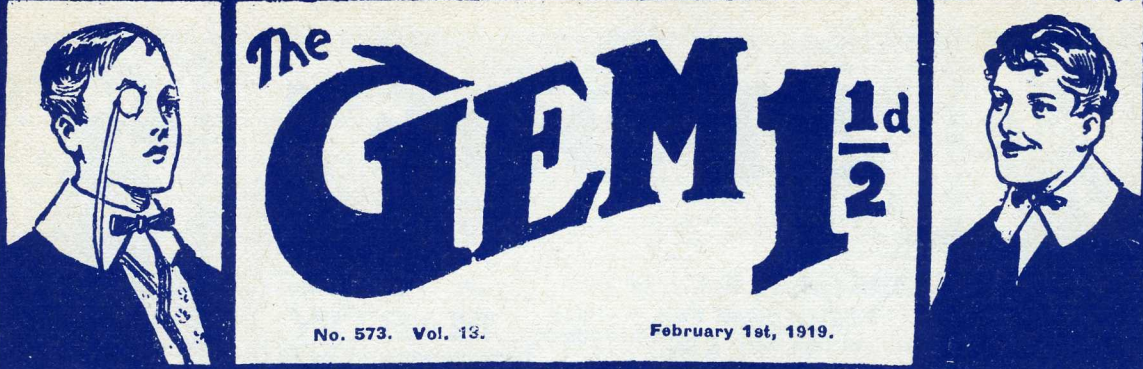


The **GEM** 1 $\frac{1d}{2}$

No. 573. Vol. 13. February 1st, 1919.



SPOOF!



BUNTER TAKES THE CAKE!

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SPOOF!



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

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

The Troubles of Study No. 6.

TOM MERRY was looking into his study cupboard with a perplexed expression upon his face when Blake of the Fourth came along.

Blake did not appear happy.

He glanced into the study, where Monty Lowther was slicing bread, and supplying Manners, who was on his knees before the study fire making toast.

Tom Merry turned from the cupboard, and was about to speak to his study-mate, when he observed Blake in the doorway.

"Hallo! Trot in, kid!" he said.

Blake came in.

"Just in time for tea," said Tom Merry cheerily. "Anything up, old scout? You look as if you've been hunting for trouble and finding it."

"I've found it without looking for it," grunted Blake. "I'll have tea with you, if you fellows don't mind."

"Not a bit—in fact, it's a pleasure," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Trot out the cake, Tommy."

"Anything wrong in Study No. 6?" asked Tom.

"Yes."

"What's happened?"

"Bunter!"

"Oh!" said the Terrible Three together.

They understood.

"It's Gussy's fault," said Blake glumly. "He would have that fat bouncer planted in our study. It's no good trying to stand him; we can't do it. Dig's gone to tea with Julian, and Herries has dropped in to see Lumley-Lumley. I've come along here to sponge on you chaps."

"My dear kid, you're as welcome as the flowers in May. Where's D'Arcy?"

"Oh, he's staying in No. 6—standing Bunter! It's what he calls 'Noblesse oblige.'"

Tom Merry laughed.

"That fellow Bunter is the limit," said Blake. "I admit I rather liked him when we met him at Greyfriars; he didn't seem much like that toad of a cousin of his, Billy Bunter. Since he's come to St. Jim's he seems just Billy Bunter over again, to the life."

"I've noticed it," assented Tom.

"He's the limit," said Blake. "It's no good; we can't stand him! I was wondering whether you fellows could make any suggestion for getting him out of our study."

"Ask him to change."

"I've done that."

"And what does he say?"

"He says he wouldn't leave his old pal Gussy for anything. He says I can change out if I like—in fact, he'd be glad if I would." Blake breathed hard through his nose. "Me, you know—out

of Study No. 6! I know I shall slaughter him some day!"

"We've been rather taken in over that chap," remarked Manners. "We thought he was a footballer; but he plays like a born idiot!"

"He's a toad!" said Blake. "A horrible toad! He tells lies—beastly lies! He brags. He—he does everything he shouldn't. You fellows wouldn't care to have him in this study, I suppose?"

"The Fourth don't dig with the Shell," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"That might be arranged—for once."

"Ha, ha! No jolly fear!"

"It's a pity he couldn't be planted on the New House," remarked Lowther.

"Even the New House is too good for him," said Blake. "No. 6 simply isn't fit to live in since Bunter came. Why couldn't he go to Greyfriars, like his cousin? No need for him to come to St. Jim's that I know of."

"And you can't even have tea with him in the study?" said Tom Merry sympathetically.

"There isn't any tea!" grunted Blake. "We came in famished after footer, and found that the fat bouncer had had his tea—and ours, too! He'd scoffed the whole shoot!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Now he's turned up with a big cake," said Blake. "I thought he'd brought it in for the study."

"A big cake?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes; a whacking big sultana cake—looked quite nice! And what do you think he's doing? Sitting in the arm-chair bolting it—all of it!"

"There was a peculiar expression on Tom Merry's face.

"A whacking big sultana cake?" he repeated.

"Never mind, we've got a whacking big sultana cake, too," said Monty Lowther comfortingly. "Miss Priscilla sent it to Tommy, and it's come along just at the right time. Why don't you trot it out, Tommy?"

"It's not there," said Tom.

"You put it in the cupboard."

"I know that."

"Well, then, it's there, isn't it?"

"The trouble is that it isn't!" answered Tom Merry grimly. "And so I think I can guess where Bunter got his big sultana cake from!"

"Our cake!" shouted Lowther.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "I wondered where he'd got it. He's bagged your cake as well as our tea!"

Manners rose from the fireplace.

"We're not standing this," he said. "I think we'd better trot along to No. 6 and see Bunter."

"I rather think so!" said Lowther emphatically.

"You make the coffee while we're gone, Blake," said Tom Merry.

"Right you are," assented Blake.

"You can kill him, if you like. I don't mind. In fact, I'd rather you did."

The Terrible Three hurried out of the study and along to the Fourth Form quarters.

They were naturally wrathful.

Miss Priscilla Fawcett's sultana cake was a thing of beauty, if not a joy for ever, in the eyes of the hungry juniors. Bunter of the Fourth had to learn to let other fellows' provender alone, and the Terrible Three were quite prepared to give him the necessary lessons.

They had liked Wally Bunter. His outward resemblance to his cousin Billy was startling, but inwardly he had not seemed to resemble the Owl of Greyfriars at all. But since the new junior had been at St. Jim's the eyes of Tom Merry & Co. had been opened on that subject. And now they did not like Bunter a little bit.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth, stepped out of Study No. 6 as the Terrible Three reached that celebrated apartment.

He gave the Shell fellows a rather troubled smile.

Arthur Augustus had made friends with Wally Bunter, and he was not a fellow to go back on his friendships. But he had found the fat junior very trying.

"Anythin' up, you fellows?" he asked, noting the expression of the Terrible Three.

"We want Bunter!"

"I twust, 'om Mewwy, that you are not thinkin' of waggin' Buntah? Buntah is a fiend of mine."

"If you don't want your friends ragged, Gussy, you'd better instruct them not to bone other fellows' cakes."

"Bai Jove! Buntah has a cake."

"He's burgled ours!"

"Oh!"

"And we're going to talk to him," said Tom Merry. "You run away and play, Gussy, if you don't think you can stand the harrowing scene: We're going to strew Study No. 6 with his bones!"

"Weally, 'om Mewwy—"

"Run away, old scout!"

"But pawwaps it is not your cake, aftah all."

"We shall see, old top. Get out of the way, there's a good kid!"

"Undah the cires, 'om Mewwy—"

"My dear gramophone, the cake will be all gone if we wait till you've run off all your records," said Monty Lowther.

"I wufuse to be called a gwamophone, Lowther!"

"Hop it!"

"I wepeat— Yawoooooh!"

The Terrible Three grasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and gently but firmly lifted him aside. Then they strode into the study.

CHAPTER 2.
Whose Cake?

BILLY BUNTER was enjoying himself. He had had quite a good time since he had come to St. Jim's. The fellows, certainly, were finding out the true inwardness, so to speak, of his nature; but no one had guessed the well-kept secret that he was Billy Bunter of Greyfriars, passing under the name of his cousin Wally.

And though he was wearing out even the great patience of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, he was still regarded with some toleration—as Wally!

Wally Bunter's reputation, in fact, had stood Billy in good stead; it had saved him, so far, from a good many study rag-gings, though how long it would continue to shield him was a question.

He was enjoying himself, in his own way, immensely at the present moment. He had had a tea for four—much to the exasperation of Study No. 6. Now he was travelling through an enormous cake, a special gift from Tom Merry's old governess—and Miss Priscilla's cakes had grown more appetising than ever since the advent of the piping times of peace.

He blinked up through his big glasses as the Terrible Three appeared in the doorway.

For a moment there was a guilty look on Bunter's fat face; but the next moment he gave the Shell fellows an affable nod.

"I say, you fellows—" he began, with his mouth full.

"Where did you get that cake?" demanded Tom Merry, pointing an accusing forefinger at the big cake, which was reduced already to half its original size. But it was still recognisable as the property of Study No. 10 in the Shell.

"That—that cake?"

"Yes; that cake, you fat burglar!"

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"Stop wolfing it!" roared Lowther.

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

Monty Lowther grabbed the cake, and rescued it from Billy Bunter's fat paws. The Owl of Greyfriars jumped up.

"I say, you fellows, that's my cake! Gimme my cake!"

"Where did you get it?"

"My—my pater sent it to me!" explained Bunter. "It—it arrived by this afternoon's post!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it is quite poss that you are in ewwah," said Arthur Augustus, his eyeglass gleaming in at the doorway. "Buntah asserts that it is his cake—"

"I should jolly well think so!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "I can show you the letter my aunt wrote with it—"

"Your aunt?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes; and—"

"So your pater sent you the cake, and your aunt wrote a letter with it?"

"I—I mean my—my uncle—that is to say, my pater wrote the letter—that's what I really meant to say. I can show you the letter," added Bunter loftily.

"Show it, then!"

"I could, if I choose; but I decline to have my word doubted—"

"What?"

"Under the circumstances, I refuse to show you the letter!" said Bunter firmly.

"You spoofing Ananias!" exclaimed Tom. "There isn't any letter, and that's not your cake!"

"If you doubt my word, Merry, this discussion had better cease! Gimme my cake, Lowther, you beast!"

"Buntah is within his rights in refusing to have his word doubted!" said Arthur Augustus hesitatingly.

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Bunter. "I should jolly well say so! Besides, Gussy

can bear witness that he saw me unpack the cake in this very study!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom, staggered for a moment. "In that case—"

"Bai Jove! I do not wemembah see in you unpack the cake, Buntah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

Bunter closed one eye at him—a sign which Arthur Augustus did not in the least comprehend. It did not occur to Gussy's noble brain that Bunter was calling upon him to bear false witness.

"My hat! He's winking at Gussy!" ejaculated Manners.

"Oh, really, Manners—"

"Bai Jove! Why should Buntah wink at me, deah boy?"

"Because he wants you to back up his lies, you ass!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"N-n-nothing of the kind!" gasped Bunter. "I—I wasn't winking—"

"What were you doing, then?"

"I—I—I was—was—in fact, I—I was—"

Bunter stammered.

"Exactly!" said Tom Merry. "Now, the fat bouncer had scoffed half the cake. Are we going to hang and quarter him, or boil him in oil?"

"Oh, really, Tom Merry—"

"Boil him in oil!" said Monty Lowther. "Or, as there isn't any oil handy, bump him on the carpet, and jump on him!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Collar him!"

"Weally, deah boys—" objected Arthur Augustus.

"You're dead in this act, Gussy; travel off!" said Monty Lowther.

"I wufuse to twavel off, Lowthah! I considah—"

Billy Bunter dodged round the armchair in great alarm.

"Stand by a pal, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "I say—"

"Wely on me, Buntah!"

"That's my cake!" went on Bunter, blinking over the top of the chair-back.

"I can produce my uncle's letter if necessary—"

"Your uncle's!" roared Manners.

"Yes."

"It was your pater's a minute ago!"

"I—I really meant my uncle—my Uncle James!" said Bunter, apparently thinking the uncle would be more convincing if the name were given. "My Uncle James, who lost his leg on the Somme, you know."

"More likely lost his head, if he was there at all!" remarked Lowther. "I can guess what a Bunter would do with his legs if he found himself in danger."

"Bai Jove! That is weally a wotten wemark, Lowthah, considaw'n that Buntah's uncle was a fightin'-man—"

"I should think so!" said Billy Bunter warmly. "I'll bet that none of your relations helped so much to beat the Huns, Lowther, as my Uncle Peter—"

"Uncle what?"

"I mean, James!" said Bunter hastily.

"Liars should have good memories," remarked Manners, repeating an old proverb which Billy Bunter would really have done well to bear in mind.

"If you call me a liar, Manners, I'll—"

"Well, what will you do?" asked Manners.

"I'll treat you with utter contempt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we've got the cake—what's left of it!" said Tom Merry. "Let the fat bouncer off!"

"He ought to be bumped!" said Lowther warmly.

"I wufuse to allow Buntah to be bumped, Lowthah! I do not weward your claim to that cake as proved at all!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I know it by sight, don't I?" demanded Tom Merry.

"So do I!" exclaimed Bunter, at once. "I've got the wrappings it came in, in my study, addressed to me!" added the captain of the Shell.

"So have I!" said Bunter.

"Bai Jove! P'woudhe the w'appin's, Buntah, and that will pwove to these fellows that you weally weweived a cake by post!"

"Yes; produce them!" said Tom.

"So I would, only I happen to have used them to light the fire with!" said Bunter. "Otherwise, I'd produce them with pleasure. I suppose you can take my word?"

"Wouldn't take it at a gift!" said Lowther. "I suppose you can see that the fat rotter is lying now, D'Arcy?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"None so blind as those who won't see!" said Manners. "Will you clear off, Gussy, while we slaughter this fat burglar?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort, Mannahs!"

"Well, shall we slaughter Gussy first, or let that rotter off?" asked Monty Lowther. "I leave it to the meeting."

"Oh, come on!" said Tom.

The Terrible Three were unwilling to slaughter the Honourable Arthur Augustus, though keen to deal out drastic punishment to the fat Owl of the Fourth. But Arthur Augustus stood in the way, and evidently did not mean to desert his pal.

So the Shell fellows gave it up, and walked out of the study, carrying the remnant of the cake.

Billy Bunter's spectacles glimmered after it till it was gone. Then he gave a deep sigh.

"If you are weally sure that that is your cake, Buntah—" said Arthur Augustus hesitatingly.

"Of course it is!" said Bunter peevishly. "Haven't I told you it was sent to me specially by my aunt?"

"You said your patah, Buntah, and then your uncle—"

"I—I mean my pater—that is to say, my uncle. I hope you don't doubt my word, Gussy?" said Bunter loftily.

"N-n-no!"

"I should certainly refuse to be friendly with a fellow who doubted my word."

"That is quite wight, Buntah."

"I'm still hungry," said Bunter, changing the subject. "The worst of it is that I'm stony broke. My postal-order hasn't come."

"Were you expectin' a postal-order, Buntah?"

"Yes—from a titled relation of mine," said Bunter. "I suppose you couldn't lend me five bob till it comes?"

Arthur Augustus gazed fixedly at Bunter for a moment or two. He had already cashed several postal-orders for the new junior, and somehow none of them had arrived at St. Jim's. Even Arthur Augustus, careless as he was in money matters, was beginning to think that Bunter ought to wait for the arrival of his remittances before he asked fellows to cash them.

However, he slid his hand into his pocket, and Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles. Bunter had looked upon Arthur Augustus as a prospective gold-mine when he came to St. Jim's in the place of his cousin Wally, and so far Arthur Augustus was panning out remarkably well.

Five shillings clinked into Bunter's fat hand.

Arthur Augustus watched him rather curiously as he rolled out of the study, en route to Dame Taggles' tuckshop.

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The swell of St. Jim's remained alone in the study, with a very thoughtful expression on his face.

CHAPTER 3.

Plotting a Plot.

TOM MERRY & Co. sat down cheerfully to tea.

Blake, however, was looking sombre.

The addition of Bunter to the happy family in Study No. 6 seemed to weigh upon Jack Blake's cheery spirits, which was not surprising.

"It's too bad!" said Tom Merry, guessing Blake's thoughts. "We were mistaken in that fellow Bunter. Can't you fire him out of your study somehow?"

Blake shook his head glumly. "He's planted there!" he said. "He won't move. It's really all Gussy's fault; he's so soft. Just the same as when Trimble came here. He planted himself on our study by getting round Gussy. We got rid of him. But Bunter is a fixture. He makes a regular income out of Gussy, you see. Wild horses wouldn't drag him away."

"He seems an awful rotter!" said Manners.

"He is!" said Blake dismally. "Why, every day some fellow comes nosing into the study after something that Bunter has scoffed. He has no mercy on anybody's rations. And the way he tells lies—"

"I should think Gussy would be fed up."

"I believe he is, but he won't own up," growled Blake. "Can't you fellows make some suggestion? How can we boot him out of the study?"

"Blessed if I see!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Gussy asked the House-master for Bunter to be put there, with your consent. After that you can't ask for him to be changed out."

"That's impossible. And he won't go of his own accord," said Blake, helping himself dismally to cake.

"You might persuade him, somehow," said Lowther. "Suppose you asked him to change into No. 2, with Trimble and Melish? They're a pair of wriggling worms, and would suit him."

"They wouldn't have him at any price."

"Well, they can't be blamed for that," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Both of them rather made up to Bunter at first," said Blake. "They thought there might be something in his yarns about his people being wealthy. But they seem to have found out it's all bunkum. They let him alone now." The Terrible Three chuckled.

"And Bunter was rather taken with Trimble, too," said Blake, his face relaxing into a grin. "I suppose he thought there might be something in Baggy's yarns about Trimble Hall. But he's let him alone since."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"Suppose—" he began, and paused.

"Well?"

"I've got a wheeze!"

"Go ahead!" said Blake, not very hopefully. His expression implied that he did not think very much of Shelf wheezes.

"Suppose Bunter's yarns about his wealthy people were true, and that he did get some remittances, Trimble and Melish would make up to him no end," said the captain of the Shell.

"But they're not."

"And suppose," said Tom, unheeding, "that Bunter believed in Trimble Hall, and the terrific wealth of the Trimble

family, then he would jump at the chance of sucking up to Baggy."

"But he doesn't."

"And then," said Tom, "they'd click, and Bunter could ask Railton to let him migrate into No. 2, and once he was landed there you'd be done with him!"

"But—"

"My dear man, you're dense!" said Tom Merry patiently. "Nobody takes any stock in Trimble's yarns. But suppose some very important persons—us, for example—began to listen to Baggy with very great respect—"

"Oh!"

"Also to Bunter on the same lines—"

"Ah!"

"Isn't it very likely that they'd succeed in spoofing one another—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"The difficulty is that it would cost some tin," said Tom. "If we believe their yarns, they'll expect us to shell out small loans. Is it worth it?"

"It's worth a small fortune to squeeze Bunter out of No. 6!"

"Besides, Gussy does squeeze out money now," said Manners. "Bunter plunders him right and left."

"That's so," agreed Blake. "I wonder—"

"It's a case of shoulder to shoulder," said Tom Merry. "We're bound to help. In fact, we're partly responsible. We were taken in by Bunter, and that helped Gussy to get taken in, and that planted Bunter on you. We'll all stand in and help. Besides, it will be fun to see those two spoofing bounders trying to chisel one another."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" said Blake heartily. "I say, I'll call Dig and Herries, and we'll talk it over."

"What about Gussy?"

Blake shook his head.

"Leave Gussy out! Gussy's too good for this world. He feels that it's up to him to stick to Bunter, because he made friends with him once, and he shuts his eyes to the plain facts. Besides, Gussy tries hard to believe in Bunter, anyway. He will back us up without knowing it."

"Ha, ha!"

Blake left the study, and returned with George Herries and Robert Arthur Digby of the Fourth. Miss Priscilla's cake was finished by the whole party while an animated discussion went on.

Herries and Dig entered heartily into the scheme. They were as fed up with their new study-mate as Blake was.

The plot was plotted, and, details having been arranged, several more fellows were called into the study—Kangaroo of the Shell, Julian and Roylance of the Fourth, and Cardew, Clive, and Lewison from Study No. 9.

They all gave in their adherence cheerfully. They had seen enough of Bunter to sympathise with the unhappy plight of Study No. 6, and they were willing and ready to do all they could to relieve that celebrated study of its incubus.

When the discussion and the cake were finished, the party broke up, and as they came down the passage from Tom Merry's study they sighted Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

Baggy was leaving Racke's study in rather a hasty manner, and for a moment a boot was visible in the doorway ere the door closed after him.

Apparently Baggy had invited himself to tea with Racke and Crooke, and had been given the order of the boot.

He was shaking a fat fist at the closed door when Tom Merry & Co. came along.

"Hallo, kid!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "What's the trouble?"

"That cad Racke!" gasped Trimble.

"He's actually kicked me—me, you

know, because—because"—Baggy hesitated a moment—"because I refused to lend him a fiver!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, you might have lent a chap a fiver," said Monty Lowther, closing one eye at his comrades. "A fellow like you, rolling in fivers—"

"Wallowing in them," said Manners.

Trimble stared at the chums of the School House. This was rather a new view for them to take, and he suspected for a moment that they were pulling his podgy leg. But their faces were quite grave.

"Well, I've got plenty of money, of course," said Trimble. "But I don't see why I should lend it to Racke."

"Better keep out of that study, Trimble," said Kangaroo solemnly. "They play banker and nap there. It's really not safe for a wealthy fellow like you."

The juniors passed on, feeling that that was enough to begin with. Baggy Trimble looked after them rather uncertainly.

It was rather gratifying to be recognised like this as a wealthy fellow, and warned to be careful of his ample wealth. Trimble jingled a French penny and a bad halfpenny in his pocket, and strutted as he went down the passage. He felt as if he were coming into his own.

If this was the opinion the School House juniors had of him, it looked as if the negotiations of small loans—date of repayment uncertain—would be an easier matter in the future. Baggy Trimble resolved to put that matter to the test at a very early date.

CHAPTER 4.

Cardew Begins.

BILLY BUNTER pricked up his ears.

It was the following day, and morning lessons were over. A very important matter occupied Bunter's mind—how and where a snack was to be obtained before dinner-time. That deep problem was filling the fat junior's mind as he sat on a bench under the old elms. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been trotted in vain. He was stony, partly owing to Bunter's previous extractions. Blake and Herries and Dig he had not cared to approach. He had received such very emphatic replies from them on previous occasions.

Bunter was thinking out the problem when Baggy Trimble and Cardew of the Fourth came strolling along under the leafless trees.

There was an almost comical expression of fat gratification on Baggy Trimble's face. Many a time and oft had he striven to get on chummy terms with the grandson of Lord Reckness, who had endless titled connections and heaps of money. And Ralph Reckness had coolly kept him at arm's-length—or further off than that—all the time.

Now there was a change. Cardew was displaying the most cordial urbanity towards the fat Fourth-Former, and Baggy was basking, as it were, in his smiles. Baggy was not aware, naturally, that Cardew had entered whole-heartedly into Tom Merry's wheeze. Baggy knew nothing of the wheeze.

Cardew was likely to carry the game much further than Tom Merry dreamed; anything in the nature of spoof appealed to his peculiar nature. And it amused him hugely to pull Baggy Trimble's egrotious leg.

"The Easter vac?" Cardew was saying, as they came within Billy Bunter's hearing. "You're really very kind, Trimble."

"Not at all, old fellow," said Trimble

affectionately. "We'd be glad to have you for the holidays."

"Well, I've never seen Trimble Hall," said Cardew thoughtfully. "I must say I'd like to see Trimble Hall."

"Then make it a fixture," said Trimble. "I'm making up a party for the holidays, Cardew. I'd be glad to have you. I'll put your name down."

"Thanks no end, old fellow!"

"Not a bit of it."

The two juniors had stopped quite near Bunter, apparently not observing him. Or, rather, Cardew had stopped, and Trimble followed his example. The Owl of Greyfriars blinked at them in surprise.

Bunter had heard all about Trimble Hall—it was impossible to be in the same form as Baggy Trimble without hearing all about it. Bunter had taken that magnificent establishment with a very large grain of salt—as he had observed that the other fellows did.

It astonished him to find Cardew taking it quite seriously in this way.

It interested him, too. Cardew, he knew, was a keen fellow, and quite at home in that elevated sphere where viscounts and marquises are as common as blackberries. If Cardew took stock in Trimble Hall, that was as good evidence as could be asked for that Trimble Hall was not merely a figment of Baggy's fertile brain.

"How shall we get down to the Hall, by the way?" asked Cardew. "What's your station, Trimble?"

"Oh, the pater's car will come for us!" said Trimble airily. "Now the war's over, you know, that's all right."

"But if you're taking a large party down—"

"About a dozen," said Baggy carelessly.

"Will the car take the lot?"

"Oh, yes. I'll phone my pater to send the biggest Rolls-Royce," said Trimble. "Rather pleasant, you know, to go down in a party by road. I never did care for railway travelling."

"Well, you do things in style at Trimble Hall, an' no mistake!" said Cardew admiringly.

"Always did, you know. What's the good of being a millionaire if you don't spend your money?" said Baggy fatuously. "That's how my pater looks at it."

"You must have a good time when you're at home."

"Topping!" said Baggy. "Of course, there'll be some people there you mayn't care for—big political johnnies—the Prime Minister, and some of the War Office big guns, and so on. But they needn't bother you."

"I sha'n't let them," said Cardew gravely.

"My pater likes that kind of society. He's going in for a title, you know, and those things have to be wangled," said Trimble. "But—"

"I should rather like to meet the Prime Minister," remarked Cardew. "I suppose you could get me an introduction?"

"Certainly. I'll make a note of it," said Baggy. "I'm afraid you'll find him a bit of a bore. I do."

"Oh! You—you do?" gasped Cardew.

"Yes. Still, one has to meet such people."

"Of—of course!"

"I think you'll enjoy yourself at Trimble Hall," said Baggy, beaming. "I don't brag of my wealth, you know. Doocid bad form. But there it is. We're millionaires, and we live up to it."

"Well, of course, anybody could see that much, from the thumpin' remittances you got."

"Oh, it goes!" said Trimble. "Money

simply flies, you know, when a fellow's as open-handed as I am. I lent my last tenner to Figgins of the New House."

"D-d-did you?"

"And the pater's got rather ratty about my asking him for money again so soon," sighed Trimble.

"No wonder, if you blug it a tenner at a time!"

"Well, I never was mean, you know, and I simply can't refuse a pal a loan when he asks for it. The worst of it is the pater's written to say that, as I've had twenty pounds in the last week, he's not going to send me any more till the end of the term."

"You really can't expect him to," said Cardew gravely.

But it comes awkward," said Trimble, watching Cardew's grave face

new and wonderful respect in his blink. "Money talks," it is said, and if Cardew was lending Trimble money because he knew all about the unlimited wealth of the Trimbles, that was evidence quite good enough for Bunter.

And the fat Owl could have kicked himself for not having welcomed the advances Trimble had made on his arrival at St. Jim's.

This wealthy fellow, son of a millionaire—a fellow who mixed with Prime Ministers at home—had been quite friendly at first, and Bunter had let the chance slip.

He resolved to make up for lost time at once.

Trimble was still staring almost dazedly at his plunder when Bunter rolled towards him and joined him.



A Temporary Loan!
(See Chapter 2.)

eagerly. "I'm to have a tenner on the last day of the term—"

"That will set you up."

"Yes; but in the meantime—"

"My dear fellow," said Cardew cordially, "if you're short of tin in the meantime, you've got plenty of friends who'll stand by you. For instance, I should be very much offended if you forgot me when you happened to be short of tin."

"W-w-would you?" gasped Trimble, hardly able to believe his fat ears.

"Certainly. I really hope that you won't forget to mention it to me, Trimble, if you happen to be short."

"I—I won't—"

"If a half-sov would be any use to you at the present moment—"

"It—it would."

"Say no more, old nut. Here you are!"

"Ralph Rockness Cardew strolled away, leaving Baggy Trimble staring, with a fixed and astonished gaze, at the money in his fat palm.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, with

"Trimble, old chap!" said Bunter affectionately.

Trimble stared at him—not a welcoming stare.

He was on pally terms with the dandy of the Fourth now, and he had no use for Bunter. Besides, a few days had been enough to convince him that Bunter's brag was as unfounded as his own.

"Hallo!" he said coldly.

"I've been looking for you," said Bunter, with determined cordiality.

"I dare say you have," answered Trimble coolly. "And you can look a little farther!"

He walked away.

"Oh!" murmured Bunter. "Fat beast!"

But Billy Bunter was not so easily beaten as all that. A little later Tom Merry & Co., from the steps of the School House, observed quite an interesting scene.

Baggy Trimble, with a smear of jam round his fat mouth, was coming in to dinner. Billy Bunter joined him in the quad, and walked with him.

Trimble gave him a baughty look.

"I say, Trimble, old chap," said Bunter coolingly. "I'll tell you what—"

"You needn't!"

"The fact is, Trimble, I was going to ask you to tea—"

"I'm going to tea in Study No. 9, thanks," answered Trimble. "Levison's asked me to tea with him and Cardew."

"To-morrow, then—"

"To-morrow I've promised Manners."

"Oh!" murmured Bunter.

Trimble seemed a very much sought-after person all of a sudden. Billy Bunter could have kicked himself once more, and quite hard, for not having seized the opportunity of palling with him.

"The fact is, Trimble," murmured Bunter, "I—I'm not very comfy in No. 6—rather crowded, you know—"

"No bizney of mine."

"Plenty of room in No. 2, though," said Bunter. "I really wanted to come into it before, only D'Arcy over-persuaded me—"

"Jolly glad he did!"

"Ahem! I—I'm thinking of asking the Housemaster to change me into No. 2, as there's more room there—"

"I'll jolly well roll you out if you wedge into my study, Bunter! And I'll see Railton about it, if you do!" said Trimble. "You're not going to loot my study as you do No. 6."

"Oh, really, Trimble—"

"Scat!" said Trimble.

He walked on alone. But Billy Bunter hurried after him, and joined him in the doorway.

"I say, Trimble, old chap—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped Trimble. "Hang on to somebody who wants your company—I don't!"

And Trimble rolled away, sniffing.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged a cheery grin. Evidently the plot was working!

CHAPTER 5.

Gussy is Puzzled.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was surprised.

He could not quite make it out.

When he came into Study No. 6, and found Blake and Herries and Digby listening to Bunter with respectful attention, he could scarcely believe his noble eyes.

Bunter was rather surprised himself—but not much. His view was that Study No. 6 was doing him simple justice at last. He was a fine fellow; he was a fascinating personality; and they hadn't recognised it. Now they seemed alive to their error, and were making up for lost time. That was what it looked like—to Bunter.

When Billy Bunter could obtain an audience he was accustomed to spreading himself. And once Study No. 6 had become respectfully attentive Bunter's spreading grew tremendous.

The glories of the Bunter home equalled, if they did not excel, those of Trimble Hall; indeed, as Herries remarked privately, when it came to lying, Bunter and Trimble were neck and neck.

In expiating upon those glories Bunter almost forgot that he was, for the nonce, Wally Bunter—but he was not in danger of betraying himself, for no one really heeded or compared his various statements—his habitual untruthfulness was well known now, and nobody expected him to keep anywhere near the facts.

Bunter's yarns generally wound up with the confidential statement that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, a postal-order he had been expecting had not arrived. But, to his great satisfaction, he found that even the postal-order was swallowed, as it were—and

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Blake and Herries and Digby, in turn, cashed it for him in advance.

With the ultimate object of ridding the study of the intolerable Owl, they felt that it was money well spent.

Arthur Augustus was surprised—he was puzzled—and he was a little suspicious.

He was pleased at first; but it dawned upon his noble brain that his chums were pulling Bunter's leg, and that was rather annoying.

Tom Merry's little scheme had been at work for a couple of days when D'Arcy tackled his chums on the subject.

Bunter had just left the study with a half-crown he had extracted from Dig—on account of a remittance hourly expected.

"You fellows seem to be gettin' on bettah with Buntah," Arthur Augustus remarked casually.

"Yes, looks like it, doesn't it?" said Blake.

"I twust you are not pullin' his leg?"

"How?"

"Well, you have vewy frequently remarked that you do not believe his statements wegardin' his home and people, Blake."

"But you did, Gussy."

"I could not possibly doubt the word of a friend, Blake."

"Even when he tells whoppers?"

grinned Blake.

"Weally, you know—"

"Well, now we're following your noble example, Gussy. We're making it a point to believe everything Bunter says."

"I twust you weally believe him, Blake."

"Can't do better than our best, can we?"

"I suppose not. But the remarkable thing is that you are tweatin' Twimble in the same way."

"Trimble!" yawned Blake. "What about Trimble?"

"I have seen you listenin' to his widdleous yarns about Twimble Hall, just as if you didn't know he was lyin'."

Blake shook an admonitory finger at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Gussy!" he exclaimed, in a tone more of sorrow than of anger. "Really, I'm shocked at you!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"How do you know that Trimble isn't telling the truth as much as Bunter?" demanded Blake.

"Weally—"

"Trimble Hall is just as likely to exist as Bunter Court," remarked Digby.

"Millionaire Trimble is as likely a person as Lord Bunter de Bunter."

"Yaas, but—"

"We've all accepted Trimble's invitations home for the next vac," said Blake. "So has Cardew. So we're bound to be civil."

"Yes, rather," grinned Herries.

"You know vewy well, Blake, that Twimble is spoofin', and that he does not weally mean to take anybody home for the vac?"

"Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be addressed as if you were shocked at me, Blake!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's.

"But I am shocked at you, Gussy! You're getting suspicious in your old age!" said Blake sorrowfully.

"I wefuse to admit for one moment that I am suspicious. I wegard suspiciousness as wotten bad form!" exclaimed D'Arcy hotly. "But we know the facts about Twimble. Didn't he ask a lot of fellows home once befoah, and hedge at the last minute? Did anybody go to his place? Didn't he contrive to wiggle out of it?"

"Well, it did look like that," grinned Blake. "But he may mean business this time."

"Wats!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I wepost—wats! You are pullin' Twimble's leg, and Buntah's leg. I weally do not see what you are doin' it for."

"Noblesse oblige!" said Dig.

"We're bound to take their word, ain't we? We're not suspicious, Gussy."

"If you think that I am suspicious, Dig—"

"Besides, Trimble is a chap worth knowin', like Bunter," remarked Herries. "I'd like you to be a bit more civil to Trimble, Gussy."

"I wefuse to be civil to Twimble."

"But the son of a millionaire might be jolly usefol—"

"I do not cweedit for one moment that his patah is a millionaire; and I should certainly wefuse to be civil to him on that account, even if I did cweedit it."

"Well, we're not so jolly disinterested," said Blake. "We're going to cultivate Trimble—for his money, you know."

"I suppose you are jokin', Blake?"

"Sober as a judge, old man! There's a lot of delightful traits in Trimble's character—if a chap could only see them."

"I have nevah been able to see them."

"You're prejudiced, Gussy. Hallo!"

Blake glanced at the study clock. "Time I was off, or I shall keep Trimble waiting."

"Bai Jove! Are you goin' out with Twimble, Blake?"

"Yes; he's asked me."

"You nevah cared for that boundah's company befoah!"

"I didn't believe then that he was rolling in money," explained Blake. "The case is altered now."

And Blake strolled out of the study.

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to believe that Blake cares a wap for Twimble's money, even if he has got any, which I don't cweedit for one moment!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "This is some wotten stunt!"

"Go hon!" murmured Dig.

"You are pullin' Twimble's leg, an' Buntah's leg, an' my leg!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with some excitement.

"My hat! What a lot of leg-pulling!" said Digby. "My dear man, if you don't believe Bunter's yarns, you can tell him so, but we're making it a point to believe in them in lumps. You ought to be pleased, as you're always standing up for that fat Owl—ahem!—I mean, that splendid chap."

"Wats!" was Arthur Augustus' reply.

He retired from the study, very much perplexed, leaving Herries and Dig chortling.

He was further suprised when he came out into the quadrangle. Jack Blake was walking down to the gates with Trimble, and Gussy caught a snatch of Trimble's conversation.

"You'll find everything tip-top at Trimble Hall—"

Arthur Augustus' feelings were expressed in a sniff.

Next his eyes fell upon Billy Bunter, who was in conversation with the Terrible Three. The Shell fellows were listening with as much respect as Blake & Co. had shown in the study.

"The difficulty is," Bunter was saying, "that my pater's sent me a cheque, the amount being rather too large for a postal-order. I don't quite know where to get it cashed."

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

Trimble paused, and glanced round; he heard that remark of Bunter's as he passed. Perhaps Blake had led him past to hear it.

There was a scornful grin on Trimble's podgy face. He, for one, did not believe in Bunter's cheque. But he was surprised to see that Tom Merry & Co. took it with perfect seriousness.

"That's awkward, Bunter," said Tom Merry seriously.

"Dashed awkward!" agreed Bunter. "I suppose you fellows—"

"Is it for a large amount?" asked Tom.

"No; only for ten pounds," answered Bunter negligently.

"Oh! Ah! I say, Blake!" called out Tom Merry.

"Hallo?" said Blake, coming up, Trimble with him.

"Bunter's in rather a difficult position," said Tom gravely. "It seems that he's got a cheque from his pater. We never get cheques, and I'm blessed if I know how to get one cashed. What would you suggest?"

"Well, if it's an open cheque, Bunter can take it to the bank," said Blake, after some thought, while Baggy Trimble stood dumbfounded.

"It's a crossed cheque," said Bunter hastily.

"Oh, in that case, the Housemaster would cash it for you," said Blake. "He could pass it through his bank, you know."

"Why, of course!" said Tom Merry. "Mr. Railton would do it like a shot!"

"It might take some time," said Bunter, blinking at them. "Perhaps, while I'm waiting for it, you fellows could—"

"Go to the Housemaster and ask him," suggested Lowther. "If he can't cash it on the spot, we'll lend you some tin with pleasure!"

"Good!" said Bunter.

He rolled away to the School House with the Terrible Three. Blake turned away towards the gates again with Trimble.

"I—I say, Blake, do you think Bunter's really got a cheque for ten pounds?" breathed Trimble.

"He says he has," answered Blake, looking surprised. "I suppose he ought to know."

"I thought it was all gas—"

"My dear chap, that's a bit suspicious, isn't it?" said Blake reprovingly.

"Has he really gone to the Housemaster about it, I wonder?"

"Cut in and see," said Blake, laughing.

"By gad, I will!"

Baggy Trimble, intensely curious, ran quickly into the House. He found the Terrible Three lounging in the passage near Mr. Railton's door.

"Where's Bunter?" he gasped.

Tom Merry nodded towards the Housemaster's study.

"Gone in to Railton?"

"Yes."

"Then—then he's really got the cheque?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Trimble.

He left the School House, and rejoined Blake, with a very thoughtful frown on his fat face. The Terrible Three grinned at one another.

"The plot thickens!" murmured Lowther.

Trimble's walk with Blake was cut rather short that afternoon—not at all to Blake's disappointment. Baggy was rather anxious to get back to St. Jim's—and see Bunter!

A fellow who asked a Housemaster to cash a cheque for ten pounds for him was a fellow worth cultivating. And Baggy Trimble by this time bitterly regretted that he had repulsed Bunter's friendly overtures. But that was an error that could be rectified!

CHAPTER 6.

A Chance for Mellish.

"WELL, Bunter?" Billy Bunter blinked rather uneasily at the master of the School House.

The Terrible Three had accompanied

him as far as the door of the Housemaster's study—to get his cheque cashed. The cheque, unfortunately, had no existence outside Bunter's fervid imagination, so he certainly could not ask Mr. Railton to cash it. But he had to enter the Housemaster's study with that pretended object in order to keep up appearances; and, once inside, he cudgelled his brains for an excuse to give Mr. Railton for his visit.

The School House master regarded him with surprise. He could not understand what the fat junior was blinking and hesitating for.

"Well?" he repeated.

"If—if you please, sir—" stammered Bunter, to gain time.

"Kindly come to the point, Bunter! My time is of value!" said Mr. Railton severely.

"The Slacker!"



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"Certainly, sir! I—I wouldn't waste your time for anything—"

"You are doing so, however! Why have you come to my study?"

"I—I—the fact is, sir—"

"Well?" exclaimed Mr. Railton impatiently.

"I—I'm expecting a postal-order, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"What?"

"It—it hasn't come, sir, and—and if you could advance me the ten shillings, sir—"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Railton severely. "You are a very singular boy, Bunter, to come to your Housemaster with such a request. Leave my study at once!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

And he left the study, glad to escape Mr. Railton's keen eyes.

The Terrible Three were waiting in the passage. They came towards Bunter as he closed the Housemaster's door.

"All serene?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nunno! He—he can't cash the

cheque!" gasped Bunter, blinking uneasily at the Terrible Three.

Bunter had a way of judging others by himself, and he wondered whether an inquisitive ear had been near the keyhole while he was talking to Mr. Railton within.

But he was soon relieved. The chums of the Shell looked sympathetic, and certainly unsuspecting.

"That's hard cheese!" said Manners.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Bunter, gathering confidence. "Awfully hard on a chap when he's got a cheque for ten quid, and—"

"We'll find somebody else," said Tom Merry musingly. "Perhaps Mrs. Taggles would change it at the tuckshop? Let's try!"

"I—I've left it with Railton," said Bunter hastily. "He—he's going to pass it through his bank, you see, and—and let me have the money when it comes. I—I shall have to wait."

"Oh!" said Tom gravely. "Well, that's really the best thing you could do with it, Bunter."

"Yes, but in the meantime—"

"I dare say Trimble could accommodate you in the meantime," said Monty Lowther, with the solemnity of an owl. "Trimble's simply gilt-edged, you know; he says so himself."

"Good! Let's go and see Trimble!" said Manners.

"He—he's gone out, hasn't he?" asked Bunter.

"He was here a minute ago, speaking to us. Let's look in his study, anyway."

"Oh, all right! But perhaps you fellows—"

"This way!" said Tom Merry, suddenly deaf.

The Terrible Three turned to the staircase, and Bunter rolled after them. They looked into Study No. 2 in the Fourth Form passage. Baggy Trimble was not there; but his study-mate, Percy Mellish, was in the room, busily occupied with lines—as the Terrible Three happened to know.

Mellish gave the chums of the Shell a sour look; but he honoured Bunter with a civil nod.

Mellish had heard Bunter's tales of magnificence—of which he would not have believed a word but for the fact that Tom Merry & Co. seemed to be taking them for granted. So far as Mellish could see, the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 were sucking up to Bunter for his money. Certainly there was no other way of accounting for their seeking Bunter's society. Bunter unadorned, so to speak, was not exactly fascinating; but if he was rich, that accounted for everything—in Percy Mellish's eyes.

"Trimble out?" asked Tom Merry.

"He's gone out with Blake, I believe," said Mellish, with a sneer. "Blake's been fishing for an invitation to Trimble's place, and he seems to have caught it. Blessed if I ever believed in Trimble Hall!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Tom.

"Trimble's asked us there for the vac."

"And you're going?"

"We've accepted the invitation," said Tom gravely. "According to Trimble, a chap will get a topping time there."

"According to Trimble!" sneered Mellish. "I'll believe in his merry palace when I see it!"

"Perhaps Trimble hasn't asked you?" suggested Bunter, blinking at him.

"Go and eat coke!" was Mellish's reply, his civility to Bunter giving way under the strain of that remark.

"Well, never mind Trimble Hall," said Tom Merry. "Bunter's looking for Trimble to cash a cheque for him!"

"Ten pounds!" said Bunter loftily.

"You get cheques for ten pounds?" exclaimed Mellish, with wide-open eyes. "That's nothing to me!" said Bunter. "Gammon!"

"Oh, really, Mellish! These fellows saw me hand the cheque to Mr. Railton, who's promised to cash it for me, anyhow!"

"Pshaw!"

"Well, as Trimble's out, there's nothing doing here!" said Tom Merry hastily. "I dare say we can accommodate you, Bunter, till you get some cash in hand. Will five bob be any use?"

"Certainly, old chap!"

Mellish's eyes grew wider and wider as the Terrible Three sorted out sufficient silver to make up that sum.

"Of course, I know that's not much to a wealthy fellow like you, Bunter!" said Lowther. "But we're not all millionaires!"

"Don't mench, old chap!" said Bunter. "I'll let you have this back when I get the cash from Railton!"

"That's all right!"

The Terrible Three went out, and Bunter was following them, when Percy Mellish called to him.

"I say, Bunter, old chap—"

"Hallo?" said Bunter carelessly.

"Care for toffee?" asked Mellish amicably. "I've got some rather good toffee here!"

"Like a bird!" said Bunter.

The Owl's fat face beamed as he sampled Mellish's toffee—and he took a rather large sample. When the toffee was finished Bunter rolled away—having accepted an invitation from Mellish to come in to tea that week.

Mellish looked very thoughtful. The sneak of the Fourth was impecunious, and he was accustomed to hanging on to wealthy fellows like Racke and Crooke for the sake of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Racke and Crooke patronised him, and disdained him. It occurred to Mellish that it would be more agreeable, and more profitable, to pay his court to this wealthy new junior, who had cheques for ten pounds at a time.

Evidently there was something in it, or why were Tom Merry & Co. so civil to the fat fellow? They must have an axe to grind, Mellish reflected. And when it came to flattery and toadery, Mellish felt that he could easily cut out Tom Merry & Co. He had great gifts in that line.

Mellish was thinking that over while the Terrible Three, having finished with Bunter, went down to football practice.

"It's working!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Next thing will be a close friendship between Bunter and Trimble—you'll see!"

"Bunter will be after Trimble's money, and Trimble will be after Bunter's; and, as neither of them has any, no harm will be done!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trimble's sure to try to get Bunter to chum with him in his study, and I fancy Mellish will second him. And Bunter's sure to jump at the chance, to get in close touch with Trimble's wealth!"

The Terrible Three roared.

The wheeze was working like a charm. The two incurable spoofers were succeeding in spoofing one another—with a little assistance from Tom Merry & Co.

It really looked as if Study No. 6 would

CHAPTER 7. Bosom Pals.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled into Study No. 6 at tea-time the next day, and found it rich and fragrant with the scent of frying herrings. He was relieved of W. G. Bunter before very long!

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He sniffed.

"I say, you fellows, I've asked a friend to tea!" he said.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!" answered D'Arcy. "Any friend of yours is welcome! Vevy fortunately, we have some jam."

"Yes; that's lucky!" remarked Blake solemnly. "Who's your friend, Bunter—Tom Merry?"

"No!" said Bunter disdainfully. Apparently he did not think very much of Tom Merry.

"Lowther or Manners?"

"Certainly not! It's Trimble!"

"Oh, Trimble!" said Herries, turning his face away to hide the grin that was overspreading it.

"Bai Jove! Trimble!"

"And I'd like something a bit decent for tea," said Bunter, with a very dissatisfied blink at the herrings. "Trimble's a rather decent chap!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I should like to be hospitable," said Bunter. "Blessed if I care about offering a friend fried fish for tea!"

"Cut down to the tuckshop," suggested Digby. "Dame Taggles has a lot of stuff in—"

"Railton hasn't changed my cheque yet," explained Bunter. "I'm still short of tin."

"Too bad!" said Blake seriously.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass on Blake searchingly. Gussy was not suspicious. Suspicion and Gussy were as far as the poles asunder. But he had doubts about that cheque. He could not help having very strong doubts.

The amazing circumstance was that Blake & Co. appeared to swallow it whole. The story of the ten-pound cheque was a little too steep for Gussy, who was of quite a trusting disposition; and it would have taxed his credence to the utmost limit. He naturally expected his chums to express their opinions on the subject with Fourth Form candour. Instead of which they seemed to take the cheque for granted.

Arthur Augustus simply couldn't catch on. His unwearied politeness to Bunter was past his noble comprehension.

"Well, it would take a day or two for the cheque to pass through the bank," said Herries gravely. "It has to go through a clearing-house or something. I don't see why Railton can't advance you the money."

"Yes; why not ask him?" remarked Dig.

Bunter shook his head.

"I don't care to ask favours of him," he said. "He might have offered it. He didn't choose to, and I sha'n't ask him. I shall wait till the cheque is cashed."

Jack Blake looked at the Owl almost in wonder.

He knew perfectly well that there was no cheque in existence, and that Bunter had not therefore given it to Mr. Railton to change for him. Yet the fat junior spoke with calm assurance, as if he believed in it himself.

The fact was that Billy Bunter was so accustomed to talking out of his hat that he had almost lost the distinction between truth and falsehood. So long as his statements were believed, that was good enough for him; and he did not consider it necessary that they should have any relation to the facts.

Arthur Augustus looked very uncomfortable. He felt, rather than knew, that the Owl was lying, and it gave him a sense of great uneasiness.

Blake turned to the herrings again. Snoozing Bunter was rather a joke, but Blake felt his patience approaching the limit sometimes.

Herries and Digby coughed, and went on laying the table. They, too, wondered how Bunter could do it. They

almost expected him to choke, sometimes, when he rolled out such thumping whoppers. They did not know the Owl so well as he had been known in the Greyfriars Remove. Bunter was in no danger of choking.

"So—so Twimble is comin' to tea?" said Arthur Augustus, breaking a silence that was growing painful.

"Yes, my pal Trimble," said Bunter loftily.

"I was not awaah that Twimble was your pal, Buntah."

"You're aware of it now, then! I've chummed up with Trimble," explained Bunter, blinking at Gussy. "We've got a lot in common. In these days of Socialism and Bolshevism and things it's the duty of wealthy fellows to stick together. That's how I look at it."

"Oh!"

"I didn't know Trimble was wealthy—I mean, he didn't know I was wealthy—I—I—I mean, of course, that that really has nothing to do with it," stammered Bunter. "What I mean to say is, I like Trimble. I think he's a splendid chap—a really fine fellow."

"I do not agree with you, Buntah."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"

"I do not, thank vevy much of Twimble."

"I don't like to hear a fellow run down behind his back!" said Bunter loftily.

"What?"

"You heard what I said. I'm not going to listen to anything against my pal Trimble."

Arthur Augustus' eye gleamed through his eyeglass.

"Buntah, if you imply that I am wunnin' a fellow down behind his back—"

—"he began, breathless with wrath.

"Well, what are you doing, then?"

grunted Bunter.

"I am statin' a fact that Twimble is perfectly well awaah of—that I do not think much of him, and do not approve of him," said Arthur Augustus, more quietly. "Holdin' that opinion of Twimble, I do not care to sit down to tea with him."

"He's jolly well coming here to tea!" said Bunter. "I've asked him. I suppose I have a right to ask a fellow to tea in my own study?"

"Certainly. And I have a wight to wetcha from the studay; and I shall proceed to do so."

And Arthur Augustus walked to the door.

"Suit yourself," said Bunter. "I don't care. In fact, it'll make more room for my pal Trimble."

Arthur Augustus did not reply to that. He walked along to Tom Merry's study in the Shell, where the Terrible Three gave him a hearty welcome.

Jack Blake closed one eye at his chums in Study No. 6.

Firmly imbued now with the belief that Trimble was a fellow of great wealth, and delighted with Trimble's readiness to make friends with him, Bunter was thinking of nothing but getting on the chummiest possible terms with his new pal.

He could not afford to consider Arthur Augustus at such a time. If all he heard of Trimble was correct, Gussy was a more valuable friend than Gussy. Bunter was already dreaming of the terrific good times in store for him at Trimble Hall. And certainly Trimble, personally, was more to his taste than Gussy. He had none of the notions which Bunter regarded as "high-falutin'," such as Gussy had. He was greedy and bouncing and untruthful—in fact, a fellow after the Owl's own heart.

Bunter hardly heeded Gussy's departure from the study. He was giving his attention now to tea, which he hoped would make a good impression on

Trimble. He certainly was not satisfied with herrings for tea.

"What have you got beside that?" he asked, with a disparaging glance at Blake's frying-pan.

"There's jam," said Dig.

"Anything else?"

"Bread-and-butter."

"I should like something decent for Trimble. He's accustomed to something a bit more decent than fried fish."

"We must do our best for Trimble," said Blake gravely. "Cut along to the shop, Dig, and see what you can do."

"And bring in something fit for a gentleman to eat," said Bunter. "I'm blessed if I know how you fellows stand grubbing about in the study as you do. Of course, I can make allowances for your people being poor, and all that; but, really—"

"We can't all be as wealthy as you and Trimble," said Blake meekly.

"I know that, and I make allowances. Still, you ought to remember that you've got a fellow in the study now who's accustomed to decent living."

"Oh!" gasped Blake. "We—we'll try to."

Herries gripped a cushion, hard; but a look from Blake restrained him, and he dropped it again. Herries had come quite near spoiling the whole thing.

Dig hurried away to the tuckshop, and came back with quite a handsome supply. Bunter looked more satisfied as it was laid on the table.

"That's better," he said. "You might have got a cake, though."

"It wouldn't run to one of Dame Taggles' cakes," said Dig.

Bunter snorted.

"That's all very well; but I don't see why I should go short because I happen to be temporarily short of tin. Mrs. Taggles would let you have one on tick."

"We don't run tick at the tuckshop in this study."

Another snort.

"I may as well say out plain, Blake, that I expect to be treated well in this study," said Bunter.

"Oh!"

"I've been thinking of changing out," said Bunter loftily. "I believe I should get on better with Trimble. There's more room in his study, too. Of course, I don't want to throw you fellows over," added Bunter kindly.

"Oh, don't!" implored Blake.

"Don't!" gasped Digby.

Herries uttered an unintelligible sound, something like the growl of his bulldog Towser.

"Well, a chap has to consider himself," said Bunter fatuously. "It's all very well for you fellows, having a wealthy chap in the study, very convenient for you, and all that—"

"Oh! Exactly!"

"But if you want to keep me here you will have to treat me decently, that's all," said Bunter, in a tone of finality. "In fact, I may as well tell you what I want, and what I shall expect, if I'm to stay in this study."

"Oh!"

"I've often found one of you planted in the armchair when I come in. Well, I don't mind that, so long as the chair's given up to me as soon as I want it. I'm not selfish."

"Oh!"

"And I expect something pretty decent at tea-time, especially when I bring a friend in to tea. Of course, I shall settle up for everything when my postal-order comes—I mean, when my cheque's cashed."

"Same thing!" murmured Blake.

"What did you say?"

"N-nothing! Go on, old scout!"

"Well, that's about all," said Bunter.

"Just remember that I'm not tied to this study, and if I don't find things to my satisfaction I shall walk out of it. Bear that in mind!"

"We—we will."

"I want you to be civil to Trimble, too. Try to be as good-mannered as possible—not so much of your fag boisterousness."

"Oh!" gasped Blake.

"I'll go and fetch Trimble now. Have everything ready when I come back," said Bunter.

He rolled out of the study.

Blake & Co. looked at one another eloquently.

"D-d-d-did you ever?" gasped Dig.

"That's the kind of nice fellow Bunter is when he's given his head!" murmured Blake. "Isn't he delightful?"

to him on account of it; and, with that belief in his mind, Bunter was naturally haughty and uppish, showing all the charming qualities, in fact, of his fascinating nature.

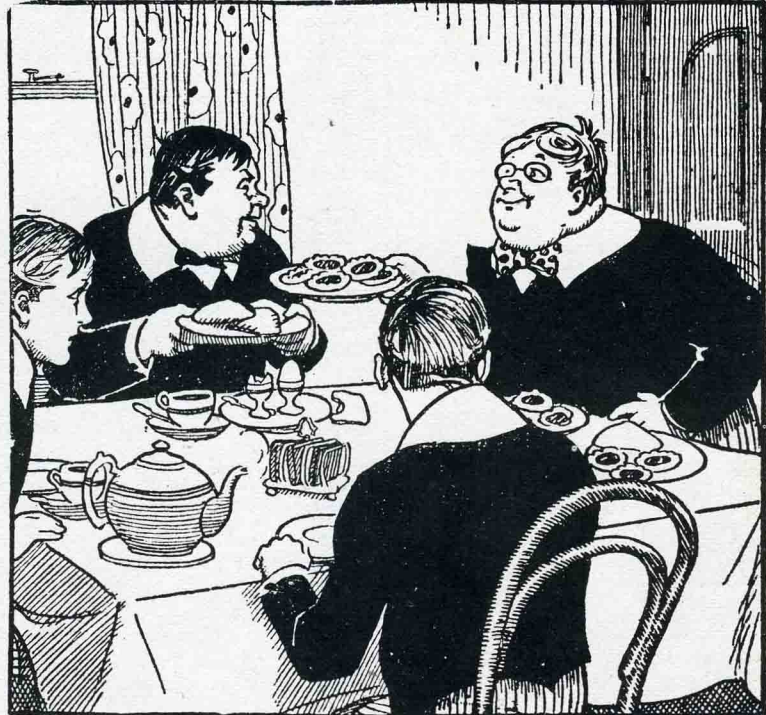
But, while he was decidedly uppish to Study No. 6, he was all smiles and civility to Trimble—the wealthy Trimble, the distinguished son of the millionaire of Trimble Hall!

And Trimble, for precisely similar reasons, was all civility and smiles to Billy Bunter.

In fact, the friendship between them was quite touching to witness.

It really seemed to be a case of "Two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one."

At the tea-table they even restrained their greediness to some extent in order to impress one another favourably.



Mutual Toadying.

(See below.)

"I can't stand it much longer," said Herries, in a tone of suppressed rage. "If it doesn't come to a finish soon, Blake, I shall start on him."

"Patience, my son! It's worth a little trouble to get that fat beast out of the study for good."

Herries snorted.

"Look here, you don't want me here. I'll go over and see Figgins in the New House. I shall break out if that fat ruffian starts gassing again—and he will."

And Herries tramped out of the study in a boiling state. Dig looked inclined to follow him, but Blake called him back.

"Don't leave me to stand it alone, Dig."

"Oh, all right!" said Dig resignedly.

Blake and Digby were there when Billy Bunter came back with his esteemed pal Baggy Trimble.

Tea was ready, and everything was in apple-pie order. Blake had obeyed Bunter's instructions on that point. It did not surprise Bunter to find that his word was law in Study No. 6.

His belief was that Blake & Co. believed in his wealth, and were sucking up

"Have another egg, Trimble?"

"No, thanks, old chap."

"Like the jam-tarts, Trimble?"

"Yes, rather! I say, Bunter, you try these cream-puffs. No, don't mind me; you try them, old fellow."

Blake and Digby were left very much out in the cold. Their tea was somewhat meagre, but they drew Trimble out on the subject of the glories of Trimble Hall, and Baggy fairly spread himself in boasting.

Blake and Dig listened with profound and envious respect, watchful of the effect upon Bunter, whose manner to Trimble grew more and more sugary. Then they drew Bunter on the topic of his titled relations, his father's mansion and the family yacht, the shooting-box in Scotland and the villa at Nice, to all of which Trimble listened with open ears and open mouth, his feelings towards Bunter evidently those of a long-lost brother.

Blake and Digby left them to finish tea together. They breathed more freely when they were outside Study No. 6.

"My hat!" murmured Blake, as they

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walked away. "I'd never have believed there could be two such terrific liars in existence. I thought Trimble was the one and only!"

"And they believe one another!" gasped Dig.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When the last crumb had vanished in Study No. 6 Trimble and Bunter came out, arm-in-arm. Mellish of the Fourth joined them as they strolled into the quadrangle, eagerly polite and agreeable.

From his study window Tom Merry caught sight of the three, and he chuckled. His chuckle drew his study-mates to the window.

"Touching picture of friendship!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"It is vewy remarkable to me," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wealdy do not see what Buntah sees in Twimble. I wealdy cannot stand Twimble myself. And—and— Ahem!"

Gussy was about to say that he did not see what Trimble saw in Bunter either, but he refrained.

"Well, they're both immensely wealthy," remarked Tom Merry. "That's a sort of bond of union, isn't it?"

"But are they, deah boy?"

"Well, they say so, and they ought to know."

"Yaas, but—"

Arthur Augustus was silent, and said no more. But he was more and more puzzled. As his belief in Bunter declined, that of Tom Merry & Co. seemed to be increasing, which was very perplexing indeed.

CHAPTER 8.

Bunter is Sorry.

"I'M sorry!"

Bunter made that statement in Study No. 6 later in the evening.

The Terrible Three had dropped in to share a supper of baked chestnuts with Blake & Co. Bunter rolled in, and helped himself to the lion's share of the chestnuts, and then looked thoughtful for some moments. Then, with a very firm manner, he stated that he was sorry.

"Sowwy, Buntah?" repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "About what, deah boy?"

"Sorry that I sha'n't be able to share this study with you any longer," said Bunter firmly.

"Bai Jove!"

"I say, that's rather hard on these chaps, isn't it?" said Monty Lowther, with owl-like gravity. "Your presence here, Bunter, gives the study a sort of distinction—"

Tom Merry gave his chum a warning look, but it was not necessary. Flattery could never be laid on too thick for Bunter.

"Of course, I'm quite aware of that," said the fatuous Owl, "and I repeat, I'm sorry! But I must say that I've never been treated really well in this study, and the fellows can't expect me to stay."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on Bunter. In spite of his manifold attempt to keep up the friendship he had formed with the fat junior, Gussy could not help his face brightening at the idea of the Owl clearing out of Study No. 6.

But Blake and Herries and Digby looked properly downcast.

"You're really going to leave us?" asked Blake sorrowfully.

Bunter nodded.

"But why?" asked Tom Merry.

"What have these fellows done, Bunter, for you to desert them in this way?"

"It isn't exactly that," said Bunter.

"There's too many in this study. I've

suggested that Herries should change out, to give me more room here, but he hasn't done it."

Herries made a sound like Towser, but did not speak.

"I never get really enough tea, either," said Bunter. "I don't want to be personal, of course, but I am down on greediness and selfishness. Considering that I foot the bill, I ought to have enough."

"You—you foot the bill?" stammered Blake.

"I mean, I'm going to when my remittance comes—I mean, when my cheque's cashed. It comes to the same thing."

"Oh, I—I see!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed hard.

"I do not wegard it as comin' to the same thing," he said. "Buntah, I am sowwy to say it, but I do not cweedit your statement."

"What?"

"I am extremely sowwy to say such a thing, but I do not believe you have had a cheque for ten pounds, and taken it to Waitlon to cash," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I have twied to believe it, but it is impos. I cannot pwetend to believe that statement, Buntah!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Blake.

Bunter sneered.

"I might have expected something of this sort when I decided to turn you down, Gussy," he said.

"T-t-t-turn me down?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes. It's jealousy!"

"Jealousy?" breathed Arthur Augustus.

"That's it. As for my cheque," said Bunter loftily, "Tom Merry came with me when I took it to Railton, and he knows."

"If that is the case, Buntah, I have made a mistake, and I am willin' to apologise. But I must wquest Tom Mewwy to confirm it."

"Oh, I went with him," said Tom.

"I stayed—ahem!—outside the study while he was speaking to Railton."

"You did not see the cheque?"

"Ahem! No."

"Or hear it spoken of in the presence of Mr. Waitlon?"

"No. Ahem!"

"Then your evidence is worth nothin', Tom Mewwy."

"Go hon!" murmured the captain of the Shell.

"I wepeat, Buntah, that I have twied vewy hard to cweedit your vawious statements, and I can do so no longah," said Arthur Augustus. "I feel in honah bound to telly you so."

"Oh, Gussy!" murmured Blake reproachfully.

"Some fellows are suspicious cads!" remarked Bunter casually.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus jumped up.

"Buntah, I am sowwy, but I cannot allow that remark to pass. I have twied to keep fwiendly with you because you saved my clobbah fwom bein' wuined by some wottahs when I was ovah at Gwey-fwiah. But it is wealdy impos. Aftah that remark, Buntah, I feel that I have no wescource but to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shush!" said Blake, pushing Arthur Augustus into his chair again. "Cheese it, Gussy!"

"Welly, Blake—"

"We're not going to allow you to quarrel with a fellow like Bunter. Suppose he was to use his influence with Trimble to keep us out of Trimble Hall?" said Blake severely.

"Oh, awright!"

"Even if Bunter deserts this study, we shall always admire him and respect him as—as much as we do now," said Blake.

"Quite as much!" said Dig.

"I will wettiah fwom the studay," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I will only remark that I am vewy glad Buntah is goin'."

"Gammon!" said Bunter.

Arthur Augustus controlled his noble feelings, and retired from No. 6.

"I suppose D'Arcy feels it a little—he feels thrown over, of course," remarked Bunter. "But I can't help that! Trimble and Mellish have been pressing me to come into their study, and I'm jolly well going to. I'm sorry, as I said. Really sorry! But the fact is, I've stood you fellows pretty patiently, and I've never been treated really well here. You needn't try to talk me over—I'm going!"

"We could go to the Housemaster and protest," remarked Blake thoughtfully.

"Too late!" grinned Bunter. "Trimble and Mellish have been to him already, and he's given permission for me to change."

"Oh!"

"I'm going to see him myself now," added Bunter. "Later, Trimble's coming to help me move my things."

The Owl of Greyfriars cast a last blink round, and, seeing that there were no more chestnuts, he walked out of the study.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another in eloquent silence.

"He—he—he's gone!" gasped Blake.

"Actually gone!" murmured Dig.

"It's too good to be true—but it's true!" Tom Merry chuckled.

"What price my wheeze?" he asked.

"My dear kids, when in doubt, always come to No. 10 in the Shell!"

"I can't quite believe it yet!" said Blake. "Not a word till the fat beast has asked the Housemaster to change him—then it'll be too late for him to change back."

And the chums of No. 6 waited—between hope and lingering doubt!

CHAPTER 9.

Exit Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER tapped at the door of Mr. Railton's study, and the School House master's deep voice bade him enter. Bunter opened the door and rolled in, and the Housemaster fixed his eyes upon him. Mr. Railton had observed Bunter a good deal since the Owl had come to St. Jim's. Bunter was rather a new thing in his experience.

"Well, Bunter?" said Mr. Railton.

"If you please, sir, I want to ask permission to change my study," said the Owl, blinking at him.

"For what reason, Bunter?"

"There's five of us in No. 6, sir, and it's rather a crowd," said Bunter. "There's more room in No. 2, and I have a very special friend there—Trimble."

"Quite so, Bunter! You would have been assigned to Study No. 2 when you came here but for your own request and D'Arcy's that you should be placed in No. 6. Have you any other motive for wishing to change?"

"Well, I don't get on very well in Study No. 6, sir," said Bunter. "I find it difficult to stand selfishness. The fellows are all right, in their way, but they're selfish—very thoughtless for others."

Mr. Railton looked at him very curiously.

"I hope you are able to avoid those faults, Bunter," he said.

"I hope so, sir," assented Bunter.

"Ahem! Well, there is no objection to your changing your study, Bunter, if

the boys in Study No. 2 do not object to the change.

"Oh, they'll be glad sir!" said Bunter. "The fact is, I should be welcome in any study I selected!"

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Bunter confidently. "I've been begged to come into several studies; but, of course, I can't oblige everybody."

"You may send Mellish and Trimble here," said Mr. Railton abruptly.

"Very well, sir!"

Bunter rolled out, and hurried away to No. 2 in the Fourth, where he found Mellish and Trimble. They greeted him affectionately. From their manner it might have been supposed that Bunter was the apple of their eye.

Bunter's manner to the two was nicely discriminated, however. To Trimble, he was honeyed; to Mellish, he was lofty and patronising. There was nothing to be got out of Mellish.

There was, as a matter of fact, nothing to be got out of Trimble, either; but Bunter was as yet unaware of that important fact.

"I've spoken to Railton," he announced. "He wants to see you two fellows, to clunch it."

"Right ho, old boy!" said Trimble. "We'll go at once!"

"Like a bird!" said Mellish.

"Don't call in at No. 6 as you go," said Bunter hastily.

"We're not likely to!" grinned Trimble. "But why?"

"I've told them you've asked the Housemaster already," explained Bunter.

"They were actually suggesting asking Railton to keep me in No. 6."

"Great Scott!"

"After your money, the cads!" sneered Mellish. "They won't lose you if they can help it."

"That's it, of course," agreed Bunter.

"They think—I mean, they know I'm rolling in oof, and they've made a good thing out of me already. I've practically stood all the exes of the study since I've been here; and, though I'm a generous chap, I'm getting tired of it. I own that."

"No wonder!" said Trimble. "They jolly well sha'n't keep you! We'll cut off and see Railton at once."

And Trimble and Mellish lost no time.

They repaired to the School House master's study, where Mr. Railton's consent to the change was duly obtained.

In great glee they returned to the Fourth Form passage.

Bunter was reclining, not to say sprawling, in the armchair in No. 2, and his blinked at them inquiringly over his big glasses as they came in.

"All serene!" said Mellish.

"Right as rain, old bird!" chuckled Trimble. "You belong to Study No. 2 now. I say, let's get your things moved in here!"

"We'll help," said Mellish.

"Oh, of course!" purred Trimble.

"We'll help Bunter! It's a pleasure!"

Bunter grinned with satisfaction. He had had the pleasure of turning down Study No. 6, and displaying what a popular and much-sought-after fellow he was; and he had planted himself in Trimble's study—on the chummiest possible terms with the son of the Trimble Hall millionaire!

No wonder he was satisfied.

The precious trio proceeded in company to Study No. 6, where Tom Merry & Co. were still chatting round the fire.

Arthur Augustus had rejoined the family circle by this time, and he looked a little restive as Bunter and Trimble and Mellish came in.

"No more chestnuts!" said Herries sarcastically.

Bunter sniffed.

"Do you think we want your mouldy old chestnuts?" he asked. "I've come to take my books and things away!"

"Really changing out?" asked Blake.

"I've spoken to Railton, and so have these chaps, I belong to Study No. 2 now," said Bunter loftily. "I'm sorry—I've said so—but—"

"Boo-hoo!" came from Jack Blake. He was weeping.

Bunter blinked at him suspiciously. Even he could see that Jack Blake's grief was not quite genuine, especially as the other fellows were grinning.

He gave another snort, expressive of disdain.

"Help me with these things, you chaps," he said.

"Bai Jove! Don't take my Latin gwammar, Buntah!"

"Oh! Is that yours?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And that die is mine!" granted Herries. "Let it alone! Your own rag is on the floor, where you left it!"

More sniffs from Bunter; but he was constrained to take only his own property, and he disappeared with it, followed by his new study-mates, also laden.

Bunter and his belongings were duly installed in Study No. 2.

"My only hat!" murmured Blake. "It really seems too good to be true!"

"Bai Jove! I cannot say I am sorrow that fat boundah has cleaved out!" confessed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is wathah had taste for him to be so vewy uppish about it, though!"

"Nature of the beast!" explained Monty Lowther.

"It's because we've been so jolly civil!" chuckled Blake. "Bunter will always have those nice manners to any one who's civil to him. You see, he thinks we're after his money."

"I do not believe he has any money, Blake."

"Same here!" said Blake cheerily.

"He has about as much as Trimble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon his chums.

"I fail to undahstand you fellows," he said.

"Go hon!"

"For several days past," pursued Arthur Augustus warmly, "you have been makin' out that you believed Buntah's vewy impvobable yarns—"

"We've let him run on," assented Blake.

"And you have been doin' the same with Twimble—"

"Quite so!"

"And now, it appeahs, you have only been pullin' their sillay legs, and you do not believe a word of cithah of them!"

"Exactly, old bean!"

"And several othah fellows, Cardew, and Levison, and Kangawoo, and some othahs, have been backin' you up in this wiculous game."

"You've got it!"

"And now, pway, what does it mean?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "I have a feelin' that somethin' has been goin' on behind the scenes which has not been confided to me."

"That's dawned on him at last!" said Monty Lowther admiringly. "With a brain like that, Gussy will wake 'em up in the House of Lords some day."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"My dear old nut," said Blake, "can't you see? The little game was to make Bunter and Trimble to believe one another's yarns—"

"Bai Jove!"

"So that they would chum up—"

"Oh!" said Arthur Augustus slowly.

"And Bunter would be anxious to squeeze into Study No. 2, and Trimble

and Mellish would be glad to get him there. See?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Gussy.

"It's worked like a charm," said Blake. "And I suggest a vote of thanks to Tom Merry, who thought of the wheeze."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I am not weally suah that I approve—"

"Go hon!" Blake rose to his feet.

"Let's see how those dear pals are getting on in No. 2."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. strolled along the passage and looked in at No. 2. Bunter and Trimble and Mellish were seated round the table there, doing their prep. They looked quite a happy family.

"Comfy here, Bunt'y?" asked Blake.

"Oh, yes, thanks," said Bunter, blinking at him. "By the way, Blake, I'll come to tea in No. 6 to-morrow, and bring Trimble—"

"Will you, by gad!"

"Yes; but it's got to be understood that there's something decent. You'll bear that in mind?"

"No," said Blake, with a chuckle; "I won't bear that in mind, Bunter! What I shall bear in mind is this—that if you show your overfed chivvy in Study No. 6, either to-morrow or any other day, you'll get a cushion on it!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And a boot to help you travel!"

grunted Herries.

Bunter blinked at the juniors as if he could scarcely believe his ears. Trimble and Mellish looked astounded. This was rather a change of tune, and they had not been prepared for it.

"I—I—I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter. "I suppose you're joking?"

"You put your fat nose inside No. 6, and you'll see!" answered Blake.

Slam!

The door closed, and the Co. went their way. In Study No. 2 astonishment reigned.

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled as they departed; and even upon the calm and aristocratic visage of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy there dawned a grin.

CHAPTER 10.

Alas!

STUDY No. 6 was itself again. Blake & Co. the next day, were wearing cheerful smiles.

The Terrible Three shared their satisfaction. They felt that they had done a good deed in helping to relieve that celebrated study of the intolerable presence of Bunter.

But that day there was a deep shade of thought on Bunter's face.

Perhaps he was beginning to realise the truth.

The polite and respectful hearing given him by Tom Merry & Co. had vanished all of a sudden. For a couple of days he had been allowed to swank, brag, and to boast, and the Co. had lent him their ears, and even lent him their money.

Now there was a change.

That very morning Bunter generously bestowed his company on Study No. 6 in the quad after breakfast. Blake & Co. cheerfully turned their backs on him and walked away.

Bunter blinked after them in astonishment. This was certainly not the adulation due to his wealth. True, he hadn't any wealth; but he supposed that Blake & Co. believed he had—and he fancied they were after it—which came to the same thing.

"I say, you fellows!" he called out.

No answer.

Bunter hurried after them.

"Gussy, old chap—"

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"I shall be obliged, Buntah, if you will not address me as Gussy!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately way. "I am Gussy only to my friends."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"

"Pwy weleass my arm, Buntah!"

"Look here, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off!" grunted Herries.

"I—I say—"

"Bump him!" said Blake. "The fat rotter's given us enough trouble in the study, and still more trouble to get rid of him. Bump him!"

Billy Bunter did not stay to be bumped.

In a state of great indignation and astonishment, he hurried off. Naturally, he was very thoughtful that morning.

After morning lessons he looked for the Terrible Three; and ran down those cheery ornaments of the Shell.

"I say, you fellows—" he began, as he came up.

"Expecting a postal-order?" asked Monty Lowther gravely.

"Ye-es, exactly!"

"Short of tin?" asked Manners.

"Temporarily," said Bunter, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "If you fellows could manage—"

"My dear chap, I can tell you what to do," said Tom Merry heartily.

"Eh? What?"

"Go to Railton, and ask him to hurry up with cashing that cheque of yours, said the captain of the Shell.

"That—that cheque?" stammered Bunter.

"Certainly."

"The—the fact is—"

"Dear old thing," said Lowther, "you needn't tell us the fact! We know the fact, my merry old bean! There isn't any cheque, and you thought you were spoofing us—and you weren't!"

"Oh, really, Lowther, if you doubt my word—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Stick Trimble for a loan, old bean," chortled Lowther. "Let him send for a cartload of banknotes from Trimble Hall. He can ask his pater to send them along in the Rolls-Royce, you know."

"I—I say—"

Tom Merry & Co. walked away, leaving Bunter stuttering. Apparently the general belief in his solvency had vanished all of a sudden—in fact, he began to realise that it had never existed, and that his fat leg had been pulled.

"Boasts!" murmured Bunter. "Lucky I've made friends with Trimble, after all. He's worth more to a chap than all that crowd."

And Bunter went to look for Trimble.

He found that podgy youth in talk with Cardew of the Fourth. But it was a Cardew quite different from the one Trimble had known for the past two days. Lord Rockness' grandson had been greatly entertained by the scheme of setting two impetuous spoofers to spoof one another; but the game was over now, as Trimble was learning rather suddenly.

Bunter jumped as he heard what the two were saying as the Owl came up.

"My dear fat pippin, I'll come to Trimble Hall—when the place is built," said Cardew, with a cheery smile. "Don't forget to let me know when it's goin' to be built."

"Wha-a-at do you mean?" stammered Trimble.

"And I'll lend you another ten bob, Trimble, when your pater's Rolls-Royce calls for us," added Cardew. "Not before then! When do you think that will be, old top?"

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Cardew sauntered away, leaving Trimble speechless.

"I—I say, Baggy—" stuttered Bunter.

"I—I say, Bunter—" stuttered Trimble.

They looked at one another.

Perhaps the truth was dawning upon both of them.

Bunter went on, after a pause.

"I—I say, Railton hasn't cashed my cheque yet, Trimble—"

"Hasn't he?" said Trimble. Trimble had heard a good many humorous remarks already that day about Bunter's cheque.

"Nunno!"

"Go and ask him about it," said Trimble, fixing his eyes on Bunter. "I'll come with you."

"I—I think I won't bother him! I—I was thinking that you might—"

"My pater isn't sending me anything more till the end of the term," said Trimble. "I've told you so—because I blued twenty pounds in one week."

"Wouldn't he if you asked him?"

"I don't care to."

Bunter's eyes began to gleam behind his spectacles.

"Suppose we telephoned him?" he said.

"It's a trunk-call," said Trimble hastily. "The number's not in the book here."

"But you know his number?"

"I—I've forgotten it," Trimble changed the subject. "I say, Bunter, I'll go to Railton and remind him about your cheque, if you like."

Bunter started.

"Not at all! Don't!" he exclaimed.

"Why, you ass—"

"Why not, if you've really asked him to cash a cheque for you?" said Trimble suspiciously.

"If you doubt my word, Trimble—"

"Well, a jolly good many fellows seem to doubt it!" said Trimble sourly.

"I heard Levison say your cheque was the joke of the term. He was laughing over it no end, with Tom Merry and Blake—"

"Well, I heard Cardew say he'd come to Trimble Hall when it was built!" sneered Bunter. "Isn't it built yet?"

"That—that was only Cardew's little joke—"

"There seem to be a lot of little jokes about Trimble Hall—"

"Not so many as there are about your postal-orders and cheques and things, you—"

"Look here, Trimble—"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"My belief is, you've been spoofing me, and there isn't any Trimble Hall at all!"

"My belief is, you've been spoofing me, and there isn't any cheque at all, or any postal-orders, and you're a spoofing, sponging impostor!"

"You fat, cheeky rotter—"

"You fat cad—"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Yah!"

Fat fists were brandished in the air as the two podgy juniors glared at one another in great wrath.

"Hallo! A fight! A fight!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Roll up, ye cripples! Bunter and Trimble—the Great War over again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of juniors at once to see that sad and sudden ending of a sudden friendship.

"Go it, Trimble!"

"Pile in, Bunter!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I've a jolly good mind to mop him up!" said Bunter.

"But—but he isn't worth it—"

"Oh, yes, he is!" urged Blake.

"Quite worth it—ain't you, Trimble?"

"I've a jolly good mind to burst the fat rotter!" said Trimble disdainfully.

"But—but it's just on dinner-time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take 'em by the necks and make 'em begin!" exclaimed Grundy of the Shell.

"You take Bunter, Tom Merry, and I'll take Trimble—Hallo, they're off!"

There was a roar of laughter as the two heroes scudded off in different directions.

At dinner that day Bunter and Trimble scowled at one another from opposite sides of the table. Each had found the other out now, and friendship was off—most emphatically off.

And when Bunter came into Study No. 2 after lessons he found Percy Mellish there—not civil and honeyed, as of yore, but decidedly ratty.

"You fat cad!" was Mellish's greeting.

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunter.

"You spoofing rotter—"

"Oh, really, Mellish—"

"I know all about your cheque!" said Mellish. "You—you lying worm, you haven't a brown to bless yours if with, unless you've borrowed it of D'Arcy or some other silly ass!"

"Look here—"

"You're as big a spoofer as Trimble—and I thought he took the cake before you came!" snorted Mellish. "I was taken in. I thought Tom Merry and the rest were making up to you for your money. What could a chap think, the way they were going on?"

"So—so they were!"

"You fat idiot! They were pulling your leg, to get you out of Study No. 6, and—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And Trimble's leg, and my leg, to get us to have you in here!" howled Mellish. "I was taken in! Now we're landed with you, you—you—you fat pig! I've a jolly good mind to sling you out of the study!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He understood fully at last.

His little round eyes gleamed with rage behind his spectacles.

"I—I jolly well won't be spoofed out of my study!" he gasped. "I don't want to stay here! You're a needy cad, Mellish, and Trimble is a poverty-stricken boulder! I'm going back to No. 6!"

"They won't have you, you fat idiot! They've wangled this whole bizney to get rid of you!"

"I—I—I'll go to the Housemaster, and—"

"After going to him yesterday to ask to be changed here?" sneered Mellish. "It's too late, you fat chump! They wouldn't have given the game away if it hadn't been all safe!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter.

The Owl of Greyfriars felt that it was only too true. But he did not despair yet. He rolled along to Study No. 6, and, as that apartment was empty, he rolled in and ensconced himself in the armchair, to wait for Blake & Co. to come to tea.

When those cheery juniors arrived Bunter felt an inward trepidation, but he blinked towards the juniors in the doorway with a ghastly smile.

Tom Merry & Co. were there—seven hungry juniors, laden with packages, come into tea after footer.

"Buntah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bunter!" roared Blake.

"I—I say, you fellows," murmured Bunter, "I've come back, you know!"

"Where's your dog-whip, Herries?"

"I'm looking for it!"

"I say you fellows, I know you're only joking. I—I wouldn't desert you, you

know—not my old pals—especially Gussy! Gussy, old chap—”

“I refuse to speak to you, Buntah!”

“He, he, he!”

“Hallo! What are you he-he-heing about?” asked Dig.

“Gussy’s little joke,” said Bunter feebly. “I can take a joke with anybody. He, he, he!”

“You’ll take something else in a minute!” remarked Blake. “Buck up with that dog-whip, Herries!”

“Wha-a-at do you want the dog-whip for, Blake?” stammered Bunter.

“To lay round a fat rascal!”

“I—I say, you know—”

“Here it is!” said Herries. “You needn’t trouble, Blake! I’ll lay it on!”

“I say, you fellows— Yarooooooh!”

Billy Bunter made a wild bound for the door. But he was not quite quick enough. There was another wild yell as Herries got in with the dog-whip.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Bunter vanished down the passage, with Herries close behind. Wild yells were heard in the distance. Herries came back in a few minutes, rather breathless,

but with a satisfied expression upon his face.

And Bunter did not come back to Study No. 6!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's — “BUNTER IN SEARCH OF A STUDY!” — by Martin Clifford.)

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 33.—George Richard Bruce Darrel.

It is only in the natural order of things that the St. Jim's stories should have more to do with the Forms of the Middle School than with those of either the Higher or the Lower. There is plenty of interest in the Third, for the matter of that; but one would get tired of the cheery fags if one met them every week. Their activities are just a trifle too juvenile to bear weekly recountal. With the Sixth and the Fifth it is otherwise. Most of what they do would be too sedate and commonplace to be really interesting to most readers. Now and then, of course, things happen in the higher Forms; but they do not happen so often there as in the Shell and Fourth.

Thus far Eric Kildare, the genial and popular skipper, is the only Sixth-Former we have had in the St. Jim's Gallery. But this week Darrel is added to the list; and there will be two or three more to come—certainly Monteith and Baker and Knox possibly others.

Darrel is Kildare's greatest chum, and every bit as good, sound, sportsmanlike, chivalrous a fellow as the captain of St. Jim's.

There has never been any break in their friendship. They were fags together—though we have no record of their fagging days. They went up the school together; and no doubt they had as high old times when in the Fourth and the Shell as Jack Blake & Co. and Tom Merry & Co. now have. As prefects, with a good deal of responsibility for the maintenance of discipline thrown upon their still youthful shoulders, they stand side by side.

Darrel is a fellow a bit off the usual lines, with more resolution and balance than the average boy of his age. He showed this in the course of his dealings with Mr. Ratcliff, narrated in that fine story, “The Fighting Prefect!”

Mr. Ratcliff had taken upon himself to gild at the Terrible Three in a manner that they considered distinctly off—and they were not far wrong, either. He threatened to cane them for impudence. They had not really been impudent, though possibly Lowther had been rather cool and off-hand with him. But then, he was running down Mr. Railton and Mr. Railton's methods to them; and they could not stand that. When he persisted in the caning notion they appealed to Darrel, who happened to be passing, and the prefect backed them up. He reminded Mr. Ratcliff that he had no right to punish a School House boy; his proper method was by complaint to Mr. Railton. Mr. Ratcliff was very angry indeed; but he could do nothing more effective than register a score against Darrel, with a view to paying it off later.

He got his chance; but, after all, he was not able to avail himself of it. For there were circumstances that gave Darrel the upper hand at the moment when the sour Ratty seemed to have him quite at his mercy.

An old St. Jim's boy named Stoker, who had suffered in his day under Mr. Ratcliff, was visiting the neighbourhood in a professional capacity. Mr. Herbert Stoker had taken to professional pugilism, and was starring at the Wayland Hall. It occurred to him that it would be quite a hefty idea to run over to St. Jim's and give Ratty a hiding. He was obliging enough to call up

the New House master on the telephone and tell him of this kindly intention.

The juniors heard of it, and were keenly anticipative of Mr. Stoker's visit. The First Eleven were playing away from home, though Darrel, who was badly under the weather for private reasons, had not gone with the team. The Head and Mr. Railton were both absent that afternoon. Mr. Linton was also out. It was not to be expected that aid should come for Ratty from Lathom, Mr. Selby, Monsieur Morny, or Herr Schneider. So, on the whole, it looked warm for the New House tyrant, unless Darrel took up the cudgels for him. And, after the row between them, this hardly seemed a likely contingency.

Mr. Stoker came along. He was quite pleasant and friendly with the juniors; but he would not be turned back by Taggles. He said that he would be grieved to have to chuck a gentleman of a hundred years of age into his lodge on his neck; but he made it clear that he would bear that grief if necessary. He did not actually chuck him in; he merely carried him in, and put him down gently.

Then the Old Boy forced his way into Mr.

Ratcliff's presence, and commanded that gentleman to hold out his hand for the cane. Ratty would not do that; he took flight out of his study window. Mr. Stoker pursued, lashing at him. He chased Ratty into the School House. The juniors did not see their way to interfere; Toby, the page, was not having any; Cutis of the Fifth stood by, refusing to lend a hand.

But Darrel chipped in. He refused to let Stoker touch Mr. Ratcliff. Stoker had already done a bit in that way; but that was not Darrel's fault.

There was a fight—a stern fight—and Darrel won. He is a boxer of more than put through it. He wanted to detain Stoker, bore no malice. He needed assistance to get back to Wayland; but he was very anxious that Darrel should not get into trouble with the Head.

That seemed likely enough. For Ratty had become brave when once his enemy had been put through it. He wanted to detain Stoker, and give him in charge for assault. Darrel would not have that; and Mr. Lathom agreed with Darrel. So Ratty reported Darrel to the Head. But he got no change out of that. Dr. Holmes is a gentleman and a sportsman.

Darrel was badly in need of twenty pounds. It was not for himself that he wanted it. He could not borrow it; but he thought he saw a way of making it. Mr. Stoker's manager had offered a purse of twenty pounds to any amateur who could stand up to Stoker for ten rounds. Darrel went for that purse. Mr. Ratcliff got on his track, and saw his chance. Boxing in public for money is a heavy offence in a prefect's case, of course; and Ratty waited until Darrel had committed himself, and, incidentally, had fairly knocked out Stoker, before he made a move.

Then he told Darrel that he would report him to the Head and the Sixth-Former knew what that meant—expulsion! But while they were talking Stoker appeared, still keen on his notion of giving his dear old House-master a hiding. Ratty appealed frantically to Darrel for aid. Darrel refused—unless he gave his word of honour to withhold the report. And Ratty gave it. After that there was no need for Darrel to do anything forcible in the way of defence. Mr. Stoker had been licked twice by Darrel, and he frankly said that he was not looking for a third licking. But he uttered dire threats against Ratty if that specimen went back on his word. Darrel had little faith in the master's word of honour. But Ratty kept it—probably because of his dread of Stoker.

It was for a woman that Darrel had wanted that twenty pounds. Some time before he had fallen deeply in love with Signorina Colonna, who was acting at the Wayland Theatre Royal. He had made her acquaintance in London, and he was most desperately in earnest. He was willing to wait five years—ten years—any time—if only she would give him hope—after the way of boys of his age. But there was more in it than in most attacks of calf-love. Darrel did not forget easily—he still cared very much for Pauline Colonna, even after she had married and gone to America with her husband, although he never knew that it was chiefly for his sake—to cure him of his infatuation—that she went, refusing a much better offer from a London syndicate.



"Young as he was, boyish in so many ways, he was yet a man in others, and in truth and depth of feeling quite a man. The signorina was the first woman upon whom he had bestowed a thought in this way, and she, with her beauty and grace, had won him at a glance. Foolish he might be, blind to obvious impossibilities, yet he was sincere and true, and there was something noble in the boy's love for the beautiful singer—a love founded as much on his instinctive knowledge of her goodness and true womanliness as upon anything else, as the signorina knew."

This is a quotation from the story in which Darrel's love-affair was told. Those who read it will recall the accident to Signorina Colonna on the stage, and how the seniors were going to Redcliffe to play, and how Darrel got Tom Merry to go to the post-office at Rycombe and send a telegram to Wayland and await the reply. They will recall, too, how Tom and his chums rode their hardest to Redcliffe, and how the news was bad, and how Darrel borrowed Tom's bike and rushed off to Wayland, leaving a gap in the team which Tom filled with credit.

There was something like a quarrel between Kildare and Darrel over that, for Kildare did not know the whole story, or, indeed, much of it. And to Kildare, of course, the desertion of the team just before a match is an offence not easily to be condoned. But Kildare is not the fellow to be lacking in sympathy for a chum. And when he came

into Darrel's study and found the fighting prefect with his elbows on the table, his face in his hands, and his whole frame shaken by heavy sobs, all bitterness left his heart. He never had a full explanation. "Next day Darrel was very pale and quiet, but quite himself. He had a sorrow in his heart, but he had courage there, too. He had his battle to fight, but he had the pluck to face it."

"It's all over, old chap," he said. "That letter was the finish. I shall never see her again! Perhaps I may tell you about it some day—not now."

That was enough for Kildare. "And if Darrel's heart ached when he read in the papers that Signorina Colonna had sailed for America, he said nothing about it. And time, as Pauline well knew, had power to heal the wound—in time nothing would remain of the boyish love but a memory tinged with sadness."

It might be so, but at least Darrel did not forget easily.

When he tried to borrow twenty pounds, and eventually made that sum by knocking out the cheery Stoker, it was for Pauline he wanted it. He told Kildare about it.

"You remember—once—there was a girl—an actress I knew—she was older than I—but I thought an awful lot of her," he said. "I've heard from her once or twice. She—she married. Well, I haven't heard from her lately. But I've had news from another

quarter—news of her, and it's bad news. She's had bad luck. They—she and her husband, you know—started a touring theatrical company, and they've been done in. There was a fire, and they lost everything. They were almost on their uppers, and there's a subscription being raised among the people who knew them to help them on their feet again. They don't know that I know anything about it. But—but I want to help. You see, I could send a subscription to the fund without their knowing that it came from me."

There are other things one might tell about Darrel—minor things, but worth telling were it not for the fact that these two stories are quite enough to show his character. He has always been nearly as popular with the juniors as Kildare himself. Who could help liking so generous and plucky a fellow?

But in his dealings with Ratty and Stoker, in his hopeless love affair, Darrel stands sufficiently revealed—brave and knightly, with a man's heart in a boy's body. There is much courage that is mere animal courage, with something of the brute in it—even so, not to be despised, for courage always matters. But Darrel's is of a higher type than that; and, thinking of it, one remembers Bayard Taylor's words in that pathetic poem which tells of how the brave men in the chilly Crimean trenches sang "Annie Laurie":

"The bravest are the tenderest,
The loving are the daring!"

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

HARDLY A SUCCESS! By Clifton Dane.

I.

"SKIMMY, you raving lunatic, if you don't throw that beastly, stinking stuff through the window I'll jolly well pitch it out, and you with it, you—your potty ass!"

"My dear Gore—" Herbert Skimpole raised a hot and perspiring face from the fireplace, where he was stirring a thick, milky-white mixture in a large saucepan, and blinked through the steamy haze that filled the study. "My dear Gore," he began again, in a mildly indignant tone, "pray control yourself! I must refuse most emphatically to throw this extremely valuable composition through the window! I am surprised and pained at you, Gore, for making such an extraordinary and ridiculous request! In the glorious cause of Science—"

"Science be banged!" roared George Gore. "I'm about fed up with you! Do you think I'm going to stand my study being made into a stinking chemical laboratory with your piffing experiments, you ass? What are you trying to make, anyhow—treacle-toffee, or what?"

Gore's query was obviously a piece of sarcasm. Whatever the genius of the Shell was making—or trying to make—it certainly was not treacle-toffee. The stuff smelled like a mixture of calcium carbide and burning indiarubber.

Sarcasm, however, was lost on Skimpole. He fixed a half-reproachful, half-pitying glare upon his questioner.

"Certainly not, Gore! As you ought to be perfectly well aware from your daily association with me, I have neither the time nor the inclination to attempt such an essentially frivolous and childish pursuit as making treacle-toffee! Indeed, I—"

"Then what is it, you—your giddy Anarchist? Give the beastly stuff a name, and then bury it, for goodness' sake!" gasped Gore, with a cough of disgust. "Why, it's enough to lift the giddy roof! The blessed study reeks like a bone works!"

Skimpole wagged a bony forefinger admonishingly at his angry study-mate.

"My dear friend, in the interests of scientific investigation all personal feelings and considerations should be sacrificed. I am perfectly well aware, my dear Gore, that my experiments are somewhat—er—unpleasant, and, indeed, obnoxious. But if you were so fortunate as to possess the intellectual ability

necessary to undertake an investigation into the histories of great inventions you would discover that all inventors were inconvenienced by these essentially trivial details, which—"

"Oh, it's one of your piffing inventions, is it?" snorted Gore. "Well, cut the cackle and get on with the washing, you ass!"

"Washing? What an utterly absurd remark, Gore! I confess that I fail to see any possible connection between my great invention and—er—washing. This valuable compound," proceeded Skimpole earnestly, "is the Skimpole Patent Dust-Layer. It will, I am proud to say, revolutionise modern, but futile, methods of laying the dust; it will solve a problem that has occupied the brains of the greatest scientists of the century. It will abolish water-carts. People will, I modestly affirm, acclaim me as the greatest scientist and public benefactor of the age. I intend to test my invention on the road this afternoon. Afterwards I propose to offer the invention to the Government. If, however, they are so short-sighted as to refuse it, I shall float a public company and—"

"And make your giddy fortune!" sniffed Gore. "Then you'd drop your blessed Socialism and become a bloated capitalist—what?"

"Certainly not, Gore!" protested Skimpole. "I have no desire whatever to make my fortune. I must admit, however, that I cherish the intention of retaining the sum of fifty pounds for my personal use. That, my dear friend, I require to purchase books. I have for some considerable time strongly desired to possess the complete set of Professor Balmcrampton's great work, 'From Monkey to Man.' I am already happy in the possession of two volumes. The remaining forty-eight volumes I—Dear, dear, Gore! What ever is the matter, my friend?"

Something undoubtedly was the matter. Gore, who had been curiously examining the mixture, suddenly gave a fiendish yell, and began to prance about the room with his hand to his mouth. The solution had boiled over, and Gore had got a splash on his hand.

"Hang you and your blessed muck!" he bellowed. "Ow! I'm scalded! Wow! Oh, hang!"

Pouncing on the saucepan, Gore dashed to the window.

"For laying dust, is it?" he growled. "Then here goes to lay the giddy dust in the quad!

Out of the way, Skimmy, you raving maniac!"

For Skimpole, with a wild cry of anguish, grabbed his angry study-mate's arm.

"Don't, I implore you, my dear Gore! I am exceedingly sorry for such a deplorable accident! But I beg of you, in the cause of humanity—"

"Humanity be jiggered!" yelled Gore, flinging open the window.

Then he hesitated. Gore was by no means so tolerant of Skimpole's little ways as his other study-mate, Talbot, was. But even in his anger Gore could hardly fail to see the obvious distress on Skimpole's face.

"All right, you silly idiot!" he growled. "Here's your precious stuff! Look here, Skimmy, my son. I'm off to the Grammar School match now. But if that filthy stuff isn't cleared out of this study by my return I'll—I'll ram your wooden head into the saucepan!"

With that terrifying threat, Gore, still nursing his hand, snatched his cap and left the study.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "What an exceedingly violent and headstrong youth!"

And, shaking his head sadly, the genius of the Shell treated his steaming preparation to a last vigorous stir, and lowered the saucepan out to the hearth.

Still reflecting on the frailty of human nature, the earnest scientist rummaged round the study until, from the recesses of the cupboard, he brought forth a large bottle. This, after much tribulation—for the stuff was hot—and the upsetting of about half a pint of the sticky stuff on the study floor, he managed to fill. Even then there remained a considerable quantity in the saucepan.

Skimpole paused, and, with one bony forefinger pressed to a still bonier forehead, frowned thoughtfully.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I shall require a much larger receptacle than that to hold the solution. How exceedingly thoughtless of me not to have provided for such an obvious necessity! However, I will now proceed to the kitchen and endeavour to obtain from the cook a pickle-jar, or some such domestic utensil."

And, with that intention, the earnest enthusiast marched away, leaving the still dripping bottle to drain its sticky overflow on to the study tablecloth.

II.

BAGGY TRIMBLE sniffed suspiciously. Baggy Trimble, when he wasn't actually eating or sleeping, usually was sniffing. But this afternoon his sniffs were unusually loud, and, had anyone been near him, would have been exceptionally objectionable. But the Shell passage was deserted save for Baggy. So that youth sniffed loud and long to his heart's content.

From Study No. 9 came a most extraordinary and alarming smell. It was the smell that had, earlier in the afternoon, been the compelling factor in driving George Gore into temporary exile—or, at least, had decided him to choose the school match with Greyfriars for an afternoon in the unsalubrious atmosphere of Study No. 9.

But to Baggy Trimble that selfsame smell had an entirely opposite effect, which explains why that over-curious youth was sneaking so cautiously along the passage—to investigate.

Sniffing hard, Baggy reached the door of Study No. 9, and peered inside. His little, piggy eyes glistened as they fell upon the still steaming saucepan. Cautiously and suspiciously Baggy tiptoed across the room, and poked a snubby nose over the thick, milky liquid.

Trimble was puzzled—frankly puzzled. He was also hungry—very hungry. But he hesitated. The thick substance steaming in the saucepan looked appetizing enough, certainly. It might be grub-toffee—anything good to eat!

But the smell! Still sniffing, Baggy lifted his podgy nose, and pondered a moment. Then, very slowly and warily, he dipped a grimy finger into the liquid. He withdrew it again with astonishing briskness, and danced about rubbing his finger frantically on his trousers.

"Wow!" groaned Baggy. "It's hot! Wow! I'm scalded to death! Oh, dear!"

Baggy stopped suddenly as his eyes fell upon the bottle on the table. Despite the fact that he was scalded to death, he withdrew the cork, and took a cautious sip.

After that Baggy Trimble's contortions were remarkable, and could have been more aptly portrayed on the cinema screen than described in mere words. His mouth, cheeks, and eyebrows went up and down like old bellows, while he gulped and spluttered in an alarming manner. Apparently Skimpole's patent dust-layer tasted as unpleasant as it smelled.

"Grough! Pah! Oh dear, the beastly stuff!" gasped Baggy.

Then, for the first time, he spotted the inscription, "HAIR-OIL," printed on the label, and his podgy features went a sickly white.

"Oh, crumbs! I'm poisoned! Grough! Hair-oil—the beastly stuff! Oh, help!" he groaned, with a horrible grimace.

For fully a minute Baggy spluttered and gasped. After a while, however, he began to feel better. Then, disappointed and still hungry, he was moodily making a bee-line for the door, when he resitated. With his cunning eyes twinkling greedily, he returned to the table. Replacing the cork, he left the study with the bottle of Skimpole's preparation hidden beneath his coat.

At Racke's study Baggy stopped, and entered without the formality of knocking. Chattering round the table were Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and Serape. From the fact that Racke crammed the pink paper he was reading under the table on Trimble's entrance, it was plain that the topic of conversation was not cows. When Racke recognised the visitor, however, he jumped to his feet with a growl of anger.

"Well, by gad! You cheeky, fat beast!" he yelled. "What the dickens do you mean by barging into my study without knocking? Why, you fat toad, if you don't clear out I'll dashed well—"

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble, pretending to take the unkindly welcome as a joke, but keeping a wary eye on Racke.

"He, he, he!"

Then, apparently thinking it wiser to get to business at once, the fat youth held up the bottle of mixture triumphantly.

"What do you think about that, Racke, old man? Hair-oil! Good stuff, too! Don't you wish you had it?"

"Get out, you fat beast, an' take your filthy stuff with you!" roared Racke. "Hair-oil! Pah! I can sniff the stuff here!"

"Oh, I say! Look here, old fellow!" protested Trimble. "Why, it was only this morning you were saying you hadn't a drop of hair-oil left—saying you'd give anything to get hold of some. I bought this specially for you. Look here, five bob, and the stuff's yours! That's jolly—"

Baggy stopped, and retreated a step. Racke did not appear to be in a mood for business. Suddenly the fat youth had a brilliant inspiration.

"Mix it with brilliantine—like D'Arcy does," he suggested persuasively. "That does the trick! Takes all the smell away! Look here, say four bob—"

"Will you clear—" Racke was beginning, when he paused.

Trimble's cunning reference to D'Arcy looked like working! The well-groomed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's perfectly-parted hair was a "thing of beauty and a joy for ever." It was one of the features of the immaculate Gussy Racke envied. Surely if D'Arcy used it—

"Here, let's see the stuff! I expect you've boned it from D'Arcy's study, you fat thief!" sneered Racke.

Trimble sniggered knowingly, and handed over the bottle. Racke examined it. The stuff did not look like hair-oil—not a bit. But it smelled—quite a lot. Perhaps it was a secret preparation of D'Arcy's thought Racke. Then he examined the label, which bore the name of a well-known toilet manufacturer. That settled Racke's doubts.

"Here you are, you thieving rotter!" he snapped, handing over five shillings to the smirking Trimble. "Now seat, or—"

Baggy pocketed the cash with alacrity, and bolted.

When he had gone Racke again examined the bottle.

"Good biz!" he laughed. "Hair-oil's beastly scarce these days! Wonder if that tailor's dummy D'Arcy will miss the stuff? Phew! Doesn't it just sniff! Perhaps it won't, though, when applied to the hair. Anyhow, I mean to try the stuff. Hanged if I don't try some now! You chaps can try it if you like—this bottle will last for ages!"

And Racke, chucking over his desk, went to the glass and commenced to apply the Skimpole's Patent Dust-Layer to his hair.

Down in the tuckshop Baggy Trimble was endeavouring—with some measure of success, judging from the smirk of satisfaction on his fat face—to remove the taste of that same solution from his mouth with Mrs. Faggles' jam-tarts.

III.

"MY dear fellows!"

It was half an hour later. Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners looked up moodily at the sound of Skimpole's mild voice from the doorway.

"Come in, fathead!" growled Tom Merry.

Skimpole, a relieved look on his studious face, entered, and closed the door.

"Ah, my dear fellows!" he observed, blinking earnestly through his spectacles. "I am exceedingly gratified to find you here! I have come—"

"Good!" murmured Monty Lowther. "And now you have accomplished so much, I suggest your going—shut the door after you—there's a good chap!"

Skimpole blinked perplexedly at Lowther.

"Really, my dear Lowther, I fail to perceive any reason or object in your suggestion. It would be manifestly absurd were I to depart without explaining my object in coming. I am urgently in need of assistance, and—"

"How much?" demanded Lowther generously, diving into his pocket and producing two-pence-halfpenny and a bad three-penny-bit. "Don't hesitate to say!"

"Dear me! You misunderstand me, Lowther. I am not in need of pecuniary assistance. Certainly not! However, possibly it has come to your knowledge that I have invented a patent dust-layer.

"A what—what-ter?" gasped three voices simultaneously.

"The Skimpole Patent Dust-Layer," explained Skimpole, with conscious pride. "I regret that time will not permit me to elaborate the details of my invention. It will suffice to say that not only will it revolutionise the dusty condition of the fair lanes and roads of this land of ours, but—ahem!—it will also cause the name of Skimpole to go down to posterity as one of the— My dear Lowther, why do you hold about that cushion in such an extraordinary way?"

"To bill of a silly ass with too much gas!" roared Lowther. "Cut the giddy cackle, Skimmy, you idiot! What's your besotted trouble?"

"I am endeavouring to be as explicit as possible, my dear Lowther," protested Skimpole. "But, as I was about to observe, I intend this afternoon to test the composition on the road outside the gates. Not that

I have any doubt as to its efficacy. Quite the contrary! But I have arrived at the conclusion that an ocular demonstration would be eminently—"

Skimpole paused as Lowther raised the cushion suggestively.

"Ahem! But to come to the point. I had intended to borrow the Rylcombe Urban Council's watercart for the experiment. On reflection, however, I have come to the conclusion that the hand-engine and hose in the woodshed will equally suit my purpose. It will, however, be a physical impossibility for one individual to manipulate the pump and direct the hose. That, my dear friends, is precisely my reason for this visit—to solicit your assistance."

The Terrible Three winked solemnly at each other. But they hesitated only for a moment. Study No. 1 were never known to refuse help to anyone.

"We're your men, Skimmy, old top!" grinned Tom Merry cheerfully. "Lead on, Edison Secundus!"

Five minutes later a little procession wended its way towards the woodshed. Skimpole led the way, staggering under the weight of a half-gallon jar. At the woodshed the party stopped. Tom Merry and Lowther hauled the antiquated old engine out of the shed. The tank was half full of water, as it happened, which suited Skimpole's purpose admirably.

"Heave-yo, no hearties!" grinned Monty Lowther, grabbing the handles of the engine. Then, with Tom Merry pushing behind, and Manners, who had a slightly sprained ankle, limping along with Skimmy in the rear, the party rumbled to the gates. Skimpole smiled beamingly as a billow of dust swirled round him in the roadway.

Lifting the lid of the tank, the inventor emptied the contents of the jar into the water.

"Phew! Pah!" gasped Lowther, getting a sniff of the solution for the first time. "My giddy aunt! Dust-layer, is it? Why, the stuff's strong enough to lay bricks! Phew!"

"That," said Skimpole, "is an unfortunate but trivial detail. I shall be grateful, my friends, if you will kindly manipulate the pump when my preparations with the hosepipe are completed."

After a little trouble, owing to the enthusiastic inventor getting himself wrapped up and nearly strangled with the hosepipe, things were at last got into working order. Amid the clanking of the pump Skimpole sprayed the road for quite a hundred yards, until the tank was empty. Then the inventor gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"You will now see, my dear friends, though in a small measure, what a benefit the Skimpole preparation for laying dust has conferred upon mankind," observed Skimpole.

Tom Merry and Lowther, however, decided that it was wisest to hose the engine and hose before waiting to see the benefits of Skimpole's experiment. They were only away at the woodshed three minutes, but they returned to find Manners bent double and roaring with laughter. Skimpole, a look of the wildest bewilderment on his face, was staring at the roadway with bulging eyes.

And no wonder! The road was free from dust, certainly. Skimpole's patent dust-layer had indeed done its work well—too well, apparently, for the road was rapidly turning a vivid green!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. Then he lowered one foot gingerly into the green wetness, and withdrew it with difficulty. "Why— Ha, ha, ha! The stuff's like treacle! Oh, my only pink pyjamas, what a mess!"

"Extraordinary!" gasped Skimpole, in amazement. "I must have mixed in some wrong ingredient! Dear me, how extraordinary!"

Suddenly Manners gave a roar, and pointed up the road.

"Oh, my hat! Look at Towser! Ha, ha, ha!"

Herrie's bulldog was in difficulties. He was staggering along in the middle of the road, and whining dismally. At almost every step he stopped, and, lifting a paw, eyed the green, sticky mess dripping from it with a ludicrous look of astonishment. A little higher up was Cornelius, the school cat, whom Towser had evidently been chasing when they struck that verdant patch of green. He was mewing pathetically, and also in evident distress. Higher up the road still half a dozen ducks were tottering along like bluebottles on a fly-paper.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Skimpole, in tragic dismay. "How unfortunate! I fear—"

Skimpole stopped and swerved, for at that moment Mr. Haddock, his thin, sour face

looking more irritable than usual, appeared at the gates. He eyed the four juniors suspiciously. The laughter of the Terrible Three ceased as if by magic.

"Boys, have you seen the postman yet?" he snapped.

"No, sir," replied Tom Merry meekly.

Mr. Ratcliff grunted, and stamped angrily. "The man ought to have been here an hour ago," he snorted. "It is disgraceful! I shall certainly write—"

What the master was about to say Skimpole and the Terrible Three will never know. They saw Mr. Ratcliff stop before he had taken half a dozen steps, and eye his boots in amazement. They he gasped audibly, and, bending down, gazed as if fascinated at the green-carpeted road.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated, in bewilderment. "Good gracious!"

For a full minute he stood thus. Doubtless he would have spent longer so occupied but for the arrival just then of the postman. And his arrival, though expected, proved most unexpected.

Only a moment before he had cycled down Rylcombe Lane whistling cheerfully as if he hadn't a care in the world. A few yards behind him cycled Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger.

The four cyclists struck Skimpole's preparation at a fair speed. But they didn't keep it up—Skimpole's dust-layer saw to that.

The postman stopped whistling, and stared with goggly eyes at his front wheel, which was sending up a fountain of green slush. After which he turned in his saddle and subjected his back wheel to a similar absorbing scrutiny. Behind him the three seniors were also engaged in examining the remarkable phenomenon.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry suddenly.

After that things happened quickly. Tom's warning shout caused Mr. Ratcliff to look up suddenly. The four cyclists brought their study of the Skimpole dust-layer to an abrupt conclusion, and looked round in alarm. But too late!

The postman jammed on his brakes hard—too hard, for the bike stopped dead, and its unfortunate rider soared over the handle-bars. Luckily, however—for the postman—Mr. Ratcliff stopped his flight.

"Poof!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, sitting down with a thump. "Poof!"

That was all the master said just then, for Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger had arrived. And all Mr. Ratcliff's time and energies for the next few moments were occupied in getting out of the mix-up that ensued.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Skimpole, gazing helplessly at the confused mass of arms, legs, and bicycle wheels. "How exceedingly unfortunate!"

The Terrible Three realised from the grunts, yells, and gasps that proceeded from the serum that someone was getting hurt, and, being more practical than Skimpole, they braved the terrors of the treacly mass and went to the rescue.

With their help the struggling figures gradually sorted themselves out. Mr. Ratcliff, his face black with fury and his gown green with Skimpole's preparation, staggered slowly to his feet. Then he waded—so to speak—towards the shore.

There he appeared to find his breath, also his tongue. And the three seniors and the postman got the benefit of both. For quite five minutes the angry master raved. Then, suddenly becoming aware of his undignified condition, he was turning to enter the gateway, when he stopped.

From down the road sounded a loud cheer, and a wagonette containing the returning footballers, and escorted by a score of cyclists, appeared in sight.

"Oh, my only Sunday tile! The show isn't over yet!" groaned Tom Merry. "Good old Skimmy!"

IV.

THE cyclists were the first to become aware of the state of the road. In blank astonishment they stared at the thick, sticky mess as it clung lovingly to the revolving wheels. But when the filthy stuff began to bespatter their machines and clothes they dismounted hurriedly, and, with handkerchiefs to noses, made a beeline for dry land.

With a final cheer the wagonette rolled up to the gates. Grundy, who was hanging on to the steps behind, was the first to come into touch with Skimpole's invention. Trust Grundy to find any trouble that's knocking around!

"Hurrah! We've won!" he yelled enthusiastically. "Three goals to one! Hurrah!"

Grundy's powerful voice ended in a smothered howl as he jumped from the steps, staggered a couple of paces, and measured his length on the sticky road.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd of lordly seniors in the wagonette. The laughter tailed off very quickly, however, when they saw the cause of the great Grundy's downfall, and found they had to puddle through the green, sticky mess themselves.

"What ever does it all mean?" gasped Kildare, stamping up to Mr. Ratcliff with an astonished face and his handkerchief to his nose. "What is— Oh, I say, sir, what a state you are in!"

"That," snorted Mr. Ratcliff, his voice quivering with anger, "is what I should like to discover, Kildare! It is outrageous—simply outrageous! If the District Council are responsible— Good gracious! What ever is the matter now?"

Something evidently was the matter. Across the quad, yelling in terror, his short fat legs fairly twinkling under him, came Baggy Trimble. Behind him, armed with cricket-bats and stumps, came Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and Scrope. They seemed to be particularly excited about something, and also to be particularly anxious to get into touch with the flying Baggy.

"Help!" shrieked Trimble, taking refuge behind the stalwart form of Kildare. "Help! Save me!"

"Let me get at him!" roared Racke, running up with slaughter in his eyes. "I'll smash the filthy beast!"

Then Racke & Co. stopped suddenly as they noticed Mr. Ratcliff and Kildare. And just as suddenly a roar of laughter went up from the crowd of onlookers. Mr. Ratcliff did not see the reason for a moment. When he did he almost fainted.

For the heads of Racke and his shady pals were, if possible, more brilliantly green than the surface of the road outside! Their hair stuck out in matted clumps, like tufts of coarse, green grass. They presented a truly terrifying appearance.

"Bless my soul! Am I going mad?" muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "Green—everything's green!"

"Look at us! Look at our hair!" raved Racke, pointing to his head despairingly. "Look what that fat rotter's done! And it won't wash off! And it's all that fat beast's fault!"

"Racke, how dare you speak to me like that!" thundered the master. "Do you mean to say that Trimble is responsible for the filthy condition of your hair? Explain yourself at once, boy!"

Stuttering with fury, Racke related the story of his deal in "hair-oil" with the rascally Trimble. When he had finished, Mr. Ratcliff, his brain in a whirl, was turning to question the still shivering Baggy, when an interruption occurred. Skimpole, who had been listening in amazement to Racke's tragic story, stepped forward, his mild features very pale, but very determined.

"Excuse me, sir," he began politely but firmly. "I believe I am in a position to elucidate what at present appears to be somewhat of a mystery to you. Possibly you have observed that the colour and consistency of the preparation with which my unfortunate schoolfellows' heads are anointed resembles the solution at present covering a portion of the road outside the gates. The—ahem!—effluvium also, I would point out, is somewhat—"

"That, you foolish boy, is obvious to anyone but an idiot!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff testily. "Tell me at once what you know of this extraordinary business, and pray do not be so extraordinarily long-winded!"

"Certainly, sir! I will endeavour to be as precise and explicit as possible. Possibly you are unaware that for some considerable time I have been engaged upon a new invention—namely, a patent preparation for laying dust. However, this afternoon, my investigations and experiments being completed, I emptied a quantity of the solution—in the absence of a more suitable receptacle—into a bottle, which, from the inscription on the label, had previously contained hair-oil. The bottle, however, unaccountably disappeared from the study during my absence. After listening to Racke's narrative, I am compelled to the obvious conclusion that my unfortunate schoolfellows have become possessed of the bottle of dust-laying solution, and have applied it to their hair

under the impression that it was hair-oil. That, sir—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, glaring around on the laughing crowd. Then the master turned suddenly to Skimpole, his eyes gleaming triumphantly.

"Is it possible? Dust-laying preparation? Do you actually mean to say— Is it possible, Skimpole, you wretched boy, that you are responsible for the disgusting state of the road outside?"

"That," observed Skimpole, "I was also about to explain, sir. The result of my experiment is, I admit, most regrettable, and as you will realise, is a great disappointment to me personally. But the present failure—entirely due to a slight error in the mixing of the ingredients. However, I hope to—"

"Enough!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "You will come with me at once, Skimpole! Dr. Holmes will, I have no doubt, be more interested in your explanations. Trimble, Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and Scrope will also accompany me, when we shall probably get to the bottom of this astounding business. What is it, Merry?"

Mr. Ratcliff stopped as he Terrible Three stepped forward.

"Skimpole is not alone to blame for what has happened, sir," said Tom Merry meekly. "We also had a hand—that is, we helped him, and are as much to blame as he."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Mr. Ratcliff in malicious exultation. "Ah, I might have suspected as much! Three of Mr. Ralton's most promising pupils, too! Very good! You three boys will also accompany me."

With dignified stride—the effect of which was somewhat spoiled by his green-bespattered attire—Mr. Ratcliff led the way indoors, followed by the unfortunate eight juniors, and followed also by a yell of laughter which Kildare tried in vain to quell.

To relate in full the proceedings of that court of inquiry—what the Head said, what Mr. Ratcliff said, what Tom Merry & Co. said, what Trimble said—the frozen truth, of course—what Racke & Co. said, and in particular what Skimpole said—would fill considerably more than the rationed columns of the "Weekly," or even of the GEM.

Sufficient it is to say that Dr. Holmes did get very nearly to the bottom of the business. And as it happened, and to Mr. Ratcliff's utter disgust, the Head took a far more lenient view of Skimpole's little experiment than was expected. Possibly, had the Head known then that there was hardly an inch of St. Jim's—class-rooms, studies, dormitories, and even his own study carpet—where the Skimpole Patent Dust-Layer had not already penetrated, the punishments would have been more severe.

Anyhow, poor Skimpole got a good half-dozen of the best, and was gated for a month. Trimble got four stiff ones—more for telling lies than for anything else—while Racke & Co. were let off with a lecture on the advisability of looking before leaping. All the same, there is no doubt they came off worst of all.

As for Tom Merry & Co.—well, they received four strokes each, despite the fact that Skimpole—good old Skimmy!—protested vigorously against their punishment, and pleaded in vain to take the full responsibility for the business upon his own puny shoulders. Good old Skimmy!

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"BUNTER IN SEARCH OF A STUDY!"

By Martin Clifford.

This week's story tells how Bunter, wangled out of No. 6, finds but a very temporary resting-place in No. 2.

Next week's will tell of his desperate endeavours to get a footing elsewhere. He tries Tom Merry & Co.—N.G. Julian & Co. are not having any. In No. 9 he is kindly allowed to stick to the armchair; but that is all. Mulvaney minor and Tompkins are surprised by his generosity; but there is a catch about that, of course. There always is a catch about it when Bunter makes a display of good qualities.

At the end of the story Bunter is still an outcast!

YOUR EDITOR.