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The Return of Monty Lowther.

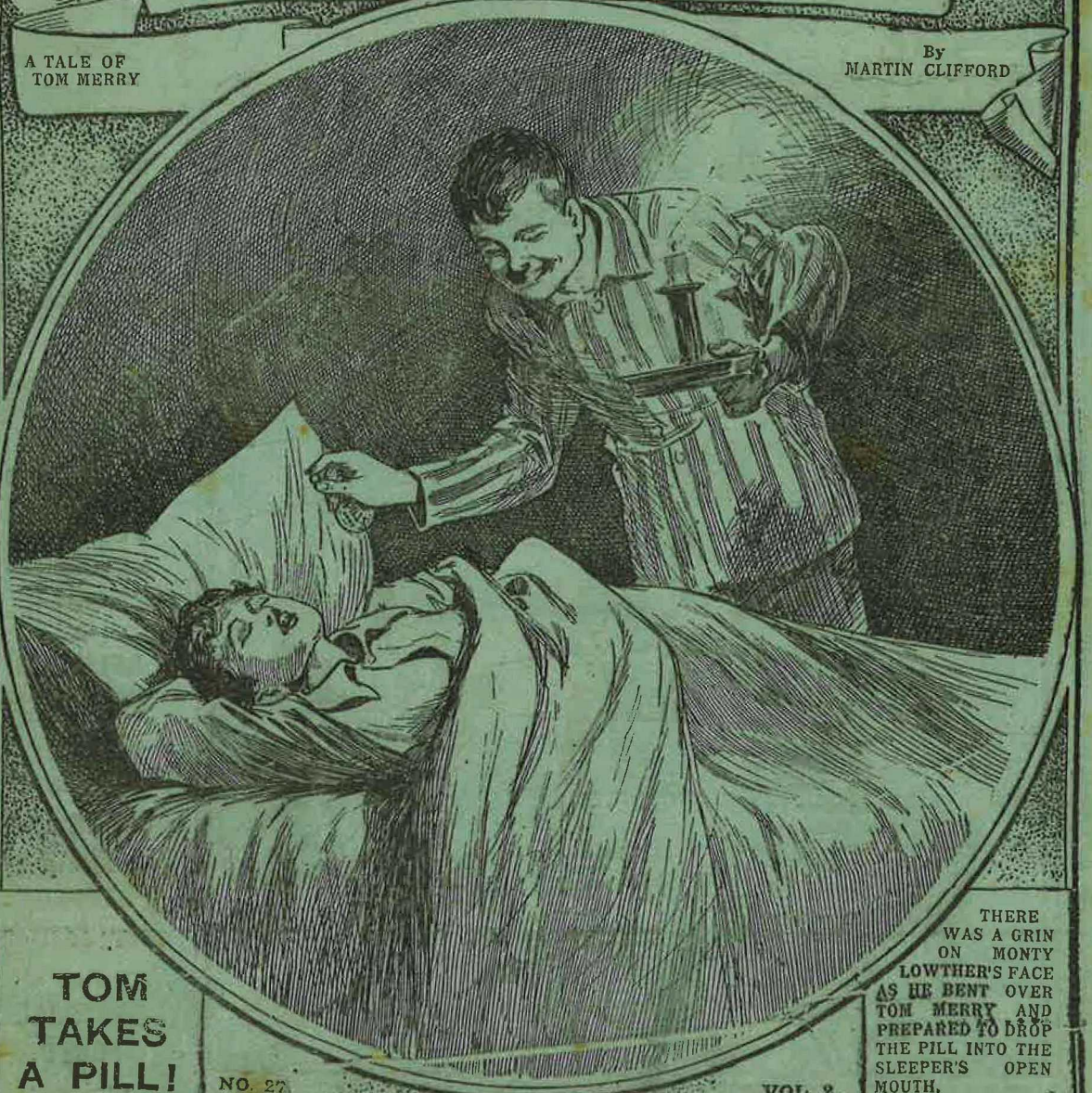
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GRAND COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE.

A TALE OF
TOM MERRY

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



TOM
TAKES
A PILL!

NO. 27

VOL. 2.

THERE
WAS A GRIN
ON MONTY
LOWTHER'S FACE
AS HE BENT OVER
TOM MERRY AND
PREPARED TO DROP
THE PILL INTO THE
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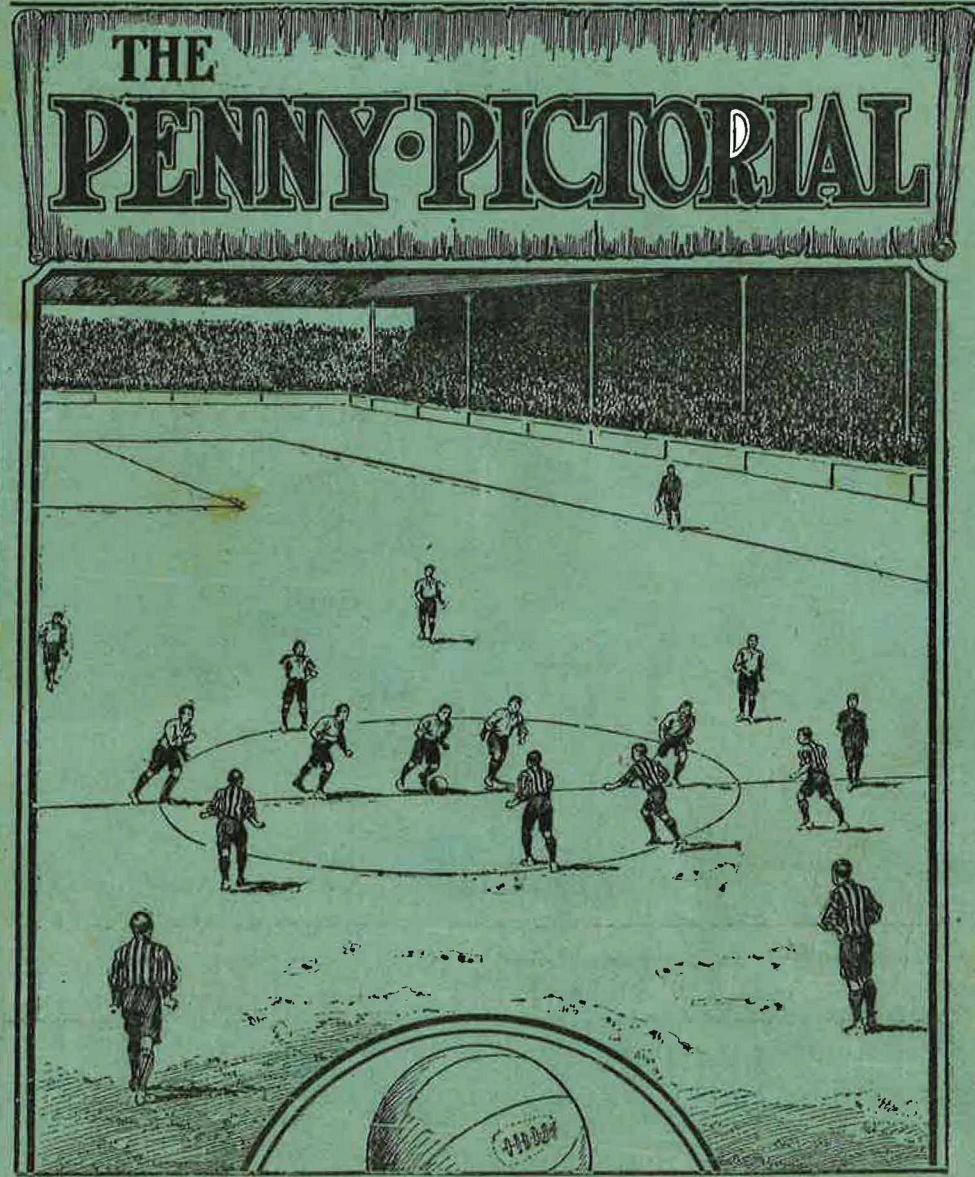
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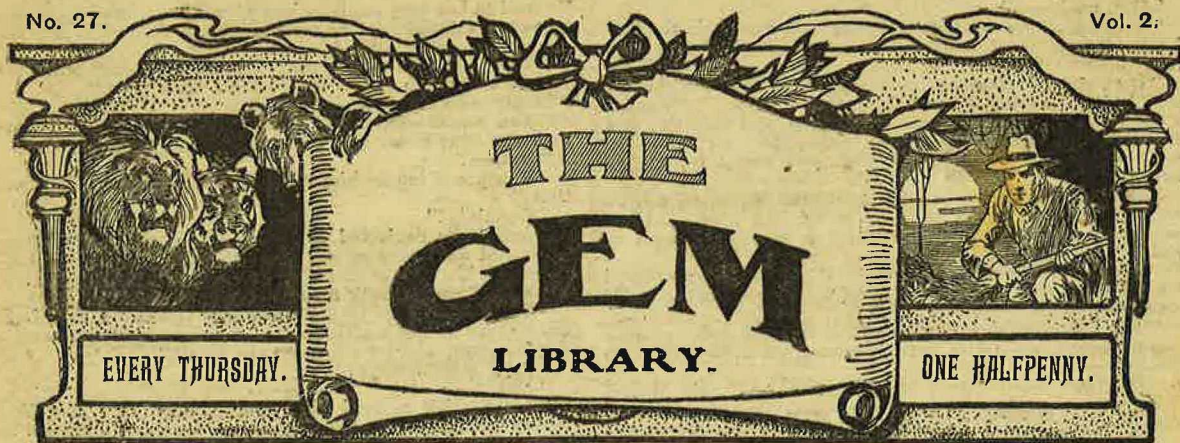
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“PLAYING THE GAME.”

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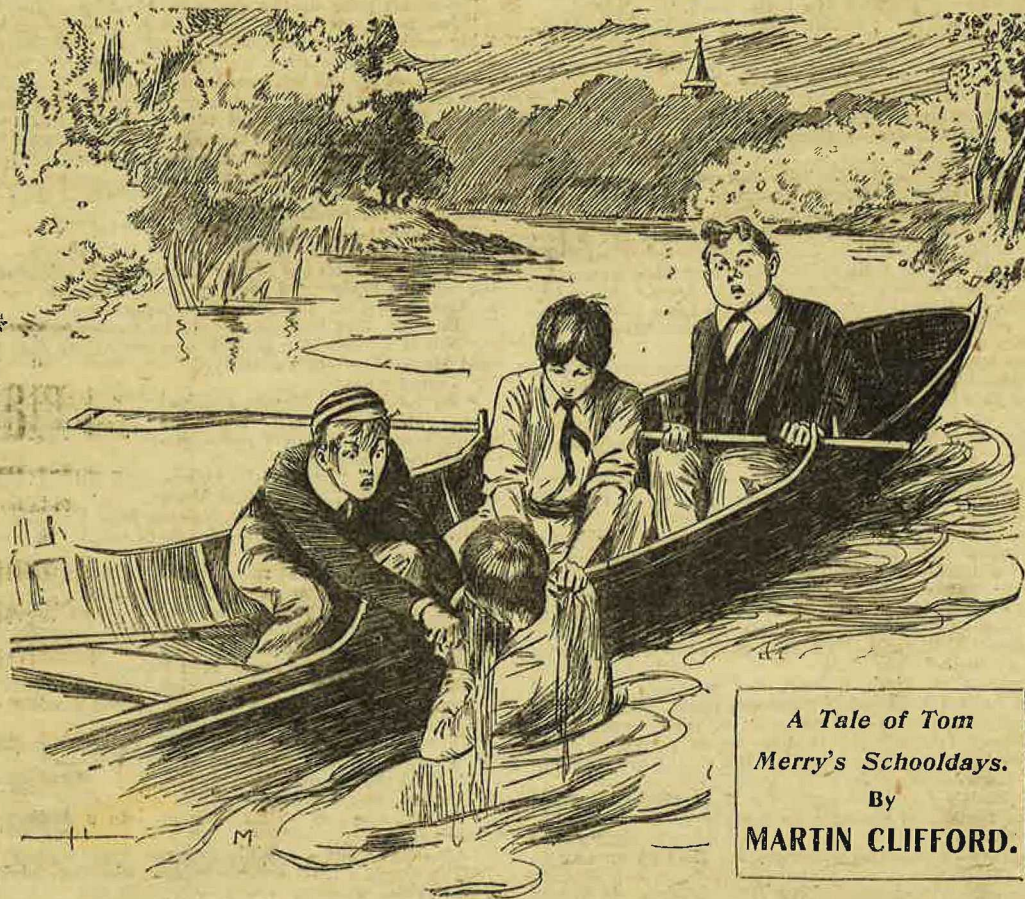
No. 27.

Vol. 2.



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

The Return of Monty Lowther.



A Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.
By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
In Dark Disguise.

“I WANT to go back to St. Jim's!”
Monty Lowther spoke discontentedly, and he looked discontented. He was standing at the window of an old-fashioned room, with his hands in his pockets, staring out across the green, sunny meadows. A little old gentle-

man, with a bald head and gold-rimmed spectacles, looked up irritably from the newspaper he was reading.
“My dear Montague, I wish you would not harp on that subject. I have acted according to my best judgment, after serious reflection, for your own good. It is much better for you to remain at home under my immediate care, and under the care of your tutor, the worthy Mr. Philpotts, than to mix with all those rough boys at a public school.”

"But, uncle——"

"You are in my charge, Montague, and I must do the best I can for you, and I cannot think it best for you to go back to St. James's Collegiate School."

"It seems a thousand years since I have seen the chaps," said Monty Lowther, turning from the window. "I wonder what Tom Merry's doing now, and Blake, and that lot; and whether the School House is still rowing the New House the same as ever. Oh, uncle, I wish you would let me go back!"

"My dear boy," said the old gentleman, softening a little as he saw a suspicious moisture in the boy's eye, "I am acting in your best interests, which I have very much at heart."

"I know you have, uncle; but—but you don't understand what this means. I—I haven't had a row with anybody for weeks—it seems years——"

"There!" exclaimed Mr. Lowther triumphantly. "As I have always said, you were learning nothing but ruffianism——"

"Oh, there wasn't much harm in our rows!" said Monty. "We were always good friends at bottom. We used to chum up even with Figgins & Co., of the New House, sometimes, and we've often helped each other out of scrapes."

"But I object to scrapes on principle," said Mr. Lowther. "I am sorry, but I must be firm. I was speaking to Miss Fawcett only yesterday, and she confided to me her fears for her ward, Tom Merry, who is now at St. James's Collegiate School."

The precise old gentleman never called St. Jim's by a shorter title than that. Monty grinned at the mention of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess.

"Oh, Miss Fawcett is a dear old soul, but she is nervous, and she doesn't know anything about boys," he remarked. "She used to send Tom Merry cod-liver oil and chest protectors, and he was chipped by all the Shell."

"Another proof that manners are not all they should be at St. James's Collegiate School," said the old gentleman severely. "Miss Fawcett fears for the health of her ward, who, I understand, is a delicate lad——"

Monty Lowther roared.

"Why, Tom Merry is as strong as a horse!"

"H'm! There is such a thing as an outward deceptive appearance of health, and a kind and watchful eye is needed," said Mr. Lowther. "I think you must make up your mind to remain at home, Montague. However, I will consult with Miss Fawcett again, and we will see what can be done. By the way, as I am leaving home for a few weeks on important business, I have made arrangements for you to stay at Laurel Villa in the charge of Miss Fawcett."

Monty turned to the window again. Across the sunny fields could be seen the red chimneys of Laurel Villa, the dwelling of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess.

It was not an exhilarating prospect to spend a few weeks in that exceedingly quiet dwelling, and Monty groaned inwardly as he thought of St. Jim's, of the rows with Figgins & Co., and the cosy little teas in the studies, and the fun on the playing-fields. They would be starting football practice now at St. Jim's, and he was out of it.

"I say, uncle——" he looked at the old gentleman again appealingly—"couldn't you let me go back for a bit—just while you're away?"

"I have already made arrangements with Miss Fawcett for your reception," said Mr. Lowther. "After doing so, it would be decidedly discourteous for me to allow you to return to St. James's Collegiate School instead."

And he rose to his feet with an air of finality. Monty Lowther said no more. An hour later his uncle walked him over to Laurel Villa, and left him in charge of Tom Merry's kind old governess.

Miss Fawcett was kindness itself, but she was a quaint old body, and Laurel Villa was a quiet old place. Huckleberry Heath, the village close at hand, was as quiet as a churchyard. Monty Lowther felt that he would perish of sheer ennui if something didn't happen. But nothing ever happened at Huckleberry Heath.

Miss Fawcett's favourite topic was Tom Merry, and she would talk about him by the hour together, when she could induce anybody to listen. Monty listened now. He listened by the hour with cheerful patience, for he had an axe to grind.

Miss Priscilla was alarmed about Tom's health. As he did not look at all delicate, and she was determined to believe that he was delicate, she feared that the outward semblance of health was only a proof that the evil was deep-rooted.

"Yes," said Monty Lowther hypocritically; "I wish I were at St. Jim's, Miss Fawcett, so that I could keep an eye on his health."

Miss Priscilla looked thoughtful. Monty Lowther seemed to her a very serious and thoughtful lad, and the way he

listened to her long explanations of her uneasiness regarding her ward showed that he took a proper interest in the important subject of Tom Merry's health.

"Yes," said Miss Priscilla; "I am sure you would not join in the rough games of the boys, Montague."

Monty winked at the ceiling.

"You would watch over Tom and see that he never wore anything next to his skin that was not properly aired."

"Rather!"

"You would induce him to take his medicine at the proper time."

"Certainly!"

"And if he neglected to take his pills and the mixture, you could find some means of administering them surreptitiously in his food or drink, so that he should not suffer?"

"Yes; I could easily manage that!"

"You could write to me every day informing me of the exact state of his health, and take his temperature with a thermometer, and let me know the result?"

"Jolly good wheeze!"

"Eh?"

"I mean it's a good idea, and perhaps may save Tom Merry from growing up an unfortunate, measly, crippled invalid."

"Yes," Miss Fawcett sighed; "I am half sorry that you are not going back to St. Jim's, Montague."

"Couldn't you try to persuade my uncle?" suggested Monty Lowther. "It seems a pity to think that Tom Merry may grow into a consumptive wreck for want of a little care."

"But Mr. Lowther is away, and will not be back for weeks; otherwise I should be tempted to do so."

This conversation was taking place on the second day of Monty's stay at Laurel Villa. Monty looked reflective.

"I say, why couldn't I go back, anyway?" he said.

"Without your uncle's permission? Impossible!"

"Just for a few weeks," said Monty Lowther persuasively. "My uncle has not forbidden it. If you thought it proper, he would certainly allow it; I'm sure of that."

"Yes; as he has left you in my charge," said Miss Fawcett thoughtfully. "You are quite right. But then there is the Head. I understand that he was a little vexed by your being removed from the school, and he would certainly not take you back without a written application from your uncle. Unless the matter was perfectly bona-fide, he would think your return was a boyish escapade, and if he wrote to your uncle for confirmation——"

"Oh, dear; that won't do!"

"So I am afraid——"

"I know!" burst out Monty Lowther, a brilliant idea flashing into his brain. "I could go back under another name—as Jack Jones, or Tom Brown, or something!"

"But, my dear boy, you would be recognised!"

"Not if I wore blue glasses, and tinted my dial a little," said Monty Lowther excitedly.

"Tinted what?"

"My face!" said Monty, abashed. "I've been in amateur theatricals at St. Jim's, you know, and I could work the oracle first-rate. They'd never guess."

"My dear Montague——"

"Look here, I've got the things, and I'll rig myself out, and you can see!" exclaimed Monty.

He dashed from the room, leaving Miss Priscilla in a disturbed and somewhat excited frame of mind. In ten minutes he returned.

He was certainly not recognisable as Monty Lowther. He had a red complexion, so well done that it looked as natural as life, and a slightly reddish colouring at the tip of his nose changed his aspect strangely, while an enormous pair of blue-tinted glasses completed the effect.

"What do you think now, Miss Fawcett?"

Monty pitched his voice in a high treble, and that was not recognisable either. Miss Fawcett looked amazed.

"Is that Montague?" she gasped.

"Yes—rather! Don't you think I shall pass muster?"

"Yes, yes; I have no doubt of that, but——"

"Then I am to go?"

"Oh, no, no; I cannot——"

"It seems a pity to let Tom go into a decline, though, doesn't it?"

"Oh dear, what a terrible thought!"

"It's worth a little trouble to save him from sinking into a miserable, crawling wreck."

"Yes, yes; you are perfectly right, Montague."

"I would watch over him like a man in possession—I mean like a brother—and give him his medicines just at the right time," said Monty temptingly. "If he wouldn't take 'em, I'll slop 'em down his throat while he's asleep! If he won't drink his cod-liver oil, I'll mix it in his coffee!"

"Yes, yes; you are a thoughtful boy, Montague, and I am sure you could be trusted to carry out my instructions."

"I'll carry 'em out to the letter."
 "You would not forget—you would not neglect them—when you were amongst your old playfellows again?"
 "I promise, Miss Fawcett," said Monty, with dignity—"I solemnly promise to carry out all your instructions to the very letter, without deviating an inch from them. Tom Merry shall be soaked in medicine till he's a walking chemist's shop!"

"I really think, Montague—"

"I can go?"

"Y-e-es!"

"Hurrah!"

Monty Lowther capered about the room in glee. He knocked over three or four of Miss Fawcett's most prized ornaments, and trod on her lap-dog, eliciting a fiendish yelp from the unfortunate animal. It occurred to the lady that it wouldn't be a bad idea, in other ways than one, to let Monty go back to St. Jim's till his uncle returned home.

"I will arrange the matter," said Miss Fawcett. "Of course, you will have to keep your identity a strict secret, and Tom must not suspect that you are an emissary to watch over his health. You must be very careful of that."

"I'll keep it dark, never fear!"

"Then—then you shall go."

Miss Fawcett was still feeling a little dubious. But her anxiety for Tom Merry prevailed over every other feeling. Monty Lowther was booked for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

A New Boy in the School House.

"WE won't stand it!"

Tom Merry fairly shouted out the words.

Manners, his chum, looked just as indignant, and he echoed the words of his leader.

"We won't stand it!"

"The idea!"

"The idea!"

"Simply rotten!"

"Simply rotten!"

"It's not to be stood!"

"Not to be stood!"

So exclaimed Tom Merry and his faithful echo.

Blake, belonging to Study No. 6, put his head in at the door, and surveyed the Terrible Two in surprise.

"I say, you chaps, are you holding an indignation meeting here all on your lonesome?" he asked.

Tom Merry glared at him.

"Don't you be funny, Blake. This is a serious matter."

Blake looked at them curiously.

The Terrible Two, whenever they were not disputing with Figgins & Co., of the New House, were usually at daggers drawn with Study No. 6, in their own house—the School House. But in times of stress and trouble, the lads knew how to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, like young Britons.

"I say, is anything wrong really?" exclaimed Blake.

"Can we help you? We'll do anything we can, you know."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Herries, who was with Blake, and had stopped at the door with him on hearing the excited exclamations of the Terrible Two. "Won't we, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, you know, it's only fair to bring our brawns to the help of Tom Mewwy and Mannahs, as the poor kids can't think things out for themselves, don't you know?"

Tom Merry's hand slid in a casual way towards the inkstand.

"Pax!" exclaimed Blake, coming into the study. "You can leave the inkpot alone, Tommy, my son. Tell us what your trouble is. Has Lathom set you a big imposition?"

"No."

"Has Herr Schneider got on your track again?"

"No, no!"

"Has the master of the Shell insisted upon your doing your preparation properly?"

"Look here—"

"Has the order gone forth that you are to wash your necks in the morning?"

"I tell you—"

"Then if none of those dreadful things have happened, what are you grumbling about?" Blake exclaimed.

"There's a new kid coming to St. Jim's."

"I believe that's happened before, and we didn't break our necks over it," Blake remarked. "Is he coming into the School House?"

"Yes."

"What's the merchant's name?"

"James Edward Jessop."

"Well, there's nothing the matter with that. I can't see what you're tearing your whiskers over. Can you Gussy?"

"Weally, I fail to perceive the weason of Tom Mewwy's stwange state of excitement," said Arthur Augustus. "We were all new boys once, and it is not vewy long since Tom Mewwy himself came to St. Jim's. I weally don't see what is the mattah?"

"They're going to shove him in this study!" hooted Tom Merry.

"Oh, are they?" said Blake. "Well, this is one of the biggest of the junior studies, and you've had it to yourselves, you two, ever since Monty Lowther went away. You can't expect to have a room of this size for only two of you for ever, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We wanted to keep Lowther's place open," said Tom Merry. "We never gave up the idea that he might come back again, and if he came, we wanted him along with us again. Now, this beastly outsider is going to take his place here, and if Monty should come back, he will be shoved into another study."

"Well, that's hard cheese, I admit," said Blake. "But have you any reason to suppose that Monty Lowther is coming back any time?"

"Well, no; the last I heard from him was that his uncle was determined to keep him at home with a private tutor."

"But we hoped he might come some time," said Manners.

"Now his place is going to be filled up. The new fellow won't turn out when he does come. This study is the most comfy of all the Shell studies, and you can bet your Sunday topper that James Edward Jessop will stick to it like a hundred leeches."

"You could make it the most uncomfy study, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "You could wag the boundah, you know!"

"We could what?"

"Wag him!"

"Off your rocker?" asked Tom Merry. "I'm talking about a new fellow, not about the tail of a dog. How on earth could we wag him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "He means rag him! It's his beautiful accent!"

"Oh, rag him!" said Tom thoughtfully. "Yes, there might be something in that."

"Suppose you were to set fire to his hair," suggested D'Arcy, with an air of reflection, "or pour some of Mannahs's pyro ovah his face, or put Hewwies bulldog into his clothes-box, it would be bound to make him want to change into some othah study."

"Ha, ha, ha! We might work that, Manners!"

"When is the merchant coming?" asked Blake.

"To-day!" growled Tom Merry. "Coming suddenly in the middle of the term. I've only just heard from Kildare about his coming into my study. It's horrid!"

"Extwemely howwid!" said Arthur Augustus. "I should certainly wag him!"

"Ahem!" said a voice at the door.

The juniors swung round towards the door with startled looks. The athletic form of Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was visible there, and by his side was a youthful figure.

"I think it's time we were moving," said Blake; and Study No. 6 marched off.

They took a look at the new boy as they went, and giggled as they went down the corridor.

James Edward Jessop—for the boy with Mr. Railton was evidently that individual—was a lad of about Tom Merry's age, apparently, and he had a richly red complexion, and he wore an enormous pair of blue-tinted glasses. He stood staring into the study by the side of the housemaster. The latter entered the room, and looked significantly at Tom Merry.

"This is James Edward Jessop, your new study-mate, Merry," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Tom meekly.

"You will shake hands with him, Merry?"

Tom hesitated for a moment. He had no animus against the stranger, but to shake hands with a fellow whom he didn't mean to make welcome was not in his line.

"You will shake hands with him, Merry," repeated Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry unwillingly held out his hand. The blue-spectacled stranger gave him a hard grip.

"Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Master Merry," he said, in a high-pitched treble voice. "Very much honoured, I assure you."

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "Where did that critter come from, and where did he dig up that voice? My only pyjama hat!"

"Manners, this is James Edward Jessop."

Manners held out his hand.

"Exceedingly honoured to make your acquaintance, Master Manners," went on the treble voice, "I am sure we shall all be happy together here."

Mr. Railton coughed.

"Merry and Manners, I expect you to make your new study-mate welcome, and to do everything possible to make him feel at home in his new quarters," said the house-master.

The Terrible Two were silent.

"You do not answer me, Merry."

"We'll make him welcome, sir," said Tom Merry, heaving a sigh.

Having given his word, he could not depart from it, and Gussy's suggestion of ragging the stranger into changing his quarters had become impracticable.

"Very good," said Mr. Railton. "Jessop, you will remain here, and Master Merry will show you where to put your books and your belongings."

"Yes, sir."

The house-master quitted the study.

"You two fellows don't seem very glad to see me," remarked James Edward, who appeared to be an extremely self-possessed youth. He certainly did not look like a fellow whose first day this was at a public school.

Tom Merry and Manners exchanged a glance.

"Well, to tell you the honest truth, we're not," said Tom Merry. "We don't want to be rude, you know, but we wanted the study to ourselves."

"That's rather greedy, isn't it?"

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Not exactly," he said. "You see, a chum of ours used to be third in the study, and we hoped he might come back to St. Jim's some time."

"Oh, I see! Who was he?"

"A chap named Monty Lowther."

"Oh! He wasn't much of a chap, was he? A miserable sort of a specimen—eh?"

Tom Merry and Manners took a simultaneous step towards the stranger.

"I've told Mr. Railton I'll make you welcome here," said Tom, "but if you say a word like that again about Monty Lowther, I'll knock you down and jump on you."

"And I'll ram your beastly goggles down your neck," said Manners.

The new-comer chuckled.

"But I say, I've heard of that chap Lowther!"

"Oh, have you?"

"Yes, I have. He lives near the place I come from, and he's a toad."

James Edward was suddenly interrupted. Tom Merry's athletic grip was fastened upon him in a twinkling, and he was jerked to his feet, and came down on his back with a thump.

"Sit on his head, Manners!"

"Here, chuck it!" gasped the new boy. "You'll damage my glasses! Pax!"

"Then withdraw what you said about Monty Lowther!"

"But—"

"Withdraw!" shouted Tom.

"Oh, all right, if you're so particular about it, I withdraw! I haven't said anything about him that I wouldn't say in his presence."

"I'd like to see you call him a toad if he was here," said Tom disdainfully. "He's worth a shipload of you, you goggled monkey!"

James Edward rose to his feet.

"So you don't want me here, because you want to keep the place open for Monty Lowther," he remarked, without showing any resentment for the rough handling he had received.

"That's it."

"Well," said the new boy, "I want peace in the camp, so suppose we make an agreement."

"What sort of an agreement?"

"I'll agree to clear out if Monty Lowther comes back to St. Jim's and wants his place in this study. Does that satisfy you?"

Tom Merry's face brightened up at once.

"Well, that's decent of you!" he exclaimed. "Yes, we'll agree, and you can stay here and welcome on those terms. It's a compact."

CHAPTER 3.

A Mysterious Boy—Tom Merry Plans a Picnic.

JESSOP!

"Hallo!"

"Mr. Railton wants to speak to you."

"I'm coming!"

And the new boy at St. Jim's jumped up and left the study. It was the second day of Master James Edward Jessop's stay at St. Jim's, and he was already quite at home in Study No. 10. He happened to be alone there now, when a fag came with the message from the house-master. He

hastily left the study to see what Mr. Railton wanted. He had not been gone five minutes when the Terrible Two came in.

Tom Merry glanced at the table and grunted:

"Hallo! That fellow Jessop's left his papers and things all over the place, as usual. He's as untidy in his ways as Monty Lowther used to be."

"Yes, but we could stand it in Monty," said Manners.

"But—"

"But in this outsider we can't, and won't," said Tom Merry. "I'll instruct him not to leave our study in a muddle like this."

And he began to collect up the new boy's belongings from the table.

"What are you going to do with them, Tom?"

"Well, I was thinking of the coal-locker."

"Ha, ha! That's a good idea. James Edward can rout 'em out when he wants 'em, and it will put him up to a wheeze about leaving his things lying about."

"Hallo! Hallo!"

"What's the matter?"

"Here's something belonging to me among his things."

"Belonging to you?"

"It must be—it's in Miss Priscilla's handwriting. Blessed if I know how it got here! I've never seen it before."

Tom picked up a sheet of paper which was closely written on in the unmistakable hand of Miss Priscilla Fawcett Tom's affectionate old governess.

Manners came towards the table, and looked at it.

"How on earth did James Edward get hold of it, then?" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know! It must be mine. I suppose my old governess wouldn't be writing to him; she can't know that kid. It's mine, but I've never seen it before."

"Perhaps it dropped out of a letter when you opened it, and you never saw it. You have a good few letters from Miss Fawcett."

"Possibly."

"Still, I don't see how it got among Jessop's papers."

"No, and I don't either, and we shall have to ask him some questions when he comes in," said Tom Merry seriously. "A chap has no right to be in possession of another chap's papers, and we shall have to show him that we don't allow that sort of thing in the School House."

"Yes, rather!"

Tom was looking curiously at the closely-written sheet.

"What does it say?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry laughed uneasily.

"Oh, it's rot!" he said. "Listen."

"Cod-liver oil. Two large spoonfuls to be taken before each meal, and before going to bed."

"Dr. Bones's marvellous mixture for sorrowful sufferers. A tablespoonful to be taken at any time when feeling low. Can be taken in tea or coffee, without the knowledge of the patient. Beneficial whenever taken, and the larger the quantity the better."

"Green globules for pining patients. Six to be taken every day."

"Dr. Bones's specials. One every night when going to bed."

"If all the above cannot be administered, as many as possible should be given."

"My hat!" said Manners. "I shouldn't like to be the chap who got that little lot inside him. I wonder how long he would live."

Tom Merry laid down the paper.

"Blessed if I understand it!" he said. "That is not written exactly as Miss Fawcett would have written to me."

"Hallo! There's the kid!"

The new boy, wearing his blue glasses as usual, came into the study. He started as he saw Tom Merry standing at the table.

"What are you two fellows up to?" he asked. "I didn't know you were here. I—"

"Where did you get this paper from?" asked Tom Merry, holding up the mysterious document.

Jessop started again.

"Have you been reading it?"

"Yes, I have. Why shouldn't I, when it's mine?"

"It isn't; it's mine!"

"Why, it's in my old governess's writing!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "I caught sight of it by accident, and I knew at once it was mine."

"Well, it isn't," said James Edward, taking the paper from his hand. "It's mine. Can't Miss Fawcett take an interest in anybody's health except yours?"

"Do you mean to say that you know my old governess?"

"This looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Oh, then I beg your pardon!" said Tom, colouring. "If the paper belongs to you, I had no right to read it. But you never told me you knew Miss Fawcett."

"PLUCK."

NOW ON SALE
PRICE ONE PENNY.

CONTAINS AN EXTRA LONG SCHOOL TALE.

"Well, I do, you see, and that is my property. It's all right—natural mistake. Only don't jump to conclusions too quickly next time."

James Edward sat down at the table and took up his pen. The Terrible Two strolled out of the study. Tom Merry was looking puzzled.

"There's something I can't quite understand about that chap Jessop!" he exclaimed. "He seems to me to be rather deep. It's queer he never mentioned that he knew Miss Fawcett. I don't like a chap who keeps secrets."

"And he's not clean, either," said Manners.

"How's that?"

"Didn't you notice him in the dormitory this morning? He hardly touched his face with the sponge. He doesn't like washing. Afraid it will spoil his complexion, I suppose."

"Ha, ha! He is highly coloured, too. He looks a funny merchant in those blue glasses, and as for his eyes being weak, I don't believe it. They don't look weak. I don't take to that chap, and I'm not going to chum up with him, even if he is in our study," said Tom Merry. "We'll leave him out of the picnic."

"Yes, we don't want any outsiders," assented Manners. "A nice comfy little party of four or five will be enough, and as many as Juggins's boat will well hold. What about Study No. 6?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I was thinking of them. One or another of them is generally flush, and they'll be able to stand their share of the axes. Let's go and see them about it."

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were not in their study, but the Terrible Two ran them to earth in the gym. Blake was attempting to induce Arthur Augustus to venture upon the horizontal bar, but the swell of St. Jim's surveyed it doubtfully through his eyeglass, and shook his head.

"I think it is weally too much of a beastly fag, Blake," he said. "I weally do not take to wuff exalchises, don't you know, deah boy."

Blake snorted.

"You're too lazy to live. You're going on that bar,"

"No, weally, I don't think—"

"I know you don't; you never have. I'm not asking you to think. That would be too much of a strain, I know, and might make you ill. But you're going on that bar."

"Weally, Blake, I am not goin' to do anythin' of the kind."

"You are! Either by yourself, or we'll shove you on."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Weally, Blake, it is altogether too much beastly twouble. Suppos my eyeglass should dwop off, and—"

"I'll see to that," said Blake, jerking away the School House swell's monocle by the cord. "Now, up you go, or I'll tread on this thing!"

"Blake, if you damage my monocle I shall no longah regard you as a fwiend!"

"I think I could survive even that," said Blake. "But up you go, or your blessed monocle will go under my boot! I mean it."

Arthur Augustus saw that he was in deadly earnest, and with a sigh he obeyed.

"Now, hang on by your ankles," said Blake encouragingly. "I refuse to do anythin' so extremely undig," said D'Arcy. "A pwetty object I should look hangin' by my beastly ankles."

"Then here goes your—"

"Hallo, Blake!"

"Hallo, Tom Merry! Don't interrupt the education of Arthur Adolphus."

"I want to speak to you."

"Oh, go ahead! No more ideas, I hope?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not exactly; only we were thinking of getting out Juggins's boat on the Ryll, on Saturday afternoon, and having a picnic at the island."

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Blake, at once. "The most sensible thing I've heard you say for a long time, Tom Merry."

"Then you'll come?"

"Certainly; we'll all come. What is it—a whip round for the axes?"

"That's the idea."

"We'll stand our whack," said Blake. "You can come down, Gussy. Have you got a fiver in your pocket? If you have, you can hand it over."

D'Arcy gladly descended to terra firma.

"I am sowwy that I haven't any fivahs," he said. "I would gladly spwing a fivah, but I am weally almost bwoke. I couldn't waise more than a soveveign or two."

Tom Merry laughed again.

"Well, as your share won't come to more than five bob, you're all right," he said. "My idea is to do the thing in style, but twenty-five bob'll be ample if we can raise it."

"I think we can stand five bob each," said Blake. "Juggins's boat is just the thing. Roomy enough, and solidly built. What about the grub?"

"We'll get that in the village."

"You could get some of it in the school shop."

"Yes, we could," said Tom Merry; "but we won't. Some of the New House juniors would be bound to be there, and they would scent a feed. You know how Figgins & Co. spotted us that other time through our getting grub at the school shop—the time we were on strike. Now, we don't want Figgins to get a hint of this."

"That we don't," agreed Blake cordially.

"You see, Figgins & Co. would be bound to track us down, and spoil the picnic," said Tom. "We're going to keep it very dark. We are enough, five of us, for a nice little party, and we needn't tell anybody a word about it."

"Yas, wathah!"

"Manners and I are going to see Juggins about the boat," went on Tom Merry. "If you feel equal to the task, Blake, you can take the funds and visit the tuck-shop."

"That's just where I live!" said Blake emphatically. "Now you're talking."

"Here's my five bob, then," said Tom.

He handed over five shillings, and Manners produced a crown-piece, Blake dropped them into his pocket.

"Don't blue it all on tommy," was Tom Merry's parting injunction. "We've got the boat to pay for, you know."

"Trust me!"

"It will be all wight," said D'Arcy. "I will go with him and see that he is not too extwavgant, deah boys."

The Terrible Two left the gym, and went out at the gates, taking their way down the river. It was a sunny September afternoon, and school was over for the day. The Ryll glistened in the sunlight, and more than one boat was out on the broad stream.

Figgins & Co., of the New House, were getting a skiff from the boathouse. Figgins looked up and nodded to Tom Merry. They were the rivals of the Terrible Two, but very good-natured rivals.

"Hallo, Merry, like to come on the water?"

"Thanks, no!" said Tom. "You're very kind, Figgy, but we've got an appointment."

"Thought you might like to steer for us," said Figgins. "Of course, we shouldn't expect a School House chap to be able to row!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Not much!" said Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co. "They don't know how to handle an oar in the School House. Hardly!"

Tom Merry picked an oar out of the boat Figgins & Co. were taking out.

"Don't I?" he remarked. "I'll show you! Is that all right?"

He pushed the end of the oar against Figgy's chest, and Figgy sat down in a remarkable hurry.

"You horrid beast!"

"How's that, Kerr?" asked Tom pleasantly, bringing the oar to bear upon Kerr, and pushing him over. "Think I can handle an oar?"

Kerr staggered and fell.

The skiff the Co. were carrying went to the ground, of course, and Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the Co., let go of it, and seized the other oar.

"Here, what are you up to?" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he received the end of that oar in his ribs. "Look out!"

"Go for him, Fatty!" gasped Figgins.

Fatty charged at Tom Merry like an ancient knight with his lance. He caught his foot in a stretcher, and went down in a heap, and the oar caught Figgins a crack on the shoulder.

"You howling ass!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "Go it, Fatty! Come on, Manners; those kids can sort themselves out without our assistance."

The Terrible Two marched off, arm in arm. Figgins scrambled to his feet, rubbing his shoulder ruefully. He looked after Tom Merry and his chum with a glitter in his eyes.

"Those two bounders are up to something!" he exclaimed. "What are they going up the river for, on their lonesome? They could have a skiff out here if they liked."

"There's something on," said Kerr.

"That's it."

"And I think it's something we ought to see into," went on the Scottish partner in the Co. "It's some time since we've really taken the School House kids down, and they'll be putting on side if we don't give 'em a lesson!"

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn. "And if there's a feed or anything like that in the wind, why that's where we come out strong. It would be a howling joke to collar their grub."

We've done it before, and there's no reason why we shouldn't do it again."

"Trust Fatty to think of the grub!" said Figgins. "Blow the grub. It's taking down the School House kids that I'm thinking of. Those kids have gone up the river, and if they're going anywhere in particular, it's to Juggins's boat-house!"

"That's so," said Kerr. "My hat, you've hit it. You know that big barge of Juggins's—he calls it a boat, but it's big enough for a family to live in—the fellows sometimes have that out for a picnic. I wonder if that's the game?"

"I'm going to see," said Figgins determinedly.

"Aren't you coming in the boat?"

"Yes; but we'll pull up the river, and I'll land near Juggins's cottage and keep an eye open for Tom Merry."

"Good wheeze! We shall be there before them!"

"Come on, then."

And in a couple of minutes Figgins & Co. were pulling hard up the river.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins Gets on the Track.

"HERE we are!" said Tom Merry. About a mile from St. Jim's, up the river, stood the boathouse and cottage of Mr. William Jugg, known as Juggins to the irreverent juniors of St. Jim's. Mr. Jugg kept several boats, and in the fine weather he did a thriving business with the boys of St. Jim's, and anglers who came up the Ryll to ply the gentle craft.

One specially big and solidly-constructed boat was often used by parties of the youngsters. It was called the Daisy. It was the Daisy Tom Merry wanted now. Mr. Jugg was seated on a bench outside his cottage, smoking his pipe and looking out over the river. He touched his cap to the boys. The Terrible Two were good customers to him. At the cottage could be had ginger-pop and other light refreshments, and many a time and oft had the Terrible Two sampled them.

"Hallo, Juggins!" said Tom Merry. "We've just run down to ask you if we can have the Daisy for to-morrow afternoon?"

"I'll keep her for you, Master Merry," said Mr. Jugg. "I expect there will be others wanting her, but you shall have her."

"Thanks, old chap; but, mind, if any other chap comes asking about the boat, don't let on that we're going to take her out."

Mr. Jugg grinned. He knew all about the rivalry between the two houses at St. Jim's, and had seen something of the conflicts between the Terrible Two and Figgins & Co.

"Right you are, Master Merry; I understand."

There was a rustle in the trees close to the bench the old boatman was sitting on. The juniors did not notice it.

"You see," went on Tom Merry, "we're making up a party for a picnic, and we're going to take the grub in the Daisy, and camp on the island up the river. We've got to keep it awfully dark, or there will be ructions. If we started from the school boathouse, the New House rotters would be on the track at once. We shall bring the grub here in bags, and shove it into the Daisy."

"I'll be careful, Master Merry. If Master Figgins comes asking questions, he won't get anything out of me."

"You know, Figgins, of course? A long-legged, funny-faced sort of a waster!" said Tom Merry, unconscious of the hidden ears that heard his flattering description of the chief of the New House juniors. "You know him, Juggins?"

"Oh, yes, very well!"

"Not a word to him, mind!"

"Not a word, Master Merry."

"We'll be along for the boat about half-past two."

"Right!"

"And you can shove a dozen ginger-beer and some cakes and biscuits in the locker," said Tom, "and some apples and oranges. Make it five bobs'-worth."

"I will," Master Merry.

"That's all right, then! Good-afternoon, Mr. Jugg!"

"Good-afternoon, young gentlemen!"

"And, mind, not a word to that waster Figgins!"

The Terrible Two walked away. Mr. Jugg resumed his pipe and his contemplation of the river. A hidden listener stole silently from the thicket. He emerged into the sunlight, and Figgins was revealed. Taking care to keep out of sight, Figgins scuttled away to the willows, where the skiff was waiting in cover, with Kerr and Fatty Wynn. The Co. looked at him eagerly as he jumped in.

"Found anything out?" was their simultaneous question.

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, I should say so!"

"Go ahead!"

"Old Juggins was smoking his pipe on his favourite bench," said Figgins. "I only had to stick in the trees and wait for Tom Merry and Manners to come along. They came, and I heard every word. All's fair in war, you know. I was a giddy scout watching the enemy."

"That's so. What did you discover?"

"Tom Merry and a party of School House kids are going to have the Daisy out, and go up to the island in the river and picnic there."

"My hat!"

Fatty Wynn passed his hand ecstatically over the fifth button of his waistcoat.

"We shall be there!" he remarked.

"Yes," said Figgins emphatically; "we shall be there! I expect Tom Merry has chummed up with Study No. 5 for the picnic, and that will make five. If they have that new chap with the blue goggles, it will make a half-dozen. I don't suppose there will be more than that."

"We shall have to get help for half a dozen," said Kerr. "No good the three of us tackling twice our number."

"We shall be a dozen," said Figgins grimly. "I'm not going to leave anything to chance this journey. We'll pick out nine of the best. That will make twelve of us. We'll pull up to the island an hour before Tom Merry starts, hide our boat, and ambush there."

"Ha, ha!"

"It will be a surprise-party for Tom Merry, and no mistake! I was thinking of a picnic for to-morrow afternoon," said Figgins. "If the School House kids provide it for us, all the better. It will come cheaper."

"Ha, ha!"

"But I say," said Fatty Wynn nervously, "there's one thing you haven't thought of, Figgy."

"What is that?"

"Why, if there's only half a dozen in Tom Merry's party, he will only have laid in grub enough for six."

"What about that?"

"Why, if we go a dozen strong, there won't be enough to go round. You see, all the fellows we take will expect to share in the loot. Fellows are so selfish!"

"They'll be entitled to, I should think," said Kerr. "Hang it, we can't collar the grub at all without help!"

"Yes, I know that, Kerr; but, as I was saying, grub provided for six won't go far among twelve," said Fatty Wynn. "That's an important point, Figgy, and it's no good overlooking it!"

"Oh, you needn't be alarmed, Fatty!" said Figgins. "Tom Merry always does things in style, and there's sure to be plenty of grub. I heard him order five bob's-worth from Juggins, and they're going to bring the rest in bags."

Fatty smacked his lips.

"That sounds well," he said. "Still, if we went only nine strong, it would make assurance doubly sure."

"Why, we want to be in full force to make sure of getting the best of the School House kids," said Figgins.

"I mean, it would make assurance doubly sure about getting enough grub to go round," said Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, drown him!" said Figgins. "Suppose you make it a point to eat only twice as much as is good for you, then there will be plenty left. Dry up! Now, let's settle what fellows we are going to let into the game. We've got to be careful to keep the whole business a dead secret."

And, as they floated back down the current to the school, Figgins & Co. turned over their plans, and settled that question. Meanwhile, the Terrible Two, unconscious that there had been a "chief among them taking notes" during the visit to Mr. Jugg, walked back to St. Jim's quite satisfied with themselves.

"I think that picnic will be a howling success," said Tom Merry. "When Figgins hears of it afterwards, he'll be ready to tear his hair for not spotting us and making a raid."

"Yes; we'll tell him about it ourselves afterwards," said Manners considerably. "I only wish old Monty were here to come along with us."

"Yes; that would be jolly!"

They entered the study. The new boy was there, seated in the easy-chair, with his feet on the table, reading. His blue glasses were pushed away from his eyes, but as soon as he saw the Terrible Two, he let them slide into their place again.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said lazily. "What are you doing with yourselves to-morrow afternoon? It's a half-holiday, isn't it?"

"Yes; it is," said Tom Merry.

"I suppose you'll be going out?"

"Yes; I suppose so."

"I hear that when Lowther was here, you always went out in a party. They called you the Horrible Three, or something."

"They called us the Terrible Three," said Tom, breathing hard.

"I can't see anything terrible about you myself," said the new boy, staring at them through his blue glasses. "Still, I'm quite willing to revive the Horrible—I mean, the Terrible Three. I'll come out with you to-morrow afternoon."

"Will you?" said Tom pointedly.

"Oh, yes; I don't mind!"

"I dare say you don't; but we do!"

"Why, what's the matter with you?"

"I don't take to you," said Tom Merry; "you're too secretive! You strike me as a chap who keeps secrets, and isn't open and above board."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at now?" demanded Tom Merry.

"You! You amuse me!"

"Do I? I don't know what your little game is, Master James Edward Jessop, but you are going the quickest way to get a thick ear!" said Tom.

"Don't lose your ickle temper!" urged James Edward.

"I heard you muttering something or other about a picnic. I'm on in that scene!"

"No; you're not!"

"Don't be inhospitable!"

"I don't want to be, but we've made up our party, and if we were going to increase it, there's a good many fellows I'd rather take than you," said Tom Merry. "I always speak my mind, you know, and if you don't like what I say, I'm willing to come to the gym. with you, and have it out with or without gloves!"

"Now, that's what I call really kind!" said the new boy. "Still, I won't intrude on your kindness. As for your old picnic, you can keep it! I think it's quite likely you'll be sorry afterwards that you didn't press me to come."

"I think we'll risk that," said Manners.

"Yes; rather!" Tom Merry said emphatically.

The new boy grinned. When he was left alone in the study again, he broke into a loud laugh. Something in his talk with the Terrible Two seemed to amuse him highly.

He opened a drawer in the table, and took out a little box, which he unlocked. It contained two bottles and two pill-boxes.

One of the bottles was labelled "Dr. Bones's marvellous mixture for sorrowful sufferers," and the other, "Cod-liver oil."

The two pill-boxes were labelled also, one "Dr. Bones's green globules for pining patients," the other, "Dr. Bones's specials."

The new boy opened the last-named.

It contained a dozen pills of very considerable size, of a yellowish colour. Master James Edward nodded his head.

"Must begin to-night!" he murmured. "I must keep my solemn promise to Miss Priscilla, even if I—ha, ha!—didn't want to. One 'Special' every night, by hook or by crook!"

He closed the special box, and opened the other.

It was full of little pills of a greenish colour.

"If I remember correctly," murmured the new boy, "these give you a pain in the tummy, as if you had been swallowing tin-tacks. Miss Fawcett says it's good for you, and I dare say she knows; but I'm jolly well not going to try. If it does people good, there's no reason why Tom Merry should have all the benefit. All the giddy picnickers shall be benefited. The question is, how am I to get at their tummy, and dissolve a sufficient number of Green Globules for Painful Patients in it?"

He chuckled as he slipped the box of green globules into his waistcoat-pocket.

"The cod-liver oil can stand over," he reflected. "I'll swamp some of that into Tom Merry when I get a chance. The marvellous mixture is the thing to improve the picnic. It has a taste like ink and quinine and unripe tomatoes all rolled into one, and a little of it sprinkled on sandwiches and cakes and put into the currant-wine will work wonders. I said they'd be sorry for not asking me to the picnic."

And Master James Edward Jessop slipped the bottle of marvellous mixture into his pocket, and put the little box away again.

If the new boy at St. Jim's had his way, the picnickers were certainly in for a high old time.

CHAPTER 5.

The New Boy Takes Care of Tom Merry's Health.

TOM MERRY sauntered into Study No. 6 later on, and found the chums of the Fourth Form in rapt contemplation of a heap of good things piled on the table.

"I see you've got 'em," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, we've got 'em," said Blake. "I've laid out all the cash, after all, and haven't left anything to pay for the boat. Mother Murphy had such a fine selection that I simply couldn't resist it. I've got a lovely assortment. I told you you could trust me to lay out the money."

"Well, you are a giddy donkey!" said Tom Merry. "I warned you particularly not to blue all the tin on the tommy."

"You can't get good things in this world without paying for 'em," said Blake, "and it's no good trying. But it's all right. Gussy is going to stand treat for the boat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look at these things," said Blake, with an air of pride. "Precious few caterers could do as much on twenty-five bob, Tom Merry."

"Yes; it's a nice lot."

"There's puddings and pies and sandwiches and cakes and rolls and biscuits," said Blake.

"And red-currant wine and ginger-pop and lemonade," said Herries.

"And apples and oranges and nuts; and, weally, I think that Blake has done us down extremely well!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; I like the look of that little lot," he assented. "Makes one want to start now. But I've already ordered five bobs'-worth of old Juggins, so that will be a shilling more each. As for the boat, we'll whip round to pay for that. We're not giddy sponges! I say, I think we shall have a jolly good time, if the weather keeps fine."

"I think it will," said Blake. "It's time we had some summer, and it really seems to have set in fine at last. It was a ripping idea of yours, Tom Merry, to have the picnic on the island. No chance of being spotted by the New House fellows there."

"No; it's a jolly Robinson Crusoe sort of place to picnic in," said Herries. "Jolly lonely, and all that, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! It makes one feel quite adventurous, don't you know!"

"I hope you didn't let Figgins spot you bringing the grub in," said Tom Merry anxiously. "He's so beastly sharp."

Blake snorted.

"Do you think we're such asses?"

"Well, it has happened before."

"It hasn't happened now," said Blake. "As a matter of fact, Figgins & Co. were up the river all the time, and I saw 'em come in and put away their boat, after we had got the grub into this study."

Tom Merry looked relieved.

"Then that's all right," he said. "You can't be too careful with those horrid bounders. We should look pretty blue if we found a dozen New House kids on the island ready to lift the picnic."

"No danger of that. Figgins hasn't the slightest suspicion, so far as I'm concerned," said Blake. "He won't get to know anything, unless you or Manners give it away."

"Of course, that's rot!" said Tom Merry. "We're safe. Now, about the grub. I suppose it had better be left here for the night?"

"Here, or in your study."

"Here would be safer. There's that new merchant in goggles in our study, and I don't trust him as far as I can see him," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

"That red-faced kid Jessop, do you mean?"

"Yes; that's the merchant."

"What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know exactly, but I don't trust him. He's secretive. He gives you an impression of laughing at you in his sleeve," said Tom, "and that's not nice."

"I should say not," said Blake emphatically. "If anybody laughed in his sleeve at me, I'd provide him with something else to laugh at! Why don't you make the study too hot to hold him? He's only an outsider!"

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus. "Why don't you take my advice, Tom Mewwy, and wag him?"

"Can't be did," said Tom. "I've given my word to Railton."

"Oh, that alters the case! Are you going to bring the goggle-merchant on the picnic?"

"Not much!" said Tom. "I don't like him, and I'll see him further first. I'm not going to chum with a chap who keeps secrets and looks mysterious. So you'd better keep the grub in this study till to-morrow."

"Right! We'll shove it out of sight, so as not to tempt any of the kids who may happen to come along," said Blake. "This box will do first rate. There isn't any lock, but we'll lay some books on top of it in a careless way, and nobody will suspect what's inside."

"That's a good idea."

All the juniors lent a hand at stowing away the provisions, and the box, which was a fair-sized one, was filled to the brim.

The lid was closed, and some books and papers laid on top, in an elaborately careless way. Certainly no one who had not an inkling of what was inside would suspect that the box contained one of the best feeds ever provided in the School House at St. Jim's.

"That's safe enough," said Tom Merry. "Good-night, you kids!"

"Who are you calling kids?"

"Ahom! I forgot. Good-night, young gentlemen!"

"Good-night, fathead!"

And the rivals, allies for the time, parted on good terms. It was getting near bedtime, and, after a last look at the precious box, the chums of the Fourth left the study.

The new boy—James Edward Jessop—had been assigned the bed in the Shell dormitory formerly occupied by Monty Lowther.

He looked curiously at Tom Merry as the Shell went up to bed.

"I say, Merry, you're not looking well," he said.

"Rats!" said Tom cheerfully.

"I'm afraid that that red flush in your cheeks is dyspeptic—no, that's not the word—I mean, hectic, and indicates—"

Tom walked up to the new boy.

"Look here," he remarked, "I'm getting fed-up with your funny ways! Just you let my looks alone. Do you want to be laid across that bed and spanked?"

"Not particularly."

"Well, that's what you'll get if you do any more chin-wagging!"

"But, really—"

"Oh, dry up!"

The new boy dried up. But there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes behind the blue glasses. He did not remove those glasses till he was in bed, and then his face was immediately buried in the pillow. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who boarded in the School House, came to see lights out. He found the Shell all tucked away in bed.

The light was turned out, the master of the Shell closed the door, and silence and slumber reigned in the dormitory.

When next the hour boomed forth from the clock-tower of St. Jim's, it was heard by only one pair of ears.

While the rest of the Form slept soundly, James Edward Jessop was awake.

He rose as twelve boomed from the school-tower. He stepped quietly from the bed, and, after a faint scratch, there was a flare of a match, and a light glimmered in the dark dormitory.

The new boy at St. Jim's lighted a candle, and drew a small box from under his pillow. It was labeled; "Dr. Bones's specials."

James Edward grinned, and taking the candle in one hand, and the pill-box in the other, he stole towards Tom Merry's bed.

Tom Merry was sleeping the sleep of the just. His head was thrown back on the pillow, and, as it happened, his mouth had become open, and a deep and steady breathing told that he was in deep slumber.

The new boy looked at him, as the candle glimmered on the unconscious face. Tom Merry may have been dreaming, but he did not dream of what was coming. Monty Lowther opened the pill-box, and selected one of the "specials."

Taking it in his finger and thumb, he bent over Tom Merry. There was a grin on his face, and a twinkle in his eye. Neatly and deftly he dropped the pill into the open mouth of the sleeper, so that it fell close beside the tongue, and remained there in the mouth.

The moisture of the mouth was pretty certain to melt it away before long, and Tom Merry, all unconsciously, would have taken one of the "specials," which Miss Priscilla Fawcett fondly believed would do him an immense amount of good.

A faint, almost inaudible chuckle broke from the new boy as he saw that the pill had lodged in the desired place. He stole back to his bed, and extinguished the candle with his thumb and finger.

"That's done," he murmured. "Rather rough on the patient, but I must keep my word to his old governess. A promise is a promise."

He listened for a few minutes in the darkness. There was no sound in the dormitory but steady breathing, with an occasional snore. Tom Merry had not awakened. Reassured, James Edward glided silently to the door, and out into the corridor, closing the door silently behind him.

Down the stairs in the darkness he went to the Fourth-

Form studies, and opened the door of No. 6. He entered, and then he relighted the candle. The light glimmered over the well-known quarters of Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy. The new boy looked round him inquisitively.

"It must be here," he murmured. "I know perfectly well that Blake was getting in the grab for the picnic, and as it isn't in our study, Blake must have kept it here. It's only a question of finding it."

He began to search the study diligently. The cupboard revealed nothing, but in a few minutes he noticed the box, and looked inside, and then he uttered an exclamation:

"Eureka!"

There was the prize. The new boy did not remove any of it. He was not there to raid, nor did he wish to leave behind any trace of his visit. What he did he need not describe.

But when he closed the lid of the box again there was an empty "Marvellous mixture" bottle in his hand, which had been full when he started, and a "Green globule" box was in the same state. James Edward Jessop chuckled hugely.

"Nothing like taking care of the health of your nice schoolfellows," he murmured, "especially when they don't ask you to a picnic. There's not many fellows get up in the middle of the night to do good like this."

He left the study, and quietly closed the door. The Shell dormitory was still silent and slumbering when he re-entered it. In a few minutes more James Edward Jessop was back in bed, and sleeping the sound sleep of one who deserved well of his fellow-mortals.

CHAPTER 6.

The Picnic.

TOM MERRY opened his eyes and yawned. The sun was glimmering in at the high windows of the dormitory, but the rising-bell had not yet gone. Tom did not usually awaken before rising-bell, and now, as he glanced along the row of beds, he saw that the rest of the Shell were still sleeping.

"Hallo!" he murmured. "I seem to be first awake. I wonder what that funny taste in my mouth is? Horrid, whatever it is!"

He sat up in bed. There was certainly a most peculiar taste in his mouth, which he could not account for. It was not exactly like anything he had ever tasted before, and how it had come there he hadn't the faintest notion.

He was in good health, and a boy in good health ought not to have a bad taste; and, indeed, Tom had never noticed such a thing before.

"It's beastly!" he murmured. "And I never had any supper last night, either. What the dickens can it be?"

He got out of bed, with the idea of washing out his mouth. He felt a peculiar bitterness in his mouth and down his throat, just as if he had taken some extremely unpleasant medicine overnight.

He washed out his mouth, but the taste was a clinging one, and it continued to cling, and it was still clinging when the rest of the Shell were awakened by the rising-bell.

Tom was also feeling a little out of sorts inwardly. He had a sensation similar to the beginning of sea-sickness, which he was at a loss to account for.

"Hallo, Merry!" said James Edward Jessop. "Feeling out of sorts this morning?"

"Yes, a little bit," said Tom.

"I told you last night you weren't looking well."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you'd like some medicine—"

"If you show me any medicine I'll pour it down your neck!"

"Well, that's what I call gratitude!"

"Oh, ring off!"

The Shell went down to breakfast. Tom made a less hearty meal than usual, for he was feeling quite queer. During the morning, however, the feeling wore off. When morning school was over, the fresh air in the quadrangle made him feel himself again. Blake met him immediately the midday dinner was disposed of in the School House dining-hall.

"Ready, Merry?"

"Yes, rather!"

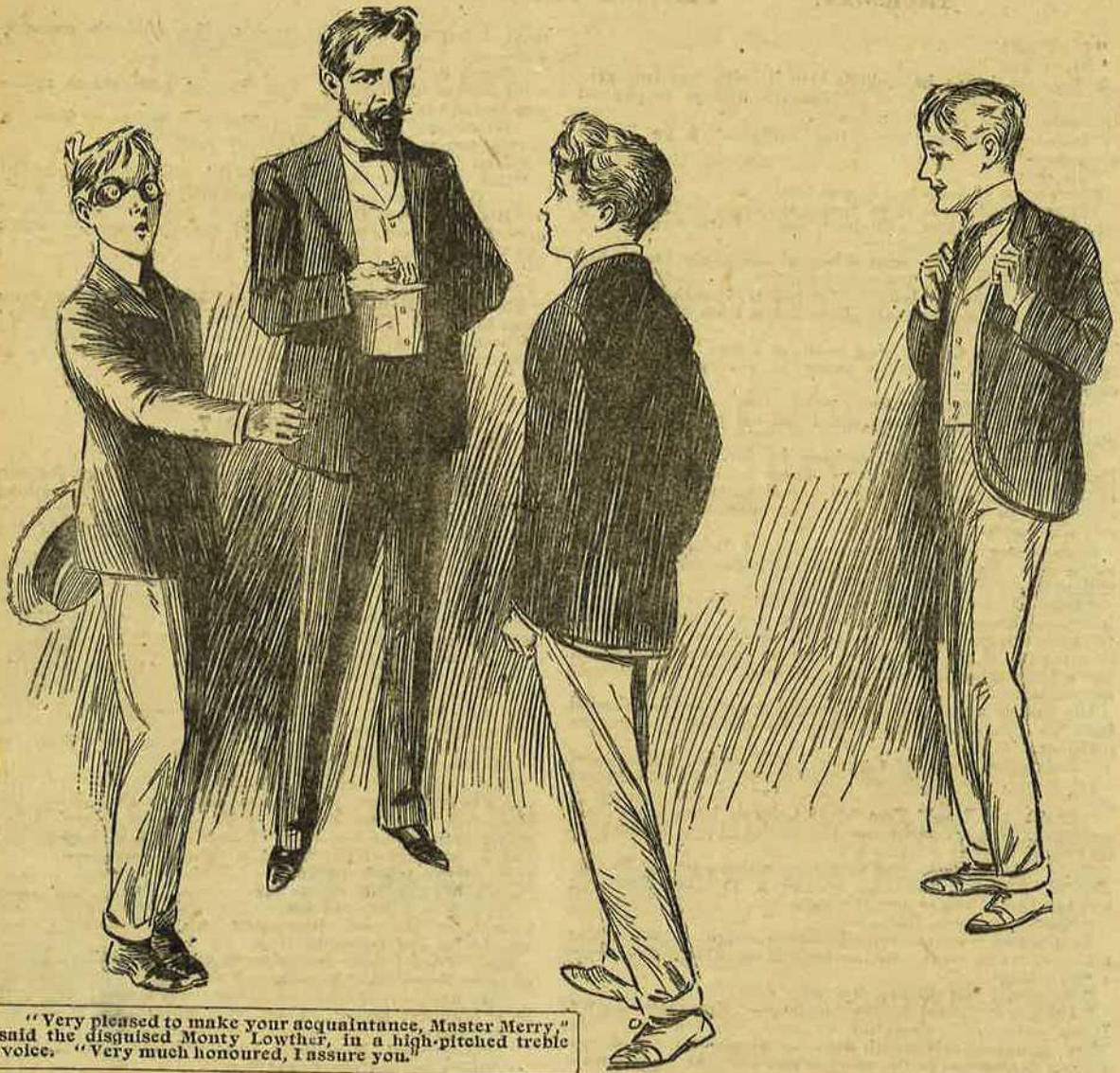
"You're looking a bit off colour!" said Blake. "Anything wrong?"

"N-no! I woke up with a nasty taste in my mouth this morning."

"You'd better wire to Miss Fawcett for some medicine."

Tom Merry reddened.

"Oh, don't rot! The fact is, I feel just as I did once after I allowed Miss Priscilla to persuade me into taking one of Dr. Bones's special horrors!"



"Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Master Merry," said the disguised Monty Lowther, in a high-pitched treble voice. "Very much honoured, I assure you."

"Ha, ha! You haven't been scoffing any of those things, surely?"

"No, I haven't. It's quite mysterious."

"I say, you feel up to the picnic, don't you?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "I'm all right now. What about Figgins? We don't want him to spot us carrying the bags."

Blake grinned.

"Oh, that's all serene! I was going to tell you; Figgins is gone."

"Where is he gone?"

"D'Arcy saw him going down the road to Rylcombe, with Kerr and Wynn. He's gone to the village, and that's the opposite direction from the island up the river."

"Good! If he's gone down the river, and we go up, we shan't see anything of him, that's a cert. Jolly good thing, too. Is the grub all right in your study?"

"Yes, Herries and Gussy are packing it into the bags now."

"It hadn't been spotted?"

"No; everything was just as we left it."

"That's good! This picnic is going to be a big success. Figgins & Co. will be wild when we tell them about it afterwards."

"Ha, ha! We'll let 'em know what they missed, too!"

The Terrible Two accompanied Blake to Study No. 6, where five bags were being packed with the comestibles. The bags were of a good size, and pretty full when the packing was finished. The five juniors took one each.

"We'll go out singly, so as not to attract attention," said Tom Merry. "We'll rendezvous at Juggins's cottage."

"That's a good idea!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry departed first. He kept his eyes about him, but Figgins & Co. were conspicuous by their absence, and none of the New House juniors seemed very alert. Many of them were on the playing fields, but a good many seemed to be away from the school.

Tom walked through the wood to the boatman's cottage without misadventure. The New House was evidently quite in ignorance of the whole affair. At the cottage he found old Mr. Jugg, who had the Daisy all ready for the juniors.

Tom deposited his bag in the boat, and waited for the rest to join him. They were not long in doing so. Within a quarter of an hour the whole party were gathered at the rendezvous, and each reported that nothing had been seen of Figgins & Co.

"Oh, we've pulled the wool over their eyes nicely," said Blake. "Figgys will be ready to tear his hair to-night. Come on!"

They took their places in the boat.

"I don't mind if I steer," said D'Arcy. "It's such a beastly fag rowing, you know, and I'm weally not vewy stwong."

Blake inserted his knuckles in the back of D'Arcy's collar, and gently jerked him out of the stern seat.

"Blake, I insist upon this wude wuffness ceasin' immediately! I—"

"There's your oar, Gussy."

"I have stated in plain terms that it is not my wish to row."

"There's your seat."

"The grub is," said Fatty Wynn, flinging his pudding into the river, "awfully rotten!"
Figgins was looking amazed and dismayed.
It had been such a complete and sweeping victory, and this was the result!

A feast that they could not eat.
A feed that had already made them feel ill.
"I don't understand it!" gasped Figgins.
"I should say you don't," growled Pratt. "Nice sort of a leader you are, to lead us into a ghastly frost like this."
"It's not my fault."

"Rats! You ought to have known better."
"How could I know there was anything wrong with the grub? Tom Merry didn't know himself, for I'm certain those kids would be eating it now if we hadn't scoffed it from them."

"Why couldn't you let them eat it, then? Nice sort of a victory this is, to save Tom Merry from being poisoned with this rotten grub, and get poisoned ourselves."

"You've done 'em a good turn, Figgy," said another junior. "Tom Merry ought to be grateful to you. Yah!"

"Oh, shut up, you grumbling asses!" said Figgins. "Blame me when anything goes wrong! I'll leave you out next time there's a feed to be captured."

"I wish you would, if it's anything like this one."

"I feel as if I'd been on the Channel."

"I feel horridly ill."

"I shall never get this taste out of my mouth."

"I've got a pain in my inside."

The complaints rose crescendo on every side. Only the Co. loyally stood by Figgins, and they were looking very grim and glum, too.

Fatty Wynn, in fact, looked as if his heart were broken. The feed had gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream, and it left an aching void.

"Well, it's no good sticking here," said Figgins, at last. "We can't eat that stuff. We'd better be getting back to the school."

In glum humour the New House juniors got into their boat, taking with them the oars to be left at Mr. Jugg's cottage. They drifted down the stream to the tune of endless grumbling. Figgins, like most unsuccessful captains, had to pay the penalty of failure.

During the return the juniors explained all that they thought of him and of his mental capacity, and their thoughts were not flattering.

Mr. Jugg's cottage came in sight at last. Figgins steered for the shore, and ran the boat to the landing-stage.

"Hallo, there's that goggle-merchant!" remarked Kerr. "That's the new thing they've got in the School House. They keep it in Tom Merry's study."

The new boy in the School House was seated upon Mr. Jugg's bench, blue glasses and all. A St. Jim's skiff was moored to the planks. James Edward Jessop was consuming a glass of ginger-pop, and there was another bottle on the bench beside him, as well as a cake and a bundle of sandwiches.

"Looks as if he's enjoying himself!" growled Figgins. "Good mind to chuck him into the river for luck!"

He stepped ashore, and tossed out the oars belonging to the Daisy. James Edward Jessop looked at him curiously. "Hallo, Figgy, you look cross!"

Figgins frowned at him.

"Who are you calling Figgy, you cheeky new kid?"

His frown did not seem to perturb the merchant in blue glasses in any way.

"Anything gone wrong?" he asked. "Haven't you enjoyed your little selves? I've had a nice pull up the river from St. Jim's. Have you seen anything of Tom Merry and his party?"

"Yes," growled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha! Did they have their picnic?"

Figgins looked at him curiously.

"What are you cackling about, you goggled image?"

"The best joke of the season!" said James Edward Jessop, chuckling. "I don't know that I ought to tell you, but it's too good to keep."

"What's the joke?" asked Figgins, beginning to feel suspicious.

"Ha, ha! Only that I've shoved a lot of medicine and

pills into Tom Merry's grub, and when they start feeding, it will be a little surprise for them."

And the new boy at St. Jim's roared.

Figgins exchanged a glance with his followers. They crowded ashore to join him, with meaning looks. Figgins stepped towards the hilarious James Edward.

"So you shoved a lot of medicine and pills into the grub, did you?"

"Yes, rather! They'll enjoy— Hallo, hallo! What are you up to?"

Figgins had grasped him, and in a moment more Kerr and Wynn had pinned his arms. James Edward struggled.

"Look here, Figgins—"

"You funny merchant!" said Figgins, in measured accents. "So it was you shoved that horrid stuff into the grub, was it?"

"Yes, it was. What's the row?"

"Nothing; only Tom Merry and his party didn't eat that grub—"

"Why not?"

"Because we raided it from them—"

"You—you raided it?"

"Yes, and we ate it—at least, some of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Strikes you as being funny, does it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, here's some more fun for you. I'll teach you to bung your filthy medicines into grub that I want to scoff!" said Figgins. "Duck him, kids!"

"Here, chuck it—"

"We're going to. Chuck it into the river," said Figgins.

James Edward struggled frantically.

"Don't! Help! My glasses—"

"I'll take care of your glasses," said Figgins, removing them. "Now in with him!"

The New House juniors were too wild to care for James Edward's protests. His trick had really been played on Tom Merry, but they had got the benefit of it, and they were badly in want of vengeance.

They gave James Edward a run down to the water, and sent him in headlong.

The water by the landing-place was too shallow to drown a child, and so James Edward was in no danger; nevertheless, the experience was an unpleasant one.

He disappeared into the water with a tremendous splash, and a howl of laughter greeted his reappearance.

He was flowing with water, his hair hung in wet locks, and there were weeds streaking it, and, strangest of all to relate, his face had gone extremely pale compared with its former rich red complexion.

"The joke doesn't seem so funny now, does it?" said Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha! This is where we do the laughing! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House party.

"Hallo! What's the kid doing?" exclaimed Kerr.

James Edward's actions were certainly remarkable. Instead of trying to scramble ashore, he had turned away, and was swimming out into the river.

Figgins stared after him in amazement.

"Come back, you silly cuckoo!" he called out.

James Edward made no reply, but manfully breasted the stream. Again Figgins called after him, but he took no notice.

"Off his rocker, I expect," said Figgins. "We'll pick him up in the boat, kids."

They embarked on the boat, and pushed off again. It did not take them long to overtake the swimmer, and Figgins leaped over and grasped him by the hair.

"Leggo! M-m-m-leggo!" spluttered the new boy.

"In with him, chaps!"

Several hands grasped James Edward, and he was hauled into the boat. Then, for the first time, the boys got a good look at his face since his immersion. There was a shout of astonishment. For, the blue glasses being gone, the features were revealed without disguise, and the water of the river had washed off the artificially-red complexion and the darkening of the eyebrows.

A face that had once been well-known at St. Jim's was revealed, and one name was uttered in a simultaneous shout by the New House juniors, in varying tones of amazement—"Monty Lowther!"

CHAPTER 9.

Monty Lowther Faces the Music.

MONTY LOWTHER lay in the boat, drenched and dripping, and staring at Figgins & Co., with a ghastly grin on his face.

It was Monty Lowther, right enough. The disguise which had served the turn of Master James Edward Jessop was

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gone, and the missing member of the Terrible Three was revealed in his own proper person.

"Monty Lowther!"

"You humbug!"

"You howling impostor!"

"You horrid sham!"

Monty Lowther grinned. He rubbed the water out of his eyes, and blinked at Figgins & Co. and the amazed juniors of the New House.

"You—you've bowled me out!" he sputtered.

Figgins's brow grew exceedingly stern.

"Yes, we've bowled you out, you horrid humbug! And now explain what you mean by it."

"Eh?"

"What you mean by it!" roared Figgins. "What do you mean by coming back to the school in disguise like a giddy burglar?"

"Let me see. I suppose you're curious?"

"Curious?" said Figgins. "Not at all. You needn't tell us if you don't want to; only, if you don't, we shall tie a rope to your ankles and tow you back to St. Jim's behind the boat! Don't let me persuade you; do just as you like."

The discovered impostor chuckled.

"Now, don't get waxy, Figgins. If I tell you the yarn, will you promise not to give me away in the school?"

Figgins shook his head decidedly.

"No, I won't!"

"But look here—"

"I'm looking, and I can see a beastly horrid humbug! I don't approve of humbugs. Besides, there's twelve of us here, and the thing would be certain to get out. A secret like that can't be kept among twelve people."

Monty Lowther made a grimace. There was certainly something in what Figgins said. The secret of his identity being known to twelve juniors, it was hardly feasible to think of trying to prevent it from becoming common property at St. Jim's.

His little game had come to a sudden termination. His promise to Miss Fawcett had been faithfully kept so far, but now he was to be deprived of further opportunities of looking after Tom Merry's health.

The game was up; and when the story was all over St. Jim's, it would soon come to the ears of the masters, and then his departure from the school would follow. Still, it had been very funny while it lasted.

"Well, if you won't keep the giddy secret, I won't tell you a word," said Monty Lowther; "so there you are, Figgy! You can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"All right," said Figgins. "We'll take you back to St. Jim's, and show you up. I dare say Tom Merry will be interested to know about your shoving that stuff into his grub."

"Which you ate! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" said Figgins crossly.

"Ha, ha! How do you like the marvellous mixture?"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Are you fonder of that, or of the green globules for piping patients?"

Figgins turned red.

"Look here, you've got to keep your head shut!" he warned.

"Rats! I want to know, you know. You've had a good dose of both marvellous mixture and green globules, and I want to know— Oh, ow!"

Figgins had picked up a boat-hook and given the humorous Monty a dig with it.

"Now, if you don't want to get a sock on the napper," said Figgins, "you'll dry up!"

Figgins looked as if he meant it, and Monty Lowther accordingly dried up. That is, he dried up in a vocal sense. He was too drenched to dry up in any other way.

The boat reached the school boat-house. The juniors landed, and Monty was yanked out of the boat.

"Bring him along!" said Figgins. "We'll show up the horrid impostor to all the school! We'll teach him to disguise himself like a giddy burglar and take us in! We'll teach him to shove marvellous mixture into grub that we want to collar!"

"Look here—" said Monty Lowther.

"Shut up!" said Figgins, prodding him with the boat-hook. "You're not talking in this act! This is where you keep your head shut."

"Forward!" said Kerr.

With one of the company on either side of him, Figgins walking in advance, and the rest of the New House party bringing up the rear, the unfortunate humbug was marched on.

It was useless to attempt to escape, and he did not attempt

it. He entered somewhat into the humour of the situation, but he was not quite without uneasiness.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were lounging at the gates of St. Jim's. They stared at the New House juniors, and then at their captive, in amazement. Of course, they knew Monty Lowther at a glance now that he was undisguised.

"Monty!"

"Lowther!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, Monty Lowther," said Figgins. "We found him in the river. It belongs to Tom Merry, and we're taking it to him."

"It's his property," explained Kerr. "Have you seen Merry, Blake?"

"Yes. He's in his study. But—"

"Come on, kids!"

"But, I say, where did he spring from? What does it all mean, anyway?" demanded the amazed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah—what does it all mean, deah boys?"

"This," said Figgins, pointing at Monty Lowther with the boat-hook like a showman—"this is the goggle-merchant."

"The what?"

"The goggle-merchant. He came to St. Jim's in blue glasses, and called himself James Edward Jessop. We've bowled him out."

"My only aunt Maria Jane!"

"We're taking him back to his owner," said Figgins. "You can come along if you like. March, kids! Forward!"

They marched on to the School House. The amazed chums of Study No. 6 joined them. At the door of the School House the followers of Figgins & Co. dispersed, to spread the strange tale over the school, but Figgins & Co. did not relinquish their prisoner. They marched Monty in, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy followed.

"I say, Blake," muttered Lowther, "get me out of this. Stand by a School House chap against these horrid New House bounders!"

"Rats!"

"Remember how they collared your grub on the island."

Blake and his chums looked at one another. The temptation was strong to avenge that reverse now that Figgins & Co. had ventured into the lions' den by entering the walls of the School House.

But honour forbade. The enemy had come in in good faith, and any attack upon them wouldn't be "cricket." So Blake shook his head, though he shook it slowly.

"No, Monty, old man, it can't be did!" he said. "It's pax now between us. Besides, you're going to be shown up for being such a horrid humbug!"

"But, I say, Blake—"

"Nuff said. Quick march!" said Blake decisively.

Monty Lowther was marched on, right to the door of Tom Merry's study in the new wing of the School House. Figgins kicked at the door.

"Hallo, there! You can come in."

The chief of the New House juniors opened the door, and the procession "processed" into the room.

Tom Merry and Manners were busily engaged examining some photographic prints, and they did not even look up.

"What do you want?" asked Tom Merry, without turning his head.

"Got something that belongs to you," said Figgins casually. "We picked it up in the river, and brought it to you as lost property."

The Terrible Two looked round. Their eyes fell upon Monty Lowther, and they gave a simultaneous jump.

"Monty Lowther!"

"Old Monty!"

They rushed forward and seized him. They grabbed him away from Figgins and hugged him.

"Hallo, he's all wet!" said Tom Merry, making that discovery as the water from Monty's clothes soaked over him.

"What has happened?"

"Didn't I say we picked him up in the river?" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the Co. "They don't see the joke."

Tom Merry stared.

"What joke?"

"Look at this merchant. Take a good look at him. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes, of course we do!" said Tom. And Manners added: "Have you gone clean off your silly rocker, Figgins?"

"No. When did you see him last?"

"Why, the time his uncle fetched him away from St. Jim's."

"Ha, ha, ha! Not since then?"

"No."

"Ha, ha! Then, you don't know your study mate again? I admit he's a bit changed without his complexion or his goggles."

"What on earth are you driving at, Figgins?"

Figgins waved his hand to Monty.

"Allow me to introduce you to Master James Edward Jessop, the biggest humbug that ever came to St. Jim's!" he exclaimed.

"Jessop?"

"Impossible!"

"I tell you it is! His complexion is washed off, and here's his blue goggles. It was Monty Lowther all the time!"

"Im—impossible!"

"It seems strange," said Arthur Augustus, "but it is true, Tom Mewwy."

"But—but—but—"

"Don't you know his clothes again?" said Figgins. "Besides, the horrid humbug won't deny it! He knows he's bowled out! Bless you, all St. Jim's knows it by this time!"

Monty Lowther gave a sickly grin.

"Go on, Monty! Give us the facts!"

"Well, it's true," said Monty Lowther, "I was the giddy goggle-merchant. I never thought the game would end up so suddenly as this, though."

"You horrid bounder! And you ran down Monty Lowther to us—yourself all the time—"

"Yes; and, really, Tom, old chap, I never felt more inclined to speak out than when you wanted to punch my head for running myself down. But—"

Tom Merry assumed his sternest expression.

"A joke," he remarked, "is a joke! But a joke played on us is another matter. You've no business to play your little jokes on your own study! You've got to give an awfully satisfactory explanation, in the presence of these gentlemen, or else we shall scrag you and rag you."

"Good!" said D'Arcy. "Wag the howwid boundah!"

"It really wasn't my fault!" said Monty, grinning. "I wanted to come back to St. Jim's, and my uncle wouldn't agree. Then he went on a journey, and left me with Miss Fawcett, and she agreed to let me come like this, to look after Tom Merry's health."

"What do you mean?"

"I was to give you medicines and pills," said Monty Lowther. "I've done it, too! I put one of Dr. Bones's specials in your mouth last night—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co.

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"You—you beast! That accounts for the horrid taste in my mouth this morning!"

"I couldn't help it! I had promised Miss Fawcett, as a condition of my coming here, and a chap can't break his word," said Monty virtuously.

"N-n-no, I suppose not!" said Tom Merry suspiciously. "And you didn't want to, either, you image! I—"

"That's really why I shoved pills and medicine into the grub in Blake's study," said Monty Lowther. "I thought I'd do you all a good turn, you know."

"You did what?" exclaimed Blake. "Then Figgins—"

"We couldn't eat the stuff!" said Figgins. "It nearly poisoned some of us!"

Study No. 6 roared with laughter.

"Well, you've explained, Monty," said Tom Merry severely. "And I don't consider your explanation at all satisfactory."

"Far from it," said Figgins & Co., with one voice.

"Yaas, wathlah!"

"You've taken in your old chums, and made yourself a general nuisance," said Tom Merry, with the air of a judge. "You're are found guilty of playing the giddy ox, without any extenuating circumstances."

"Hear, hear."

"You might have poisoned me with that horrible, marvellous mixture and those fearful green globules for pink people," said Tom, with still more severity. "I grant your promise to Miss Fawcett, but—"

"I had to do it, you know! I—"

"You've taken us all in! You're a humbug! You're a sham! You're a hollow mockery! You're a delusion and a snare! And I sentence you—"

Tap!

A knock at the study door interrupted the sentence of the self-constituted judge.

"Oh, come in, fathhead—whoever you are!" said Tom Merry.

The door opened, and Mr. Railton, the master of the

School House, entered. Tom Merry turned as red as fire. He had not guessed that it was the house-master at the door. But Mr. Railton appeared not to have noticed his polite form of address.

"Is Jessop here?" he said. "Jessop, you— Why—what—what is this?"

Monty Lowther reddened.

"Please, sir—"

"You are wet-soaked! What—"

"I've been in the river, sir. Figgy pulled me out. I—"

Mr. Railton's eyes were fixed upon him sternly.

"I have just heard a most singular story," he said. "I came here to question you, Jess—I mean Lowther. But I need not do so now. The story is evidently true."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! Then you will kindly come with me to the Head, and explain the meaning of this masquerade!" said the house-master. "Or, rather, you will dry yourself and change your clothes, and then follow me to the Head's study."

And Mr. Railton quitted the room.

The juniors looked at one another ruefully. All thoughts of reprisals upon Monty were gone now. He was freely forgiven, in the face of the storm that was pretty certain to burst in the Head's study.

"Well, it was bound to come out!" said Monty Lowther resignedly. "As well soon as late! It was funny enough while it lasted! I'd better change my things! Anyway, as I don't belong to the school, I can't be punished. That's one comfort!"

Mr. Railton had proceeded straight to the Head's study.

He found Dr. Holmes with a letter in his hand, and his brows puckered over it in a decidedly worried way.

"I am glad you have come, Railton," said the Head. "I have had a most extraordinary letter from Miss Priscilla Fawcett."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, indeed! You remember the boy Montague Lowther, who was taken away from the school some short time back by his uncle?"

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Yes; I remember him perfectly well."

"Well, this uncle has left England on business, and he left the boy with Miss Fawcett. Now he writes to her that, as his business will keep him away from England for some considerable time, instead of the few weeks he originally supposed, he has decided to yield to his nephew's wish, and allow him to return to St. Jim's. This is what Miss Fawcett has written to me; but that is not the extraordinary part. The lady states that Montague Lowther is, as a matter of fact, already at the school."

"Really?"

"Yes. Being anxious about the health of Tom Merry, she allowed Lowther to carry out a harebrained scheme of coming here under another name, he promising on his side to keep a careful watch upon Merry, and to send her daily reports as to his health."

"Ha, ha!"

"The whole thing is absurd! Lowther, of course, knows very well that Merry is the picture of health, and that his governess's fears are groundless. But he appears to have been glad of the chance of coming back to St. Jim's on any terms. I can sympathise with the lad's attachment to his old school, and his desire to return, Mr. Railton."

"So can I, sir; heartily! As a matter of fact, Master Lowther's little deception was revealed by accident to-day, and I have told him to come here and explain to you. I did not know that Miss Fawcett had written and explained already."

"It is an absurd business," said the doctor, smiling. "However, Lowther shall certainly remain at St. Jim's now that he has his uncle's permission. Ah, here he is!"

There was a timid tap at the door.

"Come in!"

Monty Lowther entered the study.

"Lowther," said Dr. Holmes, with a severe expression, which the twinkle in his eyes belied, "I have just received a letter from Miss Fawcett, explaining the absurd trick in which you have been engaged. She also tells me that your uncle will remain abroad for some time, and that he gives his permission for you to return to this school, if you wish."

Monty Lowther's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, sir!"

"Do you wish to remain at the school?"

"Oh, yes, sir! So much, sir! If you will let me—"

DAILY MAIL.

"PLUCK."

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"Upon the whole, I shall not punish you for this absurd prank," said the Head. "But remember—nothing of the kind must ever occur again!"

Monty could safely promise that.

"You are very kind, sir! I wanted to come back to St. Jim's so much! This will be awfully jolly! I mean, I am very glad I can stay, sir."

"Very good! You will stay. Under your proper name, of course! You may go, Lowther."

"Thank you, sir."

Monty Lowther went. As he closed the door, he heard the doctor and the housemaster laughing together.

He went directly to Study No. 10, where the juniors were still waiting to hear the verdict. He came in beaming, and in a few words explained.

"I'm to stay! Hurrah!"

"Bravo!" said Blake and Herries heartily. And Arthur Augustus chimed in:—"Bwayo!"

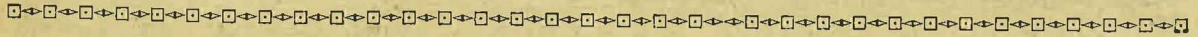
"Hear, hear!" said Figgins & Co. cordially. "We're glad to have you in the school again, Monty, and we'll make you sit up yet, you bouncer!"

Tom Merry and Manners took a hand each of the restored member of their honourable company, and shook it high in the air.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom. "Now we're the Terrible Three again! And you had better look out, Figgins & Co.!"

THE END.

(Next Thursday's special tale of Tom Merry's school-days, entitled "Playing the Game," by Martin Clifford. Order your "Gem" Library in advance.)



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

READ
THIS
FIRST

lad, surely I have not caused you to hate me, that you should bring such a terrible accusation against me." (Now go on with the story.)

Mr. Perkins Threatens Jardon.

"Oh, I wouldn't do anything like that, sir! I rather like you, sir," said Perkins, "and I would like you a lot better if you weren't so strict. If you want to make me like you, all you have got to do is to let me have my own way."

"My lad, it would be to your disadvantage. But surely you do not tell your father that I struck you in that—that brutal manner? There is no other word for it."

"I only said you caned me, sir."

"Come, my lad! To act a lie is as bad as to tell one," exclaimed Dr. Andale. "In some cases it is, if possible, worse. I call upon you to tell your father, and to tell these lads, the truth. I have caned them all, and shall possibly cane them again, but they know, and you must know, that I would never strike a brutal blow. I beg of you, Perkins, to speak the truth; and I warn you that I will have it."

"Of course, as I said, I got another licking after yours, sir, and—"

"You certainly did not say so, Perkins," interposed the doctor. "I can only assure you, Mr. Perkins, that I never have struck a boy in such a shameful manner, and that I never shall do so. I did not strike him on his shoulders at—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"How dare you laugh like that, Bouncer?"

"Sorry, sir. I know you don't catch me so high up as that, sir. Frightened of the lungs, I expect."

"Who struck you in that manner, Perkins?"

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"I will know! I will know who did this thing, and I will—"

"Stay, Dr. Andale!" exclaimed Mr. Perkins. "I don't wish my son to be the cause of another boy's ruin. As you know far better than I could tell you, all boys have their faults, and in this case I consider that a flogging would do the boy who was guilty of the act far more good than if he were expelled, which I take is your meaning."

"I might consider that my painful duty."

"Will you allow me to deal with the bully—he must have been such?"

"You will take a great responsibility off my shoulders."

"Well, Tim, I gave you a ducking because I thought it would do you good, and bring you to your senses; but I certainly should not have done so had I known the treatment you have received. So there is a sovereign for you, and—"

"Oh, I say, thanks! Look here, you can come down every week and chuck me into the river, father. I'd like it at a sovereign a time, and in the summer I'll lower the rate to five bob. You can chuck me into the deepest part, if you like, 'cos I can swim all right."

"And that is the boy I have tried to give a lesson to," sighed Mr. Perkins. "But I will learn the bully's name, and I will try him with one. Like you, Dr. Andale, I would never harm a boy; but in this case I feel that severe punishment is necessary, so as to deter the lad from striking others in a similar manner."

"You can't do it, father," said Tim. "He would jolly well punch your head."

"Oh, won't there be a jolly spree!" continued Tim Perkins, as, accompanied by the chums, he followed his father from the doctor's study. "My dad will get an awful thrashing. Why, he's frightened of my mother. He, he, he! Well, it will serve him right for chucking me into the water; only I hope he doesn't get his eye knocked out, because he's an artist, and he wouldn't be able to earn enough money to keep me if he got his eye knocked out. I'll bet Jardon gives him beans. I know the old man can't fight, else he wouldn't put up with my mother's cheek."

"You are a contemptible little cad!" exclaimed Rex. "Haven't you any respect for your father?"

"Eh? Of course I have. I bet I respect him a lot more than you do your father. Why, he can paint the sun going down behind a tree. He did it once, and asked me what I thought of it. I said that I had never seen a tree burning like that. You should have heard my mother laugh. She thought it awfully funny, but he didn't. My mother always says that she can't make out how he sells the rubbish. Still, he must, 'cos we get plenty of money. That's the door, father. He, he, he! My back is something awful."

Needless to say, the chums followed into Jardon's study, and they found that worthy seated in his easy-chair, smoking a cigarette.

"I am this lad's father," observed Mr. Perkins.

Now, had that gentleman said, "I am Rex's father," there is not the slightest doubt that Jardon would have shown him some respect; but Tim Perkins's father was another matter. Jardon knew that Tim was an utter idiot, and he presumed that his father would be the same.

"Sit down, my good man," exclaimed Jardon, in his loftiest manner. "You will find a chair somewhere about,

STORMPOINT (continued).

Well, Tim's father, what do you want? Have you come to ask me to take dear little Tim as a fag, and to teach him better manners?"

"I fear you would scarcely be competent," observed Mr. Perkins, remaining standing. "I would prefer my son to be taught by a gentleman."

"What's that, fellow?"

"I am not accustomed to repeat my observations."

"You often do to mother, father," said Tim.

"Take him home to your mother, and tell her, with my compliments, not to let him loose again," said Jardon.

"He, he, he! I knew he would knock spots off you, father. He's awfully smart; a lot smarter than mother, and see how she makes you sit up."

"Take him away, Tim," said Jardon; "I don't want him. He appears to be a bigger idiot than you are."

"Young man," exclaimed Mr. Perkins, with absolute calmness, "I must say that I do not consider your behaviour at all gentlemanly."

"I do not consider you competent to judge of gentlemanly behaviour," retorted Jardon.

"I will not discuss that matter with you," said Mr. Perkins quietly. "I have come here with reference to what I consider your brutal treatment of my son. I have seen his back, and I know that you struck him in that manner. Now, I admit that he is a very tiresome and aggravating lad; but your treatment is absolutely brutal. Whatever provocation he gave you, you had no right to strike him in such a manner. It was cowardly and contemptible in the extreme, and you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself."

"Have you quite done, Perkins's father?" sneered Jardon. "Have you entirely finished your eloquent ratiocination?"

"I have little more to say."

"Then if you have little to say, it will match the little you have said. You can go. Kindly walk to the left of my table, because I have some silver on the other side."

"My lads," exclaimed Mr. Perkins, turning to the chums, "I have not come here to bandy words with this young man, and for that reason I do not intend to point out to him the extreme stupidity and coarseness of his remarks. It is evident to me that he has not been accustomed to associating with gentlemen. I came here to chastise him for what there can be no doubt is brutal treatment, and that is what I now intend to do."

"You insolent scoundrel!" roared Jardon, springing to his feet. "Do you know that I am the best boxer in this college?"

"I hope, my lads, that you will not consider the punishment I give the misguided young man too severe," continued Mr. Jardon, completely ignoring the bully.

"It can't be, unless you knock his stupid head off his shoulders, sir," growled Bob.

"If you do not leave my study this instant," cried Jardon, stepping up to Mr. Perkins, "I will knock you down, fellow."

"I feel that it is a case where severe punishment is required," continued Mr. Perkins, still addressing the comrades. "You have seen, my lads, how brutally my son has been treated. As I tell you, I do not know what provocation was given; but I do know that no young man has the right to thrash a more lad in that brutal fashion. It is my duty to make an example of that young man. I shall do it. Ah, boys, if you could only take Tim in hand and make him one

of you, I—I would willingly give half the remainder of my life!"

"Why, papa is a bigger idiot than the boy!" roared Jardon. "I always thought that Tim Perkins was the biggest idiot on the face of this earth; but his pa goes one better. Take him home, Tim, and tell your mother, with my love, to slipper him."

"It's rot!" growled Bob. "I know a decent fellow when I meet him, and don't care a hang whether he is a gentleman—as you call them—or not; but Mr. Perkins is a decent gentleman, and because his son is not all that might be desired, it does not follow that the father is to blame. My impression is that if you took Tim in tow for a few months, sir, and chucked him into the water when he needed it, there would be a vast difference in his character before those months had elapsed."

Mr. Perkins fixed his eyes on Bob, and appeared to be weighing his words.

"Bob, my lad, he exclaimed, placing his hand on that worthy's shoulder, "I believe you are right. I shall take your advice during the holidays. I am a great believer in kind treatment, but kindness must be tempered with justice. Yes, I shall try your remedy. You are a smart lad."

"I'm not, sir; not by long chalks. I'm the biggest dunderhead in the college. Ask Rex; he's truthful."

"Well, Rex, do you think that?" inquired Mr. Perkins, smiling.

"Bob is like Tim, sir, he can learn if he likes," answered Rex. "Bob does not often like; Tim never likes. But Bob is making money in some miraculous manner. He's not making it a pound at a time. He's got a stepfather who is a rotter—there's no other term for him. He has stopped Bob's pocket-money, and yet that beauty makes more than he can spend. How he makes it no one but, I believe, the doctor knows, but you can jolly well bet he makes it honestly. Bob wouldn't know how to make it dishonestly; and if he did, he wouldn't do it."

"You hear that, Tim," said Mr. Perkins. "You hear what must be the truth, because Rex says that the doctor knows how Bob makes this money. Well, you hear that he would not be dishonest. Now, he has been brought up by a stepfather, and could not have had the advantages that you have had. You cannot say that I have ever struck you or been unkind, that—"

"Why, you chucked me in the water, father!"

"Well, it was not deep," observed Mr. Perkins, smiling slightly; "and you said that you were determined to go into it."

"That was of my own accord. I didn't want to go into it of anyone else's accord. It makes all the difference in a case of suicide; and I shall tell my mother that you tried to drown me, and won't you get into a good old row, that's all, unless, of course, you choose to give me a sovereign to square it. I'd strongly advise you to stump up, and so I tell you."

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Perkins, "I will take Bob's advice against yours. Now, what is this young man's name?"


"Jardon," answered Jim.

"Now, Jardon, I am going to thrash you."

"Fellow," roared Jardon, "do you know to whom you are speaking? You, that little idiot's father, to dare to speak to a gentleman like that!"

"I am going to give you a severe thrashing, my lad," said Mr. Perkins, without a sign of temper. "I am doing this because I believe it will be for your good. Mind, I am not going to strike you in the brutal manner that you struck my son; all the same, I shall give you a severe thrashing."

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