

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS - WEEK NUMBER !

The GEM 2^D

LIBRARY

of
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

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1925.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.



THE "IMPOSSIBLE SCHOOLBOY" ARRIVES !

Septimus Ricketts, the new boy of the Fourth, at St. Jim's, starts well ! (Read the amazing school story—inside.)



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

THE OLD YEAR OUT.

I REALLY cannot let this number tail off the year 1925 without wishing you once more a Jolly Christmas, and, at the same time, thanking you all for your splendid support during these past twelve months. Gemites are a class unto themselves where loyalty and appreciation are concerned. That wonderful spirit of esprit de corps seems to run through you in an all-conquering wave. For sheer loyalty no Editor could martial a more formidable band of youthful enthusiasts than those who subscribe weekly to the GEM. I thank you all, once again. You have done your part well and loyally; new chums have been introduced to our circle, and, moreover have stayed in it, well satisfied with the consistent high quality of the contents of the GEM week in and week out. I, for my part, have honestly endeavoured to give you the best of programmes. Suggestions for this and that sort of story have flowed into this office in an unceasing stream. To each single one of these suggestions I have given full consideration, with the result that often they have been adopted. It's the fifty-fifty spirit that makes a weekly journal like ours a credit to everyone concerned. Between us, my loyal chums, we are going to do even greater things during the coming year. Our present high circulation is going to be doubled. With your help it can be done—it will be done! Meantime, we have to see the old year out. Good luck to every man jack of you! May you enjoy yourselves this Yuletide as you have never enjoyed yourselves before.

THE NAMBY-PAMBY TREATMENT.

I have received a jolly interesting letter from a grown-up reader whose three sons all read with great enthusiasm their copy of the GEM every week. My correspondent confesses—not to his shame as he indeed remarks—to reading still, despite his age, the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. That statement is, in itself, a tribute to our stories. Mr. — goes on to say that no parent could do better than to bring up his boys on the same lines as Mr. Martin Clifford has drawn Tom Merry & Co. My correspondent is a great believer in the theory that a youngster should be "allowed" to take his hard knocks as they come along, and rather deplures the growing tendency nowadays for parents to "molly-coddle" their children. I think my correspondent is right! Hard knocks are the real lessons of life, and the smiling way we take them tends to bring out the best in us. After all, a boy, if he is a real boy, thrives on hard knocks and keeps smiling. Cotton wool treatment never made this glorious Empire of ours—cotton-wool treatment will never hold it for us. Take your knocks smilingly in your youth, my chums, and the future will hold less terror for you than for the fellow who is unprepared.

NEXT WEEK'S PROGRAMME!

"GRUNDY, THE VENTRILOQUIST!"
By Martin Clifford.

A topping complete story of Tom Merry & Co., with George Alfred Grundy in the limelight.

"NEW YEAR" NUMBER!

Tom Merry & Co. have given us a special issue of the "St. Jim's News," devoted to the New Year. It's top-hole!

"A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!"

There will be another grand instalment of this footer yarn. Don't miss it!

AUBREY RACKE!

He is the subject of the St. Jim's Rhymester's poem next week. Cheerio, chums—Happy Christmas,

YOUR EDITOR.

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You Know A Good Joke? Let's Hear it, Chum.

Delicious Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes
Awarded for Interesting Pars.

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

TUCK FOR STIRLING. An Angry Retort!

"Waiter!" From the table by the window the voice of an elderly gentleman rose in accents wrathful. "Waiter!" "Yes, sir?" replied the much harassed one, hastening forward. The elderly gentleman, overcome by emotion, made several vain efforts to articulate. "Take this egg away!" he roared. "Take it away!" "Yes, sir," said the waiter obligingly, as he glanced wistfully at the offending article. "And—and what shall I do with it, sir?" "Do with it!" The outraged customer rose menacingly from his chair. "Do with it?" he bellowed fiercely. "Why, wring its neck!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Master James Spark, Gorselea, Burnhead Road, Larbert, Stirlingshire.

THAT SILENCED HIM!

His prowess on the football field was the theme of young Swoffleton's discourse at the club. What he had done and how he had done it was explained and lauded till everyone within hearing distance was heartily tired of the subject. "Then in the match with Praddehamlot," continued the boaster, "I did rather a neat thing." Stifed groans greeted the beginning of the new tale, and one listener felt he had reached the limit. "The pass came over from the centre," declared Swoffleton, "and I dashed down the left wing shouting—" "Chocolate, twopence a bar!" interrupted the fed-up listener.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Alan Crosbie, 10, Fenwick Street, Clifton Hill, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

THE LIMIT!

A racing motorist was taking his friend for a run in his high-powered car. They were rushing through the country with the speedometer hovering near the seventy mark, when the driver made an impatient ejaculation and turned to his pallid friend. "I shall have to pull up, old chap," he said. "Cylinder's knocking. Hear it?" "That's not the cylinder," stammered the friend; "that—that's my knees!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Frank Bell, 29, Leicester Street, Sheffield.

POINTS OF VIEW!

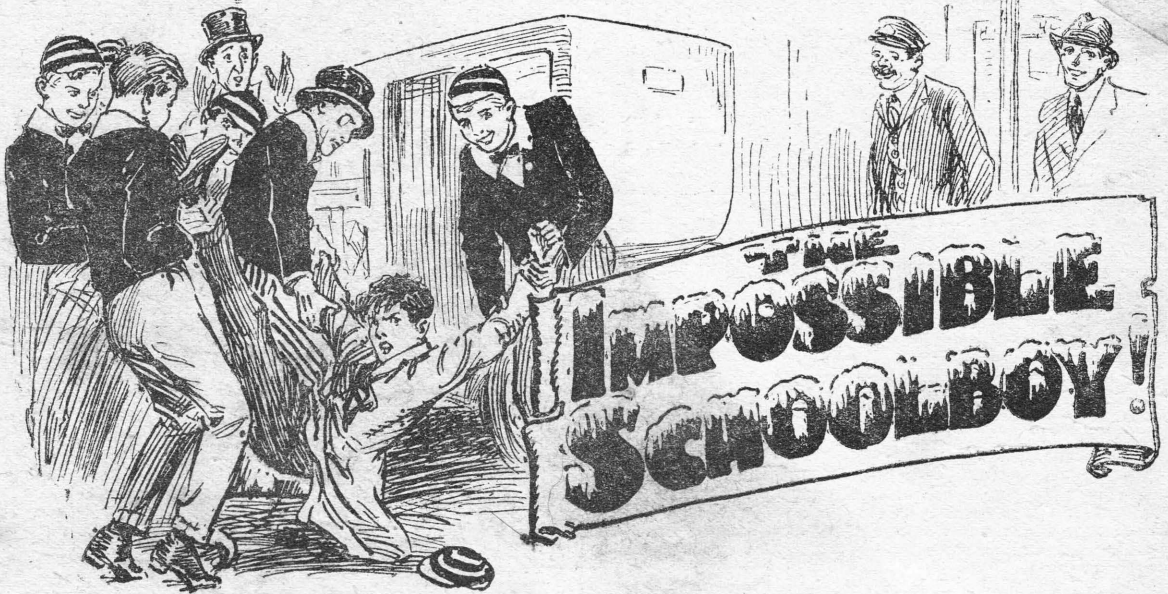
In a railway carriage a youth had disturbed the other passengers by loud and foolish remarks during the greater part of the journey. As the train passed a well-known lunatic asylum, he remarked: "I often think how nice the asylum looks from the railway." "Some day," growled an old gentleman, "you will think how nice the railway looks from the asylum!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Charles Gollodge, 52, Bartlett Street, Caerphilly, near Cardiff, Glam.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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

A MODERN OLIVER TWIST! When Septimus Ricketts is threatened with a severe caning he simply smiles and says he "doesn't mind." The caning over, he coolly asks for some more of the same medicine. Full well does he earn the nickname of—



A New, Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, introducing an amazing new boy in the person of Septimus Ricketts.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. The New Boy!

WICKETTS!"

"Eh?"

"Wicketts!" repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

He spoke in a very thoughtful tone, and there was a thoughtful frown upon his aristocratic visage. The Terrible Three and Blake, who were standing on the School House steps with him, turned round in surprise.

"Come again, Gussy," said Monty Lowther affably. "I don't catch your drift."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Did you say wicketts just now, Gussy?" inquired Blake.

"No, dear boy. I said Wicketts."

"Oh, crumb!"

Tom Merry tapped his forehead significantly.

"Gussy's gone off his onion at last!" he said in a sorrowful tone. "It can't be sunstroke, because we're still in winter. It's that kink in Gussy's upper story we've often noticed before. I've expected it, and now it's come. Gussy's off his dot!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye and regarded the captain of the Shell with a wrathful look.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard your wemarks as most oppwobious, and unless they are withdwawn I shall considah it my painful dutay to give you a feahful thwashin'!" he said.

The Terrible Three backed away in mock alarm.

"Help!" said Manners. "Gussy's getting violent! Hold him, Blake! Don't let him do us in!"

"Bai Jove! You uttah asses—"

"Has he got a knife?" said Monty Lowther anxiously. "Madmen usually carry knives, or revolvers. I sha'n't feel safe until Gussy has been put under restraint!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his nose.

"I wegard you as a set of fwabjous chumps!" he exclaimed. "I wefuse to be put undah westwaint! You know vevy well that I am not off my wockah—"

"Then what were you burbling about wicketts for?" demanded Blake.

"I wasn't burblin'— I—I mean, I made no wemark whatevah concernin' wicketts!" replied the swell of the Fourth, with a good deal of hauteur. "I merely said Wicketts—"

"There he goes again!" exclaimed Lowther. "This is getting serious, you chaps. I really think we ought to get Gussy a strait-jacket!"

"Bai Jove! You fwightful fatheads! Wicketts!"

"Poor old Gussy! He's right out of his depth!" said Tom Merry. "He's gassing about wicketts in the height of the footer season! His last season's batting average must have been playing on his noddle and sent him potty. Perhaps he won't get violent, after all, if we humour him."

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs, and a warlike gleam entered his eyes.

"Bai Jove! As you wefuse to stop wottin', Tom Mewwy, I will administrah that feahful thwashin'—"

"Spare me, Gussy!" cried Tom. "Think of my sorrowing relatives—"

"Weally, you boundah—"

"Say on, Gussy! Let's talk about wicketts, old chap. Any old thing!"

"You don't wish to talk about wicketts, you ass!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I'm afraid you fellows misapprehend me. The subject of my wemarks has nothin' to do with wickett. Wicketts is the name of someone."

"Oh! So you know a chap named Wicketts!" said Blake.

"Not exactly, deah boy. Wicketts is the name of the new kid. Twimble has informed me that there's a new kid comin' into the Fourth this aftahnoon, and his name is Wicketts."

"First I've heard of a new kid," said Blake. "It's funny how Trimble manages to nose out these things, isn't it?"

"Jolly rummy name, too," remarked Lowther. "The kid's bound to get chipped, with a name like Wicketts. But why are you so mighty interested in the new merchant, Gussy?"

"I am not exactly intewested, but I have heard the name before," said D'Arcy. "I think I have heard Cousin Ethel speak about some friends of hers named Wicketts. They are supposed to be fwightfully wick—at least, young Wicketts is. He was left a large sum of money by some distant relative, and he's able to afford just what he likes. He lives with his aunt, who is a friend of Cousin Ethel's, and has a pwivate tutah—"

"Fathead!" hooted Blake. "That isn't Wicketts. It's Ricketts! We've heard all about this rich kid, Ricketts."

"Yaas. I said Wicketts."

"Ricketts, you ass!"

"Yaas, Wicketts," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway cease that wibald mewwiment, you fwabjous duffahs!" said the swell loftily. "I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at. As I was sayin', this young Wicketts whom

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Cousin Ethel has often talked about, may be the new kid who is comin' to St. Jim's to-day. Twimble says he has nevah been to a public school before, and is wollin' in money. I should wegard it as extwemely likely that it is the same Wicketts."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry. "Perhaps you're right, Gussy. But I don't see that it makes much difference. The fact of a new kid being immensely well off doesn't cut any ice with us. As a matter of fact, I prefer the ordinary common or garden type of new boy. Chaps who are rolling in filthy lucre usually put on a frightful lot of side."

"Yaas; but I don't think young Wicketts is inclined to do that, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "But twom what I have heard of him, he has one or two peculiar twaits."

"Oh, well, blow the new boy!" said Blake. "The question is, what are we going to do with ourselves this afternoon? It's a half-holiday, and footer's off, and—"

"Master D'Arcy and Master Merry!"

The voice of Toby, the school page, intervened.

Toby appeared in the doorway of the School House, and the juniors looked up anxiously.

"Hallo!" said Tom. "What's the row?"

"I don't know, Master Merry," said Toby, with a grin. "The 'Ead wants to see you and Master D'Arcy in his study."

"Bai Jove!"

"All serene, Toby."

Greatly wondering, Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus made their way up to Dr. Holmes' study.

The Head was seated at his desk when they entered. There were no thunderclouds on his brow, so they breathed again. A summons to the Head's study so often meant a wiggling!

"Ah! I am glad you have not already gone out, boys," said Dr. Holmes. "As a matter of fact, I want to ask whether you would perform a slight service for me this afternoon."

"We shall be pleased to do anything we are able, sir," replied Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Head smiled kindly.

"A new boy is being admitted into the Fourth Form, and he arrives at Rylcombe by the three-fifteen train this afternoon. The boy's name is Septimus Ricketts, and I think that probably you lads may have heard of him. I understand that Miss Adeline Ricketts, his aunt and guardian, is a close friend of Miss Cleveland."

"Yaas, I have heard cousin Ethel speak of the Wicketts, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "So young Wicketts is comin' heah?"

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Yes. That is precisely the reason why I wished to speak to you lads," he said. "Ricketts, apparently, is somewhat—er—different in many respects from the usual type of new boy who comes to St. Jim's. In the first place, he has never been to school before, but has received his education from a private tutor employed by his aunt. Consequently, school life will come as an entirely new experience to him; he will undoubtedly feel strange, and will not at first find it easy to adapt himself to his fresh surroundings. It will not, perhaps, be an entirely pleasant change for a lad who is being sent to a public school for the first time, and difficulties are bound to beset his path. There will be innumerable obstacles for him to overcome, and he will need the friendship of some trustworthy and reliable lads to assist him in getting used to his new life and customs. That is why I sent for you, Merry and D'Arcy."

"Oh!"

"Miss Ricketts, in her last letter to me, mentioned that she would especially like her nephew to gain the friendship of D'Arcy, and, as the lad will be coming into the Fourth Form, I thought it best to acquaint you with the facts, D'Arcy, so that perhaps you would take an interest in him." Arthur Augustus looked very pleased.

"Yaas, wathah!" he said. "I will wegard it as my dutay to place young Wicketts undah my pwotection, sir."

The Head gave a smile.

"Thank you, D'Arcy," he said. "And you, too, Merry? As captain of the Lower School here, I should like you to give an eye to the new boy, and help him."

"I shall be pleased to do what I can for him, sir," replied Tom.

"I know I can rely on you, Merry. I mention this matter to you specially because I have been told that Ricketts may not at first pull well with the other juniors. The lad is very wealthy, and as a consequence has had a somewhat pampered upbringing. He has been accustomed to having all he desired, and to doing practically everything that suited his own whims.

"That, of course, is most deplorable, and tends to make a boy headstrong, foolish, and self-willed. It may be that Ricketts will expect to be treated with the same indulgence

at St. Jim's as he received at home, and if so will not at first find it easy to conform to the ordinary school discipline. I do not wish the lad to feel unhappy or uncomfortable, and I am sure you will be able to help him considerably to surmount any troubles he may meet with, Merry."

"I will do my best, sir," said Tom quietly.

The Head drummed on the desk with his fingers.

"As I informed you just now, my lads, Ricketts will be arriving by the three-fifteen train at Rylcombe. Perhaps, if you have no other particular arrangements, you would be so good as to meet Ricketts at the station and show him the way here?"

Tom Merry grinned slightly.

He had guessed what was coming, and, of course, he did not mind, although as a rule new boys were left to fend for themselves on their arrival—it did them good.

"Very well, sir," he said. "We shall be pleased to meet the train and bring Ricketts here."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am extremely obliged, my lads," said the Head kindly. "I trust that you and Ricketts will get on well together here and become firm friends."

Tom Merry and Gussy left the Head's study, and Dr. Holmes went on with his writing, looking greatly relieved.

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble!

"WELL, I'm jiggered!"

Jack Blake made that statement.

Tom Merry and Gussy had just told him and the others of their interview with the Head. Blake did not look exactly pleased—and neither did Manners or Lowther, for that matter.

"That's the limit!" said Monty Lowther. "We've got to spend the giddy afternoon looking after a new boy. Oh, crumbs!"

Tom Merry laughed good-naturedly.

"You chaps needn't come unless you like," he said. "You can mosey off and enjoy yourselves some other way. The Head asked Gussy and me to go down and meet young Ricketts, and we couldn't very well refuse."

"Wathah not, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "The Head looked a little wowwied ovah the mattah, and the least we could do was to welieve him of the wowwy."

Blake snorted.

"Fancy the Head being worried over a mere new boy!" he said. "New kids are jolly small potatoes, and aren't worth bothering about. Let 'em rough it—that's what I say!"

"Yes; but this Ricketts merchant is a bit of a fledgling, by all accounts," said Tom Merry with a smile. "It's his first experience of school life, you see, and so Gussy and I are going to take him under our wings."

"Oh, bosh!" said Blake peevishly. "Ricketts deserves to be bumped for giving us all this trouble! We'll go down to the station with you, of course, as we're all in the firm."

"All serene."

Digby strolled up just then with Herries, who had been busy feeding Towser in the stables. When told of the news, they agreed with Blake that the new boy deserved a bumping for giving them all this trouble. But for all that, they elected to go with the others to the station.

The chums of the School House set out shortly afterwards and made their way down to Rylcombe. Arriving at the station in good time, they sauntered on to the platform to await the coming of the three-fifteen.

The train, as usual, was late, and it was past three-thirty when it came rumbling into the little country station.

"Well, here it is at last!" said Blake, as the train drew to a halt at the platform. "Now for Ricketts!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked up and down the platform expectantly, but no schoolboy descended from the train. A number of people alighted at Rylcombe, but of Septimus Ricketts there was no sign.

"H'm! That's jolly queer!" said Tom Merry, knitting his brows. "Where on earth can the new kid be? If the silly young ass has missed the train, we can't be expected to hang about here all the afternoon on the offence of his turning up later. We— Oh, my hat! Look at this merchant!"

A strange individual had just struggled out of a first-class compartment of the train. He carried two large portmanteaux, which apparently were very heavy, and when at last he reached the platform and dumped them down he almost fell on top of them.

Tom Merry & Co. regarded him with no little amusement, for he presented a really funny appearance.

He was a worried-looking little man, with very thin legs that were slightly bandy. He wore a pair of very tight-fitting trousers, and a waistcoat and bob-tailed coat that were obviously too large for him. But it was the rest of his appearance that amused Tom Merry & Co.



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The little man had evidently been in a scrap of some description, for his clothing was rumpled badly and showed numerous smears of dust and foot-marks; his high-necked collar was ripped from its stud and hung loose, whilst his sombre black necktie dangled ungracefully over his left shoulder. His rather thin, solemn-looking face was also very dusty, and the top-hat that he wore had been battered so much that it came very close to resembling a concertina in shape.

The dusty little man sank down upon one of the trunks and mopped at his perspiring brow with a handkerchief. Then, seeing Tom Merry & Co. grinning at him, he jumped up suddenly and hastened towards them.

"Ah! Good-afternoon, my young friends!" he said, in a rather high-pitched voice. "You—ha!—are from St. Jim's?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom Merry wonderingly.

"Have you—ha!—seen Master Ricketts?" asked the little gentleman in an anxious tone. "Your new school-fellow, you know."

"No, sir; we haven't seen him," replied Tom Merry in wonder. "As a matter of fact, we are looking for him. We came from St. Jim's to meet him, as he was expected by this train."

The bandy little gentleman raised his hands, which were encased in a pair of black cotton gloves, and gave a deep groan.

"Ah, my young friends, Master Septimus is not here. He has decamped! I am Mr. Noggs, his tutor, and I was to have accompanied him to St. Jim's this afternoon. Master Septimus, although he did not wish to travel by railway, was quite docile at first, and he set out with me on this train. But, oh, my dear young friends, Master Septimus is a most erratic youth! The train was too slow for him, and, despite all my efforts to detain him, he broke out at Abbotsford and ran away."

Mr. Noggs, pushing back his battered topper, felt a bump that was rising on his bald head, and he gave another groan—deeper than before.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at Mr. Noggs and at each other, and tried hard to suppress their chuckles. He was a pathetic, but extremely comical character.

"You see this bump?" said Mr. Noggs, blinking sorrowfully at the St. Jim's juniors. "You perceive the condition of my hat and the dusty state of my attire? You may wonder, my dear young friends, how it happened? Ah! Master Septimus is an erratic youth—a most erratic youth. When I remonstrated with him in the train at Abbotsford, and attempted to stop him from leaving, he struck my top-hat with such a violent impact that it went over my eyes, but as I still clung to him, he tripped me up and, after an affray

of wrestling on the carriage floor, he rolled me under the seat, where I became jammed, and left me there."

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

Mr. Noggs gave a moan, and drew a deep breath.

"Ah, my dear young friends, this is no laughing matter," he said sadly. "I have suffered considerable physical and mental discomfort as a result of Master Septimus' prank. I do not know where he is. As I said before, he is a most erratic youth. So I deemed it best to proceed here, and acquaint Dr. Holmes with the facts."

"Bai Jove! What an extraordinary affair!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Surely, Mr. Noggs, it would have been possible to trace young Wicketts? Without a ticket, he would find it extremely difficult to leave Abbotsford—"

"Ah, my young friend, you do not know Master Septimus!" groaned Mr. Noggs. "There are no obstacles or difficulties that he cannot surmount. If he desires to do a thing, he does it, without counting the cost or heeding the consequences. He is very self-willed and impetuous, and nothing can conquer his spirit. I know, for I have been his tutor for five years. Ah, when I look back I shudder, my young friends, and wonder how I have managed to survive it! Five years ago I was blessed with a head of hair; but now, alas, I am bereft of all hirsute adornments—I am bald! What has precipitated my baldness, you may ask? Who was responsible for my falling locks? Who, but Master Septimus?"

Mr. Noggs gave another moan and lifted up his eyes in an expression of ineffable sorrow.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged grins.

"My word!" murmured Blake, in an undertone. "This new kid, Ricketts, is a bit of a coughdrop, by all accounts!"

"Yes, rather!"

Mr. Noggs adjusted his collar round his neck and kept it in position by tying his necktie round it very tight—so tight, indeed, that it almost strangled him. Then he bent down to pick up the portmanteaux, and immediately his collar flew backward again.

Mr. Noggs gave a moan.

"Well, this about beats the band!" grinned Tom Merry. "That kid Ricketts must have given poor old Noggs a high old time! Let's take pity on him, and help him with the luggage."

Tom Merry and Blake stepped forward and gallantly shouldered a portmanteau each. They led the way off the platform, and Mr. Noggs trotted after them with his battered topper in his hand and his collar bobbing up and down behind him.

In this manner they left Rylcombe Station, with D'Arcy, Lowther, Manners, Herries, and Digby following them, emitting sundry chuckles.

"We'd better get the cab to take you to St. Jim's, sir," said Tom Merry. "I— Oh, look out, Blake!"

As they were standing in the station yard, a large, hand-

some limousine came sweeping in from the High Street. It drove into the yard at a reckless speed, and Tom Merry and Blake, who were standing there with the portmanteaux on their shoulders, had to leap wildly out of the way to avoid being run down.

Blake, indeed, quite lost his balance, and the portmanteau he was carrying toppled off his shoulder as he fell. There was a fiendish yell from Mr. Noggs as the heavy case dropped on one of his feet.

"Yaroooooogh! Yah! My goodness! Ow-wow-wow!" "Yowp!" said Blake, and he struggled up. "So sorry, sir—"

Mr. Noggs was executing a species of Hottentot war-dance on one leg, clapping the other one in both hands. Tom Merry & Co. glared round wrathfully towards the limousine, which had drawn up outside the station vestibule.

They were quite taken aback to see a young and rather small schoolboy grinning at them over the steering-wheel.

"You—you fatheaded little idiot!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly. "You might have run us all over, driving into the yard like that! You— Why, my only sainted aunt!"

Tom broke off in astonishment on seeing that the new boy was wearing a St. Jim's school cap. Blake and the others noticed it, too, and they blinked quite dazedly at the new arrival.

That youth returned their glances with a cool, mocking grin.

The juniors jumped when the boy in the car, contorting his features, made a horrible face at them!

"Well?" he said at length. "I hope you've had a good look at me. Do you think you'd know me again if you saw me?"

Jack Blake drew a deep breath. "You—you cheeky young bounder!" he exclaimed. "Who the merry thump are you, anyway?"

No doubt existed, next minute, as to the identity of the boy in the limousine, for Mr. Noggs, stopping in the midst of his weird dance, set his injured foot to the ground and gave vent to a loud gasp.

"Master Septimus! Then you have arrived, after all!"

The boy grinned broadly.

"Yes, Noggy, here I am!" he said, in a very pert and possessed manner. "I gave you the slip beautifully at Abbotsford, didn't I? That rotten train was too jolly slow for my liking, so I hired this car to drive me to St. Jim's. I managed to tip the driver out somewhere down the road, and came on for a joy-ride on my own. Gee! It's a long time since I had a chance to drive a car. Let me see, it was six months ago when I smashed up Aunt Adeline's two-seater, wasn't it, Noggs? Well, you look a pretty fine specimen, I must say! Look at your clothes! I'm ashamed of you, Noggs! Don't you dare come to St. Jim's with me like that!"

Mr. Noggs gave a moan.

Tom Merry & Co. blinked at the boy in the limousine.

Then this was Septimus Ricketts, the new boy for the Fourth!

They could not help staring at him. The manner of his arrival at Rylcombe, driving a tremendous car, was alone sufficient to justify them in staring at him.

Septimus Ricketts returned their stares with a series of strange grimaces. Then he stood up in the car and, taking off his cap, he bowed with mock solemnity.

Tom Merry & Co. were able to take good stock of him.

Septimus Ricketts was short and sparely built—quite a slip of a boy, in fact. He had a very peculiar cast of features—they were sharp and well chiselled, but they could not have been called good-looking, by any means. His eyes were large and blue, and they twinkled with a light in which was mirrored a spirit that was unmistakably fiery, dominant, and inflexible. He had a broad, high forehead, and his raven black hair was so long that it fell over his face in a miniature cascade as he bowed.

Straightening up, he tossed back his hair and treated Tom Merry & Co. to another of those peculiar, cool grins of his.

"Good-afternoon, you old fogies!" he said calmly. "You are from St. Jim's, I suppose? I see you have already made the acquaintance of Noggy."

"Master Septimus!" exclaimed Mr. Noggs, raising his cotton-gloved hands in a gesture of horror and remonstrance.

"Oh, don't you start now, Noggy!" said the new boy, with an air of careless patronage—mixed, perhaps, with a trace of insolence. "I had quite enough of your jaw on the train. I thought I'd look in here to see whether you had arrived. You're such an ass, Noggy, and are quite liable to get lost, you know."

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged wondering glances.

"My word!" said Herries. "Fancy a kid talking to his tutor like that! I should expect to get scragged!"

"Rather!"

"Bai Jove, I weward that young boundah's behaviour as

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most unseemly, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye and surveying the new boy severely. "I say, Wicketts, I twust you will allow me, as a fellow of tact and judgment, to point out that—"

"Oh, hallo!" said young Ricketts, turning towards Gussy and imitating that aristocratic youth's attitude. This consisted of raising an imaginary monocle to his eye, screwing up his face as though to adjust that monocle, and regarding Gussy very fixedly—not to say insolently. "Is that you, Marmaduke—I mean, Arthur? How-de-do, deah boy? I think I know your people, don'cherknow! You're D'Arcy, aren't you? I can tell it fwom that fwightfully jolly old tootle of yours, you know!"

"Bai—bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in a faint voice.

Tom Merry & Co. were as taken aback as Gussy.

The cool, unvarnished nerve of the new boy quite took their breath away. They could only stand and stare for several minutes.

"I'm beastly awfully glad to see you, you priceless old thing!" went on Septimus Ricketts, making a horrible face at Gussy.

The swell of the Fourth looked dazedly at the speaker. He began to wonder whether he had heard aright.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "Pwiceless old thing! I—I weally—"

"The cheeky little rotter!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "He's trying to take the Mike out of you, Gussy!"

"Gweat Scott! I have been thwown into a feahful fluttah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "Wicketts, I weward your conduct as most wude and uncalled-for—"

"Bow-wow!" said the new boy, with consummate cheerfulness.

Gussy gave him a freezing look through his monocle. That look might have withered any ordinary person, but it did not seem to have the slightest effect upon Septimus Ricketts.

"Wicketts, this is weally intolewable!" said D'Arcy severely. "I must wewest you to bear in mind that you have no wight to—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Septimus Ricketts.

Gussy's eyeglass glimmered with wrath.

"I wewuse to wing off! I—I mean I wewuse to be addressed in that diswespwctful mannah, Wicketts! I weward you as a cheeky young boundah, bai Jove! I came down heah, Wicketts, with the most fwriendly intentions—in fact, I was pwepahed to put you entially undah my pwotwction—"

"Me—under your protection!" cried the new boy. "Oh, my hat! That's rich! Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Weally, Wicketts, I fail to see any cause whatevah for wibald laughtah!" he said heatedly.

"Go hon! Well, I can, you wall-eyed fathead! Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus bristled with anger at that. The light of battle gleamed in his eyes, and he advanced towards the limousine, his cuffs pushed back in a businesslike manner.

"Wicketts, you have had the fwightful impertinence to make fun of me!" he began.

"Well, who could be off it?" retorted Ricketts. "Especially when you talk about putting a fellow under your protection! Don't you think you need protecting yourself, D'Arcy? Take him home and treat him kindly, somebody!"

"Bai Jove! I wewuse to tolewate this any longah!" cried Arthur Augustus. "Wicketts, you wottah, it is not customaw for me to stwike new boys, but undah the cires I considah it my painful dutay to give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"Rats!" said the new boy defiantly. "Come up here and try it, you old tailor's dummy!"

"Tailor's dummy! Oh, bai Jove! Put up your fists, you howwid boundah!"

Arthur Augustus could stand no more. The blood of all the D'Arcys was boiling in his veins. He made a rush at the limousine, mounted the footboard, and dragged open the door.

Septimus Ricketts of the Fourth did not seem in the least perturbed by this sally. He regarded Gussy with that peculiar, mocking smile of his, and as the swell stepped forward towards him he gave him a sudden shove in the chest. Arthur Augustus was not expecting that, and he went staggering backwards through the car doorway.

"Yawooooogh!" he roared.

Septimus Ricketts gave Gussy's topper a swipe as he fell, and both the swell and his topper landed simultaneously on the cold, hard cobblestones of the station-yard.

Bump!

"Gwoooooogh! Yah! Oh deah! Yowp!"

Gussy sprawled there in a most ungraceful attitude, and the new boy stood in the car doorway, grinning down at him.

"Now, you rotters!" panted the new boy. "Take that!"
 "That" was a terrific jab with the paint brush—and Tom Merry and Herries took it between them on their faces.
 "Yarooooh!" roared Tom Merry. "Oooogh! Gerrugh!"
 gurgled Herries. (See Chapter 3.)



Then he regarded Tom Merry & Co. with a cool, defiant stare.

"Any more of you old frumps care to give me a fearful thrashing?" he asked. "I'm willing to take anything you like to give me, you know."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"The cheeky young monkey!" he exclaimed. "I'm blessed if I ever ran across a kid with such nerve!"

"Gwoogh! Oh cwumbs! Ow-wow!" gasped Arthur Augustus, struggling to his feet and groping for his monocle and topper. "Where is that wottah Wicketts? I am hurt, and my clobbah is considerably wumped! I am goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Here, let's all take a hand!" exclaimed Blake. "This Ricketts merchant is too jolly cheeky for a new kid! He wants some of the sauce and bounce knocked out of him! We'll give him a jolly good bumping!"

"Rather!"

Tom Merry & Co. surged forward to the car, with determined looks on their faces. Mr. Nogs jumped away and stood in the background, moaning and wringing his cotton-gloved hands. As for Septimus Ricketts, he stood defiantly in the car doorway, his large eyes glittering and his fists clenched and raised, ready to defend himself.

"Come on, then!" he said between his teeth. "Bump me if you can! Come on!"

CHAPTER 3.

Catching a Tartar!

TOM MERRY & CO. needed no bidding. They came on!

They had been roused to wrath by the new boy's nerve and insolence. They admired his pluck, but at the same time felt it incumbent upon them to give him a bumping. He needed a lesson badly, and Tom Merry thought that Ricketts might as well have it now as to stand the racket when he got to St. Jim's.

Certain it was that if he flaunted such "cheek" and audacity at the school he would find himself in hot water at once. New boys were expected to be respectful and unassuming, and a boy who was brazenly insolent, and

"made faces" on the least provocation, was liable to "get it in the neck" severely.

"Bump him!" roared Herries. "We'll teach him to sauce us and make faces—the perky little rotter! Ow!"

Herries broke off as an extremely hard fist, with a force behind it that seemed to come from a battering-ram, struck him square on the jaw. He gave a yell and sprawled backward into Monty Lowther's arms.

Biff! Thud! Wallop!

Septimus Ricketts was hitting out to right and left, and the blows he delivered were most telling, to judge by the roars of anguish that arose from the recipients.

"Ow-wow!" moaned Blake, dabbing at his nose, which had received a nasty jab from the new boy's knuckles. "He's like a young tiger! Yow! Scrag him!"

Crash!

Tom Merry managed at last to tear the door open, and the juniors piled into the front of the car. Ricketts stepped back, fighting furiously.

His strength, for one so small, was amazing, and the manner in which he sprang about, dodging the hands that were outstretched to grab him, and ramming home blows here and there, was a revelation.

"Hold him!" panted Blake. "Don't let the little rotter get out the other side!"

Septimus Ricketts squirmed round the steering-wheel, dragged open the other door, and was about to scramble through it, when Manners and Tom Merry grabbed his legs.

The new boy came over with a crash and a roar, and the avengers piled on top of him.

Even then Ricketts would not give in. He fought and struggled with the ferocity and gameness of a tiger, and Tom Merry & Co. found it a hard job to hold him. He wriggled like an eel in the juniors' hands.

"My word! He's a proper little Tartar, isn't he?" gasped Tom Merry. "But we've got to bump him for his cheek!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Ricketts. "I won't be bumped! You won't knock any of the cheek out of me, you rotters! Yoooop! Oh crumbs! I shall cheek you all the more, so there!"

"Oh, will you?" said Blake grimly. "We'll see about

that, young Ricketts! Yank him down to the ground, you chaps!"

"Yaroooocogh!" roared the new boy.

He was a prisoner now, and Tom Merry & Co. were more than ever determined to give him his gruel.

He struggled and kicked wildly, but all to no purpose. He was held in many hands, and his wriggling form rose and fell.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yoooop! Yah! Leggo! Wow! Stoppit! Rescue, Noggs! Yah-ooogh!"

Mr. Noggs forced forward, his hands upraised in horror.

"My dear young friends!" he cried. "Pray—pray desist! You are hurting Master Septimus—"

"That's just what we intend to do!" said Blake grimly. "It seems to me that a little of this sort of thing would have done him good long ago. He's got to learn that he can't do and say just as he likes to us; those tricks don't work at St. Jim's! Keep off the grass, Mr. Noggs!"

"Oh, my goodness gracious!" moaned Mr. Noggs.

The bumping operation was proceeded with, and the yells of Septimus Ricketts rose crescendo.

Quite a crowd of people gathered round in the station-yard to look on and laugh. Schoolboy rags were quite a common occurrence in Rylcombe, and no one interfered.

"There!" said Tom Merry at length. "Give him another one for luck, and that will be enough, I think."

Bump!

"Yooooooop!"

The juniors let go of their victim and stood back.

Septimus Ricketts reclined on the cobblestones only for the briefest space. All the gameness and energy of any ordinary boy would have been completely knocked out by such a severe bumping, but not so with Septimus Ricketts!

No sooner had Tom Merry & Co. stood back than he was on his feet, his fists clenched and his eyes gleaming with undaunted spirit. His long hair hung over his face in an untidy mass, and his clothes were smothered with dust; but he presented a grim and defiant little figure as he stood there facing the raggers.

"I'll pay you out, you rotters!" he said passionately. "I've never been treated like that before, and I won't stand it!"

"It's a great pity, then, that you haven't been treated like it before!" retorted Tom Merry. "I suppose you've been allowed to keep on with your bounce and sauce without getting licked for it—eh? You'll find things a little different at St. Jim's, old scout!"

Septimus Ricketts did not reply to that.

His gleaming eyes, looking round, had caught sight of a pail of paint, a long brush, and a bag of sand behind him. Decorating operations were in progress on the station approach. And boards and trestles fairly littered the place. The workmen had left the spot to go into the station, leaving the paint, the long-handled brush, and the sand where they had been working.

Quick as lightning, the new boy wheeled round and seized the brush out of the pail. Then, before Tom Merry & Co. realised exactly what he was doing, he attacked them, brandishing the loaded brush before him.

"Now, you rotters!" he panted. "Take that!"

"That" was a terrific jab with the brush—and Tom Merry and Herries took it between them, on their faces. Each caught one end of that wide brush on his nose, and a liberal amount of paint bestowed on their nasal organs. The two juniors began to splutter and sneeze wildly.

"Yaroooocogh!"

"Oogh! Gerrugh!"

"Look out!" shrieked Blake. "He's going to daub the lot of us with that filthy stuff!"

That undoubtedly was the new boy's intention—and he proceeded to carry out his intention with grim determination.

He dipped the brush in the black paint again, and then charged at Tom Merry & Co., jabbing to right and left with his paint-soaked weapon.

No shimmering lance nor flaming sword could have been more devastating in effect. Tom Merry & Co. scattered before Septimus Ricketts, yelling with horror and consternation, with the brush wreaking havoc in their midst.

Gussy's topper again went flying, and paint bespattered his beautifully brushed hair. Then, as he opened wide his mouth to yell his protest, the brush came up again, and poor Gussy's yell trailed off into a weird, choking gurgle.

"Yerrroooooogh!"

The Terrible Three and Blake, Herries, and Digby tried to make a concerted rush at the wielder of the brush, but Septimus Ricketts, hastily redipping the business end of that weapon in the paint, swept it round ruthlessly to the attack.

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A few wide swoops with that brush were sufficient to retard the attackers. With the black, sticky, clammy stuff smothering their faces and clinging to their clothes, Tom Merry & Co. fell back in confusion, uttering a chorus of dismal yells.

"Ooooooh! Yah! Wow! This is awful!" gurgled Blake. "The little—gerrooocoh—rotter!" spluttered Monty Lother, whose face resembled that of a very black Christy minstrel. "I—I'll scrag him! Yow! Lemme get at him—yaroooocogh!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the villagers of Rylcombe, who had gathered in a large crowd to watch the fun.

Septimus Ricketts glared round, his eyes still gleaming determinedly. There was not much paint left now, most of it having been transferred to the persons of Tom Merry & Co., so he laid down the brush and picked up the bag of sand.

"Oh, jeminy! Stop him!" howled Digby. "He's going to slop that sand over us—Yerooooooh!"

The sand was flung over the juniors like some vast, overwhelming torrent. They staggered back, spluttering, sneezing, and yelling, whilst the avalanche of sand enveloped them.

When the air had cleared, and Tom Merry & Co. again appeared to view, a loud, hilarious roar of laughter went up from the onlookers.

The appearance of those seven hapless juniors was ludicrous in the extreme! Nothing like them had ever been seen before in Rylcombe, or anywhere else on earth.

The sand, clinging lovingly to the paint on their faces and persons, imparted unto them an aspect that was indescribably funny. They were in a parlous state indeed!

They stood there, gouging sand and paint out of their eyes and ears and mouths, looking for all the world like some fearful phantoms from a nightmare, whilst the onlookers gazed at them and shrieked.

"Yooooooogh—Ow!" choked Tom Merry, blinking round dazedly.

"Gerrroooooogh! Yah! Owch!" spluttered Blake.

"Gwoogh! Yow! Oh deah!" gurgled Arthur Augustus, groping for his monocle and jamming it into his eye.

That monocle, alas! stuck there only too well, but it could not be seen through, for it was smeared with paint, and there was sand adhering to it!

The hapless St. Jim's juniors, in fact, were so overwhelmed at the awfulness of the calamity that they could only stand in the midst of the sand and blink and gasp and splutter.

"Well, that's given you something to get on with, at any rate!" chuckled Septimus Ricketts, on whom the recent bumping did not seem to have had the slightest effect. "You can go back to St. Jim's now, you old freaks, and tell the rest of the freaks how it happened. I'm going for a ride now, so don't expect me at the school just yet. So—long!"

Tom Merry sprang forward with a frantic shout as Septimus Ricketts jumped up into the limousine.

"Stop! Come here, you little rotter!" he shrieked. "We—we'll scrag you for that! We—"

"Rats! Go and eat coke!" retorted the new boy defiantly.

The whirr of the car self-starter sounded, and next minute the powerful engine burst into life. Even as the painted juniors raced forward, with battle, murder, and sudden death in their hearts, Ricketts gave a warning toot on the hooter, and the car bounded forward.

Toot! Toot! Toot!

"Out of the way, there!" shouted Septimus Ricketts, who looked more diminutive than ever, seated at the wheel of that giant limousine.

Tom Merry & Co. and the crowd scattered, and the car swung out into the Rylcombe High Street.

The new boy stood up at the wheel as the car turned, and looked back at Tom Merry & Co. with that peculiar, mocking smile of his.

He waved his cap defiantly and sat down.

A moment later the limousine disappeared from view into the High Street.

Tom Merry & Co. stood in the station yard, and blinked wildly at each other.

Realisation of the horrible sight they presented sent them almost frantic.

"Oh, my hat! This is terrible!" gasped Tom Merry at length. "If only I could lay hands on that little demon—"

"We'd slaughter him!" gurgled Blake sulphurously. "We'd hang, draw, and quarter the young rotter! Oh dear! How the dickens can we go back to school like this? Groooooogh!"

"Bai Jove! I feel weally wotten, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus distressfully. "I have nevah been in such a feahful pwedice before! I—I—"

"Haw, haw haw!"

Tom Merry gave a hurried look round as that guffaw

rang out. He and his chums were the cynosure of all eyes!

"Come on, chaps! We must get out of this somehow!" he exclaimed. "We've got—groogh—to make the best of it and go on to St. Jim's, I suppose. Mr. Noggs, are you going on to the school?"

"Assuredly, my dear young friend," said the new boy's tutor. "I must acquaint Dr. Holmes with the facts of Master Septimus' escapade. I think I had better—ah—take the cab."

Tom Merry & Co. fervently wished that they, also, could charter that means of conveyance. But Old Harry, the village cabman, refused emphatically to have them in his ancient hack in their present parlous state.

So, whilst Mr. Noggs chartered the cab and engaged the assistance of Old Harry in lifting the new boy's trunks on board, the seven unhappy juniors wended their way down the High Street and struck out for St. Jim's, breathing all manner of threats and dire imprecations on the devoted head of Septimus Ricketts, wherever he might now be.

when those seven weird figures had come into view round the bend in the lane. And then, when Tom Merry & Co. were recognised beneath their covering of paint and sand, they shrieked with mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, of the New House, who was there with Fatty Wynn, Kerr, and Redfern. "What a sight to feast our giddy eyes upon, my countrymen! What are these fearful apparitions? Describe them to me, somebody!"

The juniors at the gates chortled.

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. blinked wrathfully at the merry-makers.

"Groogh!" said Monty Lowther. "I don't see anything to cackle at—"

"But we do!" grinned Kangaroo. "You have made yourselves in a mess, and no mistake! How did it happen? There hasn't been an earthquake in Rylcombe, has there?"

"Nun-no!" mumbled Lowther. "We—we—"

"Has anyone seen Ricketts?" demanded Tom Merry in a voice deep with pent-up emotion.



St. Jim's Jingles!



No. 17. BERNARD GLYN, of the Shell Form.

THE road to fame, 'tis often said,
Is paved with good inventions;

And Bernard has a brainy head
Of extra-large dimensions.
He can invent a clockwork ghost,
A creature gaunt and bony;
And some day he will surely boast
The fame of a Marconi!

He haunts the workshop night and day,

There spending all his leisure;
Whilst other chaps at footer play,
Or chase some rival pleasure.
With hammer, chisel, tape, and rule,
Weird objects he devises;
And then, upon a startled school
Springs staggering surprises!

His closest chum is Clifton Dane,

Who thinks him jolly clever,
And marvels at the fertile brain
Behind each keen endeavour.
Whatever Bernard Glyn designs,
Whatever new "sensation,"
Produced on ultra-modern lines,
Wins Clifton's admiration.



BERNARD GLYN,
The Schoolboy Inventor.

Apart from the inventive skill

Of this retiring Crusoe,
Bernard plays footer with a will
When called upon to do so.
His fine displays on Little Side
Have set the welkin ringing;
His shots at goal are seldom wide,
His passes strong and swinging.

But Bernard takes his chief delight

In planning, scheming, shaping;
He has no time for feud or fight,
For jollity or japing.
He never hesitates to fill
"The unforgiving minute,"
And when engaged on work of skill
His heart and soul are in it!

It is a pleasant task to praise

The name of one so famous;
He's straight in all his works and ways,
His deeds will never shame us.
I'm quite sincere in what I say
(Not merely a tormentor);
The whole wide world will hail some day,
"Sir Bernard Glyn—Inventor!"

NEXT WEEK :—AUBREY RACKE, THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE SHELL.

CHAPTER 4. A Strange Arrival!

"WHAT the—"
"Who the—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

A great roar of laughter greeted the appearance of Tom Merry & Co. at the gates of St. Jim's.

There was a goodly crowd adorning the gateway. Mr. Noggs had already arrived in the cab, and the interest and curiosity of the boys of St. Jim's had been thereby aroused.

Baggy Trimble had spread the news far and wide that an immensely rich new boy, by the name of Ricketts, was expected to arrive that afternoon, and that Tom Merry & Co. had gone down to Rylcombe Station to meet him. Consequently, most of the Lower School had evinced a desire to see the new boy when he came in, and the news that he had somehow dodged his tutor and decamped on his own had added a spice of excitement to the proceedings.

The boys round the gates had opened wide their eyes

"Yes, where is he?" hooted Blake hungrily. "Where's Ricketts? We're going to slaughter the little rotter!" Their schoolfellows stared.

"Why, haven't you met Ricketts?" asked Lumley-Lumley innocently.

Blake gave a snort.

"Met him? Yes, we've met him!" he hissed. "Look at us! That's what we've got for fagging down to the station to act the guardian angel stunt to a new boy!"

There was a fresh howl of laughter from the juniors at the gates.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Figgins, in wonder. "You don't mean to say you've all been ragged by a new boy?"

"Ahem!" coughed Tom Merry. "We—we—"

"That is to say—" stammered Blake feebly.

"Wicketts is a violent young wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, whose aristocratic features were liberally bedaubed with paint and sand. "He tweeked us with the gwossett diswespact and insolence, and we had no wecourse

but to administah a seveah bumpin'. Then the weckless little wuffian weliated by attackin' us with a paint-bwush and—and thwovin' sand ovah us. Weally, deah boys, this is no laughin' mattah. I wegard it as a most disastwous state of affairs, bai Jove!"

"It is—for you!" roared Figgins. "You look a proper set of asses, and no giddy error! But fancy letting a new kid do it on you like that! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. glared wrathfully round them.

None but themselves could appreciate the deepness of their distress. They raged inwardly to realise that they had been made the laughing stocks of the school—and by a mere new boy!

It was galling and humiliating, to say the least!

"Well, I always did say you School House chaps were a fatheaded lot of jossers, but this absolutely romps off with the whole giddy biscuit-factory!" said Figgins, wiping the salt tears of merriment from his eyes. "Painted and sanded by a new boy—it's the giddy limit! Gaze at 'em, kids, and weep!"

The juniors gazed at the luckless ones, and they wept with glee in good sooth! Verily, they thought, Tom Merry & Co. were sights for gods, and men, and little fishes!

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

"Let's go in and clean ourselves up!" he muttered. "I don't suppose we shall hear the end of this for days. My word, won't I make that Ricketts bounder squirm when he does come in!"

"Rather!" said Blake, in accents deep and threatening.

The seven painted juniors dashed across the Close and made tracks for the School House, and the hilarious laughter of their schoolfellows followed them.

They were mounting the School House steps when a tall figure in cap and gown came out of the door above. Tom Merry & Co. fell back with dismayed gasps when they saw that it was Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster was amazed at the apparitions that came up before him on the steps. He stood stock still, and peered almost unbelievably at them.

"Boys," he exclaimed, "who are you? Why, bless my soul! Merry—Blake—D'Arcy! How dare you appear in public in that disgraceful condition!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, sir—"

"Surely something must have happened!" said Mr. Railton, peering closely at them. "You boys have not been playing with paint and sand?"

"Nunno, sir!" gurgled Blake. "We—we haven't been playing with them, sir."

"Then how came you to be in that state?"

"We—we—we—"

Tom Merry & Co. did not reply. They could not! Mr. Railton looked very grimly at them.

"Boys, this is a serious matter!" he said. "I can tolerate schoolboy pranks within reason, but this—this is beyond a joke! Who is responsible for the affair?"

Still none of the juniors answered.

Mr. Railton set his lips.

"Very well! I appreciate the fact that you lads do not wish to resort to tale-bearing, so I will have searching inquiries made into the matter," he said. "Kindly go to the bath-room immediately and remove all traces of that paint!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

Tom Merry & Co. went gladly. For the next hour, at least, they were all very busily engaged in the bath-room. Hot water was used by the gallon and soap lathered away by the chunk, whilst there was a great run on scrubbing-brushes. There they rubbed and scrubbed away furiously, in an atmosphere of steam and soapsuds, spluttering and snorting at their arduous labours and continuing all the while to vent their opinions of Septimus Ricketts in hair-raising terms.

When, at last, they came downstairs again, clad in fresh raiment, their faces were very red and their hair extremely bousled, and they still bore faint traces of the paint—especially round their ears.

They were greeted with chuckles on all sides.

"Feel better?" grinned Clifton Dane. "My word! You've got a chivvy like a lobster, Blake!"

"Never mind about my chivvy!" growled Blake.

"Where's that kid Ricketts? Has he come in yet?"

"No, not he!" was the reply. "Kildare and Mr. Railton have been inquiring for him. The little bounder hasn't shown up, so far!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We're jolly anxious to see him, too!" grinned Percy Mellish. "A chap who can paint and sand seven others must be a bit of a curiosity. He, he, he!"

Tom Merry & Co. went redder still.

"Oh, ring off about that!" said Lowther gruffly. "If

you're looking for a set of thick ears. Mellish, you can keep on cackling. Otherwise, you'd better ring off!"

Mellish caught the warlike glint in Monty's eyes, and he "rang off."

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. went along to Study No. 10 to escape from the chortling that was rife in the School House.

Tea-time came, and they cheered up somewhat over an excellent repast of fragrant tea, hot sosses, and toast, with a cake and pastries to follow.

By the time tea was over dusk had settled over St. Jim's and lights were gleaming in the windows.

"Well, I wonder if that Ricketts merchant has arrived yet?" said Tom Merry. "We must have a word or two with him on the quiet."

"Yaas, wathah! Undah the cires, deah boys, I am pwepaiahed to take a lenient view of the affair, just for this once," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, Wicketts must have the ewwor of his ways pointed out to him, and as a fellow of tact and judgment, I shall considah it my duty to—"

"You'd better keep off the grass, Gussy," said Blake. "It strikes me that young Ricketts isn't a kid to be talked to—except with a cricket-stump. That's how I'd like to talk to the little bounder!"

"Anyway, we'll give him a chance to apologise, as he's a new kid, and this is his first day of school life," said Tom Merry. "He must have come in by now. Let's go out and make inquiries."

The chums of the School House left Study No. 10 and went down to Hall. Juniors were standing about in groups, and everyone grinned when the seven ragged ones came in.

"Hallo! Still looking for Ricketts?" chuckled Aubrey Racke. "You'd better make up a search-party and go out to hunt for him. He hasn't turned up yet."

"What!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Ricketts still out?"

"Yes, rather!" said Grundy. "That kid must be a bit of a coughdrop! His tutor, Loggs, or Joggs, or whatever his name happens to be, has been walking about here wringing his hands and moaning like old boots. He seems to think that Ricketts has run away for good, and doesn't intend coming to school."

"Bai Jove!"

At that juncture Mr. Railton walked into Hall. He beckoned Tom Merry over to him. The Housemaster was wearing an extremely worried look.

"Have you any idea where the new boy, Ricketts, may be, Merry?" he asked quietly. "I understand that you and your friends went to the station to meet him."

"We met him at the station, sir—or, rather, he came up to us in a car," replied Tom. "He—he drove away without telling us where he was going."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I am already aware that this most extraordinary boy has been driving about somewhere in a large car," he said. "I gathered from Mr. Noggs that Ricketts was—er—responsible for you and your friends appearing here covered with paint and sand."

"Ahem!" said Tom.

"Ricketts must be a lad of exceptional temperament," said Mr. Railton. "He gave no indication, Merry, as to his destination when he drove off?"

"None whatever, sir," replied the Shell captain. "All he said was that he was going for a ride. I think he intends coming on here, though, because he told us not to expect him till later."

Mr. Railton set his lips in a thin, hard line.

"Thank you, Merry!" he said. "Dr. Holmes is particularly anxious on Ricketts' behalf. The young rascal has no right to absent himself from school in this manner. If you should see Ricketts come in, Merry, kindly send him up to the Head at once!"

"Very well, sir," said Tom.

He rejoined his chums, who were standing at the Hall door.

"I wonder where that young scamp has got to?" he said, wrinkling his brows in perplexity. "Let's go down to the gates and look for him."

"Right-ho, Tommy!"

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. strolled over to the gates, where they were joined by Talbot, Levison, and Kangaroo and, later on, by several others.

They glanced up and down the Rylcombe Lane, but there was no sign of the missing new boy.

Nearly half an hour elapsed before the clatter of horse's hoofs and a terrific jolting and bumping down the lane startled Tom Merry & Co. from their thoughts.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake, in alarm. "What the Dickens—"

"Mad horse!" gasped Kangaroo, as a galloping steed loomed swiftly out of the darkness.

The juniors' startled eyes beheld a strange vision.

Behind that galloping horse came the ramshackle hulk of Old Harry's cab, which was rocking and lurching perilously from side to side with the terrific speed at which it was being dragged along.

Tom Merry & Co., in fact, almost fell down when they recognised the station hack, with its aged and venerable nag between the shafts.

They could scarcely believe their eyes, for never before in the whole history of Rylcombe had Old Harry's cabhorse been known to attain anything like such a speed!

Seated on the box of the careening cab was Old Harry himself, a look of abject terror on his weatherbeaten face. He was hanging on to the handrail for dear life with one hand, whilst he clutched his aged topper with the other. And seated on the roof of the cab, with reins and whip in hand, was the small, lithe figure of Septimus Ricketts, the new boy!

Tom Merry & Co. stood transfixed with amazement as Ricketts drove the horse at unchecked speed right up to the gates, and then reined her in somewhat in the manner of a dashing charioteer of old.

Old Harry's nag drew up, wild-eyed and panting, and it is certain that she would have collapsed from her undue exertions were it not for the shafts and harness that kept her up.

"Whoa!" said Septimus Ricketts, and then he leaned forward to Old Harry, who was crouching on the seat, trembling violently. "There you are, you old frump! That's the way to make a horse go!"

to see such wealth. So did Old Harry, and his rugged face underwent a most decided change of expression when the amazing new boy handed him two pound-notes.

"My heye! Which I'm very much obliged, young gent," he said. "In course, Hi hunderstands that it woz honly yore little joke. Boys will be boys, I know. Thank'ee kindly, sir."

Septimus Ricketts jumped down, and stopped when he saw Tom Merry & Co. and the other juniors looking at him.

In a trice that cool, peculiar grin of his spread over his face.

"Good-evening, you old frumps!" he said calmly. "I see you've got rid of the paint. You had a job, I bet."

"You—you little bouncer!" exclaimed Tom Merry, controlling the wrath that rose within him. "Where the dickens have you been?"

"What's that got to do with you?" came back the ready retort.

"Weally, Wicketts, I considah—"

"Now, don't you start again, D'Arcy!" said the new boy facetiously. "I don't care a straw what you consider, anyhow. Is old Noggy knocking about?"

"Mr. Noggs has been waiting for you to come in," said Tom Merry, hardly knowing whether to laugh or be angry. "You ought to have come straight here from the station, Ricketts. The Head was expecting you this afternoon."

"Oh, blow the Head!" said Ricketts. "He's another old frump, I suppose. Does he want to see me?"

"My hat! Of course he does!"

EXTRA-SPECIAL

"FROM GREYFRIARS TO BORSTAL!"

An appealing story of Harry Wharton & Co.
at Greyfriars, featuring the fall of Vernon-
Smith, once a millionaire and now a pauper.
IN THIS WEEK'S

"MAGNET" Library.

MIND YOU READ IT!

"Oh, you little warmint!" moaned Old Harry. "You've ruined my boss! This'll be the death of Nancy! My heye! Which Hi'll 'ave the perlice on yer—"

"Bosh!" snapped Septimus Ricketts. "It'll do her good. Anyway, if your nag expires, you can weigh up the carcase, and I'll pay you her value in cats'-meat."

"Which my keb is all shaken hup, and Hi shouldn't be surprised hif it drops to pieces arter this!" wailed Old Harry. "I'm shook hup, too—"

"Oh, don't moan about that!" said the new boy carelessly. "My word, though, you are a slow lot in this part of the world. When I hired you at Rylcombe to drive me to St. Jim's I didn't expect to be jogged along at about four miles an hour. So I just got out, climbed over the roof of the cab from the window, and dropped down here beside you. See? I believe you're more frightened than shaken up, you old jesser! You thought I was a highwayman or a demon."

"Which you'll see a demon right enough!" snorted the luckless cabby. "Get hoff my keb! Hi'll complain to your 'cad-master—"

"Keep your wool on, old top!" said Septimus Ricketts. "Will this satisfy you?"

So saying, he extracted a wallet from his inner pocket and took out a wad of notes.

Tom Merry & Co., blinking upward, wondered mightily

"Then show me where the old bird lives," said the new boy. "No larks, mind, or I shall give you something!"

"You—you—" began Blake wrathfully, but Tom Merry led Septimus Ricketts into the Close.

The new boy walked beside him quite docilely, looking about him in the darkness with an air of curiosity.

"So this is St. Jim's, eh?" he said. "I've often wondered what a college is like. What sort of chaps are the masters—something after the style of old Noggs?"

"Ha, ha! Not much!" laughed Tom Merry, who was already beginning to like Septimus Ricketts, despite his weird ways. "I'm afraid Noggs hasn't brought you up very firmly, Ricketts."

"Brought me up! I like that!" he said. "Noggs is only a tutor—or a schoolmaster, if you care to put it that way. He's not much more than a servant, you know. He's paid to teach me, isn't he?"

"Ye-es, but there's an awful lot of difference, really," said Tom. "Schoolmasters aren't servants—a jolly long way from it. You have to treat masters with respect here, I might inform you."

Ricketts turned up his nose.

"Oh, bosh! I sha'n't treat the masters any more respectfully than I've always treated Noggy," he said. "You chaps may be content to cavey in to them, but you won't catch me doing it."

Tom Merry gave a low whistle.

"Oh, crums! I say, Ricketts, you'd better not start checking the masters," he said seriously. "You'll get it in the neck if you do."

"Rats! I can hold my own! St. Jim's isn't a sort of prison for boys, I hope, or a penitentiary?"

"No fear!" laughed Tom. "But we can't do just as we like, you know. There are rules and regulations to be observed, and the masters have to be obeyed. It doesn't pay to kick against the traces, kid. Take that as a tip."

"Thank you for nothing!" said Ricketts airily.

They had now arrived in the Hall, and a number of juniors came running up. But Kildare of the Sixth stepped quickly forward and took the new boy's arm.

"Are you Septimus Ricketts of the Fourth?" he demanded brusquely.

"Yes, I am!" said that youth pertly.

"Then you've got to come along with me to the Head at once!" said Kildare, shooting him a sharp glance. "This way!"

"Oh, any old thing!" said Septimus Ricketts.

He walked away with Kildare, and the stares of all the juniors in Hall followed him.

The new boy was conscious of those stares, but he exhibited none of the shyness that was usual with new boys. Instead, he turned, as Kildare was leading him through the Hall door, and looked calmly and mockingly round.

Then he made a face, put out his tongue, grinned, and disappeared into the corridor beyond.

The hush that fell on the juniors at this behaviour on the new boy's part was broken by an indignant exclamation from Aubrey Racke.

"Great Scott! Did you see what that cheeky rotter did? He made a face at us and put his tongue out!"

"Yes; the nerve of it!" snorted Grundy. "I'm blessed if I ever saw a new kid with such bounce!"

Tom Merry & Co. were standing together in a corner. All but Tom were smiling quietly. The young Shell captain was looking serious.

"Ricketts is a peculiar kid, and he's absolutely untamed," he said quietly to the others. "He's never been used to discipline, by the look of things, and I'm afraid he's in for a pretty hot time, if he thinks he can carry on the same here as he has always been doing. Either he's in for a hot time, or we are—one of the two!"

And Tom, on further consideration, was inclined to think that it would be the latter of the two.

CHAPTER 5.

A Modern Oliver Twist!

"COME in!" said Dr. Holmes' deep voice in response to Kildare's tap at his study door.

The school captain opened the door and entered, taking Septimus Ricketts in with him.

Mr. Noggs was in the study with the Head, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was also there.

Dr. Holmes rose when he saw the new boy, and Mr. Noggs, who had been moaning, raised his cotton-gloved hands and gave vent to a cry of relief.

"Ah! Master Septimus! You have come at last!"

"Yes, here I am, Noggy!" was the calm reply from Septimus Ricketts. "You needn't have waited, you know. Won't you be frightfully late in getting back?"

Dr. Holmes was regarding the new boy sternly.

"Ricketts!" he exclaimed sharply. "That is not the proper manner in which to address your late tutor."

Septimus Ricketts looked the Head up and down with that cool grin that was so subtle and mocking.

He appeared to be very interested in Dr. Holmes' mortar-board and gown, and some seconds elapsed before he spoke.

"Well, what of it?" he said. "I've always spoken to Noggs like that. Haven't I, Noggy?"

Mr. Noggs wrung his hands and gave a moan.

Dr. Holmes' kind old face took on a very stern look.

"Ricketts, you will kindly speak more respectfully to Mr. Noggs!" he rapped. "And please remove that insolent grin from your face!"

The new boy's grin broadened.

"Where have you been, Ricketts?" asked the Head, controlling his anger with an effort.

"Only out for a ride, you know," was the calm rejoinder.

"You are impertinent, boy! Remember that I am your headmaster, and that you must address me as sir!"

"Very well, sir!" replied Septimus Ricketts, still grinning.

Dr. Holmes began to breathe very hard through his nose.

"I repeat, Ricketts, where have you been? You should have been here nearly four hours ago."

"I've been out for a ride in the car I hired at Abbotsford, sir," replied Ricketts, quite unabashed by those awful tones

of the Head, which never failed to inspire terror into the hearts of the other boys. "I had a bit of a row with some silly frumps from this school whom I saw at Rylcombe Station, and then I went off for a ride. What does it matter, anyway? I'm here now, aren't I?"

"That is not the point, Ricketts," said Dr. Holmes, whose brow was growing blacker and blacker. "You should have been here at three o'clock at the very latest. What reason had you for this escapade?"

Septimus Ricketts tossed back his long hair and gave a shrug.

"No reason, sir; only that I didn't want to come here until I chose to come," he said.

"That is no reason, Ricketts! Are you aware that you have already flagrantly broken one of the school rules?" exclaimed the Head angrily. "You deserve to be caned severely for the anxiety and trouble you have occasioned."

The new boy smiled.

"You can cane me if you like, sir," he said.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Don't take pity on me because I'm a new boy," said Ricketts, with the utmost sang froid. "I've often read about fellows being caned at school, but as I've never been to school before I haven't had the experience myself. You can cane me if you like, and I sha'n't mind. As a matter of fact, I'm rather curious to know what it feels like."

"Bless my soul!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "Ricketts, how dare you address me in such an impertinent manner?" he exclaimed. "It's deplorable that you should have been left to grow up with such a reckless, wayward spirit. You will learn what obedience and discipline mean, Ricketts, now that you are at St. Jim's."

Septimus Ricketts continued to smile.

"I shall be able to do as I like, I hope," he said. "You never interfered with me much, did you, Noggy?"

Mr. Noggs moaned.

"If you attempt to flaunt authority and break the school rules you certainly will be interfered with, Ricketts!" rapped Dr. Holmes. "You must apologise to Mr. Noggs for assaulting him in the train, and for keeping him all this time in suspense."

The new boy laughed outright.

"Apologise to Noggy! Oh, my hat! What next?"

Dr. Holmes' eyes gleamed angrily.

"Do you hear me, Ricketts?" he exclaimed. "Mr. Noggs is your tutor, and is entitled to be treated with respect, not insolence. I command you to apologise to him!"

"Well, I won't!" said Septimus Ricketts calmly. "Noggy is a frightful old frump, and a nagger. He gets paid for his work, so why should I bow and scrape to him?"

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Lathom exchanged glances.

"Bless my soul! The boy is positively unbridled!" exclaimed the Fourth Form master.

The Head set his teeth and looked grimly at the new boy.

"Ricketts, I am the headmaster of this school, and I am not here to be trifled with," he said. "Once again I command you to tender your apologies to Mr. Noggs for your disgraceful conduct this afternoon."

Septimus Ricketts shook his head.

"I'm not going to apologise to Noggy," he said firmly.

"Neither you nor anyone else will make me, sir!"

"How dare you, Ricketts? How dare you defy me?" cried Dr. Holmes in anger. "Have you no sense of respect or obedience, boy? If you do not immediately comply with my request I shall cane you."

"All right, then," said the new boy coolly, "I'll be caned."

Dr. Holmes' eyes glittered with a steely light, and he reached for his stoutest ashplant.

"Ricketts, I warn you that a caning is by no means a pleasant experience, as you appear to suppose," he said. "It is not customary for a new pupil to receive a caning on his first day at school, but in this case I shall certainly administer severe chastisement unless you obey me. I give you a last opportunity to curb your obstinacy, Ricketts."

"I won't apologise to Noggy, so that's flat!" said the new boy stubbornly. "I'd rather have the caning."

"Very well!" said Dr. Holmes grimly. "Very well indeed, Ricketts. Hold out your hand!"

The new boy did so, and the Head brought down the ashplant with sweeping force.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

He delivered four strokes, two on each of the junior's palms, and then he paused.

Those strokes, delivered with all the Head's strength, which was, indeed, considerable, did not seem to have made the slightest impression on Septimus Ricketts.

He stood there, with that peculiar, mocking grin still on his face, and he actually held out his hand for more.

"Go on, sir," he said calmly. "Try and hit a bit harder next time."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom in amazement. "The lad is thoroughly hardened, Dr. Holmes."
 The Head set his teeth and raised the cane again. Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!
 He was thoroughly angry now, and he meant to hurt the boy who stood there, grinning, before him.
 Still Ricketts did not wince, even in the slightest.
 "Harder, sir!" he said mockingly.
 Dr. Holmes flung away the cane.
 His kind old face was pale, and his lip trembled with anger.

"Ricketts, you are a thoroughly reckless and audacious young rascal!" he exclaimed. "I shall not bandy further words with you to-night. Mr. Lathom, will you kindly take this lad away?"

"Very well," said the Fourth Form master, looking grimly at Septimus Ricketts. "Come with me, boy."

Ricketts turned away and followed Mr. Lathom, still with that strange, mocking smile on his face, and Dr. Holmes sat down at his desk again with a deep sigh.

CHAPTER 6.

The Reckless Raider!

"WELL, of all the cheek!" said Baggy Trimble. The fat junior of the Fourth had just come along to his study to do his prep. Opening the door, he had halted in astonishment on the threshold and given vent to that exclamation.

Seated in the armchair in front of the fire, with his legs stretched upward and his feet resting on the mantelpiece, was Septimus Ricketts.

The new boy had apparently made himself well at home. On the carpet beside him were two ginger-beer bottles—both empty—and a pie-dish, also empty. Baggy regarded these articles in horror. When he had left the study, but half an hour ago, those two bottles had been full of pop, and the pie-dish had contained half a luscious rabbit pie.

Now, alas, the pop and the pie were no more! It needed no Sherlock Holmes to deduce the fate of those

comestibles. There were traces of pie-crust round the new boy's mouth.

"You—you thief!" roared Baggy furiously, advancing into the study and glaring at Septimus Ricketts with a look of perishing wrath. "You burglar! You've wolfed my pie! You've guzzled my pop! Oh, dear!"

"Well, this is my study!" was the calm rejoinder from the new boy. "Mr. Lathom put me in here. I found those things in the cupboard, so I had them. I've been out all the afternoon, and I'm jolly hungry."

"So am I," howled Baggy. "I was saving those things so that I could have a snack before bed-time. You'll have to pay for them, you rotter! That pie cost me one-and-nine at the tuckshop!"

Septimus Ricketts brought his feet down to the carpet with a thud.

"You've got a tuckshop here?" he said. "Oh, good! I'm as hungry as a hunter. You needn't make a fuss about that pie and the ginger-pop. Come over to the tuckshop and we'll have a slap-up feed. I've got plenty of tin."

Baggy's little round eyes opened wide.

"My word, you're a sport, Ricketts!" he said, with quite a sudden change of demeanour. "You were welcome to the pie and the pop, of course! I'm jolly glad Lathom has put you in this study. We'll be pals—what?"

"Oh, any old thing!" said the new boy, carelessly. "But where's the tuckshop?"

"It's closed," said Baggy lugubriously. "We—we're too late."

"Bosh!" said Septimus Ricketts, tossing back his long black hair. "I'm hungry, and I want some tuck. We'll soon make 'em open the tuckshop. What's your name, porpoise?"

"Trimble," said Baggy, with rather a glare. "I say,

(Continued on page 16.)



Tom Merry & Co. fell back with dismayed gasps when they saw Mr. Railton at the top of the school house steps. The Form-master stood stock still and peered almost unbelievably at the juniors. "Boys," he exclaimed, "who are you? Why, bless my soul! Merry—Blake—D'Arcy! How dare you appear in public in that disgraceful condition!" (See Chapter 4.)



THE St. Jim's News



EDITORIAL!

By
Tom Merry



Pantomime Fun!

By
Dick Redfern.



MY FIRST "PANTO!"

PANTOMIMES play a big part in welcoming the New Year in. They seem to be as popular as ever; and even the grown-ups—with the exception of a few killjoys like Mr. Horace Ratcliff—enjoy many a hearty laugh at the "panto."

Of course, the original pantomimes have been altered almost beyond recognition. In some cases villains have been turned into heroes, and heroes into villains. Old-fashioned dames have been brought up to date, with short skirts and shingled hair. I have seen Cinderella played by a grown-up man, and Jack the Giant-killer by a young lady. I have seen Babes in the Wood played by people who had left their babyhood behind them forty years ago. And sometimes the pantomime stories have been so extensively altered and added to that it is hard to identify them with the originals.

Some people object to these changes; but, personally, I think they are all to the good. We should get frightfully bored if we saw the same old thing enacted year after year in the same old way. Variety is the spice of life; certainly it is the spice of pantomimes.

This year, at St. Jim's, we have got up a special panto of our own. "Little Red Riding Hood" will shortly be played to a packed house, and I will get one of the fellows to write a description of it in time for publication in this issue.

I had a great deal of difficulty in choosing the cast for "Little Red Riding Hood." The fellows simply tumbled over each other in their eagerness to take the title-role. Baggy Trimble badly wanted the part, because, as Little Red Riding Hood, he would have to carry a basket of grub to his ailing grandmother. Were Trimble to take the part, I'll wager his grannie wouldn't see anything of the grub! Can't you just picture the fat and fatuous Baggy, garbed as a little girl in a red cloak? He would be the most substantial Red Riding Hood that the pantomime stage had ever seen.

Obviously, the part of Red Riding Hood would have to be played by a fag; and Wally D'Arcy was finally chosen, much to his delight. His major, Arthur Augustus, was selected to take the part of Red Riding Hood's mother. But Gussy objects to dressing up as an old-fashioned dame, and he will probably appear on the stage looking like a very modern flapper, complete with monocle!

My one quarrel with the pantomime season is that it is too short. It seems to come and go in a flash. Here is a chance for some public benefactor to step in and do the boys and girls of England a good turn. I'm sure he would earn the gratitude of all the St. Jim's fellows, anyway.

Tom Merry

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 933.—

I'VE been to "Beauty and the Beast"—A feast of fun, a ripping feast! I'd never laughed so much for weeks; I had to wipe my streaming cheeks. And all too swiftly flew the time At that delightful pantomime!

I then saw "Jack, the Giant-killer," And voted it a topping "thriller." I shouted: "Kill him, Jack! That's fine!" (I was an eager kid of nine.) And slaying giants seemed no crime At that hair-raising pantomime!

One winter evening, cold and damp, "Aladdin" and his Lucky Lamp Transformed the evening into one Foul of hilarity and fun. The rigours of our English clime Were banished by that pantomime!

I saw the Infants in the Wood, And also Miss Red Riding Hood. And when I saw the Wolf beheaded, It was a sight I never dreaded. Excitedly I cried: "That's prime!" I gloried in that pantomime!

"Jack and the Beanstalk" made me roar, And "Puss-in-Boots" I did adore. And when I took my sister Bella To laugh and cry at "Cinderella," We voted it superb, sublime, A really perfect pantomime!

And, now that I am turned fifteen, On pantomimes I'm just as keen. They seem to charm all care away, And keep you happy, blithe, and gay. Pack all your cares in your portmanteau, And go and see the nearest panto!

VERY CLEVER!

Jack was home for Christmas, and felt immensely clever. At dinner, with his mother and father, Jack looked at the covered dish containing two boiled chickens. "You think there are only two chickens there," he said. "I will prove that there are three. This is one, and this is two—and one and two make three." "Very good!" said Jack's father. "I'll have one, mother shall have one, and you can have the third!"

RATHER MIXED!

A house-party was indulging in amateur theatricals, and a shy young man was given a part in which he had to run on the stage, and cry: "The King is dead! Long live the King to follow!" Unfortunately he got nervous and confused, and cried out: "Long live the King! He's dead!"

Some Amusing Recollections of our Contributors.

BAGGY TRIMBLE:

The first pantomime I ever saw was "Jack, the Giant-killer." I enjoyed it all right up to a point, but when I saw the giant sit down to an enormous brekker of porridge, and ham and eggs, and fried sossidges my mouth began to water, and prezzantly I could stand it no longer. Fancy having to sit in the stalls, feeling famished, and watching a fellow on the stage scoffing a hearty meal! Whilst the giant was spooning porridge into his mouth, I grabbed my uncle by the arm, and implored him to take me away. He did so, and I shall never again go and see a panto with any gorging scenes in it!

MR. HORACE RATCLIFF:

I witnessed my first—and last—pantomime when I was a lad (I was never a boy) of five. I failed to see anything funny in the clownish antics of the performers. I sat through the performance with an upturned nose and a disdainful sneer. I requested my father not to take me to any more pantomimes, and he acceded to my wishes. I understand that some of the junior boys of this school are getting up a pantomime. If I were the Head, I should not tolerate such brainless buffoonery!

MONTY LOWTHER:

My first panto was "The Forty Thieves." I was little more than a baby at the time, and everything seemed very grim and real. I didn't grasp the fact that it was merely make-believe. There was a terrific "scrap" on the stage, and, in my wild excitement, I rushed to the assistance of the heroes, who were getting the worst of it. This unheeded effect made the audience roar with laughter. One of the forty thieves picked me up in his arms, and I screamed with terror! But he merely carried me back to my seat, and dumped me down beside my governess, bidding me sit tight and be a good boy. As soon as I realised that the scrap on the stage was merely a sham fight I enjoyed the fun as much as anybody present.

CURLY GIBSON:

I saw lots and lots of pantomimes when I was a kid, and I can't remember which was the first. It might have been "Babes in Boots," or "Puss-in-the-Wood." It might have been "Ali-Baa-Baa Black Sheep," or "Little Red Cinderella," or "The Forty Beanstalks." dash it all, you can't expect a chap to remember what happened in his far-off childhood. I'm getting an old man now!

GEORGE FIGGINS:

The finest panto I ever saw was "Dick Whittington and His Cat." And the antics that cat got up to would have put our Minnie, the mouser, completely in the shade!



The ST. JIM'S PANTOMIME!

A Rollicking Story of the
New Year Revels.

By
Robert Arthur Digby.

"SPECIAL NOTICE!
A GRAND PERFORMANCE OF THE
FAMOUS PANTOMIME,
'LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'
(under the auspices of the St. Jim's
Dramatic Society),
will be held in the Concert Hall this
evening, at 8 sharp.

CHIEF CHARACTERS:
LITTLE RED RID- WALTER ADOLPHUS
ING HOOD ... D'ARCY
HER MOTHER ... ARTHUR AUGUSTUS
D'ARCY
HER FATHER ... TOM MERRY
HER AGED GRAND- MONTAGUE LOWTHER
MOTHER ...
THE WOLF ... GERALD KNOX

ADMISSION FREE TO ALL!
ROLL UP IN YOUR THOUSANDS!!

We had to look twice at that announce-
ment, which had been posted on the notice-
board in the hall.

It was the inclusion of Knox's name which
made us look twice. What was Gerald
Knox, the lordly and dignified man of the
Sixth, doing in a junior pantomime? Surely
there must be some mistake?

We questioned Tom Merry, the promoter,
on the subject.

"There's no mistake," said Tommy, with
a grin. "Knox is taking part in our panto,
all serene. He took a lot of coaxing before
he would agree to come in, but at last he
consented. We buttered him up a lot—told
him he was a born actor, and all that sort
of thing—and we said that the Panto would
be a wash-out without him. So, finally,
Knox agreed to give his services."

"But why did you ask Knox, when a
crowd of junior chaps would cheerfully have
offered to take the Wolf's part?" I in-
quired.

Tom Merry smiled rather grimly.
"We're going to give Knox a 'rough
house' this evening," he said. "We've let
him conduct our rehearsals, and throw his
weight about, and boss the show generally.
But to-night he's going to get it in the
neck, good and proper!"

"But why?" asked Herries.
"It will be poetic justice," explained Tom
Merry. "Just before the pantomime season
came along, Knox got up to his old bullying
tricks. Young Wally D'Arcy was fagging for
him at the time, and he got Knox's back
up in some way. Anyhow, Knox locked the
door of his study, and pitched into D'Arcy
minor with an ashplant. Gave him quite a
brutal licking. Knox may have forgotten
the incident by now, but young D'Arcy
hasn't—and neither have we. Knox took it
out of that kid, and now we're going to
take a little out of Knox! Do you catch
me?"

We nodded and grinned.
"You fellows are to keep strictly mum
about this, mind," said Tom Merry. "If it
got to Knox's ears that we propose to give
him a rough handling, he'd back out of the
show, of course."

We promised to keep our own counsel, and
we looked forward quite eagerly to the
forthcoming show. It was the first time
"Red Riding Hood" had been played at
St. Jim's.

Long before the appointed hour the Con-
cert Hall began to fill up. And when eight
o'clock came the hall was packed to over-
flowing.

The curtain rose amid peals of laughter.
The audience fairly rocked with merriment
when they caught sight of Little Red Rid-
ing Hood and her mother.

Wally D'Arcy, garbed as a little girl in a

red cloak, looked the part to the life. But
his major, Arthur Augustus, who took the
part of the mother, was a most unmotherly
matron to look at. Gussy wore modern
skirts and high-heeled shoes and a vivid
jumper. His hat must have been a Paris
model, though goodness knows where he got
it from. His features were powdered and
painted in the approved modern style; but
the crowning touch was Gussy's monocle!
Either the silly clump had forgotten to take
it off, or he wore it with malice afore-
thought.

It is no exaggeration to say that the
fellows in the front row nearly went into
hysterics at the sight of Arthur Augustus.
"Mrs. Red Riding Hood" looked more like
a very modern flapper than a prim, old-
fashioned mother.

At last, however, the actors were able to
make a start.

Mrs. Red Riding Hood turned to her de-
mure little daughter in the red cloak.

"My deah child," she began, in tones
which were very aristocratic for the wife of
a woodman, "I undahstand, bai Jove, that
your gwandmothah, who lives in the wood,
is lyin' ill in bed. Yaas, wathah! Now, I
want you to be a good gal, an' take her
these cakes an' a pot of buttah."

"Right-ho, Gussy!" said Little Red Rid-
ing Hood, who had not troubled to memor-
ise her part very carefully.

The audience yelled. And Arthur Augustus
frowned, and reproved his minor in a stage
whisper. So faint was Gussy's stage whisper
that it was heard all over the hall!

"Weally, Wally! You should have said,
"Very well, my deah mothah. I shall be
happy to do your biddin'."

"Rats!" growled Little Red Riding Hood.
Arthur Augustus controlled his wrath with
an effort, and continued with his "lines."

"Now, I want you to be vewy careful,
deah gal, as you go through the wood.
You must on no account stop an' talk to
anybody. There are some despewate wuffians
about, an' I should not like my little gal
to come to any harm. You must not lingah
by the way, like Toby, the page, does when
he wuns an ewwand."

There was a loud laugh at Toby's expense.
After further conversation between Little
Red Riding Hood and her mother, the
former departed on her errand.

The curtain fell for a brief space. When
it rose again we were shown Little Red
Riding Hood being waylaid by the Wolf—
Knox of the Sixth. Knox certainly looked
a very realistic animal in his wolf-skin.

"Good-morning, Little Red Riding Hood!"
he said.



Tom Merry chased the wolf round and
round the bed, doing great execution.

"Good-morning, Master Wolf!"
"And where may you be going, my pretty
maid?"

"Eh? Old Gussy—I mean, my mother—
has sent me to see my grandmother and
take her these cakes and this pot of
butter."

"Oh!" said the Wolf grimly. "And
where does your grandmother hang out?"

"In the cottage at the end of the wood."
"Well, if that's the case," said the Wolf,
"I don't mind going and seeing her, too.
Let's see which will be there first."

And the Wolf started off at a loping run,
while Little Red Riding Hood lingered on
the stage to pluck imaginary flowers.

The scene then changed to the Grand-
mother's cottage. Behold the Grandmother
—Monty Lowther of the Shell—lying on a
bed of sickness, propped up by pillows!

There was a sharp rat-tat on the door.

"Who is there?" wheezed the old lady.
"Little Red Riding Hood," came the
reply. "I've brought you some cakes and
a pot of butter from mother."

"Ripping!" croaked the grandmother.
"Trot right in, Red Riding Hood!"

The Wolf came stealthily in, and the
next moment the old lady's bed-room was
the scene of a fierce struggle, in the course
of which the Wolf emitted a fendish yell.
It seemed as if the grandmother, despite
her burden of years, had managed to give
him a sly punch in a vital spot.

The struggle continued, and presently the
grandmother disappeared. We were given
to understand that the Wolf had gobbled
her up.

The Wolf then garbed himself in the old
lady's bed-gown and nightcap and jumped
into bed, to await the arrival of Little Red
Riding Hood. Not satisfied with devouring
the grandmother, the Wolf intended to
tuck into Little Red Riding Hood by way
of dessert.

Presently there was a tap on the door,
and Little Red Riding Hood came tripping
in with her basket. The Wolf slithered
down farther into the bed.

"Is that my Little Red Riding Hood?"
he called.

"Yes, grandma."

"Come in, my dear! Have you brought
me something nice?"

"Yes. There's a cake and some butter.
Afraid I've scooped the best part of the
cake, though. It was too jolly tempting to
keep intact!"

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

Little Red Riding Hood grinned, and
approached the bed. Then she gave a
startled cry.

"Oh, grandma, how rough and long your
arms have grown!"

"All the better to hug you with, my
dear!" growled the Wolf.

"And what big ears you've got, Knoxy—
I mean, grandma!"

"All the better to hear you with!"
growled the Wolf quite angrily.

"And what cruel, vindictive eyes you've
got! Anybody would think they belonged to
Knox of the Sixth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Wolf rose up angrily from the bed.

"I'll slaughter you, young D'Arcy, for
holding me up to ridicule!" he hissed.

"And what awful fangs you've got!"
went on Red Riding Hood, unheeding.

"All the better to eat you with, you
young scamp—I mean, my dear!" choked
the Wolf.

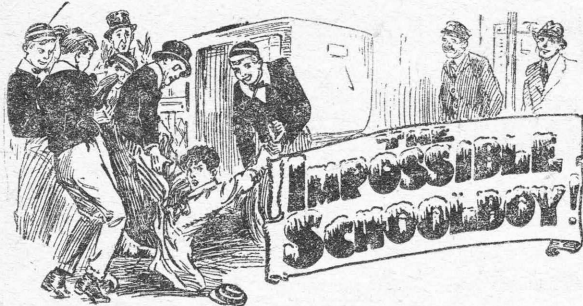
It was at this critical stage that Little
Red Riding Hood's father—Tom Merry—
rushed on the scene. Tom was dressed as
a woodman, and he was supposed to cut
off the Wolf's head with his axe. He didn't
go quite so far as this, for he hadn't an
axe—merely a cricket-stump. But a cricket-
stump can be a very painful weapon at
times, as the Wolf discovered!

Tom Merry chased the Wolf round and
round the bed, doing great execution. And
the audience was on its feet, laughing and
cheering.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pile in, Merry!"

Tom Merry enjoyed himself thoroughly for
a hectic two minutes. But Knox didn't!
Even through his thick wolf-skin he felt the
painful effects of those blows. Finally, he
died yelling from the stage, uttering dire
threats of vengeance. And the curtain was
rung down upon the St. Jim's Pantomime!



(Continued from page 13.)

Ricketts, you won't get Mrs. Taggles to serve you, you know. It's against rules."

"Blow the rules!" said Ricketts warmly. "Show me the way to the tuckshop, Trimble. I'll get some tuck somehow."

Baggy blinked curiously at his new study-mate and gave a gasp as that youth grabbed him by the arm and led him rather forcibly from the room. He trotted along beside Septimus Ricketts, and so showed him the way out of doors and across the darkened Close to the tuckshop.

The little shop was closed, of course, and the shutters were up at the windows and the door. The whole place was in darkness, except for a solitary light which gleamed from the window of the little parlour at the back.

Septimus Ricketts rapped sharply on the door, and then, receiving no response, he commenced to beat a kind of tattoo on the shutters. This had the effect of rousing Mrs. Taggles. Her footsteps were heard in the shop within, and she called out, in rather a startled and tremulous voice:

"Who's there?"

"Open this door!" exclaimed Septimus Ricketts. "I want to buy some tuck."

Mrs. Taggles was heard to give a gasp at the other side of the door.

"My goodness gracious! This shop is shut, and Dr. Holmes doesn't allow me to—"

"Blow Dr. Holmes! I'm hungry, and I want something to eat. Will you serve me?"

"I'm sorry, but that is impossible," said Mrs. Taggles firmly, and she went back into the little parlour at the rear of the shop.

Septimus Ricketts stamped his feet angrily and thumped at the shutters. Baggy blinked in the darkness.

"There you are! I told you so!" he said. "We sha'n't be able to get any tuck to-night, Ricketts. I— Why, mum-m-my hat! Wh-what are you doing?"

The new boy had commenced to climb up the drain pipe at the side of the shop. Lithe and active as a monkey, he soon reached the top of the little wooden porch over the door. Baggy blinked up at him in amazement.

"Don't look like a silly boiled owl!" said Septimus Ricketts from above. "I'm going to break into this shop somehow and get some tuck. If I can't be served, I'll take what I want and leave the money—that's fair enough."

"But you—you daren't!" gasped Baggy in horror. "Come down, Ricketts! The Head will lick you like anything!"

A careless laugh was the only response he received from the new boy. Ricketts scrambled over the tuckshop roof, and Baggy heard him give a low cry of satisfaction.

"Good egg! Here's a skylight—and it opens easily, too! I'm going in, Trimble. You wait down there and take the things as I give them to you. Don't run away, or I shall wallop you afterwards!"

Baggy almost dropped with fright when he saw the new boy scramble down through the skylight into the tuckshop.

He waited outside, fearfully wondering what would happen next.

Baggy himself would go to almost any lengths to obtain tuck when he was hungry, but to break into the school tuckshop after closing-time—well, it was unheard of!

Crash! Bump! Wallop!

Those sudden noises came from within the tuckshop, giving evidence that the new boy had arrived. Apparently he had fallen over some tins in the darkness, for there was a fearful clatter, to be followed almost immediately by a series of loud shrieks from Mrs. Taggles.

"Help! Help! Police! Burglars!"

Baggy Trimble's knees began to knock.

"Oh, lor!" he gasped. "That's done it! Now there'll be a shindy!"

There was certainly a "shindy" inside the tuckshop. Mrs. Taggles' shrieks arose crescendo, and Baggy could hear her beating at the door of her parlour. In a little while he heard the bars being lifted from the other side of the tuck-

shop door. The door opened, and Septimus Ricketts' voice came hoarsely to his ears:

"You there, Trimble? It's all serene! I've locked the old lady up in her parlour, so now we can take what we want. Grab these—quick!"

He thrust out a tin of biscuits, a large cake, a jar of jam, and an assortment of pies. Baggy took them mechanically.

"Now, skedaddle off to the study! I'm going back for some more!"

Bang, bang, bang! came from the door of the parlour, and above the din Mrs. Taggles' screams sounded loud and piercingly.

Baggy, looking round, saw two burly figures running up in the gloom. He recognised them as Knox and Sefton of the Sixth.

Baggy Trimble tarried no longer in the vicinity of the tuckshop. He grabbed that pile of tuck unto his portly bosom and scuttled away at top speed. He was soon lost in the darkness of the quadrangle and, whilst Knox and Sefton continued on their way to the tuckshop, Baggy entered the School House via the lower box-room window and, by dint of great stealth, smuggled the tuck upstairs to his study.

Meanwhile exciting events were taking place at the tuckshop.

Knox and Sefton, attracted by Mrs. Taggles' cries, dashed to the spot with all haste, wondering what on earth had happened. They had no sooner arrived, than a small figure of a junior, his arms laden with tuck, showed himself at the doorway.

"Help!" screamed Mrs. Taggles from within. "My shop is being robbed! Police! Help! Oh dear!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Sefton, drawing a deep breath.

"There's nothing to get windy about, Knox—it's only a junior. The young rascal has broken into the tuckshop, and is making off with his loot."

"The little sweep!" grated Knox, his eyes glittering.

"We'll have him, then!"

Slam!

Septimus Ricketts, seeing the prefects arrive, jumped back into the interior of the tuckshop and slammed the door in Knox's face.

"Open this door, you little rotter!" shouted Knox furiously.

"Rats!" came the defiant response from within.

Fellows were dashing up from far and near, all startled by the shouts that were ringing out on the night air. Mr. Horace Ratcliff came hurrying up from the direction of the New House.

"Good heavens! What has happened?" cried the Housemaster. "Is something terrible the matter, Knox?"

"Only a junior broken into the tuckshop, sir," said Knox, between his teeth. "But we've got him trapped. He can't get away!"

"Go and eat coke, you old fogies!" said the voice of the marauder.

Tom Merry gave a startled gasp.

"My only hat! It's young Ricketts!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

The word went round, and Knox happened to hear it.

"It's the new boy, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Ratcliff. "Open this door and surrender, Ricketts, do you hear?"

"No, fear!" retorted Ricketts. "I came here for some tuck, and I haven't stolen it, either. I've pushed a pound note under the parlour door. You old fogies go away, and I'll come out."

"Good heavens! The insolence of the boy!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff, his thin features going quite pink. "I command you, Ricketts, to come out here this instant!"

"Rats!" was the quite cheerful reply. "You might as well go away. I'm quite willing to stay here all night, you know."

The crowd outside the tuckshop had now swollen to vast proportions, and great was the excitement when the news went round that Septimus Ricketts, the new boy of the Fourth, had broken into the tuckshop and was now in a state of siege.

"My giddy aunt! What a kid!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"He's got nerve enough to do anything! Look at Ratty! He's nearly raving!"

Mr. Ratcliff was certainly in a royal rage. He was a very sour-tempered gentleman at the best of times; but to be thus defied by a junior—a new junior—was more than he could stand.

Mr. Ratcliff thumped at the tuckshop door, but Ricketts refused to open it. At length the Housemaster turned a wrathful face to Knox and the other prefects who were standing round.

"Fetch a hammer—an axe—anything!" he choked. "This door must be battered down and that recalcitrant little rascal taken into custody!"

Knox fetched a sledgehammer, and he commenced violent operations on the lock of the tuckshop door.

Crash! Bang! Smash!

"Now we sha'n't be long!" said Kerruish excitedly. "My word, won't young Ricketts get scragged for this!"

Crash!

The door was giving, and all eyes were turned upon it. No one saw the small, lithe figure that clambered over the roof via the skylight, and slithered down the back of the tuckshop to the ground.

Septimus Ricketts, chuckling softly, ran off into the darkness of the cloisters, leaving his would-be captors to break their way into the tuckshop.

CHAPTER 7.

As Tough as Nails.

CRASH!

"There!" panted Knox triumphantly. "The lock's given, sir!"

He dropped the hammer and pushed open the door. He and Sefton and Mr. Ratcliff strode forward into the doorway. As they did so, there was a fearful swooshing noise from above and, before they realised what was happening, an avalanche of some strange white substance came down swiftly upon them.

Mr. Ratcliff, Knox, and Sefton were smothered with the white stuff, and the remarks they made as they struggled together in the doorway were weird and wonderful.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ugh! Ah-ahh!"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

Silence fell on the amazed onlookers for some minutes, and then, as the bright moonlight in the quad revealed these three ghastly, white-topped figures, a long, loud, lifting roar of laughter arose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerrooooooh!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff. "What—what—"

"Yoogh! It's flour, sir!" choked Sefton, blinking round wildly. "The little imp must have propped the flour-bin on top of the door, so that when we opened it we should be smothered—"

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

Mr. Ratcliff fairly danced out of the tuckshop, shedding flour in great clouds.

"Silence, boys! Yoough! Ah-ti-shoo! Be quiet, do you hear?" he roared. "I—Ugh! Yah! Bless my soul! Knox—Sefton—Kildare! Search the shop for that young hooligan!"

The three seniors thus addressed entered the tuckshop rather gingerly, fearful of more traps. But nothing further happened. Kildare, who had great difficulty in containing his laughter at the sight presented by Mr. Ratcliff and Knox and Sefton, turned on the gas, and the interior of the shop was flooded with light.

Except for the overturned flour-bin and the flour that bestrewed the floor, the shop was quite orderly. Some tins, however, had been overturned behind the counter and, feeling an untoward draught, Mr. Ratcliff blinked upward.

Cries of surprise arose from all when they saw the open skylight.

"Good heavens! Then the young scoundrel has decamped!" cried Mr. Ratcliff. "Go, Knox, and search for him! Ricketts must be found and taken to Dr. Holmes to answer for this outrage! Go!"

Knox and Sefton went, and Mr. Ratcliff stamped away, leaving a long, long trail of flour in his wake. That trail led right across the quadrangle, into the School House, and right up to Dr. Holmes' study.

Meanwhile, the prefects instituted a hunt for the new boy throughout the length and breadth of the school grounds. Half an hour later, however, they returned empty-handed. The wily new boy had eluded them.

Dr. Holmes was angry, Mr. Ratcliff frantic, and the masters deeply concerned over the amazing affair; but the rest of the school seemed to regard it as a huge joke.

Baggy Trimble heard of these doings, and wondered mightily. He was somewhat afraid, too, that when Ricketts was caught—as he must be inevitably—there would be a rumpus in which he himself would be involved. So Baggy, seated in Study No. 2 alone, deemed it advisable to get rid of the raided tuck as soon as possible. He proceeded, therefore, to get rid of it by the simple and most effective expedient of demolishing it.

It was long past time for prep, and Baggy was seated in front of the fire, steadily munching a piece of cake, when there was a mysterious sound at the window. It made Baggy jump, and he gave a gurgle as a mouthful of cake went down the wrong way.

The window was opening! Some unseen hand was raising

the sash, and as the cold night air blew into the study, Baggy Trimble trembled violently—not with the cold, but with fear!

"All serene!" said a cheery voice from the darkness outside. "You needn't look so frightened, Trimble. It's only me!"

"Gug-g-great Scott!" stuttered Baggy, as Septimus Ricketts clambered in.

The new boy closed the window and surveyed Baggy with a grin.

"Well, I suppose the old frumps are still looking for me?" he said. "Let 'em look! I've been climbing about on the parapet outside, and I looked into each study window until I came to this one. My hat! You've scoffed nearly all the tuck, you fat boulder!"

"Ahem!" coughed Baggy. "You—you see, Ricketts—" "Put that cake down! The rest of the tuck is mine—and all this, too!"

So saying, Ricketts proceeded to empty his pockets of all manner of small delicacies taken from the tuckshop. He had two tins of pineapple and a packet of figs stuffed up his waistcoat. Without more ado, he turned Baggy out of the armchair, settled himself comfortably therein, took possession of what was left of the tuck, and proceeded to enjoy himself.

Baggy Trimble watched him with wondering eyes.

"I—I say, Ricketts," he stammered at length, "there'll be a frightful row about this, you know! It was all your idea, and I—I'm not going to be dragged in!"

Septimus Ricketts looked round at him, and his lips curled into a grin of contempt.

"You needn't worry, Trimble; I sha'n't sneak on you," he said. "I can stand the racket, if there's going to be one."

He remained in the study until the bell rang for bed, and then he walked out into the Fourth Form passage as calmly and unconcerned as though nothing whatever had happened.

Blake & Co. came out of Study No. 6 at the same time. They almost dropped when they saw the new boy.

"Bai—bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, surveying him fixedly through his monocle. "Wicketts! Then you have been beah all the time!"

"Well, why not?" was the cool retort. "Is anything the matter, then?"

"Anything the matter!" said Blake faintly. "Oh, my hat!"

"Look out, Ricketts!" said Herries. "Here comes Knox!"

Gerald Knox came striding round the corner to herd the Fourth away to bed. He stopped short and his mouth opened wide when he beheld Septimus Ricketts. Then he started forward with a wrathful roar.

"Ricketts! Now I've got you, you little sweep! I—Yaroooooh!"

The new boy, as lithe and active as a young fox, darted downward and shot between Knox's legs like a rocket. The prefect was wholly unprepared for such a sally, and he fell to the floor with a fendish howl.

Septimus Ricketts was gone!

The juniors were amazed and horrified. Knox struggled to his feet, breathing fire and brimstone. He dashed away in pursuit of the new boy.

Jack Blake & Co. later went up to bed. They received another shock, on arriving in the dormitory, to see Septimus Ricketts sitting on his bed, calmly undressing himself.

"Well, carry me home to die, somebody!" gasped Blake. "If that kid doesn't beat the band! Knox is looking for you, Ricketts."

"Let him look!" said the new boy pertly. "I say, you chaps, what do you think I'm in for—a caning?"

"Rather!" said Blake. "You'll get the licking of your life!"

Septimus Ricketts put on his pyjamas and slippers and walked calmly to the door.

"Wh-where are you going now?" demanded Blake.

"Only to see the Head and get my licking," said the new boy. "I might as well get it over now and be done with it. See you later!"

"Bai Jove!"

Septimus Ricketts walked away, to get his licking!

He left the Fourth Form dormitory in a foment of excitement.

Knox came in later, scowling blackly, and he saw lights out.

It was some time afterwards when the dormitory door opened and a small figure walked in. It was Septimus Ricketts, looking very diminutive indeed in his pyjamas.

Candles were lit at almost every bed, and the Fourth-Formers gazed eagerly at their strange, new Form-fellow. They were amazed to see him grinning in that quiet, peculiar way of his.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Blake. "He—he's actually

turned up smiling again! Hasn't the Head licked you, Ricketts?"

The new boy nodded.

"Yes, rather!" he said. "Dr. Holmes wasn't half waxy! He gave me four on each hand."

"Whew!"

The juniors looked unbelievably at him.

"Gammon!" exclaimed Percy Mellish. "Why, you'd be doubled up!"

"Bah!" said Septimus Ricketts, screwing up his face in a contemptuous grimace. "Caning doesn't hurt me much! That's sixteen strokes I've had, so far—eight when I arrived and eight just now. I think Dr. Holmes is just about fagged out; but he could have given me sixteen more for all I cared."

Jack Blake & Co. looked at Septimus Ricketts in wondering amazement. A boy who could take sixteen strokes of the cane in one evening without turning a hair was something more than a curiosity—he was a prodigy!

Ricketts, however, did not mind the stares of his Form-fellows.

He clambered into bed, settled himself comfortably between the sheets, and within a very few minutes was fast asleep!

Jack Blake passed a hand dazedly across his forehead.

"Well, my hat!" he exclaimed. "My only hat! I—I think I'll turn in, after that!"

And the Fourth-Formers blew out the candles and turned in wonderingly.

CHAPTER 8.

Ricketts Cuts Loose!

MR. LATHOM gave Septimus Ricketts a very grim look as he came into the Fourth Form-room next morning.

The Fourth were all in their places. Ricketts was sitting at a desk near the middle of the class, his elbows on the desk and his chin resting on his hands. His face was wreathed in a wide grin, and he was evidently enjoying his new surroundings.

"Sit up, Ricketts!" rapped Mr. Lathom.

The new boy did not move.

"Do you hear me, Ricketts?" thundered Mr. Lathom. "Sit up straight in your desk!"

Septimus Ricketts thereupon sat bolt upright in his desk, as stiff as a statue, and grinned serenely at the class.

A titter ran round the Form-room, and Mr. Lathom's eyes took on an icy glitter.

"If you do not behave, Ricketts, I shall make an example of you!" he said angrily. "You are not dealing with an easy-going tutor now, remember, but with the master of a Form. I will be as lenient with you as I can, having in mind the fact that you are a new pupil, and are unused to school life, but I warn you not to take liberties."

"Very well, sir," said Septimus Ricketts, quite docilely.

After that, it really seemed that he meant to do his best to get along with the rest of the Form, and he applied himself to the lesson in such a ready manner that Mr. Lathom began to unbend. The new boy, he found, was very sharp, and there was not much of the usual Form work that he did not know.

He had evidently learned quite a lot under the tuition of Mr. Noggs, despite his wayward and reckless ways.

As the lesson wore on, however, Septimus Ricketts began to tire of Cæsar and the Gallic Wars.

Mellish was construing, with Mr. Lathom keeping an eagle watch on him, when all of a sudden a strange noise disturbed the serenity of the Form-room.

Snorrrrrrrrrr!

Mr. Lathom gave a jump and wheeled round. Then he gave another jump, more violent than before, when he saw Septimus Ricketts reclining at his desk in an attitude of blissful repose, his head laid on the desk, slumbering soundly.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom. "Ricketts!"

Snorrrrrrrrrr!

"Goodness gracious! The boy has had the audacity to fall asleep during lessons!" exclaimed the Form master angrily. "Ricketts!"

He raised his voice to quite a shout, but still the new boy slumbered peacefully on.

The other juniors tittered.

"Silence, boys!" rapped Mr. Lathom angrily. "Ricketts, do you hear me? Wake up!"

"Snorrrrrrrrrr!" was all that came from Septimus Ricketts.

Mr. Lathom strode up the gangway, his lips set in a thin, hard line. He grasped the slumberer by the shoulder and shook him violently.

"Ooooooogh!" said Septimus Ricketts, stirring sleepily. "Whassermarrer? Gerraway, Noggs!"

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"This is not Mr. Noggs. It is I, your Form master!" rapped Mr. Lathom, in a terrific voice. "Wake up, you slothful youth!"

Septimus Ricketts sat up and blinked round in surprise. Then a serene grin spread over his face.

"My word! Fancy my being here!" he said.

Mr. Lathom's brow was thunderous.

"Ricketts! How dare you go to sleep during lessons! How dare you!" he rapped.

"Sorry, sir," replied the new boy cheerfully. "I forgot where I was."

"Forgot where you were, Ricketts?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "Bless my soul, the audacity of the boy is amazing! Silence, boys! This is no laughing matter. Ricketts, come to the front. I will give you something that will serve as a reminder to you that you are in the Form-room, and that you are here to work—not sleep. Follow me!"

Still grinning, Septimus Ricketts followed Mr. Lathom to the front of the class. He stood by the blackboard and made a face behind Mr. Lathom's back. The rest of the Fourth almost exploded.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Lathom, wheeling round. He was just in time to catch Ricketts making another face at him. "Good heavens! You have the brazen effrontery to make ridiculous contortions at me, Ricketts! Boy, how dare you! It is apparent that you need to be dealt with firmly, and I shall see that that is done. I refuse to be treated in such an audacious manner by a boy in my own Form. Hold out your hand!"

Mr. Lathom selected his stoutest cane, and he set to work with grim earnestness.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

The laughter in the Form-room died down. Mr. Lathom was quite an athlete with the cane, and he knew how to "lay it on." He put all his vim and vigour into the strokes he dealt out to Septimus Ricketts, and was amazed, after delivering four "stingers," to see the new boy still smiling mockingly at him.

"Go it, sir," said Ricketts. "You're not whacking hard enough, you know."

"B-b-b-bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Lathom.

The Fourth looked on and marvelled.

The cool grin on the new boy's face infuriated Mr. Lathom. He gritted his teeth, and his eyes contracted into points of fire.

"If that manner of chastisement has no effect on you, Ricketts, I will adopt other measures," he said. "Tough your toes, boy!"

"Yes, sir," said Septimus Ricketts.

He bent down and touched his toes, turning his head to grin cheerfully at his amazed Form-fellows.

Mr. Lathom took a firm grip on the cane, measured his distance, and then—

Swipe!

"Yaroooooogh!" roared Mr. Lathom.

Septimus Ricketts jumped forward, somewhat in the manner of a frog, just as the cane was descending, and Mr. Lathom took the blow himself—on his right leg. The Form-master yelled, dropped the cane, and commenced to hop on one foot, hugging his injured leg.

The effect was comical, really, but the Fourth did not laugh this time. They sat in their seats, frozen with horror. They expected Mr. Lathom to fall on the new boy now, and tear him limb from limb.

Mr. Lathom glared round, snatched up the cane, and made a dash at Septimus Ricketts. All his scholastic dignity was thrown to the winds now, for he was hurt and outraged.

"Come here, Ricketts!" he cried furiously, as the new boy made a dash towards the window. "I will thrash you until I break your brazen, reckless spirit. Stop, do you hear?"

"Catch me if you can!" said Septimus Ricketts tauntingly.

He vaulted quickly through the window and disappeared from view.

The Fourth were all on their feet by now, and there was a general rush to the window. Mr. Lathom tore his way to the front and gazed out, trembling with rage.

He saw no sign of the runaway junior at first; but, on looking upward, he gave an amazed cry.

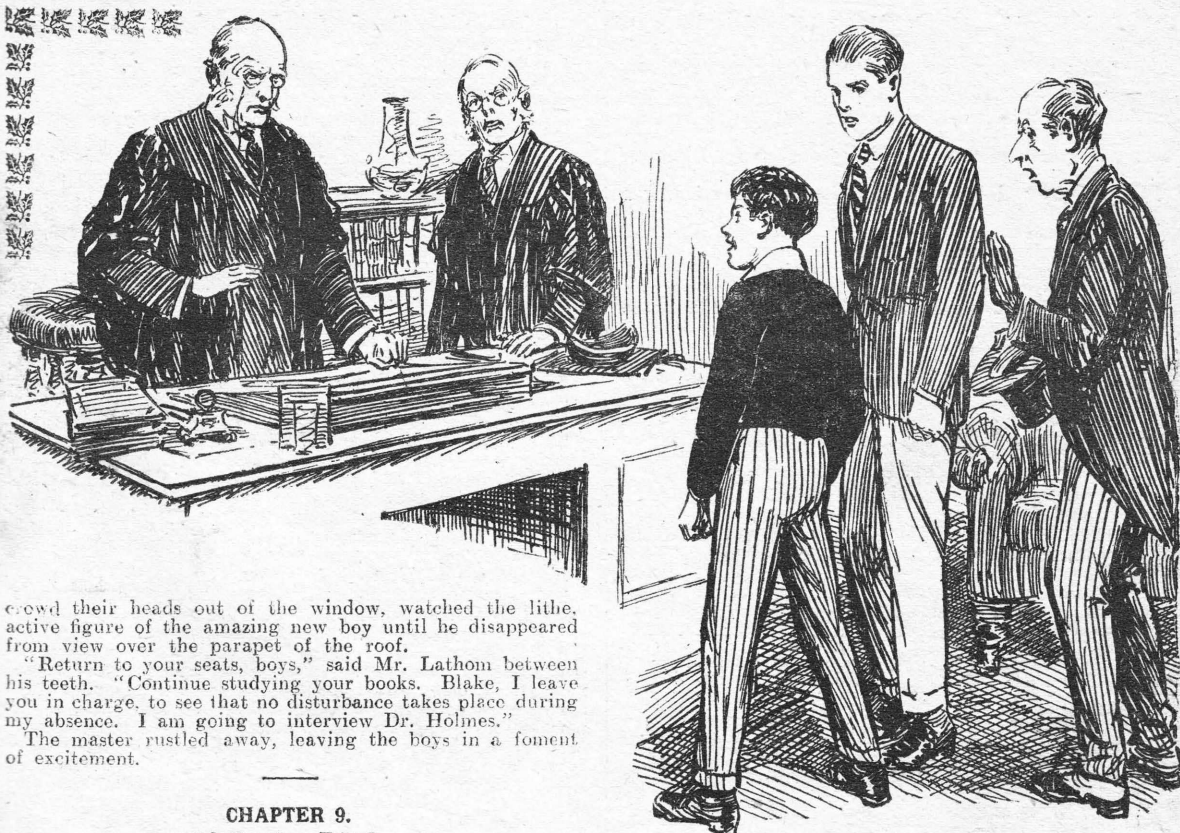
Septimus Ricketts was clambering hand-over-hand up the ivy that grew on the House wall. He was making for the roof, and the nerve and daring he displayed made Mr. Lathom catch his breath in horror.

The new boy paused, grinned down at the master, and then put out his tongue at him.

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Lathom. "Can the boy be in his right senses? Ricketts, come back! Return to the Form-room at once! Do you hear?"

Ricketts heard, but he paid no heed. With a defiant wave of the hand he renewed his climb.

Mr. Lathom, and as many of the juniors as were able to



crowd their heads out of the window, watched the lithe, active figure of the amazing new boy until he disappeared from view over the parapet of the roof.

"Return to your seats, boys," said Mr. Lathom between his teeth. "Continue studying your books. Blake, I leave you in charge, to see that no disturbance takes place during my absence. I am going to interview Dr. Holmes."

The master rustled away, leaving the boys in a foment of excitement.

CHAPTER 9.

! A Reckless Trick!

THE Fourth did no more work that morning, for their minds were full of Septimus Ricketts and his startling behaviour. Mr. Lathom did not return to the Form-room, and when the final bell rang Blake dismissed the class, and they all trooped away, agog with the morning's happenings.

Blake & Co. met Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Talbot on the stairs and the Shell fellows gasped when they were told of Septimus Ricketts' defiance of Mr. Lathom.

"My word!" said Tom Merry, giving a low whistle. "I don't think that kid will ever be tamed! I'll bet Mr. Lathom was tearing his hair!"

"He was—almost!" grinned Blake. "He and the Head are holding a council of war over Ricketts now, I suppose. I'm blest if I know what they can do with the little blighter to keep him out of mischief. Lickings have no effect on him, that's a cert. He's as tough as nails!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of the School House strolled out into the quadrangle.

The Form-rooms had all emptied by now, and the old quad was crowded. Seeing a crowd not far away, and noticing that everyone was looking excitedly upward, Tom Merry & Co. hurried over and gazed up, too, wondering what was the matter.

They drew deep breaths of amazement at what they saw, for hanging on to the top of the flagstaff on the clock-tower, high aloft over the School House, was the small, lithe form of Septimus Ricketts!

It was a dizzy height, and no one, in the whole history of St. Jim's, had ever dared to climb up there before; yet there was the new boy, hanging on to the mast with one hand, and waving his cap to the startled crowd below with the other, as cheery and unconcerned as though there were nothing extraordinary in the feat!

"Mum-m-my only sainted aunt!" gurgled Blake in a faint voice. "The mad young idiot! He might have broken his silly neck, climbing up there!"

"What a nerve, though!" chuckled Cardew of the Fourth.

"Weally, deah boys, this has thwown me into a feahful fluttah!" said D'Arcy, looking up in horror through his monocle. "Supposin' the weckless little wascal should fall—"

"Look! What's he doing now?" shrieked Curly Gibson of the Third.

The new boy had something up there with him—a long

"You deserve to be caned severely for the anxiety and trouble you have occasioned," said the Head sternly. The new boy smiled. "You can cane me if you like, sir," he said. "Wha-a-at?" gasped Dr. Holmes. "Don't take pity on me because I'm a new boy!" said Ricketts calmly. (See Chapter 5.)

object that looked like a thick stick from that great distance.

A great roar of astonishment arose from the watching crowd when Ricketts was seen to open out—an umbrella!

Watched with breathless wonder by his startled school-fellows, Septimus Ricketts took some cord from his pocket and proceeded to bind the handle of the umbrella to the flagstaff. This operation he performed quickly and deftly, and he raised his cap and bowed to the throng below when the job was finished.

The spectacle of the umbrella tied to the school flagstaff was so absurd and ludicrous that the onlookers burst into one long, hilarious yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The umbrella kept in position, and Septimus Ricketts clung to the mast beneath it, grinning down serenely.

"Bai—bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard that as distinctly funnay, deah boys! Ha, ha, ha!"

The old quadrangle rang with the boys' laughter, but the mirth died down somewhat when three awe-inspiring figures in cap and gown appeared.

They were Dr. Holmes, Mr. Railton, and Mr. Lathom!

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Head, peering upward through his spectacles, and gazing fixedly at the strange sight on the flagstaff. "Can it be possible? My goodness gracious! It is Ricketts!"

Mr. Lathom blinked in mute amazement, unable to move or say a word for the time being.

As for Mr. Railton, he looked thunderstruck, but gradually his face assumed a more normal expression, and for a second his lips twitched into a smile—but only for a second!

"Bless my soul!" cried Dr. Holmes, striding forward; his gown fluttering in the wind. "The boy may fall and be killed at any moment! Ricketts, do you hear me? Come down this instant!"

He waved to the daring youngster on the mast, and Septimus Ricketts waved back, but he made no attempt to come down.

Others were shouting to him now, and the deep-throated voice of Kildare, the school captain, sounded high above the others.

Still Ricketts did not budge, but continued to hang on to the mast and wave his cap defiantly.

Dr. Holmes looked round, horror-stricken and helpless. "Cannot anything be done to make the boy obey?" he cried. "Will no one compel him to come down from that precarious position? He is in terrible danger, yet he foolishly pays no heed—"

Tom Merry moved forward, his eyes glinting determinedly.

"I'll climb up and make him give in, sir!" he cried. "I can do it, and it's quite safe!"

"Merry!" cried the Head. "Stop! It is foolhardiness to attempt to climb to that altitude—"

But the young Shell captain was gone! He sprang up to the ivy on the School House wall, and, gaining secure foot and hand hold, he commenced to climb rapidly upward.

The ivy was centuries old, and it grew firmly on the aged brick walls. Tom and his chums had many a time before climbed up to the dormitory windows, and the plucky junior had no fear.

The crowd in the quadrangle watched tensely as he went upward, hand over hand, never faltering or making one false move.

Tom Merry clambered over the parapet and ran along to the base of the tower. Then, raising himself on the heavy masonry, he crawled up unerringly to the pinnacle.

He reached the bottom of the flagstaff and took a fleeting look downward. The sight almost made him giddy. Far, far below he could see his schoolfellows looking like so many pigmies, so vast was the distance that separated them.

A mocking laugh from above made him look up sharply. Septimus Ricketts was grinning down at him, as calmly and mockingly as ever.

"Come on, you old frump! Get me down if you can!" Tom Merry gritted his teeth, grasped the flagstaff and commenced to climb.

A tense hush fell on the watching crowd. Tom kept on grimly to his task until he reached the centre of the mast. Then he paused, and, clinging firmly with legs and hands, he looked up.

"Will you come down, Ricketts?" he panted. "No!" was the defiant answer. "I won't be fetched down, so there! I'll come down when I want to. Go back!"

"Rats! You're coming down now!" said Tom between his teeth. "Be careful, you young idiot!"

Ricketts tried to drive him back with his foot. Tom, gripping the mast between his knees and steadying himself with one hand, reached out with the other and succeeded in grasping Ricketts' feet.

"Now, down you come!" he exclaimed. The new boy gave a frantic yell and clung to the top of the mast.

But Tom Merry was determined. He took care not to imperil the youngster above him, for a fall would probably have meant a horrible death for both, yet he maintained his hold on Ricketts' feet, and at last compelled him to follow him down.

They reached the parapet and faced each other. Tom expected Ricketts to still be obstinate and resentful, but instead of that he turned to the Shell captain and held out his small hand.

"Shake, you old fogey!" he said, with a grin. "That was splendid, by gum!"

Tom laughed good-naturedly, and gave the new boy a warm handshake.

Storms of cheering sounded from below, and when the two juniors were seen to shake hands on the roof the cheers were renewed.

Tom Merry went back and detached the umbrella from the mast and then he and Ricketts climbed down together to the quadrangle. They were immediately surrounded, and Tom was thumped on the back till he was breathless.

Dr. Holmes strode forward and fastened a firm grip on the new boy's shoulder.

"Come with me, Ricketts," he said grimly. "Your conduct is intolerable, and you must be taught what discipline means. It is futile for you to struggle, now."

"Oh, I sha'n't struggle," said Septimus Ricketts, grinning. "I'm in for another licking, I suppose?"

The Head did not reply. He beckoned to Mr. Railton, and he and the Housemaster led Ricketts away between them.

CHAPTER 10.

In Defiance of All!

"**T**HEN you are still determined to defy me, Ricketts?" The Head's voice was deep and ominous as he addressed the small, black-haired junior before him. Septimus Ricketts nodded, still with a cool grin on his face.

"Put it that way if you like, sir," he said. "I'm not

sorry for anything I've done, and I'm not going to apologise to Mr. Lathom."

"Your Form-master has been treated, like myself, with the grossest disrespect, Ricketts, and it is only just and proper that you should apologise."

"Well, I won't!" said the new boy stubbornly.

The Head's brows contracted.

"You are aware that I cannot tolerate this conduct any longer, Ricketts?" he rapped. "You have only been at St. Jim's a day, yet you have caused more trouble than any other boy in the school. Your behaviour is without parallel. In the whole course of my scholastic career I have never yet encountered a boy that treated his masters with such calculated insolence nor set discipline at defiance so flagrantly. I am determined that you shall obey the rules of this school—either of your own free will or by force. I am willing to overlook your lapses, Ricketts, so long as you apologise to Mr. Lathom and give me your word of honour that you will behave better in future."

Septimus Ricketts did not reply.

"Well, Ricketts, will you do that?"

"The new boy shook his head.

"No, sir. I don't see that I've committed any crime, and anyway, I want to do as I please," he said.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Lathom, who was in the study with him, exchanged glances.

"That, then, is your answer, Ricketts?" said the Head very quietly.

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Holmes set his teeth in anger.

"Very well," he exclaimed. "I will waste no more words upon you, Ricketts, but will adopt measures that will, perhaps, bring you to your senses. You will be locked up in the Punishment Room alone, and kept there until your stubborn will is broken. No one shall be permitted to go near you or have any intercourse with you, and your diet shall consist of very frugal fare. It is unprecedented for a new boy to be thus treated, but, in view of the attitude of defiance which you have adopted, I consider it the only course to take. Corporal punishment, apparently, has no effect upon you. We shall see what a few days' sojourn in solitary confinement in the Punishment Room will do."

He rang the bell at the side of his desk, and Toby, who answered it, was despatched in search of Taggles and Kildare.

The school captain arrived first, and Taggles came in shortly after.

Dr. Holmes pointed to Septimus Ricketts. "Will you kindly take this boy, Kildare, to the Punishment Room, and see that Taggles securely locks the door and fastens the windows?" he said. "Taggles, you will help Kildare should the boy resist."

Septimus Ricketts' eyes blazed. He commenced to dodge round the room in an attempt to reach the door, but Kildare grasped him just in time and swung him back in his firm grip.

"The new boy fought like a young tiger, and Taggles, at the Head's command, laid hold of him.

Struggling and shouting wildly, Ricketts was bundled out of the study and dragged away between Kildare and Taggles.

There was no arguing with the stalwart captain of St. Jim's.

The new boy was literally carried up the back stairs to the Punishment Room.

A clamorous crowd followed, and excitement reigned supreme in the School House.

Taggles grated the key in the lock of the Punishment Room, and the heavy oak door swung open. Ricketts was flung inside, and Kildare planted himself in the doorway.

The junior stood up, his small fists clenched and his eyes flashing round his prison.

The Punishment Room was cold and dismal enough. There was no gas and no furniture beyond a bare wooden table, a chair, and a gaunt iron bedstead. The very look of the place was sufficient to strike terror into a boy's soul.

Taggles went in and saw that the iron bars over the window were secure. Then he and Kildare went out and slammed the door on Septimus Ricketts.

The key grated once more in the lock, and the new boy was a prisoner in Nobody's Study.

Kildare, with a few curt words, dispersed the juniors who had gathered outside.

The whole of St. Jim's was soon discussing the fate of Septimus Ricketts, and it was agreed on all sides that a term of incarceration in the Punishment Room was really the best treatment that could have been given him.

The bell for afternoon lessons tolled at length, and the Fourth trooped into the class-room, still discussing the new boy in animated tones.

Mr. Lathom was more testy than usual that afternoon—due, no doubt, to his nerves being somewhat frayed after his experiences with the new pupil. And so, on Jack Blake's

whispered advice, the Fourth "sat tight" and put themselves on their best behaviour.

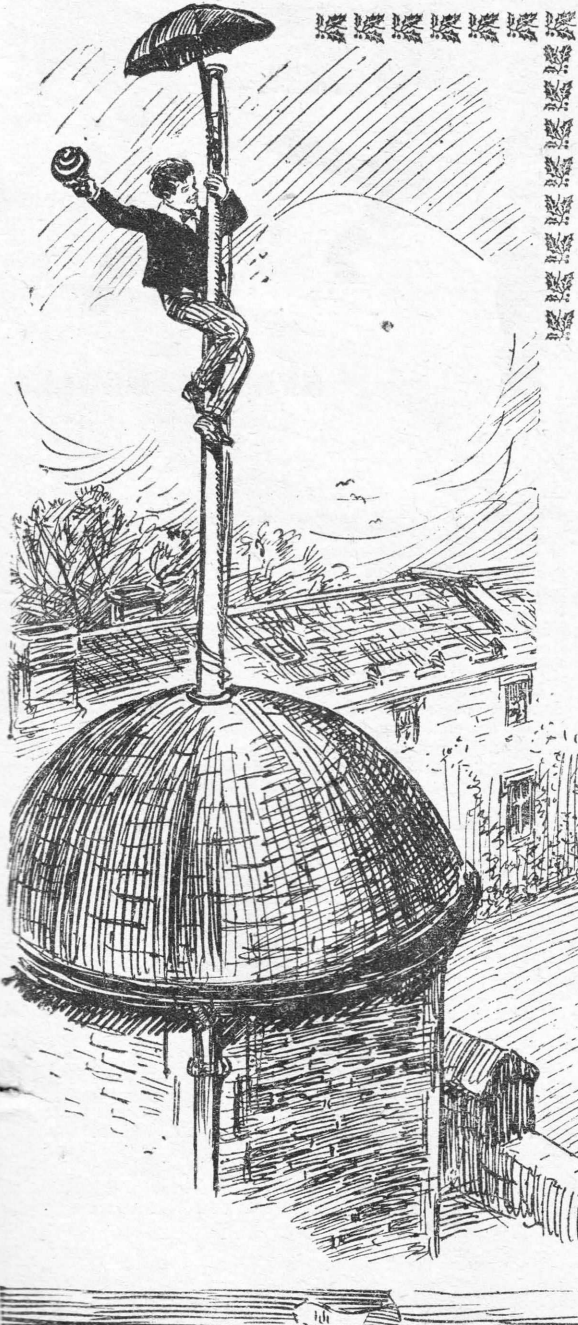
The afternoon wore on, and lessons seemed to drag. Try as they might, Jack Blake & Co. could not give their best attention to Maths and Euclid. They were thinking of the new boy, languishing alone in the chilly confines of Nobody's Study.

It was bitterly cold weather—the River Rhyl, in fact, was frozen hard—and not one of them envied the prisoner in that empty and unwarmed room on the back landing.

Mr. Lathom was standing before the blackboard, explaining an intricate theorem in Euclid, when there was a sudden rattle at the door-handle of the Form-room:

Everyone's eyes immediately turned to the door, which had begun to open slowly.

And then, to the utter amazement and disbelief of all, a small and well-known figure appeared.



It was Septimus Ricketts!

The new boy walked boldly into the Form-room, his face wearing an amused, triumphant grin. Mr. Lathom fell back with a gasp, wondering whether his eyes were playing him false.

"Good heavens!" he managed to ejaculate at last. "Ricketts! You here!"

"Yes, I'm here, sir," was the calm reply, whilst the Fourth sat at their desks in petrified wonder and astonishment. "I've come in to lessons like a good boy."

Mr. Lathom looked dazedly at him. "How—how came you to be released from the Punishment Room, Ricketts?" he demanded.

"I wasn't released, sir—I broke out!" replied the new boy, with a chuckle.

"Bless my soul! You—you broke out!" cried Mr. Lathom. The new boy nodded.

"Yes. They can't hold the upper hand of me for long, you know—I always beat 'em somehow. I thought things out while I was sitting in that rotten room, and made up my mind to escape. I noticed that the fireplace had been bricked up, but I had my penknife with me, and I set to work to scrape out the mortar and remove the bricks. It took a long time, but I managed to unblock the fireplace. Then all I had to do was to climb up the chimney, get down from the roof, have a wash and brush up afterwards, and then come along here. See?"

"Good heavens!" Septimus Ricketts walked calmly to his desk and sat down. The Fourth-Formers stared at him in awed wonderment.

As for Mr. Lathom, it was several minutes before he recovered from his astonishment.

He looked at Septimus Ricketts in such a manner that any ordinary boy would have trembled. Ricketts, however, continued to smile.

"Boy!" thundered the Fourth Form master in awful accents. "You have had the unparalleled audacity to break out of the Punishment Room—to escape by means of the chimney! Once again you have flaunted authority and set Dr. Holmes' orders at naught! It is scarcely credible that a boy could be so obstreperous. Dr. Holmes will be amazed when he hears of this latest escapade of yours. Ricketts, you will follow me to the Sixth Form room at once, to see the Head."

Septimus Ricketts stood up at his desk. "Don't you want me to take lessons, then, sir?" he asked innocently.

"Certainly not!" roared Mr. Lathom, whose nerves had been sorely tried, and whose temper was consequently worked up to boiling point. "You insolent, impudent young scamp! You shall be made to suffer for this behaviour! I will take it upon myself to bend you to my rule. Come here, Ricketts!"

The new boy walked out to the front again, and stood facing the infuriated master.

"If I'm not wanted at lessons, sir, I think I'd better go," he said calmly. "Cheerio, you chaps!"

He dodged, as Mr. Lathom made a grab at him, and ran from the room.

The master gave an angry shout and set out after him. He ran down the corridor, leaving the Fourth to their own devices.

"Ricketts! Stop! Come here!" he cried.

"No fear! I'm going out!"

(Continued on page 27.)

The spectacle of the umbrella tied to the flagstaff sent the juniors congregated below into a yell of laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!" But the laughter died down somewhat when three awe-inspiring figures in cap and gown appeared. They were Dr. Holmes, Mr. Railton, and Mr. Lathom. "Good heavens!" ejaculated the Head, peering upward and gazing fixedly at the strange sight on the flagstaff. "Goodness gracious! It is Ricketts!" (See Chapter 9.)

THE MAGNETIC FORCE!

Captaining to victory a "scrap heap" of players against a side with a big reputation behind it seems a hopeless task, doomed in advance to failure. But, raw recruits as the new Albion players are, they suddenly find themselves imbued with that "winning" spirit which has made Dick Hastie famous as . . .



BY
SYDNEY HORLER.

The New Springdale Albion!

A NEW spirit was abroad in Springdale. Enthusiasm had gripped the town as never before. Men who had become tired of hearing the name of Springdale Albion were now on the tiptoe of excitement. The streets on this particular day were full of hurrying throngs. They came from mill and factory, office and mine. They half-ran, half-walked, and gesticulated as they went with their hands, driving their arguments home. The truth was that a tremendous sporting upheaval had taken place, and the town was living in a whirlwind of excitement. For, during the short space of a week, the old football team had been buried, and a new one born.

A stranger tale had never been told in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. This new team was to be led on the field by a mere lad, a lad, moreover, whose father had recently caused his name to be associated with dire disgrace. But the recollection of what Dick Hastie had done in his first match whilst wearing the Albion colours, and the thought of how bravely he had stood the storm when arrested on that foul charge of theft, were more than compensation for this fact, and the thousands strong who were now hurrying in the direction of the Albion ground wished for nothing better than to see him successful that day as captain.

The kick-off in this game against Millburn Wanderers was fixed for half-past two. At two o'clock a dense stream of men were pouring into the ground. The turnstiles, which had become almost rusty for want of use, were working now at full pressure.

Two men stood watching the hurrying throngs. They were David Martin, the new chairman of the club, and James Burn, whose ready pen had wrought so much good for this magic cause.

"Look at them, Mr. Martin!" cried the reporter. "Look at them! They'll soon bring you all the money you want!"

The gloom on David Martin's face lifted.

"It's good to see them," he said; "but don't forget that we're saddled with a debt of eleven thousand pounds. All that money will have to be paid to the bank, Simister, Travers, and company before we can really do any good."

The reporter was rash enough to slap the older man on the back.

"I tell you, you have nothing to fear, Mr. Martin!" he said. "Young Hastie will be an International before long, and when he is the ground won't be big enough for the crowds that'll come to see him play!"

Together, the two walked towards the dressing-rooms. Outside the door they parted, the newspaper-man to his place in the Press-box, and the new chairman to the home dressing-room. Martin looked round as he entered.

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"I know all of you will do your best to-day, boys," he said; "you will do your best because you know we expect it of you. And even although half of you are reserves, I am sure you are going to put up a good fight. There's a big crowd outside waiting to see how you'll shape. They will want to see you win—so shall I—but if you can't win, at least lose honourably. Whatever you do, boys, play the game! The new directors of this club intend to keep Springdale football clean. We want you to be a credit to the town, instead of a disgrace. We want referees and linesmen to go away from Springdale with a good word for the team they have seen play. That's all I've got to say, boys, except to wish you good luck!"

Andy Anderson, a changed man now that he had confidence in his employers, came over to Dick, who had completed his changing.

"How do you feel, lad?" he asked anxiously.

"Fine!" replied Dick. "I never felt so fit in my life!"

Anderson looked at him and heaved a sigh.

"Lad, I'd give a million if I had it to be in your shoes to-day!" he said.

Any comment that Dick might have made to this strange remark was cut short by the warning toot of the referee's whistle. Instantly all thoughts but those of the approaching game vanished. Dick knew that a lot was expected of him that day, and he determined to justify his many friends' fervent hopes.

"Here you are, skipper!"

Anderson, with a happy laugh picked up a practice ball and flung it across to Hastie.

"Skipper?" repeated Dick. He had not yet been let into the secret, which was the talk of the town. He had heard the rumour, of course, but had not credited it.

"That's what I said, 'skipper,'" replied Anderson. "If you didn't know it before, you might as well know it now. Mr. Martin has told me to tell you that you will be captain of the Albion team from now on! You're not too overwhelmed, I hope?"

Dick was overwhelmed; so overwhelmed, that all he could do was to caress the ball between his hands, until one of the men who was to play under his direction came and took his arm.

"Come on, lad. The referee'll be waiting."

Feeling his heart thumping loudly beneath his jersey, Dick trotted down the asphalt track that led to the playing-pitch. Behind him he could hear the gentle thumping of the studs in the boots of the men he had been chosen to lead.

Suddenly he heard a terrific yell. The noise deafened and stunned him. Before him stretched a dense mass of cheering men, and the name they were calling was "Hastie!" and louder, "Hastie!"

Of a truth, emotion was rioting that afternoon. The Springdale crowd, through a series of extraordinary circum-

stances, had whipped themselves into a state bordering on frenzy. To begin with, the vast majority of the spectators had been supporters of the Albion when it was a very famous team. These, in coming to the ground that afternoon, felt that they were assisting at a ceremony which had a spiritual side. They had never expected to see this wonderful day dawn, when a Springdale Albion eleven went on the field determined to win back cleanly and fairly something of the old lustre that had been lost. These men, then, had a feeling that they were rebuilding a lost hope.

The fact that the youngest member of the team had been chosen to lead it was a symbol to them, for Youth was to be the hope of the new Albion team. Too long had old men, in a playing sense, dragged it down. Too long had the Albion been a refuge for players long since past their prime. Yes, in Youth must they put their faith.

So it was that when Dick Hastie, the first of the team to show himself, appeared, he was given a reception that might have astonished a king.

It was noticed then that the Albion directors had sent their men to battle wearing a new uniform. Spick and span they looked in their vivid scarlet jerseys and clean white knickers.

When the crowd got over their first transports of delight, they had other things to think about. They had heard that the Albion would be fielding a strange team that day, but they had not expected anything so drastic as this.

It was recognised that the new directors had had to take a long chance; but it was certainly a very desperate gamble that they had risked. The team to play against Millburn was composed of reserve players with but four exceptions. The only three first-team players to be included, apart from Hastie, were Bennett, the goalkeeper, Huntley, the left-back, and Andrews, the inside-right. This was an amazing side to put out against a team which had beaten one of the strongest sides in the Division by six clear goals on the previous Saturday. It looked as though the new Albion were going to start their career with a severe walloping.

For the first ten minutes after the kick-off it seemed that the worst fears of the spectators would be realised. The crowd had a succession of cold shivers. Not only were mis-kicks frequent, but the tackling of the home defenders was faulty, and the untried forwards, not used to the swiftness of the League game, were all at sea. They could neither gather the ball, nor could they pass correctly at this stage. It seemed practically certain that directly the Wanderers got into their stride, it would be merely a case of how many goals they would score.

But the Fates were kind to the Albion during that first period of relentless pressure on their goal. Their citadel survived. It was true that the crossbar was twice struck when Bennett was out of goal, and that the upright was shivered when the visiting centre-forward had plenty of space at which to aim. It was also true that, in the desperation of the moment, Huntley might conceivably have given away a penalty. Not that he tackled his man unfairly; but the visiting inside-left went to earth with a thud that could be heard all over the ground.

Then, after this period of dreadful anxiety, came a change. By some miraculous process the new Albion team had become settled and confident. It was as though these untried players had told themselves that they were as good, if not better, than their more experienced rivals. Had a goal been scored against them during these testing opening stages, the side might have been turned into a demoralised force; but because the gods of fortune had smiled instead of frowned, they took heart of grace.

There were many crudities, of course, but there was one thing that could be said about the new team. That was that the players were keen. To see players wearing the scarlet jersey of Springdale who were really keen was an entirely new sensation to most of the spectators.

Not only were these new players keen, but they were clean! The words of David Martin in the dressing-room before the match had gone deep. There was plenty of lusty, even robust, tackling—for these reserves were eager to seize the chance that had been offered them of making good—but no abominable fouling was witnessed. Even Andrews and Huntley, who had formed part of the dirtiest playing side in the country, restrained themselves. It may be that in that strange company they were awed into a sense of decency.

Dick was too busy to notice this at first, but when realisation came, it filled him with an overwhelming sense of pride. It was an honour to lead this new side. Apart from that, he forgot everything now that he was on the field. For the time being, he was a footballer, and his absorption in the game shut out everything else in the world.

When that first severe testing time had been faced, when that ordeal had been successfully survived, Dick had the first stirrings of a slight hope. If only the impossible would happen! If only this "remnant" of a team could win! What a send-off to the new club it would be!

He knew that most of the reserves who had been called up for service were but crude, however determined; but still, there were one or two of them who, with practice, would certainly develop. As it was, they showed distinct promise. As skipper, his would be the duty of developing this young talent. Had he not been so serious, he must have smiled, because the men he intended to coach were all considerably older than himself.

He did not spare himself, being forward and half-back in one. Heart and soul, as well as craft and muscle, went into every kick, every pass, every stride he made. For always there was that vision wonderful—the tantalising hope of being able to lead this team to victory in the very first game!

The crowd were eager to help him. Even those who had come to scoff remained to cheer. Backed up, as it were, by Dick Hastie's wonderful display, the crudity of many of the home team was overlooked. There were a few free-kicks given against the Albion, but these, it was noticed, were due not to dirty play, but to over-keenness.

After the first ten minutes the game developed into a titanic struggle. Yet, strange as it seemed, the harder the fight the more confidence this "scrap-heap team" seemed to gather to itself. A certain amount of this confidence no doubt was drawn from the cheers of the crowd, cheers which rang out unceasingly as the tide of battle flowed this way and that. But, for all that, the Albion battled bravely.

At half-time the honours were even. Not a goal had been scored, although each side had had narrow escapes. The home side left the field to the sound of ringing cheers.

In the dressing-room they were greeted by a smiling David Martin and a wildly-enthusiastic Andy Anderson.

"You've done wonderfully well, boy!" said the new chairman, whilst the trainer's contribution was: "I'm proud of every mother's son of you!"

Short as it was, the interval seemed too long to the eager players, and instead of leisurely walking on to the field when the referee's whistle blew for fresh activity, they almost ran. There were still forty-five minutes to go; much might happen in that time.

The tension became keener with every minute; even though no goals were scored, the football in this second half was of a high quality. Excitement reigned supreme. Determined raids were made, only to be beaten off; wingers worked themselves into splendid positions, only to see the defenders triumph at the last moment.

Half an hour had sped of the second half, and still not a single goal had been scored. Yet this was not so much the fault of either forward line as it was due to the magnificent defence of the four backs on view.

All the while the crowd cheered Hastie.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

DICK HASTIE, a young fellow of twenty, and a born footballer, is approached by

J. B. TOVEY, a football "scout" on the look-out for fresh talent, who declares that if Dick will join the famous Swifts he will make an International of him within two years. Dick, however, has to turn the tempting offer down, for

ROBERT HASTIE, his father, suddenly disappears, leaving behind him a host of clamouring creditors. Believing in his father's innocence, and holding himself responsible for the money entrusted to his father, Dick publicly announces that he will stay in Springdale until every penny has been wiped off.

DAVID MARTIN, Hastie's staunch friend.

JAMES BURN, a "live-wire" reporter on the "Springdale Gazette."

BENJAMIN TRAVERS, the managing-director of Springdale Albion.

Some time elapses, and so strong is public opinion that Benjamin Travers is forced to give Dick Hastie a place in the Springdale eleven. The lad acquits himself well. This move on Travers' part, however, is the beginning of a foul conspiracy, for Travers wants to see Dick out of the way. The lad is arrested on a charge of stealing money from the pockets of his fellow-players, and so strong is the evidence that Dick's guilt would appear to be proved up to the hilt. At the critical moment in the trial, however, Anderson, the Springdale trainer, declares that the charge is a foul conspiracy. What's more, he proves his statement to the satisfaction of the presiding magistrate. Dick is acquitted, and with his acquittal comes a change in the fortunes of the Springdale football club. A new board of directors take control, and Travers and his rascally associates are expelled from the club.

(Now read on.)

In him they saw their chief hope. Dick had played brilliantly, but without that atom of luck which makes all the difference between success and the other thing.

At last, with ten minutes or so to go, Dick received the ball in mid-field, dribbled half a dozen yards, beat another man to get in his kick unhampered, and then, turning sharply, lunged the ball out to the extreme right instead of feeding his own partner, as everyone had anticipated.

The new outside-right for the Albion that day was a local youth, named Hart. That he had craft in his toes was proved by the deftness with which he trapped the splendidly-placed ball before going in close and shooting from ten yards' range.

This new movement was so swift that the Wanderers' defence was momentarily nonplussed.

A moment's breathless silence, and then:
Whang!

That deftly-driven ball, had it been a few inches lower, would undoubtedly have brought victory to the home side. As chance would have it, however, it struck the crossbar with a resounding smack that sent the ball twenty yards or so back into the playing pitch.

The reserve centre-half of the Albion met the ball with his head.

"Hastie!" he called.

Dick knew the pass was meant for him long before he heard his name uttered. He nodded the ball down to his left foot and, in that same instant, let fly.

It was a perfect dazzle drive, a whizz-bang of a shot! No one could understand how the ball passed through that multitude of legs before finding a resting place at the back of the net at the juncture of upright and crossbar. But sufficient was it that the goal had been scored, and the crowd of twenty thousand strong promptly gave itself over to uproarious delight.

Ten more minutes!

Ten minutes in which each foot of ground, each twist of the ball, was fiercely contested. Many times during that ten minutes did the Albion goal threaten to succumb, but brave hearts were defending it. Huntley and his partner never wavered, and so the end came, as everyone might have prayed, but scarcely dared to hope, with the "scrap-heap team," as it had been termed, the victors in a memorable fray.

The Stalking Shadow!

SPRINGDALE ALBION had won their first match as a re-organised team, but although that fact delighted David Martin and his fellow-directors, the new Board had plenty of worries. The chief of these was the colossal debt of eleven thousand pounds, which the old gang had left them as a legacy. Most of this was owing to the bank that had supplied an overdraft. As the manager of this particular bank had been a close friend of Benjamin Travers, he now very unsportingly threatened to call this money—amounting to eight thousand pounds—in. This meant that the club would be forced to go into bankruptcy unless the necessary money could be found.

In the fresh crisis, Jimmy Burn, the new football writer of the "Gazette," proved himself invaluable. Bringing all his energies into the task, he started what he called "The Sportsman's Fund."

"ARE YOU A FOOTBALL LOVER?"

were the words which he printed in large type at the top of his column.

Straight to the point, it commanded the attention of everyone who opened the newspaper.

Below were the words:

"Springdale Albion F. C. is in grave peril. One danger has been overcome, but an even greater one remains: The club owes no less a sum than eleven thousand pounds to different creditors, and unless the major part of this money is forthcoming from the sport-loving community of Springdale the famous club will be forced into bankruptcy.

"ARE YOU A SPORTSMAN?"

"If you are, you will send your contribution at once to the offices of this paper."

The answer to this appeal was simply amazing. It caught the imagination of the town, and everyone vied with everyone else to send the biggest contribution possible. Money poured into the office by every post. It came in all forms, from cheques to threepenny-bits carefully wrapped up in paper.

The most significant feature of all was the messages that were sent with the contributions. These were powerfully addressed to Dick Hastie, and everyone wished him good luck in his captaincy of the club.

What the other newspapers up and down the country described as "one of the most remarkable meetings even known in connection with football" was held at the town-hall a week after the appeal had first been printed.

David Martin presided. He looked what he was—the happiest man in Springdale that night.

As he stood up, holding a pink slip of paper, which proved to be a cheque, in his hand, Martin smiled broadly at the burst of applause with which he was greeted.

"To-night's gathering, my friends," he said, "makes me feel more proud than I have ever been before of being a Springdale man. Only Springdale men could have done the wonderful thing you have accomplished during the last week. This cheque"—holding the pink slip aloft—"spells a continuance of life for Springdale Albion." When the volleying cheers had died away the speaker continued: "As you know, it is my ambition to make the dear old club as famous as it used to be, and I think that in time, with your loyal aid and support I shall succeed."

Another outburst of applause greeted this announcement. When the clamour had died down David Martin further said:

"If you will please excuse me now, I must go. I have to catch a certain train. As it is about a football matter I know you will wish me luck."

"Going to sign another player, Mr. Chairman?" asked a voice.

David Martin smiled inscrutably.

"That's a matter which at the moment is on the lap of the gods," he said.

The train journey that David Martin took that evening bore good fruit. A couple of nights later Dick Hastie received an urgent message to go to the Woolpack Hotel, in the High Street. Arriving there, he was greeted by a short, stocky man, with twinkling eyes.

"Bob Layton!" he cried delightedly.

"Yes, Mr. Hastie, it's your old partner. Suppose I can call you 'partner,' although we only played one game together?"

"What's the meaning of this, Bob?" inquired Dick. "You don't mind me calling you 'Bob,' I hope? You see, I'm a pro. now myself."

"Mind? I like it, lad! We're going to make up the future left wing of Springdale Albion. Didn't you know?"

"No; I'll be hanged if I knew! What does it all mean?"

"Come in this room and you'll soon hear."

In the private sitting-room to which he was escorted Dick found David Martin talking to a man who sprang up at the young forward's entrance.

"Mr. McKinnon!" exclaimed Dick.

This was a night of surprises.

Wally McKinnon, the famous manager of the London Swifts, held out his hand.

"It seems that we can't get you to play for us, Hastie, but I'm glad to see you, all the same!"

Here David Martin took up the talk.

"We owe Wally McKinnon a thousand thanks," he said, "for he has agreed to transfer Bob Layton to us for practically nothing. Bob Layton, I should explain, Dick, used to be one of the finest outside-lefts in the world."

"He is still, on his day," put in Wally McKinnon. "I had some difficulty in inducing the directors to let him go,



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Instantly Dick tore off the mask. He had had suspicions before, but now these were fully realised. His mysterious attacker was Tunney—the forward whose place he had taken in the Albion team! (See this page.)



I can tell you. He has been such a faithful servant to us, but his heart was evidently in Springdale, where his mother lives, that I managed to persuade them, however. Hastie," he added, turning to the young forward, "Bob will make you the finest partner you could possibly have. There's not a trick in the game that he doesn't know, and unless I'm mistaken he will be the means of bringing out every bit of genius you have got. I wish you both the best of luck!"

Having said so much, the good-hearted football manager wished the small company good-bye, as he intended to return to London that same night.

When he had gone, Bob Layton, after getting from Dick the full story of what had happened since his arrival in Springdale, said to his future partner:

"And now for a secret, Dick! The real reason why I wanted to come to Springdale was because I knew that in you I should have the finest partner in the four divisions of the League. Wally McKinnon said the same. You'll disappoint me unless you wear an English International cap before you are very much older, boy!"

Dick laughed. The words opened up a golden vista, but the possibility seemed so remote as to appear fantastic.

"Don't pull my leg, Bob," he said.

But Layton responded with a determined: "Well, we'll wait and see!"

After wishing David Martin and Bob Layton good-night Dick turned into a lonely thoroughfare known as the Fosseway, which was the nearest direction to his lodgings. He had proceeded five yards or so when he suddenly became aware of a stalking shadow. The man, whoever he was, moved in the gloom caused by the tall wall on the left side of the footway, but when Dick suddenly turned he was only six yards away.

"What's the idea? What are you following me for?"

It was then that Dick noticed that the man was wearing a black mask over the upper part of his face. A cloth cap was pulled well down over his eyes, and his overcoat collar was high around his neck.

Thus questioned, the man made no reply. Instead, with right arm uplifted, he rushed silently at the speaker.

arm was now useless, and he aimed a terrific blow at his foe's chin with his right fist.

Fortunately, the blow connected. The man staggered, and before he could recover himself Dick, rushing forward, landed twice in quick succession, with the result that, after making an ineffectual attempt to keep his feet, the masked man fell to the pavement.

Instantly Dick tore off the mask. He had had his suspicions before, but now these were fully realised. His mysterious attacker that night was Tunney, the forward whose place he had taken in the Springdale Albion team!

"I needn't ask, I suppose, the meaning of this caddish business?" he said. "But I will give you this warning, Tunney—"

"Don't hand me over to the police, Hastie!" pleaded the beaten man.

"I never intended to hand you over to the police, although a year or so in gaol probably would not do you any harm. The warning I want you to hear, Tunney, is this—if you, or any of the others associated with you, try any more funny tricks with me, you'll regret it! The best thing for you and Burleigh & Co. to do is to clear out of the town. Do you get that?"

Tunney, who by this time was sitting up, made a movement with his head which might have been taken for assent.

"It's pretty rough losing our jobs the way we did," he said.

"That's nothing to do with me. You'd have lost them in any case before long. Football doesn't want players of your type; but in any case, now the Albion don't want you, why don't you try to get a job out there?"

"We can't. We're too well known."

"H'm! I thought so. Well, clear off to Canada or somewhere, and get a job of work out there."

Tunney slowly rose to his feet.

"You ain't such a bad chap, Hastie, after all," he muttered. "Many a fellow would have called the police after to-night's job. Now I'm going to give you a bit of warning."

"About whom? Burleigh?"

"No," Tunney sneered in contempt; "not about Burleigh, nor about anybody who used to play for the Albion. Somebody higher up than that."

"Well?"

"Benjamin Travers and Sam Simister aren't likely to stop at anything to get you out of this town, Hastie—you can take that from me. It may be worth a bit for you to know it."

The Wing of the Century!

DICK had barely time to notice that his assailant was armed with what he took to be a short, loaded stick before the man was on him. He lifted his arm in protection, but a stunning blow caused him paralysing pain. He knew that for offensive purposes this left

"I dare say it's true, Tunney, but I'm quite capable of looking after myself. Still, thanks for the tip."

Hastie thought for a moment, and then said in an altered tone:

"Look here, Tunney, why don't you try to pull up?"

"What's the good?" said the disgraced forward gloomily.

"It's this good; if only you trained properly, you'd be a decent player again. Didn't you use to play at inside-right?"

Tunney looked surprised.

"Yes. Why?" he asked.

"Because if you give me your word that you'll make a decent start again, I think I could induce Mr. Martin to give you a further trial."

The other started back.

"What! After trying to do you in to-night?"

"Never mind that. But there was something at the back of that which you haven't told me about yet, Tunney."

The other hung his head.

"Yes, there was," he admitted. "Sam Simister offered me ten pounds to put you out—and that's the truth. I don't mind telling you I hated you; but you're a decent fellow Hastie, and now I'm sorry."

"Are you willing to do what I ask?"

"What's that?"

"Give yourself another chance."

"I am," said Tunney eagerly.

"Right! Be down on the ground to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, and I'll speak to Mr. Martin about you."

"Hastie," exclaimed Tunney, "I'll never forget this—no, I'll never forget it! Do you hear what I say?"

"Good-night, Tunney!" said Hastie, with a smile, and walked away.

The signing-on of Bob Layton, the once famous outside-left of the Swifts, was a theme that was done full justice to by Jimmy Burn. The football reporter of the local "Gazette" raked up Layton's illustrious record and printed it in leaded type. Soon, all those who were not already familiar with the ex-Swift winger's achievements, were discussing the latest acquisition to the Albion team animatedly.

It was recognised that in signing this famous outside-left the Albion had done a very good stroke of business. Eardley, the young local who had understudied Wilson, was not ripe enough yet for full honours. He was a willing lad, and within a couple of years might possibly be a credit to any team, but at the moment he was crude and unfinished. Layton, on the other hand, knew every trick in the game. Although he had lost some of his speed, it was generally expected that he would make his head save his heels. It was also generally expected that he would bring out all the latent genius that the local football world now knew Dick Hastie possessed.

No one was prouder to make the acquaintance of the old star than Andy Anderson.

"It's many a time I've seen you in print, Bob," he said;

this either—he was to prove this in signal fashion.

"but this is the first time I've ever seen you in the flesh."

"But not the last time, I hope," said Layton.

"Not the last time by many hundreds, I hope," was the trainer's response. Between the two a friendship sprang up at once, and no factor was so instrumental in cementing this as the liking both had for the lad who captained the side.

All the world was agog to see how the new Albion left-wing would disport itself, and half an hour before the kick-off in the next home match the ground was crammed to its fullest capacity. In fact, much to the regret of the new board of directors, the gates were forced to be closed a few minutes later.

A gigantic cheer went up to greet Dick Hastie as he led his men on the field. Fully twenty-five thousand people had gathered, and they seemed to shout with one voice:

"Come on, the Albion!"

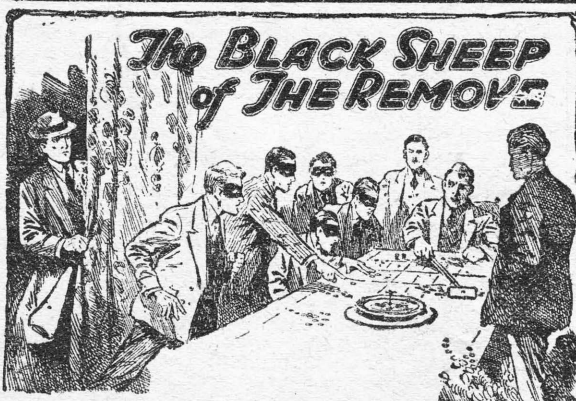
This was the war-cry which years before had spurred on to victory the illustrious team that had three times in its history won the championship of the First Division. For years it had been allowed to lapse, but now, with the prospect of the sun shining through the clouds once more, the old enthusiasm became rampant. The old war-cry sounded from all parts of the field. Men jumped to their feet in the grand-stand, waving their hats and yelling the words with the full power of their lungs, and down by the railings others echoed the cry and carried on the orgy of inspiring sound. Springdale Albion had been born again in a riot of ecstatic noise.

The round, smiling face of Bob Layton, hero of hundreds of pulsating football fights, was a sight to see as the crowd, flushed with excitement, recognised him and gave him vociferous welcome. It was nothing new to him to be greeted with such enthusiasm, but he was glad for his skipper's sake that the crowd had taken to him so kindly.

It was recognised that this match with Downside was to provide a proper test. It was true that the reorganised team had beaten Millburn on their merits, but for the Albion to climb out of the Slough of Despond into which they had fallen—they were now only second from the bottom of the League table—victory after victory would have to be secured.

Dick was fortunate enough to win the toss. This meant a distinct advantage, because there was a strong wind blowing down the field. His movement of the hand signifying that the Albion would play with the aid of this breeze, caused another round of cheers to volley forth, and the young Albion players trotted to their places like happy schoolboys as the referee planted the ball on the centre-spot.

Dick Hastie was never able to forget that moment. The tremendous drama which was raging round him stirred him intensely. He saw himself as an actor upon a stage, but the throbbing excitement did him good instead of harm. Although he did not know it, he was the fortunate possessor of that mystic quality which is known as the big match temperament, and soon—although he did not know



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The crowd, as the teams lined up, gave itself over to delighted anticipation. Downside was an ancient rival of the Albion. Here was yet another club that had fallen from its proud estate. Many causes had conspired to cast Downside from its pinnacle, some of them similar to the devastating forces that had almost ruined Springdale. Whatever their position, however, the two clubs had always maintained a fierce rivalry; and there was no reason to suppose that this rivalry would lessen in tension that day.

To beat Downside! That would be a wonderful triumph. No victory could possibly be sweeter. The crowd longed for victory for another reason. A win would show to the superstitious (and there is a tremendous lot of superstition in modern football, both among the players and the crowds) that the unkind Fate which had been glooming over the club for so long had at last been satisfied and propitiated. It might be taken for granted, if the home side could only win that day, that the old evil days were gone—gone never to return.

(Can Hastie and his wonderful band of stalwarts make good? Be sure you read next week's rattling fine instalment of this powerful footer serial, chums.)

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THE IMPOSSIBLE SCHOOLBOY!

(Continued from page 21.)

Septimus Ricketts ran on, and bolted down the stairs.

Mr. Lathom paused, panting, by a window, and he saw the new boy cross the quadrangle and walk out of the gates.

The master set his teeth hard, and a steely glitter entered his eyes.

"The lawless young scoundrel shall not go scot free!" he muttered angrily. "I will bring him back with my own hands, and see that he is given his just deserts."

Mr. Lathom hurried away, fetched his hat and overcoat, and left St. Jim's in hot pursuit of the runaway.

It was bitterly cold out-of-doors, but Mr. Lathom felt quite warm in his hurry. There was no sign of Septimus Ricketts in the Rylcombe Lane, but he guessed that the boy would make for the village, so he kept on in that direction.

He saw a party of skaters returning from the river, and inquired of them whether they had seen a junior wearing the St. Jim's cap.

"Yes; we saw him over by the river, sir," replied one of the men. "A little fellow, with rather long black hair."

"That is the boy," said Mr. Lathom eagerly. "Whereabouts is the young scamp likely to be?"

"Just beyond those trees, sir," was the reply. "If you take a short cut across this field, you'll come to the part of the river where we saw the boy."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Mr. Lathom, and he hurried on across the field.

He had nearly reached the trees when he saw a St. Jim's school cap over the top of a clump of low bushes. Ricketts was on the other side—of that there was no doubt.

The master hurried on until he reached the bushes. Looking over them, he saw the new boy sliding about on the ice of the Rhyll with joyous abandon.

"Ricketts!" cried Mr. Lathom angrily. "Come here!"

The new boy stopped and stared in great astonishment at the appearance of his Form master looking over the bushes.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "You here, sir!"

"Yes, I am here, Ricketts!" said Mr. Lathom grimly. "I have come all the way from St. Jim's to take you back to answer for your misdeeds. Will you surrender to me, you little rascal?"

"No fear, sir!" retorted the new boy, and he skated swiftly away.

Mr. Lathom started through the bushes with an angry shout.

So intent was he on watching the runaway junior that he did not see how close he had stepped to the river bank. He found his feet sliding from under him, all of a sudden, and he staggered forward. He did his best to recover his balance, but it was too late.

Mr. Lathom floundered forward helplessly on the ice, and as he did so there was an ominous sound below him.

Crack!
The ice was thin at that part of the river, and, although he had held up for the boy, the weight of Mr. Lathom was too much.

It broke under his feet like glass; black water bubbled up through the gap in the ice, and Mr. Lathom, with a cry of horror, disappeared from sight.

Septimus Ricketts heard that cry and turned, just in time to see what had happened.

In an instant he forgot everything, except that the master was in deep water and probably could not swim. He stayed only to tear off his jacket. Then he bounded to the gap in the ice and plunged in.

CHAPTER 11.

The Hero!

THE black waters bubbled in the yawning gap where the master and boy had disappeared. Nobody saw the tragedy happen, so nobody knew how long a period of awful agony it was before those waters parted again and a drenched head appeared above the surface—the head of Septimus Ricketts.

The intrepid junior fought his way to the edge of the jagged hole, and there he clung with one hand. In his left arm he held a heavy burden—he had not come up alone. The Form master was in his grasp, and Mr. Lathom's head appeared. He was unconscious, and he lay like a log in the exhausted junior's grasp.

Ricketts held on to the broken edge of the ice, and at the same time supported the insensible Form master. His face

was white as death. The bitter cold of the icy depths had penetrated to his very bones. He was panting—choking for breath, and although he tried to cry out he could not, for his very throat and jaws seemed numbed.

He struggled to keep up and clung tenaciously to the ice, fighting with the swirling mist that threatened every moment to rob him of his senses. He had been underneath those choking depths for what had seemed an eternity, and he was spent. The numbing coldness of the water and the master's weight told terribly on the youngster. He felt that the arm supporting Mr. Lathom was being wrenched from his shoulder.

He looked round wildly, but only the long expanse of frozen river and the thick woods beyond met his sight.

There was no help near!

The plucky youngster rallied his ebbing strength and gave a loud, choking cry:

"Help!"

He put all his energy into that despairing shout. The black water seemed to be sucking him down. Numbness and unconsciousness were gradually creeping over him. Tough as he was, Ricketts knew that he would not be able to hold on much longer.

"Help! Help!"

There was a crashing in the undergrowth, and two local farmers burst their way to view. They had heard the boy's desperate shouts.

Ricketts saw them, and a gleam of hope came into his glazed eyes. Had there been no help forthcoming he would have gone down to his death with Mr. Lathom, whom he had saved.

But there was help now—the help of strong, eager hands. The two men came quickly to the spot, and grasped him and his unconscious burden. The situation was still fraught with the direst peril—the ice might give again at any moment.

But the men were experienced in such matters, and, proceeding carefully, they landed the boy and the master he had rescued. They took them to the shore and laid them on the grass. Septimus Ricketts lay very still. His almost superhuman effort had been too much for him, and his eyes closed in unconsciousness.

The stalwart farmers, after consulting hurriedly, each took one of the prone figures in his arms and dashed across the field to the road. As luck would have it, a motor-car came along just as they reached the road, and, waving, they attracted the driver's attention, and he stopped.

"What has happened?" he asked, as the two men ran up with their burdens. "Good heavens, they have been in the river! Put them inside; I'll drive to the hospital at once."

"That's too far away," said one of the farmers grimly. "These be a lad and master from St. Jim's. You'd better drive there, sir, if you will."

"Very well."

Mr. Lathom and Septimus Ricketts were lifted gently into the car, which turned next minute and drove off at top speed to St. Jim's.

Lessons were just over when they arrived, and the quadrangle was crowded. Excitement was intense when the insensible occupants of the car were seen. Wally D'Arcy rushed to fetch the Head.

Dr. Holmes came out quickly, his kind old face wearing a look of horror and concern.

"Good heavens! What has happened?" he exclaimed.

"We found them in the river, sir," explained one of the farmers. "The gentleman had evidently fallen in, and the boy saved him from being drowned. He was holding on to the ice and supporting the gentleman when we found him."

"Good heavens!"

"The boy's a real plucked 'un, and no mistake, sir," said the other man. "If it hadn't been for him, this gentleman would have been drowned. He was half-senseless himself, and the cold must have been terrible, yet he held on gamely till we arrived. He undoubtedly saved this gentleman's life."

There was a thrilled hush in the quadrangle.

Mr. Lathom was stirring now, and a low moan escaped his lips.

Ricketts lay there in the car as pale as death. The hard lines round his set mouth told of what he had endured in order to rescue the Fourth Form master.

"They must be taken to the sanatorium at once!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, in horror. "Kildare, ring for the doctor immediately. Monteith, go to Miss Marie and tell her to have hot water and blankets ready."

The two prefects dashed away; meanwhile, a dozen willing hands lifted Mr. Lathom and Ricketts from the car.

The master was conscious, and was able to stand up with support. His head was swimming and his feet felt like lead. He shivered and trembled with the horror of his past situation.

THE IMPOSSIBLE SCHOOLBOY!

(Continued from previous page.)

"Are you all right, my dear Lathom?" asked Dr. Holmes anxiously.

Mr. Lathom gave a convulsive shudder.
"I—I fell through the ice!" he stammered. "I—I was under the water. Oh, the darkness—the cold! I was choking—drowning! How did I get out?"

"Ricketts saved you," said Dr. Holmes quietly.
"Ricketts! He was yards away—"

"Then he must have returned and plunged in to your rescue," was the fervent response. "Thank Heaven the brave lad was in time!"

Mr. Lathom suffered himself to be taken quickly into the sanatorium, where Miss Marie had everything ready for the reception of the two, who had been so near to a terrible death in the frozen river.

Septimus Ricketts was laid in bed and left in the hands of the doctor, who had come quickly in response to Kildare's call.

There was nothing else to be done, and the juniors waited out in the quadrangle, on tenterhooks of anxiety, wondering whether the new boy's condition was serious.

His plucky act in rescuing Mr. Lathom from the ice was the talk of the school, and everyone spoke in terms of warmest praise and admiration of the reckless junior.

Kildare came out later with good news.

Ricketts was very ill; but he had received attention in time, and the danger was past.

A cheer arose from the juniors in the quad at this announcement.

Upstairs in the sanatorium Septimus Ricketts lay restless in bed, wrapped in warm blankets. He had been delicious; but the doctor had administered a sedative, and the fever was dying.

A step sounded at his bedside, and, hearing it, the boy opened his eyes.

He saw Mr. Lathom leaning over him.

A flicker of a grin—his old calm grin—crossed Ricketts' white, drawn face.

"Then you're all right, sir?" he murmured. "I—I'm glad. I'm sorry that I ran you into danger, sir, and I—I apologise for my madness."

"Do not distress yourself on that point, my brave lad," said Mr. Lathom in a tremulous voice. "You saved my life at the risk of your own. Only I can tell what horror you went through for my sake. I owe you a debt of the deepest gratitude."

He took the junior's small, white hand and pressed it softly.

Septimus Ricketts closed his eyes, and Mr. Lathom stole away.

Later that evening a car drew up at St. Jim's, and a sweet little lady descended. She was Miss Ricketts, the new boy's aunt and guardian, who had come post haste to the school on receiving a telephone message from Dr. Holmes as to the illness of her nephew.

She was taken immediately to the sanatorium, and there she remained until it was night-time and the lights were gleaming in St. Jim's.

By that time there was better news concerning Septimus Ricketts. The hardy little fellow had rallied, and was now making rapid progress towards recovery.

Miss Ricketts held a long consultation with Dr. Holmes that evening, and she stayed the night as the guest of Mrs. Holmes.

Next morning an announcement was made that was received with deep and genuine regret by all St. Jim's. Miss Ricketts had decided to take her nephew away from St. Jim's, feeling that the boy was too unsuited for school life to remain there. He would be put into the hands of another tutor when he had fully recovered, and later, perhaps, would be again sent to school.

Tom Merry & Co. were particularly sorry to hear this. Septimus Ricketts came out of the sanatorium that morning, looking as lithe and cheerful as ever. He left St. Jim's was missed at St. Jim's. In spite of his recklessness and grinning a cheery farewell from the car.

Although his stay had been very brief, Septimus Ricketts was missed at St. Jim's. In spite of his recklessness and obstinacy, he had shown himself to be a sportsman and a hero, and for days afterwards the boys of St. Jim's never tired of discussing in terms of deepest admiration the Impossible Schoolboy!

THE END.

(Look out for a screamingly funny story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "GRUNDY, THE VENTRILOQUIST!" By Martin Clifford. Don't miss this special treat, chums.)

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