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No.
346.
Vol.
9.



IN THE HANDS OF THE SECRET COMMITTEE!

The end of the Fourth sat up and looked dazedly about him. Three dark figures stood round him—covered from head to foot in black cloaks. "You are accused of sneaking!" said one of them sharply. "Do you plead guilty or not guilty?" (An exciting incident in the grand long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. in this issue.)

THIS WEEK'S CHAT.

The Editor's Personal Column.

For Next Wednesday—

"TOM MERRY'S FIND!"

By *Martin Clifford.*

In this splendid long, complete story of the famous chums of St. Jim's Tom Merry is revealed in quite a new capacity. Chance saddles him with a most peculiar—and somewhat troublesome—charge, and invests him with duties that are quite new to him. However, he stands by his duty manfully, like the good fellow he is, and never regrets the trouble and excitement that was caused to him and his chums by

"TOM MERRY'S FIND!"

A WORD IN SEASON.

In spite of the grave state of affairs in our country at the present time, I feel sure I can confidently look to my vast army of reader-chums to stand by "The Gem" Library loyally.

The time has now arrived when the "Gem's" staunch supporters can prove their loyalty by coming forward and making strenuous efforts on behalf of their favourite paper. The continued success of the "Gem" and of its companion papers depends wholly and solely upon its readers.

Many of you will be perusing this Chat Page amid the invigorating surroundings of camp-life. There you will meet with all sorts and conditions of fellows—Scouts, Cadets, and Territorials—many of whom have never read our papers, and are in ignorance of the entertaining reading matter they contain. Here is a golden opportunity for the loyalist. He can boom the "Gem" abroad. He can tell of the excellence

of its stories to his many camp-mates; and, in short, he can be the means of securing a large complement of new readers. If he does this, he can be quite satisfied that his part has been performed in keeping the good old "Gem" Library from going on the wane. I take this opportunity of thanking my reader-friends for the co-operation I have already received from them.

In the meantime, there will be no falling-off in the "Gem" stories to be presented to my readers during the coming weeks. The stories of famous St. Jim's School will lose none of their charm, and fine war features and illustrations will also be provided. No opportunity will be neglected in order to keep the invincible trio of companion papers in their place in the front rank. All I ask is the earnest support of my ever-loyal chums in these troublous times.

THE EDITOR.

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

I have recently received a letter from the Three Leaders League in which I am informed that, for the benefit of American, Canadian, and Newfoundland readers, a branch of this League has been opened at 355, Baltic Street, Brooklyn, New York, United States of America.

Any of my readers in those parts, or any other part of the American continent, who wish to join the League, are invited to write to the above address for full particulars. A stamped addressed envelope should be enclosed for the reply.

I am also asked to give notice to readers in Great Britain that they may join by writing to the London office of this League, which is at 26, Princes Square, E.

Once again I must offer my congratulations to the president and his conferees on the success of their undertaking.

Master A. Hoebberg, of 75, Teignmouth Road, Cricklewood, London, N.W., informs me he is desirous of forming a "Gem" League in his district, so all my readers in that neighbourhood who would like to join Master Hoebberg in this enterprise should communicate with him at the above address, enclosing a penny stamp for reply.



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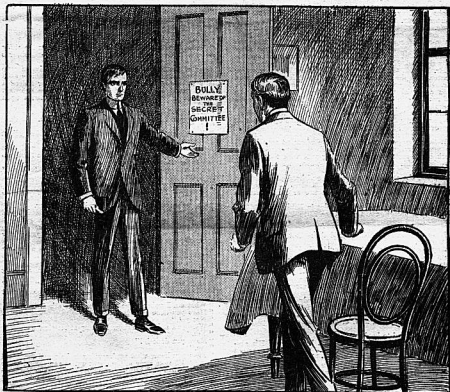


COMPLETE STORIES
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THE SECRET COMMITTEE!

A Grand Long, Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



"My hat! Look here!" Knox gave a yell of wrath as he caught sight of the notice on the outside of his door. Cutts gave a whistle. "That wasn't there when you came in," he said. "Some kid has had the awful cheek to put that notice there while we've been playing." (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER I.

Mutiny!

"MATTYFAHS are gettin' sowsies!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that statement in a very decided tone.

And the half dozen glum-looking juniors who were gathered in Study No. 6 in the School House growled in reply:

"Bom-wow! Tell us something we don't know." Tom Merry & Co. were looking glum. As a rule, those cheery youths were quite bright and chuffy. Tom Merry's smile was like a ray of sunshine. Monty Louther was always humorous. Manners was a

cheerful chap. And Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, of Study No. 6, generally looked as if they hadn't a care in the world.

Now they looked as if they had been collecting the cares of the whole universe.

The sunny smiles, the cheery chipping, the little jokes, were all gone. The glory, so to speak, had departed from the House of Israel.

Evidently something had happened. In fact, as Arthur Augustus put it, matters were getting serious. The Terrible Three of the Shell had come along to Study No. 6 to talk matters over with the chums of the Fourth. As Monty Louther declared with great solemnity, it was time for them to stand shoulder to shoulder, if St.

Next Wednesday:

"TOM MERRY'S FIND!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

Jim's wasn't to go entirely, hopelessly, and absolutely to the giddy bow-rows.

In the first place, the Head was ill.

The juniors, who liked and respected their Headmaster very much, were a little concerned about him. Still, it cannot be said that the Head's illness, by itself, would have brought this tragic gloom to their youthful brows. They were sorry he was ill; but they could have borne it with fortitude if there had been nothing else the matter.

But there was.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was away. The juniors missed their kindly, cheery Housemaster, who always had a genial nod and a smile for them. Yet again it must be admitted that Mr. Railton's absence by itself would not have plunged them into the blues in this way. They could have borne up under it quite cheerfully.

It was, to come to the point, the "rotten" state of affairs resulting from the illness of the Head and the absence of Mr. Railton that worried them.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was acting in Mr. Railton's absence in his place. Mr. Linton was a good Form-master, somewhat severe in his methods, but upon the whole Tom Merry & Co. were pleased to give him their approval. But as a Housemaster he was, as Tom emphatically declared, N. G.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, as senior master, took the Head's place while he was indisposed. And Mr. Ratcliff was a severe, acid, "nagging" gentleman, with a special "down" on Tom Merry & Co. True, he did not come into contact much with the heroes of the Shell and the Fourth. But he could not be trusted to hold the scales of justice with an even hand. Anybody who was down on Tom Merry & Co. was certain to be looked upon with an approving eye by Mr. Ratcliff.

Hence the trouble.

With a disapproving Headmaster to whom no appeal could be made, and with the reins of House government in a slack hand, matters were not going well with the juniors; especially with the juniors with whom we are chiefly concerned.

Kildare, the captain of the school and head prefect of the School House, did his best. But Kildare could not see everything, and he could not be in two or three places at once.

And the juniors could not tell tales to Kildare.

Knox, the prefect, and Cutts of the Fifth, Tom Merry's old enemy, found their opportunity now, and they were not slow to take advantage of it.

Lines and lickings—lickings and lines—that was the order of the day.

Any appeal to Mr. Ratcliff would only have increased the lines and lickings. And any appeal to Mr. Linton would have been equally useless, for the Shell master quite approved of lines and lickings, as the best method of governing unruly youths.

Therefore, it was clear that matters were getting serious; very serious indeed.

Of the seven juniors gathered in Study No. 6 there was not one who hadn't a large number of lines still in hand, imposed by Knox the prefect, or by Mr. Linton himself, or by Mr. Ratcliff. And most of them had smarting palms in addition.

Something had to be done.

Jack Blake had wildly suggested a barring-out. His suggestion was met with a general snort. Barring-out were out of date. Besides, the juniors could not decently make trouble of that sort while the Head was ill. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared with emphasis that it would be bad form, and the other fellows agreed, even Blake acknowledging that Gussy was right for once.

Still, something had to be done. The Head's indisposition might last for weeks. Mr. Railton would certainly be away a week at least. And the Co. had come unanimously to the conclusion that they weren't going to stand it.

"Mattahs," said Arthur Augustus solemnly, "are gettin' altogether too serious. I have two hundred lines to write out."

"And I've got three hundred!" growled Herries.

"We've all got lines," said Tom Merry, rubbing his palms together; "and Knox caned me this afternoon. He said I was making a row in the passage."

"And you weren't?" asked Dig sympathetically.

"Well, perhaps I was," admitted Tom Merry. "I couldn't chuck a cushion at Levison without making a little bit of noise, of course. But it was no business of Knox's."

"Certainly not!"

"Wathah not, deah boy."

"And we can't do anything with Ratty!" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "All we can do with him is to keep out of his way."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Only we can't keep out of Knox's way, and Cutts's. That's the GEM LIBRARY.—No. 346.

rotter Cutts! He's only in the Fifth, and he ain't a prefect; but he's taken to cuffing the juniors," said Manners, with a deep breath of indignation; "and if we go for him back again it's a row, and we get the prefects down on us."

"It's wotten!"

"Heastly!"

"Intolerable!" said Manners.

"What's going to be done?"

"I wopeat that mattahs are gettin' awf'ly serious, and I suggest that some step be taken," said Arthur Augustus.

"What step, as?"

"I refuse to be called an ass. Undah the circs—as it will, of course, require thinkin' out—I propose that you fellows put yourselves undah my guidance—"

"Rais!"

"As a fellow of tact and judgment, I considah—"

"Rot!"

"If you fellows are goin' to make wudeh remarks, I shall have no alternative but to withdraw from the discuss," said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity.

"Hear, hear," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, jumping up as the study door was thrown open. "What the dickens— Oh, it's Knox!"

Knox of the Sixth strode into the study. He had a cane in his hand, and a frown upon his brow. The juniors eyed him with suppressed fury. Any other prefect, or indeed a master, would have knocked at the door before entering. But Knox of the Sixth had no politeness to waste upon juniors.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Blake.

"Have you done your lines?" demanded Knox.

"No!"

"Wathah not! Quite imposs to do so many lines all at once, Knox, deah boy."

Knox frowned more dazkly. He knew very well that the juniors had not done their lines; he had given them too many to be done in the time.

"You were ordered to take in your lines before tea-time," said Knox, in his most bullying tone.

"Yaas, but—"

"I warned you that you would be caned if you didn't do them."

"Oh, we're going to do them," said Tom Merry.

"That won't do. Your impositions are doubled," said Knox, taking out a pocket-book, and making a pencilled note; "and if you've not shown them up before bedtime to-night, they will be trebled. That will keep you pretty busy to-morrow afternoon, I fancy."

The Co. looked daggers at Knox. The morrow afternoon was a half-holiday, and the juniors did not want to be kept busy with lines on that afternoon.

"And now, hold out your hands," said Knox, swishing the cane. "You first, Merry."

Tom Merry's eyes gloamed. He was getting "fed up" with Knox and his bullying. His temper was getting near danger-point.

"What am I going to be caned for?" he asked.

"Have you done your lines?"

"Not yet."

"Were you ordered to show them up at tea-time or not?"

"Yes."

"Have you done it?"

"No."

"Then you know what you're going to be caned for," said Knox. "I'll take some of the cheek out of you, or I'll know the reason why! I'll bring you to your senses while Railton's away, and he'll hardly know you when he gets back. Hold out your hand!"

"And the rest of us after Tom Merry, I suppose?" asked Blake.

"Yes; the lot of you. I'll teach you something like discipline now there's a chance! I don't approve of cheeky fags!" Tom Merry put his hands behind him.

"Do you hear me, Merry?"

"I'm not deaf," said Tom coolly.

"Then hold out your hand."

"I won't!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bwas, deah boy! And I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort, too."

Knox paused. For a junior to disobey the orders of a prefect of the Sixth was something new. Yet it had been certain to come, sooner or later, if Knox persisted in his persecutions. Now it had come.

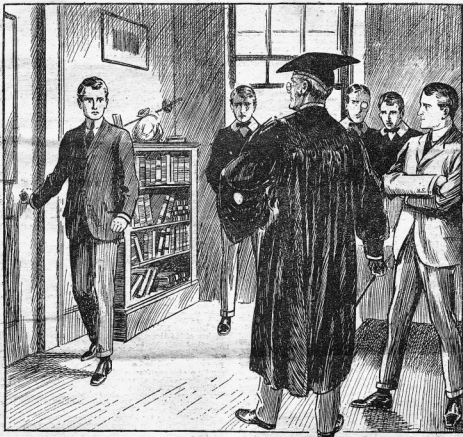
"Very well," said Knox, lowering the cane, "I shall take you to Mr. Linton and report you. Follow me!"

"Rats!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Why, I—I—I— You cheeky young swep!" roared



"If you haven't confidence in me, sir, there is nothing for me to do but to resign from my position as a prefect," exclaimed Kildare hotly. "I therefore place my resignation in your hands until Mr. Ralston's return, when I shall ask him to consider the matter." Mr. Linton nodded coldly. "I accept it!" he said. (See Chapter 2.)

Knox, quite losing command of his temper. "I—I'll thrash you within an inch of your life! I'll—I'll—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Wags!"

"Clear out!"

"Shut up!"

Subordination was evidently at an end, and the juniors, having once broken out, as it were, were having their money's worth. If a licking from Mr. Linton was to follow, they felt that they might as well compensate themselves in advance by "slanging." Knox to their heart's content.

"Yaas; wun away, Knox! You are an uttah-wottah!"

"And a rotten cad!"

"And a beastly bully!"

"And a silly ass!"

"Go and eat coke! Buzz off!"

Knox did not buzz off. If he had been cooler, he might have hesitated to tackle seven angry juniors, prefect as he was. But he wasn't cool; he was in a towering rage. He leaped upon Tom Merry, and lashed out with the cane. But he had time for only one lash. Tom Merry's right came out and caught Knox on the chin with a terrific upper-cut, and the prefect staggered back. As he staggered, the juniors rushed upon him, and he was borne to the floor with a crash. Tom Merry snatched up the cane.

"Give him some for himself!" roared Blake.

"Pile in!"

"Let him have a taste of it!"

The rebellious juniors were too excited now to think of the consequences. Tom Merry brought the cane down, with a resounding thwack across Knox's shoulders as he struggled in the grasp of the juniors.

"Yow-ow! Oh!"

Knox gave a wild roar, and tore himself loose, and bounded to the door. He received another slash before he reached the doorway. Then he leaped through into the passage, and Monty Lowther's boot caught him behind as he leaped, and he yelped and rolled over.

"Huwah! Wag him!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Pile on the cad!"

"Go for him!"

But Knox did not wait to be piled on. He picked himself up and fled. His footsteps died away rapidly down the passage.

And the seven juniors in Study No. 6 looked at one another, their excitement cooling down considerably.

"My hat," murmured Blake, "we're in for it now! Whacking a prefect—by gum!"

"He drove us to it, dear boy."

"That won't make any difference to Linton. He's gone to fetch Linton. My only hat! What's going to happen now!"

And the juniors waited in considerable trepidation for the results of their unpremeditated but extremely serious rebellion.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"TOM MERRY'S FIND!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 2.

Catching It!

KILDARE of the Sixth looked into Study No. 6, with a troubled expression upon his handsome face.

Seven equally troubled faces met his gaze. Old Kildare was very popular with the juniors, and he had done his best to see that matters went well after the departure of Mr. Railton. He had kept Knox within bounds at first, but later on that became difficult, as the prefect had succeeded in ingratiating himself with Mr. Linton. Kildare was a plain, straightforward fellow, who would never have deigned to toady or flatter; and Knox had no scruples on a point like that, so he had the advantage of the St. Jim's captain there.

"Well, what have you young rascals been up to?" demanded Kildare gruffly.

"Playing the giddy goat, I'm afraid," said Tom Merry ruefully.

"Yass, wathah! I admit—"
"Knox has just rushed downstairs, looking like a demon," said Kildare. "He's gone to Mr. Linton's study. What have you done to him?"

"Caned him," said Tom.

Kildare jumped.

"You've done—what?"

"Well, it was only a couple of lashes across the shoulders, not what you'd really call a caning," said Tom cautiously.

"You—you young ass!"

"He came for me," said Tom Merry. "He was going to slog me because I wouldn't hold out my hand, and—and I think I must have lost my temper, somehow. You get fed up with Knox in the long run, you know."

"Yass; I consaidh—"

"What was he going to cane you for?" asked Kildare, with a worried look.

"Because our lines weren't done at teatime. He knew we hadn't had time to do them. How are we to show up hundreds of lines at teatime?"

"It was a bit thick, I suppose," muttered Kildare. "But you know it's very wrong to strike a prefect."

"Didn't exactly strike him. Only—only whacked him."

"I don't see much difference. I'm afraid Mr. Linton won't, either. You should have appealed to Mr. Linton instead of taking the law into your own hands."

"Ye-es; but he wouldn't have listened. He gave us some lines himself."

Kildare was silent. He knew that the juniors had been in a troublesome and difficult position, though they had undoubtedly made matters worse by acting as they had done. Striking a prefect was too serious an offence to be passed over.

There was already a heavy step and the rustle of a gown in the passage. Knox was bringing the master of the Shell upon the scene.

"I'll say what I can for you, kids," said Kildare hurriedly. "I'm afraid you're in for it, but I'll do what I can."

"Thanks, Kildare!"

Mr. Linton swept into the study. Knox followed him in with a scowling face. The prefect's clothes were still dusty from his fall in the passage. He had gone directly to the temporary Housemaster, and Mr. Linton had lost no time in coming on the scene. Ever since the departure of Mr. Railton there had been trouble of some kind or other with Study No. 6, and Mr. Linton was fed up with it. Naturally, he was not inclined to suspect that a prefect had made a set against certain juniors. It was much more probable, to his mind, that the juniors in question were usually young rascals, who wanted to kick over the traces now that their Housemaster was away, and Mr. Linton felt deeply resentful at the mere thought of being regarded as of less account than Mr. Railton. He intended to show the delinquents that he could come down on insubordination with as heavy a hand as the School House master himself.

"Kildare! You are here? I will take this matter in hand myself," said Mr. Linton. "It is too serious for a prefect to deal with."

"I wasn't thinking of dealing with it, Mr.," said Kildare.

"I looked in to see what was the matter."

"Very well. You may retire now."

Kildare hesitated.

"Excuse me, sir, I think I ought to say a word. I don't defend what the youngsters have done, of course—"

"I should trust not!" snapped the master of the Shell. "I certainly should trust not, Kildare!"

"But, sir, I must tell you—it is my duty—that Knox is too hard upon them. It seems that he was about to cane them for not having done their lines, when they have not had time—"

"I think, Kildare, that any remarks you have to make to me concerning another prefect had better be made in private," said Mr. Linton icily. "This kind of thing is subversive of all discipline."

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"If you think so, sir—" said Kildare, colouring.

"I do, decidedly. Besides, this case is clear. These juniors have insulted a prefect. If I were to pass such an offence, or deal with it leniently, I should be unworthy to hold authority in this House. I am about to punish them most severely."

"Oh, cwimbs!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"If you are going to punish them now, sir, it will not be any use my giving you my view of the case afterwards in your study," said Kildare drily.

"I am not interested in your view of the case, Kildare," said Mr. Linton sharply. "My impression is that these juniors, who are always giving trouble in one way or another, consider that they are at liberty to turn the House into a bear-garden now that their Housemaster is away. I shall try to impress upon them that the reverse is the case."

"Westly, sir—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yass, but—"

"Very well, sir," said Kildare, as Blake and Herries clutched at their chum and reduced him to silence. "If you will not listen to me, there is no more to be said. As head prefect of the House, I may say that I am entitled to be listened to."

Mr. Linton flushed.

"I am aware that Mr. Railton placed a great deal of authority in your hands, Kildare. I may state plainly that I do not intend to do the same while I am head of the House. It seems to be your desire to let the juniors run wild. I cannot say that I have confidence in you."

Kildare's eyes flashed.

"If you haven't confidence in me, sir, there is nothing for me to do but to resign from my position as a prefect!" he exclaimed hotly. "I therefore place my resignation in your hands until Mr. Railton's return, when I shall ask him to consider the matter."

Mr. Linton nodded coldly.

"I accept it," he said.

"Very well," Kildare turned on his heel and strode from the study. There was no more to be said. But as he strode down the passage, with burning cheeks and indignant heart, he heard Mr. Linton's voice:

"Knox, as Kildare has resigned, I shall make you head prefect of the House until Mr. Railton's return—afterwards subject to his approval."

"Thank you, sir," said Knox in his silky, almost cringing tones. "I shall do my very best to deserve your confidence, sir."

"I am sure you deserve it, Knox."

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind to say so."

Kildare set his teeth as he went down the passage. He was no longer a prefect—until Mr. Railton's return, at all events—and Knox was head prefect of the House for the same length of time. Kildare wondered bitterly how matters would progress in the House under Knox's rule.

In Study No. 6, the juniors stood in dumb dismay. Good old Kildare had chipped in to help them, with his usual love of fair play, and he had "got it in the neck" himself, in consequence, in the most crushing way.

Knox was triumphant all along the line.

Knox, head prefect!

There would be indignation throughout the House, in the Sixth as well as among the juniors; but Mr. Linton, who was blessed with a tremendous amount of obstinacy, which he mistook for firmness, would not be moved in the least by that.

And matters would certainly go from bad to worse for Tom Merry & Co., for now there would be no check whatever upon Knox's tyranny.

But Mr. Linton did not give them much time for thinking. He took a cane from Knox's hand, and rapped out an order.

"Hold out your hands in turn!"

The juniors had collared Knox and booted him out of the study. But the most reckless of them did not think of resisting a Form-master. They obediently held out their hands, and the cane came down, lashing again and again, till each of the juniors had had three cuts on either hand, and they were simply wriggling with pain. Then Mr. Linton and Knox returned from the scene, the prefect inwardly gleeful, and the Form-master feeling that he had performed a necessary stern duty. And in Study No. 6 there was a sound of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins Rises to the Occasion.

Figgins of the Fourth paused, and whistled softly. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the Fourth—the famous Co. of the New House—were coming along the Fourth Form passage in the School House—coming to Study No. 6.

The New House Co. for once were not on the war-path. Although the rivalry between the juniors of the two Houses

at St. Jim's seldom slept, it was "off" now—quite off. As Figgins nobly said, they couldn't rag the School House bouncers at a time when they were "down." The old dispute, as to whether the New House or the School House was cock-house at St. Jim's could stand over till things were going better with Tom Merry & Co.

Kerr fully agreed with the great Figgins in taking that view, and Fatty Wynn went a step further in suggesting that the persecuted juniors of the School House should be asked over to a stunning feed in the study of the Co. In times of trouble or stress Fatty Wynn's great specific was a feed, and he believed that a really good spread would buck up the School House fellows no end. And as the chums of the New House were in funds, Fatty's generous suggestion had been adopted non. con., supplies had been laid in, and here were Figgins & Co., brimming with kind intentions, come over to ask their old rivals to tea.

But as they drew near Study No. 6 sounds met their ears that did not seem to indicate that the juniors there were in a festive humour. Figgins & Co. paused in the passage in wonder. For this is what they heard proceeding from Study No. 6, in a kind of chorus:

"Goo-oh-or!"

"Yow-w!"

"Bai Jove! Wow!"

"Oo! My paw! Ow!"

"The awful beast! Yow!"

"The horrid rotter! Groocoooh!"

"Oh erumba!"

"Yaroooop! Oh!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

Seven different voices mingled in those remarkable exclamations, with which were mingled groans and mumbles and grumbles.

Evidently there was trouble in No. 6. Kerr remarked that it looked as if the Assyrian had come down like a wolf on the fold.

"Don't sound as if they want to go out to tea, does it?" said Figgins doubtfully.

"Oh, come on!" said Fatty Wynn. "Nothing like a feed to buck you up. When you've got to hear anything, you can't do better than lay a solid foundation. They'll cheer up like anything when we tell 'em we've got a whole salmon, and a cake, and three kinds of jam. You see."

Figgins nodded, and tapped at the door. The voice that came from within Study No. 6 was not welcoming. It said:

"Oh, go away, fathead!"

Figgins smiled, and opened the door. Seven cheerless juniors glared at the trio from the New House.

Figgins & Co. looked at them, and came into the study and closed the door. The suffering seven did not utter a word of welcome. They uttered nothing but groans and grunts.

"My hat," said Figgins, "you look as if you'd been through it!"

"Yas, wathah! We have been through it!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If the Head were not on the works, I should appeal to him. But it is no use appealin' to Watty. Your disgustin' Housemaster would only give us some more."

Figgins nodded sympathetically. "You're right, Guesy. Old Ratty has been a bit easier with us lately though. We hardly know him in the New House now. He's as pleased as Punch at being in the Head's shoes for a bit."

"He hasn't been easier with us," grunted Blake. "We try to keep out of his way. But we can't keep out of Knox's way. What do you think? Kildare has resigned, and Linton has made Knox head prefect of the House."

"Oh, rotten!"

"That means we're under his heel for good—until Raitton comes back, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! My palms feel on fire."

"I am suffervin' fearful pain, dear boys," said Knox who will be found slaughtered one of these days," said Herries darkly. "I know he will. I can feel it in my bones."

"You fellows are having a high old time, and no mistake," remarked Kerr.

"Oh, rats! Have you come over to tell us that?" growled Monty Lowther. "You can go back to the New House and eat cokes. What do you want on the respectable side of the quad, anyway?"

"Yas, wathah! I refuse to have these New House boundahs gloatin' ovah our fearful suffervins!"

"Let's kick 'em out of the House," said Manners, rising. "It will be some comfort to pass the licks on."

"Hear, hear!"

Figgins grinned, and held up his hand. "Pax!" he exclaimed.

"I refuse to pax—I mean—"

"We've come over as friends—as your old pals," Figgins explained. "While you fellows are in this hole, we've agreed

that there's not going to be any more House rows. They are off. While you're down on your luck we're going to stand by you, and back you up as much as we can."

"That's the programme," said Kerr and Wynn together.

"Bai Jove, I wear that as really wippin' of you, Figgys, dear boy, and I take back my remark!"

"And we've got a stunning feed ready in our study, and we want you fellows to come over," said Figgins. "It's really something decent."

"A whole salmon," said Fatty Wynn temptingly, "and one of Mrs. Tuggles' biggest cakes, and three kinds of jam."

"By Jove, you're going it!" said Tom Merry, laughing in spite of the aching in his palms. "This is really awfully decent of you chaps."

"Yas, wathah!"

"Three kinds of jam," said Fatty Wynn. "Strawberry, raspberry, and black currant, and a three-pound jar of each. And I've been making a lot of toffee."

"Come along," said Figgins. "No good grunting and growling, you know. Besides, we've been thinking this matter over for you, and I've got an idea."

"Whose?" groaned Monty Lowther. Lowther was suffering severely, but if he had been going to execution he would undoubtedly have made a little joke on his way there.

"My own, of course!" said Figgins indignantly. "Look here, you see—ahem—I mean, come over to the New House, and we'll talk it over in my study, without any danger of anybody spying. There are sneaks in this house."

"Look here, Figgins—"

"No offence," said Figgins hastily, "but I've heard about it. Levison of the Fourth is hand and glove with Knox, and has been giving you away."

"Yas, it's true," said Arthur Augustus. "No good being watty with Figgys for statin' the precise twuth, dear boys. Levison and Mellish have both been sneakin' and curvying favah with Knox, and gettin' us into wooks, and there's no denyin' it, half our twoubles have come from their sneakin', and the othah half frown punishin' them for their wotter sneakin'."

"Come on, then," said Figgins. "Tea's ready."

The School-House juniors rose to their feet. They could not help feeling that it was very kind of Figgins to back them up in this way, and Figgys' offer was too good to be refused. Tom Merry & Co. marched out of the study with the New House trio. As they came out into the quadrangle they were the recipients of a good many sympathetic looks and remarks from their friends.

"I hear you laid into Knox," said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Good luck to you!"

"And then Linton laid into us!" groaned Blake.

"Never mind; it was a jolly good thing," said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "I guess it will be a lesson to Knox."

"Linton has made him head prefect of the House."

"Oh, by gum!"

"Head prefect?" howled Reilly. "Bedad! What a rotten shame!"

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn. "Still, it won't last after Raitton comes back. Old Raitton knows Knox better than Linton does."

"But we shall have a high old time until Raitton does come back!" remarked Clifton Dane, with a dismaying whistle. "This takes the bun, and no mistake!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked across the quad with Figgins, leaving the School-House discussing the new and disconcerting situation with dismayed faces. They realised that they were fairly under the thumb of the bully of the Sixth now. Popular prefects like Kildare and Darrel, and Langton and Rasheden, would not be able to interfere to prevent injustice when Knox was placed in authority over them, and backed up by the Housemaster. The juniors agreed that it was getting altogether too thick; but they also admitted that they did not see what was to be done. As Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth remarked, they mightn't like it, but they had to grin and bear it. Bear it they certainly had to do, whether they grinned or not. The only fellows who were likely to grin under the circumstances were Levison and Mellish, who were high in favour with the new head prefect.

CHAPTER 3.

A Tremendous Wheeze.

FIGGINS'S study in the New House presented quite a festive appearance when the Co. ushered their guests into it. The evening was a little chilly, and there was a big fire blazing in the grate, and the kettle was singing cheerily on the hob. The table was spread for tea, and a handsome spread it was. The whole salmon, of which Fatty Wynn was justly proud, reposed on a large dish, and looked very tempting indeed. And in spite of their sufferings Tom

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Merry & Co. realised that that severe caning from Mr. Linton had not impaired their appetites. They were hungry!

Figgins made the tea, Kerr carved the salmon, and Fatty Wynn handed round the plates and the toast. Under the cheering influence of fragrant tea and a good feed and good-fellowship, the persecuted heroes of the School House felt their spirits revive. Life seemed to be tolerable after all, and quite worth living, even with Mr. Linton in old Ralton's place, and Knox head prefect of the School House.

"Bai Jove! this is bettah than House wags," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Thank you, dear boy; I will have another helpin'. What about that ideah you were speakin' of, Figgys? We are prepared to give it our distinguished consideration."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry & Co. cordially. As a matter of absolute fact, the chums of the School-House did not think that Figgins's idea was likely to amount to much. They had a strong persuasion that the School-House was the place for ideas, and that all "wheezes" emanating from the rival establishments were only "so-so" at the best. But Figgins & Co. had acted so handsomely they were prepared to listen to Figgins's suggestions at any extent just then, and make the very best of them.

Figgins coughed modestly. "Well, I think it's rather a good idea, myself," he remarked. "You see, I've been reading a story about a Nihilist society, and that put it into my head."

Tom Merry paused with his fork halfway to his mouth. "A Nihilist society?" he said.

"Yes. You've heard of them—secret societies, you know. They have 'em in Russia and—and places," said Figgins, rather vaguely. "The Russian Government doesn't allow politicians to get up on their hind legs and jaw, as they do in this country, so they form secret societies, where they can jaw as much as they like. And they throw bombs and things—"

"Bai Jove! I twust you are not suggestin' that we should throw bombs and things!" ejaculated D'Arcy, in alarm.

"Of course not, ass!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I know all about all their methods," went on Figgins, evidently much taken with his idea. "When a person is disagreeable to them—a Czar or a Prime Minister or some bouncer of that kind—they hold a secret council, with masks over their chivvies, and remove him."

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled. "Remove him?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"How do they remove him, dear boy? And what good does it do to remove him? I suppose he would be just as disagreeable in one place as another."

"Ass! Removing him means blowing him up, or chopping him down, or something like that."

"Gwreat Scott!"

"Of course, that's carrying the thing too far," went on Figgins. "You don't want to blow Linton up, or chop Knox down. But what's the matter with a secret society, like the giddy Nihilists, with the brake on? You see, they've got a down on you in your House. You can't go for Knox without getting Linton on your necks. You can't go for Linton without being sacked. But a secret society could go for the rotters, and nobody would know. Nobody would suspect whence came the blow!" said Figgins impressively, apparently borrowing that expression from the Nihilist romance he had lately perused with so much profit.

"Bai Jove!"

"A secret society!" said Blake, with a thoughtful brow.

"It would be jolly good fun, anyway."

"Masks and daggers and things," said Digby. "Good egg!"

"Penny plain, twopenny coloured!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther—" began Figgins warmly.

"Yes, shut up, Monty," said Manners. "I think Figgys's idea is a jolly good one. A secret society could go for the rotters without getting it in the neck afterwards."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"But if Knox goes for us, and a secret society of seven members goes for Knox, it won't take him long to guess who they are, even if we have our chivvies masked like Deadwood Dick and Murdering Bill," he remarked.

"Yass, that's so."

Figgins smiled superior.

"But it won't be a secret society of seven members," he explained. "It will be a society of three members, and you can take it in turns to act, you see. The other members can show themselves in public about the same time, and prove an alibi. Moreover—"

"That's a good word, anyway," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Moreover," repeated Figgins firmly—"moreover, the first time the secret society gets to work, all the seven of you can be in public places, open to inspection, so that you can't be suspected. For we three will take your places for the first sitting—see! Suppose, for instance, Knox is collared and taken somewhere for judgment, and punished—three masked johnnies do the business—of course, he'll suspect you at once. You'll prove that all the time you were in your studies or in the common-room, or attending old Lathom's lecture, or something of the kind. That will clear you of suspicion, and then you will be able to go to work afterwards quite safely."

The chums of the School House looked admirably at the great Figgins. Certainly he was turning his perusal of Nihilist romances to good account, and all for their sakes.

"Risky, if you get bowled out!" said Blake.

"We're willing to risk it, to give you a start," said Figgins; "and after the secret society has once got to work it will be a regular case of terrorism, same as in Russia. Knox won't dare to bully and rag the kids when he thinks he may be collared at any moment by the Masked Three or the Black Band, or whatever you like to call it. Cutts of the Fifth will pull in his horns a bit, I fancy. Levison and Mellish will stop sneaking when they find that the Murderous Three are on their track. Even old Linton might go slow when he receives a mysterious warning from the Black Brotherhood."

"Yass, watah!"

"By Jove, Figgys, you are a corker!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's simply a stunning wheeze. And it will be great fun, too."

"Tremendous, dear boy!"

Figgins smiled with satisfaction. He was not above feeling gratified at impressing the School House juniors with the excellence of New House wheezes. Certainly nothing of the kind had ever been mooted at St. Jim's before. And the mere idea of forming a secret society, with black masks and secret signs, and the whole bag of tricks complete, so to speak, appealed very much to the imaginations of the juniors. Already, in their mind's eye, they could see themselves hauling the obnoxious Knox before the secret tribunal, and passing judgment upon him, and making him thoroughly sorry for himself, without a fearful kicking from their Housemaster to follow.

"It's ripping!" said Tom Merry. "Keep it dark, of course. Not a word outside our noble selves."

"Yass, watah!"

"You can post up notices to the obnoxious persons—such as bullies and sneaks," continued Figgins. "Something in this style: 'Tremble! The Secret Tribunal is on your track!' Or, 'Look out for the Bloodstained Brotherhood!'"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, it's stunning!" said Blake. "We'll make 'em hop! And we've got masks and things among our props in the Junior Dramatic Society; no difficulty about that. Masks and black cloaks, that's the wheeze!"

"We'll try the villains before the secret tribunal," said Manners thoughtfully. "Mind they don't recognise our voices, though."

"You can cultivate deep bass voices for the occasion," said Figgins; "and, as I said, we three will take the matter in hand for the first sitting of the Secret Tribunal. The meetings can be held in the old tower—that's well out of the way—after dark. We can keep the props there, hidden under one of the loose stones in the floor. When a victim is to be captured, he's suddenly tackled in the dark, a sack slipped over his head, and there you are!"

"Bwaww!"

"You let us know when you want us to get to work, and we'll be ready," said Figgins. "You can rely on us. Have some more tea?" went on Figgins, suddenly dropping from the dramatic into the commonplace, and the juniors grinned.

That tea in Figgys's study was, after all, a joyful occasion. The juniors discussed and rediscovered the scheme with ever-growing satisfaction. Even if the Secret Tribunal did not have the effect intended, at least it would be a lark. But all the members of the society hoped that the effect would be great—that the tyranny of Knox, the bullying of Cutts and Gilmore, and the sneaking of Levison and Mellish, would be nipped in the bud, and that everything, as Figgins remarked, in the garden would be lovely.

ANSWERS

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 346.
FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in **"CHUCKLES," #4**

CHAPTER 5.

The Sneak!

"ANYBODY got a dogwhip?"

Harry Noble of the Shell, more familiarly known as Kangaroo, asked that question in the School House.

It caused some surprise among the juniors to whom he put the question.

"What the dickens do you want with a dogwhip?" asked Clifton Dane. "You haven't got a dog."

"A horsewhip would do."

"But what—"

"If not, I shall have to use a cricket-stump," said Kangaroo.

"But what's the little game?" exclaimed Blake.

It was after morning lessons, the day after the great meeting in Figgins's study in the New House. Tom Merry & Co. had discussed the great scheme of the secret society at great length, but as yet no step had been taken in the matter.

"It's Levison!" said Kangaroo, breathing hard.

"Sneaking again?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! The wottah!"

"I've just had Linton down on me," said Kangaroo, whose face was red with anger. "Knox reported me to him for splitting his canes in the Form-room. It's time his canes were split, I should say! But how did Knox know I split 'em? He wasn't there. Somebody was watching me, and told Knox."

"Levison or Mellish," said Tom Merry. "Nobody else in the House would do such a rotten thing as spy on a fellow and sneak about him."

"Wathah not!"

"That's what I want the dogwhip for," said Kangaroo.

"I'm going to call on Levison, and talk to him."

"With a dogwhip?" chuckled Blake.

"Yes. Words are no good with a cad like that. But a jolly good licking may teach him to keep his tale-telling to himself."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on, though!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Unless you're quite sure it is Levison, it is hardly the thing to pitch into him."

"Yaas, he ought to be twied," said Arthur Augustus.

"Bethah leave him until—"

"Shurrup!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I was not goin' to say anythin' about the Secret."

"Cheese it, you idiot!"

"I refuse to be called an idiot, and I repeat that I was not intendin' in the least to mention the—Yow—ow—ow! Some howwid idiot has stamped on my foot! Yow!"

"It's all right, Tommy," said Kangaroo. "Levison's going to own up."

"How do you know?"

"I'm going to lick him till he does," explained the Cornstalk, "then I'll kick him for sneaking—see? Quite simple."

And Kangaroo, having failed to find either a dogwhip or a horsewhip, contented himself with a cricket-stump, and walked away to Levison's study, with a crowd of juniors at his heels.

Levison of the Fourth was more than suspected by the juniors of playing the sneak. Knox, the prefect, had an almost unearthly knowledge of their doings, almost of their very thoughts. If a fellow broke bounds, if he split a cane, if he inkeed Knox's Sunday topper, if he put treacle in Cutts's slippers—if he did anything, in fact, that was not allowed by the rules of the school, Knox always knew all about it. It was quite clear that a spy and a sneak was at work. And suspicion naturally turned upon Levison of the Fourth, who was well known to be perfectly unscrupulous in such things. Levison was very "thick" with Knox of the Sixth, and was never by any chance punished by him. And some of the fellows had begun to treat Levison with unaccustomed civility, knowing that it was in his power to get them into trouble with the tyrannical prefect, if he chose.

But Kangaroo was not one of that kind. He was the kind of fellow to adopt sterner measures, and he would have been cut in pieces before he would have truckled to the cad of the Fourth.

The Cornstalk threw open the door of Levison's study and strode in. Levison and Mellish were there, talking together and chuckling. The two outsiders were having quite a good time since Mr. Railton had gone away. Under Knox's rule they had become personages of unusual importance and consideration.

Both of them stared insolently at the crowd of juniors in the doorway. But they looked a little disquieted at the sight of the cricket-stump in Kangaroo's hand.

"I've been licked," said Kangaroo, plunging into the subject at once.

"Indeed!" said Levison. "Not before you needed it, I dare say."

"Somebody watched me splitting Linton's canes, and told about me."

"Go hon!"

"I think it was you, Levison."

"You are at liberty to think what you like."

"And at liberty to thrash a sneak!" said Kangaroo, seizing Levison by the collar and jerking him off his chair.

"Now, you rotter!"—the cricket-stump rose and fell—"take that—and that—and that—"

"Yow—ow—ow—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that—and that—and that! Own up, you cad!"

"Knox!" screamed Levison. "Knox!"

"He's asking for knocks, and he's getting knocks," grinned Monty Lowther. "Give him what he's asking for, Kangy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Care!" yelled Reilly from the passage. "Here comes Knoxy!"

Knox the prefect strode into the study.

"What is this?" he exclaimed angrily. "What are you doing to Levison, Noble?"

"Licking him for sneaking," said Kangaroo coolly.

"Put down that stump!"

"Certainly! I've finished with it."

"Now follow me to the Housemaster."

"Follow in your father's footsteps," murmured Monty Lowther.

Kangaroo hesitated; but he decided to follow Knox. The head-prefect of the School House swung out of the study, and the Cornstalk followed him to Mr. Linton's room. The master of the Shell looked up with a worried frown.

"I have to report Noble, sir, for a brutal assault upon Levison with a cricket-stump," said Knox. "It is a particularly bad case, Noble having attacked a smaller boy than himself with a stump."

Kangaroo flushed crimson.

"You rotter!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "I licked him for sneaking, as you know!"

"Silence, Noble!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Well, sir, Mr. Railton never allowed sneaking when he was here," said Kangaroo independently. "Knox oughtn't to allow juniors to come to him telling tales."

"I trust that there is nothing in what Noble says, Knox?"

"Nothing at all, sir," said Knox calmly. "I certainly should not allow tale-bearing, if I knew of it. I trust you know me better than that, sir. I have endeavoured to carry out your wishes and instructions to the best of my ability, sir; that is all."

"Quite so, Knox. I will put down this unreasonableness!" said Mr. Linton, taking up his cane. "You have acted in a ruffianly way, Noble. I shall punish you severely. Hold out your hand!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold out your hand at once!"

Kangaroo gritted his teeth and obeyed. He received six cuts before he was dismissed from the study. And Mr. Linton's last words were:

"If you repeat this conduct, Noble, I will detain you for every half-holiday for the rest of the term, and I shall make it a point to ask Levison whether you interfere with him in any way."

Kangaroo departed in silence. To be gated for the half-holidays for a whole term would be a worse punishment than the most severe flogging, and he realised that it would not do.

Levison was safe after that.

When the juniors were going in for lessons that afternoon Levison met the Cornstalk in the Form-room passage, and regarded him with a sneering smile. Kangaroo clenched his fists, and unclenched them again.

"Had your lesson—what?" asked Levison, with a sneer.

"You cad!" muttered Kangaroo. "You've only got to wait till Railton comes back, then there will be an end of your sneaking, and I'll—"

"Oh, rest!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Levison, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You're all gas, you know!"

Kangaroo made a stride towards him.

"Look out, Kangy!" muttered Tom Merry. "Knox is watching you!"

"Well, what are you going to do, you rotter?" asked Levison, eyeing the Cornstalk coolly.

Kangaroo controlled himself with difficulty.

"I'm going to wait!" he muttered. "It will keep!"

"So you are threatening Levison, Noble?" said Knox.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"TOM MERRY'S FIND!"

A Magnificent New, Lond. Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. by MARKIN CLIFFORD

coming along the passage. "I heard you. You will take two hundred lines!"

Kangaroo gritted his teeth, and went into the Form-room, boiling with rage. Levison swaggered into the Fourth Form-room.

His star was in the ascendant now, and he could afford to swagger. The contemptuous look of his Form-fellows did not affect him in the least. If he could not be liked, at least he could be feared, and that was a considerable satisfaction to the end of the Fourth.

But, as Blake remarked in a furious whisper to Dig, his time was coming.

It was not advisable for anybody to "go" for Levison openly. The sneak and the bully were hand-in-glove, and Levison was safe from open punishment. But when the Secret Tribunal got to work, then there would be trouble for the "rotters." Figgins's great idea was the only resource.

CHAPTER 6.
The Warning!

"GREAT Scott!"
"What does that mean?"
"Flew!"

"Is it a joke?"

"My hat!"

There was a buzzing crowd in the junior common-room in the School House. They were gathered before a paper that was pinned on the wall.

The paper was a common sheet of notepaper. Upon it was a most surprising notice, written in Roman capitals, and therefore affording no clue to the hand that had written it. And it ran:

"WARNING!

SNEAKS, BULLIES, AND ROTTERS GENERALLY,
TAKE WARNING!
YOU ARE WATCHED!
THE SECRET COMMITTEE HAS ITS EYE ON YOU!
TREMBLE!!!"

"My only summer chapeau!" ejaculated Kangaroo, as he stared at that amazing notice. "This must be a joke! It's like a bit from Figgins's serial in the 'Weekly'!"
"Somebody being awfully funny, I suppose!" remarked Glyn.

"Somebody been reading 'Deadwood Dick' and 'Blood-stained Bill,' and got it on the brain?" chuckled Dane.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Secret Committee!" said Gore. "What the dickens is the Secret Committee?"

"Secret silly asses, I should say!"

"Secret lunatics!" suggested Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a warning to sneaks, bullies, and rotters!" observed Lumley-Lumley. "I guess you had better look out, Levison!"

"And you, Mellich!"

Levison and Mellich stared at the peculiar notice. They grinned sardonically. Their impression was that it had been posted up there to scare them by some unfortunate victim of their sneaking; but they were not likely to be scared by a paper pinned on the wall of the common-room.

"Silly rot!" said Levison, shrugging his shoulders. "If a prefect sees this, there will be trouble for the duffer who stuck it up there!"

"Here's Darrel!" said Kangaroo, as Darrel of the "Sixth" passed the door. "Chance for you to speak, Levison!"

Darrel of the Sixth looked into the junior common-room. The excited exclamations of the crowd there had attracted his attention. But Darrel was not the sort of fellow for Levison to sneak to. If he had taken tales to Darrel, he would have been caned on the spot for tale-bearing, and he knew it.

"Hallo! What's the excitement?" asked Darrel, with a smile.

"A giddy secret society?" grinned Kangaroo. "Look at that, Darrel!"

The juniors made room for Darrel, and the big Sixth-Former strolled into the common-room, and looked at the notice on the wall. He looked surprised, and then laughed.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Is it a joke?"

"Must be, I suppose," said Kerruish. "Not but what something of the kind is wanted here. There's been too much sneaking and bullying since Railton went away!"

A murmur of approval followed the Manx junior's remark. Most of the fellows there were quite of his opinion.

"It's rot, of course," said Darrel, jerking the notice down from the wall. "You mustn't play these tricks, you know. Don't let there be any more of it!"

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And the good-natured prefect crumpled up the paper in his hand and walked out.

"Good old Darrel!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess Knox would have raised Cain about it. But I guess there won't be any more of it!"

But Lumley-Lumley "guessed" wrong. A few hours later there was a second notice, an exact reproduction of the first, pinned up in the same place in the common-room. The juniors saw it there, and wondered. Whoever was putting those notices up was looking for trouble, Kangaroo remarked, and sooner or later he would find it.

It had come to the ears of Knox of the Sixth somehow—the juniors could guess how.

Knox came into the common-room, and looked at the paper and scowled. The reference it contained to bullies and rotters was directed at him, as he very well knew. He glanced round at the juniors in the room.

"Who put this paper here?" he demanded.

There was no reply.

Knox gave a baffled look at the crowd of faces. If the juniors did not choose to tell him who had put the warning notice there, there was nothing to be done. Even Levison and Mellich were unable to give him any information. The Secret Committee, whoever they were, were quite unknown to the sneaks of the School House.

"I shall find out who is playing this fool trick, and punish him!" said Knox, tearing down the paper. "If there is any more of it, I shall report the matter to the Housemaster. You had better be careful!"

And Knox strode angrily away. He went to his study, where Cutts of the Fifth was waiting for him. The two black sheep of the School House intended to pass the evening pleasantly with a little game of nap—of course, quite unknown to the powers that were. If Mr. Linton had known Knox a little better, he would certainly not have made him head-prefect of the House.

Cutts of the Fifth was sitting on the table, staring at the looking-glass over the mantelpiece, when Knox came in. Knox followed his glance, and started. Upon the mirror words were traced in chalk in large Roman capitals:

"WARNING! THE SECRET COMMITTEE IS
WATCHING YOU! LOOK OUT!"

Cutts turned to the prefect with a grin.

"Is that a joke?" he asked.

"—I suppose it's some check of those rotten fags!" said Knox, between his teeth. "Did you find that foolery written there?"

"It was there when I came in," said Cutts.

"You didn't see anybody hanging about the study?"

"No; there was nobody here."

Knox took a duster, and wiped the glass clear. His face was dark with rage.

"It's Tom Merry, or some of his friends," he said. "I wish I could catch them in the act, that's all!"

"Can't your invaluable friend Levison catch them?" said Cutts, laughing.

"It seems not. But they'll be bowled out soon, and then"—Knox gritted his teeth—"then let them look out! But never mind those cheeky fags now; let's have a game!"

The two seniors settled down to their play. It was an hour later when Cutts left the study, with a satisfied smile, having won most of Knox's spare cash. He left the prefect in a temper that was far from amiable. Knox was a bad loser. As Cutts pulled the door open, he uttered an exclamation.

"My hat! Look here!"

Knox gave a yell of wrath. On the outside of the door, visible now that it was open, a sheet of paper was pinned bearing in large letters:

"BULLY! BEWARE OF THE SECRET COMMITTEE!"

Cutts gave a whistle.

"That wasn't there when you came in," he said. "Some kid has had the awful cheek to pin that notice there while we've been playing!"

Knox, pale with rage, picked up a cane, and strode out of the room. He made his way directly to Tom Merry's study. His suspicions had fallen upon the Co. at once. But the study was empty; the Terrible Three were out. Knox strode on to Study No. 6; but that famous apartment was also drawn blank.

The discomfited prefect stamped into Levison's study. He was keenly anxious to get at the author of that chalked inscription on his door, and it was a time when his benchman in the Lower School should have been able to aid him. He found Levison and Mellich together in the study, both of them looking a little queer. On the study table words had been chalked in large letters:

"SNEAK! LOOK OUT FOR THE SECRET COMMITTEE!"

"What does that mean?" roared Knox.
 "We—we found that here when we came in," faltered Levison. "Blessed if I know who did it! Somebody has been here while we were in the tukahop!"
 "You young fool! Find out who it was, and I'll skin him!" hissed Knox. "Haven't you sense enough to spot the fellow who plays a trick like that?"
 "I suppose I can't see what's going on while I'm not here, can I?" growled Levison sullenly.

"If you don't find out who's playing these tricks, you'll get a licking yourself, that's all!" said Knox savagely.
 He stamped out of the study and returned to his own quarters. He had not been absent more than ten minutes, but when he came into his room there was a fresh inscription in chalk on the looking-glass. Knox stared at it as if he could hardly believe his eyes, but there was the warning notice in large letters:

"LOTTER! THE SECRET COMMITTEE IS ON YOUR TRACK! TREMBLE!"

Knox, with feelings too deep for words, took his duster again and wiped the glass clear. The Secret Committee was beginning to get on his nerves.

CHAPTER 7.

The Secret Committee.

TAGGLES, the school-porter, granted as there came a loud ring at the bell. It was a good hour after locking-up, and Taggles did not like being disturbed. But he had been disturbed in like manner a good many times lately. He guessed that it was Levison of the Fourth who was ringing the bell, and he granted discontentedly as he went down to the gates.

"Back up, Taggles!" said Levison's voice between the bars of the gate. "Don't keep me waiting here all night!"

Taggles snorted.
 "Which I'll report you for being late, Master Levison," he growled.

Levison laughed.
 "Report, and be hanged! I've got a pass."
 "Yes, I know you 'ave, you young blackguard!" Taggles muttered under his breath. "Nice goings on since Mr. Raitton went away! Which you're a young raskil, and Knox is another raskil!"

"What are you mumbling about, Taggles?" asked Levison pleasantly.
 "Ugh!"

Taggles unlocked the gates, and Levison came in. Under favour of the head-prefect of his House, Levison of the Fourth had many liberties that were not enjoyed by the rest of the juniors. Levison did not intend to play the sneak and informer for nothing, and Knox had to make it worth his while. The head-prefect was kept accurately informed of all cases of delinquency among the School House juniors, at the price of allowing the informer to break as many rules as he liked. Levison always had a pass out of gates when he wanted one, and he wanted one pretty often. He had his own peculiar amusements outside the walls of St. Jim's, which he pursued with much greater freedom now that Knox of the Sixth was head prefect of his House.

Taggles went grunting back to his lodge, and Levison swaggered away across the dark quadrangle towards the School House.

But his swagger and his whistle died away suddenly as three dark forms suddenly leaped upon him from the shadows of the old elms.

Before he knew what was happening Levison was grasped, and a sack was dragged over his head, and the open end of it drawn tight round his waist with a cord.

Levison, taken utterly by surprise, struggled furiously inside the sack, and began to yell. But a heavy hand pressed the sack tight over his mouth, and his yells were stilled at once.

"Silence!" hissed a deep bass voice through the covering.
 "You are in the hands of the Secret Committee! Silence!"

"Help!" spluttered Levison.
 The sack was pressed more tightly over his face. Then he was swung off his feet, and three pairs of strong hands grasped him and carried him away.

Levison trembled in the sack.
 The Secret Committee, whoever they were, had not stopped short at words, evidently. The warnings posted up in the School House had been followed by deeds at last. The sneak of the School House was in the hands of the Secret Committee.

And that they were "secret" to him. He was quite assured that they were Tom Merry and Manners and Lewther, the Terrible Three of the Shell. Levison hadn't the slightest doubt on that point. And while he was being

carried silently away through the darkness he was inwardly resolving to report the Terrible Three to Knox, and bring down condign punishment upon their devoted heads.

But that was in the future. For the present he was in the hands of the enemy. What were they going to do to him? Where were they taking him?

Levison shivered.
 He had done enough to earn the severest punishment from the juniors he had spied upon and betrayed. It was only too likely that he was about to receive what he deserved, whatever might happen to the avengers themselves afterwards. And the prospect was not pleasant.

He struggled again in the sack, and was promptly lowered to the ground and bumped, and after that he ceased to struggle. He ground his teeth and waited.

Where was he being taken? For full five minutes now he had been carried, and that was time to reach any spot within the walls of St. Jim's. Yet he was still being carried on. The gates were closed. He could not be taken out of the gates unless he was dragged over the wall. Still his captors tramped on with him. Where?

Levison realised that he was being taken about at random, in order that he should not afterwards be able to retrace the journey; so that he could not, when he was free, discover the secret meeting-place of the Secret Committee.

The journey ended at last. Levison could see nothing in the darkness in the interior of the sack. But he felt that he was being carried through some doorway, into some building. Certainly it was not the School House. It might be the old tower, the ruined chapel, the wood-shed, the bike-shed, the gym—anywhere. He could not tell.

He was set down on a cold stone floor.
 There was a moment of silence, and then he heard a match strike. A candle had been lighted. Then several long minutes of silence.

Then a deep bass voice—a voice that was evidently disguised, and which Levison tried in vain to recognise—pronounced the words:

"Take off the sack!"

The sack was jerked from Levison's head.
 The end of the Fourth sat up and looked dazedly about him. Three dark figures stood round him, covered from head to foot in black cloaks. Their faces were hidden by masks, in which eye-holes had been cut, through which their eyes gleamed strangely. Convinced as he was that it was simply a comedy, and that the masked trio were only his schoolfellows, whom he knew perfectly well, Levison felt a thrill of uneasiness as he gazed upon them.

He looked round the room in which he found himself. But if he had hoped to recognise the place he was disappointed. That it was a small room was all that he could be certain of, for the walls had been draped in black—Levison could see that it was cheap canvas, daubed with black paint—and the floor was covered with the same. Overhead, black canvas had been stretched to conceal the ceiling. The room was black on all sides, without a glint to the real aspect of the place. Levison felt himself baffled. It was not likely that he would be able to retrace the way to the secret meeting-place of the masked trio. But, after all, it would not be necessary, for he was convinced that he knew whom they were.

"Bind him!"

Levison made a movement, but a grip like iron was laid upon his collar. A cord was looped round his wrists, and another round his ankles, and knotted.

He sat helpless on the floor in the centre of the black room, with the three weird-looking figures standing round him. And he noted, with growing alarm, that one of them had a horsehip in his hand.

"Prisoner!"

"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Levison. "I know you, Tom Merry! Do you think you can take me in with this kind of rot!"

"Prisoner," repeated the deep bass voice, "you are in the hands of the Secret Committee!"

"I'm in the hands of three silly fools who've been reading American penny horrors, and who are playing the giddy game!" growled Levison.

The chief of the Secret Committee coughed.
 "Ahent! Insolence to the Secret Committee is punished with death—I mean, with two cuts of the horsehip," he said. "Touch him up!"

Lash; lash!
 "Yowowowowow!" roared Levison.

"Silence!"

"Help!"

"Another cut!"

Lash; lash!
 "Yaroooh!"

"Silence, prisoner! You are now on your trial before the Secret Committee, appointed by—by yourselves, to inquire
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into cases of sneaking and bullying, and to put the offenders on their trial and punish them according to their deserts."

"Go and eat coke!"

"You are accused of sneaking."

"Oh, rats!"

"The evidence against you is clear, but the committee are willing to hear your defence. Did you, or did you not, sneak about Noble of the Shell the other day?"

"Find out!"

"Did you, or did you not, inform Mr. Selby that Wally—ahem—D'Arcy minor of the Third was keeping white rats in the Form-room?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Did you, or did you not, search Tom Merry's study, looking for chalk, to fix upon him an accusation of having put up some of the notices of the Secret Committee?"

Levison started. He had not known that there had been an eye on him on that occasion.

"What have you to say, prisoner at the bar? Guilty, or not guilty?"

"I'm not going to say anything, you silly idiot!" howled Levison. "Do you think I'm taken in by this rot? I know your voice. You're Tom Merry!"

Levison was sure by this time that he recognised the tones of the captain of the Shell.

"Silence! Here I am Chief of the Secret Committee. Guilty or not guilty?"

"Rats!"

"The prisoner refuses to plead at the bar of the Secret Committee," said the Chief. "He is therefore adjudged guilty. He is sentenced to twenty strokes with the horse-whip, well laid on!"

"Hear, hear!" said two deep bass voices.

Levison was puzzled. He could not tell which of the voices was Tom Merry's, now that he heard them all. But he felt certain that Tom Merry was the chief.

"Carry out the sentence!"

The masked figures advanced upon Levison. He shrank back in desperation.

"Here, hold on!" he exclaimed. "I—I—I'll plead, if you like, you silly idiots! Not guilty!"

"Too late!"

"Look here!" yelled Levison. "If you lay a hand on me, I'll go straight to Knox, and tell him what you've done and who you are."

"You will speak to Knox?"

"Yes, I will!"

"Prisoner at the bar, your present declaration is taken as complete proof that you are a rotten sneak. The proofs are complete, anyway. No one is touched by the Secret Committee until the proofs are complete. Therefore, you are adjudged guilty. Execute the sentence."

"Hands off! You—ow—ow! Help!"

Levison was seized and turned over on the floor. Two pairs of hands held him there, by the neck and the feet, and the chief raised the horse-whip.

The sentence was carried out at once. The horse-whip rose and fell with swiftness and precision, and every lash elicited a yell or a gasp from the sneak of the Fifth. The Chief counted the strokes as he dealt them, and he put a great deal of muscle into each of them.

Levison's yells rang out loudly, till the masked individual who held his head jammed a hand over his mouth, and held it there. After that Levison only gasped and spluttered.

"Twenty!" said the deep voice at last.

"Grough!"

"Prisoner at the bar—"

"Growthowowowow!"

"Your sentence is now executed. I recommend you to think over your rotten ways, and reform. Any further sneaking will be punished in the same way."

"Gr-r-r-r-rh!"

"You are now given a chance to reform. Stop sneaking and lal-lal-bearing, try to be a decent chap, and the Secret Committee are done with you. But one word of sneaking again—to Knox, or to Selby, or to anybody—and the Secret Committee will hear of it, and you will go through it again. Do you understand?"

"You understand?"

"Take him away!"

The sack was placed over Levison's head again. Several minutes elapsed, and he knew that his captors were removing their masks and cloaks, in order to be able to leave the secret chamber in their accustomed guise as juniors of St. Jim's. But he could not see, and his hands were secured, even if he had had the courage to risk further punishment by attempting to remove the sack.

He was lifted up at last, and carried out. Once more in the cold night air; carried, he knew not whither, in the strong grasp of three pairs of hands.

He was set down at last, and the sack whisked off.

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He rolled on the ground, blinking round him with dazed eyes. He was in the blackest darkness. Faint footsteps died away in the distance. Levison sat up, blinking. He made out at last that he was in the quadrangle, under the trees. He wrangled furiously at the cords on his wrists, and in a few minutes succeeded in getting his hands free. Then he dragged at the bonds on his ankles, and released his feet, and staggered up.

He had been rapid. But it had taken him five minutes to release himself. If he had yelled for help, and waited till someone found him and released him, it would have taken longer. The three mysterious avengers were long gone. Levison knew that it was useless to think of trying to track them down in the shadowy quadrangle. No doubt they were in their House before this.

He rubbed his wrists, and gritted his teeth. He was aching from the chastigation he had received in the Black Chamber, aching all over. And he was boiling with rage.

"Hang them!" he muttered. "Hang them! But I know who they are. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther. I'm certain of that. Hang them! I'll make them smart for this!"

And Levison, with his teeth set and his eyes gleaming with rage, rushed away at once towards the School House.

CHAPTER 8.

Not Guilty!

"**B**AI JOVE! Levison looks excited!"

"Seen a ghost, Levison?"

"Looks a bit dusty, too!"

Quite a little crowd of juniors were in the hall as Levison rushed into the School House. His eyes glittered as he recognised the Terrible Three among them. The chums of Study No. 6 were also there. Levison shook a furious fist at Tom Merry.

"I'll make you smart for it!" he yelled.

"Eh?" The captain of the Shell looked surprised.

"What do you mean, Levison? What am I going to smart for?"

"For the rotten trick you've played on me!" snarled Levison. "Do you think I didn't know you? I recognised your voice all the time."

"My voice! What are you driving at?"

"You'll soon see! I'm going straight to Knox!"

And Levison dashed away towards Knox's study, leaving the crowd of juniors staring after him in astonishment.

Knox started to his feet when Levison of the Fourth burst suddenly into his study, flinging the door open without knocking.

"What the dickens—" began Knox angrily.

"I've got something to tell you, Knox!" panted Levison.

"You needn't burst into my study like a mad bull, if you have," growled Knox. "Besides, I've wanted you to come here quietly when you've got anything to tell me. Do you want it to be jawed all over the House, you young idiot?"

"This won't keep," said Levison savagely. "I tell you, I've been collared in the quad, put in a sack, and carried off somewhere and licked with a horse-whip."

"Wha-a-at!"

"It's those rotters who call themselves the Secret Committee—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther!" howled Levison. "They were masked—"

"Masked?" gasped Knox.

"Yes; and they took me into a room hung in black—"

"Look here, don't pile it on," said Knox roughly. "I don't want an instalment from a newspaper serial."

"It's the truth!" said Levison fiercely. "I tell you, they collared me in the quad, in the dark. They shoved a sack over my head, and lifted me up, and carried me somewhere; I couldn't see where. When they took the sack off, I was in a room hung with black, and the three of them were masked, and wore black cloaks covering them from head to foot, like a secret society in a silly novel. They've got the idea out of some rotten book, of course. They tied me up, and gave me twenty with a horse-whip!"

"By gad," said Knox—"by gad!—Mind, stick to the exact facts, Levison. This is enough to get those young rascals a flogging apiece, if it's true. But don't say anything you can't prove."

"I can prove it all right. I tell you, I knew Tom Merry's voice!"

"You didn't see his face?"

"How could I when he was masked?" hooted Levison. "That was what they wore the silly masks for. They didn't think I'd know their voices; they tried to disguise them, but I knew them all right!"

Knox rubbed his hands. There was no doubt that he had a case against the Terrible Three at last, a case that would get them into serious trouble. However much a secret committee, wearing masks, and meeting in a chamber draped

in black, might recommend itself to the romantic notions of the juniors, it was quite certain that the Housemaster would disapprove of it most strongly. A forging speck, if not the "sack," would be the punishment meted out to that precious Secret Committee.

"Linton must know about this," said Knox. "I've told him already about the warnings chalked up in my study, and he's ratty about it. This will bring him down on those young rotters like a ton of bricks."

"The sooner the better!" growled Levison.

"Come with me!"

The head prefect of the School House proceeded at once to Mr. Linton's study, taking Levison with him. There he made the end of the Fourth repeat his story. Mr. Linton listened in amazement, his brows growing darker and darker. The master of the Shell was astounded. He was not a novel-reader, and he had no romantic ideas whatever; and the formation of the Secret Committee of St. Jim's seemed to him merely a piece of unparalleled audacity and "cheek." As soon as he had heard Levison's story to the end, he selected his stoutest cane.

"Call the three boys concerned in here at once, Knox," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were called into Mr. Linton's study. They came in quite calmly and cheerfully to meet Levison's accusation.

"You are aware why I have sent for you?" demanded Mr. Linton, with a thunderous frown.

"I suppose Levison has been saying something, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Levison accuses you of having seized him in the quadrangle, made him a prisoner, and thrashed him."

"When, sir?"

"Less than half an hour ago, as you know jolly well," said Levison, between his teeth.

"I shall punish you most severely for this outrageous conduct, Merry—"

"Punish me, sir?"

"Certainly! Do you think—"

"But I didn't do it, sir."

"Levison declares that you were the leader—"

"Did he recognise me, sir?"

"He could not do that, as your face was covered in some ridiculous manner, but he is positive that he recognised your voice," said Mr. Linton.

"I think Levison must be mistaken, sir," said Tom Merry demurely. "Or perhaps he is not telling the truth. Levison isn't a very truthful chap."

"You jolly well know it's the truth!" snarled Levison. "You tried to disguise your voice, but I knew it all right—and Manners' and Lowther's, too."

"Mine?" said Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"Yes. You were one of them, and Manners was another."

"Do you boys deny it?" asked Mr. Linton, with a worried look. He had taken the truth of Levison's accusation for granted; but now he realised that he could not very well punish the Terrible Three without proof. He was aware, too, that Levison did not bear a very good reputation for truthfulness, while, on the other hand, Tom Merry was known to be the soul of honor.

"We'll do more than deny it, sir," said Tom Merry. "We'll prove that Levison is not telling the truth—prove it as clearly as you like, sir!"

"And in what way?"

"We haven't been outside the House since dark, sir. It's been dark a good hour, and Levison says this happened half an hour ago. Well, we've been inside the School House all the time, and any number of the fellows can prove it. I was playing chess with Glyn until ten minutes ago, and we'd been playing a good hour. Glyn will tell you so if you ask him, sir. Four or five fellows were watching the game. After we'd finished playing we came out of the common-room, and we've been talking in the hall ever since. We were just going up to do our prep when Levison came in. There are a dozen fellows who can bear out what I say."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Levison fiercely.

"Silence, Levison!" said Mr. Linton, frowning. "This matter can easily be put to the proof. Call in Glyn, Knox."

The prefect, giving Levison a far from amiable glance, obeyed. Knox began to see that his crushing case was falling to the ground.

Bernard Glyn of the Shell was called in. He corroborated Tom Merry's statement from beginning to end. To prove this matter more clearly, several other Shell fellows were called in and questioned. They all bore unmistakable evidence that Tom Merry & Co. had not been outside the House since dark.

Mr. Linton fixed a very stern look upon Levison,

"It appears that you were mistaken, Levison, in supposing that you recognised Merry's voice," he said.

Levison himself was dismayed, and at a loss. He could not suppose that half a dozen fellows were lying to save Tom Merry. He knew now that the Secret Committee could not possibly have been the Terrible Three of the Shell. His thoughts went at once to the chums of Study No. 6. Of course, it was Blake and two more of them! But, after his previous statement, he could not very well declare that he had recognised Blake's voice, so he was silent.

But Kangaroo burst out angrily:

"Mistaken!" he exclaimed. "He wasn't mistaken, sir! He was telling whoppers to get Tom Merry into a row!"

"Silence, Noble!"

"And I don't believe there's a word of truth in the whole yarn!" exclaimed the Cornstalk. "We all know what kind of an imagination Levison has."

Mr. Linton looked more keenly at Levison. Certainly, the junior's story of what had happened to him was a strange one—very strange indeed. Was it possible that he had concocted it from beginning to end? It was evident that his statement that Tom Merry was concerned in the matter was false. It was quite likely that the rest of the story was equally untrue.

"I trust, Levison, that you have not been trying to deceive me with this extraordinary story!" said Mr. Linton in a grinding voice.

"It's true, sir—all true! I've been horsewhipped, and—"

"Very well. The story seems to me extraordinary, but I will let that pass," said Mr. Linton. "I advise you, however, to be very careful before you make another accusation like this. You have very nearly caused me to commit an act of injustice. You have falsely accused Merry—"

"I—I thought—"

"You should be quite certain before you make an accusation, Levison. You will beg Merry's pardon, in my presence, for having made this accusation."

Levison gritted his teeth hard.

"Oh, sir—"

"Or I shall cane you," said Mr. Linton grimly.

"I—I beg your pardon, Merry!"

"Granted!" said Tom Merry airily, and Levison trembled with rage.

"You will take a hundred lines, Levison, as a lesson to you to be more careful on another occasion," said Mr. Linton.

"Now you may go."

"But, sir—"

"Enough! You may go!"

And Levison went. Tom Merry & Co. followed him out of the study with smiling faces. The cad of the Fourth had certainly not scored this time, and the juniors' opinion of Mr. Linton had risen. They felt that the well-known description of a certain schoolmaster applied to the master of the Shell—he was a beast, but a just beast.

Knox, the prefect, turned savagely upon Levison when they were alone.

"You thundering young ass!" he said between his teeth. "A pretty trick you've made of it, haven't you? Now tell me how much truth there was in it? Were you lying from start to finish?"

"It was all true," said Levison sullenly. "I must have been mistaken about Tom Merry. It seems pretty clear that he was in the house at the time. Of course, I know now that it was Blake."

"Blake! How do you know?"

"I feel sure of it."

"You felt sure that it was Merry ten minutes ago," said Knox, with a sneer. "You'd better take a bit more care next time, you crass idiot! I'm on the right side of Linton now, but he will soon begin to give me the marble eye if I take accusations like this to him. And you're such a confounded liar that I don't know whether to believe what you've told me or not. Very likely you invented it all."

Levison scowled.

"You'll jolly soon know that it's true enough," he said. "I've had my turn, and it will be yours next if they're not found out and flogged."

"What?"

"They've done me, and they're safe after it. They're more down on you than they are on me, and your turn will come next," said Levison, with a sneering grin. "When they tie you up and lick you, Knox, you'll know whether it's true or not."

And Levison swung away. Knox was left with a deep frown on his brow. Levison's last words had given him food for thought.

CHAPTER 9.

No Clue.

THE extraordinary adventure of Levison of the Fourth was the talk of the School House that evening.

The Secret Committee was on every tongue. A good many fellows did not hesitate to state their belief that Levison had drawn upon his imagination for the whole story, and his disproved accusation against the captain of the Shell confirmed them in their belief.

Tom Merry & Co. did not give any opinion on the subject. They maintained a non-committal silence. When Reilly demanded Tom Merry's opinion, the captain of the Shell replied that he was fed up with Levison, and had nothing to say about him or his yarns.

"But sure, do ye believe there's such a thing as a Syceret Committee at all, at all?" Reilly demanded.

"I must say it looks like it," said Tom Merry gravely, but he declined to express a positive opinion.

When the Fourth Form went to bed, Levison was the recipient of many curious looks in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House.

The cad of the Fourth certainly looked as if he had been through it, and that bore out his story of the horsewhipping in the Black Chamber.

But even if his yarn was true in every detail, the Fourth-Formers had no sympathy to waste upon himself, for the Fourth-Formers had brought his punishment upon himself by sneaking, spying, and tale-bearing. The Secret Committee, if it existed at all, had been formed for the purpose of keeping Levison, and fellows like Levison, in check, and the juniors heartily concurred in the scheme. There was hardly a fellow in the Form who did not wish good luck to the Secret Three, whoever they were.

Levison kicked his boots off savagely. Melish was the only fellow there who felt any sympathy for him, and Melish was feeling considerably uneasy for himself. He had an idea that his own turn might come next—if Levison's tale was true. Levison went to his bed, and uttered a sudden exclamation as he saw a sheet of paper pinned upon the pillow.

There was a line daubed on the paper in capital letters with a brush, affording no clue to the hand that had written it:

"YOU HAVE TOLD TALES AGAIN! BEWARE OF THE SECRET COMMITTEE!"

Levison ground his teeth as he read the warning.

The Cadet of the Three had warned him that if he told tales of what had happened to him in the Black Chamber he would be duly punished, and he had gone directly to Knox with the tale. And here was the warning that the punishment was in store. Levison grabbed up the paper, crumpling it in his hand, and turned a furious look upon Jack Blake.

"You put this here, Blake!" he shouted.

Blake looked round.

"Eh? What's that, Levison?"

"You put this paper here? I know perfectly well that you were one of those three rotters! I'm going to show this paper to Darrel when he comes in!"

"Show it to him by all means, my son," said Blake easily.

When Darrel, the prefect, came in to see lights out, Levison strode towards him, holding out the paper. Darrel stared at it.

"Blake pinned that on my pillow!" exclaimed Levison savagely.

"Blake—" began the prefect.

"It's only another of Levison's whoppers, Darrel," said Blake calmly. "I didn't put it there, and I didn't even know it was there till Levison showed it to me."

"It's a lie!" yelled Levison fiercely.

Blake's eyes glittered. He made a stride towards Levison, and the cad of the Fourth promptly backed away behind Darrel.

"Hold on, Blake!" said Darrel quietly.

"Levison, be a bit more careful what you say, please. Did you see Blake put this paper on your pillow?"

"It was there when I came into the dorm," said Levison sulkily.

"Then why do you say Blake put it there?"

"I know he did!"

"How do you know?"

"He was one of the gang that collared and licked me!" growled Levison. "I thought it was the Shell rotters at first; now I know one of them was Blake!"

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"Indeed! You accused Merry and Manners and Lowther to Mr. Linton," said Darrel, who had heard the whole story. "Now you change it to Blake. Have you the impudence to say that you recognised Blake's voice—after what you're said before?"

"I know it was Blake!"

"You have no right to say anything of the kind. Still, I will ask you, Blake, whether you were out of the House this evening. This nonsense must be stopped, whoever is at the bottom of it!"

Blake grinned.

"I dare say Levison will get the right chap, if he accuses everybody in the school in turn," he remarked. "As a matter of fact, I haven't been out of the House since dark, and a dozen fellows can prove it."

"Yarn, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have been with Blake the whole time. We were watching Tom Merry's argy-bargy with Glyn for a long time, and affah that ye were talkin' to the fellows. Hewies and Dig were with us."

"So was I, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley. "It's all bunkum, Darrel! I know quite well that Blake hasn't been out of doors this evening."

"Sure, and I know it too!" said Reilly.

"We can all prove it, Darrel," said Hammond. "Levison is talkin' out of the back of his neck again!"

Levison gave a baffled look round. Again he was non-plussed. He did not in his heart believe that Blake would lie, and it was impossible to believe that a crowd of the Fourth would back him up in a lie. Evidently the members of the Secret Committee did not belong to Study No. 6. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy could not possibly have had a hand in his punishment in the Black Chamber.

He thought of Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn, but their evidence in Tom Merry's favour showed that they, too, had been within doors at the time the Secret Committee were punishing Levison. Then who could the mysterious three possibly have been? Possibly not School House fellows at all. But if they belonged to the New House, why should New House fellows take up the quarrel at all, when it did not concern them? The New House juniors had nothing to do with Knox or Levison. Besides, it could not have been a New House fellow who had placed the paper on Levison's pillow—that was impossible.

"Well, Levison, what have you to say now?" snapped Darrel.

"I—I—I know they're mixed up in it somehow!" stammered Levison. "Make them say who put this paper on my pillow, then?"

Darrel looked round.

"Did any fellow present put this paper on Levison's pillow?" he demanded.

There was a chorus in reply:

"'Twasn't me, Darrel!"

"Then it was one of those Shell rotters!" howled Levison.

"Tom Merry most likely—"

"You'd better let Tom Merry alone!" said Darrel drily.

"And you're getting altogether too free with your accusations, Levison. You will take a hundred lines for accusing Blake of this, when it is quite clear that he did not do it. Think before you speak next time; that's my advice. Now hold your tongue and go to bed."

And Levison had no choice but to obey.

The snarl of the Fourth was evidently not prospering, and it was some time before he slept after lights were out. By telling tales to Knox, and again to Darrel, he had provoked the vengeance of the Secret Three, whoever they were, and he felt that he was in danger of another punishment. And the mysterious three, working in secret, had only to await another opportunity of collaring him and inflicting the punishment with perfect impunity. They could not be stopped, and they could not be punished, since they were utterly unknown. Levison's sleep that night was troubled with dreams of black masks and rooms hung in black and horsewhips.

The chums of Study No. 6 smiled sweetly after lights out. The paper on Levison's pillow, of course, had been placed there by one of the Shell fellows, unknown to Blake & Co., so that they could truthfully deny knowing that it was there.

Levison scowled when he turned out in the morning, and scowled all the time he

FOR NEXT WEEK:

TOM MERRY'S FIND!

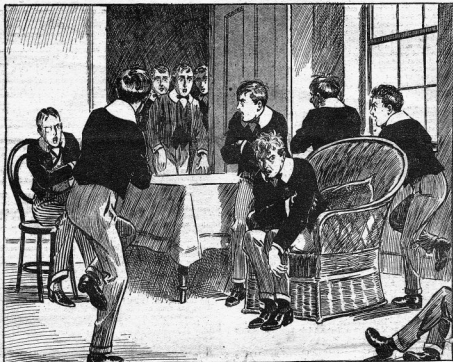
Another Splendid Long, Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's.

—By—

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in Advance.

PRICE ONE PENNY.



Seven cheerless Juniors glared at the trio from the New House. Figgins & Co. looked at them, and came into the study and closed the door. The suffering seven did not utter a word of welcome. They uttered nothing but groans and grunts. "My hat!" said Figgins. "You look as if you'd been through it." (See Chapter 3.)

was dressing. He was in an extremely bad humour. He had expected quite a high old time as Knox's favourite, and right-hand man, now that Knox was head prefect of the House; but instead of that he was getting the most troublesome time of his life, and the knowledge that he deserved it did not make it any more agreeable.

When the Fourth took their places in the Form-room that morning, and Levison opened his desk, a card met his eyes, placed in his desk to greet him as soon as he opened it. It bore the words, in daubed capitals:

"SNEAK! TREMBLE!"

Levison did not tremble, as the message of the Secret Committee enjoined. He clenched his hands with rage. He snatched up the card, and held it up for Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, to see.

The little Form-master blinked at it over his glasses. "Dear me!" he said. "Whatever is that, Levison?"

"Somebody's put that in my desk, sir!" said Levison, his voice trembling with rage.

"What an absurd trick!" said Mr. Lathom, frowning.

"It's a regular persecution, sir! I think the fellow who's playing these tricks ought to be found out and stopped!"

"Most decidedly!" said Mr. Lathom. "Do you know who it was?"

But Levison had had enough of making wild accusations. He had no idea who it was, and he did not venture to utter the long list of names of the persons he suspected.

"No, sir," he stammered.

"Did any boy present put this card in Levison's desk?" demanded Mr. Lathom, blinking over the Fourth Form.

"No, sir!" came a chorus.

"It was one of the Shell, I am certain, sir!" exclaimed Levison.

Mr. Lathom frowned with annoyance.

"This nonsense must be put a stop to," he exclaimed. "I will step into the Shell-room and speak to Mr. Linton. Come with me, Levison, and bring that card."

Blake and Figgins exchanged uneasy looks as the Form-master walked out, followed by Levison. If the whole of the Shell were questioned, it looked as if the secret would come out. Tom Merry would not tell an untruth on the subject, and it would not be possible for him to refuse to answer questions.

The Fourth-Formers were feeling very anxious. Mr. Lathom rustled into the Shell Form-room, where the juniors were at first lesson. He explained hastily to Mr. Linton, and the master of the Shell looked at the card with a dark frown. He held it up for the Shell to see.

"Boys!"—Mr. Linton's voice was like the rumble of distant thunder—"I demand to know if any boy present placed this card in Levison's desk in the Fourth Form-room?"

There was no reply.

"Answer one by one!" said the Form-master. "I am determined that this absurd nonsense shall cease!"

And the master of the Shell questioned the whole Form in turn. Each of the fellows made the same reply—he had not placed that card in Levison's desk. Levison watched Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther keenly as they stood up and answered. But their words came out firmly and calmly, and he could not think that they were lying.

Levison felt as if his head were turning round. Was it some fog in the Third or the Second, then, who was playing these tricks?

As if the same thought had entered Mr. Linton's mind, the master of the Shell turned towards the door, with a remark to Mr. Lathom.

"This affair must be inquired into thoroughly. Come with me, sir, and I will speak to the Third."

Mr. Lathom and Levison followed the master of the Shell to the Third Form-room. Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, looked at them in surprise. When Mr. Linton stated his business, Mr. Selby at once put the Third to the question. Levison keenly watched Wally D'Arcy and Frayne, who were on especially good terms with Tom Merry. But Wally and Frayne and all the rest answered up at once. They hadn't put the card in Levison's desk, and knew nothing at all about

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it. Mr. Linton, frowning more darkly than ever, proceeded to the Second Form, where the same process was gone through, with the same result.

"We seem to be where we started," Mr. Lathom remarked. "It is, of course, useless to question the senior boys. It would be absurd to suppose that anyone in the Fifth would be playing these absurd tricks."

Mr. Linton nodded frowningly.
"I cannot understand it," he said. "I watched every boy as he answered, and I think I should have detected an untruth. Yet every boy denies having been concerned in the matter." He fixed his eyes upon Levison. "Levison!"
"Yes, sir?" muttered Levison, not quite liking the Form-master's look.

"I cannot help thinking it is possible that you are playing these tricks yourself in order to obtain a little cheap notoriety," said Mr. Linton severely.

Levison jumped. He had been bitterly disappointed by the result of the investigation, but he had hardly expected the Form-master to come to a conclusion like that.

"I, sir?" he gasped. "I?"
Mr. Linton scanned his face sharply.

"I will not punish you upon suspicion merely, Levison, but I warn you to be very careful," he said impressively. "You may go back to your Form-room."

And Levison went, consumed with rage inwardly, and biting his lips. He began to wish that he had not succeeded in establishing for himself a reputation as an amateur Ananias.

Blake & Co. looked at him as he came in. His expression was enough to show them that no discovery had been made.

After morning lessons the chums of the Fourth lost no time in comparing notes with the Terrible Three, but they did not speak on the matter till they were out in the triangle, safe from Levison's prying eyes and ears.

"How on earth did you get out of it?" Blake demanded.

"Blessed if I didn't think the game was up!" said Figgins.

"How the dickens did you fellows wriggle out of it?"

"Out of what?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

"They questioned you—"

"Yes."

"Well, then—"

"They asked us if we'd put that card in Levison's desk,"

said Monty Lowther. "Of course, we told the truth on the subject. George Washington isn't in it with us. We simply told the truth—our heads."

"You hadn't," yelled Blake.

"Certainly not!"

"Then—then who did?" gasped Koor. "There can't be another giddy Secret Committee at work as well as us."

Tom Merry laughed.

"More was than one of killing a cat," he remarked. "We thought it safer for the card to get into Levison's desk without any of us putting it there."

"Bai Jove! But the card couldn't get there by itself, dear boy."

"Have you ever heard of such a person as Toby, who has the honour of being page in the School House?" said Tom, laughing.

"Toby! My hat!"

"A tanner to Toby, and the trick was done! Toby can keep a secret; and Levison has ragged the poor kid so much that he was afraid of the chance of giving him something back. By a judicious expenditure of tanners and threepenny-bits the warning notices of the Secret Committee can be posted in future without any of us having a hand in it," Tom Merry explained.

"Bai Jove!"

"And—and you fellows didn't put it there!" ejaculated Herries. "Toby did!"

"Exactly! And I don't think anybody is likely to suspect Toby, the page, of being a member of the Secret Committee—what?"

"Wishish not!"

"Hs, hs, ha!"

And the members of the Secret Society of St. Jim's laughed loud and long.

CHAPTER 10.

Knox's Turn.

TOM MERRY & CO., in spite of the Secret Society and all its work, had a far from pleasant time during the next few days.

Knox, the prefect, though utterly puzzled as to whom the Secret Three could possibly be, was convinced that Tom Merry and his friends had some sort of a hand in the matter.

The result was that he was harder than ever upon the heroes of the School House.

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Levison, too, was busier than ever in his peculiar department. The slightest infraction of the school rules by the juniors he hated was certain to come to the ears of the head prefect, and lincs and lickings resulted. Whenever the matter was serious enough Knox would take it before Mr. Linton; and Mr. Linton, worried and annoyed by the trouble he found upon his hands, grew more severe than ever.

Mr. Raiton was not coming back yet, and the Head was still indisposed; Mr. Ratcliff was still acting in the head-master's place; Mr. Linton was still Housemaster of the School House. Knox, as head prefect, and high in favour with the Housemaster, had everything in his hands. At first Kildare had succeeded in keeping Knox within some bounds, but that was over now. Kildare was no longer a prefect, he had retired from that rank till Mr. Raiton's return. And Darrel and Langton and Rusden could do nothing against the head prefect, backed up by the Housemaster. Knox of the Sixth had it all his own way, and he was taking his opportunity to feed fat his ancient grudge against Tom Merry and his chums.

But for the safety-valve, so to speak, provided by the Secret Society there would probably have been an outbreak among the juniors. As it was, the great society held many secret meetings, debating what was to be done with the obnoxious Knox and the equally obnoxious Levison.

The result was quite a flood of daubed warnings to the bullying prefect. Knox found the notices of the Secret Committee chalked in his way, pinned on his pillow, and even hooked on his back. One morning he came into the Sixth Form-room with a card fastened on the back of his coat by means of a fishhook, bearing the inscription—

"BULLY! YOU ARE WATCHED! LOOK OUT!"

Knox's temper was not improving, as was natural under the circumstances. And although he found it impossible to trace any of those offences to Tom Merry & Co., he visited punishment upon their heads at every slight excuse. As for the Secret Committee venturing to lay hands upon him, he hardly thought it possible, but he was very carefully upon his guard all the same.

But the blow fell at last!

Knox had gone over to the New House to visit Sefton of the Sixth, who was one of his chums. And when he left the New House, about eight o'clock, a light glimmered in the window of Figgins's study. If Knox had noticed it he might have guessed that it was a signal to someone out in the dark quadrangle, but he did not notice it.

He strode across the quad, thinking chiefly of a "quid" he had lost in a little game with Sefton. Suddenly, as he passed under the eaves, three dark figures leaped on him, and a sack was whisked over his head before he knew what was happening.

He was borne heavily to the earth, enveloped in the sack, and a heavy knee was planted on his chest.

In a moment the prefect realised that it had come at last—that he was in the hands of the Secret Committee.

Levison's yarn was evidently true!

The Sixth-Former struggled furiously and shouted; but the sack was jammed close on his face, and it muffled his cries. Three strong pairs of hands were upon him, and his struggles were unavailing.

A looped cord was passed over his wrists, and they were drawn together and tied. Then a cord was passed round his ankles and knotted.

He was helpless.

He felt an inward shiver as he was lifted from the earth and carried away, the three captors breathing hard under the heavy burden.

Knox yelled again for help, and then yelled with pain, as a pin was pushed through the sack and found a resting-place in his leg.

"Towwwwwww!"

"Silence, catiff!" came a deep voice.

Knox did not yell again; he did not want any more of the pin. The captured prefect made no further resistance. He knew that he was in unmerciful hands, and that the Secret Committee did not intend to deal gently with him. He shivered as he was carried away through the darkness.

Where were they taking him?

He tried to make out the direction, but blinded by the sack it was impossible. He began to count the steps taken by his captors as well as he could, with the idea of retracing them afterwards, and thus finding out the secret meeting-place of the Committee. But he soon realised that he was being carried to and fro, in order to baffle anything of that kind, and he gave it up.

Five minutes—which seemed as long as five hours to Knox—elapsed, and then he knew that he had been carried into a building.

He was dumped down, none too gently, on the floor. His weight had told upon the members of the Secret Committee.

He lay in the sack, sprawled upon the floor, for several

minutes. Through the sack the glimmer of a light struck upon his eyes. The silence around him was only broken by the rustling movements of the three.

Then a deep voice was heard—a voice speaking in a deep bass, which Knox knew was assumed for the occasion, and through which he vainly endeavoured to trace any familiar tones:

"Remove the sack!"

It was just as Levison had described it to him. He was going through it in his turn, and he trembled with mingled rage and fear at the thought.

The sack was jerked off, and Knox blinked in the light.

Three figures in black cloaks and masks surrounded him as he lay bound and helpless on the floor.

"You young hounds!" gasped Knox. "I'll have you sacked for this!"

"Silence, prisoner!"

"I—I'll smash you! I—I'll—"

"Silence!"

"Help!" yelled Knox. "He—owwww!"

Knox's yell broke off, as a chunk of soap was crammed into his open mouth. He spluttered into silence.

"Prisoner at the bar," went on the chief, in his deep voice, "you have been guilty of bullying and tyranny!"

"Groooh!"

"You have been warned again and again! You have not reformed!"

"Gerrrrrrh!"

"Now the hour of vengeance has struck!"

"Owww!"

"You are in the hands of the Secret Committee! Are you prepared to meet your doom?"

"Oh! Oh! Groo!" gasped Knox.

He fixed his furious eyes upon the speaker, endeavouring to penetrate his disguise. But the black mask and the black cloak told him nothing. The cloaks of the three hid them from head to foot. Knox could see that they were not real cloaks; they had been roughly made of cheap canvas daubed with black paint. Probably the Secret Society had no very extensive funds to expend upon their terrifying paraphernalia. The room was hung with the same material; and Knox strove in vain to guess where he was. On all sides, the same sombre hangings of black met his gaze. If he could only have seen a hand or a foot he might have had some clue, but he could see nothing excepting black cloaks and masks.

"Your punishment," went on the deep voice, "is already decided upon! Your spy was given twenty strokes! As you are a worse offender you will have thirty! Turn the beast over!"

The last remark was scarcely in keeping with the solemnity of the proceedings. Knox was certain that it was a junior who was speaking. But which junior, among the hundreds at St. Jim's? That was the question.

It had been proved clearly enough, on the occasion of Levison's capture and the inquiry that had followed, that the Secret Three were not any of the members of Tom Merry & Co. of the School House. Was it possible that they were New House fellows? Knox thought of Figgins & Co. He remembered that Figgins had met him in the passage as he came out of Sefton's study. Had the young rascals been watching him, and had they followed him?

It seemed the most probable theory, though, as Figgins & Co. were generally on fighting terms with the School House chums, it was rather curious that they should have taken up Tom Merry's quarrel in this way.

Two of the masked figures seized Knox and turned him over. They grasped him by his collar and his ankles to turn him. Then the Chief picked up a horsewhip.

"You are going to take thirty strokes, well laid on, Knox," said the deep base voice. "I advise you to meditate upon your sins, and resolve to turn over a new leaf. That is the only way that you can escape the vengeance of the Secret Committee."

"You young hounds! If you dare to touch me—"

Lash!

"Yow-ow-ow!" gurgled Knox.

Lash, lash, lash, lash!

The blows came down with vigour and precision. It was exactly like a flogging, and Knox had not known what it was to be flogged since he had been a young rascal in the Fourth Form.

"This seemed to bring back old times. The blows descended fast, and Knox wriggled and squirmed and gasped under them. He would have yelled for help, but the chunk of soap which he had ejected from his mouth was thrust in again, and held there by a firm hand. He could only gasp and splutter chokingly.

Lash, lash, lash!

Twenty strokes had been delivered, and the bully of the Sixth was writhing and gasping with pain. He used a cane

freely enough himself, and never cared for the pain he inflicted, the sufferings of others had never affected him in the least. Indeed, he rather enjoyed it. Now his own turn had come, and enjoyment was gone. He writhed and gasped and spluttered.

Lash, lash, lash, lash!

The strokes came pitilessly down.

Maddened with the pain, the furious prefect struggled wildly, but his hands and feet were securely tied, and firm hands held him. Lash, lash, lash!

"Thirty!" said the deep base voice.

"Oh, give him a few more!"

"No. That is his punishment. Prisoner on the floor, do you think that you have had enough?"

"Groooh!"

"Remove the gag. If he yelps stick a pin in him."

The soap was taken from Knox's foaming mouth, and he did not yelp. He had had quite sufficient experience of that pin.

"Oh, you young villain!"

"Have you had enough?"

"I'll smash you!" hissed Knox. "I'll have you sacked! I'll—"

Lash!

"Yaroooh!"

"Have you had enough, prisoner on the floor?"

"Yow! Yes. Oh! Yes."

"Are you sorry for having been a bully and a beast?"

"Hang you! I—"

Lash!

"Are you sorry?"

"Oh crumbs! Yes; awfully sorry. Ow-wow!"

"Very good. Will you act more decently in the future if the Secret Committee lets you off without further punishment?"

"You young hound—"

I—

"Yes," wailed Knox. "I—I will. I—I'll do anything you like. I'll say anything you like. Ow-ow-wow! Grooh!"

"Keep your word, prisoner on the floor, and the Secret Committee have done with you. Break it, and your next punishment will be more severe. This time you have been thrashed as you deserve. Next time you will be shaved clean on your head, and tarred. That is a warning."

"I—I—I—"

"Silence!"

Knox cowered into silence. The spirit had been quite taken out of the bully of the Sixth by that flogging. Like most bullies, he was a coward at heart, and he was almost whimpering now, senior and prefect as he was. He was only anxious to get out of the hands of the Secret Committee without further punishment. Vengeance would come afterwards.

If only he could have spotted some clue to their identity. As if to oblige him in that respect, the Chief, in throwing down the horsewhip, allowed his arm and hand to come out from under the cloak. Knox's eyes fastened almost greedily upon the hand. Would he know it again? His eyes gittered. Across the wrist was a thin red mark, such as might be made by the scratch of a pin. The prefect's heart beat with a fierce joy. He would know that scratched wrist again, and when he found a junior with a scratched wrist he would have found the Chief of the Secret Committee.

"Replace the sack!"

The sack was drawn over Knox's head again. He was lifted and carried away, with the chunk of soap jammed into his mouth again, a thick piece of canvas being bound round his head to keep it there. He had no chance of calling out when the three avengers carried him from the Black Chamber.

A few minutes later Knox felt himself dumped down on the ground, the sack was whipped off, and three dark figures vanished before he could glance at them. He lay under the dark trees, hoarse and gagged. The gag he could not possibly get rid of without the use of his hands, and he set to work wriggling his wrists free. It was nearly half an hour before he succeeded, but when his hands were once loose he jerked away the gag, and cut the cord round his ankles with his pocket-knife. Then he staggered to his feet, dishevelled, panting, aching in every limb.

Two minutes more, and Knox was in Mr. Linton's study, pouring the tale of that amazing outrage into the astonished ears of the Form-master.

CHAPTER 11.

Some Persons Unknown.

"MY hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo of the Shell. "It's getting thick! Knox this time!"

"Yaas, it's really gettin' quite excitin'."

"Awfully excitin'," yawned Blake. "It isn't all lavender

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A Magnificent New, Large, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEDNESDAY—

"TOM MERRY'S FIND!"

to be head prefect of the House when you happen to be a healthy bully."

There was great excitement in the School House. What had happened to Knox was on every tongue now. Had Knox taken some time to think the matter over he might have hesitated to avow in public that he had been collared and fogged. It was an exceedingly humiliating confession, and it caused many smiles and sneers and shrugs of the shoulders. But Knox had not taken time to think: He was only anxious for vengeance.

And vengeance was not to be had. Mr. Linton had taken the matter up at once. He had called the prefects into his study, and ordered an instant investigation into the matter.

The prefects investigated in a somewhat perfunctory manner. They were all of opinion that Knox thoroughly deserved what he had received, that he had, in fact, asked for it. Knox's swagger and swank since he had become head prefect had not pleased Kildare or Darrel or Rushden or Langton in the least. He had been put over their heads, and he made them realize it quite clearly. They were not at all disposed to exert themselves in his cause.

However, the prefects made the inquiry. Nothing came of it. Not a single junior could be found in the School House who had a scratch on his wrist, that certain clue by which Knox hoped to discover the offender.

But that only confirmed Knox in his suspicion that the Secret Committee were not members of the School House at all, but New House fellows who had taken up the cudgels for Tom Merry & Co.

The inquiry was, therefore, transferred to the New House. Figgins & Co. and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence were the juniors upon whom Knox's suspicions chiefly rested.

But all those juniors proved conclusively that they had been in their own studies ever since Knox left the house after his visit to Sefton. Figgins, indeed, called Knox himself as a witness that he had seen him there in the house just before he left, and Knox had to admit that that was so. Mr. Ratcliff took the inquiry up keenly enough, Knox having found much favour in his eyes. They were very much alike in methods and manners.

But the junior with a scratched wrist was not discovered in the New House.

In fact, when the inquiry was over, it was quite clear that there wasn't a single scratched wrist in the school at all.

Knox was amazed. He had seen that scratch—a red, prominent scratch—with his own eyes. He had made a special note of it. He had told it to the Housemaster as a certain clue to the leader of the delinquents.

And it had not been found! Such a mark could not, of course, be concealed. A scratch was a scratch, and it could not have healed up completely in the course of half an hour or so.

Yet it could not be discovered. The assembly the whole school and question each fellow individually as to whether he had taken part in the outrage did not recommend itself to Mr. Linton's mind at all. Previous questionings had been useless. Besides, with the prospect of the "sack" before him, could any boy be expected to own up? It was useless to drive the offender into telling a falsehood, Mr. Linton considered.

Knox felt that it was useless, too. Besides that, he began to have a suspicion that the Secret Three were not St. Jim's fellows at all. Tom Merry & Co. were very friendly with Gordon Gay, of Rycombe Grammar School. True, they had many a row and rag, but they were on cordial terms, notwithstanding that, and it would be just like Gordon Gay to "chip in" in such a quarrel.

Knox remembered that the Grammarians had visited Tom Merry that very afternoon; he had seen Gay and Frank Monk and Wootton major talking to the Shell fellows in the quad.

The clue of the scratched wrist having utterly failed to reveal the culprit, Knox was driven to the conclusion that Tom Merry & Co. had leagued with the Grammarians, and that the Secret Committee were Gordon Gay and his friends. There the investigation had to stop.

To visit the Grammar School and demand an inquiry there on a vague suspicion was impossible. If Gordon Gay & Co. had been broken the walls of St. Jim's that evening, they would have covered up their tracks carefully enough. Dr. Monk would have pooh-poohed any suggestion of the sort if Mr. Linton had thought of referring the matter to him; but Mr. Linton, though he was somewhat inclined to share Knox's opinion, never thought of doing anything of the kind.

The matter had to drop. THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 345.

Knox, in a state of fury, mingled with unconscious for the future, had to take it "lying down."

He had been so certain of discovering at least one of the three, so secure of vengeance, that it was a bitter disappointment to him. But there was evidently nothing to be done.

But while Mr. Linton bit his lips with anger, and Knox fumed, there was rejoicing among the members of the Secret Society of St. Jim's.

After prep that evening the Terrible Three visited Study No. 6, where Blake & Co. greeted them with cheerful smiles.

"All seaween!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Right as rain!" said Tom Merry.

"And yet Knoxy had a dead-certain clue," grinned Blake—a clue that Sexton Blake or Ferrers Locke would have followed to the bitter end—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's wathink queeah," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully, "considerin' that it was you three Shell boundahs who collared him—"

"Shush!"

"Walls have ears, ass!" said Monty Lowther.

"And it means the sack if anybody's bowled out," Manners remarked. "Flogging a prefect is a bit more than a joke, however much he may have deserved it!"

"Yaas; but about that scratch on the wrist. I thought it was all up when I heard about that," said Arthur Augustus.

"I wearaged you as a weckless ass to let Knox see your wrist at all, Tom Mewry!"

"Go bon."

"And how did you hide it, deah boy, when they looked for it?"

Tom Merry laughed, and held out his arm. There was no sign of a scratch on his wrist.

"Bai Jove! Did Knox deoam it, then?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

"No; he saw it right enough."

"Bai Jove! But how—?"

"It was there then, but it vanished afterwards," explained Tom Merry. "Of course, I let the duffer see my wrist on purpose!"

"Great Scott! But how did you get wid of the scratch?"

"Washed it off immediately I got into the house, of course."

Arthur Augustus's eyes rolled from his eye in his astonishment.

"Washed it off!" he repeated.

"Yes."

"B-b-b-but how?"

"Soap and water."

"You washed off a scratch with soap and watah, Tom Mewry?"

"Certainly."

"I presume you are pullin' my leg," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Pweay be sewious. You know perfectly well that it is impos to wash off a scratch with soap and watah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Woolly, deah boys—"

"Not that kind of scratch," grinned Tom Merry. "You're as big a duffer as Knox, Gussy. You see, I put the scratch on first, to let Knoxy see it—to put the rotter on a false scent. Have you ever heard of grease-paint, make-up, and the Junior Dramatic Society? What's the good of being an amateur actor if a fellow can't paint a scratch on his wrist?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Knox is quite mystified!" grinned Tom Merry. "He's been hunting high and low in the school for a fellow with a scratch on his wrist. He will have to conclude that the Secret Committee don't belong to St. Jim's at all. The best of it is that Gordon Gay has a scratch on his wrist, and when he comes over here to tea to-morrow, I shouldn't wonder if Knoxy spots it. I fancy he's got a suspicion of the Grammar School chaps now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if he should go off on a wild-goose chase to the Grammar School, it will keep him busy. It won't hurt Guss, and it won't hurt us, and it will amuse Knoxy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's surmise was correct. The following afternoon Gordon Gay & Co. came over to tea in Study No. 6, at St. Jim's. Knox of the Sixth spotted them as they came suntering across the quadrangle, and he came down to meet them at the door.

Gordon Gay and Monk and Wootton raised their caps very politely to Knox. Tom Merry had confided the history of

the Secret Society to the Grammar School chums, and Gordon Gay & Co. were greatly tickled by it.

"I want to speak to you, Gay," said Knox grimly.
 "Go ahead," said Gay affably.
 "Will you let me see your wrist?"
 "M-m-my wrist?" ejaculated Gay, in astonishment.
 "Yes; your right wrist."
 Gay held out his left hand.
 "The right one!" snapped Knox.
 "Isn't that right?" asked Gay innocently.
 "Let me see your right wrist at once!"
 "Hold on," said Gay, slipping his right hand into his pocket. "It occurs to me that you have no right to give me orders, Knox, old man. I don't belong to this school, you know. You can make the kids here sit up at any time you like, but we don't care twopenny for you!"
 "Not three-ha'pence," said Wootton major.
 "Not a ha'penny," corroborated Frank Monk.
 Knox gritted his teeth. His bullying was, indeed, out of place now; he had no authority over Dr. Monk's boys. He changed his manner with an effort.
 "Will you oblige me by showing me your wrist?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly, if you put it nicely like that!" assented Gordon Gay. "There you are!"
 He held out his wrist for inspection.

Knox's eyes glittered as he saw a red scratch on the wrist. He felt that he had found his man at last.

"So it was you?" he exclaimed.
 Gay looked surprised.
 "I! What was me?" he naturally inquired.
 "How long have you had that scratch?"
 "Lemme see! I got it from a pin in that ass Mont Blong's jacket, when he was showing me a jui-tait trick!" said Gay thoughtfully. "Two days ago, Knox. Awfully good of you to inquire after my little accidents in this way!"
 "You young hound!"
 "Eh!"
 "You were here last night!" exclaimed Knox fiercely. "I saw that scratch! You will follow me to Mr. Linton at once!"

Gay regarded him with cool contempt.
 "I shall do nothing of the sort," he answered composedly. "You can go and eat ome, my friend. Come on, you chaps! We've wasted enough time on this lunatic!"
 And Gordon Gay & Co. proceeded to Study No. 6, leaving Knox standing with a brow like thunder.

CHAPTER 12.

No Luck!

TOM MERRY & CO. were all in Study No. 6, waiting for the arrival of the Grammarians.

The chums of the School House were standing an extra-special feed to celebrate the punishment of their tyrant, and the Terrible Three and Figgins & Co. were all there.

The study was considerably crowded, but there was room for the three Grammarians. The festive board, as a novelist would say, groaned under the goodly viands. Fatty Wynn's face was quite beatific in its expression.

"Welcome, my infants!" said Jack Blake cheerily. "The feast is spread in the festive hall, and everything in the garden is lovely!"

"Yess, wathah!"
 "Good egg," said Gordon Gay. "We've brought over a topping appetit' apiece. By the way, has your prefect Knox gone dotty?"

"Not more than usual, so far as I know!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Did he ask to see your wrist? I saw him talking to you."

"Yes," said Gay. "He's awfully interested in a scratch I've got there. Seems to me that he's off his rocker. He told me to follow him to Mr. Linton, and I came up here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 There was a roar of laughter in Study No. 6. The Grammarians looked puzzled; but Tom Merry concisely explained, and then Gordon Gay & Co. joined in the laughter.

"My hat! What a dodge!" said Gay admiringly. "Let him come looking after me if he likes! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, you can prove that you were indoors last night, if necessary!" said Tom Merry.

"Quite easily."
 "Not that your headmaster would be likely to listen to such a yarn, if Knox was ass enough to go and complain to him," grinned Figgins. "I shouldn't wonder if he brings Linton here to speak to you, though."

"Talk of angels, and you heah the wattle of their wings," remarked Arthur Augustus, as a knock came at the study door.

Mr. Linton entered, with Knox behind him. There was a

worried and harassed look upon the face of the master of the Shell. The Secret Society was beginning to get on his nerves. He had plenty of matters to think about besides Knox and his endless troubles with the juniors, the absence of Mr. Railton throwing a good deal of extra work upon his shoulders. Possibly he was getting a little fed up with Knox.

The juniors all stood up very respectfully as Mr. Linton entered.

"Gay, I wish to have a word with you."
 "Certainly, sir," said Gordon Gay.
 "Were you within the precincts of this school last evening after eight o'clock?"

"I, sir? Oh, no, sir!"
 "You give me your word, Gay?"
 "Certainly," said Gordon Gay.
 Mr. Linton paused. The Australian schoolboy's eyes met his clearly and frankly.

Knox's acid-venue broke in:
 "He has a scratch on his wrist, sir, exactly the same as the one I saw."
 "I've a scratch on my wrist, certainly," said Gordon Gay;
 "but I was doing my prep at the Grammar School last evening at eight o'clock."

"I don't believe you!" said Knox.
 Gay shrugged his shoulders. He did not care a straw whether Knox believed him or not.

"That will do, Knox," said Mr. Linton, with a worried frown. "We must accept Gay's assurance on the point."

"If you were to see his headmaster, sir—" Knox ventured.

Mr. Linton shook his head decidedly.
 "Gay would repeat his assurance in the presence of his headmaster, and my purpose would be effected," he said. "It is certainly a strange coincidence concerning the scratch on Gay's wrist, but I am compelled to accept his word."

And Mr. Linton rustled out of the study.
 Knox waited till he was gone, and then he turned savagely upon the three Grammarians.

"You can fool him," he snarled, "but you can't fool me! I shall catch you at it next time, and then you will smart for it!"

"Catch a weasel asleep!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Knox, old man, you couldn't catch me in a month of Sundays!"
 "You admit it was you, then?" howled Knox.

"Not at all. I don't admit anything," said Gay cheerfully.
 "You've said you don't believe me. Well, you can believe what you like, old chap; it doesn't matter to me in the least. You can believe that I flew over in an aeroplane if you like. I haven't the slightest objection."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox stamped furiously out of the study. The laughter of the juniors followed him down the passage. The prefect lounged moodily into Cutts's study, and Cutts of the Fifth looked at his clouded face with a smile.

"Not bowled the young rotters out yet?" he asked.

"No," growled Knox.
 "Why not look for the place where they took you? If you find it, you may find some clue to the young rascals!"

"I don't believe they're in St. Jim's at all," said Knox.
 "I'm pretty certain it's a set of those Grammar School rotters chipping in."

"Phy! It will be pretty hard to put salt on their tails, if that's the case!" said Cutts, with a whistle. "Not that I think it's likely. But what are you going to do?"

"I'll make them squirm for it, anyway! If it's Gay and his friends, they're doing it to oblige Tom Merry, and I'll make Merry smart for it!" said Knox, gritting his teeth.

"And suppose the Secret Committee collar you again?"

Knox looked very troubled.
 "I suppose I shall have to chance that," he grunted.
 "Loole here, you're a keen beggar, Cutts, and it may be your turn next. Can't you give me some advice?"

Cutts laughed.
 "The only advice I can give you is to let the young beggars alone," he said. "You can't find them out, and they can't be stopped. They've got a good bit of plunk and resource to think of this wheeze at all. I've given up cuffing the fags myself. Safer to let them alone, under the circs. I don't want to be panned off somewhere in the dark and flogged. Not at all to my taste. Leave them alone, Knox, old man. You've run on to a bigger job than you can handle, and my advice is—chuck it! When Railton comes back the whole thing will come to an end."

"I'm going to make them feel that life isn't worth living before Railton comes back," said Knox viciously. "I sha'n't be head prefect when Railton's here again."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.
 "Well, if you're going to hunt for trouble, I can't help you," he said. "I've given you my advice—chuck it."

"Oh, rats!" growled Knox, and he swung out of the study, and slammed the door behind him.

Knox, in his hour of need, condescended to ask help and counsel from the other prefects. But the other prefects gave him exceedingly short and sharp replies. Darrel candidly advised him to stop being a beastly bully. Langton suggested that he should try being decent by way of a change. Having obtained scant comfort from the prefects, Knox stamped away ill-temperedly to his own study.

As he entered his study he uttered almost a yell of rage. Chalked in big letters on the looking-glass was the notice, greeting him as he entered the study:

"BULLY! THE SECRET COMMITTEE IS WATCHING YOU! BEWARE!"

Knox panted with fury as he rubbed the chalked letters from the glass. While he was so engaged, a stone whizzed through his study window and dropped on the floor. In surprise, the prefect stared at it. A paper was tied round the stone, and he dragged it off and unfolded it. Daubed on it in large letters were the words:

"THE HOUR IS COMING! TREMBLE!!!"

Knox rushed to the window and looked out into the quadrangle. A great many fellows were to be seen, but no one was near his window, and there was no possible clue to the person who had thrown in the note.

Knox's hand trembled a little as he thrust the threatening note into the fire. His courage was beginning to fail him.

CHAPTER 13.

Levison Has Had Enough.

"WOW! Wow!"
"Grooch!"
"Great Scott!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Tom Merry & Co. heard those lamentable exclamations as they passed Study No. 6 an evening or two later.

The captain of the Shell opened the door and looked in. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy were groaning in chorus, what time they rubbed their hands or twisted them under their armpits.

"Been through it again?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, by Jove! Oh, crumbs! My beastly hands feel as if they have been bayed!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Knox, of course?"

"Yaas."

"He's found a card pinned on his back," granted Blake. "Twasn't us, but he felt certain we knew something about it. So we did, as a matter of fact, but he has no right to jump to conclusions like that. He's licked us all round."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Dash it all, you can appeal to Linton for that!" he exclaimed. "Even Knox isn't allowed to cane chaps on suspicion."

Blake groaned.

"But he's got his excuse ready," he snorted—"we haven't done our lines—as usual. He's taken jolly good care to load us up with lines, so that he's always got an excuse for going for us. I've got about three hundred overdue."

"And I've got four hundred or so," grunted Herries.

"I've left off counting mine," said Digby lugubriously. "I can't do 'em all, so what's the use. Knox has been worse instead of better since the Secret Committee put him through it."

"And he's specially waxy now, because he's lost his sneak," said Blake. "Levison has had his lesson. He hasn't sneaked at all the last two days—he's afraid to. I hear that Knox has been cutting up rusty with him."

"Well, that's so much to the good," said Tom Merry. "Knox will have to be dealt with again—more severely. He was warned, and he promised to reform. Next time, perhaps, he will keep his promise. He's making us smart because he can't get at Gordon Jay. He thinks the Secret Committee are Grammarian chaps. Well, it's time the Secret Society got to work again."

"But how?" said Blake dolefully. "He has taken to keeping careful. He is on his guard now. He has taken to awfully inside the house after dark, and if he goes out he always has a chap or two with him—Cutts, or Gilmore, or Sifton, or somebody. He doesn't mean to take any chances. The Secret Committee won't be able to get at him again, so far as I can see."

"Wathash not! The awful wrotch is too deep for us!" said Arthur Augustus despondently.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We'll see about that," he replied. "S-hush! Here comes the beast!"

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 1D.

Every Monday.

Every Friday.

Every Saturday, 2

Knox came striding along the Fourth Form passage. He paused as he saw the Terrible Three in the doorway of Study No. 6.

"Have you done your lines, you three?" he demanded.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Yes, Knox. All done, every blessed one, and taken in to Mr. Linton."

And Monty Lowther and Manners smiled too. They had bucked up with their latest impositions in order to give Knox no excuse for doubling them.

"Oh!" said Knox, with a scowl. "Don't grin at me in that impertinent way! Take a hundred lines, Lowther!"

"Eh? What for?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"For impertinence," said Knox, scowling.

"But I wasn't impertinent, my dear fellow," objected Lowther.

"Take two hundred lines!" snapped Knox.

"Look here——" began Tom Merry and Manners together warmly. This was getting a little too "thick" even for Knox.

"Take two hundred lines each, and show them up before bedtime," said Knox. "Fail, and they will be doubled, and you will be kept in to-morrow afternoon to write them out."

And Knox strode on to the passage, leaving the Terrible Three dumbfounded. Jack Blake grinned at them in a feeble way.

"You're getting it now," he said. "It's a case of the giddy wolf and the lamb over again. If you do anything, you get it in the neck. If you don't do anything, you get it in the neck just the same. Knox has got us under his thumb."

"My hat!" muttered Tom Merry, drawing a deep breath. "We're not going to stand this. It's too thick. I'm going to appeal to Linton."

"You'll only make matters worse."

"I'm going to try. Come with me, you chaps!"

"Ahem!" said Lowther. "Of course, we have a right of appeal to the House-master. But considering that Linton backs Knox up, did chaps—ahem!"

"Let's try, anyway."

"Oh, all right!"

Lowther and Manners followed their leader to Mr. Linton's study. The Form-master gave them a look of sharp inquiry. He listened impatiently while Tom Merry stated his case.

"We appeal to you, sir, as our House-master at present. Knox has given us two hundred lines each for nothing at all."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Linton. "I am sure Knox would do nothing of the kind. What reason did he give?"

"Ahem! He said Lowther was impertinent; but he wasn't."

"Probably opinions differ on that point," said Mr. Linton drily. "After what happened in Study No. 6 last week, I am quite prepared to believe it. I shall certainly not rescind your impositions. You may go."

"But, sir——"

"You may go!" repeated Mr. Linton, more sharply.

The Terrible Three left the study.

"Didn't I tell you it wouldn't be any good, Tommy?" said Monty Lowther despondently, when they were in the passage. "Linton backs up Knox, all the time. Naturally, he won't hear a word against the chap he's made head-prefect. It's no good. I suppose you're not thinking of carrying the appeal further on—to Ratty?"

"Well, no," said Tom. "I know that would make matters worse. Ratty would only go for us. There's only one thing to be done. The Secret Committee have got to give Knox another lesson."

"They can't get at him!" growled Manners.

"I've got an idea about that."

And the Terrible Three returned to Study No. 6, where the members of the secret society held a long and serious council together.

Meanwhile, Knox had gone into Levison's study. The spy of the Fourth was alone there when the prefect came in. Knox closed the door, and fixed his eyes upon Levison in a very unpleasant manner. He had a cane in his hand, and Levison eyed the cane uneasily. Matters had not been going well between the precious pair for the last few days.

"You haven't been to my study lately," said Knox.

"No," said Levison, his eyes still on the cane.

"You know our arrangement," said the prefect. "I was to be kept regularly informed of all that went on in the House. That's my system. Why haven't you made any reports for the last two days?"

Levison shifted uneasily.

"I—I'm not going to sneak!" he muttered. "Look here, Knox, it ain't safe. You can't find out who those secret rotters are; and you can't stop their tricks. I'm jolly well not going to be collared and flogged again, if I can help it. You can manage without my help."

Knox gave him a bitter look.

"So you are afraid of those young fools with their silly macks on!" he snapped.

"Well, yes, I am. I've had enough."

"And do you think I'm going to let you desert me like this?" demanded the prefect. "I depend on your reports for keeping the juniors in order."

"I'm not going to bring you any more reports," said Levison doggedly. "I'm sorry now I started it at all. Kildare used to manage without having reports brought to him when he was head-prefect. It's a rotten thing, anyway, and I'm fed up with it. I'm not going to do it any more."

Knox set his teeth hard.

"Very well. Of course, you can have your own way. You were late to calling-over last night, Levison. Hold out your hand."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"You can't expect me to favour you. I've cased Tom Merry and Blake for being late for call-over, and I must be just!"

Levison backed away.

"Don't talk that rot to me!" he snarled. "Look here, Knox, if you begin bullying me, I'll go to Mr. Linton and tell him that you've made me sneak about the fellows, and established a regular system of spying and tale-bearing. How would you like that?"

"I don't think he would believe it, especially when I explain to him that I have punished you for tale-bearing," said Knox grimly.

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"That's what I'm going to do now. You are a sneak, Levison, and I disapprove of sneaks. Hold out your hand!"

"I won't!" yelled Levison.

Knox said no more, but he strode at the cad of the Fourth, seized him by the collar, and lashed him across the shoulders with the cane. Levison roared and struggled in the grasp of the bully of the Sixth, but the cane rose and fell relentlessly. Levison's experience in the hands of the Secret Committee had been nothing to this. He was thoroughly thrashed, and gasping with pain, when the prefect threw him aside at last.

"There!" panted Knox. "That may bring you to your senses, you young rascal. And you'll stay in to-morrow afternoon and write out two hundred lines."

Knox quitted the study and slammed the door after him. He left Levison groaning and grinding his teeth. It was not the first time that the cad of the Fourth had discovered that the way of the transgressor is hard. Between the Secret Committee on one side and the bullying prefect on the other, the spy of the School House seemed likely to have an exceedingly unpleasant time.

CHAPTER 14.

Victory!

MIDNIGHT had tolled out from the clock-tower.

St. Jim's was buried in silence and slumber.

The last door had closed; the last light had been extinguished.

But in the old School House of St. Jim's there were several fellows who were wakened.

Knox of the Sixth, in his room in the Sixth Form passage, was sleeping soundly enough. He did not hear a cautious step in the passage outside; he did not bear the handle of his door turning softly.

Like all the Sixth Form, Knox had a room to himself, study and bed-room combined. The dim starlight, falling into the window, glistened upon the bed and the sleeping prefect.

Knox awoke suddenly.

A tap on the shoulder had awakened him, and he started up in bed, to discover that he was not alone in the room.

Three dark figures, cloaked from head to foot, their faces concealed by black masks, stood by his bedside.

Knox glared at them for a moment, doubting whether he was dreaming.

He had taken so much care of himself since his experience in the hands of the Secret Committee, that he had ceased to fear reprisals from them. Outside the House he gave them no chance of getting at him; and that they would venture to attack him inside the House had never even occurred to his mind.

"He realised his mistake now."

"Here, in his room in the School House, at the hour of midnight, the Secret Committee had come. And Knox glared at them with mingled rage and terror.

He opened his mouth for a yell; but the Three were prepared for that. In an instant he was seized and pushed down into the bed again, and a handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth.

Knox struggled wildly in the bed.

But three strong pairs of hands were sufficient to keep him down, and his wrists were dragged together and tied. A cord passed round his head secured the stuffed handkerchief in his mouth. Then he was yanked out of the bed upon the floor, his ankles were tied.

Unable to struggle or to call out, the prefect lay upon the carpet, his dilated eyes fixed upon the three dark figures.

He was in the hands of the Secret Committee again.

Here in his room they had seized him. He could not call for help. There was nothing to stop the infliction of the punishment, and the bully's heart misgave him, and he shivered with apprehension.

"Put on the sack!"

It was the deep voice he had heard before in the Black Chamber. The prefect, shivering with cold in his pyjamas and with terror too, was shoved into the sack, and it was drawn tight about him.

Then he was lifted from the floor.

With wildly-beating heart, striving vainly to call out, the bully of the Sixth felt himself carried out of his room.

Whether were the captors taking him now? Not to the Black Chamber where he had been punished before; they could hardly get him out of the house. He felt himself carried upstairs, flight after flight. He guessed that he was being taken to the top box-room—a secluded room, far from the bed-rooms and dormitories, where a little noise was not likely to be noticed, even in the silence of the night.

He was set down upon a cold, hard floor, and he heard a door closed and locked. He trembled. He was a prisoner, locked in the secluded box-room with the Three.

Who were they?

His suspicion that the Secret Committee were Gordon Gay & Co. vanished now. The Grammarians could not be in the School House of St. Jim's at that hour of the night.

Neither could they be New House fellows. At all events, it was extremely improbable.

Were they Tom Merry & Co.? That did not seem likely, either, for the Shell fellows had proved a conclusive alibi on the occasion of the first appearance of the Secret Three at St. Jim's.

"Take off the sack!"

The sack was drawn away.

Knox glared round him with starting eyes.

He was in the top box-room, as he had suspected. This time the room was not hung in black. Apparently the committee had not risked bringing the weird paraphernalia of the Secret Society into the House. But the three figures were clad in black cloaks and masks complete. A Nihilist society could not have looked more imposing and mysterious.

"Knox!" came the deep voice. "You know in whose hands you are!"

Knox glared, but he could not speak. The Secret Three evidently did not intend to give him a chance of waking the house. A single yell for help from the bound prefect would have put a sudden end to the proceedings in the box-room.

"You have broken your word, Knox."

"Groooh!" mumbled Knox faintly.

"You promised to amend the last time you were in our hands. You have not kept your promise. You are a cad!"

"Grrrr!"

"You were warned of what would happen to you if you persisted in your evil courses," went on the deep tones.

"Now the sentence is going to be executed."

Knox's eyes almost started from his head, as the Chief of the Three produced a pair of scissors, and another of the dark figures lifted a jampot full of tar from an empty trunk. He remembered the terrible threat of the Three, and he shuddered. He made wild efforts to speak, but the handkerchief stuffed into his mouth prevented all utterance.

Two of the conspirators grasped him, and the chief set to work upon his hair. Knox wriggled and mumbled spasmodically as the scissors clipped through his hair, and tufts of it fell over his face and on the floor.

He wriggled wildly, but he wriggled in vain. The thought of how he would look on the morrow, with the hair shaved clean off his head, made him grind his teeth. Tufts after tufts of hair dropped off under the slipping scissors.

Knox writhed his head wildly, and gave a fearful gurgle as the scissors clipped the tip of his ear.

"Better keep your silly napper still," said the chief. "You may get your ears amputated next time."

Knox gurgled.

"You want to speak?" asked the chief, his eyes gleaming at the prefect's furious face through the holes in his mask.

Knox nodded his head.

"You can't have the gag taken out. You would make a row," said the chief in his deep tones. "You can write if you like."

He produced a pencil and a sheet of paper, and placed them within reach of Knox's right hand. The cord was slackened sufficiently to allow the prefect to write.

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"Stop it!" That was what Knox wrote down in scrawling pencil.

"Rats!" said the deep-voiced chief. "I'm going to shave every hair off your silly head, and then anoint you with tar."

The prefect shuddered.

Clip, clip, clip! went the scissors. Thicker and faster the hair dropped from Knox's devoted head. He was feeling quite cold about the head now. He knew the yell of laughter that would greet him on the morrow, when he appeared in public with a shorn and shaven crown. This was worse than the flogging. And the tar was still to come.

Clip, clip, clip, clip! As actively as a professional barber, the Chief of the Three clipped away at Knox's hair.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r-r!"

Knox began to scribble again.

"Stop it! I'll do anything you like!"

The chief paused. Knox was very nearly bald by this time. His head looked like that of a convict.

"There is some more to come off," said the chief. "Not much, but some. You will look very pretty in the morning, Knox."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"I should recommend you not to show yourself all at once. You will give the fellows rather a shock."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"If we let you off the tar, will you promise to amend your wicked ways, and try to become a decent chap?"

"Grrrrr!"

"Nod your head if you mean yes."

Knox nodded his head. He would have agreed to anything to avoid being reduced to a state of complete baldness, with a coating of tar to take the place of his hair.

"Will you keep your word?"

Nod!

"You are an awful liar, you know. Will you put it into writing?"

Knox shook his head savagely.

Clip, clip, clip!

Knox nodded hurriedly, and his ear had another narrow escape.

"Good! You will write as I dictate."

Nod!

The chief laid down the scissors. From under his black cloak he produced a small sheet of cardboard and a fountain-pen. Knox's eyes glittered as he saw them. Evidently the Three had come with the intention of forcing him to write as they dictated. They knew in advance that he had not the courage to go through his punishment and defy them to the end.

"Take the pen, Knox." Knox took the pen, and his right arm was wholly released, so that he could write with freedom. He was allowed to sit up, and the card was placed on a box beside him. One of the masked avengers held the targer ready. It had occurred to Knox to attempt to struggle now that one arm was free. But the jar of tar held above his head caused him to abandon that idea at once. He did not want the tar to come swamping down on him.

"Now write as I dictate," said the chief in deep tones. "Fail to do so, and you perish—I mean, I shall shave you quite bald, and tar you all over, and leave you tied up here till the morning. You have provoked the wrath of the Secret Committee of St. Jim's, Knox, and you are doomed!" "Doomed!" repeated the two masked followers of the chief.

There was the sound of a chuckle from the direction of the door. Knox started. He realised that there were other fellows outside the box-room listening to the scene. He wondered savagely how many of the School House juniors were concerned in the proceedings of the Secret Committee. The chief turned a stern glance towards the door.

"Shush!" he growled. "This is a serious matter, Brother of the Black Chamber! Shush—I mean, silence!"

There was another chuckle, and then silence.

"Write!" said the chief sternly. "I, Gerald Knox, of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's— You rotten cad, write in your own fat!—If you try to disguise your writing again, it's all up with you! Mind, this is your last chance. Write as I tell you, in your own hand, or I'll shave you bald and tar you from head to foot, and flog you into the bargain. You're not getting half what you've been asking for."

Knox's eyes blazed, but he obeyed. The chief turned the sheet of cardboard over, and Knox started afresh, writing at the dictation of the deep-voiced chief:

"I, Gerald Knox, of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's, confess that I am a cad and a bully, and beg to say that I am sorry for it. I promise to mend my ways, and try to become decent, and will endeavour in every way to do my duty as a prefect, without being a beastly bully and rotter as heretofore.—As witness my signature,

"GERALD KNOX, Sixth Form."

"Good enough!" said the chief, and there was another chuckle from the doorway. "This confession will be posted up in the House to-morrow. Knox, and you will be expected to keep your word. Fail, and the Secret Committee will seize you again, and next time you will not escape. Next time your hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes will be clean-shaved, and you will be tarred from top to toe, as well as receiving one hundred lashes from a horse-whip. This is a promise, honour bright, as Chief of the Secret Society of St. Jim's."

Knox shuddered. He knew that the masked chief meant every word he said. Although the masks and the cloaks and the secrecy smacked very much of amateur theatricals, there was no doubt at all that the mysterious society were in deadly earnest.

The chief waited for the ink to dry, and then slipped the card under his cloak. The candle was blown out.

In the darkness, Knox heard a sound of departing footsteps, and then the door softly closed, and he was left alone.

The juniors—whoever they were—were gone! Knox struggled with his bonds, but, as on the previous occasion, he was nearly half an hour in getting free from them. Long before that, the members of the Secret Committee were in bed and asleep; and Knox knew that it was useless to visit the dormitories in the hope of catching them. However much he might suspect their identity, he could prove nothing. Knox wriggled himself free at last, tore away the gag, and limped away from the box-room, shivering with cold, and almost sick with rage and chagrin.

He went back to his room, and plunged into bed. But it was not easy to sleep. Somewhere in the School House was the card he had written, and on the morrow it was to be posted up in the House for all St. Jim's to read. Knox writhed with rage and shame as he thought of it. That confession, written in his own hand, would cover him with humiliation as with a garment.

If he had had only a little more courage, if he had defied the Secret Committee to do their worst, as he knew fellows like Kildare or Darrel would have done in his place. But he hadn't had the courage. Grim courage and determination seldom go along with a bullying and tyrannical character. He could never have endured having his eyebrows and eyelashes shaved, and the infliction of a hundred lashes. He had bought his safety by signing away his dignity and self-respect; and when that card was posted up in the house there would be a howl of laughter from the whole school, a torrent of contempt and ridicule that would utterly crush the bully of the Sixth. He knew that he could never face it. From the head of the Sixth to the smallest fag of the school he would meet with nothing but laughter, contempt, and mockery. Every fellow—senior or junior—would despise him wholeheartedly for his pusillanimity, and in the face of such a torrent of scorn and ridicule he could never hold up his head. His authority would be gone. The littlest fags would hardly pretend to respect him.

He groaned in anguish of spirit at the thought.

He had carried matters with a high and heavy hand, but the Secret Committee had won in the long run. Even if he found out the offenders, and obtained their punishment, that would make no difference to the shame and humiliation of his own position. Even Mr. Linton could not stand by him any longer. The Form-master would feel nothing but cold contempt for a prefect who had allowed himself to be threatened and dictated to by juniors. Once Mr. Linton's eyes had fallen upon that humiliating confession, and Knox would not remain head-prefect another minute, if he remained a prefect at all.

The game was up!

The Secret Society of St. Jim's had won hands down, and the bully of the Sixth was beaten, badly beaten! He knew it, and realised it clearly, and he knew that his only chance of ever holding his head up in the school again was to secure the suppression of that document in his own hand. If the Secret Committee could be induced to keep it dark he would be willing to make any terms. But how was he to find them to make terms with them? He groaned again as he realised his helplessness. The dawn was creeping into his window before the unfortunate bully slept at last.

CHAPTER 15.

All Serene!

TOM MERRY came downstairs with a cheery face in the sunny September morning. The hero of the Shell seemed to be in great spirits.

"Merry!"

It was Knox's voice, but not Knox's usual tones. His tones were very subdued; in fact, quite civil.

(Continued on page 111 of cover)

OUR GRAND NEW WAR SERIAL.



READ THIS FIRST.

Paul Satorys, the rightful heir to the throne of Istan, lives quietly in England as a private gentleman until he hears that his place in Istan has been usurped by an adventurer named Jem Stanton, who is the exact double of Satorys. Worse than this, Stanton has deceived Grace Lang, Satorys' fiancée, out to Istan with him. Grace, however, discovers the deception and escapes from the usurper. She falls into the hands of a tribe of natives, who make her their queen, and call her Nada. Satorys himself is subsequently captured by the natives and brought before the queen, who, however, he does not recognise owing to her veil. Nada offers to help him, and Paul leads her native troops against Istan. He is defeated, however, but saves himself by donning the uniform of an Istan officer, and mixing with the Istan Army. With his faithful followers, Peter Martyke and Anton, he enters the city, and gets into conversation with an Istan officer. He learns that Germany has declared war on England, and that the troops of Istan are going to England to help the German invading forces. Paul Satorys, with Peter Martyke and Anton, succeed in reaching England with the Istan troops undetected, but immediately they land they escape to warn the English general. But General Summers, in command of the British forces, decides to push forward, and at Evesham the first great battle takes place. Paul, with his companions, are in the front rank, when the order is given to charge. Despite the raking fire of the invaders, the men succeed in getting at the Germans, and a terrible hand-to-hand fight begins. Satorys, with the British, is slightly wounded, and it is not until some hours later that he knows the charge failed. It is then he has the wild idea of making himself known as the King of Istan. No sooner thought of than acted upon. Paul visits Stanton, overpowers him, and, in a fine, stirring speech to the Istan troops, wins them over to his side. Stanton escapes through the German lines. Meanwhile, England is in a pitiful plight, thanks to short-sighted counsels and the impression that the country was safe from conquest. Satorys advances with the Istan army, to find that the Germans will not give battle, but seek to draw him further into the country.

(Now go on with the story.)

Turning the Tables.

Satorys had served in the British Army during his long exile from his native country, and now the old military instinct returned.

There was no question now of the loyalty of the men of the powerful corps which had been shipped to England to assist, as it was imagined, in the downfall of the British Empire, and the news that the army from Istan had swung round and was marching against them caused something akin to panic in the German troops.

Satorys saw little of anybody but the chiefs of his staff in the crowded hours that followed.

With a widely extended front the Istan force advanced, and the German position was attacked, the guns of Britain's new ally opening the assault late in the afternoon.

A Bid for a Throne.

A Thrilling War Story.

By CLIVE R. FENN.

The enemy was strongly entrenched, but the moral effect of the loss of the Istan alliance was tremendous, and, moreover, there was the advance from the north as well to be reckoned with.

"It is wonderful, sir!" said Peter.

He was standing by the side of his leader, both being mounted, and Satorys, glass in hand, was watching the slow advance of the Istan troops.

Satorys slipped his glass into his belt and gave a satisfied nod.

"Wonderful it is, Peter," he said. "Haven't seen much of you these last few hours. Was wondering what had become of you."

"Been busy, sir," said the sailor. "Been with Mr. Anton. He's got his command, you know, and—"

"And you haven't—eh, Peter? Is that what you were going to say?"

"No, sir, I am only a common sailor, and, of course, I don't expect a command; but if you give me leave to stand by you, same as before, I shall be very much obliged to you."

Of course, Peter, you are my friend, and I look to you to be with me," said Satorys kindly.

"Despite all these brilliant officers, sir, who—"

Peter stopped as the bugles rang out, and the Istan commanders were seen galloping forward straight towards the clouds of smoke which hung over the valley and screened the foe.

Satorys pressed his knees into his horse's side and rode into the smoke, and Peter followed, and the real business of the day began; for the Istan infantry was doubling up, their way cleared by the artillery, and charged. There was no ruinous close formation here, no mad clinging to the old plan. The plucky little Istan soldiers fought, not as a machine, but each man had his chance; and with the formidable force of cavalry charging on the right flank right for the enemy's gunners, and the line swinging forward resistlessly, the Germans were hurled back, their officers vainly striving to maintain their men in their alignment, keen even then for the principles of the old school of war.

Peter saw Satorys charge into the thick of the fighting, and he followed, to see the Istan infantry falling thick around. Then he was at the side of his leader, who was charging onward, careless of danger, reckless of all but the thought of victory.

The enemy broke, re-formed, and with their gunners saluted as they stood to their guns, fell back, but rallied again. And Peter was with Satorys as the German infantry surged up, threatening to overwhelm the Istan centre, where the colours fluttered bravely. For a time the issue seemed in doubt.

"My flag retreats!" cried Satorys.

It was he who seized the standard from the hand of the officer who dropped mortally wounded, he who raised the flag high and roared out the order to charge once more.

And the Istan soldiers responded, mad with enthusiasm now; and before the furious onslaught the Germans broke in disorder.

"I'll carry it!" cried Peter. "It's safe with me."

And Satorys surrendered the tattered emblem as the line swept on.

A scene of carnage then. The men were dropping all
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Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

around, but nothing could stay that charge. And as night fell the German position was swept, scattered parties of the enemy fleeing westward, and their second line meeting the same fate at the hands of the British force which was coming south by forced marches to link up with England's new ally.

Nothing could have equalled the enthusiasm of the British troops as they fraternised with the Italian men. The war had opened disastrously, but it seemed likely to close in triumph for Britain.

There was everything nearly in its favour now, and the whole nation was in arms. Never had the land seen such a burst of patriotism sweep from coast to coast; and as leader of the Italian field force Satorys was privileged to witness the enthusiasm of one and all for the war.

And during the times that followed, Satorys permitted Peter to remain on the same footing, though the brave old sailor was somewhat changed.

"You see, sir," he said, as the march south began, "things are mighty different now, and I give you best. It has all been very grand, and all that; but you are a real, proper sort of King, and will go back to Istanbul one of these days, and let Stanton hear something drop; for he is back there, so they say, trying to keep his place—which he won't. But, as I was saying, it is different now; and me being only a simple, harmless sort of sailor, it isn't right for you to be letting me treat you as I do."

"That is for me to judge, I suppose, Peter."

"I don't know so much about that, sir. You see, it's this way—now that Mr. Anton has so much to do, I have to talk to somebody, and it is difficult for me to think of you as anybody else but 'Mr. Satorys,' same as you used to be."

Satorys laughed, and drew himself up in the saddle.

"If I were you, Peter, old friend, I wouldn't trouble my head about such things as that. I am not changed. We are going on just the same; and if you mention the matter again, or try to be stand-offish and proud, I shall be angry."

"Now you've said it, sir," said the sailor. "If there's trouble, I hope you won't get to blaming me—you with a staff of splendid officers, some of whom look at me with a cock of the eye, as if to ask what I am doing here. I don't mind so long as you say it is all right. That's good enough for me."

"Glad to hear you say so, Peter. If it had not been for you I should not be here at all."

"Oh, come, come, sir! We won't fish up old scandals, if you please. Let bygones be bygones, as the oyster said. But isn't it wonderful what they can do in this country—your old country? For you are as good as an Englishman yourself, and you have often told me you were proud of the fact. There may have been mistakes, but there haven't been any more. Things might one time have looked in a bad way—but isn't going to be any more."

It was, indeed, as Peter said, wonderful how the British nation, taken utterly by surprise as it had been, rose to the emergency and showed the world that the old warrior spirit lived and was as strong as ever.

Under the leadership of the King—his Majesty King George, who had accorded so hearty and gracious a welcome to his spirited ally from Istanbul—the rally had been something which would shed undying glory on the British name. The invasion was a thing of the past, the German divisions being annihilated, swept to the sea; and now the part in Europe which the British Empire had to play was one which promised to turn the tide, and crush for ever the aggressors of Berlin.

The march south of the armies was a triumph, and the country seemed to have recovered, to have forgotten the temporary reverse. Troops were pouring in from Canada, Australia, and India; and the British Navy commanded the seas.

The hour of peril was over.
The hour of chastisement for the tyrant had come.

War to the End.

"You told me I could say what I liked, sir," said Peter; "and so I will let out a bit."

It was several days later, and the combined forces were entering London, where the populace seemed to have gone mad.

"Say on, Peter," said Satorys.

"I am no general, sir, or anything like that, and it still seems somehow wrong for me to be talking to you."

"You are my friend, Peter. Surely that is enough!"

"Thank you, sir. I don't ask for more. Just look at 'em, sir," the sailor went on, as the crowd broke through the cordons of police and surged frantically round the incoming

troops. "There were some folks who cried down the Old Country, a lot of tallow-faced, sheep-headed, dishonest fools—foreigners who have eaten our bread. But they have discovered their mistake now."

Peter was in his element during the days which followed, and he learned with delight that the Italian force had volunteered to a man to serve in the war across the sea—a war which could have only one end, namely, the crushing of the power of Germany, which country seemed destined to be beaten to her knees.

There had been too many insults, too many threats, and now it was war to the end. And as Peter saw the excitement in London; heard the music sounding as the troops assembled before departure for France, he felt that what he knew as to the secret of Istanbul, of the girl who had made him swear silence as to her identity, might remain a secret for a long time yet. Nada was safe, and one day—might it be soon!—Paul Satorys would be returning to Istanbul—returning in triumph, with his people ready to welcome him as the great deliverer, the King who had brought great glory to the land, and who was coming back in honour to ascend the throne.

Some part of this was misty to the sailor; but he was very well satisfied as things were, he being in the proud position of friend of the King of Istanbul, and he did not ask for more.

And out in Europe, the war raged, the vast cohorts of Germany pressing westward and eastward, fighting for a world power, which, if gained, would make Berlin the mistress of the Continent and of the lands beyond.

There was no doubt in England as to the ultimate issue, and the people were standing by as one man, welcoming their gallant allies from the South, cheering Satorys as the hero—he was, accepting with stoical fortitude the hardships which the war entailed, though there was no dearth of food since the splendid British fleet had succeeded in keeping open the Atlantic trade routes, which ensured a plentiful supply of provisions for the Homeland.

But London had seen the realities of war for the first time in its life. The Government had risen to the need of the hour, and the country which had been overrun with German spies was now on the watch for the peril within. Never in its history had the country been so near the downfall. Never had the triumph been greater than now, the disputes of politicians forgotten, parties no longer existing, all for the State. It was great to see that enthusiasm, to feel the heart of the nation beating, as the country rose to a man.

But if the intensity of the feeling evoked was tremendous in Britain with men rushing to the colours, and those held back by sterner duty, only regretting that the call to them was to stand by and help in other ways, with feuds forgotten, and the drum-note sounding through the cities and the countryside, the enthusiasm was as great in France—France, the brave country which had suffered for years and waited, as only the strong can wait for the day.

The welcome the Allies received from the French was something which had in it the pent-up feeling of the years.

It looked as though the advance of the French troops and their Allies would be irresistible, for France and her supporters were fighting with the sense of right behind them, the knowledge of injustices to be swept away, and the men of the Italian force as with the British shared this feeling as with forced marches the main body pressed forward, crossing the frontier, and driving before them the advance parties of the Germans.

"They've got the people against them, sir, right enough," said Peter, as he trotted on by the side of Satorys, whose staff was just behind. "I may not know much about history, but I do remember the last war, and how the French had to give up a big slice of their own country. No wonder they never forgave it."

The speaker turned in his saddle, and gazed at the mountains whose crested peaks flashed in the sun. Away to the right the furious cannonade had started once more, the gunners of the Allies replying with effect to the fire of the Germans, who was moving down the advance bodies in swaths.

"It's war!" muttered the sailor.

He glanced at his companion. Satorys had reined in, and shouted an order to one of his officers, who galloped off to obey the order he had received, and to the sailor as he looked the scene was strange and unreal, the bridge over the tributary of the great river where they were halting seeming to be far more than a mile distant from the scene of carnage. It was war, though the smiling valley ahead of them was as peaceful, and as a trumpet rang out for the charge Satorys turned his horse, and was about to place himself at the head of his own advance guard, for he fought as a simple commander, a king though he was, when the bridge quivered, and ere the warning yell of Peter could have had effect, the King of Istanbul felt the ground beneath him heave, knew that the little bridge had been mined, and the next moment he

was flung from his horse, and dashed down into the depths of the water. He rose to the surface, and struck out.

All around him he saw fragments of the bridge, bodies of those who had perished; but even at that moment he realised that the disaster was of small account, for amidst the frenzied cries of victims came the trumpets sounding the charge. The woodwork bumped against him, and he caught hold of a beam. It slipped from his grasp. He was swimming again, and now he saw a dark form lying across a broken plank. Satorys made for it. It was Peter, the sailor, who was unconscious, and as Satorys dragged him to the further bank he felt the man was dead.

Satorys was treading in the ooze, and now he halted, looking back, wondering whether it was victory or defeat. The roar of the artillery filled the air, and he saw the light French cavalry dashing forward half a mile away.

And just at that moment Peter stirred, struggled up into a sitting posture, and then rose to his feet, and gave a groan. "We shall be losing all the fun," he said. "You saved my life, sir, and I shan't forget it; but just now there is something else to do."

He swung round, and Satorys saw what the sailor was about to do. Two horses, riderless, were plunging up the bank.

"Only a wetting. They are ours!" cried the sailor. "We had better get on."

"Yes, get on!" cried Satorys hoarsely. "No," jerked out the sailor. "You must wait, sir. You are not just an ordinary man. You must wait for the rest."

Satorys was mounted, and his horse started forward. He made no reply to the sailor's protest. The escort of the ruler of Istan had been swept away, but the brave French were charging forward, sabring the German gunners of the frontier fortifications, and the sight sent a thrill through the breast of Satorys. It was the revenge of years. For the moment he felt only one thing, only one mad desire—to be with the French, to fight by the side of the best soldiers, equal to all, and he pressed his horse's flanks, and charged on, with the sound of the firing whipping the summer air.

Then a sudden hush, and only the thud, thud of his horse's hoofs, or was it that he was deaf? He did not know—only that one thing to be in it along with the French and the Allies, for Istan was racing onward far away on the left wing, and the business, long delayed, of chasing the Germans back to safe old frontiers, was under way.

Peter was at his side. The air was dense with clouds of smoke, seeping off through the sunlit valley, and ahead there lay the conquered provinces, villages, smiling countryside, where the people were ready to acclaim the return of the French, whose brothers they were.

Peter did not talk then. The advance consisted of the French cavalry, a famous regiment, whose soldiers in the past had died for their motherland on the field of honour, a few soldiers of the Istan force, in the mad charge forward to reap the advantage of the artillery onslaught, the Allies had intermingled, and some of his own men saw Satorys charging on in their midst, their leader and revered chief, but at that moment, when the supreme issue hung in the balance, just a soldier like themselves.

Europe would ring with the splendour of that charge, and Peter, simple sailor as he was, felt the same as they all.

There was a stretch of open country, a wood, a chaos of deserted waggon, a delta of dead and dying, and beyond the enemy making another stand. The guns were abandoned, then. Another rush, and the Germans were in flight, their morale lost, and the French and their Allies were charging onward, racing through the outskirts of a considerable town, cutting down all who opposed.

Never in the course of the war was there anything to compare with that charge, minor engagement, though, of course,

it was, for the town was Mulhouse—Mulhouse, which, with its sister towns of the conquered provinces, had been waiting for that day.

There was a moment's halt there, a halt which was inevitable, for the streets of the town were narrow, and the people were dashing out of the houses cheering wildly, cheering with that sort of enthusiasm which is so near to tears, while from the windows flowers were thrown, and the French flag fluttered as well as the colours of England and Istan.

Peter gave a gasp as he let his sword slip from his hand and hang by his kno.

"It's too bad, sir," he said. "I can hardly speak at all, for I feel as though I had been fed on gunpowder for a week, and it's gritty stuff at best. But you take it, sir, indeed you do. You have no business here like this almost alone, doing the work of an ordinary trooper. I don't know what others would say to it. It was as much as I could do to keep you in sight. I do not mind doing the correct thing by the Germans, and I dare say there's a lot back there what wishes they'd never set eyes on me; but this sort of game is not good enough for you."

Satorys had backed his horse up against a garden wall, and now he lit a cigarette.

"Sorry you don't like it, Peter."

"Not like it, sir! Why, I wouldn't have missed this bit for all the gold in the Bank of England, and enough of them notes to reach round London. I was thinking of you, sir, that's all. Ah, get away with you!" he cried, as a fat woman dashed up to him and seized his hand, kissing it. "Don't do it, marm, don't do it! I hate that kind of thing, and, besides, I haven't had a wash for a week!"

The woman began to murmur something about the brave, brave soldiers, and Satorys smiled down at her, and slipped a coin into her hand.

They were pressing on once more, the Germans routed, and falling back on their second line of defence in complete disorder, while the French forced their signal advantage. Mulhouse was free!

"Down with Germany!"

Peter shook his head in grim displeasure as Satorys, heedless of the importance of his own life, trotted his horse onward through the darkening town. He had not been recognised, and the main Istan force was by that time miles away.

"And I am his only guard!" growled Peter, as he pressed forward. "Well, he has often told me that I am as good as a crowd, so there's nothing else for it. He won't listen to a man once he has got an idea into his head. But what will happen if he gets mischieved? Germany isn't beaten yet, not by long chalks it isn't, and the situation is not just what I would like to have it, that is, so far as we are concerned."

It was evening, then. Through the quaint, old-fashioned town, well within the frontier, the French and their allies streamed amidst the frantic hurrahs of the people. It might have been but yesterday that Alsace and Lorraine had been torn from the land to which they had owed allegiance for a matter of two hundred years. There were, of course, many in the crowd which cheered the gallant soldiers, who remembered the old days, the black year when France was in tears, and to Satorys, as he rode on, the whole thing was real enough, although in the heartbreaking days of 1870 he had been too young to understand.

The old men cheered themselves hoarse, and the children ran along by the side of the detachments, and called to them in the musical language of France, for Alsace had never forgotten, never given up hope, and the young generation was as well-primed as the grey-moustached veterans who stood bareheaded in front of the houses, and tried to grip the hands of the soldiers who were pushing on, on to Berlin, maybe, on to glorious death for some, for war knows no pity, shouting out the magic words which had been whispered through France for many a long year, "La Revanche!"

It was on into the night with the unknown around, and even Peter as he rode forward was impressed, for behind were the vast armies of France, and the brave Allies of the country which has stood for liberty and brotherhood. Ahead lay the frowning grey lands of Germany, a Germany no longer flushed with victory, a Germany cast down, its pride humbled to the dust, its crack regiments flung back from the frontiers they would have violated, the legend of its invincibility shown to be but an idle dream.

"Look out, sir!"

Peter was alive to the perils of the country, and as the force debouched into the open country amidst the luxuriant gardens and rich meadows of the beautiful province, it was the sailor who saw the shadowy figures of a strong body of

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the enemy whose design it was to cut off some of the French, for the latter had been compelled to divide after leaving the centre of the town.

Peter was not too late to put Satorys on the alert, but as the Germans made a dash, cutting at the French soldiers, maddened by the defeat, trying to recover what they had lost, for Berlin would bear of the repulse, and the day was bad one for the Fatherland, Satorys had scarcely time to a-bow about and defend himself.

He was slashed at by the burly Ublan of the Guard, and with his companions he found himself driven back, though the rally of the little group of Frenchmen was superb.

And then all was darkness, and he remembered nothing—only that he was still riding on, and that somebody kept on talking, and he felt that he ought to have been amused, but he was too weary to do more than listen and try to understand.

Then he was thinking of the condition of affairs, ready to blame himself for having separated himself in the excitement from his own men, and after that all was darkness—a darkness which suddenly came to an end as he started up, and saw Peter standing and looking down at him.

Satorys saw that he was lying in a pleasant room, saw that a woman with white hair was passing out of the door—a door which had flowers painted on the panels, and the sunshine streamed in through the door window.

"Yes, sir," said Peter; "I know exactly what you want to know—that is, how you came here. A nice business I had, for at first I thought you were dead."

"Well, I am a long way short of that, Peter."

"So's the French nation, sir," said the sailor, as he rustled a newspaper he was holding. "We have got off the main track, and there are plenty of the sausage-eaters round about, but this little place is hidden away, and they haven't spotted us yet."

Satorys tried to rise, but fell back with a groan. He remembered now. He had had a sabre cut across the thigh which threatened to lame him for life.

"Lie still, sir, and I'll tell you all about it. You can't move yet a while, and as I warned you—no, I didn't; only meant to—it is impossible for you to get about at present. Our party was badly damaged, and seeing that you were falling in your saddle, and that it wasn't any use for the moment to go on fighting, I managed to get you away, holding you up in the saddle, and making for the country. That's how it is we are here—all the doing of the horses; no use saying nice things to me about it, for I could never have got you out alone. A bit hot there, sir, all said and done, with the Germans mad with rage, and slashing at everybody with their long swords; but they won't get Alsace back, so matter what they do."

"My good Peter!"

"Nothing of the kind, sir. Ah, I see what you want—a stick, and the woman here showed me a lot."

Peter went to a table, and handed Satorys a box of cigars, striking a match, and frowning all the time.

"Have one yourself, Peter."

"Don't mind if I do, sir. Well," he went on after a pause, as he slipped cross-legged into a chair, "it's all in this paper, and during the day and a half you've been lying here—"

"A day and a half!"

"That's the truth, sir; and very bad it all made me, a-thinking that your number was up, and that we should have the Germans down on us every minute asking what we were doing here; and probably they would not have believed if I told them we were peaceful travellers, walking round just to see the flowers grow."

"I suppose not, Peter; but it is hard to understand."

"Dare say, sir; but it is all true, and I have been trying to find out a means of communicating with our fellows, but it has not been possible, for we are off the track here, and it may mean capture, which is not what would suit us. But outside things is going all right, sir. I know a word or two of German, and can say 'Ich bin Engländer und wollen sie zagen!' and things like that; and the good woman here is almost French, and her sons have gone off to fight for France. There's a lot in this paper—a lot about what is being done, and how the King of England is standing up to them, with the dear Old Country at his back. The German fleet has been swept off the seas, except for one or two ships which the British Admiral is keeping as souvenirs, just to remember it all by, and the French have pressed on. You will have a chat with the good lady, sir, for she knows just about all there is to be known."

"And I am lying here helpless!" murmured Satorys, as he gazed out of the window into the beautiful garden which was ablaze with wonderful flowers.

"I wouldn't let a little thing like that worry you, sir."

"A little thing!"

"Well, it is, sir, and it isn't, if you take my meaning."

"I don't, Peter. I only know that things have gone against us, and that, from what you say, we may find ourselves inside a German prison before very long."

The sailor took a long pull at his cigar.

"Don't mention such a thing, sir. I hate them, I really do, and they would have their work cut out to get me there. Besides, this cottage is a long way up-country, and report says they are falling back steadily, and will never trouble this part of the land any more. I have done my best, sir; and the woman told me I ought to have been a doctor for the way I saw to your hurt, but the sawbones' idea never appealed to me. You just take things easy for a bit, sir, and don't worry, as the soap advertisements say."

"It don't seem any use worrying, Peter," said Satorys; "but it is bad to be out of it even for a time."

"But it is only for a time, sir," said the sailor gravely. "You will soon be right again. I have been thinking, sir, these last hours, when I was alone, thinking of the war, and it makes one think when one sees a woman like our friend here—she will be coming with some dinner presently—working on, suffering because she fears she may never see her sons any more, and it is war—a wicked war. Yes, it makes one think when one reads of how a chap who is, by persuasion and birth and all the rest of it, an emperor, getting up one fine morning, or it might be a wet one, and saying, 'I think I will have a war.' And he has it. And what's the end of it? Ruin and slaughter, hundred of thousands of the best chaps lying dead, and I reckon they have all got homes, and people what cares for them, and gardens, and all that, and, maybe, little kiddies whom they love. Not that I mind fighting, sir. But it isn't fighting to stand up to artillery, and be mown down without even as much as seeing the fellows who are taking aim. I suppose it is all right, but this war, it is a bad one, and the only good thing about it is that it will put the German back in his proper place. Never did like the Germans. The language is too sloshy, made so at the Tower of Babel when the languages were given out, and the chap who was to take his little lot for Germany got a mouthful of linewash in his mouth as he was going up a ladder. Besides, they think they know everything, and they swank till it makes one tired."

The door opened, and the woman with the white hair, of whom Satorys had caught a glance, entered.

"I am so glad to see you are better," she said softly.

She moved silently about the room, preparing a meal.

Satorys watched her. There might have been no war in the land, from the peacefulness of that scene.

"Thank you," he said at last. "We owe you much—my friend and I."

"It is an honour to help the brave English. You and the brave sailor there are British, I know."

Satorys did not contradict her, and the woman went on to speak of the war.

"I could have cried with joy when the news came that the French were in Alsace once more. But—but—" A deadly pallor came over her face, and she turned to Peter, seizing the sailor's arm, and pointing across the garden to the lane. "The Germans—the Germans!" she cried. "Your friend—we must hide him. Quick—quick!"

Satorys struggled to his feet, mastering the pain he experienced, and stood gripping the back of a chair, while the woman pointed excitedly to the floor above.

"Can you get up?" she cried.

Satorys looked at the ladder to a trapdoor and nodded, and Peter took his arm.

"I suppose it is the only way this time, sir; but my, when the time comes, won't those Germans get it warm? They are too many for us now. Yes, they are coming through the garden, going to make a stay, perhaps, and they had better not see us."

It was with the utmost difficulty that Satorys managed to mount the ladder, but the sailor assisted him all he could, and the woman of the house hurriedly removed the covers she had laid, trembling like the white.

In the room above the living-apartment—a chamber which was nothing more than a loft—Satorys sank down in the straw, and Peter lay flat on his chest, and inspected the newcomers through a crack in the boards.

"Yes, sir," he said, speaking as though in reply to something the other had said, though Satorys had not opened his lips; and they are Germans, right enough, or wrong enough, and they look as though they found the place comfortable. The good lady is being ordered to get them dinner—our dinner—bad 'cess to them! Wish she would poison the lot. They are officers, and think no end of themselves; and—"

(Continued on page 111 of cover.)

A BID FOR A THRONE.

(Continued from page 24.)

and—"Peter stopped, and seemed to be too interested in what he saw to speak.

"Well," said Satorys irritably, "what do you see?"

Peter turned his head for a second, and then resumed his position of close observation of what was passing in the room below.

"I wouldn't speak so loud, sir, if I was you," he whispered. "Those chaps are important people. But whoever they are, if they found that the good lady here was keeping a couple of strangers upstairs in her loft, they might want to know more, and it would be a bad day for us."

There was silence for a period. Satorys lay back, longing for the time when he would be able to get away and rejoice the troops.

The light from the roof fell in bright patches on the straw, and from the eaves came the twittering of birds.

Peter spoke again.

"They are having their dinner, sir—I mean ours—and all the time they are looking at papers and maps."

The sailor did not move again, but went on throwing out his words in a whisper.

"There's work to be done here, sir. Maybe, if we managed to get to know what was in those papers—well, we might, who knows?—it would perhaps help the French on to Berlin. Ah, yes; you may look like that, sir, but the French are going to Berlin, and no cheap trip either, you may take it from me!"

From below came the subdued buzz of talk, the rattle of a sword on the red brick floor, and the scroop of a chair.

The Rescue.

Peter gave a shout of joy as the German firing party swung round to meet the new enemy, for the fact was plain enough to them as it had been to Satorys and his fellow-prisoners.

In a moment the Germans were on the defence, forgetting their victims, as a hundred troopers of French light cavalry charged up, cutting down the Germans as they dashed for their horses, too surprised to put up anything of a fight.

"You are injured, sir?"

Satorys had moved away from the wall, and was standing by one of the farm-sheds watching the discomfiture of the foe, and longing to take a share; but he was unarmed. Now he saw facing him the young French officer who had brought such timely relief.

"Nothing to speak of, monsieur," he said. "My word, but you came in the nick of time. My friend and I had been laying up in that poor lady's house, for I did get it pretty badly in a skirmish a few days since, and, of course, we were taken for spies."

The officer had called back the pursuit. Madame Briand was weeping out her gratitude that her brave young son was saved. Peter stood by Satorys, gazing intently at the smart young French officer who seemed so interested in Satorys.

"I know you, sir."

Again Peter studied the other. There was something which he could not quite understand, but cudgeled his brain as he would it remained a mystery.

"You know me," said Satorys. He limped into the farm kitchen by the side of the officer. "I am honoured, of course, monsieur, but for the time being there is precious little to know. That brave fellow and myself were cut off from the main body days since, and it seems more like years to me with all this inaction."

"I am Captain Darand," said the officer. "I have heard, of course, as who has not, of the alliance of Islam with our country, and I know you to be Paul-of-Istan, although you are here as a simple officer. I deem myself fortunate to have been the means of assisting you."

"Thank you," said Satorys. "And now for the news?"

"It is good—slow advance, very slow, for the enemy is pressing hard, the flower of its army on our frontier. But you—you are able to ride again?"

Satorys nodded.

"Then we return," said the officer.

He strode to the door, gave an order to a soldier who was standing there on guard, came quickly back to Satorys, and laid his hand on his arm.

(Another long instalment of this splendid war story in next Wednesday's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE SECRET COMMITTEE!

(Continued from page 20.)

Tom Merry looked at him with a smile. Knox's head looked a little odd, his hair was so exceedingly short. He ground his teeth as he caught the smile upon Tom Merry's face. He seemed about to break out for a moment, but he restrained himself. He could not afford to quarrel with Tom Merry just now.

"Have you done the lines I gave you yesterday, Merry?"

"No."

"You need not do them."

"Oh!"

"The same applies to Louthier and Manners, and—and the fellows in Study No. 6," said Knox, with an effort. "You may tell them so from me."

"Certainly," said Tom Merry demurely. "They'll be very glad to hear it. Any message for Kangaroo or Dane or Glyn or Helly or Kerruish or—"

Knox gritted his teeth again, but he tried to smile.

"Yes—yes. I—I've altered my mind. Upon the whole, I—I think, perhaps, I've been a—little too severe. You can tell them all they needn't do their lines."

"Thanks!"

Tom Merry turned away.

"Hold on, Merry! I—I haven't finished yet."

"No!" said Tom, turning back. His look was very demure.

"Last night," said Knox, snaking his voice, and glancing round to make sure that no one was near to overhear him—"last night I—I had some trouble with those young rascals who call themselves the Secret Committee."

"Did you really, Knox?"

"Yes." The prefect's eyes blazed for a moment at the calm and unconscious face of Tom Merry. The curb he was putting on his temper was very irksome. "Look here, Merry! I'm pretty certain that you know something about it."

"I!" said Tom, in mild surprise.

"Yes, you!"

"Go on!"

"I—I'm not trying to bowl you out," said Knox, breathing fast. "I—I'm not thinking of punishing them. Last night I wrote out something on a card in the box-room, and—and you—they—said it was to be posted up for all the school to read. Well, I don't want that to happen."

"No?" said Tom Merry innocently.

"No. Will you see that this card is destroyed or, at least, kept strictly dark, and—and there won't be any more trouble for any of you."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath. This was victory with a vengeance. The Secret Committee had won all along the line. There was a pause.

"Well!" said Knox at last.

"Of course I can't speak for the Secret Committee," said Tom. "I can give you my opinion—my disinterested opinion—on the matter, if you like."

"Go on," said Knox, between his teeth.

"Well, my opinion is that the Secret Committee has been formed to stop your ragging the juniors, Knox. If you chuck it I should think it very probable that they will let you alone. If there's no more trouble I consider it extremely likely that that confession—ahem! I mean that card you speak of—will be kept strictly dark until Mr. Railton comes back, when it will be destroyed. Of course, I'm speaking simply as a disinterested person, but that is my opinion."

"I understand," muttered Knox thickly.

"The Secret Committee, having gained their point, will probably not bother you any more, unless you break out again," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "As a disinterested person, that is my opinion. You can take it for what it's worth."

"It's understood, then?" said Knox, and he walked away.

Before long Gerald Knox's surrender was known to all the members of the Secret Society of St. Jim's, and they rejoiced exceedingly.

The tranny of the Sixth-Form bully was at an end.

Tom Merry and his chums and Figgins & Co. of the New House celebrated the victory in a tremendous feed, at which Figg was the guest of honour, in recognition of the great service he had rendered in supplying the idea of the Secret Society.

As for the Secret Society it existed no longer.

THE END.

(Another long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "Tom Merry's Find!" Order early.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our

Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

DRASTIC MEASURES.

Colonel Scotchman was weary. He had had a very arduous day retreating from the enemy, and he wished to recoup his strength in order that he might retreat still further on the morrow.

"Marperson," he said to his new servant, "I'm going to snatch forty winks' sleep. Stay by my tent, and see that I'm not disturbed."

Mac agreed.

Five minutes later the snores of Colonel Scotchman were cut short by the loud report of a gun.

"Great Scott!" cried the colonel. "Are the enemy upon us?"

"No; dinna fret," replied Mac, inserting his head reassuringly through the tent flap. "It was only a wee mouse; but as I thought he might wake you up, I shot him!"—Sent in by L. Lewis, Bournemouth.

A STORY IN A.

Adolph, an Austrian artisan, adored Anna, an aristocrat, and Anna adored Adolph. Another aristocrat, Alfred, an ambassador, adored Anna. Anna abhorred Alfred. Alfred adored Anna, admitting admiration. Anna assumed amazement. Alfred abjured Anna. Anna admonished Alfred. Alfred adopted aggressiveness. Alfred's audacity alarmed Anna. Alfred attempted abducting Anna. Anna, afraid and agitated, acquainted Adolph. Adolph accused Alfred. Alfred, angered, abused Adolph awfully. Adolph answered Alfred. Alfred attacked Adolph. Anna, aghast, aided Adolph. Adolph and Anna almost annihilated Alfred. Alfred ablated absolutely. Anna accepted Adolph. Adolph and Anna abruptly absented, and abandoned Austria altogether, arriving at Antwerp, and always abiding abroad afterwards. Adieu, Anna and Adolph!—Sent in by A. Reader, Yorkshire.

THE RETORT COURTEOUS.

The old gentleman's wife was getting into a carriage, and the gentleman himself neglected to assist her.

"You are not so gallant, John, as when you were a boy!" she exclaimed, in gentle rebuke.

"No," was his ready response; "and you are not so buoyant as when you were a gal!"—Sent in by Miss O. K. Flint, York.

VERY MUCH SO!

"I beg your pardon," said the youth who had knocked at the door. "I thought this was Mr. Miller's house."

"I am Mr. Miller."

"Then I am glad to find that when I thought I was mistaken, I was mistaken in thinking I was mistaken."

"What?"

"I say when I thought I was mistaken, I was mistaken in thinking I was mistaken, and being mistaken in thinking I was mistaken when I wasn't mistaken. I was glad to find I was mistaken when I thought I was mistaken, because I wasn't mistaken—or, rather, I was mistaken when I thought I was mistaken, and so I couldn't have been mistaken—well, at any rate, I'm glad. Looks as if we're going to have rain, doesn't it?"—Sent in by E. Babshaw, Birkenhead.

ROUGH ON KELLY.

Casey had been appointed foreman the day before, and he fully appreciated his position. A lady happening to visit the works approached him.

"And who might be in charge of this department?" she asked.

"Ov am, mum!" said Casey proudly.

"Really?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said Casey, puffing out his chest. "And I'll prove it. Kelly"—addressing one of the workmen—"you're sacked!"—Sent in by J. Mortimore, St. John's Wood, London.

SMART CHAP!

A newsboy approached an Irish jaunting-car with a view to selling some of his papers.

"Buy a paper, sir!" he inquired of one of the two doctors on the vehicle.

"No, my boy, I don't want one," was the reply.

"Spare a copper, then, sir?" entreated the boy.

"No, I tell you; I have none to give you!" was the retort. On approaching the other doctor, his appeal met with the same result.

"I say, driver," he exclaimed sarcastically, "drive those gents to the workhouse!"—Sent in by Miss Christine Cassidy, Glasgow.

HARD LINES.

A sad story is told of a chemist whose night-bell rang loudly in the small hours. When he came down he was met by a placid man, who asked for a bottle of soda-water. The chemist's feelings were strong, but, being there, he resolved to do business, and sold the bottle.

"Twopence," said he, "will be allowed on return."

Then he went back to bed.

Two hours later the night-bell rang again. Again the chemist went down, and again he was met by the placid man.

"Here's your bottle," said the latter. "Gimme my twopence!"—Sent in by Miss N. Dann, Middlesbrough.

THE DECADENCE OF ART.

He thought he was a connoisseur, and was lamenting the decadence of art.

"Look," he said, "at the great Italian school of painters! Look even at the old Greeks! Why, Zeuxis painted grapes so naturally that birds came to peck at them!"

"He did, did he?" said the hearer. "That is nothing. I have a friend who paints a dog so naturally that he has to paint a muzzie on him to keep him from biting!"—Sent in by C. Hunt, Gosport.

CRUEL!

"See here!" grumbled the condemned man. "Ain't there a law against cruel and unusual punishment?"

"Yes," answered the warder.

"Ain't I ter be 'anged next week?"

"I'm afraid you are."

"Then what d'yer mean by sending me a bunch of story-papers to read that ain't got nothin' but serial stories in 'em?"—Sent in by G. Ashton, Cardiff.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

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