TOM MERRY AS EDITOR.

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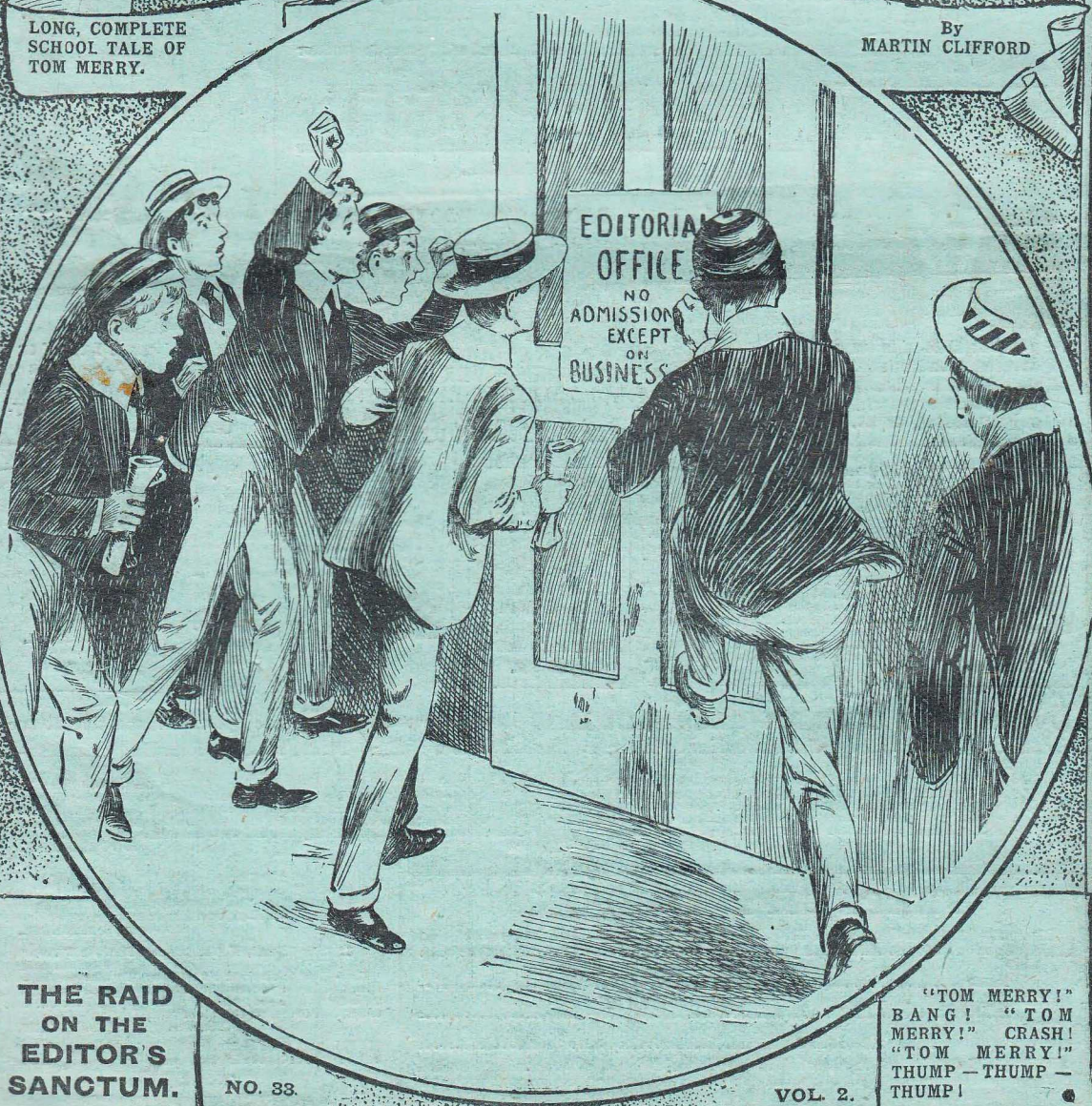
TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY.

LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD



THE RAID ON THE EDITOR'S SANCTUM.

"TOM MERRY!" BANG! "TOM MERRY!" CRASH! "TOM MERRY!" THUMP—THUMP—THUMP!

NO. 33. VOL. 2.

NEXT THURSDAY: "BY ORDER." By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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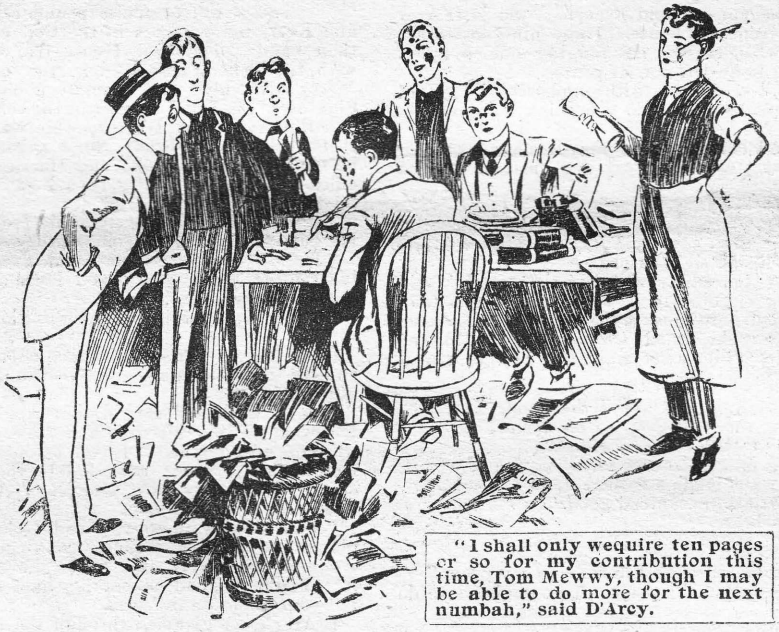
A Splendid School Tale.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



"I shall only wequire ten pages or so for my contribution this time, Tom Mewwy, though I may be able to do more for the next numbah," said D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 1.
The Contributors.

"TOM MERRY!"

Thump!

"Tom Merry!"

Bang!

"Tom Merry—Tom Merry—Tom Merry!"

Bang—bang!

Half a dozen juniors were gathered outside the door of Tom Merry's study in the School House at St. Jim's, knocking and calling.

They had been knocking and calling for five minutes, but no reply had been vouchsafed from within.

Yet they knew perfectly well that Tom Merry was there. The door was locked on the inside, and they could hear an occasional movement on the part of the occupant of the study. Tom Merry was there, but he seemed to be afflicted with an unaccountable deafness.

"Tom Merry!"

Bang!

"Tom Merry!"

Crash!

"Tom Merry!"

Thump—thump—thump!

"The rotter can hear us!" exclaimed Gore wrathfully. "He must know that we are here."

"My hat!" grinned Jimson, of the New House. "If he doesn't, he must be shockingly deaf. Never mind, knock a little louder."

"I'll kick the blessed door down if he doesn't open it!"

"Steady on!" said Mellish. "You'll bring old Schneider on the scene if you make too much row."

"Hang old Schneider! Who cares for him?" growled Gore. "I'm going into this blessed editorial office, I tell you. Think I'm going to write out a beastly contribution, covering nine pages of manuscript, for nothing? Not much!"

"Certainly not," said Jimson. "And I've got a little poem here, running to fourteen stanzas, and that's going into 'Tom Merry's Weekly,' or there will be trouble."

Each of the juniors loudly knocking for admittance at the door of Tom Merry had a roll of manuscript under his arm, or sticking out of his pocket.

Several other fellows were coming along the passage now, and each of them was similarly equipped.

"I say, can't you get in?" asked Pratt, of the New House, as he arrived. "What's the matter?"

"The door's locked."

"Well, knock."

"We've been knocking," growled Gore. "They won't let us in."

"What rot!" said Pratt. "I'm going in. I've got a poem in blank verse on the Spanish Armada for the first number of 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

"And I've got the first chapter of a ripping serial," said French, a Shell boy, belonging to the New House. "It's called 'Gory Dick, the Heroic Highwayman'"

Bang—bang—bang!

Thump—thump—thump!

The juniors were getting exasperated. It was really too bad. Only a few days before, the idea of starting a school magazine had been mooted, and had been discussed by the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 in the School House, assisted by Figgins & Co. from the New House.

Tom Merry had been selected to edit the new paper, which

was named after him, as it was his idea. The idea had caught on. All the budding authors and poets in both the houses at St. Jim's had immediately set to work to compose contributions for the new paper. The first number was to come out on Saturday, and this was Wednesday, a half-holiday at St. Jim's. After dinner, the eager contributors had rolled up to the editorial office with their sheaves of copy, and their state of feeling at being denied admittance may be imagined.

They knew that Tom Merry and his chums, Manners and Lowther, were to be busy that afternoon getting up the first number of the paper, and they had come along with their copy with the best intentions in the world.

But the door was locked, and no notice was taken from within of the clamour.

The words "Editorial Office" stared at them in sprawling white letters from the oaken door, and underneath was written in smaller characters, "No admission except upon business." But the contributors were there on business; so, of course, the prohibition did not apply to them.

Indignation was growing in the passage.

Thump! Bang! Crash! Gore brought his boot into play, and, though he could not kick through the solid oak panels of the door, he made them creak and groan.

"Here, I say, draw it mild!" said Jimson. "You'll have Schneider, or else a beastly prefect, down on us."

"I don't care! I'm going in."

"It's too bad," said French. "I suppose Tom Merry doesn't want to be disturbed. Cheek! It's an editor's business to be disturbed, of course."

"I should say so."

"Besides, some fellows have been let in," said Jimson. "Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther are there, and so is Blake, from Study No. 6, and Herries, too."

"Oh, they're in the game," said French. "So is D'Arcy and Figgins & Co., from our house. Those nine beasts are always combining, when they're not ragging one another. Still, we're not going to be left out, of course."

"I should say not," said Gore, with emphasis. "I've got nine pages written out here, and do you think I'm going to take all that trouble for nothing?"

"Well, old fellow, I don't see how they'll make room for your nine pages, after putting in my first instalment of a serial," said French.

"Your serial can be left over."

"Can it?" said French warmly. "It beats your stuff hollow, I'll guarantee that. 'Gory Dick, the Heroic Highwayman; or, the Bloodstained Treasure'——"

"Ha, ha! I fancy the editor will bar that stuff," said Jimson. "The thing is going to be a bit better class than that. I've got a poem here—just a little thing of fourteen stanzas of twelve lines each—called 'Castle Cressy.' I'll read it to you, if you like, while we're waiting. This is how it starts:

"'High on a beetling rock above the flood,
O'erhanging the wild deep so far below,
The ancient Castle of Cressy stood,
Frowning defiance at every foe.
The great walls made a gallant show,
Built of materials guaranteed good.
And on the keep——'"

Bang—bang—bang!

"Shut up that row, Gore, while I'm reading my poem."

"Sha'n't! I can't stand that poem. You oughtn't to do such things."

"Look here, if you——"

"Yes, I think we've had enough of that poem," said French. "You couldn't possibly compare it with my serial. Listen to this: 'On a wild, murky, stormy, fearful night, while the lightning roared and the thunder flashed—I mean, while the thunder flashed and the lightning roared—I mean, while the thunder crashed and the lightning flashed—a dark, mysterious horseman might have been seen riding at full speed along a black, gloomy road, where all was hidden and invisible in the dense darkness——'"

"Oh, my hat! How could they see him if he wasn't visible?"

"Oh, that's a detail! The description is splendid, and——"

Crash—crash!

"I tell you you'll have old Schneider here, Gore, if you——"

"And I tell you I don't care for old Schneider!" yelled Gore, exasperated. "Old Schneider can go and eat coke——Ow!"

A fat finger and thumb had closed upon Gore's ear.

"Vat you say pefore?" demanded the angry voice of Herr Schneider, the German master at St. Jim's. "Vat you say—hein?"

"I—I—I——"

"Old Schneider can go and eat te coke mit himself—hein? Gore, I——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Gore confusedly. "You needn't go—— I—I mean that I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know you were there."

"Vat is all dat noise for pefore?" asked Herr Schneider, releasing Gore's ear, after giving him a twist that made him wriggle. "Vat it all mean—hey?"

"We're trying to make Tom Merry hear, sir," said Mellish submissively. "We—we want to speak to him importantly, sir, and we can't make him hear."

"If Tom Merry not hear tat noise, it is pecause he not vant to hear it pefore," said the German master. "You vill be quiet, or else I gome again, and if I gome again I pring ein cane after, ain't it?"

And Herr Schneider, with a warning wag of the finger at the juniors, went back to his study, from which the terrific disturbance had drawn him.

The discomfited contributors looked at one another. Gore rubbed his injured ear, which was as red as fire, and growled:

"Why couldn't some of you tell me the old beast was coming? Look here, kids, we're going into the editorial office. We've got to bust in the door somehow."

"Hallo! Here comes Figgins & Co. and D'Arcy!" exclaimed Pratt. "They're going in, and we'll get in at the same time. Quiet!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Staff.

FIGGINS & CO. were coming up the passage. Figgins, the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors, had a roll of foolscap under his arm. Fatty Wynn and Kerr, the partners in the Co., carried similar rolls in their hands. The New House trio were generally at war with the School House, but the establishment of 'Tom Merry's Weekly' had brought about peace for the time, Figgins & Co. being sharers in the concern.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was coming along with them, belonged to Study No. 6 in the School House, where he chummed with Blake and Herries, now in the editorial office. He had evidently been over to the New House to fetch Figgins & Co.

The four looked curiously at the crowd of contributors waiting outside the door of Tom Merry's study.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the great Figgins. "What are you kids doing here? Have you been spending your term's pocket-money in foolscap?"

"We've brought in our contributions," said French, with dignity.

"Oh, I see! You seem to have enough of them. But can't you see the notice on the door—'No admittance except upon business'?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his eye, and surveying the annoyed contributors through it. "Haven't you any eyes, deah boys? You fellahs are not admitted to the editowial office, you know. Wun away, now, and play! We're goin' to be feahfully busy this aftahnoon."

"You tailor's dummy," said Gore, with a disparaging glance at D'Arcy's fancy waistcoat and nicely-creased trousers and lovely tie, "what have you got to do with it? You're no good, unless they have a comic front page, and put your photo on it."

D'Arcy's eye gleamed through the monocle.

"What did you call me, Goah?"

"I called you a silly tailor's dummy!"

"I'm sowwy to quawwel with you, Goah, but I must wefuse to be chawactewised as a tailah's dummy," said Arthur Augustus. "I must wequest you to wetwact that obnoxious expwession, or else I shall be compelled to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha! I can see you doing it!"

"You will feel me doin' it in a minute, Goah, if you do not wetwact."

"Well, I'm not——"

"Here, dry up," said Figgins, seizing Gussy by the arm. "You're not going to fight Gore when there's editorial work to be done."

"Pway welease me, Figgins. I must thwash Goah for his impertinence——"

"Rats!" Figgins tapped at the door. "Open the door, Tom Merry! It's us, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, and Arthur Algernon Aubrey Augustus Plantagenet."

"Figgins, I have said before that I dislike such idiotic vawiations bein' made on my name," said Arthur Augustus. "My name is Arthur Augustus, and I shall take it kindly if you will not call me Algernon."

"Sorry, Algy. I'll make a point of it, Aubrey. I won't forget again, Gustavus. You may rely upon me, Tudor Plantagenet."

"You are simply widiculous——"

"Here, open this door, Tom Merry! We're in the firm, you know; we don't belong to the silly riff-raff who have been making a row outside here!" called out Figgins.

"It's us!" shouted Kerr and Wynn.

There was a sound of the key turning in the lock.

The door of the editorial office was opened, and Tom Merry's cheerful countenance came into view.

Tom Merry was looking very businesslike.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, with a white apron on, which was plentifully smeared with ink, as were his hands and his sunny face.

Figgins stared at him.

"Hallo! Is that the editorial costume, or are you doing the office-boy act now?"

"Oh, come in!" said Tom Merry. "We're hard at work. This silly lot of kids——"

"What's that?" exclaimed Gore.

Tom Merry looked at him severely.

"You've been making a row out here," he said, "and interrupting the editorial labours. March off!"

"We're coming in."

"You're not! Clear off!"

"We've brought our contributions——"

"All contributions have to be slipped under the door," said Tom Merry. "The sanctity of the editorial office cannot be broken in upon by any old contributor wandering in at odd moments. It's not to be expected. You ought to know better."

"That's all very well, but——"

"Clear!" said Tom Merry.

While he talked with Gore, Figgins & Co. and D'Arcy had entered the study. Tom Merry, as a matter of fact, was only talking to keep the contributors quiet while they did so. Now he slammed the door.

George Gore made a rush.

"The beast! Shove it open before he can lock it!"

He hurled himself against the door.

But it was too late!

The key clicked in the lock, and Gore kicked at the door in baffled exasperation. The editorial office was fastened again against all intruders.

"Stop that kicking," said Mellish. "If old Schneider comes again, he won't let you off so easily next time, Gore."

Gore growled, but he desisted. His ear was still smarting.

"Well, what's to be done?" he snapped. "We're not going to be left out in the cold like this, I suppose. I'm getting fed up with Tom Merry's nerve."

"So are we all," said French. "We've got to get in somehow. It's a point of honour now. Besides, it's only fair to the paper to let them have our contributions. Catch me shoving mine under the door."

"Or me mine! Might get overlooked!"

"I don't suppose Tom Merry would have sense enough to understand how good mine is, unless I was there to explain it to him."

"Very likely not. Of course we must go in."

"Of course we must. Can anybody here pick a lock?"

There was a general silence. Apparently none of the contributors had ever understudied Bill Sikes or Charles Peace.

"Well, we're going in," said Gore. "If we can't pick the lock, we can't open the door, but there's the window!"

"The window!" exclaimed Mellish.

"Yes. You know how those kids borrowed Taggles's big ladder the other day to get in at the window. Well, we can do the same. It only means a tip to Taggles."

"I'm stony," said Mellish.

"Oh, don't be mean! It will only mean a penny each to make up a bob, and that will be enough for Taggles. Fork out, and come along."

"It's a good idea," said French.

And, after some discussion, the baffled contributors made the whip round to raise the tip for the school porter, and left the passage.

Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. were looking round the editorial office.

The whole of the nine members of the editorial staff were now in Tom Merry's study, and the work of producing the first number of "The Weekly" was about to seriously commence.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, to whom the study belonged, had already been busy. The inky state of their faces and fingers showed that. Blake and Herries, from Study No. 6, also showed the signs of labour.

Arthur Augustus looked at the staff rather disparagingly.

"I weally hope that it is not stwictly necessawy to get into that beastly inky state," he remarked. "I am afwaid that if it is the case, I shall have to wesign my position on the editowial staff of 'Tom Mewwy's Weekly.'"

"Rats!" said Jack Blake. "You'll get just as inky as you're wanted to, Gussy. Don't you start criticising busy people."

"I weally don't want to be cwitical, Blake, but weally——"

"Dry up!" said Herries. "Take your jacket off and get to work. Here's a lot of copying to be done."

Figgins looked at the table, which was littered with papers. The floor was pretty well littered, too, with torn paper and spoiled sheets.

"You've got a fearful muck here," said Figgins. "I don't know much about editorial offices, but I should imagine that they're kept a bit tidier than this."

Tom Merry smiled superiorly.

"That's where you're wrong, Figgy. Have you kids brought any contributions with you?"

The New House trio looked at one another, and made no reply.

"Did you hear what I asked you?"

Still no answer.

Tom Merry looked at the three in amazement.

"Why don't you speak?" he exclaimed. "Are you deaf, Figgins?"

"Oh, were you speaking to us?" asked Figgins, with interest. "You said 'kids,' so, of course, I didn't know you meant us."

"Oh, don't rot now, Figgy! We're awfully busy!"

"Yes, you look it."

"It will be a bit of a pull to get the first number out by Saturday," said Tom Merry. "And as we've announced the forthcoming publication on the school notice-board, we must keep up to time. There will be a howl if we don't."

"That's right enough. But we're in the dark at present," said Figgins. "What about the publication? Are we going to have the paper printed?"

"Can't, the first number. It couldn't be done in time for publication. We might think about it for the second number. I think the 'Rylcombe Times' people would do it at a moderate figure."

"It was suggested to have a printing press ourselves in the club-room," said Figgins. "I thought that a good idea."

"Yes, but it's too beastly expensive," said Tom. "Then it would take such a fearful time to set up the type, and all the work would have to be done by hand."

"But it would be jolly to have a lot of copies."

"Yes, I know; but we must be satisfied with small beginnings," said Tom Merry. "You see, a paper that isn't charged for has a lot of disadvantages to start with. All the tin has got to come out of our pockets, and the reader gets his whack for nothing."

"But weally, deah boy, I should be wewy pleased to——"

"Rats! We're in this on equal terms, Gussy. We'll see what we can do about the second number; but the first will have to be manuscript, written out by hand. We'll each do our share of the work."

"It will cost something for foolscap," said Figgins, looking round the littered floor. "Where have you got all that ink from on your chivvy?"

"Must have come off my fingers. I've been making up the title page, and I've spoiled a good many. Must have something artistic, you know."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"There's an advantage in having a manuscript number," went on Tom Merry. "We don't know exactly to what extent the copy will run. If there's more than we expect, we can shove in some more pages."

"That's a good idea."

"We must let some of the outsiders contribute," added Tom, "though I expect there will be a lot of awful piffle for us to sort over. But we want to encourage budding literary ability among the juniors of St. Jim's, of course. Besides, if we were to fill the number up with our own stuff, they would say we were conceited."

"Ha, ha, very likely!"

"Yaas, wathah! It is bettah to be modewate," said D'Arcy. "I shall only wequire ten pages or so for my contwibution this time, Tom Mewwy, though I may be able to do more for the next numbah!"

"Eh? How much will you want?"

"About ten pages, deah boy."

"Then you won't get it! The longest contribution is limited to one page," said the editor. "That will make the paper a jolly good size."

"I am sowwy, Tom Mewwy, but I could not consent to have my contwibution mutilated," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I have not taken the twouble to w'ite a long, complete stowy to have you chop it up, you know."

"We may be able to work it in as a serial," said Tom

Merry pacifically. "We shall want a serial. I was going to write that myself, but I don't mind."

"But I do," exclaimed Figgins. "I'm the serial merchant. I've got the first chapter here of a ripping serial, a first-class story of Red Indians, entitled the 'Black Chief of the Red Braves——'"

"That's rot!" said Monty Lowther. "A tribe of Indians wouldn't have a nigger for their chief, it stands to reason."

Figgins sniffed scornfully.

"You don't understand. The chief is called the Black Chief because of his fearful deeds, and he's really red in colour, you know. He——"

"Don't his braves do any fearful deeds?"

"Yes, of course, they do—awful."

"Then he ought to be called the Black Chief of the Black Braves," said Lowther. "I'm blessed if I can see why one should be black and the others red."

"If you're going to make fun of my serial, Lowther——"

"I'm not; it's funny enough without any help from me. Why don't you call it the Red Chief of the All Blacks, and make it a football story?"

Figgins turned crimson with wrath. Tom Merry hastened to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"I expect the serial will do rippingly," he said. "It sounds a bit lurid——"

"That can be altered easily enough," suggested Blake. "Put the title in French—Rouge-et-Noir! That means red and black— "

"You'll get a black eye if you keep on, you ass!" said Figgins. "I think——"

"Well, let's see the serial," said Tom Merry. "Hand over the manuscript. Listen, you chaps, and I'll read you a bit of it. It's understood that nothing goes into the paper without the approval of the whole staff. That's the only way we shall keep the piffle out without hurting anybody's feelings."

"Good idea," said Figgins. "I don't want to brag about my serial, but I really think there are few stories about Indians that can beat it."

"Give us a sample," said Manners.

Tom Merry opened the manuscript.

"'The Black Chief of the Red Braves. A grand story of the Wild West——'"

"Well, I like modesty," remarked Monty Lowther

"Ass!" said Figgins. "You always have to describe a story like that. The reader takes your word for it."

"I expect he'd have to in this case——"

"Dry up!" said Tom Merry. "'Chapter I. 'The massacre!' Ahem! 'The waggon-train was corralled in the midst of the rolling prairie. The emigrants stood to their guns as the redskins rushed to the attack——'"

"What redskins?" asked Lowther.

"Ass!" said Figgins again. "A lot you know about literary composition. The long-description business has gone out. You start a story now just as if the reader knew all about it. That saves a lot of space."

"Oh, I see! It might lead to confusion!"

"In a brain like yours, perhaps. Go on, Tom Merry!"

"'The redskins rushed to the attack with bloodcurdling yells. The noble defenders, prepared to die for their King and country, fired——'"

"What king?" asked Monty Lowther. "What country?"

"I think that's a bit mixed," said Tom Merry. "This isn't a military story. The king and country business doesn't come in right here."

"Oh, go on with the yarn!" said Figgins.

"'Fired again and again, and thousands and thousands of Indians lay gasping, dead, and dying, on the ground, amid pools of blood.'"

"I don't want to be critical," said Monty Lowther; "but I ask if anyone present has ever seen a dead Indian gasping?"

No one seemed able to supply the necessary information.

"I think we'd better alter that thousands into hundreds," Tom Merry remarked. "Thousands of dead and dying looks rather thick."

"Go on with the yarn!"

"'Blood was everywhere. It soaked into the prairie, and dyed the grass a brilliant red. In the midst of the horrible slaughter the Black Chief of the Red Braves rode on his brown charger ankle-deep in blood——'"

"My hat," said Manners, "that chap must have had strong nerves, or perhaps he had been in the black-pudding business! I think we ought to take out some of the blood."

"Yes," Tom Merry assented. "It's the fault of a beginner to be too lurid. Better have nobody killed at all, I think——"

"What!" howled Figgins. "How is he to be called the Black Chief on account of his fearful deeds if he never kills anybody?"

"Call him the White Chief, on account of his kind heart," said Monty Lowther. "That will be just as good, and a lot more wholesome."

Figgins looked daggers at the playful Lowther. He stuffed his manuscript back into his pocket.

"I'm not going to have it altered!" he declared. "I'd rather keep it out of the paper. Let Gussy's story go in as the serial."

"I object to my stowy bein tweated as a sewial. It is a long, complete stowy, dealin' with fashionable life, and descwibes the adventures of Gerald Fitztompkins in the West End, you know. I'm not goin' to have it cut up. If there's no woom in the papah, some of you fellahs can let your contwibutions stand ovah till latah——"

"Cheek!" said Kerr. "Catch us doing it!"

"For the good of the cause, deah boy. But I am willin' to stand or fall on the mewits of my stowy," said D'Arcy. "Wead some of it out, Tom Mewwy, and we'll see what the staff say about it."

"Oh, you read it, Gussy! You'll do it more justice than I could."

"Vewy well. Anythin' to oblige. Listen, deah boys!"

D'Arcy opened his manuscript, and read:

"'Gewald Fitztompkins. A Womance of Fashionable Life. Chapter I. The New Waistcoat——'"

"The what?" asked half a dozen voices.

"'The New Waistcoat. Gerald Fitztompkins entahed his dwessin'-woom at his luxurious chambahs in St. James's Stweet, and surveyed his tall, awistocwatic figah in the glass. He was dwessed in a morning-coat of the latest cut, and light twousahs beautifully cweased by the lovin' care of John James, his faithful wetainah. His patent leathah shoes were as bwight as the sun at noonday, and fitted perfectly his nicely-shaped feet. His socks were of silk and an exceedingly pwetty pattern——'"

"Did he wear his socks outside his boots?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No, of course not, Lowthah!"

"Then how could anybody know what they were like?"

"Nobody would," said D'Arcy, "except the authah, of course, who is descwibin' the hewo of the stowy. But to wesume. 'His shirt was of the finest linen, vewy white, owin' to the care of his laundwess, who had been selected by John James, always deeply devoted to the twuest intewests of his mastah.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"'His tie was of the latest shade, and tied with the exquisite finish only found in the most extwemely fashionable circles. His collah was of the exact height wequired by good taste, and his sleeve-links——'"

"My hat! Anything more about Gerald?"

"Lots," said D'Arcy cheerfully. "'His flaxen moustache had been carefully shaved off, and so was not to be seen——'"

"Ha, ha! How astonishing!"

"'His hands, which were slim and white, and extwemely awistocwatic, showed the lovin' care of the manicurist. His waistcoat——'"

"Ah, now we're coming to it!"

"'His waistcoat,' pursued D'Arcy, 'was the only article of Gewald's appawel with which fault could be found. It was of the latest cut, but the pattern had been superseded, and the shockin' discovewy had only just come to the knowledge of Gewald Fitztompkins. His usually impassive face was dark with angah. It was the duty of John James, his faithful wetainah, to obtain the first hint of anythin' new in the way of waistcoats, and for once John James had failed his mastah. For once the faithful wetainah had failed in his duty! Hence the wage visible on the face of Gewald Fitzktompkins.

"'He touched a bell as he turned fwom the glass. John James entahed the woom. Gewald turned a feahfully severe look upon him.

"'Wetch!' he cwied. 'Have I nouwished a vipah in my bosom?'

"'John James fell upon his knees.

"'For sevewal hours,' continued Gewald gloomily, 'I have worn a waistcoat that was half a day behind the fashion. Wetch, I dismiss you!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally wish you would not laugh," said Arthur Augustus. "This is not a comic stowy, but a twagic one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When I descwibe how Gewald Fitztompkins bears himself undah these vewy twyin' circs, you will agwee that——"

"We shall agree that that piffle can't go into the 'Weekly,'" said Fatty Wynn.

"What do you wemark, Wynn?" asked D'Arcy, turning to the fat boy of the New House with chilly politeness. "May I wequest you to wepeat that wemark?"

"Certainly!" said the obliging Fatty. "That silly piffle can't go into the magazine. The whole school would have a fit."

"Pway hold this manuscwipt, Tom Mewwy, while I

administah a slight cowwection to Fatty Wynn," said Arthur Augustus, with stately dignity.

"Come on!" said Fatty Wynn, rolling back his cuffs. "I can lick any School House bounder in the place, and I'm not afraid of a giddy tailor's dummy!"

"Bai Jove, I see I shall have to thwash you feahfully!"

"Hold that ass back, Blake," said Tom Merry. "He belongs to your study, and I look to you to keep him in order."

"Right you are!" said Blake.

"I wefuse to be kept in ordah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I distinctly wefuse to pass ovah the obnoxious wemark made by Fatty Wynn. I——"

"Dry up!" commanded Blake.

"I wefuse to dwy up!"

"You'll get chucked out if you're not quiet!" said Monty Lowther. "Any dispute between different members of the staff has to be referred to the editor. That's one of the rules of the magazine."

"Oh, vewy well! I always wants to keep the wules," said Gussy gracefully. "I will let Fatty Wynn's chastisement stand ovah to a future occasion."

"About the serial," said Tom Merry. "It won't do. The whole college will cackle over it. 'The Romance of a New Waistcoat' won't go down——"

"My deah Mewwy, that's only your bad taste, you know. I say that stowy is awfully good, and I ought to know, as I wrote it."

"You ought," assented Tom Merry; "but apparently you don't. I leave it to the staff. Is Gussy's serial about a new waistcoat going in or not?"

"Not!" said seven voices in chorus.

"Oh, vewy well," said the swell of the School House quite cheerfully, "I bow to the majority, of course! I will w'ite anothah."

"Not quite so much clothes in the next," said Tom Merry.

"That's your bad taste again, Tom Mewwy. The subject is an awfully important one, and I am vewy well qualified to speak upon it. There is a gweat deal of womance in it."

"H'm! I think I shall do the serial myself, kids," Tom Merry remarked. "I say, Kerr, what have you got?"

"A poem about the Battle of Bannockburn," said Kerr, who was the Scottish partner in the Co., and ardently patriotic, like every true Scotsman. "It's rather good, you know."

"Read out the first verse."

"Certainly!" Kerr cleared his throat and blushed as he unrolled his manuscript. "Here you are, chaps:

"'It was in the early morning,
On Bannock's fatal plain,
The horsemen and the footmen,
Were pouring in amain——'"

"I say, I've heard something like those last lines before," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, rot!" said Kerr hastily, and he went on reading:

"'The traitorous Southrons marched to war,
With banner and with drum,
But when they saw our bold array,
They wished they hadn't come!
For the——'"

"'Nuff!" said Tom Merry. "I'm not denying that you chaps kept your end up very well at the battle of Bannockburn, but there's no need to be rude about it. You'll have to cross off the traitorous Southrons."

"Sha'n't!" said Kerr. "What do you know about poetry? I'm not going to have a fine poem mutilated to spare your feelings!"

"Then we'll spare the poem," said the editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly." "Poetry isn't much catch, anyway. We can't have the whole magazine filled up with bad rhymes."

"Bad rhymes! Why, mine are first-rate! You——"

"'Nuff said. What have you got with you, Fatty?"

"I haven't finished it yet," said Fatty Wynn modestly. "It's a poem on a more important subject than battles and things like that. It's about grub."

"About what?"

"Grub. It's a sort of parody of 'Beautiful Star,' you know, and it begins like this:

"'Beautiful grub, my heart's delight!
Charming both by day and night!
How get enough of it?—there's the rub!
Grub of the tuck-shop, beautiful grub!'"

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't finished it yet," said Fatty Wynn. "I'll have it done in time for Saturday, though. The last verse is very touching. It nearly makes me cry."

"Yes; it's a pathetic subject. I think we can shove that in, if you finish it up to the same high standard of excellence," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Good!" said Figgins, pleased by the praise bestowed upon a member of the Co. "I think it's rather good; but it sounds more comic than serious to me. That doesn't matter, though."

"Certainly not!" said Tom Merry. "Let me see. What have you got, Herries?"

"A poem, too," said Herries modestly, producing a crumpled fragment of scribbled paper from his pocket. "You know this kind of poetry is very popular nowadays: 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee,' and 'The Sun and the Shower,' and 'The Cauliflower and the Glow-worm,' and that sort of thing. Mine is called 'The Dicky-Bird and the Spring Onion.'"

"Go on!"

"'A dicky-bird sat on a garden-wall,
A spring onion grew below;
And the dicky-bird sighed, as the onion he eyed,
As he watched it grow and grow.
'Oh, dearest spring onion,' the dicky-bird cried,
'I love you—I love you so!'"

"Oh, my only pyjama hat!" ejaculated the editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly." "That makes me want to weep, just as if I had the spring onion under my eyes!"

"I'll read you some more; there are twenty-eight verses, and——"

"That's enough, Herries, old man; I think we'll make a serial of that. One stanza a week will be enough for any reasonable person, I think."

"More than enough," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Now, Blake, what have you to show?"

"I'm doing the football column," said Blake. "No need to go into that now. Manners is taking the photography column, I think."

"That's so," said Manners.

"I've got something written out," said Monty Lowther. "I shall be glad to have your opinion of it."

"Fire away!"

"It's a sort of sonnet, you know—a bit above the heads of the kids, perhaps," Monty Lowther remarked. "But we want something good to give the paper a tone, don't we? We can't have it all funny business like Herries's 'Ode to a Dicky-bird."

"You utter ass!" said Herries witheringly. "That isn't funny; that's serious."

"My mistake," said Lowther blandly. "Anyway, we ought to have something in the really poetic vein, and that's what I've tried to turn out. I dare say it will be a bit above the fellows' heads."

"Well, let's hear it," said Tom Merry.

"Get it off your chest!" said Blake. "The longer we have to wait, the worse the agony is. It's like having a tooth out, you know."

Lowther, without taking any heed of Blake's remark, proceeded to read out his composition.

"When in the dark, mysterious gloom of night,
I sit beside my casement oft and gaze,
And through the trees the glimmering, pale moonlight,
While in the court the silver fountain sprays;
In other times, in other happier days,
The past is dead and gone, nor will return.
Oh, list—oh, list, the nightingale's sweet lays!
The weary otter sleeps amid the fern;
The night grows old, the stars all paler burn."

Tom Merry ran his fingers through his curly hair.

"That sounds awfully poetical," he said. "But I think you were right about it's being above the fellows' heads, Lowther. Does it mean anything?"

"Of course it does!" said Monty indignantly. "It's a sonnet, so it's bound to be rather vague, you know."

"Ye-es, I suppose so," said Tom Merry dubiously. "I read some Browning once, and it read a great deal like that."

"But if it means anything," said Blake curiously, "what does it mean?"

"It means that a chap is sitting at his window," said Figgins thoughtfully, "in the moonlight. He's thinking about the past, when he used to hear the nightingale hunting the otter. Is that it, Lowther?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Lowther.

"Then I'm blessed if I can guess what it does mean!" said

Figgins. "I admit it sounds poetical, but I believe a poem ought always to mean something or other."

"Well, that's not really necessary, perhaps," Tom Merry said, with an air of reflection. "The rhymes are all right, and so is the metre. If people can't understand it, they'll think it's awfully deep poetry, I suppose, so that will be all right. It can go in. Now——"

Crash! Tom Merry was suddenly interrupted. Crash went a pane of glass in the window, and the head and shoulders of Gore appeared through it. Tom Merry jumped up in amazement.

CHAPTER 3.

Trouble with the Contributors.

GORE had not intended to enter the editorial office in that manner, but he had no choice about it. He had succeeded in obtaining the ladder from Taggles, and the band of determined contributors had planted it under the window of Tom Merry's study, and Gore was the first to mount to the attack.

Mellish and Pratt and French followed him up the ladder, while the rest held it from below. They had not held it very securely, and as Gore reached the top it slipped a little, just as he was getting on the window-sill. The result was that his head went through the nearest pane, and the crash of the breaking glass announced his arrival to the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Gore, more startled himself than the staff were, gasped, and drew his head back from the broken window.

"You ass!" said French, behind him. "Open the window, quick!"

Gore gave a growl.

"I've cut myself!" he snapped. "I'm hurt!"

"Well, you shouldn't be clumsy. Open the window!"

But there was no need for George Gore to open the window. It was opened from within, and Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins looked out. The contributors on the ladder looked at them, and they looked at the contributors.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Here you are again, I see. What do you want?"

"We're coming in," said Gore.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, you may be," he said. "But I really think you are not. Are you going down, or shall I shake you off the ladder?"

"Look here," said Gore, "we've a lot of contributions for the paper, and they've got to go in."

"The editor of 'Tom Merry's Weekly,'" said Tom sententiously, "is always willing to consider contributions, which must be original and clever, and must be put under the door of the editorial office. No argument can be entered into with a contributor. No piffle can be published in the columns of the 'Weekly.' Every story is a gem."

"Look here, you humbug, if our stuff doesn't go in, there will be trouble!"

"Submit it in the usual way, and we'll do our best for you," said Tom Merry. "I can't promise more than that. Meanwhile, you mustn't disturb the editorial labours. Get off that ladder, or else I shall have to chuck you off!"

Gore scowled. Behind him furious contributors were scowling.

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Can't! It's asking too much, to want a chap to look at a face like that. Now, if I shake you off the ladder it will shed your gore," said Tom Merry. "Travel, while you've got the chance, and don't come disturbing a busy editor again."

There was no help for it. The scaling-party descended the ladder, the staff at the window kissing their hands to them gracefully. They pulled the ladder away, apprehensive lest Tom Merry might tumble it upon their heads, and laid it down. Then they held a council of war.

"As far as I'm concerned," said Mellish. "I wouldn't have my poem put in their old paper if they asked for it now."

"And they shouldn't have my serial," said French, "if they went down on their bended knees and begged for it with tears in their eyes."

"As for me," said Gore, "I'm done with 'Tom Merry's Weekly.' I'm not going to write for it. But what I say is, are we going to stand this howling cheek?"

"Not if we can help it," said French. "But what are we to do? We can't bust in the door without old Schneider or Railton catching us, and then we shall catch it hot. We can't get in at the window."

"No; Gore's settled that by sticking his head through the glass," Jimson remarked. "What did you do that for, Gore, old fellow?"

"You silly ass! Do you think I did it on purpose?" exclaimed Gore. "It was the fault of those stupid cuckoos not holding the ladder steady! But never mind that. I'm not giving in yet. Tom Merry and those bounders have got to be punished for their cheek, and we're going to do it."

"But how? How are we to get at the rotters?"

"We can't—but I've got an idea! You see, they've closed the window, but they can't close that hole in the glass."

"No, but what is the use of that to us?"

"A lot," said Gore, "if we can get out Taggles's garden-hose, and start pumping water in on them!"

There was a general gasp of amazement and delight among the baffled contributors.

"My only hat!" exclaimed French. "Gore, old man, you ought to have a tin medal—you ought really. I don't think much of your brain-power as a rule, but this idea is really ripping."

"First chop," said Mellish. "But can we get the hose out and fix it up? that's the question. You see, it will have to be done without Taggles knowing it."

"Easy enough. Jimson can go and keep Taggles in talk while we do it. Start him telling you about the time he was in the Army, Jimson, and he won't leave off till he's choked. Keep him busy while we rig up the hose."

"Right-ho!" said Jimson. "That's easily done. Rely upon me."

And Jimson started off. The rest of the contributors chuckled gleefully.

"When the jet of water comes into the editorial office," said Gore grimly, "the staff will wish they had been a bit more polite to their contributors. Shove the MS. under the door, indeed! Catch us! Very likely get our ideas pinched. I think that if I take the trouble to write for an old school rag I'm to be treated with consideration."

"Certainly. They're an ungrateful lot."

"We'll make them sit up, though."

Unconscious of the treat in store for them, the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" were busy. They had a heap of copying-out to do, and it was laborious work, not much better than writing out impositions, as Blake remarked, there was not a rush to do it.

In fact, each member of the staff found excellent reasons why he himself should do more superintending than working, and it was only by the exertion of the editor's authority that any work was got done at all.

"I wish I wrote a better hand," Monty Lowther remarked regretfully. "I shall have to ask you to write out my pages, Manners."

"Wish I could oblige you," said Manners politely. "But I gave my wrist a nasty twist on the football field yesterday, and I was going to ask Tom to do my bit."

"Got enough of my own to do," said Tom Merry. "I'm writing up the editorial chat and the leading article."

"You don't have a leading article in a school magazine," said Figgins.

"Yes, we do," said Tom Merry, with emphasis. "The editor's decision must be regarded as final, and it is only upon this condition that you enter into the competition—I mean, that you contribute to the magazine."

"Oh, all right; have it as you like!" said Figgins. "Look here, I've written out a lot of my stuff. I've got a—a crick in the wrist. Does anybody want to write some out for me?"

A chilling silence followed the question.

"Don't all speak at once," said Figgins sarcastically.

"Oh, don't be lazy!" said Tom Merry. "It's worth a little trouble, I think, to produce a paper which will knock the Sixth Form magazine into a cocked hat."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I tell you what, Tom Mewwy. If you will put in the whole of my stowy of Gewald Fitztompkins in the first numbah, I will w'ite it all out myself."

"Can't be did!" said Tom Merry decisively. "We want to have the first number read, you know, and nobody would read that piffle."

"If you chawactewise my litewawy work as piffle, Tom Mewwy, I am afraid that there will be twouble in the editowial office," said D'Arcy emphatically.

"Oh, don't argue!" said the editor. "I say, this is hard work! Write as small as you can, all of you, or the magazine will fill up about a ream of paper. It looks to me as if we shall have a bit of a job to get the first number out by Saturday."

"If you don't bring the paper out to time, we'll jolly soon get a new editor who can, Tom Merry!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm going to do all I can," said the editor. "No chap can do more. No good grumbling. There ought to be more half-holidays in the week, as a matter of fact. We can't very well leave over the football practice, and this takes such a fearful time. We can't very well publish a magazine with blots on it, or smudges, and every blot means

a new page to be written. Then there's the title-page. I'm not satisfied with the design yet, and I've done fifteen."

"Better hand that over to me," suggested Kerr.

"Thank you, I think I can manage! When I want to retire from the editorship I won't forget you, Kerr. Enough talking now—get to work."

They got to work.

Silence fell in the study, save for the scratching of pens, and the occasional restless movement of feet. Tom Merry sorted over contributions and examined them with remarkable patience. A good many budding poets and authors had submitted their manuscripts in the prescribed way, by slipping them under the door of the editorial office, and these Tom Merry felt it his duty to read over.

Naturally, there were pages and pages of absolute "piffle," as he termed it, and most of it scrawled in almost indecipherable writing. The lot of an editor who did his work conscientiously was not a happy one. It had not yet occurred to Tom Merry to appoint a reader, nor is it probable that he would have found an individual of the staff willing to undertake the task.

"Well, we're getting on," Figgins remarked, looking up at last. "There's my little lot. How are you getting on, Kerr?"

"First rate!"

"I shall be able to shove in the whole of my poem on grub," said Fatty Wynn. "I've finished it now, and I must say I consider it pathetic. What are you up to, Gussy?"

Gussy was scratching his nose in a very thoughtful way.

Some idea had evidently taken possession of the great brain of the swell of the School House. He glanced at Fatty as he asked the question.

"I have been thinkin'," he said languidly, "it would pewwaps be bettah for me to w'ite up a fashion column than to contwibute a stowy. Every self-wespectin' magazine ought to have a fashion column."

"Ha, ha!"

"I think it's a good ideah. You see, the fellahs here dwess vewy wottenly as a wule. They haven't the faintest ideah of how to dwess with taste," said D'Arcy seriously. "As a mattah of fact, I am the only weally well-dwessed gentleman in the lowah Forms, and there are only a few in the Sixth who know how to dwess. A fashion column would be an eye-openah for the wagged little wuffians in the Fourth and the Third."

"Good old Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "It couldn't be worse than your serial, anyway, so you can shove it in if you like."

"I stwongly object to such a dispawagin' wemark concernin' my sewial. I am the last fellah in the world to bwag, but I weally think——"

D'Arcy was suddenly interrupted. There was a sudden fizzing sound, and a jet of water smote the window of the study, and then shot through the broken pane.

Right across the study it came in a stream, and it caught the swell of the School House full in his aristocratic countenance. He sprang to his feet with a yell.

"Weally—I—gweat Scott! I—ow—oooooooh!"

Tom Merry jumped up.

D'Arcy had dodged out of the stream, and it played right across the study and splashed on the opposite wall, and thence scattered in all directions.

"What—what—what is it?"

Swish, splash, swish!

Splash!

CHAPTER 4.

Washed Out!

TOM MERRY was not often taken by surprise, but he was astounded now, and he stood for some moments rooted to the floor, while the jet of water played through the broken pane, and scattered splashes all over the study. The staff were all on their feet, most of them drenched already by the water. The table was swamped, and the valuable manuscripts of the "Weekly" soaked in a moment. The pages all ready for publication were swimming in water, and hopelessly blotted.

"What does it mean?" gasped Blake. "Is there a fire, or what?"

Swish, splash!

"It's the garden-hose in the quadrangle!" shouted Tom Merry. "Taggles must be mad! He's playing it on our window!"

"It can't be Taggles! It——"

Tom Merry dashed to the window. The jet of water was changing its position every moment, as the handler of the hose moved the nozzle, and as Tom Merry ran forward, the stream caught him in the face.

He was bowled over like a ninepin. Backwards he went, crashing into Figgins and Manners, and knocking them both against the table. The table was not built to stand usage like that. It went reeling, and turned over on its side, and the soaked manuscripts were deposited on the floor, amid the overturned inkpots.

The staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" gave a simultaneous howl of rage.

"If that's Taggles, we'll kill him by inches!" spluttered Blake, springing to the window, in spite of the stream that entered at the broken pane.

The glass was thickly splashed, and he could not see through it. He threw up the sash and looked out into the quadrangle. Then he gave a yell of fury.

Down below were the contributors, with the garden-hose in the hands of Gore. He was directing the stream upon the study window with a skilful hand. He caught sight of Blake's furious face at the open window, and instantly turned the hose upon him. Blake was swept back before the rush of water. Tom Merry sprang to the window. He shook his fist at Gore

"Wait till I come down to you, you rotter!" he yelled.

Gore grinned.

"Wait till you can get out of your study!" he replied.

And he directed the nozzle upon Tom and swept him away from the window.

Soaked and dripping, the editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly" dashed to the door, to fly down to the quadrangle and take instant vengeance upon the destroyers. To unlock the door was the work of a second, and then he dragged at the handle; but the door refused to budge.

He tugged and tugged in amazement, but the door, after yielding about an inch, remained fast, and he could not open it.

"Why don't you get it open, Tom Merry?" exclaimed Figgins. "Do you want us to stay here and get drowned?"

"I can't get the beastly thing open. It's stuck, somehow!"

"Rot! Let me try!"

"Try, then, fathead!"

Figgins gripped the handle of the door and tugged. But the result was the same; the door would not open.

"They've fastened it somehow!" exclaimed Blake. "Ah, I know! They've tied a rope across to the handle of the door opposite."

"Yaas, wathah! That is weally a vewy deep twick to play!"

Fizz! Swish Splash!

Gore probably did not know how much water was in the study, or else he was determined that the editorial office should be thoroughly drenched. The hose still played on the window, and, as it was now open, the stream of water entered without let or hindrance

The study and everything in it received a soaking such as it had never experienced before, and the valuable documents lying about were like limp blotched rags.

The staff were furious. They tore at the door in vain. It would not open. They rushed to the window, and the stream of water drove them back.

Suddenly the stream ceased to come. The staff crowded to the window again. The hose was lying on the ground, and not a single one of the contributors was visible. The only person in sight was the fat German master of St. Jim's, and his presence accounted for the disappearance of the jokers.

Herr Schneider came towards the hose and looked at it, and then looked round him.

"Keep out of sight!" muttered Tom Merry.

The nine juniors dodged back from the window.

Tom Merry continued to watch the German master from behind a corner of the curtain.

Herr Schneider seemed amazed.

"Vat means all tat after?" the juniors heard him exclaim. "Dis is mosh singular pefore. Vat vas Taggles do mit tat hose here, ain't it, and vy he run avay ven I come? I tink I see more zan vun run. He have been sending te water on te vall of te house, vich is fery singular."

And the German master looked up at the wall of the School House. The broken pane in Tom Merry's window, and the soaked state of the window and wall around it, caught his eye, and a glimering of the truth came into his mind.

"Mein Gott! Tat is a shoke of te juniors pefore! I tink tat I have found te troot' now—it is a shoke of te poys! Ve vill see!"

And the German master walked back with his ponderous tread into the School House, evidently with the intention of ascending to Study No. 10 to investigate. The staff of the school paper looked at one another in dismay.

"He's coming here," said Tom Merry. "I suppose it would have been impossible to keep the thing dark, with the study in such a state."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Quite impos,

Tom Mewwy. Those young wascals ought to be punished——"

"But we can't sneak on them!" said Figgins hastily.

"Of course not!" said Tom Merry. "We're going to make them sit up for this ourselves, but we can't sneak to a master. And you may be pretty certain that Gore won't own up."

"Yaas, wathah! But I think it quite poss. that our wespected mastah will be angwy if we do not give him the names of the perpetwatahs of this outwage, deah boys!"

"Very likely!"

"He can go and eat coke!" said Blake. "We're not going to give those brats away; but, by Jove, we'll make them wriggle! All the manuscript has been spoilt!"

Tom Merry glanced at the drenched and blotted paper littering the floor. The first number of the "Weekly" was utterly ruined, and not a single page was of the slightest use. The whole work had to be done over again from the beginning.

"It's a bit rough on us," said Tom. "Those jokers might have drawn a line at that. But we shall make them grin on the other side of their mouths. My hat! The study is in a lovely state! I wonder if we shall ever get it dry again? Hallo—what's that?"

There was a stumble and an exclamation in the passage.

"Mein Gott!"

Monty Lowther gave a chuckle.

"It's old Schneider! He's run into the rope across the passage!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a sharp tap at the door.

"Who is in dis study?"

"We're all here, sir!" called out Tom Merry.

"Ha! Ven dere is any mischief, I must know tat you vas dere, Tom Merry!" said the German master. "I shall look into tat matter pefore."

"Well, that's nice!" said Tom. "I don't see how even old Schneider can make out that I'm to blame for this. He can't imagine I got the study soaked like this for fun."

There was a fumbling at the door. The German master unfastened the rope, and threw the door open. He stared aghast at the condition of the room and its occupants.

"Mein Gott! Vat is all tat! Vat have you been doing, hein?"

"Somebody's been squirting water through the window, sir," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's a bit rough on us. The room is quite wet!"

"Ach! I should say it is vet. Who vas it tat play tat trick?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"I ask you who vas it tat play tat trick, Tom Merry?"

"I—I don't think I can give you his name, sir."

"Do you mean to say tat you vas not to know pefore."

"No, sir, I didn't know before he did the trick, or I should jolly soon have been on his track," said Tom Merry innocently.

The German master frowned. He knew, in spite of Tom Merry's innocent expression, that the hero of the Shell was deliberately making a play upon his peculiar English.

"Tom Merry! I ask you vat is te name of te offender? Do you know it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You vill tell me vat it vas, ten, tat he may be properly bunished," said Herr Schneider.

"I can't, sir."

"Vy can you not, poy?"

"It—it would be sneaking, sir."

Herr Schneider stared at Tom in amazement. He had not expected a reply like that from a junior, and he did not respect the schoolboy sense of honour that dictated it. He did not understand boys. His only view of the matter was that the junior was impertinent.

"Fery vell, Merry," said Herr Schneider, breathing hard, "you refuse to answer me, your master. I vill mention tat to Mr. Railton."

And the German master stamped away towards the study of the housemaster, leaving the nine juniors dismayed.

"Ill-tempered old beast!" said Figgins. "I'm afraid you're in for a row, Merry."

"Oh, I generally am, so that doesn't matter!" said Tom Merry carelessly. "Never mind that; I can stand it. Let's see if we can clean up some of this frightful mess."

"Excuse me, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I am in a feahfully wet and soiled state, and I weally think I had bettah go and change my clothes and put on a clean collah before I attend to any othah mattah."

And the swell of the School House hurried away for that most important object.

The juniors did their best with the study, but the damage was great. It was finally decided to present Mary, the housemaid, with the sum of five shillings, accompanied by a request to do her best in the matter.

Then the juniors went to change their clothes. Most of them were soaked to the skin, and it was needed.

"I'm afraid the date of publication will have to be put off a little," Tom Merry said ruefully. "It can't be helped."

"Never mind," said Figgins, "we'll come over to tea, if you like, and we'll discuss a plan for making those little villains smart for spoiling our first number."

"Yes, do!"

And Figgins & Co. returned to the New House. Blake and Herries went to their own quarters to clean up, and the Terrible Three went up to the Shell dormitory.

"It's beastly!" Monty Lowther remarked. "The worst of it is that you're going to get into a row, Tom, for sticking up for that beast Gore, whose the cause of all the mischief."

"That's the rub," said Manners. "I suppose it wouldn't be cricket to give him away."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I can stick it out," he said cheerfully.

He had just finished changing when a fag put his head in at the door.

"Mr. Railton wants to speak to you in his study, Merry."

"Righto!" said Tom.

And he made his way to the study of the housemaster.

CHAPTER 5.

Hauled Over the Coals.

MR. RAILTON, the master of the School House at St. Jim's, was looking very stern as Tom Merry entered his study. Herr Schneider looked wrathful as ever. He had evidently made the most of his complaint to the housemaster, as Tom Merry saw by the expression of Mr. Railton's usually genial face.

"You sent for me, sir," said Tom respectfully.

"Yes, Merry. I am sorry to hear that you have been impertinent to Herr Schneider."

"I did not mean to be so, sir."

"Herr Schneider tells me that you have refused to reply to a question put to you by him."

Tom Merry was silent.

"Mein Gott!" said Herr Schneider. "I have nefer seen so much of vat you call te nerve pefore after. Te poy I tink is all nerve."

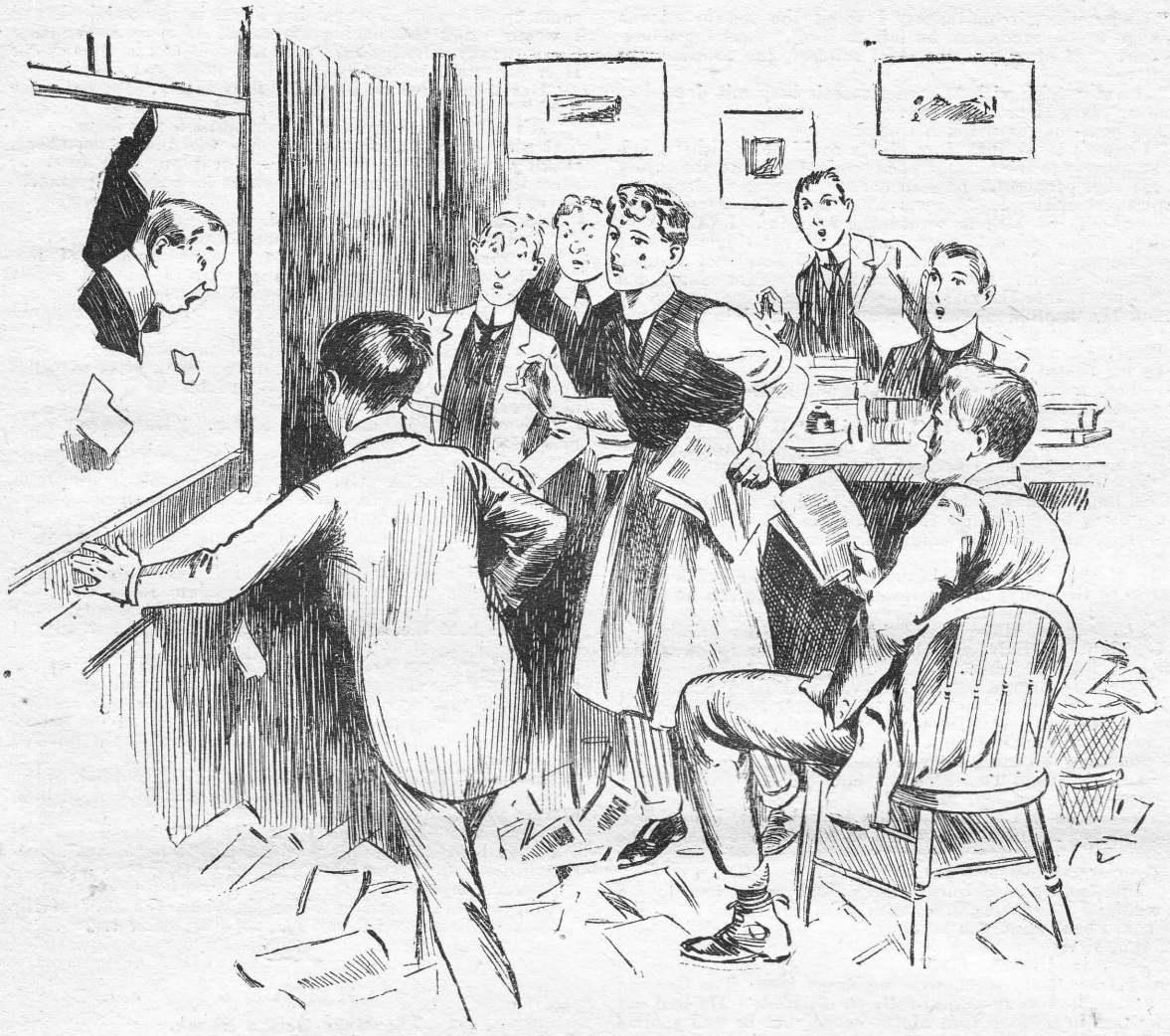
"Come, Merry, what have you to say?"

"It—it was a trick played on us by some of the fellows, sir," said Tom, colouring. "They washed us out of our study with the hose——"

"Yes, I have looked at the study," said the housemaster drily; "it is in a shocking state, and such an act cannot possibly be allowed to pass unpunished."

"It was a bit rough, sir, but I don't think they meant to do so much damage really," said Tom Merry. "We can stand it, sir. We're going to make them wriggle—I mean we don't mind—really, sir."

(Please turn to the last page.)



Crash! Gore's head came through the window of the editor's room. "Hallo!" said Tom Merry, "Here you are again, I see. What do you want?"

The housemaster passed his hand over his mouth to conceal a smile.

"Whether you mind or not, Merry, such an amount of damage must be severely punished. You have refused to tell Herr Schneider the name of the perpetrator."

"Not exactly refused, sir," said Tom Merry.

"But you did not tell him?"

"No, sir, I did not tell him."

"Although he commanded you to do so?"

Tom Merry did not reply.

"Then you have refused to tell him," said the housemaster severely. "You have refused to answer a question put to you by a master."

"N-no, sir, I shouldn't put it like that. It would be impertinent to refuse a master, and I couldn't be impertinent to Herr Schneider, sir. I respect him too highly. It wasn't exactly refusing—only—only I didn't like to answer, sir."

"That seems to me a distinction without a difference, Merry."

"Well, sir, I shouldn't like Herr Schneider to think me impertinent," said Tom Merry meekly. "I shouldn't like you to think me so, either, sir. You know the rules better than Herr Schneider does, sir. I know you, yourself, wouldn't ask me to sneak."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

It looked as if he were angry, but, as a matter of fact, he was hard put to it to keep from laughing.

"Merry! I really cannot permit you to speak like that. The perpetrator of such an outrageous action must be found and punished. The study is damaged, and you will have to occupy another till it is properly dried."

"We don't mind, sir. But when it's a question of giving a chap away, of course, we couldn't do it. Why, sir, if I were to tell you the fellow's name, I should be sent to Coventry by the whole School House, and the New House as well."

"Ahem! But I repeat that the person must be punished——"

"That's all right, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "We're going to punish him, and when we've done with him, he won't think life worth living. I——"

This time the housemaster could not help laughing.

"Really, Merry, I do not know whether to cane you or not," he exclaimed, "I cannot, of course, approve of your taking the law into your own hands. That is impossible. At the same time, Herr Schneider, upon second thoughts I consider it advisable to respect a sense of honour in a lad, even if somewhat mistaken."

Herr Schneider looked decidedly annoyed.

His dignity had been ruffled, and nothing but the exemplary punishment of Tom Merry would have satisfied him. To his mind, Tom had not made out a defence, as Mr. Railton seemed to think, but he had only aggravated his guilt by his explanation.

"Of course, it is as you vish, Mr. Railton," he answered stiffly. "I bow to your authority, of course."

Mr. Railton looked rather uncomfortable.

"I don't mean that, Herr Schneider," he replied. "Merry has certainly overstepped the mark in being impertinent to you, although I am sure that he did not mean to be so."

"Certainly not, sir," said Tom Merry at once.

"Under the circumstances, I think the matter of the damage to the study can be left to itself," said the housemaster. "If Merry, as the chief sufferer, can overlook the matter——"

"It vas a trick vich te young rascals blay mit demselves pefore," said Herr Schneider.

The housemaster shook his head.

"I cannot think that Tom Merry could be foolish enough to be a party to the damage of his own study, and the injury of his own property," he said drily. "It was evidently an unpleasant trick played upon him, and it is generous at least of him to wish to screen the offender. I think that matter should be passed over. As for his refusing to answer your question, Herr Schneider, I admit that that was indefensible—ahem! I do not think it is a case for caning, but otherwise, I leave the matter in your hands."

And Mr. Railton picked up his pen as a plain hint that the interview was ended.

The German master was looking very angry.

To his ruffled mind it seemed that Tom Merry ought to have been awarded a record caning, and he hardly troubled to conceal his opinion.

"Fery vell, Mr. Railton," he said. "It is as you vish. Merry, you are let off tat caning, but I shall expect you to pring me one hundred lines of Sherman tis evening."

"Yes, sir," said Tom glumly.

The imposition was a heavy one, and it meant that he would have no more time that afternoon for "Tom Merry's Weekly," and that he would have to miss the football practice.

Mr. Railton knitted his brows a trifle, but he had left the matter in the hands of the German master, and so he could not possibly interfere.

"You may go, Merry," added Herr Schneider grimly.

Tom left the study, and the German master followed him out and closed the door.

"You have escape easily, Merry," said Herr Schneider, when the door was shut. "Mr. Railton is fery lenient mit you. I, meinself, vould trash you severely. If you do not bring me tat hundred lines of Sherman after tea, I vill see tat you have te caning tat you deserve."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, "but—but——"

"Vat vould you say, Merry?"

"Will it do if I bring the lines to-night, sir, before bedtime. I can do them then, and I shouldn't have to miss the footer——"

The German master frowned blackly.

"You vill do tose lines, Merry, and pring tem to me immediately after tea," he said, with emphasis. "If you do not, I shall cane you severely."

"But, sir——"

"Not a vord more. Go!"

And Tom Merry went, with a gloomy face. The German master stalked away majestically to his study. He had not succeeded in getting Tom Merry caned, but he had spoiled his half-holiday, so he was satisfied.

"Hallo, going to a funeral?" asked Blake, meeting Tom in the passage. "What's the trouble? Has Schneider been to Railton?"

"Yes," Tom explained. "I've got to do a hundred lines of German this afternoon, and take them in after tea."

"Rotten!" said Blake. "But I'll tell you what, old chap. We'll help—we'll all do some, and get the impot over in no time."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That won't work with Schneider, Blake. It's all very well with Lathom, and even with Railton sometimes, but old Schneider's too keen. He's bound to spot the wheeze, and he'd make me do the lot over again."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Augustus, "I twied that twick on him once, and he gave me two hundwed lines from Faust to w'ite out in consequence. It was a weally feahful ordeal, deah boys. But I say, Tom Mewwy, has the howwid boundah specified what lines you are to w'ite out?"

"No," said Tom, looking at him. "Only it's German. I suppose I shall have to dig into Schiller as usual."

"No, don't! I have an extwemely funny idea in my head," said Arthur Augustus. "It will be a wippin' joke on our wespected teachah, if you have the nerve."

"I've got nerve enough for anything to take that horrid old bounder down a peg or two," said Tom Merry. "I asked him if to-night would do for the imposition, so that I needn't miss the footer, and he wouldn't have it. He's gloating over my missing the footer."

"Yaas, he is weally an extwemely unpleasant old person," said D'Arcy. "Now, you can w'ite out any lines you like?"

"Yes, so long as it's in German."

"And you can w'ite the same line over again, if you like, a hundwed times?"

"Of course."

"Then I can suggest a line," said Arthur Augustus. "I came upon it when I was doing Faust in the owiginal, and I weally think that it fits the case. As it is a line that Gœthe weally wote in that gweat poem, it will be imposs. for Herr Schneider to find fault with it, don't you know."

"Get it off your chest," said Tom Merry. "What's the line?"

"It's what Faust says to Mephistopheles, you know, when that nice chap wants him to sign the giddy document, making himself over to Mephisto," explained D'Arcy. It wuns thusly: 'Auch was Geschriebnes forderst du, pedant?' Savvy?"

Tom Merry scratched his head.

"And what does it exactly mean, Gussy?"

"It means, 'And you demand some writing of me, pedant,'" said Arthur Augustus, with a blissful smile. "That's just what Schneider does, doesn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Blake. "Fancy calling old Schneider a pedant to his face!"

"It's not calling him a pedant," smiled Gussy. "You see, he hasn't specified what lines Tom Mewwy is to w'ite, and a line from Gœthe must be all wight. If it happens to fit his case, that's only an accident."

"Of course," grinned Tom Merry. "Gussy, you're a genius!"

"It will be a whack in the eye for the old boundah!" said D'Arcy complacently. "He won't be able to find fault with a line from Gœthe, but he'll know jolly well that you're calling him a pedant. Serve him wight."

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't mind writing out an imposition like that."

"Come into our study and do it," said Blake. "You won't be able to inhabit your own again for some time. You'll have to take up your quarters in the empty study where we held the hobby club meetings for a few days, I expect."

Tom Merry was soon seated at Blake's table writing out the imposition. The lines grew under his rapid pen, and though the task was a long and weary one, it was finished by tea-time. Figgins & Co. came over to tea in the School House, and Figgins burst into a roar as he saw the finished imposition.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled. "That will tickle old Schneider. I think we all ought to be there when you give it to him, Merry, and watch his face."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "I'll give it to him in the hall after tea before the other masters, and if he makes a fuss they'll catch on to the joke."

"Good wheeze."

And, with this amiable object in view, the staff of the "Weekly" descended to the hall together after tea.

CHAPTER 6.

The Herr Gets a Shock.

HERR SCHNEIDER was standing in conversation with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, as the boys left the hall after tea. It was permissible to miss that meal at St. Jim's, and most of the boys had it in their own studies, among them being our nine friends.

Nine solemn-faced juniors appeared in the doorway, and Tom Merry left the rest and came into the hall with the foolscap in his hand, covered with straggling German characters.

Herr Schneider looked at him out of the corner of his eye. He had rather hoped that Tom Merry would omit to bring that imposition in time, so that he might have an excuse for administering the averted caning, after all; but the sight of the paper in Tom Merry's hand dispelled that hope.

The German master had just been detailing to Mr. Lathom the sinfulness of Tom Merry, and the master of the Fourth had listened with polite attention, though, as a matter of fact, he was far from agreeing with Herr Schneider.

"Ach!" said Herr Schneider, giving a glance of disfavour upon the hero of the Shell. "You have written out tat imposition pefore, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry; "I wrote it out before tea, sir."

Mr. Lathom smiled. Herr Schneider took the foolscap, and adjusted his spectacles, and read the first line. He meant to find fault if it were possible.

"Ach! Vas it tat? Vas——"

The German master's fat face went purple with rage.

"Vas it tat?" he roared. "Vat! You call me ein pedant, ain't it? Vat!"

"I, sir?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment. "I call you a pedant, sir—I, sir? Oh, sir, I respect you too highly, sir, to call you a pedant, sir."

"Vas is tat, den?"

"That, sir? That's the imposition, sir."

"You vas call me ein pedant! Mein Gott! I have nefer

heard of such insolence pefore after, ain't it? Ach, himmel! Ach!"

The German master was spluttering with wrath. Mr. Lathom looked at him in amazement. The mild little master of the Fourth never lost his temper, and he was naturally surprised by the evident rage of the excited German.

"My dear Herr Schneider, what is the matter?"

"Look at tat pefore!" shouted Herr Schneider. "Look at tat vich tat poy have dare to write vun hundret times and pring to me after!"

He held up the offending sheet to the Form-master. Little Mr. Lathom adjusted his spectacles and looked at the imposition. Tom Merry remained perfectly grave and virtuous-looking, while the eight juniors at the door were chuckling themselves hoarse.

"'Auch was Geschriebnes forderst du, Pedant?'" read out Mr. Lathom. "Ah, it is a line from Gœthe's 'Faust': 'And what writing demandest thou, pedant?' The exercise seems to be very well written, Herr Schneider. I wish the boys in my Form wrote their impositions out as clearly as this. I cannot see any fault to find with this."

The German choked with wrath.

"No fault to find mit ein poy calling his master a pedant?" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" said Mr. Lathom.

"Te young rascal write tat line on purpose, ain't it? It is vun reflection upon his master—a new piece of te impertinence!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Lathom again.

"Merry, you have vunce again been impertinent——"

"I've only done what you told me, sir," said Tom, respectfully but firmly.

"Himmel! You tink I tell you to call me a pedant?"

"You told me to write out a hundred lines in German, sir, and you didn't say what lines. I've done what I was told, like a dutiful and obedient scholar. It is always my ambition, sir, to be regarded as a dutiful and obedient scholar by my kind teachers."

Mr. Lathom coughed violently. The German master became more furious than before, if that was possible. He looked as if he were on the verge of apoplexy.

"Come mit me!" he roared. "I nod deal mit you. I vill see vat Mr. Railton he have to say apout tat, ain't it, after."

"After what, sir?"

"Come mit me, you pad poy!"

He laid a heavy hand upon Tom Merry's shoulder, and marched him off. He left a giggling crowd behind him. The juniors at the door gave way, giggling, too. Tom Merry maintained a perfectly demure look as he accompanied the German master to the study of Mr. Railton.

The housemaster was there, and he looked up, surprised and a little annoyed, and set down his teacup. Mr. Railton was having tea in his study, and he did not like being disturbed.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Is anything wrong again, Herr Schneider? You seem to be very unfortunate to-day."

That greeting did not pour oil on the troubled waters. Herr Schneider sniffed audibly at the housemaster's injustice, as he regarded it.

"Mr. Railton, look at tat paper pefore, please!"

"Give it to me, then."

Mr. Railton patiently took the famous imposition, and looked over it. A slight wrinkle came into his brow.

"What is this, Herr Schneider?"

"I give Merry vun imposition," said the German master. "I tell him to take vun hundret lines, and—and tat is vat he vas write mit himself after."

"The lines seem to be very well written, and there are no blots," said Mr. Railton, with a perfectly grave face. "What fault do you find with it?"

"He vas call me vun pedant!"

"Where did you get this line, Merry?"

"It's a line from Gœthe's 'Faust,' sir," said Tom Merry, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. "As Herr Schneider didn't specify what lines I was to take, I thought I would take a line from Gœthe, sir. I admire Gœthe very much, and often read him in my leisure time, sir. And one line is as good as another for an imposition, isn't it, sir?"

"Ahem! Yes. You did not specify the lines that were to be written, Herr Schneider?"

"No. I do not always pefore. But tat impertinence——"

"You may go, Merry."

"Thank you, sir!"

"But," began Herr Schneider, in angry surprise—"but, Mr. Railton——"

"Pray wait a moment, Herr Schneider! You may go, Merry."

Tom Merry went out of the study, and closed the door.

"Mr. Railton, tat poy have been impertinent vunce more, and you not punish him!"

"I think no notice should be taken of the matter!" said the housemaster, with emphasis.

"No notice, mein herr! Mein Gott! Ven he——"

"Listen to me, Herr Schneider. In my opinion you were unnecessarily severe upon this lad in the first place, but I did not interfere with you. The boy evidently considered that he had been treated with undue severity, and this joke is the result. You have no fault to find with him, and you would have acted more wisely in not seeing the reference that this line bears to yourself."

"But—but—mein Himmel!—but——"

"Let me finish. Merry has undoubtedly chosen a line that contains an expression which may be taken as a reference to yourself. Yet, as the line is a line from a standard German work, it is impossible to find fault with it. You should not have taken that reference to yourself. You must permit me to say that if you had acted judiciously, you would have ignored the suggestion that the line could have any reference to yourself. Then the joke would have fallen blunted, as it were. Now, I am afraid that it will become the talk of the school; while at the same time it is impossible to punish Merry with any show of justice."

Herr Schneider's face during this little lecture was not pleasant to see.

"The best course now," pursued the housemaster, "is to let the subject drop. If no further notice is taken it may be dropped by the others. That is all I can say."

Herr Schneider did not reply. He was too annoyed to trust himself to speak, and he went silently out of the study, leaving the precious imposition lying on Mr. Railton's table.

The housemaster picked it up, glanced at it again, and smiled. Then he threw it into his waste-paper basket, and gave his attention to his tea.

That the joke would spread over the house was certain. It was already spreading, and seniors and juniors were chuckling over it, and some of the masters, too.

As the German master walked down the passage, after leaving the housemaster's study, a voice floated to him from the distance:

"'Auch was Geschriebnes forderst du, Pedant?'"

The German master gave a start of rage; but the offender was not in sight, and he walked on, breathing fury. He went into his own study and slammed the door. Then he uttered an exclamation of rage.

There was a looking-glass over the mantelpiece, and across the looking-glass were written the words—evidently by a finger dipped in his ink-pot:

"Auch was Geschriebnes forderst du, Pedant?"

Murmuring German words which will not bear translation, Herr Schneider took a duster and wiped the inscription off the glass.

As he did so there came a knock at his door.

"Come in!" growled Herr Schneider.

The door did not open, but the knock was repeated.

"Come in, after!" shouted the German angrily.

Still the door did not open. He stepped to it and tore it open savagely. No one was there, but a card was attached to the handle of the door, and on the card was written the familiar sentence.

"Auch was Geschriebnes forderst du, Pedant?"

Herr Schneider slammed the door with a slam that rang through the School House.

CHAPTER 7.

Tit for Tat.

THE staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" gathered in Study No. 6 in high glee. The joke on the German master had fully compensated them for the trouble he had given them, and Tom Merry nobly said that he didn't mind spending half a half-holiday writing out an imposition for so good an object.

"We've scored off Schneider," said Tom, with an air of great satisfaction. "The whole house has got hold of the joke, and he won't be allowed to forget it in a hurry. I heard some kids of the Third chanting that sentence in the quad under his window just now. They gave it a pronunciation peculiar to the Third Form, but I've no doubt he understood."

"Good!" said Blake. "He's been asking for trouble for a long time, and now he's found it. It was a real, ripping, good idea of Gussy's."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I think you will notice, deah boys, that most of my ideahs are weally good wippin' ones. You know, I'm an awfully deep fellow."

"Yes, you are," agreed Tom Merry. "Fearfully deep, we all know that. But this idea was really a good one, and it's worked out well. If Schneider had had sense enough to pretend not to notice the joke in the impot, it would have fallen flat. He delivered himself into our hands like an innocent lamb to the slaughter. I've just posted a postcard to

him in the school letter-box, and you can guess what's on it. It will please him when he gets it this evening."

The junior chuckled gleefully.

"We must always aim at pleasing our kind teachers," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "I know it, because I read it in a book my uncle sent me on my birthday, called 'Truthful Tommy.' No relation to Tom Merry——"

"Here, draw it mild," said Tom Merry.

"Did you read it?" asked Blake, with interest.

"Yes," said Lowther, "I read three whole lines. There were sixty pages, but I never got any further. 'Truthful Tommy, or the boy who never told an untruth,' was a little bit too thick for me. The chap who wrote it must have been an awful rascal when he was a boy. At least, he seems to think it's a remarkable thing for a boy not to tell a lie—as if any decent fellow would tell one! But I say, now we've ruffled the plumage of the Schneider bird, it's time to deal with the chaps who made such a ghastly mess of the first number of 'The Weekly.'"

"That's so," exclaimed Figgins. "I've been thinking of that. I saw them in the quad as we came in—the ring-leaders, Mellish, Gore, Pratt, and French. The others don't matter. We must make an example of those four."

"That's the wheeze," said Blake. "Of course, we don't bear any malice, though it was a rather rough sort of a joke. But these kids have got to be kept in their places, or else they'll be getting up on their hind legs and growing cheeky."

"Exactly," Tom Merry remarked. "They've got to have their lesson. They've drenched our study, and got me into a row. I think that if they had a drenching themselves it would do them good, especially the New House kids, who are bound to want washing."

Figgins jumped up.

"If the editor of 'Tom Merry's Weekly' is looking for trouble——" he began.

"Peace!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That was a slip, and I withdraw the remark."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am weally surpwised at you, Tom Mewwy. The gweat Figgins is our guest, and this is not the time to tell the unpleasant twuth about the New House wotters. I weally think—— Ow!"

Figgins had taken hold of the somewhat prominent nose of Arthur Augustus between a thumb and forefinger that closed together like a vice.

"Ow! Leggo! What are you up to?" spluttered Arthur Augustus.

"Who are you calling rotters?" demanded Figgins. "Hey?"

Arthur Augustus jerked his nose away. He was crimson with wrath.

"Figgins, I no longah wegard you as a guest! I will give you such a feahful thwashin' that you will——"

Blake jerked the indignant swell of the School House back into his seat.

"Quiet, Gussy! No rowing allowing during a meeting of the editorial staff!"

"Welease me! Figgins has taken liberties with my nose!"

"Oh, blow your nose!" said Figgins.

"I wefuse to blow my nose. I insist upon your weleasin' me, Blake, while I chastise Figgins. I shall lose my tempah and stwike you."

"Peace, babbler!" said Tom Merry, raising his hands. "Figgins being a guest, and you having made a disparaging allusion to the New House kids as rotters, I adjudge Figgins to be the aggrieved party. You have been rude, Gussy."

"Tom Mewwy! Wude! Gwacious me! I weally——"

"Yes, rude. We're all ashamed of you," said Blake solemnly.

"Ashamed of you!" repeated the rest of the staff.

D'Arcy was greatly distressed. To be considered rude was about the most painful thing he could possibly imagine.

"My deah boys, I weally did not mean to be wude to Figgins," he said. "Figgins, I withdwaw any wemark that may have given you pain, and I will wefwain from chawactewisin' the New House wotters as wotters in the future. I am extwemely sowwy to have failed in the tweatment wequired towards an honahed guest."

"I am satisfied," said Figgins, with a bow. "Your apology is accepted."

"Thank you, Figgins. It would be most painful to my feelin's to be considered wude. You are sure that you are satisfied with my apology?"

"Oh, quite!" grinned Figgins. "That's all right, Gussy!"

"Because I assure you, upon my honah as a gentleman, that I nevah intended——"

"'Nuff said!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Let's come back to the subject. I was saying that the kids who spoiled our first number want to be drenched, to show them how nice it is. What do you think of the idea?"

"Good!" said Herries. "But they won't stand up for you to drench them, and you won't be able to get hold of the hose. Taggles will take care of that."

"I'm not thinking of that. We don't want any old hose. There's a pond in the doctor's garden, and what's the matter with that?"

"But will they go to the pond?"

"Yes, if we escort them, with a gentle grip on the back of their necks."

"Ha, ha, ha! Let's go and give 'em the bath!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The plan was adopted. It was necessary to give Gore and his friends a lesson, that was admitted on all hands, and a better plan could not be devised. The nine juniors sallied forth into the quadrangle in quest of their foes.

They found the four juniors together. Gore, Mellish, French, and Pratt looked decidedly alarmed when the nine members of the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" suddenly bore down upon them, and surrounded them before they could escape.

"Hallo!" said Gore, assuming a rather sickly smile as a hasty glance showed him that his escape was cut off. "Nice afternoon, ain't it?"

"Jolly nice," aid Tom Merry. "Will you come for a walk?"

"A walk?" said Gore, rather taken aback. "Where?"

"Oh, in the doctor's garden!"

"I—I'd rather not, if you don't mind, Merry. I—I——"

"But I do mind," said Tom, linking his arm in Gore's and marching him off. "Come along, you chaps. Follow the man from Cook's!"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins, putting his arm through Pratt's. "Come along, Pratt."

"I—I don't want to come, Figgy!"

"Can't be helped; I want you, and that settles it."

"Of course it does," said Lowther, taking Mellish's arm. "Nice evening for a walk, Mellish. Come and have a turn round the doctor's garden. What are you wriggling for? I say, Manners, take his other arm, will you?"

"Certainly," said Manners.

"I—I don't want to come! Let me alone!" said Mellish, struggling.

"Ungrateful person!" said Monty Lowther. "We're taking all the trouble to take you for a walk, and you don't want to come. Shocking!"

And Mellish was marched off between the Terrible Two.

French made an attempt to dodge away, but Blake and Herries seized him, and he was walked off in a similar manner. It was useless for the quartette to struggle; they had to go, whether they liked it or not.

"Hallo!" said Jimson, whom they passed en route. "Where are you going? What's the joke?"

"Collar that chap!" called out Tom Merry. "He was one of them!"

Jimson realised his danger, and tried to run; but it was too late. Kerr and Fatty Wynn were upon him in a twinkling, and as he struggled, Arthur Augustus came to their assistance. Jimson was quickly secured.

"Don't be so wuff, Jimson," said the swell of the School House. "There is weally nothin' to be alarmed about. We are only goin' to give you a little bath in weturn for your kind favah this afternoon, deah boy!"

"I don't—— I won't—— I sha'n't—— I—I—I——"

"Don't get excited. It's weally bad form, you know."

The unhappy five were marched into the doctor's garden, and right along to the pond. The swans looked at the intruders, and swam away, as if guessing that there was going to be a disturbance.

"Here we are, Gore," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "That was an awfully ripping joke of yours to-day, and we're so grateful we think one good turn deserves another. In you go!"

"I won't! I—— Help! Help!"

"In you go!"

Gore's struggles were in vain. With a powerful twist Tom Merry sent him splashing into the water. It was shallow, but Gore went right under, and when he rose to his feet the water was up to his armpits.

"You beast!" he yelled. "I'll—— Oh! Ow!"

Mellish came whirling in, and the splash he made sent Gore flying. After Mellish went Pratt and French, right under the surface.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly," in chorus. "Is that how you like 'em done, kids?"

Four drenched and tousled heads rose from the water. Four faces streaming and slimy with mud glared furiously at the avenging staff.

"You beasts!" roared the four.

"Now in with Jimson! What are you kids dawdling for?"

"He is stwugglin' in a vewy wuff mannah!" gasped Arthur

Augustus. "The disgustin' wuff bwute has cwumpled my waistcoat!"

"Shove him in!"

Jimson struggled, but it was of no use. He went flying into the pond, and the four already there went reeling in the water. Now five heads rose above the surface.

Five half drowned juniors scrambled towards the bank. They were met with clods of earth raining upon them, and were glad to recede.

"Let us get out!" said Mellish pleadingly. "We shall catch our death of cold."

"Would that matter?" asked Blake.

"Let us get out! Please!"

"I don't think they ought to be allowed out," said Arthur Augustus, "until they have made the amende honowable. Do you apologise, you boundahs?"

"No!" roared Gore furiously. "I don't, for one!"

"Then my advice is to let them wemain there, deah boys."

"Yes, we do, we do apologise!" exclaimed Mellish. "Gore can stay in here if he likes. I apologise in the most complete way, any way you like. Can I come out?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mellish crawled out. One by one the delinquents expressed their contrition, and were allowed to follow. Gore was the last; but the water was cold, and he soon gave in.

"Now," said Tom Merry, with a lordly wave of the hand, "you may consider yourselves let off lightly. Instead of punishing you, we have given you a bath free gratis and for nothing. In future, mind you keep off the grass and leave the editorial office of 'Tom Merry's Weekly' severely alone."

And the recipients of the free bath crawled away.

"We've taken a lot of trouble over those kids," said Blake; "but I don't regard it as time wasted, as they've been taught a valuable lesson."

"Just so," said Figgins. "It's the place of leaders of public opinion like ourselves to bring them up in the way they should go."

"The first number of the 'Weekly' won't come out till Monday or Tuesday, now, I expect," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully; "but I think we shall be able to get on with the editorial work now without so many interruptions."

And he was right.

CHAPTER 8.

"Tom Merry's Weekly," No. 1.

WEDNESDAY had come round again, and excitement reigned at St. Jim's. It was the day of publication of the first number of "Tom Merry's Weekly." Owing to the destructive attack upon the editorial office, the date of publication had been advanced, and Wednesday had been fixed for the first appearance of the great paper.

Besides the staff, outside contributors had had a good deal of stuff put in, so there were quite a number of fellows eager to see their own efforts in print. It was not exactly in print, as the contributions were copied out on foolscap pages by one or another of the regular staff, but it amounted to the same thing.

Seniors as well as juniors took a great interest in the forthcoming publication. It was rumoured that the new paper contained a good many skits and jokes about the Upper Forms, and some of the seniors were keenly alive to ridicule.

After school on Wednesday the editorial office was besieged. Gore and his friends were there, ready for mischief if a chance offered, though the lesson they had had in the doctor's pond had not been wholly lost on them. Knocks resounded upon the door of the editorial office. It was opened at length by Tom Merry. The editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly" was looking as sunny and cheerful as usual, and the staff, who were all on the scene, were in high feather.

"Hallo!" said Gore. "Is that paper of yours ever coming out, Tom Merry?"

"Certainly. Gentleman of St. Jim's, the first number of 'Tom Merry's Weekly' is now published," said the hero of the Shell. "It——"

"Where is it?"

"Give us a copy!"

"Hand it out!"

"Gentlemen, I regret to state that owing to our limited facilities for producing this important periodical, it has been found only possible to issue one copy, which will be read in turns by the subscribers," said the editor.

"Well, hand it out!" said Gore.

"I hope you've put my poem in," said French. "Perhaps you've left it out because it was one up against you."

"Not at all. Your poem is in."

"Good! Let's see it."

"Gentlemen, there being only one copy of the 'Weekly,' and there being so numerous a crowd of eager perusers, that copy will be placed in a position to be read by all at once," said Tom Merry. "All who are eager to read the first number of 'Tom Merry's Weekly' are requested to adjourn to the quadrangle."

"What the dickens for?" asked Gore.

"You'll see."

"Oh, come on, kids!" said Gore; and he marched off with the rest.

Then the staff issued from the study, Tom Merry carrying the bulky manuscript periodical under his arm. Monty Lowther followed with an easel on his shoulder, and then Manners, carrying a board. Blake had a pointer in his hand, and Figgins & Co., Herries, and D'Arcy, for some curious reason, carried cricket-stumps.

A crowd, growing larger every moment, watched the setting up of the easel in the quad. The board was placed upon it, and the "Weekly" was put on the board. The editor's object was now clear. By displaying the "Weekly" on the easel as many as wished were enabled to read it at once.

Tom Merry took the pointer from Blake, and handled it like a showman. The rest of the staff gathered round the editor on either side. In front of the easel gathered the crowd, looking over one another's shoulders at the title-page of the "Weekly."

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "it is requested that the smaller boys be allowed to stand in front, the taller ones further back. The seniors will oblige by keeping in the rear. I am very pleased to see so many of the Upper Form fellows present, as it shows that they are not above appreciating the literary efforts of the Lower Forms. If they are able to obtain any hints from the 'Weekly' as to how to improve the Sixth Form magazine, they are quite welcome. It must be admitted that that stodgy publication requires improvement."

"Go on!" said Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, laughing. "Let us see the paper, Merry."

"Here you are! Look, and feast your eyes on it."

The front page of the paper bore the inscription:

"Tom Merry's Weekly. A journal devoted to the interests of sport, literature, and art. Published weekly by Tom Merry & Co., Study No. 10, School House, St. Jim's. Price nothing. No reduction for quantities."

Tom Merry turned over the first leaf.

"Gentlemen, before the reading commences," he remarked casually, "I may mention that the staff of this journal are ready for trouble, and are armed for the fray. If any gentleman present takes exception to anything published in the magazine, and attempts to do any damage to the paper, he will probably get hurt."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, go on with the penny reading!" said Gore.

Eager eyes scanned the front page of the magazine. It contained the opening chapter of a grand new serial, by G. Figgins, entitled: "The Red Chief; A Realistic Romance of the Wild West."

It was the Indian story improved, Figgins having relented on that point. The bloodshed had been taken out, and certainly the story was all the better for it. There was an illustration by Kerr, who drew very well, depicting the Red Chief on his mustang. Tom Merry left the page open for the crowd to read.

"Say when," he remarked laconically.

"When!" shouted Gore.

"When!" echoed thirty or forty voices in chorus.

"I say, you haven't read it!" exclaimed Figgins wrathfully. "I——"

"And we're not going to," said Gore. "Turn over, Tom Merry. Those who want to read that piffle can do it afterwards; we want to get on with the washing now."

That was not complimentary to Figgy's serial. But it was pretty generally endorsed by the crowd standing before the magazine.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "we shall be here all the afternoon if we read every contribution word for word. The magazine will pass from hand to hand afterwards, and then every fellow can go thoroughly into whatever pleases his taste."

"That's right enough," said Figgins.

And Tom Merry turned over. The second page contained more serial, but the third was devoted to poetry. And here the audience showed more attention.

The first was a poem by French of the New House, and it elicited much laughter. It was a parody of a song of Gilbert and Sullivan's, and it referred to the postponed publication of the magazine. The first verse ran as follows:

"When the enterprising editor is not editing,
And the magazine does not appear to date,
He gives explanations we are far from crediting,
About some jokers making him so late.
Some excuse he's bound to have, this, that, or t'other,
Why the editorial work's so slowly done.
Taking one consideration with another, with another,
A contributor's lot is not a happy one."

Loud laughter followed the reading of this effort, and French looked very pleased.

"A contributor's lot is not a happy one," sang Blake; "especially when he gets ducked in a pond. Next item, please."

Tom Merry turned over.

The football column, signed J. Blake, was awarded general attention. It contained football news and notices, and some personal paragraphs. Opinions from readers were invited upon the following important question: Whether the St. Jim's First Eleven would not be materially improved by having some juniors included in it, instead of being composed wholly of seniors. Some of the seniors turned red, while the youngsters chuckled loudly.

"It will be remembered"—the article went on—"that a junior has on one occasion played in a First Eleven match for St. Jim's with great success and credit. If some of the seniors could be induced to gracefully retire and make room for Blake, Merry, and Figgins, to name only three juniors, we consider that the team would be much better class. This point is earnestly recommended to Kildare for consideration."

Every eye turned upon Kildare. Some of the seniors were looking annoyed, but the captain of St. Jim's only laughed.

"Cheeky young beggars!" said Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, laughing, too.

Then followed a "Football Song," by Tom Merry. It began with:

"Play up, play up, for the good old coll.,
Play up, and play the game!
Play hard, play fair, and play to win!
Play up, for name and fame!"

There were several verses, of which the sentiment was excellent, whatever might be said of the versification.

An article on fashions, by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, was received with a good deal of giggling, and the audience said "When!" promptly.

Now came the serious poetic effort of Herries, and its reception rather puzzled the poet. It was written in the well-known style, and was meant to be serious, but the readers seemed to see something decidedly humorous in it.

"A dicky-bird sat on a garden-wall,
A spring onion grew below,
And the dicky-bird sighed, as the onion he eyed,
As he watched it grow and grow;
'Oh, charming spring onion,' the dicky-bird cried,
'I love you, I love you so!'"

He sat on the wall and he sang his song,
Of love for that onion rare;
But his words were lost, on the breezes tossed,
And wasted on desert air;
He sang in vain, in his love and pain,
For the spring onion did not care!

And the summer passed, and then at last,
In his love and pain and woe,
Did the dicky-bird fall from the garden-wall,
By the side of the plant below,
And he slowly died by the careless side
Of the onion he worshipped so!"

Herries thought that that little poem was pathetic enough to bring tears to the eyes of a brazen image, but apparently the St. Jim's boys did not take it in the right spirit. They laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks, and Herries looked indignant.

"I can't see what all this cackling is about," he said stiffly.

"You wouldn't!" said Gore. "Ha, ha, ha! Poor little dicky-bird! Poor little beast! Ha, ha, ha! Charming spring onion! Oh, my hat! Turn over, Tom Merry, before I have a fit!"

The editor of the "Weekly" turned the leaf.

There was nothing comic on the next page. It was devoted to photography, and was written by Henry Manners, and it was serious, not to say heavy.

The audience requested Tom Merry to turn over, showing little interest in the work of Manners, and less still in the article on the "Antiquities of the Collegiate School of St. James," by William Pratt, which followed.

Then came the touching poem by Fatty Wynn, on a subject dear to the schoolboy heart, and especially dear to the heart of Fatty himself.

"Beautiful grub—my heart's delight!
Charming both by day and night.
How get enough of it—there's the rub.
Grub of the tuck-shop—beautiful Grub!

Beautiful breakfast—who would scorn,
Bacon and eggs at early morn.
Hungry and fresh from the morning tub,
To grub of the morning—beautiful grub!

Beautiful dinner—when at last
The weary waiting hours have passed.
If it is late we could almost blub—
Grub of the noontide—beautiful grub!

Beautiful tea—we sadly need
A rather more substantial feed;
But still we manage along to rub,
Grub of the evening—beautiful grub!

Beautiful supper—never doubt,
The best feed's when the lights are out.
To stand the tommy our cash we dub,
Grub of the night-time—beautiful grub!"

Fatty Wynn felt decidedly flattered at the notice taken of his poem. Some of the fellows began chanting the verses to themselves to the well-known tune. Tom Merry was laughing as he turned over the page.

Monty Lowther's sonnet came next, with several stanzas added to it, which we need not reproduce. The readers wrinkled their brows over it, striving to make out what it meant; and some thought they had succeeded.

Some called on Monty Lowther for an explanation, but he did not vouchsafe one, and Gore declared his conviction that Lowther did not know what the poem meant any more than anybody else.

An epic poem in blank verse by Mellish followed. It commenced:

"I sing of the glorious days of old, when William the Conqueror reigned,
And the brave Saxons opposed the invader on the battle-field of Hastings;
When Harold bold and all his knights were slain or wounded,
And the insolent invader triumphed over his foes."

There were a hundred lines, all on a par with the sample we have given, and Mellish regarded them with an eye of pride, but the readers called loudly on Tom Merry to turn over the page.

"Next item!" said a dozen voices.

The next item was an article signed "T. M." It was an article on natural history, and some of the audience cried nastily for the leaf to be turned, until it was discovered that the bird treated of in the article was known as the Schneider-bird. Then they wanted to read it. It led off as follows:

"The peculiar bird known as the Schneider-bird is found in any study where it is specially not wanted at the moment. It is a peculiar-looking object, the head being shaped somewhat like a cannon-ball, and quite as dark. The upper surface is bare, but dotted with a few ragged tufts of hair. The beak is long and pointed, and is being continually stuck into affairs which are really no concern of the Schneider-bird at all. This unpleasant creature is made in Germany, and it is the wish of everyone who comes in contact with it that it could be caged and taken back to its native habitat."

There was a good deal more in the same strain, over which the juniors giggled joyously, and the seniors tried in vain to keep serious faces.

"I say, that won't do, you know!" said Kildare.

Tom Merry turned the leaf.

Kerr's poem on "Bannockburn" followed. Kerr had consented to take out the traitorous Southrons, and so he had been allowed to fill a page with his patriotic effort.

The next page was devoted to advertisements.

They occasioned a great deal of chuckling among the readers. Some of them were comical.

"WANTED.—A kind nurse to look after the Third Form, and see that they wash their necks in the morning, or, at least, once a week."

The Third Form boys coloured and looked uncomfortable.

The next advt. was written by a Shell boy, and contained a hit at the Fourth Form.

"FOUND.—An Euclid, with leaves uncut, presumably belonging to a Fourth Form boy. Same can be had by applying to X. Y. Z., office of this paper."

The next was evidently the work of a Fourth-Former, and written as a reply to the above.

"FOUND.—An exercise-book, covered with finger-marks,

and thereby presumed to belong to some kid in the Shell. The owner can have same on submitting finger-prints to be compared with the numerous specimens on the exercise-book."

Another one had evident application to the swell of St. Jim's.

"LOST.—A brain-box, with contents. Anybody finding same is requested to restore it to its owner, A. A. D'A., who is sadly in need of it."

There were many more in the same strain. Later on came a poem in the serial form, by Blake, of which we give a specimen. Whether it was meant to be comic or tragic, the readers could not for the life of them decide.

"It was in the Middle Ages in the days of bards and sages,
Whom we read of in the pages of the chroniclers of old,
In the time of war and wassail, in an ancient feudal castle,
Thronged by many a valiant vassal dwelt a noble baron bold.
And this baron had a daughter as all noble barons oughter,
And the young men came to court her from the north, south, east, and west;
But among her many suitors, serenading tootle-tooters,
Young Sir Fatted de Fitzbooters was the one she loved the best.

Now, Sir Fatted was a chappy might make any damsel happy,
But his heritage was scrappy and his bank account was nil.
He could sing and dance and caper lightly, he could sing and smile most brightly,
He could serenade her nightly, but he couldn't pay his bill;
And the baron had vast riches, and despises poor suitors, which is
Very wrong, alas—but such is life in times or new or old.
He had vowed that Lady Flora should accept a rich adorer,
As her mother had before her when she wed the baron bold."

After the second verse was written "To be continued."

"Well, that's one good thing," said Gore. "There's no more of it now. But, I say, Blake, you won't really go on doing a wicked thing like that, will you?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake.

The next page occasioned a good deal of surprise, among the staff as well as among the readers. The fact was, that this page, although not at the end, had been left till last, and had been written in at the last moment. The task had been entrusted to D'Arcy, and Tom Merry had not had time to look over it.

D'Arcy had written in the page from notes scribbled on different fragments of paper, and had somehow got them mixed, and so the article was a little mixed also; the swell of St. Jim's being in too great a haste to notice that the thing did not make sense.

He had, in fact, mixed up three articles together—a football article by Blake, a gardening paragraph by Jimson, and a paragraph dealing with the falling off of the subscriptions to the hobby club, by Manners.

The result was as follows, and it was read out amid screams of laughter from the audience. The staff looked very uncomfortable.

"The present football season promises to be one of the most successful ever known at St. Jim's. Of the games played so far, first-eleven matches, the school have won seven, lost one, and drawn two—a very creditable result. In one of the matches a junior played, as the team were a man short, and he kicked the winning goal—which most of the juniors consider a good reason why, at least, one junior should always be placed under a glass and kept in the full sunshine, and being kept moderately damp, but not too much so, the growth will be rapid. The greatest care will have to be exercised if this experiment is to be a success, for the least carelessness may spoil all, and instead of a healthy growth, the specimen will very probably show a decrease in the subscriptions during the current season, which we hope is rather due to an increase in the interest taken in footer than to a diminution of the interest taken in the indoor hobby."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the audience. "That sounds mixed!"

"You ass, Gussy!" growled Tom Merry. "That's because I hadn't time to read over the proofs—I mean the page! Nice sort of an ass, you are, aren't you?"

"I object to bein' chawactewised as an ass, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, you are one! Let's get on!"

"Here, I say, I'd like that read over again!" said Gore.

But Tom Merry turned over. They now came to the puzzles and conundrums. Some of the latter were very personal.

"Why is a Third Form kid like a monkey?—Because he was born so.

"Why is Knox, the prefect, like a hooligan?—Probably early training.

"Why is Gore of the Shell a pig?—Because he can't help it.

"What is the difference between Sefton of the Sixth and a blackguard?—None at all."

"Hum!" said Kildare. "The blue pencil is wanted there, I think, Tom Merry."

And, shaking his head, the captain of the school walked away, and most of the seniors followed him.

The younger portion of the audience continued to read and chuckle.

"There's a comical bounder named Gore,
Who's always a bit of a bore.
He writes lots of bosh,
And he got a free wash,
And I dare say could do with some more."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Pratt. "There's your character, Gore!"

"Perhaps you like your own better," sneered Gore.

"My own! What do you mean?"

"Look there!"

"There's a kid in the New House named Pratt,
Who always talks out of his hat.
We should think it immense,
If he ever talked sense,
But there isn't much prospect of that."

Pratt turned red.

"Ha, ha!" cackled Jimson. "You've got it in the neck this time, Pratty!"

"Oh, you're there, too!" said Gore. "Look!"

"I? What do you mean?"

"Look and see!"

"There is Jimson—you know him, I s'pose,
Who writes detestable prose;
But his writing is worse,
When he puts it in verse,
So we wish he would put it in prose."

Jimson turned scarlet with wrath.

Gore and his friends were whispering together while the others went on reading. The limericked juniors were looking dangerous. So were the Third Formers, who had been the subject of the little jokes. Mischief was brewing, but the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" were too interested in the matter in hand to notice it.

"Hallo, Mellish, you're in it, too!" exclaimed Jimson, as he saw Mellish chuckling away over the last effusion. "Look there, my son—there's something for you to cackle over!"

"There's Mellish, whose verse to be plain,
Is the cause of less pleasure than pain.
He has written a lot,
Of most absolute rot!
Oh, Mellish don't do it again!"

Mellish read that limerick and made a dash at the magazine. Tom Merry sprang in his way and they closed. The staff rushed forward with the cricket-stumps ready to defend the "Weekly," but unfortunately, the two combatants reeled against the easel, and it went down with a crash to the ground.

"Tom Merry's Weekly" fluttered down, and Gore was on it like a shot. One powerful kick sent it sailing through the air, out of reach of the staff, and there was a rush of the aggrieved juniors upon it. French was first to reach it, with Tom Merry and Figgins hot after him, and the rest of the staff rushing on. French took a running kick at the magazine, and passed to Pratt, who dribbled the unfortunate volume onward, and passed again to Jimson as he was tackled by the staff. Jimson kept on across the quad with the "Weekly" at his feet, the incensed staff hot on the track after him. But Jimson was rapid, and he covered a score of yards before Tom Merry closed up behind him. As he felt the editorial hand falling on his shoulder, Jimson took a flying kick, and the volume sailed into the air and landed in the basin of the fountain with a splash.

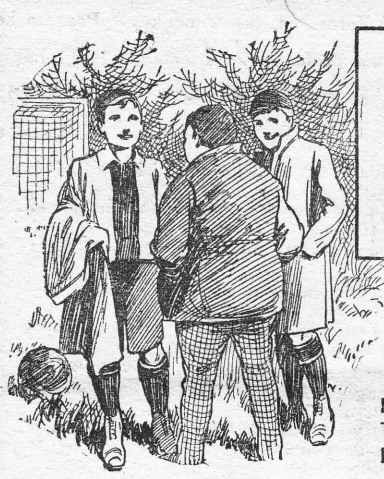
. . . . . .

"Never mind!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, as the staff stood round looking at the dilapidated paper. "Never mind; it's been published and circulated in a way, and that's the end of it. We'll have the next number out in better style—got up better, and really printed, so that we can have as many copies as we like. I tell you, kids, that 'Tom Merry's Weekly' is going to be a success!"

And the staff, with one voice, said:

"What-ho!"

(Another tale dealing with Tom Merry next Thursday. Order your copies in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

READ THIS FIRST

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers, who play many spiteful tricks upon them. A new boy named Alburton comes to Stormpoint, and the chums object to his swaggering disposition, so nickname him "Swipes." A paper-chase is arranged by the Head, and Bob and Rex are chosen for the hares. The chums draw well ahead, and finally decide to climb Stormpoint. The hounds get cut off by the tide. "They will have to wait till the tide goes down," said Rex. "They can't possibly get off that plateau now. The sea that is running would dash them on the rocks."

(Now go on with the story.)

The Return of the Hares.

"That's true enough; all the same, we should get caught. I tell you what it is, Rex, we must reach the summit. We should be disgraced, and Jardon would never let us hear the last of it. There is only one thing for us to do, and that is to reach the top."

"How?"

"What?"

"Which do you consider would be the best way of reaching the top. Bob?" inquired Rex, looking comical, for he firmly believed it to be an utter impossibility.

"Climb."

"We might be able to do so if we were flies; we could use our wings then."

"We could do it if we were about eight feet high."

"Quite so; but we can't stop here while we grow all that little lot."

"I've got it. Shove your noddle against those rocks, and I will climb on your shoulders. I shall easily reach it then, and any idiot can drag himself up."

"What a fortunate thing it is that you are idiotic!" observed Rex, doing as Bob suggested, although he felt that it was most frightfully risky.

Bob caught at such projections as he could find, and cautiously climbed on Rex's back. He was heavy, but Rex bore the strain all right, and Bob was just able to reach the edge of the cliff; then Rex scarcely dared to breathe as he watched his chum draw himself up inch by inch until he gained the summit of the great height.

For some minutes Bob remained seated on the brink with his legs dangling over. The work had been very hard, and he badly needed a rest; but at last he lay flat on the ground, and reached his arms over.

"Catch hold of my wrists, Rex," he said, "and I'll get a grip on yours, then you will easily get up."

They were both well accustomed to this sort of work, but they found it no easy task. Bob, however, was able to draw his chum up until he also got a grip on the edge of the cliff, and in a few moments he was in safety by Bob's side.

"Now, then, old Jardon," bawled Bob, "do you really think you will win your bet? Oh, you great hulking swindler, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for setting those men to stop us; but, you see, your contemptible meanness did not succeed this time! You can wait there till the tide runs down. The other hounds won't be back much before you. You have lost your money, but you can have the consolation of knowing that you have had a good run for your money. Good-bye! I hope you won't get hungry and thirsty, but I rather fancy you will be both before you are able to leave that plateau. Come on, Rex, we haven't time to listen to the idiot. Let's scatter a little scent, else they will vow they did not know which way we had returned to the college. I'll guarantee it won't be the same way as they return."

The chums went at a run to the college, and roused Porker from his afternoon nap with a violent ring at the bell.

"Why, the varmints have come in fust!" gasped Parker. "Bust it, I've lost! I'm blowed if this 'ere is fair!"

"It wasn't at all fair, Piggy-Porker!" exclaimed Rex. "You know why it wasn't fair, and so does that bully Jardon. Ha, ha, ha! I knew the lot of you had been betting. There goes five o'clock, and, considering the nature of the course, it isn't at all bad time."

"I'll report you for getting wet. I'll get level with you, you varmints! You ain't safe, neither of you. If the doctor was to do his dooty by you he would expel you from the college."

"How much have you lost, old Porker?" inquired Bob.

"You mind your own business, you rat! I never bet."

"Why don't you say at the same time that you always speak the truth?"

"'Cos I ain't such a liar as you are! You pretend to speak the truth, and never do it!"

"I wonder how many weeks' wages the silly old shocker has lost?" exclaimed Bob. "We shall have him in a frightful temper for the next few weeks, until he has made up the loss. Never mind, Porker, perhaps next year you will have better luck!"

"I believe the hounds caught you."

"You believe anything very easily. Come on, Rex. We had better change our togs before we report ourselves to the doctor. He will be delighted that we were not caught. You had better go out and search for the hounds, Porker. They have had a most delightful day, one way and another. Perhaps, at the same time, you had better go and pay those two blackguards at the bridge for not stopping us. You forgot that it was quite possible for us to offer them twice as much as you and Jardon had paid them, so that we could get by. Mind, I don't say that is the way we really passed them, but if you question them concerning the matter, I dare say you will be able to learn how it all happened. The hounds are not likely to be in just yet."

(To be continued in next Thursday's "Gem.")

How do you do?

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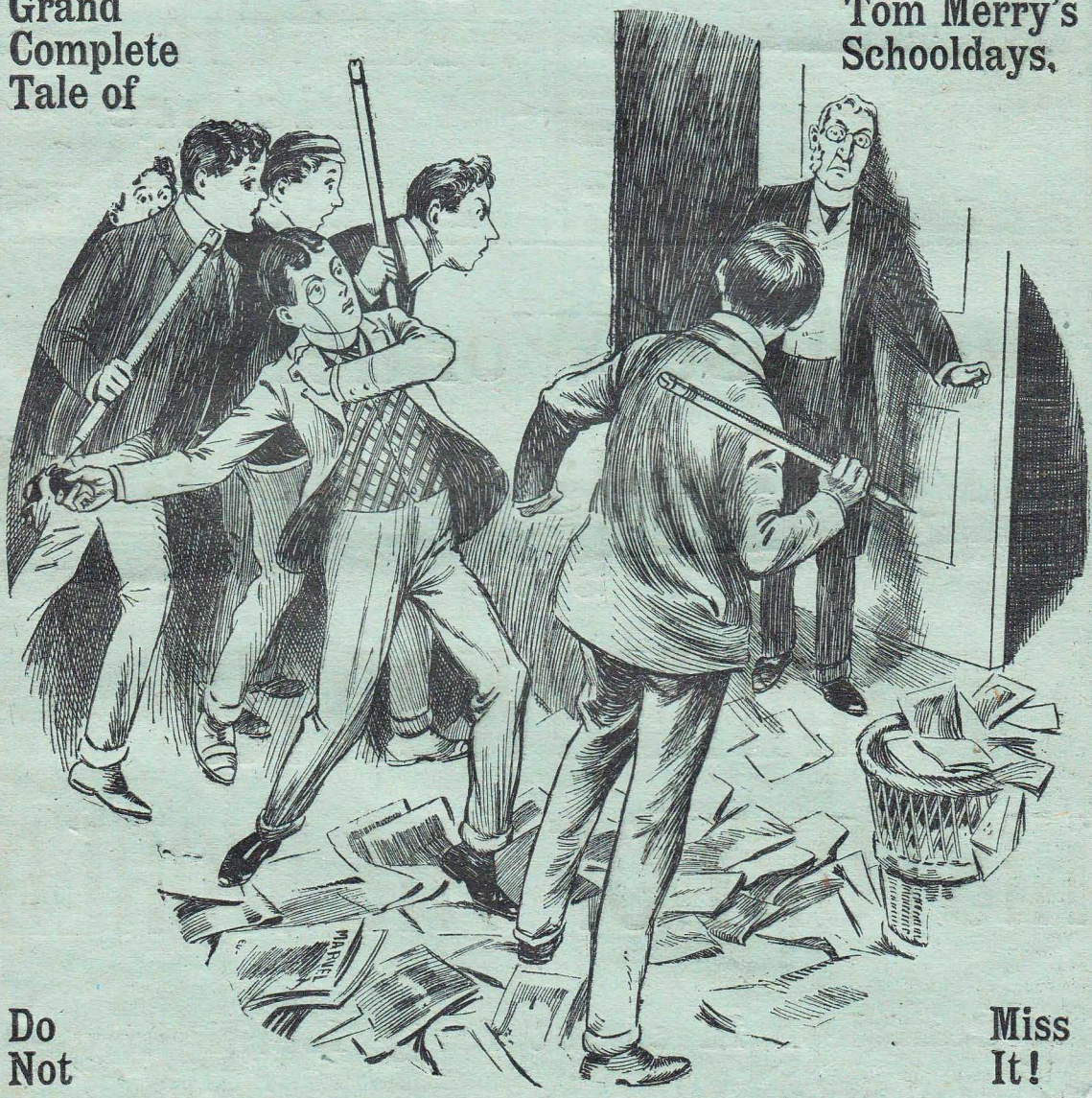

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