

The Kid at St. Katie's!

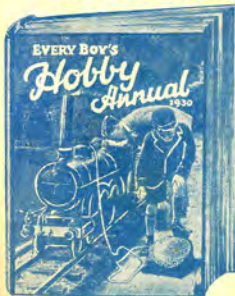
BY MICHAEL POOLE



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THE KID AT ST KATIE'S!

By
Michael Poole



Here's a splendid long complete yarn with a real Christmassy flavour, featuring your old favourites, DICKIE DEXTER, LINCOLN BECK & Co., the bright young sparks of St. Katie's!

CHAPTER I. A Lucky Day!

IT was a bright, brisk December morning, and in the corridors of St. Katherine's School there hung a peaceful silence. In the Form-rooms the bright lads over whom Mr. Roger Blunt ruled as headmaster of Katie's were all hard at work, or at least they were doing their best to give a life-like imitation of it.

After all, the examinations this term weren't quite the same as the tremendous and fearsome grind they had to face at the end of the Midsummer term. For better or worse, this term was nearly over, and no amount of swotting would make much difference in the place on the list which each boy would occupy. Already Jolly Roger was going through the preliminary reports, and his eagle eye was studying every tiny detail each master had prepared about the boys in his charge.

But presently into one of the deserted corridors came a solitary youth. Upon his face was a happy grin. If there was

one thing more than another which brought the light of gladness to the eyes of Lincoln Beck it was the joy which comes from dodging work for even the briefest period.

One minute ago Linky Beck had been studying French grammar under Mr. Stend, but a pathetic request to be allowed to get his exercise-book had been granted. Lincoln Beck had not really been a scholar at St. Katie's so very long, and he had only been pushed into the school by accident, as it were. He was an American youth who could proudly boast that he had had his name in quite a lot of journals in the U.S.A. for freak performances. His brother, Washington Beck, had a reputation not quite so colourful, but he, too, had been regarded as a complete nuisance.

There didn't seem to be any hope of ever reforming them till someone suggested that they should be sent to St. Katie's School and there come under the reforming influence of Mr. Roger Blunt. At the end of a few months they were no better and not much worse than the rest of the lads at Katie's. And they had a tremen-

does amount of respect for Mr. Roger Blunt.

Lincoln Beck wouldn't have harmed a fly this morning. He was just pleased that Sammy Steed had fallen for his story about forgetting his exercise-book, and that he was free to wander where he listed for another ten minutes or so. It would have been better, of course, if he could have had a chum to share this brief freedom with him, and that is why Linky gave a little cry of joy as he almost ran into the arms of Richard Dexter, of the Transitus Form. Beck as yet was merely attached to the Fifth Form for certain subjects, while for others he went to the Fourth, and for one or two subjects he was with the Trape.

They did that kind of thing at Katie's with a boy whose education had been a bit patchy. Then when they got him up to a certain level he would go into his rightful Form. Linky was sincerely hoping that he would get fixed up in the Transitus in the end, because in the Transitus were Jimmy Curtis and Dickie Dexter and his own brother Washington Beck, and Linky lived with them in Study 7 in the Transitus corridor.

It was just pure luck that the Kid, to give Richard Dexter his usual nickname, had been struck with the same bright idea for obtaining a few minutes' freedom this morning. He had explained to Mr. Graham, who was taking the Trape in maths this hour, that he had left his algebra book in his locker, and Mr. Graham, being in a kindly mood this morning, had given him permission to go and get it.

"Hallo, hallo, my bonny blue-eyed laddie!" Lincoln Beck greeted the smaller, more innocent-looking youth with great joy and gladness. "Who turned you loose without your nursemaid?"

"So they've not taken you to Borstal yet, my dear old pie-faced-chum!" laughed Dickie Dexter, and his face was also lighted with a glad smile. "That's a little present from the Boxing Black."

With which words the Kid let fly with a straight left for Linky's shoulder. Linky side-stepped, and then gave the Kid a swift flick on the left side of the face.

"One of Gene Tinney's!" murmured Linky. "This is the touch that made

Jackie Dempsey want to lie down and weep. It's coming, Kid!"

In the next two or three minutes there was quite a pleasant exhibition of high-class boxing. You know the style? Open hands, little flicks, exaggerated feinting, and much prancing round on the toes, but nothing hard enough in the way of flicks to hurt a sensitive fly.

They did it just because it was the sort of morning for a little brisk exercise which would send the red corpuscles chasing the white corpuscles and giving a jerk to all the vitamins the doctors say you ought to have, and finally bringing the glow of ruddy health to their noble brows and sending them back to the Form-room ready to tackle French verbs or algebra, or make paper darts or sick pellets, and yet dodge the master's eagle eye quite easily because their minds were awake and alert.

"Dexter leads on points!" the Kid gasped, as he gave a nice slip. "This is where you take the count, Linky!"

He made quite a savage dart at Lincoln Beck, but Linky was pretty nippy on his feet and had the advantage in height and reach. Quite by chance, though, he gave the Kid a resounding slap on the right cheek. It stirred the Kid's blood, and he dashed in to settle Linky. Neatly and pleasantly, Lincoln side-stepped and enlarded the Kid round the neck. The next moment the Kid's head was firmly gripped and he was studying the dust on the corridor floor from the height of about the middle of Lincoln's back.

Linky at this juncture was standing upright, his left arm round the Kid's neck, and his right arm swinging savagely round and sending quite a lot of air hurrying on. He could only touch the Kid's face by hitting behind his back, and an onlooker might have imagined that he was trying to get up speed to bring his fist full round.

"Oh, you little toad!" said Lincoln joyously. "This is where mother's little pet goes through the hoop. In two seconds, my wee laddie, your little face will look like a squashed blackberry tart. Oh, but I'm going to spillcate you! Are you sorry now that you dared to say rude things to me? Wait till I've finished with you! Jack Dempsey couldn't—"

Lincoln didn't say any more because at that precise moment he was suddenly

dragged by the shoulder and literally heaved against the corridor wall. Almost at the same moment the Kid landed next door to him, and they gauged together.

Of course, you know and I know that Lincoln was just talking hot air because it was a bright and frosty morning. At the outside he'd just have touched the Kid's face and then let him go—if the Kid hadn't jerked himself free before that. This would have marked the end of the scrap. The Kid would have grinned and Linky would have grinned, and they'd have straightened their hair and probably said some more cheerful things to each other before wandering on to their Form-rooms once more, quite convinced that life is full of little joys if you only grip them as they drift along.

But it hadn't quite worked out that way. Again, it was probably a matter of luck that Mr. Daintith should be wandering along the corridor and turned round the corner just in time to see the Kid's last attack and Linky's swift manoeuvre. Also, he heard all the blood-curdling threats which Lincoln uttered.

For a moment or two Mr. Daintith was held up in sheer astonishment. If there was one thing more than another Mr. Daintith could not stand it was fighting, especially the bullying of a small boy by a big boy. And here was a most flagrant case.

He jumped forward as he saw Linky's hand swing round, and he gripped Lincoln in a fierce grasp and banged him back against the wall. Almost as violently he seized the Kid and planted him alongside.

"Wretched boy!" said Mr. Daintith, and glared at Lincoln. "Both of you! Follow me! I will inquire into this!"

It was at this stage that Lincoln's luck became unstick. Mr. Daintith hadn't got a Form to occupy his mind this hour. When this happened to any other Form-master he generally moused off to the masters' Common-room to read the papers, but Mr. Daintith wasn't like that. He hadn't been at Katie's very long, having come really as a sort of "spare part," but nowadays he took the kids in the Upper Second. Funny how they nearly always put tall, stern, battle-faced masters in charge of kids, but it is so.

Moreover, Mr. Daintith was the Rev. John Daintith, M.A., if you don't mind my mentioning it. And he was one of the genuine "life-is-real-life-in earnest" sort of

chaps who never have been young and don't believe in it, anyway. Sometimes he smiled in a tired sort of way when he spoke about the "muddled cubs" who played football, or the "dismalised fools" of the cricket eleven, but he became quite stern again when anyone started to argue about boxing and such low-down "sports."

How on earth he'd drifted to Katie's was one of those things nobody understood, because Katie's was a great place for sport. I'm not arguing they were right or wrong, but it was so, and Mr. Daintith was a sort of lone pioneer trying to lift the boys to what he called a higher plane, and when he found they wouldn't be lifted he tried to jerk them up.

However, Lincoln and the Kid followed him meekly into his empty Form-room, and Mr. Daintith solemnly mounted the little platform on which the master's desk stood.

"Tell me your name and Form, boy!" he commanded, and pointed a finger at Lincoln Beck, while his other hand rested on the desk. As he stood in this dramatic position he looked a bit like Ajax defying the lightning, or Wellington addressing the troops at Waterloo.

Beck answered him gently, and then Dickie Dexter was called upon for his name and Form.

"It grieves me very much that on such a day as this, when the festival of Christmas is drawing near and our hearts should be filled with joy, that two boys, who have enjoyed the advantages of such a school as St. Katherine's, should be filled with vindictive hatred one towards another," Mr. Daintith began, and then for a full ten minutes he let them have a first-class jawing about the evils of letting their angry passions rise and all that sort of thing.

"To you, Dexter, I have little more to say," he said at the end of the first ten minutes. "Doubtless you were taken off your guard, and this boy chose the moment to bully you. Should he attempt to lay hands upon you again, or to wreak vengeance upon you for the punishment I propose to inflict upon him, you will at once report to me. You, Beck, will—"

"He wasn't bullying me, sir!" Dickie Dexter thought it was about time to put a word in before Linky got it in the neck.

"Be quiet, Dexter! Did I not see him

with my own eyes! Did I not hear his threats to injure you severely?"

"That was only in fun, sir!" Dexter protested. "I mean, sir, I wouldn't let him hurt me. He's bigger than I am, but I was in the semi-final for the light-weights last year, sir, and if I really tried, sir, I could make Beck go all out. He really wasn't bullying me at all, sir."

Of course, the Kid meant it all for the best, but, as he ought to have known, it's generally best to say nothing and take things as they come. What he said now merely angered Mr. Daintith.

"You admit then that you were fighting!" he demanded. "You call it fun? You admit that you are equally culpable with Beck? Who began this fight, may I ask?"

"I did, sir," the Kid admitted promptly. "But it wasn't really a fight——"

"Silence! You have said enough!" Mr. Daintith waved his left hand to show that he'd finished. "I will not bandy words with you! I saw you fighting. That is sufficient. And so long as I am a master at this school I will do my utmost to teach boys the futility of brute force. You will both write me two foolscap sheets on the 'Futility of Force,' and you will both go to punishment drill on three occasions for fighting during school hours. Let me have the essays by Friday morning certain, and if they fall short of the standard I expect from boys in the Transitus and the Matriculation Forms, you will re-write them until they are satisfactory. You may go!"

They staggered out. It was—it was so utterly silly! Three drills and a two-page essay! At this time of the term, too! It wouldn't have been so bad if it had been at the beginning of next term, or any old time except the last fortnight before Christmas. The exams were just coming along, and although nobody reckons exams are jolly things, still, it's a lot pleasanter time than during the ordinary term work, because instead of prep. there was "singing" in the Drawing Hall, and that was pretty jolly, and you couldn't get lines, or punishment school, or drills for not doing prep.

As a matter of fact, any decent master cut out the "schools" and "drills," and even lines read about this time. Christmas was in the air, and old Graydon had rarely any clients for P.D. at 5.30 in the

evening. Just imagine going out for three evenings in vacation and holding a bar-bell in the gym, and old Graydon taking it out of you because you'd dragged him from his paper, while your chums were having a jolly time in the Drawing Hall!

"It's rotten!" said the Kid.

"I'm not going to the drills!" said Lincoln Beck bitterly. "I'm through with that junk—for this term, anyway!"

"We'll talk about it later," said the Kid wearily. He didn't think it was a bright morning, and the corpses had given up chasing each other, and the vitamins had gone on strike. He wandered dully back to the mummy room.

"Where have you been all this time, Dexter?" demanded Mr. Graham. He really rather liked Dexter, but took jolly good care not to show it by any hint of favouritism.

"I, sir?" the Kid was still thinking bitterly about the rottenness of things, and he spoke almost surlily. "I—I went to my locker, sir."

"Did you get what you went for, Dexter?" Mr. Graham rapped out, because the Kid had nothing in his hand.

"No, sir, I forgot," Dexter said, and sank into his seat. He was fed up with those pie-cans who were always asking questions.

It struck Mr. Graham that Dexter was taking advantage of the fact that they were on very good terms—out of school hours. Mr. Graham was sorry—but it was obvious the boy needed a sharp lesson.

"Very well, Dexter! You will please attend punishment drill this evening for me!" he rapped out. "In future, when you leave the Form-room for the express purpose of getting a book from your locker, you will either get the book or explain to me why you have not got it. That is all!"

"My giddy aunt!" murmured the Kid. "This is my lucky day!"

Which is exactly what Linky Beck was saying at the very same moment. Mr. Steed was not a harsh man, but he objected to a boy taking advantage of him, and when Lincoln Beck wandered in after an absence of fifteen minutes he judged that the lad had been enjoying himself and demanded an explanation. Where was the

book he went to get? Had he been to his locker?

"Oh, shucks!" said Lincoln Beck in despair, because it was this sort of thing that really did get his goat. Why couldn't they leave him alone? It was no use starting to explain to Mr. Steed all about Mr. Daintith; Lincoln had discovered long ago that there was a sort of secret brotherhood among masters. Besides, he didn't want to advertise to anyone that he had the drills to do—because he jolly well wasn't going to do them, anyway!

"I think you forget where you are, Beck!" snapped little Steed. "You will take a drill! I will make a note of it now!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Blues Begin!

"I 'M not going!" said Lincoln Beck. "I 'M do 'em one for Graham," the Kid said slowly. "I'll work that off to-night. Then, for the love of Mike, try to think of some scheme for dishing old Daintith, Linky!"

Linky didn't even attempt to look inside the gym, but the Kid wandered along and reported to Sergeant Graydon, drill instructor at Katie's, and he was the one and only specimen down for the job this evening. Even the Kid could see that Graydon was mad about it, and that he was in for a rough passage.

In ten minutes the Kid was mad, too. Something had annoyed the sergeant, and he was taking it out of the Kid. Even at normal times Graydon saw to it that the lads who came for punishment drill didn't have a joy-ride. You had to stand with a bar-bell, chosen by Graydon for weight according to your size, and for one solid hour you had to play monkey-tricks with this on the word of command from Graydon. "Bars—up!" rapped Graydon, and you held the thing full length above your head.

"Bars—shoulders!" And you brought the thing down to shoulder level for five minutes or so. "Bars—rest!" And it was held straight down.

And you had to do the thing properly, or Graydon could say he wasn't satisfied, and you had to come again the following night, because Graydon didn't sign the

book for you. The sergeant couldn't give you a drill himself, but he could jolly well make you do two for the one somebody else had given you!

Oh, but it was a sickening, miserable business, especially on a cold evening, and more especially still when you were the only one on the plank. Twice the Kid dropped the bar-bell—and that generally meant that Sergeant Graydon showed you how a drill-instructor talked in the Army!

"Up! Down! Bars—Out!" rapped Graydon. "D'you think this is a bit of fun, do you? I'll show you before you're through!"

He did, too! The Kid stuck it, but his temper had reached that stage when it really hurt, and he jerked out the heavy bar—and once again it crashed to the floor.

"That'll do!" Graydon snapped out. "You'll come to-morrow night and see if you can do drill then! Get your coat on! And remember—to-morrow night!"

For fifty-five minutes the Kid had been going through it—and it didn't count! Graydon wouldn't sign the book, and Mr. Graham's drill was still to be worked off. And the last jerk had twisted his wrist, and it was still hurting him as he went out and up to the study. From Big Hall he could hear the row of the chaps at "singing" which was one of the jolliest, rowdiest, permitted and organized amusements that had ever existed at Katie's.

It suddenly struck the Kid that it was all wrong! Drill was a rotten institution—and he'd got to get it altered. More, he wasn't going to work off a single further drill!

When Lincoln Beck came in with the others they found the Kid sitting in solitary state. Linky asked about the drill, and the Kid told him.

"Hard luck, Kid!" said Jimmy Curtis. "Rotten luck! Graydon can be a pig when he goes out for it. But you'll have to go, old son!"

"I shall not!" said the Kid. "I'm going to put a stopper on that giddy game! I'll waken Roger, and the whole crowd of them up before I'm through!"

"But you can't go and sneak to Roger about it, laddie!" Jimmy Curtis pointed out, kindly and sympathetically. "I mean to say— Well, you know what Roger would do? He'd stick on another couple

just to teach you to take your grub like a man!"

"He won't do that to me!" asserted the Kid, and it was really altogether unlike Dickie Dexter to talk in that way. But to-night he was not merely fed up; he was in a blaze of righteous indignation. How on earth he was going to carry out his threat and dodge the drilla and make everybody sorry they'd tried to crush him, he didn't for the life of him know just yet.

But with Linky Beck he talked of plans and schemes that night. The only trouble was that every idea they struck had some flaw in it and was bound to come unstock—which would merely make the job worse than before!

Even Linky's brilliant brain-wave, suggested by the Kid's complaint that he'd twisted his wrist, was pretty hopeless. Follows had tried the sprained wrist before—and it never came off! You had to report to the school doctor, and he knew all about the noble art of lead-swinging!

Yet that was the only scheme which offered the slightest chance, and they talked and talked till lights out, trying to fix the right details.

"We'll try it!" said the Kid desperately. "I'm running this stunt, Linky! You do exactly as I tell you."

This explains why on the following afternoon they journeyed into Dulchester together and went to the goods entrance of the shop kept by Mr. Walter Lee, M.P.S. Mr. Lee's assistant was a certain bright youth whose name was Charlie Challiner, and everybody said that Charlie would make a brilliant success as a chemist. He was quite an old friend of the Kid's, and he welcomed them gladly.

"Come into the surgery, children," he told them, and led them into a queer little room where they mixed the ointments and made up the prescriptions.

"Ah, ah!" said Charlie, when they'd told him their tale of woe. "This is a pretty stiff proposition, little ones, but I'll see what can be done."

He did, too. Within about fifteen minutes or so, the right wrist belonging to Richard Dexter and the same portion of Lincoln Beck's limb, had been treated with some funny purple stuff, which ran half-way up their forearms. Over this, especially round the wrist itself, Charles painted iodine; then he bound them up in cur-

rest professional fashion, and insisted that they should have narrow slings to rest the injured arms in.

By the time he turned them out anybody would have guessed they were hospital cases.

"Very serious sprains indeed!" said Charlie, as they bade him good-bye. "Tomorrow if they're no better I shall probably take you along to Dr. Smithson and get him to make an X-ray examination. But—don't you forget the tips I've given you, laddies, or Dr. Ogle will see through you like a shot!"

They wandered away into the streets of Dulchester.

"It's bluff, Linky!" the Kid said. "Bluff all the time! We're not going to tell anybody we've got sprained wrists, and we're making no accusations. Don't forget that! We're good little lads, and we wouldn't sneak on anybody. Wild horses and Jolly Roger himself won't drag out of us how we can get these wrists or how we've suffered. With a bit of luck——"

At that very moment there was quite a big slice of luck knocking round for the pair of them. They were just drifting past the Cloisters Hotel and Restaurant, which was, of course, the swagger place in Dulchester, when someone hailed them joyously.

"Hallo, Dickie! What's the matter, Lincoln? Been playing football again?" It was Marjory Frayne who greeted them gladly and merrily, and inside two minutes she was telling them all about everything and everybody.

Of course, you've heard about Marjory? She was a real, eighteen-carat gold brick, as Linky would have said; a first-rate sport, and a topping good sort. Also, as it happened, she was sister of Mrs. Roger Blunt, the Head's wife.

"But I can't stop!" Marjory told them. "Nancy and a friend, who's staying at your place till she comes to us for Christmas, are just hopping round the shops, and I've got to reserve a table for tea. Frightfully particular Nancy is now! Must have a table in one of those little alcoves, you know. That's being the wife of a headmaster. She told me I mustn't speak to any of the boys——"

A sudden idea had struck the Kid, though he hadn't quite worked it out yet. "We were just thinking of having tea

here," he said. "We'll drift in with you, Marjory. Linky's frightfully keen on the Cloisters for tea, aren't you, Linky?"

"Absolutely!" agreed Linky, scenting that the Kid was hitting some scheme. "I never go anywhere else nowadays, unless, of course—"

As a matter of fact they had been to the Cloisters, but not to the restaurant part of the show. Jolly nice place it was, though, as they realised when they wandered with Marjory through the pleasantly lighted rooms. There were lots of tables, square ones and round ones in the main room, and then all round were odd corners and jolly little alcoves, making the place a bit like a church really, only brighter and more cheerful.

"My hat!" breathed the Kid, as he heard Marjory telling a waitress that she wanted a table reserved in one of these alcove places and indicated the exact one. "I say—look here, Linky! You collar the horse-box next door to that! I'm going to talk to Marjory!"

Lincoln promptly reserved the jolly little alcove next the one now being reserved for Mrs. Blunt and party, and Dickie Dexter was telling Marjory, very earnestly, a long story.

"What a shame! Oh, I do think it's unfair, Dickie!" Marjory said. "Yes! I see! I'll cough twice when we're really in. But you trust me, Dickie! Oh, and Miss Harper—Nancy's friend—is frightfully keen on this League of Youth, you know. Roger isn't very struck, I gather, but Mr. Daintith is going to be a vice-president for the district, and—but I must run away now, or they'll wonder where I am. You trust me, Dickie!"

She went off, and Richard Dexter joined Lincoln Beck in the alcove. Linky was already ordering a fairly stout tea, but the Kid told him not to be in too big a hurry. They might have to stay here some time, and they didn't want to be turned out before the right moment.

An oak partition about six feet high separated these little alcoves, each of which was lighted by a shaded lamp. In whispers the two conspirators discussed the plan of campaign which now lay open to them.

"That's the ticket, Kid!" Lincoln Beck was an expert in the business of fairy-stories. "Fog 'em up! Get 'em all chasing each other and trying to discover the truth.

and we'll be the noble-hearted lads who suffer in silence till our little hearts are nearly broken! We'll give them something to talk about, anyway!"

"I don't like dragging females in," the Kid said, "but all reformers who are trying to do a bit of good in the world sometimes have to do things which they don't really like. And, anyway, I'm dead keen on having a shot at making old Daintith wish he hadn't piled those drills on us!"

It was a quarter of an hour before the Kid heard sounds from the next alcove, and then came two gentle coughs. Marjory had given the signal!

Three minutes later Mrs. Roger Blunt, talking in quiet, subdued tones to her old friend, Miss Margaret Harper, heard a voice which she was sure she had heard before, from the other side of the partition. Marjory Prayne bent her head over her buttered muffin as she perceived that her sister whispered "Sh! Just one moment, Margaret!" to Miss Harper.

Quite clearly, even harshly, came the voice from the other side:

"Oh, shucks, Kid! We'll have another plate of buns, anyhow! You'll be wishing you could get buns in a month's time, old son! Salt beef and pickles is all you get at tea—if you're lucky!"

CHAPTER 2.

Reforming Jolly Roger!

MRS. ROGER BLUNT was young and enthusiastic, and she was intensely keen on "understanding boys" and helping her husband in his job of training about two hundred and fifty of them to be real men.

That was why she put a sudden stop to her friend's quiet conversation and whispered quietly to her:

"Two boys from the school. One ought not to listen really, but it is so interesting to hear their point of view. One understands so much better!"

In less than five minutes Mrs. Blunt was wishing she hadn't suggested the eaves-dropping act, but by that time Miss Margaret Harper was intensely interested. The boys were obviously quite unconscious of the fact that their voices carried plainly to the next alcove, for they were discuss-

ing the school, the masters, their own grievances and opinions, and even their plans and hopes.

"They're topping bars, anyway!" It was the voice of Richard Dexter which drifted to Mrs. Blunt. "I couldn't have stuck ten at school to-day. To-morrow—more trouble, Linky!"

"I don't see why we couldn't have gone straight up to Roger and told him," Linky grumbled. "Your idea about sneaking—"

"Don't be a silly ass!" retorted Dexter. "It isn't my idea! It's Roger's! You go and tell him that you've had three drills given you by that snide Daintith, and that you think it isn't fair. What d'you reckon would happen?"

"But if we explained?" protested Lincoln Beck.

"You wouldn't get a chance of explaining, old son," retorted Dexter. "You ought to jolly well know that by now. If you go to Daintith and ask permission to appear to the Head, he'd give you another drill for impertinence; if you go to Roger on your own and try to tell him, he'll give you three drills extra for trying to sneak."

"Well, but with those wrists—" said Lincoln Beck.

"What about it?" demanded Dexter. "You can't say Daintith sprained your wrist, can you? My hat! You tell Roger that! He'd jolly soon let you know what he thinks of chaps who sneak! Then he'd shove you up before Ogle, saying we'd been having treatment in Dulchester for a sprained wrist! Oh, my giddy aunt! Ogle would promptly say we hadn't, and then Roger would hand out more punishment for lying. It's what they call the vicious circle, old son, and you've got to put up with it or quit."

"But you used to reckon that Roger was a decent chap," Lincoln Beck still argued. "I think if we went—"

"Do dry up!" begged the Kid. "Roger was all right as a Form-master—one of the best. Mind you, he'd lam you frightfully if he thought you were trying to deceive him, and then let you off when you expected to be skinned alive, just because you didn't attempt to excuse yourself. But now—well, he's all out for discipline and supporting the masters."

"He told me before I came here that my life would be one long, drawn-out misery,"

said Lincoln. "Jumping snakes! I'd sooner be in prison!"

"Of course you would," the Kid agreed quite cheerfully. "When you're in prison you've finished. When you're in school you're only just starting. That brute Daintith sees you patting me on the shoulder and says you're fighting. I tell him you're not. So he punishes you for fighting and me for being impertinent. Then we both get punished because Daintith kept us from our Forms. If we complained we'd be punished again for trying to sneak. I go and try to do a drill, and, because I drop the bar-bell, Graydon says I've got to come again. It's what they call making a man of you, Linky! Don't forget to take that sling off before you get back to school."

"But that doctor fellow said I must wear it until he'd tried the X-ray on it," protested Lincoln. "If it does happen to be broken—"

"No such luck, old son!" said Dexter. "You keep it out of sight! My hat! You'd get into a frightful row if they knew you'd been having it treated in town."

"Well, I shall report sick to-morrow," said Lincoln Beck.

"Don't you do, Linky!" the Kid laughed merrily. "Then they've fairly got you! Trying to dodge punishment, that's what you're doing! You've either not got a sprained wrist and therefore you're lying, or you have a sprained wrist and you've done it purposely to dodge the righteous anger of your kind masters! Pooh! Stick it, Linky! Christmas is coming!"

"All right! Let's quit!" Lincoln Beck's voice was mournfully pathetic. "You're right, of course. But it's rotten!"

They rose a few minutes later and wandered forth without turning their eyes towards the alcove where Mrs. Blunt and company sat.

"It's a bit mean," said the Kid when they were outside. "But the fat's in the fire now. I'll bet there'll be ructions over this! But don't forget, Linky—you admit nothing except you're a bad lad, and you haven't got any sprained wrist. We dragged in Daintith, Steed, Graham and Graydon all right. Leave it at that."

Away back in the alcove three people were all talking at once, because Marjory Frayne thought she might to take a hand in

this game. They had seen the pathetic figures of Lincoln Bock and Richard Dexter with their right arms in nice white slings wandering away, but Mrs. Blunt had said nothing.

"There's some misunderstanding," Mrs. Blunt said when they had disappeared. "I am sure that if Roger knew—"

"My dear Nancy," said Miss Harper firmly, "I have already heard Roger's views on what he is pleased to term discipline. I am surprised to hear about Mr. Daintith, though, because he seemed a very kind man. But I think most men have the same views—"

"If you know as much as I know," said Marjory daskly, "you'd just wonder how those poor boys lived."

Mrs. Roger Blunt was in a horribly complicated state of mind. She was most anxious to help her friend in founding the League of Youth in this district, but—

"Please don't say anything to Roger, Margaret," she suggested to Miss Harper. "I'll ask him a few questions and try to find out the truth."

"I should like to be there!" said Miss Harper, and smiled.

If only the Kid and Lanky Bock could have known how their luck had changed they would have jumped for joy. As it happened, Mr. Daintith was dining with the Blunts that night, but it was not until 8-30 in the drawing-room that Mrs. Roger had a chance of asking her husband one or two questions which were puzzling her.

Jolly Roger was in a particularly happy and contented frame of mind to-night. If any boy had been brought before him at such a stage for some trivial offence he would have said: "The next time, my boy, I will flay you alive!" very boisterously and cheerfully. "Gal! But you be very careful, my boy, or your life here will be one long-drawn-out agony. You quite understand? Good-bye, my boy!" And probably he'd give the boy a playful pat on the shoulder, and the lad would go out and say: "Old Roger's a brick, you know! Sort of makes you feel at home when you're on the carpet before him." That was only Roger's way.

So when his wife said to him to-night: "I want to ask you a question about school discipline, Roger," he answered cheerfully enough: "Fire away! I think Mr. Dain-

titth and I know all that there is to know on that subject!"

"Supposing," said Mrs. Blunt thoughtfully—"supposing Mr. Daintith, for instance, had given a boy three punishment drills, and the boy thought it an unfair punishment, what could he do?"

"The three drills!" rapped Roger cheerily, and laughed.

"But supposing he came to you and complained?" Mrs. Blunt went on. "Supposing he explained to you that Mr. Daintith wouldn't listen to his appeal, what would you do?"

Roger's eyes were twinkling. He knew what they were getting at! Miss Harper had been on with her pet theories about the boys' courts of honour and of appeal. Well, well!

"Give him three more drills—and take good care that he did them!" retorted Jolly Roger.

"But—why?" Mrs. Blunt asked the question almost weakly. Miss Harper was sitting up, and her eyes were shining brightly.

"Why? Because we don't encourage boys to sneak at St. Katie's!" said Roger proudly. "If Mr. Daintith gave the boy three drills, the boy would deserve it! That settles the matter. Where would the master's authority be if every time he punished a boy the boy himself had the right to run and complain to the Head? Nonsense!"

"Supposing Mr. Daintith had—" began Miss Harper, because she wanted to chip in on this.

"One moment, Margaret," Mrs. Blunt said, because she didn't want her friend to start cross-examining Roger. "Supposing Mr. Daintith had twisted a boy's arm and sprained his wrist badly, then given him three drills, would he have the right to complain then?"

"My dear child"—Roger and Mr. Daintith were both smiling now—"forgive me putting it so crudely, but such a thing is quite impossible. In the first place, Mr. Daintith would not twist a boy's arm."

"But he has!" Miss Harper cried out, not to be balked of her share in the argument. "And the boy doesn't report it because he would be punished! And he can't do his punishment, which was most unfairly given, because his wrist is bad!"

It all came out then. Straightaway, of

course, Roger had a shock when he heard it was Dexter and Beck, and promptly he suspected some joke; but his wife insisted that the boys could not possibly have known of their presence in the restaurant, and Roger had to accept it.

"Very well!" Roger had lost something of his brightness now. "I will inquire into the whole matter in the morning. I shouldn't worry, Daintith. I don't suppose there's a word of truth in the whole story!"

"So I suppose they will be punished again for lying—or will it be for sneaking!" asked Miss Harper, quite nicely, you know, and with a pleasant smile; but it jarred on Roger. He loathed women butting into matters which they didn't understand.

"It really is most ridiculous!" said Mr. Daintith. "The boys deserve to be punished severely——"

"Again?" asked Mrs. Blunt, and even she felt angry, though she tried hard to smile and pretend that this was really all very interesting and amusing.

"I'll inquire now!" Roger went to the telephone and rang up the master's Common-room. From there he learned that it was correct that both Mr. Stood and Mr. Graham had given the two boys in question one punishment drill, which was thoroughly justified. Mr. Stood and Mr. Graham, however, gladly accepted the Head's invitation to come over and take coffee. Then Roger sent a message down to Graydon, and the answer duly came back that Dexter had been to drill last evening, but had been slack, and it had been transferred to another night—but he hadn't been to-night, and Sergeant Graydon was reporting him to Mr. Graham.

Roger was still smiling when he came back to the drawing-room, where there were now three masters.

"I don't approve of what I am doing myself," he laughed. "But our old friends, Beck and Dexter, have evidently been trying to stir up a little trouble for us, so I propose to get them over here and just make the fact quite clear that it would be impossible to ill-treat those two boys. They are, without exception, the two most ingenious young scoundrels who ever wandered round St. Katie's! Ah! I fancy I hear them now. Let me bundle them,

please! This is probably where young Dexter gets a surprise!"

But that was where Roger made a mistake! The Kid and Linky Beck had bailed the message to appear before Jolly Roger at nine o'clock at night with considerable joy.

"Don't forget the lay, Linky!" Dexter whispered. "You're a bad boy—and they're all good masters!"

"Come in, boys!" Roger greeted them cheerily as they were shown in, but the two lads looked horribly sheepish and afraid. Guilt and fear were plainly to be seen on their countenances.

"I think you know everyone here?" Roger asked them cheerily. "You saw Miss Harper at the Cloisters Restaurant this afternoon, I believe?"

"The Cloisters, sir!" Dexter gasped, and the fear became very pronounced. "I—I've never seen Miss Harper before, sir. I—I was at the Cloisters this afternoon, sir, Beck and I went there to tea."

"But you saw Mrs. Blunt there, surely?" beamed Roger. He knew Dexter was not a liar, and this first question was intended to catch him right out. But Dexter had not seen Mrs. Blunt—he'd taken jolly good care of that!

"I—I didn't, sir," he stammered.

"But weren't you wearing a sling?" Roger asked, quite nicely. "Hurt your hand, haven't you?"

"It's nothing, sir," Dexter answered, and kept his hands behind his back.

"Oh, it's nothing, sir," Lincoln assured him. "Just a little twist, sir. Quite accidental, sir."

"How was it caused, Beck?" Roger asked.

"It—it was twisted, sir—accidentally."

"An extraordinary coincidence that both you and Dexter should have injured wrists at the same moment! Let me look at them!"

Luck? My hat! What with iodine and dye they looked quite a pretty sight! Roger tried another tack.

"You've been having them treated, have you? What does Dr. Ogle say about them?"

"Nothing, sir," Dexter answered steadily.

"Ah! He has seen them, then?"

"No, sir!"

Roger stuck at them, never showing any excitement and smiling all the time. And

Dexter and Rock answered. Their wrists didn't hurt at all, really, but they just thought—Christmas coming, and all that—they'd have them *treated*. But it wasn't worth while troubling Dr. Ogle. Dexter's had happened in the gym. It wasn't anybody's fault; a bar-bell had slipped and he tried to catch it. Yes, he was doing a punishment drill at the time. It was for Mr. Graham, but it wouldn't count because the bar-bell had fallen, and the sergeant told him he wouldn't sign the book. He hadn't told Mr. Graham about that, and he hadn't done the drill. He was expecting his wrist would be all right by Monday, and then he could do all the drills. Of course, it would be three drills next week for Mr. Graham. That was only fair.

Roger wasn't really making much progress, and he tried a new line on Lincoln Beck. Did he think he had been fairly punished by Mr. Daintith?

"Yes, sir! Oh, yes, sir!" Lincoln was quite eager over that.

"Ah!" Roger smiled once more. "I only want to get at the real truth, my boy. We are all very interested. Why were you punished by Mr. Daintith?"

"Mr. Daintith said we were fighting, sir."

Again Roger reached a full-stop, because Lincoln wouldn't answer at all when he asked him if they were fighting. So he asked Dexter, and the Kid simply said: "Mr. Daintith said we were fighting, sir."

"And Mr. Daintith threw Beck against the wall and hurt his wrist?" Mrs. Blunt suddenly took a hand. "You need not be afraid, Dexter. We only want to know the truth."

"He didn't mean to hurt him," Dexter protested. "It was an accident."

"But you weren't fighting at all?" Mrs. Blunt asked. "You were just joking with each other, really?"

"Mr. Daintith said we were fighting," said the Kid wearily.

"And then Mr. Graham gave you another drill because you had been detained by Mr. Daintith?" Mrs. Blunt was keeping on the job and Roger didn't interfere.

"Well, I had been out for a long time," Dexter said.

"But why didn't you explain to me, Dexter?" Mr. Graham felt annoyed that

this sort of thing should be dragged up against him.

"Explain that I'd been fighting, sir?" asked Dexter, a bit puzzled.

"So you really do think you have been unfairly treated over this business, Dexter?" Roger still tried to get to grips with the job, but he'd never known Dexter quite like this before.

"No, sir!" Dexter protested. "I mean, sir—"

His face had suddenly flushed, but he drew himself up with a quick jerk.

"Well!" demanded Roger. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, sir," Dexter said, and his little lips were tightly closed the moment he had spoken. But Roger pressed him, insisted that he should explain, and Dexter suddenly blurted out: "Well, it's all unfair, sir! You know it is, sir. Everybody knows it is. I know I shall be punished for saying this, but somebody ought to say it. If they'd make the masters go to punishment drill they wouldn't be so quick—I'm sorry, sir!"

He pulled himself up quickly, and Roger nodded.

"All right, Dexter! I am glad to have heard your views. We were really anxious to know them. You may go now!"

They went out, but scarcely were they in the corridor before Lincoln Beck's raucous voice floated back in a tense whisper.

"Jumping snakes, Kid! But you'll get it in the neck for this! My hat! You've fairly done it this time!"

Inside the room Roger was looking angry, and Miss Harper was smiling at Mrs. Blunt, who wasn't smiling a bit. The three masters were pursing their lips and trying to look perplexed.

"I don't know!" Roger was saying. "However, it may have served a useful purpose. We'll talk about this later."

Out in the quadrangle the Kid was laughing till the tears ran down his face.

"It worked all right, Linky!" he gasped. "I never, never really thought—Dickie Dexter reforms Jolly Roger! My giddy nunt! I reckon we're gift-edged heroes, old son. The good news will spread and masters won't be so jolly keen as they have been on slugging out their drills. And old Graydon will get a rap across the knuckles

which will serve him right. He's jolly well needed it for a long time!"

And Dickie Dexter was right. It was a fact that a little bit of reform was needed at Katie's, and by his blind bluff Richard had started the ball in the right direction. Mr. Daintith sent for them on the following day and told them the drills were washed out and in future they were to explain more fully. He was sorry about Beck's hand and Linky said it didn't matter a bit and he never meant to let him know. And Mr. Graham told the Kid he wished he had explained—and the drill was knocked off. So was Linky's from Mr. Steed. Roger had a long talk with Graydon, and various changes were made in "drill" which had been needed for a long time.

"And that's that!" the Kid said when he heard the good news and had had time to weigh it all up. "We've done a little bit of good all round, Linky. And we shan't miss singing, after all. Come on. I guess it's about time we began to drift down for singing!"

CHAPTER 4.

"Singing" at Katie's!

OF all the customs which had grown up and become established through the long years since St. Katherine's School was founded, not one could claim more whole-hearted popularity than "Singing."

That was its official name, and no one ever attempted to call it anything else. How or when or why singing had first started no one knew, but always during the last fortnight of the Christmas term the notices went up on the Board and the Head himself usually made an announcement as well that there would be singing in Big Hall at five-forty-five that particular evening, and all Forms were required to attend.

There was no penalty, so far as anyone knew, if one didn't attend singing. But nobody ever tried to dodge it. Between half-past five and a quarter to six the bright sads of Katie's began to drift into the hall and each Form would see to it that desks or seats of some sort were arranged in reasonable comfort for themselves, and

there was a general row and scramble as everybody tried to get in favourite corners.

In the midst of the row Mr. Ruffell, the music and writing master, would stroll in. Probably two or three other masters would drift in with him and wander towards the big platform. They didn't try to stop the row, but grinned slyly when they saw two kids having a scrap over a particular seat.

Other masters would slip quietly in by the masters' entrance to the hall, but they didn't take their places with their Forms. They just lounged comfortably on the big seats which ran at the back of the platform. At any other time but singing they'd have been dashing round with fierce expressions and demanding order. But to-night they liked it!

Helaby of the Sixth mounted the platform and sat down to the grand piano which had been dragged to the front, instead of trying to hide behind the big organ. Mr. Ruffell stopped forward, smiling joyously, and he held a tuning-fork in his hand, which he banged on the reading-desk. Nobody heard it, but the row began to subside; Helaby gave a mighty crash on the piano, then did one of those swift twiddle runs up and down the keyboard, just to show that what he didn't know about piano-playing wasn't worth knowing, and then gave another mighty crash which fairly echoed among the rafters of the ancient hall.

The row had died down to a whisper, Mr. Ruffell called out: "Number twenty-seven, The Chesapeake and Shannon." Some boys who had small blue-backed books opened them; the books were lettered: "St. Katherine's School. 1587. Song Book."

Bang! went the piano once more. Mr. Ruffell dropped back into the seats with the other masters—one or two of them were still strolling in, just casually—and the row began!

"The Chesapeake to hold, out of Boston
I am told,

Came to take the British frigate neat
and handy-O!

The people of the port came out to
see the sport,

With their music playing Yankee-
doodle-dandy-O!"

Did the little lads of Katie's let it rip? Gentle reader, believe me, they jolly well did. The hefty chaps of the Sixth, and the nuts of the Fifth, right down to the small kids in the First-Form Preparatory, didn't hold back one tiny bit.

"Yankee-doodle, yankee-doodle-dandy-O!

Old Broke he waved his sword, crying,
'Now, my lads, aboard!'

And we'll stop their playing Yankee-doodle-dandy-O!"

Mr. Graham, a stern, tall, silent young man who took the lads in mirth, was lying back in the seat on the platform and swinging his legs to keep time; and he was bawling with the rest of them.

"Yankee-doodle" came to an end at last, and just for a change they swung into "Forty Years On," and when they came to the refrain: "With the tramp of the twenty-two men, follow up, follow up!" everybody stamped and banged and raised a glorious dust.

Old Roger himself came drifting in through the masters' entrance, and the bright smile he wore when he was glad had become a genuine broad grin of sheer contentment. Once or twice he turned proudly round to where, in the doorway, a little group of people were standing. In the dim light which illuminated that particular dark corner you couldn't very well see who the folks were, but as a matter of fact it was Mrs. Blunt and one of two of her musical friends who'd never heard boys sing their glad songs of happy childhood.

"The British Grenadiers" was Mr. Russell's next selection, because it always had been so, long before Mr. Russell had done the selecting business. It isn't the sort of song you want to whisper softly into the silent night; it's one of those songs that sounds a lot better if you kick your feet on the floor and bang your fists on the desk, just to give the right impression of the sort of lads the British grenadiers really are.

"But of all the world's brave heroes,
there's none that can compare,

With a tow, row, row, row, row, row,
to the British Grenadiers!"

Crash, bang, crash, bang, crash! You may be one of the chaps who reckons there's nothing much in music, but if you'd been there when the lads of Katie's were singing their songs of Araby, you'd jolly soon realise that old Shakespeare was quite right when he said that music hath charms to soothe the savage breast.

They varied the programme a bit, too. They didn't keep all the time to the old classics, such as "British Grenadiers" and "Fairbairn Swore a Feud." Mr. Russell would drift forward as the last fierce wail of "Fairbairn's" refrain died down, and he'd raise his hand for silence—or something that wasn't a bad imitation of it—and he'd just call out cheerily to the lads in the Sixth: "What next? Something more modern?" And maybe the captain of the school, having consulted his fellow-protects on the subject before, would reply: "Coal-black Mammy of Mine, sir!"

Mind you, some of these modern songs have a lot of vim in them; though, of course, you'll never beat the real old swinging songs. The saddest of that haunting refrain had scarcely died down: "I wanna go back—I wanna go back, to that coal-black mammy of mine," before they'd started on "Rule Britannia," which was followed by "Good King Wenceslas," then a really serious thing which told you a few facts about William of Dulchester, who'd founded Katie's a long, long time ago.

"God Save the King"—everybody standing very erect and looking straight in front of them, with old Roger now at the reading-desk with Mr. Russell, and the masters behind them, looking very stern and solemn and serious again—brought them back to steadiness once more. Jolly Roger gave a signal when the anthem had died down, and the captain of the school led the Sixth out, the rest of the Forms following in their proper order. No rush, no excitement now, but everybody jolly happy and contented, and with a queer sort of feeling knocking round that, after all, Katie's was a top-hole place.

No, not quite everybody! There was that little mob of females standing just inside the master's entrance, practically hidden from everybody because of the dark shadows which lay over this side of the platform, though they could see almost everything.

There was Mrs. Roger Blunt, wife of the Head, Mrs. Daintith, wife of one of the masters who had only been at Katie's a couple of months or so, and Miss Harper, who was a great friend of the Head's wife. They were all very nice people, and they were all keen on doing a bit of good in the world, especially when it came to helping boys to be happy. Also, all three of them were very musical.

Mrs. Blunt was quite sure that if the boys were encouraged in music it would do a lot of good at Katie's, and she had made a beginning, gently and quietly, and without too much fuss. One or two of her efforts had gone a bit astray, as, for instance, when she tackled Lincoln Bock. But she'd seen the humour of this, being really a very decent sort, and she laughed about the episode even now.

But to-night's affair hadn't merely been disappointing; it had staggered her. She had an idea that the singing-master would have had the new Orchestral Society in full swing, and that the two or three boys whom they'd discovered really could sing, would have been giving solos; in short, she was expecting a highbrow concert, with perhaps all the boys joining in the singing of the school song somewhere near the close. Instead, there had been this tearing, rampagious, yelling, banging, bellowing exhibition!

"What did you think of it?" she asked Miss Harper as they wandered back to the Head's house. The Head himself had remained behind to have a chat with one or two of the masters.

"I am trying not to think about it," said Miss Harper. "I understand what you meant now when you said that St. Katherine's was not a musical school. It isn't!"

"I'm sure— Of course, Mr. Blunt hasn't been headmaster long, has he?" suggested Mrs. Daintith tactfully.

"But— It was very rowdy, wasn't it?" Mrs. Blunt didn't say very much. She was thinking hard. Something ought to be done about this. Here was a chance to let her influence really get to work in the school, and she wasn't going to miss it!

When she told Jolly Roger all about her ideas, he was at first nearly as staggered as she had been when she realized what "singing" meant at Katie's.

"Singing always has been like that," Roger pointed out. "Of course, I suppose a properly organised concert might be

better. I'd never thought about it in that way. We shall have to go very carefully, however, in the beginning. I mean— Well, have a talk with Russell!"

Roger left it at that, and didn't interfere. Maybe you think that wasn't Jolly Roger's usual way of dealing with any problem? But in certain matters he was always content to let an experiment be made, and be guided by results. Somehow, he had the feeling that this was a thing which concerned the boys themselves more than anybody else, and doubtless, in one way or another, they would indicate which they preferred.

"Oh, I expect the boys will decide in the end!" he told Mr. Russell cheerily, when the singing-master mentioned the question to him. "I have no doubt they will express their views in some way, and in such a matter I shall be guided by their wisdom."

And Jolly Roger was, as usual, quite right. The boys would undoubtedly express their views!

CHAPTER 3.

The "Excelsior" Row!

"IT'S the giddy limit!" murmured the Kid brokenly.

"It's going a bit too far," agreed Jimmy Curtis. "Why on earth they want to change— But there you are! 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,' as one of those pseudo Johnnies says. But if I were the captain of the school— My hat!"

Curtis gasped, for even as he spoke the door opened, and there was Maxwell, who had been captain of Katie's since the beginning of the term. A good man was Maxwell, and not the sort who went bawling into other people's studies without some jolly good reason.

"Sorry, Maxwell!" Jimmy Curtis felt certain that Maxwell had overheard him, and he felt a bit embarrassed.

"That's all right, Curtis!" Maxwell laughed, but there was just a hint of nervousness in his voice. "Talking about this—er—concert, I suppose? Well, and what would you do if you were captain of the school, Curtis?"

A lot depends on how a thing is said; the captain's question might have been just a straight tip to Curtis to mind his own

business, or it might have been jolly sarcastic, but as a matter of fact it was neither. It was absolutely serious.

"Well, we were all thinking that to-night's affair was a bit of a farce," Curtis said. "If the prefects made a gentle protest to the Head—"

Maxwell shook his head quickly. "Can't do that, old son!" he jerked out. "You see, it's the Head's wife who struck the idea, really, and old Ruffell was telling us— But it's very awkward! That's why I thought I'd drift along and have a chat with you. I mean to say, there's been one or two queer times when the Kid and you— Well!"

He meandered on jerkily and nervously, which was rather strange, because there was nothing nervous about Maxwell. But "Singing" to-night had upset him, and he felt that something had to be done, carefully and tactfully.

Mrs. Blunt had quickly got to work after her first experience of "Singing" at Katie's, and to-night the programme had been altered completely. Instead of the usual joyous row, Mr. Ruffell had made a speech, explaining that to-night was a practice for the real concert they hoped to give before they broke up.

Old Ruffell was quite nervous because there were about half a dozen females on the platform, and to-night most of the masters sat with their Forms. After Ruffell had finished, Halsby gave ten minutes' exhibition on the piano, and everybody had to keep quite quiet. After that, Marks, commonly known as Hocky, was called upon, and he ascended to the platform with a violin under his arm and a grin on his face, which was a sort of cross between a leer and the first symptoms of sea-sickness.

Hocky began to make weird sounds on the fiddle, while Halsby banged odd notes on the piano, and then, after another sickly leer at the mob, Hocky began to saw away.

Mind you, it wasn't so bad, except when he got to the sweet, pathetic bits, which were a bit painful if you didn't quite grasp the idea. Naturally, some loped-off as knocking round about the centre of the school gave a brilliant and life-like imitation of a cat bidding farewell to the milkman. "Mia—ow—ow—ow—wow!" and two or three masters went, "Sh—sh—sh!" very viciously, and Roger looked horribly stern on the platform, while the females in

front half-turned round and looked at the Sixth fellows as though they'd done it.

Still, Hocky Marks got through all right, and there was a bit more clapping, while Mr. Ruffell was trying to announce that the School Quartet would now render "Excelsior." There was a bit of shuffling and whispering, and four sad-looking lads crept out and climbed the platform. Nobody had ever heard of the "Quartet" before, and Maxwell whispered to Rushby to ask whether he reckoned he ought to give them their colours right now, and Rushby sniggered so much that Miss Harpoc turned round and gave him what Linky Reek would have called the frozen mitt and glazy eye.

Maybe you've heard about "Excelsior"? It's all about a lad who was dead puts on climbing a mountain on a dark and snowy night, and when anybody tried to say "Cut it out, old son," he simply referred them to his little flag—"a banner with a strange device, Excelsior!" Jolly fine poem it is, and as a duet or a quartet, or anything of that sort, it's the real goods, especially when they come to the part where there's a sort of race, each fellow trying to sing "Excelsior" in a different way from the other, and all of them seeing who can beat the other. Complicated thing it is, too, and everybody who sings it goes in for special training.

So, you see, there is a lot of excuse for St. Katie's Quartet. They started off slowly, solemnly, and shakily, and horribly pathetically: "The shades of night—were falling fast—As through an Al-pine village passed—" and so on. But it was when they got to the "Excelsior" stunt that the mix-up began.

Oh, my hat! They kept on warbling out "Excelsior! Excelsior! Ex-cel-sior!" and Halsby was turning round and glaring at them; and then he'd suddenly bang the piano, and that startled them into it all over again. And some of the prize asses in the Fourth tried to give them a leg-up, and they began to shout out: "Excelsior! Excelsior! That encouraged two or three in the Third to try their voices on the stunt, and masters started again to give their life-like imitation of a steam escape: "Sh—sh—sh!" "Excel— Sh—sh—Sh—Sh— Excel— Sh—sh—sh!"

A lot of fellows seemed to think the "Sh—sh—sh!" was part of the chorus, and they joined in. Somehow, Mr. Ruffell

quietened the thing down, and he let the quartet buzz on again for another spasm, then politely turfed them off, and announced that the school orchestra would now give a selection from somebody or other, and seven or eight youths struggled up to the platform with various instruments.

But why go on? It was a painful evening, chiefly because everybody was dying to sing, and when you feel that way you can't really enjoy sitting quite still listening to other people make a mess of what you jolly well know you could do so much better. And, anyhow, this wasn't singing!

That's the real truth of the matter. The idea that on the last night of the term this giddy show was going to be repeated, with two or three other people coming along to sing—and keep the lads of Katie's from singing—wasn't encouraging. The prefects were sick about it, because, after all, they didn't want to see odd kids from the Fourth or the Third perched up on the platform playing fiddles or singing pathetic songs in a wailing sort of way about "The beautiful country of dree-earns!"

That was why Maxwell had drifted round to see the Kid and Curtis, and, incidentally, he didn't care if the Beck brothers took a hand. Just what he wanted he didn't know, but he had a vague idea that the Kid might have a brain-wave, and in some mysterious way, without any fuss, you know, make a mess of the breaking-up concert, and so transform it into the good old "singing."

The Kid was flattered by the captain's compliment, and he made up his mind there and then that he'd run any risk to pull the job off. But how?

That was a problem, but they didn't tell Maxwell so.

"You leave it to us, Maxwell!" they assured him. "We'll let you know what to expect later on. But beyond that—not a word!"

And Maxwell went away quite content. He was really more content than either Jolly Rogers, or his wife, or the masters. Most of them felt a bit uneasy about this "breaking-up concert," and wished now that other folks wouldn't butt in and try to alter the old order of things. Of course, it had been announced, and Rogers had several wobbles about it, but, as Mrs. Blunt pointed out, it was always a bit dif-

ficult to get new things started, and the very fact that the boys had not conducted themselves like perfect little gentlemen just showed that it was about time one or two little changes were made.

"I am sure it will be a success," she stated, "and the boys will really enjoy it a good deal more than the rowdy, untrained singing they have been having. Besides, I shall get quite a good programme, and General Bradwood is coming, and will sing one or two songs that will appeal to the boys. We mustn't make it too classical to begin with, of course!"

During the next few days the quartet were practising, the Orchestral Society was kicking up weird rows in the Drawing Hall, and Mr. Russell was struggling with sundry youths who fancied themselves as first-class singers, and Mrs. Blunt was going from one lot to the other, though in between times she was practising, too, because she'd decided to give the lads of Katie's a little insight into what music really was. Helsby had managed to dodge the opening pianoforte solo because he said he was nervous, and, anyway, he didn't think he was quite up to the standard; so Mrs. Blunt decided to take this on herself.

On the afternoon before breaking-up day there was a final practice in Big Hall, after which the instruments of the Orchestral Society were carefully placed away in the little room under the platform, the different music was all placed, ready, and Mrs. Blunt gave a final trial run on the piano. Everything was in order!

A certain number of volunteers were dragged in to make the Hall respectable, and to arrange the desk and chairs. It was right on tea-time when they had finished the job, and they wandered out with the consciousness of those who have done their duty. But, the porter, locked the main door of Hall when everyone had left, because they didn't want anyone wandering round, and maybe disturbing things again, until the concert was due to begin. "Doors open at 5.35," the notice in the entrance-hall ran. "Concert begins at 6 o'clock prompt."

Queer thing about those volunteers who fixed the desks and chairs was that they included Richard Dexter, James Curtis, Lincoln and Washington Beck. Nobody would dream of saving an unkind word

about the bonny lads of Study 10, but they weren't the sort who ran after hard work or tried to impress anybody by volunteering for anything. Yet they were there. And when the last of the "volunteers" had wandered out from the Hall, and old Butt was taking a last look round in the dim light before he locked the Hall—they were still there!

But they weren't on view! Very quietly Jimmy Curtis had dodged behind the little screen where the organ-blower usually went; Lincoln and Washington Beck had crept into the very darkest corner of the room under the platform—and this wasn't well lighted at the best of times, being little more than a big store cupboard; the Kid was lying under the long seat at the back of the platform, near the master's entrance, and it would have taken a hundred horse-power searchlight to have picked him out.

Not for five minutes after the strange, heavy silence had settled over the Hall did the Kid venture forth and look cautiously round. Then he gave a light whistle—and from their different hiding-places emerged the other three dastardly conspirators.

For that's exactly what they were. There wasn't going to be any concert to-night, if they could help it!

"The piano first!" said the Kid, and they began. Carefully and really quite skilfully they rained lots of music into the piano's interior. Now and again the Kid would gently touch one of the keys, to see if it were still in working order. If it still showed an inclination to rattle, more sheets of music went in!

Any that was left over was pushed away in the organ-blower's box. Then they went to the little room below the platform, and began to tackle the stringed instruments left by their dear schoolfellows. There were precious few strings left by the time they'd finished!

"It's a great pity!" moaned Jimmy Curtis as he did a bit of artistic work with Hookey Marks' fiddle. "Sill, I don't see why a fellow like Hookey should be encouraged to annoy his school-fellows. Not at all!"

"There'll be some fun to-night!" said the Kid hopefully. "We'll clear out by the master's entrance, but— Be careful! We'll give old Maxwell the tip—and it's up to him to handle the thing after that!"

Quietly and cautiously they stole forth into the darkness of a late-December afternoon. To-night, as the Kid had said, there would doubtless be some fun!

CHAPTER 8. The Old-fashioned Way!

"**Q**UITE! Oh, quite, Mrs. Blunt!" General Bradwood agreed with Head's wife, but the remnant smile was on his face as he turned to Lord Velwood. "But boys have different tastes nowadays. Remember singing in our day, Velwood? Didn't we make the rafters ring! Boys were boys then!"

The General's ideas weren't at all what Mrs. Blunt thought they ought to be, but they wandered across to the school for this great breaking-up concert. All the boys of St. Katie's were gathered in Big Hall and everything was ready. There was some gentle row going on somewhere under the platform, but Roger guessed that would soon die down so he stood up and mumbled his little piece, which again wasn't quite like Jolly Roger. But the first item on the programme would be a pianoforte solo by Mrs. Blunt.

You could still hear bangs and cries from the room under the platform, and one of the masters stole softly forward to tell them to keep quiet just as Mrs. Blunt sat down to the piano. As a matter of fact the row was pretty fierce, because Hookey Marks was dead certain that the strings had been plucked off his violin by young Telford of the Fourth, and he was trying to tell Telford what he'd jolly well do for him if he didn't fork out the strings without any argument.

The row in fact, was becoming pretty serious when the master crept in and whispered a violent "Sh—sh—sh! Keep quiet!" because he knew that Mrs. Blunt was just about to knock a lot of noise out of the grand piano.

At least he thought she was. But Mrs. Blunt felt a bit pained straight away when she discovered that some one had taken her music which she'd left in correct position, all ready, not more than a couple of hours ago. However, after half-a-minute's des-

perate hunting and fumbling, she decided she knew the thing quite well enough to do without any music, so she sat down pretty swiftly and started right away.

But it didn't sound a bit like Holsby's twiddle bits. Thud—biff—pang! One note seemed to be trying to let folks know it was there. Thud! thud!

Mrs. Blunt jumped up, started to do queue tricks with the piano, then looked inside the big, propped-up lid, and suddenly began to struggle to drag out the organs which were jammed in various places inside.

Just as she dragged out the first torn sheets and turned to face the audience in a rather helpless sort of way, Hooky Marks came flying out of the room beneath the platform. Young Telford having discovered that his violin was also minus any strings, suddenly got tired of Hooky's arguments and simply gave a fierce dig with his elbow which sent poor Hooky into the hall.

"I—I'm sorry!" Mrs. Blunt gasped out, and felt horribly uncomfortable for just one second. It seemed to everybody who saw what happened that she was frightfully upset and that the Captain of the school, realising this, suddenly took affairs into his own hands, and before anyone quite knew what had happened, the Sixth had started off into "Forty Years On."

"Forty years on when afe and arunder
Parted are those who are singing to-
day,

When you look back and forgetfully
wonder

What you were like in your work and
your play—"

By the time they reached that point the whole school had taken it up. The General had jumped forward to help Mrs. Blunt, but he was standing by the piano now, and half-smiling upon the school, while Lord Velwood was already singing the old song with the best of them.

"Follow up, follow up, follow up!" Didn't they make the raster ring once again. This was old times once more. The general was whispering, though it was very nearly a shout because of the din. "Don't trouble, Mrs. Blunt! Let them sing this first! Quite like old times. Sorry about this. Must get it repaired quickly!"

"Don't trouble, please!" Mrs. Blunt was

shaking her head, and quite a jolly little smile had come to her face now. "I—I think the boys prefer the old singing to a real concert!"

Then, with just a little bow she waved her hand very gently to the school. One could hardly say what it was, but somehow to Maxwell and the Sixth, and to four bright lads who really knew, it seemed to mean: "Carry on! You have it your own way!"

And it really did mean that! The master who had been in the room beneath the platform, as soon as he realised that the pianoforte solo was temporarily washed out, crept forth once more and mounted the steps of the platform. He was just in time to speak to Mrs. Blunt before she turned to her husband, who was already standing like a frozen Wellington, trying to understand why his wife had suddenly stopped the performance.

"All the boys' instruments have been interfered with!" Mr. Russell, the master, whispered. "Most extraordinary! I—"

"Don't worry, Mr. Russell, please!" Mrs. Blunt whispered back. "Just make it as in the old days—the real singing the boys love!"

Oh, but she was a sport! You're bound to put that down to her credit right away. Maxwell and those who were watching the scene, even while they kept up the song, saw her turn to the Head himself, and saw the frozen smile on Roger's face change to one of cheerfulness.

"No, it's quite all right, Roger!" Mrs. Blunt told him. "I think you said the boys would decide! Well, they have! They don't want high-brow concert for the night before breaking-up, and they do want one of the sing-songs the general is so keen on. They have indicated that quite clearly. Perhaps you'll arrange for it to go on in the old style."

"But you—you are staying?" Roger asked, and he was still a little bit puzzled yet.

"Of course I am!" she laughed. "I'm going to enjoy myself, too!"

Mind you, I don't think she really thought she was, but she made up her mind to go through with it and not make any fuss, or run away in a temper, or tell Roger to stop the row. No, she'd decided a long time ago to try and understand the boys' minds, and Roger himself had given

her a few tips on the subject. To-night, after hearing the general, Lord Velwood and her husband talk of their breaking-up row in the same way she'd have spoken of a real clammy concert she'd heard in her school-days, she decided that boys had different tastes.

Mr. Buffell had run down the platform again and made two or three of the orchestra help him to drag the old upright piano out from the room. Only occasionally was it used nowadays, but old Helsby could get nearly as much row out of it as he could out of the grand.

"Forty Years On," died away at last, and Roger was standing at the reading-desk. The school guessed that something had come unstuck and there was a sense of excitement over them all as they waited for Roger to speak.

"I am sorry to tell you that something has happened to our musical instruments," Jolly Roger called out cheerfully. "In the circumstances, therefore, we shall all join in the old songs, as usual. What next?"

He looked at Maxwell, who gave the prompt reply. "British Grenadiers, sir."

"Very appropriate!" laughed Roger and looked at the general. My hat! The general was smiling all over his face, and nodding his head joyfully. Hadn't he been in the Grenadiers?

"The British Grenadiers," said Roger, and retired to the back of the platform where he began to laugh with his wife and Miss Harper. Helsby had struck up and inside four seconds the whole school was well away.

Usually, on this last night before Christmas, singing was a bit rowdier than usual, simply because they generally dragged in a few spells of cheering. The Head, the Governors, the School, and maybe one or two masters came in for cheers and "He's a jolly good fellow." But never until to-night had there been real "strangers" at the last singing of the year.

Still, old Maxwell knew what to do! As the last shout of the "Grenadiers" died down, Maxwell was standing on the form.

"General Sir Thomas Bradwood!" he yelled. "Hip, hip, hooray!"

Helsby was ready for them when the row began to peter out. A bang on the

piano, and they let it rip once more. "For he's a jolly good fellow! And so say all of us!"

"Speech!" There was always a prize man who yelled that out, but Roger had whispered to the general just to let him know about it. The general stepped to the reading-desk, gave a sort of salute, and cried out: "Thank you, boys! Thank you! A very happy Christmas to you all!"

Roger was alongside him at once, and his hand went up. Silence! "I think a Christmas carol at this stage," Roger called out. "Three verses of 'Good King Wenceslas,' please!"

Maxwell was on the seat again before they'd finished. They expected that this time it would be "The Head!" but it wasn't! Maxwell had his own ideas about that!

"Mrs. Roger—" He jolly nearly forgot to say "Blunt," but just remembered in time. "Hip, hip, hooray!"

It was very probably the first time Mrs. Roger Blunt had had cheers all to herself. And it's a thrilling sort of experience! Three hundred boys standing and cheering lustily, and even the masters standing and cheering madly! You'd only to look at the masters to realize that they were only overgrown boys and were just as much in this set as the chaps in the Forms. And then—"For she's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us!"

A hundred fellows qualified for the prize of chief am as they yelled "Speech! Speech!"

Mrs. Blunt hesitated; her husband gave a gentle wag, and whispered to her, and then the Head's wife was calling out, rather nervously, but quite clearly: "Thank you—very much, boys! I—am very glad. I—with you all a very happy Christmas!"

More cheering! But it was a night of cheering! They sang the old songs that had been sung at Katie's for forty years and more at Christmas, and they cheered the Head, and they cheered the Visitors, and they sang "For he's a jolly good fellow!" about twenty times.

On the platform Jolly Roger was beaming on everybody, and in turn everybody was beaming at Jolly Roger. But every now and again, as they were singing, Roger would wander along to the grand piano and start hunting inside the thing. One by

cise, and without any fuss, he dragged out the copies of the music which had been so skillfully rammed in this afternoon.

Nobody really worried about this—except a few! And they watched Roger intently as he left the next song in charge of Mr. Ruffell and wandered down from the platform and into the queer room below. No one could see what he was doing in here, but Maxwell right at the front could give a good guess that Roger was using an electric torch and hunting round pretty carefully!

But when Roger came out his face was still smiling, and he mounted the platform again and announced the last song of the evening. Later, he made just a brief speech; it was a very practical affair because it just repeated the old orders for the morrow about ticket money, times of trains, the different conveyances, and all the usual rigmarole connected with the job of packing off the whole school to their parents' guardians and friends, winding up with just a very brief review of the past term and hopes for the next term.

"And a very happy and jolly Christmas to you all!" he cried and at that the cheering broke loose once again, though above it all could be heard: "A happy Christmas to you, sir!"

Then "God Save the King," as always, and a quiet sort of procession from the Hall, though the row outside grew louder and louder as the different Forms got out. In the general rumpus no one worried about the fact that a few masters were knocking round, or that Roger himself was using his eagle eyes. But he was!

Maxwell had waited to collar the Kid and Curtis, and went off with them to their study. The two Becks were there, and felt jolly pleased about the part they'd played in this great stunt to-night.

"Mind you, I think Roger's got his suspicions!" Maxwell said. "But I think he's too good a sport—ah!"

For Jolly Roger himself had quietly entered the room, and was beaming on them as he held out a small knife, the blade of which was now open and had been broken at the end.

"This is yours, I think, Beck minor?" he asked cheerily. "No, don't rush away, Maxwell! You may be interested in this!"

He turned a little, and, of course, his

eagle eye dropped on the Kid the moment he had handed the knife over to Washy Beck.

"I found it in the little store-rooms under the platform, Dexter!" Roger said, in that cheery "I-know-all-about-it-and-a-lot-more" tone he could use so well. "Broken apparently in trying to unscrew one end of a piccolo I found there. I should imagine Beck minor has a cut on his left hand, haven't you, Beck? I guessed so. You were there when it happened, Dexter, of course!"

"Yes, sir," said the Kid, quite simply.

"And Curtis and Beck major, I presume?" said Roger. "No one else, Dexter?"

"No, sir," Richard answered, quite truthfully.

"No! Well, you did the job very well! Would you believe it, Maxwell, these four boys deliberately stuffed the piano and carried out various adjustments to the instruments of the orchestral society, thus rendering the concert which was arranged to take place this evening entirely impossible. As a result, of course, we simply had the usual singing, and the school was deprived of what, I am sure, would have been a most interesting programme. You agree with me that this is a most serious offence against the rules of the school, Maxwell?"

Maxwell could feel Roger's eyes absolutely piercing him. It was a horrible position to be in, but Maxwell didn't really funk it.

"Well, sir, I was wondering—I mean, sir, I think the school enjoyed the singing a good deal better than any set programme sir," the captain said. "After all, it's an old tradition, sir. And of course, at Christmas-time. One ought not to play practical jokes too much, sir, but a little thing of that sort, I mean. Well it didn't do any harm, did it, sir? I know the school prefers the old 'singing,' sir, and I suppose these fellows knew, too, and—Well, sir!"

He broke off helplessly, but met Roger's eyes bravely enough—and Roger began to laugh!

"All right, Maxwell! I see your point of view! Of course, if you had had any hand in it, I should have demanded a full explanation," Roger said. "You would, of course, have explained that it wasn't quite

the sort of thing to come to see me about—for various reasons which you would not quite care to explain in full to the headmaster. That, I imagine, would be the line which you would take, Maxwell!"

"Yes, sir," Maxwell admitted, and realized afresh that Roger was a marvel.

"Then I think it is very fortunate that you were not in this business, Maxwell!" Roger said briskly. "I should most certainly have told you that it was your duty to come to me, even at the risk of hurting my sensitive nature, and put before me the views of the prefects. However, it is not necessary for me to give you my views on this aspect because, of course, you were not with Dexter and the others. In the circumstances I shall leave the whole matter over to the prefects to deal with in whatever way they think proper. They will doubtless be very angry when they hear the part these boys have played, and I have full confidence in their ability to mete out due punishment to the culprits. I am glad I have discovered the full truth. No! Don't attempt to defend them further, Maxwell!"

"I—I was only going to explain, sir—" Maxwell began.

"No further explanation is necessary!" Roger said. "The matter is now in your hands. Myself—I shall forget the matter from this moment lest in my anger I am tempted to take more drastic steps. Good-night, boys! It has been a most enjoyable evening! A merry Christmas to you all!"

"Good-night, sir," they began. "A merry—" But Roger had gone.

"My hat!" breathed Maxwell, and stared at the Kid. "How did he know? That knife—But, d'you think he was pulling my leg a bit about hauling you up before the prefects?"

"Pulling your leg?" asked the Kid. "My giddy aunt, Maxwell! The man's a marvel! He knows everything. But I think he jolly well wanted this to happen! Only he had to let us know that he knew just as a sort of warning that you can never bluff him. Though I guess we managed to bluff him last week. Looky! Still, I guess we've really won through again to-night, and done the old school a bit of good once again!"

They left it at that because other fellows came barging in, and there was a

general row going on everywhere. The last night of the term! To-morrow—home, Christmas, a full month or more before they need worry about books or prep, or any other silly thing! Who cared?

A joyous, rowdy night, with no question of rules or even of lights out till long after the right time! And in the morning all the excitement of seeing different parties off for the station, and yelling out "A Merry Christmas!" and shaking hands with everybody.

The last fest of the year had been played—and would be forgotten by the time they came back. Everybody was laughing and jolly and cheerful—except the one fellow you would have expected to be more cheerful than anybody else.

There seemed to be something on Dickie Dexter's mind this morning, and even Linky Bock noticed it, and had a word with the Kid.

"Oh, it's all right!" the Kid asserted. "But—oh, I don't know. Mean to say, I'm not frightfully keen on Christmas. But come on. Here's our tin Lizzie! Good-bye, Benny! Merry Christmas! See you next term!"

They had all gone at last, and St. Katie's was a school of ghosts, given over to cleaners and servants, while the boys had scattered north, south, east and west throughout the country. The Berks were joining their people in London; Jimmy Curtis was probably going to France with his uncle, and was looking forward to a good time. But Dickie Dexter—the Kid wasn't looking forward to anything but a dull, flat month because nothing ever happened in that part of the world where he was doomed to spend his Christmas holidays!

CHAPTER 7.

A Change for the Kid!

"O H, my hat!" murmured Richard Dexter for the second time within the hour.

"Really, Richard!" Mr. Herbert Dimmell's voice was almost quivering with pained sorrow. "I wish—I really do wish—I don't know!"

Uncle Herbert gave it up in despair, and his two sisters, Richard's Aunt Amelia and

Aunt Joan, looked at each other pathetically. There was just the faintest suspicion of a smile in Aunt Joan's eyes, but Aunt Agatha was almost as pained as her brother.

"Do all the boys at your school use such strange expressions, Richard?" Aunt Agatha asked, and eyed him sorrowfully.

"Oh, not all of them," the Kid felt bound to answer. "Some chaps say 'Oh, dear!' and some just say 'Jumping meek!' They are bound to say something, aren't they?"

"I really cannot see any necessity for such expressions at all," Mr. Dimadell said. "My own impression—and I really feel quite strongly upon this subject—is that your tutors and masters are to blame for not impressing upon you the necessity for keeping the English tongue pure and undebased. I think I shall write—Will you kindly remind me, Agatha, to address a letter on this subject to the editor of the 'Broad Review'? If Richard is a typical specimen of the English schoolboy—"

Mr. Dimadell mumbled painfully and naggingly on. The Kid began to practise the *Memo* code with a table-knife, until he was gently reproved by his Aunt Agatha. Then he stuck his hands in his pocket and leaned back in his chair. Even Aunt Joan very quietly called his attention to the fact that such things were not done in the best circles.

It was a cheery beginning for what is usually regarded as one of the bright days of the year. But breakfast on Christmas morning at the Globe House, Runge, was not much different from the seven other breakfasts the Kid had already had there these Christmas holidays.

Dickie Dexter would have told you that his uncle and aunts were not really bad sorts, but Mr. Dimadell was a semi-invalid, and any little thing was liable to upset his nerves. It was hard luck, in a way, that they had to put up with Richard during the holidays, but Richard's father and mother were away in some far-off clime and weren't likely to be home for another year or two. Richard's mother was the youngest sister of the Dimadell family, but the only one who bore any resemblance to her was Aunt Joan, and there were times when Richard thought Aunt Joan would be a

first-class sport if she'd keep clear of Uncle Herbert and Aunt Agatha.

But even Aunt Joan worried the Kid to tears at times. She was horribly afraid that he was going to catch cold if Richard ventured outside the house. Certainly this week had been nearly bad enough to justify her, for cold rain had been followed by driving sleet, and yesterday even the well-known drive of the Globe House had been suddenly turned into a sheet of glass by the sharp snap of frost which had bobbed up.

Christmas Day had dawned with sullen shiveriness. When at last the Kid was free to wander from the breakfast table he drifted to the window and stared out hopelessly over the bleak garden. One could almost feel the thin wind which bent the gaunt saplings, and the sky was a leaden grey, heavily forbidding in its leaden dullness.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" the Kid murmured, and turned round fearfully lest anyone had overheard him. "This is going to be a jolly Christmas! I'm fed—fed right up!"

Even in the summer his kind relatives got on the Kid's nerves, so that he was jolly glad to get back to Katie's again. But on Christmas Day the hours dragged hopelessly along. Somehow he didn't even want to read, and he kept thinking of the jolly time Linky and Wasby Beck would be having at the big London hotel where they were staying. Linky had half suggested that the Kid ought to join them there, but the Kid had explained exactly how his uncle and aunts would regard such a proposal.

Jimmy Curtis would probably be in the South of France, because his uncle, who took charge of Jimmy during holidays, was rather keen on the sunshine and cheeriness of that part of the globe. As the Kid stared through the window at different times during the long-drawn-out morning, he quite appreciated Jimmy's uncle's point of view. The skies had grown, if anything, heavier and more leaden, and now and again great white snowflakes drifted across the greyness. As they sat down to the Christmas dinner—which was all right, you know, but wasn't exactly festive, because Mr. Dimadell had to be very careful of what he ate, and he didn't like to see

other people overdoing it—the snowflakes were beginning to do their well-known whirling act, and the bleak garden was beginning to take on a real Christmas dress.

But that didn't cheer the Kid one little bit. His aunts would have had several fits if he'd attempted to go out in such weather; the only possible programme before him this afternoon was to sit in the drawing-room with his aunts and pretend to read "Inspiring Thoughts for Quiet Hours," which had been Aunt Agatha's Christmas present to him.

He was just going to turn from the dining-room window and drift to the drawing-room to settle down to his fate, when something came charging down the drive.

Whirr! Whizz! Gr-r-r-r! A long, lean car, very much covered up on the top deck, simply shot past the window, and pulled up with a sudden jerk by the front door of the Glebe House. For a brief space, at all events, the Kid forgot his boredom in his wonder. A dozen possibilities were in his mind as, through the stormy window and drifting snowflakes, he could discern two figures, smothered in heavy coats and leather caps, jump from the car and make a dash for the door-bell.

The bell clanged noisily through the house, and Richard grinned to himself as he pictured his uncle, just settling off for his afternoon nap in the study, being rudely disturbed by such a racket. He guessed these people weren't regular visitors at the Glebe House, or they'd have been warned by now.

The Kid waited a minute or two before drifting out of the dining-room. One never knew. Something might happen if he wandered casually into the drawing-room, where doubtless the visitors had been shown.

But no! The visitors had been taken to the study, and the Kid could hear his uncle's voice raised in querulous protest, and then Aunt Joan's voice reached him.

"I will call Richard and explain," she said. "In such a case, Herbert, I feel—"

"Don't—don't alarm him, please!" another voice interrupted, and just for an instant the Kid had a shock as he recognised the queer little drawl, despite the touch of sadness in the tones. It was Lincoln Bock!

But why? Again the Kid's quick-acting mind had a dozen swift ideas, going from joyous hope, as he saw a prospect of escape, tight down to black despair once more as he realised the hopelessness of his uncle and aunts allowing him to go for a joy-ride on such a day as this!

"Oh, Richard!" Aunt Joan almost ran into him as she came from the study. "Some visitors have called—friends of yours, they are. I fear they have not brought happy news, dear Richard; but you are brave. You must be ready to hear something which may shock you. I cannot tell you—I don't quite understand yet, but it concerns one of your school friends. Come with me!"

In the study the first thing the Kid saw was Washy Beck, standing rather like a stuffed grizzly bear, and with an expression on his face which the Kid had only seen when Washy was getting it in the neck from Jolly Roger. He looked horribly sorry for himself!

Lincoln Bock was talking in a very low voice to Mr. Dimsdell, and his back was towards the Kid as he entered the room. But he turned just after the Kid came in and held out his hand slowly and sorrowfully. There was nothing of that Christmas feeling about the Beck brothers to-day!

"Ah, Richard!" Linky's voice was charged with emotion. "I trust you are quite well, dear boy. I—Washington and I came here to—well, I cannot say it is good news we bring. Eh—Jimmy Curtis—"

He stopped and looked at Mr. Dimsdell as though he thought he ought to explain.

"There has apparently been an accident, Richard," Mr. Dimsdell said. "Nothing serious—at least, it is hoped not."

"No, no! It's not serious!" Linky Beck protested. "I mean—Jimmy dropped off a car—the door was open, and—well, the car had been going at more than thirty miles an hour, and Jimmy wants to see you, Richard. He keeps saying 'Tell Dexter—ask Dickie Dexter to come.' And—well, we've promised to bring you to him. I know it's Christmas Day, but—you'll come, Richard!"

The Kid was staring in puzzled wonder at Lincoln Bock. For the life of him he couldn't quite grasp it all, and just at first he had an idea that this was some new stunt of Linky's. But there was nothing

joking or leg-pulling in Linky's manner, and the Kid began to realize that for once in his life Lincoln Beck was genuinely upset. Washington Beck practically never opened his mouth, and it didn't need a thought-reader to grasp the fact that Waddy wasn't having a pleasant Christmas.

Jimmy Curtis hurt? It was rotten; but Linky Beck was taking out his watch, and was obviously afraid that they were going to be late. Just at first, of course, Aunt Agatha asserted definitely that Richard couldn't go because the weather was too terrible, but Uncle Herbert, strangely enough, took the other point of view. If these other two boys could risk the weather to come for Richard, why shouldn't Richard go?

It took a lot to give Dickie Dexter a confused and dazed mind, but he got it all right in the next ten minutes. His aunts were fussing round him and wrapping mufflers about him; they even packed a bag hastily in case it was impossible for him to return that night; Washington Beck piled on him one of those great leather coats and thick gauntlets; Mr. Dimadell was apparently discussing the details of the accident with Lincoln Beck, and Linky was shaking his head and saying: "Poor old Jimmy! He was Richard's best friend! Why, at school, you never saw one without the other!"

The Kid was being bundled into the car, and his aunts were standing just inside the hall trying to call messages to him. By now the snow had settled down in real earnest to cover the earth with a carpet of white. Lincoln and Washington Beck clambered aboard, and with much snorting and grinding the lean monster was maneuvered round, and away up the drive she swung.

It was difficult to ask any questions of either Linky or Waddy as the car sped onwards. Even now the Kid hadn't any real idea of what had happened to Jimmy Curtis, and he wished Linky wouldn't be so horribly mysterious and solemn about it.

They had run at a fairly good pace for perhaps a couple of miles when Linky slowed down, and was content to jog along very gently. The Kid, trying to peer over Linky's head, and through the snow-dispersed wind screen, could see a figure standing ahead of them in the middle of

the road. He had one hand upraised, and Linky obeyed the command without argument.

"Think we might do a ginger wine, boys?" Linky called cheerfully over his shoulder as the car came to a standstill. "Hop out, Kid! Here we are, Jimmy! No trouble at all! The little laddie came like a pet lamb when I told him you'd been asking for him all morning!"

The Kid had opened the little door and hopped out on to the snow-covered highway. There, in big motoring-coat, but with one hand joyfully outstretched towards Dexter, was Jimmy Curtis!

"Jimmy! I'm jolly glad!" The Kid's first greeting was full of enthusiasm, though his voice changed pretty swiftly. "But what's the giddy scheme? You haven't been injured, have you? That piece of mutt came dashing up to our show and told a horrible yarn about you falling from a car and being terribly smashed up!"

"Who did?" Jimmy seemed amazed at such a story. "You didn't tell them that, did you, Linky?"

"Oh, shucks!" Lincoln Beck waved his gauntleted hand in gentle amusement. "Me and George Washington are twin brothers. The Kid must have misunderstood me for sure, Jimmy. All I said was that you dropped out of a car the door being open. You did, Jimmy, didn't you? You didn't climb over the door or anything fancy like that, did you?"

"But you said the car was going at thirty miles an hour!" protested the Kid.

"No, no, child," Lincoln said kindly. "I said it had been going at thirty miles an hour, and it really had, Kid, before I slowed down for Jimmy to hop or drop out. No, little one! You mustn't try and make out that Uncle Linky strayed from the paths of truthfulness on Christmas Day or any other day. But let's drag the old tin-can over to this side of the road, and then wander into this ancient hostelry and see if they'll give us a little refreshment before we proceed onwards. This is going to be the best Christmas of your life, Kid! A present from Uncle Linky who thought you might be missing him! O— you're going to enjoy yourself, my little one!"

"You trust Linky!" murmured Washington Beck, who seemed to have lost that sad

look about the eyes now, and even Jimmy Curtis laughed joyfully, as they ran through the snow towards the entrance to the "White Hart Hotel."

The Kid laughed, too, and decided definitely that just for a change he'd follow Washy's advice and "Trust Linky." It was Christmas Day, and the Kid felt quite sure he'd have a lot more fun with Linky Beck and his "lin-can" than he could possibly have at the Globe House. It was going to be a Merry Christmas after all.

CHAPTER 2.

Lost or Strayed!

YOU might think about a lot of things which happened in Lincoln Beck's life that they came just by accident. Of course, often enough some of his most brilliant schemes became unstruck at critical moments, but that wasn't Linky's fault. It was only because somebody else botched in and tried to upset things.

For instance it wasn't just Linky's luck that the landlord of the "White Hart" was quite prepared to welcome the four lads of St. Katie's when they drifted in with the snow-flakes this Christmas afternoon. Two days ago Linky had made this same journey and found out exactly where the Globe House, Passage, lay, and, further, just what the "White Hart" could do for four lads if they called about three o'clock, or maybe a little after, on Christmas Day. "Cut it out, Kid," he murmured gently, when presently the four were sitting in a jolly, oak panelled room, with a great fire lighting up the array of silver and glass laid on the white tablecloth, or sending gleams of deepest red in the polished back of the big, deep-seated settle in which Linky was already lounging. "Did you think Uncle Linky was going to let you spend a miserable Christmas all by your little lonesome? Didn't you tell me your uncle was a fossilised old pie-man who wouldn't dream of letting you run off for a day with the bad lads of Katie's? That's the time when Uncle Linky gives the old think-box a jerk!"

It had been in Linky's mind all the time from the very moment they gave a last cheer to Katie's and the ancient car, piled high with luggage, began to rumble

ahead for Dukchester station, that Christmas wouldn't be quite right if Dickie Dexter and Jimmy Curtis didn't join up with the Beck outfit in some way or other.

There were difficulties in the way, of course. But, strange as it may seem, Jolly Roger actually helped Lincoln quite a lot. Lincoln's school report came along the morning after the Becks rejoined their parents at the Amurias Hotel, London. Knowing what Roger knew about Linky, you'd guess that the "General Remarks" by the Head of Katie's wouldn't be exactly complimentary, and that after reading these remarks about his son, Mr. Cyrus Beck would give his well-known imitation of a fireworks display!

But it was nothing like that.

"Has made satisfactory progress in his Form work," wrote Mr. Blunt, "and is settling down very well to school routine. In view of his previous experience, I am well pleased with his efforts."

"ROUND BLUNT (Headmaster)."

Jolly decent of Roger it was, and even Lincoln felt that next term—well, if he wasn't exactly the fair-headed laddie of Katie's, at least he'd be jolly careful!

Mr. Beck simply beamed upon Linky, and you can take it for granted that both Linky and Washy played up to him. Could they have their dear school companions along to play with them over Christmas? Why, of course! Nothing would please Mr. Beck more. Get the car out and allow Linky to make a few gentle runs in it? Certainly! For the first time in his life Mr. Beck began to feel proud of his boys.

To get Jimmy Curtis along was quite simple. Jimmy's uncle wasn't going to the South of France until his nephew had gone back to school again, and he was only too pleased to be relieved of the responsibility of having Jimmy hanging round for a couple of days or so over Christmas. So Jimmy joined the Beck mob on Christmas Eve, and had a ripping time.

Then Lincoln fixed up his little stunt to drag the Kid into the happy gathering. From what Dickie Dexter had told him, he knew that it wouldn't be a simple job, and that was why he timed his arrival at the Globe House at what Lincoln reckoned was the appropriate moment. They might be suspicious if he landed there in the middle of the morning, or they might even be polite, and want Lin-

could stay to lunch, and Linky wasn't keen on that idea.

But his scheme had worked perfectly. He'd given the Kid a surprise, which pleased Linky, and he'd avoided any argument or protests, and there wasn't even a strict time limit set on the duration of the Kid's trip.

And here the four were, all merry and bright, and quite ready for the feed which the landlord of the White Hart presently laid before them. Lincoln, Washy, and Curtis were ravenously hungry, and although the Kid had had a fair sort of feed about an hour ago, he was quite prepared to give them a helping hand on the present job. The meals at the Globe House were prepared for infants and invalids, and not for growing lads.

"I told the old boy not to expect us back too early," Linky remarked, as he had a second helping of Christmas pudding. "We'll quit this place about four-thirty, and should hit little old London about half-past six. You'll be just raising that peckish feeling again by that time, but to-night the old boy's going to give us what's good for us, and the programme begins about eight. That little shack where the old lad's camping out know all about Christmas, and I guess we're all in for a top-hole time."

Oh, Linky had it all mapped out! A pleasant, gently-exciting day it was going to be, and to-morrow's programme would be the same, only there was a theatre fixed up for that. They'd have a jolly trip back to Romage on the third day, and land the Kid amongst his own relatives again, with the glad news that Jimmy Curtis was quite out of danger and able to sit up and take a little nourishment. Maybe they'd fix up some little scheme for getting in one or two more glad reunions before they made the trip to Katie's again.

It was very jolly sitting in this pleasant room and talking of days at Katie's, and what they would do in the summer, and of the fun they'd have next term. Almost they forgot that they still had a little journey of forty to fifty miles before them, and that the snow was still coming down outside. It was the landlord who reminded them of this when he came into the fire-lit room presently.

"Far to go, young gentlemen?" he asked.

"Only London," Linky told him cheerily.

"The old tin-can will do it in a couple of hours."

"I'm thinking you're in for a rough passage if you're trying to make London to-night, sir," the landlord said. "Snow! They said it'd be a white Christmas, and it's true enough. If you take my advice

But Lincoln wasn't the lad to take anybody's advice when it meant upsetting his programme. Inside two minutes they were scrambling into their overcoats and mufflers and thick gloves. Linky dashed off first to draw the car out from the shed where it had been temporarily sheltered, and the three followed more leisurely.

"Jumping snakes!" said Jimmy Curtis, as they stood on the top step and stared out. "I guess the landlord is about right! This is the first time I've seen a real snow-storm! I say, Linky, what about it, old son? Are you going to take your chance, or—"

"Oh, shucks!" Lincoln called back. "A bit of snow won't upset the old tin-can. Why, when Bill Rokeby took me along to see his granddad, who live way out— But hop in, boys! You'll be ready for a real feed by the time we hit the old Asturias again."

"You trust Linky!" murmured Washy Beck, as he clambered into the car. And the others followed him without argument. After all, Linky did know something about a car, and they weren't going to show any funk.

Slowly the car swung out into the road. The Kid was sitting now alongside Linky at the driving-wheel, and Washy and Curtis were at the back. The powerful headlights shone on a long stretch of trackless white, and already the big snow-flakes were obscuring the wind-screen. Linky made some adjustment which enabled him to have a clear view over the top, but this wasn't exactly an improvement for the others.

"And it's oh, for the life of a sailor!" Linky bellowed cheerfully as the car lurched over and then righted itself. "Sing up, boys! This is where the old auto shows the stuff she's made of. Ahoy, there! Light on the starboard bow!"

Another car heaved past them, struggling slowly and painfully, it seemed, against the snow. It was very jolly, of course, but nobody except Linky felt like singing. The Kid marvelled, indeed, that Lincoln could

see ahead at all; for, so far as he was concerned, there was little more than a black curtain over which rained millions of white flakes. But the old tin-can wasn't trying to break any records to-night—and Linky could handle a car!

They must have been jogging and churning ahead for a full hour before they struck their first packet of trouble. By this time both the Kid and Curtis had reached the stage where most emphatically they followed Brother Washy's advice to "Trust Linky!" They were jolly thankful no one was relying on them to land them at the Asturias Hotel.

Even Linky seemed to be getting a bit worried, though. The car had slowed down very gradually, and now seemed to be ploughing along with a slow jerking motion, while Linky was no longer lying back in his seat, but was crouching over the wheel and trying to peer ahead or through the window of the storm-cover at his side.

Now they were simply crawling heavily along, and for quite a long time Linky hadn't spoken a word.

"Ah! That's a sign-post!" Linky pulled the car to a standstill, and hopped out. The Kid followed him, but the sign-post, even after Linky had managed to clear away some of the snow which obscured it, was precious little use. The names, so far as they could decipher them, didn't help them one little bit since they seemed to be of places that weren't on the map.

They had passed through odd villages, and even glimpsed large houses, with lights peeping from many windows, once or twice on this journey, but at this juncture they might have been amongst Arctic wastes. Not a light nor a vestige of human habitation could they see, and the great snowflakes still whirled pitilessly around them.

"Well, we'll push on, boys!" Linky called, still cheerily. "Keep a look out, and may be you'll see the North Pole round the corner. When me and old Peary went seal-hunting— Oh, uh! A light! Land ahead, boys!"

It was a light! Not a farthing dip, nor a bobby's lantern, but a light that made even Linky's bright beams at the front look weak and feeble. It swept across the road, showing up the snow-covered hedges which marked the boundaries, the black,

black-and-white of the leafless trees, and the whirling, dancing flakes and sweeping drifts.

Now the light swept on a little farther, which made it easier for Linky to judge the point from which it came. The car was already moving forward, slowly and cumbersome, towards it, and in five minutes or so they came to a standstill beneath it. Apparently it was a small searchlight fixed in the centre of an ironwork arch, which marked the entrance to the drive of some large house.

Just how it was worked, or what its object was exactly, they had no chance to discover. Almost eerily the thing swung downwards till it enveloped the car itself in a blaze of light!

The car had drawn up quite near a house that was evidently one of the lodges, and the four boys were already scrambling out, when into the broad beam from the searchlight above them came the figure of a man.

And they knew him! Recognised him straight away!

"My giddy aunt!" gasped the Kid. "Father Christmas!"

Of course, they knew it was a joke, or something of that sort, but it was the queerest, quaintest, most amazing surprise in this day of funny surprises. There he was, a big, hefty, red-robed, white-whiskered Father Christmas, with the snow whirling round him, and the searchlight above showing up his red cheeks and the glistening buttons on his wonderful coat. But he was a pretty up-to-date sort of chap, because, almost as soon as they'd grasped who he was, he swung a long cape over his coat to keep the snow from it.

"Father Christmas it is!" he hailed them joyfully. "Ah, ah! Schoolboys, twat! My luck is always in! The real, modern, right up-to-date schoolboy, riding in a car, and coming to hunt Father Christmas in case he can't come out to them! Splendid! Can I squeeze in the car, and I'll tell you where to run it! Good boys! Swing up the drive! Switch the light behind us, Jekks!"

He bawled the last command out, as Linky turned the car slowly into the drive. The Kid, Wasky Beck, and Jimmy Curtis were squeezed in at the back, and Father Christmas sat with Linky at the front. Now the light behind them showed a broad drive, and presently, through the snow,

loomed a great house, with many yellow lights gleaming from its windows.

"Welcome to the home of Father Christmas!" laughed the red-robed giant, as he jumped from the car when Linky brought it to a standstill. "Leave the car! Someone else will see to that! Welcome to all of you!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Cure for Nerves!

JUST at first the Kid's impression was that this was some amazing stunt of Linky Beck's, although the more he thought about it the more he realised that even Linky couldn't have ordered a snowstorm, or even have timed everything quite so exactly.

As a matter of fact, Lincoln Beck was just as much puzzled as the Kid. The only thing he felt, however, was that as usual his luck was holding good. He wouldn't have admitted it to any of the others, but he was beginning to get the wind up a bit when he realised there was prospect of spending the night ploughing through the snow, or even getting stuck, especially after all he'd promised the lads.

Now, well, this was an adventure, anyway! His father would probably jump to the conclusion that Linky and Washy had decided to stay at Dickie Dexter's place, and would put it down to Linky's credit that he had enough sense not to try and drive through this snow. So that was all right!

But this Father Christmas merchant! What was the idea exactly? The bright lads of Katie's weren't exactly infants in arms, and, even in their surprise, they were trying to weigh it all up and find out where the catch came in.

Following Father Christmas they passed through the outer hall and entered a wonderfully impressive inner hall, where liveried footmen stood ready to receive them. To one of these Father Christmas just whispered a command, then turned to the four boys.

"See you again in a short time, boys!" he told them cheerily. "Walton will see you have anything you want, but I've just got to run away now. My busy night, you know. Don't waste time, Walton. We don't want to miss any of the fun."

He hurried off there and then, leaving the four with the footman.

"Will you come this way, sir?" the manservant didn't show the slightest sign of any surprise as he led them up the wide stairs, along a corridor, and into a very pleasantly furnished bed-room, where a bright fire was blazing. It rather looked as though the room were in use, for quite a lot of clothes were laid out.

"May I help you, sir?" The footman began to give a hand in removing their heavy coats and other motoring paraphernalia, and you wouldn't have guessed that he was just eyeing them over to judge the sort of chaps they were. "Ah, you will not require to change, sir? You will doubtless wish to wash, sir? The bath-room is here, sir. These shoes, sir—if you are unable to find any to fit you, sir, I can bring others at once, sir."

"Don't you worry about that, dear lad!" Linky Beck said brightly. "Just keep a grip of yourself for one moment, Archibald! You have a kind face, and I would fain converse with thee for one brief moment. Have a look at my face, and the faces of these bright laddies around me. Have you ever seen us before?"

"I have not had that honour, sir," said the footman, and his face had about as much intelligence and expression in it as an oyster.

"You've been unlucky!" said Lincoln. "But I want to find out, Archibald—you don't mind my calling you Archibald? I only give that name to good-looking, and soon as I saw you—but that's not the point! Tell me, laddie, what's the name of the kind-hearted mite who's dressed up as Father Christmas? Was he expecting us, or are we an accident, or has he got us mixed up with somebody else in the snowstorm? To cut it short, where are we and why?"

"You are in the house of Father Christmas, sir," the footman answered, just as stolidly as ever. "To-day is Christmas Day."

"Oh, shucks!" murmured Lincoln. "Say, Archibald, did you ever hear about George Washington? He used to live down our street, and one day he picked up a little hatchet—"

"I remember the story, sir," the footman said. "May I be of any service to you, sir? You will doubtless find these

shoes more comfortable than the somewhat heavy boots you are now wearing, sir. Permit me, sir."

It wasn't the slightest use trying to get anything out of that footman. The Kid tried and Curtis had a shot, but they got no further than Linky had done. And somehow the manservant changed their boots and shoo'd them into the bath-room, and handed them hair brushes, and even gave them cups of hot coffee, which cheered them up considerably.

Then he ushered them out of the rooms and led them down the broad stairs, flung open a door in a really grandiloquent way which made the Kid feel like a duke, and bowed them into the room on the other side of the door. Even before they got inside they could hear sweet music, and the sound of dancing, and kiddies' voices, as well as grown-up voices, so they were prepared to see something in the way of a mob. But—

"Oh, my hat!" murmured the Kid, as he saw the sight.

"Jumping snakes!" gasped Jimmy Curtis, and Linky Beck said "Gee, Jimmy!" While Washy murmured "My!" in an awe-struck sort of voice.

A big room it was, and you wouldn't have said it was brilliantly lighted, nor yet gently lighted. Yet there were lights all over the place; big electric lights hanging from the ceiling yet partially obscured by pink shell shades; little fairy lamps, half-hidden among holly and mistletoe festoons; dainty little lights on the dozen or more tables, at some of which people were already sitting just as they might have done in a restaurant. Waiting on those who were eating were pierrots and pierrettes, to judge by their jolly attire.

But the tables only occupied a quarter of the room, and away beyond them the real fun was taking place. A gorgeous Christmas tree, glistening and sparkling, and laden with packages tied with many-coloured ribbons, stood in the corner; near it someone was playing a piano, and in the clear space a dozen or more youngsters were dancing to the music.

Before they had time to take it all in one of the pierrots had collared the four lads from Katie's.

"This way, gentlemen, please!" he begged, and they followed him to one of

them empty tables. "This is the children's hour, because very soon the time will come when they must leave us, as you will readily understand, gentlemen. Dinner will be served immediately."

He hopped off and left them sitting at the table and still gazing round trying to take in all the wonders and charms of this place. At a table near them sat four men, all dressed in similar fashion; blue serge suits, cricket shirts, and black shoes. The Kid guessed somehow that they weren't quite used to this sort of thing from the way in which they kept staring about them, or the slightly surprised manner in which they answered the waiter when he addressed them. But there was precious little doubt about the fact that they were doing full justice to the feed!

As a matter of fact that part of the programme presently occupied the attention of Lincoln Beck and his chums. The pierrot who had first collared them had the job of looking after them, and his attitude was that of a man who took a kind, fatherly interest in their welfare, but realised that they were dukes or princes in disguise.

Even Linky, who was by way of being an expert on high-class grub, having studied the matter carefully since the days when he was a child, admitted that the "Asturias Hotel" couldn't have put up a better feed. They didn't overdo it, you understand, but the pierrot merchant seemed to grasp just exactly how they felt about the matter, especially when it came to the sweets stage. But when it came to trying to have a quiet confidential chat with the man, they found him just about as helpful as the footman had been.

"Ah, sir, you have forgotten the fact, but to-day is Christmas Day!" he informed them, in just the same kind fatherly way he'd told them about the grub. "You have already observed Father Christmas himself? He is now about to distribute his gifts to the children. A pleasing ceremony, as I feel you will agree."

"Yep," said Lincoln, because he was really a polite lad and didn't like to be rude to the pierrot. "And who's the other queer-looking mutt, with the gilt edging affair round his headpiece?"

"That, sir, is good King Wenceslas, of

whom you have also heard," said the pierrot.

They couldn't ask him much more because the fun had begun round the Christmas tree, and the kiddies were shouting and laughing, and pulling crackers, or taking their gifts from Father Christmas, and the piano struck up once more.

But by the time the Kid and his friends were really through with the fruit, and had pulled a few crackers themselves, and put on the paper hats and masks, they were beginning to lose that first curiosity about what was behind all this giddy game.

"What's it matter, anyhow?" the Kid pointed out. "If old Father Christmas hadn't turned up we should have been turned into snow men by now, old son! It was a chunk of first-class luck——"

"Linky always hitches on to any luck that's knocking round!" murmured Washy Beck.

"Oh, shucks!" Linky laughed, because he was feeling jolly happy and contented. "Here's old Christmas himself bearing down on us, and bringing his pal, King Wenceslas, along. What a life!"

The children had begun to disappear in the general row; two or three girls in fancy costumes, apparently representing different characters from nursery rhymes, had come in and were shepherding the youngsters off, and Father Christmas was waving them a fond farewell and laughing jocosely.

It was just as the last kiddie disappeared that Father Christmas turned and made a bee-line for Linky and his chums. He dragged good King Wenceslas along with him and greeted the boys boisterously.

You might say that the real fun so far as the chums were concerned began right from that minute. They were introduced to King Wenceslas, and then Father Christmas dragged them off and they joined in some dance which was just starting. Who their partners were they hadn't the faintest idea, because by now all the girls and the men were wearing masks and fancy caps, and anyhow, half the girls were dressed in fancy costumes, from little Red Riding Hood to the milkmaid.

But some of them could dance jolly well, and even the Kid had the feeling that he was a born dancer and thoroughly en-

joyed himself, though generally that sort of thing bored him to tears. And as soon as they'd finished and were sitting down for a brief rest, one of the pierrot-merchants drifted along to the piano and began to sing. He had a topping voice, too, and it was a rattling good song.

Some of the crowd had drifted into a room beyond this large room, but the chief fun was here. Father Christmas was wandering round all the time, radiating an atmosphere of jollity and merriment. Now and again he would put his hand into the bag which was slung over his red robe and take out a little packet which he gave to someone to whom he happened to be talking.

He collared the Kid presently and began to talk cheerily to him about school, and mixed it all up with odd stuff about getting happiness when you can, and about never being able to get happiness unless you shared it with a chum, with which, of course, the Kid agreed, and even told him how his chums had rolled up to take him out to-day because they guessed he'd be lonely.

"That's the right spirit!" Father Christmas said. "You stick to that idea all the time! If you have a stroke of luck share it with somebody else! And I'm very glad I met you to-night. You'll take a little memento of your meeting with Father Christmas away with you? Don't open it till you're well away from him, because I have met queer people who want to argue about it, instead of carrying on. Good luck to you!"

He gave the Kid one of the little packages, very neatly tied up and sealed, and across the white paper cover was written in imitation handwriting: "A Present From Father Christmas."

There was more singing and dancing; more ices and pleasant drinks; more crackers were pulled; a model aeroplane flew the length of the room; servants came in and piled more logs on the great fire, or one of the jolly pierrot-waiter-joke-merchants would wander up to you and drag you away to try some new ice which he claimed was the last word in ices. A giddy, merry, mysterious night, with Father Christmas and King Wenceslas acting as masters of the revel.

But everything comes to an end, of course, though it was somewhere after mid-

night when the same old footman wandered up to the Kid and Jimmy Curtis and remarked once again that he was at their service when they felt that a little rest would fill the bill.

"Right! I think I'm ready, Kid," Curtis said. "We'll go and collect Linky and Washy and see how they're feeling."

A few minutes later they were in the bed-room to which they had been taken when first they arrived at this strange house. The fire was still burning brightly, and everything they could desire was there.

"If there is anything further you require, sir, or if I can be of service to you in any way—" began the footman.

"No, Archibald," Lincoln said kindly. "When you feel like telling us your life story and a few facts about Father Christmas, you will be welcome. I admit I'm fagged, but it's been a very jolly evening, and Lincoln Rock isn't the sort to start any argument when the glad hand's been stuck out at him. Good-night, Archibald!"

"Good-night, sir!" Archibald bowed in his best manner. "Good-night, sir!"

"Jumping snakes! But it's been a night!" said Jimmy Curtis cheerfully, as he started to sling his clothes about the room.

"We'll call it a day!" said the Kid.

"Me—I'm saying nothing!" said Linky. "Old Father Christmas came along and told me what a nice lad I was, and how it had done his hoary old heart a lot of good to see my bright face, and then he said a few words about putting the half-nelson on Happiness the moment you saw it passing by, and he shoved a little packet in my hand; but I mustn't open it to-night in case I don't like it, and— But say! Did you see me doing the two-step with that little milk-maid girl? I remember when I was way back in New York I used to—"

He began to give them a little of his past history once more, and Jimmy Curtis did the same, just to show that America wasn't so many streets ahead of Australia when it came to real adventure and amusement.

But they were very tired. It had, as the Kid remarked, been a day, and presently they'd tucked themselves nicely away in pairs in the two big beds, and

only the gentle glow of the fire illuminated the room.

They awakened to find their old friend Archibald wandering round the room and pulling back curtains, and generally making a row just to let them know that the dawn had turned up and the sun was shining on snow-covered fields; but there hadn't been such a terribly heavy fall after all. Anyway, it was just on nine o'clock, and he thought they'd like to know it.

You never struck such a man as Archibald. He disappeared quietly, but bobbed up again just when they wanted him, and when they were all dressed up once more in their own clothes and boots he took them off to another room where there were quite a lot of people, some of whom they seemed to have seen before, but others who were complete strangers.

"Good-morning! Good-morning!" some of the people greeted them cheerily, and others just went on eating. Some had finished breakfast and others were just beginning, and Linky Beck & Co. quickly got to work, because they hadn't lost their appetites overnight, or done anything silly of that sort.

When they felt they'd done all that was reasonably expected of them they found old Archibald still hovering round.

"I am instructed to inform you, gentlemen, with the compliments of Father Christmas, that should you desire to stay here for the day the house is at your disposal," Archibald said. "But should you have other engagements, I am to tell you that the roads are fairly good, and you should have no difficulty in proceeding on your journey. In anything you wish, sir, I am at your service."

He bowed to Lincoln, whom he evidently regarded as the eldest of the crowd—in which, of course, he was perfectly correct.

"I think we'll push on, boys," Lincoln suggested. "The dear old lad will be wondering where we camped out for the night. Of course, he won't believe us when we tell him, but if we can persuade the old auto to push back to the 'Asturias,' I guess that's the programme for us."

"I will order your car to be in readiness for you in half an hour, sir," said Archibald.

They wandered away to the bed-room again to collect their heavy coats and oddments, including the Kid's bag. While

they were pottering round Archibald came to them once more.

"Your car will be there in a quarter of an hour, gentlemen," he reported; and both the Kid and Linky Beck were struck by the fact that Archibald's voice had lost its richness, and there was a queer little twinkle in his eyes which made him look a lot younger and not quite so footmanish, despite his brown livery.

"Well, Archibald, as I've told you before, I like you," Lincoln Beck said gently. "But say! Can't you tell us all about it. What's the jolly mystery, anyway? We've enjoyed ourselves tophole, but where do we address the polite letter of thanks? What's your name, Archibald, and do you like your job? Don't be afraid, lad! Linky Beck isn't the sort to spread the secret if you give him the hint."

Linky was almost pathetic in his appeal for enlightenment. The footman was smiling quite broadly now, and all his stiffness had gone from him, and he was leaning back against a chest of drawers, with his hands stuck in his pockets.

"Oh, there's nothing really mysterious in it at all," he said, and now his voice sounded almost as drawly and good-humoured as Linky's did. "I'll tell you all about it, if you'd really like to know, especially if you'll not say too much about it. We—the gov'nor and I—rather try to keep it secret, you know, because other people merely think you're silly asses if this sort of stunt gets into the papers. I gather your name is Lincoln Beck? No, I'm not a detective, but quite a lot of your things have your name on them. Any relation to Mr. Cyrus Beck of New York?"

"Only his son," said Lincoln. "He doesn't always like to admit it, but he can't escape it."

"I've heard of him. Probably my gov'nor knows him quite well—Lord Danehurst is his name. He was the chap who played the Father Christmas part last night. I'm John Danehurst."

"The Hon. John Danehurst—got your Hoo for footer a year or two ago?" the Kid suddenly asked.

"Quite!" John Danehurst laughed. "But this giddy stunt—nothing in it really, you know. The gov'nor was getting terribly punny and nervy a few years ago,

and was just dashing off to the South of France for the Christmas season, thinking that might do him good, though he knew it jolly well wouldn't, when he saw a specialist who put him on the right track. Told him to try and make somebody else happy over Christmas instead of worrying so much about himself.

"Go and get a crowd of unemployed, or children, or anyone you like into your Christmas festivities," this doctor johannis told the gov'nor. And I'm hanged if the gov'nor didn't take his advice!"

"But they weren't all tramps there last night!" Lincoln Beck asked.

"No. We've developed the idea since then. This is really the small show here. The gov'nor organizes quite a lot of big spreads, and so on, in different districts where they'll be most appreciated, because, obviously, he couldn't fit 'em in by the hundred here. But when he started that it rather looked as though he'd miss his share of the fun once again, so we run our own show here.

"We got a certain number of the youngsters from the different villages round about, and we arrange for all our own servants to be the guests on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The gov'nor generally drags in one or two actor people, too, and they, in turn, bring along one or two people who are down on their luck in their profession. The well-to-do actors were the pierrrots who waited or sang—everything is turned as topsy-turvy as possible.

"Then we do keep a watch at both lodges on Christmas Day, and any stray passer-by is dragged in. Last night, of course, was a pretty fierce sort of night, and the gov'nor had the idea quite early on of fixing up that searchlight affair to guide any motorist who happened to be getting into difficulties. We caught two lots—one of two, and, later, you four. It's really been quite a success. Four genuine tramps, six stranded motorists, all of them completely mystified by the gov'nor's performance; then we had a dozen or so who knew beforehand that it was all a put-up job. And the kiddies! You missed the best part of that performance. They do enjoy themselves, and they'll all be carted safely back to their parents before the day's out. But— Oh, it's making a new man of the gov'nor. And you'd be surprised how



"Oh, my hat!" murmured the Kid, as the chimes of St. Katie's entered a big room. "What a sight!" The room was festooned with decorations, and in a corner stood a gorgeous Christmas tree. A number of children were dancing, and everything was bright and gay. (See Chapter 9.)

much fun there is in life when you start these games!"

"My hat!" the Kid murmured, and looked at Linky Beck.

But Linky was still gasping, because he was the sort of lad who could appreciate a top-hat joke!

"Your car will be waiting, sir!" The Hon. John suddenly became Archibald, the footman, once again. "Permit me, sir!"

Their car was drawn up at the front entrance, bright and clean. The snow still lay thick upon the drive, but the sky was bright and clear and the air crisp. Maybe Linky wouldn't break records to-day, but he'd hit London Town all right.

"You will have no difficulty about finding the road, sir," said the Hon John, and gave Linky instructions. "Good-bye, gentlemen! A very pleasant journey!"

Not until they were well on the road did the Kid recall the mysterious packet which Father Christmas had given him. He mentioned it to Linky, and they drew to the side of the road so that they could all examine their Christmas gifts.

Inside each was a small bundle, carefully wrapped up. And each bundle contained five very new one-pound notes! With cash, too, was a printed message, a bit on the p-p-p side, maybe, but really good—all about getting happiness by trying to give happiness to the next chap.

"Yep!" said Lincoln Beck, as he started the car again. "Maybe it works all right when you happen to be Lord What's-his-name."

"Of course it's true!" asserted the Kid. "Why, you pican, weren't you trying to have a chunk of happiness at me when you turned up at the Globe House? And what's happened? Have I let you down? If you hadn't come for me—"

"Cut it out, Kid!" begged Washy Beck. "It isn't that! It's just Linky's luck. Haven't I told you about it before?"

And Jimmy Curtis just grinned, and the Kid smiled, but they said nothing. Why argue? Linky's luck, or whatever it might be, they'd had a topping Christmas. Happiness? Maybe the old chap was right, and, anyway, with a nice little wad in their pocket they'd jolly soon hand a bit on to the next chap who looked as though he had had to side-step Christmas.

"That's the spirit!" said Jimmy Curtis.

"But I guess it will take a week to do it, Kid. I've collected quite a lot. So I'd better be ill for a week, and you'll write your kind relatives and tell them you can't leave me just yet. I'll bet they're a lot happier without you, anyway! Try and give them a bit of happiness, Kid, and you'll enjoy yourself!"

CHAPTER 10.

New Year Resolutions!

IT was quite a pleasant journey really to London on that Boxing Day. At the Hotel Asturias, where the Beck family were camping out, Mr. Cyrus Beck welcomed them gladly. He had not been in the least worried about his two sons, because he knew they weren't the sort to get lost, and, if anybody had kidnapped them—well, it would serve the kidnappers right!

But already Mr. Beck had noticed that his boys were reforming, and he had weighed it up that it was the refining influence of their two companions, Dickie Dexter and Jimmy Curtis, combined with the eagle eye of Mr. Roger Blant.

He could see the refining influence at work. On Boxing Night, when they had a box for two of London's brightest shows, Linky, in a fit of forgetfulness, had made a nice, hard paper ball with his programme, and was just on the point of aiming it carefully at some perfectly innocent old chap who sat in the stalls below.

A low moan of horror was just breaking from Mr. Beck's lips as he realised that the ball was going, but in a flash Dickie Dexter had whipped the ball away and dropped it on the floor of the box.

"Chuck it, you ass!" the Kid himself. "You're not in New York now—you're with us!"

Linky merely grinned quite cheerfully, and made no attempt to bring disgrace upon the family again. Mr. Beck felt there and then that he would like to give the Kid a medal and a pension for life.

So the Kid's brief stay with the Becks passed pleasantly enough. Mr. Beck would have been glad if he could have stayed longer, but Richard wasn't the sort to overdo a good thing, and he decided on the 29th that it was time for him to quit.

Linky drove him back, and between the two of them they managed to answer Uncle Herbert's questions about the injured friend quite nicely. Lincoln got on quite well with Mr. Dimadell, but it was an effort, and he felt horribly sorry for the Kid having to stick it for the rest of his holidays.

That explains why, when Linky had hidden them all good-bye, and was parring along in his car for London once again, he thought a lot about the Kid.

He thought, too, about what Lord Danehurst had said about gripping happiness when you had the chance, and especially about doing other people a good turn. And then he thought about the fact that in another day or two it would be the bright New Year, and that it was just about the right time to turn over a new leaf and begin to make some good resolutions.

By the time he reached the Hotel Asturias, Linky was simply bubbling over with good resolutions. When he saw Washy lounging in a big armchair in the Becks' private sitting-room, reading a book and stuffing his mouth with mussels and oysters, Linky realized at once that it was about time he started to exercise an influence for good over his young brother.

"You lazy young toad!" he gasped out as he gave the armchair a swift upward jerk from the back and sent Washy sprawling on the floor. "Why can't you do something useful instead of lazing round and wasting your time? Look here, Washy! You've got to brighten up a bit, me lad! I don't mind telling you right now that when the old clock chimes twelve on the last day of the year we're starting right off trying to do a bit of good—"

"Tell us all about it, Linky!" begged Washy, as he rose and began to rearrange his hair. "What's the latest stunt?"

"Stunt? You pie-faced mutt! This isn't a stunt! I'm through with all that now!" Linky stood very erect, and the old man had faded away and his lips set for a moment in quite a firm, strong-silent-man sort of line. "Maybe I've led you astray in the past, Washy, but you can forget it. This is where we start on a new programme, Jan. 1st. Make a memo of that, Washy! Hello, dad!"

Mr. Beck strolled into the room, and Linky promptly began to tell him all about

it. Linky's parent was fairly well used to his son's brilliant ideas, but he'd never known the lad of his own free will start talking about helping others. Always before the main idea had been for Mr. Beck to give Linky the helping hand!

Even now Mr. Beck wasn't going to be left out of it altogether. Linky wanted him to write a nice, kind letter to Mr. Herbert Dimadell, Dickie Dexter's uncle, asking him to allow his dear nephew to spend a few further days with his little playmates, the Beck Brothers.

"You needn't say too much, dad," Linky pointed out. "But it will look better coming from you, and old Dimadell will probably fall for it. I'll write Dickie and tell him some more about it."

For the life of his Mr. Beck couldn't see where the catch came in. Had this happened a few months ago Mr. Beck would have been willing to stake his hat coat that it was some new trick of Linky's, but he'd been much impressed over the holidays by the general improvements in his son, and he was quite sure that young Dexter wasn't exerting a bad influence at all.

So Mr. Beck wrote a nice, kind letter, speaking highly of Richard, and begging Mr. Dimadell to allow him to spend a week or so with his sons. Linky also wrote to the Kid, and it was the sort of letter that made the Kid feel exactly as Mr. Beck had felt. Where was the catch in it, and what was Linky's latest scheme?

Yet it was also the sort of letter which Dickie could hand over to his uncle and aunts for them to read and see what nice friends he had at school. There were several touching references to their dear friend, Jimmy Curtis, and quite a lot about starting the New Year with bright hopes and noble ambitions. Lincoln Beck was quite good at stringing his words together when he felt that way.

New Year's Day dawned bright and clear. The snow which had fallen fairly heavily over Christmas had completely disappeared, though out in the country the roads were doubtless still suffering from its effects. But Lincoln was up early, that being one of the new resolutions, and he had read the brief letter from Dickie Dexter long before his father informed him that he'd had a nice note from Mr. Dimadell, thanking him for the kind invitation, and saying that he would be quite happy for his nephew to join the Becks.

"And there you are, Washy!" said Lincoln, as they went to drag out their car. "I was thinking of all sorts of patent stunts to land the Kid back here again—and there wasn't any need to try any tricks at all. Always be straightforward and everybody will trust you!"

He said a lot of things of that sort on their way down to Bussage, and Washy would have been horribly bored by it all but for the fact that in his own mind he was quite sure that Linky had something up his sleeve and was going to spring a surprise on the lot of them!

Even Dickie Dexter couldn't quite grasp it all when Lincoln started to turn out his hot air about the glad New Year, and he kept looking at him and wondering whether he was going to be ill, because Linky was looking very serious this morning and had been most anxious to tell Mr. Dimadell and Aunt Agatha all about the good resolutions he'd made for the coming year.

Still, they got into the car and pushed off, but Lincoln wasn't out to break speed records this morning. He wanted to talk and tell the Kid all about the resolutions, and the new leaf, and how he'd probably be going in for lots and lots of exams at Katie's, and taking all the prizes for good conduct and hard work.

"Every day in every way I'm getting better and better!" Linky asserted, because he'd read that somewhere, and he knew it was all right. "And we'll form a sort of secret society, Kid, and hunt out folks who want the glad band of friendship and give 'em a jerk up. I can see it all now! There's going to be a lot more fun in helping the poor and the down-trodden—every day I'm going to find out somebody who's just been waiting for Lincoln Beck to come and give them a push along. When we get back to Katie's— But I'll tell you more when we're feeding. Mustn't neglect that, Kid, 'cos you want to keep strong for the good work. I spotted this show coming along, and it looks the sort of place where they serve up the right grub and give you the view for nixes. Hop out!"

He had run the car into the fore-court of a very charming-looking country hotel. It was nearly two o'clock, and they had been travelling for close on two hours, so that their appetites were in first-class order, and the Kid had been wondering just when they were going to have a bite to stop that sinking feeling. He hoped Linky's new resolu-

tions didn't run in the direction of food reform or anything silly of that sort.

He needn't have worried. Linky's eyes had been quite open all the way, and he'd noted this particular place as one of the most promising. They descended from the car and stood waiting for a moment or two while Lincoln performed some little trick with the works.

The car had been drawn up some ten or a dozen yards to the right of the main entrance to the hotel, and just as the three fell into step to walk in together there was a sudden commotion which held them up.

A figure came flying from the main entrance. Flying is the right word, because he never touched one of the three steps, but came with arms outstretched and legs sprawling, so that one couldn't quite tell whether he was giving a lifelike imitation of a glider in action, or whether he was merely practising the long jump.

Whichever it was, nobody could have reckoned it was a complete success. The man's feet touched the ground, and he made frantic efforts to prevent himself from sprawling headlong into the mud for about three steps, then down he came.

Within another instant someone else had taken the same long jump, but they seemed to understand the ropes better, because the second man dropped fair and square on his feet, gave another little hop, and pounced on the chap who was now wallowing in the mud.

"Would you try your tricks on me?" demanded the second man. "Joe! Fred! Fetch the policeman! Quick! I've heard about him before! This'll teach him to leave his note-case at home! He's struck the wrong address when he tries the confidence trick on here! I'll—"

He had jerked the other fellow to his feet now, and the pair of them made quite a pretty picture. The captive was a tall, clean-shaven man, and he looked as though he'd been quite well-dressed until he struck the mud. His captor was a short, plumpish man, with a red waistcoat and shirt-sleeves of purest white. In the background, a waiter and an hotel servant in a white overall were jumping about in an aimless sort of way, and getting frightfully excited about it.

"Gee!" said Lincoln Beck, and for the first time this morning the grin came back to his face. "I guess this is a job for us, Kid! Here's where we stop in right now

and du Good Turn No. 2. No. 1 was dragging you out from the family vault, Kid, but this looks like being a real beaut. Stand back there! Give him air! 'Morning, gentlemen! Happy New Year to you! Lincoln Beck's my name—and when there's trouble knocking round I'm the lad who pours the oil on the water! Lincoln the peace-maker they call me in New York, and I'm just opening a branch establishment here! What's the argument about, anyway?"

CHAPTER II.

Introducing Professor Northwich!

THE Kid and Washy Beck hung back a little. Probably the Kid was as keen on a scrap as anybody, but he liked it to be one in which he had some personal interest, and he certainly was not the sort to go butting in on other people's business.

The main points of the argument were made clear almost before Linky had finished his little speech. At all events, the Kid grasped the fact that the plump man in the red waistcoat and white shirt was the manager of the Evesbridge Hotel, while the gentleman in the mud-spattered clothes had just lunched there. From what the landlord managed to gasp out, the chap had done himself very well, even to filling his case with the best cigars the hotel possessed.

Then, apparently, he had tried one or two skilful little dodges for doing the disappearing act without attending to the small item of the large bill which was waiting for him. When they spotted his game and cornered him, he had put up some polite excuse about having left his note-case and pocket-wallet behind him, but would ring up his friends and ask them to come along and put the matter right.

But the landlord was a hard-hearted and suspicious man, and he was right on the spot when once again the visitor had begun to drift towards the door. The final scene of the first act had been witnessed by Lincoln Beck and his chums.

Of course, the Kid and Washy Beck would have been quite content to leave it at that, and there wouldn't have been anything more exciting in it than keeping a look-out from the dining-room window to see the lobby come and march the chap off.

But Linky didn't feel that way at all, especially on this the first day of the bright New Year, when he was overflowing with good resolutions. Just for a minute or two he hadn't much chance of saying much because the landlord was trying to explain all about it, and the two manservants were anxious to corroborate every detail.

"He's a twister—I've met his sort before!" the landlord asserted, and still kept a tight grip on the collar of the victim. "Don't you stand arguing here, Joel! Run along!"

"My dear Lincoln Beck!" It was the professor who seemed to waken up from his daze quite suddenly, and he held his hand out to Linky. "This is indeed a fortunate meeting! You remember, of course? When last we met it was in dear old New York. And how is your very charming father now? Has he made the trip across the pond, after all? I remember, he told me he was really rather afraid of the voyage, as it didn't suit him at all. But how very delightful to meet you again."

He was gripping Lincoln by the hand and greeting him like a long-lost brother. There wasn't any doubt about it that the chap really was pleased—and of course he'd recognised Lincoln Beck right away and talked about his father and New York, so he evidently was an old friend of the family!

Even Lincoln gasped a little, because for the life of him he couldn't ever remember having seen the chap before. But on one else except Linky saw the quick wink which the man gave—and Linky gripped the idea swiftly that the muddled gentleman was relying upon him to play up!

"Good!" Linky had been looking a bit perplexed up to that moment, but now he suddenly became as excited as the other chap. "If it isn't dear Professor Northwich, who taught me all I ever knew about geology and land-slides! Say, professor, but this is a glad re-union. You remember little Washy, don't you? Come and say how d'you do to the professor, Washy! And this is my young friend, Richard Dexter, son of Lord Dexter, the Governor-General of Saskatchewan. We were just going to hop into the old log hut and have a bite of bread and cheese. You'll join us for sure, professor?"

"Delighted, my dear Lincoln!" the pro-

fessor said. "If my very dear friend, the landlord of this hostelry, would kindly remove his hand from my collar— There is some little problem of cash worrying him at the moment, Lincoln. I wonder if you would mind?"

Right there and then Lincoln had his chance to do the helping hand business in decent style. He took out a pocket-case which, as the landlord could see, was fairly bulging with notes, for Linky had been very lucky this Christmas time, and he took out three or four.

"That's all right, sir." The landlord had had several shocks in these past few minutes, and he was trying to gather his scattered wits together again. "I mean—if you are coming inside! I'm sorry if we've misunderstood the professor, sir. I'm very sorry, sir!"

He had released his hold on the professor's collar and was beginning to try and knock some of the mud from him. Dickie Dexter was half expecting to see the professor make a bolt for it again, but he didn't.

"That's quite all right, my good man!" he assured the landlord. "My young friend, Mr. Lincoln Beck, will assure you that when I was professor of geology at the Yale University I had a most unfortunate reputation for absent-mindedness. As I explained to you, I came out to-day to study the rocks in the neighbourhood—and found myself upon them, to indulge in a somewhat feeble pun. You are quite sure you don't mind, my dear Lincoln? Naturally, I shall send you my cheque as soon as ever I return home again, but I scarcely dare contemplate the awful consequences which would have befallen me, owing entirely to my own forgetfulness, had you not so fortunately appeared at the critical moment. However, we will let bygones be bygones, my worthy fellow. The mud will brush off when it is dry."

He turned to the landlord and smiled forgivingly upon him, and then the whole mob began to wander towards the hotel. To try and decide which of them was the most surprised or the most fogged would be a difficulty. The landlord had been absolutely confident until a minute or two ago that he'd struck a first-class confidence trickster and twister, and now he was wishing he hadn't thought it, because it was quite clear that these youngsters, with a

high-grade car and lots of money, were old friends of Professor Northwich.

Wasly Beck was puzzled because he was quite certain he'd never met the professor before, although Linky seemed to think he had. And Dickie Dexter couldn't quite grip it all because it seemed such an extraordinary coincidence that the Becks should drop across an old friend at such a critical juncture.

Linky, of course, knew that he'd never met the chap before, yet he was puzzled at the glib way the "professor" had trotted out his name and talked about his father and New York. Still, there was one cheering thought in it all to Linky; there wasn't any manner of doubt that he was doing a good turn! He knew that when he paid the professor's bill!

"It is really most kind of you, my dear Lincoln," the professor asserted as they wandered into the dining-room, and Lincoln squared the account before going farther. "You will excuse me if I run away and try to remove some of the mud? No, I'm afraid I cannot join you at lunch, but I will sit with you, and perhaps— Yes, landlord, let me look at the wine-list!"

Talk! Professor Northwich, as Lincoln had called him, could leave Linky and the Kid gasping! Now they had a chance of seeing the man calmly he seemed an extraordinarily nice fellow. It was difficult to tell his age, because while his hair was flecked with white, making him look rather elderly and distinguished, his face was as smooth and unwrinkled as their own, and there was a queer little smile lurking about his eyes all the time.

He rejoined them after they had begun their lunch, and he looked a lot brighter now that the mud had been removed. You'd have thought he'd have been standoffish with the landlord after the way he'd been turfed out. But he wasn't. He made jokes about it, and insisted on the landlord having a glass with him.

An extraordinary chap, as the Kid realized long before that lunch was through. One minute he reminded you of George Robey and made you laugh tremendously, and the next minute there was a touch of Jelly Roger about him—Roger when he was really very jolly and full of vim, and he had fascinating little ways even in such a thing as smoking a cigar.

He talked, but he let them have a fair share, too, and Linky told him all about his good resolutions and what luck it was to strike such a chance so early, and they talked about Mr. Cyrus Beck and about Katie's, and the good time they were going to have at the Hotel Asturias, and what a lot of resolutions Linky had made, and the time slipped along quite pleasantly.

"But, say, professor!" Linky looked round just to make sure that neither the landlord nor the waiter was within hearing. "This has been a top-hole joke, but what is your name, really? You never did meet me in New York, did you?"

"No, my dear Lincoln, I didn't!" The professor became quite serious. "As for my real name—frankly, I cannot remember it! I knew it this morning. I know—but it was very trying! If I told you the story, I doubt if you would believe me. The landlord wouldn't believe it, why should you?"

He seemed almost bitter about it, and a sad look had come into his eyes.

"Tell us!" begged Lincoln. "Only I was puzzled at the way you knew me and where I came from."

"My dear boy, you gave your name and mentioned New York almost as soon as you came near me," the Professor pointed out, and the Kid suddenly remembered that it was so, and thought what a quick chap the professor must be. "But now—my own story. To relieve my mind I will tell you, but I do not ask you to believe it. The whole thing is incredible—and when I have told it I will leave you."

But it wasn't such an incredible story, and there was certainly nothing to be ashamed of about it. He'd been in the war some years ago, and he drew a little plan showing how the British Army would have been cut off, but—well, he saw a way out, and, of course, it was only what anyone else would have done, so he just did it, and saved the army. But he got a very hard blow on the head while he was on the job, and that made him even now lose his memory and forget nearly everything, especially his own name and where he was living. He could remember things that happened some time back but not those within the past few weeks. It would all come right again in a week or two, and then he'd know all about it, and he'd just wander back to his friends, find his

cheque-book, and take another trip to pay up all those who'd been kind to him. Maybe it wouldn't happen again for months and months, but it was very trying when it did!

"Did they give you a medal for doing that?" asked Linky, who was terrifically impressed by the yarn.

"Oh, yes!" Mr. Northwich shrugged his shoulders. "I got the V.C. and the D.S.O.—but one doesn't talk about that! And I must be going. I am keeping you boys. You'll give me your address, so that I can send on to you all that you have so very kindly lent me!"

"But look here!" Linky protested. "You can't go wanderin' off and getting some fatheaded boob of a landlord trying the heavy uncle stunt on you again! Now, look here! This is my lucky day, and if there's any good deed knocking anywhere round Lincoln Beck it's going to get done! Yep! I'm the little fair-haired laddie of the family, professor, and you don't quit us till you're Al at Lloyd's! I'll tell you!"

Linky talked and the professor protested. Of course, he wasn't a professor—at least, he didn't think so—but they decided to stick to "Professor Northwich" as a name till he managed to remember his own. And in the end the professor agreed to Linky's idea—but only on condition that he should be permitted to pay back every cent he'd borrowed from Linky or was paid by Linky for him.

"Oh, shucks!" Linky said. "Isn't this Jan. 1st? Look at that wall!"

He handed his case to the professor, who smiled as he opened it. "Good resolutions do not mean acting foolishly, Lincoln!" he said sternly. "You will learn as you grow older. However, I will borrow two or three of these, as you really seem to have more than you need. Will you make a note of that, please? Three pounds, plus twenty-five shillings and sevenpence. I don't want to start preaching at you—especially after the really wonderful kindness you have shown to me, but I feel I ought to point out—"

He gave them quite a cheery Bible lecture on "The Care of Money." By Jove, but he was a ripping sort of chap, and you could see that the landlord had changed his mind a bit since he tried to call the bobbies in!

They went out and climbed into Linky's

car, Mr. Northwich taking his place alongside Linky. He still protested that he ought not to take advantage of boys in this way, and it was evident that he was a bit sensitive, especially when they struck London Town.

"Really, I ought not to come, Lincoln!" he asserted for the tenth time. "Especially in these clothes. I mean—I wish I could remember the name of my tailor! I do hope my memory comes back to-night, and then I shall wire at once. What is my name? Where are my tailors?"

He buried his head in his hands and tried to think, but it was in vain. Anyway, as Linky said, it didn't really matter. Why not toddle round to the tailors who supplied Mr. Beck and his sons?

Which was what they did. Linky went in with the professor and explained that he was a great friend of his father's; and then the professor himself explained that all his baggage had gone astray, and he really must have a couple of suits at once, and would they put it down to Mr. Beck's account and he would arrange with him?

Mind you, for a chap who'd lost his memory, Northwich was jolly particular about his clothes, which showed that he was somebody important. But they managed to fit him out all right, and then they wandered forth, with the parcel in the car, and ran along to one or two other shops. Lincoln had to fork out a bit for a suitcase, and Northwich got horribly upset again, as he said he hated the idea of borrowing so much from a boy.

"I'm not much good at thanks," he told them later. "But you fellows are real bricks. I'm really frightfully sensitive about this unfortunate—ah!—weakness of mine, so, if you don't mind, say very little to your father about it. I'm bound to remember in a day or two, and then we can afford to laugh at it, and I'll explain to him. In the meantime—I am just John Northwich, professor of geology at the University of Yale, for the present!"

So the four toddled off to the Hotel Asturias, where Mr. Northwich was lucky in being able to engage a room quite close to Linky's and the other lads. And that night, when Mr. Northwich dined with the Beck family, Linky felt jolly proud he'd brought him along, because even Aunt Sinola said afterwards that she'd never,

never met a more charming man than Professor Northwich!

"A very nice fellow indeed!" Mr. Beck said. "Knows how to dress, too! How did you come to know him, Lincoln? I didn't quite understand when you introduced him, except that he was staying in this hotel."

"I'll tell you all about it in a day or two, dad!" Linky assured his parent. "He's one of the best, is old Northwich! Sort of chap who makes it easy for me to turn over a new leaf! He's dead keen on fellows who try to do a bit of good and give the old world a push along occasionally. And that's where little Linky is going to win a first prize, dad! We're making a record this year!"

And that was a fact—though neither Mr. Beck nor Lincoln quite appreciated it yet.

CHAPTER 12.

Alias Cousin Bertie!

INSIDE the next two days Professor Northwich had become a real friend of the Beck family. In particular, he got on very well with Mr. Cyrus Beck, and often they'd sit together for a couple of hours. So far as could be gathered from Mr. Beck, he was a very smart business man, as well as a geologist and a professor, and he'd got an option on some land—but Mr. Beck didn't talk too much about business!

The three lads didn't see quite so much of Mr. Northwich as they would have liked. For one thing, he wasn't keen on walking the streets in broad daylight, in case he met anyone he knew and failed to recognise them. But he'd go for a ride in Linky's tin-can, and he'd let Linky or Washy get him the cigars and cigarettes he needed, though he was always very particular to make a note of the exact amount, so's he wouldn't forget how much he owed when his memory came back.

It was on the third evening of his stay at the Asturias when Mr. Northwich was down in the smoke-room with Mr. Beck and was explaining exactly how much would be required to develop the land in which he was interested. Into the smoke-room strolled a tall, hatchet-faced sort of man—one of those cool, calm chaps who stand in the centre of a place and stare

rooms at everybody just to make sure there's nobody there they know or don't want to know.

The newsman gave a slight nod to Mr. Beck, because Mr. Beck knew Mr. Jefferson Sully, of the New York Detective Service, quite well. Then, just for an instant, Mr. Sully's eyes met those of Professor Northwich. Almost immediately Mr. Sully turned and walked back to the door.

"Excuse me one moment!" Professor Northwich said to Mr. Beck. "I'll go and bring those papers I mentioned."

You couldn't say he hopped out of the place, and yet there was something particularly alert and swift in the way he slipped to the back of the pillared smoking-room, and then, instead of making for the visitors' entrance, dodged quietly through the door into the room where the waiters hung out.

"Not this way, sir!" one of the servants pointed out when Mr. Northwich slipped in, but he just smiled as he spotted another door.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said kindly. "Inspecting the fire-extinguishers—insurance company, you know!"

And he'd dodged through the next door before there was a chance for anyone to say more! Inside the next three minutes he'd done a record sprint up an out-of-the-way staircase, and was on the floor where his own room was situated.

Again, there wasn't any sign of haste as he slipped quietly into his own room, slung all the clothes he possessed into the suitcase and stuck various oddments into his pockets. With hat and overcoat on he dodged along to a room farther down the corridor, carrying his suitcase with him.

Just as it happened, Linky Beck was in his bed-room and the Kid was with him, as they'd just decided to go out to the pictures and were trying to make themselves look pretty. The door of the room was very slightly ajar, and Mr. Northwich walked in cheerfully.

"Well, boys!" There was a little twinkle in his eyes which made his face jolly fascinating. "You'll be glad to hear my memory has returned quite suddenly. A little shock has done it! I am Hubert Fairway—of the British Secret Service. And I've just seen Wilhelm Grutz—you've probably heard of him—the greatest scout-leader and enemy of this country that ever

lived! Sounds quite like a fairy-tale, doesn't it? But I'm going round in Scotland Yard at once! I don't think he spotted me—and I don't want to frighten the bird. But I'd like your help for a few minutes, Lincoln."

"Right ho!" Lincoln agreed, though his mind was a bit confused with the quick statement Northwich, or Fairway, had made.

"Just take my bag and hat and wander down to the Rome Street entrance," Fairway said. "Then get a taxi for me at the corner of the street. I'll join you there in three minutes!"

Linky took the bag and hat and pushed off without any questions. Fairway turned to the Kid.

"Just slip after him, Dexter, will you, old son?" he asked in a cheery, pleasant sort of way which made you feel jolly glad to be helping such a fine chap. "Don't catch him up, but let me know if he gets down the stairs without anyone interrupting him."

The Kid slipped along and saw Linky taking the stairs three at a time. He waited till he could see no more of him and then hurried back to the room. Just before he reached there he saw that a big man had just taken the key out of the door of the room that Fairway, or Northwich, had been occupying.

Mr. Fairway meantime had made good use of his time. He knew where Lincoln kept his reserve supply of notes, because he'd been with him when he stowed a few away. Yet as the Kid approached the door Fairway opened it and asked a question.

"All well?" he asked.

"Yes. Lincoln's gone; no one stopped him," the Kid answered.

"Good!"

Fairway stepped right out into the corridor, and instantly stepped back again. He had caught just one glimpse of the big man strutting along the corridor.

"Ah! A little awkward, Dexter!" Fairway was still smiling as he closed the door which, of course, was fitted with a snap lock and could only be opened from the outside with the proper key. "I wonder—"

He had slipped across the room to the window and pulled the curtains apart. The next minute the lower frame had been

raised and Fairway was peering below. "Very awkward, really!" he smiled. "However—Don't open the door, Dexter!"

Someone was knocking insistently outside the door, and Dexter standing quite near the door could hear a harsh voice rap out to someone else: "Go down and get the key. Quick!"

Fairway had climbed on to the window-sill, turned easily, and lowered himself. A horrible fear flashed through the Kid's mind. He knew the outlook from that window, and the idea of anyone attempting to drop from the sill filled him with horror.

"Mr. Fairway!" The Kid jumped forward. "Don't—"

"Cheer-o, Dexter!" Fairway's eyes were still smiling with that very friendly, almost lovable smile of his. "See you again—one day!"

He'd gone! Leaning through the window the Kid saw his form just touch the veranda rails below, then he seemed to lurch inwards and topple downwards again, so that apparently he was lying broken on the narrow veranda itself. Yet in another two seconds the form was up again and swinging over the veranda once more.

What happened after that the Kid could not tell. But it was not nearly so great a drop from the veranda to the ground as it was from this window to the veranda itself. And the Kid hadn't time to think very much because the hammering at the door was going on.

"Lincoln Beck! Are you there? Open this door. It's—Ah!"

Even as the Kid hesitated about opening the door there was the sound of a key turning in the lock, and two big, stern-looking men literally jumped inside.

"Hands—"

Both of them were gripping heavy, black-looking revolvers, and their eyes were dodging round the place in a quick jerky sort of way, till they spotted the open window through which the cold night air was now blowing.

"Y-r-r-r!" At least, that's what the bigger man's remark sounded like to the Kid. "Where is he—Cousin Bertie, Charles Fairway, the Hon. Herbert, or Northwich, or whatever fancy name he's took this trip? Slipped it? No good,

Johnnie. He's gone by the window—I reckoned he would. Where's young Beck? Oh, say, fan me, Johnnie!"

The big man, known to many admirers as Mr. Jefferson Sully, sank into the one easy chair in the bed-room and began to laugh. The other man kept growling:

"Ugh! Ugh! He's fly! Comin' Bertie's fly! Ugh!"

All of which, of course, left the Kid dimly bewildered. The dramatic drop of Mr. Fairway, the sudden opening of the door, the jerking round of those nasty-looking revolvers, all mixed up with that talk about secret service, and on top of it all the big man laughing! Well, you'd want to be mighty clever to grasp what it was all about, wouldn't you?

The two men slipped their revolvers away and took out huge cigars instead. The Kid mightn't have been in the room for all the notice they took of him, and he was jolly glad when at last Linky Beck came panting in.

"Say, Kid!" Linky gasped out, almost before he was in the room. "He's gone straight to Scot—Hallo!"

He stared in wonder at Mr. Sully and his assistant, and Sully grinned and laughed quite cheerfully.

"Yep, sonny! You know me—Jefferson Sully of New York City. Now tell me all about this little friend of yours—Cousin Bertie, or Professor Northwich, who's been tryin' to pull the wool over daddy's eyes. Been helping him to make a clean getaway, eh? Well, you ain't the first little lamb Cousin Bertie's skinned. Ah! Come right in, Mr. Beck! Your very charming friend the professor has taken a short cut. Let's get the whole story now, and then count the losses!"

The whole mob moved off to Mr. Beck's sitting-room and here the full and true history of Herbert Charles Fairway was revealed by Detective Sully. If Linky Beck and his chums admired "Professor Northwich," it was nothing compared with the esteem which Sully had for him. He reckoned that "Cousin Bertie," which was the popular name the police of several countries had for him, was one of the cleverest men in the whole world.

He was an Englishman, of good family and good education, speaking two or three languages as perfectly as he spoke his mother tongue. But he didn't like the idea

of making a living by the ordinary methods, and he'd worked the confidence trick in most cities of the world. New York had in this past year become altogether too warm for him, though how on earth he'd slipped across to England even Sully didn't know.

Still, Sully had heard that he was in London and was just bringing off another big coup. Apparently, however, Cousin Bertie suddenly realised that the London police had marked him down and were just waiting for the right moment to slip the bracelets on. When Sully, who had several little jobs on in this country, reasoned London it was only to learn that Cousin Bertie had disappeared utterly.

Now in the light of what Mr. Beck and his son could tell him Sully realised that Bertie had been really badly pressed for a time, being very short of funds. That was why he'd been taking a free lunch on New Year's Day, and owing to a highly suspicious landlord had failed to get away with it.

"But they'd never have got Bertie to the look-up, even if you hadn't turned up!" Sully asserted. "Why, the man's worth a fortune as a daring actor for the pictures, if he'd only settle to it! Then, you had some along, and Cousin Bertie sees a chance to start again, though it's a bit risky coming to a big London hotel without even a moustache as a disguise. But he's not keen on disguises, Cheek! It wouldn't surprise me if he went to Scotland Yard and complained I was molesting him, and show 'em papers to prove he was an up-right citizen. He's got a way with him, has Bertie! Gas! But when I think—How much has he lifted out of your pocket, Mr. Beck?"

As a matter of fact, he hadn't relieved Mr. Beck of very much; but in a day or two he would probably have had quite a lot, because he'd got Mr. Beck thoroughly interested in a big proposition. It was only now that Cyrus Beck realised that even the clothes "Northwich" had been wearing would appear on Mr. Beck's next account, and the hotel would doubtless expect Mr. Beck to pay their little account with Mr. Northwich.

And Linky had even taken away the suitcase—for which Linky's own money had paid!—and handed it to "Mr. Northwich" as he jumped into the taxi! They dis-

covered, too, that one or two little items were missing, such as Linky's reservoir pocket-case.

"But you've been lucky!" was Sully's comment. "Why, when Cousin Bertie takes a real fancy for anyone, same as he seems to have done for you, he always reckons to clear a thousand dollars at least. He's a real nice chap is Bertie—but he charges a lot for his company!"

"My hat!" murmured Lincoln Beck. "And that's what comes of trying to do a good turn! Me! I'm not turning over a new leaf. Kid! I'm turning back to the old one!"

"No, no, Lincoln!" Mr. Beck said, and the Kid thought that he really was a brick over it all and never blamed Linky one little bit, but just talked quite nicely about one swallow not making a summer, and one wrong 'un not making the whole world black. And Sully said he reckoned it was so, and it was just a bit of experience for these lads to hit one of the real ornaments of the confidence-trick world, because it would just teach 'em not to be too trusting of strangers, though that didn't mean they'd ever strike another chap like Cousin Bertie again, if they lived to be ninety-nine, because he was a first-class prize man in his own line.

"Well, they're not likely to see or hear of him again," mused Mr. Beck, philosophically. "He's squeezed us once—and once bitten, twice shy!"

"Maybe so," said Detective Sully. "And maybe not. But say, you boys! If ever you do tumble across Cousin Bertie again—flash the good news to Scotland Yard! They're wanting to meet him very badly!"

It was rather thrilling to think of being in touch with Scotland Yard, but they never had any chance of doing any detective work those holidays. Professor Northwich had disappeared utterly.

There were no other brilliant patches of colour in the holidays after that. Dexter had a jolly time in London, but spent the last ten days or so with his uncle and aunt, at the end of which time he wasn't exactly sorry that the time had come to say good-bye again and pack up his traps for Katie's once more. There were a lot of things that might be improved at Katie's, but at least one did get a certain amount of fun there, but there was precious little amusement knocking round the Glebe House!

"Back once more!" the Kid said as the train steamed out of Besage station, and there was no regret in his voice, "Here's to the next term!"

CHAPTER 12.

Enter Mr. Forgan!

"HERE we are again!" Lincoln Beck slung a small bag into the corner of Study 7, and Jimmy Curtis gracefully heaved his cap through the air and it alighted beautifully on the gas-bracket. Wasby Beck dropped lazily down in the old familiar couch and stared round the dear old home.

The Kid had been on the spot to welcome them, and he was already busy getting ready for a brew of tea just to celebrate the return.

"Did you bring any condensed milk along, Linky?"

"Here you are!" Linky hadn't forgotten the instructions and threw it across. "Light up the old stove, Jimmy! Get up, Wasby, and help Uncle Richard with the brew!"

From the corridors came cheery calls and shouts. Fellows pushed their heads in at the open door and gave kindly greetings.

"Hallo, Kid! Glad to see you back again! They told me you'd got six months for pinching oranges in Piccadilly! Cheer-o, Curtis!"

"Hallo, Banty!" Curtis cried joyously. "They're not keeping you at Borstal after all! Come right in, dear boy!"

The gentle aroma of Primus stoves and tea and tinned sardines drifted round the corridors again. It may be that there was not so much excitement at the beginning of this term as after the summer holidays, but everything was very jolly, and there was still just a bit of the cheeriness of Christmas clinging round.

There were not likely to be many changes this term. There might be a few odd removes, or even odd changes among the studies, or two or three changes among the masters. Mr. Daintith, for instance, had returned to church life again, as he preferred it to the teaching world, and doubtless there would be one or two minor changes of that sort.

But so far as the boys were concerned everything would be much as last term;

very rarely were there any removes to record, and these were only 'specials,' where a fellow in the Fifth had gone into the Matric because he was entering for some exam., or a fellow in the Transitus had been given the chance to go into the Science Fifth instead of waiting till the end of the summer term.

It was just on the cards, too, that the Transitus might have a new Form-master. Until last summer, Jolly Roger had been master of the Transitus, but since he had taken the Head's job the Form had been rather messed about between two or three masters.

"Shag the biscuits over, Wasby!" the Kid called out. "You're still sticking to the old Matric, Linky? Hallo, Matt! What's the news?"

Matthew of the Transitus had barged in just to let them know he was back.

"Just been down to the Wreckers," he told them, "as he helped himself to a biscuit. Beck major's been pushed into our mob—sort of exchange really, because old Robby's gone to the Matric."

"Oh, good egg!" the Kid cried. "That's a bit of luck, Linky! Now we do know where we are—all four in the same Form! One for Jolly Roger!"

"And we've got a brand new Form-master!" Matthew announced. "Chap called Forgan—Herbert A. Forgan, B.A. He's taking over the sports, too. Old Jenny's seen him—Roger's been carting him round a bit. Fine looking chap, Jenny says—a bit like Roger, you know. Hope he's not too much—Yea, of course, Dexter!"

Matt's voice suddenly changed as he caught sight of someone else at the door. It was Jolly Roger—cheery, smiling, full of vim and the joy of life, as usual, and behind him was another figure in cap and gown.

"Ah, ah! Welcome back, boys! Enjoyed your holidays? Not sprained your wrist again, Dexter, I hope!" Roger was beaming upon them—but just giving them a little hint straightaway that a lot of things which they fancied were buried in the dim past were still quite fresh in his memory! "And you are quite well again, Beck major? That's good! You observe that you are in the Transitus Form now, Beck major! I am expecting that you will make considerable progress with your

work this term! Mr. Forgan, who is new to the School, will be keeping a very watchful eye upon you as the Form-master of the Transitus. Here are four—five, in fact, counting you, Matthews—of your Form, Mr. Forgan!"

"Ah! Very glad to meet them! I shall doubtless get to know them better in the course of the next day or two! And which is Deek, who, like myself, is a newcomer to the Form? I see!"

Oh, a cheery fellow! A cheery face, a cheery voice, and his eyes beamed as gladly and joyously as ever Roger's did. Very much the same height and build as Roger he was, but his hair was touched with grey, though his face was quite young looking.

But—the Kid had risen, as the others had, and he suddenly felt frozen to the spot! Ten thousand horrible sensations were dancing up and down his spine, and he didn't know whether to yell out or make a valiant effort and try to hide his amazement.

Lincoln Beck was also staring at the new master, while Washy's mouth had formed into a little O as though he were just going to whistle when his lips got frozen. The three of them were staggered, amazed and bewildered!

For Mr. Forgan was beyond all shadow of a doubt the same person as the "Professor Northwich," alias Cousin Bertie, alias Mr. Fairway, and quite a lot of other names, who had stayed at the Asturias Hotel only a week or two ago as the guest of Mr. Deek—at least, that's how it actually turned out, though Mr. Deek didn't really know it till Mr. Northwich had gone!

And here he was—posing as a master at St. Katie's School!

Sully had said that he was a man of good education, and had been to a well-known public school. But how on earth could he have bluffed Mr. Roger Blunt? What about his certificates and qualifications? You can't just walk into a school such as Katie's and say, "I'm a highly-qualified master, and I'd like a berth at this school." They jolly well want to know quite a lot about you!

To the Kid and the two Becks the fifty or sixty seconds which followed their recognition of the new master was horribly dramatic. But fortunately neither Curtis nor Matthews had their knowledge and

they behaved quite naturally, while Roger was too cheery to worry overmuch. Besides, he'd probably put their looks of surprise down to the fact that he'd given them a straight hint that he knew the real truth about a certain episode which had taken place just before Christmas!

Mr. Forgan himself showed not the slightest trace of surprise or of recognition. He simply beamed on them all and made some cheery remark about meeting them again in the morning, then turned and drifted away with the Head.

"Looks a decent sort," Matt said when they'd gone. "But you never can tell. Well, I'll push along!"

"Do!" said the Kid, and was surprised that he could keep his voice so steady. "We like your company, Matt, but we don't like the way you scoff our biscuits. Close the door! Thanks!"

Not until the door really was closed did they dare speak of the shock they had just experienced.

"Say, Kid," murmured Linky Deek, "do we faint or just get hysterical, or what? I— It leaves me gasping!"

"My hat!" The Kid shook his head helplessly. "My giddy aunt! It—it's Fairway all right!"

"Sure!" jerked out Washington Beck. "Why—his suit, Linky! It's the one he bought with you that day! The one the old dad's got to pay for!"

"What's the mystery?" Curtis asked. "Is this a little secret you've been keeping up your sleeves, or doesn't Jimmy Curtis figure in this act?"

The three had seen Curtis on various occasions during the Christmas, but, just as luck would have it, he had been away during the three days in which the others had really got to know Mr. Fairway (alias Professor Northwich). But they had told Jimmy all about their exciting experience as soon as ever he did turn up, and Jimmy was rather sorry he'd missed that particular item.

Still he knew all about Mr. Fairway, and they certainly didn't intend to keep this latest development a secret from Jimmy. Inside twenty seconds Jimmy Curtis was gasping with them!

"Bat—jumping snakes!" Jimmy said. "You ought to go along and tell Roger straightaway!"

"We promised old Detective Sully that we'd either let him know or send word to

Scotland Yard," the Kid said. "But I reckon we ought to put the whole yarn up before Roger. He'd know exactly—Sh! Come in!"

There was a gentle tap at the door, and, as the Kid called out, it was opened with a certain quiet slowness, as though the sheep outside didn't want to intrude or make too much row.

It was Mr. Forgan, now master of the *Transitus*, but until lately Herbert Fairway, commonly known as Cassin Bertie by the police and recognized by them to be the finest exponent of the confidence trick throughout the world!

He was smiling as he stood in the doorway—a genuine, happy, jolly sort of smile—and his eyes were twinkling with good humour as he surveyed them.

"Well, boys"—his voice was like his smile, very pleasant and calm and with a kind of good-natured note ringing in it—"I imagine you were rather surprised when you saw me! You've told Curtis all about me, of course! I was sorry he didn't come along when I was staying with you at the *Asturias*. You didn't mind my leaving you so hurriedly that night, Dexter? I really didn't want to meet that man Sully!"

Dexter didn't know what on earth to say. The last he'd seen of the man who now called himself Forgan was when he was slipping through a third-floor window at the *Hotel Asturias* and risking his life in a dangerous drop to the veranda below.

"I—well, sir—" Dickie Dexter tried to keep a grip on his riotous thoughts. "I mean—Mr. Sully told us about you afterwards, and—it's very awkward!"

What else could he say? If Mr. Forgan had seemed surprised or afraid it would have been different, but he seemed just quietly amused about the whole business. And, of course, it couldn't have been a surprise to him, because they'd told him all about their life at Katie's, and about Roger, and the *Transitus*, and how old Batey, who'd been their Forminaster for a time, had left, and lots of other things. Of course, when they were telling him, they didn't suspect for a single instant that he was a crook!

But the cool nerve of the man, to come to Katie's—to bluff Roger—to play the part of Forminaster! My hat! It was colossal!

"Oh, yea, Sully would tell you!" Just

for a moment the smile went from Mr. Forgan's face. "It is through that man, with his lying, boasting—But I refuse to be bitter! I thought I'd just come along and inquire what you propose to do. I haven't told Rog—the Head—that I know you. And I haven't told him about this, Beck!"

He took out a small notebook. Lincoln had seen it before, because in it Mr. Forgan—or Northwich, as they called him then—had entered down every item of money borrowed or spent on his behalf by Lincoln Beck.

"I meant to tell him about that," Mr. Forgan went on; "but, frankly, when it came to the point, I hadn't the courage. Roger knows, of course, that I've had a pretty rough time, but I'm doubtful if ever he would forgive me for borrowing from boys. Still, when I've paid back, I shall tell him!"

He closed the book and stuck it back in his pocket almost fiercely. Yet he still smiled as he looked at Dexter.

"Does—did you know the Head before, sir?" the Kid asked wonderingly.

"Know Roger Blunt?" asked Forgan. "Look at me, Dexter! Why, even Beck remarked upon the fact that I reminded him of Roger Blunt! He's my cousin—and my best friend! By Jove! Know him? If you knew Mr. Roger Blunt as well as I do, you'd be ready to kiss the very ground he walked on. The straightest, bravest, truest man who ever breathed! The one man in all the world who, despite all the ill-fortune which has befallen me, despite the lies of the Sullys and the stupidity of ignorant police, still believes in me! Whatever may happen to me in the future, believe this, boys! The headmaster of St. Katie's, Roger Blunt, is one of the finest men in all the world!"

CHAPTER 16. The Arrest of Linky!

IT was queer—horribly queer! Even Jimmy Curtis, who hadn't met Mr. Forgan before, began to think that the Kid and the Becks had made a horrible mistake in thinking the chap was an out-and-out wrong 'un.

But this news staggered them all. Roger was this chap's cousin! And you could see

by the way Forgan spoke about Roger that he admired him tremendously. Of course, they didn't need telling that Roger was a fine chap; they knew that, but, knowing it, they couldn't help being impressed by Forgan's statements.

There was a queer pause in the room for a time, as though Mr. Forgan expected one of them to speak. But what could they say?

"Well, I won't stay much longer," Mr. Forgan said abruptly. "I'm not going to make a speech, and I'm not going to try and prove to you that whatever the so-called Detective Sully told you is all nonsense. I realize that my conduct must have seemed horribly suspicious to you, and the only excuse I can give is that I really was very much up against it at the time. Mr. Blunt—perhaps some day he will tell you the whole story of my—oh, let's call it bad luck!"

Again he paused, but he was smiling once more, with a certain courage in his eyes which you couldn't help admiring.

"Anyhow, I'll just say this. It's a case of mistaken identity, chiefly due to that fool Sully," Mr. Forgan went on. "Wherever I go I am shadowed, cursed, by this man Fairway. I have no doubt he is very clever, but I am the one to suffer for his wrong-doing. Mr. Blunt knows, though, of course; I imagine he wouldn't agree to carry on with it if he knew that some of the boys in the school also know. Anyhow, his idea is that I should stay here for a while where I am quite safe. I am fully qualified to teach, I may say. Meantime, thanks to your Head's generosity, we shall have the best detectives and legal experts unravelling the tangled skein. In two months, three months, we may be able to prove to all the world that Herbert Forgan is not, and never has been, Herbert Fairway."

"Then you are not really this chap Fairway at all?" Jimmy Curtis managed to ask a question at last.

"Do you think I am?" Forgan rapped out the question with a sudden blaze of anger, which just as quickly he controlled, and even smiled again. "But it is not fair to ask you! You are only boys, and I ought not to try and influence you in any way over such a problem. Believe me, I do understand how you must feel over it all—and I cannot help you. I am not

going to ask you to preserve my secret. You must absolutely decide for yourselves whether you are prepared to wait and give me a chance—or not.

"In any case, I suggest that if you propose to take any steps, you communicate with Scotland Yard rather than drag Mr. Blunt into it. That is the only secret I would ask you to keep—in fairness to him. Don't mention it to him, nor mention the fact to anyone else, that he is my cousin and knows the full story. I'd loathe myself if I let Roger Blunt suffer in any way on my account. Good-bye, boys!"

"But—" Dickie Dexter tried to think of something else, but didn't quite know what he wanted to say.

"Do exactly what you think is right!" Mr. Forgan said quite cheerfully. "If the police come, I shall be here waiting for them. If they don't—I shall not refer to the matter in any way again until I have the clear proofs to show you, and"—he smiled cheerily at Lincoln Beck—"the wherewithal to settle the accounts of the late Mr. Northwich, my dear Beck! Good-bye!"

He nodded, and turned abruptly and swung out of the room. For two or three minutes after he had gone there was not a word spoken. They were all thinking—hard!

"Gee!" It was Lincoln Beck who first broke the silence, and even he wasn't boastful about it. "Say, Jimmy—But this beats the band!"

"Yes!" Curtis jerked out. "Well! What are you chaps going to do? Anything?"

"Forget it!" said Lincoln Beck. "Mean to say, if he's Roger's cousin— Well!"

"I don't think he'd ever have come here and faced you chaps again if he hadn't been a pretty straightforward sort of man," Curtis mused quietly. "What do you think, Kid?"

"I don't know!" The Kid shook his head helplessly. "Anyway, I'm doing nothing. I wouldn't like to think— And as you say, Jimmy, he would never have dared to come here—and even showing old Linky the amount of money he still owes him!"

"Shucks!" said Linky. "I'd forgotten that. You know, I always liked the man. If he does manage to prove there's been a ghastly mistake made, he'd be jolly glad

we'd played the game with him. I'm not out to help the cops!"

"They talked about it for quite a long time, but there wasn't much difference in their views. It was a frightfully complicated business, of course, but old Northwick-Forgan, as he called himself now—had certainly been jolly straight about it, and he hadn't even asked them to promise to keep it secret. He'd just left it to them to do whatever they wanted.

It's jolly difficult sometimes to decide exactly what is the right thing to do. What would you have done? Would you have gone sneaking off to the police and told the whole yarn? I'll bet you wouldn't! You'd have done exactly as the Kid and his chums did—keep it a close secret and never whisper a word to anyone.

And at the end of a week you would probably have felt as they did, which was jolly glad that they hadn't breathed a word to a living soul. Right from the first morning when he had a heart-to-heart chat with the Transitus lads, old Forgan was in the running for first prize as the most popular master at Katie's. He had one or two queer methods of teaching, especially such things as French, where he he went in more for the conversational system than strict grammar, but he made all the subjects interesting, because he always had some little yarn to tell the Form.

He took charge of the sports, too, and he simply staggered some of them by his feats. In football he wasn't particularly brilliant, except in giving tips on how to keep fit, or showing the goalie one or two tricks in the quick jumping line, because he was all out for agility and suppleness. In running he could give the crack man of the school a fair start over any distance and beat him easily.

Probably he shone most of all in the gym, where old Graydon admitted that he'd not seen many to beat him since he left Aldershot. The most difficult tricks seemed quite simple when Mr. Forgan tried them on.

"It's all a question of muscle control," he told a little mob of fellows who'd come to get a few tips from him in the gym, one day. It wasn't a compulsory lesson, but Mr. Forgan had just let a few of the boys know that he was taking a turn there, and he could give them a hint or

two if they rolled up. The Kid and Curtis had strolled in and watched Mr. Forgan as he swung on the hand-rings.

"Drag the horse along here!" he told two or three chaps. "That's right! Now I'll show you what I mean when I talk about muscle control! Ah! Dexter! I don't suppose you've ever seen anyone do this little trick before!"

He swung himself violently up by the hand-rings—though there didn't seem to be anything violent in his efforts. Yet presently he was going up till he almost touched the great beam from which the ropes were suspended. Then suddenly he had let his own rope go, and he was swinging with both hands to another but stationary rope. Quite easily, so it seemed, he had climbed a little higher up this, and then, his knees gripping the rope, he climbed until his right hand was on the top of the big beam.

Another two seconds and he was hanging by the finger-tips from the beam, and you could see him giving a swift look down to where the spring-board of the horse lay almost directly under him. The horse itself was probably about three feet out from the hand-rings, which were suspended from the beam.

"Now! Stand away from the horse!" Mr. Forgan called, and swung his legs very slightly. He couldn't swing very much, of course, because he'd got precious little grip with his fingers on the flat top of the beam.

"O-oh!" Half a dozen fellows gave an involuntary gasp as Mr. Forgan let go and dropped downwards. But the little swing had sent him out a little way—his feet, or rather the tips of his gym shoes merely touched the leather horse, and for an instant it seemed as though his whole body collapsed on to it—before he went sprawling off rather like a fellow who takes a low, flat dive, and his arms were slithering along the spring-board of the horse.

Then as his feet came sliding a few inches down the spring-board, old Forgan had jumped up with that quick little bounce of the circus performer, and put out his hands with a gesture of amusement.

"Quite simple—if you know exactly how to use your muscles!" he said cheerily, but not boastfully. "And it's a useful thing to be able to do—in case you're ever pursued by the police, and have to make a swift exit by the window or over the

balustrade. No, I'm not joking, Dexter! Dexter laughed, but I assure you that both criminals and the police nowadays attach much importance to gymnastic training. But don't try it until you are quite confident!"

As a matter of fact, Dexter wasn't laughing, but everybody else was. Yet only the Kid knew the real humour of the whole thing, for he'd only seen such a feat performed once before—and that was when this very same man had actually made his escape from the police!

In the general laughter and enjoyment of Mr. Forgan's humour, no one noticed the seriousness of the Kid. Forgan was already giving one of the Sixth fellows hints on a much simpler feat, and they gathered round to watch one of the crack gymnasts of the school make himself look rather foolish and ungainly over a trick that seemed as simple as A B C when Forgan did it.

Three weeks of the term had passed—not without certain little excitements for the Kid and his chums, totally unconnected with Mr. Forgan. But already the memory of Mr. Northwich, alias Herbert Fairway, alias Cumin Botic, had begun to fade in the dreams of the past, and "old Fergie" was part and parcel of St. Katie's.

Always cheery and good-humoured, he was already very popular with the other masters, and had even made a reputation for wit in the little social circle in which the masters moved. His knowledge of men, places, books, old furniture, paintings, jewellery, was a continual surprise even to men like Roger, who had introduced him to the Fraynes, his wife's people. Lord Velwood, a governor of the school, told Roger that he considered Forgan one of the most entertaining and delightful men he'd ever met.

But the thunderbolt, so far as the Kid and his chums were concerned, fell with a mighty crash just about four weeks after the beginning of the term.

Mr. Dunster, the Head's clerk, came to Study 7 somewhere about half-past two. But, the school porter, was just going from the room as Mr. Dunster entered. The porter had brought a note, marked "Urgent," addressed to "Mr. Richard Dexter, Study 7, St. Katherine's School," and the Kid was just tearing the envelope open when Dunster came in.

"Beck, J. L.?" asked Mr. Dunster in serious voice, and Linky answered cheerily. "The Head wishes to see you at once, please!"

The Kid stopped for a moment and looked at Jimmy Curtis and then at Linky.

"What's the trouble this time, old son?" he asked, and began to feel a bit worried because Roger didn't send Mr. Dunster to drag you along unless it were something serious.

Linky laughed and shook his head.

"Nothing this time, for sure, Kid! I'm the good little liddle who never strays away. Cheer-o!"

And Linky went off while the Kid opened the letter. It was from his old chum, Marjory Frayne, and she wrote quite excitedly to say that most dreadful things had happened, and they'd had burglars in the house, and Mr. Frayne had telephoned to the police, and they'd been making a thorough search and had found a clue.

"I don't know what it is exactly, but I heard father say that he couldn't believe it was any of the boys from the school. And the man—he's a detective, and isn't in uniform—said it was quite clear it was a schoolboy, and his name was Beck, and they are going off to the school now, so I'm scribbling this, and will give it to Davis (the chauffeur) so that he can let you have it. Lord Velwood's house was burgled the night before—by the same boy, the detective says. I don't believe it, Dickie, and you must help. Must doo."

"MARJORY."

"My giddy aunt!" said the Babe, and gave Jimmy Curtis a quick wink. "Sling it back when you've read it, Jimmy!"

Curtis was reading it through in another two seconds, and he carefully folded it before handing it back to the Kid.

Meantime, in the Head's study, Lincoln Beck was suddenly grasping the fact that this was intensely serious. Besides Roger, there was Mr. Frayne and a big, rather heavily-built man, dressed in a blue serge suit, and he seemed to glue his eyes on to Linky the moment he entered the room.

"Ah, Beck!" Roger's voice was very calm, but Linky knew when he spoke in that tone there was generally trouble

knocking round. "I want to ask you one or two questions, and I should be very glad if you would answer them as simply as possible. They are rather important, and I need not assure you that I am not trying to catch you in any way."

"Yes, sir," said Linky, and realized that everybody was now watching him very intently.

"Did you leave the school at all last night after lights-out?" asked Roger.

"No, sir!" Linky answered.

"Ah!" Roger nodded, and seemed a bit more cheery. "Have you any money on you, Beck? Could you show me all that you have?"

"Yes, sir."

Linky put his hand in his pocket and took out a mixed assortment of silver and coppers which he laid on Roger's table. Then, as he put his hand in his coat-pocket and pulled out a pocket-wallet, a horrible little thought flashed through his mind.

No one in the school knew that just after morning school to-day Mr. Forgan had called Beck back in rather a stern voice. When Linky turned and faced him, Mr. Forgan rapped out:

"Don't go about with your shoe-lace undone, Beck! I think I've called your attention to that before!"

Then, as Linky bent down to examine the shoe-lace which wasn't really undone, Mr. Forgan suddenly slipped an envelope into his hand, and said in a very quiet voice:

"All right, Beck! Take this—and run away now! On account, you know!" And added in a much louder voice: "Don't argue! Run away!"

And Mr. Forgan himself had swung out of the room. Linky had quietly slipped open the envelope, and inside were five brand-new one-pound notes!

Lincoln had put them in his case, but in the usual excitement of dinner he hadn't a chance to tell the Kid and his chums about this amazing thing, and it had rather slipped his memory just for a time until he was taking the case out.

"You have no other notes anywhere?" Roger asked, as he glanced almost casually into the case and saw that it wasn't absolutely bulging with notes.

"No, sir!"

Lincoln spoke quite definitely.

"No. Well"—Roger turned to the big man—"I think you may take it that the boy is speaking the absolute truth. Oh, by the way! Is this your handkerchief, Beck?"

He held up a rather nice coloured silk handkerchief in such a way that Lincoln could see the little white slip in the corner on which was embroidered "J. L. Beck."

"Yes, sir."

Linky was rather surprised.

"When did you lose it, Beck?"

"I couldn't say, sir." Linky hadn't the remotest idea. "But I'm sure I've not had it this term, sir. I mean—I think I had it at Christmas, sir, but didn't bring it back with me."

"Ah!" Roger began to smile very gently. "That is all right, Beck. I'm sorry—"

"Urgh!" It was the big man who had casually moved to Mr. Blunt's table, and, very quietly, picked up Linky's note-case, then suddenly made a growl of triumph. "Here you are!"

He held up the five clean pound-notes to Mr. Frayne.

"B/63 series!" he rapped out. "Yours, Mr. Frayne! We've got him!"

Inside the next two minutes there was any amount of excitement. Mr. Frayne was explaining again that he'd got forty one-pound notes from the bank yesterday, and had noted the series number, and that these were certainly five of them. Roger was trying to keep them all calm, and asking if he could explain, but the detective had gripped Linky's shoulder and was warning him that anything he said now would be used in evidence against him later on! And Linky was standing gasping and wondering, dimly gripping the fact that he was being accused of having burgled Lord Velwood's house and Mr. Frayne's house during the past two nights!

CHAPTER 15.

Omitted by an Expert!

SOMEHOW Roger took control, despite the detective, and Lincoln wasn't carted off straight away. Roger asked Linky where he got the notes from, and Linky said that he had them

given him in repayment of a debt. He could explain more fully, he said, but he'd prefer to do it to Mr. Hunt alone, and after he'd had a chance of seeing the one who'd given them to him.

Once he'd got over that first little shock, Linky didn't get the wind up at all, and his attitude impressed both Roger and Mr. Frayne. In a tight corner, Lincoln Beck was quite a good chap, and he knew that if he staved to give the whole story away it would land the Head and quite a lot of other people into a mess. But he didn't show the white feather at all.

So Lincoln wasn't actually pressed, but Roger told him that he was not in any circumstances to leave the school, as, if he did, he would most certainly prove himself guilty. Mr. Frayne agreed with Roger's course, and the detective also agreed to carry on his investigations a bit further. Lincoln was packed off from the room, apparently free, but, of course, he wouldn't have much chance if he did try to bolt. Roger would watch that—as he assured the detective after Lincoln had gone.

When Linky got back to Study 7 he had another shock! Mr. Forgan himself was there! He'd heard the rumours about burglaries, and had come along in a frightful sweat, but he was just calming down now. Lincoln told him what had happened, and everybody in Study 10 learned about the notes.

"But—Why, the Head himself gave me—Oh, but I see it all now! So Mr. Frayne had the series number, had he?" Mr. Forgan began to smile quite cheerily once more. "Don't you worry, Beck! I see exactly what has happened—and that chap Fairway is digging my footstep again. Well, I shall clear you completely by to-morrow—and clear myself, too!"

He was positively radiating courage and good humour now, and almost winked at the Kid, who was watching him and the wonderful play of his eyes with something approaching fascination. Mr. Forgan even whistled a bar of some song—and then absolutely laughed joyously for the Kid's benefit, so it seemed.

Curiously enough, the Kid recognised the song Mr. Forgan whistled, and knew that the words which came into that

particular part were: "Only another night to roam."

"Don't worry one little bit, boys!" he assured them before he left the room. "I am going straight to the Head now. You can leave it entirely to me!"

And he did go to the Head. Just what he said they didn't know, but he had a fairly long talk with Roger, and the Head never even came near Lincoln Beck that day.

But it was a queer day. In Study 7 they talked and talked, wondering what Roger thought about it all, and what Forgan had said to him, and what a queer chap Forgan was, yet never getting very much farther in their attempts to get at the real truth.

Only the Kid whispered to Jimmy Curtis, while they were getting undressed that night, something of his own ideas, and Jimmy gasped.

"Anyway, you please yourself, Jimmy," the Kid said. "But I'm slipping into bed like this, and I'm going outside as soon as the coast is clear. If I get nabbed—well, I shall just say straight away why I did it. The thing's got to be cleared up sooner or later, and old Forgie, whistling that song and winking, too. Oh, I may be wrong, but I've got a weird idea about it all!"

"I'm coming, too, old son!" Jimmy Curtis whispered back.

That was why when most of the other fellows had settled off to sleep the Kid and Curtis were creeping down the emergency exit stairs, and were practically fully dressed. Very cautiously they wandered in the shadow of the school, keeping eyes and ears open. But at the end of two hours they were both beginning to think they were qualifying for first-class mugs.

Meantime, somebody else was also doing a bit in the bobby's line. Jolly Roger had decided to keep a sharp look-out to-night, and in any case, he wasn't going to risk any chance of Lincoln Beck doing a bolt. Not that Roger thought he would really, but—well, it was an extraordinary business, despite the fact that Mr. Forgan had been to him and said that Beck had told him the whole story and would the Head take no steps whatever until noon to-morrow, because Forgan had got a theory and he hoped to prove it by that time.

At one o'clock then Jolly Roger discovered that in Dormitory D both Lincoln

Beck and Washy Book were sleeping the sleep of the innocent. But the beds of Curtis and Dexter were unoccupied.

Roger slipped back swiftly to his own House, by the private passage which connected it with the school. His idea was to get on thicker clothing and wait for the two lads, and discover the real truth.

But as he passed his House-study, very quietly and swiftly, Roger had a momentary impression of a light shining. He went to the door, and was going to open it very cautiously a little farther when it was moved by someone on the other side, and the next moment Roger was aware of the fact that a figure was looming up before him.

"Ah! Who are—"

Roger made a quick grab, but the other fellow was quicker. In a flash his fist had shot out and Roger went crashing back. The blow, coming so swiftly and unexpectedly, dazed him for a moment. Then he jumped to it. That is, he grasped the fact that the figure had chased off down the stairs, and he went, too. Before he reached the foot the gentle banging of the door leading into the school grounds told him that the chap, whoever he was, had got a pretty decent start.

But Roger was through the door himself inside ten seconds. Right across the school court, keeping well to the wall, he could just discern a figure going at a record pace. Even as Roger began to run forward he saw the figure suddenly go sprawling and other figures appeared.

Two sharp cries of "Help! Help!" reached him, and away went Roger.

Dickie Dexter and Curtis had seen the figure come flying from the Head's door, and they even glimpsed someone else come out, evidently in chase before the first figure neared them.

"Collar him, Jimmy!" whispered the Kid. "Now!"

They both jumped, and down came their prey.

"Help!" yelled the Kid.

"Help!" yelled Jimmy Curtis. "Help! Run— No, you don't, my lad! Cling on, Kid!"

Someone else was giving a hand, and the captive was on his back with a big form sitting on top of him and nearly throttling him.

Oh, but it was a night of surprises for

everybody! Roger was only in his dressing-gown, but he'd slipped off the girdle from the waist and inside ten minutes he'd done a bit of first-class rough handling and the prisoner had his hands tied behind his back.

"Come along, boys!"

Roger had recognised the other two, and they ran their victim back to the House. Here in Roger's study the light was switched on and they looked upon the smiling face of—Mr. Herbert Forgan!

He was fully dressed, and despite the rough usage, looked quite happy and comfortable. Roger stared from him to the half-open and untidy drawers of his desk. Then he suddenly caught sight of a bundle of papers sticking out of Forgan's coat pocket. Roger made a grab at them and recognised a bundle of his own diplomas and certificates.

"What does this mean, Forgan?" Roger asked in his faint tones. "Unless you tell me the full truth I shall send for the police."

"I should do that in any case, Mr. Blunt!" Forgan smiled, and didn't seem in the least perturbed. "The game's up so far as I am concerned, and I shall go quietly, you know. But those burglaries—I did them. I left poor young Beck's handkerchief just to create a little diversion. It amuses me to see everyone getting into a frightful state over these trivial affairs."

Somehow, Roger began to grasp the full truth, or parts of it. Forgan assured him, as though it were a good joke, that the open introduction from the Head of Yale University, as well as all his certificates in the name of Herbert Forgan, had been stolen, just as he was now keen on stealing Roger's own certificates for future use.

"But I should have left you a full note of all that had happened," Forgan said. "I've thoroughly enjoyed my month here. The police are hunting the Continent for me, and here I am. In good form and in first-class health. However, the game's played out, and young Dexter and Curtis have brought me down. Did you suspect that little song I was whistling to-day, Dexter?"

"Only another night to roam!" Dexter repeated. "Yes. I thought—I told Curtis—"

"Good man!" Forgan seemed quite

pleased. "A very bright lad, Mr. Blunt. Much above the average in intelligence. But—" His face suddenly contorted with pain. "I wonder if you'd mind unfastening this wretched thing that's tied round my wrists! I know I ought not to ask, but I'm afraid these energetic lads of yours broke something when they brought me down. Ah-h-h!"

A little moan of sheer agony which he struggled to repress with clenched teeth broke from him. Roger Blunt was not a brute, even though he could at times be brutal, and he stopped forward now, but nodded to Curtis to stand by the door. He was taking no risks.

He unfastened the girdle from Forgan's wrists, and Forgan in obvious pain stretched out his right hand.

"It's the wrist, I think," he murmured, as he stood up. "If you'd just feel it, Mr. Blunt—"

Roger was looking at the wrist, Curtis was by the door, and Dexter was quite near his chem, when, with amazing suddenness, Forgan's left flashed out and Mr. Blunt, with never a chance to defend himself, went to the floor.

The next instant Forgan had jumped back and a revolver was suddenly pointing at Curtis.

"Don't move, boys!" Forgan rapped out. "I shall wing you if you do. I told you gymnastics—"

He had backed to the window, and until then no one had noticed that the catch was already undone. It was one of these windows which open door-wise from the centre, and Forgan swung it open just as Roger was struggling to his feet again.

"I should keep very still, Blunt!" he snapped. "The police will tell you—Ah!"

He had hopped upwards and backwards, sat for a second on the ledge, and then turned quickly and scrambled out to the outside sill. Yet it was all done so quickly and easily that his revolver was pointing into the room again before they really grasped his manoeuvre and he was kneeling on the sill.

"Good-bye, boys. Always keep up your gym work. You were pretty good to-night, and I'm sorry I can't stay!"

He suddenly stood upright on the sill, and they could see his face literally beam-

ing with pleasure and joy. Now his hands went above his head.

"Sorry, Blunt. Good-bye. The revolver isn't loaded, and you've got your certificates!"

He leaped backwards and outwards. It was twenty feet to the ground, and they rushed, as Dexter had rushed before, to the window and stared out. All they saw was a figure picking himself up quite easily and then swinging round and racing swiftly across the quad.

"After him!" Roger rapped out, then suddenly changed his mind. "No; he's had too much start, and I know he's a first-rate runner. He can give me ten in the hundred. He did it just after I first met him. I—I'm afraid I have been rather foolish, but I must say I liked the fellow."

"He—he's your cousin, sir?" Dexter said sympathetically, because old Roger was looking a bit sick about things.

"My—what?" Roger gasped. "I'd never seen or heard of the man in my life till he came with a letter and very high certificates and testimonials from Yale, and suggested that he might have a temporary post here to study British methods. He said he was a first-class man at sports—and he proved it! And his knowledge of languages was obviously splendid. But sit down! You evidently know more about the man than I do. Tell me everything!"

They told him, and Roger even went out for a short time, and came back with Lincoln Beck and heard his story. Of course, everything was quite clear long before the detective came, for whom Roger had telephoned. Lincoln Beck was completely cleared. It was obvious that, after the London affair, the strange humour and sheer impertinence of "Herbert Fairway" hit on the idea of going to Katie's, partly as a hiding-place and partly as a rest.

With his delightful manner, his extraordinary ability, and his amazing capacity for deceiving even the cleverest and most acute judges of human nature, he might have posed as a master at Katie's for years on end. But "Cousin Bertie" had no intention of doing so. He began to gather "moss," and it was proved later that he had made quite a decent haul in the neighbourhood, aided by the fact that he had been able to visit the houses as a friend of the family.

Most of his takings were in hard cash or small valuable articles which could be easily converted into money. It was discovered later that earlier in the evening of his last day at Katie's he had gone out with his suitcase and had sent it away by train to a certain London station to be kept till called for. By the time this fact was discovered, which was late on the following day, the bag had already been reclaimed from the London station!

"Which proves that he is no longer in this neighbourhood," Mr. Blunt told Dexter and his chums the following night. "I'm very sorry, boys, that this has happened, but I don't think any one of us can really be blamed for what occurred. We were deceived by a post-master in the art, and we are fortunately accustomed to dealing with straight and honourable people and not smooth-tongued rogues such as Forgan undoubtedly is. Let us forget him. Scotland Yard will doubtless lay him by the heels presently, but I think we have seen the last of him at Katie's!"

"I hope so, sir," Lincoln Beck murmured, because Linky felt a little bit sick about the way Forgan had lauded him in for a real trying time.

Dickie Dexter said nothing. He just wondered. Would Forgan ever cross their path again, or was Roger right in thinking that they had seen the last of him, and that sooner or later they would hear that Scotland Yard had gathered him into their fold?

CHAPTER 16.

Park Pine and Bright Eyes!

FOR some days after the departure of Mr. Forgan, everyone in study 7 followed the papers carefully in the hope of reading something about him. But there was nothing reported, and presently as the days passed on, they began to forget all about Cousin Bertie, who had so many other names that he must keep found it difficult to remember them all himself.

Jimmy Curtis began to get violently interested in footer, and Washy Beck was trying hard to follow in his footsteps. Dexter wanted to be enthusiastic, but somehow he never shone very well as the footer field, and whenever he could he looked off with Lincoln Beck.

Of course, when there was a big match on, whether for School or Form, Dexter was as keen as the next man. But even in this Linky was on the dull side. When the Kid was yelling himself hoarse with excitement Linky would be bored stiff. After the most brilliant goal that was ever scored, when strong lads of the Sixth were chucking their caps in the air and knocking their best pals over, and screaming their joy aloud, Linky would blurt out:

"Is that a corner-kick, Kid? What's the fuss about now?"

"Shout, you toad! Shout!" the Kid would yell back. "It's a goal—a goal! Katie's are leading 2—1! Oh, my hat! But we'll wipe the earth with them now!"

And yet this same fellow Lincoln Beck could spend a couple of hours following a quiet round some ancient church or old ruins, and gasp with wonder at the moth-eaten yarns he was told! It was marvellous!

He was a real genuine specimen of what they call the rubber-neck in his part of the world. Knowing Linky as you do, you would scarcely believe that there wasn't any excitement, next to breaking records on a motor-car, which he liked better than wandering round some ancient abbey.

On such occasions as he managed to persuade the Kid to come with him, Dexter invariably wished he'd stuck to footer, and would drift off into a day-dream while they trailed round. He would waken up with a sudden jerk when Linky gripped his arm and said, "Chee-ee-ee-ee!" just like the sound made by a well-pumped bicycle tyre when you take a tin-fack out of it. And Linky's eyes would be wide open and his head twisting upwards and sideways in real rubber-neck fashion as though he were afraid of missing the tiniest detail.

As far as possible, of course, the Kid kept Linky from indulging in this weird taste of his, and it says something for his efforts in this way that it wasn't until this particular term that Linky had ever managed to get inside Dulchester Cathedral.

But one February afternoon the Kid and Linky strolled quietly together through Dulchester's ancient streets, and, as they passed the famous Dulchester Cross there was a little mob of about twenty people gathered round, and someone was spouting in a loud voice, telling everybody just who built the cross in the dim and distant past,

and a lot of things that had happened since. It wasn't altogether an unusual sight in Dulchester, and you could have told a mile away just where the mob had started out from. Most of them were from Linky's own country, the famous U.S.A.

"Let's hitch up, Kid, and listen to this," Linky said, quite excitedly. "You've never told me about this!"

He seemed quite pained that the Kid had never told him all about the Dulchester Cross, and he darted off across the square, and inside two minutes you could see him nearly dislocating his neck with the rest of the crowd.

The Kid meandered slowly across, and reached Linky's side in time to hear him give his well-known imitation of a punctured tyre.

"Che-e-e-e-e! Guess if this old chunk of granite could say a few words, sir—"

"Yes, sir!" The tall, calm-looking, horn-spectacled man smiled on Linky kindly. "And what part of the States do you come from, young man? Are you located in this vicinity now?"

He asked a few more questions of that sort, and Linky gave him his full history, so that by the time the crowd moved on across the square once more, Linky was most decidedly hitched up with the mob, and the Kid had been dragged into the job as well. It turned out that the little crowd were a collection of highly important people who were doing a tour of Europe, with a special eye on places of historical interest. They were staying in Dulchester for a few days, and had more or less commended the Clifters Hotel and the Abbey Hotel, and, after seeing the famous Dulchester Cross, they were going to pay a first visit to the cathedral.

Linky was quite pleased about that, even though the Kid wasn't, and they wandered into the cathedral, where one of the official guides was already waiting for them. You know the usual programme? Some folks simply love it—and some don't. It isn't anything up against the Kid really, but he knew jolly well he was in for an afternoon of first-class boredom. Linky was perfectly happy, and he was gluing himself right alongside the guide and staring up at the roof and peering down at inscriptions and saying "Che-e-e-e-e!" in

great style, while the Kid was some distance behind the tail-end of the crowd.

Oh, why on earth hadn't he stayed and played footer? How much longer was the guide chap going on jawing?

"The offerings of the pilgrims were so great that in the year 1378 they were enabled to raise the roof, which as you will please observe—"

They were straining their necks to look at the roof—all except one tall, distinguished-looking chap, who had also dropped behind a little and was now standing quite near the Kid.

The Kid had noticed him once or twice, partly because he was a good-looking chap, and partly because he kept looking at the Kid. He was well-built, though a little on the slim side for one who was evidently somewhere in the fifties. His hair was tinged with grey, and his carefully-trimmed beard and moustache were the same, but his complexion, where the face-fungus didn't hide it, was almost rosy with health. Probably he'd been an athlete in his younger days, but there was no doubt about it that he looked very fit and alert.

"Waal, my boy!" he spoke with just a gentle, pleasant drawl, and his accent had just the faintest hint of that nasal twang which is supposed to be the copyright of Americans. "Are you interested in these imposing edifices erected by the sacrifices of bygone generations?"

"Oh, I've been here many a time," the Kid answered. "But my friend is very interested."

"Yes, I am," the American said. "I guess I've heard all I want to hear to-day, and I'm just dying for a nice cup of coffee, with lots of cream in it—and a pork pie! Say, have you ever heard of anyone wanting that for afternoon tea?"

The Kid felt he wanted to laugh—not at the chap's queer taste in the tea line, but because that was just the tea which he and his chums had had dozens of times at Dawson's, in Close Street. Everybody at Katie's knew of Dawson's pies, and everybody knew that Dawson's made the finest coffee, with lots of cream, for miles round!

"You want to try Dawson's!" the Kid said. "I've had coffee and pork pie there many a time. It's in—"

"Let's feed!" suggested the American quickly. "You show me the way. Your chum is bound to come to Dawson's!"

The Kid had precious little doubt about the fact that Linky would wander along to Dawson's when his neck got really tired. And if he didn't—well, the Kid hadn't undertaken to be a mother's help so far as Linky Beck was concerned, and he gave a swift assent to the stranger's bright idea.

He was a nice chap; one of those men you feel at home with straightaway, and inside two minutes the Kid was telling him a few facts about Katie's. Then the stranger would ask one or two more questions, in that pleasant, gently-drawing, but very interested voice he had. In this fashion they drifted through the streets till they came to Dawson's.

The stranger had the same manner with the waitress who buzzed up. You know what I mean? He didn't rap out: "Two coffees—two creams—two pies!" in the "don't-you-dare-argue-with-me" voice, but he talked as though he were the oldest customer they had, and even said, jestingly, of course, that he'd heard of Dawson's pies on the rolling prairies of Western America. And the waitress went off laughing and feeling a bit happier about life, and forgot about everybody else's orders in her anxiety to get the right-complexioned pies for the alien man and the bright boy at the third table.

The Kid was laughing, too, but somewhere at the back of his mind was a queer sort of feeling. Have you ever had it? You know perfectly well that this is the first time you've ever met a particular person, yet, for the life of you, you can't get rid of the feeling that you know him quite well, and that you've met him many a time before!

That was the sort of feeling that was drifting uneasily round the Kid's mind, even while he laughed at his new friend's jests.

"And I suppose life in your justly-famous school drills on from day to day with the calm, slow-moving, but powerful progress of the deep and mighty river?" drawled the American. (Oh, he could speak a mouthful, as Linky Beck would have said!) "No excitements to disturb the current of your work! No alarms of fires, no burglars breaking in—just peace!"

"Oh, I don't know about that," the Kid answered, and looked straight into the stranger's spectacled eyes. Behind the glasses the man's eyes were positively

radiating amusement and enjoyment—and a sudden, horrible suspicion shot like a red-hot stab through the Kid's mind. Where had he seen someone with eyes just as tantalizingly bright as this man's?

The very question the man had asked him brought it all back in a swift flash! Why, less than a month ago, there had been burglaries around Dulchester, and tremendous excitement and complications at the school, over the master who had called himself Herbert Forgan!

And this man, posing as an American tourist, eating Dawson's pies and questioning the Kid, was Forgan himself.

CHAPTER 17.

A Personal Interview!

DICKIE DEXTER could feel his heart beating like a steam-hammer as the truth flashed upon him.

But that didn't upset Richard's quick-acting mind! He guessed straight away that there wouldn't be any sense in showing the fact that he knew, so, just to hide his confusion, he pretended to sneeze, and buried his face in his handkerchief.

"Tell me something of your excitement!" the man was saying. "Didn't I see something in the papers about an attempted burglary at your school some little time ago—or was it another school?"

"Oh, we had a bit of excitement in that way," the Kid admitted, and began to get a firm grip of himself. "I didn't know it was in the papers. But the chap got away all right, and he didn't really get anything from the school."

"And I guess you'd be all ready for him if he ever tried to make a second trip!" the American laughed. "Vurry interesting! Vurry!"

They talked quite a lot because the American was mildly interested in the burglary, but the Kid treated it as a thing that had happened and passed into the dim and distant past. While they were talking, Linky Beck came drifting in, and he joined them. Of course, the Kid couldn't tell Linky his ideas about the chap, and anyhow, the Kid began to take less part in the conversation because the other two were talking about America, and the stranger said he thought he'd met Mr. Beck some time ago, but couldn't be quite sure.

And all the time the Kid kept watching the chap, though he didn't overdo it. The queer thing was that he couldn't quite make up his mind absolutely definitely even now. At first he was dead certain that it was Herbert Fairway, who, clean-shaven and rather jaunty-looking, had passed as Mr. Forgan, B.A., and taught the Transition for nearly a month. Then he had the feeling that he was deceiving himself because the chap had eyes rather like old Fairway's in the way they sparkled with sheer joy.

But what on earth could the chap—if he really were Fairway—be doing with this crowd of American tourists? Was it likely that the man would risk coming back to Dulchester again, even in a first-rate disguise?

They went out at last, after quite a top-hole tea, for which the American paid without any argument. As they sauntered along, another member of the American party passed them and greeted their friend,

"Ah, Mr. Blunt, I missed you at the hotel!" the newcomer said. "I'll see you later, perhaps?"

"I'm coming now," their friend agreed. "Good-bye, boys! I've been verry pleased to have the pleasure of meeting you, and I hope I'll see you again! I'll not forget your names—Lincoln Dock and Dexter! Good-bye!"

He left them and the Kid turned to Linky.

"Blunt! My hail! Did you hear his name, Linky?" he demanded. "Taking old Roger's name! Did you guess who he was, old son?"

But Lincoln didn't guess. What was more, when the Kid put his suspicions to him, Linky became sarcastic. The chap wasn't a bit like old Fairway, and anyway it was pretty certain he'd never take the same name as Roger and then come to Dulchester! Blunt was a fairly common name, anyhow, and—

"Forget it, Kid!" Linky said tolerantly. "You got old Cousin Bertie on the brain, but you can't go buzzin' round and tackling everybody and saying they're Herbert Fairway, alias Mr. Forgan. Why, that mob I hitched on to this afternoon—think they'd have anything to do with anybody who wasn't one of the gilt-edged people? They've all travelled together from Boston and New York, and they all belong to the Zenith Club, which is the real thing in high-class fat-wads. They read Shakespeare,

and study the works of the real high-brows. That chap who corted me round—he's dead keen on Ruskin. Don't you go creating any fuss about that lot, Kid, 'cos they won't stand for it!"

Linky indeed became almost indignant about the Kid's suspicions, and, of course, the Kid himself saw quite plainly that he couldn't just go and tell a bobby to go to the Cloisters Hotel and arrest a certain chap there, because the Kid felt sure he was a first-class criminal. The Kid didn't know a great deal about British law, but he guessed it didn't allow for that sort of thing.

But what ought he to do exactly? You see, knowing what he did about this chap Fairway, he guessed that there was quite a lot of trouble coming to Mr. Roger Blunt, if Fairway were pretending to be Roger Blunt!

Yet, surely to goodness, the chap couldn't be pretending to be Roger Blunt right in Dulchester itself, where everybody knew the Head of Katie's!

It was a horribly complicated business all round. One minute the Kid felt he was an ass for imagining such fatheaded things, and then the next minute he could see, with his mind's eye, the American stranger with the jolly, laughing eyes behind the big specs—and felt dead certain that this was Fairway, the man who had done Lincoln Dock in for a fair amount of money, had landed quite a lot of bills on Mr. Cyrus Dock, had hurgled several houses round Dulchester, including Lord Valwood's and Mr. Frayne's, and had tried to sneak all Roger's diplomas and certificates! A man who, according to Detective Sully, of New York, was the cleverest "con. man" in the wide world, and had even made a hard-hearted detective hand his money over!

The Kid dragged Jimmy Curtis on one side and told him the whole yarn, including his own doubts as soon as he had a chance.

"What would you do about it, Jimmy?" the Kid asked. "I would go and do the giddy detective stunt, but I can't—"

"You go and tell the whole yarn to Jolly Roger!" Jimmy decided. "He's as dead keen as you are on catching Fairway. You put the whole thing up to him, Kid. Roger will know!"

Of course, that sounds easy enough, but, as a matter of fact, it isn't quite such a simple thing—to see the Head at a school

such as Kalin's as you might think, except when he wanted to see you. There was a certain amount of formality to be gone through for anyone below the Sixth, and it generally meant putting the whole thing up to your Form-master. And the Kid couldn't very well do it that way, because he couldn't explain to anyone except Roger himself what it was he wanted to see the Head about.

Still, having decided to follow Jimmy's advice, the Kid managed to see Mr. Dunster, the Head's clerk, just before morning school on the following day. Dunster, of course, wanted to know all about it, but the Kid put him off by explaining that it was an urgent matter which had really nothing to do with the school, and would Mr. Dunster mind mentioning it to the Head?

Mr. Dunster did mention it, and somewhere about a quarter-past ten a message came to the master of the Transitus, desiring him to send Dexter R., of his Form, to the Head's room. Several fellows wondered what new stunt the Kid had been up to, especially when they saw how serious he looked.

You can bet that old Roger was puzzled, too! He knew Dexter quite well, and he'd never known him before try to seek an interview with the Head. What was the little game this time?

Wherefore Roger was very much alert when Dexter was ushered in. He was sitting up, very erect and very headmasterish, and his eagle eyes were gleaming brightly. If the Kid had had an uneasy conscience he'd have had several attacks of ice-cold shivers in the first few seconds.

"Ah! Dexter! You wish to see me?" Roger rapped out. "An urgent matter—and a personal one, I understand? Yes?"

But the Kid wasn't put off his stroke quite so easily as all that! He told Roger all about yesterday afternoon, including the tea at Dawson's, and he gave his own views and Lincoln Beck's views as well.

Roger's eye had lost its glitter to some extent before the Kid had finished, and when he asked him questions it was in a careful way, just as a judge might have done and you would never have guessed that Roger was weighing up a lot of things from the answers.

You can't blame Roger for being suspicious—suspicious of Dexter, I mean!

Once or twice in days gone by, when Roger was Form-master of the Transitus, Richard Dexter had played the bleating lamb on Roger, and long afterwards, when it was too late, Roger had discovered that he'd been the innocent lamb and Richard Dexter had been the dorp, ingenious villain of the piece!

"Does Beck major agree with your views?" Roger asked, and again Dexter told him that he didn't.

"When did you first become suspicious?" was another question Roger put, and quite a lot of other details. But the end of it all was that Roger came to the opinion that in this case Dexter was simply acting sensibly and telling him just what he felt. It was up to Roger to find some way of settling the question.

But how? Roger felt just as the Kid had done that it was a very awkward problem. If it really were Fairway, the sooner the police took charge of him the better, because such a man was a danger to the community. More, if he were really taking Roger's own name—it might do Roger himself, and the school, a tremendous amount of harm. So it wasn't the sort of job over which you could sit down and do nothing.

"Have you any suggestions as to what steps might be taken to test your suspicions, Dexter?" Roger asked.

"I haven't really, sir," the Kid admitted. "But, talking it over with Curtis, sir, we thought it might be a good idea—"

He explained to Roger one or two of the bright schemes Jimmy Curtis and he had struck, and Roger listened quite calmly, and never showed by a flicker of an eyelid his personal amazement that Richard Dexter's ingenuity was even superior to what Roger had imagined.

"Yes, Dexter!" Roger nodded calmly when Dexter had finished. "Very well! It may be better if you have an exact from me in case your investigations occupy more time than you anticipate. I cannot say that I entirely approve of boys from this school acting as private detectives, but in the circumstances I am prepared to take some little risk. I suggest you even lunch at the Cloisters Hotel to-day. It may be that I shall see you there later. But after your masterly exposition of the science of detection, I am content to leave the matter

to your hands. I will take certain steps, of course. Very good, Dexter!"

He handed him a slip of paper—an exact allowing Dexter, Curtis, Beck ma, and Beck mi. to be absent from the school from 12-20 until 10 p.m. Even the Kid felt he wanted to gasp when he saw it!

But he kept quite calm and cool and murmured:

"Thank you, sir. I will report later, sir!"

And Mr. Roger Blunt, headmaster of St. Katie's School, smiled to himself as he paced up and down his study after Dexter had gone. He wasn't smiling about Herbert Fairway, but about Richard Dexter.

"If this is some new trick of his, then he is even more ingenious than I have given him credit for," Roger mused. "I must keep very alert! And if it is quite correct, he is even more remarkable! It is most interesting!"

It was! Even Dexter had ceased to worry much in the joy of quietly letting his chums know the programme for the day! They were staggered when they saw the exact, but they fell in with the scheme at once. Linky was quite certain that the Kid was wrong, but there was nothing wrong with the idea of a very full half-day and evening in Dulchester!

"Lead on, Detective Dexter!" Linky murmured as they went boldly from the school at 12-30. "I've got my autograph album all right, and so's Washy! Now tell us the scheme, old son!"

And Detective Dexter (no connection with any other firm) calmly explained:

CHAPTER 18.

Linky's Little Part!

AT the Cloisters Hotel it didn't take them long to find out just where the members of the Zenith Club were lunching, and, as Linky had already promised to meet one or two of them, there wasn't any fuss over the four lads being shown to the same room.

They sat down at a separate table, of course, but Linky was not the sort to give a polite bow across the room and leave it at that—especially when he'd had instructions on his part from the Kid! He was hopping about and dragging Brother

Washy with him, and inside ten minutes all the members of the Zenith Club were gently amused by the brothers' enthusiasm, and had learned the fact that Lincoln Beck and his friends had got a special leave for that afternoon because their headmaster was quite anxious the Becks should meet their fellow-countrymen again!

"And, say, Mr. Wootton, I'm real keen to get a few autographs in my little album of the distinguished company which has gathered here," Lincoln told one of his new friends, and he dragged out his autograph album, and opened it to a clean, unsullied page, and Mr. Wootton signed it.

Linky got one or two others before he wandered back and tackled No. 2 course on the menu, but as soon as he'd got through that he was up again, and the autograph album came out once more for someone else to sign. The Kid, watching him, saw Linky seize upon the friend who'd taken them to tea at Dawson's yesterday—and the Kid felt his heart beating a little more quickly.

For only the Kid and Linky really knew that this was the most difficult part of the job. Linky had planted his autograph

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book before "Mr. Blunt" and was rattling ahead in great style.

But just at first it looked as though Mr. Blunt would try to dodge the job, but the other folks at the table laughed about it, and Mr. Blunt took out his fountain pen and signed it. The three other people at the table were already getting out their fountain pens to sign, but just at the moment when Mr. Blunt had completed his, Linky was suddenly attracted by somebody at the other end of the room.

"Excuse me just one moment!" said Linky. "I'm coming back! I'm a whale on high-class autographs!"

But he'd dashed off back to the table where the Kid and the other two sat, and, if anybody had been watching, they would have realized that his chums were telling him to sit down and not make an ass of himself by bobbing round the room like a jumping frog.

"Wait until we've finished lunch!" the Kid expostulated in a loud voice. "You and your mouldy old autograph albums! You'll want a special library for them before you've finished. But let the people have a chance to eat!"

"All right! All right! Don't get so jumpy, Kid!" Lincoln protested, but sat down quite obediently and stuck the autograph album on his knee.

"O.K., Kid!" he whispered, as he tucked the sweets. "Smuggle it away. I've got Washy's!"

So that by the time the meal was finished the Kid had Linky's autograph album and Linky had Washy's. As the mob began to drift from the dining-room, Linky was up again and dodging round once more with an open book with which he pestered various distinguished members of the Zenith Club—who were really rather pleased at the idea that their signatures were considered important enough to stick in an album.

The Kid had no more than a brief glimpse of "Mr. Blunt," but he noticed that to-day the American was wearing glasses with yellow lenses! Considering the fact that this was the one point on which the Kid was backing—that is, the chap's eyes—it struck him that there was something very queer about the yellow specs.

The Ducks, of course, were hitching up with the mob, but the Kid and Curtis drifted quietly away. As they sauntered

through the lounge-hall of the hotel, who should they spot but Jelly Roger himself! He merely nodded to them, however, and the Kid didn't attempt to report progress at this stage. But Roger was doing a little bit of investigating on his own!

Meantime, the Kid and Curtis wandered on to a certain chemist's shop in Dulchester. Maybe you've heard of Charlie Challinor before? He was the chief assistant of the chemist, really, and had already passed a few exams which showed that he was a bright youth. But Charles was a real chemist and scientist, inasmuch as he knew quite a lot about the queer things that can be done with mixing chemicals.

It was Charles, for instance, who, quite a long time ago now, had explained to Curtis and Dexter quite a lot about how the police took finger-prints and how they could get them quite clearly, when apparently there wasn't a finger-print at all.

The Kid had been tremendously interested in that, though he never expected he'd have anything to do with finger-prints—until last night, when he remembered some of the things Detective Sully had told him at the Asturias Hotel during the Christmas holidays, after the notorious crook, Herbert Fairway, had made his escape. Detective Sully had said that one of the sure things by which in the fulness of time he reckoned they'd lay Fairway by the heels would be finger-prints. They'd got Fairway's finger-prints all right!

That's where the Kid had had his inspiration from for his present stunt, and he was quite excited as he explained to Charles Challinor all about it in the dispensing-room at the back of the shop and asked him whether he thought he'd be able to get anything out of the autograph album he dragged out.

On the top of one of the pages was written in a curious back-hand "R. O. Blunt," and both the Kid and Charlie Challinor handled that page very carefully. Then Charlie began to hunt among the bottles and turned up one or two books he'd got, and presently he was sprinkling some powder on the leaf which they'd torn carefully from the album.

In a few more minutes Charlie was holding the leaf up by one corner.

"There you are, children!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Scotland Yard couldn't

have made a better job of it. Of course, I can't tell you exactly what fingers they are— But I don't know! Now look here! I'll bet those are the four fingers of the left hand where the chap pressed the page down to keep it straight! That's smudged a bit—but the others are clear!"

Oh, Charles was very proud of the job, though he didn't quite know what it was all about. Nor did he really believe the Kid when the latter said he was going straight out to send a telegram to a big detective in London!

But that's exactly what the Kid did, and he spent quite a lot of money on a telegram to Detective Sully, Asturias Hotel, London.

"Believe Cousin Bertie here again. Have obtained finger-prints and will send to you if desired, but Cousin not staying here long. With American Zenith Club tourists. Wire instructions to Headmaster or to R. Dexter, St. Katherine's, Dulchester."

Half-an-hour later Detective Sully received the telegram in London, and just for a moment a smile rested on his face after he had read it. Then he passed it over to another strong silent calm-looking sort of man.

"Better pack your grip right now, Pinky!" he said. "It may be a spoof or we may strike the wrong trail, but if it is Cousin Bertie— Gee!"

And in another fifteen minutes Sully and his chief assistant were speeding in a fairly powerful car for St. Katherine's School!

CHAPTER 16.

Sully's Triumph!

IT was about three o'clock when the Kid sent off the wire, and he knew that nothing much could happen now until Detective Sully turned up. The Becks were going to keep trail of the American "Mr. Blunt," and, if possible, the four chums were going to join up again at half-past four for tea at Dawson's.

"I'll cut back to school, Jimmy," the Kid suggested. "If I can see Roger I'll tell him what we've done, but the telegram might come to me. Anyhow, I expect Roger will go back before tea."

"Right-o!" Jimmy agreed. "I won't

come back just now, but you'll be along at Dawson's between half-past four and five!"

"I'll have a shot," the Kid said, and suggested one or two other meeting-places for later on, in case he failed to manage to get back to Dawson's. But he meant to come into Dulchester again because there wasn't much sense in having a special coat and not using it—whether they were doing detective work or not!

The Kid hurried back, and had gone about half-way along the road when he spotted a well-known figure some distance ahead. Mr. Roger Blunt had paid a visit to the Cloisters Hotel and had had quite a long chat with the proprietor.

Afterwards he had had a glimpse of the "Mr. Blunt" of the Zenith Club, but it was too brief for him to form any definite impression. Roger did not think his namesake had seen him at all, though Roger himself had seen the Transitus boys.

Yet Roger admitted, as he walked back to Katie's, that he was vaguely perplexed.

When young Dexter overtook him, the Head spoke cheerily to him.

"Well, my budding detective!" he laughed. "Have you tracked the villain yet, or is the chase slackening?"

"I got his finger-prints, sir," the Kid answered, just as though it was one of his regular jobs in life to wander round collecting finger-prints. "And I've wired Detective Sully and asked him to wire instructions to you or to me, sir."

Roger still felt he wanted to laugh at Dexter's cool cheek. But was it cheek? Anyhow, Roger no longer had any suspicion of Dexter being on some patent stunt of his own.

"Well, you'd better hang on for an hour or so, Dexter," the Head told him before they parted. "If any message comes, I will let you know."

The next hour passed slowly for the Kid, and he had almost decided to wander back into Dulchester again when a big car drove up to the Head's house. The Kid couldn't see who got out very clearly, but a vague hope entered his mind that it was Sully.

It was! And within another ten minutes the Kid was in the presence of the Head, Detective Sully, and Detective Pinkham, and was telling them all about it.

"Gee!" said Sully when the Kid had

finished, and was handing him the sheet torn from the autograph album, which had been carefully preserved in tissue paper, cardboard and a large envelope. "But this lad's got the goods, all right, Mr. Blunt! And now, Pinkham! Get the folio!"

Detective Pinkham opened his bag, and a queer sort of photograph album was produced. Sully took it and opened it to a certain page, then he put the fingerprints Charlie Challinor had made before him, and began to examine them with the aid of a big, square magnifying-glass.

He rose at last and handed the leaf from the autograph album over to Mr. Blunt.

"That's very clever," he said with just a little twinkle in his eye. "There's a long-standing reward of one thousand dollars waiting for the person who puts the New York Police in the right way of landing Cousin Bertie into their hands! I've got all the warrants that are necessary, and the British Police will give me all the help I need. I'm hoping you'll have no objection, sir, to the dollars being handed over to our young friend, Dexter, here in due course?"

"Why?" asked Roger. "Do you think

"I'm dead certain sure!" Detective Sully suddenly banged the table triumphantly with his fist. "Got him! I've chased him over three continents, and now—Bully for you, Dexter!"

Detective Sully quickly fixed up the programme to be followed, and Roger nodded his approval, because it would avoid all publicity for the school. In Roger's opinion, Dexter had done quite enough—so the Kid wasn't going to appear in the last act.

Dexter felt a bit disappointed that he was being missed out. But he saw Roger and the detectives drive off in the car for the Cloisters Hotel, and then he himself wandered forth. He wasn't going to prop tonight—not when he'd got an exert up till ten o'clock! No! He'd wander out a little way in the hope that Jimmy Curtis had decided to come back.

As he sauntered along towards the school gates he heard the sound of footsteps and voices. Quite on the spur of the moment the Kid stopped back among the

tracks which lined the drive, and he was jolly glad he did so the next minute!

There were three in the little party coming along the drive—Linnola and Washy Beck and "Mr. Blunt." They stopped almost opposite where the Kid was standing, and the Kid heard Mr. Blunt say in his pleasant, drawling way:

"Waal, I'm glad I met you boys, but sorry I missed young Dexter. If you can get out again, come down to the Cloisters Hotel. I'll be there and I'd like to see you all before I go. We're leaving this very charming neighbourhood to-morrow."

Linky said something about being sure to find Dexter and then they'd all come back, because they'd got leave till ten, and then the brothers hurried on. Mr. Blunt turned and slowly sauntered towards the gates.

But not for long! The Kid, listening to his foot-falls, was suddenly aware that they had ceased. Two—three minutes passed, and Dexter was just going to come out and chase after the Becks, when a figure passed him, treading in catlike fashion along the edge of the drive.

It was Mr. Blunt, alias Herbert Fairway, so the finger-prints had proved! What was his giddy game now!

Actually the Kid wasn't long left in doubt, because Blunt did not attempt to keep in close hiding. He made a baseline across the court-yard, and the Kid, now following cautiously some distance behind, saw him at the door of the Head's house for a moment. Then, so far as the Kid could tell, he simply opened the door and slipped inside.

Here was a pretty position! Roger and Sully would probably be at the Cloisters by now—and the man they wanted was doubtless burgling Roger's study.

But Dickie Dexter promptly made up his mind! Rushing to his own study he discovered the Becks and gave them a swift outline of what had happened and what they'd got to do. Got outside and keep on guard!

Then he dashed off to the masters' Common-rooms and found four or five lounging about—and they jolly well stared at the Kid for daring to butt in on their privacy. But the Kid jolly soon explained—and they gripped it all right.

In less than ten minutes two matters and the Kid were making their way to

the Head's house by the private entrance, and two other masters were joining the Becks outside. Two of the masters had run swiftly for their old service revolvers, and though they weren't loaded they might be useful. Likewise one of them had collared a coil of rope—which they also hoped would be useful.

They crept quietly to Roger's study—but flung open the door very suddenly!

"Hands up!" Mr. Warman, who'd been a major in the army and was pretty hot stuff in the stern command line, yelled out the order, and Mr. Ventham, of the Third, made a sudden leap. In the next two minutes there was a first-class dust-up and the Kid was hovering round with the rope.

They were on the floor, but the Kid slipped the noose round Fairway's legs. Despite his struggles, Fairway hadn't much chance against three of them and the fight was all over under five minutes. Rather dishevelled and upset, Herbert Fairway was sitting in a chair, trussed like a prize turkey.

Hardly had they got him nicely fixed than someone burst into the room. Mr. Roger Blunt and the detectives had discovered at the Cloisters Hotel that the fake "Mr. Blunt" had gone up to St. Katherine's School with two of the boys, and they dashed back.

"Hallo, Cousin Bertie!" The detective smiled grimly. "So we've run you to earth at last!"

"But you—Sully!" For once, even Herbert Fairway had a surprise. "You! My dear man, surely you haven't done this all by yourself?"

And at that the explanations began. And when Fairway heard of the way his fingerprints had been taken that very day—for Sully told him everything—his eyes gleamed with sheer joy.

"Well played, Dexter!" he said. "It's a good job I'm going back to America.

No, Sully! I shan't try to dodge you this side of the pond. Fact is, England is too trying for one of my tastes."

"Come on!" growled Sully, peevish at Fairway's words. "The car's waiting, and it's London for you, Cousin Bertie!"

They released his bonds to some extent, but still kept his arms secure, for Sully wasn't taking any risks. Then, with a cheery good-night to the masters, Mr. Fairway pamed out, Sully on one side and Pinkham on the other.

Roger Blunt congratulated Richard Dexter on his smartness, in the presence of the masters. It was a proud moment for the Kid, but it wasn't much more than a moment.

"The only thing I cannot understand, Dexter," said Roger, and he spoke as though it really did puzzle him most tremendously, "is how a boy—your intelligence should be placed at a moment in the sixth place in your Form. There's something wrong! You don't think any of the masters under whom you work have been marking your work unfairly?"

"No, sir," the Kid answered, and he began to look as puzzled as Roger did.

"No!" Roger still looked perplexed. "And yet I cannot believe you have been slacking. Perhaps you have not concentrated sufficiently on the tasks set you? You must try to win through, my boy! I feel sure you can do it. Good-night, Dexter! Good-night, boys! You must settle down to-morrow after all this excitement! Good-night!"

And Roger beamed upon them as they wandered forth. The excitement was over, but one thing remained. Work! Dickie Dexter had won through all right in the queer complication around Herbert Fairway, as well as quite a lot of other complications. Jolly Roger knew it. And Roger would take good care that Dickie Dexter would win through all right in his work at St. Katie's.



The **END**



THE WORLD'S BIGGEST!

The world's biggest—what does that phrase call to the minds of us whose man's efforts are concerned? The White Star liner Majestic, perhaps, or the Woolworth Building, or the ship R 101—each, in its own sphere, marking the furthest stage man has yet reached in point of size. But there are other "record-holders," which, even if they aren't as much in the public eye as those already mentioned, are just as interesting in their way.

The "Grab" Champions!

If you've ever been to a football match that has drawn a crowd of twenty thousand, you probably wouldn't need much convincing that a pie capable of giving every member of it a square meal was far and away the biggest ever. Such a pie was made at Denby Dale, in Yorkshire, a town famous for its giant pies, the ingredients including trifling items like four bullocks and fifteen hundred-weights of potatoes!

Before we leave the subject of food, there is another record worth mentioning, and this, too, belongs to Yorkshire. The revival of an ancient gipsy gathering at the moorland village of Baildon meant the preparation of a huge pot of broth—enough for five thousand people. Five hundred pounds of meat, 600 lb. of peas, 300 lb. of potatoes, fowls by the score, half a hundredweight of onions and a quarter of a ton of carrots were emptied into the 6 ft. deep cauldron and cooked for twelve hours. They say you could smell that broth miles away!

A different kind of world's record is that held by the Quebec Bridge spanning the St. Lawrence River in Canada, the largest cantilever bridge in existence. The task of giving this mammoth structure of steel a new coat of paint is the biggest job of its kind in the world by a long way. A few facts may give a faint idea of its magnitude: 90,360 tons of steel were used to make the bridge, which provides 219 acres for the hand of thirty-five painters to cover, and they use 7,820 gallons of paint in doing it.

Something Like a Flag!

If, by any chance, a flag was wanted to put a finishing touch to the world's biggest

painting job there's one all ready in Pittsburgh, U.S.A. It certainly wouldn't be dwarfed into insignificance, for this particular flag has all others, large or small, locked to a frazzle. It hasn't been used lately, and very likely it never will, for when it was suspended from a wire cable between two of the highest buildings in the city, the vibration caused by its flapping literally shook them to the foundations. With ropes and rigging the flag weighs more than 3,000 lb. and covers more than a third of an acre, and after it had dislodged lots of tiles and coping-stones it was considered wiser to take it down.

Talking of records doesn't make you instinctively think of Mexico, does it? There's one championship, however, to which that country can lay claim without fear of being disputed. When the government of Mexico started a newspaper they decided to do the thing really well, and issue it in sheets measuring six feet by nine. Probably the authorities realised that their little daily bulletin might make itself a bit of a nuisance at the breakfast table, so the millions of copies they had printed were posted on hoardings and bulletin boards throughout the Republic. Thus any Mexican citizen who happens to be able to read is provided with a newspaper free, gratis and for nothing. There's just one possible drawback: a slow reader might get a crick in the neck before he'd finished the headlines!

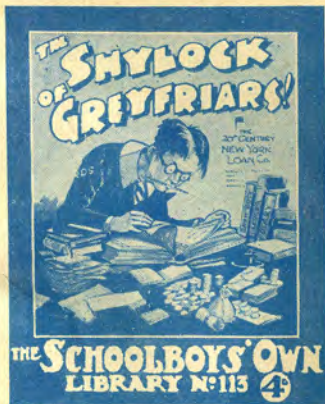
Taking the Count!

A map of England and Wales showing cities, towns and even tiny villages is no unusual thing, but imagine one including every street, corner and alley in the land! This last word in maps isn't in existence yet, but it will be when the census of 1931 takes place, for it is one of the most important items in the preparation for the "great count."

The exact amount of space this map will take up hasn't been disclosed, but it's interesting to guess what would happen if it were made in one piece. Supposing, for instance, it had to be unrolled: would it have to be taken out on Salisbury Plain, or would half a dozen football-pitches be enough?

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