

"THE TAMING OF THE TYRANT!" SIDE-SPLITTING COMPLETE YARN INSIDE!

The GEM

2^D

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



HOAX ABOUT ST. JIM'S! DR. HOLMES' REPORTED RESIGNATION!

CHAPTER

Ratty on the
Warpath!

"SCANDALOUS!"

He repeated the word
M.A., Housemaster
of the New House
at St. Jim's, snorted
out that word.

Mr. Ratcliff was a somewhat sour-tempered man. Words like "scandalous" were frequently on his lips. Sometimes they were there without much cause.

On this occasion he did have a certain amount of justification. En route for the School House for morning lessons, he had just discovered three juniors in the very act of invading the sacred precincts of the Head's garden.

The delinquents in question, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—were now before him.

"Scandalous!" repeated Mr. Ratcliff harshly, looking, nevertheless, as though his discovery was not altogether displeasing to him.

"The fact were trespassing on the Head's garden."

"Denials are useless, Merry!"

"I wasn't going to deny anything, sir!" retorted the leader of the Shell coldly. "I was going to say that we were looking for our football. We kicked it over the wall by mistake."

"The explanation merely makes your offence more culpable!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "All three of you will follow me to the Head at once!"

"Oh, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned and stalked off. The Terrible Three exchanged expressive glances and followed him. It was a bright morning. The Terrible Three had been revelling in the early sunshine. They found it difficult to understand how even Mr. Ratcliff contrived to be bad-tempered in such weather. But bright mornings made no difference to the Housemaster of the New House. He was evidently looking for trouble in his usual amiable way.

It is said that those who seek shall find. If Mr. Ratcliff really had started out with the intention of seeing trouble, he had quickly found it. And his luck was evidently in. For immediately he turned towards, in turning the corner from the Head's garden to the quad, he found even more trouble.

He took them rather quickly. Some shouting and laughter from the other side. The inference was that some mischief was enjoying himself. So Mr. Ratcliff set his lips grimly and fairly sprinted round the corner to see what he should see.

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The TAMING of the



The juniors whose voices he had heard were Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth. Blake & Co., with their usual high spirits, were employing the few remaining minutes before classes in a vigorous game of leap-frog. By an unlucky mischance, at the very moment Mr. Ratcliff turned the corner, Blake hurtled over Herries' back and alighted with terrific force on Mr. Ratcliff. And Mr. Ratcliff found his second instalment of trouble.

Thud!

It was a truly fearful impact. For one dizzy moment Blake found himself clinging affectionately round Mr. Ratcliff's neck. Then he and his unwilling host went down together in a tangled heap.

"Ugh!" came a choking gasp from Blake.

"Ow! Oh!" roared Mr. Ratcliff, when he had collected sufficient breath with which to roar.

"Man down!" sang out Monty Lowther.

"Ha, he, ha!"

Then the juniors' laughter died a sudden death as Mr. Ratcliff sat up again. The expression on the Housemaster's face was enough to kill anything in the remotest degree resembling laughter.

RATTY MADE NEW HEAD! READ THIS YARN—AND LAUGH!

TYRANT!



"Oh! Ugh! Ow!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "You—you—"
 "Sorry, sir!" groaned Blake. "You see—"
 "I see that I have been violently assaulted by a ruffianly young School House hooligan!" booted the New House master furiously. "Help me up! Oh! Oh dear!"
 "Bai Jove! I twust you have sustained no sewious injurys, sir!" said D'Arcy, as he lent a hand. "If you feel it necessary to call a doctah—"
 "Silence!" rasped Mr. Ratcliff. "You will not call a doctor, D'Arcy. You will follow me to the Head—you and your wretched companions!"
 "Bai Jove!"

"Follow me!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff. And he limped off, with seven victims trailing after him.

"You chaps in this, then?" asked Blake, sotto voce, as he tramped along beside Tom Merry.

Tom made a grimace at Mr. Ratcliff's back.

"He caught us in the Head's garden, just before you bashed into him. Trust Ratty!"

"On a lovely morning like this, too!" remarked Digby disgustedly. "Let's whistle 'Pack Up Your Troubles' just to show what we think of him!"

"Bai Jove! That's wathah a bwright ideal!" said Arthur Augustus. "Take the note from me, deah boys!"
 The chums of the School House grinned and took their note from D'Arcy. A moment later, to Mr. Ratcliff's surprise and consternation, the shrill notes of the old War ditty were sounding behind him.

The juniors are fed up with the ranting of the Tyrant! They're going to take him down a peg or twq!.... He's brought down half a dozen pegs when they've finished with him!

Mr. Ratcliff looked round, his lean face pink.

"Wretched boys! How dare you!"
 "I twust you have no objecsh to our whistlin', Mr. Watcliff?" inquired Arthur Augustus innocently. "It's such a wippin' mornin' that it's quite hard to have to suppress one's feelin's about it!"

"You will be silent immediately—all of you!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh!"
 The grinning juniors were obediently silent. Really they had not anticipated getting away with demonstrations of happiness with Mr. Ratcliff in front of them.

Quite a crowd was waiting for them on the steps of the School House, and there were many inquirers as they marched through into the building.

"Been rioting, eh?" asked a le d Kangaroo of the Shell. "Or, is it only an early morning Nature-study class?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Mr. Ratcliff looked back with a glare. "That is presumably intended for impertinence to me, Noble!" he snapped. "You will follow me to the Head!"

"Well, my hat!"
 "All are welcome!" grinned Lowther. "No fee for joining!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Silence!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff furiously. "The next boy who speaks will—Ow!"

The remarks of the Housemaster of the New House concluded on a sharp yelp of pain, as he felt a stinging sensation on his left cheek.

"Shot, sir!" chirruped somebody from the rear.

Mr. Ratcliff faced the crowd with an almost fiendish expression on his face.

"Scandalous! Monstrous!" he ejaculated. "For the second time I have been assaulted! Some wretched boy with a peashooter has evidently—Ow! Oh! Wow!"

The last as three more stings ensued on the other cheek. Mr. Ratcliff wheeled round, his eyes almost bolting out of his head.

"Wildrake! So you are the culprit!" he ground out, as Wildrake's hand flashed down. "You will follow me to the Head!"

"More the merrier!" grinned Lowther. "Fall in at the rear, Wildrake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I guess I'm with you!" smiled the Canadian junior. And he, too, joined the cheery band of miscreants that Mr. Ratcliff had collected.

The infuriated Housemaster danced towards the Head's study, almost beside himself with rage.

His victims, though not altogether happy at the prospect of an interview with Dr. Holmes, smiled as they followed him. Now that there were nine of them, they felt that the Head would probably see in the affair an absurd side, which Mr. Ratcliff, in his rage, had so far failed to appreciate.

Straight up to the Head's study marched the nine malefactors. Mr. Ratcliff tapped on the door, and in response to the Head's deep "Come in!" led the way in.

Dr. Holmes was at work at his desk when they entered, but at the sight of the invading army he rose with quite an alarmed look on his mild face.

"Bless any soul!" he exclaimed. "My dear Mr. Ratcliff—"

"I apologise for the interruption, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have brought these juniors to you for various misdemeanours meriting punishment which I, as New House master, am unable to carry out."

"Bless my soul!" repeated Dr. Holmes, eyeing the juniors in astonishment.

"I have had occasion before, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly, "to comment on the undisciplined and insubordinate characteristics of a large section of the School House juniors—characteristics which unhappily have a deleterious effect on the discipline of my own House also."

"The misdemeanours of these juniors bear testimony to the truth of my complaint," said Mr. Ratcliff. "To give you briefly their offences—Merry and Manners and Lowther I found trespassing on your private garden."

"Dear me!"

Blake and his study-mates I discovered in the quad indulging in brutal horseplay which resulted in my sustaining painful injuries."

"Goodness gracious!"

"Noble," pursued Mr. Ratcliff, "was guilty of gross impertinence to me when I entered the School House."

"My dear Mr. Ratcliff—"

"And Wildrake, sir, actually had the temerity to direct a fusillade at my face with his peashooter. You will see, Dr. Holmes, that all these juniors have behaved in a most abominable manner, and I ask—may, demand—"

"Mr. Ratcliff!" said the Head sharply.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!"

The Head turned to the juniors concerned.

"You have heard what Mr. Ratcliff has had to say, boys. Do you admit the truth of the charges?"

"Well, yes, sir, but—"

"You see, sir—"

"Bless Jove! If I might say a word, my dear sir—"

"It's true I fired one pea, but—"

"Silence!" said the Head. "It would appear, then, that Mr. Ratcliff's charges are substantially correct. You have all incurred my deep displeasure, and you must behave with more care and respect in future. Write me out two hundred lines each."

"Oh, yes, sir!" choked the juniors, quite happily.

Mr. Ratcliff, whose face seemed suddenly to have turned an art shade of green, took a step forward.

"But, sir—"

"I should like a word with you, Mr. Ratcliff, if you will kindly stay behind for a minute. You may now go, boys."

"Thank you, sir!"

The juniors departed, smiling, to tell the good news to the waiting crowd outside.

"Three cheers for the Head!" chortled Kangaroo, as he closed the door behind him. "He saw through Ratty all right!"

"And Ratty'll go through the hoop now, or I'm a Dutchman," said Tom Merry. "Listen!"

They listened.

From within the study came the sounds of a wordy battle.

CHAPTER 2.

The Head Speaks His Mind!

"MR. RATCLIFF!"

"Dr. Holmes!"

"It is far from my wish," said the Head, "that there should exist between myself and any member of my staff anything approaching animosity. I trust that such a state of things will be at all times impossible, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff icily. "I must, nevertheless, remark, that if my efforts at inculcating discipline into the juniors are to be nullified—"

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"What else am I to say, sir?" asked Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "I brought before you, for serious breaches of discipline, a number of juniors—"

"Nine," said the Head.

And there was a hint of sarcasm in his voice which was not lost by his subordinate.

"Nine, then, sir, if it is necessary to be precise. These nine juniors had committed various breaches of discipline requiring, I submit, careful questioning and examination and exemplary punishment."

"I understand your feeling in the matter, my dear sir," said the Head, with a nod.

"I anticipated, sir, that you would take a most serious view of matters, which I considered it my urgent duty to bring to your notice."

"I hope, Mr. Ratcliff, that I treat all matters concerning discipline with appropriate seriousness."

"I am relieved to hear it. But your assurance does not relieve the sense of injustice I feel at your attitude in the incident which has just concluded."

Dr. Holmes eyed Mr. Ratcliff steadily.

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"Very well, my dear sir. I will explain my own views in the matter. Possibly they will eradicate that feeling of injustice."

"Possibly!" said Mr. Ratcliff sardoniously.

"I remarked just now that I did not wish any animosity to exist between myself and any member of my staff," said the Head quietly. "I said that in order that you should not misunderstand my attitude. At present, it would appear that you regard me as having treated Merry and his friends with excessive leniency."

An unintelligible mumble came from Mr. Ratcliff.

"Perhaps I did," went on the Head. "It was certainly my intention not to treat them with excessive severity. That intention, my dear sir, was the result of your own attitude, not only in this, but in other matters which have preceded it."

"Sir!" gasped the Housemaster of the New House.

"I have hesitated long before speaking to you in this way. Your visit this morning with a crowd of alleged wrongdoers, however, has brought matters to a point where further hesitation is most inadvisable. Let me say at once, therefore, Mr. Ratcliff, that your methods in dealing with juniors do not invariably meet with my approval."

"Dr. Holmes!" choked Mr. Ratcliff.

"I will speak plainly, my dear sir. It is in your own interest that I should do so. Discipline without a human side to it cannot hope to succeed. More harshness is not sufficient. Severity in some cases is necessary and even laudable, but there must also be understanding."

"You are suggesting that I have no understanding of the boys in my charge?" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "In that case, sir—"

"I certainly do not go so far as that, Mr. Ratcliff! But I am convinced from my own observations that you occasionally assume severity where something else would better serve the purpose."

"It is untrue, sir," croaked Mr. Ratcliff. "I beg you to believe, sir, that—"

"I am merely giving you an opinion based on personal observation," said the Head quietly. "You see, if I may say so, Mr. Ratcliff, inclined to be heavy in your judgments. It would, I am sure, be an advantage if you occasionally postponed consideration of such matters as you brought to me this morning to a time when calm and dispassionate judgment could be brought into play."

"But the juniors' offences were serious—"

"I do not dispute it. But your action in bringing nine boys to me for separate offences committed in the space of a few minutes rendered the whole thing more than a little farcical."

"The boys did not belong to my House," muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "And I have learned from bitter experience that it is useless to take complaints to Mr. Raiton."

The Head's frown became portentous.

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff, I cannot allow you to speak of Mr. Raiton in such terms. Mr. Raiton has my complete confidence, and, I am sure, the confidence of the governors also."

Mr. Ratcliff could not suppress a sneer.

"The governors! What do they know of the matters? We scarcely ever see them. Some of them are absent most of the time. One, I believe, has never even attended a Board meeting."

Dr. Holmes uttered an exclamation.

"You are losing control of yourself, my dear sir. If you are referring to Sir Burnleigh Coke—"

"That is the name of the gentleman, sir!" snapped the embittered Housemaster.

"Then you should know that Sir Burnleigh has been engaged in India for years on most important Government business. On his return, which is expected shortly, I have no doubt that his wide experience in administrative matters will be always at the service of the Board. But that is beside the point."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip.

"Exactly, sir. Perhaps it would be better if I postpone speaking further on the subject. I deeply regret that any difference of opinion should have arisen between us."

The Head nodded seriously.

"It is certainly most regrettable, Mr. Ratcliff. I am glad, however, that I have been able to speak to you openly, and I am sure you will give my opinions your earnest consideration."

"Certainly, sir—certainly!" said Mr. Ratcliff, suppressing his real feelings with a mighty effort. "Then, with your permission, I will go."

"Very well, my dear sir."

And the Head resumed his seat and his interrupted work. Mr. Ratcliff, looking somewhat like a demon king in a pantomime, tore out of the Head's study.



It was a truly fearful impact. For one dizzy moment, Blake found himself clinging affectionately round Mr. Ratcliff's neck!

He was just in time to see about a dozen heels disappearing round the corner of the passage. He was just in time, also, to catch three unfortunate juniors who had tarried too long to get away with the roset.

The three in question were Figgins and Kerr and Wynn of the New House, Mr. Ratcliff's own domain.

Mr. Ratcliff swooped down on them like a hawk.

"Figgins, Kerr, Wynn! You were listening!"

"Oh crikey!" was all Figgins could say.

"Report to me immediately after lessons!" snarled the Housemaster of the New House. "I shall cane all three of you severely!"

And, without waiting to hear what Figgins & Co. had to say about it, Mr. Ratcliff swept off to the Fifth Form room.

"Well, that'll be the third licking this week," remarked Figgins. "Is it we who's wrong, or Ratty?"

"It's Ratty right enough," snorted Kerr. "He's getting worse and worse. He wants taking down a peg or two, if you ask me."

"Wish we could do it," growled Fatty Wynn. "But, of course, we can't."

A grim smile appeared on Kerr's shrewd face.

"Can't we? I fancy I've got an idea for taking Ratty down like he's never been before. But we'll see how he behaves after classes first."

They waited. And, having heard something of the argument in the Head's study, they were not surprised to find that Mr. Ratcliff's behaviour was as bad as they had ever known it.

That decided Kerr. Ratty had asked for it, and the Scottish Junior decided that Ratty should get it. In what way it was proposed that he should get it was a secret which, for the moment, Kerr shared only with Figgins and Wynn.

It wasn't till afterwards that the juniors heard of the strange behaviour of Mr. Ratcliff in the Fifth Form room.

When Mr. Ratcliff left the Head's study he was somewhat shaken by what had taken place. Having cooled down a little he came to the conclusion that he would have to be careful if he wanted to remain at St. Jim's. After much thought, he decided to reform himself and be kinder and less bitter with his Form. Yes, that was the right idea; he would put it into practice at once, and when the Head heard he would be favourably impressed.

The bell rang for morning school, and Mr. Ratcliff went to his Form-room. He entered briskly and beamed round

upon the assembled class. Some tried to beam back at him, but for the most part there were audible gasps of surprise.

"What's come over the man?" everybody was asking. "Good-morning, boys!" chirped the cheerful Ratcliff. "A ripping-morning, isn't it?"

"Y-y-ess, sir!" stammered Cutts.

"Not the sort of morning," continued the new Ratcliff, "that makes one feel like working, eh?"

"Not a bit, sir!" came a chorus of voices.

Everyone had found his tongue now.

"Well, well," said Ratty, "it so happens that I have something which will occupy me elsewhere, so I will leave you alone for half an hour or so. During that time you boys may do just as you like!"

"Th-thank you, sir!" gasped the Fifth in unison, as Ratty left the room, closing the door after him.

For a moment there was complete silence in the Form-room, then came a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ratty's gone mad!"

"He's loopy!"

"What's anyone going to do?" asked Cutts.

"Go to sleep," suggested Smith major.

"Hear, hear!"

And it was generally agreed that that morning first lesson for the Fifth Form should be sleep!

Half an hour later Mr. Ratcliff returned to his Form-room. The sight which met his eyes would have caused the most patient of masters to fly into a rage, but not so the new Ratty. He just glanced round the room and beamed at everybody. Not that anybody saw him; everyone had his eyes shut!

The Fifth Form was sleeping. Gerald Cutts had his legs up on the desk; other members sprawled about in a variety of attitudes of abandon; several caps had been hung on to the gas-bracket, while in front of the nearest desk was pinned a notice:

"DON'T MAKE A NOISE—
WE'RE TIRED!"

Ratty stood in the doorway, smiling serenely at his sleeping Form.

As he stood thus there was a swishing of silk and a step behind him.

"Bless my soul! Mr. Ratcliff, what is happening here?" It was the voice of the Head.

As one man the Fifth

Form of St. Jim's awoke and sat blinking at the two masters. For a moment, as the Head looked at the class, it seemed as if he were concealing a smile. Then he turned to Mr. Ratcliff.

"Mr. Ratcliff, see this Form some work to do, and then kindly come to my study?"

And with that Dr. Holmes turned and swept out of the room.

Nobody quite knows what took place between the Head and Ratty at that second interview; but suffice it to say that that was the end of Ratty's reformation, and from then on he was more bitter than ever. Certainly there was no more sleeping in class, but there was an abundance of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!

CHAPTER 3.

Enter Sir Burnleigh!

"HALLO! Hallo! Who?"
 "What the thump?"
 "Who and what is it?" demanded Tom Merry, concluding the unfinished remarks of Manners and Lowther, his two chums.

The Terrible Three stared in undisguised surprise at the newcomer who was just walking through the gateway of St. Jim's.

It was Wednesday—a half-holiday at St. Jim's—and there being no football, beyond a nick-up game in which they had not joined, the three heroes of the Shell had strolled down to the gates, intending to take a jaunt to the village.

As they passed the porter's lodge their eyes had fallen on the stranger. And having once looked at him the Terrible Three found it difficult to turn their eyes away again.

He was a short man, but what he lacked in height he made up for in width. He seemed almost as broad as he was long, in fact. His skin was tanned a deep, dark brown, and by way of contrast he wore a snow-white moustache. He was dressed in a mustard-coloured suit, a broad-rimmed hat, and white spats.

Although he looked as queer a specimen as the Terrible Three ever remembered meeting.

The newcomer returned stare for stare, and eventually addressed them.

"Hey, you young rascals! Where do I find Dr. Holmes?" he roared, in a voice which reminded the chums of the Shell of a sergeant-major on parade.

Tom Merry recovered his composure and raised his cap politely.

"Fraid he's out for the afternoon, sir," he replied. "I fancy he's on a visit to Dr. Locke at Greyfriars School. But Mr. Raitton will see you, no doubt."

"Half a mo. Mr. Raitton's out, too!" put in Manners.

"I saw him go off with the Head in his car."

"Probably gone to Greyfriars, too," remarked Lowther.

"That leaves Ratty—h'm!—Mr. Ratcliff in charge. Will you see him, sir?"

"Of course I'll see him!" roared the peculiar-looking gentleman. "Use your common sense, boy! Take me to him at once!"

Lowther felt inclined for a moment to point out that he was not employed as a messenger-boy. But he judiciously decided that the stranger should be given his head, and accordingly nodded.

"Right-ho, sir! This way!" he said, and led the way to the New House.

"What name shall we say, sir?" asked Tom Merry, not a little curious to know the identity of the newcomer.

"One of us will have to run up and tell Mr. Ratcliff you're here."

"Dashed if I see what my name has to do with you, you young rascal!" hooted the stranger. "But if you must have it, it's Sir Burnleigh Coke, a member of the Board of Governors of this school."

"Oh!"

The Terrible Three suddenly became very respectful, and Lowther thanked his lucky stars he had taken no liberties. The governors of St. Jim's, to whom even the Head had, figuratively speaking, to bow down, were mighty men indeed, and disrespect to one of their number was unthinkable.

"This is the New House, sir," explained Lowther, very respectfully. "Mr. Ratcliff is in charge here."

"Huh!"

"If you'd care to wait in the waiting-room—"

"I have no intention whatever of waiting in the waiting-room, dash your impudence!" said Sir Burnleigh Coke, quite ferociously. "Conduct me to the room of this creature Ratcliff!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What did you say?"

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"Oh errike! Nothing much, sir!" gasped Lowther.

"Well, his room's up here, but—"

"Then take me to it, and don't stand there looking like a codfish!" shouted the irascible Sir Burnleigh.

The Terrible Three looked at each other. Sir Burnleigh Coke seemed to be unique in other ways than in dress; and they felt that they would not be sorry to push him on to the Housemaster of the New House.

They ran up the stairs in front of him, and Lowther tapped on the door of Mr. Ratcliff's study. Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice bade him "Come in!" and he looked round the door.

"A gentleman to see you, sir—"

"Then he will have to wait!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I am at present extremely busy, and—"

"It's Sir Burnleigh Coke, sir."

"What—what!"

A wonderful change seemed to take place suddenly in Mr. Ratcliff. His thin lips curled up in an expression as near to a smile as Lowther had ever seen on his wrinkled face. A governor was a governor, and Ratty did not often have the opportunity of meeting one.

"Have Sir Burnleigh shown up at once, Lowther!" he said. "Naturally, I shall be delighted—"

"So you're Ratcliff—hey!" interrupted a booming voice in the doorway, and Sir Burnleigh himself waddled in.

"Where's Holmes, then? And Raitton?"

"Dear me! They are unfortunately out, my dear Sir Burnleigh. Your visit is apparently unexpected."

"Just as well, Ratcliff—just as well!" bellowed the honoured visitor. "I can see the school as it really is, without any window dressing. In fact, I've seen some of it already. I am not impressed."

"My dear Sir Burnleigh—"

"Don't try to soft-soap me, sir!" roared Sir Burnleigh. "I'm in the habit of calling a spade a spade, and when I say I am not impressed, I mean it! There is an air of slackness about the place."

"I most certainly agree that—"

"You're a slack-looking creature yourself, to begin with," added the visiting governor. "Look at the way you're dressed! Like a scarecrow!"

Mr. Ratcliff's face turned a kind of mottled colour.

"But—but, my dear sir—" he gasped.

"You think you can fool me just because I'm an old fossil from India, but you're dashed well mistaken! Tell me this school is faultless, and I'll soon tell you what you are, sir! Take these boys to begin with!"

"Anything wrong with us, sir?" asked Tom Merry, with a frown.

Sir Burnleigh laughed a cynical laugh.

"Wrong? Why, there's nothing right! Look at your faces! I suppose they are faces? If they're masks, you'd better take 'em off and let me see what you're hiding underneath."

"Great pip!"

"Look here, sir—"

"Silence!" bellowed Sir Burnleigh. "I came here to talk, not to be talked to! Now, Ratcliff, if you're ready to conduct me round the school—"

"I assure you, my dear Sir Burnleigh, I am entirely at your service," said Mr. Ratcliff ingratiatingly. "You may go, boys—"

"They may not go!" hooted Sir Burnleigh. "Who the thunder gave you the right to dictate what shall happen while I'm here, I'd like to know? The young rascals shall stay with us till I give them the order to dismiss."

"Well, of all the cheek—" gasped Manners.

"Better not kick up a fuss," murmured Tom Merry.

"After all, he's a governor."

"Some governor!" said Lowther, under his breath.

But "some" governor or not, they were dealing with one of the mighty men who governed the destinies of St. Jim's, and it was impossible to disregard his orders. So the Terrible Three stood by.

"I am ready, Ratcliff!" roared Sir Burnleigh. "Lead the way!"

"With pleasure, my dear sir—with very great pleasure, indeed!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "This way, Sir Burnleigh!"

And the trembling Housemaster led the way downstairs..

CHAPTER 4.

A Backer for Ratty!

"THIS," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a proud wave of his arm as he descended the steps of the New House, "is the New House building."

"Indeed," said Sir Burnleigh. "Well, let's see something of this School House over here. An old-looking show. Hide-bound by convention and tradition, or I'm a Dutchman!"

Mr. Ratcliff glared at the Terrible Three, as if warning

them that dire consequences would follow if they did not soon get out of earshot. Then he sank his voice to a confidential tone.

"Between ourselves, my dear Sir Burnleigh," he said, "there is something in what you say. A tradition does attach to the School House—if I may say so, a false and pernicious tradition."

"Bah! It's the same with all old schools!" bellowed the visitor. "Dashed if I know why you should say so, though, Ratcliff. I suppose you've got an axe to grind."

Mr. Ratcliff's face went livid. It was literally true to say that he did have an axe to grind, but it was extremely unpleasant to hear it put in plain English.

"You are quite mistaken, my dear sir, I assure you," he said. "If I have anything unfavourable to say concerning the School House, it is said simply and solely from a sense of duty."

"I expect you're all equally bad!" snorted Sir Burnleigh. "But we shall soon see. Take me up to the junior quarters of the House. And take your hands out of your pockets, you three louts at the back, or, by gad, I'll have you fayed!"

"Why, you——"

"Gad!" warned Tom Merry. And Lovthorpe swallowed his wrath, took his hands from his pockets and followed Mr. Ratcliff and the honoured guest into the School House.

Up they went to the junior quarters of the House. Why Sir Burnleigh should be particularly interested in junior activities was a mystery to Tom Merry and his chums, but he evidently was.

"Here we come to the Fourth passage," explained Mr. Ratcliff, walking a little ahead. "All these doors lead into separate studios, which are shared by two or more boys. Doubtless at this hour we shall not find many at home."

"Shan't we?" booted Sir Burnleigh, suddenly opening the door of Study No. 9. "Then how do you account for this——"

"Black young rascal fast asleep on a sofa?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Manners. "It's Cardew! Just like the bouncer to spend a fine afternoon snoozing!"

"Monstrous!" roared Sir Burnleigh. "What's St. Jim's coming to, I'd like to know? Hey, you! Get up!"

"Whoopoo! Oh gad!" roared Cardew, returning to wakefulness with a jump, as he felt the distinguished visitor's walking-stick prod him in the neck.

"Disgraceful! Ought to be ashamed of yourself!" declared the irate old governor. "Get up at once, sir!"

"Oh gad! What is it?" said Cardew limply.

Mr. Ratcliff interposed.

"Cardew, this gentleman is Sir Burnleigh Coke, a member of the Board of Governors. I am ashamed that he should catch you immoderately indulging your shameful desire for slumber. Stand at attention!"

"Oh help!"

Cardew stood as near to the required position as his languid poise permitted. Sir Burnleigh Coke glowered at him.

"Lazy young jackanapes!" he snorted. "In my time, sir, you'd have been flogged."

"I'm afraid you will find, Sir Burnleigh," murmured Mr. Ratcliff, "an element of slackness in this part of the school, which I trust I have managed to keep out of my own House."

"Bah!" said Sir Burnleigh contemptuously. "We will proceed!"

They proceeded to Study No. 6.

There, Mr. Ratcliff almost rubbed his bony hands with glee.

Just as though Fate was playing into those same bony hands, Bagley Trimble, the Falstaff of the Fourth, was standing before the cupboard helping himself liberally to the supply of tuck which the absent tenants of the study had left there.

Mr. Ratcliff strode forward and grabbed the invading Falstaff by the scruff of his podgy neck.

"Trimble! Wretched boy! You are engaged in the nefarious act of robbing a schoolfellow of comestibles!"

"Oh lor!" gasped Trimble.

Trimble was somewhat slow-witted, and that was all he felt capable of saying for a moment. He stared at Mr. Ratcliff and the Terrible Three, and at the strange figure of Sir Burnleigh Coke with bulging eyes.

Sir Burnleigh Coke stared back at Trimble as though he were regarding some loathsome specimen of the animal world.

"A robber—eh?" he roared. "So that's what they're turning out at St. Jim's now, is it? Robbers and sneak-thieves, by gad!"

"I would impress on you, my dear sir, that such a thing as this is unheard of in my own House," said Mr. Ratcliff ingratiatingly. "Thanks to the discipline which I invariably apply!"

"Bah! The whole thing disgusts me!" snorted Mr. Burnleigh. "We will see one more study, and then depart."

"Certainly, my dear Sir Burnleigh! Trimble! I shall see to it that Mr. Raitton is informed of this misdemeanour."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Ratcliff!" roared Sir Burnleigh. "While I am here, I am in charge. And while I am in charge, I insist on the adoption of my own methods of punishment. Bring this fat young villain along with you, and that lazy young rascal you called Cardew! I'll show you what to do with 'em!"

"Oh, with pleasure, my dear sir!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. And he piloted the trembling Trimble out of Study No. 6, and hastened off to rope in the unhappy Cardew.

Then came the crowning discovery of Sir Burnleigh's expedition in the School House. The old gentleman, on his own initiative, looked in Study No. 2. By sheer bad luck he looked in at the precise moment when Percy Mellish, the lone occupant, who occasionally indulged in sporting proclivities, was puffing away at a cigarette, and perusing the columns of a pink sporting paper.

It was a case of Pelton being piled on Ossa. Mr. Ratcliff heard a kind of muffled explosion from Study No. 2. It was Sir Burnleigh Coke giving vent to his feelings.

"Shameful! Scandalous! Iniquitous!" he boomed. "Where's the Head? He shall hear from me, Ratcliff, mark my words! I'll call a Governors' meeting! I'll write to the 'Times'——"

Mellish, his face as white as chalk, rushed to the window and flung away the offending smoke before Mr. Ratcliff should see it.

"Oh crickey! I—I was only trying it to see what it was like, sir!" he gasped, as the Housemaster appeared in the doorway. "The paper I picked up in the passage."

"A likely story!" bellowed Sir Burnleigh. "Bring him along with the rest, Ratcliff. We'll parade 'em all outside the building, and I'll show you how I deal with slackers!"

The old martinet stamped off, and Mr. Ratcliff and six somewhat apprehensive juniors followed him.

They arrived in the quad, and Sir Burnleigh wheeled round on them and fixed a fiery glare at the juniors.

"Now form a circle round me and do a bit of running, you young rascals!" he roared. "And when I say 'I'm running,' I don't mean walking or trotting, but running. See?"

Capt. P. P. ECKERSLEY, who is Chief Technical Adviser to POPULAR WIRELESS



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"But—" gasped Tom Merry.
 "Run!" hooted Sir Burnleigh Coke ferociously.
 The Terrible Three looked at each other helplessly. It seemed as if Sir Burnleigh had decided to do his best to make an exhibition of them, and they felt very much inclined to ignore the absurd order and walk off.

Other considerations restrained them. Thanks to a number of unfortunate coincidences, and partly to the presence of Mr. Ratcliff, this important personage had in the Head's absence been given a wrong impression regarding the School House, and the Terrible Three felt that it was up to them, if possible, to correct that impression.

So they started to run, and after a moment's hesitation Cardew and Mellish and Trimble followed their example.

Round and round circled six unhappy School House juniors, while Sir Burnleigh and Mr. Ratcliff looked on from the centre.

Naturally, the unusual spectacle attracted a good deal of attention. Cutts and one or two other Fifth-Formers strode out of the House to examine the phenomenon. Grundy and Wilkin and Gunn of the Shell, and Levison and Clive of the Fourth, collected round wonderingly. Wally D'Arey and a crowd of Third Form fags ran across from the fag sports ground to join the crowd. Very soon the circling spelt out an enormous audience.

At first the crowd plied the runners with questions as to the nature of their little game. Receiving no replies, they began to offer derisive encouragement. Finally, when Sir Burnleigh started urging on the laggards with his walking-stick, they began to laugh, and the laugh quickly became a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Is it a circus, or a dancing-school?" asked Cutts.
 "Whatever it is it's worth watching. Go it, young Merry!"

"Open your eyes, Cardew!"
 "Step on the gas, Baggy!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three continued to circle round with burning faces. Behind them, with bellows to mend, came Cardew, and after him, puffing and blowing in painful chorus, finished up Trimble and Mellish.

For fully twenty minutes the eccentric visitor kept them at it. By that time Cardew was groaning aloud, while Trimble and Mellish looked as though they were on the point of expiring altogether.

Then at last Sir Burnleigh called a halt.
 "Let that be a lesson to you, you young rascals!" he roared. "Now you know something of my methods of punishment, Ratcliff. Give 'em hardship, give 'em publicity, and give 'em fresh air at the same time. Get the idea?"

"Quite, quite!" said Mr. Ratcliff. Inwardly he had come to the conclusion that Sir Burnleigh was not very far removed from a mental case. But that made no difference to his determination to obtain the eccentric but influential gentleman's backing. "And now, sir, will you honour me by taking a cup of tea with me?" added the Housemaster of the New House.

Sir Burnleigh shook his head.
 "No time, Ratcliff. Positively must go now," he said.
 "Walk down with me to the gates."

"With the greatest of pleasure, my dear sir!"
 "You know, Ratcliff, I'm beginning to like you!" declared Sir Burnleigh, as they left the buzzing crowd behind. "You're no oil-painting, and there's something lacking up top in addition to hair."

"Yes, my dear Sir Burnleigh—" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff, turning almost green.

"I'm judging by what you tell me, Ratcliff, you certainly make a better job of running your House than this fellow Raitton makes of the School House."

"It is gratifying beyond measure to hear you say so!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with quite a smirk.

Sir Burnleigh granted.
 "I say just what I think. I don't like the School House at St. Jim's, and I'm going to have something done about it. Dr. Holmes is getting too old, and this Raitton person's no good. That's obvious."

A wild idea entered Mr. Ratcliff's head.
 "You—you're not suggesting, my dear sir—" he gasped incoherently.

"I'm not suggesting anything!" roared Sir Burnleigh. "I'm saying, not suggesting, that I'm going to use all my influence to obtain the resignation of Dr. Holmes. Having obtained which, I shall see that you are appointed in his place."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.
 The world seemed to swing round him. Horace Ratcliff, headmaster of St. Jim's! Incredible! Yet by a miracle it had suddenly become possible!

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He could have fallen on Sir Burnleigh's neck and kissed him. Fortunately, he repressed that inclination and contented himself with a formal, though excessively warm, handshake at the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

Astonishing the Natives!

IT was a new Mr. Ratcliff that returned from the gates. The Mr. Ratcliff who had accompanied Sir Burnleigh Coke down to Taggles' lodge was a humble and ingratiating individual. The Mr. Ratcliff who returned was a smug, self-satisfying, and exceedingly aggressive gentleman.

Mr. Ratcliff strutted rather than walked up the carriage-drive. His eyes gleamed with a peculiar gleam. Within his breast his heart beat a little faster than usual.

At last, thought Mr. Ratcliff, he was coming into his own! For years he had had to endure the scarily concealed scorn of Mr. Raitton and the mild but very real dissatisfaction of the Head. Now at last it was to end!

A rosy future seemed to open out before Mr. Ratcliff. Already he pictured himself as Head of St. Jim's, with power to enforce his own ideas. A grim smile hovered round his thin lips as he pictured the dismay of the juniors and the chagrin of the other masters.

Full of a delightful new sense of authority, the would-be Head of St. Jim's deliberately made his way back towards the School House.

Outside the House a small crowd was still left, discussing the antics which Tom Merry and his luckless companions had had to perform. Mr. Ratcliff stopped to address them. "Kindly break up this unseemly assembly at once!" he snapped. "I will not have the quad made a meeting-place for gangs of idle loafers!"

"Oh!"
 "My hat!"
 The crowd blinked at Mr. Ratcliff.
 "At once!" said Mr. Ratcliff, taking a threatening step forward.

"Great pip!"
 The juniors present stared at Mr. Ratcliff almost incredulously. It was an unwritten law at St. Jim's that fellows on the School House side of the grounds were under the authority of School House masters only. Mr. Ratcliff had never been known to flout that law, whatever his inward feelings might have been. Yet here he was, giving out orders as though he had suddenly been appointed dictator of the school!

Almost unable to believe their ears, the juniors continued to stare.
 Cutts and one or two Fifth-Formers who were still there did more than stare. They ostentatiously placed their hands in their pockets and planted themselves where they stood as though they meant to stay there.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes gleamed.
 "Cutts! St. Leger! You are seniors, and I look to you to set an example. Return to the House at once!"
 "Thanks, but I'd rather stay here, if you don't mind, sir!" drawled Cutts.

"Same here!" said St. Leger. "If we're doin' any harm, Mr. Ratcliff, you'd better call a School House master to see us about it!"
 Glimpses of the Fifth chimed in with a languid "Oh, rather!" and there was a chorus of "Hear, hears!" from the juniors.

Mr. Ratcliff made an angry exclamation.
 "So you choose to defy me! Very well. Every boy present will write me out a hundred lines—"

"Wha-a-at?"
 "And those who still refuse to go I shall cane! You hear me?"

"Lines!" gasped Jack Blake. "Lines from a New House master while we're on our own ground? Am I dreaming?"

"Mr. Ratcliff—" began Cutts.
 "I forbid you to speak, Cutts! I have ordered you to return to the House. Go!"

"But—but what's the matter, sir?" demanded Cutts.
 "You know that you've no authority to punish School House men out of class—"

"Another word, Cutts, and I shall order you to my study for a caning!"

"You—you'll what?" hooted Cutts.
 "That is enough, Cutts! You are insolent. Go at once to my study in the New House. It is not usual to inflict corporal punishment on boys of your age, but in the circumstances I am justified. I shall cane you severely."

"M-m-my hat!" murmured Tom Merry dazedly. "Ratty's coming out strong all of a sudden!"

"You hear me, Cutts!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

Cutts glared.

"I hear you, sir. But I'm not takin' any notice!"

"What!"

"If you want me to report to your study, you'll have to wait till Mr. Railton comes back an' ask him about it!" said the Fifth-Former. "Cane me, eh? By gad!"

And Cutts fanned himself, as though the idea of being caned by Mr. Ratcliff made him quite faint. Mr. Ratcliff suddenly seemed to make up his mind to take action. He stepped forward and raised his hand.

Smack!

Cutts, taken by surprise, staggered under a ringing smack on the ear. Next moment he rushed forward, flushed with anger. What would have happened if somebody had not interfered, the spectators scarcely liked to think. Fortunately, Tom Merry and Blake dragged him back.

"Hold on, old bean!" chuckled Tom. "Can't scrap with a master, you know!"

"Ease up, Cuttuy!" advised Blake.

"All serene; I won't touch him!" grunted the Fifth-Former, shaking off his captors. "But, by gad! If he didn't ask for it—"

"Oh!"

"How dare you! What is the meaning of this extraordinary scene?" demanded Mr. Railton. "It would appear, though I can hardly believe it, that you are actually attacking Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Hem!"

Mr. Railton's arrival seemed to put a fresh complexion on things. The juniors fell back, looking decidedly sheepish.

"It—it isn't really quite as bad as it looks, sir—" began Tom Merry, when Mr. Ratcliff interrupted him.

"The young hooligans are completely out of hand!" he said harshly. "But for your arrival, Railton, they would have made a brutal attack on me by this time!"

Mr. Railton gave his colleague a sharp look. He detected something different in his tone, and he couldn't fail to notice being called simply "Railton" without the courtesy of the "Mr."

"This is very surprising, Mr. Ratcliff," he observed, scanning the crowd with his keen eyes as he spoke. "I do not notice among the crowd any boys whom I would have described as hooligans. Nor, I am sure, is there anyone here who would ordinarily indulge in activities meeting



Round and round circled six unhappy School House juniors, while Sir Burnleigh and Mr. Ratcliff looked on from the centre.

"So it was your intention to strike me, Cutts!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Very well! You will regret that before long!"

"By gad!" said Cutts. "If these fellows hadn't stopped me then—"

"Silence! Since you decline to go to my study, and the insubordinate attitude of your School House colleagues makes it impossible for me to rely on them, the matter will be temporarily dropped. I may speak to Mr. Railton when he returns," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a sarcastic twist of his lips; "but more probably the matter will now be left till a later date, when I shall be able to deal with you on my own!"

"Let's bump the rotter!"

"Hear, hear!"

The resentment of the School House juniors at Mr. Ratcliff's attitude seemed to blaze up suddenly into a white heat of anger. Mr. Ratcliff, fear in his lean face, took a step back. The slightest increase in that wave of hostility would have caused him to turn tail and run for it. He was spared that humiliation, however, by the arrival of Mr. Railton.

The rival Housemaster, who had just left the Head's car at the gates, came on the scene looking amazed and angry. "Boys!"

the description of 'brutal' without extreme provocation. Before I pass judgment, therefore—"

Mr. Ratcliff interrupted him with a sneering laugh.

"You need say no more, Railton! I quite understand that, whatever the circumstances, you will side with the young ruffians of your own House!"

"Mr. Ratcliff—" gasped Mr. Railton, in astonishment.

"That is precisely what I expected, so I am not disappointed!" sneered the Housemaster of the New House. "Don't trouble to make a pretence of looking into the matter, I beg of you. It won't hoodwink me, sir, so you may as well save yourself the bother! But remember—this—"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed the shocked Mr. Railton.

"A time is coming, and very shortly, too, when some radical changes will take place at St. Jim's!" snarled Mr. Ratcliff. "Enjoy your triumph while you may, therefore, for it is likely to be short-lived!"

With that he turned on his heel and stamped away.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" cried the Housemaster of the School House.

But Mr. Ratcliff was deaf to the voice of the charmer.

Mr. Railton watched his retreating figure in amazement.

for a moment. Then he turned to the crowd and opened his mouth to speak, only to close it again. Finally, without another word, he turned away and walked towards the School House. Quite obviously Raitton was floored.

The crowd broke up, buzzing with excitement. Mr. Ratcliff's amazing new air of authority was the sole topic of discussion.

As a result of Sir Burnleigh Coke's visit, the tyrant of the New House had certainly succeeded in astonishing the natives!

CHAPTER 6.

A Startling Rumour!

"I SAY, you chaps—"
"Buzz off, Baggy!"
"Heard the latest?" demanded Trimble, who had just burst into the Junior Common-room like a cyclone. "I say, you chaps, it's the giddy limit! I'm going to get up a rebellion!"
"Eh?"

The juniors in the Common-room had been discussing footer when Trimble broke in, but the Falstaff's concluding remark relegated even footer to the background.

"You're going to what?" roared Blake. "You—you're going to—"

"To get up a rebellion!" hooted Trimble. "Britons never shall be slaves, and all that kind of thing, you know! I'm going to raise the giddy standard of revolt! Who's going to follow me?"

"What the thump—"
"We don't want the rotter over here!" roared Trimble. "Life won't be jolly well worth living! I'm not going to stand it!"

"Stand what, you fat clump?" asked Tom Merry.

"Once he arrives here—"
"Once who arrives?" howled Herrics.

"He'll do his best to make our lives a misery!" yelled the Falstaff of the Fourth indignantly. "I don't see why we should stand it— Whoopoi! Who's kicking me?"

"Me!" snapped Blake. "I'm going to keep on kicking you, too, till you explain what the thump you're talking about!"

"Beast! All right! I'll explain; I thought you all knew!" gasped Trimble, making frantic efforts to dodge Blake's upraised foot. "Everybody's talking about it over in the New House."

"About what, say?"
"About the Head and Ratty!"

"What about them?" bawled Herrics.

"Why, the Head's going to resign, you see—"
"Eh?"

"And Ratty's going to be made Head instead of him!"
"Why, you silly fat idiot—"

"It's true!" roared Trimble. "Everybody's got it! Ask anyone you like! Ask Raitton, or Kildare—"

"Hallo, hallo! Who wants me?" called out Kildare of the Sixth, who happened to walk in to shepherd the juniors to bed at that moment. "Time you kids were all upstairs, you know. What's the riot about?"

"Nuff to cause a riot, if it's true!" grinned Lowther.

"Baggy says the Head's going to resign and Ratcliff's going to be appointed in his place. Heard anything about it, Kildare?"

Kildare frowned.

"I have heard some far-fetched yarns. But I don't believe them."

"Hear, hear!"
"Though how and why such a story should get about beats me completely," added the captain of St. Jim's. "It's no concern of yours, anyway. Up to bed, kids!"

The juniors went up to their dormitories buzzing with excitement. Kildare's manner had not been altogether reassuring. He had said that he didn't believe the rumour; but he had not said it with conviction. It was very evident that Kildare was wondering inwardly, like the rest, whether there might, after all, be some truth in Trimble's yarn.

Kildare's attitude, as a matter of fact, was general among the seniors and even among the masters, to whom the rumours had also spread by this time.

It was realised that Dr. Holmes was getting on in years and would inevitably retire sooner or later. And though the choice of Mr. Ratcliff as his successor might be unpopular, it was quite a likely choice. Ratty was the senior of the rest of the masters both in age and in years of service, and the Governors might easily decide on him.

There was excitement among the masters as well as in

junior circles that evening. None of them knew from what quarter the rumours had emanated, but most were of the opinion that there could be no smoke without fire.

CHAPTER 7.

Misleading Ratty!

"GOT it!"
"Thus Tom Merry, after morning lessons on the following day."

"Got what?" asked Manners, without enthusiasm. Since the inspired announcement that Mr. Ratcliff was to be promoted to the headmastership; there had been a lack of enthusiasm all over St. Jim's.

"If it's a wheeze for losing Ratty—" said Lowther hopefully.

"Well, it's not quite that," smiled the leader of the Shell. "But it's a wheeze for finding out how much there is at present in the rumour. Thinking it over—"

"Don't!" begged Manners.

"If there's anything at all in the yarn then that old joser, Sir Burnleigh Coke, must be at the back of it!"

"Well?"
"Well, if I ring up Ratty, pretending to be Coke, and tell him it's all fixed, we shall see what Ratty does. If I'm wrong, he'll simply think Coke's balmy. If I'm right, and Coke really is behind the rumour, it ought to be funny to watch Ratty running around under the impression that he's Head when he isn't."

"My hat! Sounds interesting!" grinned Lowther. "Imagine his happy look when he finds he's been japed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Think it's a good idea, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"What-ho!"
"Then in that case, we'll strike while the iron's hot, and ring him up right away. There's a public telephone-box halfway down the lane to Rylcombe, and we've plenty of time to get there and back before dinner."

"March!" said Manners.

They marched.

It was not far to the public telephone-box of which Tom Merry had spoken, and the leader of the Shell was soon through to St. Jim's and immediately afterwards speaking to Mr. Ratcliff.

At the sound of Mr. Ratcliff's unmusical voice Tom completely altered his own tone.

"That you, Ratcliff?" he bellowed, in quite a passable imitation of Sir Burnleigh Coke's rasping voice. "What the deuce do you mean by keeping me waiting all this time? For two pins, man, I'd—"

"Dear me! It is Sir Burnleigh Coke! This is indeed an unexpected pleasure, my dear sir!" came Ratty's voice through the receiver. "I trust you are well, my dear Sir Burnleigh?"

"Don't talk rot, Ratcliff!"
"What?"

"Don't waste my time with insane chatter, you hopeless dolt!" roared Tom Merry. "I rang up to speak to you, Ratcliff, not to hear a lot of idiotic questions about my health!"

"Oh crickey!" murmured Manners.

"I am exceedingly sorry, Sir Burnleigh—" came Mr. Ratcliff's apologetic murmur over the wires.

"I'll make you sorrier before I've finished, unless you act like a rational human being instead of a half-wit!" hooted Tom Merry, still imitating Sir Burnleigh's voice. "Now listen, Ratcliff; it's all sealed, signed, and settled!"

Tom heard a gasp at the other end.

"You—you mean about my appointment? How ever can I thank you, Sir Burnleigh?"

Tom Merry winked at the ceiling of the telephone-box.

"No need to thank me, Ratcliff! Now, about Dr. Holmes—"

"He has resigned!" asked Mr. Ratcliff eagerly.

"What do you think, idiot?"
"Then I am actually headmaster of St. Jim's, at this moment!" cried the Housemaster of the New House.

"Seems like it, certainly!" agreed Tom. "No time for more, Ratcliff. See you later. And do try not to be such a fool!"

With that, Tom Merry rang off hurriedly, just in time to prevent the roar of laughter that came from Manners and Lowther being heard at the other end.

"So he's fallen!" asked Lowther, when he had stopped laughing.

"Like a lamb! I know jolly well that that old freak Coke was at the back of it!"

"And Ratty is now under the impression that he's Head!"

"Just that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps we'd better get back to St. Jim's now, before he

suspects anything," added Tom. "Wouldn't be nice to find him waiting for us at the gates."

"Well, not exactly," grinned Lowther. "Kim on!"

They hurried back to the school. They were just in time to see Mr. Ratcliff rushing across to the School House from his own building.

Monteith, a New House prefect, was crossing the quad in front of them, and Mr. Ratcliff stopped for a moment to exchange a word with him. The Terrible Three noticed that the Housemaster's wrinkled face was flushed a little, and they guessed the reason.

"Monteith!" they heard Mr. Ratcliff say. "I have news for you which you will find both surprising and gratifying."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Dr. Holmes, my dear Monteith, has resigned the head-mastership of the school—"

"Oh gad!" murmured Monteith.

"And I," said Mr. Ratcliff proudly, "have been appointed to the vacant position! You, Monteith, as a New House prefect, will appreciate the honour that has fallen to your House."

"Oh gad!" repeated Monteith, quite faintly. Then he added: "Gratters, sir, of course—that is to say, congratulations!"

"Thank you, Monteith! I am now on my way to see the Head—I mean, Dr. Holmes," corrected Mr. Ratcliff, with a grim smile. "You may inform the boys of the New House of the happy tidings, my boy!"

"Oh gad!" said Monteith, for the third time. And he remained in the quad, blinking after Mr. Ratcliff's retreating figure for some time after the excited Housemaster had departed.

The Terrible Three, on the other hand, followed Mr. Ratcliff. They were very curious to know what would happen when he reached the Head's study.

Before he arrived at that dreaded sanctum, Mr. Ratcliff had informed quite a number of people of the great change that was coming to St. Jim's. He met Kildare in Hall and briefly conveyed the news to him. He ran into Rushton going up the stairs, and Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom at the top, and stopped to tell them each in turn. Finally, he met Mr. Raitton coming out of the Head's study, and whispered the news in his ear.

Messrs. Linton and Lathom and Kildare and Rushton and the Terrible Three and a number of juniors who had magically got to hear what was on, saw him whisper and also saw Mr. Raitton start violently.

"Mr. Ratcliff—" said Mr. Raitton, endeavouring to detain the rival Housemaster.

But Mr. Ratcliff did not intend to be detained. He pushed past his old rival and entered the Head's study, leaving the door ajar almost as though he were inviting an audience.

"Good-morning, Dr. Holmes!" he observed. "Sir Burnleigh Coke has just telephoned me, informing me of your momentous decision."

Dr. Holmes jumped.

"Decision, Mr. Ratcliff? Sir—Sir Burnleigh Coke?"

"I need hardly assure you, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, "that I, like everybody else at St. Jim's, will part from you with regret."

"What!"

"While I am distressed, sir, I cannot say that I am altogether surprised at your decision to resign—"

"M-m-my decision to resign!" stammered the Head. "Do I understand you to say my decision to resign, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Quite, sir! That is the subject of my remarks," nodded the Housemaster of the New House. "As I say, I am not altogether surprised—"

"Mr. Ratcliff, have you been drinking?" gasped the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff started violently.

"What—what—"

"Surely that can be the only explanation of your incomprehensible statements!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "I am loth to believe that you have fallen a prey to some malignant mental disease. The only alternative explanation is that you have been drinking. For shame, sir!"

"My—my dear sir—" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Shameful!" said the Head. "I refuse to talk to you while you are in this condition! I suggest that you go to bed and sleep off the effects of the vile liquor—"

"Sir!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "You are suggesting that I am intoxicated? Merely because I offer a few remarks on the subject of your resignation—"

"What ever do you mean, my dear sir?" asked Dr. Holmes in amazement. "If you are referring to the head-mastership—"

"That is certainly the subject of my remarks," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Sir Burnleigh informs me that you have resigned."

"Dear me!"

"And that I have been chosen by the Board of Governors to be your successor as headmaster of St. Jim's. I take it that Sir Burnleigh is in a position to know."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head, in astonishment. Mr. Ratcliff suddenly looked at the Head with startled eyes. A dreadful thought seemed to occur to him.

"Then isn't it true, sir?" he gasped. "Is it—can it be possible?"

Dr. Holmes' voice was deep and cold when he replied: "It is not true, Mr. Ratcliff. I have not resigned, nor, at the moment, have I any intention of resigning."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff limply.

"I can only conclude, sir, since you repudiate the suggestion that you are intoxicated, that you are the victim of a practical joker," said the Head, in the same deep, cold tones. "I assume that you took no precautions to find out whether the gentleman to whom you were speaking really was Sir Burnleigh Coke?"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Oh—oh dear! Dear me!"

"It is a matter for regret that you did not take that elementary precaution," said the Head relentlessly. "I have nothing more to say."

"Oh dear! Then I have been hoaxed. The voice was like Sir Burnleigh's, but—"

Mr. Ratcliff broke off, almost frozen with horror at the realisation of the mess he had made of things. He stood eyeing the Head for a moment; then, with a gurgling cry, he rushed from the room.

Outside he was greeted by a crowd which had swollen to quite enormous proportions by this time. There was a roar as he appeared.

"Here he comes!"

"The new Head."

"Is it true, sir?"

"Are you sure about it, sir?"

Mr. Ratcliff, white to the lips, held up his hand for silence.

"I have to inform you all that my first announcement was premature," he managed to say. "Dr. Holmes has not, at the moment, resigned. And I have not been appointed in his place."

And Mr. Ratcliff rushed away.

After he had gone there was a chuckle. The chuckle changed to a laugh, and the laugh to a roar. In the end the entire School House seemed to be yelling. And it was a long time before they stopped yelling over the way Tom Merry had succeeded in misleading Ratty.

CHAPTER 8.

The Genuine Article!

TOM MERRY'S little hoax had the effect of quietening down the rumours for a day or so. A good many imagined that it would kill them altogether; but that was not so.

Figgins and Kerr and Wynn strolled up to a group of School House juniors in the quad during morning break on the following Saturday, and Figgins butted in with:

"Heard all about it, chaps?"

"No. And if it's some third-rate New House gag, we don't want to," said Blake. "You fellows seem to have spent the last few days grinning at us. What's the lark?"

"Nothing more than usual, old bean!" responded the long-legged leader of the New House juniors sweetly. "Be straight if we didn't grin when we look at your faces, but—"

"Why, you funny ass—"

"That's not what I want to tell you," said Figgins cheerily. "Coming to the point—have you heard that Ratty really is to be appointed Head?"

There was a roar from the School House juniors.

"Can it!"

"Dry up, Figgy!"

"It was only a jape, you fathead!"

Figgins grinned.

"I know all about that phone call being a jape. That didn't disprove anything. I've heard a rumour—"

"You mean you're trying to start a rumour, you spoofer!" said Tom Merry. "Looks to me as if these chaps might be at the bottom of it all, you men."

"Bai Jove, that's a bright idea! What do you know, about it, Figgy, dear boy?"

"Own up, you New House spoofer!"

"Find out, you School House wasters—if there's anything to find out!" retorted Figgins.

"Jolly good mind to find out, too!" said Tom Merry.

"What about bumping 'em fill they own up?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Collar 'em!"

"Back up, New House!" yelled Figgins, as he found himself suddenly surrounded.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn "backed up" nobly. But with the odds at about ten to one against them, they were not able to put up a very effective defence, and in the space of a few seconds, all three were being whirled into the air by their School House rivals.

"All together!" yelled Blake. "One—two—three—down!"

Figgins & Co. smote the ground with a fearful impact, and emitted a well-synchronised chorus of pain.

"Whoop!"

"Ow—ow—wow!"

"Whoop! Leggo, blow you!"

"Not just yet!" smiled Tom Merry. "We want to know all about this Ratty bizney first. Going to tell us?"

"What the thump should we know—"

"Again!" said Tom, and for the second time the three New House heroes rose and fell to the accompaniment of another yell.

Six times was this little operation carried out. But Figgins & Co. remained adamant, not even giving a hint as to whether they did know anything about the mystery of the Ratcliff rumours.

"Better give it up," remarked Tom Merry. "I really believe the bouncers know something. But we can't keep on bumping them all day. Let 'em go, chaps! Your win, Figg!"

"Ow! You howling idiot!" roared the leader of the New House juniors. "For two pins I'd mop up the floor with you!"

"Try it on, old dear!"

"Hold on, Figg!" interrupted Kerr, as Figgins took a step forward. "We're going to score pretty soon without making a battlefield of the quad. Let it drop for the present."

Figgins dropped his hands and chuckled.

"Something in that, by George!" he remarked. "We'll let it pass. But just wait and see, you School House wasters! You may see something to open your peepers over a pretty soon."

And that that cryptic remark the New House leader marched off with his two henchmen, smiling quite cheerfully again.

Tom Merry shook his head thoughtfully as they went. "There's something deep and fishy happening somewhere, my infants," he said. "What it is, I'd give a lot to know." And Tom Merry returned to the Shell Form room in a very suspicious frame of mind.

He would have felt more suspicious still had he observed the movements of Figgins & Co. after dinner that day. The three New House juniors kept a sort of guard on the gates for quite a long time, as though they were waiting for someone to go out.

Eventually the Head's car rolled down the drive. Figgins & Co. "capped" Dr. Holmes very respectfully and Dr. Holmes smiled back graciously.

Immediately he had disappeared down the lane Figgins & Co. quitted the gates as though their vigil had ended.

They passed Mr. Ratcliff on their way back to the New House, and smiled. Mr. Ratcliff, who was taking his after-dinner constitutional round the quad, scowled back at them. Since the little telephone hoax had been perpetrated on him Mr. Ratcliff had been even less amiable than usual.

But something was destined to happen very soon that was to atone, temporarily at all events, for that unfortunate occurrence.

To be exact, it happened about an hour after, when Mr. Ratcliff was back in his study.

The telephone-bell rang.

Mr. Ratcliff answered the ring, and was immediately agitated to hear a very familiar voice at the other end of the wires.

"That you, Ratcliff? Are you there, confound you?"

"Sir Burnleigh Coke!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"Of course it's Sir Burnleigh Coke!" roared the hearty voice of the caller. "Now, Ratcliff, I'm going to tell you something that will brighten up that wretched face of yours. I've seen Holmes!"

Mr. Ratcliff felt a prickly sort of sensation at the back of his neck. After his recent experience he felt a deep distrust of the telephone. He had to admit to himself that this voice certainly did sound more like that of the original Sir Burnleigh Coke than had the practical joker's of two days before. But it still behoved him to be careful.

"Before you go further, Sir Burnleigh," he said, "may I ask for proof that you really are Sir Burnleigh?"

"What the thumper—" roared the voice of the caller. "The reason I ask for proof, sir," explained Mr. Ratcliff, trembling with fear lest he should go too far, "is that I have been recently made the victim of a hoax in which a villainous person impersonated you on the telephone. Naturally, I have no wish to offend, but—"

"Confound their infernal impudence! How dare they impersonate me!" hooted Sir Burnleigh. "You were a fool to take it in, Ratcliff—an unutterable fool!"

"Really, my dear sir—"

"But since you doubt whether it really is myself speaking, I'll soon give you ample proof. I'll come up to the school this afternoon in person. Perhaps you'll believe me then!"

Mr. Ratcliff smiled.

"Really, Sir Burnleigh, it seems hardly necessary to do the— I think I can distinguish your voice as that of the real Sir Burnleigh now."

"Bah! I'll come, nevertheless. In the meantime, Ratcliff—"

"Pray, proceed, my dear Sir Burnleigh!" almost purred the Housemaster of the New House.

"I have seen Holmes. I have spoken to him. And you may take it that you are to supersede him immediately."

Mr. Ratcliff's heart gave a wild leap. "You really mean that Dr. Holmes has resigned and that I am appointed in his place? Naturally, after the hoax I mentioned I am a little suspicious."

"I don't understand what the thunder you're talking about! You can assume that you are headmaster from this minute, anyway."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

Like a flash, all his hopes and ambitions returned to him.

"Well, now you know how you stand!" roared Sir Burnleigh. "So far as I'm concerned, you can sit in the headmaster's chair right now!"

"My dear Sir Burnleigh," murmured Mr. Ratcliff, "from the bottom of my heart, I—"

"Rot!" snorted Sir Burnleigh. "Well, you may expect me up at the school in half an hour, Ratcliff. Good-bye!"

And he was gone.

CHAPTER 9.

Beggar on Horseback!

MR. RATCLIFF was convinced. Since the hoax which Tom Merry had so successfully played on him, the new Housemaster's hopes had sunk to zero. While recognising that he really had, on the occasion of Sir Burnleigh's visit, received a promise of sorts, he had begun to look on that promise

Would You Believe It?

£5 for an immortal poem



Not dead, but asleep.
Golden Camomile
at night.

John Milton received only £5
from his publishers for 'Paradise Lost'

The Bible contains
3,566,480 letters, 773,746 words
31,173 verses, 1,189 chapters
and
66 books



Fighting blindfold!



Andabates
were Roman gladiators
who fought blindfolded,
wearing helmets with
no opening for the eyes.

with great misgiving. The jape had taken all the wind out of Ratty's sails.

But this was the genuine article. Mr. Ratcliff felt convinced of that. He had no doubts whatever about the voice of the man who had just spoken. There was something about it which had been lacking in the voice of the japer. He even wondered now how he had been deceived so easily.

Anyway, that could all be forgotten now in the glorious knowledge that he had at last been made headmaster of St. Jim's.

Mr. Ratcliff sat almost in ecstasy for a minute or two. Then he rose to his feet and quitted his study.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn were walking down the passage. Mr. Ratcliff beckoned the former.

"Figgins! Run down to Taggles immediately and order him to ring the bell for an assembly of the whole school in the Hall!"

Figgins jumped.
"An—an assembly—"

"You heard what I said, Figgins! Carry out the order at once!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins nodded almost dazedly and hurried off with Fatty Wynn to see Taggles.

Mr. Ratcliff, smiling grimly, waited in the New House till the deep note of the school bell clangued out. Then he walked out of the building and turned his steps in the direction of the School House.

He observed with satisfaction that the unexpected tolling of the bell, coming as it had in the middle of a half-holiday, had caused something like a pandemonium. Footstools were streaming off the playing fields, asking each other what could have happened; idlers were hurrying through the gates from the lane with amazed looks on their faces, and excited crowds were gathered round the steps of the School House, discussing the extraordinary happening.

Mr. Ratcliff walked briskly up the steps, the crowd parting to make way for him. The fellows "capped" him as he passed, and Mr. Ratcliff acknowledged the salutation with a curt nod.

"Assemble in the Hall at once, all of you!" he snapped.

"There is no occasion for delaying here."
And the new headmaster of St. Jim's rustled through into the Hall.

There he was confronted by Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Mr. Railton. He eyed them with a hostile eye, and would have walked straight past them had not Mr. Railton stopped him with a tap on the arm.

The Housemaster of the School House went right to the point.

"Taggles tells me that the school bell is being rung on your instructions, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "May I ask for an explanation?"

Mr. Ratcliff smiled.
"You may, sir; but you will have to wait for it until I make the public explanation which I intend to address to the assembled school in a few minutes."

"Sir!"
"In the meantime, it may be safely assumed that I am not taking on myself the rights and privileges of the headmaster without having received due authority," snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "Kindly allow me to pass!"

Mr. Railton's eyes gleamed.

"Naturally, my dear sir, I should not dream of creating a scene by preventing you," he said. "For your own sake, however, I must point out that in assuming the responsibility of calling together the school in the absence of the Head you have exceeded your duties."

Mr. Ratcliff sneered.

"Thank you, Mr. Railton! In the circumstances I suppose you consider you have the right to interfere!"

"Undoubtedly I have the right to interfere!" retorted Mr. Railton angrily. "It is not my intention, however, to provoke trouble with you by doing so. On the assumption that your arbitrary act—"

"Sir!"
"Has been performed for the purpose of making some harmless announcement, or that it is merely an act of insensate vanity—"

"Sir!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.
"On that assumption, sir," concluded Mr. Railton stiffly, "I shall not interfere. But I deem it my duty to warn you to be careful. That is all!"

"And that is quite enough—more than enough, in fact!" barked Mr. Ratcliff. "Let me pass, Mr. Railton!"

Mr. Railton stood aside, his usually good-tempered face flushed with anger. Mr. Ratcliff, without another glance at his old rival, stamped across the Hall and mounted the platform from which the Head customarily addressed the assembled school.

In a short space of time there was a very fair muster present. Naturally, there were many whose excursions had taken them out of range of the school bell, and absentees were inevitable in the circumstances. But Mr. Ratcliff felt quite satisfied as he surveyed the serried ranks before him. He raised his hand for silence.

The assembled school looked at him. With most of them deep suspicion and hostility was mingled with curiosity to know the reason for this unexpected summons.

"Boys," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I have called you together for the purpose of making an announcement of great importance. Two days ago it was reported that Dr. Holmes had resigned the headmastership of the school and that I had been appointed headmaster in his place. That report was premature."

There was a chuckle from the back of the Hall at the recollection of Tom Merry's jape. Mr. Ratcliff suppressed it with a ferocious scowl.

"I am now able to say," he went on, "that Dr. Holmes has, this afternoon, placed his resignation in the hands of the Governors—"

There was a buzz from Mr. Ratcliff's audience.

"And that I have definitely been appointed to the vacant post," continued Mr. Ratcliff. "I take over my duties immediately, and you may, therefore, consider me as your headmaster from now on."

He paused to give them an opportunity of cheering. Not that Mr. Ratcliff would have misconstrued a cheer as a sign of affection—he had no illusions about that—but he felt that, in common politeness his promotion ought to be celebrated with the customary honours.

But Mr. Ratcliff paused in vain. For once politeness was at a discount at St. Jim's. Nobody cheered.

Trumble of the Fourth was the only one present to attempt formal congratulation. That podgy junior, perhaps in the hope of softening Ratty's heart for future occasions, solemnly started to clap.

There was a burst of laughter from one part of the Hall, undoubtedly the effect of that solitary clap was rather mirth-provoking. Two pink spots that suddenly appeared on Mr. Ratcliff's cheeks showed what he thought about it. He fixed a wolfish glare on Trumble.

"Trumble!" he barked.

The Falstaff of the Fourth abandoned his clapping and nodded brightly.

"Yes, sir."

"How dare you interrupt when I am speaking?" hooted Mr. Ratcliff.

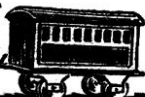
Trumble looked surprised.

"Why, I thought you stopped to give us time to clap,"

Facts from Far and Near.

The Goliath of Insects.

An earwig can move 530 times its own weight.



The record for model steam-driven speed-boats is held by M^r Clifford's Chatterbox—43 m.p.h. (1926)

Can you divide this crescent into 6 pieces, each bearing one of the black spots, by making 2 cuts?

(Solution given on page 27.)

sir," he said. "I only did it because I thought you'd be pleased!"

"Stand out at once!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I am going to make an example of you, Trimble, by caning you severely. Stand out, boy!"

"Go it, Baggly!" encouraged Blake, sotto voce. "You thought you'd get something by making a pal of Ratty. Now you're going to get it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "And kindly hurry, Trimble, or I shall double your punishment!"

"Ow! But I was only clapping you!" yelled Trimble indignantly. "I was showing my loyalty to you, sir. The other beasts hate you like poison!"

"What!" howled the new headmaster of St. Jim's. "But I'm not like that!" went on the Falstaff of the Fourth. "I don't think you're half such a rotter as you seem to be, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a roar from the whole assembly. Trimble's efforts at diplomacy were irresistible.

Mr. Ratcliff did not attempt to suppress the roar. Instead, he grasped his cane grimly and firmly in the right hand and with the left hand grasped his lone supporter by the scruff of the neck.

"Wretched boy!" he thundered. "Let the punishment which I am about to administer to you teach you to remain silent when your headmaster is speaking!"

With that, Mr. Ratcliff waded in. His cane rose and fell mercilessly on Trimble's podgy anatomy, and a series of wild howls proceeded from the Falstaff of the Fourth.

How long the swishing might have gone on was afterwards a matter for conjecture. Fortunately for Trimble, the new Head was interrupted soon after he had begun by the sudden arrival of an extraordinary-looking gentleman whom many of the juniors remembered having seen a few days before.

"Sir Burnleigh Coke!" ejaculated Tom Merry. Mr. Ratcliff heard him, and at the sound of that magic name hastily released the roaring Trimble and faced the door.

"You may go, Trimble!" he said; then he quickly adjusted his features so that their usual grim expression changed into a benignant smile of welcome. "Good-afternoon, Sir Burnleigh! Pray step up on the platform and allow me to introduce you to the school."

"Pleasure!" bellowed the old martinet, advancing to the front of the assembly. "So you've got the young rascals together, hey, Ratcliff? Well, they're not exactly a handsome lot, but good looks aren't everything—eh, what?"

He stood beside Mr. Ratcliff on the platform and addressed the gathering.

"I'm a man of few words, boys," he said. "So my remarks won't keep you long. All I want to say, in the name of the Governors, is that Mr. Ratcliff has our authority to exercise the strictest discipline from now on."

"Oh!"

It was a sort of groan that went up from every part of the Hall.

"If Mr. Ratcliff takes my advice," went on Sir Burnleigh grimly, "he'll run this school on good, old-fashioned lines—plenty of work and plenty of floggings! You hear that, Ratcliff?"

"I quite agree, my dear sir," said Mr. Ratcliff heartily. "Then I hope you'll carry out the idea, sir! That is all I've got to say. Shall I dismiss the school, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Exactly as you please, my dear Sir Burnleigh!"

"Dismiss, then!" roared Sir Burnleigh. "And, remember—hard work and floggings for everybody!"

The school dismissed. And there was a weeping and wailing and a gnashing of teeth throughout St. Jim's. Ratty had been bad enough in the comparatively small role of Housemaster. What he would be like as Head, with the authority of the Governors to carry out a programme of hard work and floggings, hardly bore thinking about! Judging by his first address to the school it certainly appeared that Mr. Ratcliff could be compared with the proverbial beggar on horseback; and it seemed highly probable that, like that proverbial individual, he would ride straight to that legendary gentleman who is usually depicted as the owner of a pair of horns and a tail with a prong on the end of it.

CHAPTER 10.

The Real Sir Burnleigh!

"THAT rotter—"
 "That rank outsider—"
 "That measly, crawling worm!" said Jack Blake bitterly. "Is there any word invented that's bad enough to describe him?"

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"Can't be!"

"And to think he's going to be our Head!" snorted Digby. "I'm going to ask my people to take me away!"

"Same here! What say you, Tommy?"

Tom Merry frowned.

"It's a bit early to talk of that yet. Personally, I doubt still whether Ratty really has been appointed Head."

"But it must be true, fathhead!" growled Herries. "You heard what that chap, Sir Burnleigh Coke, said—"

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"You mean the alleged Sir Burnleigh Coke?"

"Eh?"

"The alleged Sir Burnleigh Coke!" repeated Tom. "Suppose the chap we've just seen in the Hall is not the real Sir Burnleigh at all?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And that the whole thing is a hoax like the little wheeze I worked off on Ratty the other day. That would put a different complexion on things, wouldn't it?"

"Great pip!"

"If you ask me—" went on the leader of the Shell, when a warning buzz of "Cave!" caused him to cut short.



Judging from his remarks, the pseudo Sir Burnleigh!

A moment later Mr. Ratcliff and Sir Burnleigh Coke came out of the main door of the School House round which the juniors were gathered.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at the little group at the top of the steps.

"You are impeding the way by idling, lounging about in this most inconvenient spot!" he snapped. "Take a hundred lines each!"

The juniors gasped. Their new Head was evidently not going to waste time in getting to work.

Cutts of the Fifth came towards the steps as the odd-looking pair descended. Mr. Ratcliff paused for another moment to address him:

"Cutts!"

"Sir!" said Cutts, with an inquiring lift of his eyebrows.

"You will report to me in my study in the New House at six o'clock. I intend to punish you for the insubordination you displayed a few days since."

"Oh gad!"

Mr. Ratcliff whisked off again, leaving Cutts staring after

him almost transfixed. Quite a crowd followed Mr. Ratcliff and his honoured guest at a respectful distance after that, curious to see what else the new Head would do on his way to the New House.

Kildare was the next man to cross the tyrant's path. Mr. Ratcliff called out to the captain of St. Jim's.

"Kildare!"

"Mr. Ratcliff!" responded Kildare grimly.

"You will call and see me this evening at half-past six, when I will explain to you in detail the terms on which I shall allow you to continue as head prefect!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Kildare steadily. "I shall not keep the appointment!"

"Hear, hear!" chortled Blake, from the rear, and there was a yell from the rest of the crowd:

Mr. Railton eyed Mr. Ratcliff's guest with a keen, searching eye.

"That is a little difficult. If you will come aside for a moment—"

"The matter must wait," said Mr. Ratcliff brusquely. "Report to me later on."

"Phew!" came a whistle from the breathless crowd. "Give him one, sir!" advised one unidentified hero.

And for a moment, as a matter of fact, Railton almost did! Mr. Ratcliff never knew how near he had come that afternoon to receiving a black eye from his School House colleague.

Sir Burnleigh led the unsuspecting Ratty off to the New House, and the crowd dispersed.

Then there was a sudden shout.

"The Head!"

Tom Merry led a rush of juniors to the drive leading from the gates, through which Dr. Holmes' car had just appeared.

"Now we'll soon know for sure!" muttered Tom. "And I wouldn't mind betting ten to one in jam-tarts that I'm right—he hasn't resigned!"

"Who's the Johnny he's got with him?" asked Lowther. "Big bug, by the look of him!"

"Never mind him!" said Blake. "What about three cheers for the Head—our Head, I mean, not Ratty?"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Let it rip, chaps! Hip-hip-hip—"

And the juniors well and truly "let it rip." They saw a look of astonishment appeared on the Head's face. He gave an order to his chauffeur, and the car pulled up. Mr. Railton went up to it and spoke to Dr. Holmes.

Tom Merry saw his lips frame the words, "Sir Burnleigh Coke," and guessed what the Housemaster was talking about.

Then he heard Dr. Holmes utter a sudden exclamation.

"But, my dear Mr. Railton, the gentleman with me now is Sir Burnleigh Coke. How is it possible—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Hear that, chaps?"

"Couldn't help it!" said Blake. "But what the thump—"

"Quick!" snapped Tom. "There's not a moment to lose. Find Figgins and tell him!"

"Figgys?"

"How does he come into it?"

"He knows all about it—that's how! It's just as I suspected all along. The whole thing's a put-up job on the part of Figgins and his pals."

"What!"

"And if I'm not very much mistaken," finished Tom, "the chap who's pretending to be Sir Burnleigh Coke is Kerr!"

"Oh, ye gods!"

The juniors scattered, and began searching for Figgins.

CHAPTER 11.

Trouble Ahead!

"HALLO, hallo! School on fire, or something?" Figgins asked that cheery question as Tom Merry and Blake and Lowther swooped down on him near the gymnasium.

Tom Merry grabbed him by the arm.

"Quick, you ass—what that fellow in the New House with Ratty? Is it Kerr?"

"Kerr?" asked Figgins, in pretended surprise. "Why, I thought Ratty had just gone in with Sir Burnleigh Coke!"

"You did, did you?" snorted Tom. "Well, it may interest you to know that Sir Burnleigh Coke—the real Sir Burnleigh Coke—has just arrived in the Head's car with the Head himself!"

"What?" howled Figgins, the grin suddenly fading from his face.

"Then it was Kerr, after all?" asked Tom.

"Of course it was, only you School House duffers were too thick-headed to spot it!" snapped Figgins.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

But at that moment Baggy Trimble came trotting up.

"I say, you fellows," panted the Falstaff of the Fourth, "come and see what's happening in the quad! Old Kerr will get the sack! He, he, he!"

"What's that, you fat rotter?" snapped Figgins, and only paused to aim a kick at Baggy before he dashed off towards the quad at top speed.

The three School House juniors followed, leaving Baggy to look after himself.

The sight that met their eyes when they reached the quad would have reduced them all to tears of laughter had it not been for the serious consequences which must obviously result for Kerr. Even as it was they could not refrain from being amused.

In the middle of the quad the Head was talking to the

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...has Napoleon fighting a sword duel with Wellington!

"Good old Kildare!"

Kildare continued his walk. Mr. Ratcliff, after a furious look at his retreating figure, linked arms with Sir Burnleigh Coke and continued his triumphant progress.

From a distance Mr. Railton watched the incident with lowering brows. As Kildare walked away, the Housemaster of the School House approached.

Sir Burnleigh Coke, for some reason, seemed anxious to avoid Mr. Railton. He endeavoured to pilot Mr. Ratcliff in another direction. But Mr. Ratcliff saw no reason for dodging the man whom he now regarded as his vanquished rival, and he stood his ground.

"Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Railton. "I should like a word with you privately."

Mr. Ratcliff tried to look majestic—not a very easy task in his case.

"I'm afraid I am very busy, Railton," he said loftily.

"Presumably you can say what you have to say before Sir Burnleigh?"

real Sir Burnleigh Coke, the two standing facing one another. A few yards away Mr. Ratcliff was talking to Kerr, and they were facing one another. The position was that the Head and Ratty were back to back, while the two Sir Burnleigh Cokes were facing one another!

The real Sir Burnleigh was trying hard to get a good look at Kerr, while Kerr was dodging about behind Ratty! Finally Kerr secured Ratty by the arm.

"Come on, Ratcliff—come on!" he boomed. "Let's go up to your study!"

And they went.

A few minutes later Mr. Railton joined the Head and the real baronet, and the three set off on the trail of Mr. Ratcliff and Kerr.

Behind them followed Merry, Figgins, Blake, and Lowther. The three School House juniors looked serious, but Figgins' face was drawn with anxiety. It was too late to warn Kerr now!

Up the stairs went the three gentlemen, behind them went the juniors. At length they reached Mr. Ratcliff's study, and, without troubling to knock, the Head and his two companions walked in.

"This is the impostor, gentlemen!" said Mr. Railton, as he passed through the doorway.

CHAPTER 13. Kerr's Way Out!

"AND that's that!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Looks as if it's all U.P. with Kerr," said Blake, with a shake of his head.

They had halted outside Mr. Ratcliff's study, the door of which had now closed behind Mr. Railton. Figgins gazed at that door with eyes of despair.

"It's—it's ghastly!" he muttered. "After all that Kerr did—"

"Well, he couldn't have done much more, certainly!" remarked Lowther, with a grim chuckle. "He appointed Ratty to be Head, and addressed the blessed school in the Hall. Beyond ordering the chaps to pull down the school he couldn't have gone much further!"

Figgins clenched his fists, and took a step forward. "I'm going in!" he announced. "I'm not letting Kerr face it on his own. Go and call Fatty, too. He'll want to be in it."

"Hells—mo!" Tom Merry laid a restraining hand on the leader of the New House juniors. "Plenty of time for that stuff later on. I should hang off for a while first, though, Figg. Kerr's pretty tricky. He may pull through yet."

Figgins paused.

"Wish I thought so. Daahed if I see how it's possible. Once they take off those false whiskers—"

"And the false eyebrows, and the wads of cotton-wool in his cheeks, and the grease-paint and the half-dozen suits he's wearing, they may recognise Kerr!" finished Tom Merry.

"Exactly! But until they do that, I don't think it's possible to know him. So there's hope yet. Kerr may find a way out."

And, as a matter of fact, at that very moment Kerr was thinking very hard to find a way out.

He had remained outwardly calm when the door had opened to admit the beaks. Kerr was known to be an expert at disguising himself, and he could disguise his feelings even better than his face. He did not betray his inward qualms by so much as a flicker of an eyelid.

As Mr. Railton came out with the word "impostor," he did sit up and take notice. But presumably that would have happened in any case.

"Impostor, sir!" he hellowed, still assuming the character of the fiery Sir Burnleigh Coke of his own creation. "You call me an impostor?"

"That is what I said," replied Mr. Railton calmly.

"Pray leave the matter to me, Mr. Railton," said Dr. Holmes, regarding the bogus governor steadily. "I understand, sir, that you claim to be Sir Burnleigh Coke, a member of the Board of Governors of this school."

"That is so, sir," replied Kerr, experiencing a horrible sinking feeling as he met the Head's stern gaze. "Is my claim disputed? Is some slanderous villain saying I am not Sir Burnleigh Coke?"

"There is one gentleman here who has every right to dispute your claim," replied the Head quietly. "The reason for that is that he happens to be Sir Burnleigh Coke himself!"

"But this is ridiculous!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, whose face was a study in conflicting emotions. "There is no question whatever about this gentleman being Sir Burnleigh. You will remember, Dr. Holmes, that he called during your absence the other afternoon. I have no doubt what—"

ever that this is the Sir Burnleigh I entertained on that occasion."

"That, my dear sir, seems very probable," intervened the real Sir Burnleigh Coke. "Quite obviously this impudent rascal has imposed on your credulity both on that occasion and now."

"In-imposed!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff, his face beginning to take on a sickly, greenish hue.

"The fact that he has had the infernal impudence to play the same trick twice, however, doesn't make him any less an impostor," said Sir Burnleigh. "The man is an impostor—possibly a lunatic, too, for I can imagine no sane reason for this preposterous masquerade! I suggest that we ring for the police."

"An excellent suggestion," said Dr. Holmes. "Kindly utilise your telephone for that purpose, Mr. Ratcliff! Remain still, sir!"

The last to Kerr, who had suddenly risen to his feet. A gleam had come into the Scottish junior's eyes while Sir Burnleigh had been speaking.

Sir Burnleigh's suggestion that he must be a lunatic had brought it there.

Kerr's heart beat quickly at the thought that he might yet get out of his dreadful dilemma. A lunatic! Why not! He much preferred the idea of their thinking him an escaped lunatic to that of their recognising him as George Francis Kerr of St. Jim's.

While his brain worked like lightning on the problem, Mr. Ratcliff was regarding him almost with horror in his eyes.

"Sir Burnleigh!" he gasped at length. "My dear sir, I—"

"Pray telephone the police at once, Mr. Ratcliff!" ordered Dr. Holmes.

"But this cannot be—this cannot be—the tyrant of the New House. Tell them they are wrong, Sir Burnleigh! Give me, at any rate, verbal confirmation that you really are Sir Burnleigh Coke!"

He looked imploringly at the disguised New House junior. Kerr drew a deep breath. He had plenty of nerve. But it required almost superhuman nerve to play the game of bluff he was starting on now. There was nothing else for it, however, and Kerr took the plunge.

"You speaking to me, Ratcliff?" he barked, in the drill-sergeant voice of his imaginary Sir Burnleigh Coke.

"Of course I am, sir! You are Sir Burnleigh Coke, aren't you?"

"Me?" asked Kerr, in apparent surprise. "Why, you must be making a mistake. I'm not Sir Burnleigh Coke. I'm Napoleon!"

"Napoleon?" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Napoleon—Napoleon?" roared Kerr. "I've been looking everywhere for Wellington, but I can't find him. Have you seen him, Blucher?"

"B-B-Blucher?" moaned Mr. Ratcliff. "Oh dear! The man is mad! Then he is not Sir Burnleigh Coke after all! Oh dear!"

"The police!" said the real Sir Burnleigh, in a hoarse stage whisper over Kerr's back. "Phone at once!"

"Where's Wellington?" yelled Kerr excitedly. "Bring him out, and I'll show him who's who! Ah! There he is!"

Mr. Ratcliff sank into his chair, incapable of action. The shock of finding that his carefully cultivated "Sir Burnleigh Coke" was nothing more than a lunatic was too much for him.

"I'll do it!" snapped Mr. Railton, and he stepped to Mr. Ratcliff's desk and picked up the telephone receiver.

Meanwhile, Kerr was engaged in weird and wonderful gymnastics in the corner of the room.

Sir Burnleigh Coke and the Head, who had cautiously stepped away from him since his outbreak, judged from his remarks that he imagined he was fighting a sword-duel with Wellington.

In reality Kerr was very carefully manoeuvring towards the door.

He got to his objective at last, just as he heard Mr. Railton saying:

"Is that the police station? Excellent! Please send several men at once to St. Jim's. We are endeavouring to detain a dangerous mental case who—"

Kerr waited to hear no more. With a sudden, swift movement he dropped his pretence of sword-fighting, and leaped over to the door.

There was a shout from Sir Burnleigh Coke:

"Stop him! He must not escape!"

But Kerr had different ideas altogether. His only thought was that he had to escape, whatever happened! One second's delay at this stage would have been fatal, for Sir Burnleigh and the Head were both rushing at him, while Mr. Railton had dropped the receiver to give his aid.

Fortunately the door-handle responded to his violent

wrench. In a trice, Kerr had flung open the door and fairly hurtled out of the room.

Outside in the passage several juniors, among whom Kerr recognised Figgins and Fatty Wynn, stared at him as though they were looking at an apparition.

"Delay them!" hissed the Scottish junior, as he flew past them.

Figgins was not usually very quick on the uptake. But he was inspired on this occasion.

No sooner had the words left Kerr's lips than the leader of the New House juniors uttered a loud yell, as if he had been hurt, and reeled across the passage, to collide with the Head and Sir Burnleigh Coke.

There was another yell then from the two unfortunate gentlemen. They came to a dead stop, with Figgins sprawling in their path, still uttering agonised yells.

"Ow! Help! Save me!" roared Figgins. "He hit me on the jaw! Ow!"

"Dear me! The man is evidently behaving in a violent fashion!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, looking extremely agitated. "He must be captured without delay before he inflicts grievous bodily harm on some unsuspecting youth."

"Hurry!" snapped Sir Burnleigh Coke. "You will be all right, my boy. Keep together, all of you, and help us to find the man!"

And Sir Burnleigh and the Head rushed off down the passage.

A moment later Mr. Raiton dashed out of the study, having finished his talk to the police station before starting on the chase. Figgins, who had collapsed on the floor, was waiting for him. He jumped up at the precise moment when Mr. Raiton was passing, and the top of his head came into violent and painful collision with the School House master's jaw.

Crack!
"Whoop!" yelled Mr. Raiton, staggering backwards towards the study again, both hands to his injured face.

"Figgins! You—you—Oh!"

With a mighty effort he conquered his feelings and righted himself again, and, after a glare at Figgins that ought really to have shrivelled up the junior on the spot, rushed off in the wake of the Head and his visitor.

"Better than nothing," grinned Figgins. "That gives old Kerr a start, anyway."

"Well, it was one way of doing it," remarked Lowther. "Wonder what the Head would say if he knew the truth?"

"S-sh! Ratty's still about, you know."

"What's keeping him, then?" asked Tom Merry curiously. "Blessed if I haven't a good mind to look in and see!"

And he suited the action to the word, and took a peep into the room.

It was pretty obvious that the shock of his disillusionment had detained Mr. Ratcliff. The Housemaster of the New House, all his fond dreams destroyed by the dreadful reality, was sitting in his chair still staring dazedly at the opposite wall.

"Poor old Ratty!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Blow him!" said Jack Blake. "I've no sympathy to waste on Ratty after seeing how he'd behave if he really were made Head. Let's push off and see how Kerr's getting on."

"Let's, then."

And they "pushed off," and pretended to join in the search for the alleged escaped lunatic who had posed as Sir Burnleigh Coke.

The New House was agog with excitement by this time. Juniors armed with cricket-stumps, fires-bats, and pokers were exploring the passages and rooms in a very thorough

manner. Tom Merry gathered that Figgins & Co. had not taken many fellows into their confidence in the matter of the great hoax on Ratty, which, in all the circumstances, was the wisest course.

Figgins led the way upstairs to the dormitories, and on one of the landings they again encountered the Head and Mr. Raiton and Sir Burnleigh.

"No luck, sir?" asked Tom Merry of Mr. Raiton.

"There is not a trace of the man, Merry. It is very extraordinary."

"I fully expected to find the man in the Fourth dormitory," remarked the Head. "Undoubtedly, there were footsteps across that room when we were underneath. But he is not there."

"What's this?" asked Sir Burnleigh Coke suddenly, after vainly trying to open a door near by.

"It is a junior bath-room," replied the Head. "Is the door locked?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"Then we have found him. Open the door at once!" ordered Dr. Holmes, with a rap on the door. "We know you are here."

Figgins drew a sharp breath, wondering what reply would come from within.

He had no cause for alarm. Kerr was "up to snuff" now as before.

"Can you wait a minute, sir?" he asked. "I'm not quite dressed. Shan't be long. Anyway, I'm not hiding."

The Head uttered an exclamation.

"Dear me! It is not the man, after all. It is apparently a junior boy."

"Kerr, by the sound of him, sir," said Blake demurely.

"Precisely! Very well, Kerr, in the circumstances, there is no need for you to open the door. But hurry, downstairs as soon as you are dressed. A dangerous man is at large in the building."

"However did he get in, sir?" asked Kerr, from the bath-room, apparently astonished by the Head's information. And Kerr's chums outside found it difficult to control their faces for a few seconds.

The search went on, moving away from the bath-room.

A few minutes later Kerr came downstairs, wearing his usual school suit, and looking spick-and-span and quite cool, calm, and collected. He very willingly joined in the search for the elusive eccentric who had posed as Sir Burnleigh Coke. But even his intervention brought success no nearer.

The mysterious hoaxer had vanished, never to return.

CHAPTER 13.

Awful for Ratty!

"M R. RATCLIFF!"

"Sir!"

"This is a very unfortunate business—very unfortunate, indeed!"

Dr. Holmes drummed on his desk, and regarded his subordinate in a far from amiable manner.

Two hours had passed since the disappearance of Mr. Ratcliff's unknown supporter. The police had searched the school buildings from top to bottom, and departed. The Head and Sir Burnleigh Coke and Mr. Raiton and Mr. Ratcliff were now in the Head's study in the School House.

Sir Burnleigh and Mr. Raiton regarded the victim of the biggest hoax that had ever been known at St. Jim's rather curiously.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was haggard. Like Lucifer, Son of

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the Morning, he had fallen from his high estate, and he found the fall a very painful one.

The worst of it was, from Mr. Ratcliff's point of view, that he had, so to speak, burned his boats completely, and there was no way of getting back to where he had been before.

Dr. Holmes knew everything—knew of Ratty's assembling the school, knew of his high-handed dealings with Mr. Railton, Kildare, and others, knew the whole dreadful story from beginning to end, in fact.

His face had grown grimmer and grimmer during the two hours in which he had, bit by bit, picked up this knowledge. As to Sir Burnleigh Coke, the St. Jim's Governor, who had so inconceivably encountered the Head at the house of the Chairman of the Board that afternoon, his expression by this time was quite extraordinary. His opinion of the St. Jim's he had found on his return from his long stay in India was very evidently not altogether a favourable one.

Mr. Ratcliff licked his dry lips.

"Naturally, sir—naturally, gentlemen, I am sorry," he managed to stammer.

"Naturally!" said the Head grimly.

"Very naturally," remarked Sir Burnleigh dryly.

"My behaviour must appear execrable—incorruptible," muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "Possibly it is difficult for you to observe in it any redeeming feature."

"Certainly that would appear difficult," assented the Head.

"Beyond my powers, anyhow," grunted Sir Burnleigh.

"Nevertheless, gentlemen, I assure you that I was actuated by strictly honourable motives," groaned Mr. Ratcliff.

"I accepted that—that trickster at his face value—foolishly, perhaps."

"Very foolishly."

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Mr. Ratcliff bowed.

"In the light of what has transpired since, that would appear to be the case. At all events, I accepted him as Sir Burnleigh Coke in quite good faith, and I had no reason to doubt that the Governors had, as he indicated, accepted your resignation, Dr. Holmes, and appointed me in your place."

"Case of the wish being father to the thought!" snapped Sir Burnleigh Coke bluntly. "My impression is that you were inordinately anxious to assume the reins of office."

"For the sake of the preservation of discipline, I did not want the impression to get about that nobody was left in charge of the school."

"It was impossible for that impression to get about, Mr. Ratcliff, since nobody had heard of this imaginary resignation of mine," interrupted Dr. Holmes. "Quite frankly, sir, your explanations of your conduct are, in my opinion, totally inadequate."

Mr. Ratcliff mopped the beads of perspiration from his brow.

"It—is it very regrettable, sir."

"Very."

"I—I—" Mr. Ratcliff seemed on the verge of choking. "If you take such an extremely serious view of the matter, sir, there is only one step left for me to take. I must place my resignation in your hands."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"I must say, Mr. Ratcliff, I feel very much like accepting it."

He glanced at Sir Burnleigh. Mr. Railton, who had grown increasingly uncomfortable at his old rival's humiliation, muttered an excuse and quitted the room, to be greeted outside by curious looks from the expectant crowd of juniors which had gathered near the Head's study.

Back in that fateful apartment Sir Burnleigh Coke was eyeing Mr. Ratcliff keenly. The wretched Housemaster was in a pitiable condition, and it was only too obvious that, despite his offer to resign, he was by no means anxious to leave the comfortable and congenial berth he had occupied for so many years.

Sir Burnleigh coughed.

"If I may offer a suggestion, Dr. Holmes—" he said.

The Head nodded quite eagerly.

"Most decidedly, my dear sir. I am open to receive any suggestion."

"I should say that Mr. Ratcliff has had a lesson which he is not likely to forget in a hurry. Perhaps the matter can be left at that. For a number of reasons Mr. Ratcliff has, during the last few days, departed from that standard of loyalty which a headmaster has a right to expect from his assistants. I do not anticipate that he will do so again."

"Never!" declared Mr. Ratcliff.

Dr. Holmes' face cleared a little.

"Naturally, I have no desire to act harshly in the matter," he said. "Mr. Ratcliff has been associated with the school for a good many years, and, although we do not always see eye to eye, I should like to think that it was possible to revert to the mutual respect that has previously characterised our relations."

"It shall be my endeavour to restore that felicitous state of affairs, sir," moaned Mr. Ratcliff.

"Then, in the circumstances, my dear sir," said the Head, "I decline to accept your resignation, and I will do my best to forget the matter as speedily as I can."

And the interview ended in handshaking all round.

A favoured few knew the inner story of the great hoax on Mr. Ratcliff; but they kept their knowledge to themselves, and for the most part St. Jim's never knew who was responsible for the amazing affair. The Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co. had to admit that for once Figgins & Co. of the New House really had scored.

What the effect of the great joke would be on Mr. Ratcliff's character was at first a matter for keen speculation throughout St. Jim's. Most fellows opined that his reform would be of short duration, and their prophecy turned out to be fairly correct. But there was a difference. However tyrannical Mr. Ratcliff became in the future, his conduct was always likely to be modified by the recollection of the awful time he had had when he'd endeavoured to seize the position of headmaster of St. Jim's!

THE END.

(By Jock, you fellows, old Ratty was caught, sure enough, that time! Next week's story of St. Jim's is a real thriller! Read "THE LIGHTHOUSE MYSTERY!" in the GEM!)

Can You Beat Him? Try It and See, Boys!



The Oracle is the wisest man in the world! There's only one thing he doesn't know—and that's nothing!

OUR office-boy came in the other morning, chums, and told the Ed. that he was going to a night school to learn flying. The Ed. said that he was a giddy young ass, and when he got up into the air he would feel giddy still. So I asked young Adolphus if he suffered from vertigo. He said he would prefer to go, if the Editor would let him.

Of course, I didn't expect the young noodle to know that vertigo was another word for giddiness. When I explained that vertigo meant giddiness, he said he hoped to giddiness he wouldn't feel it in the air.

As I explained to the Editor, it's a funny thing that people who turn quite giddy when they look over the edge of a high building, never feel that way when they're in a plane. Sir Alan J. Cobham, the famous airman, says that that is due to the forward movement of the machine, and the lack of contact with the earth.

Sir Alan Cobham has said that he only once experienced the sense of height, and that was when he was flying over Montserrat. He says that the rocky boulders of the summit of the mountain were only twenty feet below his plane on one side, and on the other side was the valley, 4,000 feet below. When he looked down into the valley he didn't feel anything, but when he looked at the mountain he did. When young Adolphus heard me yarning about the famous Sir Alan Cobham, he started firing questions at me one after the other, until the Editor pushed him through the door and announced that my job was to answer readers' queries, and not the office-boy's. Thereupon we set to work.

At the first question I thought the old Ed. was going to choke. Said he, "A reader wants to know what Ixtacohuall is? Now my lad, is there such a thing? And if so, Why?" I grinned and settled myself firmly into position. "That word," I told the Ed., "is pronounced csh-tak-se-watl." "T a x i what'll" snapped the Editor. "What do you mean, you be-whiskered old baboon? What taxi'll what, or what taxi what'll?" "Keep calm," said I, "and keep your hair on, Ed. old top." "I'll keep my hair on all right," he growled, "and that's more than you've been able to do, you hairless old hump!"

I told the Ed. that he was going a bit too far. "Yes, and so are your whiskers," he retorted. "Get 'em out! Now what about this eshtaxi-thingammybob?"

"That, sir, is the name of a lofty

volcano, near Mexico. The name means 'white woman.' They call it that because it has three peaks, covered in snow, which look from below like a human figure."

"And what's a jabiru?" asked the Editor, looking at another letter.

"A jabiru, sir, is an American stork. It has a massive bill and white plumage, and is related to the old world genera *kenorchus*—"

"That's quite enough of that," he snapped back. "Let's stork about something else. Here's a letter about ponies. How many breeds of ponies are there in England?"

"There's the Shetland," said I, "and the Highland pony. Also the Fell breeds, and the Dartmoor and Exmoor. The smallest is the Shetland, which when fully grown is often under nine hands in height."

"What do you mean by nine hands?" "A hand is four inches," I explained to him.

The Editor jotted down this piece of information and picked up another letter. "Now," said he, "here is a question from a girl reader, Bessie Linch, of Brighton. She says she has been reading a story in which the men after dinner all stood up and drank toasts to the ladies. Bessie wants to know how it's possible to drink toast?"

"The expression came about in this way," I told the Ed. "Years ago, in the old days of the Stuarts, people put bits of toast in the wine, to give it a better flavour. That's an easy one," I added. "Not much chance of knocking anything off my pay at this rate."

"George Barraclough wants to know what a hockey stick's made of?" fired out the Ed.

"The blade of a hockey stick is made of ash," I answered, without a moment's hesitation. "The handle is made of cane. Next please."

"A Beebles reader wants to know what gas they put into gas-filled electric lamps?"

"Nitrogen, or a gas called argon," said I. "When an electric light bulb is filled with one of these gases, great care has to be taken to ensure that the gas going in is quite pure. Should any oxygen, carbon dioxide, or water vapour find its way into the bulb the life of the lamp is considerably shortened. Filling light-bulbs is no easy matter, believe me."

"And finding a corker that you can't answer is no easy matter either," growled the Ed. "Tom Wade, of Withcelsea, writes to ask whether sailors have any other method of finding the depth of the sea, besides doing it with a rope?"

"Yes, Ed., in deep water they use a method known as echo sounding. The instrument used in echo sounding is known as a fathometer. This instrument is fitted with two microphones, and a time recorder that is so delicately made that it will register a one-thousandth part of a second."

"How does it work, Whiskers?" asked the Ed. with interest.

"Well, sir, the principle behind the

thing is this: we know the speed at which sound travels through water, and by discharging a sound at the top, and then counting the time it takes for the echo to come back from the bottom of the sea, we are able to tell how deep the sea is. That's the idea, roughly, and it's very useful, even in very deep water, can be made in a few seconds. There are other ways, as, for instance, the Lucas machine."

"What's the Lucas machine?" the Editor asked, beaming with admiration at my immense knowledge.

"That's a gadget that carries 6,000 fathoms of 20-gauge wire, and it's fitted with a couple of brakes; one brake holds the reel, and the other stops the wire going out when the weights strike the bottom. There is a dial fixed to the reel that records the length of wire run out. Then there's another gadget, called 'the submarine sentry.' This gives the man on the ship warning of shallow water. It's worked by means of a 'sinker,' a kind of inverted kite, on the end of a cable. If the sinker strikes an unsuspected sandbank, it releases itself from the cable, rises to the top of the water, and automatically sounds an alarm gong."

"That's jolly useful," said the Ed. "Know any more?"

"Lots," said I, "but I don't want to take you out of your depth."

"It's certainly deep stuff, Whiskers," agreed the Editor. "Can you tell Lionel Burgo what steeplechasing is?" A steeplechase is a horse-race in which the horse has to clear obstacles on the way—fences, water-jumps, and so on.

"This poser," said the Ed., "is from a Harringay 'Gemite,' Joe Loftus. Joe has been reading that fine old collection of stories called the 'Arabian Nights,' and he says that in one of the yarns, entitled 'Sinbad the Sailor,' eagles are supposed to have been seen flying around with diamonds in their beaks. Now could that really have happened? What do you think?"

"Easy enough," I answered. "You see, Ed., all the old diamond mines were in India, and in India, years ago, when a diamond mine was found, the natives were in the habit of sacrificing a number of cattle in the new mine. That was supposed to keep away evil spirits. Well, as you know, eagles will seize any lumps of flesh they find, and there's no doubt that in these old diamond mines the diamonds stuck to the carcasses of the dead cattle, and were carried away by the eagles. And that's how old Sinbad came to see all these eagles with all those diamonds."

"You seem to have an explanation for everything," said the Ed. "Can you tell Bob Baxter, of Enfield, how peppermint is made?"

"Peppermint isn't made," I told the Ed. "Peppermint is obtained from a herb which you can see growing for yourself in places near streams in England. Of course, it's cultivated, for the sake of the oil obtained from it. It is the oil that is used in peppermint lozenges and soda-mint tablets, which are very good for indigestion. And talking of indigestion, sir, I'm quite sure I haven't digested my lunch."

"Why haven't you digested your lunch?" asked the Ed., glaring at me. "A young fellow like you ought always to digest his lunch."

"Well, sir," said I, "I haven't digested mine, because I haven't had it. But I'm going to—right now." And off I skeddaddled.



CHAPTER 1.

An Old Acquaintance.

SLICK DOLAN slouched along the wet pavement with shoulders hunched, and hands driven deep into frayed trouser pockets. The peak of a shapeless, grimy cap was pulled down low over his eyes. From thin, tight lips hung a half-burnt cigarette.

An odd-looking youth was Slick Dolan, with drooping shoulders, scraggy and ungainly legs; a hard, unflinching face, moody, defiant, and sullen. Only the eyes looked promising—hard, certainly, but sharp and intelligent.

A typical Thames-side "wharf rat," in fact. Slick knew every inch of the unsavoury district round Porter Street, with its cobbled alleys, dusty-windowed shops and tenements, half-derelict wharfs and warehouses—ugly enough at any time, but nightmarish now in the low-hanging smoke and rain.

Slick slithered to a halt, and hunched himself into the black mouth of an alley. It was only when inside that he became aware that the covered entry held another shelterer from the cold rain—a lounging form in dungarees, and a rough greasy jacket, and an equally greasy cap. "Looks like setting in for a dirty night, kid!" said the sailor huskily. "Got a match?"

Slick scowled and produced a grubby match from a waistcoat pocket. The man lit up, jamming the flame against the blackened bowl of a pipe. He sucked noisily, and then he spoke again.

"Yes, a bloomin' dirty night and no error! Hard on a bloke like me as ain't got the price of a doss down!"

"You're no worse off nor me!" snarled Slick; his face was pinched with cold, and he was not in the mood for conversation.

"Got no home, eh?" said the man, with rough sympathy. "Well, I reckon as you're wiser to more than one show where a bloke can doss for his'n! Me—all I wants is a 'cap of straw and a roof!"

Slick shrugged his thin shoulders and grunted. The man gave him a sidelong glance and pointed with his pipe to a warehouse, looming up stark against the grey skyline.

"There's that warehouse there!" he said. "Empty, and no bloomin' watchman, as far as a man could see. I bin huntin' round tryin' to get in, but it ain't no good! Winders all boarded up and— But maybe you knows of a way in, kid—"

He paused. Slick Dolan had sucked in his breath sharply, and was eyeing him with sudden suspicion. Slick did know of a way in—one of the many secrets of that dingy warehouse. But it was as much as his wretched skin was worth to reveal that knowledge to a stranger.

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SLICK DOLAN "WHARF RAT"

His quick, suspicious glance met, not the bleary eyes of a drunken seaman, but a pair of keen, grey eyes, hard and steely.

He recoiled with a gasp—a gasp of alarm. "You—you ain't no sailor!" he shrieked. "You're a cop, that's what you are!"

The man took his pipe out. The grey eyes tightened a little.

"Here, 'old hard, mate!" he grinned. "Me a bloomin' cop! Haw, haw!"

"Of course you are!" jeered Slick, bitter hostility in his shrill voice. "Think I don't know you! You're Mister Brent—a blessed 'tec. Garn! You ain't pumpin' me, cop!"

He jumped to run for it, but, with a muttered exclamation, the man in sailor's garb shot out an arm. A steely grasp closed on the thin shoulders, and the squirming, wriggling youth was hauled back into the entry.

Detective-Sergeant Brent, of the C.I.D., regarded him grimly from under his greasy, peaked cap.

"So you spotted me, Slick!" he remarked in his crisp, ordinary voice. "You always were a smart youngster! Well, I've wanted to have a chat with you for some time, Slick."

"Lemme go!" whined Slick Dolan. "I ain't done nothin', and I ain't tellin' you nothin', either! There ain't no way inter that warehouse as I knows of."

"I rather fancy you do, Slick!" said Brent. "But never mind that now, young 'un!"

He paused, and his keen eyes dwelt grimly on the lad's sullen face.

A detective in Brent's position was not accustomed to being checked to his face, by a wharf rat. Moreover, he had prided himself on his disguise, and it was exasperating to be bowled out by a young ragamuffin.

Yet there was kindness in his grim look. From his childhood Brent had known Slick—had, in fact, been brought up himself among the same squalid surroundings.

He had known Slick's father, who died of drink, and Slick's mother, who died of overwork and starvation.

Then had come the War, and the Army had made a man of Brent. He had left the Army with the rank of sergeant-major, and the same qualities of character that the Army, brought about the same result when he joined the Force as a constable.

But he hadn't forgotten Slick Dolan.

"Now, listen to me, Slick!" he said at last. "You're going the wrong way, young 'un—you're hanging round a gang that'll get you into trouble pretty soon, Slick! Just a friendly warning!"

"I ain't done nothing! Lemme go!"

"Not yet! You've got to stop this game, Slick—you can't win. And it ain't your game, kid. You tried me hard when I was just a cop round here. I might have taken you many a time, and if I'd done my strict duty you'd didn't, Slick?"

"Garn! Cut out that Sunday-school marm stuff! Lemme go!" jeered Slick; he was bolder now.

"I'll tell you why," resumed Brent, unheeding. "It's because there's good stuff in you, Slick Dolan. I haven't forgotten when you battled that kid ashore off Bolter's Wharf—river was in flood, and you were only ten thou. You've got grit, Slick, and you're too good for sneaking women's handbags, and much too good," he added grimly, "to go to gaol when I rope in Gat Lesparri and his gang."

Slick Dolan snarled. Brent eyed him curiously. "Listen! What have you got against me, Slick?" he asked good-humouredly.

"You—you're a rotten cop!" panted the lad.

SLICK BY NAME—SLICK BY NATURE!
He's the world's worst gangster—
but he's a darned good pal!

"Oh! Yes—that's it, of course," said Brent, understanding. "Yes, I'm a cop, kid. And now—his voice went hard, icy—got this, Slick Dolan! You've got to lay off Gat Lesparri and his gang. I've about fixed them—it's a question of time. That's what I'm here for now. See? Just you steer—Here—"

This time Slick was just a trifle too quick for him. A sudden wrench, a swift wriggle, and he was off, racing over the wet, broken cobbles. He vanished in the misty rain, shrouding the sheds and derricks of the wharf, at the bottom of the narrow road.

Brent muttered something under his breath. He would have muttered more had he known Slick's movements after that.

The youth had forgotten his drenched clothes and chilled body. He ran hard, dodging round tumbledown sheds and gaunt, ugly granaries. His thin lips were compressed, determined.

He reached his objective at last—the part of the warehouse that fronted the river, the very warehouse Brent had so obviously tried to pump him about.

He glanced about him swiftly. The dreary, derelict wharf showed no sign of life anywhere. Slick moved to a small door in the wall. Near it was a small window, boarded over. Slick rapped on the door, and then moved to the window. His grimy hand went through a gap in the boards, and he appeared to pull something. When he moved to the door again it opened under his pressure—there was no latch or handle.

Slick slipped inside the warehouse and the door closed behind him.

There was a passage beyond. From the shadows a figure loomed—that of a big, hulking man, red-haired and distinctly unpleasant.

"Aw! You, kid!" he grunted. "Whatcher want?"

"Slick pants Gat Lesparri! I got news for 'im! Lemme see him at once, Red!"

"Gat's got 'is ears up this afternoon!" scowled Red Harris. "Take my tip and give Gat a miss, Slick—news or no bloomin' news! Hook it!"

"I got to see him!" snapped Slick.

"Aw! Got on, then; it's your own funeral!"

Slick moved on swiftly, passing along a dim corridor and then up wooden steps. He reached another passage, and stopped by what seemed bare matchboarding. But there was a door there, and, after rapping hard, Slick lurched inside breathlessly.

It was a small room, with walls of almost new matchboarding, like the door. Round the walls were ranged bales and boxes. A small table stood in the centre with two chairs. The two men were in the room—one seated back in a chair, the other seated on the table, swinging his legs.

The man on the table was a familiar type round Porter Street—a burly, brutal ruffian, muscle-bound, beetle-browed, and yet he was dressed differently from the usual run. He sported a loud check suit, a soft hat, a flashy tie, and he smoked a cigar. He was a gangster, and his name was Gurney, and he was Gat Lesparri's right-hand man.

The man in the chair was Gat Lesparri. He seemed young, though his hair was grey. He wore a quiet blue suit and bowler hat, and looked like a solicitor's clerk. His face was clean-shaven and curiously pallid, and his eyes were black and very shiny. Only his eyes gave a hint of the type of man he really was.

He only smiled at Slick, but Gurney slid from the table with an oath.

"What the heck d'you want? Beat it!"

"I got to see Gat Lesparri!" panted Slick. "There's a cop outside! It's that 'tee—Brent!"

Gurney ripped out an oath, and his red face went a trifle pale. He leaped from the table again. Gat still smiled, though there was no trace of mirth in the smile.

"Let up, Gurney," he said, his voice curiously meek and gentle. "No good gettin' het up! So Brent, the 'tee, is outside, kid? Where?"

"In front of this warehouse," panted Slick. "He tried to pump me—wanted to know the road in 'ere!"

Gurney swore again, but Gat Lesparri smiled, unmoved.

"We'll have to smoke that nosy cop up yet, Gurney!" he remarked. "He's gettin' too hot!"

"He says he's got you fixed, Gat!" gasped Slick. "Sooner or later, he said, he'll get you!"

Gurney swore savagely and half drew a gleaming automatic from his hip-pocket.

"In front, is he?" he snarled. "Now, kid? Then, by heck—"

"Aw! Lay off that, Gurney!" drawled Gat Lesparri, in a tired voice. "Want to bring half the cops in London here? Ain't you got anythin' quieter than that?"

Slick Dolan suddenly shivered.

Crime came easily to Slick Dolan—crime in a small way,

that is, bag-snatching and picking pockets. He had been brought up amongst it. But his hero was Gat Lesparri. Amongst the criminal fraternity of that Thames-side stretch Gat had become a by-word. And Slick's one ambition—at present—was to become a full-blown member of Gat's gang; not merely a hanger-on, a sort of errand boy, as he was now.

Yet the deadly menace, the cruel, ruthless offhandedness in Gat's mild tones, was not lost on him, and he shivered with sudden dread.

He suddenly felt strangely sick.

Gat rose and strolled to the window. Boards covered it for the most part, but plenty of light still came through the openings left. Gat Lesparri stared out thoughtfully, and suddenly he gave a slight exclamation, and turned.

"Come here, kid! That him down there?"

Slick joined him.

"Yes, that's him!" he snapped. "Brent—got up as a bloomin' seaman!"

"Then there's your chance, Gurney!" said Gat pleasantly. "Standing just by that window—fairly asking for a sock! Get me?"

Gurney swore and glanced out. His face grew evil as he drew from a hidden pocket a length of rubber tubing, weighted at one end.

"Give him a good one, and finish the job now!" said Gat. "Don't muck it, or you won't get the chance again—I know Brent! Go it!"

Gurney wore rubber-soled boots, and he left the room without a sound.

CHAPTER 2.

Slick Takes the Turning.

GAT LESPARRI stood by the shuttered window. Slick Dolan by his side. Down below, heedless of the rain, the shabby seaman leaned against the wall of the warehouse, in the angle where a wing jutted out.

He was smoking his black pipe, and seemed half asleep—or drunk.

Above his head, a little to the left, was a small window, and two of the three rotting covering-boards had broken away, leaving a gap.

Through the gap the head and shoulders of Gurney suddenly appeared. He held the rubber tubing in his huge fist. His face was evil and repulsive in its deadly menace.

Slick Dolan's eyes dilated, his mouth went curiously dry and hot. Blood throbbed in his temples. Slick knew all about murder. Didn't Gat pack a gun, and didn't folk say—? But this was his first experience of the actual thing in all its stark, dreadful reality. And, somehow, the actual thing was different—he didn't like it.

And he had wanted to join the gang—to be a gangster, to hobnob with men like this quiet, pallid-faced Gat Lesparri, standing so still by his side. Slick shot a glance at him. There he stood watching coolly while that evil-faced thug killed Brent—a man who was only doing his duty.

Slick Dolan felt a sudden, unaccountable loathing for the pallid-faced, merciless form in the bowler hat.

He glanced out again, legs shaking and trembling.

Gurney's arm was raised. Slick felt sick with horror. Why couldn't he watch like Gat? He wanted to be a gangster, to pack a gun, and he was feared; yet, here he was shivering with horror. Thoughts raced through his mind in that swift fraction of time while Gurney raised his arm.

And then a picture—a swift picture of himself, a ragged kid crouching in an alley, cold and hungry. Of Brent just coming off his beat, hooking a kindly hand in his choker and yanking him into a fried-fish shop; standing him a feed of chips and fish—a feed fit for the gods! And he had done it more than once; many a time when—

Gurney's arm was raised now; he was going to strike!

Slick wanted to scream, and then suddenly he did scream, desperately, hysterically.

"Look out! Look out, Mister Brent! Look out, cop! Run!"

Slick's crazy shrieks choked as a sudden, soft oath ripped out. Long, white fingers gripped his throat, and his head cracked against the wooden partition. Gat Lesparri's pallid face was close to his, and Slick's own face went bleak at sight of the fury in his shiny eyes.

But not before he had seen the seaman leap aside and the deadly rubber tubing sweep harmlessly downwards!

"You—you durned, enishin' little rat!" breathed Gat, his pallid features convulsed like a fiend's.

Gurney came into the room, his face white and frightened.

"That kid did it—he did it, burn him!" he snarled, his voice husky with rage. "Out him—out the young whelp!

And then we got to beat it!"



Slick received a jolt in the small of his back. He lurched and fell headlong.

He rushed across the room. But Gat Lesparri had recovered himself now. He released Slick, who instantly slid to the floor, sobbing for breath. Gat, with surprising strength, sent the raging Gurney staggering back against the table.

"He yelled, the young whelp!" snarled Gurney. "Foot! Don't you realise I missed 'im, Gat? That durned 'tee will have half the Force round 'ere soon, now! That kid—out him, and we got to beat it!"

"Aw! Stop shooting your mouth, Gurney!" drawled Gat. "Brent don't work like that! Half the Force—nothin'! He works on his own, does Brent. He'll hang round, and we'll get him yet!"

He turned on the trembling Slick Dolan, mildly reproachful.

"Aw, kid, what you done that for?" he demanded.

"I—I was frightened!" panted Slick. "I—I don't know why I yelled, Gat—I swear I don't!"

"I reckon that's what it was, Gurney," said Gat nodding. "The kid lost his head! Ain't up to joining the gang yet," he added, with a grim chuckle.

Gurney let out a string of oaths, but Gat stopped him.

"Aw, ease off a bit, Gurney," he said, winking at that baffled ruffian. "Got a fag? No; well, I'll send Slick out for some while we talk this matter over. Here, kid, take this and get some fags; bring 'em back here, and never mind that durned cop! Ain't the man to run from a cop? Aw, this kid's got more pep than you have, Gurney!"

He handed Slick a shilling as the wharf-rat scrambled up still sick and giddy. Gat nodded to the door, and Slick slithered out.

"All right, Gurney," said Gat, when Slick had gone, "don't get het up again! The kid will bring the fags back; he knows me better than to fail! And our friend Brent will see him get in; trust the durned bloodhound to do that! An' he'll follow, and then—then we'll get him where we want him! See!"

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Gurney saw. Meanwhile, Slick Dolan made his way out of the dingy warehouse of secrets. He fingered his sore, aching throat as he slithered out. His eyes were gleaming strangely, for he knew why he had screamed now.

The life of a gangster was not for him. As Brent had said, he was cut out for better things than hitting a helpless man with a weighted tube—than murder! In that dreadful moment, as he watched Gurney's arm, Slick had known that. Gone was his hero-worship of Gat Lesparri. He saw him now as a thing of evil—the merciless gunman and murderer that he was.

Slick's eyes burned with sudden resolve. Brent—the only bloke who had ever shown him real kindness in his wretched existence. And he had nearly helped to out him—

A hand gripped his thin shoulder and he jumped convulsively. It was Brent, his seaman's garb soaked with rain. Slick had run into him while rounding the corner of the warehouse.

"Hold on, kid!" Brent's voice was hard, and yet there was a note in it that made Slick feel a throbb at his throat. "Hold on! It was you who yelled just now, Slick! You just saved my bacon, kid!"

"I—I told them, mister; it were my fault!" panted Slick, his words rushing out in a flood. "But I couldn't see you hit like that." He gripped the detective's arm. "You gotter run, mister—clear out of here! Gat's swore to get you! He's waitin' in there now. He sent me for fags, and I knows why! He wants you ter follow me in, and then him and Gurney'll get you. You gotter hook it, cop!"

Brent's face was hard as iron. He knew that he had had a narrow shave, and that that shrill yell had saved his life. He knew that to enter that warehouse now would be asking for more trouble. But Brent thrived on trouble, and when he spoke his voice was steady and cool.

"So they're waiting for me, eh? Well, I won't disappoint them. Go and get those cigarettes, Slick. I'll see you about this afterwards. Know I wasn't mistaken in you, kid. Good kid! But—go and get those cigarettes!"

"But—they'll get you, mister!"

"We'll see! Go!"

Slick hesitated. But a glance into Brent's steely eyes told him it was useless to argue. He went, disappearing in the mist and rain. He was back quickly, and when he reached the small door on the water-front side of the warehouse Brent was close beside him.

When the door opened, Brent sidled along the warehouse wall, swift as a shadow, and his foot jammed the door, preventing its closing again. An instant later Brent was inside, with the door closed behind him.

He stood motionless, with his back towards it.

The passage was full of shadows, and Slick had disappeared. It was quiet, strangely and significantly quiet. But Brent knew that life lurked in the shadows. And suddenly Brent ducked instinctively, and something smashed against the door behind—just where his head had been. Then, like the sudden snapping of a dried stick, came a crack and a flash. The sudden explosion in that confined space seemed deafening. The crash echoed from wall to wall.

It was Gurney who had disobeyed Gat in his excitement and rage. He had loosed his gun, but the shot did no harm. Next moment Brent had leaped at the spot where the flash had come from, and Gurney swore as his gun was sent flying from his hand.

Then clamour smashed the quietness of the warehouse. Brent prided himself on always playing a lone hand—when he could. But he felt that he had overdone it this time; that he had fairly asked for trouble in his reckless determination to see the inside of that warehouse.

He wished that he could get at his whistle, but he was never given the chance. Detective-Sergeant Brent rarely carried a gun—he usually relied on his fists, and he used them now with smashing effect.

The narrow passage seemed full of struggling, fighting, cursing men. Yet there were only four there—four not counting Brent! To him there seemed a dozen.

He never had time to count, however. For once, the

C.L.D. man had bitten off more than he could chew. He went down to his knees at last, still fighting gamely. Then suddenly something hit him on the head.

He collapsed in a sagging heap with a sobbing intake of breath.

This time Gurney's wicked length of rubber tubing, with its weighted end, had not met only empty air.

CHAPTER 3.

Slick Sees It Through!

THAT fraction of time while Slick Dolan had watched Gurney's arm raised for the murderous blow, was the turning point in his life.

It ended his ambition to be a crook, a gangster. He had rather prided himself on his sickness at picking pockets, at lifting fruit from costers' barrows, at snatching handbags, and the like. He had been proud to be connected, even in a humble way, with a big gun like Gat Lesparri. That moment of horror had killed all that.

Yet why did he feel so durned "soft" about Brent all of a sudden? Wasn't he a bloomin' cop—an enemy? Slick Dolan couldn't understand it. As he lay crouched behind a bale in the warehouse and listened to the clamour in the passage, his lips curled in his old sneer. But it vanished the next moment.

Silence had fallen on the warehouse—a significant silence, and he knew what it meant. Brent was "outed"—Brent who had stood him feeds when he was hungry, and—

He was getting "soft" again, but this time he did not sneer. He listened, his pale face strained and anxious. As he thought about it, fear began to grip him—fear and horror. It was real enough; he was not at the pictures, or listening with bated breath to Gurney spinning yarns in the billiard-room behind Gat's garage.

It was reality, and Slick didn't like it at all. He knew now that, as Brent said, he was cut out for something better. He listened, and then he began to creep about, all ears and eyes. He'd got to know what had happened to Brent—somehow.

By listening at the partition he soon found out. He was only a few yards behind Gurney and two more men when they carried the limp form of Detective-Sergeant Brent down cellar steps and through a trapdoor. Up to Slick's nostrils came the dank smell of Thames water.

He shuddered, almost sure of the worst now. From beneath some old, mouldy sacks his sharp eyes watched as one by one the three men, led by Gurney, came back up through the trapdoor, a torch flashing in Gurney's hand.

They vanished, and their foot-prints died away up above.

Slick breathed hard and deep. He simply had to make sure of what had happened to Brent.

He moved to the trapdoor over mouldy cement. Through a grating, half-covered with cobwebs, came a glimpse of the heaving Thames; a siren hooted hoarsely on the misty river. He stooped over the trapdoor and grasped the ring. The door came up easily—it was not fastened.

The next moment Slick knew why fastening the trap was not considered necessary by Gat's men. For Brent himself was bound hand and foot with brutal tightness. And he was fastened to an upright post, the lower part of his body in water—dirty, grimy, river water.

To Slick's ears came a constant sound of water running—running into that underground cellar.

Nor was that all. High up in the slimy wall of the cellar was a wide grating—a wide gap with upright, rusted bars across.

Weeds and bits of rubbish hung, wet and dripping, on the sill and bars, and from where he stood Slick glimpsed the water outside, swirling just below the grated window.

And the tide was coming in—fast and remorseless. He knew the end Gat Lesparri had planned for Brent now—to be drowned like a rat in that horrible cellar! That was it. The tidemark, high up on the wall, showed him that.

With a voice that trembled Slick called down. "Mister Brent! You hear me, cop! I'm coming down!" Brent lifted his head. His eyes were gleaming, but his face was calm. But even as he looked, hope in his heart, his eyes dilated as he glimpsed something behind Slick Dolan.

It was the figure of a man in a blue suit and bowler hat—Gat Lesparri himself, come down to see that his orders had been carried out to the letter, and perhaps to gloat over his defeated enemy.

Slick heard his soft, smooth voice before he saw him. "Yes, kid, you're goin' down all right, I guess!" he said. The next moment Slick took a pair of hands in the small of his bent back. He lurched and fell headlong with a dull, echoing splash into the half-flooded cellar.

There was a low laugh above. Gat's pallid face vanished as the trap slammed down. Evidently the gangster was not giving Slick Dolan a second chance.

Slick disappeared under the icy-cold water, and his face reappeared again, blue and dripping. But he could swim like a fish, and he soon reached the post to which Brent was bound.

Brent wasted no words. His head was spinning, and he could scarcely see. Gurney had hit hard, though not so hard, fortunately, as the ruffian had intended to hit.

"Cut me free if you can, kid," he breathed faintly. "It's our only chance. Those brutes mean to finish us!"

Slick wasted no time in words. His pinched, blue face was set. Another siren blared out on the river. It was a passing tug, and the wash sent a wave splashing through the barred window. Time for action, not talk. But—

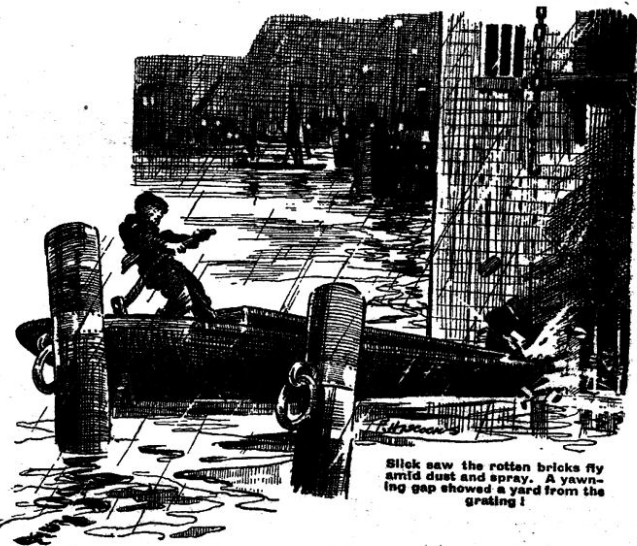
"A knife—in my pocket!" gasped Brent. "Quick! No good shouting. Nobody would hear. That fiend knows that! Quick!"

Slick, half swimming, searched for and found the knife. It was no easy matter to open it. His fingers were numb, and the water was swirling round him now.

Another wave splashed into the cellar. Soon, in a matter of moments, the water would be pouring in, and Brent's head was nearly below the grating!

Slick managed the blade, but he had to duck under the water to use it on the cord round Brent's legs. Precious moments went as he hacked and strained and slashed, panting and spluttering and half sobbing.

Brent kicked his cramped, numb feet free at last. His



Slick saw the rotten bricks fly amid dust and spray. A yawning gap showed a yard from the grating!

Face was white and beaded with sweat, despite the chill of the water. A moment and the wharf rat had cut his arms free.

The water was coming in fast now, through crannies and holes in the rotting brickwork. It started to pour through the grating—black, turbid, Thames water. Desperation nerved Brent. Everything was whirling before his eyes, but he managed to reach the grating, and Slick joined him there.

Brent took the knife and started to hack frantically at the rotting mortar in which the bars were set. Chips flew up in his face. The swirling water hampered him, and then the blade broke. But one bar was already loose.

A vicious wrench and it came out. Brent attacked the second bar. It was slimy and thick with rust, but it was firm as a rock. The second blade broke, and Brent realised the hopelessness of trying to shift that or the other two.

"No go!" he muttered, with a groan. "Slick, you can get through, I think. Off you go, and good luck! And, Slick lad, go straight after this!"

He helped the wharf rat up, and Slick wormed and scrambled desperately, water swirling round them—icy water that bit deeply. Brent knew his own number was up. If Slick escaped there was no time to get help.

But Slick would escape. He was thankful for that. He forced the youth through, though Slick yelped with the pain of it. Slick swam round, spluttering and gasping, and then he grabbed the bars from the outside.

He hung on and looked round. Along the wharf lights twinkled across the heaving water. Along the wharf loomed a lighter, black and ugly in the misty rain. He gasped out:

"Get back, cop, and 'ang on to that there post! I got an idea, and I'll 'ave you out yet, Mr. Brent! I—I ain't forgotten them feeds you stooed me!"

Brent had forgotten, and did not understand. The thin, tightly compressed lips of Slick gave him a curious feeling of hope. But he waited, as Slick swam away like the wharf rat he was. He reached the wharf side and hauled himself out and upwards. The next moment he was running along the wharf, stumbling drunkenly.

He reached the lighter, and his numbed fingers tore at the ropes.

He unhooked one, and ran along to the next. The last rope splashed into the river, and the lighter swung outwards as the tide gripped her.

Slick Dolan sprang aboard and stumbled over to the tiller. His thin, pathetically sparse form held unsuspected strength, and he forced the tiller over desperately.

The lighter was loaded, and low in the water; but the current was strong, and the boat answered the tiller. Slick flung all his puny weight upon it.

The boat was well out already, but its iron-shod nose pointed shorewards now, and it drove straight at the warehouse, looming up stark in the mist. Savagely the wharf rat tore at the tiller again.

Water swirled through the grating. But Brent had vanished now. At last he had grasped Slick's desperate venture. The lighter swung round more and more, and then—

Crash!

The iron prow had missed the grating. But Slick's groan was stifled as he saw the rotten bricks fly amid a smother of dust and spray. And a yawning gap showed a yard from the grating—a gap through which the river water surged.

The nose of the lighter hung there a moment, and the lighter reeled and swung round. Then it moved on, its nose scraping against the brickwork. It was just moving out again when Slick Dolan leaped along to the prow and scrambled ashore, panting, dripping, and exhausted. Another moment and the lurching figure was swallowed up in the shadows of a crane, while the lighter drifted on.

In the cellar Brent, at his last gasp, was fighting for his life. But Slick had given him his one chance. Somehow he found himself out in the open air, rain falling coldly on his face. A few desperate strokes and he hung on to the woodwork of the wharf.

Two minutes later he had scrambled up. And the blast of a police whistle told Slick Dolan, limping dismally into the shelter of a tumbledown shed, that his mad venture had not been in vain.

Brent's whistle was a mistake—one of the few mistakes Detective-Sergeant Brent ever made. When the police searched the warehouse they found plenty of stolen goods—hundreds of pounds' worth—but not the thieves. Gat Lesparri knew a police whistle when he heard one, and he went while the going was good.

"But I'll get 'em yet!" roared Detective-Sergeant Brent savagely, as he went to his diggings. "As for Slick—poor kid! He's made a bad enemy to-night. But if Gat harms him—"

Brent's eyes glinted, and his iron jaw shut like a vice. Gat Lesparri had made a bad enemy, too, in Detective-Sergeant Brent, of the C.I.D.

THE END.

(That was a narrow one, boys! Well, what do you think of Slick, eh? He's a great little guy, isn't he? Meet him again in next week's GEM!)

PARABLES AND PARODIES.

By MONTY LOWTHER.

The Humorist of the Shell at St. Jim's.

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.

Under the spreading chandelier

We see old Ratty stand;

His eye is frosty and severe;

A cane is in his hand.

And every fellow shakes with fear

In case he might be tanned.

Week in, week out, from morn to night

You can hear old Ratchiff roar;

New fellows all go pale with fright

And grovel on the floor;

But older chaps don't mind the sight—

They've seen it oft before.

To chapel he on Sunday goes

And sits among his boys;

And if a chap should blow his nose.

Or make the slightest noise—

Five hundred lines or "Touch your toes!"

Will be his dreadful choice.

Spoiling his voice with hollering

Onward through life he goes;

Each morning sees its aches and pains

Each evening sees its woes;

And Ratty dreams of lines and canes

When tucked up in the clothes.

THUS SAITH LOWTHER—

There are only two things I hate in this world, and Knox is both of them.

If Gussy had twice as many brains as he has got now, he would be half-witted.

Skimpole is so thin that he has to come into a room twice before anyone can see him.

PUSSY CAT, PUSSY CAT.

"Gussy boy, where have you been?" I said.
 "I've been to the study to visit the Head."
 "Gussy boy, Gussy boy, what did you there?"
 "The Headmastah bent me across his armchair."

"Gussy boy, Gussy boy, what happened then?"
 Tell us all about it in Study Ten.
 He answered and said: "I pwefer not to say!"
 Then he gave us a look and he wriggled away."

Hush-a-bye, Knoxy, tucked up in bed,
 Don't go out painting the village bright red;
 The night is so cold, you would shiver and freeze,
 So hear me, I pray, and forget the Cross Keys.



By
HEDLEY SCOTT.

(Opening Chapters
Retold on Page 28.)

The RANGERS' RECRUIT!

At Stapleton Castle!

WELL, boys!" Major Carstairs voice boomed into the dressing-room. "All fighting fit?"
And, in the manner of a crowd of high-spirited children, came affirmative replies.

The major crossed to Buxton and tapped him on the shoulder.

"We're expecting great things from you, Buxton," he said. Buxton smiled expansively.

"Then I'll do my utmost to justify your confidence, sir. I feel as fit as the proverbial fiddle!"

"Good for you, my boy!" smiled the major. "And remember, no personal nonsense with Hartley!"

For a moment Buxton's eyes glimmered. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

"Don't always have that up against me, major," he said. "The past is dead and done with."

The major walked on and addressed much the same remarks to Bill Hartley—a gesture of fairness that Buxton did not appreciate, however, judging by the steely glance he threw out at the old soldier's broad back.

"Ready, lads?" Sandy stilled the chatter in the dressing-room. "The Stapleton boys have just turned out."

The trainer's words were drowned in the roar of welcome that lifted skywards as the Stapleton Town eleven trotted on to the pitch. Rattles shrieked, Klaxon horns added to the din, whilst a trumpeter, with an ancient instrument that had seen service in the coaching days of old, filled up every pause with a hideous blare.

In the lull that followed, all eyes turned towards the players' entrance for a first glimpse of the famous Cashton

Rangers. And, as they doubled out, lusty yells and cheers, plentifully backed by the gentleman with the trumpet, braced them up with encouragement.

They were still cheering madly when the two captains shook hands and the coin spun in the air. Then came an unearthly stillness. Which side had won the toss?

The Rangers—for Dunstall was seen pointing decisively to the northern end of the pitch. What little wind there was, then, would favour the Rangers.

Again the storm of cheers, through which, vociferous as it was, pierced the shrill note of the whistle.

The game had taken life!

The Stapleton forward line raced away in a well-coordinated movement. Their left-wing man beat the Rangers' half-back who thundered at him, made as if to centre, and, instead, took a snap shot at goal.

"Ooo-er!"
There was sting and direction behind the shot, and the Rangers' supporters could not stifle a groan as they watched Howard Turner's lithe figure leap across the goal-mouth in a frantic effort to save. His groping fingers encountered the ball and brought it under control; the Stapleton centre literally flung himself at the goalie in an effort to charge both custodian and leather into the net, but Turner side-stepped him.

Next moment the dull boom that echoed throughout the ground announced that the danger was over. The first-minute surprise raid had failed.

Marchant Buxton, watching the fight of the ball, trapped it cleverly, swerved like an eel round the centre-half, who had been detailed to stick to him like glue, and swung it along the carpet to Bill.

"Now then, Ginger!"
Ginger obliged.

With a dizzy feint he beat his man, raced on a few steps, and then drew the defence in the direction of Tish Freeman. As half-back and full-back raced to intercept the wing-pass Bill coolly returned the ball to Buxton. In a moment the Stapleton defence was at sea.

Buxton threw a swift glance over the field, and immediately turned the leather to his outside-left; but Rawlings, in his eagerness, allowed himself to be put offside, and that well-schemed opening ended disappointingly, with the referee blowing lustily on his whistle.

The Duke of Stapleton, with his fellow-directors, looked relieved.

"That boy Hartley you picked up," he remarked to Carstairs, "is a certain International for next season!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,202.

GANGSTERS TAKE LOCKE FOR A RIDE!

But things happen in between the beginning and the end—and

LOCKE TAKES GANGSTERS FOR A RIDE!

Carstairs grinned. "Your Grace, I'm going to disagree with you," he replied, "for Hartley, mark my words, will get his Cap this season."

"He's another Alec James," mused his Grace. "Cool, despite his red hair. Yes, Carstairs, on second thoughts, proverbially the best, I think you're right."

"Go it, Ginger!"

Thousands of voices took up the cry as Bill was again seen to be in possession. The Stapleton defence, now alive to the fact that they were up against a crack, watched him anxiously.

A half-back went down in a sliding tackle in an abortive effort to dispossess the tall inside-right; the centre-half shadowed Buxton wherever he dodged; the left full-back advanced diagonally towards Tich Freeman. A forward pass would have brought little result that would have benefited the Rangers; but Bill, working to a preconceived plan, tapped the ball back.

The Rangers' right-half made no mistake. He trapped the ball neatly, as neatly tricked the burly centre-half, who left Buxton's side for one moment, and quite unexpectedly returned the ball to Bill.

Just for a fraction of time Bill fastened on to it—just sufficient time for Buxton to race ahead. Then aloft the ball soared fifteen yards farther up the field, with Buxton racing like mad to control it.

The green-and-white stripes of the Stapleton eleven seemed to be everywhere. Half-backs and the two full-backs converged on Buxton, now racing at top speed for goal, with the ball lobbing gently at his feet.

"Shoot, man! Shoot!"

Boo-umph!

A split second before the amateur went down from a hefty shoulder charge the ball left his right foot. Straight and true, with cannon-ball sting in it, it thudded against the inner side of the goalpost. The Stapleton goalie sprawled in a helpless heap, his despairing hands clutching nothing more solid than air. The Stapleton right-back took a head-long dive in a daredevil effort to turn the ball out of the net, but Buxton's swerving shot beat them both. With gathering speed it darted off from the goalpost like a hissing snake, to swish mockingly against the rigging, as the ref's whistle officially credited the Rangers with a goal.

"Good old Buxton!"

"That's the stuff, Rangers!"

The Rangers' faction was delirious with joy. They cheered thunderously as the players trooped back for the restart, Buxton being the recipient of many congratulations and hearty thumps on the back.

Buxton threw Bill a smile, much to that worthy's astonishment.

"Your goal, Hartley, really," he said.

"Not!" grinned Bill. "All credit to you, Buxton!"

The whistle shrieked. The game was in motion again. The Stapleton eleven worked like demons possessed to level the score. But, as is often the case in Cup-tie football, so it was in this local Derby—the first goal proved the winning goal—the only goal of the match.

Right to the bitter end the Stapleton eleven attacked, but the Rangers' defence was impregnable. And when it wanted barely two minutes to the finish of the game, the Stapleton defence—half-back line and one full-back—deserted their posts in a despairing effort to equalise. The noise was deafening, the pace heart-breaking, but the coveted goal did not materialise. The final whistle blew with the Cashton Rangers the victors by one goal, schemed undoubtedly by Bill Hartley, and shot by Buxton, the amateur.

As the weary players trooped back to their dressing-rooms, the crowd stood up and cheered with all the power of their lungs. It had been a game of games—clean, forceful, and clever.

Sandy Ferguson's face radiated with joy. Even his pessimism had been vanquished by that splendid result. Even his dislike of Marchant Buxton had evaporated.

"Boys," cried the trainer, "I'm mighty pleased with you! You can do what you like at Stapleton Castle. I'll turn a blind eye to everything."

The players gave him a cheer. The reception at the Duke of Stapleton's ancestral castle would be doubly enjoyed with Sandy, the strict disciplinarian, relaxing.

In a noisy throng the Rangers tubbed and changed. For a few hours at least—until midnight—they were going to enjoy themselves

like ordinary people. Strict training for the nonce was to be set aside. Even "smokes" would be allowed.

When the Rangers emerged from their dressing-room they found awaiting them three roomy Daimler cars. The Duke of Stapleton was "doing it proper," as Tich Freeman confidently whispered to Bill.

Buxton, usually reserved, mixed with his team-mates, and had an affable word for everyone. Albeit Tich Freeman scowled, with no attempt at concealment, when the amateur announced his intention of taking the journey with them.

"Do you mind?" added the amateur, looking directly at Bill Hartley.

"Not in the least!" said Bill.

Yet the presence of his implacable enemy in the car that took them down to Stapleton Castle rather damped his spirits. Conversation became forced, until finally it faded into monosyllabic ejaculations.

Suddenly the car stopped, and Bill found Tich Freeman's elbow jabbed into his ribs.

"Stewth, Bill, w's're 'ere!"

The towering stone walls of Stapleton Castle greeted the eyes of the footballers as they tumbled out. The great doors had been flung back. On either side of the steps stood a footman resplendent in livery.

Their statusqueous appearance amused Tich, for with his customary familiarity he jabbed his elbow into the well-fed stomach of the nearest footman.

"Ow!"

It was doubtless the first time that Wilkins, come of a long line of servants to the Stapleton menage, had ever uttered such an unintelligible and undignified expression. Yet there was every excuse for him. That friendly jab had doubled him up like a penknife.

"What's up, 'Oraze?" cooed Tich innocently. "Got convulsions?"

"No, sir!" gasped the astonished footman, recovering his wind and his composure.

"Then when don't you give your face a treat an' smile?" said Tich, with a wink at Bill.

"Very good, sir!" answered Wilkins stiffly.

The footballers passed on into the spacious oak-panelled hall. Costly chandeliers of crystal shed a brilliance over the pedestal suits of armour that regularly spaced the hall. It was all most awe-inspiring. Ahead lay the giant staircase, generously illuminated by modern contrivances that could not, however, rob the centuries-old oak of its charm and antiquity.

Here was a "piece of Old England" that Bill Hartley had previously only read about. He found himself wondering what momentous happenings had taken place within these ancient walls. Historical fancy conjured up visions of past members of the Stapleton family clanking up those massive stairs in cumbersome armour. Then, in the midst of his imaginings, burst the voice of his Grace the Duke of Stapleton.

"This way, you boys!"

His Grace personally conducted the party to the reception-room—a blaze of colour and charm. An orchestra of musicians' gallery played tuneful music, whilst uniformed servants went quietly, but methodically, about their business.

In addition to the footballers there were representatives from every field of sport among the guests. Boxers, racing men, Rugby stars, Olympic champions, celebrated flying men, doughty swimmers, fraternised with happy abandon. The duke went from one to the other with a smile and a friendly greeting. Sport and sportsmen were his "hobbies," and sport had no more generous or more enthusiastic patron.

At a signal from his Grace the footman threw open the doors of the dining-hall, and the guests filed in and took their allotted places.

"Gentlemen!" His Grace, at the head of the long table, was on his feet. "Gentlemen, or rather would I prefer to say 'friends,' you are here to enjoy yourselves. We are sportsmen together. Make merry!"

In the murmuring applause that followed there could be heard from the parlank beyond the repeated hooting of an owl.

Buxton heard it plainly enough, and his eyes narrowed. It was the signal. His gang had arrived. With a hand that showed no sign of the excitement that stirred within him, the gang leader, to all his neighbours, toasted his success. In reality he was toasting success to the biggest and most daring raid ever planned

BILL HARTLEY is a six-foot edition of brawn and muscle, with flaming red hair, is sent down from Oxford, arriving home, with quarrels with his father and goes to London to find work. There he meets Major Carstairs, an old friend, who is chairman of the Cashton Rangers F.C. After a trial, Bill is signed on by the club, only to find that their centre-forward is Marchant Buxton, who brought about his dismissal from the "Varsity. Buxton, who is also the leader of a gang of crooks, is determined to ruin Bill, but Ferrers Locke intervenes. Determined to dispose of Locke, Buxton appoints a member of the gang to poison the detective. The dastardly plot fails, however, but Locke causes it to be known that he has been killed in the guise of Michael Kelly, he gets a job at the Tinsden Film Studios. Later, he reveals himself to Hartley, handing over a drum of film with the request that the Rangers' recruit should place it in a safe deposit. The next day sees Bill with the rest of the players' eleven, ready for the big match of the season with Stapleton.

(Now read on.)

in the annals of crime. Nothing less than a wholesale looting of Stapleton Castle by the Buxton gang!

The Tables Turned!

MICHAEL KELLY—Adolph Haverswood voiced the name thoughtfully.

The managing director of the Tindean Film Co. was seated in his private office. Facing him over a narrow mahogany desk were the brothers Chakenham.

The hour was five-thirty—to be precise, within five minutes of the time the Daimler cars carrying the Cashton Rangers to Stapleton Castle, set out.

Work for the day at the Tindean Film Studios had ceased. With the exception of the three men in the office and a night watchman, the premises seemed deserted.

"Boys," said Haverswood at length, "beyond a few quid-dlets and an unsavoury reputation, my esteemed paternal relative left me little. But I must admit that the intuitive sense of danger that was part and parcel of him has shown itself in me on a score of occasions."

"What are you getting at?" growled Thomas Chakenham, fidgeting uncomfortably.

Adolph Haverswood leaned forward, his manicured index finger pointing directly at a large photograph that lay on the mahogany desk.

"That's what I'm getting at," he said sibilantly. "That guy calling himself Michael Kelly—"

"The actor merchant from the States?" said Chakenham, with a wry laugh. "The chap who's been worrying you to give him a job?"

Haverswood nodded.

"You've said it. I gave him a job to keep him quiet. And then, with venom:

"I'm not so certain that I shan't keep him quiet for keeps."

There was a silence, broken only by the muffled ticking of a small clock on the mantel.

"What's he done?" ventured Thomas Chakenham, at last.

Haverswood smashed his fist on the panels of the desk.

"What's he done?" he roared. "I'll tell you. Since the man Kelly came nosing round these studios, our safes have been picked, our desks have been ransacked, our employes have been pumped."

The Chakenham twins started.

Haverswood rose to his feet.

"In case you don't know it," he said grimly, "each room in these premises is fitted with an elaborate camera which is set in motion the moment the actors have departed each day. It's an invention I bought from a Swede. No flashlight is required—the process lies in the extraordinary sensitiveness of the film."

"Great jupiter!" breathed Chakenham.

"It's a precaution I adopted some time ago when some of our secrets began to leak out," continued Haverswood. "To be brief, however, that man Kelly has been in and out of our offices not once but half a dozen times. See, I have pictures of him ransacking this very desk."

The Chakenham twins were alarmed now.

The rough photographic prints Haverswood handed to them plainly showed the outlines of the man they know as Michael Kelly ransacking the very desk at which they now sat.

"It's Kelly, all right!" whispered Thomas Chakenham, and his twin brother nodded.

"Course it's Kelly!" snarled Haverswood. "American actor—chah! He's some long-nosed busybody from the Yard, if you ask me."

He sneered at the fear that settled on his audience.

"Windy, what? Well, calm yourselves. We'll have Mister Michael Kelly here in less than five minutes. Then you can see for yourselves."

"You've sent the boys after him?"

Adolph Haverswood nodded.

Before the mantel clock had ticked off another fifteen monotonous seconds there sounded the tread of feet in the passage.

"Open the door!" Haverswood jerked his head in command.

The taller of the twins obeyed. Into his line of vision came three hefty-looking fellows, half-dragging and carrying between them the man Michael Kelly.

"Shut the door!" snapped Haverswood. He fixed his burning eyes on the prisoner. "Take one of the keys."

A rough gag of two handkerchiefs was thrust into Kelly's mouth. For a moment he permitted himself to breathe in the air. His wrists were bound behind his back, his ankles were hobbled. His face was smeared with mud, but there was no sign of fear in his tanned face as he looked at Haverswood, the twins, and his three captors.

"Kelly!" snapped Haverswood, without beating about the bush. "Who are you?"

Michael Kelly, alias Ferrers Locke, opened wide his eyes. "Sure, me name is Kelly. What Oi am is known to you an' all the picture fans, Mister Haverswood. But, now, 'tis meself that would ask you a question—"

"You'll ask no questions!" hissed Haverswood. "You're here to answer them. Understand! That's why I had you brought here!"

The captive merely shrugged his shoulders. But he stiffened imperceptibly as he caught a fleeting glimpse of the rough proofs on the desk, and recognised in each of them a likeness unto himself.

"Who are you?" repeated Haverswood. "A busybody from Scotland Yard?"

The prisoner started violently.

"Scotland Yard, begorrah!" he exclaimed heatedly.

"Why, I wouldn't put me face inside there at all, for ten thousand pounds. They're got me finger-prints, begorrah, but they won't get me!"

Haverswood's face expressed some relief. The man's words seemed to ring true.

"Then who in the name of thunder are you?" he demanded. "And what's your game?"

Ferrers Locke's brain worked swiftly. By the in-criminating photos that lay on the table it was evident that hidden cameras had recorded his movements in the Tindean Film Studios, although he was aware that no flashlight had ever betrayed their presence. He

took a shot at random.

"Which Oi'll be frank with ye, Mister Haverswood. I'm paid by a German firm to find out a secret camera process which is supposed to be hidden in these premises."

The Chakenham twins exchanged glances of relief.

"Oh, you are!" snapped Haverswood. "So you proceed to get a job with us, and then skulk round, when everyone's gone, doing us a good turn. I don't think. Well, Mr. Kelly, if that is your name, which I very much doubt, you poked your nose into a firm that has its own way of dealing with busybodies. With a grim nod to the three captors: "Take him—for a ride!"

The sentence was deliberate, slow, and significant. The taller of the three men who had brought in the prisoner grinned knowingly, touched his cap and seized Locke roughly by the shoulder.

Rough-handed, the detective found himself out in the fresh air. The gag was jammed home again. He was in a tight fix and he knew it. His captors were gangsters of the "all in" type. No crime was too much for them, providing the money was big enough.

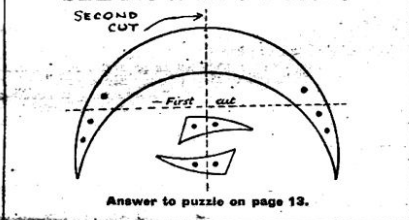
But help was at hand in the shape of Jack Drake.

The detective's assistant had been too late to assist his chief when the lightning-like raid at his lodgings had been timed for twenty minutes to six. Drake's punctuality, however, had served a useful purpose. He had witnessed the unwilling departure of his chief in the company of the gangsters; he had even taken the liberty of riding on the luggage grid at the back of the car, thoughtfully slipping out within a few yards of the main gates of the studio.

The brick wall of the studio was not offered Drake very much difficulty, neither were the three locked doors. Thus, within a very few minutes of his appearance before Haverswood, Drake had slipped past the posted himself outside the office, and remained hidden in deep shadow.

Now, speeding frantically out of the premises by the same way as he had entered, the youngster raced for the closed car standing a few yards from the main gates. He blessed

SEE HOW IT'S DONE?



his luck when he saw the night watchman nodding over his fire. Drake acted swiftly.

With a successful knife-fight, he slashed at the tyres of the car, and then, without a moment's hesitation, he abandoned. The hissing of escaping air came from the punctured tyres.

The car would not travel very far in that condition. The car's front wheels upon the road caused Drake to dodge into the shelter of a clump of bushes. There, with his hands on his hips, he waited. Two youthful eyes watched the three men, and with their captive between them, stop at the car. Drake, with a gruffly ordered one of his companions to get to the driving wheel.

Followed the sound of the self-starter in operation. Locke was pitched into the car, and his two captors moved in after him. The car started off, and as it did so a lithe figure shot from the bushes and clutched a hold on the luggage grid.

The jerky motion of the car, due to the punctured tyres, could not pass unnoticed for long. Suddenly Drake heard an imprecation from the driver. The brakes jammed on and the car jerked to a standstill.

"Puncture!" growled the driver. "We've got a puncture."

The information was greeted with a string of lurid epithets, uncomplimentary to the tyres and driver. Then the saloon door of the car was opened, and the two men got out.

"Puncture!" exclaimed the leader of the gangsters. "Puncture, you dolt! Why, all four are as flat as pancakes!"

He swore under his breath.

Inside the car Ferrers Locke's heart leaped high. Something had happened to give him a respite, that was certain. And while the three gangsters bent over the slashed tyres, Jack Drake slipped unnoticed from the luggage grid. Automatic in hand, he advanced.

"Put 'em up!"

The three men wheeled, started off their wits at hearing a voice so near to them; more startled still to see the owner of the voice, and the grim weapon he levelled at them.

"Why, it's a blamed kid!" swore the leader, and he made a sudden dive at the youngster.

"Crack!"

Not for nothing had Drake spent hours of assiduous practice at the shooting gallery. His shot winged the gangster's head, and stopped him, with a howl and a curse.

His two companions seemed less eager to attempt a rush. "Keep 'em up!" rapped Drake. "I shoof to kill next time!"

Gangsters, used to guns and gunmen—afraid of their skin without a gun in their hands—they obeyed. Kid or no kid, there was menace in his tone, and, moreover, he could shoot straight.

With levelled gun he disarmed the gangsters and pocketed their weapons, by which time the hobbled figure of Ferrers Locke appeared in the doorway of the car.

"Here, you, squint-eye," snapped Drake, at a sandy-haired fellow with a cast in his eye, "unfasten those ropes, slick!"

Squint-eye obeyed with alacrity, what time Drake kept his companions covered.

"Good for you, Jack," said Locke gratefully, when he had been released. "These charming fellows were going to take me for a ride in the real American style."

Drake grinned.

"It's our turn now to take the blighters for a ride, guv'nor," he said, with a wink.

The gangsters, protesting and whining their innocence, were secured and bundled into the car. Whilst Locke covered them with a loaded gun, Drake made himself busy at the steering wheel.

The engine purred, the car lurched forward in a series of bumps, and an uncomfortable journey to the nearest police station ensued. The officer in charge stared in amazement as the saloon car clattered on its firm tires into the station yard, but his amazement took another turn when Drake and Locke ushered out the bound gangsters.

"Look after them, officer," said Michael Kolly, alias Ferrers Locke. "These three are dangerous men. I charge them with kidnaping with intent to murder. This young fellow will witness the charge."

The station officer scratched his head in bewilderment, but Ferrers Locke drew him on one side, spoke to him in lowered tones that the gangsters could not hear, and next moment the luckless trio were being bundled into the cells.

"And that's that, my boy," said Locke, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "I was caught napping at the dig, and I owe my life to you."

"Nonsense, guv'nor!" said Drake uncomfortably. "It's all in the day's work."

"Have it that way if you like," agreed Locke, "but the day's work isn't finished. We've got to get behindhand. We're wanted at Stapleton Castle just as quickly as a car can get us there!"

(Ferrers Locke's had a narrow squeak—but what's in store for him at Stapleton Castle? Don't miss next week's feast of thrills, boys, whatever you do!)

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