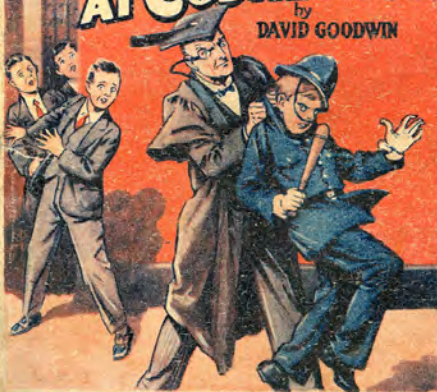


# THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON

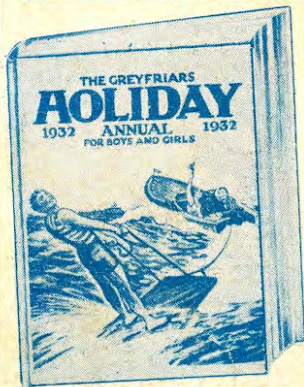
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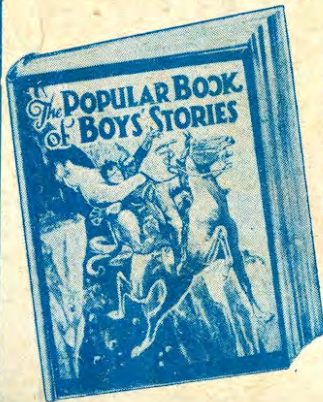
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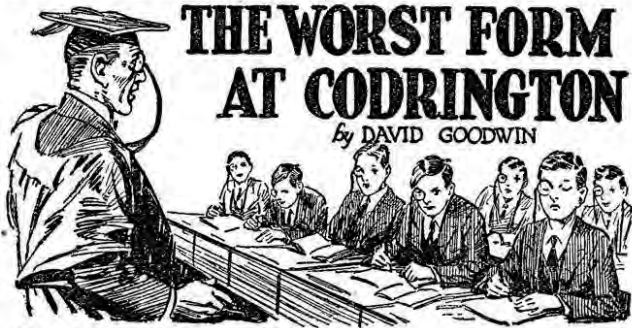
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# THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON

by DAVID GOODWIN

Untamed! . . . Form-masters come and Form-masters go—mental wrecks—but the Remove at Codrington School still remains untamed, until the advent of a new, mystery master. . . .

## CHAPTER 1. The New Boy!

"WANTED.—An assistant master, of high scholastic attainments and an iron will, to undertake the control of an exceptionally unruly and backward Form at a large public school. High remuneration. State qualifications and degrees. Box 771B."

A WIDE and wicked grin spread slowly over the freckled features of Talbot Delaval Wynne—better known as "Taffy"—aged sixteen, as he pursued the above advertisement in the columns of a paper, while standing on the platform of Stanstead Station.

"Derry, my buck," he called to a friend some distance away, "come and cast your cold grey eyes over this!"

Richard Dereker—in well-cut lounge suit, and with a straw hat perched on his head at a rakish angle—strolled up and took the paper. Dereker read the paragraph and gave a short whistle.

"What d'you think of it?" he asked.

"Think of it? It's us—we—our little selves! There isn't a doubt about it. The

'large public school' is Codrington; and 'the unruly and backward Form,' my dear infant, is the Remove—of which you and I are now the pride and adornment."

"Rot!" said Dereker. "It must be a hoax. The school hasn't come down to advertisin'. The Governors wouldn't stand it."

"The Head, my dear boy, generally does as he likes, and he's an eccentric bird. If Box 771B isn't the Head, I'll eat him! The last remaining grey locks have vanished off his now polished pate in tryin' to find a Form-master who can handle the Remove. You know the berth's vacant again."

"Of course!" assented Dereker, with a grin. "Little Morton clucked it at the end of last term and has gone for a year's holiday to try to repair his shattered nerves. I often wonder the poor little wretch didn't die at his desk."

The Remove at Codrington prided itself, most improperly, in being unique in unruliness. Of course, at all great schools that Form—sometimes called the Lower Fourth—is the worst to handle, from the point of view of the Form-master.

It is in that class that the wildest spirits are found; those who love no labour, or who, though not objecting to it, are too full of the zest of life to work for a step higher. Besides these, the Remove becomes a sort of eddy where all the "slackers" accumulate, sometimes remaining in it for years. Yet, for all its wildness, there is occasionally more real grit in that Form than in most of those above or below it.

The Codrington Remove was not a mere mild, ordinary one. The last Form-master but one, who had a great reputation beforehand for taming refractory boys, resigned after his first term, and had been heard to describe it as a crew of demons fresh from the pit. And Messrs. Wynne and Dereker, who did not look at all demon-like, but still were shining lights of the Remove, and accepted by many as its leaders, looked through the paragraph again and agreed that it was genuine. The headmaster was advertising at last for somebody who could tame the Form.

"Well, if any master has answered this advert and taken the post, I pity him," said Taffy Wynne. "One term with us in the Remove will be sufficient to send him packing, regretting the day he ever came to Codrington."

"Yes, like all the other Form-masters," grinned Dereker. "I've lost count how many we've had, but each one has been confident he could tame us. Alas for their hopes! And I'm open to take a small bet that we make it hot for the gentleman with the iron will. We'll start the term well. Hallo! Here's De Quincey. Quince, you're a literary and artistic sort of bird—have a squint at this!"

A lean, dark-complexioned boy, very carefully dressed, and with a thoughtful scowl on his features, took the paper. De Quincey—for that was his name—also belonged to the Remove, but was very different from most of its members. He esteemed himself to be a poet, and had a very bitter tongue and a picturesque mode of speech. His great ambition was to found and edit a school magazine.

"My good ass," he said pityingly to Dereker. "I saw this ten days ago! Why, the paper's a fortnight old! They've got the man they want by this time, no doubt, and he'll be trampling on your necks to-morrow morning."

"You suppose it's genuine, then?" asked Dereker.

"Of course! There's no mistakin' such rotten grammar as the Head writes. How can a man be 'of an iron will'? He can have an iron will, or acquire an iron will. But how can he be of—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Wynne. "I want to know about this chap who thinks he's going to break us in."

"Let him!" said De Quincey.

He turned scornfully away towards a group of well-dressed Codrington seniors of the Shell and Fifth Forms who had arrived, and were waiting for the train which picked up the Codrington boys at the various stations on the opening day of the term. They knew their own importance far too well to consort with such rabble as the Remove; but they put up with De Quincey because the whole school did so, and everybody was a little afraid of his tongue.

"Isn't it a wonder nobody ever kicks De Quincey?" said Dereker. "If any of us others said the things he does there'd be murder done. Hallo! Who on earth let that out of the cage?"

He stared at a small and rather pale boy who just then appeared on the platform. The newcomer had a very simple face, and his limbs were so thin that they seemed like mere sticks inside his carefully brushed clothes; moreover, he looked as helpless as a stray puppy. His luggage—a trunk and a big, unevenly shaped parcel—was brought in on a barrow by a coarse and red-nosed outside porter.

"Thank you very much!" he said gratefully to the porter in a nervous voice. "I'm—I'm very much obliged to you, sir!"

"Have you gotcher ticket?" said the porter, eyeing him dubiously.

"Er—er—yes, to be sure! It was bought for me. My aunt put it in my pocket herself," said the pale youth, feeling in a waistcoat pocket.

He then took off his hat and thanked the porter again.

Taffy, who was staring in wonderment, nudged his chum in the ribs.

"D'yer want me to get yer anything from the bookstall?" said the porter, still more suspiciously; for there were no signs of a tip.

As a rule, the Codrington fellows tipped

well, and the newcomer's boxes were labelled to the school.

"No, thank you. I'm very much obliged to you!" bleated the new boy, looking more lost than ever. "If I had any money I should have asked you to get me the 'Ranger,' if you would be so kind. But I haven't any money; my aunt sewed up my trousers pockets. She——"

"No money!" gasped the porter, glaring. "Then where's my tip—eh? 'Oo's to pay me?"

"Dear me! I—I thought my aunt had paid for everything," said the boy, turning pale. "She said——"

"Have I brought these 'ere boxes all the way up the road for nothin'?" snarled the outside porter.

And, turning to his barrow, he shot the new boy's luggage on the platform with a bang.

"I—I—I'm very sorry!" stammered the boy, who seemed to be on the point of tears.

"I've a good mind to prosecute yer! Now, look 'ere, if you don't——"

Dereker was laughing till the straw hat wobbled on his head, and the new boy looked as if he were going to faint before the red-nosed porter's wrath; but at this point Taffy Wynne strode forward and interposed.

"Shut up, Robins!" he said peremptorily to the porter, and then turned to the new boy. "Are you going to Codrington?"

"Y-yes, sir," bleated the slim youth. "But this gentleman says I owe him money. If I could send for my aunt——"

"Robins, you red-nosed fraud, what do you mean by ragging him like that?" said Wynne sharply to the porter. "Put his boxes with mine—do you hear?—and look after the lot!"

"Yessir!" said the porter briskly.

"And if I hear you having the cheek to bully any chap bound for the school, I'll see you never get another tip from a Codrington man while the place stands. We're expecting the Remove along by the down train, and if you don't want to be ducked in the engine trough——"

"All right, Mister Wynne, I'll see to the luggage," said the porter smartly, taking the boxes to the labelling-room.

The new boy, looking timidly at Taffy,

nearly melted into tears of gratitude—or, at least, seemed as if he were going to.

"How very kind of you, sir! How shall I thank you? I—I——"

"All right, kid. It's a wet summer, and you needn't weep on my bosom," said Taffy, while Dereker, screwing a key-ring into his eye, contemplated the new boy through it as if he were some strange animal.

"I really do not know what I should have done if the gentleman had insisted on being paid," said the boy, with a sigh. "It is dreadful to think of being in his debt. I—I thought of offering him my white mice in payment; only it would have broken our hearts to be parted. I know they could not live without me."

"White mice?" said Taffy, with a dazed look.

"Yes, in a cage among my luggage. Such sweet things! One is black and white, and the other is skewbald. They are orphans," continued the new boy, his hands clasped, and his eyes filling with tears. "Their mother died when they were young, and I brought them up by hand. If you had seen the dear little mites sucking a rag dipped in warm milk, it would have touched your heart!"

Dereker leaned against a newly-painted pillar, and, gasping for breath, mopped his forehead. De Quincey, who had silently reached the spot and overheard the speech about the mice, peered at the new boy, and then at the labels on his luggage.

"Is the worm really going to Codrington?" said De Quincey, in tones of wonder. "What in the world are we coming to? Where did you wriggle from, creature?" he said, addressing the gaping new boy. "Did the rain bring you to the surface? Speak, you creeping thing!"

"Shut up, Quincey!" said Taffy abruptly. "I'm in charge of it. Git!"

"I congratulate you both on having at last found a creature of your own mental level," said De Quincey blandly to Wynne and Dereker. "I will leave you to fraternise. Au revoir, worm! I hope it may be adieu!"

The new boy was too bewildered to make any reply. He looked such a forlorn little figure that Taffy, who sometimes did the most extraordinary things—as his friends put it—on a sudden impulse, took it into

his head to make friends with him, and possibly stand between the new boy and trouble. There would be plenty of trouble in store for such a boy at Codrington.

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Remove Arrives.

"WHAT'S your name, kid?" asked Taffy.  
"Jellicoe," replied the new boy timidly. "Cecil Jellicoe, sir."

"Who are your people?"

"Please, I haven't any people. I live with my aunt—Mrs. Caterham. I've always been an orphan," said the youth, with simple pathos. "That's what makes me so fond of mice."

"Where does Mrs. Caterham live?"

"At Houghton Park, please, sir."

"Don't say 'sir,' you little ass. Is that straight about the mice? You've got 'em with you?"

"Yes; in a double cage, with a little wheel for exercise," replied Jellicoe.

"It's bad business," said Taffy gloomily. "Don't know how the school'll take it. Shockin' bad form, keepin' white mice at Codrington. If it was a badger, now, or a hyena, well and good. It'd be something to make you remembered; you'd stand out from the common herd. But white mice! Even the preparatory kids wouldn't own to it!"

"He can't keep them," said Dereker decisively. "Lodgey'll drown them."

Lodgey was the school sergeant.

Jellicoe looked so aghast that even the tough Taffy felt for him and hid a smile.

"We'll see what can be done. Maybe I'll give you a leg-up, kid. Mind you, it's no small beer having me for a pal. It's not often I talk to a new kid, except with the toe of my boot, and you seem a worse terror than most of 'em, too. Hold on a shake while I get my ticket," said Taffy, stalking off.

Dereker caught him up at the booking office and began to protest.

"Look here, Taffy, this can't go on. You're only rottin', I hope."

"Rotting! What d'you mean?" said Taffy abruptly.

"Why, you can't really intend to be seen with this pasty-faced little terror! He's dotty, or not far off of it. Hang it,

think of our position! You're not going to back him up at the school? The chaps'll never stand it. They would turn you both out."

Taffy turned on him fiercely.

"Will they, by gum! That's quite enough. I'll look after the kid, Derry, and stand between him and evil—like the prig-hero did in that ghastly book the matron gave us last term. Just let any of the rabble get up an' dictate to me, an' there'll be war!"

Dereker shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll preach sickly sermons in the dormitory about protectin' the weak, and walk about with my arm round the little beast's neck, if anyone objects!" said Taffy. "You know me."

"Well, you're a pig-headed chap—I've often told you so," said Dereker blandly. "A fellow's only got to suggest that you'll get hurt if you do a thing and off you go and do it. I don't mind. We're one flesh, Birne and you and I, so I don't mind givin' you a hand. There may be some fun in it, though I don't see where."

"Of course. You're a good chap, Derry. I've a sort of notion the kid might turn out decently somehow. Suppose we make a cheap imitation of a second-rate fag out of him, just to see? It's possible he's got hidden merits."

"There are denced few signs of them," said Dereker. "We shan't see much of the insect, that's one comfort, for he'll hardly be placed higher than the Third Form."

"Sometimes these puny little beggars are swots. He's older than he looks. Maybe he knows where he's placed. There's a dodge now for new kids to get their papers when they're taken to see the Head before the term opens."

They rejoined the limp Jellicoe, who was waiting forlornly on the platform, nobody designing to take any notice of him.

"I say, young Jelly-what's-your-name," observed Taffy, "do you happen to know what Form you're in?"

"Oh, yes," said Jellicoe, with a blush; "I was taken to see the headmaster a week ago, and had a paper to do. He wrote afterwards to my aunt to say I should be put in a class called the—er—the—er—I think it was called the Movement, or something—"

"The Remove?" said Taffy, with a gasp.

"Yes, that's it—the Remove," replied Jellicoe.

The two chums stared at him blankly.

"Then I should say, my little lad, that your days on this earth are numbered," muttered Dereker.

"Is it a nice class?" asked Jellicoe meekly. "Are the boys industrious and well behaved? My aunt is very anxious for me to—"

The shriek of a locomotive whistle interrupted him, and a train came rolling into Stanstead Station. Taffy took the new boy solemnly by the shoulder and pointed towards it.

"You've hit it exactly," he said gravely. "Couldn't have described them better—and it's the only decent Form in Codrington. Look, there it is! You can see it from here—and hear it."

The new boy stood staring at the train, with eyes that opened wider and wider. Most of it was quiet enough, but from the middle carriage came an appalling uproar, and from one window a straw hat was being twirled violently on the end of a long walking-stick, while the hat owner fought frantically for its possession. The hat was sent flying on to the roof of the platform-shelter.

From the next window puffed great clouds of dust and through a thick fog in the compartment five or six youths could be seen belabouring each other with linen-bags amid a terrific shindy. The third window was blocked up with a great ball of newspapers, and from the fourth—which Jellicoe stood gaping at as it drew level with him, came flying a railway cushion straight upon his open mouth, and sent him sprawling backwards.

In a moment Taffy darted to the door, flung it open, and seized upon an enraged boy of his own age and size.

"You young beast, Kempe, you meant that for me!" cried Taffy, jerking him out on to the platform and shaking him violently. "I'll teach you your place, my beauty! Didn't you learn it last term? Take that, and that!"

A couple of deft kicks, implanted as Taffy spun the culprit round, disposed of Kempe; and at the same moment another boy, with bright chestnut hair, and one side of his collar flying loose as a sign of recent strife, came darting out of the carriage.

"Hullo, Taffy! Hullo, Derry!" he cried,

shaking hands with his chums heartily. "How can Codrington go to the dogs while we three exist to keep it alive—eh, what? Those other rotters— Hallo! Who's the invalid?"

Birne—for such was the newcomer's name, looked with interest at Jellicoe, who Taffy was helping to his feet. Dereker rather expected to see the new boy blubbering, but he was not. Jellicoe picked himself up in silence, feeling his features with both hands to make sure they were there.

"I—er—I am afraid this is a very rough class," he said, in an annoyed voice. "Where are my white mice? My aunt—"

"She's past helpin' you now," said Taffy. "I alone stand between you and death, Jelly. Come on and bag seats, you chaps. Hi," he cried, hustling the new boy into the compartment with a rush, "make way for your betters, you cripples! What, only two seats empty? Minors and Stanford, out you get!"

With surprising speed Taffy and Dereker pitched out of the carriage a couple of loudly-protesting youths, who at once made a fierce attempt to force their way in again. A spirited battle was soon raging round the door, Jellicoe shrinking into a seat in consternation. The two evicted persons were soon beaten off and were seized upon by an angry stationmaster, who hustled them into another carriage, threatening all sorts of penalties.

"The Remove. The dear old giddy Remove!" cried Taffy, dealing Birne a sounding slap on the leg as the door was slammed. "Where's the Form that can live with it? Only it doesn't do for the rank and file of it to forget that they've got to sing small when my little lot gets on its hind legs. Why, O'Flanagan, old bird, how are you? Hallo! What's that clothes-horse want?"

The hubbub in the four compartments occupied by the Remove was scandalising everybody, and making the stationmaster painfully eager to send the train along. In the midst of it an angry-looking Fifth Form boy of Codrington, nearly six feet high and dressed with exquisite neatness, came striding to the carriage. His name was Verulam, one of the most dignified of the seniors.

"Stop this noise, you young cads!" he cried hotly. "Do you hear? We won't have a lot of little blackguards disgracin'

the school like this! It's worse than a louts' beanfeast, and if you young ruffians don't stop——"

"Lo, he has spoken treason! In with him!" howled Dereker. And in a moment the carriage door flew open and three lusty Remove boys hurled themselves upon Verulam. He was hauled bodily into the compartment again, and the door shut.

If the noise had been noticeable before it was twice as bad now. The big senior fought and struggled in a perfect frenzy of rage, and his long legs curled about both seats.

Jellicoe shrank into a corner, wondering what sort of company he had fallen into. It was surprising the ease and speed with which the four Remove boys mastered the big Fifth-Former, who then disappeared under a bunch of them.

What they were doing Jellicoe could not see. But a minute later, just as the train was starting, Verulam was ejected out on to the platform—an amazing sight.

He looked as if he had been in the hands of a quick-change artiste. His trousers had been hauled off and put on again inside out, his coat was tied round his neck by the sleeves, his necktie knotted round one ankle, and his collar fastened to the other. His face was flushed and well smeared with dust. How all this had been done in less than two minutes the scared Jellicoe could not imagine; but there it was.

A shout of laughter went up from all the Remove carriages as the dazed senior staggered across the platform. He was only just in time to reach the brake-van, and was hauled into it by the grinning but indignant guard.

"If that hasn't taught you to leave us alone, nothing will!" said Taffy, poking his head out of the window. "Robins! Is that luggage in?"

"Yessir!" exclaimed the porter. "All labelled and put in!"

"Here you are, then!" said Taffy, thrusting a shilling into the porter's palm as the train ran past, and with his other hand he plucked Robins' cap and threw it at his head. "Take that for a reminder not to bully Codrington men, whether they tip you or not!"

Taffy sank back into his seat with a smile of bland satisfaction, and surveyed the company.

"Well, our syndicate's complete," said

Taffy, with satisfaction. "Shove up, all you other kids, an' don't crowd your betters! Well, Jellicoe, what d'you think of it?"

The new boy, whose eyes were as big as saucers, was too alarmed to reply. He seemed to shrivel up in his seat. The others noticed him for the first time.

"Eh? Who blew that in here?" exclaimed Johnson II, a red-haired boy, with a freckled nose. "D'you hear, kid? Who are you?"

"Throw it on the line!" said Mallock, another of the Removites, and he reached across as if he really meant to do it, to Jellicoe's great alarm. Taffy struck Mallock's arm up with a force that made his elbow tingle.

"I'll throw you out on the line if you don't let him alone!" said Taffy. "You hear me? Hands off!"

"Is he your young brother, Wynne?" said Johnson.

"No, he isn't!" returned Taffy angrily. "Shut your head!"

"Taff's got some bee in his bonnet about that little object in the corner," said Dereker, aside to Birne. "Goin' to dry-nurse him, just to cause trouble, I think. However, I said I'd back him, so——"

"I'll tell you about that presently," broke in Taffy to his chums. And to divert the attention of the others from Jellicoe he pulled out the newspaper. "I say, you chaps, have you seen this?"

He read out the advertisement, and it caused great amusement. They were all very keen to know who the new Form-master might be, however.

"I'll take two to one we give him brain-fever before the month's out!" said Johnson gleefully.

"He'll probably be some ass who thinks he can trust to a bit of extra skill with the cane," said Dereker. "As if the giddy Remove hadn't got its skin tanned hard as india-rubber ages ago! Or else some chump who thinks himself sarcastic!"

"Let him come! I like to see their giddy hair turnin' grey week by week," said Taffy appreciatively. "Where's Quince?"

"Gone into another carriage—with Sanderson, I think," said Birne. "P'r'aps Quince spotted him for an oof-bird on sight."

"Which? Who's Sanderson?"

"A new chap," chuckled Birne. "Been

placed in the Remove. He's got tons of money. Got scared of us on the journey, I think, and when we stopped at Fairley Junction he stood us all grub and pop."

"By Jove, you should have seen him buyin' up the whole refreshment-room!" said Johnson enthusiastically. "Told us to order all we liked—veal-pies, rolls, tarts, Bath buns without end. Must have cost thirty bob! And I saw him change a ten-pound note to pay for it. Governor's a gold-mine magnate, and allows him lots of money!"

"Ah, we've got some pretty run fish in the school this term, I should think!" said Mallock. "Especially considering the dirty little tadpole in the corner. If he — Hallo, here's the giddy station!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Mysterious Stranger!

"ALL change!" bawled Johnson, flinging open the carriage door. "Alight here for the royal and ancient college of Codrington, noted for the noble bearin' of its Sixth Form, and the ladylike behaviour of all the little boys who shape their future careers at its world-famed— Look here, young Mallock, if you want a black eye just do that again!"

The occupants of the carriage came pouring out like an avalanche, and Johnson was swept off his feet. The senior boys of higher Forms hurried out of the station as quickly as they could. It was always a thorn in their flesh to see how rowdily the notorious Form behaved, and they did not want to be mixed up with "Remove ruffians." But some latitude is allowed at Codrington on assembly-days.

"My luggage!" panted Jellicoe anxiously. "I must see it is not roughly handled. The mice are in their cage in the big parcel, and—"

"All right, kid! I'll get a porter to see it isn't knocked about," said Taffy. "Hi, porter! This way, Jimmy! See my luggage on the cart, will you, and another lot labelled 'Jellicoe'? Take extra care of it. Come on, Derry, or we shall have to scrap for places on the charabanc!"

They made their way through the station, and on reaching the road beyond found there were no vehicles waiting ex-

cept the luggage carts. It was a six-mile drive to the school, and the senior boys were always picked up by the four-in-hand coach—the Barleyford Rocket—which kept itself free for the journey on Codrington opening days, while brakes were sent for the juniors.

"What's this, John Williams?" said Taffy, seizing upon a porter. "Where are our wagnettes?"

"Not arrived yet, sir. Big fair at Barleyford to-day, an' all vehicles hired at whopping big prices. They'll be some time a-gottin' away."

"Who's responsible for it?" cried Marston, the head of the Fifth, angrily. "Where's our coach? They've no business to take any other job to-day!"

"Fraid you'll have to wait, sir. Be the best part of an hour afore the Rocket can get 'ere. Took a party down this mornin'."

The wrath and surprise were great. Codrington School was not used to being treated in this off-hand way. The elder boys were vowing vengeance on the Barleyford Rocket's proprietor, and the station became blocked.

"Here, let's get out of it!" said Dereker. "Let 'em fight it to a finish! I'm not in such a hurry to get back to that giddy old emporium of knowledge myself!"

The juniors and Jellicoe made for the river bank, and were soon deep in talk over school politics and the possibilities of the new Remove master. None of them took any notice of Jellicoe, and they had covered a good deal of ground before they troubled about him. They halted by the embankment bordering the river and threw themselves on the warm turf.

"What's the game about this new kid, Taffy?" said Birne. "Let's get it over. Have you captured him for a fag?"

"Not a bad idea," said Dereker, lying on his back and chewing a piece of grass. "Remove isn't allowed to have fags. Make the Senior Forms savage."

"It isn't exactly that, though we might make him useful," Taffy replied; "but Derry said the other rotters would jump on him, because he's—well, what you see he is—and jump on anybody who backed him up, too. Well, I want to see the beggar who'll jump on me, so I'm goin' to cherish him, just to raise the wind. If you chaps don't like it, you needn't—"

"Oh, I'm on if you are!" said Birne lazily. "We all pull together, of course. I'll wipe his mouth after meals, and kiss him for his mother, if you like."

"I don't want to foist him on you," said Taffy, "only—I say, what the dickens is that chap dodgin' about for yonder?"

"Lie still, it's all right," said Dereker, for the afternoon sun was making him sleepy.

Taffy, however, had his suspicions aroused. He was always on the look-out for any species of "japes" played upon himself and his chums, and the attempts his enemies made were many.

Taffy crept up the slope and peered through the grass on top. He decided, however, that it was a false alarm, for the person he had seen was no Codringtonian, but a man of between thirty and forty, neatly dressed, with a clean-shaven, rather plump face, and an eyeglass swinging in front of his waistcoat.

The man's movements were so queer that Taffy continued to watch him. There was an anxious look on the stranger's face, and he glanced furtively back from time to time and appeared to be keeping under cover of the bushes along the river, and sidling from one to the other.

Presently he gave this up and stepped out hurriedly, coming nearly opposite Taffy. One more glance back he gave, and then suddenly dived under a bush and remained here, crouching and motionless.

Taffy's astonishment at this queer behaviour was turned into quite another feeling when he saw a policeman, accompanied by a man in plain clothes, appear along the path!

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Taffy's Capture!

THERE could be no doubt that the police officers were after him, Taffy thought. The sergeant and detective—or whatever the plain-clothes man was—came hurrying along in the direction the stranger had taken, talking earnestly together and peering ahead. But they walked right past the man's hiding-place without dreaming he was there.

Taffy, who was well hidden by the fringe of grass, slid back down the slope

in considerable excitement, and beckoned to his chums.

"Here, you chaps," he whispered, "don't make a sound, but just nip up to the top here, an' look over without showin' yourselves!"

The others agreed at once, supposing some jest was in the wind. As they were going gingerly up the slope, Taffy looked back, and saw De Quincey and Mallock walking up from below, naturally knowing nothing of what was to be seen on the other side. Taffy made a sign to them to approach silently, which they did at once. In a few moments all the boys were peering through the long grass on the top, and Taffy, in a low voice, told them what he had seen.

The two officers of the law were now some distance beyond, and soon they disappeared round the bend of the river. No sooner had they done so than the man in the bush showed himself cautiously again, and remained for a few moments motionless.

The boys had a full view of him, though themselves unseen, and they watched him without a word. The stranger looked round cautiously, and glanced at a wooden bridge which spanned the river close by to make sure that nobody was approaching from that direction. Then, turning his back on the bridge, he retraced his steps hurriedly by the way he had come, reached the place where he had crossed the embankment, passed over it once again, and set off across the fields at a rapid pace. Just before he did so he glanced back, and caught sight of the boys lying on the embankment. He gave a slight start, hesitated a moment, and then resumed his flight, and in a few moments was out of sight beyond a small wood.

The boys, who had not said a word hitherto, rose to their feet and stared at each other in some consternation.

"By gu'n, he's wanted by the police, an' he's done them in the eye!" said Birne excitedly. "They've missed him!"

"What ought we to do?" queried Dereker.

Before anybody could reply deep voices were heard as somebody approached on the river side of the embankment.

"He's doubled back; I'm sure of it!" said one.

"No; it's my belief he went over the

bridge, sir. We ought to have separated, and one gone over it," replied the second voice. And the speakers came into sight at the same moment. They were the police-sergeant and the plain-clothes man, and they were hurrying back on finding their quarry was not in front. "Hallo, young gentlemen!" said the man in plain clothes. "Have you seen anybody pass by here just now?"

"Didn't he go over the bridge?" interjected the sergeant.

"Was it a tall man, rather sleepy-looking, with an eyeglass?" said Taffy quickly.

"That's him!" exclaimed the police officer ungrammatically. "Where did you see him?"

"This way!" cried Taffy. And, running over the top of the embankment, he led the officer to the wooden bridge. "If you cross over, an' go right ahead as far as you can, you'll run into him!"

The sergeant and his companion hardly waited to hear the end of Taffy's sentence. They set off hurriedly across the bridge without a word of thanks. After which Mr. Talbot Wynne rejoined his companions, and for some moments nobody spoke as they watched the police hastening off on a fool's errand.

"I say, Taffy, you are an ass!" said Birne at last.

"There'll be a rare row when they find you told 'em a whopper like that!" observed De Quincey sourly.

"Do you want a black eye, Quince?" said Taffy sharply. "I told 'em the truth!"

"Why, the fellow barked in exactly the opposite direction!" said Dereker.

"Just so!" replied Wynne. "I didn't say they'd overtake him. I said they'd run into him. Which is exactly what they'll do if they keep right on an' go slap round the world! Anything else?"

Dereker grinned, but rather feebly.

"That's all right," said Birne. "But I think you're an ass all the same, Taffy!"

"I'm beginning to think I am," admitted Wynne. "But I did it on the spur of the moment. However, let's leave the giddy fugitive to his own devices, an' go an' get some pop. This is dry work!"

They cut across the fields to the high road, and came upon it near the old wayside hostelry of the Crown and Anchor. Many of the Remove boys were there al-

ready, for it was a hot day, and all were thirsty.

It was strictly against Codrington rules for any boy to enter a hotel or licensed house unless with his parents. But, as Taffy remarked, the term had not properly opened yet. The Remove did not affect anything stronger than ginger-beer, and those already there had consumed some gallons of it.

The Remove had its code, wild as it was, and, with few exceptions, the Form considered it *infra dig.* to go into a bar. Their "pop" was brought outside to them on small tables. Sanderson, a large boy, very well-fed looking, was acting as host.

"Hallo! Is that the oof-bird?" said Taffy. "Well, he looks it! I'm standing Sam to my lot, though; no new kids pay for me! What'll you chaps have—pop? Bring it out, William—lashings of it!"

They were in the act of pouring down generous libations of home-brewed ginger-beer when the sound of a horn down the road reached them, and a four-in-hand coach, with a handsome team of dappled greys, pulled up at the inn door, empty save for the driver and conductor.

"Why, here's the Rocket at last!" said Taffy. "Hallo, Tom!" he cried to the coachman, who flung the reins to an ostler and descended. "You'd better shove those cattle along to the station. The giddy Fifth is goin' to eat you alive for bein' late!"

"Can't help it, sir!" said Tom. "I've got to 'ave a wet first! I'm perished with thirst. Never had such a day!"

Both the coachman and conductor vanished into the inn, leaving a solitary ostler from the stable-yard to hold the heads of the leaders.

Taffy looked the coach over, and his eye brightened. In a moment an idea sprang into his head, and was acted upon.

"By gum, Derry, here's our chance!" he exclaimed, in an undertone. "We'll bag the Fifth's coach an' leave 'em lamenting! I'll tool her to Codrington! Pass the word to the chaps to board her quick, an' chuck me the reins as soon as I'm up!"

Dereker darted off on his errand in a moment. The news was spread swiftly and silently, and received with delight on all sides. In a twinkling half a dozen boys were on top and four inside. Birne hoisted the scared Jellicoe up in front, and Taffy gained the box at the same time.

"Here, 'ave you young gents booked seats by this coach?" cried the ostler.

"The Remove books whatever it jolly well wants!" retorted Taffy.

Birne tossed the reins deftly up to him, Dereker "barged" into the ostler as if by accident and swept him away, and the next moment the long whip cracked, and the team sprang forward smartly. Away went the coach, Dereker swinging himself on behind as it passed, and the ostler, seated on the dusty road, yelled loudly.

The driver and conductor, with half-emptied pots of beer, rushed out of the inn, shouting and waving their arms. They raced after the coach to try to catch it up, but Taffy, shouting with laughter, whipped the team to a gallop, and the Barleyford Rocket swiftly left its pursuers far behind, shaking their fists and uttering ferocious threats.

"Steady 'em, Taffy, or you'll have the show over!" said Dereker, for the coach had begun to rock alarmingly.

Taffy was not on the box for the first time by any means. His father, General Sir Mostyn Wynne, was a famous light of the Four-in-Hand Club, and the boy had often driven one of his drags at home in the holidays. Taffy pulled his team together like a workman, and then sent them along at a slashing trot.

"Dear me!" gasped Jellicoe, holding tight with one hand and keeping his hat on with the other. "My aunt never contemplated my journey to school in this manner, I feel sure! But it's—it's rather nice!"

"You're learnin' a lot, aren't you, kid?" said Taffy, swinging his team round a corner. "There's the station ahead! Derry, give 'em a blast on the foghorn!"

## CHAPTER 5.

### Arriving in Style!

AS the railway station came into view right in front, Dereker drew the long coach-horn out of its basket and blew with all his might. The result was nothing like a proper coaching tantivy, but he evolved a terrible, ear-splitting bray from the horn, and the senior boys came pouring out of the station in a hurry.

They gaped in speechless surprise as the coach came into view with its load, Taffy

on the box, and giving no signs of stopping.

"What the deuce are you doing on our coach?" shouted several Fifth Form magnates angrily. "Pull up—pull up! Do you hear, young Wynne?"

"Clear the road for the Remove Rocket!" cried Dereker, with another blast on the horn. "All you other rotters can jolly well pad it to Codrington on your lily feet! Keep 'em going, Taffy!"

The coach swept past, amid a chorus of wrathful cries from the seniors, and was soon away round the corner and full swing on the road to Codrington. The next mile was covered in surprisingly short time, when right ahead, toiling up a hill, was seen a troupe of five nigger minstrels in coats of many colours, with banjos and other properties under their arms, on their way homeward after a day at Barleyford Fair.

"Hallo!" cried Taffy, slowing up alongside them. "D'you want a lift, Uncle Remus?"

"Rather!" said the minstrels, who looked fatigued.

"Jump up on top, then, an' we'll take you as far as Codrington School! Shove up an' make room, you chaps! Squeeze 'em in anywhere!"

The burnt cork contingent were only too willing. Luckily, the bulk of the Remove had been left behind in the hurried start, and the boys made room somewhere. Away went the coach again.

"You've got to work your pasaaage, my bucks!" said Birne. "Strike up something cheerful!"

The minstrels, nothing loath, unslung their instruments—two banjos, a fiddle, and a key-bugle—and broke forth into tuneful melody. Accompanied by plenty of incidental music, the coach accomplished the journey rapidly, and the ivied walls and tall spires of Codrington School were already in sight when Dereker looked back and cried a warning.

Flying along the road in hot pursuit came a light dogcart with a big, spanking mare stretching out in a hand-gallop. In the cart were two men—the coachman of the Barleyford Rocket and the ostler from the Crown and Anchor. They were overtaking the coach as fast as the mare could cover the ground.

"Here's Tom after us!" cried Dereker. "Stick the pace on, Taffy! It's the last

lap, and we must beat 'em for the honour of the Remove!"

One glance behind did Taffy give, and then urged his team to gallop. Not a quarter of a mile ahead were the tall iron gates of the school. Dereker blew frantically on the coach-horn, and, to the strains of music from the minstrel band, the Barleyford Rocket swept up to the school gates and came to a halt—a winner by twenty yards. The four sweating horses blew out their nostrils, and the band blared in triumph, while a cheer arose as Taffy jumped down from the box.

It was quickly checked when the dogcart, with its two infuriated passengers, galloped to the spot and pulled up, while from the school drive an excited master in cap and gown bore down upon the arrivals with black wrath upon his brow.

"Phew!" said Dereker, under his breath. "It's Quayle—the one an' only Quayle! The biggest terror in Codrington! Now for a ghastly row!"

The honourable members of the Remove, in something like a panic, scuttled off the coach even quicker than they had mounted at the journey's start. And quicker than any of them was Taffy Wynne, who tossed the reins on the horses' backs and lit off the box with one jump, landing on the off-side, away from the gates and the angry and astounded Housemaster.

"Derry," he hissed, grabbing the arm of his chum, who sprang just beside him, "go an' draw Quayle's fire while I settle Tom. We've got to stop him at any price. Who's got some money?"

Dereker hastily emptied his ticket-pocket into Taffy's hand, and two or three others on that side, hearing the appeal did likewise. At such times the Remove stood by each other. Already the clanking of the iron gates could be heard as Mr. Quayle angrily bade the lodgekeeper open them, and on the off-side of the road the dogcart had pulled up, the horse straddle-legged and steaming, and Tom, the coach-driver, jumped down with a furious face, and strode towards the boys.

"You young fiends!" he cried. "I'll have ye all in the lock-up for this!"

"S-sh! Steady, Tom!" said Taffy, laying his finger on his lips with a dramatic gesture, and walking to meet the man. "Mr. Quayle's comin' out of the gates. He'll hear you if you shout like that!"

The coachman was so taken aback that he stopped dead.

"Hear me! By gosh, I want him to hear me! You—"

"S-sh!" said Taffy again. "It's all right. Don't raise a row, Tom!" He thrust the money—there was just over three pounds—into Tom's hand. "Take our bob fares out of that, keep the change, jump on the box, an' drive these orchestratin' niggers into the next parish. We've done with 'em. Your friend can fool the dogcart back."

Tom stared at the coins in his palm, and opened his mouth to protest; but he hesitated, and was lost. He liked the boys, and, though he had been in a great rage, did not want to get them into trouble; besides, the money equalled a week's wages. Before he knew how it happened, he was hoisted up on the box, the reins thrown up to him, and the team, starting smartly, drew the coach away at a rapid pace. The crew of minstrels on top, who had been "guying" Mr. Quayle, struck up again on their instruments as it rolled out of sight round the corner.

"Stop the coach—stop it! Pull up, I say!" cried the indignant Housemaster. "Come back!"

But Tom paid no heed. He was busily signalling to the dogcart-driver with his whip before he disappeared, and that vehicle also turned and went back by the road it had come. Till then the coach had shielded Taffy and his transactions from the view of the gentleman in the cap and gown, and the whole affair was over in far less time than it takes to tell it. Taffy and the chosen spirits of the Remove remained, facing a sorely-ruffled Housemaster before the school gates.

"Go in!" said Mr. Quayle hotly, pointing to the gates. "In with you, and we will see who is responsible for this outrage!"

The heroes of the Remove entered the grounds, some of them looking rather scared. The "jape" was an altogether new one, and they did not know what might come of it. Taffy nudged Birne stealthily in the ribs. The portals clanged behind them.

"Now," said the Housemaster, white with indignation—for the minstrels had been very rude—"what is the meaning of this disgraceful affair? Where is Wynne? Come forward, sir, I saw you on the box of that coach, and you were driving, or attempting to. Come here!"

Taffy stepped forward briskly enough, and met the master politely.

"It was a special occasion, sir," he said amiably. "I did it for the best."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, it was very awkward. There's a fair at Barleyford to-day, and all the carriages an' coaches are doing jobs there. The fair—"

"What has that to do it?"

"Why, the result is, sir, there wasn't a single—er—vehicle to meet us, except the luggage-carts, an' they said there mightn't be any for hours. There's half the school waitin' at the station; hundreds of chaps, all in a regular stew—I mean very disturbed, sir—because they were afraid they might be late gettin' here."

"Ah, they would be!" said Mr. Quayle, with a dangerous glare. "Go on, sir! What has this to do with—"

"So some of us hurried off to find a—a conveyance, sir; an' we came across the coach standin' outside a pu—a hotel, sir, the driver and guard bein'—er—engaged elsewhere. So, bein' afraid the coach might be claimed for the fair again, and knowing its duty was to get the fellows to the school," added Taffy, speaking very quickly, "I thought it'd be a good thing to bring as many of our men as I could without delay, in case any of the ki—the young ones got into mischief in the town, and—"

"You would think that, of course!" said Mr. Quayle, still more grimly.

"Ah, Mr. Quayle!" broke in a clear, strong voice, as a tall, elderly man, with a commanding presence, came down a path leading to the grounds. It was Canon Wyndham, the headmaster of Codrington. "What was that extraordinary noise I heard? More roughs from Barleyford? The boys are very late! Where are the rest of them?"

As Mr. Quayle turned to answer the Head, the ten boys raised their hats hurriedly and seized the opportunity to get away, leaving the powers to confer. The boys quickly entered the huge, old red-brick School House by the main doors and made for the lobby.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Jellicoe Introduces Himself to the Remove!

"**T**HAT was a narrow squeak!" said Taffy, with a sigh of relief. "Jolly glad the Head didn't turn up a bit earlier an' spot our giddy arrival for himself!"

"It'll be smoothed over now, with luck," said Birne. "It did look pretty thick at first. Quayle took down your blessed report like milk—at least, I think he did. He won't want to raise a shine with the Head on first night, if he can help it. There's nobody else in the school would ha' done it, though."

"Quayle's an ass," said Taffy, slinging his hat on to its peg; "but he's rather a decent ass! He won't say any more than he need, and he's afraid of the Head, anyhow. Well, Jelly," added Wynne, glancing at the new boy, whose eyes were as big as saucers with surprise, "how's auntie's pet—eh? What d'you think of it?"

"I think it was rather dangerous," said Jellicoe meekly. "I thought every moment the horses would fall down. And I am still surprised that the gentleman in the square-topped hat did not punish us and put us to bed."

"Ah, that was my giddy diplomacy!" said Taffy. "I told you it was no small beer havin' me for a pal. If I hadn't convinced the Quayle bird we were all innocent you'd not be put to bed, but havin' the little pink hide flogged off you at this moment. Better see if the luggage is in now."

"Oh, yes, the luggage!" said Jellicoe eagerly, as he accompanied the three chums towards the downstairs box-room, the others remaining behind. "Can I get to it quickly? My white mice are there in their cage, and the darlings must be fed! They have not broken their fast since this mornin'. But, oh dear, where am I to get food for them?" he exclaimed, in sudden dismay, as the box-room was reached. "What is to be done? At home, Sarah used to give me what I needed. But here—the tears trembled in his voice—"there is no Sarah! (Sniff!) It is very hard to see them want!"

"Really, this kid is getting to be a bigger nuisance every minute!" said Taffy desperately, as the new boy unwrapped a fancy cage containing two piebald mice. "What are the beastly things fed on?"

"Bread-and-milk, please!" bleated Jellicoe anxiously. "Nice fresh milk and new bread! If you will tell me where I can get it, I will go and ask—"

"They wouldn't give it to you, you little chump!" growled Taffy. "Besides, you'd get murdered on the way. Wait here while I go and see."

"Yes, certainly. It's awfully kind of

you to take all this trouble," mumbled Jellicoe gratefully.

Taffy presently returned with some fresh bread and a broken teacup filled with milk, which he had wheedled out of the matron. Jellicoe thanked him in a voice thick with emotion.

"This prize-story hero business is more exhaustin' than I thought it'd be," said Taffy, wiping his forehead. "Don't get up on your hind legs too much, Jelly, for I'm not sure whether I'm going to be your high-souled protectin' angel yet. I can't do it unless the other chaps make a row about it—and I'm hopin' they won't. If I cherish such a little terror as you, it'll be because they drive me to it. Put those beastly things away as soon as you've fed them!"

"Yes, Wynne," said Jellicoe humbly. He was already cured of saying "sir."

"You'd better shove 'em in that empty cupboard up there, an' take care nobody gets an inkling you own them, or you're done for. We're going to work now—we do sometimes—an' when you're done with those filthy mice, you'd better come down to the Remove room."

"Yes, Wynne."

"I can't be looking after you the whole time, as you'll be a blight on my bright young life. If you meet any chaps in the corridors, and they ask you your name an' Form, answer up civilly at once, an' tell 'em."

"Yes, Wynne."

"Don't saythin' about your aunt, or white mice, or that sort of thing, or you'll be smitten on the earth an' left for dead. An' don't give your Christian name—it's an awful disgrace here for a fellow's Christian name to be known."

"Yes, Wynne."

When he found himself alone, Jellicoe finished feeding the mice, and, with a benediction, placed them in the cupboard. He then opened his tin box, and, diving deep into it, fished out five or six very neatly-kept and spotless school books, though they were not new.

There was a Greek grammar, a work on mathematics, the first three books of Euclid, and two of the books—new—which Codrington used, one of them a Latin Commentary. Jellicoe tucked these under his arm and set out to find the Remove room.

He lost his way in the vast, rambling old building, and presently arrived in a wide stone passage, with dull leaden-pane windows on one side, and class-room doors

on the other. From one of them came the sound of a fair-sized riot, muffled only by the heavy door.

"No. 5," said Jellicoe, pausing in front of it. "Did not I hear somebody say that the Remove studied in a room called No. 5? No doubt Wynne and his friends are here at their studies."

He knocked gently upon the door, but such a noise was going on inside that he was not likely to be heard. He knocked louder and louder still, and finally he opened the door and walked straight in.

Eight or ten of the Remove were there already—they had arrived by wagonette some ten minutes before, and were celebrating the occasion. The noise stopped, and they stared in surprise at the pallid and meagre-looking Jellicoe, with the pile of books under his arm.

"Hallo!" said a disgusted voice. "Who's responsible for that? Where did it spring from?"

"Get out of here, you object! Who are you?" cried several others, moving towards the new boy.

"I—I beg your pardon!" gasped Jellicoe, retreating. "I thought this was the Remove class-room. I belong to the Remove, and my name is Jellicoe. I will not tell you my Christian name, because it's bad form. But I came here to study."

Jellicoe would certainly have been roughly handled and thrown out on his neck but for the shock his speech gave the gentlemen of the Remove. They were quite taken aback, and were inquiring feebly of each other what species the newcomer could belong to when the dark De Quincey entered.

"Ah, here is the natural history specimen!" he said. "He seems to perplex you, my young friends. Yes, he belongs to the Remove. He is under the protection of our only Wynne, who, I suppose, must have left the cage door open."

"But what is it, Quincey? Where did it come from?" cried several protesting voices, as the new boy stood and gasped in a scared way.

"By the look of it," said De Quincey, eyeing Jellicoe curiously, "I should say it was just hatched out of its shell by the sun. Doubtless the Head will put it in the school museum."

They all stared at Jellicoe in dead silence, but quite failed to disconcert him. He was searching in his Latin Commentary, and

walked up to De Quincey with a studious air.

"Would you be so very kind as to indicate the lesson for to-morrow?" he said. "I—er—I wish to make myself worthy of the Form to which I have the honour to belong. My aunt— Dear me, I nearly forgot myself then! I should like to begin my studies at once."

Even the calm De Quincey was rather staggered at this. However, he took the book and opened it at the back.

"Willingly, good worm!" he said suavely. "I commend your zeal for knowledge. Our lesson to-morrow is the index. We are required to know the index by heart, with the correct numbers of all the pages, reduced to decimal fractions and elegiacs. You had better start learning the index at once from A to Z."

Jellicoe's pale brow wrinkled somewhat, and he sat down at a desk apart, placing his other books in a neat pile beside him. He began the task which the facetious De Quincey had set him. The rest of the Form were still at a loss to know what to make of it. The new boy read a few lines of the index and looked up.

"I—er—confess I cannot see the object of our master in setting us this task," he said meekly. "Can you, Mr.—er—de Quincey?"

Before the jester could make any reply Kent-Williams entered the room—a tall youth, with dark, reddish hair. His eye caught the studious Jellicoe, and he stopped and glared.

"What's this?" he said. "What d'you mean by swottin', you little beast?"

He strode across to Jellicoe's desk, snatched the Latin Commentary from him, gave him three powerful thumps on the head with it, and threw the volume away. Jellicoe gave an agonised yelp at each thump and shrank away, blubbering.

"Of all the cheek I ever saw, this beats the lot!" cried Kent-Williams. "Who let this thing come in here? He doesn't belong to the Form!"

"You err, my comrade," said De Quincey; "he is in the Remove, and he's under the lordly protection of Wynne."

"Is he, though? Wynne be hanged!" exclaimed Kent-Williams, snatching up another book and slapping Jellicoe across the face with it. "Get up, you dirty little beggar, when your betters speak to you! Swottin' under my very nose, by gum!"

He dealt the pile of volumes a blow that

sent them flying across the room, and just then Taffy himself, who had heard the last few sentences, came striding into the room.

"Hallo!" he said, flushing. "You've got to work already, have you, Kent-Williams? I didn't know you wanted any more handlin' from me. Take that as a sample, an' that to go on with, an' that for dessert!"

He descended upon Kent-Williams like a whirlwind, and the latter, who had turned to face him with a sulky and scared countenance, was sent spinning by three rapid drives from the shoulder, only one of which he managed to guard. Kent-Williams turned to fly, but Taffy grabbed him by the nape of the neck, and, twisting him round with surprising strength, sat down suddenly on a form, and took the captive's head between his knees.

"Come here, kid!" said Taffy to Jellicoe. "Get the biggest of those books and lay on a round dozen upon his quarterdeck! We'll show who's top-dog in the Remove!"

Kent-Williams yelled furiously, but he was kneeling in a very exposed position, and Wynne's knees held his head in a vice-like grip.

"Help! Fergy! Kempe! Rescue!" he howled.

The boys roared with laughter, for few of Kent-Williams' followers were there. Jellicoe alone stood still, and looked frightened out of his wits. Taffy's violent attack, the heaviness of the blows, and the complete abasement of Kent-Williams had scared him almost as much as the enemy's treatment of him did. It seemed very brutal to Jellicoe.

"Go ahead, kid! Lay it on and warm him!" said Taffy.

"I—I don't like to, Wynne!" stammered the new boy, his eyes nearly starting out of his head. "I don't like to hit him when—when he's like that!"

"Don't you?" said Taffy. "We're not so particular here. He's bearded me, an' he must die the death. One of you—"

"I'll be proxy for the kid," said Birne, grinning. "Book me as substitute." He held out his hand to the new boy. "Put it there, Jellyface!"

The new boy put his hand in Birne's, trembling. Birne shook it slowly and gravely five times and let it go.

"With this lily hand," said Birne, holding up his own, "which has been in mesmeric communication with Jellyface, I shall now do the deed. That's thought—"

transference, you know, or giddy mental telegraphy—all the same as if the little beast did it himself! Give me that Cicero, an' count the strokes!"

The volume of Cicero was wielded twelve times with resounding bangs upon the most exposed part of Kent-Williams' person. When it was over he was allowed to rise, purple-faced and with one end of his collar burst loose. He made for the door, and, turning, glared back at Taffy.

"You beast, Wynne! Wait till I get back with my little lot, and we'll slay you! Just wait, you an' that chalk-faced kid, too!"

He rushed down the corridor, calling loudly the names of Ferguson and Kempe and many others. A commotion was heard in the passages, but the next moment the bell clanged loudly for call-over, and the whole household had to make for the big school-room. The sounds of strife were quelled.

"Dear me!" bleated Jellicoe in a breathless voice, as he followed the three chums out of the class-room, keeping very close to them. "I—I never thought Codrington would be like this!"

"Didn't you, kid?" said Taffy dryly.

"You've a lot to learn yet!"

## CHAPTER 7.

Enter Mr. Lambe!

"I SAY," exclaimed Johnson II., bursting into No. 6 dormitory next morning, where Taffy and his cronies were dressing, "the new master's come! You never saw such a holy-lookin' terror in your life!"

"What's he like?" said Taffy, as the dormitory began to buzz with excitement.

"What sort of terror?"

"He's a big, rather stoutish chap; he looks as simple as a chaw-bacon, and more than three-parts asleep."

"Does he?" said Taffy, knotting his tie.

"Well, I've heard of the Remove wakin' people up!"

"Know anything else about him?" asked Birne, hurrying into his coat.

"Only that his name's Wollaston Lambe, with a string of letters after it—about half the alphabet."

"Ah!" said Dereker with a fiendish smile.

"Lambe is he! We'll lead him to the slaughter! We'll attend to the Lambe—we'll joint him an' roast him an' serve him

hot with sauce! We'll lard him and hash him and curry him! He'll wish he'd never left the giddy fold!"

Taffy, Birne, and Dereker hastily finished dressing, and went down to call-over, for they were only just in time.

Jellicoe hovered in their wake, as usual. There was no early "prep" on the first morning of the term, and breakfast followed in due course; but nothing was seen of the new master.

Before chapel, however, the three chums were passing through the upper corridor, when Johnson, standing near the glass door that shut off the passage leading to the masters' studies, beckoned to them softly.

"Here," he said, "this is the chap! D'you want to have a look at him?"

The chums stepped to the glass door.

"Where's the prodigy?" said Dereker.

"Where's the Lambe that's going to bite the tiger? What—that!"

Mr. Wollaston Lambe came down the passage towards them with a long, large stride, blinking benevolently. He was bound to turn off before reaching the door, which was partly curtained, and thus the boys had a glimpse of him unseen.

It had its effect, too. Taffy looked at the new master, started, and stared in blank unbelief. He could not believe his eyes.

The others made muffled exclamations, with the exception of Johnson, who had departed.

"Great Jupiter!" said Taffy. "It's the fellow we saw hidin' under the bush by the river yesterday!"

Mr. Wollaston Lambe, all unconscious of being watched, turned round a corner and disappeared.

The three boys and Jellicoe were left staring at each other in perplexity.

"It is, by gum!" cried Dereker. "I'd know him in a thousand! It's the chap who dodged that policeman an' the plain-clothes officer so cleverly! Don't you remember his crouchin' among the willows?"

"An' Taffy leading the police off on a wrong scent?" added Birne with a whistle.

There could be no doubt about it whatever. It was the same man. The clothes under his half-open college gown were even the same. The rather fleshy face and amiable, sleepy expression, and the eye-glass, hanging from a narrow black ribbon instead of a cord!

"This beats cock-fighting!" exclaimed Dereker. "He's wanted by the police,

that's dead sure, an' he's given 'em the slip! 'What a ragi!"

"Don't tell the other rotters about it; let's keep it to ourselves," said Taffy.

And the three, bursting with the knowledge they had just acquired, hurried down to chapel.

Little could be seen of Mr. Wollaston Lambe during the twenty minutes' service, for he was in the darkest part of the chapel, under a filled-in window that was being repaired. But when the new master stood up Taffy saw several of the Remove looking at him; and De Quincey, who was just opposite, stared intently.

After the service, Taffy and his companions hurried to the box-room to unpack some books, and were some time about it.

"Remember, not a word of this!" said Taffy, as they made for No. 5 class-room. "We'll soon be in touch with the beggar now!"

"Right. Unless De Quincey and some of the others have spotted him, too. We weren't the only ones who saw him, you know."

"They wouldn't be such asses as to blab!"

Taffy was wrong, however. When they reached the class-room they found it in a ferment. Everybody was talking at once, and the amazing news was in the possession of the whole Form.

"Here's Wynne! Wynne saw him first. It's the same man, isn't it, Taffy?" cried several voices.

"What a go!" exclaimed Kent-Williams. "He's a criminal! The police want him! He's in our giddy hands!"

"P'raps they've caught him and let him out on bail."

"More likely he gave them the slip altogether," said De Quincey. "That's how it looked to me. Maybe he's taken this job on for a blind. There will be a little pleasant excitement for us, my dear young friends."

"Are you sure it's the same man, though?"

"Sure?" echoed De Quincey scornfully. "I'd know him anywhere! I had a good look at him yesterday, and again to-day, and I never forget a face."

"It's the man, right enough," said Taffy.

"What'll be the end of it?"

De Quincey smiled a fiendish smile, and, picking up a piece of chalk, walked to the blackboard.

"This'll be about it," he said.

De Quincey was not only of poetic lean-

ing, but he was much more talented as a sketcher. Silence fell on the class, and like lightning there grew under his chalk an amazingly clever portrait of Mr. Wollaston Lambe, with short-cropped hair, dressed in convict's clothes, with fine, broad-arrow markings, and wielding a quarrier's pick-axe.

The face was the face of the new master, admirably drawn in a few bold lines. It was unmistakable, and to finish it off De Quincey added the eyeglass fixed in the convict's eye, and with its black ribbon attached. Then, with a few more strokes, he sketched into the corner a warden standing over the convict with a rifle.

At that moment the door opened quickly and quietly, and on the threshold stood Mr. Wollaston Lambe himself, eyeglass in eye, and looking astonishingly like the portrait, all but clothes.

A gasp of consternation went round the room. Mr. Wollaston Lambe, standing stock still, looked long and silently at the portrait on the blackboard, and then turned his sleepy gaze on De Quincey, who stood, chalk in hand, as if petrified.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Mr. Wollaston Lambe Takes the Remove!

THERE was such a dead silence as was seldom experienced in No. 5 class-room. It was reported that the Remove had never been startled before, but they certainly seemed a little startled now. The insult on the blackboard, staring the new master in the face, was flagrant.

The whole Form felt that he understood the drawing; indeed, he must have been rather dense if he did not. His own features and form, clothed in the glaring convict dress, were recognisable by anybody. Would he seize upon the artist and flog the life out of him? De Quincey stood rooted to the spot, the chalk in his hand, and his eyebrows slightly raised. He took it coolly enough. So did the new master. The Form held its breath.

Mr. Wollaston Lambe blinked sleepily round the class, and blinked at De Quincey again. Then he walked leisurely up to the blackboard, and inspected the portrait with great care.

"Ah!" he said suavely. "What a bless-

ing is the artistic sense! Is this your work?"

"Yes, sir," said De Quincey.

"What is your honoured name?"

The artist told him.

"And so, my gilded youth, you have been drawing a fancy portrait? I do not"—Mr. Lambe peered round at the assembled boys—"I do not see the original anywhere in the class."

"He's in the room, sir," spoke up Walsh, out of pure "cheek."

Mr. Wollaston Lambe blinked at him for several seconds.

"Come here," he said smoothly.

Walsh came and stood before the master in the middle of the floor. Mr. Lambe did not move a muscle, and Walsh, in spite of himself, began to quake. There was something about the new master, when you were close to him, that made you very apprehensive, without quite knowing why.

"Stand there for the present," said Mr. Lambe; and then he turned to De Quincey again, who was wishing himself well out of the room though he kept a bold front.

"My good De Quincey, this imaginative sketch of yours shows great merit. Let us hope the fate of this person in his Majesty's uniform may never be yours."

De Quincey dropped the chalk.

"At the same time, these artistic efforts must be reserved till after school hours. The blackboard you have decorated so charmingly is required for other purposes. This work of art must be rubbed out."

Mr. Lambe stretched out a long arm and quietly grasped De Quincey by the front of his waistcoat. The artist-poet shrank a little at the touch, and there was plenty of slack to give the master a grip. To the amazement of the Remove, Mr. Lambe lifted De Quincey off the ground with one hand as if he had been a feather and calmly proceeded to wipe the blackboard with him.

Finally, the master placed him down again, while the class sniggered.

"The blackboard is now clean," observed Mr. Lambe, bending his gaze on De Quincey.

"Yes, sir!" gasped the artist, staggering, for the motion had made him feel unwell.

"We will employ your talents a little further," said the master, and, looking sleepily at the class again, he beckoned to Dereker.

"Go to the bath-room and get the two small mirrors which I observed hanging on

the wall," said Mr. Lambe. "Bring them here."

Dereker departed at once on this errand. He was quite keen to see what the new master meant to do. He soon returned with the mirrors, and found the class remarkably quiet. Mr. Lambe took the looking-glasses and arranged them near the blackboard.

"Now," he said, "my excellent De Quincey, by looking into this mirror you will see your own side-face clearly in the other. Be good enough to draw it on the board."

De Quincey stared gloomily at the looking-glass, while a broad grin adorned the rest of the class.

"You do not seem pleased with your reflection, De Quincey," said the master suavely. "It is not much to be proud of, certainly, but do not be downcast. We cannot help our looks. Draw; I am waiting."

## CHAPTER 9.

### On the Warpath!

DE QUINCEY would have given a good deal to refuse. He guessed that he was going to cut a poor figure. But somehow Mr. Lambe, standing over him, convinced him he had better obey. Before De Quincey knew it, he had picked up the chalk and commenced sulkily to draw.

The features he drew were not at all like his own, and after the first few strokes the master stopped him.

"That does not do you justice, De Quincey. It is far too handsome. I shall be obliged to wipe it out again."

De Quincey seized the duster that hung on the peg and wiped out the sketch himself in a great hurry and began to draw afresh. He did not want to be used as a polisher any more. His neat black coat was in a gruesome state behind, and the whole Form was sniggering. With rage in his heart he completed the sketch in a few strokes. It was like himself now.

"Much better," said Mr. Lambe. "And now, with your accustomed skill, draw a large and rampant jackass, with that face in place of a head."

Much against his wish, De Quincey obeyed.

"The ears a little longer, please," said the master. "Farther—right up to the top of the board."

De Quincey obeyed, in spite of himself. He drew the ass' ears nearly two feet long, and the finished picture made De Quincey look a bigger fool than he had ever thought it possible anybody could look.

"Very good!" said Mr. Lambe. "They are still scarcely long enough to be true to Nature, for the folly of the ass, De Quincey, is measured by its ears. But that is the fault of the board—the whole room could hardly hold them, unless we raised the ceiling. Stand by the picture and let us compare it with the original. Perfect—yes, perfect!"

The whole Form shook with laughter. It was unfeeling of them, and, besides, it was too much of a triumph for their natural enemy. But they did. They shouted with mirth as none but the Remove dared. The portrait was really fine.

Mr. Wollaston Lambe took a couple of steps towards the benches, and his eyeglass dropped. He blinked round, as usual, and the noise was hushed. The laughing ceased. It was a surprising thing, but so it happened. The Remove actually became quiet.

"Thank you," said Mr. Lambe suavely. "That is better. De Quincey, stand beside the picture, at attention, and keep guard over it. It is a masterpiece. My congratulations, De Quincey. We will now proceed to business."

He went to his desk on the raised dais and surveyed the class, with a pleasant and drowsy smile.

"A very well-behaved and intelligent company of boys," he said amiably. "My only grief is that we shall enjoy each other's company so short a time. I can see you will all work so hard that you will be moved into the Upper Fourth Form at the term's end. Dear me! I wonder who could have told me this was an unruly Form? I will now take your names, if you please, starting from the top."

Each boy gave his name in turn. There would have been some very riotous "business" at this point with most masters, but just now the Remove was rather inclined to lie low and see what would happen next.

The names were given only once, and from that time forward Mr. Wollaston Lambe never forgot one of them, nor had to ask a boy what he was called. The lesson was Latin, and he opened at Horace.

"Horace, I understand, has been the subject of your study last term," he said, with a sleepy smile. "I should have thought

it was too advanced for the Remove, to judge by your open and innocent countenances. However, we'll take the last term's examination parts and see what you know of them. Stand out, Wynne; you can begin. From 'Arte nova instructos.'"

The class, as Taffy stood up and began to stumble through the page, became a little more like itself, and began to murmur threateningly.

"Fancy the beggar standin' up there with his beastly eyeglass, when he's done a murder or robbed a church or something," growled Ferguson, to his next-door neighbour.

"What a rippin' go if the police came in and clapped the darbies on him," whispered Kempe, grinning.

"That ass, De Quincey, has made a mess of it! He's given us away."

Mr. Lambe turned his sleepy gaze at once in their direction, but broad grins broke out behind him. Kent-Williams, who was at the other end of the class and right behind, was perpetrating a "jape" of his own. He caught the attention of De Quincey at the blackboard, and, winking ferociously and pointing to Mr. Lambe's back, imitated the motions of a person taking exercise on a treadmill.

The master, drifting gently backwards, his eyes fixed on his book, suddenly turned and caught Kent-Williams neatly by the ear, to the actor's great discomfiture, and the performance ceased.

"Don't stop, Kent-Williams," said Mr. Lambe, leading him gently out into the middle of the room. "Continue, if you please—one-two, one-two!"

Kent-Williams gave a squeal—the pressure on his ear was considerable—and perforce he had to go on treadmilling. His face was screwed up, and his feet moved frantically up and down. Mr. Lambe gradually released him.

"Kent-Williams, you have a prophetic mind. Don't stop, please. This will be excellent practice for you in later life. Really, a most artistic Form—this Remove!" said the master. "Continue to move like that until further orders, and let me advise you not to stop till I tell you. Go on, Wynne—from 'Quae regio'—and try to avoid more than five false quantities to the page."

The convulsed Form beheld Kent-Williams marking time frantically and pawing the air

in the centre of the floor like a squirrel in a cage.

Mr. Lambe took no notice. He continued the lesson blandly, calling on Kempe to replace Taffy, and then Dereker. Kent-Williams stopped short rebelliously, but Mr. Lambe shut the book and advanced slowly towards him. The culprit began again in a hurry.

Friends and supporters urged him to rebel; hissed out advice to him to refuse, and take what came. But somehow Kent-Williams was convinced he had better go on treadmilling. He grew red in the face, and panted breathlessly. At last he really did stop short.

"Hoc interdicto teneatur," read Mr. Lambe, without looking up from his book. "Go on, Kent-Williams. Why are you stopping?"

"I can't go on, sir!" gasped the culprit. "Please, sir, I'm dead-beat!"

"You little know what the human frame can endure when obliged," said Mr. Lambe, closing the book. He cast a quick glance round the class, and his eye lit on Johnson II., who was watching Kent-Williams with fiendish glee. "Step out, Johnson, and come here. Take this ruler and apply it briskly to the toes of Kent-Williams whenever he fails to mark time. But make no noise about it, or you will suffer also."

The Remove was quite taken aback with this strange treatment, and watched helplessly. Johnson did not hesitate, but came straight out, and, taking the long blackboard ruler, hit Kent-Williams so painfully on the toes with it that that worthy was fain to lift one foot after the other more briskly than ever. Johnson had a dislike for Kent-Williams, and entered into the thing with zest.

"Very good," Mr. Lambe said. "I hold you responsible for him, Johnson. Proceed, Dereker—*aucupii sociis privari.*"

The couple in the centre were hard at it while the lesson proceeded, Kent-Williams gasping and perspiring freely, and Johnson smiting his corns viciously at every pause, while they kept up a fierce and whispered dialogue between them.

"I'll kill you afterwards for this, you beast!" (One-two, one-two.) "If you don't stop it, young Johnson, you'll be sorry you were born!" (One-two, one-two.)

"I've got my orders, old boy, an' I'm

goin' to jolly well carry 'em out!" (One two, one-two.)

"Look here, if you don't stop it I'll hack you in the mouth!"

"Not you! The Lambe'd make you swallow the blackboard if you did!" (One-two, one-two.)

"Oh, do chuck it! You're killin' me!" (One-two, one-two.)

"I'm enjoyin' this, Kent, ain't you?" (One-two, one-two.)

"Sufficient," said Mr. Lambe amiably, laying the book on his desk. "You can both go to your places."

Kent-Williams staggered to his desk, hardly able to reach it, he was so out of breath. In the pause that followed, the Remove prepared itself to break out into thorough riot at last, when at that moment the bell rang, and the lesson was over.

Mr. Wollaston Lambe picked up his books, blinked mildly and affectionately at the class, and walked towards the door.

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Lambe's Weak Spot!

MR. LAMBE soon became the topic of conversation.

"Something's got to be done," said Dereker. "He's gettin' too much of a hold on the Form."

"Not for a day or two yet. I want it to be a howlin' success when it does happen," said Taffy; "an' not to make asses of ourselves an' the Form as well, like the other gang have."

"Well, but in the meantime we ought to spring a good crisp jape on him, as openly as you like, to freshen things up," said Dereker earnestly, as they made their way to Room No. 12. "Don't you think the one I told you of is good enough? Because I do."

"Yes, it's all right," said Taffy. "Of course, it means our getting all dropped on to."

"I don't think so myself; but that don't matter much. It may be a bit beyond him to deal with. That eyeglass the Lambe wears is a weak spot in his giddy armour, and I don't like to see it glarin' at me from his desk, either."

The other members of the Remove, when the plan was submitted to them, expressed

themselves in favour of it, with the exception of Ferguson's brigade.

"We aren't going to do what you sweeps tell us," said Ferguson sulkily. "Who are you to settle what the Form shall do?"

An outbreak of discussion followed, but most of the Form were in favour of Dereker.

"Only we've got to know what it is first," said Walsh. "We aren't buyin' a pig in a poke."

"I'll transmit the idea to the Form in two days' time, before first lesson," said Dereker. "Anybody who doesn't like it can stand out."

Two mornings later, according to his word, Dereker turned up at Room No. 12, with his chums behind him and a wooden box under his arm. He opened it before the assembly and showed a perfect stack of eyeglasses. Taking one out, he screwed it into his own optic.

It was exactly similar to the one the Lambe always wore—a rather unusual sort, with the old-time black rim round it, and a watered-silk ribbon instead of a cord. The Form grinned.

"I hired these from a London optician," said Dereker, "an' had to pay a stiff deposit. However, that's no matter. I object to the Woolly Lambe's giddy eyeglass. He wears it for side, if you ask me. If he can wear one in class, why shouldn't we? There are thirty here, all up to sample, and enough to go round. I propose to use 'em this mornin'; so come an' take your choice, my bucks."

"I don't see much fun in it," grunted Kent-Williams.

"Of course you don't, my little lad. It's subtle humour, and doesn't reach your turgid brain. It's new, an' it'll be interestin' to see if the Woolly Lambe gives himself away."

A clamour of agreement with Dereker's idea came from the Form. They were all willing. Those who would have preferred to "crab" any scheme of the Taffy partners found the pressure of public opinion too much for them. It was decided that all should bear a part, and that it would be worth while to see what the Woolly Lambe would make of it.

A curious quiet reigned in the Remove class-room that morning when first lesson was due to begin. Mr. Wollaston Lambe somewhat wondered at it. He was accustomed to hear a considerable uproar before

he arrived, which did not stop until he entered the room itself.

He came stalking down the corridor with long, swinging strides, and turned into the class-room. Then he halted; and, for the first time since his entry into Codrington, the Woolly Lambe showed signs of something like surprise, for every boy of the twenty-six had in his eye an eyeglass exactly like the Woolly Lambe's, and was staring straight before him, making no sound. The whole Remove was eyeglassed and ribboned to the last member of the Form!

A tense silence prevailed. Mr. Lambe, continuing to stare at the assembly, took his own eyeglass from his eye and began to polish it slowly and pensively with his silk handkerchief—a constant trick of his. As if worked by automatic machinery, the whole Remove took hold of their eyeglasses, wiped them with their handkerchiefs, and replaced them.

The strain became intense, though everybody was quivering in the effort to hang on to the eyeglasses. The wretched Walsh suddenly emitted a wild snort of laughter, sounding as if he had burst, and dropped his monocle. He flushed crimson as Mr. Lambe turned a slow, steady gaze on him before turning his attention to the glass again. Walsh, with trembling fingers, fumbled in a vain attempt to screw the glass back into its place.

Only the Codrington Remove could have produced such a scene. And only the Woolly Lambe could have dealt with it. The new master turned, walked to his desk, and mounted on the dais. A slight spot of colour was glowing on each of his cheeks.

"There seems to be an epidemic of myopia, or short sight, among the Form this morning," he said dreamily; and then he paused. "Dereker, come here!"

The schemer came, wondering rather uneasily why he was selected, and whether the Lambe knew he was the starter of the jape.

"Do you find this optical apparatus improves your vision, Dereker?"

"Er—yes, sir," said Dereker, who was trying hard to persuade himself that he saw better with the eyeglass. As a matter of fact, it blurred the view rather badly.

"Ah, I feared for a moment you were wearing it merely in order to look fashionable!" returned the Woolly Lambe in his sleepy voice. "And you are used to it? You feel quite comfortable with it?"

"Yes, sir," said Dereker, beginning to feel apprehensive. As the master's eye pinned him he somehow felt it would be much more disastrous now to drop the monocle than to keep it fixed up.

"Oblige me by getting on that form," said the master.

"Now oblige me by jumping down. No; leave your eyeglass where it is."

The schemer jumped down, and, greatly to his own gratification, the eyeglass did not budge. It withstood the shock, and was gripped between his eyebrow and cheek. He was very sure it would be a bad thing for him if it did fall. As a matter of fact, Dereker had had a sample eyeglass for four days past, and had been amusing himself by wearing it at odd times, thus he had acquired a mastery over it. Some eyes do not hold monocles well, but Dereker's did.

"Again!" said Mr. Lambe.

Twice more did Dereker mount and jump off the form; but the eyeglass stood the test, much to everybody's surprise.

"Very good!" said the master. "You have saved yourself from much tribulation, Dereker. I am glad to see you so at home with an eyeglass. And the rest of you?" he queried, blinking at the Form. "Do you also find yourselves benefited by wearing these ornaments?"

"Yes, sir!" chorused the Remove eagerly, following Dereker's lead and hoping to escape trouble.

"Your vision is improved, and the road to the brain made clearer by the greater purity of the eyesight?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Excellent! Then we must not dream of removing them; the Latin prose will benefit immensely. You will wear them throughout the lesson, and any boy who allows his glass to drop from its place for one moment will be debited with one hundred lines."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when two monocles fell with a clatter on the desks. The long strain of keeping them fixed up was too much. Three others soon followed, despite frantic efforts to retain them.

"Madison and Kent-Williams," murmured Mr. Lambe, noting the imposition written in his book, "one hundred lines each, so, I perceive, Johnson, Minors, and Ferguson—the same. Any boy not replacing monocle within ten seconds after it falls I receive five hundred lines extra."

A perfect plague of eyeglasses dropping soon affected the Form; for to keep them up for so long was almost impossible. In every case the culprit received one hundred lines, and by the time the lesson was over two or three unlucky wights had earned as much as five hundred apiece.

The Form had expected to have the eyeglasses confiscated, and perhaps a caning all round afterwards. But the present state of affairs was refined torture, aching faces and fiercely screwed-up cheeks making wild efforts to keep up to the mark, while lines were distributed freely every quarter of an hour or so. Some of the victims were shaking their fists furtively at Dereker whenever Mr. Lambe appeared not to be looking.

Taffy, Birne, and Dereker had a better grip than anybody else. Birne only failed once, near the end, and earned a single hundred lines. The remaining two escaped scot-free, and the only other boy who did so was Walsh. Several were muttering vengeance against Dereker before the lesson was over; but most of the Form, only one or two hundred lines to the bad, were enjoying the joke thoroughly. There was a decided snap about it. The only drawback was that the Woolly Lambe did not allow it to interfere with the lesson. With infernal ingenuity he kept the Latin prose fully up to the mark. A quarter of an hour before the bell was due to ring, he closed his book with a snap.

"You can drop those optic ornaments," he said.

The Form did so, with a mighty sigh of relief.

"They have served their turn admirably," said the master. "The Latin prose was distinctly above the mark. But"—his eye wore a dangerous glitter for a moment—"once is enough. The member who enters this room again with an eyeglass in sight will thereby earn five thousand lines as a commencement upon him. Am I understood?"

"Yes, sir!" said several fervent voices, from speakers whose chief wish was never to see an eyeglass again.

Before the Woolly Lambe could continue, a prefect entered the room and delivered a written note, evidently from the Head.

No sooner had the door closed behind him and the Remove was alone than Ferguson leaped to his feet.

"Well, you blithering idiot, Dereker,

"What have you got to say for yourself now?" raved Ferguson, who had suffered severely in "impots." "Four hundred lines, by gum, that's what I've got! Aren't you proud of yourself?"

"So have I!" cried Minors.

"Shut up, you asses!" Walsh interposed. "It was a rippin' good jape, an' well worth a few lines! It drew the Lambe at last. It got home at him!"

There was a chorus of approval from those who had suffered least and had seen the humour of the affair.

"I say it was drivellin' rot, then!" howled Kent-Williams, who was well on the four hundred mark; and he took off his eyeglass and hurled it at the wall, where it smashed to splinters. "The deuce take the thing, an' you, too!"

"You'll jolly well pay for that!" said Derek. "They cost two bob each, an' they aren't mine! Do you hear, young Kent?"

"I shan't pay, you beast! Go and eat coke!" bellowed Kent-Williams. "You're the biggest cad in—"

Derek leapt to his feet and rushed at him, and in a moment the Form, feeling like its old self again, was in a pandemonium.

Taffy's great rival, together with Kempe and Kent-Williams, had retired to a favourite retreat of their own, in a light and airy cellar beneath the old pavilion at the far end of the playing-fields—a spot unknown to Taffy, and where they had been for some time discussing a dark plot of their own concoction.

"I hope it'll turn out better than the last," Kempe was saying.

"You're a despondin' beast, Kempe," said Ferguson. "How can it turn out anything but well? If it doesn't come off we can chuck it and go to bed."

"Lambe doesn't know you suspect anything, of course?" asked Kent-Williams.

"Not he."

"I passed his door half an hour ago," said Kempe, "an' I heard him chucklin' to himself like an idiot! I wonder what about? He'd just come back from a walk up the hill above the Dog and Duck, for I'd been watching him."

"He'll chuckle on the other side of his beastly face soon!" said Ferguson. "There's

no need for us even to leave the school grounds. My idea is that we slip out at about ten o'clock, hide in the shrubberies, and watch Lambe's window. Then, when this prowlin' ruffian does turn up, we can see what he does, an' how the Woolly Lambe communicates with him."

"Are you certain they do communicate?" asked Kempe. "When did you see the man last, an' what's he like?"

"A big lout in baggy tweeds and flat bowler-hat. I've noticed him mouchin' round the place several times, as I told you. But last night I spotted him from the dormitory window sneaking into the school grounds. You can't see very well from the dormitory, but he stopped just at the corner below, an' I believe he was throwin' pebbles up at Lambe's window to attract his attention."

"That's queer. Who d'you suppose the man can be, then?"

"It's a dead certainty he's up to no good. By what we know of the Woolly Lambe, I should say this chap was an accomplice of his. Once a gaol-bird always a gaol-bird, you know! The most likely thing is that Lambe passes out plunder to him on the quiet. There's lots of very valuable old plate in the school, you know, an' the Head's got a collection of old gold coins worth any amount of money."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder if that's why Lambe's taken this situation here. There couldn't be a better place for a wrong 'un to do well in. And I know there's no proper safe in the school even to guard the valuables properly," put in Kent-Williams thoughtfully.

"There you are, then. This chap's humbugged the Head, but he can't humbug us!" said Ferguson importantly. "And if we do catch this accomplice of his, the fellow's sure to split on Lambe. They always do."

"Shall we tell the sergeant or anybody, an' get help to nab him?" suggested Kent-Williams.

"Of course not, you ass! Can't you see we've got to do the thing on our own? Surely three of us are enough to tackle one man. We're all pretty hefty," said Ferguson.

"As long as he hasn't got a revolver or a life-preserver," said Kent-Williams doubtfully.

"Dash it all, you don't funk it, do you?" said Ferguson angrily.

"No, no!" returned Kent-Williams hastily. "Certainly not!"

"Funk it be hanged!" said Kempe gruffly. "We'll tackle him right enough. As soon as we're actually goin' for him we'd better shout for help, though, an' there'll soon be plenty. Lodgey ain't far off."

"Very good, then; gather at the boot-room, an' we'll all be in the laurels a little before ten," said Ferguson. "Just shove on a pair of shoes, and jacket and trousers over your pyjamas. Better get back now; it's right on tea-time. Keep yourselves to yourselves, an' don't mix with anybody between now and then."

The conspirators departed, and at the same hour Taffy and his companions, together with Jellicoe, were foregathering in the Hall for tea.

Ferguson and his brethren came late, arriving just behind the Woolly Lambe and Mr. Flower. Ferguson and the other two had places near the door, and instead of staying for a while, as usual, they departed immediately the meal was over, behind the masters.

"Hallo!" observed Dereker, as he saw them go. "Taffy, it looks as if they were keepin' purposely out of our way. I wonder what the game is? We must watch them."

They presently made their way very leisurely to No. 12; but the evening passed without the Ferguson contingent turning up again, except at prep, and when that was over they kept out of the way once more till call-over, and finally retired to rest, leaving Taffy's forces quite baffled.

"No go!" said Taffy, as he undressed. "Those beggars have got some private affairs on hand, that's clear. Jelly, just you get all the balmy an' refreshin' sleep you can. There's a strenuous day in front of you, my pet."

Taffy, as a rule, was asleep within thirty seconds of getting into bed, but on this occasion he lay awake some time thinking.

He was dozing off as the muffled notes of the big staircase clock struck ten, when a distinctly-heard creak outside in the corridor brought his senses to full tension again.

Taffy knew that creak well, and the particular board that made it. He always avoided it himself, if leaving the dormitory after lights-out, and he wondered which of the masters were on the prowl.

A few seconds later the creak was repeated; and, after a long pause, he heard it a third time.

"That's no master," he thought; "it's one of the chaps—or, rather, three. The plank scarcely creaks at all goin' up the corridor; it's only walkin' towards the stairs that makes it sound like that. Somebody's got a midnight brew-party on in one of the box-rooms; or else it's a Fifth Form beauty goin' to slip out of the school on business of his own."

Something impelled Taffy to slip out of bed and go to the window, for it commanded a view of the path to the shrubberies. He had an idea that Topham, the sad dog of the Fifth, sometimes made nocturnal excursions for reasons of his own, and Taffy was curious to see if it were so.

He was just in time, however, to see a figure he knew still better than that of Topham making two or three rapid strides across the gravel, and vanishing into the shrubberies, followed directly after by two others.

Taffy glanced after them with interest. He saw the last of the three crouch just inside the edge of the laurels, as if intending to stay there; but presently one of the others, reappearing, touched him, and the two went cautiously further round the corner, and there were lost to view.

Taffy, without hesitation, went to Dereker's bed and placed a hand on that sleeping beauty's mouth, from which delicate snores were proceeding.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Ferguson Bites the Dust!

"W<sup>H</sup>AT'S up?" said Dereker, opening his eyes.

"Don't make a row!" whispered Taffy. "Fergy and his lot have gone out. They're hidin' in the laurels, I believe. Don't think they've gone any farther. Look here, shall we slide out, too, an' see what the game is?"

"Right-ho!" said Dereker. "Shove on bags and a jacket, an' wake Birne!"

In a few minutes the three had stolen quietly out of the dormitory, the door-handle and lock of which they always kept well oiled.

"How did those chaps get out?" whispered Birne.

"I don't know; but not by our little route. We'll stick to that," said Taffy. "I've got the key."

The three chums had their own method of getting out after lock-up when they had need to, which was seldom. They had never patronised Ferguson's route, but the kitchen stairs; they had a longer, but better, mode of exit—through a casement that opened from one of the lobbies on to the leads of the old gymnasium, whence it was a short and easy drop to the ground, with a convenient window-sill for climbing back again.

This exit brought them out on the opposite side of the house, and they made their way right round to the back of the shrubberies till they were near where Taffy had seen the Ferguson crew disappear. There they crept on very cautiously, inch by inch.

"I see 'em!" breathed Dereker, pointing through the bushes. "They're all squattin' together near the house."

"Just opposite Lambe's window!" murmured Taffy. "They're watchin' it. The Lambe's at home, anyhow."

There was a light in the Remove-master's room, and the window was half-open, though the blind was down. Taffy and his companions were well in the background, and by stooping they could dimly see among the bushes what appeared to be the rival three, nearer the building itself. For some time no one moved.

"Is that another of them?" whispered Dereker, pointing to a figure that presently came into view, moving stealthily along the narrow path through the bushes.

"No; they're all in front," replied Taffy, under his breath, peering at the newcomer. "I wonder if that's Lodgey stalkin' 'em?"

The stranger, silently as a shadow, came creeping along the path, passing within two or three yards of the chums, who were crouching among the thick bushes. It was not the sergeant, as Taffy had thought. They could only see his outline for a few seconds, but it was a man who would have looked tall had he been walking upright; and he was either very stout or else dressed in uncommonly wide and baggy clothes, and wore a flat, low bowler hat.

He passed the boys without seeing them, and halted at the edge of the laurels, well under the shadow. After watching some time, and looking up continually at Mr.

Lambe's window, he took a last furtive glance round him, and tiptoed across the gravel till he reached the wall.

A thick, matted growth of old ivy clothed it on that side with stems and branches as big as a man's wrist. It was soon evident what the stranger meant to do. He began cautiously and gently to climb up the ivy, which was not a very difficult task.

"My aunt!" murmured Taffy. "He's makin' for the Lambe's room! Is it a bobby going to nab him, an' making sure of it that way?"

"Or a thief, who's some pal of his?" said Birne excitedly.

"Or the Woolly Lambe himself disguised?" put in Dereker, watching eagerly. "I say, this is a go, you chaps!"

The light went out in Mr. Lambe's study. The man had nearly reached the window when it happened, but now he could not be seen at all, so much in the shadow was the ivy-covered wall. Taffy thought he could make out Mr. Lambe himself appearing at the window, and he certainly heard voices.

Suddenly there was a loud rustle among the shrubbery, and Ferguson and his comrades darted out.

"Thieves! Thieves!" yelled Ferguson at the top of his voice. "Come down ~~over~~ that, you ruffian! Hi, sergeant! Thieves!"

At the first sound of alarm the man above could be made out clambering down in a great hurry.

"Give yourself up, you thief!" howled Ferguson, as he rushed to the wall. "It's no good tryin' to get away—we've got you! Come on, you chaps, nab him! I—Oh!"

There was a flop, a thump, a tremendous yell from Ferguson and the man in the baggy clothes, springing out from the wall, let himself drop, intentionally, right on top of the big Remove youth who was waiting to capture him.

It was a five-foot fall, and Ferguson and the climber went rolling over, with a fearful howl from the former, who was knocked flat by the large and active body that bore him to the earth, just as Kempe and Kent-Williams sprang to the spot. All the wind was knocked out of Ferguson, but the nocturnal visitor, whoever he was, jumped to his feet in an instant, and was off like the wind down the laurel-path.

"I say, here's the whole school turnin' out!" exclaimed Dereker. "What had we better do?"

Codrington was roused with a vengeance, and in surprisingly quick time. Already most of the windows were open, and masters and boys were staring out.

Ferguson's agonised yell had brought the sergeant running out of his lodge, and Mr. Quayle and Mr. Perkes, with two of the Sixth Form prefects, came hurriedly out of the side door.

"My aunt! I know what we'd better do!" said Taffy. "We'll be lucky if we get back safe. Let's bunk!"

Taffy & Co. sprinted round at the back of the shrubberies as quickly as they could go, but it looked as if they would be cut off from their road of retreat.

Somebody came running past the old gym, and the moment he was out of the way the three nightfarers scrambled on to the leads of the gym again and in through the window.

"They'll be searchin' the whole place for open windows in a jiff," muttered Taffy, as he hastily closed the casement. "An' the whole house is buzzin'! Scoot to the roof, and watch for a chance to get back into the dormitory as soon as the coast's clear."

Meanwhile, before the three chums had regained the house, Ferguson and his merry men found themselves face to face with an awkward situation. They would willingly have made an escape, too, out of modesty; but Mr. Quayle and Mr. Perkes, darting round the corner, came upon them just as Ferguson was picking himself up, gasping for breath.

"Kempel Ferguson!" cried Mr. Perkes. "What are you doing here?"

"We were tryin' to catch the thief, sir!" said Kempe gloomily, and then he started as he saw the Head come round the corner, looking stern and anxious.

"Thief? What thief?" said the Head, catching Kempe's words. "Who are these boys?"

Mr. Lambe silently joined the group, his eyeglass glittering in the starlight as he gazed reflectively at the wobegone three, and, at the sight of him, Ferguson, remembering his wrongs, boiled up.

"We were trying to catch a thief, sir, who was getting into the school, or, rather, having plunder passed out to him by an accomplice!" spluttered Ferguson. "And he knocked me down—"

"One moment!" said the Head sternly. "Will you first explain how you came to

be out of the school at this time of night, and what you were doing?"

"We—er—we—that is, we happened to hear a noise, sir, and looked out of the dormitory window," said Ferguson collecting his wits. "We saw a man stealing past, so we—we thought we'd better slip some clothes on and see what he was up to. We came down through the servants' door, and we saw the thief!"

"Well?"

"He was climbing up the ivy to Mr. Lambe's window," said Ferguson, with a fierce glance at the eyeglass. "But perhaps Mr. Lambe can tell you more about it than I can," he concluded ominously.

All eyes were turned on the Remove master, and Kempe and Kent-Williams, who felt very nervous, inwardly applauded Ferguson.

"Bless me!" said the Head. "Is there really anything in this, or is it some silly piece of imagination—or worse? Did you see this thief, Mr. Lambe? Have you missed anything from your study?"

"I have missed nothing!" said the Remove master, with a calm smile. "Ferguson tells the story so well that it would be a pity to break into it."

"Proceed, Ferguson!" said the Head.

"The light went out in Mr. Lambe's room, sir," said Ferguson, wishing himself safe in bed, or anywhere but under the Head's eye "and I thought I saw something passed out—that is, I lost sight of the thief for a moment, and then I shouted for the sergeant to come and help, and I rushed forward to seize the ruffian as soon as he came down. But he—er—he jumped right down on top of me, and knocked all the breath out of my body, sir."

"And then he was off before we could catch him, sir," put in Kent-Williams and Kempe eagerly.

"Look at the state I am in, sir," said Ferguson plaintively, calling attention to his clothes, which were covered with wet gravel, and one side of his face, that had also been well rubbed in it. "I did it for the sake of the school, sir, because I thought you were being robbed, and, if you'll look among our valuables, sir," he added, with a sidelong glance at the Woolly Lambe, but addressing the Head, "I expect you'll find some missing."

"Eh? Why, the man did not succeed in getting into the house at all!" said the Head in surprised tones.

"I fancy he's got an accomplice in the school, sir," muttered Ferguson, with another glance at the imperturbable Woolly Lambe.

But the Head somehow continued to look suspiciously at Ferguson, for he knew the record of the three companions was none too good. The speaker's gravel-stained condition seemed to bear out the tale, however.

"I suttonly saw somebody a-running half-way down the laurel path," said the sergeant.

"That was the man!" said Kempe eagerly. "He bolted that way, sir."

"Really," said the Head, for the sergeant's evidence impressed him. "Then we had better have a search made at once. The police must be informed, and I will immediately inspect all valuables, and see if any are missing. You boys had better return to your dormitories at once. Ferguson, I am—er—I have to thank you for your—hem—efforts on behalf of the school. We will go into this matter to-morrow, however, when we know more about it, and I will see you in my study at eleven o'clock. And now to inform the police."

The Head turned away, and was shortly overtaken by Mr. Lambe, who went off in conversation with him.

The three amateur policemen, in deep disgust, went indoors.

In the meantime, Taffy and his cronies had regained the shelter of their dormitory without mishap.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Taffy Attempts a Difficult Undertaking!

THE Head called the school together in Hall, and made a welcome announcement. An old Codrington boy, General Sir Cecil Hutton, after a victory over certain tribesmen on the North-West Indian Frontier, had cabled to the school asking the Head to grant the boys a whole holiday in celebration of the event.

The Remove agreed that it was a first-class piece of luck, and that Sir Cecil Hutton was the sort of chap the school ought to turn out more frequently.

"I've heard he was the biggest terror in the Remove in his time," said Birne. "May he go on carnin' whole holidays for us as long as there's a nigger left in India. All the same, there's a fly in the giddy oint-

ment. I've got such a lot of impots that it'll take me all the morning to do 'em."

"Same here!" said Taffy. "The Woolly Lambe's been piling 'em on lately. He didn't use to do that so much. It ain't playing the game, you chaps."

"He's been here about a month now," said Ferguson, "and the police haven't been after him yet."

"Wouldn't it be sport to get oneself up like a constable in uniform, and come an' arrest him, just to see what he'd do?" said Taffy, grinning.

"I thought you barred that sort of thing," said Kempe.

"So I did; but that was when Lambe behaved like a sportsman. All these impots freeze up the giddy milk of sympathy in my—er—bosom. What d'you think, Jelly?"

"I rather like Mr. Lambe," said Jellicoe simply; "but if he is really a criminal person, as you say, I think you had better leave it to the real police to arrest him, and not meddle with it."

"From the lips of infants and blithering idiots cometh forth wisdom," said Saunderson. "All right, kid, I don't want to ~~do~~ <sup>do</sup> with you. You're hot stuff, though you don't look it! All the same, there's a suit of policeman's clothes for hire in Blentford, if a spoof arrest is the idea."

"What d'you mean?" said Ferguson. "Suit of clothes? Which? How?"

"I saw 'em in Blentford High Street last week, anyhow. There was a travelling theatrical company got sold up, I'm told, and all their props were on sale in a shop window. There were dresses and tights, and soldiers' kits, and I noticed a policeman's uniform, with helmet an' truncheon, all complete," said Saunderson, grinning.

"Of course I was only rotti'n'," said Taffy. "Who would tackle such a job in his senses? It would take a precious hefty bobby to arrest the Lambe, too! Who's coming down for some footer before the wind hardens the ground?"

The Remove joined issue with a party from the Fourth and went down to the field. The ground was very dry, no rain having fallen for a long time, except a slight shower the previous night. They put in an hour and a half's solid practice, and then the Remove, after changing in the pavilion, returned to the School House to make its arrangements for the day; there being, of course, no match fixed for the unexpected holiday.

Taffy and his satellites looked in at Study No. 12 on their way along the upper corridor, where many of the other players had congregated already, and there they found Saunderson. He had not been present on the footer-field, and was in his bowler hat—clear proof that he had been on a journey. It was not the thing to wear a cap if one went any farther than the village confines. A large parcel lay on the desk before Saunderson.

"Hallo, slacker!" said Taffy. "What have you been up to? What's in the bundle? Grub for the Form?"

"No," said Saunderson, twisting his gold watch-chain round his fingers. "I didn't think of grub, or I'd have brought some for the chaps. This is what I spoke to you about. I went and got it."

Saunderson, with much dignity—for some of the boys rather respected him on account of his wonderful supplies of pocket-money—undid the parcel, and showed a complete and well-brushed policeman's uniform, with tunic, helmet, belt, truncheon and Government boots all in order.

"What the deuce is that for?" said Walsh.

"I got it in the town, from the shop I told you about," said Saunderson, as the Form crowded round wonderingly. "I bought it on purpose for Wyne."

"For me?" said Taffy, staring.

"Yes. So that you could arrest Lambe, you know—as you said you would."

"Have you gone off your chump, Saunderson?" said Taffy, in amazed tones.

"Case of softenin' of the brain," observed Dereker, shaking his head gravely; "must be. Comes of havin' too much pocket-money!"

"Do you mean to say you bought that uniform," exclaimed Walsh, "for Taffy?"

"I hired it," replied Saunderson. "The price was jolly stiff, though."

"Then you must have more money than sense!" said Taffy. "However, we'll allow it to be a joke, if that'll comfort you. Is this where we laugh?"

"You did say so!" insisted Saunderson.

"Didn't he, you chaps? You said what a rippin' thing it'd be to put up a bluff arrest on Lambe, an' run him in, to see what he'd do."

"I dare say," said Taffy, "but you all jolly well know I never said I'd do it, nor would any chap with as much brains as a sea. All I said was, it'd be fun to see it."

So it would be to see Ferguson jump down a well with a fifty-pound weight tied to his leg. But I don't suppose he'd do it. It'd be just as sensible. Saunderson, my oofy youth, you can take those duds back to the shop."

"You won't wear them?" cried Saunderson. "Why not?"

"Because I don't choose!"

"You're afraid!" said Ferguson. "Isn't he, you chaps? You funk it, that's all!"

Several of his followers echoed him. Everybody was excited about the uniform.

"Afraid of what?" said Taffy, flushing angrily. "Who says so?"

"I do!" jeered Ferguson. "We all do! You're plucky enough when it's only talking and blowing and bragging. But when the things are brought for you it's a very different tale. It was your idea. I dare you to put it through! But you won't, of course! No, you'd rather sneak out of it!"

"You dare me, do you?" cried Taffy, red as fire. "By gum, I'll do it then! Give me those togs! I never said I'd do it, but I will! And I'll thrash you into a jelly afterwards for saying I'd funk, you beast, Ferguson!"

Taffy's explosion astonished even his chums, and he seized the uniform and helmet without more ado.

"Here, chuck it, Taffy; don't be an ass!" said Birne.

"Let me alone! I shall go and change in the water tap-room on Lambe's floor," said Taffy, hurrying out with the clothes, followed by the applause of the Form and the jeers of some who doubted he would be as good as his word. "There's just time."

He darted upstairs and hurried into the tap-room where the water-jugs were filled—a little, dim compartment in the second corridor.

He was tall for his age, and the uniform was not made for a particularly large policeman. By turning the legs of the trousers inwards a couple of inches they did pretty well as to length, though they were baggy. The tunic wanted some padding out with towels, but the regulation boots, above all, needed filling up.

"I say!" said Walsh, sticking his excited face in through the doorway. "Hurry up! It's just about Lambe's time for leavin' his study, an' you'll catch him on the hop if you go at once! Come on!"

"There aren't any signs of the Lambe yet, are there?" exclaimed Taffy, struggling with the buttons of the tunic.

"No; but he might turn up any moment. It'll be no go if you miss him now," returned Walsh.

"Get out of this, you little nuisance!" cried the exasperated Dereker, rushing at the messenger and sending him flying out into the passage. "Who asked you to shove your snout in here?"

Dereker was particularly annoyed at Walsh's interference. He knew well enough there would be no chance of catching the Woolly Lambe unless they hurried, and he devoutly hoped they would be too late; there were few risks Dereker would have refused to run, but he believed Taffy was throwing himself away foolishly by undertaking such a jape as this. Birne quite agreed with him.

They both purposely blundered as much as possible in dressing Taffy, and in addition to getting boots on the wrong feet, put the belt on inside out, and both these items had to be changed again.

"Do hurry up!" cried Taffy impatiently. "You chaps are all thumbs this morning! I shall go just as I am if you don't get it right soon."

Taffy was turned out fairly well a few moments later; the chums, seeing he was bent on it, thinking they had better do their utmost to get him as fit as possible for the part he was to play. The striped cuff-band showing he was on duty was buckled on to Taffy's sleeve, and then the helmet was placed on his head.

Being about three sizes too large, it came down nearly to Taffy's chin, and whichever way it was tried on it would not fit.

"Looks more like a giddy extinguisher than a helmet," said Dereker.

They hastily hunted up a thick sheet of brown paper from the cupboard, and, making it into a ring, fitted it round the inside of the rim, and then crammed the helmet on Taffy's head. They set the belt straight, pushed a white wool glove as big as an overcoat on to each of Taffy's hands, and stood back to look at him.

"Will it do?" said Taffy eagerly.

"Jolly lucky there ain't much light in the corridor, 'specially near Lambe's room," replied Birne, looking at him critically. "Draw a line or two under his eyes with the end of a burnt match, Derry, to make

him look older. Yes, that's better. Don't overdo it."

"You look as if you want a course of suppers with the cook to fill those togs out, Robert," said Dereker; "but it's the best we can do. Now, then, are you really going to tackle this job, or won't you think better of it? There's precious little sense in it, an' it means you're pretty certain to get sacked."

"I'm going through with it, I tell you!" exclaimed Taffy. "Open the door!"

Finding he was determined, Dereker and Birne ushered him out into the passage, where a chorus of guffaws from the assembled Form greeted his appearance.

"Pass along here—pass along," said Taffy, pacing out heavily with the genuine policeman's stride. "Don't obstruct the hurryfare!"

"Come on, you retters, don't spoil the game!" said Walsh to the rest, and the Form rather reluctantly withdrew.

They would not go right away, however, and heads were peeping furtively round the corners in each corridor as Taffy and his chums marched towards their goal.

"You chaps had better fall back here," said Taffy, as they came in sight of the end of the passage. "I'll go on alone."

Dereker and Birne, halting, watched Taffy's progress with some misgiving. Neither of them felt comfortable, and they retired round the corner, so as not to interfere with their leader's business.

As Taffy passed the top of the side stairs, Jane Matilda, one of the housemaids, came up them. Finding herself face to face with a live policeman in the very heart of the School House, she dropped her dust-pan and brush and gave a loud squawk.

"Oh, my!" she cried.

"Don't be alarmed, my gal," said Taffy, with a majestic wave of his hand. "I ain't come for you. All I require o' you is to tell me which is the room of a man called Lambe."

"What, Mr. Lambe, the master?" she gasped.

"That's the one. Don't make no noise about it, but just point 'is room out quiet an' leave the rest to me."

The housemaid was so frightened that she bolted down the stairs, leaving the pan and brush where they fell. As she did so, Mr. Lambe's door suddenly opened violently, and the master himself strode out.

"Who is asking for me? What is all

this!" he said sharply; and then his eyes fell on the uniformed figure, and he paused in surprise.

Taffy's heart failed him for once, and he wished himself a mile away. The situation seemed appalling. However, it was no use backing out now, and, trusting to the gloom, he stalked towards the master with a firm step but a quaking heart.

"It's my duty to app'rend you," he said hoarsely, "and anything you say may be used—"

"You confounded fellow!" cried the Woolly Lambe, suddenly darting forward and seizing Taffy angrily by the arm. "Didn't I tell you I wouldn't have this? How dare you, sir—eh?"

Taffy was so taken aback by this that he was quite at a loss what to do or say.

"Do you mean to disregard my warnings altogether?" cried the angry master. "I'll have you turned out of the Force, you infernal nuisance! Come here!"

Before he knew what was happening, Taffy found himself whirled into the housemaid's brush-room close beside—a small, dark compartment where the brooms and dusters were kept. Mr. Lambe's strength was surprising, and for the first time he seemed to have quite lost his temper.

"You come there—in uniform, too!—and inquire after me from the very servants—in hearing of half the boys in the school, too! Haven't I warned you fellows about this? By Jove, I'll teach you a lesson, my man! I've had enough of this!"

The master's feelings overcame him, and, taking the sham policeman by the shoulders, the Woolly Lambe shook him till his teeth rattled.

Taffy did not know whether he was on his head or his heels. The master's grip was like a pair of vices, and Taffy found himself whirled to and fro like a roll of carpet. His helmet flew off, with the brown-paper pad and the towel inside, and Mr. Lambe, seeing the victim's youthful appearance, in spite of the darkness, stopped in amazement.

"Why, what the deuce does this mean?" he cried.

Taffy did not wait to reply. The moment the master's hands were off him he bolted. Darting to the door and dodging the grab Mr. Lambe made at him, the boy slipped through, pulled the door to with a jerk, and snapped the catch into place. Then he flew down the corridor for his life.

Of the consequences of locking the master in he recked nothing. His one idea was to gain time for escape, in the forlorn hope that he had not been recognised. He heard the Woolly Lambe kicking and pulling at the door as he fled.

Sprinting down the corridor with breathless haste, nearly tripped up by the blue trousers which were coming unrolled at the ends, the first persons he encountered were his two chums at the corner, who joined him in his flight.

"Into the tap-room!" yelled Taffy breathlessly. "Look sharp! The Lambe's after me!"

No quick-change performer at a variety show ever did a more rapid transformation than Taffy then. He was wearing his own clothes, of course, under the uniform. It was the work of a moment to scuttle out of his disguise, cram on his shoes, and scrub the charcoal marks off his face with a handkerchief. Derekor snatched up the accusing uniform and crammed it into a cupboard just as Johnson II. stuck his head inside the door.

"I say," he whispered hoarsely, "the Lambe's broken open the door, an' he's coming down the corridor! Look out, you chaps!"

"Then we'll go and meet him!" said Derekor desperately. "Clear out of the way, Johnson! Come on, Taffy!"

Arm-in-arm, the three chums emerged and walked coolly along the passage, Taffy in the middle. They would rather have made a bolt of it, but they considered Taffy's best chance was to let himself be seen at once, clothed and in his right mind. They felt a thrill of doubt and apprehension as the Woolly Lambe came in sight.

He was walking down the passage with a rapid stride and a slight flush on his cheek, straight towards them. The three boys stepped aside respectfully to let him pass, and the master, casting one of his keen glances over the three, went straight on without pausing. The danger, for the moment, at any rate, was over.

"Phew!" sighed Derekor, leaning against the wall with a sigh of relief. "That's over! I believe he doesn't know who it was, 'pon my word I do!"

"I wish I felt sure about it," said Taffy

thoughtfully. "You never know what to make of him."

The chums, feeling quite bewildered, drifted into No. 12, where most of the Remove had retreated, and Taffy was received with uproarious glee.

Taffy did not feel much inclined to give information, for he felt he had slipped through the lion's claws by a lucky accident, and might yet suffer for it.

"He believed you were a policeman, anyhow, till your helmet came off!" exclaimed Johnson. "Fancy goin' for a bobby like that! He can't be very scared of gettin' arrested."

"I tell you what it is, you chaps," cried Walsh. "He's got a pull over some of the police, that's what's up. That's why he's been loose all this time. They have to smell round after him, on account of orders, but they daren't arrest him."

"You've hit it," exclaimed Minors, "else why did he say he'd warned the police not to do it?"

## CHAPTER 13.

### A Hero and Sportsman!

"MY dear young friends," said Derek, as the chums gathered in the quadrangle afterwards, "let us quit this ignoble strife, and walk in the ways of peace. We want a restful afternoon; no japes, no rivalry, no Lambe-worrying. What shall we do with our noble selves till tea-time?"

"There isn't a match," said Taffy, "and we've had a good whack at practice this week. My idea it to go jacking."

"Rather!" said Derek. "Angling's a peaceful occupation, an' has been ever since Izano Walton threw his tin of worms at the milkmaid for singing out of tune. Go and get the two rods and the waterproof bag out of my locker, will you, Jelly?"

In a short time the quartette, armed with three rods of sorts, a fishing bag, gaff, and a zinc bait-kettle, sallied forth from Codrington, and crossed the meadows towards the river. A favourite spot for jack-fishing, and one within easy reach, was a little way below a mill that spanned an off-shoot of the river half a mile from the school.

To a fisherman's eye it was a very likely-looking piece of water indeed, and for that matter, it was as good as it looked. There

was a thatched boathouse near the head of the bend, without a door, and a heavy fishing punt was inside it.

"We'll borrow the punt," said Taffy. "The old keeper always lets us have it. Decent old bird! Jelly, are you afraid to navigate the giddy waters?"

"I'll go with you, Wynne, if you'll let me, wherever it is," said Jellicoe.

"What touching faith!" remarked Derek. "I prefer the banks myself for fishing, don't you, Birne? You an' I have only got one rod between us, so we'll take turns."

"We'll go down below the big pool," said Birne. "You can yell to us when you're going to turn it up, Taffy."

"All right," said Wynne. "Give us one or two baits; I want 'em for Jelly. I'm goin' to spin a Devon minnow myself."

He borrowed three of four of Birne's small roach and put them in the well of the punt, where they swam about quite contentedly. Birne and Derek, with a cheery smile, walked along the river bank, and were soon out of sight round the bend. Taffy put his two rods together, before pushing off. To his own line, he filled a trace and artificial minnow.

"What's that roaring noise?" said Jellicoe, as they poled out of the boathouse.

"Marford Weir," said Taffy; "it's down the next reach. I'll bet there's a regular Niagara of water sweepin' over it to-day. Precious nasty place. However, we needn't go anywhere near it. Our best tip will be to moor in the best spots for a quarter of an hour at a time, as you can't manage the punt, and we'll fish them out piece by piece."

Taffy and Jellicoe each managed to hook a jack, after which they shifted along again. There was a stretch of unpromising water before them, so they passed it over and went some way farther down, mooring again in a rather stronger run of water.

"Current's a bit rapid here," said Taffy, casting out as soon as Jellicoe had thrown out his float tackle. "All right for you, your bait's in the eddy; but it's not much good my spinning in such a— By gum, isn't it, though?" he exclaimed, striking sharply. "I'm into him! A proper fish this time!"

Jellicoe turned eagerly to look, and saw his companion was engaged in a stiff tussle. The fish, instead of dashing off like a

torpedo, sank deep in the river as soon as he felt the hooks, and bored suddenly along the bottom—sure sign of a good fish. Taffy dared not put too much strain on him, for the tackle was light, and the way in which the pike forged along was irresistible.

"He's no sprat," said Taffy. "He'll make yours look like twopence-halfpenny if I can get him out!"

"I say, the punt's loose!" said Jellicoe. They had not noticed it in the struggle with the big fish, but the punt had become unmoored, and was floating rather rapidly down midstream.

"I can't help it if she is," said Taffy, his eyes riveted on the sizzling line as it cut through the water. "Is the brute never going to slacken? He is a stayer, an' no mistake. Say, kid, get hold of the punt-pole, and try to shove her in to the shore, and we'll land. I shall be able to manage this chap better then."

Jellicoe poled away as best he could, but he was not much of a hand at it, and the current made things all the harder. He got the punt towards the left bank somehow, however, and tried to stick the punt-pole in it. It would not hold, however, and as the stern of the punt came within reach of the bank he jumped ashore with the painter in his hand, meaning to pull her in by it.

The attempt was a disastrous failure, for his heels slid on the bank. The wet rope slipped through his fingers with a jerk, and when Jellicoe recovered himself the punt was out of reach. The impetus of his spring had sent her out towards the middle again, and as Jellicoe looked at her and then glanced downstream, a sudden fear seized him.

"I say, look out!" he shouted. "Wynno! Look ahead! Bring that punt in to the bank!"

Taffy was so engrossed in his fight with the big pike that he scarcely heard. Another cause prevented him from catching what Jellicoe said; a continuous, dull roar, growing louder and louder till it drowned every other sound.

A wild yell from Jellicoe attracted his attention.

"The weir!" he exclaimed. "She's driving down to it, by gum!"

He laid down his rod, and darted aft to seize the punt-pole. To his horror it

was not there. There was no spare pole in the boat, and the danger was now only too evident.

Right ahead was the line of big square posts, rearing high above the surface that marked the edge of the weir, and between them the water was rushing over in one long, solid cataract, with a roar like thunder, to the weir-pool below. Once over the fall and into the seething caudron, no swimmer could have lived a minute, even if he escaped smashing on to the jagged posts and piles beneath.

"Great Scott!" cried Taffy. "She'll be over it!"

There was a single paddle in the punt, and, snatching it up, Taffy paddled with all his might, striving to drive the punt in towards the bank. It was hopeless. The current carried the craft along like a straw, faster, and faster yet, towards the fatal spot. Jellicoe, on the bank, was horror-struck, and utterly unable to help.

The edge of the weir was now not thirty yards away, and right ahead was a large jagged stake sticking up, with the water foaming round its crest. Taffy made a frantic effort to paddle clear of it, but too late.

The punt, though heavy, was ill-balanced, and as her side struck the stake the current lurched her violently, and, with a roll, she turned right over.

Taffy was thrown out and soured under, with the water roaring in his ears. He came up, gasping and choking, only a few yards away from the weir edge, and a moment or two later he was swept right up to it.

One of the square posts was in his road, and he grabbed it, with frantic energy, just as he was about to be swept over. The current, racing along in one great volume, pressed him violently against the post and spouted past him, and, clinging on with arms and legs, he hung there helplessly.

How long Taffy hung there he could not have told. Sick and dizzy with the roar of the weir, and not daring to shift his hold for fear of being torn from it and hurled over the edge, he gave himself up for lost. The chilly water numbed him to the bone. He felt his grip relaxing.

The faint echo of a voice reached him above the roar of the fall, and, opening his eyes feebly, he caught a glimpse of

somebody on the bank—a man with Jellicoe close behind.

It was the Woolly Lambe—of all people. One glance did the Form-master take, and then he started running like a hare towards some sheds a hundred yards down the meadow.

Mr. Lambe reappeared with a long coil of wagon-rope, and swiftly threw off his coat. Never had the master of the Remove looked so fit or so capable, and his movements were quick as lightning. Even the half-unconscious boy, hanging to the weir-stake in despair, felt a faint thrill of hope again. Mr. Lambe was well above him—a considerable distance along the bank.

Then, knotting one end of the rope round the stem of a stout bush, the master, without a moment's hesitation, took the rest of the coil and sprang into the river with a leap that took him far out from the bank, and was swept straight down upon the roaring weir.

"Hold on, Wynne—only a moment! Brace up!"

With the rope uncoiling fast behind him, Mr. Lambe was sweeping down towards the weir-posts, driven by the current, striking out with all his might to get a little way out across the stream.

On the bank, Jellicoe was dancing in an agony of anxiety and horror, for it needed only a glance to see how deadly was Wynne's peril. Dereker and Birne came in sight, running as fast as they could towards the weir.

It looked as though Mr. Lambe had given himself up to the same fate as awaited Taffy. There seemed hardly a chance that he could ever reach the boy. But with tremendous overarm-strokes he forced himself still farther outwards, and just in time he came in line with the post Taffy was holding.

Taffy's stiffened arms had unclasped from the great baulk of wood, and the current, taking him in its grip, was at the point of tearing him away and hurling him over the fall. The Woolly Lambe, being swept right on to the post from above at that moment, caught the boy with a grasp of iron and pulled him back to his hold in the very nick of time.

"Look your arms round! Hang on!" roared Mr. Lambe in his ear.

Wynne's brain scarcely took the words in, nor was he more than half conscious,

but the sound of the master's voice braced him up a little, and he managed to cling on, Mr. Lambe holding him. They both hung there for some time, pressed against the post by the flood, with the brown water swirling round and past them. The master recovered his breath, and turned his head towards the shore, where Dereker and Jellicoe stood alone, Birne having sprinted off to seek help. Dereker had waded into the eddy at the side, up to his middle, in his anxiety.

"Undo the rope from the bush and make your end of it fast to the bank!" shouted Mr. Lambe, with all the power of his lungs. "Stretch it as tight as you can!"

So deep was the roar of the water that the boys could not hear what he said. He tried to make them understand by signs, waving his free arm, while he clung on with the other and his legs.

Jellicoe was the first to see what was meant, and darted off up-river to the bush, Dereker wading out and dashing after him. They untied the rope and ran back with it towards the weir, the bight of it sagging right across the stream.

"Stick to it tight!" exclaimed Dereker, taking a turn with the rope round his wrist. "If we lose it they're both done for!"

Had he not taken the precaution, the rope would almost certainly have slipped from his grasp when the strain of the current came across its whole length. The Woolly Lambe with difficulty made his own end of it fast to the post to which he was clinging.

The two boys ashore put their weight on the rope and hauled it taut, Dereker binding it round the tree that stood on the bank. Mr. Lambe watched them with anxious eyes, for if a bad or loose knot was made, or the rope clumsily fastened, he knew there would be little chance for him or Taffy.

The rope was now stretched between Mr. Lambe and the bank, its length pressing against the row of posts about a foot above the water, almost on the very brink of the weir. The master tried his weight upon it, and then glanced at Taffy.

The boy's face was blue and pinched, and his eyes half shut. It was plain he could do little to help himself, for the chill of the water had taken all the strength out of him, and Mr. Lambe was beginning to feel its effects too.

"Back up, Wynne!" shouted the master, close to his ear. "We'll soon be out of



"It's all right, sir!" called Taffy as the Head arrived with a candle, looking perturbed. "We've got the burglar!" "Get off! Help!" spluttered the captive, and it was the voice of the mathematics master!

this! Can you hang on to me while I get ashore?"

"I'll try, sir," said Taffy. "I'll do it somehow."

The Woolly Lambe put one sinewy arm round the boy, and, gathering all his strength, seized the rope with his right hand and let go the post. The force of the current made the rope quiver and give desperately, and they seemed fated to be swept over.

But with a swinging, kicking motion the master managed to cover the space between the posts, and reached the next one. Then, realising the longer he stayed the more numb he would become, he went straight on to the second, reaching it successfully.

"He'll do it! He'll save Wynne!" cried Jellicoe.

"I'd have sworn it wasn't possible for anyone to keep hold!" muttered Derekker. "Ah, they're gone!"

The words came from him with a gasping cry, as Mr. Lambe and his burden were swung nearly straight out over the edge between the second and third posts. The strength of the flood there was tremendous, running in fits and starts. But it slackened an instant, and the Remove master, reaching the next stake with a great effort, hung there, panting. He was nearly worn out by the desperate struggle, but after thirty seconds' rest he pushed on again, and, passing the two last posts by main force, he reached the safety of the eddy, and was helped out upon the bank by the willing hands of Derekker and Jellicoe.

"Thank Heaven, sir!" cried Derekker fervently. "You're a hero if ever there was one! We thought you were both done for."

The Woolly Lambe made no reply, but turned his attention to Taffy, who had revived somewhat now that he was on dry land and out of the strain of the current. The master rubbed him violently to restore circulation, helped by Derekker, and the blue colour quickly left Taffy's lips and cheeks. He had been tired out and numbed by cold, but had not swallowed any water or suffered semi-drowning, which made all the difference. Taffy struggled to his feet.

"You saved my life, sir," Taffy said earnestly, his face flushing, "and risked yours to do it. I—I wasn't worth it. If you wouldn't mind shaking hands—"

"That's all right," said the Remove

master, with a nod and a smile, taking Taffy's hand. "Nothing to make a fuss about. Don't want to lose any of my Form in the middle of the term, you know."

"I'll never forget what you've done for me, sir. You're a brick!" said Taffy fervently. "And if ever I—"

"Oh, never mind that!" said the master. "All I want you to do—you three—is to keep your own counsel. That will be quite enough repayment," he added. "I don't want it chattered about the school, you understand?"

"Of course, sir, if you'd rather," said Derekker.

"I happened to see your punt upset," said Mr. Lambe, wiping the wet from his eyeglass with Derekker's handkerchief. He put his monocle in his eye and looked through it pensively at Taffy. "I was not hiding under an alder-bush this time, however," he added with a sleepy smile.

Three chums started and looked at each other guiltily.

"I should get back and change as quickly as possible, if I were you," said the Woolly Lambe cheerfully. "And, talking of changing, Wynne, a police-constable, you should notice, does not usually wear a hat that is several sizes too large for him."

He blinked thoughtfully through his eyeglass at Taffy, and, with a nod, turned and walked towards the school at a brisk pace, leaving the chums looking both astonished and rather foolish. They stared after him till he disappeared.

"I don't care if all Scotland Yard's after him!" cried Taffy. "I don't care if he's a forger or scragged somebody—though I'm hanged if I believe it! I'll never do anything to queer him—no; and I'll stand by him against the blessed lot of them if ever I get the chance!"

"Fergy an' that lot mean to try an' get him into quod if they can," said Derekker.

"The sweeps! We'll make hay of 'em if they try it! We'll take a hand in that game!" snorted Taffy.

"Right-ho! Down with Fergy and all his gang!" said Birne. "Confound their politics! Down with their knavish japes! We back the Woolly Lambe against all Codrington! Where's Jelly?"

They looked round for the new boy, and, to their astonishment, found him by the deep water some way below the weir-pool,

with a rod in his hand, playing a fish that was making the top joint bend like a whip, and he was hopping with excitement.

"I've got him! He's beginning to give in!" yelled Jellicoe, as the chums hurried down towards him. "Where's the gaff?"

Jellicoe wound in the prey, which was now pretty well played out; and, as the gaff was lost, Taffy tailed the fish and drew it out on the bank. It was a grand, deep-sided, beautifully marked pike of fully nineteen pounds' weight.

"Well done, kid!" said Taffy. "A real beauty! We'll have it stuffed in memory of the occasion."

#### CHAPTER 14. A Night Alarm!

THE following afternoon the four campaigners settled down to a very decent "brew" in the upper box-room, and did full justice to the provender.

"Saw old Baggy-breeches hangin' round the place again half an hour ago," remarked Dereker, devouring doughnuts at the rate of two per minute.

"Who?" said Taffy, pausing.

"The chap in the baggy tweeds—only he's wearin' different clothes now—that fell on Ferguson and was climbin' up the ivy to Lambe's room not long ago. Don't you remember?"

"Hope the Woolly Lambe isn't gettin' up to more mischief," said Dereker. "He'll get nabbed sooner or later. Ferguson an' his lot are hot on it already."

"Hang me if I'll stir a finger to get the Lambe into trouble, whatever he may do!" said Taffy warmly. "And whoever nabs him, if there's anything wrong, Ferguson's lot shan't!"

"You can't do less than stick up for him," said Birne.

"He saved my life, and I wish I'd the chance of savin' his," said Taffy. "He's a white man—I don't care what he's done! Wonder if we couldn't give him a hint somehow about Fergy?"

"Can't do that. I don't much think he wants one, either," said Dereker. "But keep an eye on Fergy's gang, in case they spot that chap who's hangin' about. Fergy doesn't miss many chances, though he

generally makes a mess of things. There's prep bell!"

The rest of the evening passed without event, and nothing more was seen of the man whom Dereker had noticed, nor did the chums think that their rivals, the Ferguson gang, had noticed him. All seemed perfectly serene, and they turned in at lights-out time in a serene frame of mind. The Fergusonites were judged to have had enough to keep them quiet for a day or two.

Taffy lay for a while after he had turned in, thinking of recent events and of the Woolly Lambe, trying to probe the mystery surrounding the master. Finally he lapsed into slumber.

Taffy, whether for his sins or not, was the lightest sleeper there. He seemed to be conscious of the attack before it was made, even in his sleep.

Perhaps it was that peculiar sense which caused him to half open his eyes towards three in the morning and turn over.

He was only half awake, and half dozing. But there came from the corridor outside ever so faint a creak, and no sooner did that sound reach Taffy's ears than he was broad awake in a moment.

Taffy listened for a few moments, and then slipped quietly out of bed and made for the door.

He opened the door gently and peered down the corridor.

It seemed to him that he heard a faint rustle down at the far end; but nothing was to be seen.

Round the corner went Taffy, and peered down the next corridor. There was a faint light from the waning moon through the landing window, and the first thing that struck Taffy was that the door of the room next to the Head's library was open.

That door was always kept double-locked at night, and the window of the room was iron-shuttered. It was there that the Head's famous collection of antique gold coins—said to be of great value—was kept. And there certainly seemed to be a slight glimmer of light from the room.

"Jimimi!" he muttered. "Is somebody monkeying with the coins?"

For a moment Taffy hesitated. Should he go on at once and tackle the matter himself?

But the next instant he was darting back to the dormitory. Three were better than

one, and an idea had struck him that would take all three of them to carry out.

As he slipped back into the dormitory he thought he saw somebody else dart out of another door farther along; but he did not wait to investigate. He grabbed Dereker by the nose and awoke that worthy from his peaceful slumber.

"Waas marrer!" gurgled Dereker.

"Don't make a row! Nip out quick, and come with me! Somebody's after the Head's coins!"

Dereker was out of bed instantly, and Taffy woke Birne and warned him. Without a moment's loss of time the three of them gained the corridor without disturbing anybody, Taffy taking the lead.

"Are you sure, Taffy?" whispered Dereker.

"The door's open, anyway, and there was a light in the room. Look here," whispered Wynne, halting, "we've got to settle what to do. Supposin'—what if—"

"Supposin' it's Lambe's work, you mean?" put in Birne, for Taffy found it difficult to say anything against the man who had saved his life, strong though his suspicions were. "If that loafer in the baggy clothes is doing it?"

"More likely to be Lambe himself," said Taffy, under his breath. "I thought I heard that heavy breathing of his. We can't wink at a burglary, you chaps, whatever's happened. We'll put it to him straight, and make him chuck it!"

"We're going to have our hands full," muttered Dereker.

"Come on, then! This is no time to be talking about it," said Birne impatiently.

"I fancy I saw Fergy comin' out of Dormitory No. 7," whispered Taffy, as they sped noiselessly along towards the landing. "Don't know if the others were with him."

"Confound the beast, shoving his wretched nose into everything!" said Dereker. "All the more reason to hustle, if he's out for trouble, or Lambe won't get much mercy. By gum, the door is open, sure enough! Better bunk straight in."

They did so. They burst into the room all together, guessing they might have a desperate man to deal with, who would probably keep them busy before they got the better of him. But, to their surprise, the room was empty.

A candle-end was burning dimly, stuck on a chair, and the big cabinet which held

the famous gold coins was broken open. All the drawers were pulled out, every one was rifled, and the collection of some hundreds of pieces had been thoroughly looted. A coin or two shimmered on the floor in the candle-light.

"He's gone!" cried Dereker. "He must have heard us, and hooked it while we were stopping to jabber like a lot of fools! We ought to have— Great Jehosaphat!"

Birne tripped headlong over a wire, and instantly a deafening peal of bells rang out. Dereker's exclamation of dismay was drowned in the crash of sound. Bells jangled all over the room, echoing through the great, sleeping house, and other bells were heard faintly tinkling in the distance down the corridors.

Birne had touched off a burglar-alarm, which the burglar himself had been clever enough to avoid. The three chums nearly jumped out of their skins, so startled were they at the sudden uproar; and Taffy, jumping back, touched off another alarm, starting the peal all over again.

"We shall have the giddy house on to us now. They'll think we're the burglars!" exclaimed Dereker, rushing out of the door. "Come on, you fellows, let's see if we can collar the beggar before he gets away! He can't have gone far."

Away they went down the next corridor, instinctively making for the window which opened on to the leads over the old gymnasium. It was the way by which they usually went out when they wanted to, and they thought it the likeliest way for a burglar to get in.

But hardly were they round the corner when a dark form was seen running towards them at full speed. It was a man in stocking feet, judging by the padded sound his footfalls made. He held a large bundle under one arm, and appeared to be making for the direction of the leads window as fast as he could go.

The boys started back into the shadow as soon as they saw him. But only for an instant. One glance at the flying figure—which had evidently not seen them—was enough.

"It's the burglar! Nab him!" hissed Birne. And the next moment the man reached them, and they hurled themselves upon him with a yell.

The shock of the collision was severe.

Taffy, darting out, collared the man low, and the two of them toppled over heavily, the fugitive striking the ground with a violent bump. Dereker and Birne threw themselves upon him and lent willing aid.

"Murder!" howled the captive, as the two lusty Removites threw their weight on him. "Ough! Oosh! Leggo! Help!"

"Hold him down! Sit on his head!" cried Taffy; and there was a violent struggle, the prisoner fighting frantically.

They could hardly see what they were doing in the dark—Dereker, in fact, saw nothing but stars; somebody's fist smote him violently in the eye.

But the captive lay face downwards, and was soon overpowered, though he struggled with hysterical strength. Birne sat on his legs, and Taffy on his head.

"It's all right—it's not the Lambe," hissed Taffy. "Get hold of that bundle he was carrying; that's the swag. Here's somebody coming. By Jove, it's the Head!"

"Get off!" gasped the prisoner faintly. "You're killing me!"

It was the Head, indeed, who came in sight, half dressed, and hurrying down the corridor, with a perturbed face, and a candle in his hand.

"What is it? Who are you?" he cried.

"It's all right, sir!" called Taffy enthusiastically; for he was vastly relieved to find the culprit, whoever he might be, was not Mr. Lambe, but a smaller and slighter man. "We've got the burglar!"

"And the swag, sir—your coins!" chimed in Dereker.

"Burglar?" exclaimed the Head, holding the candle down. "What are you doing, boys? Are you mad?"

"Get off! Help!" spluttered the captive.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Birne in dismay. "It's Mr. Perkes!"

"I don't care who it is—he's got the coins, and they're in that bundle!" cried Taffy excitedly.

"Get up! Release him at once!" exclaimed the Head. "What does all this mean? Explain!"

Mr. Perkes, for it was the mathematics master, sure enough, struggled to his feet with a purple face and glaring eyes, his whiskers sticking out like a halo. The boys looked at him in blank consternation, for

it began to dawn on them that they had made a mistake.

"Wynne, Dereker, and Birne!" he gasped furiously. "I might have guessed it! I call you to witness, sir, I have been disgracefully assaulted by these young ruffians! I demand that they be flogged and ex—"

"We thought you were the burglar, sir. We're very sorry!" exclaimed Birne. "It was—"

"Thought Mr. Perkes was a burglar!" broke in the Head. "Are you crazy, Birne?"

"What was he running for the window for, with that bundle under his arm?" said Taffy suspiciously; for he was still not satisfied.

"Bundle!" roared Mr. Perkes frantically. "I was carrying my coat under my arm—there it is, sir—because I had not time to put it on. I hurried out on hearing the alarm, hoping I might be of use, sir, and this is the reward I get. My face ground in the dirt and the breath beaten out of my body!"

The boys were taken aback, for it was absurd to suppose the mathematics master had anything to do with the burglary. The bundle was his coat, as he said, and he had struggled into some of his clothes to reach the scene of action quickly, bringing the coat with him. Things looked awkward.

A wild commotion broke out in the next corridor, and all hurried to the spot, the Head with his candle. In a dark recess just off the passage Ferguson, Kempe and Kent-Williams were battling furiously with Bertram, one of the Sixth Form prefects. They were hanging on to him like wolves upon a bull, and the big Sixth-Former, foaming with rage, had torn himself free from two of them and sent Ferguson staggering with a mighty punch on the bridge of the nose just as the Head arrived.

"You young demons! What do you mean by it?" roared Bertram.

"Ah!" murmured Dereker, his grief turning to joy. "They've made the same giddy mistake as we did! We're not the only bristles on the brush!"

"Bertram!" cried the Head. "What are you doing?"

"I—I don't know, sir," said the bewildered prefect, whilst Ferguson nursed his nose and the other two looked on

aghash. "Is there a thief in the House?"

"Yes, unless he has got away, which is, no doubt, the case!" groaned Canon Wyndham. "I have been into the strong-room, and my collection of coins is rifled. I cannot understand what this means. Come in here, all of you!"

He strode into an adjoining class-room, and lit the gas.

"Now," said the Head fiercely, "let us get to the bottom of this. I do not understand it at all, nor how you all come to be out of your beds. These coins of mine, worth over three hundred pounds, have been stolen."

"Yes, sir," broke in Ferguson eagerly, "and I know who did it. I'm pretty certain. I don't mean Bertram—we got hold of him by mistake in the dark, thinking he was our man. We've suspected it all along, sir, and now——"

"What do you mean?" cried the Head. "Do you know the name of the thief?"

"Yes, sir. It's Mr. L——"

A noise outside interrupted him—a slight scuffling in the corridor, as if somebody were being dragged along. Then the door swung open, and in walked Mr. Lambe himself, with a most remarkable-looking prisoner in his grasp.

The Woolly Lambe, calm and unperturbed as ever, was fully dressed, neat and trim, and his eyeglass was fixed in its usual place. With him was the burglar, plain for all eyes to see, a sullen-looking ruffian, with a dirty scarf round his neck, and dressed in fustian. He was a powerful man, but the Remove master held both his wrists in one vice-like hand, while in the other he carried a green baize bag, evidently taken from the prisoner.

"Good-morning, Canon Wyndham!" said the Woolly Lambe blandly, fixing the Head with his sleepy gaze. "I have brought you your collection of coins, and also the gentleman who took a fancy to them. Thought it might interest you. Unpleasant-looking customer, isn't he?"

Everybody in the room was perfectly stupefied, while the Woolly Lambe smiled affably and blinked at them all with a sort of paternal kindness.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head, fumbling for his glasses.

The sullen prisoner made a sudden effort

to twist himself out of Mr. Lambe's grasp, but the iron grip that held him was not to be overcome.

"Lemme go, sir!" he whined. "I ain't done no 'arm. It's all a mistake!"

The Woolly Lambe planked the green baize bag down on the Form desk next to him, and the bag jingled loudly.

"I think you'll find your gold coins in there, Canon," he said to the Head, "except one or two which are spilt about the strong-room floor."

## CHAPTER 15.

### Ferguson Is Not Satisfied!

CANON WYNDHAM undid the bag with nervous fingers, and emptied out a number of the coins—rare old gold pieces, from the time of the Cæsars downwards. He gave a gasp of thankfulness.

"I—I cannot say how deeply I'm indebted to you, Mr. Lambe!" he said fervently. "You have actually caught this rascal in the very act, then. Poor wretch!" he added, with a touch of pity, as his eyes fell on the man's sullen, hunted-looking face; for there was a soft spot in the Head's heart for anybody who was thoroughly "down." "I wonder what drove him to such a life? He—he does not look dangerous."

"I—er—did not exactly give him the chance to be dangerous," said the Woolly Lambe pleasantly; and reaching into the man's baggy side-pocket, he took out a heavy, blued revolver.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, flushing, feeling he had been too hasty with his sympathy. "A pernicious scoundrel, indeed! I was wrong. This night's work might have cost a life, if the rascal had fallen into less capable hands. Mr. Lambe, my best congratulations on your skill and courage. The school should be proud of you, sir!"

Mr. Perkes gave a little sarcastic cough, and Ferguson and his companions looked glum. Taffy's contingent alone looked thoroughly delighted, and Birne, in dumb-show, was affecting to pat the Remove master on the back—being well behind the rest—and winked joyously at Dereker.

"We had better dispose of the man at once," said the Head. "He shall be given

into custody without any delay. How did you come to capture him, by the way? Did you hear him break into the house?"

"I suspected something wrong," said Mr. Lambe quietly, "and decided to investigate it. Finding the strong-room was being looted, in short, I caught the prisoner in the act of committing a felony, and made sure of him on my own account. It was not difficult," added Mr. Lambe, with a sleepy glance at the mathematics master and Ferguson's trio; "but so many cooks nearly spoiled the broth."

Mr. Perkes and Ferguson looked foolish, and rather sulky to boot.

"I'd have nabbed him myself if it hadn't been for that ass Bertram," growled Ferguson, under his breath, "always getting in the way!"

"You have dressed yourself with uncommon care—at three in the morning—out of regard for the burglar's feelings, I presume," said Mr. Perkes sourly.

The Head frowned, but Mr. Lambe only adjusted his eyeglass and stared through it at the mathematics master with the look the Remove knew well. But the prisoner, who had relapsed into gloomy silence, suddenly broke out furiously:

"You was in it, too!" he shouted hoarsely, glaring at his captor. "You was, you knows it! Bloomin' humbug! You'll give me over to the rozzers, will yer! You're worse than me, you are!"

The Woolly Lambe smiled across at Canon Wyndham, who laughed; but the laugh changed to a frown at the man's villainy and his accusation.

"Is there nothing the scoundrel will stop at!" he said. "You are making yourself ridiculous, my man. Hold your tongue! The police——"

"Police! He can talk o' police, he can!" roared the burglar, nodding his head ferociously towards Mr. Lambe. "Yes, I'll split on yer! Wasn't you after the stuff, same as me? Yes, gents, 'e was in it! 'E was in the very room watchin' me! He nabbed me, an' he had hold o' me twenty minutes afore he even brought me out to yer at all! I could tell yer——"

"Silence, fellow!" said the Head angrily. "Mr. Lambe, we had better get rid of him. These silly accusations are wasting everybody's time!"

"Sounds more like the truth!" growled Ferguson, aside. "We're getting at it——"

"You captured him some time ago?" asked the Head, tying up the bag of coins tightly.

"About twenty minutes since, as he says," replied the cheerful Remove master. "I took him into the end room where the telephone to the station is, and detained him there. His honoured title, by the way, is Gipsy Joe, and I introduce him to you as such. He is not a gipsy, but a rather clever cracksmen, and his set of house-breaking tools, which he was obliged to leave in the strong-room, you will find are quite the best of their kind."

"Ah, you've got the gift o' the gab, right enough!" snarled the burglar savagely. "You can do the swell patter. You're a gentleman lag, that's what you are!"

"I telephoned to the station from the end room, and a police escort will arrive on their bicycles in a minute or two," said Woolly Lambe, whose calm was perfectly unruined. "There they are," he added, as a peal was heard at the front bell. "We may as well save them the trouble of coming in. I think the less fuss the better."

"You others stay here!" said the Head, accompanying Mr. Lambe out of the room as he led his captive away, Mr. Perkes bringing up the rear. "I shall return in a moment, and shall need an explanation."

"Exit Gipsy Joe," observed Mr. Lambe amiably, handing the captive over, "I'll leave him in your charge, sergeant. I think you'll find he's an old friend."

"He'll find plenty at Dartmoor," said the sergeant. "Thanky, sir; I'll see he gets his old quarters. Took him in the act, did you?"

A glance of understanding seemed to pass between the policeman and the Remove master. A pair of handcuffs clicked smartly on the prisoner's wrists, and the sound woke him to a fresh outburst of fury.

"Take 'im, too!" he shouted to the police, pointing to Mr. Lambe with his manacled hands. "'E was in it as much as me! Take 'im——"

"Lock the rascal up!" said the scandalised Head. "Away with him!"

The burglar was hustled off down the carriage-drive, complaining loudly and shouting threats. As soon as he was taken outside the gates the Head shut the front door, and the audience on the landing fled back to the class-room feeling very chilly.

for the cold wind from outside had whistled round their bare legs.

"Rotten swindle!" growled Ferguson. "The Head's an ass! Why, I believe those two policemen themselves were in league with Lambe, an' daren't arrest him! That burglar was right; Lambe's a lag himself and—"

The Head's entrance put an abrupt stop to Ferguson's revilings. Canon Wyndham, who had not let go of the bag of coins ever since they were given back to him, looked at the six boys keenly. Bertram had vanished.

"Before you go back to bed," said the Head, "I want to know how you all came to be roaming about the corridors at three in the morning?"

There was rather an awkward pause. The Head turned to Taffy, and repeated his question sharply.

"We—er—we weren't, sir, exactly," said Wynne. "There was a row—I mean, we heard a noise in the corridors—at least, I did—and came out to look, and, finding there had been a burglary—"

"What caused the alarm to go off, long after Mr. Lambe must have caught the man?" said the Head sharply.

"That was us, sir. I—er—mean, this was we," Taffy replied, in some confusion. "We hooked it—er—we ran to the strong-room, sir, finding the door was open and the cabinet burgled. And then Birne fell over a wire, and the bells all went off. So, as the burglar had gone, we thought he'd probably leave the house by the window over the old gymnasium—"

"Why did you think that?"

"Well, it—it's the handiest window, sir," said Taffy, still more confused and wishing the Head would not ask so many questions.

"It is a long way from the strong-room. I don't know why you should call it handy. What then?"

"As we were going there, sir, we saw somebody with no boots on and a bundle under his arm, bunking—er—running towards the window, so we got hold of him, sir, thinking it was the burglar. But most unfortunately it was Mr. Perkes, and we—"

"Very well, that will do for the present," said the Head sternly, biting his lips and wishing he were alone and could laugh. "Ferguson, what is your explanation?"

The burly Removite drew himself up to his full height. Now was his chance to shine as a detective. The Woolly Lambe's goose was cooked so far as Ferguson was concerned.

"We heard the burglar, too, sir, and went out determined to capture the scoundrel at all hazards. Our intention was to save the famous collection which is the pride of Codrington, sir," said Ferguson virtuously, who had been getting his speech ready for some time. "By an unlucky mischance, Bertram got in the way, or we should have caught the burglar. I woke up about three, sir, and heard a noise. It did not take me long to guess what was wrong. And I woke Kent-Williams, and said to him: 'Kent-Williams, somebody's after the headmaster's coins! We must capture the fellow at all hazards!' Taking Kent-Williams and Kempe with me, I—"

"Thank you, Ferguson! That'll do—that'll do," said the Head dryly. "Go back to your dormitories, all of you. I appreciate your efforts to—er—guard my collection; but the next time you had better stay in bed, by which a great deal of confusion and unnecessary trouble will be saved. Wynne, you and Dereker and Birne will have to apologise to Mr. Perkes in the morning for the unfortunate mistake you made. I fear catching burglars is not your forte, for you could not make a greater mess of it if it were Latin prose."

The six heroes looked decidedly "sick."

"However, while Mr. Lambe is with us we need evidently not fear housebreakers. Now get back to bed, and try not to be more ridiculous than is necessary."

The two rival gangs departed, and Taffy and his two partners felt rather crestfallen till they reached the dormitory. By that time, however, they had recovered their spirits, and saw there was a broad silver lining to the cloud. Things had really gone excellently on the whole.

"Can't make head or tail of it all. It sounds as if the burglar had spoilt Lambe's game by breakin' in to-night," said Birne, "and so Lambe pinched him."

"I don't believe that," said Taffy stoutly. "I'm not goin' to believe Lambe was after anything shady at all. Anyway, he's done just what he ought to do, and did it jolly well. It's rather lucky we

didn't have to tackle him—he's a tough nut."

"We should be dressin' our giddy wounds by this time, I fancy, if it had been Lambe," said Dereker. "But on the whole, though we ourselves haven't exactly shone, the proceedings have been scrumptious. There's been a whole packet of excitement, certainly nothing slow, an' we've flattened the Perke-bird into a pancake. The half-minute when I sat on his head seemed a whole life-time of joy."

"Got to apologise to the sweep to-morrow," said Birne thoughtfully.

"Well worth it at the price. We'll frame an apology that'll make his whiskers curl like the honeysuckle. Good-night, you chaps! Let's get some beauty-sleep."

## CHAPTER 16.

### A Narrow Shave!

THE next afternoon was a "half," and the chums spent the first hour in practice on Little side, in which Birne proved himself a good enough half-back to be chosen for the first team in the forthcoming Withington match. Taffy, as one of the best forwards in the school, already had his cap.

"Bully for the Remove!" said Dereker, as they made their way back to the house after changing in the pavilion. "There's only one Fifth Form chap in the eleven to five of ours. We've earned a little refreshment, my dear young comrades. What about a brew?"

"I'm rather sick of the tuckshop stuff," said Taffy, as Jellicoe joined them. "Walsh says there's a new shop in Fordbury, where they turn out an American thing called hot waffles, with maple syrup. Walsh swears they're beastly good. There's time to go and try 'em!"

"Anything in the interests of science," agreed the other two. "Jolly, are you up to goin'?"

"Oh, yes!" said Jellicoe. "I did not feel quite equal to football to-day, but I can walk all right."

They set out at once on the road to Fordbury, and in due course arrived at the new pastrycook's. The hot waffles, done in New York style, were tried and voted quite worth coming for. The chums started

back after polishing off a couple of dozen of them.

"What a giddy eyesore that thing is!" remarked Taffy, as they overtook an extra large traction-engine that was rumbling slowly along the road, making a thunderous noise and emitting dense clouds of smoke. "It oughtn't to be allowed on the roads at all."

The sound of hoofs was heard in a by-road that opened on to the highway near the point where the traction-engine happened to be, and a gentleman riding a big Irish hunter came in view, and with him a decidedly pretty girl of about sixteen, on a rather skittish pony.

Exactly what it was that happened the boys were rather too far off to see, but both horse and pony took fright at the traction-engine, and the girl's pony, after shying violently right across the road, bolted madly in the direction of the boys.

"By Jove!" cried Dereker, in alarm, running back. "Help! Stop her, you chaps, or she'll be through the fence and over the quarry!"

It did not need more than a glance to see the danger. Fifty yards beyond the boys the road made so sharp a bend that the maddened pony was certain to come to grief in trying to round it. Just at the curve was an old quarry, fenced off by rather flimsy posts and rails, which beast and rider would be all but sure, barring a miracle, to cannon against and break right through. There was a thirty-feet drop beyond on to rocks.

Taffy, just then some way behind his companions, saw the danger in a moment, and sprang to the rescue, holding himself ready to stop the maddened pony.

"Get out of the way!" cried the girl. "You'll be knocked down!"

Taffy had no idea of shirking. As the flying beast reached him he caught the bridle with a quick, skilful spring, and the next moment was being dragged along bodily, bruised, winded, and his arms nearly pulled out of their sockets by the jerk. But he hung on doggedly. The pony had to slacken speed, and Dereker and Birne quickly coming to the rescue, it was pulled up altogether.

"Oh, how good of you!" cried the girl. "How smartly you stopped him! I never thought it could be done, and I was afraid

you would be knocked down. How can I thank you?"

"Never mind about thanks!" said Taffy, laughing, thinking the girl looked uncommonly pretty—as girls go. "As to being knocked down, we're used to that at Codrington. We're glad to have been of any use."

"Well done, young gentlemen!" cried the rider of the hunter, who had got his mount under control and ridden up at full gallop. "I don't know how to thank you!" he said fervently, jumping down from his horse and grasping Taffy by the hand. "I made sure my daughter would be into that terrible quarry!"

"Oh, we didn't do much, sir!" said Taffy, feeling embarrassed. "The pony was easy to stop. It wasn't any——"

"Not a word! You saved my daughter's life, sir! I won't hear a word to the contrary. Never saw anything done smarter. Just in time, too! Might have been brained by the pony's hoofs yourself, as easily as anything, if you hadn't been sharp. You're used to horses, I can see. These your chums, eh? They all helped!" said the old gentleman, shaking hands heartily with the others. "You're all Codringtonians, I see, by your caps. I am Sir Harry Beckford, and this is my daughter Dorothy."

Taffy knew the speaker well by sight, and that he lived at Roydon Hall, and was one of the Governors of the school. He was a fine-looking old man, tall and upright, with a bronzed face and white moustache. He asked the boys their names, and they told him.

"I'm uncommonly pleased to meet you," he said, "and so are you, Dorothy, eh? Folks who meet as we did don't need any introductions. Eh, what? They grow the right sort of stuff at Codrington still, I see. I was there myself once. Gad, rather! I remember three terms in a Form called the Remove especially. I believe they've still got it?"

"Yes, it's still there, sir," said Taffy, adding, "We're in it ourselves."

The girl laughed.

"We were on our way to the school," said Sir Harry, "to call on Canon Wyndham. Are you going back there? We may as well go together, then. The horses can walk."

It was not far to Codrington, and Sir Harry, who was a most cheerful old gentle-

man, chatted the whole way. Taffy walked beside Dorothy's pony.

"I've heard that Form of yours, the Remove, is the worst in the school," she said, laughing.

"You've got the wrong word," said Taffy. "Best in the school."

"The person who told me said it was the worst."

"Oh, you must have been talking to the masters about it, or to people of that sort!" said Taffy.

"I wish you'd tell me some more of your stories," she said. "By the way, have you ever been to Roydon? I know my father's going to ask Canon Wyndham to come over and dine with him to-night, and I shall make dad ask you and your friends, too. He'll be glad to, of course."

"We'd like to awfully, of course," said Taffy, rather astonished; "but there's no chance of it. The Head would never let us dine out late after lock-up."

"Oh, yes, he will! Canon Wyndham can't refuse dad anything, and dad can't refuse me anything," said Dorothy Beckford cheerfully. "You leave it to me; I'll fix it up!"

Taffy's surprise at this passed all bounds, but before he could say any more they found themselves at the school. The party rode into the quadrangle, and many of the seniors being present, there was a good deal of sensation on seeing the illustrious visitors Taffy & Co. had picked up. The sound of the horses' hoofs brought the Head out.

"How are you, canon?" said the baronet cheerfully, dismounting from his horse, while Taffy helped the girl off her pony. "Vastly glad to see you. Will your groom put these horses up?"

"Come in, Sir Harry!" said the Head, shaking hands with him. "You're just in time for tea. How d'ye do, Dorothy? Your pony's well splashed!"

"We've had a precious narrow shave," said the baronet—"at least, Dorothy has. If it hadn't been for these smart youngsters of yours being at hand, there'd have been a bad smash," he added, and forthwith related how Taffy had stopped the bolting pony. The Head looked both surprised and pleased.

"I'm very glad Wynne was able to render you such a service," he said, while Taffy backed away, feeling very uncomfortable.

"A wild youngster, Sir Harry—one of the biggest handfuls we have in the school—but I know well enough he has courage."

"Wild!" snorted Sir Harry. "I like 'em wild. Always the best sorts. I was a bit of a rip myself when I was here," he added, with a chuckle, and came very near poking the Head in the ribs with his whip-handle. "What I want to ask you, Wyndham, is to come and dine with me to-morrow at Roydon, if you've nothing to do."

"Charmed!" said the Head.

"And let these youngsters come, too—the ones who come in with me. I'll give them the run of the house, and show 'em some sport."

"Very well," said the Head. "As your daughter has had a narrow escape, we must make an occasion of it. Their records are fairly clear of late, I think, only they must be back at the school before tea."

"That's all right. My chauffeur will get them back. Whom have we here?" said Sir Harry, turning sharply, as the Woolly Lambe, on his way to his quarters, came past them up the steps.

"Our new Remove master," said the Head. "Mr. Lambe, let me introduce you to Sir Harry Beckford, the chief Governor of the school and chairman of the board."

"Glad to meet you," said Sir Harry affably, as the Woolly Lambe bowed, and then he looked keenly at the Remove master. "I've met you before somewhere, haven't I?" he said. "Where was it?"

"In the prisoner's dock, I should say," muttered Kent-Williams grimly in Ferguson's ear. "Old Beckford's on the bench of magistrates."

## CHAPTER 17.

### Ferguson Sees an Opening!

THE Woolly Lambe returned. Sir Harry's keen gaze perfectly calmly, and Tafty, who alone had heard Kent-Williams' remark, held his breath for a moment in suspense; for the baronet was evidently trying to remember where he had seen the Remove master.

"Possibly you've seen me in some match or other, if you are interested in cricket," said Mr. Lambe pleasantly. "I used to play a little in past summers."

"That's a modest way of putting it," said the Head, smiling. "Mr. Lambe used to play for Leamshire some seasons ago, and was accounted a first-class bat."

"Ah, that must be it!" said Sir Harry, though he still looked in a puzzled way at the master. His face cleared up, however, and he shook hands with Mr. Lambe heartily. "County cricketer, were you? What a deuced pity to give it up! Grand game! Never miss a good match if I can help it, though I'm a shocking hand at remembering people's names. Always get 'em mixed up. So you're the new master of the Remove, eh?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lambe pleasantly.

"Always glad to meet new Form masters. There aren't many changes at Codrington, except in the Remove," said Sir Harry, his eyes twinkling. "A cricketer's what they want, begad—a good slogger, by what I remember of the Form, eh? Come and dine with me to-morrow night, won't you? Canon Wyndham's coming."

"Thanks, I shall be very glad to!" said the Woolly Lambe, after a glance at the Head; and then the company parted.

The old gentleman and his daughter rode out through the gates and went off down the road at a sharp trot. Mr. Lambe and the Head were left conversing on the steps, and the four chums retired together.

Ferguson and his two inseparables passed by, with black and bitter sneers on their faces.

"It's extraordinary what a taste Sir Harry has for low company!" said Ferguson. "He'll be sorry for it when he finds half his spoons missing after the dinner! Come up to the study."

Ferguson & Co. went gloomily into the House.

"Now's the time to put a spoke in the Lambe's wheel, then!" said Kempe, shutting the door of the study. "We ought to give Beckford a word of warning."

"Not a bad idea," said Ferguson thoughtfully. "No; by gum, it's a real good chance!"

"You saw how Beckford stared at the Lambe," suggested Kempe. "He'd seen him somewhere—and I'll bet it wasn't any place as creditable as a cricket field. The old boy's got a bad memory, that's all."

"He's got something else," said Ferguson. "One of the finest sets of gold

plate in the county. Roydon Hall's full of valuable things."

"I wish Lambe'd prig some of 'em!" put in Kent-Williams viciously.

"So do I; but that's no good if he isn't caught. Why not send Sir Harry an anonymous letter?"

"What's that?"

"A letter without any signature, you ass, in a disguised hand—or signed 'A Friend'—warnin' him what Lambe is, and giving Beckford the tip to watch him."

"Good. Send it by express post, so that it reaches him when Lambe's there at the house!" said Kempe eagerly. "It'll show him up, anyhow!"

"We'll do it?" agreed Ferguson, with a nod. "Dispatch it just at the proper time. The fat'll be in the fire then. Sir Harry's the chief Governor, you know, and he's an old terror when he's roused,"

"Besides being a magistrate!" exclaimed Kent-Williams. "We've got it at last! Meet later on and let's put the letter together."

Nothing more happened until shortly before tea-time, when Dereker, alone in the quadrangle, caught sight of Ferguson and his chums watching him out of the box-room window. Just before, he had seen Kempe going up to the room with an ink-bottle and a package of some kind. The rival firm pointed Dereker out to each other and leered, and directly afterwards they all disappeared back into the room.

"That lot are as sick as pups because they are not asked to Sir Harry's!" thought Dereker. "Wonder what Kempe wanted with an inkpot? That reminds me, I haven't thanked the governor for the last postal-order. It doesn't do to forget these little things."

He went upstairs and wrote an epistle to his father—and if the spelling had been equal to the gratitude in it, it would have been a model letter. There was just time to catch the post if he went straight to the village office, so he slipped out and did so.

While buying a stamp he noticed Kent-Williams at the counter, but Kent-Williams did not choose to notice him. The Fergusonite had just handed an express letter to the postmistress. Dereker, not being in such a hurry, posted his own outside, with a mere three-halfpenny stamp on it, and hurried back to tea without troubling to wonder what the other

boy's letter could have been about to need "expressing."

Word came from the Head immediately after tea that Taffy and his three allies were to get ready at once, and make themselves as presentable as possible. There was not room for them in the Head's old family brougham, but it so happened that Sir Harry had arranged to fetch the boys, as he was sending them back afterwards.

The Head and Mr. Lambe started, therefore, about a quarter to seven, in the brougham, and the boys waited till the hour struck, when Sir Harry's station motor-omnibus turned up at the gates and took them along.

Very stiff about the collars—the three senior boys were wearing "stick-ups"—and beautifully brushed, the four Removites walked in rather sheepishly behind the Head, and Sir Harry, who was old-fashioned in courtesy, and did not care who knew it, welcomed them in the great armour-hung hall.

"Delighted to see you, canon!" he said. "Good-evening, Mr. Lambe! Ah, there are the young rescuers, eh? Welcome to Roydon."

He shook hands all round, and at once made the boys feel at home.

"Come to my library, canon; I've got an old edition to show you and Mr. Lambe. You youngsters don't care for that, eh? Roam round and amuse yourselves—get the head gardener to show you over the hot-houses. Pick anything you like! There's Dorothy; she'll look after some of you."

Dorothy Beckford welcomed the Removites, laughing, and at once all five were on the best of terms. The Beckfords knew how to put guests at their ease. The boys rambled about the great house, looking at the armour and the ghost chamber and the panelled galleries, and then made a tour of the famous hot-houses outside, where, despite the season, nectarines and peaches were ripe and ready. They sampled several of these, and then went back to the house.

There was a large side room by the stairs at the back of the hall, which was used, as Dorothy said, to hold the larger dishes for the dining-hall as they came in from the kitchen. A long metal stand, heated underneath by a spirit-lamp, kept them warm.

Hanging on a set of pegs were some old-fashioned dish-covers, and one of these was of enormous size. It had the Beckford

coat of arms on it, and was nearly as big as a hip-bath.

"What a whacking cover!" said Dereker. "What's it for?"

"That's our biggest meat-cover, and was made in Queen Anne's time," said Dorothy. "It was made for covering a whole roast sheep at the tenants' dinners."

Jellicoe stood and gazed at the big cover with tears in his eyes. Jellicoe was a vegetarian, and he was thinking it the emblem, so to speak, of the dreadful sin of meat-eating. He followed the others out, and as they made their way towards the dining-hall a thought shot through his peculiar brain, and he made a desperate resolve. Quick as lightning he acted on it.

Slipping back through the curtains of the portiere, he made his way back to the room by the stairs. Bells jangled below, and the footsteps of servants were heard coming up. Looking round in desperation, he saw a dark recess at the far end of the room, where coats and rugs were hanging. He glided in amongst them, and concealed himself.

## CHAPTER 12.

### A Surprise for the Party!

"**I** FEAR they will be angry," Jellicoe gasped under his breath; "but I will risk it. What a splendid thing it would be if I could convince Sir Harry. A shock might bring it home to him. I am sure he is a man of brains and could be brought to see the error of his ways!"

In came two men-servants, bearing a large dish, on which was a splendid steaming turbot, quite fifteen pounds in weight, with slices of lemon all round it. The dish was placed on the warm metal shelf, one of the covers put over it, and the men hurried down again to the kitchen.

Jellicoe watched anxiously. Soon the second dinner bell rang, and at once the men reappeared and bore the turbot away to the dining-hall. Five minutes later one of them returned, and with the help of a comrade brought in a much larger dish, on which was a towering, hissing baron of beef.

"What a disgusting sight!" murmured Jellicoe.

The enormous metal cover was placed over this, although it was much too big for the great joint on the dish. Then

the man hurried away again, and Jellicoe, screwing up his courage, came out. His face was pale, but set and firm, and his eyes glistened like some fanatic dervish's.

"Now to strike a blow for the right!" he hissed. "Come what may! Ha, ha!"

He hoisted up one end of the great cover and exposed the steaming beef. What was to be done with it? Jellicoe's eyes lit on a pair of folding doors of a cupboard at the back of the shelf. In a twinkling he jumped up and opened them.

Heaving the covers back, he grasped the baron of beef. It took all his strength to lift, and it burnt his hands pretty sharply, but with an effort he managed to hoist the big joint inside and shut the cupboard doors.

Footsteps were heard approaching—the men were coming back. There was no time to run to the recess. Jellicoe's heart came into his mouth. What was he to do?

"Where the deuce is that youngster?" said Sir Harry, as they entered the dining-room.

"Mr. Jellicoe? He was with us a minute ago!" said Dorothy, looking round.

Taffy and his companions felt rather uneasy at the strange disappearance, and the Head was looking annoyed. There was no saying what the simple-minded Jellicoe might take into his cranium, as the chums knew.

"It's very unceivil of the boy; I should not have thought it of him," said Canon Wyndham. "Let me—"

"Oh, never mind! The young rascal will soon smell his way here," said the genial baronet. "We needn't wait for him. Jenkyns, go and see if you can find that young gentleman, and let dinner be served."

In came the great turbot, and it was placed before Sir Harry.

"I suppose you youngsters have good appetites?" said the host. "All boys worth their salt have."

"I'll answer for these," said the Head.

The turbot was capital, and the boys did their share, but nobody seemed very cheerful as yet. The Head was evidently angry, and it was certainly bad manners of Jellicoe to be late. Jenkyns, the footman, reported that nobody could find him, and little was said during the course.

"Extraordinary thing where the boy's

got to," said Sir Harry. "What's his name—Jam-jar? Never can remember names. He must make up for lost time when he does come. I've got a surprise for you here, canon."

"What's that?"

"Old English baron of beef, served whole. None of your mere sirloins. The bigger the joint the better the meat. I let the whole household sup off it afterwards. You've never seen my big Queen Anne dish-cover before, have you?"

The two footman came in, fairly staggering under the weight of the great dish.

"Heavy, isn't it, Jenkyns?" said the baronet.

"Never knowed one so 'eavy, Sir Harry," gasped Jenkyns.

The dish was placed on the table, which seemed to creak under it. Everybody looked at it expectantly. The host rose, and taking his long carving-knife, gave it a whet or two with the steel, and prepared for business.

"Off with the cover, Jenkyns."

The footman lifted the great metal lid. The next moment the whole dinner-party was struck dumb with amazement. Mr. Lambe, for the first time in history, nearly dropped his eyeglass from its place. Instead of a baron of beef Jellicoe himself was revealed, sitting cross-legged on the dish. He looked very pale, rather scared, and was perspiring freely. But he stuck there, like a Burmese idol.

Sir Harry staggered back a pace, gripping the carvers convulsively, and stared with eyes that started out of his head.

"Eh, what? What the deuce! It's Jam-pot! Where—who—"

Everybody looked petrified—even Taffy could not find his voice. The Head dropped his spectacles into his glass of champagne.

"I—I beg your pardon," said Jellicoe, in a faint voice, "but you will not regret the loss of the beef, will you? I am here instead. I only wanted to point out how wrong it is to eat meat!"

"What!" gasped Sir Harry.

"Think," said Jellicoe, in a hollow voice, "how happy the cow was, browsing on the buttercups and frisking among the little lambs, before it was called upon to furnish us with baron of beef! Here," he continued, holding out a silver paper-covered roll with a hand that shook somewhat, "is something which is a—perfect substitute.

Try it, and you will see we—we need not eat meat at all. It is Nailer's Nutritious Nut-food."

The rest of the company had to pinch themselves to make sure that they were awake. The Head first found his voice.

"Jellicoe!" he cried, in terrible tones, "What do you mean by it, Jellicoe? How dare you!"

Sir Harry suddenly fell back into his chair, his features relaxing, and roared with laughter. He laughed till the room shook, and the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Wretched boy!" cried the Head, his wrath rising to a fearful pitch as he left his chair and strode towards the vegetarian. "You dare to insult a gentleman in this atrocious manner at his own table! You shall be flogged within—"

"No, no," said Sir Harry, wiping his eyes and starting up between them. "Not a bit of it, canon. It's all right. Here, come out of it, youngster!" He reached out, and, lifting Jellicoe bodily off the dish, set him on his legs upon the floor. So you're a vegetarian, are you? Gad, you're starting early! Want me to eat nuts instead of beef, hey?"

"A disgraceful, ill-mannered affront!" exclaimed the Head.

"I'm sorry you don't like my fare," said the baronet, chuckling. "But, no matter, you shall eat nut-meal, or chicken-meal, or catsmeat, or anything you like. I always like my guests to please themselves. Cheer up, my boy!"

Jellicoe seemed on the point of bursting into tears.

"I—I'm afraid I've been very rude," he moaned. "Yes, I see it all now. I was very rude. But I never meant to be. I thought it was such a good opportunity to—to—I wish I hadn't done it now. I'm very sorry."

"Tut, tut! Let him alone, canon. He didn't mean any harm."

"I really sometimes think the boy is—you know, not quite sound in his head," said Canon Wyndham, in a low voice to Sir Harry. "But—"

"Oh, he's all right! Buck up, Jelly-jar! Jellicoe! I wish I could remember your name!" said Sir Harry heartily. "I'm afraid I'm too old to start vegetarianising, but you may if you like."

"You must apologise most humbly for the insult you have offered to Sir Harry,

"as he is good enough to forgive you," said the Head.

"I do," exclaimed Jellicoe. "I apologise, sir. I'm awfully sorry. I—I wish I wasn't a vegetarian. I'm—I'm sick of it."

"That's all right," said Sir Harry. "But look here, where's the beef?"

"In the cupboard over the iron shelf," said Jellicoe, fairly bursting into tears.

"Great glory!" muttered Taffy. "It really ain't safe to bring the kid out."

Sir Harry made a sign to the footmen, and, sure enough, they found the baron of beef, brought it in, and put it on the dish. It was still hot. Then Sir Harry had another fit of laughter that turned him purple in the face.

"Tell us how you did it, Jellicoe," he said, "and we'll forgive you."

"I—I hid the beef in the cupboard," blubbered the vegetarian, "and then I heard somebody coming, so I got on the dish and pulled the cover over me. I thought it would be so effective if I were served at the table, and could offer you the nut-food. It all came to me in a moment."

"I should think so," grinned Dereker. Sir Harry picked up the carvers.

"Look here, my boy," he said cheerily, "I'm more than four times as old as you are, so it's not likely, is it, that you can tell me what's good for me?"

"No, sir," said Jellicoe humbly.

"Now this vegetarianism of yours is all very well for faddists and so forth, but no healthy boy has any business with it. You hear me? Fancy a schoolboy ashamed to eat roast beef! Why, the British Empire was built up by roast beef. To denounce it, sir, is high treason, or little better."

"Yes, sir," said Jellicoe warmly. "I never thought of that."

"High treason," said Sir Harry, flourishing his carving knife, "is punishable by the axe and the block. But you are pardoned, my lad, only on conditions you sit down in that chair and eat a bigger plateful of it than anybody else at the table. If you don't, I'm hanged if I won't send you home! Will you?"

"Yes, sir," said Jellicoe eagerly. "I shall be very glad to."

"Jenkyns, bring a waterproof for him to sit on, because he's been well basted with gravy. And bring another dish. That's right. Now to business."

Sir Harry, carving like a Trojan, soon helped all the company to beef. It was

splendid beef, and, thanks to the size of the joint, it was still piping hot. To Jellicoe he gave a thumping portion, and there is no denying that the vegetarian looked at it hungrily as it was being brought to him.

"Now, Jellicoe," said Sir Harry, "what do you say to throwing that patent rubbish of yours into the fire?"

"Yes, sir," said Jellicoe thankfully.

And, turning round, he dropped the Nailer's Nutritious Nut-food among the hot coals.

"Glad to get rid of it, Jellicoe, aren't you?" said the Woolly Lambe placidly, putting up his eyeglass.

"Yes, sir. I always hated the nasty stuff really," said Jellicoe.

"Isn't the beef good!" said Sir Harry.

"Grand, sir!" said the ex-vegetarian, with his mouth full.

"Then there's a choice piece of nonsense knocked on the head," said Sir Harry.

"Hallo! Ring at the bell! That's the evening post."

The meal went merrily, and everybody was in the highest spirits, when the footman came in with a missive on a tray.

"All right, Jenkyns! I don't want any letters now," said Sir Harry impatiently.

"Beg pardon, Sir Harry. It's an express letter marked 'Urgent,' so I thought I'd better bring it."

Dereker, with a serious face, nudged Taffy, and the two exchanged a meaning glance. The former had not forgotten what he saw at the Post Office.

Sir Harry took up the letter.

"Don't know the handwriting," he said half aloud. "Will you excuse me, gentlemen? I'd better open it, as it's marked 'Urgent.'"

He tore the envelope open and perused the letter inside. For a few seconds he read, and sat as if thunderstruck. His face became very pale, and his features hardened and grew grim. He looked up from the letter and fixed his gaze fiercely on Mr. Lambe. That gentleman was not looking. His eyes were wandering sleepily round the room, taking in its rich appointments and the massive plate that shone on the sideboard.

The baronet, still staring at the Remove master, crushed the letter in his left hand and rose to his feet.

"No bad news, Sir Harry, I hope?" asked the Head anxiously.

The dead silence that fell made everybody feel very uncomfortable, and all wondered what was going to happen next. There seemed to be thunder in the air. Sir Harry's jolly face now looked terribly stern and threatening.

Mr. Lambe turned his head and met Sir Harry's gaze with the greatest unconcern. He was the only unembarrassed person there. He put up his eyeglass and smiled at the baronet with perfect frankness, as if unaware that anything was wrong.

Sir Harry turned abruptly to the Head. "You ask me if I've had news?" he said in a grating voice. "Yes, infernally bad! I have received a letter from a cad, and I don't know who he is—a cad without a name!"

He crushed the missive up in his hand and breathed hard. Nobody felt able to say anything. Sir Harry paused a moment, and then, flinging the note into the fireplace, he filled his glass to the brim with champagne and held it high.

"I pledge you, Mr. Lambe!" he cried heartily. "A glass of wine with you! I'm charmed to see you at my table!"

The Woolly Lambe rose at once and drank to his host, saying cheerily:

"To you, sir!"

As he did so the strain passed off, and everybody sighed with relief. They felt they had escaped a very awkward affair, though they hardly knew what.

"There's something precious wrong somewhere," whispered Derek to Birne. "I can guess who sent that note."

It was surprising how quickly the clouds turned to sunshine. Sir Harry became as merry as a cricket again, and soon had the company talking and laughing freely. In a few minutes the incident was forgotten altogether.

The baronet showed himself a charming host, and the boys were surprised to find what good company their headmaster could be. But the Woolly Lambe was the brightest of the three, and kept the table alive with his wit. He was really very funny when he chose, and as the dinner progressed the talk about Codrington became uncommonly light and free, considering the four boys were there, rather to the Head's dismay once or twice.

"You are the sort of chief who is needed there," said Sir Harry to Mr. Lambe. "Only a gentleman and a sportsman could handle the Remove. Boys know when they

have one to deal with. Here's success to you and the Remove, Mr. Ram!"

"Mr. Lambe, not Ram," put in the Head mildly.

"I beg your pardon—Mr. Lambe, of course!" said Sir Harry, whom the champagne was making rather jovial. "Capital name, too. What do they call you in the Form, sir? Not the sheep—eh?"

"No; the Woolly Lambe," replied the Remove master, laughing.

The Head smiled discreetly. The boys looked surprised, for in their simplicity they had not supposed the Form master knew what they called him.

"Woolly Lambe—eh? Capital!" chuckled Sir Harry. "Of course, it would be? Your first name's Wollaston—eh? Egad, I'll wager they don't find you a lamb in class! That eyeglass of yours is a big help. Terrifies 'em, you know, when you look at them through it. What!"

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Lambe, laughing. "I should say not. The whole class wore them one morning—out of compliment to me, perhaps—an eyeglass apiece. Derek led the attack. Wonderful eye for a glass, he has!"

The chums looked rather embarrassed. They did not see the fun, and thought it was not fair of Mr. Lambe to bring all this up against them in public. Jellicoe especially looked grave as a judge trying a murder case, and regarded the Head with a disapproving stare.

## CHAPTER 19.

### Toasting a Hero!

"**B**Y Jove! Uncommon clever of you to trace the glasses to Derek!" laughed Sir Harry. "You're quite an expert in crime."

"Oh, no!" said the Woolly Lambe, smiling. "Wynne is a born detective. In fact, he set out as a policeman one day and was about to arrest me, though I don't know what wickedness he thought I'd been guilty of."

"Oh, I say, sir!" said Taffy, blushing like a beetroot. "This is too bad! I——"

"We must have the story!" chuckled Sir Harry. "Wouldn't miss it for anything. What was it, Mr. Lambe?"

The Remove master was just going to

oblige with the tale when Taffy, in sheer agony of mind, broke in.

"It isn't fair, sir! If—if you don't stop, I shall tell them about your pulling me out of the weir."

"No, no!" exclaimed the Woolly Lambe, laughing, but startled. "Not that! Mercy, my boy! I surrender!"

"He saved my life and very nearly lost his own," said Taffy to the others.

"Bless my soul! We've got to hear about that!" said Sir Harry emphatically. "I won't let a soul out of the room till I've heard it."

"So you shall, sir. It was this way. Jellicoe and I were fishing one day when the river was flooded."

"Wynne, you promised to hold your tongue about it!" cried the Woolly Lambe.

"Only in the school, sir," said Taffy mischievously. "You've made things so hot for me to-night I'm going to make you uncomfortable, and then we'll be quits. Yes, Sir Harry, lots of men have got the V.C. for less plucky things than Mr. Lambe did. It was like this."

In simple language, and to the Remove master's great discomfiture, he told of the gallant rescue the Woolly Lambe had made when the punt went over the flooded weir, and how narrow an escape they had both had. There was complete silence, and everybody hung on the boy's words, listening eagerly.

There was a pause after he had finished, and then the baronet, his eyes glistening as he looked at the master, stood up.

"Friends," he said, "I give you a toast. Drink with me to the health of the most gallant gentleman who ever came to Codrington!"

All were on their feet in a moment, and looking towards Mr. Lambe they toasted him with a heartfelt cheer, and as it died out Dereker's deep baritone burst forth in two notes.

"For—or——"

The others all took it up.

"—he's a jolly good fellow,  
For he's a jolly good fellow,  
For he's a jolly good fellow—ow!  
And so say all of us!"

The Head joined in more heartily than anybody, and three ringing "Hip-hip-hurrahs!" wound up the verse as they sat down.

"You young scoundrel, Wynne!" said the

Woolly Lambe, feelingly. "Wait till I got you in class to-morrow."

"I'm proud to have you under the roof of Roydon, sir!" said Sir Harry enthusiastically.

"And I never even heard of this," said the Head. "Not a word of it!"

"He wouldn't let me mention it in the school, sir," said Taffy.

"A brave man is always modest," added the baronet.

"I wish I'd left you in the weir, you young rascal," said the tormented Woolly Lambe. "Just fall in again and I'll take care you don't get out!"

The laugh went all round the table, and all was jollity again very quickly. The meal was ended, all but the dessert, and when that was over Sir Harry rose and suggested a move to the drawing-room.

The footman opened the door, and Sir Harry stood aside while his two older guests filed out first. Just then Purvis, the butler, approached his master.

"Beg pardon, Sir Harry! Will you give me the keys to lock the valuables up as usual? Or shall I wait?" he said, in a low voice—it was a rule at Roydon Hall for the safes that held the gold plate to be locked at nine o'clock.

"Oh, I'll see to it myself," said the baronet. "I want to show my guests one or two things. I don't suppose you four youngsters care about old plate, and heirlooms, and things, eh? All right, stay here for a quarter of an hour, and help yourself to more dessert, or coffee, or anything you fancy. We'll have a game of billiards presently, or some shooting at the model rifle range."

He went out, and the boys were left in the dining-hall. They glanced at each other meaningly as soon as they were alone.

"What a rippin' evening!" said Birne. "But I say, that was a rum go when the message came in for Sir Harry. There was something about Lambe in that letter."

"It looked as if there was going to be a row," said Taffy. "It was an ugly business, that. I wonder——"

"It doesn't take much guessing who sent the thing, and the reason why it came just when it did," said Dereker. "I'm going to see."

He stepped quickly to the fireplace. The crumpled-up note had not been burnt. It

had fallen off the firebars, as Dereker noticed at the time, and was lying among the cinders. He picked it up and opened it.

"I say," said Taffy, "we oughtn't to do that, you know. We're Sir Harry's guests, and that's his letter. It won't do, prying into his—"

"Look here," said Dereker, "we're on Lambe's side, aren't we? And we know there are some blackguards up against him. We're pledged to do our best for him, an', I say, it's no breach of faith with anyone to read this note, because I know who sent it."

"Derry's right enough," said Birne. "We're doing all we can for Lambe, and it looks as if somebody's played a low-down trick on him. Sir Harry's in the dark, and we're not."

Taffy agreed, and Dereker smoothed out the note. They read it quickly. It was written, but printed in capitals with a pen, and read as follows:

**"LOOK AFTER YOUR GOLD PLATE. THE MAN WHO CALLS HIMSELF LAMBE IS A THIEF. AND THE POLICE ARE AFTER HIM. HE HAS DONE ONE BURGLARY NEAR HERE ALREADY. YOUR HOUSE WILL BE THE NEXT."**

**"A WELL-WISHER."**

"Look at that!" said Taffy, clenching his fists. "The skunk who sent this reckoned to get Lambe disgraced right here at the table."

## CHAPTER 20.

### Dereker on the Warpath!

**B**UT it didn't come off," said Birne. "Sir Harry looked jolly well upset by it at first, and no wonder. Did you see the way he looked at Lambe?"

"He didn't believe it!" exclaimed Taffy. "No gentleman would take any notice of an unsigned letter, and such a dirty one as this. He just threw the thing away, and showed what he thought of it by jolly well drinking Lambe's health. The old boy's a brick. We—"

"There's nothing to show who wrote this," said Birne. "It's printed, so as not to leave any handwriting that might be recognised. So was the envelope, for I

got a glimpse of it when it was brought in."

"I know who did it, though," said Dereker. "It was that worm Ferguson; he and his gang were confabulating up in the boot-room half the afternoon."

"That's true," said Jellicoe. "I saw them myself."

"The sweeps! But it's hard to say which one actually wrote it," said Taffy.

"It was Kent-Williams. He's the partner who always works these sort of dodges, and I saw him in the post office, sendin' off a letter by express post to catch the evenin' mail, which is delivered here at eight-thirty."

"Ah!" said Taffy. "So Kent's the 'well-wisher,' is he? He'll wish himself well out of it before we've done with him. They've played some rotten tricks this term, but that's the rottenest of the lot. You were right to read that note, Derry."

"And I'm going to keep it," returned Dereker grimly, folding the note and putting it in his pocket. "I vote we— Hold on, here's Sir Harry!"

Their host entered the room, looking very cheery; but when he saw the grave faces of the boys he paused a moment and considered them.

"By the way, my lads," he said quietly, "do you happen to know of any enemies that your Form-master, Mr. Lambe, has?"

"Well, sir," said Taffy, feeling the question was rather awkward to answer, "I should say he's got a lot more friends. But some fellows are such beasts that—"

"Ah, yes! Well, I don't want to know anything about that," said the baronet. "But surely he is very popular at the school?"

"With nearly everybody he is, sir, even in the Remove, where we all get sat on now and then. It's only one or two cads that don't like him. I won't say any more."

"Quite right. If such a master as Mr. Lambe were not popular I should believe there was something very wrong with the boys. Come along; we're going to have a shooting-match. Any first-class shots here?"

All went merrily again when the party came together, and after coffee in the warm conservatory they went to Sir Harry's miniature rifle range in the Long Gallery, which was beautifully fitted and lit by electric light. They shot four or

five matches with keen rivalry, Birne coming out a winner among the juniors, while Jellicoe contrived to plug a chairback that was not more than six feet away from the target.

"Bless me! It's past ten!" said the Head. "I shall have to send these youngsters home, Sir Harry, as we agreed."

"Oh, hang it, no!" said the baronet. "Let 'em stay, canon, and all go together. Pity to split the party up—it'll be dull without 'em!"

The Head protested, but he did not seem able to hold out against Sir Harry, who carried his point. It was seldom enough that any Codringtonians got visiting-leave. And so cheerily did the party go that the time was hardly noticed, and it was past eleven before the Head insisted on making a move.

The old family brougham from Codrington was so long in being made ready that the motor-bus which had fetched the boys was at the door long before it. The Head would not let them wait any longer; his conscience rather pricked him for not having sent them home before. So he insisted on their going ahead at once.

They bade the heartiest of farewells to the genial Sir Harry, and thanked him for the evening's pleasure. Dorothy told Taffy that there were three ponies in the stables, and that she meant to get the chums invited over on a half-holiday for some pony-racing on the old training ground. In high spirits the boys got into the comfortable station motor-bus and departed.

"Rippin' people," said Dereker as the park was left behind. "What we want is more Governors like Sir Harry Beckford. I never took much stock in girls before, but Dorothy's a regular brick. That pony-racing will be a capital sport."

They discussed the incidents of the evening during the journey, and the bus ambled along serenely. It was a slow concern, though comfortable, and not very sure, either. In about twenty minutes' time there was a jar and a bump, and it stopped dead.

"What's wrong, uncle?" said Dereker to the chauffeur, getting out. "Water gone off the boil?"

"The differential gear's gone wrong," said the chauffeur gloomily. "This here's going to be a job."

He got out his box of tools and disap-

peared underneath the car. The boys, finding they could not help, went inside again out of the cold, and were so engrossed in the discussion of the evening that they found three-quarters of an hour had passed and still the car was under repairs.

"By gum, this is a go!" chuckled Birne. "Lambe an' the Head will have got home before now. Had we better walk it?"

"No jolly fear! I don't mind if it takes all night," said Taffy. "It isn't our fault; besides, she's about ready now."

"Lucky there's no horse near—it'd die of laughing at us," said Birne. "The family brougham's beaten the stink-car, after all."

The motor rolled along again, and presently slowed down and turned into a side road.

"He's going a long way round," remarked Dereker at last, looking out of the window. "Where are we?"

"There's a lot of fresh stone down on the main road, an' he's afraid of his tyres," said Taffy. "That's why we're goin' this way. Shortest in the end, unless she— Oh, skittles!"

There was another bump and a bang, and the car was stopped again. This time it was the carburettor that was out of action, and the boys all got out feeling exasperated.

"Look here, we shall have grown whiskers by the time this rattle-trap gets us home!" said Taffy. "How long are you going to be?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour this time," was the reply. "The blessed ol' car's playing the fool to-night; she hasn't broken down before in the last two months."

"Let's go for a walk an' get warm, then," said Dereker. "It's jolly cold sitting in there now the foot-warmer's cooled off."

The chums stepped out briskly down the road. It was still a good distance to the school, and the car had brought them so far out of the way that they were not sure of the route. And, besides, there was something novel in being out all night. So they decided to let the car land them at Codrington, if it took a week.

The night was clear and frosty, with a quarter moon that shed a faint light over the fields. The boys went through a gate into a meadow on the left.

"Hold on, you fellows—squat!" whispered Taffy suddenly. "Who's coming yonder?"

They crouched close to the hedge as they saw two dark figures approaching near the river. It did not look as if they were up to any good, for they were sneaking along rapidly and cautiously, each bearing some kind of bundle on his back.

"Poachers!" whispered Dereker.

The men passed within twenty yards, and disappeared under a little stone bridge that spanned a dry backwater of the river. In a few moments they came out again without the bundles, and hurried off as fast as they could go, looking furtively behind them.

"There's an old dry sluice-pit, with a board over it," said Taffy. "I've seen the place. You'd think somebody must be after 'em. It's not on Sir Harry's land, though."

The hoot of the motor's horn sounded down the road, and they heard it approaching. It decided the boys to leave the poachers' spoils alone and get back to bed, for they were pretty well tired out. They got into the motor again, and Jellie promptly went to sleep.

"Been quavin' an excitin' evenin'!" said Dereker, yawning. Then he pulled out the anonymous note and read it again by the light of the lamp inside the car, and his wrath rose afresh. "I tell you what," he said. "I'm going to give the skunk who wrote this a fair warning what he'll get, and he shall know his dirty game is spotted before he's an hour older."

They eagerly discussed the ways and means of bringing it home to the culprit, and were in the middle of it when the car drew up at Codrington. It was then past midnight, and the Head himself, looking very worried, received them at the door. The chauffeur explained what had made them late, and drove off.

"I am beginning to wish this visit had never been paid at all," said the Head, in a distracted voice. "Get to your dormitory quickly, and into bed without delay!"

"Quite a pleasure to obey the old bird for once!" yawned Taffy, after they had reached the dormitory, as he pulled off his jacket. "He seems very sick about something. Can't be only the car's delay that upset him."

"He's always worrying about something," said Birne. "You're in a dickens of a hurry, Derry! Where are you off to?"

"No, by gum!" said Dereker hesitatingly to himself. "I'll do it now! The beggar shan't wait for it!"

He took the hand-printed note out of the pocket of his coat, and, paying no attention to the questions of his comrades, left the room and ran down the corridor in his bare feet. There was a dangerous look on his face, and his teeth were set. An inch of gas was burning at the jet half-way along the wall, as usual, and the rows of beds, all tenanted, were quiet, save for here and there a snore. Kent-Williams' bed was the third one. Dereker went straight to it, and, seizing hold of the sleeper, hauled him out bodily.

Kent-Williams awoke with a yell that roused the whole dormitory, and, finding himself leaving the bed precipitately, he clutched hold of the washstand, bringing it down with a crash. Dereker hauled captive, washstand and all on to the floor, and Kent-Williams struggled to his feet.

"What are you doing, confound you?" cried Kent-Williams, while everybody in the dormitory sat up in bed and stared.

"Stand up, you earth-worm!" said Dereker hotly. "Look here, do you see that?"

He held out the crumpled, anonymous letter, and Kent-Williams, catching sight of it, turned pale.

"You sent that to Sir Harry Beckford, you cad!"

"I didn't! I don't know what you're talking about!"

"That's a lie! You sent this caddish message to try to queer Lambé when he was Sir Harry Beckford's guest. I'll show you up, you beauty! I'll have you sent to Coventry by the whole school! Sir Harry treated your dirty letter as it deserved, and chucked it away without taking any notice. But I'll see you don't get off so cheaply!"

Kent-Williams made a spring, and snatched at the note, but Dereker, stepping back, blazed with anger, cuffed him across the face with all his might.

"That's for a liar and a cur!" he said.

The whole dormitory was in a commotion at once as Kent-Williams staggered back.

"Go for him, you chaps!" cried Ferguson, springing out of bed. "We'll teach him

Dereker faced the enemy, caring nothing for the odds against him; but just then somebody cried "Cave!" and a door was

heard to open along the corridor. Everybody bolted back to bed, and Dereker, finding himself alone, hesitated a moment, and then, finding there was nothing for it but flight, he darted out of the room and down the passage.

## CHAPTER 21.

### The Robbery at Roydon Hall!

**D**EREKER had had long leave, and did not want to abuse it by trouble with the authorities just then.

Much as he would have liked to stay, there was no use in remaining and getting caught. Moreover, he had the note with him, which would probably fall into the hands of Mr. Perkes if he stayed, and that would be disastrous.

He was out of sight down the dark passage before the master arrived to see what the noise was about. Dereker gained his own dormitory, and, carefully hiding the note, he got into bed.

"Have you seen Kent?" asked Taffy. "What did you do?"

"Punched his beastly head. I wish I'd time to do it properly. To-morrow we'll settle that business with him and Ferguson and Kempe. Let's chuck it now. Good-night!"

It was rather an effort to turn out in time next morning; but as the Head had been particularly decent in granting them extra leave, the quartette did not like to be late.

They were anxious to bring the rival gang to book as soon as possible, and confront them with the anonymous letter. But Ferguson and his chums most adroitly kept out of their way, and there was no getting hold of them.

"The beggars are scared this time," said Birne. "They know we've got 'em."

"Humph! I don't see that we can prove very much," replied Taffy. "They'll deny they had anything to do with it, of course."

"I'll let the whole Remove judge for themselves, anyhow," said Dereker emphatically.

"What's become of the Head, by the way?" said Birne. "He wasn't in chapel

this morning, and he's not in the school now."

"Hasn't got up yet," suggested Dereker, grinning. "Got a head like a pumpkin after Sir Harry's old tawny port. He's having tea and soda-water in bed."

They learned, however, that the Head had left Codrington very early in the morning, driving away in a great hurry in the dogcart. Strangely enough, there seemed to be an air of uneasiness about the whole school, masters and all, though it was hard to define what it was. All sorts of rumours were flying about.

The general surprise increased when it was found that the Woolly Lambe was not there to take the Remove. Mr. Quayle took it for first lesson instead. There was a good deal of rioting, naturally, and Mr. Quayle found his hands very full. He could not handle the Remove as its customary master did.

Taffy and his chums, however, did not take much part in the "rag." They were too full of the events that had passed, and they had a feeling that something serious was in the wind. After second lesson they consulted together, and went up to No. 12 Room, where the Form was foraging, and where they hoped to corner Ferguson & Co.

The three rival warriors were there, but before anything could happen Johnson appeared at the door and called:

"Who saw Lambe last? It was you, Taffy, wasn't it? Where is he?"

"How the dickens should I know?" said Taffy. "He left Sir Harry's after we did, and came home with the Head."

"That's just what he didn't do. He never came home last night, for his bed hasn't been slept in. I've just heard that."

Before anyone could comment on the fact Walsh came dashing along the passage and into the room, quite out of breath.

"I say, you chaps, have you heard the news?" he cried. "Roydon Hall's been burgled! Sir Harry Beckford's been robbed of eight hundred pounds' worth of gold plate!"

His words struck the whole assembly speechless, coming as they did right on top of Johnson's news.

"Roydon Hall burgled!" muttered Taffy.

"Absolutely stripped! They say it's the

cleverest robbery that's been done for years."

Nobody said anything for a moment till Walsh gave a chuckle.

"No wonder, when you four chaps were there half the night! Where have you hidden the swag, Taffy? Share it out!"

Nobody paid any attention to Walsh's feeble joke, however. Taffy and Dereker were quite dumbstruck, and Ferguson, suddenly pushing forward, confronted them with a savage leer.

There was a heavy tread in the passage, and Lodgey, the school sergeant, appeared at the door.

"Master Wynne, you're wanted," he said. "All the four young gents that was at Sir Harry's last night are sent for to go to Roydon Hall at once."

"Who says so?" cried Taffy.

"The 'Ead. Police orders, I think," said Lodgey. "Come along, please, gentlemen! There's a motor-car waitin' at the gates, an' I was to hurry you."

A perfect storm of questions assailed Lodgey and the quartette as the Remove crowded round; but Taffy, followed by Birne, Dereker, and Jellicoe, hurried out without replying. They only stopped at the lobby to get their caps.

At the gates they found the car awaiting them, not the slow omnibus of the day before, but a large open Daimler, driven, however, by the same man. Half the school saw them drive off, and soon they were spinning along the high road at forty miles an hour.

"Great Scott, this is a go!" said Dereker gloomily. "I wonder how it's going to end?"

"I say," began Taffy, leaning over the front of the tonneau and talking to the chauffeur, "do you know what they want us for?"

"For witnesses, I think," said the driver. "Cause you was there last night just before it happened."

Taffy thought quickly. He looked so excited that Dereker asked him what was wrong. Without replying to him, Taffy got up and spoke to the chauffeur again.

"Do you know what time the robbery took place?"

"Pretty early in the night, they say. The p'lice think it was soon after the visitors had gone, an' before the house was locked up. 'Bout half-past eleven."

Taffy clapped his hand on Dereker's knee.

"By Jingo!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming. "I don't know where the thief is, but I'll bet a shilling I know where the swag is!"

"What!" said the others.

"Sir Harry's gold plate. In the culvert under the old bridge, where we stopped last night."

"What? Where we saw those poachers stow their game?"

"Game, be hanged! We were a jolly sight too ready to suppose it was game, I fancy. Golden game, if you ask me. It was just after the robbery took place. An' where'd you find a better hidin'-place?"

"By gum! Remember the tall chap who came first with the biggest bag? Just like —"

"Taffy's right. It's worth tryin', anyhow."

"It's even betting the stuff's there, unless they've got it away in the meantime."

"There's the place coming in sight now! I vote we go an' see, anyhow!"

"Hi, chauffeur!" cried Taffy, leaning forward again. "We want you to stop for a minute or two at the gate in front there! 'Twon't delay you a jiffy!"

"Can't do it, sir!" said the chauffeur emphatically, increasing his speed. "My orders are to get you to Roydon as fast as the car can go, and stop for nothing!"

"By George," said Taffy furiously, "if you don't do as we tell you, we'll climb over there and run the car into the hedge! I don't care what your orders are! Pull up, I tell you!"

"Here, no larks, young gents!" said the chauffeur, in some alarm. "Don't go playing the fool with the car!"

"Larks, be hanged!" returned Taffy emphatically. "You stop, or I promise you we'll do what I said! Here, come on, you chaps!"

The chauffeur was scared at the thought of being interfered with while the car was going at such a pace, and he slowed down.

"I shall lose my place over this—" he began.

"No, you won't! We'll make it all right for you! Pull up here—close beside the hedge. We shan't be five minutes, if that!"

The car stopped, and the chums jumped out.

"There's no use all four of us going," said Dereker. "It'll only make a show if there's anybody about."

"All right; you come with me," said Taffy. "Birne and Jelly, stay here an' keep the chauffeur quiet. Very likely there may be nothing in it at all, but we'll just make sure."

Jellicoe and Birne were none too pleased at being left behind, but there was no time to argue; and Taffy led the way back along the road at a run.

"The ass of a driver has brought us a long way past it!" said Dereker.

"Couple of hundred yards, that's all. It's just as well—we don't want the car waiting too close, in case there's anybody about. I'm not counting on this job, but—"

"Just as well to make sure," said Dereker. And they reached the gate leading into the field next the bridge. "See if there's anybody in sight before you get over. If you're right about the swag, someone might come for it at any moment."

"I should think they'd wait for dark, though they might leave it for weeks, till the whole thing's blown over," said Taffy, taking a careful survey round the fields. "There's no one in sight. Over with you!"

"I thought I saw somebody coming along round the little hill there," said Dereker, hesitating.

They stood upon the gate and looked; but neither could see anyone. The meadows seemed quite deserted—not even a cow or a grazing horse in sight.

The boys dropped over to the other side and ran across the meadow, through the hedge and into the dry water-course.

"Rummy thing there's no water in it," said Dereker.

"There's a sluice that shuts it off from the main river now. They don't open it very often."

The banks of the dry back-water were high; and the boys hurried along the gravelly bed to the little stone bridge. They could just stand up under its arch.

"Now then, where's the hiding-place?" said Dereker.

Taffy examined the walls thoroughly. Many of the bricks were loose, but no cavity could be seen. Just under the entrance of the arch was an old sluice-gate of small size, made to draw up and down, and it had a sort of lid fixed across its under edge.

Taffy took hold of the top piece.

"This is where I thought it might be," he said. "Give us a pull!"

They raised the water-gate and its low lid without any difficulty, and fixed it as high as it would go. Under the lid, in the bed of the stream, was a slight cavity, but there was nothing in it.

"Sold!" said Dereker. "If there was anything here at all it was those bags of game, and they've been taken already, evidently. Let's go back to the car!"

"Hold on a shake! We'll have a look round first. Don't tramp about with those fairy hoofs of yours, but keep still!"

Taffy went outside, and, bending down, had a good look at the ground. The sand and dry loam showed all footprints pretty plainly, and besides the ones they had made themselves, he saw two sets of others, which could be traced with a little trouble.

"Look here!" he said. "Here are the marks of the chaps who came last night, anyhow!"

"The poachers?" put in Dereker.

"Poachers don't wear india-rubber shoes, as a rule. Look at the ribbing across the prints of this one. They lead under the bridge. These other ones are made by boots, though—somebody with a long, narrow foot an' rather neat."

"So they are!" said Dereker, stooping and looking closely. "And with those patent rubber heel-pieces, with a cross in them. You can see it quite plainly here where the soil's damp."

"There don't seem to be any pointing outwards again, though. They must have left by the other end."

The ground under the bridge itself was too trampled for any marks to be seen; but leading out on the other side of the arch both sets of footprints could be seen plainly—the ribbed shoes and the boots with the patent heels quite clear, except when the two tracks crossed each other.

Walking beside them, the boys traced them some distance along, and the tracks then left the water-course and disappeared in the grass of the meadow next a tall hedge.

"There are only these two," said Dereker.

"That settles it. Nobody's been here since those chaps last night, then; and the bags they carried must be still here."

"Yes," agreed Dereker; "keep your eyes open, Taffy; we'll soon find 'em!"

## CHAPTER 22.

## The Booty!

THE chums made a thorough search of the arch and the ground, but with no success. There was not a sign of digging anywhere, either. The time was slipping away; but the waiting motor-car was forgotten, so engrossed were the boys in the search.

There was evidently no hiding-place except the empty sluice, however, and they had to own themselves baffled.

"It's a cert those beggars had got rid of the bags, though, when we saw them appear again by the hedge there," said Dereker, stirring up the floor of the little cavity thoughtfully with a long stick. "And yet—Hullo! There's wood or something under this stuff!"

Taffy lay down quickly, and reached to the floor of the hole. He scooped away the pebbles and earth with his hand, and, sure enough, there was a flat board there. The earth had been scooped in over it to conceal it. He got his fingers under the side of the board and pulled it up. Then both boys uttered an exclamation as they saw another hole underneath, completely filled up by two green-baize bags.

"Here they are!" ejaculated Taffy. "By Jove, we nearly missed 'em!"

"Good! At the worst we shall get some hare-soup out of the job!" said Dereker.

"Precious heavy for hares!" said Taffy, heaving one of the bags up.

It clanked harshly as it was dropped on the pebbly ground; and Taffy, his fingers trembling with eagerness, whipped out his pocket-knife and cut the cord that bound the neck of the bag. He thrust his hand in, and drew out a small solid gold salver.

Dereker and Taffy gave a whoop of triumph. They capered with delight on the floor of the river-bed.

Dereker pulled out another piece of plate—a chased golden goblet with Sir Harry Beckford's coat of arms on it.

"Taffy, I swear you're a great man!" exclaimed Dereker.

"You were right all the way! This is the biggest scoop we've ever made. Out with the other bag!"

They hoisted it up from the hole, and it was crammed with the famous Roydon Hall plate, just like the first.

The boys only glanced at it to satisfy

themselves, and then Taffy quickly tied up the bags again.

"We've done 'em!" he said triumphantly. "They won't grow fat on this burglary—and they'll be nabbed, too! All the police need to do is to watch the place on the quiet till the thieves turn up again to look for the stuff. Up with that bag, and let's get back to—"

"I say," said Dereker, under his breath, "there's somebody coming already! I wonder if he's making for this place?"

Taffy glanced through the arch, and saw a tall figure moving rapidly along towards the water-course. He was a good distance off yet, and was keeping very close to a tall hedge on his left.

"Yes, he's coming here," said Taffy, pausing. "He wouldn't be sidling along like that for anything else. Funny thing—I seem to know the shape of him!"

He stopped abruptly; and Dereker clutched him by the arm.

"It's Lambe!" said Dereker, in a horrified whisper. "I'd know him in a huz-dred!"

Taffy gave a gasp. Yes, it was the Woolly Lambe, sure enough. He could be seen more plainly as he came round the angle of the hedge. Glancing to left and right, he was making quickly and quietly straight for the bridge.

"This is awful!" muttered Dereker. "He's the thief, sure enough, and he's coming back to get the swag! What shall we do?"

Taffy seemed incapable of speech for a moment. Then he seized the nearest bag of plate.

"Quick!" he said. "Get these to the car, and let's clear out before he sees us!"

"Oughtn't we to stay, and—and—"

"You can if you like; I'm off!" said Taffy, swinging the bag on to his back and decamping through the other end of the bridge.

"I'm with you!" said Dereker, taking the other bag and doing the same.

It was too gloomy under the bridge for anyone to have seen them from outside at a distance. Once clear, the bridge itself sheltered them, and the banks of the water-course prevented their being seen by the approaching master. They followed it for

a hundred yards, and then, doubling round the end of a hedge, ran along the other side of it and gained the road.

"After all, he saved my life," muttered Taffy. "And I'll have no hand in giving him up; others can do as they like. We've got the stuff!"

The bags of plate were heavy, as much as the boys could carry at any speed, and their anxiety to get away without being seen made them all the heavier burdens.

Dereker wondered what Mr. Lambe would do if he saw and caught them. It would be an ugly situation to face a desperate man in such a case. But once on the road they felt safe, and quite out of breath and exhausted they reached the motor-car.

"Heave these inside!" panted Taffy, calling on the other two to help.

"By gum, you've got it, then!" said Birne. "What is it—game?"

"Can't you feel what it is, you chump? Go ahead, driver—as fast as you like!" said Dereker, slamming the door of the tonneau.

The chauffeur looked curiously at the boys and their burdens as they came up; but he started the car and drove on at a rapid pace. Taffy got up on the seat to peer over the hedge as they went, in the hope of seeing something of Mr. Lambe; but they were out of sight of the bridge already, and he sat down again, looking very glum and pale.

Birne had fingered the bags, and was about to raise a howl of glee, when Dereker checked him and nodded towards the driver's back.

"A veritable triumph!" murmured Jelliecoe. "Accept my congratulations!"

"We'll shove these bags somewhere till we see how the land lies," said Taffy, in a decisive tone.

The car drove into Roydon Park and up to the Hall. There seemed scarcely anybody about, and a solitary footman opened the doors.

"Where's Canon Wyndham?" asked Taffy.

"With Sir Harry in the library, sir. I was to take you up at once when you came."

"Anybody else with them?"

"Inspector Browning, sir, of the police force."

Taffy drew a breath of relief.

"We'll come up," he said, "only we've got some baggage here we want to have

locked in a safe place. Is there a room where—"

"The butler's pantry, sir, if that'll do?" said the footman, showing the way to a small room lit by a little high window that was not made to open.

The boys put the baize bags gently inside, and Taffy coolly double-locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"Now we're ready!" he said.

And the footman led them upstairs to the library and ushered them in.

Sir Harry was standing with his back to the fireplace, looking harassed and worried. The Head looked no less so, and was paler than usual. The third person was a big, smart-looking police-inspector. The baronet came forward and shook hands sadly with the boys.

"I'm sorry to drag you over here like this, my lads," he said, "but there's no help for it, and we must give the police all the assistance we can. I'd almost sooner lose the plate altogether, heirloom though it is, than have any of my guests worried like this after offering them hospitality."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Dereker, anxious to reassure him. "It's—it's a holiday for us; only we're awfully distressed about this loss of yours. Is there—have they caught the thieves?"

"You can rely on it they'll very soon be in custody, sir," said the inspector, as a man who states a fact and is quite sure of it.

"I hope so," said the Head.

"With the case in such able hands as it is now," added the inspector, "and after what we've heard, you can look on it as a certainty. I gave the thieves till to-night. But after this wire"—he held up a flimsy telegram—"I shouldn't be surprised to see them brought here in custody at any moment."

"You seem very confident," said the Head moodily.

"I am confident, sir. I'm an old hand, but I know my betters," said the inspector. "I'd be sorry to be the thief who stole your plate, Sir Harry, with Mr. Methuen after me, and knowing what he does know about the case already. He'll have the thief. The thing I'm worried about is your gold plate, which may have gone into the melting-pot by now."

"That would be a disaster," said the Head.

The boys glanced at each other at the mention of the gold plate, but the inspec-

tor's words fell on them like cold water. Each in his heart still hoped that the Woolly Lambe would get safely away. The gold was found.

"If I could get a word with Sir Harry apart," whispered Taffy to Dereker. "I believe he'd chuck the case and not prosecute, when he knows the plate's safe."

"If I'd had this telegram a bit earlier," said the inspector, "there wouldn't have been much need to send for these young gentlemen at all. But as they're here, I'll ask them a few questions."

"Answer everything the inspector asks you, boys," said the Head. "Tell him all you know."

Taffy, in an agony of doubt as to what questions were going to be put, faced the inspector.

"You were alone together in the dining-room," he said to the boys, "for some time before you joined Sir Harry at the shooting-range?"

The four nodded.

"Did Purvis, the butler, come in during that time?"

"No; nobody came at all till Sir Harry fetched us," said Taffy.

"You're sure?"

"Quite."

"One of you young gentlemen was hidden under a dish-cover in the room by the kitchen stairs, I think, before dinner?" said the inspector, looking at his notebook.

In spite of themselves, the boys grinned.

"Yes; it was I," observed Jellicoe.

"Did the butler come in during that time?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear him say anything to the other servants?"

"Yes. He said: 'Don't forget we lock up earlier to-night,'" replied Jellicoe, "to the second footman, who replied: 'Somebody's put the hall clock on nearly half an hour.' And the butler answered: 'No, they haven't; it's the right time.' That's all."

"Ah," said the inspector, jotting down some notes, "you're a very intelligent young man! I wish there were more like you! Where was Mr. Methuen about that time?"

"Mr.—who?" said Jellicoe, puzzled.

"He means Mr. Lambe," said Sir Harry.

"He'd gone to dinner, sir," said Jellicoe.

"Ah," said the inspector. "Well, Sir Harry, there's only one thing. I wish you'd

kept that anonymous letter you received instead of burning it!"

"The thing annoyed me so much at the time that I threw it into the fire," said Sir Harry. "I'm sorry now. But do you suppose that had any bearing on the case?"

"I don't know, sir; but it's very suspicious, coming just before the occurrence like that. If you'd got it, I'd soon trace it to the writer. I think I might manage to do it yet."

Dereker glanced meaningly at Taffy, and the quartet nodded to each other. It looked as if Kent-Williams was having a narrow shave of becoming more public than was good for him.

"I say," said Dereker, under his breath, to Taffy, "hadn't we better tell 'em we've got the stuff here?"

Taffy nodded. He had been hanging on as long as possible, hoping to learn something before he sprang his surprise to the company. But he could not make head or tail of the proceedings, and it seemed useless to keep their news back any longer. He was just going to speak when the inspector broke in:

"There's nothing for it now, gentlemen, but to wait as patiently as we can till the result of this telegram turns up. As I said, it may be—Hullo! There's a motor coming up the drive now!"

The hoot of a horn was heard outside as a rapid car buzzed up to the doors, so quickly that it was hidden by the porch, from where the inspector stood at the library window, before he could see much of it. Almost at once footsteps were heard on the stairs.

"I'm not a betting man," murmured the inspector; "but if I were, I'd lay long odds that's him, and that he's got 'em!"

The door was opened, and in walked Mr. Lambe himself. And with him was Purvis, Sir Harry's butler, with handcuffs on his wrists—a prisoner.

The boys were absolutely dumbfounded. That the butler should be the culprit, and the Remove master, of all people, should be the captor, astounded them.

Behind Mr. Lambe came a plain-clothes police officer with a second prisoner, also handcuffed. This man was a rough-looking customer, quite unlike the suave, bald-headed butler.

"Well done, sir!" cried the inspector. "I was just saying I knew you'd make a cert of it!"

"My dear sir," exclaimed Sir Harry, striding forward eagerly to greet Mr. Lambe, "this is really wonderful! My best congratulations!" His brow clouded over as he turned to the butler. "You scoundrel, Purvis! To think that you, whom I've trusted and treated well so long, should serve me like this!"

The butler maintained a glum silence, and did not open his lips. Mr. Lambe, though cool as ever and correctly eyeglassed, did not look at all pleased over his capture.

"Here are the thieves, inspector," he said. "The other man is Ike Raynes, whom you probably know of. He's Purvis' accomplice. But what is troubling me is the loss of the plate."

"You didn't overtake them with it, then, sir?" asked the inspector eagerly.

"No. They had hidden it in a certain spot which, with the clues I had, I was able to trace," said Mr. Lambe. "It is in the open fields not far from here. I left the two prisoners in the car in charge of Police-constable Gray here and went to the spot. I found the hiding-place, but the loot had already been removed."

"Removed?" cried the baronet.

"Yes, Sir Harry. I had hoped to restore to you your gold plate as well as the prisoners; but the hiding-place has been rifled, and they have got clean away with the stuff."

"What a pity!" exclaimed the Head.

"It is a pity, canon! It will be doubly difficult to discover where the gold plate has gone now. But I shall do it!"

"If it isn't already in the melting-pot!" put in the inspector in a melancholy voice.

Taffy stepped forward as Dereker nudged him violently in the ribs.

"It isn't melted, sir!" he said to Sir Harry.

"Eh—what! How d'you know?"

"Your gold plate is all right, sir. We've got it here!"

A thunderbolt could not have made more sensation. They all stared at Taffy as if they thought he had gone mad.

"If you'll excuse me and Dereker a minute," said Taffy, "we'll bring it."

The two chums promptly disappeared before anybody could reply, leaving even the inspector scratching his head in bewilderment. In a couple of minutes Taffy and Dereker were back, panting under the weight of the baize sacks. Then, lowering them to the floor, they cut the strings and

let a stream of solid gold plate rattle out on to the carpet.

"Good heavens!" said Sir Harry, and then words failed him.

Mr. Lambe put up his eyeglass in amazement, and the inspector nearly scratched all his hair off. The Head, in his surprise, blew his nose like a motor-horn.

"Where on earth did you find this?" said Mr. Lambe.

"In the secret hiding-place where the thieves left it, sir, under the old sluice-gate, beneath the little bridge in Fenn's Meadows."

"This beats cock-fighting!" said the Woolly Lambe. "How did you know it was there?"

"We saw the thieves put it there last night, sir, when we were waiting for the motor-car to be mended. We supposed they were poachers at first, and didn't take any more trouble about it. But, hearing Roydon Hall was burgled, we thought we might as well go and see, and we found the stuff," said Taffy. "We brought it in the car, and it isn't Sir Harry's chauffeur's fault that he was late; it's ours."

The Woolly Lambe broke into a peal of hearty laughter.

"Well done, lads!" he said. "You gave me a pretty fright, too! You see, Sir Harry, I'd traced this hiding-place by means

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of the clues I had, and it was a bit of a shock to find the gold gone. I knew you two young rips had been there as soon as I entered the room," he added, with a glance at Taffy's boots, to which a few grains of the river-bed sand still clung; "but I didn't guess you'd got the swag yourselves. I was just going to motor back and investigate, after getting rid of my prisoners."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sir Harry, shaking hands heartily with Mr. Lambe and the boys. "This is a record! I don't know how to thank you, gentlemen! Egad, if Codrington School were given a free hand, it seems to me there wouldn't be a criminal left in the country!"

"What we did was only a slice of luck, sir," said the bewildered Taffy. "But it really was wonderful how the Wool—how Mr. Lambe managed to track the burglars down and find the hiding-place of the loot in a few hours."

"It was simple enough," said Mr. Lambe. "I knew the attempt was going to be made, and that it would probably be made directly we left the house last night. The butler's accomplice, Raynes, is well known to me. I left Canon Wyndham and the brougham soon after we started and kept watch."

"The burglary was very cleverly done, and I was thrown off the track of the real malefactors, who got away with the plunder. With the clues I had, however, I was able to run the men to earth near Fordhaven early this morning. They did not dare try to get the gold plate away across country while the hue-and-cry lasted, and I knew they had hidden it. To find the hiding-place was a little more difficult, but I had a couple of good clues. There is no need to give you all the small details of a criminal case. I managed to trace it to the old bridge, and the rest you know. Just make the prisoners show the soles of their feet, will you, constable?"

The plain-clothes man did so. The butler, who was, of course, no longer in his dress uniform, wore leather boots, with patent rubber heels. His accomplice had on ribbed tennis shoes.

"The capture was made only just in time," concluded the Woolly Lambe, "for Purvis would have got out of the country by steamer in another half-hour, leaving his partner to negotiate the gold plate at leisure. By the way," he added, turning to the boys, "what time was it when you

took away the stuff? About eleven o'clock, I think."

"Yes, sir, just a few minutes before," said Dereker. "I looked at my watch."

"And you saw me coming—eh?" said Mr. Lambe, smiling. "Don't deny it! You must have. Why did you scuttle out with the stuff in such a hurry?"

"We thought—" began Taffy, and then he checked himself.

The Woolly Lambe laughed heartily.

"Yes; you thought I was the thief!" he said, chuckling. "Don't deny it! You did!"

The boys blushed scarlet, and the remorseless Woolly Lambe enjoyed their embarrassment.

"You thought I was coming back for my own plunder—eh? Ha, ha!"

"Thought the finest detective in the South of England was a thief? What d'ye mean?"

"Detective?" echoed Taffy, in a dazed voice.

"Yes; an' beggin' Canon Wyndham's pardon, it's a thousand pities Mr. Methuen ever took to schoolmastering," said the inspector, with a sigh.

"I wish I could understand half of what's being said!" returned Taffy, in bewilderment. "Who's Mr. Methuen?"

"Have you ever heard of Slade Methuen, young sir?"

"I—I seem to know the name," said Taffy, "somehow."

"You don't know much if you haven't," said the inspector contemptuously. "But beg pardon, sir, perhaps I'm talking too much."

"Well, you'd better go on now," said Mr. Lambe, "for we've got too far to keep it to ourselves any longer. You can give the plain facts if you like, inspector."

## CHAPTER 23.

### A Cloud Lifts!

"WELL, gentlemen," continued the inspector, "Mr. Lambe, under the name of Mr. Slade Methuen, was for six years one of the cleverest crime investigators in England. There were few detectives to beat him that I've met!"

"Phew!" muttered Dereker. "I'm beginning to see a glimmering light!"

"Sometimes," said the inspector, "when

a case had fairly baffled Scotland Yard, one of our best men would go to Mr. Methuen—Mr. Lambe, that is—and he'd take the field all on his own, and solve the knottiest problem you please. I never knew him to—"

"Come, draw it mild, inspector!" said the Woolly Lambe impatiently. "That will do! They don't want to hear you pouring melted butter over me. The plain facts are all that are wanted to save me the trouble!"

"Well, sirs, Mr. Lambe only did this for a hobby, so to speak, and spent most of his time in study, and a good deal in athletics. He's an old Oxford Blue, which I dare say you know."

"All right, inspector; thank you!" said Mr. Lambe, breaking in. "That's enough to set things straight."

"I won't say any more, sir. I'm afraid we've given you a lot of trouble, even at Codrington. We were always coming to you for help, for it means a lot, especially to a country policeman, to handle a good case successfully. Why, I remember, gentlemen," added the inspector, laughing, "the very first day Mr. Methuen—Mr. Lambe, I mean—went to Codrington; me and an officer from Fordhaven were fairly chasing him after he left the train to get his advice over a coining case that was beating us; but he hid somewhere down by the river, and dodged us till we went by, and fairly gave us the slip. He'd decided to cut himself adrift from detective work, and have nothing more to do with it, d'ye see?"

"By gum! That day when you hid under the bush, sir!" blurted out Dereker.

And Mr. Lambe roared with laughter, the Head joining in.

"Well, this isn't exactly a time for mirth," said the Woolly Lambe, "as we've got these prisoners here. Inspector, I think the sooner you take them to the cells the better."

"And I'll come to the police-court in the afternoon, then," said Sir Harry. "Thank you, inspector!"

The prisoners, who had remained sullenly where they were placed and said no word, were removed, and soon were spinning towards Fordhaven in the motor-car with the two police-officers.

"You enterprising youngsters seem rather astonished," said the Woolly Lambe.

"Astonished isn't the word, sir," replied

Taffy. "We—we always knew you were a brick, if we may say so. But a detective as well—did anybody know it?"

"I only learned it this morning," said Sir Harry; "and I'm all the prouder of my guest, you may depend."

The boys glanced at the Head.

"Yes," said Canon Wyndham, with a slight smile; "I knew it from the first."

"Do you mind me having a short talk with these youngsters alone, canon?" asked the Woolly Lambe. "Just to make things straight for the sake of the school?"

"By all means," said the Head.

"You don't object, Sir Harry?"

"Take 'em into the next room, my dear fellow," said the baronet genially. "How could I object?"

The Woolly Lambe told the boys to follow him, and as soon as they were by themselves he began.

"Sit down," he said, "I want to give you a few words of explanation, and to ask you to give me a promise. You're very straight, loyal youngsters, all four of you, and what I'm going to say is for the good of Codrington. I want you to understand just what has happened."

The boys were all attention.

"You've heard enough to put you on the right track," said the Woolly Lambe, smiling. "You saw me on the first day hiding from the police. So I was, because they're such confounded nuisances. The inspector told you the reason."

The Woolly Lambe's eyes twinkled behind his eyeglass.

"Then there was the worthy gentleman who climbed the ivy to my study. He was a plain-clothes officer, and took that method to get at me and pester me for advice. I had forbidden the police to call at the school for me."

"There was also the School House burglar. I heard him breaking in, and secreted myself in the room where the coins were, knowing he would go there. I caught him in the act, and he seemed to suspect me of having been there for the same purpose as himself." Mr. Lambe smiled. "Then there was Wynne's own exploit as a policeman. Taffy groaned. "I'm afraid I nearly shook the life out of you over that, Wynne. I really thought at first you were a policeman who had come to badger me about some case or other. Never mind: it is forgotten."

## CHAPTER 24.

## Sent to Coventry!

"I GAVE my London work up, lads, because my wish has always been to have the mastership of a Form in a big Public school, and my wish has been fulfilled at Codrington. I don't mean to clear out unless I'm wanted to."

"Nobody'll want you to, sir!" chorused Taffy Wynne & Co, enthusiastically.

The Woolly Lambe coloured slightly with pleasure.

"I have to be rather rough on the Remove sometimes, you know. But what I want to say to you is this—I've given you a full explanation because you've been so mixed up with the affair that it's due to you; but I want your promise to say nothing about this in the school."

"You've the right to order us to, if you like, sir," said Taffy; "and, for my part, I'd do any mortal thing you asked me. You've my promise."

"And ours, sir," chorused the others.

Mr. Lambe shook hands with them.

"Till I give you leave to speak, then," he said. "Come along!"

They followed him back to the library.

"The Woolly Lambe for ever!" murmured Birne behind his back. "But it's rough on us, this promise."

"Not it!" said Dereker. "I foresee it's goin' to lead to the giddiest jape of the whole term."

"It's a fact!" cried Kent-Williams, hurrying into the dormitory at three in the afternoon, with a look of concern on his face. "You've told me to find out, an' I've done it. The Woolly Lambe ain't arrested at all. He's caught the thief, an' Sir Harry's plate's been found. They're making a giddy hero of him!"

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Ferguson. He and Kempe were the only other occupants of the dormitory.

"Dead sure! He turned up at Roydon with the thief, an' was complimented by the police, an' Sir Harry fell on his neck an' wept with gratitude."

Kempe uttered an exclamation of dismay. As for Ferguson, his very veins swelled up with wrath; he could not speak, and went purple in the face.

"And those beasts—Wynne and his pals—

were right in the thick of it again!" groaned Kent-Williams.

"Let's go and see what's going on. All the idiots are flockin' into Number Twelve. I believe they've turned right round, and are backing up Lambe now."

The three conspirators went to the prep room, and their worst fears were realised. The Remove, stirred to its depths by this last exploit, were more inclined to cheer for the Woolly Lambe than to abuse him.

Taffy and his chums had been kept back from Roydon for some time, and, though they kept Mr. Lambe's secret as promised, they gave a full account of his turning up with the thieves in custody.

"By gum! He's a jolly good chap, after all—the Lambe!" cried Walsh enthusiastically. "You can say what you like, but a fellow who's up to a game like that ain't a bad sort for a master."

"Good old Lambe! I always said he was all right!" vociferated Johnson.

"Did Beckford's servants count the gold plate after it had been in your hands?" sneered Ferguson. "They'll be able to put the missin' articles down to the thieves."

Taffy turned and regarded him coolly.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" he said. "How d'you like the way things are turning out? I should think you feel like change for a threepenny-bit in ha'pence—eh?"

"Cheer up, Fergy! Don't look so down in the mouth!" said Birne. "I told you you were an ass long ago, but you didn't believe it. You see it now, don't you?"

"I see you sucking up to this precious gaol-bird who goes about giving his pals away!" said Ferguson viciously. "And I've seen that all along. You—"

"Dry up!" said several threatening voices. "You can chuck all that rot now. Lambe's a rippin' sort!"

"All right!" shouted Ferguson. "Keep your runaway gaol-bird, then. If you like havin' a stone-breakin' convict over you—why, do! There are three of us here who aren't so fond of company off the treadmill, and we mean to manage things our own way. Wait till the smash comes, and he's shown up, and then you'll see what the Remove's got to be proud of—our ex-master doin' ten years penal!"

There was silence for a moment or two, and Dereker, flushed with anger, jumped up on a form next the wall.

"Here, you chaps!" he cried. "Here's

something for you to look at! We've got three chaps here who are too good to associate with Lambe—fine, honest, straightforward chaps—Fergy, Kempe, and Kent-Williams!"

He pulled out of his pocket the anonymous letter that had been sent to Roydon, and flourished it before the eyes of the Remove.

Ferguson and his friends made a rush at Dereker, but the Taffy brigade kept them back. The Form were anxious to hear what was up.

"Look here, an' see what these beauties call fair play!" cried Dereker. "They made up this letter between 'em, and Kent printed it, and sent it to Sir Harry, so as to arrive when we were all at dinner."

He read out the anonymous message, warning Sir Harry Beckford that his guest was a thief, and containing the other accusations.

There was a moment's pause, and then came a howl of execration from the whole Remove.

"It's a lie! We never wrote it!" roared Ferguson.

"I'd nothing to do with it, and I'm willing to swear it!" cried Kent-Williams shrilly.

"I saw Kent-Williams with my own eyes handin' it in at the village post-office!" announced Dereker. "And Jelly saw them plottin' it in the afternoon. It's written on Codrington impot paper, and I say it's the work of the Ferguson crew!"

A grim silence fell on the room.

"Well, you fellows," said Dereker finally, "what do you say? If these three fine, straightforward chaps are too good to associate with Lambe, I think they're too good to associate with us."

"This ain't funny, Derry," said Johnson. "It's serious."

He jumped up on a form.

"The Remove is hot stuff, but it plays the game. I move that Ferguson, Kempe,

and Kent-Williams, who've disgraced the Form, be cut by everybody in it."

"Hear, hear!" shouted twenty voices.

"We've never had a low-down trick like this played before; and sneaks who write anonymous letters to a man's host aren't up to the Remove standard. I move the three rotters referred to be hereby sent to Coventry, and made to stay there!"

"Hear, hear! Carried unanimously!" shouted the Remove.

Ferguson, nearly frothing at the mouth with anger, strode up to the form and shook his fist in Johnson's face. He was breaking out into a furious tirade, when the rest of the Remove pressed round him dangerously.

"None of that!" they cried. "If any of you three cads as much as open your mouths, we'll give you a Form licking, and run you through the gauntlet, as well as cut you!"

"And you're lucky to escape it!" said Taffy contemptuously. "Get, while you've a whole skin!"

The aspect of the assemblage was so threatening that the Ferguson brigade, fairly scared, made for the door.

In spite of the promise that Mr. Lambe extracted from Taffy & Co., the truth about the Remove Form-master soon leaked out. There were too many people in the know for the secret to be kept successfully. In a couple of days, the whole of Codrington knew that Mr. Lambe was really Slade Methuen, the famous private detective, and then there was a sensation of the first class!

The Remove found that the Form-master was the hero of the school, and Ferguson & Co. took care to hide their diminished heads and to lie very low. Contrary to expectation, Mr. Lambe did not leave Codrington, but remained at the school under his adopted name. Needless to say, however, he had no more trouble, in class or out, with the Worst Form at Codrington.



# THE SECRET CITY!

**T**O us, accustomed to town councils that employ all the methods of up-to-date publicity to attract visitors, it is difficult to imagine a city that goes out of its way to keep strangers out and which uses every means of discouraging the few that do penetrate its walls from staying any length of time.

## Encircled by Mountains.

But Lhasa, the sacred city of Tibet, has so successfully shut itself from prying eyes that it is only since 1904, when an armed British mission entered the city, that western eyes have seen the place at close quarters.

Some of its isolation has broken down since then, but entirely against the wishes of the natives, who resent the fact that modern progress has found a means of overcoming the stupendous natural barrier which formerly made their country and capital impenetrable.

Even if the grim ranges of mountains that encircle Tibet are crossed, the city of Lhasa is still inaccessible. It lies in what might be called the bottom of a natural cup. The entrance to the city itself is through a gateway cut out of a solid ridge of wall. A searching scrutiny is made of all persons at this gate, and many a western adventurer, insufficiently disguised, has been detected and debarred from entering.

## The Reason for Secrecy.

What is all the secrecy about? Once inside the closely guarded limits of the city, there seems little by way of beauty or value to be so zealously hidden. There is no paving, no fine streets, no drainage. One's first impression is of filthy hovels, evil smells, and hordes of mangy dogs.

And then, looking up, one sees the sun's rays caught and reflected on the golden dome that covers a queer conglomeration of gilt and scarlet buildings that have a strange beauty of their own. It is the Potala, the palace of the Dalai Lama, whom the Buddhists throughout Tibet, India and China, acknowledge as their lord. Lhasa is to them what Mecca is

to the devout Mohammedan, a city for holy pilgrimage.

Fear that unbelieving foreigners might harm the Dalai Lama and wrest the city from the priests who rule it has largely been responsible for the policy of isolation. But for the thousands of pilgrims who come to pray in one of the many Buddhist temples, all hostile regulations are relaxed.

## A Daring Act.

Elaborate religious festivals are organised on their behalf. Thousands of monks (one monastery alone holds eight thousand) pass in slow procession through the streets made noisy with the whirling of prayer wheels and the discord of Tibetan music.

If it is a special occasion, then the priests will wear their hideous masks that transform them into devils, and from the top of the Potala a rope will be stretched to the ground. Down this a man will swoop, head first, on his chest. This act, which requires as much skill as nerve, is regarded by the Tibetans as one likely to appease their god.

For the people not connected with the temples or monasteries life is primitive and dull. They have, though, an occasional piece of supreme excitement. This is at the death of the Dalai Lama. To the Tibetans he does not die—his spirit passes into another male child. It may be any one of their children, and hopes run high whilst all the names of the male populace are written down and mixed into what we should call a lottery. From the number three names are drawn, and from these three the monks choose whom they consider to have received the reincarnated spirit of the Grand Lama.

With pomp the chosen one is carried to the Potala, though he may be only a newly-born baby. For the rest of his life he will be little more than a prisoner, his every move governed by elaborate ritual and etiquette. But from the mountain-girt palace of the Potala he can look down on the Forbidden City of the World, and know it as his kingdom.

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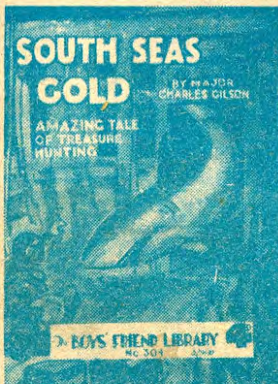


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