

RUCTIONS AT ST. JIM'S! Read the Exciting "THE SPY OF THE FOURTH FORM!"
School Story—

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



RATTY FLARES UP!

Mr. Ratcliff, the tyrannical New House-master and acting Head, gets quite heated, and has to be put out!
(An exciting incident from the thrilling, extra-long school story of Tom Merry & Co. inside.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

MY DEAR CHUMS.—In this week's superb issue of the GEM you will find a really rattling Ratcliff yarn. The interest taken in the eccentric outsider known popularly as "Ratty" is intense. Nothing can diminish the eagerness with which everybody wants to hear more about the tyrant with the mean and jealous disposition. Very often indeed the possession of a nickname implies that the honourable owner of same is well liked. This is not so in the case of Mr. Ratcliff. We never hear of anybody feeling warm towards him. Next week the narrative of the astounding events at St. Jim's is carried on in gripping style in an extra-long 25,000-word story.

"THE REBELS OF THE SCHOOL HOUSE!"

By Martin Clifford.

Vexation sore long time they bore at the School House. They put up, in fact, with as much as human nature could stand, and perhaps a bit more, for they are stout-hearted fellows. But Ratcliff, being the limit, there was nothing else for it but a rising, just to show the autocrat the error of his ways. In the present instance Ratcliff's conduct has been outrageous and cowardly. He administered punishment without rhyme or reason. He gave fellows lines for nothing at all, or next to it. The upshot we see next week.

A HINT FROM HISTORY!

Over and over again the corridors of St. Jim's have rung with cheers for one cause or another. Just as at all schools there is plenty of enthusiasm, any amount of esprit de corps, loyalty, cohesion, all that sort of thing. But I doubt if even St. Jim's has ever shown a more united front than now. Next Wednesday's yarn marks a step in advance for the great author whose stories always create a tingling interest, be they grave or downright gay. In the coming story we have a blend of these qualities, and you will read with palpitating excitement the narrative of the ebbs and flows of the great revolt. Mind you do not miss next week's enthralling tale. It is packed with dramatic incident, for the barraging-out is not being run on half measures or with tactics which are lukewarm.

ANOTHER CROSS WORD PUZZLE!

Right on the wicket, as usual! The GEM has reason to be proud of the rousing reception of its Cross Word feature. These little chess-board-like aids to brisk brain activity are all the rage, as we all know. There will be a rush to solve next week's A1 problem. Look out for it! There is an entirely fresh note struck in the GEM Cross Word puzzle, and, as we are all of us keen on the scent of what is new, it is sure to have a good welcome.

A MAP OF ST. JIM'S!

From Rockdale, Sydney, comes an urgent plea for a chart of St. Jim's, a full picture of the Houses and so on. My correspondent thinks this map could be given in sections each week. He wants the complete plan of the school and the surroundings of St. Jim's, with the roads, railways, woods, lanes, and the two villages of Rylcombe and Wayland. What do others think of this notion?

"THE ST. JIM'S NEWS."

There is a Grand Bazaar Number next week. But let there be no false impression—the Supplement is not dealing with the Oriental type of bazaar, through which the gay and slippers Turk treads on the prowl for bargains. The bazaar dealt with next

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week is the cheery sale of work, the any-price-you-like affair, with raffles and side-shows galore, and the giddy hoop-la to stimulate the proceedings. The motive behind this special bazaar is magnificent. St. Jim's is intent on assisting some youngsters who are down, but not out. Apart from the subject of the bazaar, which is dealt with in first-class style, I may say that the "St. Jim's News" is bound to get a better reception than ever next week. The capital feature has been crowded out on occasion, but it is always looked for with eager anticipation by Genites all over the world.

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

By A. S. Hardy.

Our serial is still swinging along in brilliant fashion. In my big budget of letters I find plenty of tributes to the fine story which shows the game struggle against long odds put up by Hal Chester, and what came of it. I also receive compliments to this story because it shows what life is off the footer-

field as well as on it. Chums who write to me say they like a yarn which contains heaps of sport, and also lots about the busy life in shops and factories in big cities, and the people who work there. In all that this famous author excels. Read next week's splendid instalment.

LEVISON STORIES!

For long enough past I have received letters from certain of readers clamouring for more yarns dealing with the Levisons. I am always eager to meet the wishes of my friends, and, accordingly, I have arranged for a very striking tale about these popular characters to appear in the near future. The Levisons have won a very definite place. There has always been sympathy for the troubles of Ernest, the fellow who has had so many ups and downs, while Frank, his loyal minor, stands out as a hero. Then we have Doris Levison, a true-hearted girl who has played her part in many a well-remembered story. Look out for the coming treat. I believe there is an idea abroad that Mr. Martin Clifford has shelved the trio. That is not so!

THE TUCK HAMPER.

Last, but not least, comes the Tuck Hamper Competition, which is going better than ever, as may well be imagined. Besides the Tuck Hamper, there are plenty of money prizes. Remember, I am on the look-out for bright and amusing jokes and rollicking storyettes, so send in your best—on post-cards.

Your Editor.

A magnificent story of baffling mystery and thrilling adventure, featuring the World Famous Detective

FERRERS LOCKE
and his Clever Boy Assistant
JACK DRAKE.

Starts in this week's issue of
The "MAGNET" Library.

Mind you read it, boys!

The coming of Paul Ratcliff to St. Jim's bids fair to set the whole school in an uproar!



The Spy of the Fourth Form!

A Magnificent Exciting Extra-Long Complete Story of the Famous Schoolboy Characters, Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Startling News!

IT'S a fact, I tell you!" Baggy Trimble, the fat youth of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, blinked in at the doorway of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, where the Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co. were having tea. There was a fine spread on the table, and the chums of the School House were doing it justice.

They did not appear to notice Baggy Trimble's entry. "I say, I'm addressing you fellows!" said Baggy in a louder tone of voice.

He might have been addressing a brick wall for all the response he got. Monty Lowther and Herries were pitching into the cream buns as if for a wager. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the noble swell of St. Jim's, was busily engaged with a meringue. Digby and Manners and Tom Merry and Blake went on chatting on footer topics as if blissfully unaware of the undesirable presence of Baggy Trimble.

"It's a fact, I tell you!" repeated Baggy, his voice raised almost to a scream.

Blake looked round. "Hallo! It's our prize porpoise!" he said. "Get out, Trimble!"

"Which exit do you prefer, Baggy—the door or the window?" asked Tom Merry.

Baggy snorted, but backed away discreetly towards the door.

"I've come to tell you fellows something!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I've got news that will jolly well interest you, I know! I happen to have heard——"

"You mean you've overheard something through listening at somebody's keyhole," said Tom Merry. "Well, you can buzz off, Baggy. We don't want to hear any of your yarns."

"Really, Tom Merry!" said Baggy, elevating his snub nose high in the air. "Under the circumstances I shall refuse to tell you anything about the new boy."

The Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co. grinned. "Oh! So there's a new boy coming?" said Monty Lowther. "You're about as much good as Gussy at keeping a secret, old tulip!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I wegard that remark as oppwobvious!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "I must request you to withdwaw——"

"Look here, you chaps! Are you going to listen to me?" roared Baggy crossly. "There's a new chap coming to-morrow, and he's coming into the School House."

"Well, let him come," said Blake. "So long as he isn't dumped into our study we don't mind. Such small beer as new boys don't worry us."

"But you haven't heard!" screeched Baggy, fairly

trembling with excitement. "'Tain't an ordinary sort of new boy at all. He—he—— What do you think, you chaps?"

"Any prizes offered for guessing, Baggy?" asked Lowther. "No!" roared Baggy. "But who do you think is coming as a new boy?"

"Not the Prince of Wales?" suggested Blake humorously. "Or a young emperor or an earl, or a duke or a marquis?" said Tom Merry.

"No!" gasped Baggy. "Ratty's nephew!"

"Eh?"

"Ratty's nephew!" roared Baggy breathlessly.

It was out now, and he felt quite relieved that he had unburdened himself of that tremendous news.

"Ratty's nephew!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What, Bartholomew Ratcliff? That kid that came here once before and proved such a tartar that he had to be thrown out of the school neck and crop?"

"No, not him!" gasped Baggy. "This is another nephew. Paul Ratcliff, I think his name is. He's arriving to-morrow as a new boy, and he's going into the School House in the Fourth. I heard Mr. Railton telling Kildare about it. Railton said that perhaps when the Head came back he would arrange for young Ratcliff to go into the New House, but for the time being he's been put in our house."

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were really quite startled at the news. They forgot all about their tuck and their discussions.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Blake. "So another of the Ratcliff tribe is coming into our House! That's the giddy limit!"

"Rather!"

"I never knew that Ratty had another nephew," said Tom Merry. "But still, the old hunks has as much right as anyone, I suppose, to have two nephews. And—and the giddy nephew merchant is coming here! My only hat! If he's anything like Bartholomew was—well, there's some high old times ahead!"

Baggy Trimble went his way to spread the news far and wide.

He set the whole School House agog with the information that another of Mr. Ratcliff's nephews was coming to St. Jim's.

Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was not a popular master at St. Jim's; on the contrary, he was distinctly unpopular. He was a bully and a tyrant of the first water, and he fully merited the nickname "Ratty," which the long-suffering juniors had bestowed upon him.

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Figgins & Co., the heroes of the New House, bore most of the brunt of Ratty's tyrannical ways, of course, but the boys of the School House had had many a rub with the rival Housemaster, and Ratty was as unpopular in the School House as in his own domain.

"I wondah what this young Watcliff will be like, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "I hope he's nothin' like the other Wattys, bai Jove!"

"He'll have a high old time here if he is!" said Jack Blake grimly. "We don't want any more of the Ratcliff tribe in our House, anyway. Why couldn't he have been put into the New House with Ratty?"

"Perhaps he'll go there when the Head returns," said Tom Merry. "But still, the chap may be decent enough, in spite of the fact that he's related to Ratcliff. After all, that's not his fault but his misfortune."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

The chums of the School House finished their tea and then went down to the Common-room. They found a crowd of juniors gathered there, and all were discussing the latest news in great excitement and animation.

The general opinion was that young Ratcliff was bound to be like Bartholomew was—just like his uncle—and the boys of the School House were not at all keen on his coming. Mr. Railton ought to have put him into the New House with Ratty, they said.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster in the School House, was managing affairs at St. Jim's during the Head's temporary absence. Dr. Holmes had had a slight nervous breakdown, due to overwork and study, and on his physician's advice had gone away for a complete rest for a short while.

Mr. Railton's action in assigning the new boy to the School House was criticised on all sides in the School House. Tom Merry & Co. strolled across the quad to pay Figgins & Co. a visit, and they found the juniors in the New House feeling quite pleased at the arrangement. They, too, had heard the news, and were unanimous that Ratty's nephew should go into the School House.

Figgins grinned when Tom Merry mentioned the matter to him in his study.

"We don't want young Ratty here," he said. "The old un's quite enough to put up with. Monteith tells us that the new kid's name is Paul—Paul Ratcliff. He arrives to-morrow afternoon, and you chaps are welcome to him. Take him with our blessing!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"The chap may turn out to be quite O.K.," said Tom Merry evenly. "Anyway, we sha'n't hold anything against him till we see him."

"Wathah not, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, polishing his monocle. "Fair play's a jewel, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. were quite prepared to give Paul Ratcliff a chance. As Tom had said, there was no reason why a set should be made against a fellow simply because Mr. Ratcliff happened to be his uncle. In fact, if young Ratcliff was a decent chap, he had their sympathy.

"We might as well show the chap that we're willing to be friends," said Tom Merry in the study that evening. "Racke and his crowd reckon to rag him directly he comes, but I'll put my foot down on that. We've nothing special to do to-morrow afternoon, so I vote we meet young Ratty at the station and see what he's made of."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "He arrives by the three-fifteen, doesn't he? We'll be there. I'm rather anxious to see what this Ratty merchant is like."

And so it was agreed that Tom Merry & Co. should meet Paul Ratcliff at the station and give him a chance to show "what he was made of."

CHAPTER 2.

Ratty Minor!

"TRAIN'S IN!" said Lowther.

"At last!" said Blake fervently.

Trains were very few and far between at Rylcombe Station, and those that did run, always ran late. Tom Merry & Co. had been waiting quite a long time for the 3.15.

They crowded on the platform and looked interestedly up and down as the passengers alighted from the train. A boy dressed in Etons was seen to descend from a first-class compartment, and the School House juniors exchanged glances.

"Here's young Ratty!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The new boy was standing by his trunk when Tom Merry & Co. walked up. They regarded him with great interest, and Tom could not help feeling a wave of disappointment as he took stock of the newcomer.

Paul Ratcliff was rather a tall, slim youth, round-shouldered and weedy-looking. His face was thin and sallow, just like Mr. Ratcliff's, and his eyes were small and glittering—in fact, his whole expression was decidedly unpleasant.

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and the chums of the School House were by no means pre-possessed by his looks.

He returned their gaze with an insolent stare.

"Hallo!" he said, in a rather harsh voice, reminiscent of Mr. Ratcliff's. "Are you fellows from St. Jim's?"

"Yes," replied Tom Merry quietly. "We've come from St. Jim's to meet you, as we heard you were coming. You are Paul Ratcliff, I suppose?"

"That's me!" was the grinning reply. "I'm obliged to you fellows for your trouble, I'm sure. No larks, or I shall report you to my uncle."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked hard at Paul Ratcliff. It needed no expert judgment of character to "weigh him up," and the more the chums regarded him, the less they liked him. Mr. Ratcliff's unpleasantness of nature evidently ran in the family, for even this nephew seemed to have inherited a full share of it.

"One of you fellows couldn't carry my bag, I suppose?" he said in a lofty, superior manner.

It was apparent that Paul Ratcliff took it for granted that he had some ascendancy over the other juniors at St. Jim's in virtue of the fact that he was a nephew of one of the masters. Tom Merry & Co. made up their minds to dispel that fallacy without delay.

"We could carry your bag, Ratcliff, but it happens that we're not in the habit of making ourselves lackeys for new boys," said Blake gruffly. "Better carry it yourself, or tip a porter."

Young Ratcliff glared at Blake, then picked up the bag himself and slouched away to the barrier.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged meaning glances as they followed the new boy.

"My hat!" murmured Lowther. "What a specimen."

"So that's Ratty minor!" breathed Blake. "A proper second edition of Ratcliff, isn't he?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I wegard him as wathah a boundah, bai Jove!"

Paul Ratcliff dropped his ticket close to the barrier, and Tom Merry obligingly picked it up for him, noting, incidentally, that it was a third-class ticket.

Ratty minor handed the ticket to the collector and passed through into the vestibule. Tom Merry looked at him in astonishment.

"Aren't you going to pay the excess?" he asked.

"The excess?" said young Ratcliff. "On what?"

"On your railway ticket, of course!" exclaimed Tom heatedly. "It was a third-class ticket, and you travelled first!"

The thin features of Ratty minor creased into an unpleasant grin.

"Well, what does that matter?" he said. "The collector doesn't know, does he? Why should I pay first-class fare when I can wangle it with a third-class ticket? I'm not green, you know! He, he, he!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye and regarded Ratty minor severely.

"Weally, Watcliff, I quite fail to see any reason for laughah!" he exclaimed. "Do you call that a joke, avoidin' payment of the pwopah fare? I wegard it as a mean wotten swindle on the railway company, bai Jove!"

Ratty minor ceased to grin, and scowled instead.

"What's it got to do with you?" he demanded insolently. "I'll jolly well do as I like, and you rotters can mind your own business!"

"It's our business to see that chaps belonging to St. Jim's play the game!" retorted Tom Merry hotly. "You know as well as we do, Ratcliff, that what you've just done amounts to robbing the railway company of seven bob. Are you going to pay up?"

"Why the dickens should I?" snarled Ratcliff minor. "Nobody is any the wiser, except you chaps, and it's nothing to do with you."

"That's where you make a mistake, you cad!" said Tom, trying hard to keep his temper. "You've got to pay the seven shillings excess, so buck up!"

"I sha'n't!" said the other fiercely. "You rotters can go and eat coke!"

"We shall make you pay, if you won't do it of your own free will," said Tom Merry quietly. "Now, Ratcliff, will you do the decent thing?"

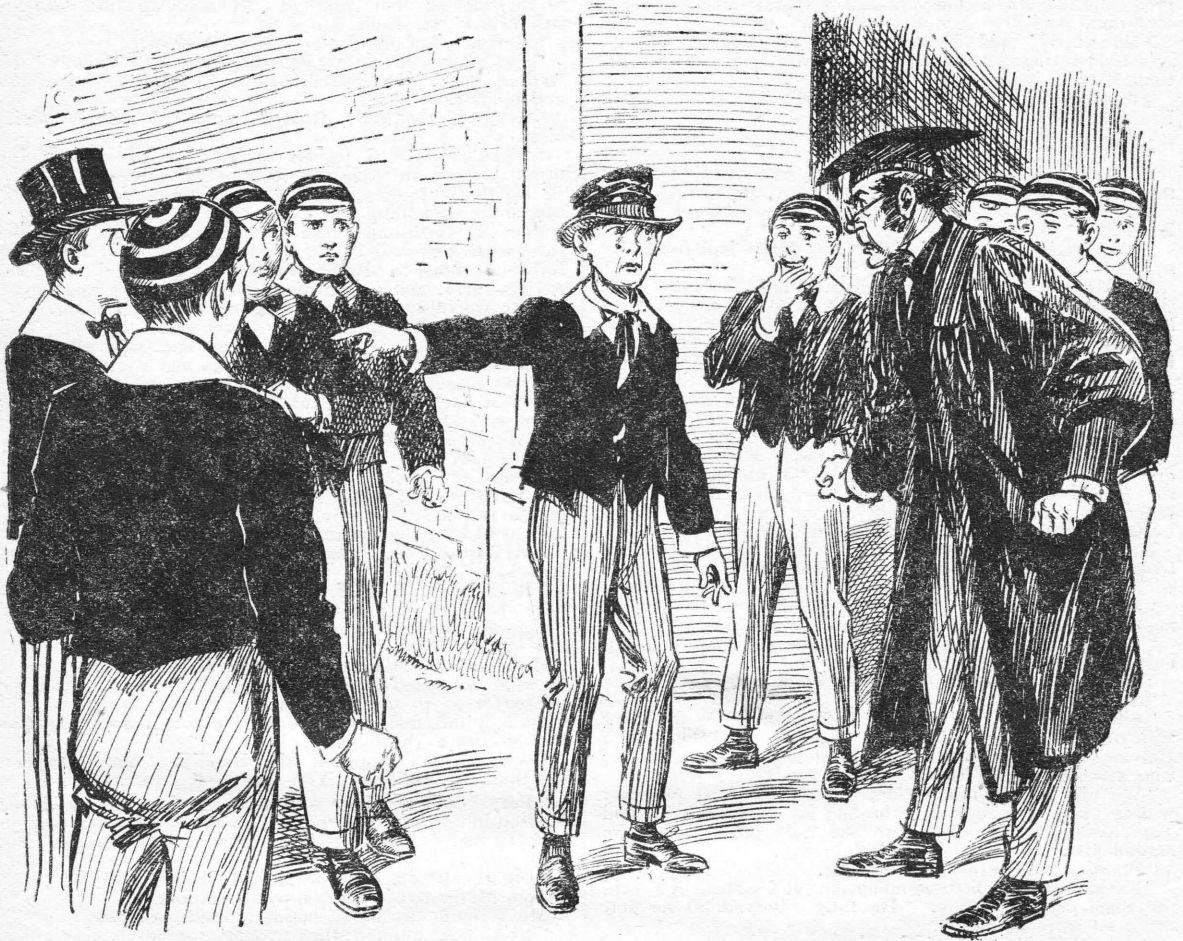
Young Ratcliff's eyes glittered and he took a step back.

"No!" he panted. "I'm not going to be dictated to by you cads. I warn you, if you lay hands on me, I shall complain to my uncle—"

"Oh, rag the rotter!" exclaimed Blake in exasperation. "He needs a thundering good walloping, and the sooner the better! Turn his pockets out and make him pay!"

Tom Merry & Co. closed in on Paul Ratcliff, and that youth looked furtively about him, his sallow face paling.

"Leave me alone!" he gasped. "What I do is no business of yours, and I shall tell my uncle! I— Yah! Yah! Owt! Leggo! Oocoo! Stoppit! Yaroooooogh!"



"I was set about at the station by a gang of fellows from this school, uncle!" cried Ratcliff minor, his beady eyes darting spite and malice at the hilarious juniors. "They ragged me and left me like this!" "Good heavens!" cried Mr. Ratcliff in horror. "Who are the boys responsible for this outrage on my nephew?" "There they are, uncle!" said Paul Ratcliff, pointing out the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. (See page 6.)

Bump!

Paul Ratcliff smote the booking-hall floor with a resounding concussion, propelled there by many violent hands. He yelled and struggled, and kicked wildly.

"Yaroooh!" Blake gave a sudden yell and jumped away from Ratcliff.

"Oh! The little toad bit my hand!" he cried. "Look out, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove! Yawooooogh!" roared D'Arcy, as young Ratcliff's teeth bit hard into his hand.

Tom Merry set his teeth grimly.

"What a rotten little worm!" he exclaimed. "We'll give him bite! We'll show him that he can't play those tricks with us!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Paul Ratcliff. "I'll complain to my uncle, I tell you— Yoooooop!"

Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump!

Tom Merry & Co. were enraged and in deadly earnest now. They bumped young Ratcliff until the station resounded with his yells. Then, to the great amusement of the people who had gathered round, they rolled him over, and Tom Merry turned his trousers pockets out whilst the others held him down.

Ratcliff minor had plenty of silver, and Tom selected seven shillings, which he gave to the grinning porter.

"That's the excess on this worm's ticket from Lexham," he said. "We're just showing him that honesty is the policy at St. Jim's!"

"Ay, ay! Good lads!" said a big, bluff farmer in the crowd approvingly.

Paul Ratcliff lay on the booking-hall floor, whimpering like a child. He was in a very battered and bent condition. His beautiful new Eton jacket was ripped up the back and half the buttons were missing from his waistcoat; his collar was wrenched from its stud, and his necktie hung in a tattered rag over his left shoulder. He was smothered in dust from head to foot; his face was smeared liberally with

it, and his hair was dusty, too, and horribly tousled—in fact, he looked an utter wreck!

He struggled to his feet and gave Tom Merry & Co. a baleful look.

"You wait!" he whimpered. "I'll tell my uncle when I get to St. Jim's! I'll have the lot of you flogged for this! Yow! Groogh! Boo-hoo!"

"Tell Mr. Ratcliff what you like, you miserable toad!" said Tom Merry, his lip curling with contempt. "You'll get a ragging every time you try any of your rotten tricks at St. Jim's, I can promise you that!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked out of the station and left Paul Ratcliff to reach St. Jim's as best he could. He shook a dusty fist after them, and then, moaning, he picked up his bag and trudged away, his appearance in the High Street evoking much laughter from the good people of Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 3. Ratty Tries It On!

"**H**ERE'S Ratty minor, 'chaps!"
"See the battle-scarred hero comes!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a crowd had gathered at the gates of St. Jim's to await the arrival of Paul Ratcliff. Tom Merry & Co. had come in a short while ago, and had told several fellows just what they thought of Mr. Ratcliff's nephew. They had couched their remarks in very plain terms, and something like a sensation had been caused when Blake and Gussy had shown the marks on their hands where young Ratcliff's teeth had bitten them.

A dusty and dishevelled figure had come into view, crawling along the Rylcombe Lane.

It was Paul Ratcliff.

He scowled at the crowd of juniors at the gates as he came up, panting. The boys of St. Jim's regarded him in

great interest, and a chorus of chuckles arose at his battered condition.

"My word!" said Clifton Dane. "He looks as though he's been trying conclusions with a steam roller, doesn't he, chaps?"

"What a nice, kind, lovable little fellow he seems!" said Levison. "Just like Ratty, in fact."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rather!"

"Let me pass!" snarled Ratty minor, who was in a raging temper. "I want my uncle! Where's Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Cave, kids!" yelled Wally D'Arcy. "Here comes Ratty!"

"Oh, jeminy!" gasped Blake. "Now look out for squalls!"

Mr. Horace Ratcliff came striding towards the gates from the direction of the New House, his gown fluttering behind him. The juniors respectfully made way for him.

Ratty almost fell down when he beheld his dusty and tattered nephew.

"Gug-g-g-goodness gracious! Paul, it is you!" he ejaculated in a faint voice. "What has happened, Paul? Has there been a railway accident?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the boys round the gates.

"Nunno, uncles!" gurgled Paul, his beady eyes darting spite and malice at the hilarious juniors. "I was set about at the station by a gang of fellows from this school. They ragged me and left me like this."

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Ratcliff in horror.

He looked at his nephew, and his thin and meagre face took on a thunderous expression. His small, bright eyes, which reminded one of a rat, gleamed round on the assembly.

"Who are the boys responsible for this outrage on my nephew?" he demanded between his teeth.

"There they are, uncles!" whined Ratty minor, pointing out the Terrible Three and Blake & Co.

The crowd looked blackly and contemptuously at him.

"Yah! Sneak!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, who was palpitating with rage. "Merry, Lowther, Manners, Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, Digby. You are the abandoned young hooligans who attacked my nephew?"

"We met him at the station, sir, and we were perfectly willing to be civil to him, if he had been civil to us," said Tom Merry quietly. "We--we had an argument, and we ragged him, the snivelling little humbug!"

"What--what!" cried Mr. Ratcliff.

"I said snivelling little humbug, sir, and I mean it!" said the Shell captain calmly. "He fully deserved all he got, and a lot more besides."

"Hear, hear!" chorused the chums.

The crowd chuckled, whilst Mr. Ratcliff seemed quite at a loss for words for several seconds. When he spoke his voice was like the rasping of a file.

"Come with me, you young hooligans!" he exclaimed. "I will report you to Mr. Railton, and demand that you be flogged for this outrage. Follow me!"

Mr. Ratcliff led his forlorn nephew away to the School House, and Tom Merry & Co. followed, looking very grim and resolute. It was undoubtedly very galling to Mr. Ratcliff to know that he had no authority to deal personally with Tom Merry & Co., dearly as he would have loved to. He had a special "down" on those high-spirited youths, and always complained that Mr. Railton was far too lenient with them.

Tom Merry & Co. knew that they would receive fair play at the hands of their own Housemaster.

The infuriated Ratty marched them indoors and upstairs to Mr. Railton's room.

The Housemaster was seated at his desk, poring over some papers when Mr. Ratcliff entered with Ratty minor and Tom Merry & Co. Mr. Railton stood up, looking from one to another in astonishment. When his gaze lighted on Ratty minor it dwelt there for some time. Mr. Ratcliff opened the proceedings with a fiery snort.

"I have brought these young rascals here, Mr. Railton, to receive the condign punishment they deserve!" he rasped. "Look at my nephew! See the state he is in, as a result of these boys' ruffianism!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, who was looking very hard at the dishevelled junior. "Then this is Paul Ratcliff, your nephew?"

"This boy is Paul Ratcliff!" came the tart reply. "And this is the manner of his arrival at St. Jim's, Mr. Railton. He was waylaid at Rylcombe Station by Merry and these others, and was subjected to a ruffianly attack. I demand that they shall be flogged for their disgraceful conduct!"

Mr. Railton rose to his feet, and he looked sternly at Tom Merry & Co.

"What have you lads to say to this?" he said. "Is it true that you treated the new boy in that--that brutal manner?"

"We admit ragging him, sir," said Tom Merry. "We did

so in order to show him that we don't tolerate cads and swindlers at St. Jim's!"

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, aghast.

"Pwaw allow me to explain the circs, Mr. Wailton," said Arthur Augustus stepping forward. "As a fellow of tact and judgment--"

"Keep off the grass, Gussy!" muttered Blake, nudging him.

"Weally, Blake, I wefuse to keep off the gwass. I--I mean, I insist on explainin' to Mr. Wailton--"

"Be quiet, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton quietly. "Merry can do the explaining."

Tom Merry in quiet, cool tones then proceeded to outline the events that had led to the ragging of Paul Ratcliff at Rylcombe Station. Ratty minor went pink and white and red by turns, and as for Mr. Ratcliff, his face and fingers worked convulsively as he strove to contain his anger.

"I don't believe a word this young rascal says, Mr. Railton!" he rapped out at last. "Merry is prevaricating. My nephew is quite above petty swindling, and I regard Merry's story as a pack of lies from beginning to end!"

"So it is!" whined Paul Ratcliff. "It's a trumped-up yarn, sir! These fellows can make their own story good, but it's all lies. They were waiting for me at the station, and they set about me as soon as I came out."

"There you are!" cried Mr. Ratcliff triumphantly. "What did I tell you, Mr. Railton? Merry has been telling falsehoods, and he and his fellow hooligans deserve a flogging. I demand that you castigate them immediately!"

Mr. Railton's lip curled as he regarded the other Housemaster.

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff, I am scarcely foolish enough to take the word of one boy against seven," he said curtly, "especially as these seven are lads whom I know to be of the highest integrity and honesty. I take Merry's word, and the corroboration of his friends, as being a true account of what happened at Rylcombe Station. Moreover, I will go so far as to say that I am in hearty agreement with what they did, and am of the opinion that it is your nephew who merits a thrashing."

"What--what!" gurgled Mr. Ratcliff. "You--you dare say that, Mr. Railton! You--you--"

"Pray recollect where you are, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Railton in a quiet, even voice. "I have told you my opinion, and the matter, so far as I am concerned, is finished. You boys may go!"

"Oh, thank you, sir!" cried Blake brightly.

Tom Merry & Co. trooped away, smiling.

Mr. Ratcliff was almost beside himself with fury.

"You have allowed these young scoundrels to go scot free!" he yelled. "I protest most emphatically against your ruling, Mr. Railton. Being the Housemaster of these boys, you are biased in their favour."

Mr. Railton's face took on a grim look.

"May I once more remind you to curb yourself, Mr. Ratcliff?" he said. "Your accusation as to motive is entirely without foundation. Will you have the goodness to retire now? I have a considerable amount of work to attend to."

Mr. Ratcliff turned to the door. His lean, sallow face was pink with wrath. He glared like a gargoyle at Mr. Railton, then, apparently too full for words, he turned away in silence and left the room, slamming the door with quite unnecessary violence behind him.

Mr. Railton fastened a stern look on Ratty minor.

"I trust I shall not hear of any further dishonest actions on your part, Ratcliff," he said sternly. "I warn you that if I do, I shall deal most severely with you. Your--ahem--condition calls for a complete change of clothing and a bath. I will summon the captain of the school and put you in his charge."

Mr. Railton rang the bell for Toby, who, within a very short time, fetched Kildare.

The stalwart school skipper eyed his dirty protegee with disfavour, and ordered him curtly to follow him to the bathroom.

When Ratty minor came down half an hour later he was clean and tidy again, but his face wore a savage scowl.

Mr. Ratcliff was waiting for him in the Hall, looking more like a wild wolf than ever.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "What a lovely couple they make--Ratty major and minor! They're a pair well matched--what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Ratcliff walked out of the House with his scowling nephew, leaving the School House juniors chuckling at his impotent fury.

"I suppose old man Ratty has taken Ratty minor across to the New House to tea," said Tom Merry. "Well, he can jolly well stay there! The New House is welcome to both the Rattys. We certainly don't want young Ratcliff here. Of all the mean, miserable, sneaking little toads, he's the worst!"

"And wasn't old Ratty in a tantrum!" chuckled Blake. "I

reckon he was ready to tear his hair at what Railton said. Railton's a brick!"

"Rather!"

Tom Merry & Co. watched the lean, weedy new boy follow his uncle into the New House; then they turned away and went along to Study No. 6 for tea. They had been prepared to invite Ratty minor to that spread; but now, as Blake remarked, they would sooner have a dozen Baggy Trimbles to tea than one Ratty minor!

CHAPTER 4.

No Luck for Ratty!

BAGGY TRIMBLE was quite indignant.

He said that it was too thick, and that he wouldn't put up with it.

The reason for Baggy's indignation was the news, divulged to him that evening by Kildare, that Paul Ratcliff was to share his study.

Baggy, together with Mellish and Wildrake, were the occupants of Study No. 2, which was the smallest in the Fourth Form, and by far the shabbiest. Perhaps that was mainly because of the slovenly ways of Baggy Trimble and the carelessness of Percy Mellish. Wildrake was down with flu, and Mr. Railton had ordered his removal to the Sanatorium. The rest of the Fourth grinned when they heard of Ratty minor's "billet," and all agreed that Study No. 2 was the most suitable place for the new boy, excluding Nobody's Study, or the box-rooms.

As for the present denizens of Study No. 2, they were far from pleased. Baggy said that it was bad enough to have Mellish for a study-mate, let alone having Ratty minor thrust on him, and Mellish stated loudly in the Common-room that it was as much as he could do to stand Baggy Trimble, and to have Ratty minor to put up with as well was too thick.

Ratty minor himself had quite a lot to say when he saw Study No. 2 for the first time that evening. He had just come over from the New House, and Toby showed him to his quarters.

Baggy and Mellish were at home when their new study-mate entered. He looked round and gave an emphatic sniff. "H'm! Is this the rotten hole they've put me in?" he said.

"Get out if you don't like it!" growled Mellish. "We don't want you here! You needn't think we're pining for your company, young Ratcliff!"

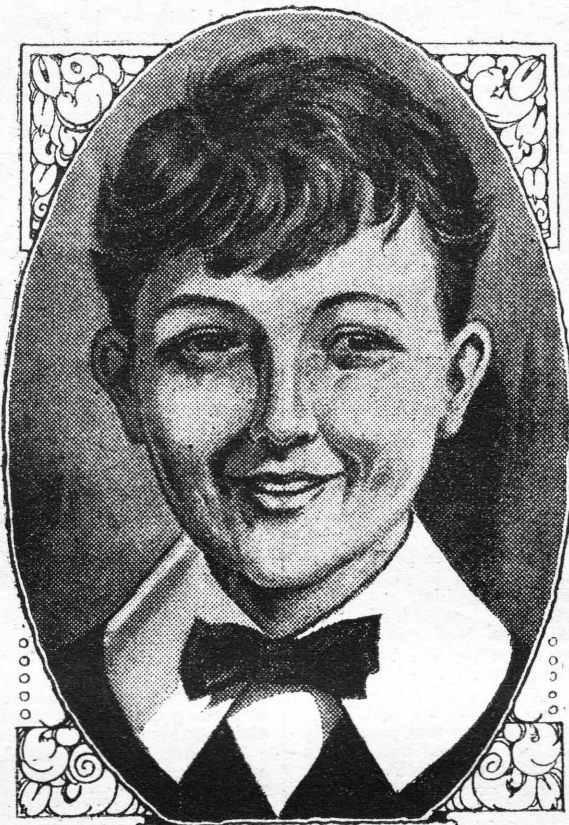
"No fear!" said Baggy Trimble valiantly. "You'll get a thick ear if you're cheeky, you know!"

Ratty minor gave Baggy a disparaging look. "Pretty fine sort of study-mates I've got, too!" he snorted. "I'm hanged if I'll put up with this! Look at the wallpaper—it's grubby all over, and pulled away in parts! Look at the ceiling—cracked in the centre and stained with ink! Do you call these ramshackle old sticks by the name of furniture? They're more fit for firewood! Is that a carpet you've got on the floor, or is it a threadbare rag? Oh, my hat, what a den! I'm not going to put up with this!"

Baggy and Mellish glowered at him. "Look here—" began Mellish. Slam!

Ratty minor was gone. Ten minutes later the door opened again, and the new boy reappeared. This time, however, he had Mr. Ratcliff with him.

The Housemaster's beady eyes glinted round the room. "So this is the study to which Mr. Railton has apportioned



MICHAEL MULVANEY.

The minor of Patrick Mulvaney of the Sixth Form and a member of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form. Known as "Micky," this lively young junior hails from Ireland. A real broth of a boy he is, too. Not quite so studious, though, as his study mate, Clarence York Tompkins, with whom he gets on well. A thoroughly good fellow in every way, and one who is always ready to join in a good jape. Not much good at sports, but always an interested spectator at the school's footer and cricket matches. Everybody's friend is Micky.

you!" he exclaimed. "Scandalous—positively scandalous! I will see Mr. Railton about this at once, Paul!"

Mr. Ratcliff swooped away, and there was an angry growl from the boys in the passage.

Ratty minor grinned unpleasantly.

"There you are!" he said to Mellish. "I told you I wouldn't put up with it! Fancy me having to room in this hole—and my uncle a master!"

"If I had my way with you, you rotter, I'd put you in the woodshed or the stables!" growled Jack Blake from the doorway. "You ought to be jolly well scragged for toadying up to Ratty!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy heatedly. "I wegard you as a sneak and a wotten outsider, young Watchliff. Why don't you request your pweicious uncle to have you twansferred to the New House, bai Jove?"

"Good idea!" said Kerruish enthusiastically. "We'll all second the motion! Why don't you go over to that old casual ward where your giddy uncle is? He rules the roost over there, and you can have anything you want. You jolly well won't get your own way in the School House, you rotter!"

"No fear!"

"Look out, kids!" said Bates. "Here come Ratty and Mr. Railton!"

The two Housemasters came along the Fourth Form corridor together. Mr. Railton looked round Study No. 2.

"A disgraceful room!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I request that my nephew is given another room, Mr. Railton!"

"This study is certainly in a somewhat dilapidated condition," assented Mr. Railton quietly, "but it is impossible to expect too much in a room tenanted by junior boys. The—er—untidy state of this apartment is due entirely to the carelessness of the occupants. Really, Mr. Ratcliff, I see nothing here to take unusual exception to."

"I do not approve of the room, Mr. Railton!" snapped the New House master angrily. "Surely there is another study in this corridor to which my nephew can be transferred?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ratcliff, but there is not," replied Mr. Railton coldly. "Dr. Holmes may be able to arrange for alternative accommodation for your nephew when he returns, but it is impossible for me to make other arrangements now."

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes seemed to glint like points of fire. He gave a gulp.

"Very well," he said, between his teeth. "Very well indeed, Mr. Railton. That will do!"

And, trying hard to contain his wrath, Mr. Ratcliff swished away.

Audible chuckles followed him down the corridor, and Mr. Railton looked round severely.

"Do not make any disturbance, boys," he said. "Ratcliff, you will keep to this study, and I shall make a point of seeing that you and your study-mates do not quarrel."

Ratty minor scowled, and, with a very bad grace, he went into Study No. 2, and slammed the door behind him.

The juniors in the corridor chortled when Mr. Railton had gone.

"Well, that was one in the eye for Ratty, and no giddy error!" said Blake. "He doesn't like it because he can't run things his own way in the School House. My word, wouldn't he give us a high old time if he only could! I'm afraid Ratty doesn't love us, my sons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ratty minor wore a very sullen expression during the

remainder of that evening, and he was still frowning portentously when the Fourth went up to bed.

It had come as rather a shock to him to discover that he was unable to "lord it" over his schoolfellows by virtue of his relationship with Mr. Ratcliff. The fact that the New House master was his uncle made no difference to his position in the school—indeed, it went against him, as he soon discovered.

Blake & Co. had "prepared" his bed for him; and when Ratty minor got into bed and had settled himself down comfortably a sudden yelp burst from him.

"Yow-wow-wow! Something stuck in me!"

The Fourth-Formers grinned expectantly.

Ratty minor scowled at them and rolled over. Next minute he uttered a wild yell and sprang wildly out of bed.

"Yaroooooogh! Oh crumbs! Wow! I'm hurt!"

"Dear me!" said Blake, in elaborate surprise. "What ever is the matter, Ratcliff?"

"Groooooogh!" moaned Ratty minor, rubbing his back tenderly. "Something stuck in me—it felt like a lot of pins! You rotters have been larking with my bed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The luckless junior dragged the lower sheet off his bed, and a number of small pieces of coal were displayed to view. He gazed at them in speechless wrath, whilst Blake & Co. roared.

"You—you cads!" screeched Ratty minor, his beady eyes glittering with hate. "I'll complain! I——"

"Now, what's the row in here, you little sweeps?"

It was Kildare's voice at the door.

Ratty minor turned a spiteful face towards him.

"They've put coal in my bed, Kildare!" he whined. "I—yow—I'm hurt! Grooogh! Blake's the leader and——"

"Stop that snivelling and clear it out of your bed, then, Ratcliff!" rapped the St. Jim's skipper curtly.

"Yow! Yes, but——"

"Don't argue with me, Ratcliff! Do as you are told!"

Ratty minor scooped up the pieces of coal and scowlingly threw them into the fireplace. Kildare watched him, with a grim, contemptuous look, whilst Blake & Co. chuckled softly.

"Now get back to bed, Ratcliff!" rapped the school captain.

"Look here, aren't you going to punish these rotters for——"

"Get into bed!" thundered Kildare. "I'll give you two minutes, and if you haven't turned in by then I'll make use of this cane!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Ratty minor saw the determined look on Kildare's handsome face, and he scrambled into bed with great precipitation.

"Next time you come sneaking to me, Ratcliff, I shall cane you!" said Kildare grimly. "That's the way I deal with sneaks. Now, hop into bed, you kids, and no jawing!"

"Right you are, Kildare!"

The Fourth Form juniors cheerily turned in, and Kildare saw lights out, departing from the dormitory, with a word of warning to the juniors not to make any further disturbance.

When Kildare had gone a thin, spiteful voice came from Ratty minor's bed.

"You wait till the morning, you rotters! I'll let my uncle know of this! I—— Yaroooooogh!"

A slipper whizzed through the darkness, and it struck Paul beautifully on the point of his chin. He gave a yell that woke the echoes in the dormitory.

"Yooop! Yow! Oh dear! Wow-ow! Who threw that—yow-ow—slipper?"

"I did!" said Blake's voice grimly in the darkness. "You'll get the other one, you worm, if you don't stop your jaw!"

"Groooooogh! Wow! Oh dear! Ow—ow—ow!"

Ratty minor did not make any further observations that night. He lay there moaning and gasping until at last he moaned himself to sleep.

CHAPTER 5.

A Bit of a Rumpus!

TWO days passed—days of harsh, bitter experience for Paul Ratcliff. He found that life in the School House with Tom Merry & Co. was a hard life indeed for a toady and a sneak. His airs and graces brought him nothing but raggings and bumpings, and many were the tales of woe which he took unto Mr. Ratcliff in the New House.

Ratty, of course, upheld his nephew in everything, and he did his best to vent his spleen on Tom Merry & Co. and their fellow-heroes in the School House. The rascally master of the New House did not gain much satisfaction as a result of his incessant complaints, however. Mr. Railton bore with him patiently at first; but he soon became exasperated with Mr. Ratcliff, and on more than one occasion hot words

passed between the two masters. Mr. Railton was a stern but just master, and he meted out punishment only where it was deserved, and not in accordance with Mr. Ratcliff's unreasonable, malignant wishes. This infuriated Ratty, and his bitterness towards Tom Merry & Co. knew no bounds.

Mr. Railton, as a matter of fact, had no time for Ratty's complaints, for much extra work had devolved upon him as a result of Dr. Holmes' absence from St. Jim's.

One evening Baggy Trimble came tearing into the junior Common-room in the School House in a state of wild excitement.

Tom Merry & Co. and the chums of Study No. 6 were in there, and they turned in surprise at Baggy's precipitate entry.

"Bai Jove! What evah is the mattah, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus. "You appear to be in a feahful fluttah!"

"Have you chaps heard the news?" gasped Baggy.

The juniors regarded the fat Fourth-Former in wonder.

"What the merry dickens has happened, Baggy?" asked Blake.

"Tell us the worst!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"I heard Kildare telling Darrell!" gasped Baggy. "To-morrow—to-morrow Mr. Railton goes to London!"

"Go hon!" said Tom Merry. "What awful news, to be sure! I suppose Railton can go to London if he wishes!"

"Yes; but—but it's an important conference, and he may be away for over a week!" spluttered Trimble.

"Oh!"

"And what do you think, you fellows? Ratty's taking charge of the school till Railton comes back!"

"Great pip!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, jeminy!"

A chorus of startled, dismayed cries arose from the juniors in the Common-room. Baggy Trimble mopped his perspiring brow with a grubby handkerchief. That momentous news had really proved too much for him, and he was in a hot and breathless state.

"It's a fact!" he managed to gasp. "Railton expects to be away for a long time, and Ratty will have a free hand till he comes back."

"Gammon!" said Blake incredulously. "It can't be true, Baggy! It's too horrible to be true!"

"Well, it is true!" said Baggy. "I'm not spoofing, you know. I heard Kildare telling Darrell in the Hall."

The juniors looked deeply concerned and dismayed.

"Ratty ruling the roost here—why, it doesn't bear thinking about!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If what Baggy says is true, chaps, we're in for a reign of terror. Ratty will make our lives simply not worth living!"

"Yaas, the old wotah is bound to work off his spite on us, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, polishing his monocle in quite an agitated manner. "Bai Jove! Won't Watty minor cwow ovah it?"

"He'll have the laugh of us properly," said Blake. "But—but Trimble's got hold of the wrong end of the stick, I reckon!"

"I hope so!" said Tom Merry fervently.

The juniors received corroboration of Baggy's news that evening, however, at call-over. Mr. Railton announced to the whole school that he had been unexpectedly summoned to London to attend an important conference, and that he would be leaving St. Jim's the next morning. He expected to be away for at least a week, and during his absence Mr. Ratcliff would take charge of the school. Mr. Railton looked worried as he made this momentous announcement. Perhaps he was thinking the same as Tom Merry & Co.—that there was likely to be trouble at St. Jim's with Mr. Horace Ratcliff as acting headmaster. Mr. Ratcliff, on the other hand, looked very pleased with himself indeed. As he sat facing the school in Big Hall his thin, meagre features were suffused in a triumphant grin.

As for Ratty minor, he fairly chuckled with jubilation. He gave the other juniors a laughing sneer as they filed out of Hall.

"Now you rotters won't have things all your own way!" he said. "My uncle will make you sit up, don't you worry!"

"Meanwhile, then, you can sit down, you rotter!" said Blake; and he sat Ratty minor down—very violently—on the cold, hard linoleum in the corridor.

Bump!

"Yaroooooogh!"

The chums of the School House walked on, leaving Paul Ratcliff sitting in a very ungraceful attitude on the floor, gasping.

St. Jim's was in a ferment at the news. The prospect of Mr. Ratcliff as a headmaster was by no means cheery. To the juniors it seemed as though a great calamity had befallen the school. They could think or talk of nothing else the whole evening.

"There'll be ructions!" Jack Blake said darkly. "Ratty's bound to make things warm for us—I could tell it from his



"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry as the juniors ranged themselves about the room, some sitting on beds and others squatting comfortably on the floor. "I propose a toast to Ratty, don't you?" "Hear, hear!" came the unanimous reply. "Here's to Ratty, then," said the junior captain. "Down with the old tyrant and all his knavish tricks!" (See page 13.)

looks in Hall when Railton made the announcement. The old rotter was grinning like a Cheshire cat."

Tom Merry nodded.
"Yes, Ratcliff will get his own back on us if he can," he said quietly. "He'll turn the tables on us properly. He'll back his measly nephew up, and we shall be ragged bald-headed. But we sha'n't stand too much of Ratty, my sons. If he gets too bad we shall kick!"

"Hear, hear!" said the other juniors, with great unanimity.

"We shall see, anyway, what to-morrow brings forth, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus philosophically.

Mr. Railton left St. Jim's shortly after breakfast the following morning, and Ratty took command of the school. He installed himself in the Head's study in the School House, looking pleased with himself and with all the world.

Tom Merry passed the word round among the juniors to "give Ratty a wide berth." The junior captain knew that the rascally master of the New House would seize his first opportunity to get his revenge on them, and thought it best to leave Ratty severely alone, and thus prevent the opportunity occurring, if possible.

This meant, of course, that Ratty minor would have to be given a wide berth, too. It went against the grain to have to do this, but Tom Merry said it was for the best.

Ratty minor commenced to "put on side" directly Mr. Railton had gone. The young rascal knew now that he had the ascendancy over Tom Merry & Co., and he lost no time in impressing that fact on them.

The juniors "stood" Ratty minor quite heroically that day. He did his best to goad them into a rag, so that he could complain to his uncle and bring him down on the ragers like a hundred of bricks. But Tom Merry & Co. would not be drawn, and Ratty minor's savagery increased.

When lessons were over the Terrible Three and Blake, Herries, and Digby went down to footer practice with the rest of the Junior Eleven, excepting Arthur Augustus, who stayed indoors to sort out his large collection of fancy waistcoats and neckties.

There was a bazaar in progress in Rylcombe, in aid of the local hospital, and Gussy had been smitten with the idea of sending his surplus finery there. Blake and the others had roared when Gussy told them. The idea of the good villagers of Rylcombe having the temerity to buy and wear Gussy's gorgeous waistcoats and brilliant neckties struck them as being decidedly funny. Gussy's mind, however, was fully made up, and Blake cheerily said that it was best to let him "have his head." So, whilst his chums disported themselves on the footer field, Arthur Augustus remained in Study No. 6 to wade through boxes and bags and trunks.

The room soon became littered with Gussy's numerous belongings. The swell seemed to find some difficulty in deciding which fancy waistcoats and neckties he should send, and he was still engaged in the task of sorting out when Blake returned, fresh and ruddy from footer.

Blake gazed at the litter in Study No. 6 in great wrath.
"Why, Gussy, you—you fathead!" he exclaimed. "Look at the mess you've made this room in!"

"Weally, Blake, I wufuse to be chawactewised as a fat-head!" said Gussy, with considerable asperity. "Pway wun away, deah boy, for a little while!"

"Run away!" gasped Blake. "It's nearly teatime, idiot, and we want our tea! Clear away that rubbish, or I'll chuck it all out into the passage—and you after it!"

"Bai Jove!" Gussy's wrath rose now, and he jammed his eyeglass firmly into his eye and glared at Blake. "Bai Jove! I should certainly wufuse to have my neckties and waistcoats thwown out, Blake. And as for thwovin' me out, you are welcome to twy, you boundah!"

"I mean it!" said Blake crossly. "Will you shove this gaudy junk away and clear up?"

"Undah the circs, Blake, you can go and eat coke!" said Gussy frigidly.

Blake wasted no more time on words. He made a rush at the table and swept off a pile of neckties at one fell swoop. Arthur Augustus gave a roar, and, pushing back his

caufs, and with the blood of all the D'Arcys burning in his veins, he went for Blake.

"Leave those things alone, Blake! Oh ewumbs! Theah goes my Sunday toppah! I'll give you a feahful thwashin' for that, you wottah!"

"Out they go!" said Blake grimly; and he hurled an armful of neckties, collars, and bows through the doorway.

Next minute he gave a roar as Gussy's hefty fist delivered a resounding thump on his nose.

"Yaroooh! Wow!"

He closed with his noble chum, and the two waltzed round the room, fighting furiously, and trampling on waistcoats, ties, topers, and other articles of the noble swell's collection.

Biff! Wallop! Thud!

Blake broke away at last, and took the opportunity to kick a hat-box and topper out into the passage. These were followed by another handful of neckties and silk handkerchiefs, and, just as Gussy made another furious dive at him, Blake grabbed a fancy waistcoat and hurled it through the doorway.

Flop!

"Ooooooogh! Bless my soul! Ow!"

The waistcoat had flown full into the visage of a gentleman in cap and gown who appeared in the doorway of Study No. 6 at that precise moment. Blake and Gussy stood still, almost frozen with horror, when they saw that the newcomer was none other than Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the new acting Head of the school.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy Holds the Fort!

"**B**-BAI Jove!" stuttered Gussy.

"My hat!" gurgled Blake.

Mr. Ratcliff's mortar-board had been knocked sideways, and he was hurt. This was not surprising, for Blake had thrown that waistcoat into his face with considerable force. Ratty was not only hurt, he was furious.

"Blake! How dare you!" he choked. "You—you deliberately hurled that waistcoat at me—"

"Awfully sorry, sir!" gasped Blake. "It was an accident, I assure you—"

"Do not lie, Blake!" shrieked Ratty. "I saw you deliberately take aim at me! You and D'Arcy, moreover, were fighting here and causing a commotion! If Mr. Railton tolerates such rowdyism among the juniors of this House, I certainly shall not! Follow me, both of you!"

"Bai Jove! Look heah, sir—"

"Not a word!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "Come!"

Gussy and Blake glared at each other, and followed Ratty from the room.

A number of juniors were gathered outside the study, and they looked sympathetically at Ratty's victims. Ratty minor was on the stairs, and he grinned gleefully when he saw his uncle sweeping along, with Blake and D'Arcy in his wake. Blake felt an overwhelming temptation to bowl Ratty minor down the stairs, but wiser counsels prevailed, and he passed on, snorting.

Mr. Ratcliff took the luckless juniors into his study, and selected a stout, formidable-looking ashplant. He swished it viciously in the air, and his beady eyes took on a malignant glitter.

"Hold out your hand, Blake!" he exclaimed.

Blake hesitatingly did so, and he received six vicious, stinging cuts, laid on with all the force which Ratty could muster. Then Arthur Augustus underwent the same ordeal. Tough though they were, the juniors were both gasping by the time the castigation was over.

"There!" said Mr. Ratcliff, between his teeth. "Perhaps that will impress upon you young rascals that I intend to maintain discipline in this House while I am in charge. Furthermore, I do not approve of boys fighting in their studies, and as you two little hooligans cannot live harmoniously together I shall separate you into different studies."

"Oh ewumbs!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

Blake started.

"Separate us, sir!" he gasped.

"That is my decision, Blake!" said Ratty viciously. "You and D'Arcy must be prevented from creating any further disturbances in the House."

"But—but we weren't really fighting, sir!" cried Blake, in dismay. "It was only a friendly tiff—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy warmly. "You are undah a misappwehension, Mr. Watcliff. Blake and I are weally vewy gweat friends, and the—er—disturbance we made just now was meahly the result of a slight disagreeement—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!" rapped Mr. Ratcliff. "Do not seek to deceive me by subterfuge. I see that it is necessary to separate you, and Blake in order to maintain peace, and I

shall put my plan into effect immediately. You, Blake, shall change places with my nephew. I will see that your belongings are transferred into Study No. 2."

Blake looked quite dazedly at Mr. Ratcliff. He could scarcely believe the horrible significance of what he heard.

"I—I'm to be turned out of Study No. 6!" he ejaculated. "I—I've got to dig with Trimble and Mellish! You—you can't do that, sir! You—"

"Wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, his eyeglass glimmering with wrath. "I pwotest most stwongly against your decision, Mr. Watcliff! I wegard it as most unweasonable and unnecessawy! I wefuse to allow Blake to leave my studey!"

Mr. Ratcliff's face went quite pink.

"You refuse!" he spluttered. "D'Arcy, are you mad? How dare you speak to me, a master, like that! Take five hundred lines!"

"Yaas; but I wish to point out, Mr. Watcliff—"

"Silence!" thundered the tyrannical master of the New House. "I will not bandy words with you, D'Arcy! You two little scoundrels will remain here while I make arrangements for the change to take place."

Blake and Gussy stepped forward to the door, but Mr. Ratcliff was too quick for them. He skipped from the room, slamming the door behind him, and the key grated in the lock.

Blake gritted his teeth.

"We're done, Gussy!" he muttered. "Oh, the awful old Hun! He's only making our scrap-up an excuse, of course, so that he can put his rotten nephew into our study!"

"Yaas, wathah! But I won't tolewate it, Blake. Waity has no right to sepawate us. Fancy you diggin' with Twimble and Mellish! Why, it's uttably imposs!"

Blake groaned.

"What can we do, Gussy? Ratty's monarch of all he surveys now. Oh, I wish the Head would come back! He'd soon put the stopper on Ratcliff's tricks."

Half an hour passed, and the prisoners in Ratty's study became almost frantic with anxiety. At last there came a tramping of feet outside. The door opened to admit Mr. Ratcliff and Gerald Knox.

Knox was grinning evilly, as if enjoying some joke. The rascally prefect had his knife in the juniors, and was quite ready—anxious, in fact—to back up Mr. Ratcliff in his campaign of frightfulness against them.

"Your belongings have been removed from Study No. 6, Blake, and you will find them in Study No. 2," said Mr. Ratcliff tartly. "My nephew has been transferred to Study No. 6, and I shall see that he is not interfered with. Herries and Digby, who had the audacity to defy me, have been sent to the punishment-room to await a caning. I warn you lads that I will have my instructions obeyed to the letter, otherwise there will be trouble."

Arthur Augustus strode forward and faced Mr. Ratcliff, his noble brow flushed with justifiable anger.

"I wefuse to wecognise your instwuctions, Mr. Watcliff!" he exclaimed heatedly. "I wegard you as a bwute and a tywant, bai Jove!"

"D'Arcy!"

"I wefuse to have anythin' to do with your nephew, whom I wegard as a most undesivawable study-mate, bai Jove!" went on D'Arcy, in ringing tones. "I wegwet havin' to address you in this mannah, Mr. Watcliff, but I must insist on Blake bein' weinstated to Study No. 6 at once!"

"My word!" ejaculated Knox. "The insolent young puppy!"

Mr. Ratcliff was fairly palpitating with wrath.

"How dare you—how dare you, D'Arcy!" he fumed. "We shall see who is master here—you or I! You— Oh, good heavens! Stop him, Knox!"

D'Arcy had made a sudden wild break for the door, and as Knox darted towards him he gave the prefect a shove that sent him sprawling into the arms of Mr. Ratcliff. Next minute D'Arcy was gone, and a chirrup of joy arose from Blake. He also would have broken away, but Knox intercepted him and swung him back with a savage snarl.

"D'Arcy, you young scoundrel, come back!" bawled Mr. Ratcliff, holding the table for support.

Arthur Augustus was half-way down the corridor, and if he heard he heeded not. He fairly flew along to Study No. 6. He flung open the door and rushed in. A gasp sounded in that famous apartment.

Paul Ratcliff was seated in the comfortable armchair in Study No. 6, and he had a lurid American detective novel in his hand. He had apparently been taking things easy in his new quarters. He grinned sneeringly at D'Arcy.

"Hallo!" he said. "No larks, mind! You know, of course, that my uncle has put me into this study?"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his nose, and his eyes glittered.

"Yaas, I am fully awah of that, you wottah!" he said. "And I am goin' to put you out! I wefuse to have you in heah!"

Ratty minor jumped up in alarm as D'Arcy advanced towards him with cuffs pushed back threateningly.

"I—I say, don't you dare lay hands on me!" he cried. "I'll bring my uncle here to deal with you, and— Yow! Oooooo! Hands off, you cad! Yaroooooh!"

Arthur Augustus laid a violent grasp on Paul Ratcliff and whirled him round the room. His noble jaw was set, and the light of grim determination shone in his eyes.

The study door was open, and a crowd of startled juniors were watching proceedings from outside. Arthur Augustus propelled his struggling, kicking Form-fellow towards the door.

"Look out, kids!" shouted Kerruish. "Ratty minor's coming out on his neck!"

Whiz!
Bump!

"Yarooooooooh!"

No sooner had Kerruish spoken than the form of Ratty minor came hurtling through the doorway, to land with a fearful concussion on the linoleum outside. There he lay, in an ungraceful heap, moaning heartrendingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors in the Fourth Form passage.

"Good old Gussy!"
"Cave, old chap! Here's Ratty!"
"And Knox!"
"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus saw that there was no key in the door, Mr. Ratcliff having taken possession of it. So he dodged inside and pushed the armchair and the table against the door, and, grasping the study poker, he took up his position behind the barrier just as Mr. Ratcliff and Knox arrived.

Ratty minor had picked himself up, and was bewailing his lot to Mr. Ratcliff.

Ratty's face went pink as he gazed into Study No. 6 and saw Arthur Augustus standing behind the barrier, ready to hold the fort.

"D'Arcy," he ejaculated, "have you taken leave of your senses, you little scoundrel? How—how dare you! You have ejected my nephew—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus promptly. "And I wefuse to allow him to come in heah again! This study belongs to Blake, Hewwies, Digbay, and myself, and theah is no weason why you should upset what I might term a happy family, bai Jove! I am afraid, Mr. Watcliff, that your

motive is petty spite and jealousy, and that you are actin' undah no sense of dutay whatevah!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the Fourth-Formers in the passage. Mr. Ratcliff fairly danced with impotent rage.

"You insolent young scamp, D'Arcy!" he raved. "I will have you flogged for this! I—I command you to surrender to me this instant!"

"I'm sowwy, Mr. Watcliff, but I must wefuse to obey you, undah the cires," replied D'Arcy firmly. "You have no wight to turn Blake out of his studay, just to satisfy your howwid spite, bai Jove!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned furiously to Knox. "Remove that young scoundrel at once, Knox!" he shouted.

Knox made a rush at the barricade and, finding he could not push it over, he made a determined effort to climb over it. He uttered a fiendish yell when the poker struck him on the nose.

"Yarooooooooh!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the onlookers in the passage. "Go it, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry. "Keep your end up, old chap!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of St. Jim's, setting his monocle straight. "I mean to, deah boy. Watty minah isn't comin' in heah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Knox crawled back from the barrier, holding his nose and moaning.

"Go on! Go on!" screeched Ratty. "Drive him out, Knox!"

"Grooooh! It's impossible, sir!" gasped the rascally prefect. "I can't do it alone! The young sweep will have to be stormed out!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned to the others in the corridor. "Boys, I command you to attack D'Arcy and drive him out of that room!" he shouted.

Nobody moved to obey that order. "Boys! Do you hear? Obey me!" Ratty's voice rose to a shrill falsetto.

"No takers!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "We're backing up D'Arcy, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We agree with him entirely."

"Hear, hear!"
Mr. Ratcliff seemed to choke. At that juncture Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth,

(Continued on next page.)

COME ON, YOU CROSS WORD ENTHUSIASTS!

Owing to requests for more Cross Word puzzles I am placing another one before you this week.

The puzzle is worked on very simple lines, and there are no prizes offered for the solution. It is only for amusement during spare moments.

For the benefit of those Gemites who have not yet been introduced to the pleasures of Cross Word puzzles, and who do not know how to start, I will explain the idea.

Each number in the squares refers to a definition, and these numbers appear in squares which start words. The black squares mark the end of a word. From the definitions, or clues, given you must find a word of as many letters as there are white squares allotted to that word. For example, the clue for the square No. 5

CLUES. (ACROSS.)

1. The Head of St. Jim's.
5. Where trials are held.
9. Where material is sold.
10. Dick Brooke (initials).
12. Royal Navy.
13. With reference to.
14. Harry Noble (initials).
15. Part of the verb to be (present tense).
17. A little mark.
18. In which corn is kept.
19. A vehicle.
21. The heart or inner part.
22. Wetred.
25. One who roves.
26. Conjunction.
27. To take objection to.
28. Meaning "cannot."
30. To tip up.
33. Getting on in years.
34. An untruth.
35. A branch of the Army.
36. Initial letter of "Boy."
37. One.
38. Roman figure (50).
39. Short for father.
40. Roman figure (10).
41. The thirteenth letter.
45. Brown colour.
47. To endeavour.
49. On which ships sail.
50. American expression.

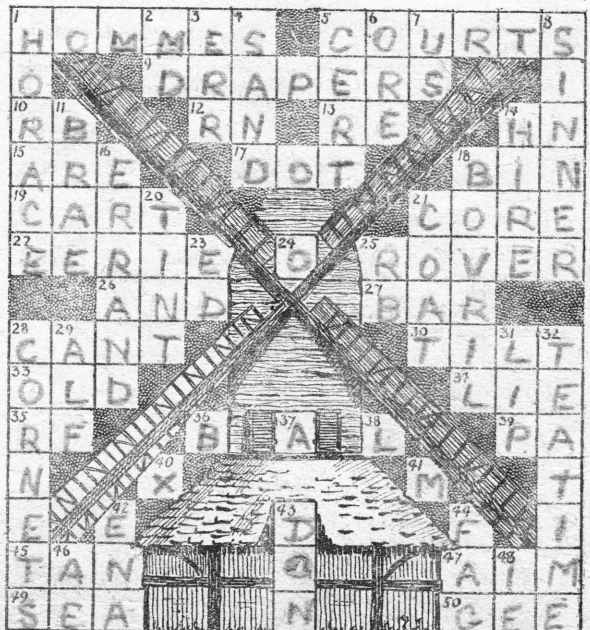
CLUES. (DOWN.)

1. Mr. Ratcliff's Christian name.
2. Meaning Master of Divinity.
3. To wander from right course.
4. What children delight to play with at the seaside.
5. A sure thing.
6. A metal.
7. Ourselves.
8. One who does wrong.
11. A hillside.
14. To engage for pay.
16. A message.
18. A beverage.
20. A light colouring.
21. A jacket.
23. Contraction of editor.
24. Nought.
25. Robert Boulton (initials).
28. Herries' favourite instruments.
29. A boy's name.
31. Part of mouth.
32. Mealtime.
42. A girl's name.
43. A boy's name.
44. Slang for cigarette.
46. Diphthong.
48. Meaning "that is."

is "Where trials are held." That is very easy to solve. The answer is "Courts." That word runs across, commencing from the square marked "5." Now, on the same square another word starts that must commence with the letter "C," and the clue to this word which runs down is "A sure thing." Now, what is the word meaning a sure thing? Just think a moment, and you will guess it.

As you proceed you will find words interlocking—words going across with the words going down. Now set to work.

(See the solution of last week's puzzle on page 22.)



came hurrying down the corridor to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. He was followed by Mr. Linton of the Shell. Both these gentlemen gazed at the scene in horror and amazement.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "Whatever has happened, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"D'Arcy, the young scoundrel, is defying me!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "He and Blake were engaged in a disgraceful bout of fisticuffs in this study, and I had to separate them. I have transferred Blake to Study No. 2, and placed my nephew in here. D'Arcy has ejected him and refuses to allow him to enter."

"Yaas, wathah—I wefuse most emphatically!" said the noble swell, with flashing eyes. "I wegard your action as unweasonable and intolewable, Mr. Watchliff. The fact that Blake and I had a friently scwap did not justify you sepawatin' us. I suggest that you did that out of pure spite, and for the purpose of gettin' a bettah study for your nephew, bai Jove!"

Messrs. Lathom and Linton exchanged meaning looks. "Ahem! D'Arcy is certainly very outspoken, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Linton. "I should imagine, from the attitude which he had adopted, that your nephew would have no wish to return to that room, in any case. Personally, I am of the opinion that, to save further trouble, Blake should be reinstated in his study and—er—D'Arcy should be punished for his breach of authority."

"So you side with D'Arcy!" fumed Mr. Ratcliff. "Not at all," replied the Shell master coldly. "I was merely suggesting, my dear Ratcliff, that further trouble might be saved by keeping your nephew out of that room." "And I agree!" said Mr. Lathom mildly. "Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy have occupied Study No. 6 on amicable terms for so long, Mr. Ratcliff, that I should not consider it—ahem!—propitious to separate them now. I do not regard them as being inordinately quarrelsome boys. As Linton says, the retention of your nephew in the study will undoubtedly lead to further trouble. It would be wiser, I think, to let him remain in Study No. 2. D'Arcy, of course, must be punished, from the point of view of discipline. That is my opinion, Ratcliff."

Ratty chewed his moustache frantically. He could scarcely trust himself to speak. Black looks were darted at him from all sides.

"Very well—very well! I am much obliged for your observations, Lathom," he managed to articulate at last. "I—I shall consider what further steps to take in the matter. Paul, come with me."

Ratty and his nephew walked ignominiously away, followed by deep chuckles from the juniors.

Mr. Lathom looked severely at Arthur Augustus, who was still standing behind the barrier, ready to hold Study No. 6 against all comers, if necessary.

"D'Arcy, replace that furniture and let me see an end to this affair!" said his Form master, in a stern voice. "You are not likely to improve matters by adopting such an attitude. Boys, kindly disperse, and make no further disturbance!"

Arthur Augustus obeyed Mr. Lathom at once. The Terrible Three came in and cheerily helped him tidy up Study No. 6. Then they waited, on tenterhooks of excitement, wondering what would happen next.

Toby came at length, with the message that Mr. Ratcliff wished to see D'Arcy. Gussy went, looking very determined and grim. He was prepared to go to any lengths to defend the time-honoured rights of Study No. 6.

Mr. Lathom was with the New House master when he arrived at the study. The master of the Fourth had apparently been trying to pour oil on the troubled waters. In any case, Ratty seemed to have climbed down.

"Blake will return to Study No. 6, D'Arcy," he said, in a harsh, rasping voice. "You and Blake, and Herries, and Digby, however, shall receive the punishment you deserve. I shall expect all four in this room at eight o'clock this evening."

"Very well, sir," said D'Arcy.

Herries and Digby and Blake were released from durance vile, and the chums of Study No. 6 consulted with Tom Merry & Co. later as to what they should do.

They were quite prepared to defy Ratty and not keep their appointment with him at eight o'clock. But they decided, after all, to stand the punishment that was in store. After all, Ratty had been defeated in his effort to break up the happy home in Study No. 6.

So Blake & Co. went up like lambs to the slaughter that evening, and returned to their sympathetic schoolfellows with their hands tucked tight beneath their armpits, uttering various expressions of woe.

By bed-time, however, the effects of the caning had passed off, and they were quite cheery again. And thus ended the first day of Mr. Horace Ratcliff's reign as acting headmaster at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Something like a Rag.

MR. RATCLIFF did not allow the grass to grow under his feet, and in the days that followed, his tyrannies in the School House extended. Tom Merry & Co. chafed under the heel of the oppressor, and did their best to stand Ratty, hoping each day that either Mr. Railton or Dr. Holmes himself would return and remove the tyrant's yoke.

Mr. Ratcliff interfered with their liberties and kept them down with an iron hand. He administered lickings and lines on the slightest provocation, and seemed to take peculiar delight in making the juniors hate him. Ratty minor was now in his glory, and he became almost unbearable to the other juniors. His insolence made Tom Merry & Co. writhe, but every time they called him to account, either by bumpings or raggings, he would take the first opportunity of whining to Mr. Ratcliff and thus bring down the vials of that gentleman's wrath upon the raggers.

Blake vowed that, if he had much more of Ratty minor, he would quietly take him out of St. Jim's one dark night and put him to a lingering death, and leave no trace behind.

There was no doubt that Ratty minor, next to Mr. Ratcliff himself, was the most unpopular person in the whole of St. Jim's.

The limit was reached, the juniors thought, when Mr. Ratcliff sent forth the fiat that study feeds were to be taboo. Ratty gave no reason, except that he did not approve of the juniors "gorging themselves with indigestible comestibles" each day in their studies.

The news aroused a tumult of wrath and indignation in the Lower School. It seemed that there was no ending to Mr. Ratcliff's interferences with their traditions. Ratty was in earnest, too. He enlisted the help of Knox, and a daily tour was made of all the junior studies, and boys found with tuck on the premises were summarily caned, and their provender confiscated.

"It's too thick!" exclaimed Tom Merry in the Common-room one evening, when a whole batch of juniors had just been hauled before Ratty for a caning. "Ratcliff has no right to stop us having tuck if we want it. It's a downright rotten piece of interference on his part, and—and he ought to be scragged!"

"If I had my way I'd boil the rotter in oil!" said Blake darkly. "Scragging would be too merciful!"

Tom Merry set his teeth resolutely. "Ratty sha'n't grind us down like a lot of slaves," he exclaimed. "We've put up with a lot so far, but we're not going to have our feeds stopped. If we can't enjoy our usual study brews we shall have to try something else. Chaps, I've got an idea. Let's pool funds and have a good blow-out in our dorm to-night."

"Hurrah!" chirruped Monty Lowther. "A dormy feed! Ripping wheeze, Tommy!"

"First chop!" said Blake enthusiastically. "I've got a late pass from Kildare for to-night, and I can buy the tuck in the village and smuggle it over the wall. If we keep things dark Ratty won't smell a rat."

"That's just the point," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to keep absolutely mum about this, and for goodness' sake don't let Ratty minor get wind of the feed. He'd set Ratty on our track, and we should be made to sing pretty small."

"Rather! But how shall we manage about Ratty minor?" said Blake. "That's rather a difficulty, isn't it?"

"You chaps can wait till he's asleep, and then creep out and come along to our dorm," said Tom Merry. "There's no reason why he should wake up if you keep awfully quiet. Anyway, you can risk it."

"Rather!" said Blake. "We shall manage it, I expect. Let's have a whip-round for the tuck now."

All the juniors present in the Common-room eagerly contributed to the tuck fund, and they agreed, one and all, that the projected dormitory feed should be kept a dread, dark secret. Blake left the Common-room and went in search of other juniors who were likely to join in the scheme. Every junior, indeed, to whom Blake mentioned the matter showed a ready willingness to be "counted in," and by the time the hero of the Fourth had completed his round quite a substantial sum had been collected.

The feed in the Shell dormitory that night showed every promise of being a big affair. A further attraction was the announcement by Bernard Glyn, the mechanical genius of the Shell, that he had just completed his latest invention, a smokeless and odourless portable stove, and that he would smuggle the stove into the dormitory for the purpose of cooking the sosses and the rashers and making toast.

Tom Merry & Co. voted this a splendid idea. After all, no really good feed was complete without a round of hot sosses and chips and gammon rashers and toast. These were the things that gladdened the hearts of the juniors and of which they had been deprived lately by Ratty's tyrannical



Willing hands seized the blanket on all sides, and Ratty minor was tossed in it. Again and again he flew ceilingwards, yelling and kicking. "That's just to give the rotter a little of what we've been saving up for him!" cried Jack Blake. (See page 16.)

edict. They all looked forward very eagerly to the dormy feed.

Glyn and Kangaroo managed to smuggle the patent stove upstairs and into the Shell dormitory. The beauty of Glyn's stove was its small size and compactness. It was hidden under Glyn's bed without the slightest trouble.

Blake performed his part of the plot with equal fidelity and success. When darkness had fallen and the old Close was lonely and deserted, a huge parcel of tuck was passed over the school wall and rushed away through the shadows by a willing trio—the Terrible Three, to wit. The parcel was taken into the School House via the wash-house window and conveyed up the back stairs to the Shell dormitory. There the parcel was opened and its contents distributed among the beds, so that when the coverlets were replaced not a solitary sign of the tuck should be seen.

"Good!" chuckled Tom Merry, in great satisfaction. "That's the first part of the bizney over. Barring accidents, my sons, we shall have a regular bean in here to-night."

"Ha, ha! Rather!" chortled his chums. The juniors "in the know"—and these comprised practically the whole of the Shell and Fourth—kept to their vow of secrecy, and not a word was breathed concerning the feed.

They went up to bed that night looking as good as gold, and neither Rushden nor Darrell, the prefects who saw lights out on the Shell and Fourth Form dormitories respectively, had the slightest suspicion that there was anything unusual "in the air."

Jack Blake & Co. remained very quiet, and pretended to go to sleep. Cardew, whose bed was next to Ratty's, kept a careful watch on that youth until at length he saw that he was asleep.

"You awake, Ratcliff?" he asked softly. Ratty minor did not stir. He slumbered peacefully. "Good egg!" said Cardew. "Get up, chaps! The coast is quite clear, I think."

The Fourth-Formers arose from their beds, and Blake and Herries left the dormitory in advance to scout out the land. They returned to report "all clear," and a general exodus was made from the room.

The juniors crept along on tiptoe, and Lumley-Lumley,

who was the last to leave, closed the dormitory door ever so carefully and quietly behind him.

Tom Merry & Co. were up and doing when they arrived. "Come in, old sons!" grinned Tom. "We've got the giddy stove going and the sosses are cooking. Some of 'em are already done to a turn."

A very appetising smell of cooking pervaded the air in the Shell dormitory. Blankets had been hung over the windows to exclude all light, and everything was well in preparation for the grand midnight feed.

Glyn and Monty Lowther tended to the cooking operations. The youthful inventor's stove certainly came in wonderfully useful. The beds were littered with tins and jars and bags, all containing toothsome delicacies, and crockery and other table utensils were much in evidence. These, of course, had been smuggled up during the evening.

At last the sosses and the chips and the rashers were all done to a turn, mountains of buttered toast had been made, and tea brewed in quarts. Those juniors who did not want tea had the choice of ginger-pop and currant wine. There was, in fact, plenty of everything for everyone.

"Gentlemen," cried Tom Merry, as the juniors ranged themselves about the room, some sitting on beds and others squatting comfortably on the floor, "I propose a toast to Ratty, don't you?"

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors, but not too loudly for fear of rousing the prefects.

"Here's to Ratty, then, the greatest Hun since Kaiser Bill!" said Tom. "Down with the old bounder and all his knavish tricks!"

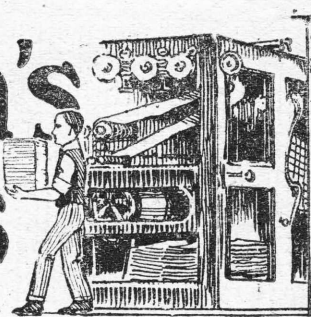
The juniors responded heartily to that toast. Then, at Tom Merry's invitation, they fell to. The Shell dormitory soon resounded with the merry rattle of knives and forks and the champing of jaws. The dormy feed was now a thing of wondrous actuality, and the heroes of the School House proceeded to do it full justice.

So engrossed were they in the feed that they did not detect a slight movement that sounded outside the door.

(Continued on page 16.)



The St. Jim's News



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

THE other day Mr. Lathom set the Sheriff the task of writing an essay on the subject: "What, in your opinion, is the invention that has done the greatest service to mankind?"

Well, you know, that's a bit of a poser, isn't it? There are so many things which have become part and parcel of our daily lives, and seem to be absolutely essential to our existence, so that we take them quite for granted, overlooking the fact that they simply didn't exist, and were hardly dreamt of a few hundred years ago.

Where should we be nowadays without railways, telephones, the telegraph—wireless and otherwise—gas, oil, steam and petrol engines, dynamos, electric motors, weaving machinery, printing presses, and such things as motor-cars, motor-bikes, aeroplanes, electric light and cinematographs, to say nothing of gramophones, typewriters, fountain pens, telescopes, cameras, and heaps of things of that kind?

It isn't easy to say which of them has done most towards making life more pleasant and interesting, and most of the fellows boggled at the task of selecting one particular invention for that honour. Some of the fellows, however, went back to first principles for their selection, and conferred the palm upon some simple but essential mechanical contrivance, such as the wheel, the lever, or the wedge. It's quite true that these things had to be actually thought out, because there is nothing quite like them in Nature for man to copy.

Of course, the essays that were handed in were perfectly serious, for Form masters have little or no sense of humour, and the penalties for indulging in playfulness in connection with Form work are apt to be more than a trifle drastic. Monty Lowther was particularly regretful that he had been unable to give expression to certain humorous ideas that had occurred to him, but he cheered up no end when I suggested that he should write an article for the "News" on the subject, and put his repressed humour into it.

Of course, that meant my planning a special "Inventions" issue of the paper; but I was perfectly willing to do that, as I was certain I should have no dearth of contributors with such a subject for them to spread themselves out upon.

You will search through these columns in vain, however, for any mention of Bernard Glyn. It is quite true that he is far and away the most prominent inventor at St. Jim's—in fact, I should say he is the foremost schoolboy inventor of his day—but the fact is he comes into the limelight fairly often, and I thought it only right and proper that the other fellows should for once be given pride of place.

Of course, Glyn did not mind in the least. He's got a job already that will keep him going for some time to come.

In my opinion, the two greatest inventors at St. Jim's, after Glyn, are Baggy Trimble and Mr. Ratcliff. One invents excuses and the other invents ways of making trouble, and in their own particular lines they are supreme.

TOM MERRY.

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MY OPINION!

By David Llewellyn Wynn

IF there is ever a statue erected to the memory of the man whose invention has done the greatest amount of good in the world, it ought to be one of the fellows who invented pies.

Of course, it is possible that the name of this great benefactor of the human race has not been preserved in the pages of history. I have often looked through history books in the hope of finding it, but I haven't come across it up to now. The world has always failed to pay due homage to its greatest men, the people who have done most to make life really worth living.

But there ought to be a statue, none the less. A statue would have the effect of bringing to the minds of thousands of thoughtless people some dim visions of those dark and sombre days when there were no pies in the world. Then they would perhaps realise what they owe to the man who invented them, and be duly grateful that they have been born during a time of civilisation.

When I think of those dreadful pre-historic days before pies were invented, my blood runs cold. Under such conditions life could have been no more than a mere existence.

You know there's something about a pie that—well, I don't know quite how to put it, but perhaps you understand what I mean. All grub's good, of course some kinds are better than other kinds; but there's no denying that a pie is the best of all. It makes you feel real pally with yourself when you put a knife into a big cake or turn sosses out of the frying-pan into the dish, for instance, but there's nothing so absolutely thrilling as cutting the crust of a pie. Any kind of pie, it makes no difference whatever.

You see, with most grub, you know exactly what there is as soon as you look at it. That's all very well in its way, of course, but you can't work up the same sort of excited feeling about it that you can about a pie, where you don't get a glimpse of the joys to come until that gorgeous, glorious moment when you cut the crust.

And then, when you feel your knife sink through the firm pastry, and you get your first glimpse through the cloud of steam that instantly arises off the meat, or fruit, or whatever it is. Oh!

Take a nice juicy rabbit-pie, for instance. What could be nicer? I think that when I leave school I shall go in for a job as a cook making pies. You know I am a past-master at the art. I could knock Mrs. Taggles into a cocked hat. Mind you, there is nothing against her pies, though—you can tell that by the number she sells; but when they are turned out by one that really does know his job—and I've had many a pat on the back for the ones I've turned out—you will agree with me that it is the finest feed one could partake of.

(Footnote by Figgins.—I don't know whether this MS. will fill the column, but, in any case, Patty Wynn isn't likely to bother any more about it. He's just thrown down his pen and rushed out to see if Mrs. Taggles has taken out of the oven a batch of rabbit-pies she put in a short time ago.)

GREAT MINDS!

By Monty Lowther.

IN my opinion the greatest inventor who ever lived is myself.

My great speciality, of course, as everybody knows (at least, I hope they do; they ought to, anyway—I've pointed the fact out often enough) is inventing jokes. Of course, all the jokes I crack are entirely my own invention, and I should like to take this opportunity of contradicting an abominable rumour, invented and spread abroad by certain low fellows of the baser sort, that I crib them.

I repudiate the vile innuendo with scornful contempt.

At the very most, all that can truthfully be said is that I sometimes get the bare idea of a joke from somewhere else.

I say the bare idea. Well, one can't expect to get more from such a scatter-brained crowd that roam about the corridors of this establishment. If it wasn't for me and my jokes life would hardly be worth living, believe me. Of course, I get told off at times, but it is all in good part.

Next to me, the greatest inventor in the history of the world is the genius who first thought of the idea of leaving openings in the tops of socks so that people could get their feet into them. That was a really brainy wheeze, you must admit. Before he patented his idea people used to have to carry their socks in their hands, like some chaps carry gloves nowadays, because they couldn't get inside them.

Then there was the man who spent years of his life inventing the complicated machinery that makes the holes in coke. Previously coke had been made entirely by hand, with the aid of a small tool something like a bradawl, and the process involved enormous labour, and made the cost of the finished article practically prohibitive to all but the very wealthiest, such as plumbers and journalists, who often used to have small pieces set into gold rings and tiepins, in lieu of the humble diamond, or ruby.

It has been computed that each of the special coke-making machines now in use can turn out as much in an hour as it used to take five hundred men a year to make by hand, with the result that coke is now produced so cheaply that we can afford to use it for garden-paths and flavour dog-biscuits with it.

The well-known classic saying, "Go and eat coke!" comes down to us from the period when coke was exceedingly rare, and there was a popular belief that if it could be obtained in sufficient quantities and eaten, it would have the effect of rejuvenating the eater and prolonging his life almost indefinitely. Recent scientific research, however, has established the fact that coke as an article of diet has very little superiority over any other form of food, and most certainly cannot produce the miraculous effects that had been previously wrongfully attributed to it.

But if I could only get on to the track of the fiend who invented prep— Well, I'd set my thinking tackle to work and invent something with boiling oil in it that would make him jolly sorry he ever spent his time thinking out that kind of stunt.



MANY INVENTIONS!

By Robert Arthur Digby.

ABOUT a week, or maybe a fortnight ago, Gussy invented a fancy waistcoat.

I don't know whether it's really correct to talk about inventing a waistcoat in the ordinary way; but this was not the ordinary way; it was an extraordinary way. It was Gussy's way, and all of Gussy's ways are extraordinary ways. So I consider that "Gussy invented a waistcoat" is quite correct, in the circumstances. Indeed, I can't think of another way of putting it, unless I said that he perpetrated a waistcoat.

For instance, you couldn't say he designed it, because a design implies a certain amount of method, and if there was any method in the arrangement of colours on that waistcoat it was a similar method to that adopted by the kind of quasi-scientific ass who mixes half a dozen chemicals haphazardly in a test-tube, to see whether anything exciting will happen.

In nine cases out of ten nothing does happen, and in the tenth, it's fairly certain to be something pretty horrible—like Gussy's waistcoat.

Gussy had the waistcoat made up in Wayland. The local tailor at Rylcombe wasn't equal to the task. He's getting on in years rather, and his nerves aren't what they were when he was younger. And the Wayland tape-measure merchant is particularly well qualified to tackle jobs of that description. You see, his hobby is landscape gardening.

Gussy went over to Wayland on several occasions to supervise the operations, and each time he came back and entertained us with full details, until we jammed his head into the coal-scuttle as a gentle hint that the subject wasn't of the slightest interest to us.

At last came the great day when the garment was to be ready, and as it happened to be a half-holiday Gustavus had plenty of time to attire himself as befitted the occasion before sailing out.

And I can tell you he did look a dandy, too. His silk topper was polished to perfection. And his shoes, too. To say that you could see your face in them would hardly have done the cleaner full justice. His monocle was highly polished, too. Gussy has a silk handkerchief specially for this purpose. And oh, those lavender gloves of his, they did look dinky. Must have cost him fifteen shillings at the least. His beautifully-creased trousers looked as if they had been attended to by expert hands. His tie, too, with its brilliant colours, would have fairly put Jacob's coat in the shade.

Arthur Augustus arrayed in his splendour, and with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes, passed through the school gates, and started off on his journey to Wayland.

Blake and I went out soon afterwards. We hadn't intended to, but, unfortunately for our plans of staying in and making up the accounts of the Junior Sports Club, Herries had invented a new way of practising the cornet in the study, by showing a duster down the bell of the instrument. It certainly muffled the sound, a trifle at least, but that's about all you could say for the notion. Instead of the usual blare and tootle there was a queer sort of quivery, dithering noise that made you feel wobbly inside. Anyway, Blake and I couldn't stick it, so we cleared out and left Herries to get on with it.

We went for a stroll in the woods. In the meantime Gussy had gone on to Wayland full of joyous anticipation of the treat that was in store for him.

The waistcoat was finished and waiting for him, and he decided to put it on at once. There is one thing about Gussy; he's got his share of pluck. He may be a trifle wanting in the upper regions, but there's nothing wrong with his nerve. For my part I'd bunk for my life if anybody ever suggested my wearing a thing like that in public.

Now, they say it's better to be born lucky than rich, and I daresay that's true, though I don't know much about it, for I wasn't born one or the other. Gussy, however, was certainly born rich, so I suppose he can't expect to be lucky as well. Anyway, whether he expects it or not, he very rarely is, and this occasion was no exception to the general run of things.

At the same time, it was entirely his own fault. Instead of doing the sensible thing and coming straight back to Rylcombe, as he ought to have done, he invented a new way—for him, at least—of spending the rest of the afternoon. He went to the pictures. Now the pictures are all very well for silly asses like Monty Lowther, who knows no better than to laugh at other silly asses being hit in the eyes with custard-pies and that sort of thing; but a member of Study No. 6 ought to have more respect for himself than to spend his time wallowing in a plush seat on a fine bright afternoon, while his pals have to tramp about the countryside with empty pockets. Now, if he'd mentioned to us that he intended to go to the cinema we could have made arrangements to meet him outside—before he went in, of course.

There was some special picture being shown, part of a series.

It seems that some johnny has invented a way of showing people how to do things properly, by means of cinema films, and one of the things he's teaching them to do is to walk.

Really walk, of course, I mean. Not merely convey yourself from place to place just for the sake of getting there, but to walk for the sake of the walk and the good it does you—to stick out your chest and tuck in your tu'penny, and keep on walking, like Felix.

Gussy fell for it. He hadn't been watching the film for more than thirty seconds before he discovered his own way of walking was all wrong. The realisation began to worry him. He determined to bring himself up to the scratch and remodel his style. If he'd asked us we could have told him of several other directions in which he might profitably have started on the self-improvement stunt, other than walking; but he didn't ask us, so, of course, he—anyway, let's get on with the yarn in the proper sequence.

When he came out of the cinema he set himself to walk back to St. Jim's, just for the sake of practice. Now, I'm willing to admit, right away, that there was something in this idea of Gussy's. It's quite true that he doesn't walk as he ought to do. Time after time we've pointed out to him that he really ought to be walking on four legs, that being the method of locomotion generally recognised as conventional for animals of his genus. But, at the same time, five o'clock

of a winter afternoon on the Wayland-Rylcombe lane is not the time and place for trying out new stunts. Because, at the best of times, that part of the landscape is dangerous ground for the most wideawake fellow at St. Jim's, and Gussy is never within a thousand miles of being that, even when what he calls his mind isn't fully occupied with the task of making certain that the sole of his boot is at the proper angle to his shin-bone when it touches the ground.

You see, that blessed lane is a happy hunting-ground for Grammarians.

Naturally, Gussy ran into a bunch of them. He may not be certain that he's putting his foot down in the proper manner when he's walking, but he can always be certain he's putting it into some trouble or other, whatever he may be doing.

There was Gordon Gay, Monk, Lane, and the two Wootons. Merry lads, all of them. Bright young sparks! And how they do love Gussy! They say that ragging him consoles them for the fact that when they go to the Zoo they're not allowed to touch the exhibits, and that they get the same feeling of satisfaction from it as they would from being permitted to tease the inmates of the monkey-house.

They immediately went into committee to consider the question of inventing some new form of frightfulness—with Gussy as the victim.

Up to that moment they hadn't caught a glimpse of his waistcoat, in consequence of the fact that his overcoat was buttoned up. While they were talking it over he made a break to get away, and, though he didn't succeed, his coat came open in the struggle, and they got the shock of their young lives.

In the next few seconds they got another. Blake and I, who had just arrived upon the scene, dropped on to them from the other side of the hedge, and hit out. They didn't offer much resistance in the moment or so that sufficed to drag Gussy clear; which was lucky, considering that we were outnumbered. They seemed a trifle dazed; but whether that was due to the unexpectedness of our appearance or to the effect of that glimpse of Gussy's waistcoat, I won't undertake to say.

I only know that before they'd recovered themselves we were fifty yards down the lane, going like steam and dragging Gussy along with us. They set out in pursuit, of course, but their pace didn't amount to a row of beans compared with ours. We knew what to expect if they caught up with us, and we didn't want any of it. We've had some, and we find that we can get along very well without it, thank you!

Blake and I hung on to Gussy's arms until we were in sight of St. Jim's, and I'll bet we taught him more about running in that few minutes than ever he learned about walking at the pictures.

And when we reached St. Jim's we suggested that he invented a way of repaying us for the rescue by going over to the tuck-shop and expending sundry coin of the realm—in the matter of which the rest of us were painfully deficient—in the purchase of the wherewithal for a study tea.

And that invention, at least, was a highly successful one.



When the Grammarians saw D'Arcy's waistcoat they had the shock of their lives!

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ANSWERS
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(Continued from page 13.)

A lean, weedy figure had crept along the corridor and had bent down at the dormitory door, and a beady, glittering eye was applied to the keyhole.

Paul Ratcliff—for it was he—gave a low gasp as he took stock of the scene within.

"Mum-m-m-my hat! The rotters! So this is their game!" he muttered. "No wonder there was nobody in the dormitory when I woke up! My word, won't uncle be pleased to hear of this! The cads have got the door locked and taken the key, but I expect uncle will have a key. He'll give 'em a bit of a shock. He, he, he!"

Chuckling maliciously to himself, Ratty minor stole away. Tom Merry & Co., blissfully unconscious of the fact that they had been discovered, wired in merrily and with good cheer. They had been kept so long without tuck by the autocratic Ratty that they were able to tackle this feed with more than usual relish. Eating and drinking and merrymaking went on apace.

All of a sudden a key grated in the lock, and the juniors looked up in alarm. Several of them, indeed, were so startled by the interruption that they choked. The dormitory door was flung open, and the terrible, towering figure of Mr. Horace Ratcliff stood on the threshold.

Ratty's face was by no means pleasant to look upon at that moment. His eyes seemed to glint like points of fire. Behind him stood Ratty minor, grinning triumphantly into the room.

"So," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff between his teeth, "you are caught red-handed, you unmitigated little rascals! In spite of all authority and rules you have had the effrontery to indulge in this—this disgraceful orgy in the middle of the night!"

"Oh, cwombs!"

"Now we're in for it!" moaned Blake. "That horrible toad of a nephew of his must have woken up."

Mr. Ratcliff stalked into the dormitory, fuming.

"I have never heard of anything more outrageous in all my life!" he stormed. "You have even gone to the length of introducing this—this stove into the room, placing the school in jeopardy of fire! I—"

"Look out, sir! shrieked Lennox suddenly. "Your gown's alight!"

"Oooooooogh!"

Mr. Ratcliff had been standing close to Glyn's stove, and in whirling round towards the juniors his gown had enveloped it. The flimsy material ignited immediately, and a sheet of flame curled round Ratty's legs.

"Yaroooooop!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

He danced like a dervish, and his yells rang out loudly on the midnight air. He wildly imagined that he was in dire peril of being cremated on the spot, but the juniors could see that Ratty was in no real danger.

"Oooooogh! Yah! Help! Fire! Yow-wow-woogh!" he shrieked.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Watty's set himself on fire, deah boys! I wegard that as distinctly funny, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fire!" roared Blake excitedly, making a rush for the nearest water jug. "Water's the thing, boys! We've got to put Mr. Ratcliff out! Fire!"

Blake grabbed the jug and dashed up to Ratty, whose gown was smouldering merrily.

Swooooooosh!

The contents of the jug went all over Ratty, and his yells rose higher.

Other water jugs were quickly forthcoming, and a small horde of juniors rushed forward with the fixed intention of putting Ratty out. Perhaps they were, on the whole, actuated by the thought that here was an excellent opportunity of getting their own back on the rascally House-master, and that they might as well be in for a pound as a penny.

Water went swooshing over Ratty from all directions.

"Yoogh! Yah! Gerrugh! Gug-gug!" he gurgled.

Sizz-zzz-zzzzz!

His gown went out in a twinkling, but the juniors did not seem to notice that. All the water available went over Ratty, and he soon presented a very bedraggled figure indeed.

He was drenched from head to foot, and water ran from him in streams.

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He stood near the dormitory door, shaking with cold and wrath.

The juniors looked at him and yelled. They could not help it.

"Ha, ha, ha"

"Boys! Yaroooh! You little scoundrels—"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom's voice at the door.

"Whatever is the matter?"

The Fourth Form master came in, followed by a crowd of startled juniors and seniors. Their anxiety turned to great amusement when they beheld the dripping Ratty.

The dark corridors of St. Jim's re-echoed with the sound of the laughter that rose from the neighbourhood of the Shell dormitory.

As for Ratty, he was on the verge of apoplexy.

"They shall suffer for this outrage!" he howled. "I—Groooogh!—shan't let this pass lightly! Gerrooooh! I—I shall c-c-catch c-c-cold if I s-s-stand here! Yow! Ugh! I will deal with the—ow!—young s-s-scoundrels in the morning. Yah!"

Ratty squelched away, leaving a long, long trail of water behind him. The midnight revellers were in hysterics. They sat on their beds and kicked up their heels in mirth.

"Silence, boys!" commanded Mr. Lathom sternly. "Cease this unseemly noise. This affair is most disgraceful! You have swamped the dormitory with water, and you will kindly clear it up without delay."

"Right you are, sir!"

Tom Merry & Co. set to work willingly, and they soon had the dormitory in shipshape order. The remains of the feed was put away, and Mr. Lathom ordered his pupils back to their own dormitory. They went, chuckling, and Mr. Lathom did not leave them until they were all in bed and the lights were extinguished.

Blake sat up soon after Mr. Lathom had gone.

"Well, kids, what a fiasco!" he said. "But I'm glad Ratty copped out. That's one consolation."

"Ha, ha, ha! Ratter!"

"And now Ratty minor is going to cop out for being a rotten sneak!" said the Fourth Form captain, getting out of bed and lighting a candle. "Out you get, chaps! We'll toss the rotter in a blanket!"

"Good!"

Ratty minor clung to his bed and whimpered with fear when Blake & Co. closed round.

"Don't you touch me!" he wailed. "You'll get it worse in the morning, I tell you! My uncle— Yow! Oh! Leggo! Yarooooogh!"

Bump!

The plaintive Paul came out of his bed with great precipitation and sprawled on the floor. He was immediately seized in many hands. A blanket was dragged from his bed and he was tossed roughly into it.

"Now, gather round, boys!" said Blake grimly. "We'll give this rotter a little of what we've been saving up for him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Willing hands seized the blanket on all sides, and Ratty minor was tossed in it. Again and again he fled ceiling-wards, yelling and kicking. At last he fell right through the centre of the blanket, which was not proof against those incessant impacts, and Blake & Co. wound up the proceedings by bumping him on the floor.

Kildare brought a sudden termination to the ragging by charging in with a cane. Blake & Co. left Ratty minor writhing on the floor, and they scrambled back to their beds like rabbits to their warrens.

Kildare surveyed the wriggling sneak with a grim look, and ordered him to bed. Ratty minor fairly crawled into bed, and lay there moaning and shivering.

There was no further disturbance in the School House that night.

As Blake remarked with a chuckle, they had made a good night of it, and, all things considered, they had rather enjoyed it.

Whether the sequel to those lively events would be enjoyable, however, was another matter.

CHAPTER 8.

Short Commons!

NEXT morning there was considerable excitement, and in some cases alarm, in the School House at St. Jim's. The order had gone forth for the whole Shell and Fourth to be assembled in Hall, by Mr. Ratcliff's command. Kildare and his fellow prefects of the Sixth, who were commissioned with the task, looked very cross about it. They did not like, being bothered. Gerald Knox was the only one among them who relished the job at all. Knox, of course, was in his element. Anything "up against" Tom Merry & Co. appealed strongly to him.

The juniors took their places in Hall, and waited the coming of Ratty.

"I wonder what the old Hun will do?" said Blake. "There

are nearly forty of us in it, and he'll need a good deal of vim to lick the whole giddy crowd."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"Pewwaps he'll do it in welayes, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "He could cane six at a time, and spend an hour or two between each batch to get his stwength up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" rapped Kildare, as Mr. Ratcliff swooped in.

There was silence at once, and all eyes turned on Ratty. That gentleman's thin, sallow face was quite demoniacal in its expression. His brow was like thunder, his eyes were watering, and his nose had a pronounced red tint. The first thing that Mr. Ratcliff did was to sneeze.

"Ah-ti-shoooooh!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Ratty's caught a cold," he whispered to Talbot. "The after effects of that water, I suppose!"

Mr. Ratcliff glared round at the assembled juniors as though he would have liked to devour them.

"Boys—atchoo!—you are aware of what took place last night," he choked. "Two whole Forms participated—ah-choo!—in a disgusting food orgy, collaborating in an unprecedented and flagrant breach of the school rules. Choo! Choo! Not only that, but the whole school was placed in danger by the taking of a lighted stove—groogh—into the Shell dormitory, and I—atchoo!—was brutally assaulted and drenched with water, as a result of which I have this—gug—cold!"

Ratty brought his handkerchief into violent action on his nose, thus making it still more red.

"I have received a detailed account of all that took place—choo—choo!—and I am aware of the identities of the ringleaders in that disgraceful affair!" went on Ratty, in a rasping voice. "Those boys shall receive a severe castigation. Atchoo!"

The juniors in Hall darted black looks at Paul Ratcliff, who was grinning. He had told his uncle of the blanket-tossing affair which had followed the dormitory feed, and Ratty had promised him that the ringleaders should suffer.

Mr. Ratcliff's watery eyes glittered maliciously.

"It appears that the juniors of this House are in a conspiracy against me," he went on. "It is my duty to make my authority respected here. I shall not fail to do so. Ah-ti-shoo! Since you flaunted my orders with regard to the taking of foodstuffs into the House, other than those required by the ordinary school routine, and since you so overfed yourselves last night—choo-chah!—at that disgraceful orgy, I shall place you all on short commons!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

The suspicion of a smile curled the corners of Mr. Ratcliff's thin lips as he noted the consternation this announcement had caused.

"The following boys will remain behind to receive their punishment," he said, and he consulted a list. He read out the names of Tom Merry, Lowther, Talbot, Glyn, Clifton Dane, Blake, Levison, D'Arcy, and Herries.

"Those, it appears, were the ringleaders in last night's unprecedented affair," said Ratty viciously. "The other boys may go."

There was a buzz in Hall as the juniors turned to go.

The boys whose names had been read out looked ruefully at each other. There was no help for it. They were in Ratty's hands, and the prefects were there to keep order. True, Kildare & Co. did not appear to sympathise with Mr. Ratcliff, but they had to perform their duty and obey his orders.

One by one those nine juniors filed before Ratty, who wielded the cane with amazing vim and vigour. He was, however, panting and exhausted by the time he had completed his onerous task.

He stood there on the dais, alternately sneezing and gasping.

"Each of you will take a thousand lines of Virgil, and will deliver them to me by to-morrow night!" he rasped. "You will, of course, go on short commons with the others. Now go! Ah-ti-shoo!"

The luckless nine left the Hall, gasping.

Their chums were standing in an anxious group outside.

"Hard cheese!" said Kangaroo, when Tom Merry had told them of Ratty's revenge. "That old tyrant will overstep the mark before long, and then there'll be ructions!"

Baggy Trimble was wildly indignant.

"Fancy the rotter putting us on short commons!" he roared. "He's got no right to cut down our grub! I shall jolly well write to my people about it! They pay for my food here, and I'll see that I get it!"

"The beastly outsider!"

"The awful Hun!"

There were clouded brows and gleaming eyes in the School House that day.

When dinner-time came round, and the juniors assembled in the dining-hall, they found Mr. Ratcliff there, looking

more watery-eyed than ever, superintending the issuing out of the food.

The Shell and Fourth partook of a very frugal meal. Each boy, with the exception of Ratty minor, was given a small helping, so small as to be almost negligible, and they groaned when they found that there was no pudding for them afterwards. They filed out of the dining-hall feeling hungry and wrathful. Baggy Trimble, in fact, was almost in tears.

"I'm famished! I've had no dinner! Oh, dear!" he moaned. "I know my health will give way. You chaps know what a delicate constitution I've got. If Ratty keeps this up, I shall gradually fade away and die!"

"Well, that will be one blessing, anyway!" said Blake.

"Yah! Unfeeling rotter! Oh dear! I do feel ravenous!"

Baggy rolled upstairs, lamenting his lot, and the hungry savage juniors went out into the quadrangle. They tried to obtain some things at the tuckshop, but Mrs. Taggles shook her head sorrowfully—she did not like to turn away customers.

"I'm sorry, young gentlemen, but Mr. Ratcliff has ordered me not to serve you," she said.

"Can't I buy just a tart or two?" asked Monty Lowther desperately.

"No, Master Lowther!"

"Or a bar of chocolate?" demanded Herries.

"I'm sorry, Master Herries, but I mustn't serve you!"

Blake sparred furiously at an imaginary figure of Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

"Oh, if only I could have just a little while alone with him, to do as I like!" he said fervently. "I'd give a term's pocket-money for ten minutes with Ratty!"

The juniors went up and down the School House, seeking all that they might devour. But they did not find much. Mr. Ratcliff had forestalled them, and had ordered the fags and the seniors not to give them anything. Wally D'Arcy informed Tom Merry & Co. that his spirit was willing to allay their hunger, but his means were weak. He generously offered them a pair of kippers which he had saved from yesterday's tea, and a solitary sardine in a tin. These, however, were not accepted, although Tom Merry & Co. appreciated the good spirit of the offer. Baggy Trimble managed to exchange a penknife for a chunk of grubby toffee with Curly Gibson of the Third, and that was all the sustenance he had in addition to his scanty dinner.

By the time afternoon lessons were over, the whole Shell and Fourth were in a state bordering on cannibalism. Mr. Ratcliff herded them down to tea in Hall, but that meal was more frugal, even, than dinner had been. The juniors were just as ravenous after tea as before.

The Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co. met Figgins & Co. in the quadrangle. The heroes of the New House were looking particularly bright and gay. Now that Mr. Ratcliff was confining all his attention to the School House, the boys in his own House were enjoying a very welcome respite from his tyrannies.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, staring at the dismal-looking School House fellows. "You chaps are looking pretty blue. It's Ratty, I suppose?"

"Haven't you heard?" moaned Blake. "We're on short commons."

"Yes, we did hear," said Figgins sympathetically. "Too bad, isn't it? We know what it is to put up with Ratty's tantrums, and we're jolly sorry for you."

"He's cut down our dinner!" said Monty Lowther furiously. "That's the order! All we had to-day was one small helping, and no pudding."

"No pudding?" cried Fatty Wynn, in horror. "N-n-no pudding! Oh crumbs!"

"And tea in studies is stopped, and we're barred from the tuckshop!" groaned Herries. "We have to stand tea in Hall every day, now. And there was no jam or cake to-day. Only weak tea, with hardly any sugar, and two thin slices of bread. What do you think of that?"

"Oh dear!" said Fatty Wynn. "I couldn't put up with that! It's too horrible to think about. Is that really all you have had to eat?"

"That's all!"

Fatty shuddered at the bare thought of going on such short commons.

"We're not going to stand it!" howled Blake. "It's too thick!"

"What can you do?" said Figgins. "It's jolly hard lines, but you can't scrag a Housemaster, you know; 'tain't allowed."

"And we jolly well can't starve!" snorted Manners. "Something will have to be done, or we shall annihilate Ratcliff!"

"Tell you what," said Figgins, "you chaps can come over and have some grub in our place. We've got some tuck left over from tea, and we can get some more from the

tuckshop. Ratty hasn't barred us, I hope! Will you be our guests?"

"Will we!" cried Monty Lowther joyously. "Try us! Figgy, old chap, you're a giddy good Samaritan! I've said some hard things about you in my time, and I've written Limericks on the New House in my comic column in the 'Weekly,' but I retract 'em all now. Anything for a mouthful of real grub!"

"This way, then!" grinned Figgins good-humouredly.

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. went with their rivals willingly. Paul Ratcliff, who was standing under the elms, saw them pass into the New House, and his eyes took on a cunning gleam. He hurried away into the School House.

Figgins & Co. took their hungry rivals up to their study, and there provided them with a feed that made their eyes sparkle and their mouths water. They were tackling the remains of a rabbit-pie between them when the door opened and Mr. Ratcliff strode in.

"So you are still defying my orders!" he rapped. "And you, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, are aiding and abetting them. You School House boys will take another five hundred lines each, and will leave this House immediately!"

Tom Merry & Co. went, and it was only by dint of superhuman restraint that they forebore from hurling themselves on Ratty and wiping up the floor with him.

Figgins & Co. were caned, and the New House was placed out of bounds to the School House juniors.

By that means the rascally tyrant of St. Jim's prevented Figgins & Co. from giving sustenance to their ravenous rivals across the way, and Tom Merry & Co. went to bed that night feeling very hungry and savage.

CHAPTER 9.

One Against Many!

RATTY was determined that his laws should be enforced, and he went to great pains to achieve that end. The short-commons edict was carried out to the letter, and Ratty took elaborate precautions against his victims obtaining surreptitious supplies.

Paul Ratcliff acted as spy for his rascally uncle, and on those rare occasions when tuck was somehow smuggled into the junior studies, Ratty minor, as soon as he got to know of it, bore information to the tyrant.

The Hungry Brigade raged at the gross unfairness of it all, and they looked forward eagerly to the time when either the Head or Mr. Railton returned. The other masters at St. Jim's were sympathetic towards them, but were unable to overrule Ratty. The tyrant was monarch of all he surveyed, and there was none to dispute his right to do as he liked.

The School House juniors went about with hungry, savage looks. Rebellion smouldered in their breasts, and it needed only a spark now to set the smouldering fires aflame.

Their unhappy feelings were reflected in all they did. They slackened considerably in their school work, and lessons became more of an ordeal than ever. They did not seem to have the same spirit for their games, either. Tom Merry worried over this considerably, for on the following Wednesday afternoon an important football-match with Redclyffe was due to take place.

Tom kept his team hard at practice, but he could not help noticing that some of the fellows were decidedly "off colour." Short commons, and that rankling feeling of injustice fostered by Mr. Ratcliff's tyrannies, were not calculated to keep up in the boys a very high standard of physical fitness.

The St. Jim's juniors were looking forward to that match, which was one of the last big matches of the season. Redclyffe School had a junior eleven that was far-famed for its prowess, and Tom Merry knew that the game would be a stiff one.

Ratty minor surprised him on the afternoon before the match by broaching the subject. He buttonholed the junior skipper as he was coming off the playing-field.

"I say, Merry, I suppose you haven't got a place for me in the team to play against Redclyffe to-morrow?" he asked. The junior captain looked him up and down contemptuously.

"You!" he exclaimed. "A place for you in the team! Oh, my only hat! I should jolly well say not!"

Ratty minor scowled.

"And why not?" he demanded. "I suppose I've as much right to a place as anyone else?"

"You might have, if you could play footer," replied Tom. "But you can't play footer for toffee, you worm! Why, you're as big a slacker at games as Trimble or Mellish or Racke. Kildare always has to drag you down to footer practice."

"I can play football if I like," growled Paul Ratcliff, his small eyes glittering. "I want a chance to play in a match, and I reckon I'm entitled to a place in the team to-morrow."

"You can go on reckoning, then," said Tom. "I'd as

soon put Trimble in the team as you, you weedy rotter. Why, I've never heard of such cool cheek! You can go and eat coke!"

Paul Ratcliff's eyes glittered as Tom Merry turned on his heel and strode away.

"The rotter; he gives all the places in the team to his own particular pals, and leaves the others out!" he muttered. "I belong to the Fourth, and I'm entitled to a show in that match. And I'll jolly well see that I get one, too!"

He walked indoors and made his way up to Mr. Ratcliff's room.

Tom Merry & Co. were seated in Study No. 10 when Joe Frayne of the Third looked in.

"Ratty wants to see you, Merry," he said.

The chums looked at each other.

"Oh, crumbs! What's the trouble now?" gasped Manners. "Some petty little complaint, I suppose. Your hands ought to be just about hardened to the cane now, Tommy, old scout!"

"They are, practically!" said the leader of the Terrible Three with a grim smile. "I'm getting to the end of my patience with Ratcliff, though. If he starts any of his larks now, I shall tell him what I think of him, and hang the consequences! After all, it can't be long before Mr. Railton comes back."

He made his way to Mr. Ratcliff's room and tapped.

The New-Housemaster's acid voice bade him come in.

Paul Ratcliff was standing by the desk, and he grinned cynically at the Shell captain.

"You wanted me, sir?" said Tom, ignoring the Ratcliff minor.

"Yes, Merry," replied Mr. Ratcliff tersely. "My nephew informs me that you have refused to allow him to play football in a match that takes place to-morrow. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir, that is so," replied Tom quietly.

"Do not speak to me in that insolent tone, Merry!" rapped the tyrant harshly, incensed at Tom Merry's calm and unperturbed manner. "It appears that you have excluded Paul from the team for no other reason than sheer personal animosity. What right have you to do that?"

Tom Merry felt his anger rising, and he set his teeth hard.

"I have every right, sir, as captain of the team, to use my own discretion in selecting my players," he said. "The match is a very important one, and I have put none but the very best players into the team. Ratcliff is not even a good player; in fact, he has shirked football practice ever since he came here, and I wouldn't think of including him in the Junior Eleven."

Ratty minor scowled, and Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip with temper.

"Merry, how dare you couch your reply in those insolent terms!" he rasped. "I can see more than ever now that you bear my nephew a grudge, and that you intend keeping him out of the team through petty spite. I do not encourage that spirit."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom, quite involuntarily.

Ratty's small eyes glittered at him.

"I do not approve of your attitude towards my nephew, Merry, and I command you to give him a place in the team!" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry looked aghast at the Housemaster.

"You—you command me to put Ratcliff into the team, sir?" he asked.

"That, precisely, is my meaning, Merry!" was the harsh retort.

"Impossible, sir!"

"What!" thundered Ratty, starting up.

"It's quite impossible, sir," said Tom Merry, facing the tyrannical master with flashing eyes. "The list of players is already made out, and I could not think for one moment of putting Ratcliff into the team!"

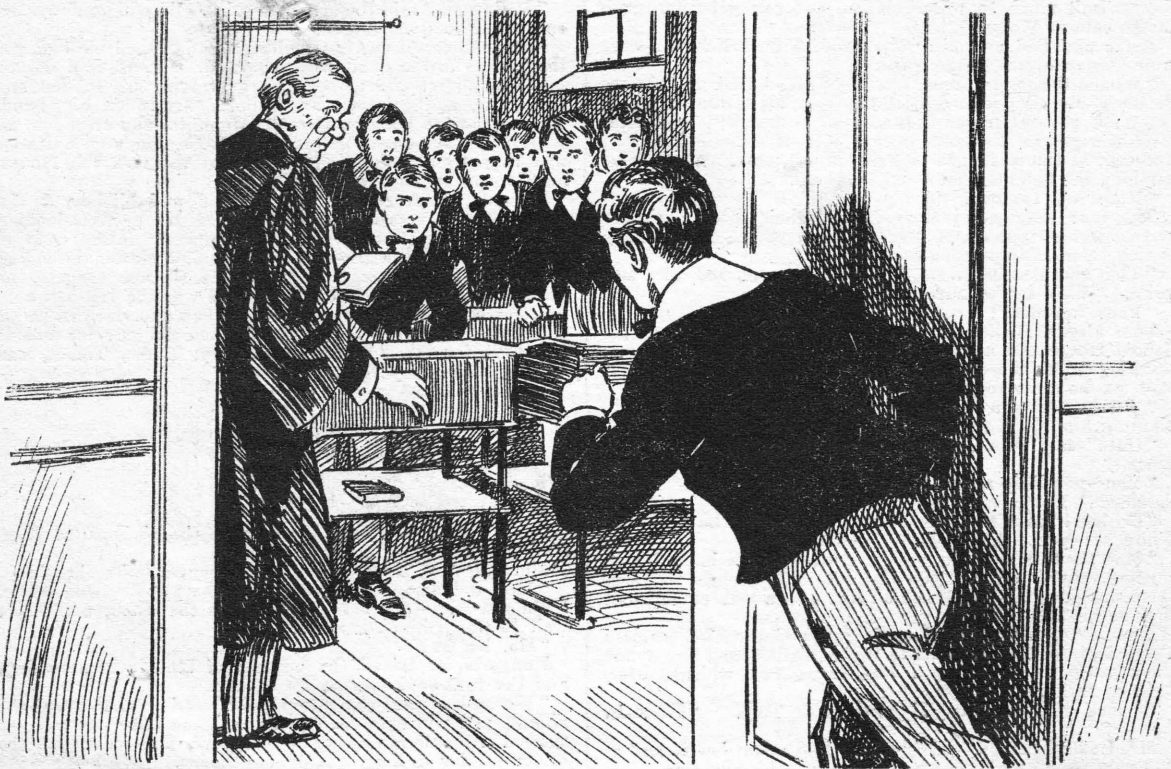
"Merry!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff, his thin face working with rage. "You dare disobey my orders! You—"

"I'm sorry, sir, but you have no authority to interfere in our junior eleven arrangements," said Tom, without flinching. "I am the captain of the team, and it rests with me as to whether Ratcliff shall play or not. I say he's not good enough for the team, and he's not going in!"

"Good heavens!" Mr. Ratcliff could hardly believe his ears. "Merry, you audacious little scoundrel! I command you to put my nephew into the team—"

"I can't, sir, and I won't!" Tom was thoroughly angry now, and he clenched his fists hard. "You've got no right to order me about like that! You may cane me, sir, or you may flog me, but you'll never make me consent to put that weedy, good-for-nothing slacker into our football team!"

That was too much for Mr. Ratcliff. He clutched a cane and made a rush at Tom. The Shell captain noted the move and dodged round the study. He saw his opportunity, and wrenched open the door, but as he made to dash out of the room he ran into the arms of Blake, D'Arcy, and Talbot, who had just arrived with impots in their hands.



Flushed and wild-eyed Jack Blake rushed into the Shell class-room. "Rescue, you fellows!" he shouted. "Ratcliff and Knox have got D'Arcy locked up alone and Ratty's flogging him! We're not going to stand that!" "No fear!" cried Tom Merry, springing out of his seat and leading the way to the door. "Up the rebels! This is where we declare war on Ratcliff!" (See page 22.)

"Bai Jove! Gwoogh!" gasped D'Arcy, staggering back. "What the merry dickens—" began Blake. He was interrupted by a yell from Tom Merry. Mr. Ratcliff had grasped him by the coat-collar and hauled him back into the room, and was whacking furiously at him with the cane. "Yarough! Ow! Oh! Stoppit, you rotter!" shouted Tom, struggling desperately to get free. "Leave me alone! Oh! Yoop! Rescue!" Blake, Gussy, and Talbot needed no second bidding. They made a rush at Mr. Ratcliff and dragged him away from their leader. Arthur Augustus seized the cane and sent it spinning into a far corner. Tom Merry stood, panting, by the table, whilst Mr. Ratcliff, almost frantic with rage, tore himself free. "We're sorry we had to manhandle you, sir," said Blake grimly, "but we couldn't stand still and watch you pitching into Merry like a hooligan. We're fed up with you and your rotten ways!" "What—what!" screeched Mr. Ratcliff. "Blake, how dare you!" "We dare anything now, sir," said Blake recklessly. "You're a bully and a tyrant, and we mean to stick up for ourselves!" "Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye. "I regard you as an unweasonin' boundah, Mr. Watcliff! May I wrequest to know what the wumpus was about, Tom Mewwy?" "Mr. Rattelf ordered me to give this rotter a place in the team for our match with Redclyffe to-morrow!" said Tom hotly. "He didn't like it when I refused, and he went for me with the cane!" "Bai Jove!" "The awful cheek!" ejaculated Talbot. "Mr. Rattelf has no right to boss our footer! We'll stand by you, Tommy!" "What-ho!" said Blake angrily. "We'd do anything rather than play that measly worm!" "Boys, have you taken leave of your senses?" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. "You dare insult me in that manner, and brazenly flaunt my authority! You shall be flogged for this!" "Try it on, sir!" exclaimed Blake. "You'd have a job! The whole School House is fed up with you and your rotten ways, and it won't take much to start a revolt. You're welcome to try flogging us, sir." Mr. Ratcliff paused, breathing hard through his nose. Perhaps he realised that he had overstepped the mark, and

that it would be best to climb down, however much it rankled. "Silence! Not another word!" he fumed. "You boys had better not goad me further, or I shall keep my threat. You will all be detained to-morrow afternoon, and will write out lines from Virgil in the Fourth Form room instead of taking the usual half-holiday. Now go!" Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, and Talbot left the study, looking dismayed and wrathful. "Gated to-morrow afternoon—the four of us!" exclaimed Blake. "Can't you see Ratty's wheeze? He saw that he couldn't pitchfork his rotten nephew into the team, so he thought he'd put the stopper on our match by detaining us!" "The fwrightful outsiders!" Tom Merry set his teeth. "That's Ratty's idea, right enough," he said. "But it won't work! Are you chaps game to break detention?" "Yaas, wathah!" "Sure thing, Tommy!" "We're driven to the wall now, and we'll take matters in our own hands a bit!" said Tom decisively. "Ratty has gone too far, and he can jolly well put up with the consequences. He won't muck up our match to-morrow, that's a cert. We'll get out, if we have to pull the whole giddy school gown." "Ha, ha, ha!" When the juniors heard of the detention of Tom Merry, Blake, Talbot, and D'Arcy, their anger reached boiling-point. Mr. Ratcliff's attempted interference with the junior eleven infuriated them. Paul Ratcliff was practically sent to Coventry that evening, and all announced their readiness to back up Tom Merry in his defiance of the tyrannical New House master. Wednesday dawned bright and sunny, and by midday the sun was pouring down brightly on the countryside, whilst a fresh, stiff breeze blew up from the west. "What a topping day!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the Shell trooped out of the Form-room after lessons. "Just right for footer! Are you ready, Talbot? We've got to meet Blake and Gussy and cut off quick!" "I'm ready," said Talbot quietly. "It's a jolly good plan of yours, Tommy, to break away before dinner." "Ratty has an idea that we mean to cut loose, I think," said Tom. "He'll be waiting on us after dinner to yank us to the Form-room. But if we get out before dinner, he'll be properly done in the eye. Now we're on short commons,

dinner isn't much to miss. Besides, we can get some grub in the cafe at Wayland."

Blake and D'Arcy and a number of Fourth-Formers were waiting downstairs in the quad.

"What's the programme, Tommy?" asked Blake. "Do we do the giddy disappearing trick before or after dinner?"

"We'll get our footer togs and run off now," said Tom. "We can get to Wayland, have a peck of something to eat, and wait at the station for the rest of the team. We shall be catching the two-ten train from Wayland."

"Right-ho, Tommy!"

The four detained juniors fetched their football clothes and made neat parcels of them. Blake spotted Ratty minor eyeing them as they came downstairs.

"That rotter smells a rat, I think," he remarked, in a soft voice. "We'd better hurry!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry, Blake, Talbot, and Gussy hurried out of the School House and made their way to the gates. Knox was standing under the elms, and when he saw them with their caps on, he came running over.

"Where are you young sweeps going?" he demanded, planting himself in the juniors' path.

"Out!" said Tom Merry laconically. "Move away there, Knox!"

"You—you little rascals!" exclaimed the prefect. "You're detained! You're not allowed out of gates!"

"Go hon!" said Blake cheerily. "You must be mistaken, Knox, old sport. Anyway, we're going out!"

"Stop them, Knox!" came a wild shriek from behind, and, turning, the juniors beheld Mr. Ratcliff dashing towards them, his gown billowing behind him and a look of impotent fury on his face.

Knox made a rush at Tom Merry, and the Shell captain closed with him. Next minute Blake, Talbot, and Gussy laid their grasp on the prefect, and Knox was whirled over, fighting furiously.

"Chuck him at Ratty!" exclaimed Tom. "Here he comes!"

Mr. Ratcliff pounded up, snorting like a war-horse, and as he approached, the juniors hurled Knox in his direction.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Bless my soul! Ooooooh!"

Ratty was bowled over like a ninepin, and he gave a yell that awoke the echoes as he lay on his back on the ground, with Knox moaning beside him.

"Now's our chance, you fellows!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

The four escaped juniors dashed through the gates, followed by the jubilant cheers of the onlookers.

They were out of sight by the time Mr. Ratcliff and Knox struggled to their feet. Ratty fairly flew to the gates and out into Rylcombe Lane. He was just in time to see the runaways turn the bend. They waved to him as they passed from his view.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" roared Blake from the distance. "See you later!"

"Gug-g-g-good heavens! Yow! The reckless young scoundrels!" gurgled Mr. Ratcliff. "Knox, you dolt, why did you let them escape? After them, do you hear? Take out your bicycle and have them apprehended in Rylcombe!"

Knox raced to the bicycle shed and dragged out his machine. He mounted with a rush and pedalled away furiously on the trail of the runaways.

The juniors in the quadrangle chortled.

"Poor old Ratty!" gasped Monty Lowther. "He's almost tearing his hair! I wonder he doesn't take a bike out, too! It would be grand to see him join in the giddy Marathon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff did not take out a bicycle. He stormed in the gateway and glared incessantly down the lane, whither the runaways and Knox had gone.

Knox came into view ten minutes later, wheeling his machine on the back wheel, the front wheel being twisted and bent almost double. Knox himself was only just recognisable, for he was smothered in mud from head to foot, and a festoon of weeds dangled gracefully around his neck. He squelched up to the gates, and stood there making incoherent sounds.

"Gooooo-hooo! Gerroch!"

"Knox," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a faint voice, "what—what has happened?"

"Ow! Yooogh! The little rotters waylaid me in the—yow-wow—lane, sir, and in trying to—groogh—dodge them I ran into a—wow—ditch! Oooooch!" gurgled Knox.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

"Silence!" stormed Mr. Ratcliff. "This is no laughing matter! Grooogh! Do not approach too closely, Knox. The effluvium from that mud is most overpowering! Where have the young scoundrels gone now?"

"Yerroogh!" moaned Knox. "They went to Rylcombe, sir."

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"Very well," said the tyrant angrily. "I will go down and endeavour to trace them."

Knox squelched away, trundling his damaged bicycle, and the juniors in the quadrangle chortled. Mr. Ratcliff dashed indoors and reappeared soon after, wearing his top-hat and frock-coat, and gripping an umbrella firmly in his hand. With him were Kildare, Darrell, Monteith, and Rushden, all with their caps on. The prefects left St. Jim's with Ratty, and they seemed far from pleased at the task the House-master had imposed on them.

Dinner was over when Mr. Ratcliff and Kildare & Co. returned. They came in empty-handed, the prefects looking fed-up and Mr. Ratcliff frantically furious. Ratty went in immediate search of the rest of the junior eleven, intending to detain them instead. But, to his further chagrin, he discovered that they had gone. This was the last straw to Mr. Horace Ratcliff's temper. He raged and stormed in his study, and the boys who heard him from the corridor outside trembled for the fate of Tom Merry, Blake, Talbot, and D'Arcy when they returned.

CHAPTER 10.

Smouldering Fires!

"HERE we are again, kids!"

"All serene, Tommy?"

"Rather!"

The four fugitives were on the platform at Wayland Station when the others arrived.

Merry, Blake, Talbot, and Gussy seemed quite cheerful.

"How did Knox look when he got back?" inquired Blake. "We saw him take a high dive into the ditch, but didn't wait to watch him come out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kangaroo explained the manner of Knox's homecoming, and the runaways roared.

"We took a short cut through the wood so as to avoid the village, and when we reached the road on the other side we spotted a motor-van going to Wayland, and we tipped the driver to give us a lift," said Tom Merry. "We had a good feed when we got here—the first square meal for days!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It was weally pwime, deah boys!"

"Well, Ratty must be raving now," grinned Manners. "He'll want to massacre the lot of us when we get back to St. Jim's!"

"Oh, blow Ratty!" said Tom Merry. "I'm thinking of the match, not of what's coming after. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, you know."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

The heroes of St. Jim's took the train to Redclyffe, and arrived there in good time.

Their victory over Ratty seemed to have imbued them with renewed spirits and energy, and they felt ready and eager for the fray.

"This is where it behoves us to play the game of our lives, my sons!" said Tom Merry, as they changed in the Redclyffe pavilion. "We must win the match after taking so much trouble to get here to play it."

"Hear, hear!"

The St. Jim's Junior Eleven played that afternoon as they had never played before. They meant to return victorious to the old school, and that determination urged them on. They put up a solid defence to the hurricane attacks of the Redclyffians in the first half, and Fatty Wynn, in goal, astounded the home team and spectators alike with his marvellous powers of goalkeeping. The score was 1-1 when half-time arrived, and both sides were a little breathless.

Tom Merry & Co. took the offensive in the second half, and they attacked the enemy territory with unanimity and precision. The lanky-legged Figgins on the left wing and Talbot on the right wing did their duty right nobly, and, together with Tom Merry, Blake, and Gussy in the forward line, they wrought havoc with the Redclyffe defence by their clever passing. Tom Merry, receiving the ball by a brilliant pass from Figgins, shot it into the net like lightning, leaving the home goalie without the ghost of a chance of saving it. Play became one long sequence of thrills after that, and Redclyffe, despite their hard striving, failed to equalise. The final blow of the whistle saw Tom Merry & Co. the victors by the odd goal.

The Redclyffe fellows cheered their visitors for their gallant game, and took them away to a splendid tea. Needless to say, the St. Jim's boys did this full justice, and they thrilled their hosts with an account of the stirring times they had been passing through at St. Jim's.

Once back on the train, en route for Rylcombe, their thoughts reverted to Ratty. What revenge had he in store for them when they got back? What would be the next item on the already long list of their troubles?

"This much is certain, my sons," said Tom Merry, as they walked along Rylcombe Lane through the gathering dusk. "Ratty won't have things so much his own way now. The

chaps have got their backs up, and if we lead the way in a rebellion against Ratty they'll all join us. A jolly good barring-out in the School House might bring the old rotter to his senses. After all, we've got plenty of reasons for revolt, and no one could blame us if we did kick against the traces. As for this afternoon's business, Ratty had no right to interfere in the team, and it was through his interference, and our sticking up for our rights, that we got detained. We were perfectly justified in breaking detention, and we've every right to resist Ratty if he tries to rag us."

"Hear, hear!"

"I, for one, am not standing any of Ratty's nonsense!" said Blake.

"Neithah am I, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Watty can go and eat coke, bai Jove!"

The junior eleven arrived at St. Jim's, to find a number of eager fellows waiting for them at the gates.

"Who won?" was the first question asked them.

"We did!" grinned Tom Merry. "The score was 2-1, and it was a jolly hot game, I can tell you."

"Hurrah!"

"Jolly good!" said Kerruish enthusiastically. "But Ratty—"

"Yes, how's our old pal Ratty?" inquired Blake.

"He's raving!" said Cardew. "He means to get his own back, though. There's a notice in the Hall that will rather interest you chaps. Ratty's barred all footer—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Playing-fields are closed to the Shell and Fourth by Ratty's order!" grinned Cardew. "And he's got Merry, Blake, Gussy, and Talbot down for a public flogging to-night!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry's teeth snapped down hard together.

"So Ratty's closed the playing-fields, and we're in for a flogging—eh?" he exclaimed. "We shall see about that."

The junior footballers went indoors, and they gathered in the Common-room to discuss matters.

"What are you going to do, Tommy?" asked Monty Lowther anxiously. "You surely won't knuckle down to Ratty and let him flog you?"

"No fear!" said Tom. "There won't be any flogging to-night, at any rate. I've got a wheeze that will make sure of that. I'm going to smash up all the birch rods."

"Whew!"

The juniors looked in astonishment at Tom.

"That's the first action in our campaign against Ratty," said the young Shell captain grimly. "We sha'n't let Ratty run things just as he likes in our House. The time has come for us to kick, and kick hard!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused the juniors unanimously.

"Not a word to Ratty minor, but my plan is to get at the school birches and smash 'em!" went on Tom. "Ratty can't flog four chaps without a birch, can he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No fear."

"All the birches are kept in the cupboard in the Sixth Form room," said Tom. "I want a few chaps to come with me now and keep cave while I get in there."

Volunteers were quickly forthcoming, and a few minutes later Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Blake, Herries, and Kangaroo left the Common-room to carry the plan into execution.

Blake fetched a chisel and a hammer from his study, and the expedition moved off to the Sixth Form room.

That august apartment was dark and deserted when the juniors arrived there. Tom Merry and Blake went in while the others kept cave. The cupboard wherein the dreaded birches were kept stood at the farther end of the room. The lock soon yielded to the persuasions of the chisel and the hammer, and Tom swung the door open.

Six birch-rods hung in sinister array inside the cupboard.

"There's no time like the present, my son, so let's smash 'em up now!" chuckled the junior captain.

"What-ho!"

The rods were taken out one by one and smashed with great thoroughness. They were quickly reduced to fragments, fit only for firewood. The pieces were left at the bottom of the cupboard, and the juniors departed, chuckling.

When they arrived back in the Common-room they found Kildare and a number of prefects waiting to collar them.

"So you've come back!" said Kildare grimly, taking Merry's arm. "I'm sorry, Merry, but you've got to come along to Hall. The school assembles there shortly, and you four are booked for a flogging."

"All serene, Kildare," said Blake. "We'll go quietly. As a matter of fact, we're rather looking forward to the flogging episode."

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare and his colleagues looked queerly at the four juniors as they led them away to Big Hall. They could see that the youthful delinquents had something up their sleeves, but they made no comment.

Ten minutes later the rest of the school assembled in Hall. Tom Merry, Blake, Talbot, and D'Arcy were standing in a row in front, closely guarded by the prefects. Taggles, the old and ancient porter, was on the dais, looking very pompous and important. His duty at a public flogging was to hoist the victim across his back.

The buzz of excited voices in Hall died down when the tall, spare figure of Mr. Ratcliff appeared.

That something had happened was apparent, for Ratty was looking madly furious.

He faced the school with eyes that glittered like a wild cat's.

He had to gulp once or twice before he could summon sufficient mastery of himself to speak.

"Boys, an outrage—an unprecedented outrage—has occurred, which will necessitate the postponement of the flogging which you came here to witness!" he rasped. "Some young rascal, or rascals, had the audacity this evening to break open a cupboard in the Sixth Form room and smash the birch-rods, rendering them useless!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A loud, lifting roar of laughter arose from the boys in Hall.

Mr. Ratcliff's face and his voice and the burden of his announcement were all so funny that the school yelled.

Even Kildare & Co. chuckled softly. The four juniors in front, however, did not join in with the general ribaldry. They stood there, looking demurely innocent.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at them like a gargoyle.

"Blake! Merry! I demand of you to tell me whether you know anything of the outrage!" he bellowed.

Blake hung his head.

"I—I cannot tell a lie, sir!" he said. "I'm like George Washington. I did it with my hatchet—I mean hammer!"

"And I did it with a chisel, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The school was fairly in an uproar.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "All Forms will disperse in an orderly manner! Merry, Blake, Talbot, D'Arcy, you may go for the present. I—I will deal with you to-morrow!"

With that Ratty left the Hall, looking as incensed as it was possible for a man to look.

There was great rejoicing in the School House that night over the manner in which Tom Merry & Co. had once again scored over the tyrant.

What would Ratty do now? That was the question that exercised everybody's mind. Tom Merry & Co. were as determined as ever not to knuckle down to him. In ordinary times they were sticklers for discipline, but under the present circumstances they felt that they were justified in defying Ratty.

The fires of revolt were ready to burst forth at a moment's notice in the School House at St. Jim's. The long-suffering juniors needed but the word from Tom Merry, and they would rise up under his leadership and declare civil war on the oppressor!

CHAPTER 11.

Open Rebellion!

"RATTY'S lying low!" said Manners.

"Perhaps he's windy, and wants to let the matter drop," suggested Digby.

"H'm!"

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. had gathered in Study No. 10 in the Shell passage after dinner next day. The short commons order was still in force, and the meal had been very frugal, as usual.

Tom Merry & Co. could not understand it. The whole morning had passed, and Ratty had done nothing to get his revenge. The juniors had fully expected him to attempt to administer the floggings that morning, for just after morning chapel Taggles had been sent over to Rylcombe Grammar School with a note from Mr. Ratcliff to Dr. Monk, requesting the loan of a birch-rod, and Taggles had brought back a hefty birch, which Ratty now guarded. Baggy Trimble had ferreted out that news; and Taggles, when questioned on the subject, confirmed it.

Yet Ratty had allowed the whole morning to go by, and nothing had happened. Could it be, as Digby had suggested, that the tyrannical master was losing his nerve, and had decided to go no further with the matter? Yet that seemed so unlike Ratty, who was the last word in vindictiveness. Perhaps, after all, he was only lying low.

The time for afternoon lessons came round, and still there was no sign of activity on Mr. Ratcliff's part. The Fourth Form assembled in the Form room, greatly wondering.

Mr. Lathom found his pupils very inattentive at their lessons, but he knew that the unrest that had been so marked among the juniors lately was due to Mr. Ratcliff's tyrannical regime.

He was struggling through construction with Baggy Trimble when the Form-room door opened and Toby, the page, looked in.

"Please, sir, Mr. Ratcliff wishes to see Master D'Arcy in his study," he announced.

Mr. Lathom looked at the swell over the rims of his eyeglasses.

"D'Arcy, you may go," he said.

Arthur Augustus rose from his desk and left the Form-room wondering.

Jack Blake looked uneasy. What did Ratty want with Gussy? It must be a very important matter, he thought, for him to send for D'Arcy in the middle of afternoon lessons.

Blake sat at his desk pondering the question for some time. Then all of a sudden he heard a snigger on his left hand, and, looking round, he saw Paul Ratcliff chuckling gleefully to himself, as though enjoying a great joke.

A sudden, swift suspicion then flashed into Blake's mind.

Had Mr Ratcliff sent for Gussy in order to get him into his study alone to flog him? If Ratty still intended flogging the four runaways, but feared interference from the other juniors, that would be an excellent ruse. With all the other boys at lessons, and nobody to interfere with him, Ratty could send for the four delinquents one by one and have them at his mercy.

The more Blake thought of this the more convinced he felt that he was right. With a sudden impulse, he sprang up from his seat.

Mr. Lathom's eyes sought him out at once.

"Well, Blake?" asked the master gravely.

"Please, sir, may—may I be excused?" stammered the junior, not knowing what to say.

"For what reason do you wish to be excused lessons, Blake?" asked Mr. Lathom.

"I—I want to look after D'Arcy, sir!" burst out Blake. "I believe Mr. Ratcliff has decoyed him to his study for a flogging, and I—I want to go and make sure!"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Lathom was as astounded as the boys. "I certainly cannot excuse you on those grounds, Blake! I— Good heavens! The boy is decamping! Blake, come back!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I must look after D'Arcy!" exclaimed Blake as he made for the door.

Mr. Lathom was quite taken aback, and he stood by the blackboard, gasping. Blake dashed out of the Form-room, his heart beating wildly, but his mind fully made up. If Gussy was in trouble Blake meant to take a hand in the proceedings.

He tore along to Mr. Ratcliff's study, and as he neared that apartment he heard the well-known voice of his noble chum raised in accents of anguish.

"Oh, you wottahs! You bullies! Leave me alone! Hands off, Knox, you feahful cad! Mr. Watcliff, I pwo-test— Ooooooogh!"

Lash! Lash! Lash!

There followed the ominous sound of the birch rod, and Blake knew, then, that his suspicion was correct.

Gussy was in that room, at the mercy of Mr. Ratcliff and Knox. The junior's blood boiled as he heard those cruel, lashing strokes and his chum's cries of pain that followed.

Blake wrenched at the door handle, but found that the door was locked. He commenced to kick and thump on it.

"Open this door, you cads!" he shouted. "Let D'Arcy go, Mr. Ratcliff, do you hear?"

Lash! Lash! Lash!

The tyrant must have heard Blake, yet he continued the flogging of D'Arcy.

Blake gritted his teeth, and his eyes glistened with the light of resolution.

"Hang on, Gussy!" he shouted. "I'm going for help!" He dashed away to the Shell Form-room.

Mr. Linton was in the middle of a maths lesson when Blake burst open the class-room door. The Fourth Former was flushed and wild-eyed.

"Rescue, you fellows!" he shouted. "Ratcliff and Knox have got D'Arcy locked up alone, and Ratty's flogging him! We're not going to stand that!"

"No fear!" came the ready answer from the boys of the Shell.

Mr. Linton sprang to his feet in amazement.

"Boys—boys what does this mean?" he cried. "I—"

"Up the rebels!" shouted Tom Merry, springing out of his seat and leading the way to the door. "This is where we declare war on Ratcliff!"

"Hurrah!" roared the Shell fellows.

They left their books and followed Tom Merry's call.

"Boys—boys—" cried the astounded Mr. Linton; but his voice was drowned in the juniors' excited war-cries and the trampling of feet as they pounded from the Form-room.

They dashed along to Mr. Ratcliff's study, whilst Blake went back to his own Form-room to summon the others to join the revolt against Ratty.

The birch rod could be heard lashing away furiously in Mr. Ratcliff's room. Gussy, in spite of himself, was crying out with pain.

Tom Merry rapped on the door.

"Stop, Mr. Ratcliff!" he shouted. "Stop it, do you hear? And open this door, you rotter!"

They heard Mr. Ratcliff give vent to an exclamation of anger and amazement.

"Return to your Form-rooms, you little rascals!" he cried fiercely. "Go away! How dare you interfere!"

"We jolly well mean to interfere!" retorted Tom Merry hotly. "We've stood enough from you, but this is the limit! The worms will turn, you know, and we're turning against you! Will you open this door?"

"No!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff from inside. "I do not take orders from juniors! You shall all suffer for this!"

"Yah!"

"Rats!"

"We're done with you, Ratcliff!"

At that juncture a horde of Fourth-Formers arrived, under the leadership of Jack Blake.

"Has the cad released Gussy yet?" panted Blake.

"No," said Tom Merry grimly. "Will you chaps fetch one of those heavy oak forms out of the lecture-room? We'll batter the door down if Ratty won't open it!"

"What-ho!"

A form was fetched, and the juniors ranged it against the housemaster's door.

"I give you the last warning, Ratcliff!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Will you open the door, or shall we batter it in?"

"You little hooligans! You wouldn't dare!" cried Ratty's voice, trembling now with fear as well as rage.

"Go away!" howled Knox from within. "We're not likely to open the door at your orders!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Let go with the form, you fellows!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The juniors, wielding the form, dealt the lock of the door a number of determined, shattering blows. The woodwork trembled under each successive onslaught, and a chorus of dismayed yells arose from Mr. Ratcliff and Knox.

Crash! Biff! Crash! Bang! went the form against the door.

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake suddenly. "The lock's busted!"

"Good egg!"

"Now for Ratcliff and that rotter Knox!" said Tom Merry between his teeth.

The rebels of the School House poured into the room, shouting their war-cry, "Down with Ratty!"

They were in deadly earnest now, and, once having started the revolt against the tyrannical Housemaster, they had no thought of turning back.

Mr. Ratcliff and Knox were overwhelmed. Knox went flying under the table with a fiendish yell, and a horde of juniors piled on top of him. Mr. Ratcliff made a wild break

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S CROSS WORD PUZZLE.

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for the door, but he was grasped in many hands and whirled back.

Blake sprang to D'Arcy's side. The swell's face was white and strained, but he smiled bravely.

"I—I'm all wight, deah boy!" he said. "The wuffian pitched into me with the birch. I was quite unpwepaished for this twap, you see. I should have suffahed far worse if you hadn't come along."

"I guessed what Ratty was up to," said Blake. "It was an artful trick, Gussy. I should have been the next victim to walk into the trap, I expect; and then Tommy and Talbot. Anyway, we've got the old tyrant now, and Knox, too!"

"Yerrrruuugh!" came Knox's voice in a muffled gurgle from under the table.

The juniors on the floor were giving him, as Monty Lowther expressed it, a "high old time." Knox was bumped and rolled over and sat on, and then soot was raked down from the chimney and rubbed into his hair, and all over his face, and a bottle of ink was poured over his head to add to the effect. The juniors were so tickled at Knox's appearance, indeed, that Mr. Ratcliff found an opportunity to break loose.

He burst his way through the laughing, hilarious juniors, and ran—actually ran—down the corridor, his gown flowing in shreds behind him.

"Ratty's gone!" hooted Baggy Trimble. "After him, you fellows! We'll rag him, too!"

"No; we'd better let Ratty go," said Tom Merry. "We'll kick Knox down the stairs, and then make arrangements for our barring-out!"

"Hurrah!"

"A barring-out's the thing!" chuckled Blake. "It's the only way to show the world at large, and Ratty in particular, that we mean business! Who's for a barring-out against Ratty?"

"We all are!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with Ratty!"

"We'll hold a barring-out till either Mr. Railton or the Head returns!" cried Tom Merry. "That'll give Ratty something to rave about! He's been asking for trouble all along, and now he'll get it!"

"What-ho!"

"Down with Ratty!"

Knox was raised in many hands and whirled out of the study. He was propelled to the top of the stairs and rolled down them.

Bump, bump, bump!

The rascally prefect smote each stair with a mighty smite, and his yells rang through the house.

"Yaroooogh! Yah! Ow! Wow! Oooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rebels.

Doors were opening, and startled voices demanding to know the cause of the disturbance.

Kildare was one of the first on the scene.

"We've revolted against Ratty, and we're going to hold a barring-out till he's gone from power," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Don't you try to chip in, Kildare. We're in real earnest, and we're out for our rights!"

"Why, you silly young idiots—"

"Yah!" roared the rebels. "We want our rights! Down with Ratty!"

"Hurrah!"

Tom Merry led the expedition downstairs.

"We'll hold the barring-out in the gym, my sons, for the time being," he said. "We must have some food supplies, especially as we've been starved by Ratty lately. We'll make up for it now. So first of all we'll clear the whole giddy larder of everything eatable that's in it."

"Good wheeze!" chuckled Kangaroo. "There's plenty of stuff in stock. The supplies only came in yesterday."

Tom Merry was nothing if not methodical. He split up his army of rebels into three parties. One section went with him to raid the pantry, whilst another was detailed to take blankets and other bedclothes from the dormitories into the gymnasium, and the third acted as a protective medium for the other two in case of interference.

But nobody interfered with the rebels except Mrs. Kebble, who naturally resented that sudden invasion of her domain below stairs. Tom Merry & Co. gently but firmly persuaded the good dame into the kitchen, and there they locked her whilst they pillaged the pantry and transferred everything eatable to the gymnasium.

The prefects held aloof from these proceedings. Their sympathies were entirely with the juniors, and, moreover, they realised the utter futility of pitting themselves against two whole Forms of rebels.

Mr. Ratcliff had overstepped the mark with his tyrannies in the School House. Tom Merry & Co. had now declared war against him, and they were determined on his downfall.

Tom Merry & Co., before finally leaving the School House, sought out Ratty minor and gave him a thorough bumping. That put them into a great good-humour, and they marched across to the gym in a merry throng.

Mr. Ratcliff appeared a short while after. He inquired for Tom Merry, and Kildare curtly informed him that the junior captain and the rest of the Shell and the whole of the Fourth Form, with the exception of Ratty minor, would be found in the gymnasium.

Mr. Ratcliff strode over to the gym. He found the door bolted. But the rebels were at the windows, and they grinned serenely at him.

"You little scoundrels!" raged Ratty. "What does this mean?"

"It means, Ratty, that we're holding a barring-out against you," said Tom Merry from one of the windows. "We're fed-up to the neck with your rotten ways, and we're kicking. You're not fit to be a master at a decent school. You think that because you rule the roost over in the New House you can do the same in the School House and grind us down like a lot of slaves. Well, this is where we show you that you are jolly well mistaken! You've got to call off those nice little rules you've made for us, and go back to the New House and take your miserable worm of a nephew with you before we pack up!"

"You—you—you—"

Ratty could not find words sufficient to express his feelings. His looks, however, spoke volumes.

"Buzz off, Ratty, and leave us alone!" shouted Blake. "We're not under your thumb now, you know. We're giddy Communists!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys, I command you to come out of there!" shrieked Ratty. "Do you hear me? Come out!"

"Rats!"

"Go and fry your face, Ratty!"

"Britons never shall be slaves!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with Ratty!"

That was the slogan of the School House rebels, and they shouted it for all the school to hear. Mr. Ratcliff staggered back to the School House, gasping with impotent fury, whilst the boys in the quadrangle roared with laughter at his predicament, and the rebels in the gymnasium yelled cat-calls after him.

It was war to the teeth now between Mr. Horace Ratcliff and Tom Merry & Co., and the rest of the school wondered how it would end.

The rebels, installed in their stronghold in the gymnasium, felt quite cheery, being unanimous in the opinion that they had right on their side. They were prepared to hold out against Ratty indefinitely.

And Mr. Ratcliff, pacing up and down his untidy study, chewed his moustache agitatedly and gritted his teeth in rage and chagrin. He had not bargained for this state of affairs, and realised that he had indeed gone a little too far in his persecution of the School House juniors. What would Dr. Holmes say when he knew? What would be the outcome of this humiliating affair?

And, as if in direct mockery of his miserable thoughts, there came the war-cry of the rebels through the open window:

"Down with Ratty!"

THE END.

(Ratty has put his foot in it this time without a doubt! What will be the outcome can hardly be realised. For a further feast of thrills, chums, be sure you read next week's exciting yarn dealing with the rebels of St. Jim's, entitled: "THE REBELS OF THE SCHOOL HOUSE!" by Martin Clifford.)

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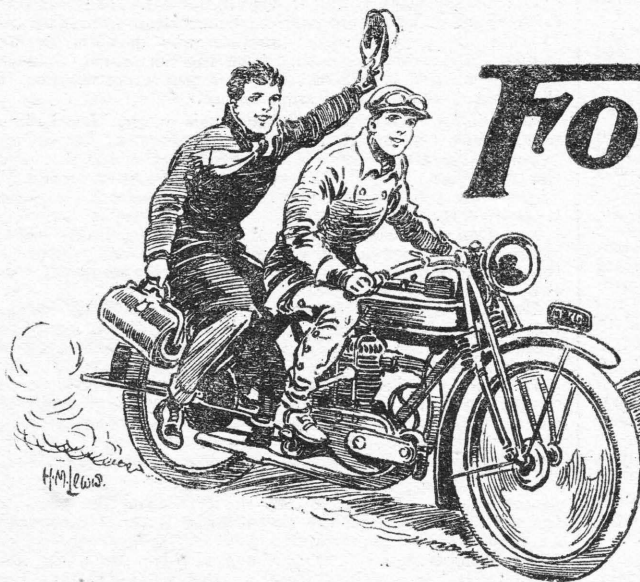
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OUT ON FRIDAY! ORDER YOUR COPIES TO-DAY!

Hal Chester might be new to League Football, but he can play all right. Already more than half the League clubs are ready to offer a big price for his services!



FOOTBALL CHUMS!

By
ARTHUR S. HARDY.

(The Most Popular Football Writer of the Day.)

A thrilling yarn, telling of the trials and tribulations of young Hal Chester, in his bid for fame on the footer field.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

HAROLD CHESTER, a well-knit youngster in his teens, and a member of the Kingsdown Football Club. His love for football earns for him the disapproval of

JAMES HENSON, his stepfather, a Nettingham grocer, in whose employ Hal Chester is. Like the rest of the employees at Henson's, Harold finds his guv'nor a very hard taskmaster. First of all, his stepfather dislikes him; secondly, James Henson hates football; and, thirdly, he believes that he—Harold—is an idler.

An important match is down for decision on Saturday for which Hal had already been granted permission to assist his team. But when the great day comes Mr. Henson cancels his promise. Hal has pledged himself to play for his team. He was considered one of the best players in the club, and could not very well let his side down.

Suffering from a sense of injustice, Hal is determined to turn out for his team, come what may.

But luck is against the lad, for in the match he is badly fouled by a man named Stevens, one of the opposing backs. It is late when he returns home, weary and in great pain, and he finds the door locked against him. He meets an old school friend, however,

in Tommy Bell, who is well in with the management of the Nettingham Football Club, and who gets him a place in the team.

Hal proves a great asset to his side, but, nevertheless, earns the enmity of some of the older players in the team.

Having realised his ambition, Hal pays a visit to his sick mother, and, on learning of his stepfather's slump in business, the lad offers to find the necessary cash to send his mother away. It is a rude awakening indeed for Mr. Henson to find Hal doing so well, and at football, too—the game he hated!

Later, the Town visit Manchester, and a hard and grueling game follows. Losing the toss, the Town are set to face a strong wind. The City fairly pounce down upon their goal, and within the first minute put the ball past Dicky Double, the Town's goalie. It was not a very happy start. The pace was tremendous after this, and after twenty-seven minutes the Town's outside-right gets the ball and races down the field with it. He sends across a centre, and Hal, watching the flight of the ball, rushes at it and, with a nice header, sends it sailing past the City's goalie for an equaliser.

It was a great effort, and well the Moss Side crowd appreciated it!

(Now read on.)

Hal's Hat-trick!

IT was now a ding-dong game, the City playing up and trying to get through by sheer pace and weight. But it was not to be. Thirteen minutes after scoring the equaliser Seymour, nipping in, took the ball before the cumbersome Dawson could touch it. Off he went at top speed, his feet twinkling as he ran. A glance showed him the way was closed. Over on the wing he saw Hal running, the other wing man keeping just behind, on the touchline. Well, let Hal Chester have a chance, thought Seymour—the boy seemed to know where the goal was.

His pass was beautifully given, the ball speeding out of the way of the defenders. Hal, dashing goalwards, slanted in, took the ball at top speed, and shot just as he neared the penalty area. The ball was in the net before Mitchell had time to sight it.

From then till half-time the Town dominated the play, the City forwards being given no rope, and the teams retired with Nettingham a goal to the good.

Dawson looked mighty grumpy when he gained the dressing-room.

"I suppose," he said with a sneer, glaring at Seymour and Hal, "you chaps intend to give me the ball some time this game?"

Hal coloured hotly. He hated being accused of selfishness. Seymour was shaped in a different mould. He looked straight at Dawson.

"Well, I'm not so sure," he cried. "You did mighty little when you did get it first half. And we're getting goals. I somehow think I'd rather give the ball to Chester than to you!"

Tommy Bell, stepping up to them, intervened.

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"Don't grumble, Dawson," he said. "You hadn't many chances, it's true, but you were blotted out, and, remember, this is a team game. What does it matter who scores as long as we win?"

Dawson closed up like a knife, but from his expression it could be seen he did not like it.

He was sulky when the teams turned out again. The others did not mind.

The play was fast when the match was resumed, each team having a look in in turn. For six minutes the exchanges were of an even character. Then Tommy Bell, tackling the City's centre and securing the ball, dribbled down the field and pushed it beautifully to Dawson's foot.

"There you are, Geoffrey," he cried. "Don't say you're starved now."

Dawson brightened up, dribbled on, found Woosnam blocking the way, and worked over to the left. Seeing which, Hal ran to the centre, taking his place. Dawson, running on to the City's right-back, stumbled, and the ball bounced on. Very luckily Small got it. He did not hesitate a moment, but squared it across the field. With a rush Hal got to the ball, dashed on, evading the City players by sheer skill and judgment.

Mitchell was in front of him, and blue-shirted players were coming at him. Yet he took his time, hesitating just that fraction of a second to make sure of balance and aim.

Bang!

The ball left his foot like a cannon-shot. It was in the net in a flash, Mitchell stumbling forward with outstretched hands in a vain attempt to handle it. The Town were now three goals up.

From the rails came a roar.

Glancing up as he smilingly made his way up-field again, Hal recognised Jim Burrows. His ardent admirer was whirling a rattle and cheering like a madman.

"That's the stuff to give 'em, Harold!" he screamed, and Hal, with a laugh, turned to accept Tommy Bell's congratulations.

"The hat trick, old man!" said his old school chum and friend. "My hat! If you go on like this, you'll make yourself famous, lad! And I'm proud of you."

The Bargain!

THE Town won that away game by three goals to one, and right worthily they deserved the victory. The ardent Manchester football enthusiasts who had watched the game caught themselves wondering how it had all happened.

Goodness knows, the City had had their full share of the game. They had attacked as often as the Town.

The explanation lay in the elusiveness and splendid anticipation as well as pluck of the boy player, Harold Chester, of whom they had heard so much, and who had played such a grand game.

Those goals were not flukes. The lad might be new to League football, but he could play all right. He was the best inside-forward seen at Moss Side since the season began.

It was a bit of luck the Town getting him after the initial mistake their manager and trainer had made in turning him down and letting him go to the United. The story of the United's disappointment was only just beginning to leak out.

If Harold were put on the transfer list now, what he would fetch was the question Manchester men put to themselves as they trudged on their way homewards that evening. Here was a lad who had risen from obscurity to fame in a few short weeks. And more than half the League clubs would be glad to get hold of him even at a big price now.

It was a very happy, very flushed, and very elated Harold who hurried off the field to the dressing-room at full-time. But he did not boast. There was no need to. He knew his worth, and yet he was level-headed enough not to want to labour the point.

When the team left the ground for the return journey, Harold trudged along with Dicky Double on one side of him, and Tommy Bell on the other. Very boyish and very earnest he looked as he talked over the fortunes of the game.

"I don't find playing for the League team any greater strain than playing for the school used to be, Dicky," he cried. "I was a kid then. I'm grown-up now. Relatively, the strain is about the same." He smiled. "And," he added, "having you and Tommy behind me makes it all seem so easy."

The whole of the party, players and directors, officials and friends, were smiling happily as they made the journey back to Nettingham. The fortunes of the club were looking up. If the three young players, Dicky Double, Tommy Bell, and Harold Chester, went on from promise to fulfilment, then things might soon be as they used to be on the City ground.

To their surprise, when they arrived home they found a huge cheer awaiting them. As they left the station cheer after cheer was raised, and the red-and-white was flourished and waved as it used to be in days gone by.

"Good old Town!" shouted loud-voiced enthusiasts, as they crowded near to have a better view of their favourites. "Good old Hal!"

"My boy," said Manager Bliss, when at last they struggled free of their admirers and climbed into a cab for the drive home, "don't let this sort of thing spoil you. The worst complaint a footballer can ever suffer from is swelled head. I should hate for you to get that way, and you are very young, you know."

"I don't think I'm likely to develop it, sir," answered Harold. "I know I can play, and knowing that I realise all the same that it is always necessary to try. It's what a chap does on the field, not what he says off it, that matters."

Bliss laughed at the youngster's philosophy.

"There are one or two of our fellows who would be all the better for realising that, too," he said. "Good-night, my boy. You played a grand game. You now rank among the select few who have scored a hat trick for the Town."

Tommy and Hal went early to bed that night, after having an exhaustive look at the football papers. In the morning Harold went along to the hospital to see Gerald Marsh, and from thence to his mother's.

He found his mother much improved in health and brighter in spirits, but his stepfather was long-faced, and looking far from well.

Never a smiling man, his face was set in gloom these days.

Harold, who knew him well, did not like the tell-tale circles round his eyes or the leathern appearance of his sallow skin. He seemed very down, as if he had been brooding.

He had not been to church that morning, scarcely feeling up to it.

Every now and then, as Harold talked to his mother, Mr. Henson would glance up, eyeing him attentively.

"Harold," he said presently, "I have told your mother about the money. She knows that you have offered to pay for her health visit to the seaside. I could not have let her go thinking that it was I who sent her there."

Harold had to admire his stepfather for that. With all his faults, there was nothing underhanded about James Henson. He was as upright as the day. No flying under false colours for him.

The boy felt then as he had often felt before—what a pity it was that his stepfather had always eschewed games. Playing games was a waste of time, James Henson always believed and declared. Yet, thought Hal, he might not have made any less successful a business man had he allowed himself to break away every now and again.

His mother interrupted his train of thought.

"Harold," she said, "I would not dream of allowing you to pay the expenses. I have a little store of money saved up—about fifty pounds—that your stepfather knew nothing about. If I am to go away I will use that—"

Hal leaned eagerly forward.

"No, mother, please don't!" he cried. "Put that money into the business. It will help to tide over a bad time. I don't want the money I've got. You are welcome to it. I have no responsibilities, nobody but myself to keep. Let



"Good old Town!" shouted loud-voiced enthusiasts, as they crowded near to have a better view of their favourites. One of the crowd rushed forward and gripped Chester tightly by the hand. "Good old Hal!" he cried.



Stevens' jaw dropped at the sight of Hal Chester. "Going to try and queer my pitch again, are you?" he snapped, glaring at the lad.

me do this, please. And I tell you what, I'll see Mr. Bliss, our manager, about it in the morning, and see whether I can't get away with you. I could keep fit by the sea, and could always get back in time for the matches."

James Henson, listening, frowned.

He could scarcely credit that it was Harold speaking, the boy he had despised and disliked, called a waster.

Harold had never talked like this or looked like this as long as he had worked for the stores. The break-away had made all the difference.

Had he misjudged, after all? Was there more good in this game of football than he had thought?

Harold's mother had told him about her little hidden hoard that morning. It troubled him. He could not allow Harold to pay his mother's expenses at the seaside with this little nest-egg available; and yet if he could apply the sum to his business it might not only tide over a bad time, but save him.

Harold knew what was passing in James Henson's mind. "Sir," he said, "don't let mother use her money for the holiday. I'll see to that. I'll go with her if I can. Let it be a holiday for both of us."

"I thank you for the kindly thought, Harold," said the stepfather stiffly.

"Mother, please—" Harold's smile was irresistible. "Very well, if you really wish it," said Mrs. Henson, with a sigh.

"I'll come along on Monday and let you know whether I can come away with you or not, mother," said Harold as he rose to go. "Then we can fix the time of the train."

He went round to see George Bliss that night, explaining all the circumstances, the manager listening very attentively. "Where do you propose to go for the holiday, boy?" asked George Bliss. "Blackpool?"

"We will find a quieter place than that. Mother needs complete rest as well as invigorating air. We will go to Silversea. Besides, it's nearer."

George Bliss frowned, but only for a moment.

"Lad," he said, "it's against the rule of the club for a player to be allowed to live away from the town, even for a little while. But I am going to stretch a point in your case. Let me have your address, and I'll send you instructions about the games. We meet the Arsenal at home next Saturday. I want you to be here in plenty of time."

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"I won't let the team down, sir."

George Bliss smiled and then shook hands with Harold.

"I'm sure you won't," he agreed. "I hope your mother will soon be better, my lad."

"Then I can start away on Monday, if I like, sir?"

"Start whenever you want. And good luck go with you, lad."

Bill Stevens seeks a job!

HAROLD hurried to the stores with the good news early on Monday morning. When he arrived there, to his surprise, he found a long queue of men and boys lined up. They stretched from the door of the shop past the private door and away down the street.

Hal paused for the moment to look at them. They were of all sorts, ages, and sizes, some of them smart-looking, others down at heel and dejected, some stupid-looking, while others seemed alert.

As he watched them a man came to the shop door, opened it, and beckoned to the leader to enter.

The boy knew what that meant. James Henson was in trouble with his staff again. The hardest of taskmasters and a grumbler, he never could keep his servants. The constant changing did not make for better working, Harold knew. No wonder his stepfather was in trouble!

He passed along, reached the door, and rang the bell.

As he waited for Milly to open to his ringing he glanced along the street. As he did so, a burly, disagreeable-looking man dodged back out of sight. It was Bill Stevens. Harold did not see him, but the bully saw and recognised Harold, and an ugly gleam came into his eyes as he saw Milly open the door and Harold go in.

No sooner had the door closed when an errand-boy, carrying a basket, came out of the shop and swung along beside the queue. As he approached, Bill Stevens stepped out from the line and stopped him.

"I say, lad," he said, "I saw Harold Chester, who plays for Nettingham Town, go into the house just now. What's he got to do with this business?"

The boy grinned from ear to ear.

"He used to be employed 'ere as errand-runner, like me," he explained. "And a nice job it is, I don't think! I'm fed-up wif it. James 'Enson, the boss who keeps the shop, is 'Arold's stepfather. 'E fired 'im, and 'Arold got taken on by Nettingham Town. Wish I could git a job like it instead of working for this old nigger-driver!"

"Ah," said Stevens, speaking smoothly, "then you don't like Mr. Henson?"

"I hate the sight of the old perisher!" retorted the boy. Stevens grinned.

"I saw an advertisement in the paper this morning," he said, "and I've come after this job. Seems to me there are a lot of others of the same mind."

"You'll be sorry if ever you git a job in this place!" cried the errand-boy. "You must be silly to try."

He went off on his way whistling.

One by one the men and boys in the queue entered the shop, passed on to James Henson's office, interviewed the stores' proprietor, and came out again. There were very few worth employing among them. None of them were experienced enough to Mr. Henson's way of thinking.

At last Bill Stevens' turn came.

The man who had been kicked out of professional football glanced eagerly round him as he entered the office, and took stock of things while he answered the questions that were fired at him.

"You look a strong and capable man," James Henson admitted, as he looked Harold's enemy up and down. "But as you have had no experience of this kind of business I am afraid I cannot employ you."

Stevens pressed the point, leaning on the top of the desk and glowering down at the man. His hat dangled from his fingers.

"Look here, sir," he pleaded. "I'll own lack of

experience does seem a bar to my getting the job, but if you employ me I promise you I'll give you full work for full pay, and every satisfaction."

James Henson hesitated. He was not over-impressed by Stevens, yet he had to admit that the man seemed a lot superior to any of the others who had applied for the post.

They were debating the question of wages when the door opened and Harold came in. The boy was about to tell his stepfather that he had arranged to take his mother away with the nurse in the morning, when his eyes lighted on Stevens.

His enemy here! It was a facer for Hal.

Stevens' jaw fell at sight of Hal.

"Going to try and queer my pitch again, are yer?" he snapped, as he glanced at Hal.

James Henson glanced at his stepson in surprise.

"Harold," he cried, "do you know this man?"

"Yes, sir," answered Hal quietly. "His name is Stevens. He is the man I told you about who attacked me Saturday week. He was a professional footballer, but has been suspended for life."

"That man," stormed Henson, as he rose to his feet and pointed sternly at the door, "a professional footballer, who has disgraced even that low game? And he told me that he used to run a sweetstuff shop. A liar as well, eh? He told me his name was Morgan! There is the door! Get out—"

Bill Stevens, glowering at the two of them, laughed.

"That's right," he cried, "try to rob a man of his means of living. When a chap's down, kick him! Chester, I'll pay you for this. I owed you one. Now I owe you two. As for you, you old fool, take your shop and eat it! Work here? I wouldn't be seen dead in the place!" He pulled the door open and laughed. "And they say there's such a thing as justice!" he howled. "But wait!"

"A vulgar brute of a man," said James Henson, as he looked hard at Harold. "Of such men are your football teams made?"

"Scarcely that, sir," answered Harold serenely. "He has been kicked out of the game, and serve him right. Remember, I am in it, sir. Mother is going away with me in the morning. We are catching the eleven o'clock train to Silversea."

"To be sure. I am glad," replied Henson mechanically, looking worried. "Now will you please excuse me, boy. I am busy. I have a crowd of other applicants to see."

Harold departed. As he hurried through the shop and looked about him it struck him that it was looking untidy and almost dirty, and it used to always be so spick-and-span and smart. With a sigh he passed into the street.

Meanwhile, Bill Stevens swaggered down the street muttering to himself.

His mind harboured the blackest thoughts. It seemed as if everybody's hand was turned against him.

How could he get even with Harold Chester? How could he make that smug-faced shopkeeper suffer?

He was trying to think of a way when the errand-boy to whom he had spoken before came swinging back towards the shop.

"Git the job?" asked the lad.

"No, I didn't!"

The boy laughed.

"Kid, do they keep a sight o' money on the premises over Saturday night?" asked Stevens.

"The boss locks it up in the safe," answered the lad. "There's a tidy lot, I should say. Why?"

Stevens winked and laughed.

"Easy pickings—perhaps," he suggested. "What time do you shut off work?"

"Seven!"

Stevens looked the lad up and down.

"Will you meet me at the tram terminus, City Square, near the War monument, at 'arf-past, and come and 'ave a snack?" he proposed.

The boy, grinning from ear to ear, jerked back the answer.

"Not 'arf!" he said.

"That's a bet, then?"

"It's a bet—at the monument at 'arf-past seven—"

"Right-ho!"

And as Stevens lounged on his way laughing, the boy went off in the opposite direction whistling and kicking the basket at every other step, each kick being vicious and intended to damage.

Nice boy!

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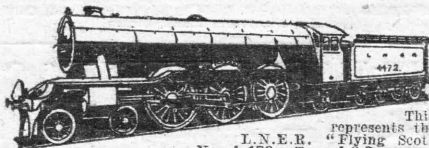
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BRIGHT BOY!

Tommy: "Bo-o-o-o! I've fallen down!" Ma: "You bad boy! In those new knickerbockers, too!" Tommy (never at a loss for an excuse): "Bo-o-o-o! I hadn't time to take them off when I felt myself going!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Wells, Marton, near Rugby.

VERY COOL!

Carefully the famous big game shot closed his book, switched out the light, and composed himself for sleep. An hour later his servant was awakened by sounds coming from the direction of the basement. At once this trustworthy man rushed up to his master's room and, after a great deal of shaking, succeeded in rousing up the great man. "I hear a burglar downstairs, sir!" he said nervously. "Are you quite sure, James?" "I am perfectly sure, sir!" Then get my gun, and—he yawned—"and—er—let me see, I think I will wear my plus fours!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Robert L. Green, 358, Alliance Avenue, Newington, Hull, Yorks.

HE REMEMBERED!

An Australian was grumbling about the wretched state of the weather to his English companion. "Do you ever have summer in this durned country?" he inquired curtly. "Oh, yes," replied the

Englishman. "When?" queried the man from "down under." The Englishman knitted his brows. "Well, it varies," he said at last. "Last year it was on a Wednesday!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Fred Money, Valetta, 26, Cowper Road, Winton, Bournemouth.

TAKING THE AIR!

A draft of vicious mules had just arrived at the camp, and a new recruit made the common but sad mistake of approaching too near to the business end of one of them. His comrades caught him on the rebound, placed him on a stretcher, and started off for the hospital. On the way the invalid regained consciousness, gazed at the blue sky overhead, experienced the swaying motion as he was being carried along, and shakily lowered his hands over the sides, only to feel space. "My word!" he groaned, "I ain't hit the ground yet!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Louis Kuesta, 85, Victoria Street, Dolais, South Wales.

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