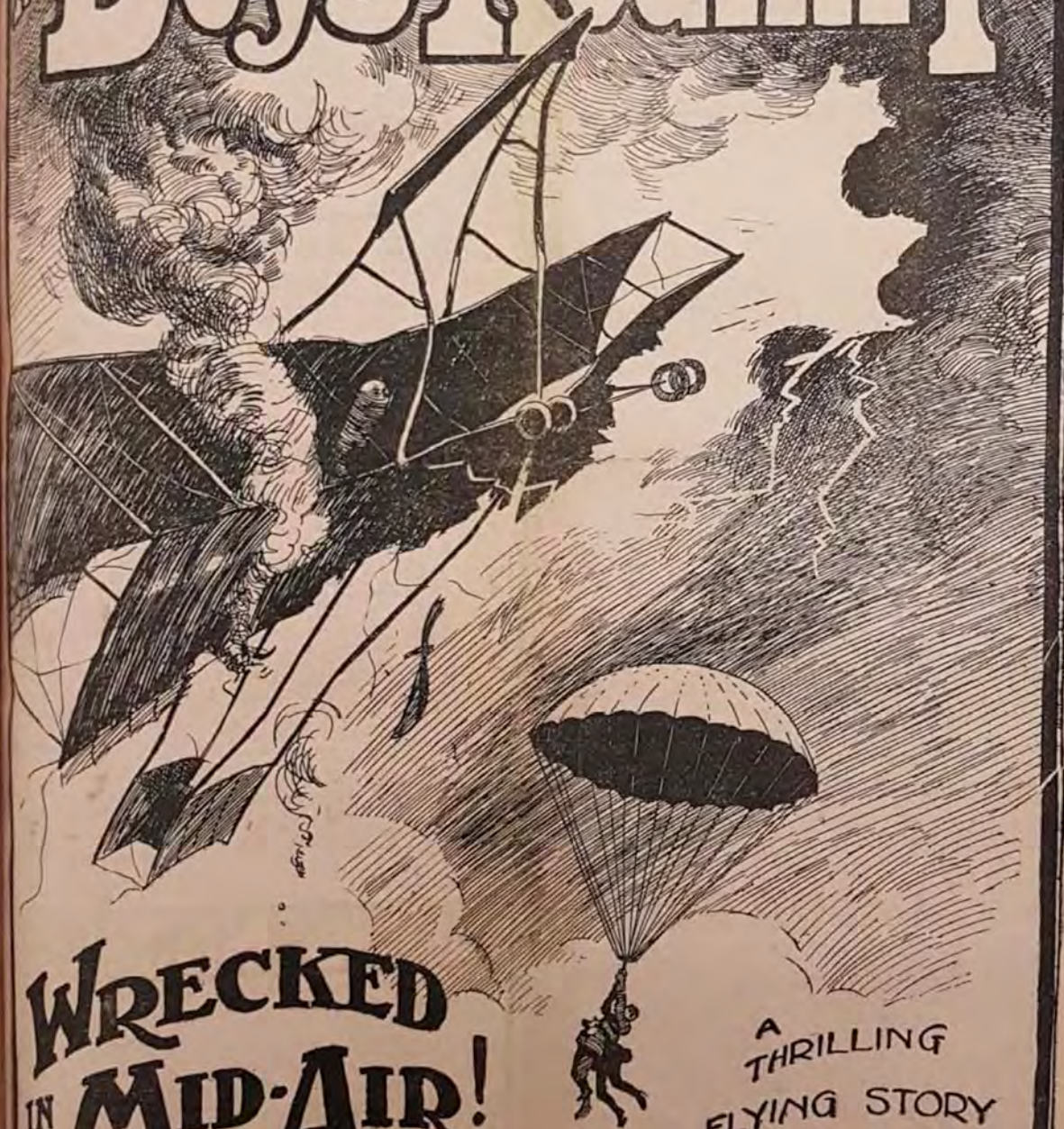


THE GREAT SATURDAY SPORTS PAPER!

Boys' Realm 1^d



**WRECKED
IN MID-AIR!**

**A
THRILLING
FLYING STORY**



THE 1st CHAPTER.
Clifford's Challenge.

It was not often that Clifford paid a visit to the study of his hated rival, Jack Noble, the captain of Potham's Third, so that Jack, as somewhat surprised one morning when the door of his sanctum opened to see Master Clifford.

"Hello, Clifford," said Jack coldly. "What do you want for?"

"How do you do, Noble?" he said carelessly.

"So, Macintosh," for Fighting Mac was known to you two and Drake and Russell kept themselves a bit as ornaments. Well, Bayne, Barker, Prince, and myself want to take you to the river to the iron bridge. The race is about two miles. Are you game?"

"What do you think?" answered Jack.

"I'm not averse to the idea," replied Fighting Mac.

"When's the contest to come off?"

"Next Saturday," replied Clifford. "To-day's Monday, so we shall have a week for practice. Young Fender is going to coax us. This is his coaxing."

"Better have Lawson minor," said Jack to Macintosh. "He's a lightweight, and knows a trick or two. All right, Clifford; you can manage the matter as settled."

When Clifford retired to seek out his cousin and acquaint them of the fact that the challenge had been accepted.

"Cliff struck me as being very cock-a-hoop," said Fighting Mac, as soon as the challenge had been made. "I'm not so sure he doesn't think he's won up us. Jack, Master Clifford's not in the habit of running any risks. D'you spot any holes?"

"What hole do he do?" said Jack carelessly.

"He's quite capable of half-sawing through our own, and that sort of thing; but he must know we won't lose yesterday. No; I believe he can do us down. Well, we've just got to see to it that he doesn't—like and his personal bias. We must go into training for the race, Mac. No more luck till it's over."

"I'll be that Clifford and his men have been training for over a week already," grumbled he. "That's why they spring the challenge on us."

"All the more honour and glory if we win," answered Jack. "What d'ye say to a trial spin this afternoon, Mac? We'll be able to see how we do."

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
Poddles' Detective.

THE Honorable Becket Redway, known to his intimates as Poddles, was possessed of a keen eye, though hitherto no detective had presented itself before him to show his powers.

"I did not prevent him from persevering in his effort to strike some red-hot trail. He would not let him and thither in the most approved method, would examine footmarks in the snow with great care, and badger his school-mates to give him impressions of their finger-prints."

"You never can tell," he had said to one of his school-mates. "There's been many a fellow here through having given him finger-mark tests. That's what they do at Theotland."

It was now so far as to write out a number of memorandum cards, which he sent round to his school-mates. Here is a reproduction of his memorandum.

"The Honorable Becket Redway, criminal investigator, is ready at all times to probe the most intricate cases to their source. If ever you have a case, send for M. R. He will track the criminal to his doom."

On the Thursday before the boat-race, Clifford's four and Noble's crew, which was somewhat surprised to receive a

CLIFFORD'S BOAT RACE

A STORY
YOU
WILL LIKE.

A Rattling Complete Tale of Jack Noble & Co.

visit from Bob Russell, the mechanical genius of Potham College.

"What, my naughty deathhound!" said Russell scornfully. "Your chance has come at last. A crime has been committed. You seem to think a bit of yourself as a 'fiver. Suppose you have a shot at discovering who has stolen my prize motor?"

"Your prize motor?" said Poddles eagerly. "But this is very exciting." He folded his arms across his massive chest, and struck a would-be stern attitude. "Did the miscreant leave any clues behind him?"

"Clue?" replied the other scornfully. "Well, I can tell you this much. There's not a chap in the school who doesn't know I was at work on the thing for the Smithson Prize. I finished it, too. It isn't a big motor. I got it in my study. It can't have walked off of itself. If I could catch the fellow as nicked it, I'd—well, I don't know what I would do."

"And you thought no one?" said Poddles.

"I suspect everyone!" was the savage retort. "Fat lot of good it is coming to you, though, I can see that. What's the good of this detective stunt of yours, anyway?"

"Give me a free hand," replied Poddles impressively, "and I'll collar the scoundrel. I ask for no reward. Take me to the scene of the crime. Have you told anyone else of your loss?"

"No," responded Russell, "not yet. But, of course, I shall—"

"Then you can get someone else to find the prize motor," interrupted Poddles sternly. "You've come to me for help. If you want me to find the thief, you must let me do it my own way."

Russell whistled in amazement.

Poddles seemed very much in earnest.

"Here," said the inventor, "you haven't pinched the thing yourself, by any chance, have you? You speak as though you knew a good deal about it."

"Of course, I haven't pinched it," said Poddles indignantly. "But it isn't likely I'm going to tell you if I've seen any suspicious as to who did. Great detectives don't do those sort of things. They keep their mouths shut, pile up all the clues they can, and, when the time comes, they then forward and collar the criminal. That's what I want to do."

"I'll keep mum, right enough, if you'll promise to find out who's bagged the thing," grumbled Russell. "But where'll I be, if you make a mess of the thing?"

"Becket Redway, detective, have never failed yet," said Poddles, striking an attitude.

"And this was perfectly true, for the simple reason that he had never yet attempted to track a criminal down."

"Then come to my study at once," said the other eagerly, "and see if you can spot any clues."

Poddles followed his guide.

It was immense the way in which the young disciple of Sexton Blake set to work. He crawled about the floor, examined bits of the carpet with magnifying-glasses, made mysterious measurements with a tape-measure, ransacked cupboards, examined every corner of the study, the while Russell peeped at his antics. At length Poddles, who had discovered absolutely nothing to help him in his task, rose to his feet, and folded his arms across his chest.

"Everything points to the fact," he said, in his most professional manner, "that a thief has been here. The engine hath been stolen, right enough. I have made many discoveries. To-morrow I shall have more to tell you. In the meanwhile, not a word to a soul."

"Jimmy!" said Russell. "But, if you're kidding me, I'll lay you alive!"

Poddles smiled, though in his heart he felt somewhat dubious about the result of the job he had taken on. For the life of him he didn't know how to proceed in his investigations. He had begun by bluffing; he would have to go on in the same way, though how he was to keep his word was more than he could see.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
Poddles on the Trail.

AS he would, Poddles could not command himself to sleep, though he lay as still as a mouse in his bed, and resolutely tried to find slumber.

The reason for his wakefulness was not far to seek. It was now Friday night, and he was no nearer discovering who it was that had stolen Russell's motor-engine than at the commencement of his quest.

It was all very well for him to talk big to Russell, to make protestations, to hint darkly at clues and secret discoveries. He had to admit himself that he was face to face with failure, with exposure that in a very short time he

would be made to look ridiculous in the eyes of the whole school.

So that it is no wonder that he lay awake, revolving the matter in his mind; seeking for clues where clues were not; trying to think what Sexton Blake would have done in the same situation.

No, a detective's life was not a happy one. He was far from that when he was in his brain to the exclusion of every other thought.

The school clock chimed out the hour of midnight. The moon flooded the dormitory with light. Poddles groaned miserably. The next morning he was even more wide awake than ever.

His heart began to beat fiercely against his ribs.

He had heard a sound proceeding from the Fourth-Form dormitory. He decided to investigate. He got out of bed, huddled into his coat and trousers, crept across the room, out of the door, and along the silent corridor. He opened the door of the Fourth-Formers dormitory an inch or two, making never a sound. He saw that Clifford was sitting up in bed, was looking cautiously round the dormitory, was assuring himself that everyone was asleep.

Poddles watched his enemy. He saw Clifford reach out a careful arm and give Marker a shake, saw Marker sit up and perform the same action on Bayne.

Very cautiously the trio crept out of their beds, and set to work to arrange their pillows to simulate the appearance of boys lapsed in slumber. The "detective's" pulses thrilled. They would not have done this had they not meant to leave the dormitory.

They were off on some clandestine quest. What game were they up to? Why were they not taking all the rest they could in view of the race that was to take place on the morrow? Poddles hid himself behind an oaken chest in the corridor. Even as he did so the trio stole to the door of the dormitory, and slipped out into the corridor.

They had huddled into their coats and trousers.

Poddles watched the three shadowy forms disappear at the end of the long corridor.

Then the young detective stole after his unsuspecting quarry. The latter had gone down the stairs that led to the private side of the study. What on earth could they want there? Poddles asked himself. He soon discovered the meaning of the manoeuvre.

There was a French window in the head-master's study that opened out to a strip of lawn. The trio had gone through this window. They arrived on the scene in time to see them slip across the grass, and disappear in the head-master's garden.

He tracked them to a wall at the bottom of the garden. This they scaled, to drop into a lane on the other side, a lane, as Poddles knew very well, led to the river.

They went forward swiftly, without looking back to see if they were being followed, though

even had they done so it is to be doubted whether they would have seen the steady figure of their pursuer, who took good care to take advantage of every bit of shadow, never to allow himself to appear in the full light of the moon.

At the end of the lane, on the bank of the river, was the school boat-house. Undoubtedly the objective of the three boys was the latter place.

Who could they want there? Poddles asked himself the question again and again as he stole after them. The race between the rival fours was to take place early to-morrow, or rather today for it was past midnight. Could it be that Clifford had some low-down scheme for securing Jack Noble's prize? Knowing Clifford as he did, Poddles felt assured that that undesirable gentleman was perfectly capable of any low trick.

"He'll have to reckon with Becket Redway," muttered the young detective to himself, as he drew forth an imaginary revolver from his hip-pocket, and braced himself up for battle.

Not that he intended being seen. No, the odds were too much against him for that. And besides, he had yet to learn why it was that Clifford and his cronies had taken this midnight excursion.

Snark, the school porter, who looked after the racing-boats, had deemed it advisable to leave the two in the water for the night. One of them showed a tendency to leak. "I'll do our best to let 'em scull up a bit," the boatman had said. "I'll leave 'em in the lower boat-house about"—the lower boat-house being a rearing structure that communicated with the river by means of a pair of swing wooden gates, with a staging all round its exterior to allow entry to the boats. A door, always kept locked, gave entrance to the boat-house on the river side.

Vermining his way forward Poddles was enabled to see Clifford take a key from the pocket of his trousers, and open the door of the lower boat-house. The three conspirators slipped inside the wooden building. Poddles clanked his teeth.

"They do mean to do something to Jack's boat," he said to himself. "Courage, Becket, my man, the honour of the Third is in your hands!"

Little did Clifford, Marker, and Bayne suspect the truth. They had no inkling of the fact that there was a witness to their night's work, that a pair of exceedingly sharp ears listened to their low-voiced confabulation, that two very keen eyes watched them as they worked in the boat-house, took in every detail of their labours, learnt enough to tell him all he wanted to know, and then sped away on noiseless feet so as to reach the school before they did.

And when they did come back to the school—when they did creep back to their beds—it was to find their dormitory-mates still lapsed in the soundest slumber. Everything was evidently O.K.

But Poddles, in the adjoining dormitory, was not asleep. He had too much to think of for that. Everything rested in his hands now. He meant to bring off this coup single-handed.

THE 4th CHAPTER.
Clifford Gets a Nasty Jar.

PODDLES' first visitor on Saturday morning was Bob Russell, in a very wrathful frame of mind, obviously thirsting for the "detective's" blood.

"I'm bleeding if I stand it any more!" was the angry remark. "Here we are where we started, and you don't seem any nearer finding out who stole my motor-engine, than you did at the beginning. You're a fraud, and I'll show you up before the whole school."

"One moment," said Poddles theatrically, "you go too fast. The mystery is my mystery."

(Continued on the next page.)



The boat crashed into the yielding mud, with the result that all the oarsmen were flung violently backwards, while bow turned a graceful somersault and alighted in six inches of mud.

