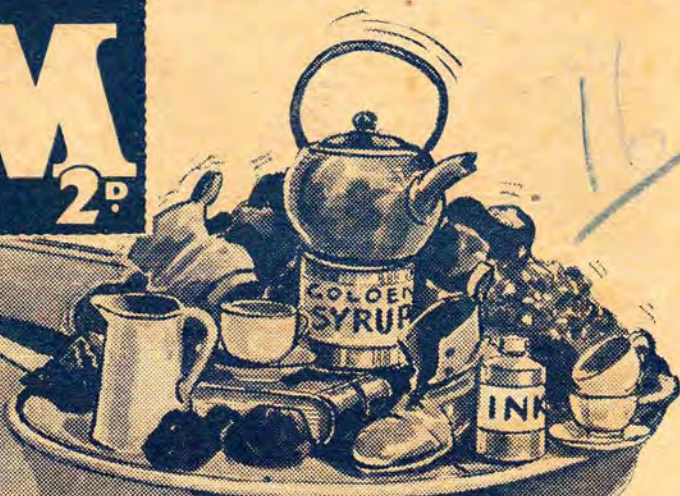


SPARKLING NEW ST. JIM'S SERIES STARTS TO-DAY!

THE
GEM
2P



*Baggy
Trimble's
Booby-
Trap!*





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. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Blunt himself! But keep your letter SHORT, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned.

"D'Arcy and Roynance Admirer," of Holyhead, I. of Anglesey, writes:

1. What are the Christian names of Durrance, Bates, Macdonald, Lorne, Wyatt, Jones minor, Robinson, Clarke, Digges, Pratt, and Chowle?
2. What is (a) D'Arcy's height, weight, position in Form, age? (b) Roynance's ditto?
3. Could we have charts giving names, ages, etc., of St. Jim's people?

ANSWER: 1. *George, Harold, Bruce, Alan, Percy, Edwin, Alfred, William, Richard, Adolphus, Percival, Cyril.*

2. (a) 5ft. 4ins.; 1st. 14lbs.; 6th last term; 15 years 3 months; (b) 5ft.; 1st. 12lbs.; 8th last term; 14 years 9 months.

3. Space alone forbids. Some day, perhaps, if the Editor can spare the room. Why not compile your own "charts" from the information given in the GEM stories from time to time?

John Edwards, of Wimbledon, S.W.20, writes:

Why on earth do the chaps at St. Jim's wear coloured ties with their Eton suits? Black ties are always worn; my father agrees. I shall be wearing toppers like you do at my next school. Are they comfortable things for the head? As you say, a film ought to be made of St. Jim's. Here I am wearing the proper sort of tie.

ANSWER; Gussy speaking: "You are quite right, dear boy.

Most of the fellows at St. Jim's have simply no regard for the pwoopwies-ties of dweess whatever. They get up in the mornin' in no end of a rush, and just pop on the first tie that comes handy, often with the most appallin' results, sartowially speakin'. If there evah is a film made of St. Jim's, I shall personally see to it that the fellows pwoesentint' St. Jim's are pwoerply attired.

A topper is quite comfortable to wear, and I pwefer it to any othah hat, though my pwoefewence unfortunately is not shared by many fellows at St. Jim's."



John Edwards, of Wimbledon.

Alan Thacker, of Dereham, Norfolk, writes:

Would you please answer these questions without your usual "monkey business"?

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1. Is there anyone in the Shell who is a really good synco-pating pianist?

2. Does Tom Merry play any musical instrument?

3. Has a really "hot" band ever been formed at St. Jim's?

P.S.—I enclose photo.



Alan Thacker, of Dereham.

ANSWER: De-lighted!

1. No; but Monty Lowther and Talbot can "tickle the ivories," to some effect.

2. Tom plays the piano a little.

3. We've formed various bands, but we're not up to broadcasting standard, if that's what you mean. To judge by the snap of you at the piano, it would appear that you have musical ambitions. Let's hope you speedily attain "note" with a "minim"-um of heartbreak.

Dudley Holday, of Ilford, Essex, writes:

How do, Sexton? Here are five filleted puzzlers. How old are you? Why is St. Jim's called St. Jim's? Is Martin Clifford dead? What town does D'Arcy come from? How much did the "Silver Swallow" cost? Yours till Niagara Falls!

ANSWER: I'm no relation to Sexton Blake, for a start. Now for the fillets: I'm fifteen and a third, roughly. St. Jim's is the popular contraction of St. James'. Who suggested Martin Clifford had shuffled off this mortal coil? And if he were dead, how could he be recording-our adventures every week? I'll have to write to him to find out how much the "Silver Swallow" cost. The nearest place to Eastwood House, the ancestral home of Gussy, is the little village of Easthorpe, which is in Hampshire. You look happy at your gardening in the snap, which unfortunately was not suitable for publication. Yo ho!

I'll be at the usual stand next week. Cheerio!

JACK BLAKE.

BAGGY TRIMBLE'S BOOBY-TRAP!



A SPOT OF TROUBLE!

"BRUTE!" granted Tom Merry.
"Blighter!" agreed Monty Lowther.
"That rotter," said Manners, "wants booting!"

The Terrible Three of the St. Jim's Shell came to a halt, staring at the man whom they described variously as a brute, a blighter, and a rotter.

It was the last week of the summer holidays. Manners and Lowther were putting in a few days with Tom at Laurel Villa, his home in the remote rural region of Huckleberry Heath.

At the present moment they were walking home by a field-path after an afternoon's ramble with Manners' camera. They were discussing the coming term, and football prospects, and rows with Figgins & Co. of the New House, when they noticed the horseman riding a little distance ahead.

That rider seemed to be having some trouble with his mount. When the St. Jim's juniors sighted him he was laying on the riding-whip with such vigour that the cracks rang across the field like pistol-shots. The horse reared and plunged so wildly that the rider had difficulty in keeping his seat.

"That silly ass will be off soon!" remarked Lowther.

"Serve him right!" growled Tom.
"Oh, my hat! There he goes!" exclaimed Manners.

A frantic bound of the horse sent the rider toppling from the saddle. He bumped into the grass, and the St. Jim's juniors heard his yell as he bumped.

The horse galloped off, leaving the rider sitting on the earth, gasping for breath, his face red with rage.

The three juniors resumed their way along the field-path, passing quite near the man, who sat panting in the grass, not at all sorry to see him there, and the animal at a safe distance from the lashing whip.

"Here, stop, will you?" he called out as they were passing.

They stopped.
"What do you want?" asked Tom Merry curtly.

"Catch that brute for me, will you?"

The horse had stopped at a little distance, the reins streaming over its head. It would have been easy enough for the schoolboys to catch it and lead it back to the dismounted man. But they certainly had no idea of doing anything of the kind.

*Tom Merry & Co. in
a Sparkling New Story
of Fun and Adventure
at St. Jim's, by*

MARTIN CLIFFORD

Tom Merry looked fixedly at the panting man. He was a young man, not more than thirty, with a clear-cut, rather hard face—not pleasant in its expression at the moment. The bump in the grass had evidently shaken him rather severely, and in other circumstances Tom would have been only too willing to render assistance. In the present circumstances he was not.

"No!" he answered bluntly. "You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself for using a horse like that!"

"What?"

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

The young man staggered to his feet. He gripped the riding-whip hard in his hand and made a stride towards Tom Merry.

"You cheeky young cub!" he said. "What do you mean?"

"Only what I say!" answered Tom. "You've driven that horse nearly wild; you ought to have more sense if you haven't more decency! A fellow like you oughtn't to be allowed to ride a horse at all!"

Manners and Lowther grinned. It was not Tom Merry's way to tell a stranger what he thought of him, but he was letting himself go this time. Who the young man was none of the Terrible Three knew; they had never seen him before. Whoever he was, he was left in no doubt about Tom Merry's opinion of him.

The young man did not reply in words. His savage temper, hitherto wreaked on the horse, now turned on Tom Merry. His answer was an angry lash from the riding-whip, which landed on Tom's shoulder.

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

He leaped forward as the riding-whip rose for another angry lash. Before that lash could descend, Tom Merry's fist crashed on a rather sharp chin, and the young man went backwards.

For the second time he bumped in the grass.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lowther.

That young man was twice Tom Merry's age, twice his weight, and nearly a head taller. But he had gone down under that jolt, and he lay on his back in the grass, spluttering.

Tom Merry stood looking down at him with flashing eyes. He expected trouble when the man got up again, and he was not afraid of it. It was not long in coming.

The fallen man bounded up. He made a spring like a tiger at the captain of the St. Jim's Shell. Twice Tom's fist landed with plenty of force; then superior strength told, and he was grasped in one strong hand, while the other laid on the whip.

Tom Merry's chums were not likely to stand idle and watch.

"Back up!" shouted Lowther.

"Collar the brute!" growled Manners.

And they jumped together at the man, grasped him, and dragged him away from Tom by main force. Lowther snatched the whip from his hand, and he was pitched headlong to the earth.

"Give him a few for himself!" roared Manners.

"What-ho!" said Monty.

And he brought down the riding-whip with all his force across the man's sprawling legs.

"How do you like it, you rotter?" he exclaimed. "Take that, you cad—and that, you bully—and that, you measly toad—and that, you worm!"

Whop, whop, whop, whop!

"Hold on, Monty!" gasped Tom.

"Rot! Let him have a few more!" said Manners.

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Whop, whop, whop!

The man was yelling frantically. He wriggled and squirmed away from the whip and bounded to his feet.

Then he made a rush at the St. Jim's juniors. The three lined up to receive him, and he came to a halt.

"You—you young cubs!" he panted.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Tom Merry. "You've got what you deserve, you brute; and if you want some more you've only got to ask for it!"

"Give me that whip!"

The man seemed to have had enough of the St. Jim's juniors. He was ready to go after his horse.

Monty Lowther tucked the whip under his arm. "You're better without that," he answered. "If you want it you can walk a mile for it! I'll leave it on the stile in Huckleberry Lane!"

"Give me that whip at once!"

"Come and take it!" invited Monty.

The young man did not accept that invitation. He gave the three schoolboys a black, furious look, turned, and tramped towards the horse, which promptly broke into a gallop again as he approached.

"I don't think he'll catch that gee very easily," remarked Lowther. "He won't whop it with this whip any more if he does. Come on!"

Leaving the enraged man in angry and almost hopeless pursuit of the elusive horse, the juniors walked on, Monty with the whip under his arm. When they reached the stile near the village—a mile from the spot where they had left that angry young man—Lowther deposited the riding-whip thereon, for the man to fetch if he wanted it.

Then the juniors walked on to Laurel Villa. Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom's ancient governess and guardian, was in the garden, and she waved an affectionate hand to her dear Tommy as he appeared in sight.

"Not a word about that row to Miss Fawcett, you chaps!" said Tom. "It would worry her!"

And the incident was dismissed, none of the juniors guessing for a moment how soon it was to crop up again.

UNEXPECTED!

"JAMES is late!" said Miss Priscilla.

"Shall I make the tea, ma'am?" asked Hannah.

"I think we had better wait for James," said Miss Fawcett thoughtfully. "My dear boys, do you mind waiting for a few minutes?"

"Not the least bit in the world," answered Tom Merry, with a smile.

The juniors were quite ready for tea after a long ramble in fields and woods. They were going to have tea in the old sweet-scented garden. The table was laid under the branches of the ancient oak that stood in front of Laurel Villa. All was ready, except the guest who was expected and who had not yet arrived.

"You will be very pleased to see James, I am sure, my dear Tommy," said Miss Priscilla.

Tom Merry, captain of the Shell, no end of a big gun in the Lower School at St. Jim's, was still "dear Tommy" to Miss Priscilla. Often he was "darling Tommy," and sometimes even "precious Tommy," which Tom did not mind in the least, though it made his friends smile a little.

"Oh, yes, rather!" agreed Tom, rather slowly, however.

"Who's James?" murmured Lowther.

"Cousin of mine," answered Tom. "Some sort of school mastering chap. I've never seen him. Second or third cousin, really. Not a near-relation at all."

"Oh, my hat! I never knew you had school-masters in the family!" ejaculated Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not exactly a schoolmaster," he said. "Tutor sort of man. His name's James Silverson. I've never seen him, and hardly heard of him—till just lately. And, except to please the old dear, I can't say I want to much," he added, in a lower voice that did not reach Miss Fawcett.

Miss Priscilla was discussing with Hannah the important question whether the tea should be made, whether it should be delayed, or whether Hannah should go down to the gate and ascertain whether James was in sight.

Tom Merry, as his chums could see, was not feeling very enthusiastic about that visit from his Cousin James.

The fact was that he knew very little of him, had never seen him, and what little he knew was not calculated to make him think a lot of James.

When Tom was at home in the holidays, he often helped the ancient lady with her accounts. And he had not been able to avoid noticing that in Miss Priscilla's passbook were quite a considerable number of entries under the name of "James Silverson."

As James was a man of thirty, who followed the profession of tutor, and sometimes "temporary master" in school, there seemed to Tom no adequate reason why he should draw so often on a simple old lady for cash.

Without being suspicious, he could not help feeling that James was, in point of fact, plundering the simple old soul—Miss Priscilla having one of those innocent natures which are a standing invitation to the needy and unscrupulous.

That being all that Tom knew of James, it was natural that he did not feel fearfully keen on making his personal acquaintance.

However, he was more than willing to play up and be as nice to James as he possibly could to please Miss Priscilla.

Hannah at length went down to the gate to see whether James was coming. Miss Priscilla turned to the schoolboys with a beaming smile.

"It is so fortunate that James has obtained a post as tutor at Egerton Hall," she said. "It gives him an opportunity of coming here and making your acquaintance, darling. Is it not fortunate?"

"Fine!" said Tom.

"I have not seen James very often," went on Miss Priscilla. "For some years he has had a post as travelling tutor abroad. But he has always written to me regularly."

Tom Merry was aware of that, and aware of the chief subject in James' letters.

"He came down to this part of the country only a few days ago," went on Miss Fawcett. "I hope we shall see a good deal of him during the remainder of the holidays, precious."

"Oh, yes!" said Tom.

"I am so glad that you are going to meet him at last, because possibly you may be able to do something to help him."

"I?" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes, my dear," beamed Miss Priscilla. "I should be so glad to see James obtain a permanent post in some school like St. Jim's. Perhaps there may be some vacancy on Dr. Holmes' staff some time."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"And then, perhaps, you might mention James to your headmaster, and he would give him the post," beamed Miss Priscilla.

Manners and Lowther suppressed a gurgle at the idea of a Shell fellow advising the Head about engaging a new member of the staff.

"James has the very best recommendations," said Miss Priscilla, "and I have written to Dr. Holmes about him, Tommy."

"Oh, my hat!"

"So if a vacancy should occur, and you put in a word at the right time, what a good thing it might be for James."

"I hardly think the Head would mention the matter to me, old dear," said Tom. "But if he does, I—I won't forget."

Hannah came back from the gate.

"Can you see him, Hannah?"

"No, ma'am."

"It is very odd," said Miss Priscilla. "James, I believe, is very punctual, and he said he would ride over from Egerton Hall at five."

Tom Merry started a little.

"Ride over," he repeated.

"Yes. I hope he has had no accident riding a horse," said Miss Priscilla. "But something must have delayed him." *

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther exchanged a startled glance. The same disturbing thought came into all their minds at once.

James was riding over that afternoon, and had been unaccountably delayed. They remembered a horseman in a field a mile away in the direction of Egerton Hall who certainly had been delayed.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Lowther. "Is it possible—?"

"Oh scissors!" murmured Manners.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Tom.

It was a very disturbing and uncomfortable thought. They could only hope that it was unfounded.

Hannah at last made the tea. Tea began under the oak-tree. It had been in progress about a quarter of an hour when the garden gate clicked, and Miss Priscilla looked up and beamed.

"Here is James!" she exclaimed.

Tom Merry & Co. looked round. A young man walked up the garden path from the gate, and their eyes fixed in dismay on the man they had whopped with his own riding-whip!

TIT FOR TAT!

JAMES SILVERSON, greeted Miss Priscilla with elaborate politeness and respect. He did not for the moment glance at the three schoolboys sitting in deck-chairs under the shady oak. But they looked at him.

It was the same man, though they could hardly believe that he was the same man from his present look and manner.

There was no savage temper or evil malice in his face now. James looked as if butter would not have melted in his mouth.

The man who had so cruelly used his horse, and who had laid his riding-whip round Tom Merry, was an evil-tempered brute—the juniors knew that. But they would never have guessed it from James' present aspect. Certainly no such idea crossed Miss Priscilla's simple mind.

She beamed on James.

"I am so glad to see you, James," she said. "And so glad that darling Tommy is here to

meet you. But have you had an accident, James? Your chin—"

On that rather sharp, clean-shaven chin there was a blue mark—quite a prominent mark. It had been left there by darling Tommy's knuckles.

James Silverson passed his hand over his chin. "Oh, nothing!" he said. "I fell in with a gang of young hooligans on my way here, and there was a little trouble."

"How very dreadful!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla in horror.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another. They were the gang of young hooligans to whom James alluded. They rather wondered what James would say when he condescended to turn his eyes on them.

"That is why I was delayed, Miss Fawcett," said James. "I am sorry, but really I was not to blame."

"But how very dreadful!" exclaimed the old lady. "Everything is so peaceful in this delightful neighbourhood. I have never heard of such a thing before. Perhaps you had better see Mr. Hudge. He is the village policeman. My dear Tommy might have fallen in with them. Tommy darling, did you see anything of a gang of bad characters while you were out on your walk this afternoon?"

"Oh," gasped Tom, "no!"

Mr. Silverson looked round at the schoolboys as Miss Fawcett addressed Tom. He gave a violent start as he recognised them.

Miss Priscilla was looking at Tom, and did not see the flash of rage that passed over James' face for a second. But it was only for a second, then he was calm and urbane again. When Miss Priscilla glanced back at him, he was smiling pleasantly.

"Hannah!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

"Please make a fresh pot of tea for Master James."

"Yes, ma'am!"

"And this is Tommy, James," went on Miss Priscilla. "This is my precious Tommy, and these are his dear little friends at school."

The juniors rose to their feet. They could not help colouring and feeling utterly awkward and out of countenance at this unexpected development.

Indeed, Miss Priscilla, unsuspecting and unobservant as she was, might have noticed something amiss but for James, who, after the momentary shock of recognition, was quite cool and self-possessed again.

"So you are Tom!" he said, holding out his hand. "I am delighted to meet you, my boy! I have heard a great deal about you, of course! This is a real pleasure!"

Tom Merry shook hands with him almost dazedly.

It was only an hour since this fellow had laid hands on him, and had been pitched over and whopped with his own whip! That he felt exactly the same now as he had felt then Tom did not doubt for a moment. Still, he was glad that James was able to carry the awkward situation off easily, and that there were going to be no disturbing revelations to worry Miss Priscilla. It seemed to be James' cue to wash out the whole incident, and act as if he had never seen Tom Merry before, as Miss Priscilla supposed.

It was the way a man of the world would have dealt with the awkward position, and perhaps

the best way; but it made Tom wonder at James' power of duplicity.

"And these are your school friends," went on James genially.

"Manners and Lowther," stammered Tom.

Mr. Silverson shook hands with Manners and Lowther in turn—both of them as staggered as Tom.

Then he sat down in a deck-chair and accepted tea and cake. The schoolboys sat down again, relieved that there had been no unpleasantness in Miss Priscilla's presence, but feeling a little dazed.

James chatted to Miss Priscilla, and the three schoolboys, still rather dumbfounded, devoted themselves to cake—which they liked a good deal better than James, or James' conversation.

They were rather anxious for tea under the oak-tree to be over.

Miss Priscilla, quite concerned about that blue mark on James' chin, harked back to the subject of those hooligans, little dreaming that they were sitting there, under the oak-tree, eating cake!

"It is dreadful—really dreadful, James!" she said. "Tell me how it happened!"

"Oh, it was nothing," said James. "I had dismounted, and my horse ran away, and I asked the young scoundrels to catch him for me."

The juniors exchanged glances.

James, of course, could see that they had not mentioned the matter to Miss Priscilla, and did not want it to reach her ears. So he could say what he liked. Under cover of telling the old lady what had happened he was telling the three what he thought of them!

"They refused, in a very insolent manner," went on the cheery James, "and actually attacked me—being a gang of ruffianly young brutes, looking for a row."

Manners opened his lips and shut them again. Tom Merry's cheeks were burning. Monty Lowther's eyes were gleaming.

"But could you not describe them to Mr. Hudge, and have them arrested, James?" asked Miss Priscilla. "What were they like?"

"Oh, a common, low-looking gang—the usual sort of rowdy hooligan," answered James.

"They cannot belong to this neighbourhood," declared Miss Priscilla.

"Oh, no; I am sure not!" assented James.

"On a holiday in these parts, I have no doubt—perhaps staying at some place where their rascally and ruffianly character is not known."

"How dreadful!" sighed Miss Fawcett. "Tommy, darling, perhaps you had better not go out for a walk again, in case you should fall in with those dreadful roughs!"

Tom Merry did not quite know how to answer that. But Monty Lowther answered for him.

"Oh, Tom's all right, ma'am!" said Monty. "Tom can look after himself. You should have seen him this afternoon."

Tom gave him a look, which he did not heed. Monty was not going to let the cat out of the bag. But he was going to give James Silverson a Roland for his Oliver—tit for tat!

"What?" exclaimed Miss Priscilla. "Did anything happen while you were out this afternoon?"

"We came on a man who was ill-using a horse," said Monty coolly. "A mean, cruel, cowardly rotter—the meanest, nastiest cur I've ever seen—and Tom knocked him down!"

Manners gave a gurgle, Tom Merry grinned. The expression on James' face as he heard that was, as Monty said afterwards, worth a guinea a box!

"My dear, dearest Tommy!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla. "What did the dreadful man do after you had knocked him down?"

"Oh, that was all right," said Lowther. "We never had any real trouble with him—a sneaking, cowardly worm of a fellow!"

"A measly toad of a man!" said Manners, taking his cue from Monty. "He was glad to clear off—a cringing kind of a sneak!"

James' face was a picture!

"Then I am glad that you punished the dreadful man, my darling Tommy!" said Miss Priscilla. "Cruelty to animals is a very mean and cowardly thing. Is it not, James?"

"Oh!" gasped James. "Ah! Oh! Yes! Certainly!"

Tea went on, and talk went on, but James made no further allusion to those hooligans. James had found that he was getting back as good as he gave, and he let the subject drop like a hot potato!

HAND TO HAND!

"YOU cub!"

Tom Merry gave a start.

The Shell fellows of St. Jim's had got away from the tea-party under the oak-tree as soon as they could. Manners wandered away with his camera; Monty Lowther ensconced himself in a hammock with a "Holiday Annual," and Tom had gone into the house, by the french window on the garden, to look for his "Modern Boy."

At Laurel Villa everything was wonderfully tidy. Miss Priscilla, with Hannah's strenuous support, had a place for everything, and everything in its place. So it naturally happened that Tom's "Modern Boy" was not on the chair where he had left it, and was not to be seen. It had been tidied up, and had to be hunted for.

Tom was hunting for it when James Silverson appeared at the french window, looking in.

He had been left talking with Miss Fawcett under the oak-tree. But Hannah had arrived on some housekeeping matter, which enabled him to escape, for it was very probable that James, though he did it well, did not enjoy the task of making himself agreeable to the old lady. Tom liked Miss Priscilla's company, because he was fond of her and grateful for her kindness and affection; but James, it was fairly certain, did not share those feelings. To James, Miss Priscilla was an inexpressibly tiresome old bore, whose one use was to draw cheques in his favour when he was hard up—as he very often was. So James had been glad to get away.

James appeared at the window with a genial smile on his face.

That smile lasted till he had looked round the room within and ascertained that nobody was there but Tom. Then it vanished, leaving his face expressing his real feelings, a malignant dislike, that startled Tom as he read it there. And his remark—made in a low voice, so that it could not possibly reach ears in the garden—was also expressive of his real feelings.

Tom stood looking at him with contempt in his face.

Above everything, he desired to avoid a "row" in Miss Priscilla's place; anything was better than disturbing and worrying his old guardian. So he was glad that James had kept up appearances before her.

But how a man could chop and change like this was a puzzle to him. Genial politeness, when

it served the fellow's turn, dropped like a cloak when it served no purpose.

"You cub!" repeated James, stepping into the room from the garden. "Did you know me when you set on me with your hooligan friends?"

"I did not know you," answered Tom quietly. "I never dreamed that it was you. I should have hated to think that a relation of mine—even a distant relation—could be such a cowardly brute."

"As cheeky as ever!" said James.

He gave a glance over his shoulder at the garden, to make sure that Miss Priscilla was not at hand. Then he stepped farther into the room, his deep-set, greenish eyes glinting at Tom.

"I wish," said James, "that you happened to be at the school where I have been in authority. I should find means to take some of the impudence out of you."

"You would find it pretty hard to get a job in any school, I think, if the headmaster knew the kind of man you are!" retorted Tom.

"You are fairly well dug in in this place," said James Silverson. "You play your game pretty well. You're only half my age, but you know better than I do how to make a fool of a foolish old woman."

Tom's face flamed.

"You rotten cur!" he said, between his teeth. "I don't want to row here, and you know it, and you're taking advantage of it; but if you dare to say a word against Miss Fawcett I'll knock it back down your rotten neck!"

James laughed.

"I am as near a relative to the old dame as you are!" he said. "I'm rather more of a credit to her, I think. But who stands to take everything when the time comes?"

"Do you think I've ever given that a thought?" asked Tom. "I should be no better than you if I had."

"I fancy you've given it a lot of thought," sneered James. "I know exactly how a silly schoolboy would feel when an old governess calls him darling and precious before his school pals. I can only marvel at the way you pretend not to mind it. I give you full marks for hypocrisy."

"Is that what it looks like to you?" asked Tom.

"Exactly. I'm not a fool," said James.

"I think you're a bigger fool than rotter," answered Tom contemptuously. "Can't you understand that a fellow can be fond of an old lady who's cared for him since he was a little kid?"

"I can understand that a fellow has an eye on the main chance," jeered James. "Nobody would think, from this silly old place, with its antimacassars and potty old china and laurel hedges, that the old dame was rich; but you know as well as I do that there's a whole stack of money to come—and that's your game."

Tom did not answer that.

The man made him feel almost sick. He crossed to the inner door to get out of the room and out of James' disagreeable presence.

James Silverson made a stride after him, caught him by the shoulder, and jerked him back into the room.

"Not so fast!" he grinned. "I'm not done with you yet, my dear relative."

"Let go my shoulder!" said Tom, between his teeth.

He spoke in a subdued voice, anxious that Miss Priscilla should hear no sound of altercation.

She might have been coming along to the french window at that moment, for all he knew.

James compressed his grip.

"Why not shout to your pals?" he asked mockingly.

"You know why, you cur!" breathed Tom. "But if you don't let go my shoulder I shall hit out!"

Smack!

Still grasping his shoulder with one hand, James smacked with the other. It was a terrific smack that made Tom's head ring.

Another was coming, but Tom did not give James time for that. Even to avoid a row and save giving Miss Priscilla a shock, he could hardly let the fellow smack his head at his own sweet will.

He closed with James, grasping him and struggling to release himself. James was very much the stronger of the two, but the sturdy Shell fellow of St. Jim's gave him plenty of trouble. They rocked across the room in a silent but savage struggle.

"Goodness gracious!"

It was a startled voice at the french window.

"Darling Tommy! James, what—"

Miss Priscilla was looking in!

Instantly James' grasp on the schoolboy relaxed, and he turned to Miss Fawcett with a smile.

"There, that's how it's done, Tom!" he said, with such a kaleidoscopic change of manner that it took Tom's breath away. "I was showing Tom a wrestling trick, Miss Fawcett; but really and truly he's almost too much for me. I fancy he has learned more at St. Jim's than I can teach him."

"Oh!" gasped Miss Priscilla.

Her face had been amazed and horrified for a moment; she had had an impression that a quarrel was going on. But James' prompt explanation relieved her mind at once.

"Tom is very clever at wrestling," said Miss Priscilla. "He is very clever at everything. I do not understand much about school games, but I believe Tom always scores a very large number of runs when he plays football, and goals—I think they are called goals, or something very similar—at cricket. Tom is captain of his Form at school. Are you not, Tommy precious?"

"Oh!" gasped Tom. "Yes!"

He got out of the room, leaving James, with a polite and genial smile on his face, talking to Miss Priscilla and telling her what a good wrestler Tom was.

Tom Merry went out into the garden, his face flushed. Monty Lowther glanced at him from the hammock.

"What's up?" he asked.

"That—that—that rotter!" Tom choked.

"Let's get out, old man, and stay out till he's gone. I can't breathe in the same place with him."

Monty nodded and slipped from the hammock, and they went to look for Manners and his camera; and the three of them steered clear of Laurel Villa till they were sure that James had departed.

THE HAND OF AN ENEMY!

"SOMETHING'S up!" murmured Manners. Tom Merry did not need telling that.

It was the following morning. The three had been out in Tom's old boat on the stream

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.

that flowed at the bottom of the garden of Laurel Villa, and they had come in in time to clean up for lunch, and were in the hall when Miss Priscilla looked out of a doorway and called:

"Tommy darling!"

There was a distressed quaver in her voice, and the usual expression of cheerful kindness was quite gone from her face. Deep trouble seemed to be implanted there. Tom gave her quite a startled look and hurried to her at once.

"Anything the matter, old dear?" he asked.

"Yes! No! I must speak to you, darling!"

"Well, here I am," said Tom in wonder. His friends went up the staircase, and Tom followed Miss Priscilla into the room where the french windows looked on the garden.

"Shut the door, Tommy," said Miss Priscilla. She sank into a chair.

Tom shut the door. He was wondering more than ever; it was clear that something was very wrong. Miss Priscilla seemed on the verge of tears.

"Has anything happened?" asked Tom.

"That!" murmured Miss Priscilla. She pointed to an article lying on the table; and Tom, glancing at it, saw with wonder that it was a sporting newspaper with the title "Racing Tips." He stared at it blankly. Such a publication had never before been seen within the walls of Laurel Villa.

"That!" said Tom. "How on earth did that get here?"

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy!" wailed Miss Priscilla. "Why did I ever let you go to school? Do not think that I blame you for one moment, my dear! You have fallen under some bad influence."

"I?" gasped Tom.

"Tell me! Who has led you into this?"

"Into what?" gasped Tom.

"I cannot think that it was Manners or Lowther; they seem such nice, well-behaved boys. But who—"

"I don't quite understand," said Tom. "What on earth's the matter?"

"That dreadful paper—" moaned Miss Priscilla. "I could not believe my eyes, darling, when it fell from your coat pocket—"

"My coat pocket!" said Tom, like a fellow in a dream.

"Oh, Tommy—Tommy, who has led you into this?" moaned Miss Priscilla. "My dear little innocent child—"

Tom Merry was a sturdy fellow, and the finest junior footballer at St. Jim's. But the years had passed unnoticed by Miss Priscilla; and he was still, in her ancient eyes, the precious little Tommy of long ago. Tom did not mind that in the least; James was quite in error on that point. But for once there was just a spot of impatience in his look.

"I can't make this out!" he said. "What the dickens makes you think that that silly rag was in my coat pocket?"

"Tommy!"

"It couldn't have been," said Tom. "I've never seen it before."

"Tommy! Tommy!"

Tom breathed rather hard. "Tell me all!" said Miss Priscilla. "Tell me everything! How did this begin, my darling? When did it begin?"

"When did what begin?" almost shrieked Tom.

"Oh, Tommy—Tommy," wailed Miss Priscilla, "be frank! Tell me everything."

"But there's nothing to tell you!" stammered

Tom. "You don't fancy that that rotten rag belongs to me, do you?"

"Does it not?" exclaimed Miss Priscilla.

"Of course it doesn't!"

"Then you were only carrying it in your pocket for one of your friends—is that it?"

"Certainly not! Manners or Lowther wouldn't touch such a rag with a pair of tongs!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "I can't imagine where it came from—but it certainly never was in my pocket."

"Tommy! Tommy! It fell from your coat pocket when Hannah took the coat from the peg to brush the dust—"

"Wha-a-t?" stammered Tom.

"I could not believe my eyes! Oh, Tommy! That my innocent, unsuspecting little Tommy should have been led into dreadful gambling on horseracing!"

"But I haven't!" yelled Tom, bewildered. "If that rag fell from my coat pocket, somebody must have shoved it there for a silly joke. I tell you I've never seen it before!"

"Oh!" gasped Miss Priscilla.

"I can't make it out," said Tom. "If you saw it fall from my coat, it must have, I suppose—but I can't make it out—"

"My little precious!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla, her troubled face clearing, like the sun coming out after stormy weather. "Why did I not think of that? Of course it does not belong to my darling Tommy! But I was so distressed—so dismayed—so alarmed—"

Tom Merry's lips set.

"I can't make out how it got there," he said. "So far as I can see, it can only have been an idiotic lark—I've certainly never seen the rag before. But I'll jolly well find out!"

"It is extraordinary," said Miss Priscilla. "Lowther often plays thoughtless jokes, but this—"

"He wouldn't do this," said Tom.

"But how could anyone put a newspaper in your pocket without you seeing him when you were out of doors?" asked Miss Priscilla. "Perhaps you took off your coat and hung it somewhere—"

Tom shook his head.

"I haven't worn the coat for a week," he said. "The weather's been too jolly warm for a fellow to want a coat! And that paper's dated yesterday."

"It is very mysterious!" said Miss Priscilla. "But so long as you assure me that it was not yours, my darling, my mind is relieved, and nothing else matters."

"Well, I can assure you about that!" said Tom, his face breaking into a grin. "I haven't taken up racing papers, and backing horses, and painting St. Jim's red—hardly! I'll take this rag and ask Manners and Lowther if they know anything about it."

And, leaving Miss Priscilla quite relieved and comforted, Tom Merry took the sporting paper, and tramped upstairs to look for his chums.

He found Manners and Lowther waiting for him on the landing on which their rooms opened.

"What the dickens is the row?" asked Manners.

"That!" said Tom, holding out the sporting paper, at which his chums stared blankly. "Monty, old man, you couldn't be such an ass as to stick that in my coat pocket for a joke, could you?"

Lowther stared.

"Monty's ass enough for almost anything,"

remarked Manners. "But even Monty isn't ass enough for that!"

"Hardly!" gasped Lowther.

"Well, somebody put it there," said Tom. "It fell out of the pocket when my coat was moved. I've made my guardian understand that it doesn't belong to me—but where did it come from?"

"That's yesterday's paper," said Lowther, looking at it. "You never had your coat out yesterday, Tom!"

"No!" said Tom. "It was shoved there while the coat was hanging up. But who—and how—and why—"

He broke off as he caught Monty's eyes on him with a very curious expression in them. His face flushed.

"You ass, Monty, do you think that rag belongs to me?" he hooted.

"Nunno! Not if you say it doesn't! But—"

"But what, fathead?"

"Well, somebody in this house must have parked it in your coat pocket. I suppose Miss Fawcett, or Hannah, or the maidservants don't take in that kind of literature?" said Lowther.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"If you think—" he began.

"I don't, if you say so! But I can't make it out," said Lowther. "I suppose nobody burgled the house last night just to stick a sporting paper in your coat pocket."

Tom was silent. The matter was utterly bewildering to him. It was only too clear what it looked like; and he realised, too, that only Miss Priscilla's unquestioning faith in his word could have made the old lady believe what he had told her.

"I've told you, Monty Lowther, that I know nothing whatever about that putrid rag!" he said at last, very distinctly.

"And I tell you, fathead, that I take your word, if you say so—but I can't make it out!" said Lowther.

"I think I can!" said Manners quietly.

"You can?" exclaimed Tom.

"That's yesterday's paper," said Manners.

"It may have been in the pocket of a visitor here yesterday!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom. He had forgotten James Silverson.

"If that man has any reason for wanting to queer your pitch here, he did it!" said Manners.

"He's a rotter all through—we know that from the way he was humbugging Miss Fawcett. If he's got any motive for trying to sow trouble here—"

"If!" exclaimed Tom. "I know he has, the rotter! The putrid tick told me that he believed I was after the money, and let out that he was—"

"That does it, then!" said Manners. "We left him here when we went out—easy enough for him to get at a coat hanging in the lobby hall. Your name's on it, inside the collar. He had that racing paper in his own pocket—that's the sort of tick he is—and he got the bright idea of landing it on you—and that's why it fell out, too, when the coat was moved—it was left so that it would show up."

"Oh!" murmured Monty.

Tom Merry nodded. Now that Manners said it, he had not the slightest doubt.

"That's his game!" said Manners. "That's the sort of rotter he is. You'd better be on your guard when that reptile's crawling around, Tom."

"The rotter!" breathed Tom, "The awful rascal! That's it, of course—it can't be anything else. And—and I can't explain to Miss Priscilla—I can't tell her what a scoundrel the fellow is. By gum, though, I feel like pushing my fist into his face next time he blows in! Only—only I can't do that. I—I can't do anything. By gum, I shall be glad to get back to St. Jim's, and be clear of that reptile!"

Miss Priscilla's face was quite bright again at lunch. All was clear so far as the old lady was concerned. The matter having been explained to her satisfaction, she had dismissed it from her mind. It was not so easy for Tom Merry to dismiss it; but he was glad, at least, that once he was back at St. Jim's, he would be clear of that unpleasant relative for good! It was just as well for his peace of mind that he could not see into the near future.

CORNERED!

"**B**AI Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What's up?" asked Blake.

"Look!"

It was the first day of the new term at St. Jim's—or, rather, the first evening. There was no prep first night, and St. Jim's fellows were improving the shining hour in various ways; and in Study No. 6 in the Fourth the way was a study supper.

A hamper of uncommon dimensions had accompanied Arthur Augustus back to St. Jim's—of such uncommon dimensions, in fact, that he had a little difficulty in getting it past the House dame!

However, that difficulty had been negotiated and overcome, and the hamper was safely landed in Study No. 6.

Now the owners of that study had come up from Hall. There were going to be some guests at that study supper—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and Talbot and Kangaroo of the Shell; Levison, Clive, and Cardew of the Fourth, and other fellows—and Study No. 6 had to get ready for that rush of custom, so to speak.

The big hamper stood across a corner of the study. Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy had come up to unpack it.

But they made the happy discovery that somebody had saved them the trouble! The lid of that big hamper stood open and upright, leaning against the corner. The contents had been deeply disturbed! All over the study carpet near it was a sea of crumbs, and several paper bags. Smears of jam were plentiful round about.

"Somebody's been heah!" said Arthur Augustus, fixing a wrathful eye and eyeglass on the hamper. "Look!"

"Looks like it!" agreed Jack Blake. "That fat sweep Trimble, I expect."

"By gum! He's been busy, whoever he was!" said Herries. "He's been standing at the hamper and feeding his face."

"Let's go and kick Trimble!" suggested Digby.

"Well, pewwaps that would be a little wuff as we don't know whethah it was Twimble or not," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Well, we haven't kicked Trimble yet this term!" said Dig.

"It is only the first day of term, Dig—"

"Can't begin too soon!" argued Dig.

Three cheery faces looked in at the door. Tom

THE GEM LIBRARY.—NO. 1,647.

Merry, Manners, and Lowther, first of the guests to arrive, came into Study No. 6.

"Too early?" asked Tom, with a smile.

"Wathah not! Twickle in, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "Some wottah has been waidin' this hampah!"

"Trimble!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"Yaas, I suppose it was that fat wottah! Still, everythin's in such a wush on the first day of term that pewwaps some New House tick may have dodged in without bein' spotted!" said Arthur Augustus. "Fatty Wynn would like to get at that hampah, what?"

"But you've asked Figgins & Co. to the spread!" said Blake. "Fatty would wait, in the circumstances."

"Yaas, pewwaps! But—"

"Let's go and kick Trimble!" said Dig. "It must have been Baggy Trimble, and that's that! Look here, those Shell chaps can go and kick him for us while we're unpacking the hamper."

"Pleased!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Any old thing!" agreed Manners.

"We'll boot him all over the house!" declared Monty Lowther. "It was Baggy all right, Gussy—you know his jolly old reputation for grub-raiding."

"Yaas, but you wouldn't kick a chap on his reputation, Lowthah!"

"Oh, no! On his trousers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"Here's old Talbot," said Tom, as Talbot of the Shell appeared in the doorway. "Let's ask him!"

"What and which?" inquired Talbot.

"Somebody's raided Gussy's hamper! Guess who?"

Talbot laughed.

"Well, at a guess, I should say Trimble!" he answered.

"Passed unanimously!" said Jack Blake.

"Trimble's going to be booted."

"Weally, Blake—"

Levison, Clive and Cardew arrived in a bunch. Study No. 6 was getting rather crowded now.

"Let's ask these chaps, too," said Monty Lowther. "Guess who raided Gussy's hamper, you men?"

"Trimble!" answered three voices in unison.

"Now let's go and kick him!" said Lowther.

"Pway don't do anythin' of the sort!" said Arthur Augustus. "You can't boot a chap without pwoof, even a gwubby tick like Twimble. Aftah all, he hasn't gone vevy deep into the hampah. I fancy we must have intewwupted him, comin' up. I think—"

There were more footsteps in the Fourth Form passage, and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House arrived.

The deadly foes of the School House were friendly and smiling now, the rival Houses being on a peace footing for the occasion.

Fatty Wynn, indeed, beamed with friendly cordiality. Fatty, so far, had had only two teas and one supper, so he was more than ready for a hospitable spread in Study No. 6 in the School House.

"Here we are, old beans!" said George

Figgins. "Room for three little ones?"

"Staggah in, old chaps!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Let's ask these chaps, too," said Monty

Lowther. "Kerr's no end of a detective. Guess who's raided Gussy's hamper?"

"It wasn't Fatty!" grinned Figgins. "Fatty's been trying to make a famine in the New House."

"I've had a snack or two," said Fatty Wynn. "But I'm ready for supper, all right. Bet you it was Trimble."

"Safe bet!" said Kerr. "Yaas, wathah! I suppose it was Twimble, if it was not Wynn!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "But we're not goin' to kick Twimble on suspicion. If I were suah that it was Twimble, I would give him a feahful thwashin'—he has smeared jam and jellay all ovah the hampah. But—"

Kerr chuckled. "You'd like to know who it was?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Then shut down the lid of the hamper!"
 "Eh? Why?"

"To see who's hiding behind it in that corner," said the Scottish junior of the New House, grinning.

"Wha-a-t?"
 The crowd of juniors in the study stared at Kerr.

It had not occurred to any of them that the grub-raider was still in the study. But Kerr was a fellow of rather uncommon penetration and observation. Figgins often declared that his

Scottish chum could beat Sexton Blake and Ferrers Locke at their own game, if he tried.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What the dooce makes you think there's somebody in that cornah, Kerr?"

"Deduction, my dear fellow!" grinned Kerr. "Quite simple, my dear Watson! Whoever has been feeding at that hamper has got himself feahfully jammy and sticky! There's a jammy mark on the wall just over the hamper. It's out of reach, unless a fellow leaned over the hamper. Why should he—unless he was stepping oyer it to hunt cover behind it?"

"Bai Jove!"
 "Somebody with a jammy paw leaned his hand on the wall as he scrambled over the hamper," said Kerr. "If he hunted cover, it was because he heard you fellows coming!"

"Good old Sexton Blake!" grinned Digby. "Oh, Kerr can do these things!" said Figgins. "Bet you the sweep's behind that hamper all the time!"

"That's why he left the lid up!" said Kerr. It was a big, square hamper, and as it stood across the corner there was room behind it for a fellow to squeeze—and the raised lid afforded cover. Arthur Augustus stretched out his hand to that lid and jerked it down on the hamper.

Then there was a roar in Study No. 6. "Trimble!"
 "Oh, jiminy!" gasped Baggy.



Tom Merry and James Silverson rocked across the room in a silent but savage struggle.
 "Goodness gracious!" gasped Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

The fall of the hamper-lid revealed a podgy figure jammed in the corner. Baggy, interrupted in his raid on the tuck, had hunted the nearest cover—and there he was!

"Think it was Trimble now, Gussy?" asked Blake sarcastically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I say, you know, it—it wasn't!" gasped Baggy Trimble. "I—I just looked in to ask you fellows if you'd had good hols! I—I heard that you'd been out to Brazil or somewhere, and—and I—I—"

"Collar him!"

"Bag him!"

"Boot him!"

"I say, I—I never!" howled Trimble. "The—the fact is, it—it was—was those New House chaps! I—I saw them at it."

"What?" roared Figgins.

"Bai Jove! Hook him out, deah boys, and ewey fellow beah kick him!" said Arthur Augustus. "I twust you will all kick him as hard as you can."

Three or four pairs of hands hooked Baggy Trimble out of the corner. He roared as he was hooked out.

"I say, I tell you, it was Kerr!" he roared.

"I say, I saw him—"

"You podgy fibber!"

"You bloated Ananias!"

"Boot him!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Baggy, plunging wildly for the door.

How many kicks Baggy captured before he got out of Study No. 6 he could hardly have counted. Every fellow there gave him one at least; some two—and lucky men got in three! Baggy roared frantically as he shot out at last into the Fourth Form passage.

After which there was supper in Study No. 6—Baggy, fortunately, having been interrupted before he had scoffed more than a third of the supply of tuck. Still, Baggy had done remarkably well, and it was perhaps worth the booting; though Baggy, as he flew yelling down the Fourth Form passage, did not seem to think so.

A SPOT OF EXCITEMENT!

"**W**HERE'S my camera?"

"Oh dear!"

Manners asked the question in tones of excitement. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther ejaculated "Oh dear!" in tones that might have been taken to indicate that they were tired of that camera.

It was the second day of term, and the three had come up to their study after class. Manners had left his camera on the study table, and having left his camera on the study table he expected to find his camera on the study table when he came up to Study No. 10 in the Shell. True, that was not the proper place for it; it should have been put tidily in its place on the shelf. But junior studies at St. Jim's were not run on the lines of Laurel Villa at Huckleberry Heath—and things did get left about!

"Who's shifted that camera?" hooted Manners. "If those New House sweeps have started their tricks again—"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.

"One of them sneaked in and hid my camera last term!" said Manners. "Where is it, then?"

"Perhaps you left it in the dark-room—"

"I left it on this table!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.

"That can't be right!" said Lowther.

"What! Think I've lost my memory?" hooted Manners. "That's right, you ass!"

"But you said it was left—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Didn't he say it was left on the table, Tom?"

Lowther appealed to the captain of the Shell. "If it was left, it can't be right!"

"You—you—your funny idiot!" roared Manners. He was in no mood for playful jokes from Monty when his beloved camera was missing—he was feeling rather like a lioness who had lost a cub. "You piffing fathead—you silly owl—can't you talk sense for once in your life-time? Are you a potty idiot, Monty Lowther? Haven't you any sense at all?"

"None!" answered Lowther. "I never use scent—Racke does, but I've no scents whatever."

Manners did not answer that in words. He picked up a cushion and hurled it at his too humorous chum. Lowther dodged just in time, and it landed on Tom Merry's ear.

"Ow!" roared Tom.

"Oh!" gasped Manners. "Sorry—meant it for the other idiot! Where's my camera? If those New House ticks have been ragging my camera again—"

A podgy face looked in at the door.

"Looking for your camera?" asked Baggy Trimble.

"Yes, seen it?"

"Kerr's got it! I saw him walking it off to the New House," answered Baggy. "I came up to tell you."

Manners gave a roar.

"I jolly well knew it! I jolly well knew it was those New House sweeps again! Did he take it over to his House, Trimble?"

"Yes—he was laughing like anything—"

"I'll give him something to laugh at!" roared Manners.

He rushed out of the study.

"Hold on, you ass!" roared Tom Merry.

Manners did not even hear. He flew. His chums rushed after him.

If Manners was going to the New House on the warpath—as evidently he was—he was likely to need aid. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther cut down the passage after him—leaving Baggy Trimble grinning.

"Stop, you ass!" shouted Lowther.

Manners, unheeding, did the stairs two at a time.

At the foot of the staircase, Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was standing talking to Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master. Linton stared grimly at the junior bounding down the staircase; little Mr. Lathom blinked at him in surprise over his spectacles.

Fellows were not allowed to rush about passages and staircases like runaway horses. Manners had quite forgotten that in his excitement. His Form-master promptly reminded him of it.

"Manners!" he snapped.

"Oh!" Manners came to an unwilling halt on the stairs. "Yes, sir!"

"Why are you rushing about in that extraordinary manner?" demanded the master of the Shell.

"Oh! I—I'm in—in rather a hurry, sir!" stammered Manners.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Linton dryly. Linton had a dry, sarcastic way with him. "I should be

very sorry, Manners, to delay you in a matter of urgent importance; nevertheless, I must request you to go up to your study at once and write out fifty lines of Virgil. Bring me the lines when they are finished."

Manners stood on the stairs, breathing hard and deep. Tom Merry and Lowther halted on the staircase higher up.

The master of the Shell resumed his conversation with Lathom. He took it for granted that his command would be immediately obeyed. But Manners, in point of fact, was on the very verge of disobedience to constituted authority. He was actually thinking of disregarding Mr. Linton and cutting out of the House—in quest of his camera!

It was rather fortunate for Manners that his friends had followed him down. They stepped to him, took his arms, and turned him round on the staircase.

Manners gave them a glare.

"Look here—" he muttered.

"Come on, ass!" whispered Tom.

"Come on, fathead!" breathed Lowther.

"My camera—"

"Come on, dunderhead!"

"Over in the New House—"

"Come on, idiot!"

"Look here—"

"Come on, maniac!"

Tom and Monty walked their chum back up the stairs. Manners went reluctantly, but he went. He went with a face like a thundercloud. "Anythin' the mattah, you fellows?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as they passed him on the study landing.

"My camera's gone!" hissed Manners.

"Bai Jove! Is it? Does it mattah, old chap?"

"Idiot!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry and Lowther got Manners back to Study No. 10 in the Shell. Manners eyed them almost wolfishly when they got him there.

"I'm going after my camera!" he said.

"Linton can go and eat coke! Think I'm going to let those New House bounders fool about with my camera!"

"They won't damage it," said Tom soothingly.

"Kerr knows all about cameras! You've got your lines to do now."

"Blow the lines!"

"Linton—"

"Blow Linton!"

"You're not going to start the term with a row with a beak, old chap! Get going on those lines!" said Monty Lowther.

"I want my camera!" roared Manners.

"We'll go and see about your camera as soon as you've started on your lines," said Tom. "Don't be an ass, old chap!"

Manners glared—but he gave in. Really, there was nothing else to be done.

"Where's my rotten Virgil?" he snapped. "Where's some beastly impot paper? Bother Linton! Blow Linton! Blow— What the thump have you fatheads been sticking under the table for a fellow to bang his foot against?" he added, as he threw himself into a chair, shoved his legs under the study table, and banged his foot.

"Nothing that I know of—"

"There's something!" Manners stooped and looked under the table. Then an extraordinary expression came over his face. "Oh! Look!"

He reached under the table and drew out—a camera!

STUMPED!

TOM MERRY and Monty Lowther stared at that camera.

It was the missing camera—not, it seemed, missing at all. Manners had left it on the table. He had found it under the table.

Certainly under a table was not the place where a fellow would have thought of looking for a camera. But there it was!

Manners laid it on the table, staring at it. Tom Merry and Monty exchanged a look. Then they spoke together:

"You ass!"

"You fathead!"

Manners had very nearly landed in a row with his Form-master. He had very nearly rushed headlong into the New House to hurl himself at Kerr of the Fourth. And there was the camera all the time!

"You blithering chump!" said Tom Merry in measured tones. "What the thump did you stick the wretched object under the table for?"

"I didn't!" said Manners.

"It got off the table all by itself?" asked Lowther. "Sort of locomotive camera—it walks about on its own?"

"Don't be an ass! Trimble said he saw Kerr of the Fourth walk off with it to the New House. What was a fellow to think—when it was gone? That fat swab was pulling my leg."

"If you weren't such a silly ass about your blithering camera—"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" snapped Manners. "That fat scoundrel was pulling my leg to make me pitch into Kerr. I should be scrapping with him by this time if Linton hadn't stopped me on the stairs. Go and boot Trimble while I get my lines done."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom. "That fat rascal! Because Kerr spotted him in Blake's study yesterday, I suppose—"

"Go and boot him!"

"All right!"

Leaving Manners to get on with his lines, Tom Merry and Monty went to the Fourth Form passage. The door of Study No. 2, which belonged to Baggy Trimble, Mellish, and Wildrake of the Fourth, was half-open, and from the doorway came the sound of a fat chortle.

"He, he! That Scotch blighter's getting it by this time! He, he!"

"Manners is likely to get more than Kerr if he's gone into the New House after him!" It was Percy Mellish's voice.

"He, he! That's all right!" chortled Trimble. "Manners kicked me yesterday along with the other rotters! But they wouldn't have spotted me but for Kerr! I'll teach him! He, he!"

"And where's the camera all the time?"

"He, he! I shoved it under the table, that's all. When they find it they'll think those New House swabs have put it back—see? They've gone over to the New House now; they won't find it yet! He, he!"

Tom and Monty exchanged a glance as these remarks floated out to their ears.

Really, Baggy had planned astutely, and he had come very near to success. Kerr was to be punished—for having spotted the fat Baggy in Study No. 6. And if Manners got a New House ragging for punching him, all the better, from the vengeful Baggy's point of view. It was quite deep and astute—indeed, quite Machiavellian—

though, like so many astute schemes, it had gone wrong.

Tom Merry kicked open the door of Study No. 2.

Trimble and Mellish, both grinning, looked round. But one of them ceased to grin at sight of the two Shell fellows. Baggy became quite solemn; Mellish, on the other hand, grinned more widely than before.

"I—I say, have—haven't you fellows gone over to the New House?" stammered Baggy. "I—I say—"

"Not at all," answered Tom. "We've come here to give you six of the very best! There's a stump in that corner, Monty!"

Lowther annexed the stump.

"But, I say," gasped Baggy, "if—if you don't get that camera back those New House ticks may damage it, you know. In fact, I—I heard Kerr say—"

"Never mind what you heard Kerr say, you lying little fat toad!" said Tom. "The camera's been found—"

"Oh!" gasped Baggy.

"And as it's never been out of our study at all, we know exactly how much you saw Kerr walk it off to the New House!"

"Oh jiminy!"

"Shove him across the table, Tom!" said Monty Lowther, flourishing the stump.

"I—I say, you keep off!" roared Baggy, in alarm. "I—I meant to say—keep off—I—I meant to say I saw Kerr put it under your study table—see? That's what I saw him do, really. It was Kerr all right—Yaroooh! Leggo, Tom Merry! Keep that stump away, Lowther! Oh jiminy!"

Baggy roared in anticipation as the captain of the Shell hooked him across the study table, face down. His anticipations were soon realised. Monty Lowther got busy with the stump.

Swipe!

"Oh jiminy!"

Swipe!

"Wow!"

Swipe!

"Leggo! Yow-ow-ow!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Baggy Trimble's voice, on its top note, rang the length of the Fourth Form passage. A dozen fellows came along to the door of Study No. 2 to stare in.

"Bai Jove! What are you fellows whoppin' Twimble for?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Telling whooppers!" answered Tom.

"Oh cwumbs! If you whop him ewevy time he tells whoppahs you'll weah out that stump!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "It will keep you feahfully busy, old chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooh! Oh jiminy! Yo-hoo-hooop!" roared Baggy, as he rolled off the table. "Ow, ow! I tell you I never—I mean, I didn't—I never wasn't—Ow! Wow!"

"That's a tip!" said Tom Merry. "If you're shirty with Kerr, Baggy, you can go and punch his head; but you can't pull another fellow's leg to do it—see?"

"Ow! Wow-wow!"

Monty Lowther pitched the stump into the corner, and the two Shell fellows left the study, leaving Baggy roaring and Mellish grinning.

Baggy's deep-laid scheme of vengeance had gone sadly awry. Kerr had not been punched; Manners had not been ragged. Only Baggy had

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.

been stumped—which was an outcome of a scheme that could not possibly have satisfied any schemer. And the fact that Baggy was not satisfied was audible to everybody within quite a distance of Study No. 2 for quite a long time.

THE LOST LINES!

"**W**HADY, you fellows?"
"Waiting for hours!" answered Blake.

"Weally, Blake, that is wathah an exaggewation! It's hardly a quartah of an hour since I went up to the dorm to change my collah!"

"A quarter of an hour to change his collah!" sighed Digby. "Lucky he didn't have to change his tie, too!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Of course, Gussy had to change his collah to go to tea over in the New House!" said Blake sarcastically.

"A fellow likes to look decent, Blake!"

"I haven't changed my collah, fathead!"

"You are not vewy particulah about such things, deah boy! But I think one fellow ought to be well dwessed, to keep up the cwedit of the studay."

"Nothing else you want to change?" asked Blake. "You don't want to change your socks, or change your mind?"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Taken your lines in to Lathom, Gussy?" asked Herries. George Herries was the practical member of Study No. 6.

"Bai Jove! I quite forgot!"

"Gussy all over!" groaned Blake. "We shall get to tea in Figgy's study about time for the House supper! Perhaps Figgy's Housemaster will let us stay to supper instead!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "It will take only a few minutes to hand in my lines to Lathom. They're w'itten long ago, and I've only got to cawvy them down to his studay."

"Buck up, fathead!" said Digby.

Three members of Study No. 6 were waiting on the study landing. They had waited quite a long time while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a few finishing touches to his elegance before going over to the New House to tea. Now they had to wait again. But it was not a new experience; they often had to wait for Gussy, whose manners and customs were leisurely.

But, really, they did not expect to have to wait much longer, as Study No. 6 was only a few steps up the Fourth Form passage from the study landing. Even Gussy might have been expected to reappear in a couple of minutes at the most with the impot that was due to his Form-master, and which he had been strictly enjoined to hand in before tea.

But two minutes passed, and two more followed, and Arthur Augustus did not reappear from Study No. 6.

Blake, Herries, and Digby stared up the passage—in vain. Arthur Augustus had gone into the study. He did not emerge.

"It won't be supper at this rate; it will be brekker!" remarked Blake. "What is that ass sticking in the study for? Gone to sleep, do you think?"

"Let's go and wake him up," said Dig.

And the three went up the passage.

They looked into Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus was standing there, his eyeglass screwed in his noble eye, staring round the study. He

seemed to be scanning every quarter of the study with a puzzled and perplexed scrutiny.

"Are you coming?" roared Blake.

"Daydreaming?" asked Herries.

"Potty?" inquired Dig.

"It is vewy odd," said Arthur Augustus. "I cannot find my impot anyhow. Have any of you fellows shifted my lines?"

"No, ass! Sure you did them, or only wandering in your mind?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, if you did them they're here. Or have you taken them in to Lathom and forgotten all about it?"

"Wats! I left them heah aftah I finished them. Somebody has shifted them. If you have shifted them, Blake—"

"I haven't even seen them, ass! I haven't been in the study since class."

"If it was you, Hewwies—"

"Fathead!" said Herries

"If it was you, Dig—"

"Ass!" said Dig.

"Weally, you fellows, I want to know what has become of those lines!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "Lathom has got to have them befoah tea! I don't want Lathom comin' up to the studay after his beastly lines! He is wathah watty with me already; he was watty when he gave me the lines. He seemed annoyed. I thought, when that dictionary slipped from undah my arm and dwopped on his toes. Pewwaps he has corns or something. Anyhow, he was watty, and I don't want a wow with the man."

"Chump!" said Blake. "You had to bang a Latin dic on Lathom's hoof, and you had to pick out the special toe he has a corn on; and now, either you've forgotten to write the lines, or else you've taken them in and forgotten that. Anyhow, come on!"

"But I have to take my lines in to Lathom before I leave the House, Blake. He said vewy strictly I was to take them in befoah tea."

Snort from Jack Blake

"Figgins has asked us to tea," he said; "not to supper—not to brekker in the morning—not to dinner to-morrow! Tea to-day—see?"

"Yaas, but—"

"Come on, then, fathead!"

"But Lathom will be watty," said Arthur Augustus. "I may get a whoppin', you know."

"I hope so!" agreed Blake. "It will do you good. Besides, you'll get a whopping here and now if you don't come. Fatty Wynn will have scooffed all the grub if we're much later."

"Pway look for the lines, deah boys; they must be heah somehow."

Blake, Herries, and Dig looked round the study; but, like Arthur Augustus, they looked round in vain. If Arthur Augustus had written a hundred lines from Virgil that afternoon, those lines seemed to have understudied the riches which take to themselves wings and fly away! There was not a spot of them to be discovered in Study No. 6.

"Come on!" said Blake again.

And as Arthur Augustus still hesitated, Blake took him by one arm, and Digby by the other, and they walked him out of the study.

Really, fellows who were asked to tea in the other House could not keep their hospitable hosts waiting for ever and ever. It was a mystery what had become of Gussy's lines, but with tea waiting in Figgy's study in the New House there was no time to elucidate that mystery.

"But weally, you know, I shall get into a wow!" protested Arthur Augustus, as his friends walked him across the study landing.

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed Blake. "Come on!"

"But I don't want to get into a wow with Lathom, Blake," said Arthur Augustus. "Lathom may think it is meant as diswespect if I do not take in the lines, and it is fighwifht bad form to be diswespectful to a Form-mastah."

"Awful!" agreed Blake. "Come on!"

"Lathom was watty, you know, but I don't want to make him wattiah. He may send for me."

"Very likely. Come on!"

"He may go up to the studay for those lines."

"Let him! Come on!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Hear, hear! Come on!"

Arthur Augustus, led by both arms, had to come on.

Blake's view was that, in the first place, Gussy shouldn't have dropped a dic on Lathom's favourite corn and got the lines; in the second place, he should have taken the lines in to Lathom; in the third place, it looked as if he had and forgotten it; in the fourth and most important place, tea was waiting in Figgy's study, and the guests were late already. So for all these reasons Arthur Augustus was marched off by his friends, and the lines and Lathom were left to take care of themselves.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as the four left the School House, and he spotted a grinning podgy face in the quad. "Twimble!"

"Never mind Trimble! Come on!" said Blake.

"Yaas, but I think—"

"Gammon! You couldn't! Come on!"

"You uttah ass, will you let a fellow speak?" howled Arthur Augustus. "I think vewy likely Twimble has been playin' twicks again."

"Very likely. Come on!"

"You know what that flabby wottah did yestah-day. He put Mannah's camewa out of sight, and pwetended that he had seen a New House man takin' it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"Suppose—"

"No time for supposing. Come on!"

"I am goin' to speak to Twimble. I will punch your nose if you don't stop, Blake! Twimble, you fat wottah, have you been playin' twicks in my studay?"

Baggy Trimble grinned.

"Lost your lines?" he asked.

"Yaas, you twicky wottah, and I jollay well think you know what has become of them!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"That's right" agreed Baggy. "I can tell you where to look for them. I saw Kerr of the New House walking off with them."

"What?" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Kerr, you know."

"Oh cwikey!"

Study No. 6 gazed at Baggy Trimble. They had heard all about his little game the day before with Manners' camera. Evidently the fat and fat-headed Baggy was trying on that same game again with Study No. 6.

"You—you—you saw Kerr!" gasped Blake.

"Yes; walking them off," said Baggy breezily.

"I thought I'd tell you. If I were you, D'Arcy, I'd go straight to the New House and punch Kerr's head for bagging your lines."

"Bai Jove!"

How even the fatheaded Baggy hoped to get by with this was rather a mystery. But Baggy

Trimble's podgy intellect had its own mysterious processes. Baggy clearly hoped to get by with it.

"You uttah idiot, what have you done with my lines?" howled Arthur Augustus.

"Eh? Kerr's got them!"

"Kick him!" said Blake. "No time to bother about the lines now, but we can spare a minute. Boot him!"

"Yarooooooh!" roared Baggy.

Study No. 6 booted him all together. They booted him hard, and Baggy fled, roaring.

"But weally, you know—" said Arthur Augustus.

"Come on!"

"Twimble knows where my lines are—"

"Yes; come on!"

"Lathom—"

"Never mind Lathom! Come on!"

And Study No. 6 went into the New House, and there was tea in Figgy's study. And that was that!

THE PRISONER OF STUDY NO. 6!

BAGGY TRIMBLE looked this way and that way, and dodged into Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. Nobody was in sight, and the fat Baggy dodged into that study unseen.

Baggy was in a wrathful and vengeful state. Booting did not agree with Baggy. The fact that he asked for it was no comfort to Baggy. Like many other people, Baggy did not like receiving that for which he asked.

But the trail of vengeance did not seem to prosper with Baggy. His first essay in that line had earned him a stumping. His second had earned him a booting. Perhaps he hoped that it was going to be "third time lucky," for here he was, at it again!

Baggy was wriggling painfully. He was squirming; but he was, he hoped, going to make somebody else squirm. That was why he was in Study No. 6 while Blake & Co. were far from that celebrated apartment.

"Blow 'em!" murmured Baggy. "I'll show 'em! Won't I jolly well show 'em! Blow 'em!"

Baggy set the study door about a foot open; then he lifted a chair to it. From which any observer, had there been one, might have guessed that it was a booby-trap that Baggy's podgy brain was hatching for the benefit of Study No. 6 when they came back to their quarters.

Baggy was going to build up no end of a booby-trap over that door. Then he was going to squeeze out, leaving it for Blake & Co. Some of them would be sure to get it. The more the merrier, from Baggy's point of view.

From the top of the door to the lintel over the doorway, Baggy proceeded to construct that booby-trap.

First he placed a tea-tray in position. On the tray he piled a number of articles—an ink bottle full of ink, a milk jug half-full of milk, a dish containing all the ashes he could scrape out of the grate, and a pair of football boots he sorted out of the cupboard.

"He, he!" chortled Baggy.

Booby-traps were not unknown at St. Jim's, but only Baggy Trimble was idiot enough to use such things as crockery-ware for the purpose. But Baggy was idiot enough for anything.

Baggy Trimble surveyed his handiwork, when he had proceeded thus far, with grinning satisfaction.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.

But he was not quite satisfied yet. That booby-trap, as it stood, was enough to give any fellow a severe jolt when he put his hapless head under it. But Baggy, like Alexander of old, sighed for fresh worlds to conquer. He looked round the study for more.

A dictionary, three or four schoolbooks, and some lumps of coal were added to the cargo on the tea-tray. Then the kettle, which—fortunately, from Baggy's point of view—was full of water. Then a tin of golden syrup—with the lid off!

Baggy grinned with glee as he piled it up. This, Baggy thought, would make the roppers sorry they had booted a chap! But even yet he was not satisfied. Arthur Augustus' hundred lines—hitherto hidden under the cushion in the armchair—were sorted out and added to the pile. On top of them Baggy lodged a pile of cups and saucers.

By that time the tea-tray had rather a full cargo, and even Baggy decided that he had gone far enough.

There was no doubt that somebody was going to get an awful shock when that cargo came down!

Baggy had been about twenty minutes in the study by this time. It was time to go. Baggy prepared to go.

To go, he had to squeeze out of the doorway with the door a foot open. But as he stepped to that aperture an unlooked-for difficulty dawned on his fat brain.

Baggy was not slim. He had rather overlooked the fact that a foot of space, through which most other fellows in the St. Jim's Fourth could have squeezed, was no use to him!

He started squeezing out, and the door moved, and there was an ominous jerk of the overlaid tea-tray above. Baggy Trimble, in alarm, stopped squeezing at once. He did not want his booby-trap to land on his own fat head!

"Oh, jiminy!" breathed Baggy in dismay.

He could not get out of the study!

Twenty minutes of labour in piling up that booby-trap over the door had made him a prisoner in Study No. 6.

This was quite an unexpected development. Baggy gazed at the space through which his podgy person could not pass; he gazed at the booby-trap on which he had expended so much time and trouble. He was fairly caught—by himself!

Either he had to undo his whole job from the beginning, or else he had to remain in that study—to be caught there when Blake & Co. walked into the booby-trap.

That was not an attractive prospect.

In fact, it almost made Baggy's blood curdle to think of it. Nobody, of course, was to know that Baggy had done this. But they could hardly fail to guess if they found Baggy in the study!

"Blow!" hissed Baggy.

He realised that there was nothing for it but to unbuilt that booby-trap. The whole thing had to be done over again, with a wider allowance of space in the doorway for Baggy's extensive circumference.

Baggy breathed hard and deep. But there was nothing else for it, and he stepped across the study to fetch a chair for that purpose. And as he did so footsteps came up the passage from the study landing and stopped at the door of Study No. 6.

Baggy jumped.

Somebody was coming to the study, and whether it was one of the owners or a visitor, Baggy did

not want to be caught there. Very much indeed Baggly didn't.
 He had little time to hunt cover. Baggly ducked and dodged under the study table.
 Tap!
 It was a tap at the door! The door was pushed farther open from outside and then—
 Crash!

BAGGY'S CATCH!

MR. LATHOM, the master of the Fourth Form, did not know what was happening to him.

It was quite a new thing in his experience. Mr. Lathom had been a schoolmaster for a quarter of a century, and in all that long space of time nothing like this had ever happened to him before.

Lathom was, as Arthur Augustus had told his friends, a little ratty. Twinges in the corn on which Gussy had dropped his dictionary kept him in that ratty state. He was annoyed with Arthur Augustus.

Very strictly had he bidden the swell of St. Jim's to bring his lines in before tea-time. It was now tea-time, and he had seen nothing of either D'Arcy or his lines.

So he came up to Study No. 6 to inquire, thoughtfully tucking a cane under his arm when he started.

But Mr. Lathom forgot all about the lines when he pushed open the door of Study No. 6 and stepped in.

It seemed to him that the ancient pile of St. Jim's was collapsing on his head!

Whatever it was, it came down with a terrific crash. Mr. Lathom spun over, with a startled and horrified squeak.

Crash, smash, crash, bang, smash!
 A regular rain of all sort of articles crashed and battered on the unfortunate master of the Fourth.

Lathom rolled in the ruins, gasping. A tea-tray had banged on his head. An inkpot had caught him in the ear. A stack of crockery-ware smashed all over him. He rolled in a sea of the crashing and smashing property of Study No. 6.

He rolled and roared. The terrific din, as that booby-trap came down on Lathom, woke all the echoes of the Fourth Form passage. Fellows who were in their studies rushed out to see what the matter was.

"Whose legs?" asked Cardew, coming out of Study No. 9 with Levison and Clive.

From the open doorway of Study No. 6 a pair of legs extended, and the tail of a gown. That was all that was to be seen of Mr. Lathom from up the passage.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Clive.
 "That's a beak!" gasped Levison.

He cut down the passage to Study No. 6.
 "Oh! Ah! Ooogh! What has happened? Oh! Ah! Ooogh!" came from Mr. Lathom, extended in the doorway, half in and half out of the study, surrounded and covered with wreckage.
 "Lathom!" stuttered Levison.

"A booby-trap!" gurgled Cardew. "Some booby—to set up a trap like that for a beak!"

Levison ran to the Form-master to give him a hand up. Mr. Lathom sat up dizzily amid the wreckage.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Ow! Oh! Goodness gracious! Oh!"

He sat and spluttered. Sitting and spluttering, he had a view of a fat figure crouching under the study table.

Standing up, he would not have seen it. Sitting up, he did!

"Oh! Urrgh! Is that Trimble?" gasped Mr. Lathom.

"Oh jiminy!"
 "You have done this, Trimble!"
 "Oh crikey!"

"Oh! Bless my soul! I—I—I am—am sticky! What is making me sticky?"

"Merely a tin of treacle, sir," said Cardew. He stooped and picked a tin of streaming golden syrup from the Form-master's knuces.

"Bless my soul! Ooogh! Trimble, you young rascal! Oh! Ooogh!"

"I—I—I never—" gasped Trimble in dismay and horror. Oh jiminy! Oh crumbs! Oh lor'!"

Baggy had made quite an unexpected catch in his booby-trap! His fat brain almost swam with horror at what he had done.

"Can I help you, sir?" gasped Levison.

Mr. Lathom staggered to his feet with Levison's assistance. His aspect was startling—smothered with ink, and ashes, and treacle—and some of the fellows in the passage had hard work not to let him see them smile.

"Pray give me your arm, Levison!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Trimble, I will deal with you later. The Head will deal with you! Bless my soul! I—I am quite dizzy. I—I—I—pray assist me, Levison!"

"Certainly, sir!"
 Levison led the hapless master of the Fourth away down the passage.

Baggy Trimble crawled out from under the table, his fat knees knocking together. The

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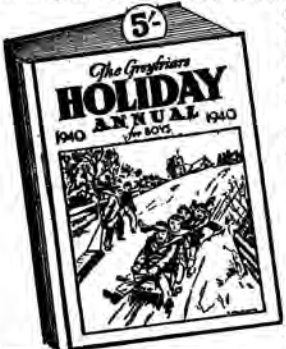
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Fourth Form fellows in the passage stared at him. Mr. Lathom was limping painfully as he went. Mr. Lathom was damaged. What was going to happen to Baggy was quite alarming for Baggy to think of. That booby-trap would have given a Fourth Form fellow a severe jolt. Its effect on an elderly gentleman was much more severe! Baggy undoubtedly had done it now!

"You priceless idiot!" said Cardew. "You might have cracked a fellow's head with that sort of thing! You dangerous maniac—"

"I—I never did it!" moaned Baggy. "I—I don't know who did it! I—I say, d-d-do you think they'll think I did it because I was here?"

"What the thump did you want to get Lathom for?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"I didn't!" wailed Baggy. "How was I to know he was coming up? He hardly ever comes up to the studies. I meant it for D'Arcy and his pals, and—and I couldn't get out after I'd fixed it up, you see, as there wasn't room—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And—and then Lathom had to come and put his silly head into it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" roared Baggy. "I may get sacked for this."

"Jolly likely, I guess," said Wildrake. "Flogging, at least, and serve you jolly well right! You can't play these games with a beak!"

"I tell you I never meant it for Lathom!" howled Baggy.

"You'd better tell Lathom that. It may make him feel all right—after getting it," said Cardew. "On the other hand, it mayn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble rolled away to his own study in the lowest of spirits. "Third time" had not been lucky—it had been the unluckiest of all. Baggy was fed-up with the trail of vengeance. From the bottom of his podgy heart, he wished that he had never set out on that trail. But it was rather too late to wish that, and Baggy could only wait in horrified apprehension for the dreaded summons to his Housemaster's study.

WHOPPED!

"WAG him!" said Arthur Augustus hotly. "We'll rag him baldheaded!" hissed Blake.

"We'll scalp him!" hooted Herries.

"We'll strew him in small pieces all over the House!" breathed Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co. had returned from tea in the New House. They had arrived at their own study in the School House to find a crowd of fellows gathered round the door. And the state of their study and the news that Baggy Trimble had done it, excited their deepest wrath.

Ink, ashes, and treacle were all over the place. Almost every article of crockery in the study was smashed. School books were mixed up with smashed crocks and ink and treacle. Arthur Augustus' hundred lines were mixed up with the lot.

Gussy knew where those lines were now. They lay scattered amid the wreckage in Study No. 6. But the discovery was of no use to him. Those lines were in no state to be presented to a Form-master. Those lines had to be done over again.

"The uttah ass must have been off his silly

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.



As Blake & Co. came into their study to unpack somebody had saved

wockah!" said Arthur Augustus. "All that wub-bish fallin' on a chap's head might have done some feahful damage. I am sowwy for Lathom. But weally it is wathah lucky he came to the stoday. We might have got it, you know."

"I'm sure that will be a comfort to Lathom," remarked Monty Lowther. "You'd better mention that to him, Gussy, and console him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, pewwaps Lathom would not see it in that light," admitted Arthur Augustus. "But it is vewy lucky, all the same. I might have got it on my nappah, you know. That would have been wathah sewious. But it must have been a feahful shock for poor old Lathom."

"He seemed far from pleased," remarked Cardew.

"Well, Trimble is the limit," said Tom Merry. "I don't think you fellows need worry about ragging him. He's gone down to the House-master now, and won't want any more when Ralton is finished."

"He's going to have some more!" roared Blake. "He's going to be smashed and squashed and pulverised and spificated! Look at our study!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Every dashed crock in the study smashed," said Herries. "The minute I see Trimble, I'm going to punch him, and I'm going to keep on punching him."

"I'm going to boot him," said Dig, "and I'm going to keep on booting him."



the big tuck-hammer, they made the discovery that d them the trouble!

"Yaas wathah!"

"Ow, ow, ow, ow! Wow, wow, wow!" floated up the Fourth Form passage from the direction of the stairs.

"Here he comes," grinned Manners.

"Collar him!" hissed Blake.

"Ow, ow, ow! Oh jiminy! Wow!" came an anguished wail. And Blake & Co., as they looked at Baggy Trimble, did not collar him.

Baggy came up the passage bent almost double. He wriggled like a centipede as he came. He wailed, he moaned, and he groaned. Evidently Baggy Trimble had been through it severely in his Housemaster's study. Even the owners of Study No. 6 admitted that he did not look as if he needed any more.

"Had it bad?" asked Levison.

"Ow! Wow, wow!"

"How many?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ow! I—I think it was about a thousand!" moaned Baggy. "I—I thought Railton was never going to leave off. Ow! Wow, wow, wow! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Bai Jove! I suppose we cannot vevy well wag the flabbay wottah!" said Arthur Augustus. "He seems to have had it wathah stwong."

"Ow!" he moaned. "Railton pitched into me! Ow! He seemed to think he was beating carpet. Ow! I told him it wasn't meant for Lathom. Ow! And he only said that if it had been, I should have been expelled. Well, as it was all a—wow, wow, wow!—as it was all a—yow, ow, ow!—I mean, as it was all a mistake,

he ought to have let me off! Wow! And he made me bend over a—wow-ow-wow!—over a chair, and gave me about a million swipes! Wow!"

Baggy wriggled spasmodically.

"Look at our study, you fat villain!" snorted Herries.

"Blow your study!" moaned Baggy. "I wish I hadn't done it now! What did Lathom want to poke his nose in for? Ow! I'm jolly glad he's going to be laid up. Wow!"

"Lathom going to be laid up!" exclaimed Blake.

"Railton said so," groaned Baggy. "He said — Wow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Railton said wow-ow-ow-ow?" asked Monty Lowther. "What did Railton say wow-ow-ow-ow for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow-ow! Railton said that Lathom had had a serious shock—wow-ow! He said such a shock was very serious to a man of Mr. Lathom's years. I can't help his years, can I? 'Tain't my fault he's nearly a hundred years old, is it? Housemasters don't seem to have any sense. I can't help Lathom being as old as Methuselah, can I? Ow-ow-ow!"

"You can help catching him in booby-traps, you dangerous lunatic!" said Tom Merry. "No wonder Railton gave it to you hot and strong, if poor old Lathom's going to be laid up."

"Bai Jove! I've a jolly good mind to wag you, aftah all, Twimble, you unuttewable idiot!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Ow! Wow-wow!"

"When you've done ow-wow-wowing, you can clean up all this muck," said Herries. "If it isn't all cleaned up before prep, you'll get worse than you got from Railton."

"Ow! Wow-wow!"

Baggy Trimble tottered into his study. For a long, long time sounds of woe and anguish were heard from that study.

Baggy had had the whopping of his life. But, really, considering the damage he had done, he was lucky not to have been "sacked." Whether he had meant that crash for Lathom or not, Lathom had got it. Baggy really had got off cheaply with a whopping. Still, it was clear that the School House master had put uncommon beef into that whopping, and for hours the unhappy Baggy wriggled and writhed and moaned and groaned in Study No. 2 and could not be comforted.

He was still squeaking at intervals when George Herries looked into Study No. 2 a quarter of an hour before evening prep was due.

Herries had a fives bat under his arm.

"Feeling better, you fat foozler?" asked Herries.

"Ow! No!" groaned Baggy. "I shan't get over this for weeks! Ow!"

"Well, we can't wait for weeks to use our study," said Herries. "Get going! It's got to be cleaned up."

"Look here—"

"Are you getting busy?"

"No!" roared Baggy. "Go and eat coke!"

Whop!

"Keep that fives bat away!" yelled Baggy.

Whop!

"Ow! Yaroooh! Will you keep that fives bat away?"

Whop!

"I—I'll clean up the study, if you like. Keep off, blow you!"

"I'll see that you do!" said Herries.

And he saw that Baggy did, standing over him with the fives bat while he did it.

Study No. 6 was newly swept and garnished when it was wanted for prep. And Baggy Trimble was more fed-up than ever with the trail of vengeance.

There was only one consolation for Baggy, Lathom was going to be laid up. From that circumstance the suffering Baggy derived a little comfort.

STARTLING NEWS!

"SILVERSON!" said Tom Merry blankly.

"Yes!" answered Blake.

"Not Silverson?"

"Yes; know the name?"

Tom Merry did not answer.

He just stared.

"I've nevah heard of the chap," said Arthur Augustus. "One of those tempoway beaks you get from the agents, you know!"

"Silverson!" murmured Monty Lowther. "My hat!"

"Must be the same!" said Manners. "It's not a common name."

"Heard of him?" asked Blake.

"Just a few!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

The Terrible Three of the Shell were entertaining Study No. 6 to tea, a couple of days after Baggy Trimble's catch in Study No. 6. Blake had mentioned quite casually an item of news—which had a startling effect on Tom Merry and his chums.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was laid up.

Lathom was an elderly gentleman, and that bump in the doorway of Study No. 6, with all sorts of things crashing down on him, had had a fearfully upsetting effect on him.

For a couple of days, the Fourth Form had been without a master, and things had been rather at sixes and sevens in that Form.

It was rumoured that it might be some time before Mr. Lathom was able to take his Form again.

In such circumstances, the Head, of course, took the usual step of engaging a temporary master to fill Lathom's place pro tem. It was only necessary to communicate with the scholastic agency in London which supplied such temporary masters at short notice.

There was nothing unusual in that. Blake mentioned quite casually that a man named Silverson was coming in Mr. Lathom's place, to take the Fourth till Lathom recovered from the effects of Baggy Trimble's activities.

That name had a startling effect in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

The Terrible Three, in the rush and bustle of the new term, had almost forgotten that unpleasant relative of Tom Merry's whom they had met in the holidays at Laurel Villa. Now they were very disagreeably reminded of him.

"I'll boot that mad ass Trimble!" said Tom.

"But what's the matter with Silverson?" asked Herries.

"If it's the same man—" said Tom slowly.

"Ten to one!" said Manners. "That man is coming here."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.

"Thank goodness he's going to boss the Fourth, and not the Shell!" said Monty Lowther, with a whistle. "We should have had a gorgeous time with him if he was here in Linton's place!"

"There's always something to be thankful for," remarked Manners, "and by gum, we can be thankful for that!"

"But what the dooce do you know about the man, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Too much if it's the same man, and I suppose it must be," said Tom, knitting his brows. "A man named Silverson, who takes posts like this, is a relative of mine—sort of cousin two or three times removed, though not removed so far as I should like him to be—and we saw him in the hols. and had fearful rows with him."

"Bai Jove!"

"Not a nice man?" asked Dig.

"Absolute rotter!" said Lowther.

"Nice for us in the Fourth!" said Blake. "But look here, he must be all right if the Head's engaged him—and he has. They only send good men when he wants an extra beak—the Head's jolly particular."

"Oh, I dare say he's all right so far as his qualifications go," said Tom. "He must be up to the mark as a schoolmaster, or the Head wouldn't have him, of course. But in other ways—"

"You actually had a row with him?" asked Blake.

"Yes; punched his face."

"Oh, great pip!"

"Bai Jove! That was vewy diswespectful, Tom Mewwy! I cannot approve of anythin' of the sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly.

"I think you would, Gussy, if you'd seen him," said Tom. "What frightful luck that he should be picked out to come here!"

"That special blighter—out of a long list!" said Manners.

"Oh! I fancy I can understand that, though!" said Tom ruefully. "Miss Priscilla has been recommending him to the Head—she thinks a lot of him, and she told me she'd like to see him at a school like St. Jim's. I'll bet that made the Head think of him specially!"

"Pity we didn't open her eyes about the rotter!" grunted Manners.

"Well, we couldn't, old chap! But this is rotten, and no mistake! If the man had any decency, he would keep away from here, after what happened in the hols. A job for a few weeks can't be a very big object to him."

"You can bet he jumped at the chance!" said Lowther. "Thank goodness he's not going to be our beak—but a beak can make himself jolly unpleasant."

"A man like that oughtn't to be a schoolmaster at all!" said Manners. "It's not his line!"

"Not in the least!" agreed Tom. "Well, I suppose we can keep clear of him as we're not in his Form, thank goodness! If he goes out of his way to make himself unpleasant, we can keep our end up."

"And some over!" said Monty.

"When is he coming, Blake?"

"This afternoon," answered Blake. "May be here already, for all I know. Fancy our new beak being a relation of yours!"

"A distant one," said Tom, "and I hope he'll keep his distance. I suppose it's the same man—what's his other name, if you know?"

"James!" answered Blake.

"That settles it! It's the same man!"
 "But what was the woe about, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you were to blame, you know."
 "Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
 "I'll tell you!" said Tom; and he related the episode at Laurel Villa. Blake whistled when he had finished.

"Sounds nice!" he commented. "Well, he's only here for a couple of weeks, thank goodness—perhaps not so much as that! May be only a week. Old Lathom will pull round before long—he's only jittery from a shock. We shall have to stand your jolly old relative till then!"

When tea was over, and Study No. 6 were gone, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked at one another expressively.

"This is a go!" remarked Monty.
 "Fancy that brute coming here!" said Manners.

"After all, we can keep clear of him," said Tom. "He won't have anything to do with the Shell. Nothing to worry about, really—only it's rather startling. I thought I was never going to see the brute again."

"You won't steer clear of him very easily, Tom," said Manners quietly. "He's not coming here because he's hard up for a job for a week or two—he's coming here because St. Jim's is your school, and he's on your track."

"Think so?" asked Tom doubtfully.
 "I don't think—I know!" answered Manners. "That man is a bad egg all through, and he won't stop at much, either! That's pretty plain, from the trick he played with that racing paper. We shall have to keep a wary eye open on Mr. James Silverson while he's at St. Jim's."

And it was not long before Tom Merry knew that Manners' words were prophetic!

MORE HASTE, LESS SPEED!

MR. JAMES SILVERSON, the new master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, stared. Mr. Silverson was in his study—which, a couple of days ago, had been Mr. Lathom's study.

James had been two or three hours at St. Jim's. In his interview with the Head, he had made rather a good impression on Dr. Holmes. He had not perhaps made quite so good an impression on Mr. Raiton, the Housemaster. He had met the rest of the staff at tea in Common-room. Now he was in his own study, unpacking a bag, when Baggy Trimble happened along.

The door of the study suddenly opened without a knock, and a podgy junior popped in, and instantly closed the door after him.

No wonder James Silverson stared. He was new to St. Jim's, and unacquainted with its manners and customs; but he could not suppose that it was customary there for a junior to pop into a Form-master's study without knocking, as if the room belonged to him.

The bag he was unpacking was in the farther corner of the study. Trimble did not see him as he popped in; and immediately he was in, he shut the door and stood facing it, evidently listening.

His podgy back was turned to the staring Form-master.

But Mr. Silverson guessed the next moment

what this meant! The study had been unoccupied till his arrival. This junior knew nothing of his arrival, and fancied that the study was still unoccupied. That was why he had dodged in—obviously to escape some pursuit. Some other fellow, it was clear, was after that fat fellow—perhaps because the fat fellow had a tin of toffees tightly clutched in a fat paw!

James Silverson stared at Baggy's podgy back, and opened his lips to speak. Before he could do so, however, the study door was hurled open again.

Another junior popped in!
 James' eyes gleamed at that junior. It was Tom Merry of the Shell!

Tom Merry, no more than Baggy, noticed the man standing by the bag in the farther corner of the room. His eyes were on Trimble—and on the tin of toffee clutched in the fat hand. Tom had heard from Blake that the new master of the Fourth was coming that afternoon, but he had not seen him, and from the fact that Baggy had cut into that study, he naturally did not suppose that a master was there. So he followed him in.

"I—I—I say!" gasped Baggy in dismay. "I—I say, Tom Merry, I—I—" Evidently the fat Baggy had hoped that he had dodged into that study unseen.

"Give me those toffees, you fat frump!" snapped Tom. And without waiting for Baggy to reply, he jerked the tin of toffees from his podgy paw, tapped him on the head with it, and turned to the door.

"Yaroooh!" roared Baggy.
 James Silverson started forward.
 "Merry!" he thundered.

Tom jumped almost clear of the floor in his surprise. Baggy Trimble fairly bounded. That angry bark was the first intimation either of them had that anyone else was in the study.

"Oh!" gasped Tom. He turned and stared at Mr. Silverson. "Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy Trimble. "I—I say, I—I never knew you were here, sir, if you're the new beak, sir—I—I mean, the new master, sir! Oh crikey! I—I wouldn't have come in if I'd known."

"What is your name?" asked Mr. Silverson.

"Tut-tut-tut—"

"What?"

"Tut-tut-Trimble, sir!" stuttered Baggy.

"Your Form?"

"Fourth, sir!" groaned Baggy. He could guess, of course, that this hard-faced young man with the glinting eyes was his new Form-master, as he found him in Lathom's study. And Baggy was apprehensive. Even a mild gentleman like little Mr. Lathom would have been annoyed by a junior bolting into his study like a rabbit into a burrow; and this man did not look mild at all—he looked far from mild.

"Then you are in my Form, Trimble!" said Mr. Silverson. "You should not rush into a master's study like that, Trimble. However, I can excuse you if you were being pursued by an older boy bullying you."

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. He realised that he was in luck. This hard-eyed, sharp-chinned man was not putting the blame on him, but on Tom Merry. It was all right for Baggy.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed at James Silverson. "I was not bullying Trimble, Mr. Silverson!" he said, speaking quietly, though his eyes gleamed with anger. "I—"

"I can believe the evidence of my own eyes, Merry," said Mr. Silverson coldly, "and because you are distantly related to me, you must not expect anything in the nature of favouritism."

"If you think—" almost shouted Tom.

"I warn you not to be insolent, Merry! Do not dare to raise your voice in a master's study. This boy of my Form was trying to escape from you and you pursued him into this study and took his toffees away by force, and struck him with the tin!"

"I—"

"Silence! If you were in my Form I should cane you with the utmost severity," said Mr. Silverson. "As it is, I shall take you to your Housemaster, and report your conduct, and request him to administer punishment. I will not allow boys of my Form to be bullied, ill-used, and robbed by you, Merry."

Tom's face flamed.

"If you'll listen—" he exclaimed.

"Whatever you have to say, you may say to your Housemaster!" Mr. Silverson stepped to the door. "You will come with me to Mr. Railton. Trimble, you will follow me."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Trimble.

"I tell you—" panted Tom.

"If you do not immediately come with me, Merry, I shall take you by the collar," said Mr. Silverson grimly.

"Of course I shall come, but—"

"Silence!"

Tom Merry, with a crimson face, followed the new master to Mr. Railton's study. Baggy Trimble brought up the rear, with a grin on his fat face.

Mr. Railton, Housemaster of the School House, glanced up and rose to his feet as the new master entered, followed by Tom Merry and Baggy Trimble.

"What—" he began.

"I regret very much, sir, to have to report a junior for punishment when I have been only a few hours in the school," said Mr. Silverson smoothly. "But such a shocking case of bullying—"

"Bullying?" repeated the School House master, staring. "Neither of these two boys, surely—"

"Merry, sir,"

"Merry?" repeated the Housemaster. "I can hardly imagine Merry guilty of bullying. Kindly tell me what has occurred."

"This boy of my Form, sir, Trimble, fled to my study to escape from Merry," said Mr. Silverson. "Merry not only pursued him into my study, but took away a tin of toffees from him by force and struck him with the tin. Such an act is an act of dishonesty as well as brutality!"

"This is extraordinary!" said Mr. Railton. "If Merry has acted in the way you describe, Mr. Silverson, you have certainly done well to report his action to me, and I have been very much deceived in him. Merry, have you taken that tin of toffees in your hand from Trimble?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"I did not strike him with it, as Mr. Silverson fancies," added Tom, with cool contempt. "I gave him a tap, that was all—little enough, I think, after I'd had to chase him for it."

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy Trimble.

Mr. Railton gazed at him hard, and then gazed at Baggy Trimble. He knew Tom Merry and THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.

he knew Trimble. There was a brief pause, which was enough for Mr. Railton to guess pretty accurately how the matter stood.

"Trimble!" he rapped.

"Oh, yes, sir!" mumbled Baggy.

"Does that tin of toffees belong to Merry?"

James Silverson gave a start.

That had not occurred to him for a moment. He had seen his chance and jumped at it, and now it dawned upon his malicious mind that he had jumped rather hastily. It was a case of more haste and less speed.

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy. "I—I—I—"

"I warn you to tell me the truth, Trimble!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I think it—it might belong to Tom Merry, sir! I—I wasn't going to scoff the toffees, sir! I—I only took it from his study for a—a joke! I never knew he saw me coming out with it! I—I—I mean, I—I—"

James Silverson's face was a study.

"I hardly think, Mr. Silverson, that Merry is much to blame for having taken back his own property from Trimble!" said Mr. Railton dryly. "Merry, you should have explained this to Mr. Silverson!"

"Mr. Silverson would not allow me to speak, sir."

"Oh! You may go, Merry," said Mr. Railton hastily.

"Thank you, sir!"

Tom Merry left the study—with the tin of toffees under his arm.

"Trimble, you will take a hundred lines!" said Mr. Railton. "You may go."

Trimble went.

"My dear Silverson," said Mr. Railton very quietly, "you are new here, and as yet unacquainted with the boys of this House. You appear to jump to conclusions—erroneous conclusions—very easily! I may inform you, for your guidance, that Tom Merry is one of the very best boys in the House or in the school; he is quite incapable of bullying or any other such mean action, and I regret very much that you should have made such a mistake—I cannot help adding, such an inexcusable mistake!"

James Silverson left the Housemaster's study without answering that. He went back to his own study with tightly compressed lips and a glint in his eyes. He kicked the door shut, and stood breathing hard through his nose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That sound of merriment, floating in at the open study window, caused him to glance out into the quad.

Three Shell fellows were walking past at a little distance—a very little distance—from his study window, one of them with a tin of toffees under his arm. All three were laughing.

They walked past, Silverson's bitter glance following them. He could guess why they were laughing. He could also guess that they wanted him to hear.

Then they turned back and walked past the window again.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came another roar.

Then Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther walked off, still laughing, and leaving Mr. Silverson pleased by that happy sound of boyish merriment—perhaps!

Next Wednesday:

"TOM MERRY'S ENEMY!"

HOLDING THE FORT!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE REBELS!

"W E'RE in for it!"

Frank Richards made that remark. And Bob Lawless nodded and rejoined emphatically:

"I guess we are, Franky!"

"Who cares?" grinned Chunky Todgers.

"We're winners, so far," remarked Vere Beauclerc, smiling. "And we're not going to give in."

And there was a chorus of:

"Never!"

There was no doubt that Frank Richards & Co. were "in for it." Cedar Creek School was in a ferment. In the big school-room, where classes were usually held by Miss Meadows, Mr. Slimmey, and Mr. Shepherd, there was an excited crowd, most of them talking at once.

The dismissal of Miss Meadows had been followed by the resignation and departure of her two assistant masters, and Cedar Creek was left without any masters at all. Certainly there was the new headmaster, Mr. Ephraim Peckover, who had taken Miss Meadows' place, but that gentleman the school refused to receive.

Doors and windows were barricaded, and the schoolboy strikers were holding the fort, and so far they had held it successfully.

Outside, in the playground, Mr. Peckover was looking very angry and very blue, and Mr. Gunten, the chairman of the board of trustees, was stamping with fury. Old man Gunten was in a quandary, and he was beginning to realise the fact. He had "worked" it with the board to dismiss Miss Meadows for sending his son away from the school, and he had supposed that it would be all plain-sailing after that.

The revolt at Cedar Creek had taken him quite by surprise. To add to his discomfort, he had quarrelled with the sheriff, whom he had brought in to restore order, and Mr. Henderson had departed in a huff with his men.

Old man Gunten shook a fat fist at the schoolhouse, which sheltered the rebels, and from which derisive shouts and catcalls came.

"They're going!" called out Tom Lawrence, who had his eye to a crack in a window-shutter.

There was a rush to look. Old man Gunten and Mr. Peckover were going out at the gates, evidently giving the matter up as a bad job, for the present at least. There was a cheer in the lumber schoolhouse.

"Beaten to the wide!" chuckled Chunky Todgers. "I say, you chaps, no lessons to-day! Hurrah!"

"Old man Gunten will have to come round," said Bob Lawless. "One thing's a dead cert—we keep on strike till Miss Meadows comes back."

"Hear, hear!"

"What are you scowling about, Franky?" asked Bob, glancing at Frank Richards, whose brows were knitted in thought.

Frank smiled.

"I was thinking," he said. "Old man Gunten is pretty certain to call in our people to deal

with us, Bob. What will you say if your father comes along?"

"Blessed if I know!" confessed Bob. "But we're not going to give in. Popper was against sacking Miss Meadows, anyway, but he was out-voted on the board."

"I guess everybody was against it," said Lawrence. "Miss Meadows was popular, and nobody's ever seen this man Peckover in the section before. My people are down on old man Gunten, I can tell you."

"If our people chip in, we shall have to put it to them as nicely as we can; but we're not giving in," said Bob Lawless decidedly. "We can hold out in the schoolhouse for a week if we choose; and we'll do it!"

"A regular siege," said Chunky Todgers. "Good! What about grub, though?"

"Bother grub!"

"Oh, don't be a jay, Bob Lawless!" said Chunky warmly. "I suppose we can't hold out without grub. I think I'd better see to the state of the larder at once."

"And somebody had better see to you while you're doing it, or there won't be any left!"

"It will be rather a difficulty if old man Gunten springs our people on us," remarked Lawrence. "If a chap's popper comes for him he will have to go, that's all; and the rest can carry on."

"That's it!" said Bob. "Now, let's see about some lunch, and we'll be ready for old man Gunten when he comes along again."

It was near the usual dinner-hour, and the Cedar Creek fellows were ready for a meal. Chunky Todgers had led the way to the kitchen, from which Black Sally had been gently but firmly persuaded to depart.

The whole building was in the possession of the rebels. Fortunately, a good supply of provisions was kept there, the backwoods school being a good distance from the nearest settlement.

As most of the Cedar Creek crowd had their midday meal at the school, it was necessary for a good supply to be kept on hand, and Miss Meadows had been very careful in that respect.

Chunky Todgers' podgy face beamed as he examined the stores, and found that there was no danger of famine.

"Topping!" said Chunky. "You see, there was grub for the whole school—and there's only twenty or so of us—so it will last. No need for anybody to go short."

"We're going to be careful, all the same," said Bob Lawless. "You're not going to burst your crop, Chunky. I'm going to stop you when you've eaten enough for two."

"Look here, you jay—" began Chunky indignantly.

"Who's going to cook?" asked Dawson.

"Me cookee," said Yen Chin. "Me good cookee, oh, yes—topside gleet cook!"

"Go it, heathen!"

The log fire was soon roaring and Yen Chin at work. Before long the rebels of Cedar Creek

were seated round the table, enjoying themselves. They were getting used, by this time, to the peculiar state of affairs; but probably there was uneasiness in some minds as to the view their parents might take of the strike in the school. The grown-up view was likely to be quite different from the schoolboy view; though the dismissal of the popular schoolmistress had caused indignation in the whole section.

Dinner was over when there was a sound of knocking at the schoolhouse door.

"Here they come!" squeaked Chunky Todgers. There was a rush from the dining-room at once. Only one fellow remained there, and that was Chunky. Todgers thought the opportunity was too good to be lost; and, instead of being allowed to enough for two, as Bob Lawless had declared, Chunky proceeded to allowance himself to enough for three, if not four or five!

NOT A SUCCESS!

FRANK RICHARDS opened the shutter of the window nearest the door and looked out. The big door itself could not be approached, being barricaded with a stack of forms and desks. It was not the enemy who had arrived.

"Molly!" exclaimed Frank, as he saw the newcomer.

It was Molly Lawrence, and she ran at once towards the window, her face flushed from hurrying.

"They're coming, Frank!" she exclaimed. "Who are coming, Molly?" asked Frank.

"Jolly good of you to come to tell us," "Old man Gunten and father and Mr. Lawless, and some more," she said. "Mr. Gunten has been riding round the homesteads to get help. He wants all the boys' fathers to come here and order them to come out."

"Just like him!" grunted Bob Lawless. "Some of them are not coming, though," said Molly. "I heard Mr. Gunten talking to them at our house. He hasn't got many to come. Mr. Todgers said he had no time to bother!"

"Good old Todgers!" grinned Bob. "He said it was a relief not to have Chunky home if he stayed here," said Molly, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "And Mr. Hacke told him he could manage the school without his assistance," said Molly.

"Good old popper!" said Eben Hacke. "And I think most of them are too busy on the farms to bother about it," said Molly. "But Mr. Gunten has got some of them together. I thought I'd ride over and warn you."

"Good old Molly!" said Frank Richards. "And my uncle's with them?"

"Yes. They're riding up the trail now," said Molly. "I had better go. Good luck!"

And Molly Lawrence ran back to her pony, and rode away.

"Now for it!" said Bob Lawless, rather grimly.

A few minutes later there was a clatter of hoofs in the playground of the backwoods school. Old man Gunten rode in with his party. There were six of them, including Mr. Lawless, Mr. Lawrence, and old man Gunten. The other three were the fathers of Dawson, Hopkins, and Mayhew.

Rancher Lawless rode up to the window. "So glad to see you, dad!" Bob Lawless remarked.

"Nice morning, isn't it, uncle?" ventured Frank Richards.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,647.

Mr. Lawless looked at them.

"Now what does this shindy mean?" he demanded.

"Hasn't old man Gunten told you, popper?"

"I'm asking you!" said the rancher gruffly.

"Well, to put it in a nutshell, we're on strike, dad," said Bob. "We're standing up for Miss Meadows. She's been dismissed because she turned Kern Gunten out of the school for being a blackguard. We want her back. We won't let in the new headmaster at any price. He's a low-down coyote, anyhow. We're holding the fort till Miss Meadows comes back."

"But this won't do, Bob," said Mr. Lawless.

"It's all right, popper. Old man Gunten will have to toe the line," said Bob confidently. "You leave us to it, and we'll bring him to reason."

"That's the kind of insolence I've been hearing from your son, Mr. Lawless!" roared the Swiss storekeeper. "By gosh, if he were a son of mine, I'd teach him better manners!"

Mr. Lawless gave the Swiss a grim look.

"I guess my son compares rather favourably with yours, Mr. Gunten!" he rapped out. "He has not been turned out of the school for gambling and blackguardism, at any rate!"

"I don't want any chinwag from you, Mr. Lawless!"

"It comes to this," said the rancher quietly, though his eyes gleamed. "You've dismissed Miss Meadows, Mr. Gunten, and appointed a new Head. I don't deny you've the power, as you have a majority behind you on the board. But I want to know just this: Is your new headmaster going to take your son back into the school?"

"He is!" snapped Mr. Gunten defiantly.

"A gambling rascal, who isn't fit to associate with these boys!" said Mr. Lawless. "Well, as a member of the board, I can't uphold what they are doing."

"I should think not!"

"But, at the same time, I don't feel called upon to interfere," said Mr. Lawless coolly. "It was a mean trick getting rid of Miss Meadows as you did, and I've told you so, and I tell you again. You've got the school into this pickle, and you can get it out again without my help. That's what I say, and I advise these gentlemen to say the same."

"Ear, 'ear!" remarked Mr. Hopkins. "I came 'ere to call my son 'ome, but I think I'll take your advice, Mr. Lawless."

Old man Gunten clenched his fat hands. There was a consultation among the horsemen outside the schoolhouse, watched anxiously by the rebels within. They had resisted the sheriff and his posse, and were prepared to hold the fort against all comers, but they were bound, of course, to obey their parents. So those whose fathers were present waited anxiously for the decision.

"You'd better come home, Tom!" called out Mr. Lawrence at last.

"I say, dad—" began Lawrence, in dismay. "Order him to open the door, Mr. Lawrence!" bawled old man Gunten.

"No business of mine, Mr. Gunten!" said the farmer. "Manage your school your own way. I'll take my son home with me—and that's all that concerns me."

"My view exactly," remarked Mr. Dawson. "Come out of it, Dick!"

Mr. Mayhew called to his son. Three disconsolate youths dropped from the window in obedience to their father's commands.

It was a reduction of the garrison of the schoolhouse, but the fort was still held. Old man Gunten's trump card had not, after all, won the game for him. He was little "forrader" than he had been before.

"Mr. Lawless," he spluttered, "you are upholding disorder—mutiny! I call on you to order your son to return to his duty!"

"My son is doing what he thinks is his duty," answered the rancher. "I guess I'm not taking a hand in the game, one way or the other. My advice to you is to reinstate Miss Meadows."

"I'll ask for your advice when I want it!" snapped Mr. Gunten.

The rancher shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'm done here," he said. "And I may as well mention, Mr. Gunten, that Miss Meadows is appealing to the authorities against her dismissal, and that I am supporting her. You'll hear about it soon. Good-bye, Bob, and behave yourself, you young rascal!"

And with that the rancher rode out of the gates with Mr. Hopkins. The others were already gone.

Old man Gunten was left alone once more.

"What's the next move, old scout?" called out Frank Richards.

The fat storekeeper gave him an evil look.

"I give you young rascals a last chance," he said. "Return to your lessons at once, and I'll see that you're let off with a thrashing all round."

"I guess we're not taking any."

"Otherwise," said Mr. Gunten, between his teeth, "I shall ride back to Thompson and get help there—not the sheriff and his men, but the kind of galoot that will do the business. And if you get hurt it's your own funeral."

"That means that you're going to enlist the rowdies of Thompson, does it?" said Frank Richards. "Well, go ahead!"

"You young scoundrel—"

Squash!

An apple in an advanced state of decomposition hit Mr. Gunten's open mouth, and put a sudden stop to his flow of eloquence.

"Good shot, Yen Chin!" yelled Bob Lawless.

"Geroogh! Yoooch!" Mr. Gunten spluttered wildly. "Ow! Ooch! I'll—Groogh!"

The storekeeper stamped away, spluttering. A howl of laughter followed him. A minute more and horse's hoofs rang on the trail as the enraged man galloped away to Thompson.

Bob Lawless drew a deep breath.

"That means business," he said. "Old man Gunten is coming back with a gang of toughs—the Red Dog crowd very likely. He's too wild to care what happens. My sons, there is going to be a scrap!"

"And we're going to come out on top," said Beauclerc.

"We're going to try," said Bob.

And the schoolboy rebels waited with almost breathless keenness for the arrival of the enemy.

THE RED DOG CROWD!

THERE was a thudding of hoofs, and a jingling of bridles in the playground of Cedar Creek School. Frank Richards & Co. looked from the window. They were serious now, though none the less determined.

Old man Gunten had arrived with his new assistants, a dozen rough-looking men—the scum of the Thompson Valley.



The end of the pole struck Four Kings on his chest, and he went spinning back through the window.

"The Red Dog crowd!" said Bob Lawless.
 "We're ready for them!" said Frank Richards quietly.

But there were grim faces in the schoolhouse now. The Red Dog crowd were well known in the Thompson Valley, and their reputation was an unenviable one. More than once Sheriff Henderson had had trouble with them, and most of them had seen the inside of the calaboose. They usually hung about the Red Dog Saloon in Thompson, an establishment famous for its "shindies."

Most of the roughs had been drinking, to judge by their looks. Probably the storekeeper had stood drinks all round to put them in a humour for the expedition, as well as promising liberal payment for their services.

"There's Four Kings!" said Bob. "He's the leader of the gang. You remember him, Franky?"

Frank Richards nodded.

Four Kings spotted the schoolboys at the window, and shook a brawny fist at them. He had had trouble with Frank Richards & Co. before, and the chums had forced him to quit Thompson, with the alternative of being handed over to the sheriff to answer for his crime. Evidently he had returned to his old haunts, and he was glad of the chance of paying off old scores against the chums of Cedar Creek.

"I guess I'm arter you!" roared Four Kings. "Come out of that there shebang!"

"Come and get us out!" called back Beauclerc.

"I reckon I'll do that!"

"Hold on a minute!" rapped out old man Gunten. Furious as he was, the fat Swiss was aware of the serious trouble that might follow if the rough gang began to attack; it was certain that there would be heavy blows given and received. "I guess I'll speak to them first."

"What's the good of chewing the rag?" demanded Four Kings. "We've come hyer to lambaste the critters!"

"Hold on, I tell you!"

Mr. Gunten came towards the window.

"You see that gang?" he said. "I guess you know what'll happen if they start on you! You'll get hurt! I give you a last chance of climbing down."

"Thank you for nothing!" answered Frank.

"Mind, if those galoots once start there'll be damage!" said Mr. Gunten. "They've brought their cattle-whips, as you can see, and they'll use them!"

"If they can get in here they're welcome to use them!" said Bob Lawless.

The storekeeper gritted his teeth.

"I don't answer for what they do!" he said. "If they get their dauder up they may draw a knife or a shooter!"

"That's your funeral, Mr. Gunten; you'll answer for it!" said Bob Lawless.

"Will you give in?"

"Nix!"

"Then you'll take the consequences!"

"And you'll take a chunk of wood on your cabeza, Mr. Gunten, if you don't vamoose!" answered Bob, raising his hand with the missile in it.

Old man Gunten beat a prompt retreat.

Bob Lawless stepped back from the window, and closed the shutter and barred it.

"Look out!" he said tersely. "It's business now! Old man Gunten must be mad to call in

that gang; he's responsible for it to the law. But that won't help us now if they get at us."

"I guess we're going to help ourselves," said Eben Hacke.

"Ear, ear!" said Hopkins.

There was a sound of shouting outside. The Red Dog crowd were coming. The roughs had heavy cattle-whips in their hands, dangerous weapons if they got near enough to use them. Two of them, Four Kings himself and Euchre Dick, had axes to beat in the shuttered window. The big door had already been found to be impregnable.

Crash, crash!

"There they go!"

The wooden shutter soon flew to fragments. In the opening the brutal face of Four Kings appeared, glaring in on the garrison. Evidently the ruffian supposed that he only had to clamber in, and to drop unhindered into the school-room. He found that that was a mistake.

Every one of the defenders had a stick or whip in his hand, and they were not slow to use them. Three or four cudgels came whirling at Four King's face, and he popped it back just in time.

"Bring a bench hyer!" he shouted.

A pine bench from Mr. Slimmey's cabin was run under the window and Four Kings mounted on it. Then his sinewy arm came through the smashed window, his hand gripping the cattle-whip. He received two or three blows without heeding them, and lashed right and left with the heavy whip, clearing space round the window inside.

There were loud yells as the defenders dodged the lashing heavy thong, not in all cases successfully. The ruffian grinned, and put a leg through the window. Astride there, he lashed round savagely to keep the schoolboys back, and prepared to drop inside.

But Frank Richards & Co. were ready for that. Frank was grasping the long pole that had already served in a previous attack, and he charged with it at the ruffian in the window. He did not need to go near enough to get within the lashing circle of the whip.

The end of the pole struck Four Kings on his brawny chest with all Frank's weight behind it. There was a fiendish yell from the Red Dog leader as he went spinning back from the window, completely dislodged by the charge. Louder yells echoed outside as Four Kings sprawled down helplessly on his followers.

The schoolboys gave a breathless cheer.

"Well done, Franky!"

"Vellee good, ole Flanky!" chuckled Yen Chin. "Hele comee Euchle Dickee! You see me chuckee stool!"

Euchre Dick's swarthy face appeared in the window, and the Chinese hurled the pinewood stool with deadly aim. Euchre Dick did not wait for it. He sprang back outside, and the stool struck the broken shutter and fell to the floor.

The bull-voice of Four Kings could be heard outside, blustering and swearing furiously. The ruffian was hurt by his fall, and his temper was at boiling point.

"Why don't you get in?" Old Man Gunten was shrieking. "What am I paying you for? Get in! Do you hear me?"

"Not so jolly easy!" murmured Beauclerc. "Hallo! Here he is again!"

Four Kings' furious face appeared at the window, almost convulsed with rage. He clambered in head-first.

"Give it him!" yelled Bob.

Whack, whack! Crash!

A shower of blows landed on the ruffian's head and shoulders, and he bellowed with rage. The punishment was too severe even for the infuriated bulldozer. He scrambled back, and dropped to the ground again, yelling with pain, and clasping his head with both hands.

"Our win!" gasped Bob Lawless.

DANGER AHEAD!

"**HURRAH!**"

Outside the barred schoolhouse there was a buzz of furious voices as the Red Dog crowd raged there in vain. After the experience of their leader, no member of the rough gang was anxious to put his head in at the window.

The garrison stood on the alert. Surrender was less in their thoughts than ever, for if once the rough gang had been allowed to get at them it was certain that the damage would go far beyond what Mr. Gunten would be prepared to answer for.

Four Kings and his gang were out of the control of their employer now. Old man Gunten realised that, and he was a little uneasy as to the outcome of the desperate measures he had taken. But at his first word to Four Kings that much-injured gentleman hustled him away, with a glare that warned Mr. Gunten to hold his tongue.

"We're going to have them critters out of it," said Four Kings between his teeth. "And I'm going to lay my whip round them till their own folks won't know them arter I've done! That's the programme, old man Gunten, and you can stow the gab, or maybe you'll get some of it yourself!"

"How are you going to get them out, pard?" asked Euchre Dick.

"I guess there's ways and means. I reckon there's a ladder somewhere around. Look for it, boys!"

The Red Dog crowd spread over the school buildings, searching for a ladder. One was soon found in the stable-yard, and it was rushed towards the lumber schoolhouse.

Bob Lawless was watching from the window.

"They're going to climb on the roof!" he rapped out. "Cherub, you keep guard down here! Franky and six of you come after me!"

Bob hurried out of the school-room, Frank and half a dozen fellows following him fast.

The big school-room had an almost flat roof, which could be reached from the schoolmistress's house, which was part of the same building, one of Miss Meadows' windows overlooking the roof.

Bob ran up the steps leading to the upper story of the house, rushed into a room, and threw open a window. He jumped out on the schoolhouse roof without hesitation, and his followers clambered after him. They were none too soon. The top of the ladder already appeared above the edge of the roof, and Four Kings was ascending.

The ruffian's intention was to force an entrance at the window over the roof; or, failing that, to hew his way with the axe down through the roof itself into the school-room below. But as his head appeared above the level, he found that Frank Richards & Co. were there to meet him.

Four Kings glared up at the schoolboys gathered by the ridge, his eyes blazing.

"You wait till I get at you, you young hounds!" he said through his set teeth.

"You'll try it at your own risk," said Bob. "Mind, we're keeping you back, even if you break your fool neck!"

"We'll see about that! Come on, boys!" roared Four Kings.

The ruffian sprawled from the ladder upon the roof. Frank Richards swung his pole forward, and shoved it at the ruffian, catching him by the side of the neck. Four Kings was forced backwards, and his legs went dangling over the edge, and he clutched wildly at the ladder.

"Look out!" yelled Euchre Dick below, as one of his leader's boots smote him on the side of the head. "Wharrer you at? Yarook!"

"By gum! He's going!" gasped Bob Lawless.

Four Kings was falling, and his desperate grasp closed on the ladder, and it was dragged away with him. The ladder toppled over, amid loud yells from the men clinging to it, who jumped clear among their comrades below. Four Kings and the ladder disappeared from the sight of the schoolboys on the roof. The heads of his followers broke Four Kings' fall, and, to judge by the yelling, some of the heads were almost broken, too.

"I guess they won't try that game again!" gasped Bob Lawless.

Bob was right. The ladder was not reared up to the roof again; it was a little too dangerous for the Red Dog crowd.

Bob stood on the edge and looked into the playground. The attacking party had retreated a little distance, and the ladder lay unheeded on the ground. Farther off, outside the school gates, he caught sight of a graceful, girlish figure mounted on a pony.

"Hallo! There's Molly!" he exclaimed.

He waved his hat to the girl, and Molly Lawrence waved her hand back. There was no school for Molly that day, but she had not gone home with her father and brother, being anxious for her chums in the besieged schoolhouse.

Frank Richards waved his hand. Then he looked down at the crowd in the playground.

The Red Dog gang had been defeated so far, and Frank had a faint hope that they would accept their defeat and leave Mr. Gunten in the lurch. But there was no sign of a retreat.

Four Kings was rubbing his bruises and swearing, whilst his comrades were spreading about the school buildings, as if in search of something.

"What on earth are they up to, Franky?" asked Bob.

Frank shook his head.

"Blessed if I can make out!" he answered. "They seem to be gathering firewood."

The schoolboys watched anxiously. They could see that something was being planned, though they could not so far guess what it was.

Mr. Gunten came towards Four Kings, and Frank judged by his expression that the Swiss was already regretting that he had called in such allies. The schoolboys could not hear what he said, but the bull-voice of Four Kings came plainly to their ears as he answered:

"Yep! I guess we're going to smoke them out, Mr. Gunten."

"But——"

"Don't you chew the rag at me!" roared Four Kings. "You hev' brought me hyer to do the job, ain't you?"

"Yes," stammered the storekeeper. "But I reckoned——"

"Never mind what you reckoned! I guess that

cuts no ice with me. I'm hyer to handle them young swabs, and I kinder reckon I'm going to do it. Look at my cabeza! Ain't I been hurt? I tell you, I'm going to lambaste them galoots till they can't crawl home! They won't be able to yaup after I'm through with 'em!"

Four Kings gritted his teeth, his eyes gleaming. It was clear enough that the brutal ruffian meant every word he said, or rather, bellowed. He was aching from the damages he had sustained, and it was no longer a question of earning Mr. Gunten's pay, but of making the rebels suffer for what they had done.

The storekeeper had a dismaying prospect before him of answering for the damage his brutal allies might do when they got the upper hand.

"Look here, Four Kings!" he began feebly. "You may fire the place if you try that game!"

Four Kings brandished a knuckly fist under Mr. Gunten's podgy nose, and the storekeeper jumped back in alarm.

"See that?" he said. "I guess you'll get it on your jaw if you chinwag me! Shet up!"

And he turned his back on old man Gunten and shouted to his followers to hustle.

"Smoking us out—that's the game!" said Bob Lawless, setting his lips. "Franky, old son, that looks a bit serious for us."

Frank Richards nodded. He understood well enough how serious it was, though he was not daunted.

The Red Dog crowd were gathering wood from all directions, tearing down palings from the corral to add to the supply. Branches and twigs and pine-cones, sticks and logs and palings, were heaped up under the broken window, and there was a smell of kerosene as Euchre Dick broached a keg of oil over the stack.

"We've got to face it!" said Frank.

He glanced once more towards Molly Lawrence, sitting her pony in the distant gateway. The girl's face was white. She had seen the preparations of the Red Dog crowd, and realised the danger there was of the lumber schoolhouse catching fire. As Frank glanced towards her, Molly wheeled her pony and dashed away.

Frank Richards & Co. descended into the house, barring the upper window behind them. They came down into the school-room, where they found Beauclerc and his companions with very grave faces.

"I guess this will beat us, you galoots!" said Chunky Todgers dismally.

"Look!" muttered Hopkins.

Outside, a sudden flare of flame danced in the gathering dusk of evening. It was followed by a thick column of smoke. The stack had been fired!

RANCHMEN TO THE RESCUE!

THERE was grim silence in the school-room. Close under the window the fire was burning, and beyond it the Red Dog crowd were feeding it with wet wood, to thicken the smoke.

The window was open to it, the shutters being in fragments. A dense volume of smoke rolled in at the window. It thickened in the big room, and soon the fellows were coughing, and eyes were smarting on all sides.

Bob Lawless set his teeth. He had not foreseen that the enemy would attempt to smoke the garrison out like a racoon from its hole. But

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the move could not have been guarded against if he had foreseen it.

The big school-room was thick with smoke, which grew thicker and thicker, and the school-boys could scarcely see one another in the haze. There was coughing on all sides.

"Get out of this!" said Bob Lawless at last.

The schoolboys retreated from the school-room into the house, and the big door was shut and locked and barricaded behind them. The school-room was now open to the Red Dog crowd to enter by the window if they chose, but the school-house itself was still held. Wisps of smoke followed the rebels, but the closed door kept off the worst of it.

Crash, crash!

Frank Richards started. Outside, the blows of an axe were falling on a window of the school-house, and a glimmer of daylight came through the shutter. Blow after blow fell, and the shutter flew into fragments.

But there was no attack, which the rebels of Cedar Creek were ready to meet. The Red Dog crowd had had enough of that. There was a buzz of voices and roars of laughter outside as flaming brands from the fire were piled under the smashed window and a new fire was started there.

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ORDER EARLY.

Smoke poured in in a dense volume. Four Kings was carrying out his purpose with a deadly thoroughness. He guessed that the smoke had already driven the defenders from the school-room, and he was now smoking them out of the schoolhouse itself. There was no defence against that attack, and as the smoke thickened the heroes of Cedar Creek looked at one another in dismay.

"I guess we can't stand this!" groaned Chunky Todgers.

"We can't breathe here!" muttered Bob. "Get up the stops!"

The ground floor was left, and the garrison retreated into the upper rooms, which had belonged to Miss Meadows and the servants of the house. Doors were closed and mats pressed along them, but the smoke followed and penetrated into the rooms.

Bob Lawless threw open a window on the side farthest from the smoking fire without, and the schoolboys gasped for air.

There were no flames now; the Red Dog crowd were damping down the fires to render the smoke thicker.

Four Kings, with a savage grin on his face, was waiting for the moment of his triumph, whip in hand. Sooner or later the garrison of the schoolhouse would be driven to rush out to escape

suffocation, and they would be delivered into his hands. Then would come the revenge the ruffian was promising himself.

Old man Gunten was looking on grimly. He had no further control over the ruffians he had enlisted, and he was only too thankful that they were taking care not to set the school on fire.

"I guess that'll force 'em out," grinned Four Kings. "Stand ready, boys, and collar them as they come out!"

But the garrison were not coming out yet. They knew what awaited them, and until the last minute, at least, they were determined to hold on.

The smoke in the house was growing denser and denser. It penetrated into every corner, and the coughing and gasping was incessant.

"I guess we shall have to vamoose, Lawless!" gasped Eben Hacke at last. "It ain't pleasant, but we're caught by the short hairs."

"We're not knuckling under to the new Head!" said Bob. "Never that! But we can't stand this much longer."

Frank Richards gave a sudden start. From somewhere in the distance came a sound of galloping hoofs—the hoofs of a crowd of horses.

"What is that?" exclaimed Frank. "Bob, can you hear—"

"It can't be help," muttered Bob. "If the boys at the ranch knew what was going on they'd ride over here and scalp this crowd before you could say 'No sugar in mine'! But they don't know."

"Hark!" The horsemen, whoever they were, were coming nearer. The Red Dog crowd had heard them, and there were exclamations without.

Louder yet, and louder, came the thudding of many hoofs, and then a confused din of shouting.

Frank Richards leaned from the window, but it was at the back, and he could see nothing of what was happening.

"By thunder!" yelled Bob Lawless. "It's a scrap—it's help! I know Billy Cook's voice! They're the boys from the ranch!"

"Hurrah!" Loud above the tumult came the roar of a stentorian voice the chums of Cedar Creek knew well—that of Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch.

"Give 'em thunder, boys! Wipe 'em up!" "The cowboys!" shouted Vere Beauclerc.

The rebels of Cedar Creek dashed down the steps to the lower floor and tore open the window at the back of the house. From the window they poured out into the cool, fresh air. It was safe to venture out now; the Red Dog crowd were too busily occupied to think of them.

With a rush the rebels came round the house and past the smoke and obtained a view of the playground. The scrap was over. The Red Dog crowd were fleeing in all directions, pursued by the cowboys of the Lawless Ranch, lashing at them with their long whips.

Old man Gunten, as he ran and dodged with the rest, came in for a few of the cuts before he reached his horse and rode frantically down the trail. In a few minutes more Cedar Creek School was clear of them; yelling with pain and rage, the Red Dog crowd were in full flight.

With a shout and a clatter of hoofs the ranchmen rode back towards the schoolhouse.

"Billy Cook!" roared Bob Lawless. "Oh crumbs! Billy, old man, I'd rather see you

(Continued on page 36.)



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FROM FOE TO FRIEND !

JACK DRAKE lay quite still. Round him was the blackness of the tropical forest, the thick, interlaced branches overhead shutting out the light of the stars.

He could not see his companions sleeping in the grass round him under the ceiba-tree, where the camp of the treasure-seekers was pitched. Only the deep snore of Tuckey Toodles told of their presence.

Somewhere in the darkness near at hand, Tin Tacks, the black seaman, was keeping watch and ward.

But his attention was directed away from the camp, not towards the sleepers under the ceiba-tree.

It seemed to Jack Drake that he was in the grip of some fearful nightmare, as he lay in the deep grass and leaves, with a rough hand pressing over his mouth, and the point of a knife pressed to his chest. But it was no dream.

From the shadows above, the single eye of Peg Slaney glittered down at him.

Drake looked up at it in silence.

This was the man whose life he had spared, from whom he had held back the negro's knife, the rival in the quest for the buried gold of the Orinoco. He had spared Peg Slaney's life—for this!

A grin wrinkled the deeply bronzed face of the one-eyed seaman. His low, husky whisper sounded in Drake's ear.

"The nigger reckoned I was roped up safe. I guess there ain't any ropes would hold Peg Slaney through a whole night. And this is Daubeny's knife, took from his belt while he slept."

He chuckled softly.

Drake did not speak; he could not.

But the horror of his position was passing. Somehow, for what reason he could not divine, the one-eyed ruffian was holding his hand.

Peg Slaney's husky whisper went on:

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BURIED TREASURE!

By Owen Conquest.

"What's to prevent me from knifing you this minute, mate? You saved me from the nigger, and you offered me a fair share in the treasure when found, being as I had the clue that them young swabs got away from me. Fair play, I call that. I offered to jine your crowd—I meant it, fair and square. You says as how I'm not to be trusted."

He removed his rough hand from Drake's mouth.

"Now, yell if you like," he said. "I've showed you that your life was at my mercy, ain't I? Now say whether I'm to be trusted."

The junior sat up dazedly.

He blinked at the dim, shadowy figure beside him. The drawn knife no longer threatened him.

He began to understand.

Ruffian and villain Peg Slaney undoubtedly was, but he was not insensible to the fact that Jack Drake had held back Tin Tack's knife, and had offered him a share in the treasure of the Orinoco, generous dealing which Peg Slaney certainly was not accustomed to, and which had had an unexpected effect upon him.

There was a glimmer of steel as the knife moved. Peg Slaney placed the handle of it in Drake's hand.

"There's young Daub's sticker," he said. "Now you say whether I'm to be trusted, Jack Drake."

Drake gasped for breath.

"I say, what's the row?" It was Dick Rodney's voice. He had awakened. "Is that you shifting, Drake!"

"It's all right, Rodney!" gasped Drake.

"But what—"

Dick Rodney peered through the shadows and sprang up from the bed of leaves.

He had discerned the ragged, uncouth figure of the one-eyed seaman crouching beside Drake.

"Tin Tacks!" he shouted.

Rodney had no weapon, but he sprang towards Slaney, shouting to the negro as he did so.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Drake, scrambling to his feet. "It's all right, I tell you; Slaney's all right—"

"Me here, Mass' Jack!" came the deep voice of Tin Tacks, as the burly negro came through the shadows, rifle in hand. "Golly! Dat Paquito loose again! I soon settle him."

"Stop!" shouted Drake.

He stepped between Tin Tacks and the one-eyed seaman. Tin Tacks had already raised his rifle.

The whole camp was awakened now.

Tuckey Toodles' voice could be heard, in quavering accents, asking whether it was the Indians. Daubeny and Torrence and Egan were all speaking at once.

Peg Slaney stood with his hands in the pockets of his ragged, tarry trousers, a sneering grin on his mahogany face.

"Put down your rifle, Tin Tacks," said Drake. "Slaney is all right; he's true-blue. I tell you,

old man. He could have got away if he'd liked, and worse than that—

"Me no catch on, Mass' Jack."

Drake breathlessly explained.

Tin Tacks listened with great astonishment in his black face. Drake showed him the knife which Slaney had taken from Daubeny's belt while he slept.

"Golly!" said Tin Tacks. "Me no tink much good of dat one-eyed trash, Paquito, but—"

"Haven't I proved I mean straight?" growled Peg Slaney. "I've put it in your power to rope me up ag'in if you like. I leave it to Jack Drake."

"It's all serene," said Drake, at once. "You're one of the crowd now, Slaney, for the treasure-hunt. We can trust you."

"Look here—" began Egan.

"Mass' Jack gib orders here," said Tin Tacks.

"What Mass' Jack say, goes. Me no like Paquito, but Mass' Jack gib orders."

"He's proved his good faith, Tin Tacks," said Drake.

"Yes, dat all right."

"It's a go?" asked Slaney.

"Yes."

"Good enough!"

Peg Slaney threw himself down in the leaves to sleep. And the night passed, under the ceiba in the Venezuelan forest, without any further alarm.

A FRIGHT FOR TOODLES!

MORNING dawned upon the tropical forest. Sun rays filtered through the thick branches overhead, and a dim light reigned among the massy trunks and lianas.

The adventurers gathered to a breakfast of dried fish and wild fruits, washed down with water they had brought from the stream. It was a frugal breakfast, and drew loud growling from Tuckey Toodles, who compared it sadly and sorrowfully with the fare on board the school ship, the old Benbow, now anchored at Barrancas on the Orinoco, with the rest of the school on board. "I'm fading away on this grub," said Tuckey Toodles pathetically. "You fellows can see I'm growing thinner."

"There was room for it," remarked Rodney.

"All the better for you, Tuckey, if you lose a ton or two," said Drake encouragingly. "You can spare that much."

"Yah!" was Tuckey's reply to that.

Peg Slaney ate with the rest, eyed rather askance by some of the party. Slaney as a member of the expedition required getting used to; but no one doubted any longer that the one-eyed ruffian meant well. Somewhere in his fierce, lawless heart there was a glimmer of good, and Jack Drake had succeeded in awakening it.

When camp broke up, and the gold-seekers marched on by the Indian path through the forest, Slaney marched with the rest.

The route lay along the Indian path. The beaten track led through the heart of the forest, far from the waters of the Orinoco.

It was close on noon when Slaney held up his hand and stopped the party.

"I guess we go round 'ere," he said.

"Leave the path?" asked Drake.

"Ay, ay!"

"Why dat?" asked Tin Tacks suspiciously.

Peg Slaney grinned.

"Cause we're comin' on to the Arrowac village," he answered. "You can see the tracks

around if you look for them. I guess we ain't 'arf a knot from the jacals of the Redskins now."

"Phew!" murmured Daubeny. "It would be no joke to walk right into an Indian village."

"I suppose they would be hostile," said Drake.

"I guess there ain't any doubt about that," said Slaney, with a chuckle. "They don't love white men in these 'ere parts."

"I dare say we could beat them off—we're armed," said Daubeny.

"They 'ave blow-pipes with poisoned arrows in 'em," said Slaney. "You'd get 'em from ahind every bush, if they was roused. Better steer clear, I say."

"Dat right 'nuff," said Tin Tacks. "We keep clear of dat copper-skinned trash, Mass' Jack."

"Yes, rather," said Drake.

Leaving the Indian path, the party plunged into the forest, making a wide detour to keep clear of the Arrowac village.

It was not easy work penetrating the untrodden forest, and in places it was necessary to hew a path through the tangled brake. But both Slaney and Tin Tacks were well accustomed to the tropical forest, and wherever there was a path or opening, they found it. It was hot and moist under the trees, though the thick foliage overhead kept off the direct rays of the burning sun. The whole party were thoroughly fatigued by the time they stopped to rest, at a considerable distance beyond the unseen village of the Arrowacs.

Late in the afternoon they resumed the march. Vernon Daubeny read over the treasure clue again as they started.

"The next clue is the Arrowacs' tree-graves," he said. "We've landed at the stone bluffs, and followed the Indian path, and the next thing is the tree-graves, whatever they are."

"That's plain enough," said Slaney, "and we ain't much farther to go for the Injun cemetery, I guess."

"What the thump is a tree-grave?" asked Rodney.

"The Injuns hereabouts don't dig graves for their dead. They put 'em in hammocks slung up high in the forest."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I guess the burial-ground mentioned in the paper belongs to that village we've dodged," said Slaney. "We can't be far off it now."

The adventurers were following the Indian path again, and all of them were keeping their eyes well open for the next sign.

Progress was slow in the moist heat, and they dripped with perspiration as they marched. Tuckey Toodles left the path, tempted by the sign of a cluster of coconuts, and the next moment he came bolting back with a splutter of horror.

"Run for it!" he spluttered.

"What?"

"Run!" panted Toodles.

He started back along the path at top speed.

Drake darted after him, and caught him by the shoulder.

"You thampin' ass!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

"Yaroooh! Leggo! Run for your lives!" panted Tuckey. "Indians, you fathead! Run for it!"

The gold-seekers stared round them uneasily.

There was no sign of Redskins, and no sound from the forest, save the murmur of the wind in the trees.

"The silly ass has seen some shadow move!" snapped Daubeny impatiently. "Come on!"

"Leggo, Drake! I saw him!" gasped Toodles.
"Saw whom?"

"The Indian in his-hammock, taking a nap, I suppose!" spluttered Toodles. "I bumped right on the hammock. Lucky I didn't wake him up."

Slaney uttered an exclamation.

"You'd have woke up a live Indian fast enough if you'd bumped on his hammock, I guess!" he exclaimed. "We'll look into this."

"I tell you——" gasped Toodles.

"Shut up!" growled Drake.

Slaney led the way from the Indian path into the wood, followed by Tin Tacks with his rifle ready.

But there was no danger.

In a couple of minutes they came upon the Indian hammock that had so scared Rupert de Vere Toodles.

It was slung between two high posts planted in the ground among the trees. In it was a still form wrapped in strips of fibre. The wrappings were too thick for anything but a general outline to be discerned; but they knew that it was a body the hammock contained.

Slaney's single eye glistened.

"A tree-grave!" he said "I guess we came near missing it if that fat fool hadn't bumped into it."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tuckey Toodles. "Is that it? I—I mean, I—I was looking for the tree-graves, you know. I—I found it. I wonder what you fellows would do without me."

"Fathead!" said Drake

"I say, you know——"

"Dry up, Toodles!"

Tuckey Toodles gave a snort.

The party spread among the trees, and in a few minutes they found that they were amid a burial-ground—so to call it—of very considerable extent. In the dim twilight under the great trees, hammock after hammock was discerned, each with its lifeless tenant wrapped in fibre. Some of them were slung to the branches, some to high stakes planted in the ground, and there were scores of them.

"This is the place right enough," said Daubeny of the Shell. "We've found the tree-graves."

"And now——" muttered Egan.

"After this we've got to find the big ceiba on the mesa, and we're right on the spot."

And, with renewed hopes, the treasure-seekers turned their backs on the burial-ground of the Arrowacs, and tramped on by the Indian path beaten through the heart of the forest.

THE TREASURE!

"THE mesa!" Peg Slaney uttered the words suddenly and exultantly.

The Indian path ended on the bank of a rippling stream that ran swift and shallow over a sandy bed.

The tropical forest ended with the stream.

Beyond the water was a stretch of rocky soil, extending for some distance ahead.

A few trees were scattered here and there, but for the most part the rocky track was open, baking in the blaze of the sun. And close by the stream a large flat rock stood in full view.

The rock was about a dozen feet high, with sides almost as precipitous as the wall of a house, and the top of it was almost level, fifty or sixty feet in extent either way.

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On the summit grew patches of scrub and bush, and a single tree.

It was a gigantic ceiba. It stood seventy feet high over the rock, with wide-spreading branches that shaded nearly all the mesa.

The mesa was evidently not all rock, but partly of earth, since that gigantic tree found sustenance there for its roots.

"That's the mesa?" asked Daubeny.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Come on, then!" exclaimed Daubeny excitedly.

Tin Tacks led the way through the stream.

The adventurers stopped to drink as they passed, and to refill their flasks. During the march through the forest, they had exhausted the supply of water brought from the Rio Catalina.

Then they pressed on.

The shallow stream rose only to their knees, and it was easy to tramp through it across the sandy bed.

With excited faces, they clambered up the opposite bank, and tired as they were, they forgot fatigue, and ran for the mesa.

They had to stop when they had reached the big table of rock, however. The sides were too perpendicular for climbing, and the rock offered scarcely any hold for their hands.

Egan muttered a curse. His eyes were glittering with greedy excitement now that the gold-seekers were so close upon the end of their perilous quest.

"How are we to get up?" he snarled.

"I guess there's a path up somewhere!" said Peg Slaney. "Cause why; the gold's buried there, and somebody's been up 'ere afore us."

"Me look!" said Tin Tacks.

The juniors rested in the shadow of the mesa, while Tin Tacks and Peg Slaney searched round it for a practicable ascent. In a quarter of an hour Tin Tacks' voice was heard calling.

"Dis way, Mass' Jack."

"Come on!" exclaimed Drake.

The juniors hurried after Tin Tacks.

They found Peg Slaney already halfway up the rock, Tin Tacks watching him from the foot.

In one spot the rock was broken away, and the jagged edges afforded a good hold for a climber.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Rodney. "Anybody could climb that! Here goes."

"I say, I can't climb that!" exclaimed Tuckey Toodles. "I suppose some of you fellows could pull me up."

"Certainly," said Drake. "Take hold of his other ear, Rodney."

"Yaroooh!"

"Don't you want to be pulled up?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo my ears, you beasts!" howled Tuckey Toodles.

Apparently Master Toodles did not want to be pulled up—by that method, at least.

Tin Tacks followed the one-eyed seaman, and was at the top almost as soon as Slaney.

The juniors followed him.

Tuckey Toodles was the last to arrive, with many a gasp and grunt and groan. But he arrived.

On top of the mesa, the juniors stared round them with keen eyes.

If the mysterious document was to be relied upon, they had now reached the end of the treasure-quest. The gold of the Venezuelan revolutionists, long since shot by their cheery fellow countrymen, was buried at the foot of the towering ceiba-tree.

The surface of the mesa was almost as flat as

that of a table, but in one place was a deep hollow, where rain had collected and remained in a pool. Close by the pool stood the gigantic trunk of the ceiba. The sun was low in the west now, but the heat was still great, and the shade of the wide-spreading branches was welcome to the juniors.

"Now for the treasure!" panted Egan.

"Under the big ceiba, the paper says," said Daubeny, with a voice dry and husky with eagerness.

"Plenty of room to choose from," remarked Rodney.

"I guess there'll be a clue!" muttered Peg Slaney.

His glittering eyes searched the massy trunk of the ceiba. He uttered an ejaculation as he pointed to a cut in the thick bark.

It was the mark of an axe, evidently very old. Equally evident, it had been made there to indicate on which side of the great tree the "cache" of gold had been made.

The ground was hard, baked by the sun, and mingled with stones. There was still a hard task ahead of the treasure-seekers. Slaney had brought a pick with him, and that was the only digging implement in the party. Tin Tacks had possession of the pick. Drake & Co. had been unable to provide themselves with anything of the kind, in the hurry in which they had slipped away from the Benbow party.

"Leab' him to me, Mass' Jack," said Tin Tacks.

The blows of the pick rang on the hard soil.

The juniors looked on for a few minutes while the negro worked, but they were too eager to remain long in idleness. Even Tuckey Toodles was keen to lend a hand in digging for the treasure.

Daubeny and Egan had knives, and they began to hack at the soil with them, and the others looked round the mesa for something with which to dig—a pointed stick was better than nothing. There was a sudden shout from Torrence as he dragged an iron pick-axe, red with rust, from a clump of flowering plants.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Drake.

"A pick!" yelled Daubeny. "Somebody's been here before us."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Perhaps it was left by the chaps who buried the treasure," said Rodney hopefully.

"It's possible."

Egan seized the pick, and began hacking at the soil. A further search in the thicket revealed a rusty spade, and Drake seized it and lent his aid in the digging.

The implements were very useful; but the discovery of them made the hearts of the treasure-seekers sink.

It was possible that they had been left by the unknown party who had buried the treasure. But the juniors knew that it was unlikely. Men who had buried the treasure in that lonely spot would not be likely to leave such clues close to the treasure. Evidently the implements had been thrown carelessly aside, and the flowering plants had grown over them and covered them; but for long they must have remained in full view of anyone who might have taken the trouble to climb to the top of the mesa.

But if they had not been left there by the men who had buried the gold, by whom had they been left?

Had there been other treasure-seekers earlier on the ground?

It was only too probable.

The juniors had not reflected on it before, but

it was likely enough that Peg Slaney's document was not the only existing clue to the treasure of the Orinoco.

Probably more than one copy had been made, to guide any member of the revolutionary gang who might survive.

The thought was in their minds now, and it was a bitter one. They plied the implements with almost savage energy, as the sun sank lower and lower in the western sky.

ATTACKED!

"LOOK!"

Peg Slaney was wielding a pick now, and as he dragged it from the earth, a fragment of skin was seen adhering to it.

It was a fragment of the skin of some wild animal, undoubtedly part of a roughly made sack, which had contained—what?

It could only have contained the buried gold.

"We're close on it!" panted Daubeny.

Every hand was helping now, tearing at the earth, dragging it out in handfuls as it was loosened.

A rotten skin sack was disclosed to view at last.

It had evidently been a large sack, though it was rotted in fragments now, and fell to pieces at a touch.

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Slaney dragged it out, and uttered a bitter curse.

Among the remnants of the skin sack, three or four gold pieces glistened in the setting sun.

Slaney stepped into the excavation, and groped among the earth with savage hands.

A small silver ingot rewarded him, and two or three more gold pieces were turned up by the juniors.

That was all.

In the deepening shadows, they gathered about the excavation they had made, with grim looks.

Peg Slaney was still on his hands and knees in the pit, tearing at the earth like a savage animal, and muttering curses.

But the rest had given up hope now.

"Done!" muttered Vernon Daubeny, with twitching lips.

Egan stood with a white face, his fists clenched in impotent rage and disappointment. Torrence threw himself exhausted on to the ground to rest. Tuckey Toodles almost wailed.

"We've come all this way for nothing!" howled Tuckey. "You fellows are a set of thundering asses, I must say! Dragging me off like this—nearly starving me to death—and all for nothing!"

"Shut up!" roared Rodney.

"Yah!"

"Done!" repeated Daubeny. "After all our

trouble—after all our danger. Somebody's been here before us."

"We might have thought of that," said Jack Drake quietly. "There may have been two or three of those documents in existence. The very persons who buried the treasure may have taken it away again. I—I suppose they had the best right to it."

"Oh dear!" groaned Tuckey Toodles. "Now we've got to get back to the Benbow somehow, and there'll be an awful row with Mr. Packe. I hope you fellows will admit it was all your fault! That's the very least you can do, I think."

"Kick him, somebody!"

"Yaroo!"

Peg Slaney scrambled out of the pit at last. In the dying light, the mahogany face of the one-eyed seaman was haggard.

"Beat!" he said. "We're beat! I never knowed—a thousand curses on him."

"On whom?" snarled Daubeny.

"Your father!" shouted Slaney furiously. "That's how he made his pile, and went home rich from South America. It's years since the treasure was lifted—you can see by the rust on the pick and spade. Old George Daubeny came here and lifted it years ago—when I got the paper from him, he must have gone after the gold at once, while I was running for my life. He'd lost the paper, but I guess he remembered every word there was on it."

Daubeny burst into a laugh.

He had been seeking the revolutionists' treasure, which had been lifted from its hiding-places ten long years ago—by his father.

A string of savage curses poured from Slaney's lips.

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"You can chuck that, Slaney!" said Jack Drake curtly. "It can't be helped now, and anyhow, you've got no right to the treasure. Sir George Daubeny has as much right as anybody, as Ponce Garcia gave him the document. Anyhow, the treasure's gone, and cursing won't bring it back."

"Dat right, Mass' Jack," said Tin Tacks. "You shut up, you one-eyed trash, or me soon stop you!"

Slaney turned away. He threw himself down under the ceiba, exhausted with his efforts, and worn out by sayage rage and despair.

The treasure quest was ended; and it left the one-eyed ruffian as poor as when he had started. The career of wealth and pleasure which he had promised himself was destined never to come to pass.

"Well, we're done," said Drake at last. "Now we've got to get back to the Benbow, and take our medicine for clearing off without leave. We shall have to camp on the mesa for the night."

"Golly!" ejaculated Tin Tacks.

He whipped up his rifle and fired suddenly.

Crack!

"What—"

"Indians!"

A copper-skinned face, with black glittering eyes, was looking at the treasure-seekers over the edge of the mesa, from the path by which they had climbed.

A dusky hand had been raised to hurl a spear, when Tin Tacks sighted the enemy and fired.

The Indian's head vanished instantly, and there was a yell below. The savage was wounded.

"Indians!" panted Daubeny. "The Arrows!" Loud and fierce rang the yells of the Arrows below the mesa. Drake seized his rifle.

"We've got to keep them off the mesa," he panted. "If they get to close quarters—"

A head, covered with black plaited hair, rose into view, and Drake pulled trigger at once. The head vanished before the bullet could touch it.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Tuckey Toodles. "We— we shall all be killed— Oh! Ow! Oh dear!"

Tin Tacks and Drake ran towards the spot where the path came up the side of the mesa, rifle in hand. The sun was gone now, and only the brief tropical twilight lingered.

"We keep dem off, Mass' Jack," said Tin Tacks confidently. "Only one at a time can come up dere, and we keep dem off, easy."

Drake nodded.

It was easy enough to keep off an Indian attack, so long as the gold-seekers held so strong a position, with only a narrow path up from the plain. But—

Yells came from all directions in the darkness. Two or three arrows, fired in the air from below, fell on top of the mesa.

"We're lost!" muttered Egan, clenching his hands convulsively. "And all for nothing—nothing!"

The mesa was surrounded.

The yelling Arrows were on all sides, and their fierce yells showed that there was no mercy for the whites, if the yelling savages succeeded in getting them into their clutches. And escape was cut off—the gold-seekers were surrounded. Jack Drake, cool and courageous as he was, felt something like the chill of despair creep into his heart as he stood on the watch with his rifle ready for a rush from below.

Next Wednesday: "DRAKE'S DARING!"



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A. Cleverly, Lower Belvedere, Devizes, Wilts; age 14-18; stamps, wild life, and railways; Canada, U.S.A., Australia, West Indies, Africa.

HOLDING THE FORT!

(Continued from page 29.)

just now than anybody twice as good-looking! Good old Billy!"

Billy Cook grinned.

"I guess we've wiped up that crowd handsome!" he said. "It was time the Red Dog crowd had a lesson, and, by hokey, I reckon they've had it!"

"But how did you know?" gasped Frank Richards.

"I guess Molly Lawrence came along and told me they were smoking you out," said Billy Cook.

"Good old Molly!"

"I sent her home and called the boys together," said the ranch foreman. "Jest a word to your popper, Bob, and then we humped it hyer as fast as horseflesh could bring us. I reckon this hyer business ain't our funeral; but the Red Dog crowd don't have any concern hyer, either, and we came to wipe them up—and I guess we've done it! But no time to chinwag. We're

N. Steele, 46, Woodvale Road, Hall Green, Birmingham; stamps, snaps, soccer, films, pets, motoring, and general topics; America and British Dominions.

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R. Page, North Lodge, Grendon, nr. Atherstone, Warwickshire; any age; camping, swimming, and snaps; anywhere.

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going to see them galoots safe home to Thompson, and I pity any of them that we catch on the trail!"

And, with a wave of his hand, Billy Cook rode away, with the cowboys after him, in pursuit of the fleeing ruffians.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "Good old Molly! That's where she was going when we saw her ride off. But for that—"

"But for Molly I reckon we should have come out at the little end of the horn this time," said Bob. "But I guess the Red Dog crowd won't come moseying round here again. Old man Gunten will have to look a bit farther! Molly's saved our game, and we're holding on."

"Hurrah!"

It had been a close thing; but as Chunky Todgers remarked, a miss was as good as a mile. The rebels of Cedar Creek were still holding the fort.

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