

WHO WANTS A MATCH FOOTBALL? (Turn to page 9)

The GEM

THIS WEEK'S
Grand Stories

**"TOM MERRY'S
GREAT JAPE"**

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

**"THE CAPTIVE
SCHOOLMASTER"**

By OWEN CONQUEST



*Tom
Merry's
Prehistoric
Man!*

A ST. JIM'S MASTER MAKES THE GREATEST DISCOVERY OF THE AGE!—

Tom Merry's Great



Down the hillside went Mr. Lathom with a speed that was very creditable in a middle-aged gentleman of sedentary habits. After him raced the prehistoric man, brandishing his fists and yelling in a manner worthy of the earliest prehistoric times!

CHAPTER 1.

Mr. Lathom is Too Kind!

TOM MERRY stopped and stared, and nearly let the football slip from under his arm in astonishment. He was quite taken aback.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and most of the fellows were thinking of footer practice. Tom Merry's chums in the Shell, Manners and Lowther, had already gone down to the football ground.

Tom had run upstairs for the Soccer ball, and as he came running down, whistling cheerfully and in great spirits, he found nearly all the Fourth Form at St. Jim's gathered in the Hall.

That was surprising in itself, as usually they ought to have been out of doors, playing footer. But the astonishing thing was their woebegone look.

Blake, usually the sunniest of the juniors, looked as if he was going to a

funeral. Digby and Herries were giving one another commiserating glances. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, wore a worried look. Even Reilly's genial Irish face was clouded. Figgins & Co. of the New House looked gloomy and glum. There wasn't a smile to be seen in the whole of the Fourth Form.

Tom Merry stared blankly.

The Fourth Formers glanced at him in a dispirited way.

The sight of the Shell fellow, with a light coat on over his football rig, and the football under his arm, seemed to plunge them into still more gloomier depths of depression. Jack Blake groaned aloud, and Figgins was heard to snort.

"What the dickens is the matter with you?" demanded Tom Merry, as soon as he recovered his voice. "Is it a flogging for the whole of the Form?"

"Certainly not, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, jamming his famous monocle into a lack-lustre eye.

"Detained for the afternoon?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"No!"

"Coming down to the footer practice?"

"Do we look as if we're coming down to the footer practice?" said Jack Blake, with another deep groan. "Don't talk about footer practice to me, or I shall scream!"

Tom Merry was more and more amazed.

"What's happened?" he demanded.

"Nothing!"

"Then what are you all looking as if you were going to be flogged for?" asked the captain of the Shell.

"I wish it were only a flogging!" groaned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy pathetically. "We could get ovah a floggin', and get down to the footah. It's worse than that."

"Well, it can't be the sack," said Tom Merry. "You Fourth Form kids are a worry, but the Head can't be going to sack the lot of you."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Is it an outbreak of measles or something? Are they going to march you off to the hospital?"

Blake grinned for the first time.

"No, fathead!"

"Then what is it?"

"It's Lathom!" grunted Blake.

"What has he done?"

"It isn't what he's done, it's what he's going to do!" groaned Blake dolorously.

"What is he going to do?"

"He's going to be kind to us!"

"What is there to grumble at in that?" demanded Tom Merry. "I've

—THERE'S NOT A DULL MOMENT IN THIS RIPPING LONG YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.

Jape!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD

wished often enough that old Linton, our giddy Form-master, was as kind as your Lathom. Lathom is a jolly good little ass. He's a scientific chap, I know, but everybody has his little weakness, and Lathom's is geology. A man might have worse vices than that."

"I wish he'd take up drink or gambling instead!" snorted Figgins. "I wouldn't care if he'd play shove-ha-penny with the Head—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or if he didn't come home till morning. He could do those things without worrying us. But now—"

"Yaas, now!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Now, it's simply howlid. Of course, it's up to us to treat Mr. Lathom decently, and take his kindness in the spiwit in which it is meant. But—"

"I wish I knew the chap who invented geology!" said Herries viciously. "I'd take him into a quiet corner with my bulldog Towser!"

"Taking up geology?" asked Tom Merry, still more amazed. "What a giddy pastime—beats bug-hunting hollow. Very brainy, I must say. I thought Skimpole of the Shell was the only chap in the school who cared for geology. You don't mean to say you're chucking footer this afternoon to go and look for fossils?"

"Do you think we would if we could help it?" howled Blake. "Lathom's going to take us on a geological excursion as a favour—an act of kindness. He goes rooting about among filthy old stones himself and enjoys it. He's going to give us some enjoyment this afternoon. We're not ordered to go—only we can't say no. We're going to explore the giddy rocks and revel in Older Pliocene and Newer Pliocene, and Upper Miocene and Lower Miocene—oh, my hat!"

"And jurassic—" said Figgins.

"And triassic—" said Kerr.

"And silly-assic!" snorted Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

The Fourth Formers glared at him. It was no laughing matter for them. So long as Mr. Lathom dabbled in geology by himself, they were willing to give him his head, as Blake generously said. But when he wanted to impart the wonders of modern science to his suffering Form, and took them away from the football field for the purpose—well, then the limit was reached.

To walk out in orderly array, like good little Erics, as Figgins put it; to be chipped by the village boys and the Grammar School fellows, without being able to take vengeance on the spot; and to be expected to "enthuse" if a fragment of incomprehensible bone should be discovered amid a heap of incomprehensible stone—it was not a joyful prospect for the Fourth.

"What are you cackling at, you silly chump?" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, bump him!"

And the exasperated Fourth Formers rushed at the Shell fellow. In a moment Tom Merry was seized by many hands, and he descended upon the floor with a loud concussion.

Bump!

"Now laugh!" snorted Blake.

Tom Merry did not laugh; he yelled.

"Ow!"

"Give him another!"

"Yaas! Give the wottah anothah, deah boys!"

"Are you ready, my boys?" asked Mr. Lathom, coming down the passage and blinking at the juniors over his glasses.

"Dear me! What is that?"

"Ow! Yow!"

"Are you hurt, Merry? Dear me, you should not run downstairs in a hurry!" said Mr. Lathom. "It is very kind of you to help Merry up, my dear boys. It is very gratifying to see you gather round your schoolfellow in this way to help him, but do not crowd round him too much. I trust you have not hurt yourself, Merry?"

"Nunno!" gasped Tom Merry, as he gained his feet. "No, sir, thank you!"

"We will start now, my boys. We are going to have a most enjoyable afternoon," said Mr. Lathom, rubbing his hands. "Follow me!"

The Fourth Formers followed Mr. Lathom, marching out of the School House in solemn array.

Tom Merry gasped for breath.

"Poor old Blake!" he murmured.

"Poor old Figgy! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was sorry for the hapless victims of Mr. Lathom's enthusiasm,

It was no laughing matter for the chums of St. Jim's when they had to take up the study of geology! But it was the laugh of a lifetime that brought their careers as geologists to an abrupt end!

but he could not help thinking it funny, and he chuckled as he ran down to the football field.

Blake & Co. did not chuckle. They followed Mr. Lathom out of the gates of St. Jim's with the solemnity of owls.

CHAPTER 2.

Saved by the Enemy!

MR. LATHOM trotted along quite cheerily and chirpily.

He was in his element, and his kind eyes beamed with benevolence over his glasses.

The Fourth Formers marched on glumly.

They did not want to hurt their kind Form-master's feelings and they did not want to offend him. But they could not look happy. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could only muster up a feeble smile when he met Mr. Lathom's eye. But Mr. Lathom was short-sighted, and he was wrapped up in the thrilling joys of geology. He only supposed that the boys were looking grave and thoughtful, which was eminently right and proper on the occasion of a geological excursion.

"And to think," murmured Jack Blake, in despair, "that those Shell rotters are playing football at this very minute!"

"Awful!" groaned Figgins.

"Yaas, watah! It's enough to make a chap groan!" said Arthur Augustus. "I trust my politeness will not give out before this expeditious ovah. But I can feel it wunnin' low."

"The only chance for us is meeting the Grammarians," said Kerr. "If we could get up a serap with them, it would knock geology on the head!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Suppose we ask Mr. Lathom to stop at Mother Murphy's and have some ginger-pop and tarts?" suggested Fatty Wynn hopefully.

"Ass!" said Blake.

Mr. Lathom glanced round kindly at the murmur of voices.

"We shall proceed through Rylcombe," he said. "Then we shall reach Broken Hill, which is singularly rich in geological examples. Is it not extraordinary to reflect, my dear boys, that at one period the whole of this region was under water, the waves of a prehistoric sea stretching as far as the eye could reach?"

"But doesn't water always reflect, sir?" asked Kerr, venturing to pull Mr. Lathom's respected leg very gently.

"Eh—what did you say, Kerr?"

"If this region was under water, sir, it wouldn't be extraordinary to reflect, would it? I've always noticed, sir, that one can see one's reflection in water."

Mr. Lathom stared at Kerr. Kerr was looking quite solemn, and could not be suspected of joking with his Form-master; and, indeed, a geological excursion was not likely to make any fellows feel humorous.

"You misapprehend me, Kerr," said Mr. Lathom mildly. "However, no matter. Here we are in Rylcombe. Pray keep in order as we pass through the village, and do not scatter about the street."

"Yes, sir."

Fatty Wynn's eyes lingered lovingly on the window of Mrs. Murphy's tuck-shop as the army marched down the High Street. Outside Mrs. Murphy's shop, consuming ginger-beer, were three cheerful-looking youths. The St. Jim's fellows knew them at once—Gordon Gay and Frank Monk and Carboy, of Rylcombe Grammar School. The three Grammarians raised their caps to Mr. Lathom as he passed, and the St. Jim's master acknowledged the salute politely and walked on.

But the Grammarians did not salute the juniors so gracefully. They grinned at them, as if there was something very amusing in seeing them in battle array, so to speak.

"Going for a nice little walk with a nice little master?" asked Gordon Gay.

"How sweet!" said Carboy. "Gussy, where did you dig up that necktie?"

Arthur Augustus turned purple.

"Weally, you wottah—" he began.

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"My boys, I have to step into Mr. Wedge's shop for a moment for the volume of 'The Geological History of Sussex,' of which I intend to read you a chapter this afternoon. Pray remain here, and do not scatter about."

Mr. Lathom toddled into the book-shop.

"What's the little game?" asked Gordon Gay curiously. "Do they make the Fourth walk out like a little fag Form now?"

"We're going geologising!" groaned Blake.

"Oh crumbs!"

"And if we hadn't a master with us, we'd wipe up the ground with you cheeky rotters!" growled Figgins.

"Yaas, wotiah!"

Gordon Gay chuckled. There was a siphon of soda-water with the ginger-beer, and Gordon Gay played with it carelessly.

"You haven't answered my question yet, Gussy," he murmured.

"Weally, Gay—"

"Where did you discover that face?" asked Gay, with an air of great interest. "And where did you dig up that nose? Did you find it on one of your geological excursions?"

"You—you uttah wottah!"

"Looks rather prehistoric to me," remarked Carboy, jamming a half-crown into his eye in playful imitation of D'Arcy's eyeglass, and scanning the swell of St. Jim's. "By the way, do you call it a face, Gussy?"

"What's in a name?" said Frank Monk. "Gussy wears it on the front of his head, so it must be a face, mustn't it? I suppose you're not wearing a mask, Gussy?"

"Certainly not, you wottah!"

"You need one, you know, if that is really a face."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his aristocratic nose. He deliberately dropped his eyeglass from his eye, and pushed back his spotless cuffs.

"Pway stand wound, and sweep us from the bookshop, deah boys!" he said. "I am goin' to give these wottahs a feahful thwackin'."

"Old Latham will be out in a minute!" growled Blake.

"Blow Latham!"

And Arthur Augustus, having finished his warlike preparations, advanced upon Gordon Gay & Co. The Australian junior gazed at him smilingly till he was within a couple of feet, and then he gently exerted a pressure of his thumb upon the siphon lever.

Fizzzzzz!

"Oh! Ah! Yawoooooh! Gwoooooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as the stream of soda-water caught him full in the face the Grammarians had passed so many rude remarks upon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gweat Scott! Ow, you wottah! Gwoooooh!"

Jack Blake, grinning, rushed to the rescue, but he recoiled back with the grin fairly washed off his face as the siphon was turned upon him.

"Yah! Oh!" he howled. "Gwoooooh!"

"Lots of it," said Gordon Gay cheerfully. "Come and have some more. Will you have a taste of soda-water, Figgys?"

"Yow!" roared Figgins, as Gay turned the siphon upon him without waiting for a reply.

"Very refreshing on a warm afternoon," remarked Gay. "Have a little, Herries?"

"Yowp! Oh!"

"Collar them!" roared Blake, dabbing his face with his handkerchief.

"The rotters! Collar them!"

"Here's Latham!" muttered Page.

"Blow Latham! Collar those Grammar School rotters!"

The Fourth Formers of St. Jim's rushed in a crowd upon the three. Gordon Gay & Co. made a jump into the tuckshop. In the doorway they grinned at the excited St. Jim's juniors, and kissed their hands. But the Fourth Formers were too excited to care for the fact that Mr. Latham might step out of the bookshop at any moment. They forgot everything but the fact that the Grammarians were ragging them.

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and that they wanted vengeance, and wanted it at once.

Jack Blake led a rush, and the juniors poured into the tuckshop upon the Grammarians.

"Collar them!"

"Bump tho wottahs!"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Gordon Gay. "We've woke up a giddy hornet's-nest."

They had.

The rush of the Saints bore the Grammarians back into the tuckshop. They were collared and overwhelmed by numbers, in spite of their resistance. Mrs. Murphy, behind her little counter, gave a shriek of alarm.

"Young gentlemen! Oh dear—oh dear! Help!"

The tuckshop was swarming with juniors in a state of wild excitement. Gordon Gay, borne down in the grasp of a dozen hands, collapsed into a large box of eggs. Those eggs were marked twelve a shilling, and they were not sold so cheaply on account of their freshness. Gay crashed into the midst of them with a yell, and the broken eggs squashed and spurted round him, and the odour that rose from them showed that they would not have been really cheap at twenty a shilling.

"Oh dear!" shrieked Mrs. Murphy.

"Oh dear! Police!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Blake. "Somebody will have to pay for those eggs, and the price ought to be high if it matches the eggs."

"Gro-oogh!" spluttered Gordon Gay.

"Shove the other rotters in," said Figgins. "We shall have to have a whip-round to pay for the eggs, so we may as well be generous with them."

"Leggo!" roared Monk. "Don't you dare to— Yawoooooh! Ow!"

Squash!

The eggbox was a large one, and there was just room for the three Grammarians to squeeze into it. They sat tightly packed, with broken eggs squashing and squirting under and round them. The scent from the eggbox was terrific.

"Keep 'em there!" said Jack Blake, grinning. "This beats soda-water, doesn't it, Monkey?"

"Owl! Leggo!"

"How much that box of eggs, Mrs. Murphy?" asked Blake. "We're treating our young friends to those eggs, and we're going to pay."

"Eight shillings, Master Blake."

And the juniors subscribed that sum. It was worth it, as Blake remarked. The scent alone, applied to the Grammarians, was worth double the money.

Gordon Gay & Co. wriggled in the eggbox, held there by a dozen pairs of hands. But there came a yell of alarm from the juniors outside the shop:

"Cave! Latham!"

"Hook it!" said Figgins.

They scrambled out of the tuckshop. Mr. Latham had stepped out of the book establishment with a heavy volume under his arm. He was blinking round in search of his vanished Form when the juniors came swarming out of the tuckshop into the street. Mr. Latham looked at them chidingly. He imagined that the juniors had gone into the village shop for refreshment while they waited for him.

"My dear boys, pray form in line. You should not— Dear me! What is that?"

Mr. Latham dropped the "Geological History of Sussex" with a crash. He gazed in horror and amazement at three youths who came rushing out of the tuckshop after the St. Jim's juniors,

smothered with yolks of eggs and fragments of broken shells. The scent they brought with them could have been out with a knife.

"What—what—what— You wretched young hooligans! Go away!" shouted Mr. Latham, as he saw that the three egg juniors were rushing to the attack.

Gordon Gay & Co. had lost their caps and their collars in the struggle. Their jackets were split, and they were smothered with dust and eggs. No wonder Mr. Latham did not recognise them as the three polite youths who had saluted him so gracefully ten minutes before.

"Go away!" shrieked Mr. Latham, waving his little geological hammer excitedly. "Go away, you young ruffians!"

"Yawooooh!"

"My dear D'Arcy, have I struck you by accident? I am sorry. You wretched and foul-smelling young hooligans, go away at once, or I will chastise you!"

But the infuriated Grammarians did not even hear him. They were at boiling point, and they rushed right at the St. Jim's fellows, careless of the odds. If they couldn't lick so many, they could impart to them the stickiness and the scent of the smashed eggs.

Blake & Co. knew it, and they backed away—not from the fists, but from the eggs.

Mr. Latham rushed in between the foes, and the Grammarians' rush was stopped—by Mr. Latham.

Exactly how the little Form-master was going to stop the rush of three excited and athletic youths was not clear. He had, perhaps, overestimated his powers. The rush was stopped for one second as the trio came into collision with Mr. Latham, and then Mr. Latham rolled on the ground, and the Grammarians rolled over him.

Mr. Latham's umbrella and glasses flew in different directions, and his geological hammer joined the "Geological History of Sussex" on the ground. He clutched wildly at the three egg youths who were scrambling over him, and shrieked for the police.

"Rescue!" roared Blake.

Eggs or no eggs, the juniors had to rescue their Form-master. They rushed upon the vile-scented Grammarians, and collared them, and yanked them off Mr. Latham.

Police-constable Crump heaved in sight in the village street, and Mr. Latham sat up and shrieked at him.

"Officer, arrest these young hooligans! I give them in charge! Oh dear! Where are my glasses? Take them in charge, officer! Where are my things? Dear me! Help!"

"Hook it!" murmured Blake; and as the St. Jim's fellows released them, Gordon Gay & Co. vanished down the nearest turning.

Mr. Crump, portly and stout, arrived heavily upon the scene when they were gone.

"Wot's all this 'ere?" demanded Mr. Crump, taking out a notebook. "My heyo! Drunk and disorderly in broad daylight! Your name, old gent—I want your name and address!"

"What!" shrieked Mr. Latham. "How dare you! I am Mr. Latham! I have been attacked by three desperate ruffians!"

"Mr. Latham!" gasped the constable, recognising him. "Oh, lor! Sorry, sir! I didn't know you with that hegy stuff on your face, sir! Assault and battery, I s'pose—attempted robbery in broad daylight! We'll ave the rascals, sir! Can you give me their descriptions?"

Blake and Figgins tenderly helped Mr. Lathom to his feet. D'Arcy recovered his umbrella, and Kerr rescued his spectacles, upon which Police-constable Crump was just about to plant a heavy boot. Levison slyly kicked the "Geological History of Sussex" out of sight round the corner. "Yes, yes!" panted Mr. Lathom. "Pray take them in charge, officer! I will come to the station and charge them!"

"One good turn deserves another," murmured Blake. "They charged him first."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys, this is no laughing matter! How dare you laugh! Where are the

"Didn't one have a beard?" asked Kerr.

Blake scratched his nose thoughtfully. "I wouldn't swear to the beard," he said. "But none of them had been shaved to-day; I could see that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wot kind of clothes?" asked Mr. Crump, who was busy taking notes.

"Oh, rotten rags!" said Blake.

"None of them had a collar on!"

"Their jackets were torn and dusty," said Fatty Wynn.

"They looked horribly dirty, Mr. Crump."

"Ave you ever seen 'em before?" asked the constable.

abandonment of the excursion. And they had discovered, as well as Mr. Lathom, that the smell of the eggs was decidedly unpleasant. They were very careful to walk in windward of their Form-master as they marched back to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

Teaching Skimpole Soccer!

TOM MERRY & CO. were busy on the football field when the Fourth Formers came in. Mr. Lathom went upstairs at once to change his clothes and to consider the problem of getting them clean,



As Arthur Augustus advanced upon the Grammarians, Gordon Gay pressed his thumb on the siphon lever. Fizzzzzz! A stream of soda-water caught D'Arcy full in the face. "Oh! Yawwooh! Gwooooh!" he spluttered.

miscreants? You have allowed them to escape!"

"I didn't see them, sir!" said Mr. Crump stiffly. "I'm a-waitin' for their description, sir."

"I was so confused, I hardly noticed. Three ruffians; that is all I can say."

"Pr'aps these young gents noticed them?" suggested Crump.

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "I will give you a description, if you like."

"Pray do, Blake!" gasped Mr. Lathom.

"Three fellows nearly six feet high" said Blake; "or, say five feet ten. Would you say five feet ten or six feet, Figgins?"

Figgins grinned.

"Say five feet eleven," he said thoughtfully.

"With ginger whiskers one of them; the other two with black moustaches," said Blake.

"Yes, we've seen them hanging about Rylcombe several times," said Blake.

"I'll 'ave 'em before long, Mr. Lathom, sir. You can rely on that," said Mr. Crump, closing his notebook with a businesslike snap.

"I trust so!" panted Mr. Lathom.

"I will come to the station and charge them with assault when you have arrested them, Mr. Crump. My boys, I'm afraid we shall have to abandon our excursion for this afternoon. I do not feel in a state to continue it. We must return to the school."

"Oh, sir!"

"I am afraid there is no help for it," said Mr. Lathom. "I am smothered with broken eggs, and the smell is decidedly unpleasant. Let us return."

And Mr. Lathom, breathing very hard, started off. The juniors followed, and when Mr. Lathom's back was turned they ventured to exchange winks. They were not broken-hearted at the

and the juniors made at once for the football ground.

"Hallo! Got back?" asked Tom Merry, as the juniors came crowding up. "Have you settled the geology already?"

Blake chuckled.

"We've been rescued," he explained.

"Yaas, wathah—wescued by the enemy," said Arthur Augustus.

The Shell fellows grinned as they listened to what had happened in Rylcombe.

"Rough on poor old Lathom," said Manners. "But a jolly good stroke of luck for you. You can pile into the footer now!"

"You bet!"

"You've got the pleasure of geology still in store!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "The giddy excursion is only put off, what?"

Blake looked alarmed. "I didn't think of that. If he springs it on us on Saturday afternoon, there will be trouble. There's a Form match on Saturday."

"Yaas, wathah! We shall weally have to wemonstwat with Mr. Lathom," said D'Arcy. "It would be imposso to cut a Form match. I am afraid my politeness would not stand the strain."

"Sufficient for the day is the geology thereof," said Kerr. "Let's get to the footer. We shall have to think of a dodge for getting out of it on Saturday."

And the juniors piled into the footer practice.

While the play went on, a youth with a bony figure and an extremely large head, ornamented with tufts of hair, stood and looked on. He blinked at the players through his large spectacles in a thoughtful sort of way; but he was evidently not thinking of football.

Skimpole of the Shell did not take kindly to that game. Skimpole was a genius. His knowledge of football was nil, and his knowledge of cricket was on a par with it. In class work he was not brilliant, but in abstruse subjects that made other fellows' heads ache, Skimpole was easily first.

What he didn't know about Determinism and a heap of other "ism" wasn't worth knowing. And his knowledge of biology and geology and numerous other "ologies" would have filled volumes.

Skimpole smiled sadly as he watched the Shell and the Fourth Form fellows punting the ball about. He marvelled that otherwise sane and sensible fellows should waste their time kicking about an inflated ball, when they might have been studying the peculiarities of rocks, caenozoic, mesozoic, and palaeozoic.

An idea was working in the mighty brain of Skimpole of the Shell, and he was anxious to impart it to the other fellows; and he had to wait while they punted about a mere football-fiddling while Rome was burning, so to speak.

When the hour of five tolled out from the clock tower, however, the Terrible Three of the Shell came off the field. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were thinking of tea. Skimpole bore down upon them at once.

"Have you finished at last?" Skimpole asked mildly, as he blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"Yes, my son," said Monty Lowther; "but if you want to pile in, don't let us stop you."

Skimpole smiled in a superior way.

"I fear I shall never have time to waste on football," he said. "I have a new idea which I am anxious to tell you—"

"You want to stand us tea?" asked Lowther. "Well, I don't mind; we've only got sardines in the study. Come on!"

"My dear Lowther, are you aware of the great and world-stirring discovery that has lately been made?" asked Skimpole chidingly.

The Terrible Three stared.

"Blessed if I've heard of it!" said Tom Merry. "You're not referring to the discovery of America by Columbus, I suppose? We have heard of that."

"A vastly more important discovery than that!" sniffed Skimpole.

"Anything to do with photography?" asked Manners, with interest. "If it's anything new in colour photography—"

"I should hardly be likely to waste my time on that subject, Manners!"

"Why, you ass—," began Manners warmly.

Manners was an enthusiastic photographer.

"My dear Manners, what is it that the whole world is now discussing with bated breath—the one topic of the universe—"

"The third-back game in footer?" asked Lowther.

"My dear Lowther—"

"The Income Tax?" asked Tom Merry.

"My dear Merry, remains have been discovered which prove that the human race existed thousands of years earlier than was previously supposed—a flood of light has been let in on the prehistoric history of the human race. Yes, my friends, the human race is proved to be of immemorial antiquity—"

"You can tell that to Gussy," yawned Tom Merry. "D'Arcy is very strong on pedigrees and ancestral lines. I haven't any use for them myself."

"Well," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully, "an ancestral line would be very useful for hanging out the family washing!"

But Skimpole was proof against Monty Lowther's humour.

"I have an idea—," he went on.

"Keep it," said Lowther. "Preserve it in ginger, or boil it in oil! Don't tell us!"

"I desire to take you into my confidence, and share with you the glory of the discoveries I am going to make. My idea is to form a geological club!"

"Then you can uniform your idea again," said Lowther.

"Instead of playing football in your spare time, you shall devote your energies in aiding me in making discoveries, and share with me the glory—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'll tell you what, Skimmy," he said.

"We can't take up geology instead of footer; but if you like, we'll teach you how to play footer instead of geology!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Manners.

"Come on, Skimmy! We were going into tea, but we don't mind giving you ten minutes."

"My dear friends—"

"Don't trouble to thank us," said Lowther, taking Skimpole's arm. "This way!"

"I should hardly be likely to change my—"

"No need to change," said Lowther, deliberately misunderstanding. "Play as you are!"

"But I mean—"

"You mean to become a good footballer," said Tom Merry, taking Skimpole's other arm, and helping to propel him upon the field. "That's right—a jolly good idea!"

"I tell you, I—"

"Chuck that footer over, Blake. Skimpole wants a lesson in footer!"

called out Monty Lowther. "He's going to give up science for footer!"

"I protest! I do not mean—I—"

"Here you are!" grinned Blake.

"Stop it, Skimmy!"

He kicked the ball towards Skimpole, and Skimpole stopped it—with his nose!

"Ow!"

"Pile in!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Now, you've got to take the ball up the field—see—this is called a field—you shove it through the goal—that's called the goal—you have to kick it with your foot—your pedal extremity is called a foot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows, I—I—I—"

"We've got to stop your doing it," Lowther went on instructing. "We shall charge you over if we can. Then we bump into you and floor you—that's called a charge. The row you make when you go down is called a howl. See!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Lowther—"

"You can look on me as your instructor," said Lowther. "I'm strong on instructing. I'll tell you the names of everything, as you are a beginner. Now, kick—the concussion between the foot and the inflated sphere is called a kick. The inflated sphere itself is called a football, from whence the name of the game is derived."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For example, this is a kick—"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Skimpole.

"You have to plant your foot on the ball, just as I planted it then on your calf. Do you understand? I don't mind giving you another specimen to make it clear—"

"I—I understand! But—but—"

"You've got it wrong; there are no butts here. Butts are used in archery, not in footer. Now pile in. If we charge you over, you may be hurt—that is called a casualty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are seriously hurt, that is called a regrettable accident on the football field. Got that?"

"M-my dear Lowther—"

"Play up!" shouted Lowther. "On the ball! Run!"

"But, I tell you, I—"

"I'm doing the telling now; all you've got to do is to follow my instructions. Otherwise, I shall cause a violent impact between my digital extremities and your auricular appendage. That is called a thick ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked round in dismay. He was too serious and solemn a youth to understand anything in the nature of a joke.

"But, my dear fellows, I don't want to learn footer—"

"Fellow who doesn't want to learn footer is called a slacker, a mug, and an ass!" said Lowther. "He has to be reduced from a perpendicular posture to a semi-horizontal attitude—that is called a bump. Are you going to pile in?"

Skimpole thought he had better. Several pairs of hands were already stretched out to reduce him from a perpendicular to a semi-horizontal position.

"Take it right up the field," commanded Lowther, "and look out! We're going to charge you off the ball if we can; and if you should get killed, that would be called a fatality!"

The unfortunate genius of the Shell kicked the footer away, and ran after it. The whole crowd of footballers whooped on his track. Some of them followed closely behind Skimpole, helping him on his way with gentle taps of their footer boots behind. Others ran in advance to charge him off the ball.

Skimpole ran for goal as he had never run in his life before, only anxious to escape.

"Charge!" roared Blake.

"Oh! Ow! Yaroooooh! Help! Goodness gracious! Yah!"

The genius of the Shell disappeared under a crowd of swarming juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footballers sorted themselves out. Skimpole sat up and gasped, and set his spectacles dazedly upon his bony nose.

"Oh dear! Oh, my goodness gracious! Ow! Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Getting on famously," said Monty Lowther admiringly. "I see your nose is running red—that is called tapping the claret!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh! Ow! Oh!"

"I'll give you another lesson tomorrow," said Lowther kindly. "One good turn deserves another. Every time you offer me instruction in geology, I'll give you instruction in football. Ta-ta!"

And the Terrible Three walked away chuckling, leaving the unfortunate scientist of the Shell still sitting on the ground and gasping for breath.

Among Skimpole's other gifts was a great knowledge of astronomy, but never, with the most powerful telescope, had he seen so many stars as he saw at that moment.

CHAPTER 4.

A Dangerous Club!

"SEEN the notice?"

Jack Blake asked the question as Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell came down after tea in the study.

The Fourth Former was grinning.

"No," said Tom Merry. "What is it—notice by the Head?"

"No; something more important than that."

"Something about the footer?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No; come and look!"

The Terrible Three followed Blake curiously towards the notice-board. There was a new paper pinned on it, and they recognised the sprawling handwriting of Skimpole of the Shell. They grinned as they read:

"NOTICE.

"H. Skimpole of the Shell invites all members of the Lower School to attend a meeting in the Common-room at seven o'clock to discuss the formation of a Scientific Club, of which H. Skimpole will be president.

"The meeting will be followed by a lecture by H. Skimpole, on the subject of 'Human Origins,' illustrated by Mr. Lathom's jawbone, kindly lent for the occasion.

"(Signed) H. SKIMPOLE."

Tom Merry whistled.

"Is he off his rocker?" he asked. "He hasn't been practising as a dentist, I suppose, and extracting Mr. Lathom's jawbone?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!" said Blake. "It's a specimen. Lathom believes that it is a jawbone of a prehistoric man who lived and flourished thousands of years before the creation of the human race. He dug it up himself in the cave on Broken Hill, near Rylcombe, a long time ago, and he keeps it locked up in a box in his study. He trotted it out in the Form-room one day when he gave a lecture—a blessed old fossil! I dare say it belonged to some lost donkey that died in the cave!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's the jawbone of an ass now if it belongs to Lathom!" yawned Monty Lowther. "And with Skimpy's jawbone, that will be two of them! Let's go to the meeting, and rag Skimpy bald-headed, and make him chuck it!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "We're bound to stand this wubbish fwom Lathom, but we're not bound to stand it fwom Skimpy. I p'pose that we wag the meetin'."

Figgins & Co. are comin' ovah for a wag, too."

"Hear, hear!"

Skimpole of the Shell had had some doubts as to whether the meeting he had called would be attended or not. He had to confess with sorrow that his schoolfellows did not take a deep interest in human origins. They were unaccountably indifferent to the important question whether the human race originated in the alluvial mud of a tropical river ten million years ago, or whether it was hatched out of rotting vegetation in a primeval forest in the comparatively recent period of merely five million years ago.

But Skimpy's fears were without foundation this time—the meeting was well attended. Before seven o'clock had struck, half of the Shell and the Fourth were in the Common-room, and a contingent of the Third. Figgins & Co. and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had come over from the New House.

When Skimpole came into the room he blinked round with pleasure at the numerous meeting gathered in his honour.

There was an encouraging shout at once.

"Go it, Skimpy!"

"My dear friends, I am glad to see so many of you gathered here," said Skimpole, rubbing his bony hands. "Look!"

He held up a peculiar-looking object. It was a fragment of fossilised bone, and might have been anything. According to Mr. Lathom and several scientific gentlemen to whom he had shown his treasure, it was a jawbone of a prehistoric individual who had flourished before the Flood, in company with the cheery mastodon and the merry megalosaurus.

Skimpole evidently regarded it with awe.

"What is it, entirely?" asked Reilly of the Fourth.

"It's a jawbone," said Skimpole. "It belongs to Mr. Lathom."

"Faith, and how is he getting on without it?"

"It is not Mr. Lathom's own jawbone."

Reilly. It is the jawbone of one of the earliest of the human race, discovered in a cave near Rylcombe. The surrounding strata clearly proves that man existed in the pleistocene period."

"My hat!"

"Gentlemen, I have a great scheme to communicate to you—the formation of a scientific club. I am willing to be president. Under my direction, the club will search for further ancient remains in the cave near Rylcombe. We shall proceed there with picks and spades. And who knows but what we may discover the whole skeleton of a prehistoric man—an estimable treasure? Our fame would resound to the farthest corners of the civilised world."

"Hear, hear!"

"In that cave are splendid deposits of the eocene period—the earliest of the Tertiary," resumed Skimpole. "My firm belief is that man was contemporary with the marine fossils unearthed in the eocene strata."

"You don't say so!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Anybody know what he is talking about?"

"By Jove, I give it up!"

"Think of the triumph if we should discover a fossil of the eocene period!" said Skimpole, his round eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "Mr. Lathom has consented to patronise the science club. Gentlemen, I have a book here to take down the names of members. Pray come forward!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall spend half-holidays in digging up fossils," went on Skimpole. "Think how better that will be than playing games."

"Bai Jove!"

"I can see myself spending my half-holidays like that—I don't think!"

"What shall we do to him?" murmured Blake.

"Something lingering with boiling oil in it," suggested Digby.

"Frog's-march to begin with," said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"And bump him!"

"And scalp him!"

"Good egg!"

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And there was a forward movement of the meeting—not to sign their names on Skimpole's list of membership, but to collar Skimpole. But just as Skimpole's fate was trembling in the balance, there was a warning whisper of "Cave!"

Mr. Lathom entered the Junior Common-room.

The forward movement was arrested. The juniors stared at the Form-master, who wore his most benignant expression.

"Ha! Quite a large meeting, I see!" said Mr. Lathom, rubbing his hands. "I am very pleased to see this—very pleased indeed, my boys! I am glad to see you taking a deep interest in this most delightful study!"

"Yaas!" gasped D'Arcy.

"We're frightfully keen, sir!" said Levison of the Fourth.

"I am glad to hear it, Levison. By the way, you have not done your lines, I think?"

"I have been reading up geology, sir, and haven't had time," said Levison.

"Well, well, never mind! You need not do the lines, Levison," said Mr. Lathom kindly. "Pray do not let me interrupt you, my boys! I am here merely as a spectator—a very interested spectator. Pray go on exactly as if I were not present."

The juniors exchanged grins. That was hardly possible. If Mr. Lathom had not been present, they would have been marching Skimpole round the Common-room in the frog's-march; and under the eye of the Form-master it could hardly be done. But Skimpole chimed in gleefully:

"The fellows are just going to sign their names on the list of membership, sir. They all want to be members of the science club."

"Good—very good!" said Mr. Lathom. "Pray go on! I shall be very interested to see how many names are on the list."

The juniors exchanged dismal glances.

It was impossible to tell Mr. Lathom that they had attended the meeting solely for the purpose of ragging the amateur lecturer. And as Mr. Lathom was waiting to see them sign their names, they could not very well draw back.

Tom Merry felt that he was in for it, and he signed his name first. The other fellows followed suit, and the roll of membership was crowded. Skimpole watched the proceedings with his eyes glistening behind his spectacles. His science club was achieving an undreamt-of success.

When the roll was finished, Mr. Lathom said he would address a few words to the meeting on the subject of geological discoveries of recent times. The meeting groaned under its breath. Mr. Lathom's few words took exactly an hour to deliver, and would probably have lasted longer, only the Fourth Form master had to leave to attend to other duties. When he had departed, the juniors gathered round Skimpole with deadly looks.

For a mortal hour they had had to listen to a learned disquisition upon primary, secondary, and tertiary periods, with pleistocene, and Miocene, and eoocene jostling jurassic rocks and old red sandstone.

Only a few of them had ventured to sneak out quietly.

The rest remained, only comforted by the thought of what they would do to Skimpole after Mr. Lathom had gone.

Now he was gone, and the door had closed behind him, and the amateur

scientist of St. Jim's was at the mercy of the science club.

Skimpole suspected nothing. He rubbed his bony hands gleefully.

"Now, my dear fellows, we will make arrangements for Saturday afternoon," he began. "Why, what—how—help! Yah! Oh, mercy! Yow!"

The president of the science club was in the hands of the members. He roared and struggled, but it was of no avail.

The juniors had the intense suffering of a whole hour to avenge.

They frog-marched Skimpole round the room; they bumped him on the floor; they poured ink down his back.

They left him lying a wreck when they had finished, and firmly convinced that the Lower School had gone mad.

Skimpole lay upon his back, gasping for breath, and staring dazedly at a circle of threatening faces and brandished fists.

"Now are you going to chuck it?" roared Blake.

"My dear Blake—" stuttered Skimpole feebly.

"If you are ever heard to utter the word geology again, you'll be bumped!"

"But, my dear Blake, geology is—Yarroogh!"

Bump!

"I warned you," said Blake.

"Bot—but—but geology—" Bump!

"Yarroogh! Oh! Help!"

Then, with their feelings somewhat relieved, the juniors streamed away.

Skimpole picked himself up, and felt himself all over to ascertain whether he was still all there. He felt as if he wasn't.

"Oh dear!" groaned Skimpole. "Oh dear! What an extraordinary outbreak, when we were getting on so nicely! Ow! Oh dear!"

And Skimpole crawled away.

Like the hapless engineer who was hoist by his own petard, he had been, as Monty Lowther remarked, knocked down by his own club. And Skimpole had a variety of aches in nearly every bone in his body as he crawled away to his study.

CHAPTER 5.

Flirting a Plot!

"H A, ha, ha!"

Thus Tom Merry.

The Shell fellows had just come out of the Form-rooms on the day following the formation of the Skimpole Science Club.

Monty Lowther and Manners looked at their chum. Tom Merry's eyes were dancing.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Lowther.

"I've got a wheeze!"

"Thought of a sort of suffocating Lathom?" asked Manners eagerly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I'm beginnin' to think that he needs it," said Arthur Augustus, joining the Shell fellows. "He is takin' that wotten scientific club seriously, and now you Shell chaps are in for it as well as us."

"He lent me a book on old red sandstone this morning," growled Manners. "He'll ask me presently how I liked it."

"Howwid'!"

"We belong to a science club, and Skimmey is president," said Tom Merry.

"Skimmey wants to lead us on an expedition to discover some prehistoric remains. Well, why shouldn't he?"

"Eh?"

"It would please him to discover them. And if we arrange 'em in advance, there's no reason why he shouldn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You know the street musicians who've come to Rylcombe," said Tom Merry. "There are three of them—one plays the banjo, one the concertina, and the other one does songs and dances, and calls himself the prehistoric man. He dressed up in a skin, with a hairy mask over his chivvy, you know. It's an old dodge in the music halls, and always makes the people laugh. Well, Bob Jones, the prehistoric man, is still in Rylcombe. The other two were run in yesterday for being drunk and disorderly, and Bob Jones is staying at the Red Cow till they come out. He can't go on the road again until they are let out of chocky, and he can't do his performance by himself, so he must be wanting a job. He's a very thirsty chap, too."

"But what—?"

"Why shouldn't Skimmey discover a whole, entire prehistoric man in the cave?" asked Tom Merry. "It would be over so much better than a mere skeleton, and would please him more. And if Lathom is so jolly well pleased with a mere jawbone, it stands to reason he would like to discover a whole prehistoric man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There are lots of gaps in the rocks there, where blithering idiots—I mean scientific investigators—have been at work," resumed Tom Merry. "We'll put Bob Jones into fissure, and cover him up with rocks, and Lathom and Skimmey will discover him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"It will be the joke of the season when it gets out, and Lathom will really have to chuck up the game," said Tom Merry. "He won't be able to say geology or prehistoric without making people giggle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, it's a wippin' ideah! I do not approve, as a wule, of pullin' the leg of a Form-master, but the matiah is gettin' sewious. Lathom is talkin' about another wotten excursion on Saturday aftahnoon."

"When we have the Form match to play!" growled Blake.

"Yaas; it's wotten!"

"Well, we can't play you if you're going hunting for fossils," said Tom Merry. "So it's up to us to rescue you and ourselves. Lathom has promised a lecture for the next meeting of the science club."

"Ow!"

"Let's go down to Rylcombe now and see Jones, and make arrangements for to-day," said Tom Merry. "Then we'll get Lathom and Skimmey to take the science club out for a walk after lessons."

"Good egg!"

And the juniors walked down to Rylcombe, discussing the details of the plot as they went. They did not have far to look for Bob Jones. Outside the Red Cow, in the village, a crowd was gathered, looking on and listening to a weird performance.

A curious-looking creature was executing a weird dance, and singing in a hoarse and husky voice.

He was a short, stout man, dressed in a hairy skin that fitted closely to his body and limbs, and gave him the appearance of a wild animal.

His face was covered with a hairy mask drawn over his head, and thick

with rough hair. Behind him a stumpy tail whisked as he danced. The burden of the song was:

"I'm the prehistoric man!
I lived before the world began!
I used to climb the trees,
With the little chimpanzees,
And a pretty, prehistoric Mary Ann!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What a dreadful voice!" The song having ended, the prehistoric man moved round collecting coppers from the onlookers with a hairy paw.

But, as often happens, the onlookers chose that precise moment for proceeding on their way, and the collection was not large.

The prehistoric man gazed dolefully at three halfpennies and a penny in his paw. Then he came towards the juniors.

"How's luck?" said Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Orrible!" said the prehistoric man sadly. "Look at that! Twopence-a-penny for a song and a dance, and the other blokes in the stone jug! Orrible!"

"Would you like to earn a pound?" The prehistoric man's eyes glistened.

"Would I?" said Mr. Jones. "Not 'arf!"

"Look here!" said Tom Merry. "We want you to give a sort of performance to-day—quite easy, and it's a pound! What do you say?"

"I'm on! Rather!"

"All you have to do is to lie quiet and hold your tongue and pretend to be dead," explained Tom Merry.

Mr. Jones stared.

"That's a queer game!" he commented.

"That's the programme," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, I can do that. I lay I shall be really dead, and no pretendin' if the luck don't change," said Mr. Jones dismally. "What's the game?"

Tom Merry explained.

"It's a little jape—a joke, you know. We want to hide you in a cave, to let a chap discover you and think you're a fossil."

"A fossil! My 'at!"

"When it's all over, it's a pound for you," said Tom Merry. "And here's five bob to go on with as well. Is it a go?"

"Ain't it!" said Mr. Jones, by which he apparently meant that it was a go.

Tom Merry gave Mr. Jones precise instructions as to what was required of him.

Mr. Jones promised faithfully to carry out his instructions, and the juniors returned to St. Jim's feeling very well satisfied. If the jape "panned out" well, the great discovery in the Ryecombe cave would become the joke of the school, and they felt that the enthusiastic Form-master would cease from troubling and the weary would be at rest.

Mr. Lathom met the juniors as they came in. There was a look of concern on his face.

"I have lost a key," he said. "Perhaps one of you has seen it—the key of the box in which I keep my precious fossil. I must have dropped it somewhere!"

"Sorry, sir, we haven't seen it," said the juniors.

"Pray return it to me if you should find it," said Mr. Lathom. "The box is at present locked, and I am unable to open it!"

Mr. Lathom walked away.

Levison of the Fourth had a key in his hand this morning, after lessons, said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I saw him showing it to Mellish in the quad as we went out."

"Just like that wotial to bone it and wowsy old Lathom," said D'Arcy. "Lathom is always losin' somethin' or othah. Levison ought to return it to him!"

"I'll see that he does," said Tom Merry.

The Shell fellow looked round for Levison. He found the cad of the Fourth in his study with Percy Mellish. The two juniors were chuckling.

"Hallo! What do you want?" demanded Levison, as Tom Merry came in.

"Me. Lathom's key, please."

"How do you know—"

"I saw you in the quad with it. And Mr. Lathom is inquiring for it. Why don't you take it back to him?" asked Tom Merry.

Levison chuckled.

"I'm going to get that blessed fossil out of his box, and chuck it away," he explained. "It will serve him right for taking us out yesterday afternoon on a fool's expedition! Fancy old Lathom's face when he opens the box and finds that the fossil is gone. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Mellish.

Tom Merry's brow grew stern.

"You're jolly well going to do nothing of the sort!" he exclaimed.

"What the deuce does it matter to you?"

"Old Lathom would never get over it. He's been offered fifty pounds for that blessed fossil, Blake says, and he sets a big value on it. It would be a rotten trick to destroy it!" said Tom angrily.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"That's my business!"

"Mine, too!" said Tom Merry. "You can jape Lathom as much as you like—he's an awful worry, I know—but you're not going to destroy his property!"

"Rats!"

"Mind your own business!" said Mellish. "We're jolly well going to make an end of his blessed prehistoric jawbone, and have done with it!"

"You're not!"

"Who's going to stop us?" roared Levison furiously.

"I am!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Will you hand me over the key?" said Tom Merry quietly.

"What do you want it for?"

"To take it back to Mr. Lathom!"

"You can leave it to me to take back," said Levison. "After all, I don't want to keep his blessed key! I'll give it to him in the Form-room this afternoon!"

Tom's lip curled.

"Yes, after you've destroyed the fossil," he said. "I don't trust you. I'm going to take that key back to him."

"Are you?" said Levison unpleasantly. "Well, find it if you can."

"Hand it over."

"More rats!"

Tom Merry closed the door of the study and pushed back his cuffs. The two cads of the Fourth viewed those proceedings with some alarm.

"Look here—" began Mellish uneasily.

"Are you going to give me that key?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, I am not!" roared Levison.

(Continued on the next page.)



Make the Jester Smile and Win a MATCH FOOTBALL!

Send your Joke to The GEM Jester, 7, Tallis House, John Carpenter Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

A BROAD HINT.

Inspector (after a rather dreary lecture): "Now, does any boy want to ask me any further questions about our railways?"

Bright Boy: "Yes, sir! What time does your train go?"

A football has been awarded to K. Williamson, 73, Celt Street, Liverpool 6.

OVERLOADED.

Stout Old Lady: "Porter, it's disgraceful! That train I've just left simply crawled along."

Porter: "I can quite understand it, ma'am. But I bet it's going faster now you're out of it!"

A football has been awarded to S. Wootton, 381, Victoria Road, Aston, Birmingham.

SIGNS OF GOLF.

Brown: "I see that an explorer in the Congo Free State has discovered a new tribe of natives, who beat the ground with sticks as a sign of anger."

Green: "Fancy golf spreading to Central Africa!"

A football has been awarded to R. James, 47, Highgate Lane, Farnborough, Hants.

HELPFUL.

Sergeant: "Porter, my men are packed like sardines in these carriages. Can't you do something about it?"

Porter: "Yes; try numbering them off from the right, and tell the odd numbers to breathe out while the even ones breathe in!"

A football has been awarded to B. Robinson, 9, Parkmount Street, York Road, Belfast.

REFLECTION.

Explorer: "And there, as I entered my house, I came face to face with a ferocious ape. What do you think I did?"

Bored Listener: "Removed the mirror!"

A football has been awarded to K. South, 7, Selbourne Park, Gillingham, Kent.

SATISFIED.

Judge: "Aren't you ashamed to be here?"

Prisoner: "No, sir. What's good enough for you is good enough for me!"

A special prize has been awarded to D. Wrathall, 1,649, Grayham Building, Model City, Montreal, Canada.

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"Then I'm going to lick you—and Mellish, too, if he chips in. I don't mind taking the two of you on together," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I—I say, I don't want to row with you, you know," stammered Mellish, backing away round the study table. "Better give the beast the key, Levison."

Tom Merry advanced upon Levison with his hands up. The cad of the Fourth hesitated a moment, and then dragged the key from his waistcoat pocket, and hurled it upon the floor.

"Take it, hang you!" he snarled.

"Thanks!"

Tom Merry stooped and picked up the key, and left the study without another word.

Mellish looked ruefully at his chum.

"That's a good jape spoiled," he said.

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'll make that interfering rotter sorry for it," he muttered, "and I'll smash up that rotten fossil, too! I'll—!" Levison paused.

"You'll what?" asked Mellish curiously.

"Don't ask questions, and I won't tell you any lies," said Levison curtly. "You gave me away the last time I trusted you. Go and eat coke!"

And whatever idea was working in Levison's mind, he did not confide it to his study-mate.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry made his way to Mr. Lathom's study, and greatly pleased that gentleman by handing him the recovered key.

"Thank you very much, Merry!" said Mr. Lathom gratefully. "Where did you find it?"

"Ahem! I—I picked it up, sir," said Tom Merry, without adding that he had picked it up on the floor of Levison's study. And he escaped before Mr. Lathom could ask him any more questions.

CHAPTER 6.

Levison is Mysterious!

THERE was considerable anticipation among the juniors during afternoon lessons.

Quite a number of them had been taken into the secret—in fact, all who could be trusted to be discreet about it.

And when Mr. Lathom started out for a walk with the Junior Science Club, there would be no lack of juniors ready to follow.

Instead of marching off glumly and in anguish of spirit as on the previous day, they would enter into the procession with joyfulness.

The discovery of a whole, complete prehistoric man in the cave in the hill near Rylcombe would, of course, be extremely interesting to youthful geologists. And when the prehistoric man turned out to be alive, and no other than Bob Jones, the street performer, it would be more interesting still. The juniors wanted very much to see what Mr. Lathom's face would look like then.

So the juniors were unusually keen for lessons to be over, so that they could start on that geological expedition.

They were grinning cheerfully as they came out after lessons.

Skimpole, the president of the Junior Science Club, was at once surrounded in the Form-room passage.

"When is Lathom starting?" asked Tom Merry.

"We are starting at half-past five," said Skimpole. "I trust the whole of the members of the science club will accompany us."

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"What ho!" said the juniors.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! We're all on!"

"There isn't one of us who'd miss it for his weight in jain-tarts," said Fatty Wyun.

"My dear friends, I am very pleased to hear this," said Skimpole, beaming upon them through his spectacles. "I am glad to behold this enthusiasm. It shows that you realise the importance of the subject. Imagine the thrilling pleasure, my dear fellows, in making a discovery of, perhaps, a thighbone or a double-tooth, by which the date of the human race could be pushed back another million years or so."

"Ripping!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! Simply thwillin'."

"Makes us awfully eager to start, simply to think of that," said Monty Lowther. "I should sleep more soundly of a night if I knew exactly how many million years it was since your ancestors used to live in the trees and hang on by their tails, Skimmy."

"My dear Lowther, all our ancestors lived in trees, and certainly had tails," said Skimpole. "The missing link has never been discovered, and there is no evidence that it ever existed. But all the more for that reason, scientific men do not doubt that it did exist. Faith is required in these matters."

"Yaas, lots of it, appawntly," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But pway do not insinuate that my ancestors lived in trees, and had tails, Skimmy. I wefuse to cweedit anythin' of the sort. I am willin' to believe it of your ancestors, if you like—in fact, I should wegard it as vowy pwob, judgin' by appeawances."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is one of the best-established truths of science, my dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole gently. "Man is descended from an ape-like creature, closely akin to the monkey. That ape-like creature is the missing link."

"So the men descended from the monkeys?" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

"Yes, my dear Lowther."

"And the monkeys descended from the trees, I suppose?"

"Eh?" said Skimpole. "My dear Lowther—"

"They must have," argued Lowther.

"They couldn't have stayed up in the trees all their lives, even if they were hanging on by their tails. I consider it a scientific certainty that the monkeys must have descended from the trees."

Skimpole was never known to see a joke. His truly scientific brain was wanting in a sense of humour.

"My dear Lowther," he said gently, "you confuse the two meanings of the verb—to descend. You should read Darwin on the 'Descent of Man From a Lower Species'—"

Lowther shook his head.

"Darwin was off-side," he said. "You can't descend from a thing that's lower. You ascend."

"You misapprehend, my dear Lowther. I will explain at length—"

"No you jolly well won't," said Tom Merry. "Lowther can go on misapprehending. We'll all be ready at half-past five, Skimmy. We'll go down to the footer now."

"Very good!" said Skimpole. "I am very pleased to see this enthusiasm, especially after you fellows cut up so rusty last evening, when the club was formed. I have reflected upon that extraordinary occurrence, and have failed to elucidate the motive which caused that unparalleled outburst."

"It was only enthusiasm," said Lowther.

"It was an exceedingly strange form for enthusiasm to take," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "However, I—"

But the juniors did not stay to listen to Skimpole. They streamed away into the quadrangle.

Levison of the Fourth was wheeling out his bicycle as they came out of the School House.

The juniors did not trouble to glance at Levison. The cad of the Fourth turned a scowling glance upon Tom Merry, and then walked on with his machine. Outside the school gates he mounted, and pedalled away swiftly towards Rylcombe.

The chums of the School House were thinking of anything but Levison; but if they had seen his proceedings after he reached the village they would certainly have been very curious.

Levison alighted from his bicycle outside the locksmith's shop, and went in. Mr. Keyser, the locksmith, was there, at work at his bench, filing a key. Levison glanced round the shop, as if to ascertain that there were no other customers present, before producing a little box from his pocket.

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked Mr. Keyser.

"I've lost a key," Levison explained. "I want you to give me one like it. It's a common sort of key, and I dare say you've got some just the same."

Mr. Keyser smiled.

"But if you've lost the key—!" he said. "Can you describe it?"

"I've got a wax impression of it," Levison explained. "I lost it once before, and I couldn't open my money-box till I found it, so I took a wax impression of it at the time, in case I should lose it again."

"Ah! If you have the impression I—"

"Here it is."

Levison handed the little box containing the wax to the locksmith, and Mr. Keyser looked at it.

"Got one like it?" asked Levison.

"Not exactly; but I could easily file one down to be exactly like it," said the locksmith. "It's a common key enough."

"How long would it take?"

"Ten minutes."

"Then I'll wait."

Levison waited. In a quarter of an hour the locksmith handed him the key, which fitted the wax impression exactly. Levison paid for the key and rode back to St. Jim's with a grin on his face.

He put up his bicycle and came into the School House. Mellish met him in the passage.

"Hallo! Where have you been?" he asked curiously.

"Been on my bike," said Levison carelessly. "Is old Lathom in his study, do you know?"

"No; he's with the Head."

"Oh, good!"

"Where are you going?" asked Mellish.

"Nowhere in particular."

Levison strolled away and sat down in the Common-room with a book. Mellish looked after him curiously, and then went out into the quad. When he was gone Levison left the Common-room and hurried to Mr. Lathom's study.

He tapped, in case the Form-master should be there, after all, and opened the door.

The room was empty. Levison entered, and closed the door behind him.

In five minutes he came out.

His face was a little pale as he walked down the passage. At the end of the passage he started, and gritted his teeth.



"Well's all this 'ere?" demanded Mr. Crump, taking out his notebook. "My heya! Drunk and disorderly in broad daylight! I want your name and address, old gent!" "What!" shrieked Mr. Lathom. "How dare you! I am Mr. Lathom! I have been attacked by three desperate ruffians!"

as Mellish came out of the window recess.

"What have you been doing in Lathom's study?" asked Mellish. Levison gave him a furious look.

"You rotter! You've been spying on me!"

"Well, I knew you had something on," Mellish said. "Why can't you tell a chap? If it's a jape on old Lathom I'll help you with pleasure."

"You can keep your head shut," said Levison. "It's a jape, and it means trouble if it comes out that I was in the study."

"I'm mum!" said Mellish.

"You'd better be mum," said Levison savagely. "You'll be an accessory now, as you know all about it, and you'll be in trouble as well, if I should be bowled out."

"But what—"

"Oh don't ask questions!"

And Levison strode away without satisfying his study-mate's curiosity. He walked down to the footer ground, where the chums of the School House were punting the ball about.

The juniors had started a match of seven a side to pass away half an hour, and they were too keenly interested in it to have any eyes for Levison.

The cad of the Fourth sauntered into the pavilion, where the juniors had left their jackets. Again the eye of Percy Mellish was upon him, and Mellish was puzzled and devoured with curiosity. That his study-mate was engaged in some cunning scheme he was certain, but for the life of him he could not guess what it was.

Levison sauntered away from the pavilion and joined Mellish.

"Coming out for a walk?" he asked. "I've got a remittance to-day, and we can cash it at Mrs. Murphy's."

"Right-ho!" said Mellish at once.

"But, I say—"

"Well, what?" snapped Levison.

"What's the little game?"

"Find out!"

And that was all the satisfaction Mellish could obtain.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Lathom in Luck!

PROMPTLY at half-past five the Junior Science Club were ready.

They were waiting outside the School House in numerous array when Mr. Lathom came out.

Skimpole was beaming with pleasure.

Skimpole's club was going strong.

He had hoped for success in forming that scientific club; but he had never dreamed that it would be taken up like this on all sides.

The Terrible Three were there, and Blake & Co., and Kangaroo and Glyn, and Clifton Dane and Reilly, and Kerruish, and Vavasour and Gore, and Wally of the Third, with Curly Gibson and Jameson, and Figgins & Co. of the New House, and Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, and there were many more.

Figgins & Co. fraternised with Tom Merry & Co. in the most amicable way.

House rows seemed to be a thing of the past.

Mr. Lathom noted it with a pleased smile. Generally, juniors of the rival Houses of St. Jim's could not meet without mutual chipping and ragging.

But now the lamb and the lion were getting on famously together.

Under the influence of the enthusiasm for scientific investigation, the juniors forgot House rows, and even abandoned football.

It was a triumph of science. Mr. Lathom felt very pleased indeed.

"Ha! I see you are ready, my boys," he said, with his little cough.

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"Quite ready, sir," said Monty Lowther. "And awfully keen."

"Burning for knowledge, sir," said Kerr.

"It's so kind of you to take us, sir," said Gore.

Mr. Lathom waved his hand.

"Not at all, my dear lads. It is a pleasure to me—a real pleasure! I am more pleased than I can say to see you all so keenly disposed towards scientific investigation. I congratulate you, Skimpole, upon the success of your science club."

"It is indeed very gratifying to me, sir," said Skimpole, who had a fine flow of language all his own.

"Quite so, quite so. Well, let us start," said Mr. Lathom.

There were none of the solemn and gloomy looks that had distinguished the procession of the previous afternoon. All the juniors looked cheerful—in fact, The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,467.

they smiled and grinned and even chuckled as they marched along in the wake of the little Form-mastor.

Several of them had armed themselves with digging implements for the investigations that were to take place at the cave outside Rylcombe. If there were any geological discoveries to be made, they were determined to make them. Indeed, in their keenness, the Terrible Three went on ahead, promising to wait for the others in the cave.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther walked quickly, till a bend in the lane hid them from the sight of the procession. Then they ran at top speed.

"Must make sure that everything is in order," said Tom. "We shall be there a quarter of an hour ahead of the party, and we can see all is in order."

Broken Hill was a rugged eminence a short distance from Rylcombe. The hill had been quarried at one time, but the quarries had long been abandoned. There were caves and deep gashes left in the hillside where the quarrymen once had worked.

As Mr. Lathom would have explained volubly, the opening in the hillside gave a geologist wonderful opportunities for investigation. In those distant ages when the south of England was a primeval sea, and antediluvian monsters swam about where now the sheep fed on the downs, all sorts of weird changes had been going on, leaving a history written in strata of rock for future geologists to read.

Rocks of nearly every period seemed to be jumbled in the hill, representing millions of years, jostling one another in confusion. In that gap in the hill Mr. Lathom, with his own hands and spade, had disinterred the famous jawbone—and he had found it in a stratum that was indubitably eocene. Therefore, it was established that the early ancestors of the human race had lived and flourished in the eocene period. But Mr. Lathom's hopes went further. Suppose a human fossil should be discovered in Secondary Rocks—

At that thought Mr. Lathom's eyes would gleam behind his spectacles and his hands would tremble with agitation.

In his mind's eye he saw himself revolutionising modern science—adding millions of years to the calculations even of those scientists who had been most liberal with millions of years.

Indeed, Mr. Lathom had already thought of the title of the pamphlet he would issue on the subject—he would call it "Mesozoic Man."

He could feel in advance the thrill that would run through the scientific world when "Mesozoic Man" burst upon the dazzled universe.

It was only necessary to make the discovery, and Mr. Lathom was so keen upon his theory that very little evidence would be needed to satisfy him.

The Terrible Three came into the cave, and found a stout man sitting there, imbibing liquid refreshment from a flask.

It was Mr. Jones. It was evident that the five shillings in advance had been spent in liquid refreshment. Mr. Jones' eyes were a little heavy and bleary, and his head sagged as he nodded to the juniors.

"Arternoon!" he said huskily.

The juniors looked at him in dismay. "You ass! You're squiffy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther indignantly.

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"Not er tall," said Mr. Jones—"not or tall! Only a little nip to keep up the spirits! I'm ready for the job!"

"Where's your blessed skin?" asked Manners. "You ought to be dressed for the part now. The party will be along in ten minutes."

"I got it 'ere," said Mr. Jones, rising. "It won't take me two ticks. I puts it on outside me clobber, to make me bigger—see?"

He unfastened the bundle, and the hairy covering rolled out. With unsteady hands, Mr. Jones donned his garb of the prehistoric man. It did not take him many minutes. The Terrible Three lent their aid.

The ruddy face and bleary eyes of Mr. Jones disappeared under the hairy mask, and his red hair beneath the thick, bushy "crop," supposed to be characteristic of prehistoric men.

In the dim light of the cave he certainly looked very startling, and it would have given the juniors themselves a shock if they had come upon him suddenly without knowing who he was.

"Orlright—hey?" said Mr. Jones.

"Yes. But you'll have to keep quiet."

"Quiet as a lamb," said Mr. Jones. "Fact is, I'm sleepy. I'll go to sleep. I've been workin' 'ard."

Drinking hard would have been nearer the mark, the juniors thought. But they were satisfied for Mr. Jones to go to sleep.

"You don't snore?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"I never 'eard myself snore," said Mr. Jones.

"You've got to lie down in this fissure, and we're going to cover you over with rock," said Tom Merry. "We'll pile 'em on gently."

"Orlright!"

"Either of you chaps know anything about these blessed rocks?" asked Tom Merry, looking round. "I'd like to stick him in the most ancient of them. Lathom would be pleased most of all to find him in primary rocks. Know primary rocks?"

"Blessed if I do!" said Lowther.

"Same here," said Manners. "Never mind; any old rocks will do. Here's a fissure just about his size. Chuck him in!"

It was a fissure in the cave-wall the size of a coffin, and something of the shape. Mr. Jones laid himself down in it, and the juniors covered him up. The split cave wall was a couple of feet from the ground, and had been left by some investigator who had been chipping out of the rock. There was just room for Mr. Jones to lay himself out at length comfortably. He immediately proceeded to go to sleep.

The Terrible Three selected chunks of rock, of which many were scattered about the cave, and packed them in carefully, giving the wall the appearance of being unbroken.

There were crevices enough to supply Mr. Jones with air to breathe; as Lowther remarked, it would be a bother afterwards if he should be suffocated. Fortunately, there was no danger of that.

In the subdued light of the cave, the wall had quite a normal appearance, as if the rocks packed in by the juniors had been there from time immemorial. Mr. Jones was quickly hidden from sight.

All was now ready for the geologists' investigation. The Terrible Three sauntered out of the cave, and saw the party in sight, coming up the incline, Mr. Lathom breathing a little hard.

As the science club arrived, the Shell fellows winked at their comrades to assure them that all was in order.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "Quite a long walk. But now we are here, my boys. In this cave you will find wonderful examples of the secondary or mesozoic period. Follow me!"

And Mr. Lathom turned his glasses upon the cave-wall where the closed-up fissure hid the person of Mr. Jones.

He tapped on the rocks lately packed by the Terrible Three with his geological hammer.

"Look at this wall," said Mr. Lathom.

The juniors looked.

"This rock is of the secondary period," said Mr. Lathom.

"Bai Jove!"

"I suppose it has been like that for thousands of years, sir?" said Monty Lowther diffidently.

Mr. Lathom smiled.

"It would be nearer the mark to say millions, Lowther."

"And quite undisturbed, sir?"

"Quite!" said Mr. Lathom.

The Terrible Three looked properly awe-stricken, though it required an effort, considering that the rock had, as a matter of fact, been disturbed within the last ten minutes.

"How ripping it would be to discover a fossil in it!" said Lowther.

"Why not dig into it and see?" said Manners.

"That is what we are going to do, my dear fellows," said Skimpole. "I have brought an axe for the purpose. Pray stand clear."

Skimpole crashed his pick upon the rock.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry in alarm, as one of the chunks rolled out of the fissure. "You might do some damage with that axe!"

"My dear Merry—"

There was a grunt from the interior of the ancient rock, which was fortunately drowned by the clatter of the falling stone.

"Give me the axe," said Tom Merry. "You're too heavy-handed, Skimmy. If there's a fossil there, we don't want to smash it."

"With pleasure, my dear Merry," said Skimpole, handing the pick to the captain of the Shell.

Skimpole was not addicted to physical exercise.

"I will take notes."

Tom Merry handled the axe carefully. He knocked out chunk after chunk, and suddenly there was a startled exclamation from Blake.

"Look out, there's something there!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Lathom ran forward.

He put his hand into the aperture, and almost trembled with emotion.

"Goodness gracious!" he ejaculated.

"What is it, sir?" chorused the juniors.

"My boys!" Mr. Lathom's voice was husky. "My boys, we have made a discovery!"

"Oh, sir!"

"I can feel the rough hair of some animal. Some prehistoric beast buried in rocks of the mesozoic period—perhaps some new species. The remarkable thing is that it is not a skeleton—the enclosure in the rock has evidently preserved the whole carcase—and it is intact. My boys, this specimen will be of incalculable value. Pray be careful. Remove the rock slowly and with great care."

"Certainly, sir!"

And Mr. Lathom looked on with

glistening eyes as the rocks were removed, and the form of the prehistoric man was disclosed to view.

CHAPTER 8. The Lively Fossil!

MR. LATHOM felt almost faint. His hands were trembling, his eyes were gleaming. There, in the narrow fissure of the rock, lay a still form—a hairy form. Preserved for millions of years in the heart of the rock, it remained to show modern ages exactly what had existed in the far-off mesozoic period. Not a mere skeleton—though that would have been a great discovery. Somehow, preserved by the rock, the whole carcase was there intact. And it was not the carcase of an animal. Not a mere mastodon or megalosaurus! It was a human form.

Mr. Lathom had made the discovery of the age—a discovery that would cause his name to be written in letters of gold in the annals of science.

He had discovered the prehistoric man!

"Goodness gracious!" stuttered Mr. Lathom. "This—is this is overwhelming. I—I must get my breath. Boys, that rock is of the mesozoic period."

"Yes, sir!"

"And you all see that it has enclosed a human form!"

"Is that human, sir?" asked Figgins.

"Decidedly. The mere coating of hair is such as was undoubtedly the natural protection of man in the prehistoric period, when the climate was intensely cold. You can see that the creature, while having the form and features of a man, has a tail. You can see that!"

"Thorby hangs a tale!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Lift it out, my boys—gently! It may crumble to the touch—though it certainly feels sufficiently solid. But, after a preservation in rock for millions of years—Dear me!"

Mr. Lathom mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

The juniors, with a solemnity worthy of the great occasion, lifted out the hairy form and laid it upon the floor of the cave.

Then they stood round in an admiring circle while Mr. Lathom stooped over it to investigate. There was a sudden, amazed exclamation from the master:

"Good heavens!"

"Bai Jove, what's the mattah, sir?"

"It is warm," said Mr. Lathom.

"Warm, sir?"

"Yes. Amazing—incredible—unheard-of, as it seems, the creature is living!" Mr. Lathom stuttered. "Oh, if only the Royal Society were present now!"

"Extraordinary, sir!" said Tom Merry. "I've heard of insects being preserved in amber, and coming out alive and kicking after years and years."

"The close confinement in the rock has had the same effect upon this person," said Mr. Lathom, in an agitated voice. "Doubtless, in the earliest ages of man, his characteristics approximated more closely to those of the lower orders of creation. Indeed, it is an indubitable fact, otherwise we could not go on with evolution. Like the Polar bear hibernating in the ice, living without food for a whole winter, so this creature of a prehistoric period has slept in the heart of the rock while countless ages have rolled by."

"Bai Jove!"

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling!



Hallo, everybody.

The biggest hotel in Wayland has the radio in every room. Listening Inn.

Herries says dogs are to be starred in films. "Barkies"?

Wayland Football Club have a goalkeeper named Light. The bright "light" of the defence!

Blake tells this: He went to a fortune-teller, who said: "Tell your fortune, sir, one and sixpence."

"That's right," agreed Blake. Got it?

Saw a film last week showing how to make a cup of tea. Stirling.

"Gun Shot At Night," runs a headline. Here's hoping it wasn't seriously hurt.

Said old Isaacs, the theatrical costumier, to me: "There's a machine in my shop which would make my fortune if I could keep it going all the time." "What is it?" I asked. "A cash register," replied Isaacs.

I hear Welsh miners keep very much to themselves. "Mining" their own business?

Stand by: "Doesn't that horrid thing make your teeth ache?" asked the old lady of the man with the pneumatic drill. "It did, lady," replied the navvy, "but now they've all dropped out!"

A 22-stone Wayland resident was rescued in the nick of time from a big blaze. It was feared that the fat would be in the fire!

I hear three well known school-boy internationals are now with big teams. In a "class" by themselves.

Grimes, the Wayland grocer's assistant, runs a footer eleven. One of his forwards seemed very winded in a match the other afternoon. "Wh

can't you keep up with the others, Joe?" asked Grimes. "Because they didn't 'ave to blow the ball up before the game started!" said Joe.

Next: "Look me in the face!" said Gore. "What, and spoil my day's pleasure?" ejaculated Blake.

I see a business man advises everybody to stand firm as a rock. Some are already "on the rocks."

"Nother: "Where can I get local colour for my novel?" asks a writer. What about a paint factory?

Dialogue at the Wayland Police Court: Judge: "Were you begging?" Defendant: "Certainly not, yer Honour. I just put out my hand to see if it was raining, and this gentleman dropped a copper in it!"

Did you hear about the boxing trainer who dashed into the dressing-room of the badly-battered heavyweight and said: "Good luck, Joe—I've fixed you a return match!"

"Cats must lead a hand-to-mouth existence," observes Digby. Catch as cats can?

A competition for the handsomest nose was held in Wayland. Hundreds turned up.

The manager of the Wayland Hippodrome complains he cannot find good comedians. At his wits' end?

"The first awkward moments in ice skating are soon over," says an authority. So is the ice skater!

I hear a film company offers £100 for a boy whose freckles will photograph. "Spot" cash?

Then there was the nervous parachutist who got caught on a telegraph wire. He was "highly strung."

You know the name of the new Chinese long-distance flyer? Wun Long Hop.

Quickly, now: Would you prefer a lion to kill you or a tiger? Presumably you would rather the lion killed the tiger.

End piece: "I want to send these trousers by book post," said McDadd. "But you can't send trousers by book post," objected the post office official.

"But," said McDadd, "don't the regulations say anything open at both ends can be sent book post?"

"Book" next week's copy, boys!

"And it was reserved for me—me to make this discovery!" pursued Mr. Lathom. "Life has nothing more to offer now."

"Ripping, isn't it?" murmured Figgins. "I hope Jones won't wake up and spoil it."

But that was exactly what Mr. Jones was going to do.

There was a loud yawn from the prehistoric man, and a movement.

Mr. Lathom started back.

"Stand clear, my boys. It is quite possible that the creature may awake in its full senses and become ferocious."

"Gweat Scott!"

The prehistoric man sat up on the floor of the cave.

Peculiar sounds came from his throat, which was feeling remarkably dry. From some recess of his skin he drew a flask, and applied it to his mouth.

Mr. Lathom watched him with intense interest.

"Doubtless some hunter of that far-off period," he was murmuring. "He is provided with a flask, like a modern hunter. Indeed, there is a smell from

what he is drinking which seems to indicate that spirituous liquors were not unknown to man in the mesozoic period.

Gurgle, gurgle!

The prehistoric man finished what remained in the flask, and was refreshed.

He blinked round at the juniors and the Form-master. The amount of refreshment he had taken had obliterated his memory of the bargain made with Tom Merry & Co. The prehistoric man was drunk!

The juniors observed that disconcerting fact, and regarded him with considerable uneasiness. Mr. Jones' two partners had been looked up for being drunk and disorderly. There was no telling what Mr. Jones himself would be like in a state of inebriation.

"Joh!" said the prehistoric man.

"Ah! Groogh! Whurrammi?"

"Listen, my boys," said Mr. Lathom, in a whisper. "He is speaking in the unknown language of his period, before, probably, articulate words could be formed by human lips."

"Whurrammi?" pursued the pre-

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historic man, and to the juniors it was evident that he was puzzled by his whereabouts, and was asking: "Where am I?"

"Quiet, my boys."

"Watcher staring at?" said the prehistoric man offensively.

Mr. Lathom almost fell down.

It was not good English, certainly, but it was English; and to hear it upon the lips of a man who had lived in prehistoric ages—

"Wot I want to know is, what's the gime?" pursued the prehistoric man. "Wot's the little gime? Watcher staring at?"

He staggered to his feet.

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom, dumbfounded. "What—who are you?"

"I'm the prehistoric man!" growled Mr. Jones. "I lived before the world began. I used to climb the trees with the little chimpanzees, with a pretty prehistoric Mary Ann."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

Mr. Lathom staggered back.

"It is a—a—a cheat—a deception!" he shrieked. "This—this scoundrel has dared to play a trick on me!"

"Hey? Who you calling a scoundrel, old funnyface?" demanded the prehistoric man. "Not so much of your lip, or you'll get a wipe round the smoller!"

"You—you villain—you—"

"Oh, you 'ook it!" said the prehistoric man. "Shut your tater-trap!"

"You scoundrel!"

That was too much for the prehistoric man. He made an unsteady rush at the Form-master, and gripped him, and they struggled wildly.

"Oh, good heavens! Help! Drag-gimoff!" shrieked Mr. Lathom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, hold me, somebody!" moaned Blake. "My ribs are going! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Oh dear! He is drunk and mad and dangerous! Help!"

"Scoundrel, am I?" roared Mr. Jones. "I'm a nonnest man. I'm the prehistoric man wot 'ave played to every crowned 'ead in Yurup! Take that—and that!"

Mr. Lathom took "that" and "that" because he could not help it. The juniors rushed to the rescue, and dragged off the prehistoric man. Mr. Lathom staggered away, gasping for breath, and very much agitated.

"Hold him!" he panted. "Hold him! I will have him arrested, I will!"

Mr. Jones tore himself away from the grasp of the juniors.

"'Ave me arrested!" he roared. "Wot for, I'd like to know, funnyface? My heye, I'll give you wot-ho, you himmage!"

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Lathom, and he fled madly from the cave. The prehistoric man was rushing at him with clenched fists and glaring eyes, and not whole mountains of mesozoic rocks, or even palaeozoic, though chockful of fossils, would have kept Mr. Lathom in the cave another second. He dashed away at top speed, with the prehistoric man after him.

"Stop!" roared Mr. Jones. "You've called me names, and I'm going to lam yer! Stop, I says!"

But Mr. Lathom did not stop.

Down the hillside he went with a speed that was very creditable in a middle-aged gentleman of sedentary habits.

After him went the prehistoric man, brandishing his fists and yelling in a

manner worthy of the earliest prehistoric times.

The juniors could not follow. They rolled about the cave in hysterics, shrieking and yelling with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove, look at them!"

"Poor old Lathom! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Set a fossil to chase a fossil!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked at the science club in astonishment. He could see nothing whatever in these annoying occurrences to laugh at. But the other fellows could, and they laughed, they shrieked, and they roared till they seemed in danger of convulsions.

CHAPTER 9.

Skimpole Does Not Understand!

ST. JIM'S heard the story with great joy.

The whole school talked of nothing else that day. In passages and studies there was a sound of incessant chuckling.

Even the Head heard of it, and was suspected of chuckling.

Mr. Lathom did not chuckle.

He had arrived at St. Jim's in a breathless state, having fortunately escaped the clutches of the prehistoric man. Mr. Jones had imbibed from the flask not wisely but too well, and he came to grief at the bottom of the hill. But Mr. Lathom, under the impression that the prehistoric man was still after him, had trotted all the way to the school.

Mr. Lathom shut himself up in his study to recover from his terrible adventure.

The juniors came straggling in a few at a time, and then the story spread over the school.

Tom Merry & Co. did not refer to the part they had played in the occurrence.

All they had to say was strictly true—that the prehistoric man was hidden in the cave, and had turned out quite a different kind of prehistoric man from the kind Mr. Lathom had at first supposed.

"And you don't know how he got there, I suppose?" Kildare of the Sixth asked, trying to look sternly at the juniors.

"He must have walked there," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "What do you think, Tommy?"

Tom Merry nodded solemnly.

"Must have," he said. "There isn't a tram-line, and I don't think he could have taken a cab in that rig."

Kildare laughed.

"Well, if you had anything to do with it, you had better keep it dark," he said. "Mr. Lathom will be annoyed, I should think."

"I shouldn't wonder if he gives up geological excursions after this," Blake remarked.

Kildare grinned and walked away. He had a shrewd idea that the prehistoric man had been "planted" on Mr. Lathom

by those enterprising young rascals; but it was no business of his, and he did not inquire further.

Exactly what Mr. Lathom thought about the matter, when he had had time to reflect, the juniors did not know.

Mr. Lathom was not a suspicious man, but it must have occurred to him that probably the members of the science club knew more about the matter than he did.

It was unlikely that Mr. Jones would have buried himself in the mesozoic rocks for the purpose of taking a nap.

Nor was it likely that a perfect stranger would have originated the scheme as a jape on the geological Form-master.

Some of the juniors, if not all of them, had had a hand in it, and Mr. Lathom could scarcely fail to guess as much.

They had pulled his leg—the august leg of a Form-master.

But it was worse than useless to think of inquiring into the matter. The ridicule it had caused was bad enough already. Mr. Lathom only wanted the story to die away, and he was not likely to take any step that would bring it prominently into public notice again. And it would be difficult, if not impossible to discover which were the culprits.

When they saw the Form-master the next day the juniors regarded him a little anxiously, wondering how he was taking it.

There was an unusual stiffness in Mr. Lathom's manner.



"Ow! Groogh!" shrieked Skimpole. "My dear Lowther, the back of my neck!" "Never mind the ink," said the clubs? "Groogh! Yes—"

He was a kind-hearted and genial little man, but he could not forget very quickly the great shock his dignity had sustained.

And so he was much less genial than usual that day.

He made no reference, however, to the scene in the cave; neither did he refer in any way to any further geological excursions.

After lessons, Skimpole of the Shell lay in wait for Mr. Lathom as he came out of the Form-room. Skimpole was as keen as ever. He had no intention of letting the science club be dissolved by a single untoward incident.

"A very unfortunate occurrence yesterday, sir," began Skimpole.

Mr. Lathom halted, and gave him a freezing glare. He did not know that Skimpole might have been a party to the prehistoric fraud.

"I have no desire to discuss it, Skimpole," he said stiffly.

"I suppose you will be paying another visit to the cave, sir?" suggested Skimpole. "Owing to that unfortunate occurrence, we were hardly able to make any investigations. You left so suddenly—"

"Skimpole!"

"And though I would gladly have continued the investigations, sir, after your hurried departure—"

"Boy!"

"I could not do so, sir, as the fellows, for some reason I cannot comprehend, were excited to risibility.

"How dare you, Skimpole!"

The genius of the Shell blinked at him in surprise.

"It is a fact, sir. They seemed to see something very funny in the incident. I cannot say for what reason, but such is the fact. I hope, however, that you will take the science club out again."

"I shall do nothing of the sort!"

"Wh-what!"

"You hear me, Skimpole?" snapped Mr. Lathom.

"But, sir, you are honorary president of the club—"

"I withdraw my permission for you to use my name!"

"Oh, sir!"

"I decline to have anything further to do with your ridiculous association, Skimpole! I suspect you, sir, of impertinence!"

Skimpole's jaw dropped.

"Mr. Lathom, I—"

"No more, sir! If you mention the matter in my presence again I shall cane you!"

And Mr. Lathom marched away majestically.

Skimpole blinked after him in the blankest astonishment. He could see no reason whatever why Mr. Lathom should be angry with him; but Mr. Lathom evidently was angry.

Skimpole was trying to think it out, when the Terrible Three came along, and woke him up with three separate and powerful slaps on the back.

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole. "Oh! Ow! My dear Merry—"

"Wherefore this thudness?" asked Monty Lowther. "Are you trying to

think out a geological problem—how prehistoric men get buried in caves?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am very much surprised," said Skimpole—"very much surprised indeed! I spoke to Mr. Lathom about another excursion of the science club, and he was angry—very angry. Can you think of any reason why he should be angry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It perplexes me very much," said Skimpole, in distress. "Mr. Lathom declines to be any longer the honorary president of the science club, and he was angry—angry with me. That is a loss to our organisation—a very great loss."

"Horrible!" sighed Monty Lowther. "Lend me a handkerchief, somebody; I want to blub."

"Pray do not be so upset," said Skimpole kindly. "Although Mr. Lathom has withdrawn for some reason that I cannot fathom, there still remains myself, and I shall endeavour to do my duty to the science club."

"Thank you, Skimmy!" said Lowther brokenly.

"You're very good!"

"Noble!" sobbed Manners.

"Manly!" said Tom Merry tearfully.

"Generous!"

"That is, in fact, my aim," said Skimpole modestly. "By devotion to the interests of the science club, I hope to supply the loss of our respected

honorary president. I shall do my best to make the club a great success. I have every hope of discovering another jawbone in the cave—perhaps a jawbone with the teeth intact. Indeed, it is within the bounds of possibility that other bones—a thighbone or a rib—may be unearthed. Think of that, my dear fellows!" said Skimpole, with glistening eyes.

"You're sticking to geology and things?" asked Lowther.

"Yes, indeed!"

"Going to talk to us about geology, and osteology, and prehistoric fossils and mesozoic rocks, and things like that?"

"Certainly!"

"Never going to give the subject a rest?"

"Never, my dear friends."

"Then there's only one thing to be done," said Lowther. "Collar him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear friends," exclaimed Skimpole in amazement, struggling wildly in the grasp of the Terrible Three, "I—I fail to comprehend. I—I consider—Yah! Oh! Yah!"

Bump!

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, setting his spectacles straight on his bony nose, and sitting up on the floor to stare after the departing figures of the Shell fellows. "I fail to understand the cause of this inexplicable conduct. If this is enthusiasm on the part of Merry and Manners and Lowther—ow!—I must say that it is—yow!—a very peculiar form of enthusiasm! Groogh!"

CHAPTER 10.

By Whose Hand?

TOM MERRY was on the footer field about an hour later, when Toby, the School House page, came hurrying down to the ground.

"Master Merry!"

"Oh, run away!" called out Monty Lowther. "Master Merry's busy!"

But Toby did not run away.

"Mr. Lathom wants Master Merry in his study at once," he said.

Master Merry went off the footer field looking a little dismayed.

"Sure he wants me, Toby?" he asked.

"Yes, Master Merry. And he's in a awful wax," added Toby, by way of friendly warning.

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"In a wax with me?" he asked.

"I think so, Master Tom."

"What the dickens for?"

"I dunno, Master Merry. But he rang the bell somethin' awful, and hordered me to find you and send you to his study at once!"

"All right, Toby; I'll go."

Toby departed with a commiserating look. Tom Merry went into the pavilion for a jacket. His chums walked with him to the School House.

"Looks like trouble," said Jack Blake. "If it's a row about the affair in the cave yesterday, we're all in it, mind."

"Can't be that," said Lowther. "That would have come out before, if it was coming out at all. It's something fresh."

"Blessed if I know what I've done," said Tom Merry, and then he knocked at the door of Mr. Lathom's study and opened it.

Mr. Lathom was standing up, with a black frown upon his usually genial face, and a glitter behind his spectacles. Never had Tom seen the master of the Fourth in such a state of anger. There

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pray do not spill that ink over me! It is running down her. "Will you swear to give up geology and science All right! Ow!"

was evidently something very serious the matter.

"You sent for me, sir," said Tom Merry respectfully.

"Yes, I sent for you, Merry. Yesterday I lost the key of the box in which I keep my fossil," said Mr. Lathom.

"You found it,"

"I returned it to you, sir," said Tom. "Quite so. After you returned it to me, I had occasion to open the box, and the fossil was there intact."

"Yes, sir."

"But now," said Mr. Lathom, in a voice of thunder, "it is gone!"

"Gone, sir!"

"Yes, gone!"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom, sincerely enough. He would not have damaged Mr. Lathom's precious relic for worlds. And he did not quite see what the matter had to do with him. "But as it was there after I returned you the key, sir, I suppose you cannot think that I have had anything to do with it. I assure you—"

"You have not touched it, Merry?"

"Certainly not. Has the box been broken, sir?"

"The box has not been broken. It has been unlocked. The key, however, is still in my possession, on my watch-chain. I have not lost it. There is, evidently, another key of the same kind in this school, in the possession of the person who has rifled my box. Look at that, Merry!"

Mr. Lathom opened the lid of a mahogany box that stood on the table.

Inside was a sheet of paper, a fly-leaf torn carelessly from some book, and upon it was written, in large letters:

"RATS!"

The precious jawbone had been taken away, and that impertinent message had been left in the place of it.

Tom Merry stared at it.

"Have you seen that before, Merry?" asked Mr. Lathom sternly.

"Never, sir!"

"You did not place it there?"

"Most certainly not!"

"Very well! I should be glad to believe you, but this matter will require to be investigated. I have refused a considerable monetary offer for that fossil, and the person who has taken it is no better than a thief. If it is a foolish practical joke, I am willing to let him off with a caning if the fossil is immediately returned."

"I know nothing about it, sir!"

"The key was in your hands. It has been in no other hands that I know of. Only a person who has had the key in his possession could get one like it that would open this box. It is not an uncommon key, certainly, and there may be many like it in existence, perhaps in this school. You have no key like it, Merry?"

"No, sir. I didn't look at the key, and don't remember what it was like. It looked to me like any other key."

"Very well! In other circumstances, Merry, I should like to take your word without proof. But I cannot be ignorant of the fact that you and your friends have made a jest of this kind of thing!" said Mr. Lathom sternly. "About what happened in the cave yesterday, it is not my intention to speak; but this abstraction of my fossil, and the insolent note left in its place, are quite in keeping with what occurred then."

Tom Merry coloured.

"It is necessary for the fossil to be found and returned to me," said Mr. Lathom. "I have sent for you to ask

you whether you have anything to say before I place the matter in the hands of Dr. Holmes."

"I don't know anything about it, sir."

"How long was the key in your possession before you returned it to me?"

"Less than five minutes."

"You found it, then, within a few minutes after I mentioned the matter to you?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Really! It seemed as if you knew where to look for it!" said Mr. Lathom, with unaccustomed sarcasm. "Where did you find it, pray?"

Tom Merry moved uneasily.

"I did not know where to look for it, sir," he said. "I had seen a fellow with a key in his hand that morning; and when you mentioned that you had lost one, I thought that might be the one. So I went to him, and asked him for it."

"You did not tell me this, Merry."

"No, sir; it wasn't necessary. I brought back the key at once, and didn't think anything more about the matter."

Mr. Lathom looked at him searchingly.

"You did not note what it was like, and procure another key of the same kind?"

"I have said I didn't, sir."

"Were you aware that the fossil was worth a considerable sum of money?"

"Blake told me so, sir," said Tom Merry. "He said you had been offered fifty pounds for it, for a museum or something."

"That is correct. You see the seriousness of the matter, I hope. Besides the great value of this specimen to me, it has a market value of fifty pounds. Someone has abstracted it. It appears, from what you say, that my key was in another person's hands, although you did not tell me at the time. Who was this person?"

"Levison of the Fourth, sir."

"I suppose he will bear out your statement?"

"Mellish was with him when I took the key from him, sir."

"Very well: I will send for both of them."

Mr. Lathom rang, and Toby appeared. He was dispatched immediately for the two cads of the Fourth. In a few minutes Levison and Mellish came in, the latter looking decidedly nervous and uneasy. Levison, however, was quite cool and collected.

"Levison," said Mr. Lathom, "Merry tells me that you found the key I had lost yesterday, and that you handed it to him in the presence of Mellish. Is that the case?"

Levison paused for a single moment. His brain worked quickly. It would not do to deny the whole transaction, as he was prompted to do. He had nerve enough, but he was very doubtful about Mellish. If Mellish blurted out what he knew, under the stern and questioning eye of the Form-master, Levison's lie would recoil on his own head. That reflection passed instantly through Levison's mind, and he answered:

"It's quite true, sir. I found a key lying in the passage, and picked it up."

"Did you know it was my property?"

"Oh, no, sir! I asked Mellish if he knew anybody who'd lost a key, and he said he didn't. You remember that, Mellish?"

"Perfectly," said Mellish.

"Then Merry came into my study and told me you had lost the key, sir, and said he wanted to take it back to you, so I gave it to him."

"You told me you had picked it up, Merry."

"I did pick it up, sir. It dropped on the floor where Levison threw it."

"Very well. How long was the key in your possession, Levison?"

Levison appeared to reflect.

"Might have been ten minutes, sir."

"Have you another key like it?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Have you procured one like it since?"

"I, sir!" exclaimed Levison, in astonishment. "Of course not, sir. Why should I?"

"Someone has procured a similar key, and opened this box and taken away the fossil, and left this insolent message in its place."

"Oh, sir! What a rotten thing to do," said Levison.

"I have since examined my key, and find traces of wax upon it," went on Mr. Lathom. "A wax impression was taken of it before it was returned to me. Either you or Merry must have done it. Levison, and then procured a new key."

"I don't know anything about it, sir."

"And you know nothing about it, Merry?"

"Nothing, sir!"

"It was one of you, and you both deny knowledge of the matter," said Mr. Lathom sternly. "One of you is lying."

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Levison is known to be an untruthful boy," went on Mr. Lathom, with a severe glance at the black sheep of the Fourth. "But Levison, so far as I can see, has no concern in this matter. He was not connected with the party that went to the cave yesterday, where such a painful incident occurred."

"I hope, sir," said Levison virtuously, "that you wouldn't think me capable of playing a trick like that on my Form-master, sir."

"I have already said that you had nothing to do with it, Levison. I do not intend to raise the question of what happened yesterday," said Mr. Lathom, with dignity, "but it casts doubt on your statement now, Merry."

"I am sorry you think so, sir."

"Someone has stolen—there is no other word for it—my fossil, which is worth fifty pounds. It must be restored. Again I offer to the guilty person to return it and to end the matter with a caning."

There was no reply.

"As you have nothing to say," said Mr. Lathom, "I shall have to appeal to the Head to investigate the matter. You three juniors will remain in this study, meanwhile."

Mr. Lathom quitted the room, and turned the key in the lock outside.

CHAPTER 11.

Found Guilty!

LEVISON grinned.

"Well, you've done it now!" he ejaculated.

"What do you mean, you cad?" asked Tom Merry fiercely. "Do you mean to say I have anything to do with taking the silly rubbish away?"

"Do you mean to say you didn't?" grinned Levison.

Tom Merry advanced towards him with blazing eyes.

"You cad! You took a wax impression of the key while you had it. Only a miserable worm like you would think of such a thing. You thought the key

(Continued on page 18.)



Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! How do you like the St. Jim's yarn in this number? Isn't it great? It is—it are! Next week I have another just as good—if not better. When your pals want to know the best school story of the week, just put 'em on to

"FIGGY'S GRAND CIRCUS!"

It's a riot of fun and high-spirited adventure, with all your favourites of St. Jim's "hitting the high spots" and making things hum generally. It all begins because it's Taggles' birthday. In honour of the auspicious occasion Tom Merry & Co. consider that it's up to them to give the old porter a bumper benefit. Having decided on that, it becomes a question of raising the cash. To provide some sort of entertainment is the best means, and so Figgy hits on the idea of a circus. That causes it! You'll simply revel in the fun and thrills of that circus.

An additional attraction of this grand yarn is the visit to St. Jim's of William George Bunter, the fat fellow of Greyfriars. He's the uninvited guest of Gussy. But Bunter comes in useful for Taggles' benefit—even if it does prove rather expensive for Gussy in footing the bill for tuck! Look out for this ace-high yarn next Wednesday.

"THE BLACK SHEEP'S SECRET!"

Owen Conquest's contribution to the programme is another gripping story of Jimmy Silver & Co., in which there's a surprising development in connection with the Head's missing notecase. Slog Foggers, the sneak-thief who stole the

wallet and hid it in Mr. Manders' overcoat, has not yet given up hope of getting his thieving hands on it again. But, as you will read in the next yarn, Slog little knows that another has learned his secret—that Leggett, the black sheep of Manders' House at Rookwood, also has dark designs on that notecase!

By the way, have you won one of our grand footballs yet? If not, send along a joke to-day. The Jester has plenty more footballs to award.

TONGUE-TIED!

I don't suppose for a moment that any of my readers will ever feel tempted to see what paint tastes like; but, in case any of you do, just remember what happened to twelve-year-old Buddy Copenhaver, of Chicago. He couldn't resist the temptation when he came upon a lamp-post which had recently acquired a new coat of paint, and so he dabbed his tongue against it for a few moments.

To his horror, he found that his tongue had become stuck to the paint! For half an hour Buddy tried to free his tongue, but it was in vain. He was a fast fixture to the lamp-post, and he had visions of having to lose some of his tongue!

It was then that someone noticed the boy's unhappy position, and the police

and the fire brigade were summoned to release him. But they were as helpless as Buddy. The only thing left to do was call a doctor. The medico came on to the scene, and he poured a little denatured alcohol where the boy's tongue was stuck to the post. In a few seconds he was free—never again to be tempted to taste paint!

A "FISHY" BUSINESS!

Mention of alcohol reminds me of an unusual story connected with the intoxicant. It was noticed during cold weather in Tewksbury, U.S.A., that, while other rivers and ponds became covered with ice, a certain little brook remained unfrozen. When it was examined, the fish in it were seen to be extremely active and full of beans. This fact made the chief of police suspicious. He had the water tested, and it was found to contain alcohol! No wonder the fish felt frisky!

The police followed the course of the brook until they came to an old barn standing on the bank. They forced an entry, and inside they discovered an illicit still for distilling liquor!

PUTTY PILFERERS!

The cold weather was primarily the cause of the discovery of that illicit still; but home here in England recently a spell of frost was not attended by such a satisfactory outcome. The folk on a new estate in East Yorks woke up one morning to find that the putty round their window-panes had disappeared. Fresh putty was put in, but that went like the rest. It was estimated that nearly three hundredweight of putty vanished from 1,000 windows!

Who the putty pilferers were was a mystery until someone kept watch, and then it was solved. Hungry birds were the culprits! They had taken a liking to the linseed oil and whiting, and while food was scarce in the frosty weather, the putty had proved a palatable substitute. But the birds' source of food supply on that particular estate came to an abrupt end. Red lead was mixed with the new putty, and not a bird would touch it. Hungry as they must have been, they would not be tempted by the poisonous red lead.

TAILPIECE.

Teacher: "What is the most wonderful achievement of the Romans?"
Tommy: "Learning Latin, sir!"

THE EDITOR

PEN PALS COUPON
28-2-36



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

R. R. Stokes, 83, Kenilworth Square, Rathgar, Dublin; age 14-17; dance bands, Rugby, motor-racing.

Colin Reid, 11a, Robertson Road, Centennial Park, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia; stamps; age 11-13.

David Stocke, c/o Railway Dept., Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia; sports, stamps; age 16-17.

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Raymond Woodward, 1, Dodd Street, Hillsbro', Sheffield, 6; age 13-14; stamps, swimming.

R. J. Hevey, 28, Denison Street, South Hobart, Tasmania, Australia; stamps, newspapers.

Rex Hevey, 28, Denison Street, South Hobart, Tasmania, Australia; stamps, snaps, etc.

Miss Jeane Barnett, 13, Mountain View Road, Morningside, Auckland, S.W.I., New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 18-22.

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might be inquired after before you had a chance of using it, and you took the impression to be able to get a new one."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.
"If you can prove that, all serene," he said. "It will want proving, you know. I'm not the chap who plays geological jokes on Lathom. I didn't hire a music hall performer to pretend to be a prehistoric man in a cave. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Mellish.
"But you did this!" said Tom Merry.
"It must have been one of us, and as it wasn't I, it must have been you."

"Oh, rats!"
Tom Merry clenched his fists.
"You cad! You told me you were going to take the fossil and chuck it away if I hadn't taken the key from you."

"I don't remember anything of the sort. If you tell Lathom a yarn like that you'll have to prove it," said Levison coolly.

"Mellish heard you."
"I don't remember Levison saying anything of the sort," said Mellish calmly. "I think I remember his saying that he was just going to inquire of the Housemaster if anybody had lost a key."

Levison gave his chum an approving glance.

"Yes, I remember saying that," he remarked.

"You pair of rotten liars!" shouted Tom Merry, quite losing his temper. "I'll jolly well lick you and make you own up!"

"Going to have a rough-and-tumble in a Form-master's study?" grinned Levison. "Lathom will get ratty when he comes back."

"Are you going to tell the truth?"

"Yes. I've done that, and I'm sticking to it."

"You—you rotter!"

Tom Merry rushed at Levison. The cad of the Fourth put up his hands, and retreated round the table. The key clicked in the lock, and the door opened, and Mr. Lathom appeared, with the imposing form of the Head behind him.

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.

"Merry!" echoed the Head, in a thunderous voice.

Tom Merry paused, and dropped his hands, flushing scarlet.

"You will kindly have no hooliganism here, Merry!" said Mr. Lathom acidly.

"This conduct does not speak well for you, Merry!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I—" stammered Tom Merry.

"That is enough. Toby, come in!"

Toby the page followed the Head and the Form-master into the study, and the door was closed again. The Head was looking very grave.

"Mr. Lathom has acquainted me with this unfortunate occurrence," he said. "If both you boys persist in denying knowledge of the matter, I shall have to investigate it with thoroughness. Have you anything to say?"

"I haven't, sir," said Levison.

"And you, Merry?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. One of you has, or had, in his possession a key which will open this box belonging to Mr. Lathom. It's my duty to order a search to be made, painful as such a proceeding is to me."

"I'm quite ready, sir," said Levison meekly.

"You mean you've thrown away the key, you cad!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

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"Silence, Merry! Toby, you will search Master Levison first."

"Yes, sir!"

Levison stood out cheerfully to be searched. Toby went through his pockets in a very thorough way. If Toby had been able to express his opinion, he would have declared without hesitation that Levison was the guilty party. Toby had suffered a great deal from Levison's mischievous and malicious nature, his position in the House making it difficult for him to retaliate on a boy in Levison's position. Toby would have given a great deal to discover that key in Levison's pockets, and his search was very thorough. But the key was not to be found.

Toby ceased the search at last.

"Might be in Master Levison's box, sir," he ventured to suggest.

"I'm quite willing for my boxes to be searched, sir," said Levison.

"That will come afterwards, if the key is not found here," said the Head.

"But now search Master Merry, Toby."

"Yessir!" Toby hesitated. "Skuse me, Master Tom."

Tom Merry forced a smile.

"Go ahead, Toby! Don't mind me!"

Toby's hands went through his pockets. As his hand rested in Tom Merry's jacket pocket a strange change came over Toby's face.

"What have you found?" asked the Head sternly.

"A—a key, sir!" stammered Toby.

"It's under the lining, sir. I desay it's the key of Master Merry's box, sir."

"We shall see," said the Head grimly. "Take it out!"

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"I don't keep any keys in that pocket," he said. "I've got my keys in a bunch. And—and I didn't know there was a hole in the lining."

Toby found the hole in the lining and extracted the key. Amid a breathless silence, he laid it on the table. Mr. Lathom took a key from his watch-chain and laid it beside the one taken from Tom Merry's pocket. The two keys were exactly similar.

Tom Merry stared at them blankly.

"I—I—I—" he stammered.

"Well, Merry, what have you to say?" asked Mr. Lathom in a harsh voice.

"This key, exactly resembling mine, was hidden in the lining of your jacket!"

"I—I don't know how it got there, sir!"

The Head's lip curled with contempt.

"Pray do not utter falsehoods on the subject, Merry!" he said cuttingly.

"Falshoods, sir?"

"Yes, falshoods! If you expect me to believe that that key became hidden in the lining of your jacket without your knowledge, you must be very foolish!"

Tom Merry's head swam for a moment. Then he uttered a cry.

"Levison, you cad! You put it there!"

"Nonsense!" broke in the Head sharply.

"How could Levison put a key in your pocket without your knowledge?"

"I—I don't know. In the dormitory, perhaps."

"Levison does not share your dormitory."

"I—I don't understand it. But—but—"

"You are discovered!" said the Head coldly.

"It is useless, as well as wicked, to throw foolish and unfounded accusations at Levison! I trust, Merry, that you will now have sufficient decency to end this farce and admit the truth!"

"The—the truth?" stammered Tom.

"Yes. You—or some of your friends

—played a most inexcusable prank upon Mr. Lathom yesterday. Mr. Lathom has made no complaint, and I do not intend to take up the matter. But you have now carried that prank, Merry, too far! You have abstracted valuable property, and you have lied about it!"

"I—I haven't lied! I—"

"Silence! I command you, Merry, to fetch back immediately Mr. Lathom's property, from wherever you have hidden it, and restore it to him! You will then come to my study. I shall flog you, Merry, not so much for this foolish joke as for telling falsehoods and endeavouring to throw the blame upon an innocent person!"

"But, sir, I—I—"

"Go and fetch Mr. Lathom's property at once!" thundered the Head.

"But I can't! I don't know—I—I—"

"Have you dared to destroy it?"

"Certainly not! I haven't—"

"Then go and fetch it!"

"I can't! I—"

"Leave this study at once!" said the Head sternly.

"I give you one hour, Merry, in which to restore Mr. Lathom's property! If you do not recover it and restore it in that time, I can only conclude that you have destroyed it, or that you have disposed of it dishonestly! In either case, I shall expel you from the school!"

"But f—I—I—"

"Not a word more! Go!"

And Tom Merry staggered rather than walked from the study.

CHAPTER 12.

Hard Pressed!

"BAI Jove! What's the mattah?"
"Tom, old man—"
"What the dickens—"
"Tom—"

The crowd of juniors all exclaimed at once as Tom Merry came out of the School House into the sunny quadrangle, with a face white as chalk.

They had been waiting for him, wondering what the trouble was; but they had never expected anything like this. Tom Merry seemed to be dazed. They knew at once that something serious had happened, and they were alarmed.

"Buck up, dear boy!" said D'Arcy.

"What is it? If Lathom's cuttin' up wasty about the pwehistowie man, we're all in it, and we'll stand by you like anythin'!"

"Sure, and we're all ready to own up!" said Reilly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It isn't that!" he said, with a gasp.

"Then what is it?" said Lowther.

"You look as if you've got it right in the neck! Tom, old fellow, what's the matter?"

Tom Merry told what had happened in Mr. Lathom's study.

The juniors listened in dismay.

"Levison, of course!" said Blake.

"If he's destroyed the giddy fossil, he won't dare to own up, even if we rag him."

"More likely keeping it to sell!" snorted Herries. "Levison wouldn't be above getting money for it and sticking to it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It must have been Levison!" said Tom Merry. "It couldn't have been anybody else. But he denies knowing anything about it, and sticks to his yarn."

"And the key was found in your pocket?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes; stuck into the lining."

"Phew!"

"And—and you don't know how it got there?" asked Blake hesitatingly.

"Of course I don't! I've never seen the key before!"

"I—I say, you know, if you've japed old Lathom over his precious fossil, there's no harm in telling us," said Digby slowly.

Tom Merry glared at the Fourth Former.

"You silly ass!" He hesitated. "You think I told lies, then?"

"Well, no. But—"

"But what, then?"

"Well, I don't see how a key could get into a pocket without a chap knowing. It's jolly odd!" said Digby, more tartly.

"Extremely odd," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But we are bound to take Tom Mewwy's word for it, Dig, deah boy."

"I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Monty Lowther warmly.

"Any fellow who thinks I told lies can clear off and let me alone!" exclaimed Tom Merry savagely.

"Keep your wool on!" said Kangaroo soothingly. "It looks jolly queer, but I—I suppose Levison did it somehow. He's always playing some rotten trick on somebody."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I haven't the faintest idea how the key got there," said Tom Merry, more calmly. "I only know that I've never seen it before. It was shoved into my pocket by somebody—and it must have been Levison. When I took the key away from him yesterday he said he was going to take away Lathom's fossil and chuck it away, and I wouldn't let him. That's why he has done this."

"Yaas, it's pretty cleah. The uthah wottah! We shall have to find it out and fix it on him somehow, and then it will be all wight," said Arthur Augustus hopefully.

"It's that rotten jape yesterday that makes Lathom suspicious of me," groaned Tom Merry. "He thinks this is some more of the same, and he's got his back up about that already. The trouble is I've got to find the fossil and take it back in an hour, or the Head says I'm to be sacked for stealing it."

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Then it's got to be found," said Manners decidedly. "We can be pretty sure that Levison has it, and he's hidden it. We've got to find it."

"We'll find Levison first and bump him till he owns up where it is," said Lowther.

"Good egg!"

The juniors looked for Levison. But Levison was not to be seen, and neither was Mellish. They were well aware of the storm they had raised, and they expected to be looked for, and they were keeping out of sight.

After a quarter of an hour the juniors were compelled to give up the search for Levison.

Tom Merry was almost in a desperate frame of mind.

The Head had been in deadly earnest in what he had said. If the missing article was not restored within an hour Tom Merry would be adjudged guilty of stealing, or of destroying it.

Any further appeal to the Head was useless. And only Levison knew where the fossil was, and Levison was not to be found. And, even if found, it was too much to expect that he would own up. For his own sake, he dared not do so, after the story he had told in Mr. Lathom's study.

"The wotten thing will have to be found," said Arthur Augustus disconsolately. "If we can take it back to old Lathom it will be a wespote; and then we shall have time to find out and

prove that it wasn't Tom Mewwy who boned it."

"But where is it?" said Blake hopelessly.

The Terrible Three had come to the same conclusion. But where to look for the fossil—that was the question.

Arthur Augustus wrinkled his aristocratic brows in a deep effort of thought.

"The wottah wouldn't dare to destroy it, in case it came out," he said. "He's hidden it somewhere. If this blows ovah I shouldn't wondah if he twies to sell it—he's quite wottah enough. Pewwaps it's in his study."

"Let's go and look!" said Manners.

They went up to Levison's study, in the Fourth Form passage. Lumley-Lumley, who shared that study with Levison and Mellish, was there, and when he heard what was wanted he willingly joined in the search.

Levison's belongings were ransacked right and left.

But no trace of the missing jawbone was discovered.

If Levison had hidden it, he had not hidden it there, and it was impossible to guess where it might be. There were a thousand nooks among the old buildings where so small an article could have been stowed out of sight.

And the time was passing on.

At six o'clock Tom Merry had to be present in the Head's study, to be flogged if he had restored the missing property, to be expelled if he had not.

It was useless for him to repeat that he did not where it was; the Head simply would not listen to him.

A quarter to six rang out from the clock tower.

Blake & Co. stood and discussed the matter in the quad. The Terrible Three were still pursuing the hopeless quest.

"What would Sexton Blake do in the cires?" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "You know, deah boys, I have wathah a gift as an amatenah detective."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake crossly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Talk sense!" said Herries. "What's going to be done?"

"It looks to me, deah boy, as if poor old Tom Mewwy is goin' to be done," said D'Arcy dismally. "Where can that uthah wottah have hidden it? Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boys. I'm goin' to think it out."

D'Arcy's brows wrinkled in a portentous frown. He was evidently making a big intellectual effort to think it out. His chums left him thinking it out, and wandered away to help in the search.

Six o'clock striking brought Arthur Augustus out of his reverie. But an idea had come into the mighty brain of the swell of St. Jim's, and his eye was glowing behind his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove, I've got it!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came miserably towards the School House. Arthur Augustus waved his eyeglass to them.

"I've got it, deah boys!"

The Shell fellows' faces lighted up. "Got it?" exclaimed Tom Merry breathlessly. "Good luck! Where is it?"

"I was not wewewwing to the fossil, deah boy."

"Oh, ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, shurrup!" said Lowther crossly.

"Pway don't be wude, Lowthah," said the swell of the Fourth severely. "I have not found the wotten jawbone, but I have got an idea—"

"Go and boil it!"

"I believe I have spotted the wottah's game! Where are you goin', Tom Mewwy?"

"I've got to go in to the Head, to get the order of the boot."

"It's all wight, I weally believe," said Arthur Augustus excitedly. "I'm goin' to look for the wotten thing now. Keep the old boy talkin', and if I find it—"

Tom Merry nodded hopelessly, and passed into the House. He had very little faith in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's idea that he knew where to look for the missing jawbone. The captain of the Shell went with a gloomy brow to the Head's study.

The juniors gathered round the swell of St. Jim's. The elegant Fourth Former was wildly excited, and Blake evidently believed that D'Arcy had thought of something sensible for once. He quoted the text about wisdom proceeding from the mouths of babes and sucklings.

"I wufuse to be warged as a babe and sucklin', you ass!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I have worked it out in my bwain in the best Sexton Blake manner. Now, we are all agweed that Levison must have boned the bone."

"Yes, ass!" said Lowther impatiently. "Get on!"

"And he has hidden it somewhere—"

"Yes!" roared Lowther.

"Pway don't shout, deah boy! I don't like bein' wored at, it thwows me into a fluttah! Now, Levison must have known that the wotten wubbish would be searched for, and it might be bwought to light. Well, then, where would he be most likely to hide it?"

"That's what we've been trying to

(Continued on the next page.)

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find out for the last hour!" growled Blake.

"Yaas, but you haven't the detective instinct, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I've worked it out in my bwain. If the fossil is discovered, to support Levison's wotten accusation against our fwiend, Tom Mewwy, it would have to be found among Tom Mewwy's pwope."

"Oh!"

"Therefore, my impwession is that it has been hidden in somethin' belongin' to Tom Mewwy—pewwaps in his twunk or hat-box!" said D'Arcy triumphantly.

CHAPTER 13.

The Judgment of Arthur Augustus!

"PHEW!"

The juniors uttered the exclamation all together.

Was it possible, after all, that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had hit upon the solution of the problem that had baffled them all?

"By Jove!" said Manners.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chirped gleefully.

"Wely on it, deah boys, I've got it!" he said. "You can always twust my judgment. I have often reflected that if I evah came to the awful necessity of workin', I should make a wippin' detective. It's a gift, you know!"

"Oh rats!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, if you can suggest a bettah theow—"

"Ass! There's nothing in it," said Monty gloomily. "Levison would like the rotten thing to be found in Tom Merry's box, if it was found at all; but Tom goes to his box every day for something or other. If it was there he would have found it himself."

"Ahem!"

"Of course he would!" said Blake, his face falling. "I'm afraid there's nothing in it, after all, Gussy."

"Waks!" said Arthur Augustus. "Levison may have hidden it undah othah things, or put it into Tom Mewwy's Sunday toppah."

"Tom would have found it on Sunday, then, and Levison didn't know Lathom would miss it before Sunday."

D'Arcy rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Pewwaps you're wight," he admitted. "All the same, my theowry is a jolly good theowry. You chaps know more about Tom Mewwy's mannaahs and custums than I do, as you're his pals. Hasn't he any box or somethin' that he doesn't go to for anythin'?"

"There's his trunk in the box-room," said Lowther. "He's not likely to go to that until the end of the term, of course."

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors looked at one another quickly.

"Let's go and look!" said Manners tersely.

They lost no time. In less than a minute they were scampering up the stairs to the box-room.

They ran into the room, and Lowther lifted the lid of Tom Merry's trunk. Then his face, flushed with hope, fell again. The trunk was empty. There were some old sheets of newspaper in it, and nothing more to be seen.

"Nothing doing!" grunted Lowther.

"Wait a minute, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus leaned over the big trunk and jerked out sheets of newspaper.

Clatter!

Something hard fell from the news-

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paper and rattled on the floor. The juniors gave a yell of excitement.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

"The giddy fossil!"

There it was—the precious relic—the jawbone of antediluvian date that Skimpole had displayed to admiring eyes at the first meeting of the science club. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed to grow an inch taller as he gazed at it through his monocle. His theory had been proved—he had hit upon the truth.

"I don't want to wub it in, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus gently. "But I weally must wemark that pewwaps you will admit now that I was in the wight."

Blake gave his elegant chum a thump on the back that made him stagger.

"Right as rain! Hurrah!"

"Ow! You feahful ass! You've nearly bwocken my back!" wailed D'Arcy.

"Never mind that; this isn't a time to worry about trifles. This rotten thing has got to be taken to the Head. Come on!"

"I'll take it, deah boys. As I discovered it, it is up to me to pwesent it to the Head and explain to him."

"Buck up, then!"

And Arthur Augustus, with the relic of prehistoric times in his hand, dashed away for the Head's study in hot haste.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry was with the Head. Mr. Lathom was there, and both the masters fixed a stern look upon Tom Merry as he came in.

"You have come. I trust, to restore Mr. Lathom's property?" said the Head severely.

"No, sir; I can't find it."

"What! Do you mean to say that you have lost it?"

Tom Merry met the Head's stern gaze steadily.

"I mean to say that I don't know anything about it, sir," he said quietly. "I had nothing to do with taking it from the box in Mr. Lathom's study, and I don't know what has become of it. I think Levison knows."

"You have said enough," said the Head coldly. "I have already told you my decision. I shall expel you from the school unless you restore Mr. Lathom's property to him."

"I cannot do it, sir, as I do not know what has become of it!"

"Then you know what to expect. I—"

The Head broke off as a thump came at the door, and it opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed in. Dr. Holmes rose majestically to his feet.

"D'Arcy, what is the meaning of this intrusion? How dare you—"

"It's all wight, sir!" D'Arcy waved the famous jawbone in the air. "It's found, sir!"

Mr. Lathom gave a cry of delight and pounced upon the precious relic. The enthusiastic geologist looked as if he could weep over it. He almost hugged it.

"Ah!" said the Head, his frown relaxing. "Is that your property, Mr. Lathom?"

"That is it, sir," said Mr. Lathom, his face beaming. "That is the fossil, sir—the sole surviving proof of the human race in the eocene period—"

"Ahem—just so!" said the Head hastily. He did not want to listen then to the startling and revolutionary theories that Mr. Lathom drew from that fragment of bone. "Did you find it, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said the swell of St. Jim's proudly. "It's all wight, Tom Mewwy. I thought it out, you know, and that theowry flashed into my bwain—"

"Good old Gussy!" murmured Tom Merry gratefully.

"Where did you find it, D'Arcy?"

"In Tom Mewwy's twunk in the box-room, sir. I worked it out in my bwain that the wottah must have hidden it there."

"Are you referring to Merry?"

"Mewwy! Certainly not, sir! I was refewwin' to Levison."

"Oh!" Dr. Holmes turned to Tom Merry, his look more severe than ever. "It appears, Merry, that this property, which you deny having abstracted from Mr. Lathom's room, has been discovered in your box. Can you account for that?"

"Only that it must have been placed there, sir."

"And by whom?"

"By the same rotter—the same person who put the key into my jacket pocket, sir," said Tom Merry, meeting the Head's eyes unflinchingly.

Dr. Holmes made an impatient gesture.

"Nonsense! I have already given you my opinion of that statement. How can you expect me to listen to such an accusation, without a particle of truth? As the property has been restored, Merry, I shall keep my word. I shall not expel you, but you will be flogged soundly, sir, for your conduct! To-morrow morning, before prayers, the school will be assembled, and you will receive your punishment in public. You may go!"

"Weally, sir—" began Arthur Augustus.

"You may go also, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir; but if you will allow me to wemark—"

"I will allow you to leave my study," said the Head, raising his voice a little.

The Head picked up his cane, and Arthur Augustus followed Tom Merry out of the study rather hastily.

CHAPTER 14.

All Skimpole's Fault!

TEA in Tom Merry's study was a gloomy meal that evening. The captain of the Shell was gloomy and depressed. He had ample reason to be.

The sentence of a public flogging hung over him, and there was no appeal. Unless, in the interval, some proof of his innocence could be discovered, he was to be flogged before all St. Jim's on the following morning.

His chums were as gloomy as himself.

All the juniors believed firmly enough in Tom Merry's assurance that he had nothing to do with the abstraction of the fossil from Mr. Lathom's study. That is to say, all the Co. and their friends believed in him. But fellows who did not know Tom Merry so well were more inclined to go by the evidence.

Arthur Augustus had saved Tom Merry by his brilliant discovery of the fossil in the trunk in the box-room. But in some respects that discovery had made matters worse. The trunk was Tom Merry's, and as Gore of the Shell remarked, he would want some proof before he believed that Levison or anybody else had hidden the fossil in Tom Merry's trunk. It might be so, or it mightn't, and a fellow wanted proof.

"Gore is a wottah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, in Tom Merry's



Mr. Keyser walked down the Hall, scanning the faces of the juniors. "Levison, stand-out at once!" rapped Mr. Lathom as the cad of the Fourth tried to hide behind other fellows. Mr. Keyser glanced at Levison. "That is the boy, sir!" he said, pointing to Levison.

study. "But there is some weason in what he says, and a lot of fellows say the same, you know. Aftah all, they weelly haven't sufficient intelligence to work the maitah out in their bwains as I did. It wequiah a fellow of tact and judgment."

"How are you going to work Tom Merry out of the flogging to-morrow morning?" demanded Blake glumly. "There's another chance for your giddy tact and judgment."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I'm thinkin' it ovah, deah boys," he said. "I am twyin' to work it out in my bwain on Sexton Blake's methods."

"Oh, blow Sexton Blake!" said Monty Lowther.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I think that is a votten weemark. I don't desire to wub it in—but I found the fossil, didn't I?"

"And made the Head more certain than ever that it was Tom Merry who had boned it," growled Lowther peevishly. "Why couldn't you find it somewhere else while you were about it?"

"Weally, deah boy, I cannot wegarō that as weasonable. I could only find it in the place where Levison had hidden it."

"Right, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "You did a lot for me, old fellow, and I'm grateful. I'm afraid I've got to go through the licking to-morrow. It isn't the licking I mind—I could stand that. But for the Head to think I've been telling lies, and for old Lathom to suppose that I played a rotten trick on him—that's what I feel most. Lathom is an ass

but he has always been kind to us, and he must think me a rotter."

"It was the prehistoric man did it," groaned Blake. "If it hadn't been for that jape, Lathom wouldn't have been so rusty."

"All Skimpole's fault," grunted Kangaroo. "If he hadn't started his howling idiocy of a science club, we shouldn't have sprung the prehistoric man on him."

"All Skimmy's fault, of course," growled Lowther. "Why couldn't he stick to Determinism?"

"Of course, we can bump Skimpole," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Yaws, wathah! But that won't save Tom Mewwy from bein' licked to-morrow mornin', deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

"Come in!" called out Tom Merry. Skimpole of the Shell blinked into the study.

The juniors regarded him with deadly looks. They had just worked it out to their satisfaction that Skimpole was the cause of all the trouble, and Skimpole's visit to the study just then was a great deal like stepping into the lion's den. Monty Lowther rose to his feet, and took a large bottle of ink from the shelf. Manners picked up a cushion. Skimpole did not observe any of these preparations. He blinked at the juniors cheerfully through his big spectacles.

"I am so glad to find you all here, my dear fellows," he said, rubbing his bony hands. "It will save calling a meeting of the science club."

"The what?" said Blake.

"My science club, my dear fellow. You are aware, of course, that there

is a half-holiday to-morrow afternoon—Saturday?"

"Go hon!"

"Some of the fellows will be playing football," said Skimpole, with a pitying smile. "But the members of the science club will, I trust, be better occupied."

"Bai Jove!"

"I have planned a visit to the cave outside Rylcombe, and a really thorough investigation of the strata there. You shall all help, every one of you."

"Oh!"

"You shall all share in the glory of the discoveries I hope to make. We will go immediately after dinner, and stay there till dark. We may be able to spend six hours together in geological investigations, my dear friends." And Skimpole beamed upon the juniors as he held out that enticing prospect.

"Six hours," said Blake. "Not enough. Why not get leave to go immediately after morning lessons, and take our dinner with us? We could put in another hour that way."

"My dear Blake, I welcome the suggestion with pleasure. I am indeed glad to see you so keen on the subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole looked surprised.

"I fail to see what you are laughing at, my dear fellows. It is a very good idea, I consider. What are you locking the door for, Lowther, may I ask?"

"I don't want anybody to come in and interrupt while we are slaughtering you, Skimmy," said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"My dear Lowther—"

"Collar the idiot!"

"But my—my dear fellow—I fail to comprehend—"

Manners launched the cushion, and Skimpole sat down on the study carpet. His spectacles slid down his nose, and he blinked over them in great astonishment.

Monty Lowther uncorked the large bottle of ink.

"Hold him!" he said. "Keep still, Skimpy, or you will be trodden on. Do you see this ink?"

"Yes, my dear Lowther. I am somewhat shortsighted, and without my glasses I do not see very clearly, but I certainly perceive a somewhat large bottle of ink in your hands."

"I am going to anoint you with it," explained Lowther.

"Wh—what!"

"I am going to pour it over your head. When you have had enough, you can swear solemnly never to utter the words geology or science club again. See?"

"B—but—Ow! My dear Lowther, pray do not spill the ink over me. It is running down the back of my neck!" shrieked Skimpole, struggling in the grasp of the members of the science club.

"Never mind the ink," said Lowther. "We're willing to waste a bob's worth of ink for the good of the cause. Have you had enough?"

"Ow! Yes! More than enough! Groogh! Oh!"

"Will you swear—"

"Groogh! Certainly not! I never swear! I am incapable of such a reprehensible proceeding, my dear Lowther. Gore swears sometimes, and I have reproved him for it. Ow!"

"Will you swear to give up geology, and science clubs, and things, and stick to some other less troublesome variety of lunacy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! My dear Lowther, geology is not a form of lunacy! Ow! That is quite a mistake. Most wonderful discoveries have been made—wow!—millions of years have been added to the age of the human race—groogh!—ow! Keep that ink away, you silly chump—yah! Upon the whole, my dear fellows, I am willing to dissolve the science club—yah!—ow!—groogh! Chuck it!"

"No more science club—and no more geology?" demanded Lowther.

"Groogh! Yes—no; all right! Ow!"

"Chuck him out!" said Lowther.

"All the ink's gone! Roll him out!"

"Oh dear! Oh, my goodness! Yow! Oh!"

Skimpole was rolled out of the study into the passage. The door slammed on him. The genius of the Shell sat up, streaming with ink, and jammed his ink glasses on his nose, and panted for breath.

"Oh dear! I fail to understand this—groogh!—conduct, after the enthusiasm they displayed at first—ow! But I think—graw!—that—yow!—I will give up trying to enlighten them upon scientific subjects—groogh!"

And he did.

CHAPTER 15.

At the Eleventh Hour!

THE next morning there was a great deal of suppressed excitement when the juniors came down.

Before prayers that morning Tom Merry was to be publicly flogged in the Big Hall.

Fellows looked curiously at the hero of the Shell to see how he was "taking the Gem Library—No. 1,467,

it." Tom Merry looked a little pale, but he was quite calm.

His chums were looking very down hearted.

"Blessed if I feel inclined to go in to brekker!" growled Jack Blake. "Where has that ass Gussy got to? Seen Gussy, anybody?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared in sight. He was on his bicycle, and riding down towards the gates. Blake & Co. rushed after him. It was a rule that juniors should wheel their bicycles out before they mounted, but Arthur Augustus was evidently in a hurry. Blake yelled after him.

"Where are you going, fathead?"

"Out, dear boy," called back Arthur Augustus, without slackening pace.

"Don't you know brekker's ready?"

"Yaas!"

"Come back, you ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass!"

"Will you come back?" roared Blake.

"Sowwy—can't!"

And Arthur Augustus pedalled out of the school gates, and shot away towards Rylcombe at scorching speed.

Jack Blake gazed after the disappearing figure of the swell of St. Jim's in amazement.

"What bee has he got in his bonnet now?" he asked.

"On the track of something, perhaps," said Digby. "Looking for a giddy mare's nest, I suppose. He'll get licks for missing brekker."

The Fourth Formers went back to the School House.

Breakfast was a gloomy meal there.

It dragged through, Arthur Augustus' place at the Fourth Form table being empty. Mr. Lathom's eye was upon that place, and he inquired sharply where D'Arcy was, and made a note of his absence. Unless Arthur Augustus had a good explanation to give when he came in, there was trouble in store for him.

He had not come in by the time the order was given for the school to assemble in Big Hall.

Monty Lowther and Manners walked on either side of Tom Merry, as the captain of the Shell went in with the rest. Kildare of the Sixth paused to speak to them as they went in. The captain of St. Jim's looked grave and concerned.

"I'm sorry for this, Merry," Kildare said. "I've got a hint to give you. If you owned up and begged Mr. Lathom's pardon, it's quite possible you might get off with a caning. The Head hates a flogging as much as anybody else."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I'm not likely to own up to a thing I didn't do, flogging or no flogging!" he exclaimed hotly.

Kildare regarded him curiously.

"You stick to it that you didn't do it?" he said.

"Yes, of course I do."

"I'm sorry, Merry. The evidence seems pretty clear."

"I know it does," said Tom bitterly.

"Levison's fixed all that!"

"I don't trust Levison; but—well, if you are innocent, Merry, I'm more sorry than I can say. But I don't see how the Head could decide otherwise than as he has done, on the evidence."

Tom Merry took up his place in the ranks of the Shell.

The whole school was assembled when the Head came in by the door at the upper end of the Big Hall.

Dr. Holmes was looking very grave and severe.

"Boys!" he said. "You know for what reason you have been assembled here this morning. Merry, come forward!"

Tom Merry stepped out from the midst of the Shell fellows.

All eyes were upon the junior as he advanced up the Hall. Tom Merry's face flushed a little, as he felt that curious regard from all sides, but he did not falter. Steadily and calmly he advanced.

He met the severe glance of the Head without faltering.

"Merry, have you anything to say before I mete out your punishment?" said the Head.

"Only that I am innocent, sir!" said Tom.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"Remove your jacket!" he said harshly.

Tom obeyed.

"You will take up Merry, Taggles."

"Yessir!" said Taggles.

There was a sudden crash as the door at the lower end of the Hall was flung violently open. Heads were turned round to see the cause of the disturbance, and Dr. Holmes looked sternly along the crowded Hall.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, breathless, with his hat on the back of his head, and his eyeglass streaming at the end of his cord, rushed in.

"Gussy!"

"D'Arcy!" The Head's voice was like the rumble of thunder. "How dare you, sir, interrupt these solemn proceedings in this manner! I—"

"Pwax excuse me, dear sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It's all wright!"

"Boy! What do you mean?"

"Come in, Mr. Keyser!" shouted Arthur Augustus, and a little, old man followed him into the Hall, looking very breathless and confused. "This way, dear boy!"

"Who is this?" thundered the Head.

D'Arcy marched his hesitating companion up the Hall, amid a murmur of amazement from all the fellows there.

"Pwax excuse my intewwuptin' the proceedings, dear sir!" panted Arthur Augustus. "I am weally very sowwy, but I feel sure you would like to know that Tom Mewwy is innocent before you lick—I mean, flog him, sir."

"What!"

"I've got pwoof, sir," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Is it possible?" The Head's look changed. "If this is so, D'Arcy, you have done me a great service, as well as your schoolfellow. But—"

"This chap is Mr. Keyser, sir—he is a locksmith fwyom Wylcombe. It suddenly flashed into my bvain, sir, when I was thinkin' it out. I washed down to Wylcombe on my jiggah, sir, to see Mr. Keyser, and asked him whethah a chap had had a key made at his place lately. I know Levison is a clevah beast, but it stuvck me that he might not have been able to make a key himself, so vewy likely he had gone to Mr. Keyser to make one. So I washed off—"

"Do you mean it was Levison?"

"Mr. Keyser wewenmbals that a St. Jim's chap came in to have a key made on Thursday, sir, and he would wewenmbah the key if he saw it again, and he can identify the chap."

The Head breathed hard for a moment.

"Mr. Lathom, will you kindly show this gentleman the duplicate keys?" he said.

"Certainly!" said Mr. Lathom.

Mr. Keyser, very red and confused at finding himself the cynosure of three hundred pairs of eyes, looked at the keys the Form-master held out. He immediately selected the duplicate key.

(Continued on page 23.)

THE MASTER WHO WAS HELD TO RANSOM FOR AN OVERCOAT!

The CAPTIVE SCHOOLMASTER!



"For mercy's sake," gasped Mr. Manders, "release me! I beg you to release me from this dreadful place! I will allow you to keep the money you have taken from me—" "Five bob!" said Slog Poggers with a snort. "Five blooming bob!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The Missing Master!

"H EARD about Manders?" That question was being asked up and down Rookwood School.

Hardly a fellow met another fellow that morning without asking that question.

But it was quite a superfluous question. Everybody had heard about Manders.

Mr. Manders, Housemaster of Manders' House at Rookwood, was missing.

He was missed first, of course, on the Modern Side, the Modern Side at Rookwood being located in Manders' House. But the news spread to the Classical side. Overnight there had been a rumour that Mr. Manders was missing from his usual haunts. In the morning the rumour was confirmed.

Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern Fourth were full of it. Knowles of the Sixth, captain of Manders' House, was seen to be looking puzzled and perturbed. Mrs. Moote, the Housedame, came over to see the Head. Fellows who had seen the Head, declared that the Big Beak looked waxy. Perhaps he took the view that a Housemaster ought not to have been missing.

Still, it could hardly be supposed that Manders was missing of his own accord. Something must have happened to Manders.

But what?

Nobody knew—or, if anybody knew, he said nothing of what he knew.

Leggett of the Modern Fourth offered it as his opinion that it was a jolly good

thing that Manders was missing, and that the longer he remained missing the better for Manders' House and Rookwood generally.

Generally speaking, the Modern fellows concurred in that opinion, for Roger Manders was anything but popular in his House. An acid temper and a sharp tongue, naturally did not make him popular.

But in view of the possibility that something had happened to Manders,

To Mr. Manders an overcoat seemed a small price to pay for his freedom from a kidnapper. But what the Rookwood master didn't know was that the overcoat was the hiding-place of nearly fifty pounds!

Leggett's opinion was considered unfeeling, and Tommy Dodd & Co. bumped Leggett for stating it.

Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Classical Fourth discussed the mystery like everybody else. Jimmy Silver had a rather worried expression on his face. Mornington, on the other hand, wore a smile. Morny of the Classical Fourth seemed amused by the general excitement—and several times Jimmy glanced with a troubled and doubting eye at Morny's smiling face.

"It's queer," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Jolly queer! From what I hear, Manders went out yesterday afternoon after tea—"

"And he never goes out of gates since that tramp Poggers pitched into him," remarked Raby.

"Never," said Newcome. "He sticks in the school like a winkle in its shell."

"But he went out," declared Lovell. "I've had it from Tommy Dodd. Doddy says he had a phone call in the afternoon—that may have fetched him out. I remember I heard the telephone bell ring when I was there; it was when you were ragging in his study, Morny—"

"Was it?" said Mornington.

"Yes, it was. You ought to know, as you were keeping doggo behind his window curtain while he was taking the call," said Lovell. "It was after that that he spotted you and laid into you with a cane. Don't you remember?"

"I remember he laid into me with a cane," drawled Morny.

"Well, after that he went out," said Lovell. "He never came back. I hear that Mrs. Moote told the Head that his bed hadn't been slept in—so he was out all night. He's not here this morning. He would have left word with Mootey if he'd meant to stay out the night, of course."

"Something's happened to him," said Raby.

"And I jolly well know what!" declared Lovell.

"You do?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, look at it," argued Lovell. "That man Poggers was after Manders. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,467.

He waylaid him half a dozen times—goodness knows why. Once he pinched an overcoat from him—"

"Must have been hard up for an overcoat," remarked Mornington. "I remember Manders was wearing his old coat that day and somebody called out 'Old Clo' and there was a row—"

"But he was only wearing that old coat because his usual coat had been damaged by that tramp pitching into him," said Lovell. "That man Poggers has made a regular mark of old Manders. Goodness knows why. He's the same man who pinched the Head's notecase—you fellows remember? That wallet has never been found—"

"Oh, blow that!" said Oswald. "That's ancient history. What about Manders?"

Quite a number of Classical fellows were listening to Lovell. Arthur Edward's statement that he jolly well knew what had happened to Manders excited interest.

"Yes, if you know all about it cough it up!" said Putty of the Fourth.

"My belief is," said Lovell, "that that man Poggers was watching for him, as he's watched for him before, spotted him out of gates, and knocked him on the head!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Knocked him on the head," repeated Lovell firmly. "If he had just pinched his wallet, like he did the Big Beak's, or his overcoat, like he did before, Manders would have come back all the same. He hasn't come back. So my belief is that Poggers knocked him on the head."

"In that case," drawled Morny, "it's lucky there was nothing in it to damage."

"Oh, shut up, Morny! That's rather rotten if poor old Manders has been knocked on the head," said Lovell severely. "He got me a licking yesterday and he whopped you, which a Modern beak has no right to do; but if he's been knocked on the head by a tramp—"

"But he hasn't!" said Morny.

"Well, I tell you he has!" snorted Lovell. "For some idiotic reason that man Poggers has been after him time and again, trying to pinch his overcoat. Well, yesterday he spotted his chance and took it."

"Only Manders wasn't wearing his overcoat when he went out yesterday," grinned Mornington.

"How do you know?" demanded Lovell, rather taken aback.

"Because I saw him going out," said Morny coolly. "And for the first time this spring he went out without being wrapped up like a mummy."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

And the other fellows grinned. Everybody knew that Slog Poggers had waylaid the Modern master more than once and tried to "pinch" his overcoat—had, indeed, got away with an old coat on one occasion. But a warm spring afternoon had tempted Manders out without his overcoat—which rather seemed to knock a leak in Lovell's theory of what had happened.

"If you're sure of that, Morny—"

said Lovell.

"Quite!" grinned Morny. And he strolled away, his hands in his pockets, grinning. Jimmy Silver followed him and tapped him on the arm. Jimmy's face was very grave.

"What do you know about Manders, Morny?" asked the captain of the Fourth very quietly.

Valentine Mornington stared at him.

"What should I know?" he queried.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,467.

"You've just admitted that you saw Manders going out yesterday—nobody else seems to have noticed him. I know Manders whopped you yesterday, and you were talking rot about getting even with him. I met you coming in after tea—you must have gone out soon after you saw Manders go."

"And what do you deduce from that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" grinned Mornington.

"You were grinning like a Cheshire cat when you came in. Look here, Morny, you jolly well watched Manders going out, and went after him. I know that now as well as if you told me. And you're such a silly, reckless ass that—"

"Thanks!"

"Morny, don't be a mad ass! If you know anything about what's happened to Manders—" said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, lots!" drawled Morny.

"Well, what?" demanded Jimmy.

"That's tellin'—"

"Look here, Morny—"

"Rata!" said Morny.

And he walked away, leaving Jimmy Silver more worried and anxious than ever.

Awful for Manders!

ROGER MANDERS groaned. It was not his first groan. He had been groaning at brief intervals for quite a long time.

Mr. Manders could, indeed, hardly believe that this was not some horrid dream from which he would awaken presently in bed in his room in Manders' House at Rookwood.

Such an experience as this had never come his way before. Mr. Manders was an orderly, precise, indeed, fussy, gentleman, and seldom or never stepped out of his groove. Now he had been jerked out of his accustomed groove in such a wild and whirling manner that it made his head spin.

While all Rookwood was wondering where Manders was he was not far away. He was, in fact, hardly a couple of miles from the school. He could have walked in under the half-hour—had he been free to walk.

Manders was a prisoner, in the power—as he firmly believed—of an irresponsible lunatic!

For unless Slog Poggers was insane, what was the meaning of this? Why did he want Mr. Manders' overcoat so desperately that he was preparing to take such lawless and desperate means to get possession of it?

Here was Mr. Manders—with his wrists tied together with a cart-ropes, pinched by Slog from a neighbouring farm, no doubt. One end of the rope was tied on his bony wrists—the other end to a jutting roof.

In the heart of Coombe Wood there was a deep hollow, a sort of cave, under the roots of an ancient tree. It was to that lair that Slog had led Mr. Manders the previous afternoon.

In that spot Mr. Poggers had sometimes camped during the weeks he had spent in watching the school for Mr. Manders. There were various camping utensils in the earthy cave—a kettle, a saucepan, a little rusty stove, two or three extremely dirty blankets, and other such things—all, of course, pinched by the enterprising Slog, whose profession was that of a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles.

Mr. Poggers was accustomed to rough quarters, and no doubt that den under the old tree was as good as the corner of a barn or the lee of a haystack, to which Mr. Poggers was used. But

Roger Manders, Housemaster of Rookwood, was by no means accustomed to rough quarters—he liked his little comforts. A night in the tramp's earthy den was a night of horror to Mr. Manders.

Slog had left him there; to sleep if he could, to stay awake if he couldn't—the heartless Slog evidently not caring two hoots, or one, which he did.

Mr. Manders might have shouted for help. But nobody would have been likely to hear him on a windy March night in the heart of a lonely wood. And before leaving him Mr. Poggers had warned him that he would not be far away, and that if he made so much sound as a whisper he would come back and give him something to keep him quiet.

During the long night, therefore, Mr. Manders had not made any attempt to call for help. He suspected that Slog was gone—but he could not be sure. He had no desire whatever to be given something to keep him quiet! He groaned—but he did not even groan loudly.

Now it was day again—and Manders was still groaning. Birds twittered in the boughs; spring sunlight glimmered through the trees, and a few glimmers penetrated into Mr. Manders' earthy prison.

Daylight brought him no comfort.

He was missed at Rookwood, of course. He dreaded to wonder what the Head would think of his unaccountable absence. Everybody would be wondering. Nobody would guess the truth!

It was so amazing that Mr. Manders himself could hardly believe that it was not a prolonged nightmare. Still more amazing was Slog's reason for doing it. From the bottom of his heart Mr. Manders wished that he had been wearing his overcoat when he came out. For that was what Slog wanted. It was because the Housemaster had come out minus his overcoat that Slog had bagged the Housemaster. Obviously—to Manders—the man was mad!

Mr. Manders, certainly, did not want to lose his overcoat—but he would have sacrificed his whole wardrobe to have escaped this dreadful experience.

He groaned.

"Shut it!" said a voice, husky and unpleasant.

Mr. Manders started, sat up on the pile of dirty blankets, and turned his startled eyes on the tramp as Slog ducked his head and pushed in. Mr. Poggers, at long last, had returned.

"For mercy's sake," gasped Mr. Manders, "release me! I beg you to release me from this dreadful place! I will allow you to keep the money you have taken from me—"

"Five bob!" said Slog, with a snort.

"Five blooming bob!"

Mr. Poggers was evidently disgusted. In the wallet he had picked from Dr. Chisholm's pocket there had been a wad of notes—only unfortunately he had lost that wallet. From Mr. Manders he had pinched only five shillings—which Mr. Poggers considered hard lines on a bloke.

"I fear that I shall catch a cold—" groaned Mr. Manders.

"You'll catch something worse afore I've done with you if you don't and over that blinking overcoat!" said Mr. Poggers threateningly.

Mr. Manders trembled.

Here was the man's insanity coming out again.

Nobody, looking at Slog Poggers' hard, sly face, his cunning little piggy eyes, would have supposed him a lunatic on his looks. They would have supposed him a sly, cunning, unscrupulous rascal. Even Mr. Manders



The Italian turned on Lovell, swinging up the bundle. Next moment that bundle fairly crashed on Arthur Edward's head. "Yooo-hooop!" he roared, and went over backwards as if he had been shot!

had to admit that he did not look insane.

But if he were sane, why this peculiar obsession to possess an overcoat which, after all, was not new and of no great value?

"After all these 'ere weeks that I been 'anging about a-watching for you!" said Mr. Poggers indignantly. "Peelers looking for a bloke, making a covey's life 'ardly worth living. Then I gets you, and you ain't got the coat on! I don't know why I ain't knocked your ugly face through the back of your 'ead—strike me pink I don't!"

"I—I-I beg you—" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Shut it!" said Slog.

He sorted in a ragged pocket and produced a cheap fountain-pen and a cheap blotter. Mr. Manders eyed those articles in wonder. Slog, it seemed, had visited a town to bring back writing materials. No doubt he had been expending Mr. Manders' five shillings at Latcham.

"Now," said Slog in a husky tone of menace, "you're going to write a note, you are, for that there overcoat to be 'anded to the bloke you send for it. See? I got a pal waiting to take the note up to the school. I can't go personal, but I got a pal to go. I'm going to set your 'ands loose to write that note. You get me?"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders. "You write it jest 'ow you like," said Mr. Poggers. "I leave that to you, but you better make sure that they 'and that overcoat to my pal—'cause if he comes back without it I'm going to break every bone in your bony old carcass!"

"I—I will—will certainly—"

"You better!" said Mr. Poggers darkly.

He released Mr. Manders' hands. Mr. Manders took the pen in hand and rested the blotter on a jutting root.

"You—you will release me when you have received the overcoat?" he gasped.

Slog snorted.

"Course I will!" he snarled. "Think

I want to keep you about as a pet, or what?"

Mr. Manders began to write. Slog watched him with gleaming eyes.

At last he was going to get that overcoat, in the lining of which he had hidden the Head's wallet on the night of the theft at Rookwood. Slog really felt that he had earned it by this time.

"There!" gasped Mr. Manders.

Slog took the note, spelled through it suspiciously, nodded, and folded it in an envelope, which Mr. Manders directed to his Housedame at Rookwood. Then the kidnapped Housemaster was tied again, and Slog ducked out of the cave.

His "pal" was waiting under the trees. It was Beppo, the grinning dark Italian organ-grinder, who had served Slog's turn several times, watching for Mr. Manders when, for reasons of prudence, Mr. Poggers did not desire to approach too near to Rookwood.

"'Ere you are!" said Mr. Poggers. "You 'ook it with this 'ere to the school, Beppo, and they'll 'and you the coat! And, mind," added Mr. Poggers, with a dark look, "I'll 'ave an eye on you when you come away with it, and don't you think of bunking with that there coat because you know what's in it. 'Cause if you do, I'm tipping you that you won't be able to grind no organ agin till you come out of the 'orspital. You get me, Beppo?"

"Si, si!" grinned Beppo.

The organ-merchandise started for Rookwood—Mr. Poggers following him at a distance and venturing as near the school as he dared, evidently not placing too great a reliance on his "pal." Mr. Poggers' way of life had not taught him faith in human nature.

Mr. Manders was left alone again. He only hoped that no difficulty would be made about handing over that overcoat. Otherwise, he knew what to expect from Mr. Poggers—and it was a fearfully unpleasant prospect.

What Morny Knew!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON had a thoughtful look on his face in third school that morning. There was a good deal of whispering in the Fourth. The mystery of Mr. Manders interested everybody. No news had been received of the Modern master, and the belief was growing that something must have happened to him. Otherwise, it was simply impossible to account for his absence. Fellows wondered whether Dr. Chisholm would call in the police. They looked forward to a little pleasurable excitement.

Mr. Dalton had to let his class whisper—there really was no stopping them. He gave several fellows lines—but it was no use; the whispering soon restarted. Mr. Dalton himself was puzzled, like other members of the staff. Everybody at Rookwood, from the Head to the smallest fag, wondered what had become of Mr. Manders. Jimmy Silver had a lingering suspicion that Mornington knew—but he said nothing of that. Morny said nothing, but Jimmy noted that thoughtful expression growing on his face during third school.

So far, Valentine Mornington had seemed to treat the absence of Mr. Manders as rather a joke. But it seemed to be borne in, even on Morny's mind, that the matter was serious.

The fact was that the last twinges of the thrashing Mr. Manders had bestowed on Morny had now worn off. Morny was able to take a more equable view of the matter, and even to realise that he had fairly asked for that thrashing by perpetrating a record rag in Manders' study.

After third school, Morny joined Jimmy Silver when the Fourth were dismissed. Jimmy was going out with Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, as usual; but the dandy of the Fourth linked an arm in his and almost dragged him away from his chums.

"Well?" said Jimmy, rather grimly.

when Morny walked him under the old Rookwood beeches, evidently so that no one else should hear what he had to say.

"That old ass, Manders!" began Morny.

"If you've done something mad and idiotic, Morny—" said Jimmy, with a deep breath. "Have you told Errol?"

"I've told nobody. I'm not goin' to, either; the Head would want to know why I haven't mentioned it before. Don't be an ass!" added Morny. "I never touched Manders. I was goin' to, perhaps—but I never did. I was feelin' pretty wild after he pitched into me yesterday, and—and—well, never mind that. I never touched the old ass!"

"I'm glad of that, at any rate," said Jimmy, with deep relief. "But what has happened to Manders, then?"

"That man Poggers has got him." "Got him?" repeated Jimmy. "Are you making out that a tramp has kidnapped a Housemaster, or what?"

"Just that! Listen, and I will a tale unfold," said Mornington flippantly. "You know Manders got me in his study yesterday, when I was ragging there, and laid into me. Well, I was behind the curtain while he was taking his telephone call, and couldn't help hearing what was said on the phone."

"What the thump's that got to do with it?"

"Lots! It was that phone call that took Manders out. It told him that Slog Poggers had been arrested, and Manders was wanted at the police station to identify him."

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy. "That was why he went, then?" He stared at Morny. "But if Poggers was arrested, he can't have—"

"If you'd shut up a minute, I'd tell you. Knowing that Manders was going out, I kept an eye open and cut out after him. Never mind what I was thinkin' of doin'—I never did it! But followin' him along, behind the hedge in Coombe Lane, I saw what happened. That blighter Poggers—"

"But you said he was under arrest at the police station," said Jimmy, in bewilderment.

"Will you let me tell you?" snapped Mornington. "He grabbed old Manders in the lane, and let out that he had put up that phone call himself, to trick him out of gates."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He wanted something from Manders, and Manders hadn't got it with him—and he snaffled him and hiked him off into Coombe Wood. And that's the last I saw of either of them."

"You—you knew that, and—and you never—"

"Manders shouldn't have laid it on so hard when he had me in his study," said Mornington, with a sneer. "I wasn't bothering about Manders! You remember you advised me to let him alone." Morny grinned. "Well, I let him alone—and that's that!"

Jimmy Silver stood silent, breathing hard. He understood now.

"I suppose it was that idiotic overcoat," went on Mornington. "You know that man Poggers seems mad on getting hold of Manders' overcoat. He's tried it on a lot of times, as everybody knows. I've heard that you and your pals got it back once when he bagged it off Manders. Must have a screw loose, I think."

"Looks like it," said Jimmy. "Of course, it was the overcoat he wanted—and he got Manders instead, as he went out without it. And you've held your

tongue all this time, and left Manders—"

"I don't suppose the man will hurt him. It's that silly overcoat he wants—he's got Manders to get hold of it through him. But—the old ass has been away all night, and all the morning, and—and—"

"And you're getting worried about him!" snapped Jimmy. "Time you did, I think. You ought to have spoken out as soon as you got back to the school—"

"Well, I didn't," said Morny sullenly. "And I can't now—they'd want to know why I didn't spout it out before. I'm not askin' for a Head's floggin'. I've told you now—"

"No good telling me. It's the Head you ought to tell."

"I'll watch it!"

"But it can't be kept dark. Manders will—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Morny irritably. "I tell you I'm not askin' for a floggin'. Look here, that brute Poggers parked old Manders in Coombe Wood. It's to make him hand over that overcoat. There's only one thing he can do—make Manders send for the coat! Can't you see that?"

"Yes—I suppose so. But what—"

"Somebody will come for the coat," said Mornington. "Can you see that—now I point it out to you? Well, whoever comes for the coat will be hand-in-glove with Poggers, of course—"

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"I'm willin' to lend a hand if you'll play up. You can tell your pals, if you like—but don't howl it out all over Rookwood. Poggers can't mean anything, except to make Manders send for the dashed overcoat. Well, when somebody comes for it, we ask him nicely to tell us where Manders is—and go and fetch him home. What about that?"

"You think—"

"I know! No good askin' me why the man wants the coat—we know that he's chased Manders up hill and down dale trying to get it off him—and that's enough. I heard him say to Manders that he hadn't got what he wanted, and he was going to bag him till he got it. Isn't that clear enough?" demanded Morny. "Somebody will come for it—and we can ask him to tell us where Manders is parked—"

"Think he'll tell us?"

"Yes—if we bang his head on a tree till he does."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"There's no news yet—no word from Manders so far. It's coming," said Morny. "That's why I've told you. Poggers can't come himself—he's too well known here. He will send somebody, with some sort of message from Manders. All we've got to do is to keep an eye open for that somebody. See?"

Jimmy Silver admitted that he saw.

Bad Luck For Beppo!

OLD Mack, the Rookwood porter, cast a doubting and suspicious eye on the greasy, dusky-complexioned man who came in at the gates.

Old Mack had seen Beppo before, trundling his organ in the roads about the school. The music merchant had no organ with him now. Old Mack wondered what he wanted, and rolled out of his lodge to inquire.

Beppo gave him an uneasy grin and a bow.

"You show me ze Manders' House, sare!" he said. "I have ze message for ze Missis Moote at ze Manders' House."

"Oh!" said old Mack. He pointed out Manders' House, eyeing Beppo still with

a dubious eye, as the foreign gentleman walked towards that building.

Outside Manders' House quite a number of fellows had gathered. There were both Moderns and Classics in the group—for once on amicable terms with one another. There were five Classics—the Fistical Four and Mornington. There were three Moderns—Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle. And as Beppo came up to the House, the eight juniors all eyed him, and exchanged glances with one another.

Morny's secret had been confided to Jimmy's pals, and to the three Tommies of the Modern side. All of them were rather doubtful, but more than willing to lend a hand, if it proved that Morny was right. That would be proved if some stranger arrived to fetch Mr. Manders' overcoat.

So the sight of a dusky-complexioned, rather tattered stranger naturally excited keen interest among the juniors. "What did I tell you?" murmured Mornington.

Tommy Dodd stepped towards the dusky stranger as he came up to the House. Beppo glanced at him.

"Want anything here?" asked Tommy politely.

"Yes, sare. I have ze note for ze Missis Moote," explained Beppo.

"I'll take you to her, if you like."

"Zank you, sare!"

Tommy Dodd marched the dusky man into the House, bestowing a wink on the other fellows as he went. They waited eagerly. "Somebody" had arrived—with a note for Mrs. Moote. Obviously, it was to his Housedame that Mr. Manders would send a note if he wanted his overcoat, Jimmy Silver & Co. were getting very keen.

Tommy Dodd conducted the messenger to the Housedame's room in Manders' House.

"Man with a message, Mrs. Moote," said Tommy.

Beppo produced a letter. Mrs. Moote stared blankly as it was handed to her. She stared at the superscription in the well-known hand of Roger Manders.

"Bless me!" said Mrs. Moote. "It is from Mr. Manders!"

"By gum!" murmured Tommy Dodd. "I say, Mrs. Moote, tell us if there's news of Manders."

"Certainly, Master Dodd, as soon as I have looked at the letter."

Mrs. Moote slit the envelope, adjusted her glasses, and read—with great surprise growing in her plump countenance.

"Bless me!" she repeated.

"Manders all right, ma'am?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Oh? Yes, certainly!" said the Housedame. "Mr. Manders writes that he has been kept away unexpectedly, and will return shortly, and asks me to send his overcoat by this messenger. It is very extraordinary! I am quite sure the Head will be very much annoyed. So unlike Mr. Manders—"

"Ze gentleman say I take a parcel, madam," said Beppo.

"Yes, that is right," said Mrs. Moote. "Please wait here, and I will send for the coat—it is in a wardrobe upstairs—and I will wrap it up for you to carry. Please sit down."

Beppo sat down.

Tommy Dodd scuttled out, his face ablaze with excitement. Seven fellows outside the House gave him eager, inquiring looks as he appeared.

"It's a note from Manders—asking for his coat!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Oh crumbs!"

"What did I tell you?" grinned Mornington. "It was plain enough, I think!

It's Manders' coat that potty tramp wants, not Manders. How could anybody want Manders'?"

"Pretty clear now," said Jimmy Silver, with a nod. "Well, there's enough of us here to deal with that dago merchant, and with Poggers, too, if we come across him. Keep your eyes open."

The juniors kept their eyes open. Ten minutes later the dusky-complexioned man emerged from Manders' House with a bundle under his arm.

The coat had been handed over without question. Mrs. Moote knew Mr. Manders' handwriting well enough. Surprised as she was, there was nothing for her to do but to hand over the coat as requested by Mr. Manders in his note.

Beppo walked away to the gates with the bundle.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged a glance—and walked after Beppo!

They quickened their pace as they reached the gates. When the Italian walked out they were at his heels.

Beppo glanced round as they followed him out. He quickened his pace a little in his turn. So did the eight juniors.

Beppo gave them another quick look. He saw no reason why he should be suspected—as he certainly would not have been had not Morny witnessed the kidnapping of Mr. Manders the previous day.

But he was feeling uneasy—and he walked still faster. Jimmy Silver & Co. accelerated. They preferred to deal with the man outside the school. Now Beppo was in Coombe Lane—and they proceeded to deal with him.

"Collar him!" said Mornington.

"Snaffle him!" grinned Lovell.

Why he should be suspected and followed Beppo did not know. But there was no doubting the fact, as the crowd of schoolboys closed round him.

With a quick dodge, Beppo eluded their grasp and broke into a run. Lovell jumped after him and grabbed him by the collar.

The Italian turned on him, swinging up the bundle. That bundle, containing the famous overcoat, fairly crashed on Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Yooo-hoo!" roared Lovell.

He went over backwards as if he had been shot. There was a heavy bump as he landed on his back in Coombe Lane.

"Oooooogh!"

Beppo ran.

Seven juniors sprinted after him, hard and fast. One lay in the dust, gasping. Jimmy Silver leaped at the organ merchant, grasped him by the collar behind, and whirled him over.

It was Beppo's turn to roar as he went down.

"Bag him!" gasped Jimmy.

"What-ho!"

The whole crowd hurled themselves on the hapless Beppo. The bundle rolled in the road, as the Italian struggled and yelled.

But Beppo had simply no chance. Collared on all sides, grasped by innumerable hands, he was dragged to his feet.

Lovell came panting up. He grabbed up the bundle, while the other fellows grabbed Beppo.

"Now, Mussolini," said Mornington, with a grin, "where's Manders'?"

Beppo gasped.

"Take us straight to Manders," said Jimmy Silver. "If you brought that note from him, my man, you know where he is. Get on with it!"

Beppo spluttered.

"Are you going?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"No!" gasped Beppo. "Mai, mai! I take ze bundle to ze signor, but I go alone viz myself—"

"This tree will do," said Mornington.

Beppo, hooked to the tree at the roadside, gave a fearful howl as his head was banged on it.

"Now are you taking us to Manders, Mussolini?" asked Mornington genially.

"No!" yelled Beppo. "Mai, non mai! I— Yaroooooh!"

Bang!

"What about it now?"

"Cospetto! Wow! I take you—I do anything! La testa—la testa mia! I go—I take—yes! Knock not my testa on a tree! Oooogh!"

"Nothin' like makin' a chap see stars to make him see reason at the same time," remarked Mornington. Lead on, Mussolini!"

Beppo, groaning, led on.

And Mr. Slog Poggers, from his cover in a hawthorn thicket at a little distance, watched them go—with feelings that could not have been expressed in words.

There were too many of the Rookwooders for Mr. Poggers to think of tackling them, slogger as he was. He kept in cover, to keep clear of sharing Beppo's fate!

And as he watched the Rookwooders disappear across the fields, in the direction of Coombe Wood, Mr. Poggers groaned in bitterness of spirit.

Once more fortune, after seeming to smile on Mr. Poggers, had let him down. That precious overcoat, with a wallet full of notes hidden in the

lining, had been fairly within his grasp this time; and somehow—he could not begin to guess how—that mob of young rascals had spotted the game, and the game was up!

It was cruel luck. When the schoolboys were out of sight, Mr. Poggers crept from his cover and hit the open spaces—a sadder, if not a wiser, Poggers!

Rescue!

MR. MANDERS left off groaning and listened.

He heard a sound of footsteps and voices. He heard thickets and foliage rustle in Coombe Wood.

He started up from the pile of dirty blankets on which he sat, his heart beating faster. Was it help—and rescue? Quite a number of persons seemed to be coming—and Slog Poggers could hardly have returned with a crowd.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Is this the place?" He heard a voice he knew—the voice of Jimmy Silver of the Classical Fourth.

"Si, si, signor!" came a gasping reply.

"Where the dickens have they parked him, then?" It was Mornington's voice. "Is Manders buried under leaves, like a Babe in the Wood, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, Mussolini—"

"Here!" shouted Mr. Manders. He could venture to shout, now that he heard the familiar voices of Rookwooders, evidently looking for him

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"This way! Help! Oh, help! This way, my boys—my dear boys!"

It was the first time in history that Mr. Manders had addressed any Rookwooders as "dear boys!"

But even Mr. Manders regarded them, at the moment, as dear boys—very dear boys indeed! They were coming to Mr. Manders' rescue! Even Mornington, for the moment, was a dear boy—though he had ragged Manders' study the day before, and Manders had whopped him for it.

"Hallo, that's Manders!" came Lovell's exclamation.

"Where are you, sir?" called Tommy Dodd.

Mr. Manders panted "This way—a cave under the tree—this way! Help!" "Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Lovell. "They parked him safe enough! Look!"

The opening of that earthy den was low and narrow, and hidden by bushes. Daylight streamed in as the bushes were dragged aside. Faces looked in—some of them grinning!

"Help!" gasped Mr. Manders. "My dear boys—my dear, dear boys—how thankful I am to see you! My dear boys!"

"We'll have you out of that in a jiffy, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

The juniors crowded in. They got hold of the rope and unfastened the knots. There was a sudden yell from the fellows outside—a scampering of feet, a wild rustling and trampling of the bushes.

Beppo, taking advantage of the general attention being concentrated

on Mr. Manders, had wrenched away and fled. He vanished like a scared rabbit into the wood.

"That blessed dago's hooked it!" gasped Tommy Cook.

"Never mind Mussolini—we've got Manders!" said Mornington.

"My dear boys!" said Mr. Manders. "My dear boys!"

He tottered out of the tramp's lair, helped by Tommy Dodd and Jimmy Silver. He stared round him uneasily as he emerged—the juniors could guess why.

"Poggers isn't here, sir," said Jimmy. "We've seen nothing of him—only an Italian organ-grinder chap who brought a note—"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders. "My dear boys, I am thankful that you found me! That ruffian—that wretch—that—that insane hooligan, Poggers—that—that—"

"Like your coat, sir?" asked Lovell.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Yes, I shall be very glad of the coat. I am chilled—chilled to the bone—and I am extremely muddy and dusty, after—after—"

"Here you are, sir!"

The bundle was unwrapped, and Mr. Manders gladly enfolded himself in the big, thick overcoat.

"My dear boys," he said, "it was to steal this very overcoat that that wretch—that ruffian—seized me! I am very thankful that you found me, but how—"

"Mornington spotted the man who came for the coat, sir!" said Jimmy Silver demurely. "Morny suspected

that the letter was a fake, got up by that man Poggers—and so we collared him and made him guide us to you, sir—"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the astonished Mr. Manders. "That was extremely intelligent of Mornington—very intelligent indeed! Mornington, you have shown extraordinary perspicacity! Amazing!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Morny gravely.

The whole party walked back to Rookwood with Mr. Manders. Mr. Manders was glad of their company—dreading to see the bullet head and piggy eyes of Slog Poggers.

It was no end of a sensation at Rookwood.

Fellows talked of hardly anything else for days.

Search for Mr. Poggers by the local police was renewed and intensified, and while it was going on, Mr. Manders remained within gates—not likely to be tricked out again by a spoof phone call! Mr. Manders—and his celebrated overcoat—were safe!

Everybody agreed that much credit was due to Mornington—the fellow who had spotted Poggers' confederate! They wondered how he had done it—and Morny did not explain. It was one of the things better left unexplained.

(Another great story next week from this exciting Rookwood series. Don't miss reading "THE BLACK SHEEP'S SECRET!")

And Levison was given, then and there, a flogging that he remembered painfully for many a long day.

When it was over, and the fellows streamed out of the Big Hall, Tom Merry was surrounded by congratulating friends. But Tom ran at once to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He grasped his hand, and shook it as if he would shake it off.

"Three cheers for Gussy!" sang out Monty Lowther.

And the cheers for Gussy were given with a will.

Arthur Augustus was the hero of the hour, but he bore his blushing honours with becoming modesty. It was only natural, as he said confidentially to Blake, that the fellows should realise sooner or later that he really was a fellow of tact and judgment—and Blake grinned and agreed.

(Next Wednesday: "FIGGY'S GRAND CIRCUS!" Watch out for this rollicking long yarn of circus fun and thrills at St. Jim's—introducing Billy Hunter of Greyfriars. Order your GEM early.)

TOM MERRY'S GREAT JAPE!

(Continued from page 22.)

"That is the key I made, sir," he said. "I filed it down while the young gentleman was waiting."

"Would you have the kindness to look round, to see whether you can select him among these boys?" said the Head courteously. "A very serious accusation has been made, and if you can recognise the boy in question, it may prevent a very grave injustice being done."

"I will do my best, with pleasure." And Mr. Keyser walked down the hall, scanning the faces of the juniors.

"Don't you try to hide behind Hewwies, Levison!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Levison, stand out at once!" rapped out Mr. Latham.

Mr. Keyser glanced at the cad of the Fourth.

"That is the boy, sir!" he said, pointing to Levison.

"Come here, Levison," said the Head, in a terrible voice.

Levison, white as death, staggered rather than walked up the Hall.

The Head's look was terrifying.

"What have you to say, Levison?"

Levison had nothing to say. What could he say? He was discovered—once more his cunning had caused him to overreach himself.

"It is you, Levison, who are guilty! I thank you, Mr. Keyser! You have prevented a very serious injustice from being done. D'Arcy, I thank you. You have done very well, D'Arcy—very well indeed!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said Arthur Augustus innocently, and there was a chuckle.

"I am sorry, Merry," said the Head gently. "I am sorry indeed that this mistake has been made. I am only too glad it has been discovered in time. You may go back to your place, Merry. Levison, you will be flogged. You have acted disgracefully—wickedly."

"It—it was a j-joke, sir!" stammered Levison.

"Silence! Take him up, Taggles!"

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