

"THE REBELS OF THE SCHOOL HOUSE!"

Magnificent School
Story Inside.

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 894.
Vol. XXVII,
March 28th,
1925.

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



PRISONERS ON THE ROOF!

Shaking with ungovernable fury, Mr. Ratcliff and Gerald Knox, prisoners on the gymnasium roof, watched Taggles, valiant attempt to rescue them. (A thrilling incident from the exciting school story inside.)



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

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,—It is the cheeriest thing in the world to feel absolutely certain of some pleasant happening. For instance, take our new number of the GEM. Its splendid and varied programme will ensure it a hearty welcome from everybody. One glance at the trusty calendar will show you that the new number is a Special April Fools' Day issue, and, of course, the occasion is celebrated at St. Jim's in proper style.

"FOOLED ON THE FIRST!"

By Martin Clifford.

Tom Merry & Co. set the ball rolling with a grand wheeze for the express benefit of the Fourth. Next week's St. Jim's yarn is undoubtedly the brightest specimen of April fooling any author could possibly hit upon. The Shell fellows make up their minds to treat Blake & Co. to a really stimulating jape, something which they will remember for long enough. The start is made under capital conditions, and a mysterious hamper is prepared. In the hamper there is a particularly fine selection indeed, calculated to make the recipients sit up and take notice. For real inside information just wait for Wednesday. Japes are the funniest things out when they go smoothly, but sometimes there is a kink in the arrangements. The hitch in this case somewhat alters the original programme; but no matter about that, for St. Jim's gets the laugh of the season, and so will all Gemites.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

Who said the merry Supplement did not come up to time? It will be all there next week with a topping April Fools' Number all complete with jokes, japes, and hints about how to do honour to April 1st. They know a rare lot about All Fools' Day at St. Jim's, and it was a wise step to give readers of the "St. Jim's News" the benefit of such knowledge. There are lots of experienced jesters at St. Jim's. We have Grundy with his massive and fertile wit, while Monty Lowther is a host in himself. With all this in mind, I can confidently recommend next week's special All Fools' Number. It is a thoroughly gay and stuntful affair.



Here You Are, Lads!

BUMPER SEMI-FINAL NUMBER

No boy should miss this week's FOOTBALL FAVOURITE (on sale Wednesday, March 25th). It is packed with topping Soccer features, including a thrilling Cup tie story by ARTHUR S. HARDY, and a first-rate article by Arthur Iremonger (Notts County goalie) entitled "Semi-Final Sensations." FOOTBALL FAVOURITE is wonderful value for 2d! Make sure of this week's issue.

FOOTBALL FAVOURITE

On Sale Wed., Mar. 25th. Order To-day. 2d

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"FORCED TO FIGHT!"

By John W. Wheway.

You will all be glad to meet Trojan Tim again. T. T. figured in a dashing yarn a few weeks back, and Mr. Wheway explained the difficulties and trials which lie at the back of the young sportman's life. Uncle Nick and his partner in guilt—namely, Cousin Ferriars—are resolved to land Tim Webster in disgrace, so that he shall not benefit by a legacy of five thousand pounds. He will lose his right to the cash if he takes part in professional sport. Tom is a Trojan all through. Next week he finds himself in a peculiarly perilous position. The author works out a clever plot, with its tricky situations, in masterly fashion, and he makes you like young Tim more than ever, and appreciate the youngster's manliness and real downright sportsmanship. I must say a word, too, on behalf of that chirpy adventurer, Raggy, a programme-seller. Raggy is everything by turns and nothing long, but he skips through life with unflinching spirits, and is always prepared to do a pal a good turn. What more could anyone ask for?

"FOOTBALL CHUMS."

By Arthur S. Hardy.

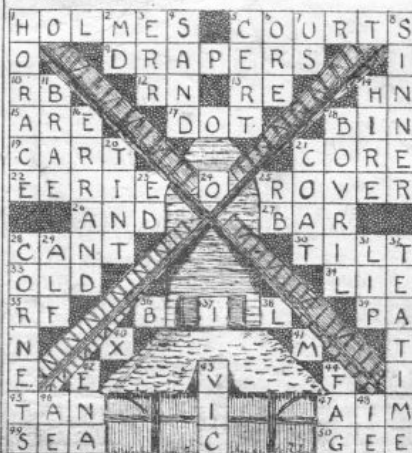
Our next week's instalment of this stirring football serial contains much that will rivet the attention of all GEM readers. Mr. Hardy works things up to a wonderful climax, and he manages to enlist the sympathy of everybody for young Hal Chester. There will be surprising developments in the next instalment, and plenty of sport, such as Mr. Hardy knows so well how to handle.

THE "SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY"

At last I am in a position to let you know of a splendid new feature which will be jumped at by every reader of the GEM. Be sure and ask your newsagent for Nos. 1 and 2 of the "Schoolboys' Own Library." These two grand books contain long complete stories of St. Jim's and Greyfriars. The new "Library" will appear each month, and I know it will get a tremendous reception from all readers of the GEM and other Companion Papers. Don't forget! The "Schoolboys' Own Library," 4d.

Your Editor.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S CROSS WORD PUZZLE.



SEE PAGE 27.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best storyette sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your joke, to me.

LUCKY OLD LANCs!

NOT NICE FOR NURSE!

The old lady from the country wended her way slowly along the platform looking for a seat in the old "local" which had just pulled up in the station. Reaching her objective, she sat down, and, with a sigh of relief, disposed of her various parcels and an umbrella. Then she noticed a nurse who occupied another seat in the carriage. "Ah," she said, eyeing the uniform, "I don't know what we'd do without the likes o' you." "Oh," replied the nurse. "Now you are too kind. There's no doubt you do things equally as worthy." "Not me, miss," responded the old lady. "I can kill a duck or a chicken w' the best—that I admit; but when it comes to 'uman bein's,' my 'cart fails me!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Miss Jennie Leadbetter, 15, Peel Road, Fleetwood, Lancs.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE!

An inspector, testing a class at arithmetic, found one boy rather dull on the subject. "Suppose," he said, "I lent your father ten pounds on the understanding that he would pay me back a pound a month, how much would he owe me at the end of six months?" "Ten pounds," replied the boy promptly. "My lad," snapped the inspector, "you are entirely wrong. I'm very much afraid you know very little about arithmetic." "Yes, sir," said the boy, in a tone of surprise. "And I'm afraid you don't know very much about my farver!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Norman Lamb, Mutton House, Beamish Park, Beamish, S.O., co. Durham.

A DOUBTFUL COMPLIMENT!

Maiden Aunt: "And what brings you to Town, George?" Country Nephew: "Aa coom up ter see the sights, auntie, so Aa thought Aa'd call on you first!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Gordon Solly, North Lopham, Diss, Norfolk.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON. THE GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

"Down with Ratcliff!" That's the slogan of the School House juniors at St. Jim's. Fed up with the tyrannies of Mr. Ratcliff, they have taken matters in their own hands, and rebellion is the order of the day. Installed in their stronghold in the gymnasium, they are prepared to hold out against the acting Head indefinitely!



THE REBELS OF THE SCHOOL HOUSE!

A Magnificent, Extra - Long
Complete Tale of Tom Merry
& Co., the Rebels of St.
Jim's.

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. No Surrender!

"MY giddy aunt! This takes the bun!" George Figgins, of the New House at St. Jim's, was the speaker, and his voice thrilled with excitement.

And his chums, Kerr and Fatty Wynn, said with one voice:

"Great pip!"

"What larks!" chortled Wally D'Arcy of the Third. "This is some rag, kids!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

School House and New House fellows were crowding in front of the gymnasium at St. Jim's. Excitement reigned supreme. The gymnasium door was locked and, protruding through the glass fanlight on the roof was a tall pole, on the end of which a flag, depicting the skull and crossbones on a black background, waved proudly and defiantly in the morning breeze. Practically all St. Jim's, seniors as well as juniors, had gathered round, and the air was noisy with the thrum of the boys' voices. And Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was raging up and down in front of the gymnasium door. Such a scene had never been witnessed in the old quadrangle at St. Jim's before.

"My word! Ratty's in a proper tantrum, isn't he?" chuckled Owen.

"Like a giddy lion seeking what he may devour!" grinned Figgins. "Good old Tom Merry!"

"More power to his elbow!" chirruped Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A giddy barring-out, by gum!" said St. Leger of the Fifth, with a whistle. "It's come to something now, and no mistake. It's all Ratty's own fault!"

"Yes, rather!"

Everybody was in agreement that Mr. Ratcliff was completely to blame for the amazing state of affairs that had come to pass at St. Jim's.

A barring out of the entire Shell and Fourth Forms of the School House, led by Tom Merry, was in progress against the tyrannical Housemaster. The rebels had installed themselves in the school gymnasium and had defied Ratty to do his worst.

Exciting scenes had been witnessed at St. Jim's during the past few days. The trouble had really commenced with the arrival of Mr. Ratcliff's nephew, Paul, as a new boy in the Fourth. Dr. Holmes, the respected old Head of the school, was at the seaside, taking a rest following a slight mental breakdown, which had been occasioned by overwork and study, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster in the School House, had taken charge of the school during the Head's

temporary absence. Things had gone swimmingly up to the time of the arrival of Mr. Ratcliff's nephew.

"Ratty minor," as Paul Ratcliff was called, had rapidly become as unpopular as Mr. Ratcliff himself. Tom Merry & Co. had been quite prepared to make friends with the new boy, but Paul Ratcliff had turned out to be such a disgraceful young rascal that the chums of the School House had turned against him in disgust and contempt. Ratty minor had come to St. Jim's with the blissful intention of "lording it" over the other juniors, taking it for granted that, because his uncle was a Housemaster of the school, he would be looked upon as a very important personage. Trouble had started from the first moment he set his foot inside St. Jim's. Mr. Ratcliff had backed up his rascally nephew, of course, and had attempted to interfere in the School House for the purpose of making things easy for Paul and decidedly uneasy for Tom Merry & Co. Mr. Railton, however, had refused to be dictated to by Mr. Ratcliff, and this had added to Ratty's hatred of the heroes of the School House. Mr. Railton was a stickler for justice, and had openly shown his disapproval of Mr. Ratcliff's high-handed, malicious ways.

Ratty minor had proved himself to be a sneak and a toady and this, of course, condemned him in the eyes of his schoolfellows. He had had a far from easy time in the School House, and had been for ever whining his complaints to his uncle. Mr. Ratcliff, having no jurisdiction over the School House, had been unable to exercise his hatred and spite towards Tom Merry & Co. at first. It had come as a great shock to the School House juniors when Mr. Railton had been called away to London to attend a series of important conferences. Mr. Railton was expected to be absent for some time, and Mr. Ratcliff had taken charge of affairs at St. Jim's, pending the other Housemaster's return.

This had given the tyrannical New House master just the opportunity he had been waiting for, to get his revenge on Tom Merry & Co. He had installed himself in the School House, and had proceeded to make the juniors in that establishment "sit up." He had administered canings galore and doled out thousands of lines, and had so ground down his victims under his iron heel that life in the School House—for Tom Merry & Co., at any rate—had become intolerable.

One of Ratty's first moves had been to ban all tuck in the junior studies. Tom Merry & Co., wrathful at this unjust edict, had held a dormitory feed on a large scale. Ratty minor had spied on them and given information to his uncle, whereupon Ratty had descended on them with all the vials of his wrath, and as a result had put the entire Fourth and Shell on short commons. The crisis had come when

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Ratty had attempted to force Tom Merry into putting Paul into the junior eleven. The junior eleven captain had, of course, refused to include the weedy slacker in his team, and Ratty, for revenge, had sought to interfere with the match the eleven were playing with Redclyffe by detaining Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, and Talbot. These youths, boiling with indignation at the gross unfairness of it all, had broken detention, and had played in the match. That had brought matters to a head, and when Ratty, after prohibiting all footer, and closing the playing fields, had attempted to entice the four juniors into his study, one by one, to undergo a cruel flogging, the whole Lower School had risen in revolt.

With Tom Merry at their head they had commenced a barring-out against Mr. Ratcliff, and had made the school gymnasium their stronghold, taking their beds and the contents of the school pantry with them.

Mr. Ratcliff had been quite taken aback at this move. He had not expected the worms to turn so drastically, and trembled to think of what Dr. Holmes would say to find such a state of affairs at St. Jim's. He was furious, and had savagely made up his mind to quell the outbreak at once. This, however, he found no easy task, in face of the rebels' defiance.

As he strode up and down outside the gymnasium he fumed, and almost tore his hair. As Figgins had remarked, he was like a raging lion.

"Open this door!" he shouted, glaring up at Tom Merry & Co., whose cheery faces appeared at the window. "Do you hear me, you little scoundrels? I command you to open this door immediately!"

A chorus of derisive yells answered him.

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke, Ratty!"

"Yah!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The infuriated Housemaster, losing all sense of dignity, hammered at the big door with his clenched fists.

"Merry! Blake! D'Arcy! Open the door at once! You shall be expelled! Kildare—where are you? Kildare, I command you to get this door open at once! Is my authority to be flouted in this disgraceful manner, Kildare?"

Eric Kildare, the stalwart captain of the school, looked scornfully at Mr. Ratcliff. His sympathies were not with the tyrant at all, but with his victims whom he had so mercilessly oppressed. Seniors as well as juniors had felt the sting of Mr. Ratcliff's spleen, and had suffered interferences with their liberties at which they had chafed. Indeed, Kildare, in the privacy of his own study, had confided to a select circle of his fellow prefects his opinion that Ratty deserved to be taught a lesson.

Mr. Ratcliff looked furiously at Kildare.

"Kildare! Let me in, do you hear?"

"The door is locked, sir," said Kildare quietly.

"Then unlock it!"

"The juniors have taken the key, sir. You might try the back door—"

Mr. Ratcliff in his rage had not thought of that. He whisked away with fluttering gown. But Tom Merry & Co. had forestalled him, and when he arrived at the back door he found it as securely locked as the front. The enraged master hammered on it and then dashed back to the front of the gymnasium. A chorus of laughter greeted his appearance, and this served to further infuriate him.

Mr. Ratcliff simply panted with rage.

Kildare, Darrell, North and several other prefects had walked away, intending to have nothing to do with the matter. Mr. Ratcliff had brought about this situation himself, they thought, and it was up to him to deal with it as best he could.

The juniors in the quadrangle were chortling, and Tom Merry & Co. were grinning defiantly from the window. Mr. Ratcliff looked round wildly, and his eyes lighted on Gerald Knox, the rascally prefect who had backed him up in his campaign of frightfulness against the juniors.

"Knox, get into the gymnasium and open that door!" shouted the tyrant furiously. "I will not be defied like this! Do you hear me, Knox?"

"Ahem! Yes, sir, but—"

"Do not stand there arguing with me, Knox!" raved the Housemaster. "Get in at one of the windows and open the front door! I will bring the little renegades to subjection! Go on, Knox!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Knox!" roared Figgins.

Gerald Knox did not seem to be in a hurry to comply.

He blinked up at the gymnasium window, and then he blinked at Mr. Ratcliff.

"I—I can't get in there, sir!" he gasped. "Those little rascals wouldn't let me in, and—"

"Will you obey me, Knox?" fairly screamed Mr. Ratcliff.

"I myself will assist you up to the window-ledge."

He strode forward and Knox reluctantly followed, casting

apprehensive glances at the window, where the grinning faces of Tom Merry & Co. could be seen.

Mr. Ratcliff stood underneath the window, and Knox grasped the water-pipe that ran up the wall. He scrambled up the pipe, and Mr. Ratcliff steadied him.

The boys in the quadrangle looked on cheerfully and expectantly. They could foresee nothing but disaster to this desperate, unthinking effort of Mr. Ratcliff's to get the gymnasium door open.

Knox reached the window-ledge and grasped it with his hands.

"Yow! Steady there, sir!" he gasped.

"You are—ow!—kicking, Knox—grooogh!" said Mr. Ratcliff furiously. "Be very careful how you go! Yow! Now, open the window from below, and—"

Slam!

The window opened, but it was not Knox that opened it.

Blake raised the sash, and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther leaned out, holding a bag of soot between them. Taggles had recently been sweeping the school chimneys, and had left the soot in the woodshed, intending to keep it for his garden. The rebels had raided that soot early in the morning, thinking that it would come in very useful to them during the barring-out.

Knox blinked up at the bag in horror.

"You—you little rotters!" he cried furiously. "Don't you dare throw that— Yooooooh!"

Swoooooosh!

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther inverted the bag, and a torrent of blackness swept down like an avalanche. It enveloped Knox in a cloud and, losing his hold of the window-ledge, the Sixth-Former dropped heavily on top of Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a yell when he saw the soot coming, and made to jump out of the way. But he was not quick enough. Knox, in falling, grasped him round the neck, and prefect and Housemaster went crashing to the ground together. And there they lay, in an ungraceful heap, amidst that ghastly heap of soot that had come down from above.

"Yarooooogh!" gurgled Knox.

"Yah! Ooogh! Ah! Gug! Gug!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff wildly.

From the boys at the window and the boys in the quadrangle there came a loud, long howl of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ratty sat up gouging soot out of his eyes and ears and hair. He presented an appearance closely resembling a Christy minstrel. Mr. Ratcliff, indeed, had received as much of the soot as Knox had done, although Tom Merry & Co. had really intended it all for the Sixth-Former. It was Mr. Ratcliff's misfortune that he happened to be underneath at the time.

As for Gerald Knox, that luckless fellow was quite unrecognisable. He blinked round him as he sprawled by Mr. Ratcliff's side, and the quad fairly rang with the laughter of the onlookers.

"Yoooch! You little rascals! Grooogh! You—you scoundrels!" gurgled the Housemaster, glaring, with a sooty glare, at the cheery rebels at the window above. "You dare outrage me in this—grooogh—manner! I will have you flogged—expelled— Yoooooogh! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye and gazing down at Mr. Ratcliff from the window. "You pwesent a weally shockin' spectacle, Mr. Watchiff! I'm afwaid you were entiaibly to blame, you know. By behavin' in your wecent extwaordinawy mannab, you were not keepin' up with the dignity of your posish. A Housemastah and a tempowawy Head should have a pwopah sense of his own dig, bai Jove!"

"Gerroooooogh! Gug! Gug! You—"

"Carry on, Gussy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Ratty looks as though he needs some good advice—I don't think!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem!" said Arthur Augustus. "I feah that Mr. Watchiff is not at pwesent in a humah to heah a word in season."

Mr. Ratcliff wasn't!

He jumped up, shedding soot in all directions, and he shook a sooty fist at the rebels up above.

"I'll bring you to subjection!" he yelled. "I—oooch—I'll compel you to recognise my authority! Groogh! The ring-leaders shall be expelled and the rest flogged—"

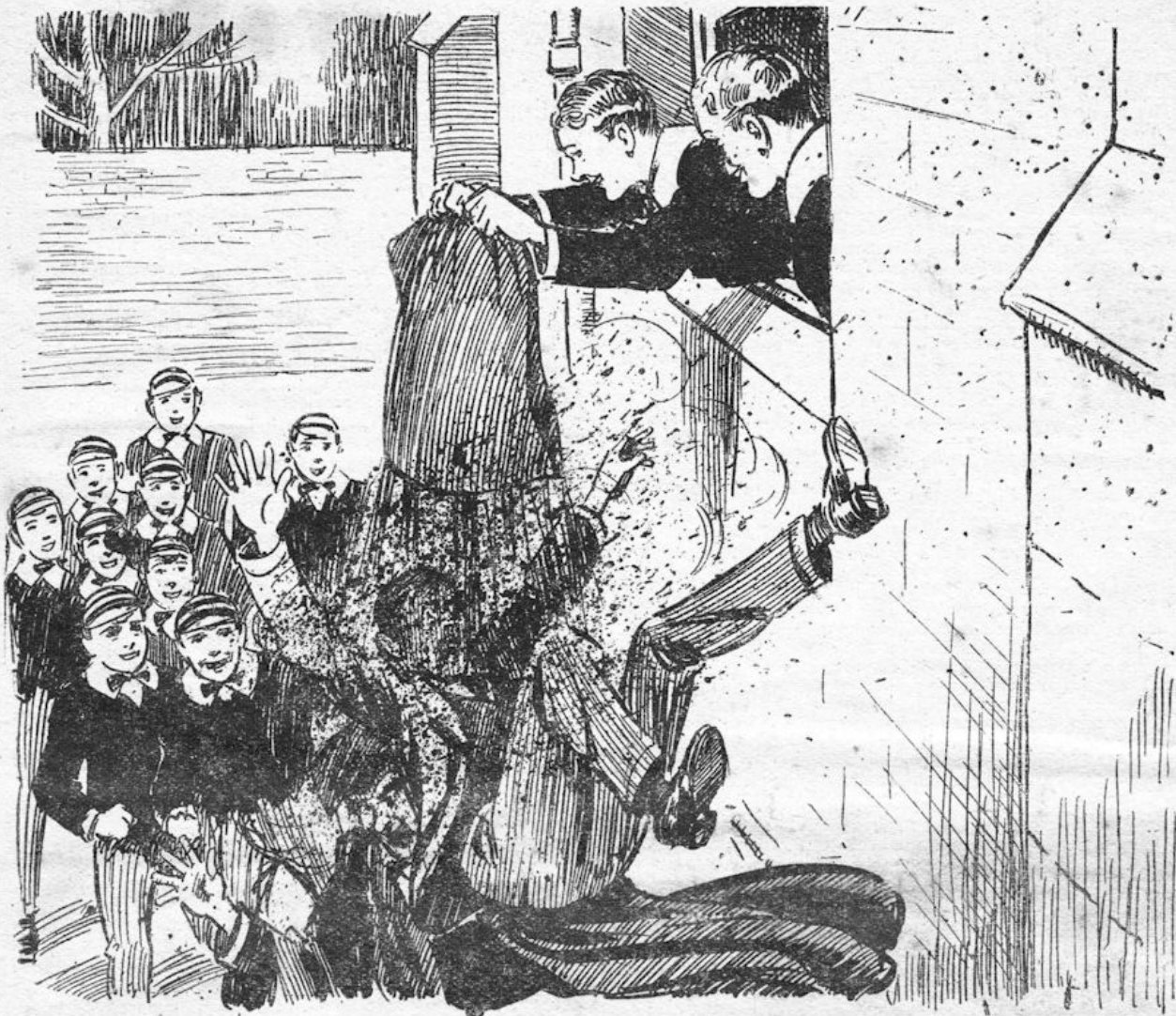
"Oh, crumbs!" exclaimed Blake. "You'll have a job, old sport!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you open that door and surrender to me?" howled the temporary Head furiously. "I warn you young renegades that the longer—gerrooch—you remain in there, the worse shall be your punishment! Ooogh!"

"Weally, Mr. Watchiff, you can hardly expect us to suwwendah before we awwive at some agweement," said D'Arcy. "You've got to come to terms, bai Jove!"

"What-ho!" said the rebels.



Gerald Knox looked up at the bag of soot in horror. "You—you little rotters!" he cried. "Don't you dare throw that—Yoooh!" Swoooosh! Tom Merry and Monty Lowther inverted the bag, and a torrent of blackness swept down like an avalanche upon Knox. Losing his handhold, the Sixth-Former dropped heavily on top of Mr. Ratcliff. (See page 4.)

"We'll come out on condition that you return to the New House wheah you belong, that you take your wotten nephew with you, and that you wescind all the howwid wules and regulations you have imposed on us since Mr. Wailton left you in charge!" went on the noble swell of the Fourth, his eyeglass glimmering in the morning sunlight. "Those are our terms, Mr. Waccliff, and failin' your compliance with them, we intend to remain heah until eithah the Head or Mr. Wailton returns!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the boys in the gymnasium.

"Spoken like a man, Gussy!" chorled Figgins from below. Mr. Ratcliff fairly danced in the midst of the soot.

"I refuse!" he howled. "How dare you seek to impose conditions on me, your master? This affair is disgraceful—unprecedented! I will not be dictated to by you depraved little rascals!"

"All serene, then!" said Tom Merry. "We're quite comfy here, Ratcliff, and we'll hold out till the end of the term, if need be."

"Rather!"

"I—I—I—" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself with rage. "Will you open that door?"

"No, fear!"

"Rats, Ratty!"

"And many of 'em!"

"Agree to our terms first!" said Jack Blake.

"Never!" hooted the infuriated master. "Such a thing is preposterous! I will make you smart for this! I—I—"

Mr. Ratcliff paused, for want of breath and want of words. He glared round furiously, and, seeing the boys in the quadrangle laughing at him, he realised what a ghastly figure he cut.

He shook his fist at Tom Merry & Co. as he whirled round. "Remember, you little scoundrels, that you shall pay dearly for this!" he shouted. "I will deal with this matter

later, and will take steps to bend you to my will! You shall not defy me for long!"

"Yah!"

"Do your worst, Ratty!"

"Britons never shall be slaves!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Ratcliff, choking with wrath, strode away to the School House. Knox followed him, and both left a long, long trail of soot as they went. Laughter followed them on all sides, and they retreated into the School House in deep ignominy.

Pausing in the Hall to glance back for a moment, they saw the rebels' flag waving defiantly over the gymnasium roof, and heard this cry which rose high above the laughter in the quadrangle:

"Down with Ratty!"

That was Tom Merry & Co.'s war-cry. They were out to overthrow Ratty and all his works. And, win or lose, they intended to hold out against the Housemaster to the bitter end.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry is Firm!

A TALL, weedy, pasty-faced junior was standing on the stairs as Mr. Ratcliff and Knox stamped up to the bath-room, and he gasped with astonishment when he saw them.

It was Paul Ratcliff of the Fourth—"Ratty minor," as the boys called him.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed. "What—what has happened?"

"Happened, indeed!" choked Mr. Ratcliff. "I have been shamefully assaulted by those young rascals in the THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 894.

gymnasium! They—they hurled soot over me—hurled it over me with impunity! Grooooooh!"

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Paul Ratcliff. "The cads!"

He walked away, his small, beady eyes glittering, whilst Mr. Ratcliff continued on his sooty way upstairs.

His nephew was waiting in his study when he returned.

The Housemaster had had a complete change and a thorough scrubbing, and his face was almost purple. Traces of soot could still be seen clinging to his scanty locks.

Ratty minor had been watching the gymnasium from the window with a scowling face. He was as infuriated as his uncle at the drastic methods that Tom Merry & Co. had adopted to bring the reign of terror at St. Jim's to an end. The callow-minded fellow hated Tom Merry and his chums with all his heart, and he was ready to do anything to help bring them to subjection.

"Just hark at them, uncle!" he exclaimed, as the sound of the rebels' voices, singing a lusty war-song, was wafted across by the breeze. "They'll have to be got out of there somehow."

"But how?" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "The little reprobates have locked themselves in, and they defy me! I intend to make them suffer, but—Oh, come in!"

A tap had sounded at the door, and in response to Mr. Ratcliff's call two masters entered.

They were Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, and Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master.

Both these gentlemen were looking very grim and worried.

Mr. Ratcliff gave them a choleric glare. He was in a royal rage.

"Well," he snapped, "what is it?"

"We have come to speak to you concerning this—er—this amazing insurrection that has broken out among the juniors, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Linton. "You will agree with us that such a state of affairs is intolerable—"

"It is positively disgraceful that such a thing should have occurred, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Lathom warmly.

"Two whole Forms have alienated themselves from the school and are barricaded in the gymnasium. Linton and myself, as the respective Form masters of the Forms concerned, consider that immediate steps should be taken to quell the outbreak."

Mr. Ratcliff scowled.

"Indeed!" he said. "I trust that you have a practicable suggestion to make as to a means of bringing the young scoundrels to order? I presume that you are aware of the extent of their defiance."

"From what we have seen and heard, Mr. Ratcliff, we can fully appreciate that the boys are determined to proceed with their revolt against authority," said Mr. Linton tartly. "They appear to be actuated by a deep-rooted sense of injustice, and have certain grievances which, I think, should be looked into."

"That, precisely, is my opinion, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Lathom. "The boys, I feel sure, would be perfectly tractable and amenable to reason if steps were taken to deal with them equitably and reasonably. It appears to me that—ahem!—their grievances are not without some foundation."

Mr. Ratcliff turned quite pink.

"Then you sympathise with the little rascals!" he rasped. "You wish to suggest that I surrender to them?"

"Lathom and I suggest that the boys' case should be gone into with fairness and justice," replied Mr. Linton with some asperity. "I would remind you, Mr. Ratcliff, that it would be hardly—er—propitious to have such a condition of affairs obtaining at this school when Dr. Holmes returns. He would take a most serious view of the matter!"

"So you think that I am to blame!" almost shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "You consider that I should submit to this disgraceful flaunting of my authority! Never, sir! I will bring the little renegades to book, but they shall bow to my will. Moreover, they shall be made to suffer for their behaviour!"

The two Form masters exchanged grim glances.

"If you will pardon my saying so, Mr. Ratcliff, your attitude would tend to develop the trouble, rather than alleviate it," said Mr. Linton. "Harsh treatment and—er—truculence, in my opinion, will stiffen the boys' resistance. Indeed, I will go further and state my candid belief that the outbreak was precipitated in the first place by the inordinately severe methods you adopted in dealing with the boys. Merry and Blake and the majority of the others are not lads who would readily or with impunity break the school rules in so reckless and outrageous a manner."

"That is so," agreed Mr. Lathom mildly. "I am convinced that Merry, who is directing this insurrection, is a sane and sober-minded lad, and that he would not participate in such an affair unless there was some real justification for his doing so. May I again emphasise my opinion, Mr. Ratcliff, that the boys' grievance should be gone into with an impartial spirit. Both Linton and myself are most

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anxious to see an immediate settlement of this unfortunate affair."

Mr. Ratcliff paced up and down the study, his small, bright eyes glittering, and his hands clenched with very rage.

"I will not give in to them!" he hooted. "I am in charge of this school, and my authority is supreme! I will make the young scoundrels see that I am not to be trifled with! Their so-called grievances are illusory. The boys in the School House have been pampered too much, and it is my intention to make them bow to authority! Discipline shall be maintained, whatever the cost! Merry and the others have set themselves against me, and have brought about this insurrection in order to shirk ordinary school work, and at the same time make as much trouble as they can! I will not tolerate the suggestion that my methods in dealing with them were unusually harsh or severe. The restrictions I imposed on them were necessary for the maintenance of order in this House! I shall not lower my dignity by parleying with them! The longer they continue in their defiance of me, the more severe shall be the penalties which I shall impose when I have forced them to surrender!"

Mr. Linton turned to the door, looking coldly at the tyrant of St. Jim's.

"Very well, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "Lathom and I have informed you of our opinion, and we offered our advice with no other object than to see a speedy restoration of order and good will at this school. It is most unfortunate that you cannot see eye to eye with us, and you, of course, as acting headmaster, must take what course you consider best. The course you propose to adopt, however, is bound to fail in its object. The boys are desperate and determined. Moreover, it is apparent that they have the sympathy of the rest of the school, and you would be well advised, Mr. Ratcliff, to try to come to some amicable settlement, even though it means—ahem!—the sacrificing of a little dignity."

"Thank you for your advice, Linton, but I shall take what action I think fit," said the tyrant between his teeth. "You may be assured, however, that I shall not surrender one iota to the demands of Merry and his band of young renegades."

The two Form masters exchanged looks, and then, without another word, they left Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Mr. Lathom made a hopeless gesture as they walked down the corridor together.

"It is useless to speak to Ratcliff," he said. "Perhaps if we have a word with the boys themselves a way out of the difficulty may be found. Really, my dear Linton, this is most worrying."

"It is disgraceful!" said the Shell master angrily. "Personally, Lathom, I am able to appreciate the boys' point of view. Ratcliff's interference in this House, and his harsh treatment of the juniors were beyond all reason. I anticipated that trouble would ensue, and Ratcliff, in the main, is responsible."

Mr. Lathom nodded, and the two masters hurried out of doors.

The rebels in the gymnasium were busy preparing a late breakfast. Glyn's patent stove was installed in there—the self-same stove which had been used in the Shell dormitory for that memorable dormitory feed, when Ratty's gown had caught fire. Baggy Trimble, Herries, and Kerruish were doing the cooking, and an appetising odour of frying eggs and bacon and hot cocoa pervaded the air in the gymnasium.

Tom Merry & Co. were well equipped for their barring-out.

On one side of the gym the rebels' beds were arranged, the mattresses, of course, lying on the floor. Most of the gym tackle had been set aside or stowed away, so that there was plenty of room for all, and room to spare.

A large trestle table had been erected in the centre of the building, and on this the breakfast things were laid.

The rebels were quite at home, and their cheeriness knew no bounds. They thoroughly enjoyed their novel position, and they did not have the slightest intention of leaving their stronghold until Ratty had given in.

Whilst breakfast was in progress, a look-out was stationed at each window, and at the front and back doors of the gym.

Blake, who was on duty at the front window, announced the arrival of Messrs. Linton and Lathom. The rebels were up in a trice, and they crowded to the windows.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Tom Merry respectfully to Mr. Linton.

"Ahem! Good-morning, Merry! You are, I perceive, determined to continue with this—this unprecedented affair?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" replied the junior captain warmly. "We're out to bring Mr. Ratcliff to his senses, sir. He badly needs a lesson, and he'll get one now."



"Now we have you!" cried Mr. Ratcliff excitedly. "Stop them, Knox! Capture the little rascals—Wow!" The Housemaster broke off as a weighty volume smote him on his rather thin and prominent nose. "You little sweeps, I'll—Yah! Wow! Yarooooh!" Knox dropped back, for at that moment a perfect fusillade of books filled the air, thudding all over his person. (See page 9.)

"Hear, hear!" chorused the rebels.
 "Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "My dear boys, you can scarcely realise the seriousness of the attitude you have adopted. Your action constitutes a flagrant breach of the school discipline!"
 "We know that, sir," said the rebel leader seriously. "We don't like kicking against the traces, but in this case I think we are perfectly justified. Mr. Ratcliff came into the School House with the fixed intention of making us sit up, and he did it—with a vengeance! We stood him till he overstepped the mark, and now we're making him sit up!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Ratty has driven us to it, sir. We're running this barring-out as a means of staying the tyrant's hand. Ratty played the giddy goat when he got control over us, and now he's got to put up with the consequences!"

"Hear, hear!"
 Mr. Lathom looked distressed.
 "Boys, you cannot maintain this situation for long," he said. "Dr. Holmes would be very angry if he knew. Your lessons will suffer—"

"Blow lessons!" hooted Aubrey Racke, of the Shell.
 "We're taking a rest from lessons, sir! This is where we get a free holiday, at Mr. Ratcliff's expense!"

Tom Merry whirled round angrily at the cad of the Shell.
 "Hold your row, you rotter!" he exclaimed. "We're in this for business, not pleasure. If you're joining in just for the sake of the fun of the thing, you can jolly well get out—on your neck!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I distinctly disappwove of your attitude, Wacke! I considah it most mercenawy, bai Jove, and not at all in keepin' with the mowal of this bawwin'-out!"

The Form masters outside exchanged glances.
 "Then you refuse to come out, Merry, and bring a termination to this affair?" asked Mr. Linton.

"I'm afraid we must refuse, sir," said the leader of the rebels respectfully. "We are sticking at nothing to stand up for our rights."

"I twust you won't considah us lackin' the pwopah respect due to you as our Form mastahs," said Arthur

Augustus. "Our quawwel is entially with Mr. Watcliff, and we would willin'ly obey you if we could, but our pwesent posish wenders it imposs. Undah the cires, theahfore, we must wefuse to obey even your ordahs!"

"Very well," said Mr. Linton quietly. "It is futile, then, to appeal to you. Come, Lathom; we will discuss this matter between ourselves. Something must be done to restore order here."

The two masters walked back to the School House, and the rebels of St. Jim's proceeded with their breakfast in high spirits.

CHAPTER 3.

A Bright Suggestion!

TOM MERRY wore a thoughtful frown.

Brekker was over, the gymnasium had been cleared, and the rebels were settling down to a morning of freedom. The majority were disporting themselves on the ropes, the crossbars, and the vaulting horses, and one or two couples were enjoying a bout of boxing.

The bell for lessons had just tolled, but this morning the bell held no significance to the juniors of the School House Shell and Fourth. Only the members of those Forms belonging to the New House were at lessons, and the juniors in the gym chuckled when they thought of their practically empty Form-rooms.

"Cheer up, Tommy!" said Jack Blake, walking up to the Shell captain and slapping him heartily on the back. "Wherefore the worried look and furrowed brow, my son? Worrying about Ratty?"

"N-no, not exactly," replied the junior captain. "I was thinking about—about lessons."

"Oh, bother lessons!" said Blake. "We can't do our lessons and run a barring-out at the same time, can we?"

"Why not?" asked Tom Merry.

"Eh?"

"Why shouldn't we?" said the rebel leader, looking gravely at the Fourth Form leader. "After all, we've no real right to throw over lessons."

Blake stared at Tom Merry in surprise.

"You must be off your rocker, Tommy!" he exclaimed. "We can't possibly leave here and go in to lessons! Why, Ratty would be after us like a shot. He'd order the prefects out, and we should never get back. That would put the tin hat on our giddy barring-out!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You don't see what I'm driving at, Blake," he said. "Look here, old son, as things are now, Ratty would be able to complain to the Head or Mr. Railton that this barring-out was run for the sole purpose of dodging work. That's all rot, of course, but if the barring-out lasts any time at all, as I think it will, and we stick in here all day long and mope, we sha'n't do any lessons, and Ratty would have that to throw up against us. See the point?"

"Myes, I see it," said Jack Blake slowly. "But I don't see how—"

"On the other hand," went on Tom Merry, "supposing we continued with our lessons as though nothing had happened, but at the same time kept up the barring-out against Ratty? We should then make it clear that it was Ratty, and Ratty only, who was the cause of the barring-out, and he wouldn't be able to accuse us of shirking."

"Yes, you chump, that's all very well, but how the merry dickens can it be done?" demanded Blake. "As I said before—"

"It can be done!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "We needn't leave here and take lessons in the Form-room, idiot! We could do our lessons just as well here—in the gym!"

"Mum-my word!"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, who had strolled up and had listened to Tom's argument. "That's wathah a good wheeze, Tom Mewwy!"

"I think it's a corker!" said the junior captain, his eyes glistening eagerly. "We'll run a school here on our own—a barring-out school! We'll have lessons at the same times as the rest of the school, and we'll work just the same as though we were in our own Form-rooms! It can be done easily—as easy as rolling off a form! A party of us could raid the School House this morning, and bag books and papers, and the other things we should need for our school. Then we could settle down this afternoon, and do our lessons in the usual way, and knock off when the final bell rings. Nobody, then, would be able to accuse us of slackening—in fact, it would go further to prove that we're in earnest. What do you think of the idea?"

"Whippin', deah boy!"

"Top notch!" said Blake. "There's only one thing, Tommy. Some of the chaps here are in the barring-out just for the fun of it. They look on it as a bit of a rag. There's Racke, and Baggy Trimble, and Mellish, for instance. They're bound to cut up rusty if we put 'em to doing school work. They reckon on taking things easy while the barring-out lasts."

"We'll soon see about that," said Tom Merry grimly. "Call the chaps round, you fellows. We'll hold a meeting, and I'll put it to the crowd."

"Good egg!"

A meeting of the rebels was called, and Tom Merry, standing on a vaulting-horse, expounded the scheme to his fellow outlaws. Gasps of astonishment arose as the leader of the rebels proceeded.

"My hat!" ejaculated Talbot. "Then the wheeze is to run a sort of school from school!"

"That's the ticket!" said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, I put it to you that it's up to us to keep a decent record if we can. Mr. Railton or the Head are likely to return at any time, and they'll think more of us if they find that we've kept on with our school work. If they discovered us having a merry mike, Ratty will have room to talk."

"Rats!" shouted Gore. "It's a rotten idea, Merry! Who wants to mug lessons on a barring-out? Of all the cheek!"

"Rather!" said Racke. "We're on strike, and chaps don't work when they're on strike. Do you expect us to swot all day, Merry? Not so jolly likely!"

"No fear!" said Baggy Trimble. "A barring-out's a barring-out, you know!"

"Go hon!" grinned Tom Merry. "Did you work that out by algebra, Baggy? Anyway, I think it's a sound wheeze, and I'm going to put it to the vote. Hands up, all in favour!"

A cluster of hands shot up at once. Tom's chums and Blake & Co., and Talbot, Levison, Wildrake, Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, Kerruish, Julian, and Reilly all put their hands up, and other hands were raised one by one, until the only fellows who remained with their hands sullenly lowered were Racke, Crooke, Mellish, Gore, Clampe, Scrope, and Baggy Trimble. All the others were in favour of Tom Merry's scheme.

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"Passed unanimously!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Henceforth we'll be known as St. Gym's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

All except the dissenters announced themselves ready to go ahead with the preparations for their school in the gym. Tom immediately set to work to think out a plan of campaign.

"First of all, kids, we shall have to agree on a headmaster for our giddy school," said Tom Merry. "The chap who is elected will have the same powers as the Head in an ordinary, common-or-garden school!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze, Tommy!"

"He must be a chap well up in classes and possessing the ability to take lessons and maintain order," went on the junior captain. "I will arrange for a cane to be purloined from the School House when we raid the other things, and our Head will have the right to give lickings where necessary—and lines, as well!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter, chaps!" said Tom Merry. "We've agreed to run a school here on our own, and it's up to us to make it a real school in every respect. When you do a thing there's nothing like doing it with all your might."

"Hear, hear!"

"Not only must we elect a Head, but we must have prefects," continued Tom Merry. "They, also, will have the same authority as prefects in our other school—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So that, you see, our miniature school will be run on approved lines," continued the rebel leader. "First of all, let's elect the headmaster. I nominate Talbot. He's an awfully clever chap, and he'll know how to run the lessons."

"Better make it a Fourth Form chap," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" cried Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "As a fellow of tact and judgment I considah myself an eligible candidate for the posish—"

"Go and eat coke, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther. "We want a chap with some brains in his noddle, not a giddy vacuum!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I considah that wemark as oppwobwious!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's heatedly. "Unless you apologise, as fwom one gentleman to anothah, it will be my painful dutay to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Manners. "Let's get on with the washing, and cut out the jaw. I think it's pretty evident that our Head must be a Shell fellow, and he's got to be a fellow with some sense. I reckon Tom Merry just about fills the bill."

"Hear, hear!" said a chorus of Shell fellows.

"What about me?" exclaimed Grundy. "I'm the chap for the job, you know. I'm Grundy, and I can do things. I—"

"Sit on him, somebody!" said Tom Merry.

George Alfred Grundy was promptly sat on, and he concluded his remarks with a series of muffled roars.

"Now, let's get down to it!" said the rebel leader. "Manners has been good enough to propose my humble self as headmaster here. Does anybody second that proposal?"

"I do!" said Kangaroo promptly.

"Hands up those in favour!" said Tom.

There was a good showing of hands, and after some squabbling among the would-be candidates Tom Merry was unanimously elected Head of the school in the gym.

The election of prefects then took place. Here, again, a good deal of squabbling took place, but finally it was decided that Blake, Talbot and D'Arcy should fulfil the roles of prefects.

"Then that's settled!" said Tom Merry. "Now, my sons, the time is ripe for the raid on the School House. We want a few forms and desks, a blackboard and easel, papers, books, pencils, and heaps of other things. All the other chaps and masters are at lessons now, so with good luck we should be able to carry out our raid without a hitch. All the things we need can be taken from the lecture-room, the store-room, and the studies. There's no need for us to go near the Form-rooms at all."

"Right-ho, Tommy!"

The raiding party was formed, and each fellow was detailed to perform a certain task. Tom Merry had all his plans cut and dried before the gymnasium door was unbolted, and he and his fellows sallied forth.

The quadrangle was silent and deserted, and the party of rebels reached the School House without mishap. Tom Merry stationed guards outside to keep watch, and he and the others entered the Hall.

As in the quadrangle, not a soul was to be seen. Five minutes later Tom Merry, Blake, and a few others came

out, each carrying a long form. These forms were rushed into the gym without more ado.

Thenceforth a continuous procession went back and forth between the School House and the gymnasium, and in this manner forms, desks, chairs, and stacks of books and papers were transferred to the rebel "school."

Tom Merry, Kangaroo, and D'Arcy were descending the back stairs in the School House, Tom laden with a blackboard and a master's cap and gown, and the others each carrying a pile of books, when a well-known figure appeared on the landing below.

"My hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo. "It's Ratty minor! Ratty must have excused him lessons!"

"Grab him!" said Tom Merry quickly. "We'll take him across and enrol him in our school. We'll give him a taster of what Ratty gave us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Gussy and Talbot dropped their books and bounded down the stairs after Ratty minor.

That youth, with a frightened yell, dashed away, but Kangaroo caught up with him at the end of the corridor.

"Yaroooogh!" wailed Paul Ratcliff, as Noble's heavy hand descended on his shoulder.

"This way, my pippin!" said the Shell fellow. "We want you! Come on, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Paul Ratcliff struggled and kicked wildly, making several unsuccessful attempts to bite his captors. He yelled at the top of his voice as Kangaroo and D'Arcy whirled him along.

Tom Merry, standing on the top of the stairs with the blackboard and the books, cast anxious glances up the corridor.

"Hurry up, kids!" he exclaimed. "The rotter will rouse the house, and we'll have a hornet's nest about us in a minute."

"Yoop! Help! Yah! Let go! Rescue!" shrieked Ratty minor.

There was a bellow of rage at the end of the passage, and Gerald Knox, of the Sixth, came dashing along, his face livid with fury.

"You little sweeps!" he shouted. "So you've come back! Stop! Do you hear?"

"Let that rotter go, chaps!" exclaimed Tom. "We shall have to catch him another time! This way!"

Bump!

"Yoooooogh!"

Ratty minor descended to the floor with a terrific concussion, and Knox sprawled over him as he came dashing along.

Tom Merry was already in the Hall doorway with the blackboard, and this, together with the cap and gown, he handed to Kerruish, who was waiting outside. Kerruish promptly rushed it across to the gym, leaving Tom with his hands free.

"Get those books, quick!" he exclaimed, as Kangaroo and Gussy dashed up. "We can use 'em to pelt Knox with!"

"Rather!"

Doors were banging open, and startled voices were demanding to know the cause of the disturbance.

The first person to appear after Knox was Mr. Ratcliff himself. He had, in fact, seen the rebels' operations from his study window, and had come down in hot haste.

Kildare & Co. and a crowd of Fifth and Third Formers



The well-known porter and keeper of the keys at St. Jim's. A staunch believer in "forty winks" for the benefit of one's health. His conversation with the juniors of St. Jim's usually consists of: "You young rips!" and "What I says is this 'ere!" Hates doing too much work, but is always affable when he scents a tip. An easy victim for the leg-pulling Monty Lowther. The old school porter has many "burdens" to bear—hoisting up juniors for corporal punishment. His wife Martha keeps the school tuck shop. Ephraim Taggles has guarded the gates of St. Jim's for many years, and is the oldest inhabitant of that great seat of learning.

were behind Mr. Ratcliff, but they hung back, content to look on and enjoy the fun.

The three raiders were back in the Hall now, each armed with a number of books.

Knox and Mr. Ratcliff came pounding forward, like hungry wolves on the fold.

"Now we have you!" cried Ratty excitedly. "Stop them, Knox! Capture the little rascals—Wow!"

The Housemaster broke off as a book struck him on his rather prominent nose. Mr. Ratcliff fell back with a roar, clutching at that organ.

"You little sweeps, I'll—Yah! Wow! Yaroooogh!" bawled Knox, for at that moment a perfect fusillade of books burst forth, and they thudded all over his person.

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz!

Biff! Crash! Thud!

Those whirling volumes struck Mr. Ratcliff and Knox on all quarters, and they fell back, ducking, dodging, and leaping wildly to avoid the missiles.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally D'Arcy. "Go it, ye cripples! One for Ratty's knob, Gussy—that's the style!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Kangaroo, and D'Arcy had been backing to the hall door whilst they hurled the books at their opponents. At last all the volumes had been thrown, except one, which Tom Merry held.

"Cut off, you chaps!" he cried to Kangaroo and D'Arcy. "We're as right as rain now!"

"Wathah!"

Knox, with a bellow like an infuriated bull, came charging to the door, with the Housemaster behind him. Tom Merry took careful aim with the book, and threw it unerringly. It struck Knox full on the jaw, and he went reeling back into Mr. Ratcliff's arms.

"Yaroooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the boys at the inner Hall door.

"Good-bye, Bluebells!" said Tom Merry sweetly, and he blew a kiss to Mr. Ratcliff before he departed.

Knox chased him down the School House steps and across to the gym, but there the prefect ran into a crowd of rebels who seized him in willing hands and dragged him inside.

The key grated in the lock before Mr. Ratcliff arrived. He was accompanied by Kildare & Co., whom he had ordered to come to his aid. Ratty minor was there also, looking dusty and dishevelled and savagely out-of-temper.

Knox roared as he was hauled unceremoniously through the gym.

"Yarooogh! Wow! Yah! You little rotters, leggo! Ow! Oooooop!"

"We don't want you here, Knox, so you might as well go!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Drop him out of the window, chaps!"

Knox was bundled to the window and dropped out. It was not a long drop, but was sufficient to give Knox a nasty jar when he landed.

"Yaroooogh!"

Tom Merry, in looking down, saw Ratty minor hovering near, and his eyes gleamed. He turned to Kit Wildrake, the Canadian junior.

"I say, Wildrake, do you think you could lasso Ratty minor for me?" he asked. "I'd like to have that measly little rotter here to teach him a lesson."

"Lasso him?" grinned the lad from the wild and woolly West. "Surest thing you know, old top!"

Wildrake had that morning been entertaining his fellow

rebels with some wonderful rope-spinning tricks, and he quickly fetched the rope, which was of a goodly length.

He leaned out of the window, his lasso in hand, and his keen eyes judged the distance separating him from the spot where Paul Ratcliff was standing.

All of a sudden the rope left the Canadian junior's hands and, like a long snake, it twirled through the air. The noose dropped with a nicety over Ratty minor's head and shoulders, and Wildrake pulled the noose tight under that startled youth's armpits.

"Here, wh-what the— Oooooogh! Stoppit!" howled Ratty minor, as Wildrake and Tom Merry commenced to haul him in.

Mr. Ratcliff dashed forward, arriving underneath the window just as his nephew was being pulled up the wall.

The Housemaster reached forward, but the luckless Paul was kicking wildly, so that one of his boots, quite by accident, of course, struck Mr. Ratcliff on the nose.

Biff!

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the rebels.

Ratty yelled and hopped back with alacrity.

Paul Ratcliff was dragged in through the window and dumped heavily on the floor of the gym.

"Got you this time, my beauty!" chuckled Tom Merry. "It was jolly unkind of you, though, to kick nunky on the boko like that! Just bark at him yelling down there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff was almost frantic with rage. He danced about and waved his arms and shook his fists, cutting a most undignified figure. But the more he raved the more the rebels laughed, and at last the tyrant gave it up and strode away, holding his nose.

The boys in the quadrangle chortled at this further victory of the rebels.

CHAPTER 4.

A School from School!

"YOU cads! Let me go!" panted Ratty minor.

He was standing against the gymnasium wall, surrounded by the rebels, and his face at that moment was certainly not pleasant to look upon. His lean, sallow features were contorted into an angry snarl, and his beady eyes were glittering like a wildcat's.

"You've got to obey orders now you're here, Ratcliff!" said Tom Merry grimly. "You haven't got your rotter of an uncle to shield and pamper you, remember!"

"My uncle will pay you out for this!" exclaimed the other passionately. "You'd better let me go, or—"

"You'll stay here, you cad, and undergo a course of discipline!" said Tom Merry. "I'm headmaster in this establishment, and my orders are to be obeyed. First of all, you can wash and peel the potatoes for dinner!"

"I won't!" yelled Paul Ratcliff defiantly. "I'm not going to! I— Ow! Yarooooogh!"

Blake and Talbot, at a sign from Tom Merry, grasped the captive and hustled him away.

Trimble and Kerruish were already busy with preparations for the rebels' dinner, and a huge meat pie was in the making. A basin of water and a sack of potatoes were set before Ratty minor, and the rebel school prefects ordered him to "get on with it."

He persisted in his refusals until Blake and Talbot employed the expedient of ducking his head in the water. In this manner they quickly brought the captive to subjection, and, a fresh supply of water having been secured, he set to work, scowling, and washed and peeled the potatoes.

Dinner was soon prepared, and a fine spread was placed on the trestle-table. The rebels' eyes glistened with appreciation. As Lumley-Lumley remarked, this was the first "real grub" they had seen for days. Mr. Ratcliff's short commons edict had kept them in a semi-starved condition, and they revelled at the prospect of a square meal at last.

Tom Merry placed a small piece of pie, a half of a potato, and a microscopic portion of cabbage on a plate and handed it to Ratty minor.

"Wh-what's this?" ejaculated that youth.

"Your dinner!" said Tom grimly. "The tables are turned now, old son, and from now on you're on short commons. We have decided to give you a taster of what we've had to put up with these past few days."

Ratty minor gazed at his meagre fare in speechless wrath. The other juniors chuckled.

"I'm not going to eat this!" he bellowed at last. "You can jolly well keep it!"

"All serene!" said Tom Merry. "You can do as you please, of course. If you care to go on hunger strike, that's not our bizney."

"But—but this isn't enough!" howled Paul Ratcliff furiously. "You don't call this a dinner, do you?"

"That's as big a dinner as Mr. Ratcliff allowed us when we were on short commons!" retorted the rebel leader. "You can take it or leave it. That's your choice!"

Ratty minor yelled and protested, but all to no purpose. Tom Merry and his "prefects" dished out the dinners, and the rebels fell to with a will. Paul Ratcliff sat sullenly at the table and refused to eat at first, but the sight of the others enjoying themselves and his own pangs of hunger soon overruled his obstinacy, and he scowlingly gulped down his frugal portion.

Apple dumplings and custard followed, but there was none for Paul Ratcliff. Tom Merry & Co., when in the hands of Mr. Ratcliff, had been allowed no "afters" at dinner, and they were determined to treat Ratty minor as they themselves had been treated.

When dinner was over, and the rebels had announced themselves completely satisfied, Ratty minor was made to assist in the onerous task of washing-up. He had to be bumped several times and ducked twice before he would consent to do the washing-up, and he gasped and moaned dismally the while he did it.

The others cleared the table away, and the "class" was prepared. The forms and desks were ranged in front of the blackboard, and sharp at the stroke of the afternoon bell that tolled in the School House, Tom Merry, clad in cap and gown and armed with a cane, took his stand by the table in front of the class.

The prefects were rounding up the pupils.

"Where's Trimble?" Blake was saying. "Has anybody seen the fat idiot? It's time for lessons!"

Cardew grinned.

"Better look in the washhouse," he said. "I fancy I saw him there, with a tin of biscuits!"

"Oh!" said Blake grimly.

He strode into the gymnasium washhouse, and there, sure enough, was the fat youth of the Fourth, seated on the rim of one of the wash-basins, busily engaged in devouring the contents of a tin of biscuits. Baggy had raided the biscuits from the rebel commissariat department that morning and had hidden the tin in the wash-house. He almost fell off his perch when he saw Blake.

"You—you fat looter!" roared Blake. "So this is your little game!"

"Ow!" gasped Baggy, blinking nervously at Blake. "I—I say, Blake, I found this tin of b-b-biscuits, you know."

"Yes, I know all about that!" snorted Blake. "Take a hundred lines, Trimble, for petty pilfering! You deserve a jolly good licking!"

"Oh, really— Yow-wow! Leggo! Wharrer you at?" yelled Baggy, as Blake took him by the scruff of his neck.

"This way to lessons!" said Blake, yanking him along. "I shall recommend the Head to give you a licking!"

"Oooop!"

Baggy was rushed to the "class."

All the other juniors were seated. Racke & Co. and Ratty minor did not look at all pleased, but the others were grinning.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, the acting headmaster, when Blake and Trimble arrived. "What's the row?"

"This fat rotter was loafing in the washhouse, and I found him wolfing a tin of biscuits, sir," said Blake. "May I respectfully suggest a thundering good licking?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the "class."

"Silence!" said Tom Merry sternly. "Trimble, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! To filch biscuits, buns, or other edibles from the stores is contrary to the rules and statutes of this school! Hold out your hand!"

"No fear!" snorted Baggy defiantly. "I'm not going to be caned by you, Tom Merry!"

"Trimble, how dare you!" rapped the youthful headmaster, setting his mortar-board straight. "If you don't hold out your hand I'll instruct the prefects to lay you across the table, and I'll larrup you so that you won't be able to sit down for a time!"

Baggy chose the lesser evil, and he held out his hand.

Swish! swish! went the cane.

Baggy Trimble roared at the top of his voice:

"Ow-wow-wow-wow-wow!"

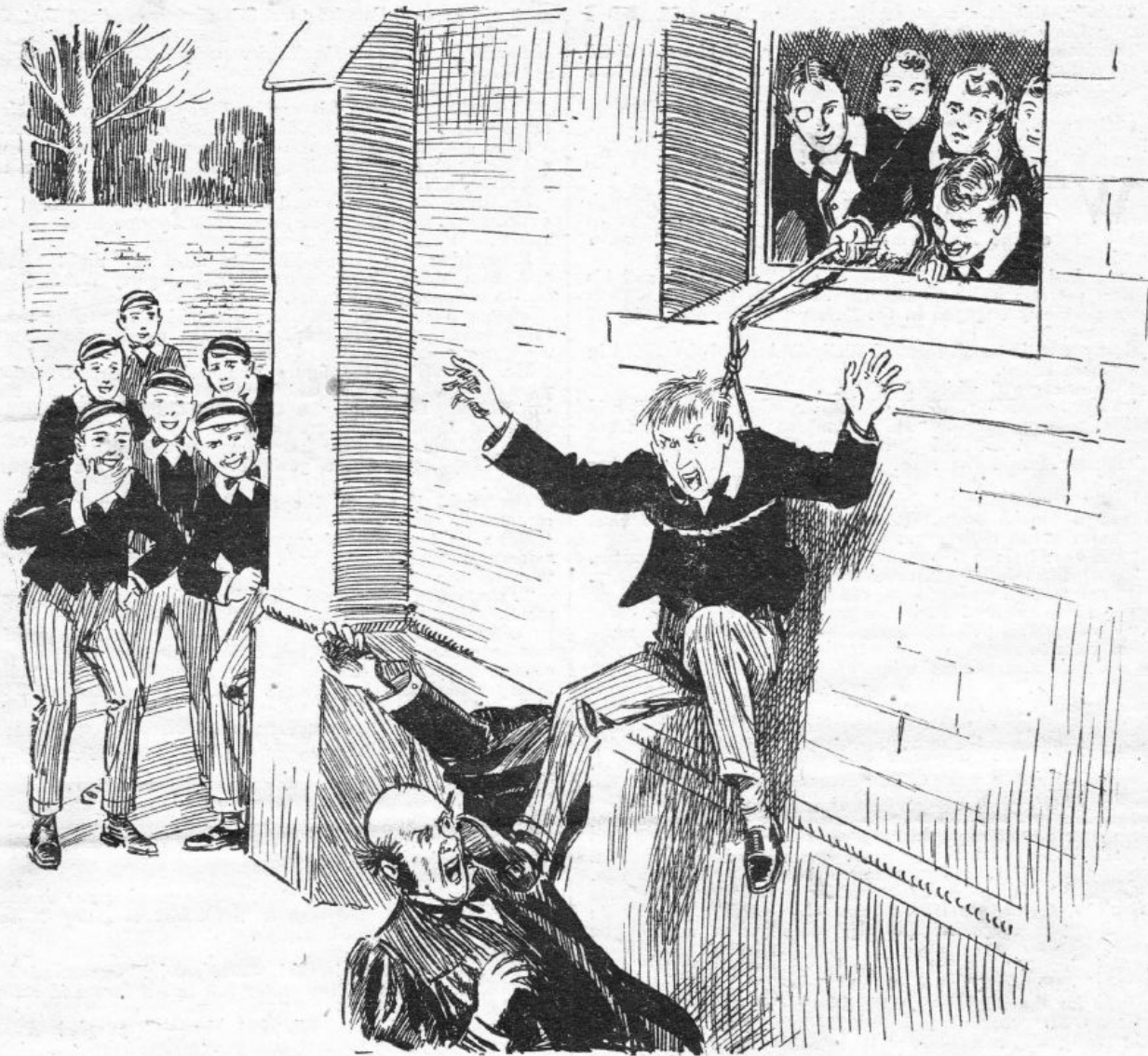
"There!" said Tom Merry sternly. "Let that be a lesson to you, Trimble! Go to your seat!"

"Grooo-hooogh!"

Tom Merry set straight his mortar-board, which had come to rest gracefully over his left ear, and he took up his Latin grammar.

"Now, boys, cut the cackle and let's get to the horses—I—I mean, let's proceed with the lesson!" he said.

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"Here, wh-what the—Oooooogh! Stoppit!" howled Ratty minor as Wildrake and Tom Merry commenced to haul on the rope. Mr. Ratcliff dashed forward, and he arrived underneath the window just as his nephew was being pulled up the wall. The Housemaster reached forward, but the luckless Paul was kicking wildly, and one of his boots struck Mr. Ratcliff on the nose. Biff! "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the rebels. (See page 10.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" rapped the rebel leader. "Kerruish, you will kindly construe from Caput XI."

Kerruish obediently stood up and tackled Julius Cæsar's immortal "De Bello Gallico," and the lesson proceeded on the tenor of its way.

A good many of the juniors soon indicated signs of slacking off, but the youthful master kept them hard at it. The prefects backed him up nobly when Racke and Gore became recalcitrant, and discipline was strictly maintained in the rebel school. Ratty minor sullenly reconciled himself to his fate, and worked with the rest.

Tom Merry proved himself as able a leader at lessons as he was at games. He was a good scholar, and he made his "pupils" do some really useful work. Most of their work was done in writing, and Tom retained the sheets of paper on which the exercises were written, so that he would be able to show them afterwards as proof that the rebels had really been working.

When lessons at last came to an end all were quite cheery, except Baggy Trimble, Paul Ratcliff, Racke, Mellish, and Gore, who had been caned either for slacking or insubordination, and Tom felt completely satisfied with his "class."

Shortly after the dismissal of "class," Mr. Lathom appeared outside the gymnasium, and the rebels went to the window.

The Fourth Form master looked in surprise at Tom, who was still dressed in cap and gown.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "What—what are you doing in that attire, Merry?"

"I'm a headmaster now, sir," replied Tom cheerfully. "What!"

"You see, sir, we've started a school here on our own," explained the rebel leader. "We didn't want you to think that we are running this barring-out just for the sake of dodging lessons, so we are taking classes here in the ordinary way, and I'm—ahem!—the master."

"Dear me!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Really, this—this is most extraordinary! You must be joking, Merry!"

"There's no joke about it, sir," said Tom. "We're in earnest, I assure you. We've done two chapters of the Gallic Wars this afternoon and a good bit of Euclid, including the Theorem of Pythagoras. I really think, sir, that I've managed to make the fellows understand that giddy theorem at last. I drummed it into 'em, and even Trimble is now able to prove conclusively that in a right-angled triangle the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rebels.

Even Mr. Lathom had to smile.

"Dear me!" he said. "That is commendable news indeed, Merry. I am very gratified to hear that you are not neglecting your school work. But may I again ask you to cease this insurrection against Mr. Ratcliff? It is most distressing that two whole Forms should be so completely at loggerheads with their master!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we mean to stay here until Mr. Ratcliff has climbed down," he said. "If he cares to meet us half-way we might consider the matter, but we're not coming out to be flogged and bullied and ground down at his will!"

"Wathah not!"

Mr. Lathom sighed.

"Really, this is a most complex matter," he said. "I—I hardly know what to do."

The Fourth Form master walked away, shaking his head sorrowfully, and the rebels in the gym. went on with their preparations for tea.

CHAPTER 5. The Biters Bit!

"**W**HEW-EEEEEE!"

That low, piercing whistle sounded through the gloom, and Reilly, who was mounting guard at the front window of the gym., peered down-

ward.

Dusk had fallen over St. Jim's, and Tom Merry and his dutiful prefects had rounded up the rebels for prep. They were all busily engaged in the "class" at the other side of the room.

Reilly saw the small form of Wally D'Arcy of the Third in the gloom below.

"Whew-eeeee!" whistled Wally.

"Faith, an' it's your minor outside, Gussy darlin'," said Reilly, looking round. "He's tryin' to blow out his front teeth entirely. Shall I open the window, Merry?"

"Rather!" said the rebel leader. "Perhaps the kid has news."

Reilly opened the window, and Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus looked down. Blake and Talbot kept the class concentrated on their prep.

"Bai Jove! Is that you, Wally?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Only little me," said the hero of the Third cheerily.

"How are you blowing, Gus, old tulip?"

The noble swell of St. Jim's gave a gasp of horror.

"Weally, Wally!" he exclaimed. "How many more times am I to impress on you that I, as your majah, should be treated with propah respect? Bai Jove! I—"

"Bow-wow!" retorted young D'Arcy. "I haven't come to listen to a jawbone solo, Gussy. I've got some information. Joe Frayne, who's fagging for Knox, overheard him telling Gilmore all about it. Ratty's plotted a plot with Knox and Cutts of the Fifth, and Monteith's going to help. He didn't want to, but as he's a New House prefect he's more or less under Ratty's thumb. The dirty deed comes off to-night. Ratty's found a key belonging to the back door of the gym., and to-night he, and Knox, and Cutts, and Gilmore, and Monteith are going to break in and kidnap Tom Merry and Blake, and as many of the others as they can. They'll be armed with canes, and Taggles and the gardener have been bribed to lend a hand, too. Ratty reckons on catching you chaps on the hop while you're asleep, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Thanks awfully for the tip, Wally. We'll be on our guard."

"I say, Merry, you look jolly natty in your cap and gown," said Wally with a chuckle. "What's the idea?"

"We're running a school here," explained the leader of the rebels. "Our motto is 'Business as usual' during the harring-out."

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally. "You don't mean to say you're doing lessons?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said his elder brother. "We're cawwyin' on just the same as though we were in pwopah school. That's why we waided the School House this mornin', you know."

"My only Aunt Jane!" gasped Wally. "That takes the giddy bun! You are a set of silly jossers, and no mistake!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Still, I wish you luck!" grinned the hero of the Third. "You've got Ratty's rag out, and no mistake. He's been simply tearing his hair all day. How's Ratty minor-getting on? Have you boiled him in oil yet?"

"Ha, ha! Not quite!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Oh, well, I'm off!" said Wally. "Cheerio!"

"Good-bye, Wally, and thanks for what you've told us!"

"Don't mench! Chin-chin, Gus!"

Wally scuttled off in the gloom, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy returned to the "class."

When the rebels heard the news of the intended raid they chuckled.

"Good old Wally!" said Blake. "How jolly lucky he got to know of Ratty's plot. So the wheeze is to kidnap you and me, Tommy. I suppose Ratty reckons on holding us to ransom, as it were?"

"That's about it!" laughed Tom. "Forewarned is forearmed, my sons, and we'll give Ratty & Co. a hot reception when they do come."

"Rather!"

"Let me see," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We've got a couple of firehoses on the premises, haven't we? They'll be jolly useful. Those two sacks of flour and the box of eggs we raided from the pantry and the rest of the

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soot will come in handy, too. It's very convenient that this place has a flat roof, which we can easily reach through the skylight up there. We'll give Ratty & Co. an air attack."

"What-ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry doffed his cap and gown, and preparations for the reception of Ratty and his minions went on apace.

Dusk deepened into night, and a large, bright moon came out from the clouds, shedding its mellow light down on the grand old pile of St. Jim's.

Bed-time came round, and the rebels, watching from the gymnasium, saw the lights go out one by one in the School House.

Everything was in readiness to meet the night attack, and Tom Merry & Co. were waiting eagerly for Ratty & Co. to commence operations.

Eleven o'clock boomed from the old clock tower when seven shadowy figures crept across the quadrangle towards the gymnasium.

Mr. Ratcliff's spare figure was easily discerned, and so were Taggles and the school gardener, George. As they came closer Tom Merry & Co. were able to recognise the others as Monteith, Knox, Cutts, and Gilmore.

Mr. Ratcliff and these latter four were armed with canes, whilst Taggles and the gardener each carried a quantity of rope.

The night attack on the rebel stronghold was about to commence.

Not a light glimmered anywhere in the gymnasium as the raiders approached the back door, walking on tiptoe and with infinite caution.

"Take care!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff, who was in command. "We must act quickly, and take the young renegades by surprise. I have the key, and I have taken the precaution to grease it well. When I have unlocked the door and opened it you must rush inside immediately, and wrest Merry and Blake from their beds. Those two must be abducted at all cost, and, of course, if it is possible for you to take any others, you will do so. Now keep close behind me, and I will open the door."

Mr. Ratcliff's followers kept very close behind him as he tiptoed to the back door. He inserted the key in the lock, but as he did so he and the others were horrified and amazed to see the door come open, apparently of its own accord. It opened with a bang, and this bang was followed by a loud, rushing noise.

Sizz-zzzz-zzzz!

Two powerful streams of water came surging out through the doorway, and, bursting in the midst of Ratty & Co., bowled them over like ninepins.

Sizz-zzz-zzzz!

"Yaroooooogh! Ah! Oh! Oooooooch!" screeched Mr. Ratcliff, as he caught the water full in his face and reeled over.

"Oooooogh! Yah! Wh-what the——" gurgled Knox.

"Oh, crumbs! Yow! Gerroooooogh!"

Sizz-zzz-zzzz went the water.

The rebels holding the two firehoses directed their aim unerringly on the raiders, and as fast as they tried to rise the water smote their legs and bowled them over again.

Mr. Ratcliff and his helpers floundered in the water and raised the night echoes with their yells.

"Oooooch!"

"Yah! Ow-wow!"

"Gerrugh! Gug! Gug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors in the gym.

The water ceased flowing at last, and Mr. Ratcliff & Co. staggered to their feet, drenched to the skin.

Next minute another noise sounded above, and a torrent of whiteness shot down with swift suddenness.

Tom Merry & Co., hiding on the roof, had emptied a sack of flour over their victims!

Swooooosh!

"Oogh! Wot the—— Yah!" roared Taggles, as the floury deluge swept over him. "Look out, sir! Oooooogh!"

Mr. Ratcliff had caught the flour in deadly earnest. So had Knox, and Cutts, and Monteith. It smothered them from head to foot, and where it mingled with the water that already soaked them it formed into a clammy paste.

Mr. Ratcliff and his followers looked ghastly sights in the moonlight, and the juniors on the roof could scarcely move for laughter.

"Oh, my hat! This is rich!" gurgled Blake. "Look at the floury phantoms! Gaze at 'em and weep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let 'em have the rest of the flour—and then the soot!" gasped Tom Merry. "Don't forget the soot!"

"No fear!"

Swoooooosh!

The rest of the flour went swooping down, and this was followed by a deluge of a different colour—to wit the soot!

"Oooooogh!"

"Yah-abhh!"

"Wooooogh!"

Those weird and wonderful yells, and several others equally weird and wonderful, arose from the seven luckless raiders below.

Ratty & Co. were fairly swamped with water and flour and soot. The spectacle they presented in the moonlight, with the soot on them in addition to the flour, was truly remarkable to behold. It was, as Monty Lowther sobbingly said, a sight for the gods and men and little fishes.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at them and howled.

Ratty & Co. also howled—though not with laughter. Their howls carried across to the school buildings, and windows banged up, lights were lit, and startled voices could be heard in the distance.

The sight of Ratty & Co., and the sound of their loud lamentations, were calculated to startle anybody!

"Oooooogh!" moaned Taggles, who looked a really wonderful sight. "Wot I says is this 'ere— Grooooooh! This is awful! Ow-wow! Young rips! Yah! Which Hi'm turmin' this job in, horders or no horders! Gerooooch!"

Tom Merry turned to his henchman on the roof.

"Gather up your ammunition, my sons!" he chuckled.

"We'll give 'em the eggs as a parting compliment!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ratty & Co. had had quite sufficient, and they commenced to beat a hasty retreat. As they ran, a fusillade of eggs whizzed down at them from above, and, as Monty Lowther remarked, this "egged" them on considerably.

Whiz! Whiz! Thud! Splosh!

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ow! Stoppit!"

"Gerrugh!"

Splosh! Thud! Splosh!

Eggs burst thick and fast upon the retreating raiders. Some of those eggs were apparently very ancient, for the aroma that arose as they burst was emphatic, to say the least.

Ratty & Co. took to their heels and ran as they had never run before. Streaks of water and soot and flour trailed behind them as they went, and the rebels on the gymnasium roof kept up their barrage of eggs until Ratty & Co. were out of range.

From the dark and gloomy distance came their doleful cries, and Tom Merry & Co. raised a loud, resounding roar of triumph:

"Good night, Ratty!"

"Pleasant dreams!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And whilst the rebels of St. Jim's rejoiced and made exceeding merry, Ratty and his myrmidons crawled into the School House in a truly fearful condition, there to become the objects of laughter and derision from all who beheld them.

Mr. Ratcliff did not get to bed until the early hours, and when at last he fell asleep he dreamed dreams of turmoil and strife, and all uncharitableness.

CHAPTER 6.

Foiled Again!

MR. RATCLIFF lay very low next day, and he gave the gymnasium a wide berth. Tom Merry & Co. had proved more than a match for him so far, and he required time to get his second wind, as it were.

The barring-out proceeded merrily, and with every indication of ultimate victory for the rebels. Morning and afternoon lessons were taken in the gymnasium, and Tom Merry and his prefects brooked of no slacking among the "pupils." Ratty minor was kept strictly on short commons and was made to work hard. Tom Merry had extra sentries put on duty round the gym that night, but nothing happened.

On the day following, Talbot, who had the handling of the stores, announced to Tom Merry that supplies were getting low.

The rebels, released from Mr. Ratcliff's short commons edict, had been "doing themselves" extremely well, and vast inroads had been made into the stock of provisions that had been raided from the school pantry.

"So grub's getting short!" said the rebel leader, when Talbot made his report. "That means that fresh supplies must be got in pretty soon—what?"

Talbot nodded.

"I'm afraid so, old scout," he said. "I suppose we shall have to make another raid on the pantry?"

The rebel leader shook his head.

"Too risky!" he said. "Ratty will be watching like a hawk, and I dare say he's got the pantry well protected. The only thing to do is to get in supplies from outside."

"Whew! That's rather risky, too, isn't it?" said Talbot.

"Yes, but it can be managed," replied Tom Merry. "A party of us must go out this morning, while lessons are on, and buy the stuff we want at the village stores. Then the parcels could be smuggled over the wall and fetched in here. With luck, we shall be able to work it."

The rebels were called together and a whip-round for funds was made. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nobly contributed two pounds to the good cause. Lumley-Lumley gave a pound, and Cardew ten shillings. The other juniors willingly "shelled out" all they could afford, and the total sum collected was found to be ample for the rebels' immediate needs.

Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, Levison, Kangaroo, and Sidney Clive elected to venture out of St. Jim's on the "grub-running" expedition.

They waited until morning lessons were well in progress before they set out.

They hurried across the Close from the direction of the gymnasium, and, reaching the cloisters, it was a matter of minutes for them to climb over the wall from the old oak-tree, which was always used by the juniors for bounds-breaking purposes.

Rylcombe was quickly reached, and there Tom Merry and his cheery followers proceeded to expend the fund money on the provisions they needed for the barring-out.

Shopping took up rather more time than they had anticipated. Each of the six juniors was well loaded with parcels when they set out again for St. Jim's.

"We shall have to get a move on!" said Tom Merry. "Lessons will be over soon, and the quad will be crowded. Put your best feet foremost, my sons! If Ratty catches us, we're done!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwwy like anythin', deah boys!"

The "grub-runners" were hurrying along the Rylcombe Lane towards St. Jim's when suddenly Tom Merry uttered a cry of astonishment.

"My hat! Look who's coming, you fellows!"

A schoolboy had appeared in the lane ahead, and he came dashing towards Tom Merry & Co. at top speed.

It was Monty Lowther!

"What the dickens is the matter, Monty?" demanded Tom Merry, as his chum dashed up, breathless with excitement.

"Ratty minor's escaped!" gasped Monty. "He got out through a window and was gone before we had a chance to nab him!"

"Oh jeminy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"He went straight up to Ratty, of course, and told him that you chaps were out in the village!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ratty came down with all the prefects and half the Fifth, and he's got a cordon round the school. I only managed to get out by the skin of my teeth to warn you!"

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances of dismay.

"Well, that's properly done it!" gasped Jack Blake. "Ratty's got the school surrounded, and he's waiting for us to return to nab us. From all appearances, Tommy, the game's up!"

The rebel leader set his teeth hard.

"Is it?" he muttered. "Not yet, old scout! Ratty's got to catch us first, and he'll have a job to do that, I'm thinking!"

"Ratty will be like a cat watching for mice," said Kangaroo desperately. "He won't give us the ghost of a chance now he's got us on the hop. He'll keep the giddy school guarded day and night. We're in the very dickens of a hole, Tommy."

Tom Merry, in spite of himself, had to admit that they were.

The juniors stood by the wayside, discussing the situation in dismal tones.

"What can we do?" moaned Jack Blake. "If we go back we shall run right into Ratty's arms. And we—we can't stay out of doors indefinitely, Tommy."

"Weally, this is a wotten pwedic, deah boys!" said D'Arcy distressfully. "We shall nevah be able to get back to the gym, with all this gwub. The posish is uttably hopeless, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry's boyish brow was wrinkled with thought.

Whilst he was still attempting to think matters out, a rumbling noise sounded in the lane, and, looking round, the juniors saw the village coal merchant's cart approaching from the direction of the village.

The cart was loaded with sacks of coal, and Tom Merry, when he saw them, gave a sudden joyous roar.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "I've got it, my sons!"

"Got what?" said Blake anxiously.

"A wheeze—a notion—a giddy brain wave!" said Tom Merry, his eyes glistening eagerly.

"Bai Jove! What is it, deah boy?"

"Get it off your chest, ass!" roared Blake.

The leader of the rebels chuckled.

"The wheeze, if it works, will enable the whole crowd of us to get back to the gym with the tuck, as easy as rolling off a form!" he said. "See yonder small cart approaching? We'll commandeered that—"

"Bai Jove!"

"We'll empty some of the sacks by the road here, and you

(Continued on page 16.)



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

LAST week a Merrie Olde English Faire was held down in Rylcombe in aid of a fund for providing local poor children with summer holidays, sending them away to the seaside and the country, and that sort of thing.

The affair was really a kind of bazaar, and lasted for two evenings, and I believe it was a great success. Anyway, it deserved to be, because everybody who was concerned with the management of the function put heart and soul into their job, while the general public turned up in large numbers, and spent their money right generously.

Of course, the Grammarians had a hand in the affair, but we didn't expect any really brilliant ideas from them. As long as they helped to bring in a little more money we did not mind. Naturally, they put on plenty of side, but we overlooked that.

Most of the St. Jim's fellows went on one evening or the other, and quite a number of us on both. The beads afforded us every opportunity for going, excusing prep and giving exeats until bedtime, as the effort was in aid of so worthy a cause, and our presence naturally assisted in swelling the receipts.

As a matter of fact, quite a number of the fellows gave their assistance in various ways. Some took charge of stalls, others walked about and palmed things off on to people, or acted as stewards at the side-shows and concerts. Of course, the St. Jim's Concert Party were there, providing mirth and melody, and the Junior Dramatic Society gave a short play each evening. The proceeds of these concerts alone totalled quite a respectable sum—upwards of ten pounds, I believe—and those of us who were running side-shows, such as houp-la and air-gun shooting, took money hand-over-fist.

A lot of the Grammar School fellows were in the same line of business, and there was very keen competition, but I am glad to say that our total receipts were nearly three pounds in advance of theirs. Not that it mattered much which way it was, really, as all the money went the same way, whoever scooped it in; but, still, we have a fondness for being top of the list in everything if we can manage to get there.

For the most part we attended strictly to business, but we found a little time and energy for various diversions, such as pulling the legs of the Grammarians, or defeating their efforts to return the compliment. You will be able to read something about that in the following columns.

Anyway, everybody enjoyed themselves, and the fund benefited to a considerable extent, which, I suppose, is another way of saying that the affair was a complete success.

By the way, I might add, as Kerr has omitted to mention the fact, that the New House managed to have their toffee-stall, in spite of everything, and did exceedingly well with it.

Tom Merry

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The St. Jim's News



TOFFEE!

By George Francis Kerr.

THE New House aren't in the habit of taking a back seat, whatever the occasion, so when we heard that the School chaps were making arrangements to poke their noses into this bazaar affair, we decided it was up to us to give some sort of helping hand as well.

You can't expect a thing to turn out a complete success if such idiots as the School House are given the sole handling of the affair. When it comes to brains the School House chaps come nowhere. They don't realise this themselves, of course; they're far too stupid. The New House has always been cock House of St. Jim's, but Tom Merry and his crowd are afraid to admit the fact. The bazaar was for charity, therefore it was up to us New House fellows to make a success of the whole thing.

At the same time, we realised that whatever we did would have to be done in the face of great difficulties, not the least of which would be lack of any sort of support from the very individual who ought to have done most to encourage us—Ratty!

Figgy, Fatty, and I discussed the matter from all points, and finally decided that, Ratty or no Ratty, we'd be on the spot with the goods, in some form or other, when the time came. We thought at first of rigging up a houp-la stall, but had to abandon the notion on learning that Study No. 6 had already arranged to provide one.

Then Fatty Wynn had a sudden inspiration—connected with tuck, of course.

"Why not a toffee-stall?" he suggested.

"Home-made toffee, you know!"

"Good idea!" approved Figgins. "It'll sell like hot cakes! How about the tin? Butter and milk and sugar cost money, you know."

We whipped round nearly thirty bob between us, and that evening we set to work making the stuff. It isn't easy to manufacture toffee in large quantities over a study fire, but we turned out quite a lot in a very little time.

Just as we were pouring it out on to some tin trays we'd borrowed, the door opened, and Ratty came stalking in.

He immediately commenced to kick up merry Hanover's delight, and even went so far as to declare that he'd forbidden us to have anything to do with the bazaar—which he hadn't, of course.

He banged on the table, and biffed his hand into a packet of butter, which he shook off on to the floor—unfortunately for himself, because about a minute later, while he was still going strong, threatening us with all kinds of dire penalties, he trod in it.

Now, if there's one thing more than another that doesn't make a good floor-covering, that thing is butter. Ratty found that out then, if he hadn't known it before, because, as soon as he stepped into that half-pound or so of butter, his feet slid away from under him, with the consequence that he sat down suddenly and unexpectedly in a tin of toffee that had just been put out to cool. Judging by the yell that Ratty gave out, it hadn't cooled very much in the few minutes it had been there, and—well, anyway, I don't think Ratty will be in a hurry to interrupt any more toffee-making operations, anyway, yet awhile.

TABLEAUX!

By Monty Lowther.

ISUPPOSE everybody knows what tableaux are. Most people have been bored to death by this type of alleged entertainment at one time or another in their lives.

Well, the Grammarians had arranged to do some of these horrible things at the bazaar, in between the shows that our concert-party and Junior Dramatic Society were giving, and a few of us ambled along to see what sort of idiots they would make of themselves. We wondered if they could possibly improve on their usual condition.

The price of admission was only sixpence, so we felt that we shouldn't be much out of pocket even if the show was as much of a wash-out as we expected it to be; but we stopped at the fruit-stall for a few moments in order to make certain we were in a position to have our money's worth one way or another, whatever happened. The lady in charge of the fruit-stall seemed very surprised when we asked for tomatoes; but, fortunately, she had some on hand, and was obliging enough to pick out the very ripest among them.

The first tableau was entitled "Tribute to Cæsar," and from the title we expected to see a lot of chaps dressed up in Roman togas, or breastplates and graves and kilts, receiving bags of ready cash in a very lordly manner from hairy-looking johnnies in skin hearthrugs.

When the curtain went up, however, we were treated to a view of something entirely different from that.

Instead of the expected tableaux featuring the colonial policy of Imperial Rome, we saw a half-dozen fellows in Etons, wearing Grammar School caps, in the forefront of which stood Gordon Gay and Frank Monk.

They were looking down at half a dozen fellows who were kneeling before them, also in Etons, and wearing St. Jim's caps. These fellows were made up so as to resemble, in some slight degree, Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, Redfern, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Skimpole. (These two latter, I suppose, because they're fairly easy to caricature.)

And in the pseudo Tom Merry's hand was a large scroll, with an enormous red seal at the bottom, bearing the words:

"WE ACKNOWLEDGE AND CONFESS, IN ALL DUE AND PROPER HUMILITY, THAT THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL IS TOP-DOG, AND ST. JIM'S ARE NOT IN THE PICTURE."

There was a gasp of amazement from the audience, who had not been expecting anything of the kind, followed a fraction of a second later by quite a number of gasps—this time from the figures in the tableau, who had also not been expecting anything of the kind—by which I allude, of course, to the tomatoes, which arrived at their appointed destination with promptness and accuracy, and in a state that fully confirmed the statement of the lady who had sold them to us with regard to their ripeness.

"Tribute to Cæsar"—eh? Well, they got it all right—paid with interest!



QUITE a NICE TIME!

By Clifton Dane.

"Not a bit of it! This is where you make your fortune, old bean. All you have to do is to knock the sixpence off the ball, and it's yours."

"The ball or the money?"

"The sixpence, of course, you ass! It has to fall clear of the circle," he added casually.

It looked delightfully easy. So I seized hold of the cue and set to work, having no scruples about taking money off Grammarians. I needn't have worried; it would have been just the same if I had.

Of course, I saw at once that the thing to do was to hit the ball with the sixpence on it as hard as I could, so as to make the coin fly off. So I hit it hard. It went whizzing off the table, and left the sixpence exactly in the middle of the chalked circle.

Lane went over and brought the ball back, after politely thanking a farmer for so kindly stopping it with his ear and thereby preventing it from going through the doorway and perhaps getting lost in the corridor.

The farmer stood rubbing his ear and watching me until he saw that I was making preparations for another shot, when he suddenly fled.

My next shot was taken with more care than the first. I had an idea that if I hit the ball on the side it would shoot the sixpence off in the opposite direction. It proved to be a very good plan, and worked out quite successfully, except for the fact that the sixpence dropped in precisely the same position as previously. In my next five or six attempts I sent the ball to every point of the compass, and twice it shot off the table with great force, fortunately without rolling out of sight, as on each occasion somebody was obliging enough to arrest its flight before it had reached the ground—one gentleman using his nose and the other the back of his neck.

And still the sixpence persisted in dropping in exactly the same spot. I haven't the slightest doubt that I should have succeeded if I'd gone on trying; but about this time something very special was going on in one of the other rooms—or, at least, that's the conclusion I came to, because everybody started to hurry out of the one I was in. So I laid down my cue.

"Here, I'm going to follow the crowd!" I said. "I seem to be missing something."

Lane looked round in a thoughtful manner. "Do you? Well, I can't think what it can be—unless it's the clock over there. Have another shot, and you might hit it this time."

"Don't be an ass!" I said, and left him. I couldn't find out what it was that had attracted all the people from the room with the bagatelle-table in; but I soon came across another money-making stunt.

This time it was a scientific wheeze. An electric fish-pond. Well, that's what they called it, though it wasn't a fish-pond, really. It was a big zinc bowl full of water, with a shilling in the bottom. You paid three-pence, and put your hand into the water,

WILDRAKE'S WAY!

Another interesting feature of the Jollie Olde Faire was the shooting gallery. Of course, this attracted the "crack" shots of the school.

Arthur Augustus got going, and scored fifteen bulls out of a possible twenty-four. Then along came Wildrake, who scored twenty bulls without a "miss." Grundy was next, but he complained of the rifles not being true, for out of a possible twelve he did not get on the target once. Wildrake made a sporty bet of ten shillings that he would not get a bull however long he tried. But Grundy did, however, for his rifle went off on one occasion before he had taken aim, and, strange to say, a bullseye was recorded. Of course, Wildrake paid up, and another ten shillings was added to the day's takings. Wildrake intended to pay up whether he won or lost—it was his way!

and tried to get the bob out. Of course, there was a wire attached to the bowl, and another to a brass plate you had to stand on to get near the bowl, and these were connected up to a shocking coil, so that as soon as you put your hand into the water you completed the circuit, and got enough current through you to make you take your hand out of the water in a hurry.

Carboy was running the show, and he was manipulating the coil in such a way that if anybody could stand the shock and get his hand near to the shilling, Carboy turned on a drop more of the juice and saved the situation.

But Carboy wasn't quite so smart as he began to fancy himself. He was ass enough to challenge Bernard Glyn to try his luck, and old Glyn has forgotten more about electricity than all the Grammarians put together will ever get into their nappers if they live to see cherries growing on goose-berry-bushes.

He just grinned and went away for a few moments, and when he came back he put his hand into the water and picked up the shilling as easily as if there had been no current flowing. As a matter of fact, there wasn't, for Glyn told me afterwards that he'd put some insulating material inside his shoes. Carboy looked pretty blue, and dropped another bob into the bowl. Then he linked up a spare dry cell or two, and invited Glyn to have another go. And Glyn picked up a second bob just as easily as he had done with the first.

Glyn picked out five shillings, one after the other, and, of course, they all came out of Carboy's pocket. The fund didn't suffer—in fact it was threepence better off each time. By the time that Glyn had wiped the fifth shilling and put it into his pocket Carboy was pretty wild, and I think he must have had an idea of how Glyn had worked the trick, for he disconnected the wire from the footplate and attached it to a brass handle that had to be held in one hand.

Several people had seen Glyn getting the shilling without any difficulty, and they decided it must be easy, and came to try their luck. Carboy had forgotten to disconnect the extra cells he'd joined up, and the consequence was that the first people to try after Glyn got pretty bad shocks. That scared them off, and the others as well, so that Carboy's business fell off suddenly.

Of course, he found out the mistake he made, and took out the extra cells, but people weren't keen on risking it even then. So he proceeded to give a demonstration, just to show how simple and harmless it was. He held the handle, and put his hand into the water and took out the shilling. Then he switched on the full voltage again; and took out the shilling even then. I began to think he must be a bit of a marvel; but Glyn, who was watching him pretty keenly, spotted the dodge he was working off.

"He's short-circuiting the current by letting the handle touch the side of the bowl," whispered Glyn to me. "It isn't going through the water at all; he's not getting the slightest shock."

My friend the farmer had joined the crowd around the "fishpond," and was standing a couple of feet or so away from Carboy, watching him interestedly.

"It's quite easy," said Carboy, putting his hand into the water and twisting it up a bit, as though he was getting a shock. "You feel a slight prickling, of course, but not enough to hurt. See, I can pick up the shilling, and I'm using full power—about four times as strong as you would get. So if—Oooooow!"

I couldn't resist the temptation. Drifting quietly up to his side, I pressed against him for a second, and joggled his elbow, so that the handle he was pressing against the bowl was knocked away, and, of course, he got the full current through him.

The powerful shock almost doubled him up during that brief instant. One of his knees jerked up and hit the underside of the light table with a bang. Up went the table, and the bowl full of water with it.

As I said, the farmer was standing facing the table, and about a couple of feet away. Swi-ss-sss-sh!

Poor old chap! It was certainly his unlucky day. He stopped that bowl of water—four or five pints at the least—with his waistcoat.

I do hope they have another bazaar soon. I like them, you know. Of course, they may not appeal to everybody. Farmers, for instance.

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YOU can always find plenty of fun at a bazaar. At least—which comes to the same thing, you can always find plenty of opportunities for making your own.

The Jollie Olde Englishe Faire, or Merrie Olde Englishe Faire, whichever it was, proved no exception to the general rule. I had no end of a lark there.

Perhaps things wouldn't have been quite so merry and bright if the Grammarians hadn't been there.

As soon as I stepped inside the place and saw Gordon Gay trying to sell a box of face-powder and a puff to the local butcher, I knew we were in for a lively evening. Then I caught sight of Monk and Mont Blanc and the two Wootons, and was more certain of it than ever.

I soon found out that the Grammarians were taking quite a big part in the affair. They were here, there, and everywhere, and you couldn't walk across a room without treading on a few of them. Not that that mattered, of course. You tread on all sorts of people at a bazaar, and take absolutely no notice of little incidents of that kind until somebody with a hoof like a paving-slab treads on you. Then you begin to grumble about the place being crowded.

The bagatelle-table was the first of the stunts that tempted me to part with some of my hard-earned cash. (What's that? You didn't know my pocket-money was hard earned? Well, if you'd ever seen me spending hours hard at work composing heart-rending appeals to send home, you'd know better than to suppose I come easily by it.) However, as I was saying, the bagatelle-table swindle rather appealed to me, partly in consequence of the fact that on the wall against it was a large notice that said:

"WE ARE GIVING MONEY AWAY HERE!"

Personally I doubted it. Of course, I've often heard it said that it takes all kinds of people to make up the world, and I've no doubt that it does. Such a theory as that affords a logical explanation of the existence of such creatures as Knox and Racke—and even Baggy Trimble. And, in order to include every species of human being, there must be a certain number of the kind of people who give money away. But at the same time I suspect that they must be present among us in a very infinitesimal proportion. Mind you, I won't say they don't exist. I only say I've never met any of them; and it's not because I haven't kept my eyes open, I can tell you. I should very much like to meet one or two.

And, in the hope that I might be going to do so, I went over to the bagatelle-table. I wasn't reassured by seeing, when I'd pushed my way through the crowd, that there was only half a dozen people near the table. It appeared to me to be very peculiar, to say the least of it, that a person so willing and even eager to give away money that he had taken the trouble to advertise the fact, should stand almost unregarded by a large crowd. And then I got a proper view of the philanthropist, and saw it was Lane of the Grammar School. That settled it, once and for all. Lane isn't at all a bad sort of chap, for a Grammarian, but as a kind of fairy godmother—well, anybody with half an eye could see enough to put him down as a non-starter.

"Come on, Dane!" he called out, catching sight of me. "Money for nothing!"

"I don't doubt it," I replied grimly. "You get my money and I get nothing!"



(Continued from page 13.)

chaps can hide in 'em instead!" went on Tom. "I'll take the coalie's place and drive the van into St. Jim's—right under the noses of Ratty and his giddy cordon! Now do you see the wheeze?"

"Mum-m-my hat!" ejaculated Blake, his eyes opening wide.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"For all we know, that load of coal may be booked for St. Jim's!" said Tom Merry. "All the better if it is! It's a closed cart, too, and everything should be plain sailing. You fellows will be in the sacks instead of the coal, and I'll be the coalman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other rebels fairly yelled at the idea.

Monty Lowther hugged Tom Merry affectionately to his breast.

"Come to my arms and let me hug you, Tommy!" he gushed. "You're worth your weight in gold, old scout!"

"Yow! Grooogh! Leggo, you chump!" gasped the leader of the rebels, and he managed at last to wrench himself away from the effusive Monty.

"Here's the giddy coal cart!" chuckled Blake. "And now for it!"

The seven juniors walked out into the middle of the road as the coal cart rumbled up, and the coalman reined in his horse, looking astonished.

"My heye!" he exclaimed. "Wot's the game, young gents?"

"Whither away?" asked Tom Merry sweetly.

"Eh?"

"Where are you taking that load of coal?" asked the rebel leader. "Not to St. Jim's by any chance?"

"Yus, that's just where I am takin' it," replied the astounded coalman. "Mrs. Kebble hordered this coal yesterday. Which I shall be very much obliged if you'd 'op out of my way, young gents. Gee-up!"

"Not so fast, old chap!" said Tom Merry beckoning to Gussy to hold the horse's head. "We're going to commandeer this cart!"

"Wot?"

"We don't want to be rough, and we're going to make this worth your while," said Tom Merry. "You've got to come down and surrender this cart to us! Moreover, I shall want your hat and overalls and boots!"

The village coalman blinked unbelievably at the Shell captain.

"You—you want my cart, and my togs!" he stuttered. "Look 'ere, young gents, if this is a joke— Oh! 'Ere, wot the— Yah! Ow! 'Ands off! Yarooogh!"

Tom Merry and Blake vaulted up the front of the cart and laid firm hands on the coalman. He was yanked down into the road, yelling and struggling wildly. It was fortunate for Tom Merry & Co. that the Rylcombe Lane was a lonely thoroughfare at that time of the day, and that no-body came along to disturb them.

The coalman was taken gently, but firmly, into the field at the other side of the hedge, and he was divested of his hat, choker, boots, and overalls. Tom Merry discovered some rope in the cart, and with this the luckless coalman was bound.

"There!" said Tom, with a chuckle. "We're awfully sorry to have to take these liberties with you, my man, but our desperate situation demands desperate measures. Here's five bob for yourself, and we hope you won't be too cross with us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry slipped two half-crowns into the coalman's trousers pocket, and then proceeded to put on the articles of apparel which had been commandeered. Meanwhile, the others hauled down the sacks of coal one by one from the cart and emptied them at the roadside, until only one full sack remained. There were now nine empty sacks, and these were taken up into the cart. Three were filled with

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parcels of provisions which Tom Merry & Co. had brought from Rylcombe, and a quantity of coal was rammed into the mouths of the sacks afterwards, to make it appear that they were full of coal. Tom Merry's transformation was now complete. With coal dust rubbed liberally over his face, his features were quite unrecognisable, and, with the coalman's hat pulled down over his forehead, he would have passed muster anywhere as a youthful coal-heaver.

"Now, squeeze into those other sacks, my sons!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Never mind the coal dust on your clobber, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus was regarding the interior of his sack in horror. The prospect of stowing himself away in there was not very inviting to the elegant swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! How howwid!" he exclaimed. "My clobber will be wuined, deah boys! However, I will pwceed. It's all for the good of the cause, bai Jove!"

The juniors scrambled into the sacks and hobbled in them into their proper position in the cart. They kept their heads well down inside the sacks, and Tom Merry cheerfully placed coal on their heads so that, when every sack had thus been treated, it looked for all the world as though every one was full of coal.

"Good egg!" chuckled the rebel leader, as he surveyed the sacks. "You'll have to keep still, my sons, or you'll knock the coal off your nappers and give the giddy game away."

"Hurry up, fathead!" said Blake's voice sulphurously from inside one of the sacks.

"All serene!" chuckled Tom. "We sha'n't be long now!" He sat at the driver's seat on the cart and gathered up the reins.

"Gee up, boy!" he cried.

The horse moved forward and the coal cart, with its hidden human load, rumbled on towards St. Jim's.

Tom Merry's heart thrilled with excitement as he drove the cart boldly up to the school gates.

Mr. Ratcliff and Knox were there, and, as Monty Lowther had said, a cordon of seniors was ranged on either side of the gates.

The St. Jim's fellows glanced at the coal cart, but allowed it to pass without comment.

Tom Merry touched his coal-heaver's hat respectfully to Mr. Ratcliff when he drove the cart into the Close. The acting headmaster gave him a glare.

"Did you see a party of boys belonging to this school down the road, my man?" he rasped.

Tom Merry scratched his head with elaborate slowness.

"Yus, sir," he replied, in a deep voice, totally unlike his own natural tone. "I did see 'em down the lane, sir. About 'arf a dozen, wasn't there?"

"Yes—yes!" said Mr. Ratcliff eagerly. "Where are they? How far away are they?"

Again Tom Merry scratched his head.

"Which they ain't very far away, sir," he said. "No, they ain't far away, you can take it from me. You'll see 'em soon, if you look out for 'em, sir."

"Ah, capital!" said Mr. Ratcliff, rubbing his hands with malicious relish. "Then they are coming this way, Knox. Within a very short time the young scoundrels will be in my hands!"

The tyrant of St. Jim's chuckled at the prospect, and he and Knox bent their gaze anxiously down the Rylcombe Lane.

The bogus coalman also chuckled as he drove the cart onward into the precincts of St. Jim's.

The juniors, who were keeping anxious watch in the gymnasium, were amazed to see the coal-cart drive up. The "coalie" reined in his horse outside the gymnasium door and beckoned to the rebels at the window.

Herries opened the window.

"What do you want?" he said. "If you're looking for the matron, she—"

"Open the door—quick!" exclaimed Tom. "Ratty's looking this way, and there isn't a moment to lose. The others are inside the cart here, hidden in the sacks."

"Gug-g-great pip!"

Herries almost fell down with amazement when the "coalie" lifted his cap, to display the curly head of Tom Merry. And, of course, everyone recognised the junior's voice.

A chorus of delighted cries rose from the boys in the gymnasium. The door was swiftly opened, and Tom jumped down from the cart.

Mr. Ratcliff, seeing the gymnasium door open, came rushing across, with Knox running dutifully behind him.

"Hop out of those sacks, quick, chaps!" cried the rebel leader. "Here come Ratty and Knox!"

The sacks in the cart suddenly came to life. The coal was tipped from their tops, and Blake, D'Arcy, Lowther, Levison, Kangaroo, and Clive sprang out.

Mr. Ratcliff halted in his tracks, and blinked incredulously when he saw those six juniors vault down from the coal-

cart, whilst Gerald Knox stood stock-still, his eyes and mouth agape.

"Gug-g-good heavens!" said Mr. Ratchiff, in a faint voice. "We've been done, sir!" howled Knox furiously. "The little sweeps were concealed in the coal-sacks. And—and that's Merry dressed up in the coalman's clothes, sir!"

Mr. Ratchiff was too overcome to be able to speak for some minutes. He stood there, panting with helpless fury.

Tom Merry & Co. were roaring with laughter, and the other fellows in the quadrangle simply chortled when they saw how beautifully the Housemaster had been hoaxed.

Mr. Ratchiff, with an enraged bellow, dashed forward wildly when he saw the rebels unloading the three sacks of provisions from the cart.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "I will not allow this. I—I command you to stop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rebels, who came pouring out of their stronghold.

Mr. Ratchiff looked round desperately. "Seize them, Knox!" he shouted. "Go on, Knox, do you hear? Kildare, where are you? Darrell, Monteth, Gray! Stop the little rascals!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared louder still. Ratty and Knox were peited with coal when they advanced, and were thus kept at bay whilst the sacks of provisions were taken safely into the gym. The rebels crowded back into their stronghold, and bolted the door, leaving the empty coal-cart outside, and the quad strewn with knobs of coal.

Mr. Ratchiff was beside himself. He had been congratulating himself that at last he would have Tom Merry & Co. in his power, that he would show them who was master. It galled him to think how his intended prey had slipped through his hands. Everybody was laughing at him. He even saw Kildare and his fellow-prefects chuckling together. He waved his fists in impotent rage, and fled to the School House, his gown fluttering behind him.

"Dished, diddled, and done, by Jove!" chuckled Blake, as he brushed the coal-dust from his clothes. "This is where Ratty sings small, I reckon!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear us smile."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the smile of the rebels in the gymnasium could be heard all over the school.

CHAPTER 7. Prisoners on the Roof!

"SOMETHING will have to be done!"

Mr. Horace Ratchiff made that statement savagely to Knox in his study after dinner the following day.

The tyrant had been hiding his diminished head since the "grub-running" episode, and the whole school was still chuckling over it.

He had summoned Knox to his study to discuss ways and means of getting the rebellion under control. Both Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom had flatly refused to associate themselves with him, or help him in any schemes unless those schemes were of a conciliatory nature towards the rebels. Mr. Ratchiff was in a far from conciliatory frame of mind, and he had, in desperation, summoned Gerald Knox to his side, hoping that the rascally prefect would be able to suggest a plan.

"Every day, every hour, the young rascals' defiance grows worse!" fumed Ratty. "They are setting my authority at naught, and I will tolerate it no longer! Something must be done immediately, Knox. How can they be evicted from the gymnasium? Cannot you devise a plan?"

"We shall never get them out by force, sir," said Knox savagely. "All that we can do is to drive them out by some other means."

"But what other means can we adopt?" cried Mr. Ratchiff. "I put it to you, Knox, what other means is it possible to adopt?"

Knox considered for a little while, and gradually his coarse face took on a grin.

"I've got an idea, sir!" he exclaimed. "Had we been able to prevent them taking all that food into the gymnasium this morning we should have starved them out."

"Yes, yes, but they have the food, so what has that to do with it?" rapped Mr. Ratchiff testily. "We cannot starve them out now, Knox!"

"No, sir; but we can keep them thirsty instead of hungry!" said Knox, with a chuckle.

"What—what do you mean, Knox?" demanded Mr. Ratchiff.

"I mean that we could cut off the water supply to the gymnasium, sir," said the prefect. "That would put paid to their little account, I reckon. They may have plenty of food in there, but they won't be able to exist long without water. We'll dry them out, sir!"

Mr. Ratchiff's eyes glittered.

"Of course—of course!" he exclaimed. "That is a capital

idea, Knox! Why didn't I think of that before? With the water supply cut off, and with no means of obtaining water from outside, the little renegades will have to surrender. The pangs of thirst will drive them to subjection. How shall we turn off the water from the gymnasium, Knox?"

"The turncock is in the quadrangle, sir, next to the main school turncock," replied the Sixth-Former. "It's fortunate for us that the water can be turned off from outside. Taggles will know where the turnkey is. We could turn the water off now, sir, if Taggles gets us the turnkey."

Mr. Ratchiff looked quite jubilant.

"Go to Taggles at once, then, Knox, and obtain the turnkey from him!" he exclaimed. "We will not delay in carrying this plan into execution."

Knox hurried away, and he was gone so long that the Housemaster began to pace up and down the study impatiently. He was anxious to get ahead with the scheme of "drying out" the rebels, and the delay in getting the turnkey irritated him.

The acting Head was in quite a furious state when Knox at last returned.

"Well?" rapped the Housemaster. "Have you got it, Knox?"

"Yes, sir, here it is," replied Knox, holding out an ancient turnkey that was eaten away with rust.

"You have been a very long time in securing it, Knox!" said Mr. Ratchiff testily.

"I'm sorry, sir, but Taggles couldn't remember where the thing was kept," said Knox. "It's years and years since this turnkey was last used, and it had got mislaid. Shall we go down now and turn the water off, sir?"

"Yes, yes; at once!" said the Housemaster impatiently.

They made their way downstairs, Mr. Ratchiff carrying the rusty turnkey. Crossing the quadrangle, they came at length to the rear of the bicycle-shed, where two deep holes were let into the concrete side by side. These holes gave access to the turncocks on the water-mains below, one turncock controlling the supply of water to the gymnasium, and the other being fixed on the pipe that supplied the rest of the school.

"Shall I turn the water off, sir?" said Knox.

"No, I will do it," said Mr. Ratchiff.

He plunged the turnkey down the hole, and, having fixed it on the cock below, he proceeded to give it a sharp twist.

But the turnkey would not turn. Evidently the turncock below, not having been used for a number of years, had become stiff. Mr. Ratchiff tried again to turn it, and again, and yet again, but he could not budge the turnkey an inch. He wrenched and tugged and twisted at it until he was quite blue in the face.

"Let me have a try, sir," said Knox.

"Grooogh! Here you are!"

Mr. Ratchiff willingly surrendered the turnkey to the burly prefect. Knox took a firm grip of the handle, and twisted. Nothing happened. Knox set his teeth grimly and wrenched at the turnkey with all his might. Despite these efforts, he did not succeed in moving it, although when he let go he saw that the rusty handle was beginning to bend.

"Perhaps the two of us together might manage to turn it, sir!" he gasped.

Both Mr. Ratchiff and Knox grasped the turnkey, and they wrenched and jerked, and twisted and tugged at it for all they were worth.

"Groooooogh!" panted Mr. Ratchiff, as he heaved away, with legs wide apart. "It is very stiff, Knox. I am afraid we shall never succeed in turning it. Yaroooooogh!"

The key turned at last, when Mr. Ratchiff least expected it. He lost his balance, and sat down on the concrete with a terrific thud. Knox went the other way, performing weird acrobatic evolutions in order to preserve his balance. Mr. Ratchiff gasped and blinked dazedly at the turnkey—at least, all that could be seen of it.

It had snapped!

The strain of the wrenching it had undergone, and the sudden giving of the turncock, had proved too much for the rusty old turnkey. It had come in half, and Mr. Ratchiff was holding the top half in his hand. The other half, of course, was down the hole.

"Yow!" cried the Housemaster, struggling to his feet, and glaring at Knox, who was grinning. "I fail to perceive anything humorous in this, Knox! Grooogh! I'm hurt!"

"I was thinking, sir, that now the water's turned off it's going to be the dickens of a job to turn it on again!" said Knox. "The turnkey's snapped like a carrot, and it's absolutely useless. There isn't another one in existence, so far as I know, and it's practically impossible to get one like it. There won't be any water in the gymnasium for weeks now, sir."

Mr. Ratchiff gave a grim smile, too.

"That is not a very serious matter, Knox," he said. "The gymnasium can do without its water supply until another turnkey can be found or made. I am glad that we managed to turn the water off before the turnkey snapped. It will not be very long now before Merry and the others are forced to leave the gymnasium and surrender."

Looking extremely pleased with himself, despite the nasty fall he had sustained, Mr. Horace Ratcliff walked away.

He was afterwards seen to be wearing a queer smile wherever he went, and the juniors in the School House wondered what Ratty had got up his sleeve.

While afternoon lessons were in progress, Mr. Ratcliff went out into the quadrangle, and he hovered about the gymnasium, looking expectantly up at the windows. Knox came over to him, grinning. Instead of taking lessons that afternoon the Sixth were holding a debate, and Knox had obtained special permission from Mr. Ratcliff to miss the debate. Consequently, he had the afternoon to himself.

"Have the young sweeps noticed the cutting off of the water yet, sir?" asked the prefect.

"No, apparently not," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am expecting to hear a commotion very shortly, Knox, when the discovery is made. I—I should very much like to know what the rascals say when they get to know of my ruse."

"Your ruse!" said Knox warmly. "It was a good idea of mine, sir, don't you think?"

"My scheme is certain to bring the renegades to book!" said Mr. Ratcliff doggedly.

"Ahem!" Knox glared a little. "Anyway, it's about time they found out about the water, sir. My word, wouldn't I like to see their faces when they discover that they are to be dried out! If I can get a ladder out of the woodshed without being seen, and put it up against the back wall of the gymnasium, where there are no windows, I'd climb on the roof and take a look through the skylight. They wouldn't see me up there."

Mr. Ratcliff's small eyes glittered.

"I will come with you, Knox," he said. "Perhaps I, too, would be able to—climb on the roof and see what the little scoundrels are doing. I should be most interested to ascertain their mode of conduct inside the gymnasium."

Mr. Ratcliff's "interest" in the rebels was in reality an irresistible desire to spy upon them, and so absorbed was he with this desire that, for the time being, he forgot his dignity as a Housemaster.

Knox succeeded in taking a ladder to the rear of the gymnasium, where there were no windows.

There was nobody about, and Knox, ranging the ladder against the wall, clambered up on to the roof.

Mr. Ratcliff, standing at the foot of the ladder, blinked about him hesitatingly. He could hear Tom Merry & Co. inside the gymnasium, and he dearly wanted to spy upon them and find out what they were doing. Dare he climb up that ladder and venture on the roof? The temptation was too great for him to resist, and Mr. Ratcliff commenced to climb the ladder. He crawled up gingerly, his gown fluttering behind him, and his mortar-board rammed down hard on his head. He reached the roof at last, and clumsily scrambled off the ladder on to the leads.

He had done it! Mr. Ratcliff was on the gymnasium roof with Knox.

The prefect was already bending over the fanlight, looking down into the rebels' stronghold below. Mr. Ratcliff crossed to the fanlight, and he, too, peered down.

He gasped at the scene that met his eyes.

The rebels were seated at their desks round the blackboard, and Tom Merry, clad in cap and gown, was taking them with an algebra lesson!

The Housemaster and Knox blinked down in astonishment.

Tom Merry, by his lucid explanations and patience, showed himself to be an able "schoolmaster," and his "class," on the whole, were attentive.

This was an eye-opener for Mr. Ratcliff and Knox. They had heard from Paul Ratcliff that Tom Merry & Co. were running a "school" in the gym, but they had not imagined for a moment that the juniors were so much in earnest.

"My word!" murmured Knox. "Can't you see the idea, sir? They're doing that so as to be able to curry favour with the Head later on."

Mr. Ratcliff set his teeth.

"You are right, Knox," he muttered. "I will stop them from continuing this nonsense if I can. I— Oh! What was that?"

His ears had detected a sound behind them. Wheeling round, the Housemaster and the prefect were horrified to see the top of the ladder moving away from the wall!

"Quick, Knox!" screeched Ratty. "Somebody is removing the ladder!"

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"Oh, jeminy!" gasped Knox, leaping forward over the roof.

He was too late, however, for the ladder, when he arrived at the edge of the parapet, was gone! He and Mr. Ratcliff were prisoners on the roof!

CHAPTER 8.

More Shocks for Ratty!

MR. RATCLIFF reached the Sixth-Former's side a moment later, and they both gazed downward, to see Jack Blake grinning up at them. The leader of the Fourth was holding the ladder.

"Hallo, old beans!" he said cheerily. "Fancy you being up there, you know! Have you been enjoying the lesson?"

Mr. Ratcliff's face was a study.

"Gug-g-good heavens!" he gasped. "Blake, replace that ladder immediately! I wish to descend!"

"Go hon!" chuckled Blake. "I'm afraid you'll have to stop up there for the time being, old bean! You didn't reckon on getting spotted, I suppose? Ha, ha, ha! I happened to be on guard at the window just round the corner, you see. I heard a bump on the roof, and came out to see what was doing. You ought to have gone a little quieter, Ratty!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Put that ladder back where you found it!" howled Knox.

"Do you hear me, Blake? Put the ladder back!"

"Rats!" said Blake, walking off with the ladder. "You got up there, and you can stay there for the time being, old scouts. Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff and Knox fairly danced on the roof. Ratty yelled after the Fourth-Former, but Blake, like Baalam's ass, heeded not the voice of his master. He bore the ladder out of sight, and the prisoners on the gymnasium roof were left to rave to themselves.

Tom Merry, hearing strange noises from above as Ratty and Knox pounded about on the roof, dismissed his class. Blake clambered in through the window grinning.

"What's all that row going on up above?" asked Tom Merry in bewilderment. "Is there somebody on the roof, Blake?"

"Rather!" chuckled Blake. "And who do you think it is?"

"Ratty minor?" said Tom.

"No fear!" roared Blake. "Ratty himself, my son—and Knox!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Is that a fact, Blake? You haven't made a bloomer?"

"Not I!" grinned Blake. "Ratty and Knox had a ladder outside. They had climbed on the roof and were spying on you through the fanlight up there. I happened to hear 'em, and I went out and bagged the ladder. Ratty and Knox were still up on the roof, and they can't get down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. shrieked with merriment.

"My word!" gasped Monty Lowther. "This is too rich! Open the door, Tommy—we must have a look at our old pals! We can't miss this!"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Weally, I wegard this as fwightfully funnyay, you know! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry opened the gymnasium door, and the rebels crowded outside. They gazed up at the prisoners on the roof, and then roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it cold up there, Ratty?"

"Splendid view, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff pranced to and fro on the roof, waving his clenched fists, his gown billowing behind him in the breeze. His attitude was that of a caged lion. He was shaking with ungovernable fury, and his face was almost purple as he glared down at the hilarious juniors.

"How dare you make a laughing-stock of me!" he yelled. "Let me down, will you? I command you to replace the ladder!"

"Command away, sir!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We don't obey your orders now, you know. You've got to stay up there for the time being. You're out of harm's way!"

"I—I—I—"

"Let us down, will you?" yelled Knox. "You little sweeps will pay dearly for this, if you don't bring back that ladder!"

"Yah!"

"Go and eat coke, Knox!"

"Have a run round the roof to cool yourself down, dear boy!" suggested Cardew. "Only mind the fanlight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff and Knox stamped about on the roof raving, threatening and beseeching, but Tom Merry & Co. turned deaf ears to all their entreaties.



Sizzz-zzzzzzzzz-zzzzzzzzzzz! Two powerful streams of water came surging out through the doorway and, bursting in the midst of Ratty & Co., bowled them over like ninepins. Sizzz-zzz-zzzzz! "Yaroooogh! Ah! Oh! Ooooooch!" roared the Housemaster. The rebels holding the two fire-hoses directed their aim unerringly on the raiders, and as fast as they tried to rise the water smote their legs and bowled them over again. (See page 12.)

The bell rang in the School House yonder, and a few minutes later Wally & Co. of the Third came trooping out into the quad, lessons being over.

As soon as Mr. Ratcliff and Knox were seen on the gymnasium roof, a rush was made to the spot. Wally & Co. gathered round the gym, and they simply yelled at the predicament of the two on the roof.

Figgins & Co., and members of the Fifth and Sixth came running up, and soon a large crowd collected round the gymnasium. By this time, of course, the rebels had returned to the interior of the building, and the door had been relocked.

The Housemaster and Knox, raving on the roof, were the cynosure of all eyes, and loud shouts of laughter arose.

Mr. Ratcliff glared down balefully, quivering with impotent rage.

"Monteith—Gray! Procure a ladder at once!" he shouted. "Do you hear me, Monteith? Don't stand there laughing like a hyena, you dolt! Fetch a ladder and get me down!"

"Ha, ha! All right, sir! Groogh!" gurgled the New House prefect, who was quite doubled up with laughter. "I'll see what I can do for you. Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith and Gray staggered away together. They seemed in no hurry to effect Mr. Ratcliff's release.

Taggles, the St. Jim's porter, came rolling on the scene, and his eyes opened wide with astonishment when he saw the master and the prefect on the gymnasium roof.

"My heye!" he gasped incredulously. "Is that Mr. Ratcliff hup there—and Master Knox? My heye! Wot I says is this 'ere—nice goin's hon, hindeed! I—"

"Taggles! Fetch a ladder!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff. "Obey me this instant, Taggles, or you shall be dismissed! Procure a ladder as soon as you can!"

"Mum-m-my heye! Yessir!"

Taggles rolled away with great expedition to obey the infuriated Housemaster's order.

He returned a short while later carrying a ladder.

Tom Merry looked grimly at Taggles as he approached. "Don't you dare put that ladder against the wall, Taggy!" he said. "We've got the water hose here, and you'll get a drenching if you come any closer!"

"Oh, 'elp!" gasped Taggles, halting in dismay.

Mr. Ratcliff, in his excitement, jumped about on the roof like a very dervish.

"You may disregard their threats, Taggles!" he shouted. "The water-hose is useless! I myself turned the water off nearly two hours ago!"

"Great pip!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other in dismay.

"Bai—bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "What a wotten twick! Watty's turned the watah off!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "You will soon have no alternative but to submit to me, you depraved little ruffians! Then the reckoning shall take place! Come on, Taggles! The ladder—quick!"

Taggles walked forward with the ladder and Tom Merry signalled to Kerruish.

"Turn on the water!" he exclaimed. "There may be enough in the tank to last us!"

Kerruish turned the handle, and a sizzling stream of water immediately shot out of the hose. Tom Merry directed the hose, and that gushing flood of water struck Taggles in the region of his waistcoat.

"Oooooogh-ah-h!" howled the luckless porter. "My heye! Yarooooh!"

The force of the water sent him staggering back. Taggles performed a wild balancing trick with the ladder, and then, as another gush of water smote him under the chin he completely lost his balance and fell to earth, with the ladder on top of him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rebels.

Mr. Ratcliff blinked down from the roof quite dazedly.

"G-g-g-good heavens!" he stuttered. "They still have plenty of water, Knox. I cannot understand—"

"They're using up the water that's already in the tank, sir," replied the prefect savagely. "When that's gone there won't be any more. Let 'em waste it, sir; it'll be all the less for them to drink!"

"But I want to get down!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff furiously. "Taggles, never mind the water. You are already wet. Bring the ladder to the rear of the building, where there are no windows."

The old school porter squelched dismally to the rear of the gymnasium, and the crowd followed. Tom Merry chuckled.

"There's no window, but there's a ventilator halfway up the back wall," he said. "I'll stand on the vaulting-horse and play the giddy hose through the ventilator. That will keep Taggy at bay!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

Taggles gave a yell of dismay when, just as he was about to range the ladder against the back wall, that sizzling stream of wetness burst forth from the ventilator and drenched him.

The crowd roared, and Mr. Ratcliff raved.

"Come on, Taggles!" he shouted. "Do you hear me, man? Bring the ladder here!"

Taggles made several valiant attempts to get the ladder to the wall, but each time he was driven back by that unerring stream of water.

Neither Mr. Ratcliff nor Knox could understand it a bit. They had turned off the gymnasium water supply, yet the pressure in the fire-hose seemed to be as strong as ever.

Taggles gave up the struggle at last; human endurance was not proof against that watery flood. He departed, snorting, leaving the ladder on the ground in a vast pool of wetness.

Mr. Ratcliff shouted after him, but Taggles did not turn back. Knox bellowed at the top of his voice, but in vain. The crowd in the quadrangle yelled with merriment, and nobody obeyed Mr. Ratcliff's frantic orders to pick up the ladder and set it against the wall.

Mr. Lathom came trotting over from the School House, his face depicting the deepest horror and concern. The sight of Mr. Ratcliff and Knox on the roof was like an awful apparition to him. He could only stand and stare for several minutes.

"Ratcliff! My dear sir, how—how came you to be up there?" he ejaculated.

Mr. Ratcliff scowled.

"Never mind how I came to be up here, Lathom!" he exclaimed. "I shall be obliged if you will turn your attention to the question of getting me down. The young rascals in the gymnasium intend to keep me up here all night."

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Lathom. "I—I will see if I cannot reason with them."

He walked round to the nearest window, which Tom Merry opened.

"Boys, may I entreat you to cease this unseemly disturbance and allow Mr. Ratcliff and Knox to descend?" exclaimed the Fourth Form master. "You surely cannot intend to keep them on the roof indefinitely!"

"They got up there of their own free will, sir," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's their own fault, really, for being such idiots as to climb over our roof, especially Ratty—I mean Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Dear me! This is most extraordinary!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "In any case, Merry, you must allow Mr. Ratcliff and Knox to descend. Their position is most humiliating. I command you to let them down at once!"

"Very good, sir," said the rebel leader respectfully. "We'll turn the water off, and the others may go ahead with the ladder."

Mr. Ratcliff heaved a deep, deep sigh of relief when Mr. Lathom bore this information to him. Monteith and Gray, who had diplomatically kept in the background whilst the hose was playing, came forward with the ladder. They held it against the wall whilst Mr. Ratcliff and Knox descended.

A chorus of derisive laughs greeted their return to Mother Earth. Ratty was choking with fury, and Mr. Lathom looked quite anxiously at him as he accompanied the Housemaster to the School House.

"The young scoundrels have had the upper hand so far!" raved Mr. Ratcliff. "They have outraged all the school laws and violated all discipline. But soon I shall have them in the hollow of my hand, Lathom. I have turned off the water supply to the gymnasium, and it is now only a matter of time before they surrender. They cannot remain there without water."

Mr. Lathom regarded the Housemaster in amazement.

"You—you have turned off the water supply!" he ejaculated. "Bless my soul! That is a most drastic expedient, Mr. Ratcliff."

"I considered it a necessary expedient," rasped the tyrant.

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"What is more, Lathom, there is no likelihood of the water being turned on again. The turnkey is broken, and it will be an almost impossible matter to duplicate it without having one specially made."

"My goodness gracious!" said Mr. Lathom.

Mr. Ratcliff grinned an evil grin and went his way, consoling himself with the thought that soon Tom Merry & Co. would be in his clutches, and then he would be able to take the revenge he craved.

But before he had gone far Mr. Horace Ratcliff received another shock.

Mrs. Kebble, the buxom Matron of the School House, came puffing up the stairs after him as he was about to turn towards his study.

"Mr. Ratcliff! Oh, deary me! Mr. Ratcliff! Sir!" she cried.

The tyrant turned sharply to Mrs. Kebble.

"Well, ma'am, what is the trouble?" he snapped.

"Deary me! A most dreadful thing has happened, sir!" cried the Matron. "I don't know what to do. Somebody has turned off the water, and there isn't a drain in the whole school."

"What!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, it's terrible, sir! I don't know whatever we shall do! The water is turned off at the main, and Mr. Taggles has discovered the turnkey broken. He says it is impossible to turn the water on again!"

"Gug-gug-g-good heavens!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff in a faint voice.

He clutched the banisters for support, for he felt that his legs would give way at any minute. His brain seemed to reel at the awful realisation of the truth. He had turned off the wrong turncock! Instead of cutting off the rebels' water supply he had cut off the water from the whole school—New House as well as School House!

It was awful to contemplate, but it was true.

"What shall I do?" wailed Mrs. Kebble. "There isn't a drop of water in the school. All the water left in the tanks was used for washing-up. There'll be no water for the boys to wash in the morning. There'll be no tea or cocoa for breakfast. We sha'n't be able to do the cooking, or the washing-up, or—or anything! The school will be at a standstill without water. What ever can I do, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"I—I don't know," gasped Ratty, his face a livid white. "I will see you later, Mrs. Kebble. I—I—I must look into this matter!"

The Housemaster whisked away in horror.

He met Knox on the landing, and he strode up to the prefect waving his arms wildly.

"A pretty pass things have come to, Knox!" he stormed. "All through your idiotic suggestions."

"Why, what—what—what—" gasped Knox in amazement. He wondered vaguely whether the Housemaster's recent troubles had turned his brain. Meanwhile, a small crowd was collecting at the end of the passage.

"What, indeed!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, palpitating with rage. "You turned the wrong turncock, Knox! You have cut off the water from the school, not from the gymnasium!"

Gerald Knox almost dropped, and there was a buzz of excited voices from the end of the passage.

"M-m-my hat!" gurgled the prefect. "Surely there is some mistake, sir—"

"Mrs. Kebble has just told me!" shrieked the Housemaster. "There isn't a drop of water in the place. It's all been used. And the turncock's turned off, the turnkey is broken, and that means we shall be without water for days. You idiotic dolt, Knox! It's all your fault."

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered the prefect, glaring angrily at Mr. Ratcliff. "You dare say it is my fault, sir! It's your fault, you mean. You turned the water off!"

"I didn't! I—I—"

Knox snorted.

"You're jolly well not going to lay the blame on me, sir!" he exclaimed. "I shall jolly well let the school know different. Besides, you've already bragged to Mr. Lathom about turning the water off. I've just seen him, and he told me."

"I—I—I—"

Mr. Ratcliff was floored!

Knox gave another snort and strode away.

Mr. Ratcliff looked round, biting his lip, his eyes glittering. Then, gulping something down in his throat, he turned and swished away to his study, closing the door with a bang.

The news spread like wildfire.

Figgins & Co. bore it to the rebels in the gymnasium.

"Have you heard the latest?" grinned the New House leader, standing under the front window of the gym, where Tom Merry & Co. were gathered. "Ratty thought he'd turned your water off—"

"But he hasn't!" said Tom Merry. "We've got plenty of water. Ratty must have made a giddy bloomer!"

"He did!" chuckled Figgins. "He switched off the wrong turncock—and broke the turnkey in doing it! Instead of switching your water off, he's cut it off from the rest of the school!"

"Bai Jove!"

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "You don't mean to say, Figgy, that Ratty's left the school without water, and that it can't be turned on again?"

"That's just what Ratty has done!" said Figgins. "He's put the lid on things properly now!"

"Great pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rebels, when they realised the full significance of Ratty's action, fell into paroxysms of mirth. They yelled until the quad re-echoed with the sound of their laughter. They clasped each other for support in their merriment, whilst others collapsed to the floor of the gymnasium and kicked up their heels in high glee.

"Oh, that's rich!" gurgled Blake. "It romps off with the whole giddy Huntley & Palmer foundry! Ratty's sent St. Jim's dry, and he thought he was doing little us! Oh, carry me home to die, somebody! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. went their way, but they did not feel very mirthful. Fatty Wynn, indeed, was assailed with torturing fears as to what extent the lack of water at St. Jim's would affect the food supply.

The rebels in the gymnasium, however, rejoiced exceedingly, and when Mr. Ratcliff, almost demented with rage and chagrin, heard their laughter from afar, he flew into a mood that bordered on homicide!

CHAPTER 9.

A "Dry" Joke on St. Jim's!

IT was not until the following morning that St. Jim's began to realise the full seriousness of the situation. Rising-bell rang out loud and clear, calling the school to a fresh day's work. Cries of wrath and consternation arose from the boys when they discovered that there was no water with which to perform their morning ablutions.

Piggott, in the Third Form dormitory, chuckled.

"He, he, he! What a lark!" he said. "Selby won't be able to rag us now for having dirty necks and inky fingers. No more washing, you chaps, till Ratty gets a new turnkey. Isn't it great? He, he, he!"

Wally D'Arcy snorted.

"I'm blessed if I can see anything funny in it!" he snapped. "We aren't all water-dodgers like you, Piggott, although we do have dirty necks at times. I want a wash, even if it's only a giddy sluish-round. We—we can't go all day without a wash, surely!"

The boys had perforce to dress without washing, and they trooped downstairs to see what was "doing."

Wrath and indignation reigned supreme at St. Jim's. There were frowzy faces everywhere, and the great army of unwashed—seniors as well as juniors—declined Mr. Ratcliff in lurid and far from complimentary tones.

Frantic efforts were made to obtain water, but there was no water to be had. The only oasis in the desert was the gymnasium, where the water flowed from the taps as freely as ever. Tom Merry & Co. were in jubilant mood. Mr. Ratcliff had unwittingly placed them in a stronger position than ever, and they felt that they had good reason to be jubilant. The barring-out was progressing very satisfactorily, from their point of view, and they were determined to "stick it" to the last.

A crowd of angry, grubby-faced fellows gathered round the gymnasium before breakfast. Tom Merry & Co. grinned down at them from the windows of their stronghold.

"Hallo, chaps!" said Tom Merry breezily. "You are a happy-looking lot, and no giddy error! Look at your chivvies, too! From all appearances, a general wash and brush-up wouldn't do you any harm!"

"How can we wash when we've got no water!" howled Gerald Cutts of the Fifth. "Ratty's cut our water off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rebels.

"Fat lot there is to laugh at!" snorted Pratt of the New House. "How would you chaps like it—hey? It's no joke, I can tell you!"

"Bai Jove! You're wight, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, looking down through his shining monocle. "It's a fwrightfully wotten pwedic to be in. To have to go without a mornin' wash must be simply howwid!"

"Groooogh! It is horrid!" said Redfern. "Something ought to be done in the matter—"

"You ought to let us have some water from the gymnasium!" hooted Cutts. "I vote we make a raid and—"

"You'll jolly well do nothing of the sort!" rapped Tom Merry warmly. "This is our stronghold, and all raiders will be ejected on their necks. As regards supplying the rest of the school with water, we can't do that. We feel awfully sorry for you, and all that, but it's Ratty's fault, and you must argue it out with him. It's up to Ratty to get back the water supply—not us! We're out to give Ratty the kybosh,

and we're not going to help him out of his hole by giving away water. What we have we hold, my sons!"

"Hear, hear!" said the rebels heartily.

Figgins nodded.

"Tom Merry's right, you chaps," he said. "We can hardly expect him to supply us with water. If he did, he'd be helping Ratty."

"Talk of angels!" grinned Kerr. "Here is Ratty!"

The tyrant of St. Jim's came striding over from the School House. His face, which had manifestly not been washed, was suffused with fury. He glared at Tom Merry & Co., and, if looks had power to kill, those youths would have been stretched lifeless on the spot.

The rebels, however, were very much alive! They greeted their old enemy with a chorus of yells.

"Good-morning, Ratty!"

"Nice day, isn't it—so far?" grinned Blake.

"Oh, I wonder what it feels like to be washed!" trilled Monty Lowther gaily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ratty shook his fist at the laughing rebels.

"Will you come out of there and surrender to me?" he yelled. "This affair has now gone beyond all sufferance, and I warn you that I am desperate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co. derisively.

Mr. Ratcliff clutched at his scanty locks and looked round wildly. Kildare and a number of seniors were standing near by, talking angrily together.

"Kildare—Darrell—North—Langton—Monteith!" screeched Mr. Ratcliff. "Form an attacking-party at once and drive those little ruffians out into the open!"

None of the prefects essayed to move. Mr. Ratcliff seemed to choke.

"Do you hear me?" he raved. "I command you to carry out an attack on the gymnasium and gain access to the water supply! Go on, Kildare! Are you deaf, fellow? Good heavens! Can it be possible that you, too, mean to flaunt my authority, Kildare?"

"You can put it that way if you wish, sir," replied the stalwart school captain grimly. "I certainly have no intention of helping to create any fresh trouble at this school. There has been trouble enough already, and the fault does not lie entirely with the juniors in the gymnasium."

"Hear, hear!" came the unanimous cry from the fellows standing round.

Mr. Ratcliff almost dropped.

"What—what!" he stammered, glaring round in all directions. "Then you are all against me! You, Kildare, are siding with these young scoundrels, and would encourage them in their defiance of me!"

Kildare set his teeth hard.

"If you want my candid opinion, sir, I think that you exceeded your duties when you took charge of this school," he said. "You came into the School House with the intention of making trouble, and you have succeeded only too well. Your attitude towards the juniors was that of a tyrant and bully, the restrictions you set up were entirely out of reason, and, under the circumstances, the boys cannot be blamed for rising against you."

"Good old Kildare!" shouted Blake from the gym window. "That's the way to talk to Ratty! Give it to him straight from the shoulder!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Ratcliff did not reply—he could not.

Kildare turned to the boys in the quadrangle.

"It's impossible for you fellows to have breakfast until you've washed," he said. "Who's coming for a dip in the river?"

"We'll come, Kildare!"

"Good wheeze!"

"What-ho!"

A rush was made indoors to fetch bathing costumes and towels, and Mr. Ratcliff was left on his own, fuming.

A few minutes later a huge crowd followed Kildare's lead from St. Jim's. Mr. Ratcliff frantically ordered them to come back, but nobody paid any heed to the tyrannical Housemaster. Practically all St. Jim's was against him now. Nobody loved the tyrant. And Mr. Ratcliff ground his teeth with rage and chagrin as he realised how rapidly his power was slipping through his fingers.

Kildare and the others returned some time later, looking fresh and cheerful after their morning dip in the Rhy. Their cheerfulness had a severe set-back, however, at the breakfast table. Mrs. Kebble, unable to obtain water supplies, had only a "dry" breakfast to offer.

The boys of St. Jim's did not mince their words in stating their opinion of the Housemaster and all his works.

Mr. Lathom was looking worried, and Mr. Linton savage. They, like the rest of St. Jim's, were now completely out of patience with Mr. Ratcliff. In order to obtain a wash that morning they had had to pay Toby to fetch two pails of water from a farmhouse. This outraged the masters'

sense of dignity, and their feelings towards Mr. Ratcliff were the very opposite of cordial.

The two masters went together into the library to discuss matters. Mr. Linton banged his fist down hard on the table.

"Lathom, the condition of affairs we have now arrived at is infamous!" he exclaimed angrily. "For the sake of the prestige of the school, and our own dignity as masters, we must take steps to deal with the matter."

"What is the use?" said Mr. Lathom, despairingly. "Ratcliff is intractable—he will not listen to reason. Primarily, of course, he is the cause of the trouble."

"Ratcliff has brought things to a pretty pass by his management of affairs," said Mr. Linton tartly. "It is imperative, my dear Lathom, that something shall be done immediately to curb Ratcliff's authority, and re-establish peace and order at this school. Ratcliff himself has precipitated the present situation, and he now finds himself incapable of dealing with it. You and I are more or less powerless, so we have one alternative. We must let Mr. Railton know of what is going on."

Mr. Lathom nodded.

"That is indeed the best course to adopt, Linton," he said. "Mr. Railton may see his way clear to return and take the matter in hand immediately. Perhaps—ahem!—it would not be advisable to let Ratcliff know that we intend communicating with Mr. Railton?"

"Ratcliff shall not know!" said Mr. Linton decisively. "I will go down to Rylcombe Station without delay, and dispatch a telegram to Mr. Railton. There is no necessity to consult Ratcliff at all."

The Shell master nodded to his colleague, and whisked away. A few minutes later he was seen to hurry out of St. Jim's, wearing a very grim and determined expression.

The school, really, was in a sorry fix.

Mr. Ratcliff made frantic efforts to find another turnkey, and he and Taggles searched high and low, but all without success. Every attempt to turn on the water failed miserably. The services of the village plumber were invoked, and this worthy, after spending the whole morning trying to manipulate the turncock with various keys, finally gave it up as a bad job. St. Jim's would have to remain "dry" until a new turnkey could be made.

And as the day wore on, and the situation became more desperate, Ratty's rage and mortification increased. He tried again and again to threaten or cajole Tom Merry & Co. into surrender, but they steadfastly maintained their defiance, until Ratty was almost at his wits' end. He retired ignominiously into his study to think things out.

CHAPTER 10. Ratty Retires!

"MONTEITH!"
Monteith of the Sixth Form was standing at the school gates later that day, talking to Gray, when Mr. Ratcliff came swishing up.

"Monteith, I want you—and you, also, Gray!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "Follow me!"

The New House fellows looked surprised.

"I—I say, what do you want us for, sir?" asked Monteith. "I have planned to make a final attack on the gymnasium," said Mr. Ratcliff in a rasping voice. "The young renegades in there have to be driven out, and the water supply commandeered to supply the needs of the school. The matter is desperate, Monteith, and I consider myself justified in taking desperate measures to cope with the situation. The only means of getting into the gymnasium and securing the mastery there is to break down the door and eject the young ruffians by force."

Monteith did not look at all keen.

"I'm afraid you'll be biting off more than you can chew if you try that, sir," he said gruffly. "You might succeed in breaking in the door, but you'll have a job to empty the gymnasium. There are two whole Forms there, remember."

"I did not ask for your opinion, Monteith!" rapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I have thought of everything, you may be well assured, and I appreciate the magnitude of the task before me. I dare say I shall be able to cope with the young rascals. I am making up a party to attack the gymnasium, and— Ah!"

He broke off as three men, strangers to Monteith and Gray, walked in at the gates.

The newcomers were not prepossessing individuals. They were coarse-looking and roughly dressed, and they brought in with them a distinct odour of spirits.

"Arternoon, sir!" said one of the seedy trio, touching his battered bowler. "You're Mr. Ratcliff, sir, wot's engaged us to do a bit of fighting this arternoon?"

"Yes, that is correct," said the Housemaster. "Come this way, my men. Come, Monteith and Gray."

The two prefects blinked at the visitors, and then at each other.

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"My only hat!" gasped Monteith. "Now I see Ratcliff's wheeze. He's engaged help from outside. He's made up his mind to get Merry and his crowd out of the gym., and he's paying men to help run the attack. Great Scott!"

"Here come some more!" grinned Gray.

Four men, shifty-eyed and shabby-looking, appeared in the gateway. Taggles, seeing them, came rushing out of his lodge.

"Get hout!" he said, with a wraithful glare at the newcomers. "Tramps ain't allowed 'ere! 'Op off!"

"'Ere, not so fast, old codger!" said one of the men. "We've got an appointment 'ere with a gent by the name of Ratcliff."

"My hoye!" said Taggles.

Mr. Ratcliff came hurrying back.

"Come in, my men!" he said. "I—I think—ahem!—we will wait here till the others appear."

A crowd of boys began to gather, and Mr. Ratcliff's hired men were looked on with great disfavour. The news soon spread that the Housemaster had engaged a number of rough men to expel Tom Merry & Co. from the gym.

Five other men arrived, and that number apparently completed Mr. Ratcliff's mercenary band, for he led the dozen away, ordering Gray and Monteith to follow. This the prefects did, though very reluctantly.

The Housemaster led the way to the School House steps, where Knox and a number of other prefects were waiting, with Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger of the Fifth. Mr. Ratcliff had pressed the seniors into service, but, like Monteith and Gray, they did not appear to relish the job that lay before them.

They looked in amazement at Mr. Ratcliff's twelve hired men.

"My hat!" said Cutts, his eyes glittering. "Ratty means business, then. With those twelve merchants on the job, I reckon we stand a good chance of driving those little blighters out of the gym!"

"Rather!" said Knox with relish.

Mr. Ratcliff looked round with gleaming eyes.

"You will have to batter down a heavy door, and for that purpose weapons will be needed," he said. "Knox, will you kindly look out some implements which you think will be suitable. There are plenty in the school."

"Right you are, sir!" grinned Knox. And he walked away.

He returned shortly afterwards, armed with two pickaxes, a large coke-hammer, and two choppers.

"How will these do, sir?" he grinned.

"Excellent!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Hand them round as far as they'll go, Knox. They ought to be sufficient to break in the door."

"Rather!"

The weapons were handed round, and Mr. Ratcliff led his army across to the gymnasium, followed by an eager, excited crowd.

Tom Merry & Co. were expecting them, the news having been previously conveyed to them by Figgins, and were looking out of the open windows when the Housemaster and his myrmidons arrived.

"My word!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "What a giddy crowd! Are they all pals of yours, Ratcliff?"

"You shall shortly pay for your insolence, Merry!" snarled the Housemaster. "You can see now that I am determined to bring you to book by any means at my disposal. I will give you the alternative of either surrendering or being ejected by force. Again I demand of you to surrender!"

"And again I tell you to go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"You—you insolent whelp! I shall order these men to batter the door down and eject you!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"Order away, old sport!" responded the rebel leader. "They're welcome to chuck us out, if they can!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Let 'em all come!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff's temper rose to boiling-point. He wheeled round to his "army" and waved his arms.

"Go on!" he screeched. "I have given the little rascals the opportunity of surrendering without force and they have refused, so I will not be answerable for the consequences! Batter the door down and throw them out! Go on! Yoooooooop!"

A large, ripe tomato, hurled by Jack Blake's unerring aim, struck Mr. Ratcliff in the nape of his neck and, bursting, disported itself down his back.

The Housemaster danced and yelled, and the spectators shrieked with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ratty's hired army dashed forward to the gym door, and as they did so Tom Merry & Co. played the fire hoses on

them. Torrents of water swept down on the attackers, and they fell back, gasping.

"Ooocogh!"
 "Yerroooooch!"
 "Gug-g-gug-gug!"

Those men were not fond of water in any shape or form, judging by the fuss they made. There was no doubt, however, that the majority of them badly needed a wash, and from the point of view of cleanliness, at any rate, their wetting was a good thing!

"Go on! Break the door down! Never mind the water!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff, prancing about in the rear, and keeping a watchful eye on the hoses. "What am I paying you for? On—on!"

"On, Stanley, on!" chortled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff's men went on.

They charged valiantly through the barrage of water and brought their weapons to play upon the gymnasium door, whilst Knox & Co. hung back, ready to attack when the door was down.

Bang! Crash! Bim! Crash!
 Swoooooosh!

Water fell on the raiders in torrents, but they slashed away at the gymnasium door with dogged determination, urged on by Mr. Ratcliff.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, looking down from the window. "They're goin' it, deah boys! Just hark at the wuffians!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Tom Merry called his men away from the windows and ranged them in front of the door.

They were in for a desperate fight, he knew, and they could not afford to take chances. Indiah clubs and lengths of knotted rope were served out to the juniors as weapons. Kerruish and Digby held the water-hoses poised in readiness for when the door should go.

Crash! Bang! Wallop! Crash!

The door was shivering under the terrific impacts of the raiders' weapons. Soon it began to splinter, and the ends of the pickaxes came through at each stroke.

Mr. Ratcliff was dancing with fiendish glee outside.

"Go on! That's it, my men! Ah!"

Crash!

The top panel of the door was in. Tom Merry & Co. dashed to the aperture and struck out with their weapons at the raiders. The men received blows from all sides, but they continued to wield their heavy weapons with deadly effect on the door.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Biff! Whack! Wallop!

"Go on, men!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff jubilantly, his gown fluttering behind him as he pranced to and fro, squelching in the puddles and pools in front of the gym. "The door will soon be down and—"

"Cave, Ratty!" shouted a voice in the crowd. "Here come Mr. Railton and the Head!"

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

The commotion in the quadrangle died down as Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton, both looking amazed and angry, strode over from the gates, where they had just arrived in the station cab.

Mr. Ratcliff ceased to prance about as he caught sight of the newcomers. He went quite faint for a minute, and his heart palpitated with fury and dismay. He seemed to wilt under Dr. Holmes' stern, piercing gaze.

Mr. Ratcliff stammered out something, but his words were drowned by a deafening cheer that came from the rebels in the gym.

"The Head's come back!" shouted Tom Merry. "We're jolly glad to see you, sir, and hope you're quite better. Three cheers for the Head, boys!"

"Hooray!"

The boys in the quadrangle joined in the cheering, and the air resounded with those scores of lusty voices.

Dr. Holmes smiled for a moment at this warm, hearty welcome. There was no mistaking the joy of the boys of St. Jim's at seeing their Head back with them once again.

The Head raised his hand for silence, and again he looked sternly at the nonplussed Housemaster.

"Mr. Ratcliff," he said, in an angry voice, "what is the meaning of this extraordinary scene?"

Mr. Ratcliff panted.

"A barring-out is in progress, sir! The juniors have rebelled against all law and order, and have been holding me at defiance for days! They are quite out of hand!"

"A most extraordinary state of affairs, sir!" said the Head coldly. "I hardly expected to find St. Jim's in such a condition on my return, although Mr. Railton, whom I met in London, and who was about to set out for here, gave me to understand that some trouble had occurred. He had, in fact, been requested to return and take the matter in hand."

"Oh—oh!" gasped the astounded Mr. Ratcliff. "Indeed!"

"I had intended staying in London for a few days before resuming my duties here, but as soon as I learned from Mr. Railton that there was trouble in the school I decided to return with him. And this, Mr. Ratcliff, is what I find!"

"I—I—I—"

"What are these ruffians doing here, Mr. Ratcliff?" demanded the Head.

"I—I engaged them, sir!" stammered Ratty.

"Bless my soul! You actually engaged them to batter down the gymnasium door, Mr. Ratcliff, and to use those dangerous weapons against the boys?"

"I had to take some measures to get the young renegades out of the gymnasium, sir! They defied me to do my worst, and as I had not sufficient support from the other boys in the school I had to resort to outside help to restore order!"

"Restore order!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "It seems that just the reverse has taken place, Mr. Ratcliff!"

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

"Silence, boys!" exclaimed the Head. "Mr. Ratcliff, you had better fulfil your obligations to these men and send them away at the earliest possible moment. Really, I have never heard of such a thing!"

Mr. Ratcliff, scowling, paid the men, who squelched away from St. Jim's looking far from satisfied.

Dr. Holmes surveyed the rebels grimly.

"Kindly answer me, Merry!" said the Head tartly. "What does this mean?"

"We're fed up with Mr. Ratcliff and his rotten ways, sir," said the rebel leader. "He's nothing more than a bully and a tyrant. We don't mind being punished for things we deserve, but when a master sets out to make things hot for us, out of pure spite, we think it's time to kick. That's what Ratty—Mr. Ratcliff—did, and we kicked!"

"Bless my soul!"

"We stood Mr. Ratcliff as long as we could, sir. He came over to the School House looking for trouble, and he got it!"

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I was afraid, when I left, that there would be trouble if I left Mr. Ratcliff in charge," he said. "I could see trouble brewing, but I had no alternative but to hand over the control of the school to him. It seems to me, sir, that a complete inquiry into this affair will have to be made."

"I shall certainly sift the matter to its depths, Railton," said the Head with a frown. He turned to Tom Merry & Co. "Boys, there must be an immediate end to this disgraceful business. You will evacuate the gymnasium, and return to your proper places in the school."

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry. "We shouldn't think of disobeying you, sir."

"I trust not," said the Head dryly.

He walked to the School House, accompanied by Mr. Railton and Mr. Ratcliff. The New House master was not looking happy. They met Mr. Linton on the steps, and Mr. Lathom joined them in the Hall.

Mr. Ratcliff had the most uncomfortable half-hour of his lifetime in the Head's study. Dr. Holmes exacted a full account of the whole affair, and he listened very attentively to both Mr. Ratcliff's and the other masters' rendering of the story.

Tom Merry & Co. were then summoned to the Head's room, and Ratty minor was fetched. The Head then heard the juniors' case. Tom Merry gave a true and concise account of the trouble with Ratty minor and Mr. Ratcliff, and told the Head full details of the barring-out that had ensued. Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton could not help smiling when they heard of the school in the gym.

When the juniors had been dismissed, the Head turned to Mr. Ratcliff.

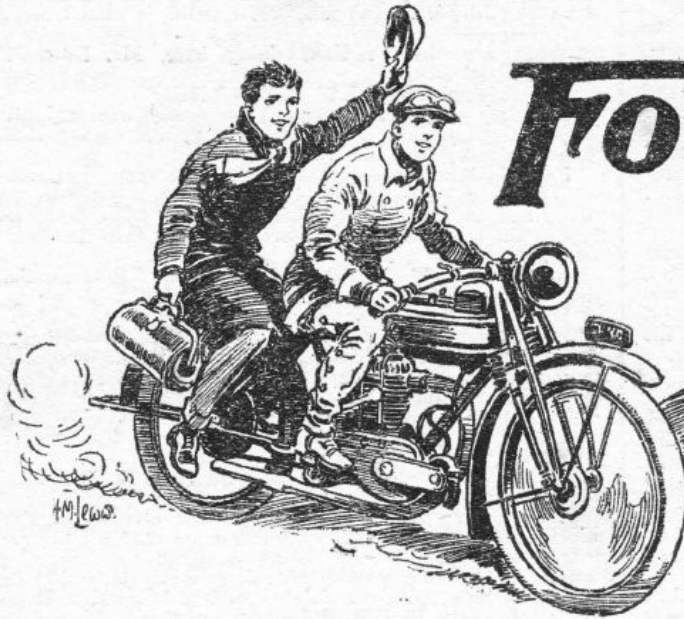
"It appears from what I have heard, Mr. Ratcliff, that the crux of the whole matter lies in your harsh treatment of the juniors in the School House, and your preferential attitude towards your nephew," he said coldly. "You seem to me to have acted throughout in a very hasty and bitter manner. The cutting down of the boys' meals I certainly do not approve of; it is a dangerous thing to interfere with the food of healthy and growing boys. Mr. Ratcliff, I cannot help but find serious fault with you, and I must state my opinion that the greater part of the responsibility for this outbreak lies at your door."

Mr. Ratcliff turned almost green.

"The juniors no doubt acted hastily, too, but they were actuated by a sense of deep injustice," went on the Head. "I was very gratified to hear that they continued with their school work whilst—er—living in the gymnasium. Merry says that he will show me the work which they have actually done, and if I approve of it the lads shall not be too severely punished. I have always been an advocate of tempering justice with mercy, especially when dealing with boys, and you would do well to bear that maxim in mind in future, Mr. Ratcliff. That is all. You will return to the New House and resume your duties there as usual."

(Continued on page 28.)

In spite of the stubborn defence put up by the famous Arsenal players, there is no holding the bustling forwards from Nettingham Town!



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 gov'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!

Hal sees the United's manager, and, after getting permission to accompany his mother to the seaside, returns to convey the good news.

He arrives at the office just in time to warn his stepfather against Stevens, the man who had brought so much trouble upon his shoulders, and who is applying for a vacant position in the shop.

Stevens, in consequence, is turned down.

Seeking vengeance, the unscrupulous Stevens waylays the errand-boy that same day, and asks him where James Henson keeps his money. Finding the lad an easy pawn to assist him in carrying out his dastardly scheme, Stevens makes an appointment to meet him at half-past seven to talk things over.

(Now read on.)

Sea Breezes!

THERE was not a happier or more contented boy in the world than Hal Chester when he took his mother away to Silversea. Hal had arranged for rooms at the Beach Hotel through the medium of the club telephone at the City Ground, and upon his arrival at the delightful but deserted spot found the sun shining and the bite of the bitter wind tempered by the soft ozone of the sea. It all seemed so different from Nettingham.

The nurse who had been attending to Mrs. Henson so faithfully and so long went with them. She was to stay for a week at least, and then return to her duties.

The effect of the change upon Harold's mother was magical. The boy could note a difference at the end of a day's stay. He knew that it was something more than mere rest and sea air that was responsible for the change. She was away from the worries of the house and the business.

Constant contact with the gloom and depressing mental outlook of such a dour and hard-bitten man as James Henson, Harold knew, would take the go out of anyone.

As the three of them—son, mother, and nurse—walked along beside the sea Mrs. Henson laughed and talked with her old-time brightness of spirits.

Harold had to carry his mind back to the time when he was a very small boy to remember her like this. Then his father had been alive, and his mother's life was one long round of happiness, of laughter, and of gaiety.

Whilst willing to acknowledge his stepfather's many sterling qualities—his honesty, his determination of character—Harold, young though he was, could understand why

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the eternal self-repression and unvarying sameness of the man had affected his mother's nerves.

He shuddered as he recalled his own dullness of mind during the period in which he had worked at the Stores, stealing an hour or two now and then in which to play the game he loved, and always to get a wiggling for doing it when he got back home.

The wholesale price of commodities; the retail price that should be placed upon them; the troubles of the shop; the selfishness of creditors who would not pay; the power of growing opposition; the domestic details of the house and the need for economy—Harold could remember nothing else than these topics of conversation having been indulged in at the meal-tables, unless James Henson switched to politics, and then his stepfather had allowed no other opinion than his own.

All this and the gathering weight of business troubles, plus the difficulty of managing her big house with insufficient domestic help, had brought about the crisis in his mother's health.

Now she was free from it all. She laughed again. The nurse laughed with her. Harold laughed to think that he was able to do this for his mother.

"Harold, I do think at last that your stepfather is coming to realise that you have something in you," said Mrs. Henson suddenly, turning to Hal. "If it were not for you I should not be here now; and I really believe, dear, that the change is going to make all the difference in the world to me."

"Of course it is, mother," the boy replied, his face flushing. "And when you go back home I hope you'll make my stepfather understand that his stern and relentless views are not necessarily always correct."

"I know they are not," the mother sighed. "But it is hard to move him from any settled opinion. I believe he

would be ever so much better, Harold, if the business did not worry him so."

"He is so capable and so thrifty that I feel sure he will pull through, mother."

"Perhaps. But you know his way. He cannot keep any really good man at the Stores because he is always interfering; and nowadays they won't stand it. He can never see that. The result is he gets bad salesmen, bad errand-boys—indifferent service everywhere. I tried to get him to get a small and inexpensive motor-car, so that orders might be delivered more quickly; but he said he could not afford it. So he has carried on with the boys and the pony and trap—and we are losing customers through it all the time. He could have got a delivery-car on the hire-purchase system, but he would never do that."

Harold nodded. He knew. He had been through the mill with his stepfather, who hated modern ideas or any sort of change that is proclaimed by moderns as progress. He saw his mother's face cloud as she spoke.

Yes, it was a great thing to get her away from it all. Hal now linked arms with his mother and drew her down to the sand so that they should walk along near the edge of the lapping waves.

"Don't worry about the business now, mother dear," he said. "Time enough to think about that when you get back. One of these days Mr. Henson will awaken to the fact that he must keep in line with the rival businesses he has got to fight. And when he does that he will move forward again. If he does not, then he will fail, of course; but, even with all the doubts he holds, I should say that he is a long way off failure yet. There is the stock at the Stores, you know, and the fittings; it must be worth a good many thousands of pounds."

"But most of it is unpaid, Harold."

They swung along, and Harold, as soon as he conveniently could, changed the conversation. Instantly the careworn expression of his mother's face vanished. She began to laugh again.

It was not until Friday that Harold went back to Nettingham.

He arrived at twelve o'clock, and drove at once to Mrs. Sandy's, delighting Tommy Bell by his return.

"Good old Harold! So glad you came back for a bite, old man!" said the boyish centre-half, as he wrung Harold's hand. "You're looking as fit as a fiddle. Feel all the keener for football, I suppose, because of your rest?"

"I feel I want a game, Tommy," laughed Harold, beaming round the table.

The cloth was laid, and Tommy was in the act of carving up a joint of beef. He was entertaining guests—Dickie Double, looking fatter than ever, and Ben Robinson, the trainer.

Ben had long ago got over his prejudice against Harold. Oddly enough, with such examples as Dicky Double and Tommy Bell—to say nothing of Harold himself—Ben was beginning to change his views about football.

He used to hold the opinion that there were no players like the old ones, but now he realised that, providing they were skilful enough, elusive, nimble, eager boys like Tommy Bell and Harold Chester who possessed great speed—they wanted a mighty lot of beating.

Ben studied Harold critically, noting his tanned face and the brightness of the boy's eyes.

"Chester," he said, "I did not hold with the manager giving you leave to go to the seaside, even in the circumstances that took you there. I'd have had you down at the ground and put you through a spell of hard training; for you've got to make weight and muscle yet, you know. But I'm not sure he wasn't right; you're looking grand!"

Harold laughed breezily.

"I heard a lot of talk about this afternoon's game as I was travelling to Nettingham," he declared. "There were quite a crowd coming to see it. We look like having a big gate. Tommy, are we going to beat the Arsenal?"

"The answer is in the affirmative," smiled Tommy—"that is if the forwards can get a goal. Surly Dawson is still a bit too fond of himself to fill the centre-forward position properly; but you look as if you might bang the ball home. I like playing against the Arsenal. They are a clever side, and play football. So much the better for our chance. I think, even with the handicap of Surly Dawson, we shall win, Hal."

"When are you going back to Silversea?" asked Dicky, as he tackled a piece of Yorkshire pudding. "Staying over the week-end?"

"Yes," replied Harold. "Mother is all right with the nurse. I sha'n't go back until Monday morning."

The meal was finished to an accompaniment of general conversation, and then Ben Robinson, after thanking Tommy for the feed, made a bolt for the football-ground.

An hour later, when the others followed, they found the streets thronged.

Along the main thoroughfares the crush of vehicles was tremendous. Every one of them was packed to overflowing. Streamers were flaunted everywhere.

Near the football-ground they passed a whole regiment of loyal followers of the Arsenal who had come up for the game. They surged onward, singing and laughing, every face bright with enthusiasm.

James Henson would have been shocked had he witnessed this display of club partisanship. Luckily for him, he was so far removed from the centre of activity that he was not worried by it.

A glance round the ground before they went to the dressing-room to change, showed the three chums a packed enclosure.

"Harold," grinned Dicky Double, "I wish our old Head were here to see this. Do you know that we three, Tommy, you and I, are very largely responsible for the change? Gates were falling off badly when Tommy first came to stiffen the team. Then I came and gave 'em a further fillip upwards, and lastly you came, and—look! If we lick the Londoners to-day we shall have another whopping big gate when we play Huddersfield Town on Saturday week."

They turned and walked slowly back up the tunnel to the dressing-room.

There, in the semi-darkness, a voice hailed them.

"Why, it's Jim Burrows!" laughed Harold, going to his enthusiastic admirer and shaking hands. "Jim, I shall never forget how you interfered and saved me when Stevens attacked me after the Bury match."

Jim Burrows, raising a hand to his jaw, felt it. He was still wondering how it had escaped fracture, for the wallop Billy Stevens had landed there had stung.

"It was nothing, Harold," said the quaint fellow. "Here, do you see who I've brought with me to-day?"

Harold turned to see Bert Roberts smiling at him, and Bert looked just the picture of health.

"Why, Bert," cried the boy, taking his old chum by the hand, "it's good to see you here! But why aren't you playing for the Athletic? They've got a match on, surely?"

"Oh, yes!" returned Bert Roberts, shrugging his broad shoulders. "They've a match on right enough, but I've refused to play in it!"

"Phew! Why? I thought you were there for life, Bert!"

"I thought so, too; but things haven't been the same since you left, Hal, and that's a fact. The committee is divided. There's a section of it—the Clarkson side of it, you know—that has never ceased to run you down since you left the Athletic and turned professional. They never seem to realise that you had to do it, Hal, had to earn your own living! I've had a deal to say. So have the opposing section of the committee with Robbie Green a staunch defender of your action. Well, to cut a long story short, I had a row last week. On Friday when the club met to discuss future policy, Clarkson attacked you more bitterly than ever, and had a nasty go at me. I at once resigned. They've sent a deputation round to my house since to try and get me to play for the team to-day. But I've finished. I'll never play for the Albion again. If Clarkson wants to control the club, all the best players and the best men will resign. It means the ruin of the old club, Harold."

"And I have been the cause of it!" groaned Hal.

"No, never blame yourself for that, Hal. It just could not be helped."

"And so you have come to watch Harold play to-day?" said Tommy Bell, looking Bert up and down with approving eyes.

"Yes."

"Partly," said Jim Burrows. "I brought him here to see Mr. Bliss. I wrote to the manager telling him I was going to bring Bert along here. He interviewed me courteously enough, but he was very busy; he said he couldn't see Bert. Told me he already had too many players on his books, and didn't want any more."

Harold shot a glance at Bert.

"You really want to join the Town, Bert?" he asked.

"Yes, if they'll give me a chance. I hinted at that when I met you the other day, Hal."

"I know. Oh"—Harold's eyes sparkled brightly—"if only we could get you, what a centre-forward you would make!"

"I know a better one, Hal—you!"

Harold shook his head.

"Not big enough or heavy enough, Bert."

He swung round on Dicky Double and Tommy Bell.

"I like Mr. Bliss," he criticised, "but I must say he seems to lack vision. Tommy, you just ought to see Bert Roberts play. He's good. He would make the team, and Mr. Bliss won't even see him."

Tommy laughed loudly.

"All the more reason why he should sign Bert on later when he does see him," he remarked. "Jim, bring Bert

into the dressing-room. You can be with us while we change, and we'll have a talk."

Another Win for the Town!

THE Town wore white shirts and blue knickers that day out of compliment to the Arsenal. Really by reason of the fact that they were the older club, they might have worn the red, but it was a nice thought.

Represented by Lewis; Baker and Kennedy; Milne, Butler and John; Hoar, Brain, Woods, Ramsay and Toner, the Londoners turned out to a welcoming roar. A very smart and likely looking lot they seemed to be as they moved easily and nippily over the fine green turf of the City Ground, and the crowd that packed the stand and banks settled down to enjoy the game.

Another and yet a louder roar greeted the Town as they turned out.

Ten of them passed the gate, and then came Harold Chester. But he did not stay behind to secure a round of applause for himself—his concern was for Jim Burrows, who was smothered with the Town's favours, and his chum, Bert Roberts.

Leading them along the rails, he consigned them into the hands of trainer Ben Robinson.

"Look after them, Ben!" he cried. "They're pals of mine!"

It was recommendation enough. Ben took them to a form where there was room and sat them down there, remaining also to chat, his bag sponge and towel being placed beside him.

A minute later the game began, and at a pace that thrilled. The teams put up as fine a display as had been seen on the City Ground that season. There were times when the nippy cleverness of the Arsenal's halves and forwards threatened to give the visitors an early lead. The ball went from man to man with a certainty that gave Tommy Bell and his boys a heap to do. Good shots were sent at Dicky Double, too, but his sure hands made no sort of slip. He held the fort like a hero. To roars of delighted laughter the fat boy, whose smiling and blazing eyes won the favour of the crowd, bounced out of goal on nimble feet, revealing a speed and activity that was astonishing for one of his weight.

Forwards rushed at him, but evading them with ease, Dicky Double punted the ball far down the field and so

helped to take the sharp edge off the Reds' attack at a time when they were bubbling over with the enthusiasm of effort.

On the other side the forward play was nothing like so good. The wing men were passing to one another in skilful fashion, but in the centre was Geoffrey Dawson, who, in spite of good resolutions, was in a peevish and selfish humour, always testing his skill and tackling ability against that of Butler, the Arsenal's centre-half.

The thing that Dawson had got to get into his head before he could ever hope to become a star player was the fact that he was not half as good as he imagined himself to be.

Butler, finding that Dawson was inclined to be selfish, gave him rope enough until he had got the ball, and then proceeded to blot him completely out of the picture. This he managed either by tackling or intercepting a pass.

When it came to heading, too, he was the master mind.

Surly Dawson, looking as cross as a cross-word puzzle, began to try little tricks such as elbowing, tripping, and handling; but the referee's hawk-like eyes were quick to detect infringements. Every time Dawson fouled the Arsenal's players, the official spotted him, and the free kicks he awarded sent the Reds away.

Tommy Bell was a patient man, but when the game was thirty minutes old, and Dawson had completely spoilt a dozen useful breakaways, he went up to Geoffrey and spoke to him.

"I can't have this, Dawson!" he cried. "You must play the game! And remember, too, you are not the whole forward line. Why not give the other boys a chance?"

Dawson, like Gerald Marsh in the past, was not a man to take any kind of fault-finding with a good grace. The next time he got the ball he banged it peevishly far over the cross-bar of the Arsenal's goal into the crowd.

Tommy Bell's face darkened.

The referee watching him closely and noticing that he was beginning to argue with his opponents, went up to him and cautioned him.

"The old fool!" muttered Dawson to himself. "He ought never to be allowed to referee!"

Unfortunately for him, the stage whisper was overheard by the referee and a mental note made of it.

It bore ill consequences for Dawson.

The play had been transferred to the Arsenal end of the field, and Hal Seymour, Kirton and Small were drifting this way and that in an endeavour to work an opening from which to score, with Tommy Bell and the half-backs also on the qui vive.

The tackling and intervention of the Reds here was splendid. Three times Hal nearly had the chance he desired, but was obstructed. At last he backheeled the ball to Dawson.

"Here you are, Geoff!" he cried.

The pass was beautifully made, and left Dawson with a clear sight of goal. But, to Dawson's annoyance—and it was his own fault that he started too late—a red-shirted player dashed in and banged the ball over the touch-line to safety.

Dawson could not stand that, so, thrusting out a leg, he brought the player heavily down—a flagrant act committed within four yards of the referee. What was worse, the Arsenal player was lamed for a moment. He limped off on the shoulders of a chum.



Angry at being robbed of the ball so easily, Dawson thrust out a leg and brought the Arsenal player heavily down.

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Dawson went, too!
 "Leave the field, Dawson!" commanded the referee.
 The peevish centre-forward's face whitened in dismay.
 "But, sir—it was an accident! I didn't mean any harm!"
 "You have been a nuisance ever since the game started!"
 retorted the referee sternly. "Leave the field! The game will be stopped until you've gone!"
 Looking the picture of misery and dismay, Dawson left the field, and with a man short the Town continued the game.

To the surprise and delight of their supporters, they were in no way badly handicapped by the change. The forwards knew now what they had to do. They were relieved of the responsibility of having to put the ball to a selfish and stubborn player who would waste the chance or else fail to return it. When they passed from one to another they made progress, Tommy Bell finding plenty of work for the Arsenal players to do, by supporting his wingers whenever he got a chance. Then from a sudden breakaway Small, on the left, banged across the ball to Seymour, who got to it, trapped it, and then went this way and that in a corkscrew run which brought him within a few yards of goal. Lewis managed to touch it, but he could not stop the ball from curling into the net behind him. That goal had an electrifying effect upon the crowd. The ten men held their own with the eleven, half-time finding the Town a goal ahead.

In the second half, with the wind at their backs, and Low and Smart adopting the one back game, by which they repeatedly put the Arsenal forwards offside when they became dangerous, they showed more enterprise and dash, being far more dangerous than they had been in the first forty-five minutes of the game.

Ding-dong the game went, and it waited only sixteen minutes to full time when with a sudden burst the Reds got away. Smart, failing in a tackle, let them right through. Down upon Dicky Double swept five red-shirted players, with Low and Tommy Bell pelting after them.

Dicky, finding nothing else for it, came out of goal with a rush. It was great to see the fat boy move. Ramsay, the inside-left, took a shot at goal whilst travelling at full speed. The ball flying low and true came by Dicky just out of reach and waist high. He flung himself at it, but just

missed, falling heavily balanced for a moment on the back of his neck, his legs swinging above his head. Slowly the burly boy turned over and down he fell, to lie with all his weight across the forward. Levering himself away, and blinking the mud out of his eyes, he glanced at goal, to see the ball snugly reposing against the network.

As the crowd roared Dicky got up, then he went to his goal, picked the ball out of the net and threw it upfield.

The scores were level. It looked as if the Town might gain only one point instead of two, after all.

But from the restart the home side got going again. It was wonderful to see the way in which both Seymour and Harold juggled with the ball. Seymour had always been a very clever player, but now the presence of Hal seemed to give him inspiration. Each tried to out-reach the other, and the methods paid. Ten minutes from the end, after they had made several spirited attacks, the Town broke through. Seymour, dribbling on, tried to work an opening, but finding the way barred, passed the ball at the psychological moment to Harold.

The youngster had only the goalkeeper to beat, no player being near him.

First gaining control of the ball, then running on a pace or two to steady it and himself, he sent it to the back of the net with all the power, sense of direction, and certainty that he used to display at school.

That goal settled it. Try how they would, the Reds could not get near goal after that. The corner they forced just before the whistle blew was of no use to them, for even as the flag kick was taken the last note of the whistle sounded loudly, and the game was over.

Dawson had done his best to lose the match, but Tommy Bell and the rest of the boys, Seymour and Harold in particular, had won it. The Town made another move up the table.

(Highly cited, the United's team trooped off the field. But there was one among their number, Hal Chester, who would not have felt so cheerful had he been aware of the exciting happenings which were taking place at his stepfather's shop! Be sure you read next week's exciting instalment of this powerful footer serial, chums.)

ANOTHER SPARE-MOMENT CROSS WORD PUZZLE, CHUMS!

HERE you are, chums! See what you can make of this. 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.

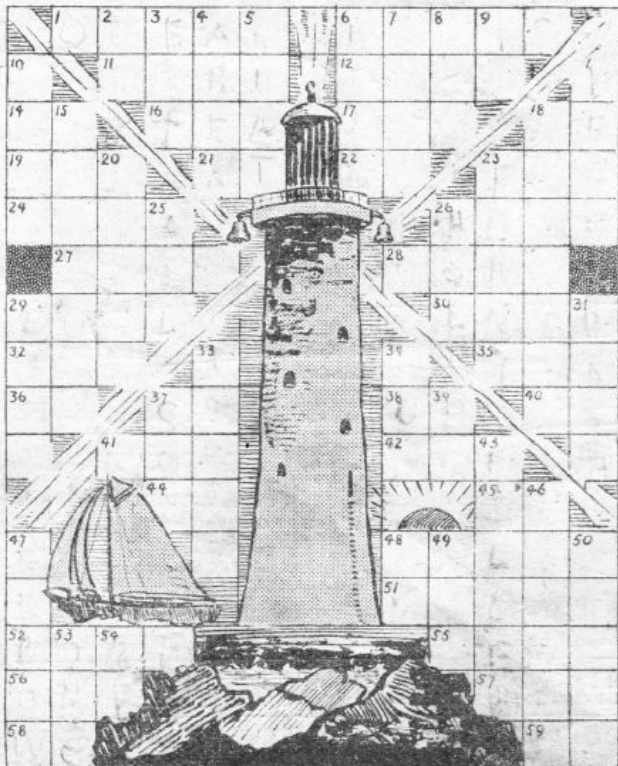
For the benefit of those who do not know how to start Cross Word Puzzles I will explain the idea.

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 definition, 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. 6 is "A floating wooden framework" (plural). That is very easy

to solve. The answer is "Rafts." That word runs across, commencing from the square marked "6." Now, on the same square another word starts that must commence with the letter "R," and the clue to this word which runs down is "Lines of light." Now, what are lines of light? Think for a moment, and you will guess.

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

- | CLUES. | | ACROSS. | |
|--------|--|---------|--|
| | Down. | 1 | A wide expanse of water. |
| 2 | Initials of a New House rotter. | 6 | A floating wooden framework (plural). |
| 3 | To masticate food. | 11 | Caution. |
| 4 | An open space. | 12 | An exclamation of sorrow. |
| 5 | Tidy. | 14 | Abbr. for "Able Bodied." |
| 6 | Lines of light. | 16 | An afternoon meal. |
| 7 | Trimble's way of spelling "ails." | 17 | Time. (adv.) |
| 8 | Corpulent. | 18 | Verb to exist. |
| 9 | Initial and last letters of "ties." | 19 | Abbr. for "Reserves." |
| 10 | Solid. | 21 | Prep. denoting nearness. |
| 13 | Assistance. | 22 | Abbr. for "Steamship." |
| 15 | Signal fires. | 23 | A fresh-water fish. |
| 18 | The end of a beam. | 24 | Propositions given. |
| 20 | Not new. | 26 | An accumulation. |
| 23 | Weird. | 27 | To summon. |
| 25 | The whole lot. | 28 | Where the juniors of St. Jim's sleep. |
| 26 | Hole without an "e." | 29 | A girl's toy baby. |
| 29 | An arched roof. | 30 | Having made a false statement. |
| 31 | To dash swiftly. | 32 | A number. |
| 33 | Buildings for shelter. | 35 | A girl's name. |
| 34 | Abbr. for "Subaltern." | 36 | Abbr. for "Manuscript." |
| 37 | Signal of distress. | 37 | Adv. "in like manner." |
| 39 | Abbr. for "Post Office." | 38 | Out of bed. |
| 43 | A means of support. | 40 | Abbr. for "Doctor." |
| 46 | Off on a bicycle ride. | 41 | Yourself. |
| 47 | The bend of the arm. | 42 | A boy's name. |
| 48 | Cyril Yorke (initials). | 44 | Abbr. for "Steamship." |
| 49 | Abbr. for "Laboratory." | 45 | A branch of the Army. |
| 51 | A leather band. | 48 | The hooked nail of a bird. |
| 53 | Meaning "Order of the British Empire." | 51 | A sailing vessel. |
| 54 | Diphthong. | 52 | A vessel propelled by oars. |
| | | 55 | An intoxicating liquor. |
| | | 56 | Meaning "Order of the British Empire." |
| | | 57 | On which ships sail. |
| | | 58 | Us. |
| | | 59 | Abbr. for "Lord Provost." |



"THE REBELS OF THE SCHOOL HOUSE!"

(Continued from page 23.)

Mr. Ratcliff was almost speechless. "Very well, sir," he stammered at last. "Very well indeed!"

He staggered, rather than walked from the study. Hisses followed him out of the School House, and he hurried across to the New House to hide his diminished head.

Tom Merry & Co. knew their fate that night.

The Head and Mr. Railton had inspected the school work done by the rebels under the tutorage of Tom Merry, and they had highly commended it. The whole of the Shell and Fourth were sentenced to "gatings" for three consecutive half-holidays, and Ratty minor was sent away from St. Jim's, not under the terms of expulsion, but because the

Head deemed it wiser for him not to remain, under the circumstances.

The juniors of St. Jim's rejoiced at the news, but they gave Ratty minor a hearty send-off when he went.

The water in the gymnasium was utilised for school purposes until the new turnkey was delivered, when the ordinary water supply was switched on again.

St. Jim's laughed loud and long over the stirring events of the barring-out, and Tom Merry & Co. felt that the Head had let them off very lightly, considering how completely they had encompassed the Downfall of Ratcliff!

THE END.

(Look out for another topping yarn next week, chums, entitled "FOOLED ON THE FIRST!" By Martin Clifford. You will laugh loud and long at the exciting events which happen on the advent of All Fools' Day! Don't miss your GEM by failing to order EARLY!)



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