

HALF-CROWNS GIVEN for READERS' JOKES!

The **GEM** 2^d

"THE THIEF!"

Super St. Jim's Story,
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"BILLY HUNTER'S HOUSE-WARMING!"

Grand Yarn of Greyfriars
By FRANK RICHARDS.

Also,

**FUN COLUMN,
ILLUSTRATED
JOKES, STAMP
ARTICLE, and
YOUR FORTUNE
FROM the STARS.**





HOW'S YOUR LUCK THIS WEEK?

Read what the stars foretell,
by PROFESSOR ZARRO.

EVERYBODY is interested in astrology nowadays, and wants to know what the stars forecast for them. Here are star readings for all GEM readers, worked out for the period February 23rd to March 1st. To find your horoscope, look in the section in which your birthday falls.

January 21st to February 19th.—Go carefully in the early part of the week; don't rush into making arrangements or starting new ventures. The latter part of the week is far more fortunate to any new schemes you have in mind. There are signs that you may have a slight quarrel with a friend or close relative—this will be put right before the week is out. Your lucky number is 3.

February 20th to March 21st.—Follow your "hunches" throughout this week, and you won't go far wrong. After Friday, all sporting matters are favoured, and there are signs of money for you, too. Small, but very important, changes are due in your work. For those at school, Wednesday (to-day) is an extremely important day—a very interesting happening will occur.

March 22nd to April 20th.—"Steady, the Bulls!" That sums up the stars' advice to you this week. You won't find yourself launching out into anything new, but you will find that sticking to your present pursuits brings luck. If you get a chance to travel, or make a journey, take it—good results will follow.

April 21st to May 21st.—An expensive week; you'll probably find yourself thinking of lots of things you could do if only you had the necessary money. After the week-end, a meeting with a friend you had lost sight of, or maybe one with whom you have quarrelled. To-day and Thursday, hobbies prosper. Not a very good week for energetic sports, but an ideal one for any kind of celebrations.

May 22nd to June 21st.—For you Gemini folk, this week has grand prospects. Your suggestions will be taken up by friends, teachers, employers, and parents, and you will reap the benefit accordingly. You'll have lots to do over the week-end—and they'll be the things you like doing. If you have a worry, or a problem on your mind, ways and means of getting over it will arise.

June 22nd to July 23rd.—The most unusual characteristic of this week is that it's an excellent time for making exchanges. I don't mean merely that you'll get a bargain by swapping an old penknife for a cycle-lighting set, or something like that, but in other ways, too. For instance, you may change places with another player in your football team, and find your-

self playing the game of your life. Hard workers can safely expect a step-up this week.

July 24th to August 23rd.—This is a vital week for you, because, through being impetuous, you may make a costly mistake. The best safeguard is not to do anything drastic, even though you feel sure it will turn out all right. The beginning of next week brings a good time for you in company with your friends. An ideal time for experimenting, especially on Monday.

August 24th to September 23rd.—If you've been waiting for the tide to turn in your favour, now's the time it starts. But, in the same way, if you've been having a long run of luck, it's due to end some time this week. The week-end brings an exciting experience, probably taking place out of doors. But it might be anything, from a meeting with your favourite film star, to being chased by Farmer Giles' bull. Nine is a very lucky number for you during the next few days.

September 24th to October 23rd.—There's a tendency for you to try to race ahead this week, but you will not make progress that way. Signs, too, of swelled heads, which are dangerous, as well as being "frightfully infwa dig," as Gussy would say. Friday is far and away your best day, but the whole week can be a good one if you guard against the dangers already mentioned. You will probably travel at the week-end, but there are indications that a change of plans will land you up somewhere different from the place you intended.

October 24th to November 22nd.—Good advice from other people smooths out your difficulties, making this a pleasant week, if not a particularly exciting one. With luck, a little windfall comes your way towards the week-end. You may get useful information from a chance remark that you overhear.

November 23rd to December 22nd.—Your big surprise this week will be discovering your own popularity. To those wanting friends, this may lead to a firm friendship. For all, it's a carefree week, and you will find ample opportunity for doing the things you like. Saturday, February 26th, is an excellent day for joining clubs, or anything similar. The keynote of the week is to mix freely with those around you.

December 23rd to January 20th.—An active, busy week, especially where matters that you have almost forgotten are concerned. Wait till after the week-end before making ambitious plans, because you will learn a lot of useful ideas in the early part of next week, and these will influence your schemes. Don't make journeys unless you have to; they may be spoiled by rain, or some other misfortune.

BIRTHDAY INDICATIONS.

WEDNESDAY, February 23rd.—A successful year lies ahead, because you'll clear up old muddles. For many, a big change later in the year. A very pleasant holiday is forecasted, together with plentiful pocket-money.

THURSDAY, February 24th.—Not a very good year for work, but look on it as a training period. All sorts of adventures. In your home life, changes for the better.

FRIDAY, February 25th.—You'll start all kinds of new plans this year, and will consequently find new, lasting interests. Other people take a big hand in your affairs, your best friend especially.

SATURDAY, February 26th.—Those who take chances bring off a "scoop." If you sit for an exam., for instance, you'll probably get through. By the end of the year, you'll find you have a much wider circle of friends.

SUNDAY, February 27th.—Lack of money will hold up an important plan, but this problem will be solved later by a gift or increased earnings. Money forms the keynote of the year—you may go out to work to get it, or have to save for something, and so on.

MONDAY, February 28th.—A very eventful year all round. You'll shine at work and in all your favourite sports. Don't, however, tempt your luck—what comes to you naturally should be enough!

TUESDAY, March 1st.—Minor delays in your best-laid plans will irritate you in the next month or two, but, once they are out of the way, you rocket ahead. A quarrel with a friend or relative about your friendship with a third party. Look forward to Easter-time!

HERE'S THE BEST ST. JIM'S YARN YOU'VE EVER READ! TELLING OF A JUNIOR WHO STOOPED TO DISHONESTY RATHER THAN FACE DISGRACE!



The THIEF!

The door opened suddenly, and Gore clutched up the notes hurriedly, desperately. Skimpole blinked at him in astonishment. "My dear Gore—" "You spying hound!" exclaimed Gore, furious at being discovered. "You—you rotten spy!"

CHAPTER 1.

Merely a Misunderstanding!

STUDY No. 5 in the School House at St. Jim's was growing crowded.

That famous apartment was often crowded on the occasion of a feed, or a meeting of the Junior Sports Committee. But on this occasion, though it was tea-time, there was no sign of a feed, neither was a meeting arranged for that special evening.

But the crowd was growing.

Blake, Herries, and Digby, who shared that study with D'Arcy of the Fourth, had been there when the crowd began to arrive.

D'Arcy was conspicuous by his absence, but Blake, Herries, and Digby were there, and they were busy. They were discussing an important question—how far two sardines would go among four fellows, and to what extent that limited supply of provisions could be augmented by obtaining the best possible value for fourpence-halfpenny at the school shop.

They were a little surprised when the crowd began to arrive.

The Terrible Three of the Shell came first—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. They came in with polite and expectant smiles.

They looked a little surprised at the sight of the sardines.

Blake & Co. looked surprised at the sight of the Shell fellows.

"Hallo!" said Blake.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "It's six."

Blake looked at his watch.

"Just six," he agreed.

"Weren't you expecting us?" asked the captain of the Shell.

"Not exactly," said Blake. "But you're welcome—as welcome as the flowers in May. Did you scent the sardines from the passage?"

"What about tea?" asked Manners.

"Just what we're debating," said Blake affably.

"Two sardines don't seem a lot for four chaps, and fourpence-halfpenny isn't what you'd call a terrific financial resource. Lend us the help of your mighty brains to plan it out, and you can stay to tea if you like. I guarantee you won't over-eat yourselves."

"Do you mean to say that Gussy asked us here to help you wolf two sardines?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, Gussy asked you, did he?" said Blake. "Well, we back up the invitation. Study No. 6 is celebrated for its hospitality. Do stay!"

"Do!" said Herries and Dig persuasively.

Before the Terrible Three could THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1567.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The Head's safe lay open before George Gore—and he needed fifteen pounds to save himself from the "sack" . . .

reply, three Fourth Formers entered the study. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House.

They nodded agreeably to the School House fellows.

"Just in time," said Figgins cheerfully.

"Trot right in!" said Jack Blake heartily. "I suppose Gussy asked you. He asked these Shell-fish."

"Yes," said Figgins. "Gussy told us in the quad to turn up at six sharp."

Fatty Wynn looked inquiringly round the study.

"Can I help?" he asked. "Is there any cooking to do?"

Blake shook his head.

"There isn't any cooking," he said. "The sardines are cooked—both of them!"

"You—you don't mean to say that you've got nothing but two sardines?" stuttered Fatty Wynn in dismay.

"Oh, yes! There's half a loaf—"

"Half a loaf!" said Fatty Wynn faintly.

"The proverb says that 'Half a loaf is better than no bread,' you know. Besides, we've got cash resources," said Blake.

"Oh, good!" said Fatty Wynn, brightening up.

"Fourpence-halfpenny," added Blake. And Fatty's plump face fell again.

"Is this a jape?" inquired Figgins.

Blake waved his hand airily.

"Don't ask me," he replied. "I'm not responsible for Gussy's actions. I think sometimes he's not responsible for them himself. All we can do, as D'Arcy's chums, is to back up his invitation. We're doing that."

"We are!" said Herries.

"We is!" said Digby.

The guests in Study No. 6 looked at Blake & Co., and looked at one another. Just then Kangaroo and Glyn of the Shell came in, followed by Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. They had cheery smiles on their faces.

"Minute or two late," said Kangaroo, otherwise Harry Noble. "D'Arcy said six sharp, but I see you haven't started."

"I guess we'll lend you a hand, if you like," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Gussy said six sharp, did he?" said Blake. "Just like Gussy! Did he say it was a feed?"

"Well, he didn't say so, but we concluded it was, as it was tea-time," said Kangaroo, puzzled.

"Did he mention that we had only two sardines in the study?"

"My hat, no!"

"Ah, that's just like Gussy! If he'd mentioned that you'd have been here a bit earlier."

"Look here—"

"Hallo here are some more of 'em!" said Blake cheerfully, as Gore and Skimpole of the Shell came in. "Did Gussy ask you chaps?"

"Yes," said Gore. "He said six sharp. Isn't the feed ready?"

"Did Gussy say it was a feed?"

"He asked us very particularly to turn up at six sharp," said Gore, "and as that's tea-time, we naturally thought—"

"Naturally," assented Blake. "If you're hungry, old chap, begin at once." And Blake pointed to the sardines.

"Why, you silly ass—" began Gore.

A tramp of feet interrupted him. Reilly and

Kerruish of the Fourth and Clifton Dane of the Shell came in. There wasn't much room to come in by this time. Study No. 6 was large for a junior study, but it had its limits. However, they got in.

"Sure, we're five minutes late," said Reilly. "But you haven't started yet. Where's Gussy?"

"Wandering about somewhere," said Blake; "wandering in his mind, probably. Would you fellows mind standing close? I can see that Gussy has asked everybody in both Houses to tea, and I shouldn't be surprised if the Grammar School chaps come as well. There seems to be a rush on those sardines."

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, "if Gussy is being funny—"

"Is he ever anything else?" said Monty Lowther. "If there is not going to be a feed, I vote we look for him and scrag him."

"Not going to be a feed!" roared Gore. Gore's temper was never reliable. "Why, I'll scalp the howling ass! I understood—"

"Sure, I thought intirely that—"

"The blithering duffer—"

"If this is a jape—"

"Here comes another!" grinned Monty Lowther, as footsteps came along the passage. "Talbot, perhaps. I hope he's not going to lose his whack in the sardines."

But it was not Talbot of the Shell who appeared in the doorway. It was the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's.

The crowd in the study glared at him, but he did not seem to observe that. He turned his celebrated monocle upon them with a smile of satisfaction.

"All here, deah boys?" he remarked. "Pwavy excuse me for keepin' you waitin'. I have been lookin' for Talbot—"

"Isn't Talbot coming?" asked Blake, in a disappointed tone. "That's a pity—a great pity. What's left of these sardines will be wasted."

"The boundah seems to have gone out," said D'Arcy. "Howevah, we can speak to him aftahwards."

"Where's the feed?" demanded Fatty Wynn.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the fat Fourth Former.

"What feed?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently.

Then there was a roar.

"You silly ass!"

"You burbling cuckoo! So you're pulling our leg?"

"My hat, if there isn't a feed—"

"Sure, we'll lynch him!"

"I guess we'll scrag the silly burbler!"

"Bai Jove! I weally fail to undahstand you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, perplexed. "I asked you to turn up here at six sharp for a vewy important meetin'—not a feed. I have somethin' to say to you all."

"And that's all?" bellowed Gore.

"Yaas, that's all, Gore."

"Scrag him!"

"Bai Jove! I pwotest! Hands off! It is weally vewy important. Gweat Scott! Oh, my hat! It's quite a misundahstandin'! Oh cwikey!"

Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared. The hungry and enraged guests rolled over him like the waves of the sea. From beneath a heap of excited juniors came a muffled voice, in tones of anguish.

CHAPTER 2.

Very Important Information!

"WESCUE! Oh cwumbs! This is howwid! You awful wottahs! Oh cwumbs!"

"Bump him!"

"Squash him!"

"Rag him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was scarcely room to bump the unfortunate Arthur Augustus—the hapless victim of so unfortunate a misunderstanding. But the juniors did their best. There was no doubt that the swell of St. Jim's was thoroughly ragged.

The most disreputable tramp that could have been found in the Sussex lanes would have looked more respectable than Arthur Augustus when at last he was released by his exasperated guests.

He sat up in a dazed condition, groping for his eyeglass, with his jacket split, his collar and tie gone, his waistcoat buttonless, and his hair like a mop.

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Sure, and if ye want to play another little joke on us at tea-time, Gussy, don't mind us," said Reilly. "We're always willing to treat you in the same way."

"Wow! It wasn't a joke!"

"Not for you, as it turns out," remarked Kerraish.

"I guess there's such a thing as being too funny," remarked Lumley-Lumley. "Good-bye!"

"Gwooooh!"

Lumley-Lumley and Kerraish and Reilly left the study.

Arthur Augustus struggled to recover his breath.

"You uttah wottahs! I wasn't asking you boundahs here to tea—wow-ow!"

"Rot!" said Fatty Wynn. "You said it was important for us to get here at six sharp."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, you chaps!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm fearfully hungry. And pommelling that idiot has made me hungrier."

Figgins & Co. departed, chuckling.

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. The sight of him made the juniors shriek with laughter. Seldom or never had the most elegant fellow at St. Jim's presented such a shocking spectacle.

"Pway don't go!" exclaimed D'Arcy breathlessly. "In the circs, as it was a misapprehension, I excuse your wascally conduct, though I have a great mind to give you a thwashin' all wound!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Run for your lives!" yelled Bernard Glyn. And he edged out of the study and fled.

Kangaroo followed him, chuckling.

"Don't go, you asses!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It's a vewy important mattah."

"Not quite so important as tea-time!" said Kangaroo, as he disappeared.

"You -hundering ass!" said Gore, as he went to the doorway. "You haven't had half enough, asking a chap to a feed, when there isn't a feed."

"Pway don't go, Gore."

"Oh rats!"

"It concerns you particularly, Gore."

"What does?" asked the Shell junior, pausing.

"What I am goin' to tell you fellows. It is weally vewy important, or I should not have called a meetin'. It concerns Gore more than anybody else."



"It's a good, job we've got a portable wireless to charm these snakes, Bill!"

"Yes; but what happens when the band stops playing?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Pennie, 70, Belamy Drive, Stanmore, Middlesex.

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at," growled Gore.

But he stayed.

The Terrible Three had been making for the door, too, but they paused.

The crowded meeting had now all melted away, save the Terrible Three, and Gore and Hammond, and the owners of Study No. 6 themselves.

"Concerns us, too?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, buck up and get it over. It's tea-time."

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus brushed his hair breathlessly. "What does tea-time mattah? I had forgotten all about tea."

"We've reminded you," grinned Gore.

"But what's on, Gussy?" asked Hammond of the Fourth.

"It's awfully important."

"Well, pile in!" said Blake.

"Pway be patient, deah boys! How can I speak when I'm in this dusty condition?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Want us to wait while you change your clothes?" asked Gore sarcastically. "Well, I'm not waiting, for one."

"Pway wait a minute!" said Arthur Augustus. "Where's my collah? I will pwoceed to the point at once."

"Ear, 'ear!" said Hammond.

"The fact is, deah boys, it's a vewy important mattah, and all those fellows ought to have been here to heah about it. I want you all to back me up in dealin' with that scoundwel."

"Eh? What scoundrel?" asked Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"That wascally and disreputable sharpah, Tickey Tapp."

Gore gave a start.

"Tickey Tapp!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas."

"What do you know about him?" exclaimed the Shell fellow gruffly.

Arthur Augustus, having found his monocle, jammed it into his eye. He was still collarless. It was evident that his impatient audience would not wait until he had put on a new collar.

"You fellows wemembah," said D'Arcy, "you wemembah a wascally named Tickey Tapp who used to hang about here? You wemembah he started a gamblin' place in a lonely house on the moor, and got St. Jim's chaps to go there?"

"I remember," said Tom Merry. "We raided his place and kicked him out, and he cleared off."

"Yaas. He persuaded that ass Gore to gamble with him—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Gore.

"Pway don't be watty, Gore, deah boy. I am not alludin' to those unpleasant circes for the sake of woundin' your feelings. But you know vewy well that the wottah got you gamblin', and you were in a fwightful fix, and we smashed up that wascal's place as a lesson to him. He cleared off because he was afwaid we would put the police on to him. Well, he has come back."

"How do you know?" demanded Lowther.

"I have seen him, deah boy. I saw him this aftahnoon. He was waitin' neah the school, and lookin' at his watch, and it was cleah to me that he was waitin' to see somebody come out."

"Did—did you see somebody come out to him?" asked Gore hurriedly.

"No, deah boy. I came in to think it ovah, and aftah reflection, I decided to call a meetin' to considah what should be done."

"Oh!" said Manners. "So that was it?"

"Yaas, wathah! It is quite cleah to me that he is up to his old tricks again," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Pway don't think that I suspect you of havin' any dealings with him now, Gore. I should certainly not think you were such a wottah."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"That is hardly a polite wemark, Gore. I was thinkin' that you, havin' suffered from that wuffian's wascality yourself, would be vewy glad to lend a hand in dealin' with him."

"Well, I shouldn't!" grunted Gore. "Why can't you mind your own business, and let the man alone?"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is our business. I called the meetin' to considah the mattah. My ideah is that we should make an agweement to look for that scoundwel, and give him a feahful waggin', and duck him in the wivah, as a warnin' not to come wound this school any more."

"Hear, hear!"

"You fellows will all back me up, I am suah—"

"I won't, for one," said Gore. "I think you're a meddlin', silly ass, and you can leave me out!" And Gore stamped out of the study and closed the door after him, with a slam that rang along the Fourth Form passage from end to end.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "This is wathah surpwisin'. I thought Gore would be keenah than anybody about waggin' that boundah. What has Gore got his wag out ovah, I wondah?"

"Oh, you ass!" said Blake, with a grin.

"I wufuse to be called an ass, Blake, and I see no reason for that wemark."

"It's pretty clear wath Gore's got his rag out for," said Blake. "He's the chap Tickey Tapp came to see this aftahnoon, I should say."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! But Gore promised—"

"Some promises are like piecrust," remarked Monty Lowther. "Now the rotter is in the neighbourhood again, it looks as if Gore's made it up with him."

"But he swindled Gore, you know."

"Well, I don't see what Gore was ratty about, if that isn't the reason," said Tom Merry. "I'm jolly glad we're on to it. If Gore's asking for the sack, it would be only decent to chip in and save him from making a silly ass of himself. I suppose Tapp thought it was all blown over, and it was safe to come back. We'll give the rotter a regular high old time if he comes near St. Jim's again."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

"Bet you he won't, if it's Gore he comes to see," grinned Monty Lowther. "Gussy havin' given Gore the tip, Gore will pass it on to Tickey Tapp, and meet him somewhere else after this."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "You see, I nevah suspected Gore, as he had made a pwomise. But pewwaps it isn't Gore. It might be Cutts of the Fifth, or St. Leger, or Levison—"

"Possibly," agreed Tom Merry. "Anyway, we'll keep a sharp look-out for Tickey Tapp, and if we find him, we'll make an example of him. You fellows had better come to our study for tea, unless you're awfully keen on those sardines."

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll come."

"Pway put it off for half an hour, Tom Mewwy, while I change my clobber!"

"We'll allow you half a minute," grinned Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps!"

The chums of the School House proceeded to Tom Merry's study for tea, and a quarter of an hour later, Arthur Augustus rejoined them there, looking newly swept and garnished, so to speak, and as elegant as ever. And over tea in Tom Merry's study, the juniors discussed with great keenness various schemes for making things warm for the rascally Tickey Tapp, if he should venture near St. Jim's again.

CHAPTER 3.

Old Acquaintances!

"**B**Y gum! It's the Toff!"

Talbot of the Shell stopped abruptly. The handsome, sturdy Shell fellow of St. Jim's was coming along the lane towards the school, with his active, springy stride.

A man was leaning on the stile, smoking a cigarette, and he glanced up carelessly at the sound of footsteps.

Talbot looked at him.

The man was dressed in a tweed suit, with a soft hat, worn rakishly on one side of his head. He had strongly marked features, a prominent nose, and a small black moustache. It was a face that, once seen, was not likely to be forgotten, and Talbot of the Shell knew that face.

"Tickey Tapp!" he exclaimed.

The sharper grinned.

"Fancy meeting you!" he exclaimed.

Talbot paused. A cloud came over his face as he looked at the shifty-eyed man.

"What are you doing here, Toff?" asked Tickey Tapp.

"I'm going back to school."

Tickey Tapp stared at him.

"School!" he repeated. "School! You! Are you pulling my leg?"

"I am not," said Talbot quietly. "There's been a change since I knew you long ago, Tickey. A big change. And—excuse me—if you are still on the old game, I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"Well, that's plain English, that is," said Tickey Tapp.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Tickey," said Talbot, "but I mean it. I've chucked it all up long ago, and unless you've done the same, I'd rather not know you."

"You've chucked it up?"

"Yes."

"Gammon!" said Tickey Tapp.

Talbot gave a shrug, and turned to go. He

did not want to enter into an altercation with the dingy rascal.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tickey Tapp. "Can't you spare one minute for an old pal? You wasn't so dashed standoffish in Angel Alley, Toff, when we used to be with the Professor, and Hookey Walker, and the rest. I've been away for some time. I haven't seen anything of the old gang. How are they going on?"

"They're not going on at all," said Talbot quietly. "The old gang has been broken up."

"The beaks?" said Tickey Tapp.

"No. They've done as I've done, most of 'em."

"And that's—"

"Turned over a new leaf," said Talbot.

Tickey Tapp burst into a roar of laughter. He evidently regarded Talbot's statement as a first-class joke. Talbot did not smile; he looked steadily at the sharper.

"You don't believe that," he asked.

"Well, it is rather rich, isn't it?" said Tickey Tapp. "You can't pull my leg, Toff. But what are you doing here? You look as if you're in clover. In Etons, too! What's the game?"

"I'm a schoolboy."

"Oh, draw it mild, Toff!" said Tickey Tapp.

"You can believe me or not, as you like," said Talbot contemptuously, and he turned away.

"Jest a minute, Toff!" exclaimed Tickey Tapp, in great astonishment. "Don't hurry away from an old pal."

"You were never a pal of mine," said Talbot, with a curl of the lip. "I met you half a dozen times, that's all, when you came there to see the Professor. I hardly knew you."

"But I knew you," grinned Tickey Tapp. "The Toff—the kid cracksman. You were a magician, Toff. There wasn't a safe you couldn't open—"

"I'm trying to forget those days," said Talbot, his handsome face clouding again. "I tell you that is all over."

"Honest Injun, Toff, you've chucked it?" asked Tickey Tapp in wonder.

"Yes."

"Well, that beats me! I 'eard as old Captain Crow was dead, but I thought his son was still in the same line—cracking cribs."

"Well, it's all over," said Talbot shortly. "The Toff is dead and done with, and will never come to life again."

"And you don't want to see an old acquaintance from Angel Alley—what?"

"No," said Talbot bluntly.

Tickey Tapp laughed.

"Always straight out with your answer, you was," he said. "But suppose an old pal should turn up, Toff, and give away your little game at the school?"

"There's nothing to give away. My whole story is known there," Talbot laughed scornfully. "There's no chance of blackmail, Tickey. I've got no secrets to keep. You can go to the Head if you like and tell him all you know of my past, and you won't be able to tell him more than he knows already."

"Oh!" said Tickey Tapp, evidently discomfited.

"You can try it if you like; you needn't take my word for it," said Talbot. "My advice to you, Tickey, if you want it, is to chuck card-



As the ruffian attacked him, Talbot's fist came out like lightning. The blow caught Tickey Tapp on the chin and sent him to the ground as if he had been felled by an axe.

sharping, gambling, and swindling, and find something better to do."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tickey Tapp. "Not me! I've got some old pals at your school. Once upon a time I ran a secret roulette bank in a place near here, and some of the youngsters came to play. I had to clear off. Some of the young 'ounds came and wrecked my place; and, of course, I could do nothing. The police would 'ave collared me if they'd known about it. A young 'ound named Tom Merry was the worst of them."

"Tom Merry is my best chum," said Talbot quietly; "and he did quite right. You and your sort are not wanted about St. Jim's. I know your game—getting young fools to play cards with you, getting them to owe you money, and that kind of thing. And I tell you I won't have any of it at St. Jim's."

"And 'ow'll you stop me, Mr. Magnificent Cracksmen?" asked Tickey Tapp jeeringly.

"I might give you a hiding," said Talbot coolly. "But there is a better way; I know enough about you to send you to prison for a good many years if I chose to open my mouth."

Tickey Tapp drew a deep breath.

"You'd do that—you'd give me away? You'd give an old pal away to the beaks?"

"You never were a pal of mine. I hardly knew you, as I said," replied Talbot. "Even in those days, when I was not particular; I despised you. If I was a cracksmen, that was not so base as a sly, sneaking swindler such as you. I remember you robbed me once. You could not be honest even to your own set. I remember a good many things. I don't want to rake them up. But if I find that you have some silly young blackguard

in your clutches I will have no mercy on you—none at all. I mean that!"

"You young 'ound—"

"That will do!"

Talbot turned on his heel.

The sharper, his eyes blazing, picked up a thick stick from under a tree and sprang after him, striking out savagely.

The bitter and contemptuous words of the one-time Toff had goaded him almost to frenzy.

But the Toff had not lost his old alertness in his schoolboy life at St. Jim's. He swung round at the hurried step of the ruffian; he dodged the descending stick, which would have stretched him senseless if it had struck him; his right fist came out like lightning and caught Tickey Tapp on the point of the chin.

The blow hurled the sharper to the ground as if he had been felled by an axe. Tickey Tapp rolled in the dust, panting.

Talbot of the Shell looked down on him with blazing eyes.

"Will you have some more?" he asked.

"Ow!" groaned Tickey Tapp, clasping his chin with both hands. "Ow! Oh!"

"Remember my warning," said Talbot.

And, without another word or a look, the Shell fellow strode away towards St. Jim's.

Tickey Tapp sat up in the dust and blinked after him, muttering curses.

CHAPTER 4.

Tea in Study No. 10.

TALBOT of the Shell strode on to the school. There was a cloud on his handsome face now.

Every reminder of his old life—of those black old days when he had been known as the Toff, the prince of cracksmen—touched him on the raw.

The change in the Toff had gone deep. Little proof of that was needed. For the prince of cracksmen had not lost his old skill, and there was wealth at his command if he had chosen to go back to the old ways. But he did not choose.

He was happy now—a happiness he had never known in the old days, wild and exciting as they were.

Tickey Tapp had reminded him of much he had sought to forget, that was all. The man could not harm him. He could tell nothing that was not already known. It was only that evil reminder that troubled Talbot now.

But he shook the depressing thought from him; his brow cleared as he came in sight of the school gates. Here was his home, here were his friends; the past was dead, and could not revive.

Talbot nodded pleasantly to Gore, as the latter passed him in the lane. Gore had just come out of the gates.

"Had tea?" said Talbot, pausing.

"Yes," said Gore; "you hadn't come in."

Gore was Talbot's studymate in the Shell, along with Skimpole.

"I was late in Wayland," said Talbot. "Anything the matter, Gore?"

"No," said Gore, with a start. "Why?"

"You are looking down in the mouth," said Talbot, with a smile. "Haven't the gee-gees come in to time?"

Gore's predilections for "gee-gees" were no secret in the Shell.

"I've had rotten luck!" growled Gore.

"What the deuce do you expect? Why not chuck it?" said Talbot good-naturedly.

Cousins and Rivals!



Arthur Carter, the new boy in the Greyfriars Remove, is all out to "dish" Billy Bunter, who has cut him out of his wealthy uncle's will. But it's easier said than done, for there's one weapon in Bunter's fat hands of which the scheming Carter knows nothing. Read the story of this contest between rogue and fool in

"A VENTRILOQUIST'S VENGEANCE!"

Frank Richards' new, 35,000-word school yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, appearing today in

The MAGNET

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He was not chummy with Gore, but he was his studymate, and he had found good qualities in the bully of the Shell which the other fellows had never seemed to notice. And he was a little concerned about the obstinate fellow. Gore would sometimes keep quite straight for a long time, but he was bound to break out again sooner or later, and the risk of his proceedings was very great. If the Head knew that Gore was acquainted with the sporting set at the Green Man in Rylcombe, Gore would not have honoured St. Jim's with his presence much longer.

"Well, I did chuck it," said Gore, who was always more patient with Talbot than with anybody else, for some reason. "But—but a fellow wants a little excitement, you know. I suppose I'm an ass!"

"Not much supposing about it," said Talbot. "You're not going down to the Green Man, surely, Gore?"

"Not in the day-time," grinned Gore. "I've got an appointment. Ta-ta!"

He nodded to Talbot and walked on. Talbot went in at the gates. He was hungry after his long walk, and he hurried up to his study. He met Tom Merry in the Shell passage.

"Hallo! Here you are!" exclaimed Tom. "I was just going to look for you. Had your tea, Talbot?"

Talbot laughed.

"No; I've only just come in."

"Come along, then; we've got a feed going, and distinguished company," said Tom Merry. "And we've got something to tell you."

"Thanks, old chap," said Talbot, and he followed Tom cheerfully into Study No. 10.

The Shell study was pretty full, and presented a festive scene. The four chums of Study No. 6, and Harry Hammond of the Fourth were there, as well as the Terrible Three. Tea was nearly over, but Monty Lowther immediately jammed a kettle upon the fire, and Manners sliced a loaf for toast, and Tom Merry dropped three eggs into a little saucepan, and stuck it beside the kettle.

"Welcome little stwanger," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Where have you been, you boundah? You've missed the meetin'. I was lookin' for you evewywhere."

"Meeting?" said Talbot.

"Gussy called a meeting in our den," explained Blake, with a chuckle. "He asked nearly everybody in Sussex to turn up there at six sharp, and they came expecting a feed. It turned out to be a jaw-meeting. It developed into an indignation meeting. You should have seen Gussy afterwards. A tramp would have looked a dandy beside him."

"I was tweated with gwoos diswespect, owin' to an absurd misunderstandin'. I am sure Talbot would not have misunderstood me in that widiculous way. Howevah, dwy up, while I tell Talbot. It's wathah important, Talbot, old chap."

"Go ahead!" said Talbot.

"It's about Tickey Tapp— Bai Jove, what's the mattah with you, Talbot?"

Arthur Augustus broke off in astonishment. All the fellows in the study stared at Talbot very curiously. For the look that came over his face as the name of Tickey Tapp was uttered was startling. The Shell fellow had sat down at the table; he half rose again, his brows knitting darkly.

"What—what name did you say?"

"Tickey Tapp."

Talbot sat down again. He felt the glances curiously upon his face, and his cheeks burned. There was silence in the study.



"Well, you asked me to bring 'ome some bricks for the kid!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to N. Spenceley, 30, Clarendon Road, Reading, Berks.

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Mistake!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY put down his teacup, extracted his monocle, and jammed it into his eye.

He turned it upon Talbot with a fixed stare, as if he would burn a hole in him.

"Talbot, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus' dulcet tones broke the silence.

Tom Merry was turning out the eggs. Manners, who had ceased to make toast, started again, and there was a smell of burning.

"I am sowwy to see this, Talbot."

"Eh?" said Talbot confusedly.

"I may say that I am howwified."

"What's the matter?"

"Shut up, Gussy!" murmured Blake.

"I wufese to shut up, Blake! I am goin' to speak a word in season to Talbot. It is only too cleah that he wequiah it. Talbot, I wepeat that I am sowwy to see this. We have worked it out that that wottah, Tickey Tapp, knew somebody in the school and was playin' his wotten games here again. It was suspected that it was that ass Gore. But, in the circs—"

"Gore!" said Talbot, with a start.

"In the circs," repeated Arthur Augustus, unheeding. "I can have no doubt that you are the party."

"I?" said Talbot.

"Yaas. If I have dwawn a w'ong impressioun from your vewy weemarkable behaviour, I shall be glad to be cowwected," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "Here's the egg-lets, Talbot!"

"And here's the toast," said Manners.

"And here's the tea," said Monty Lowther.

Talbot smiled. The Terrible Three were all chipping in to save him from an awkward situation. But Arthur Augustus was not to be denied.

"I am surpvised and shocked, Talbot," he continued. "It is weally uttally weckless of you to have anythin' to do with a chawactah like that!"

Talbot burst into a laugh.

Tom Merry & Co. laughed, too. For a moment they had felt a chilling uneasiness, so strange had been Talbot's look at the mention of Tickey Tapp. But the sound of that frank, hearty laugh relieved them.

Not that they were inclined to doubt their chum. Their faith in the one-time Toff was founded as upon a rock.

"This is no laughin' mattah, Talbot!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Isn't it?" said Talbot.

"Certainly not!"

"My mistake. I thought it was!"

"Weally, Talbot——"

Talbot started on the toast and eggs with a good appetite. He was hungry.

"I am speakin' to you for your own good. I do not suspect you, Talbot, of any vicious pwo-civities."

"Thanks awfully!"

"I am goin' to ask you a question, Talbot," went on Arthur Augustus, in a fatherly way. "I trust you will answah it, because it is a vewy sewious mattah. Are you acquainted with this wascally bad chawactah, Tickey Tapp?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "If you had any sense, Gussy, you'd know he wasn't. If I were Talbot, I'd dot you in the silly eye!"

"I should wefuse to be dotted in my silly eye—I mean my eye. Talbot has not answahed my question yet. Are you acquainted with Tickey Tapp?"

"Yes."

"Eh?" said Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"My 'at!" said Hammond.

"He's only pulling Gussy's leg," said Blake. "Gussy was specially sent into this world for that purpose, to cheer fellows up when they're feeling down."

"Weally, Blake——"

"It's a fact," said Talbot calmly.

"Now, Talbot, I am goin' to ask you a vewy sewious question."

"Pile in!"

"Have you evah played cards with that wottah?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!"

Talbot's reply electrified the study. The juniors stared at him in blank amazement. Even Arthur Augustus looked startled.

"E's a-pullin' of your leg, Gussy," murmured Hammond, in his Cockney accent.

"Not at all," said Talbot.

"You have played cards with him?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, considerably staggered by this result of his cross-examination.

"Certainly! May I have another lump of sugar?"

"For—money?" gasped D'Arcy.

Talbot smiled genially.

"Does Tickey Tapp look like a fellow to play for love?" he asked.

"Wathah not!"

"Well, then, you can draw your own conclusions."

"D-did you play for much money?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes—banker, with a ten-shilling limit."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Talbot," exclaimed Tom Merry aghast, "what do you mean? I know you are only rotting; but——"

"He is not wottin'," said Arthur Augustus; "he is confessin' the dweadful twuth. It is vewy fortunate that I have dwopped on the mattah like this. You fellows see now how important it is to wag that wascal Tapp, and dwive him away. Talbot is on the woad to wuin, and we are goin' to wescue him."

"Thanks!" said Talbot. "Any more tea in the pot, Lowther?"

"Yes," said Lowther. "Here you are!"

"Right! One lump, please. Go on, Gussy. You don't know how entertaining you are. Excuse my being a hardened sinner—perhaps I shall begin to show signs of remorse presently."

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"How often have you played with the wottah, Talbot?"

Talbot reflected.

"Twice, so far as I remember."

"I suppose you lost money?"

"The first time I lost seventy pounds."

"Bai Jove!"

"The second time I had spotted the way Tickey Tapp played cards, and I chucked it after losing three or four quid."

"Then—then you owe him money?"

"Not at all."

"But—but you haven't seventy pounds!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Your allowance from the scholarship is less than that."

"Quite so."

"If you are pullin' my leg all this time, Talbot——"

"Not at all. I'm confessing. Open confession is good for the soul, you know. I lost the money and paid up in cash."

"Where did you get the money, then?"

"Stole it."

"What!"

Talbot's bantering manner dropped from him; the colour came into his cheeks deeply. He rose from the table.

"You've asked me, D'Arcy, and I've answered you. Is there anything else you would like to know before I clear off?"

"But—but—but I can't believe you, Talbot. Where did you steal it?"

"From a safe?"

"You—you mean that you committed a wobbewy?"

"Yes."

"If this is a joke, Talbot, I don't quite see it," said Tom Merry.

"It isn't a joke," said Talbot.

"When did it happen, Talbot?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"About two years ago."

"What!"

Tom Merry drew a breath of relief. He understood now. It was in the bad, black, old days of the Toff that Talbot had committed the robbery and gambled with Tickey Tapp.

"About two years," said Talbot calmly. "Good-evening!"

He turned to the door. Tom Merry grasped his arm and dragged him back.

"Don't go, you ass! D'Arcy is going to apologise before you go, or we'll scrag him till he won't be able to play the fool for a whole term."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it is not necessary to put it like that," said Arthur Augustus in deep distress. "It appeahs that I have wathah put my foot in it."

"Go hon!" said Blake.

"It doesn't matter," said Talbot, forcing a smile. "I was going to explain to you chaps, after Tickey Tapp's name was mentioned, if D'Arcy had given me time."

"Bai Jove! I'm awfully sowwy——"

"It's all right," said Talbot. "I knew Tickey Tapp slightly in the old days. He used to come sometimes to Angel Alley. I used to gamble at that time. There was plenty of money about—easy come, easy go. I don't think I need tell you that I haven't done anything of the kind since I've been here."

"Of course you needn't," said Tom Merry. "As for that born idiot——"

"I wefuse to be called a born idiot, Tom Mewwy! I was undah a misappwehension, and I must say that Talbot was pullin' my leg a little,

too. I certainly dwew the impwession that he had seen Tickey Tapp quite lately. I admit my mistake—"

"But that wasn't a mistake," said Talbot. "I saw Tickey Tapp an hour ago."

"Gweat Scott!"

"You saw him?" exclaimed Blake.

"Yes. That was why I was so startled to hear his name mentioned here. I passed him in the lane, and he claimed acquaintance with me."

"My hat! And you—"

Talbot held up his right hand. The juniors could see that his knuckles were barked. There was a general grin.

"I left him nursing his chin," said Talbot. "Is there any other point I can satisfy you about, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus was crimson.

"I can only apologise, deah boy. Fwom one gentleman to anothah, an apology is quite suffish, I hope."

"Quite," said Talbot. "Don't say anything more about it. If you fellows will excuse me, I'll get off and do my prep."

Talbot quitted the study.

The rest of the company looked at Arthur Augustus as if they would eat him.

The swell of St. Jim's had a genius for putting his foot in it. But he had really exceeded the limit this time.

"Bai Jove!" he said at last. "I feel as if I ought to be kicked, you know!"

"What a coincidence!" said Blake. "I was just feeling the same. What do you fellows feel like?"

"Just the same," chorused the juniors.

"Then pile in!"

"Bai Jove! Blake—Tom Mewwy—stop it! Yawwoh! Lowthah, you beast! Yawp! Man-nahs—Dig—you awful wottahs! Yow-ow-ow!"

Arthur Augustus fled.

CHAPTER 6.

A Little Gamble!

THE next day was a half-holiday at St. Jim's; and as there was no game on in the afternoon, Arthur Augustus proposed to devote it to Tickey Tapp.

That the rascal was hanging about near St. Jim's was certain, since D'Arcy and Talbot had seen him on the same day near the school. What his object was the juniors did not need telling. And as for Gore's conduct in Study No. 6, they could guess that the sharper's victim was the obstinate Shell fellow—one of his victims, perhaps, for there might be others.

Quite a little army gathered for that afternoon out. Talbot could not come as he was going somewhere with Miss Marie. But most of the fellows who had attended that meeting in Study No. 6, which had ended so disastrously for Arthur Augustus, agreed to come. Most of them had helped Tom Merry at the time when the chums of St. Jim's raided Tickey Tapp's secret gambling-den on Wayland Moor and "cleared him out." They were quite keen to give the rascal another lesson.

They did not ask Gore to accompany them. Gore, as a matter of fact, went out immediately after dinner, and they did not see him.

George Gore had an engagement that afternoon. Apparently it was an engagement that

(Continued on next page.)

LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty Lowther.



Hallo, Everybody!

A new machine can tell whether a fellow is telling the truth or not. Mr. Railton can do that without any help. Ask Trimble!

"Remember, my dear Gore," said Skimpole, after Gore had collected a licking, five hundred lines, and a gating, "that the worst things you expect never really happen to you!"

Story goes that a Peruvian scientist has made a walrus answer the telephone. If only he could make the girls at the Rylcombe Exchange do the same!

The school medico would like to discover a remedy for mumps. That's a swell idea!

"Community Singing in the Army," runs a headline. No doubt conducted by trill sergeants!

I understand Kerr is thinking of calling a play he has written "Storm in a Tea-cup." It is full of stirring scenes.

Heard in a broadcasting studio: "Those two 'effects' men are not on speaking terms," said one actor. "Why is that?" asked another. "Well, during the last production, there was a big storm scene, and each claimed that the other was stealing his thunder!"

Stop Press: Grundy's XI 17, Tom Merry's XI 0. It should be mentioned that this match took place last night in George Alfred's dreams.

Tip for golfers: Never take lunch. A high tee is more suitable. Ow!

A contemporary asks where are the giants of present-day football. One of them stood in front of me watching Wayland Wanderers, the other day.

Fogs, states Dr. Holmes, cause more illness than any other sort of weather. The season of mists—and chemists.

D'Arcy tells me he makes a point of seeing the revival of "Peter Pan" every year. Kind of Re-Peter Pan.

I am asked to deny the statement that when Grundy went to the Wayland Fair, the gipsy who offered to estimate the power of one's mind took a look at Grundy and gave him his money back!

There are some uncomfortable jobs connected with acting, says a writer. The worst of all is wondering what to do with the bird when you have got it.

Ring me up some time—it's your twopence!

required a supply of cash, for he borrowed a half-crown of Talbot, and a shilling of Skimpole, and ten shillings from Crooke, and several other little sums up and down the Shell.

But the Shell fellow was not in a good temper when he tramped away down the lane. He had not been able to raise a supply of cash such as he had hoped for. Gore had more than enough money for his needs, as a rule. But the fortune of a Rothschild would not long stand the drain of gambling, and Gore was not a Rothschild.

His gloomy brow was proof enough that his late ventures had not been a howling success. And the foolish fellow, like all who allow the folly of gambling to take possession of them, hoped that with further capital he would be able to win back his losses.

Gore started a little as he passed Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, in the lane. The sight of his Form-master gave him a guilty feeling. If Mr. Linton could have guessed where he was going—

The Form-master gave him a nod. Gore paused and raised his cap. He had taken a sudden resolution.

"May I speak to you, sir?"

"Certainly, Gore!"

"You—you won't mind, sir. The fact is, I want to get my new footer boots this afternoon—and the money hasn't come for them. It's coming next week. If I had fifteen bob now, I could have them at once. Might I ask you, sir—"

"I am glad, Gore, you are devoting yourself to football—a very healthy game, and a good occupation for your time. I have had to speak to you severely, Gore, for finding less honourable pursuits." Mr. Linton handed the junior fifteen shillings. "Return me the money when you receive it."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"Not at all, my boy."

Mr. Linton continued his stately promenade, much pleased by that improvement in Gore, whom he had had to find fault with on a good many occasions.

Gore stood with the money in his hand. He felt a pang of remorse. But the thought of the gleaming cards, the chink of money, banished his remorse, and he started off again.

After all, he would get the boots after keeping his appointment with Tickey Tapp; he would pay for them out of his winnings.

Gore tramped on across the fields and followed a rutty lane to Wayland Moor. In the old tumbled-down shepherd's hut on the moor a man was sitting on a fallen beam, smoking a cigarette.

He nodded familiarly to Gore.

"Here we are again," said Tickey Tapp cheerfully.

"I'm going to have my revenge this afternoon," said Gore, taking a seat on the beam and extracting a cigarette from his pocket.

"Course you are," said Tickey Tapp. "Luck must turn. You'd 'ave beaten me 'ollow last evenin', but you ran out of spondulicks just when the luck was turnin' for you. You'll win this time."

"I'm going to try," said Gore. "I've borrowed three pounds. Blessed if I know how I shall settle up with the fellows if I don't win! Have to sell my bike, I suppose. I don't care. Let's get going."

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"Ear, 'ear!" said Tickey Tapp.

He drew a pack of greasy cards from his pocket.

Gore flushed a little.

"I've brought some cards," he said hastily.

He produced a pack of new cards.

If Tickey Tapp had shown any objection to using the new cards, Gore would probably have guessed how it was that his money had gone so fast the previous evening. But the sharper was too deep for that. It was pretty plain that Gore did not trust him, since he had taken the trouble to provide himself with a new pack of cards. And it was not the sharper's game to deepen his distrust.

Tickey Tapp's eyes gleamed for a moment, but he nodded carelessly, and slipped his pack back into his pocket.

"Right you are," he said. "They're a bit newer than mine. What's the game?"

"Nap."

"Go ahead!"

They began to play, using the beam between them as a card-table.

Even if Tickey Tapp had played fairly, Gore would have had little chance against the coolness and experience of the hardened card-sharper. But Tickey Tapp did not mean to waste two or three hours when an hour was enough. The cards, when he started, were a new pack. But by the time they had played for a quarter of an hour the cards were marked sufficiently for Mr. Tapp's honourable purpose.

The excited, feverish boy was not likely to notice the little mark the rascal made with his thumbnail on the back of the aces, or the slight twist he gave to the corner of the kings.

It was child's play to Tickey Tapp. Each time a court card came into his hands he marked it in a way that was invisible to Gore, but quite visible enough to help Tickey Tapp when he was dealing. And at dealing, Tickey Tapp had great skill. Long practice enabled him to "stack" the cards as he pleased, once they were marked.

Gore's three pounds—mostly in silver—passed gradually over to Tickey Tapp, and Gore's face grew longer and gloomier.

The last coin went before an hour had elapsed.

Gore sat quite still, breathing hard. He had surrounded himself with a host of small debts in his Form to raise the capital to try his luck again. He had tried his luck and failed.

"Tired?" asked Tickey Tapp.

"Stony!" said Gore.

"Ard lines!" said Tickey Tapp sympathetically.

"It's want of the ready. I've 'ad a run of luck. It would be bound to change. Still, I'll give you your revenge any time you like, Master Gore."

He yawned and rose to his feet.

"Don't go," said Gore desperately. "Look here, Tickey, you've got all my money."

"Ain't I won it?" demanded Tickey Tapp, his brows lowering.

"Yes, yes; I know that. I'm not complaining. What I mean is, I—I'm expecting some more money soon, and—and look here, Tickey, my word's good enough for you, I suppose?"

Tickey Tapp was looking at him keenly. He had fully expected this, and he had turned it over in his mind whether it was worth the time and the trouble to win Gore's I O U. He had decided that it was, but he left the suggestion to come from Gore. It suited him to be in the position of a good-natured sportsman badgered into playing.



"If I don't 'andle my fifteen pounds on Saturday afternoon," said Tickey Tapp savagely, "I'm calling on your 'eadmaster Saturday evening to ask him for my money!" Gore stared at the cardsharper with glassy eyes, transfixed.

"Well, I wouldn't like to say no to a pal, Master Gore," said Tickey Tapp, seating himself again on the beam. "Don't run it too 'igh, though. I'm not going to land you with a debt you can't pay."

"Oh, I can pay all right! I'm expecting a tip from home."

"Very well," said Tickey Tapp. "You make out a little I O U, and I'll lend you five quid on it. That suit you?"

"Oh, ripping!" exclaimed Gore.

He took out his pocket-book and a pencil.

"'Ere's a fountain-pen," said Tickey Tapp. It really looked as if Mr. Tapp had come provided for just that emergency.

George Gore took the fountain-pen, and with his pocket-book on his knees wrote out the required I O U, which Mr. Tapp carefully examined and slipped into his pocket.

Gore eagerly took the five pounds that Mr. Tapp pushed across to him.

The cards were soon going again. At Gore's suggestion they played for half-crown points. Gore was anxious to get clear quickly. Unfortunately it did not work out like that. The five pounds travelled over to Mr. Tapp much more quickly than the first three. In half an hour Gore was penniless once more.

"Well, I must be going," yawned Mr. Tapp.

Gore panted.

"Look here, I—I've got some money in the bank," he said. "I—I'll draw it out as quick as I can, Tickey. It takes three days."

"How much 'ave you got there?" asked Mr. Tapp, with a curious smile.

"Ten pounds," said Gore desperately.

"That's a lot of money," remarked Tickey Tapp meditatively.

"My—my pater put it into the bank for me on my birthday," said Gore, quite surprising himself by his faculty in lying.

"Good old sport," said Mr. Tapp. "But you've 'ad enough, Master Gore. You'll be saying afterwards that it was my fault, and—"

"I won't," said Gore. "Look here, play the game! Take my I O U for ten quid, and if I lose it I won't ask you again."

"But you won't lose it," said Mr. Tapp discontentedly. "You'll clean me out."

Gore's eyes sparkled at the mere thought.

"Well, be a sport," he said.

"All right," said Mr. Tapp. "I can't say no to you, Master Gore. You are a goer, I must say. If I win your paper—not that there's much chance of it—you'll pay up on Saturday? That'll give you plenty of time."

"Heaps!" said Gore. He threw reflection to the wind. He would win this time. He would! He must!

"It's a go," said Tickey Tapp.

The fountain-pen and the pocket-book came into requisition again, and Mr. Tapp pocketed a promise to pay ten pounds, signed by George Gore.

The thought of having to meet that paper with money on Saturday turned Gore's heart cold for a moment. But he gritted his teeth and played. He would win; he would snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

If the wretched boy had been getting fair play he was not in a state to win. He was eager, feverish, excited—at one time wildly reckless, at

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

another time over-careful. He played in large sums for him. He desperately suggested pound points, went nap, and had to pay five pounds in a lump to Mr. Tapp. Gore had a stunned look then, but he went on mechanically with what he had left. It all went the same way. Mr. Tapp was getting tired of fleeing his foolish victim, and he no longer gave Gore the slightest run for his money.

Gore sprang to his feet when his last coin was gone. He flung the cards upon the ground with a curse.

"Had enough?" smiled Mr. Tapp.

"If—if you'll give me another chance—"

"I got to get 'ome," said Mr. Tapp. "I got your paper for fifteen quid now, Master Gore. I'll expect to see you on Saturday, and give you another game then, if you like. You'll come 'ere?"

Mr. Tapp lighted a fresh cigarette as he surveyed his victim.

Gore was pale and shaking now. He was feeling the reaction after the hot, unhealthy excitement of two hours.

"Here?" he repeated mechanically.

"Yes; or where you like. Don't forget to draw that money out of the bank."

Gore groaned. He had no money in the bank. Fifteen pounds on Saturday! The mere thought of it made his head reel. He was not likely to have fifteen pence by Saturday, let alone fifteen pounds.

"Well, so-long!" said Tickey Tapp.

"Hold on a minute!" muttered Gore hoarsely.

"I—I shall have to ask you to wait a bit for that money, Tickey."

"Yes; I'm waiting till Saturday," assented Mr. Tapp.

"Later—later than Saturday. I—I can't pay it then."

"I'm leaving Rylcombe next week for the races, and I shall want it," said Mr. Tapp calmly. "You draw that money out of the bank, just as you agreed."

"I—I can't."

"Why can't you?"

"I—I haven't got any money in the bank!" groaned Gore.

Mr. Tapp did not really require that information. He knew it as well as Gore himself. But he towered over the wretched boy in riotous indignation.

"You ain't got any money in the bank?" said Mr. Tapp, in measured tones. "But you told me you 'ad, Master Gore, and I took your word."

Gore's chalky face crimsoned. He had fallen to this—that this low, dingy blackguard could twit him to his face with falsehoods.

"And that five," went on Mr. Tapp, with increasing indignation, "that money you're expecting from 'ome. P'r'aps you'll tell me next that you ain't expecting nothing."

"Nothing," muttered Gore. "I—I—you see, I—"

"Then it comes to this 'ere," said Tickey Tapp. "You've made me play—badgered me into playing, in a manner o' speaking—and now you owns up that you've give me waste paper, and you can't pay your honest debts. I'm surprised at you, Master Gore! I'm a good-natured cove, but I ain't standing that, and don't you think it. You're paying up on them bits of paper on Saturday."

"I can't!" muttered Gore.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

"Then all the worst for you!" said Tickey Tapp sententiously. And he turned to the doorway.

Gore made a step after him.

"Tickey Tapp! What—what do you mean? What are you going to do?"

"Never you mind what I'm going to do!" said Tickey Tapp darkly. "That's my business! But I ain't going to be swindled, or I'll know the reason why!"

"You—you can't sue me for the money," said Gore, with a little more courage. "You can't sue for gambling debts. Besides, I'm a minor. My pater wouldn't pay."

"You know the whole bag of tricks, I see!" sneered Tickey Tapp. "But there's ways and means, Master Gore. You'll pay up on Saturday. If you don't I'll see whether your 'eadmaster will allow an honest man to be swindled!"

Gore stared at him.

"Dr. Holmes! Do you think he'd make me pay that? You're mad! He'd have you thrown out of the House if you went to him and told him you'd gambled with me!"

"Would he?" said Tickey Tapp venomously. "I'd tell him a few things about his bright pupil afore I was throwed out! I'd give him my opinion of young gents who borrowed money on I O U's and refused to pay!"

"I—I tell you, you wouldn't get a cent!" groaned Gore. "I should be sacked from the school, that's all. That wouldn't do you any good."

"I don't know. I should get my own back that way after the way you've swindled me," said Tickey Tapp. "By thunder, if you don't pay me up on Saturday, Master Gore, I'll make you sorry for it!"

"I—I didn't mean to swindle you, Tickey!" moaned the wretched junior. "I—I'll pay when—I can. But—but I don't know how to get the money."

"Well, I've 'eard of young gents in want of money writing 'ome to their people," said Tickey, calming down a little. "I've 'eard of sich things as saying money's wanted for a new bike, or for new clobber, or for books and things."

"I—I couldn't cheat my own father!" said Gore, in a scared tone.

"You don't mind cheating me," said Tickey Tapp sarcastically.

"I—I mean, my father wouldn't shell out. He's as hard as nails, as keen as a razor. And I've been in a scrape before."

"Then there's your friends in the school," said Tickey Tapp. "Why not borrow a little?"

"They wouldn't lend me pounds. And—and I've been borrowing all I could."

"Well, I knowed a sport once as borrowed without asking permission," said Tickey ruminatingly. "He was a young gent just like you—at a school where there was a lot of rich coveys. He was in a scrape, and he 'elped 'imself."

Gore turned white.

"Steal!" he stammered in horror.

"Don't say as 'ow I'm advising you to steal!" said Tickey Tapp savagely. "All I says is this—that if I don't 'andle my fifteen on Saturday afternoon, I'm calling on your 'eadmaster Saturday evening to ask him for my money! I've got your own 'and to show him, fair and square! 'Nuff said!"

Tickey Tapp strode out of the hut. Gore stared after him with glassy eyes, transfixed; then, with a deep groan, he sank on the beam.

SPECIAL STAMPS

Special stamps are issued in some foreign countries for franking parcels, newspapers, etc. Here, our expert puts you wise how to identify them.

LAST week you'll remember we talked about the main classes of prepaying stamps. There are still a few, however, which we haven't mentioned yet. Foremost among these are newspaper stamps.

In Britain we stick an ordinary penny or three-halfpenny stamp on a newspaper wrapper. But in places abroad you have to buy special newspaper stamps. Portugal and Brazil distinguish such stamps by the word "Jornaes," Spain prefers "Impresos," while Denmark adds the word "Avisporto" to her specimens. The most unusual newspaper stamp title is probably that of Uruguay—"Prensa," which, however, is nothing more than Spanish for "Press matter."

PARCEL STAMPS.

In some foreign countries special stamps are also issued for franking parcels. Belgium, which has made much of these items, marks them "Colis Postaux" (for the benefit of her French-speaking population), and "Postcollo" (for the benefit of the Flemands). A variation of these inscriptions is "Chemins de Fer" and "Spoorwegen." Both these words mean "Railways" and are a direct reference to the importance in Belgium of the "iron road" as a means for carrying this bulky type of mail.

The Italians describe their parcel stamps in the words "Pacchi Postali."

On a number of stamps of Panama you'll find the letters "A.R.," either in their design or in an overprint. These letters stand for the Spanish "Aviso de Recepcion," and remind us of an interesting special postal service in operation in certain Central and South American states.



The design's slipped down on this Official stamp of Indore. Avoid such a badly printed specimen where possible.

If you want to make sure that your letter reaches its destination safely, you can frank it with one of these stamps—whose initials, incidentally, mean "Acknowledgment of Receipt"—and the Post Office will send you word of the fact. In countries where revolutions have been frequent,

such a safeguard has often been very useful.

Much the same sort of service is, of course, available to us in the registered letter post. Here, in Britain, we don't issue special "Registered" labels, although many other countries do, the Spaniards marking theirs "Certificado."



The Bolivians have one word for our own "Postage Due"—"Multa"—as this stamp shows.

OFFICIALS.

One large class of prepaying stamps are the Officials. These are for the special use of the various Government departments, and provide a useful check on their postal expenses.

During Queen Victoria and King Edward VII's reigns, we ourselves issued a whole range of Officials, including one for our Royal Household. The 10s. Inland Revenue item of King Edward proved to be the rarest of all the British stamps when auctioned in December last.

Most countries' Officials are easily recognised, from the simple variations of "Official" used. Probably "Dienstmarke" of Germany, and "Gobierno" of Peru, are the only puzzles.

One class of stamps now only remains to be mentioned—the Postage Dues. In Britain, when you fail to stamp a letter sufficiently, the Post Office sticks a number of "Postage Dues" to the envelope—double the deficit—to pay for the trouble you've put them to.

Much the same thing happens in other countries, though they don't often mark their stamps by the straightforward "Postage Due." The French say "Chiffre Taxe a Payer," so do the Belgians, who also add the Flemish equivalent of "Te Betalen." This latter expression serves also for Holland and her colonies.

The Swedes use "Lösen," the Norwegians "At Betale," or "A Betale," while the Danes go in for "Porto." This word is also appropriated by Austria, Jugo-Slavia, and Bosnia; "Take" is the Albanian version, "Takea" the Bulgarian, "Taxa de Plata" the Rumanian. "Doplatat," "Doplatit," and "Doplatne" are found on Polish or Czechoslovak stamps, while "Franqueo Deficiente," "Multa," "Deficit," and "Taxa Devida" appear on stamps hailing from Central and South America.

CHAPTER 7.

Ragging a Rascal!

"H UWWAH!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chirruped out that exclamation in tones of triumph.

A dozen Boy Scouts were tramping across the moor, and they came in sight of the old shepherd's hut just as Tickey Tapp stepped from the doorway.

"Tickey Tapp, by Jove!" exclaimed Blake.

"Run to earth!" chuckled Kangaroo.

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.

The Scouts of St. Jim's had been "beating" the whole neighbourhood all the afternoon. It was

not an ordinary Scout run; it was a hunt for Tickey Tapp. But they had not had any success so far, till, as it drew near tea-time, they were tramping homeward across the moor, and then the man they sought stepped out of the old shepherd's hut fairly under their eyes.

With a rush they came up to the surprised Tickey Tapp, surrounding him in front of the hut.

The sharper stared at them. Their intentions were evidently hostile, and Tickey Tapp looked and felt uneasy.

"Hallo!" he said. "Wot's the little game?"

"You're the little game!" said Jack Blake

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

cheerfully. "Who have you been swindling this afternoon, Tappy?"

"Look 'ere—"

"See if there's anybody in the hut," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass into the doorway. He started at the sight of the cards scattered on the floor, the reek of smoke in the air, and a junior sitting on the fallen beam with his face in his hands.

"Gore! Is that you, Gore?"

"You! What do you want? Hang you! Let me alone!"

"I don't intend to bothah you, Gore," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I can see what you've been through. It serves you wight for bein' such a wottah!"

"Mind your own business, you fool!"

Arthur Augustus' hands clenched for a moment, but he unclenched them again. The wretched white-faced junior, with his nerves in a twitter, was not a fellow to quarrel with. It was only too evident that he had not enjoyed his game with Tickey Tapp.

Arthur Augustus turned away without a word.

"It's Gore," he said. "They've been gambling. Let Gore alone. He doesn't look vewy happy. But this scoundwel—"

Gore strode from the hut. Without a look at Tickey Tapp, or the juniors, he stalked away across the moor, and disappeared among the gorse. He did not care for the discovery of his blackguardism. The juniors were not likely to betray him. Indeed, at that moment of misery, Gore would have cared little if they had.

Tom Merry & Co. did not speak to him. They closed round Tickey Tapp.

The cardsharpener had made a movement to sink away, but there was no room for him to pass. A dozen Scouts, staves in hand, were round him. The rascal was not to get away so easily.

"You've been playing cards with Gore?" said Tom Merry sternly.

"Find out!" retorted Tickey Tapp.

"We've found out!" said Tom Merry. "You've been seen hanging about the school before, Tickey Tapp. We guessed what you were after—now we know for certain. You're going to get out of this neighbourhood!"

"Who'll make me?" sneered Tickey Tapp.

"We shall!"

"You touch me, and I'll 'ave you up for assault!" said the sharper, though his face had grown paler, and his eyes had a hunted look.

Tickey Tapp was not likely to have anybody "up" for assault. Mr. Tapp was always anxious to keep a respectful distance from the minions of the law, and would never have dreamed of calling upon their services.

"We're jolly well going to touch you, though you're not fit to touch," said Tom Merry. "You've got that shady fool under your thumb, and others, perhaps. Now you're going through it! And if one ragging won't make you clear out of the district, I warn you that you'll be handled again, and harder, wherever we find you."

"Why, you—you 'ooligans!" exclaimed Mr. Tapp indignantly. "I'll—I'll— Oh, my heye!"

Hands grasped the rascal on all sides.

Tickey Tapp struck out savagely, but he was pinioned in a few seconds.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567,

"To the pond!" said Tom Merry grimly.

Tickey Tapp, struggling furiously, and cursing at the top of his voice, was rushed away to the pond, a couple of hundred yards away. On the verge of the pond, he resisted again with desperate energy; but he was lifted fairly off his feet, and swung to and fro in the air.

"One, two, three!" said Tom Merry. "Go!"

Tickey Tapp, with a spluttering gasp, went whirling through the air out over the shallow, muddy water. There was a terrific splash as he struck the surface, and next moment he disappeared under it.

The pond was not more than two feet deep, and it seemed to consist of nearly as much mud as water. Tickey Tapp rose spluttering and blowing like a grampus, and his face was almost hidden by thick mud and sline. He stood in the pond, with the water washing round his waist, and spluttered. The juniors regarded him with grins. They had no pity on the rascal.

"Groogh!" said Tickey Tapp. "Oh crumbs! I'll have the law on yer! I'll—I'll smash yer! I'll come up to the school! I'll show yer!"

"Come up to the school, and welcome, and we'll give you some more!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tickey Tapp came plunging and puffing towards the bank, his face red with rage under the thick mud. A dozen Scout staves met him, and pushed him back.

Tickey Tapp yelled with wrath.

"You young 'ounds—will you lemme come out?"

"Will you promise to clear out of this district, and not come back?" asked Tom Merry, in his turn.

"No!" yelled Tickey Tapp.

"Then you can have some more mud."

Tom Merry thrust the end of his staff forcibly against Mr. Tapp's chest, and sent him reeling back.

Tickey Tapp lost his footing in the pond, and disappeared once more with a mighty splash backwards.

"Bai Jove, that's wathah a cack-handed dive!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "That wottah will be drowned if he keeps on like this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Up came Tickey Tapp again, gasping and streaming. He gouged the water out of his eyes, and glared venomously at the juniors.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "have you had enough?"

Tickey Tapp spluttered out mud and water and oaths:

"Yow! Yes! Lemme gerrout!"

"Will you clear out of this neighbourhood at once?"

"Yes!" groaned Tickey Tapp. He would have promised anything.

"We can't twust that wottah's word, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I believe him quite capable of bweakin' a pwomise."

"Go hon!" remarked Figgins, grinning.

"Weally, Figgins, there is nothin' to gwin at."

"We can't trust him," said Tom Merry; "but we've given him a lesson, and he knows what to expect. I wish we could send the brute to prison; but we can't do that. He can't be locked up for what he's done, I suppose. But if he comes back here, and we ever see him again, we'll make it hotter for him. You hear that, Tickey Tapp?"

"Lemme kummout!"
 "Do you hear me?"
 "Yow! Yes, I'll go! I'll do anything you like! Lemme come out of this hicy water!" groaned Tickey Tapp.
 "You can come out."

Tickey Tapp crawled forth as the threatening staves were withdrawn. He came squelching through the mud, and crawled out on dry ground, streaming with mud and water. He looked a pitiable object, but the juniors could feel no pity for him. The remembrance that he was there to inveigle their schoolfellows into vice, to cheat them, and lead them perhaps to ruin, hardened the hearts of Tom Merry & Co.

Without saying another word to the rascal, they tramped away in the direction of the school, satisfied with their afternoon's scouting, and its result.

CHAPTER 8.

Trouble in the Form-room!

"MISS MAWIE, bai Jove!"
 The juniors had reached the gates of St. Jim's, when Miss Marie and Talbot came in sight from the direction of Rylcombe.

The Scouts raised their hats with sweet smiles to Miss Marie, who smiled cheerfully.

"You have been scouting?" she asked, noting their costume.

"Yaas, wathah! Wunnin' down a wascal, you know."

"We've made a catch," grinned Blake.

"The catch of the season!" chuckled Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Marie looked a little perplexed, and Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to tell of their enterprise.

Talbot laughed a little grimly. He had warned Tickey Tapp to go, and the rascal had not taken his warning. It was probable, he thought, that the drastic measures adopted by Tom Merry & Co. would have more effect.

Miss Marie laughed a little.

"I hope he deserved it—I mean, I hope you did not make any mistake," she said.

"No fear. We caught him with a St. Jim's chap," said Tom Merry. "The silly duffer looked as white as a sheet, and there were cards and cigarettes—no doubt about the game. Tickey Tapp had cleared him out of his money—I could see that. And he's not only a gambling rascal, but a cheat as well. Lumley-Lumley spotted him cheating when he was keeping a roulette bank in a lonely house near here once—didn't you, Lumley?"

"I guess I did," said Lumley-Lumley. "He used to bring up the numbers to suit his book, same as they do in the Continental casinos. He rooked Go—I—I mean, the chap we're speaking of, at that time. The chap must be a howling ass to have anything more to do with him."

"I wathah think he's had his lesson now," said Arthur Augustus, with satisfaction. "It was my ideal, Miss Mawie. I spotted the wottah hangin' about yesterday, and it flashed into my bwain, you know."

"Lots of room for it," murmured Lowther.

"Lowthah, I wegard that remark as—"

"Good-bye!" said Miss Marie.

They had reached the Head's house, and the girl went in.

Figgins & Co. cut off to their House, and the

School House fellows strolled on to their own quarters.

"Who was the chap you found with Tickey Tapp?" asked Talbot abruptly. "You didn't want to mention him to Miss Marie—but you can tell me."

"Your precious studymate," said Manners.

"Gore?"

"Yes. It's his old game," said Tom Merry. "Playing the giddy goat. It's not our business to interfere with him, of course; but we mean to interfere with that scoundrel, Tickey Tapp. I fancy he'll clear off. Gore will have something to thank us for if he does—though he won't do it."

"Not likely," grinned Kangaroo.

Talbot looked very thoughtful when he left his chums and went to his study.

Skimpole was there, but there was no sign of George Gore.

Gore did not come in till calling-over. He had spent some hours in tramping by himself across the country, thinking out his position. He had not been able to think out any satisfactory solution, however. He had not the slightest chance



IT WAS HIS TEMPERATURE CHART!

"And is that the mountain you fell off?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Jones, 4, Weybourne Grove, Tonge Moor, Bolton.

of raising the money for Tickey Tapp by Saturday, and he knew it; and if the man went to the Head, Gore would be kicked out of St. Jim's—as he deserved.

Tickey Tapp had to be paid! Gore had no money, and he owed little sums on all sides; but at the best of times he could not have expected to borrow so considerable a sum as fifteen pounds.

How was he to get the money? Writing to his father, he knew, was useless. Mr. Gore was not a gentle or tender parent; but the tenderest parent would have wanted some explanation before he handed out such a sum as fifteen pounds. There was no hope in that quarter.

If there was any hope at all, it was in the infamous suggestion the cardsharp had made—that Gore should "borrow" the money from his schoolfellows without asking their permission—in other words become a thief to satisfy his creditor. Tickey Tapp did not care where the money came from. He was a believer in the Oriental proverb, that the smell of all money is sweet.

Gore had rejected the bare thought of stealing. That was at first. Now he was getting more used to the idea.

It was that or the "sack."

Anything was better than being expelled from the school, the miserable junior told himself. Tickey Tapp must have his money.

When Talbot and Skimpole came up to the study to do their preparation, Gore was not there. He

did no preparation that evening. It meant trouble with Mr. Linton in the morning; but Gore could no more have "mugged" Latin that evening than he could have flown.

He tramped to and fro under the elms in the quadrangle till bed-time, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, his brow contracted, his brain in a buzz. There were several fellows at St. Jim's who had more money than was good for them, and Gore was thinking of their money.

D'Arcy of the Fourth often had a fiver, and he was careless with his money; Cutts of the Fifth had plenty; St. Leger of the Fifth was rich; Crooke of the Shell simply reeked with money. There were chances enough, as Tickey Tapp had said. But the risk—it had come to that now—from gambling to dishonesty is but a step. Gore was thinking by this time not of the crime, but of the risk.

The gleam of lights in the windows of the dormitories recalled Gore to the passage of time. He hurried into the House and ran up to the Shell dormitory.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was there to see lights out, and he frowned at Gore.

"Where the deuce have you been, Gore?" he asked.

"In quad," muttered Gore. "I'm sorry, Kildare. I've got a fearful headache. I thought the fresh air would do it good."

Kildare looked at him, and his frown vanished as he noted the junior's pale, strained face.

"All serene," he said. "Tumble in."

Gore turned in.

Tom Merry & Co. had glanced at him rather queerly, but they did not speak. They had rather expected a "jaw" from Gore on the subject of chipping in as they had done on the moor that afternoon. They were quite prepared to give Gore as much "jaw" as he could possibly give them. But the burly Shell fellow seemed to have forgotten the matter completely.

Kildare switched out the light and went away. There was the usual buzz of talk, but Gore did not speak. Even when Kangaroo alluded to the scene on the moor, and chuckled over it, Gore was not to be drawn. As a matter of fact, he was glad to hear that Tickey Tapp had been ragged. He would probably not have been sorry to hear that he had been drowned instead of ducked in the pond.

The Shell fellows dropped asleep at last, but it was long before George Gore slept.

He lay awake and cursed his folly silently.

What had made him such a fool? Very likely Tickey Tapp had been cheating him somehow all the time. But whether Tickey had won fairly or foully with the cards that afternoon, he held Gore's written promise to pay £15. Gore almost laughed aloud in bitterness in the silence of the dormitory. Fifteen pounds! It might as well have been fifteen thousand! What a fool he had been—after the lesson he had had before, too!

There was nobody who could help him—nobody who would help him, if he could, to pay a gambling debt. Talbot, perhaps, but he had no money. He thought of Crooke—he was chummy with Crooke—but he pictured the cad of the Shell's cynical laugh and sneer if he asked for a loan of fifteen pounds—date of payment uncertain.

He dared not even attempt to borrow the money. For if there were thefts in the school, it must be known that he, Gore, was in bitter need of cash. It would turn the finger of suspicion upon him at once.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

He fell asleep at last.

He was sleeping heavily when the rising-bell clanged out in the morning.

He turned out with the rest, silent and morose. He dressed quickly and went down. He was anxious to be out of sight of the rest. When the bell rang for classes, Gore came into the Shell Form Room last, and Mr. Linton glanced at him a little severely as he went to his place. He was several minutes late.

Lessons that morning seemed like a drawn-out horror to Gore.

How could he put his attention into lessons with that fearful trouble upon his mind? And he dared not let his trouble be seen; he must not do anything that would draw possible suspicion upon him.

It did not take Mr. Linton long to discover



With a spluttering gasp, Tickey Tapp went whirling through the water as he struck the surface, and

that Gore had done no preparation the previous evening. Gore was called upon to construe, and he stammered over the page, and the Form-master cut him short angrily.

"You did not prepare this lesson, Gore?"

"No!" growled Gore savagely. He was not in a mood to be baited by the master of the Shell.

"No what?" thundered Mr. Linton.

"No, sir," said Gore sullenly.

"Why did you not prepare your lesson?"

"I was tired."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Linton. His eyes gleamed dangerously. He did not know the wretched trouble that was gnawing at Gore's heart; he only saw that the junior was morose and insolent. Mr. Linton was the very last master at St. Jim's to endure anything approaching insolence from one of his pupils. "You did not prepare your

lesson because you were tired. You have the impression that you may prepare your lessons or not, as you choose, apparently, Gore. Come here!"

The master of the Shell took a cane from his desk. Gore lounged out before the class. He was in a mood of such bitterness and recklessness that he hardly cared what happened to him. Anything that happened could hardly be worse than what seemed inevitable—the alternative between becoming a thief and being turned out of St. Jim's.

Indeed, the desperate thought came into his mind that it would be better to be sacked at once for insolence to his master than wait till Saturday to be sacked for gambling. In that mood he approached Mr. Linton, who bade him hold out his hand.



He ran out over the muddy water. There was a terrific splash when he disappeared under it!

Gore growled, and kept his hands in his pockets.

Mr. Linton regarded him with more astonishment than anger.

"Take your hands out of your pockets, Gore!"

"I'm not going to be caned!" said Gore.

There was a buzz from the Shell fellows. Mr. Linton almost fell down. He stared at Gore as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"What!" he gasped. "Gore—this insolence—" He broke off. "You can either be caned by me or by the Head, Gore. What is the matter with you?" Mr. Linton really thought that something must be wrong with the junior to account for his extraordinary conduct.

"I don't care!" said Gore doggedly. "You can send me to the Head if you like."

Mr. Linton breathed hard through his nose.

"I shall certainly do so, Gore. I shall request him to punish you severely for your insolence."

Mr. Linton wrote a note on his desk, sealed it in an envelope, and handed it to Gore.

"Take that to Dr. Holmes at once!"

Gore was about to refuse sullenly, reckless of consequences; but the prospect of getting out of the Form-room, away from the lessons that were driving him to distraction, prevailed. He took the note without a word, and quitted the Form-room.

Mr. Linton turned to the class again, with a thunderous brow. The Shell were very much on their good behaviour after that. As a matter of fact, they sympathised with their Form-master. Gore's insolence had been inexcusable. If it had been Herr Schneider it would have been different. But Mr. Linton, though a severe master, was not a tyrant, and there was no excuse for Gore's conduct. But there was no doubt that Gore would pay very dearly for it when he delivered that note to the Head.

CHAPTER 9.

The Temptation!

GEORGE GORE tramped along the deserted passages with the note in his hand.

He stopped half-way to the Head's study.

He wanted to think.

All the fellows and the masters were in their class-rooms; the great door stood open, and the thought came into his mind to take his cap and run.

It was better than being sacked.

He looked out into the sunny quad. The sunshine and fresh air seemed to call him. He took a step and stopped again.

Run—where? With no money in his pocket, where was his next meal to come from? Home—that was the only place to run to. And he knew that his father would send him back instantly to the school, with a grim request that he should be punished with the utmost severity for his escapade.

Gore could picture the look on his father's face when he presented himself at home and announced that he had run away from school. He smiled a bitter, sneering smile. His father would have to keep him if he was sacked. Serve him right. He had been sacked before, and the Head had allowed him to return on the promise of better conduct. This time there would be no forgiveness.

"Well, let them sack me!" the wretched boy said desperately to himself. "Better than becoming a thief, and perhaps going to prison, too." It was easy enough; he had only to "cheek" the Head as he had cheeked Mr. Linton—if his nerve did not fail him when he came face to face with Dr. Holmes.

He strode away again to the Head's study, his mind made up, and tapped at the door.

There was no reply, and he opened the door. The study was empty. Gore grunted as he went in to wait for the Head. He had screwed up his courage to the sticking-point, and now he had to wait while it oozed out at his finger-ends.

Dr. Holmes had evidently lately been in the study; probably he had stepped out to speak to one of the Form-masters. Several papers lay on the desk, and the door of the iron safe in the wall was ajar. The Head could not have

expected to be absent more than a minute or two, or he would not have been so careless.

Gore's eyes lingered on the safe.

His eyes began to gleam. There was plenty of money there, very likely. His heart beat faster.

Plenty of money, and the Head might not miss it for weeks—might not miss it at all. Plenty of money, and he needed fifteen pounds.

Why didn't the Head come in? It was a shame to put temptation in a fellow's way like this. Why didn't he come? Plenty of money—fifteen pounds! Plenty of money! The words hammered in his feverish brain like a horrid chorus.

He felt his head swim. A mist swam before his eyes; his heart was beating like a hammer. Why didn't the Head come in?

Almost unconsciously he found himself treading on tiptoe to the door. The passage was deserted. No sign of Dr. Holmes. Something was keeping him away. With a pale face Gore tiptoed back across the study; his hand touched the iron door of the safe.

He pulled the door open a few inches. There was a little bundle on the shelf inside, fastened with a red elastic band. Currency notes—a bundle—ten or twelve or twenty. Another bundle beside it—ten-shilling notes. More money than he wanted—more than was sufficient to save him from ruin and disgrace.

He hardly knew what he was doing, but the two little bundles of notes dropped from his trembling hand into his pocket. He closed the door of the safe again as he had found it, barely ajar; he stepped back to the middle of the study.

His heart was contracted; he could scarcely breathe. Was he saved, or plunged deeper into destruction? He hardly knew. He only knew that there was a footstep in the passage, and that it was too late to replace what he had taken.

The footsteps passed the door. Silence again. Why didn't the Head come?

Gore stood still.

There was time, then—time to replace the notes he had taken, and he made a step towards the safe. He stepped back again. It was that or ruin. The unhappy boy was in no state to think out calmly. The threats of the cardsharpener were ringing in his ears. He was not himself at that dreadful moment.

He made a sudden run to the study door. Nobody could prove that he had been in the study, even if the money were missed, if he was not seen there. He stepped into the passage, and closed the door silently behind him. He tiptoed away, and still the Head did not appear, and he walked down the Form passage into the quadrangle.

The cool breeze fanned his burning cheeks and revived him. He felt his coolness return; a strange coolness and clearness came to him. The die was cast.

He came back to the Shell Form Room.

Steadily, quietly, with a nerve that surprised him, he entered the Form-room. He knew what to do.

Mr. Linton glanced at him sharply. He saw his note to the Head still in Gore's hand.

"You have been to the Head, Gore?" Mr. Linton's voice was like the rumble of thunder.

"No, sir! I've—I've been in the quad. I—I'm sorry, sir. It was wrong to speak to you like that just now, and I apologise, sir. I hope you'll cane me instead of sending me to the Head."

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Mr. Linton paused.

"This is a late repentance, Gore!" he snapped. "I don't know what made me speak like that, sir," said Gore submissively. "I—I don't feel well to-day, sir, and I've got an awful headache. I can't say how sorry I am, sir. I beg your pardon most humbly."

"Well, well, Gore," said Mr. Linton, considerably mollified, "as you seem to have come to a proper sense of your conduct, I will not insist upon sending you to the Head. I shall, however, cane you severely myself."

"Yes, sir," said Gore humbly.

Mr. Linton kept his word. He gave Gore three on each hand, and they were what the juniors called "regular stingers."

"You may now drop that note into the fire, Gore."

"Yes, sir."

Gore went back to his place. He was like a fellow in a dream. He hardly felt the pain in his hands, severe as it was. He was saved—saved from Tickey Tapp—saved from disgrace and ruin. And at what price? He did not dare to think of that.

When Mr. Linton addressed him, he answered vaguely; and the Form-master, realising that the boy was not quite himself, and putting it down to the headache Gore had complained of, let him alone for the rest of the morning.

It was ten minutes after Gore was in the Form-room that Dr. Holmes came back to his study. It was a mere chance that had caused Dr. Holmes to leave his study as he had done. He had stepped into the passage to speak to Mr. Railton as he passed, not intending to leave the study at all.

But Mr. Railton, as it happened, had thought of a new light upon a certain obscure passage in "Æschylus," which the two masters had been discussing the previous evening.

The mere mention of the great tragic poet was enough to drive all mundane matters from the Head's mind. He had entered eagerly upon the discussion, and, as Mr. Railton was on his way to the Sixth Form Room, the Head had walked with him down the passage.

They had, in fact, barely turned the corner when Gore came along. Outside the Sixth Form Room they had paused, thrashing out that passage in "Æschylus," whose obscure passages had caused brainstorms to many bald and learned old gentlemen besides the Head of St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes came back to his study with a smile of satisfaction upon his kind old face; for, though it had taken him twenty minutes to do it, he had completely convinced Mr. Railton that his new rendering of that obscure passage was wrong, and the Housemaster had reluctantly yielded to the point. The Head felt at that moment as Tom Merry felt after winning a tough footer match.

The Head started, however, as his eyes rested on the open safe.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, horrified at his own carelessness. "Bless my soul! I—I had completely forgotten! How shockingly careless of me!"

And the Head promptly locked the safe.

CHAPTER 10.

The Burden of Guilt!

TALBOT joined Gore as the Shell came out of the Form-room after being dismissed.

Gore was hurrying away.

He had not had time to examine his plunder,

and the stolen currency notes seemed to be burning a hole in his pocket.

"Hold on a minute, old chap!" said Talbot. "Any hurry?"

"Yes—no." Gore stopped, almost furious with trying to hide his agitation. "What is it? What do you want?"

Talbot looked at him in surprise. He could not understand Gore's excitement.

"I want to speak to you," he said. "Another time will do if you're in a hurry."

Gore was about to nod and hurry away, when he checked himself. He was desperately anxious to appear quite casual and ordinary, to do nothing that could cause remark or suspicion. If the notes were missed, or inquired after, he did not want Talbot or anybody else to remember that he had been strange in his manner that morning.

"No; it's all right," said Gore, with an effort that was visible to the astonished Talbot. "I've got some lines to do before dinner, that's all. But there's no tremendous hurry. What have you to say?"

"I don't know whether you'd care for me to speak about it," said Talbot, after a glance to assure himself that no one was within hearing. The rest of the Form had poured out into the sunny quadrangle. "It's about that chap you met yesterday."

Gore was on his guard at once. "What chap?" he said doggedly.

"Tickey Tapp, the cardsharp."

"I suppose those cads are spreading it over the school," he said. "The Housemaster will get to hear of it next."

"They're not saying a word," said Talbot quietly. "I asked Tom Merry, and he told me, because he knows I shan't speak."

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you can all say what you like," he said. "I shall deny it—deny that there was anything wrong about it, I mean. It isn't my fault if a

disreputable character speaks to me against my will."

"If it was like that—"

"What do you think it was like?" demanded Gore truculently.

"I'm speaking to you as a friend, Gore," said Talbot very quietly. "I know—I've had jolly good reason to know—the harm that rotten acquaintances can lead a chap into."

"I'm not quite in the same boat as you were," said Gore.

Talbot flushed.

"No, dash it all, I oughtn't to have said that!" said Gore repentantly. "I'm sorry, Talbot. But—but it's irritating that a chap can't do as he likes without a lot of silly fools meddling in his business. Those fellows had no right to come there; it wasn't their business."

"From what I hear, that man Tapp has swindled you before."

"Well, Lumley-Lumley said so."

"And I know he's a scoundrel," said Talbot.

"What the dickens do you know about him?"

"I saw him several times in the old days," said Talbot.

Gore softened a little. He knew what it cost the Toff to make any allusion to that miserable time in his life.

"Well, I don't say he's a bright specimen," said Gore, trying to speak humorously. "He's a precious rascal, I dare say. But because he happened to speak to me on the moor yesterday there's no reason to suppose I'm thick with him."

"I understand you played cards with him."

"Well, suppose we had a little game of nap?" granted Gore.

"I fancy he didn't leave you with much money in your pocket, if you did," said Talbot.

Gore was silent.

"I know it isn't my business," added Talbot, "but knowing that that fellow is an utter rascal, I felt I ought to tell you. If you have any

(Continued on next page.)

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dealings with him he will play you a rotten trick some time."

Gore's lip quivered. The rotten trick had been played. Talbot's warning came too late. Not that he would have listened to it if it had come earlier.

"He's going to be shifted out of this neighbourhood, too," said Talbot. "I know how that can be done. As I said, I don't want to chip into what doesn't concern me; but, as a sensible chap, Gore, I hope you'll keep clear of him."

"I shall never see him again," said Gore.

Talbot's face cleared.

"Then you're not thick with him?"

"No; I hate the sight of the low cad."

"Oh, good!" said Talbot, much relieved.

"Excuse my speaking, then. I only wanted to do you a good turn."

"I know you meant well," said Gore. "You're not so lofty as some of the precious Erics we have here. As for Tom Merry—"

"If you say anything against Tom Merry, Gore, we shall quarrel. I'd better get off."

"Oh, all right!" said Gore. "I won't utter a word. I don't want to row with you, Talbot. I dare say those chaps mean well, too, but I wish they'd mind their own business. It isn't pleasant to be watched and suspected. As you have taken the trouble to bother your head about me, I may as well tell you that Tickey Tapp told me he is going away from here next week, and I, for one, shall certainly never see him again. I wish I'd never set eyes on the cad."

And Gore walked on. Talbot rejoined his chums in the quadrangle, feeling relieved in his mind.

Gore hurried up to his study. He had got rid of Talbot without awakening his suspicions. The fact that he had lost money to Tickey Tapp the previous day was to be kept, of course, a dead secret. It would not do to allow any St. Jim's fellows to suspect that he had a little debt to settle.

He hurried into his study and closed the door, and hastily turned the currency notes out of his pocket. His heart was beating hard. He knew that he had more than enough to settle his debt to Tickey Tapp. He could have wished that it had been exactly the right amount; it would have seemed less of a crime then, somehow.

He counted the notes hastily.

There were twelve for one pound, and twelve for ten shillings, in the two little bundles—eighteen pounds, in all.

He would settle with Tickey Tapp on Saturday. As for the odd three pounds, he would get rid of it. The thought of keeping it for his own use made him shudder.

If he did not keep any of it, he would not be less a thief; but, somehow, he felt that he would be less a thief.

A thief!

The word haunted him; it rang in his brain. It had come to that! He was safe from expulsion now—safe! But was his last state better than his first? Suppose he had been expelled for gambling? He thought of his father's stern face, his grim wrath. He shivered. But—but suppose this came out? And suppose he was expelled, not for gambling, but for theft?

He stared moodily, almost dazedly, at the notes on the table. Why had he done it? Suppose he went to the Head now?

He groaned aloud in bitterness of spirit. "Jacta

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est alea"—the die is cast. He had taken the plunge. There was no retreat now; the Rubicon was crossed!

When would the Head miss the notes? Perhaps at once, perhaps in a day or two, perhaps not for weeks. And when he missed them he could not possibly connect Gore with their loss. No one knew that the Shell fellow had been in the study at all, that was certain.

He was safe—from all but the gnawing of his own conscience, from all but the bitter knowledge that he was a thief, and unfit to look a decent fellow in the face!

That was the price he had to pay for his "little gamble." And when he saw Tickey Tapp again on Saturday, the cardsharpener would tempt him to play again. Would he play? He shook his head at the thought, with a bitter smile. He had had enough of that. Once his 10 U's were safe in his hands again, he would not be mad enough to thrust his head into such a trap.

That was all over. He would start clear—start quite fresh—with only that one bitter memory to live down—if he could. Whom would they suspect, when the notes were missed? Not Gore! One of the servants, perhaps, or Talbot.

Gore started as that thought came into his mind. Would they suspect that the Toff had broken out again?

It could not be helped, he told himself savagely. He had to take care of himself.

The question now was, where was he to hide the notes beyond the possibility of discovery until the time came to hand them over to Tickey Tapp?

The door opened and Gore clutched up the notes hurriedly, desperately. Skimpole of the Shell blinked at him in mild astonishment through his big glasses.

"My dear Gore—"

"You spying hound!" exclaimed Gore, beside himself at the discovery. "You—you rotten spy!"

Skimpole jumped.

"I assure you, my dear Gore— Dear me, what a lot of money! Surely, Gore, a fellow has a right to come into his own study without being accused of spying! Besides, what is there to spy upon, my dear Gore? I suppose that money is your own?"

Gore panted.

"You skinny fool, do you dare to hint—"

"My dear Gore—"

The bully of the Shell restrained himself with a great effort. He could have struck Skimpole to the floor at that moment. He realised that he was betraying himself by his excitement and fury. But his nerves were in a twitter; he was not his own master. It was his first step to crime.

"I am sorry I disturbed you, my dear Gore," Skimpole went on, looking quite distressed. "I really see no cause for this rattiness; but what a lot of notes you have there, my dear Gore! My people never send me remittances like that," added Skimpole, with a sigh.

"Oh, shut up, you duffer!"

"If you care to be generous, Gore, now that you have so much money, I know of a very sad case in Rylcombe—"

"You silly idiot!"

Gore was hammering his brains. Somehow, he must induce Skimpole to keep his secret that he had seen so much money. But how, without exciting Skimpole's own suspicions? The good Skimpole was not a suspicious fellow, certainly, or he would have suspected something already.

"Look here, Skimpole, I suppose you've heard



"I won't ask you any questions, Gore," said Talbot; "but if a chap can help you——" "Help me! I'm past helping!" exclaimed Gore bitterly. "I'm in trouble. Let me alone!"

about what happened yesterday—about the Scouts, I mean——

"No, my dear Gore."

"Tom Merry and the rest, you remember. They were jawing in the dorm last night——"

"Oh, yes; about ducking some disreputable person——"

"Yes, yes. About me, too."

"They did not mention you in connection with him, Gore."

"Well, I—I was there," he said. "As a matter of fact, Skimmy, I'd been playing nap, with Tickey Tapp, and—won all his money."

"Goodness gracious!" said Skimpole.

"So I don't want you to jaw about having seen this cash," said Gore. "As—as I won it from Tickey Tapp, the fellows would be down on me for having it. You see that?"

Skimpole nodded.

"Yes, I quite see that, my dear Gore. I am shocked myself—surprised and shocked. If the Head knew——"

"He won't know, unless you go blabbing it out," growled Gore.

"I hope I am not a sneak, Gore," said Skimpole, with dignity. "I shall certainly not give you away to anybody in authority."

"Keep it dark from everybody," said Gore. "And—and, look here, I'll stand you ten bob for some of the precious tramps you are always helping."

"Thank you! I should not care to use money obtained by gambling. Even in the cause of charity, I draw a line somewhere. However, I shall say nothing. I shall probably forget all about it, too. I have more important matters to

think about. Have you seen my book on entomology?"

"Your what?"

"My volume upon entomology. I fear that some practical joker has hidden it," said Skimpole. "Pray help me search the study for it, Gore."

Gore did not help Skimpole search the study for his valuable entomological volume. He hurried out and slammed the door, leaving Skimmy shaking his head solemnly. Skimpole had never really approved of George Gore; and now he approved of him less than ever.

But Gore was not thinking of Skimpole's approval or disapproval. He was thinking of the notes that seemed to be burning through the lining of his pocket. Where was he to hide them?

CHAPTER 11.

Haunted!

"WHAT luck, Gore?"

Levison of the Fourth met George Gore as he came out of the School House.

He joined him in the quad, looking at him curiously.

Gore set his teeth with silent rage. Was he never to be let alone—never to have an opportunity of concealing his plunder in some safe corner?

Every moment that the stolen currency notes remained in his pocket was a terror to him. He must get them away from his person, in case of discovery—in case of inquiry, suspicion, and search. He must find a hiding-place for them—a safe hiding-place.

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He could have struck Levison to the ground as the Fourth Former joined him. But he dared not show a sign of the rage and fear within him, and he contorted his face into a grin.

"What luck?" he repeated vaguely. "What do you mean, Levison?"

"I mean what I say," replied Levison, laughing. "What luck? Have you collared the cash?"

Gore staggered back.

The question struck him like a bullet in the breast. The wretched junior was now in such a state of mind, that any chance remark might seem to have a bearing upon his secret.

"What?" he panted. "Levison, you spying cad—your rotter—you hound—you—you've been watching me!"

Levison jumped in utter amazement.

"That's a pretty list of names!" he exclaimed. "What the deuce do you mean, Gore? Are you dotty?"

"You—you—I—" Gore strove to recover himself. Levison's remark had seemed to him to mean that Levison had watched him in the Head's study. What else could it mean? Yet a moment's reflection would have told him that Levison had been in the Fourth Form Room all the morning, and could not have watched him.

He realised that Levison could know nothing.

But Levison was on the way to learning some-



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thing, perhaps, owing to the Shell fellow's uncontrollable agitation.

"What do you mean?" stammered Gore. "I don't understand you—"

"Yes you do," said Levison. "Do you think I don't know all about it? I know you went to see Tickey Tapp yesterday."

"Oh!"

"And I know you did see him," went on Levison. "You were out all the afternoon. You've been out of sight since, and what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I—I—"

"You needn't tell me anything if you don't want to," said Levison. "Still, I don't see why you can't tell me whether you had any luck yesterday. I was thinking of having a shot myself."

"You—you mean you—you were asking me whether I had won Tickey Tapp's money?" gasped Gore.

"What else do you think I meant?" asked Levison, in wonder. "I wasn't asking you whether you had picked his pocket."

"Oh!" said Gore. He could have kicked himself for his own folly.

What was the matter with his nerves? Of

course that was all that Levison had meant; what else could he have meant? But Gore's mind had been obsessed with the thought of the stolen money that was in his pocket at that moment.

"Well," said Levison, repeating his question. "Have you collared the cash? Have you come home rolling in wealth, or did Tickey Tapp clean you out?"

"Oh," murmured Gore, "yes—no! We—we had a little game, and I lost five shillings. That was all."

"What a plunge!" said Levison sarcastically. "You must have felt a regular plunger on that. Five bob! Oh, my hat!"

"Quite enough, too!" said Gore. "And I don't want any of your rotten jaw about it, either. Go and eat coke!"

Gore swung away, leaving Levison considerably astonished. Gore was only anxious to be rid of him—to be rid of everybody. If he could only get away by himself for a time, out of sight of all St. Jim's!

The Shell fellow drove his hands deep into his pockets as he walked across the quadrangle. The stolen money haunted him. Worse than the remorse and shame that gnawed at his heart. And it was only Thursday, and he was not to see Tickey Tapp till Saturday.

Suppose he took the risk to see the sharper at the low public-house where he lived in Rylcombe? He could pay him and have done with it. It was worth the risk.

The dinner-bell interrupted his feverish thoughts. He went in to dinner, silent and gloomy, yet trying to adopt a natural manner.

Crooke nudged him at the table.

"Had your letter?" he asked.

"Eh? My letter?" repeated Gore, coming to himself with a start.

"There's a letter for you in the rack."

"Oh? I didn't know! Thanks!"

"And I advise you not to leave it on view," Crooke whispered.

Gore gave him an inquiring look, but he asked no questions. The black sheep of the Shell was giving him a warning. Gore understood that.

Whom could the letter be from? He turned pale as the thought of Tickey Tapp came into his mind. Would that man have the audacity to write to him at the school—to run such an open risk of having everything discovered?

The Head or the Housemaster might see the letter. There was a certain amount of supervision exercised over the juniors' correspondence. As a rule, it was not interfered with; but the letters were sometimes looked over, for, of course, it was the Housemaster's duty to see that his boys did not receive letters from disreputable persons—sporting touts, and the like.

Gore did not dare to leave the dinner-table. He waited in misery until the meal was over.

When the juniors left the dining-room Gore hurried to the letter-rack and secured his letter. It was addressed to him in a strange hand—probably Tickey Tapp. He did not know the man's writing; doubtless Crooke did, and so the Shell fellow had given him that friendly warning.

Gore thrust the letter into his pocket and hurried out into the quadrangle with it. It had not been opened, as he noted, with breath of relief. He did not venture to open it himself in the House. Not till he was in the seclusion of the old chapel ruins did Gore slit the envelope and take out the letter.

It was from Tickey Tapp, and Gore was relieved to see that the sharper had worded it carefully,

in case it should fall into the wrong hands. It ran:

"Dear Master Gore,—I have had to leave rather sudden, owing to circumstances, but I come back early next week. You can see me on Toosday at six to pay for the two little articles.—Yores respectfully,
T. T."

Gore crushed the note in his hand. The sharper had been careful; he did not want to betray him, so long as there was a chance of getting his money.

If the Housemaster had seen that letter he would only have supposed that some man in Rylcombe had sold Gore "two little articles," which were to be paid for on Tuesday, and Gore could easily have invented an explanation. The Housemaster would hardly guess that the two little articles were two I O U's signed by Gore, promising to pay a card-sharper fifteen pounds.

Gore could understand, too, why the sharper had gone. After the ragging Tom Merry & Co. had given him, he had deemed it safer to disappear from the neighbourhood for a time. He might have had other reasons for disappearing, too, though Gore did not think of him in connection with Talbot.

Doubtless the card-sharper thought that the extension of time on his debt would be welcome enough to the wretched debtor. As a matter of fact, it came like a blow to George Gore. His scheme of getting rid of the stolen notes by paying Tickey Tapp at once was knocked on the head row. He could not even get rid of them by Saturday. He had to keep the money until Tuesday—nearly a week.

In his rage and dismay, he cursed Tom Merry and his friends. Their interference was the cause of this. But for their chipping in and handling Tickey Tapp, Gore could have seen the man before afternoon lessons that day and relieved his mind of a crushing weight.

Now that was all over. He did not know Tickey Tapp's present address; but even if he had he dare not trust the stolen notes to the post.

He tore the letter into fragments and scattered them in the ruins. What was he to do? Suppose the money was missed? Suppose there was a search?

There came into his mind the remembrance of Eugene Aram, haunted by the body of the man he had slain, the body that he could not hide. The stolen notes seemed to Gore like the body of that murdered man. He could not get rid of them; they haunted him; they were ever present, to condemn him by any chance at any moment.

He must hide them. He looked round the ruined chapel. There was the old crypt below. That would be a safe place. He made up his mind, and descended the stone steps to the crypt.

"Hallo! Going exploring?"

Gore started violently. Crooke of the Shell had just come into the ruins, and was regarding him curiously. Gore hastened up the steps again, his face crimson.

"I'll come with you, if you like," said Crooke. "Better get a torch if you're going down there, though. There's holes in the floor."

"I—I'm not going! I—I was only just going to have a look in!" stammered Gore. "What—what do you want, Crooke? What the—"

He paused. He had been about to demand why

(Continued on the next page.)



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR.

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HALLO, chums! How do you like the St. Jim's yarn in this number? Great, isn't it? Martin Clifford has certainly hit the high spots. I imagine you are now all eager to read the second story of the series. Our office-boy is so eager, in fact, that he asked me if he could read the manuscript before it went to the printers! I told him to be patient, like other readers. He gets his copy of the GEM for nothing, as it is!

However, to return to the subject of next week's story. I think it is quite as good, if not better, than the current one. It bears the title:

"TALBOT TAKES THE BLAME!"

Gore's folly has brought him to a serious plight; but worse than the thought that he is a thief is the mental anguish he suffers. The fear of discovery and a guilty conscience play havoc with his nerves and drive him almost to distraction.

Eventually, after the worry has made him ill, he takes Talbot, his studymate, into his confidence. Always sympathetic and generous to anyone down on his luck, the Toff promises to help the wretched black sheep, and succeeds in getting back Gore's I O U's from Tickey Tapp.

But Gore still has the eighteen pounds he stole from the Head's safe! The theft has not been discovered, but how can he replace the money in a locked safe?

Readers will enjoy every word of this gripping yarn, which Martin Clifford tells in his most forceful style. It's our author at his very best!

"BILLY BUNTER'S HOUSE-WARMING!"

Frank Richards, too, is in great form with part two of this sparkling Greyfriars story. Billy Bunter's reckless issuing of invitations in the Remove to a non-existent house-warming party in Study No. 1 has had painful consequences for Harry Wharton & Co. Unfortunately, it also has a big bearing on another matter—the election for vice-captain of the Remove. Bob Cherry is a candidate, but as the chums of Study No. 1 are in disfavour with the rest of the Form owing to the house-warming disappointment, Bob's chances are none too bright.

How a "dark horse" wins the day at the election, causing a sensation in the Remove, and how Bunter's house-warming at last comes off, are the high-lights of a grand story that you mustn't miss. Together with all our usual features of fun and fact, it completes another unbeatable programme. Don't forget to order early, chums!

THE EDITOR.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

Crooke had followed him, but he checked himself abruptly.

"You got that letter?" asked Crooke.

"Yes."

"I thought I'd give you the tip; I knew the fist," said Crooke. "If one of the prefects had known it—"

"There was nothing in it to hurt," said Gore. "He's going away, and he wrote to say so, that's all."

"If I were you, I'd give him a hint not to write here," said Crooke dryly. "It's a jolly risky thing to do."

"Yes, I—I will."

Gore walked out of the ruins, and Crooke went with him, chatting.

Crooke's talk ran on races, and "gee-gees," and odds, and dead certs, and sure snips—a subject that was generally interesting enough to Gore, but which now got on his nerves horribly. He answered almost at random. But he did not dare let Crooke see that he was anxious to get rid of him, and when the bell rang for afternoon classes Crooke went with him to the Form-room.

The bundle of notes still reposed in George Gore's pocket. Could he ever get rid of them, or would they cling to him, like the body of the murdered man to Eugene Aram?

He wondered wretchedly, and he thought of the last scene—of the "two stalwart men" who came for the self-betrayed criminal, and how Eugene Aram walked away between them, with gyves upon his wrists. Was that how Gore of the Shell was destined to leave St. Jim's?

CHAPTER 12.

The Way of the Transgressor!

"I'VE been thinkin', you chaps—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark at tea-time on Saturday.

The St. Jim's Boy Scouts had been on a long run that afternoon—beating the neighbourhood for Tickey Tapp. They found no sign of him.

The Terrible Three and Talbot were at tea in Study No. 6 with Blake & Co. They were hungry after the Scout run, and were in great spirits. They felt that their drastic measures with Tickey Tapp had been a success.

For Tom Merry had even gone to the length of inquiring at the Green Man for him, and had learned from Mr Joliffe that Tickey Tapp had left.

"You've been whatting?" inquired Monty Lowther, with an expression of incredulity.

"Thinkin', deah boy!"

"Tell us another!" said Lowther.

"I werged you as an ass, Lowthah! I have been thinkin'. We have been successful; I considah that we have handled the mattah wemarkably well. My ideah has worked out all wight."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"It was my ideah to wag that wottah till he twavelled off. We have done it, and he has gone. I am not likely, of course, to bwag in any way; but I weally think you fellows might wecognise that my ideah was a wippin' good one, and that I have superintended the mattah in a weally toppin' mannah!"

"Top-notch!" said Talbot, with a smile. "But what have you been thinking about? Don't startle us like that without explaining the results."

"Weally, Talbot—Howevah, I have been thinkin', as I wemarked. I have been thinkin'—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

about Gore; he has acted like a wotten black-guard! But I weally think it's time we weassured him."

"Eh?"

"I am sure that he is wepentant. He has been in fightrightly low spiwits for days, and he is always moochin' off somewhere by himself. Of course, he feels fightrightly ashamed of havin' been caught actin' in that caddish mannah last Wednesday. We have vewy pwobably given him the cold shouldah. But I think it is time to chuck it. I weally considah we might tell Gore that we wegard bygones as bygones, and weassure him about it, you know."

"It's a fact that he's been awfully down in the mouth since Wednesday," said Manners. "I've noticed it. He's been in hot water with Linton every day over his lessons."

"Yaas, and that appeals to betway a state of wepentance and wemorose, you know."

"More likely worrying over the money he's lost!" grunted Blake.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"Go hon!" said Tom Merry. "I suppose that rotter Tickey Tapp cleaned him right out, and he's stony—and he owes Crooke money. Crooke was asking him for it yesterday, with a dozen fellows within hearing, and Gore couldn't settle. Can't say I pity him much—he had a pretty severe lesson before, and he ought to have had more sense."

"Yaas; but if he is sowwy now, it's up to us to let bygones be bygones," said Arthur Augustus. "It makes a fellow feel wotten to feel that chaps are lookin' down on him, and does not encourage him to be decent. So I was goin' to suggest that we fetch him in here to tea."

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Blake.

Blake did not like Gore.

"It would be only the decent thing, Blake," said D'Arcy. "It would be wathah a bothah, pewpaws, but—"

"Oh, I don't mind! Wire in!"

"Vewy good! You fellows don't object?"

"My dear chap," said Monty Lowther, "bring him in, by all means. We'll kiss him on his baby brow, and—"

"I wefuse to have my wippin' ideah widiculed, Lowthah. Talbot, as you are Gore's studymate, may I wequest you to fetch him in?"

"You may," said Talbot, laughing.

Talbot was good-natured himself, and he went to fetch Gore. As a matter of fact, Talbot was a little concerned about his studymate.

Whether it was repentance or remorse, or regret for lost cash, certainly Gore had been in very low water for a few days.

Talbot and his chums were far from suspecting what was really the matter with him. The last few days had been a long-drawn-out horror to George Gore.

He had found a hiding-place for his stolen money—in a crevice in the old ivy-mantled tower; but, once they were hidden there, he had been assailed by a terror that they might be discovered by chance.

After a few hours he had sought them and hidden them again. Again and again he had hidden them, and each time that haunting terror was renewed; each time he had unearthed them once more and carried them about with him for a time, while he tried to find a new and safer place of concealment.

The state of the wretched boy's mind during these days may be better imagined than described. He neglected his work, with consequent trouble



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in the Form-room; he lost his appetite; he grew pale and distraught and morose. He "mooched" away by himself, and hardly spoke a word to anyone.

Then a fear that his conduct would be remarked, commented upon, and suspected, drove him to make efforts to appear natural, and he would seek his friends and talk to them vaguely, almost distractedly, till their surprised looks apprised him that he was giving away his troubled state of mind.

Every day he feared to hear that the Head had discovered his loss from his safe, but the discovery was not made. When would it come? Every day seemed a century long to him. Tuesday seemed more distant than ever—the day when he would be able to relieve himself of his burden.

He was plunged in gloomy thought in his study when Talbot came in.

Only half an hour before he had taken the notes once more from a secret hiding-place, and they were in his pocket again. That time they had been slipped into a crevice in the old crypt, and he had heard some fellows talking of exploring the crypt, and he had rushed away to remove the hidden notes in a panic. He felt that he could not endure the strain much longer. Sooner or later he felt a horrible dread that the secret would fall from his tongue in a feverish, unguarded moment.

Talbot looked at him and wondered. At that moment George Gore's face betrayed all the

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PEN PALS COUPON

26-2-38

cankering misery that was eating at his heart. What was the matter with him?

Gore made a sudden movement before Talbot could speak. His face fell into his hands.

Talbot started suddenly.

"Gore, what's the matter, old fellow?"

Gore started at the sound of his voice, as if electrified. He raised his face from his hands.

His eyes were dry and burning. He fixed a look on Talbot of fury and hatred. At that moment the wretched boy hated the whole world, and hated himself.

"Leave me alone!" he snarled. "What do you want?"

"You're in trouble," said Talbot quietly.

"I'm not."

"I won't ask you any questions, Gore; but if a chap can help you—"

George Gore burst into a wild laugh.

"Help me! I'm past helping." His fury passed, he flung himself into a chair. "Yes; if you want to know, I am in trouble. Let me alone."

"You won't tell me what it is?"

Gore shivered.

"No, I won't!" His passionate anger revived again. "What are you asking me questions for? Let me alone! Mind your own business!"

He sprang to his feet again, and clenched his hands, and advanced towards Talbot, savage and threatening.

"Hang you! Let me alone, I say!"

(Continued on page 36.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

Billy Bunter's House-Warming!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

Bunter's Suggestion!

"I LIKE the paint," said Harry Wharton, "and the paper's all right. But—"

"But the furniture," said Bob Cherry.

"Exactly—the furniture!"

"There's a table," remarked Nugent, "and five chairs. They're provided by Greyfriars, free, gratis, and for nothing."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter! We're talking business—"

"Yes; but I say—"

"Cheese it! This question of furniture is a serious one."

And the chums of the Greyfriars Remove looked serious. It was an important occasion.

At the beginning of the term the whole row of Remove studies had been destroyed by fire.

The rebuilding had been hurried on at express speed, and it was now completed, and the juniors were at liberty to take up their new quarters.

The famous Remove passage had come into existence again—a little cleaner and brighter than of old. The studies, in their fresh paper and paint, looked very clean and cheerful. The Famous Four—Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh—were standing in Study No. 1, making plans. They had a brand new study in place of the old one, but all their household accessories had been destroyed in the fire.

Hence arose the question of furnishing.

It was certainly a serious question, for the pocket money of the juniors was limited, and it was no light matter to furnish a room for five fellows.

The school had provided a table and five chairs. That was all very well for a start, but, as Bob Cherry pointed out, they could not possibly live, move, and have their being in a room furnished with a table and chairs.

"The table's all right," Harry Wharton remarked.

"And the chairs are not so bad," said Nugent.

"But we must have an easy-chair," said Bob Cherry; "likewise a carpet. If it will run to a rug, we must have a rug."

"And a clock."

"Yes, and curtains."

"A room looks all the better for curtains," said Nugent thoughtfully. "A square of carpet will do, and we can paint the floor round it, or you can get some nobby linoleum to look like parquetry, you know."

"I say, you fellows—"

"The best thing we can do is to raise all the tin we can and pool it," said Harry Wharton. "We must stand in this together, you know. And it's a good idea to write home and get things from your people on an occasion like this. A square of carpet or a rug saves a chap a lot of money, and we really don't want 'em new."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

"I say, you fellows—"

"I wish you wouldn't keep on jawing. Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "What is it you want? Say it quick and take a little run."

Billy Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove with suppressed indignation.

"Look here, you fellows, I don't think you ought to waste all the available cash on silly furniture. I can do without an easy-chair for a time, and, if I can, I'm jolly sure you can. And curtains are extravagant. What you really want on an occasion like this is a house-warming."

"A which?"

"A house-warming. The proper thing is to stand a feed, and ask the fellows in to celebrate getting a new study."

"My dear porpoise—"

"It's up to you, Wharton, as captain of the Remove, to give the biggest house-warming in the Form," said Billy Bunter emphatically. "I don't like to see you neglecting your duties."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"But, my dear ass, we must get the place furnished before we give a house-warming."

"I don't see the necessity. You can borrow some chairs, and the chaps will bring their own knives and forks and plates. In fact, I've already asked Hazeldene and Russell."

"You cheeky young duffer!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You mean to say you've invited guests here when we haven't even got the place furnished."

"I don't think you ought to be mean, Cherry. I like to be hospitable, and if you fellows disapprove of hospitality—"

"You'd better jolly well put your visitors off for a bit!" growled Bob Cherry. "We've got to get the sticks in."

"I don't see how I can very well do that, Cherry," said the fat junior, with a shake of the head. "You see, this study has got rather a reputation for hospitality, and the fellows naturally expect a house-warming. I've as good as promised it. Of course, I don't mean you chaps to pay for it all. I'm expecting a postal order to-morrow morning, and—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! If we stand the house-warming this evening, you chaps will have to advance the money. But that won't hurt you, as I'll stand my whack when the post gets in in the morning."

"Buzz off for a bit, Bunter, and let us think it out."

"Yes, but—"

Bob Cherry seized the fat junior by the shoulders and ran him to the door. Billy Bunter squirmed in vain in the junior's muscular grasp.

"Ow! Oh, really, Cherry, you beast—"

"Buzz off!" exclaimed Bob; and he gave the fat junior a heave that sent him spinning down the passage.

BACK TO THE OLD HOME! FUN AND FROLIC IS FAST AND FURIOUS WHEN THE REMOVE TAKE OVER THEIR NEWLY-BUILT QUARTERS!

There was a sudden shock as two bodies met, and Billy Bunter staggered in one direction and Wun Lung, who was coming along the passage, in another.

Billy Bunter had met him in full career.

Wun Lung, the Chinese, was slim and light, and Bunter was a heavy-weight, and so the Chinese junior got decidedly the worst of the collision.

He went down with a bump on the linoleum, and Billy Bunter staggered against the wall. But he did not remain there a moment. He stumbled and rolled over, and plumped down fairly on the Chinese.

There was an agonised gasp from Wun Lung.

"Oh, savee me—clushee!"

But Billy Bunter seemed to be in no hurry to move. He was breathless and rather dazed, and perhaps he found the Chinese soft and comfortable to sprawl upon.

Wun Lung gasped painfully under the weight.

"Help! Me clushee!"

Bob Cherry ran along the passage, laughing. "Get off, Bunter, you ass! You're crushing him!"

"I'm winded!" moaned Bunter faintly. "I can't move! I'm knocked out! Ow!"

Billy Bunter had said that he could not move, but he moved suddenly enough then. The Chinese had dug a pin into his fat leg, and Bunter found that he could move.

He jumped up with a wild yell, and Wun Lung slowly and breathlessly rose to his feet.

"You—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "You—you horrid heathen! I'm hurt!"

"Me, too!" gasped Wun Lung. "Me clushee—me squashee! What you tinkee?"

"I—I—I'll—"

"You'll take a little run," said Bob Cherry, taking Bunter by the collar. "Buzz!"

And Bunter "buzzed." Wun Lung followed Bob Cherry back into the study, with an expansive smile on his yellow face.

"Letter for you, Wharton," he said, with his curious Oriental pronunciation in which many "r's" turned into "l's." "Me blingee letter."

"Thanks!" said Wharton, taking it. "Hallo! It's from my uncle! Will you excuse me, you fellows?"

He opened the letter, and as he read the first lines the expression on his face became thoughtful.

Called Away!

BOB CHERRY gave a whistle.

"Bad news from home, Harry?"

Wharton looked up from the letter. He shook his head.

"Not bad news," he said, "but rather a trouble just at the time. My uncle wants me to go home for a week, and he says he's obtained permission from the Head. I'm to go with him to meet an old Army friend, who is just coming home from India, and to stay a few days at his place. He's an old friend of my father's, and my uncle thinks I ought to go."

"Lucky beggar, to get a week's holiday."

"Well, I don't know. I shall like the run, of course, but it will be a bit awkward leaving Greyfriars just now," said Wharton musingly. "There's the furnishing, and the house-warming, and then there's the footer. The return match with the Upper Fourth is coming off soon, and



The Remove commenced ragging Study No. 1 in a spirit of mischief, but one or two fellows were determined that it should not stop short of absolute wreck. The bookcase and table went over with a crash, and Stott hurled the fireirons into the looking-glass. In no time the study was wrecked.

the Remove eleven wants keeping at practice. There's plenty of work here for a Form captain."

"The workfulness is great for the honourable Form captain," remarked Hurree Singh, "but the substitutefulness will be the proper caper."

"That's right," said Bob Cherry. "You can appoint a deputy. We ought really to have elected a vice-captain, you know. The school has a vice-captain as well as a captain, so why shouldn't a Form?"

"Echo answers why," said Nugent.

Hurree Singh shook his head.

"Excuse me, my friend, but echo would naturally answer Form," he remarked. "The echo answers last wordfully, as a rule."

"Ha, ha, ha! You see—"

"But perhaps the difference is idiotic," said the nabob. "I've often found it somewhat difficult to comprehend the idiots of this country."

"The—the which?"

"The idiots of this country. You see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "He means the idioms."

The nabob shook his head gently.

"I think not, my worthy chum. I studied your beautiful language under the best native masters in Bhanipar, and I learned it with this thushfulness."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, to come back to the subject," he said. "I've got to leave Greyfriars on Friday for a week. We ought to have a vice-captain to take my place while I'm gone. I don't know whether the Form would agree to my appointing one."

"Oh, I don't know," remarked Bob Cherry. "If you appoint the most suitable chap, the Remove might agree to it. I should be quite willing——"

"I should be quite willing——" began Nugent. "The willingness of my honourable self would be terrific."

"Me tinkee, too," remarked Wun Lung. "Me tinkee me good captain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me tinkee me ipping captain."

"Oh, yes, you'd be ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "But heathens are barred. I suppose, as a matter of fact, there'll have to be an election for Form vice-captain."

"Yes, and it had better be got through before I leave," said Harry. "Suppose we have the election after school to-morrow, and if we can fix up a house-warming we'll have it after the election."

"Good!"

"And how about the furnishing? Let's make up the pool."

And a cap was passed round for contributions. Wun Lung, who was always rolling in money, wanted to contribute, but the Famous Four would not hear of it.

"Thanks all the same, Wun Lung," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We can't let you help us in this matter, you know."

A word from Wharton was always enough for Wun Lung. He rooded, and glided from the study with his usual noiseless step.

The contributions from the chums of the Remove did not amount to much.

Nugent found half-a-crown, Harry Wharton several shillings, and the Nabob of Bhanipur a pound. Bob Cherry hunted through his jacket pockets without success, and then went into his waistcoat with the same result.

"Where did you put it?" asked Nugent.

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Where did I put what?"

"The money you're looking for, of course!"

"There isn't any. I was just looking, in case there might be some I'd overlooked."

"Oh!"

"You'll have to leave my whack over till I get some tin, on Saturday," said Bob.

"One pound nine-and-six," said Wharton.

"Well, that's not so bad. We can make a beginning on that. Look here, suppose we get a pass to go down to Friardale after tea, and see what we can pick up at the second-hand furniture shop. I prefer to deal at a second-hand shop when there's only a little bit of tin to spend. You get better value for your money, and you sometimes pick up a really valuable article."

"Good! Wingate will give us a pass. And now, about tea? There isn't much, but I suppose it's no good drawing on the cash to get in grub for tea."

"Not a bit of good. We must be awfully economical till the furnishing's done. Bread and cheese is all right. And Bunter is out, so we shan't want more than half as much as usual."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Remove set about preparing their frugal meal.

Inquiries!

IT was usual, among the Greyfriars juniors, to have tea in their studies, when their funds ran to it. The school tea, provided in Hall, was a substantial meal enough, but it could not, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

by any stretch of imagination, be called luxurious.

The juniors were at liberty to supplement it with articles purchased with their own money at the tuckshop. But it was much cosier and more comfortable to have tea in their own studies, and if they could raise as much as a chunk of bread and a sardine, they generally did so.

The Remove had been deprived of separate studies for so long that tea in their own quarters was a luxury not to be dispensed with.

But pocket-money was at a low ebb as the week grew older, and most of the Removites had got rid of the previous Saturday's pocket-money; and those who were not content with frugal meals in their rooms went into Hall to tea, or looked round for invitations to wealthier studies.

In this state of affairs Billy Bunter's idea of a house-warming in Study No. 1 came like corn in Egypt in the lean years.

The whole Remove agreed cordially that the chums of Study No. 1 were bound to stand a really ripping house-warming.

Wharton was captain of the Form, and Study No. 1 was generally acknowledged to be top study. A chap could not take a high position in the Form without being called upon to pay for it somehow. The Remove agreed that the house-warming was a ripping idea, and that Wharton's house-warming should stand for the whole Form, as it were, and save the other fellows from the necessity of standing one. And the invitations Bunter recklessly lavished on all sides were accepted cheerfully.

Billy Bunter was not quite so stupid as he pretended to be in the matter. He had looked forward for a long time to the glorious feed that was to inaugurate the taking possession of the Remove's new quarters, and he did not mean to be disappointed, if he could help it.

The general expectation of the whole Form would place the Famous Four in an awkward position if the house-warming did not come off, after all.

"Another cup of tea?" asked Bob Cherry, straining the last drop of water from the kettle into the pot and giving it a shake. "It's still got a colour."

"No, I think not," said Harry Wharton. "I'll have a bit of cheese, though."

"Pass the cheese, Nugent."

There was a knock at the door, and Hazeldene of the Remove looked into the study. The chums looked up.

"Is the feed ready?" asked Hazeldene.

"What feed?"

"Why, the house-warming, of course. I understood that it was this evening."

"Then there's something wrong with your understanding apparatus," said Bob Cherry. "It isn't."

"But Bunter said——"

"Oh, never mind Bunter! Buzz off!"

Hazeldene, looking very puzzled, withdrew. A few minutes later Russell looked in.

"Hope I'm not late," he said.

"That's according to what you've come for," said Bob Cherry. "If you've come to tea, you're late; but if you've come to supper, you're early."

"I've come to the feed."

"What feed?"

"Why, the house-warming, you know."

"I don't know."

"Look here——"

"Oh, go and eat tinctacks!"

Russell glared and banged the door after him as he went out. The chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"This is all that young ass Bunter's fault!" exclaimed Nugent.

The door opened again. This time it was Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, who walked in. But Bulstrode was looking very agreeable now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry.

"Good-evening, you chaps!" said Bulstrode.

"I've come!"

"So I can see. Now we're waiting for you to go!"

"Oh, you must have your little joke!" said Bulstrode good-humouredly. "I suppose it's all right, Wharton? You and I haven't been on very good terms, but on an occasion like this, I think all personal differences ought to be sunk."

"On an occasion like which?"

"Why, a house-warming, you know. I understand that you fellows are giving a house-warming to stand for the whole Form."

"You've got it wrong," said Nugent blandly. "We're waiting for the whole Form to stand us a house-warming."

"But Bunter said——"

"Never mind Bunter. He's always bunting. Good-bye!"

Bulstrode seemed on the verge of an explosion. But he stamped out and slammed the door instead. Wharton was beginning to look worried.

"I suppose this sort of thing will go on all the evening!" he exclaimed. "We'd better get out while we've got the chance."

"Good wheeze!"

And the chums took their caps and quitted the study. They went downstairs and entered the Sixth Form passage to go to Wingate's study to get a pass. At the corner Skinner of the Remove came up, with an ingratiating smile.

"Jolly good of you to remember me," he said.

"I'll come. Bunter didn't say exactly what time."

"Better go and ask him, then," grunted Bob Cherry. "He knows more about it than we do."

And they left Skinner looking very perplexed. Wingate was in his study. He listened patiently while Harry explained what he wanted the pass for, and then wrote it out.

"There you are," he said. "Be in before eight, that's all."

"Right! Thanks very much."

The chums donned their coats. The February weather was very keen and cold. They reached the hall door, when Mark Linley met them. The lad from Lancashire stopped.

"I say, Wharton, is it right what Bunter has been telling us?" he asked. "Are you standing a feed in Study No. 1 to-night?"

"No. It's Bunter's gas," said Harry. "The house-warming may come off, if we can fix it. Bunter is trying to work it, but I don't know yet."

Mark Linley laughed.

"I suspected something of the sort. But the whole Form seems to have been taken up with the idea."

The chums looked angry as they plunged into the windy Close. Bunter was preparing a peck of troubles for his long-suffering studymates.

But just then they did not foresee all the troubles that Bunter's reckless issuing of invitations was to lead to, or that expedition in search of furniture would not have been made.

Furniture Hunting!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were soon in Friardale. In the little old-fashioned place there was one second-hand dealer's, and, judging by the look of the furniture, it had been there a very long time.

The juniors were out for bargains, for one pound nine shillings and sixpence was not really a very large sum to spend. Bob Cherry said that, of course, they could not expect a room like a palace for that; and, indeed, their expectations did not run nearly so high.

A gentleman with an aquiline nose greeted them as they squeezed their way into the dusky, dusty shop, crammed with articles of furniture of rather more or less value—rather less than more.

"Vat can I do for you?" he asked. "If you vish to raise der money, dat is der next entrance."

The next entrance was that of the pawnbroker's establishment, evidently run in connection with the furniture shop.

"We haven't come to raise money," said Harry Wharton. "We want to buy some furniture."

"Ah, I see, young man!"

"We're newly furnishing a study, you see," explained Bob Cherry, with some little importance. "We want the thing done in pretty good style, you know."

"Neat, but not gaudy," said Nugent.

"The stylefulness should be terrific."

"I have shoost der articles you require," said Mr. Lazarus. "You will want a table and chairs, and an ottoman and bookcase."

"We have the table and chairs. We shall want a bookcase, certainly."

"Vat you tink of dis?"

"H'm! That's all right. What's it made of?"

"Real mahogany," said Mr. Lazarus. "Solid all through. I lets you have it dirt cheap."

"Well, I dare say that will be all right," said Wharton. He had his doubts about the solidity of the mahogany, but he felt that he could not expect princely purchases on one pound nine shillings and sixpence. "Now for the carpet."

"I have shoost der thing for you."

The square of carpet that was unrolled before them was really just the thing. It was very worn in the centre, but Bob Cherry remarked that the table would hide that. It was frayed round the edges, but Nugent suggested that that could be improved in the tacking down. The pattern was almost obliterated all over, but Wharton said he did not like a glaring pattern. As the carpet thus pleased all parties, it was decided upon.

A looking-glass was next selected, and then a screen. The clock the chums had decided to buy new. Second-hand clocks had a way of obstinately refusing to go, Bob Cherry said. Fireirons and curb were selected.

"I say, I think we'd better stop now," said Wharton. "We want to pay cash for these things and the resources are limited, you know. We can come again for the rest of the things. These will be enough for the present."

"Good! Let's have the bill, Mr. Lazarus! You've got the tip, Harry?"

Mr. Lazarus smiled oilily and began to reckon. "Let me see. Der bookcase, three pounds fifteen——"

"Eh?"

"Der carpet, vun pound ten——"

"What?"

"Der gilt mirror, two pounds five——"

"Which?"

"Der screen, fifteen sheeling."

"Hold on!" said Wharton, while his clumsy looked pictures of dismay. "I hadn't the faintest idea that we were running it up like that. I thought you were selling up these things cheap."

"The cheapfulness is terrific."

Mr Lazarus smiled benignly.

"I lets you have dem sheep," he said. "Dis is der sheep shop. I takes off discount for cash."

"Oh, but—"

"I also allows you something off, as goot customers. Suppose we say nine pound for der lot?" said Mr. Lazarus.

"But we have only one pound nine-and-six," said Harry, a little crestfallen. "Come to think of it, the things would have to be awfully cheap to come inside that."

"Den I am sorry," said Mr. Lazarus, still good-humouredly. "But I do not keep shop to give tings away."

"N-no, I suppose not."

"I lets you have dem sheep. Ve vill say seven pound der lot."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Can't be did. We must get what we can for the cash we have, that's all."

"You not pays me in cash," suggested Mr. Lazarus. "I lets you have dem, and you pays me afterwards—a little at a time."

Harry Wharton shook his head again, still more decidedly.

"No, thanks! Nothing on tick!"

"It is my hire-purchase system," said Mr. Lazarus persuasively. "You takes der goods and pays me vun shilling, two shillings a week, and you not misses it."

"That's a jolly good idea!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't see why we shouldn't have the furniture on the easy-payment system, Harry."

"I don't like the idea."

"Blessed if I see how we shall get the study furnished any other way," said Nugent. "It wants a fearful lot of money when you come to furnishing."

"I don't like running into debt."

"It is not debt, young man," explained Mr. Lazarus. "You see, the furniture becomes your property, and you pays so much a week."

"Thanks, no. I say, you chaps, let me have my way this time," said Harry earnestly. "However you put it, it is getting into debt, and I don't like the idea."

"Oh, very well!" said Bob Cherry reluctantly. "But I'm blessed if I can see what we shall get for the money!"

"Perhaps Mr. Lazarus has some cheaper things?"

"I sells you dem tings sheep," said Mr. Lazarus discontentedly.

"Very well, we'll go somewhere else."

But Mr. Lazarus wouldn't have that. Perhaps one pound nine-and-sixpence seemed better than nothing to him. He remembered that he had a cheaper line, and requested the boys to follow him deeper into the recesses of the musty shop.

The goods now displayed seemed, as far as Harry could see, quite the equal of those previously seen. There was a well-worn square of carpet for seven-and-six, and Harry could not see that it was worse than the other. A looking-glass was to be had for eight shillings, and a fender and fireirons for ten shillings.

They weren't very good, and they were far

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567,

from new. But Harry could not see much difference between them and the rejected lot.

The bookcase had to be left over. Harry said that they couldn't do everything at once, and that was undoubtedly true. But Mr. Lazarus had a "lovely" bookcase for "vun pound," and he begged to be allowed to send it up to the school on approval.

He was willing to take all risks, and only smiled when Bob Cherry suggested that a junior's study wasn't a safe place to leave a bookcase in. It seemed ungracious to refuse, and as the bookcase was to be on approval for a week, and funds were likely to come in before then, Wharton assented.

"When can we have the things?" Harry asked as they were leaving the shop.

"I sends dem viz you now in my handcart," said Mr. Lazarus.

"Thank you very much."

And the purchased articles were forthwith piled upon a handcart, and a lad with an aquiline nose took charge of it and shoved it away industriously after the juniors. It was very kind of Mr. Lazarus, considering the small amount of the purchases, but doubtless he was looking for further custom.

The handcart, with a roll of carpet, a looking-glass, a fender and fireirons, and a bookcase upon it, attracted some attention from the juvenile members of the population of Friardale.

The village boys generally exchanged cat-calls and yells of defiance with the Greyfriars fellows when they met, and the present opportunity was too good to be lost. The youthful villagers collected in a kind of procession to follow the handcart, calling out all sorts of rude things. The Greyfriars juniors turned very red, but for some time they walked on without appearing to take any notice.

But finding it impossible to exasperate the juniors to a row, the villagers adopted more forcible tactics. A rush was made, with the evident intention of upsetting the handcart, and the juniors turned back with clenched fists.

The crowd of villagers melted away, yelling derisively.

"This is getting warm," said Harry. "Look out, Bob!"

But Bob Cherry did not look out quickly enough. A cabbage-stump came sailing through the air, and it struck him on the back of the head with a thump that made him give utterance to a roar.

"Ow! What's that? Ow!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" yelled the villagers.

Bob Cherry glared round. He had a pain in his head, and his temper was up. Without stopping to count the odds, he charged back at the enemy.

This was rather unexpected, and before they could scatter the wrathful junior of Greyfriars was upon them.

Right at the leader Bob Cherry rushed, catching him under the chin with a right-hander that sent him spinning. Then the junior rushed on, and a couple more of the enemy went rolling over in the road.

There was a chorus of yells.

"At him!"

"Rush him!"

"Give him what for!"

And the village boys closed round him threateningly.

But Harry Wharton & Co. were rushing to

the rescue now. Their charge sent the villagers scattering, and Bob Cherry was rescued, three or four of the enemy lying sprawling on the ground as the juniors turned once more to follow the furniture-laden cart.

And though the villagers sent catcalls and yells after the juniors, they did not venture to come to close quarters again, and Harry Wharton & Co. arrived safely at the gates of Greyfriars with their new purchases.

Getting Into Order!

NEARLY all Greyfriars turned out in the dusky February evening to see the handcart wheeled across the Close. The new purchases of Harry Wharton & Co. seemed to possess a boundless interest for all—seniors and juniors alike.

Even Wingate of the Sixth, the school captain, looked at them from the House steps and grinned. Blundell and Bland of the Fifth stood with their hands in their pockets, laughing heartily. The chums of the Remove could not see anything to laugh at, and they were red with wrath, but their blushes only made the Fifth Formers laugh the louder.

But worst of all were the Upper Fourth. The Upper Fourth were the rivals of the Remove, and the two Forms took every opportunity of chipping one another. The Upper Fourth were not likely to let this one slip.

Temple, Dabney & Co. gathered round the Removites as the handcart was wheeled up, and cheered.

"Three cheers for Wharton's uncle!" sang out Temple.

And the Upper Fourth responded heartily.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Generous old gentleman!" said Fry. "Fancy giving a lot of his stock-in-trade to his dear boy like this!"

"We've bought these things, you asses!" growled Bob Cherry. "They weren't given to us!"

"Rats! It was your uncle gave them to you. Three cheers for their uncle!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Oh, shut up, you duffers, and clear off!"

"Hurrah for the Remove uncle—hurrah!"

The Upper Fourth crowded round. Their evident intention was to hustle the handcart till it was upset.

Harry Wharton shouted to the Remove:

"Back up, Remove! Go for the rotters!"

The Removites were only too willing to obey the call. They were generally ready for a row, and just then they were in particularly good-humour with the captain of the Form.

An impression had got about—due, probably, to Billy Bunter—that Wharton was furnishing his quarters with a distinct view to making things comfortable for the house-warming; and, of course, the whole Form took the matter to heart. There wasn't a member of the Remove who didn't intend to turn up at the house-warming, and so every Removite had a personal interest in Wharton's "props."

"Go for the cads!" exclaimed Trevor. "Buck up, there!"

"Give 'em socks!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"The sockfulness is terrific!"

The Remove did not stand on ceremony. They rushed the Upper Fourth. And Temple, Dabney & Co. were not inclined to take that quietly.

They hit out, and a scrimmage was soon raging round the handcart.

Two or three times excited combatants bumped on it, and it was in imminent danger of upsetting, but the catastrophe, fortunately, did not quite come about.

"Here, stop that row!" shouted Wingate from the steps. "I'll be amongst you in a minute!"

But the rival juniors were too excited to heed.

The scrimmage waxed furious, and the captain of Greyfriars descended the steps and waded in. He cuffed right and left, and at last succeeded in restoring peace.

Then he stared at the handcart and the flushed and excited chums of the Remove as they clustered round it.

"You'd better get those things indoors," he remarked. "Take 'em in at the side door. Temple, you clear off—and you, too, Dabney."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

The furniture was carried in at the side door and conveyed to Study No. 1. The handcart was dismissed, and the juniors set to work arranging the furniture. It was a labour of love. The carpet was first laid down. It wasn't a very large square, and it left a couple of feet of the bare boards round its edges. But Bob Cherry said he was going to stain the boards imitation mahogany.

Nugent shook his head at the suggestion.

"Better have some of that nobby parquetry linoleum," he said. "Parquetry will look ripping, and it will be rather a new thing in a Remove study."

"But lino costs money, old chap."

"So does paint, if it comes to that."

"Yes; but not nearly as much as lino. I could do all the painting required on about two bob."



"Look out, Bob!" yelled Harry Wharton. But the warning was too late. A cabbage-stump came sailing through the air from a villager, and struck Bob on the head with a thump!

Now, lino costs about two bob a square yard, cheap."

"Still, I rather think parquetry——"

"Never mind the parquetry at present," said Wharton. "What about shoving up this looking-glass. Better get it up first thing, now the carpet's down. It will give the room a finished appearance. Don't you think so?"

"The finishfulness will be terrific!"

"It wants a nail. Anybody got a hammer?"

"Here you are!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What do you want?"

The latter question was addressed to Stott, who had put in his head at the door. He grinned amiably at the chums of Study No. 1.

"Can I help you in any way?" he asked.

"Well, that's jolly decent!" said Bob Cherry. "Haven't you got your study to look after, Stotty?"

"Oh, that can wait! I'd like to lend a hand here. I suppose the house-warming isn't coming off till you've got the furniture fixed up?"

"Oh, blow the house-warming!"

"I say, you're not postponing it, are you?" exclaimed Stott, in alarm. "I should think that a bit rotten, you know."

"There isn't any house-warming," said Wharton.

"You don't mean to say that you've blued all the money on furniture, and haven't any left for the feed?" said Stott, indignantly.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I jolly well warn you that there'll be a row."

"Travel!"

Stott went out and slammed the door. The chums of Study No. 1 were too busy to care much what he did or said. The glass was soon fixed up.

"It's beginning to look all right," grinned Bob

Cherry. "I suppose the bookcase had better stand here, where the old one did. I hear that the governors are going to make the fellows a cash allowance for the things burnt at the time of the fire; but I suppose they'll have thought it out and decided by next Christmas, or so. In the meantime, this will be ripping."

"It does look shipshape," said Wharton, with an admiring glance round the study. "I shall take the opportunity, while I'm home, to send down some little things, you know. There's lots of things at Wharton Lodge that won't be missed, and that would make all the difference here. The new set of books we've got will look ripping in the bookcase."

"I wish we had some paint, so that we could give the room the finishing touch," said Bob Cherry regretfully.

"Better wait till we're in funds, old chap, and get some parquetry linoleum."

"Oh, blow your linoleum, Nugent! I tell you a coat of dark green paint will look ripping—just the final artistic touch the place wants."

"H'm!" said Nugent doubtfully.

"The h'mfulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhaupur.

"Better go and get a wash now," said Harry, looking at his hands, which had become decidedly soiled in the process of arranging the furniture. "These things want a bit of cleaning. It will be ripping to do our prep in here this evening, instead of in the Common-room. I've got the notice to write out, too, about the election of vice-captain. It will have to be posted up to-night."

And, a wash being voted the most advisable step next, the chums of the Remove adjourned to the nearest bath-room.

The Remove in a Rage!

"SEEN the new notice up?" asked Skinner, as he met Bulstrode, an hour later.

Bulstrode looked at him.

"No. What is it? A Remove notice?"

"Yes; signed by Wharton. It's a chance for you."

"How do you mean?"

"Wharton's going away for a bit. There's to be an election for vice-captain, and, as you used to be captain of the Remove before Wharton came, it's a chance for you to get in again."

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Stott. "And once in as captain, you may be able to keep Wharton off the grass for good when he does come back."

Bulstrode's eyes glistened.

He had never quite got over being left aside by the Remove when Harry Wharton was chosen captain of the Form.

Any chance to take up his old place was welcome to him; and if he could accomplish his object by any kind of trickery he was not likely to hesitate.

He nodded to Skinner and Stott, and strolled into the Hall, where the notice-board was that bore the paper signed by Wharton. There were a good many notices on the board, but only one that was of any great interest to the Remove. There was a crowd of Lower Fourth boys standing there reading it when Bulstrode came up.

"NOTICE.

"H. Wharton, captain of the Remove, being called away for a time, there will be an election for a vice-captain, to take his place during his absence. The vice-captain will have the full

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power of Form captain during the absence of H. Wharton, and all fellows taking part in the election will be expected to give their word to accept him as captain on the same terms as H. Wharton. The election will take place tomorrow—Thursday—at seven sharp, in the Form-room. Any member of the Remove Form is eligible for election.

“(Signed) H. WHARTON.
“Captain of the Remove.”

“Good!” said Trevor. “I rather think I should make a good vice-captain. What do you think, Bulstrode?”

“I think you’re talking out of your hat, Trevor. Of course, I’m the fellow for the place.”

“I expect one of Wharton’s chums will get it,” said Hazeldene. “This house-warming business is making them popular.”

“There’s something fishy about that house-warming, though,” said Ogilvy. “Bunter is gassing a lot about it, but I’ve noticed that Wharton doesn’t say anything.”

“Well, Bunter’s in the study with them. I suppose he knows.”

“Besides,” said Lacy, “it’s up to the captain of the Form to stand the house-warming.”

“And faith, there ought to be a house-warmin’, intirely!” exclaimed Micky Desmond.

“You’re right there.”

“Oh, it’s coming off, right enough!”

“Wharton isn’t the sort of chap to leave the Form in the lurch after making so much fuss about the house-warming.”

“It’s mostly Bunter—”

“Well, of course, Bunter knows, as he’s in the study.”

“I’m not so sure about it,” said Bulstrode. “It looks to me as if Wharton’s spent his tin on furnishing the study, and hasn’t any left for the feed.”

“That would be pretty rotten. I don’t think we ought to stand for it. It’s playing the low-down on the Form.”

“Oh, give him a chance!” said Hazeldene. “I’m pretty certain it will be all right, only they don’t like being bothered when they’re busy. If they’re getting ready for a big feed, they must have plenty on their hands.”

“Well,” said Ogilvy, “my opinion is that there’s something fishy about the whole thing. I may be right or I may be wrong.”

“Probably wrong,” said Hazeldene cheerfully. “But it’s easy enough to go up to Study No. 1 and ask.”

“I’ve done it,” said Bulstrode, “and they showed jolly plainly that they didn’t intend any house-warming to come off.”

“Well, let’s go and see.”

Hazeldene’s suggestion was adopted. A crowd of Removites followed Bulstrode upstairs to Study No. 1 to inquire after that house-warming.

The Famous Four were at prep, and Billy Bunter was sitting on the end of the fender. Bunter wore an injured expression. He missed the easy-chair which had been in the old study. He said that Wharton knew very well how he liked an easy-chair, and that he ought to have got one first of all when he started shopping. In lieu of an easy-chair he sat on the end of the fender and toasted one side of his face.

Otherwise, he was feeling very comfortable. Several fellows had ingratiated themselves with Bunter, to make sure of invitations to the house-warming—and there was only one way to Bunter’s good graces—a feed at the tuckshop. Bunter had

had several feeds, and he felt that he could not manage more than two or three more before bedtime. But after several good meals, closely following one another, he wanted an easy-chair more than ever.

Bulstrode kicked open the door, in his polite way, and Harry Wharton dropped a blot on his paper, and looked up angrily.

But the bully of the Remove was too well backed up by the Form on this occasion to care anything for an angry look.

He marched into the study with a truculent air, and the Removites crowded behind him. There wasn’t room for a quarter of them in the study, and the superfluous ones had to remain in the passage, craning their necks to look in at the door.

The chums of Study No. 1 looked surprised at this sudden and unexpected invasion. They did not know what to make of it at first.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” said Bob Cherry.

“Anything wrong? Is there another fire?”

“We’ve come,” said Bulstrode.

“That’s it,” said Hazeldene. “We’ve come. Is it ready?”

“Is what ready?”

“The house-warming.”

“Looks like it, doesn’t it? If you can eat a Latin dictionary, or drink red or black ink, you can start right away. Otherwise, not.”

“Look here!”

“Oh, buzz off!”

Bulstrode brought his fist down on the table with a thump that made the papers flutter, and brought a spurt of ink from the inkpot.

“Look here, we want to have this straight!” he exclaimed. “Is there to be a house-warming, or is there not? Bunter said—”

“You can explain all that to Bunter,” said Harry Wharton. “I suppose we’re not responsible for all the gas you get from Bunter?”

“Oh, really, Wharton—”

“You can’t crawl out of it in that way,” said Bulstrode. “I suppose you don’t want to carry out the idea now. The Remove isn’t going to stand it. Why, a lot of fellows have been feeding Bunter up with jam tarts and sandwiches because of the invitations he gave them.”

“Well, it’s a dead loss in jam tarts and sandwiches,” said Bob Cherry. “There may be a house-warming yet. But not just now.”

Bulstrode turned to his followers.

“You see how it is, you chaps! They’re rotting us.”

There was a yell of wrath.

“They’ve been japing the whole Form!” exclaimed Ogilvy. “I told you there was something fishy about the whole affair.”

Another yell.

“When fellows jape the whole Form,” said Bulstrode, “a ragging about meets the case. What do you say to wrecking the study?”

There was a shout of approval, and the excited Removites pressed on. Bob Cherry sprang to his feet.

“Don’t be asses! I tell you, we never—”

“Give ‘em socks!”

“Listen to me!” shouted Harry Wharton.

“We—”

“Go for ‘em!”

And there was a rush.

“Line up!” shouted Harry.

And the chums of Study No. 1 lined up promptly enough, and they hit out as the Removites came on.

Bulstrode went down in a heap, and Skinner
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,567.

and Stott went sprawling across him. But the rush was too much for them. In close quarters they were overwhelmed, and they went down under the excited crowd.

And then the ragging began. The Remove commenced it simply in a spirit of mischief, without intending it to go too far, but there were one or two ill-natured fellows present who were determined that it should not stop short of absolute wreck.

The table went over, and books and papers and ink were mingled on the carpet. It was Bulstrode who shoved over the bookcase, with a crash that broke all the glass in it, and split the door. It was Stott who hurled the fireirons into the centre of the looking-glass, and smashed it to fragments. The destruction of their property excited the Famous Four to fury, and they fought like demons. But it was of no use against the odds.

The study was wrecked.

Then, satisfied with the damage they had done, the Remove crowded off, grinning and chuckling, leaving the hapless chums in the midst of the wreckage.

Harry Wharton staggered up, looking and feeling dazed.

Bob Cherry sat up, with ink streaming down his face, and liquid glue tangling his hair. Nugent was gasping amid the wreck. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was lying with his head in the ashes of the grate, too breathless to move.

Wharton's face was very angry as he looked round the devastated room. Billy Bunter had prudently made himself scarce.

Bob Cherry grinned through the streaming ink on his face.

"Well, this is a rag, and no mistake."

"It's all through that fat ass Bunter!" gasped Nugent. "Let's go and look for him and massacre him."

"The massacrefulness should be terrific," groaned the Nabob of Bhanipur, raising his ashy head. "The knockoutfulness of my worthy self is great."

And the chums of Study No. 1 did look for Bunter. But the Owl of the Remove was not to be found—and he prudently kept out of sight for the present.

(Thanks to Bunter, the Famous Four have got it in the neck from the Remove! But the fat Owl eventually gets his hour e-warming—as you will see in next week's exciting chapters.)

THE THIEF!

(Continued from page 27.)

Talbot looked at him, and stepped quietly out of the study. He had not come there to quarrel with Gore, and Gore would have struck him the next moment. Gore slammed the door furiously after him.

"Is he comin'?" asked Arthur Augustus, as Talbot came back into the study.

Talbot shook his head.

"Pewwaps I had better go and ask him," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"I'd leave him alone just now, if I were you," said Talbot quietly.

"Bai Jove! Here he is!"

George Gore passed the open doorway of the study, tramping towards the stairs.

Arthur Augustus stepped out and called to him.

"Gore, dear boy—bai Jove!"

Gore did not reply or turn his head.

Arthur Augustus whipped after him, and laid a kindly hand on his shoulder, stopping him.

"Gore, dear boy, come to tea, will you?"

Without a word, Gore struck him violently on the chest, sending him reeling back, and strode away.

Arthur Augustus collapsed against the wall, gasping with astonishment and rage.

"Bai Jove! The wottah! The cad! I'll—" Talbot's hand fell on his arm as he was about to rush after Gore.

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"The uthah wottah has stwuck me—"

"Come back into the study."

"Wats! I am goin'!"

"Gussy, old man, you'd better come."

Something in Talbot's look and tone had the effect of calming Arthur Augustus.

"Is the chap off his wockah?" he asked.

"I think he is very near it," said Talbot.

"Oh, vewy well!"

Tea in Study No. 6 did not end very cheerfully that evening. Gore's strange conduct worried the juniors. Even those who liked him least felt concerned about him.

In the old quadrangle, Gore of the Shell was tramping to and fro under the elms in the dusk—pale, distracted, with burning eyes. How was it to end? Hope was dead in the heart of the reckless boy who had hurried so lightly upon the road to ruin, and had nearly reached the goal.

(George Gore's in a sorry plight—expulsion or worse stares him in the face! But when things look blackest he finds a loyal helper in Talbot. Look out for next week's powerful yarn: "TALBOT TAKES THE BLAME!")

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