and the cad of the Fourth had no choice but to defend himself.

Blake's blows were fast and hard and heavy, and Mellish was knocked right and left. In a few seconds Blake had his head in chancery, and they struggled among the forms and the startled boys, who were all on their feet.

"Ow!" yelled Mellish. "Help!"

Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Take that, you cad—and that—and that!"

"Help!"

Thump, thump!

"Blake, are you mad? Blake!"

"Ow! Help!"

The Form-room was a scene of the wildest excitement. The fellows were all standing up, startled at the unheard-of scene, in amazement and excitement.

Mellish and Blake struggled and reeled among the forms, and Mellish was getting about the worst punishment he had ever received in his life.

Mr. Lathom reached the excited juniors at last, and grasped Blake by the shoulder.

"Blake, desist at once! Stop, I tell you!"

"Help!"

"Blake!"

Blake let Mellish go at last, and the cad of the Fourth rolled on the floor among the legs of the desks and the boots of the Fourth-Formers, gasping, groaning, and almost weeping with pain and rage.

Blake stood flushed and dishevelled, breathing hard.

Mr. Lathom fixed a stern glance upon him.

"Blake," he exclaimed, "what does this mean? Do you want to be expelled from school? Are you mad? Why have you attacked Mellish in that savage manner?"

"He knows, sir."

"I don't," moaned Mellish. "I never did anything. I didn't say a word!"

"Explain yourself, Blake."

Blake held up his Virgil with the paper in it.

"Look at that!"

Mr. Lathom looked, and his brows contracted.

"Who wrote that?"

"Ask that squirming cad!"

"I—I didn't!" gasped Mellish. "I never wrote it. Blake is a thief, and he jolly well knows it, but I never—"

"How do you know that word is written here, if you did not write it?" asked Mr. Lathom sternly.

Mellish gasped.

In his hurry to exculpate himself he had given himself away completely—for, indeed, how could he know what was written upon the paper if he had not written it himself?

His face went crimson.

"Well, sir, you see, sir—" he began haltingly.

"I see that you are a cowardly and untruthful boy!" said Mr. Lathom sternly. "Blake is undoubtedly right in his conclusion that you wrote this in his book."

"I—I—"

"Under the circumstances, I shall excuse Blake," said Mr. Lathom. "You understand, of course, Blake, that you must be more careful and that anything like this must not occur again."

"I am sorry, sir. I was excited," faltered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, and no wonder! If I had seen that papah, I should certainly have given Mellish a feahful thwashin' myself," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir; but as I was sayin'—"

"Enough!"

"But weally—"

"Silence! Mellish, you have acted in a cowardly and disgraceful manner. I think you have been well punished, or I should certainly cane you."

Mellish scowled.

He could not understand how it was, but he never seemed to be able to get into favour. And here was Mr. Lathom taking Blake's side, even after that extraordinary outbreak and interruption of the morning lessons.

"You will stay in for the next three half-holidays, Mellish, to think over the meanness of your conduct," said Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, sir!"

"That is enough."

"But, sir—"

"Not a word more, or I shall cane you! Take your seat!" And Mellish sat down sulkily.

He did not get any more sympathy from the boys than from the master. Every glance that was turned towards him was condemnatory.

Blake sat breathing hard, his face very pale now that the excitement had passed. He had punished the cad who had taunted him, and that was some satisfaction; but, after all, very little.

The taunt would be renewed. Would it ever die?

Mellish, if he had only known it, and if he had only understood the feelings of a higher nature than his own, had his revenge! Jack Blake was the most miserable junior at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole Gives It Up!

JACK BLAKE wore a gloomy look as he came out of the Form-room after morning lessons.

His chums looked at him, but did not speak to him, and did not accompany him. They could see by his manner that he was downhearted, and that nothing they could say or do would cheer him up, and at that moment it was better for him to be left alone.

At that moment it was exactly Skimpole's tactful way to come and bother him. The scientific youth had no time for considering minor matters like delicacy and tact. He was too deeply interested in the origin of species fifteen million years ago to have much regard for the finer feelings of human beings who happened by chance to be living at the present day. He came out of the Shell Form Room, and blinked round in search of Blake, and discovering him alone, came over and captured him by a jacket-button.

"I say, Blake—"

Jack Blake grunted.

"Get away!"

"I want to speak to you—"

"Shut up!"

"Really, Blake, I cannot but regard that as almost rude. I—"

Jack Blake seized the genius of the Shell by the shoulders, and jammed him violently against the wall of the passage. Skimpole's spectacles slid down his nose with the shock, and he blinked helplessly at Jack Blake over them.

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Look here," said Blake grimly, "I've had enough of your piffle for the present! I don't want any Determinism, or evolution, or origin of species, or any other silly piffle. Do you understand?"

"No; I don't! Pray release me Blake! You are causing me considerable discomforts. The subjects you have mentioned have occupied the greatest brains—"

"The emptiest numbskulls, you mean," said Blake. "Anyway, don't bother me with them. I'm bothered enough at the present moment—savvy?"

"But I wasn't going to speak about them, Blake. I was about to observe that, in connection with the missing banknote, I—"

"I've had enough of the missing banknote, too."

"Do you mean to say you really took it?" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Idiot! No—I mean to say I don't want to hear anything more about it," said Blake, shaking him.

"Ow! I understand! Ow! Please don't shake me,

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Blake! It disturbs my train of thought considerably. I'm glad you have not confessed to being guilty, as it would upset my latest and best theory. I have decided that you are innocent."

"Thank you for nothing!"

"And that Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners are innocent."

"Ass!"

"Figgin' & Co. are also cleared."

"Idiot!"

"Really, Blake, that is almost rude."

"Oh, you frabjous ass!"

"I have worked everything out clearly now. It was D'Arcy himself who abstracted the banknote from the desk."

Blake jumped.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yes."

"But it belonged to D'Arcy!" howled Blake.

"Exactly," said Skimpole, blinking at him—"exactly! And that is what makes this case most remarkable and interesting and one that would have interested Sherlock Holmes immensely. Why did D'Arcy purloin his own banknote? It is a most interesting mystery. Ow! What are you doing?"

"Knocking your silly head against the wall, you ass!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"There!" said Blake. "Now let the banknote alone, and go back to evolution, and the origin of species, and Determinism, and the other rot!"

"Ow!"

Blake walked away, leaving Skimpole ruefully blinking, and rubbing the back of his head. He blinked at the Terrible Three as they came by, arm-in-arm.

"Anything wrong?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Yes," groaned Skimpole. "My head—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You needn't have told us that—we know it—"

"Eh?"

"We know your head's wrong, Skimmy. It's only necessary to hear you on the subject of Determinism to know that. Anything else wrong?"

"Really, Merry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake has bumped my head against the wall in the most savage way. I do not know whether there is any damage done—"

Monty Lowther examined the wall.

"No; the wall's all right," he said. "The wainscot is jolly strong oak, you know, and it couldn't be damaged by a softer sort of wood."

"I was not alluding to the wall, Lowther, but to my head. Fortunately it does not ache. When it aches I have to leave my brain work, such as my book on Determinism, and my great volume on the subject of the origin of the human species in the mud of primeval ocean. If I had not already discovered the purloiner of the banknote, I should certainly think that Blake was guilty, from his conduct."

The Terrible Three gave a simultaneous jump.

"Discovered him!"

"Oh, yes!"

"How?"

"By my ability as a detective, and clever deductions on the same principles as that of Sherlock Holmes."

"And who is it?"

"D'Arcy!"

"D'Arcy?"

"Yes," said Skimpole, smiling loftily at the impression his words seemed to make. "I may say, I suspected you three fellows at one time."

"Us?" said the Terrible Three faintly.

"Certainly! But the case is now clear. It was D'Arcy!"

"D'Arcy!" said Tom Merry feebly. "But the banknote belonged to D'Arcy!"

"Yes," said Skimpole, rubbing his hands. "That would be a floorer to a common intellect; but to a really scientific mind, an apparent contradiction is a greater certainty than the most obvious commonplace. You understand me?"

"Blessed if I do!"

"Ah, your defective brain development is the cause! I will explain. D'Arcy was the last person in the world one would suspect of stealing his own banknote, therefore he did steal it! You follow me?"

"My only hat!"

"D'Arcy is the guilty party. He—"

"Skimmy," said Tom Merry kindly, "you ought to give up detective work. Your brain is more suited to writing books on scientific matters, or repeating the multiplication table, or something of that sort. Give it up."

"Really, Merry—"

"And, as a hint that you have mistaken your vocation,

I think we ought to bump you, not because we want to, but from a sense of duty."

"I—I— Oh, leggo! Ow!"

But the Terrible Three seized the amateur detective and bumped him, and they walked on and left Skimpole in a dazed state.

Kangaroo came along with Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and they looked down at the genius of the Shell in great astonishment.

"Can't you find a chair?" demanded the Australian.

"What on earth are you sitting on the floor for?"

"Really, Noble—"

"Matter of taste, I suppose? I should prefer a chair myself."

"Pray help me up! I have been bumped with considerable violence, and very much shaken. I must observe that there is a surprising amount of hooliganism developing in this school. I was merely explaining to Tom Merry that D'Arcy was the person who had purloined the banknote, when he— Yow!"

Kangaroo planted his foot on Skimpole's chest, and sent him rolling over, and then Cornstalk & Co. walked on.

Skimpole picked himself up.

"I—I feel very shaken and confused," he murmured. "I must say that I am being treated with rudeness and ingratitude. I will give the matter up—they can solve the mystery for themselves. I am not of a spiteful or revengeful nature, but I certainly cannot undertake to clear up mysteries for people who treat me in this manner."

CHAPTER 14.

Light at Last!

GORE of the Shell came up to his study.

There was a thoughtful frown upon Gore's face. It was curious that the Shell fellow should care so much what happened to his old enemy, Jack Blake of the Fourth; but there was no denying the fact that Blake's trouble did weigh on Gore's mind considerably.

He came into the study, and gave a grunt as he saw Skimpole.

Skimpole had always found Gore an uncomfortable study-mate, owing to his bullying nature; but of late that had been altered. Gore had been quieter and kinder; but Skimpole, on his part, was as troublesome as ever. He left papers and books lying about the study, and talked Determinism till Gore was bored to death with it.

Skimpole was busy writing at the table as Gore came in.

"Hallo, Gore!" he said. "Would you mind looking out a book for me?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I am very busy with my article on Determinism for 'Tom Merry's Weekly.' I require Professor Loosetop's volume for reference, and I do not remember where I left it."

Gore grinned.

"Have you given up the amateur detective business?" he asked.

The genius of the Shell nodded.

"Certainly, Gore! I have found my well-intentioned labours met with so rude and ungrateful a reception, that I have decided to give up the whole matter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is no cause for merriment. I have been treated very roughly. Every fellow I suspected of being a thief seemed to cut up rough about it."

"How surprising!"

"Yes, it shows a want of scientific balance," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "I have now resumed my article for the 'Weekly,' for which I borrowed a quantity of foolscap from D'Arcy the other day, but have never yet used. If you are going to stay in the study I hope you will be quiet."

"Rats!"

"I cannot think when a noise is going on. By the way, have you ever reflected which exerts the greater force in the formation of character, heredity or environment?"

Gore yawned.

"Blessed if I know, or care!"

"It is a most interesting subject. Now— Dear me!"

Gore stamped his foot with a force that made the table jump, and the ink spurted from Skimpole's pen over the manuscript he had just covered with scrawling handwriting.

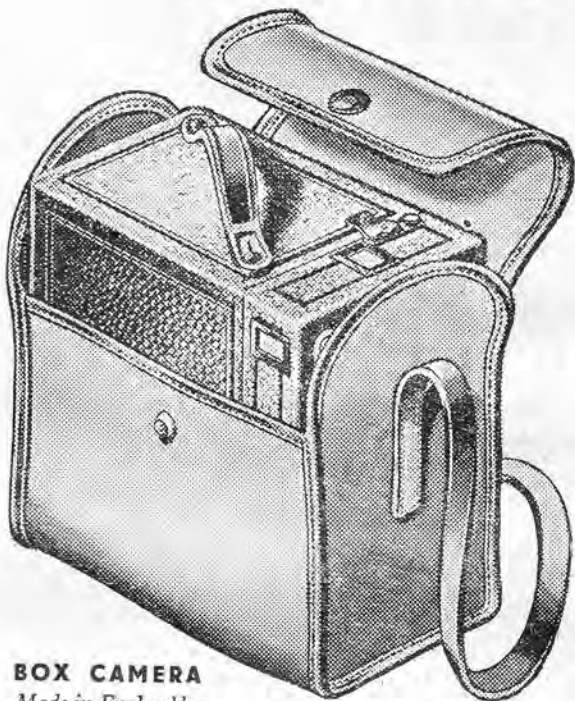
"Oh dear! You have spoiled my contribution now."

"All the better!" growled Gore. "I'll spoil your features if you talk piffle to me. I've got something else to think about."

Skimpole blinked at him, and pushed the blotted paper aside, and drew a little heap of foolscap from a drawer of the table. As he selected a block of it for writing, Gore started forward with a sudden excitement in his face.

(Continued on the next page.)

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"What's that?"

"Eh? What?"

A crisp, rustling slip of paper was half projecting from among the foolscap.

Gore caught hold of it and pulled it out.

"Look!"

"What is it?"

"A banknote!"

"Dear me!"

Gore's eyes blazed with excitement.

"It's a five-pound note!" he shouted.

"Is it really? Does it belong to you, Gore?"

"To me? No!"

"Then how did it come here?"

"Isn't it yours?"

"Mine?" Skimpole shook his head. "My people cannot afford to send me five-pound notes. But—"

"Is this note yours, idiot?"

"Really, Gore—"

"Answer, you ass!"

"No, it is not mine."

"Nor mine," said Gore. "How did it come here?"

"I really do not know. Doubtless it came here in some way or other. I am too occupied to trouble my head about such trivial matters. I wish I could finally decide whether heredity or environment exercises the greater influence on the formation of character, as I desire to make that the subject of my article for the 'Weekly.'"

"This must be Gussy's banknote."

"Eh?"

"Somebody's shoved it in here," said Gore. "Stay! You said something about borrowing that foolscap of D'Arcy."

"Yes, that was some days ago."

"Where does he keep it?"

"In his desk."

"He gave it to you from his desk?"

"I took it."

"Took it?"

"Yes."

"When did it happen?" asked Gore, trembling with excitement. "Was it that day D'Arcy missed his banknote?"

"Yes, I think it was."

"Aren't you sure?"

"I am really thinking about other matters. Is heredity or environment the greater force in—"

Gore seized the youthful Determinist by the shoulders and pinned him, wriggling, against the door of the study.

"Now, then, you idiot—"

"Ow!"

"Did you take the foolscap from D'Arcy's desk on the day the banknote was missing?"

"I—ow—yes!"

"Then you took the banknote among it without noticing it?"

"I really—yes, I dare say I did—I did not notice it. It is really not a matter of any consequence, compared with the influence of heredity and environment."

"You ass!" said Gore. "The banknote's been in this drawer among the foolscap all the time. You utter ass!"

"Really, Gore—"

Gore grasped the banknote and ran out of the study. In the passage he almost ran into Mellish, who stared at the banknote and Gore's excited face in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter, Gore?"

"I've found it!"

"Found what?"

"The missing banknote!"

"Phew!"

"It was mixed up in some foolscap Skimpole took from D'Arcy's desk, and it's only just turned up!" exclaimed Gore exultantly. "I—"

He was pushing past as he spoke, but Mellish grasped him by the arm and stopped him.

"Hold on, Gore!" he whispered.

"Eh? Why? I'm going along to Tom Merry's study."

"Wait a minute."

"What for?" demanded Gore impatiently.

"Look here," said Mellish eagerly, "you'll muck the whole thing up. I don't know what your game is in currying favour with that crew in this way, but there's no sense in it. If you show up that banknote, Blake will be cleared."

"That's what I want."

"You ass! You can't take me in with that rot. Why don't you own up to the truth; and I tell you that between us we can ruin Blake, and make all the others of that crew as miserable a set of rotters as we like, and have a good time on the fiver. See?"

Gore gave Mellish one look, and then his left fist shot out.

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and the cad of the Fourth reeled along the passage and crashed upon the floor.

"Oh!"

"I hope that's a plain enough answer for you, you cad," said Gore.

"Oh!"

"I think it is," said Tom Merry's voice quietly.

Gore started, and looked round.

Tom Merry was standing in the doorway of his study. He had evidently seen and heard all that had passed.

Gore's face went crimson.

"You—you know I never thought of doing what that cad suggested?" he exclaimed quickly.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I know it, Gore. You have found the banknote, it seems?"

"Yes. Come with me, and find Blake."

"Right-ho!" Tom Merry shouted into his study: "Manners! Lowther! Come on! Gore's found the banknote, and it wasn't stolen, after all."

"Hurrah!"

And the Terrible Three and Gore rushed off together to Study No. 6.

They burst into that study like a whirlwind, and the chums of the Fourth were doing their prep.

"Hurrah!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Blake.

"Look at that!"

"Eh? It's a fiver, isn't it?"

"It's Gussy's fiver!"

"What?"

"What was the number of your fiver, Gussy? Have you got it?"

"Yaas. It's in that wiah fwom my aunt."

"Look at that. Is that the number?"

D'Arcy took the banknote and compared the number with that in the telegram from his aunt.

"Yaas."

"Good!"

"Where on earth did you find it?" exclaimed Blake, trembling a little now.

"Gore found it."

"Gore?"

"Yes. Skimpole carried it off in some foolscap he borrowed from D'Arcy's desk."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What a set of asses you fellows were not to think of it. I wemembah tellin' you I put the banknote undah the foolscap."

"Why didn't you think of it?" demanded Herries.

"Weally—"

"You ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Well, never mind whose fault it was," said Tom Merry. "It's found now, and it never was stolen, that's the great thing. I'll go and tell Kildare. My hat, I'm jolly glad it's turned up. Fancy Skimmy having it all the time, and hunting for it while it was in his own study! Just like Skimpole!"

"He might never have found it, too, if he hadn't given up detective work, and gone back to writing his rotten articles," grinned Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake was quite pale with relief.

"Thank goodness it's been found," he said. "It's been a rotten time for me the last few days. I'm much obliged to you, Gore."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Gore as a good fellow."

"He is a jolly good fellow," said Blake. "And as it was all Gussy's fault—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"As it was all Gussy's fault, I vote that Gussy is condemned to blow the whole fiver at a big feed. We'll have those Shell bouncers, and Figgins & Co., and Kangaroo and the rest, and Gore shall be the guest of the evening."

"Bravo!"

"Oh, rot!" said Gore, turning red. "I—I—"

"I wegard it as a good suggestion, and unusually sensible of Blake," said D'Arcy. "I second Blake's motion, and pass it unanimously."

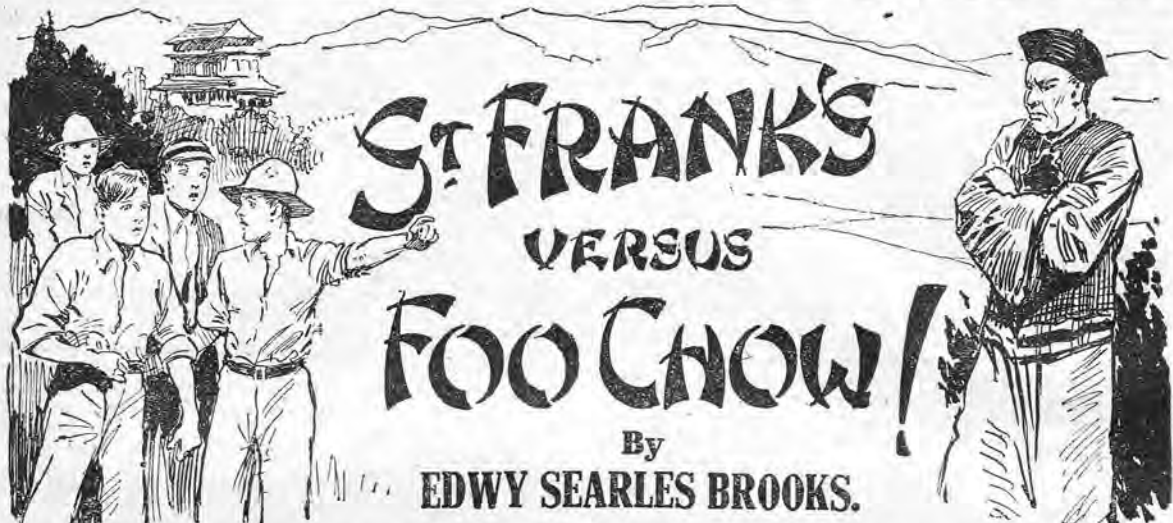
"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the feed duly came off, and the fiver was royally spent, and Gore was the guest of the evening—a novel position for Gore among the chums of St. Jim's—and Tom Merry & Co. vied with one another in doing honour to the fellow who had been their enemy, but who had proved to be their best friend in solving the mystery of St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Gussy's in trouble next week—he's booked for a flogging because he won't sneak. See "GUSSY'S SACRIFICE!" — next Wednesday's magnificent St. Jim's story.)

HERE'S THE BEST ST. FRANK'S HOLIDAY-ADVENTURE YARN EVER WRITTEN!



Yung Ching, of the St. Frank's Remove, has been kidnapped by Dr. Foo Chow, an all-powerful mandarin of Inner China, who covets the province of Hu Kiang, ruled over by Yung Ching's father. A holiday party from St. Frank's set sail to rescue him, but they are captured by Foo Chow and imprisoned in his island stronghold. Edward Oswald Handforth and his chums, however, succeed in escaping and take refuge in the home of a Chinaman whose son Handy saves from a tiger. Meantime, the St. Frank's party, thinking Handforth & Co. are dead, are in a restless mood, and Lord Dorrimore says, "I've got to do something or bust!"

Willy's "Hunch"!

LORD DORRIMORE spoke with a note of tension in his voice. Even now he was only controlling himself with difficulty. Nelson Lee regarded him rather curiously. As a rule, Dorrie was the most easy-going of mortals, and Lee had never seen him in this mood before.

The sporting peer was essentially a man of action—a man who simply couldn't exist in a well-ordered state of Society. The round of London gaiety—the calm life of a country estate—the everyday circle of normal existence; these things were like poison to him. When he did visit home, he only came for a fleeting week or so. Then he would be off again into the wilds—into some out-of-the-way corner of the globe where he could live the simple life and fight Nature in her roughest moods.

This present affair, therefore, was a sheer, long-drawn-out agony. His yacht had been captured, and was lying down in the river, almost within sight. And Dorrie knew that her officers and crew were prisoners, too. This farcical pretence of Foo Chow's was gallingly-exasperating to the point of being a physical pain.

For never had human beings been such utter captives as these "guests" of Foo Chow's. Although they had all the privileges of the palace at their command, the grounds were guarded by thousands of soldiers—literally thousands. No matter which direction one wandered in, these soldiers would be encountered.

The palace was surrounded by luxurious tropical gardens, and the whole was encircled by an ornamental wall. Gazing over this, one stared right down—sheer to the swiftly flowing waters of the stream. For the place was a stronghold—a rocky island in mid-river, with perpendicular cliffs rising straight up from the water. There was only one point which communicated with the mainland, and this was connected by means of a great drawbridge.

Generally this was kept down, but always raised at night. And on both sides it was guarded by hosts of Foo Chow's troops. These men were like ants. For this Chinese potentate had men almost without number at his command. China is a land of teeming millions.

"Yes," repeated Dorrie. "I've got to that condition when another twenty-four hours of this business will drive me crazy. I've got to get into action. Understand, Lee? Action!"

Nelson Lee gripped him by the arm. "Action!" he repeated. "Yes, I understand, Dorrie. But it so happens that any kind of action is impossible. Cool down, old man, and look at the thing sensibly. I shall be the first to urge activity if the opportunity comes. But there's no sense in beating our heads against a brick wall."

Lord Dorrimore breathed hard. "I'm not so sure about that," he retorted. "If we beat hard enough we may break the wall down—or knock our-

selves insensible. I've just got to that stage when I don't much care what it is!"

Barry Stokes nodded.

"I feel just the same," he confessed. "Let's make a move, Lee. Let's start something—and to-night. It doesn't matter what. If we only have a decent shindy with some of these Chinks it'll allow us to blow off a little steam. Anything for a change!"

"Good man!" nodded his lordship. "Well, Lee?"

Nelson Lee was quite firm.

"No," he said quietly. "Absolutely no!"

"But, man alive—"

"Listen to me, Dorrie," interrupted Lee. "You're not a weakling—you're not a child! And the same applies to you, Barry. Practically the whole of our party consists of youngsters—boys and girls. And most of the boys are fairly itching to get into action. If we start a fight they'll join in. Their young spirits won't be able to resist the temptation. And what will come of such a fight?"

"We shall probably smash a few heads," remarked Dorrie drearily.

"Yes, and there would be some deaths, too," went on Lee. "What do these Chinese care for us? They hate us. As long as we remain docile they'll let things go on. But we've only got to fire the spark and there'll be a ghastly massacre. Don't you see that it's absolutely impossible for us to start this fuse going? All those young lives would be on our heads."

"We should probably go under with the rest," growled Dorrie stubbornly.

"Yes, but I want to die in a better way than that," retorted Nelson Lee. "No, you two have got to show a bit of strength. I tell you it's impossible for us to start any action now. For it will merely precipitate bloodshed, and those innocent boys and girls will be the chief ones to suffer. And perhaps they'll suffer worse than death."

"By gad!" muttered Dorrie.

"Torture is one of Dr. Foo Chow's pastimes," continued Lee. "He's content to let things run as they are, so we've got to keep calm. It's galling, I know, and it calls for courage. Aren't we capable of it?"

Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Stokes were compelled to admit that the schoolmaster-detective was right.

"All the same," said his lordship, "somethin' is goin' to crack!"

It was nearly bed-time for the younger members of the party; and there was nothing to be scared of in this, for the bed-rooms of the palace were as luxurious as the other apartments. Electric lights glamed everywhere, and the rooms were airy, cool, and comfortable.

Willy Handforth of the Third was scarcely himself this evening. For over an hour he had walked alone in the grounds, and nobody had dreamed of going near him or

speaking to him. Even William Napoleon Browne, the tactful skipper of the Fifth, had made no attempt to console the fug.

When Willy approached the terrace he found Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon hovering about, both of them in the last throes of misery. They could not be expected to feel the same agony at the loss of Willy's eldest brother, but they were deeply sorry for their young leader. His unhappiness was their unhappiness.

They didn't approach him. Willy was making straight for the group of Moor View girls who were sitting in deck-chairs under one of the big trees. Irene Manners and Mary Summers were bending over Ena Handforth, who had been sobbing intermittently for hours. The other girls were looking on in an unhappy group.

"Chuck it!" said Willy curtly.

"Oh, don't speak so sharply, Willy!" murmured Irene.

"Chuck it, I say!" repeated Willy, grasping his sister by the shoulder and roughly forcing her back. "Crying, eh? What for?"

"I suppose it's beastly weak of me, Willy, but I can't help thinking that Ted is really dead!" murmured Ena. "I didn't think so at first, but the time keeps going on, and—"

"I'm ashamed of you!" said Willy quietly. "My hat! I always thought you were a pretty strong sort of person for a girl, and here you are, blubbing like a kid! Why? Ted's as alive as I am!"

Ena looked at him with a sudden wild hope.

"Have—have you heard something?" asked Mary Summers eagerly.

"No, of course not," said Willy. "I've heard nothing, and I've seen nothing. And my common sense tells me that Ted was drowned. But I jolly well know he wasn't! I've got a hunch that he's safe!"

Ena's eyes became dimmed again.

"It's your common sense that's right, Willy," she said sadly.

"Rats!" said Willy. "Is Ted the kind of fellow to get drowned in a silly river? There's one thing that tells me absolutely that he's alive. Foo Chow has told us all that he's dead! The man's a horrible liar, and he only said that just to torture us. If old Foo Chow had expressed some sort of hope, I should have been in the last stages of misery. But he said that Ted was seen to go under, struggling. Well, that's good enough for me. Ted's alive!"

There was something shrewdly sensible in this reasoning. But Ena Handforth only shook her head and looked at him with dull misery.

"I wish I could believe you, Willy, but I can't," she said unsteadily. "If there was only some way of proving it. If there was only a chance of finding out—"

"Leave it to me," interrupted Willy calmly.

"Why, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know—yet," replied Willy vaguely. "But you needn't think I'm going to let things just drag on without knowing something more definite. But mum's the word, you girls!" he added warningly.

"Willy!" said Irene, staring.

"Don't use that tone, for goodness' sake—"

"What are you thinking of?" went on Irene, grasping Willy by the arm. "You mustn't try to escape, or anything like that. It's too risky. Promise me that you won't do anything foolish."

"Right!" said Willy promptly. "I promise!"

"It all depends upon the point of view," said Doris Berkeley dryly. "That's an easy promise, Willy. You might consider something quite sensible which we should call a piece of sheer madness."

"It's quite likely," said Willy. "But you needn't get the wind-up. I can do a fat lot, can't I? I don't mind admitting that I haven't got the faintest idea of anything definite. But I've got a feeling in my bones that something's going to turn up. That's all. So cheer up, Ena, and look pleasant. Before the morning we'll have Ted back with us, as large and as noisy as ever!"

He walked off, and found Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon.

"Bed-time," he said briefly. "Coming up?"

They followed him to the sleeping compartment which had been set aside for their use. And they were glad to be alone with him.

"Hard lines, Willy!" said Chubby Heath awkwardly. "Juicy and I would like to say something, you know."

"We—we want to cheer you up a bit," said Juicy Lemon miserably.

"Don't try," advised Willy. "Judging by the tone of your voice, Juicy, old man, you couldn't cheer up a gate-post! I'm dashed if you're not on the point of blubbing!"

"I'm not!" denied Lemon fiercely.

"And it's my major who's missing," went on Willy. "It would be a different thing if he were dead. What rot! Dead! Piffle! You can't make me believe that tosh!"

His chums couldn't deal with this sort of talk. They felt

that Willy was simply fooling himself deliberately, just to keep his pecker up. He hadn't a trace of evidence to support his fantastic "hunch." And Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon undressed and got into bed, silent and forlorn.

Willy made no attempt to retire, however. He walked up and down the stately apartment, his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets. Now and again he paused and stared out over the gardens through the open balcony window.

Willy was very different from Edward Oswald. He never ventured upon a mission which promised no success. His major would blindly start off on a thing, leaving the main result to chance. But Willy wasn't like that.

He had no desire to escape. What was the good of escaping anyhow? His one aim was to find out what had happened to Edward Oswald. Supposing he got out into the grounds, what then? He would simply find himself amid totally unfamiliar surroundings, the victim of the first group of Foo Chow's soldiers who happened to spot him. And there wasn't any hope that he would ever get off this island, either. No matter how he racked his brain, there seemed to be utterly no possibility.

"Aren't you coming to bed, Willy?" asked Chubby Heath, at length. "What's the good of mooning up and down the room like that?"

"You're giving us the pip," added Juicy gloomily.

Willy regarded them coldly.

"I'm not feeling sleepy," he growled. "If you don't like me here, I'll go out on the balcony."

He walked to the open window, and his chums sat up.

"Oh, I say!" protested Chubby. "We don't want to drive you out, old son! You mustn't take any notice of Juicy having the pip. Like his callous nature to say a thing of that sort—"

"I didn't mean it!" broke in Juicy Lemon. "We want to cheer you up, Willy. A good sleep is what you need more than anything. You won't make matters any better by getting these fits of the blues—"

Willy grinned.

"You chaps are full of imagination," he interrupted. "I'm not in the blues, and I'm not in need of any cheering. Ted's alive, and I'm just trying to think of some way to prove it. That's all. Go to sleep like good children, and nurse won't spank you!"

He walked out on to the balcony, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, highly indignant, ceased to take the slightest interest in his trouble. Any fellow who could insult them in that way wasn't worth worrying over.

A Golden Opportunity!

THE balcony overlooked a scene of tropical luxuriance. Indeed, it was difficult to imagine that this spot was in the midst of a rugged section of a primitive Chinese province. In every sense the outlook was entrancing.

As Willy stood on the balcony he leaned over the marble balustrade and gazed at the scene with wonder. Every time he looked at it, in fact, he wondered. It all seemed so fantastic.

A palatial marble building, with every modern luxury—electric light, super-wireless, hot and cold water, and a staff of servants who were trained in European fashion. Outside, the grounds were laid out in the most perfect gardens one could wish to see. Exquisitely kept flower-beds of riotous colour, shady paths, and velvety lawns. Palm-trees grew round the fountains, which were playing even now, causing a musical splashing which was cooling to the ear on such a warm night. And everywhere the scene was full of a soft radiance from the many electric standards.

This rocky island in the middle of the river was practically a mile long and over half as broad, and the whole extent of it was covered with gardens and pathways and smooth roads for motoring. And in one direction lay the great avenue, leading straight to the drawbridge.

Beyond, on the farther banks of the river, there was darkness. Barren rocks and rugged peaks could dimly be discerned against the skyline. The city of Yang Fu was some miles away. Dr. Foo Chow was a man who had spent many years in Europe, and his tastes appeared to be cultured. He preferred this sort of home to a purely native one. And so he had built his palace in a lonely spot, distant from all trace of the real China. For Yang Fu itself was a native city in every sense of the word, without a single twentieth century innovation. The contrast in this rock home was, therefore, all the more striking.

"He's a queer beggar," murmured Willy, shaking his head. "I'm blessed if I can understand him. A millionaire, with every luxury imaginable, and yet he's jealous of poor old Ching's father, and wants to pinch his lands! Some of these people never know when they've got enough." He shook himself. "But this isn't helping old Ted," he went

on firmly. "I've got to think of something feasible. It looks as though I shall be thinking all night!"

He idly watched the movements of some of Foo Chow's soldiers. These gentry were attired in gorgeous uniforms—impressive and picturesque. There was the same contrast here as in the other respect. Foo Chow's household robes were indicative of wealth untold; but his subjects in the villages and towns were poor, ragged, poverty-stricken wretches who lived in a permanent condition of semi-starvation. Not that they differed from other people in China. The majority of these millions are fighting constantly for existence.

As if to enhance the sense of normal civilisation, a Rolls-Royce open car came gliding noiselessly along the terrace, and pulled up exactly beneath the balcony on which Willy was standing. The two richly attired men in the front seats got out and stood at attention.

"Except for those comic-opera chauffeurs, I might be in Palm Beach, or Miami, or another of those Florida pleasure resorts," murmured Willy. "What with this gorgeous palace and these palm-gardens, it's just like a super-American resort. What's in the wind now, I wonder?"

He soon knew. Dr. Foo Chow himself emerged from the palace and spoke a few words to the driver. He and his companion

to conciliate you, Lord Dorrimore," he said softly. "I am grieved. Perhaps you would care to accompany me, after all? I think it could be managed. And a little change would perhaps help to alter your mood."

"Accompany you where?" asked Dorrie suspiciously. "I have already mentioned that I am a doctor of science," said Foo Chow. "I have decided that a little scientific experiment shall take place to-night. A question of amputating a forefinger without the aid of an anæsthetic. Quite a novel experiment, and well worth watching."

Lord Dorrimore turned purple. "You devilish hound!" he shouted thickly. "So you're going to torture that poor boy to-night, after all? An' you have the cool impudence to ask me to witness the butchery! By gad, I'll smash— Let me go, Lee! Confound you, man, let me go!"

"Steady, Dorrie—steady!" muttered Lee grimly. Dr. Foo Chow was chuckling with enjoyment. "Quite an unwise outburst," he murmured. "You must remember that I have soldiers within call—within sight. You have but to lay a violent finger upon my person, and you will be struck dead by the first bayonet. My person is sacred to these subjects of mine."

An officer came out at that moment and spoke to Dr. Foo Chow in Chinese. The latter excused himself and went



Hearing the explosions of the electric light bulbs Willy had thrown, the Chinese soldiers instantly ran in the direction whence they had come. It was Willy's chance to escape! With one clean leap he was over the balustrade and dropping down towards the rear seats of the car.

saluted and vanished. Foo Chow climbed into the driving-seat and paused to light a cigarette.

"Ah, gentlemen, this is a pleasure I had not anticipated!" he said smoothly. "My only regret is that I cannot offer to take you for a night blow. Unhappily, the circumstances will not permit of such courtesies."

Willy saw that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had just strolled out from one of the shady paths, unaware, until that moment, that their "host" was so near at hand. Probably they would have avoided him if they had known.

"Thanks all the same, Dr. Foo Chow, but we're rather particular," said Dorrie curtly. "Comin' indoors, Lee?"

"I fear I have offended you in some way, Lord Dorrimore," said Foo Chow regretfully. "Can we not remain amicable? Is this veiled hostility really necessary?"

"Under the present conditions, Dr. Foo Chow, would it not be better to avoid these discussions?" asked Lee smoothly. "By the way, would it be impolite to ask whence you obtained your degree?" he added, by way of turning the conversation.

"I am a doctor of science—not of medicine," smiled Foo Chow. "It is a degree which I obtained at your own University of Oxford. A wonderful institution, gentlemen."

Lord Dorrimore nodded. "It's a pity Oxford didn't know what sort of a blackguard they were admittin' when you went up," he said, with some warmth.

Dr. Foo Chow laughed. "I can see that it is quite useless to make any attempt

indoors. And Lord Dorrimore became suddenly calm, going deathly pale.

"One more affair like that, and I'll break loose!" he panted.

"I don't blame you, sir," said Willy stoutly. They looked up and saw him on the balcony.

"Go to bed, Willy," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Why are you not undressed?"

"Don't blame the poor youngster!" growled Lord Dorrimore. "Hasn't he lost his brother? Look here, Lee, let me wait here for Foo Chow! Let me disfigure that grinnin' face of his! I'd like to mangle it—"

Nelson Lee led the enraged peer away, and Willy pursed his lips.

"I suppose Mr. Lee's right," he murmured, "but it needs a strong will to keep your temper like that. Poor old Dorrie! I believe he'd go dotty with joy if he could only reduce Foo Chow to pulp."

Still leaning over the balustrade, Willy idly contemplated the empty Rolls-Royce. So Foo Chow was going off to Yang Fu? He was going to torture poor old Chingy at once? The cruel fiend! Willy went hot at the very thought. And there he was, up on that balcony, unable—

"Great guns!" breathed Willy tensely. "I wonder!" A thought had come to him—a daring idea. There wasn't one chance in a thousand that it would be successful—There was that car, empty, and Dr. Foo Chow was

obviously going to drive it himself, without any of his attendants. He had only been called in unexpectedly, and might emerge at any second. But just now the Rolls-Royce was empty.

And when it did start, it would go straight to Yung Ching's prison—that was the point! That was the one fact which burned its way into Willy Handforth's brain. The car, with Foo Chow at the wheel, was going straight to Yung Ching's prison!

Willy judged the distance with a keen eye. It was an easy drop—right into the rear seat. Yes, by jingo, there were rugs there, too! But what about the soldiers? There were two groups of guards—both on the terrace, on either side of the car, at some little distance. These men were watching.

"It's no good!" groaned Willy. "I might have known! If only I could distract their attention for a tick, though—My hat, got it!"

In any emergency, Willy Handforth's brain acted like lightning. Turning, he ran swiftly into the bed-room, and found Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon asleep. Without disturbing them, he hurried to the wall and removed the two electric light bulbs from the ornamental bracket. There were several of these brackets in the room, and all the lamps were glowing.

In less than a second Willy was back on the balcony. One glance told him that the car was still empty. He stood well back, so that none of the soldiers could see his movements. Then, with all his strength, he hurled these electric lamps, one after the other.

Willy was famous for the length of his throw on the cricket field, and he sent those bulbs down the paved path in the direction of the drawbridge. Then, with every sense on the alert, he waited.

Crash! Crash!
The sounds came like explosions—peculiar, muffled reports. Willy had known that any electric light bulb, being a vacuum, will give this dull report upon violently bursting. The result was exactly as he had anticipated.

The soldiers, hearing those strange explosions down the path, instantly turned in that direction. Willy didn't even wait for them to move. With one clean leap he was over the balustrade. He dropped sheer, and landed with a soft thud upon the rear cushions of the Rolls-Royce.

The next moment he rolled down into the darkness, at the foot of the seat, and covered himself with one of the rugs.

A Regal Banquet!

AH FONG beamed upon Handforth & Co., and his face wrinkled up into a thousand creases. He stood there with folded hands, bowing.

"Dinner him leady," he explained cheerfully.

"Allee same eattee!"
"Good man!" said Handforth, smacking his lips in anticipation. "'Allee same eattee' sounds jolly good to me. We've only had a few raw potatoes and things since midday, and we're just about ready to eat boot leather!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Church and McClure heartily.
Ah Fong had apparently dressed in his Sunday best for the occasion, for his garments were much cleaner than the ones he had worn previously.

Quite a little time had elapsed, Handforth & Co. having been invited to "sleep" while dinner was being prepared. This was evidently an elaborate business, judging from the excitement which had throbbled through the modest household.

All three juniors had only been separated from the living-room by means of a thin screen, and they had heard the constant chattering and the clattering of pots. Sundry appetising odours had come to them, whetting their hunger the more.

"Old Ah Fong seems to be quite a decent old stick," Handforth had remarked during these preparations. "He's pally with us because we saved his son from that giddy tiger. Well, if it means a feed, we're in luck. Some of these Chinks aren't so bad, after all."

Now that the meal was ready, the chums of Study D were eager to sit down to it. The wait had seemed an appallingly long one, and they were literally famished.

"By the way," asked Handforth, "how's little Seng?"

"Him sleepie one-time," replied Ah Fong, with a happy nod. "Seng, him die if you not lescue him and washee wounds. Ah Fong glateful. Ah Fong muchee your slave. Ah Fong do anything—"

"Well, don't make a song about it, old man!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "What about Mrs. Ah Fong? Isn't she pleased, too? As long as you change those bandages night and morning, I don't think there'll be much fear of complication. Strictly speaking, there ought to be a few

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stitches put in that gash in the shoulder, but he'll probably mend without 'em."

Ah Fong shook his head in bewilderment.

"No savvy," he said. "Much speakie no good."
"Oh, I'm a bit too quick, eh?" said Handforth. "All right, I'll have a shot in your own lingo. Seng, him get well plente quick if you washee muchee. Him sleepie and stopee in beddee. Savvy?"

"Ah Fong savvy," grinned the Chinaman. "Allee same washee. But dinner leady. You makee come?"

"You bet!" said Handforth promptly.
They were coming to the conclusion that this meal was to be a somewhat ceremonial affair. Apparently, they were regarded in the light of honoured guests, and were to be treated as such. The meal was to be something of a feast—a celebration of little Seng's salvation.

Ah Fong opened the flimsy communicating doors and stood aside. From his voluminous sleeves he had produced two lacquered sticks, and he solemnly raised them to his head. Then he handed them to Handforth.

"Pencils!" said Edward Oswald. "What's this, a present?"

"Him not pencils," explained Ah Fong. "Him chopsticks."

"By George, chopsticks, eh?" grinned Handforth. "Have we got to eat with these giddy things? It can't be done, old son. We might be able to pick up some macaroni with 'em, but if you've got rice on the menu, I can see some trouble ahead!"

Fortunately, Ah Fong only understood a very few words from this statement. He could only follow a conversation when it was in pidgin English and slowly articulated.

Church and McClure accepted their chopsticks in turn, and then passed into the main living-room. The table was loaded with many dishes, and the air was heavy with the smell of various foods.

"Hallo!" said Handforth, looking round. "What about the ladies?"

Ah Fong's two elder sons were waiting, but there was no sign of his wife or daughters.

"Dry up, Handy," whispered Church. "Haven't you heard that the Chinese never have ladies at feasts? It's only the men who eat. Women are of no account in this country."

"Then it's a dirty trick!" said Handforth hotly. "We can't enjoy a feed properly, knowing that Mrs. Ah Fong and the girls are shoved out into the back room. They've got to make an alteration!"

He turned to the host.

"How about your wife?" he demanded.

"She no eat," said Ah Fong unemotionally.

"And your daughters?"

"They no eat."

"Oh, I suppose they've had their dinner?" asked Handforth. "H'm! It's a rummy way, but I suppose you know best. Ladies first—eh? Well, that's better. Where do we sit?"

He prepared to seat himself, but Ah Fong grew excited. "No, no!" he exclaimed. "You sittee here. Me, Ah Fong, host. Me sittee at head of table. You sittee on my left. You most excellent and honourable guest."

"In that case I ought to sit on your right," said Handforth.

Again he prepared to sit down, but Ah Fong was insistent. Nothing would satisfy him but that Handforth sat on his left. As usual in China, such customs were the exact opposite of the European. The honoured guest always sits to the host's left in China.

Handforth & Co. were rather out of place with all this ceremony, in any case. They wanted the feast, and were not particular about the formalities.

They found little bowls in their places, and a spoon, too. This was a welcome discovery, for they could easily handle a spoon.

The meal commenced—curiously enough—with the dessert first. Again, this was in direct contradiction of European custom. There were water-melon seed, pickled plums, and other curious delicacies. They tasted quite appetising, however, and Handforth and Church and McClure were fully ready for the hot dishes when they were placed in front of them by the eldest son.

"I don't know what this stuff is, but it tastes good," said Handforth, as he juggled with his chopsticks. "It's a rummy idea to eat syrup-dumplings with the meat, but I suppose it's one of the customs, and I could eat anything just now. But why do they cut everything into little bits? We're not kids!"

"It's not polite to criticise, Handy," said Church.

"You likee him food?" asked Ah Fong anxiously.

"First chop!" replied Handforth. "Him muchee good! In other words, O.K.! This is the stuff to give the troops! How about some more of that stew?"

Handforth was particularly keen on a meat stew, which tasted very savoury. He couldn't quite name the meat, but it was very tasty. And the meal went on with everybody in the highest good-humour.

The only trouble was that the chopsticks were difficult to manage. All the food was cut up into small pieces, so that it could be handled with comparative simplicity by means of the chopsticks.

"It seems easy enough," murmured Church, as he watched Ah Fong. "But I'm blessed if I can wangle 'em like that!"

The host was having no trouble with the chopsticks. He simply put one thumb over both, and pressed the tips of his second and third fingers against the middle of each. In this way he picked everything up with uncanny precision, the lower chopstick steadying the upper.

At a really ceremonial Chinese dinner, a guest would rather go hungry than dare to use his other hand as a help.

"Him tasty piece!" said Ah Fong.

He was offering Handforth a choice piece of meat from his own bowl, held between his chopsticks—which had just come out of his own mouth. Handforth vaguely remembered having heard that it was a mortal insult to refuse such a proffered dainty. He accepted it with polite courtesy.

"I don't suppose I shall be poisoned, so I might just as well do the right thing," he said. "It's a good thing you can't understand what I'm saying, old chap. Now have a chunk of mine!"

"Better go easy, Handy," said McClure. "He might get

"Absolutely full!" said Church comfortably.

"Couldn't eat another scrap!" confessed McClure.

"You gluttons!" retorted Handforth, with a frown. "We'll soon get some exercise to help our digestions, though. We've got a long walk before us. I must say this grub is appetising," he added, regarding the remains of the feast. "I wonder what we've been eating?"

"Tasted like pork to me," said Church. "They eat lots of pork in China. It wouldn't be polite to ask any questions, Handy. Go easy, you know. These Chinamen are touchy about certain things, and you can't be too careful!"

But Handforth was not to be put off.

"Heap good dinner!" he said, beaming upon Ah Fong.

"Plenty nice!"

"You likee?" asked Ah Fong, with delight.

"Rather!" said Handforth. "I mean, muchee-muchee!"

"Me greatly honoured!" said the host. "Miseable food, but Ah Fong not lich. Dooe best I can. Muchee honoured!"

"What's this stew made of?" asked Handforth, as he drew the dish towards him, and eyed the contents curiously. "This was the stuff I liked best of all! So jolly savoury!"

"Him allee sorts," grinned Ah Fong.

"All sorts?"

"Him pork," said the host. "Him dog. Him lat!"

"Dog?" said Handforth, with a violent start.

"Lat?" breathed Church. "You—you don't mean rat?"

McClure merely made a peculiar sound, and dived for his handkerchief.

"Dog?" repeated Handforth, with a gulp. "You—you don't mean that there was dogflesh in that giddy stew?"

Ah Fong beamed with pleasure.

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the hang of it, and we don't want to offend a friend like this."

Handforth had selected a piece of floppy fat, which he had had no intention of eating himself, and Ah Fong accepted it with huge delight. His sons were grinning with enjoyment, too.

"My hat! We've forgotten to smack our lips!" said Handforth, after a while. "Mustn't overlook a thing like that. Go it, you chaps!"

So, accordingly, for the rest of the meal the three juniors made all the noise of which they were capable. And Ah Fong and his sons were so hugely pleased that their good-humour increased with every minute.

After the Feast!

AT last the chums of Study D had had their fill. Food was still pressed upon them, but they could eat no more. Indeed, now that their hunger was thoroughly satisfied, some of the oily dishes were somewhat unsavoury to look upon.

But they were all delighted with Ah Fong's well-meant hospitality. There was a great gulf of difference between this humble coolie and his modest feast, and Dr. Foo Chow and all his modern triumphs.

For Dr. Foo Chow was an enemy, and Ah Fong was a friend. This was the astonishing part of it all. Handforth & Co. had never dreamed of making a friend like this, and they were grateful for the food and the shelter. But, of course, they couldn't stay here much longer. They had their mission to accomplish, and, furthermore, there was a chance that Ah Fong might get into serious trouble if the fugitives were found on his premises.

"Well, that's that," said Handforth, as he sat back in his chair. "You chaps finished?"

"Dog-flesh him one piece good," he replied. "Me catches lats and put him in. Muchee nicee!"

"Rats!" gurgled Handforth, going pale. "My only sainted aunt! We've—we've been eating this horrible muck, and didn't realise!"

"I'm feeling sick!" moaned McClure.

"Wait a minute!" went on Edward Oswald, his voice growing faint. "What—what are these, Ah Fong? These things in syrup?"

He pointed to another dish.

"Him dlied cockroaches," smiled Ah Fong.

"Cockroaches?" howled Handforth wildly.

Ah Fong pointed to another dish.

"Him slugs," he explained. "Much nicee—slugs. And him eggs—buried eggs. Me keepee eggs in glood one moon—two moons—"

But the guests had fled. Outside, under the night sky, they wasted a goodly portion of the feast. It was a matter of ten minutes before they began to recover and before conversation became possible.

"Rat stew!" breathed Church hoarsely. "Dog-meat!"

"Dried cockroaches and rotten eggs!" moaned McClure.

"And—and we enjoyed it all!" said Handforth brokenly. "Oh, my goodness! You—you blithering idiots! Why the dickens did you ask him what we'd eaten?"

Church and McClure were suddenly stimulated.

"You howling ass, that was your idea!" snorted McClure. "Didn't we warn you? It serves you right for being so jolly inquisitive! I had a horrible sort of fear that we'd been eating insects and things, but I thought it would be better to let well alone. Just look what you've done!"

"I'll never have another meal with a Chinaman as long as I live!" panted Edward Oswald. "And yet I suppose

he meant well. But—but rats, you know! Cock-roaches—

"Shut up!" hissed McClure.

"Let's—let's forget all about it!" muttered Church. "I want some water! I—I can still taste— Oh! Let's get back to Foo Chow! He may be a rotter, but he gives us decent grub!"

"We've got to get back to Ah Fong," said Handforth. "He'll be wondering what the dickens has happened to us. I don't suppose we can blame him much—these people eat dog-meat and all the other things as a matter of course. He'll be awfully cut up if we tell him we don't like—"

"I say," broke in Church sharply, "what are those lights?"

"And voices?" added McClure, staring.

They moved beyond a clump of bushes, and looked out across the cultivated rice fields and other land. Lights were moving about in the distance, and voices could be distinctly heard.

"Rammy!" said Handforth. "By George!" he added, with a start. "I wonder if they're Foo Chow's beastly soldiers searching for us?"

The question was answered by Ah Fong, who came running up in the gloom.

"Him soldiers!" he breathed tremulously. "They searchee! Muchee danger! Catchee you, and punish one time chop! Makee him!"

"Do which?" asked Handforth. "Oh, run!"

"Allee same quick," said Ah Fong nervously. "Catchee you here, and Ah Fong die!" He hesitated, and then went on: "Me hidee you! Comee one time, and me takee you into loof—"

"Thanks all the same, old man, but we're not going to hide in your roof," replied Handforth grimly. "You and your whole family would be put to death, I expect, if you were caught hiding us. We'll cut. It'll take more than Foo Chow's soldiers to catch us. Don't forget we're Boy Scouts!"

"No savvy!" said Ah Fong helplessly.

"That's all right—no time to explain," said Edward Oswald. "Thanks for the feed, and thanks for your hospitality, both of which we appreciate, although we're not accepting any more invites! So-long, old crinkly face!"

He turned to his chums.

"Ready?" he asked curtly. "Come on!"

They waved to Ah Fong, and made off into the night—in the opposite direction to the straggling lights. Church and McClure were alarmed, for it seemed impossible to them that they could avoid capture.

"It's no good, Handy—we might as well give ourselves up," said Church.

"Give ourselves up?" repeated Handforth. "You silly chump, we can dish these soldiers as easy as winking! Just like the Chinese! They search for us with lanterns, and talk in high voices, on purpose to give us good warning! They're a funny crowd, these Chinks!"

"My hat, there's something in that!" admitted McClure, with a start.

Handforth was right. The Chinese are certainly astonishing in their methods, and here was an example of it. They were searching for these three boys—whom Foo Chow obviously thought to be still alive—quite openly, with lanterns! It was characteristic of them. And Handforth & Co. had no difficulty whatever in avoiding the search parties.

"I hadn't the heart to tell old Ah Fong what I thought of his grub," continued Handforth, as they pushed through some dense clumps of bushes. "It's a good thing he couldn't understand all we were saying—"

"Better go easy here," broke in Church. "That tiger, you know! It might still be lurking about somewhere. I expect that's why those soldiers are carrying lanterns. But we're all in the dark—"

"We're not afraid of any tigers," said Handforth contemptuously. "I'm with you, my lads! If that tiger starts

any more of his tricks, I'll give him another punch in the eye! But I'll bet he's miles away by this time, and he hasn't stopped running yet!"

It was rather an aimless trudge through the night. Actually, it was quite early yet, although Handforth & Co. had an idea that midnight was not far distant. They were totally wrong in this assumption. The evening, although dark, was young.

Now and again the three juniors found themselves floundering in muddy rice fields, or picking their way through sugar plantations. But as to any definite direction, they were quite at sea. They only knew that they had avoided the search parties.

"We shall never get to Yang Fu at this rate," said Church at last. "We're simply going across country all the time. It would be a different thing if we could find a road. But there seems to be nothing—"

"What do you call this, then?" said Handforth triumphantly.

They were climbing up a steep, grassy bank, and had just reached the top. And there lay a broad, concrete highway—a most remarkable thing to come across in this land of dirt tracks. It stretched away on either hand, smooth and wide. In spite of the gloom, the three juniors could see the roadway distinctly. It was incongruous in this primitive country.

"By jingo, you're right!" said McClure. "It's the highway right enough! And this is the way to Yang Fu, too—to the left, here. We know it's the only important road, so it must lead to the city."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We go to the right."

"But that's the way to the stronghold," declared Church. "Can't you see the hills in the distance? It's all flat in the other direction, and there's a kind of luminous glow, too. That must be Yang Fu."

Handforth grudgingly nodded.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "Yes, we'd better go to the left. It must be two or three miles to the city—"

"Optimist!" interrupted McClure tartly. "It'll be nothing less than nine or ten! I don't see how we can walk that in less than three hours, allowing for a few stoppages, while we dodge the search parties—"

"Hallo! Lights!" interrupted Church, staring. "Look! I'm jiggered if it's not a motor-car! Can't you hear the purr? Old Foo Chow going into the city to torture Chingy!"

They drew back and crouched down, their hearts beating more rapidly. The lights of a powerful motor-car had appeared in the distance, along that broad ribbon of highway. They had arisen from a dip, and the car was now sweeping down the gradual slope at high speed.

Handforth & Co., concealed by some friendly bushes, caught a brief glimpse of a great Rolls-Royce, with Dr. Foo Chow himself at the wheel.

Little did Edward Oswald Handforth dream that his minor had just swept by, too!

Dr. Foo Chow was feeling satisfied with the general course of events. Haste was not one of his weaknesses. He did everything deliberately and thoroughly, and his plans for the seizure of Yung Li Chang's lands were proceeding as he had originally intended.

He was about to take the first step in his scheme against Yung Ching's father! This evening the unfortunate little Chinese boy would suffer the first mutilation—the severing of a finger as a warning to Yung Li Chang to surrender his lands!

But Foo Chow little knew that Willy Handforth was within a foot or two of him at this very moment!

(Will Foo Chow carry out his cruel action, or can the St. Frank's adventurers prevent it? Don't miss next week's thrilling chapters.)

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