

TOM MERRY & CO. IN THE WILDS OF BRAZIL!

THE
GEM
2nd

*The
Bandit
of the
Forest!*



I'LL BE HEARING FROM YOU, CHUMS—WHAT?



Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. He is candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Blunt himself! But keep your letters SHORT, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned.

Hugh O'Brien, of Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, writes:

Please tell me when was St. Jim's founded, and by whom? How many Forms at St. Jim's, and how many boys? Also, ask Trimble what he is going to be when he grows up.

P.S.—How old is Wally D'Arey?

ANSWER: Exact origin of St. Jim's is shrouded in the mists of time that it's hard to say who should have the credit. King Henry VII founded a lot of schools—possibly because he himself was too old to have to attend classes! It was about then that St. James' School rose on the site of a former abbey—though some put the date later, after the destruction of the monasteries by King Henry (Six-Wives) VIII! Forms at St. Jim's: Second, Third, Fourth, Shell, Fifth, Sixth. About 300 boys. I imagine Trimble will be just the same scrounger he is at present, a few sizes larger, of course—provided he doesn't burst first! Wally is thirteen and a half.

Raymond Henley, of Montenotte, Cork, Eire, writes:

Could you tell me the name of each Form and the average age? Are there any school stories of Highcliffe or Rylembie Grammar School?

P.S.—I've started reading the GEM again after some years. Why have you shortened it?

ANSWER: Third, 13½. Fourth, 15. Shell, 15—16. Fifth, 16—17. Sixth, 17—18. Though Highcliffe and the Grammar School often come into the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories, there are no separate yarns about them. The GEM, by the way, has not been shortened, or in any way "cut off" in its "prime"! It used to be 28 pages, now it is 36. They're smaller—but you get just as much reading matter for twopence.

"Cricketer," of Sutton, Surrey, writes:

I've about a dozen photos of Surrey County cricketers. If I sent them to the secretary, would he get them autographed for me, or would I have to send them to the players separately? Where can I get a photo of Frank Woolley? I've tried shops in London.

ANSWER: I'd be inclined to try the secretary first, with a very nicely written letter. You never know your luck, though I dare say

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secretaries of cricket clubs have enough to do already without bothering with autograph hunters! Try the Kent County Club for a snap of Frank Woolley. They may be able to put you on the right track. Don't forget to enclose a stamped addressed envelope, whoever you write to.

J. Elboy, of Stamford Hill Manse, London, N.16, writes:

Is there anyone at St. Jim's who appreciates good music, such as Mozart or Beethoven?

Do you know the ages of Bob Cherry and Billy Bunter?

Is Racko good at anything but breaking rules?

Is D'Arey concerted? If not, why has he such a high opinion of himself?

I am 12 years of age. If I went to St. Jim's, what Form would I be in?

ANSWER: Lots of fellows like good music, from Herries, who may appear to murder it on his cornet, to quiet fellows like Talbot or Digby. Bob Cherry is 15 years 2 months, and Bunter 15 years 1 month. Racko is very good indeed at inventing excuses after he has broken rules. D'Arey has no high opinion of himself—but he always tries to think the best of everybody else! You'd be in the Second or Third—it would depend on your ability. Okay-dokay!

Rosemary Watkins, of Woodford Bridge, Essex, writes:

Have you any brothers or sisters? What is your favourite hobby? Do you think Manners is a good photographer? How many monocles has Gussy had since he came to St. Jim's?

ANSWER: No, I regret I haven't. Hobby? At the moment of writing, answering readers' letters! Manners is top-hole with the lens and shutter—he has an "eye" like a hawk, and so has his camera! How many monocles—34,567 to date—or so Monty Lowther estimates it. He may have doubled or trebled the actual figure. But that leaves a real "eyeful" of a total, doesn't it? Sorry if the puns give you a "pauze," Wow!

NERVE-TINGLING ADVENTURE AND UNKNOWN PERILS LIE AHEAD OF TOM MERRY & CO. AS THEY PENETRATE INTO THE WILDS OF BRAZIL!

The BANDIT of the FOREST!



THE BANDIT BEYOND THE BRIDGE!

STORMY WEATHER!

"OH!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His eyes opened. Gussy had been dreaming.

It was late; the inside of Cabin No. 6, on board the liner Blue Star, was as black as a hat.

In three other bunks, Blake and Herries and Digby were sleeping the sleep of the just.

Arthur Augustus, when he turned in, had dropped off into peaceful slumber. But his slumber had not remained peaceful.

In the mists of shadows and sleep, he forgot that he was on board a steamer bound for Brazil. He fancied that he was back in the old quad at St. Jim's—and that Figgins & Co. of the New House were ragging him. They were pitching him right and left, bundling him all over the shop, in fact, till he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

Then suddenly he woke—and fancied he was still dreaming. For he was still being pitched right and left, and bundled about all over the shop, (though his eyes were wide open—still uncertain whether he was on his noble head or his aristocratic heels!

"Oh!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Oh ewikey!"

He rolled! He bumped! He knocked his head, and ejaculated "Oh!" for a third time. Then he realised that his feet were high up and his head low down! But a moment after he realised that his feet were low down, and his

head high up! It was really mysterious and disconcerting.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Whatever is the matten? Somethin' must be the matten! Pewwaps the ship has run on a wock! Bai Jove!"

He leaned over to call Blake in the lower bunk. His chums seemed to be sleeping through these extraordinary acrobatics that were being performed by the Blue Star.

It was rather unfortunate that another lurch came as Gussy leaned over. Quite unintentionally, he nose-dived.

There was a bump on the floor of Cabin No. 6. It was followed by a loud howl.

"Yawwooh!"

The floor of Cabin No. 6 was as agitated as his bunk had been. Arthur Augustus, scrambling wildly up, discovered the floor trying to stand on its head, so to speak, and shot over to the bunks on the other side.

He grasped for support. His wild grasp closed on some object in the bunk. With both hands he held on for his life.

From the bunk came a roar. It was the voice of George Herries of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, but it sounded at the moment as if Herries was using a megaphone.

"Ooooh! What's up? Let go my nose! Let go my hair! Yarooop!"

Gussy was not a cat, to see in the dark. He was unaware that he had clutched Herries' nose with one hand, and Herries' hair with the other, in the darkness and confusion of the moment.

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Schoolboy Adventure
in South America by
MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

Herries' roar informed him of the fact. It might have informed the occupant of every cabin on C Deck of the Blue Star but for the roar of the wind, which drowned even Herries' inflated roar outside the cabin.

"Leggo!" bawled Herries. "Is that Gussy? Is that that pretty ass, Gussy? Is that that mad idiot, Gussy? Is that that raving maniac, Gussy?"

"Weedily, Heavens!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus was quite willing, indeed eager, to let go Herries' nose and hair. Any other hold would have suited him as well, or better. But he could see nothing in the dark, and the floor seemed to be trying to get up and hit him in the back, and he held on to the nose and the hair, being without any visible means of support.

"Ow!" yelled Herries. "Leggo!"

"Sewwy, dear boy!" gurgled Arthur Augustus. "I think there must be a storm or something—the steamer seems to be wallin' all oveh the Atlantic! Wait till I get hold of that bunk!"

George Herries did not evince any disposition to wait till Arthur Augustus got hold of the bunk! Generally speaking, Herries was a quiet and patient sort of fellow. But with his nose being nearly pulled off, and his hair being dragged out by the roots, patience failed him.

Instead of waiting till Arthur Augustus was able to change his grasp to the edge of the bunk, Herries hit out in the dark, thumping his noble chum on his noble chest with a terrific thump.

Then Arthur Augustus let go both nose and hair, without waiting to get hold of the bunk! He went backwards as if he had been shot. There was another bump in Cabin No. 5.

"Oh ewmbs!"

"You mud ass!" roared Herries. He sat up, rubbing his nose with one hand, caressing his scalp with the other.

The steamer lurched again. Sitting up without holding on was hardly safe in the circumstances. Herries pitched out of the bunk, and a second St. Jim's junior was added to the one already on the floor.

"Oh ewikey! What is that?" spluttered Arthur Augustus, as George Herries landed. "Is the top deck fallin' in? Help!"

"What on earth's the row?" Jack Blake came out of slumber, and leaned out of his bunk to peer into the gloom, from which wild howls and gasps and yells peaked in chorus.

Blake had been sleeping soundly. He was not conscious of the fact that a sudden tropical storm had arisen, and that the Blue Star was pitching and thumping on the wild billows of the Atlantic, till he leaned out of his bunk. Then he discovered it, all of a sudden, as he shot out head first.

Bump!

"Yawoooh! The deck's fallin' in!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "That's the second plank that has dwopped on me—"

"Oh gum!" gasped Jack Blake. "Is that Gussy I've fallen on?"

"Take your hoof out of my eye!" came Herries' voice in fierce, concentrated tones. "Will you take your hoof out of my eye?"

"Bai Jove! Is that Blake? What are you jammin' your elbow into my yah for, Blake?" wailed Arthur Augustus.

"What the thump are you fellows doing on

the floor?" howled Blake. "Sleeping on the floor for a change, or what?"

"What's up?" exclaimed Digby. He peered out of his bunk.

"Only you!" gasped Blake. "We're all down!" Blake scrambled wildly to his feet. "What's that 'I'm treadin' on'?"

"Gee-oh my neck!"

"Oh my hat!"

The Blue Star gave another plunge into a yawning gulf of sea. Jack Blake went staggering, throwing out his arms for support. They closed round a neck, as Digby leaned from his bunk.

"Here! Look out!" shrieked Digby.

He clutched wildly for a hold, but found none, and Blake, pitching over, dragged him headlong out. Blake rolled, and Dig rolled, partly on the floor and partly on Herries and Arthur Augustus.

It was quite a mix-up!

HELPING MANNERS HOME!

"THAT ass!" sighed Tom Merry.

"That chump!" said Monty Lowther. The two Shell fellows of St. Jim's were speaking of their chum Manners. Late as it was getting they were not yet gone to bed in Cabin No. 6.

The door was wide open, and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther sat in the doorway, waiting for Harry Manners.

Absence is said to make the heart grow fonder, but in the present case, it seemed to have an exasperating effect.

Tom Merry and Lowther were ready—more than ready—to turn in! When they turned in, they were going to fasten the door. So they could not, obviously, turn in till Manners turned up, unless they were to roll out again to let him in when he came.

Manners, some time ago, had gone to the ship's dark-room to develop photographs he had been taking through the day. When Harry Manners was thinking of photographs, he forgot all lesser considerations. Apparently bedtime had passed unnoticed by Manners. Anyhow, he was still absent.

The Blue Star was rocking and pitching a good deal, big ship as she was. Stormy winds were blowing as the steamer drew near to Madeira, which the St. Jim's fellows expected to sight the next day. The Atlantic rolled in mighty surges.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther wanted to go to bed. But Harry Manners was still absent on the upper deck, where the liner's dark-room was situated—though really he had had by now time to develop innumerable photographs.

"Let's see if the howling ass is coming!" said Tom Merry at last; and the two juniors left the cabin and went out on C Deck, bracing themselves against the wind.

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Lowther, as a dim figure loomed up on the deck.

"Thank goodness!" yawned Tom Merry. "Hullo, that's not Manners, you ass!" he added a moment later.

"That Rio rullian!" muttered Lowther.

It was a rather tall and muscular man who came along the deck. He had a dark, almost black face and thick black brows, under which jetty eyes glinted.

The two Shell fellows watched him rather grimly as he passed. He did not glance at them. Their eyes lingered on him till he disappeared.

"That rotter's not turned in yet!" muttered

Monty Lowther. "Looking for a chance at Gussy very likely!"

"They keep the cabin door locked since what he did last night!" said Tom. "Joao Rabeira can't get at old Gussy!"

"Bet you he's got his eye open for a chance!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"It's a giddy mystery!" went on Lowther. "Why the dickens does that black-jowled ruffian want to stop Gussy from going out to Rio?"

"Ask me another!" said Tom.

"There's no doubt about it!" said Lowther. "He turned up at St. Jim's after Gussy had had that weird letter from his brother Conway at Rio. When he found us on this steamer, he told Gussy plainly that his life would be in danger if he kept on to Brazil!"

Tom nodded again.

"And last night he was spotted trying to get into Cabin No. 6!" said Lowther. "And if he had got in and caught Gussy napping, he would have made his words good, Tom. There's no proof, I suppose, as he was stopped before he could do any mischief—but there's no doubt about it!"

"None at all," said Tom. "Blessed if I can make it out, Monty—but it's plain enough!"

"That letter from Lord Conway in Brazil has got me beaten!" went on Lowther. "There was no sense in it that I can see—it's made Gussy think that there's something wrong with his brother out in Brazil, and he's fixed up this holiday trip to look him up. Rabeira knows it's that letter that has caused this trip to be made. But why should he care?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom, shaking his head. "But he jolly well does care!"

"Gussy suspects that old Conway must have got a spot of the sun in Brazil," said Monty. "And blessed if it doesn't look like it to me, too! Why on earth did he write that letter, Tom? I can remember it, word for word—and I can't make any sense of it!"

"Same here!" said Tom, smiling. "'Dear Arthur, do you remember a trick I showed you last Christmas? I hope you do! Keep this letter!'—that was the lot. And why a man in Brazil should write that to a chap at home has got me beat!"

"But where does that black-faced brute Rabeira come into the picture?" asked Monty Lowther. "What can Rabeira possibly have to do with Gussy's brother in Brazil?"

"We may find out when we get to Rio de Janeiro and see Lord Conway," said Tom. "It's just a puzzle! But there's one thing, Monty. Whatever that man Rabeira's motive is, he means mischief, and we've got to be on our guard while we're on this steamer! I think we'd better cut along to the upper deck and fetch Manners—something might happen if he came straying along at this time of night and butted into that ruffian mooching about on deck!"

"It's Gussy he's after—not us!" said Monty.

"I know. But he doesn't love any of us, to judge by his looks, and he's about as savage as a puma in one of his own forests!" said Tom. "We want to go to bed, and that ass Manners doesn't seem to be coming! Let's hike along to the upper deck and fetch him. We'll jolly well grab him and run him home, whether he's finished his dashed photographs or not!"

"Oh, all right!"

Tom Merry glanced along the deck. The black-browed man from Brazil had disappeared, and he could see and hear nothing of him. But that he was still somewhere on deck Tom had,

no doubt—quite possibly watching, or hoping, for some chance of getting at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who, as all the St. Jim's party knew, had had a narrow escape the previous night.

"Come on!" said Lowther.

And the two juniors made their way along the pitching, slanting deck to the stairway to the upper deck.

The photographic dark-room was at the after end of the upper deck. But they did not need to go quite so far. Standing in an open cabin doorway, from which electric light streamed out, they spotted their chum Harry Manners.

He was leaning in the doorway, swaying to the pitching of the ship, and apparently in conversation with some person inside the cabin.

They had wondered how the development of any number of photographs could possibly have kept him so long. Evidently, it hadn't. Manners was talking to somebody—probably some passenger interested in photography—and it was for that reason that he had forgotten bedtime and the fact that his chums had to wait for him.

"The ass!" breathed Tom Merry.

"The fathead!" grunted Lowther.

Manners' voice reached them as they came on towards him.

"We shall get a run ashore at Madeira tomorrow, Monsieur Montarde! I shall be taking a good many snaps, I hope. And you—"

"Mais oui!" came a squeaky voice from the cabin. "Perhaps I see some of you ven zat ve take ze photograph, isn't it—yes?"

Evidently Manners' new acquaintance was a Frenchman, and his name, it seemed, was Montarde—which was equivalent to Mustard.

"Yes, rather," said Manners. "We shall be in the same party going ashore, and—Hallo, you fellows!"

"Do you know it's nearly eleven o'clock?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Is it?"

"Do you know we've been waiting to go to bed?" hissed Lowther.

"Have you?"

Manners did not seem interested. He turned into the doorway again to continue his conversation with Monsieur Montarde. Planning a photographic expedition on the island of Madeira seemed to be more interesting to Harry Manners at the moment than anything else.

But he did not continue that conversation.

Tom Merry grabbed him by his right arm. Monty Lowther fastened a grip on his left ear. They jerked together, and Manners came quite suddenly out of the doorway of Monsieur Montarde's cabin.

"Ow!" he gasped. "What the thump—Leggo! And? Leggo! I'm talking to a chap about—Ow, wow! I was saying—coogh! Will you leggo?"

"Hardly! Come on! We'll help you home!"

"I tell you—" roared Manners.

"This way!"

"You silly chumps!" howled Manners.

His chums did not heed. With a firm grasp on Manners, they led him away, expostulating vigorously and resisting strenuously as he was helped home.

From the doorway of the lighted cabin a plump little Frenchman, with a pointed black beard and a string of film in his hand, looked out with an expression of astonishment on his face.

But Manners was not given time to say even "Good-night." His comrades whirled him along to the stairway down to C Deck.

"Will you leggo!" shrieked Manners, clutching at the handrail. "I tell you— Oh ewkey!"

It was rather risky to struggle on the steps, with the Blue Star pitching and plunging in yawning gulfs of water. Three juniors rolled together, and did the stair in one, and landed in a heap on C Deck.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, holy smoke!" howled Lowther.

"Oh! Ow! You mad asses!" yelled Manners.

They sat up, gasping. Monty Lowther clambered to his feet. He rubbed a knee, an elbow, and a shoulder, all of which had banged on something hard. He glared ferociously at Manners.

"Boot him!" he gasped. "Boot him to the cabin! Keep on booting him! And then we'll chuck his camera overboard, and I've a jolly good mind to chuck him after it!"

"Idiot!" gasped Manners.

"Oh, come on!" howled Tom Merry. "Are we ever going to bed?"

"Fathead! I was just telling that French chap—"

"Blow that French chap! Come on, you footling fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Boot him!" hissed Lowther.

"Oh, chuck it!" grunted Manners; and giving up hope of continuing that interesting photographic conversation with the French passenger, he stumbled along C Deck with his comrades, heading for Cabin No. 8 and bed.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS ASKS FOR IT!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY struggled to his feet in Cabin No. 6. That cabin at the moment seemed to be chiefly populated by whirling arms and thrashing legs, butting heads and howling voices. Four juniors, mixed up on the floor, seemed to be as hopelessly tangled as the ancient knot of Gordius. Arthur Augustus emerged sputtering from the tangle, and hung on to a bunk, and gasped for breath.

"Oh ewkey! You pottay asses! Oh ewumba!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You have thwown me into a feahful fluttah! Oh scissahs!"

"Lemme gerrat him!" came a gasp from George Herries. "I'll teach him to lug a fellow's nose off! I'll teach him to drag a fellow's hair out by the roots!"

"Weally, Herries—"

"What blithering idiot hooked me out of my bunk!" howled Digby. "What dangerous maniac is trampling on my legs?"

"I've banged my funnybone on something!" moaned Blake.

"You mad ass, it was my nose!" groaned Dig. "You've pushed my nose through the back of my head with your silly elbow."

"Oh, blow your nose! My funnybone— Ow!"

There was a sudden illumination as Arthur Augustus groped for the switch and flashed the electric light on.

Then Cabin No. 6 sorted themselves out. They gasped for breath, and rubbed their damages. There seemed to be quite a lot of casualties in Cabin No. 6.

"Pway keep your tempahs, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's the fault of the beastly ship for wollin' and wockin' like this! No good twyin' to sleep in this wuff weathah. I'm goin' out on deck."

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"Go to bed, ass!" grunted Blake. "We were sleeping all right before you began playing the giddy ex."

"Weally, Blake—"

George Herries rubbed his nose, and rubbed his cranium, and regarded Arthur Augustus with a ferocious glare. He seemed undecided whether to charge at Arthur Augustus and punch him right and left. However, he restrained his just wrath and grunted, and rubbed his damages instead.

Arthur Augustus slipped on his trousers over his pyjamas, and encased himself in a coat. Three fellows glared at him.

"Stick where you are, fathead!" said Blake. "It's not safe for a born idiot to get out in this weather. You'll tip over the rail."

"Wats!"

"Suppose you run into that black blighter from Brazil?" hooted Herries. "Like him to drop you into the Atlantic? That's what he was after last night."

"I should wufuse to allow the wuffian to dwop me into the Atlantic, Hewwies."

"You're not leaving this cabin, idiot!" said Digby.

"I cannot sleep with the steamah wockin' about like this, Dig. And I am feahfully bwaised and shaken up by you uttah asses wollin' ovah me. A walk on deck—"

Blake interrupted.

"You go near that door," he said, "and we'll collar you, and tie you to your suitcase with your braces! Mind, I mean that!"

"Let's, anyhow!" said Herries.

"Wats! I wepeat that I am goin' to take a stwoll on deck!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You fellows seem to misundahstand the posish. You are twavellin' to Bwazil in my charge! I am not twavellin' to Bwazil in yours!"

"Aren't we your keepers here the same as at St. Jim's?" demanded Blake.

"You uttah ass—"

"Will you get into that bunk?"

"Certainly not!"

"That does it!" said Blake. "Collar him, and pitch him in!"

"Bai Jove! Welease me, you sillay asses!" howled Arthur Augustus, as his three comrades collared him, and pitched him headlong into his bunk. "Oh ewkey! Bai Jove! I have a vewy gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin' all wound!"

"Stick in that bunk!" hissed Blake. "You get out of it, and we tie you up with your braces!"

"I should uttally wufuse to be tied up with my bwaces, Blake! I wepeat that I cannot sleep."

"Well, you can keep awake if you like, so long as you keep in the bunk," said Blake. "Don't get out again. You've got it coming, if you do."

Blake switched off the light, and turned in again, his example followed by Herries and Dig.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his noble nose.

He had been sleepless before. That wild mix-up on the floor of the cabin had made him more sleepless than ever. A walk on deck in the keen sea wind was just what he wanted. But he did not want to be tied to his suitcase by his braces, so he remained where he was.

There was, as Gussy had pointed out, a misunderstanding in Cabin No. 6. Gussy was in charge of the party going to Brazil, watching over them with fatherly care. Blake & Co.,

instead of realising this, fancied that it was up to them to look after Gussy. There really was no reconciling such very different points of view.

Arthur Augustus maintained an indignant silence for a quarter of an hour. Then he spoke in a whisper:

"Blake!"

No answer.

"Hewies!"

Silence.

"Dig!"

Still silence.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

They were fast asleep again, unaffected by the plunging of the Blue Star. With great caution Arthur Augustus lowered himself from his bunk.

He was going to have that walk on deck. Now that Blake and Herries and Dig were asleep, there was no one to say him nay.

They did not stir as Gussy got out of his bunk. There was only a sound of regular breathing in the cabin. Outside the wind roared over the Atlantic, and it drowned any slight sounds that Arthur Augustus made.

Softly he opened the door, stepped out on deck, and shut the door after him.

Then he began to pace C Deck, with relief and satisfaction.

Half an hour on deck might make him sleepy again, and he would turn in and slumber. As for danger, Arthur Augustus flattered himself that he knew how to look after himself.

As he paced the deck, buffeted by the wind, he had a watchful eye open for Joao Rabeira, the man from Brazil—for some mysterious reason his deadly enemy. He had not forgotten the bravo's suspicious actions of the night before. Certainly he was not afraid of Joao, or any other bravo in Brazil, from Pernambuco to Rio. But he was wary. Even Gussy's powerful brain realised that it would be injudicious to encounter the desperado on deck late at night.

He passed to and fro, keeping that watchful eye open, enjoying the keen buffets of the wind, though every now and then they made him stagger.

Nobody else appeared to be aboard on C Deck, though in other parts of the big steamer people were still up, and the strains of the piano could be heard from the smoke-room.

Suddenly, as Arthur Augustus paced, there was a faint sound behind him. Before he quite realised that he had heard it an arm was flung round his neck from behind, and he was jerked backwards in a sinewy grasp.

"Oooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

That was the only sound he made. The sinewy arm round his neck choked his utterance. In amazement and alarm he twisted his head, and stared in the dimness into a dark, black-browed face that grinned at him with savage triumph.

Arthur Augustus' eyes dilated.

He made a wild effort to struggle. Arthur Augustus was no weakling. But the sinewy, muscular bravo of Brazil was twice or thrice as strong as the schoolboy. The swell of St. Jim's was little more than an infant in his powerful grip.

"Bom!" breathed Joao Rabeira, in his ear. "It is good that I watch, little senhor. Now a door he is shut, but I find you outside of a door. Yes."

He chuckled.

Arthur Augustus realised now—too late—that the bandit had been on the deck, and he had

spotted the hapless Gussy, and swooped. He had seen and heard nothing of him till now.

Grasping him, and holding him helpless, the bravo peered with glinting eyes up and down the deck.

"Bom!" he repeated. "You walk on a deck, little senhor, and the wind he is rough; you fall into a sea. Who shall say it is not so? Bom!"

Arthur Augustus wrenched at that python-like grip with all his strength. But he wrenched in vain. His efforts produced no effect whatever on the iron-limbed bravo.

"Sim—sim! Yes," breathed Rabeira, his black eyes glittering at Arthur Augustus. "You have a letter from the brother in Brazil. You think to go to find the one that is lost. Do you think that I do not know when I find you on a ship that go to Rio? Sim, little senhor, sim!"

He chuckled again.

"Did I not warn you, fool, that you would not live to tread the sertao in my country? If the lost one is found it will not be by a schoolboy! Nao! Nunca, nunca! It is to finish."

Again his glittering eyes shot rapid glances into the shadows. Then, with a grip of iron, he dragged the helpless junior towards the rail. Arthur Augustus, white as chalk, struggled frantically, desperately resisting every inch of the way as the bandit of Brazil dragged him to his death.

MAN OVERBOARD!

TOM MERRY jumped almost clear of C Deck. "Look!" he gasped.

The three Shell fellows were heading for Cabin No. 8, Manners, as he stumbled along, telling his comrades what he thought of them.

In Monsieur Moutarde, the French passenger, it seemed that the St. Jim's amateur photographer had found a kindred spirit—a fellow who was as keen on photography as Manners was, or, as his friends would have described it, as potty on the subject.

When Manners was on his favourite topic, he forgot time and space. What did bed-time matter, in comparison with a really interesting "jaw" on the subject of photography? Nothing at all. So Manners was trying to explain to his friends what blithering idiots they were, without convincing them in the least, when Tom Merry suddenly sighted the bunch of dark shadows ahead on the deck.

The next moment he was running like a mad-man, Lowther and Manners staring after him.

"What—" exclaimed Lowther.

"Oh!" gasped Manners. "Look!" And they ran at the heels of their comrade.

"You villain!" panted Tom.

His voice and the crashing fist that came with it were the first intimation to Joao Rabeira that anyone was at hand.

Tom Merry's knuckles, with all his strength behind them, crashed under the dusky ear of the Brazilian, taking him quite by surprise.

Joao, if he had thought of Arthur Augustus' friends at all, had supposed that they were in their berths and fast asleep. Arthur Augustus had been alone on deck when he had found him, and no one else in sight. So, indeed, the Shell fellows would have been, but for Manners and his jaw with Monsieur Moutarde.

Rabeira staggered blindly under the sudden blow, and his grasp slipped from the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus rolled, gasping, on the deck.

It was only in time, for in another minute the South American desperado would have reached the rail, and Arthur Augustus, in spite of his resistance, would have been flung headlong into the wild waves that surged below.

"Ooogh!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he rolled. "Oh ewikey! Help!"

The Brazilian staggered with a savage howl; but he would have recovered his balance had not Monty Lowther reached him, and kicked his tottering legs from under him. The ruffian went down with a crash.

"Gussy!" panted Tom.

"All wight, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus, sitting up dazedly. "Oh cwumbs! Is that you, Tom Mewwy? Oh, bai Jove!"

Rabeira, as he sprawled on the deck, whipped a knife from the back of his trousers. But he had no chance of using it. Even as it gleamed out, Manners stamped on the dusky hand, almost crushing the fingers, and Jono, with a howl of agony, released the weapon. Monty Lowther promptly kicked it away.

Rabeira leaped to his feet, nimbly as the puma of his native land.

"Collar him!" panted Tom Merry.

"Help!" roared Manners, at the top of his voice.

Rabeira faced the juniors, his dark face convulsed with rage. But he jumped back as the three rushed at him.

There was a calling voice, and the steward of C Deck came running up. Rabeira jumped back again, and then turned to run, and ran fairly into the steward as he came.

"Hold him!" shouted Tom. "Hold him, Rawson!"

"What!" gasped the steward.

He grappled with the desperado, but Rabeira, with a fierce effort, flung him aside.

But the Terrible Three were upon him as he pitched the steward away. They grasped him together, and by main force dragged him down on the deck.

The ruffian struggled and fought like a wildcat. But the three were too many for him, and they held him till the steward came to their aid.

Arthur Augustus staggered dizzily to his feet.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Hold him, deah boys! The wottah was goin' to throw me ovah-board!"

And Arthur Augustus added his grasp to those already on the desperado. By that time the alarm was spreading. Voices were calling from all directions, and from Cabin No. 6 Blake and Herries and Digby came rushing, and several of the watch were hurrying to the spot, three or four stewards, and a half-dressed purser.

"Gussy!" shouted Blake. "Where's Gussy?"

"Heah I am, deah boy!"

"You fathead! Where have you been? What have—"

"Pway lend a hand with this wuffian, Blake!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, he is a wughul wildcat!"

With six or seven pairs of hands on him, Rabeira was still struggling and resisting, mad with rage.

His game had been to act by stealth—to leave it to be supposed that Arthur Augustus had gone over the side by accident when he was missed in the morning. But that game was up now. The rascal had been caught in the act, and he fought desperately like a cornered wild animal.

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In spite of the many hands on him the desperate rascal, with a herculean effort, broke loose, and leaped away.

Panting, breathless, exhausted, he staggered back against the rail, his eyes glittering like a rat's at the circle of enemies closing in on him.

"Collar him!"

"Seize that man!" shouted the purser.

"Bag him!" panted Blake.

The whole crowd rushed at the Brazilian, and in a second more he would have been grasped and dragged down.

But before the grasping hands could reach him, Jono Rabeira clutched at the rail and lunged himself over.

For a moment his sinewy hands held on to the rail, and he hung over the surging sea, his savage eyes still blazing defiance.

"Oh ewikey! Stop him!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Seize him!"

The next moment the man was gone, shooting down like a plummet into the sea.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry, catching his breath, as he saw that desperate act.

"He's gone!" panted Lowther.

Startled faces lined the rail, staring at the wild waters.

"Look!" breathed Manners.

For a moment, in the gleam of the steamer's lights, a dark, black-browed face was seen on a surging billow. Then it vanished.

The Blue Star churned on, leaving behind the desperado, whose fierce face had disappeared under the surges of the Atlantic.

"Man overboard!"

A hundred voices took up the shout. A minute more, and the steamer had changed her course, and her bright headlights were circling back on the sea, seeking the man who was battling for his life in the wild waters.

"They'll never find him!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Not likely!" muttered Blake.

"But how," exclaimed Manners—"how did he get hold of Gussy? What were you doing on deck, Gussy?"

"The silly ass hooked it after we were asleep!" said Blake. "I've a jolly good mind to boot him all over the steamer!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"How did he get you, Gussy, you fathead?" asked Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus shivered.

"The howwid wottah got me fwom behind!" he said. "Bai Jove, I have had a feashfully nawwow escape. He was goin' to chuck me ovah the wail, you know! I should have gone ovah if Tom Mewwy had not butted in!"

"Thank goodness Manners kept us up!" said Tom, with a deep breath. "But we're clear of that villain now! He must have gone down."

"It is wathah dwendful!" said Arthur Augustus. "But we are not vevy fah fwom land. Pewwaps he has a chance—"

"I suppose there's a chance," said Tom doubtfully. "We're not far off Madeira. But—"

He shook his head. "Not much chance," said Manners. "Can't say I'm sorry, either. The brute would have used that knife if I hadn't stamped on his fist in time."

"Yass; but—"

Arthur Augustus broke off and stared at the sea, rolling heavily under the wild wind.

Savage brute and deadly enemy as the man

from Brazil was, the juniors could not help hoping that he would not go down to his death in the deep waters.

There was a chance that he might escape with his life; indeed, his desperate act indicated that he fancied, at least, that he had a chance of reaching land, and he had chosen that slim chance rather than arrest and prison. But it did not seem likely that the surging Atlantic would ever give up the desperado who had flung himself into the stormy waters.

He was not, at all events, sighted again from the steamer.

When the Blue Star resumed her course, throbbing on to Madeira, she went without Joao Rabeira. And Tom Merry & Co. wondered whether they would ever see the bandit again, or whether the Atlantic had closed for ever over that dark and desperate face.

UNEXPECTED!

"FINE!" said Manners.

"Tip of a top!" agreed Monsieur Moutarde.

Tom Merry & Co. smiled.

The mountains of Madeira were sinking against the bluest of skies as the Blue Star rolled on southward.

There had been a brief stop at Madeira, where the St. Jim's party had landed at Funchal; and while the other fellows explored the quaint old seaport and rooked over rugged roads on bullock sledges, Manners had been busy with his camera, in company with Mr. Mustard—as the juniors called the French gentleman—not in his hearing, of course.

Gaston Moutarde was a young man, in the thirties, though his pointed black beard and curled moustache made him look older.

Manners had taken a fancy to him—founded entirely on finding a kindred spirit. But, though his photographic predilections were his chief recommendation, in the eyes of Harry Manners, he was a very polite and agreeable young man, and all the juniors liked him.

He was, like the St. Jim's party, bound for Rio de Janeiro, but not on a holiday trip. They learned that he was a planter and trader in Brazil, and was returning to that country after a visit to "la belle France."

He spoke English, but not quite so accurately as he spoke French and Portuguese. His accent reminded the juniors of Monsieur Morny, the French master at St. Jim's—only it was, so to speak, a little more so!

At the present moment he was seated in a deck-chair with the St. Jim's party on C Deck, and he and Manners were comparing notes and photographs.

Since leaving Madeira, both had been busy in the steamer's dark-room, and innumerable photographs had been developed, and later printed out in the bright tropical sunshine.

Monsieur Moutarde pronounced Manners' pictures to be a "tip of a top," by which, no doubt, he meant tiptop; and Manners beamed on him, while the other fellows smiled.

Under his arm, Gaston had a portfolio of South American photographs, which he had brought along from his cabin to show his enthusiastic young friend. He had travelled over most of Brazil, even on the little-known Araguaya, among the wild Caraya Indians. All the juniors were interested in pictures of the

country they were about to visit; and the photographs passed from hand to hand, and they duly admired pictures of the bay of Rio, with its many islands, and Sugar-Loaf Mountain in the background, and of vast forests where Indian figures looked like pigmies among the mighty trees, and of great rivers where alligators lay like logs on the rolling waters, and of a villa set in wild scenery which Mr. Moutarde told them was his "quinta"—his dwelling in the far back-lands of Brazil.

The quinta, or country villa, stood on the banks of the Rio Preto, or Black River, which, they gathered, was an almost unknown tributary of the Araguaya—itself little known; for in the interior of the vast country of Brazil, there still remain great tracts almost unexplored—little changed from the days when the Portuguese first landed.

"Suppose you travel very far in Brazil, you call and see my quinta!" said Monsieur Moutarde. "You see many strange things, and you can take pictures of Indians, alligators, pumas, great serpents that eat you up with one gulp—"

"Bai Jovel! That would be wippin'!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Is it vewy fah frow Wio, Mr. Moutarde?"

"For Brazil, no—some few hundreds of miles," answered Gaston. "It is beyond the railway, and it is rough work to travel; but zero was one English friend who come; it is a few months ago, when I am at home. Perhaps you know zat young man zat come from your country."

He sorted through the portfolio of photographs. "I have here one picture of him," he said.

"I take that picture the day he go in his canoe viz ze Indians, after he stay two-three day chez moi at ze quinta. He is one verree nice young nobleman of your country."

"A nobleman?" said Manners.

"Mais oui! Tres noble!" said Monsieur Moutarde. "Nous sommes bons amis—zat is to say, vo are good friends, and always I call him Lord."

"You called him Lord?" ejaculated Tom.

"Oui, oui; being so good friends, he call me Gaston, and I call him Lord!"

Whereat the juniors smiled again.

"Voila!" said Gaston, taking a picture from the well-filled portfolio. "Here is my friend Lord. He stand in ze canoe on ze Rio Preto when I snap him viz my camera. When I shall be come back to my quinta, I shall hope zat he is of return, for zero are many dangers on ze Rio Preto, and I zink zat perhaps he do not come back! Zero are Indians, and zero are alligators, and zero are bandits, and I shall be very glad to see my friend Lord safe at my quinta when I shall be zero one more time."

Monsieur Moutarde held up the photograph for the juniors to see.

There was a general howl of surprise from Tom Merry & Co. as they looked at the photograph of the young man standing in a canoe—an athletic figure in shorts, mosquito-boots, and an immense Brazilian hat.

"Great pip!"

"Lord Conway!"

"That's old Conway!"

"Bai Jovel! My bwothah!"

"You know my friend Lord?" asked Monsieur Moutarde, evidently pleased. "You have seen Lord?"

"Pway let me look at it!" Arthur Augustus stretched out his hand for the photograph. He jammed his eyeglasses into his eye and scanned the picture. "Bai Jove! There's no mistake about it—it is my elder bwotah."

"Ton frowl!" exclaimed Monsieur Moutarde in astonishment. "It is your brother?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But ze name is not ze same!" said Gaston, puzzled. "Votro nom—your name is D'Arcy, n'est-ce-pas—and my friend his name is Lord Conway."

"Yaas, but D'Arcy is the family name, you see!" explained Arthur Augustus. "Old Conway's name is D'Arcy, too, of course."

"Vraiment!" said Monsieur Moutarde.

"Yaas, wathah! What a vewy wemarkable thing, you fellows, to run into a friend of old Conway's on this steamah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, what is the mattah?"

Gaston Moutarde jumped up from his deck-chair. He seemed puzzled by the fact that Arthur Augustus and his brother were called by different names; but he was evidently delighted to have discovered the brother of his friend Lord on the steamer bound for Rio.

"Allons!" he exclaimed, beaming. "It is ze brozzer of my friend Lord! Permit zat I embrace you, petit!"

"Oh cwumbs! I say—"

"Ze brozzer of Lord is my friend also!" exclaimed Gaston.

"Yaas, wathah! But I say—oh cwike!"

Arthur Augustus wriggled as the effusive Gaston embraced him, and kissed him on both cheeks.

"I wish I had my camera bere now," murmured Manners.

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

Gaston sat down again, beaming! Arthur Augustus blinked at him. He was very glad to meet Lord Conway's friend, but he could not help wishing that old Conway's pal in the Brazilian wilds had been a little less demonstrative. However, his manners were equal to the strain, and he contrived to smile, while the rest of the St. Jim's party grinned from ear to ear.

"But look here," said Blake. "If old Conway is up in the back country of Brazil, hundreds of miles from anywhere, how the dickens did he post that letter to Gussy from Rio?"

"Yes, that's jolly queer!" said Tom Merry. "Was Lord Conway still on the Preto, sir, when you left Brazil?"

"Mais oui! He is not yet of return, I zink."

"He must have returned to Wio, or he could not have sent me a lettah from Wio!" said Arthur Augustus. "I expect we shall find him at Wio! I am vewy anxious to see the old chap! Was he all wight when you saw him last, sir?"

"All white—tout blanc?" asked Gaston. "Je ne comprends pas."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Was he all right?" asked Tom Merry, laughing. "Did you leave him in good health?"

"Ah, oui! Ze verree best."

"He had not had sunstroke or anythin'?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Non! Non! He was tip' of a top—right as a rain!" assured Gaston. "Mais pourquoi—why do you ask zat?"

"I had a vewy queeah lettah from him," explained Arthur Augustus. "That is weally why we are makin' this holiday trip to Bwazil—to

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see whethah old Conway is all wight! I have the lettah heah. Pway look at it."

Arthur Augustus sorted out the letter from Rio, which had caused him so much astonishment when it arrived at St. Jim's. He handed it to the Frenchman.

"Zat is ze hand of my friend Lord!" said Gaston, who evidently knew Lord Conway's handwriting. "But zis letter—I do not make a head or a tail of him, as you say in your language. Zat is a verree strange letter for Lord to write from Brazil."

Monsieur Moutarde read the strange letter over three times. But it was clear that he could make no more of it than the St. Jim's fellows had been able to make. It was an utterly extraordinary letter for a traveller in Brazil to have written home. The French planter wrinkled his brows over it, and ran his fingers through his trim beard, and shook his head, and handed it back to Arthur Augustus.

"Zat is ze hand of Lord," he said. "But why he write zat from Brazil, je n'en sais rien—I know nozing! You do not know?"

"It beats me hollow," answered Arthur Augustus. "But the queeah thing is, that that wottah Waboiwah had another lettah, just like this, and I saw it when he came to my school—old Conway must have witten two lettahs just the same as one anothah, and Waboiwah got hold of one of them! That is the extwaordinary thing."

Monsieur Moutarde shook his head again. Evidently he regarded it as extraordinary as the juniors did, and was completely puzzled.

"I twust that we shall find old Conway at Wio," said Arthur Augustus. "Unless the old chap has gone cwacked, I cannot make head or tail of it. But he must be back at Wio—and we shall find him there. And I shall jolly well look aftah him aftah this, bai Jove!"

"If he's at Rio, he will have got your father's cable, and will know we're coming," said Tom. "We may see him waiting for us on the quay when the steamer gets in!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus hopefully. "But—but I can't help wondowin' what that wottah Waboiwah meant by speakin' of the 'lost one'—he must have meant old Conway, I suppose. I can tell you this, you fellows—if old Conway has gone and lost himself somewhah in the wilds of Bwazil, I am not goin' back to St. Jim's till I have found him."

"Let's hope we'll spot him on the quay when we roll in!" said Tom.

But all the St. Jim's party doubted whether they would see Lord Conway waiting for the Blue Star to come in. What that mysterious letter meant, and in what way Joao Rabeira was mixed up in the matter, they did not know, and could not guess, but they could not help feeling that something had happened to Gussy's brother in Brazil, though they could not imagine what.

LANDING AT RIO!

"WIO!" said Arthur Augustus.

Under brilliant sunshine, the Blue Star steamed into the harbour of Rio de Janeiro.

There was bustle on the steamer. Innumerable passengers were sorting out baggage, and preparing to pass through the almost endless formalities of landing in Brazil. Tom Merry & Co. stood eagerly watching the great city as it



Arthur Augustus resisted desperately as the bandit of Brazil dragged him to the rail—and death!

spread out before them between the Sugar-Loaf and the sea. Innumerable islands dotted the vast bay, and countless craft of all kinds sailed and steamed among them.

"Jolly!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly warm, anyhow!" said Blake, fanning his face with his straw hat.

"Warmish!" agreed Tom. "But we didn't come to an equatorial country to keep cool!"

"Bai Jovel! I hope we shall see old Conway on the quay!" Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass more firmly into his eye as the Blue Star glided by endless docks and quays to her berth.

There was a shade of anxiety on Arthur Augustus' face. The nearer the St. Jim's party drew to their destination, the more, somehow, Arthur Augustus had doubted whether his brother would be there to greet them when they landed. It would have been an immense relief to him to see the athletic figure of Lord Conway among the swarming crowd on the quay by which the liner had taken up her berth.

But if Lord Conway was there, he was not to be seen.

Gangways were run out, and passengers were

going ashore, when Monsieur Moutarde joined the group of schoolboys.

"Vous venez—you come?" he asked.

"We're to be met here," explained Tom Merry. "Lord Eastwood—D'Arcy's father—cabled out to the Planters Hotel before we started. If Lord Conway is back in Rio, he will come to meet us."

The French planter shook his head.

"I zink not!" he said.

"If he is away, the English manager, Mr. Robinson, is to take us in charge," said Tom. "We belong to the purser till he hands us over."

"C'est ca!" said Gaston. "Zen I see you runca more—I also go to ze Planters. But I zink not zat you see my friend Lord zero."

And Monsieur Moutarde joined the shore-going crowd and disappeared. Arthur Augustus knitted his brows.

"I weally twust that old Conway will turn up!" he said. "I am weally revy wowried about him! How the dooco was that lettah posted, if he had not got back to Wio?"

"Might have given it to somebody to take to Rio and post!" said Blake. "If he's in the back-country, he must have done so."

"Yaas, but that's more extwaordinawy than

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evah! I cannot make out why he w'ote such a letter at all—and it is simply amazin' that he should take the trouble to send it a long way to Wio."

The juniors watched anxiously for a sight of Gussy's brother. But they saw no sign of him, and, a little later, the purser came along with a stout gentleman in a Panama hat, who proved to be Mr. Robinson, the English manager of the Planters Hotel.

Tom Merry & Co. were duly handed over to Mr. Robinson.

"Is my bwotah at the Plantahs, Mr. Robinson?" was Arthur Augustus' first question. "Lord Conway, you know?"

"No; he has not yet returned from the interior," answered the plump gentleman.

"Has he been away vewy long?"

"Three months."

"Bai Jove!"

Evidently Lord Conway had not returned to Rio since Gaston Montarde had seen him on the Rio Preto in the back-country of Brazil. That made the mystery of that strange letter more mysterious than ever.

Under Mr. Robinson's convoy, the St. Jim's party left the steamer. Each of them carried a bag, and Mr. Robinson explained that he would see to the more bulky luggage later. They learned that it might take three or four days to pass through the Customs, such proceedings in Brazil being conducted on extremely leisurely lines.

A car from the hotel was waiting, and Mr. Robinson packed them into it to drive to the Planters.

When the chauffeur got into motion, the juniors discovered that everything at Rio was not conducted on leisurely lines. The car simply bolted.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as he pitched over on Blake's knees. "Oh ewikey! What's the fearful hwyway?"

"We're moving!" grinned Blake.

"We are—we is!" agreed Tom Merry.

The car roared on at a terrific speed. Looking from the windows, the juniors could see that everything in the streets of Rio seemed to move at an easy saunter—excepting the cars. The cars flew! All the energy of the Brazilian Republic seemed to be packed into the chauffeurs.

"Order and Progress" was the motto of Brazil; but about the cars, at least, there was more progress than order, and it was very rapid progress. Every driver seemed to be in a terrific hurry to get somewhere, and every other minute Tom Merry & Co. expected to witness a tremendous crash.

They were rather relieved when they arrived at the Planters Hotel without an accident. On the steps they found Gaston Montarde, who greeted them with a smile and a bow.

"Mon ami Lord, he is not here!" said the planter. "Perhaps I get news of him when I am go back to my quinta, and zen I send you ze news."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"We're not waitin' for news," he said. "Some-thin' must have happened to old Conway, and I am goin' to look for him! Pewwaps you fellows would like a run up country—if not, you can do Wio while I go and look for old Conway."

"We're likely to let you get out of our sight in a foreign country, you image!" grunted Blake.

"Woolly, Blake—"

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"I can see Gussy walking down the neck of the first alligator he meets!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Wenily, Lowthah—"

Monsieur Montarde smiled.

"Perhaps you will all come to my quinta, and zere I hope we shall see my friend Lord of return from ze Rio Preto," he said.

And it did not take Tom Merry & Co. long to make up their minds to accept that invitation. Lord Conway had vanished from human knowledge somewhere in the wilds of Brazil, and Tom Merry & Co. were going to root him out—if they could.

HATS OFF!

"Bai Jove!"

"What—"

"That wottah!"

"Which?"

"That wottah Wabewah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"Oh!"

It was the third day in Rio de Janeiro.

Tom Merry & Co. were anxious to start for the interior, but it was necessary to spend some days at Rio.

Arthur Augustus had made up his noble mind that he was going to search for Lord Conway, regardless of the dangers and difficulties that might lie in his path, which were pretty certain to be numerous.

His friends, of course, had made up their minds that they were going with Gussy.

Not only were they determined that Gussy should not go out of their sight in a foreign country, but Jack Blake even declared his determination of buying a chain to lead him on!

But they had to wait some days for the baggage to get through the Customs, and for Gaston Montarde to get through his business in the city before he started on the long journey to the Quinta da Silva, his home in the remote back country of Brazil.

The juniors were to travel in his company and under his care, and they could not help realising what a stroke of luck it was to have picked up that friend of Lord Conway's on the steamer. Even Monty Lowther agreed that Manners' camera had come in useful for once.

But for that kindred taste for photography which had caused Manners to make the acquaintance of the French planter, they might never have known that Monsieur Montarde was in the liner at all, and Gaston would have landed at Rio unaware that he had made the voyage with the young brother of his friend "Lord."

For strangers, especially schoolboys, who were going to penetrate into the wilds of Brazil, a man who knew the country and knew the ropes was an invaluable help.

Arthur Augustus certainly was prepared to take the railroad as far as the railroad extended and proceed farther on horseback or muleback, and plunge into the unknown perils of the Rio Preto and the wild, untrodden mountains beyond on his own and regardless of consequences. But it was probable that the swell of St. Jim's, unassisted, would not have succeeded in getting very far upon such a journey. The help of the kind-hearted and friendly French planter made all the difference to the prospect.

And it was a very attractive idea to visit a quinta far up in the wilds, and see something

of Brazil in a region where white men were few and far between.

Meanwhile, the juniors were seeing the sights of Rio. They walked and motored in the extensive "avenidas," steamed among the islands in the bay on the hotel launch, and ascended Sugar-Loaf Mountain.

Now they were taking a walk along the great esplanade that faces the bay, lined with white villas looking on the sea.

The heat of the tropic day was over—the worst of the heat, at least, for they had found it always very hot in Rio. Crowds of people were sauntering and promenading—of every shade of colour from jettest black to pale saffron. All sorts of languages reached their ears—Portuguese and Spanish, French, German, and Italian, and others that they did not even recognise. All nations seemed to be mingled in the great seaport of South America.

Among the crowds there were many big grass-hats to be seen, many of them worn by men who had come in from up-country. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, pausing in his elegant saunter, fixed his eye and his eyeglass on a figure that had slouched by under an immense hat. He pointed it out to his friends with the light walking-cane he carried.

"It's Wabeiwah!" he exclaimed excitedly.
"Rabeira!" repeated Tom Merry doubtfully.
All eyes fixed on the man who had passed. The huge hat that shaded his head hid his identity quite completely.

"Come on, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "This is a chance to collah the bwute and hand him ovah to the police!"

"Hold on!" yelled Blake.
He grabbed Arthur Augustus by the arm.
"Welease me, you ass! He will get away!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, dragging at his arm.
"Hold on! You're not going to start a shindy here!" howled Blake. "How do you know it's Rabeira?"

"I saw his face as he passed. He looked wound at me. I am absolutely suah that it was Wabeiwah!"

"Ten to one he was drowned when he took that nose-dive off the Blue Star," said Herries.
"He was not drowned, Hewwies! If he was drowned he would not be heal in Rio. That stands to weason."

"Well, he isn't here in Rio," said Herries.
"Lots of these dark chaps look very much alike."
"I wepeat that it is Wabeiwah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I am suah that I wecognised him when he passed, and he looked wound at me. He must have swum ashore at Madoiwah."

"Um!" said Tom Merry dubiously. "I suppose if he did he would come on to Rio; but—"

"But—" grinned Lowther.
Tom Merry & Co. had almost forgotten the Brazilian bandit in the time that had passed since that hot night on board the Blue Star. They hoped that the man, ruffian as he was, had escaped from the sea; but it did not seem to them likely, and they had not been thinking of the possibility of seeing him again on the continent of South America.

Arthur Augustus jerked his arm away.
"Look here," exclaimed Manners, "you'd better make sure before you kick up a shindy with a stranger, fathead!"

"I am quite suah, Mannahs, and you will jollay well see that it is that wascal Wabeiwah when I knock that hat off with this stick and you see his face!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"Hold on!"

"Gussy—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus rushed in pursuit of the man in the big grass-hat.

The wearer of that hat had disappeared into a crowd; and, as there were a good many such hats to be seen, Tom Merry & Co. were far from sure which was which. They rushed after the excited Gussy.

If Joao Rabeira had escaped from the sea, and was in Rio and keeping an evil eye on them, they certainly wanted to know; but they doubted it very much. And they did not want to see the excited Gussy knock the wrong man's hat off with that stick.

"Gussy!" shouted Blake.

"Stop, you ass!" shouted Dig.

"Make sure first, you howling ass!" shrieked Lowther.

But Arthur Augustus was sure. There were at least two or three dozen of those immense grass-hats to be seen, bobbing here and there, and really it was quite easy to mistake one for another in the thronging crowd on the sea-front.

Arthur Augustus had momentarily lost sight of his quarry when Blake grabbed his arm. But he was quite sure that the grass-hat for which he was heading was the one under which he had seen the dark, black-browed face of the Brazilian bandit. Perhaps it was, and perhaps it was not. Arthur Augustus, at any rate, was sure of it, and he rushed after it, gripping his stick.

A dozen people stared round at him. Nobody in Brazil ever hurried unless he was in a motor-car, when he not merely hurried, but flew. Everybody on the promenade was taking it easy—except Gussy, racing after that big hat, and his friends, rushing after Gussy.

Arthur Augustus fairly swooped down on his prey.

Crash!

The stick smote the big hat and sent it flying from the head beneath.

It spun in the air and landed on the ground, and the wearer, with a yell of amazement, jumped almost clear of Rio de Janeiro.

He spun round, staring at Arthur Augustus.
"Gwab the wotah!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's. "Get hold of him, you fellows, befoah he wuns— Oh! Gweat Scott! Oh ewikey!"

Arthur Augustus broke off suddenly. His eye almost popped through his eyeglass at the face that was revealed by the knocking off of that big hat.

It was not the face of Joao Rabeira!

Joao Rabeira's face was dark; but this face was darker—much darker. It was, in fact, the face of a full-blooded negro, black as the ace of spades! The black man fairly jabbered in his astonishment and wrath.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus faintly.
"It—it—it's the w'ong man! It is not that wascal Wabeiwah at all—it is a black man! Oh deah!"

"Oh, you ass!" gasped Blake.

"Oh, you chump!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"There's going to be a row!" murmured Monty Lowther.

There was!

The black man, justly incensed at having his hat swiped off by a stranger, advanced on Arthur Augustus, jabbering Portuguese in excited tones and brandishing a pair of black fists that looked like legs of mutton!

Arthur Augustus backed away in utter dismay. Tom Merry made a jump for the fallen hat, picked it up, and brought it to the black Brazilian. He raised his own hat with one hand as he handed it over with the other. He hoped thus to placate the black gentleman.

But the black gentleman was not easily placated. He grabbed the hat and jammed it on his woolly black head, but he still advanced on Arthur Augustus, who backed and backed, making wild, conciliatory gestures. As he spoke no Portuguese, and the native no English, it was impossible to explain—and conciliatory gestures seemed to have no effect on the black man.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "How can I make him understand that it was all a mistake, and that I took him for somebody else? Bai Jove! Pway keep off! Oh ewikey!"

He jumped actively back, barely escaping a swipe from a big black hand. The black Brazilian jumped after him and wiped again—a terrific downward swipe that landed like the blow of a mallet on the crown of Arthur Augustus' beautiful straw hat.

Crunch!

"Yawwooh!"

The straw hat flattened down round Gussy's ears. Tom Merry & Co. gathered round him. Really, the black man was entitled to be angry and to retaliate for Gussy's unprovoked attack; still, they had to stand by Gussy. Fortunately, the big black man seemed to be satisfied with having smashed in Gussy's hat.

"Ow! Oh ewikey!" howled Arthur Augustus, grabbing at his hat and struggling to get it off.

The black man burst into a roar of laughter. About fifty other people, crowding round and looking on, roared with laughter also. Satisfied with his vengeance, the black citizen of Brazil went on his way—leaving Arthur Augustus wrestling with his hat.

SHADOWED!

"O H ewikey!"

"You image!"

"You chump!"

"You fathead!"

"You burbling cuckoo!"

Arthur Augustus wrenched off the crumpled hat. He rubbed his head, which as well as the hat had felt the effect of that hefty swipe, though fortunately not to the same extent. But Arthur Augustus was thinking less of his head than of his hat.

That straw hat, like all Gussy's attire, had been a thing of beauty and a joy for ever when Gussy put it on his noble head to promenade by the sea. Now it was a hopeless wreck. The big black fist had fairly knocked it in.

Really, Arthur Augustus had got off cheaply. What would have happened to him had that brawny black fist smitten him instead of the hat, hardly bore thinking of. But the swell of St. Jim's gazed sadly and sorrowfully at his crumpled headgear.

"Bai Jove! Look at my hat!" he gasped.

"You howling ass!"

"You benighted dunderhead!"

"That hat is ruined! Pway don't wag, deah boys—it is bad enough to have my hat ruined, without you fellows waggin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "I was such that that chap was Wabeiwah!"

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"Ass!"

"Blitherer!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. He punched that hapless hat into something like shape again. "That wascal Wabeiwah will be gettin' away all this time! For goodness' sake let's go aftah him befoah he gets away! Look woun! for a gweat big hat!"

"What?" yelled Blake.

"He cannot be vewy fah away!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "Pway come on, and—"

"You blithering owl!" gasped Tom Merry. "Do you think we're going to let you knock any more hats off?"

"I am going to wun down that wascal Wabeiwah!"

"Look here—" yelled Blake.

"Pway don't wosh at me, Blake!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus testily. "I have told you more than once that I dislike bein' woshed at!"

"You burbling, blithering, blethering bander-snatch—"

"You are wastin' time, Blake! Follow me, deah boys, and get aftah that wascal! You will know him by his hat!"

And Arthur Augustus started.

But he did not proceed very far. Blake grabbed him by one arm, Tom Merry by the other. Arthur Augustus was brought to a sudden halt.

Whether Gussy really had sighted Joao Rabeira at all, the juniors did not know, but they thought it improbable. But even if he had, there was no doubt that the Brazilian bandit was lost in the thronging crowds now—and certainly they were not going to let Arthur Augustus chase every man in Rio de Janeiro who wore a big grass hat. One shindy was enough for one day!

"Time we got back to the Planters!" remarked Blake. "Come on, Gussy!"

"Welease my arm, Blake!" booted Arthur Augustus. "I am not goin' back to the hotel—I am goin' to wun down that wascal!"

"Come on, fathead!" said Tom Merry.

"Will you welease me, Tom Mewwy?" roared Arthur Augustus.

"No fear—not till we get you safe home! You're too jolly dangerous—knocking niggers' hats off—"

"That was a wathah unfortunate mistake—"

"You're not making any more rather unfortunate mistakes to day, old bean! The next man may knock in your head instead of your hat! Come on!"

"I wefuse to come on!" bawled Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere in his wrath and indignation. "And if you do not welease my arm immediately, I will punch your nose!"

"Keep hold of that fin, Blake!"

"You bet!"

"Come on, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "That wascal Wabeiwah is gettin' away all this time!"

"Let him rip! Come on!"

Arthur Augustus emphatically refused to come on, but he came on all the same. With one arm linked in Blake's, and the other in Tom Merry's, there was no choice in the matter.

They walked Arthur Augustus off, frantically expostulating. He wrenched and he wriggled as he walked, but he had to walk.

"Keep quiet, old bean!" grinned Blake. "You've got half Rio de Janeiro staring at you already."

"You uttah ass!" howled Arthur Augustus. "They'll think you've been looking on the wine when it is red, and that we've got to guide your tottering footsteps home!" said Blake, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh cwikey!"

Arthur Augustus ceased to wrench and wriggle. With deep indignation in his aristocratic face, he walked quietly between Tom Merry and Jack Blake.

Every now and then, however, he turned his head to see whether he could spot the dark, black-browed face of the bandit in the throng. His kind friends kept tight hold of his arms. Arthur Augustus was not going to break loose again if he fancied that he spotted Joao Rabeira.

Suddenly he gave another jerk at his arm.

"Leggo, you fatheads!" he howled.

"No fear! You're not chasing niggers in big hats any more—"

"You utter ass, there is a mosquito on my nose!" wailed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh! Ha, ha! Knock it off, Dig!"

"Right-ho!" said Dig.

Smack!

"That all right, Gussy?"

"Yawwooooh!"

"I've knocked it off—"

"You have nearly knocked my nose off, you wuffian!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Keep away, you dangerous idiot!"

"Here we are!" said Tom Merry, as the juniors arrived at the Planters Hotel.

Arthur Augustus was released at last from the kind care of his friends.

Having a hand free at last, he jammed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed six grinning faces with deep indignation.

Then, disdaining to utter a word, he stalked away to his room, with his noble nose in the air.

"Gussy, old man—" called out Blake.

"I refuse to speak to you, Blake! I refuse to uttah a single word. I regard you as a sillay, cheeky ass, and I refuse to uttah a single syllable!"

And Arthur Augustus disappeared into his room in a state of overwhelming, overpowering indignation and scorn.

But about a minute later there came a shout from that apartment.

"Bai Jove! Come heah, you fellows—quick!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Huwwy up! Blake, Tom Mewwy, Dig—quick!"

In surprise, the juniors rushed into the room. Arthur Augustus was standing at the window, which looked out over the sea-front. Innumerable saunterers and loungers were to be seen there, and Arthur Augustus pointed from the window at a figure surmounted by a huge grass hat.

"What—" exclaimed Blake.

"Look!"

"Oh, my hat!"

All eyes fixed on a dark, black-browed face under the big hat, as the man below looked up.

The juniors knew that dark, evil face only too well. It was the face of Joao Rabeira, who, evidently, had not gone down in the Atlantic after that desperate dive from the Blue Star.

"Rabeira!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The dark-faced man below saw the faces at the window. His black eyes glittered up under the thick black brows; the next moment he turned away and was lost in the throng.

"Rabeira! No mistake about that," said Manners, with a whistle. "He's shadowed us to this hotel."

"Yaas, wathah! Who was wight?" asked Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I don't want to wub it in, but I request you fellows to answah that question—who was wight?"

Blake winked at his friends.

"You were, Gussy!" he answered. "Aren't you always right?"

The soft answer turneth away wrath, and Arthur Augustus came down from the chilly pedestal of freezing dignity.

Rabeira had disappeared as soon as he saw that he was observed. He was not seen again, and the following day Tom Merry & Co. boarded the west-bound train with Monsieur Montarde, and they hoped, at least, that the bandit was left behind at Rio.

SHOTS FROM THE CAMPO!

CLANK! Clank!

"Bai Jove! What are we stoppin' for?"

"Something's up!"

It was the second day of the train journey.

The first day on the main line had passed comfortably and cheerfully, and the juniors had stayed for the night in an hotel at a junction some two hundred and fifty miles from Rio de Janeiro. The second day, on a branch line, was not so comfortable, or so rapid. The train was slow, it had many stops, and the stops were lengthy. Now it had stopped again, and this time before reaching a station.

Looking from the windows the juniors could see only the wide-stretching "campo," baking in the glare of the tropical sun, with a line of blue hills in the distance.

Here and there, on the plain, a horseman was to be seen riding, screened from the blazing sun by the usual immense hat. One of the riders was following the railway track, at a short distance from the train. The juniors, glancing at him carelessly, saw little of him but the wide-spreading hat, and the glare of a red sash, and a rifle under his arm.

The train remained at a standstill. A good many of the passengers had alighted and were standing by the track, talking excitedly in Portuguese.

"What's up, Mr. Montarde?" asked Tom Merry. "We don't seem to be going on."

The planter shook his head.

"Je n'en sais rien!" he answered. "I know nozzing! But ze railway in Brazil is not like ze chemin-de-fer in France—zere are many stops. Perhaps it is ze engine. Perhaps it is ze track. Perhaps somezing is up, or somezing else is down. I go to see."

And Monsieur Montarde stepped from the train and walked along to inquire the cause of the stoppage.

"May as well get out and stretch our legs!" suggested Blake. "Everybody seems to be getting down."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's fellows descended from the train. Most of the other passengers were out now, standing in groups, talking and gesticulating.

Apparently, it was a mishap of some kind, and the train was unable to proceed. As there was

no town, not even a village, in sight, Tom Merry & Co. rather wondered what was going to happen next and when they were going to get on with their journey—if they were going to get on with it at all!

Gaston Moutarde came back at last, shrugging his shoulders almost up to the brim of his hat.

"What is it?" asked Manners.

"It is ze block on ze line!" he said. "Ze big tree, he fall across ze track. Ze train cannot go on. It is one verree bad trick. Someone has done zis to stop ze traffic, but I do not know because!"

"Somebody has blocked the line with a tree-trunk!" exclaimed Tom Merry in astonishment.

"'Ost cal! Zat is so!"

"But why—"

Gaston shrugged his shoulders again.

"Nobody know! But ze train cannot proceed. It is some hours before ze line is clear; but I zink perhaps it is better zat we go on anozer way."

"What other way?" asked Tom.

So far as the juniors could see, there was no other way of proceeding, unless by walking. And walking endless miles over the undulating campo was obviously out of the question.

Gaston smiled and waved his hand towards the plain.

"Two-zhree mile, zero is aldeia—zat is village!" he said. "Zere is a car to send for. I find a man to go, and in two-zhree hours zero is a car!"

"Oh, good!"

Gaston wrinkled his brows thoughtfully and ran his fingers through his trim black hair.

"I do not understand zis," he said. "It is verree singular zat ze train he should be block on ze line! Zere is somevun zat vish to stop zis train in ze middle of ze campo. But why because?"

He shook his head.

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus suddenly.

He jumped as his hat suddenly spun on his head. Arthur Augustus was wearing a handsome white panama. Something suddenly struck it and whirled it on his head.

"Bai Jove! What—"

Crack!

It was the report of a rifle that echoed across the campo.

"What the thump—" gasped Tom Merry.

"That was a shot—"

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Gaston Moutarde.

It was a bullet that had spun the hat from Arthur Augustus' head!

In amazement and alarm the St. Jim's juniors stared round.

The horseman in the red sash, who had been following the train at a gallop, had slowed down to a trot as the train stopped. Now he had come to a halt, and was sitting his horse, facing the halted train. In utter amazement, the juniors saw that his rifle was to his shoulder. It was he who had fired!

For a moment they were simply thunderstruck. Then, as they saw the dark, evil face over the rifle, they understood.

"Rabeira!" yelled Blake.

"Duck!" gasped Tom Merry.

The bandit was firing again, and the juniors promptly threw themselves down, Jack Blake grasping Arthur Augustus and dragging him headlong over.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus as he bumped.

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The next moment the bullet crashed on the train, and there was a spatter of smashing glass.

From the groups of passengers, up and down the track, came shouts of excitement and alarm.

Gaston Moutarde stood for a spellbound moment staring at the horseman in the red sash. But it was only for a brief moment. Then the Frenchman's hand shot to his hip pocket. The second report of the rifle was followed instantly by the crack of a revolver.

It was at Arthur Augustus that the bandit was firing. The first bullet had left a hole through the brim of his hat; the second would probably have gone closer had not Blake dragged him down in time.

But the bandit did not fire a third shot. Monsieur Moutarde had weighed in too promptly for that.

Tom Merry & Co. heard a loud, sharp yell from the horseman and saw the rifle sag in his hands, then slip from his grasp and clatter down on the sun-baked campo.

They saw the bandit clasp his right arm with his left hand—and knew that the planter's bullet had hit.

The next moment Joao Rabeira had whirled his horse round and was dashing away at full speed.

Twice Gaston Moutarde fired after him as he went; but the bandit rode on at a mad gallop, and vanished beyond a ridge of the campo.

The planter lowered his smoking revolver.

"Mon Dieu!" he ejaculated. "Zat coquin—zat scoundrel—he do not want zat ze brozzer of Lord go to finish zis journey to my quinta!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared after the vanishing horseman. They knew now why the line had been blocked—Joao had confederates in the back country, far from Rio. He had tracked the party from the sea coast—and but for Monsieur Moutarde, there was little doubt that Arthur Augustus' search for his brother would have come to a sudden end.

"The villain!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus examined his beautiful panama hat with a saddened brow. There was a round hole through the brim. "The uthah wottah! He has wuined my hat!"

"Thank goodness it wasn't your head!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, of course—but he has wuined my hat! I shall have to weah it, all the same, with that hole in it, but it is wathah howwid, you know. Bai Jove! I should like to punch that blightah's nose!"

Gaston Moutarde grinned.

"You do not zink zat perhaps you better go back to Rio?" he asked.

"Oh, no! It would take too long to go back to Rio and buy a new hat," answered Arthur Augustus innocently. "I shall have to cawwy on with this somehow."

The juniors chuckled.

"You have not ze fright?" asked Gaston, making his meaning clear.

"Eh? Oh, no!" Arthur Augustus blinked at him. "I twust you do not suppose that I could be fwightened by that wottah, Mistah Mustard—I mean Monsieur Moutarde! Pawwaps, though, the uthah fellows had bettah chuck it," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Old Conway isn't your bwothah, you know, and it is not much of a holiday for you chaps, with that wascally wottah hangin' about and pottin' at a fellow with a wille. What do you think?"

"I think you're an ass, old chap!" said Tom Merry.

"I think you're a blithering idiot!" said Blake.

"I think you're a burbling cuckoo!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"You silly owl, do you think we'd let you get out of our sight?" granted Herries.

"Zen you care not for ze danger, and you come on viz you?" asked Monsieur Moutarde.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus was going on; and equally no doubt that his comrades were going on with him. And Gaston having found a man to dispatch to the aldeia to fetch the car, the juniors sat down in the halted train to wait till the car arrived.

A SPOT OF EXCITEMENT!

"HERE'S the jolly old bus!" said Blake.

It was a large Ford, and it looked as if it dated from early days. But the St. Jim's fellows were very glad to see it, after sitting for a couple of hours in the train waiting for it to appear.

Other passengers had started tramping along the line; others were sitting in the train, or gathered in groups on the track, hoping for the best. The line was not cleared yet, and did not look like being cleared for some time to come. Ancient as that car looked—about as old and shabby a car as the juniors had ever seen—a good many envious glances were cast at them as they gathered round it.

The man who had fetched it was duly rewarded with a handful of milreis, and the bags were stacked on it, and the seven juniors packed in. Gaston Moutarde was to drive, and Tom Merry sat beside him in front, six fellows packing inside. With the passengers and the baggage the car was fairly well packed, and, indeed, rather resembled a sardine tin when it rolled away from the railroad over the campo.

It was rough going. The old car bumped and jolted and rocked over the rough campo. Not till more than a mile had been covered did Gaston strike into a marked track, where the going was a little less rough, though still too rough for comfort. But the track led to a road, and though the most easily satisfied motorist would not have called it a good road, it was a great improvement. Old and shabby as the car looked, the engine seemed to be all right, and Gaston made it almost fly.

A few days in Rio had rather accustomed the juniors to South American recklessness in motor-driving. Gaston seemed to have picked up the manners and customs of the country in that respect.

Every now and then a bumping sound was heard from within the car, where the passengers were shaken up rather like peas.

Tom Merry, sitting beside the driver, caught his breath at intervals as the car rocked on three, or two, wheels. Several times he glanced at the driver, who, bunched over the wheel, seemed to be wholly concentrated on getting every possible ounce of speed out of the car.

The road gave place to track again, and the car rocked and jolted, and seemed almost to leap from hillock to hillock. Innumerable miles rolled under the whizzing wheels.

Gaston evidently knew the way well, though to

the eyes of the schoolboys it seemed as if they were passing through an untrodden wilderness.

Twice they passed a bullock-cart jogging along at almost a snail's pace; but after that they saw nothing of inhabitants. The rough track over the campo gave place to a rugged path through a shadowy forest, where for mile after mile the car roared on under mighty branches that shut off the sun and made a dim twilight. Once, from an overhanging branch, Tom caught sight of a spotted, sinuous form, like a great cat, and his heart beat faster as he realised that it was a jaguar. But if that jaguar—probably watching for travellers—had had a fancy for leaping on the car, it had no time—the old Ford roared by and was gone in a flash.

Gaston gave the junior at his side a glance at last, and smiled.

"You have not ze fright?" he asked.

"No fear! But we're rather covering the ground, aren't we?" asked Tom.

"Mais oui! I zink perhaps zat coquin, Rabeira, keep ze eye open for us!" said the planter. "We lose no time to get ahead of zat bandit."

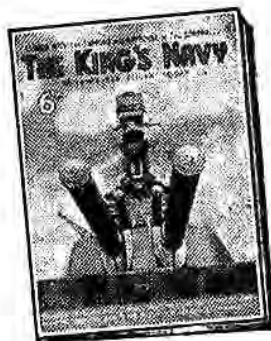
"Oh!" said Tom.

He realised that it was possible that Rabeira, during the long wait at the halted train, might have planned another ambush on the way to the Quinta da Silva.

It was fairly certain that he must have guessed the juniors' destination, as they were travelling with Gaston Moutarde. And he knew that Arthur Augustus was seeking his brother in the wilds of Brazil, and it was at Gaston's quinta that Lord Conway had last been seen.

In the excitement of that headlong dash by forest and campo, Tom had forgotten the bandit. But he remembered him now. Tom had plenty of courage, but it was not agreeable to think of

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a shot suddenly ringing out from behind a tree. The forest gave way to campo again, and the car raced on by a track marked by the hoof-prints of mules and bullocks. Then suddenly Tom Merry caught his breath with a gasp at the sight of a ravine that stretched across the way in front.

It came into view at first as a dark line, but he soon saw what it was; and, so far as he could see, it stretched endlessly in either direction, barring the way. Its depth he could not see, but he could see that it was fifty feet wide—a vast gulf of space.

He glanced at Gaston. But the French planter, hunched over the wheel, did not look at him, and he drove on at the same reckless speed.

"Bai Jove!" Tom heard a voice from the rear of the car. "What's that, you fellows?"

"Looks like a ravine!"

The fellows behind had seen it now. They were all staring at the ravine as the car roared down to it. Now, however, Tom could see that there was a bridge, down to which the rugged campo track led; but it was such a bridge that he would never have dreamed that a motorist would take, especially at a high speed.

It was a wooden bridge, spanning the gulf. Two immense tree-trunks, shaped roughly by an axe into beams, lay across the ravine, with transverse planks fastened to them. Here and there were gaps where the wood had worn away under wind and weather. There was no handrail, and the bridge was not much wider than the car.

It seemed to Tom that even a foot passenger might have felt a little giddy, walking across such a bridge. Gaston was evidently going to take it in the car, and without slackening speed.

Tom shut his teeth hard.

It seemed to him almost a certainty that the car must shoot off the bridge and plunge into the abyss beneath.

Now that he was near to it, he could see that the ravine was deep. He could not see the bottom, but he could see thirty feet down. A fall into that depth meant instant destruction for car and all it contained.

He looked at Gaston again, but the French planter gave him no heed: he was concentrated on driving, as he needed to be with that bridge ahead of the car.

"Oh!" breathed Tom, his heart thumping.

As the car roared down to the wooden bridge, he caught sight of a spot of red on the incline up from the farther side of the ravine.

It was a red sash. And the next moment his eyes were on Joao Rabeira.

The bandit was, after all, ahead of the St. Jim's party. He was standing in the middle of the track on the other side of the ravine, facing the car as it came—his dusky right hand lifted and the brilliant sunshine glinting on a revolver aimed at the oncoming car.

Tom heard a sharp-drawn breath from Gaston. But the Frenchman did not slow down. The car rushed on.

The car had to take that dangerous bridge, and to take it in face of the bandit's fire. Tom Merry clenched his hands hard, but uttered no word. What a French planter could face, a St. Jim's man could face.

The car roared on.

Under the brim of the big grass-hat, Tom could see the dark face of the bandit and the evil grin on it.

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Something touched his right hand, and he looked quickly round. It was the butt of a revolver. Gaston's eyes gave him a quick flash. "You can shoot—yes?" he breathed.

"Yes, yes!" panted Tom.

He grasped the Frenchman's revolver.

His heart beat fast, but his head was cool. It seemed to him hardly possible that the car could take that flimsy bridge in safety; but with the bandit, at least, he could deal. Rabeira, watching over his revolver, was waiting till the car was on the bridge—grinning evilly over the levelled barrel. As the car roared down to the edge of the gulf, Tom Merry threw up his hand and pulled trigger.

Crack, crack, crack!

He fired three swift shots, and then the car was on the bridge.

The juniors inside could feel the flimsy structure rock as the Ford roared across.

There was hardly a foot to spare on either side. But, as the juniors were to learn afterwards, Brazilian drivers in remote parts of the country were used to such bridges, and accidents were surprisingly rare. The car shot across like an arrow, Gaston sitting like a rock at the wheel.

The car was already on the bridge, when Tom Merry saw the man in the red sash stagger, and he knew that one of his shots, at least, had gone close enough to graze the bandit.



"Bai Jove—what——" gasped Arthur Augustus report

He fired again as the car roared across. But the bandit recovered himself in a moment, and his revolver blazed. A bullet crashed into the baggage stacked on the car. He had had only a scratch, but it had disordered his aim, and the bullet, fortunately for Gaston and Tom Merry, flew high.

A moment more and the car was across the bridge, leaving it oscillating behind, and racing up the track on the farther side.

Joao Rabeira bounded out of the track just in time to avoid being run down. He caught his foot in a trailing rope and went sprawling. And the car, roaring on, left him sprawling!

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry.

Gaston gave him a grin.

"Now it is all left!" he said. "Is it zat you say all left, or all right, in your language?"

Tom gave a breathless chuckle.

"All right," he said. "Right as rain!"

"Tip of a top, n'est-ce-pas!" said Monsieur Montarde.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" came a voice from behind. "I wathah think Bwazil is the place for a holiday, if you want a spot of excitement!"

And the other fellows agreed with Gussy. And they agreed also that that spot of excitement was enough to last them a good while. It was possible to have too much of a good thing!



his hat suddenly spun on his head. Crack! The rifle followed.

THE MAN IN THE CEIBA!

TOM MERRY & CO. were glad to get to bed that night in a little "hospedaria," or inn, at an "aldeia" of a few dozen inhabitants, on the bank of a deep, wide river that rolled under mighty forest branches.

The car, Gaston told them, was to be sent back from that point. The next stage of the journey was to be done by water—by canoe on the river—for a distance of some forty miles.

The juniors were not sorry to hear it. They had had enough jolting and bumping over the wildest and ruggeddest of tracks, and they said good-bye to the old Ford without any regrets.

The quarters at the little frontier hospedaria were of the very roughest, but they were tired enough to sleep soundly anywhere; and they hardly opened their eyes till Monsieur Montarde called them in the sunny morning.

After breakfast, some of the Indian "moccos" carried their baggage down to the bank, where a canoe was waiting. It was a large canoe, with six paddlers, all of them copper-skinned Indians, to whom Gaston Montarde spoke in their own language, of which the schoolboys did not comprehend a single word.

The baggage was piled on board, and the passengers took their places. The canoe went with the current, assisted by the paddles. Big and heavy as it was, and well loaded with passengers and baggage, it made a good speed, and the aldeia soon dropped out of sight behind.

"Bai Jove, this is wathah more comfortable than the cah, you fellows!" remarked Arthur Augustus, stretching his noble limbs on a thick rug and leaning back against a suitcase.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Tom Merry. "We're really in the wilds now! A few weeks ago, at St. Jim's, we never thought we should be canceling on a Brazilian river with a crew of Red Indians."

"Wathah not! These Indians seem all right!" said Arthur Augustus. "Are there any wild Indians in these parts, Mr. Montarde?"

"Ici, non—here, no!" answered Gaston. "But on ze Rio Preto—yes! No white man has ever followed ze Black River to ze source in ze mountains—unless," he added, with a smile, "my friend Lord he have done so. On ze banks of ze Preto zere are wild tribes of Carayas—but zey are far from ze quinta."

As the canoe rolled on down the stream, the juniors noticed that Monsieur Montarde sat with a rifle, which he had unpacked from his baggage, across his knees.

The thick, dark forest that bordered the river on either side was the haunt of jaguar and panther; but they guessed that the planter was "fucking more of Joao Rabeira than of the four-footed animals of the Brazilian wilderness."

There was a sudden babble from the Indian paddlers when the canoe had covered about five miles from the start. One of the Indians, as he exclaimed, pointed with his paddle.

The juniors all looked in the direction indicated.

Ahead of the canoe the stream narrowed, the forest-clad banks approaching one another to within a distance of twenty feet. Branches of the forest giants extended across the water, the sunlight glinting through high arches of thick foliage.

"What's up, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, sitting up and jamming his eye-glasses into his eye.

"Something!" said Blake. "The Indians seem jolly excited! Blessed if I can see anything!"

"Jaguar, perhaps!" said Tom Merry. "Something on that big tree, anyhow!"

Close by the bank, a little distance ahead, a gigantic ceiba-tree grew. Some of its huge branches stretched across the stream, and it was at one of the great branches that the Indians was pointing with his paddle.

As they drew closer, the juniors could see that something was stirring, high up on the branch arching over the water.

But it was not a jaguar. They spotted a big hat among the foliage, and the glimmer of a dark face under the hat. It was a man on the branch over the river, watching the canoe as it came.

"Bai Jove! Is it that wascal Wabeiwah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry shook his head. He could see the face clearly now, under the brim of the hat. It was a dark, swarthy face of an Indian half-breed—not the face of the bandit.

"No," he said. "But—"

"He's watching the canoe!" said Blake.

Gaston sat motionless as the canoe glided on, the rifle in his hands, his eyes fixed on the figure in the tree.

The juniors watched it breathlessly. They could see no weapon, but it was likely enough that one was hidden by the foliage.

If the man was an enemy, they could guess that it was his intention to fire down into the canoe as it passed; and if he was not an enemy, watching for the canoe, it was difficult to guess why he was there at all.

Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass.

"This is gettin' wathah thwillin', deah boys!" he remarked. "That chap isn't Wabeiwah—but I wathah suspect that it is a friend of his. Probably he is hand-in-glove with lots of othah wascals in these parts!"

The juniors' hearts beat fast.

They could see that Gaston Moutarde was watching the man like a cat, his finger on the trigger of the rifle he was ready to lift. His face, generally kindly and smiling in expression, was set and hard, his eyes glinting like cold steel.

Had it been Jose Rabeira on that high branch, they suspected that Monsieur Moutarde would have pulled the trigger without standing on ceremony.

It was more likely than not that the man was one of the lawless gang with which Jose was connected, but until he made a hostile movement, the planter could not be sure, and the schoolboys could not be sure. They felt their hearts thump as the canoe glided nearer and nearer to the branch that barred the blue sky over the water.

Gaston, for a moment, glanced at Arthur Augustus and smiled. Having polished his eyeglass, the swell of St. Jim's stuck it in his eye, and watched the figure in the tree with perfect calmness. If the watcher in the ceiba was a confederate of Rabeira, there was no doubt which member of the canoe's crew was to be his target, but the elegant ornament of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's did not turn a hair.

The planter fixed his eyes on the half-seen figure again. He watched it intently; the juniors with bated breath.

Gaston muttered a word in the Indian tongue, and the Indians suddenly plied their paddles with redoubled swiftness, the canoe fairly shooting down the stream.

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There was a sudden movement in the foliage above, and something glinted in the sunlight.

Crack!

It was Gaston who fired!

The hidden weapon had come into sight; the muzzle of a rifle bore full on the canoe, and in a moment more the bullet would have sped. But as the barrel glinted, Gaston threw up his rifle and pulled the trigger, and even as the man in the tree brought his firearm to bear, he was struck.

A rifle dropped, splashing into the water—and a loud, fierce yell woke the echoes of the forest.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

The figure in the tree was falling. The juniors breathlessly watched it slip from the branch, and saw two desperate hands clutch. For a long and terrible moment the bandit hung to the branch, but his grip was lost, and he shot downwards.

"C'est ca!" said Gaston coolly. "Ca va!"

Splash!

The falling body struck the water, sending up a mighty splash. The big grass-hat floated away on the stream—and the juniors had an instant's glimpse of a dark face, with rolling eyes, that emerged from the water, only to disappear again.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus. His face was a little pale.

The canoe shot on. A minute more, and it was passing under the branch where the bandit had lurked and watched. The juniors cast glances round on the sunlit stream, but they saw nothing of the man who had fallen.

Tom Merry touched the planter on the arm. Gaston glanced at him and, reading his thoughts, shook his head.

"Zat is finish!" he said. "Zere are alligators—zat is finish!"

The juniors were silent as the canoe glided on.

THE FOE IN THE FOREST I

"NOW it is a pony of ze shank!" said Monsieur Moutarde.

"Eh?"

"What?"

In the blaze of the tropical noon, the canoe had stopped, and the St. Jim's party landed for lunch under the shady trees. While they rested in the shade, after the meal, the Indians paddled away with the canoe, and disappeared down the stream.

Tom Merry & Co. were getting used by this time to Monsieur Moutarde's variety of their language. But they were rather perplexed now, and they looked at him inquiringly.

"Vat you call in English a pony of ze shank!" said Gaston. "Ze canoe take on ze baggage, but it is verree long way by water, and zey do not come to arrive at ze quinta till anozer day. Zis river flow into ze Rio Preto, and zen zey paddle up ze Preto to ze quinta. Mais nous—us, ve go by a pony of ze shank, as you say in your tongue."

"Oh!" gasped Tom. "Shanks' pony!"

And the juniors understood that they were to walk the last stage of the journey.

The way lay through the deep forest, leading away from the river.

Gaston Moutarde led the way, and the juniors followed him in single file.

If there was anything in the nature of a path, Tom Merry & Co. could see nothing of it. They wound along between mighty trunks, under vast branches that shut off the glare of the tropical

sun—though they did not shut off the heat. A steamy warmth prevailed, which made the juniors gasp for breath.

Here and there, it was necessary to push aside thick masses of lianas that hung from the branches. But Gaston tramped on without a halt, evidently never at a loss; and the schoolboys followed on. They were now within a few miles of the quinta on the Rio Preto, and the country was familiar to the planter, wild and strange as it was to the schoolboys from the far-off island in the North Sea.

"Hot!" murmured Blake, dashing a stream of perspiration from a face the colour of a peony.

"Yass, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus from the rear. Arthur Augustus was last in the file. "I weally feel as if I were cookin', deah boy! Oh, blow!"

The cord of Arthur Augustus' eyeglass caught in a twig and snapped.

The monocle was jerked from his noble eye, and dropped into the greenery at his feet.

Blake, the next in the file, was only three feet in advance of him when that disaster occurred; but, unaware that Gussy had stopped, he did not look back. Another moment, and a mass of lianas hid him, had Gussy looked—but Gussy was looking for his eyeglass.

It was some minutes before he found it, and rubbed it carefully clean on his handkerchief, made a knot in the snapped cord, and finally jammed the monocle back into his eye. Then he hurried on to overtake his friends.

It did not occur to Arthur Augustus, at the moment, that there would be any difficulty in overtaking them. A Brazilian forest was a new experience to him. For ten minutes he hurried

on as fast as the tangled underwoods between the trunks permitted, and then he came to a dismaying halt.

He had not overtaken the party. In the bewildering forest around him, there was no indication of the way they had gone!

It was borne in on Arthur Augustus' mind that he had not the remotest idea of the direction they had taken—and that he might, for all he knew, be wandering at random in the untrodden forest.

"Oh cwums!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He stared round at innumerable trunks, at masses of hanging creepers, at crawling green lizards and beautiful butterflies.

But of his friends there was no sound or sign; and whether they were near, or whether they were far, he could not guess. If they were going on, as doubtless they were, unaware that he was not following, they were probably getting farther and farther away from him every moment.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "This is wathah wotten!"

To attempt to find the party, in the perplexing mazes of the thick forest, was obviously hopeless. Arthur Augustus was lost—and he could only hope that his friends were not yet out of hearing.

If they were within range of a shout, Monsieur Montarde would come back for him—otherwise, it was not pleasant to think of the prospect.

Arthur Augustus put all his energy into a yell. "Help! Wescue, St. Jim's! Can you hear me? Help!"

The shout rang and echoed among the thick trees and bushes.

It was followed by a sound of rustling in the

(Continued on next page.)

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underwoods, and Arthur Augustus gasped with relief as he heard it.

Someone was coming back—no doubt Monsieur Montarde, for the planter was not likely to trust the schoolboys to return to look for him.

"This way!" called out Arthur Augustus. "Sowwy to bothah you like this, sir, but I appeal to have lost my way! Heah I am."

The rustling in the underwoods approached him, the branches swaying as a passage was forced through them. Arthur Augustus was rather surprised that no voice called in reply, and he called again:

"Heah I am. This way!"

A great hanging mass of lianas was thrust aside, and a figure came into sight, not six feet from him.

From under a grass-hat, a dark face and a pair of glinting eyes looked at the swell of St. Jim's—a dark face distorted in an evil grin of triumph.

"Oh ewwubs!" breathed Arthur Augustus, with a cold chill at his heart, as he saw the evil face of Joao Rabeira.

It was not one of his friends returning for him. It was the bandit of the Rio Preto, who had heard his calling voice, and had been guided by it.

Joao burst into a low, mocking, triumphant laugh as he fixed his glinting eyes on the startled, dismayed face of the swell of St. Jim's.

"So it is you, little senhor!" he grinned. "I find you in the forest of Brazil, and it is your voice that calls me! Bom!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

The bandit's hand was on the haft of a knife in his belt. Half-crouching, like a savage beast about to spring, he drew nearer to the schoolboy.

Arthur Augustus gripped his stick—the only weapon he had. Joao chuckled as he saw the action. That weapon was not likely to stop the thrust of the bandit's knife.

"We go to finish, little senhor!" grinned Joao. "You think to come to find the one that is lost—sun! He tell you in a letter, and you come to the Rio Preto to find the lost one. Better for you if you did not read what was written. He tell you in a letter where he shall be found—but I, Joao Rabeira, do not choose so! We go to finish."

As he uttered the last word, he came forward with a spring like a jaguar, the knife glittering in his hand.

Arthur Augustus' hand was up, with the stick in it. A blow would not have stopped the bandit, and he knew it; but he hurled the stick with all his force at the dusky face as Joao leapt.

The missile crashed on the dark face, striking the bandit across the eyes.

Rabeira uttered a yell and staggered, and the slash of the knife missed the schoolboy by a foot or more. Before he could strike again, Arthur Augustus leaped forward, and his clenched fist crashed into the dusky face, and Joao stumbled over. He sprawled among trailing lianas, and Arthur Augustus darted away into the forest.

Behind him, as he ran, he heard a savage voice spitting Portuguese oaths. Joao was on his feet again with a bound like a jaguar, and crashing through the underwoods in pursuit.

Arthur Augustus ran on desperately.

He plunged through hanging creepers, bumped on trunks, wound round them, tore lianas aside, tripped and stumbled, and leaped up again.

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panting for breath. Behind him came the panting bandit, losing sight of him from moment to moment, but guided by the sounds of his wild scramble through the tropical underwoods.

But the hunted junior knew only too well that that chase could not last many minutes; and suddenly, as he ducked under a low branch of a great ceiba, he stopped, caught at the branch, and clambered up.

He swung off the ground into the tree, and hardly a moment later a grass-hat ducked below as the bandit crashed on.

It disappeared, and Arthur Augustus panted for breath in the tree as Joao Rabeira tore on.

With his heart pounding, he listened. He heard the crashing of the bandit, not a dozen feet away, but it was clear that Joao had not seen him drag himself into the ceiba, and did not know where to seek him.

But the bandit knew that he was not far away; his ears told him that the schoolboy was no longer in sight.

The grass-hat appeared in sight under the ceiba again, and Arthur Augustus, clamped against the trunk a dozen feet up, held his breath as he watched it. It stopped under the tree, and was tilted back as the bandit looked up. And the blaze in the fierce black eyes told that he had seen the junior among the foliage.

"Corpo de Deos!" snarled Joao, as he placed the knife between his teeth, and grasped with both dusky hands the branch by which Arthur Augustus had swung himself off the ground.

As he did so there came an echoing shout through the dense thickness of the forest.

"Gussy!"

It was Blake's voice shouting. Joao paused for a second, like a startled puma, as he heard it, then he clambered on.

"Gussy!" It was Tom Merry's voice.

"Where are you, Gussy?"

His friends had missed him; the party were returning on their tracks to look for him. The rather shrill voice of Monsieur Montarde rose above the shouts of the juniors.

"'Allo! 'Allo! Repandez done! 'Allo!"

"Gussy!"

"Help!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Help! This way, dear boys! Look out—that wascal Wabeiwah is heah! Help!"

There was a rustling and swaying in the thickets.

Again Joao paused for a second; then again he came on, clambering like a cat.

Arthur Augustus caught a higher branch and swung himself clear as the knife flashed.

From below came the sudden sharp crack of a revolver, and a bullet tore through the foliage of the ceiba.

"Alors! Ce coquin Rabeira!" It was the voice of Gaston Montarde, and he fired again as he spoke.

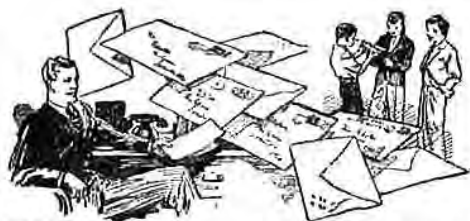
The dark, evil face was hardly a yard from Arthur Augustus; a few moments more and the bandit's grasp would have been on him. But the next moment that savage face disappeared as the bandit swung himself away, barely escaping the bullet from below.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy!" yelled Blake.

"Heah, dear boy!"

Arthur Augustus swung himself down from the ceiba. The bandit had disappeared in an almost impenetrable mass of foliage, clambering from tree to tree like a puma, Arthur Augustus



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

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

HALLO, Chums! Here I am again in my editorial chair after a few weeks' absence.

It's not every week that I can find a place for my chair in the GEM, owing to the old paper being so closely packed with great stories, but I have just managed it this week.

The chums of St. Jim's have had some exciting and humorous adventures since I last had a word with readers. Now they are in the thick of thrills in the backlands of Brazil. In next Wednesday's great yarn—

"THE ST. JIM'S EXPLORERS!"

—Tom Merry & Co. take a trip up the Rio Preto, little knowing the peril they are going to face on the dangerous river that winds into the unexplored wilds. The bandit who for some mysterious reason has menaced the juniors since they started from England, is still lurking in the forest, awaiting his chance to make another attempt on Gussy's life. And his chance

dropped among the St. Jim's fellows, gasping for breath.

"Safe!" panted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You howling ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Fathead!" roared Blake.

"Aas!"

A moment ago Blake's voice had been sharp with anxiety. Now that he saw his noble chum safe, however, anxiety seemed to give place on the spot to exasperation. "You chump, what did you wander away for? Looking for that blighter Rabeira?"

"I did not wandah away, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "I stopped for a few minutes, you see, and you fellows left me behind—"

"What did you stop for?" howled Blake.

"I dropped my eyeglass!"

"You—you—you—," gasped Blake. "By gum! I've a jolly good mind to boot you all the way to the quinta! I'll walk behind you after this, and if you stop again, look out for my boot!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Allons! Now it is all left—zat is to say all right!" said Monsieur Montarde. "But I zink I keep you under my eye—venez avec moi, petit! You keep viz me, isn't it?"

And when the St. Jim's party resumed their

comes on the Rio Preto—and it's touch-and-go for poor old Gussy!

Readers will vote this yarn of schoolboy adventure in South America one of the most exciting they have read. Look out for it!

"STOLEN GOLD!"

The chums of Cedar Creek have had their share of thrilling adventure—gold-seeking in the Cascade Mountains. Next week they turn their horses towards home, richer by one thousand dollars as the result of their efforts as prospectors. But on the home trail Frank Richards & Co. receive an unpleasant shock. The bag of gold disappears one night while they are camping. The chums are baffled by the theft! Who has stolen their gold? That you will discover when you read this gripping yarn.

"THE TREASURE CLUE!"

In the next story of the boys of the school ship, we find the Rainbow threading a course up the Orinoco River, in Venezuela. Buried treasure is once again a topic on board, owing to Peg Slaney's boasting that he has a clue to a treasure hidden somewhere up the Orinoco. Daubeny & Co. show a very keen interest in the one-eyed seaman's document—an interest not unconnected with stealing the clue, and going in search of the treasure themselves!

Another batch of "Pen Pal" notices, and more snappy replies from Jack Blake complete the next programme. Don't forget to book your GEM early.

All the best for the holidays!

THE EDITOR.

march through the forest, Arthur Augustus was second in the file, with the rest of the party strung out behind him—which, as Monty Lowther remarked, made it difficult for Gussy to lose himself again, however hard he tried!

"A Quinta da Silva!" said Monsieur Montarde. "Zat is to say, ze Villa of ze Briar! Voila!"

The forest was left behind, and under the red sunset the juniors were following a road through fields of coffee. Ahead of them, a white-walled villa surrounded by green verandas came into view, looking across trim lawns to the rolling waters of the Rio Preto. It was the quinta, and they had reached their destination at last.

"Jolly!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Monsieur Montarde ushered his young friends, with many bows, into the white-walled quinta, where, for the present, their perilous journey was over—though many perilous adventures yet lay before Tom Merry & Co. in the wilds of Brazil.

Next Week: "THE ST. JIM'S EXPLORERS!"

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THE SCHOOLBOY GOLD-SEEKERS OF CEDAR CREEK FIND THEMSELVES THE PRISONERS OF—

THE CLAIM-JUMPERS!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE CEDAR CREEK CLAIM!

"I GUESS that's O.K.," said Bob Lawless, with an air of great satisfaction.

"Ripping!" said Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc together.

And Chunky Todgers chimed in:

"You bet!"

The chums of Cedar Creek School were standing by a mountain stream, amid the pine-clad slopes of the Cascade Mountains. In the bend of the stream a wooden dam had been built out by the Cedar Creek fellows, exposing a part of the sandy bed. There Frank Richards & Co. had been at work washing out the golden grains from the "pay-dirt."

On the edge of the stream Bob Lawless had erected two posts cut from the forest, and to this posts was fastened a board, roughly fashioned with an axe. The board bore an inscription in large letters.

As Bob's brush was made of twigs and his paint of vegetable juices mixed with black mud and water, the lettering was somewhat patchy and irregular; but it was quite clear to read, and could be seen at a distance:

"NOTICE.

THIS CLAIM HAS BEEN PEGGED OUT BY F. RICHARDS, V. BEAUCLERC, R. LAWLESS, AND J. TODGERS, OF CEDAR CREEK.

HANDS OFF!"

"I guess there can't be any mistake about that," said Bob. "All the same, the sooner we register the claim at Tucker's Bar the better. I reckon we'll ride down there this morning."

"Sooner the quicker!" agreed Frank Richards.

"We want to get some tuck, too," said Bob.

"I tell you, you chaps, there's a good bit of gold-dust in that sand, and we can carry home some dollars with us when we wind up our holiday here. We've got to lay in some spades and picks and stuff, and we've made enough dust out of the claim already to pay for them. Let's get off!"

The schoolboy gold-seekers broke up camp, and mounted their horses, with cheery, contented minds. They rode away slowly down the difficult mountain trail, the pack-mule following the riders.

According to all mountain laws, the notice set up on the claim protected it from other prospectors, and as soon as it was lawfully registered it became the private property of the discoverers.

Frank Richards & Co. were naturally elated. When they had started on their holiday in the North-West they had not looked for a stroke of luck of this kind. Chunky Todgers, indeed, had announced that he was going to "strike it," but Chunky's comrades had taken that humorously.

Bob Lawless had discovered the auriferous traces in the mountain stream, and he had "panned" the sand with success. The claim was

to be registered in the names of the four, but they intended to allow a share for Yen Chin, the Chinese, who had been a member of the holiday party until a few days previously.

Yen Chin had been "fired" from the party for various misdemeanours, and, as he had put in no work on the claim, he really was not entitled to a share. But Frank Richards & Co. agreed that he should count as one of the Co.

The four riders rode cheerfully down the valley, and then into the lower trail that led to Tucker's Bar, the nearest mining-camp in that part of the Cascade Mountains.

There was a sudden call on the fresh mountain air, and a diminutive figure came out on the trail from a spruce thicket.

"You stoppes!"

It was Yen Chin.

Bob Lawless pulled in his horse, and his comrades followed his example. But their looks were not conciliatory.

"Well?" snapped Bob.

"Nicee morning!" said Yen Chin.

"Have you stoppes us to say that?"

"Velly glad see nicee old Bob again!"

"Br-r-r!"

"Pool li'l Chinese solly bad boy!" said Yen Chin pathetically. "Be velly good boy afterwards! Oh, yes! You wantee me comee backee?"

Bob shook his head.

Frank Richards was already relenting; his heart was of the softest, as the cunning little Chinese well knew. But the rancher's son looked grim.

"Hook it, John!" he said. "You can't hitch on to this crowd again! It's not only that you sneaked away from camp to gamble with Guntene and Keller, though that was bad enough—"

"No speakee any mole to Guntene and Kellee!" said Yen Chin eagerly. "Guntene and Kellee travel homee now—gonee!"

"That isn't all!" snapped Bob. "You pinched the gold we'd washed out of the claim, and you're a thief, Yen Chin! I dare say you don't look at it like we do, but it's too thick for us! You'd better take the trail home!"

"No wantee!"

"Then you can go and chop chips!"

Bob Lawless rode on. Beauclerc, who had not spoken, followed him, and Chunky Todgers snorted emphatically as they passed the little Celestial.

Yen Chin caught at Frank Richards' bridle as he would have followed.

"No leavee pool li'l Chinese!" he murmured.

Frank's heart smote him. Had a white man been guilty of Yen Chin's conduct, Frank Richards would have felt too much disgust to feel much compassion for him. But he could not help feeling that it was different with the Oriental.

He had always stood Yen Chin's friend at Cedar Creek School in the far-off Thompson Valley, in spite of the Chow's impish tricks and

his incurable habit of untruthfulness. But the robbery of his comrades to "raise the wind" for a poker game with Gunten and Keller was the limit. The chums had recovered the stolen dust, but that did not alter the fact of Yen Chin's guilt.

Certainly Yen Chin looked very repentant now, but it was probable that that was simply because he had to suffer for his rascality. He looked up pleadingly at Frank's troubled face.

"No leave pool li'l Chinese!" he murmured again. "Old Flanky volly nicey old boy! Li'l Chinese volly fond old Flanky!"

"Frank!" shouted Bob Lawless. "Come on!"

"I—I say, Bob—"

"Rot! Come on, I say! And if that heathen comes with you I'll give him the butt of my gun on his cabeza!"

"All right, Bob!"

"No takes pool li'l Chinese?"

"Can't be done!" said Frank. "Dash it all, Yen Chin, you knew what you were doing, and you can't expect to be trusted again! I'm sorry, but there it is! Let go!"

He shook off the Celestial's hand and rode on after his comrades. Yen Chin was soon lost to sight among the rocks and thickets as Frank Richards & Co. trotted on to Tucker's Bar.

But Frank could not help thinking of the Chinese. There was no reason why Yen Chin should not return to his home at Thompson. The Cedar Creek holiday was drawing to an end, anyway, and he would have to return soon. But evidently he wanted to rejoin the party and finish the holiday with them in the North-West.

He had been "on his lonesome" for two or three days now, and he had not started for the

south. Frank Richards wondered what he would do after his latest rebuff, and he hoped that Yen Chin would be sensible enough to take the trail for home.

JUMPED!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. were very busy after their arrival at Tucker's Bar. The little mining-camp in the heart of the Cascade Mountains had few facilities for sleeping, but the one and only store provided the articles of which the schoolboy gold-seekers were in need.

At a lumber hotel they obtained a dinner, and then they entered the store to make their purchases. The dust they had brought from their claim was weighed in the store and taken as cash. They purchased picks and spades and other articles required for their work on the claim, and loaded their purchases on the pack-mule.

There was a good many prospectors coming and going in Tucker's Bar, but none of such a youthful appearance as Frank Richards & Co. The schoolboys naturally attracted some attention.

The storekeeper directed them to the sheriff's office, the sheriff being the only legal official of any kind in the camp, and empowered to enter registration of claims.

"Cedar Creek Claim," as the chums named it, was duly entered, and Frank Richards & Co. had the proud consciousness of being its legal possessors.

It was late in the afternoon when the schoolboys rode out of Tucker's Bar, giving them time to reach the claim before sundown. They rode along very cheerily on the mountain trails, and



"I think the claim is ours, senores," said Gomez. "But you shall work on it—under my eye and my rifle!"

Frank, remembering Yen Chin, kept an eye open for the little Celestial. But he saw nothing of him, and he hoped that by that time Yen Chin had realised that the best thing he could do was to "make tracks" for home.

The sun was sinking towards the Pacific when the schoolboy gold-seekers came in sight of their old camp by the mountain stream.

Bob Lawless uttered an exclamation.

"The notice is down!" he exclaimed.

"Hallo! Somebody's hopped in!" said Frank. "There's a camp-fire going! Look at the smoke over the trees!"

Chunky Todgers gave a howl.

"They're after our dust!"

Bob's brow set grimly.

"The notice was plain enough for any galoot to understand," he said. "I guess there'll be trouble if anybody's jumping our claim! Look to your guns, my infants! We may want them!"

The chums of Cedar Creek looked serious as they rode on. In the mountains of the North-West, beyond the confines of the regular settlements, law and order did not exist as they had known them in the Thompson Valley. Every man was a law unto himself, more or less, in the unexplored fastnesses of the far North-West.

But Frank Richards & Co., averse as they were from the very thought of violence, had no intention whatever of being "jumped" out of their claim. It was theirs by right of discovery and by law, and the notice set up by Bob made it impossible for any later prospector to make a mistake on the subject.

They looked to their rifles as they rode up to the camp, and the weapons were in their hands as they dismounted.

"Look after the horses, Chunky," said Bob.

Frank, Bob, and Beauclerc, rifles in hand, moved through the trees towards the claim on the creek, while Chunky Todgers tethered the horses. An exclamation of anger burst from Bob's lips as they came out on the shelving bank. The notice-board and the posts had been torn down and used for the purposes of a camp-fire. The remnants of them were crackling away amid a pile of pine-cones and spruce-twigs.

An iron pot was boiling over the fire, apparently containing supper, being left to cook by itself while the new campers were busy in the bed of the stream.

There were two of them, lithe and swarthy of complexion, Mexican by race, of mingled Spanish and Indian blood, as the schoolboy could see at a glance. They had knives in their belts, but their guns were leaning against a tree on the bank, as Bob noted at once.

With a run, he was between the two Mexicans and their firearms. The coming dispute was likely to be much more amicable with firearms in the hands of only one of the parties.

The two Mexicans were busy, and did not for some moments observe the three schoolboys: but as Bob placed himself before the guns they paused in their work and looked up.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Bob.

The two Mexicans stared at him. One of them, a thick-set man, made a movement towards the bank.

"Stand where you are!" said Bob. "You're not touching these guns for a bit!"

"What is it?" asked the Mexican, speaking in English. "Who are you? What do you want?"

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"I guess we're the owners of this claim you're robbing!"

"Oh!"

The Mexicans exchanged a quick glance. The thick-set man dropped his hand upon his knife, and Bob Lawless pushed his rifle forward at once.

"Let go that stick!" he said.

The Mexican half-drew the long "cuchillo," but his companion caught him quickly by the arm.

"Para! Para. Jose Gomez!" he muttered.

"I give you a second!" said Bob Lawless, his eyes gleaming along his rifle. "If you want your arm smashed with a bullet—"

Jose Gomez released the knife.

"That's better, Greaser!"

The thick-set Mexican scowled savagely at the Canadian schoolboy.

"You knew well enough that this claim was pegged out," said Bob Lawless. "You'll hop out of that creek instanter!"

The Mexicans came up the bank, glancing towards their guns, but making no attempt to reach them.

"This is your claim, senior?" asked Gomez, forcing himself to civility, which was belied by the glitter of his black eyes.

"I guess so. You saw the notice-board you've pegged out."

"I do not read English."

"You speak it," answered Bob.

"But that is not the same, senior."

"Well, the notice being there was enough to show you that the claim was pegged out," answered Bob. "You could see that it had been worked, too. You're a claim-jumper, Mr. Greaser!"

Gomez clenched his swarthy hands.

"You're the kind of galoot the miners string up on a branch," continued Bob. "Many a pilgrim would shoot you in your tracks for jumping his claim."

Gomez scowled more blackly, and his companion backed away with a look of alarm. The claim-jumpers were totally at the mercy of the schoolboys, if the latter had chosen to use their rifles.

There were a good many prospectors in the Cascade Mountains who would have pulled trigger without wasting words in such a case.

"Vamonos, Jose Gomez!" muttered the thick-set man's companion. And Bob, who had heard Spanish talked by Mexican "hands" on the ranches, knew that that meant "Let us go."

Gomez hesitated.

"You say it is your claim, senores?" he exclaimed.

"I reckon."

"We found it deserted."

"You knew it was being worked, though. Anyhow, you know it by now," said Bob, "and the sooner you make tracks the better."

"Give us our guns, then, and we will go."

"Los escopettos y vamonos," said the other, speaking to Gomez.

Bob glanced at his comrades. He did not want to keep the property of the Mexicans—claim-jumpers as they were—but naturally he did not want to place deadly weapons in the hands of a couple of ruffians who were only too likely to use them.

"It would be foolish to give them firearms," said Vere Beauclerc quickly. "It would mean shooting, Bob. Take their cartridges away first."

"Good!" said Bob. "I'll keep this rifle looking at them, Franky, while you take away their powder and shot."

"Hands off, senores!" shouted Gomez angrily, as Frank Richards came towards him. "Vaya! Vaya!"

"You'll give up your cartridges, or you leave your guns here!" said Bob. "Take your choice!"

Gomez gritted his teeth. He settled the matter by flinging his cartridge-belt to the ground, and his companion followed his example. Then Beaulere picked up the guns, and, first discharging them into the air, handed them to the Mexicans.

"Now light out!" said Bob Lawless, making a motion with his rifle. "Don't come moseying round this outfit again, or I shall shoot you on sight! That's a plain warning! Get!"

AT THE MERCY OF THE MEXICANS!

BOB LAWLESS watched the two claim-jumpers out of sight down the rocky valley before he dropped his rifle. The Mexicans disappeared at last, however.

"Good riddance!" said Bob. "A pair of the biggest rascals this side of the Rio Grande, from their looks."

"I'm jolly glad they're gone," said Frank Richards, in relief. "I was afraid that ruffian Gomez was going to try to use his knife."

"There would be a dead greaser lying around if he had tried it."

"That's what I didn't want, old chap. I suppose they're gone for good," said Frank.

"I guess so. We'll keep a good watch to-night, all the same. You can't be too spry in the foothills. But I reckon we're not going to have our claim jumped, if we have to shoot as many greasers as there are between Vera Cruz and Acapulco!" said Bob Lawless emphatically.

The schoolboys camped for supper, which Chunky Todgers soon had ready, helping himself to the boiling pot left by the Mexicans as prize of war.

"I'm blessed if I quite know what it is!" said Todgers. "It smells jolly oily, but it tastes all right, and we're going to rope it in. Going without their supper will do those two bulldozers good!"

Frank Richards & Co. made a good supper as the last rays of the sun disappeared behind mountain-tops, and then they turned in, intending to be up early in the morning to recommence work on the claim.

The schoolboy explorers were accustomed to keep watch at night in that dangerous region, and they were more careful than ever on this occasion, in view of the possibility that the claim-jumpers were still lurking in the valley.

Bob Lawless took the first watch till midnight, and then Frank Richards relieved him.

"All serene, Franky!" Bob said. "But keep your eyes peeled."

"What-fo?" answered Frank.

He sat on a log in the shadow of a tree, with his rifle across his knees, watching the valley.

At length a faint rustle in the trees, louder than that caused by the night breeze, caused him to rise from the log and look about him in the gloom. The rustle was repeated, not a dozen yards from him, in a thicket of spruce.

It was probably an animal coming down to the stream to drink, but Frank Richards was not

taking chances. He fixed his eyes on the thicket warily, and lifted his rifle to his shoulder. With every sense on the alert, he watched.

The rustle came again. Frank Richards was about to call out to his comrades when he gave a start and a startled cry as a strong grip closed on him from behind. For a moment he thought he was dreaming or that one of his comrades had taken hold of him for a joke.

He spun round, but the grip was too strong for him, and he was forced to the ground, and in the dim light he caught a glimpse of a swarthy face—the face of Jose Gomez, the Mexican claim-jumper.

"Bob!" yelled Frank. "Bob! Beau! Wake up!"

The next instant he was on the ground, hung there savagely by the muscular Mexican, and his rifle dragged from his hands. At the same moment the other Mexican came running from the thicket.

Frank, as he rolled dazedly on the ground, understood how he had been tricked. The Mexican in the thicket had deliberately rustled the foliage to draw his attention while the other rascal stole upon him from behind from another direction.

Bob Lawless and Vere Beaulere started up from their blankets, reaching for their weapons as they did so. But Frank Richards' rifle was in Gomez's hands, and he levelled it, his black eyes scintillating along the barrel.

"Hands up!" he shouted. "Up with them, senores, or I pull trigger!"

The rifle-muzzle was bearing full on the two schoolboys within three yards of them, and it needed only the light pressure of a finger to send the bullet speeding.

"It's a cinch, Cherub," said Bob Lawless coolly. "Pass, pardner."

He put up his hands, and Beaulere followed his example. There was no help for it. Even in the uncertain starlight the Mexican could not have failed to kill at so short a range.

Frank Richards had striven to get on his feet, dazed as he was by the fall he had received, but Gomez's companion had grasped him, and a bright cuchillo glittered over the schoolboy.

The Mexican muttered something in Spanish which Frank did not understand, but he understood its import, and he lay still.

Bob Lawless' face was set, but he took the situation with his usual coolness.

"I guess this lets us out!" he remarked, keeping his hands up. "Your game, Mr. Greaser!"

"Keep your hands up!" granted Gomez.

"You bet!"

The Mexicans had the upper hand, and for the present, at least, there was nothing to be done but to submit.

Gomez grinned savagely over the rifle.

"The claim is ours, after all, senores," he said, his black eyes glittering at Bob Lawless.

"It's your game," answered Bob tersely. "I'm keeping still."

"Juan!" snapped Gomez, addressing his companion without turning his head.

"Si, si!"

Gomez rapped out something in Spanish. His comrades had tied Frank Richards' wrists with cord, and he now rose and advanced towards Bob and Beaulere and Chunky Todgers.

Under the threatening rifle of Gomez they could make no resistance, and Juan bound their

hands together. When the chums were bound Gomez gave a mocking laugh.

"I think the claim is ours, senores!" he said cheerfully. "But do not be disappointed; you shall work on the claim. Si, si! You shall work under my eye and under my rifle! Muy bien!"

Frank Richards & Co. sat down on their blankets with their hands bound. They were not feeling much inclined for sleep.

Gomez and his companion rummaged in the camp and found food, and sat down to eat, grinning and chuckling, and talking to one another in Spanish. They took no further heed of the schoolboys.

"What do you think their game is, Bob?" asked Frank gloomily.

"You heard what the galoot Gomez said. They're forced to keep us prisoners while they're jumping our claim, and they're going to make us earn our oats—working on the claim for them!"

"The awful villains!" groaned Chunky Todgers.

"I reckon the claim will run out in a week or so," said Bob, "and then I calculate they'll vamoose, taking our dust and horses and outfit, and leaving us stranded in the mountains. That's their programme. But there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, and I reckon we're going to show them somehow."

Bob Lawless spoke hopefully, but there seemed little hope in the situation for the chums of Cedar Creek. And Frank Richards & Co. were not feeling very cheerful when dawn broke over the Cascade Mountains.

TURNING THE TABLES!

CLINK, clink!

Pick and spade rang on the sand and rock in the claim as the morning sun climbed higher over the mountain peaks. Frank Richards & Co. were at work. They worked with black brows and gleaming eyes, their thoughts busier than their hands.

On the rocky bank Jose Gomez sat watching them, with a rifle across his knees, and a grin on his swarthy face, shaded by his big sombrero. Juan, his comrade, stood on the sand, with a rope in his hand, for use if the schoolboys flagged in their work.

Probably the two Mexicans, in their own country, had often worked wretched "peons" in the gold-mines in the same way, and it was nothing new to them. But it was new to the Canadian schoolboys, and it made them grit their teeth as they worked and bided their time.

It was only the thought and the hope of somehow turning the tables on the claim-jumpers that made them submit. But resistance at present was out of the question. Their weapons were in the hands of the two claim-jumpers, and Gomez sat, with his rifle ready to shoot, on the high, rocky bank, and he could have picked them off like rabbits if he had chosen.

Certainly he had no desire to risk a rope for his neck, but if the schoolboys had rushed on him with their picks, as they were strongly tempted to do, he would have shot them down without mercy.

Frank Richards blamed himself severely for having been taken off his guard in the night attack, though really he was little to blame. The Mexicans had been too cunning for him, that was all. Self-reproach was useless, however, and the

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question was how to get out of the hands of the claim-jumpers.

There was a week's work ahead before the pay-dirt was washed out of the "placer" and all the possible gold obtained. It was Gomez's intention to keep the schoolboys prisoners till all was done, partly for his own safety and partly for their labour on the claim.

Pick and spade rang under the brightening sunshine and the watchful eyes of the grinning Mexicans. The work itself did not matter much; the schoolboys had intended to spend that day in hard work. But working for themselves was quite different from working under compulsion for the benefit of a couple of thieves.

"Let 'em wait a bit!" murmured Bob Lawless, in a brief pause for rest. "I guess our turn will come soon. I know I'll have a go at them with a pick, if I'm shot the next minute, before I'll let them walk off with our gold!"

"Same here!" said Vero Beauclerc quietly. "But keep patient. Our only chance is to take them off their guard."

"Sigue!" called out Juan, with a threatening gesture of the rope.

"What does the rotter mean, Bob?"

"He means go on," said Bob, with a faint grin. "We'd better. Our turn will come."

And the labour was resumed. A great deal of work was got through during the morning, and the two Mexicans grinned with satisfaction over the result. The placer was panning out well, though it was likely to be exhausted by a few more days of strenuous washing-out.

Frank Richards & Co. were dispirited enough as they ate a meagre lunch, and, after a short rest they were turned back to work.

Bob Lawless grasped the handle of his pick hard as Jose Gomez called to him, and the Mexican half-raised his rifle.

"You scum!" muttered Bob. "You pesky scum!"

"To work, nino!" grinned Gomez. "And listen to me! Any more of your black looks, and I will put a bullet through your leg as a warning! To work!"

Bob choked back his feelings and resumed his labour. Under the afternoon sun the work on the claim went on.

The two Mexicans sat on the rocky bank under the shade of a tree, their firearms ready to their hands, and rolled cigarettes and smoked them incessantly as they watched the labour they did not choose to share.

Suddenly the schoolboys started round from their work, and stared towards the bank where the Mexicans sat. A loud and anguished cry had suddenly rung out, and, to their amazement, they saw Jose Gomez stagger forward and roll helplessly down the bank into the sandy bed of the stream.

"What the thunder—" gasped Bob.

There was blood upon the Mexican as he rolled on the sand, clawing at it with his hands, and groaning. The other rascal was on his feet, staring round at the trees behind where they had been sitting, rifle in hand. Nothing was to be seen save the thick foliage, and the Mexican, in alarm and fear, fired into the trees.

Crack!

Bob Lawless gave a gasp.

"Somebody's heaved a rock at that galoot from behind!" he panted. "By gum, I reckon his head's got a pain in it! Buck up, you chaps!"

Gomez was sprawling helplessly on the sand,

evidently hard hit. A jagged chunk of rock, hurled from the thicket, had struck him on the back of the head, nearly stunning him, and for some minutes the Mexican was helpless.

The chance of the Cedar Creek fellows had come at last. Bob Lawless rushed towards the fallen man, pick in hand. Gomez, dazed as he was, saw him, and made an effort to get his rifle up to shoot. But before he could do so, Bob's pick crashed on his shoulder, and he sank back on the sand with a yell of agony.

The next instant Bob Lawless had caught up the rifle.

Juan, high up on the bank, was firing into the thicket, with a startled and furious face; but at his comrade's yell he spun round towards the creek. His rifle was empty, but he crammed in a cartridge as he turned.

Bob raised Gomez's rifle. But the Mexican on the rocky bank would have fired first—quick as Bob was. And Frank and Beauclerc, as they saw it, felt sick at heart for a second.

But even as the Mexican above was pulling the trigger, a chunk of rock whizzed from the thicket and struck him in the back. Juan pitched forward heavily, his rifle exploding as he fell, and the bullet crashing into the sandy bed of the stream.

Unable to save himself, the Mexican pitched forward and rolled down the rocky bank, crashing within a yard of the sprawling Gomez. He lay there and groaned.

THE UNKNOWN RESCUER!

"ON him!" yelled Frank. With a leap, Frank Richards reached the fallen Mexican as he sprawled on his face, and his knee was planted between Juan's shoulders, pinning him down. The Mexican groaned. The crashing rock on his back had hurt him severely, and he was in no condition for a struggle even if he had had a chance.

Gomez had made an attempt to rise and draw the knife in his belt, but Beauclerc reached him, and his pick circled over the ruffian's head.

"Quiet!" said Beauclerc coolly. "Let that knife go, or I'll knock your brains out where you lie, you scoundrel!"

Gomez, with a curse, relinquished the weapon. Beauclerc snatched it from his belt and tossed it into the stream.

"I guess this is our game," said Chunky Todgers, gasping with delight. "Keep those rotters safe, and I'll tie 'em up."

"Go it, Chunky!"

Chunky Todgers ran for the trail-rope.

Gomez and Juan made no resistance now. They were injured, and they were under the threat of a rifle and a couple of picks, more than sufficient to keep them in a state of submission.

The chums watched them warily enough, however, till Chunky returned with the rope from the camp, and bound their hands.

The two Mexicans being secured, Frank Richards & Co. had time to turn their attention to their unknown rescuer, who was still hidden by the thicket above the bank.

"Show yourself, pard!" called out—Bob Lawless.

Who it was that had attacked the claim-jumpers so opportunely for the Cedar Creek chums was a mystery; but Frank Richards thought he could guess. And he smiled when the thicket rustled, and through the foliage a

diminutive figure appeared, with a little yellow face grinning under a stelson hat.

"Yen Chin!" yelled Bob.

The Chinese grinned.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Beauclerc.

The little Chinese clambered down the rocky bank, and joined the chums of Cedar Creek on the wet sand of the claim.

"Allee light," he said cheerfully. "Me comee backee. Nicey old Flanky glad to see pool li'l Chinese. Oh, yes!"

And Yen Chin grinned at the astonished Co.

"Well, by gum!" said Bob Lawless at last, with a deep breath. "I thought you'd made tracks for home."

"No makee tracks without nicey old pals," said Yen Chin. "Me tinkee sticked to old Flanky. Oh, yes! Me watchee. Me see. See bad Mexican man makee pool old Flanky wolkee. Oh, yes! Me comee quiet—cleepes. What you tinkee? Cleepes velly quiet in tlee. Comee behind," the little Chinese chuckled. "Heavee look at Mexican man. What you tinkee?"

"I was never so jolly glad to see a rock heaved," said Bob Lawless.

"You came along at the right time, Yen Chin," said Beauclerc, with a smile. "We were in a bad fix."

Yen Chin nodded.

"Me knowee. Oh, yes! Now allee light. You likee old Yen Chin comee back. Oh, yes?"

He blinked inquiringly at the chums of Cedar Creek.

"All serene, kid!" said Bob Lawless.

Yen Chin beamed with satisfaction.

"Nicee old Bob," he said. "Me likee old Bob velly muchee. Me going to be good boy—velly good boy."

"I hope you are," said Bob. "Now we'd better deal with these greasers."

The rancher's son searched the Mexicans for weapons, and completely disarmed them. Then he broke off some sticks from a thicket and handed them round.

"Lay it on as they go," he said.

The schoolboys formed up in two lines, grinning—Bob and Chunky and Frank on one side, Yen Chin and Beauclerc on the other. Then Gomez was cut loose and told to run.

He was willing enough to run, and the sticks lashed on him as he ran the gauntlet, eliciting fendish yells from the claim-jumper. He went running on, still yelling.

Then Juan was cut loose, and set running after him, with a liberal application of the sticks to his back to help him go. The two Mexicans disappeared down the valley, yelling wildly, and vanished. They were not likely to return.

Frank Richards & Co. worked the claim for the following week, keeping a good look-out the while, but nothing more was seen of the claim-jumpers. They had had a severe lesson, and they gave the schoolboy gold-seekers a wide berth.

At the end of the week the "placer" was exhausted, and the chums rode down to Tucker's Bar with their gold, which weighed up to the tune of a thousand dollars. Which, as Bob remarked with exuberant satisfaction, would be something to show the fellows at Cedar Creek when they came home after their holiday in the North-West.

Next Week: "STOLEN GOLD!"

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THE LOSER PAYS!

By Owen Conquest.

PAY UP!

"**D**AT de Benbow?"

Jack Drake glanced down the side of the school ship.

A boat, with two black rowers, had come threading its way through the shipping of Port of Spain, in the golden sunrise. In the stern of the boat sat a mulatto with a yellow complexion. He stood up as the boat came alongside the Benbow, and hailed Drake, who was leaning on the rail and looking towards the quay.

Drake nodded.

"Yes, this is the Benbow," he said. "What do you want?"

"I se come to see Mass' Daubeny!"

The junior started.

"Daubeny? You have a message for him?"

"Yes!"

"From whom?"

"Cap'n St. Leger. I Pablo Sam, Cap'n St. Leger's servant. I se come to see Mass' Daubeny." The mulatto grinned. "I se coming aboard!"

There was a step beside Drake, and Daubeny of the Shell joined him. Daub's face was pale and careworn.

"Don't let him get aboard," muttered Daubeny. "You know what he's come for, Drake!"

"But—"

"If Mr. Vavasour sees him, it's all up with me," breathed Daubeny. "He may come on deck any moment; he always does before brekker. Keep that yellow beast off. He's St. Leger's servant. I've seen him at the billiards saloon in Port of Spain."

"He's come for the money," whispered Drake. "Better let him come on board quietly."

"I tell you—"

"If he kicks up a row, everybody will hear him," whispered Drake. "He's only got to shout

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to tell his business to every soul on the Benbow. We may keep him quiet."

"I—I suppose you're right," muttered Daubeny. "But—"

"We'll get him below, and see what can be done," muttered Drake, with an anxious glance along the deck. "There's only the seamen about now, and they'll think he's one of the shore niggers with something to sell. We may pull through yet, Daub. Keep a stiff upper lip."

Daubeny of the Shell did not look much like keeping a stiff upper lip. His hands were trembling.

The mulatto was already coming up the side. He grinned at the juniors as he stepped on deck.

"I se come to see you, Mass' Daubeny," he said. "Cap'n St. Leger, he says—"

"Come below," murmured Drake.

"I se come—"

Drake grasped the mulatto by the arm, and hurried him below. The yellow man was led into Cabin No. 8 at a run. Jack Drake was only anxious to keep him out of sight for Daubeny's sake. At any cost Daub's connection with Captain St. Leger, the racecourse sharper of Port of Spain, had to be kept a secret.

Peg Slaney was sweeping out the cabin, and he squinted curiously at the mulatto with his single eye.

"Cut along for a few minutes, will you, Slaney," said Drake hurriedly.

"I guess I've got my work to do 'ere, sir," grunted the one-eyed steward's mate sullenly.

"Cut along, I tell you!" exclaimed Drake sharply. "You can leave the sweeping—Tin Tacks will do it presently."

Slaney grunted again, and left the cabin. Jack Drake closed the door after him.

"Now, my man!" he said, turning to the mulatto.

"I se come for de money," said Pablo Sam, with an evil grin on his yellow face. "Cap'n St. Leger send me. Twenty pound. Mass' Daubeny owe Cap'n St. Leger twenty pound he lose on de race. Cap'n St. Leger send me, and say no leave ship widout de money."

Pablo Sam sat down, and crossed his legs, in their crumpled, striped calico trousers, and lighted a cheroot, coolly. He looked as if he expected to have to wait.

Drake's eyes gleamed.

The man's insolence roused his anger; but for Daub's sake he kept his temper. The hapless plunger had to be saved, somehow, from the consequences of his own folly.

"I can't pay the money now," muttered Daubeny. "St. Leger knows that. I can pay it later when I get a remittance from England. I've told the captain so."

Pablo Sam grinned, and showed a row of white teeth.

"You want sail from Port ob Spain, and no pay!" he sneered. "No fool Cap'n St. Leger that way, young feller. You pay me, or I'se going to stay on ship till you pay."

Jack Drake clenched his hands. The mulatto lolled back in the chair, puffing out smoke from his cheroot. He was quite in the confidence of the worthy captain, his master, and he knew how matters stood. The juniors dared not let the matter come to the knowledge of Mr. Vavasour, Daub's Form-master and the senior master on board the Benbow.

"The captain's a swindlin' thief himself, and he doesn't trust anybody else," muttered Daubeny bitterly. "He thinks he won't be paid, if we once sail, and get out of his clutches. He's goin' to have his money down, or disgrace me. It's all up, Drake!"

"Hold on," said Drake. "Perhaps the rotter would take part, and let the rest stand over. We've been able to borrow some from the fellows. Look here, Pablo Sam, if we give you ten pounds—"

"Twenty!" said Pablo Sam.

"Daub can't raise twenty now. You can take ten, and the rest will be sent—"

"You spin dat yarn again," grinned the mulatto. "I tell you dat yarn no good for Cap'n St. Leger. You pay up!"

The cabin door opened, and the juniors looked round quickly; but it was only Dick Rodney that entered. He glanced at the mulatto in surprise.

"Hallo, I didn't know you had a visitor," he said. "I came to tell you it's time for brekker—I've been looking for you, Drake—"

Drake breathed hard.

"We shall be missed, if we don't go to brekker, Daub," he said. "Pablo Sam, stay here quietly till we come back—we shan't be long."

"Me stay till you pay!" said the mulatto coolly.

The juniors left the cabin, Drake closing the door carefully. He could only hope that the rascal would remain undiscovered in Cabin No. 8 till he could be dealt with. It was a difficult situation, and he wondered what would be the end of it.

At the breakfast table, Daubeny of the Shell sat with an almost haggard face.

His plunge on the Trinidad races on Saturday had ended disastrously enough for him; and ever since he had fallen into the clutches of Captain St. Leger, every hour had been full of terror to him. He felt like Damocles of old with the sword suspended over his head by a single hair.

Egan of the Shell nudged him.

"Mind your eye, Dab!" he whispered. "Vavasour's got his eyes on you. He will suspect something if you are not jolly careful."

Daubeny gave his claim a look almost of hatred. It was Egan who had led him into this and could not help him out of it. It was to Jack Drake, not to the tempter, that he had to turn for help in his scrape.

He glanced at Mr. Vavasour, who sat at the head of the Shell table. The Form-master's eyes were fixed upon him very searchingly. Daubeny flushed crimson under that keen look.

He was hardly surprised when, on rising from the table, the master of the Shell called to him.

"Daubeny!"

"Yes, sir!" faltered Daub.

"Follow me to my study."

"Ye-es, sir."

Egan and Torrence of the Shell exchanged a startled glance.

"Vavasour's on to it," Torrence whispered, with a scared look. "Is it all countin' out now?"

Egan set his lips.

"Daub won't give us away," he muttered. "It won't do him any good to land us in it, too."

"But if it comes out—"

"If it does, it means some hard layin' for both of us," said Egan, with a sneer. "I suppose you're not thinkin' of owmin' up that you were pluggin' on the races on Saturday, and makin' bets with a thief of a billiards sharkey like St. Leger?"

"I wish we'd kept clear of him," mumbled Torrence wretchedly. "It was a fool's game, anyhow. It was your idea, too—"

"Oh, turn on me!" sneered Egan. "We're clear enough if Daub doesn't give us away—we paid up what we lost. Daub shouldn't have gone in out of his depth—he couldn't expect a man like St. Leger to trust him. St. Leger doesn't know that his father is a rich baronet in England—he's heard that kind of thing before, and takes no stock in it. He wants his money, and I don't blame him."

And Egan lounged out on deck.

THE MYSTERY OF No. 81

"DAUBENY!"

"Yes, sir," muttered Daub. He stood before the Form-master with downcast eyes and a flush in his cheeks. That Mr. Vavasour was suspicious was clear enough, and Daub wondered dully how much he knew or guessed. He hardly cared now if it all came out; it would be an end of anxiety, anyhow. And the finish had to come sooner or later—he could not pay his creditor.

"I have observed you rather closely during the past few days, Daubeny," said Mr. Vavasour quietly. "I am not satisfied with you. On Saturday you appeared to have kept apart from the party of boys taken to see the races by Dr. Pankey, and you were very late in returning to the Benbow. Yesterday, on the way back from church, you made an attempt to wander away, and were stopped. You have a look as if you had something very serious on your mind."

"I—I'm not feelin' very well, sir," murmured Daubeny.

"Have you anything on your mind, Daubeny?"

"What could I have, sir?"

"That is for you to say. On board the Benbow you are under my charge; I am responsible for you to your father. If you have been guilty of any reckless or foolish conduct, it is your duty to confess it to me at once, and it will be for your benefit also. Come, my boy!"

Daubeny was silent.

Mr. Vavasour's tone was kindly enough, and, for the moment, Vernon Daubeny was tempted to make a clean breast of it.

But he did not. There was a chance—a faint chance, at least—of getting through; and the thought of being expelled—of being sent back to England in disgrace by the steamer, was too much for him.

"I—I've nothin' to tell you, sir," he muttered at last.

Mr. Vavasour gave him a very searching look. "Very well, Daubeny," he said, after a pause. "If that is the case, I have no more to say—at present. You may go."

Daubeny left the cabin, holding his head high as he went. But his head drooped when he was outside, and a hunted look came over his face. He wondered dismally what Mr. Vavasour would have said if he had known that a racing sharper's emissary was even then on board the Benbow to collect a gambling debt.

He joined Egan and Torrence on deck. The two bucks of the Shell eyed him uneasily.

"Anythin' come out yet?" asked Torrence.

"No."

"You wouldn't mention us, I suppose?" said Egan.

Daub's lip curled bitterly.

"Why shouldn't I?" he said. "You landed me in this, you silly idiot, with your sportin' and plugin', and your dashed dead cert! You told me you knew the horse was goin' to win."

"I put my own money on it," said Egan sullenly. "I'm cleared out to the last cent."

"It's worse than that for me. St. Leger has sent his servant on board for the money. He threatened to come himself—he'll come if we don't pay his nigger. What am I goin' to do?"

Egan shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't you spin a yarn?" he said. "Deny over havin' had anythin' to do with St. Leger, an' stick to it through thick and thin."

"You ass! I gave him my IOU for the money, after the race."

"And you call me an ass?" said Egan, with a sneer. "You're a silly ass to have done anythin' of the kind. You're fairly landed now."

"Is that all you've got to say, after gettin' me into it with your silly rot?" muttered Daubeny, clenching his hands.

Egan reflected

"You say the nigger's come on board? Where is he?"

"In Drake's study. Drake's standin' by me, and he's keepin' the rotter out of sight till somethin' can be done."

"If he's come for the money, he'll have your IOU on him. St. Leger knows you wouldn't part with the money without the paper."

"I suppose so."

"Then let's take it off him," said Egan coolly. "We three can handle that yellow ruffian easily enough—and once you've burned the paper there's no proof, and you can deny the whole business—say it's an attempt at blackmail, or anythin' you like."

"What?"

"Oh gad!" murmured Torrence.

"We can do it," said Egan. "All's fair in war, you know. St. Leger can't collect a debt legally from a schoolboy—a gambler's debt. It is really a kind of blackmail. Let's get the paper from the nigger, and then pitch him into his boat—or into the sea! I'm game, if you are!"

Daubeny stared at him.

He had thought that he knew Egan pretty well, but he had never realised before what a reckless and unprincipled young rascal the "sport" of the Shell was.

"And—and do you think I could stand up an' tell a bushel of lies, after robbin' a man?" stammered Daubeny. "If I wanted to I couldn't; I shouldn't have the nerve. And I'm glad I shouldn't, too."

Egan gave another shrug.

"Oh, if you're too good, that settles it," he said. "That's the only stunt I can think of to

help you out—take it or leave it. Come on, Torrence!"

And the two Shell fellows walked away along the deck, leaving Vernon Daubeny alone.

Daubeny went down to Cabin No. 8, where he found Jack Drake leaning on the door, evidently keeping guard and waiting for him.

"Is he still there?" whispered Daubeny.

Drake nodded.

"What on earth's goin' to be done, Drake?" groaned Daubeny. "Old Vavasour's suspicious already—he's been questionin' me—and if he even sees this yellow hound—"

He broke off as Tuckey Toodles rolled up.

"I say, somebody's smoking in our cabin, Drake!" exclaimed Toodles. "It's as thick as anything! Just niff."

"Don't bother, Tuckey—"

"That's all very well," said Tuckey Toodles warmly. "But we shall all get into a row if our cabin's found smelling of smoke. Is it Rodney?"

"No, you ass!"

"Then who is it?"

"Never mind."

"But I do mind!" exclaimed Toodles, his curiosity roused now. "I say, let a chap pass! I suppose a fellow can go into his own study, if he likes?"

"Keep back!" growled Drake, pushing the fat junior away as he reached out a podgy hand to the door.

"I'm going in!" howled Tuckey Toodles indignantly.

"You're not! Clear off!"

"I want my books—"

"Bother your books!"

"Look here, Drake—"

"Hallo! You fellows having a row?" called out Sawyer major cheerfully, as he came along the passage with Estcourt and Rawlings.

"There's somebody smoking in our study, and Drake won't let me see who it is!" roared Tuckey Toodles, in great wrath.

"By Jove! I can smell the smoke!" exclaimed Sawyer major. "You'll get a ragging if Packer scents this, Drake!"

"For goodness' sake, run along!" snapped Drake irritably.

It did not seem probable that Pablo Sam's presence would be kept a secret long at this rate!

"But who is it?" asked Rawlings curiously. "One of the fellows trying a big Havana?"

"No, no! Never mind!"

"I'm going in!" howled Toodles. "It's my study, isn't it? Lend me a hand, you fellows, and shift him away from the door!"

Tuckey's—howls brought half a dozen other juniors to the spot. Jack Drake kept his back to the door. Daubeny stood silent and dismayed. There was a buzz of voices outside Cabin No. 8. From the study the pungent odour of the mulatto's cheroot came very perceptibly. Pablo Sam had already filled the room with thick smoke.

"Let's have him out!" grinned Sawyer major, who was always ready for mischief. "I'm shocked at you, Drake! Shouldn't have thought you'd have a smokin'-party in your cabin—so early in the morning, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Drake angrily. "It—it's a messenger from somebody on shore, that's all."

"Let's see him, then," grinned Sawyer.

"Rats! You stand back!" roared Drake, as

three or four of the grinning Fourth Formers made a rush.

The door flew open.

There was a shout of astonishment from the juniors at the sight of Pablo Sam, smoking his cheroot, in the cabin. The mulatto looked at them, and showed his teeth in a grin.

"You silly asses, shut the door!" panted Drake.

"Cave! Here comes Packe!" called out Esteourt.

"Oh, boy hat!"

Daubeny leaned weakly against the bulkhead with a low groan. Drake slammed the door as Mr. Packe, the master of the Fourth, came rustling down the passage.

A NARROW ESCAPE!

MR. PACKE sniffed.

"What is this? Who is smoking here?"

No answer.

"What is going on here?" exclaimed Mr. Packe testily, glancing round the startled faces of the juniors. "Step away from that door, Esteourt. There is something going on in that cabin. I have seen smoke issuing from the port-hole. Open the door, Toodles."

Tuckey Toodles grinned, and threw open the door.

Drake was inside the study with the mulatto. Mr. Packe fairly jumped as he saw the yellow-skinned man.

"Bless my soul! Who—who is this, Drake?"

Drake's eyes caught Daub's in the passage. The look was a signal; Daubeny hurried away from the spot. He understood that Drake would save him yet, if he could.

"This—this man, sir?" stammered Drake.

"Yes, who is he?" snapped Mr. Packe, eyeing the mulatto with great disfavour. Pablo Sam was not a prepossessing individual to look at; the signs of drink and reckless living were only too evident in his yellow face. "What is he doing here? Answer me at once!"

"He—he came with a message, sir—" stammered Drake.

"That is no reason why you should bring him down to your cabin," said Mr. Packe sternly. "What does he want here?"

"I—I don't want him here, sir. I—I want him to go—"

"Then why does he not go?"

"He—he—I—"

"I see come for de money," said Pablo Sam coolly. "I see not goin' widout de money."

Mr. Packe stared.

"Do you owe this man any money, Drake?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Then I fail to understand—"

"I see Cap'n St. Leger's servant, sir—" began Pablo Sam.

"You—you see, sir—" stammered Drake, anxious only to interrupt the mulatto before he could explain.

"I do not see!" snapped Mr. Packe. "The man looks like a disreputable character, and you have no right to introduce him into your quarters here, or even to let him come on board the ship. I insist—"

"I see come—"

"I'll see him off the ship, sir!" gasped Drake.

"You're right, sir! He's a rascal, and he has no right here! I'll see him off—"

"I see—" began Pablo Sam wrathfully.

He was interrupted by Drake's grasp on his collar. It was no time for half-measures; Captain St. Leger's emissary had to be prevented from blurring out the facts, whatever should happen afterwards. Drake's sudden grasp ran him towards the doorway.

He resisted savagely.

"I see not going widout de money!" he howled.

"Lend me a hand, you fellows!" panted Drake.

"What do!"

"Pile in!" yelled Sawyer major.

Half a dozen of the Fourth Formers grasped the mulatto, and he had no chance of saying anything more.

He was rushed and hustled and bundled to the deck, where he sprawled, gasping; but only for a moment. The juniors whirled him up, and whirled him to the ship's side.

"What the thunder's this game?" demanded Mr. Piper, the boatswain, into whom the crowd nearly rushed with their prisoner.

"Man on board who has no right here!" gasped Drake. "He's got to be kicked out—Mr. Packe's orders!"

"I see not going—ow! Ow! Yoo-hooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I reckon I know that sea-lawyer's mug," said Mr. Piper. "He ain't the kind of critter to come aboard 'ere. Over you go, yellow mug!"

The brawny boatswain grasped the mulatto by the waistband, and fairly lifted him, and swung him over the side. The boat, with the black rowers, was waiting below. Mr. Piper dropped the mulatto neatly into it.

There was a wild howl from Pablo Sam as he landed in the boat, which rocked against the side of the Benbow.

"Now you sheer off!" called out Mr. Piper.

The mulatto scrambled up in the rocking boat. His yellow face was convulsed with rage, and he shook two dusky fists and poured out a torrent of abuse—most of it, fortunately, in Spanish, and incomprehensible to the juniors.

But they replied to it with pelting oranges and other missiles, and under that fire Pablo Sam was glad to make his escape from alongside the school ship.

The boat rocked away, the grinning black oarsmen pulling hard, and the mulatto, still shaking his fists, disappeared among the shipping of the harbour.

Jack Drake was breathing hard as he returned to his study.

The mulatto was gone; the threatened exposure had been staved off, at least. But Drake could guess what Captain St. Leger would do when his servant returned. Undoubtedly the sharper would visit the Benbow in person—less in the hope of collecting his money than to revenge himself upon the hapless junior whom he would regard as having "welshed" him.

Mr. Packe was still in Cabin No. 8 when Drake came in, and he was frowning portentously.

"Is the man gone?" he snapped.

"Yes, sir."

"Now kindly explain to me what this means, Drake. Was that man trying to obtain money here?"

"Yes, sir. He—he's a rascal!" murmured Drake. "I—I'm sorry now I didn't kick him off the ship at once."

"You should have informed me immediately, my boy," said Mr. Packe. "Bless my soul, I

never heard of such impudence! You have acted very weakly and foolishly."

"Ye-es, sir," murmured Drake meekly.

"If anything of the kind should occur again, you will report it to me at once, Drake! Have you seen that man ashore?"

"Oh, no, sir! I've never seen him till he came on board."

"It is extraordinary that he should suppose he could obtain money here," said Mr. Packe. "However, he is gone. I regret that he was not handed over to the harbour police. It is really extraordinary!"

Mr. Packe quitted the cabin at last, to Drake's great relief. Undoubtedly the matter was extraordinary in Mr. Packe's eyes—owing to the circumstance that he didn't know the facts.

Drake threw himself into a chair, to try to think the matter out. He had staved off the exposure—but it must come! Nothing could save Daubeny now.

"What can I do?" Drake muttered aloud. "What on earth can I do? If only I could—"

"Mass' Jack!"

Drake looked up quickly as the black, smiling face of Tin Tacks, the coloured gentleman of Barbados, looked in at the doorway.

TIN TACKS TO THE RESCUE!

"**M**ASS' JACK boddred about somethin?" said Tin Tacks.

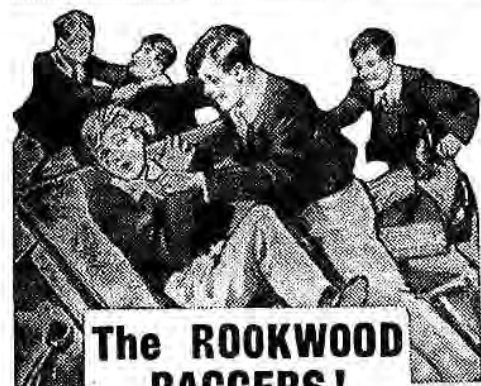
Drake smiled faintly.

"Yes, old fellow," he said. "You can't help me, though. Don't worry."

Tin Tacks came into the cabin, his black face very serious.

"You tell ole Tin Tacks, Mass' Jack," he said.

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"Ole Tin Tacks debblish clobber feller. Perhaps ole Tin Tacks help."

Drake shook his head.

"S'pose you want cash?" said Tin Tacks shrewdly. Perhaps the "debblish clobber" black gentleman guessed that many schoolboy troubles are due to shortness of cash. "You want cash, p'raps. You come to ole Tin Tacks!"

"Hallo! I didn't know you were rolling in tin, old nut," said Drake.

Tin Tacks winked.

"Ole Tin Tacks well-heeled—what do you tink?" he said. "S'pose you want hund'ed—two—tee hund'ed dollar—you ask ole Tin Tacks."

Drake stared at him. In his search for loans to help Daubeny out of his scrape, it certainly had never occurred to him to ask Tin Tacks, the carpenter, for assistance. He would never have supposed that the Barbadian coloured gentleman had much resources in the way of cash!

"Two or three hundred dollars!" he repeated.

Tin Tacks nodded and grinned.

"You bet your life, Mass' Jack!" he said. He touched his belt. "Ole Tin Tacks hab cash; berry pleased to lend him to Mass' Jack. You only speak de word."

"My hat!" murmured Drake.

"You say 'Yes,' sar?"

"Dash it all, why not?" muttered Drake, hesitating.

"Mass' Jack no too p'oud to borrow off ole Tin Tacks?" asked the coloured gentleman, his face falling.

Drake made up his mind at once at that. He did not want the faithful fellow to think that he was too proud to borrow off him.

"Not at all, old chap," he said. "Look here, Tin Tacks, I want some money; not for myself, but to get another chap out of a scrape. I want ten quids to put to what I've got. I shall get a remittance from home at Bolivar, and then I'll square with you. Is that all right?"

"Tin Tacks tust Mass' Jack all life," said the coloured gentleman. "All right, Mass' Jack. Mo got him, you bet!"

Tin Tacks opened the leather pouch on his belt, and turned out two Bank of England notes for five pounds each, very crumpled and grubby, but as good as gold.

"Dat 'nuff?" he asked.

"Quite!" said Drake. "Tin Tacks, old man, you're a trump! You don't know how much this means to me—and another chap. I've got to pay a man on shore—quick—" He hesitated. "I'll spin you the yarn, Tin Tacks, and you can help me out."

He explained hastily. It was drawing near time for morning classes, and there was no time to lose.

Tin Tacks nodded intelligently.

"Me get leave go ashore, and see dat Captain St. Leger," he said. "Mo get Mass' Daub's paper when pay money—you bet your life, Mass' Jack. No fool ole Tin Tacks. Him try skin game on ole Tin Tacks, me gib him one!" The coloured gentleman clenched a gigantic fist, and Drake grinned. "You tust ole Tin Tacks—him debblish clobber ole rascal! All right!"

"Right you are!" exclaimed Drake. "Here's the tin, old chap—you know where to find Captain St. Leger—pay the rotter his money, and get Daub's paper. Mind you get the right paper—"

"No know Mass' Daub's fist—s'pose you show me."

(Continued on page 36.)



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## THE LOSER PAYS!

(Continued from page 34.)

"Here he is! Come in, Daub!"

Daubeny of the Shell, with a white and troubled face, looked into the cabin. Daub had seen the ejection of Pedro Sam from the ship, and he was thinking of what was to follow.

"The game's up, Drake," he said moodily, without heeding Tin Tacks. "I may as well go to Vavasour and own up, and be sacked from the Benbow and sent home on the steamer. It's all up—"

"The game isn't up by long chalks," said Drake, with a smile. "There's a giddy guardian angel dropped in—"

"What?"

"A ducky angel," grinned Drake, with a nod towards Tin Tacks. "It's all serene now, old fellow!"

"I don't catch on!"

Drake explained hastily, and Vernon Daubeny listened in amazement. The Fourth Porten put a pen into his hand.

"Now write a copy of the F.O.C. you gave the captain, so that Tin Tacks will be sure to get the right paper. The fellow might try to keep it back!"

Daubeny mechanically did so.

"There you are, Tin Tacks!"

"Just like dis?" asked Tin Tacks, taking up the paper.

"Just the same!" said Daubeny.

"Me get him, or dere he trouble for Mass' St Leger. You tust ole Tin Tacks." The Bahadrian looked very curiously at Daub's pale face. "You namo Daubeny?" he asked.

"Yes, Vernon Daubeny—it's written there."

"Me hear you call Daub—sometimes—no tink," said Tin Tacks. "Daubeny same name as berry grand gentleman dat I serve once. Dat gentleman berry big gun in England, I tink. Fine, tall gentleman—b'own heard—tall as ole Tin Tacks—him barrow-night in England."

"A baronet?" exclaimed Daubeny. "My hat! Is it possible that it's my father you're speaking of?"

Jack Drake gave a whistle.

He remembered Peg Slaney's curiosity as to the name of, Tin Tacks' former master, and

Slaney's knowledge of Daub's father, which had puzzled the dandy of the Shell.

"My only hat?" exclaimed Drake. "It's so; it must be. Daub's father is Sir George Daubeny, Tin Tacks' and Sir George was up the Oyynoco years ago."

"Dat's de name—Sir George Daubeny," said Tin Tacks. "Me nebber know, but you de son of my old massa, Mass' Daub. Me berry glad to serve you, if me not belong to Mass' Jack. Nebber serve anybody but Mass' Jack now."

Daubeny smiled.

"I am glad to meet you," he said. "My father will be glad to hear about you, when I write to him. Hallo! There goes the bell! You—you'll be sure to get that paper back from St. Leger?"

"You tust old Tin Tacks, Mass' Daub. Me berry glad to help ole massa's son out of a sc'ape. Me go now."

"Good man!" said Drake.

The two juniors went on deck to their places in the Fourth and the Shell; and a few minutes later, Drake observed Tin Tacks stepping into a boat for the shore.

Neither Drake nor Daubeny gave very close attention to lessons that evening; they were keeping their eyes open for Tin Tacks' return. He came back just as classes were dismissed.

Drake and Daubeny hurried him down to Cabin No. 5.

"Got it?" breathed Daubeny.

Tin Tacks grinned and laid a paper on the table, and beside it the copy Daub had given him.

"You tust old Tin Tacks," he said. "Cap'n him berry rusty—but he glad to get money. Him swear, an' old Tin Tacks swear back, but him hand over Mass' Daub's paper, you he! You tust ole Tin Tacks! Him debblish clobber!"

And Tin Tacks grinned again, and winked, and left the cabin. Daubeny crumpled up the papers, struck a match, and set the flame to them. And as they were reduced to ashes, a sigh of relief escaped him.

"Clear at last!" he said. "I shan't forget in a hurry what I owe you, Drake—and Tin Tacks; too! Clear at last! And I'll take jolly good care never to get landed like that again."

And Drake could only hope that Daub would be as good as his word.

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