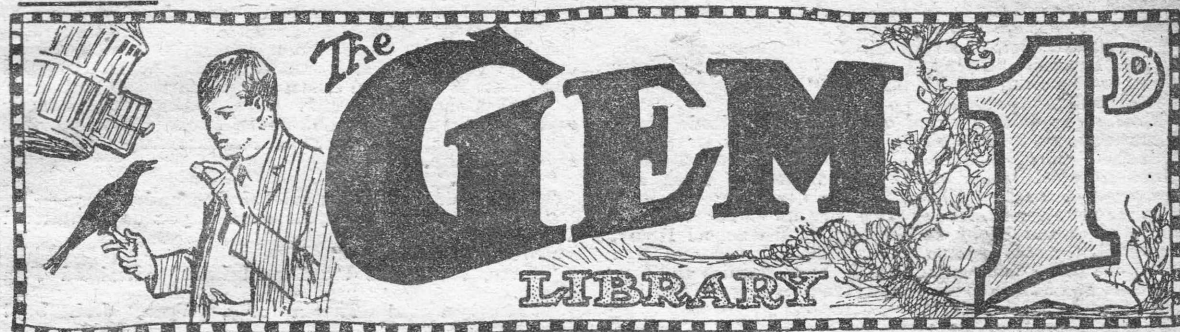


Don't Miss "THE RAG-TIME SCHOOLBOYS!" Next Week.

Every

Wednesday



Complete Stories for All, and Every Story a Gem.



CHAPTER 1.

Fatty's Fiver.

FATTY WYNN'S plump face was illuminated by a beatific smile.

Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was always a good-tempered fellow. He was always cheerful, excepting when funds were very low, and there was nothing to eat between meals. On such occasions as that Fatty Wynn's full-moon visage would be overcast. But, as a rule, he could be depended upon for good-temper, good-humour, and an unlimited supply of the milk of human kindness.

But his plump face had seldom beamed as it did now.

Judging by Fatty Wynn's expression, as he emerged from the New House with Figgins and Kerr, his inseparable chums, everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Indeed, he looked so beatific that Tom Merry & Co., crossing the Quad, on their way to the School House, stopped to look at him. Usually there was war between New House and School House at St. Jim's. But Fatty Wynn was too happy to think of warfare then. He was in a mood to have embraced his worst enemy—if he had had one.

"Come on, you chaps!" he exclaimed genially.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked at him. They had never seen the Falstaff of the New House brimming over with such delightful good-humour.

"Whither bound, oh, fairest and fattest of porpoises?" asked Monty Lowther politely.

"Tuckshop!" said Fatty Wynn. "Come along, and call all the fellows you meet! It's my treat!"

"Come into a fortune?" asked Tom Merry.

"Or has your Aunt Jemima sent you a postal-order for one-and-six?" asked Lowther.

Fatty Wynn's Hunger-Strike!

A splendid, new, long, complete School
Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at
St. Jim's.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Or have you found a five-shillingpiece in somebody's pocket?" Manners wanted to know.

Fatty Wynn sniffed.

"One-and-six be blowed! It's a fiver!"

"A what?"

"A which?"

"A who?"

The Terrible Three of the School House uttered those surprised exclamations in chorus. Fivers were not common in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's. True, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, sometimes had fivers from his pater; but then D'Arcy's pater was a noble earl, and was popularly supposed to be rolling in fivers and tenners. It was an event for any other fellow to have a whole gorgeous fiver—an event which other fellows were always willing to help him celebrate in an appropriate manner.

"A fiver!" repeated Fatty Wynn. "Five-pound note, you know," he added innocently, as if to enlighten the School House fellows if they did not happen to know what a fiver was.

The Terrible Three smiled.

"Yes, I believe I know that a fiver is a five-pound note," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Made of paper, isn't it—printed on, or something—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Fatty Wynn. "I've got a fiver—it's from my uncle. Kerr's going to help me write a letter thanking him presently. I don't often get a fiver—in fact, it's the first I've had since I've been at St. Jim's. I'm going to blow it!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Terrible Three.

And Monty Lowther rushed at Fatty Wynn, and hugged him.

"Come to my waistcoat, my chubby angel!" sobbed Lowther. "Let me fold you to my watchchain and weep!"

Next Wednesday:

"THE RAG-TIME SCHOOLBOYS!" AND "THE CORINTHIAN!"

"Leggo, you silly ass!" roared Fatty Wynn, struggling in the embrace of the exuberant Lowther. "Don't play the giddy goat! The bell will be going for classes soon!"

"No time to lose!" said Figgins. "Come on! Hallo, Reddy, Lawrence, Owen! Come on! Walk up! Fatty Wynn's got a fiver, and it's his treat!"

"Huray!"

Escorted by quite a crowd of enthusiastic friends, Fatty Wynn rolled on to the tuckshop. Figgins and Kerr walked with their arms linked in Fatty Wynn's, and the Terrible Three marched behind them. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, of the New House, fell into line.

As the news spread, fellows came from far and near. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, of the School House, arrived first, and Kangaroo, of the Shell, followed, and Glyn and Dane and Thompson and Reilly and Kerruish and Ray and Gore and Skimpole—in fact, as the poet says: "Warriors more than I can name!"

It was near time for afternoon classes. But afternoon classes were not to be thought of just then. Afternoon classes, indeed! Afternoon classes, when Fatty Wynn had a fiver, and it was Fatty Wynn's treat. It would be like Nero fiddling when Rome was burning. School House and New House were of one accord, and they backed Fatty Wynn up as one man.

Dame Taggles, who kept the little tuckshop in the corner of Big Quad., looked a little alarmed as the army marched in. For a moment she thought it was a rag, and that the exuberant juniors had come to sack the tuckshop. But her fears were quickly relieved. Fatty Wynn threw down the crisp, rustling fiver on the counter with the air of a prince.

"Change that, Mrs. Taggles, will you?"

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Taggles. "Certainly, Master Wynn!"

Fatty Wynn waved a fat hand.

"Walk up, you fellows, and give your orders, will you?"

Would they?

The little shop was crammed. Outside, the crowd was thickening. There was, as Monty Lowther said, standing room only, and there was not enough of that. Orders rolled in upon Mrs. Taggles—seldom had there been such a rush of custom. The good dame was kept busy with incessant demands.

"Ginger-beer!"

"Jam-tarts!"

"Lemonade!"

"Cake, cake, cake!"

"Dough-nuts!"

"Any old thing, but back up!"

Fatty Wynn was already busy. He had helped himself to a large pie, and had started upon it with a keen appetite. It wasn't very long since he had had dinner. But, as Fatty would have said, he had only had three helpings of everything at dinner, so he was quite ready for another feed. The pie was large, and the pie was good. It was growing rapidly smaller now.

A dozen fellows were drinking Fatty Wynn's health at once, in ginger-beer, lemonade, sherbet, currant-wine, or some other liquid form of refreshment. Fatty Wynn grinned upon them all good-humouredly. He was too busy to speak.

"Fatty, old man," said Blake, of the Fourth, "you're a prince! Mine's ginger-beer, please! You're a giddy emperor! Thanks! I must pat you on the back, Fatty!"

Smack!

"Ger-r-r-ro-o-ogh!"

Blake's enthusiastic pat on the back came at an unfortunate moment. Fatty Wynn's mouth was full, and he choked. Perhaps the pat was somewhat hard, the School House junior being carried away by his enthusiasm.

"Gro-o-o-o-o-ogh!"

"Catch him—he's suffocating!"

"Thump him on the back!"

"Poor old Fatty—it's apoplexy!"

"Fatty degeneration of the head!" said Monty Lowther sadly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!—Wow-wow-wow-wo-o-oh!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as several juniors patted him on the back at once, to help him get his breath. Their efforts seemed to have quite an opposite effect to that intended. Fatty Wynn struggled away from his rescuers, crimson in the face, and gasping.

"Ow! Chuckit! Stoppit! Grooh! Leave off, you silly asses! You're busting my blessed backbone! Gro-o-ogh!"

"Feel bettah, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sympathetically.

"Gro-o-oh!"

"I don't mind givin' you anothah thump, deah boy——"

"I'll jolly well punch your head if you do!" stuttered Fatty Wynn.

"Weadly, old chap——"

"Hallo, there goes the blessed bell!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Thanks afly, Wynn, deah boy! Bettah cut it now!"

The crowd began to melt. Fellows outside the shop had to go away unsatisfied. But Fatty Wynn had not finished the pie yet. Figgins shook him.

"Come on, Fatty!"

"Can't!"

"Bell's stopped!" said Kerr.

"Blow the bell!"

"You'll be late!" bawled Figgins.

"Look here, I'm going to finish my pie!" roared Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I haven't had time to have a mouthful. I'm not going to famish all the afternoon, you silly asses! You cut off, and tell old Lathom I'm busy—tell him I'm ill—tell him I'm dead—tell him anything you like! Yah!"

Figgins and Kerr grinned, and laid violent hands upon Fatty Wynn, and yanked him away from the counter.

"Come on, Fatty! Mrs. Taggles will give you your change after lessons. Come on!"

"Look here——"

"This way!"

"Lemme get something to put in my pocket, anyway!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Hold on a sec. Keep that pie for me, Mrs. Taggles—I'll take this toffee with me. All right, you beasts, I'm coming!"

And Fatty Wynn shoved a huge chunk of toffee into his pocket, and then his chums rushed him out of the tuckshop, and across the quadrangle to the School House, and the fat Fourth-Former, in a breathless and almost dizzy state, was rushed into the Fourth-Form room.

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble in the Form-Room.

MR. LATHOM, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, looked at Figgins & Co. over his glasses as they came in—late. The rest of the Fourth Form were in their places. Mr. Lathom was a mild little gentleman, with a mild little glance, and a mild little voice. He shook his head at Figgins & Co. more in sorrow than in anger.

"You are—er—late!" said Mr. Lathom.

"So sorry, sir!" said Figgins. "We ran all the way——"

"Simply scudded, sir!" said Kerr.

"I stopped a minute to finish something very important, sir!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Indeed! An imposition, I presume?" asked Mr. Lathom.

"Ahem! No—not an impot., sir."

"Ah! You were performing some task——"

"N-n-not exactly, sir."

"Then what was it you stopped to finish, Wynn?" demanded Mr. Lathom, raising his eyebrows.

"A—a pie, sir."

"What!"

"A pie, sir!" stammered Fatty Wynn. "But I didn't finish it, sir. These two duffers—I mean Figgys and Kerr—yanked me off before I could finish!"

Some of the Fourth Form smiled, and so did the Form-master.

"You may go to your places," he said.

And the chums of the New House went to their places. Figgins and Kerr were glad enough to escape without lines, but Fatty Wynn was not contented. He was thinking of the pie. Schubert's Unfinished Symphony would have seemed a trifling matter to Fatty Wynn in comparison with his unfinished pie. The pie, it was true, was beyond his reach until lessons were over; but the thought of it haunted Fatty Wynn, and made him feel hungry.

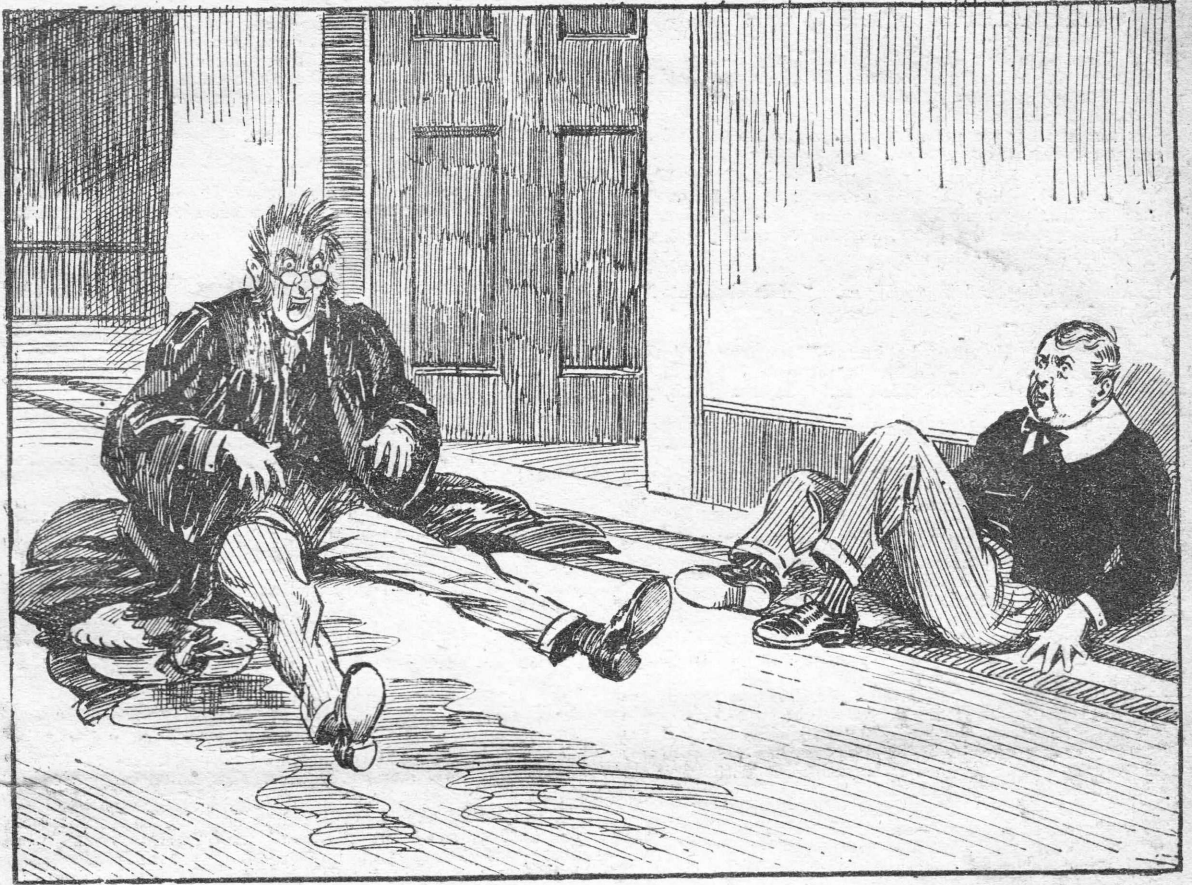
He whispered to Figgins that he was famished, and that he doubted whether he wouldn't faint before the Fourth were dismissed. But Figgins only grinned, and did not show the least sympathy.

"I say, Blake, have you got anything about you a chap

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(See column 2, page 26 of this issue.)



There was a terrific collision, and the fat Fourth-Former rushed right into the Housemaster. Mr. Rateliff crashed to the floor, and Fatty Wynn and the pie rolled over him. "Oh, good heavens! Help!" shrieked Mr. Rateliff. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn. (See Chapter 6.)

could eat?" Fatty Wynn whispered to the chief of Study No. 6.

Jack Blake looked round sympathetically. Mr. Lathom was busy with the blackboard just then.

"Peckish?" asked Blake.

"Famished!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically.

"Yes, you must be," said Blake, with a nod. "I can see that you are growing visibly thinner, and gradually fading away!"

"Got anything a chap could eat?" repeated Fatty Wynn, taking no notice of Jack Blake's pleasantry.

"Well, yes, if you'd care to eat it."

"Hand it over—I'll eat it right enough. I've only got some toffee in my pocket, and I can't break it without attracting attention. Hand it over!"

"I don't know that my little lot is particularly tasty," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Never mind—so long as a chap can eat it——"

"Oh, you can eat it all right if you like!"

"Hand it over, then."

Blake fumbled in his pocket, and produced something which he pressed into the palm of Fatty Wynn, stretched out under the desk to receive it. Fatty Wynn opened his hand and looked at it eagerly, and found that it was a chunk of cobbler's wax. The fat Fourth-Former glared at Blake, but Blake's head was turned now, and the back of his curly head was quite impervious to Fatty Wynn's ferocious glare. It was true enough that Wynn could have eaten the gift if he had liked; but he did not like.

He looked round in despair. He tossed a paper ball to attract the attention of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the next Form. The pellet caught the swell of St. Jim's on the cheek, and he started in surprise, and uttered an ejaculation.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, you fathead!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn knew that D'Arcy had a cake of milk chocolate in his pocket—he had seen him slip it there. After

lessons, Fatty Wynn would be willing to hand him half-a-dozen milk chocolates in exchange for that piece now. A bird in hand was worth a whole flock in the bush, to Fatty Wynn, when he was hungry.

But Arthur Augustus evidently did not understand that the missile was intended to draw his attention as a friendly signal. He was very much astonished. Mr. Lathom heard his ejaculation, and looked round.

"You must not talk in class, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Lathom mildly.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but I was vewy much surprised. Somethin' stwuck me on the cheek, sir!" said D'Arcy.

"Indeed!"

"Yaas, it was most surprisin'. I suppose it must have been a fwagment of plastah fwom the ceilin', sir," said Arthur Augustus, jamming his eyeglass into his eye and looking intently upward.

"Well, well, never mind!" said Mr. Lathom. And he continued dabbling fearsome angles on the blackboard.

Fatty Wynn waited a few moments, rolling up another paper pellet in his fingers. When Mr. Lathom's back was turned again, he projected the pellet skilfully at D'Arcy, and caught him neatly on the side of his aristocratic nose.

Arthur Augustus gave quite a jump.

"Gwreat Scott!"

Mr. Lathom came towards the form, looking almost irritable. He turned his spectacles very severely upon the swell of the Fourth.

"D'Arcy, I cannot allow these absurd ejaculations. You must keep order in class, or I shall be compelled to punish you. It is ridiculous!"

"Somethin' stwuck me on the nose, sir."

"Nonsense."

"But I felt it, sir. I feah that the ceilin' is in a dangewous state," said Arthur Augustus. "A fwagment stwuck me on the side of the nose, sir——"

"Nonsense! Probably some boy is throwing paper pellets

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at you," said Mr. Lathom. "Pray be more orderly, my boys!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

Arthur Augustus looked round him suspiciously. Some of the Fourth-Formers were grinning.

The swell of the Fourth elevated his noble nose in the air. Pelting him with paper pellets was highly disrespectful, and Arthur Augustus was "wrathy."

As soon as Mr. Lathom was engaged again, Fatty Wynn whizzed a third pellet at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's caught the movement, and looked round at him quickly, and the pellet, instead of hitting his ear, caught him in the eye.

"Oh, cwumbs!"

"You ass!" whispered Fatty Wynn. "Milk chocolate!"

"What!"

"Milk chocolate!"

"Gweat Scott! He must be insane!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He thwows a piece of papah in my beasty eye, an' says 'Milk chocolate.' Is it a game, you ass?"

"D'Arcy!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, sir! Ow!"

"You are making a noise again."

"Yaas! Ow!"

"You are talking to Wynn!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ow!"

"Did you throw those pellets at D'Arcy, Wynn?" asked the Form-master, picking up a cane from his desk.

Fatty Wynn groaned.

"Yes, sir," he admitted.

"Then I shall cane you. Stand out here!"

"Pway excuse me, sir," said Arthur Augustus, rising in his place. "But I feah that Wynn is not in his wight senses, sir. I feah that it may be sunstwoke, sir."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom angrily.

"He does not seem to be in his wight mind, sir. He thwew those pellets at me and said 'Milk chocolate.' I am unable to find any meanin' in his wemark, unless it is a new game. I weally think he must be a little loose in the wockah. Pewwaps owin' to ovah-eatin'."

"Wynn, did you ask D'Arcy for milk chocolate?"

"Yes," groaned Fatty Wynn. "Oh, the idiot!"

"Have you any milk chocolate about you, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove! Now I wemembah it, I have, sir. My deah Wynn, I didn't undahstand that you were askin' me for milk chocolate, or I would have passed it to you at once. I weally thought you were goin' off your wockah—"

"Idiot!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"You will come out here and lay the chocolate on my desk," said Mr. Lathom. "Such articles are not allowed to be brought into the Form-room, as you know very well. The chocolate will be confiscated. Wynn, you will take fifty lines."

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

Arthur Augustus made a pilgrimage to the Form-master's desk, laid the packet of chocolate thereon, and returned to his place. He paused to speak to Fatty Wynn:

"I'm awfully sowwy, Wynn, deah boy—"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir!"

"Take fifty lines!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"And do not open your mouth again!"

"Vewy well, sir."

And Arthur Augustus sat down.

Fatty Wynn was in despair. Several other fellows in the Fourth had eatables about them, but, after the disaster with D'Arcy, Fatty Wynn did not feel inclined to endeavour to obtain possession of them. And he was getting hungrier and hungrier. There was nothing for it but to eat the toffee; and the toffee was in a substantial chunk, and could not be broken without attracting the attention of the Form-master. It was much too thick and solid to be bitten through—at least, until it had been sucked for a considerable time.

Fatty Wynn debated the matter in his mind all through the lesson, and during the following lesson he resolved to risk it.

Mr. Lathom was taking the Fourth Form upon a personally-conducted tour amid the antiquities of that most interesting city, Rome. Mr. Lathom was quite eloquent on that subject. Fatty Wynn popped the chunk of toffee into his mouth, and gurgled over it with delight. It bulged out his cheek as if he had had a terrific attack of toothache; but he kept his head down, and the burly Herries was in front of him, so he had some cover from observation. He hoped that he would not be called upon to answer any questions. If he had to stand up, the swelling in his cheek would show at

once, unless he swallowed the huge chunk whole, which he could not do without imminent danger of a fatality.

Perhaps the incident of the milk chocolate made Mr. Lathom keep an unusually sharp eye on Fatty Wynn. He rapped out the fat Fourth-Former's name:

"Wynn!"

"Yes, sir," breathed Fatty Wynn.

"Stand up!"

Fatty Wynn had to obey. He knew that he had to get rid of the toffee, and he could not eject it from his mouth under the eye of the Form-master. He made a desperate effort to bite it through.

Wynn had good strong teeth. He drove them right through the chunk of toffee; but, to his dismay, he found that they would not come out again. They had met in the middle of that obstinate chunk, and were fixed there, stuck too fast to be withdrawn. Fatty Wynn would have gasped with horror, but he could not gasp now. If he had not been able to breathe through his nose, he would have been in imminent danger of suffocation. He stood up. The toffee was not visible now, but he could no more have spoken than he could have flown across the Form-room.

Mr. Lathom eyed him very severely.

"Wynn, I fear you are not paying attention to the lessons!"

Fatty Wynn was silent.

"Kindly tell me," said Mr. Lathom severely, "the name of the King of Rome who was driven into exile."

Fatty Wynn knew all about Tarquin, but he could not say so. He could not say anything.

Mr. Lathom looked surprised as the junior stood crimson and silent.

"Wynn!"

No reply.

"Can you answer my question, or can you not, Wynn?"

Silence!

Mr. Lathom grew a little pink in the face.

"Wynn, I command you to reply!"

Fatty Wynn made a desperate struggle with the toffee; but it was in vain. His jaws were as firmly locked as if they were in the fatal grip of lockjaw. He could only stare in dismay at his angry Form-master.

A pin might have been heard to drop in the Form-room. Mr. Lathom was quite red now. A refusal to reply by a junior was disrespectful, unheard-of. It would have been surprising enough in a reckless fellow like Lumley-Lumley, or a sulky boy like Levison; but it was amazing in Fatty Wynn.

"Will you answer me, Wynn?"

Silence!

"Very well," said Mr. Lathom, greatly incensed, "I shall cane you, Wynn. Stand out here!"

Fatty Wynn, in utter dismay, advanced before the class. Mr. Lathom took up his cane. The kind little gentleman did not like punishing the boys, and he hesitated before he told Wynn to hold out his hand.

"What is the meaning of this conduct, Wynn?" he asked.

"You are not a wickedly disrespectful boy as a rule. What is the meaning of this? Answer me!"

Fatty Wynn made a wild effort, in vain. His jaws were firmly fixed, and would not come asunder. His eyes rolled wildly as he made the effort, and Mr. Lathom was quite startled.

"How dare you make faces at me, Wynn?" he exclaimed angrily.

No reply.

"I give you one more opportunity of explaining yourself," said Mr. Lathom.

Silence!

"Then hold out your hand!"

Fatty Wynn held out his hand, and grunted as the cane descended. He could grunt, but that was the sum total of his vocal powers at that moment.

"Now go back to your place," said Mr. Lathom. "I am sorry to cane you, but you have left me no other resource. Your conduct is amazing—unparalleled! I am shocked at you, Wynn! Have you not the grace to say that you are sorry?"

Fatty Wynn was sorry enough, and he would gladly have said so, if he had had the power; but he hadn't. He could only roll his eyes at the Form-master, and that seemed to make Mr. Lathom angrier than ever.

"You are incorrigible, Wynn!" exclaimed the Form-master. "You will be detained for two hours after lessons, and will occupy the time in writing out Latin verbs, giving the complete tenses of each verb. Go to your place!"

Fatty Wynn went to his place, silent, and overwhelmed with dismay. Detained for two hours after lessons. Alas for the unfinished pie!

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry to the Rescue.

TOM MERRY & Co. met the Fourth Form as they came out. The Shell fellows were quite ready to resume the interrupted feed at the tuck-shop, and to back up Fatty Wynn of the Fourth until his five-pound note had vanished. But Fatty Wynn was not among the juniors who came streaming out of the Fourth-Form room.

"Hallo! Where's Fatty?" asked Tom Merry.

"Detained!" said Figgins.

"Poor old Fatty! How long?"

"Two hours."

"He'll be dead by that time!" said Monty Lowther, with conviction. "He can't be kept from his pie for that length of time and survive it. Poor old Fatty! We must have an epitaph on him in the next number of the 'Weekly.' I think I could turn out something very touching:

"Here lies Fatty Wynn, who most sadly did die,
Far away from his home—far away from his pie—"

"Shurrup!" said Figgins. "Poor old Fatty's got it in the neck this time! It was rotten hard lines."

"I wegard Fatty's conduct as most disrespeckful, Figgins," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He deliberately wefused to ansawah when Mr. Lathom ordahed him. It is wotten bad form be disrespeckful to a Form-mastah!"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Rats!" growled Figgins. "He couldn't speak, ass!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Why couldn't he speak?" asked Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Because he'd got his teeth jammed into a chunk of toffee," said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows roared.

"Well, it was funny!" admitted Figgins, grinning. "But it was no joke for Fatty. He's got detained for two hours. He will be thinking of the pie all the time."

"Couldn't we sneak it into the Form-room to him?" suggested Tom Merry. "Lathom is going out this afternoon. He goes over to the vicarage to tea, to-day, you know. He won't be on the look-out."

"Good egg!" said Figgins heartily. "That's a good idea. Unless Lathom asks some beastly prefect to keep an eye on Fatty," he added.

"If he does, we'll dodge the prefect somehow," said Manners. "Fatty is blowing his fiver like a nobleman, and we're bound to stand by him in the hour of need. He shall have his pie in the Form-room if—"

"Shush!" whispered Blake.

But it was too late; Mr. Lathom, coming out of the Fourth Form-room, had heard what Manners said. He did not speak; but he gave Manners a glance, and passed on towards the Fifth Form-room. The chums of the School House looked at one another in dismay. The scheme was discovered now.

The Fifth Form were not yet out, but they came out a few moments later. Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the Fifth, and Housemaster of the New House, followed the seniors into the passage, and Mr. Lathom stopped him. Mr. Ratcliff was looking as serious and sour as usual. He was not a good-tempered man. One of the chief worries of Mr. Ratcliff's life was that, being master of a senior Form, he could not use the cane in the Form-room. He could make the Fifth-Formers writhe with a sarcastic and biting tongue, but he could not cane them. He made up for it, however, by dealing with the juniors of his House.

He nodded to Mr. Lathom, and was passing on, when the Fourth Form-master detained him.

"A word, Mr. Ratcliff!" said the little Form-master.

"Certainly!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I have had to detain a member of my Form!" said Mr.

Lathom, his brow clouding over again at the remembrance of Fatty Wynn's supposed disrespect. "A boy who belongs to your House, Mr. Ratcliff."

The New House master looked more cordial at once. Punishment was a matter that appealed to him, and made him quite interested.

"Indeed! Figgins or Redfern, I suppose?"

"No; Wynn! He has been guilty of the greatest disrespect, and I was compelled to cane him," said Mr. Lathom. "I have never experienced such disrespect before in my Form—never! It was really outrageous. I have detained him for two hours. I have to go out this afternoon, Mr. Ratcliff, and I understand that some of the juniors intend to convey eatables to Wynn after I am gone." And Mr. Lathom cast a wrathful glance towards the group of juniors in the passage.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled genially.

"I will see that nothing of the kind happens, Mr. Lathom," he said. "I will certainly take the matter under my supervision, with pleasure."

Mr. Ratcliff spoke quite truly there. It was a pleasure to him to have a hand in punishing anybody.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Fourth Form-master. "That is what I was about to ask. I trust I am not a severe master; but really Wynn's conduct was outrageous, and calculated to bring his Form-master into contempt with the Form. I really think that he deserves his punishment."

"I am sure of it," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You may rely upon me!"

"Thank you very much!"

And Mr. Lathom departed.

Mr. Ratcliff, instead of going over to his own House, as usual after lessons were finished, went into the Fourth Form-room. Fatty Wynn was sitting at his desk there, looking very glum. He had been slowly negotiating the toffee, and had succeeded in getting his teeth free at last. But there was still a chunk of the toffee left in his mouth, which he was sucking.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at him with a sour smile.

"I hear that you have been disrespectful to your Form-master, Wynn!"

"I am sorry, sir!" said Fatty.

"I have no doubt you are—now that you are detained!" said the New House master disagreeably. "I shall see that your detention is not interfered with. Your friends will not be allowed to convey disgusting and indigestible eatables to you, as I find is their intention. Bless my soul—you are eating something now! Wynn, you are a most disgusting boy!"

"Oh, sir!"

"You are always eating," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You have more helpings at meals than any other boy. You hold, I believe, orgies of greed in your study. It would do you good, Wynn, to be placed on bread and water in the punishment-room."

Fatty Wynn did not reply to that. The mere thought of it made him turn cold all over.

"What are you eating?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Toffee, sir!" faltered Fatty Wynn.

"Go to the grate immediately, and eject it."

Fatty Wynn went disconsolately to the grate, and ejected the remains of the toffee. He gave the diminished chunk a mournful look, and returned to his place. Fatty Wynn's luck was out that day. Mr. Lathom had been unusually severe with him—but the little finger of Mr. Ratcliff was heavier than the right hand of Mr. Lathom. Now that he had fallen into the clutches of his Housemaster, Fatty Wynn gave up all hope. When Mr. Ratcliff had a victim at his mercy, he was very much like a cat with a mouse.

"You will now do your work," resumed Mr. Ratcliff, when the toffee had been disposed of. "I cannot remain with you, Wynn, as I have other matters to attend to." Fatty Wynn's face unconsciously brightened up, but it fell again as Mr.

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Ratcliff went on sourly: "But I shall look in from time to time, and see that you are working, and that you have not been supplied with disgusting stuff from the tuckshop. I have suggested to the Head to close that totally unnecessary establishment, but he has not seen fit to take my advice. However, I shall do my best to eradicate the greed from your nature, Wynn!"

Fatty Wynn did not speak, and the Housemaster left the Form-room, closing the door behind him. Fatty Wynn shook a fist at the door, and then turned wearily to his work. Writing out Latin conjugations, while a feed was waiting for him in the tuckshop, was weary work, and Fatty Wynn groaned over it. He had hoped to be able to dodge out of the Form-room after Mr. Lathom was gone out—but Mr. Ratcliff's intervention had nipped that scheme in the bud. Fatty Wynn groaned and scribbled verbs.

Mr. Ratcliff strode away from the Fourth Form-room, frowning at the group of juniors in the passage as he went. Tom Merry & Co. watched him go. But he did not go over to the New House. He made his way to the school library, an apartment which was situated in the great pile of the School House.

"Well, he's gone," said Tom Merry. "Lathom's asked him to keep an eye on the Form-room, I suppose. But—"

"We can dodge him!" said Lowther.

"Ware rats!" said Blake uneasily. "If he spots us—"

"We must wisk it for the sake of poor old Fatty!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have a wathah good ideah!"

"Boil it!" said Monty Lowther disrespectfully.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We can get something into the Form-room," said Kerr. "It's rough on Fatty. He's standing a feed like a giddy prince, and they've barred him off from grub till six o'clock. It's up to us to help him."

"Yaas, wathah! I have an ideah—"

"We'll manage it somehow," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I am wemarkin' that I had an ideah—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said all the juniors together.

"I wufuse to wing off. I have a wippin' ideah. Watty may come lookin' into the place at any time, and if he catches us there, there will be a wow. I have a wippin' idea for throwin' dust in his eyes."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Tom Merry resignedly. "Get it over."

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"Buck up!" roared Blake.

"I am buckin' up, deah boy; but if you keep on intew-wuptin' me I shall weally nevah get to the point. To wesume you wemembah that Kerr disguised himself as Tom Mewwy's uncle the othah day, and he took us all in—"

"What on earth has that to do with it?" roared Tom Merry.

"That's the ideah! Suppose I disguise myself as Kildare—"

"What!"

"Kildare of the Sixth! Kildare is a pwefect. A pwefect has a wight to go in and speak to a juniah who is detained. If Mr. Watchliff found Kildare there he could not say anythin'. Suppose I disguise myself as Kildare and go in with some gwub—"

"You—you—you unmeasured illimitable ass!" said Tom Merry. "Kildare is about a foot taller than you are, for one thing."

"Bai Jove! That would be wathah a difficulty," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "That would want thinkin' out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go up to the study and think it out!" urged Blake. "We'll think out something else down here."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"You will make a muckah of it if I'm not with you," he said. "Pewwaps it's no good my disguisin' myself as Kildare, on second thoughts. Suppose I disguise myself as Doctah Holmes—"

"Why not as King George the Fifth, or the Emperor of Germany?" suggested Monty Lowther. "Ratty couldn't argue with either of them, if he found them in the Form-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Or you could disguise yourself as a sane person!" exclaimed Lowther, as if struck with a sudden and really brilliant idea. "Nobody would recognise you then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" roared Blake. "While the grass is growing the cow's starving. While you're talking rot, Fatty is pining for his pie."

"I am not talkin' rot, you ass—"

"I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry, "some of you can keep watch for Ratty, and I'll buzz into the Form-room with the pie under my jacket."

"Better let me do it," said Figgins. "No reason why a School House chap should run the risk."

"Less risk for a School House chap," explained Tom Merry. "Ratty would have to report me to my own Housemaster—and Railton wouldn't be so rough on me as Ratty would be on you."

"Bai Jove, that's vewy twee!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But you had bettah leave it to me, Tom Mewwy. A delicate mattah like this requires a fellow of tact and judgment!"

"Kerr can buzz off and get the pie," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!" said Kerr. And he buzzed off at once.

The juniors kept a keen eye open for Mr. Ratcliff. They knew that the sour-tempered Housemaster would be glad to catch them if he could. But there was no sign of "Ratty" returning from the library. Blake posted himself in the library passage, to whistle if the big oak door opened—but it did not open.

Kerr returned with the pie, and Tom Merry slipped it—as well as he could—under his Eton jacket. Then the juniors cleared off, to await the result at a distance. The pie was wrapped in paper, but there was a slight trickle of gravy from within. Blake was still on the watch in the library passage, but he had given no signal.

The coast seemed clear, and Tom Merry boldly entered the Fourth Form-room. Fatty Wynn looked up, expecting to see Mr. Ratcliff. His fat face lighted up at the sight of Tom Merry of the Shell.

"Here you are, Fatty!"

"What is it?" asked the fat Fourth-Former eagerly.

"Your pie!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Shove it under your desk, in case Ratty comes in—Oh!"

"MERRY!"

It was the sharp, acid voice of Mr. Horace Ratcliff. Tom Merry spun round, not knowing where the voice had come from for a moment. He had closed the Form-room door after him, and it was still closed.

"Merry!"

The voice came from the open window. Framed in the window were the head and shoulders of the New House master—and he was looking in, with his eyes fixed upon Tom Merry and the pie.

CHAPTER 4.

Catching It!

TOM MERRY gazed blankly at the New House master. He had supposed Mr. Horace Ratcliff to be still in the library, as Blake had given no signal of alarm.

It was some moments before he realised the duplicity of the New House master.

Mr. Ratcliff must have left the library by the door that led into the Head's house, instead of in the usual way.

From the Head's house he had let himself out into the quadrangle, and had walked round to the windows of the Fourth Form-room.

How long he had been standing at the window looking in neither of the juniors knew, as Fatty Wynn was sitting with his back to the window.

But undoubtedly Mr. Ratcliff had been there when Tom Merry entered the Form-room. He had seen the Shell fellow enter, and had heard every word he had spoken to Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry was deprived of the power of speech for a moment. Anger and indignation were in his face. He had broken a rule, certainly, in bringing a pie to a junior under detention in the Form-room. If a master or prefect found him out he expected to be punished. But masters and prefects were expected to "play the game." Mr. Ratcliff had not played the game. He had played the spy.

No other master at St. Jim's, nor any prefect excepting Knox, would have been guilty of the meanness of sneaking round by an unexpected way and watching an unsuspecting junior through a window.

Mr. Ratcliff had done it, however, and he did not look at all ashamed of himself. He was looking pleased—as pleased as a cat might look when a long-expected mouse falls into its claws at last.

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Tom Merry looked at Mr. Ratcliff, and Mr. Ratcliff looked at Tom Merry. The thin lips of the Housemaster curled in a grim smile.

"What is that you have in your hand, Merry?" he demanded, through the window.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"You know it is a pie, sir, as you were listening to what I said," he replied recklessly. He was too angry to be careful what he said.

"Merry!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "You are impertinent!"

Tom Merry did not reply to that. As a matter of fact, he had intended to be what Mr. Ratcliff called impertinent.

"I shall report your conduct and your language to your Housemaster," said Mr. Ratcliff, his voice trembling with anger. "Wynn, I shall deal differently with you."

Fatty Wynn made a hopeless gesture. He was in for it now!

"Leave this Form-room instantly, Merry, and go to your Housemaster's study! Take that pie with you. I shall join you there."

"Very well!"

Tom Merry gave Fatty Wynn a hopeless glance, and quitted the Form-room. There was no help for it.

"As for you, Wynn," said Mr. Ratcliff, "you will remain here until the time of your detention has expired, and then you will immediately report yourself in my study."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff strode away.

Tom Merry had left the Form-room, with the pie in his hand. Jack Blake met him in the passage, and stared at the pie.

"Didn't you give it to Fatty?" he asked.

"Ratty caught me."

"Ratty!" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment. "He's still in the library, isn't he? The door hasn't opened, anyway."

Tom Merry smiled bitterly.

"He must have sneaked out of the other door into the Head's house to catch us. He was at the window when I went in."

Blake jumped.

"Oh, my hat! The mean cad! He ought to be scragged!"

"Scragging's too good for him!" growled Tom Merry.

"I've got to take this pie to Railton. Ratty's coming to complain. Nice, ain't it?"

And he walked away to the Housemaster's study. He found Mr. Ratcliff there. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was frowning. The New House master was pouring forth the tale of the uncommon wickedness of Tom Merry. He was only too glad of an opportunity of getting Tom Merry's Housemaster "down" on him. Mr. Ratcliff did not approve of Mr. Railton's lenient methods with his boys, and he interfered with them as much as he dared. Mr. Railton was, as a matter of fact, "fed up" with Ratty's complaints; but in this instance he could not decline to take notice of it. Hence his frown of annoyance as Tom Merry came in pie in hand.

"Merry, Mr. Ratcliff tells me that you have taken eatables into the Form-room to a New House boy under detention!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"He does not deny it!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"I should not be likely to deny what is true!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"I quite believe that," said Mr. Railton. "But you know you have done wrong, Merry. Mr. Ratcliff also tells me that you were impertinent to him when he discovered you."

"Grossly impertinent," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I don't see how I was impertinent in stating a fact, sir," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Ratcliff asked me what was in this paper. He had already heard me tell Wynn that it was a pie as he was listening at the window. I did not know he was there till he spoke."

Mr. Railton coughed, and the New House master turned crimson.

"Is this the way you allow your junior boys to speak to a Housemaster?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff thickly.

"Silence, Merry!"

"Well, he was listening, sir. He will not say that he was not listening—will you, Mr. Ratcliff?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

The New House master almost choked. He caught up a cane from the table.

"Pray leave that to me, Mr. Ratcliff!" said the School House master sharply. "I allow no one to deal with my boys in my House but myself."

The New House master gave him a bitter look. There was no love lost between the two Housemasters. Indeed, there had been an occasion when Mr. Railton had very nearly pitched his colleague neck and crop out of his study. Mr.

Ratcliff did not care to provoke him too far, and he threw down the cane.

"The boy is insolent, and you encourage him!" he snarled. "That is not correct. I am going to punish him," said Mr. Railton. "You know very well you should not say such things to Mr. Ratcliff, Merry. Hold out your hand!"

And Tom Merry was cautioned. It was a stiff caning, too, but he bore it with grim silence, not a sound passing his lips.

"You may go!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"May I take the pie, sir?" asked Tom.

"Oh, certainly!"

Tom Merry quitted the study. His hands were aching, but his anger was not directed against his Housemaster. It was Ratty he longed to be even with. Mr. Railton had had no resource but to punish him.

Mr. Ratcliff strode away to his own House. Tom Merry's scornful words had cut him deeply—deeper than a cane could cut. He boxed Redfern's ears as he entered his House, and then went to his study. At six o'clock he was there—waiting for Fatty Wynn.

CHAPTER 5.

Ratty's Raid.

WHEN six o'clock sounded, and Fatty Wynn came out of the Form-room, he found a crowd of his friends waiting for him. School House and New House fellows alike were full of sympathy, and ready to follow Fatty Wynn to the tuckshop. Fatty's plump face was lugubrious.

"Wherefore that solemn brow, my infant?" asked Monty Lowther, slapping him on the back. "Come and wire in, my fat tulip!"

"Can't!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"Bai Jove! You haven't lost your appetite, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in astonishment.

"No fear! Ratty says I'm to go to his study the moment I come out of the Form-room," groaned Fatty. "He'll be keeping an eye on the tuckshop, you can bet! I've got to go and report myself to the beast!"

"Oh, rotten!"

"Take this before you go," said Tom Merry, and he held out the pie wrapped in the newspaper.

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.

"Oh, good!"

The fat Fourth-Former retired into the window-recess and travelled through the remainder of the pie at top speed. He was finished by five minutes past six. There was a gleam of resolution in his eyes.

"I'm jolly well going to the tuckshop!" he announced.

"That has only whetted my appetite. I'm going, and I'll chance Ratty!"

"Better buzz off and see Ratty first," said Figgins uneasily.

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"He might detain me. He may have heard that I've got a fiver, and want to blow it. You know what a spying beast he is. I'm not going to risk it. Come on!"

And Fatty Wynn marched off to the tuckshop. The crowd of juniors followed him there.

In a few minutes the feed was resumed, and was in full swing. Fatty Wynn, with his mouth full, gave Mrs. Taggles instructions for a particularly large and tasty pie which was to be delivered in Figgins' study in time for supper.

Fatty had hardly travelled through a dozen tarts, however, when a shadow darkened the door of the tuckshop, and there was a grunt of dismay from the juniors. The New House master strode in with rustling gown.

"Wynn!" he thundered.

"Oh! Yes, sir?"

"Did I not order you to report yourself in my study as soon as your detention had expired?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"I—I was just coming, sir."

"You will go there at once—at once, do you hear?"

Fatty Wynn rolled out of the tuckshop. Mr. Ratcliff, with a dark glance at the crowd of juniors, followed him. He could guess the remarks that would be made after he was gone. They were made, and they were not complimentary to Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

In his study, Mr. Ratcliff fixed a stern glance upon the fat Fourth-Former. Even Fatty Wynn's cheerful, plump face was looking a little sulky now. Mr. Ratcliff could have made a cherub sulky, given the opportunity.

"Wynn!"

"Yes, sir!" grunted Fatty.

"Don't answer me in that disrespectful manner, Wynn," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "While under detention in the Form-room, you have had disgusting eatables conveyed to you. What have you to say for yourself?"

"I was hungry, sir."

"Nonsense. You are greedy, Wynn—atrociously greedy. You have more helpings at meal-times than any other boy, even than older boys; I have noticed it. You eat between meals—you frequently gorge yourself, sir. There is no other word for it—you gorge yourself in your study."

"Oh, no, sir."

"Don't contradict me, Wynn. You gorge yourself, and I think your health will suffer. I am determined to put a stop to this. Unless you change your ways, I shall feel compelled to order your detention for a time in the punishment-room, upon a diet of bread and water."

Fatty Wynn's eyes gleamed; but he said nothing.

"For a time, at least," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I shall place the tuck-shop out of bounds for you, Wynn!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Fatty, in dismay.

"Don't interrupt me with ridiculous exclamations, Wynn. I shall also take care that you do not celebrate orgies of greed in your study. I shall make it a point to visit your study, from time to time, in fact."

Fatty set his teeth. He had a wild desire to pick up a cushion and biff Mr. Ratcliff, but fortunately he restrained himself.

"If you please, sir, I've had a good-sized remittance to-day," he said meekly. "I was celebrating a bit, that's all, sir. I don't have a fiver every day, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you were expending a five-pound note in food?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, aghast.

"Well, it was a treat for a lot of us, sir."

"Disgusting! I shall take care that nothing of the sort happens again. You will take two hundred lines, Wynn, and will proceed immediately to your study and write them out. You will not go to the tuck-shop again. Now leave my study."

Fatty Wynn went without a word.

His friends waited for him in the tuck-shop in vain.

Figgins and Kerr found him in the study when they came in, writing out lines.

Fatty Wynn looked up as his chums entered, glowering.

"Lines?" asked Figgins.

"Two hundred."

"Rotten!"

"I shall biff him some day!" said Fatty Wynn wildly, "I know I shall! Lines—and the tuck-shop out of bounds!"

"The cad!"

"I'll biff him one of these days, if I get sacked for it!" said Fatty Wynn, picking up a cricket-stump and making wild passes in the air. "I'd give a term's pocket-money to give him just one good once!"

"So would we all!" grinned Figgins. "I've brought you your change, Fatty—here you are; sixteen-and-ninepence—and the pie will be delivered here in time for supper."

"Old Ratty says there are to be no more orgies in the study!" snorted Wynn.

"Oh, he can't stop us from having supper in the study," said Kerr. "Even Ratty can't do that! There's a giddy limit even to Ratty."

"I don't know. He was ratty because Tom Merry said he was listening at the Form-room window—and so he was listening, and spying too, blow him!" said Fatty Wynn.

And the fat Fourth-former ground out his lines with a darkened brow.

But Fatty Wynn bucked up again a little later in the evening, when the pie was delivered.

It was a large pie, it was a beautiful pie, and it was done to a turn. It was smoking hot, and the crust was beautifully browned. When Fatty Wynn jabbed a pen into the crust a savoury steam rose from the aperture. Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened. At that moment he was at peace with all the world, even with Horace Ratcliff.

The Co. sat down to supper with cheerful looks. Fatty Wynn was beginning to carve the pie, and had taken out one section, when the study door opened. Mr. Ratcliff came in, without knocking; a little way he had that did not endear him to the juniors.

He fixed a grim look upon the pie on the table, and on the dismayed faces of the Co.

"I thought so!" he said. "Did I not tell you that the tuck-shop was out of bounds for you, Wynn?"

"I haven't been there, sir," said Fatty.

"Then how did that enormous pie come here?"

"It was delivered, sir."

"We're allowed to have pies for our supper, sir," said Kerr.

"To whom does that pie belong?"

"All of us, sir."

"Who has paid for it?"

"Wynn, sir," said Figgins reluctantly.

"So I supposed. It is a trick to escape from my command. Wynn, take that pie to my study immediately. It will be confiscated."

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"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Fatty Wynn, "M-m-my pie! Kik-kik-confiscated!"

"Yes! Confiscated!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "It shall be used for dinner to-morrow for the Fourth Form. I will put a stop to this disgusting gormandising, Wynn, or I will know the reason why. Take it to my study immediately."

Fatty Wynn closed his teeth hard. But Figgins and Kerr gave him imploring looks—matters could only be made worse by defying the Housemaster. Fatty Wynn, controlling his fury with difficulty, rose to his feet, and lifted up the huge pie, and carried it out of the study. Under Mr. Ratcliff's greenish eyes, it was carried down to the Housemaster's study, and Wynn placed it on the table there.

Without a word he departed. His feelings were too deep for words!

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Ratcliff Gets the Pie!

TOM MERRY came over to Figgins & Co. just before bedtime. The Captain of the Shell had important matters to discuss with the Co. concerning the coming football season. But he did not find the New House chums in a humour to discuss even football.

They were not in their study. Fatty Wynn was seated on the stairs, whence he could watch Mr. Ratcliff's study door. Figgins and Kerr leaned against the wall near him, and so Tom Merry found them.

"What's up?" Tom asked, in surprise. "Fatty looks like a cat watching a hole for a rat."

"Exactly what he is!" grinned Figgins.

"Ratty has confiscated his pie," explained Kerr. "He's thinking of getting it back. It will only cause more trouble, but he is an obstinate ass."

"I'm going to have my pie," growled Fatty Wynn; "Ratty has no right to confiscate it. We were going to have supper in my study when he swooped down. He's got it in there now. As soon as he clears out of his study I'm going to have it, even if he catches me. He won't be able to get it back when I've eaten it, anyway."

"Hard cheese!" said Tom sympathetically. "I came over to talk footer—"

"Oh, blow footer!" said Fatty; and that remark, from the champion junior goal-keeper of St. Jim's, was enough to show how deeply the feelings of Fatty Wynn were stirred.

"You'll get it in the neck if you raid your Housemaster's study, Fatty, old man," said Tom Merry persuasively.

"I don't care!"

"It might mean a flogging."

"Let it!"

"He's an obstinate ass when he's made up his mind," growled Figgins. "Of course, I don't blame Fatty for being waxy, but it's no good butting at a stone wall. All these blessed Welshmen are the same—they never know when to give in."

"I'm not going to give in," said Fatty Wynn, in a sulphurous voice. "I'm going to have my pie."

"Suppose Ratty doesn't come out—"

"Then I'll raid his study after lights out," said Fatty.

"But I think he's going to old Flatt's room to jaw—he often does in the evening. Hallo, there's his blessed door opening now—lie low!"

The juniors crept back into the shadow of the staircase. Mr. Ratcliff came out of his study, tapped at the door of Mr. Flatt, the music-master of St. Jim's, and entered. He disappeared from sight; and Fatty Wynn rose to his feet.

"I'm going to chance it now!" he said.

"Fatty, old man—"

"I'm going! You fellows stay here."

"We'll come with you, if you're bound to risk it," said Figgins.

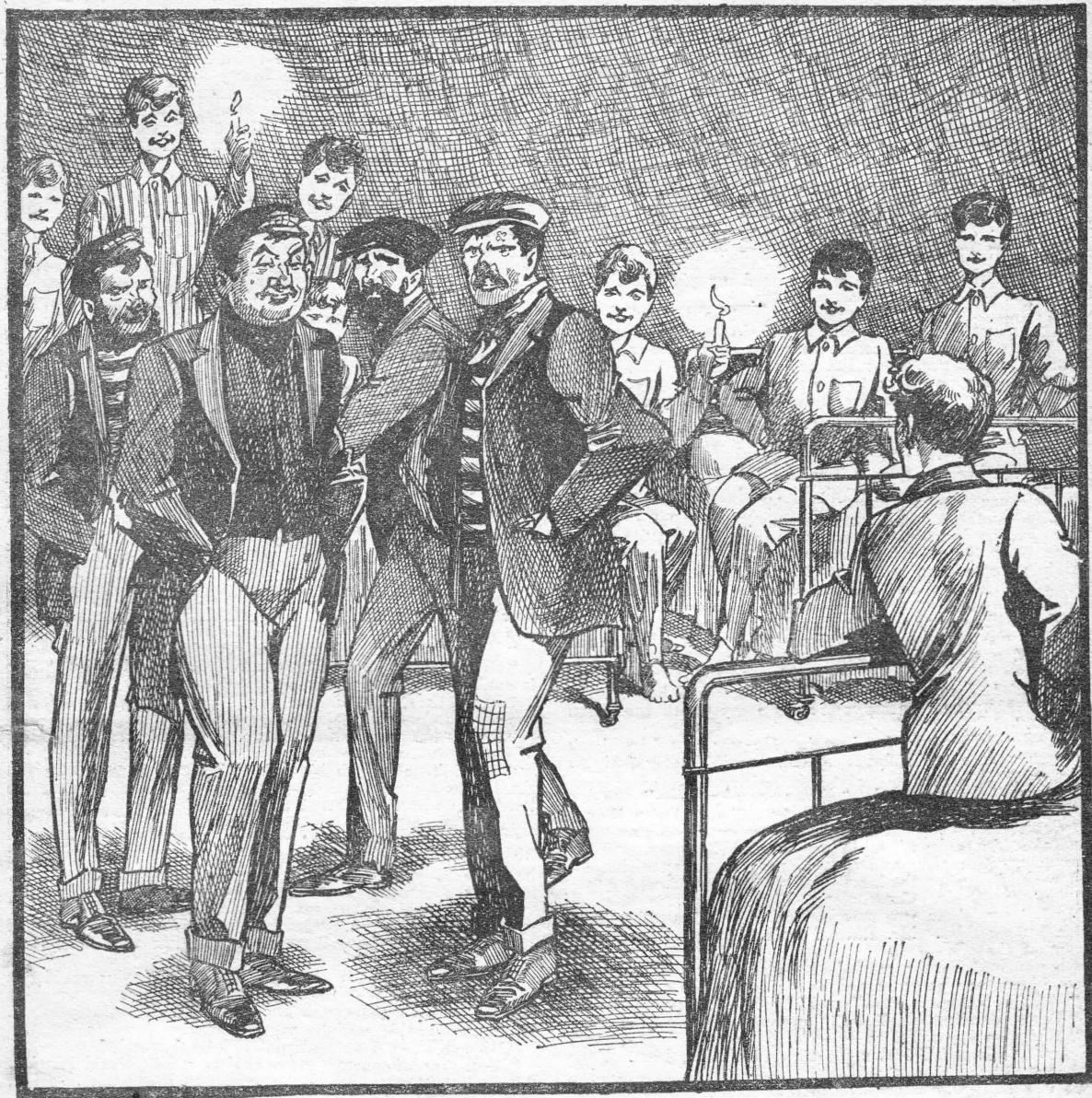
"Don't! Easier for one to send off than three—and I can carry the pie all right," said Fatty Wynn; "you'll be in the way. Keep here."

And Fatty Wynn went downstairs, leaving Figgins and Kerr and Tom Merry in a very uneasy frame of mind. The fat Fourth-Former's hot Welsh blood was fairly up now, and when he was in his present mood it was useless to argue with him. Wynn was easily the best-tempered junior at St. Jim's; but injustice rankled in his breast, and wild horses would not have dragged him back when he had made up his mind to go on.

The three juniors watched him over the banisters. Even if Fatty succeeded in getting clear with the pie, there would be trouble afterwards when Mr. Ratcliff discovered that it was gone. But it was very doubtful if he would get clear. Mr. Ratcliff might come out of the music-master's study at any moment—and even as the three juniors thought of it, he came.

Figgins groaned under his breath.

"There comes Ratty!"



When they had finished dressing, the juniors seemed undoubtedly four of the most unpleasant persons it would be possible to meet on a dark road at night. "My hat! You look a set of pretty pictures!" said Bolsover major. "Blessed if I should like to run into you on a dark night!" (For this amusing incident, buy a copy of this week's issue of "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Get a copy NOW before it is too late.)

Wynn was still in the Housemaster's study. He had found the study dark, Mr. Ratcliff having turned off the light when he left it. Fatty did not venture to put on the light, but he groped round for the pie. He knocked over an ink-bottle, and heard the ink swish over Mr. Ratcliff's papers, but he was too busy to take notice of a trifle like that. The pie was there—and Fatty Wynn's grasp closed over it. It was cold now—but through the crust came a very appetising smell of the rich gravy.

Fatty Wynn was starting for the door with the pie in his hands, when he heard a whistle from the staircase. Figgins had risked giving the signal.

The whistle meant that Mr. Ratcliff was coming. Fatty Wynn made a rush to get out of the study.

He made that rush just as Mr. Ratcliff reached the doorway.

The Housemaster, a little surprised to see his door wide open, when he remembered closing it after him, paused.

As he paused Fatty Wynn came bolting out at top speed. There was a terrific collision.

The fat Fourth-Former rushed right into the Housemaster, and Mr. Ratcliff crashed on the floor, and Fatty Wynn and the pie rolled over him.

Bump! Crash!

"Oh, good heavens! Help!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry on the staircase. "Fatty's done it now!"

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "Grooh! Ow, ow!"

Fatty Wynn rolled off the Housemaster. The piedish was inverted over Mr. Ratcliff's face, and the crust was smashed on his nose. Gravy and pieces of beef and kidney rolled thickly over the Housemaster's countenance. He was almost choked by the rush of rich gravy into his mouth as he opened it to yell.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Groogh! Help! Oh!"

Mr. Ratcliff sat up on the floor, blindly, and the piedish crashed down and broke. With a face streaming with thick brown gravy, the Housemaster stared and blinked

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round him. There was a rush of startled fellows from all sides at the uproar.

"Great Scott! What has happened, sir?" exclaimed Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, nearly stumbling over Mr. Ratcliff as he rushed to the spot.

"Seize that junior!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "It is Wynn! He has assaulted me—he has hurled me to the floor!"

"I—I—it was an accident, sir!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "I didn't see you."

"Don't tell falsehoods, Wynn!"

"I'm not telling falsehoods," shouted Fatty Wynn, furiously, "and you know I'm not!"

"Shut up, you young ass!" whispered Monteith.

"Wynn!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff.

"Do you think I should have wasted my pie like that if I could have helped it?" roared Fatty.

Mr. Ratcliff staggered to his feet. The fellows in the passage chuckled; they could not help it. The gravy, smothering his face and collar, gave the Housemaster a very peculiar appearance. But the furious look he cast about him caused the chuckling to die away very suddenly.

"Wynn, you came to my study to take away the pie I had confiscated!"

"Yes, I did!"

"You dare—you dare say so?"

"You asked me," said Wynn. "Do you want me to tell you lies?"

"You—you insolent young rascal!"

"You shouldn't have taken the pie!" said Fatty Wynn. "You had no right to, and you know you hadn't!"

The New House fellows gasped. The Housemaster had certainly never been talked to like that before. But Fatty Wynn was furious, and did not care in the least what he said.

"You'd like me to tell lies about it, too, so that you could be down on me," went on the reckless junior. "But I'm jolly well not going to, so there!"

"Cheese it!" whispered Monteith.

"Sha'n't! I came here for my pie because I had a right to; and Mr. Ratcliff knows it! I'd say so to the Head himself!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped for breath. He was so taken aback by that unexpected defiance that he could hardly find his voice.

"Wynn!" he stuttered. "Wynn, you—you—"

"Oh, I know you're going to lick me!" said Fatty Wynn.

"I don't care. You'll find some excuse or other, anyway."

"Take him away!" said Mr. Ratcliff hoarsely. "Take him away, Monteith, and lock him up in the punishment-room, and bring me the key!"

"Very well, sir. Come along, Wynn!"

And Fatty Wynn was marched off, with Monteith's hand upon his shoulder. Mr. Ratcliff walked away unsteadily to clean off the pie.

Figgins and Kerr regarded one another in utter dismay. Tom Merry was as concerned as Fatty Wynn's own chums.

"Well, he's done it now," said Figgins—"fairly done it!"

"Fancy slanging old Ratty!" groaned Kerr.

"Well, he stood up to the cad jolly well!" said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I thought Fatty had it in him! Poor old Fatty!"

It was evidently impossible to discuss football that evening, and Tom Merry left the New House. He took the news of Fatty Wynn's disaster over to the School House, and the fellows there grinned gleefully at the story of how Fatty Wynn had "slanged" his Housemaster.

"But it isn't a laughin' mattah for poor old Fatty!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "Watty will be fwightfully down on him, deah boys. He'll keep him in the punishment-woom on bwead and watah, now he's got a good excuse, in case the Head hears about it."

And all the School House fellows agreed that it was "hard cheese" on Fatty Wynn—as indeed it was.

CHAPTER 7.

Fatty Wynn's Resolve.

FATTY WYNN was alone. Monteith had led him to the punishment-room and locked him in, and had taken the key to Mr. Ratcliff.

Fatty Wynn was left to his own reflections.

And his reflections were not pleasant. The detention-room in the New House was a small apartment, with a little barred window, looking out on a blank wall. It had a bare floor, and a little iron bed in the corner, and a few articles of furniture. It was a grim and comfortless apartment, very dusky in the daytime, owing to the window being overshadowed by another building. The gas was burning now, glimmering on the bare floor and the scanty furniture.

It was very seldom that the room was used. When the

New House had been added to the great pile of St. Jim's a hundred years before, the room had been in demand—they were grim old days of heavy punishments and incessant floggings. The room still existed, and Mr. Ratcliff would have used it oftener, but for the decided opinion of the Head upon the subject. The old days of detention on a bread-and-water diet were over, and Mr. Ratcliff regretted them.

Fatty Wynn walked to and fro in the little room, growling. He was very much annoyed, and very angry. His pie had been lost, after all, and he was hungry. He wondered whether he would be allowed to have any supper; and that was a more important question for Fatty Wynn than anything that might happen afterwards. After the way he had "slanged" Mr. Ratcliff, the probability was that he would be taken before the Head, and perhaps flogged. But the pressing and immediate question was supper.

There was a slight tap at the door, and a whispering voice at the keyhole.

"Fatty!"

The fat Fourth-Former hurried to the door. He knew Figgins' voice.

"Hallo, Figgy?"

"All serene there, Fatty?"

"Oh, jolly comfortable!" said Fatty Wynn, with a grunt. "It's jolly ripping in this blessed den—I don't think! How's old Ratty?"

Figgins chuckled.

"He's in his bed-room now, cleaning off the pie."

"My pie!" said Wynn. "What a rotten waste! Steak and kidney—and such gravy! All wasted on his silly chivvy!"

"He's sure to come and see you soon, Fatty. Be careful how you jaw to him. It's no good slanging a Housemaster, you know."

"He hadn't any right to take my pie!"

"Of course he hadn't!" agreed Figgins, soothingly. "But it can't be helped, you know; and you don't want to risk getting sacked, you know. Ratty persists that you biffed the pie into his chivvy on purpose."

"As if I'd have wasted it like that!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"Be diplomatic with him, Fatty," urged Figgins through the keyhole. "It wouldn't be a joke to be kept here for twenty-four hours on bread and water."

Fatty Wynn shuddered.

"He couldn't do it!" he said. "I can't miss classes!"

"Ratty wouldn't care for that if he got his back up. All he cares about is having a good excuse to give the Head, if the Head should hear of it and make an inquiry."

"I jolly well sha'n't eat his bread and blessed water!" growled Fatty Wynn. "If they try to keep me here and starve me, I'll jolly well go on strike, like a Suffragette—hunger-strike, you know."

There was a chuckle outside the door. Figgins could not help being tickled at the idea of Fatty Wynn going on a hunger strike if there was food within reach. Fatty Wynn heard the chuckle, and he grew wrathful.

"Do you think I couldn't do it?" he demanded.

"Yes, yes; of course you could if you liked," said Figgins. "But—but it would be better to soothe Ratty and get out, wouldn't it?"

"Blow Ratty!"

"If they keep you here over to-morrow, Fatty, I'll see if I can get you something to eat," whispered Figgins. "I may not be able to come and jaw to you again, so I'll tell you now. Kerr's keeping watch at the end of the passage this minute, and he's going to whistle if anybody comes along. Ratty would like to catch me here. Your window looks out on the entry next to the museum, Fatty."

"Yes," said Fatty.

"It's barred across, isn't it?"

"Yes; two bars."

"But you could pull anything up with a cord?"

"I haven't a cord."

"I can get you one in to-morrow. You'll have to let down a string from the window, and I'll tie the cord to it, and you can pull it up."

"But I haven't a string long enough," said Fatty Wynn. "It's forty feet if it's an inch."

"Make one!" said Figgins. "You can tear up your hanky into threads, and join them together, and make a string strong enough to pull up a cord. When you have a cord, you can pull up anything. When you hear somebody whistling 'Bill Bailey' down below you'll know I'm there."

"Right-ho, Figgy! If they try to starve me out you can get me some grub. I'll lower the change of my fiver on the cord," said Fatty Wynn.

There was a soft whistle in the passage.

"Good-night, Fatty!" whispered Figgins through the key-hole.

And he fled.

Fatty Wynn sat down on the Windsor chair, the only chair in the room, and waited for the enemy. A couple of minutes later the door was unlocked, and Mr. Horace Ratcliff entered the room. Fatty rose to his feet.

The Housemaster was looking pale, and very sour and bitter. He had had a painful shock, in the collision with Fatty Wynn in the doorway of his study. He had not recovered from it yet, and his temper did not seem likely to recover from it at all. His eyes glinted as he fastened them upon Fatty Wynn.

"I trust, Wynn, that you have had time to realise the full heinousness of your conduct," he said, in a harsh, grating voice.

Fatty Wynn did not reply.

"You and the two other juniors in your study have always been the worst-behaved juniors in the House," said Mr. Ratcliff; "but you have now gone beyond all bounds. You were disrespectful to your Form-master in class this afternoon—"

"I didn't mean to be, sir," said Fatty Wynn.

"Silence! Mr. Lathom complained that your conduct was outrageous, and very properly mentioned it to me, your Housemaster. You had indigestible food smuggled to you in the Form-room while under detention. You directly disobeyed my commands in getting a huge pie from the tuck-shop. You attempted to take it from my study after it had been confiscated, and you rushed into me, and broke the pie upon my face, sir, either by accident or design"

"It was an accident, sir."

"It was not an accident that you were running out of the study with the pie in your hands, I suppose," said Mr. Ratcliff, raising his voice harshly. "Your conduct has been heinous, Wynn. And it is all due to your disgusting greediness—your insatiable desire to eat when you cannot possibly be hungry."

Fatty Wynn reddened. It was a tender point with him. He had a healthy appetite—an extremely healthy appetite, and he wasn't ashamed of it. He did not like to be called greedy. As he had often explained, he was not greedy, but he liked a lot.

"I am determined to cure this loathsome trait in your character," resumed Mr. Ratcliff. "I regard it as an important duty. For this purpose, Wynn, I shall confine you to this room for twenty-four hours upon a diet of bread and water."

Wynn's jaw dropped.

"When you emerge from this room, you will perhaps have learned, by forcible abstinence, to control your appetite," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"But I can't miss my lessons, sir," faltered Fatty.

"I shall explain to Mr. Lathom."

Mr. Ratcliff turned to the door, as a tap came on it, and opened it. The house-page brought in a tray with a plate of dry bread and a jug of water and a cup on it. He gave Fatty Wynn a commiserating look, and set the tray on the table. Then he brought in bed-clothes, and proceeded to make the bed.

Fatty Wynn watched these preparations with a heavy heart.

He did not much mind sleeping in the punishment-room instead of in the Fourth Form dormitory. Fatty Wynn was a good sleeper, and he could have slept soundly enough behind a haystack or under a railway arch. It was all the same to him, so long as he had plenty of sleep. It was the supper that worried him.

To declare a hunger-strike like a Suffragette seemed a really ripping idea—and he felt that if he did so Mr. Ratcliff would probably not venture to leave him without solid food for twenty-four hours.

But a hunger-strike meant going hungry, and that was the one prospect before which the fat Fourth-Former's fortitude failed.

But he looked at the dry chunks of bread, and reflected that it would not need very much self-denial to decline to touch them.

He came to a resolve, and as the page left the room, having finished his work there, and Mr. Ratcliff turned to follow him, Fatty Wynn spoke.

"If you please, sir—"

"Well?" said Mr. Ratcliff, turning a frowning glance upon him.

"I can't possibly live a whole day on bread and water, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff smiled grimly.

"We shall see, Wynn."

"But it's impossible, sir."

"I think not. At all events, the next twenty-four hours will show," said the New House master grimly.

"Very well, sir; then I must tell you that I shall decline to touch the bread," said Fatty Wynn firmly.

"Indeed!"

"I mean it, sir. I shall have a hunger-strike."

"You are at liberty to please yourself about that, Wynn," said Mr. Ratcliff drily. And he quitted the room, and turned the key in the lock after him.

Fatty Wynn shook his fat fist at the door after the Housemaster, and then looked glumly at the tray on the table. The dry bread was not tempting, certainly. But Fatty Wynn's appetite was keen. He was hungry—very hungry. The thought of going without food for twenty-four hours made him hungrier. He had heard that hunger-strikers stilled the worst pangs of hunger by drinking water, and Fatty Wynn tried it. He drank from the jug a deep draught, but it only made him feel the hungrier. During the next half-hour he finished the jug of water. By that time he was in a mood to eat anything. He began to crumble the bread with his fingers, and eat little bits.

But he would not give way—he told himself firmly that he wouldn't. Mr. Ratcliff should see in the morning that he was as good as his word. He had declared a hunger-strike, and he was going to stick to it. When the room was visited in the morning, they should find the bread untouched. Poor Fatty was nibbling at it all the time that these heroic thoughts were passing through his mind, and after a time he was quite surprised to see that half the bread was gone.

"May as well finish it now!" he murmured. "After all, perhaps it would be better to begin the hunger-strike to-morrow."

And the rest of the bread vanished in a twinkling, and then Fatty went to bed. So commenced Fatty Wynn's hunger-strike.

CHAPTER 8. The Hunger Strike.

TOM MERRY & Co. looked for Fatty Wynn when they came down in the morning.

They did not see him, but Figgins and Kerr were in the quadrangle, looking extremely disconsolate.

"Fatty got it in the neck?" asked Tom Merry.

Figgins nodded.

"Twenty-four hours on bread and water in the punishment-room!" he said.

The Terrible Three whistled.

"That's jolly thick," said Monty Lowther. "Better than a flogging, though."

"Not for Fatty!" said Figgins lugubriously. "Fatty told me through the keyhole that he would declare a hunger-strike."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins grinned, too. A hunger-strike and Fatty Wynn certainly seemed a queer association of ideas.

"But poor old Fatty is in a bad way," said Kerr. "He slanged Ratty right and left, and Ratty never forgives. Joskins, the page, is taking in bread and water for his breakfast. He says Fatty has finished what he left last night, so I suppose the poor kid hasn't started the hunger-strike yet."

"I fancy he won't!" grinned Monty Lowther. "It wouldn't be safe for Joskins to go into the room if Fatty hadn't had anything to eat for twenty-four hours."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going round to see him," said Figgins. "I arranged a signal with him last night. You fellows can come if you like, only don't let anybody see you."

The juniors skirted the New House, and entered the bricked passage between that house and a portion of the wall of the school museum. It was a "blind alley," and several windows opened on it, but not of inhabited rooms, so there was little danger of being observed, once they were in the entry. High above them was the little barred window of the punishment-room in the New House.

Figgins, after a cautious look round, began to whistle softly the old familiar tune of "Bill Bailey." The juniors kept their eyes fixed upon the little window high above. It was impossible for Fatty Wynn to look out, the bars being too close together. But a string was seen fluttering over the little sill, with a pencil tied to the end of it. The pencil came fluttering down towards the juniors.

"Good old Fatty!" said Figgins. "He's made a string out of his handkerchief, as I told him, and he's tied that pencil on it to weight it."

The pencil came within Figgins' reach. He caught it, and gave the string a shake to show Fatty Wynn that he had it. Then he drew a ball of cord from his pocket, and attached the end of it to the string.

"Jolly cute idea!" said Tom Merry.

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"I thought of it!" remarked Figgins modestly.

Fatty Wynn, invisible behind the bars of the window above, drew up the flimsy string again, and Figgins unwound the ball for the cord to follow. It was a thin but very strong cord, capable of sustaining a good weight. The ball unwound slowly, and the end followed the string into the barred window.

"He's got it!" said Manners.

Fatty Wynn shook the cord as a signal. Figgins cut off the remainder of the ball.

"Communications are open now!" grinned Monty Lowther. "That's always the most important point in warfare."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

Kerr took out of his pocket a small package of sandwiches, and tied it to the end of the cord. Fatty Wynn drew up the cord, and the packet of sandwiches disappeared through the bars of the window.

Then a hand was thrust out into view, and Fatty Wynn's plump forefinger pointed in the direction of the quad. Then the hand disappeared again.

"What does that mean, I wonder?" said Figgins.

"It means that we're to clear!" said Tom Merry. "Somebody's come."

"Cut!" said Kerr.

And the juniors hurried away.

Figgins and Kerr were satisfied. They had succeeded in conveying an instalment of provisions to the confined junior, and they knew how welcome the sandwiches would be to Mr. Ratcliff's victim.

And the chums of St. Jim's went in to breakfast cheered up by the thought that they had not failed Fatty Wynn in the hour of need.

Fatty Wynn, in the punishment-room, was equally cheerful. Upon his table lay a tray, with bread and water as on the preceding night. He had not touched it yet, depending on Figgins and Kerr to come to the rescue, and his heart had jumped at the sound of Figgins' whistle below. He had received the packet of sandwiches safely, and was about to open it, when he heard a step outside the door. In a moment he made the signal to the juniors below, and squeezed the sandwiches and the cord under the mattress of the bed. He was sitting on the bed looking quite undisturbed when the door was unlocked, and Mr. Ratcliff came in.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at the untouched bread and water on the table, and then glanced at the Falstaff of the Fourth.

"You have not eaten your breakfast, Wynn," he said.

"No, sir," said Fatty.

"Indeed! Does that mean that you are already learning to control your voracious appetite, Wynn?"

No answer.

"Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why do you not eat your breakfast, then?"

"I'm not going to eat bread and water, sir."

"Ah! I think you will probably change your mind about that," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a hard smile. "I think you made the same declaration last night, Wynn."

Fatty Wynn flushed.

"I am going to have a hunger-strike, sir, as a protest against a bread and water diet!" he said firmly.

"Don't be absurd, Wynn."

"I mean it, sir."

"You will get nothing else," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Indeed, I think a fast of twenty-four hours would probably do you good, considering the state of over-eaten grossness you are in now, Wynn."

"I'm not!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I never really get enough to eat."

"Your books and some paper will be brought to you," said Mr. Ratcliff, unheeding. "You will miss your lessons to-day, Wynn, but I do not intend that you shall be idle. This morning I shall expect you to write out a dozen deponent verbs in full."

"Oh!"

"Joskins"—the New House page came in—"you may place Master Wynn's books and papers here, also pen and ink."

"Yes, sir."

"You will find your morning fully occupied, Wynn. If you neglect your work, I need not say that you will be severely punished."

"Can I have some tea, sir?"

"You may not."

Fatty Wynn's lips set obstinately.

"Very well, it's a hunger-strike," he said.

"Don't be impertinent, Wynn. However, I think you will soon be brought to your senses."

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Wynn's books and papers, and pen and ink being placed on the table, Mr. Ratcliff retired, locking the door and putting the key in his pocket.

Fatty Wynn grinned as he was left alone.

He extracted the packet of sandwiches from under the mattress and opened it, and gave quite a gasp of delight. The sandwiches were packed tight and close—there were a dozen of them—ham and beef, with a little packet of salt and mustard. Figgins had forgotten nothing. Hungry as Fatty Wynn was, there was ample for him there. He could afford to turn up his nose at the dry bread on the tray. Hunger-striking on these terms was not really such a difficult feat, after all.

Fatty Wynn piled into the sandwiches. He ate six of them without a pause, and then slackened down a little. The next three followed more slowly, and he washed them down with draughts of water.

With heroic self-denial he put the remaining three sandwiches away, to be eaten later. He started on the deponent verbs.

He had made, as a matter of fact, a heartier breakfast than usual. He worked quite cheerfully at those troublesome verbs, which are passive in form and active in meaning. He was not in the least tempted to touch the dry bread on the tray.

Later in the morning he demolished another sandwich; later on, another. And finally the third disappeared just before dinner-time. He felt certain that Figgins and Kerr would contrive somehow to come to the rescue for dinner.

He was industriously grinding away at deponent verbs when Mr. Ratcliff came in, having finished his morning's duties in the Fifth Form-room. The housemaster started a little at the sight of the bread untouched on the table. Fatty Wynn rose respectfully to his feet.

"You have not eaten your breakfast, Wynn."

"I told you I should not, sir."

"You must be hungry!"

"I should like my dinner, sir."

"You will have bread and water for your dinner. As you have not chosen to eat this for your breakfast, it will be left for your dinner. If you find it somewhat spare you will have only your own obstinacy to thank, Wynn."

"I shall not touch it, sir."

"We shall see."

Mr. Ratcliff departed, frowning. Fatty Wynn chuckled softly, and leaving his verbs, went to the window and waited for another signal from Figgins.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus does His Best.

"I THINK I had better step in, dear boys."

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The Fourth-Formers, of course, had missed Fatty Wynn from the Form-room that morning. Mr. Ratcliff had been seen speaking to Mr. Lathom, and it was observed that Mr. Lathom was looking very concerned. Figgins and Kerr soon explained to the rest of the Fourth what had happened to the missing junior. The sympathy of the Fourth was unbounded. Fatty Wynn confined on bread and water, and all the trouble arising out of the fact that he had received an unexpected fiver and wanted to "blow" it in a general treat to all the fellows he knew. It was too bad; the Fourth Form agreed as one man that it was too bad. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt that it was up to him to step in, and he explained the same to his chums after morning classes were dismissed.

"You see, somethin' will have to be done!" said Arthur Augustus seriously.

"Fatty Wynn's being done at present," Blake remarked.

"It is not weally a laughin' mattah, Blake. Figgay has taken the poor kid some sandwiches, but you know what Fatty is like. What is a stalled ox to us is only a dish of herbs to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, I think I have put that vewy well," said Arthur Augustus, with a satisfied nod. "I know those New House chaps are goin' to try to get some dinnah to him, but Watty is vewy sharp—vewy sharp indeed! I shouldn't wonder if he keeps an eye on Figgins and Kerr, knowin' what they'd be likely to do."

"Just like him!" said Digby.

"Yaas. Therefore, I considah that it is up to me to step in. Those New House boundahs are not weally up to Watty. I considah that a School House fellow had better take the mattah in hand, and as it wequires a fellow of tact and judgment, I'm goin' to do it."

"Don't you go scoutin' round the New House," grunted Blake. "Ratty will be sure to spot you, and you'll give Figgay's little game away."

"Wats! But I wasn't thinkin' of that! I am goin' to get Mr. Lathom to chip in. He is undah the misapprehension that Fatty was insultin' to him yesterday; whereas, as a matter of fact, poor old Fatty was only suffewin' from a tempowawy attack of lockjaw. I think if we explained that to Mr. Lathom he would get his eahs down again, and would chip in and save Fatty from old Wateliff."

"Well, it's not a bad idea," said Blake thoughtfully. "How on earth did you come by it?"

"Oh, I think of these things, you know," said D'Arcy modestly. "I suppose it's due to my bein' a bwainy chap."

"Yes, it must be," agreed Blake solemnly. "You'd be the bwainiest chap going if you didn't suffer from water on the bwain."

"It's a good idea," said Herries. "Lathom was waxy at Wynn's refusing to answer him. It can't make matters worse for Fatty to explain about it. He oughtn't to have been eating toffee in class, of course, but upon the whole that's less serious than cheeking a Form-master."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go and see Lathom," said Blake. "He's in his study now, and we can catch him. He's a good little ass, and I know he doesn't like Ratty's rotten ways. He may chip in and get poor old Fatty out of chokey, perhaps."

And the chums of the Fourth made their way to the Form-master's study. They found Mr. Lathom looking worried. He was thinking, as a matter of fact, about Fatty Wynn. Mr. Lathom was a sensitive little gentleman, and had a great delicacy about interfering in the affairs of Mr. Ratcliff in his own House. But Wynn was in Mr. Lathom's Form, and he could not help feeling that he should have been consulted before the boy was kept away from classes. It was a juncture when the authority of the Form-master clashed with that of the House-master—and little Mr. Lathom was not able to "keep his end up" against the pushing and obstinate Ratty. And as he had first complained to Mr. Ratcliff of Fatty Wynn's conduct, his position was very delicate in the matter. He was thinking about it when the chums of No. 6 came in.

"Well, my boys, what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Lathom, with the gentle benevolence which was repaid with derision and mockery by fellows like Levison and Mellish, and with affectionate regard by all the rest of the Fourth.

"If you please, sir—" began Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nudged his chum. "Bettah leave the talkin' to me, Blake, old man," he whispered.

"Shurrup!" murmured Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"We've come about Fatty, sir—I mean Wynn," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, sir. We weckon—"

"Shurrup!" said Digby, in a stage whisper.

"Weally, Dig—"

"We think we ought to tell you, sir, about poor old Wynn," said Blake. "He wasn't to blame when you thought he was cheeking you yesterday, sir. You thought that he wouldn't answer you, sir—"

"He refused to answer me," said Mr. Lathom, frowning at the recollection.

"He couldn't, sir."

"It was quite imposs., sir, I assuah you."

"I do not quite understand you," said Mr. Lathom, in surprise. "Why was it impossible for Wynn to speak when I commanded him to do so?"

"He'd been eating toffee, sir," confessed Blake. "He tried to bite it so that he could bolt it when you spoke to him, and he fixed his teeth in it, and couldn't get 'em out again. That's how it was, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

Mr. Lathom's face broke into a smile.

"Dear me!" he said. "This is—extraordinary. I suppose you are not joking, Blake? You give me your word that this was the case?"

"Yes, sir."

"Honah bwright, Mr. Lathom."

"Bless my soul! Wynn should have told me."

"He couldn't speak, sir."

"But you others might have spoken for him—"

"Well, all of us didn't know what was the matter, sir, and then we thought you would be down on him for eating toffee in class, after what you'd said to him about the chocolate, and—and so we didn't, sir. But we thought we ought to come and tell you now, now poor old Wynn is getting it in the neck—ahem!—I mean—"

"I understand, Blake. I am very glad you have told me. I am glad to know that Wynn did not intend to be disrespectful. If I had known this, I should certainly have punished him for eating toffee in class, but I should not have been so very much annoyed."

"We thought, sir—"

"We weckoned that you might speak to Watty, sir—"

"What!"

"To Mr. Wateliff, sir, and get poor old Wynn off, sir. All the twouble arose out of that mistake about the toffee, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Lathom, after a pause. "As Wynn is in my Form, I will speak to Mr. Ratcliff. Of course, I cannot interfere with a Housemaster in his own jurisdiction. But I will see what can be done."

"Thank you, sir! You are very kind."

"Very kind indeed, sir. Didn't I tell you fellows that our Form-master could be relied on to do the wight thing?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

"Ahem! You may go now, my boys," said Mr. Lathom hastily. "I will see what can be done."

And the chums of the Fourth went, with their hopes high. A few minutes later Mr. Lathom was seen crossing over to the New House.

"He's gone to see Ratty," said Blake. "I wish Lathom was a bit stiffer; it needs a regular prizefighter to deal with Ratty. Railton would shut him up fast enough, if a fellow in Railton's Form was concerned. But let's hope for the best."

Mr. Lathom went directly to Mr. Ratcliff's study, where he found the master of the New House. The latter received him cordially enough. He thought that the Fourth Form master had come with a complaint—and perhaps the wish was father to the thought.

"I have come to speak about Wynn," said Mr. Lathom, plunging into the subject at once. "I have received an explanation of his conduct yesterday, and it proves that I was deceived in supposing that he intended to treat me with disrespect. He was to blame, but not so seriously as I supposed."

Mr. Ratcliff's manner became extremely dry at once.

"Indeed?" he said coldly.

"Yes; and so, under the circumstances, I thought I would put it to you, Mr. Ratcliff, that he might be released from detention, and allowed to return to his Form."

"There is a slight misapprehension here," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am not punishing Wynn for his conduct towards you, Mr. Lathom. He was punished for that yesterday. He is now being punished for his conduct towards me, in this House, last night."

"But as the second matter really arose out of the first—" urged Mr. Lathom.

"I am afraid I could not take that into consideration. Wynn disobeyed my orders, and attempted to take away a pie that I had confiscated—and when I discovered him, he hurled himself upon me and knocked me over—his House-master, sir. You will see that only a condign punishment would meet such a case."

"It is unfortunate that Wynn should be kept away from his lessons," said the master of the Fourth.

"I have seen to that. He is occupied in studying his Latin grammar."

"Ahem! He has now been confined for a whole morning, and, I understand, upon a very spare diet."

"Bread and water!" assented Mr. Ratcliff.

"A severe punishment for a boy like Wynn, don't you think?"

"My object is to teach him to keep his inordinate appetite within bounds. I think it will have a markedly beneficial effect upon him."

"Then you do not think that, under the circumstances, Wynn might be released?"

"I hardly think so, Mr. Lathom."

"Then I need trouble you no longer, sir," said Mr. Lathom, with a great deal of dignity, and he took his leave at once.

The chums of the Fourth did not venture to ask their Form-master the result of his visit to the New House. But when the Fourth Form assembled for afternoon classes they knew that he had failed. Fatty Wynn was not in his place.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry Takes a Hand.

FATTY WYNN had been looking at his watch anxiously for a long time. He knew that dinner-time had passed, and, in spite of the sandwiches, he was feeling hungry.

He was sure that Figgins and Kerr would not fail him if they could help it—but there was danger that the obnoxious Ratty might be keeping a careful eye upon them. Mr. Ratcliff would naturally guess that Figgins and Kerr would get into communication with their chum if they could, and he might be too clever for them. In that case, Fatty Wynn would be reduced to terrible straits. The bread was still on the table—and Fatty Wynn was determined not to touch it. But if no dinner arrived—Fatty Wynn had read of the Suffragette hunger-strikes, and he had wondered greatly how those extremely determined ladies had been able to "stick it out." He was not quite sure that his own fortitude would be equal to the strain.

And so he watched the minute-hand upon his watch, and waited and hoped. But the signal whistle did not come from below, and his hopes sank down to zero. It would be time for afternoon lessons soon, and then Figgins and Kerr had to go into class. And then— The whole afternoon minus dinner!

Where was Figgins? Fatty Wynn was a Welsh boy, and therefore, needless to be said, he was fond of music. But he had never listened to the sweetest or grandest strains with as much pleasure as he would now have listened to "Bill Bailey," if only he could have heard Figgins whistling it under his window.

He was sure that Figgins had not forgotten him, and was not neglecting him; and he was right in that. As a matter of fact, Figgins and Kerr were thinking of him at that moment—and worrying. Ratty, as Fatty Wynn feared, had been one too many for them.

The New House master had suspected, not what Figgins had done in the morning, but what he might attempt to do. And, after dinner, he had taken his newspaper, and seated himself on one of the old benches under the elms in the quadrangle, where he could keep an eye on the New House. Figgins and Kerr could not approach Fatty Wynn's window now without being seen as they went into the entry; and that, of course, would give the whole game away at once.

Figgins and Kerr consulted in a state of desperation. Figgins had expended quite a little sum at the tuckshop on provisions for Fatty Wynn, and he had them fastened up in a set of little packets small enough to pass through the bars of the window. But there seemed no means of conveying them to the prisoner.

"The awful rotter smells a mouse," said Figgins, in despair. "He knows we should think of the window. What's to be done, Kerr, old man? He won't take his beastly eyes away till we have to go into class. Can't you think of something? What's the good of being a blessed Scotsman if you can't think of things?"

Kerr was thinking his hardest. "We shall have to get out of class," he said. "Jolly lucky we're not in the Fifth. We shall have to make some excuse to get out of the Fourth Form-room, Figgy, and get to Fatty when Ratty is taking the Fifth this afternoon."

"Well, we might—Lathom's a good chap, and—and we might work it—Hallo! There is the beast beckoning to us!"

Figgins and Kerr reluctantly obeyed Mr. Ratcliff's beckoning finger. The Housemaster's eye had been upon them for some time, and probably the expressions upon their faces had told their own tale. Mr. Ratcliff laid his newspaper upon his knees, and looked at the two juniors with his keen, greenish eyes.

"May I ask what is causing your pockets to bulge, Figgins?" he asked. "It looks extremely slovenly."

"I—I've got something in them, sir," said Figgins, turning red.

"And you, Kerr?"

"I've got something in them, sir."

"Indeed! Kindly 'show me what you have in your pockets that causes them to bulge in that slovenly manner," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I do not like the boys of my House to look the most ill-dressed and careless in the school."

"I—I'll go and take the things out, sir," stammered Figgins.

"I'll go at once, sir," said Kerr.

"You will take the things out now and here," said Mr. Ratcliff acridly, "and at once."

Figgins and Kerr exchanged a hopeless, furious look; and turned out their pockets. All those neat little packets prepared for Fatty Wynn came to light. Mr. Ratcliff regarded them with an acid smile.

"I need not ask what those packets contain," he remarked. "I have no doubt that they contain food of some kind. Is it not so?"

"Yes," grunted Figgins.

"Since when, may I ask, have you taken to carrying about food in packets in your pockets?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

No reply.

"Perhaps I should not be wrong in assuming that you intended to attempt to convey these packets to Wynn?"

Silence! The Housemaster's smile grew sour.

"I suspected something of the sort," he said. "As a matter of fact, Figgins, I saw you go into the tuck-shop before dinner. These packets will be confiscated, and you will take fifty lines each. I shall also speak to your Form-master, and request him to take care that you do not leave the Form-room during the afternoon in order to carry out your lawless and nefarious intentions."

Figgins and Kerr were silent. They had a wild desire to collar Mr. Ratcliff and bump him on the ground.

"You will take this rubbish and place it on the table in my study," said Mr. Ratcliff, counting the packets, "and if there is any further attempt at anything of the kind, I shall consider whether to order you to share the punishment of Wynn. You may go!"

And they went.

The packets were duly deposited upon Mr. Ratcliff's study table, and Figgins and Kerr wandered away disconsolately. Ratty had been one too many for them; and it looked as though Fatty Wynn would have his hunger-strike put to a severe test.

The two worried juniors went down to the cricket ground. The Shell fellows were at practice there. Figgins and Kerr ran Tom Merry down outside the pavilion. The captain of the Shell was just going in to bat when Figgins collared him.

"Sheer off!" said Tom Merry.

"Hold on; it's important," said Figgins. "We want you to help us. This isn't a time for House rags, ass."

Tom Merry was cordial at once.

"Righto—what is it? Something for Fatty?"

Figgins explained the disaster that had befallen the consignment of provisions destined for the prisoner of the punishment-room. Tom Merry listened sympathetically.

"Just like Ratty!" he said.

"Will you help us?" asked Kerr.

"Yes, rather—anything you like," said Tom Merry, at once.

"We can't get out of the Form-room this afternoon; Ratty's going to speak to Lathom about it. Same thing would apply to Reddy and the rest. But one of you Shell chaps might manage it. Will you do it—get out as soon as you can, and get some grub to Fatty? You know the signal? The grub will have to be done up in packets to pass through the bars. The worst of it is that we've blued all our cash on that little lot," said Figgins ruefully, "and we're stony now."

"That's all right; I've got some tin," said Tom Merry. "We all stand in together in time of trouble like this."

That's all right."

"You're a good chap. You'll do it?"

"Yes, rather. I'll be late for class," said Tom Merry. "Linton will give me lines, but I can stand that."

"We'll help you do the lines," said Kerr.

And when the bell rang for classes that afternoon, Tom Merry did not go in with the rest of the Shell. He had confided to Manners and Lowther, so they did not look for him. Just before the bell rang, Tom had gone out on his bicycle.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, noticed his absence immediately. He made a note of it, keeping the vials of his wrath ready for Tom Merry's devoted head when he came in.

But Tom Merry was not in a hurry to come in. First lesson was half through when Mr. Linton asked Lowther if he knew where Tom Merry was.

"He went out on his bike, sir," said Lowther demurely.



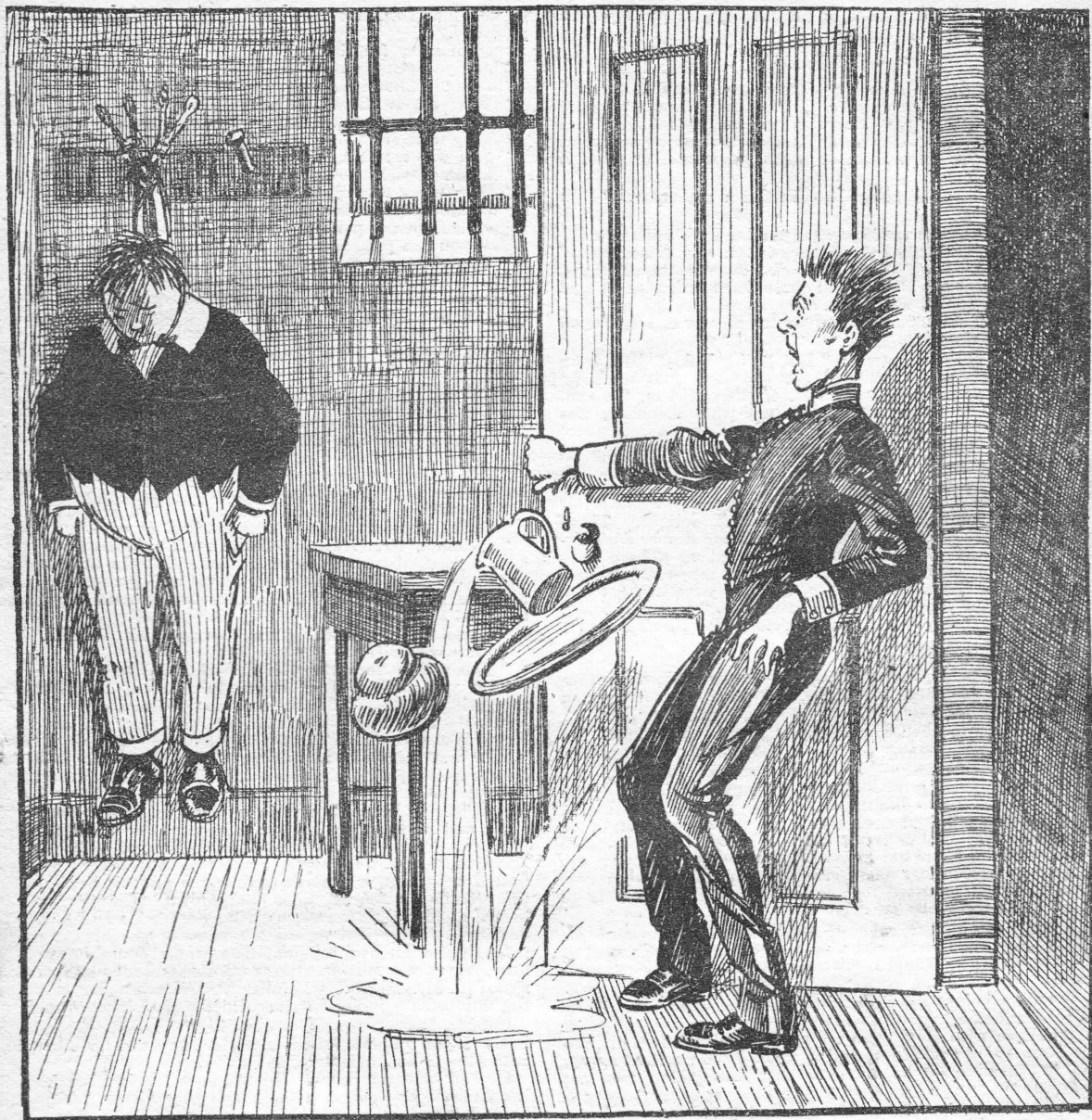
Hip Pip Pip! Hip pippip! We Take the Care, the Latest Rag-Time Band, Oh!

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

THE RAG-TIME SCHOOLBOYS!
ORDER EARLY.



Hip Pip Pip! Hip pippip! We Take the Care, the Latest Rag-Time Band, Oh!



The tray slipped from Joskins' nerveless fingers, and crashed to the floor at his feet, as he caught sight of the dummy figure hanging in the corner. Frightened out of his wits, he tore out of the door, "Help! Master Wynn 'ave hanged himself! He's dead! Help." (See Chapter 15.)

"Indeed," said Mr. Linton, compressing his lips.

It was a quarter of an hour later when Tom Merry came in, looking ruddy and dusty. The master of the Shell gave him a severe glance.

"Merry!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom Merry meekly.

"You are half an hour late."

"I am very sorry, sir."

"You will be detained an hour after class, and will write out two hundred lines."

"Yes, sir."

And Tom Merry went to his place.

CHAPTER 11.

Going Strong!

TOM MERRY suffered cheerfully in the good cause.

But Fatty Wynn was not suffering just then; so that was all right.

The prisoner of the New House had been almost in despair when the signal whistle had fallen upon his ears at last. Fatty knew that it was past time for afternoon lessons, and

he had almost given up hope. He sat with his eyes fixed on the bread on the table. The dry bread did not look very appetising, certainly. But Fatty Wynn was quite prepared to bolt it as if it had been the most delicate of morsels.

But he was on hunger-strike. In his mind's eye he could see the satirical smile that would curl Mr. Ratcliff's lip when he came in and saw that the bread had been eaten. Fatty Wynn swore inwardly that he would not give his obnoxious persecutor that gratification.

But the temptation was growing stronger and stronger. Figgins and Kerr would not be released from class until four o'clock. Flesh and blood could not hold out that length of time. Fatty was hovering round the table now—when in the nick of time, as it were, he heard a soft whistle from below, and recognised the familiar tune of "Bill Bailey."

It was not Figgins' whistle, he knew—but it was the signal. Fatty fairly jumped to the window, and let the cord run out between the bars.

In a minute or less came a shake on the cord as a signal to haul, and Fatty Wynn pulled it up. His eyes danced as he saw the series of packages tied on it, one below another, of a handy size to pass through the bars of the window.

There was a note pinned to the first of the packages, in Tom Merry's handwriting:

"Sorry late—Figgy couldn't come! Cheero!—
TOM MERRY."

Fatty dragged in the string of packages. Tom Merry had done the thing in style evidently. There were nine packages, and all pretty heavy. Fatty Wynn felt so relieved, and joyful, and grateful, that he did not open them at once, but scribbled a note on a sheet of impot paper and dropped it from the window.

"Thanks! Much obliged! You're a real sport. Still hunger-striking!" WYNN.

"P.S.—Next time if you can send me a bit of chalk."

There was a whistle from below, to tell that the note had been received. Fatty Wynn proceeded to open the packages. The first one contained a half-dozen hard-boiled eggs, and Fatty Wynn bolted them one after another to go on with. He felt better immediately, and turned an eye of scorn upon the bread on the table.

Then the whistled notes of "Bill Bailey" floated up from below. Fatty Wynn whipped out the cord, and when he drew it up, he found a large stick of chalk tied on the end.

Whether Tom Merry guessed or not what the chalk was for, he had lost no time in supplying the want.

"What a ripping chap he is!" murmured Fatty Wynn, as he concealed the cord under the mattress, and placed the chalk in his pocket.

Then he set to work on the packages again.

His eyes almost bulged from his head in delight. There was a little beefsteak pie, quite enough for dinner for anybody but Fatty Wynn. There was a cake. There were tarts. There were doughnuts. There were oranges and beer. There was a cold chicken. There were oranges and apples and nuts and a bunch of bananas. There was more, in fact, than Fatty Wynn even, could negotiate at a single sitting.

He did his best.

When he had finished there was a beatific smile of rapture upon his plump face, and there still remained a supply of provisions on the table.

Fatty Wynn washed down the repast with ginger-beer. He could despise the water as well as the bread now, that Mr. Ratcliff had supplied him with.

With a cheerful grin, Fatty set to work clearing away all traces of the feed. Paper and string from the packages, and the empty ginger-beer bottle, he concealed carefully in the chimney. In the chimney, too, he carefully concealed what remained of the provisions, carefully wrapped up. Then he cleared away every crumb that could have betrayed him. He was prepared to face Ratty now; and he went to work quite cheerfully on deponent verbs.

When four o'clock sounded from the clock-tower of St. Jim's, Fatty Wynn took the stick of chalk from his pocket. He knew that he would receive a visit from the Housemaster soon.

Standing before the little glass over the washstand, Fatty Wynn daubed his ruddy cheeks with the chalk, and rubbed it carefully in with his fingers. When he had finished, his face had assumed a pallid look, and it would have required a very intent examination to discover that the pallor was not natural.

Fatty Wynn chuckled at his pale and sickly reflection, and sat down to his verbs again. A quarter of an hour later, the passage outside creaked under the steps of Mr. Ratcliff, and the door of the punishment-room opened.

Mr. Ratcliff came in.

The Housemaster's glance went at once to the tray on the table. He expected to find that every crumb had vanished. His brow darkened as he saw that the bread had not been touched.

"Wynn!" he exclaimed sternly.

Fatty Wynn rose languidly to his feet.

He was not feeling at all languid; in fact, he had never felt better in his life. But he was aware that a fellow who had been hunger-striking all day ought to look pale and languid. So he assumed languor, and he was certainly pale enough, thanks to the aid of the chalk.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a weak, faint voice.

"You have not touched your food, Wynn!"

"I told you I should not touch it, sir."

"This is direct disobedience, Wynn!"

"I am sorry, sir. But I was not sent to St. Jim's to be fed on bread and water," said the junior. "It would be against my principles to touch it, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff frowned darkly.

"You doubtless hope that your friends will be able to convey food to you!" he exclaimed angrily. "I may tell you that Figgins and Kerr have been discovered attempting to

do so. The food has been confiscated, and they have been punished."

"I am sorry for that, sir."

"Are you hungry now, Wynn?"

"I should like to have my tea, sir, if I may."

"Your tea is there," said Mr. Ratcliff, pointing to the bread and water on the table. "You will have nothing else."

"Very well, sir."

"You will eat that, Wynn."

"I cannot, sir."

"Do you dare to disobey me, Wynn?"

"I cannot touch that, sir."

"Ah! You are persisting in the absurd and foolish freak which you are pleased to term a hunger-strike, I presume."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff set his teeth. The paleness of Wynn's face made him uneasy. If the boy should become ill, the consequences would not be wholly pleasant for Horace Ratcliff. And certainly the Fourth-Former looked far from well.

"Are you aware, Wynn, that your health will suffer if you persist in this wretched obstinacy?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

"I can stand it, sir."

"You will have only yourself to blame, Wynn, if the consequences should turn out serious for you."

"Yes, sir."

"You are attempting to influence me, boy, by risking your health!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"You will do as you think best, sir."

"Wynn, I order you to eat that bread at once."

"I cannot, sir. It would choke me," said Fatty Wynn; and, indeed, there was some truth in that—in fact, it was quite true. Fatty Wynn was so full up with good things that it would have been very difficult for him to cram dry bread down on top of them.

"I shall send you nothing else," snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Very well, sir."

"You will be sorry for this obstinacy, Wynn!"

"Do you mind if I sit down, sir?" asked Fatty Wynn, staggering a little. "Starvation makes me rather weak, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff strode out of the room, and slammed the door. Fatty Wynn chuckled silently. He knew that his Housemaster was alarmed and uneasy, and he began to feel that he was getting a little of his own back on the tyrant of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff, indeed, was in a most unpleasant frame of mind, and his brow was knitted as he went down to his study. He knew that his harshness was disapproved of in the House. The House-dame was very cold and formal to him. The boys looked upon him as a harsh tyrant—the prefects hardly took the trouble to conceal their disapproval. The very maids looked at him with horror, as if he were a kind of monster. Joskins the page had spread the story of the hunger-strike through the kitchen regions. The whole house knew that Fatty Wynn was refusing the spare diet accorded to him, and regarded Mr. Ratcliff with disgust and scorn for allowing the unfortunate junior to starve in the punishment-room.

But Mr. Ratcliff's position was difficult indeed. To release Fatty Wynn because of his hunger-strike was to allow his authority to be condemned and defied.

He had been too harsh. He had gone too far; but he had left himself no retreat without bringing his authority and himself into contempt.

Forcible feeding, which has been found impracticable even in dealing with prisoners in the prisons, could hardly be resorted to in the case of Fatty Wynn.

Mr. Ratcliff had the alternative of rescinding his own sentence, or of allowing the matter to go on as it was. And if Wynn became ill—as was likely enough—and the Head made a strict inquiry into the matter, as he certainly would—Mr. Ratcliff foresaw very unpleasant consequences to himself.

Mr. Ratcliff was punishing Wynn of the Fourth; but, as a matter of fact, Mr. Ratcliff in his study was in a far more uncomfortable state than Fatty Wynn in the punishment-room.

CHAPTER 12.

Bowled Out.

FIGGINS hurried in search of Tom Merry as soon as the Fourth Form were released from classes. He was anxious to know if the hero of the Shell had been successful. He found Manners and Lowther in the passage, but not their chum.

"Where's Merry?" asked Figgins.

Lowther pointed lugubriously to the Form-room.

"Detained an hour for being late for class," he replied.

"Oh, rotten," said Figgins. "I'm sorry! Has he told you if he got the stuff to Wynn?"

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

Lowther and Manners grinned.

"Yes, that's all right. He says he's sent him a giddy load enough to last him over to-morrow morning, if necessary. It ran into fifteen bob."

"Oh, good," said Figgins. "Of course, we're going to settle that up. I'm awfully obliged; sorry poor old Tommy's detained."

And Figgins rejoined Kerr, and they walked over to the New House in a more cheerful state of mind. Hunger-strike or no hunger-strike, Fatty Wynn was provided for. Monteith of the Sixth beckoned to them as they came into the house. The prefect was looking grim.

"Mr. Ratcliff says that you were trying this afternoon to get some grub to Wynn, by the window of the punishment room," he said.

"He caught us before we had a chance to try," said Kerr.

"Well, he has ordered that you are to keep in the House in case you should try to communicate with Wynn again," said Monteith. "Outside the House is out of bounds for you two till further orders."

Figgins grunted.

"Don't you think Ratty is piling it on a bit too thick, Monteith?" he demanded.

Monteith did not reply to that question. He smiled and walked away. He had his own opinion about Mr. Ratcliff, but he could not discuss his Housemaster with a junior.

"Looks as if we're dished about getting at Fatty!" Kerr remarked, in a low voice. "But Tom Merry's seen him through for to-day, anyway."

"And he'll be out to-morrow morning," said Figgins, with satisfaction.

"Unless Ratty should pile it on."

"The rotter! He might!"

Figgins and Kerr did their preparation in their study that evening in a worried mood. A number of School House fellows came over to see them, to ask if there was any news of Fatty Wynn. The chums of Study No. 6, and the Terrible Three, discussed the matter with Figgins and Kerr, and joined with them in making uncomplimentary remarks about Mr. Ratcliff.

But there was no way of getting a word of encouragement to Fatty. Blake, strolling round the New House in a careless sort of way, had almost run into Mr. Ratcliff, near the entry under Fatty's window. Mr. Ratcliff was also strolling round the House in a careless sort of way—very much upon the alert.

Figgins had gone scouting to the door of the punishment-room; but before he could speak a word through the keyhole, Sefton of the Sixth had collared him, and marched him off, and caned him. Sefton had been specially instructed by Mr. Ratcliff to keep an eye open, and he was doing it.

The chums of St. Jim's agreed in calling Mr. Horace Ratcliff all sorts of uncomplimentary names, but there seemed nothing else to be done, and Tom Merry & Co. returned to their own house for locking-up, very much concerned for Fatty Wynn.

"It's simply wotten!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House. "I don't believe the Head would allow it if he knew. That wotten ideah of punishment-wooms and bwad and watah is out of date."

"Lathom ought to chip in, as Wynn is in our Form!" growled Blake.

"Yaas, watah!"

"I believe he'd like to, intirely," remarked Reilly. "But he doesn't like seem'g to interfere with a Housemaster."

"It's time to stretch a point," said Kerruish.

"Yaas, watah! I quite agwee with Kewwuish, and if Watty doesn't let poor old Wynn out in the mornin', I think we ought to make up a wound-wobin or somethin', askin' Mr. Lathom to chip in."

"Not a bad idea!" said Blake.

And the Fourth-Formers discussed it at length, after lights out. Fatty Wynn being in the Fourth Form, of course it was their special business. The fact that he was a New House fellow, and their deadly rival, mattered nothing now. School House and New House were quite in accord upon this subject.

While the juniors were going to bed in their various dormitories, Fatty Wynn was sitting somewhat disconsolately in the punishment-room in the New House.

He was feeling decidedly lonely.

The prisoner of the New House had hoped to hear the signal whistle again, or to receive some communication in some way from his chums.

But he had not heard a word or a whisper.

He knew that they were not neglecting him, and that it must be due to the watchfulness of the obnoxious Ratty. But time weighed heavily on his hands, and he felt the solitude keenly. Fatty Wynn was a sociable fellow, and he

was seldom alone if he could help it. The silence and solitude of the punishment-room weighed on his spirits.

He broke the monotony from time to time by extracting choice morsels from the hidden store in the chimney, and, so far, he was in no danger of suffering from hunger. The store, however, was melting away under his constant attacks, and he was not likely to have much left for breakfast. And he was not quite certain at what time his release would come. Mr. Ratcliff was an unreliable man.

Fatty Wynn was cracking a walnut when the key turned in the lock once more, and he had just time to thrust the nut into his pocket when the New House master entered.

Mr. Ratcliff's glinting eyes noted that the bread was still untouched, though Fatty had drunk all the water by this time.

Joskins, the page, came in to replace the jug of water and to "do" the room for the night. Mr. Ratcliff stood regarding the pale-faced Wynn with a corrugated brow. His keen eyes scanned the Fourth-Former's face. Mr. Ratcliff was worried. He feared that Fatty Wynn was becoming ill, and rather than that he had made up his mind that he would release the prisoner. But he was very suspicious, and not easily satisfied. He was scanning the plump face for signs of illness, but there was nothing but the pallor of the complexion. The cheeks were as full and plump as ever—indeed, Fatty Wynn seemed to have just then quite a well-fed look.

"I see that you have eaten nothing, Wynn," Mr. Ratcliff said at last.

"I cannot touch that, sir."

"Are you not afraid of making yourself ill?"

"I'm willing to risk it, sir."

"You are looking pale, Wynn."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Master Wynn looks 'orrible pale, sir!" ventured Joskins, the New House page.

"Will you kindly hold your tongue, Joskins?" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff was still scanning Wynn's fat face. It was peculiarly white, undoubtedly; but along with the pallor there should have been other signs of emaciation, Mr. Ratcliff thought, and he was vaguely suspicious. His keen, wary eye caught a white smudge on Fatty Wynn's waistcoat, just over his pocket, and he started.

"Come here, Wynn!" he rapped out sharply.

Wynn approached him. The Housemaster inserted a finger and thumb into his waistcoat-pocket, and drew out the stick of chalk. A thundercloud came over his brow.

"Are you accustomed to carrying chalk in your pocket, like a billiard-marker, Wynn?" he exclaimed.

"I—I do sometimes, sir," stammered Fatty.

"Joskins!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir!"

"Take that sponge and wet it, and rub it over Master Wynn's face—hard!"

"Yes, sir!" said the astonished Joskins.

Fatty Wynn had to submit. The wet sponge was rubbed over his face, and Joskins gasped in surprise at the result. The pale complexion disappeared, and Fatty Wynn's ruddy and glowing cheeks reappeared in all their pristine healthiness. Mr. Ratcliff glared at the fat Fourth-Former almost as if he would bite him.

"Wynn," he thundered, "you have been attempting to deceive me. You have put chalk on your face, sir, to induce me to believe that you were becoming ill!"

Fatty Wynn was silent. His little dodge was clean bowled out now, there was no mistake about that. Mr. Ratcliff, remembering that he had really been upon the point of releasing the fat junior owing to his sickly looks, could hardly contain his fury. A lurking grin on the plump face made him angrier than ever.

"I suppose you regard that as a very clever trick, Wynn?" he stuttered at last. "You have caused me some anxiety. You shall repent it, sir. You shall stay in this room, as a punishment, for another twenty-four hours. We shall see, sir, whether you refuse your food for that length of time. If you do, I have no doubt that you will look a little pale, Wynn, without the aid of chalk."

And with that gibe Mr. Ratcliff stalked out of the room. Joskins followed him, and the door was locked, and Fatty Wynn was left to his reflections.

"Oh, the artful old dodger!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, as he towelled his wet face. "Fancy the downy old bird bowling me out like that! Oh, crumbs!"

And Fatty Wynn went to bed in an exasperated mood. He was feeling very uneasy. He had enough provisions left for a frugal breakfast, but if his friends failed to convey any more to him how was the hunger-strike to get on?

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And Fatty Wynn was more determined than ever that Ratty should not triumph—that he would stick to the hunger-strike, even if it became a genuine one. But that prospect was simply appalling to the Falstaff of the New House.

CHAPTER 13.

No Go!

THE next morning, after breakfast, Figgins of the Fourth ventured to approach Mr. Ratcliff, as the master was about to start for the School House. Mr. Ratcliff's expression was not inviting, but Figgins risked it. His manner was very meek.

"If you please, sir, is Wynn to come to class this morning?" he asked.

"No, Figgins; he is not!"

"But the twenty-four hours, sir—"

"Wynn will be detained in the punishment-room for an additional twenty-four hours," said Mr. Ratcliff, enjoying the dismay in Figgins' expressive face. "He attempted to deceive me by a trick—by chalking his face to make it look pale. I have therefore imposed this further punishment upon him, Figgins. I may add that any junior attempting to convey food to him will be most severely punished!"

"But, sir, it's a half-holiday to-day, and Wynn was to play in a match this afternoon, sir!" said the dismayed Figgins.

"I have nothing to do with that, Figgins."

"But, sir, I—"

"That will do," said Mr. Ratcliff.

And with a frown at the junior he walked away. He had visited Fatty Wynn in the punishment-room and found the bread still untouched. The fortitude of the fat junior amazed him, but Fatty Wynn was looking quite rosy, and Mr. Ratcliff was no longer alarmed for his health, and he was grimly determined to see how long Fatty Wynn's obstinacy would hold out.

Figgins gritted his teeth as the Housemaster strode away. Sefton, the bully of the Sixth, who had old grudges against Figgins, was keeping an eye on him; but Figgins was determined to get a word to Wynn before morning classes. He had recourse to Redfern. Redfern was only too willing to help. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, the New Firm, might have had their little rows with Figgins & Co., but just now they were all in line. A few whispered words were enough for Redfern.

Figgins went upstairs and into the passage where the punishment-room was situated, and Sefton of the Sixth was promptly on his track. The prefect bore down on him.

"Where are you going, Figgins?" he demanded.

"I'm going to lessons," said Figgins innocently.

"By way of the punishment-room?" asked the prefect sarcastically.

"How did you guess that, Sefty?" asked Figgins cheerfully. "Blessed if I think you are such an idiot as the fellows make out, Sefty!"

The prefect stared at him blankly for a moment, too enraged to speak. Then he rushed at Figgins, grasped him by the shoulder, and marched him off to his study to be caned.

Little as Sefton would have guessed it, that was exactly what Figgins wanted.

While Figgins was being caned in the prefect's study the coast was left clear for Redfern, and the latter, who was on the watch, scudded up to the punishment-room in next to no time. He tapped at the door softly, and whispered through the keyhole:

"Fatty, old son!"

"Hallo!" said Fatty. "That you, Reddy?"

"Yes; I've got a message from Figgins. Old Ratty is watching like a dozen cats, and he's got Sefton on the job, too. It will be difficult to get you any more grub, so you'd better be careful with Tom Merry's lot, and make it last—see?"

"There's some left," said Fatty Wynn; "enough for my brekker."

Redfern chuckled.

"Enough for the whole day for any other chap!" he said. "Make it last, Fatty. We're all putting our heads together, and we'll get some more to you somehow, if we can. It will be jolly hard, but we'll try. Only don't think we've forgotten you; we haven't."

"Right-ho! Get in some grub if you can, Reddy, for goodness' sake!" said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "I want to keep up the hunger-strike, you know."

"Ha, ha! Right-ho! So long!"

And Redfern scudded off. Figgins came out of Sefton's study with a red face, and rubbing his palms together. Redfern joined him in the quadrangle.

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"All serene. I've jawed to Fatty," said Redfern. "Did Sefton lay it on?"

Figgins grunted painfully.

"Two on each hand, and regular nippers!" he said. "Never mind; we've done him in the eye, so it's all right." And they went into the Fourth Form-room.

The School House fellows gave them inquiring glances. Fatty Wynn was not with them, so it was evident that the unfortunate junior was still under detention in the punishment-room. Mr. Lathom was not in the Form-room yet, and the juniors gathered round Figgins & Co. excitedly.

"Isn't Fatty out yet, bedad?" demanded Reilly.

Figgins shook his head.

"Ratty bowled out his dodge about chalking his chivvy," he said. "He's given him another twenty-four hours' chokey."

"On bread and water?" asked Blake.

"Yes; on hunger-strike."

"And we sha'n't be able to get any more grub to him, unless a giddy miracle happens," said Kerr disconsolately.

Arthur Augustus mounted upon a form. There was a very determined look upon his noble features. He raised a slim white hand to enjoin silence. It was clear that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was going to make a speech.

"Gentlemen!" he began.

"Hear, hear!" said the Fourth-Formers.

"Gentlemen, I wish to remark that the time has come for action. Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows! Friends, Womans, and countymen! Our esteemed Form-fellow, Wynn is in duvance vile, the powahless victim of the wabid wage of Watty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well put!" roared Blake. "Keep it up!"

"The wabid wage of Watty!" repeated Arthur Augustus, very pleased with the expression. "Gentlemen, are we goin' to take this lyin' down? What becomes of the honah of the Fourth Form and the twadiions of the School House? Gentlemen, I wise to remark that it is up to us to stand up for Fatty Wynn in the hour of need. When a fellow's down, it is time for his friends to wally wound him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I suggest, therefore, that we put it to Mr. Lathom, who is a good sort, that a Fourth-Former ought not to be shut up like this on bwad and watah, and dwiven to act like a Suffragette!"

"Bravo!"

"When Mr. Lathom comes in, I suggest that the whole Form wise to the occasion, and put it to him. I'm willin' to be spokesman—in fact, you can leave all the talkin' to me, and cheer what I say!"

Mr. Lathom came in at that moment. The little Form-master looked surprised at the sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy elevated upon the form, and the juniors standing standing out of their places talking excitedly.

"My boys," said Mr. Lathom mildly, "what is all this? D'Arcy, get down from that form at once. Go to your places, boys!"

The Fourth Form hesitated. But Arthur Augustus did not hesitate. As he explained afterwards to Blake, it was the proper place for a D'Arcy to lead, and he led. He jumped off the form, and advanced towards the surprised master of the Fourth.

"Pway allow me to speak, Mr. Lathom," he began. "It is a vewy important mattah. A membah of this Form is detained in durvance vile—"

"What!"

"A powahless victim of the wabid wage of Watty—I mean Mr. Watcliff—"

"D'Arcy!"

"Mr. Watcliff declares that poor old Wynn is to remain for anothah twenty-four hours a pwisonah on bwad and watah," resumed D'Arcy. "You are pewwaps aware, sir, that Wynn has delared a hungah-stwike. Sir, as Wynn is a membah of this Form, we think it is up to you, sir, to chip in!"

"D'Arcy! Really, you—"

"We wely upon you to wescue old Wynn ffrom the wabid wage of Watty, sir!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled the Fourth.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "Is not Wynn here? I fully expected to see him in class as usual this morning."

"He's got another twenty-four hours on bread and water, sir!" said Figgins. "He refuses to touch the bread, as he has declared a hunger-strike, like a Suffragette, sir. And Mr. Watcliff is watching that we don't get any grub to him, sir. We all think you will interfere, sir, as Wynn's Form-master."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom. "I shall certainly

speak to Mr. Ratcliff. Pray keep order here for a few minutes while I am gone!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Lathom left the Form-room. The kind little gentleman was very much disturbed. He looked into the Fifth-Form room, where Mr. Ratcliff was already busy with the Fifth. Mr. Ratcliff was calling Cutts of the Fifth over the coals when Mr. Lathom blinked in through his spectacles.

"I should like a word with you, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Fourth-Form master.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff. He came to the door with a grim expression on his face. He guessed what was coming, and was quite determined not to make any concession whatever.

"About Wynn," said Mr. Lathom hurriedly. "He has not come into class—"

"He is still detained, sir. He attempted to deceive me by a trick into believing that he was ill. He will remain in the punishment-room till to-morrow morning."

"Do you not think, Mr. Ratcliff, that that is an excessively severe punishment for a junior boy, whatever he may have done?"

"I must observe that I am the best judge of that, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I must be allowed to keep discipline in my own House in my own way. However, to reply to your question, I do not think that it is severe."

"I cannot agree with you!"

"I am sorry for that!" said Mr. Ratcliff satirically. "I must, however, adhere to my own opinion, with all respect to yours, Mr. Lathom."

Mr. Lathom grew very pink.

"I have some authority over Wynn, as he is in my Form!" he said warmly. "You seem to have forgotten that circumstance, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Not at all, sir. But first of all comes my authority

"Pray leave the matter in my hands, sir. I assure you that I am quite capable of dealing with it; and you must remember, too, that the first trouble arose out of a complaint you yourself made to me, concerning Wynn's insolent conduct," added Mr. Ratcliff, with a bitter smile.

"That was a mistake. I have explained—"

"Quite so. But—to tell the truth, Mr. Lathom, you are keeping me away from my work, and really—"

Mr. Lathom walked away. The New House master returned to the Fifth, feeling quite easy in his mind. Mr. Lathom was not likely to do anything that would bring upon him the reproach of causing trouble between the Head and a House-master.

The Fourth-Formers watched Mr. Lathom's face as he came back into the Form-room. They did not read success there.

"Is it all wight, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Mr. Lathom looked worried.

"I have spoken to Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "We do not agree, unfortunately. I shall consider what is best to be done. Meanwhile, we shall now go on."

The Fourth Form settled down to lessons. They knew that Mr. Lathom had done his best, and they were grateful. But while Mr. Lathom was considering what was best to be done Fatty Wynn was still in the punishment-room, and he had consumed the last of his supplies—and the hunger-striker was getting to the end of his tether.

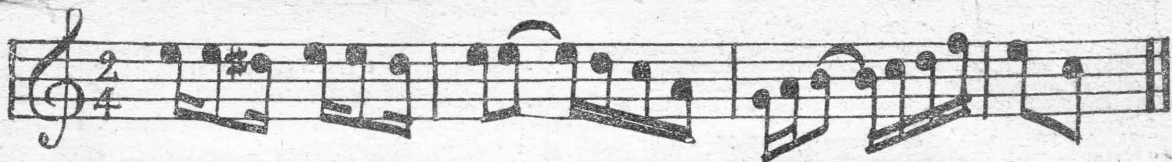
CHAPTER 14.

A Startling Discovery.

DINNER-TIME had come. Fatty Wynn heard the bell. But there was no dinner for the prisoner of the punishment-room.

The last of the provisions had been consumed—and nothing remained to be eaten but the dry bread upon the table, which the hunger-striker was determined not to touch.

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"Probably not. Well, as it would not be good for you to be unoccupied this afternoon, you may write out and construe a hundred lines from Virgil."

"It's a half-holiday, sir!"

"I am aware of that."

Mr. Ratcliff turned to the door. Fatty Wynn's eyes burned.

"I want to be let out," he said. "It's a half-holiday, and you've no right to keep me here, Mr. Ratcliff."

"No impertinence, Wynn!"

"If I should do anything desperate, sir, you'll be to blame," said Fatty morosely. "It would give you a shock if you found I had hung myself next time you come in!"

"Fortunately I have brought my cane with me," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Hold out your hand, Wynn. You must not make absurd speeches like that."

"Very well, sir," said Fatty, between his teeth. "You'll see!"

"Hold your foolish tongue!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

And the Housemaster went out and locked the door, leaving Fatty Wynn with smarting palms.

The afternoon was long and weary to the imprisoned junior. He was hungry—really hungry now. But he would not touch the loaf. After all, a loaf would not have made much difference to a first-class appetite like Fatty Wynn's, when he had missed his dinner. He had some hope that one of the Shell fellows might get into communication with him again. He dragged the table to the window, and stood upon it, and looked out. He had a view of a blank wall and a strip of sky between the bars of the window. No one came in sight. As it was a half-holiday, the juniors would all be on the playing-fields or the river. But Fatty Wynn knew that they would leave no stone unturned to help him if they could. The fact that they did not come proved that Ratty was on the watch. Fatty Wynn could picture the sour-faced man, sitting on the bench under the elms with his newspaper or a book. Later in the afternoon there came a tap at the door of the punishment-room. Fatty Wynn hurried over towards it.

"Hallo!" he whispered.

"How are you getting on, Fatty?" It was Figgins' voice.

Fatty Wynn groaned.

"Rotten!" he replied. "I'm famished!"

"We can't get anything to you—Ratty is watching. Sefton's on my track, too—I can't stay a minute," said Figgins hurriedly, through the keyhole. "I'm sorry, Fatty! We're holding a council of war about it—we'll do what we can."

"Thanks, Figgy, old man; I know you will!"

"We're trying to get Lathom to interfere. You've got the bread there, I suppose?"

"I haven't touched it," said Fatty Wynn. "I'll die first. I'll show old Ratty that I mean business, hang him!"

"Poor old Fatty!"

"I say," whispered Wynn, through the keyhole. "I'm going to take it out of Ratty—don't be alarmed when you hear. I——" Fatty Wynn broke off, as a sharp voice was heard in the passage outside, the voice of Sefton, the bully of the Sixth.

"Figgins! You young rascal! Follow me to my study at once!"

"Good-bye, Fatty!"

"Good-bye, Figgy—sorry!"

Fatty Wynn was left alone again. He was in a furious temper by this time. It meant the cane for Figgins, he knew that. And Figgy had not been able to help him either, only to whisper a few words of encouragement. Mr. Ratcliff had set Fatty Wynn a task of Virgil. Fatty Wynn picked up the volume of the esteemed Latin poet, and kicked it round the room, and dribbled it to and fro till the covers came off. That relieved his feelings a little—but his hunger was sharper than ever.

But he did not touch the loaf. The fat Fourth-Former was in deadly earnest; he was of the stuff of which heroes are made.

He knew that Mr. Ratcliff would come in again, or send Joskins in, about tea-time; and towards that hour he began to make preparations.

His first step was to strip off his clothes; the afternoon was warm, very warm indeed, in the confined space of the punishment-room, and it was rather a relief than otherwise to get rid of his Etons. He twisted up the bolster, pillows, and sheets from his bed, and stuffed out his clothes with them, buttoning the jacket over the bolster, and pinning it to the stuffed trousers.

To the ends of the trousers he attached his boots, jabbing holes with his penknife, and using the laces to fasten them in place.

By that time he had made up a dummy in very good imitation of himself, but minus the head. That important part

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he manufactured of a pillow, stuffing the end of it into the neck of the jacket, and fastening the collar round it.

With his penknife, he cut fragments from the hearthrug, which was of a coarse matting. These he fastened upon the dummy head to represent hair.

In the light from the window, the dummy could very easily be seen to be a dummy. But Wynn did not intend it to be seen in the light.

In the corner of the room were a couple of pegs for hanging clothes. Fatty Wynn put his braces round the neck of the figure, and hung it to the peg nearest the corner, where it was in the shadow. The effect was so lifelike—or, rather, so deathlike—that it startled Fatty Wynn himself.

To anyone entering the room the figure looked exactly like a junior in Etons hanging by the neck from the peg.

The head, naturally, dropped over the breast, so the face would not be seen; and in the shadow the matting looked sufficiently like hair.

Fatty Wynn surveyed his handiwork with considerable satisfaction.

"I told him he'd be startled if he came in and found that I'd hung myself," murmured Fatty Wynn. "If that doesn't startle the old bird, I'll eat my hat!"

And Fatty Wynn sat down in his underclothes to wait patiently for the advent of Mr. Ratcliff.

There was a step in the passage at last; and quick as a flash, Fatty Wynn slipped under the bed.

He lay there, completely concealed from sight, as the door opened.

Joskins the page came in, carrying a tray upon which were a new loaf and a jug of water.

Joskins paused, looking round in surprise for the junior.

Then he caught sight of the figure hanging in the corner.

Joskins stared at it blankly for a moment, his eyes nearly starting from his head, and then he let out a terrific yell.

The tray slipped from his nerveless fingers, and crashed upon the floor at his feet.

Joskins, pale of face, and frightened out of his wits, tore towards the door again.

"Help! Murder! Ow, he's hanged himself!" shrieked Joskins. "Help! Master Wynn 'ave 'ung himself! He's dead! Help!"

CHAPTER 15.

Not Felo-de-Se!

THE yell of the terrified page rang through the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff, who was about to follow Joskins into the room, was bumped into by the page as he rushed out, and very nearly floored.

He grasped Jenkins fiercely by the collar.

"What do you mean?" he shouted. "Silence, you fool!"

But Joskins was not disposed to silence just then.

"'Elp!" he shrieked. "'Elp! He's dead—'ung! He's 'ung himself hup with his braces! 'Elp! Master Wynn 'ave 'ung himself!"

There was a crowding to the spot immediately. Mr. Ratcliff, pale as death, released Joskins and rushed into the punishment-room. Monteith and Sefton were only a second after him. Other fellows crowded in. Voices were buzzing through the House. Like wildfire the news ran through the New House—Fatty Wynn had hanged himself in the punishment-room, and Joskins had discovered his dead body.

A thrill of horror ran through the House at the news.

It was buzzed forth from the New House to the quadrangle—it reached the School House, and sent a thrill of horror there.

Fellows came flocking over to the New House.

It was marvellous how quickly the dread news spread over the whole of St. Jim's, from end to end.

Fatty Wynn had committed suicide!

His body had been discovered hanging in the punishment-room. He had been driven to the desperate act by the cruelty of Mr. Ratcliff! The fellows, as they crowded into the New House, were in a mood to lynch the Housemaster.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff was in the punishment-room. He had doubted Joskins' news—or he had tried to doubt. But the sight of the still form hanging in the corner of the room convinced even Mr. Ratcliff.

His jaw dropped.

He gazed at the form hanging by the braces from the peg in the dusky corner, his eyes bulging with horror and fear.

For a moment, compassion for the reckless boy made itself felt in his hard heart.

But if so, it was only for a moment. Mr. Ratcliff was thinking of the consequences to himself. What would the school say? What would the Head say? What would the newspapers say? In that dreadful moment Mr. Ratcliff

realised that there must be an inquest; the story would be all over the kingdom. Mr. Ratcliff and his drastic methods of governing his House at St. Jim's would be discussed in every newspaper in the United Kingdom. He would be held up to execration from Land's End to John o' Groat's. He could see it all in his mind's eye—pictures of the hanging boy in the cheaper papers; photographs of St. Jim's and the New House; articles headed "Public School Methods of To-day"; or, "Mr. Wackford Squeers is Still With Us!" "Home Office Inquiry!" "Inquest on a Schoolboy—House-Master and Coroner!" Mr. Ratcliff's brain swam with the horror of it.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Monteith, so taken aback that he had not the presence of mind to do the obvious thing—cut down the hanging body. "The young ass!"

"He's hanged himself!" stuttered Sefton.

Figgins dashed into the room, with Kerr at his heels.

Figgins remembered what Fatty Wynn had whispered through the keyhole—that he was not to be alarmed whatever he might hear; but he was alarmed, all the same.

He dashed in so hurriedly that he bumped into Mr. Ratcliff, and sent him staggering.

"Get out of the way, can't you?" yelled Figgins.

"Figgins!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, shut up!"

That was how Figgins addressed the Housemaster, and Mr. Ratcliff was not even angry. He had not nerve enough left to be angry.

Figgins sprang towards the hanging body to cut it down. His hands were upon it, when his expression changed. He turned to Kerr, who was close behind him, and closed his left eye. Kerr understood.

"No good cutting him down," said Figgins. "There's not a breath—not a sign of it! He must be left for the police!"

"The police!" groaned Mr. Ratcliff.

"Will you telephone for the police, sir?" said Figgins.

"Good heavens! I—"

"Nonsense!" said Monteith, recovering himself. "The body must be cut down at once. Better telephone for a doctor, sir; there may be a chance yet!"

Monteith caught hold of the hanging form, to jerk the traces off the peg. Then a look of wonder came over his face.

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

Figgins and Kerr groaned, Monteith gasped, and then burst into a yell of laughter. He could not help it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Monteith!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. "Are you mad? This is not a laughing matter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take the body down at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Excuse me, sir—it isn't a body!"

"What!"

"It's a dummy, sir!"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

Then Monteith's laugh was echoed by a yell from the fellows in the room and the passage outside.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

For a moment Mr. Ratcliff was almost giddy with the relief. That dreadful mental picture of a coroner's inquest, of articles, paragraphs, and photographs in the Press, faded from his mind like a nightmare at dawn.

"Thank heavens!" he panted. "Then—then—"

"It's all right, sir. The young rascal has stuffed his clothes and hung them up here, that's all," said the prefect.

Monteith lifted down the dummy, and brought it out into the light from the little window. Then it was patent to all that it was a dummy. The laughter redoubled.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the doorway. "Ha, ha! I wedged that as a wippin' joke on Watty! It thwew me into quite a fluttah for a minute, though!"

"My hat! So it did me!" gasped Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff's face was like a thundercloud now. For a few moments relief had been his predominant feeling; but now he realised that his terrors had all been for nothing—that he had been the victim of an astounding "jape." He was almost stuttering with rage as he thought of it. His feelings now justified that eloquent expression of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy concerning the "rabid rage of Ratty."

"Where is Wynn?" he thundered. "He must be here! Figgins, fetch the cane from my study instantly!"

Figgins did not move.

"Do you hear me, Figgins?"

"I hear you, sir."

"Then obey me!"

Figgins stood quite still. Mr. Ratcliff was almost foaming. From under the bed Fatty Wynn crawled out, his plump form encased in his underclothes, which fitted his fat limbs exceedingly tightly. There was a broad grin upon Fatty Wynn's ruddy face.

"Hallo!" he said calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wynn!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff. "How dare you! How dare you, I say! You shall be punished for this! You shall be flogged—flogged!"

Fatty Wynn looked surprised.

"Flogged, sir! What have I done?"

"What!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "You dare to ask what you have done?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose there's no harm in taking off my clobber on a warm afternoon, is there, sir?" asked Fatty Wynn innocently. "There are no ladies present, sir. And I wasn't expecting company!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you hung up that—that effigy, Wynn, in order to make me suppose that you had committed suicide!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"No harm in a fellow stuffing his clothes to preserve their shape, is there, sir?" said Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't dare to bandy words with me, Wynn!" spluttered the Housemaster. "Get out of this room, all of you!"

Wynn, resume your clothes instantly. I shall cane you now, and then you shall be flogged—flogged as you deserve, you young scoundrel! I—"

Mr. Ratcliff broke off as Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, hurried into the room, the fellows making respectful way for him. The Fourth-Form master was looking very much alarmed.

"What is this I hear?" he exclaimed. "Is it possible that Wynn— Why, here is Wynn, safe and sound. Thank goodness! Wynn, my dear boy, I was sure you would not be so wicked and foolish as to do such a thing! I was sure there must be some mistake. Thank Heaven, I find you alive! Dear me—dear me!"

"It was a trick," thundered Mr. Ratcliff—"an infamous trick! Wynn hung up a dummy, sir, to give me the impression that he had committed suicide. What is your opinion of that, sir?"

Mr. Lathom blinked at him over his spectacles.

"My opinion is that we should all be very glad that the matter is no worse, Mr. Ratcliff!" he said tartly.

"Hear, hear!" sang out the juniors.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at them.

"Clear away immediately, all of you!" he shouted. "Mr. Lathom, I shall be obliged if you will retire also. I am going to punish Wynn so severely that he will never wish to play such a trick again!"

Mr. Lathom's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

"Indeed! I do not say that I approve of such a joke, Mr. Ratcliff, but I think that Wynn has been sufficiently punished!"

"I don't agree with you, and I am about to make an example of him! Pray leave me to regulate affairs in my own House, sir!"

"Wynn belongs to your House, certainly, Mr. Ratcliff. He also belongs to my Form; and it is the duty of a Form-master to protect his boys from cruelty!" said Mr. Lathom.

"What!"

"If you wish to inflict further punishment upon Wynn, I do not agree."

"I do not care twopence, sir, whether you agree or not!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, who was too furious to care what he said.

"Very well. If you wish the matter to go further, we will take it before the Head, and leave it to his decision."

"I decline to be meddled with in my own House! I request you to retire immediately, Mr. Lathom!"

"I will do so; and I will take Wynn with me!"

"You will do nothing of the kind!"

"Wynn, dress yourself," said Mr. Lathom, paying no heed to the infuriated Housemaster. "You will accompany me immediately to the School House!"

"Yes, sir," said Fatty Wynn, with alacrity.

He was already dressing, Figgins and Kerr helping him.

"Wynn, I forbid you to quit this room!" said Mr. Ratcliff, almost choking with rage.

"I am bound to obey my Form-master, sir," said Fatty Wynn.

"You will obey me, Wynn!"

"Mr. Lathom comes first, sir," said Fatty cheerfully. "I could not possibly disobey a master whom I respect, sir!"

There was a chuckle from the juniors at this plain intimation from Fatty Wynn that he did not respect Mr. Ratcliff.

The Housemaster made a furious stride towards him. Mr. Lathom calmly stepped in between.

The little Form-master looked at Mr. Ratcliff calmly over his spectacles. It was, as Tom Merry remarked afterwards, something like David defying Goliath, and Lumley-Lumley added that the odds were on David.

Mr. Ratcliff paused. He could not proceed further with-

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out committing assault and battery upon Mr. Lathom, and even the infuriated Ratty stopped short of that. The juniors hoped that he would do it; they only wanted him to lay a finger on the master of the Fourth, and they would have rushed upon him and dragged him off, and bumped him and ragged him, Housemaster as he was. But fortunately Mr. Ratcliff had sense enough not to go too far.

"Very well, Mr. Lathom," he said, in a suffocated voice, "you have ventured to interfere with me in my own House; you will answer for it before the Head."

"I am perfectly willing to do so!" said Mr. Lathom. "In fact, I shall proceed directly to Dr. Holmes, and take Wynn with me. Are you ready, Wynn?"

"Yes, sir!"
"Then come!"

Fatty Wynn walked out of the room under the wing of his Form-master. The juniors burst into a roar of cheering.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"
"Silence!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.
"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Mr. Ratcliff's voice was drowned in the roar.

CHAPTER 16.

All's Well that Ends Well.

DR. HOLMES' brow was very stern as he listened to what the Fourth Form-master had to tell him. Fatty Wynn stood silent while Mr. Lathom was speaking.

Mr. Ratcliff entered the Head's study a few minutes later. He realised that it would not do to have the opposite version told first without interruption. Mr. Ratcliff had done his best to calm himself. It would be worse than useless to present himself before Dr. Holmes in a towering rage. But try as he would to calm his nerves, he was trembling with anger and excitement as he came in.

Dr. Holmes met him with a cold glance.

"I am sorry to see that a dispute has arisen between two masters," said the Head. "Such a dispute is calculated to bring authority into contempt in the school. Wynn, you may go."

"Am I to go back to the punishment-room, sir?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No. You are excused."

"Thank you, sir."

And Fatty Wynn quitted the study without a glance at his Housemaster.

"I am sorry to see this!" Dr. Holmes repeated, with emphasis. "On certain points, the authority of a Form-master and a Housemaster must overlap, but it should be the special care of each that there should be no friction. Such friction can only have a bad effect upon the discipline of the school."

"I am aware of that, sir," said Mr. Lathom. "I hesitated very long before bringing the matter to your notice. I felt, however, that I could do nothing else."

"Quite so, Mr. Lathom; my remarks were addressed more especially to Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head.

"To me, sir!" said Mr. Ratcliff, trying to calm his voice, but not succeeding very well. "I fail to understand you, sir. Mr. Lathom deliberately entered the House that is under my charge, and interfered with me in the execution of my duty."

"I interfered to protect a boy in my Form from cruelty and tyranny!" said Mr. Lathom drily.

"Tyranny, sir! You dare—"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head icily. "I trust I am not to witness a quarrel in my study."

"Mr. Lathom accuses me—"

"There is no doubt whatever in my mind, Mr. Ratcliff, that you have gone too far. I do not approve of the old-fashioned method of punishing a junior by detention in the punishment-room, upon a diet of bread and water, unless under the most extraordinary circumstances, which have certainly not arisen in this case."

"But—but—"

"Pray allow me! If this matter had come to my knowledge, I should certainly not have punished Wynn with this great severity. I think you left Mr. Lathom no course open to him but to interfere."

"Thank you, sir!" said Mr. Lathom.

"The matter is now ended, Mr. Lathom," said the Head kindly. "I may add that I thank you for bringing it to my notice, and I cannot find any blame whatever attaching to you. You have performed a most disagreeable task in a manner, sir, that I should have expected of you, and I can say no more than that."

Mr. Lathom was blushing with pleasure as he quitted the study. The kind little gentleman had never been known to go upon the warpath before, and it had made him feel very nervous and uncomfortable, and the Head's words were balm to his troubled mind.

But the Head's words to Mr. Ratcliff, after the Fourth Form-master had gone, were by no means balmy or comforting.

"I don't think we need discuss this matter, Mr. Ratcliff. You have erred upon the side of severity. Wynn has played a very alarming prank; but we must thank our good fortune that it was only a prank, and not a serious matter. It is quite possible that a boy might have been excited to the pitch of doing something very foolish, Mr. Ratcliff, by such a system of punishment as you have followed. I must request you never, in future, to inflict this punishment without in the first place laying the facts before me."

Mr. Ratcliff found it difficult to speak.

"Very well!" he gasped, at last. "Your wishes shall be obeyed, sir. I will do my best, and if I find it impossible to meet your views, Dr. Holmes, I shall have no resource but to resign my position in this school!"

Mr. Ratcliff intended this as a thunderbolt; but the Head received the thunderbolt with great equanimity.

"I should be sorry, of course, if you felt obliged to take such a step, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "However, if you considered it advisable to do so, I should be the last to place any obstacle in your way. Good-afternoon, Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Ratcliff almost staggered from the study. He was not likely to resign his extremely comfortable and well-paid position at St. Jim's; but it came into his mind that the Head might request him to resign, and he realised that it would be best for him to be very careful. For once Mr. Ratcliff was cowed, and to the surprise and delight of the fellows in his House he showed unmistakable signs of a disposition to "lie down."

Fatty Wynn, needless to say, was the hero of the Lower School.

He had taken a rise out of Ratty; he had put the obnoxious Housemaster into his place, and taken him down several pegs.

He had carried out his hunger-strike, even after the supplies had been cut off, and fellows who knew Fatty Wynn best knew what a terrific strain that must have been upon his constancy and courage.

But he made up for the hunger-strike now.

His friends—and their name was legion—marched him off to the tuckshop, and they planked down their cash with royal liberality, standing Fatty Wynn such a feed as had seldom been stood him before.

Fatty Wynn did tremendous justice to that feed—his hunger-strike had prepared him for great feats in the gastronomic line—and as Tom Merry remarked, it was a treat in itself to stand and see him eat.

The smiles had returned to Fatty Wynn's plump face, and when he had finished that tremendous feed, and had no room left even for another jam tart, his expression was simply beatific. Which was a very happy ending to Fatty Wynn's Hunger-strike!

THE END.

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THE CORINTHIAN.



A Magnificent New Story of the Old-Time Prize-Ring. By BRIAN KINGSTON.

READ THIS FIRST.

Hilary Bevan, a sturdy young Britisher of gentle birth, who has been living in the country, sets out to walk to London

TO SEE HIS FATHER.

Sir Patrick Bevan, whom he has not met for three years. Arriving at his father's house, Hil learns that the latter has been absent for three days at the house of Sir Vincent Brookes, one of the leading bucks of the time. He also learns that Sir Patrick has earned the nickname of

"PLUNGER" BEVAN,

and is heavily in debt, having dissipated his fortune.

Bending his steps to Sir Vincent Brookes's house in Grosvenor Street, Hilary finds two sheriff's men waiting outside to arrest his father when he should come out. The lad enters the house, and

FINDS HIS FATHER AT THE GAMING-TABLES,

where he has been for three days and nights.

Sir Patrick rises from the table an utterly ruined man. Hilary, his heart full of grief, slips out of the house, and, engaging the two waiting sheriff's men in a fight, puts both of them to flight, thus saving his father from immediate danger of arrest. The sum for which a warrant is out against Sir Patrick is only twenty guineas; and in order to raise this amount, Hilary's next act is to accept a challenge offered in the prize-ring at Moulsey Hurst. His opponent is a Jew pugilist, Barney Isaacs by name, while Hil, fighting under the name of Harley, gains a decisive victory, and awakens the interest of a young Corinthian named D'Arcy Vavasour.

Hil seeks out Sir Vincent Brookes, and pays him the twenty guineas Sir Patrick owes, but on going to his father's house finds everything being sold up, and his father gone no one knows whither.

Hil decides to adopt the prize-ring as a career, and at a supper which is attended by the leading patrons of "The Fancy" Vavasour offers to match him for a thousand guineas against any boxer of his weight that Sir Vincent Brookes may select.

Other wagers are also to be decided between the two bucks by a cock-fight and a shooting match. Sir Vincent accepts Vavasour's challenge, and Hil goes into training under the care of Harry Harmer, an ex-pugilist.

(Now go on with the story.)

Mr. Vavasour's Warning.

With a good horse between his knees, Hil left London at three o'clock one morning. His destination was Leigh, a secluded little village within seven miles of Hitchin, where was located a house belonging to Mr. Vavasour. Here were kept the fighting cocks which would do battle with Sir Vincent Brookes' birds in a week's time, the pit at Newmarket having been agreed upon by both parties as the scene of the encounter.

It had suggested itself to Vavasour that the cottage would be a capital spot from which Hil could do his training. Harmer would join him there later. To this suggestion Hil had readily agreed.

A little to his surprise, Hil found Vavasour, who seldom left his bed-room before midday, dressed and ready to accompany him for a few miles on the road. Something of a meal was eaten before they started, and both were in the best of spirits, Vavasour being particularly ready and crisp of speech.

"Upon my soul," he said, as they crossed Oxford Street, and turned into the road leading to Hampstead—"upon my soul, but it is a real pleasure to breathe the air of London before the crowding of its streets has taken away its freshness. You like London, Ned?"

"Not in preference to the country."

"Then I deplore your want of taste. The country is vastly well for certain purposes. The London cream, for example, is very inferior, and there is a certain purity about rural water which in that obtainable in cities does not exist. But then I never drink water, and my doctor positively refuses to allow me to take cream. It is fattening, and fat is a most disagreeable misfortune. Have you observed, Ned, how impossible it is that a fat man should appear well dressed?"

This was the kind of conversation that wearied Hil; but he admitted a fat man not to be graceful, yet praised the country for its greater healthiness.

"For those who are content to live on bacon and eggs and drink ale, yes," drawled the dandy. "But the accomplishment is not one for which I am anxious. Healthy? Well, cows and plough horses are healthy; but surely you would not wish to be like either?"

In such strain he continued, Hil not knowing whether he was in jest or earnest, his manner was so serious, his words so preposterous. But an hour beyond London he was driven out of his perverse mood.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE RAG-TIME SCHOOLBOYS!"

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Crossing Finchley Common, a ragged fellow who had been lying under a hedge suddenly scrambled to his feet as they drew near, and ran into the road.

"Haven't ye a copper for a poor cove that ain't seen a bite o' grub for three days?" he whined, running alongside Vavasour's horse.

"Is that the time you have been out of prison, my friend?" asked Vavasour.

Judging by the fellow's face and sturdy limbs, the want of food seemed the least likely of his complaints. Still running, he ran his sharp eyes over the riders and their equipment, keeping up the whine for assistance. Vavasour sharply bade him give way, unless he wished to be ridden over; but the man persisted until they had reached the corner of a lane, and then, in a loud voice, he suddenly cried out something quite unintelligible to Hil.

But there were hearers who did understand. From out of the lane ran a troop of ragamuffins—men, boys, and women, tattered and dirty. They surrounded the horses, a burly female grabbing at the bridle of each, so that the animals came to a standstill, plunging and backing.

"They've no barkers, pals!" sang out the fellow who had begged; and the information encouraged the rest of the crew.

The men seized hold where they could, striving to force the riders' feet from the stirrups. In ten seconds from the warning call Hil and Vavasour were the centre-points of a couple of swearing, scrambling mobs, whose object was plain.

To spur the horses and ride down the women hanging to the reins was out of the question, and, lustily as the horsemen plied their riding-whips, striking at tousled heads and ragged shoulders, with odds of eight to one, the travellers were in a serious position.

The assailants—a crew of wandering tinkers, thieves by instinct, and footpads whenever the opportunity offered—were mostly armed with short, heavy bludgeons, and, though they got in each others' ways, they inflicted some damage. Once dragged from their saddles, Hil and his companion would quickly have been hammered into insensibility, and left to their fate.

"Catch at my bridle!" shouted Hil, who had no intention of being thus dealt with.

With a twist of the reins, he forced his horse nearer Vavasour, several of the rascals getting their feet stamped on in the process, relinquished the bridle as he saw Vavasour snatch at it, withdrew his feet from the stirrups, and, with a spring, landed in the road.

So quickly did he act, the attackers were taken by surprise, and the first two at whom he struck with his clenched fists dropped without a chance of guarding the straight shots that felled them. Into the thick of them he drove, his speed enabling him to evade the few half-hearted blows levelled at him. Inside ten seconds from reaching the ground, he had five of the tinkers lying on their backs.

"Stand to it, cullies! Ye're a pretty lot of gonoffs to be bashed by one flash gentry cove!" shouted a tall, grimy fellow, who seemed to be the leader. "I'll floor him!"

He ran at Hil with his stick raised, and his other arm across to stop the expected blow. Hil feinted with his right, and up went the fellow's arm. In an instant Hil was inside his guard, one hand on his wrist, and an arm across his neck. There was a quick step across and a twist, and the next instant the tinker went flying through the air, heels over head.

That shattering cross-buttock finished the business. Seeing their leader remain where he fell, the rest took to their heels into the lane.

"Well done, Ned!" cried Vavasour, as Hil climbed back into the saddle. "Hurt, are you?"

"A bruise or two."

"Then we will get on. This part has an ill reputation, and there may be more of the gentry about!"

Putting their horses to a gallop, they did not draw rein until the village of Whetstone was reached.

"Now, I would give much to know if this attack on us were but accident," said Mr. Vavasour suddenly.

"Why, surely nothing else?" Do you think otherwise?" asked Hil.

"Intuition, Ned, is sometimes stronger than reason. For you to have been injured would be confoundedly useful to some persons whom I know."

"You mean Sir Vincent Brookes?"

"Well, being aware of the terms of the wager between that gentleman and myself, you will agree, my dear Ned, that for you to be prevented from beating Ephraim Fennel would mean a very handsome sum of money in that good man's pockets—none too well furnished at present, as I have reason to know, his success with the cards—in which, by the way, his acquaintances are developing lately a lively interest—notwithstanding. You were too well occupied, I presume,

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just now to perceive that our assailants were more interested in you than myself. I have not even a bruise!"

"And you suggest—"

"I suggest, my dear Ned, that there is more than one person who associates with gentlemen, and from outward appearance might be supposed by the casual observer to be one himself, who, if his interest pointed in that direction, would not be averse from employing such assistance as that of the ruffians with whom we have had to do. I believe I do Sir Vincent no injustice by thinking him one of that kidney. A dangerous man, Ned, as I have already informed you; one who sticks at little. The manner in which he brought Sir Patrick Bevan to ruin proves that. One of these days I am hopeful of the truth being made known. Sir Patrick is my friend, and I will not deny I thought of him when making the wager with Sir Vincent."

"You mean that if Sir Vincent lose the wager with you, he will be brought to the condition of my—Sir Patrick Bevan?" asked Hil quickly.

"Such is my hope," Mr. Vavasour said gravely, appearing not to notice the slip Hil had almost completed. "He is a bad man, Ned. He has ruined scores; and if he be brought to beggary 'twill be no more than his deserts. The risk is no light one I have taken. The odds are against me winning; but I have right and justice on my side. But Sir Vincent is a man for making sure; he leaves little to chance. And when to win is so important to him, he will stick at nothing to make winning certain."

"Last night after we returned home I went out again. I had not forgotten Sir Vincent's visit to the Swan Tavern, and it set me thinking. I went to the tavern. Faugh! The smell yet clings to me, and the hope of ridding myself of it is the reason for this ride with you. I did not see Sir Vincent, but there was his creature Cokeley in conversation with a ruffian whose conduct in the Ring has led to him being warned off by the P.C. Club. Such association is not without meaning, Ned. They were surprised to see me, but no doubt thought me a little sprung."

"You think, then, there is likelihood of foul play, Mr. Vavasour?"

"I say that Sir Vincent is a man not above foul play. Whether the encounter of this morning be connected with him I do not assert. But be on your guard, Ned—be on your guard. And now I will wish you good-bye! I hope you will be comfortable!"

Slightly lifting his hat, Darcy Vavasour turned his horse, and rode back towards London, leaving Hil with plenty to think about as he continued his journey. For Darcy Vavasour's sake, for his own, and, above all, because of his father, he told himself he must win the coming battle with Fennel. And if Sir Vincent Brookes did attempt foul play—Hil clenched his fist.

The next day Brookes met Darcy Vavasour, and carelessly inquired where Ned Farley had gone for his training. When he learned, he was forced to turn aside to hide the satisfaction he could not keep from his face. Fortune had truly favoured him. He was going to kill two birds with one stone, and an unpleasant surprise was awaiting Hilary Bevan.

"The Hertfordshire air should bring him to the scratch in good condition, Mr. Vavasour," he said.

"Sufficient to satisfy me—and his opponent likewise, I trust," the other drawled.

The Shadow in the Lane.

"What I can't understand is why Harmer hasn't yet turned up. It was arranged he was to be here early this morning."

Hilary Bevan was sitting on a stone bench outside the entrance of the little whitewashed, rose-grown cottage which constituted his training-quarters, also the spot where Mr. Darcy Vavasour's gamecocks were reared and trained. His companion, a little man of middle age, with a sharp, lined and very brown face, tough as whipcord, and renowned as being the best hand in England at the training and feeding of fighting-cocks, took his pipe from between his lips and glanced at the lad with an acid smile.

"There's a mort o' things in this life we can't understand, lad, just because they ain't what we expected," he said.

"Most o' 'em's simple enough when we learn the truth of 'em. Chap as you're expecting ought t'ave been here five hours ago; well, he ain't come. What of it? Happen he's stayed over for another quart o' ale, or carrier's horse has cast a shoe. Donnot ye worry, lad; he'll come in time!"

"I'm not worrying." And Hil laughed.

He had been in old Jem Rider's company but a little over twenty-four hours, yet already the two were friends. The trainer, who had been in Mr. Vavasour's service and that of his father before him, was a dry old stick, shrewd with the shrewdness of the North-countryman, not over ready with his

tongue, and was the possessor of a grim humour that found frequent vent.

Time and again offers had been made him by various great patrons of the sport in which a good half of his interest in life was centred. Colonel Mellish, that extravagant supporter of the Turf, the Ring, and the Cockpit, had once promised him a thousand pounds down, showing him the money, if he would leave his master to take in hand the colonel's birds; but Jem Rider had refused point-blank. He was Darcy Vavasour's man, and for his master he would lay down his life.

"Ye're t' lad as is going t' win from Birmingham chap, eh?" had been his greeting when Hil dismounted at the cottage. Rider's grim blue eyes travelled slowly over the lad from head to toe. "Well, ye looks as though ye'd do it, too. Come in an' mak' yerself comfortable like."

The cottage stood at the side of a grassy lane or "ride," and a quarter of a mile or so from one end of Leigh village, a tiny collection of cottages and one inn, clustering about an ancient, square-towered church. It was something lonely. "The better for that," Jem Rider declared, for he had a great distrust and suspicion of any overlooking of his feathered charges and his work with them. A high hedge shut the cottage off from the lane, and the entrance to the garden was through a stout gate, which at night the trainer was careful to make fast with a big padlock. At one side was a plot of flower garden and fruit bushes; on the other, vegetable ground. Behind was a small paddock, and between the paddock and the rear of the cottage an enclosed yard.

In the yard, in pens elevated four feet from the ground, lived the gamecocks, one to each pen, and so situated that the occupants should not see each other. This was necessary; otherwise, the birds, given a view of a rival, would have been mad to fight, and, being prevented, would suffer in health.

Each pen was secured by hasp and padlock, and Rider's first duty on rising and his last before going to bed, was to see that these fastenings were sound. Rivalry among cock-fighters ran high. There were blackguard hangers-on to the game, as with the Ring, and attempts to "nobbie" another man's birds were not unknown.

Supper-time arrived—seven o'clock—and still Harry Harmer had not put in an appearance. Hil began to get anxious, in spite of his companion's assurances.

"He's a milling cove—a tribe as I niver thought much on, meaning no disrespect to you, lad," the old fellow said. "Ain't to be trusted, nohow. I've seen some of 'em. Now, wi' a gamecock—"

"Never find a waster or a rogue among them?" asked Hil slyly.

"I'm not for saying ye wouldn't sometimes. There's good an' bad in all things, birds as well as men. But I trust men less than birds. And what for d'ye want wi' a trainer at all? I've as good an eye as most for fitness, man or cock, and ye'll niver be in better fettle than ye are now, lad, choose what. Let yon Harmer alone. I'll warrant 'tis something simple is keeping him."

And Jem Rider was right, without knowing it. Just so simple a matter as a few of what were known as "knock-out drops," slyly dropped into a pint of ale to which Harmer had been treated by an acquaintance whom he had met in Hitchin. The drops had worked finely, and Harmer was lying in a stupor, carefully put away in a harness-room, what time the man who had bought the ale left the public-house to rejoin his waiting companions, and gleefully inform them the trick had succeeded.

Harmer was a game man, a dangerous fighter in the ring, as well as undeniably as clever a user of the muffers as you could have found in any sparring saloon in London, and there was certainly no sense in meeting more opposition than was necessary. Wherefore, the fellow who had hounded the trainer's ale felt pleased with himself, and laughed and joked with his half-dozen companions as they tramped the dusty, hilly road between Hitchin and Leigh village.

"When Harry does get there, he'll find his charge will want summat o' training to make him fit for Ephraim Fennel," he declared.

And the others agreed. They were an ugly-looking crew, ill-clad, but muscular-looking; with hard, battered faces, and quick, restless eyes. A tough fighter every man of them seemed, big calved, strong-shouldered, and thick of neck. Men of the Ring a knowing customer would have classed them, nor would he have been far out. But there was that in their faces, a savage, ferocious gleam of eye and hostility of manner such as was not usual with the majority of the hardy fellows who shied their castors into the roped square and stood up together until they could stand no longer for love and a bellyful.

"Thee and I have never quarrelled. Why shouldn't we fight?" had asked one champion of the ring of another professor. And for this best of reasons they did fight, and the

challenger won, each man doing his best out of professional pride, and the desire to prove which was the better man, and no ill-feeling after the mill. But this crew, tramping the Hitchin road, looked of a very different kidney, men who fought for money, and none too particular how and with whom they fought.

The few persons who passed them on the road eyed them askance, and hurried by as though glad not to be noticed by such ugly-looking fellows. They might have been honest men, but they looked confoundedly like mischief. And appearances were not deceptive.

Happily unconscious of the designs of Sir Vincent Brookes, and the preliminary success that had attended his hired ruffians, Hilary sat down to his supper of cold roast chicken, stale bread, and ale, with a hearty appetite. After all, it mattered very little if his trainer were a day or two late. Jem Rider had spoken truth; he was feeling in fine fettle, and ready to fight for a kingdom. Had he required anything to strengthen his intention of winning the match with Fennel, it was to be found in what Darcy Vavasour had told him when they parted. That Sir Vincent Brookes had acted dishonourably towards his father he had known; but that the baronet had been an active means towards his parent's downfall had been news. And then there was the suggestion of dishonest play with the cards. Here was good enough reason for a feeling of righteous resentment. And on the top of all came the warning against Brookes's likelihood to employ fraud for the winning of his bet with the man to whom Hil certainly owed a debt of gratitude. But as to how that intention could be realised, especially as himself was affected, the clean-thinking, honest-souled, honourably-minded lad could not discover. He knew nothing of those evil tricks, fraudulent or violent, that base rascals, even in those, the palmy days of the Ring, sometimes attempted.

Over the meal he drew Jem into conversation upon his birds, and found the old trainer a ready and enthusiastic talker. Much he learned of the science of cooking, the selection of the young birds, their walking and training, their feeding—an important, not to say expensive, item—the mimic combats fought with muffled spurs, the exhaustive preparation for the pit that was necessary.

"Best cocks in England, bar none, are t' maister's," old Jem declared; "and sure as Fate, lad, they'll win at New-market 'gainst t' best the baronet can find. What beats me is that t' chap should be fool enough to mak' t' match. His sense is about nowt for him to try."

"Well, I suppose he thinks differently, or he wouldn't have made the match."

"Ye can niver say what men be thinking," replied the Yorkshireman. "A fair reckless chap, this Brookes, but 'cute. 'Tis that mak's me wonder so. There's t' shooting-match, now. Captain Friend 'll be shooting for him, and Squire Listone for t' maister, an' none but a fool but kens Squire be a better shot. There's summat back o' that Brookes' head, I'm thinking."

Supper over, and Jem having washed up—he would allow no women in the house—they took themselves to the bench again, the trainer with his pipe, and Hil, his eyes alert for Harmer's coming, listened to yarns of the cockpit, and some of the speaker's personal adventures, until nine o'clock. Time for bed, and upstairs the lad went, having accompanied Rider the round of the yard to see that the birds were safely fastened. The entrance-gate was secured, candles blown out, and in half an hour the cottage was in darkness.

But although he undressed himself and got into bed, Hil did not sleep. Lying on his back, broad awake, he stared at the low, timber ceiling of the little bed-room, thinking of a score of different things. Where was his father? Would he beat Fennel? And to what use would he put the hundred guineas that had been promised him if he did? Had Darcy Vavasour any suspicion as to his real identity? Very nearly had he betrayed himself that morning. Would he have to remain a boxer all his life, or until he was no longer able to win battles?

All at once a sound, that was neither the creaking of the boughs of the tall elms in the lane nor the scratching of the mice of which the cottage held so many, caught his ears. It came from outside—a sharp, abrupt sound, like a human exclamation, and close at hand. He raised himself, listening intently.

Now, Hil was not nervous; a strong and healthy young man as himself rarely is. Yet, sitting up in bed, his ears strained for a repetition of the noise, a vague unrest and excitement, amounting almost to the anticipation of something threatening, filled him. So strong grew the impression, that at length he rose and approached the narrow window that looked across the paddock.

There was nothing to be seen. The night was neither light nor dark, yet had there been anything abnormal to be seen he would have seen it. More than once he had been up all night, tramping woods and fields with his friend

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Squire Oliver—a born enemy of poachers—and he had acquired the faculty of seeing and hearing in the dark much that another would have missed. He went to the other window, set in the outside wall of the cottage, and giving a view across the vegetable garden upon the lane, and within two seconds he saw what he felt sure was the figure of a man emerge from the further hedge, slip across the lane, and lose itself in the shadow of the high, bushy hollies between the cottage and the lane. Immediately after a man showed clearly near the cottage gate. He saw the fellow raise one arm, as though beckoning, and then came a soft whistle.

Vavasour's warning rushed into his mind, and, retreating from the window, he hurried into some of his garments. The men, whoever they were, were up to no good. Wandering tramps and vagrants would have found a spot to pass the night long before this, unless they intended a raid upon the garden and outhouses. True, the cottage was lonely, and an easy haul of poultry—Poultry! Quicker than lightning rushed the thought through Hil's brain.

The gamecocks were in danger!

Common tramps or the perpetrators of some evil design of Sir Vincent Brookes, it mattered not who the men were, the birds must be protected. Jem Rider must be aroused.

Passing the window that looked upon the yard, Hil had a glimpse of a man in the very act of throwing a long and round burden from his shoulders over the gate communicating between the paddock and the yard. He recognised the shape and size; it was a truss of straw.

What was the foul design was not to be doubted. The straw was to be fired, and the fighting cocks roasted in their pens!

Down the dark stairway went Hil at top speed. He did not even stay to rap at the door of the trainer's room and acquaint him with what was afoot.

A Hot Fight in the Dark.

HOT with anger, every muscle tingling with the need for use, Hil ran through the kitchen and to the back door. There was no lock, two long bolts securing it, and these he shot back, threw open the door, and leaped into the open. From the door to the yard gate he covered in three strides, to find a squat fellow bending down with his fingers to the padlock, and cursing it heartily. As he straightened up and turned half round, alarmed by the opening of the door, Hil was upon him, striking fiercely with a heavy whip he had snatched up as he came through the kitchen. By the fraction of a second the man saved himself from a disabling blow. Twisting aside, he escaped the stroke, and the whip smashed into splinters as it met the topostmost bar of the gate.

Running back, the man shouted, but Hil gave no heed to him. Beyond the gate he saw a bright tongue of flame shoot up. Quickly as he had acted, the invaders had been no less expeditious. A man had entered the paddock, placed his truss of straw between two of the pens, and struck a light with flint and steel. As Hil set his hands upon the gate and vaulted over it, another man entered the yard by the forced paddock gate, and he also was carrying a truss.

The raiser of the fire saw Hil flying towards him, and backed from his work. The truss had not been unbound, and as he ran at the man who had lighted it, with one tremendous kick Hil lifted it clean from the ground and hurled it clear. Falling upon the lighted end the flame was extinguished.

The impetus of his rush carried him full upon the first man, who struck out, but the force of the blow was lost, his arm having no chance of straightening against the impact of Hil's body. Then the man fell back, like a full up-ended sack struck by a battering-ram, Hil's fist having taken him with fearful force squarely between the eyes.

There was shouting behind him, for now that his appearance showed their intentions discovered the need for secrecy vanished; but to the voices and hurried stampings of quick, hurrying feet behind him Hil could give no attention. Whatever happened, everything must be done to ensure the safety of the gamebirds; to leave the second man to go on with the work of the fellow whom he had so thoroughly knocked out of time was not to be thought of. And he was a fellow not to be disposed of easily.

Dropping his truss, the hired ruffian clenched his fists and prepared for battle. He had no notion who Hil was, and he did not much care. Of course, he must be the trainer of the birds, as none other was supposed to be at the cottage.

"Put 'is light out!" cried a hoarse voice savagely from the far side of the gate; and the man proceeded to try and carry out the instructions.

(A long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 292.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

A. Sutcliffe, Box 11, Pakuranga, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in the British Isles.

H. Beckett, 124, Princes Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

A. Atkinson, care of Pigott & Co., Ltd., Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 14—16.

Miss M. Cook, care of Miss Lewis, Box 34, Kalgoorlie, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in India or America, age 19.

G. Brokate, Renmark, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 15—16.

L. Barber, Havelock Street, Dunolly, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps, age 15—16.

E. A. Lemon, 17, Loukes Street, Fremantle, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Devon, interested in stamps, age 14—16.

Miss R. Comer, King Street, Timuka, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with boy readers living in Australia and Canada, age 18.

Miss Eileen Gibson, 20, Rose Road, Grey Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers in China, India, or Africa, interested in postcards, age 13—15.

Tom Allsup, corner of Roebuck Road and Childers Road, Gisborne, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 18—19.

G. S. Watts, P.O. Box 25, Benoni, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England or Canada, age 15—16.

A. B. Ireland, P.O. Box 113, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards.

V. J. Victoria, 10, Castle Road, Hong Kong, South China, wishes to correspond with readers in the British Empire, age 15 upwards.

B. Knight, 108, Ferrier Avenue, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

L. Silverman, Box 4099, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England interested in photography, age 16—17.

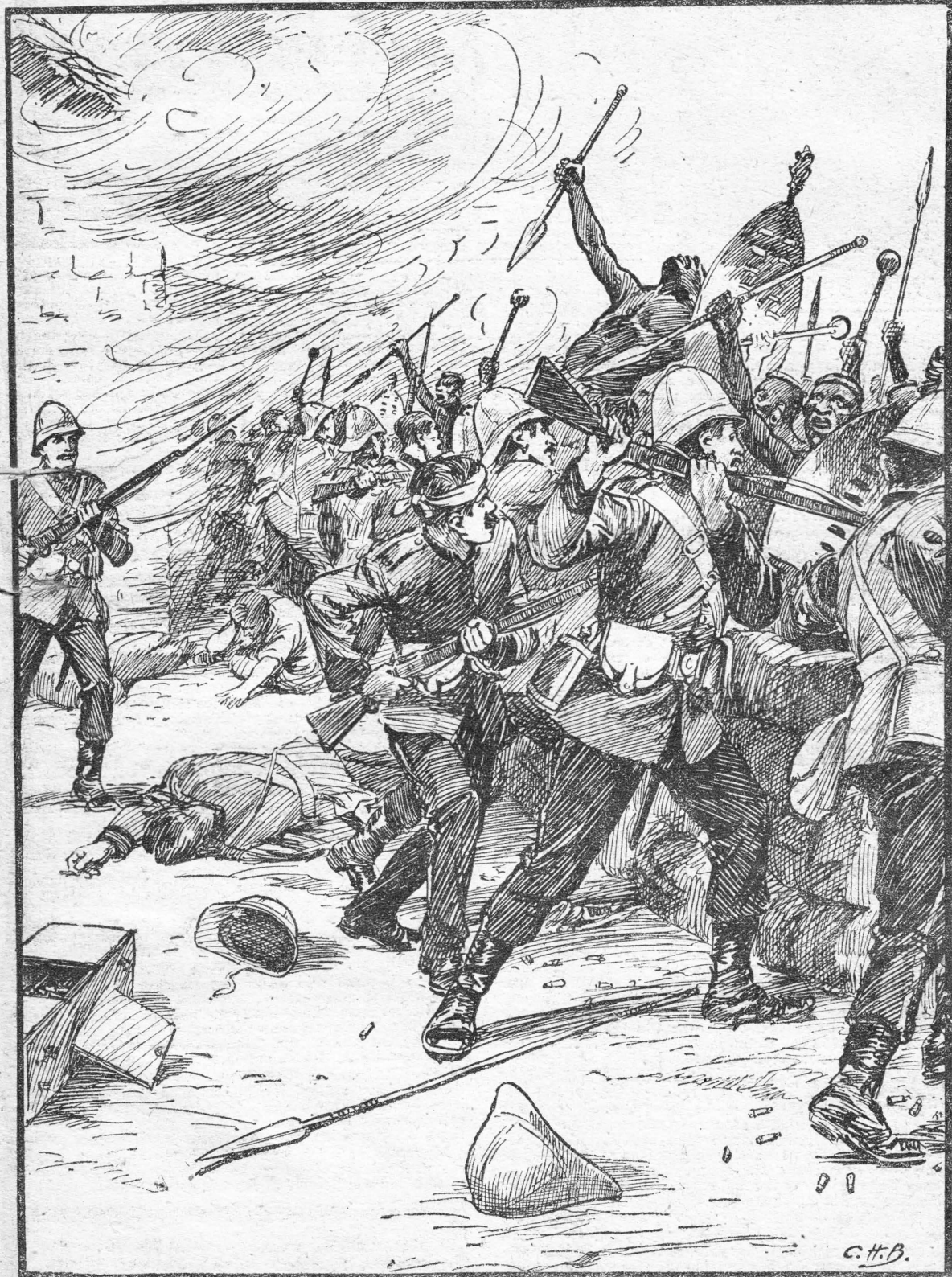
H. K. Abe, Honcho, Shinjo, Uzen, Japan, (via Siberia), wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or New Zealand, age 15—18.

Miss L. Keane, G.P.O., Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with an English girl reader, age 17.

A. Sinclair, care of Miss C. Sinclair, Woodville, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

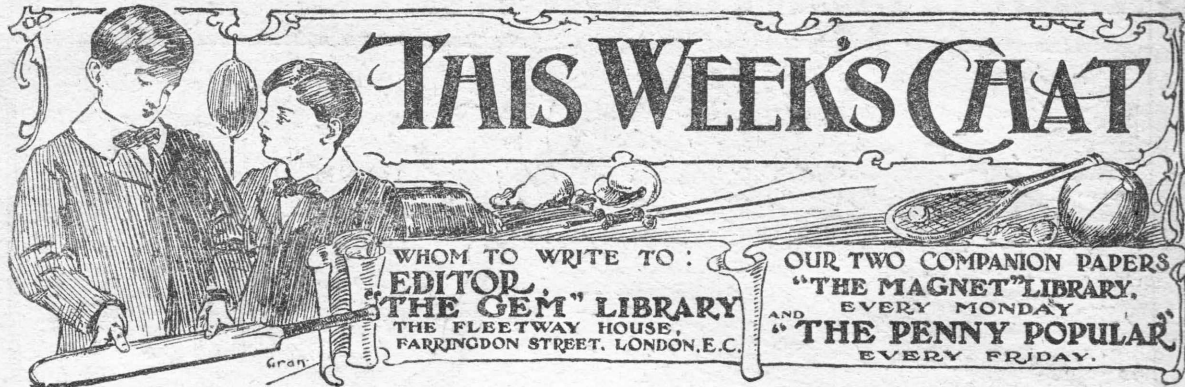
FAMOUS FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG. No. 19



Specially drawn for "THE GEM" Library by C. H. Blake.

During the defence of Rorke's Drift on January 22nd, 1879, during the Zulu War, Lieutenants Chard and Bromhead, with 159 men, 35 of whom were sick and wounded in hospital, successfully defended the post against over 4,000 Zulus. Truly a magnificent performance, and one that all Britishers may feel proud of.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"THE RAG-TIME SCHOOLBOYS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

This grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's is one that will make a special appeal to all Gemites. As a bright, complete tale of school life, with plenty of interest and, above all, plenty of fun, such as all schoolboys—and schoolgirls, too love to indulge in

"THE RAG-TIME SCHOOLBOYS!"

will be hard to beat. Don't forget, my chums, to order next week's GEM in advance.

THE EDITOR TO HIS CHUMS.**A Personal Note.**

In order to clear up a question which seems to be troubling a good few of my readers, judging from the number of letters I receive making inquiries on the subject, I should like to explain to my chums that

THE ONLY THREE PAPERS

that are under my personal and direct control are the three companion papers which, by reason of their wholesome brightness and outstanding superiority of tone, have, I am proud to say, earned for themselves the popular title of

"THE INVINCIBLE TRIO."

It is the work of my life to make these three grand companion papers—*THE GEM*, *"The Magnet,"* and *"The Penny Popular,"* indissolubly bound together as they are—the very best story papers of their class; and, judging from my satisfied readers' letters, and by my steadily increasing circulation figures, I have not altogether failed. In these times, however, when competition is so keen on every side, it will be well for my loyal chums to remember always that, come what may, *"The Magnet,"* *THE GEM*, and *"The Penny Popular"* are their Editor's papers—and the papers for them!

COLONIAL CHUMS EXPLAIN!

From time to time I receive letters from Colonial readers, whose names have been inserted in the Free Correspondence Exchange, containing explanations of some circumstances that have prevented them from replying to their correspondents. In many cases the reason is simply that they are overwhelmed by the great number of letters they receive from would-be correspondents in the Old Country. Such a case is that of Miss Rutherford, of Sydney, New South Wales, who wrote me recently as follows:

"61, Undercliff Street,
 Neutral Bay, Sydney, N.S.W.

"Dear Editor,—Will you please thank through *THE GEM*, all readers who so kindly answered my request for a correspondent? I received so many replies that I find it impossible to answer them all. I have been a reader of *THE GEM* for three years now, also *"The Magnet,"* and, of course, *"The Penny Popular"* since the first copy. I think them all grand. Thanking you, in anticipation,

"ANNIE M. RUTHERFORD.
 (A regular subscriber)."

Another Colonial chum, however, advances quite a different reason to account for his seeming lack of courtesy in not replying to those who wrote to him. This is the letter Master Roughton, of Malvern, Australia, sends:

"Roycroft, Malvern Grove,

"Malvern, Vict., Austr.

"Dear Mr. Editor,—Some time ago you were kind enough to put my name in the Correspondence Column of *THE GEM* Library, and, as a result, several readers wrote to me; I wrote back to a young lady in Leicester; but before I had time to answer the others, I was injured in a motor accident. While I was in charge of the doctor the letters were destroyed accidentally, so I had no means of finding the addresses. So, if it would not be asking too much of you, I would like you to put a short paragraph in your paper explaining the reason why I have not replied, otherwise I will think me an awful rotter.

"As regards the popularity of *THE GEM* and *'The Magnet,'* I can positively say that they put every other book, paper, or magazine in the shade. I have visited the chief towns and resorts of Australia, and everywhere you go boys may be seen selling our companion papers,

"Your cheerful reader,

"HARRY E. ROUGHTON."

I must thank both these Colonial readers for their letters, the publication of which, they may rest assured, will clear them from all suspicion of discourtesy in the eyes of those of the fellow-readers who may have written to them without receiving any answer. Incidentally, the letters published above once more provide excellent testimony as to the immense popularity of *THE GEM* Library Free Correspondence Exchange among British boys and girls in every quarter of the Empire.

HOW TO WRITE A SHORT STORY.—No. 2.

By a Successful Author.

Material for plots stares you in the face every day. Your newspaper abounds with cases forming matter for plots—stories in magazines may suggest ideas for other stories; pictures, still and moving, are replete with suggestions—and in the conversations of your friends you may find many an incident suitable for making a story out of.

Atmosphere. Now don't try to write a story about a Kentish hop farm if you have never seen one—only read about them. You will do much better to write about the school, office, or workshop you have spent many long years of your life in, and know thoroughly.

There is much said about inspiration—and victims of it. One hears it said that great authors write only when the mood takes them. That is all very well for authors who have heaps of money apart from their work; but for the man who lives by the guinea per "thousand words" inspiration is a mistress he must always be courting, whether he likes it or no.

If you have a fit of inspiration—then sit down and write it off by all means—but put the work aside for a week, then calmly review it, and you will be surprised how much room there is for revision.

My motto is: Think a great deal before you begin to write out your scheme of action, before you commit it to paper, so that you will be able to run it off quickly and easily when the time comes.

(Another of this Splendid
 Series of Articles next
 Wednesday.)

The Editor