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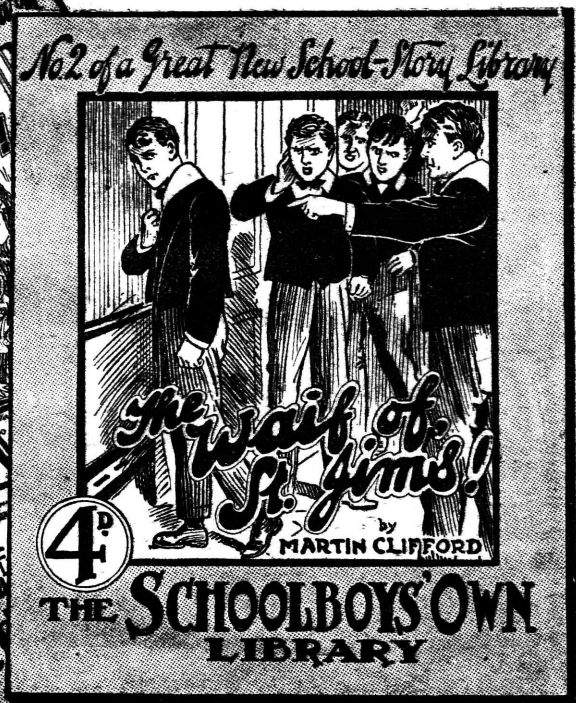
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The First of April is always a great day at St. Jim's. In this splendid yarn Tom Merry and his chums in the Shell hit upon a great wheeze to fool Blake & Co., of the Fourth. But the cheery Fourth Formers are wide awake, and in consequence somewhat alter the original programme!



FOOLED ON THE FIRST!

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

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1. A Very Important Matter!

"WHAT are we doing on Wednesday?"

"Study No. 6."

Tom Merry of the Shell Form at St. Jim's stared.

Manners looked up from the films he was cutting, and stared also.

Monty Lowther had replied to Tom's query, with an air of seriousness; but to his chums his answer seemed to indicate that his mind was wandering a little.

"Is that a joke?" asked Tom, after a pause.

"Not at all."

"Wandering in your little mind?"

"No, ass. We're doing Study No. 6 on Wednesday," explained Monty Lowther. "We've done them before, and we're going to do them again. See?"

"Why Wednesday specially, then?"

"If you look in the calendar, old man, you'll notice that Wednesday is the first of April."

"Oh!" said Tom. "I see."

"Time you did!" agreed Lowther. "Now, I've been thinking it out—"

"What with?"

Monty Lowther did not heed that frivolous question.

"It's no end of a catch," he said impressively. "When the First comes round, lots of the fellows will be trying on their little twopenny-halfpenny japes. You can always catch Trimble by asking him if he dropped that half-crown, and D'Arcy by telling him there's a spot on his necktie. I've thought of a wheeze worthy of this study."

"I was thinking—" said Manners.

"Thinking of a first of April jape?"

"Nunno! I was thinking that if it's fine on Wednesday we'd all go out for the afternoon with my camera."

"Bury your old camera! On Wednesday we shall be rather busy japing Study No. 6."

"Games practice—" began Tom Merry.

"Blow games practice!"

Monty Lowther looked rather aggrieved.

As a born humorist, he looked on the first of April as a sort of windfall; even his bosom pals were not safe from Monty Lowther on that date. This year All Fools' Day came fortunately on a half-holiday; and Monty Lowther had planned a busy time. There seemed rather a lack of enthusiasm in Study No. 10 in the Shell, however.

Fine weather on a half-holiday was almost certain to draw Manners out with his celebrated camera. And if there was no match on Tom Merry was likely to require some more strenuous occupation than practical jokes.

Certainly, Monty Lowther could have filled in his time in his own way, japing all St. Jim's from the Head down to the boot-boy, with the best wishes of his chums, but without their assistance. But that was not good enough. Monty was a gregarious youth. Also, he rather liked an audience.

"Now, look here, you chaps!" he said. "I've thought out the jape of the season—we're going to make Blake, and Herries, and Dig, and D'Arcy, all sit up and look silly. It's time those Fourth Form kids were made to understand that this study is top dog. See?"

"I see!" assented Tom.

Manners did not see; he was looking at his films, which required care when he was cutting them. It sometimes seemed to Manners' chums that he was always cutting films when he was not asking who had shifted his camera.

"I've got the things all ready," went on Monty. "Look at this."

Monty Lowther stepped to the study table, and from underneath that article of furniture he drew a large hamper.

Tom Merry glanced at it.

As a loyal chum he did his best to be enthusiastic.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

"Fine!"

"What do you mean, ass?" asked Lowther testily. "What's splendid? What's fine?"

Tom Merry chuckled. Apparently he had butted in too early with the admiring ejaculations which Monty Lowther expected at the right moment.

"Have a little sense, old chap," said Lowther. "I haven't explained the wheeze yet. That hamper came from Blankley's in Wayland. It's got their labels on it now. I dug it up out of the box-room. Kildare of the Sixth had it weeks ago, and it was chucked into the box-room when it had been unpacked. It's as good as new."

"Quite!" agreed Tom. "But what the thump—"

"You don't catch on?"

"Not quite."

"You wouldn't!" said Lowther. "I'll try to put it into words of one syllable, suitable to your undeveloped intellect. Study No. 6 are going to receive this hamper on the first of April—packed full."

"My only hat!"

"What do you think they'll think when they hear that they're getting a hamper of tuck?"

"They'll think they're in luck, I should say. Is that the jape?"

"Yes."

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"Then you can jolly well jape this study instead of Study No. 6 in the Fourth," said Tom Merry. "We can do with the tuck ourselves."

"You silly owl!" hooted Lowther. "You don't catch on yet. Study No. 6 will think they're getting a hamper of tuck. But when the hamper comes along, it will only have rubbish in it—half bricks, and chunks of coal, and so on. See?"

"Oh!"

"The idea is that somebody's sending them one of Blankley's splendid Hampers of tuck. And when they open it—Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther roared with laughter at the thought of the looks and feelings of Blake & Co. when they opened that hamper.

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Tom Merry dutifully.

Monty Lowther's merriment proved beyond doubt that it was now time to laugh.

Manners did not laugh. His brows were wrinkled over his films. Lowther gave him a glare.

"Don't you think it's funny, Manners?" he demanded.

"Eh?"

"Isn't it a scream?"

"Isn't what?"

"This jape on Study No. 6."

"What jape?"

"Oh, you burbling ass!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, realising that Manners, of the Shell had not been listening. "I'll tell you over again."

"Don't!" said Manners. "Tell me a bit later, when I've finished these films. I don't want to damage them."

"Fathead!"

Monty Lowther looked quite cross.

"All right, old chap!" exclaimed Tom Merry laughing. "It's no end of a jape, and Study No. 6 will be caught out. We're going to set the School House in a roar with this wheeze."

"I wish you chaps wouldn't talk while I'm cutting my films!" said Manners, wrinkling his brows more deeply.

"Blow your films!" roared Lowther.

"You see, if I make a slip with the scissors—"

"Rats!"

The unappreciated humorist slammed the hamper back under the table with unnecessary vigour. It crashed against one of the table legs, and Manners, who was sitting at the table with his precious films, gave a yell as his scissors zig-zagged.

"Oh! you ass! You chumps! Look—"

Lowther looked.

"Does it matter?" he asked.

"Matter?" shrieked Manners. "You've spoiled the photograph!"

"Does that matter?"

"D-d-does that matter?" stuttered Manners. "I'll jolly well show you whether it matters!" He jumped up and grabbed a fives bat from the table. "I'll give you does it matter!"

"Hailo, it's time to go!" chuckled Tom Merry. And he caught Monty Lowther by the arm and rushed him out of the study.

"Silly ass, with his blessed silly films!" said Monty as they went down the Shell passage. "Bores a fellow no end with his chumpy photography. Now, about that jape on Study No. 6. Look here—"

Tom Merry was sliding down the banisters.

"You ass!" shouted Lowther. "I was telling you—"
Tom Merry was gone.

CHAPTER 2.

The Wheeze That Could Not Come Off!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY polished his celebrated eyeglass thoughtfully. It was tea-time, and Study No. 6 had gathered to tea—and Blake and Herries and Digby were thinking chiefly of boiled eggs and muffins. But other matters of greater import were occupying the aristocratic intellect of the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. As he polished his eyeglass there was a thoughtful line in his noble brow and a twinkle in his noble eye.

"I've been thinkin', you fellows," said Arthur Augustus after a long silence. "To-morrow is the first of Apwil—"

"Your birthday?" asked Blake affably.

"It is not my birthday, Blake!" answered D'Arcy with dignity.

"Then it ought to be! Pass the jam."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You're letting your muffins get cold, and you're keeping me waiting for the jam. If this is what comes of thinking, don't do it, old chap. Besides, it might give you a pain. These sudden changes—"

"If you're goin' to keep on intewwuptin' me with fwivolous wemarks, Blake, I may as well wing off."

"Quite as well," agreed Jack Blake. "Better, in fact! You haven't passed the jam yet."

Herries and Digby grinned—and Arthur Augustus, with a deep breath, silently passed the jam.

He did not speak again.

He turned to muffins and eggs, and began to masticate the same in a deep silence that told of offended dignity.

Blake, having helped himself to jam, passed the pot along to Herries and Dig, and passed a wink along at the same time.

"Well?" he said.

No remark from Arthur Augustus.

"Well, Gussy?" repeated Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Is it quite fair to keep us on tenterhooks like this?" asked Blake reproachfully. "Here we are, hanging on your lightest word, and you shut up like an oyster and tuck into muffins and keep us waiting!"

Arthur Augustus looked a little perplexed.

"Weally, old man, I did not gathah fwom your wemarks that you were all anxious to heah what I was goin' to say."

"Didn't you say you'd been thinking?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, then, naturally we're anxious to know the result of a new experiment. What's happened?"

"Wats!"

"Go it, Gussy!" said Blake, laughing. "Only pulling your silly old leg, you know! Go it—we're all ears!"

Gussy's aristocratic face cleared.

"Well, if you fellows weally would like to heah what I've thought of for to-morrow—" he began.

"We're frightfully keen!"

"Frightfully!" agreed Herries.

"Dying to know!" said Robert Arthur Digby with becoming gravity.

"Vewy well, deah boys, I will explain," said the swell of St. Jim's, quite merry and bright again. "To-morrow is All Fools' Day, you know. As a wule, I do not approve of pwactical jokes. I wegard such pwocceedin's as lackin' in dignity and pwopah wepose. Nevathless—"

"Good word!" agreed Blake. "Quite good for a Cross Word puzzle. Go on, Gussy! Nevertheless and notwithstanding—"

"I did not say notwithstanding, Blake."

"I've said it for you, old fellow, to save time. Nevertheless and notwithstanding—go on from there."

"Nevathless," resumed Arthur Augustus rather warmly. "nevathless, in spite of my genevial disappwoval of pwactical jokes, I wathah think that circumstances altah cases, you know."

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As the fleeing Baggly Trimble crossed the landing to the stairs, he came into sudden and unexpected contact with four Fourth Formers who had just come up. "Yawwooooh!" "Oh, crumbs!" "You ass!" "Great pip!" Blake & Co., of the Fourth, were strewn right and left. A charge with Baggly Trimble's weight behind it was no joke. (See page 7.)

"Like carpenters and joiners," remarked Blake.
 "Bai Jove! I do not see any connection between circumstances and carpenters and joiners, Blake!"

"They alter cases," explained Blake. "I've seen carpenters and joiners altering cases—packing-cases and things."

"If you keep on intewwuptin' me, Blake, I shall nevah finish at this wate."

"That's all right! You never do finish, you know," said Blake cheerily. "Your giddy conversation is like a bas-relief—it does not end, but has to be broken off when one's had enough. But you haven't got to the point yet, Gussy."

"Yes, get to the point, old bird," urged Herries. "You're jolly long-winded, you know, and life's short."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"The question arises, is three score years and ten long enough for Gussy to get to the point?" remarked Digby.

"Circumstances alter cases," went on Arthur Augustus. "To-morrow bein' All Fools' Day, you know, I think we ought to come out stwong."

"That's complimentary to this study," chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I do not see where the cackle comes in. That uttah ass, Monty Lowther of the Shell, is always takin' a wise out of somebody. He wegards it as humowous to put Smith minah's white wabbit in my Sunday toppah. Now, to-morrow bein' All Fools' Day, I think it is up to this studay to jape those Shell bounders. When it comes to a weal sense of humah, Monty Lowthah is not the only pebble on the beach, you know. I wathah think I can beat him!"

"You can be awfully funny!" agreed Blake.

"You weally think so, deah boy?"

"Sure thing! In your crimson waistcoat and eyeglass, for instance, you would bring down the house easily!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"I don't see why you should call a fellow names for agreeing with you and backing you up," said Blake in surprise. "I'm willing to admit that you're the funniest thing going at St. Jim's!"

"Wats! Dwy up a minute while I explain my wheeze. We are goin' to jape Study No. 10 in the Shell," said Arthur Augustus. "We are going to set the House in a woar, with Tom Mewwy & Co. as the victims, see?"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries.

"The only question is—how?" remarked Blake. "Have you thought of that trifling detail, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

"It flashed into my bwain, you know."

"Lots of room for it to flash," said Blake.

"Weally, you ass—"

"And what's the giddy wheeze?" asked Dig. "You haven't come to that bit yet, Gussy."

"It flashed into my bwain—"

"We've had that!"

"Dwy up, you dummy! It flashed into my bwain this afternoon, when I went to the box-woom to put somethin' into my twunk. There is an old hampah there—a hampah that came frowm Blankley's, in Wayland, for Kildare some time ago."

"I've seen it," assented Blake. "But what—"

"There is no reason why we shouldn't bag that hampah, Blake, if we want to."

"None at all—and no reason why we shouldn't want to that I can see."

"That's where the jape comes in."

"In the hamper?" asked Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I wish you would listen to a chap,

instead of keepin' on buttin' in. We are goin' to bag that hampah and bwing it heah. We are goin to we-address the labels, and land it on Studay No. 10 to-mowwow—just as if it had been delivahed fwom the station, you know. Natuually, they will think it is a hampah fwom home, packed with tuck, and so on. When they open it they'll find it packed with stwaw and things, and a note fwom this studay tellin' them what asses they are! See?"

Arthur Augustus paused.

Blake & Co. regarded him with admiration.

"My only hat!" said Blake. "It really is a wheeze! Gussy isn't merely talking out of the back of his neck, as usual! It's a wheeze—a real live jape!"

"Not at all bad!" said Herries.

"Good, in fact!" said Dig.

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"I wathah thought you fellows would think it a jolly good ideah," he said. "They will feel awful asses when they open that hampah, you know, and find a lot of wubbish inside. And we'll see that a lot of fellows are awound to see them unpackin' it—what!"

Blake jumped up.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings!" he said. "Gussy has really spotted a stunt! Let's get along to the box-room and bag that hamper, and get it to the study—"

"Hold on," said Arthur Augustus, with a smile of superior wisdom. "Those Shell boundahs might spot us dwaggin' that hampah about. We'll pack it in the box-woom, and I will tip Toby in the mornin' to delivah it in their studay while the fellows are in class."

"Gussy, old man, how do you do it?" said Blake, admiringly. "Your brain will crack at this rate if you keep on."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on!" said Blake. "We'll go and get it ready now, while the fellows are at tea."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co. left Study No. 6 at once, Arthur Augustus with a cheery smile on his noble countenance. Generally, Gussy's ideas were rather at a discount in Study No. 6, and this flattering reception of his wheeze was very grateful and comforting to the swell of St. Jim's.

The four juniors lost no time in getting to the box-room at the top of the little staircase from the passage.

In that room there were plenty of boxes and trunks and old packing-cases. For several weeks that discarded hamper had been lying there. Now, to the surprise of Study No. 6, it was not to be seen.

Blake stared round the box-room.

"Where the thump is it?" he asked.

"Bai Jove! It was heah this aftahnnoon," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "It flashed into my bwain—"

"Is it there still?"

"Weally, you ass—"

"It's jolly well not here," said Herries. "It belonged to Kildare, and he must have taken it away for something."

"Oh, deah!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and stared round into every corner of the box-room.

But even with the aid of his eyeglass he could not discover the hamper.

It was gone!

"Isn't this just like Gussy?" remarked Jack Blake. "If ever he gets hold of a wheeze that isn't actually potty, something's bound to happen. Well, the giddy hamper's gone, and we may as well go, too. Next time you get a stunt, Gussy, bury it in a quiet corner."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bow-wow!"

Study No. 6 descended the box-room stairs, sorely disappointed. There was quite a cloud on the noble brow of Arthur Augustus. For once, all the study had admitted that Gussy had the goods, so to speak, and the stunt of the term was knocked on the head by the unexpected disappearance of the old hamper. Really, it was very hard cheese. And it did not occur to Gussy or his friends, just then, that another active brain in the School House had projected that self-same wheeze, to be enacted with the aid of that self-same hamper. That was a secret known only, at present, to Study No. 10 in the Shell.

CHAPTER 3.

Baggy Butts In!

BAGGY TRIMBLE, of the Fourth, stopped at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell.

Outside that study Baggy paused and listened.

The expression on Baggy's fat face showed that he was keenly interested in Tom Merry's study just then.

From within the study came the sound of a movement—the sound as of some heavy object being dragged.

Trimble's eyes glistened.

"Lowther's hamper!" he murmured. "They've got it there!"

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And Baggy raised a fat paw and knocked at the door of Study No. 10 and turned the handle.

The door did not open.

He turned the handle and pushed, and as the door did not move it was clear that the key had been turned in the lock.

Knock, knock!

"Who's there?" called out Tom Merry's voice.

"It's me—Trimble."

"Is that the kind of grammar you learn in the Fourth Form?" This question came from Manners of the Shell.

"Yah!"

"Go away, Trimble!" called out Tom Merry.

"I say, Tom, old fellow—"

"Rats!"

"Monty, old man—"

"I'll Monty-old-man you if I come out!" said Lowther.

"Take yourself out for a walk!"

"Manners, old chap—"

"Hook it!"

Trimble breathed hard.

He was not persona grata in Study No. 10 in the Shell, or, indeed, in any other study at St. Jim's—School House or New House. Even in his own study he was not popular.

So there was nothing surprising in the Terrible Three declining to open their door at Trimble's summons.

But there was something very exasperating in it. For Baggy Trimble knew that there was a hamper in the study.

The word "hamper" had caught his fat ears a couple of hours since, when he passed the chums of the Shell in the quad. They had been talking, and Trimble, in passing, had listened—one of the agreeable little ways he had. And the word "hamper" was more than enough to excite his liveliest interest. From that moment he had kept his eyes on the Terrible Three. When they went to their study Trimble was not far behind them. If there was a hamper, if tuck was to be handed out, Trimble intended to be on in the scene. No study-spread was complete without Trimble—in the fat Baggy's own opinion.

So now, though he could not suppose that the remarks from No. 10 were of a welcoming nature, he did not depart. Nothing short of the impact of a hefty boot would have induced Baggy to depart when there was a chance of tuck.

He lingered at the door, listening to the sounds within the study. There was a creak, as of the lid of a hamper being raised.

Baggy's mouth watered.

"The beasts were unpacking the hamper, then. They were going to enjoy their feast all to themselves, behind the locked door of their study, without asking a single fellow to share it!"

Really, Trimble was surprised. His own little spreads were always conducted on these lines, but he had never expected that kind of thing from Tom Merry & Co. Tom might at least have asked Talbot of the Shell, or Kangaroo, or Blake & Co., even if he forgot to ask Trimble of the Fourth; but plainly the Terrible Three had asked no one.

"Full to the brim, you know." It was Monty Lowther's voice, speaking in the study. Trimble, close to the keyhole, heard every word.

"Yes, rather!"

"What a giddy surprise!"

And the Terrible Three chuckled. They seemed to have forgotten the unimportant existence of Baggy Trimble.

They were reminded of it by a loud knock on the door. Bang!

"I say, Tom Merry—"

"My hat! The fat frog is still there!" exclaimed the captain of the Shell. "Trimble, do you want me to come out with a fives' bat?"

"What are you fellows up to?" hooted Trimble.

"Mind your own business!"

"I jolly well know it's a spread."

"Fathead!"

"I say, Tom, old fellow, let a fellow in!" urged Trimble.

"I've had no tea, you know, only the scraps in Hall. There was nothing in my study. Wildrake actually refused to whack out his cake with me, and you know what a mean rotter Mellish is. I say, you fellows, let me in, and—"

"It's not a spread, you ass!" called out Tom. "Cut off!"

"Oh, draw it mild, you know. You can't spoof me," said Trimble. "I jolly well know you've got a spread there."

"Oh, buzz off and give us a rest."

"I'm surprised at you telling fibs, Tom Merry."

"What?" roared Tom.

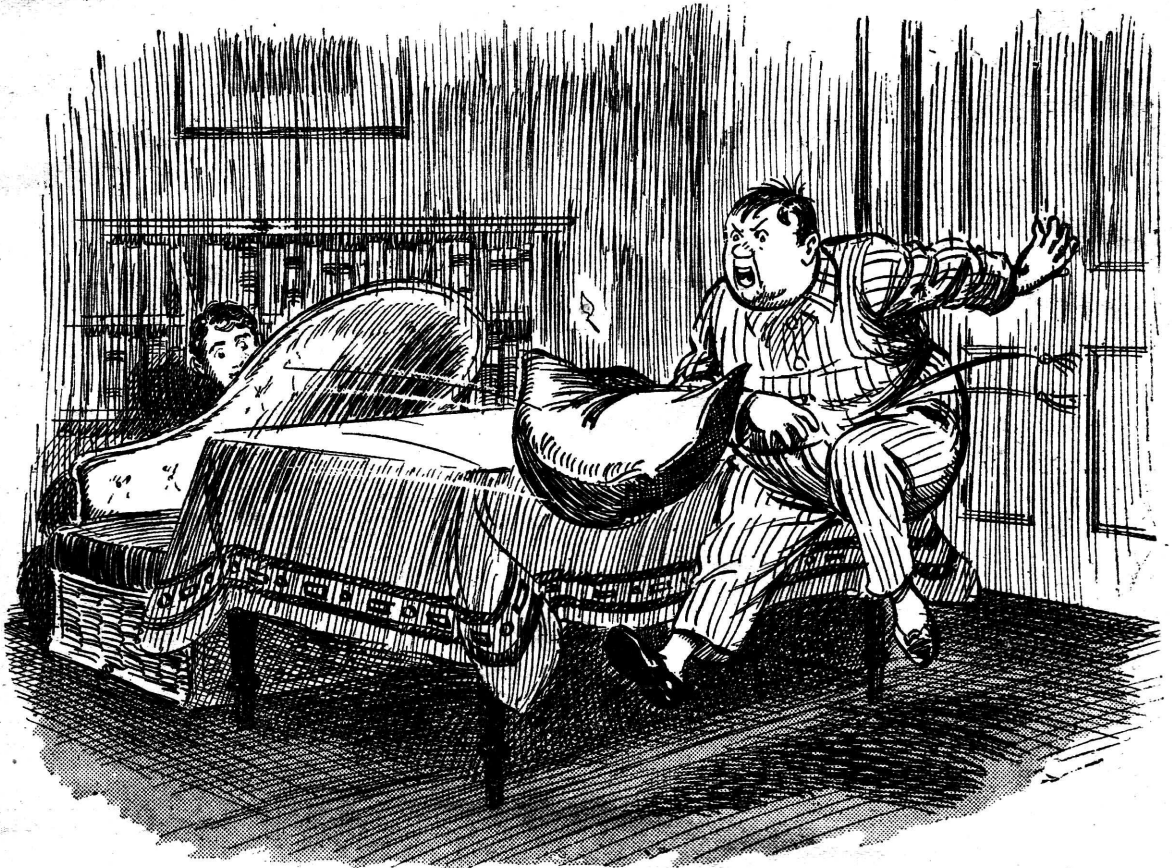
"Fibs!"

"My hat! I'll come out to you in a minute, Trimble. Why the thump can't you buzz off and mind your own business?" exclaimed Tom.

"Why can't you open the door?" retorted Trimble.

"Guzzling over a feed with the door locked. Yah!"

"It's not a feed, you ass!"



As Baggie Trimble stepped towards the table something whizzed across the room and struck the match from his fat fingers. Trimble gave a convulsive jump. "Wha-a-a-at—" "Your money or your life!" hissed a deep voice from the darkness. "Ow!" The fat Fourth Former halted for a moment, quivering with fright. (See page 9.)

"Gammon!"

"Are you clearing off, Trimble?"

"Yah!"

There was a sound of dragging, as if something were being put out of sight. Then the door of No. 10 was unlocked and thrown open. Tom Merry appeared in view, with a fives bat in his hand.

"Now, you fat frog!"

Trimble backed away, eyeing him warily.

"I say, Tom, old fellow, we've always been pals," he urged. "You've got a lot of stuff there; don't be mean, you know."

"Where will you have it?" inquired Tom.

"Look here, you know. Yaroooooh!" roared Trimble as the captain of the Shell made a lunge with the fives bat.

"Have another?" asked Tom cheerily.

"Whoop!"

"And another!"

"Keep off, you rotter!" roared Trimble, backing away along the passage. "I don't want any of your dashed feed. I wouldn't touch it now if you asked me—not if you begged and prayed. Yah! Keep that fives bat away, you rotter! Oh, my hat! Whoooooop!"

Trimble of the Fourth fled for his life. Tom Merry, chuckling, followed him a few yards along the Shell passage, lunging with the fives' bat. Having been given the trouble of chasing Baggie away from Study No. 10, Tom was taking his money's worth, as it were. Baggie went down the passage at a wonderful speed, considering the weight he had to carry, and Tom Merry returned to Study No. 10, where the door was re-locked, and the Terrible Three continued their preparation of the hamper, which did not contain anything resembling tuck, but was gradually being filled with straw, and old papers, and chips of wood, and chunks of coal, and all sorts of odds and ends to surprise Study No. 6 on All Fools' Day.

Baggie Trimble did not return to Study No. 10. He left the Shell passage at full speed, not even being aware that he was no longer pursued; and as he crossed the landing to the stairs, he came into sudden and unexpected contact with four Fourth-Formers, who had just come up.

"Yawwoh!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You ass!"

"Great pip!"

Blake & Co., of the Fourth, were fairly strewn right and left. A charge with Baggie Trimble's weight behind it was no joke.

Arthur Augustus sat down with a gasp, and Blake, and Herries, and Digby, went staggering in all directions. Trimble, breathless, reeled against the wall.

"Oh, crumbs! Ow! Oh!" he spluttered.

"You frightful ass!" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What the thump do you mean by wushin' a chap oval like that?"

"Collar him!" roared Herries.

"Here, I say, keep off! That beast Merry's after me!" gasped Trimble. "I say, stand by a chap, you know. That Shell beast is after me with a fives bat—"

"There's nobody after you, you howling funk!" growled Blake.

Trimble blinked round.

"Oh, he's gone back! I jolly well knew he wouldn't dare to come after me," he said. "I'd jolly well have licked him if he had!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Twimble—"

"Look here, you fellows," said Trimble eagerly. "You back me up, and we'll raid their study and bag the hamper. What?"

Blake jumped.

He was about to collar Baggie Trimble and bang his head on the banisters as a warning not to rush recklessly into such important personages as Study No. 6. But Baggie's words arrested him.

"A hamper?" he repeated.

"They've got a hamper in their study; having a spread all on their own, with the door locked!" gasped Trimble. "Mean, you know! Serve 'em jolly well right to raid the study and bag the hamper. What?"

"Bai Jove, if they've got a hampah—"

"That hamper—" began Dig.

"Shall we raid it?" asked Trimble eagerly. "Stacked with tuck. I heard Lowther say it was full to the brim.

We'll get two or three more of the Fourth, and—
Yaroooh! Leggo my collar, Blake!"

Bang!

Trimble's bullet head smote the banisters.

"That's for rushing into us like a silly owl!" said Blake.
"Yaroooh!"

Bang!

"That's for funkng a Shell fellow."

"Whooop!"

"Now, if you're not gone in two seconds—"

Baggy Trimble did not wait for Blake to finish. He was gone in considerably less than two seconds.

Blake & Co. went on to their study. Blake was grinning, and Arthur Augustus was looking very thoughtful. Inside Study No. 6 the chums of the Fourth looked at one another.

"Is that our hampah they've got in their study?" asked Arthur Augustus. "It weally looks as if those Shell boundahs have bagged the hampah ffrom the box-woom, and that was why—"

"That's it!" said Blake with a nod.

"Trimble thinks it's a hamper of tuck they've got," remarked Dig.

"He would! But if it was a hamper of tuck they'd be standing a spread to a crowd of chaps, that's a cert. They're not Trimble's sort."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But what—" said Herries.

"Looks to me as if they've got the same wheeze that we had," said Blake with a grin. "We were going to play a dummy hamper on them, and it looks as if they're thinking of planting a dummy hamper on somebody. Us, most likely. They've got the same stunt on."

"A case of gweat minds wunnin' in gwooves. What?" said Arthur Augustus.

"A case of two silly owls thinking of the same stunt," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Anyhow, we're jolly well going to see into this," said Blake. "If they're planning a jape on Figgins & Co. of the New House, or some of the Fifth chaps they can get on with it. But if we're the giddy victims we're going to turn the tables on them."

"Perhaps I had bettah dwop in—"

"And perhaps you hadn't," said Blake. "We'll nose it out without you giving the whole show away, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake, it was not my intention to bweathe a word."

"I know that, ass, but you're ass enough for anything, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Leave it to me," said Blake decidedly. "Anyhow, we've got to get on to prep now."

"But I considah—"

"Give your chin a rest, Gussy, old man. You'll wear it out at this rate."

"I wegard you as a cheeky ass, Blake."

"Hear, hear! Now let's get on to the prep."

And Arthur Augustus sniffed, and Study No. 6 settled down to prep.

CHAPTER 4.

Jack Blake Takes a Hand!

"MANY happy returns, Lowther!"

"Eh?"

"In case I don't see you in the morning," said Blake affably.

And he walked on towards the Fourth Form dormitory before Lowther of the Shell could answer.

It was bed-time, and the juniors were going up. Monty Lowther stared after Blake with a frowning brow, and Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"What did that silly ass mean?" grunted Lowther.

"Seems to think to-morrow is your birthday," grinned Manners. "Of course, it isn't, old chap. But it might be, you know."

"I don't see anything funny in silly rot," said Lowther.

"Anybody else's silly rot, you mean. Your own silly rot always seems jolly funny to you, doesn't it?"

"Look here, Manners—"

"Shush!" said Tom Merry. "Let old Blake have his little joke! Isn't he going to be guyed to-morrow with our jolly old hamper? It's the jest of the term, Monty!"

And Monty Lowther's brow cleared.

Like many confirmed humorists, he seldom could see the point of any little joke against himself. Such jests always seemed to him feeble in the extreme. But the contemplation of his own humorous efforts was quite enough to restore his cheery good-humour.

All was prepared in Study No. 10 in the Shell for the great jape of the morrow, and the Terrible Three went to their

dormitory with that satisfactory feeling which follows something attempted, something done, to earn a night's repose.

Under the study table was hidden the big Blankley hamper, well-packed to the brim with rubbish of all kinds, carefully corded up, and with the old labels cunningly re-addressed, equal to new.

When Blake found that hamper in his study the next day, was it not certain that he would suppose it had come by the carrier and had been landed there by Taggles during class? And when the chums of Study No. 6 opened it, with gleeful anticipations, they would find a stack of rubbish—decidedly inedible. Even Baggy Trimble would not have cared to eat anything that was in that hamper. And there would be a personal note from the Terrible Three, reminding Study No. 6 of the date and of the undoubted fact that they were April fools.

All was well—and it did not occur to the chums of the Shell that Study No. 6 knew anything, so far. Indeed, Study No. 6 would have known nothing, but for the coincidence that Gussy had thought of the self-same wheeze.

Now, as it happened, they knew a little and suspected a lot. Jack Blake did not sleep when Kildare had turned out the lights in the Fourth Form dormitory that night.

Blake intended to know all about the hamper in Study No. 10, mentioned by Trimble, and it was easy enough to slip from the dormitory and make investigations after waiting till the coast was clear.

Soon after ten o'clock Blake slipped quietly out of bed and hurried on some clothes.

Silently he left the Fourth Form dormitory and picked his way on tiptoe down the stairs.

In the Shell dormitory the Terrible Three were sleeping the sleep of the just, and, if they dreamed, they certainly did not dream that an enterprising Fourth-Former was investigating the mystery of Study No. 10.

But that was exactly what Jack Blake was doing.

Silently he reached Study No. 10 in the Shell and entered, and closed the door softly behind him.

He did not venture to turn on the light. But he was provided with a candle-end, which he stuck on a corner of the table and lighted. This dim illumination was sufficient for his purpose, and it did not show from the window.

Blake looked round the study, and in less than a minute discovered the hamper under the table.

He chuckled as he dragged it out.

He chuckled again as he read the label on it. The original inscription had been very carefully erased, and in place of it, in block letters, was written, "Master J. Blake, School House, St. James' School."

"Little me!" murmured Blake.

He did not need any more proof than that. A hamper addressed to himself, hidden under the table in Tom Merry's study, was enough.

Had Blake found it in his own study the next day after class, according to programme, no doubt he would have taken it for granted that the hamper had been sent to him by some kind relation.

In the present circumstances, however, there was no doubt on the subject—it was a first of April jest, with Study No. 6 as the victims.

Blake contemplated the hamper for a few minutes, his brow corrugated with thought.

Then he carefully untied the cords that secured the lid—slowly, carefully, methodically. The Terrible Three were not to observe in the morning that the hamper had been handled.

The lid was raised at last.

Brown paper, with straw packing under it, came away in Blake's hand, revealing a stack of all kinds of rubbish, on top of which lay a card with the inscription:

FIRST OF APRIL!

WITH KIND REGARDS FROM TOM MERRY'S STUDY.

Blake chuckled.

From the interior of the hamper he took out a number of lumps of coal, which were restored to the study coal-locker. Then he removed some half-bricks, placing them in the study chimney for concealment.

This left a space for the packing of fresh goods.

He looked round the study, and picked up Manners' celebrated camera from its shelf. The camera was transferred to the interior of the hamper.

It was followed by Tom Merry's big Latin dictionary and Monty Lowther's "Holiday Annual."

Then the straw and the brown paper were replaced, and Blake closed the lid of the hamper.

Carefully and patiently he retied the cords, restoring the hamper to precisely its original appearance.

The hamper was slid back under the study table.

"That's that!" murmured Blake.

The chief of Study No. 6 had finished in Tom Merry's quarters now. He blew out the candle and returned the stump to his pocket.

Then he opened the door. As he did so there was the sound of a soft footfall in the Shell passage.

Blake started and his heart beat a little. Someone was coming quietly and stealthily along the passage in the dark, and he wondered whether it was one of the Shell fellows in a suspicious frame of mind, or a master or prefect on the prowl. It was not likely to be a burglar; but there was something rather unnerving in that faint sound of creeping footsteps.

Blake stepped back into the study to allow the unseen wanderer of the night to pass before he emerged.

He did not venture to close the door lest the sound of it should be heard.

The stealthy footsteps came nearer. To Blake's dismay they stopped at Study No. 10, and he heard a hand groping over the door.

Silently Blake dropped on his hands and knees behind the study armchair, out of sight if a light should be turned on.

Who the mysterious visitor to Tom Merry's study could be he had not the faintest idea. The Shell fellows could not have known that a Fourth-Former was on the war-trail, as they were in a different dormitory. It occurred to Blake that it might be Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It would be exactly like Gussy to come along and help his chum with sage advice at the wrong moment. If it turned out to be Gussy, Blake was prepared to bang his head on the study door by way of reward. It could scarcely be a prefect of the Sixth creeping into the study in the dark in this way. Blake was completely puzzled.

From the gloom he heard a faint muttering voice. "Oh! The door's open!"

Faint as the voice was, Blake recognised it. It was the voice of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth Form.

Blake grinned.

He could guess Trimble's object. Still obsessed by the belief that there was a hamper of tuck in the study, Baggy had sneaked down from the dormitory to investigate the same.

There was no tuck, that was a certainty; but Blake did not want anyone to meddle with the hamper now that he had prepared it for delivery in his own way.

He heard the fat junior grope into the study and close the door. Then a match scratched.

Blake peered out from behind the armchair, and sighted Baggy Trimble, holding up the match and blinking uneasily round the study.

Baggy was evidently in a nervous state. The lure of tuck had drawn him on, but creeping through dark passages at

night was unnerving work for a fellow like Trimble. There was danger of being caught by masters or prefects, and to Trimble's imagination every dark corner might have hidden a burglar, jemmy in hand.

"Under the table, I expect," Trimble murmured, and Blake noticed the quaver in his voice.

Trimble stepped towards the table. At the same moment something whizzed across the room, and the match was struck from his fat fingers.

Trimble gave a convulsive jump. "Wha-a-at—"

"Your money or your life!" hissed a deep voice from the darkness.

"Ow!"

Baggy Trimble was not an athlete. On the cinder-path he would never have distinguished himself; in a race with a tortoise Baggy would have come in a bad second, generally speaking.

But the swiftness with which Trimble bolted from Study No. 10 was amazing.

The door flew open, and Trimble flew into the passage before the deep voice had quite finished speaking.

Had Baggy Trimble been made of indiarubber he could scarcely have bounced into the passage more suddenly and swiftly.

Blake rose from behind the armchair, grinning, and left the study.

Trimble was not likely to come back. A faint sound in the distance was all that was left of Baggy Trimble, as he bolted back to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Jack Blake followed, rather more cautiously, and reached the door of the dormitory and slipped in silently, to be greeted by a buzz of voices.

CHAPTER 5.

An Alarm in the Night!

"WATS!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"I tell you he's there!" gasped Trimble. "Wake up, you fellows! There's burglars in the House. I tell you!"

"Bosh!"

"Go to sleep and dream again!"

"Chuck it!"

Blake grinned as he silently crossed to his bed. In the darkness, and the buzzing of voices, his return to the

(Continued overleaf.)

ANOTHER BUSY FIVE MINUTES FOR YOU, CHUMS!

See what you can make of this novel Cross Word Puzzle, chums!

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

For the benefit of those who do not know how to work out 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. 4 is "Those without mental power." That is very easy to solve. The answer is "fools." That word runs across commencing from the square marked "4." Now on the same square another word starts that must commence with the letter "F," and the clue to this word which runs down is "deceptive." Now what is another meaning for deceptive? Think for a moment, and you will guess.

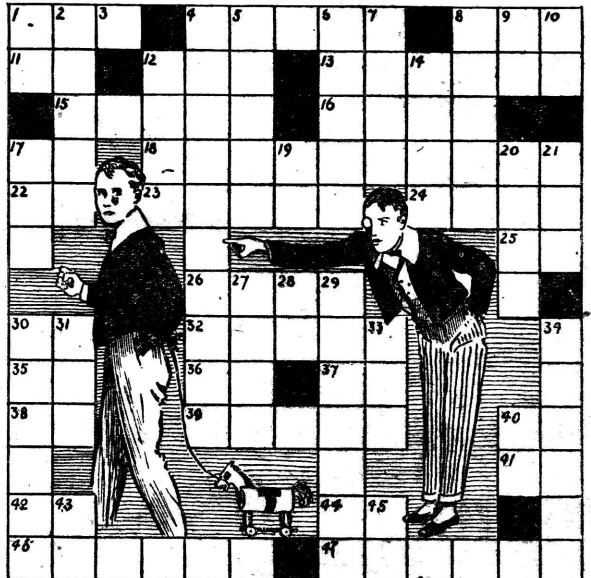
As you proceed you will find words interlocking—words going across with the words going down. Now set to work.

CLUES (Across.)

1. Everybody.
4. Those without mental power.
8. A period of twenty-four hours.
11. Abbrev. for "Medical Officer."
12. A covering for the head.
13. A water animal.
15. A pretty flower.
16. To mend with wool.
17. Meaning "North-east."
18. A musical term (somewhat briskly).
22. Conjunction.
23. To test a flavour.
24. Jacob's brother.
25. Pronoun.
26. A common metal.
30. Abbrev. for "Justice of the Peace."
32. Farthest away.
35. Concerning.
36. Ourselves.
37. Myself.
38. Abbrev. for "King's Counsel."
39. A horse.
40. Article.
41. An exclamation.
42. Abbrev. "Royal Academy."
44. Conjunction.
46. A well-known boys' school.
47. A place of learning.

CLUES (Down.)

1. Part of Verb to Be.
2. One who loves.
4. Deceptive.
5. Precious stones.
6. A place for accommodation.
7. Shine in the sky at nights.
8. Depressions caused by a blow.
9. "Art" without a "t."
10. Eyes without the "ees."
12. A jacket.
14. A large woody plant.
17. Meaning "no."
19. Eat without "a."
20. Most animals have one.
21. Not in.
27. To degenerate in idleness.
28. Trimble's way of spelling "hot."
29. The Greek Goddess of Vengeance.
30. Humorists.
31. Abbrev. "Portsmouth Football Club."
33. A colour.
34. A mean person.
40. An exclamation.
43. A preposition.
45. Abbrev. for "Flying Corps."



dormitory was not noticed. Baggy Trimble had no idea that another Fourth Form fellow had been out.

"Hallo!" said Blake with a deep yawn, as if he had suddenly awakened. "What's all this row about?"

"That uttah ass, Twimble!"

"Trimble's been findin' burglars," chuckled Cardew.

"The silly ass has been dreaming," said Levison of the Fourth. "Too many suppers at once, I suppose."

"I tell you I saw him!" howled Trimble.

"In this dorm?" asked Blake innocently.

"No. In Tom Merry's study."

"Did you go to bed in Tom Merry's study by mistake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I went down—"

"To look for burglars?" asked Clive with a chuckle.

"N-n-no! The fact is, there's a hamper in Tom Merry's study, and I was going to—to see if it was safe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And just as I got into the study I heard a fearful voice. It said 'Your money or your life!'" gasped Trimble.

"It would!" chuckled Cardew. "Can't be anybody who knows you, or he'd know you haven't any money, and your life's worth nothin'."

"You beast! It was a burglar!"

"Do burglars say 'Your money or your life?'" asked Blake. "I thought that was highwaymen."

"This one did!" hooted Trimble.

"Why didn't you collar him?" asked Herries. "Burglars ought to be collared when they're burgling junior studies. The man may get away with Tom Merry's Latin exercises."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah; or the last numbah of Tom Mewwy's 'Weekly,'" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"If you fellows don't believe me—"

"Believe you! My hat!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Somebody had better go and warn the Head," urged Trimble. "The man may be after his safe."

"He would naturally expect to find the Head's safe in a Shell fellow's study," remarked Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can't go to sleep with burglars in the House!" howled Trimble.

"Well, you go and warn the Head," chuckled Levison. "I can see the Head thanking you—with a cane."

"Go down to Railton, old fat top," said Blake. "Mr. Railton ought to know that there are burglars after Tom Merry's inkpot."

"You silly owl, he was there!" gasped Trimble. "I tell you he was there. I saw him!"

"What was he like?"

"A hulking ruffian!"

"What?" yelled Blake.

"A hulking ruffian, six feet high at least, with a black mask on!" said Trimble, breathlessly. Baggy Trimble had a fertile imagination, and he was trying to convince the Fourth with these thrilling details. "He had a revolver in one hand—"

"And a Lewis gun in the other?" asked Julian.

"His eyes gleamed through the holes of his mask," went on Trimble. "Just like—just like—"

"Just like the films," suggested Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He sprang at me like a tiger," panted Trimble. "I felled him with one blow, and then I admit I ran for it."

"You should have stopped to give him another, and finished him," said Levison. "It's a mistake to let these burglars off so lightly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you there's a burglar in the House!"

"And I tell you I want to go to sleep, so shut up!" said Herries. "Cheese it!"

"I tell you—"

"That's right. This isn't the time for your funny turn,

Trimble," yawned Blake. "Go to sleep, and let us do the same."

"How can we sleep with a burglar in the House?" shrieked Trimble. "He may come in here, with a jemmy—"

"Dry up!"

"Yaas, wathah! Dwy up, Twimble, and let a fellow go to sleep, you know."

"I tell you—"

A boot whizzed across the dormitory in the gloom, and narrowly missed Baggy Trimble.

"You—you silly owls!" gasped Trimble. "I tell you somebody ought to go down and warn Railton!"

"Well, go! Nobody's stopping you," said Digby.

"I—I couldn't—in the dark. The burglar may be waiting on the stairs," gasped Trimble, shuddering.

"Then go to bed, and shut up."

"Look here—"

Whiz!

It was another boot, and this time it did not miss Trimble. The fat junior gave a wild howl and sat down.

"Yaroooh!"

"Now shut up!" said Blake. "If I get out of bed to you, you'll have more pains than you can count."

"Ow!"

Baggy Trimble gave up the idea of alarming the Fourth, or bringing them to a proper sense of the danger. Evidently every fellow in the dormitory was a Doubting Thomas.

"I—I'll go and warn Tom Merry!" he gasped.

"Fathead!"

"Chuck it!"

Baggy Trimble picked himself up, and went to the dormitory door. He opened the door a few inches, and hesitated.

True, the burglar had been left on the floor below; but he might have followed Trimble up the stairs. As a matter of absolute fact, he had—and was now in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory. But Trimble was unaware of that little circumstance.

The darkness and silence of the corridor daunted the fat Baggy.

Not for worlds would he have negotiated the dark staircase, in every corner of which ferocious burglars, armed with jemmies, might have been lurking. But even to creep along the passage to the Shell dormitory required more courage than Baggy possessed.

"I—I say, will you come with me, Blake—"

"Shut up!"

"Will you come, D'Arcy?"

"Wats!"

"Cardew, old man—"

"I'll come, you fat villain, and burst you, if you don't ring off!" answered Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Oh dear!"

Baggy stepped back from the door. Then the awful thought of going to sleep, with a burglar close at hand, rallied him, and he rolled to the door again. He listened intently, but there was no sound, and he made up his fat mind at last.

Taking his courage, such as it was, in both hands, so to speak, Baggy emerged from the dormitory.

With a palpitating heart, he scurried along the corridor, and reached the door of the Shell dormitory.

He hurled open the door and rushed in.

"Tom Merry!" he panted.

"Eh! What?"

"What's that?"

Several of the Shell fellows awoke.

"Tom Merry, wake up, I say—wake up!"

"What the thump—" came the sleepy and astonished voice of the captain of the Shell. "Who's that?"

"It's me—Trimble! There's a burglar in your study—"

"What?" howled Tom Merry.

"A burglar! I've come to wake you up and tell you—"

"Have you?" Tom Merry sat up in bed. He clutched his pillow, and turned out, and trot towards Trimble, whose fat form was barely visible in the glimmer from the high windows. "You've come to wake me up and tell me there's a burglar in my study?"

"Yes, I— Yaroooh!"

Swipe!

The sudden impact of a swiping pillow landed Trimble on the floor. He went down with a roar.

"This isn't the time of night for practical jokes, old fat man!" said Tom. "It isn't the first of April yet, Trimble, by an hour or so!"


"I—I didn't— Yoooop!"

The pillow smote again.

"It's not the first of April till after midnight, old top," said Tom, swiping away vigorously with the pillow. "But don't come back after twelve with another yarn, or you'll get some more pillow—like that—and that—and that—"

"CAPTAIN BLOOD"

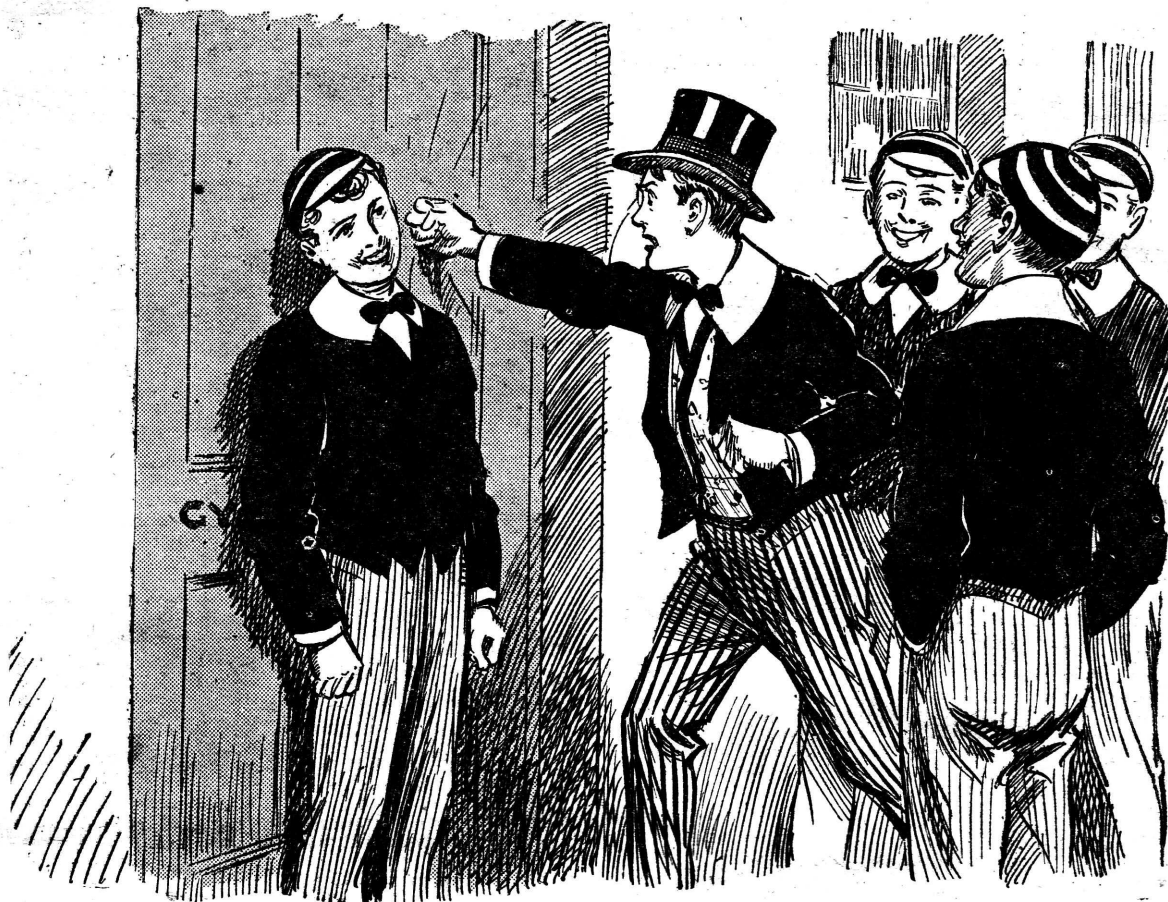
THE STORY OF THE FAMOUS FILM



IN THE

UNION JACK

The Great Detective Story Paper



"There you are!" said Bernard Glyn. "Now punch my nose!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped up to the Shell fellow, and lifted his right arm, clenching his fist for a punch. "You weally mean it?" he asked. "Yes, get on with it!" said Glyn. Arthur Augustus took the schoolboy inventor at his word. But as his fist shot out, Glyn moved his head to one side and D'Arcy's knuckles came into violent contact with the door. "Yawwooop!" he roared. (See page 12.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Give him some more!"
 "Japing this dormitory!" exclaimed Monty Lowther indignantly. "Give him jip! Cheeky ass!"
 "I—I tell you—" gasped Trimble.
 "We know all about it!" chuckled Tom, still handling the pillow with vigour. "Keep your japes till to-morrow, Trimble—you're a little too previous with them. Have another?"

Swipe!
 "Whoop!"
 Baggy Trimble rolled out of the dormitory, under the swipes of the pillow, and Tom Merry closed the door after him and went to bed. He had not the slightest doubt that this was a little joke on Baggy's part—a first of April catch that was rather too previous, so to speak. Really, an alarm of burglars in a Lower boy's study was a little too steep!

In the passage Baggy Trimble sat and gasped for breath. But the thought of lurking burglars set him in motion again. He jumped up, and scuttled back to the Fourth Form dormitory. The sounds he made himself alarmed him, and his fat mind was peopled with visions of pursuing burglars, as he reached his own dormitory and burst in.

"Help, you fellows!" he gasped.
 "Bai Jove!"
 "What the thump—"
 "The—the burglar!" panted Trimble. "I believe he's after me! I think I heard—in fact, I'm sure—"

Blake sat up in bed.
 "Turn in, you fat dummy!" he said. "Any more of your silly rot, and I'll jolly well lock you out of the dormitory, and you can chum up with the burglar till morning."
 "I—I say, Blake—"
 "Another word, and out you go!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

Baggy Trimble bolted into bed. Knowing—as he knew—that there was a dangerous marauder in the House, certainly it was his duty to go down, at any risk, and warn the House-master. That duty, however, was left unfulfilled; like many other of Baggy's duties. All the contents of the Head's safe

would not have tempted him to go down the dark staircase by himself.

As an alternative, he put his head under the bedclothes, and was still palpitating there after the rest of the Fourth had gone to sleep again. Baggy himself slept at last, and did not open his eyes till the rising-bell was clanging out in the spring morning.

CHAPTER 6.

The First of April!

GORGE FIGGINS, of the New House Fourth, grinned cheerily as he sighted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the quad after breakfast. Kerr and Wynn, his chums, grinned also. For it was the first of April that morning, the day of catches, and the chums of the New House looked on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he loftily paced the quad, as something like a windfall. They came trotting up to the swell of the School House in a cheery row.

"Top of the morning, Gussy!" sang out Figgins.
 "Good-mornin', deah boys!"
 "What's that on your face, old chap? Had an accident?"
 "Bai Jove! I was unawah that there was anythin' on my face, Figgay!"

"There jolly well is," said Figgins, staring at the swell of the Fourth, with a fixed, startled expression. "You haven't caught your face in a door, I suppose?"
 "Wathah not!"
 "Or knocked it against a poker?" asked Kerr.

"Nothin' of the kind."
 "Then what can be the cause of that fearful thing on it?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, staring at D'Arcy blankly.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus looked surprised and worried. "What evah is it? What is it like, Figgay?"
 "Blest if I know—it looks horrid!"
 "Awful!" said Kerr.

"Frightful!" said Fatty Wynn.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy groped in an inside pocket. He produced a little ivory-cased pocket-mirror, slid it open, and

looked at the reflection of his aristocratic countenance in it. So far as he could observe, even with the aid of his eyeglass, that aristocratic countenance presented its normal aspect.

"Bai Jove! I fail to see—"

"There it is," said Kerr.

"Where, deah boy?"

"Just there—"

Kerr tapped the elegant Fourth-Former's nose.

"There's nothin' on my nose, Kerr, that I can see."

"Nose?" said Kerr. "My hat! It's his nose, you fellows!" Kerr uttered the exclamation as if he had made a startling discovery.

"His nose!" repeated Fatty Wynn. "My hat! Now I come to look at it, it looks something like a nose!"

"Well, a trifle!" admitted Figgins. "Is it really your nose, Gussy? You call it a nose?"

Arthur Augustus slid his mirror back into his pocket, breathing deep, with feelings too intense for utterance. He realised that his noble leg had been pulled.

"First of April, old man!" chuckled Figgins, as he walked away with his chums, laughing.

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I had forgotten that wotten date! Bothah!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came strolling along, and they smiled cheerily at the swell of the Fourth.

"Did you give Trimble your Sunday topper, Gussy?" asked Lowther.

"Certainly not!"

"You don't mean to say he's borrowed it without asking?"

"Bai Jove! If Twimble has meddled with my Sunday toppah, I'll give him a feakful thwashin'—I know that!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "What the deuce does he want a toppah for early in the mornin', anyhow? Where is he?"

"Just gone over to the tuckshop—"

Arthur Augustus cut across towards the tuckshop.

Monty Lowther gazed after him with a grin.

"Not so jolly hard to pull the leg of Study No. 6 what?" he asked. And the Terrible Three smiled and walked on, and headed for Grundy of the Shell, who was in the quad with Wilkins and Gunn.

"Hallo, Grundy!" called out Lowther.

Grundy looked round.

"Is that your half-crown?"

Grundy of the Shell stared at the ground.

"I didn't notice dropping one," he said. "Where is it?"

"Can't you see it?"

"No, I can't!"

"Go on looking, old chap, till the next first of April!" suggested Lowther, and he strolled on with his friends, leaving Grundy frowning majestically, and Wilkins and Gunn grinning.

"Lowthah!"

"Hallo, here's old Gussy back again!" said the humorist of the Shell affably. "Did you find your topper on Trimble?"

"I did not find my toppah on Twimble, Lowthah! Twimble was weavin' a cap, and he says he hasn't touched my toppah!"

"For once—by way of a record—he has spoken the truth, old bean. Did he mention also that it was the first of April?"

"Bai Jove!"

For the second time, Arthur Augustus realised that he had been caught. He walked away with pink cheeks; and a little later came on Kangaroo of the Shell, who called to him. Bernard Glyn, the inventive genius of the Shell, was with the Australian junior.

"Seen this, Gussy, old man?" called out Kangaroo.

"What is it, deah boy?"

"Glyn's latest!"

"Bai Jove! Have you been makin' some more wotten inventions, Glyn, old chap?" asked the swell of the Fourth.

"It's rather a good thing, this time," said Glyn. He held up a small bottle, half-full of a colourless fluid, which looked remarkably like water. "See that, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas."

"It's the New Indurating Fluid," explained Glyn. "My own invention—worth a million pounds, more or less, if put on the market."

"Pwobably wathah less than more, deah boy!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "What does it do?"

"Rubbed on the skin, it toughens it to such an extent that

the hardest blow is scarcely felt," explained the schoolboy inventor. "Think of the value of that to a boxer, for instance."

"Yaas—if there is anythin' in it."

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," said Glyn. "Let me rub some on your nose, and then punch it—and you'll see."

"No jollay feah!" said Arthur Augustus promptly. "Wub some on your own nose, if you like, and I'll punch it. Ha, ha!"

"Done!" said Glyn, at once.

"Bai Jove! Will you weally wisk it, deah boy?" exclaimed the swell of the Fourth, in surprise.

"There's no risk," said Glyn. "Look here." He poured a little of the colourless fluid into the palm of his hand, and solemnly rubbed it on his nose, D'Arcy and Kangaroo watching him. Then Glyn backed up against the door of the gym.

"There you are!" he said. "Now punch!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"I don't want to hurt you, deah boy. You know all your inventions are uttah wot, don't you?"

"You silly ass!"

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Try it!" hooted Bernard Glyn. "I can jolly well tell you you're taking the colourless fluid into the palm of his hand, and solemnly rubbed it on his nose, D'Arcy and Kangaroo watching him. Then Glyn backed up against the door of the gym.

"Utah wubbish!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am only afraid of hurtin' your silly nose. But if you weally wish me to—"

"I'm waiting, fathead!"

"Vewy well, then."

Arthur Augustus stepped up to the Shell fellow, and lifted his right arm, clenching his fist for a punch.

Glyn stood like a rock, with his back to the gym door.

"Go it!" he said.

"You weally mean it?"

"Yes; get on with it."

"Vewy well, then."

Arthur Augustus took the schoolboy inventor at his word, at last. His right came out, in quite a hefty punch.

At the same instant Bernard Glyn moved his head to one side with great celerity.

Crash!

"Yawooooooop!" roared Arthur Augustus, as his knuckles came into violent contact with the gym door.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Wow, wow! Woop!"

"First of April, old chap!" chortled Glyn, and he walked away with Kangaroo, both of them yelling.

"Oh, cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus stood and rubbed his barked knuckles, gasping. For the third time he had been caught. The bell rang for class, and Arthur Augustus headed for the Form-room, and he derived a little comfort from observing that two or three fellows were rubbing barked knuckles as they sat at their desks. Evidently Glyn of the Shell had caught several more of the Fourth with his new invention. As D'Arcy was about to sit down, Levison of the Fourth called out to him.

"Look out, D'Arcy, there's a pin on that form!"

Arthur Augustus paused, and then he grinned. Three times that morning he had been caught, and he was not to be caught again.

"Wats!" he replied. "I know it's the first of Apwil, Levison." And he sat down hard.

For about the millionth part of a second Arthur Augustus sat on the form. After that brief space of time, he leaped up with a frantic yell.

"Yawoooooh!"

"What the thump!" exclaimed Blake, staring round.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Gussy, old man—"

"Oh, cwumbs! There was a pin on the form!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Some silly wuffian has put a bent pin on the form! Ow! Wow, wow!"

"I warned you!" exclaimed Levison, staring at him. "I saw it there, and called out to you, you ass—"

"Oh deah! Ow! Wow!"

"Who put that pin in my place?" yelled Arthur Augustus, glaring round at the grinning Fourth. "Who put that pin on the form? I am goin' to give the silly ass a feakful thwashin'. I am goin' to mop up the floor with him. I am goin'—"

"D'Arcy!"

It was Mr. Lathom's voice, as he came into the Form-room. He gave Arthur Augustus a very severe look over his spectacles.

"Oh! Oh, cwumbs! Yaas, sir!"

"These noisy and obstreperous manners, D'Arcy, are out of place in the Form-room," said the master of the Fourth severely.

Arthur Augustus collapsed into his seat. Really, that was the climax, when a fellow prided himself on the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere:

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not enjoying the first of April.

ANSWERS

EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:



"If it's Trimble's shilling, Lowther," said Darrell, "take your foot away and let him take it, at once!" Monty Lowther removed his boot, and Baggy Trimble pounced on the glimmering disc of silver. He clutched it up in his fat fingers, and as he did so the silver foil from a chocolate box, that Lowther had carefully wrapped round his halfpenny, came away, disclosing the copper coin. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors looking on. (See page 16.)

CHAPTER 7.

Lost a Shilling!

JACK BLAKE & CO. headed for Study No. 6 when second lesson was ended, and the juniors were free for morning break.

Three Shell fellows watched them go, with smiling faces.

"Let's follow on!" murmured Monty Lowther. "They'll find it now. We want to see them open it."

"Yes, rather!" grinned Manners.

"Sure it's all right?" asked Tom Merry.

"Quite! I tipped Toby a bob to take it to their study during class, and he's done it," said Lowther. "It's all right. Come on!"

And the Terrible Three strolled after Blake & Co.

Blake & Co. entered Study No. 6, and the first object that caught their view was the large hamper standing in the middle of the study. The four Fourth-Formers grinned at one another. Blake had already explained to his chums the little operation he had carried out in Tom Merry's study overnight. And the peculiar circumstance that the Terrible Three had, of their own accord, made Study No. 6 a present of Manners' camera, Tom's Latin dick, and Lowther's "Holiday Annual" was more than enough to make the heroes of the Fourth chortle.

"Well, here it is," murmured Blake. "We won't open it yet! Wait till those jolly japers have missed their property and raised Cain about it."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Here they come!" murmured Dig.

"Not a word!" breathed Blake.

"No fear!"

Three smiling faces looked into the study. Blake & Co. glanced round, smiling also.

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Lowther. "Somebody been sending you a hamper, Blake?"

"Looks like it," said Blake. "Rather unexpected, too. I haven't heard from my people that they were sending me anything."

"Jolly nice of them to send you a surprise-packet like this, then," said Monty amicably.

"Yes, it's rather decent," said Blake. "It seems pretty heavy, too. Must be a thumping lot of tuck in it! It's a Blankley's hamper. I suppose they ordered it to be sent here from the stores at Wayland."

"With a cargo like that, you ought to stand a regular spread in the study," said Manners.

Blake nodded.

"Just what I was thinking of," he said. "You fellows come in this afternoon and help us out with it—what!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Yes, rather! Awfully kind of you, old man! We'll come!"

The Terrible Three grinned. They could not help it. Really, it was entertaining to be asked to a share in the hamper they had themselves packed with shavings, and half-bricks, and chunks of coal, and old newspapers.

"Open it," said Manners. "Let's see what tons of good things your people have sent you, Blake."

"No; I won't open it yet," answered Blake. "Tea-time will be soon enough. No good unpacking it before the stuff's wanted."

"Yaas, that's so," agreed Arthur Augustus. "It will be safah fastened up, with Twimble pwoolin' about the place."

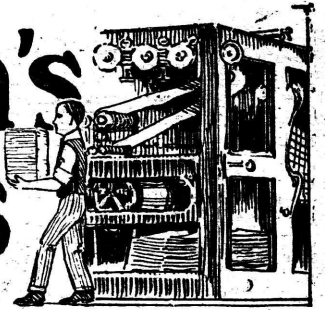
"Oh, get it open and let's see the giddy treasure," said Lowther.

"No; not till tea-time," said Blake decidedly. "And we'll

(Continued on page 16.)



TOM MERRY



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

THERE is always a certain amount of liveliness at St. Jim's on the occasion of All Fools' Day, and very few of the fellows permit the great anniversary—if it is an anniversary—to pass by unheeded.

I could fill the columns of the "St. Jim's News" over and over again with accounts of lapes and hoaxes that have taken place on this day of days, some of which have become absolutely traditional, having occurred many years ago during the schooldays of a past generation of St. Jim's fellows, but which are still remembered and spoken of with many a chuckle, and doubtless many an addition and exaggeration.

I cannot believe, for instance, that it is strictly true that many years past a certain Sixth-Former who had a grudge against the then headmaster, Dr. Marriott, obtained possession of official forms, and filled them up in the name of a well-known specialist, certifying the Head to be insane, and forwarded them to the proper authorities, with the result that the Head was forcibly removed to an asylum and kept there for several days before the discovery was made that the whole affair was a hoax. I dare say there is a certain amount of truth in the story, but I must confess that it seems to me improbable that it took place in so wholesale a fashion as tradition avers.

During my own time at St. Jim's there have been some memorable hoaxes, and not all of them have been the work of St. Jim's fellows. For instance, only a couple of years ago the School Fire Brigade was called out to a fire which proved to be non-existent, and, although it was never discovered who was responsible for the false alarm, I have little doubt, in my own mind, that some of the Grammar School fellows could shed some light on the subject if they chose to do—which, needless to say, isn't likely.

I noticed that Taggles always keeps well out of sight until the First of April has been torn from the calendar. Poor old Taggy has been long enough at St. Jim's to learn discretion, if not wisdom, and I have no doubt that in his younger and less wary days he was made the butt of some very lively jokes. Even now he doesn't always escape, in spite of his precautions. A year or so back he received a notification from the railway that a large parcel had arrived at Rylcombe Station addressed to him and awaiting his claim. He went tearing off in a hurry, and received his parcel—a precious heavy one—from the stationmaster, only to discover himself the possessor of a dozen fine bricks, wrapped up in brown paper. As Taggles is quite satisfied with his lodge as a residence, and is not contemplating the building of a house, this magnificent present was of singularly little value to him. But then, it was entirely his own fault that he fell into the trap. He should have looked at the calendar before he started out.

Tom Merry

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GRUNDY'S VISITOR.

Monty Lowther.

IF there is one chap more than another at St. Jim's who goes about simply asking to have his silly leg pulled, that is the great George Alfred Grundy. In spite of the fact that he considers himself so cute that it almost hurts him, he's really just about as simple as a four-figure additional sum, and—well, people like that do make your fingers itch to get a good grip of one of their hind legs and give it a good hard yank, don't they? At any rate, that's how it affects me, and the consequence was that on the morning of April the First our dear young friend George Alfred received a letter, the contents of which amazed and delighted him beyond measure. Briefly, it informed him that Lord Ribslade, the famous sporting peer, was coming to see him at St. Jim's.

It seems incredible that Grundy should have taken such a letter seriously; but the fact remains that he did, and punctually at three o'clock, the time appointed by "His Lordship," there was George Alfred, in all his glory, waiting at the gates.

Rather to his surprise, Lord Ribslade arrived on foot, explaining in a casual manner that he was fond of walking, because of the exercise it afforded. He was of medium height and decidedly portly build.

"Nothing like exercise, my boy—nothing like exercise!" he said. "Keeps a man slim and youthful. Look at me, for instance! So you're Grundy, are you? Humph! Do a lot of boxing—eh? I thought so. Your face looks like it. If you hit the other chaps harder than they hit you they must look like gargoyles when you've finished with them. Not that they could look much more horrible than you! Still, looks aren't everything in this world—fortunately for you. Brains are what you want in this world, and if I'm any judge, you want some pretty badly. Now let us go up to your study. I want to see your cups. How many have you?"

"Eh?" said Grundy, who didn't quite know what to make of his visitor. "Why, about four, I think! I know Gunn broke one yesterday, the clumsy ass! But—"

"I'm not talking about teacups, my boy. I mean silver cups, boxing-cups, fencing-cups, cups for running and swimming and jumping and gymnastic displays, and all that sort of thing. I'm not making a mistake, am I? You're Grundy, aren't you? THE Grundy, I mean—the finest all-round athlete at St. Jim's?"

"That's me," said Grundy modestly.

"Then where are your cups?" demanded the old gentleman excitedly. "Don't tell me you've got no cups. What? You haven't? Bah, you're a humbug, sir—a humbug! When I was your age I had a room full of cups. I had cups for fencing like this." His lordship struck an attitude and prodded Grundy vigorously with the ferrule of his walking-stick. "And for boxing—like this!"

"This" was an upper-cut that sent Grundy sprawling.

Unfortunately, at that moment my side-whiskers dropped off, and Lord Ribslade—otherwise Monty Lowther—made a graceful exit.

WHAT A LIFE!

By Wally D'Arcy.

I THINK April 1st ought to be officially recognised by the beaks, and then we might get a chance of having some real fun instead of having to work off our wheezes more or less in secret.

Take the case of old Selby and last All Fools' Day, for instance. We made a proper mug of him, and went to no end of trouble about it, too, and yet to this day he thinks it was all due to an accident.

There are all sorts of ways of making a fool of Selby, and we've tried most of them out one time or another.

Our last All Fools' Day wheeze was a new one, and I tell you it was a corker. It was quite simple, too. All we did was to untie some cord and tie it up again in a different way.

You see, if there's one thing above another that Selby can't stick—apart from me and Curly Gibson and one or two more of the gang—it's a draught. He gets a cold in the head quicker than anybody I've ever heard of, and, though Curly says he ought to be jolly thankful to be able to say he's got something in his head, even if it's only a cold, old Beaky doesn't look at it like that.

So we arranged that we'd have a draught in the Form-room on All Fools' Day to give Selby a bit of a treat. It wasn't difficult to wangle one. Just behind his desk there's a ventilator affair, near to the ceiling, and it opens and shuts with cords. Selby always keeps it shut, but Taggles opens it sometimes at nights to give the room a bit of a blow-out.

So the night before April 1st me and a couple more bright lads climbed up and altered the cords so that, whichever one you pulled, the ventilator opened.

The next morning Beaky started twiddling them about as usual, and then sat down. Well, there was a draught, and no two ways about it. I could feel it where I was, so Beaky must have been under a sort of shower-bath of cold air. He'd hardly sat down before he jumped up again and set to work pulling the cords about. He was looking for the right cord. From Selby's point of view, the right cord was the one that shut the window, and the wrong cord was the one that opened it. He knew that much all serene. What he didn't know was that on this occasion they were both the wrong cords. He tugged and pulled and jerked, and if his efforts made any difference at all it was only to open the ventilator more.

Then he began to see that something was wrong, but he couldn't make out just what it was. So he investigated. He climbed on to his desk and peered about, and then he got a chair, and put that on the desk so as to reach higher. He reached the ventilator all right, but I don't think I've ever seen him look funnier than he did when he was hanging on it after the chair had slipped off the desk.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS! SPECIAL "MUSICAL ISSUE"

of the "News" next week. DON'T MISS IT!



STUDY No.6 DO THEIR BIT!

By Robert Arthur Digby.

"**B**AI Jove! I have just wemembahed!"

Gussy's sudden ejaculation startled us rather, and we looked up and across at him in amazement. We'd only just finished tea, and were sitting quiet for a few minutes while we summoned up the energy necessary to clearing away and getting out our books to begin prep, when our tame mugwump's voice disturbed the serene calm of the happy home in so unexpected a fashion.

We gazed at him in silence for a few moments. What it was he had suddenly remembered we had no notion. But that it was nothing of any great importance we would have been prepared to bet.

"Eh?" said Blake. "What's the matter with you now?"

"I have just wemembahed, deah boy!"

"Ass! What is it that you've remembered?"

"That he's only ordered ten buttons to be put on his latest vest, when he meant to have eleven, or something like that, I suppose," said Herries, in a fed-up sort of voice. "All the better. It'll take him less time to put his bib and tucker on."

"Pway don't be so uttally wide, Hewwies! It has nothin' whatevah to do with—"

"Then, what, in the name of Columbus, is it to do with?" demanded Blake impatiently.

"Please do not woah at me, Blake! You know how stwongly I object to be woahed at. I was about to remark that I have just wemembahed that to-mowow is Apwil the First."

We received this thrilling information without any noticeable outbreak of rapture or enthusiasm. After all, there is nothing very extraordinary in the fact that March 31st is going to be succeeded by April 1st. If Gussy had suddenly recollected that he had been favoured with exclusive information that the Government had decided that April was an unlucky month, and were cutting it out of the calendar and going straight on to May or June, there might have been some cause for all the excitement.

As it was, we merely sat and stared at Gussy, wondering whether it was some new form of riddle, and the answer was a lemon, or something like that.

"Well?" said Blake, non-committally, at length.

Gussy breathed hard and gulped. "You cwass boundahs! Have I got to wepeat myself? To-mowow is Apwil the First!"

"Why spend money on calendars when we've got Gussy?" I said. "Every night before we go to our little bye-byes he informs us that to-morrow is to-morrow and to-day is the day before it, and—"

"You silly asses, will you stop wottin'?" interrupted Gussy indignantly. "Suahlay you wemembah what to-mowow is?"

"Oh, quite!" replied Blake brightly. "It's April the First, you know. Unless you've changed your mind since you told us so a minute ago, that is."

"Well! And pway what do you pwopose doin' about it?"

"About what?"

"About! Why about Apwil the First, you sillay ass, of course! Have you any suggestions to make?"

"Oh, heaps!" said Blake cheerfully. "Let's sit up and wait for it to come, and pounce on it and tie it up in a bag, and—"

"Blake, you are talkin' perfect wot!"

"I suppose I must be, if you say so, Gussy," admitted Blake. "I mean to say you're a giddy authority, aren't you?"

"Look heah, you sillay chumps!" said Gussy desperately. "You surelay don't mean

to say you have forgotten that theah is somethin' peculiar about Apwil the First—somethin' that makes it diffewent from othah days in the yeah?"

"By Jove!" broke in Blake. "How stupid of me—of all of us, in fact! I remember now, of course. But I'm afraid it's no go, Gussy," he added, shaking his head sadly. "We're out of funds, you know. You'll have to take the will for the deed this time."

"Eh? What will for what deed?" said Gussy, in a puzzled voice. "And what has bein' stonay got to do with it?"

"Well, you can't buy a present without money, can you?" said Blake. "If we'd only remembered in time—"

"What pwesent?"

"Why, yours, of course!"

"Eh? Why should you give me a pwesent?"

"Well, most people like to get a present or two on their birthday, don't they? I thought that's what you were hinting at, really."

"My birthday?" echoed D'Arcy, in a bewildered voice. "I weally don't undahstand you, Blake. My birthday is several months ahead—"

"Eh?" interrupted Blake, in apparent astonishment. "I thought you said that to-morrow was April the First?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries and I, who had been suppressing our chuckles for some time, were forced to give rein to our bottled-up mirth at the sight of D'Arcy's face as he at last realised that his noble leg was being pulled.

He put up his monocle, and surveyed us frigidly, and then turned back to Blake.

"Bai Jove, Blake, you wottah," he said icily, "you know perfectly well that my birthday does not occur on Apwil the First!"

"I'm awfully sorry, Gussy!" murmured Blake contritely. "I always manage to get the two dates mixed up in my mind—All Fools' Day and your birthday. Of course, it's very silly of me, because they're far enough apart, goodness knows. The First of April and the Fifth of November—"

Well, you know, it took the best part of a quarter of an hour to smooth things over and bring D'Arcy round; but when we'd succeeded in establishing peace and harmony we spent a few minutes discussing a fit and proper method of celebrating the occasion.

For one thing, we couldn't quite decide who were to be the victims. It was a toss-up between Tom Merry & Co. and the New House, represented by Figgins & Co., and therefore we tossed up literally, and the falling coin marked out Figgy for the sacrifice.

Then came the question of squeezing out a jape. That proved no easy task, for nobody had got any particular ideas on the subject, and it was only by pooling our ideas that we at last hit upon a notion that seemed promising. There was nothing strikingly original in it, certainly, but it had at least the merit of being pretty safe.

The scheme was simply this. Figgins & Co. were to be lured out of the New House during the following afternoon by means of a fictitious invitation of some kind or another, and this would give us an opportunity for slipping into their study and making hay of the place. We decided that between their disappointment at finding the invitation was not an invitation and their rage at discovering what had happened to their happy home during their absence they'd have good cause for remembering All Fools' Day for longer than they cared to think about it.

The first step, obviously, was to concoct the fake invitation. And I had a brain-wave about that.

About a week or so before we'd been to the vicarage for tea. It isn't often we got adopted in that way, but this was a special occasion. When the big bazaar was held in the village a short while back, it was arranged that all those who helped in any way should attend one of a series of tea-parties at the vicarage, so many at a time.

We'd already been, as I say, and I knew that Figgins & Co. were expecting an invitation, sooner or later.

So I suggested that they should have it sooner. I knew that the vicar was away for a day or so, but I doubted very much if Figgy was as well informed, and, anyway, the invitation would settle their minds about that. I looked out our card, which was all in print, with the exception of the names and date, and it was a fairly easy matter to erase these and substitute "Masters Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn," and "April 1st" for the date.

We put it into an envelope, and addressed it to Figgy, and sent it through the post in the ordinary way.

The next morning D'Arcy had two letters—one containing a fiver, thus terminating our period of stoney-brokenness; but the other he was very close about. Anyway, we weren't worrying, our chief concern at the moment being our jape on the New House; and when we saw Figgy & Co. going across the quad in their caps and overcoats, about three o'clock, we knew that all was right with the world.

It was a bit of a surprise to us when D'Arcy begged to be excused from accompanying us on the raid, the more especially as he'd been so dreadfully keen on the stunt the night before; but we'd got no time to stop and argue with him about it, so we buzzed off and left him.

We managed to get into Figgy's study without being spotted by any of the other inmates of the Home for Lost Tripehounds, and we spent a very busy and enjoyable ten minutes doing the dirty as per programme. By the time we'd finished, the place looked as if they'd had the plumbers in for a week, and we had an idea that Figgy & Co., having been handed the frozen mitt at the vicarage, would be in the proper mood to appreciate our little efforts on their behalf to the fullest.

We wrote a little note about hoping they'd enjoyed their walk, signed it, and left it pinned where they'd see it as soon as they got in, and then slipped downstairs again. We were just going to nip out of the door and back to civilisation again when Blake said "Great pip!" and pointed to the letter-board.

There was our blessed dummy invitation, as large as life, and it was clear that it hadn't been opened yet. Of course, it was plain to see what had happened. The letter had been posted too late to reach Figgy by the first post, and he'd gone out before it had arrived.

It was a bit of a blow to us, though it's true they'd gone out in any case and left the coast clear for us. But there wasn't the same sense of satisfaction as there would have been in having sent them on a wild-goose chase. Only half the jape had come off.

Anyway, it was no use crying about it, so we cut back to the School House. Study No. 6 was deserted. D'Arcy had evidently gone out. Then we made another discovery in connection with a letter. There was one lying on the floor. I picked it up, and I give you my word I jumped when I glanced at it.

It was addressed to nobody in particular—at least, it began "Handsome youth"—so I considered that I had as much right to read it as anybody at St. Jim's, and more right than most of the chaps. The writer, in a most impassioned strain, implored the aforesaid handsome youth to meet her near the woodman's hut by the Wayland path in Rylcombe Woods, and signed herself "Gladys."

Gladys! If anybody had given me three guesses as to whom Gladys really was, he'd have been wasting two of them. Kerr, any old day in the week! So now we knew why Figgy & Co. had gone out, in spite of the fact that they hadn't received our invitation, and also why Gussy backed out of the New House raid at the last minute—to say nothing of knowing why he was so dashed bashful about his morning correspondence. Talk about April 1st! In spite of our raid, we looked like coming out at the wrong end, after all, with our pet lunatic in the hands of the Philistines.

There was only one thing for it. We routed out Tom Merry & Co., and made post-haste for the woodman's hut.

From our point of view, we arrived just in-time. Doubtless Figgins & Co. had other ideas on the subject, especially after we'd finished with them.



FOOLED ON THE FIRST!

(Continued from

Page 13.)

jolly well keep the study door locked till then, in case Trimble discovers it. We don't want that hamper of tuck raided."

"Good egg!" said Herries, and he placed the key on the outside of the study door.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances. The pleasure of seeing Blake & Co. open that hamper had to be postponed.

"What time shall we turn up?" asked Lowther.

"Four o'clock, and you can help us unpack the hamper," said Blake. "There's no end of stuff to handle, to judge by the weight."

"Right-ho! Rely on us!"

And the Terrible Three sauntered away in a cheery mood. Blake & Co. were also feeling very cheery. Long before four o'clock in the afternoon they expected the Terrible Three to miss their property from No. 10 in the Shell, and to "raise Cain" about it, as Blake expressed it. They looked forward to some entertainment when the Shell fellows began to inquire after the camera, the dictionary, and the "Holiday Annual."

After third lesson that morning the St. Jim's fellows were free for the rest of the day, as Wednesday was a half-holiday. Monty Lowther looked forward to quite a busy time catching his unfortunate schoolfellows. Baggy Trimble was an early victim.

"That shilling yours, Trimble?" called out Lowther suddenly as Trimble loafed into the quad after dinner.

Baggy Trimble gave him a fat wink.

"Try next door!" he answered.

"Eh? What does that mean?"

"You can't catch me with your first-of-April japes!" answered Baggy disdainfully. "Try it on Grundy."

"Then it's not your shilling?"

"There isn't any shilling— My hat!" Trimble broke off suddenly as, looking down, he caught the glimmer of silver a couple of yards from his foot. "Oh, yes! That's my shilling!"

Monty Lowther stepped forward promptly and placed his boot on the glimmering disc.

"Hands off!" he said coolly. "You said it wasn't your shilling."

"I didn't!" howled Trimble. "It's mine! I just dropped it! I heard it clink! Take your boot away, you beast!"

Lowther shook his head.

"It's not yours, old man," he said. "You said distinctly—"

"Gimme my shilling!" roared Trimble.

"Rats!"

"Look here, I'm going to have my bob!" shouted Trimble. "I say, Blake, D'Arcy, Levison! Come here! This Shell beast is bagging my shilling!"

Trimble's voice was heard far and wide. Quite a crowd of fellows came up, wanting to know what was the row.

Solution of Last Week's Cross Word Puzzle.

The correct solution of last week's Cross Word Puzzle is as follows:

ACROSS: 1. Ocean. 6. Rafts. 11. Care. 12. Alas. 14. A.B. 16. Tea. 17. Yet. 18. Be. 19. Res. 21. At. 22. S.S. 23. El. 24. Data. 26. Heap. 27. Call. 28. Dorm. 29. Doll. 30. Lied. 32. One. 35. Ena. 36. M.S. 37. So. 38. Up. 40. Dr. 41. You. 42. Bob. 44. S.S. 45. R.A. 48. Claws. 51. Yacht. 52. Boat. 55. Beer. 56. O.B.E. 57. Sea. 58. We. 59. L.P.

DOWN: 2. C.C. 3. Eat. 4. Area. 5. Neat. 6. Rays. 7. Ales. 8. Fat. 9. Ts. 10. Hard. 13. Help. 15. Beacons. 18. Beam-end. 20. Stale. 23. Eerie. 25. All. 26. Hol. 29. Dome. 31. Dart. 33. Houses. 34. Sub. 37. S.O.S. 39. P.O. 43. Braces. 46. Awheel. 47. Elbow. 48. C.Y. 49. Lab. 51. Strap. 53. O.B.E. 54. A.E.

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Monty Lowther kept his foot firmly planted where he had placed it, heedless of Baggy's excited wrath.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"My shilling—"

"What is it? A jape?" asked Dig.

"It's my shilling! He's got his foot on it, and it's mine!" howled Baggy Trimble. "I tell you it's mine—my bob!"

"It jolly well isn't!" said Lowther warmly. "Look here, you fellows! I drew Trimble's attention to it and he thought it was a first-of-April jape, so doesn't that show that it isn't his shilling?"

"I dropped it!" howled Trimble. "I distinctly heard it clink as it dropped! It's mine!"

"Bow-wow!"

"You are a fearful fabwicatah, you know, Twimble. Vewy probably it is not your shillin'."

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Anyhow, it's not Lowther's," broke in Grundy of the Shell. "If there's a bob there, Lowther, and it's not yours, you can take your hoof off it—see?"

"But it's not Trimble's—"

"It's mine—my bob—I tell you!"

"Rats!" said Lowther. "You can mind your own business, Grundy. Now, it's not Trimble's shilling—"

"I'll call a prefect if you don't give me my money!" roared Trimble. "There's Darrell of the Sixth! I'll call him!"

"Call him if you like," said Lowther.

"Darrell!" shrieked Trimble.

Darrell of the Sixth was already coming up, attracted by the excitement. He came through the group of juniors.

"Now, what's all this?" he asked.

"My shilling! Lowther's got his foot on my shilling!" roared Baggy. "Make him give me my shilling, Darrell."

"Let me explain, Darrell," said Lowther smoothly. "I called Trimble's attention to it, and he thought I was japing. Doesn't that show that it's not his shilling?"

"It doesn't!" howled Baggy. "I tell you—"

"Did you drop a shilling, Trimble?" asked the prefect.

"Yes," answered Baggy at once. Truth and Trimble had long been strangers. They had never had even a nodding acquaintance.

"Sure?" asked Darrell.

"I heard it drop, and saw it! It rolled along there, and I was just going to pick it up when that Shell bouncer came up and jammed his foot on it!" gasped Trimble.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry—and Manners chuckled. Monty Lowther's face was quite serious.

"Well, that seems clear enough," said the Sixth Form prefect. "You don't claim that it's your shilling, Lowther?"

"It's not my shilling."

"Then it seems that it's Trimble's. Take your foot away and let him take it at once," said Darrell.

"Just as you like, Darrell."

Monty Lowther removed his boot, and Baggy Trimble pounced on the glimmering disc of silver. He clutched it up in his fat fingers, and as he did so the silver foil from a chocolate box, that Lowther had carefully wrapped round his halfpenny, came away, disclosing the copper coin.

Baggy's fat jaw dropped. There was a yell of laughter from the juniors. It was a First of April catch, after all.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you young sweep," exclaimed Darrell, "it's not a shilling at all! You said you saw it roll there—and it was your shilling!"

"Oh crumbs! I meant—"

"You meant to bag it if it was a shilling," chuckled Lowther. "Jever hear of the First of April, Trimble?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can I have my ha'penny, Darrell?" asked Monty meekly.

"I said it wasn't my shilling; but it's my ha'penny."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Darrell burst into a laugh.

"Take it," he said. "As for you, Trimble, you young rascal, you will take a hundred lines for telling lies, and if you weren't a bigger fool than rascal I'd give you six."

The prefect walked away, leaving Baggy Trimble the centre of a chortling crowd. Monty Lowther carefully wrapped his halfpenny in silver foil again and strolled away with his chums towards the New House, looking for flats to catch. And Baggy Trimble—bob-less, so to speak—rolled dismally into the School House to get busy with a hundred lines.

CHAPTER 8.

Camera Missing!

"WHERE is it?"

"Eh?"

"You howling ass, Monty—"

"What?"

"You chump!" roared Manners.

"What the dickens—"

"Where is it?" bawled Manners.

Manners had just come out of Study No. 10 in the Shell. His chums were waiting for him in the Shell passage. Manners had dropped into the study for his camera. A walk with the camera had been decided on to fill up the time until four o'clock, when the Terrible Three were to foregather in Study No. 6 for the opening of the celebrated hamper.

Manners came out of the study like a pip from an orange. He rushed up to Monty Lowther with a criminal face.

"You japing ass, where is it? A joke is all very well, but you can keep it for fellows in another study. Look here, you ass, you may damage that camera, playing your silly japes with it! Where is it?"

"Dreaming, old chap?" asked Lowther pleasantly.

"My camera!" howled Manners.

"Anything happened to that jolly old camera?" asked Tom Merry with a sigh. Really, Manners' camera put quite a heavy strain upon the friendship of the Terrible Three.

"It's gone!" bawled Manners.

"Oh, rot! It can't be gone!" said Lowther. "Anyhow, I haven't been japing with your silly camera! I'd rather jape with a wild-eyed tiger in the jungle, really!"

"Just one of your silly tricks, to take it away and hide it," said Manners. "Look here, is that really honest injun?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Then some other silly idiot has been japing in the study. I tell you the camera's gone!"

"Oh, bosh! Let's look!"

The Terrible Three went into Study No. 10, Manners in a fuming state. Hiding a fellow's things on the First of April might, or might not, be a pardonable jape, but it was unpardonable to meddle with Manners' camera. Manners' camera was a thing apart, a sacred thing that common hands might not touch. But it was gone! Sacrilegious hands, only too clearly, had been laid on it.

"It's not here," said Manners, breathing hard. "My hat! I'll jolly well scalp the silly idiot!"

"I say, where's my 'Holiday Annual'?" exclaimed Lowther. Looking round the study for Manners' camera, he had discovered that his own property had also disappeared.

"Bother your 'Holiday Annual'! I want my camera!"

"Well, I want my 'Holiday Annual'!" said Lowther warmly. "Looks to me as if somebody has been japing here. If you've hidden it, Manners—"

"I!" howled Manners.

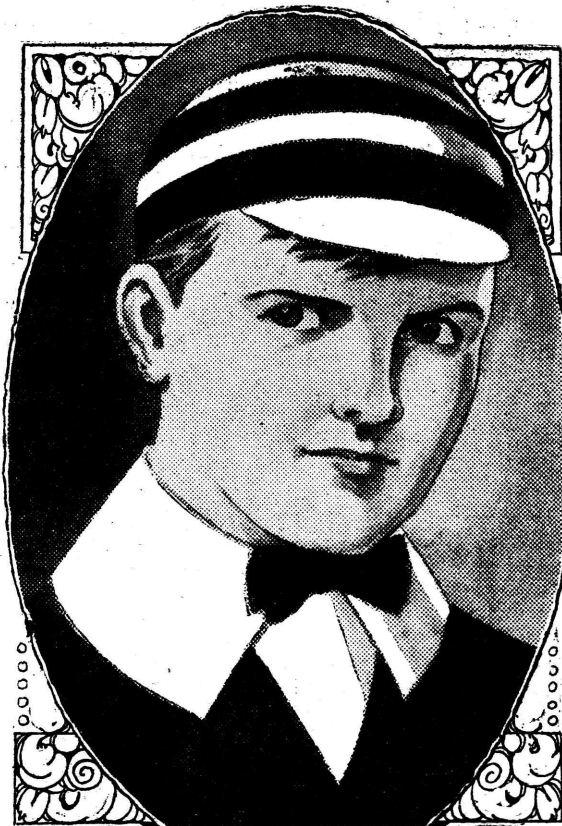
"Well, you thought I had hidden your silly camera. Have you been messing about with my 'Holiday Annual'?"

"Fathead!"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Where's my dic? Look here, I don't seem to see my Latin dictionary—and it's big enough to be seen. I shall want it this evening at prep. If you fellows have been larking with it—"

"My hat!" said Lowther, with quite a queer expression on his face. All that day, excepting while unavoidably occupied in class, Monty had been celebrating the date by japing his schoolfellows—both Houses had suffered from his unbounded sense of humour. Now it looked as if some other humorist had been at work at the same time—in Monty's own quarters. As usual, Monty quite failed to see where the joke came in.



LESLIE CLAMPE.

A member of the New House Shell Form and Study No. 3. Clampe is usually classed as something of a rotter. Has no chums among the decent fellows at St. Jim's. An associate of Racke & Crooke—a bright pair whom he has assisted in all manner of doubtful pranks. It is feared that he is somewhat addicted to smoking in secret and that he is not unacquainted with cards. More than once, Clampe has been in imminent danger of expulsion, but his narrow escapes cannot be said to have cured him of his folly.

"I call this silly rot!" he said. "Hiding a fellow's things isn't a joke—it's simply silly!"

"I thought so when you hid Talbot's algebra in the Form-room," agreed Manners.

"That was different—"

"I don't see the difference."

"You wouldn't," said Lowther. "A certain amount of intelligence is required to see a joke, you know."

"Look here, you cheeky ass—"

"Order!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Somebody has been japing in this study. I suppose it's tit for tat. You've been catching mugs all day, Monty—and now it's our turn. The things will turn up all right."

"That's all very well for your silly books!" said Manners. "But my camera is a bit more important. It may get damaged."

"Might be put out of action for good?" asked Lowther.

"Yes, it might, in careless hands!"

"Good! Then more power to the joker's elbow!" said Monty Lowther heartily.

Tom Merry chuckled.

Manners gave his comrades a glare and rushed from the study. He was in a state of wrath, and no more in a humour for jesting than was the wrathful Achilles of old.

"Let's go after him," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He may slaughter somebody if we let him loose!"

And Manners' chums followed. For the next hour or so they had quite an exciting time. Up and down and round about the School House went Manners of the Shell seeking his camera, demanding on all sides to know what silly ass, what benighted idiot, what footling, frabjous

dummy had laid silly hands on his camera. Before long it was quite a joke in the School House, and roars of laughter greeted the infuriated Manners wherever he appeared. Study No. 6 seemed quite hilarious on the subject.

"Perhaps you've given it away, old bean!" Blake suggested.

Manners glared at him.

"How could I give my camera away without knowing it, you footling ass?" he bawled.

"Well, you might have!" said Blake. "My experience of the Shell is that they're duffers enough for anything!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Study No. 6 roared. Manners gave them a homicidal look and proceeded further on his way, waking the echoes of the School House with infuriated inquiries after his precious camera. And suddenly, with a new idea in his mind, he inquired after Trimble.

"Trimble!" said Tom Merry. "What's put that into your napper?"

"Don't you remember that fat idiot came to the dorm last night with a yarn about a burglar in the study?"

"Oh, my hat! Do you think a burglar burgled your giddy camera?"

"Fathead! I think Trimble knows something about it, and I'm going to have it out of him, or burst him."

"Look here, Manners, old man—"

"Rubbish! Anybody seen Trimble?" roared Manners.

Several fellows had. Baggy Trimble was still in the Fourth Form room, grinding out his lines. Manners dashed away towards the Form-rooms, with his chums at his heels.

Really. Manners of the Shell was getting into a dangerous state, and his comrades felt that he needed watching.

Baggy Trimble had just scrawled the last line of his impot when Manners burst into the Fourth Form room. The fat junior blinked at him.

"Where's my camera?" bawled Manners.

"How the thump should I know?"

"I'll jolly well—"

Tom Merry caught Manners by the shoulder just in time. Baggy jumped up in great alarm.

"Easy does it, old chap," said Tom. "Trimble, you fat boulder, you spun us a yarn last night about a burglar in the study. Had you been down to our study from the dorm?"

"Yes, I had," said Trimble.

"And did you bag Manners' camera?"

"No, I didn't!" snorted Trimble. "But I dare say the burglar did. I saw him—a hulking ruffian, masked, with a revolver in his hand."

"You silly owl!" shrieked Manners. "Will you tell me what you've done with my camera?"

"I dare say the burglar had it. Yaroooh! Keep him off!"

Tom Merry and Lowther collared Manners, and Baggy bolted from the Form-room. Baggy stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once. Manners, evidently, was not in a frame of mind to be reasoned with, and still less disposed to swallow a story of a masked burglar in Study No. 10.

"I'm going to smash him!" roared Manners. "It's as plain as anything that he's hidden my camera for a silly lark."

"Well, it will turn up again," said Tom cheerily. "A lark's only a lark, you know. He won't keep it."

"It may get damaged."

"Well, if it does, you can damage Trimble. It's time to turn up in Study No. 6 now. We want to see the hamper opened."

"Blow Study No. 6!"

Manners was quite prepared to let the great jape slide, in his concern for the missing camera. But Trimble had vanished, he was not to be found, and Manners consoled himself at last with the reflection that the fat junior would have to show up for prep, and then he could get busy with Trimble and a fives bat. And so at last he allowed his comrades to march him away to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, to witness the opening of the First-of-April hamper.

CHAPTER 9.

Fooled!

"**W**AITIN' for you, deah boys!"

"Yes, rather; we've waited," said Blake, as the Terrible Three came up. "We thought you'd like to see the hamper opened. I fancy there's something jolly good in it."

Tom Merry smiled.

Quite a number of fellows had gathered round Study No. 6. There were seven or eight of the Fourth in the study, and as many more in the passage. Blake & Co. had evidently told the Fourth all about that unexpected hamper that had arrived. And as Monty Lowther had confided the joke, by this time, to a good many friends, there were nine or ten of the Shell crowding round to see it opened. It was quite a function. Study No. 6 were smiling and cheerful, and even Manners forgot the worry of his missing camera for the moment, in anticipation of their surprise when the hamper was opened at last.

"Something jolly good, I think," said Blake, as he took out his penknife to cut the cords. "It came quite unexpectedly, you know. I haven't had a letter or anything."

"It was brought into the study while we were at class, you know," said Herries.

"What a jolly surprise-packet," remarked Kangaroo of the Shell with a grin.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If it's tuck, there must be a jolly lot of it, in a hamper that size," said Levison of the Fourth.

"Well, what can it be but tuck?" said Blake.

"What, indeed?" smiled Monty Lowther. And there was a general grin among the Shell fellows, who were in the joke.

Blake cut the cord.

A crowd of eyes watched him as he raised the lid of the hamper.

Inside lay a card with an inscription, and Blake held it up for the general view.

FIRST OF APRIL!

WITH KIND REGARDS FROM TOM MERRY'S STUDY!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"Fooled on the First!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake looked quite serious.

"So it was you fellows sent us this hamper?" he said.

"That was jolly kind of you. Let's see what's in it."

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"You can jolly well guess what's in it, I should think," said Levison, with a laugh.

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

Blake jerked away the top layer of wrapping and straw. A handsome camera, a Latin dictionary, and a "Holiday Annual" were exposed to view.

The Terrible Three stared at them as if mesmerised by the unexpected sight. There was a buzz of surprise among the other fellows.

"Now, this is really very kind," said Blake heartily. "I've always wanted a camera. I'll have the camera, you fellows, and you can have the other presents. Like a 'Holiday Annual, Gussy?'"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here you are. Like a Latin dictionary, Herries?"

"Hand it over."

"Nothing for you, Dig, old man, but I'll share the camera with you," said Blake generously. "Rather odd to send three presents to a study with four fellows in it. Still, the camera's as good as two. We thank you fellows."

"Thanks awfly, old beans!"

"Many thanks!" said Herries.

"This is really kind," said Dig with a chuckle. "This is really better than a hamper of tuck."

"Yaas, wathah!"

With stony faces the Terrible Three stared at the camera, the Annual, and the dictionary, now in the possession of Study No. 6. It seemed difficult for them to find their voices for some moments.

"Well, if this is a First-of-April jape I don't seem to catch on," remarked Levison of the Fourth. "I wish somebody would jape me like that."

Manners gasped.

"That's my camera—"

"Mine!" said Blake. "That is, mine and Dig's. We're whacking out between us, aren't we, Dig?"

"That's it. Halves!" agreed Dig.

"It—it—it's my camera!" gasped Manners. "I never meant—I thought—I didn't know, I—I—I—" Manners gasped helplessly.

How the camera had got into the hamper was an amazing mystery to him. Certainly the jesters of No. 10 had not packed it there. But there it was!

"Well, there won't be a feed after all, as there's no tuck in the hamper," said Blake. "But we're more pleased with these handsome presents than by any amount of tuck."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here!" gasped Manners. "A joke's a joke, but that's my camera, and I want it. See?"

"Sorry," said Blake politely. "As a rule, if a fellow gave me anything and wanted it back, I should chuck it at him with scorn. But this camera is too valuable for chucking about. I'm keeping this camera—my half, at least. Dig can do as he likes with his half."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I'll let Manners have my half, if he's keen on it," said Dig. "There's a saw in your tool-chest, Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, quite taken by storm by the expression on the face of Manners, of the Shell.

"If—if—if you saw that camera—if you damage that camera—" articulated Manners, in a choking voice.

"I suppose we can saw our own property if we like," said Blake, raising his eyebrows.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"It's up against us," he said. "I can guess who the burglar was, now, the one that that fat idiot, Trimble, found in our study last night. Chuck it, you chaps. We own up we're beat."

Blake shook his head.

"I don't quite follow," he said. "You've given us these things, and now you talk about jokes, and things. I can't see any joke. Shut the door after you, you fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye," said Blake affably. "We've thanked you already."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's my camera!" gasped Manners.

"It was before you gave it to us. You're beginning to repeat yourself, old fellow."

Manners spluttered. He made a rush into Study No. 6, but a crowd of hilarious Fourth-Form fellows collared him, and he was promptly hurled into the passage. The Shell fellows were howling with laughter at this unexpected outcome of the great jape. There was a general agreement, in Shell and Fourth, that the Terrible Three, having, of their own accord, sent their property in a hamper to Jack Blake, that property was now the property of Blake, of the Fourth, to be disposed of as he thought fit. Undoubtedly that was the case, legally and morally, and Blake, of the Fourth, was evidently determined to stand up for his just rights. Manners, breathless and raging, was led away by his dismayed

(Continued on page 22.)

TRUST TROJAN TIM TO
COME OUT ON TOP!

The rascally "Nick" Webster makes another fruitless attempt to rob his nephew of his rightful inheritance!



Forced to Fight

By

JOHN W. WHEWAY



A Splendid Yarn of Thrilling Adventure.

CHAPTER 1.

More Trouble for Tim!

THERE was a shout, the sound of a sudden scuffle, and then, as though projected from a catapult, something dark and wildly animate described a whirling circle across the pavement and landed, with a dismal thud, into the muddy gutter of the kerb. And Tim Webster, who had missed sharing the downfall of the human projectile by about six inches, stopped suddenly and stared aghast.

First at the figure in the gutter which, breathing fury, was scrambling to its knees. From there, wonderingly, to the big, corpulent figure of the man who had suddenly appeared in the doorway of the fried fishshop from which the other had been so forcibly ejected.

The latter arrested his attention at once. Fat almost to a point of bursting, Bud McShane, with his battered features and his aggressive moustache was, nevertheless, still a figure to inspire terror; and, although he had been five years on the retired list, his exploits as middle-weight champion of the world were still fresh in the public mind. His features betrayed the pug in him at once; if they had not his attitude at this moment would have done, for Bud had fallen unconsciously into his famous crouching defensive position which had earned for him the name of "The Spider" in the days of his fame.

And then Tim grinned. For the fat man in this attitude was irresistibly comical. He was still grinning, and had caught a surly look from the corner of the expugilist's eye, when the second surprising whirlwind happened.

Tim had momentarily forgotten the human projectile in his sudden interest in Bud McShane, but the projectile forced itself home upon his consciousness now in a fashion calculated to leave an indelible impression. He came up from the pavement with a rush, his arms flying, his ragged coat-tails flying, and on his young, flushed face a look of hate and vengeance. Like a flash he was past Tim, and, before the Trojan realised what was happening, had planted two puny fists upon the roughest portion of Bud McShane's convex waistcoat.

"An' that's for chuckin' me out, you rotter!" he shouted.

Bud doubled up for an instant. His florid features assumed a purple hue. Then, with an agility surprising for a man of his bulk, he lifted one podgy arm, and struck the youngster resoundingly across the face.

The youngster staggered. Before he could recover, Bud was upon him, had caught him by the scruff of his collar, and, getting a grip round the youngster's waist so that his arms were pinioned to his sides, began to belabour him unmercifully.

Tim's face darkened, his fists clenched. This was no business of his, nor had he any right to interfere; but an outraged sense of justice would not allow him to stand by quietly while a youngster was being bullied before his eyes. His own face went white with the sudden passion that surged up within him. With a shout he started forward.

"Hey!" he cried.

He had no very clear idea what he intended to do; nor did he think. He only saw a youngster being bullied unmercifully, and that, in itself, aroused all his ingrained instincts of chivalry. Bud half turned. He snarled as he saw Tim, and, as though in defiance, brought down his podgy hand across his victim's cheek with a force that made the youngster yelp. Next minute Tim had him by the scruff of the neck.

"You rotter!" he hissed.

Bud wheeled, and in sheer surprise released his hold upon his victim. An ugly scowl disfigured his face. Bud was a man of few words but of terrific action. With a crack that was heard by two men at the top of the street, he brought his fist round, and struck Webster across the face.

That was enough for Tim. Reason went; hot, passionate fury took its place. If Bud was a boxer, so was Tim, for down at the Trojan Club did they not talk of him as a possible future light-weight champion? The two men coming down the street halted in surprise and watched. And suddenly the smallest of the two—the other was considerably tall and very lean into the bargain—clutched his companion's arm.

"See who it is, Nick?"

Nick Webster, incidentally Tim's scape-grace uncle—stared again.

"By gum!" he whispered. "It's—it's Tim!"

"And see who he's fighting—look at that! See who it is—Bud McShane!"

"McShane?"

"He's the retired middle-weight champion. Lodges now with old man Jones over his fried fishshop. I know him well, and he's no good. And see!" Coulson Ferriers, until recently manager of Midborough Athletic Football Club, clutched at his companion's arm again.

"By gum!" he breathed.

There was reason for the exclamation. The scrap between Tim and the ex-prizefighter had been of the briefest but most whirlwind description, and, like its commencement, it finished quickly. Tim, having struck his opponent's guard down, stepped in and brought one powerful arm flashing upwards. There was a squelch as his bunched fist crashed home upon the boxer's podgy jaw, and Bud, as though kicked by an invisible mule, went somersaulting over the pavement, to finally come to rest in the self-same muddy gutter into which he had kicked his victim two minutes before.

And there, grunting like a blown grampus, McShane lay and hazily surveyed the scurrying heavens.

Tim's lips curled as he looked down upon him, and then, as the cause of the quarrel came back to him, he wheeled swiftly upon the youngster, who, a broad grin on his face, was now standing behind his back wagging a forefinger at the beaten man in the motion of counting him out. For the first time Tim had a glimpse of his face.

"Raggy!" he cried, in amazement.

For it was, indeed, Raggy Jones, the lad who had extricated him from a nasty scrape at the Trojan ground a week ago, and who had disappeared afterwards as mysteriously as he had come. Tim badly wanted to meet Raggy.

Raggy, recognising Tim, was in no way taken aback.

"At yer service, guv'nor!" he grinned. "An' thanks very much for puting the kybosh on his nibs 'ere. My, don't 'e look a beauty?"

"I was looking for you, Raggy," Tim went on.

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"Then yer job's finished, gov'nor!" Raggy replied imperturbably.

"I want to speak to you."

"Fire away!"

"In private!"

"Oh!" Raggy's face instantly suggested secretiveness. He glanced round casually, allowed his eyes to rest for a moment upon the couple up the street, and then switched them back to Tim's face wonderingly. "Wot about?" he inquired cautiously.

At this juncture Bud McShane, with a ponderous grunt, rolled out of the gutter into the road and began to stagger to his feet. Tim, watching him out of the corner of his eye, jerked his head towards the corner of the street.

Raggy nodded. He understood. And as Tim began to walk away, he fell into step by his side. But neither spoke until they had gone some distance, though Raggy looked up at his rescuer once or twice, and there was that in his eyes which would have told Tim, had he seen it, that he had been suddenly elevated to the position of this lad's hero. Not until they had reached the corner, indeed, did Raggy, himself usually so loquacious, attempt to break the silence.

Then:

"Excuse me a minit, gov'nor!" he said, and darted back towards the corner which they had just rounded.

After cautiously popping his head round the corner, he came back, grinning a little to himself. Tim, who had halted, eyed him in wonderment.

"Spotted Ferriers and Nick Webster up the road," the urchin laconically explained. "Yer didn't see 'em, did you, Mr. Webster? They're talking to McShane now!"

"Oh!" said Tim, and his eyes narrowed.

He strode on a few paces in silence.

"Raggy, what do you know about Ferriers and Nick Webster?" he asked, after a while.

Raggy made it a point never to show surprise at anything.

"Know?" he echoed. "About Ferriers I know a lot. 'E's a bad lot, 'e is, from the tips of his hair to the rubber caps on the toes of his shoes. But about Nick I know little—except that 'im and Ferriers have formed some sort of partnership, and are anxious to land you into disgrace, Mr. Webster. W'y?" he added.

"What sort of disgrace, Raggy?"

Raggy's brow wrinkled. He glanced up at his benefactor curiously.

"That's a funny question," he said.

"Wot sort of—well, I don't know 'xactly, but that affair at the football-ground was to try and turn you into becoming professional. You're an amateur now, ain't yer?"

Tim nodded.

"You know that I play for the Trojans," he said. "I don't only play football for them, I box and run and do all sorts of things for 'em. Raggy, you're a cute kid, and you seem to know more about Ferriers than most people. Will you do me a favour?"

"Like a shot, Mr. Webster!"

"Tim, please. Look here, Raggy, I want you to keep an eye on Ferriers. I don't trust him, any more than I trust my Uncle Nick. That's a rotten thing to say, perhaps, but I've had proof that Nick's out to do me all the harm he can. I'm not afraid of him, though. He's brainless. But Ferriers, Raggy, he's cute!"

"He is," Raggy warmly agreed, his mind flashing back to his companionship with Ferriers before the ex-manager's suspension.

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"And Ferriers hasn't joined up with Uncle Nick for any good purpose.

Raggy, can you keep a secret?"

Raggy looked up in surprise.

"Because I'm going to let you into one," Tim went on, without waiting for the reply. "Raggy, when my father died he left me five thousand pounds!"

"Five—?" Raggy halted, and reeled against a lamp-post. "Say that again," he gasped faintly.

Tim grinned.

"Come here," he said. "Raggy, this isn't a time for joking. He left me five thousand, I say, but until I'm twenty-one years of age I can't touch it. Also, he left it on conditions."

"Crumbs! Sounds like a novel," was Raggy's irrepressible comment.

"On conditions that I shouldn't turn to professional sport," Tim continued, ignoring the interruption. "Supposing I turn pro, or indulge in professionalism, Raggy, before I'm twenty-one, the money goes to Uncle Nick, who is my father's next-of-kin after me. Quite obviously Nick is trading upon that—quite obviously he is trying, by trickery, to inveigle me into professionalism. Ferriers is backing him up, and Ferriers is the man I'm afraid of. Watch him, Raggy!"

Raggy whistled. This business of the will was news to him, but a whole heap of things he had not understood before now became transparently clear. Mechanically his mind jumped back to the moment when he had peered round the corner, and had seen Nick Webster and Coulson Ferriers in conversation with McShane. Did that mean anything? he asked himself.

It did. The spectacle of the fight had given Coulson Ferriers a new idea. He knew McShane, did Ferriers; he knew, too, the nature of the man—a nature which, once roused to resentment, could be very evil indeed. And when Bud McShane learned the identity of Tim Webster from Coulson Ferriers, he swore he would not rest until he had wiped off his score.

"And you can," Ferriers said. "Not only that, Bud, but you can make a bit at the same time. Supposing you challenge Webster, and he fights you—in private. What'd you take for a purse?"

"I want no purse," McShane growled. "All I want is that whelp's chivvy within hitting distance for about five minutes. I might have put on flesh, I might be past my prime, but I'm not such a has-been that I can't make a kid like him kiss the dust. Where can I find him?"

"Just a minute." Ferriers held up his hand soothingly. "Listen here, Bud, and leave matters to me. I can put you in the way of meeting the kid and earning fifty quid—win or lose—at the same time. There's a risk, of course, but you don't mind that; and if you did get nabbed the kid would be nabbed with you. Besides, even if you were, a couple of quid fine would see you out of it, Bud."

McShane's little eyes were gleaming now.

"What's the lay?" he asked.

"Simply this. I want you to fight Webster—never mind why. Webster's an amateur, so obviously he couldn't fight you in public. He wouldn't in private in the ordinary way, but there's ways and means of making him. You could make him, this very day, if you are keen to earn the money."

"Tell me," Bud invited.

"Go to his flat—I'll give you the address. Challenge him to meet you at seven o'clock to-morrow night at the old Barn in Meadows Lane. It's lonely there, and we can arrange a scrap with-

out fear of interruption. If he doesn't accept, hit him. He'll fight you right enough, after that."

"And the money?"

"I'll put that up."

Bud rose and extended his hand.

"It's a go," he said. "I don't know what your game is, Mr. Ferriers, and as long as I get my money I'm not curious. Gimme that address, and I'll barge along to this whelp's flat right now, an' if I do have to hit him I'll hit him good and hard. Knocked me down, did he? Well, I guess nobody's ever done that to Bud McShane without rueing it!"

CHAPTER 2.

Raggy's Way Out!

"A FUNNY kid," mused Trojan Tim, thinking of Raggy Jones, who had just left his flat. "A real funny kid, with some queer ideas of honour. But I like him, by ginger, I do, and I feel that he'll be a pal. A rummy kid, too, who knows more about this town and the people in it than most, I should imagine." He looked up as a tap came at the door. "Come in," he sang out.

The door opened. Tim, thinking it was his landlady, rose from the easy-chair in which he had ensconced himself, and looked towards the door inquiringly.

But it was not the landlady. The youngster stared at the big, corpulent figure who answered the invitation, and for a moment his jaw dropped as he looked into the battered, uncompromising features of Bud McShane. Then his lips tightened.

"Oh, and who let you in?" he icily inquired.

"The front door was open, and I guess I came up of my own accord," Bud McShane said. "I want a word with you, Mr. Webster."

"What about?"

"This morning. You hit me, Tim Webster, and I guess I don't take that from anybody without hitting back. You took advantage of me; you knocked me down when I wasn't looking. That's as good as a challenge, and I'm here to say that I'm taking it up. You're going to fight me, Webster!"

"Oh!" Tim said, with a note of inquiry in his voice.

"To-morrow," went on Bud. "There's a barn not far from here in a deserted road called Meadows Lane. We sha'n't be interrupted there, and we can have it out under cover. If you've got the pluck of a squashed flea you'll meet me there to-morrow night at seven o'clock."

Tim eyed the man narrowly.

"So you've already arranged it—eh?" he said. "You've got it weighed up?" There was a flicker of contempt in his eyes as he surveyed the ex-champion's podgy form. "This morning's lesson wasn't enough for you?" he questioned.

"Eh?"

Bud's eyes widened in truculent surprise.

"You know what I mean. You're past boxing, Bud McShane. You're loose, you're flabby, and you know that, whatever you might have been in the past, you're no match for a young man now. On that count, if no other, I consider that I'm entitled to turn down your challenge; besides which, I don't care for this scrap. No." He shook his head. "It's off, McShane. I couldn't fight a man like you in cold blood!"

"You're afraid!" taunted the bruiser.

"If you like," Tim said indifferently.

There was a pause. Bud's little eyes narrowed; he took a deep breath. While Tim, wondering at the idiocy of the man,

continued to survey him with amused contempt.

He did not expect, nor was he prepared, for Bud's next move, and it came as a stunning surprise. For quite suddenly McShane stepped forward and crushed a bunched fist with terrific force between the youngster's eyes.

Tim staggered. Momentarily blinded with the force of the blow, he caught at the mantelpiece to save himself from falling, and brought it tumbling, with a resounding clatter, into the fireplace. For a moment he stared in uncomprehending amazement at the man who had struck him, and then his face flamed up. Tim had a temper. At the best of times it was apt to get a little out of control. At this deadly insult it flamed up in passionate fury.

Bud knew it next second. "You overfed rat!" Tim hissed. "So that's the game, is it? That's your method of making me fight? Well, I will fight, Bud McShane, and woe betide you when I get you in the ring. Now, get out of this!"

And Bud, before he quite realised what was happening, found himself seized by the collar of his coat in an iron grip. His next conscious impression was that he was being propelled towards the door at a terrific speed. Like a whirlwind he whizzed through the door, and, emerging upon the landing outside, found himself suddenly looking down the carpeted steps which led to the hall below.

Just one quick heave Tim gave. Bud's feet missed their balance on the top step, and he made an unavailing attempt to clutch the banisters as he went spinning downwards. A series of heavy thuds, not unlike a sack of coals hurtling downstairs, announced his precipitous passage at the bottom.

With a thud that shook the house, he landed, bounced upwards like a rubber ball, and, still carried on by the impetus, rolled headlong through the open door and out into the street. A youngster, who happened to be passing at that moment, paused and grinned in delight. Bud, with a final terrific bump, came to a halt in the kerb.

"Wot-ho, Bud!" greeted Raggy. "This a new sort o' trainin', or 'as someone bin pushin' yer? I s'pose yer wouldn't like to do it agen, 'cos I didn't see it prop'ly. When—"

He flew into the hall which the bruiser had so recently vacated as the prizefighter, breathing vengeance, scrambled to his feet. Only in the nick of time did Raggy slam the door after him.

"Don't go, Tim!" Raggy entreated. Tim glanced at the youngster in surprise.

"But why?" he countered. "Well—" Raggy looked a little troubled.

After what Tim had told him—of Bud's visit and what had transpired—the feeling of uneasiness he had known ever since he had seen the boxer and Ferriers and Webster in conversation, had intensified. That there was some connection between that and this, he was sure, though, at the moment, he could not exactly see what it was.

"Because I feel there's some tricky bus'ness in it," he said. "I dunno why—I'm not good at explainin' things, but seeing them three together this mornin'—well, yer know wot 'appened at the Trojans' ground. Something tells me—" he paused awkwardly. "Don't go, Tim!" he added earnestly.

Tim's eyes softened as he looked at the youngster, but his lips, set in an obstinate line, showed no wavering from

purpose. McShane had insulted him in a manner that could only be wiped out by a meeting in the ring; had thrown down the gauntlet in such a fashion that Tim had been forced to pick it up. He had accepted that challenge both in word and in deed, and to back out now because of the nameless fear of the youngster opposite him was not to be thought of. Tim was no coward, nor, was a matter like this was concerned, was he apt to be cautious. It is doubtful, indeed, even if he had known of the plot afoot whether he would have renounced the challenge.

"I must go, Raggy," he said. "I shall go, and, in case there's any funny business, you shall come with me as my second. If I didn't go and this got round—as it's sure to do—I should never be able to look my clubmates in the face again. Besides, the whole thing's private, so what possible harm can come of it? If Uncle Nick and that cad Ferriers are up to any games"—his face

wards entered himself. And they had no suspicion when, seated in the room at the back of the house which served as Coulson Ferriers' sleeping apartment, that outside, at the window, a youthful pair of intent ears were absorbing every word of conversation they spoke.

That conversation, naturally, was chiefly about the coming fight. Ferriers' plan, having gone so far without a hitch, and promising such complete satisfaction on the morrow, had so elated him that he could talk of nothing else. Within five minutes Raggy was in possession of most of the details, and was still learning.

"And so you see," Ferriers wound up, "everything has played into our hands. Tim doesn't know that McShane will receive a money-purse for his share in the fight—at least, he won't know until the fight's over, and, after that, it'll be no good denying that he knew nothing about it. The very fact that Tim fights a man who is receiving money for the



Stepping forward, McShane crashed a bunched fist with terrific force between the youngster's eyes. Momentarily blinded with the force of the blow, Tim Webster caught at the mantelpiece and brought it crashing down into the fireplace.

darkened—"well, let them look out, that's all!"

Raggy saw from then onwards that argument would be useless. He tried it without success, and finally left his new-found friend with a feeling of despair tugging at his heart, yet his admiration for him increased a thousandfold. That there was some deep scheme afoot Raggy felt sure. But what it was he could not for the life of him see. Peril threatened Tim. He felt that, and if it was within his power he determined to avert it. But how? The question was still poignantly occupying his mind when he saw Coulson Ferriers and Nick Webster suddenly emerge from a street down which he himself was preparing to dive.

Quick as thought Raggy slipped into the shadow of a doorway, his mind made up instantly on a course of action. And, like a shadow, and as faithfully as a shadow, he dogged the footsteps of the two men for the next twenty minutes.

They did not see him. They did not see him even when Ferriers, inserting the key into the door which led to his flat, beckoned Nick to enter, and after-

fight makes him a professional, and, therefore, disinherits him. Oh, it's a cute scheme, Nick!"

"If it comes off," Nick objected doubtfully.

"What can stop it coming off?" Ferriers went on. "I've made all arrangements, haven't I? There'll be a crowd there; the police will raid the place at ten past eight just as the purse is being handed out, for if I'm any judge of boxers, Bud'll last no more than three rounds. We sha'n't be there, of course—but we shall be watching not so very far away, and we shall see the fun. We're meeting Laney, who's refereeing the fight, in the barn at six o'clock, and there I'll hand him the prize-money. After that, you and I can get out of it." He chuckled. "We've got Tim this time, Nick!"

"Oh, have you?" muttered Raggy, beneath his breath.

"And what'll happen when the police do collar 'em?" Nick put in.

"They'll take their names. Afterwards they'll all be fined. Bud won't mind that; neither will Laney, and I haven't much fear that either of 'em

will give us away. If they do we'll deny it, and as they haven't a scrap of evidence against us, our words will be as good as theirs, I guess. The crowd's Bud's affair. He's been boasting to some of his pals about the scrap, and they're going to turn up. They'll be nabbed as well, of course—"

Raggy waited to hear no more. He stole away, and an hour later, shut up in his own room above the fried fishshop, his sharpened wits got quickly to work to form a scheme to frustrate the plot he had overheard.

And when Raggy set himself to think out any problem, it was not long before he arrived at a solution. He hesitated to tell Tim what he had heard. Tim would disapprove of his eavesdropping, he knew, and he doubted, even if he did tell him, whether it would make a deal of difference to the Trojan's declared intention to see the fight through. No, Raggy decided, if he was to come to the rescue at all, he must work without Tim.

He did. His first step was to pen a note to Tim. It was written in his own handwriting and signed with the initials, "B. S." But, as Tim had never seen either his or Bud's handwriting, it was likely to arouse no suspicion in his mind when he received it.

His next step was taken at five o'clock the following afternoon. Raggy had planned to lock Bud in his room in order to prevent him from turning up, and, on a tour of investigation of the premises, found Bud in the coal-cellar. McShane had a punchball down there, and at very rare intervals used it. He was using it when Raggy poked his head in at the door.

He did not see the youngster, his back being turned towards the door at the moment. Raggy, grinning, very quietly withdrew the key, thereby making the innocent Bud a prisoner. After that he pocketed the letter he had written the night before, and hurried to Tim's flat with it.

"Bud asked me to come along with this," he lied, when he met his champion. "He says he's waiting at the barn now."

With a puzzled frown Tim took the envelope and extracted the single sheet of soiled notepaper inside it.

"Dere Sir," he read,—*"As I find I have an appointment at seven o'clock, will it make any difference to you if we get our little affair settled and done with at six? I shall be waiting for you at the agreed place at that hour to-night, and if you don't come I shall take it that you are funkng. Yours truly.—B. S."*

Tim glanced at the clock. It registered half-past five.

"Bud wants me there at six instead of seven," he said to Raggy. "That's all to the good, for the sooner we get the job finished and done with the better I shall like it. Grab that bag in the corner there, Raggy. It's got all the tackle we'll need. Now, come on!"

Raggy, grinning quietly to himself, followed.

CHAPTER 3.

A "Barney" in the Barn!

MEADOWS LANE, one of those old-fashioned country roads which are lakes of mud in wet weather and plans of miniature earthquakes in dry, was deserted, when Trojan Tim and Raggy Jones reached it, and the disused barn, looming up grey and forbidding amid its loneliness, seemed deserted, too. It was not until they got within hearing distance, indeed, that the two became aware that it was occupied.

Then Tim stopped, a look of utter amazement on his face. For from behind the dilapidated door which led to the interior of the barn, came the voice of his uncle!

"And mind," Nick Webster was saying, "that you don't mention the money before the fight, otherwise Tim might refuse. You simply hand it over to McShane when the fight's done with—that's all!"

"I see," came another voice—that of Laney, the man whom Ferriers had booked to referee the contest. "But I suppose you know that that will make Tim Webster a pro—"

He said no more, for, at that moment, the door whizzed inwards with a violence that sent it crashing flat against the wall and split the panel in two, and Tim—a very red and angry and enlightened Tim—burst in upon the scene.

Those few words had given him the clue to the whole business. Though he had not grasped the plot in its entirety he knew, from the very presence of his uncle and Coulson Ferriers, that this was another attempt to rob him of his amateur status.

Three pairs of startled eyes switched round upon him, three audible breaths escaped in one simultaneous hiss of surprise and fear. And Tim, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing, stood for a moment and surveyed them.

"So that's the game is it?" he said. "That's the plot!" He fastened a look full of bitterness upon Nick Webster. "Not content with the failure of one dirty scheme you hatch another. Where's McShane?"

"McShane?"

"He wired to me, asking me to meet him here. Where is he? Where—"

"McShane?" stammered Ferriers.

"Wrote to you?"

"McShane didn't!" It was Raggy who, grinning hugely, came forward now. "It was me who wrote that letter, Tim," he said. "I found out about this last night and I knew as these two 'ud be 'ere at this time so I thought of a wheeze so's you could butt in and get wise. McShane ain't 'ere and ain't likely to be 'ere. Cos Why? Cos I locked 'im in the coal-cellar this afternoon!"

He glared triumphantly at Ferriers as he uttered the words, and Ferriers, grasping their import, turned white with passion. He started forward.

"You what?"

"I locked 'im in—dished 'im—and you!" Raggy replied contemptuously. "I—keep 'im off, Tim!"

His last words ended in a note of alarm, for Ferriers, looking very deadly and very dangerous, made a sudden grab at the youngster. Very gently, however, Tim caught him by the shoulder and pushed him back.

"Leave him alone, Ferriers!" he said quietly.

There was danger in his tone. Tim was angry—furiously angry at the revelation of the trick played upon him and was holding himself in check only with great difficulty. But Ferriers did not heed it. In that moment he only realised his betrayal—and was hating the youngster who had brought it about.

"I—I'll smash him!" he said thickly.

"You'll smash me first," Tim said, in the same dangerously quiet voice.

The next moment the smashing began. For Ferriers, his rage overmastering his usual caution, made as though to brush Tim out of the way. His hand, sweeping backwards, caught the youngster across the face and threw up a vivid red weal upon his white flesh. Tim winced. He did not move, but his fist, the knuckles showing white, bunched up into a formidable mass. An instant later, Ferriers, wondering if the roof had suddenly collapsed, was staggering back towards the furthest wall of the barn.

With difficulty he prevented himself from falling; for a moment he stood at bay, his eyes, red-rimmed and glaring, fixed with murderous intensity upon the lad who had struck him. The next, with a cry that was only half-human, he launched himself to the attack.

Tim braced himself. Boxer though he was he would have been no match for the thickset Coulson in a trial of

(Continued on page 23.)

"FOOLED ON THE FIRST!"

(Continued from page 18.)

comrades, and the Fourth Form passage echoed and re-echoed with roars of laughter.

The first of April went the way of all days, amid irrepressible hilarity in the School House at St. Jim's. Monty Lowther's great jape and the way it had turned out, made the fellows yell, and it really seemed that they would never have done chortling over it. The camera, the Annual, and the Latin dic. remained in the possession of Blake & Co., and in Study No. 10 that evening Manners, of the Shell, was like unto a bear with a sore head, only more so—much more so. No bear, howsoever bearish, and with howsoever sore a head, ever raged as did Harry Manners that evening in No. 10 in the Shell. At great length, and with great eloquence, Manners told Monty Lowther what he thought of him and his japes, and for once Monty had nothing to say in his defence. Even Monty Lowther could not deny that this great first-of-April stunt was a ghastly frost.

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But there was still balm in Gilead, so to speak, as the Terrible Three discovered when they went to bed that night.

Manners, shoving an angry leg into his bed, gave a howl as he knocked his toe against something hard. He hurled back the bedclothes—and disclosed a camera!

"Oh!" he gasped.

It was really entertaining to watch the changing expression on Manners' face. Deep wrath faded away to a smile of almost idiotic relief and satisfaction. He picked up his precious camera and almost hugged it, what time Tom Merry and Monty Lowther disinterred a "Holiday Annual" and a Latin dictionary from the depths of their beds.

"I—I knew that villain, Blake, was only pulling my leg, all the time!" gasped Manners.

But his intense relief indicated that he had not felt quite sure about it.

Still, all was well that ended well, and now all was calm and bright. And even Monty Lowther admitted that it was not Study No. 6 who had proved to be the April Fools!

THE END.

(Look out for another topping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week—an extra-long story, entitled: "ROUGH ON LEVISON!" By Martin Clifford.)

(Continued from previous page.)

brute strength, and he knew it. But he was not afraid. He was even contemptuous, for the very manner in which Ferriers sailed in showed that he knew little or nothing of boxing as an art.

Tim knew it all from A to Z, and he prepared himself to give Ferriers a little practical demonstration of his knowledge. As the other came in he shifted his shoulder ever so slightly with the result that the sledge-hammer punch Ferriers intended for his jaw slipped harmlessly through the air.

And then, quick as thought, Tim straightened himself. His fists beat a quick tattoo upon the other's face and drew blood before Ferriers could recover himself. Ferriers went back, paused

another moment, and then came in again only to be sent reeling yet again from a terrific jolt beneath the jaw. At that he paused.

He came very carefully next time, something very like fear in his eyes. He aimed low, was conscious of a paralysing pain on his forearm, as Tim struck the blow downwards, and clouted out recklessly with his right. More by luck than judgment his fist caught the Trojan a glancing blow on the side of the face, staggering, but did not hurt him. The next moment Tim, his fighting blood thoroughly aroused, came out of himself and went for Ferriers like a wildcat.

Ferriers could not stand up to it. Like a whirlwind Tim came in; like a deadly punching-machine, planting blows wherever he felt inclined, and with a fierceness that left Ferriers' body bruised for days afterwards, he rushed the other man round the shed. Raggy stood with his mouth open while Uncle Nick, a very ugly expression on his face, watched the punishment of his associate in silence.

Except for the sound of the blows as they landed, and the hoarse breathless gruntings of Ferriers as he shipped them, no sound broke the stillness. Ferriers at the end of the worst two minutes he had ever experienced in his life was a gasping wreck, and Tim could have polished him off any moment. It pleased him to play with him, however, and so teach the rascal a lesson.

Snap!
For the twentieth time his hard right alighted upon Ferriers' badly-damaged nasal organ, and Ferriers let out a yell. Then Uncle Nick seemed to come to himself.

He started forward.
"Tim! Leave him alone!" he shouted. But Tim, intent upon his work, never heard.

Thereupon Nick Webster seemed to become possessed of a sudden fury. Grabbing up a piece of wood which lay to his hand he rushed towards the pair. Quicker than lightning, however, a small form detached itself from the shadows of the barn, and before Nick Webster had taken two steps, had flung himself on the tall man. For an



Grabbing up a piece of wood, Nick Webster rushed towards the two combatants. He had barely gone two steps, however, when a small form detached itself from the shadow of the barn and charged at him with lowered head.

instant the long gentleman paused and eyed the youngster with disfavour, and in that instant Raggy read his intention. He did not argue, for Raggy was ever a lad of action. He simply lowered his head and charged.

"Ouch!" gasped Uncle Nick, as a head as hard and as swift as a bullet, cannoned into his waistcoat and sent him crashing backwards. And "Ouch!" again as, with a terrific thump, he hit the ground.

He lay there, gasping for breath and feebly pawing the air while Raggy stood truculently over him. And in the moment of quiet that ensued came a sound like a piece of twig snapping underfoot from the other side of the barn where Tim and Ferriers were still fighting. It was followed by another yell as Ferriers, suddenly losing his balance, pitched backwards, crashed against the wall and then, very gently, slid down into a prone position. Simultaneous with the blow came a bellow from the door.

"B'glory—"
Raggy wheeled, and his jaw dropped in dismay, for on the threshold stood a corpulent gentleman, almost unrecognisable by reason of the coal-dust that grimed his hands and face, but whose identity was none the less disputable for all that. Bud McShane!

Bud was out for somebody's blood. To be imprisoned for half an hour was bad enough; but to be imprisoned in a coal cellar was worse than anything—especially in the dark. It had only taken Bud thirty minutes to make his escape, but to him it had seemed two hours and, not wishing to be cheated of his vengeance upon Tim, he had rushed away hot-foot without attempting to inquire the time or even stopping for a wash. Now he had arrived.

He spotted Tim at the same moment that Raggy spotted him. With a bellow like a bull he flew across the floor.

Tim wheeled, only just in time. Even so, Bud caught him on the shoulder. Tim reeled and staggered back to the wall. There, for a moment, he was helpless, and Bud, with a fiendish grin, drew back his arm. Like a piston-rod it flashed outwards; with a crash that shook the shed and brought a terrific

shout of pain from Bud, it banged clean through the rotten woodwork into the air outside. For, at the most critical moment, Tim had ducked!

"You cad!" he gasped.
With that he hit out—once! Bud caught the blow beautifully upon the jaw, was lifted off his feet and fell clean on top of Uncle Nick who was rising. Nick, perhaps under the impression that it was Jim or Raggy, closed with him and, getting the beaten bruiser's head in' chancery, commenced to belabour it impartially.

Raggy edged towards the door.
"Come on, sir," he said anxiously. "You've had enough—so have these three, I guess. Beat while the going's good, 'cos if you can lick one you can't lick three."
Tim nodded. "There was no sense in stopping behind, and as Raggy had said, once this precious trio sorted themselves out they would be out for his blood together. He went. It was not until half an hour later—that the two entered his flat.

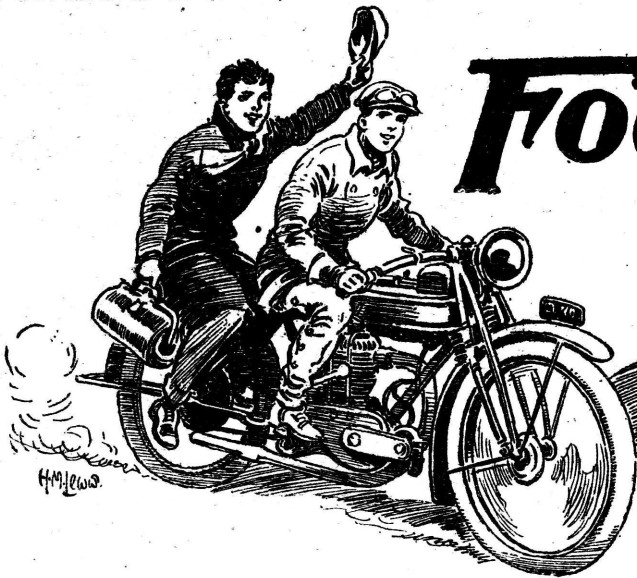
Raggy had confessed the whole story of his duplicity on the way.
"Raggy," Tim said, "you did wrong—very wrong! In the first place it's wrong to listen outside people's doors; in the second it's a criminal thing to write a letter and sign it with somebody else's initials. Still," he paused and grinned at the urchin's downcast face, "considering everything I think we might forgive you, Raggy. Promise you won't do it again!"

"I'll—I'll try not to," Raggy said. And he meant to keep his word—unless circumstances compelled him to break it. For Raggy knew that Uncle Nick and Coulson Ferriers were a long way from being beaten yet, and such rogues required to be fought with their own weapons.

THE END.

(There will be another thrilling adventure of Trojan Tim soon, chums. Meanwhile, look out for "THE STOLEN GOD!" by Lester Bidston, an exciting yarn of the two aero adventurers— "Live-Wire" Lindsay and Jerry O'Gorman—which will appear shortly.)

A scoundrel at heart, Bill Stevens turns his attention to burglary!



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 gu'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 Dawson; the Town's centre-forward.

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 his club'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.

After a very short spell Hal returns from the seaside to assist his team in their great match with the Arsenal. A gruelling tussle follows, but, in spite of the stubborn defence put up by the red-shirted players, they fail to hold the bustling Town's forwards, and the home team proves victorious by the odd goal in three. Dawson, the Town's unruly centre, had, however, been ordered off the field for rough play.

Highly elated, the Town's players troop off the field, for their win meant another move up the table.

(Now read on.)

Treachery!

WHEN the players returned to the dressing-room heated by the game, and smiling and happy over their victory, they found that Dawson had dressed and gone.

Tommy Bell and the rest were devoutly thankful. It meant they would escape a lengthy description from Dawson upon the unfair treatment and rotten luck that would pursue him.

"Harold," said Tommy, crossing to his chum, "do you think Bert Roberts would pull his weight as centre-forward for the Town?"

Hal laughed as if the question was ridiculous.

"Of course," he returned. "Bert has the makings of a great centre. You know what it is with men who fill that position, they are in the pockets of a strong centre-half from start to finish, and only get away when there is room for an unopposed run. Bert is different. He's a worry to any half-back, and he is absolutely fearless when it comes to dealing with a back. No player would ever frighten him."

Tommy did not hesitate in his intention after that. He could bank upon Harold's judgment, he knew.

"Did you ask Roberts to see you after the match?" he questioned.

"Yes. He and Jim Burrows are waiting in the hall now."

"Good! Wait for me, Hal. We'll meet them together."

Fifteen minutes later the four were talking brightly to one another.

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"Roberts," said Tommy, his ruddy face beaming. "do you really want to play for Nettingham Town?"

"Yes."

"As a professional?"

"I see no reason why I shouldn't. I've had a few bouquets thrown at me as an amateur, I am fully prepared to admit, but lately my clubmates have been giving me the cold shoulder. I live in Nettingham—got a job here. If I'm allowed to carry on with that I'll sign professional forms in a flash."

"Come with me," said Tommy, nodding. "I shall want you also, Harold. Jim Burrows can wait for us."

The manager was busy drifting from office to board-room, thence to the refreshment-room, and so back again. He had plenty to occupy his time. When Tommy stopped him and asked for an interview, he replied:

"Not just now, Tommy. Let it wait a bit. I'm busy."

"I want you to have a talk to Bert Roberts, late of Kingsdown Athletic," Tommy Bell said. "You must have seen for yourself that Dawson isn't any use at centre—"

"We've got all the players we want. I'm going to train some of the reserves."

George Bliss would have hurried away, but Tommy Bell grabbed him by the sleeve.

"You know how you nearly lost Harold Chester, sir," he said. "Well, this is a similar case. If you don't snap up Roberts, the United will mighty soon have him."

"What?" The words went home, and the manager frowned. "Where is this chap, Roberts?" he asked.

"Here he is," said Harold, introducing them. "Bert, this is George Bliss, our manager. Bertie Roberts—Mr. Bliss."

The manager looked the fine, upstanding, bronzed, and stalwart footballer up and down! Here was a man who

looked a full twelve stone or more, broad of shoulder, mild-eyed, confident, and cool.

"Chester," he cried, "do you really tell me that Roberts is good enough to be given a trial in the Town team?"

"He's a better player than I am," Harold ventured. "I would place him in the Town team without hesitation."

"Come to the office, then," said George Bliss.

The manager was as eager now to give Roberts a trial as he had formerly been to refuse him—which was his curious way.

In the office a short and direct talk cleared the air.

"Look here, Roberts!" said the manager at the end of it.

"If you'll be content to give us a trial when we play Aston Villa away next Saturday, you can play at centre. It will be a severe test, as you must admit. If you come through it successfully, and my directors approve, we will sign you on definitely. But perhaps you would rather not give us a trial run?"

Bert Roberts smiled. "I shall be only too pleased, sir," he answered, in his quiet and confident way. "With Harold on one side of me, and that clever chap, Seymour, the other, I sha'n't fail."

"All right. It's settled then. I shall want you, you know. After what happened to-day, Dawson is bound to be suspended for a fortnight. Give me your address. That's right. I'll write and let you know the time of the train, and if you'd like to come down to the ground for training, the door's open to you. I hope you'll excuse me now. I'm busy."

Manager and footballer shook hands, and, leaving the office, the three footballers joined Jim Burrows.

It was dark when they left the football-ground. A few boys were waiting at the gate to see their heroes depart.

To a chorus of good-nights they hurried on.

"Well, it does seem strange," remarked Bert Roberts, as they reached the centre of the town. "Here we are, Harold, once again members of the same team, for I don't intend to fail at the Villa on Saturday. I shall like being with you again, and I'm sure I shall get on with you, Tom. As for Dicky Double, the mere sight of his jolly face will be an inspiration. Doing anything to-night, Harold?"

"No, Bert."

"Well, will you and Tommy come along to my place? You're not going back to Silversea, I understand, until Monday. I shall have one or two pals coming in. We could have a chat, or, if you liked to listen to it, there's my wireless set."

"Thanks," said Hal, "I'd like it. You'll come, Tommy? All right. Then we'll get along home and tell Mrs. Sandys we sha'n't be in to dinner, and then come along to you."

Bert Roberts, lived in Hillsborough Crescent with his people. It was a large house, set in its own garden. Upon the way to it Harold passed the stores, and hesitated for a moment, thinking that he ought to go in and see his stepfather. But the Stores were unusually crowded with shoppers, and he could see James Henson behind the counter attending to the customers.

After all, his mother had written saying how she was getting on, and he could see his stepfather in the morning. Hal passed on.

"It looks as if business is improving at the Stores, Tommy," he remarked.

"Well, the shop was busy," returned Tommy Bell. "Do you know what I think? Your stepfather does too much of the work himself. He would be better employed directing and supervising. He's wasting his talents that way."

Harold agreed.

"I know. But it's his way!" he cried. "He muddles things without knowing it. He hasn't got the time to waste on serving. Yet he won't see it. I wish that his business would improve for mother's sake. My stepfather certainly seems a very unlucky man."

At Bert Roberts' place the two chums had the time of their lives.

A first-rate dinner, followed by a general talk, then darning to the wireless, and the hours slipped away like magic.

The streets in the less busy thoroughfares of Nottingham closed their doors, and hard-worked employees hurried home.

James Henson's Stores were open later than usual, it being nearly ten before the doors were shut and bolted.

After the staff had departed Henson had to check his takings and put the money he had received over the counter in the big safe, which he locked carefully, placing the bunch of keys in his pocket. There was a smile on his face when he went into the house for his supper, carefully locking and bolting the pass door behind him.

He had done better this Saturday than on any other Saturday, save at Christmas and holiday time, for a whole year or more. It was a sign, he hoped, that the tide had turned.

He ate the cold supper which Milly had left for him with unusual relish, and, happy at the thought that his wife was

gaining health and strength in the pure air of Silversea, he got into bed and was soon fast asleep.

But the shop which he had left so securely defended against burglars, was at the mercy of any traitor from the inside, and such a traitor was there.

It was the errand-boy who had met Bill Stevens at the War Memorial in the Town Square earlier in the week, and every night since. He came creeping from under the counter, where he had hidden himself behind some crates, and crept noiselessly to the street door, opening the little door set in the iron shutter and looking eagerly along the street.

A shadow moved out of a doorway, flitted nearer, then dived through the opening and entered the shop. Then the iron door was shut. The errand-boy and the new arrival then passed through the swing doors, which the boy had also unbolted and which stood in the middle of the stores.

Here a light was left burning as a safeguard, and the interior of the shop could be seen through a peep-hole in the iron shutters.

Bill Stevens did not care a rap for that. Taking a packet out of his pocket he leered at the boy. "Now, chum," he hissed, "where's the safe?"

Caught in the Act!

JAMES HENSON did not sleep well that night. After getting into bed and switching off the light, he lay tossing and turning, his mind in a state of unrest.

He had worked very hard that day, had been harassed by an unusual rush of customers in the late hours, and his takings had been more than satisfactory.

Did it mean that he had reached the end of a long and narrow road, and that things were about to take a turn for the better?

For most men the luck of life, good or ill, goes in spells or patches, the good being followed by the bad, the bad by the good—or so, at least, he believed.

He had begun at the Stores with an overwhelming success and had believed that he would make a fortune there. Then business had slowly but surely fallen off, until he saw bankruptcy looming ahead of him unless a miracle happened to prevent it. He had driven his stepson whom he believed to be a worthless feather-brain away from home, but had found no peace of mind through it. His wife, whom he loved devotedly, had fallen ill through being unable to bear the strain of running the big house with a shortage of servants, plus the knowledge that the business was going all wrong, and her fretting over the absence of her son.

Now she was rapidly regaining her normal health and spirits, he hoped, in the sea breezes of Silversea, whilst Harold



"Do you really mean to tell me, Chester," cried the Town's manager, "that Roberts is good enough to be given a trial in the Town's team?" "Yes," answered Hal. "He's a better player than I am!"



With a neat backheel, James Henson sent Bill Stevens toppling backwards to land into a crate of eggs which lay exposed upon the floor. For a moment the rascal lay spreadeagled in the crate, his fall being accompanied by a series of ominous crackings.

had proved himself to be a boy of courage and character. And the business was unexpectedly looking up again, too.

If only his good fortune continued, he would be able to pay off some of those long overdue accounts and gain peace of mind once more.

Perhaps he had driven his somewhat indifferent assistants a bit hard in the past, he thought; but with better prospects and regained peace of mind, he would manage better in the future.

Yes, he was able to look forward more complacently to the near future now.

Figures chased one another across the screen of his brain, and he twisted and turned uneasily, muttering to himself at times until at last he fell into a fitful doze.

What was that?

James Henson leapt suddenly up in bed, leaning upon his right hand, his eyes wide open, his ears alert. Some sound, some unusual sound, had roused him.

From whence had it come—the house, the shop, or the street?

He held his breath as he listened, but all was quiet.

From outside the house came the sound of a heavy tread that passed evenly and slowly by, then all was silent again. Perhaps it was that policeman on patrol who had roused him, James Henson thought, and laid his head upon the pillow again. But sleep was out of the question now. He knew that he would not go off until the small hours, so, contrary to custom, he switched on the electric light again and got out of bed. He drank a glass of cold water, then taking up a book, he sat up to read.

A page or so he ran through without paying much attention to the matter, finding it difficult to concentrate. Suddenly another sound startled him, and he realised that it came from the shop.

With tightening lips he rose, slipped on some shoes, donned a dressing-gown, and, tightening the cord about his waist, silently opened his bed-room door and went out on to the landing. There he listened. Decidedly there was movement in the shop. What did it mean? Had the cat been locked up there again? Was she chasing mice over the floor? Ah, no! The sound was of deeper significance than that. It was the unmistakable ring of metal on metal.

James Henson was a man of many faults, narrow-minded and self-centred, but he did not lack courage. Down the stairs he went, treading noiselessly, his pulses leaping as he heard the wood creak under his weight.

Making his way to the pass door, he silently inserted a key in the lock and turned it. With firm hold he turned the

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handle and pulled the door slowly open. There was a light burning in the shop, he saw, but it had been screened so that its rays were deflected upwards to the ceiling and outward to the walls.

Henson crept on, his eyes blazing.

He saw that a second light was burning in his private office. Shadows were cast upon its windows. Someone was in there, and he guessed that they were after the money in the safe. A side glance showed him the patent till on the counter. It had been broken open. Just as well that he had taken the precaution of removing every farthing it contained into the safe after closing the shop, or else these villains—for he knew there were two, for he could hear them speaking—would have got their greedy hands upon it.

A grim smile curved James Henson's thin lips. That safe of his was an old one, but strong. It could not be opened unless one knew the combination numbering. It would be no easy matter to force it open or blow it open.

"Lad, the old fool must 'ave known I was comin', not to 'ave left as much as a brass tack for a chap to lay 'is 'ands on. Dunno w'en I'll be able to break open this cursed safe. I ain't got a car or any pals 'andy, or I'd take the blessed thing away and open it elsewhere. Wot I wonder is wot can we do now?"

"Dunno!"

Henson pricked up his ears.

It was a man and a boy speaking, and the voice of the boy was familiar.

Henson caught his breath. What ought he to do next? Should he warn them of his presence, or ought he to try and telephone to the police? He might go back into the house and use the extension there, the telephone in the shop being within the office.

He hesitated.

Then fate decided the issue, though he was not aware of it.

Bill Stevens happening to turn his head, saw as he looked through the glass of the office windows the shadow of a man standing there, watching him.

In a moment he caught the boy by the arm.

"Not a word! Not a sound! Keep quiet!" he hissed.

The boy with staring eyes and quivering lips dropped back against the desk. He also could see the figure of the boss standing out there in the shop.

Terrified out of his wits, he remained helpless, staring at the man who had led him into this trap. Bill Stevens, who was grasping a tool with which he had been trying to force the safe, and with which he had broken open the till in the shop and the desk in the office, only to find little reward for his trouble, edged towards the door.

He reached the threshold just as James Henson decided to telephone from the house to the police.

With a spring the burglar was out and behind the shop-keeper.

James Henson heard his tread and turned. The two stood facing each other.

"Ah, so it is you!" said Henson, with the grimmest of smiles. "The man who came to me for a job the other day. The man my stepson Harold denounced. You are a burglar as well as a scoundrel, eh?"

Bill Stevens' eyes blazed.

"Not so much lip, you old duffer!" he growled. "May I ask what you intend to do about it?"

"I am going to telephone to the police and give you in charge," Henson answered. "And if you are wise you will offer no resistance."

Stevens laughed.

"The telephone wires have been cut!" he cried. "And if you value your safety you'll stay where you are while I get away. If you attempt to put the police on to me you'll suffer for it. I always pay my debts, and I never forget an injury. Got that?"

James Henson's eyes blazed.

"I don't believe you've cut the telephone wire!" he cried. "And even if you have I know you, and I shall have you arrested for burglary. I am not afraid of you!"

Stevens, realising that, laughed harshly. Henson turned away, but it was a fatal move, for with a spring the burglar was upon him.

A downward stroke of the heavy iron tool he held sent Henson staggering.

"Ah, would you?" gasped the storekeeper, as he swung round and grappled with his assailant.

The boy, gasping in terror, stared at them from the office door. He was blubbering silently.

James Henson was much the lighter man, and he was in no physical condition to match evenly the strength of the football burglar.

Yet the steel there was in him came to his aid, and as they grappled and struggled over the floor, he managed by a

surprising display of energy and good luck to twist Bill Stevens about and with a neat backheel send him flying into a crate of eggs which lay exposed upon the floor.

Bill Stevens' fall into the frail shell-covered objects would have been ludicrous had not the situation been so intensely tragic.

For a moment the rascal lay spreadeagled in the crate, his fall being accompanied by a series of ominous crackings.

Henson turned and made for the office door, blood streaming down his neck from the wound in his head. The boy seeing him scuttled for safety.

Stevens rose from the egg crate, with pieces of white shell and patches of broken golden yolk adhering to his clothes. He was smothered with the mess, and his discomfiture angered him so that he let forth a bellow as he made another spring at Henson.

He dragged him back from the door and dealt blow after blow upon the unfortunate shopkeeper's unprotected head until, with a groan, Henson sank down on to the floor to lay there in a collapsed and curled-up position, whilst Stevens, staring at him out of wide-open eyes, pulled nervously at his throat.

"That's done it!" he muttered shakily. "But it was the fool's own fault! Why didn't he let me go? Why didn't he keep quiet?"

The errand-boy, shivering with horror, crawled near. "You've bin and killed 'im!" he whispered. "Why couldn't you 'ave let the boss alone?"

"Git out of it!" muttered Stevens hoarsely.

For the first time the bully realised the enormity of his offence, and the likely consequences if the crime were ever brought home to him.

For the first time he realised that he was at the mercy of this bit of a boy. True, the kid was a confederate, but they would not punish him heavily for his share in the transaction. He, Bill Stevens, would be the one to suffer. It would mean a lengthy term of imprisonment for him, and perhaps worse if James Henson died.

The gaping boy saw Stevens' face whiten.

Down upon his knees the burglar dropped, and with hands that shook he lifted Henson and stared into his set and bruised face. Henson's mouth was partly open. Stevens could detect no sign or sound of breathing.

He let Henson's shoulders drop, and rose, his knees sagging under him.

"Kid," he muttered, turning to the boy, "where's he keep the paraffin?"

"You ain't gonner fire—"

"Where's he keep the paraffin?" repeated Stevens, with a menacing movement of his right hand.

"The tanks are in the yard; but there's a tap at the back of the stores, over there, near the ironmongery department!" gasped the boy, pointing.

Stevens, crossing the shop, seized an oil measure, turned on the tap, and let the spirit run until the measure was full to the brim.

Then he hurried into the shop, and sprinkled the contents upon the floor. Twice he repeated the process, spreading the oil everywhere. Shavings and sawdust he piled in heaps and saturated in turn.

Then, stooping, he struck a match and waited until he saw the flames leaping and spreading.

"You're not gonner—leave—him—like that—to burn!" gasped the boy, clutching Stevens desperately by the arm.

"Shut up! You're in this as well as me!" growled the burglar. "Come on!"

Choking, sobbing, and groaning, the frightened boy followed the villain to the door.

Opening it, Stevens peered out. The street was deserted, and a mist hung thickly there. Nobody would see him or the boy leave the stores. He would make his way homeward by a route which he knew would be deserted at that late hour. Nobody must see him with all that mess upon his clothes.

Was that an approaching footstep he heard in the distance, he wondered?

He must hurry. Already the smoke was pouring through the open door in the iron shutter.

With a push, he tumbled the errand-boy into the street.

"Now, cut it, and not a word on your life!" he ordered. "And if you blab I'll twist that neck of yours! Understand?"

The boy heard, and, turning, fled. Stevens, pulling the door to after him, ran on tiptoe out of the range of the light that burned in the street-lamp close by, and, keeping in close by the wall, reached a side turning, down which he fled. Then, breathing more freely, he went on, his keen eyes darting glances as he hurried along; for nobody must see him now. What did that old buffer want to interfere for? Why couldn't he have let him go? It was his own fault.

Stevens moved ahead, shakily groaning at his ill-luck. But then his luck always was dead out!

(With no thought of pity for Mr. Henson, the arch-rogue hurried away. Was Hal's stepfather to perish in those angry flames which were leaping and spreading in all directions? Be sure you read next week's thrilling instalment of this exciting footer serial, chums!)

"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.

GOOD OLD SHEFFIELD. A TRUE PROVERB!

"Hi! What do you mean by throwing stones at my dog?" shouted the infuriated man. "Well," said the youth, "he's bit me, that's why." "How many times?" asked the owner. "Once. And that's enough, isn't it?" "Yes; but you shied at him twice, you young scamp!" "Of course!" said the youth. "Once bit, twice shy!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to William H. Hobson, 21, Harrington Road, Heeley, Sheffield.

INSULTING!

Willie came home one evening with a black eye. "William," said his father sternly, "have you been fighting?" "Yes," confessed Willie. "I've just thrashed Bobby Jones." "Well, William," said his father, "I strongly disapprove of your fighting, but I cannot help feeling proud of your thrashing a boy as big as Jones. But what did you thrash him for?" "Why," said Willie indignantly, "he said I looked like you!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to John J. Allan, R.R., No. 2, Palmerston, Ontario, Canada.

POOR OLD FORD!

One day a man from Australia was conversing with a doctor from Detroit. "So you come from Detroit, then?" said the Australian. "Isn't that the place where they make all the motor-cars?" "Yes," answered the American, "but they make other things as well." "Oh, yes," came the reply. "I've had a ride in those, too!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Wm. Atley, 18, Stirling Street, Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand.

HE SPOKE TOO SOON!

Patient: "I consulted the chemist and he advised me—" Doctor: "My dear sir, chemists always give foolish advice." Patient: "To come to you!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Parton, 18, Hamilton Crescent, Palmer's Green, London, N.13.

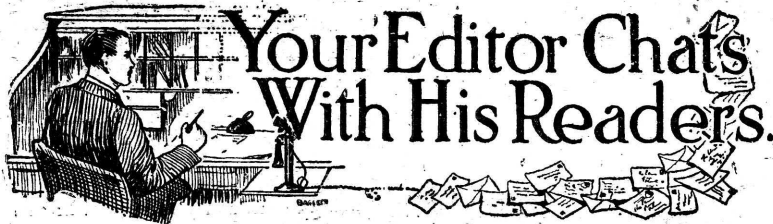
A MYSTERY!

"Any complaints?" asked the orderly officer. "Yes," said a Tommy, presenting a billy-can of liquid. "Just taste this, sir." "That's a very good soup," said the officer. "Yes, sir," said the Tommy; "but the corporal says it's coffee, and the cook says it's tea, yet I've just found a scrubbing-brush at the bottom of the dixie!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Colin Currie, "Newcombe," Masterion, New Zealand.

HE DIDN'T SHAKE MUCH!

Sam had passed through a harrowing experience. He had seen a ghost. "An' jes' come out of de cowshed," he explained, "an' Ah had a pail o' milk in mah hand. Den Ah hears a noise by de side of de road, an' de ghost rushes out!" "Did you shake with fright, Sam?" asked one of his dusky audience. "Ah don't know what Ah shook wid," said Sam. "Ah hain't sayin' for suttin' Ah shook at all. But when Ah got home Ah found all de milk gone, an' two pounds o' butter in de pail!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Geere, 27, Lowfield Road, Acton, W.3.

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



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,—Have you all heard about the "Schoolboys' Own Library"? It is great! The first two numbers are out on Friday, and they supply you with just what so many of them have been asking for, namely, long stories of the schools we know so well. The only advice possible to give is, get the "Schoolboys' Own Library." Gemites will be keenly interested in the grand long yarn of Tom Merry & Co., and they will be pleased to meet the Greyfriars favourites who figure in the other story.

"THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY."

Thousands of GEM readers have asked for a monthly story of St. Jim's. The new Library meets this widespread wish. The stories given will all be top-line—jolly, humorous, and dramatic narratives of the famous schools. St. Jim's has a good many rival establishments. Readers of the "Gem" have met, and been not end pleased to meet, characters from Greyfriars, Rookwood, St. Kit's, and other fine schools. There is now the glorious chance to get further news of all these favourites. "The Schoolboys'

Own Library" not merely meets a long-felt want for grand long yarns of St. Jim's, but it will do a lot to draw the various schools together. It is all one cheery family party, as it were. Make sure of Nos. 1 and 2. If you read them you will be fixed in your double riveted intention to see all the first-rate issues of the best school library ever dreamed of or hoped for by the keenest enthusiast.

"ROUGH ON LEVISON!"

By Martin Clifford.

Now, just a couple of words about the brilliant treat for next Wednesday's GEM. Crowds of suggestive points occur to me as I make this announcement. For one thing, our new long yarn of St. Jim's for the next issue is a Levison tale. It features that plucky youngster Frank, Ernest's loyal minor. Many chums have asked me about the Levisons. There was some sort of an idea getting round that Mr. Martin Clifford had been giving these favourites the cold shoulder. That was quite an error. I happen to know that the famous author has a very warm corner in his heart for Ernest,

Frank, and Miss Doris, but there are numerous claims on his attention. Anyhow, if there has been any shelving of the Levisons—a fact I cannot admit—such an omission is made good next week. The yarn will touch your hearts, and make you fairly wild with Carker & Co., those spoilsports who cause mischief and give Frank a bad time. The tale thrills with all the old St. Jim's enthusiasm. It gets there! Saying that, I need say no more. It is a story of peril, of fighting through, and Frank Levison swings out at the end right into the blaze of limelight as a hero.

A MUSICIANS' NUMBER!

An inordinately cheery and all-round smart supplement of the "St. Jim's News" can be looked for next week. Tom Merry and his staff are as eager about the "St. Jim's News" as possible. It goes against the grain with them, as with others, when this excellent feature gets itself crowded out. The next issue is just the most admirable thing imaginable. Music offers a big scope, and the chance is utilised in noble fashion. You will hear about the deeds of the foremost musicians of St. Jim's; and that is not all by long chalks. There are gay and melodious surprises in the coming number. It is a proper sparkler.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

Still going strong, all ready for the picnic season. Postcards, please, with the tattiest yarnlets you can find.

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

By Arthur S. Hardy.

Stevens, the arch rogue, is full of jealousy and hatred. The proceedings narrated in next week's instalment shed a new light on the character of the miscreant.

Your Editor.

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