

FAMOUS FOR FIRST-CLASS SCHOOL STORIES!

The **GEM** 2^d

**TALBOT TAKES
THE BLAME!**

By Martin Clifford.

**BILLY BUNTER'S
HOUSE-WARMING!**

By Frank Richards.

**AND MANY OTHER
GRAND FEATURES.**



The **MIDNIGHT EXPULSION!**



HOW'S YOUR LUCK THIS WEEK?

Read what the stars foretell,
by PROFESSOR ZARRO.

THERE is a horoscope for every GEM reader on this page. Look in the section in which your birthday falls, and you will see what kind of luck the stars foretell for you this week, March 2nd to 8th.

January 21st to February 18th.—Friends try to influence you more than usual, but think carefully before you take their advice. On the whole, it would be best to rely on your own judgment. Let friendship play a big part in your affairs during the next seven days, however—those with a circle of firm friends will have the best fun. For all, luck improves after the week-end.

February 20th to March 21st.—You'll need to be quick-witted, and able to make swift decisions, to get the best out of this full and active week. Work goes on without excitement, but outside your job or school hours you'll find much more than usual to do. An unexpected slice of luck connected with money. Friday is your best day.

March 22nd to April 20th.—Not your best week for sport; you'll enjoy outdoor games, but the luck will tend to be against you. On the whole, a rather quiet week, but you'll find you have new interests, which will prevent it being a dull one. Hobbies prosper; cinema-visiting, reading, walking, cycling, and travel all have favourable prospects.

April 21st to May 21st.—Promise of an outstanding week for those with ready-laid plans of how they intend to spend it. The others will see many missed opportunities, but will also feel a speed-up in their affairs. The week-end is the best time. The only bad luck tendencies seem those concerning animals. Does that mean Herries' bulldog is going to have a "go" at Gussy's "bags," I wonder!

May 22nd to June 21st.—Fellows born in this period are often a curious mixture of opposites. They may, for example, be talkative one minute and uncommunicative the next. This two-sided nature leads to a certain amount of muddle this week, and also tends to a quarrel with someone. It is really a week of ups and downs. But if you have a money problem, the next seven days should see it solved.

June 22nd to July 23rd.—Minor everyday problems may bother you at times this week, but, on the whole, a big slice of luck is what you will chiefly remember about the period. Home affairs play the biggest part, and there are indications that they will be affected by a letter, though the letter may be sent to your parents, and not to you personally. Those who are entering for scholarships or exams, or are awaiting to hear the results of similar matters, will receive good news.

July 24th to August 23rd.—The week starts badly, but just as you're getting dispirited the tide turns, and you get carried with it to good fortune. The colour blue is connected with this change for the better. A spur-of-the-moment suggestion brings you your most enjoyable time of the week. At sports, those who play in defensive positions do not do so well as those in the attacking ones.

August 24th to September 23rd.—Your work—whether it's in school or a job—is the most important thing in your affairs this week. A difficulty arises, but if you can overcome it, it leads to a change for the better, and probably promotion. There's an unusual sign in the stars, too, this week—celebrations are indicated. So now's the time to have a "feed" or hold a party!

September 24th to October 23rd.—You make a new friend this week, and he (or she) speedily proves his worth. The number 8 is lucky to you, and so is anything to do with letters—writing or receiving them—and printed matter. Perhaps that means you're going to win one of the GEM's half-crown prizes for a joke! Anyway, this week is a good time to try for one, for the stars foretell that everything is in your favour.

October 24th to November 22nd.—Those of you born in this section are under the sign of Scorpio, and that means you are the type who never know when they're beaten. If you have been struggling for something long after others would have given up, this week you reap your reward. It's a good week, anyway, taken all round. A short journey will bring you into contact with someone who will be a big help to you.

(Continued on page 35.)

BIRTHDAY INDICATIONS.

WEDNESDAY, March 2nd.—An ideally happy year lies ahead for those with friends, but the lonely fellow will realise he is missing much fun. May brings good news, and possibly a big change as a result.

THURSDAY, March 3rd.—For those leaving school, changing jobs, or moving their home in the next year there are first-class luck signs. All find general progress speeding up, and money coming in freely. A long journey later in the year, round about autumn-time.

FRIDAY, March 4th.—A big opportunity arises within the next few months; take it, for it will mean a lot to you. Home affairs are very prominent.

SATURDAY, March 5th.—A very active and eventful year in everyday matters. Big changes are unlikely, but you'll realise you are steadily forging ahead. At sports, you will find the progress quicker and more obvious, however, and may even reach the top.

SUNDAY, March 6th.—Help from an unexpected quarter helps you out of a difficulty that's coming your way. You are destined to win prizes this year, or at least receive unexpected presents for things you have done. Next December will be your boom month.

MONDAY, March 7th.—You are lucky, in that young people with this birthday have a better year ahead than older ones. There is danger in extravagance leading you into difficulties, however. The year starts slowly, and speeds up as it draws to its close.

TUESDAY, March 8th.—Don't be over-critical of others, and be on your guard against those who criticise you. If you observe these points, the year will be one you'll look back on with first-rate memories. Excellent holiday-times are assured. At other times, things are rather quiet, but by no means unpleasant.

SPECIAL THIS WEEK ONLY.

Professor Zarro will gladly send special horoscope information to any reader wishing to know luck tendencies for any particular day. He should state his age and birthday, and every inquiry **MUST** be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope for reply. Post to the address given on page 25.

HE "CRACKED" THE HEAD'S SAFE TO SAVE A SCHOOL-FELLOW'S HONOUR!

TALBOT *Takes the* BLAME!



Dr. Holmes started violently as he took in the scene—the white-faced junior standing transfixed, the open door of the safe, the bundle of notes clutched in the junior's hand. Then the Head spoke: "Talbot, what are you doing here?"

CHAPTER 1.

A Surprise for the Shell!

"GORE!"

The voice of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell at St. Jim's, was not loud, but deep. It resembled the rumble of distant thunder.

There was, in fact, thunder in the air of the Shell Form Room.

Mr Linton was a severe gentleman, and when he came down, he came down heavy.

The Shell fellows never ventured anything approaching a "rag" in class when Mr. Linton was in charge. They allowed themselves a little relaxation with Monsieur Morny, and sometimes with Herr Schneider; but never with Mr. Linton.

But that Monday afternoon Gore seemed to be hunting for trouble, and had succeeded in finding it at last.

When his Form-master addressed him, Gore replied at random. Either he had some pressing worry on his mind or he was trying to get Mr. Linton

into a "wax." If the latter was his object, his success was complete. Mr. Linton had developed a really alarming "wax."

Now, as if to put the lid on, so to speak, Gore did not answer when his Form-master addressed him. He sat with his eyes glued on his desk, just as if he didn't hear Mr. Linton's voice at all.

The Shell-master approached nearer, his eyes glinting. Never had he been treated with such disrespect in his own Form-room, and he was

not likely to bear it patiently. Patience was not his forte.

"Gore!" he thundered.

It was thunder quite close at hand now.

Gore started up and blinked at the Form-master. His face was strangely pale and his eyes were burning.

"I—I— Did you speak, sir?" stammered Gore, passing his hand across his brow.

"Did you hear me, Gore?"

"No, sir."

"Have you suddenly become deaf?" asked Mr. Linton sarcastically.

"Yes—no—no!" said Gore confusedly.

"Come here, Gore!" said Mr. Linton.

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By

**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

*Threatened with exposure
as a thief, George Gore
turns to Talbot, whose
skill as a cracksman is
the only thing that can
save Gore from disgrace!*

He stepped to his desk and took up his cane.

Gore rose unsteadily to his feet.

"What the dickens is the matter with the chap?" muttered Monty Lowther, in amazement.

"He must be ill!" whispered Tom Merry.

"He's been jolly queer lately."

Gore went out unsteadily before the class. Mr. Linton fixed a frowning glance upon him. He was intensely exasperated.

"You seem to be determined, Gore, to give me as much trouble as possible. This morning your constraining would have disgraced a boy in the Third Form. This afternoon you have assumed a stupidity greater than that with which Nature has endowed you. I have no doubt that it's due to a peculiar sense of humour, which I will teach you not to cultivate in the Form-room."

Some of the Shell grinned. When Mr. Linton was humorous, it was the duty of his class to grin, and they took his remark for a joke. Apparently, however, Mr. Linton was not joking, for he swept the class with a terrific frown.

"You are laughing, Lowther!"

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you. Take fifty lines!"

Monty Lowther did not grin any more.

Mr. Linton, having reduced his class to gravity, turned his attention to Gore again. The burly Shell fellow stood staring at him stupidly.

"Now, Gore, I am about to punish you severely. Hold out your hand!"

Gore made no movement.

Mr. Linton's brow grew darker and darker.

Talbot of the Shell rose in his place. His look was anxious and concerned.

"If you please, sir—"

"Silence, Talbot!"

"Certainly, sir," said Talbot; but he continued, all the same, "I think Gore is ill, sir."

"If Gore is ill, Gore can say so, I presume," said Mr. Linton harshly. "Gore has a tongue, I believe. There is no need for you to speak. Take your place."

Talbot sat down, crushed.

But the suggestion had given Mr. Linton food for thought. He lowered the cane, and looked searchingly at George Gore's pale, strained face.

"Is there anything the matter with you, Gore? This conduct on your part certainly does not seem natural."

Gore did not answer. He only stared at the Form-master in a stupefied way. Mr. Linton compressed his lips. The junior did not seem to be quite himself; but Mr. Linton suspected that his leg was being pulled.

"Will you answer me, Gore? You are trying my patience very severely," said Mr. Linton, in a rumbling voice. "I repeat— Good gracious!"

Mr. Linton gasped out that exclamation breathlessly, for the junior standing before him suddenly swayed and pitched headlong to the floor at his feet.

Mr. Linton started back, aghast. From the juniors came a buzz of excitement and alarm. Gore had fainted.

CHAPTER 2.

Gore's Trouble!

TOM MERRY & CO. were on their feet at once.

In that extraordinary emergency Mr. Linton seemed quite overcome. Nothing of that kind had ever occurred before in the Shell-room.

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at St. Jim's. The Form-master gazed open-eyed in surprise and horror at the junior stretched at his feet.

Talbot reached him first. He raised Gore's head on his knees. The junior's face was colourless and his eyes were closed. It was evident that he was not shamming.

"Water!" said Talbot quickly.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the master of the Shell.

Tom Merry ran to the mantelpiece, where there was a flower-vase. He pitched out the flowers and brought the vase.

Talbot quickly sprinkled the cold water in Gore's face. The Shell fellows were gathering round quickly, and Tom Merry pushed them back.

George Gore's eyes opened and he gazed round him wildly.

"Don't," he muttered—"don't let them take me! It was all his fault! He told me—he advised me!"

"Hush!" whispered Talbot.

Gore stared at him, and caught his wrist in a convulsive grip.

"Stand by me, Talbot! You've been through it yourself; I haven't. You're the only chap who'd help me. You—"

"Hush—hush!" muttered Talbot. "It's all right, Gore. We're looking after you, old chap. Don't worry."

Gore pulled himself together. He sat on the floor, leaning on Talbot's arm, his face white as chalk. Mr. Linton approached. His stern look was gone now. It was only too clear that the boy was ill.

"Calm yourself, my boy," said the Form-master in a kindly tone. "You should have told me that you were not well. I had no suspicion. Talbot, Merry, help him to the dormitory. Remain with him there, Merry, and you, Talbot, ask Miss Pinch to come and see him."

"Yes, sir."

Gore staggered to his feet, helped by his two Form-fellows, and, leaning heavily on them, he left the Form-room.

Tom Merry and Talbot took Gore up to the Shell dormitory. The burly fellow went blindly. In the dormitory he sat on his bed and stared at them, passing his hand across his forehead.

"I—I— Did I faint?" he stammered.

"Yes," said Talbot quietly.

"What's the matter with you, Gore?" demanded Tom Merry. "It isn't overwork in your case; I jolly well know that. What made you faint?"

"You'd better turn in, Gore," said Talbot.

Gore made an irritable gesture.

"I'm not going to turn in!"

"Stay with him, Tom, while I fetch the nurse," whispered Talbot.

"You needn't bring that old gargoyle to me!" said Gore. "I'm not ill."

Talbot made no reply to that. He quitted the dormitory.

Gore stared disagreeably at Tom Merry.

"I suppose I surprised you all?" he growled.

"Well, you did a bit."

"What did I say when I came to? I said something."

"I didn't hear you. You were mumbling. But what does it matter?"

Gore looked relieved.

"A fellow might blab out anything when he's like that," he said.

Tom Merry smiled.

"I suppose you haven't got any deadly secrets you might blab out?" he remarked.

Gore did not answer. He sat with a sullen expression on his heavy face. He was evidently still far from being himself.

Meanwhile, Talbot had hurried away towards the sanatorium.

Miss Pinch was the nurse in charge there, where she had the assistance of Marie Rivers, Talbot's girl chum.

The Shell fellow was hurrying through the Head's garden when a sweet voice called to him.

"Toff, you are not at lessons?"

It was Miss Marie.

The Toff-Marie always called him by that old nickname—paused for a moment.

"I've come for Miss Pinch," he said. "One of the chaps has fainted in the Form-room. He's seedy."

"Poor boy! Who is it?"

"Gore. Where's Miss Pinch?"

"In the sanatorium. I'll tell her."

Marie flitted away, and Talbot waited in the garden. In a few moments Miss Pinch came out, and Talbot explained, and the good lady hurried away to see Gore.

Talbot lingered for a few moments in the garden to talk to Marie, and then he returned to the Shell Form Room.

Meanwhile, Miss Pinch had reached the dormitory. She found Tom Merry with Gore, and he latter in a decidedly bad temper.

He declared emphatically that there was nothing the matter with him, and Tom Merry was glad to leave him with the nurse.

Gore, out of sorts, was not an agreeable fellow. He was never very agreeable at any time.

Mr Linton looked inquiringly at Tom Merry as he came into the Form-room again.

"How is Gore?" he asked.

"He seems all right, sir. Miss Pinch is with him."

"Have you any idea, Merry, what has caused this sudden attack?" Gore is a very strong and healthy boy, I believe."

"He's hard as nails, as a rule, sir. I haven't the least idea."

"You are Gore's studymate, Talbot; perhaps you have noticed—"

"I've noticed he's looked seedy the last few days, sir," said Talbot. "He hasn't said anything to me about it, though."

"Very well."

Mr Linton continued imparting instruction to the Shell, but he was evidently a little troubled in his mind about Gore.

When lessons were over and the Shell dismissed, George Gore was called into his Form-master's study. He was still looking a little pale, but otherwise quite himself.

"You do not seem to be in your usual good health, Gore?" said Mr. Linton.

"I—I was out in the fresh air this afternoon. I went out without my cap. I suppose that was it."

"Very well; you may go. I shall ask Dr. Short to call and see you."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Gore went.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy Knows What To Do!

"**W**EMARKABLE!"

That was the comment of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form when he heard about the curious happening in the

Shell Form Room. A group of juniors were discussing it in the quadrangle—Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther, and Talbot and Kangaroo—when the chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth came up, and were duly apprised with the latest news.

"It's jolly queer!" said Jack Blake. "What did the silly ass want to faint for?"

"Never seen a chap faint in the Fourth," remarked Digby—a remark which made the Shell fellows sniff. They took it as a reflection on their Form.

"I know what's the matter with him, though!" grunted Herries.

Herries did not like Gore, and did not approve of him.

"Well?" said half a dozen voices at once, in inquiry.

"You know the rotter smokes," said Herries—"smokes like a furnace! That's what it is. It's made him seedy. Serve him right!"

"Might be that," assented Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

"Hallo! What are you burbling about?" demanded Blake, as Arthur Augustus put in that interjection.

"I decline to have my remarks chawactewised as burblin', Blake! I don't wish to be personal, but I must observe that I wegard it as remark-



"Oh—er—by the way, here's that fiver I owe you, George!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Churn, Bishop's House, Reynolds Road, Beaconsfield, Bucks.

able that you chaps can't see what's the mattah with Gore."

"Then you can?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! As you cannot see for yourselves, I will pwocceed to enlighten you," said Arthur Augustus magnanimously. "In any mattah of difficulty like this, you can always wely on a fellow of tact and judgment to get at the twuth. Gore has been a wegulah beah with a sore head evah since last Wednesday. You wemembah I asked him to tea on Saturday, to buck him up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' to cackle at. He wefused wudely. Well, my ideah is that Gore is in a fighwful fix," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "Have you fellows forgotten that last Wednesday we found Gore playin' cards and gamblin' with that wascal Tickey Tapp?"

Tom Merry started a little.

"What about that? We ragged that rotten sharper, and made him clear off. He's gone for good."

"Pewwaps he isn't gone for good," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, we all know what a wottah he is. If you fellows weflect, you will notice that

Gore has been cawwyyin' on in this wemarkable way evah since he was with Tickey Tapp that day. Now this aftahnoon it has come to a climax; he is quite ill. I wegard it as certain that that wascal is the cause of it. It is vewy pwob that he has won all Gore's money, and put him into difficulties."

"But that wouldn't account for all this," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows. "The rotter has cleared off, I tell you. Didn't we hunt about for him on Saturday afternoon, and find that he was gone? We even asked the landlord of the Green Man, and he had hooked it from there."

"Yaas, quite so."

"Well, ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I am sure that I am on the wight twack. I wegard it as extremely pwob that Tickey Tapp has come back, and that that silly ass Gore is in a state of tewwah, because he owes him money."

"My hat!" said Manners. "It must be a really enjoyable experience to go the pace, and have a giddy time, judging by Gore!"

"Howevah, we shall soon know for sure," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin' to find out."

"How?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I am goin' to the Gween Man."

"You're jolly well not!" said Blake warmly. "That beastly pub's out of bounds, and a prefect would be sure to spot you."

"I am goin' to wisk that, Blake. Gore is a wottah, but he is a St. Jim's chap, and we are bound to stand by him in this mattah. We wagged that wascal once, as a warnin'. If he has come back, we're goin' to wag him again, and cleah him out. Then Gore will be all wight."

And Arthur Augustus walked away to the bike-shed, leaving his chums discussing the matter. He came back wheeling his bike.

"Hold on!" called out Blake. "Haven't I told you you're not going there, fathead? You can leave it to us."

"I wefuse to leave it to you, Blake. You would get yourself into some twouble. In a mattah like this a fellow of tact and judgment is wequiahed."

"But suppose you find him——" began Tom Merry.

"In that case, I shall give him a feahful thwashin', as a warnin'——"

"You ass——"

"Wats!"

Blake made a rush after Arthur Augustus as he wheeled his machine down to the gates. D'Arcy promptly jumped into the saddle and pedalled away.

"Stop!" roared Blake.

"Wats!"

Blake put on a spurt. Arthur Augustus went sailing cheerfully through the gateway, and turned into the road for Rylcombe. He looked back and waved his hand gracefully to Blake, who shook his fist in response.

"The silly ass!" growled Blake breathlessly, as he returned to where the rest of the Co. were watching him, with grinning faces. "If he gets into a rag with those blighters at the Green Man they'll make shavings out of him. Let's go after him."

"May as well," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

And the juniors sauntered down the lane towards Rylcombe, to get Gussy out of the trouble he was hunting for.

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CHAPTER 4.

A Fearful Thrasing!

"BAI Jove! Spotted, begad!"

Arthur Augustus jammed on his brakes. The swell of the Fourth had covered the distance from St. Jim's in record time. He was determined to carry out that little enterprise without delay. He felt that it was up to him. It was Arthur Augustus who had first spotted the presence of the cardsharp, Tickey Tapp, in his old haunts. It was at Arthur Augustus' brilliant suggestion that the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's had tracked down Tickey Tapp, and ducked him in the pond on the moor, as a warning. And Arthur Augustus felt that it was best for the matter to remain in his hands.

As he came in sight of the delectable inn called the Green Man, the haunt of all the disreputable characters in the neighbourhood, he caught sight of a disagreeable countenance in the open window, and recognised Tickey Tapp. The sharper was smoking a cigarette by the open window of the billiards-room, and commenting upon a game that was going on within.

The swell of St. Jim's jumped off his bicycle. He leaned the machine against the horse-trough outside the inn, and approached the building.

At that moment, and with such an object in view, Arthur Augustus could not pause to consider that the inn was strictly out of bounds for all St. Jim's fellows, and that if a master or prefect should see him entering it, it would mean serious trouble for him. Reckless of possible consequences, the elegant Fourth Former marched in, and met Mr. Joliffe, the landlord, inside.

Mr. Joliffe stared at him. He knew Arthur Augustus very well by sight, but he had never expected to meet him as a visitor.

"Arternoon," said Mr. Joliffe. "Glad to see you, Master D'Arcy."

"I have come in to see a person who is here," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Friend of yours here?" asked Mr. Joliffe affably.

"Certainly not! The wascal is no fwiennd of mine. I desire to see a beastly wottah named Tickey Tapp."

"No such person 'ere," said Mr. Joliffe, shaking his head.

"I have just seen him at the window, Mr. Joliffe."

"So you can't take my word—wot?" said the landlord. "There's the door, Master D'Arcy. You can walk out, or you can be put out."

"I wefuse to walk out till I have seen that wottah, and, as for bein' thwown out, if you twy anythin' of the sort I shall thwash you!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the innkeeper.

"Oh wats!"

Arthur Augustus passed Mr. Joliffe and strode on towards the billiards-room, leaving the stout innkeeper roaring with laughter. The junior came into the billiards-room, where two horsey-looking men were playing, and Tickey Tapp was looking on.

A greasy-looking marker was watching the game.

All four stared at the elegant junior who certainly looked very much out of place in that shady den. The man who was making a break suspended the game, and Tickey Tapp half-rose to his feet.

"My word!" said Tickey Tapp. "Wot are you doin' 'ere?"

"I wequiah a few words with you, Mr. Tapp," said Arthur Augustus, jamming his famous monocle

into his eye and fixing it upon the astonished sharper. "I wathah thought I should find you here, and I was wight. Last week my fwiends and myself ducked you for your fwrightful cheek in hangin' wound our school."

"I ain't forgotten," said Tickey Tapp, making a sign to his companions.

The two players edged round, getting between Arthur Augustus and the door.

Arthur Augustus did not observe that little manoeuvre.

"You have had the nerve to come back here?" pursued D'Arcy.

"It's a free country, ain't it?" asked Tickey Tapp. "Can't a man live where he likes—wot?"

"Am I goin'?" asked Tickey Tapp, appealing to his friends.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Then put up your hands, you wottah!"

Tickey Tapp yelled with laughter. But he suddenly ceased laughing as the swell of St. Jim's rushed upon him, hitting out. He put up his hands then, and there was a wild and whirling scrimmage for a few moments.

Tickey Tapp had supposed that he would be able to "mop up" the floor with the schoolboy, but he discovered that, man as he was against a boy, he was getting the worst of it.

The elegant Arthur Augustus was a good boxer, and he was perfectly fit, and Tickey Tapp was out



"You are trying my patience very severely, Gore!" said Mr. Linton. "I repeat—Good gracious!" The Shell-master broke off with an exclamation, for Gore suddenly swayed and pitched forward to the floor at his feet!

"Not a wascal like you! We wufuse to have you anywhere neah our school! You have made one of our chaps play cards with you!"

"He didn't need much making!" grinned Tickey Tapp. "Precious lot of young blackguards there are in your school!"

Arthur Augustus' eyeglass almost glittered with rage.

"You uttah wottah! I did not come here to bandy words with you. I came to tell you that you have got to cleah off!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"And if you don't go at once I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"It a man your own size!" grinned Tickey Tapp. "Don't be 'ard on a little cove like me!"

Arthur Augustus dropped his eyeglass and pushed back his cuffs.

"Are you goin'?" he asked.

of condition. A whirlwind attack drove him, staggering, round the billiards-table, and he yelled with pain and wrath as he caught D'Arcy's left with his nose and D'Arcy's right in his eye.

Had the two been by themselves Tickey Tapp would inevitably have received the "feahful thwashin'." Arthur Augustus had designed for him. But before the scrap had lasted a minute and a half Tickey Tapp's friends came to the rescue. They rushed upon Arthur Augustus from behind and collared him.

D'Arcy struggled furiously in their grasp.

"Old him!" yelled Tickey Tapp. "I'll make him wriggle for this 'ere! We'll duck him in the trough, by gum!"

"Welease me, you wottahs! Fair play, you cads!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"There was a dozen of you on to me last week!"

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grinned Tickey Tapp, mopping his nose, which was streaming. "You ducked me. One good turn deserves another! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Chuck him out!" roared Mr. Joliffe, from the doorway. "I'll teach the young 'oligian to come kickin' up a row in a respectable public-house! I'll give 'im in charge!"

"Yes, 'ave 'im locked up!" said the billiards-marker.

Arthur Augustus gasped. For the first time it occurred to him that he had been taking the law very much into his own hands in invading Mr. Joliffe's premises in this way. Not that Mr. Joliffe, as a matter of fact, intended to call in the village policeman to his aid. Mr. Joliffe did not like having any dealings whatever with the police.

"Outside with him!" said Tickey Tapp. "Chuck 'im in the trough and then call a policeman."

"Oh, you wottahs!"

Arthur Augustus was whirled to the door, quite powerless, with the three pairs of dirty hands grasping his noble person.

In a struggling bunch Arthur Augustus and Tickey Tapp & Co. came whirling out of the doorway of the inn.

Arthur Augustus' hat was gone, and his collar had been torn out in the tussle; his hair was rumpled and his waistcoat burst open. He looked very nearly as disreputable as Tickey Tapp and his friends. Still struggling, he was rushed towards the horse-trough.

"Oh cwumbs! You wottahs! Gweat Scott!"

"Duck him!" yelled Mr. Joliffe.

Arthur Augustus resisted desperately. Two or three carters and half a dozen village urchins gathered to look on in great excitement and enjoy-

Bunter the Punter!



"I've gotta hoss!" Billy Bunter, the prize poise of the Greyfriars Remove, has got a tip "straight from the horse's mouth!" The snag is—finding a "bookie" and getting the money "on" without being spotted! Laugh! You'll be tickled to death if you read

"BILLY BUNTER'S DEAD CERT!"

by FRANK RICHARDS

the hilarious school yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, starring Billy Bunter as an amateur sportsman, in

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ment. A gentleman who was coming down the High Street also paused to see what was going on.

It was Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's. Mr. Railton simply jumped at the sight of a St. Jim's junior engaged in that disgraceful scuffle outside the lowest public-house in the place.

Splash!

"Yoooooop!"

Arthur Augustus swamped into the flowing trough. He disappeared for a moment, and then sat up, spluttering and gasping. Tickey Tapp & Co. howled with laughter.

"Gwoogh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Mr. Railton came striding up. His brow was black as thunder.

"D'Arcy, what does this mean? Get out of that trough instantly, you disgraceful boy!"

"Mr. Wailton!" said Arthur Augustus feebly.

He scrambled out of the trough.

CHAPTER 5.

Fairly Caught!

MR. RAILTON stared angrily at the drenched, dripping junior.

Arthur Augustus stood before him, soaked to the skin, as untidy as it was possible to be, gasping for breath.

The sporting gentlemen of the Green Man grinned at one another. But for the arrival of Mr. Railton, D'Arcy would have been flung into the trough again. But they did not dare to lay hands upon him in the presence of the Housemaster of St. Jim's. And Mr. Railton's expression showed that D'Arcy was booked for worse trouble than Mr. Joliffe's friends could provide for him.

"What does this mean, D'Arcy?" thundered the Housemaster.

"Gwoogh!"

"You are well aware that this place is out of bounds. You shall answer for this to the Head!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Young rascal, sir!" said Mr. Joliffe, touching his cap to Mr. Railton with an air of mock respect. "I'd be obliged to you, sir, if you'd take 'im away quiet. I does my best to keep my 'ouse quiet and respectable, and when a young gent comes into my billiards-room and starts a quarrel—"

"Have you been in this man's billiards-room, D'Arcy?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Wow! Yaas!"

"Did you make a quarrel there?"

"Ow! Yaas!"

"Disgraceful!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "You shall be punished severely for this. Mr. Joliffe," continued the Housemaster, with a visible effort, "I apologise for the conduct of this boy in your house."

Mr. Joliffe waved his hand airily.

"Don't mention it, sir. I don't want to make no complaint, but, you see, there's my licence to think of."

"Exactly! Yes—yes—"

"You see, if my 'ouse gets a rowdy name through the goings-on of your schoolboys, I might lose my licence," said Mr. Joliffe, with great enjoyment.

Mr. Railton almost writhed with shame and rage. A St. Jim's junior to bring disgrace upon the lowest den of blackguards in all Sussex; Mr. Joliffe to be afraid of losing his licence owing to

the conduct of a St. Jim's fellow—it was more than intolerable.

Mr Railton's furious glare simply burned the unfortunate Arthur Augustus.

"Go back to the school at once, D'Arcy! I shall take you before the Head immediately I return!" he snapped

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Not a word! Go!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Hallo! What the deuce—"

Tom Merry & Co. came up with a run. They had just arrived—a little late—on the scene. The sight of Mr. Railton on the spot struck them with dismay.

"Merry, take this boy back to the school immediately!" snapped Mr. Railton. And, with a final black frown at Arthur Augustus, he walked away.

Tickey Tapp & Co. and Mr. Joliffe went back, chuckling, into the Green Man to celebrate their triumph. Certainly Tickey Tapp's assailant seemed likely to suffer severely from his warlike visit to the Green Man.

Tom Merry & Co. drew Arthur Augustus away, Kangaroo wheeling his bike. The juniors were utterly dismayed.

"What have you been doing?" gasped Blake.

"I've been doin' my duty," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I have been thwashin' Tickey Tapp."

"In that place?" howled Tom Merry.

"Yaas. I saw him in the billiards-woom, and went in for him."

"Oh, you idiot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And Railton caught you!" said Digby.

"Yaas. The wuffians wushed me out and ducked me, and then Waiton came up. That was watah unfortunate."

"Rather unfortunate!" groaned Blake. "Why, you thundering ass, you may be sacked for this! Oh, my aunt!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Better get on your bike and scorch back to school," said Kangaroo. "You're wet through; you'll be catching cold."

"Yaas, that's a good ideah!"

Arthur Augustus jumped on his machine and pedalled away. He was beginning to shiver, and he was certainly in danger of catching cold.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him in dismay and apprehension. What would happen to Arthur Augustus worried them. What excuse could he offer for his conduct in entering a disreputable den that was strictly out of bounds, and getting into a fight there with a gang of hooligans? It might mean the sack!

They arrived at the school in gloomy spirits, and found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the Fourth Form dormitory. He had changed his clothes and was brushing his hair. The chums of the School House looked at him, and Arthur Augustus looked at them.

"Well, this is a go!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, it does seem watah a go!" agreed D'Arcy solemnly.

"Railton will take you to the Head."

"Yaas, he told me so."

"What are you going to say?"

"The Head is entitled to an explanation," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I trust that he will approve of my conduct when I explain to him."

"Oh, my hat!"



"What do I do now, instructor?"

"Great Scott! I thought you were the instructor!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Collins, 101, Lyngton Avenue, Leigh-on-Sea.

"But if you mention Gore, that silly ass will be bowled out and sacked," said Manners.

"And the fellows will call it sneaking," said Herries

"I trust, Hewwies, that you do not regard me as capable of sneaking," said Arthur Augustus, with a chilling dignity.

"I trust you as capable of making a howling ass of yourself," said Herries, with a grunt.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Toby, the page, put his head in at the door.

"Master D'Arcy 'ere?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"You are wanted in the 'Ead's study, Master D'Arcy."

"Vewy well."

"Perhaps we'd better go with the duffer," said Blake, looking doubtfully at his chums.

"Wats! You would only put your foot in it, Blake. It'll be a'll wight. The Head is an old sport, and he will undahstand perfectly."

"We'll all go," said Tom Merry resolutely.

"Wubbish! I wefuse to take you."

"Fathead! Come on!" growled Tom Merry. "We'll see you through."

And in spite of Arthur Augustus' objections—due to a fear that his chums would put their foot in it—the whole party accompanied him to the Head's study

CHAPTER 6.

Before the Head!

"HOLD on a minute, you chaps!"

Gore of the Shell was in the passage. He stopped the juniors as they reached the stairs.

Gore's face was pale, and there were beads of perspiration on his brow. His eyes had a wild look. In spite of themselves, the chums of the School House paused. They were not feeling amiable towards Gore at that moment. It was the wretched blackguard of the Shell who was the cause of all the trouble. But his ghastly look almost worried them.

"What's the matter?" said Tom Merry. "We can't stop now. We've got to go to the Head—at least, D'Arcy has, and we're going with him."

"I—I must speak to you!" panted Gore.

"There's something up. I saw Railton speaking to the Head. They—they've found out something—"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I—I—it's all up with me, I suppose. I'd better cut."

"Cut!" said Talbot.

Gore made a movement to go, but Talbot caught him by the arm and stopped him.

"Don't be an ass, Gore! What's the matter with you?"

"I—I thought you chaps might know what was up," groaned Gore. "I—I suppose—I know what it is; but—but—"

"It's nothing to do with you," said Blake. "It's Gussy."

"I don't understand. What has D'Arcy been doing?"

"I went down to the Gween Man to give Tickey Tapp a feahful thwashin'," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Unfortunately, Wailton awvived on the scene."

Gore gave a sob of relief.

"Then—then it isn't—"

"Isn't what?" asked Tom Merry, wondering if Gore was losing his senses.

"N-nothing," stammered Gore—"nothing. M-my nerves are a bit out of order, that's all. Of course, you won't mention anything about my meeting Tickey Tapp the other day; you couldn't sneak about me."

"We're not likely to," said Tom Merry dryly.

"You can wely on that, Gore. I wegard you as havin' acted as a wottah, but we certainly do not intend to betway you."

"Thanks!" muttered Gore. "It's all right. I know you won't."

Gore hurried away, leaving the juniors wondering.

"I really believe that chap's going off his rocker," said Tom Merry soberly. "He ought to be seen to. Come on!"

They made their way to the Head's study. Tom Merry knocked, and the whole party marched in. Mr. Railton was in the study with the Head and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth—D'Arcy's Form-master.

Dr. Holmes' brow was stern. He did not seem gratified by the invasion of eight juniors when he had sent for only one.

"I sent for D'Arcy!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "But we—"

"All but D'Arcy leave the study at once."

The Head's tone was final, and the juniors had to obey. They retired from the study, and closed the door, and waited in the passage.

D'Arcy stood before Dr. Holmes quite erect and calm. He had done nothing to be ashamed of, and there was no shame on his noble countenance. He hoped that the Head would take a broad view of the matter. But if the Head didn't, the swell of the Fourth was quite prepared to face the music.

"D'Arcy, you are aware that I have received a most serious report from your Housemaster. You have visited a disreputable place in Rylcombe which is strictly out of bounds. There you entered into a disgraceful disturbance with a party of ruffians. The landlord of the house complained to Mr. Railton that he considered his licence in danger, owing to the conduct of a boy belonging to this school—yourself. I am prepared to hear whatever explanation you have to offer. But I warn you that unless you satisfy me, I shall have no alternative but to send you away from the school."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus involuntarily.

"Your Form-master speaks highly of your character, D'Arcy, and from my own observations I've always regarded you as a junior of high

principles. I am, therefore, prepared to listen to you with patience."

"Thank you, sir! I twust that I shall nevah give weason for you to change your opinion of me," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I admit that appeawnces are against me, sir, but I hope to be able to convince you that I was doin' nothin' w'ong."

"You went to that public-house—"

"Yaas, sir."

"Knowing that it was out of bounds—"

"I had a vewy particulah weason, sir."

"That is no excuse. But what was your reason? I understand that you entered into a quarrel in the billiards-room. Were you playing billiards there?"

"Gweat Scott! Playin' billiards at that wascally place. Weally, sir—"

"Then why did you go?"

"I went there to see Tickey Tapp."

"Who is he?"

"A wotten, low blackguard, sir—a fellow who plays cards for money, and gets silly youngstahs to gamble with him."

The Head started.

"If that is your explanation, D'Arcy, you are hardly improving matters. Is it possible, D'Arcy, that you went there to gamble with this man?"

"Certainly not, sir. I went there to thwash him."

"What!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom, blinking over his spectacles at his hopeful pupil.

"To—to thrash him!" said the Head. "Then Mr. Jolliffe's complaint is well-founded, that you made a disturbance in his house?"

"Certainly not, sir! I had no intention what-evah of makin' a disturbance. If Tickey Tapp had not acted like a beast I should have thwashed him and come away without makin' the slightest disturbance. But all the wottahs set on me, and thwew me into the trowth, and uttahly wuined my clobber—I mean my clothes!"

"Never mind that, D'Arcy. It appears that you went to this public-house to assault a bad character there."

"That—that isn't exactly how I looked at it," said Arthur Augustus, rather dismayed at the way the Head had put it. "I was goin' to thwash the wascal, sir; and if you knew the weason, I am quite sure you would approve of it."

"Very well; tell me the reason."

"I was wresolved to stop his twicks."

"His tricks! What tricks?"

"Gettin' silly youngstahs to play cards with him, and gettin' them into twouble," said Arthur Augustus. "We all agweed to do it, sir. We collahed the wascal on the moor last week, and we ducked him, and warned him to cleah out."

"Bless my soul!"

"I told him quite plainly that, if he evah came neah the school again, he would be thwashed. Now he has come back, so I went down to the Gween Man to thwash him."

The Head and the two masters looked at Arthur Augustus in silence. It was evident that the junior was telling the truth. It was equally evident that he fully expected the masters to approve of the line he had taken.

"And what right have you, D'Arcy, to take the law into your own hands in this manner?" said the Head at last.

"It weally seemed the only thin' to be done, sir."

"Am I to understand, D'Arcy, that this man Tapp has dealings with some boy belonging to

this school, and that this was the reason of your interference?"

"Of course, sir. Othahwise I should nevah have taken any notice of the fellow."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"I trust you are satisfied, sir? You see, that man is a dangewous wascal, and he might be the wuin of a silly youngstah who got into his clutches," said Arthur Augustus, speaking as if he were seventy years old at least. "I wegarded it as my duty to nip it in the bud."

"I believe you, D'Arcy."

"Thank you, sir! I expect you to accept my word, of course."

The Head coughed.

"But you have acted in a foolish, hot-headed, and reckless manner, with a complete disregard of the rules of the school—"

"Oh dear!"

"And I require you to give me at once the name of the boy who has been dealing with this man Tapp."

"Weally, Dr. Holmes—"

"I am quite prepared to believe that you acted in a quixotic manner in the interests of one of your schoolfellows, D'Arcy. But had you proof that you were not mistaken—that you had not, in short, discovered a mare's-nest?"

"I could hardly be mistaken, sir, when I found them togethah, playin' cards—"

"That certainly is proof positive. You found them playing cards—this man Tapp and a St. Jim's boy?"

"Yaas, sir!"

"When was that?"

"Last Wednesday, sir!"

"Who was the boy?"

"It is quite imposs, sir, for me to give you the chap's name."

"D'Arcy!"

"It would be sneakin', sir. And, besides, I have given him my word not to say anythin' about it."

There was a long silence. The Head's hand strayed towards his cane, but he withdrew it again.

Mr. Lathom coughed. Mr. Railton turned to the window, perhaps to hide a smile. Arthur Augustus stood, with his head erect, fearless of consequences. Dr. Holmes broke the silence.

"Very well, D'Arcy. You should not have made such a promise; but, since you have made it, I will not question you further upon that subject."

"Thank you, sir! I was sure you would look at it like that."

The Head coughed again. He hardly knew whether to smile or to give Arthur Augustus D'Arcy the licking of his life. Fortunately he smiled.

"You will take a thousand lines, D'Arcy, and stay in for the next two half-holidays as a punishment for your lawless conduct!"

"Oh deah!"

"But for my faith in your character, D'Arcy, I should hesitate to believe the extraordinary explanation you have given me. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!" And Arthur Augustus quitted the study.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mystery of George Gore!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY rejoined his chums, who were waiting anxiously in the passage.

They greeted him with a volley of questions.

(Continued on the next page.)

LAUGH THESE OFF!



—with Monty Lowther.

Hallo, Everybody!

I hear a farmer wounded a bird-imitator in Rylcombe Woods by mistake. That should give him something to owl about.

Skimpole says he was told it is bad luck to shoot a rhinoceros when you can see a mole on its nose. If it's that close I should say it would be bad luck not to.

A new disease is called pneumorheumatopulvariochosis. If you can pronounce that lot, you haven't got it!

News: The Head's gardener has won three hedge-trimming contests this year. By shear merit. Ow!

A heavy-weight champion has turned to writing songs. His timing is perfect, and his words do not lack punch.

In reply to a correspondent, a joint account is what is owing to the butcher.

Report has it that 7,000 people in Wayland have never had a telephone conversation. All they can do is just keep on dialling until they do get the right number.

"Crashproof Helmet for Motoring." Something new in top gear.

From the Wayland Assizes:

"Tell me," said the judge, "just how did you manage to break open the treble safety lock?"

"It would be no use my telling your worship," said the accused, "you would never manage it. It takes years of practice."

"Ear trouble easily cured," runs an advert. I know. Just turn the knob and try a different station.

A caterpillar has sixteen legs and twelve eyes, we read. If one could be grown big enough, I imagine it would make a perfect centre-forward.

Herries tells me he considers himself a finished musician. Quite!

"Tell your fortune, sir; five shillings," said a gypsy, as Tom Merry was walking round the Rylcombe Fair. "Correct," replied Tom Merry, with a grin.

I'll be here next week, chaps.

"Sacked?"

"Licked?"

"What's happened?"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "The Head is an old sport. Howevah, he has given me a thousand lines, and gated me for two half-holidays. I don't exactly know why, but I didn't argue the point with him."

"Ha, ha, ha! Not really?"

"No, deah boys; he did not look inclined to weason it out. Pewwaps I am vewy well out of the scwape, aftah all."

"Perhaps you are," said Talbot, laughing. "We can whack out the lines."

"Yes; that will only be a hundred each, or so," said Blake. "Gussy's got off lighter than he deserved—"

"And you didn't let slip anything about Gore?" asked Talbot.

"Of course not, you duffah. I simply explained that I thwashed Tickey Tapp for gettin' a St. Jim's chap to gamble with him. The Head was entitled to know that. But I wefused to mention names, and he let the mattah dwop."

"There'll be an investigation," said Tom Merry uneasily. "Now they know that, they'll be on the track."

"That's all wight. Gore has only got to hold his tongue and keep cleah of such things in the futuah."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And to-morrow, deah boys, we'll go and look for Tickey Tapp again—"

"What?"

"And if he's still here, we'll wag him," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"So you haven't had enough?" growled Herries.

"Not until that wascal is dwiven away," said Arthur Augustus. "I am convinced that Gore's wemarkable conduct to-day is due to him. Gore is a wottah; but in this mattah we are standin' up for him."

"You can leave Tickey Tapp to me," said Talbot quietly. "I've only got to speak to him, and he'll go."

"Eh?"

The juniors regarded Talbot in astonishment. The face of the Shell fellow flushed under their gaze.

"I'm not talking out of my hat," he said. "I can do it, and I will do it. You remember I told you"—Talbot's flush deepened—"in the old days when they called me the Toff—when I was what I'd like to forget now—I knew that man. I knew enough about him to send him to prison for the next few years, and he knows it."

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry.

"I shall see him to-morrow and warn him to go," said Talbot. "If he does not go I shall see that the police remove him. In either case, he won't trouble us any more."

Tom Merry slapped his chum on the shoulder.

"Ripping! That will settle Tickey Tapp!"

"Yaas, wathah! In the cires, I am willin' to leave it to Talbot."

"We'll jolly well scrag you if you don't!" growled Blake.

"I should wefuse to be scwagged, Blake."

"Oh, come and have tea, and dry up!" said Blake. "I've a jolly good mind to bump you bald-headed for nearly getting sacked and worryng your old pals till their hair turns grey. Shut up, and come and have tea!"

And the juniors proceeded to Study No. 6, greatly relieved by the way the matter had turned

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out. It was quite a merry tea-party, and there was a buzz of cheerful voices in the study when Gore's pale and harassed face looked in.

"Come in, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

Gore shook his head.

"I haven't come to tea. Is it all right?"

"Wight as wain!"

"You—you didn't let my name slip?" faltered Gore.

"Wats! Of course not. But the Head knows that Tickey Tapp has been gamblin' with a St. Jim's junior. You will have to be awfully decent aftah this, Gore. I hope it will not be too great a stwain on you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, Gore," said Tom Merry. "You've only got to keep clear of the fellow and nothing can come out."

"Keep clear of him," muttered Gore, with a ghastly look—"keep clear of him!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet. He drew Gore into the study, and closed the door.

"Look here," said Tom. "You've got to keep clear of him or you're a goner. Rallion will be watching like a cat after this. Why can't you keep clear of him?"

Gore did not reply.

"Does this mean that you owe him money?"

No answer.

"If it does," said Tom Merry, "you can rely on us. We've taken a hand in this without you asking us, and it's up to us to see you through. If you owe the man money, we'll raise it somehow, and you can get rid of him. Now, then—"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite approve."

"Is that it, Gore?" demanded Blake.

"No."

"Then what is it?"

"Nothing."

Gore opened the door and left the study without another word.

The chums looked at one another uncomfortably.

"Blessed if I don't think the chap's mad," said Blake uneasily. "He can't be in his right senses to look like that. He gives me the creeps."

The juniors finished their tea cheerfully. After tea Talbot went to his own study. Skimpole was there, deeply immersed in a learned volume on the subject of entomology—which was the latest "ology" the brainy man of the Shell had taken up.

"Seen Gore?" asked Talbot.

Skimpole blinked up over his glasses.

"Yes. He was very rude to me," he remarked.

"I do not understand Gore at all lately, Talbot. His manners are dreadful. Do you know, I should almost think that Gore has something on his mind."

Talbot smiled slightly. That fact, which was beginning to be remarked upon by the whole House, was dawning upon Skimpole's mighty brain at last.

Talbot sat down to his preparation and waited for Gore to come in. But Gore did not appear; neither was he in the Common-room when Talbot went downstairs. He did not appear till bedtime, when he came in from the dusky quadrangle, and went directly to his bed without a word to anyone.

Talbot gave him an anxious look in the dormitory, but Gore did not notice it. He was still very pale, and his eyes were feverish. All the Shell fellows were commenting on it—his fainting fit of the afternoon had not been forgotten.



Arthur Augustus sat up in the flowing trough, spluttering and gasping. "Gwoogh!" he gasped. Tickey Tapp & Co. howled with laughter. "Haw, haw, haw!" Gussy's self-imposed task of giving Tapp a fearful thrashing had not met with much success!

The school doctor had called to see Gore after lessons, but it appeared that he was not ill. What was the matter with him was a mystery; but it was becoming a subject for general remark. The juniors were beginning to think that George Gore was going "off his rocker," as they expressed it.

Gore had turned in, in silence. His eyes seemed to hold a strange, intent suspiciousness. If he caught an eye turned upon him, he scowled savagely and threateningly.

Monty Lowther happened to rest his hand upon the chair where George Gore's jacket was, folded, for a moment. There was a sudden exclamation from Gore.

"Let that jacket alone!"

Lowther spun round in astonishment.

"Eh? What's the row?"

"Don't touch my jacket, hang you!" shouted Gore, sitting up in bed. "Let it alone!"

Lowther stared at him and burst into a chuckle.

"I'm not after your smokes, Gore, old chap," he said. "I wouldn't touch 'em with a barge-pole! Gentlemen, anybody want a smoke before going to bed?" added Lowther, taking up Gore's jacket and holding it aloft.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore made a single bound from the bed, clutched the jacket from Lowther with one hand, and dealt him a savage blow with the other.

The blow was so unexpected that it stretched Lowther on the floor of the dormitory. He gave a yell of surprise and rage.

"Why, you cad—"

"Let my things alone!" hissed Gore.

Lowther sprang up furiously. He made a

jump at Gore, and the next moment they were hitting out furiously.

"Cave!" sang out Clifton Dane.

Kildare of the Sixth came into the dormitory to see lights out.

"What's the row? Stop it, you young sweeps!" exclaimed Kildare angrily. "Take a hundred lines each!"

The two combatants separated, panting.

"All serene, your highness!" said Lowther breathlessly.

"Get into bed—sharp!" said Kildare.

The Shell fellows turned in, and Kildare put the light out and left the dormitory.

The juniors dropped into slumber one by one, but there was one fellow who did not sleep. Through the long, weary hours of the night, George Gore's sleepless, burning eyes looked dully into the darkness.

CHAPTER 8.

Under a Suspicion!

GEORGE GORE turned up at classes as usual the next day.

Some of the fellows had expected that he would be sent to the sanatorium. It was plain to all eyes that he was not himself; though what could be the matter with him was a puzzle. He was not ill in body—Dr. Short had found nothing the matter with him. He seemed in a run-down state, that was all.

During the morning Mr. Linton glanced several times at Gore a little oddly, but spared him the Form work. Gore did scarcely anything all that day. It was a relief he was

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thankful for, for he could not put his mind to lessons.

* After morning lessons, when the Shell fellows were dismissed, Mr. Linton made a sign to Gore to remain behind when the rest of the Form filed out. Gore stopped at the Form-master's desk sullenly.

"I hope you are feeling better to-day, Gore," said Mr. Linton, in a tone of unaccustomed kindness.

"I'm all right, sir."

"Now, I'm going to speak plainly to you, Gore," said Mr. Linton. "Have you anything weighing on your mind?"

"What could I have, sir?" said Gore.

"I do not quite see, but I am aware that a Form-master does not see everything," replied Mr. Linton. "I should like my boys to regard me as a friend as well as a master. You have perhaps some little money troubles. I advanced you fifteen shillings last week—"

"I—I shall have that next Saturday, sir."

"That is of little moment, Gore. You may have contracted some small debt carelessly and thoughtlessly. It would be foolish to do so, but it is not a crime. If that is the case, tell me the whole matter, and we will see what can be done."

Gore looked at Mr. Linton in surprise. He had never expected kindness from the somewhat cold and severe master of the Shell.

"You are very kind, sir," the junior faltered.

"I—I'd tell you at once, sir, but it's all right—I don't want money."

"Very well. It is not that. Now, Gore, I will mention another matter. It appears that a boy in this school, at present unknown, has had dealings with a certain rascally sharper named Tapp—"

Gore set his teeth hard together.

"The Housemaster has acquainted all the masters and prefects with the matter, in the hope of discovering the foolish and reckless lad. If you are the guilty party, I am quite prepared to believe that you have repented, and I can answer for it that the Head would take a lenient view, upon the representations I should make to him. I ask you to answer me frankly, Gore, for your own peace of mind."

"I've nothing to tell you, sir."

"To be quite plain, are you the boy who is known to have had dealings with this man Tapp?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Linton eyed him narrowly. Gore was looking pale and harassed, but he had been looking like that for days past, especially since the fainting scene in the Form-room the previous afternoon.

"Very well," said Mr. Linton. "I must accept your assurance, Gore. I must attribute your very peculiar conduct to your personal health, I suppose. You are certainly not in a fit state to attend to your lessons. If you like, it could be arranged for you to go home for a few days for a change."

"I should like that, sir," said Gore, brightening up a little.

"Very well, I will speak to the Head, and you may take the afternoon train."

Gore started.

"This afternoon? Oh, no!"

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"What do you mean? You have said that you wished to go."

"I—I thought you meant to-morrow, sir," stammered Gore.

"You would rather wait till to-morrow?" said the Form-master, puzzled. "I understand you less than ever, Gore. You are certainly a very strange boy."

"I—I'd rather not go—now I think of it," said Gore, his face flushing. "My—my pater doesn't care much about me at home, and—and he won't be very glad to see me in the middle of a term. I—I'd rather not go, thank you, sir!"

"Very well, Gore," said Mr. Linton.

And Gore left the Form-room.

Gore's last words concerning his pater had moved the Form-master. He had seen Mr. Gore, and he understood that the junior might not be keen to face that exceedingly grim and hard-fisted old gentleman, if he could help it.

Mr. Gore was a devoted believer in the ancient maxim about sparing the rod. Mr. Gore had never run any risks of spoiling his child by sparing the rod—rather the reverse. It was just possible that some of George Gore's unpleasant traits were due to the grim severity of his father.

Mr. Linton remained for some time in thought. He could not make out Gore's strange conduct, but he resolved to keep a very keen eye on the junior.

Gore "mooched" off by himself when he escaped from the Form-room. He was not seen again till dinner-time, and immediately after dinner he disappeared once more. He had fallen into the habit of taking solitary walks, apparently brooding over his secret trouble, whatever it was.

He came in to afternoon classes a minute or two after the rest, and took his place without any remark from Mr. Linton on his unpunctuality. He was spared lessons for the most part, the Form-master showing him every consideration. The Shell fellows were surprised at seeing Mr. Linton in this new light. They had never supposed that there were kindly human feelings under that cold and severe exterior.

During the afternoon the Head came in for a few minutes to speak to Mr. Linton.

Several of the fellows who were near Gore noticed that his face became white, and that a haunted look came into his eyes. He sat with his eyes fixed upon the Head, with terror in his look, as the old gentleman chatted with the Form-master. Tom Merry tapped him on the arm.

"What is the matter, Gore?" he whispered. "Buck up, for goodness' sake! The Head will spot you!"

Gore looked at him stupidly, and made a visible effort to pull himself together.

He gave almost a deep sigh of relief when the Head left the Form-room. The Terrible Three exchanged glances. Why had the sight of Dr. Holmes filled Gore with that sudden, unmistakable fear? The juniors realised that Gore was in deeper waters than they had dreamed, though the mystery baffled them.

Lessons ended at last, and Gore went to his study. Talbot paused in the passage to speak to the Terrible Three.

"Will you fellows ask Skimpy something about entomology?" he asked.

"What the dickens for?" demanded Lowther. "If we start him, he'll never stop."



Sweden commemorates the 50th anniversary of the U.P.U.'s foundation. Note the old-time postman on his horse, holding post-horn.

this century, has it ever struck you as strange that the halfpennies have always been green, the pennies red, and the twopence-halfpennies blue? There's a very good reason—the Universal Postal Union, or, as it's known more briefly to stamp-collectors—the U.P.U.

EXPENSIVE POSTAGE.

For centuries before the Union was founded (1874), letters were sent, of course, from one country to another. But, at best, even at the beginning of the last century, this was a very risky business. It certainly was jolly expensive.

At that time, if you were lucky, you might be able to send a letter to Belgrade, the capital of present-day Jugo Slavia, for what was then considered as low as five shillings. On the other hand, if the postal authorities of the countries through which your letter passed took it into their heads to carry it by roundabout routes, the charge could be much more.

By the 1860's, when most countries were beginning to get decently organised postal systems within their borders, this absurd state of affairs proved very irksome, and countries' postmasters began to put their heads together to decide on a better working system.

Finally, thanks to the untiring efforts of Dr. von Stephen, the German postmaster, postal representatives of twenty-two principal European and American states met at a congress in Berne, in September, 1874. At this congress, at which the Universal Postal Union was founded, postal history was made.

It was agreed that uniform charges should be made on all letters, postcards, and printed papers passing through the post, and, to help postal workers the world over to see at a glance that an item of mail was correctly stamped, special colours were agreed upon.

Talbot smiled.

"I want to keep him out of the study for a bit. I'm going to speak to Gore."

"Oh, all serene!"

"Something ought to be done for that chap," said Tom Merry. "I can't say I like him very much, personally, but he's in a rotten state. I can't help thinking that he's done something awfully serious. He was like a sheet when the Head came in."

"I noticed it," said Talbot quietly.

"We've asked him, and offered to help him out," said Manners. "He won't say a word. I'd be glad to lend a hand if we could

Ever Heard of— THE U.P.U.?

Perhaps you haven't, but the whole world has to thank the Universal Postal Union for a uniform postage system.

LOOKING back at our various stamps issued since the beginning of

Thus stamps to the nominal value of five centimes should be green, those of ten centimes, red, those of twenty-five centimes, blue. The effect of this was that postcards for circulation within, say, Britain, France, and Germany, all bore green stamps, letters red stamps, while letters passing between those countries all had blue stamps affixed to them.

WORLD-WIDE SUPPORT.

For many years most of the members of the U.P.U. kept strictly to this colour agreement; but unfortunately, the Great War, with all its resulting increase in transport and other costs, tended to upset this arrangement. Of latter years, however, there has been a gradual return to the old order of things.

Every year since 1874 fresh countries and states have joined the U.P.U., until to-day there is scarcely a single stamp-issuing part of the world which is not represented. Latakia, in Syria, which is a French mandate, and the Maldive Islands, close to Ceylon, are the only absentees. Which means that over two thousand million people have indirectly to thank Dr. von Stephen for founding the U.P.U.

In 1924, when the fiftieth anniversary of the U.P.U.'s birth was celebrated, Germany honoured her pioneer postmaster by the issue of four stamps bearing his portrait.

Since 1874 eighteen major congresses and conferences have been held by the members of the U.P.U. To mark the eighth congress, which was held in Stockholm in 1924, Sweden issued a series of handsome stamps. When London was the rendezvous of the congress members in 1929, you'll remember that we followed Sweden's example, the £1 value being one of the loveliest British stamps ever issued.



Germany honoured Dr. von Stephen, founder of the U.P.U., by issuing stamps bearing his portrait.

do something. Blessed if I don't believe his brain's turning!"

"I should not be surprised if it were," said Talbot. "But he's not a bad chap, in the main, and I want to see him through, if it can be done. Keep Skimpole on entomology for a bit."

"Right-ho!"

During the next half-hour Skimpole of the Shell had the time of his life. Three fellows, who had never betrayed the slightest interest before in his scientific pursuits, listened to Skimpole on entomology with grave and devoted attention, hanging on the words that flowed polysyllabically from Skimpole's learned lips.

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CHAPTER 9.

Gore's Secret!

TALBOT entered the study, and closed the door behind him.

Gore was seated—or, rather, huddled—in the armchair, gazing before him dully and unseeing. He glanced at Talbot, as he came in, without interest.

Talbot sat on the corner of the table, and regarded him. Gore's look would have touched a harder heart than Talbot's. And Talbot had an understanding of the wretched boy which his chums could not be expected to have. The Toff, trained up from early youth among criminals, a crackman himself until the awakening came in his life, was not likely to be hard in his judgment upon anybody.

Since the day when the light had come to him, when he had thrown his old life behind for ever, the Toff had been as straight as a die. The past seemed to him like some black and evil dream. But it had left him with a sympathy and understanding for weaker natures.

"Gore, old chap"—Talbot's voice was very quiet, almost affectionate—"Gore, this won't do. Won't you let me help you out?"

"You can't help me out," said Gore dully.

"This can't go on," said Talbot. "You're getting the attention of the whole House fixed on you. Even some of the New House chaps have noticed it."

Gore gave a hard laugh.

"I know. It's my luck. I meant to keep up a good face on it—not to show a sign. And I couldn't. I can see now that the game's up. Everybody's wondering what's the matter with me. When it's found out they'll think of me at once. They're sure to."

"When what's found out?"

"I dare say you'll know soon enough," groaned Gore, letting his face fall into his hands.

"I think I can help you," said Talbot.

"You can't! Nobody can help me!"

"I'll tell you something, Gore. Of course, I can guess all this is in connection with that scoundrel Tickey Tapp."

"I dare say the whole House knows that, or guesses it," said Gore bitterly. "Oh, what a fool I've been!"

"You know something about my past, Gore—all the fellows do," went on Talbot quietly.

"You know that I was brought up among a gang of thieves, and never chucked it over till I came to this school. That I should be hunted now, if I had not been granted the King's Pardon. You know that, Gore."

"I know," said Gore. "You're different from me. You never had a chance, and you made one for yourself. I've had every chance, and I've ended where you began."

"So bad as that?" said Talbot.

"Yes!" said Gore desperately. "So bad as that. I know you'd help me, if you could, Talbot, though deuce knows why! We've never been specially friendly. Still, I never was down on you as some of the chaps were at first."

"And I haven't forgotten that, Gore. I want to help you. And I think I can. I was going to tell you that in the den where I used to meet the gang Tickey Tapp used to come sometimes. I knew him then, a little."

"You knew him?"

"Yes. And I know enough about him to send him to prison, if I choose. Last week I met him

near the school, and knew what his game was here. I warned him, that he had to go, or else I would see that the law had its due. He went; but he has come back. I am going to see him again to-day, and finish with him. Now, I've guessed what's the matter, Gore. You lost your money to him, the other day—"

"Yes."

"And gave him IOU's for more?"

Gore nodded.

"I've been thinking it out," said Talbot, "and I concluded that it was that. You are afraid of the use he may make of your paper. Well, I can get it back for you. No need for you to pay him what he's swindled you out of. A good sum, I dare say. I can make him give me your paper and leave this neighbourhood for good."

"You can do that?"

"Yes; quite easily. You have only to give me a description of the paper, and I will see that he hands it over. He will choose that or arrest. And I know him well enough to know which he will choose," said Talbot. "You needn't have any scruples about not paying him. He has cheated you."

"Well, he couldn't have," said Gore. "You see, I didn't wholly trust him, and I took my own cards—a new pack, not marked, you know."

Talbot laughed.

"Poor old chap! You're not quite up to the form of a rascal like that. Before the cards had been in his hands ten minutes he had marked all the court cards."

"How did he do that?"

"With his thumbnail. It's an old trick."

"I—I never thought of anything like that. I—I never heard of such a thing. How do you know—"

"I know a good many things, Gore, that you're jolly lucky not to know," said the Toff quietly. "As for his special tricks with cards, I've caught Tickey Tapp at it when I've played with him myself, in the old days."

"The villain!" said Gore. "Oh, the awful rascal! He—he made out that I was swindling him, because I hadn't the money to pay on my paper. And—and I suppose he was swindling me all the time."

"He plays to win," said Talbot. "That's his business. And he could hardly live upon losses, could he? You needn't pay him a cent. Let him keep the cash he got out of you, if you like. But if you paid him anything you would be an idiot. Leave it to me to get the paper back and see you clear. And I guarantee that you will never see the rotter again. He'll go after I've talked to him."

Gore groaned.

"Doesn't that see you clear?" exclaimed Talbot.

"No."

"But—but why?"

"I've got to see him to-day, to take him fifteen pounds—"

"Where?"

"At the old hut on the moor, at six."

"I'll go instead of you, Gore," said Talbot, "and I promise you that I will bring your paper back, and that Tickey Tapp will never trouble you again. Surely that will see you clear?"

"It's too late."

"I don't catch on. If you mean you haven't the money, that doesn't matter. There's no money needed."

"I've got the money," faltered Gore.

"You've got fifteen pounds?"

"Yes," groaned Gore.

Talbot drew a deep breath. He understood it all at last. It was clear to him now, the position in which the wretched junior was placed.

"The money isn't your own, then, Gore?"

Gore nodded wretchedly.

"Then thank goodness I've spoken to you in time!" said Talbot fervently. "You were mad to take it, Gore. But you've been half out of your senses, and if you put it back again you needn't reproach yourself too much. Put it back at once where you took it from."

"I can't."

"Oh, yes, you can! It can't have been missed yet, or there would have been a row about it. It's not been missed."

"Not yet," said Gore. "Oh, I've been in fear of it every hour—every minute. When the Head came into the Form-room I thought—"

He shuddered.

"I understand," said Talbot, gently enough.

"I've hidden it a lot of times," said Gore wretchedly, "stuck it into corners for safety, and then it haunted me. I—I was afraid somebody might find it, and then I shouldn't have the money to pay Tickey Tapp, after making myself a thief to get it. So I always went and fetched it again. I've got it in my pocket now. Eighteen pounds! It's more than I needed, but I just grabbed it, you know. He—he said—Tickey Tapp, you know—he said I could get the money somehow. He said there were a lot of fellows here with money, and I could—"

"The villain!" said Talbot.

"But—but I never meant to—I swear I didn't! I couldn't! I'm not a thief!" said Gore, in a husky whisper. "I'm not. I never meant to be. But there was the money under my very eyes, all of a sudden. I—I think I must have gone dotty for a minute. I whipped away with it, and after that it was too late. But I swear that I never really meant to steal!"

"Of course you didn't!" said Talbot, touched by the misery and remorse in the unhappy boy's face. "I know how you feel, Gore, because I've been through it. But all you've got to do is to put it back."

"I can't, I tell you."

"Why not?"

"It can't be put back. It's impossible!"

CHAPTER 10.

Too Late!

THERE was a long silence in the study.

Gore's face had fallen into his hands. If ever a foolish transgressor repented of his wrongdoing, George Gore repented now. The suffering he had gone through for the past few days had been a punishment as great as his crime. And now that help had come—when he was offered a way out—it was too late.

Talbot's face was very grave now. He had undertaken to help the wretched junior, and he realised, for the first time, the extent of his self-imposed task. But he would not give up.

"Tell me all about it, Gore," he said at last. "You're not in a state to think it out. You're upset—jolly near in a fever. I dare say I could manage it for you. I'd do anything I could."

"It can't be done."

"Whose is the money?"

"The Head's. I got it last Thursday. It's



"Hey, Joe, come and hold your finger on this knot for me!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Clayton, Brookside Farm, Chesterfield Road, Brimington, Derbyshire.

nearly driven me mad since!" said Gore hoarsely. "I'd have made up my mind to chance it with Tickey Tapp if I could have put the money back, but I couldn't."

"Where did you get it, then?"

"From the safe."

Talbot started.

"You must be dreaming, Gore. You could not have opened the safe?"

"Of course I couldn't," said Gore. "It was open. Don't you remember last Thursday—I cheeked Linton, and he sent me with a note to the Head for a licking? I—I came back and apologised to Linton, and nobody knew I'd been to the Head's study at all."

"I remember," said Talbot. "Do you mean to say that you did go to his study, after all?"

"Yes. I lied," said Gore, with desperate frankness. "Lies come pretty easy when a fellow's done wrong. I had been in the study. The Head wasn't there. He must have opened his safe to put something in, then I suppose he was called suddenly out of the study. Anyway, he wasn't there, and the safe door was unlocked. It was rotten careless of him! He had no right to be careless like that!" muttered Gore, with a miserable attempt at self-justification. "He'd no right to tempt a chap—"

He broke off again.

"But it's no good talking. I oughtn't to have touched the safe. I shouldn't have thought of doing it, you know; only just then, while I was waiting and the Head never came back, it came into my mind what Tickey Tapp had said; and then he was going to show my paper to the Head if I didn't pay up, and get me sacked out of revenge, the beast! I—I thought there was lots of money in the safe. I just had a look. I—I think I was mad then. I—I saw bundles of currency notes. I—I— Gore stammered incoherently. "Oh, what a fool I was—what a fool! But I was nearly mad with fear of what that villain would do if I didn't pay him! I collared the notes and cleared out!"

Talbot was silent.

"Then I seemed to get calm," said Gore. "I don't know how—a sort of coolness. I felt that I was such a villain, it didn't matter any more. I went into the quad for a bit, and then came back and buttered up Linton, and nobody knew I'd been in the Head's study at all. I only had to keep a good face on it, and I thought I was safe enough. But I couldn't keep a good face on it, you know. It's nearly driven me mad. All the fellows have noticed there's something up with me. I can't help it!"

"You see, I—I'm not really a thief. I can't stand it. Every time a chap looks at me, I think

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he's spotted me. I haven't been able to sleep at night. If I could have put it back, I'd have done it and chanced it; but, you see, I couldn't. I can't open the safe. The Head wouldn't be likely to leave it open another time, you know. I—I've sneaked into his study two or three times to see if—he had, but it was no go. Of course he wouldn't!"

Talbot's face was grim. His heart ached for the wretched junior. He understood the sufferings that had followed that moment of madness.

The matter was worse than he had dreamed. The junior had taken money that did not belong to him under the threats of the cardsharp, and he had taken it from a place where it could not be returned. He had repented, but his repentance came too late—not because he had kept or used the stolen money, but simply because the iron door of the safe barred the way.

"The Head hasn't missed it yet," went on Gore huskily, "but it may come any day! When he does, of course, there'll be a row, and every fellow in the House will guess what's the matter with me. They'll know. I'm not a criminal. I can't keep it up. If I'd been able to put a good face on it, I might have been safe enough. But I couldn't. I've felt as if my brain would turn thinking of it. That's why I went off into a faint yesterday. I'm not the fainting sort—you know that—but it's driven me wild!"

Talbot pressed his hand to his brow.

What could be done?

There seemed no way out. Even the Toff, cool and clear-headed and resourceful, was beaten.

Gore looked at him, with a haggard face. He read the hopeless perplexity in Talbot's look.

"You can't help me," he said. "I told you you couldn't. It wasn't any good telling you about it, though it does make me feel easier to tell somebody. I wonder the Head hasn't missed the money. I suppose he has set it aside for some account, and it's not due yet or something. But he may miss it any day. And I can't put it back—"

He broke off, with a groan.

"I knew you couldn't help me. I'm past help; I told you that when I spoke to you before! It must come out, and they'll know it was me! And I daren't go home; my father's as hard as iron. If I disgraced him, he wouldn't take me in, very likely. I shall have to run away. I wish I'd gone before. I'd better go before it comes out. Don't you think so?"

Talbot shook his head.

"What's the good of staying, to be arrested, perhaps?" said Gore. "I tell you they'll know it was me. Don't you think they will?"

"Well, yes. You've given yourself away plainly enough," said Talbot. "Besides, they might suspect somebody else, and then I think you'd own up."

"I—I thought of that, too," said Gore miserably. "I thought they might suspect you, Talbot."

"I?" exclaimed Talbot, with a start.

"Because you can open safes, you know, and all that. But if you'd been suspected, I would have owned up. I—I think I would."

Talbot looked at him very curiously.

"This will want thinking out, Gore," he said abruptly. "I'll get off now and see Tickey Tapp and settle with him, or I shall miss him; the time's getting on. I'll see you when I come back."

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"You can't help me."

"I'm going to try," Talbot slipped from the table. "Wait till I come back."

"Hold on!" said Gore hurriedly. "I—I say, you won't say a word? I've trusted you; you made me tell you—"

"Of course I shan't say a word."

"You promise? I know you'll keep your word."

"You could trust me without that, Gore; but I promise."

"You see, I mightn't be suspected, after all; or—or the Head may leave the safe open one day, and I might have a chance of putting it back—you never know."

"No one shall know anything from me, Gore."

Gore nodded; he knew that Talbot's word was sacred.

"Keep your pecker up!" said Talbot. "You'll be rid of Tickey Tapp, anyway, and have your paper back. And I'll find a way out for you—somehow."

Talbot quitted the study, leaving a ray of hope in the heart of the wretched Gore. The Toff hurried down the stairs. The Terrible Three met him in the Hall.

"Well?"

"I've got to go out," said Talbot. "You fellows can come if you like. I'm going to finish with Tickey Tapp."

"Hear, hear!"

The chums hurried for the bicycles, and in a few minutes they were speeding away to the moor to keep the appointment Tickey Tapp had made with Gore of the Shell.



After a couple of minutes a powerful right-hander from T he lay gasping. "That's enough," said Talbot. "Come

CHAPTER 11.

The Only Way!

TICKEY TAPP was smoking a cigarette in the old shepherd's hut on the moor, and waiting.

It was close on six, the hour of his appointment. At that hour George Gore was to arrive with fifteen pounds for the cardsharp, or take the consequences.

Tickey Tapp had very little doubt that his victim would bring the money.

There was a clattering of bicycles outside the old hut, and Tickey Tapp started to his feet.

Four juniors appeared in the doorway.

Tickey Tapp changed colour a little as he saw Talbot.

"Toff—you!" he ejaculated.

"Yes," said Talbot.

"Quite a 'appy meetin'," said Tickey Tapp, recovering himself a little. "We'll 'ave a talk over old times, and your friends can 'ear!"

"I haven't come to talk to you," said Talbot. "I've come here instead of Gore."

Tickey Tapp looked unpleasant.

"So the young 'ound 'as told you about it?"

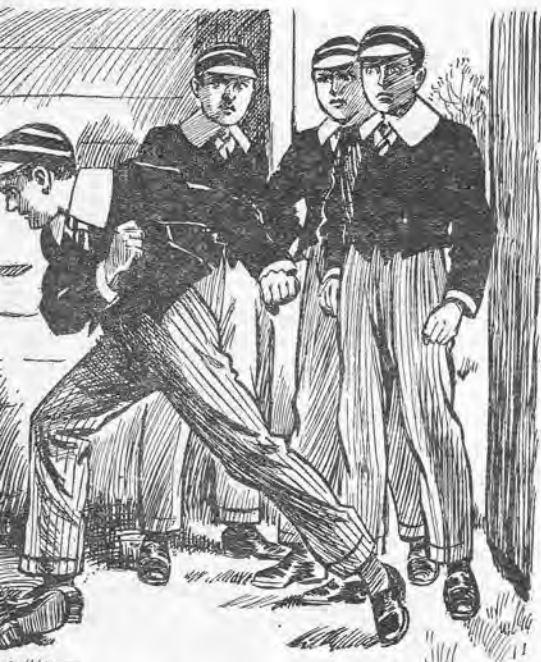
"Yes, I made him."

"E'll be sorry for it, Toff."

"He will not be sorry for it," said Talbot.

"You swindled him the other day of all his money, and made him sign IO U's. You've threatened to send them to Dr. Holmes, and get him expelled from the school unless he pays you fifteen pounds to-day."

The Terrible Three understood.



hurlled Tickey Tapp into the corner of the hut, where "The beast!" panted Tom. "He isn't half licked yet!"

"So that was what was the matter with Gore!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Poor beast!" said Manners. "Where was he to get fifteen pounds from?"

"This scoundrel advised him to steal it," said Talbot.

"The bound!"

"No wonder Gore has been looking pretty sick," said Monty Lowther. "We really ought to have guessed it was something of the kind."

"Luckily we know now," said Talbot. "Tickey Tapp, I've come here for those papers Gore gave you."

"Got the money?" sneered Tickey Tapp.

"Not a farthing!"

"Then you don't 'andle my property. Let me pass!"

The Terrible Three drew together in the doorway. Tickey Tapp was not to pass just yet. They had not done with him.

"You'll hand me those papers, and you'll get out of this neighbourhood to-night, Tickey Tapp," said Talbot calmly.

"And if I don't?"

"If you don't we'll collar you now, and march you straight to the police station, where I shall lodge information against you."

The cardsharp gritted his teeth.

"And that's my old pal the Toff!" he said.

"That's the Toff, the prince of crackmen—the young thief who was cracking cribs for thousands, while I was making a pound at a time with the cards!"

Tom Merry clenched his hands. Talbot made him a sign to keep back.

"Are you giving me those papers, Tickey Tapp?" he asked.

Tickey Tapp spat out an oath.

"You know I've got to. You know you've got me by the short hairs. But if my chance comes some day, I'll make you sorry for this, Toff!"

"Give me the papers!"

Tickey Tapp sullenly produced the IO U's and handed them over.

Talbot examined them carefully. He was on his guard against trickery. He handed them to the Terrible Three to make sure.

"That's Gore's fist, right enough," said Tom Merry. "No mistake about that."

Talbot nodded, took the two papers again, and slipped them into his pocket.

"Gore would like to destroy these with his own hands," he remarked. "It would make him feel safer. Tickey Tapp, you're leaving Rylcombe by train this evening. You understand?"

"I know what I've got to do," said Tickey Tapp; "but I'll remember this, Toff. You got the King's Pardon, did you? Yes, that was a move just like you, Toff—just like you in the old days. Always an artful cove, the Toff. There'll be a surprise at the school some day, wot?—when the Toff clears off with what's in the safe."

"You had better go," said Talbot.

"Yes, I'll go," said Tickey Tapp venomously.

"But I'll remember this when you've cleared out the old gent's safe and mizzled, Toff. I'll 'ave you then, like you've got me now, and I'll 'ave no mercy on you!"

"Will you go?"

"I'm going."

"You're not going till you've had a hiding, you rotten scoundrel!" said Tom Merry, his eyes blazing with rage. "Put up your hands, Tickey

Tapp! You fellows keep back! This isn't a rag; it's a fight, and I'm going to lick him."

Tom Merry rushed at the cardsharp, hitting out. Tickey Tapp put up his hands promptly enough, but they did not serve him very much. The sturdy junior, quivering with indignation and anger, was too much for the flabby rascal. Tickey Tapp was knocked right and left.

After a couple of minutes, a powerful right-hander hurled him into the corner of the hut, where he lay gasping.

"That's enough," said Talbot. "Come on!"

Tom Merry panted

"The beast! He isn't half licked yet. But let's get out of this—he makes me sick!"

Talbot gave the groaning rascal a last look.

"I shall make inquiries to-morrow, Tickey Tapp. If you are in Rylecombe, or anywhere in this district, you know what to expect."

Tickey Tapp replied with a curse.

Talbot looked over the Terrible Three from the hut. The four juniors remounted their bicycles and bumped over the rough track across the moor.

"That settles him, I think," said Monty Lowther. "He'll be gone to-morrow."

"I am quite sure of it," said Talbot.

"And Gore will be feeling a little easier in his mind," said Tom Merry. "It was his own fault, but a chap can't help feeling sorry for the poor beast. I'm glad it's all over."

Talbot did not reply.

The Terrible Three deemed the matter at an end now, and they were glad it was all over. But it was very far from being all over. Talbot could not tell even his best friends the terrible secret Gore had confided to him. If a way out was found, no one but Talbot would ever know; and if a way was not found, there was no need for Talbot to speak—all St. Jim's would know soon enough.

The juniors rode back to St. Jim's, three of them, at least, feeling quite satisfied in their minds. The Terrible Three wheeled their bicycles away, and Talbot hurried into the School House.

He found Gore huddled in the armchair, as he had left him. The amiable Skimpole was there, talking to Gore. He was trying to cheer him up a little. Gore did not hear a word.

"Skinmy, old man, will you do the shopping for tea?" asked Talbot.

"Certainly, my dear Talbot!"

"Here's a bob; put another to it—"

"Unfortunately, I gave my last coin to an unfortunate tramp this afternoon. The poor man complained dreadfully of thirst," said Skimpole. "I offered him a healthy draught of water, but he told me his medical man had specially ordered him never to touch water. So I gave him a shilling to purchase milk."

"Well, here's another," said Talbot. "Buzz off, there's a good chap!"

"Certainly! Do you know, Talbot, Levison declared that the poor man would not purchase milk, but some intoxicating liquor with my shilling. I thought that was very suspicious of Levison, don't you?"

"Awfully!" said Talbot. "Cut off!"

The good Skinmy cut off at last. Talbot closed the door after him. Gore gave a hopeless look.

Talbot placed the two IO U's in his hand.

"Tickey Tapp is gone," he said. "You'll hear nothing more of him. Better burn those papers at once."

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He lighted a match. Gore held the two papers in the flame, and they were shrivelled up. But the destruction of the fatal paper did not bring a ray of light to Gore's face. He was rid of the cardsharp. Tickey Tapp's power over him was gone; but his own act barred off all hope.

"Thank you, Talbot!" he said dully. "If that had happened last Wednesday I should be out of it. If I'd had sense enough to tell you then! But how could I know you'd be able to chip in like this? I couldn't know. It's too late now. And—and I can't stand it any longer, Talbot. I'm going."

"Home?" asked Talbot.

Gore shuddered.

"And face my father? No fear!"

"Where, then?" asked Talbot quietly.

Gore made a restless gesture.

"Anywhere to get out of this. I must get out if I'm not to go mad."

Talbot set his lips.

"There's a chance, Gore," he said. "I told you I'd think it over. I've thought it over. The money must be put back."

"It can't be; the safe is always kept locked. I've told you—"

"You forget," said Talbot, with a somewhat bitter smile, "I can do things that you can't do, Gore. You're talking to a fellow who used to be called the prince of cracksmen."

Gore gave a violent start.

"Talbot, you—you could—you would?"

"To save you, yes," said Talbot steadily. "I can open the safe without leaving a trace to show it; and I must find an opportunity."

"But the risk!" panted Gore. "Suppose they spotted you opening the Head's safe? Talbot, they'd think—"

Talbot's lips twitched for a moment.

"They'd think the Toff had broken out with a vengeance," he said. "I've got to run that risk, Gore."

"You'll do that for me?" muttered Gore brokenly. But there was a flush in his white face now, a new light in his eyes. There was hope in his heart.

"Isn't it the only way?"

"Yes, I know; but the fearful risk!"

"I shall take care; I shall slip out of the dorm after midnight."

"But showing a light in the Head's study."

The Toff smiled.

"I shan't need a light."

"You're a wonderful chap, Talbot. You—you think you can do it?"

"I know I can."

"I won't forget this," said Gore. "Goodness knows I've never deserved to have you do this for me. If—if it goes all right, Talbot, I shan't forget it."

"Keep out of such a scrape another time," said Talbot, "that's all I ask. I should think you wouldn't forget this lesson!"

"I'm not likely to forget," shuddered Gore. "I shan't forget this all my life. But it seems too good to be true, Talbot."

"Give me the notes."

Gore took out his pocket-book and passed two bundles of currency notes to Talbot.

"Twelve for a pound, twelve for ten shillings," said Talbot, counting them. "That right?"

"That's right," said Gore. "But suppose anything happened? Suppose the Head missed them this evening? Suppose they were found on you?"

"I'm not going to keep them on me, fathead!"

said Talbot, "I shall slip them into a safe place and take them out again to-night."

"Suppose—suppose they're found?"

"Leave that to me," said Talbot, with a pitying glance at the Shell fellow. Gore's nerves were in rags.

Talbot moved towards the door. Then Gore gave a cry:

"Stop! I can't let you do it, Talbot! I can't let you take the risk! It's a shame—a rotten shame!"

Talbot's face softened very much. If he had needed anything to decide him to take that terrible risk for Gore's sake it would have been that cry from the unhappy junior. The fellow who was willing to throw away his last chance of safety could not be all bad.

"Give them to me," said Gore. "I'll burn them and chance it."

"It isn't a chance, old chap; it's a certainty," said Talbot. "The minute the Head knows that he's been robbed it will come out about what everybody's seen about you the past week. He'll remember leaving his safe unlocked that morning; and it will come out that you were out of the Form-room at the same time. Mr. Linton will remember sending you to the study."

Gore leaned heavily on the table.

"I—I—then I suppose I was booked to be found out all the time, even if I hadn't given myself away."

"I think you were, Gore. You'd make about the worst criminal I know," said Talbot, with a slight smile. "You're not built for it, you duffer. You were booked to be found out the minute the Head missed the notes."

"What a fool I've been—what a silly fool!" muttered Gore. "But—but you are willing to take the risk, Talbot?"

"Yes."

"I oughtn't to let you," said Gore miserably. "I know I oughtn't. But it means so much to me, Talbot."

"It's settled," said Talbot. "Don't think anything more about it."

He left the study before Gore could reply.

That evening, while Skimpole babbled cheerfully at the study tea-table, Talbot was very silent. He knew the risk he was going to run, and, though he did not shrink from it, it made him grave and preoccupied. He knew what he was risking.

All he had fought for and struggled for so long—his good name—his honour—the honour so hardly won and grown so dear to the one-time Toff. Was he called upon to do it? Gore was not even a chum of his. Why should he do this? Yet he did not falter for one moment. He had promised to help the wretched culprit, and he had his word to keep.

And he felt, too, that he was called upon to do it—to save Gore from being a thief, as he himself might have been saved if he had found a helping hand in his earlier years. He knew what was at stake. But he did not repent of his resolution.

Gore was very silent, too. There was hope in his heart. But he was haunted by the fear that the Head's discovery that the notes were missing, long delayed, might take place that very evening before the Toff had had time to save him. At the very last moment the cup might be dashed from his lips.

But the evening passed, and the Shell went to their dormitory. The hour was near now—very

near. Gore did not sleep, but he was calmer. If it were still possible that he might be saved he knew that he could rely upon the Toff.

CHAPTER 12.

The Last Crib!

MIDNIGHT had boomed out dully from the clock tower. The hours of darkness were wearing slowly by.

One!

Save for the whisper of the wind in the old elm-trees in the quad there was no sound in the silent night.

School House and New House were buried in slumber.

But in the School House there were some who were wakeful. In the Shell dormitory there was one whose sleepless eyes burned with feverish anxiety, and one who, though sleepless, was calm and collected. As the stroke of one boomed faintly through the night Talbot of the Shell slipped quietly from his bed.

George Gore sat up, his eyes burning through the gloom.

Faint as the sound was that Talbot made, Gore's feverish hearing did not lose it. All his nerves were in a twitter.

He whispered softly, tremulously:

"Talbot!"

"Yes. Hush!"

Gore slipped out. There were several beds between his and Talbot's, and he was fearful of a sleeper awakening and hearing even the faintest

(Continued on next page.)

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whisper. He groped silently towards Talbot in the darkness. The Toff was dressing quickly.

"You're going, Talbot?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Shall I come with you?"

"It would be no use. You couldn't help."

"But—but the risk—" breathed Gore.

"You'd make it greater," said Talbot. "Go back to bed, old man. Your nerves are out of order. You are trembling now."

"I—I shall feel awful till you get back, Talbot."

"I shan't be long."

"I—I—I oughtn't to let you go. Suppose—suppose—" shivered Gore.

"No good supposing anything. Get back to bed, and don't make a sound. If one of the fellows should wake, there'd be questions asked. Don't give yourself away at the last minute, Gore."

"Yes—yes. But I shall—I shall feel rotten till you get back."

Gore crept away to his bed again. His nerves were twittering, his heart beating irregularly. The anguish of that night was almost too much for Gore. He felt, he knew, that he was on the verge of hysteria; he had a terrible dread that his self-control would give way.

Talbot finished dressing, and put on the rubber shoes he had placed in readiness. He left the dormitory without a sound. A task that would have shaken any other fellow's nerves was like child's play to the Toff. He reflected bitterly that it was like old times as he moved silently down the dark passage.

The prince of cracksmen was on the "old lay" once more—"cracking a crib" in the dead of night. Not for the same motive as of old, however. Not for the plunder of the safe, but to replace the plunder that had been taken in a moment of madness by another, to save a wretched and conscience-stricken boy from the horror of becoming a thief. What would the Toff in the old days have thought if he had been told that he would crack his last crib for such a purpose?

He paused on the dark staircase to listen, and his heart for a moment was bitter.

More clearly than before, at that moment, he realised the terrible risk he was running.

For danger to life and limb the Toff cared nothing; but the danger of disgrace, of condemnation, of the horror and pain of his chums, the scorn of the kind old Head—that thrilled even the iron nerve of the Toff.

Had he a right to run that risk?

For, if by any untoward chance his action should be discovered, he knew that he must be condemned.

He would not be able to explain.

Gore's secret was entrusted to his honour. Even if he was caught in the act at the safe, and supposed—as he certainly would be supposed—to be engaged in an act of robbery, he could not betray Gore. He could not sacrifice his word and his self-respect to save his good name. He could not betray the fellow who trusted to his pledge.

Gore should speak out if that happened, but Talbot smiled bitterly at that thought. Gore would not speak.

He was not a coward, he was not a villain, but he had not the courage to face condemnation and shame. If matters went badly for the Toff that night, who was risking so much for the wretched culprit, he knew that he had no confession to expect from Gore to clear him.

Gore's better nature would drive him to confess.

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but terror would hold him silent. He would suffer, he would be torn with remorse, but he would be silent.

Talbot knew it.

Had he a right to run the risk? There was yet time. Perhaps in that dark moment the Toff faltered.

But it was only for a moment. To return, to tell the wretched boy, who clung to him as to a last straw of hope, that his courage had failed him, that he must take his chance—that was impossible.

The time for reflection, for hesitation, had gone by. He had set his hand to the plough, and he could not withdraw it. He could not break faith at the last moment. In common honesty he must fulfil his pledge to Gore.

After all, what was the risk? The House was silent and sleeping. It would not take him a quarter of an hour to accomplish his task. In his first days at the school, when he had come there as the confederate of Hookey Walker, he had made an examination of the Head's safe, and he knew that it would open easily to his hand. The prince of cracksmen had the hand of a magician for such work.

To open the safe, to slip back the stolen notes and close the iron door, to hurry back to the dormitory—his work well done—fifteen minutes would cover it all. The Toff did not even require a light for the work; all would be done under the cover of darkness. Where was the risk?

Risk or no risk, he had his work to do, and his hesitation did not last for more than a few seconds.

With noiseless steps, he descended the stairs.

In the dormitory, Gore was waiting, huddled in bed, with burning eyes and throbbing heart, choking back the hysteria that was gaining on him. Gore was very near the end of his tether.

And the fellow who was taking the risk—cool, determined, and alert—moved silently in the darkness, unhesitating.

Talbot reached the lower passage and listened once more. Deep silence surrounded him. A creak of the wainscot, a whine of the wind in the quad, that was all.

He reached the door of the Head's study. The door was locked, and there was no key. But in a couple of minutes the door swung silently open.

Talbot entered the study, and closed the door softly behind him. He stood in silence.

The blinds were drawn, and not a glimmer of starlight came into the room. The blackness was impenetrable. But it did not trouble the Toff. From of old he was accustomed to work in darkness, and he seemed almost to possess the peculiar gift of seeing in the dark.

Without a sound, without displacing any article of furniture, he groped his way to the iron safe let in the wall.

His hand glided over it. A moment more, and he was at work.

In the dense darkness of the room, slight sounds were audible now as the skilled hands of the prince of cracksmen began their old work.

Five minutes elapsed—five long minutes.

Heavily the big iron door swung open. Talbot drew a deep breath. He felt in his pocket for the bundle of notes.

Suddenly his movement was arrested.

He stood frozen, as a gleam of light penetrated the darkness of the study. It came under the door.

Someone was in the passage with a light.

Who—what—



"Anybody want a smoke before going to bed?" asked Monty Lowther, taking up Gore's jacket. The next moment Gore sprang from his bed, clutched the jacket from Lowther with one hand and dealt him a savage blow with the other.

Talbot's eyes fixed themselves upon that glimmer of light with a stony look. He had no time to think. Next moment the study door was opened. A lamp gleamed into the room.

Talbot stood dazed, in despair. Dr. Holmes came into the study, lamp in hand, not seeing for the moment the boy as he stood there, silent, motionless. What had brought the Head there at that hour? Fortune had played the Toff a scurvy trick. His face was white as death as he stood, waiting for the Head to see him.

It was only a moment before the Head's glance fell upon him.

He started violently.

The hand that held the lamp trembled; the kind old face paled as Dr. Holmes took in the scene—the white-faced junior, standing transfixed, the open door of the safe, the bundle of notes clutched in the junior's hand.

The Head's face seemed to grow old and worn in that moment. For several seconds there was silence, and Talbot could feel his heart thumping. Then the Head spoke, in a low, shaking voice:

"Talbot, what are you doing here?"

CHAPTER 13.

For Another's Sake!

TALBOT was silent.

What was he to say?

Dr. Holmes set down the lamp upon his desk, and stood looking at him.

There was a dazed expression on his face. The kind old gentleman, who had been so good a friend to the Toff, had a strong affection for his protégé.

It had happened that suspicion had fallen upon

the Toff more than once, owing to his past; but he had been cleared, triumphantly, and Dr. Holmes had said to himself that never again should his faith in Talbot waver—never, whatever might be the apparent ground for suspicion. From the hour when the Toff, cleared of suspicion, had returned to the school, the Head had felt that nothing again could shake his faith.

But he had not counted upon this.

The silence in the study lasted a few minutes. It seemed centuries long to Talbot. Dr. Holmes waited for him to speak. He did not speak.

It was the Head who broke the silence. His voice was tremulous, and Talbot's heart ached as he realised what a blow this was to the kind old man.

"Talbot, unhappy boy, have you nothing to say to me?"

"Nothing," muttered Talbot; "only—only—"

"Speak, my boy!"

"It is not as you think, that is all. But I can't expect you to believe that, sir. I am not a thief."

The Head smiled sadly.

"You opened that safe, Talbot?"

"Yes."

"Those notes in your hand—they belong to me?"

"Yes."

"Replace them in the safe."

Talbot obeyed.

"Close the safe, Talbot."

The Toff mechanically did as he was told.

The work he had come there to do was done now. And now he had to pay the price of a too-generous action.

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"Why did you do this?" said the Head, still gently.

Talbot did not reply.

"You came here to rob me?"

"No, sir," said Talbot, the crimson creeping into his cheeks.

"Then why did you open the safe?"

Silence.

"What were you doing with these notes?"

Talbot's lips moved.

He knew that he must be condemned, of course. There was only one way to save himself—to betray the wretched boy who at that moment was quivering with fear and anxiety in the dormitory. For a moment the confession trembled on Talbot's lips.

Why should he be condemned—he, the innocent—to save the guilty? Had he a right to let the good old man's faith in him crumble to ashes? There were others to suffer as well as himself—for he saw that the Head was suffering—and his chums, on the morrow—what would they think—what would they feel?

But the confession, though it rose to his lips, remained unuttered. He knew that he could not

trembled a little. "This is a harder blow to me than you could have believed, Talbot. I had every faith in you. I had resolved that nothing should induce me to doubt you again. But I cannot doubt the evidence of my own eyes."

Talbot was grimly silent.

"I am not even angry with you," went on the Head; "for I believe—I still believe—that you have struggled hard against this. I cannot think that it was all hypocrisy. I am assured that you meant well, that you have fought hard to keep to the right path—that you have done your best. You have failed, and the fault lies with those who trained you in your early years—far more than with you. After this, you cannot remain at the school."

Talbot quivered.

He had expected it. He had known that it was coming, but it had struck him like a blow in the face.

He was to go!

"You cannot remain here," resumed the Head. "But I shall remain your friend, Talbot. No effort on my part shall be wanting to save you from falling back into what you once were. You must go, but you must keep me informed of your movements. You must let me help you, and you must promise me that you will try to do right."

Talbot almost choked.

The kindness of the man who believed that he had come there to rob him went like a dagger to his heart. He was innocent; but the Head could only believe him guilty, and he could not defend himself. And the Head, believing him guilty, could make such allowances for him—could still be kind to him.

"When you were sent away before," said the Head, "you were innocent. I believed that you had been guilty of dishonesty and ingratitude—that your life here had been a lie from beginning to end. Then I condemned you. But now I understand you better. I know that you have striven to do right. I know this—this has happened, in spite of your better nature. And, knowing this, Talbot, I shall still have faith in you, and hope that you will try to deserve it."

"I can't explain, sir," said Talbot hoarsely, "but it's not as you think. But I won't say any more; you cannot believe me. I cannot expect it. I can only thank you for your kindness, knowing how this must appear to you. Before I go, I—I want to ask a last favour."

"You may ask anything, my boy. I would do anything to help you, after the struggle you have made to break with your unhappy past, for I know how bitter that struggle has been."

"Then let me go quietly. Don't let Tom Merry and the rest know what you have seen to-night," muttered Talbot. "Don't let them think I am a thief."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"The matter shall not even be mentioned, Talbot. When you leave here you shall have a chance to be honest. You shall not be dragged down by the burden of what has happened to-night. Not a word shall be said."

"Tom—will ask—he will be curious—he will miss—"

Talbot's voice broke as he thought how much his chums would miss him, and how he would miss Tom Merry. But it was too late to think of that.

"It shall be said that you have left, and no explanation shall be given," said the Head quietly.



"I'd better go down and apologise!"

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betray the fellow who trusted to his honour. Whatever should happen he could not do that.

"Talbot, this is a blow to me. I trusted you. Once my faith in you was shaken, and I repented of my doubts. But how can I doubt now?"

"I—I know, sir. But—but I don't expect you to believe me; but—but it is not as you think. I did not come here to rob you."

"Then why did you come?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

The Head made a weary gesture, dismissing the subject. He could not believe that statement, absurd on the face of it. How could he believe it?

That was impossible.

And the Head thought that he understood. In spite of Talbot's long and resolute struggle to throw behind him the wretched past, his early training had been too much for him. The old instincts of the Toff had broken out. Once a thief, always a thief!

His fate was fixed. That was the Head's thought, and his feeling now was not anger, it was not scorn—it was grief and compassion.

"Do not say any more, Talbot," he said quietly. "You know that I cannot believe you. I find you here with my safe open—past midnight—with my money in your hands. My boy, I will not ask you why you have done this. I know only too well." The Head's voice

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Talbot drew a deep breath of relief. At least, he would escape the worst—his chums would not think ill of him. They would be puzzled, perplexed; but they would not think that he had been turned out of the school as a thief.

"Thank you, sir! That is all I ask."

"You may rely upon me, Talbot. Your regard for your friends' opinion shows me that there is much more good than evil in your nature."

"I—I will go," said Talbot. "I—I don't want to see any of the fellows first—they will ask questions. Let me go before morning."

"It shall be so. It will be best. You shall have money for your needs."

Talbot shook his head.

"I do not want that, sir."

"Nonsense, Talbot. I shall not let you starve. You must have money."

"I cannot take it from you, sir."

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"Talbot, you were taking money from my safe, yet you will not accept money from me as a gift. I cannot let you go from here penniless. It would be plunging you into what I want to save you from."

"I cannot take anything from you, sir," said Talbot firmly. "I am not penniless. I have something left out of my scholarship allowance—a few pounds. That will suffice until I can get work."

"You must be guided by me in this, Talbot. When you leave here you will have twenty pounds, and that will keep you from want, and from worse than want."

Talbot raised his head proudly.

"You need not fear that, sir: I shall not steal."

"I hope not, Talbot," said the Head, with a sigh. "As I have said, I trust you to do your best. If I should hear that you have failed, it would be a great blow to me. And you will take the money I offer you."

"I—I will do as you wish, sir," said Talbot dully. "Let me go at once. I—I could not face them in the morning."

"As you wish, Talbot."

The thought of George Gore came into his mind. He was waiting in the dormitory—sleepless—feverish. He must have a word with George Gore before he left St. Jim's. And there was one ray of hope in his heart—faint and feeble, but it was there.

Gore must speak. Would he be coward enough to let Talbot suffer for his sake? But as he thought of the trembling, shivering boy, Talbot felt that that hope was a delusion. Gore would not speak.

The Head had sunk into a chair. Talbot passed him and left the study.

The Head did not move. His heart was heavy. Almost he wished that he had not made the discovery; that he had been left his faith in the boy he had befriended, even if his faith was a mistake.

It seemed like Fate; as if he had had a premonition of this. Chance had revealed this miserable truth to him. He had been sleepless. He had come for a book, that was all. When he could not sleep, the Head was accustomed to poring over his beloved *Æschylus*, and that night he had left the volume in his study. It was the blindest chance that had led him there.

But it seemed to him now that he had had some presentiment; that Fate had led him to the spot

(Continued on the next page.)



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR.

Let the Editor be your pal. Drop him a line to-day, addressing your letters: The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, Chums! I heard from a new reader the other day who, since taking the GEM and "Magnet," has become very fond of school stories. He says he wants more of them to read, and asks me if there are any other school-story publications I can recommend.

That's an easy one to answer. "Schoolboys' Own Library," three numbers of which are published every month, will fully supply this reader's needs. As a matter of fact, three new issues are out to-morrow—two of them containing yarns by famous Frank Richards.

For the information of all readers, I will give a few details about them. "Detective Bunter!"—No. 328—is an exciting and dramatic story telling how the fat junior of Greyfriars by sheer luck solves a mystery which has got a detective and the police guessing. "The Rebellion at Packsaddle!" is the title of No. 329, and the yarn deals with the thrilling adventures of those old GEM favourites, Bill Sampson, the six-gun school-master, and his lively pupils of the cow-town school in the Far West. Finally, "The Housemaster's Revenge!"—No. 330—is a powerful tale of a master who, nursing a bitter grievance against St. Frank's, sets out to bring disgrace on the school.

As I said, these three grand numbers will be on sale to-morrow, Thursday, and each one is well worth the fourpence it costs.

"THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY!"

The final story of the "Gore" series bears the above title, and, believe me, chums, it provides a thrilling and dramatic climax to the previous yarns. Martin Clifford has certainly had an inspired spell. I think this series is one of the best he has written—perhaps the best.

In next week's gripping yarn Talbot, having sacrificed his place at St. Jim's to save George Gore, finds employment in a circus. He settles down to his new life, and the fun and excitement of the sawdust ring help him to forget the bitter memory of his exit from St. Jim's. But, meanwhile, dramatic developments, with Gore as the central figure, are taking place at the school—developments which are to mean everything to Talbot.

Frank Richards has provided another sparkling Greyfriars story called:

"THE CHINESE CAPTAIN!"

—in which Wun Lung takes control of the Remove in the absence of Wharton, and provides a few shocks for his Form fellows!

Then, as usual, there are all our other interesting and amusing features—completing another tip-top number.

By the way, before I close, did you notice the chap with a football on page 21? It took only 61 Bournville Cocoa coupons to secure that full-size ball, and it's just the very thing you are requiring for match practice. There are lots of other gifts obtainable, too, and you can learn all about them in the 44-page Book of Gifts offered in return for the coupon in the Bournville advertisement.

Chin-chin, chums,

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where the boy he had trusted was robbing him. The book lay now unheeded on his desk. The Head had forgotten it. The discovery of the Toff's perfidy had dazed him. He sat silent.

CHAPTER 14.

Good-bye, St. Jim's!

A HURRIED whisper greeted Talbot as he came back silently into the dormitory.

Gore was sitting up in bed, his eyes strangely bright. He did not hear the door open, but he knew that Talbot had come in.

The Toff glided silently towards his bed.

"Talbot, you are safe?"

"I am here."

"It—it is all right?" breathed Gore.

He was shaking as he sat. The Toff, heavy as his own heart was with bitter trouble, looked at him compassionately. After all, he was stronger to bear a burden than this wretched boy, whose courage had gone, whose terror had driven him to the verge of insanity.

"You are safe," said Talbot in a low voice.

Gore panted.

"Hush! Don't wake them," said Talbot, with almost a groan.

Tom Merry, his old chum, was sleeping, and he had to go without a word of explanation.

"You put the notes back?" breathed Gore.

"Yes."

"Then I—I'm safe?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven!" Gore sobbed silently.

The relief was almost too much for him.

Talbot stood silent, looking at him in the gloom. Should he tell Gore what had happened in the Head's study? The wretched boy had enough to bear—what was the use of adding to his torments? For that he would never find the courage to admit his own guilt was a certainty.

To ask Gore to go to the Head now, to tell him the truth—that was as good as breaking his pledge. And Gore would not go. Indeed, the boy was in so hysterical a state that the mere suggestion might be too much for him. Let him, at least, have peace for that night.

In the morning Gore would know that Talbot had gone. He would know why; he could not fail to know why. Then, if he chose, he could speak.

But Talbot had no hope that he would speak. Whatever remorse he suffered for his silence, he would not speak. He had not the courage for that.

"Go to sleep now, Gore," said Talbot quietly. "Get to sleep. You'll be like a limp rag in the morning. You're safe—quite safe."

"You're a great chap, Talbot! You've saved me; and I'll never forget this. I—I don't know what would have become of me. If I'd been kicked out I shouldn't have dared to go home."

"Go to sleep," said Talbot miserably. "Good-night, old chap!"

"Good-night, Talbot!" breathed Gore.

He settled his weary head on the pillow. His heart was light, his nerves were calming. He could sleep now.

He did not hear Talbot leave the dormitory again. He supposed that the Toff had gone back to bed. Talbot stepped out of the room, and drew the door silently shut. His heart ached at leaving his old friends thus, but there was no

other way. What would Tom Merry think in the morning, finding him gone—gone for ever, without a word? What could he think?

And it could not be helped. Better that Tom should be puzzled, angry, resentful, perhaps, than that he should know the reason why Talbot was gone. The happenings of the night, at least, Tom would never know.

Talbot moved away from the dormitory with a heavy heart. He found his coat, his cap; from his study in the Shell passage he took a few things he prized, and that he could carry with him. He looked round the study with dim eyes. There was Gore's old bat in the corner. Skimpole's book on entomology on the table. He would never see old Skimpole again! He was leaving it all for good—leaving all that made life worth living to him.

And Marie, his girl chum—without a word of farewell to her! That thought made him falter as he stood in the dark passage. He could write to Marie; he could tell her enough to know that she would believe in him. But never to see her again!

But it had to be.

He paused outside Tom Merry's study, thinking hard. He could not speak to his chums before he went, but he could leave a word—one word to let Tom Merry know that he had not forgotten him when he went.

He entered the study and switched on the light. Then he wrote a few lines upon a fragment of impot paper and slipped it into Tom Merry's Latin grammar. Tom was certain to find it there on the following day.

He turned out the light and left the study. He moved like a fellow in a dream; it almost seemed to him that this was some evil dream, from which he must awaken when the rising-bell clanged out over St. Jim's.

The Head was waiting for him.

He placed a little packet in the junior's hand; Talbot slipped it into his pocket. He could not refuse that last kindness from the kind old man who had trusted him, and who believed that his trust had been betrayed. The trouble, only too visible in the old gentleman's face, went to his heart. The Head believed him guilty, yet he could still find excuses for him, could still be kind.

Talbot's heart was too full for words. It was all he could do to keep back his tears.

In the silence the Head opened the great door. In the quadrangle the stars were glimmering.

"Good-bye, my boy! You will write; you will not leave me in ignorance of what you do, and what happens to you. And—and you will try to justify the faith I still feel in you," said the Head.

"You shall never need to repent your kindness to me, sir," said Talbot.

Dr. Holmes shook hands with the Toff, and the boy descended the steps into the quadrangle.

The Head gazed after him. Talbot walked erect; he did not look like one with a burden of guilt upon his soul. If there had been room for doubt, the Head would have doubted; but there was none. He could not doubt what he had seen with his own eyes.

The door closed.

Talbot swung himself lightly over the gate and dropped into the road.

(Continued on page 36.)



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PEN PALS COUPON

5-3-38

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,568.

BILLY BUNTER STANDS TREAT TO THE WHOLE REMOVE—AT HARRY WHARTON'S EXPENSE!

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.")

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

The Remove studies, which were destroyed in the fire at Greyfriars, have at last been rebuilt, and Billy Bunter suggests a house-warming party in Study No. 1 to celebrate.

But Harry Wharton & Co. are more interested in furnishing the room, and all their funds are laid out for this purpose. Another matter which occupies their attention is the coming election in the Remove for a vice-captain. The latter will deputise for Wharton, the Form captain, who is leaving Greyfriars for a week.

Meanwhile, however, Bunter has recklessly issued invitations to all the Remove to attend the house-warming. When they turn up and find there is no party in Study No. 1, ructions follow. Harry Wharton & Co. are ragged, and their study is wrecked.

(Now read on.)

Many Candidates!

THE next day the Remove were still chuckling over the wreck of Study No. 1. The indignant explanations of the Famous Four that they had planned no house-warming—that it was only Bunter's idea from first to last—provoked only smiles. If that was so, it was "hard cheese." That was how the Remove looked at it.

Billy Bunter, having kept out of sight until the first excitement had worn off, had escaped reprisals, but the chums were not in a good humour with him.

Billy Bunter was quite irrepressible, however. After breakfast the following morning, as the chums came out, he stopped Harry Wharton.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Oh, cut off!" said Harry curtly.

"Oh, really, Wharton, I hope you don't blame me for what happened last night! I warned you that something would happen if you fellows persisted in being mean about the house-warming."

"Buzz off, you young ass!"

"Yes; but what about the house-warming?"

"Do you want a prize thick ear?"

"N-n-no, Wharton—"

"Then you'd better get off that subject and keep off."

"But I say, you fellows—"

But the fellows walked off.

The house-warming seemed to have been given up, as an idea, by all but Billy Bunter. But it was pretty certain that he would leave no stone unturned to secure that house-warming.

Meanwhile, there was another matter of great interest occupying the Remove.

Wharton's intended departure for a week's holiday made it necessary for a fresh captain to be elected for the Remove, and the idea was to elect a permanent vice-captain, who could always take the captain's place when he was away.

A good many fellows were ambitious to fill the post.

At any other time, one of Wharton's chums
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would have been pretty certain to get it, but just now the disappointment over the house-warming had rather put Study No. 1 in the shade.

The other candidates had high hopes, and there were plenty of them, too. There were only about forty votes to be had altogether, and there were three candidates outside Study No. 1.

One of them, of course, was Bulstrode, who was pretty sure of a following. He had his own set in the Remove, and if the rest of the voting was greatly divided, there was a chance that six or seven votes would carry the day. Hence it was to Bulstrode's interest for the number of candidates to mount up, and he encouraged everybody who felt inclined to put up for vice-captain.

Micky Desmond was another candidate. The Irish junior had friends who would vote for him, and he had announced his intention of voting for himself, so that he was sure of at least one vote.

But the third candidate came as rather a surprise to the Remove.

It was Wun Lung, the Chinese! When the list of the candidates was put up, Wun Lung's name figured with the rest, much to the amusement of the Remove.

No one had the faintest idea, of course, that the Chinese might possibly be elected vice-captain. A Chinese Form-captain would be too funny, but Wun Lung had many friends, and Russell and Lacy, his studymates, were backing him up by way of a joke.

The subject of the election was seriously discussed in Study No. 1 after dinner that day. Bob Cherry and Nugent both thought of putting up, but it was clear that it would not be politic to divide forces.

"Let Wharton decide," said Bob cheerily. "I don't mind Harry having the casting vote."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent.

But Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Better toss up for it," he said. "Unless—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up a minute, Bunter!"

"But, I say, it's important." Bunter had just come into the study with a big notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other. "I'm electioneering. I only want to take your names down."

"Oh, rats! Who are you electioneering for?"

"Myself, of course."

The juniors stared at him blankly. Bob Cherry went off into a roar.

"You're putting up for vice-captain? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" exclaimed Bunter. "Skinner's promised me his vote, and Stott says I can have his if the house-warming comes off. If you four chaps vote for me, that will make six, and six may carry it."

"Banty, you're too funny to live! We can't vote for you, but I'll tell you what," said Bob Cherry seriously. "I don't want to disappoint you, you shall vote for us."

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

A RECORD FEAST AND ELECTION FUN AND EXCITEMENT ARE THE HIGH SPOTS OF THIS SPARKLING STORY.

"Here, head or tail, Franky?" said Bob Cherry, tossing up a penny and catching it.

"Head," said Nugent.

Bob Cherry grinned and showed the figure of Britannia.

"Wrong! I'm the candidate. You vote for me."

"Yes, I suppose so. Rotten luck!"

"Now, Bunter, are you going to vote for me?"

"No, I'm jolly well not!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "I'm candidate for election myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to keep on cackling, I'm done. I'm jolly well not going to vote for anybody but myself, anyway."

And Billy Bunter sniffed and left the study.

Bob Cherry made a quick mental calculation.

"That's five candidates," he remarked. "That makes roughly eight votes to each candidate. The chap who can rope in ten or eleven votes will be vice-captain."

"I should think you ought to be certain of a dozen, Bob."

"I don't know," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully.

"The house-warming business has knocked some of my chances on the head. The fellows have got their backs up over it."

"The only thing to do is some electioneering," said Wharton. "I shall be away a week, and somebody will have to do the captain's duties for the Form. I shouldn't like Bulstrode to get it. We'd better go and do a little electioneering now and make sure."

And they did.

Electioneering!

ELECTIONEERING on such occasions as this at Greyfriars was always an exciting business, especially in the Lower Forms.

The fellows never made any bones about speaking out their views plainly. Bob Cherry was greeted in various ways by the juniors whose votes he wished to secure for the election that afternoon.

"Vote for you, is it?" said Micky Desmond. "Faith, and I'm a candidate myself. Besides, what good would you be, intirely?"

"I suppose I should make as good a vice-captain as the next chap," said Bob Cherry, rather warmly.

Desmond shook his head.

"Faith, and it's meself that the Remove really want, if the cratures knew it," he said. "I know who I'm going to vote for, anyway—Michael Desmond, Esquire."

"Oh, you can go and eat coke!"

"Faith, and I—"

Bob Cherry went on his way. But votes were not to be had.

Other electioneering was going on. Bulstrode and his friends were making great efforts, and so was Micky Desmond. There were several Irish juniors in the Form, and, of course, they thought that an Irish captain was exactly what the Remove wanted, and they plumped for Micky.

Then Morgan was convinced that what was really needed was a Welsh captain, and he announced his intention of voting for himself, and he persuaded Evans to vote for him.

Billy Bunter was electioneering, too, but the fat Owl of the Remove did not meet with any success.



Temple & Co.'s attack sent Wharton and Bob Cherry staggering, and the basket was grabbed from them and rushed off into the darkness. "The Upper Fourth!" yelled Bob Cherry. "They've got the grub!"

Some of the fellows gave him solemn promises—so solemn that they would not have deceived anybody but Bunter, and the fat junior proudly showed round a list marked with seven or eight names.

But it was pretty certain that when the election came round there would be only one vote recorded for the fat junior, and that would be the vote of William George Bunter.

During afternoon lessons there was much suppressed excitement in the Remove, and Mr. Quelch, the Form-master, came down heavy once or twice.

Glad enough were the master and juniors when classes were dismissed, and the boys were free to busy themselves about the election.

The election had been fixed for seven o'clock, after tea; but in the interval the juniors did not bother themselves much about tea.

They contented themselves, for the most part, with snacks, and gave up all their time to electioneering, or to be electioneered.

Excitement ran high, owing to the number of candidates—an unusual number for a Form election.

Desmond, Morgan, Bulstrode, Wun Lung, and Bob Cherry made five candidates in all, not counting Billy Bunter, who was very much in earnest.

Harry Wharton had obtained permission to use the Form-room for the purpose of the election, and towards the hour of seven juniors began to crowd into it.

The fiat had gone forth that all juniors not in the room by seven sharp would be locked out, and that the door could not be unfastened in the

middle of the proceedings for the convenience of latecomers.

Harry Wharton had suggested the rule, and Bulstrode and the other candidates had heartily agreed to it.

It was evident that, once the proceedings had started, a latecomer's participation would throw them into confusion.

But while Harry had only in his mind the dispatch of business, Bulstrode was thinking of other matters.

At half-past six the Remove bully held a hurried council with Skinner and Stott in a corner of the passage.

"I've been sounding the fellows," he said. "Most of them are up against Bob Cherry, on account of the house-warming fizzle. Otherwise, he would have a bumping majority—about twenty."

"Yes; this has come luckily for you, Bulstrode."

"It has; and I'm going to make the most of it," said the Remove bully significantly. "I've got it down pretty fine now about Cherry's chances. The fellows in his own study are voting for him, of course, excepting Bunter. So are Trevor, Ogilvy, Smith, and Hazeldene—chaps who think more about the footer than anything else. That gives Cherry seven votes for certain, and I'm pretty sure that he'll get three or four more."

"Then you'll be done!"

"Not if I can help it. I can count on eight votes, including you fellows, and I'm going to vote for myself. It's allowed, and I don't see why I shouldn't do it. Cherry won't—but more fool he!"

"Of course!"

"That's nine, and Cherry's biggest possible number, in my opinion, is eleven. We only want two to tie, three to win."

"Good! But where are they to come from? I don't believe there's a single chap more in the Form to give you a leg-up, Bulstrode."

"No; but some of Bob Cherry's voters may be induced to keep off the grass when the election comes off."

Stott shook his head.

"It's no good talking to them."

"I'm not thinking of talking to them, ass! What's the matter with getting Inky into the bicycle shed, and shutting him up there?"

Skinner chuckled.

"Good! I rather think I could manage it."

"Then there's Ogilvy."

"You couldn't shut him up anywhere; he's a canny Scot," said Skinner decidedly. "I shouldn't like to try it on him, either."

"I'm not thinking of that. But suppose you were to persuade him that the proper caper is to have a Scotch captain for the Remove. Morgan is plumping for Wales, and Desmond for Ireland. If the election's to be run on national lines, I don't see why there shouldn't be a Scotch candidate; and if Ogilvy starts a Scotch party, Macdonald will stick to him. And Mac's one of the supporters I've counted for Cherry. Get rid of the three, and Bob Cherry's done for."

"Good! We'll try, at any rate."

"And I tell you what. If I get in, I'm standing a stunning feed to all who vote for me."

"Tell Bunter so, and he'll drop his candidature and vote for you, instead," grinned Stott.

"I'm thinking of that, too. Buck up, now, there's no time to lose."

And the three worthies separated.

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The Election!

THE crowd was growing thicker in the Form-room. It was close on seven, and nearly all the Remove were there.

Harry Wharton had taken the most prominent place near Mr Quelch's desk, as master of the ceremonies, on the present occasion.

His chums were with him. Bob Cherry was looking a little nervous, and Frank Nugent and Harry Wharton were cheering him up. The Nabob of Bhanipur was not to be seen. Bulstrode and Stott were there, grinning over some topic they were discussing; but Skinner was not yet to be seen. The joker of the Remove was doubtless busy elsewhere. Trevor, Hazeldene, and Smith were near the chums of the Remove, but Ogilvy and Macdonald were standing apart, talking in low tones.

Several fellows were with Wun Lung, who was smiling blandly. He looked quite confident, and his air of confidence made the fellows roar. The idea of Wun Lung as captain of the Remove was too funny!

Billy Bunter was standing with his hands in his pockets, looking very discontented. As the hour of the election drew near, Bunter gradually discovered that all his supporters had only been "rotting."

Bob Cherry observed him, and good-naturedly came towards him, and gave him a tremendous slap on the back, that made his spectacles slide down his nose.

"Hallo, nallo, hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with you, Owl?"

"Ow! I wish you wouldn't thump me like that, Cherry. You might make my glasses fall off; and if you broke them you would have to buy me a new pair."

"But wherefore that pensive brow?"

"I missed my tea, and I'm hungry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" growled Bunter. "Besides, the fellows who were going to vote for me have changed their minds. I say, Cherry, I've been disappointed over a postal order. It hasn't come."

"It never does come, does it?" said Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"Oh, really, Cherry! But, as I was saying, I'm quite stony, and I've been thinking of withdrawing my candidature and voting for you, instead. Will you be standing a feed to all the chaps who vote for me, as Bulstrode's going to do?"

"Not much!"

"H'm! In that case, I shall have to reconsider my—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Bob Cherry unceremoniously.

Bunter blinked after him, and then turned to Bulstrode.

"I say, Bulstrode, I hear that you're standing a feed after the election—"

"Yes, rather!" said Bulstrode immediately. "Sort of celebration, you know."

"Good! I've been thinking of giving up my candidature, and I can't very well vote for Cherry. I'd like to back up a chap in the same study, but a fellow must be conscientious in a matter of this kind, and I don't approve of Cherry's ideas."

"Right-ho! You stick to me!" said Bulstrode. "I'm pretty certain to get in, and if I do, the feed will be a record."

Bunter looked alarmed.

"But suppose you don't—will that make any difference to the feed?"

"Of course it will, ass!"

"Oh!" said Bunter.

He turned away, looking very thoughtful. A few minutes later he was pulling at Wun Lung's sleeve, and the little Chinese turned round with his bland smile.

"You speakee to me?" he said.

"Yes. I say, Wun Lung, are you standing a feed to celebrate the affair, if you get in as Form captain?"

"Me standee big feed."

"I've been thinking of voting for you. I can't very well back up Cherry or Bulstrode, as I don't approve of either of them; and I'm not standing myself, after all. I suppose it won't make any difference to the feed, whether you get in or not?"

Wun Lung shook his head.

"No; me standee big feed, anyway."

"Good! Come to think of it, I don't see why you shouldn't make a jolly good captain for the Remove. I shall back you up, anyway."

"Velly good!"

The little Chinese's almond eyes twinkled. It was one more supporter, and he was beginning to feel assured of success. And Wun Lung—chiefly from a spirit of mischief—was very desirous of becoming vice-captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

Harry Wharton glanced up at the clock. It wanted a couple of minutes to seven.

Skinner came hastily into the room, looking somewhat excited. Bulstrode met his eyes, and the glance they exchanged was enough.

"Time to get to business!" Bulstrode exclaimed. "Just on seven."

"Shut the door!" said Stott.

"Hurree Singh isn't here yet," said Nugent. "Where on earth has Inky got to?"

"Never mind where he's got to; we must stick to the rules," said Bulstrode. "You proposed them yourselves."

"Yes, but—"

"There goes seven from the tower!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Shut the door."

"Wait for the last stroke," said Wharton quietly.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders, but he waited. The last stroke of seven died away, and one or two latecomers bolted into the room. But Hurree Janset Ram Singh was not with them. The chums of Study No. 1 looked at one another.

The nabob had not come, and it was impossible to wait longer. It was one of Bob Cherry's supporters gone.

"Can't be helped," muttered Bob. "I'll dot Inky on the boko for this! The door will have to be shut now."

Bulstrode was already shutting it, and he turned the key in the lock.

"Now, let's get to business," said Trevor.

"Candidates forward!" said Wharton.

The candidates came forward, and there was certainly sufficient of them. Bob Cherry, Micky Desmond, Bulstrode, Morgan, and Wun Lung—and then Ogilvy. Bob Cherry glared at the latter.

"I thought you were voting for me," he said. Ogilvy grinned.

"I was thinking of it, old chap; but it's been pointed out to me that a Scotsman would make a much better vice-captain of the Remove."

"Bosh!"

"You may call it bosh if you like," said Ogilvy tartly, "but a thing of this kind wants a chap

with a clear business head, and that's me. I'm a candidate."

"Go and eat coke!" said Bob Cherry wrathfully.

"No rowing among the candidates!" said Harry Wharton. "Gentlemen, the election for vice-captain of the Remove is now about to take place. There are six candidates."

"Hear, hear!"

"The voting will go by a show of hands, and the candidates will be taken in alphabetical order. Is that agreeable?"

"Yes, rather."

"Go it!"

"On the ball!"

"Then the first candidate is Bulstrode. Hands up for Bulstrode."

Nine hands went into the air. One of them was Bulstrode's own; he did not mean to lose a point by any undue modesty.

Wharton counted the hands, with a slight wrinkle on his brow.

Considering the number of candidates and the number of electors, Bulstrode's number of votes would certainly be hard to beat.

"Cherry next. Hands up for Cherry."

The hands went up for Bob Cherry. There were seven, including Harry Wharton's.

Bob Cherry's face fell a little.

He was not particularly set on becoming vice-captain, but it was a disappointment, and, besides, he knew how much Harry wanted him to get in. He knew, too, the harm that might be done by the success of Bulstrode.

Bulstrode grinned.

Bob Cherry was the rival he most feared—or rather, the only one he feared—and as he had beaten him easily, he no longer had any doubts. The rest of the proceedings he regarded as a mere formality, preliminary to his being declared vice-captain of the Remove.

Wharton's face hardened a little, but he went on calmly enough.

"Desmond next. Hands up for Desmond!"

Four hands went up.

"Four for Desmond. Now for Morgan."

Three hands went up.

The numbers were going down. The extra candidates had no chance whatever of getting in, but by splitting up the votes they made the success of Bulstrode a certainty—at least, it seemed so.

"Ogilvy. Hands up for Ogilvy."

Again three hands were elevated in the air.

"Three. Now hands up for Wun Lung."

Quite a little crowd of hands went up, amid a general burst of laughter.

Wharton stared as he counted them.

"Twelve!"

"Twelve!" yelled Bulstrode. "It's a lie—a mistake! Don't be an ass!"

"There are twelve votes for Wun Lung," said

Harry Wharton quietly, entering the number. "Wun Lung is vice-captain of the Remove!"

(Continued on the next page.)



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The New Vice-captain!

THERE was a buzz of amazement in the room. Wun Lung was elected.

The joke of it seemed to appeal very much to the fellows who had voted for him, for they were roaring with laughter. The little Chinese looked very pleased.

Bulstrode was furious.

"It's all rot!" he exclaimed savagely. "You all know we can't have a Chinese for Form captain. It can't be allowed."

"It must be allowed," said Wharton. "Wun Lung has been elected by a majority of votes, and he's vice-captain."

"It's all rot!"

"Me captain—me makee good captain! Me standee feed."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"There are other duties required of a Form captain besides standing feeds, Wun Lung," he remarked. "I hardly think you're fit to carry them out."

Wun Lung's face fell.

Wharton was the one fellow in the Form who had any real influence over the little Celestial.

Good-natured and good-tempered as the little Chinese was, he went on his way without much regard for anybody's opinion but his own, with the single exception of Harry Wharton's.

The happy grin vanished from his little Oriental face, and an anxious look took its place.

"You not likee," he said in a low voice. "Me no savvy. Me letite."

"Retire!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "I should think so! You ought to be ragged bald-headed for putting up for election at all."

"He had every right to do so, Bulstrode."

"Oh, of course you say so! But as he proposes to retire—"

"No talkee to you, Bulstrode. Me letite if Wharton say so."

Harry Wharton was silent and perplexed. A Chinese vice-captain of the Remove would be farcical, no doubt; yet even Wun Lung was preferable to Bulstrode. And if Wun Lung resigned, Bulstrode was next on the list, and the vice-captaincy would fall to him.

"What you tinkee?" asked Wun Lung anxiously. "Me letite if you sayee so."

Wharton shook his head.

"I don't advise you to retire, Wun Lung."

The little Chinese brightened up.

"You tinkee me good captain?"

"I don't know about that," said Harry, laughing; "but you'll make as good a captain as Bulstrode, I suppose."

"Thank you!" said Bulstrode furiously. "I don't agree with you. I demand that Wun Lung resigns."

"You're talking bosh, Bulstrode! Wun Lung has a right to please himself entirely about the matter."

There was a thumping at the door.

As the election was now over, Trevor opened the door. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, looking very excited, burst into the room.

The Nabob of Bhanipur was covered with dust, and seemed altogether to have been through a very rough time.

"Am I late for the election?" he exclaimed.

"You are, you inky duffer!" growled Bob Cherry. "Not that it matters. One vote more or less wouldn't have made any difference, as it turns out."

"I've been detained foulplayfully."

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"Eh? What's that?"

"The esteemed beastly rotter Skinner enticed me into the woodshed, and then fastened the door lockfully!" spluttered the excited nabob. "I finally escapefully departed by the little window, painfully and dustfully."

"Yes, you look rather dustful," grinned Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton's brow was darkening.

"Did you say Skinner shut you up in the woodshed?" he asked.

"Yes; it was that honourable and esteemed beast."

"It was only a joke," said Skinner, looking rather uneasy. "I thought it would be a lark to make Inky miss the election."

"You did it to secure Bulstrode's election," said Wharton. "It was a mean, caddish trick, and if it made any difference to the election I should insist upon having it over again."

"If you think I had any hand in this—" began Bulstrode.

"I know you did!" said Wharton scornfully.

Bulstrode turned red and swung away. He was savagely disappointed at the result of the election, and his deep-laid plans had not helped him much. He had prevented Bob Cherry from getting the majority, but the "dark horse" had romped home, to use a sporting term, and Bulstrode was as much out of it as ever.

Wun Lung accompanied the Famous Four to their study when the meeting broke up.

Harry Wharton, with the idea of making the best of a bad job, intended to give him as much instruction as possible in the duties of Form captain.

Wun Lung was very docile. He was willing to learn, but it seemed as if his Oriental brain had not the necessary grasp of the matters Wharton explained to him.

"The image won't have the faintest idea what to do now he's vice-captain," growled Bob Cherry.

Wun Lung smiled sweetly.

"Me standee feed," he said.

"Yes, but after that?"

The little Chinese reflected.

"Standee another feed."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, but you can't fulfil the whole duty of a vice-captain by standing a series of feeds."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I shan't shut up, Cherry! I think Wun Lung's idea is a ripping one. If he stands a feed every day, I know I shall be jolly well satisfied with the vice-captain."

"You would, porpoise. When you've done standing feeds, Wun Lung, what will you do next?"

"Standee picnic."

"Ha, ha, ha! The Remove is booked for a jolly time, at all events, as long as Wun Lung's money lasts."

"Velly jollie, first chop!" said Wun Lung, beaming.

And Billy Bunter's beatific smile showed that he, at least, fully appreciated the excellence of the new programme, as outlined by Wun Lung.

Bunter is Generous!

"LETTER for you, Wharton."

"Shove it on the table," said Wharton, without looking up. He was busy with his preparation, and wanted to get it finished.

"But it's a registered one."

"Oh, hand it over!"

Wharton opened the letter. It was from his uncle, Colonel Wharton, and a crisp five-pound note rustled out of it.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "A fiver!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter, while I read the letter."

"I'll go and get the note changed for you, if you like, Wharton, while you're reading the letter. I could change it at the tuckshop."

"Let it alone, Owl!"

Wharton read the letter and put it into his pocket.

"This is all right," he remarked. "My uncle knows about the new study, of course, and he suggests that we might make a house-warming before I leave, and he's sent me the fiver."

"Good egg!"

Billy Bunter's fat face simply shone.

"I say, Wharton, that's really ripping, you know. Your uncle is a brick. We can hold a splendid house-warming for a fiver."

"We can pay for the bookcase out of it," said Wharton, "and have enough left for a good house-warming. Mr. Lazarus has sent in the bill for the bookcase, as it hasn't been returned. We couldn't send it back—smashed up."

"I've been thinking of repairing it," Nugent remarked. "I've taken up carpentry, and I think I could make a good job of it."

"Good! And you could get it done about the time Bob gets the painting done round the carpet."

"If that's meant for sarcasm—"

"I say, you fellows, I think the bookcase might be left over."

"Rats! I'm going to start mending it to-night—or to-morrow, at any rate."

"I mean the paying for it. Mr. Lazarus is a jolly good fellow that way. He's letting Hazeldene have a lot of things on really good terms."

"More fool Hazeldene."

"Oh, Vaseline will look out for himself, you know. He's furnishing his study in a really ripping style, and he said he'd like you fellows to give him a look in, and see how it's getting on."

"We will; and we'll give him some advice, too," said Wharton. "As for the bookcase, I'm going to send Mr. Lazarus a postal order for that first thing in the morning. I don't like being in debt."

"Nor do I," said Billy Bunter. "And I'm always in debt to somebody. I suppose it's my careful way of keeping accounts that does it. I never overlook any loan. I always put it down in the account, and it—"

"Stays there," grinned Bob Cherry.

"I'm going to settle up all round when I get a bit of luck. Anyway, it doesn't hurt Wharton to lend me a trifle now and then. He always has plenty of money."

"But the more you borrow, the less he has left."

"Oh, you're talking bosh now, you know! He must have plenty or he couldn't afford to lend."

"Never mind that now, Bunt," said Wharton, laughing.

"But I must mind it now, Wharton, because I was thinking that if you don't pay for the bookcase just now, you'll be able to stand the house-warming, and let me have five bob as well."

Wharton sorted five shillings out of his pocket.

"There's the five, Bunter. I shall be in funds for a bit, anyway, now. But I'm going to pay for the bookcase."

"Then there'll be only three pounds for the house-warming."

"Two-pounds-fifteen," said Wharton.

"You're jolly close about money, Wharton, and no mistake," said Bunter, putting the five shillings

into his pocket. "But I can manage the house-warming on two-pounds-fifteen, cutting it pretty fine—"

"You can!" said Wharton, staring.

"Yes. I suppose it's in my hands—it was my idea from the start. I'm really giving the house-warming. You are only finding the money."

Wharton laughed.

"All right. Go ahead!"

"Well, as I was saying, I can manage the house-warming on two-pounds-fifteen. Better hand me the money at once, and I'll start on the shopping. The school shop will be closed soon, and then we shan't get the grub to-night."

"We'll go down to Mrs. Mimble's and change the banknote," said Harry Wharton, rising from the table. "You can come with us to do the shopping, Bunter."

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"If you can't trust me with a five-pound note, Wharton—"

"Well, I can't, so ring off, and come along!"

Bunter sniffed indignantly, and came along. But his ill-humour vanished in the tuckshop.

Two-pounds-fifteen was really a decent sum to lay out in eatables, and the fat face of the Owl grew more and more shining as he proceeded to select the good things.

"Blessed if I don't blue five bob on it myself!" he exclaimed, in a burst of generosity. "I was going to pay Skinner five bob I owe him, but I don't see why he can't wait till to-morrow, when my postal order comes. After all, it's only fair for me to stand my whack!"

And the borrowed five shillings came to light.

"The generousfulness of the honourable Bunter is great," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.



Creak, creak-a-a-ek! There was a long-sounding creak as Harry Wharton & Co. heaved on the crowbar. The door was giving. "Stop that, you lunatics!" came Temple's voice from inside the study. "There'll be a row!"

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"Well, the fact is, it's my intention to be generous," said Bunter.

"But the esteemed Bunter's asininefulness is terrific."

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Hallo! Anybody come into a fortune?" asked Lacy, coming into the tuckshop. "What are you getting those things piled up for, Bunter?"

"They're for the house-warming."

"Phew! You don't mean to say that's coming off, after all?"

"Yes, I do. I'm sorry that there should have been any doubt on the subject. I did my best. I've only just brought these fellows up to the scratch."

"Oh, draw it mild, Bunt! "

"I don't see how you can contradict that, Cherry. But it's all right now, Lacy. Wharton and I are standing treat, and there will be enough to go round. Blessed if I can see what you're cackling at, Cherry!"

"Oh, come along!" said Bob. "You're enough to make an Egyptian mummy cackle, I think. Let's get the grub home."

"I say, Mrs. Mimble, will you lend us a basket to carry this in," said Billy Bunter. "Wharton and Cherry can carry it between them. It's heavy."

"But where's the feed to be held?" asked Lacy.

"Study No. 1."

"Not much room there for the whole Form."

"What about the Common-room, then?"

"The Upper Fourth will crowd in and mess up the feed."

"The Form-room—"

"Can't have it without getting permission beforehand," said Nugent. "We've had it once

this evening, and the bug-hunters are having a row."

The bug-hunters were the junior naturalist club. Wharton looked perplexed.

"Suppose we put it off till bed-time, and make it a dormitory feed?" suggested Lacy.

"No good! Suppose some beastly prefect swooped down on us and confiscated all the grub? It wouldn't matter so much with an ordinary twopenny-halfpenny feed, but on an occasion like this—"

"You can't be too careful," said Bob Cherry.

"Exactly!"

"I should think so," said Bunter, almost turning pale. "If the feed should be confiscated, I think I should be very ill."

"You'll be ill, anyway, when you've done your whack. But suppose we have Study No. 1 and the Remove passage? There's room for all the fellows there—and, come to think of it, a house-warming ought to be held in the house that's to be warmed."

"Something in that."

"Yes, rather! That's settled," said Wharton.

"Bring the grub along"

The basket kindly lent by Mrs. Mimble was crammed. It weighed a great deal, and Wharton and Cherry took it between them, and found it quite enough to carry.

They marched out of the tuckshop, and as they entered the shadowy Close there was a sudden muttering of voices, and a pattering of feet.

"Collar it!"

Shadowy figures started up round the Removites. Wharton and Bob Cherry went staggering, and the basket was grabbed and rushed off into the darkness.

The juniors were too taken by surprise to speak for a moment.

Then there was a yell.

"The Upper Fourth!" yelled Bob Cherry. "They've got the grub!"

"After them!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

And the Removites rushed frantically in pursuit.

The House-Warming at Last!

"GET in—quick!"

Temple and Dabney had hold of the basket, and, with five or six more of the Upper Fourth, they rushed it upstairs at express speed.

They were making for Temple's study, but, swift as they were, the Removites were swifter in pursuit.

As Temple, Dabney & Co. reached the upper passage, the footsteps of the pursuers were already on the lower stairs.

"Buck up!" gasped Temple.

"Oh, rather!"

"Here we are!"

They rushed into Temple's study. Temple dropped the basket and slammed the door. There was a clatter of footsteps along the passage, and Harry Wharton hurled himself at the door.

Bump!

Temple had not been able to lock it in time. It burst open, but the Upper Fourth fellows jammed themselves against it and shoved it shut again.

"Hold it!" gasped Temple. "I'll turn the key in a jiffy!"

Bump!

Click! The key was turned.

"It's locked!"



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And the breathless fellows of the Upper Fourth moved away from the door.

Bump!

The stout oak door shook, but the lock held it fast.

In a few seconds Harry's chums were on the scene, and united shoulders bumped on the door. But it did not budge.

Harry Wharton stepped back, with an aching shoulder and a fierce glint in his eyes.

"It's no good," he said. "They've locked it."

"The lockfulness is terrific!"

The Removites crowded in the passage. They could hear the sounds within of the basket being unpacked. They wanted vengeance, and they wanted it hot and strong. But a locked door was between them and their adversaries.

The news of the intended house-warming, and of the Upper Fourth raid, had spread, and soon nearly the whole of the Remove was crammed in the Fourth Form passage.

Upper Fourth Formers who came along to see what the row was about found no room for them in their own passage, and were roughly elbowed away.

Outside the door of Temple's study the Famous Four stood baffled.

Wharton wrinkled his brows in thought.

As captain of the Remove he was expected to do something; but how he was to negotiate with a locked oaken door he did not quite see.

Nugent was thumping on the panels, and Bob Cherry kicking. Russell and Trevor bawled insults through the keyhole. But Temple, Dabney & Co. only chuckled.

"Well, what are we going to do, Wharton?" asked Bulstrode.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Send for Wun Lung," grinned Skinner. "If the captain is incapacitated, the vice-captain takes his place."

"Good! If Wharton's no good, we may as well try the Chinese," said Bulstrode, only too glad of a chance of sowing jealousy if possible between the two friends. "He can't be much worse, anyway. Where's Wun Lung?"

"Me here."

"Come here, you heathen! You're vice-captain of the Remove. How are we going to get into that room?"

"Through the door."

"We can't get through the door, idiot—it's locked!"

"Me savvy."

"Got any suggestion to make, kid?" asked Harry Wharton, without the slightest trace of the jealous spirit Bulstrode hoped to see. "I'm done."

"Clowbar."

"My only hat!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "What on earth does he mean by clowbar? Is it a Chinese word?"

"Gardener use clowbar in garden."

"Eh? What?"

"He means a crowbar!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "The crowbar the gardener uses in the garden. And it's not a bad wheeze."

"My hat! There'll be damages to pay if you force a study door open with a crowbar."

"Hang the damages!" said Wharton. "We're not going to be done by the Upper Fourth. It's a good wheeze and we'll do it. Some of you cut off and get the crowbar."

"Faith, and I'll go in a jiffy, darling!"

And Micky Desmond rushed off.

He was back in a few minutes, with a long crowbar in his hand, and a grin on his face.

"Here you are, darling!"

Wharton took the crowbar and banged it on the door.

"Temple!"

"Hallo!"

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Yes, when we've finished this feed. Not before."

"We shall force it with a crowbar."

"Rats!"

"Well, it's your own look-out! Here goes!"

And Wharton jammed the crowbar with a powerful drive between the door and the post, and two or three of the Remove dragged on it.

Creak!

There was a shout of alarm inside the study.

"Stop that, you lunatics!" came Temple's voice.

"You'll have to pay for the damage!"

"There'll be a row."

But the Removites did not trouble to reply. They had made up their minds to risk the consequences.

Creak, cre-e-e-e-e-eak!

There was a long-sounding crack, a snap, and the door burst open, the lock starting from the wood under the irresistible pressure.

The door flew open so suddenly that the Removites tumbled in, and Bob Cherry gave a roar as the crowbar dropped on his toes.

The eatables in the basket had been turned out on the table, and the raiders had just commenced the purloined feast.

It was suddenly interrupted by the invasion. The Removites rushed into the study and the Upper Fourth fellows jumped up in alarm.

"Line up!" yelled Temple.

The Upper Fourth party might as well have lined up against the breakers on the rocks in Pegg Bay.

The Remove hustled and hustled them over in a second or two, and the raiders occupied all sorts of uncomfortable attitudes on the floor, with the juniors swarming over them.

The raided eatables were slung back into the basket at express speed.

Temple and Dabney were yelling for rescue, but rescue was impossible, for the Upper Fourth couldn't even get into the passage blocked up by Removites.

In a couple of minutes the raided feast was recovered, with the exception of the little that had already been eaten by the raiders. That, of course, was past recovery, but it was very little.

"It's all right!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I say, don't shove that opened bottle of wine into the basket. You'll upset it on the buns."

"Let 'em have it, as they opened it," grinned Nugent.

HOW'S YOUR LUCK THIS WEEK?

(Continued from page 2.)

November 23rd to December 22nd.—Except for a quiet period after the week-end, an eventful time lies ahead. It will be good luck and bad luck mixed, but you will at least have the feeling all the time that things are happening briskly, and that worries soon pass. Girls get better luck, on the whole, than boys.

December 23rd to January 20th.—The mechanically minded, those whose work is connected with machinery, and so on, get a "break" this week, and enjoy wonderfully good fortune. It is a fairly good time for all, however, especially in outdoor matters, and the only danger to guard against is being depressed over trifles. If you don't watch out, your whole week may be ruined through your worrying over a matter of no importance. Sunday is your best day.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze."

Bob Cherry inverted the bottle of currant-wine, and the contents spurted out in a stream over the faces of the Upper Fourth fellows, as they squirmed on the floor in the grip of their captors.

Temple yelled as he received the first, and Dabney shrieked and Fry bellowed. They made many audible objections—so audible that they might have been heard on the other side of the Close, but there was no escape for them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "They've wined now if they haven't dined! Do you feel all right, Temple?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Are you feeling better, Dab?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Blessed if I can understand the language they talk in the Upper Fourth. But I suppose they're all right, or they would say so. I think we've finished here."

"Come on!" said Harry, laughing.

The Remove crowded out of the study.

They left it in a state of wild disorder, and the occupants feeling as if life were not worth living.

Temple, Dabney & Co sat up, looking dusty, dirty, dishevelled, wet and sticky. They looked at one another with sickly expressions.

"Let's raise the fellows and go after the beasts!" growled Fry.

Temple grunted.

TALBOT TAKES THE BLAME!

(Continued from page 26.)

Soft stars glimmered over his head, the night was fine and clear. Often, of old, the Toff had known such a night, he had been abroad at such an hour. But the thrill of adventure, of the old life, had gone: his heart was heavy.

He paused at the turning of the lane to look back. In the starlight, the grey old tower of St. Jim's rose above the trees, the stars glimmering on the old windows.

"You can go after them if you like. I'm going to look for a bath-room."

And he went. And, on second thoughts, the others followed his example.

The victorious Remove crowded into their own quarters. They had recovered nearly everything, and there was quite enough for a really ripping house-warming for the whole Form.

As it was impossible, of course, for a single study to accommodate a fifth part of the guests, the suggestion of having the feed in the passage was adopted.

Fellows brought their own knives and forks and spoons and cups and plates and saucers, and took their feed on their knees cheerfully enough.

There was plenty to go all round, and the juniors all seemed to have specially good appetites for the occasion, so the feed was a huge success.

Billy Bunter had been taking snacks ever since the basket had been recovered, but that did not appear to make any difference to his appetite. At all events, he distinguished himself at the feast, as he usually did on such occasions.

And when it was over, it was agreed on all hands that one of the most successful social functions of the term was Billy Bunter's house-warming.

(The feed's over, but what of the new vice-captain? How will he fare as Whorlton's deputy? Make sure you read "THE CHINESE CAPTAIN!")

For several minutes the boy stood looking back, looking his last upon the old school he loved so well.

He stirred at last.

"Good-bye!" he whispered. "Good-bye, St. Jim's! Good-bye!"

He turned and strode away into the night.

In the School House Tom Merry was sleeping, dreaming, perhaps, but never dreaming that his chum was gone from St. Jim's—an outcast, for another's sake.

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