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TOM MERRY'S WASHING DAY

LONG, COMPLETE
SCHOOL ADVENTURE
TALE.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



THE
STUDY
LAUNDRY!

(See page 13.)

NO. 18.

VOL. 1.

THE TWO
STUCK TO
THEIR WORK GAL-
LANTLY, AND WHILE
TOM MERRY SLAVED
AWAY AT THE
WASH-TUB, DARCY
PROCEEDED WITH
THE IRONING.

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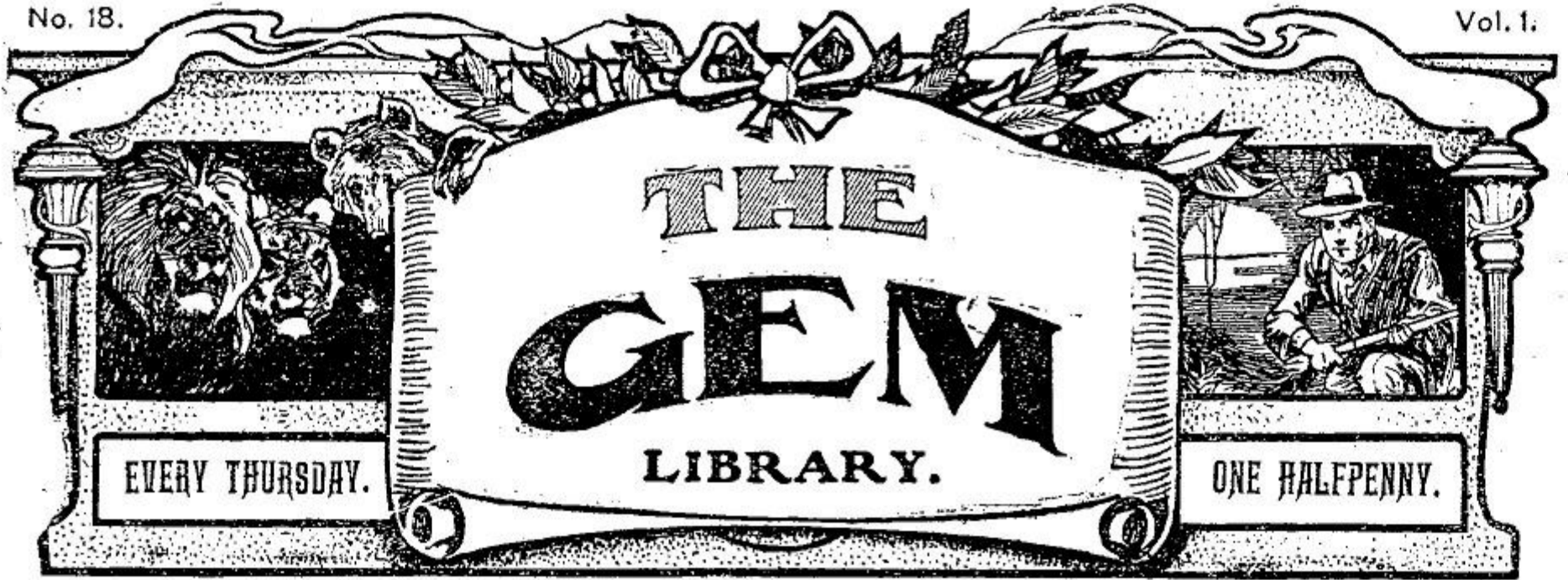
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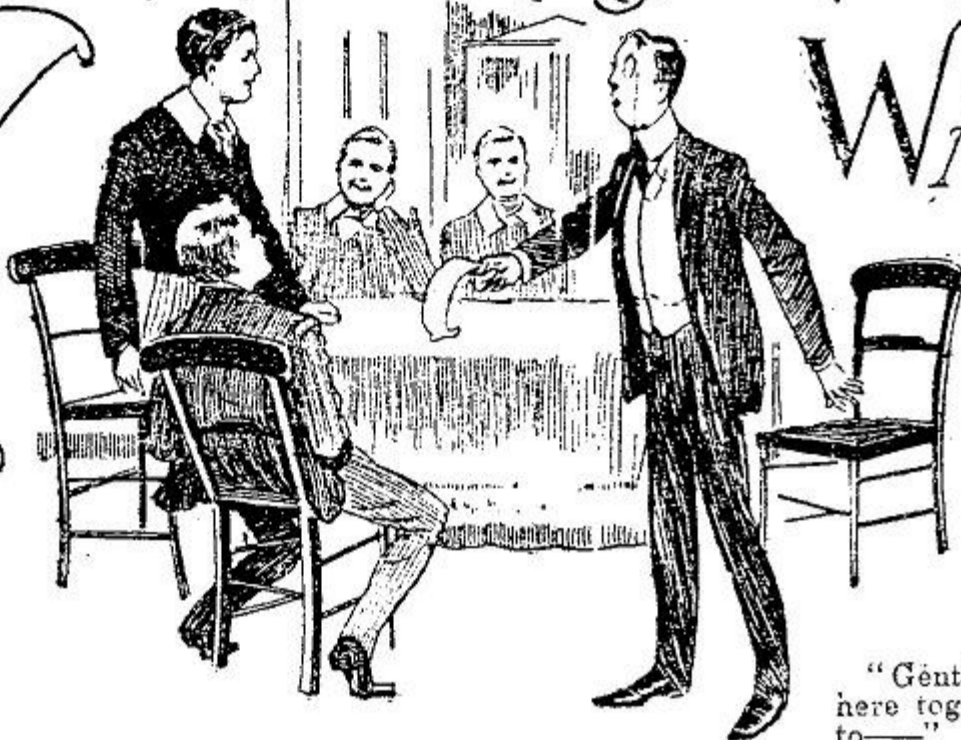


A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE,
AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

TOM MERRY'S

WASHING-DAY.

A Tale of St. Jim's,
BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

How the Strike Began.

TOM MERRY rapped on the table. "Silence for the chair!" said Manners. There was a buzz of voices in the study. Five juniors had met together in Tom Merry's quarters in the School House at St. Jim's. The juniors of the School House had a grievance, and they had met under the chairmanship of Tom Merry to give it an airing. The Terrible Two were very often engaged in deadly warfare with the chums of Study No. 6, but now, for once in a while, they made common cause together. At such a crisis, as Blake said, it was time for all true Britons to stand shoulder to shoulder. And so Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy had come along from Study No. 6 to Tom Merry's quarters to air their grievance and discuss a remedy. "I don't want to complain of Railton," said Blake, speaking of the new housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's. "He's a good sort, and I really want to back him up. But if he thinks we are going to put up with the grub we are getting here now, why he makes a very big mistake." "A jolly big mistake," said Herries. "A regular bloomer." "It isn't the gwub," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy plaintively; "it's the washing that I complain of principally. They simply wuin your shirts and collahs. You wemembah, Blake, how they wumped my dwess-shirt, and I—" "Oh, blow your dwess-shirt. The grub—" "My deah boy, the laundry—" Tom Merry rapped on the table again. "Shut up for the chair!" bawled Manners.

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, rising, "we have met here together, on this solemn and important occasion, to—to—" "To complain of the shocking state of the commissariat," said Blake. "The shocking state of the shirts and collahs when they come from the wash," said D'Arcy. "Look at this collah! It was actually bwrought to me in this dweful condition." And D'Arcy held up for the general inspection one of the high collars he wore upon state occasions, and which was perhaps not quite so smooth and spotless as it might have been. Tom Merry rapped on the table once more at the interruptions. "Gentlemen of the Shell and the Fourth Form," he said. "We have met in an indignation meeting, to discuss a remedy for our undoubted grievances." "Where does he get those words from?" murmured Herries. "Looked 'em up in the dictionary, I expect," said Blake, sotto voce. Tom Merry looked at the Fourth-Formers severely. "If you kids can't shut up while the chairman talks—" he began. "Who are you calling kids?" "You youngsters of the Fourth," said Tom Merry; who, being in the Shell, and a few months older than Blake, usually assumed grandfatherly airs towards the chief of Study No. 6. "I came here," said Blake, looking round, "with peaceful intentions. If the chairman of this giddy meeting gets a chick ear he will have only himself to thank." "Oh, don't quacrel," said D'Arcy; "this is a serious mattah! Look at this collah!" "Gentlemen," resumed Tom Merry, with another rap on the table, "the other day our old housemaster, Mr. Kidd, quitted these ancient walls to enter another sphere—"

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"Shut up, Blake! Then Mr. Railton became our housemaster, and, upon the whole," said Tom Merry generously, "we are satisfied with him."

"Hear, hear!"

"I was at another school with Railton before I came to St. Jun's," went on Tom, "and I always found him a good sort. He plays cricket like an angel—"

"Do angels play cricket?" asked Blake.

"Shut up, Blake! But as a housemaster, he can't be said to be a howling success. Perhaps he's inexperienced. Maybe he's shy. Anyway, he leaves too much in the hands of the house-dame. With the result that—"

"That the grub's insufficient," said Blake.

"That the cooking's rotten!" exclaimed Herries.

"That the washing is atrocious," murmured D'Arcy.

"Look at this collah—"

"Go on, chairman!" said Manners.

The chairman went on.

"The important question is, whether we are going to stand it," said Tom Merry. "My idea is, that we are not."

"Not!" echoed four voices cordially.

"We don't get enough to eat—"

"Not half!"

"The cooking is bad—"

"Rotten!"

"Even the laundry department has deteriorated—"

"Look at this collah—"

"And so something's got to be done."

"I should suggest something with boiling oil in it," said Blake, or else that Manners goes and plays his cornet under Mr. Railton's window. We must come down heavy, you know."

"You let my cornet alone!" said Manners hotly.

"My dear chap, I wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole."

Rap, rap!

"Dry up!" said Tom Merry. "Now, we're agreed that something's got to be done. The only question is, what?"

"What?" said Blake.

"If any of you have a sensible suggestion to make," said Tom Merry, with a severe look at Jack Blake, "this meeting would be glad to hear it. If you haven't, I've got one."

"Then, get it off your chest, my son," said Blake.

Tom Merry looked round.

"My idea is, that we should go on strike," he remarked, in a casual sort of way.

Even Blake gasped at that.

"What are we to strike?" he asked, as soon as he recovered himself. "And what are we to strike it with? And are we to hit it hard?"

"We'll go on strike," said Tom Merry unheedingly.

"They don't give us satisfactory grub. Well, we'll take to feeding ourselves, and cooking the tommy in our own studies."

Hurrah!"

"They don't wash our shirts and collars properly. We'll start a laundry department ourselves, and do it off our own bat."

"Bwavo!"

"If you want a thing well done," said Tom Merry, "you must always do it yourself. That's an old saying, and a jolly true one. We are going on the warpath. We're going to have more and better grub, or know the reason why. We're going to have our linen got up in the best style—"

"Bwavo! Look at this collah—"

"Are we agreed? If we are, we'll get on to the details."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Blake. "What-ho! It will be jolly fun, anyway. We're not going to be downtrodden. Why should we be left to the tender mercies of a giddy house-dame, while the chaps over in the New House are feeding on the fat of the land?"

"Yes, that's it!" exclaimed Herries excitedly. "Figgins & Co. have nicknamed the School House the workhouse."

"Yes, and Figgins offered to get up a subscription to buy us soup-tickets," said Manners. "I punched his nose, but that doesn't alter the case."

"It altered his nose," said Tom Merry. "But you're quite right; we have become the mock and the scoff of the New House, and something's got to be done. Hands up for adopting my suggestion."

Every hand went up.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Passed unanimously. Now about the details. The proper thing in a case like this is to appoint a certain party to be the head of each department. First comes the commissariat. I've had a lot of experience in buying grub."

"Right you are!" said Blake heartily. "Tom Merry for Minister of the Interior!"

"Ha, ha! Is it a go?"

"Yes, yes, You're head of the commissariat department.

If you don't look after our interiors properly we shall scrag you."

"Now, as to the cooking," said Tom. "Who's ambitious to shine as a chef?"

"I don't think many chefs could come up to me, for cooking eggs and sausages," said Blake modestly. "I don't mind going into the business as chef."

"Right-ho! Now for the washee-washee."

"D'Arcy, of course. He was born for it."

"Weally," murmured Arthur Augustus, "I think I could get up linen bettah than we have it now. Look at this collah—"

"That's settled; D'Arcy's the head of the laundry department. Herries can be his assistant, to help at the wash-tub."

"Thanks!" said Herries, with a bow.

"What price me?" demanded Manners. "Where do I come in?"

"You'll help me get the grub in," said Tom Merry. "It will want some doing, for the housemaster and the prefects are sure to get their backs up against it. Luckily, Railton is going away for a few days, and I hope we shall have things going on swimmingly by the time he comes back, and then he won't be able to interfere. After all, it will take a lot of work off his shoulders if we manage for ourselves. If we make a success of it, the rest of the juniors are pretty certain to come into the game, and then we'll let the seniors in, too, if they are civil about it."

"Hear, hear!"

"This study," said Tom, looking round, "is one of the roomiest of the junior studies, and I think we'll make it the headquarters. We'll all do our preparation in Study No. 6, and keep our books and things there, and we'll all feed here."

"Jolly good idea!" said Blake.

"We shall have to buy some things," went on Tom. "Let me see. We shall want a washtub—I think we can sneak that from downstairs—and some irons and things for getting up the linen. And a clothes-line. We can rig that up across the study here."

"Good idea!"

"We've got most of the cooking things we want. We'd better get a big saucepan, too. With five to feed at once, we shall have to do things on a bigger scale. Now, you kids had better bring your cooking utensils here, and—"

"Who are you calling kids?"

"Oh, don't row, now! I withdraw that word. There! Bring your pots and pans and things, and all your crockery-ware and cutlery, and we'll shift our books into your study. Hallo! That's the dinner bell."

"I'm glad it's all settled," said Blake. "It will be a good wheeze. We'd better go down to dinner now, though."

"Yes, we'll go down," said Tom Merry, with a sparkle in his eyes. "But we won't eat anything. We'll make out that the grub is so horrid we can't touch it. That will be a hint to Railton of what's to come."

"Good wheeze!" said Manners.

Blake looked doubtful.

"I say, it is a good wheeze," he agreed. "But we shall be jolly hungry."

Tom Merry smiled in a superior way.

"If you're going to bust up a good scheme, Blake, because of your unearthly appetite, you'd better say so, and have done with it," he exclaimed.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake, nettled. "I'll stick it out if you do, anyway."

"Come on, then. Mind, we're patient martyrs in this act, and we won't condescend to touch the horrid stuff."

And having agreed on that point, the five conspirators went down in a body to the dining-hall of the school-house.

CHAPTER 2.

A Case of Famine.

TOM MERRY and Manners dropped into their places at the table where the young gentlemen of the Shell were already gathered. Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy went on to the Fourth Form table. The dinner wasn't a bad one, as a matter of fact; but when Tom Merry had made up his mind, he could be firm.

Perhaps his determination wavered for a moment when he found a plate laden with boiled beef, carrots, and dumplings placed before him. He looked at Manners, and read an inquiry in the eye of his chum.

He shook his head.

Manners nodded acquiescence, though with a rather mournful look at the plate, and the two leaned back in the high-backed chairs.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, glanced at Tom Merry.

"You are not eating your dinner, Merry?"

"No, sir," said Tom, with an air of patient suffering.

"Why are you not eating it? Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why do you not eat your dinner?" snapped the master.

"I don't like it, sir."

"Indeed! If you are so fastidious you can go without. Manners, why are you not eating your dinner?"

"I don't like it, sir."

"Really! Then you also can go without. Perhaps you will be hungry by tea-time."

So Tom Merry and Manners ate nothing, while the rest of the form made a good dinner enough.

"I say, what's the wheeze?" asked Gore, in a whisper.

"Don't like the grub," said Tom Merry.

"Better than going without."

"Not at all. We're going on strike."

"Well, that may be a good idea," said Gore; "but you won't catch me going on strike and missing my dinner. Don't see where the fun comes in."

And later on Tom and Manners did not quite see where the fun came in. For by the time the rest of the Shell had eaten heartily, the chums were empty and yearning for boiled beef and dumplings, but there was none for them.

The chums of Study Six had fared even worse at the Fourth Form table.

For their martyr-like suffering and resignation had passed quite unnoticed.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, boarded in the School House, and he was at the table where Blake and his chums sat.

Mr. Lathom was a little man with extremely short sight. He wore an enormous pair of spectacles, which did not seem to improve matters much.

At all events, he could never see anybody or anything unless he stared at them very hard, and he was far from observing that Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were leaving their dinner uneaten.

Blake had expected inquiry, remonstrance, or even an order to eat his dinner, and he was prepared to act like a martyr going to the stake; but not a word was said.

When the boys rose from the table, three plates remained untouched, and even that fact escaped the notice of Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, it's too rotten!" said Blake, crossly, as they went out. "Hallo, Tom Merry, you're not looking very happy!"

"I'm not feeling very happy," said Tom. "I'm hungry."

"And I've got an aching void," said Manners pathetically.

"We're all hungwy," said D'Arcy plaintively. "I think that was a beastly wotten ideah of yours, Tom Mewwy."

"Rotten isn't the word for it," said Blake. "Nice sort of a giddy leader for a strike you are, Merry. Go and eat coke!"

"I could eat almost anything now," replied Tom. "Haven't you chaps got something in your study? We're right out."

"Not a morsel," said Blake. "We were going to lay in a new supply to-day. We can't get anything at the school shop now: it's closed till half-past four, by the new rotten regulations. Oh, I could eat Chicago tinned beef now, I could!"

They went out into the quadrangle.

"We shall have to find some grub somewhere," said Tom Merry, desperately. "This is horrible. It seemed a good wheeze enough before dinner, but now—"

"Now it doesn't seem half so good," groaned Manners. "We can't get anything to eat till half-past four, and that's over two hours and a half—I think I shall die!"

"Well, that wouldn't matter very much," said Tom sympathetically. "The question is, what am I going to do?"

"Hallo, School House cads!"

The cheerful voice of Figgins hailed them. Figgins, the chief of the New House Juniors, was accompanied by his inseparable chums, Kerr and Wynn, the famous trio known at St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.

"You're looking particularly bright just now," went on Figgins. "Thinking of your prospects in the Junior House match, I suppose."

"Oh, we're going to lick you," said Tom. "That doesn't bother us at all." He fixed his eyes on Fatty Wynn. "Manners, old man doesn't Wynn look tempting? It's lucky for him we're not in an open boat at sea. Figgy, old man, we've missed our dinner."

Fatty Wynn got behind Figgins. Tom was really looking alarmingly like a cannibal.

"Have you?" said Figgins, grinning. "I hear they're feeding you badly in the School House. Rotten old show,

isn't it? I'm always sorry for a chap who's put into the School House, though, as a matter of fact, we wouldn't have any of your freaks over on our side."

"Hardly," said Kerr, shaking his head.

"Not much," chimed in Fatty Wynn. "Still, it's too bad not to feed the brutes."

"Well, I'd rather have the School House, grub or no grub, than that rotten old casual ward of yours," said Tom, nodding towards the New House. "And as for the grub, well, we're not going to put up with it, I can tell you."

"We wouldn't," said Figgins. "Catch Ratcliff giving us bad grub. We wouldn't stand it."

"Well, we're not going to stand it. We're going on strike, and we're going to do the grub and laundry departments ourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha! How are you going to do it?"

"We're going to rig it all up in Study X. That will beat you New House Bounders. You wouldn't have the nerve. You can only say, 'Yes, sir,' and 'Please, sir,' and 'Oh, sir,' and 'No, sir,'" said Tom Merry scornfully. "Come on, Manners; I'm not proud, but I bar talking to these New House wasters."

And the Terrible Two marched off arm in arm.

Figgins grinned.

"Well, Tom Merry's always up to something," he remarked. "It seems to me that we ought to come on the scene somewhere in this wheeze. You remember how he stopped our chimney and spoiled our little feeds, kids?"

"Rather!" said Kerr.

"Ah, yes," said Fatty Wynn, with a sigh. "What a splendid feed that was! Do you remember how nicely the sausages were done?"

"Yes, they were ripping, and they were all spoiled."

"Yes, it was awful," said Fatty. "I've never got over it. I feel it now."

"Oh, hang it, you've had a good many feeds since then."

"That doesn't make any difference. I should have had them anyway. I feel as if I were one feed behind. If we were to whack in a spread every day it wouldn't alter that. We should still be one feed behind."

"Horrid!" agreed Figgins. "But if we can get the entree into Tom Merry's commissariat department, perhaps we can make it up."

And Figgins and Co. turned that idea over in their minds very seriously.

Meanwhile, five hungry juniors were going to and fro in the School House seeking what they might devour. Matters were getting serious. It was close upon time for afternoon lessons, and the wheeze more and more idiotic every moment.

"To think that we let ourselves be imposed upon like that," grunted Jack Blake. "We ought to have had enough of Tom Merry's wheezes to know 'em by this time. Where are we to get some grub?"

"There's young Walsh," suggested Herries, after some reflection. "He makes shocking bad toffee, and he's always got a lot on hand. That would be better than nothing."

"Let's go to his study and see if he's there."

The hungry three marched to Walsh's study. A smell of burning was proceeding from it, which became quite suffocating as Blake opened the door.

"Hallo, old Walsh," said Blake, in his most friendly tone. "How's things going, old dear?"

Walsh turned a reddened face up from the grate.

He had a big fire going, and a pan in his hand.

"Hallo," he gasped, "I'm making toffee. Something's going wrong with it."

"You're burning it."

"Yes, it always seems to burn, somehow."

"Never mind; give us some of it, and we'll sample it."

"There's some on the table," said Walsh. "Don't scoff any of that milk-chocolate; it's Mellish's, and he always makes a row if his things are boned. You can have as much of the toffee as you like."

And Walsh returned to his toffee-making.

Blake cocked his eye thoughtfully at the toffee on the table. He was fearfully hungry, but that black, burnt, sticky mass was a little too much even for a hungry junior.

"I think we'd better plump for the milk-chocolate," he remarked, in an undertone. "Mellish can put it down to the account of Tom Merry. I'll leave a little note to that effect."

There was pen and paper on the table, and Blake dashed off a note.

"Debit one packet milk chocolate, 6d., to account of Tom Merry."

He took the chocolate out of the wrapper, and slid the note in its place.

"Thanks awfully, Walsh," he remarked. "I don't think

we'll have any of that toffee. I'd give it to some rich old uncle if I were you, after he'd put your name in his will."

And Study No. 6 marched off, munching milk-chocolate.

Meanwhile Tom Merry and Manners were also on the hunt for provender. They did not meet with similar good fortune. When the bell rang for the Shell to enter their class-room, the Terrible Two marched in with the rest, in a state of famine.

"It's astonishing," murmured Tom, "how different a thing looks before and after dinner. Do you know, I could almost take a bite out of fat old Schneider."

Herr Schneider was taking the Shell in German at first lesson.

He looked suspiciously at Tom.

"You vas talking, Merry."

"Yes, sir," said Tom cheerfully.

"Himmel! Take feefy lines. I vill geep order in dis class, or know the reason vy. Manners, vy are you making tat face?"

"Was I making a face, sir?"

"Yes, you vas after."

"I didn't mean to, sir. I wasn't aware of it."

"You vill take feefy lines."

"Certainly, sir."

"Now, Merry, you vill construe." Tom Merry obediently rose, and took his book, and the lesson proceeded.

"I say, what's the matter with you chaps?" whispered French of the New House, to Manners. "You're looking as if you'd lost a bob and found a bad threepenny-bit."

"We haven't had any dinner," grunted Manners.

"Phew! Why not?"

"The grub's bad, and we're going on strike."

"My hat! I think I'd lay in a supply of tommy first," muttered French. "But I've some stickjaw here, and you can have it for old times' sake if you like."

"You're a good chap, French."

French passed a little packet to Manners. Manners extracted a lump of butterscotch, and passed the packet back. It was a good-sized lump he took, and it was so hard that it was hopeless to think of breaking it without a concussion that could have been heard all over the class-room, or of biting a piece off. There was nothing for it but to put the whole lump in his mouth, and Manners slipped it in at a moment when Herr Schneider's back was turned.

He began to suck it. He hoped to wear it away to a more negotiable size by the time he was called upon to construe. As it happened, he was two forms away from Tom Merry, and the construing usually proceeded in order. But Herr Schneider was suspicious of the Terrible Two that afternoon.

"Tat vill do, Merry," he said suddenly. "You vill go on from dere, Manners."

Manners started.

"Do you hear me, Manners?"

Manners rose obediently to his feet. The German master's eyes were upon him, and he dared not make any attempt to get the butterscotch out of his mouth. He shifted it into the cheek turned away from the German, and looked wildly for his place.

"Te class is vaiting for you pefore, Manners."

"Yes, sir."

Manners's voice was rather muffled. His left cheek was bulging out with the butterscotch, and he had to keep it turned from the Herr. Only the certainty of choking himself if he swallowed the lump prevented him from bolting the butterscotch in bulk.

"Go on, ten!" exclaimed Herr Schneider, rapping with his pointer.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you lost your place?"

"I—I think so, sir."

"Speak more clearly. Don't mumble like tat."

"Yes, sir."

"Merry, tell him te place."

The Shell were doing the second act of Schiller's "Maid of Orleans." Tom gave his chum a sympathetic glance.

"Geschlagen! Feldherr, nennt das Wort nicht mehr," he said.

"Now, go on, Manners."

"Yes, sir. Ich darf es mir nicht denken, dass der Franke Des Engellanders Rucken heut gesehn."

"You do not speak plainly mit yourself, Manners."

"Don't I, sir?" said poor Manners.

"Nein, you stupid! Wat is te matter mit you?"

"It must be the German, sir. It's a bit thick, you know."

"Te Sherman!" exclaimed Herr Schneider, righteously indignant at this aspersion upon his lovely language.

"Manners, I tink you vant te cane mit yourself. Go on, and speak more clearly after."

"Yes, sir. Oh, Orleans! Orleans! Grab unsern Ruhms—"

"Tat prunciation is not goot. Come out here!"

"I can do very well here, sir, if you don't mind."

"Come out here!" roared Herr Schneider.

"Certainly, sir, if you wish."

And Manners came out before the class. It required skilful navigation to arrive where Herr Schneider was standing without turning his left cheek to the angry master. Arrived before the German, Manners stood with his head a little turned to one side.

"Manners, vy you stand like tat? I begin to tink tat you vas veak in te prains mit yourself after pefore. Look me in te face!"

Manners had no choice but to obey. Herr Schneider stared at him.

"Vat was te matter with your cheek, Manners?"

"Matter, sir? Nothing, sir!"

"It is swelled to a great size. Have you te toothache?"

"I suffer a lot from it, sir."

"Have you te toothache at tis moment?"

"No, sir," said Manners, driven to a plain statement; "not at this particular moment, sir."

"Den vy vas your cheek swelled mit itself after?"

Manners passed his hand over his cheek.

"It does seem swollen, sir, doesn't it?" he remarked.

"You have something in your cheek, Manners."

"Have I, sir?"

"Vat is it? Turn it out dis instant after! Vat is it?"

Manners made a desperate effort to bite the butterscotch in two, so that he could risk swallowing it. His teeth went right into it with the effort, but unfortunately they would not come out again.

"Do you hear me, Manners? Haf you something in your mouth?"

"Mum-g-r-r-r-r-mum-gr-mum!"

"Answer me, Manners! Vat have you in your mouth after?"

"Mum-mum-g-r-r-r-r-m-m-m-m!"

Herr Schneider seized his pointer, his fat face red with rage.

"Dis vas imbertynce!" he exclaimed. "I vill teach you to insult your master pefore te whole class after! Hold out your hand!"

Manners made a desperate effort to get his teeth out of the butterscotch, but it was in vain. They were held in the sticky substance as in a vice.

"Mum-mum-g-t-r-r-r-m-m-m!"

"Hold out your hand!"

Poor Manners held out his hand, and received a stinger from the pointer.

"Now, vill you apologise for your rudeness to your master, Manners, or shall I gif you te pointer on te oder hand?"

"Mum-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Hold out te oder hand!" roared Herr Schneider.

A second cut came down, harder than the first. Manners wriggled.

"Now, Manners, if you nod instantly say tat you vas sorry after, I vill detain you vun hour dis evening after."

"Mum-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Go pack to your seat!" shouted Herr Schneider. "You are detained mit yourself for vun hour after te class."

"If you please, sir—" began Tom Merry.

"Silence, Merry!"

"But—"

"Silence! You are a barty to tis imbertynce. You vill stay in mit Manners for vun hour, and write a hundred lines from te poem of Schiller. Not a vord more. Te lesson vill broceed. Gore, you vill construe."

It was impossible to explain. It was ten minutes before Manners finally succeeded in getting his teeth free of that awful butterscotch. Herr Schneider gave the Terrible Two a severe glance when the lesson ended, and intimated that at five o'clock he would be in the room again to see that his sentence was carried out. Then he left the class-room, master and pupils equally relieved to be done with one another for one more day.

The rest of the afternoon was anguish untold to Manners and Tom Merry. They were both healthy, growing boys, and had big appetites, and the loss of their dinner made them as hungry as hunters, or rather, as wolves. The prospect of an additional hour of waiting before they could get anything to eat was a knockdown blow.

But there was no help for it. Just before the Shell were finally dismissed Herr Schneider came in and spoke to Mr. Linton, the Form-master. The latter glanced at the Terrible Two.

"Merry and Manners will be detained for one hour," he said. "The rest, dismiss."

The Shell filed out, leaving the two hungry juniors alone

and joyful. Detained for an hour—while the school shop was open, and cake and cheese and tarts and apples could have been had, ad lib, if they had only been at liberty!

Herr Schneider meant to run no risks with his prisoners. Having set them their tasks, he sat at the high desk to do some of his own work. Two pens scratched dolefully away in the silent class-room. Through the half-open door Tom Merry and his companion in misfortune saw juniors pass and re-pass. And presently the faces of the chums of Study No. 6 came peeping round the corner, and Tom caught Blake's eye.

CHAPTER 3.

Herr Schneider Takes the Cake.

TOM MERRY fixed his eyes upon Blake with an expressive look. He saw that Study No. 6 had heard of his fix, and that Blake had come with his chums to see if he could do anything. Blake put his finger on his lips in sign of caution. Tom nodded to show that he understood the friendly intentions of the Fourth-Formers, and then scribbled on a fragment of paper, and folded it up, and jerked it across so that it fell close to the open door.

Herr Schneider looked up quickly from his desk.

"Vat was you doing, Merry?"

"I, sir? I'm doing my exercise, sir."

Herr Schneider looked at him suspiciously. He affected to drop his eyes to his papers again, but in reality he kept a watch out of one of them. Blake was looking at Tom Merry from the passage, and Tom gave a slight nod to show that it was safe to pick up the folded note. Blake put his hand in to take it, and hand and wrist were perfectly visible to Herr Schneider, slyly watching.

"Vat is tat?" roared Herr Schneider.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "The brute's seen us!"

He bolted along the corridor. Herries and D'Arcy rushed after him. Herr Schneider was at the door in a moment, but he was only in time to see a last boot disappearing round a corner.

He returned to his desk, grumbling to himself, and sat there more suspicious and watchful than ever.

"Crumbs! That was a narrow shave!" Blake gasped. "He nearly had us! What a watchful brute! Now let's see what Tom Merry's got to say."

He opened the little note.

"Get us some tommy, somehow."

That was the brief message written by the hero of the Shell.

"Poor old kid," said Blake. "It's too rotten! Fancy being detained for an hour when he's missed his dinner already! We'll get him some tommy, rather."

"But how are we to get it to him," said Herries, "when the Schneider-bird is watching like a giddy owl all the time?"

"We shall have to watch our opportunity, and sling it in to him when Schneider's head is turned," said Blake. "Come on!"

They went to the school shop. Blake was fortunately in funds. He looked reflectively at the assortment of good things there.

"We sha'n't have time to chuck him more than one thing," he remarked, "so we'd better let him have something substantial, and he can put it under his desk, and have a good feed on it, and give Manners some. A tart's no good, nor an apple. We'd better make it one of these cakes. They weigh about a pound, and they'll fill 'em enough so that they can wait for tea."

And the chums were soon outside the door of the Shell class-room again, Blake with a pound cake under his arm. They could not see Herr Schneider; but Blake, keeping back out of sight, looked inquiringly at Tom Merry and held up the cake.

Tom's eyes sparkled. To a fearfully hungry junior the sight of the cake was tempting. If he could only get hold of it, and put it on the shelf under his desk, all would be serene. He glanced cautiously at the German master. Herr Schneider seemed to be intent upon his reading, and did not look up. But, with the light glimmering on his spectacles, it was hard to tell whether Herr Schneider was watching him or not.

Blake's lips formed the word "catch." Tom Merry nodded. And at that moment Herr Schneider fixed his eyes upon Tom. He caught the nod, and knew that Tom was signalling to someone outside the doorway. He had caught them at last!

He was off his stool in a twinkling, and he darted to the door before Tom Merry knew that he noticed anything, and before he could make a signal to Blake.

Blake was in the act of slinging in the cake for Tom to catch.

It left his hands with a whizz just as the German master interposed.

Biff!

The cake, intended for Tom Merry, caught the German master fairly upon the nose, and he staggered.

"Ach! Mein Gott!"

The cake went with a crash to the floor.

"Ach! Mein Himmel!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

He could not help it.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "Who'd have thought that!"

The chums of Study No. 6 sprinted down the passage as if they were racing for a big prize. Herr Schneider sat down on the nearest form, and stared at the cake.

"Ach! Mein Himmel! Merry you vas know who trew tat cake at me."

"It wasn't—ha, ha—meant for you sir!"

"Ach! Der teufel!"

Herr Schneider tenderly rubbed his nose.

It was red and swollen. The cake had not given it a gentle tap, but a hard knock, and it had brought the water to the German's eyes.

There was a footstep in the passage.

Herr Schneider's eyes gleamed.

He guessed instantly that it was the delinquent returning to gloat over his crime.

Herr Schneider gripped his pointer, and stood just inside the door, ready to spring out upon the youngster as soon as he came near.

Tom and Manners exchanged glances.

They did not believe for a moment that it was Blake, or they would have called out to warn him at any risk.

"Ach!" shouted the German, rushing out as the footsteps came level with the door. "Ach! I have got you before after."

He rushed right into the individual who was coming up the passage, and sent him reeling against the opposite wall.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. "What on earth's the matter, Herr Schneider?"

He gave the fat German a shove on the chest that pushed him off, and sent him staggering back into the class-room.

Herr Schneider gave a gasp.

"Keeldare! Vas it you who trew tat cake after?"

"Cake! What are you talking about, Herr Schneider?"

"Somevun trew ein cake and hit me on te nose before."

Kildare grinned.

"Well, I'm not in the habit of throwing cakes at masters' noses," he remarked. "You will have to look further, Herr Schneider. And I should advise you to look before you leap, next time."

And the captain of St. Jim's strolled on along the passage.

Herr Schneider rubbed his nose, and picked up the cake.

He gave Tom Merry a glare, which had no perceptible effect upon that youth. Tom was grinning; he could not help that.

"Merry, Manners, I go now, but you two vill stay here till te time is ofer."

And Herr Schneider hurried away to his room, to bestow some care upon his swollen nose, and Tom and Manners broke into a chuckle.

"Fancy Blake getting a bullseye like that," grinned Tom. "And fancy his going for poor old Kildare. Ha, ha! I say, Manners, old man, are we going to wait here and famish?"

"Not much," said Manners emphatically. "Herr Schneider's taken our cake away to his room, and I expect he means to wolf it. We've got to get a feed somehow."

"Then come on."

The Terrible Two left the class-room. They made a bee-line for Study No. 6, where they found Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy. Blake was lying on his back on the table, giggling for all he was worth. He sat up and looked at Tom Merry.

"Hallo! So you're out? Schneider gone away to nurse his nose?"

"Yes. Got any grub?"

"Here you are. Ham and hard-boiled eggs, bread and butter, tea and biscuits."

Tom Merry and Manners lost no time.

They wired into the provisions so thoughtfully prepared

ANSWERS

for them by Blake, like two famished wolves, and the provender disappeared at an astonishing rate.

"That's better," said Tom Merry, after an interval of a quarter-of-an-hour, during which there had been no sound but the sound of active jaws, the chums of Study No. 6 standing round in admiring silence; "that's better. Now I feel a bit more fit. I say, Manners, what an afternoon we've had!"

"We have," said Manners, "and if your giddy wheezes are all going to work out like that, Tom Merry, you won't be the only fellow to go on strike. I shall do some striking myself with a golf-club!"

CHAPTER 4.

What Happened to the Provisions.

TOM MERRY'S first move could hardly be called a startling success, but the juniors were not down-hearted. The plan which had been so carefully laid was pursued with keen enthusiasm.

The question of finances was the first and most important one to be settled. Quite a sum of money was required for laying in the stock of provisions which would be needed before the striking juniors could consider themselves independent of the house supplies. Ways and means were discussed in Tom Merry's study.

"I'm broke," said Manners; "but I'm going to sell my white mice and rabbits, and all I can get will go into the fund."

"I've written to my old governess," said Tom. "I told her I wanted a fiver for a most important occasion, and I had it by the post this morning. There it is."

"Good," said Blake. "I've got fifteen bob, and here you are."

"I think I can swing a tannah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking a crisp note from a pocket in his brilliant waistcoat. "Yaas, wathah! Here it is, dear boy."

The tenner joined the fiver and the fifteen shillings.

Herries searched through his pockets and added ninepence.

It was all he could do, and that, of course, was all that could be expected of anybody.

"There's fifteen pounds fifteen shillings and ninepence," said Tom Merry, "and I daresay Manners will be able to put up ten or twelve bob. We don't want to blow all this at once. I think the tenner will see us through at the start, and we'll reserve the rest in a cash box. I'm going to keep accounts, and put down every tanner spent. That's the only satisfactory way."

"Righto!" said Blake.

"First," said Tom, "we'll get as much grub as we can from the school shop. It won't do to get the lot there, or it will raise suspicion."

"We can go separately and each buy a little lot," said Blake, "and get the lots up to the study and pool 'em. Then we can make an expedition to Rylcombe and lay in the rest. We want a lot of things we can't get at the school shop."

"That's the idea. We'll carry out the first part of the programme now, and the second part after tea. There's a lot of things beside grub to be bought. Soap and soda and baking powder and things," said Tom, rather vaguely.

Blake's suggestion was acted upon. The school shop, which was only open at certain hours, supplied most of the things which the boys required to supplement the usual bill of fare. Tom Merry was the first to go there.

Figgins & Co. were there, sitting on a box and eating tarts and drinking ginger-beer.

They opened their eyes when Tom Merry asked the dame in charge of the goodies to change a ten-pound note.

"Hallo," said Figgins, "have you come into a fortune, Merry? Are you going to blow all your giddy wealth at one fell swoop? You had better stand us ginger-pop all round as you're in such funds."

"Jolly good idea," said Kerr. "Who says ginger-pop?"

"I do," exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "Ginger-pop."

"Come on, kiddies," exclaimed Figgins, "it's Tom Merry's treat, and he says ginger-pop for all comers. Walk up, gents!"

The gents were not long in walking up.

"Here, I say," began Tom, in protest.

His voice was drowned by Figgins, who was bawling at Dame Taggles, who was rather deaf.

"Do you hear, Dame? Tom Merry is treating us all to ginger-pop and cake, so trot out your best, and don't be all night about it. Buck up!"

"Very well, Master Figgins," said Dame Taggles, delighted with such an order.

"Here, I say," exclaimed Tom.

Figgins slapped him heartily on the back.

"Tom Merry, you're rather cocky for your size, and you are a School House waster," he said; "but you're a decent chap. Nobody can say that you don't stand treat in a liberal way when you're in funds. Set 'em up!"

"Look here—"

"That's all right. I know you don't like thanks, but I'm not going to be prevented from saying that you're a jolly generous fellow. Isn't he, chaps?"

"Rather!" shouted the chaps, crowding up to raid the ginger-pop and the cake. "He's a jolly good fellow!"

"I'm not going—"

"Of course you're not. You're not going till you've paid," said Figgins. "I say, you won't leave us to drink alone. Here's some for you. Put it down."

"I tell you—"

"Exactly. He says you can come again, chaps, if you're thirsty. Nothing mean about Tom Merry. Same again, Dame Taggles."

"Yes, Master Figgins."

"Look here," shouted Tom Merry, "I'm not standing treat. This is a joke of Figgins's, you chaps. I'm not—"

A general howl of condemnation went up.

"Oh, Merry!"

"What a fib!"

"Don't be mean!"

"Don't be a cad, old chap!"

"Oh, you giddy Shylock!"

"Oh, Merry! How can you?"

"Fancy a chap crawling out of it like that, after offering to stand treat!"

Figgins looked more shocked than anybody else. He set down his glass with a sigh.

"Merry," he said severely, "I'm surprised at you. You're rolling in wealth, and you offer to stand treat, and now you want to back out of it. Well, I suppose it's what we ought to expect of you School House cads—"

"I didn't—I don't—I wasn't—"

"I don't care a rap what you didn't, don't, or wasn't," said Figgins. "You're the champion mean man, and just fit for that rotten old School House. I'm ashamed of you!"

"Look here—"

"Sha'n't! Dame, Merry wants to back out now. Are you standing this treat, Dame Taggles?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Merry will have to pay!"

Tom Merry could not help grinning himself.

"Well, that's all right," he said. "I'll pay, but all the same—"

"That's better," said Figgins heartily. "I thought you wouldn't be mean. Give him a cheer, kids."

"But I never—"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The treat so generously provided by Tom Merry through Figgys's little joke was still proceeding, a good many of the juniors taking advantage of the offer to come again, and starting on second ginger-pops.

Tom resigned himself to his fate, and proceeded with his purchases. He packed them in the cricket-bag he had brought for the purpose, with the eyes of Figgins & Co. on him all the time.

"My hat!" said Kerr. "They're going to have a feed, and no mistake. I wonder whether there would be any chance of a raid, Figgy?"

"Don't you see?" said Figgins. "It's their idea of going on strike, and feeding themselves in the study. They're laying in provisions for that. I hear they're going to do their own washing, too. D'Arcy isn't satisfied with his shirts. See? The boulder's buying soap and soda and Nixey's blue! I'll bet he doesn't know what to do with 'em."

"Ha, ha! It would be a jape to get into their quarters and mix 'em up a bit."

Figgins looked thoughtful.

"I've got an idea, Kerr," he said, lowering his voice. "You remember the time you disguised yourself as old Lathom, and took everybody in?"

Kerr nodded. Kerr was a shining light of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, and he was the son of an actor of fame in London. In his study in the New House he had theatrical properties worth a small fortune, and he frequently amused admiring audiences of New House juniors with impersonations, especially of masters and seniors of the school.

His impersonation of Mr. Lathom had become history in the New House. In that guise he had been asked to take a cigar by another master, and he had passed through enough anguish to turn his hair grey.

"It wouldn't be possible to get into Merry's study in the usual way," said Figgins. "We did it once, in alliance

with Blake and his lot. That was different. Blake and Merry are as thick as thieves now over their new wheeze, and both against us. But if you could rig up some disguise—

Fatty Wynn gave a sudden cackle. Figgins looked at him. "Hallo! What's gone wrong with your inside, Fatty?" asked Figgins. "Is it the ginger-pop?"

"No," said Fatty: "I was thinking. You remember how well Kerr did Herr Schneider the other evening in the study, and took in even Monteith. Schneider is always down on Tom Merry, so there would be nothing surprising in it if he walked into Merry's study and looted the grub."

"Ha, ha, ha! Would you have the nerve, Kerr?" "Yes, rather!" said Kerr. "Then, we'll work that little wheeze," said Figgins. "Hallo, Merry! Not going?" "Yes," said Tom. "So long!"

And Tom left the shop with his bag. Ten minutes later Manners came in, and strolled up to the counter. He also made extensive purchases, and packed them in a cricket-bag and departed. He kept a suspicious eye upon Figgins, having evidently heard the story of the treat.

Five minutes after Manners had gone Jack Blake came in. Figgins & Co. exchanged glances as they saw him packing fresh purchases into a cricket bag. But Blake was not the last. After him came Herries and D'Arcy, and each of them made sufficient purchases to stand a siege.

"My only Aunt Matilda—Jane Jackson!" said Figgins emphatically. "They're on the warpath, and no mistake. They've got enough tommy there to feed an army. Tom Merry doesn't do things by halves."

And Figgins & Co. strolled away thoughtfully towards the New House.

Meanwhile, the five School House juniors had met again in Tom Merry's study. The provisions made a goodly heap on the table, and Manners said that it made him hungry to look at them.

"But that isn't enough," said Tom Merry, cocking his eye thoughtfully at the heap. "I'll scorch down to Rylcombe on my bike and order the rest. We must go into this thing thoroughly. Now we'll get on with our prep., I think."

The books and papers belonging to all the five were in Study No. 6. They left Tom Merry's room locking the door carefully after them. In Blake's quarters they found it rather a squeeze for five to do their preparation all at once, but they managed it.

Prep. over, Tom Merry found that he had time to cycle down to Rylcombe, and he went off at once; while Manners and the chums of Study No. 6 adjourned to the gym. Tom came in presently, flushed and rosy from his ride.

"It's all right," he said, as he met his chums. "I've fixed it all with Mother Murphy. The stuff is coming in to Taggles, and Taggles has agreed to pass it on without saying anything. So it will be all right."

"That's jolly good of Taggles," remarked Herries. Tom grinned.

"It has cost five bob out of the fund," he replied. "But it was worth it. Taggles is never good-natured for nothing. It will be here in the morning, and we shall find it in our study after morning school. Come on, Manners!"

The Terrible Two strolled into the School House and up to their study.

Tap, tap, tap!
"Hallo!" said Tom. "That's somebody knocking at our door."

The chums of the Shell hurried on.

Tap, tap, tap!
"Open that door before!"

The Terrible Two looked at each other in dismay. It was the voice of Herr Schneider! The round, fat form of the German master was standing outside the study door, and his knuckles were rapping sharply on the panels.

The passage was not very light, but it was quite light enough for Tom and Manners to distinguish the plump, short figure, the fat, red face and spectacles, and the light-grey clothes of the German master of St. Jim's.

"Ach! I-tat you, Merry?" It had crossed Tom's mind to retreat quietly, without letting the German discover that he was near, but Herr Schneider seemed to be unusually quick of hearing just then.

"Merry! Where was you going after? Come here! And you, too, Manners."

The Terrible Two obediently approached. They expected a wiggling, of course, for having left the class-room without permission, after the adventure of the cake and the German master's nose. Tom ran over in his mind all the excuses he could possibly think of, but he could not hit upon one that was likely to satisfy Herr Schneider.

"If you please, sir," he said meekly, "we—"

"If you please, sir," said Manners, "we—"

"Vat is all tat?"

"We were so hungry, sir."

"Vat you say?"

"We wanted to get some tommy, sir, or we'd have stayed with pleasure. We were so interested in the German exercises, sir."

"Vat? Ach! Mein himmel! Ja, ja!"

The German master stared at them in a peculiar way.

"We hadn't had any dinner, sir," said Tom.

"Ach!"

"I'm sure you'll excuse us for leaving the class-room without permission, sir, under the circumstances."

"Ach! So you vas leave te class-room mitout permission pefore?"

Tom Merry could have kicked himself. The German master was evidently ignorant of the fact that he and Manners had taken French leave, and here he had given himself entirely away.

"Yes, sir," he stammered; "that is—we—yes, sir."

"Nefer mind," said the German master. "If you vas bunished for tat, Merry, it vill not be py me. So far as I meinsel vas concerned, I not bunish you."

"Oh, thank you, sir! You are so good."

"It is not to bunish you tat I come here," said the German. "I come because I tink you haf te—vat you call grub—in your study, against te rules."

Tom made a wry face. The laying in of provisions for the strike had evidently leaked out, and reached the ears of the troublesome Herr from the Vaterland.

"But we are allowed to have grub in our studies, sir," he said meekly.

"Yes, but nod so mooch as for vun army," said Herr Schneider. "I vill see for meinsel vat you have, and shudge veder you geep it all dere. It is pad for your indigestion to have all tat pastry stuff and gorge mit yourselves after. Open tat door."

"Have you got the key, Manners?"

Manners searched through his pockets

"No, Tom."

Tom tried the door.

"I'm sorry, Herr Schneider. The door's locked, and Manners hasn't got the key."

"Ha, ha! Tat is to say, ach!" said the German master hastily. "Have you got te key yourself, Merry, mein poy?"

Herr Schneider was certainly very much on the alert just now. Tom felt in his pockets and produced the key. There was no help for it.

"Tat is petter," said the Herr. "Unlock te door, Merry, and light te gas. Don't turn it up high, because mein eyes tay are not strong."

"Very well, sir," said Tom resignedly.

They entered the study. The gas was lighted and turned half up. Herr Schneider looked round the room.

"Mein Gootness!" he exclaimed, as he saw the pile of provisions on the table. "Vat is all tat? Was you going to eat all tat, you pad, foolish poy?"

"If you please, sir, it's for Study No. 6 as well as us, and—"

Herr Schneider snorted.

"You vill keel yourselves mit te terrible indigestion. You vas trow away te briceless gift of health for te sake of gorging like te poa-constrictor."

"If you please, sir—"

"But I do not blease," said the Herr severely. "I could not leaf you all tat stuff here to make yourselves ill after, even if I desired to do so. It would not be gonsistent mit mein duty pefore. I must take it away mit me."

Tom Merry and Manners looked at each other in dismay.

"Oh, sir!" said Tom.

"Oh, Herr Schneider!" ejaculated Manners.

The German master was inexorable.

"Pack all tat in a pag, and I vill take it away mit meinsel," he said.

"We haven't a bag that will hold it all, sir."

"Ten pack it in zwei pags," said the Herr.

With doleful faces the two juniors obeyed. Two of the largest bags in the study were crammed full to the very brim, and even then some of the provisions were left upon the table. Herr Schneider began to cram these poor remnants into the pockets of his coat.

"Oh, the greedy hog!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Vat vas you say, Merry?"

"I said it would be a fine day to-morrow, sir, if it didn't rain yesterday—I mean it would be a fine day yesterday if it didn't rain to-morrow—no, I mean—"

"You vill take vun hundred lines for impertinence, Merry."

"Certainly, sir. Have you got anything else to give away?" asked Tom, who was rendered quite reckless by seeing his precious store thus ruthlessly confiscated.

The Herr frowned darkly.

"Merry, I tink I vas came you soon. You say tat Blake vas concerned in dis business of laying in so mooch food."

"Some of it belongs to Blake, I said," replied Tom.
"Den I shall have to speak mit Blake. Give me a pen and paper, and I will send him vun note, and you will take it."

The Herr scribbled a note, sealed it, and handed it to Tom Merry.

"Take tat to Blake immediately. You may go mit him, Manners. I will take dis pags to mein room for te present. Plake. Now go, you pad boys!"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom. "I shall commit Germanicide if I stay here."

And the dismayed two quitted the study, Tom with the note for Blake in his hand.

When they were gone, Herr Schneider acted in a way that was decidedly peculiar for a German master.

He sat down in a chair, and leaned back, and laughed till the tears ran down his red cheeks.

And, strange to say, the tears made paler lines in the red of his cheeks, and he laughed so heartily that his fluffy, flaxen moustache came off, and he had to pick it up from the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped the Herr, as he fixed the moustache on again in front of Tom Merry's looking-glass. "This beats everything! But the sooner I get out of the School House the better! Ho, ho, ho!"

And, having restored his face to its former appearance, the Herr lifted the two heavy bags, one in each hand, and stepped to the window.

He opened the window, and placed the bags on the sill, and then gave a whistle.

Two forms appeared below in the deep dusk of the quadrangle.

There was a faint whistle in reply.

"Is it all right?" came a cautious whisper from below.

"All serene, Figgy."

"Let's have the giddy loot, then."

"Catch!"

"Righto! Let her rip!"

The Herr dropped one of the bags, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn caught it between them. They set it on the ground, and then the other followed.

"That's the lot," said the Herr, speaking without a trace of foreign accent. "I'll be with you pretty soon, Figgy, but make sure of the loot."

"Righto, Kerr. This is great!"

And there was a chuckle from the gloom.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn disappeared into the darkness, each carrying one of the heavy bags. The German master stepped to the door of the study and passed out upon the stairs.

The next moment he started back in dismay.

A short, stout gentleman, with a red face, and spectacles, and a flaxen moustache, was coming upstairs, and they met fairly face to face.

And Herr Otto Friedrich Schneider stopped, and stared at his double as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

There were two Herr Schneiders, each an exact reproduction of the other.

"Mein Gott!"

CHAPTER 5.

Herr Schneider II.

TOM MERRY and Manners walked into Study No. 6 looking as if they had just come to a funeral. Their woebegone expression at once excited curiosity.

"What's the matter?" asked Blake, laying down his foil.

"Anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing happened to the grub?" asked Herries apprehensively.

"Weally, I hope the washing matewials are all wight," said D'Arcy, with a look of anxiety. "I weally haven't a collah fit to wear, deah boys."

"It's that unholy beast Schneider," groaned Tom. "He's come down on us like a wolf on the fold, and walked off all the tommy."

There was a general gasp of dismay.

"How did he know anything about it?" exclaimed Blake.

"Doesn't he always know everything we don't want him to know?"

"Yes, he does, the brute. But look here, we're not going to stand it. We're allowed to feed in our studies if we like, and that German isn't going to scoff up all our grub in this way," exclaimed Blake excitedly.

"Well, we're allowed to have tea in the studies," said Tom thoughtfully. "Nobody's ever thought of having dinner there before."

"There's no law against it."

"Come to think of it, there isn't."

"It's like his cheek to walk off the tommy. I protest.

Look here, suppose we go to the housemaster and lay a complaint."

"Can't be did. Railton went away this afternoon, and he won't be back for days."

"Oh, crumbs! I forgot that. There's the head, then."

"Well, something ought to be done," said Tom, turning it over in his mind. "By the way, the German's sent you a note, Blake. He knows you're in it. I let out that some of the grub was yours, thinking I'd account for having so much there, and he seized on that to drag you into it."

"Just like Schneider. Let's see what the horror has got to say, anyhow."

"I expect he wants you to go to his study, and be hauled over the coals."

"Or else an imposition," said Manners.

"Weally, this is too bad," said Arthur Augustus. "I have had a feelin' all along that something would happen to pwevent my gettin' a collah fit to wear."

Blake tore open the German master's note.

He glanced over it, and then his face was a study.

He stared at the note, and then he thumped himself on the forehead, and then he gave a terrific yell.

"Done!"

"What's that?" asked Tom Merry.

"Done!"

"Done? How—who—what—"

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Manners.

"Foiled, diddled, dished, and done!"

"What does Schneider say?"

"Schneider! Oh, Schneider says nothing!"

"Nothing?"

"Not a word."

"Then how—which—what—"

"Read the giddy letter."

Tom Merry took the letter and looked at it, and gave a roar.

"Dished!"

"Are you both off your silly rockers?" exclaimed Manners. "Give me a sight of the thing, do!"

"Read it," groaned Tom Merry. "Oh, fancy me being done like this, in my giddy old age."

Manners read the letter.

Then he began to execute a war-dance and snort with fury.

Herries seized the letter next, and D'Arcy read it over his shoulder.

And this is what they read:

"Kindest regards to Study No. 6, and we shall enjoy this grub first-rate in the New House. You School House bounders can go and eat coke.—Signed (for Figgins & Co.), Herr Schneider the Second."

Herries gave a yell, and threw the letter on the floor and jumped on it.

"Weally," said D'Arcy, "this is simply pweposterous!"

"Taken in," groaned Tom Merry. "It was Kerr all the time."

"And you didn't know him?"

"He was Schneider-bird to the life."

"Well," said Blake thoughtfully, "in my humble opinion, Tom Merry, you are a howling duffer."

"You can call me what you like. I could kick myself hard."

"But I say," exclaimed Manners, "he may not be gone yet. There may be time to catch him."

Blake started up.

"Not likely; but there's a chance. Come on. But I say, mind you don't make a mistake. You know how we collared the real Lathom that night after we had seen Kerr got up like him, and there was a row. Don't let us get hold of the real Schneider and go for him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, then."

The juniors dashed from the study.

"Mein Gott!"

It was a voice with a beautiful German accent in the corridor towards the stairs.

"Is that Kerr or Schneider?" exclaimed Blake.

"Blessed if I know," said Tom Merry. "He's got the voice, as well as the phiz and the togs. Let's go and see."

They went and saw.

The fat German was standing on the stairs with an expression of idiotic bewilderment on his plump, red face.

"It vas te same," he was saying to himself aloud. "It vas meinself as in te glass, yet dere is no glass. I have trunken vun glass of te lager, vich is not enough to make me see te tings tat not be. Yet I see him mit mein own eyes."

Tom exchanged a glance with Blake.

It was evident that this was the real Schneider, and that



"What on earth are you washing shirts for?" inquired Mr. Lathom. "To get 'em clean, sir!" answered Tom Merry. (See page 13.)

he had met the humbug on the stairs. Where was Kerr gone?

"What is the matter, Herr Schneider?" asked Tom Merry respectfully.

The German stared at him.

"I have seen a man tat might be mein twin broder," he said; "but a twin broder I not haf. He come down te stairs, and he run like vun ghost when I see him."

"That's queer, sir," said Tom. "Which way did he go?"

"He went pack along te bassage."

"Then that's the way we're going," murmured Tom Merry.

The juniors ran along the passage, leaving Herr Schneider still murmuring to himself in amazement.

"We'd better separate, and look into the studies," said Tom quickly. "He may have dodged into any of them. He's not to get away."

"Rather rot," said Blake, with a chuckle. "I never thought we should ever be grateful to the Schneider-bird, but now I could kiss him on his baby brow. He's stopped Kerr from getting out of the School-House."

"Yes," grinned Tom. "Kerr would have passed any other master as bold as brass, but he could hardly expect Herr Schneider to take him for the real article."

"Ha, ha! No. We'll have the bounder now."

The five juniors separated, and went along the passage, examining every study as they came to it. Tom Merry looked into Gore's study, and grinned. Gore was sitting at his table, looking very respectful, and the German master's double was looking over his exercise. Tom had opened the door quietly, and neither saw him for the moment.

"Tat is fery pad," said the voice of the sham German master. "Gore, I tink tat you are vun of te stupidest poys in te Shell."

Gore looked resentful.

"I didn't know a German master was supposed to examine an English exercise," he said.

"Don't be impertinent, Gore."

"I wasn't sir; but—"

"Be silent mit yourself after. I must go trough tat baper, ain't it, and see vat plunders you haf made mit yourself pefore."

Tom Merry grinned hugely.

Kerr, who certainly had a splendid nerve, had had to dodge into a study to escape from the real Herr Schneider.

The study happened to be occupied, and so, with calm effrontery, he had started examining Gore's work, as an excuse for staying in the room, and Gore had not the slightest suspicion of the real facts.

Tom stepped silently into the room and approached the sham German from behind.

"Tat is pad," said the Herr, "fery pad! Vat vas you staring at, Gore, after?"

Gore was staring in amazement at Tom Merry.

Herr Schneider the Second swung round quickly, just as Tom Merry seized him.

The next moment the Herr reposed on the floor, and Tom Merry was sitting astride of his padded chest.

"Got him!" shouted Tom. "Come on Manners, Blake! Come on, kids! Got him!"

Gore started to his feet, thinking that Tom Merry had suddenly taken leave of his senses, and greatly alarmed.

"What on earth are you doing, Merry? You'll get expelled for this!"

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped the humbug, struggling. "I vill cane you severely mit yourself after for tat pefore, Tom Merry, ain't it."

"It won't wash!" said Tom, with a chuckle. "It's very good, Kerr, old man, but it won't wash clothes! We've got you."

"Kerr!" ejaculated Gore, in amazement.

"Yes. This is a partner of the famous firm of Figgins & Co., and he's got himself into a hole this journey," grinned Tom Merry. "Here he is, chaps!"

Blake, Herries, and Manners burst into the study, followed at a more leisurely pace by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was never in a hurry.

"Got him?" said Blake. "Good! Now to unmask the villain!"

He jerked off Kerr's spectacles and wig and moustache. Except for the make-up on his face, Kerr was now revealed in his true self. He grinned feebly.

"You'd never have got me," he gasped, "if it hadn't been for that silly goat meeting me on the stairs. I thought he was away."

"Well, we have got you," said Tom Merry. "You're a prisoner of war. Where's the grub?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did he bring two big bags of tommy into this room, Gore?"

"No," said Gore. "I didn't see them."

"Where are they Kerr, you grinning image?"

"If you want to know particularly," drawled Kerr. "I slung them out of your study window to Figgins and Fatty, and they're safe in our study in the New House long ago."

"Holy smoke!" said Blake, in dismay. "Is the bouncer telling the truth?"

"Honest Injun!"

"Then we're done, after all!"

"Done brown!" grinned Kerr. "Done to a turn! And now you may as well let me go. It's time I got to the feed in Figgy's study."

"Not so fast," said Tom Merry, keeping the prisoner pinned to the floor. "We haven't got the grub, but we've got you."

"You can't eat me. I suppose?" Kerr remarked.

"No; but we can hold you to ransom."

"Eh?"

Tom looked at his chums.

"That's the idea, chaps. Figgins has got our grub, and we've got his partner. We'll send a white flag to the New House, and offer an exchange."

"Hurrah!" shouted Manners. "That's the wheeze!"

"Bravo! Tom Merry, you do have some ideas that are not wholly and absolutely rotten!" said Blake, with candour.

"Thank you, Blake!"

"Figgins won't give up the grub!" exclaimed Kerr excitedly.

"Then you'll have to make up your mind to live in the coal-locker in our study," said Tom Merry. "Get him along, chaps!"

They dragged Kerr to his feet. Between them the five juniors marched him off to Tom Merry's study, where he was sat upon a chair, and fastened securely to it with a length of cord.

"You won't get the grub back!" he said defiantly.

Tom Merry smiled.

"We'll see."

And he took pen and paper, and began to write to Figgins.

CHAPTER 6.

Held to Ransom.

FIGGINS and Fatty Wynn were looking from the study window in the New House rather anxiously. The captured provisions were safe in the study, and all was prepared for a gorgeous feast, but Kerr had not returned. Figgins had expected him back a few minutes after his own arrival, but he had not come. Now nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and he was still absent. Figgins and Wynn were getting uneasy.

"I hope they haven't tumbled to the wheeze," Figgins remarked, as he stared down into the dusky quadrangle. "I can't see any sign of Kerr."

"Well, we've got the grub all right, that's one comfort!" said Fatty Wynn, with a contented glance at the table.

Figgins sniffed.

"That's all you think about—the grub—Fatty. If they tumble to the wheeze, and get hold of Kerr, they'll scrag him!"

"Hallo! There's somebody coming from the School House!" said Fatty Wynn, catching sight of a dim form in the quadrangle.

Figgins looked out eagerly.

"That's not Kerr. It's not fat enough."

"He's coming here, anyway."

"Yes; he seems to be heading for this window. It's not Kerr. He's padded out to the size of the German master, and this chap is only a kid!"

"My hat! It's Tom Merry!"

Figgins looked very nervous. The coming of Tom Merry boded ill to Figgins & Co.; he felt that. Where was Kerr?

"Hallo, there!" said Tom Merry, stopping under the lighted window and looking up. "Is that you, Figgy? I can't make out your classic features."

"I'm here!" grinned Figgy. "What do you want?"

"I'm a flag of truce!"

"A what?"

"A flag of truce. I've brought a message from the School House."

"What about?"

"About the ransom of a prisoner of war."

"What the dickens are you driving at?"

"Here's the message."

Tom tossed an apple with a paper wrapped round it in at the open window. It fell with a clump on the study floor. Then the hero of the Shell disappeared into the shadows.

Figgins picked up the message, and unwrapped it and read it.

"From the general commanding the forces of the School House, to the funny wreck called Figgins, chief idiot in the menagerie known as the New House."

That was the courteous address of the communication.

"Hereby, herewith, and hereinafter be it stated that the spy of the enemy who came into our lines in disguise has been captured, and unless ransomed will be summarily dealt with."

"The ransom shall be two cricket-bags full of tommy, being the same that were raided from the School House by the disguised spy of the enemy beforeinafter referred to."

"Unless the ransom is paid within ten minutes of the receipt of this communication, the prisoner will be shot—into the coal-locker, and kept there till such time as the ransom shall be paid."

"(Signed, for the Forces of the School House),

"TOM MERRY."

Figgins gave a snort.

"Sold!" was all he said.

Woe unutterable had descended upon the visage of Fatty Wynn. He looked at the letter, he looked at the provisions on the table, and he looked at Figgins. Then he groaned dismally.

That gorgeous feast was destined to vanish from his sight like a beautiful dream, for he knew what Figgins would do.

Fatty might have hesitated between friendship and a feed, but there was no hesitation about Figgins. He tore the letter into four, and then began to pack up the provisions in the bags.

Fatty did not remonstrate, but he did not lend a hand. It broke his heart to see the feast going. He looked on with lack-lustre eyes, and gave a little groan every now and then. Save for that, the packing-up went on in silence.

It was finished, and Figgins took a bag in each hand and left the study. Straight across to the School House he went, up the stairs to Tom Merry's study, and there he stopped and kicked at the door. It was opened by Tom Merry.

DAILY MAIL

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom affably. "Read my little note."

Figgy grinned feebly.

"Here's the beastly ransom!" he said.

He looked round the study. Kerr, with most of his disguise gone, was sitting on a chair, tied to it, and looking far from happy. Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, and Manners were waiting there with Tom Merry for the ransom to arrive.

Figgins dumped down the bags on the floor. Tom Merry made him a bow.

"Thanks, Figgy!" he said. "It was a good wheeze, and it nearly came off. But you New House chaps aren't quite up to our weight, you know."

Figgins sniffed.

"Aren't we?" said Kerr wrathfully. "It was that silly old Deutchlander coming on the scene that stopped me, or you'd never have collared me."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Anyway, we captured you," he said; "and here's the ransom. Let him go, Blake."

Blake untied Kerr, and the prisoner rose and stretched himself.

Figgins cast a regretful glance at the bags.

"Well, it can't be helped," he said. "It was a good wheeze, but you can't expect to get there every time."

"Weally, that wouldn't be poss.," said D'Arcy. "But, I say, deah boys, while our fwiends the enemy are on the scene, suppose we all have suppah together?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry heartily. "You'll stay, chaps?"

Figgins hesitated just a moment. But there was never any malice in the heart of Figgins, and the next moment he nodded.

"Rather!" he said. "That's awfully decent of you. I say, would you mind if I gave Fatty Wynn a whistle? It nearly broke his heart to see the grub go."

"Ha, ha! Whistle him up, by all means."

Figgins opened the window, and whistled the well-known signal-whistle of Figgins & Co. Fatty Wynn was at the study window opposite, and he heard the signal from afar.

Tom Merry was bundling out a heap of the goodies on the table. There was ample in the supplies laid in by the strikers to afford a dozen feeds, and a new supply was to arrive on the morrow, so the juniors could well afford to entertain their defeated enemies.

There was a sound of puffing breath on the stairs, and Fatty Wynn came panting into the study.

"Hallo!" he said. "What did you whistle for, Figgy? Is it a row or a feed?"

"A feed, my son!" said Tom Merry, slapping Fatty on the back with a thump that knocked out what little wind he had left after that pelt across the quadrangle, and made him sit down on the nearest chair with a prolonged gasp. "A feast, old kid! I hope you've brought your best appetite with you."

"Ye-es!" sputtered Fatty. "Don't you hit so beastly hard. I'm awfully hungry. It's two hours since I had tea, and I only had a pork-pie and a pudding and a few tarts, and a couple of sausages, and some eggs, besides bread-and-butter! I'm as empty as a drum!"

"Ha, ha! Then now's yours chance to distinguish yourself."

And Fatty Wynn, to do him justice, did distinguish himself. The supplies were boundless, and Fatty's appetite nearly so. He travelled through pies, and puddings, and cakes, and tarts at an astonishing rate. But the hospitality of the strikers of the School House was as boundless as Fatty's appetite, and they pressed him to eat more and more, till even Fatty had to cry a halt.

"Another tart, Fatty?"

"N-no, thanks!" said Fatty reluctantly.

"Just a little cake?"

"N-no; I'd better not."

"I should think you'd better not," said Figgins. "I'm not going to roll you home across the quadrangle like a blessed barrel, Fatty Wynn! Chaps, you have done us down well, and we've enjoyed ourselves immensely. Haven't we, Fatty?"

"Ah-h-h-h!" said Fatty, casting up his eyes in ecstasy.

"Rather!" said Kerr. "It's been jolly. I think we'd better travel, though, or some rotten prefect will be coming to look for us with a cane!"

"We'll see you home," said Tom Merry, rising. "Come along, kids."

The friendly foes sallied out of the School House in a body. Figgins & Co. were escorted to the door of the New House by the five School House juniors in the most amicable way. At the door they parted with many expressions of goodwill, and Figgins & Co. looked out of their study window to wave a last farewell.

CHAPTER 7.

The Strike in Full Swing.

TOM MERRY was in a state of keen satisfaction. Everything was going on swimmingly. The consignment from Rylconabe had arrived, and the bribed and corrupted school porter, Taggles, had conveyed it safely to Tom's study.

That day was a Wednesday, which was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and so the strikers had plenty of time to carry out their plans. All books and papers and personal property, such as bats and nets and fishing-rods, having been bestowed in Study No. 6, Tom's airy and rather roomy study was left for use as a dining-room, laundry, and kitchen, and the strikers had accumulated a fearsome array of utensils.

There was a gigantic washing-tub, in which shirts and collars and underwear were soaked in a mixed mass, and on the table could be seen a pair of irons on a stand, with an ironing cloth, and on the mantelpiece was an imposing array of jars and packets containing soap, soda, starch, blue, and other materials for the laundry department.

Tom Merry had surveyed them rather doubtfully. D'Arcy, as head of that department, had made up the list, and insisted that not a single one of the articles could be left out; but Tom wondered whether the swell of the School House knew exactly how to use them, and in what proportions they ought to be mixed, if they ought to be mixed at all.

D'Arcy was quite satisfied with his abilities as a washer-woman, but when Tom pulled a collar out of the tub and found it as blue as the summer sky, he couldn't help having his doubts.

"How are you going to get this white again?" he asked, holding it up to the general inspection.

"Oh, that comes out in the ironing!" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't you be cwitical till the work is done, Tom Mewwy."

"I don't want to be cwitical," said Tom solemnly. "I have my faults, I know, but cwiticism is not one of them. I never was a cwitic. But if all that beautiful blue comes out in the ironing, I'll—I'll eat it."

"Well, it's your own collah, so you can eat it if you like," said Arthur Augustus. "Don't wowwy me when I'm busy, deah boy."

"Certainly not. But what are you shoving all that soda in the tub for?"

"Don't you know that you have to put sodah in the watah to make the things clean?" said Arthur Augustus, with a superior smile.

"Yes; but not a whole pound packet."

"I think that's about wight."

"And—my hat!—what's all that starch for?"

"That's to make the collahs stiff, of course."

Tom scratched his curly head thoughtfully.

"Well, I admit I don't know much about washing clothes," he said, "but I'd almost swear that the starch oughtn't to go in along with the rest at this stage."

D'Arcy sniffed.

"If you know more about washin' than I do, Tom Mewwy, you had bettah become head of this department!" he exclaimed.

"Not at all. As I said, I don't want to be cwitical," said Tom; "but I can't help thinking you've been a bit too previous with that starch."

"You'll see," said D'Arcy.

Tom crossed over to Blake, who, as cook, was in charge of the fireplace and the cooking utensils and provisions. Blake had an enormous fire going, and as the afternoon was warm, the heat of the study was enough to overcome any but Hottentots and schoolboys. A huge kettle occupied one hob, filled with water on the boil, for D'Arcy declared that he must have a constant supply of hot water. He said washer-women always had. On the other hob was a saucepan full of potatoes, from which a suspicious smell of burning was proceeding.

Blake was in his shirt-sleeves, with his collar sticking to his neck. His face was of a lovely carnation hue. He was negotiating a frying-pan full of sausages and bacon, and also looking after a pan of toffee and another of cakes.

"How are you getting on?" asked Tom.

"First-rate!" gasped Blake.

"They're going in to dinner downstairs. We're not going down, of course."

"No; dinner will soon be ready here."

Gore put in his head at the door.

"Hallo, you chaps! Ain't you coming down to dinner?"

"No," said Tom.

"Mr. Lathom told me to ask you."

"Tell Mr. Lathom, with our compliments, that we can't stand the grub, and we're going to dine in our own quarters with his kind permission."

Gore grinned.

"You're making a fine smother there."

"Oh, you get out!"

"Certainly. I don't know what the place is like where bad boys go, but I should think it was very like this study," said Gore; and he vanished.

"It is rather warm," said Blake, looking round. "But it's really all the nicer when you get accustomed to it."

"Ye-es," said Tom. "I'm getting peckish. How long do you think the dinner will be, Blake?"

"Well, the sausages are nearly done," said Blake; "the bacon will want some more time. I'm afraid the cakes haven't begun to cook yet, but we can leave them for tea."

"Of course we can. What about the toffee?"

"I think it's got a little burnt; we had better give that away, I think. The potatoes are all right."

Tom Merry looked into the saucepan.

"They niff as if they were getting burnt, Blake. Have you enough water in it?"

"Well, there was enough water to start with," said Blake, looking perplexed. "But somehow there doesn't seem to be enough now, though I've added a jugful. I'm not quite used to cooking potatoes, except baking them in their skins. Perhaps I shoved in rather too many for a start. But you have to learn these things, you know."

"Shall I dig 'em out for you?"

"Perhaps you'd better. The saucepan won't hold any more water, and the potatoes on top don't seem to be done. Perhaps those underneath are finished."

Tom Merry turned the potatoes out into a dish. There was a terrific burst of steam and smell, and half the saucepanful came out, the rest sticking inside. The potatoes seemed to have run into a solid lump. At the top they were underdone, but further down they were of a deep brown hue, deepening to a dead black at the bottom of the saucepan.

The smell that proceeded from the saucepan was something abominable, and, added to the steam from D'Arcy's wash-tub, and the scent of the cooking sausages and the burning toffee, it made the study one of the most odorous places imaginable. Blake looked at the potatoes in dismay.

"I say, you don't know how to turn potatoes out!" he exclaimed severely. "They oughtn't to look like that."

"It's the way you've cooked 'em," said Tom.

Blake snorted.

"Oh, don't try to shove it on me, just because you don't know how to turn potatoes out of a saucepan!" he exclaimed.

"A fat lot of good you are to help a chef, and no mistake. Never mind. The sausages will be all right, anyway. Oh, my only hat!"

There was a fearful buzz and splutter from the fire. In turning to look at those unfortunate potatoes, Blake had unconsciously tilted the frying-pan a little, and now the grease had boiled over the edge into the glowing coals. Blake snatched at the pan in a hurry, and, of course, sent a fresh splash of grease over the side.

The sizzle and sputter was simply terrific. Blake jerked the pan off the fire and lowered it into the grate.

"I—I think they'll do now," he gasped.

"Yes, yes," said Tom; "for goodness' sake let that awful fire go down! We shall be roasted alive. Knock off now, D'Arcy; dinner-time."

D'Arcy drew his bare arms with relief from the washtub. He wiped away the soapsuds, and let his sleeves down.

"I am glad of a rest," he said. "It's beastly awfully hard work, you know. I think Tom Mewwy had better finish that little lot after dinnah, while I get on with the ironing."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "I'm willing. Come and grub now."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I must hang some of the things out to dry first, and they'll dry while we're dinin'," he said. "Don't be gwoedy. Lend me a hand."

The juniors all lent a hand. A clothes-line had been rigged up across the study, and upon this the washing was now hung out to dry. Herries was manfully wringing out the articles one by one, and Manners, Tom Merry, and Blake pegged them out on the line. D'Arcy stood by directing them. The chief of the laundry department had laid in a gross of pegs, so they were not lacking, but space for the drying was a little circumscribed.

"That's enough," said Arthur Augustus, at last. "The west will want a little more soakin'. It's imposs. to hang them all out at once, deah boys. The heat of the woom will soon dry these, and aftah dinnah we will wing out the west and hang them up also. I think we shall turn out somethin' weally nobby, don't you know?"

Tom Merry looked thoughtfully at the clothes hanging out to dry. The heat of the room would certainly dry them quickly enough, but the blacks that were sailing about thickly were not likely to improve their colour. And, as

he looked at the shirts and collars which were nanging up with the pants and vests and socks. Tom could not help thinking that D'Arcy had been too liberal with the blue, and that the starch had gone in at too early a stage in the proceedings.

However, Tom Merry was not one to find fault, and D'Arcy had done his best. They sat down to dinner. A meal earned by the sweat of the brow is said to be the most satisfactory kind of a meal, and certainly the five juniors had worked hard since morning school.

And as the dinner was an hour late they were hungry enough for it. But even Blake had to confess that it was not exactly a success. The sausages were nearly done, it is true; so nearly that it was practically the same thing, Blake declared, and no one liked to dissent. But the bacon certainly wasn't finished. Blake said that underdone bacon was good for the digestion, a statement which passed uncontradicted, but there were incredulous glances exchanged among the diners.

Tom had intended to flank that meal with tinned beef and devilled ham, and he had taken the tins on trust from the dealer in Rylcombe as prime English meat; but on looking them over he discovered the horrid word "Chicago" on the labels, and so the tins were consigned to the nearest dust-bin, unopened.

The juniors eked out the dinner with cakes and biscuits and apples and oranges, and, after all, they were pretty well satisfied. Blake said it wasn't bad for a start. When he got his hand in, as it were, things would go better, and he would turn out nicer feeds.

D'Arcy said that he thought it was "quite pwob." Blake stared at him.

"You think it's what?"

"I think it's vewy pwob, deah boy."

"If that's Dutch," said Blake, "construe, ass! What do you mean by pwob?"

"Oh, that's short for pwobable," said Arthur Augustus airily.

"Pwobable! Oh, probable! D'Arcy, are you on the look-out for thick ears? My son, you are going the right way to get a large assortment of them. But I suppose you can't help being a how duff."

"A w—w—what?"

"A how duff," said Blake.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, that's short for a howling duffer," said Blake.

"Oh, weally, Blake, you are quite wude," said Arthur Augustus. "Yaas, wathiah!"

Tom Merry rose from the table.

"Chaps, we've had a jolly good feed, in spite of the cooking—I mean because of the cooking," he corrected hastily. "Now is the time to work. Buckle to!"

The juniors buckled to.

Herries was set to taking in the clothes that were already dry, while Tom Merry went to the washtub.

D'Arcy put the irons on the fire to heat them.

The fire had gone down a great deal, and there wasn't much left to heat the irons with, but D'Arcy said there was no hurry.

He sat in the only arm-chair, and stretched out his legs, and looked at the latest number of "Pluck" while the irons were getting hot.

"I say, lazybones," exclaimed Tom Merry, looking up with a perspiring brow from the washtub, "do you call that work?"

"My deah boy, I am waiting for the irons to get hot."

"How long do you think it will take?"

"Not more than another hour, I hope."

"And you're going to sit there all the time?"

"Well, I can't do two things at once," said Arthur Augustus. "If I am to do the ironing, I must give it my whole attention. It's very diff anyway."

"It's very what?"

"Diff, my dear boy, diff," said Arthur Augustus. "Too diff for me unless I devote all my time to it, I am afraid. Wait till you see the collars I turn out, and then you will see that I have done my share of the work."

"Oh, rafs!" said Tom Merry.

However, he went on with the washing, and Herries lent him a hand. Shirts and collars and pants were washed and wrung out in a masterly style, and Blake, looking on, said that they were getting on swimmingly.

Too swimmingly, Tom thought, when a great splash of water went over the side of the tub, and joined the flood that was already on the floor.

"By Jove," said D'Arcy, "the whole study will get on swimmingly, and we shall have to swim ourselves, deah boys, if you're not more careful with that watah!"

"It's hard work," said Tom.

"Of course it is. We can't go on strike without trouble,"

said Blake. "Don't you start grumbling, when it was your own idea."

"I'm not grumbling. Any more things to go into this blessed tub?"

"Yes," said Manners, bringing up an armful of soiled things; "here you are. That's the lot!"

"My hat! And enough too."

"I'll slip into it now for a bit," said Manners.

The work progressed. Kettle after kettle of boiling water was added to the washtub, and reckless supplies of soap and soda, and starch and blue. Blake humorously suggested a little pepper and salt, and was frowned upon by the washer.

The clouds of steam pouring from the study windows naturally attracted attention, and the School House juniors had already noticed that the five had missed their dinner in the hall.

Curiosity was strongly excited, and fellows began to gather under the window, calling up all sorts of inquiries, and a crowd collected in the passage outside the study.

Gore opened the door and looked in.

"Hallo, what are you giddy lunatics doing?" he asked.

Tom Merry looked up from the wash-tub.

Gore was at the open door, and behind were a crowd of curious juniors, eager to know what it was all about.

"It's the giddy strike," said Mellish.

"Getting on nicely?" asked Gore. "Fancy Tom Merry as a washerwoman. How do you like 'em done, Merry?"

"Like that!" said Tom cheerfully, flicking a double handful of suds into the face of the inquirer.

Gore gave a yell.

"You silly ass, you've made me all wet!"

"Go hon!" said Tom.

Blake shoved the door shut.

"We don't want all those silly donkeys staring at us," he exclaimed. "They seem to think there's something funny about this strike."

"What rot," said Tom. "We're in deadly earnest!"

"Of course we are. We'll show everybody who's who and what's what," exclaimed Blake emphatically.

"And which is which?" asked Manners.

"Oh, dry up!"

"I wish I could," said Manners, with a rueful glance at his shirt sleeves and trousers, which were simply soaked with soap and water. "I'm afraid it will be a long time before I get dry again."

"More hot water here," said Tom Merry.

Herries brought the steaming kettle. Herries had been busily employed for some time filling and refilling that kettle from the tap in the lavatory.

He began to pour into the tub.

"Say when," he exclaimed. "I say, the blessed handle's got hot this journey. I had to stick the thing down on the fire so. Oh, my hat!"

Herries was using Blake's cricket-cap by way of a kettle-holder, but he was feeling the heat of the iron handle through that.

"Look out!" he yelled.

Tom Merry and Manners jumped away from the wash-tub.

Only just in time.

Herries dropped the hot kettle, and it went souse into the tub in the midst of the soaking garments.

"You ass!" roared Tom Merry. "Look what you've done!"

"I'm looking," said Herries. "Can't see that that will do much good, though. I couldn't help it; the beastly thing was so hot."

"Lot of good washing clothes if you're going to stick a black kettle on top of them," said Tom Merry, in disgust.

"What's the good of grumbling when a thing can't be helped?" demanded Herries. "I'll take it away again. You've got plenty of hot water, anyway."

There happened to be a boat-hook in the study, and Herries hooked the kettle out of the tub, and slung it back to the grate. A few drops that happened to be remaining in it splashed over D'Arcy's outstretched legs.

Arthur Augustus gave a wild yell and leaped into the air.

"Oh! Ah! Ow!"

Herries looked at him in amazement.

"What on earth are you doing that for, D'Arcy?"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Is it a new system of gymnastics, or are you doing an acrobatic act on one leg?" asked Herries curiously.

D'Arcy was clasping his scalded leg, and hopping on the other.

"Ow! You scalded me!"

"Oh, it couldn't have been much," said Herries. "What a fearful fuss you make about a trifle. A little hot water don't hurt anybody."

"Ow! You silly ass!"

"What a fuss to make about a little burn," said Herries,

filling the kettle again from the jug. He lifted it cautiously, with a pair of Tom Merry's socks inside the cricket cap to make the kettle-holder thicker. "I shall have to shift these irons, Gussy, if we're going to get the kettle hot again."

He tried to hook the irons out of the way with the poker, and his hand came into contact with one of them.

They did not look very hot, but they felt hot, and Herries gave a whoop like a red Indian and dropped the kettle.

There was a crash and a splash in the grate.

"Woorrooh!" yelled Herries, clasping his burned hand to his mouth, and sucking at it frantically. "Ow! Oh! Yah! Ugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Arthur Augustus. "What a fuss to make over a little burn, Hewwies!"

"Nice mess you've made there," said Blake. "Gussy, your irons are hot enough now, and if you don't start doing some work I'll sling some soapsuds down the back of your neck."

"I'm weady," said D'Arcy. "Dwy up!"

D'Arcy handled the irons very carefully.

He folded up a pair of cycling stockings to hold them with. Those stockings got rather scorched, but they didn't belong to D'Arcy, so that was a matter of minor importance.

He put the irons in the stand on the table, and prepared for business.

Some of the collars and shirts could be considered dry enough for ironing, and D'Arcy had quite a pile ready for him.

He adjusted his eye-glass and started.

The study door opened, and Mellish put his head in. He was grinning.

"I say, you chaps——"

"Get out!" said Blake.

"But I've come to tell you——"

"If you've got anything to say, out with it, sharp and clear," exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, that's what I call gratitude. Mr. Lathom is coming up to see you. He knows there's something on, and he's going to see why you didn't have any dinner."

"Let him come!"

"Ha, ha! He'll have something to say when he sees all this muck."

"Let him say it."

"You're not afraid?"

"Rats! What is there to be afraid of? We're quite within our rights in forming a Juniors' Union, and going on strike," said Tom Merry disdainfully. "Everybody goes on strike nowadays when he's dissatisfied with anything. It's a regular custom, and we're not going to be behind the times. Down with the tyrants!"

"Ha, ha! Tell Lathom that."

"Oh, you travel."

Tom sent a wet sock towards Mellish, and Mellish travelled. The door closed again. The strikers looked at one another.

"I say, I wonder what Lathom will think of this?" said Herries.

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Let him think what he likes. He's not head, and he's not our housemaster. A silly form-master has no right to interfere in the studies. Let him rip!"

"That's it," said Blake. "We're standing up for our rights——"

"I'm sitting down," said Manners, who had taken D'Arcy's place in the easy-chair.

"Don't be irrelevant. As I said, we're standing up for our rights, and we're not afraid to let anybody see us at honest toil. We shall just keep straight on, and if the Lathom-bird pokes his nose in here, he can just see us as we are. There's nothing to bother about."

"Righto!"

And the work proceeded.

Tom Merry slaved away at the wash-tub, and D'Arcy proceeded with the ironing.

Arthur Augustus had said that the blue would come out in the ironing. It didn't seem to, but a good deal of brown went into the linen to keep it company, for the iron was very hot, and D'Arcy burned the collars at an alarming rate.

But he was not dismayed.

He stuck to the work gallantly, while a fearful smoke and smell rose from the ironing, and the collars assumed all sorts of weird shapes and hues.

Tap!

It was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called out Tom Merry, looking up from the steaming wash-tub.

The door opened, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, looked into the study.

CHAPTER 8.

How the Strike Ended.

TOM MERRY bowed politely over the wash-tub to the master of the Fourth.

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

"Ah—er—yes!" gasped Mr. Lathom, in amazement. "What on earth does all this mean, Merry? What are you doing with that wash-tub?"

"Washing shirts, sir!"

"What are you washing shirts for?"

"To get 'em clean, sir!"

"Er—certainly; but I mean, why should you do so?"

"We're not satisfied with the laundry department in the School House, sir."

"It is simply dweadful, sir!" said Arthur Augustus.

"They nevah turn out a collah fit to wear! We can't stand it, sir. It's simply imposs.!"

"And you think you will improve matters by doing your own washing?" asked Mr. Lathom, trying hard not to laugh.

"We're trying, sir."

"It isn't only the washing, sir," said Blake; "it's the grub. The grub has gone down frightfully—"

"Yes, I've seen you putting some of it down!" murmured Manners.

"Shut up, Manners, when your uncle's talking! It's the grub, sir! We're supplying ourselves with grub now, and cooking it in the study!"

"Oh, that cooking!"—from Manners.

"Dry up, Manners! We want to be independent of the house supplies!" said Tom Merry loftily. "You know the proverb, sir, 'If you want a thing well done, you must do it yourself!'"

"That's our idea, sir," said Blake. "I don't suppose Mr. Railton will object. It will take a lot of work off his shoulders."

Mr. Lathom seemed to be struggling with some internal pain.

"As a matter of fact, sir," said Tom Merry, "we're on strike!"

"That's it," said Blake; "we're on strike till the grub improves, and they send up our washing fair for us to wear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Lathom could hold in his amusement no longer. He laughed till he cried, and his spectacles fell off, and he had to grope for them and put them on again.

The five juniors did not join in his mirth. They maintained a chilling silence, as became a confederacy of bold strikers who were not taken seriously in their struggle to get their wrongs righted.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "So you are on strike?"

"We are on strike!" said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"Ha, ha! You have made this study in a terrible mess. I think Mr. Railton will expect you to put it in better order when he returns. Ha, ha!"

"We haven't got our hand in yet, sir," said Tom Merry. "We shall soon be going on like a house on fire!"

"Gussy is going on like that already!" murmured Manners.

And, indeed, the smoke and the smell of burning from the ironing-table was very thick. Mr. Lathom retreated through the doorway.

"Ha, ha, ha! You have made a great slop there, my boys. Are you not afraid that it will soak through into the rooms underneath?"

"Accidents will happen, sir."

"I think something else will happen if you flood the room below with water," said Mr. Lathom. "It's Knox's room, I think, and Knox is not the most patient boy in the Sixth Form. That is only meant as a friendly warning. I shall leave this terrible strike for Mr. Railton to deal with when he returns."

And Mr. Lathom walked away. The juniors heard his irrepressible chuckle floating back along the corridor as he went. They looked at each other rather uneasily. Persecution they could have faced with the spirit of early Christian martyrs, and they were prepared for it; but to have their strike taken as a huge joke was rather disconcerting.

"I don't see what he wanted to cackle about like that," said Tom Merry. "I suppose they think this is simply a wheeze; and we shall get tired of it. Of course, there's going to be nothing of the kind."

"Of course not!" said Blake. "After all, it's jolly not to be interfered with. Let 'em laugh and grow fat, if they like. The strike's going ahead, and we shall be in splendid working order by the time Railton comes back, and he won't care to interfere. I admit things have gone a little awry at first."

"That was only to be expected; but, by Jove, we shall

have to blue a lot of money on new shirts and collars!" said Tom. "Are there any of them that you haven't burnt, Gussy?"

"Yes, I think there's one," said Arthur Augustus, looking round him. "I can't catch sight of it at this moment, but I think there was one, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha! How are you going out in a burnt collar, Adolphus?"

"I haven't done any of my own collars yet," explained D'Arcy. "I started on Blake's, and then I did Mannah's, and now I'm doing yours, Tom Mewwy. I hope I shall have the irons going better by the time I do my own collars."

"You started on mine?" howled Blake. "You don't mean to say that all those burnt rags belong to me?"

"Not all," replied Arthur Augustus, ironing away. "Some of them belong to Mannahs, and some to Tom Mewwy. The iron is getting bettah now."

Blake and Manners exchanged a glance, and made a simultaneous step towards the cheerful ironer.

"I say, don't row," said Herries, who had been looking thoughtful. "It's occurred to me that there's something in what the Lathom-bird said."

"What's that?" asked Blake.

"Why, about Knox's study under this. You know, Knox is the most ill-tempered beast in the whole School House!"

"Well, I know he is, but he can't be in his study now. He'll be out on the cricket-field, practising with the Sixth."

"Yes; but I remember noticing that he had a lot of photographic prints pinned out over his table, and if the water's gone through—"

"Ha, ha! It will improve his prints, and no mistake!"

"There will be a row," said Herries.

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "Hallo! Who's that?"

Gore had opened the door of the study. His face was very excited.

"I say, you chaps, you're in for it!"

"What are you jabbering about?" asked Blake politely.

"Knox has just gone into his study. I say, the water's come through in a regular flood, and some of the ceiling has dropped on to his table!"

"My hat!"

"I think he's just coming upstairs. Yes, here he is. Thought I'd warn you. Ha, ha!"

Gore scuttled away. The next moment a big Sixth-Former burst into the study, his face aflame with fury.

"You young imps!" roared Knox, of the Sixth. "What are you doing here? You've flooded my study, and spoiled all my prints!"

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry politely. "We'll pay for all damage done, honour bright!"

"Pay, you young scoundrel! Who wants you to pay? I'll break your neck!"

"Line up!" shouted Blake.

The five juniors lined up, and the Sixth-Former thought better of it, and, after glaring at them for a minute or so, he left the study.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Blake. "Hear me smile! The silly old Sixth can't scare us, kids! Get on with the washing!"

"Perhaps he's gone to fetch help," suggested Herries.

"Lock the door!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Blake jumped to the door and locked it—only just in time. There came a terrific kick on the panels outside.

"Open this door!"

"Rats!"

"Open this door!"

"Go and eat coke!"

That was enough for Knox. He lifted his foot, and crashed his boot against the lock, breaking it into pieces. The door flew open, and Knox rushed in, with three burly Sixth-Formers at his heels.

"Here, get out of our study!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You're interrupting the work!"

Knox grinned.

"We've come here to do some interrupting," he said. "Collar the little cads, chaps!"

The seniors seized the youngsters promptly. The juniors struggled gamely, but they had no chance, and they were soon secured.

"I'll teach you to swamp my study!" shouted Knox. "I hear you're on strike. Well, this is where we do some striking. You've got so much slop that a little more won't matter. I've got to change my study till the damage is repaired, so here goes!"

He plumped Tom Merry down on the floor, and overturned the washing-tub on top of him.

"Oh! O-o-osh!" gasped Tom Merry.

He was simply buried under a heap of wet washing and soapsuds and flooded with water, which ran in streams all over the study.

Blake and Manners sprang gallantly to the rescue, and were seized, and added to the heap, and rolled remorselessly in the washing and water.

D'Arcy and Herries were plumped down on top of them, held there by the grinning Sixth-Formers, and then Knox emptied the big water-jug over the heap. He cleared the ironing-table, and hurled the shirts and collars on the struggling juniors; and then dragged down the clothes-line and what it bore, and added all that to the heap. The ashpan from the firegrate followed, with a heap of cinders, and then the contents of the coal-scuttle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Knox. "How do you like 'em done, kids? Are you satisfied, or do you want some more?"

"Gr-r-r-r!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I think that will do," said Knox. "It ought to be a lesson, even to those young rascals; and it will put them up to a wrinkle about going on strike. Come along, chaps!"

Knox and his friends, yelling with laughter, left the study.

Tom Merry sat up. He was drenched, and a wet shirt was clinging round his neck, and his face was unrecognisable from a caking of wet ashes.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The doorway was crammed with juniors, laughing hysterically. One by one the hapless strikers emerged from the wreck of the study, and five more woe-begone objects were never seen within the walls of St. Jim's.

"Well," said Blake in measured accents, "I'm not a chap

to grumble, but the next time you get me to go on strike, Tom Merry, I shall deserve all I get. Come away, chaps, and let's get ourselves cleaned somehow."

And Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy marched off. They had had enough of the strike. Tom Merry and Manners looked at each other. Even the Terrible Two—originators as they were of the strike in the School House—thought that the finish had come.

The grinning juniors at the door decamped. Mr. Lathom looked into the room:

"Dear me!" he said. "You seem to have been very unfortunate. Is the strike over, Merry?"

"Ye-es; I think so," said Tom Merry.

The strike was over. When Mr. Railton came back things were going on in their normal way. The housemaster had made arrangements for an improvement in the commissariat, and so the grievance was removed. The ending had come rather suddenly; but it was a long time before St. Jim's ceased to chuckle over the story of the strike in the School House.

THE END.

(Another Grand Long, Complete School Tale dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry next Thursday. Please order your copy of THE GEM Library in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

READ
THIS
FIRST

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers, who play many spiteful tricks upon them. Bob mysteriously comes into some money, and, as he is frightened that his stepfather—who is coming down to the school—might like to have the handling of it, Bob draws it from the bank and hides it. The three chums set out from Stormpoint College, intending to meet Bob's stepfather. They are stopped by Porker, the school porter. After annoying him somewhat, Bob tells him that they have had leave to meet "a gentleman verging on half a century, who has a nose like a cheese-cutter, and red whiskers on his chops, and whose family motto is 'Never pay your tradesmen till they make you!'" (Now go on with the story.)

The Arrival of Bob's Stepfather.

This description of Bob's stepfather made the chums laugh, but Porker was not in a laughing humour.

"You silly worms!" he growled. "Why didn't you tell me you had got permission, instead of making me run all this distance? Oh, you ought to be drowned! You ain't fit to live!"

Then Porker strode away in disgust, and the chums went on to the station. Perkins, who was sneaking after them, narrowly escaped falling into Porker's hands, but he just concealed himself in the ditch in time.

Now, Perkins was not a brainy lad, but he considered his vengeance a magnificent scheme. At any rate, it was simple.

It is very seldom that the footpath in question is used, except by the college boys; and in one part it crosses a broad ditch—that is to say, there is a broad plank across the ditch, which is about three feet deep in mud, over which a narrow stream trickles. Perkins had got a saw beneath his coat, and, clambering into the ditch, keeping out the worst of the mire as well as he could, he sawed that plank very nearly through. Then he concealed himself in some bushes to watch results.

He knew the chums would return that way with Bob's stepfather, and he did not much care which of the four crossed the plank first; in fact, he rather hoped it would be the stepfather, because he would be certain to think that Bob had played the trick, and take it out of him accordingly. Of course, there was just the possibility that the doctor's wife, or the vicar's wife, might come that way in the meantime; but Perkins determined to run that risk, believing in any event the trick would recoil on the chums. For, of course, it would be discovered that the plank had been nearly cut through.

The chums reached the station in plenty of time for the

train, and when the train came in a tremendous swell got out of a first-class carriage.

"That's Fern, my stepfather," said Bob. "He's a beauty, isn't he?"

"Looks muscular," observed Jim.

"He is," said Bob. "He's the hardest hitter I ever came across. You will like him nearly as much as I do. I wonder how much he owes his tailor? I know he has spent all my mother's money. That gold-headed cane he has in his hand belonged to my father, and Fern has whacked me with it many a time. Look at his red whiskers and his eyeglass. He has seen us. Here he comes. Don't get up, or raise your caps to him. If you knew the life he had led me you would not."

Now, Rex and Jim were very fond of Bob, so they did exactly as he asked. They did not feel inclined to show any respect to a man of that description.

Fern strode up to them, and favoured Bob with a glare that ought to have frightened him; but Bob took a lot of frightening.

"Hallo, stepfather!" was his filial greeting.

"You impertinent young rascal!" snarled Fern. "Have I not told you a hundred times not to address me as 'stepfather'?"

"I haven't counted them, stepfather."

"Get up, you insolent young dog!"

"That man is my stepfather," said Bob, without obeying the order. "The doctor thought I had better go and meet him. How are you going to get to the college, stepfather?"

"Porter, can I get a conveyance?" demanded Fern.

"The fly will be back in about two hours, sir. There's nothing else."

"It is not very far across the fields," said Rex,

Grand, Now, Long, Complete SCHOOL and DETECTIVE Tale NEXT THURSDAY.

STORMPOINT (continued).

"I know how far it is!" retorted Fern, galled at his reception. "Follow me, Robert!"

"Come on, old chaps!" said Bob. "I want you as a sort of bodyguard. Nice day, isn't it, stepfather?"

"I am given to understand that you are in possession of a hundred pounds," said Fern, ignoring the question concerning the weather. "How did you become possessed of such a sum of money?"

"I say, stepfather, I hope you haven't come down for it, because if so you will be disappointed."

"I have told you not to address me in that manner!"

"All right, stepfather! You go across the fields there, unless you prefer walking a few miles further along the road. Nice day, isn't it?"

The angry man favoured Bob with another stare, but that worthy was intent on taking stock of the swell's clothing. He eyed him up and down.

Fern's thin lips grew white with suppressed fury. Had Bob been alone he would have had to answer for his temerity, but he decided that it would be wiser to deal with the all-important matter in the presence of the doctor, and so he strode on.

He knew the way well, and he kept about three yards ahead of the chums. Then he came to that plank-bridge. Bob imitated his stride, but he made no remarks. Fern got to about the middle of the plank, when there was a cracking sound, a wild yell, and six feet of humanity were buried in a couple of feet or so of black mire, for Fern fell on his back.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Bob, who was really delighted; but then, you see, he had been shamefully treated by that man ever since his earliest recollection. "Ha, ha, ha!" And his chums joined in that howl of laughter. They were sorry for Bob, and not a bit sorry for Fern.

"Looks like a muddy water-rat, doesn't he?" observed Bob, as the outraged man struggled from his miry bath.

"You fiend incarnate!" he howled, examining the plank ere he struggled to the opposite side of the ditch and scrambled from it. "I'll—I'll—"

"You have got muddy, stepfather!" observed Bob. "Ha, ha, ha! What ever were you trying to do?"

"You young scoundrel!"

"Oh, I didn't get muddy. It's only you who have spoilt your clothes."

"Come across here. Do you hear me? Come across, boy."

"I hear you right enough, stepfather. No one could possibly help hearing you when you are howling like a fog-horn! I should have a roll in the grass if I were you. It's an awful pity you have spoilt those clothes, 'cos I'll guarantee they are not paid for. Send them back to the tailor, and tell him you don't care for the fit. Ha, ha, ha! What's the good of ragging like that? Ira furor brevis, you know—at least, you ought to."

"All right, you young villain! All right—"

"Well, you may be all right, but you really don't look it. You look as if you wanted a jolly good wash!"

Fern appeared to think that this was a case that the doctor could adequately deal with, for he strode towards the college, and, having crossed the ditch at a part where it was narrower, the comrades followed him.

"You are to come straight to the doctor," said Porker, when they entered. "You are in for it, I can tell you. Your father has been going on in fine style, and when I told the doctor exactly what had happened, you would have trembled if you had heard him go on. 'Bust my buttons, he yells, 'if I don't pay the young varmint, I'm a Dutchman!'"

"Exactly what the doctor would say," observed Rex. "I can quite fancy him making the remark about his buttons. Then, of course, we all know that 'young varmint' is one of his favourite expressions. Come on, old chaps, we shall have to face the music!"

When they entered Dr. Andale's study they found the muddy Fern there, while the doctor looked very much as though he wished he was not, for Fern was making a frightful mess on his carpet.

For the first five minutes the doctor made no attempt to speak. Fern did all the talking, while Bob gazed at him with a calmness that was truly exasperating.

"Will you allow me to question the lads, Mr. Fern?" inquired the doctor, when Fern had finished his raving.

"Do so by all means!" snarled Fern, seating himself in an easy-chair, and hoping that he would ruin it. He was savage with everyone.

"Your father informs me that you have played this disgraceful trick on him!"

"It had nothing to do with me, sir."

"You young liar!" howled Fern.

"Mr. Fern," cried the doctor sternly. "I must request you to moderate your language!"

"I don't need any man to tell me how I shall speak to the young blackguard!"

"We may as well understand each other," said the doctor. "I will not allow such language to be used in my house. I have never found Bouncer tell me a falsehood. I feel sure he will tell me the truth now. Someone sawed the plank nearly in half, your father tells me, Robert. Did you do so?"

"No, sir."

"Did you know it had been done?"

"No, sir; I knew nothing about it."

"Did you other lads?"

"I know nothing about it, sir," exclaimed Rex, "except that Bob did not do it!"

"How can you assert that?"

"In the first place, he says he knows nothing about it, sir; and in the next, he could not have done it if he had wanted to do so, because we all passed over the plank on our way to the station. It must have broken then. The sawing was evidently done after we had passed over. Probably one of the fellows wanted to play the trick on us."

"Mr. Fern tells me that you refuse to give him any information concerning the money you are possessed of, Robert!" exclaimed Dr. Andale, who was quite convinced on the other point.

"I got it honestly, sir. It has nothing to do with him."

"Your father has the right to know."

"My father is dead, sir. That man is not my father. He chose to stop my pocket-money, so I determined to make a little, and I make a good lot—a lot more than I can spend. I'm saving it. Now, sir, if you doubt my honour—"

"I do not, my lad."

"Well, sir, I am ready to tell you in confidence how I get the money, and if you are satisfied I don't want anyone else to know."

"No doubt your stepfather will be satisfied with that."

"He will jolly well have to be, sir!" growled Bob.

As a matter of fact, Bob's stepfather was not at all satisfied.

"Look what a state of mud I am in!" he exclaimed, gazing at his ruined clothes. "How am I to return home like this?"

"The railway company would charge you extra for carting mud, wouldn't they, stepfather?" said Bob. "I will lend you a suit of my clothes if you like, or you might borrow some from Porker. He's rather paunchy, but you could stuff a pillow in so as to fill you out."

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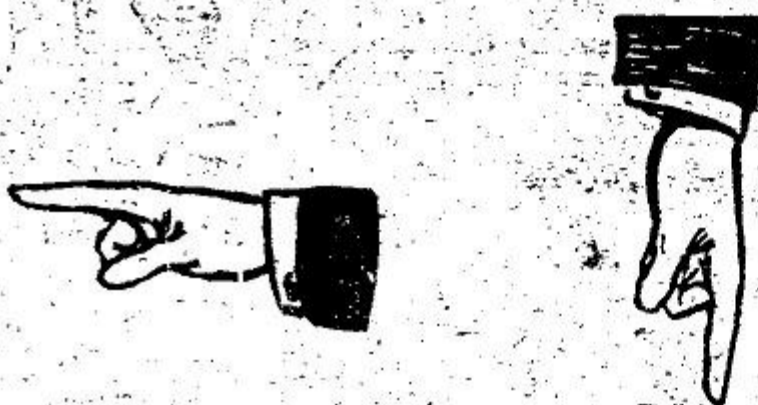
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