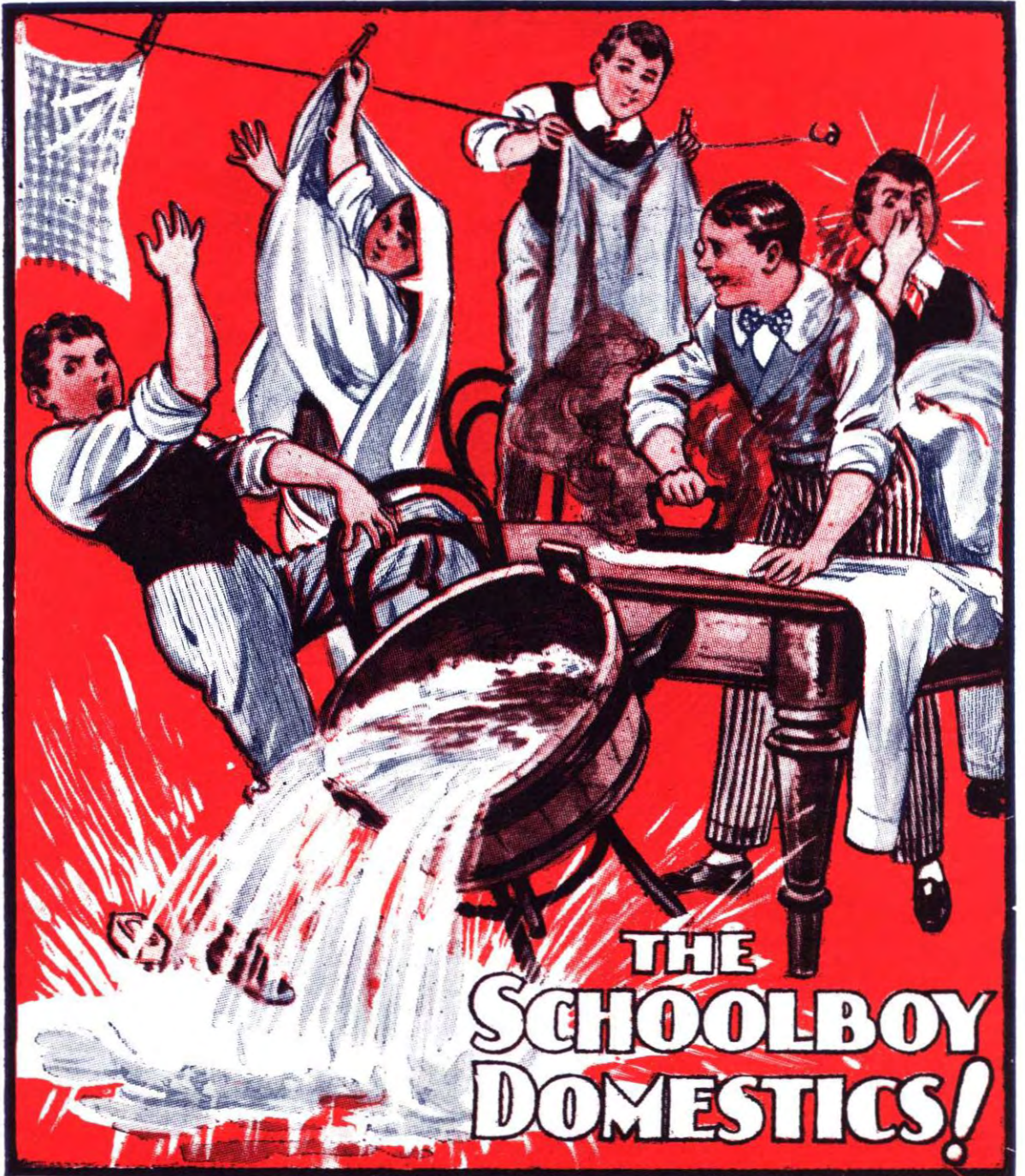


"TOM MERRY & CO. ON STRIKE!" RIPPING YARN COMPLETE WITHIN.

The GEM 2^D



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MERRY—FOOD CONTROLLER! BLAKE—CHEF! GUSSY—LAUNDRYMAN!

TOM MERRY & CO!



CHAPTER 1.

How the Strike Began.

TOM MERRY rapped on the table.

"Silence for the chair!" said Manners.

There was a buzz of voices in the study. Five juniors had met together in Tom Merry's quarters in the School House of St. Jim's. The juniors of the School House had a grievance, and they had met, under the chairmanship of Tom Merry, to give it an airing.

Tom Merry and his chums were very often engaged in deadly warfare with the chums of Study No. 6, but now, for once in a while, they made common cause together. At such a crisis, as Blake said, it was time for all true Britons to stand shoulder to shoulder.

And so Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy had come along from Study No. 6 to Tom Merry's quarters to air their grievance and discuss a remedy. Monty Lowther was an absentee,

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being away from St. Jim's for a short time on special leave.

"I don't want to complain of Railton," said Blake, speaking of the new Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's. "He's a good sort, and I really want to back him up. But if he thinks we are going to put up with the grub we are getting here now, why, he makes a very big mistake."

"A jolly big mistake," said Herries. "A regular bloomer."

"It isn't the gwub," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy plaintively, "it's the washing that I complain of principally. They simply wuin your shirts and collabs. You wemembah, Blake, how they wumped my best shirt, and I—"

"Oh, blow your best shirt! The grub—"

"My deah boy, the laundwy—"

Tom Merry rapped on the table again.

"Shut up for the chair!" bawled Manners.

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, rising, "we have met

OH, WHAT A WOW! READ THIS YARN—AND LAUGH TILL YOU BUST!

ON STRIKE

LONG COMPLETE YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.



By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

here together, on this solemn and important occasion, to—
to—

"To complain of the shocking state of the commissariat," said Blake.

"The shocking state of the shirts and collars when they come from the wash," said D'Arcy. "Look at his collar! It was actually brought to me in this dreadful condition."

And D'Arcy held up for the general inspection one of the marvellous collars he wore, and which was perhaps not quite so smooth and spotless as it might have been.

Tom Merry rapped on the table once more at the interruptions.

"Gentleman of the Shell and the Fourth Form," he said. "We have met in an indignation meeting, to discuss a remedy for our undoubted grievances."

"Where does he get those words from?" murmured Herries.

"Looked 'em up in the dictionary, I expect," said Blake, sotto voce.

Tom Merry looked at the Fourth-Formers severely.

"If you kids can't shut up while the chairman talks—" he began.

"Who are you calling kids?"

"You youngsters of the Fourth," said Tom Merry; who, being in the Shell, and a few months older than Blake, usually assumed grand-fatherly airs towards the chief of Study No. 6.

"I came here," said Blake, looking round, "with peaceful intentions. If the chairman of this giddy meeting gets a thick ear he will have only himself to thank."

"Oh, don't quarrel," said D'Arcy; "this is a serious matter! Look at this collar!"

"Gentlemen," resumed Tom Merry, with another rap on the table, "the other day our old Housemaster, Mr. Kidd, quitted these ancient walls to enter another sphere—"

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"Shut up, Blake! Then, Mr. Railton became our Housemaster, and, upon the whole," said Tom Merry generously, "we are satisfied with him."

"Hear, hear!"

"I was at another school with Railton before I came to St. Jim's," went on Tom, "and I always found him a good sort. He plays cricket like an angel—"

"Do angels play cricket?" asked Blake.

"Shut up, Blake! But as a Housemaster, he can't be said to be a howling success. Perhaps he's inexperienced. Maybe he's shy. Anyway, he leaves too much in the hands of the House-dame. With the result that—"

"That the grub's insufficient," said Blake.

"That the cooking's rotten!" exclaimed Herries.

"That the washing is atrocious," murmured D'Arcy.

"Look at this collar—"

"Go on, chairman!" said Manners.

The chairman went on.

"The important question is whether we are going to stand it," said Tom Merry. "My idea is that we are not."

"Not!" echoed four voices cordially.

"Right!" said Tom Merry. "Now we're agreed that something's got to be done. The only question is, what?"

"What?" said Blake.

"If any of you have a sensible suggestion to make," said Tom Merry, with a severe look at Jack Blake, "this meeting would be glad to hear it. If you haven't, I've got one."

"Then get it off your chest, my son," said Blake.

Tom Merry looked round.

"My idea is that we should go on strike," he remarked, in a casual sort of way.

Even Blake gasped at that.

"What are we to strike?" he asked, as soon as he re-

covered himself. "And what are we to strike it with? And are we to hit it hard?"

"We'll go on strike," said Tom Merry unheedingly. "They don't give us satisfactory grub. Well, we'll take to feeding ourselves, and cooking the tommy in our own studies."

"Hurrah!"

"They don't wash our shirts and collars properly. We'll start a laundry department ourselves, and do it off our own bat."

"Bwavo!"

"If you want a thing well done," said Tom Merry, "you must always do it yourself. That's an old saying, and a jolly true one. We are going on the warpath. We're going to have more and better grub, or know the reason why. We're going to have our linen got up in the best style—"

"Bwavo! Look at this collar—"

"Are we agreed? If we are, we'll get on to the details."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Blake. "What-ho! It will be jolly fun, anyway. We're not going to be down-trodden. Why should we be left to the tender mercies of a giddy House-

dame, while the chaps over in the New House are feeding on the fat of the land?"

"Yes, that's it!" exclaimed Herries excitedly. "Figgins & Co. have nicknamed the School House the workhouse."

"Yes, and Figgins offered to get up a subscription to buy us soup-tickets," said Manners. "I punched his nose, but that doesn't alter the case."

"It altered his nose," said Tom Merry. "But you're quite right; we have become the mock and the scoff of the New House, and something's got to be done. Hands up for adopting my suggestion."

Every hand went up.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Passed unanimously. Now about the details. The proper thing in a case like this is to appoint a certain party to be the head of each department. First comes the commissariat. I've had a lot of experience in buying grub."

"Right you are!" said Blake heartily. "Tom Merry for Minister of the Interior!"

"Ha, ha! Is it a go?"

"Yes, yes. You're head of the commissariat department. If you don't look after our interiors properly we shall scrag you."

"Now, as to the cooking," said Tom. "Who's ambitious to shine as a chef?"

"I don't think many chefs could come up to me for cooking eggs and sausages," said Blake modestly. "I don't mind going into the business as chef."

"Right-ho! Now for the washee-washee."

"D'Arcy, of course. He was born for it."

"Wecally," murmured Arthur Augustus, "I think I could get up linen better than we have it now. Look at this collar—"

"That's settled; D'Arcy's the head of the laundry department. Herries can be his assistant, to help at the washtub."

"Thanks!" said Herries, with a bow.

"What price me?" demanded Manners. "Where do I come in?"

"You'll help me get the grub in," said Tom Merry. "It will want some doing, for the Housemaster and the prefects are sure to get their backs up against it. Luckily, Railton is going away for a few days, and I hope we shall have things going on swimmingly by the time he comes back, and then he won't be able to interfere."

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GUSSY BURNED THE WASHING!
BLAKE BURNED THE BACON!
And Merry burned with indignation
when someone upset the washtub
over him!

"After all, it will take a lot of work off his shoulders if we manage for ourselves. If we make a success of it, the rest of the juniors are pretty certain to come into the game, and then we'll let the seniors in, too, if they are civil about it."

"Hear, hear!"

"This study," said Tom, looking round, "is one of the roomiest of the junior studies, and I think we'll make it the headquarters. We'll all do our preparation in Study No. 6, and keep our books and things there, and we'll all feed here."

"Jolly good idea!" said Blake.

"We shall have to buy some things," went on Tom. "Let me see. We shall want a washtub—I think we can sneak that from downstairs—and some iron and things for getting up the linen. And a clothes-line. We can rig that up across the study here."

"Good idea!"

"We've got most of the cooking things we want. We'd better get a big saucepan, too. With five to feed at once, we shall have to do things on a bigger scale. Now, you kids had better bring your cooking utensils here, and—"

"Who are you calling kids?"

"Oh, don't row, now! I withdraw that word. There! Bring your pots and pans and things, and all your crockery-ware and cutlery, and we'll shift our books into your study. Hallo! That's the dinner-bell."

"I'm glad it's all settled," said Blake. "It will be a good wheeze. We'd better go down to dinner now, though."

"Yes, we'll go down," said Tom Merry, with a sparkle in his eyes. "But we won't eat anything. We'll make out that the grub is so horrid we can't touch it. That will be a hint to Railton of what's to come."

"Good wheeze!" said Manners.

Blake looked doubtful.

"I say, it is a good wheeze," he agreed. "But we shall be jolly hungry."

Tom Merry smiled in a superior way.

"If you're going to bust up a good scheme, Blake, because of your unearthly appetite, you'd better say so and have done with it!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake, nettled. "I'll stick it out if you do, anyway."

"Come on, then. Mind, we're patient martyrs in this act, and we won't condescend to touch the horrid stuff."

And, having agreed on that point, the five conspirators went down in a body to the dining-hall of the School House.

CHAPTER 2.

A Case of Famine.

TOM MERRY and Manners dropped into their places at the table where the young gentlemen of the Shell were already gathered.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy went on to the Fourth Form table. The dinner wasn't a bad one, as a matter of fact, but when Tom Merry had made up his mind he could be firm.

Perhaps his determination wavered for a moment when he found a plate laden with boiled beef, carrots, and dumplings placed before him. He looked at Manners and read an inquiry in the eyes of his chum.

He shook his head.

Manners nodded acquiescence, though with a rather mournful look at the plate, and the two leaned back in the high-backed chairs.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, glanced at Tom Merry.

"You are not eating your dinner, Merry?"

"No, sir," said Tom, with an air of patient suffering.

"Why are you not eating it? Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why do you not eat your dinner?" snapped the master.

"I don't like it, sir!"

"Indeed! If you are so fastidious you can go without. Manners, why are you not eating your dinner?"

"I don't like it, sir."

"Really! Then you also can go without. Perhaps you will be hungry by tea-time."

So Tom Merry and Manners ate nothing, while the rest of the Form made a good dinner engh.

"I say, what's the wheeze?" asked Gore in a whisper.

"Don't like the grub," said Tom Merry.

"Better than going without."

"Not at all. We're going on strike."

"Well, that may be a good idea," said Gore, "but you won't catch me going on strike and missing my dinner. Don't see where the fun comes in."

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And later on Tom and Manners did not quite see where the fun came in. For by the time the rest of the Shell had eaten heartily, the chums were empty and yearning for boiled beef and dumplings—but there was none for them.

The chums of Study No. 6 had fared even worse at the Fourth Form table.

For their martyr-like suffering and resignation had passed quite unnoticed.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, boarded in the School House, and he was at the table where Blake and his chums sat.

Mr. Lathom was a little man, with extremely short sight. He wore an enormous pair of spectacles, which did not seem to improve matters much.

At all events, he could never see anybody or anything unless he stared at them very hard, and he was far from observing that Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were leaving their dinner uneaten.

Blake had expected inquiry, remonstrance, or even an order to eat his dinner, and he was prepared to act like a martyr going to the stake; but not a word was said.

When the boys rose from the table three plates remained untouched, and even that fact escaped the notice of Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, it's too rotten!" said Blake crossly, as they went out. "Hallo, Tom Merry, you're not looking very happy!"

"I'm not feeling very happy," said Tom; "I'm hungry."

"And I've got an aching void," said Manners pathetically.

"We're all hungry," said D'Arcy plaintively. "I think that was a beastly wotten ideah of yours, Tom Mewwy!"

"Rotten isn't the word for it!" said Blake. "Nice sort of a giddy leader for a strike you are, Merry! Go and eat coke!"

"I could eat almost anything now," replied Tom. "Haven't you chaps got something in your study? We're right out."

"Not a morsel," said Blake. "We were going to lay in a new supply to-day. We can't get anything at the school shop now; it's closed till half-past four, and that's over two hours and a half—I think I shall die!"

"Well, that wouldn't matter very much!" said Tom sympathetically. "The question is, what am I going to do?"

"Hallo, School House cads!"

The cheerful voice of Figgins hailed them.

Figgins, the chief of the New House juniors, was accompanied by his inseparable chums, Kerr and Wynn, the famous trio known at St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.

"You're not looking particularly bright just now," went on Figgins. "Thinking of your prospects in the Junior House match, I suppose?"

"Oh, we're going to lick you!" said Tom. "That doesn't bother us at all!" He fixed his eyes on Fatty Wynn.

"Manners, old man, doesn't Wynn look tempting? It's lucky for him we're not in an open boat at sea. Figgy, old man, we've missed our dinner."

Fatty Wynn got behind Figgins. Tom was really looking alarmingly like a cannibal.

"Have you?" said Figgins, grinning. "I hear they're feeding you badly in the School House. Rotten old show, isn't it? I'm always sorry for a chap who's put into the School House, though, as a matter of fact, we wouldn't have any of your freaks over on our side."

"Hardly!" said Kerr, shaking his head.

"Not much!" chimed in Fatty Wynn. "Still, it's too bad not to feed the brutes!"

"Well, I'd rather have the School House, grub or no grub, than that rotten old casual ward of yours!" said Tom, nodding towards the New House. "And as for the grub—well, we're not going to put up with it, I can tell you!"

"We wouldn't," said Figgins. "Catch Ratcliff giving us bad grub! We wouldn't stand it!"

"Well, we're not going to stand it! We're going on strike! And we're going to do the grub and laundry departments ourselves!"

"Ha, ha, ha! How are you going to do it?"

"We're going to run it all up in Study No. 10. That will beat you New House bouncers. You wouldn't have the nerve. You can only say, 'Yes, sir,' and 'Please, sir,' like good little Georgies. Come on, Manners! I'm not proud, but I bar talking to these New House wasters!"

And the Terrible Two marched off, arm-in-arm.

Figgins grinned.

"Well, Tom Merry's always up to something," he remarked. "It seems to me that we ought to come on the scene somewhere in this wheeze. You remember how he stopped our chimney and spoiled our little feeds, kids?"

"Rather!" said Kerr.

"Ah, yes!" said Fatty Wynn, with a sigh. "What a

splendid feed that was! Do you remember how nicely the sausages were done?"

"Yes; they were ripping, and they were all spoiled."

"Yes, it was awful," said Fatty. "I've never got over it. I feel it now."

"Oh, hang it, you've had a good many feeds since then!"

"That doesn't make any difference. I should have had them, anyway. I feel as if I were one feed behind. If we were to whack in a spread every day, it wouldn't alter that. We should still be one feed behind."

"Poor old Fatty," murmured Figgins, "if you miss a feed you feel it for weeks, don't you, Fatty?"

"Yes, I do," replied Fatty Wynn. "I could remember the smell of those sausages for days afterwards. It used to keep me awake at night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "Fancy anything keeping old Fatty Wynn awake!"

"All I could remember," said Kerr, "was the awful smell of all that smoke, the burnt sausages, and the kettle boiling over on the fire!"

"Same here," remarked Figgins. "I can remember that

The hungry three marched to Walsh's study. A smell of burning was proceeding from it, which became quite suffocating as Blake opened the door.

"Hallo, old Walsh!" said Blake, in his most friendly tone.

"How's things going, old dear?"

Walsh turned a reddened face up from the grate. He had a big fire going, and a pan in his hand.

"Hallo!" he gasped. "I'm making toffee. Something's going wrong with it."

"You're burning it."

"Yes; it always seems to burn, somehow."

"Never mind. Give us some of it, and we'll sample it."

"There's some on the table," said Walsh. "Don't scoff any of that milk chocolate. It's Mellish's, and he always makes a row if his things are boned. You can have as much of the toffee as you like."

And Walsh returned to his toffee making.

Blake cocked his eyes thoughtfully at the toffee on the table. He was fearfully hungry; but that black, burnt, sticky mess was a little too much, even for a hungry junior.

"I think we'd better plump for the milk chocolate," he remarked, in an undertone. "Mellish can put it down to the account of Tom Merry. I'll leave a little note to that effect."

There was pen and paper on the table, and Blake dashed off a note.



Herr Schneider heard a noise at the door, and went quietly across the room to investigate. As he approached the door, Blake threw the cake, which caught the German master in the eye!

now, and that is why I am trying to think of some way of getting our own back."

"Tom Merry is none too easy a problem to tackle," said Kerr, the canny Scot. "He's usually on the look-out for trouble, and he has a rotten habit of realising just what we're likely to do in the circumstances."

"That's so," agreed Wynn. "But we must do something about it. The thought of that lost feed is still preying on my mind. It's awful!"

"Horrid!" agreed Figgins. "But if we can get the entire into Tom Merry's commissariat department, perhaps we can make it up."

And Figgins & Co. turned that idea over in their minds very seriously.

Meanwhile, five hungry juniors were going to and fro in the School House seeking what they might devour. Matters were getting serious. It was close upon time for afternoon lessons, and the wleece seemed more and more idiotic every moment.

"To think that we let ourselves be imposed upon like that!" grunted Jack Blake. "We ought to have had enough of Tom Merry's wheezes to know 'em by this time. Where are we to get some grub?"

"There's young Walsh," suggested Herries, after some reflection. "He makes shocking bad toffee, and he's always got a lot on hand. That would be better than nothing."

"Let's go to his study and see if he's there."

"Debit one packet milk chocolate, 6s., to account of Tom Merry."

He took the chocolate out of the wrapper, and slid the note in its place.

"Thanks awfully, Walsh!" he remarked. "I don't think we'll have any of that toffee. I'd give it to some rich old uncle if I were you, after he'd put your name in his will."

And Study No. 6 marched off munching milk chocolate. Meanwhile, Tom Merry and Manners were also on the hunt for provender. They did not meet with similar good fortune. When the bell rang for the Shell to enter their class-room, the Terrible Two marched in with the rest in a state of famine.

"It's astounding," murmured Tom, "how different a thing looks before and after dinner. Do you know, I could almost take a bite out of fat old Schneider."

Herr Schneider was taking the Shell in German at first lesson.

He looked suspiciously at Tom.

"You was talking, Merry."

"Yes, sir," said Tom cheerfully.

"Himmel! Take feefy lines! I will geep order in dia

class, or know te reason vy. Manners, vy are you making tat face?"

"Was I making a face, sir?"

"Yes, you vas after."

"I didn't mean to, sir. I wasn't aware of it."

"You vill take feefy lines."

"Certainly, sir!"

"Now, Merry, you vill construe." Tom Merry obediently rose, and took his book, and the lesson proceeded.

"I say, what's the matter with you chaps?" whispered French of the New House to Manners. "You're looking as if you'd lost a bob and found a bad threepenny-bit."

"We haven't had any dinner," grunted Manners.

"Phew! Why not?"

"The grub's bad, and we're going on strike!"

"My hat! I think I'd lay in a supply of tomy first," muttered French. "But I've some butterscotch here, and you can have it for old times sake, if you like."

"You're a good chap, French."

French passed a little packet to Manners. Manners extracted a lump of butterscotch, and passed the packet back. It was a good-sized lump he took, and it was so hard that it was hopeless to think of breaking it without a concussion that could have been heard all over the class-room, or of biting a piece off. There was nothing for it but to put the whole lump in his mouth, and Manners slipped it in at a moment when Herr Schneider's back was turned.

He began to suck it. He hoped to wear it away to a more negotiable size by the time he was called upon to construe. As it happened he was two forms away from Tom Merry, and the construing usually proceeded in order. But Herr Schneider was suspicious of the Terrible Two that afternoon.

"Tat vill do, Merry," he said suddenly. "You vill go on from dere, Manners."

Manners started.

"Do you hear me, Manners?"

Manners rose obediently to his feet. The German master's eyes were upon him, and he dared not make any attempt to get the butterscotch out of his mouth. He shifted it into the cheek turned away from the German, and looked wildly for his place.

"Te class is waiting for you perfore, Manners."

"Yes, sir."

Manner's voice was rather muffled. His left cheek was bulging out with the butterscotch, and he had to keep it turned from the Herr. Only the certainty of choking himself if he swallowed the lump prevented him from bolting the butterscotch in bulk.

"Go on, ten!" exclaimed Herr Schneider, rapping with his pointer.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you lost your blace?"

"I—I think so, sir."

"Speak more clearly! Don't mumble like tat!"

"Yes, sir."

"Merry, tell him te place."

The Shell were doing the second act of Schiller's "Maid of Orleans." Tom gave his chum a sympathetic glance.

"Geschlagen! Feldherr, nennt das Wort nicht mehr," he said.

"Now, go on, Manners!"

"Yes, sir. Ich darf es mir—"

"You do not speak plainly mit yourself, Manners."

"Don't I, sir?" said poor Manners.

"Nein, you stupid! Wat is te matter mit you?"

"It must be the German, sir. It's a bit thick, you know."

"Te Sherman!" exclaimed Herr Schneider, righteously indignant at the aspersion upon his lovely language. "Manners, I tink you vant te cane mit yourself. Go on, and speak more clearly after."

"Yes, sir! Oh, Orleans Orleans! Grab unsert—"

"Tat pronunciation is not good! Come out here!"

"I can do very well here, sir, if you don't mind."

"Come out here!" roared Herr Schneider.

"Certainly, sir, if you wish!"

And Manners came out before the class. It required skillful navigation to arrive where Herr Schneider was standing without turning his left cheek to the angry master. Arrived before the German, Manners stood with his head a little turned to one side.

"Manners, vy you stand like tat? I begin to tink tat you vas weak in te prain mit yourself after perfore. Look me in te face!"

Manners had no choice but to obey. Herr Schneider stared at him.

"Wat was te matter with your cheek, Manners?"

"Matter, sir? Nothing, sir!"

"It is swelled to a great size. Have you te toothache?"

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"I suffer a lot from it, sir."

"Have you te toothache at tis moment?"

"No, sir," said Manners, driven to a plain statement; "not at this particular moment, sir."

"Den vy vas your cheek swelled mit itself after?"

Manners passed his hand over his cheek.

"It does seem swollen, sir, doesn't it?" he remarked.

"You have someting in your cheek, Manners."

"Have I, sir?"

"Vat is it? Turn it out dis instant after! Vat is it?"

Manners made a desperate effort to bite the butterscotch in two, so that he could risk swallowing it. His teeth went right into it with the effort, but, unfortunately, they would not come out again.

"Do you hear me, Manners? Haf you someting in your mouth?"

"Mum-g-r-r-m-m-m!"

Herr Schneider seized his pointer, his fat face red with rage.

"Dis vas imbertinence!" he exclaimed. "I vill teach you to insult your master perfore te whole class after! Hold out your hand!"

Manners made a desperate effort to get his teeth out of the butterscotch, but it was in vain. They were held in the sticky substance as in a vice.

"Mum-mum-g-r-r-r-m-m-m!"

"Hold out your hand!"

Poor Manners held out his hand and received a stinger from the pointer.

"Now vill you apologise for your rudeness to your master, Manners, or shall I gif you te pointer on te oder hand?"

"Mum-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Hold out te oder hand!" roared Herr Schneider

A second cut came down, harder than the first. Manners wriggled.

"Now, Manners, if you nod instantly say tat you vas sorry after, I vill detain you vun hour dis evening after."

"Mum-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Go pack to your seat!" shouted Herr Schneider. "You are detained mit yourself for vun hour after te class!"

"If you please, sir—" began Tom Merry.

"Silence, Merry!"

"But—"

"Silence! You are barty to tis imbertinence. You vill stay in mit Manners for vun hour, and write a hundred lines from te poem of Schiller. Not a vord more! Te lesson vill broceed. Gore, you vill construe."

It was impossible to explain. It was ten minutes before Manners finally succeeded in getting his teeth free of that awful butterscotch. Herr Schneider gave the Terrible Two a severe glance when the lesson ended, and intimated that at five o'clock he would be in the room again to see that his sentence was carried out. Then he left the class-room, master and pupils equally relieved to be done with one another for one more day.

The rest of the afternoon was anguish untold to Manners and Tom Merry. They were both healthy, growing boys, and had big appetites, and the loss of their dinner made them as hungry as hunters—or, rather, as wolves. The prospect of an additional hour of waiting before they could get anything to eat was a knockdown blow.

But there was no help for it. Just before the Shell were finally dismissed Herr Schneider came in and spoke to Mr. Linton, the Form master. The latter glanced at the Terrible Two.

"Merry and Manners will be detained for one hour," he said. "The rest, dismiss!"

The Shell filed out, leaving the two hungry juniors alone and doleful. Detained for an hour—while the school shop was open, and cake and cheese and tarts and apples could have been had, ad lib, if they had only been at liberty!

Herr Schneider meant to run no risks with his prisoners. Having set them their tasks, he sat at the high desk to do some of his own work. Two pens scratched dolefully away in the silent class-room. Through the half-open door Tom Merry and his companion in misfortune saw juniors pass and repass. And presently the faces of the chums of Study No. 6 came peeping round the corner and Tom caught Blake's eye.

CHAPTER 3.

Herr Schneider Takes the Cake

TOM MERRY fixed his eyes upon Blake with an expressive look. He saw that Study No. 6 had heard of his fix, and that Blake had come with his chums to see if he could do anything. Blake put his finger on his lips in sign of caution. Tom nodded to show that he understood the friendly intentions of the Fourth-Formers, and then scribbled on a fragment of paper and folded it

(Continued on page 8.)

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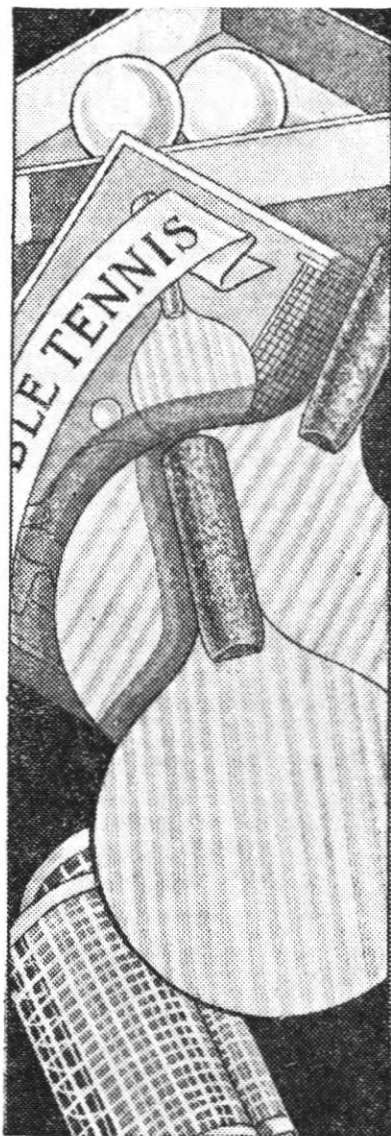
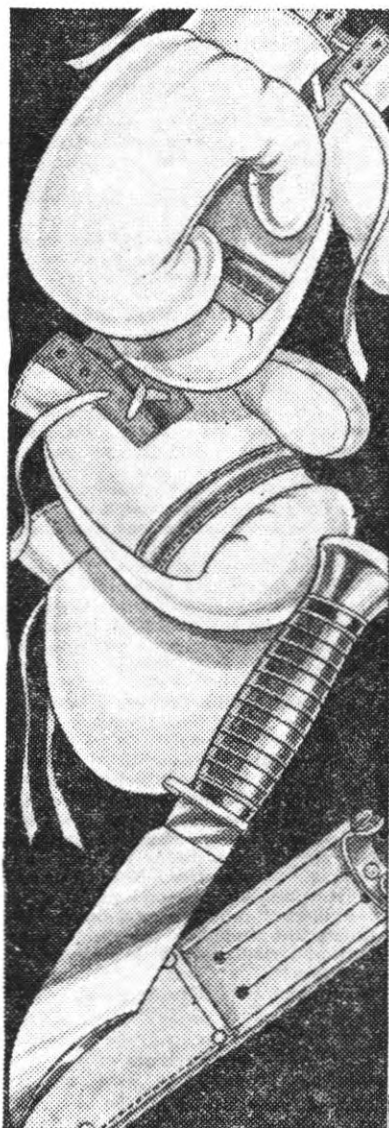
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"Tom Merry & Co. on Strike!"

(Continued from page 6.)

up and jerked it across so that it fell close to the open door.

Herr Schneider looked up quickly from his desk.

"Vat was you doing, Merry?"

"I, sir? I'm doing my exercise, sir!"

Herr Schneider looked up at him suspiciously. He affected to drop his eyes to his papers again, but in reality he kept a watch out of one of them. Blake was looking at Tom Merry from the passage, and Tom gave a slight nod to show that it was safe to pick up the folded note. Blake put his hand in to take it, and hand and wrist were perfectly visible to Herr Schneider, slyly watching.

"Vat is tat?" roared Herr Schneider.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "The brute's seen us!"

He bolted along the corridor. Herries and D'Arcy rushed after him. Herr Schneider was at the door in a moment, but he was only in time to see the last boot disappearing round a corner.

He returned to his desk, grumbling to himself, and sat there more suspicious than ever.

"Crumbs! That was a narrow shave!" Blake gasped. "He nearly had us! What a watchful brute! Now let's see what Tom Merry's got to say!"

He opened the little note.

"Get us some tommy, somehow."

That was the brief message written by the hero of the Shell.

"Poor old kid," said Blake. "It's too rotten! Fancy being detained for an hour when he's missed his dinner already! We'll get him some tommy, rather!"

"But how are we to get it to him," said Herries, "when the Schneider-bird is watching like a giddy owl all the time?"

"We shall have to watch our opportunity, and sling it to him when Schneider's head is turned," said Blake. "Come on!"

They went to the school shop. Blake was fortunately in funds. He looked reflectively at the assortment of good things there.

"We shan't have time to chuck him more than one thing," he remarked, "so we'd better let him have something substantial, and he can put it under his desk and have a good feed on it, and give Manners some. A tart's no good, nor an apple. We'd better make it one of these cakes. They weigh about a pound, and it'll fill 'em enough so that they can wait for tea."

And the chums were soon outside the door of the Shell class-room again, Blake with a pound cake under his arm. They could not see Herr Schneider, but Blake, keeping back out of sight, looked inquiringly at Tom Merry and held up the cake.

Tom's eyes sparkled. To a fearfully hungry junior the sight of the cake was tempting. If he could only get hold of it, and put it on the shelf under his desk, all would be serene. He glanced cautiously at the German master. Herr Schneider seemed to be intent upon his reading, and did not look up. But with the light glimmering on his spectacles, it was hard to tell whether Herr Schneider was watching him or not.

Blake's lips formed the word "catch." Tom Merry nodded. And at that moment Herr Schneider fixed his eyes upon Tom. He caught the nod, and knew that Tom was signalling to someone outside the doorway. He had caught them at last.

He was off his stool in a twinkling, and he darted to the door before Tom Merry knew that he noticed anything, and before he could make a signal to Blake.

Blake was in the act of clinging in the cake for Tom to catch.

It left his hands with a whiz just as the German master interposed.

Biff!

The cake, intended for Tom Merry, caught the German master fairly upon the nose, and he staggered.

"Ach! Mein Gott!"

The cake went with a crash to the floor.

"Ach! Mein Himmel!"

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

He could not help it.

"My hat!" gasped Blake.

The chums of Study No. 6 sprinted down the passage as

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if they were racing for a big prize. Herr Schneider sat down on the nearest form, and stared at the cake.

"Ach! Mein Himmel! Merry, you vas knew who trew tat cake at me."

"It wasn't—ha, ha!—meant for you, sir!"

"Ach! Der teufel!"

Herr Schneider tenderly rubbed his nose.

It was red and swollen. The cake had not given it a gentle tap, but a hard knock, and it had brought the water to the German's eyes.

There was a footstep in the passage.

Herr Schneider's eyes gleamed.

He guessed instantly that it was the delinquent returning to gloat over his crime.

Herr Schneider gripped his pointer, and stood just inside the door, ready to spring out upon the youngster as soon as he came near.

Tom and Manners exchanged glances.

They did not believe for a moment that it was Blake, or they would have called out to warn him at any risk.

"Ach!" shouted the German, rushing out as the footsteps came level with the door. "Ach! I have got you before after."

He rushed right into the individual who was coming up the passage, and sent him reeling against the opposite wall.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. "What on earth's the matter, Herr Schneider?"

He gave the fat German a shove on the chest that pushed him off, and sent him staggering back into the class-room.

Herr Schneider gave a gasp.

"Keeldare! Vas it you who trew tat cake after?"

"Cake! What are you talking about, Herr Schneider?"

"Somevum trew ein cake and hit me on te nose before." Kildare grinned.

"Well, I'm not in the habit of throwing cakes at masters' noses," he remarked. "You will have to look further, Herr Schneider. And I should advise you to look before you leap next time."

And the captain of St. Jim's strolled on along the passage.

Herr Schneider rubbed his nose, and picked up the cake.

He gave Tom Merry a glare, which had no perceptible effect upon that youth. Tom was grinning; he could not help that.

"Merry, Manners, I go now; but you two vill stay here till te time is ofer."

And Herr Schneider hurried away to his room, to bestow some care upon his swollen nose, and Tom and Manners broke into a chuckle.

"Fancy Blake getting a bullseye like that!" grinned Tom. "And fancy his going for poor old Kildare. Ha, ha! I say, Manners, old man, are we going to wait here and famish?"

"Not much!" said Manners emphatically. "Herr Schneider's taken our cake away to his room, and I expect he means to wolf it. We've got to get a feed somehow."

"Then come on."

The Terrible Two left the class-room. They made a bee-line for Study No. 6, where they found Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy. Blake was lying on his back on the table, giggling for all he was worth. He sat up and looked at Tom Merry.

"Hallo! So you're out? Schneider gone away to nurse his nose?"

"Yes. Got any grub?"

"Here you are. Ham and hard-boiled eggs, bread-and-butter, tea, and biscuits."

Tom Merry and Manners lost no time.

They wired into the provisions so thoughtfully prepared for them by Blake, like two famished wolves, and the provender disappeared at an astonishing rate.

"That's better," said Tom Merry, after an interval of a quarter of an hour, during which there had been no sound but that of active jaws, the chums of Study No. 6 standing round in admiring silence; "that's better. Now I feel a bit more fit. I say, Manners, what an afternoon we've had!"

"We have," said Manners, "and if your giddy wheezes are all going to work out like that, Tom Merry, you won't be the only fellow to go on strike. I shall do some striking myself with a cricket stump!"

CHAPTER 4.

What Happened to the Provisions.

TOM MERRY'S first move could hardly be called a startling success, but the juniors were not down-hearted. The plan which had been so carefully laid was pursued with keen enthusiasm.

The question of finance was the first and most important

one to be settled. Quite a sum of money was required for laying in the stock of provisions which would be needed before the striking juniors could consider themselves independent of the house supplies. Ways and means were discussed in Tom Merry's study.

"I'm broke," said Manners; "but I'm going to sell my white mice and rabbits, and all I can get will go into the fund."

"I've written to my old governess," said Tom. "I told her I wanted a fiver for a most important occasion, and I had it by the post this morning. There it is."

"Good!" said Blake. "I've got fifteen bob, and here you are."

"I think I can spwing a tennah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking a crisp note from a pocket in his brilliant waistcoat. "Yaas, wathah! Here it is, dear boy."

The tenner joined the fiver and the fifteen shillings. Herries searched through his pockets and added ninepence.

It was all he could do, and that, of course, was all that could be expected of anybody.

"There's fifteen pounds fifteen shillings and ninepence," said Tom Merry, "and I dare say Manners will be able to put up ten or twelve bob. We don't want to blow all this at once. I think the tenner will see us through at the start, and we'll reserve the rest in a cashbox. I'm going to keep accounts, and put down every tanner spent. That's the only satisfactory way."

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

"First," said

Tom, "we'll get as much grub as we can from the school shop. It won't do to get the lot there, or it will raise suspicion."

"We can go separately and each buy a little lot," said Blake, "and get the lots up to the study and pool 'em. Then we can make an expedition to Rylcombe and lay in the rest. We want a lot of things we can't get at the school shop."

"That's the idea. We'll carry out the first part of the programme now and the second part after tea. There's a lot of things beside grub to be bought. Soap and soda and baking powder and things," said Tom, rather vaguely.

Blake's suggestion was acted upon. The school shop, which was only open at certain hours, supplied most of the things which the boys required to supplement the usual bill of fare. Tom Merry was the first to go there.

Figgins & Co. were there, sitting on a box and eating tarts and drinking ginger-beer.

They opened their eyes when Tom Merry asked Dame Taggles to change a ten-pound note.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Have you come into a fortune, Merry? Are you going to blow all your giddy wealth at one fell swoop? You had better stand us ginger-pop all round as you're in such funds."

"Jolly good idea," said Kerr. "Who says ginger-pop?"

"I do," exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "Ginger-pop."

"Come on, kids," exclaimed Figgins, "it's Tom Merry's treat, and he says ginger-pop for all comers. Walk up, gents!"

The gents were not long in walking up.

"Here, I say," began Tom, in protest.

His voice was drowned by Figgins, who was bawling at Dame Taggles, who was rather deaf.

"Do you hear, Mrs. Taggles? Tom Merry is treating us all to ginger-pop and cake, so trot out your best, and don't be all night about it. Buck up!"

"Very well, Master Figgins," said Dame Taggles, delighted with such an order.

"Here, I say!" exclaimed Tom.

Figgins slapped him heartily on the back.

"Tom Merry, you're rather cocky for your size, and you are a School House waster," he said; "but you're a decent chap. Nobody can say that you don't stand a treat in a liberal way when you're in funds. Set 'em up!"

"Look here—"

"That's all right. I know you don't like thanks, but I'm not going to be prevented from saying that you're a jolly generous fellow. Isn't he, chaps?"

"Rather!" shouted the chaps, crowding up to raid the ginger-pop and the cake. "He's a jolly good fellow!"

"I'm not going—"

"Of course, you're not. You're not going till you've paid," said Figgins. "I say, you won't leave us to drink alone! Here's some for you. Put it down."

"I tell you—"

"Exactly! He says you can come again, chaps, if you're thirsty. Nothing mean about Tom Merry. Same again, Dame Taggles."

"Yes, Master Figgins."



To the amazement of the others, Tom Merry suddenly leapt upon Herr Schneider and, bringing him to the ground, proceeded to sit on him!

"Look here," shouted Tom Merry, "I'm not standing treat! This is a joke of Figgins', you chaps. I'm not—"

A general howl of condemnation went up.

"Oh, I say, Merry!"

"What a fib!"

"Don't be mean!"

"Don't be a cad, old chap!"

"Oh, you giddy Shylock!"

"Fancy a chap crawling out of it like that, after offering to stand treat!"

Figgins looked more shocked than anybody else. He set down his glass with a sigh.

"Merry," he said severely, "I'm surprised at you. You're rolling in wealth, and you offer to stand treat, and now you want to back out of it. Well, I suppose it's what we ought to expect of you School House cads—"

"I didn't—I don't—I wasn't—"

"I don't care a rap what you didn't, don't, or wasn't!" said Figgins. "You're the champion mean man, and just fit for that rotten old School House! I'm ashamed of you!"

"Look here—"

"Shan't! Dame, Merry wants to back out now! Are you standing this treat, Dame Taggles?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Merry will have to pay!"

Tom Merry could not help grinning himself.

"Well, that's all right," he said. "I'll pay, but all the same—"

"That's better," said Figgins heartily. "I thought you wouldn't be mean. Give him a cheer, kids!"

"But I never—"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The treat so generously provided by Tom Merry through Figgy's little joke was still proceeding, a good many of the juniors taking advantage of the offer to come again, and starting on second ginger-pops.

Tom resigned himself to his fate, and proceeded with his purchases. He packed them in the cricket-bag he had brought for the purpose, with the eyes of Figgins & Co. on him all the time.

"My hat!" said Kerr. "They're going to have a feed, and no mistake! I wonder whether there would be any chance of a raid, Figgy?"

"Don't you see?" said Figgins. "It's their idea of going on strike, and feeding themselves in the study. They're laying in provisions for that. I hear they're going to do their own washing, too. D'Arcy isn't satisfied with his shirts—see? The bouncer's buying soap and soda and Nixey's blue. I'll bet he doesn't know what to do with 'em."

"Ha, ha! It would be a jape to get into their quarters and mix 'em up a bit."

Figgins looked thoughtful.

"I've got an idea, Kerr," he said, lowering his voice. "You remember the time you disguised yourself as old Latham, and took everybody in."

Kerr nodded. Kerr was a shining light of the new House Amateur Dramatic Society. In his study in the New House he had theatrical properties worth a small fortune, and he frequently amused admiring audiences of New House juniors with impersonations—especially of masters and seniors of the school.

"It wouldn't be possible to get into Merry's study in the usual way," said Figgins. "We did it once, in alliance with Blake and his lot. That was different. Blake and Merry are as thick as thieves now over their new wheeze, and both against us. But if you could rig up some disguise—"

Fatty Wynn gave a sudden cackle. Figgins looked at him.

"Hallo! What's gone wrong with you, Fatty?" asked Figgins. "Is it the ginger-pop?"

"No," said Fatty. "I was thinking. You remember how well Kerr did Herr Schneider the other evening in the study, and took in even Monteith. Schneider is always down on Tom Merry, so there would be nothing surprising in it if he walked into Tom Merry's study and looted the grub."

"Ha, ha, ha! Would you have the nerve, Kerr?"

"Yes, rather," said Kerr.

"Then we'll work that little wheeze," said Figgins.

"Hallo, Merry! Not going?"

"Yes," said Tom. "So-long!"

And Tom left the shop with his bag. Ten minutes later Manners came in, and strolled up to the counter. He also made extensive purchases, and packed them in a cricket-bag and departed. He kept a suspicious eye upon Figgins, having evidently heard the story of the treat.

Five minutes after Manners had gone Jack Blake came in. Figgins & Co. exchanged glances as they saw him packing fresh purchases into a cricket-bag. But Blake was not the last. After him came Herries and D'Arcy, and each of them made sufficient purchases to withstand a siege.

"My only Aunt Matilda Jane Jackson!" said Figgins emphatically. "They're on the warpath, and no mistake. They've got enough tommy there to feed an army. Tom Merry doesn't do things by halves."

And Figgins & Co. strolled away thoughtfully towards the New House.

Meanwhile, the five School House juniors had met again in Tom Merry's study. The provisions made a goodly heap on the table, and Manners said that it made him hungry to look at them.

"But that isn't enough," said Tom Merry, cocking his eye thoughtfully at the heap. "I'll scorch down to Rylcombe on my bike and order the rest. We must go into this thing thoroughly. Now we'll get on with our prep, I think."

The books and papers belonging to all the five were in Study No. 6. They left Tom Merry's room, locking the door carefully after them. In Blake's quarters they found it rather a squeeze for five to do their preparation all at once, but they managed it.

Prep over, Tom Merry found that he had time to cycle down to Rylcombe, and he went off at once, while Manners

and the chums of Study No. 6 adjourned to the gym. Tom came in presently, flushed and rosy from his ride.

"It's all right," he said, as he met his chums. "I've fixed it all with Mother Murphy. The stuff is coming in to Taggles, and Taggles has agreed to pass it on without saying anything. So it will be all right."

"That's jolly good of Taggles!" remarked Herries.

Tom grinned.

"It has cost five bob out of the fund," he replied. "But it was worth it. Taggles is never good-natured for nothing. It will be here in the morning, and we shall find it in our study after morning school. Come on, Manners!"

The Terrible Two strolled into the School House and up to their study.

Tap, tap, tap!

"Hallo!" said Tom. "That's somebody knocking at our door."

The chums of the Shell hurried on.

Tap, tap, tap!

"Open tat door pefore."

The Terrible Two looked at each other in dismay. It was the voice of Herr Schneider! The round, fat form of the German master was standing outside the study door, and his knuckles were rapping sharply on the panels.

The passage was not very light, but it was quite light enough for Tom and Manners to distinguish the plump, short figure, the fat, red face and spectacles, and the light-grey clothes of the German master of St. Jim's.

"Ach! Is tat you, Merry?"

It had crossed Tom's mind to retreat quietly, without letting the German discover that he was near, but Herr Schneider seemed to be unusually quick of hearing just then.

"Merry, where vas you going after? Come here! And you, too, Manners."

The Terrible Two obediently approached. They expected a giggling, of course, for having left the class-room without permission, after the adventure of the cake and the German master's nose. Tom ran over in his mind all the excuses he could possibly think of, but he could not hit upon one that was likely to satisfy Herr Schneider.

"If you please, sir," he said meekly, "we—"

"If you please, sir," said Manners, "we—"

"Vat is all tat?"

"We were so hungry, sir."

"Vat you say?"

"We wanted to get some tommy, sir, or we'd have stayed with pleasure. We were so interested in the German exercises, sir."

"Vat? Ach! Mein himmel! Ja, ja!"

The German master stared at them in a peculiar way.

"We hadn't had any dinner, sir," said Tom.

"Ach!"

"I'm sure you'll excuse us for leaving the class-room without permission, sir, under the circumstances."

"Ach! So you leave to class-room mitout permission pefore?"

Tom Merry could have kicked himself. The German master was evidently ignorant of the fact that he and Manners had taken French leave, and here he had given himself entirely away.

"Yes, sir," he stammered—"that is—we—yes, sir."

"Nefer mind," said the German master. "If you vas bunished for tat, Merry, it will not be py me. So far as I meinself, I not bunish you."

"Oh, thank you, sir! You are so good."

"It is not to bunish you tat I game here," said the German. "I gome because I tink you haf te—vat you call grub—in your study, against te rules."

Tom made a wry face. The laying-in of provisions for the strike had evidently leaked out, and reached the ears of the troublesome Herr from the Vaterland.

"But we are allowed to have grub in our studies, sir," he said meekly.

"Yes, but nod so mooch as for vun army," said Herr Schneider. "I vill see for meinself vat you have, and shudge veder you geep it all dere. It is pad for your indigestion to have all tat pastry stuff and gorge mit yourselves after. Open tat door!"

"Have you got the key, Manners?"

Manners searched through his pockets.

"No, Tom."

Tom tried the door.

"I'm sorry, Herr Schneider. The door's locked, and Manners hasn't got the key."

"Ha, ha! Tat is te say, ach!" said the German master hastily. "Have you got te key yourself, Merry, mein poy?"

Herr Schneider was certainly very much on the alert just now. Tom felt in his pockets and produced the key. There was no help for it.

"Tat is petter," said the Herr. "Unlock te door, Merry, and light te gas. Don't turn it up high, because mein eyes tey are not strong."

"Very well, sir," said Tom resignedly. They entered the study. The gas was lighted and turned half up. Herr Schneider looked round the room.

"Mein gootness!" he exclaimed as he saw the pile of provisions on the table. "Vat is all tat? Vas you going to eat all tat, you pad, foolish poys?"

"If you please, sir, it's for Study No. 6 as weil as us, and—"

Herr Schneider snorted. "You vill keel yourselves mit te terrible indigestion. You vas trow away te briceless gift of health for te sake of gorging like te poa-constrictor."

"If you please, sir—"
"But I do not please," said the Herr severely. "I could not leaf you all tat stuff here to make yourselves ill after, even if I desired to do so. It would not be consistent mit mein duty before. I must take it away mit me."

Tom Merry and Manners looked at each other in dismay. "Oh, sir!" said Tom.

"Oh, Herr Schneider!" ejaculated Manners. The German master was inexorable.

"Pack all tat in a pag, and I vill take it away mit meinself," he said.

"We haven't a bag that will hold it all, sir."
"Ten pack it in zwei pags!" said the Herr.

With doleful faces the two juniors obeyed. Two of the largest bags in the study were crammed full to the very brim, and even then some of the provisions were left upon the table. Herr Schneider began to cram these poor remnants into the pockets of his coat.

"Oh, the greedy hog!" murmured Tom Merry. "Vat vas you say, Merry?"

"I said it would be a fine day to-morrow, sir, if it didn't rain yesterday—I mean it would be a fine day yesterday if it didn't rain to-morrow—no, I mean—"

"You vill take vun hundred lines for impertinence, Merry."

"Certainly, sir. Have you got anything else to give away?" asked Tom, who was rendered quite reckless by seeing his precious store thus ruthlessly confiscated.

The Herr frowned darkly. "Merry, I tink I vas came you soon. You say tat Blake vas concerned in dis pishness of laying-in so much food?"

"Some of it belongs to Blake, I said," replied Tom. "Den I shall have to speak mit Blake. Give me a pen and paper, and I vill send him vun note, and you vill take it."

The Herr scribbled a note, sealed it, and handed it to Tom Merry.

"Take tat to Blake immediately. You may go mit him, Manners. I vill take de pags to mein room for te present. Now go, you pad poys!"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom. "I shall commit Germanicide if I stay here!"

And the dismayed two quitted the study, Tom with the note for Blake in his hand.

When they were gone Herr Schneider acted in a way that was decidedly peculiar for a German master.

He sat down in a chair and leaned back, and laughed till the tears ran down his red cheeks.

And, strange to say, the tears made paler lines in the red of his cheeks, and he laughed so heartily that his fluffy, flaxen moustache came off, and he had to pick it up from the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped the Herr, as he fixed the moustache on again in front of Tom Merry's looking-glass. "This beats everything! But the sooner I get out of the School House the better! Ho, ho, ho!"

And having restored his face to its former appearance, the Herr lifted the two heavy bags, one in each hand, and stepped to the window.

He opened the window and placed the bags on the sill, then gave a whistle.

Two forms appeared below in the deep dusk of the quadrangle.

There was a faint whistle in reply.

"Is it all right?" came a cautious whisper from below.

"All serene, Figgy!"

"Let's have the giddy loot, then."

"Catch!"

"Right-ho! Let her rip!"

The Herr dropped one of the bags, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn caught it between them. They sat it on the ground, and then the other followed.

"That's the lot," said the Herr, speaking without a trace of foreign accent. "I'll be with you pretty soon, Figgy, but make sure of the loot."

"Right-ho, Kerr! This is great!"

And there was a chuckle from the gloom. Figgins and Fatty Wynn disappeared into the darkness, each carrying one of the heavy bags. The German master stepped to the door of the study and passed out upon the stairs.

The next moment he started back in dismay. A short, stout gentleman, with a red face and spectacles, and a flaxen moustache, was coming upstairs, and they met fairly face to face.

And Herr Otto Friedrich Schneider stopped and stared at his double as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

There were two Herr Schneiders, one an exact reproduction of the other.

"Mein Gott!"

CHAPTER 5.
Herr Schneider II.

TOM MERRY and Manners walked into Study No. 6 looking as if they had just come to a funeral. Their woebegone expression at once excited curiosity.

"What's the matter?" asked Blake, laying down his foil. "Anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing happened to the grub?" asked Herries apprehensively.

"Weally, I hope the washing matewials are all wight," said D'Arcy, with a look of anxiety. "I weally haven't a collah fit to wear, deah boys."

"It's that unholy beast, Schneider," groaned Tom. "He's come down on us like a wolf on the fold and walked off with all the tommy."

There was a general gasp of dismay. "How did he know anything about it?" exclaimed Blake.


"Doesn't he always know everything we don't want him to know?"

"Yes, he does, the brute! But look here, we're not going to stand it! We're allowed to feed in our studies if we like, and that German isn't going to scoff up all our grub in this way!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

"Well, we're allowed to have tea in the studies," said Tom thoughtfully. "Nobody's ever thought of having dinner there before."

(Continued on the next page.)

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"There's no law against it."
 "Come to think of it, there isn't!"
 "It's like his check to walk off with the tommy. I protest. Look here, suppose we go to the Housemaster and lay a complaint?"
 "Can't be did. Railton went away this afternoon and he won't be back for days."

"Oh crumbs! I forgot that. There's the Head, then."
 "Well, something ought to be done," said Tom, turning it over in his mind. "By the way, the German's sent you a note, Blake. He knows you're in it. I let out that some of the grub was yours, thinking I'd account for having so much there, and he seized on that to drag you into it."
 "Just like Schneider. Let's see what the horror has got to say, anyhow."

"I expect he wants you to go to his study and be hauled over the coals."

"Or else an imposition," said Manners.
 "Weally, this is too bad!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have had a feelin' all along that somethin' would happen to pwevent my gettin' a collah fit to wear."

Blake tore open the German's note.
 He glanced over it, and then his face was a study.
 He stared at the note, and then he thumped himself on the forehead, and then he gave a terrific yell.

"Done!"
 "What's that?" asked Tom Merry.
 "Done!"
 "Done? How—who—what—?"
 "What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Manners.

"Foiled, diddled, dished, and done!"
 "What does Schneider say?"
 "Schneider? Oh, Schneider says nothing!"
 "Nothing?"
 "Not a word."

"Then how—which—what—?"
 "Read the giddy letter."
 Tom Merry took the letter and looked at it, and then gave a roar.

"Dished!"
 "Are you both off your silly rockers?" exclaimed Manners. "Give me a sight of the thing, do!"
 "Read it!" groaned Tom Merry. "Oh, fancy being done like this, in my giddy old age!"

Manners read the letter.
 Then he began to execute a war-dance and snort with fury.

Herries seized the letter next, and D'Arcy read it over his shoulder.
 And this is what they read:

"Kindest regards to Study No. 6, and we shall enjoy this grub first-rate in the New House. You School House bounders can go and eat coke.

"(Signed) (for Figgins & Co.),
 "HERR SCHNEIDER THE SECOND."

Herries gave a yell, and threw the letter on the floor and jumped on it.

"Weally," said D'Arcy, "this is simply pwestowous!"
 "Taken in!" groaned Tom Merry. "It was Kerr all the time!"

"And you didn't know him?"
 "He was Schneider-bird to the life."

"Well," said Blake thoughtfully, "in my humble opinion, Tom Merry, you are a howling duffer!"
 "You can call me what you like. I could kick myself hard."

"But, I say," exclaimed Manners, "he may not be gone yet! There may be time to catch him!"
 Blake started up.

"Not likely; but there's a chance. Come on. But, I say, mind you don't make a mistake. Don't let us get hold of the real Schneider and go for him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Come on, then!"
 The juniors dashed from the study.

"Mein Gott!"
 It was a voice with a beautiful German accent in the corridor towards the stairs.
 "It that Kerr or Schneider?" exclaimed Blake.

"Blessed if I know," said Tom Merry. "He's got the voice, as well as the phiz and the togs. Let's go and see."
 They went and saw.

The fat German was standing on the stairs with an expression of idiotic bewilderment on his plump, red face.
 "It was te same," he was saying to himself aloud. "It vas meinself as in te glass, yet dere is no glass. I have trunken vun glass of te lager, vich is not enough to make me see te tings tat not be. Yet I see him mit mein own eyes."

Tom exchanged a glance with Blake.
 It was evident that this was the real Schneider, and that he had met the humbug on the stairs. Where was Kerr gone?

"What is the matter, Herr Schneider?" asked Tom Merry respectfully.

The German stared at him.
 "I have seen a man tat might be mein tvin broder," he said; "but a tvin broder I not haf. He come down te stairs and he run like vun ghost when I see him."

"That's queer, sir," said Tom. "Which way did he go?"
 "He vent pack along te bassage."
 "Then that's the way we're going," murmured Tom Merry.

The juniors ran along the passage, leaving Herr Schneider still murmuring to himself in amazement.

"We'd better separate and look into the studies," said Tom quickly. "He may have dodged into any of them. He's not to get away."

"Rather not," said Blake, with a chuckle. "I never thought we should ever be grateful to the Schneider-bird, but now I could kiss him on his baby brow. He's stopped Kerr from getting out of the School House."

"Yes," grinned Tom. "Kerr would have passed any other master as bold as brass, but he could hardly expect Herr Schneider to take him for the real article."

"Ha, ha! No. We'll have the bounder now."

The five juniors separated and went along the passage, examining every study as they came to it. Tom Merry looked into Gore's study and grinned. Gore was sitting at his table, looking very respectful, and the German master's double was looking over his exercise. Tom had opened the door quietly, and neither saw him for the moment.

"Tat is fery pad," said the voice of the sham German master. "Gore, I tink tat you are vun of te stupidest poyes in te Shell!"

Gore looked resentful.

Potts, the Office-Boy!



"I didn't know a German master was supposed to examine an English exercise," he said.

"Don't be impertinent, Gore."

"I wasn't, sir; but—"

"Be silent mit yourself after. I must go trough tat baper, ain't it, and see plunders you haf made mit yourself pefore."

Tom Merry grinned hugely.

Kerr, who certainly had a splendid nerve, had had to dodge into a study to escape the real Herr Schneider.

The study happened to be occupied, and so, with calm effrontery, he had started examining Gore's work as an excuse for staying in the room, and Gore had not the slightest suspicion of the real facts.

Tom stepped silently into the room and approached the sham German from behind.

"That is pad," said the Herr, "fery pad! Vat vas you staring at, Gore, after?"

Gore was staring in amazement at Tom Merry.

Herr Schneider the Second swung round quickly, just as Tom Merry seized him.

The next moment the Herr reposed on the floor, and Tom Merry was sitting astride of his padded chest.

"Got him!" shouted Tom. "Come on, Manners—Blake! Come on, kids! Got him!"

Gore started to his feet, thinking that Tom Merry had suddenly taken leave of his senses, and was greatly alarmed.

"What on earth are you doing, Merry? You'll get expelled for this!"

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped the humbug, struggling. "I will cane you severely mit yourself after for tat pefore, Tom Merry, ain't it?"

"It won't wash!" said Tom, with a chuckle. "It's very good, Kerr, old man, but it won't wash clothes! We've got you!"

"Kerr!" ejaculated Gore, in amazement.

"Yes. This is a partner of the famous firm of Figgins & Co., and he's got himself into a hole this journey!" grinned Tom Merry. "Here he is, chaps!"

Blake, Herries, and Manners burst into the study, followed at a more leisurely pace by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was never in a hurry.

"Got him?" said Blake. "Good! Now to unmask the villain!"

He jerked off Kerr's spectacles and wig and moustache. Except for the make-up on his face Kerr was now revealed in his true self. He grinned feebly.

"You'd never have got me," he gasped, "if it hadn't been for that silly goat meeting me on the stairs! I thought he was away."

"Well, we have got you," said Tom Merry. "You're a prisoner of war. Where's the grub?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did he bring two big bags of tomy into this room, Gore?"

"No," said Gore. "I didn't see them."

"Where are they, Kerr, you grinning image?"

"If you want to know particularly," drawled Kerr, "I slung them out of your study window to Figgins and Fatty, and they're safe in our study in the New House long ago."

"Holy smoke!" said Blake, in dismay. "Is the bounder telling the truth?"

"Honest Injun!"

"Then we're done, after all."

"Done brown," grinned Kerr. "Done to a turn. And

now you may as well let me go. It's time I got to the feed in Figgys's study."

"Not so fast," said Tom Merry, keeping the prisoner pinned to the floor. "We haven't got the grub, but we've got you."

"You can't eat me, I suppose?" Kerr remarked.

"No; but we can hold you to ransom."

"Eh?"

Tom looked at his chums.

"That's the idea, chaps! Figgins has got our grub and we've got his partner. We'll send a white flag to the New House and offer an exchange."

"Hurrah!" shouted Manners. "That's the wheeze!"

"Bravo! Tom Merry, you do have some ideas that are not wholly and absolutely rotten!" said Blake, with candour.

"Thank you, Blake!"

"Figgins won't give up the grub!" exclaimed Kerr excitedly.

"Then you'll have to make up your mind to live in the coal-locker in our study," said Tom Merry. "Get him along, chaps!"

They dragged Kerr to his feet. Between them the five juniors marched him off to Tom Merry's study, where he was sat upon a chair, and fastened securely to it with a length of cord.

"You won't get the grub back!" he said defiantly.

Tom Merry smiled.

"We'll see!"

And he took pen and paper, and began to write to Figgins.

CHAPTER 6.

Held to Ransom.

F IGGINS and Fatty Wynn were looking from the study window in the New House rather anxiously.

The captured provisions were safe in the study, and all was prepared for a gorgeous feast, but Kerr had not returned.

Figgins had expected him back a few minutes after his own arrival, but he had not come. Now nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and he was still absent. Figgins and Wynn were getting uneasy.

"I hope they haven't tumbled to the wheeze," Figgins remarked, as he stared down into the dusky quadrangle. "I can't see any sign of Kerr."

"Well, we've got the grub all right, that's one comfort," said Fatty Wynn, with a contented glance at the table.

Figgins sniffed.

"That's all you think about—the grub—Fatty. If they tumble to the wheeze and get hold of Kerr, they'll scrag him!"

"Hallo! There's somebody coming from the School House," said Fatty Wynn, catching sight of a dim form in the quadrangle.

Figgins looked out eagerly.

"That's not Kerr. It's not fat enough."

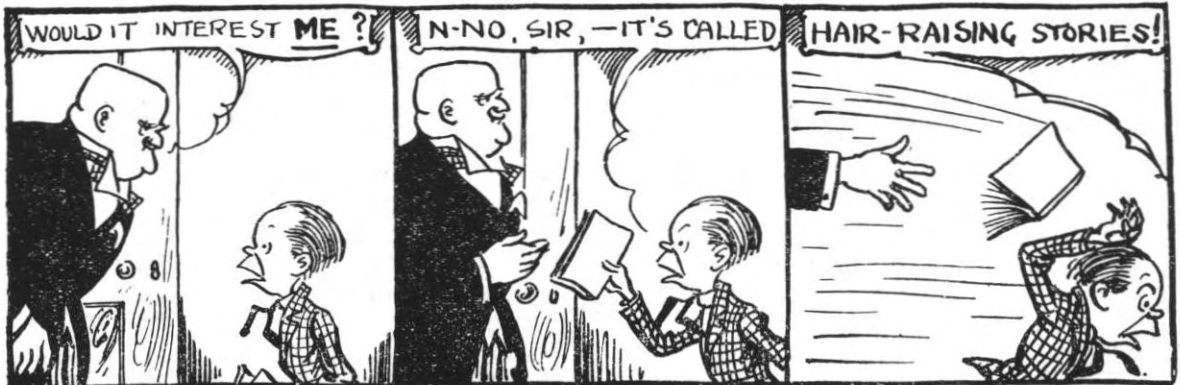
"He's coming here, anyway."

"Yes. He seems to be heading for this window. It's not Kerr. He's padded out to the size of the German master, and this chap is only a kid."

"My hat! It's Tom Merry!"

Figgins looked very nervous. The coming of Tom Merry boded ill to Figgins & Co.; he felt that. Where was Kerr?

A Bald Statement!



TOM MERRY TURNS DETECTIVE—AND GOES TO ANOTHER SCHOOL!

"Hallo, there!" said Tom Merry, stopping under the lighted window and looking up. "Is that you, Figgy? I can't make out your classic features."

"I'm here!" grunted Figgy. "What do you want?"

"I'm a flag of truce."

"A what?"

"A flag of truce. I've brought a message from the School House."

"What about?"

"About the ransom of a prisoner of war."

"What the dickens are you driving at?"

"Here's the message."

Tom tossed an apple with a paper wrapped round it in at the open window. It fell with a clump on the study floor. Then the hero of the Shell disappeared into the shadows.

Figgins picked up the message, and unwrapped it and read it.

"From the general commanding the forces of the School House; to the funny wreck called Figgins, chief idiot in the menagerie known as the New House."

That was the courteous address of the communication.

"Hereby, forthwith, and hereinafter be it stated, that the spy of the enemy who came into our lines in disguise has been captured, and unless ransomed will be summarily dealt with.

"The ransom shall be two cricket-bags full of tommy, being the same that were raided from the School House by the disguised spy of the enemy beforeinafter referred to.

"Unless ransom is paid within ten minutes of the receipt of this communication, the prisoner will be shot—into the coal-locker, and kept there till such time as the ransom shall be paid.

"(Signed) (for the Forces of the School House),
"TOM MERRY."

Figgins gave a snort.

"Sold!" was all he said.

Woe unutterable had descended upon the visage of Fatty Wynn. He looked at the letter, he looked at the provisions on the table, and he looked at Figgins. Then he groaned dismally.

That gorgeous feast was destined to vanish from his sight like a beautiful dream, for he knew what Figgins would do.

Fatty might have hesitated between friendship and a feed, but there was no hesitation about Figgins. He tore the letter into four, and then began to pack up the provisions in the bags.

Fatty did not remonstrate, but he did not lend a hand. It broke his heart to see the feast going. He looked on with lack-lustre eyes, and gave a little groan every now and then. Save for that, the packing-up went on in silence.

It was finished, and Figgins took a bag in each hand and left the study. Straight across to the School House he went, up the stairs to Tom Merry's study, and there he stopped and kicked at the door. It was opened by Tom Merry.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom affably. "Read my little note!"

Figgy grinned feebly.

"Here's the beastly ransom!" he said.

He looked round the study. Kerr, with most of his disguise gone, was sitting on a chair, tied to it, and looking far from happy. Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, and Manners were waiting there with Tom Merry for the ransom to arrive.

Figgins dumped down the bags on the floor. Tom Merry made him a bow.

"Thanks, Figgy!" he said. "It was a good wheeze, and it nearly came off. But you New House chaps aren't quite up to our weight, you know."

Figgins sniffed.

"Aren't we?" said Kerr wrathfully. "It was that silly old Deutschlender coming on the scene that stopped me, or you'd never have collared me."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Anyway, we captured you," he said. "And here's the ransom. Let him go, Blake."

Blake untied Kerr, and the prisoner rose and stretched himself.

Figgins cast a regretful glance at the bags.

"Well, it can't be helped," he said. "It was a good wheeze, but you can't expect to get there every time."

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"Weally, that wouldn't be poss," said D'Arcy. "But I say, deah boys, while our fwiends, the enemy, are on the scene, suppose we all have suppah together?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry heartily. "You'll stay, chaps?"

Figgins hesitated just a moment. But there was never any malice in the heart of Figgins, and the next moment he nodded.

"Rather!" he said. "That's awfully decent of you! I say, would you mind if I gave Fatty Wynn a whistle? It nearly broke his heart to see the grub go."

"Ha, ha! Whistle him up, by all means."

Figgins opened the window, and whistled the well-known signal-whistle of Figgins & Co. Fatty Wynn was at the study window opposite, and he heard the signal from afar.

Tom Merry was bundling out a heap of grub on the table. There was ample in the supplies laid in by the strikers to afford a dozen feeds, and a new supply was to



The seniors rapidly reduced the study to a state of havoc. Tom piled on top of him. Then the washtub was emptied over him.

arrive on the morrow, so the juniors could well afford to entertain their defeated enemies.

There was a sound of puffing breath on the stairs, and Fatty Wynn came panting into the study.

"Hallo!" he said. "What did you whistle for, Figgy? Is it a row or a feed?"

"A feed, my son!" said Tom Merry, slapping Fatty on the back with a thump that knocked out what little wind he had left after that pelt across the quadrangle, and made him sit down on the nearest chair with a prolonged gasp. "A feast, old kid! I hope you've brought your best appetite with you."

"Ye-es!" spluttered Fatty. "Don't you hit so beastly hard. I'm awfully hungry. It's two hours since I had tea, and I only had a pork-pie and a pudding and a few tarts,

THRILLS GALORE IN "TOM MERRY, THE BOY 'TEC!" NEXT WEEK!

and a couple of sausages, and some eggs, besides bread-and-butter. I'm as empty as a drum."

"Ha, ha! Then now's your chance to distinguish yourself."

And Fatty Wynn, to do him justice, did distinguish himself. The supplies were boundless, and Fatty's appetite nearly so. He travelled through pies and puddings and cakes and tarts at an astonishing rate. But the hospitality of the strikers of the School House was as boundless as Fatty's appetite, and they pressed him to eat more and more, till even Fatty had to cry a halt.

"Another tart, Fatty?"

"N-no, thanks!" said Fatty reluctantly.

"Just a little cake?"

"N-no; I'd better not."

"I should think you'd better not," said Figgins. "I'm not going to roll you home across the quadrangle like a

CHAPTER 7.

The Strike in Full Swing.

TOM MERRY was in a state of keen satisfaction. Everything was going on swimmingly. The consignment from Rylcombe had arrived, and the bribed and corrupted school porter, Taggles, had conveyed it safely to Tom's study.

That day was a Wednesday, which was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and so the strikers had plenty of time to carry out their plans. All books and papers and personal property, such as bats and nets and fishing-rods, having been bestowed in Study No. 6, Tom's airy and rather roomy study was left for use as a dining-room, laundry, and kitchen, and the strikers had accumulated a fearsome array of utensils.

There was a gigantic washing-tub, in which shirts and collars and underwear were soaked in a mixed mass, and on the table could be seen a pair of irons on a stand, with an ironing cloth, and on the mantelpiece was an imposing array of jars and packets containing soap, soda, starch, blue, and other materials for the laundry department.

Tom Merry had surveyed them rather doubtfully. D'Arcy, as head of that department, had made up the list, and insisted that not a single of the articles could be left out; but Tom wondered whether the swell of the School House knew exactly how to use them, and in what proportions they ought to be mixed, if they ought to be mixed at all.

D'Arcy was quite satisfied with his abilities as a washerwoman, but when Tom pulled a collar out of the tub and found it as blue as the summer sky, he couldn't help having his doubts.

"How are you going to get this white again?" he asked, holding it up to general inspection.

"Oh, that comes out in the ironin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't you be cwitical till the work is done, Tom Mewwy."

"I don't want to be cwitical," said Tom solemnly. "I have my faults, I know; but cwiticism is not one of them. I never was a cwitic. But if all that beautiful blue comes out in the ironing, I'll—I'll eat it."

"Well, it's your own collah, so you can eat it if you like," said Arthur Augustus. "Don't wowwy me when I'm busay, deah boy."

"Certainly not. But what are you shoving all that soda in the tub for?"

"Don't you know that you have to put soda in the watah to make the things clean?" said Arthur Augustus, with a superior smile.

"Yes; but not a whole pound packet."

"I think that's about wight."

"And—my hat!—what's all that starch for?"

"That's to make the collahs stiff, of course."

Tom scratched his curly head thoughtfully.

"Well, I admit I don't know much about washing clothes," he said, "but I'd almost swear that the starch oughtn't to go in along with the rest at this stage."

D'Arcy sniffed.

"If you know more about washin' than I do, Tom Mewwy, you had bettah become head of this department!" he exclaimed.

"Not at all. As I said, I don't want to be cwitical," said Tom; "but I can't help thinking you've been a bit too previous with that starch."

"You'll see," said D'Arcy.

Tom crossed over to Blake, who was in charge of the fireplace and the cooking utensils and provisions. Blake had an enormous fire going, and as the afternoon was warm, the heat of the study was enough to overcome any but Hottentots and schoolboys. A huge kettle occupied one hob, filled with water on the boil, for D'Arcy declared that he must have a constant supply of hot water. He said washerwomen always had. On the other hob was a saucepan full of potatoes, from which a suspicious smell of burning was proceeding.

Blake was in his shirtsleeves, with his collar sticking to his neck. His face was of a lovely carnation hue. He was negotiating a frying-pan full of sausages and bacon, and also looking after a pan of toffee and another of cakes.

"How are you getting on?" asked Tom.

"First-rate!" gasped Blake.

"They're going in to dinner downstairs. We're not going down, of course."

"No; dinner will soon be ready here."

Gore put in his head at the door.

"Hallo, you chaps! Aren't you coming down to dinner?"

"No," said Tom.



Merry was hurled to the ground and the rest of the juniors were n, followed by a water-jug and anything else that was handy!

blessed barrel, Fatty Wynn! Chaps, you have done us down well, and we've enjoyed ourselves immensely. Haven't we, Fatty?"

"Ah-h-h-h!" said Fatty, casting up his eyes in ecstasy.

"Rather!" said Kerr. "It's been jolly. I think we'd better travel, though, or some rotten prefect will be coming to look for us with a cane!"

"We'll see you home," said Tom Merry, rising. "Come along, kids!"

The friendly focs sallied out of the School House in a body. Figgins & Co. were escorted to the door of the New House by the five School House juniors in the most amicable way. At the door they parted with many expressions of good will, and Figgins & Co. looked out of their study window to wave a last farewell.

"Mr. Lathom told me to ask you."

"Tell Mr. Lathom, with our compliments, that we can't stand the grub, and we're going to dine in our own quarters, with his kind permission."

Gore grinned.

"You're making a fine smother here."

"Oh, you get out!"

"Certainly. I don't know what the place is like where bad boys go, but I should think it was very like this study," said Gore; and he vanished.

"It is rather warm," said Blake, looking round. "But it's really all the nicer when you get accustomed to it."

"Yes-es," said Tom. "I'm getting peckish. How long do you think the dinner will be, Blake?"

"Well, the sausages are nearly done," said Blake; "the bacon will want some more time. I'm afraid the cakes haven't begun to cook yet; but we can leave them for tea."

"Of course we can. What about the toffee?"

"I think it's got a little burnt; we had better give that away, I think. The potatoes are all right."

Tom Merry looked into the saucepan.

"They niff as if they were getting burnt, Blake. Have you enough water in it?"

"Well, there was enough water to start with," said Blake, looking perplexed. "But, somehow, there doesn't seem to be enough now, though I've added a jugful. I'm not quite used to cooking potatoes, except baking them in their skins. Perhaps I shoved in rather too many for a start. But you have to learn these things, you know."

"Shall I dig 'em out for you?"

"Perhaps you'd better. The saucepan won't hold any more water, and the potatoes on top don't seem to be done. Perhaps those underneath are finished."

Tom Merry turned the potatoes out into a dish. There was a terrific burst of steam and smell, and half the saucepanful came out, the rest sticking inside. The potatoes seemed to have run into a solid lump. At the top they were underdone, but farther down they were of a deep brown hue, deepening to a dead black at the bottom of the saucepan.

The smell that proceeded from the saucepan was something abominable, and, added to the steam from D'Arcy's washtub, and the scent of the cooking sausages and the burning toffee, it made the study one of the most odorous places imaginable. Blake looked at the potatoes in dismay.

"I say, you don't know how to turn potatoes out!" he exclaimed severely. "They oughtn't to look like that."

"It's the way you've cooked 'em," said Tom.

Blake snorted.

"Oh, don't try to shove it on me, just because you don't know how to turn potatoes out of a saucepan!" he exclaimed. "A fat lot of good you are to help a chef, and no mistake! Never mind. The sausages will be all right, anyway. Oh, my only hat!"

There was a fearful buzz of splutter from the fire. In turning to look at those unfortunate potatoes Blake had unconsciously tilted the frying-pan a little, and now the grease had boiled over the edge into the glowing coals. Blake snatched at the pan in a hurry, and, of course, sent a fresh splash of grease over the side.

The sizzle and splutter was simply terrific. Blake jerked the pan off the fire and lowered it on to the hearth.

"I—I think they'll do now!" he gasped.

"Yes, yes!" said Tom. "For goodness' sake let that awful fire go down! We shall be roasted alive! Knock off now, D'Arcy; dinner-time."

D'Arcy drew his bare arms with relief from the washtub. He wiped away the soap-suds, and let his sleeves down.

"I am glad of a rest," he said. "It's awfully hard work, you know. I think Tom Merry had better finish that little lot after dinnah, while I get on with the ironing."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "I'm willing. Come and grub now."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I must hang some of the things out to dry first, and they'll dry while we're dinin'," he said. "Don't be gweedy. Lend me a hand."

The juniors all lent a hand. A clothes-line had been rigged up across the study, and upon this the washing was now hung out to dry. Herries was manfully wringing out the articles one by one, and Manners, Tom Merry, and Blake pegged them out on the line. D'Arcy stood by, directing them. The chief of the laundry department had laid in a gross of pegs, so they were not lacking, but space for the drying was a little circumscribed.

"That's enough," said Arthur Augustus at last. "The west will want a little more soaking. It's impos to hang them all out at once, dear boys. The heat of the room will soon dry these, and aftah dinner we will wing out

the west and hang them up also. I think we shall turn out somethin' weally nobby, don't you know?"

Tom Merry looked thoughtfully at the clothes hanging out to dry. The heat of the room would certainly dry them quickly enough, but the blacks that were sailing about thickly were not likely to improve their colour. And as he looked at the shirts and collars which were hanging up with the pants and vests and socks Tom could not help thinking that D'Arcy had been too liberal with the blue, and that the starch had gone in at too early a stage in the proceedings.

However, Tom Merry was not one to find fault, and D'Arcy had done his best. They sat down to dinner. A meal earned by the sweat of the brow is said to be the most satisfactory kind of a meal, and certainly the five juniors had worked hard since morning school.

And as the dinner was an hour late they were hungry enough for it. But even Blake had to confess that it was not exactly a success. The sausages were nearly done, it is true; so nearly that it was practically the same thing, Blake declared, and no one liked to dissent. But the bacon certainly wasn't finished. Blake said that underdone bacon was good for the digestion, a statement which passed uncontradicted, but there were incredulous glances exchanged among the diners.

The juniors eked out the dinner with cakes and biscuits and apples and oranges, and, after all, they were pretty well satisfied. Blake said it wasn't a bad start. When he got his hand in, as it were, things would go better.

Tom Merry rose from the table.

"Chaps, we've had a jolly good feed, in spite of the cooking—I mean because of the cooking," he corrected hastily. "Now is the time to work. Buckle to!"

The juniors buckled to.

Herries was set to taking in the clothes that were already dry, while Tom Merry went to the washtub.

D'Arcy put the irons on the fire to heat them.

The fire had gone down a great deal and there wasn't much left to heat the irons with, but D'Arcy said there was no hurry.

He sat in the only armchair and stretched out his legs and looked at the latest volume of the "Holiday Annual" while the irons were getting hot.

"I say, lazybones," exclaimed Tom Merry, looking up with a perspiring brow from the washtub, "do you call that work?"

"My deah boy, I'm waiting for the irons to get hot."

"How long do you think it will take?"

"Not more than anothah hour, I hope."

"And you're going to sit there all the time?"

"Well, I can't do two things at once," said Arthur Augustus. "If I am to do the ironing I must give it my whole attention. It's very diff, anyway."

"It's very what?"

"Diff, deah boy—diff," said Arthur Augustus. "Too diff for me unless I devote all my time to it, I am afraid. Wait till you see the collars I turn out, and then you will see that I have done my share of the work."

"Oh rats!" said Tom Merry.

However, he went on with the washing, and Herries lent him a hand. Shirts and collars and pants were washed and wrung out in a masterly style; and Blake, looking on, said that they were getting on swimmingly.

Too swimmingly, Tom thought, when a great splash of water went over the side of the tub and joined the flood that was already on the floor.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "The whole study will get or swimmingly, and we shall have to swim ourselves, deah boys, if you're not more careful with that watah!"

"It's hard work," said Tom.

"Of course it is. We can't go on strike without trouble," said Blake. "Don't start grumbling, when it was your own idea."

"I'm not grumbling. Any more things to go into this blessed tub?"

"Yes," said Manners, bringing up an armful of soiled things. "There you are. That's the lot."

"My hat! And enough, too!"

"I'll slip into it now for a bit," said Manners.

The work progressed. Kettle after kettle of boiling water was added to the washtub, and reckless supplies of soap and soda and starch and blue. Blake humorously suggested a little pepper and salt, and was frowned upon by the washer.

The clouds of steam pouring from the study windows naturally attracted attention, and the School House juniors had already noticed that the five had missed their dinner in the Hall.

Curiosity was strongly excited, and fellows began to gather under the window, calling up all sorts of inquiries, and a crowd collected in the passage outside the study.

Gore opened the door and looked in.

"Hallo! What are you giddy lunatics doing?" he asked. Tom Merry looked up from the washtub.

Gore was at the open door, and behind were a crowd of curious juniors eager to know what it was all about.

"It's the giddy strike," said Mellish.

"Getting on nicely?" asked Gore. "Fancy Tom Merry as a washerwoman!"

"How's that?" said Tom cheerfully, flicking a double handful of suds into the face of the humorous Gore.

Gore gave a yell.

"You silly ass, you've made me all wet!"

"Go hon!" said Tom.

Blake shoved the door shut.

"We don't want all those silly donkeys staring at us!" he exclaimed. "They seem to think there's something funny about this strike."

"What rot!" said Tom. "We're in deadly earnest!"

"Of course we are. We'll show everybody who's who and what's what!" exclaimed Blake emphatically.

"And which is which?" asked Manners.

"Oh, dry up!"

"I wish I could," said Manners, with a rueful glance at his shirtsleeves and trousers, which were simply soaked with soap and water. "I'm afraid it will be a long time before I get dry again."

"More hot water here," said Tom Merry.

Herries brought the steaming kettle. Herries had been busily employed for some time, filling and refilling that kettle from the tap in the lavatory.

He began to pour the water into the tub.

"Say when!" he exclaimed. "I say, the blessed handle's got hot this journey! I had to stick the thing down on the fire so. Oh, my hat!"

Herries was using Blake's cricket-cap by way of a kettle-holder, but he was feeling the heat of the iron handle through that!

"Look out!" he yelled.

Tom Merry and Manners jumped away from the washtub.

Only just in time!

Herries dropped the hot kettle, and it went souse into the tub in the midst of the soaking garments.

"You ass!" roared Tom Merry. "Look what you've done!"

"I'm looking," said Herries. "Can't see that that will do much good, though. I couldn't help it; the beastly thing was so hot."

"Lot of good washing clothes if you're going to stick a black kettle on top of them!" said Tom Merry, in disgust.

"What's the good of grumbling when a thing can't be helped?" demanded Herries. "I'll take it away again. You've got plenty of hot water, anyway."

There happened to be a boathook in the study, and Herries hooked the kettle out of the tub and slung it back to the grate. A few drops that happened to be remaining in it splashed over D'Arcy's outstretched legs.

Arthur Augustus gave a wild yell and leaped into the air.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Herries looked at him in amazement.

"What on earth are you doing that for, D'Arcy?"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Is it a new system of gymnastics, or are you doing an acrobatic act on one leg?" asked Herries curiously.

D'Arcy was clapping his scalded leg and hopping on the other.

"Oh, you scalded me!"

"Oh, it couldn't have been much!" said Herries. "What a fearful fuss you make about a trifle! A little hot water don't hurt anybody!"

"Ow, you silly ass!"

"What a fuss to make about a little burn!" said Herries, filling the kettle again from the jug. He lifted it cautiously, with a pair of Tom Merry's socks inside the cricket-cap to make the kettle-holder thicker. "I shall have to shift these irons, Gussy, if we're going to get the kettle hot again."

He tried to hook the irons out of the way with the poker, and his hand came into contact with one of them.

They did not look very hot, but they felt hot, and Herries gave a whoop like a Red Indian and dropped the kettle.

There was a crash and a splash in the grate.

"Woorrooh!" yelled Herries, clapping his burned hand to his mouth and sucking it frantically. "Ow! Oh! Yah! Ugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "What a fuss to make over a little burn, Hewwies!"

"Nice mess you've made there!" said Blake. "Gussy, your irons are hot enough now, and if you don't start doing some work I'll sling some soapsuds down the back of your neck!"

"I'm weady!" said D'Arcy. "Dwy up!"

D'Arcy handled the irons very carefully.

He folded up a pair of cycling stockings to hold them with. Those stockings got rather scorched, but they didn't belong to D'Arcy, so that was a matter of minor importance.

He put the irons in the stand on the table and prepared for business.

Some of the collars and shirts could be considered dry enough for ironing, and D'Arcy had quite a pile ready for him.

He adjusted his eyeglass and started.

The study door opened and Mellish put his head in. He was grinning.

"I say, you chaps—"

"Get out!" said Blake.

"But I've come to tell you—"

"If you've got anything to say, out with it sharp and clear!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, that's what I call gratitude! Mr. Latham is coming up to see you. He knows there's something on, and he's going to see why you didn't have any dinner."

"Let him come!"

"Ha, ha! He'll have something to say when he sees all this muck!"

"Let him say it!"

"You're not afraid?"

"Rats! What is there to be afraid of? We're quite within our rights in forming a juniors' union and going on a regular custom, and we're not going to be behind the strike!" said Tom Merry disdainfully. "Everybody goes on strike nowadays when he's dissatisfied with anything. It's times. Down with the tyrants!"

"Ha, ha! Tell Latham that!"

"Oh, you travel!"

Tom sent a wet sock towards Mellish, and Mellish travelled. The door closed again. The strikers looked at one another.

"I say, I wonder what Latham will think of this?" said Herries.

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Let him think what he likes. He's not our Housemaster. A silly Form master has no right to interfere in the studies. Let him rip!"

"That's it," said Blake. "We're standing up for our rights—"

"I'm sitting down," said Manners, who had taken D'Arcy's place in the easy-chair.

"Rats! As I said, we're standing up for our rights, and we're not afraid to let anybody see us at honest toil. We shall just keep straight on, and if the Latham-bird pokes his nose in here he can just see us as we are. There's nothing to bother about."

"Right-ho!"

And the work proceeded.

Tom Merry slaved away at the washtub, and D'Arcy proceeded with the ironing.

Arthur Augustus had said that the blue would come out in the ironing. It didn't seem to, but a good deal of brown went into the linen to keep it company, for the iron was very hot, and D'Arcy burned the collars at an alarming rate.

But he was not dismayed.

He stuck to the work gallantly, while a fearful smoke and smell rose from the ironing, and the collars assumed all sorts of weird shapes and hues.

Tap!

It was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" called out Tom Merry, looking up from the steaming washtub.

The door opened, and Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, looked into the study.

(Continued on next page.)

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CHAPTER 8.

How the Strike Ended.

TOM MERRY bowed politely over the washtub to the master of the Fourth.

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

"Ah—er—yes!" gasped Mr. Lathom, in amazement. "What on earth does all this mean, Merry? What are you doing at that washtub?"

"Washing shirts, sir."

"What are you washing shirts for?"

"To get 'em clean, sir."

"Er—certainly! But, I mean, why should you do so?"

"We're not satisfied with the laundry department in the School House, sir."

"It is simply dreadful, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "They nevah turn out a collah fit to wear! We can't stand it, sir. It's simply impos!"

"And you think you will improve matters by doing your own washing?" asked Mr. Lathom, trying hard not to laugh.

"We're trying, sir."

"It isn't only the washing, sir," said Blake. "It's the grub. The grub has gone down frightfully—"

"Yes, I've seen you putting some of it down!" murmured Manners.

"Shut up, Manners, when your uncle's talking! It's the grub, sir. We're supplying ourselves with grub now and cooking it in the study."

"Oh, that cooking!" murmured Manners.

"Dry up, Manners! We want to be independent of the house supplies!" said Tom Merry loftily. "You know the

proverb, sir: 'If you want a thing well done, you must do it yourself'?"

"That's our idea, sir," said Blake. "I don't suppose Mr. Railton will object. It will take a lot of work off his shoulders."

Mr. Lathom seemed to be struggling with some internal pain.

"As a matter of fact, sir," said Tom Merry, "we're on strike!"

"That's it," said Blake. "We're on strike till the grub improves and they send up our washing fit for us to wear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Lathom could hold in his amusement no longer. He laughed till he cried, and his spectacles fell off, and he had to grope for them and put them on again.

"We haven't got our hand in yet, sir," said Tom Merry. "We shall soon be going on like a house on fire."

"Gussy is going on like that already," murmured Manners.

And, indeed, the smoke and the smell of burning from the ironing-table was very thick. Mr. Lathom retreated through the doorway.

"Ha, ha, ha! You have made a great mess there, my boys. I am afraid that it will soak through into the rooms underneath."

And Mr. Lathom walked away. The juniors heard his irresponsible chuckle floating back along the corridor as he went. They looked at each other rather uneasily. Persecution they could have faced with the spirit of Early Christian martyrs, and they were prepared for it; but to have their strike taken as a huge joke was rather disconcerting.

"I don't see what he wanted to cackle about like that," said Tom Merry. "I suppose they think this is simply a wheeze, and we shall get tired of it. Of course, there's going to be nothing of the kind."

"Of course not," said Blake. "After all, it's jolly not to be interfered with. Let 'em laugh and grow fat, if they like. The strike's going ahead, and we shall be in splendid working order by the time Railton comes back—and he won't care to interfere. I admit things have gone a little awry at first."

"That was only to be expected; but, by Jove, we shall have to blue a lot of money on new shirts and collars," said Tom. "Are there any of them that you haven't burnt, Gussy?"

"Yes, I think there's one," said Arthur Augustus, looking round him. "I can't catch sight of it at this moment, but I think there was one, dear boy."

"Ha, ha! How are you going out in a burnt collar, Adolphus?"

"I haven't done any of my own collars yet," explained D'Arcy. "I started on Blake's, and then I did Mannah's, and now I'm doing yours, Tom Mewwy. I hope I shall have the iron going better by the time I do my own collars!"

"You started on mine?" howled Blake. "You don't mean to say that all those burnt rags belong to me?"

"Not all," replied Arthur Augustus, ironing away. "Some of them belong to Mannah's and some to Tom Mewwy. The iron is getting better now."

Blake and Mannah's exchanged a glance, and made a simultaneous step towards the cheerful ironer.

"I say, don't row," said Herries, who had been looking thoughtful. "It's occurred to me that there's something in what the Lathom-bird said."

"What's that?" asked Blake.

"Why, about Knox's study under this. You know, Knox is the most ill-tempered beast in the whole School House!"

"Well, I know he is; but he can't be in his study now. He'll be out on the cricket-field, practising with the Sixth."

"Yes; but I remember noticing that he had a lot of photographic prints pinned out over his table, and if the water's gone through—"

"Ha, ha! It will improve his prints, and no mistake!"

"There will be a row," said Herries.

"Can't be helped. Lock the door!" exclaimed Tom Merry. Blake jumped to the door and locked it—only just in time. There came a terrific kick on the panels outside.

"Open this door!" It was the voice of Knox.

"Rats!"

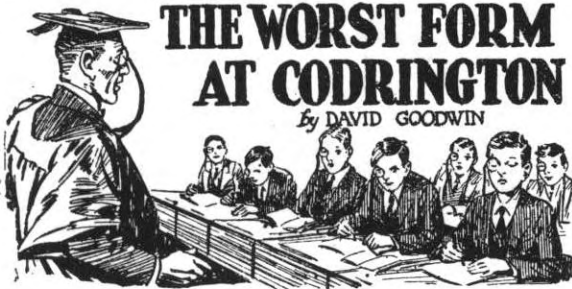
"Open this door!"

"Go and eat coke!"

That was enough for Knox. He lifted his foot and crashed his boot against the lock, breaking it into pieces. The door flew open, and Knox rushed in, with three burly Sixth-Formers at his heels.

The seniors seized the youngsters promptly. The juniors struggled gamely, but they had no chance, and they were soon secured.

"I'll teach you to swamp my study!" shouted Knox. "I hear you're on strike. Well, this is where we do some



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THE WINGER.



CHAPTER 1. The Winger Calls.

LONDON rang with the news. Flaming headlines in the newspapers shouted to an amazed public the latest exploit of the Winger.

Everyone, from the highest official at Scotland Yard, to the boys who sold the newspapers, was asking himself the question:

"Who is the Winger?"

A hundred hogsheads of very valuable old wine had been stolen from one of London's riverside wine vaults. Not a trace had been left as to how this daring robbery had taken place.

The hundred ungainly hogsheads had simply vanished, and all that was known about it was that a Customs officer had suddenly come across a strange figure, clad in black, tight-fitting garments like tights, outside the bonded warehouse where the wines were stored. The officer had challenged this eerie figure, who instantly turned on him and fired at his arm with a silent pistol.

Hence the name the puzzled public had given the sinister crook. The man clad in shining skin-tight garments had winged the Customs officer, then dived headlong into the Albert Docks, and was never seen again.

Who was the Winger? Was it him the Customs officer had seen, or was that man merely one of the Winger's gang? Scotland Yard buzzed with excitement. Every riverside police station was alive and on the alert, wondering where this new crook would strike next.

Detective-Inspector Hull, of the Limehouse Reach Riverside Police Station, sat at his desk, his brow creased to a permanent frown.

Scated over the bogey stove in the same office was Snap Fane, a Cockney boy of about fifteen, an orphan, yet with hundreds of pals, both in the Police Force and in London's underworld.

Snap's face seemed to wear an eternal grin as he warmed his slim hands before the glowing stove. Born and bred in Dockland, Snap was as sharp as a razor. His eyes were green as the sea, and keen as a needle.

Yet, in spite of his slim frame and fine, ladylike hands, Snap's knuckles had left many a bruise on bigger and tougher lads than him at the Union Jack Club.

Snap could box with the best of them, and when it came to swimming, Snap was as much at home on the Thames as he was wandering along the dark wharves which fringe London's mighty river.

Often of a summer's night Snap would float idly on his back down on the ebb tide, watching the many ships gliding past him with threshing screws. And when the weather was cold, one could find Snap afloat in a tiny craft he had made for himself.

Snap's boat was an affair of planks, fitted with two small paddles which he worked with his feet, like pedalling a push-bike. And, swimming or paddling, Snap saw more of the shadowy crooks who infest the Thames than any waterside policeman ever saw.

Most of the old lags he knew by sight and name. Newer ones soon came under his notice, his sharp eyes detecting the crook under the assumed disguise of a ship's officer, or a seemingly idle stevedore.

But the Winger!

"If I could get me peepers on him just once, guv'nor, we'd get him," he grinned, looking over his shoulder at Detective Hull. "Gosh! Fancy gettin' away with a hundred hogsheads of wine!"

Inspector Hull rose and strode across the office.

"If you could lay hands on the Winger, Snap, you'd be smarter than the whole of Scotland Yard," he growled.

"That ain't saying much, anyway," chuckled Snap.

Detective-Inspector Hull glared at the boy's cheeky face, then shrugged his shoulders and eyed the tiny, portable radio set on his desk.

"You're all right on small trails, such as detecting smugglers, Snap, but the Winger is a different proposition. He's the smartest crook we've ever had to deal with, and dangerous, too. He winged that Customs officer, and—"

He broke off suddenly. Snap sprang to his feet, and both of them stood staring at the radio set on the desk.

"Hallo, Sergeant Hull. Hallo, there!" came a small, thin voice from the instrument.

Snap flew to the thing and picked it up. It was one of the very latest instruments supplied to the police, and which could be carried in the pocket.

"Hallo, there, Hull! Are you asleep or dead, man?" said the voice again.

The cool, incisive accents cut the warm atmosphere of

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THE WINGER BAGS THE BULLION!
But Snap Fane bags it back again!

the office like a knife, sending electric thrills down Snap's spine.

"The Winger calling, Sergeant Hull!" came the voice again. "I want to know what berth the Calshot Castle is going to, please?"

"The Winger," whispered Snap, snatching the instrument closer.

Detective-Inspector Hull took it from him at once.

"Who's that wanting to know about the Calshot Castle?" he asked.

A short laugh, then:

"Oh, is that the Limehouse Police Station?" asked the cool, refined voice. "Good! How are you, Mr. Hull? Rather a rotten night, isn't it?"

"Who're you?" demanded Hull grimly.

"Oh, the jolly old Winger, as London calls me!" came the cool reply. "Can you tell me where the Calshot Castle will berth, please?"

"What's the game, Winger?" growled Hull into the transmitter.

"Same trouble, old thing," came the cool answer. "Awfully short of ready money, and I know the Castle boat's got simply tons of it aboard. I want some of it. Hallo—"

The voice ceased. In its place there came a series of long and short buzzes which kept going for about two and a half minutes. Then:

"Right-ho, Hull, don't bother!" came the Winger's icy voice once again. "That was one of my scouts giving me the necessary information."

The voice ceased, but for three minutes afterwards those soft buzzes purred from the receiver, then they stopped, leaving Snap and Sergeant Hull staring at each other.

"I copied that buzzer signal down, guv'nor," grinned Snap. "But it ain't in any known Morse code. Must be the Winger's private code."

Sergeant Hull took no notice. He was on the direct line with Scotland Yard, the frown on his face like a thunder-cloud.

"The Winger called up on the police wave length, sir," he barked into the transmitter. "Asked about the Calshot Castle. Says he wants some of the money she carries. Wanted to know which berth she is going—"

"I know—I know, Hull!" cut in the Yard testily. "We got his signals, too, and we heard you and Snap Fane talking. Warn all river stations. Get every launch and boat out and go down yourself to meet the Castle boat. Better board her, and go into her strong-room. Sit on the cases of bullion, if necessary. The Winger mustn't get away with it this time."

Sergeant Hull dropped the receiver, and cut out the set.

"Gosh, what if the Winger got that message, too, guv'nor!" cried Snap. "He would if he happened to be tuned in on our wave length."

"What could he do, anyway?" snapped Hull, snatching up the ordinary telephone and rapping out orders by the dozen to the riverside police stations.

From Westminster to Tilbury the riverside police got busy. Radio sets were tuned in to the Winger's wave-length. Dark-painted launches glided away from riverside steps, manned with armed policemen.

Sergeant Hull tuned in to Scotland Yard on the radio set.

"Okay, chief!" he called clearly. "The Calshot Castle's passed the Edinburgh Channel, and will be met personally by me east of Tilbury."

"Then we shall meet, Sergeant Hull," purred the cool voice of the Winger. "Cheerio! And many thanks for helping me!"

Sergeant Hull's face went scarlet, and his jaw fell slowly as there came an unbroken series of buzzer messages in code.

"The Winger calling up his gang," grinned Snap.

"I know it, you young ass!" snapped Hull irritably. "Get out of here! I'm going to meet the Castle boat."

The atmosphere buzzed with official messages on short wave-lengths. London was awake officially. Not if Scotland Yard could stop him would the Winger rob the Calshot Castle. The river-banks were lined. Dozens of pairs of eyes searched the waters of the Thames.

Policemen at dock gates stopped comers in and questioned them. Off Tilbury two police launches awaited the coming of Sergeant Hull.

"Gim mee a lift to my craft, guv'nor," asked Snap, as they left the office. "I'm going to work on me own."

They sprang aboard police launch No. 008, and sped down the river. Somewhere between Edinburgh Channel and Tilbury, the great South African liner was creeping nearer, carrying in her strong-room one million sterling in sovereigns from Cape Town to London.

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The Winger was after some of that money. Scotland Yard was out to stop him. Yet the reckless crook had even been so careless as to warn the police of his intentions.

Crouching in the bows of launch No. 008, Snap Fane stared across the sullen waters of the Thames. Suddenly he rose. The launch was speeding past a flotilla of moored lighters.

"See you later, boss!" he called to Sergeant Hull.

Without a splash Snap dropped overboard and began to swim to his cockleshell boat which lay among the lighters. Sergeant Hull took no notice. In fact, he never even saw Snap go over the side, for he was talking to his men.

"The Winger's getting cocky, Jameson!" he growled angrily. "The confounded cheek of the blighter, calling us up like—"

"Help! Help! Help!"

"What's that?"

Every officer aboard the launch stared out into the darkness.

Again that fearful cry for help.

"Small boat waterlogged off the port bow, sir!" shouted the look-out.

A barked command from Sergeant Hull. The 008 swung and slowed down until she was heading for a black object which was drifting down on the ebb tide.

Another barked order, and the twin screws of the launch drew her neatly alongside a rowing-boat full of water, in which stood a man with a face as black as a negro's.

"What the blazes are you doing afloat in a crock like—Ugh!"

Sergeant Hull got no further. As if by magic six inky black figures rose from the greasy waters of the waterlogged boat and swarmed aboard the launch.

A series of thuds; a gasp and choked gurgles. Seven figures clad in shining black, skin-tight rubber suits gavo six police officers the k.o. in as many seconds.

"Full speed ahead!" purred a silky voice from a slender shadow in shining black. "Strip those fools and get into their rigs."

Dragging the unconscious body of Sergeant Hull down into the small after-cabin, the Winger stripped off his clothes, and then put them on himself. With a mirror and small box of grease-paint and some false whiskers, he soon transformed his own face until it exactly resembled the face of the police-sergeant.

"Dope them well, Blake, and put them down the fore-peak!" he ordered crisply. "Full speed ahead!"

Snap Fane, clambering aboard his paddle-boat, had heard the cry for help. Dashing the water from his eyes, he saw the shadowy shape of the police-launch stop for a few seconds beside the waterlogged boat, then go chugging on its way.

"Queer!" he muttered, paddling full speed towards the boat.

Swiftly he examined the rowing-boat, then looked after the retreating shadow of launch No. 008. He eyed the waterlogged boat again, then, with a muttered exclamation, paddled for all he was worth after the launch.

"You never know!" he muttered grimly. "It might have been the Winger up to some of his tricks."

How near he was to being correct Snap did not realise. Neither did the Winger, steering 008 downstream, dream that the cutest boy on the Thames was coming after him.

CHAPTER 2.

The Winger Strikes.

"CALSHOT CASTLE rounding the bend, chief!" hailed the look-out in the Winger's captured launch.

A touch of the helm, a crisp order, and the police launch shot past two other official launches who hailed him. Three times the Winger had been challenged, and each time he had given the correct answer.

"Fine things these police radio sets, Blake!" he chuckled. "That is, so long as the idiots send out their signals en clair."

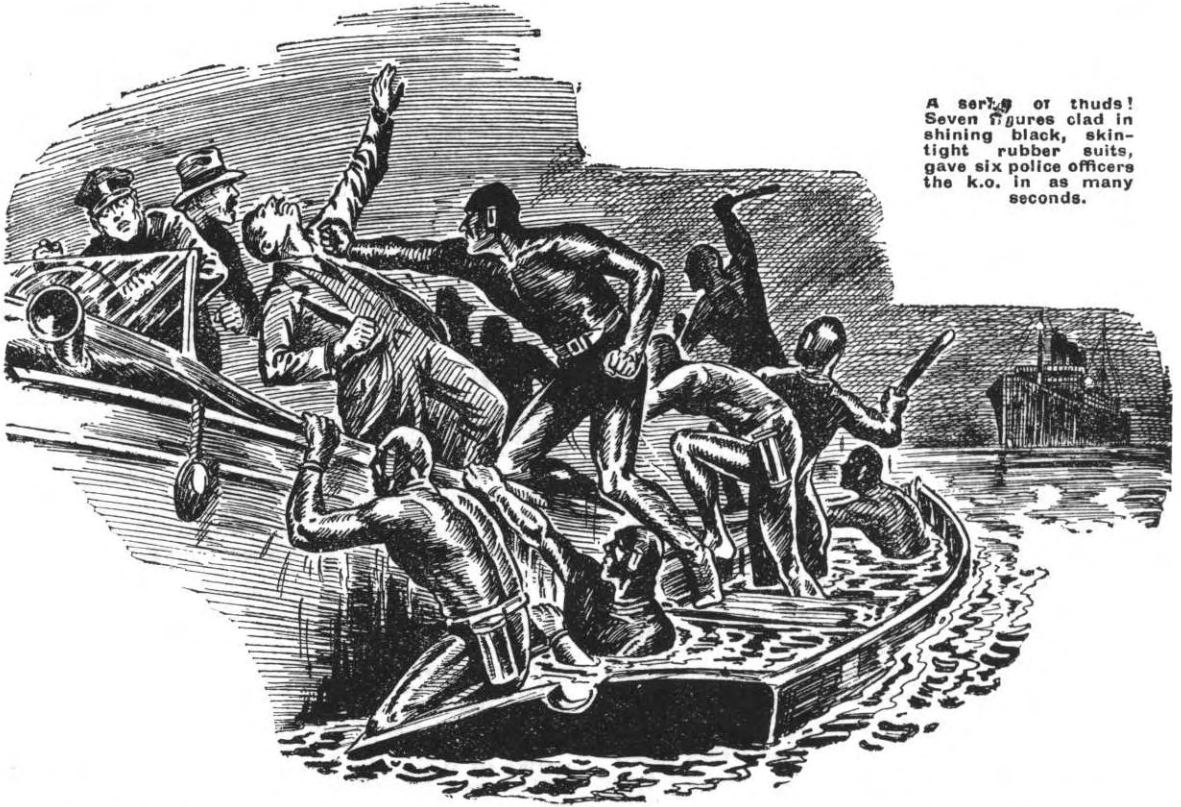
Down on the incoming liner tore the launch, swung to the tide, and steamed parallel with the great liner.

"Calshot Castle, ahoy!" hailed the Winger musically. "Lower the ladder, please, captain! I am Sergeant Hull, of the river police, and I have orders to board you!"

A tinkle of the telegraph. The great ship slowed down, and an accommodation-ladder creaked its platform to the water's edge.

"Blake, you come aboard with me," whispered the Winger. "Number Three, take the launch and steam astern off the starboard quarter. Listen-in for signals on the usual wave-length."

A minute later, disguised as Sergeant Hull, the mysterious



A series of thuds! Seven figures clad in shining black, skin-tight rubber suits, gave six police officers the k.o. in as many seconds.

Winger was shaking hands with the burly captain on the navigating bridge.

"I wish to speak privately to you, captain," he said gruffly. "Can you spare me a minute or two in your cabin? It's very important."

"Well, sergeant, what's all this fuss about?" asked the skipper when they were alone in his cabin. "I got a wireless a few minutes ago to say that a band of crooks are after the bullion in my strong-room. Perfectly ridiculous!"

"That's right, captain!" the Winger asserted grimly, twisting his false moustache. "It's a new crook known as the Winger. He's after your gold, and will stop at nothing to get some of it."

"But it's impossible!" exclaimed the captain. "No crook could enter my strong-room."

The Winger shook his head gravely. "Nothing is impossible to him, sir," he answered. "In fact, he is so infernally clever that Scotland Yard has ordered me to hide myself in your strong-room. I will take the purser in with me, and I shall not lose sight of those boxes of gold until they are safe in the bank's vans."

"Have you a warrant?" demanded the captain.

"Here it is. Now, will you send for the purser, please?"

"But—"

"Orders from Scotland Yard, sir!" cut in the Winger sternly. "They must be obeyed, or I cannot hold myself responsible."

The captain shrugged his shoulders and pressed a button. A step outside the cabin door, and the purser entered.

"I am Sergeant Hull, sir," said the Winger, with a smile.

"Anything wrong, sergeant?" asked the purser.

The Winger smiled and twisted his false moustache.

"Well, sir, I have orders from the Yard to keep guard inside your strong-room," he said. "There's a chap called the Winger who is after your gold."

"Well, it certainly sounds rich, sergeant!" laughed the purser. "Still, orders are orders, so come along."

A black shadow drifting alongside Launch 008 slowly raised its dripping head until its eyes were level with the gunwale. It was Snap Fane. His abandoned paddle-boat was drifting down on the tide, for as soon as the Calshot Castle had appeared the Cockney boy had dropped overboard and waited for her to pass him.

Eagerly his keen eyes scanned the faces of the supposed police officers manning the launch; then he lowered himself down again, and let himself be towed alongside.

"Gosh, those chaps aren't the cops!" he mused to himself. "That chap at the helm isn't Jameson!"

Suddenly he started. His ear was pressing against the bow plates of the launch. A dull thumping sounded through the plates.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Snap looked puzzled for a moment, then grinned like an ape.

"Hully smoke, I've got it!" he gasped. "That water-logged boat was full of Wingers! They boarded the launch and bagged it, and the cops are now prisoners in the fore-peak."

He risked all in another look along her decks. Five men, all dressed like the plain-clothes officers who had boarded 008 at Limehouse were there. But those were not the faces of the officers. Every man aboard the launch had a face exactly alike.

"Skin masks and false eyebrows," Snap reasoned. "Hallo! What's up now?"

The engine revolutions increased. The launch drew closer under the overhanging counter of the Calshot Castle.

"Am in strong-room. Give me five minutes, then open the door," said a thin voice which Snap instantly recognised.

A thrill ran down his spine. That was the Winger's voice speaking over the radio. He was in the liner's strong-room already.

How he had got there Snap had not the faintest idea, although if he had had time he might have made a good guess.

That the Winger was in the strong-room with the gold was certain.

Swiftly the boy thought and planned. Then he dived and swam like an otter under water until he came up alongside the liner, which had now stopped to pick up another pilot.

A rope hanging over the side served its purpose, and before the Calshot Castle was under way again, Snap Fane was hiding in the shadows of her bulwarks, watching his chance.

Then, like a shadow, he darted below, along the between decks to the place where the strong-room was.

Suddenly he stopped and darted behind some luggage. Ahead of him was a man, also in police uniform, and he was opening the strong-room door.

For a split second Snap saw the man's face. Like those in the boat, it was expressionless because it wore a skin-tight mask and false eyebrows.

The strong-room door opened. A man came out—a man

dressed in the uniform of the purser, and looking exactly like that officer.

"All right, Blake," said the bogus officer. "I've drugged the purser, and filled two sacks with quids. There ought to be five or six thousand there. Carry one, and I'll take the other. Time to clear out."

Snap glared. That voice!

"The Winger!" he gasped, aghast.

With a jangle, two sacks of gold were dragged from the strong-room. Blake shouldered one, the Winger took the other. Then, closing the strong-room door, they started aft along the between decks.

They passed within two yards of where Snap hid. The between decks were deserted, for everyone was on deck, watching the scenery.

If Snap rushed up there he would lose precious minutes in telling who he was. Also there was the chance that nobody would believe him.

To lose moments might mean to lose five or six thousand pounds.

The Winger and his Number Two faded from sight aft. Too late for Snap to seek help. He must act alone.

What could he do?

"Keep 'em in sight, anyway," he muttered, and crept swiftly along in their tracks.

He was nearly right aft when suddenly a man stepped from a side alleyway right in his path. A man dressed like the purser, but with the silky, refined voice of the dreaded Winger.

"Ah, Snap Fane, so you followed us, did you?" smiled the crook.

"Yes, and I'm gonna nab you, too, Winger," barked Snap, looking around eagerly for assistance. "Here, what's the game, mister?"

The Winger's hand shot out. There came a sharp hissing noise, and some spray showered over Snap's face and in his eyes.

A powerful scent overpowered his senses. The figure of the smiling Winger grew distorted. Snap reeled, and his knees gave way.

Instantly he realised his peril. The Winger had sprayed him with a pungent drug from a patent pistol.

He was losing his senses. The Winger was striding towards him.

Some buckets full of water hung in the fire rack close to Snap. Without hesitation he snatched one up and hurled the contents at the distorted face before him.

Shouts rang in his ears, mingling with a snarl from the Winger.

Snap heard only the beginning of it, for, seizing another fire bucket, he emptied the cold contents over his own head, and at the same time kicked out and dashed the bucket at the Winger.

"Look-out, chief, the police!" shouted another voice.

Gasping, yet with his wits swiftly returning, Snap looked around.

Men—policemen in uniform—were racing from forward along the between decks corridor. Aft of him the Winger and Blake were scooting like rabbits for an open mooring port in the stern.

Someone seized Snap and shook him. He blinked up into the face of a waterside policeman.

"The Winger!" shouted the man. "He's doped the purser and locked him in the strong-room. The Winger's got away with money. Have you seen him?"

Still gulping from the effects of the sprayed drug, Snap stuttered and pointed aft.

"Gone—Hull's launch—two bags of gold!" he panted.

The officer released his grip and roared a dozen orders to his men.

"Back to the launch!" he bellowed. "The Winger's afloat in Hull's boat."

Snap was left alone again. His senses were returning; but, still dazed, the daring Cockney lad lurched aft to the open mooring port and looked down.

Directly beneath him was the stolen launch. The Winger and Blake were climbing aft, and on her deck lay the two bags of sovereigns.

The cold night air revived Snap. Without hesitation he darted to the mooring porthole on the other side of the stern and dropped down into the inky waters overside.

"Cast off! Full speed ahead! Look-out, here they come!" snapped the icy cool voice of the Winger.

Dashing the water from his eyes, Snap looked around. Six crooks aboard 008 were staring forward along the starboard side. By their words he knew that Detective-Inspector Thomas, of Scotland Yard, the officer who had spoken to him a few seconds ago, was coming in a launch.

Two strokes and Snap got a grip on the rubbing streak

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of 008. The stolen launch was gathering speed, and, like a limp rag, it towed Snap alongside.

The Winger had succeeded again. Sheer daring and impudence had enabled him to enter the strong-room and help himself to as many sovereigns as he wished.

Desperately Snap hung on. While life lasted—not until his arms were torn from their sockets, would he let go.

CHAPTER 3.

Snap Saves the Swag.

"THEY'RE after us!" Snap caught the words as his head temporarily came out of the water.

The launch was speeding up. The strain on his arms was awful. Yet he clung on, his legs trailing within inches of the whizzing port screw of 008.

Again his head came clear of the water, and he managed to glance aft.

Two hundred yards downstream Detective Thomas' launch was bowling after the Winger.

"They're sending out radio messages, chief," shouted Blake from the after cabin.

"Two police launches putting out from Tilbury Dock, chief," came another shout from the bows.

The helm of the Winger's boat flew over. Heeling heavily to starboard the launch sheered straight for a bunch of dumb lighters which lay moored fifty yards off the mud banks.

That heel gave Snap a chance. For two seconds he lay against the bilge keel of 008. The strain on his arms was eased, and with a jerk he got his fingers over the low gunwale.

"Got to disappear, Blake," he heard the Winger snap. "Hang the police, and that kid, Snap Fane, too! I'll get him for this!"

Snap hauled himself slowly up. Within two feet of him stood the Winger, and Blake, his first lieutenant, both staring aft at the other launch which was chasing them.

"Look out, they're going to open fire with a machine-gun!" shouted Blake. "Duck, everybody!"

The six crooks ducked below the gunwales. For a second or two the Winger and Blake bent double with their backs to Snap.

A searchlight from the pursuing launch shone full on 008. At the same instant a stream of whistling bullets sang overboard.

Snap acted like lightning. Behind the Winger lay the two bags of gold. Silently Snap rolled over the gunwale and fell inboard. Still the Winger and Blake crouched down within a foot of him.

Snap reached out. His fingers closed on the heavy bags. A mighty heave and he slung them over his shoulders. Then sprang to the side seat in the after cockpit.

"Cheerio, Winger! I've got the money and the cops'll soon have you," he yelled.

The Winger and Blake turned. There stood Snap, a bag of gold on each shoulder, grinning at them in the searchlight, while around him and between them rained a shower of whistling bullets.

"That kid!" roared Blake, making a grab at Snap.

His hands gripped empty air, for, by simply falling backwards, Snap went overboard with the stolen money.

The weight dragged him straight down to the river bed. Standing on the bottom of the Thames, he placed the bags of gold side by side, then shot vertically to the surface again.

A launch was bearing down on him. One glance told him that it was the pursuing launch commanded by Detective Thomas.

He looked the other way for a sight of 008. There lay the flotilla of moored lighters. Two police launches were tearing down from Tilbury. The Calshot Castle was steaming slowly towards the pier landing-place.

"There's one of 'em in the water!" came a yell from a police officer in Thomas' launch.

A hand grabbed Snap by the collar and hiked him over the bows.

"It's me—Snap Fane—Mr. Thomas!" yelled the lad. "I sneaked the gold from the Winger. Where's 008?"

"She went in among or behind those lighters!" growled Detective Thomas. "We've got him now!"

Round swung the police launch and headed for the bows of the lighters. The two launches from Tilbury dashed around the stern of the flotilla.

"See 'em?" roared Thomas as all three met.

"Not a sign, chief!" came the answer from both boats. Snap sprang aboard a lighter and ran from one to the other. Seven in all, they floated high, having no cargo aboard.

Where was 008? Eagerly he stared into the darkness. Three searchlights swept the low mud banks of the Thames, picked out every floating bit of debris in a vain search for the missing launch.

"Gosh! Where's she gone?" Snap asked, stepping back aboard Thomas' boat. "When I went overboard with the gold, she was heading straight for the beach."

The Winger, with Launch 008, had disappeared as completely as if melted into the night air. Not a sound of whirring engines; not a sign of either launch or crooks.

Until dawn the three launches hovered around that spot. Several times Snap dived to try and find the scuttled 008.

In vain. The Winger and the boat had just disappeared, together with Sergeant Hull and his men.

"Well, it's no use us staying around here!" growled Thomas. "The Winger's got away again. Fine stunt of yours, saving the swag, Snap. Better come along and have some breakfast with us."

Snap refused. Somehow, although the Winger had disappeared, he felt that he was still near him. Yet where could he be? When Snap dived with the gold, 008 had been speeding straight for the mudbanks ahead of this flotilla of dumb lighters.

"I'll stay around here, Mr. Thomas," he said. "My boat'll maybe drift up on the flood tide, or someone'll bring it back for me."

Snap climbed aboard a lighter and squatted down. In vain he racked his brain, trying to discover the solution to the missing 008.

The day passed. An incoming tugboat brought his little paddle boat which it had found drifting out to sea.

Snap slid from the lighter and lay in it, moored to a barge.

Night came again. Ships passed up and down the Thames.

It was after midnight when Snap heard a creaking of iron. He had been dozing, and awoke with a start to see something bulky emerging from the flat bows of the centre iron dumb lighter.

"All clear, Blake! Full speed ahead!" snapped a clear voice.

"Gosh! The Winger!" gasped Snap, frantically casting off his painter.

An iron door in the bows of the centre lighter opened wide. Out of the cavity which led right into the lighter's hold came the missing launch.

A whirl of twin screws, and 008 took the tide. Snap got a glimpse of the hollow interior of that fake lighter, with its open doors in the bows.

Then the doors closed of their own accord. This then was where the Winger had taken refuge! He had made his arrangements well. The old dumb lighter was large enough to accommodate the stolen launch. And with its bottom removed and iron doors fitted in the bows, it had served its purpose.

Desperately Snap paddled after the receding launch. Hopeless for him to try to catch it.

Suddenly he saw it stop alongside a wharf. Even in the distance he saw shadowy figures climb out of her and steal away into the by-streets beyond.

But when he got aboard the launch was deserted of all except Sergeant Hull and his men, who were hammering like mad to be released from the forepeak.

"Well, Mr. Hull, the Winger wins again!" grinned Snap.

"Did he—did he get away with anything?" panted the officer.

Snap told the story, then going to the radio set tuned it on the short wave length.

"Hallo, Winger! Hallo, Winger!" he called, en clair.

For five minutes he sent out that call-sign. Then:

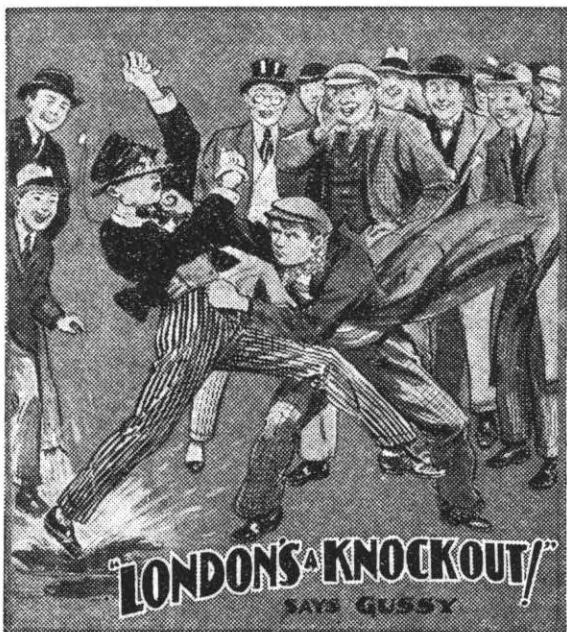
"Keep clear of me, Snap Fane, or you'll be sorry!" came the answer in the Winger's own silky voice.

Snap grinned and shook his head.

"Pity I didn't think of the hollow dumb lighter, Winger!" he said. "Hope to meet you again soon. Bye-bye!"

(Snap put one over on the Winger that time! But he hasn't caught him yet! Watch out for thrills in next week's gripping complete Winger yarn!)

The GEM 2^D



THE WOW OF THE WEEK!

Next Wednesday's GEM!

A glance at the cover for next week, reproduced alongside, shows you D'Arcy in a somewhat strange situation! But that is only one of the strange situations which arise in:

"Tom Merry, The Boy 'Tec!"

Out Next Wednesday.

Owen Conquest contributes one of his best yarns in:

"The Fighting Footballers!"

which tells of an amazing Soccer match at Rookwood.

Then there will be another all-thrill, pulsating yarn of

"The Winger!"

in addition to the usual ripping GEM features.

A NEW COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN.

SILVER'S NARROW SQUEAK!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1. Bike Footer.

"ON the ball!"
"Thud!"
"Played, Jimmy! Over here!"
"Go it, ye cripples!"

Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Newcome and Raby of the Rookwood Fourth were enjoying themselves.

The Fistical Four usually did manage to extract a fair amount of enjoyment out of life. On this occasion they were extracting it through the rather novel medium of a game of bike footer.

It was Jimmy Silver's idea to adjourn to Wilson's Mead, near the village of Coombe, and spend the hour that remained before locking-up in playing football on bicycles.

Lovell and Newcome and Raby had received that brilliant idea with enthusiasm. Certainly, the game that was now in progress fully justified that enthusiasm. Bike footer, though but half an hour established, was already a great success.

"Keep it up!" chortled Arthur Edward Lovell, as he swerved towards the bouncing leather and reached out from his bike to plant a hefty kick behind it. "Doesn't this beat cock-fighting, you chaps?"

"What-ho!"
"Phew!" gasped Jimmy Silver, speeding furiously after the ball. "Wonder what old Wilson would say if he spotted us turning his land into a bike-footer stadium?"

Newcome grinned.
"Blow Wilson! You're not hurting it, anyway! This way, Raby!"

Raby booted the ball into the air in the direction of a hayrick that stood in one corner of the field, and the four bike footballers rode wildly after it.

"Young Wilson!" exclaimed Lovell, as they drew near the hayrick.

The juniors became aware for the first time that they were not alone in the field.

Seated on the stile that gave access to the lane beyond was a somewhat elegant youth of about their own age. The elegant youth was puffing away at a cigarette as his languid eyes followed their energetic movements. He wore the Bagshot School cap, and the juniors recognised him as Aubrey Wilson, son of Hilary Wilson, J.P., gentleman farmer, and owner of the land on which they were playing.

Jimmy Silver dismounted
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"Better be civil to him, chaps, though I'm dashed if I like him! Think your pater would object to this?" he called out to the elegant youth.

Aubrey Wilson of Bagshot looked up with an air of languid surprise.

"Well, if it's not my young Rookwood friends! What a pleasure! Did you say somethin', Silver?"

"Nothing much, old bean," responded Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "I was just asking you if your pater would object to our little game. If you think he would—"

"Dear man, my pater would object to anythin'!" yawned Aubrey Wilson. "He'd even object to my smokin', if he saw me!"

"Can't say I care for it myself; but it's your funeral, I suppose," grinned the leader of the Fistical Four. "Anyway, you're his son, and if you consider we ought to chuck it—"

"Why should I? You're amusin' me. Far as I'm concerned, you can play till you break your necks, with the greatest of pleasure."

"Why, you cheeky ass—" began Lovell warmly.

"S-sh!" said Jimmy Silver. "After all, in a way, this chap's our host."

"One way of looking at it," grinned Newcome. "Well, young Wilson, as you don't object—"

"Don't I tell you you're amusin' me?"
"Oh, rats! We'll carry on, anyway."

And the Fistical Four carried on with bike footer in the gathering dusk, and quickly forgot all about their elegant, and not very pleasant host from Bagshot.

He had gone by the time the juniors at last reluctantly abandoned their game. The Fistical Four hardly noticed his absence as they lighted their bicycle lamps prior to taking to the dusky lane. They were destined, however, to recall his disappearance as a most significant circumstance at a later date.

Little dreaming what sort of a sequel was to follow their harmless game of bike footer, the juniors wheeled their machines into the lane.

The thudding of feet on the turf and an angry shout pulled them up. Looking back, they saw the outlines of a figure quite familiar to them in the village of Coombe.

"Stop! Stop, you young villains!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Old man Wilson!"

The juniors stopped.
"Old man Wilson," as Jimmy Silver had not very respectfully described Hilary Wilson, Esq., J.P., climbed over

SILVER SAVES A FELLOW'S LIFE . . . And saves himself from expulsion!

the stile. He was a tall, lean gentleman, with a grim face in which could be seen the same sardonic twist that was in the face of his son. There the resemblance ended, for while Aubrey Wilson's face was weak in every lineament, the father's was as grim and hard as flint.

"You were trespassing!" he said harshly, as he joined the juniors.

Jimmy Silver bit his lip.

"There is a public footpath across the field——"

"You were trespassing. I saw you playing your wretched bicycle game all over the field. Don't try to evade your responsibility by lies!" grated the irascible landowner and magistrate. "I will take a note of your names. Lies will avail you nothing here, either, for I remember having seen you before, and should easily recognise you again. Your name, boy!"

"Silver, sir," replied Jimmy Silver promptly. "That's not a lie, and you wouldn't have got a lie, anyway. We don't cultivate that kind of habit at Rookwood."

"Hear, hear!" concurred the rest of the Fistical Four.

Mr. Hilary Wilson grunted.

"I believe as much as I can prove—nothing more. Now your name, boy."

He took the names of the Fistical Four, one by one, and entered them in a notebook.

"Finished, sir?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, rather sarcastically, when Mr. Wilson had replaced the notebook in his jacket pocket. "Sure you wouldn't like to take age, description, blemishes, and size of boots?"

The landowner glared.

"You are insolent, boy! That fact shall be remembered, and specially reported to your headmaster."

"Look here, sir——" said Jimmy Silver, in placating tones.

"You may make your excuses to Dr. Chisholm." And the irate Mr. Wilson turned to go.

Jimmy Silver's brows contracted.

"Hold on, sir! You can't condemn us without hearing anything of our side. We saw your son a little time ago, and asked him about it——"

"I have not yet placed my property in charge of my son!" snorted the landowner. "Next time I see the young jakanapes, he shall hear from me for not reporting the presence of trespassers immediately. Now go!"

The Fistical Four looked quite rebellious for a moment. They were not the type to be spoken to in this hectoring strain, even by a wealthy landowner and magistrate. But there was no sense in adding to the trouble for which they were already booked, and eventually they turned their backs on him and mounted their machines.

"Come on, chaps!" said Jimmy Silver. "Old Mack'll have locked up if we don't look slippy."

Their leader's warning was sufficient to galvanise the rest into activity again. They put on speed, and were soon scorching down the lane in the direction of Rookwood, while the grim-faced Hilary Wilson strode the opposite way towards Coombe Manor, his home.

Neither party looked back. Had they done so they would have seen something which would have startled them.

Five minutes after they had left Wilson's Mead a red glow could be seen through the hedge from the corner where the hayrick stood. Another five minutes and the red glow had become a tongue of flame, hungrily licking the edges of the rick.

But neither Wilson nor the Fistical Four turned back to regard that sight, and for the time being they remained ignorant of the fact that the rick was doomed to destruction by fire.

Which, for the sake of the peace of mind of the Fistical Four that night, was perhaps just as well.

CHAPTER 2.

Expelled!

"SILVER wanted in the Head's study!" announced Bulkeley of the Sixth, strolling up to a group of juniors in Hall next morning. "Same applies to Lovell, Newcome, and Raby."

"Oh!"

"The old hunks has shopped us, then!" groaned Newcome. "Thought perhaps he'd wake up in a better mood this fine morning!"

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, old Wilson looked in the tantrums when he bounced in!" remarked Tubby Muffin comfortably. "Like to borrow some exercise-books to stuff in your bags?"

"Why, you silly, fat ass——"

"Tread on him as we go out!" suggested Lovell. "It'll relieve our feelings a little!"

"Good egg!"

"Look here——" roared Tubby Muffin, ceasing his cachinations and backing away in alarm.

The Fistical Four closed round the fat junior, and four pairs of hands seized him at various points of the compass. Tubby Muffin suddenly collided with the floor with a bump and a yell.

"Yoooop! Look here, you rotters——"

"March!" said Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four marched, one by one, over Tubby's prostrate body, to the accompaniment of fiendish howls from their victim and a roar of laughter from the unsympathetic onlookers.

Feeling a little better, Jimmy Silver & Co. quitted the Hall and went along to the Head's study.

On the way they cheered themselves up with the reflection that their offence, after all, was not a particularly heinous one. It would probably mean a Head's caning, but they had survived worse than that.

They were soon to learn that matters were far more serious than they had bargained for.

Jimmy Silver led the way into the Head's study, and the four juniors ranged themselves in a row before the Head's desk.

They sensed thunder in the air immediately. Dr. Chisholm's usually mild face was grave and troubled. They faced the Head, looking appropriately serious and not daring to glance in the direction of Mr. Wilson, who was seated near the Head's desk.

Dr. Chisholm regarded them sternly.

"Boys! You were probably anticipating a summons to my study. You are aware, I take it, of the reason for it."

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy Silver, glancing from the Head's stern face to Mr. Wilson's grim countenance, felt himself assailed by a doubt. He ventured:

"You are referring, sir, to our playing footer—football, I mean—in Mr. Wilson's field last evening?"

Dr. Chisholm's steady eyes fixed on the leader of the Fistical Four.

I am referring partly to that, Silver, but more particularly I refer to the burning of Mr. Wilson's hayrick!"

The Fistical Four blinked. Temporarily, the Head's quiet remark left them feeling a little dazed.

"The—the burning——" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

The Head's eyes seemed almost to pierce him.

"You are, then, unaware that the hayrick in the field where you were playing last night has been utterly destroyed by fire?"

"D—destroyed by fire? Why, of course, we're unaware of it, sir!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "How should we——"

"Mr. Wilson informs me," said the Head, slowly and deliberately, "that his hayrick was blazing furiously within half an hour of his leaving. He has concluded—quite naturally, I am forced to add—that your presence in the field may have led to the ignition of the rick."

"Oh!"

"Oh dear!"

The Fistical Four looked at the Head and looked at each other. This, then, was the reason for the Head's extreme gravity! They could understand it now. Beside the crime of which they were now accused, the offence of trespassing paled into complete insignificance.

The Fistical Four suddenly and simultaneously found their tongues:

"It's wrong, sir—quite wrong! You see——"

"Quite impossible! If you'll let me say——"

"Why, we didn't even go near——"

"Silence!" boomed out the Head's stern voice. "Silver! I will take answers from you. Where did you light your bicycle lamps—and who lit them?"

Jimmy Silver paused.

"Well, sir, I lit them myself," he said eventually. "I happened to be the only one with a box of matches. As to where they were lighted up——"

"Think carefully, boy!" came the harsh voice of Hilary Wilson.

"It was quite near the haystack, as a matter of fact," said the leader of the Fistical Four, ignoring the landowner. "I did all four just by the stile before we went out into the lane."

"Exactly as I surmised, Dr. Chisholm!" said Mr. Wilson. "This rick of mine, worth two hundred pounds if a penny, has been destroyed as a result of the criminal carelessness of this boy!"

Jimmy Silver uttered a gasp.

"You're wrong, sir—utterly wrong!" he said. "These fellows'll tell you that I used only one match and stamped it out on the first step of the stile."

"Nonsense!"

"But it's true! Lovell——"

"Ridiculous!" hooted Mr. Wilson. "Naturally, you seek to cover yourself now that you see what you have done! You were the only people in the neighbourhood of the rick last evening. If you did not cause the fire, then who did?"

"I can tell you!" exclaimed Newcome suddenly. "We mentioned last night that your son was there for a time. He was——"

Newcome had been going to say that young Wilson had been smoking; but he stopped short. Sneaking, in any shape or form, was unforgivable in the eyes of each member of the Fistical Four; and, just in time, Newcome saw that to reveal that young Wilson had been smoking would, in effect, amount to plain, unadulterated sneaking and nothing less.

Mr. Wilson turned to Newcome. His frown had intensified.

"So you wish to drag my son into it? He was on a visit to his home yesterday afternoon, and I am aware that he was about at the time when you were in the mead. But I am aware of no reason for his doing anything which could possibly cause a fire. Can you supply one?"

"I—I——"

"Are you going to invent an imaginary bicycle for him?" sneered the landowner bitterly. "If so, I can inform you at once that his bicycle was at Bagshot School!"

It was very evident that Mr. Wilson was unaware of his young hopeful's smoking proclivities or he would not have dwelt on the impossibility of his causing the fire. Equally evident, Mr. Wilson had made up his mind that the Fistical Four were entirely responsible.

Jimmy Silver and his chums looked at each other now with looks of growing dismay. The matter was beginning to assume very serious dimensions.

The Head eyed them with contracted brows.

"You appreciate now, boys—particularly you, Silver—that a very grave suspicion rests on you!"

"More than a suspicion!" snapped Mr. Wilson. "This boy's admissions make it a downright certainty! I demand, in the circumstances, appropriate punishment. For this boy, the ringleader and the owner of the matches, I suggest expulsion; for the rest—a good flogging!"

"My dear sir——" protested the Head feebly.

"Either that, sir," said the landowner, "or I place the matter in the hands of the police! The publicity your school would receive in that event would, I feel sure, be the reverse of agreeable to you!"

Dr. Chisholm shuddered.

"I cannot think of allowing the matter to go to that length, my dear sir!" he gasped. "Silver!"

"Sir!"

"You have heard what Mr. Wilson has said. With reluctance, I must admit that all the available evidence points to your being responsible for this unfortunate fire. Can you not admit your guilt, and, by frank and open confession, possibly induce Mr. Wilson to regard the matter a little less unfavourably?"

Jimmy Silver shook his head. He was pale, but very determined.

"I'm sorry, sir; it's impossible. I can only say that I didn't cause the fire; I'm certain of it."

Mr. Wilson snorted angrily. The Head sighed.

"My dear Silver, I feel sure that if you will admit the truth, Mr. Wilson will be only too happy to take a more reasonable view——"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Jimmy Silver again. "Even if it will save me from expulsion, I can't confess to something I haven't done!"

There was a murmur of approval from the other three. Dr. Chisholm stopped it with a sharp gesture.

"Silence! Then, in that case, Silver, you leave me no alternative. You will be locked in the punishment-room until I have communicated with your father, with a view to taking you away to-morrow. You are expelled!"

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver. That was all he could say. The suddenness with which the blow had fallen seemed almost to have deprived him of the power of thinking.

"Newcome, Lovell, and Raby," went on the Head, "you will report here after prayers to-morrow morning, when I shall flog you for your part in this most unfortunate affair."

And so the fiat went forth. And within a very short space of time every corner of Rookwood buzzed with the astounding news that Silver of the Fourth was booked for the "long jump"—for an offence of which he and his chums maintained him to be entirely innocent!

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CHAPTER 3.

One Slender Chance!

"YOU there, Jimmy?"

Arthur Edward Lovell's words sounded softly against the door of the punishment-room at the top of the Classical House—that dread, dreary apartment where fellows who had had the misfortune to be "bunked" spent their last hours at Rookwood.

Lovell and Newcome and Raby, who, despite eagle-eyed masters and prowling prefects, had come straight upstairs after morning classes to see what was happening to their leader, heard a movement on the other side of the locked door.

"Hallo, hallo! That you, Lovell, old chap?"

"We're all here—all three of us!" said Lovell in subdued tones. "How are things going, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver chuckled rather ruefully.

"Living a life of leisure in nice, high, healthy surroundings!" he said, with a somewhat forced effort at facetiousness. "Seriously, though, you men, this is the absolute giddy limit!"

"You're right, Jimmy!" said Lovell in a suppressed voice. "What can we do? Go and slaughter that old blighter, Wilson?"

"No; I don't think he's a bad old sport at heart," responded the imprisoned leader of the Fistical Four. "One thing I'm not going to do, though, is to take this lying down."

"No fear!"

"And I fancy I see the way out, if there is a way out," went on Jimmy Silver. "I've got to get out to see Wilson's son at Bagshot; he holds the key to the situation. If he can be got to admit that he was smoking near the rick last evening——"

"He never will admit it, old bean!"

"Well, I'm going to try to make him, anyway!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "You fellows can help me by getting the key to this room and letting me out."

"Oh crickey!"

"Dicky Dalton's got the key. That being so, ten to one it is lying in the ashtray on his desk, where he keeps a lot of other junk. If you want to help me, you chaps, dodge in while he's out and help yourselves to it."

"We'll do it, old man!" said Lovell, with a break in his voice. "Any old thing so long as it'll help to get you out of this fearful hole!"

"All serene! Thanks very much, old bean!" came Jimmy Silver's voice from inside the punishment-room. "Now, buzz off; don't want to risk getting caught here before we bring off the coup."

"Right-ho, Jimmy! Bye-bye! And keep your pecker up!"

"Trust me!" answered the leader of the Fistical Four, with a laugh. "And don't forget that key; get it if you can."

Get it they did! For the next half-hour they watched the movements of Richard Dalton, M.A., like cats watching a mouse. At the end of that time they saw him leave the House and cross the quad making in the direction of the Modern House.

It was Lovell & Co.'s opportunity, and they seized it. While Newcome and Raby kept guard Lovell slipped into Dicky Dalton's study and made a dive for the Fourth Form master's celebrated ashtray. There, sure enough, was a key which Lovell did not remember having seen there before.

It proved to be the key of the punishment-room.

Long before Mr. Dalton had returned to the House that key had opened a door, locked it again, and been replaced in the ashtray. By which time Jimmy Silver was scuttling across the quad to the bike-shed.

Taking care not to call attention to himself, Jimmy Silver got out his bike, mounted, and pedalled down a sheltered path which he knew to be little used at this time of the day.

He reached the gates in safety, slipped past old Mack's lodge, then mounted again. Within a few seconds he was pedalling furiously down the lane in the direction of Bagshot School.

Reaching his destination without mishap, he dismounted outside the big iron gates of Bagshot. There he spotted Pankley of the Bagshot Fourth, who gave him rather a surprised nod.

"Unusual time for a visit, young Silver!" he remarked.

"Unusual circumstances, young Pankley!" retorted the Rookwood junior cheerfully. "Wilson about, by any chance?"

Pankley stared.

"Didn't know you had dealings with that smoky bouncer! Still, if you want to know, he's just gone out—down to the village, to lay in supplies of cheap cigarettes, shouldn't be surprised!"

"Was he walking?"

Pankley shook his head.

"Cycling. But you may be able to catch him; he only left a minute or so ago, and he doesn't break speed records as a rule."

"Thanks, old bean!"

And Jimmy Silver waved farewell and pedalled off again, leaving Pankley staring after him in considerable surprise.

Pankley's forecast proved to be correct. Within five minutes the Rookwood junior caught sight of the languid figure of Aubrey Wilson cycling at a leisurely rate towards the level-crossing that cut across the road near Bagshot School.

Jimmy Silver put on a spurt and drew level with his quarry. Wilson looked up, and it was at once obvious to Jimmy that he knew of the rick fire in Wilson's Mead.

Wilson dismounted, white to the lips. He made an effort to appear unconcerned.

"Hallo, Silver! Funny to meet you here!"

"It's by design," replied Jimmy Silver, his eyes fixed grimly on the fellow he felt sure was responsible for the predicament he was in. "You have heard what happened in that field after we were all there last night?"

"You mean the fire? Yes; the pater phoned me after brekker this mornin'. He wanted to know whether I knew anythin' about it. Of course, I didn't."

"You're quite sure about that?"

Wilson raised his eyebrows as though surprised by the question.

"Naturally. What do you mean?"

"What I mean is that you were smoking only a yard or so away from the rick when we last saw you, and it seems to us very probable that a cigarette-end of yours, carelessly thrown away, started it."

Wilson flinched under Jimmy Silver's steady look.

"That's rot, anyway! You haven't a tittle of proof—"

"Quite right, we haven't!" nodded Jimmy Silver. "Proof's impossible. But I know jolly well in my own mind that it's true, and I want you to do the decent thing and own up to it."

"And have the old boy come down on me like a ton of bricks? Likely, isn't it?" sneered Wilson. "Between ourselves, Silver, I'm willin' to admit that what you say is probably true. I did chuck away a cigarette-end just as I spotted him comin' across the fields, matter of fact. But I'm not admittin' that to him!"

Jimmy Silver clenched the handlebar of his bike.

"You know, do you, that because of this fire I am to be expelled?"

Wilson's face, white already, went whiter still.

"I didn't know. That's rotten, an' no mistake; but I'm afraid it doesn't make any difference. You asked for trouble, anyway, playin' the ox on a field you knew was private—"

"You mean to say you're willing to let me leave Rookwood in disgrace for something you did yourself?" asked Jimmy Silver angrily. "Why, you rotter, I'll smash you! I'll—"

He reached out to grab the trembling Bagshot junior.

Wilson uttered a shout.

"Touch me, you lout, an' I'll make it hot for you! Let me alone, I tell you—"

Jimmy Silver dropped his bike. What happened next happened so swiftly that he hardly had time to follow it. Wilson as a rule was no fighter; but sheer desperation on this occasion drove him to it. He leaned across his handlebars and hit out fiercely and recklessly at the Rookwood man's face.

Jimmy Silver fell back with a sharp cry of pain. Instantly, the Bagshot junior was into the saddle of his machine and pedalling down the road towards the level crossing.

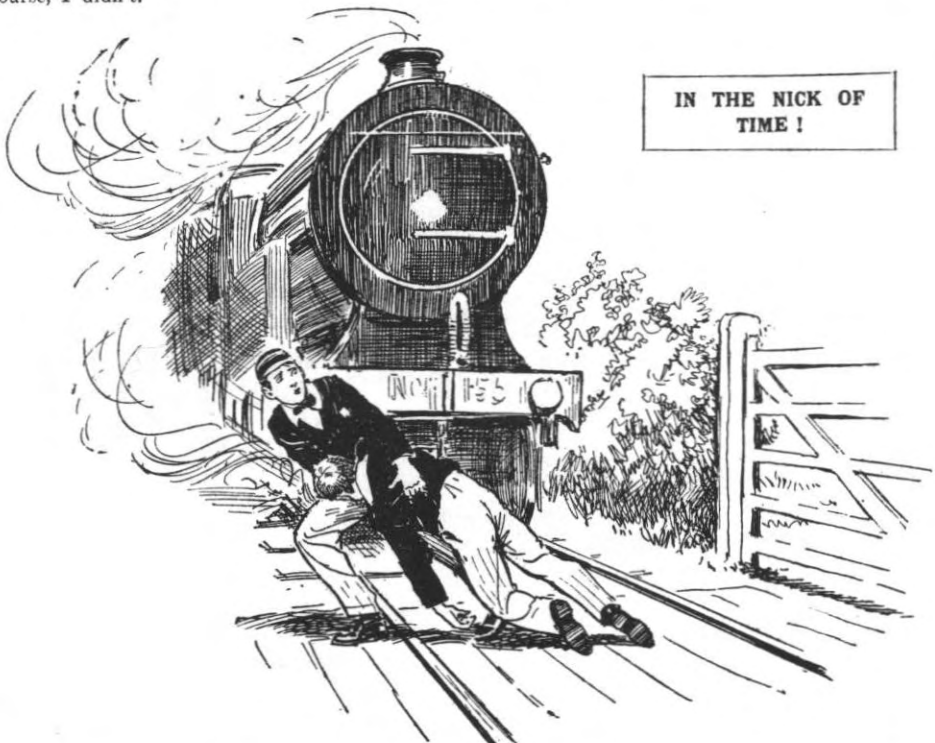
Jimmy Silver, recovering his balance, saw Wilson dismount, open the big level-crossing gate, and pass through. With frantic haste, he made to cross the lines.

And then—

A gasp of horror suddenly escaped Jimmy Silver.

Wilson's movements had evidently been too hurried. Just as he was half-way across, his bike left his hands, to go flying into the hedge, and he himself fell sprawling across the track.

At the same moment Jimmy Silver's ears caught the roar of an approaching train, and his horrified eyes saw the Southampton express racing along towards Wilson's motionless body!



Jimmy Silver grabbed frantically at Wilson, and the next moment he was staggering forward, dragging the Bagshot man with him!

CHAPTER 4.

Well Done, Jimmy!

ONLY a few seconds separated Wilson from death. If anything could be done to save him, it had to be done like lightning.

Not for more than a fraction of a second did Jimmy Silver hesitate. Then he leaped on to his bike and fairly flew down the slight slope that separated him from the crossing.

Reaching it, he flung the machine aside and vaulted the level-crossing gate.

The scream of the approaching express was in his ears. Jimmy Silver did not even look to see whether he stood a chance. He had eyes only for the still figure of Wilson of Bagshot.

One wild rush across the track and he was in the path of the oncoming train. He made a frantic grab at Wilson's collar and staggered forward, dragging the Bagshot man with him. There was a thunderous clangour, and for one dreadful moment he thought he had failed. Then he found

himself rolling on the grass at the side of the track, with Wilson in his arms, while the train roared by.

He had saved his man!

As the last carriage shot by and silence replaced the deafening noise of the train, Wilson sat up, dizzily, terror in his eyes.

"It's gone? Oh, thank Heaven! Silver—"

"You're not hurt?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Wilson shook his head.

Jimmy Silver picked himself up.

Wilson rose, and his eyes dropped under Jimmy Silver's glance.

"I'm afraid I am a rotter," he said, in a low voice. "I didn't quite realise how caddish it was to allow anyone so decent as you to be sacked for something I'd done myself—or, if I did, I didn't care! But after this—"

Jimmy Silver's face hardened a little.

"I'm not asking you to let this make any difference. I came over here to get you to see the thing in the right light."

"Well, so I do now," said Wilson. "You're coming right back with me to Coombe Manor, an' I'm goin' to get it off my chest to the pater even if he turns me out of home for it. I'm afraid he's in for a bit of a shock!" he concluded, with a wry grin.

And so it turned out. The grim old landowner-magistrate of Coombe Manor was shocked to hear, in the first place, that his son was addicted to the habit of smoking, and that the fire had arisen from that cause. He was even more shocked to find that his inflexible attitude had led to sentence of expulsion being passed on an innocent boy—a boy, too, who, as he learned from his son's lips, had saved his flesh and blood from a fearful death.

So much greater was the second shock than the first that young Wilson's offence was treated with less severity than it might otherwise have been treated. Promising to leave the matter to be dealt with by the headmaster of Bagshot, Mr. Wilson hastened to set right the wrong he had done.

He summoned his car and returned with all speed to Rookwood, taking Jimmy Silver with him.

Heedless of the hundred-and-one questions with which he was bombarded on all sides, Jimmy Silver led Mr. Wilson up to the Head's study. And there another person received a shock—namely, Dr. Chisholm, the worthy old Head of Rookwood, who was almost overwhelmed to discover what an injustice had been done.

The wrong was soon righted. And in five minutes Jimmy Silver, with his three chums, who had been summoned to the Head's study to hear their sentences rescinded, were walking down the stairs arm-in-arm, fully restored to their old spirits again.

In the Hall there was a cheer from a large crowd, which had, by this time, learned what had happened.

"Gratters, Silver!"

"Good old Jimmy!"

And the Fistical Four felt that all was right with the world once more—though it was quite a long time before they obliterated the unpleasant memory of Jimmy Silver's Narrow Squeak.

THE END.

(Jimmy Silver did have a narrow squeak that time, but he got away with it all right! Amazing things happen at Rookwood in next week's yarn, "THE FIGHTING FOOTBALLERS!")

"TOM MERRY & CO. ON STRIKE!"

(Continued from page 18.)

striking. You've got so much slop that a little more won't matter. I've got to change my study till the damage is repaired, so here goes!"

He plumped Tom Merry down on the floor, and overturned the washing-tub on top of him.

"Oh! O-p-sh!" gasped Tom Merry.

He was simply buried under a heap of wet washing and soap-suds, and flooded with water, which ran in streams all over the study.

Blake and Manners sprang gallantly to the rescue, and were seized and added to the heap, and rolled remorselessly in the washing and water.

D'Arcy and Herries were plumped down on top of them, held there by the grinning Sixth-Formers, and then Knox emptied the big water-jug over the heap. He cleared the ironing-table, and hurled the shirts and collars on the struggling juniors, and then dragged down the clothes-line and what it bore, and added all that to the heap. The ashpans from the fire-grate followed, with a heap of cinders, and then the contents of the coal-scuttle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Knox. "Are you satisfied, or do you want some more?"

"Gr-r-r-r!" gasped Tom Merry.

Knox and his friends, yelling with laughter, left the study.

Tom Merry sat up. He was drenched, and a wet shirt was clinging round his neck, and his face was unrecognisable from a caking of wet ashes.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The doorway was crammed with juniors, laughing hysterically. One by one the hapless strikers emerged from the wreck of the study, and five more woebegone objects were never seen within the walls of St. Jim's.

"Well," said Blake, in measured accents. "I'm not a chap to grumble, but the next time you get me to go on strike, Tom Merry, I shall deserve all I get. Come away, chaps, and let's get ourselves cleaned somehow."

And Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy marched off. They had had enough of the strike. Tom Merry and Manners looked at each other. Even the Terrible Two, originators as they were of the strike in the School House, thought that the finish had come.

The grinning juniors at the door decamped. Mr. Lathom looked into the room.

"Dear me!" he said. "You seem to have been very unfortunate. Is the strike over, Merry?"

"Ye-es, I think so," said Tom Merry.

The strike was over. When Mr. Railton came back things were going on in their normal way. The Housemaster had made arrangements for an improvement in the commissariat, and so the grievance was removed. The ending had come rather suddenly; but it was a long time before St. Jim's ceased to chuckle over the story of Tom Merry & Co.'s great strike.

THE END.

(Tom Merry has a more serious job to do next week than going on strike! He's hot on the trail of an unscrupulous gang, in "TOM MERRY, THE BOY 'TEC!" Don't miss this yarn, boys!)

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