ROBERT GRAVES

MY NEW-BUG'S EXAM

WHEN LIGHTS WENT out at half-past nine in the evening of the second Friday in the Quarter, and the faint footfalls of the departing House-master were heard no more, the fun began.

The Head of Under Cubicles constituted himself examiner and executioner, and was ably assisted by a timekeeper, a question-recorder, and a staff of his disreputable friends. I was a timorous 'new-bug' then, and my pyjamas were damp with the perspiration of fear. Three of my fellows had been examined and sentenced before the inquisition was directed against me.

'It's Jones's turn now,' said a voice. 'He's the little hash-pro who hacked me in run-about today. We must set him some tight questions!'

'I say, Jones, what's the colour of the House-master -- I mean what's the name of the House-master of the House whose colours are black and white? One, two, three...'

'Mr Girdlestone,' my voice quavered in the darkness.

'He evidently knows the simpler colours. We'll muddle him. What are the colours of the Clubs to which Block Houses belong? One, two, three, four...'

I had been slaving at getting up these questions for days, and just managed to blurt the answer before being counted out.

'Two questions. No misses. We must buck up,' said someone.

'I say, Jones, how do you get to Farncombe from Weekites? One, two, three...'

I had issued directions only as far as Bridge before being counted out.

'Three questions. One miss. You're allowed three misses out of ten.'

'Where is Charterhouse Magazine? One, two, three, four...'

'Do you mean The Carthusian office?' I asked.

Everyone laughed.

'Four questions. Two misses. I say, Robinson, he's answered far too many. We'll set him a couple of stingers.'

Much whispering.

'What is the age of the horse that rolls Under Green? One, two, three..'

'Six!' I said, at a venture.

'Wrong; thirty-eight. Five questions. Three misses! Think yourself lucky you weren't asked its pedigree.'

'What are canoeing colours? One, two, thr...'

'There aren't any!'

'You'll get cocked-up for festivity; but you can count it. Six questions. Three misses. Jones?

'Yes!'

'What was the name of the girl to whom rumour stated that last year's football secretary was violently attached? One, two, three, four...'

'Daisy!' (It sounded a likely name.)

'Oh, really! Well, I happen to know last year's football secretary; and he'll simply kill you for spreading scandal. You're wrong anyhow. Seven questions. Four misses! You'll come to my "cube" at seven tomorrow morning. See? Good night!'

Here he waved his hair-brush over the candle, and a colossal shadow appeared on the ceiling.