

WHO IS THE TELL-TALE OF ST. JIM'S ?

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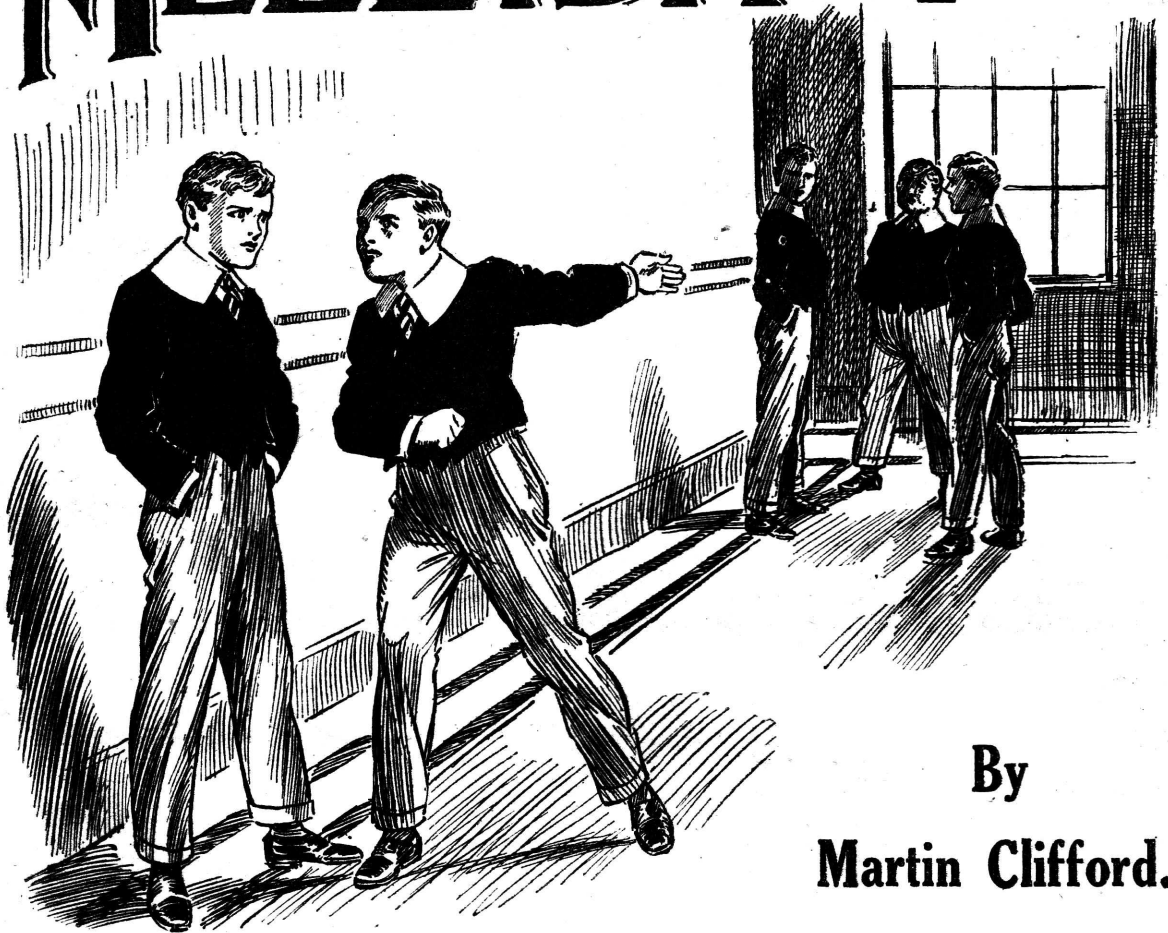
The GEM

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READ AND ENJOY THIS GRAND EXTRA-LONG—

MELLISH—THE



By

Martin Clifford.

Mellish caused terrible trouble at St. Jim's when he started telling tales—but it was nothing to the trouble he caused for himself when he was found out!

CHAPTER 1.

Something the Matter.

THERE was a shade of gloom upon the brow of Tom Merry of the Shell Form at St. Jim's. Tom was, as a rule, merry by nature as well as by name, and it was so unusual for him to appear with a clouded brow, that the circumstance attracted great attention. But to inquiries as to what was "up," and what had given him the "hump," Tom Merry returned only short and evasive answers, which did not much enlighten the inquirers.

He was certainly worried about something; it was easy for everyone to see that. Figgins of the New House saw it when he met him in the quadrangle, and Figgins at once stopped to inquire the cause. For the moment the great Figgins forgot that School House and New House were deadly rivals, and that he and Tom Merry were rival leaders.

"Hallo, kid, what's the matter?" asked Figgins. "Have you lost a shilling and found a threepenny-bit?"

"No!" said Tom Merry.

His manner was so abrupt that Figgins gave a start.

The rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's did not prevent the juniors, as a rule, from entertaining a really friendly regard for each other at heart, and their jows and raids were never attended by any real ill-feeling. And so Figgins looked in surprise at the unrelaxing face of Tom Merry.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,263.

"Anything wrong?" he said.

"Oh, no!"

"I see. You're going about looking like a funeral mute for the fun of the thing, I suppose?"

But Tom Merry did not smile.

"I say, you're not bearing malice about any of our little tiffs, surely?" exclaimed Figgins, looking at Tom Merry with a puzzled expression. "That wouldn't be like you."

"Of course not!" said Tom Merry hastily.

"I know we busted up your study last week."

"That's nothing!"

"It's not that, then?"

"Of course it isn't!"

"Then what is it?" demanded Figgins.

"Nothing!"

The chief of the New House juniors gave an expressive grunt. He could see that something was wrong, and he suspected that Tom Merry's resentment was directed against himself. At all events, the School House junior's manner was not friendly.

"Well, if you've got up this cast of countenance because you think it's pretty, you're making a big mistake," he said. "That look of yours would stop a clock. If you've got anything on your chest, why can't you spout it out?"

"It's all right!"

"All wrong, I should say. But I suppose that's a polite way of telling me to mind my own business, so I'm off!"

And Figgins went off whistling.

MISCHIEF MAKER!

Tom Merry gave himself a sort of shake, as if to dismiss unpleasant thoughts, and walked on towards the School House.

Three juniors were coming down the School House steps—Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy of Study No. 6. They sighted Tom Merry at once, and stopped him. Tom looked a little impatient, but he stopped.

"What's up?" said Blake directly. "I hear you are going around with a frown on your noble brow. Why, which, and wherefore is this thushness?"

"What are you grouching about, Merry?" asked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, flicking a speck of dust from his immaculate boots. "What is the mattah, deah boy? You seem to be weavin' a wowwied look, you know, and that's beastly bad form."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

"If that's what you call a polite answer to a friendly inquiry," said Blake, "I can only say that you've got a lot to learn, Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard the weply of Tom Mewwy as distinctlay wude. I am surprised at you, Mewwy."

"Well, don't bother," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fixed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed Tom Merry with a disdainful glance.

"Don't bothah!" he repeated. "Tom Mewwy, you are extwemely ungentlemanly. I am vewy much surprised. I have nevah known you to be so wude before, though you have nevah weally tweated me with pwopah respect."

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry walked on, but Blake gently insinuated two fingers in the back of his collar and jerked him back again.

"Don't be in a hurry," he exclaimed; "we want an explanation."

"Yaas, wathah! You must give an explanation of your wude and uttably ungentlemanly conduct, Tom Mewwy, or we shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"Right-ho!" grinned Herries. "Let's roll him down the steps for a start."

"Oh, no, deah boy; that would spoil his clothes, and we don't want to be too severe! If we give him a feahful lickin' with a cwicket stump, I think it will about meet the case, you know."

"Oh, don't rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There's nothing the matter, only I don't feel in the humour for a jaw, that's all."

And he jerked himself away and walked into the House, leaving the chums of Study No. 6 staring after him in astonishment.

"Well, my only Aunt Sempronia!" said Blake emphatically. "I've never seen Tom Merry like that before."

"There's something wrong," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! That's as plain as your face, or nearly so."

"I wish I knew what was up," said Blake, looking mystified. "Of course, Tom Merry is a cheeky young bouncer, and has the nerve to fancy himself chief of the School House juniors. That's all—"

"Rot!" said Herries.

"Exactly, all rot!" agreed Blake. "We're the leaders, as every sensible chap must admit. Still, I rather like Merry, apart from his nerve, and I'm sorry to see him cutting up rough like this."

"Pewwaps he only wants a feahful thwashin'."

"Gussy, you're an ass! Come on, kids, and let's get down to the practice."

And Study No. 6 dismissed the matter from their minds, and went down to the cricket ground—Blake and Herries to practise, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to watch them. He found football fatiguing.

Tom Merry entered the School House, and ran into Lowther and Manners, his chums in the Shell. He would

have passed on quickly, but Manners caught him by one shoulder and Lowther by the other.

"Halt!"

"Well, I'm halted," said Tom, with a smile. "What's wanted?"

"You are!"

"Well, here I am!"

The chums of the Shell solemnly backed him against the staircase, and pinned him there, and Lowther wagged his forefinger warningly at him.

"Now, Tom, what's the row?"

"What's the trouble?" said Manners.

"Nothing," said Tom.

"Won't wash," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "Why that frown upon your baby brow?"

"Why that gloom upon a countenance that was wont to shine, even as if it had been freshly scrubbed with soap?"

"Oh, don't rot!"

"Explain yourself, then, you bouncer. What do you mean by walking round like Hamlet in a fit, and not explaining what's the trouble?" exclaimed Lowther indignantly.

"Well, it's really nothing, you see."

"Then tell us the nothing."

"It was a mere trifle, but I felt rather rotten about it."

"Have you got anything up against us?"

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry hastily.

"Against Blake and his lot?"

"Oh, no!"

"Has Figgins been ruffling the serene plumage of your noble nibs?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Oh, so it's Figgins!" said Monty Lowther. "What has he done? I know he's a cheeky kid. It's a great nerve on his part to exist in the same school as our noble selves; but he will do it, you know."

"What has been and gone and done?" asked Manners solemnly.

"Oh, nothing!" said Tom Merry. "It's not worth talking about." And suddenly twisting himself loose, he ran up the stairs, leaving his chums staring after him, and then at one another in astonishment.

Tom Merry entered his study, and his clouded brow grew darker as he saw Mellish of the Fourth sitting on his table, evidently waiting for him to come in.

Mellish was the cad of the Fourth, and as full of ill-natured mischief as an imp, and there was very little in common between him and Tom Merry.

He looked up and nodded coolly to the hero of the Shell. Tom Merry's face remained dark and set.

"Hallo, Merry; I wanted to see you!"

"The desire was all on your side, then."

"Oh, don't be a rotter!"

"The fact is, Mellish, I don't like you, and I wish you'd keep the other side of my door," said Tom Merry abruptly.

"That's plain English, isn't it?"

"Well, yes; quite candid in fact," said Mellish, as he slipped from the table. "I suppose it's the special Merry brand of politeness."

"I don't see why I should be polite to you," said Tom angrily. "You seem to take a pleasure in making trouble everywhere."

"Is that all the thanks I get for—"

"It's all the thanks you'll get from me!"

"I came here to say—"

"Say nothing; you've said too much already."

"Oh, just as you like! If you knew that Blake had—"

"Oh, hang it! What about Blake?"

"I won't tell you. If you knew what he had been saying you would wish— But, never mind, I'm mum!"

And Mellish quitted the study, and Tom Merry was left alone, with a darker cloud than ever on his face, and his lips set hard.

CHAPTER 2.

The Committee of Investigation!

"I SAY, Blake—"

"Oh, don't worry, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked indignantly at his chum. The four comrades of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's were in their study, No. 6, in the School House. Blake was looking worried, and Herries and Digby seemed to be doing a great deal of thinking. D'Arcy, too, had been looking reflective, when he had suddenly broken the silence, only to be promptly sat upon.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'm worried. Dry up!"

"I wufuse to dwy up! I've been thinking—"

"Well, if it hurts you, go to the doctor, but don't bother me. I tell you I'm worried!" grunted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! But, you see, I'm wovvied, too," said D'Arcy. "I'm wovvied about Tom Mewwy, you know. I weally think there's somethin' wong!"

"That's plain enough," said Digby.

"Vewy twue. Is that what you are thinkin' about, Blake?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I decline to be called an ass. The expwession is oppwobwious—"

"Look here," said Blake, stretching out his hand to the inkpot on the table, "if you have anything to say, Gussy, say it, and then shut up!"

"Certainly, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, keeping a wary eye upon the inkpot. "The fact of the mattah is, that there's somethin' wong with Tom Mewwy, and I think we ought to look into it."

"Oh, I see! I was thinking something of the kind myself!"

"Gweat minds always wun in gwooves," said D'Arcy complacently. "You see, as leadahs of the juniahs it's weally our duty to look into anythin' that goes wong in the Lowah Forms in the School House, and weally Tom Mewwy seems to be quite upset about somethin' or othah, you know!"

"That's a fact!" said Herries, with a nod. "And I can't help thinking that it's something a bit serious, for he isn't the fellow to make a long face about a trifle."

"You're right there," said Blake; "but I don't quite see how we are going to look into the matter. After all, it's his own affair."

"Yaas, but as leadahs of the juniahs—"

"Cheese it! Have you got any idea in that empty skull of yours?"

"Yaas, wathah! I think we ought to wesolve ourselves into a committee of inqwiry—"

"Ha, ha, ha! A committee of inqwiry to discover why Tom Merry has got the hump!" grinned Blake.

"It isn't the common or garden hump that he's got, deah boy. He has been goin' about all day with a face like a kite, so there must be somethin' the mattah of more importance than the mere hump."

"Well, yes; I agree with that. It looks to me," said Blake, "as if he's got something up against somebody, and doesn't like to say it out. If that's the case, I think he ought to speak out and clear the air."

"Yaas, wathah! That is the bwiliant ideah that flashed into my bwain while I was thinkin' it ovah," said D'Arcy. "My ideah was to question Tom Mewwy—"

"Suppose he won't answer?"

"Then he can be made to. My ideah was to lay for him in the passage, and dwag him into the study here, and make him ans'ah our questions upon this important subject."

"I fancy that wouldn't work, Gussy. We might give him anything, from frog's-march to something with boiling oil in it, but he wouldn't open his mouth if he chose to remain mum."

"Yaas, I know he's wathah an obstinate bwute sometimes, but we might twy, at all events. It's weally for his own good, you know, so it does not mattah if we hurt him a little."

"Still, the committee of inqwiry isn't half a bad wheeze," said Blake thoughtfully. "There's nothing going on at present, and with Figgins working up for an exam, things aren't so lively as usual with the New House bounders. We've got time to attend to the matter, so I vote we look into it."

"Passed unanimously!" said Herries and Digby heartily.

As a matter of fact, the chums of Study No. 6 were really concerned about Tom Merry. Any depression of spirits or ill-temper had seldom been noticed before in the hero of the Shell. A snappish answer from Tom Merry was a sure sign that something was wrong, and although the rivalry between

Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three for the leadership of the School House was very keen, the chums of the Fourth could not help liking Tom.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy beamed round upon his comrades. "Very good!" he said. "Now, as chairman of the committee—"

"As what?" asked Blake unpleasantly.

"As chairman of the committee of inqwiry—"

"As a howling ass, you mean."

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as a howlin' ass. I wegard that expwession as absolutly diswewspectful. As chairman of the committee—"

"The chairman of the committee is elected by vote," said Blake, "and as leader of this study, I put up for the job."

"Now, Blake, I weally wegard that as—"

"Put it to the vote."

"Wats! It was my ideah—"

"Now, don't be an ass, D'Arcy!"

"Then don't you be a wottah! It was my ideah, and I claim to be chairman of my own beastlay committee."

"If you had as much sense as would go on the point of a pin, Gussy, I wouldn't say no; but as the matter stands—"

"I am willing to put it to the vote," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I wegard your dewogatory wemarks with disdain, Blake."

"That's right! Now, then, hands up for Gussy!"

Gussy's hand promptly went up, but it was alone in its glory, so to speak. Herries and Digby only grinned. They had no intention of electing the swell of the School House to the position of chairman of the committee of inqwiry.

D'Arcy gave his chums a withering glance.

"Hands up for me," said Blake, with a grin; and he set a good example by elevating his own right hand in the air.

To his surprise, again it was only a solitary hand that went up. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went off in a series of chuckles. Blake looked at Herries and Digby with the glare of a basilisk.

"What do you mean by standing there like a pair of dummies?" he asked politely. "What are you getting at, you duffers? What's the little game, you silly asses?"

"Well, I think I should make about as good a chairman as the next chap," said Digby in a casual sort of way.

"What do you think, Herries?"

"I think I'm the man for the job, to speak quite plainly," said Herries modestly.

Arthur Augustus chuckled audibly. Blake looked at him.

"Is anything the matter with you, D'Arcy?"

"Anythin' the mattah, deah boy? Certainly not!"

"Then what are you making that row for?"

"Wow? What wow?"

"That funny row in your neck, like an old hen with the asthma!"

"Why, you ass, I was laughin'!" said D'Arcy indignantly. Blake sniffed.

"Then don't do it any more—at least, without warning. It's not fair. Now, look here, you conceited asses, I'm the proper chairman for this giddy committee—"

"Wats! You must admit that I am the pwopah person to—"

"Well, I really think I should fill the bill all right," said Herries. "Of course, I may be mistaken."

"Of course you may," said Digby; "in fact, there's not much doubt on that point, in my mind. I think I'm the chap—"

"Wats! I say wats! Undah the circs—"

"Let's toss up for it," said Blake resignedly. "It's no good arguing with you kids. You're too conceited for anything. Here's a penny!"

Blake spun the coin in the air and caught it again.

"Guess, Dig!"

"Head," said Digby.

Blake showed the coin, and it was the figure of Britannia that met Dig's eyes, and he gave a grunt.

D'Arcy withdrew a half-crown from his waistcoat pocket and tossed it up. It was for Herries to call to him, and Herries promptly said "Tail."

"Head, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, beaming, as he showed the coin.

"Now it's between you and me, Gussy," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you toss, or shall I?"

"Oh, I'll do it, deah boy! Here goes!"

D'Arcy clapped his hands over the coin again. Blake wrinkled his brows thoughtfully, and finally said "Head!"

The coin was disclosed to view, and Blake gave an expressive grunt. He had guessed wrongly, and D'Arcy beamed with satisfaction.

"Bai Jove, I have won, you know!" he exclaimed,

tossing the half-crown into the air again in his glee. "I am chairman of this beastly committee!"

"Who are you calling a beastly committee?"

"Merely a form of speech, deah boy! When I say beastly I don't mean beastly," said D'Arcy lucidly. "By the way, did anybody see where that beastly half-crown went to?"

"I think it went to the floor."

"I know it went on the floor, deah boy; but what I want to know is—where? Get down and look for it, will you, like good chaps?"

"Why the dickens can't you get down and look for it yourself?" demanded Blake.

"I can't, either," said Blake, who was not looking. "The first step, I suppose, will be to go to Tom Merry and demand an explanation in the name of the committee of the Fourth Form, specially appointed to inquire into the matter."

"He'll tell us to go and eat coke," Digby remarked.

"Well, we're not bound to do it, you know. Come—"

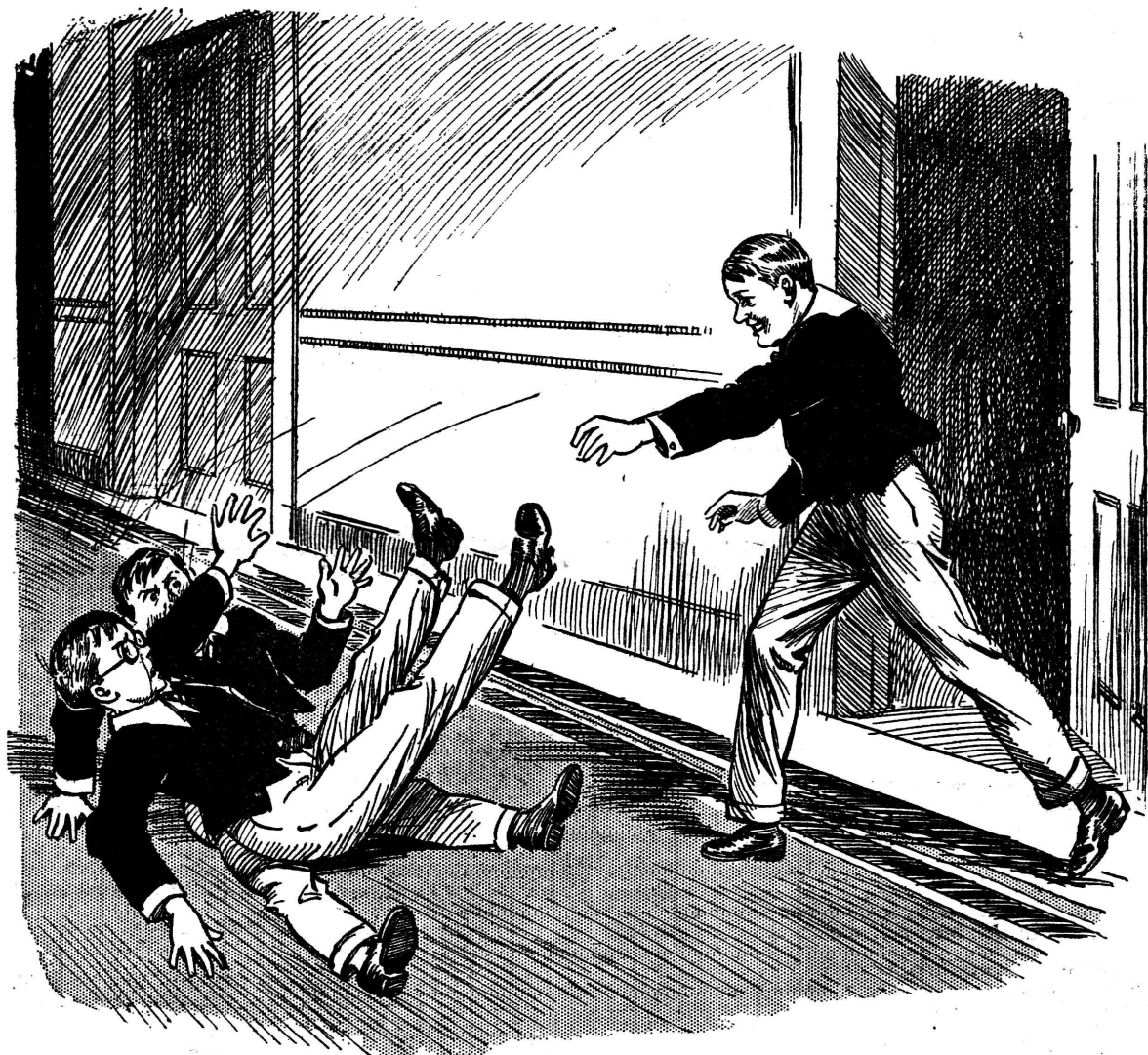
"I haven't found that beastly half-crown—"

"Never mind; very likely it will turn up."

"Yaas; but a half-crown is a half-crown, you know!"

"Did you work that out in your own head, Gussy, and without the aid of a net?" asked Blake seriously.

"Oh, don't wot, Blake! Help me to look for that beastly half-crown—"



Gore sent Skimpole hurtling against Mellish, who was just rising, and the two juniors crashed to the floor with a bump!

"I am afraid I should wumple the knees of my twousahs, deah—"

"What about the knees of my trousers, hang you?"

"Oh, well, weally, that's not of so much importance—"

"Gussy, there are times when you want killing, and want it badly!" said Blake darkly. "If you ever find yourself dead in some corner, you'll know the reason. Now we're properly constituted as a committee of investigation, kids, let's get to business. We've got a rotten chairman, of course—"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a wotten chairman—"

"What's the first step?" asked Herries. "I've done my prep, and I'm ready for anything?"

"I can't see that half-crown," said D'Arcy, peering about the floor through his famous monocle, but without bending his knees.

"No time now. The committee of inquiry isn't going to inquire into a lost half-crown," said Blake disdainfully. "Why couldn't you use a penny to toss with, like any ordinary individual?"

"But I'm not an ordinawy individual—"

"No, you're an extraordinary ass! You can get Skimpole, the amateur detective of the Shell, to look for your half-crown, if you like. Come on, kids, the chairman's busy, so he can't come. I'll act as chairman pro tem."

"That you won't, you howwid boundah!" exclaimed D'Arcy, following the chums quickly to the door. "I shall certainly wefuse to have my pwovince invaded in that way. I am comin' with you, deah boys, and nevah mind the beastly half-crown."

"You may never find it again, Gussy."

"I'll wisk that," said D'Arcy. "I'm chairman of this beastly committee, and I'm goin' to take the lead, I assuah you, deah boys."

"Oh, get along, then," said Blake.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity in his stride, led the way to Tom Merry's study.

The door was closed, but the sound of voices could be heard within, showing that the chums of the Shell were at home.

"I'll knock," remarked Blake, as they came up the passage. "I—"

"Excuse me, Blake, I will knock, as chairman of the committee."

"Oh, rats!"

"It is not in order to say 'Wats' to the honahwable chairman—"

"More rats!"

"Blake, I must weally wemonstwate— Digby, what are you knockin' at the door for? It is my place to knock at the door, as chairman of the beastly committee—"

"Come in!" sang out the voice of Monty Lowther within.

Digby put his hand to the door, but Arthur Augustus gently but firmly pulled him back.

"Pway excuse me, Dig, I take the lead— Hewwies, you wottah, what do you mean by puttin' yourself forward before your honahwable chairman in this way?"

But the grinning Herries had already opened the door.

The chums of the Fourth entered the study, to be greeted with looks of surprise by Monty Lowther and Manners.

Tom Merry did not look up.

CHAPTER 3.

The Committee Get to Work!

LOWTHER and Manners fixed an inquiring, and, to tell the truth, not particularly welcoming, glance upon the chums of Study No. 6. As a matter of fact, they were rather worried at that moment; and besides, when the Fourth-Formers came in force it sometimes meant ructions with the Shell, and the Shell boys were prepared for hostilities. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's beaming face was enough to assure anyone of his peaceful intentions.

"What do you kids want?" demanded Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Wait a minute," said Blake aggressively. "Who are you calling kids, Montague Lowther?"

"You Fourth Form infants," said Lowther deliberately.

"We didn't come here for a row," said Blake. "But under the circumstances I don't see how I can let Lowther off without punching his head."

"Lowther doesn't want to be let off," Monty remarked. "If you can punch my head, go on with it, and see how it turns out!"

"Blake, I insist upon your keeping quiet. You are spoilin' the whole thing by puttin' yourself forward in this way."

"Have you come out to-day specially to search for a thick ear, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to weply to such a perfectly widiculous question. Lowthah, I weally wish you would extend to us a less wide gweetin', as we have come to do you a service."

"Oh!" said Lowther, not very gratefully. "What's that?"

"We have been appointed as a committee of inqwiy—"

"As a what?" asked Monty Lowther and Manners together; and Tom Merry looked up from the paper he had taken up when the Fourth-Formers entered the study.

"A committee of inqwiy—"

"What are you going to inquire into?"

"Into the cause of the mysterious mannahs and customs of Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, you checky young donkey! And who appointed you?"

"The leaders of the Fourth Form—that is to say, ourselves," replied D'Arcy with dignity. "As a committee of inqwiy—"

"As a committee of inquiry you had better travel," said Lowther; "otherwise you will probably leave this study as a committee of wrecks."

"We wefuse to twavel until we have inqwiahed into the cause of the late stwange conduct of Tom Mewwy. Tom Mewwy, pway stand up and ans'ah my questions!" said the swell of the School House firmly.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to go and do anythin' of the sort!"

"Now, look here, Merry," said Blake.

"Pway dwy up, Blake, and leave the talkin' to your chairman!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,263.

"Sorry we can't let you talk here," said Manners. "There's the door and the window—take your choice!"

"I wefuse to take my choice. Tom Mewwy, I call upon you to stand up and ans'ah my questions—"

Lowther glanced at his leader.

"Shall we kick them out, Tom?" he asked.

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye and gave Lowther a disdainful glare. Blake, Herries, and Digby drew closer together, shoulder to shoulder, evidently in readiness for the commencement of the kicking-out process.

Tom Merry laughed, something like his old, pleasant laugh, and rose from the armchair. He ran his fingers through his curly hair, as he always did when he was non-plussed or perplexed, and looked at Arthur Augustus.

"My dear kid," he exclaimed, "there's nothing to be inquired into. Never mind the kicking-out now, Lowther. Go quietly, you kids!"

"Who are you calling—"

"Pway shut up, Blake! I weally wish you would bear in mind that I am chairman of this beastly committee. Tom Mewwy, we wefuse to leave this woom until you have satisfied us. If you want to wow, we are weady for a wow!"

The hero of the Shell laughed rather impatiently.

"Gussy, you're a good little ass! But really—"

"At any othah time, Tom Mewwy, I should feel called upon to administah a feahful thwashin' to you for applyin' that oppwobwious expwession to me, but as chairman of the honahwable committee I can afford to pass it ovah. Tom Mewwy, pway shut up and ans'ah my questions—"

"How on earth is he to shut up and answer your questions, too?" demanded Blake.

"Pway don't intewwupt, Blake!"

"No; but really—"

"Weally, Blake, I must insist upon your either shuttin' up or wesignin' your seat on this committee," said D'Arcy firmly.

"But I haven't a seat; I'm standing!"

"I was usin' a figuah of speech, deah boy. You must shut up, or clear out. I hope that this warnin' will be sufficient. Now, Mewwy, have you or have you not been goin' about the whole day lookin' as if you had somethin' on your mind?"

"Really, I don't know."

"Well, I can ans'ah that question for you—you have. I don't suppose for a moment that you have committed a cwime—"

"Thank you!"

"But you have somethin' on your mind, and it gives your fwinds the cweeps to see you goin' about like an amateur funewal mute, deah boy."

"I'm sorry," said Tom Merry, laughing in spite of himself. "I'll try to look a little more cheerful, that's all!"

"You had bettah confide the twouble to us. We will do our best to wemove it. Have you fallen in love, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No! I'm not troubled with your complaint, Gussy."

"I wegard that wemark as a weflection upon myself. I have only been in love twice since I have been at this school, as you know perfectly well. But let that pass. Pway wefwain from makin' personal weflections. It is not good form. If you have not fallen in love, what is the mattah?"

"Nothing."

"You wefuse to ans'ah questions?"

"Yes."

D'Arcy stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Now, the question for us to decide, deah boys," he said, turning to the grinning committee, "is this—shall we wag him—"

"Shall we what?" demanded Digby.

"Wag him, and make him ans'ah—"

"Oh, rag him! That's not a bad idea."

"Better try it," said Lowther, with a look that hinted, however, that he really meant that the chums of the Fourth had better not try it.

"Shall we wag him," said D'Arcy, "or shall we pursue our inqwies in othah quartahs?"

Tom Merry gave a start.

"I say, do shut up with this rot!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that you're going over all the school chattering about me, do you?"

"Yaas, watah! As a self-wespectin' and conscientious committee of inqwiy we are bound to pursue our inqwies in all quartahs till the twuth is discovahed—"

"Rather!" said Blake, Herries, and Digby in unison.

"Look here, I'd much rather you chaps minded your own business—"

"Pewwaps you would, Tom Mewwy; but that is weally not the point—though, as a mattah of fact, it is our business to look into this stwange mystewy, as leadahs of the juniahs of the School House—"

"Oh, cheese it! There's really nothing the matter. I don't want you to go gassing all over the school!" said Tom Merry restlessly.

"Well," said Monty Lowther, "as a matter of fact, I rather agree with Gussy. If you don't speak out and explain, Tom, I shall be rather inclined to join the committee of investigation."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Lowther!"

"Thank you! You're growing marvellously polite in your old age, I must say."

"What I mean is—"

"Let us go, deah boys. Upon the whole, as chairman of the committee, I decide that for the pwsent we will pursue our inqwies in othah quartahs, and not wag Tom Mewwy, except as a last wesource."

"Stop a minute!" exclaimed Tom. "If you're curious about the matter—"

"We are not at all cwiuous, deah boy. We are actin' in this way fwom a sense of duty, and fwom wegard for you."

"Oh, rats! The fact of the matter is that—that—"

Tom Merry paused and coloured deeply. The chums of the Fourth looked at him in amazement.

"Yaas, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a very judicial air. "Go on. The fact of the mattah is—what?"

"Well, somebody has been saying something unpleasant, that's all—I heard that a certain chap had been running me down—"

"Who was the chap?"

"Never mind that. It was a chap I have had plenty of rows with, but I always liked him, all the same, and I never thought he was the kind of fellow to run a chap down behind his back!"

"I see. That would natuwallly wowwy you a bit, I suppose. It would wowwy me undah similar circs," said D'Arcy. "But as a committee of investigation, we cannot stop here at this point of the case. We want to know who the chap was?"

"I know," said Lowther. "You as good as told us before, Tom."

"Well, it was Figgins," said Tom Merry. "But I don't want it jawed all over the House. I am saying this in confidence, and I expect you to treat it as such."

"I weally think it would be bettah to ask Figgins for an explanation."

"Nothing of the sort," said Tom Merry hastily. "I have spoken to you in confidence, and I expect you to keep mum as to what I've told you."

"Oh, vevy well!" said D'Arcy, with a nod. "You have a wight to ask that, though it places us in wathah a difficult position as a committee of investigation."

"Oh, blow your committee of investigation!"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort—"

"You've done with investigation, anyway, now you know the facts."

"Not at all, deah boy! You haven't told us what Figgins said."

"Never mind what he said."

"Or how you came to know that he said it."

"Never mind that either!"

"Pewwaps he nevah said it at all—"

Tom Merry turned red.

"Do you think I'm cramming, then?"

"Certainly not, deah boy! But you may have weceived incowwect information."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It was correct enough; the way I heard it showed that Figgins had really said something, anyway. Never mind, it's nothing to worry about. I couldn't help feeling rather rotten about it—"

"Yaas, wathah! I should have felt wotten myself. But I'm not quite satisfied yet. If you wufuse to tell us what Figgins said—"

"Oh, hang it!"

"And who told you he had said it—"

"I've answered all the questions I'm going to answer, Gussy. So you can travel," said Tom Merry, sitting down in his chair again.

"Vevy well. Undah the circs the committee of investigation cannot wegard its work as completed," said D'Arcy. "We shall wespsect your confidence, Tom Mewwy, but we have no alternative but to seek furthah information. Come on, deah boys, and we will pursue our inqwies in othah quartahs."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry; and Lowther and Manners repeated that ancient and expressive word as the committee of the Fourth Form turned to the door.

"Don't worry," said Blake kindly, as he went out. "We'll look into the matter, Tom Merry, and find out all the facts for you."

"Oh, get along!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus closed the door, and the Terrible Three were left alone.

The Fourth-Formers were chuckling. The committee promised to be a great success; at all events, they had been successful so far. And, upon the whole, the members of the honourable committee had to admit that they had no reason so far to be dissatisfied with their chairman.

CHAPTER 4.

The Tell-Tale!

MELLISH came along the passage towards Gore's study, just as the committee of inquiry came out of Tom Merry's doorway, and he stopped and looked at them.

"Hallo! What's going on?" he asked casually.

"We are," said Blake, walking past him down the passage. Blake had little liking for the cad of the Fourth Form, and was not disposed to stand upon ceremony with him. And Herries and Digby promptly followed their leader.

Mellish's eyes glinted as he glanced after them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy delayed for a moment. He disliked the cad and tale-bearer of the Fourth as much as his chums did, but personal likes and dislikes were never allowed to stand in the way of politeness by the swell of the School House.

"Nothin' in particulah, Mellish," said D'Arcy politely. "We have just been payin' a visit to Tom Mewwy to inqwiah what's the mattah, that's all, deah boy."

"Oh, you've been paying a visit to Tom Merry, have you?" said Mellish.

D'Arcy had moved on, but he stopped again as Mellish spoke in a very peculiar tone.

"Yaas, wathah!" he said, looking curiously at the cad of the Fourth. "There's nothin' swange in that, is there, Mellish?"

"Oh, no! Nothing that I know of! Only if you knew what—"

"If I knew what?"

"What I know," said Mellish.

"I weally do not compwehend you, deah boy. What do you know?"

"Oh, never mind!" said Mellish, with the air of one who could disclose great secrets if he wished. "It's nothing."

"But weally, Mellish, you have awoused my cwiwosity!"

"It was a mere nothing that he said about you, after all—"

"Who said?"

"Why, Tom Merry, of course!"

"Tom Mewwy said something about me?" said D'Arcy.

"Weally, it's not like Tom Mewwy to talk about a fellow behind his back, bai Jove!"

"That's all you know."

"Well, of course, you nevah know a fellow till he's put to the pwoof, I know," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "But I should nevah have believed anythin' of the kind of Tom Mewwy."

Mellish grinned.

"If you knew what he had said—"

"Well, what did he say, deah boy?"

"Catch me telling you! Of course, you'd blurt it all out to Tom Merry, and then I should have the three of them down upon me—"

"I weally twust you know me better than that, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus, with great dignity. "Of course, I should wegard anythin' you told me as stwictly in confidence!"

"Well, that alters the case, of course. I don't mind telling you, if you really want to know. He said—but perhaps I'd better not say. It would only make bad feeling."

"You had better tell me, Mellish."

"No, upon second thoughts, I won't."

"Then, upon thir'd thoughts you will, Mellish, unless you want me to give you a feahful thwashin'," said D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his eye and regarding the cad of the Fourth with a really ferocious look.

"Oh, if you're going to take it like that—"

"I'm going to take you by the scwuff of the neck and wub your featuahs on the floor, if you don't immediately tell me what Tom Mewwy said."

"Well," said the cad, "you're sure you want to know—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well," said Mellish, with an appearance of great reluctance, "he said you were a— I hardly like to say it, I know you won't like it."

"Tell me at once, or I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"Well, he called you a silly popinjay, and said you ought

to be kicked out of the School House and shoved into the menagerie with the pets," said Mellish.

D'Arcy turned red with wrath.

"He called me a—me a popinjay, Mellish?"

"Certainly."

"He said I ought to be put in the menagerie!"

"His very words."

"Bai Jove! I will instwuct him about chawactewisn' me as a popinjay! I will give him a feahful thwashin'—"

The swell of the School House rushed back towards the door of Tom Merry's study. But the alarmed Mellish caught him by the arm and stopped him.

"I say, look here, Gussy—"

"Welease me immediately!"

"You mustn't—"

"I am goin' to thwash Tom Mewwy!"

"But your promise! Remember—"

"Bai Jove, I had forgotten that! It had weally slipped my memowry for the moment," said D'Arcy, recollecting himself. "I beg your pardon, Mellish."

"Yes, I should say so."

"I will not say anythin' to Tom Mewwy. But I weally wish you hadn't told me," said D'Arcy, looking greatly distressed. "I don't see how I can wegard him in the same light as before now that I know he talks about me behind my back. I weally wish you hadn't told me, Mellish."

"Well, you forced me to."

"Yaas, that's twue enough. I should have thwashed you if you hadn't; and I weally feel wathah inclined to thwash you anyway, deah boy."

Mellish retreated in alarm

"Here, don't be an ass!"

"I weally feel most uncomfy about it. I cannot wegard Tom Mewwy as a fwiend, and I cannot respect him when I wegard him as a backbitah."

"Well, you see—"

"Oh, don't talk to me! I wathah despise you."

And Arthur Augustus walked away rather disconsolately. Mellish grinned, and went on to Gore's study and looked in.

"Hallo, Gore! Why—what—"

George Gore was the leader of the "smart set" among the juniors of St. Jim's. That set had been sat upon so heavily by Tom Merry & Co. that it had been really crushed out of existence, but Gore still kept up some of its worthy customs in the privacy of his own study. He was smoking a cigarette when Mellish suddenly opened the door, and he gave a guilty start and slipped it into his sleeve, in mortal terror lest it should be a master or a prefect who had discovered him.

"I— Oh, Mellish, is it you? Ow!" Gore jumped up, shaking his sleeve frantically. He had meant to conceal the cigarette there, but it had slipped farther than he had intended, and was burning his skin. "Ow! Oh!"

Mellish grinned.

"Ow! You silly ass, you startled me like that! It's burning me! Ow! I can't get the beastly thing out!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish.

Gore shook his sleeve frantically, and the cigarette dropped out at last. The bully of the Shell rubbed his scorched arm, and grinned expressively.

"Sorry!" grinned Mellish. "But it was funny! He, he, he!"

"What do you want here, you confounded ass?"

"Oh, I only dropped in to speak to you. I hear you've got a holiday. There's a lot of favouritism in this school."

"Nothing of the kind!" growled Gore. "I've got to go home for a week or two because my uncle's ill, that's all. Blessed if I want to go."

"H'm! Of course, it's true if you say so. Wish I had a chance of getting away for a week," said Mellish. "Mighty convenient to have an uncle ill sometimes—"

"Don't you believe me?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Ass! Do you think the Head would give me permission to go if it wasn't true?" growled Gore, still rubbing his arm.

"He might be taken in—or there might be favouritism. I know once Tom Merry had a whole holiday when the rest of the fellows had to go on as usual. Still, it's no business of mine. I hope you'll have a good time."

"You confounded monkey!" shouted Gore. "I tell you I'm going home to a wretched place full of doctors and medicines and sickness, and I don't want to go. I've got to."

"Keep it up, if you like. Tom Merry thinks—"

"What has Tom Merry been saying?"

"Oh, nothing! There was Skimpole, too. He thought—"

"Hang Skimpole, and you, too! You've made me burn my arm! Get out of my study!"

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"Skimpole said—well, never mind, as he's your study-mate I suppose I had better not say anything," said Mellish, turning to the door.

"You had better, if you don't want me to jam your head against the wall," said Gore, rushing at the cad of the Fourth and seizing him by the collar. "Now then, what did Skimpole say?"

"Well, he said he thought it was all rot about your uncle being ill, and that you were rotting—"

"Oh, he did, did he? I'll talk to Skimpole about that," said Gore. "As for you, I'll teach you to pop into my study like a jack-in-the-box and make me burn my arm—"

"Let me go—"

"I'm going to! There you go!"

And Gore twisted Mellish into the doorway, and gave him a powerful kick that sent him sprawling out into the passage.

Mellish gave a yell and fell on his hands and knees, and rolled over, and then sat up rather dazedly and stared at Gore. The bully of the Shell was standing in his doorway, roaring with laughter.

"You—you rotter!" gasped Mellish.

"Dear me! Why have you treated Mellish so violently, Gore?" exclaimed a weedy youth with a very large head, who came along the passage in time to see Mellish ejected from the study. "You must know that—"

"Hallo, Skimpole! I want to speak to you."

"Certainly, Gore," said Skimpole unsuspectingly. Skimpole was always unsuspecting. He was a curious youth in some respects, and had amazed the Lower Forms at St. Jim's by taking up Determinism, and later on by starting as an amateur detective. "I am quite at your service, Gore."

"Well, come here, then, fathead!"

Skimpole came there, and Gore grasped him by the shoulders. With a twist he sent the unprepared junior staggering over Mellish. Mellish was just rising when Skimpole fell upon him, and the two went to the floor together with a bump.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Gore. "There, that will teach you to talk about me, Skimpole!"

The freak of the Shell sat up in bewilderment and groped for his spectacles.

"But—but I haven't talked about you, Gore!" he gasped.

"You can settle that with Mellish. If you come into this study now I'll chuck you out on your neck, so you know what to expect," said Gore.

And he went into the study and slammed the door.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy Resigns!

"WHERE'S our giddy chairman?"

"Here I am, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, coming into Study No. 6 as Blake asked the question.

"Do you want me?"

"No, of course not!" said Blake blandly. "I was only wondering where you were. What has happened now? You look as if you had lost a shilling and found a threepenny-bit. Is it that confounded half-crown?"

"No."

"What's the matter, then?"

"Nothing."

"Blessed if you're not getting as mysterious as Tom Merry, going about scowling like a demon in a pantomime, and refusing to explain what's the matter!" exclaimed Blake.

"I wefuse to be compared to a demon in a pantomime."

"Well, what's the trouble, then, ass?"

"I decline to be called an ass. Weally, Blake—"

"The question is, what's the next step for the committee of investigation to take? If you're the chairman, tell us what's to be done next."

"Weally, I think we're takin' too much notice of that Shell boundah," said D'Arcy. "I think the committee had bettah be dissolved."

"What?" exclaimed three voices in amazement.

"I weally considah that the committee had bettah be dissolved. I don't care a wap what's the matter with Tom Mewwy!"

"What's made you change your mind all of a sudden?"

"Oh, I've got my weasons."

"But the committee's not going to bust up because you've got your reasons," said Blake. "We're going to pursue our inquiries in other quarters."

"Then I wesign!"

"You don't want to be on the committee any more?" asked Blake, staring in amazement at the swell of the School House.

Arthur Augustus shook his head, decidedly.

"Wathah not!"
 "Very well, we'll leave you on the beach. I'm chairman now, you fellows!"
 "Rats!" said Digby. "Of course, we have to toss up again!"
 "If you're such an obstinate bounder, Dig, I'm afraid there will be rows in this study," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "I suppose you learned to be so obstinate while you were away from St. Jim's. I used to keep you in order."
 "Well, as a matter of fact, Blake, you grew a fearful bump of bumptiousness while I was away," said Dig solemnly. "I really think that I ought to take you in hand now I've come back, and pull you off your perch."
 "With or without gloves?" asked Blake, in a casual sort of way.
 "Which ever you like."
 "Pway don't quawwell, deah boys! Why not toss up for

"Not in the least, Digbay! I have already told you that I have changed my mind about wesignin'."
 "You've changed it too late. I appeal to the committee."
 "The committee, of course, will uphold me."
 "The committee, of course, will do nothing of the kind," said Blake promptly. "Dig's chairman, and you're off the board."
 "Weally, Blake——"
 "Nuff said. What's the programme, Dig?"
 "We'll go over to the New House——"
 "Blake, I must wefuse——"
 "Shut up!"
 "I wefuse to shut up! I am compelled to make my voice heard in this mattah. I have changed my mind——"
 "I'll change your features for you if you don't dry up!"
 "As chairman of this committee——"
 "You've resigned."
 "I withdwaw my wesignation."



As Digby jerked the inkpot a stream of ink flew out and smote Arthur Augustus full in his aristocratic countenance. "Yawooh!" howled Gussy.

the beastly chairmanship?" said D'Arcy, in a tone of remonstrance.
 "Right-ho!" said Herries. "Lend me a half-crown to toss, Gussy, will you?"
 "Yaas, wathah, if you can find the one that's on the floor!"
 "Never mind, I'll make this penny do. Call to me, Blake."
 "Oh, all right!" grunted Blake. "Head!"
 "Tail!" said Herries. "Now I'll call to you, Dig. Head!"
 "Tail!" grinned Digby. "I'm chairman. I can tell you what to do."
 "Upon second thoughts," said D'Arcy, who had been reflecting deeply—"upon second thoughts, deah boys, I will not wesign from the chair of the committee."
 "Won't you?" said Digby grimly.
 "No. As the committee of inquiry is still to go on, it would be bettah for me to remain at the head of it, you know. You fellahs will be bound to get yourselves into some trouble or othah if you go on without a guidin' hand."
 "We won't bother you for a guiding hand, Gussy."
 "Not at all, deah boy; quite a pleasuah!"
 "To you, perhaps," said Digby; "not to us. The fact is, kid, that you've resigned and I'm chairman, and that's the end of it!"

"You had better withdraw yourself."
 "I wefuse to withdwaw myself. As chairman of this com——"
 "Ring off!"
 "I uttably and absolutely wefuse to wing off! As chairman of——"
 "Get outside!"
 "Certainly not! As chair——"
 "Outside!"
 "I shall wemain where I am. As——"
 Three exasperated juniors rushed upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and whirled him towards the door. Blake opened it, and D'Arcy was sent flying out into the passage. Then Blake slammed the door upon him.
 "There, he's quiet now!" he exclaimed. "Never knew such a chap for keeping on with the chin-wagging. He goes on like a giddy gramophone. Now then, Dig, what's the game?"
 "We'll go over to the New House——"
 Digby was interrupted by the opening of the door. Arthur Augustus put his head in. His collar was hanging out by one end, and his eyeglass floating at the end of its cord, and his face was excited.
 "Get out!" roared Blake.

"I distinctly wefuse to get out! I say——"
 "Are you going?" exclaimed Digby, his hand closing on the inkpot on the table.

"Certainly not! I——"
 Swish!
 A stream of ink flew from the pot as Digby jerked it forward, and it smote Arthur Augustus D'Arcy full in his aristocratic countenance.

He gave a howl as the stream of black fluid transformed him into a very good imitation of a nigger minstrel.

"Ow! You wotten wascal! Ow!"
 "Ha, ha, ha! Get out!"

Blake slammed the door upon the inky dude of the School House. D'Arcy could be heard grunting and gasping in the passage.

"Now then, Dig, go on with the washing!"
 "As I was saying, we'll go over to the New House and see Figgins & Co. about it," said Digby. "We'll ask Figgins——"

The door was thrown violently open, and Arthur Augustus came in like a stone from a catapult. He rushed straight at Digby, but Blake caught him and slung him back.

"Hallo, hallo! What's the matter?"
 "Welease me!"

"Rats! What's the joke?"
 "I am goin' to give Digbay a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Better go and wash your chivvy!"
 "I wefuse to go and wash my beastlay chivvy! I am goin' to admintsh a feahful thwashin' to that disgustin' wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Welease me at once, Blake, or I shall stwike you!"

"Keep your hair on!"
 "I wefuse to keep my hair on—I mean, don't be a wiculous ass, Blake! Welease me, or I shall lose my tempah and stwike you."

"Ha, ha, ha! Outside!"

D'Arcy went staggering into the passage again. This time Blake locked the door upon him. In a moment the swell of St. Jim's was hammering at it furiously, but the juniors within took no notice.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "Gussy is on the warpath this evening. What are we to ask Figgins when we get to the New House, Dig?"

"Well, you see, we can't break Tom Merry's confidence," said Dig thoughtfully. "Can't tell Figgy what Tom Merry said, but we can ask him if he knows anything about the matter, and if there's a mistake we can set it right, perhaps."

"Good wheeze!"
 "Right-ho!" said Herries. "Let's go over there at once. We haven't much in the cupboard for tea, and if Figgy has anything decent going, we may get a feed there."

"Something in that," said Blake. "Come on!"
 "What about Gussy?"

Hammer, hammer, hammer came the thumps of the School House swell upon the door. The strong oak shook under the efforts of Arthur Augustus.

Blake grinned.
 "We'll open the door and lock him in," he said, quietly unlocking the door and taking out the key. "Be ready when I open it."

"Ha, ha, ha! We're ready!"
 Blake threw the door wide open. Arthur Augustus, who was in the act of thumping it with both fists, staggered into the room, and in a moment Blake had given him a push which sent him across the study.

"Now then!"
 In a twinkling the three juniors were outside in the passage, and Blake had slammed the door to after them.

But in another moment D'Arcy was tugging at it from inside.

"Let me out, you wottahs!"
 "Not this evening!" murmured Blake, holding the door shut while he inserted the key in the outside of the lock and turned it.

"Let me out, Blake!"
 "Presently, old chap! You're not safe at present."

"I no longah wegard you as fwriends!"
 "We'll try to survive it, Gussy."

"You are a set of wottahs!" bawled D'Arcy through the keyhole.
 "Go hon!"

"I shall wefuse to acknowledge you in fatuah. I have always endeavoured to keep my circle of fwriends quite select, not to say swaggah. But I have admitted you to my fwiership, and you are not at all gwateful. I am no longah——"

But the chums of the Fourth did not wait to hear the rest. They walked away down the passage, leaving D'Arcy addressing the oak door and the empty air, and descended the stairs and went out into the quadrangle. The windows

of the great school buildings glimmered with lights in the dusk of the spring evening.

The blind of Study No. 6 was up, and the chums heard the window violently open. The voice of D'Arcy floated down through the gloom.

"Will you come and let me out, you feahful wottahs?"
 Blake chuckled.

"Good-bye, Gussy!" called out Digby. "Be good!"
 "I wefuse to be good! I——"

But the chums of the Fourth did not listen. They went down the steps of the School House, grinning. Blake turned his head as he stood in the dusty quadrangle, and saw the head and shoulders of Arthur Augustus silhouetted against the light of the study window, and he kissed his hand.

D'Arcy shook his fist in reply. Then the chums turned away to cross towards the New House, and at the same moment a junior with a strapped bag in his hand came out of the School House. It was Gore, and Blake stopped for a moment, looking at him in surprise.

CHAPTER 6.

A Warm Reception!

"**W**HITHER bound, Gore?" asked Blake, looking first at the bully of the Shell and then at the bag he carried.

"Going home!" snapped Gore.
 "Got a holiday?"

"No; my uncle's ill, and I'm wanted at home."
 "Well, that's rather a curious idea," said Blake in a reflective sort of way. "If I were ill, I am sure the sight of your chivvy would make me worse——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Gore; and he passed down the steps and crossed towards the gates with a discontented frown upon his face.

It was evident that George Gore had very little sympathy with his sick uncle, and still less desire to go home on account of him.

The bully of the Shell disappeared in the dusk towards the gates, and the three chums walked away towards the New House.

Four youths were standing on the steps there, with their hands in their pockets, looking out into the dusk, and talking.

The great Figgins was leaning against a pillar, with a frown upon his brow, and Kerr, Wynn, and Marmaduke Smythe, the famous Co., were looking rather less amiable than usual, too. Something had apparently happened to disturb the equanimity of the New House quartet.

"Hallo! Here are the rotters!" exclaimed Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co., as he caught sight of Blake, Digby, and Herries.

Figgins started and looked towards them.
 "Cheek, to come over here now!" exclaimed Marmaduke.

"Well, we'll give them a little lesson while they're on the spot."

"Wait a tick!" said Fatty Wynn quickly. "There may be some mistake about it, and if Blake is willing to explain, and, say, stand a feed by way of compensation——"

"Oh, shut up, Fatty!"
 "I think that's a good idea. We——"

"If you say the word 'feed' again to-night I'll jump on your neck!" exclaimed Figgins irritably. "Shut up!"

"That's all very well," said Fatty Wynn, stepping a pace farther away from his irate leader, "but I'm hungry."

"Go and eat coke, then!"
 "Hallo!" sang out Blake, as he came up with his companions. "We've come to see you, Figgins."

"Have you?" said Figgins grimly.
 "Yes. We've got a bone to pick with you."

"Same here!"
 "Eh, what's that?" asked Blake, rather surprised by Figgins' grim and uncompromising tone.

There was usually warfare between the two Houses of St. Jim's, but any real ill-feeling seldom entered the contests.

"We've got a bone to pick with you, too," said Figgins.
 "Anything the matter?"

"Hold on, Blake!" said Digby. "You seem to have overlooked the fact that I am chairman of this giddy committee."

"If you want to hear yourself jaw, Dig——"
 "Well, I don't want to hear you jaw; that's how it stands."

"So you're a committee, are you?" asked Figgins in an extremely disparaging tone. "A committee of what?"

"A committee of inquiry."
 "Oh, I thought you might be a committee of backbiters!"

said Figgins.
 Blake turned red.

"What the dickens do you mean by that, Figgins?"

Figgins shrugged his shoulders
 "Better ask yourself the question," he replied. "You ought to be able to answer it as well as I can."
 "What the dickens—"
 "Hold on, Blake, and let me question Figgins."
 "Oh, rats!"
 "Now, look here, Blake, don't be an ass!"
 "Oh, go ahead!"
 "Figgins, I should like to know what you mean by that remark," said Digby impressively. "From the information we have already gathered it seems to me that you are more in the backbiting line than anybody else at St. Jim's!"
 Figgins flushed crimson.
 "Who says so?" he exclaimed angrily.
 "I do. From what we've heard—"
 "What have you heard?"
 "Never mind that. It was told us in confidence."
 "Just a second!" exclaimed Kerr, as if struck by a new idea. "Was it Mellish who told you this, what ever it was?"
 "No, it wasn't. It was Tom M— But I don't think I can tell you."
 "You've told us now. It was Tom Merry."
 Digby bit his lips with vexation.
 "You've let it out now, Dig," said Blake consolingly.
 "All your own fault, for being such an obstinate ass! If I had been chairman of this committee—"
 "Oh, cheese it, for goodness' sake! You're getting as bad as Gussy!" said Digby crossly. "Blessed if you don't go on like a gramophone!"
 "And what was it Tom Merry said?" demanded Figgins.
 "Oh, hang! Never mind that. I never meant—"
 "I dare say you didn't! It's like you School House bouncers to talk about a fellow behind his back and not tell him what you've got up against him!" exclaimed Figgins scornfully.
 "You know perfectly well that you're talking rot, Figgins!" exclaimed Herries hotly.
 "Perhaps you mean that I'm telling fibs?" said Figgins aggressively.
 "Jolly near it, anyway."

"Are you looking for a black eye, Herries?"
 "Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Blake. "Listen to me!"
 "Excuse me, Blake, I'm chairman of this committee!"
 "Look here, Dig, I shall dot you in the eye if you bother me!"
 "Will you? I should like to see you!"
 "Oh, get home, you kids!" said Figgins. "It's not worth while to wipe up the quadrangle with you, or—"
 "It's jolly lucky for some bouncers that it's not worth while!" said Blake darkly. "Somebody would get hurt in the process."
 "If you put it like that, Blake, we shall wade in and do it!"
 "Wade in, then!"
 "Come on, kids! Kick these School House rotters home to their own side!" exclaimed Figgins, rushing at Blake.
 "Buck up, School House!" cried Blake.
 "What-ho!"
 In a moment the rival juniors were struggling furiously; and they were hitting hard, too, this time. Even in their roughest encounters they were usually restrained from giving really hard knocks, but this time all restraint seemed to be gone.
 A feeling of bitterness had, for once, crept in on both sides. They fought hard, and with dire results to themselves. In a few moments one of Blake's eyes was closing up, and Figgins' nose was bleeding copiously.
 Fatty Wynn was rolling on the ground, and Herries was rolling over him, and, as there had lately been some rain, the state of their clothes may be better imagined than described. Digby and Kerr were boxing away like a pair of prize-fighters, paying much more attention to attack than to defence, and each of them receiving some extremely severe punishment.
 The fight was accompanied by exclamations, gasps, tramping of feet, and was not long in attracting attention from within the New House.
 In a few minutes Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, came out with a frown upon his brow and a cane in his hand.

(Continued on next page.)

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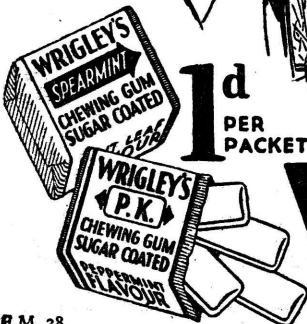


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WRIGLEY'S

MEANS BETTER CHEWING GUM

"What's this row about?"
 The juniors were too excited to heed even the voice of a prefect. Monteith looked at them in amazement in the dusk as he recognised them. Fighting between the two parties was common enough, but not in such deadly earnest fashion as this.

"Stop it! Do you hear? Stop it!" shouted Monteith. But still they did not heed. Monteith wasted no more time in words. He gripped the cane, and took an active part in the proceedings. Blake gave a yell as he felt the cane on his calves and let go of Figgins. Figgins roared as he got it over the shoulders.

"Ow! What's that? Ow!"
 "Go into your House!" said Monteith sternly. "What do you mean by fighting in the quadrangle, like a gang of hooligans?"

"Ow! Is that you, Monteith?"
 "Yes, it is. Go into your House at once, Figgins! Blake, return to the School House directly, or I will report you to your Housemaster!"

Blake and Figgins glared at one another, with a world of expression in their looks.

"Just you wait till to-morrow!" muttered Figgins.
 "I'll remind you," said Blake.

"Are you going, Blake?"
 "Certainly. Anything to oblige a nice fellow like you, Monteith!" said Blake, rubbing his damaged eye.

Monteith made a movement towards him, and Blake retreated. Figgins called to his chums to cease the fighting, and Blake did the same. Kerr and Digby separated, glaring at one another aggressively; but Herries and Fatty Wynn were not so amenable to the voice of authority.

Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the Co., was usually a quiet and inoffensive junior; but when his Welsh fighting blood was aroused it was not easy to quieten him again. He rolled over on the ground with Herries, who was equally excited and aggressive, and neither heeded the calling of Blake and Figgins.

"Let go! Get up!" shouted Monteith angrily. But the enraged combatants took no notice. Monteith began to lay on the cane, getting in a cut wherever he found a suitable spot, and that had the desired effect. Herries and Fatty Wynn squirmed away from the stinging cane, and separated. They scrambled to their feet, bruised and dishevelled, and smothered in mud.

Monteith burst into a laugh as he looked at them.
 "Well, you're a pretty looking pair of funny objects!" he exclaimed. "You had better go and get yourselves cleaned. No more of this!"

"I'll—"
 "I'll—"
 Herries and Wynn had evidently not finished yet.

"Shut up, both of you! Be off, you School House youngsters! Mind, if there's any more of this I'll report you to Mr. Railton! Go into the House, Figgins!"

Exchanging glares of mutual defiance, the rival juniors separated and the New House Co. were seen into their House by Monteith. Blake, Herries, and Digby went back slowly and rather disconsolately towards the School House.

"We haven't done much good there," Blake remarked. "I never suspected that Figgins was such a real beast before."

"Nor I," said Herries. "You never know a chap till you find him out."

"I don't quite understand it," Digby remarked thoughtfully.

"What don't you understand?"
 "Figgins & Co. seemed to have something up against us. I believe they were talking about us when we came up."

"Very likely. I dare say they've heard of the committee of inquiry, and Figgins knows that we are going to show him up."

"That's possible."
 "Oh, I expect that's it! Anyway, one thing's jolly certain—it's war to the knife with those New House bouncers now. We're going to give them a warm time, to show the rotters what's what."

To which Blake's chums heartily agreed.

CHAPTER 7.

No Longer Friends!

THE next morning there were very visible traces to be seen in the juniors' faces of the combat of the evening outside the New House. When the Terrible Three came down to breakfast, Tom Merry noticed at once Blake's black eye, Herries' swollen nose, and Digby's cut lip, as well as many other lesser signs of conflict upon all three of them.

"By Jove! They've been in the wars!" Tom Merry remarked. "Have they been fighting with one another, or—"

"Or pursuing their inquiries in other quarters," grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy is the only one that doesn't look as if he had been in a mangle," Manners remarked.

"But there's something up with Gussy," Tom Merry said shrewdly. "Look at the way he's holding up his head! Note the scornful calm of his aristocratic brow."

"He's not speaking to the other rotters."
 "Something's up! Let's go and ask him."

The Terrible Three bore down upon the swell of the School House. Monty Lowther tapped him on the shoulder, and he turned round and screwed his monocle in his eye to survey the Terrible Three.

"Anything wrong, old son?" asked Lowther.
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"How's the committee of inquiry getting on?"
 "I weally do not know, as I have wesigned the chairmanship of the beastlay committee, deah boys."

"Why, how will the poor committee get on without you?" exclaimed Manners, in great astonishment. "Don't be hard upon them, Gussy. Remember that a brain like yours is required to steer them through—"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; I wemebahed that, and I wished to withdraw my wesignation, and then—what do you think they did?"

"Can't say."
 "They wefused to accept the withdrawal of the wesignation, and said I had given up the chairmanship for good. Wasn't that wathah wotten?"

"Awfully!"
 "Fearfully!"

"Yaas, wathah! But that is not all—they locked me up in the study while they went over to interview Figgins & Co."

"Outwageous!"

Potts, the Office Boy!



THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,263.

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Rumour!

TOM MERRY had a worried look in the Shell classroom that morning. There was a trouble on his mind, and a fellow of Tom's frank, open nature found it hard to conceal the fact when he was worried.

D'Arcy's conduct was inexplicable to him. The swell of the School House had many curious manners and customs, which caused much merriment to the School House at St. Jim's, and the New House as well, for that matter. But he had a heart of gold, and there was nobody at the school who did not like him at bottom. In spite of study rows between the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6, the feeling between the two parties had always been really friendly, and certainly there had never been a trace of bitterness in their relations. Now a change had come.

D'Arcy had evidently been in earnest; he had refused to speak to Tom Merry, for reasons which evidently seemed to him to be good. What did it all mean? Tom Merry felt that there was something altogether unpleasant in the air at St. Jim's. First, there was his own disagreement with Figgins; now there was this unpleasant affair with D'Arcy. Tom Merry was decidedly worried.

"I say, are you thinking about that young ass, D'Arcy?" asked Lowther, who was sitting beside Tom, taking advantage of Mr. Linton, the Form master, being occupied for the moment. "You look as if you were going to a funeral."

Tom Merry nodded gloomily. "I am feeling rather rotten about it, and that's a fact, Monty."

"It's nothing—only some more of Gussy's rot," said Lowther. "He's always got some piffle or other going on."

Tom shook his head. "He was serious in what he said."

"But I suppose he can't have anything real up against you, can he? You haven't trodden on his toes in any way?"

"Not that I know of, unless he has taken some of our little jokes too seriously."

"I should think he was too accustomed to them by this time to do that, Tom."

"So should I; but what—"

"He had something in his mind," said Manners. "He may have been told something by somebody—some tell-tale, perhaps. It seems to me as if there's something of that kind going on in the school."

"Quite possible."

The master of the Shell turned his head. "Take fifty lines for talking in class, Merry!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, as cheerfully as he could. And the discussion ceased till morning school was over.

The day happened to be Wednesday—a half-holiday at St. Jim's—and after morning school the boys were free for the rest of the day, with the exception of evening preparation. After dinner Tom Merry stayed in to write his lines, and Lowther and Manners strolled out into the quadrangle to wait for him there.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out of the School House looking rather forlorn. He had dropped the acquaintance, as he expressed it, of the chums of Study No. 6, but his severity was rather recoiling upon himself. He felt rather lonely that afternoon. The three juniors were keeping up the game, and the first advances towards a reconciliation had to come from Arthur Augustus, and the swell of the School House was determined not to make them. So the

"Yaas, I wegardud it as extwemely outwageours. Of course, it all happened as I expected—they had a feahful wow with Figgins & Co."

"Ah, that accounts for their lovely appearance this mornin'!" grinned Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! What was wequiahed as a chairman of the committee of inqwiwy was a fellow of tact and dis-cwectiun—a fellow of my sort—and without me, of course, the whole thing went to wack and wuin."

"Naturally," said Manners. "But, of course, you'll take the lead again now, and get them out of the troubles they have fallen into?" said Lowther solemnly.

"I should be quite willing to do so, and I made an offhah to that effect last night, offewin' at the same time to ovahlook their feahful impertinence in lockin' me in the study. But, instead of bein' pwopahly gwateful, they called me an ass!"

"Horrid!"

"So I have dwopped their acquaintance," said D'Arcy. "I am unfortunately compelled to continue to weside in the same study, until I can change into anothah, but I no longah wegard them as fwends."

"Too bad!" said Tom Merry. "I say, Gussy—"

D'Arcy regarded the hero of the Shell with a freezing glare through his monocle.

"Did you address me, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, of course I did."

"Then I shall be extwemely obliged if you will have the kindness to wefwain fwom doin' so again."

Tom Merry stared at the swell of the School House in blank amazement.

"Eh? What's that, Gussy?" he ejaculated.

"My name is D'Arcy," said Arthur Augustus, with a great assumption of dignity. "I am Gussy only to my fwends."

"And you don't include me in the list?" asked Tom Merry.

"Certainly not!"

"But surely, Gussy—I mean, D'Arcy, you don't want any study rows we have to make us enemies, do you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I am not alludin' to study wows when I say that I do not wegard you as a fwend, Tom Mewwy. Study wows and House wows are nothin'. We could be good fwends in spite of an occasional wow. I am not speakin' of that."

"Well, what are you speaking of, then?"

"Oh, nothin' in particular!" said D'Arcy evasively.

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I have wemarked before that I wefuse to be addressed as Gussy by a person whom I despise."

Tom Merry started. He had imagined at first that D'Arcy had some joke in his mind, but now the serious expression of the School House swell's face showed that he was in deadly earnest.

"What did you say, D'Arcy?"

"I wefuse to be at all familiar with a fellow whom I despise," said D'Arcy loftily.

"Does that mean that you despise me?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

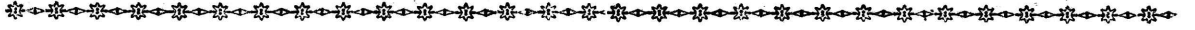
"And why?"

"Nevah mind."

"What have I done?"

"Oh, nothin'!"

And D'Arcy stalked away.



LIGHT IN THE HEAD!



acquaintance remained dropped. When D'Arcy spotted Lowther and Manners chatting under the elms, he strolled towards them with an agreeable smile upon his face.

"Nice afternoon, isn't it?" he said pleasantly.

"Haven't noticed it," said Lowther. "Yes, I dare say it is. Nice afternoon to go for a walk in the country."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, then, why don't you go for one?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, ring off and travel!"

"I wegard that remark as uttably wude and disagwee-able—"

"What about your remarks to Tom Merry, you young ass?" growled Lowther. "It's all through you that he's got an impot this afternoon."

"I am weally sowwy, but I don't see—"

"Well, it was through talking about you in class."

"Tom Mewwy is wathah too fond of talkin' about me, I think," said the swell of the School House disdainfully.

Monty Lowther turned red. He sometimes had little tiffs with his leader himself, but at a hint of an attack upon Tom Merry he was up in arms at once.

"What do you mean, you cheeky young rotter?"

"Nevah mind."

"But I do mind!" exclaimed Lowther, seizing D'Arcy by his left arm, while Manners laid hold of his right. "Now, just explain yourself."

"I wefuso to do anythin' of the kind."

"Then we'll give you the giddy frog's-march, and bump you down in every puddle we can find in the quadrangle!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I wefuso to be fwog's-marched!"

"Yank him along, Manners!"

"Pway don't be such wuff bwutes! Help! Wescue!"

"Hallo! What's the matter here?"

Kildare of the Sixth, captain of St. Jim's, came out of the gym, and turned his glance upon the three juniors as he heard Arthur Augustus shout. Lowther and Manners released the swell of the School House, looking rather sheepish. Kildare's frank brow grew stern.

"Is it possible that you are going in for bullying, Lowther and Manners?" he exclaimed. "I should never have expected anything of the kind from you."

The chums of the Shell became crimson.

"Not at all!" exclaimed Lowther hastily. "We were going to give D'Arcy the frog's-march, because he's an obstinate young brute—"

"I wefuso to—"

"Well, let him go!"

"Thank you, Kildare, for wescuin' me fwom those wuffians!" said D'Arcy. "I shall certainly dwoop their acquaintance atfah this."

And he walked away.

Kildare gave Manners and Lowther a rather peculiar look, and strode on his way. The chums of the Shell glowered after Arthur Augustus.

"Everything's going wrong, I believe!" growled Lowther.

"There's Kildare takes us for a pair of bullies now!"

"Well, it did look like it!"

"Well, that obstinate young brute ought to be ragged! I don't know what to make of him! He's got something up against Tom Merry; and, to do Gussy justice, he's not the fellow to take offence at a joke. It's something more serious."

Manners looked worried.

"But Tom can't have done anything mean."

"I wouldn't believe that for a moment. There must be a mistake somewhere. Hallo, here's Mellish! He knows pretty nearly everything that ever goes on in this place, and gets most of his knowledge by listening at keyholes, I believe. Let's ask him if he knows anything."

"Hallo, Mellish!" said Manners.

Mellish was going down to the gates. He stopped and nodded as the chums of the Shell came up to him.

"Have you noticed anything wrong with Gussy lately?" asked Lowther. "He's got something up against Tom Merry and he won't explain what it is."

"No good asking," said Mellish. "How should I know?"

"Well, you generally pry into everything, and have a finger in every pie, and your nose in everybody's business, you know."

"Thank you, Lowther. Perhaps I could tell you something that would make you open your eyes, if I chose. If you knew what Tom Merry said—but never mind."

Lowther stared at him.

"What Tom Merry said about me, do you mean?"

"Oh, never mind! Of course, I oughtn't to have spoken!"

"Tell me what you mean!"

"It's nothing!"

"I don't believe a word of it!" said Lowther angrily.

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"I'll go straight to Tom Merry and tell him your words, you cad!"

Mellish looked alarmed.

"Oh, don't make a row about nothing! It was Gore told me, and I don't answer for it! You can go and settle it with Gore!"

"Gore's gone away!"

Mellish winked.

"That's all you know."

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Manners and Lowther together. "Do you mean to say that Gore hasn't gone away?"

"I know what I know."

"That isn't much, I expect," said Lowther. "Look here, is there really anything in this, or are you only gassing?"

"I can only say what I've heard," said Mellish, with a shrug. "I don't know whether there's any truth in it. If Gore had the smallpox—"



The crowd thickened in the dusk, and from all sides fellows came

"The smallpox!" ejaculated Manners and Lowther in a breath.

"I don't say he has it. I don't say the Head is keeping him in the school and giving out that's he's gone home—"

"Why, you utter ass, it would be illegal to keep him here—"

"The Head might risk that rather than allow it to get about that there was an epidemic starting in the school."

"Impossible! There's been no doctor here!"

"Suppose it's all being kept a secret? Mr. Linton is qualified as a medical man, as I happen to know, though he's never practised. Perhaps he—"

"Perhaps you are an ass!"

"Perhaps I am!" sneered Mellish. "Well, we shall see how things turn out, anyway, and perhaps you'll believe me then."

And he went out of the gates, leaving Manners and Lowther looking very curious and uneasily at one another.

"Of course, there can't be anything in it," Manners remarked.

Lowther shook his head.

"Of course not, but——"

"But it's queer, Mellish getting hold of a yarn like that."

"That's it! Still, he's always getting some sort of a yarn to tell. Better take no notice of what the confounded fellow says. That reminds me, we never made him tell us what he was going to say about Tom."

"Too late now, too late! Let's go in and see if Tom's finished."

"Right you are!"

The chums of the Shell walked into the School House. There was a cloud upon Monty Lowther's brow. In spite of his determination to pay no attention to the words of the cad of the Fourth Form, he could not wholly dismiss Mellish's innuendoes from his mind.



to look on. Three fights at one time was a sight not to be

CHAPTER 9.

Strangers!

"HERE comes Gussy!"

Blake grinned as he came quickly into the study in the School House. Herries and Digby returned his grin, and the three Fourth-Formers at once became very busy. D'Arcy had dropped their acquaintance, so it was quite natural that they should be absorbed in their occupations, and should not glance up when the swell of the School House came into the study.

Arthur Augustus walked in and glanced round through his eyeglass.

Blake was oiling a cricket bat in the most industrious way in the world, and Digby was writing an impot at express speed. Herries was deeply interested in a Latin grammar.

"I say, Blake——"

Blake did not look up.

"Blake, are you vewy busy over that wotten bat?"

The chief of Study No. 6 did not reply.

"Digby, would you like me to help you write out that beastly impot?"

Digby did not answer.

"I say, Hewwies, old man!"

Herries kept his eyes fixed upon the book.

"Hewwies, old fellow, do you usually wead a Latin gwammah on a half-holiday? And is it a habit of yours to hold it upside down?" asked Arthur Augustus sarcastically.

Herries turned red and threw aside the grammar.

"Were you speaking to me?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who are you?"

"Eh?"

"Who are you?"

"You know vewy well who I am, Hewwies."

"I don't know you at all!" said Blake.

"Pway don't wot, Blake! I am willin' to wewen the fwidnship——"

"But we're not, without a sincero apology and a proper introduction by some mutual friend," said Blake. "That settles it!"

"Oh, wats! I think——"

"Please don't trouble to tell me what you think! I'm not at all interested in the thoughts of a fellow I don't know."

D'Arcy screwed his monocle savagely into his eye.

"I wegard you as wottahs!" he exclaimed, with a withering glare round the study. "I wufuse to speak to you!"

"Thank you vewy much."

"Oh, wats!"

And the indignant swell of the School House walked out of the study and shut the door behind him with unnecessary violence.

Blake roared.

"We'll keep it up till he comes round!" he grinned. "I'm not going to speak to him again without being properly introduced, for one. When a chap drops my acquaintance he's not going to pick it up again when he chooses, as if it were a marble or a pegtop he had dropped."

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather not!"

Arthur Augustus wandered disconsolately down the passage, where he met Skimpole, whom he invited to go to the village tuckshop with him.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry Loses His Temper!

MELLISH was in the tuckshop when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Skimpole entered, and he gave the swell of St. Jim's a friendly nod. His mouth watered as he saw the jam tarts selected by Skimpole, and he joined the two juniors.

"I'll have some of those tarts, if you like, Gussy," he remarked.

"I don't like!" said Gussy.

"Now, don't be mean, old fellow!"

"I wathah despise you, Mellish," said D'Arcy; "but I don't like to be mean. You can have some of the tarts, if you like."

"Thanks, I will."

D'Arcy's way of putting it was not particularly hospitable, but the tarts were nice enough, so Mellish was satisfied. He did not trouble his head about trifles. Three youths were standing at the counter, and their caps showed that they belonged to Rylcombe Grammar School. They were Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the leader of the Grammarian juniors, with whom our friends had had many a tussle; but just at present they seemed to be more interested in some topic they were discussing among themselves than in seeking a row with the Saints.

"It's all rot, of course!" said Monk.

"Must be," assented Carboy.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Lane, with a shake of the head. "Such things have happened, you know; and you never can tell."

"Oh, I think it's rot!" declared Monk. "Another three bottles of ginger-pop here, please, Gaffer Jones!"

"Ready, young gentlemen!"

Gaffer Jones was behind the counter of the little shop. He always took Mother Murphy's place there when the old lady suffered from one of her periodical attacks of rheumatism. He handed out the ginger-pop, and the three Grammarians discussed that and the topic that was exercising their minds at the same time.

"It can't be true!" said Frank Monk, with a decided nod of the head. "Dr. Holmes would have more sense!"

"I should think so."

"Well, he wouldn't want it to get out, you see, or people

might start taking their boys away from the school, and then they might never come back again."

"I'm! I think it's all rot! Let's ask D'Arcy."

"I don't suppose he'd know anything about it."

"Let's ask him, anyway."

The three Grammarians walked towards the St. Jim's juniors. D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass, and looked at them inquiringly.

"If you are lookin' for a wow, Fwank Monk—"

"Not at all," said Monk genially. "Rows are off. We only want to speak to you, Gussy."

"Well, as a wule, I only speak to people whom I wegard as select, not to say swaggah," said D'Arcy; "but I am quite at your service, deah boys. Go on!"

"Thanks awfully, Gussy! You don't know how grateful we are for your condescension!"

"Yaas, wathah; I suppose you must be. But pway go on! Will you have some jam tarts? They are vewy nice."

"Certainly! Chaps, take as many tarts as you like; it's Gussy's treat! I say, D'Arcy, Mellish has been telling us—"

"No, I haven't!" broke in Mellish quickly. "I said that I had heard it, Monk. Don't put the yarn down to me."

"Oh, all right! Mellish has been saying that he's heard that there's a chap with the smallpox up at St. Jim's—being kept secret, so that it won't get out that there's an epidemic in the school."

"Oh wats!" said D'Arcy. "What wot!"

"That's what I say," said Frank Monk. "But Mellish seems to think there's something in it, so I thought—"

"It's all wot, of course! Who told you, Mellish?"

"One of the fellows in the Fourth said he'd heard it," said Mellish. "Of course, it's well-known that Gore hasn't really gone home."

"Bai Jove! I thought he had, you know!"

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"It was a yarn about his uncle being sick."

"But why should they pwetend he had gone home if he hasn't gone home?"

"Oh, I say nothing! It's no business of mine. I know a great many of the fellows think Gore hasn't really left the school. Take that, along with the rumour that there's a fellow with the smallpox being kept secret at the school, without a doctor being called in!"

"Bai Jove, it does look swange!"

"I should say that it does," said Mellish. "Of course, there may be nothing in it. I only repeat what I have heard. Thanks for the tarts, Gussy! They were ripping!"

And the cad of the Fourth strolled out of the tuckshop, leaving the juniors there with serious faces. Gaffer Jones, behind the counter, had listened curiously to the talk, and his wizened old face showed how keenly it interested him. The Gaffer was one of the worst gossips in Rylcombe, and it was pretty certain that before the day was out the rumour would be all over the village that smallpox had broken out up at the school.

"It really looks queer," said Frank Monk. "I only hope nothing of the sort has happened. These tales often get about with nothing to found them upon. Possibly it was just the affair at our school that gave rise to this rumour."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Lane. "Still, it's queer. I really think we ought to bar these kids, you know. They may be carrying infection with them."

"Yes, by Jove!" exclaimed Carboy. "Smallpox is awfully catching, and we might get it by just standing near D'Arcy."

The swell of St. Jim's gave an indignant sniff.

"I tell you, it's all wot!" he exclaimed. "Have some more jam tarts, deah boys, and don't talk silly piffle!"

"Good advice!" grinned Frank Monk. "I dare say you're an infectious rotter, but I'll risk it for the tarts!"

"Same here," said Carboy. "Hallo, here come the Terrible Triplets! Let's ask them if they're aware of the outbreak at the school."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good idea."

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came into the shop and walked up to the counter. The Grammarian trio turned towards them, grinning.

"Hallo, Merry!" said Frank Monk. "I hear that you've got smallpox up at the school."

Tom Merry stared at the Grammarian.

"This is the first I've heard of it," he said.

"Isn't it a fact, then?"

"Of course it isn't, fathead!"

"Who are you calling a fathead?"

"You," said Tom Merry. "Only a silly ass would take stock in a yarn like that! Besides, we've had the school disinfected since you chaps were there."

The Grammarians turned red.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled D'Arcy. "I wegard that wemark as weally funny."

"Do you?" said Tom Merry. "I regard you as a rather funny animal, too."

"I weally wondah that you fellows keep up the acquaintance of that feafuhl wottah!" said D'Arcy. "I have been greatly deceived in Tom Mewwy. I used to wegard him as a decent chap, and I would willingly have admitted him to my circle of friends, though I usually endeavah to keep that select, not to say swaggah. But since I have found him out in his twue colours— Oh, you howwid wottah!"

Tom Merry's patience was exhausted. With a jerk of his wrist, he sent the contents of his glass of ginger-beer streaming into the face of Arthur Augustus.

D'Arcy gave a yell as the fluid splashed over his face and chest, and then he rubbed his eyes and glared at the hero of the Shell.

"Tom Mewwy, you uttah wottah—"

"Well, shut up, then!"

"Bai Jove, I will give you a feafuhl thwashin'!"

And Arthur Augustus, burning with wrath, dashed at the hero of the Shell with his fists waving in the air like Indian clubs, and his eyeglass dangling behind at the end of its cord.

CHAPTER 11.

Rough on the Grammarians!

TOM MERRY was angry—more angry than his chums had ever seen him before; but he did not hit out at D'Arcy. He knew perfectly well that one of his right-handers would have sent the swell of St. Jim's rolling along the floor of the tuckshop, and he was sorely tempted to deliver it; but he restrained himself. D'Arcy had wounded him deeply; but he could not help having a feeling that the School House dude had been deceived in

some way. It was certainly not like Arthur Augustus to wantonly insult anybody.

Tom put up his hands and warded off the terrific drives of the swell of St. Jim's, and gave him a gentle tap on the chest that made him sit down upon a box of dog-biscuits. D'Arcy jumped up again like a jack-in-the-box, and rushed on; but Monty Lowther, who feared that Tom might really lose his temper and hurt him, caught him by the shoulder and slung him round.

And when he was slung round, the temptation was too strong for Manners to resist, and, without stopping to think, Manners let out with his foot, and the swell of St. Jim's was propelled along the floor by a powerful kick.

"Here, fair play!" exclaimed Skimpole. "As a Determinist I am bound to take the weaker side in a quarrel; and as a—"

"And as a silly duffer, what are you bound to do?" exclaimed Lowther, nettled at the suggestion that there had been a want of fair play in the matter. The chums of the Shell had acted by way of a joke, but Skimpole was too dense to see it. "It seems to me that you are bound to get a thick ear!"

"Back me up, deah boy!" gasped D'Arcy. "Let us administrah a feahful thwashin' to those wottahs!"

"We'll back you up," chuckled Frank Monk, "won't we, kids? He stood us tarts nobly, like a little man, and we're bound to back him up."

"Rather!" exclaimed Lane and Carboy.

"Come on, then!"

D'Arcy was rushing to the attack again. Skimpole followed him, feeling that he could do no less. And the three Grammarians, eager for fun, backed them up for all they were worth.

"Shoulder to shoulder!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

And the Terrible Three lined up to receive the attack, and met it gallantly. But the Grammarians were equal to them as fighting-men, and D'Arcy and Skimpole were thrown in, as it were, and made the odds heavy. And in a few seconds pandemonium reigned. Eggs, meat pies, anything that could be thrown, flew about the tuckshop, and it looked as if the place would soon be wrecked.

"Kick the wottahs out!" cried D'Arcy. "I insist upon the wottahs bein' immediately kicked out, deah boys!"

"Out with them!" gasped Skimpole.

The three Grammarians were too hard at work to have any breath left for talking. But with five to three the chums of the Shell would certainly have been hurled forth; but at that moment three St. Jim's juniors entered the tuckshop. They were Blake, Herries, and Digby.

The three did not stop to ask questions; they saw Grammarians and Saints mingled in combat, and they rushed into the fray at once.

"Sock it to 'em!" yelled Blake.

And the Fourth-Formers of St. Jim's "socked" it to the Grammarians in fine style. D'Arcy and Skimpole were hurled aside; Gussy collapsing into a box of eggs. Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy were dragged to the doorway by the combined efforts of six Saints, and hurled into the street.

They went rolling and sprawling in a heap under the great tree that stood before the tuckshop, and crashed into one of the little tables set there for refreshment, and brought it over with a crash and a smashing of empty glasses.

"Good!" panted Tom Merry. "Thanks for your help, Blake!"

"Oh, don't mention it," said Blake politely; "always pleased to see you kids out of a scrape! Warm work, though, isn't it? Are you thirsty, Dig?"

"Yes, rather!"

"So am I," said Herries.

Tom Merry laughed his old, pleasant laugh.

"It's my treat!" he exclaimed. "Ginger-pop or lemonade, or both?"

"That's all right, old chap; I was only joking!"

"But I insist!"

"Oh, if you insist, have your way—both!" said Blake, grinning.

Arthur Augustus was picking himself up from an overturned box of eggs. He was looking ruffled and indignant. Blake noticed him for the first time.

"Hallo! Who's that chap?" he said. "Was he ragging the Grammarians, too?"

"No; he was fighting us," grunted Lowther. "Tom Merry washed his face for him with some ginger-beer, and, instead of thanking him prettily, he started making a row, and the Grammarians backed him up."

"My word!" said Digby. "So he was on the Grammar School side, was he?"

"Yaas, wathah, you wottahs!" howled Arthur Augustus. "They backed me up like decent fellows against those wotten wuffians!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Mewwy thwew a glass of gingah-beer in my face—"

Blake looked rather warlike.

"Hallo! What's that? Have you been chucking ginger-beer at a chap belonging to our study, Tom Merry?"

"That's all right," said Digby; "we don't know the fellow!"

"Quite a stranger to us," said Herries. "Anybody who likes can chuck ginger-beer at him."

Blake recollected, and he laughed.

"Of course, I had forgotten that," he remarked. "I don't know the chap, so it doesn't matter to me."

"You howwid wottah!"

The Terrible Three were looking at Blake in amazement. They did not know what on earth the chums of Study No. 6 were driving at.

"What's the game?" asked Lowther. "Is this some wheeze we haven't heard of? What do you mean by saying that you don't know Gussy?"

"He dropped our acquaintance," said Blake; "dropped it yesterday, you see. Since then we've used no other—I mean, since then we don't know the fellow. He can't possibly know him again till he's been properly introduced by a mutual friend."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wufuse to be intwoduced—I wufuse to wenenw my acquaintance with such a set of wotten boundahs!" said the swell of the School House. "I wash my hands of you!"

"Bettah wash your face," suggested Blake; "it needs it."

To this suggestion the swell of St. Jim's made no reply. He stalked out of the tuckshop with a great deal of dignity. Skimpole followed him.

Blake looked rather curiously at Tom Merry.

"But what was the row about?" he asked. "What did you go for old Gus for? Surely he's a harmless lunatic?"

"He's got something up against me, and won't explain what it is," said Tom Merry abruptly. "Do you know what it is, Blake?"

"Blessed if I do! I wonder if that was why he resigned from the committee of inquiry?" said Blake thoughtfully.

"He seemed to have something on his mind, and refused to explain. I don't see what it can be."

"There's something in the air at St. Jim's lately, I think," said Tom Merry restlessly. "Fellows seem to be getting on bad terms, and saying nasty things about one another, and now there's this yarn about smallpox breaking out at the school."

"Smallpox at the school!" said Blake in amazement. "What on earth are you talking about? There's no smallpox at the school!"

"I know there isn't; but somebody has started a yarn that there is, and the Grammar School fellows have got hold of it."

"Why, what utter rot!"

"Of course it is, but it will be all over the village soon, anyway. I wish I knew the ass who started it. Hallo!"

Three faces were looking in at the doorway. Monk, Lane, and Carboy seemed inclined to rush in and renew the fight. But the odds of two to one were too great; they contented themselves with words.

"Rats!"

"Rotters!"

"Yah!"

"Oh, clear off!" said Tom Merry. "If we come out to you we shall really hurt you this time; we've only played with you so far!"

"Yah! Don't come near us!"

"You'll infect us if you do!"

"Go and get yourselves fumigated!"

The juniors of St. Jim's turned red. Tom Merry made a step towards the Grammarians. Frank Monk made a great show of haste to escape.

"Here, come along, kids!" he exclaimed. "It's catching, you know!"

And the three Grammarians bolted—and ran into a short, stout gentleman in a frock coat and silk hat, who was coming into the shop. It was Dr. Short, the local medical man, well known in Rylcombe, and St. Jim's, too.

"Hallo, hallo! What is this?" exclaimed the doctor. "What is catching, my boys?"

"Oh, nothing, sir!" said Monk, turning red.

And the Grammarians escaped before the little doctor could question them.

Dr. Short, looking rather puzzled, entered the shop, and nodded to Gaffer Jones.

"I've come to see Mrs. Murphy again!" he exclaimed.

"How's the rheumatism, Mr. Jones—better, I hope?"

"She's still very poorly, sir," said Gaffer Jones.

(Continued on page 19.)

DIG INTO—



Address all letters: *The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.*

HALLO, chums! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, is in the limelight again. You will laugh till you bust when you read of his amazing antics in next week's fine long complete story of St. Jim's. Watch out for the title:

"JUST LIKE GUSSY!"

and stand by for the best fun and adventure story of the week. Potts, the Office Boy, will also be included in next Wednesday's sparkling issue, and you will also find more stirring chapters of David Goodwin's grand naval story:

"CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET!"

If, when you have read your copy of the GEM, you feel like reading another tip-top school yarn, you cannot do better than ask your newsagent for the "Magnet." In it you will find a delightful long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. and Billy Bunter, the famous chums of Greyfriars. 'Nuff said! Now for some news pars.

THE TALKING SCARECROW!

He was a cute farmer, but he was very worried by the wholesale attacks the crows made upon his crops. Then he got a brainwave, as he caught sight of his scarecrow flapping in the breeze. Why not fit it up with a loud-speaker? The job was soon done. While the "set" was working that scarecrow gave the inquisitive crows a surprise they never got over. It talked, it sang, it played various instruments, and so on. The crows gave the fields a wide berth after that, and the farmer congratulated himself. But his congratulations came too soon. Although the crows were scared off successfully, the quaint "all-talking, etc." scarecrow attracted song birds, so the last state was almost as bad as the first!

THE WAGER!

Two Southampton schoolboys were disappointed. They had expected it to rain—had wanted it to rain. But rain did not fall! This unusual desire for rain was the result of a wager. A argued with B that his macintosh was the real goods—much better than B's. B, however, would have none of it. They decided to stay out in the rain for a given time to see which mac would stand up to a real test. As the rain did not fall they then hit upon the bright idea of sitting in a water-trough for a period of five minutes—the one who had the driest trousers at the expiration of that time to be the winner. Water proof!

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,263.

HEARD THIS ONE?

"I will now proceed to make this man's mind a complete blank," said the hypnotist to his breathless audience. "He will forget everything."

"Hi!" interrupted the village grocer frenziedly. "Don't do that! He owes me ten pounds!"

SEEDS FROM ABOVE!

"Start the prop. We've got umpteen acres to sow, and it's time we were starting on the job." This is the sort of conversation that will soon be common in Russia, between farmers with the latest farm aeroplane. Once up aloft in this plane they proceed to scatter their seeds over a given acreage twenty times faster than the most up-to-date tractor can do the job. So the saying that the "plough is mightier than the sword" will soon be well out of date!

THE BRAVEST BOY IN BRITAIN!

He is six years old, and in those six years he has experienced more bad luck than most people have coming to them in a lifetime. But he doesn't complain; he doesn't ever cry, and believes that if you are hurt in one place you can, by pinching your flesh somewhere else, do much to alleviate the first pain. Just lend an ear to the string of misfortunes that have overtaken this plucky, philosophical youngster. When he was three he fell off a roof and injured his head. A few months later he tumbled down the cellar steps and injured his head again. Before he was four he contracted diphtheria. At the age of four he smashed his fingers. A few months after that he developed measles. When he was five he broke his arm. Last Christmas, when he was six, he was knocked down by a van, and on his second day in hospital he caught scarlet fever. Yet this "hard luck" youngster is not one to complain. The nearest approach to it was when his mother refused to let him go on the roundabouts for fear he would tumble off and get hurt.

Can you beat that string of misfortune in six years of life?

THE "TROUSERS PRESS" CHAIR!

The latest "trousers press" is the invention of a German. It takes the form of a chair with a double seat, the top "flap" of which is hinged to the back rest. When being used as a press the trousers are folded between the two seats and held firmly in position by a pair of metal clamps. Then the owner, or his heavy-weight friend for preference, uses the chair in the normal way and so brings about that knife-edge crease!

ELEPHANT v. HORSE POWER!

It took quite five years to train one of the King of Siam's royal white elephants, and now that elephant is in disgrace. It appears that he took exception to a motor-car, which was standing by the roadside, in a very heavy-handed—or footed—fashion. Up whirled his trunk and over went the car on its roof. Then Jumbo's feet started to stamp out that car until it looked like nothing so much as a collection of scrap-iron. The mahout on his back prodded the elephant's tender spots with his driving-spear, but that had no effect. Not until that car was a car no longer did the white elephant desist. Then, with an air of having accomplished something really big, he stalked off in lordly fashion to the royal stockade. Just recently motor tractors have been in fashion in Siam for the haulage of heavy work and some people are wondering whether the royal elephant had overheard a conversation praising the usefulness of its mechanical rival, and so decided to get a bit of its own back. Others declare that it was the smell of the car and the shape of it that upset the royal elephant. What do YOU think?

HOPPING GIANTS!

The sight of an ordinary English frog gives some people the "creeps," but if they were to see the largest products of the "frog farm" in Southern Louisiana they would have a nightmare. These specimens often measure a foot long, turn the scales at two pounds weight, and, by those with a fondness for frogs' legs as a table delicacy, are reckoned "prime eating." So great is the demand for frogs' legs these days that the folk of Southern Louisiana have developed quite an industry from the rearing of these giants—and a paying industry at that!

KING'S GOLDEN CROWN GROWS AN INCH!

Just over three months ago the Imperial Crown which his Majesty the King wears on State occasions was said to be unsafe, so it was placed in "hospital" for repairs. The name of the jeweller's shop where the "hospital" treatment was administered was kept a close secret, and an armed guard watched over the treasure day and night. That kept ambitious cracksmen at bay. Now once again the King's Crown is back in its old quarters in the Jewel Room at the Tower, safely escorted there by armed men from Scotland Yard. The experts who examined it on its return made the discovery that the Crown had grown an inch taller in the process of repairing it and adding gold to the framework. But that extra inch means that the Crown which was originally made in 1838 is now safe to be worn and is good for service for another hundred years or more!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

Fred Somers of Canning Town wants to know whether it is a fact that if you owe anybody money in Ethiopia you are chained to him until the debt is paid. My records show that this is a fact. I have before me a picture of a very small "darkie" who is holding a chain, at the other end of which is a giant fellow who owes him money! Around the wrist of the giant debtor is a steel band, and his punishment is to go wherever his creditor goes until the debt is paid. There is a lot to be said in favour of the Ethiopian law, but supposing the giant fellow, quoted above, decided to wipe out his creditor, instead of wiping out his debt? What then?

YOUR EDITOR

MELLISH, THE MISCHIEF MAKER!

(Continued from page 17.)

"Ah, sorry to hear it! How do you do, Tom Merry? All well up at the school?"

"Ripping, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"What was it that those Grammar School lads were saying?"

"Oh, only some nonsense, sir!"

And the St. Jim's juniors left the shop.

Dr. Short glanced after them, and then turned to Gaffer Jones, whose face showed plainly that he had information to give, if the medical gentleman chose to ask for it.

"Do you know anything about this, Mr. Jones?"

"Deed and I do, sir! The young gentlemen have been talking it over in the shop the last hour, sir."

"Then what is it?" asked the little doctor sharply.

"They do say smallpox has broken out up at the school, sir."

"Smallpox? Gracious me!"

"So they was a-saying, sir."

"Impossible! I have not been sent for!"

"They do say as the headmaster he is a-keeping of it secret, sir, so as not to let people know there's a epidermis—"

"A what?"

"A epidermis, sir—one of them things that catches—"

"Oh, an epidemic!"

"Epidermis is good enough for me, sir, with all respect," said Gaffer Jones. "As I was a-saying, they do say as the headmaster is keeping the boy hidden at the school so as to keep the epidermis a secret."

"Bless my soul!"

"I dessay there's nothing in it, sir; but it do look queer."

"Mere nonsense!"

"Of course, sir; but it do look queer, all the same."

"Stuff! Don't talk this nonsense up and down the village, Jones. I shall run down to the school this afternoon to ascertain that all is well."

"Of course, I shan't say a word, sir; not to a soul!"

"Of course you will, you mean," growled the unceremonious little doctor; "you'll chatter it right and left. Come, let me go in to see Mrs. Murphy; it's my last call, and I can drive on to the school."

CHAPTER 12.

Something Like a Fight!

"HAVE you heard?"

It was Figgins who asked the question, and he addressed Lowther, whom he had just met in the quadrangle at St. Jim's.

Lowther looked at him.

"Heard what?"

"That yarn about the smallpox."

"On, yes!" said Lowther. "They're saying that there's a fellow got it, and being kept secretly somewhere about the school."

"That's it," said Figgins. "I have just had the yarn from Skimpole, and it seems to be all over the school. Of course, there's nothing in it?"

"Of course not," said Lowther; "but it's queer!"

"But who could it be? I've totted up all the fellows in our House and they're all well and kicking, and they're all to be seen!"

"So are all on our side, excepting Gore. He's gone home to his people, as his uncle is ill. But they're saying—"

"They're saying that he hasn't really gone home," said Blake, joining them. "Some of the fellows think he's got it, and is being hidden away."

"Some silly busybody has started the yarn, I suppose," said Figgins, with such an extremely significant look at Blake that the School House lad could not help noticing it.

"What are you looking at me like that for, Figgins?" he demanded at once. "Do you mean that I started the yarn?"

Figgins gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Oh, I don't say so!"

"But you implied it," exclaimed Blake wrathfully, "and I want to know what you mean by it, Figgins!"

"I'd prefer not to say."

"Oh, if you're afraid to speak out—"

"If you put it like that, I'll speak out fast enough!" exclaimed Figgins, with a flash in his eyes. "What I mean is this, then—that a chap who goes about backbiting people is quite capable of spreading a yarn like this!"

Blake's eyes fairly blazed.

"And you mean to say that I go about backbiting people?" he shouted.

"Yes, I do!"

"Here, draw it mild, Figgins!" exclaimed Lowther in astonishment. "That's not the way to talk to Blake! We all know—"

"I know what I'm talking about!" said Figgins obstinately.

Blake pushed back his cuffs.

"You say that I'm a backbiter, Figgins?"

"Yes; I've said it!"

"Then you'll have to back up your words!"

"I'm ready. Come into the gym!"

"Hang the gym! Put up your fists!"

"Right you are!"

No more time was wasted in words. The two juniors were at it hammer and tongs in a second, with blazing eyes and set teeth.

Lowther looked on in helpless amazement, and a crowd quickly gathered round the spot.

"What's the row?"

"Here, hold on!"

"Draw it mild!"

Figgins reeled back with blood streaming from his mouth. Blake followed him up with clenched fists.

"Are you going to take your words back?"

"No!" yelled Figgins, tearing off his coat. "Here, hold my coat, Fatty! Take this confounded waistcoat, Kerr! Now, let me get at him!"

Blake had also torn off his coat and waistcoat. The two foes rushed at one another fiercely, and the fight was renewed with savage determination such as was seldom witnessed even in the worst of House rows at St. Jim's.

"What's it all about?" exclaimed Tom Merry, coming on the scene.

"Blessed if I know!" said Lowther. "Figgins called Blake a backbiter for some reason, and, of course, Blake was not going to stand that!"

"Figgins did?" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "Well, of all the cheek! That's a word more suitable for Figgins himself than Blake!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Kerr, firing up instantly at this aspersion upon his chief. "Do you mean to call Figgins a backbiter, Tom Merry?"

"Well, I—"

"Yes or no, unless you are afraid to speak out plainly!"

"Yes, then!" said Tom Merry between his teeth. "I don't want to quarrel with you, Kerr, but that word is a jolly good description of Figgins, as I know."

Kerr struck the School House lad full in the face with his open hand, with a smack that sounded like a pistol shot.

"Now, come on!" he said savagely.

Tom Merry did not need asking twice. He came on, with blazing eyes, and he and Kerr were soon fighting like tigers. The crowd thickened round the spot in the growing dusk of the evening, looking on with eagerness and amazement. Two fights at the same moment were rather exciting, and the end was not reached yet.

"Go it, Figgins!"

"Give him beans, Blake!"

"Go it, Tom Merry!"

"Buck up, Scotty!"

"Knock out the New House rotter!"

"Give the School House cad what-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Although a patwiotic School House fellow, I must weally remark that I think Tom Mewwy deserves to get a feahful bashing. He certainly has no wight to call Figgins names, considerrin' his own wascally and backbitin' conduct!"

Monty Lowther reached out and seized the swell of the School House by the nose between his finger and thumb.

"What's that about Tom Merry?" he demanded.

"Welease by dese, you howwid wottah!" wailed D'Arcy.

"Take back what you said!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind! Welease by beastlay dese, and I will give you a feahful lickin'!"

"You'll have the chance!" exclaimed Lowther. "I've had enough of your rotting, D'Arcy! Take off your coat!"

And he dragged off his own.

D'Arcy was not slow to obey. He rushed at Lowther with brandished fists, and the next moment was lying on his back, staring up at the stars that were beginning to come out in the dark blue sky.

Digby rushed forward and faced Lowther.

"Here, come on, you Shell rotter! You'll find me a bit harder to tackle!" he shouted. "Come on! Do you hear?"

"I hear, and I'm coming!" grunted Lowther.

Digby was indeed a more formidable opponent than D'Arcy. Lowther had his hands full when he tackled the Fourth-Former. Arthur Augustus sat up, rubbing his nose. He groped about for his missing eyeglass.

"Thank you vewy much, Digby! Give him a feahful thwashin'!" he exclaimed. "Go it, deah boy! Knock him wight out!"

Digby had forgotten, in his excitement, that he did not know D'Arcy. Three fights going on at once were certain to attract attention, and an alarm rose that the prefects were coming, but the combatants were too furious to care.

"What is this fearful row about?"

It was Kildare's voice. The captain of St. Jim's pushed his way through the crowd of juniors, with Monteith, of the New House, at his heels.

"What is the matter? Stop that fighting instantly!"

Kildare's words were law. The exasperated juniors separated unwillingly, bruised and battered, but by no means satisfied.

The captain's brow was dark and stern.

"How dare you fight like this in the quadrangle?" he exclaimed. "What is it all about? Another of your House rows?"

"No, it isn't!" said Monteith. "Here's Lowther fighting with Digby. What are you up to, you young rascals?"

"What is all this about, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Answer me at once!"

"Well, I started it," said Blake, wiping his mouth from which the red was streaming. "I didn't like something Figgins said."

"Something that was quite true!" shouted Figgins.

"Do you want some more?"

"Yes, I do, and—"

"Take that young fool, Monteith!" exclaimed Kildare, seizing Blake by the shoulders and forcibly dragging him away from Figgins.

And the New House prefect did the same with Figgins.

"Go into your own Houses, you young rascals!" went on the captain of St. Jim's. "I think you have all taken leave of your senses the past few days. There has been nothing but quarrelling and ill-feeling."

"He called me a backbiter."

"You had no right to use such a word, Figgins!"

"Well, he is one!"

"Oh, take him away, Monteith! Every fellow who was fighting here will get six with the cane!"

"Right!" said Monteith. "I'll look after Figgins and Kerr."

And he bundled the New House champions off. There was a buzz in the gateway, and a neat little car, with Dr. Short sitting in it, drove in and stopped before the Head's house.

Well known was Dr. Short and his car to the boys of St. Jim's, and a buzz went round at the sight of them.

"Then it's true!"

The smallpox story was fresh in every mind, and the sight of the medical man driving up to St. Jim's confirmed what had hitherto been a doubtful rumour.

CHAPTER 13.

Called Before the Head!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, was in his study. He rose to his feet as Dr. Short was shown in, and looked in some surprise at the serious expression upon the little medico's face.

"No bad news, I hope, Short?" he exclaimed.

"That is what I have come here to learn, my dear sir," replied Dr. Short.

The Head looked puzzled.

"I confess that I don't quite understand."

"Do you know the rumour that is about the village?"

"No, I must say I do not. I have heard nothing. What is it?"

"It is to the effect that there has been an outbreak of smallpox at the school here."

The Head looked amazed.

"Smallpox! Here?"

"Yes."

"What absolute nonsense! There is absolutely no foundation for it! What can possibly have put such an idea into people's heads?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, in utter bewilderment.

"That is what you must find out. I am glad to learn that there is no truth in it."

"Not a particle, my dear sir!"

"I found some boys talking over it, by chance, in a shop in the village," said Dr. Short. "Then I inquired, and found that others had heard the story. They say that a boy here is dangerously ill, and is concealed, the story being given out that he has gone home to see a sick relation."

The Head started.

"One boy has certainly gone home to see a sick relation!" he exclaimed. "A boy named Gore, in the Shell."

"Ah, then no doubt that gave rise to the story!" said Dr. Short, with a nod. "But it is pretty clear that the rumour must have originated from the school here."

"You mean that some foolish lad belonging to St. Jim's must have spread the report in the first place?"

"There is not much doubt about that in my mind."

"What could make a lad act in a way so absurd and malicious?" The Head frowned. "I shall inquire into this. If I knew which boy to question—"

"Question those whom I heard speaking of the matter in Mrs. Murphy's shop," said Dr. Short. "Some of the Gram-marian schoolboys were twitting them with it. I remember that Merry was there, and Blake and Lowther, with their friends."

The Head touched the bell.

"I will send for Merry and Blake."

"That is a good idea. I have no doubt that they will tell you all they can; and, at all events, you can depend upon the truth from them."

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were quickly summoned to Dr. Holmes' study. The Head looked at them very expressively as they came in. The heroes of the School House bore very visible traces of the fight in the quad. They had not had time to put themselves in order either, and their clothes were dishevelled and dusty. Blake kept a handkerchief to the corner of his mouth to mop up the "claret" that was still oozing away there. Tom Merry was blinking painfully with his left eye. Dr. Short smiled slightly, but the Head's brow was growing very stern.

"Merry, Blake, have you been fighting together?"

"No, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"But you have been fighting somebody?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, and whom was it?"

"Kerr, sir, of the New House."

"And you, Blake?"

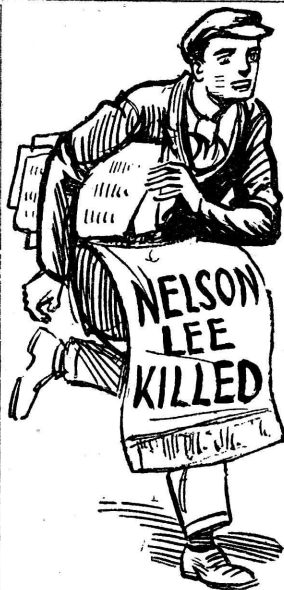
"I've been scrapping—I mean fighting, sir, with Figgins," mumbled Blake. "It—it was nothing, sir—it doesn't matter!"

"It matters a great deal, I think," said the Head. "I usually take no notice of House disputes, as you know, but in this case the fighting appears to have been carried to a brutal extent."

The two juniors coloured uncomfortably.

It was quite true that the combat had been, for once, hard and bitter, and the signs of battle they bore showed it.

"But the matter may stand over," said the Head, dismissing the subject. "At present I wish to question you



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Swish! Swish! Monteith waded in to stop the fight. Blake gave a yell as he felt the prefect's cane and quickly let go of Figgins, who also received a cut!

about another matter entirely. There seems to be an absurd rumour abroad that there has been an outbreak of smallpox at the school, and that a boy suffering from that disease is hidden at St. Jim's. Have you heard anything about it, Merry?"

"Yes, sir, I have heard it."

"Have you any idea how the rumour was started?"

"No; I have only heard it talked about among the fellows."

"And you, Blake?"

"I don't know who started it, sir. Every fellow I've heard speak of it says that he heard it from somebody else."

The Head wrinkled his brows.

"That is generally the way with rumours," Dr. Short remarked. "Nobody knows exactly how they start, but they gather in size like a snowball rolling downhill. I came over to inform you of what was being said, Dr. Holmes. May I suggest a way to silence the absurd chatter?"

"Certainly. I shall be very grateful."

"The story seems to have centred itself round the departure of the boy Gore. If he could return immediately to the school, if only to remain here a day or so, it would explode the absurd story."

The Head nodded.

"That is true. I will see if it can be done. Unfortunately, Gore's uncle is very ill, and his people want him at home. But I dare say it could be managed. Thank you very much for the suggestion. You may go, Merry and Blake."

The juniors left the study. They left the Head and the little medico deep in consultation. In the passage outside the two juniors looked at one another curiously.

"You look a pretty object, Meriy," Blake remarked.

Tom Merry grinned.

"If you could see yourself, Blake, you wouldn't pass any remarks on me."

"Very likely. I had about the toughest tussle of my life with Figgins," Blake said, as they walked down the wide-flagged corridor. "And it's not over yet. I'm going to look for him in the gym this evening."

Tom Merry's brow was clouded.

"Things are getting into a bad state here," he said, with a shake of the head. "I don't quite know how it is, but everything seems to be going wrong lately. Your tame dude has got something up against me, and won't explain what it is. I give you my word that I haven't done anything to put his back up that I know of. Well, so-long—I'm going to get a wash!"

"Same here!"

And the juniors parted.

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry Takes Action!

TOM MERRY came into his study half an hour later clean and newly clothed, and looking a great deal better. But his handsome face was still disfigured by cuts and bruises, and his left eye was quite purple. There was a thoughtful shade upon his brow, as if he were thinking something out.

Manners was making the tea. Lowther, with a clouded brow, was opening a tin of sardines. Lowther had a swollen nose as his trophy from the fight in the quadrangle. Tom Merry glanced at him inquiringly as he came in.

"Anything wrong, Monty?"

"No!" said Lowther, so shortly that Tom Merry stopped and stared at him. He came over to his chum and looked him full in the face.

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther, turning away and emptying the sardines into a dish. "Are you ready for tea?"

Tom Merry flushed red.

"Lowther! What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Doesn't look like it, by the look of your chivvy. If you've got something up against me, say it out instead of grumping there like a sulky kid!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly.

Lowther bit his lip.

"I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry, after a pause.

"There's been something altogether wrong at St. Jim's lately, and I've been thinking over it very seriously. It looks to me as if some ill-natured mischief-maker has been at work."

Lowther started.

"We all seem to be at sixes and sevens," went on Tom Merry, with a clouded face. "I've got something up against Figgins, Gussy has something up against me, Figgins complains of Blake, and now you——"

"By Jove! I believe you're right!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I was a fool to listen to a word——"

"So somebody has been talking to you?"

"Yes."

"About me?"

"Well, yes," said Lowther, turning red.

"I think you might have spoken out, Monty, before you believed anything, whatever it is, against an old chum!"

"Well, it seemed so rotten to talk about it," said Lowther.

"I didn't like to seem to distrust you, Tom—that's a fact—yet I couldn't help the beastly thing weighing on my mind. It made me feel quite uncomfortable. Yet very likely that was what Mellish said it for—he's a rotten cad——"

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"Mellish?"

"Yes; he told me—what I was speaking of."

"Mellish! It was Mellish who told me, you know, about Figgins. He made me promise not to tell Figgins."

"He wanted me to promise not to tell you, but I wouldn't."

"Mellish is at the bottom of it," said Tom Merry, with conviction. "I know he's a spy and a tell-tale."

"We've all known that for a long time," said Manners.

"That's the truth. He's at the bottom of this, and, after all, you know how easy it is to set people by the ears by going about telling them things and making them promise not to tell."

"Yes, rather."

"Now I know the young rotter has been yarning to you, I shouldn't wonder if it was all lies he told me about Figgins!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "But let's hear what he said to you, Monty. I'll give you my word, honour bright, that I'll tell you whether there's any truth in it or not."

"Well, he said——" Lowther hesitated.

"Go on!"

"Oh, it's too rotten to repeat! I know there's nothing in it, and I was a fool to listen to the young rotter for a minute. I didn't really want to."

"Never mind—go on!"

"Well, he said that he heard you say to Manners——"

"Hallo, I'm in it, too, am I?" exclaimed Manners.

"Yes; but mind, I didn't believe a word of it!"

"Let's hear what it is," said Tom Merry.

"Well, he said he heard you say to Manners that you wished I had never come back to St. Jim's, and that the study was much more comy while I was away," said Lowther, with a scarlet face. "Of course——"

Tom Merry turned quite pale with anger.

"Lowther, there wasn't a word of truth in it!"

"I know there wasn't, old chap, and I was a fool——"

"Manners will bear me out, if necessary."

"It's not necessary."

"Of course, I bear you out," said Manners. "Tom Merry never said anything of the kind to me, Monty. If he had I should have punched his nose. You ought to know Tom better than that."

"Yes, of course I ought."

"You know how glad we were to have you back again, Monty," said Tom Merry reproachfully. "I think you really might have come straight to me and told me what the cad said."

"I know I ought to have done so, but I felt so rotten and uncomfy about it—though, of course, I knew all the time that you hadn't really said anything of the sort."

"The young beast!" muttered Tom Merry, between his teeth. "After that, a fellow would be a fool to take the slightest notice of anything he said."

"I should think so!" exclaimed Manners. "And that lets in some light on Gussy's queer conduct lately. Perhaps Mellish has been yarning to him."

"Very likely."

"We're going to look into this!" exclaimed Tom Merry abruptly. "I'm beginning to see light, I think. I fancy that we shall find Mellish at the bottom of it all and very likely at the bottom of that story about the smallpox, too. There's no end to the mischief a tell-tale can do if he sets his mind to it."

"That's true enough."

"Blake and his lot made up a committee of inquiry," went on Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "That was really a good idea. Suppose we revive the idea and inquire into the matter ourselves? We'll go into it with Blake, and among us we ought to be able to sift out the truth."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Lowther heartily.

And Manners nodded assent.

"Then let's go along to Study No. 6."

Lowther hesitated.

"After my row with D'Arcy and Dig——"

"After what D'Arcy said about you, Tom!" said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded decidedly.

"Yes, chaps. I mean it. If we're going to get all this cleared up it's no good standing on our dignity. I believe a tale-bearer is at the bottom of our trouble with Study No. 6, and we ought to see into it."

"What sort of a reception do you think they will give us?"

"We must risk that. Anyway, I expect we shall be given a chance to explain."

"Well, have your tea first," said Manners. "It's ready."

"Oh, buck up, then!"

The chums of the Shell had tea with record haste. Then they went along to Study No. 6, and as they drew near they heard loud voices proceeding from it.

"Shut up, little boy!"

"I wefuse to shut up!"

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At length Tom Merry lost his temper, and with a flick of his wrist he sent the contents of his glass straight at Gussy!

"Do you want a dot on the nose? I tell you that I cannot allow a stranger to join in the conversation like this!"

Tom Merry grinned.

He gave a knock at the open door and walked in. Lowther and Manners followed him, and the chums of the Fourth Form jumped up to meet them, looking very warlike.

CHAPTER 15.

D'Arcy is Introduced!

TOM MERRY waved his hand in sign of peace.

"Keep your wool on, kids!"

"Who are you calling 'kids'?"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy! Pway whom are you chawactewisin' as kids?"

"Sorry—I mean goats; that is to say, respected and honoured young gentlemen of the Fourth Form!" amended Tom Merry. "We have come—"

"I can see that," said Digby. "Now I want to see you go!"

"We want to explain—"

"Go and do your explaining in your own study, like good fellows," said Blake, with a nod towards the door.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The reception could not be called an encouraging one. Lowther and Manners both looked inclined to commit assault and battery on the chums of the Fourth, but Tom Merry remained calm.

"Look here, Blake, it's an important matter."

"Important rats!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now then, Gussy, dry up!" said Blake. "You mustn't speak too much in this study. As a stranger here—"

"I wefuse to be regarded as a swangah!"

"Ring off, I tell you! Chuck the ink at him if he opens his mouth again, Herries. Now then, Tom Merry, explain yourself!"

"This is how the matter stands. Some rat has been making trouble, telling fellows that other fellows said

things about them which the said fellows probably never did say or thought of saying."

"Very well put," said Blake admiringly. "Somebody said that somebody said that somebody else said that somebody—"

"Oh, give me a chance! I have just found out that a certain rotter in your Form has been telling Lowther a fearful crammer about me!"

"I don't think he could have been in our Form."

"Hang it, let me go on! The chap was Mellish."

"Mellish?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes; Mellish of the Fourth!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Mellish yarned to Lowther about me, and nearly made us to start a row," said Tom Merry. "If I hadn't been a specially calm and reasonable chap—"

"Oh, leave out the piffle!"

"Well, anyway, Lowther and I had a talk and it came out. Mellish was lying about me behind my back. Then it occurred to me that what he told me about Figgins might be a lie, too."

"Oh! So it was Mellish who set you against Figgins?"

"Yes; and I was fool enough to listen to him. Only what he said sounded so—well, as if it had something in it, anyway."

"But you don't think so now?"

"Well, I don't know, of course; but I think I ought to speak to Figgins and have it out," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then there's this ass, Gussy—"

"I distinctly wefuse to be alluded to as an ass, or—"

"He has got something up against me and won't explain what it is."

"I pwomised not to tell you."

"Well, you can tell me this much. Was it Mellish who told you whatever it was?" asked the hero of the Shell.

"Yaas, that is quite wight."

"Ah, it was Mellish!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So there's three yarns traced to Mellish," said Tom Merry, with a glint in his eyes. "Now, I understand that

Figgins & Co. have lately been getting their tails up over something or other."

"They've got something up against me," said Blake. "Figgins called me a backbiter, and I'm going to make him take it back, or else smash him up, I can tell you!"

"That was what Gussy called me."

"Yaas, wathah; but undah the circo I am inclined to think that pewwaps I was a little hasty, Tom Mewwy."

"Thank you! I am glad you've got a glimmering of common sense, anyway," said Tom Merry cordially.

"That is wathah a diswespectful way of puttin' it."

"You see, Blake, Figgins may have been taken in like the rest of us, and we ought to look into the matter before we start smashing up anybody," said Tom Merry. "It would really have been wiser to look into the matter some time ago, before these black eyes and swollen noses were distributed."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But better late than never, you know. If we amalgamate into a general committee, we can take in Figgins & Co."

"Yaas, certainly; and I no longah have any weal objection to amalgamatin' with Tom Mewwy, deah boys!"

"Oh, you don't count!" said Blake. "You're left out, of course, as we don't know you."

"I shall certainly wefuse to be left out!"

"We can't have a stranger in the committee," said Digby, with a grave shake of the head.

"Quite impossible," said Herries—"at least, unless the person is properly introduced by a mutual friend."

"Oh, pway don't wot!"

"Then let me settle the difficulty," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I am very well acquainted with this gentleman, Arthur Augustus Fitzjackass, whom I respect very highly—"

"Hear, hear!"

"So pray allow me the honour of introducing him into this select circle. Mr. Blake—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! Algernon Aubrey de Vere—Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's!"

"Pleased to know you, sir!" said Blake, with a bow.

"Oh, weally, Blake!"

"Mr. Digby—Arthur Augustus FitzPercy Montmorency!" said Tom Merry, going on with the introductions, and giving D'Arcy a new set of names every time. "D'Arcy, this is Arthur Digby, only son and heir of Sir Robert Digby, baronet."

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Montmorency!" said Dig solemnly.

"Oh, weally Dig!"

"Mr. Herries, pray allow me to introduce Aubrey Algernon Plantaganet! Aubrey—Master Herries, of the Fourth Form, a gentleman I know well. I hope you will be friends."

"Pleased to meet you, sir!" said Herries.

"Oh, weally Hewwies!"

"Now, you all know one another," said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand, "and Arthur Augustus Algernon Aubrey FitzPercy de Vere Montmorency is a member of the honourable committee of inquiry."

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, I wesome my owiginal place as chairman?"

"Of course you don't!" said Blake promptly.

"Now, Blake, don't be a wottah!"

"I don't intend to be—I intend to be a chairman. You and Dig have had your turns. But I'll tell you what," exclaimed Blake, in a burst of generosity, "Tom Merry has first thought of the idea of looking into this matter in the way suggested, and he has hit on the fact that there's a tale-bearer making mischief all round, and we'll make him chairman."

"I don't know if I can agree to that!"

"Don't trouble; the rest of us will settle that," said Blake kindly. "Hands up for Tom Merry, chairman of the committee of inquiry!"

Seven hands went up, D'Arcy's last; but he soon followed the rest, and gracefully conceded the point.

Tom Merry was duly elected chairman of the committee of inquiry.

CHAPTER 16.

Figgins & Co. Join the Committee!

FIGGINS & CO. were in their study finishing their tea. They were looking the reverse of cheerful, and both Figgins and Kerr had black eyes. But the damage to their faces was as nothing compared with the worry on their minds.

"The school is going to pot," said Figgins gloomily. "I don't mind a few hard knocks. I've had harder ones

before; but it's a fellow one liked acting meanly that gets over one! I can't stand that!"

"That's it," said Fatty Wynn. "I would never have thought it of Blake."

"Nor I," said Kerr. "Only it looks—"

Tap! came at the door.

"Oh, come in!" said Figgins crossly.

The door opened, and Tom Merry walked in. The New House quartet looked at him in surprise.

"What the dickens do you want?" said Figgins. "We're not in much of a mood for talking to you School House rotters, I can tell you, so the sooner you get out the better it will be for your health."

"Keep your whiskers on, Figgy!"

"Oh, get out, and don't call me Figgy!"

"Rats! I've got something to say to you. I know you kids don't really want to act like a parcel of silly asses—"

"Eh—what?"

"We're all in this," said Tom Merry. "We're a committee of inquiry, and I'm chairman. We're looking into the tale-bearing and lying that has been going on in the school lately."

"Tale-bearing!" said Figgins thoughtfully.

"Yes. You fellows have got something up against Blake."

"Supposing we have?"

"Well, you ought to speak out plainly."

"Supposing we promised not to?"

"You shouldn't have made such a promise."

"Perhaps not; but we did."

"I can't quite blame you, for I was caught the same way," said Tom Merry quietly. "Now that we're looking into the affair, we can trace all the trouble to one chap—a fellow we all know to be a tell-tale. Now, somebody has told you something about Blake, I gather?"

"Perhaps."

"Good! Now, you've promised not to tell, and that's all right. But if I name correctly the chap who told you, and add that we've found him out in spreading yarns in the School House, that will show you that you judged too hastily, I should think."

Figgins started.

"Do you mean to say that Blake never said—"

"I don't know what he's supposed to have said, but I think it probable he never said it."

"It was a fellow of your own House who told me."

"Yes, and I know whom it was."

"His name, then?"

"Mellish of the Fourth?"

Figgins' expression showed that the hero of the Shell had given the correct name. The Co. exchanged significant glances.

"Am I right?" demanded Tom Merry.

"JUST LIKE GUSSY!"

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"Well, I must admit that you are."
 "As to what he said—"
 "He made us promise not to tell," said Figgins uneasily.
 "I don't see how we can get the matter thrashed out at all."
 "I'm in the same fix with regard to what he told me you've said about me."
 Figgins uttered an exclamation.
 "I? What do you mean? My hat! Was that what you were so uppish about in the quad the other morning?"
 Tom Merry coloured.
 "Well, yes. I believed it then."
 "What was it, ass?"
 "I've promised not to tell. It was from Mellish I had it, though. But I've hit on a wheeze for getting at the truth. We can't break promises, even to a cad like that."
 "No, I don't see how we could."
 "But we can have Mellish up for a trial before the lot of us," said Tom Merry. "We'll put it to him straight and make him own up."
 "Good wheeze!" exclaimed Figgins heartily.
 "Thank you for nothing!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.
 "The meeting is being held in the club-room in the School House, and I expect Mellish is already there."
 And Figgins & Co. accompanied Tom Merry to the rival House for the first general sitting of the committee of inquiry.

CHAPTER 17. Rough Justice!

"I WON'T come!"
 "Yes, you will!"
 "I won't—I won't!"
 "Your mistake, Mellish. You're coming!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Yank him along! It doesn't matter if you hurt him, so don't bother about that. Give him a lift with your boot, Herries!"
 "Right-ho!"
 "Ow!"
 "Better come along, Mellish."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 The four chums of Study No. 6 were conducting the cad of the Fourth along to the club-room. Mellish had been seized by force, and whisked out of his study before he knew what was happening.
 The chums of Study No. 6 half carried, half dragged him along the passage, and he was bundled headlong into the room. There he rolled over on the floor. He jumped up and made a rush for the door, and was promptly shoved back.
 "No go!" said Blake cheerfully. "You're wanted here, Mellish, and here you stay."
 "Confound you! What do you want me for?"
 "Wait till the committee arrive, and then you'll see."
 "I won't wait!"
 "You may be right, Mellish, and I may be wrong, but I really think you will wait," smiled Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 And Mellish, looking at the four chums standing in the doorway, decided that he would wait.
 A few minutes later Tom Merry came in with Figgins & Co., and Manners and Lowther, who had been waiting for Tom at the door of the School House, came in along with the new members.
 Tom Merry glanced round the room.
 "I see we're all here," he exclaimed; "and you have the accused rotter also. Good! Gentlemen of the committee, take your seats!"
 "Well, as there are eleven of us, and only three seats, that will want some doing!" Blake remarked.
 "Well, stand! It's all the same, so long as there is a seat for the chairman," said Tom Merry, sitting down. "See that that rotter doesn't bolt!"
 "What-ho!"
 "I think I had bettah sit down," said D'Arcy. "I find standin' up most exhausting." Fway pwoceed with the proceedings, Mr. Chairman!"
 "Bring forth the prisoner!"
 "Get a move on you, Mellish!"
 "Shan't!"
 "Have you got a pin on you, Figgins?"
 "Certainly! Here you are."
 "Don't rot, you beasts!" growled Mellish, coming forward. "What the dickens do you want me for, Tom Merry?"
 "You are to answer questions before the committee of inquiry."
 And the inquiry went on quietly and seriously. Mellish was forced to admit his guilt.

Eventually the questioning was finished.
 Tom Merry glanced round at the committee.
 "Is it clear that Mellish, as well as being a slanderer and a tell-tale, was the originator of a ridiculous rumour which has caused a lot of gossip in the village and worried our respected headmaster?" he asked.
 "Quite clear!" answered nine voices in unison.
 And a tenth voice added:
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Good! Mellish, you are found guilty!"
 Mellish made a desperate rush to the door. Strong hands seized him and hauled him back. The chairman rose to his feet.
 "What punishment, gentlemen?"
 "He ought to be hanged, drawn, and quartered," said Blake thoughtfully—"but that would make a mess in the club-room."
 "Something with boiling oil in it would be nearer the mark," said Figgins.
 "Bettah give him a feahful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus.
 "Good idea! A fearful thrashing will meet the occasion," said Tom Merry. "Lay him on the table face downwards."
 The order was obeyed. Lowther took hold of the leather strap with a businesslike air.
 "How many?" he said.
 "Two hundred," said D'Arcy. "I think that two hundred lashes, well laid on, would give Mellish a weally valuable lesson."
 "Ow! Mercy! Help!"
 "Why, we haven't started yet!" said Blake in disgust.
 "The fellow is as big a coward as he is a liar, and that's saying a lot."
 "Twenty," said Tom Merry. "Begin!"
 "Right-ho!" said Lowther, swinging up the strap.
 It came down with a sounding whack upon Mellish, and he seemed to feel it very much, for he wriggled like an eel and let out a yell that rang through the whole School House.
 "Bai Jove, he'll have the pwefects here soon!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Bettah buck up with the west, Lowthah, before we are intewwupted."
 "Nineteen!" said Tom Merry, counting.
 The door was thrown open. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came in quickly, his face amazed and angry.
 "Merry! Figgins! What is all this? What—"
 "Twenty!"
 The twentieth stroke fell, and Mellish yelled. Then he was released, and he rolled off the table, howling.
 "What—"
 "It's all right, Kildare," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "This is only a case of administration of justice. We've found out the tell-tale who's been causing trouble in both Houses, we've discovered the chap who spread the yarn that there was smallpox in the school, and we've punished him."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Kildare understood, and his face cleared.
 "You are quite sure about that, Merry?" he asked, without looking at the squirming, writhing cad of the Fourth.
 "Quite sure," said Tom Merry quietly. "When we compared notes we knew who it must be, but we gave him a fair trial."
 "Good! I will mention to the Head that the originator of the report has been found and punished," said the captain of St. Jim's.
 "Gentlemen of the committee, the matter is now satisfactorily settled," said Tom Merry. "The tell-tale has been found out, done in, shown up, and put down."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Bai Jove, this it wathah funny, you know!"
 "And I don't think he'll start his little game again without stopping to think twice about it," said Tom Merry.
 "The purpose of the committee having been effected, the meeting is now dissolved. We hurried over our tea, and I'm rather peckish. It's up to the biggest ass present to stand a feed to the whole committee."
 And with one voice the committee chimed in:
 "Come on, D'Arcy!"
 "Weally, deah boys—"
 "Come on, D'Arcy!"
 "Well, since you are so pweassing," said D'Arcy, "although I can scarcely regard Tom Mewwy's way of puttin' it as respectful, I don't mind if I do. Fway follow me!"
 And the meeting broke up.

THE END.

(Gussy loses his watch and hires a detective to find it in next week's ripping yarn of St. Jim's, "JUST LIKE GUSSY!" Mind you read it!)

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HERE IS OUR RIP-SNORTING NAVAL ADVENTURE YARN.

CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET



JINKS.



NED.

by
**DAVID
GOODWIN**



Ned Hardy, the most popular middy on the Victorious, is in secret communication with his brother Ralph, who was dismissed the Service after a robbery on board the Victorious. Ned believes his brother innocent and thinks he was "framed" by spies. In a boxing match Ned beats Wexton, the cad of the ship, and in revenge Wexton brings a "pug" known as the "Chatham Chicken," on to the Victorious, and introduces him as Beaufort, a midddy from another ship. Ned is chosen to box him.

The "Chatham Chicken" Unmasked!

THE Chicken led with his left, and Ned guarded. Then, with a fierce slogging attack, the guest waded in. He fainted at Ned's ribs, and drove with all his force at the midddy's face. Ned allowed the blow to whistle past his ear, and countered swiftly at Beaufort's jaw; but the next moment Ned was staggering back with his head ringing from a crushing blow under the ear.

On came the Chicken again. Ned got another blow in the face, but recovered, ducked under a third, and came home heavily on the stranger's "mark." The Chicken seemed surprised. He advanced again, and Ned, quick though his guard was, received a left-hand jab and a drive that would have knocked any other midddy in the room off his feet. He landed a flush hit on the Chicken's mouth, and then, seeing that things were desperate, closed in and tried the lightning uppercut which both his father and Ralph had taught him—the legacy of the Hardys.

The Chicken only just guarded it, and his little pig eyes gleamed. Next moment he was driving Ned back on the ropes, and once there sprang in and lashed at him right and left with both fists, making the boy reel.

"Time!" cried the referee.

The spectators fairly gasped. They had never seen such boxing in a gun-room. The visitor's ringcraft was amazing, and his hitting terrible. But they had expected to see Ned knocked out at once by it, and the way he stood up astounded them even more. The form he had shown against Wexton was nothing to this. Yet he was certainly outclassed.

"This Beaufort's a terror! Why, he's fit for any prize-ring!" said Acland. "Young Hardy can handle his dukes, by Jove!"

"The other can make cold meat of him, though. He hasn't a chance. I say, we're going to get licked, Keppel."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,263.

"Time!"

Ned came up to the scratch with his jaw set hard, and his eye scanned Beaufort grimly. He realised, as if by instinct, that there was some plot afoot. This was a bruiser. Ned knew the breed. And the Chicken, looking into Ned's eyes, saw that he knew it. But the midddy said no word. He had started the fight, and he would rather have died than open his lips in protest. He had no chance. The whole room saw it. But he fought on, for his own honour and that of the Victorious.

Hardly had he shaped up than the Chicken was upon him again, and though Ned fought like a Trojan, he received the most merciless pummeling the gun-room had ever seen. They were amazed that he could keep to his legs under it. His quick guarding saved him much, and the worst of the Chicken's blows were broken, but the punishment was terrible.

He got several sharp returns in, and made the Chicken gasp and grunt more than once. "Time" was called, and at the end of it, amid a round of applause at his pluck, Ned came up again. He thought he saw Wexton's dark face grinning evilly at him from the back. The Chicken gave him little time to look.

"If I could only get in that left uppercut and land it properly he might go down!" thought Ned.

He knew instinctively that it was his only chance. But what chance was there? Beaufort had escaped it once, and saw what he had to fear, even from this stripling, and was wary. The Chicken grew angry at being balked. He drew Ned on, and then, with one swift, smashing blow, knocked him flat.

Ned fell heavily. He heard the voice of the timekeeper counting the seconds like a voice in a dream. If ten were counted before he rose, he was done.

"Four—five—six—seven—"
Ned, groping blindly, struggled to his feet. In an instant

Beaufort was upon him, lashing out with both hands. Ned dropped again, caught by a crashing hook-hit on the left ribs, and this time he could not rise. The fatal seconds were counted again.

"Five—six—seven—eight—nine—"

"Time!"

A cheer rang through the room. Ned was saved on time. He had a minute to pull himself together again. Keppel, his second, sponged his face and revived him, but he was a woeful sight.

"By gad, what pluck!"

"It's a shame! The fellow's killing him! His grit won't let him give in, but—"

"Better chuck it, Hardy!" Hart said anxiously. "You've made a grand fight of it, but he'll—"

"Chuck it be hanged!" croaked Ned hoarsely. And as "Time!" was called, he stood up. His eyes were half closed, and his head swam; but he fought at arm's length, and was quick on his feet as ever.

The Chicken grew more and more impatient. He did not see the dogged, watchful look in Ned's eyes. The middy was avoiding him, backing out. He followed Ned up savagely, meaning to finish him. Beaufort drew back for a final onslaught, and Ned, stooping slightly, dropped his hands as if utterly weary. The Chicken saw his chance and dashed close in.

Clip! Crash!

Ned's left came upwards under the very point of the bruiser's chin—one deadly, whizzing uppercut, with every ounce of his weight and strength behind it. It was the chance he had been working and watching for so long—the Hardy uppercut, delivered just as it should be, with the whole force of loins and back.

The Chicken's neck snicked, and he flew backwards, his feet fairly off the ground, and landing with a bang that shook the room, lay still.

As the bruiser went down on his back the excitement rose to fever heat. Above the loud buzz of amazement and applause that followed Ned Hardy's knock-out blow, Sub-Lieutenant Hart's voice rang out, clearly counting the seconds.

It was a time of breathless suspense for everybody present. The honour of the Victorious hung in the balance. Ned, hardly able to stand, his face bruised and livid, his sides heaving, remained where he was, his hands on his knees. He had used the last reserve of his strength.

"One—two—three—four—five—"

The Chatham Chicken lay on his back, one knee drawn up, his great chest panting. His hands, with the small, hard gloves on them, pawed feebly at the ground beside him, and his left foot moved as if to try and twist himself up. It was no use. That terrible uppercut had done its work. Wexton, forgetting all else, shouted at him wildly, but he could not move.

"Six—seven—eight—nine—out!"

A roar of applause swept through the school-room, and the middies cheered frantically. Ned, dazed and giddy, stood looking down at the prostrate form of the bruiser. He could hardly realise that it was all over. He heard his name shouted in triumph on every side.

"Well lone, Victorious!" cried Hart, closing his watch with a snap. "Mr. Beaufort is counted out. I award the match to Hardy."

There was a fresh outburst of cheers, and Hart, as much carried away as the youngest middy present, bore down on Ned, and shook his hand again and again.

"By George, Hardy, it was splendid! You've got the pluck of a dozen! I wouldn't tackle that fellow myself. Why, he fights like a champion!"

"And so do you, by gum!" cried Keppel. "That wonderful uppercut! How the dickens do you do it, youngster?"

"Pass the word for Mr. Hart, there!" came a gruff voice down the alleyway, and the sub-lieutenant darted to the door.

"I must go! See you later, Hardy! So-long, you youngsters! Look after the other fellow, and do all you can for him."

"Never mind me; I'm all right," said Ned dizzily, as Hart vanished. "Get Beaufort up and give him a drink."

Acland and Mayne were already tending the prostrate visitor, and sponging his face. Ned staggered into a chair and pulled off his gloves. His head sang like a kettle, and he could hardly see. But through the group that crowded round him with congratulations, he caught a momentary glimpse of Wexton's face at the other end of the room, so convulsed with suppressed rage and disappointment that Ned hardly recognised it.

"Ripping scrap, wasn't it?" gasped Ned. "The other chap was much too good for me. I was awfully lucky. Is he all right?"

The Chatham Chicken had got his wind back by degrees, and stood up, though looking very wobbly. There was nothing wrong with him, but the tremendous spinal jar that follows a heavy uppercut under the point of the chin lasts

some minutes, and he had hardly recovered yet. He looked rather sullenly at Ned.

"There's going to be a second bout, I suppose?" said Wexton quickly, looking with a sudden flash of hope at the Chicken, who was getting his colour back and seemed fresher.

"What!" said Keppel sharply. "The fight was fairly won by Hardy, and Beaufort didn't come up to time. Under all rules—"

"If Beaufort wants to go on I'm ready," said Ned, who, though he knew he would have little chance of standing another round with the bruiser, did not care to back out. "We can start again, I suppose, without Hart."

"Not me!" growled the Chicken dizzily. "My 'ead's nigh comin' off!"

"The fight's been fairly decided," said Keppel. "You're a rare hard slogger, Beaufort, and there aren't many middies with such science as you've got. But the Victorious is hot stuff, you see. And now there's been enough scrapping for a bit, so let's take a rest. What will you have to drink—a Marsala?"

"I could do with a long gin-an'-beer," said the Chicken, spitting appreciatively on the floor.

The middies were more astonished than ever at this midshipman who drank gin-and-beer, talked like a coster, and fought like a prize-ring "pug." There was another pause, and in the middle of it Jinks came rushing down the alleyway and into the school-room, in a terrible state of mind.

"Oh, you scugs!" he shouted. "You might have waited for me! Is it all over?"

"It's all over, and Hardy's won," said Keppel.

"Good business!" exclaimed Jinks gleefully. "Where is he? Great guns, Ned, what a face you've got! Look as if you'd been fighting a steam-hammer! Which is Beaufort? Present me to him, old cock! I'll bet he put up a nailing good fight!"

"This is Beaufort," said Keppel, indicating the visitor.

Jinks' eyes fell on "Mr. Beaufort's" face, and he gave a long stare of amazement.

"That!" exclaimed Jinks. He scanned the guest keenly, while Ned was being helped on with his jacket. "What are you giving us, Keppel? Do you mean to say this fellow has been fighting Ned?"

"Yes, don't I tell you?" said the senior middy. "Our guest, Beaufort, of the Triumphant."

"Beaufort my foot!" cried Jinks. "This is Grundy, the Chatham Chicken, a professional light-weight bruiser from the dockyards."

A thunderbolt in the school-room could not have made a bigger sensation. Wexton turned pale, and sidled towards the door. The Chicken began to look very uneasy, and glanced in the same direction.

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Keppel.

"Sure? I know the Chatham Chicken by sight as well as I know you. Saw him fighting for a purse at the Old Barns at Chatham the other day. Do you mean to say you passed this fellow as a midshipman?" said Jinks scornfully. "Look at him!"

"What have you to say to this?" said Keppel, advancing grimly upon the Chicken as the others crowded round.

"Say!" blustered the Chicken. "I'm Beaufort, o' the Triumphant, I am! This kid's barmy!"

"You're a professional pug—that's my opinion of you!" said Acland. "And if you've come here to knock an amateur about who's two years younger than yourself—"

"Of course he's a pug!" broke in Jinks. "Don't I tell you I know him? Some cad's brought him here in that rig-out so that he could beat our best man!"

"By Jove! It's a put-up job!" cried Mayne. "Who brought him here? Wexton, wasn't it?"

"What do you mean by this, Wexton?" cried Keppel fiercely. "Explain yourself, quick—"

"He was introduced to me as Tom Beaufort, of the Triumphant!" cried Wexton, in a flutter. "Moresby, of the dockyards, introduced him. I'd never seen him before! I—I'm sure it must be all right! He's Beaufort, surely?"

"If he isn't we'll tar and feather him!" cried half a dozen voices furiously.

"Yes, by Jove! If he's played a cad's trick like that on Ned Hardy!" snorted Acland. "Now, you fellow, the truth—and quick about it!"

The Chatham Chicken glanced swiftly about him. He did not like the look of things at all. Wexton slipped away, giving him no help. And he could not very well give away Wexton, for he knew he would not get his money if he did, and it would make things no better for him, but rather worse.

(What will happen to the "Chatham Chicken" now? He seems to be in a pretty tough corner! Watch out for next week's thrilling instalment!)

EASTWOOD SHIELD LEAGUE.

SAINTS MEET DISASTER!
HIGHCLIFFE SEIZE THEIR CHANCE!

By "OLD BOY."

Highcliffe, Wed.

GALLANT winners of the Eastwood Cup, St. Jim's journeyed to Highcliffe knowing that they had only to win this game and then defeat Redclyffe to finish at the head of the Eastwood League—a double triumph on which their hearts were set.

The team was unchanged, and spirits were soaring as the eleven sped swiftly towards Highcliffe in the big charabanc. I was a little surprised to observe no signs of staleness. After the excitement of a cup final, there is frequently a reaction, but the Saints seemed as keen as ever, and certainly they had good cause for confidence, on their recent displays.

I had a word with Frank Courtenay, the Highcliffe skipper, and heard that he had a recurrence of that old bugbear of Highcliffe—slacking. With his usual energy, however, Courtenay had waded in among the slackers and welded his team into a real fighting machine, and only injuries and the fortune of war had jolted them down from the top of the table, which they adorned in the middle of the season. On their own heath, the Highcliffians appeared a dangerous force—even Rupert De Courcy, the prince of slackers, deigning for Courtenay's benefit to exert himself.

To be exact, De Courcy came very near to scoring in the first minute, and only a prompt decision by Fatty Wynn, who rushed out of goal and smothered the shot, averted matters. After that, however, the Saints took control, and Highcliffe found themselves very much on the defensive. Smithson in goal had an exceedingly hot time, but proved himself a safe custodian, and once again Fatty Wynn at the other end came into the picture, Highcliffe swept through, and Courtenay let drive. Fatty saved at full length, and De Courcy, running in, took the rebound and shot just wide of the upright. It was a real "let-off," and St. Jim's pulled up their socks in earnest.

Good play on the right sent Talbot through, and skilfully drawing the Highcliffe left back, he put the ball across to Levison. Levison, tackled, fainted and gave to Tom Merry, who shot on the instant. Smithson had hardly time to move a hand ere the leather was climbing up the rigging behind him!

It was a good goal, and St. Jim's led by it at the interval. Somehow, however, I sensed that all was not well with the Saints. They seemed to lack fire, and the luck had been with them so far.

On resuming, the luck turned against them suddenly and decisively. Kangaroo let Courtenay through, and Figgins for once failed to stop his man. Fatty

Wynn, in a quandary, elected to remain on his goal-line, and it was his undoing. Courtenay was afforded just that extra second in which to steady himself, and the shot which he drove in would have beaten any goalkeeper on earth. Level!

St. Jim's set themselves sturdily to wipe out that unfortunate lapse, but they were "up against it." Courtenay's men had begun to get the measure of their opponents, and De Courcy was moving heaven and earth to make up for that dreadful miss in the first half. Well as St. Jim's played, they were a little slower than usual, and Highcliffe came through again on the left, De Courcy initiating a nice movement. The ball came in to De Courcy himself, and he made a yard or two, paused, and gave Frank Courtenay an ideal chance. Courtenay let fly, but Fatty Wynn leaped desperately to one side, just managing to repel the ball, but going down full length in the effort. As the ball came out, however, De Courcy loped smoothly forward and swept it into the net over Fatty's prostrate body. He had made amends.

Highcliffe from that moment were most distinctly on top. St. Jim's kept going with unexampled steadiness, but for once their dogged determination bore no fruit. On the wing, D'Arcy had received an accidental kick on the shin, reopening an injury which had troubled him recently, and St. Jim's were obviously unable to overcome the odds.

Just before full time Tom Merry made a heroic effort to level the scores, taking a long pass from Figgins in his stride and going through like a past master. He beat three men and was about to shoot when one of the brothers Wilkinson charged him fairly enough clean off his feet, and cleared with a hefty kick. When Tom sat up, rather dazedly, the golden opportunity was gone—for good!

On the phone came the news that Greyfriars had routed Bannington by twelve to nil, and they are now level on points with the Saints. The last match of the season, St. Jim's v. Redclyffe, will therefore decide who is to top the table. Greyfriars are away to Clarendon, and the chances are practically even!

RESULTS:

HIGHCLIFFE .. 2 ST. JIM'S .. 1
Courtenay, De Merry
Courcy

Teams.—HIGHCLIFFE: Smithson; Wilkin- son major, Wilkinson minor; Grey, Benson, Lewis; Yates, De Courcy, Courtenay, Jones minor, Derwent. ST. JIM'S: Wynn; Figgins, Kerr; Redfern, Noble, Lowther; Talbot, Levison, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy.

ABBOTSFORD.. 0 ST. FRANK'S .. 6
Nipper (3), Pitt (2), De Valerie.

GREYFRIARS .. 12 BANNINGTON GRAM. SCH. .. 0
Bull (penalty), Cherry, Wharton (5), Nugent, Vernon-Smith (2), Penfold, Hurree Singh.

REDCLYFFE .. 1 BAGSHOT .. 1
Stoker. Fankley.

ROOKWOOD .. 5 ST. JUDE'S .. 1
Dodd (2), Silver (2), Mornington. Raleigh.

LEAGUE TABLE TO DATE:

	P.	W.	D.	L.	F.	A.	Pts.
Greyfriars	21	15	3	3	86	24	33
St. Jim's	21	15	3	3	88	28	33
St. Frank's	21	15	2	4	69	27	32
Rookwood	21	15	2	4	74	40	32
Eylcombe	21	12	3	6	64	39	27
Highcliffe	21	11	5	5	52	35	27
Redclyffe	21	7	3	11	40	40	17
Bagshot	21	6	5	10	36	58	17
St. Jude's	21	2	7	12	27	68	11
Clarendon	21	2	5	14	38	67	9
Abbotsford	21	1	7	13	26	91	9
Bannington	21	1	3	17	14	94	5

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